Summary

Octavia Blake isn't allowed to date until her big brother Bellamy does, so she calls in a favour from her best friend Clarke Griffin.

All Clarke has to do is seduce Bellamy, fake date him, and then break things off when Octavia starts going out with her waiter conquest. It's supposed to be quick, easy, and painless.

And it is.
Until Clarke starts falling for real.

Notes

I'm not all that crazy about high school AUs since I fricken hated high school lol, but I love this plot idea and it really would not make sense for an adult and independent Octavia to be held back from dating by her mother. So here we go.

Fic inspired by the fantastic movie 10 Things I Hate About You.
Title inspired by One Last Time by Ariana Grande.
Clarke knew something was up when she met Octavia at her locker that morning, but she wasn't at all prepared for the words out of her best friend's mouth. All Clarke said was 'Hey, Octavia' before Octavia went insane.

"I need you to date Bellamy."

The smile slid right off of Clarke's face and she furrowed her brow. She couldn't find her voice until Octavia impatiently cleared her throat. Clarke huffed out a short breath, her mouth turning up slightly in a dumbfounded smile.

"You're kidding, right?"

Taking a deep breath and sighing it out, Octavia shut her locker and grabbed Clarke by the arm, spinning her around and hauling her along to their first class.

"I wouldn't ask if I wasn't desperate."

"Sorry, why exactly are you desperate for me to date your asshole brother?"

Octavia made a disgruntled sound, tugging Clarke around the corner.

"That's not what I meant."

"What else could you possibly mean?" Clarke asked, bemused. Not that Octavia's answer would make any difference. There was no way Clarke was going out with that bastard.

Octavia cleared her throat. "Okay, well, do you remember our waiter from last Saturday? His name was Lincoln."

Clarke laughed once. "How could I forget? You were all over him."

"Not the point, Clarke," said Octavia, a small smile in her voice. She bit her bottom lip, her smile growing, and then blurted, "He asked me out."

Clarke came to an abrupt stop, whipping her head around to see Octavia, her eyes wide.

"What?" she said, jaw on the floor. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Octavia patted her on the shoulder. "I just did, bud."

Clarke rolled her eyes. "Well, what did you say?"

Octavia hesitated, clicking her tongue. "That's the thing. I can't go out with him unless you date Bellamy."

Clarke snorted, her excitement for her friend instantly evaporating. She passed Octavia and strolled into their classroom, heading to her usual seat at the back corner with Octavia right behind her.

"Why, you want to double date with us or something?" Clarke asked, glancing at her over her shoulder.

"Ew," said Octavia, scrunching up her face. "Don't be gross."
Clarke dropped her bag next to her chair and sank into her seat, facing Octavia's desk and waiting for her to sit as well before she spoke again.

"Then humour me," she said, one elbow bent across the back of her seat and the other resting on her desk. "Why do I have to torture myself in order for you to get it on with Lincoln?"

Octavia glanced away.

"It's my mom," she said, a strange tone to her voice that had Clarke narrowing her eyes. "She has this rule that I can't date until Bellamy does, but he just turned twenty-three. Twenty-three, Clarke. The guy's never had a girlfriend in his life, and I'm starting to think that's just to keep me from dating for as long as possible."

Clarke frowned. "That's really too bad for you, Octavia, but it also makes what you're asking me even more impossible."

Octavia furrowed her brow, her lips parting in confusion.

"How?"

"Well, for starters," she said, crossing her legs, "if he hasn't been in a relationship by now, that means he doesn't want one in general. Let alone one with me. I'm like his arch nemesis, public enemy number one."

Octavia levelled her with a look that said she thought otherwise.

"That's a bit of a stretch, babe."

Clarke just shook her head and turned to face the front, leaning back against her chair.

"I can't do it," she said, shaking her head. "It's just ... wrong."

"Look," Octavia started, gently tapping the table. "I know that you two don't really see eye to eye, but -"

"That is a colossal understatement, O," Clarke said, giving her a pointed look. "Do you not remember three years ago? He made it his life's purpose to follow me around and piss me off for like, five months."

It was the worst time of Clarke's life, if she were being dramatic honest. It was probably the worst time of Bellamy's life, too, if he had any shame. He'd been so full of himself then, subsisting in some sort of king-of-the-world phase. His cockiness in itself had been enough to put her off, but to make matters worse, he just wouldn't leave Clarke the Hell alone. She'd been forced to sit in his holier-than-thou presence more times than she could handle, silently seething and imagining smacking the stupid, self-assured smiles from his face. It was because of him and his incessant teasing that she'd decided to date Lexa (alias: worst mistake of Clarke's life). Lexa had been going after Clarke for a while, and even though she hadn't wanted to be in a relationship at the time, Bellamy's obnoxious behaviour changed her mind. She'd thought getting into a relationship might make him drop his disregard for her personal space/desire to be left alone, therefore ensuring she wouldn't beat him over the head with one of those massive ancient civilization books he loved so much. Almost surprisingly, it'd worked. Shortly after that, Clarke had found herself more than a little enamoured of Lexa, which she secretly thanked Bellamy for. After Clarke found out what an asshole Lexa was, she'd secretly blamed Bellamy for that, too. It was his fault she started dating her in the first place.

Bellamy Blake had been the bane of Clarke's existence. He still was. She said as much to Octavia.
"You literally said it yourself that it was three years ago," Octavia said. "No one's the same as they were three years ago."

"He is," Clarke said without missing a beat. "He may not be as unbearable, but he's still always trying to annoy me. You know it's true."

Octavia smirked in spite of the look Clarke was giving her and then rolled her eyes, leaning forward.

"Clarke, come on," she said, keeping up with her pestering. "Just do me this one solid and I'll never ask you for anything again."

"We both know that's a lie."

"Clarke."

"Even if I agreed to this," she said, trying to express rationality since Octavia was currently void of it, "Bellamy never would. He likes me about as much as I like him."

"I'd say he likes you a bit more," said Octavia.

"Doesn't matter," said Clarke. "Still not doing it."

"You don't have to like him," Octavia went on. "You just have to get him to date you so that I can go out with Lincoln."

Sitting back in her chair, Octavia smiled happily, as though she'd just given the argument-winning statement.

Clarke wasn't easily swayed, however.

"No, Octavia," she said as stern as she could.

She ignored the whiny noise that came out of Octavia's mouth and focused on the front as their teacher entered the room. She continued trying to ignore her for the rest of the period and again the next class they had together. Octavia was having none of it.

They were sitting side by side with their desks pushed together while they worked on their History project when Octavia sighed impatiently, as though they were already in the middle of the argument. She stood her text book open on her desk and ducked her head behind it. Taking her cue, Clarke sighed and did the same.

"Do you want me to die a virgin?" Octavia whispered. "Is that why you're not cooperating?"

Clarke's eyes twinkled. "If you think you have to be in a relationship to have sex, then I have news for you."

"Clarke, stop kidding around," Octavia said in a rush. "This is serious."

She scoffed. "You definitely need to rework your definition of the word."

"What do you want, huh?" Octavia asked, her voice taking on a desperate tone. "Money? A dog? My arm?"

Rolling her eyes, Clarke dropped her voice.

"I don't want anything except to not date your brother," she said, glancing up over her book to make
sure they hadn't been spotted, and then she ducked back down. "That's what I've been saying this whole time."

"It's not like you'll be with him for long," Octavia pleaded, and there was a strange undertone to her voice that Clarke couldn't decipher. "It'll just be for, you know ... a believable amount of time."

"Which is how long, to you?"

"A month," she said meekly. "A few at most."

Clarke widened her eyes, her mouth dropping open. She would have loudly objected if Octavia hadn't rushed on.

"If you only dated for like, a day, he and my mom would both catch on!" she insisted. "They're not idiots."

"Bellamy is the biggest idiot in this town," Clarke said.

Saying nothing, Octavia sighed, her face falling. Clarke frowned at her glum expression and leaned a bit closer.

"Why don't you just go out with Lincoln without telling your mom?"

"Because," she said simply. "What would I tell her if I wanted to go out to see him? She'd ask where I was going."

"Tell her you're coming to my house," Clarke said simply, refraining from adding 'duh'.

"And if I want to stay the night with him?"

Clarke pressed her lips together. Aurora always called when Octavia slept over at Clarke's, and not just once. Multiple times, all through the evening, like she thought Octavia was going to try to escape.

"You'll be eighteen in November," Clarke said, trying to be helpful because she really did not want to do this. "You'll be able to do what you want then."

"That's almost a year from now," Octavia said quietly, and now Clarke was the one to avert her gaze, trying to suppress the guilt tightening her stomach.

Octavia was back to working on the project, sniffling slightly, and Clarke's shoulders slumped.

Maybe she was over exaggerating. It wasn't like Octavia was asking her to kill someone. It was just Bellamy. He was irritating as all Hell half the time, but the other half, he was ... well, not terrible. He could be funny, and generous, and he always drove Clarke and Octavia around when they were younger before they had their licenses. He could be considerate when he wanted to, and he was selfless where his family was concerned. He'd even willingly helped Clarke when she'd needed it without her having to ask.

He'd assisted her with her homework on multiple occasions. The first time it happened, she'd been sitting on the floor at the long living room coffee table at the Blake house, her books scattered around her while Octavia made a snack in the kitchen. Bellamy was lying on the couch behind Clarke, silently watching TV while she complained to Octavia about how stupidly worded the problems were, and this was the third one in a row that she'd skipped over because she just didn't get it. Bellamy stuck his arm out at Clarke's side, palm up. She looked over her shoulder at him and then at
his hand, frowning.

"Remote," he said, and Clarke grabbed it from the coffee table, handing it back to him without looking.

He surprised her by muting the TV and sitting up, planting his feet on the floor next to her and crossing his arms on his knees, leaning forward.

"Let me see," he said gently, tapping her arm to get her to move it off the page.

Stiffening, Clarke straightened, staring at his face until he looked at her.

"What?" he asked.

Clarke knit her eyebrows together.

"What are you doing?"

Bellamy snickered. "I'm helping you with your homework, Princess. Which number?"

"Um..." she hesitated, trying to determine whether he was going to give her the wrong answer on purpose to get her grades down, just because he could.

When she met his eyes, though, he was watching her expectantly, and she couldn't see anything malicious about it.

So she said, "Number seven is pretty hard."

Bellamy looked back at her text book and she watched his eyes glide left to right as he scanned the problem. She expected him to scoff at her or tell her how stupid she was for not understanding something so simple, but he didn't. He brought his fist to his mouth, cleared his throat, and then dropped to his knees beside her, going straight into explanation.

Five problems later when Bellamy was leaning close to Clarke, both their eyes on the text while she read the question, Octavia came back into the room carrying a plate with a sandwich. Taking her seat from before, she raised her eyebrows at Clarke, but didn't say anything about it. Nothing changed after that occurrence aside from Clarke actively seeking Bellamy out to ask for his help. He'd never turned her down. Not even once.

Clarke closed her eyes, sighing. So, maybe Octavia was right about Clarke not hating Bellamy, but that didn't mean she was open to dating him, however fake it was. If she was supposed to convince him she liked him, and somehow get him to 'reciprocate' those feelings, she'd be in for an awful time. She'd have to kiss him at some point, wouldn't she? It wasn't even a pleasant thought, so the actual experience was sure to make her skin crawl.

But ... if she had to hold his hand, or hug him, or let him touch her, theoretically she could do it. For Octavia, she could do it.

Clarke sighed heavily and squeezed her eyes shut, giving herself one condition: she was not, under any circumstances, having sex with Bellamy Blake.

"He probably won't go for it," she whispered then.

Octavia tilted her head up slightly, still facing forward.

"Seriously," Clarke went on. "I don't think there's anything I can do to make him want to date me,
but ... I'll give it a shot."

Octavia looked over at her, her eyes wide and hopeful, flitting rapidly between Clarke's. Clarke leaned toward her.

"If your stupid brother kills me for trying to flirt with him, I'm holding you personally accountable," she whispered, and then gave Octavia a small smile.

For a few seconds, Octavia only stared, but then a wide grin broke out across her face. She lurched toward Clarke, giving her a tight one-armed hug and thanking her profusely while ignoring the teacher's inquiry of why they weren't working.

When she pulled away, her face was full of excitement, but Clarke couldn't muster up the same look. All she felt was dread.
Step One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Much to Clarke's chagrin, Raven burst out laughing when she told her about the plan.

As soon as school was out, Clarke went home instead of to the Blakes' like usual - she definitely needed to prepare if this was going to work. The first thing she did was phone her long time friend, Raven Reyes, who was a year older and currently in University.

"Raven," Clarke groaned, closing her eyes and pinching the bridge of her nose. "This isn't funny. I really need your help."

Raven snorted, sounding like she was trying very hard to suppress her laughter.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"You already told Octavia you're game. You can't back out now."

"I know," said Clarke, sighing and walking from her bedroom window to her bed, tossing herself onto her back. "That's not what I need to talk to you about, though."

"All right," she said slowly. "What's up? Shoot."

Clarke crossed her ankles, her free hand resting above her head.

"I told Octavia that I'd do this because, really, what kind of no-dating rule is that?"

"You're telling me," Raven agreed.

"But the whole thing depends on me getting Bellamy to ask me out -"

"It's the 21st century," she chimed in, sounding far too giddy about the situation for Clarke's liking. "Just ask him yourself."

"There's no way I'm giving him the satisfaction."

Raven chuckled, and Clarke went on.

"Plus, I really don't want to live the rest of my life with Bellamy Blake holding it over my head that I wanted to date him," she said, her face pulling at the mere thought of it. "It's not even a matter of whether I want to, anyway. I have to, on principle. You know ... for Octavia."

Raven was quiet for a long moment, and when she spoke, she sounded suspicious.

"I just want to clarify. You don't, like ... have a thing for Bellamy, do you?"

"Of course not," she said, rolling her eyes as she sat up. "Why would I call you about it if I did?"

"Because we're friends and this is the kind of stuff we talk about," she said as though it were obvious.

"I don't think I'd be exactly eager to tell you if I miraculously developed feelings for Octavia's brother," she said, shaking her head to herself. "You'd never let me live it down."
"You're right," said Raven, sounding proud. "Why did you call, then?"

"Because I have no idea how to pull this off."

Raven snorted. "So you want me to give you tips on how to snag Blake?"

"I've been wondering how to do it all day, and I'm coming up blank," Clarke said, mindlessly picking at the lint on her blanket.

"I don't know if this is gonna be as hard as you're making it sound, Clarke," she said. "If it were me, I'd go out with you. Hands down."

Clarke laughed, rolling her eyes. "Yeah, well, you don't hate me. Bellamy, on the other hand...."

"Doesn't hate you, either," she said.

Why was everyone saying that lately? Were they all oblivious to the goings-on between the pair of them? Was she the only one aware of the enjoyment he garnered from torturing her? She needed help handling Bellamy, but all anyone was giving her was their opinion that handling him would be simple.

"So let's say this whole thing actually has a chance," she said instead of responding to Raven's entirely false analysis. "How does it work? I can't just suddenly start flirting with him. That'd be way too conspicuous. He wouldn't buy it."

"True," said Raven. "Number one priority is to make it believable. So ... how are your acting skills, Griffin?"

Clarke was sitting in her car outside Octavia's house at 8:32, staring angrily at the front door and trying to figure out what Bellamy was doing and which (of the several) approaches she was going to take in just a few minutes. She'd just texted Octavia that she was outside psyching herself up, and that she was about to do some things she wasn't proud of, but hey, this whole thing was Octavia's idea so she'd just have to deal. She conveniently left out the part where she'd told Raven all about it and intended on using her wheeling tactics. (What she didn't know wouldn't hurt her, and all that.)

What Raven and Clarke ultimately came up with was a fool-proof step-by-step strategy that would definitely have Bellamy grovelling at her feet, begging for a date. Or something to that effect. Raven, meticulous as she was, had thought of everything. There were so many options that Clarke had started making jot notes until Raven stopped mid-spiel and told her to 'stop writing this all down, I can hear you. It's not a school project. There's not going to be any homework'. She kept writing, though, just much quieter. As it turned out, though, her notebook of knowledge wasn't necessary. While Raven was meticulous, she was also concise. To help matters along, their conversation helped Clarke look at the situation as less of a chore and more of a game, something she could win. She did love a good game. Especially one as challenging as this.

Her phone buzzed in the passenger seat and Clarke looked over, quickly reading the message from Octavia.

This is a judgment-free zone. Do what you gotta.

With one last deep breath for courage, she slid out of her car and locked it behind her, pulling her Ways to Nab Bellamy Blake list to the forefront of her mind as she stalked determinedly toward the house and let herself in.
There were a lot of alternatives to pick from depending on which precarious position she 'accidentally' or otherwise found herself in with Bellamy. It all started off predictably innocent.

**Step One:** Preparing for the Nab

**Option 1: All Blakes at home**

- She wasn't supposed to do anything out of the ordinary if this was the case. Having Aurora pick up on her trying to 'date' Bellamy would likely work against her, and by extension, Octavia. Aurora was dead weight, unpredictable, and Clarke had to stick to her regular ways around her, reserving anything that could be seen as abnormal for any of the following options.

Clarke didn't have to worry about that. Aurora started the night shift at the care home she worked at half an hour ago and wouldn't be home until early morning. The plan was a go.

**Option 2: Bellamy and Octavia at home**

- If she was in the same room as them both, subtlety was her weapon lest she wanted him to think her actions insincere. Blatantly flirting with him in front of Octavia would make him think she was only teasing him and not being serious, given the fact that he thought she despised his very existence. Her objective was to stare at him - *in a sexy way*, Raven had said pointedly, *don't be stalkerish* - until he caught her at it and when he did, she'd look quickly away.

Bellamy and Octavia were lounging in the living room when she stepped inside. They both looked up at the sound of the door closing. Octavia smiled, and Bellamy went back to watching TV.

"You guys miss me?" she said, instead of her usual crude greeting (*I'm home, motherfuckers*, was her go-to). Bellamy caught the shift, if his blank look at her was any indication

"Always," said Octavia, trying to keep the smirk from her face. Clarke winked at her as she slipped her jacket off her shoulders and hung it on the hook, toeing off her shoes.

"Hi, Bellamy," she said, walking further into the room. There was full blown confusion on his face at that, clearly wondering why she was being civil instead of saying something like, *Shame you haven't moved out, yet,* or *Oh, look, the unlikable one.* To his credit, he greeted her like usual.

"Hey, Princess."

He was lying down on the couch across from the only empty arm chair in the room, and while Clarke considered getting him to move and sitting down with him, she thought that might come off as a bad thing rather than good.

"You seem happy," he said, his voice carefully neutral.

She smiled at him. "Really?"

God, it was hard to keep the sarcasm from her voice. But he didn't say anything, and a few seconds later, his confusion/suspicion/whatever was coming in handy. She was facing the TV at an angle, her legs crossed and her hands folded on her lap, and she was making it as obvious as she could, while still being discreet, that she was watching him. When he slid his eyes to hers, she waited half a second before looking down and then over at the TV. The next time she looked at him, the same thing happened. The third, he was already looking at her. She resisted the urge to pump her fist victoriously.
If both Blakes were present, but in different rooms, she had to find an excuse to be in the room inhabited by Bellamy. The excuse had to be obviously bad so he knew she was actively seeking him out just to be around him. Laugh at whatever he said, brush against him, force heart eyes. All of that would earn her definite brownie points.

When the TV show ended, Bellamy handed the remote to Octavia, mentioning that he had to do his laundry. He eyed Clarke once more as he walked past her chair and into his bedroom. Octavia was shaking her head in awe, mouthing *Oh, my God* and blowing Clarke a kiss, apparently having seen most of the silent gazing. When she heard Bellamy leave his room and walk down the hall, water pouring into the washing machine, she stood, rolling her eyes at Octavia's thumbs-up, and she made her way down the hall and to the laundry room door.

Where she stood leaning against the doorjamb, Bellamy's back was facing her as he clicked the lid of his laundry basket open. Just as Clarke opened her mouth to say something cheesy and flirty, Bellamy grabbed the back of his collar and yanked his shirt over his head. All that came out of Clarke was a little squeak. He looked over his shoulder at her, his eyebrows raised.

"Come to air your dirty laundry, Princess?" he joked. The pun was so incredibly lame, and so incredibly Bellamy, and Clarke had to resist *hard* not to make a face at it. He was smirking at her, falling into old routine like he hadn't noticed her constantly checking him out ten minutes ago.

She'd seen him shirtless before on many occasions, but all those times, she didn't care, nor did she have necessity to care. That was different now, and somehow, this situation seemed intimate, too. Or maybe she was just reading too much into it. At least the pink tinge she felt heat her face would look like blush rather than the fear that it really was (why she was scared, she didn't know). The smirk dropped from Bellamy's face as he noticed her flushing skin, and Clarke took a deep breath. *Now or never.*

She walked into the room, clearing her throat - that seemed like an authentic thing to do when feigning nervousness - and went slowly to Bellamy's side. When she was next to him, she kept her head down, her gaze on the floor. He took a small breath, about to speak, and she flicked her eyes up to his in the most flirtatious *gazing-under-her-lashes* that she could manage. Whatever he was going to say got stuck in his throat. He was still for a moment before shifting to face her fully, his eyes searching back and forth between hers.

A slight panic set in when she realized she had literally no idea what to do from there. The weird, awkward way she was acting around him at least seemed to be affecting him in one way or another, whether it was filling him with confusion or tension or something else. She didn't know what to say, and even though it seemed so cringey in her head, she came up with a semi-seductive plan. She dropped her eyes to where he was still holding his shirt and then glanced up at him again, as though asking permission. He hadn't looked away from her face. *Ah, why the Hell not?* she thought bravely, reaching forward to take his shirt from him. She let her fingers curl very obviously around his hand, making sure he didn't mistake this for an accidental touch, and she pulled the shirt from his grasp. His hand slackened when he realized what she was doing, and she was grateful, because if he'd tightened his grasp so she couldn't take it, it would have gotten stifling in that room pretty quickly. He was blocking the washing machine with his body, so she took a step toward him, gauging his reaction as she did. He didn't move away, and she could feel his eyes burning into her face, but she didn't want to lock eyes yet. She had to lean forward to reach the washing machine. Bellamy still didn't move, even as she gripped his arm for 'stability' and felt his skin hot to the touch. Was he just warm or was this working? She really hoped it was working, needed it to be working, because she couldn't even fathom the idea that she was forcing herself in such a terribly awkward situation for nothing.

Standing on the tips of her toes and balancing across Bellamy's arm, which he'd so graciously held
out horizontally, braced on the edge of the washing machine, Clarke dropped the shirt into the wash and then lowered back onto her feet. She let herself sway gently into Bellamy, her arm pressing into the muscles of his chest and both her hands still holding onto his forearm. If he lifted his other arm, she'd be cocooned against him, and she could not stop imagining it happen.

She turned her face toward him then, staring at his chest for a few seconds before tilting her head up, meeting his eyes.

"I thought I should give you some help," she said, her voice soft and coy and so unlike her, especially when directed at Bellamy.

The browns of his irises were barely visible beneath the deep black of his pupils. His jaw clenched, and she slid her eyes down to his lips.

That was definitely off book, but then again, so were his reactions. Clarke and Raven thought she should refrain from the hard flirting for a while until he warmed up to her. The last thing they wanted was for him to sniff out their plan. The two girls thought for sure it would take him at least a couple of weeks to start to loosen up to her, because before then would just be unrealistic. He hated her, why would he respond positively to her advances this early? But maybe his hating her was helpful. Maybe ... maybe he wanted to have some kind of kinky hate sex with her. It would definitely explain the way he was staring at her mouth now, looking like he was seconds away from closing his arms around her and pulling her flush against him. But she couldn't let that happen, not yet. She needed him to fall for her, or at least for him to feel like he was. If she let him kiss her now, he wouldn't be left wanting anything more than the one thing she was never giving him, and if that happened, poof went Octavia's hopes and dreams.

So she slid her hands off his arms and stepped away, watching his eyes snap back up to hers. She smiled coquettishly - or at least what she hoped was coquettish; it was hard doing these things with Bellamy when she was making fun of him in the back of her head for falling for this so easily - and backed away, swallowing hard. He took a step toward her when he saw her throat move, but before he could advance any more, she turned and walked smoothly out of the room. Help delivered, she thought.

She didn't go back to Octavia because her heart was suddenly beating way too hard and her face and chest were far too warm. She'd hadn't fully considered the implications of fake-dating Bellamy. If it worked, and it definitely looked like it was working, it entailed him kissing her, and not just once. If she only dated him for a month, and if they had an average of three kisses a day (she was being extremely stingy with the number, knowing that there would have to be make-out sessions, and it would be their first month, so there would be way more than three a day, but whatever. She didn't want to think about it), that averaged ninety kisses. Ninety. With Bellamy. She would have to kiss him ninety times at least. How was she supposed to do that, or do anything intimate with him, when the mere thought of it made her want to jet the Hell out of there? And it didn't seem like she would need very long to seduce him, either, so she'd have to be dealing with those things much too quickly for her liking. She couldn't believe that this wasn't nearly as hard as she thought it was going to be.

- If Bellamy was awake and Octavia was asleep, Clarke was to pull Bellamy into the living room (if he wasn't already there) and make him watch a movie with her - it was important to let him pick. Keeping up with the glances was imperative, too, and if it was a horror movie, sit right next to him; if it was something else, leave a bit of space, but definitely be closer than normal.

Octavia passed out nearly four hours later after being the unknowing buffer between Bellamy and Clarke. The idea was for Clarke to keep Octavia as in the dark as possible (that wasn't a rule, she just
didn't feel like describing to her, Bellamy's sister, the details of what she did with him) so Clarke had said nothing of the charged moment in the laundry room. As soon as she got home, though, she was definitely going to call Raven and brag about her acting skills. This plan was already working flawlessly and she was one hundred percent in the mood to voice her achievements, as small as they were. Honestly, it was easy enough to get Bellamy to want her body - she'd seen enough of him sneaking in on early mornings to know he frequently got off with some girl he never saw again, so naturally he'd want the same with her - but what she was really trying to work toward was getting him to want her, period. That was the really tough bit.

In thinking that, she almost decided to ditch this particular piece of the plan. The opportunity was all for it, but she wasn't ready to move that fast, to cuddle with him for two hours on the couch. Besides, if he was actually thinking rationally, he'd still see this as some seriously suspicious stuff, so she had to keep her cool. But nothing said she had to go off book again. She could watch a movie, and glance at him like earlier, and everything would be fine and it wouldn't get handsy at all. The only thing worrying her was that Bellamy was in his room, which would make it obvious that she was going to watch a movie. But whatever. She was grown, and whether this was all fake or not, she still had absolute control over what happened to and with her body, and if Bellamy tried anything stupid, she'd just tell him off. Simple as that.

So she went silently to his room, taking extra care when she passed Octavia's door, and lightly rapped on Bellamy's. His voice was muffled when he told her to come in. She pushed the door open and peeked her head through. Bellamy raised his eyebrows from where he sat on his bed, back against the headboard and his legs stretched out, ankles crossed. The room was dark, the only light coming from the hall and his laptop, which was set facing him on the bed.

"Hey," she started, keeping her voice low. "What are you doing?"

"Watching a movie."

Well, wasn't that perfect?

"You want to watch it together?"

He stared for a moment before nodding, and then cleared his throat, sliding over to make room for her. She closed the door quietly and came over to the bed, lithely climbing atop it and sitting with her leg folded beneath her, leaving a little more than a foot of space between them. Bellamy started the movie over from the beginning - only a few minutes from where he'd stopped it - and pressed play. As soon as it started, her chest tightened in apprehension. It was a horror movie that was just released; one she'd already seen, and one that scared her enough that she really wasn't looking forward to watching it again.

She'd settled in as best as she could anyway, and everything was quiet between them for a while. Clarke grew progressively tenser as it played, anticipating and dreading what was to come. Then, when the first scare happened, she'd turned her head away from the screen toward Bellamy, her eyes squeezed shut. Hardly a few seconds later, Bellamy spoke.

"Do you want to come closer?" he asked, his voice quiet.

Clarke opened her eyes and lifted them to his face. He gave her a light smile.

"I'll keep you safe," he teased, still quiet.

She looked down at the space between them, hesitated for half a second, and then pulled herself
closer. It didn't really take much thought, if she were being honest. She was scared, and she was supposed to be flirting with him anyway. Bellamy didn't try to drape his arm around her, or get closer to her himself in any way. He let her sidle up against his arm, hers pressed against it, her body turned slightly toward him, and then he looked back to the screen.

Barely five minutes later, Clarke was letting out a small murmur of fear at a chase scene, turning her face into Bellamy's shoulder and clutching at his arm. She felt him tense for just a second under her hold before relaxing. Realizing she'd done too much too fast, she quickly lifted her head and made to pull her hand back, but then she paused, thinking it was better to do this, wasn't it? To show him her intentions? To make him think she wanted him? So she gently rested her head on his shoulder, letting her hand relax where it held his arm.

For a few seconds, he said nothing about it, so Clarke thought he might not. But then he pulled his arm away from her, and there it was. Finally, things were making sense. She knew his giving in to her advances so soon was weird. He must have been uncomfortable the whole time, only letting it all happen so he could suss her out.

"Sorry," she said, moving away, but then Bellamy lifted his arm, opening his side for her to ... to cuddle up against, if she wanted to.

Her lips parted and she met his eyes. He swallowed.

"Just 'cause it's scary," he explained, watching her, waiting.

She knew he was giving her an easy excuse, and maybe protecting himself in case she rejected it. She couldn't be sure of that, though. For the second time since the movie started, she was pulling herself up to him, closer this time, right into the cocoon of his side. His arm folded around her back, his hand settling on her upper arm, his thumb rubbing her arm once. And Clarke ... she didn't hate it. It was a little strange that all of this was happening with Bellamy, to be sure, but it struck her then that it was the first time since Finn that she'd had any sort of intimacy with someone. She'd almost forgotten what it was like to be held, or to be caressed ... to feel protected by someone, even if it was just from the scary killer in the movie. It didn't matter right then that it was Bellamy, and that she was supposed to hate him, that she was certainly supposed to hate doing this with him. She took a deep breath and sighed it out slowly, settling in closer against him, letting her eyes fall closed for a moment.

They stayed like that for the rest of the movie, Clarke snug against Bellamy's side. He'd occasionally run the pad of his thumb lightly over her arm, but he never did anything more than that. It was the extent of their intimacy until the credits rolled. When Clarke moved to slide off his bed, so did he. She didn't think anything of it at first, thinking instead of how to say goodnight in a flirty, but not overtly flirty way, until she started toward his door, and so did he. Clarke paused, giving him a questioning look.

"I'll walk you out," he said.

She let out a small laugh, glancing at the door before looking back to him.

"Of your room?" she asked.

He didn't answer, opening the door for her instead.

"All right," she said then, smiling and shaking her head at him. "Thank you."

He followed her still to Octavia's door, and Clarke was trying not to wonder whether it was weird as
she reached for the doorknob. She was about to say goodnight and go to bed, but Bellamy stopped her, touching her waist with both hands and pulling her closer toward him, causing her hand to fall away from the door. Both of her hands came instead to his biceps, holding on for leverage in case she had to push herself back, which she thought she very well might. There was a look in his eyes, something heavy and determined, and all she could think was he was going to kiss her. She knew it would have to happen at some point, but she wasn't ready for it yet. It was too fast even for her, and she was the one supposed to be making it happen.

"Bellamy, I -"

"I'm not going to do anything," he said, reading her mind. She believed him, but his voice was strained, and she knew despite his words, he wanted to. He brought his hands to her face and tenderly brushed her hair back. "I just wanted to do this once," he murmured, his fingertips gliding from her jaw down her neck. She shivered, goosebumps erupting down her skin, and she couldn't be sure that it was entirely from discomfort.

After only a moment longer, he dropped his hands and took a small step back.

"Have a good sleep," he said.

She nodded, swallowing, and stepped back toward the door.

"See you tomorrow," she said, turning the doorknob while keeping her eyes locked with his.

He smiled. "See you tomorrow."

- If Bellamy was in the shower, Clarke had to get something from the bathroom. Octavia did it pretty often, but Clarke always waited him out, not wanting to see anything that would scar her for life. Apparently this step was helpful for her because Bellamy would be naked, and would therefore have no choice but to feel vulnerable at Clarke's presence, and would probably think of things involving her and nakedness, which ... was good.

The sound of the shower was what woke her up in the morning. It was on the other side of Octavia's wall, dull enough to be quiet, but she could still hear it. She was a light sleeper. Clarke slid out from underneathe the covers and rubbed her eyes as she left Octavia's room, glancing down the hall to see if the one in the bathroom was Bellamy or Aurora. Bellamy's bedroom door was wide open and he wasn't inside. *All right, good,* she thought with a nod. *Might as well get this over with.* There was nothing she needed from the bathroom except to pee, so.... She knew that wasn't quite what Raven had in mind when she told her to 'get something', but this was a legitimate reason and there was a half-wall between the shower and the toilet, anyway, not to mention that their shower curtain was opaque black. He wouldn't be able to see anything.

She knocked lightly before she opened the door.

"Yeah?" he called, and she closed herself into the room.

"It's just me," she said, running her fingers through her hair.

"There's plenty of room in here if you want to join me, Princess."

The change in Bellamy's tone was so drastic, she could have laughed, practically feeling him wink. It was like there were two sides to him: the usual one, the one that said things like this, that teased her to no end, and then the one from last night ... the one from the laundry room ... the one who was entirely empty of playfulness, the epitome of some sort of charged tension whose pull was strong.
She wasn't really sure how to act in front of that one, the one she was sure he used on every female conquest he ever had. This one, however....

"Don't get your hopes up," she said, trying not to sound bored. "I just have to pee."

He didn't say anything after that, which she thought was a bit strange, but obviously she wasn't going to push it. She honestly just wanted to get out of there as fast as possible, because she kept accidentally reminding herself that he was naked a few feet away from her, and that all that was protecting her from seeing him was a thin curtain that could easily be pushed aside. And her mind wouldn't stop imagining what he looked like, which she definitely didn't want to know about. She left the bathroom and went back to Octavia's bed, trying to fall back asleep, and squeezing her eyes shut really hard whenever an image of naked Bellamy showed up behind her eyelids.

- If Clarke was showering at the Blake household, she was to wrap a towel loosely around her bust and parade around in front of him. If he was in his room, her best bet was to call him out for a 'favour' or 'help'. It wouldn't hurt to crush her lips together beforehand to give them an alluring, natural red tinge.

She wrung her hair out into the shower before patting it as dry as best as she could. She'd purposely grabbed one of Bellamy's towels for this, only realizing afterward that she should probably tone down the blatant flirting unless she wanted to encourage more intimacy than she meant to. But it was too late for that, and she didn't have the care to worry about it. Aurora was fast asleep in her bedroom, Octavia out on a run, and the last time she'd seen Bellamy, he was walking into his room holding a towel around his hips, shagging his wet hair with his other hand. So now it was her turn to be all wet and silky smooth, or every other cheesy description Raven had used.

She adjusted the hang of her hair, trying to make it look enticing and wavy. When she was satisfied, she loosened the towel around herself, holding it closed between her breasts. It was so slack around her that the back of it hung to the small of her back, which was exactly what she was going for.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, she looked down the hall to Bellamy's door. It was closed. Sighing impatiently, she walked to the kitchen. All there was to do was convince him she needed help reaching a top shelf or something, which she frequently did in reality, thanks to her height, so she could just call him out and act all cute and innocent and short and I-need-tall-strong-Bellamy-to-do-something-for-helpless-little-me. She opened the highest cupboard, craning her neck to see what she could use from inside. There was an aspirin bottle sitting close to the front, and even though she didn't have a headache, she'd take one for the team. She was just about to call out to Bellamy when she remembered his mom was asleep and needed to stay that way. She turned to head to his room and get him, but then jumped in surprise when she saw him leaning against the door frame wearing a tight black shirt and crossing his arms over it, raw emotion on his face.

And then something God awful happened and she figured, karma, since the way she was leading him on right now wasn't exactly nice.

Since she hadn't toweled off, thinking having water droplets on her was supposed to be enticing, the tile had become wet, and she lost her footing on it and slipped. In an attempt to break her fall, she lost her grip, too, on the towel and fell butt naked onto the floor. Her first thought was Oh, God, that is fucking mortifying. Her second thought was a groaned my ass. Clarke hurried to cover herself again, glancing up at Bellamy. He had his back turned to her now, his hands pressed hard to either side of the door frame as he leaned forward away from her.

"You okay, Princess?"

"Did you see anything?" she asked breathlessly instead of answering, hauling herself to her feet.
Fuck the loose, drapey towel look. She was wrapping it tightly all the way around her body, no qualms about it.

"No," he said instantly, shaking his head. "I closed my eyes and turned as soon as I saw your foot slip."

She rolled her weight from one foot to the other. "Are you just saying that?"

"If I saw you, I'd tell you."

She stared at him for a second, seeing his hand flex, like he wanted to turn.

"You really didn't look?" she asked.

"Of course not."

Well, that was ... rather touching. She should have guessed he'd be that way. Aside from the recent flirting, or this new, more intense side of him she was seeing, he was still the same person. He'd never been a creepy gawker who looked when he wasn't supposed to.

"Okay," she said meekly, tightening the towel again. "You can turn around."

He did so slowly, dropping his hands from the door frame. That expression on his face from before was gone, replaced with regular old Bellamy Blake.

"You all right?"

At least he wasn't making it weird.

"My ass hurts."

And there was that flirty look again.

"I could massage it if you want."

She rolled her eyes, but she was smiling a real genuine smile.

"How selfless of you," she said, walking toward the hall.

He laughed, pressing his back into the doorway for her to pass. Her arm grazed his abdomen as she did. When she was halfway to Octavia's room, she glanced over her shoulder at him, expecting to see his eyes quickly move away from her ass, but it surprised her to see he'd been looking straight ahead, and he smiled when he caught her eye. He was just full of surprises, this one.

And then Clarke started to think that maybe the whole fake dating him wouldn't be as gross as she'd been trying to make herself believe. As she experienced the previous night, it was actually quite nice to be in that role again, to have someone to depend on, and to be held by. She could get used to it, she thought, even if it was Bellamy. It would only be for a little while, anyway, and for that little while, she might as well get some enjoyment out of it.

When she went home later that day after lunch, she called Raven and relayed everything back to her except the towel situation. She pretended that went off without a hitch, and Raven bought it, telling her that things sounded very promising, especially since she'd gotten through so much of the list in one day. At the soonest opportunity, Raven told Clarke to move on to the last phase of Step One. All she had to do for that part was get him alone.
Chapter End Notes

If this was a bit boring, I'm really sorry. I got into this idea of a little checklist and figured I'd just write it out, but then as I was editing the chapter, I was like ... well, this isn't as interesting as I thought it'd be.

Anyway, though, next chapter is real-time and just better in general.. thanks for reading :)

Clarke could never have predicted the events of the following week. It all started with the rain.

The last class of the day was Law 30, which Clarke shared with her friend Monty Green - just for the credit, they'd both said. Their desks were on the far left side of the room in the middle of the row, Monty's right in front of hers, so when he propped his chin in his hand and turned his head to look out the window, Clarke automatically followed his gaze, letting the low monotone of the teacher's voice fall to background.

It was thick outside, humid and gloomy. It had been all day. During first period, the heavy grey clouds started dripping out rain in a light drizzle, and shortly after, it morphed into rolling sheets that hadn't let up at all, flooding the courtyards with puddles and puddles of water. There was supposed to be a home football game after school, one that Clarke had every intention of attending (and not just because she liked the game ... the tight uniforms on the boys definitely helped) but even with the insistence of the football boys and their coach (rain or snow, we're ready to go ... Clarke thought their 'motto', if it could be called that, was beyond cheesy) she somehow didn't see it happening. Not that it really mattered. This was her favourite weather to curl up with a blanket and Octavia and binge watch Netflix with ice cream and pizza, or go for a drive with all her friends through the city, or paint really sad portraits, or go to the Blakes' and annoy Bellamy about anything.

Though, that last one wasn't really an option at the moment, what with her trying to seduce him and all. A deep frown settled on Clarke's face when she tried to furiously shove away the notion that bothering him for the sake of bothering him didn't hold that much appeal anymore. Instead of succeeding, though, she seemed to rouse her sane self into a riveting internal conversation with her.

This isn't like you. Why don't you want to bug him, Clarke?

Oh, my God. What's happening to me?

Do you love him or something?

I don't even like him.
Are you trying to convince yourself or me?

You are me. Oh, God, I'm talking to myself. I'm going crazy.

Maybe that's why you don't hate him now. You've gone insane. Might as well go check into a mental hospital, you loon.

Ugh, shut up.

"Excuse me?"

Clarke's eyes widened. Oh, no. That last part must not have been in her head.

She slowly looked away from the window to the front of the room, seeing Monty smirking at her over his shoulder. Her teacher didn't look nearly as happy.

"Did you just tell me to shut up?" he asked, incredulous.

Clarke frowned, swallowing hard and shaking her head. "No?"

"Office," he said lowly, pointing to the door. "Now."

"Mr. Jaha, I didn't-"

"I said now."

With a heavy sigh and slumped shoulders, Clarke gathered her books and tried to ignore the hushed laughter of the students around her. It was even harder not to high-five them when they held a hand up as she passed, quietly cheering. No one really liked Mr. Jaha that much. When she closed the door behind her, she heard him sharply tell the class to settle down and the snickers died off at once. Clarke stood outside for a moment, her bag over her shoulder and her textbook in her hand, debating whether or not she really should go to the office. It was the last class of the day, and there were only (she pulled her phone from her pocket to check the time) fifteen minutes left until the bell, so really ... she could just go home and tomorrow, deal with Jaha's wrath over her not doing as she was told. She had to do something instead of lurking outside the classroom, so she started down the hall to her locker.

Her options for the day, sans football game, were:

1. Go home and watch movies by herself since Octavia had work at the coffee shop The Ark from 3:45 until closing. That was the depressing choice.
2. Round up Monty, Jasper Jordan and Finn Collins (the only other friends she had at this second-rate school) and go for a drive around town. Ehh, she thought as she walked. Without Octavia, that just wouldn't be as fulfilling.
3. Raven was only a few miles away ... Clarke could drive out there and ... on second thought, Raven would probably beat her for it; that one really hated spontaneous visits.
4. And finally: she still had to put forth the last part of her 'snag Bellamy' plan ... after the 'snag Bellamy' plan was the 'keep Bellamy interested' plan and then the 'toss Bellamy' plan (she was most looking forward to that one, so forgive her if she was eager to get this first section over and done with).

Admittedly, all of her options sucked and she needed something better to do, but it was raining and she got kicked out of class and she was a little bit (unreasonably) upset with Octavia for having an occupied afternoon and God, she might as well be productive. When she stopped at her locker to put away her books and get her homework, she pulled her phone from her pocket and dialed Bellamy's
cell phone. He picked up on the second ring, sounding groggy.

"Hello?"

"Hey," she said, stuffing a book in her bag. "Were you asleep?"

"Uh, yeah," he said, sounding confused. "Sorry ... who's this?"

She clicked her tongue, rolling her eyes. "It's me, it's Clarke."

Something banged on his end, followed by the sound of air crackling into the mouthpiece. When he spoke again, his voice was much more alert.

"Oh - hey. Uh ... hey."

"Hi," she laughed, staring at her locker and trying to figure out how to start. "Sorry for waking you. I didn't realize you'd be sleeping."

"No, it's fine. Is everything okay?"

His pleased tone caused a Bellamy-induced pit of guilt to form in her stomach. All these new feelings were springing up that she wasn't sure how to handle, especially not when they concerned him. As confusing as it was, she couldn't keep pretending she hated him, though she didn't exactly feel benevolent toward him either.

"Yeah, everything's fine," she answered, frowning. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"You've never called me before unless you needed something," he said.

She winced, her guilt growing. "Oh, well - I just ... what are you doing today? Do you have work or anything? Any plans?"

"No, nothing. I just had back to back shifts at the bar last night and then the car shop this morning, but the rest of my day's open."

So that explained his mid-afternoon nap. He works too hard, she thought absently.

"Well, that's good, then," she said. "You should sleep. I'll talk to you later."

By this point, she'd gathered all her belongings and was heading down the hall to the front doors, about to hang up the call, when -

"Wait, why'd you-" he paused and she could hear him swallowing. "Did you want to ... do something, or...?"

She cleared her throat, stopping at the front doors and staring dejectedly out into the downpour.

"Not if you're tired."

"No, I'm fine," he said quickly. "If you wanted to come, I've got the house to myself."

Clarke narrowed her eyes. She knew he did, of course. It was why she called. Except it was distressing that he mentioned it. Was he implying something? If he was, she was way out of her depth, and despite her silence, he didn't elaborate, which was all the more worrying. If he wasn't amending his statement, saying something to assure her that a certain activity wasn't on his mind, that made her think it probably was.
"Well, what would we do?" she asked lightly, trying not to sound pushy.

He was silent for a beat, and then -

"Whatever you want."

It was hard to keep the smile off her face.

"I'll see you soon, then."

After Clarke pulled up across the street from the Blake house almost half an hour later, rain pattering against the roof of her car and her clothes and hair still soaked from her mad dash through the downpour at school, she felt an uncharacteristic nervousness rooting her to her seat. The driveway was empty but for Bellamy's vehicle, as she'd known it would be, and suddenly, her body felt electric. Not for the first time over the last couple of days, she was unsure about this whole situation and what it was doing to her, and to him, if she were being honest. It was impossible to differentiate the rapid beating of her heart between good nerves or bad, and the thought that she was good nervous about Bellamy Blake, of all people, was difficult to wrap her head around. Honest to God, a week ago she was referring to him as Octavia's idiot brother and now she was trying to convince herself that this was not some kind of booty call. Really, the only thing stopping her from putting her key back in the ignition and ripping home was the reminder that he'd said they'd do whatever she wanted. Unless he thought she wanted to ... with him.

She furrowed her brow, staring unseeing at the house. That couldn't be right. This was Bellamy she was thinking about. All things considered, he was a good guy - Octavia's brother - and there was no way he'd pressure his little sister's best friend into doing anything with him that she didn't want to (Clarke didn't know why she doubted that so much, but she was trying really hard to give him the benefit of the doubt). Besides, this wasn't even about her. It was about Bellamy, for Octavia, and Clarke was just as much of a pawn in this whole scheme as he was.

She was snapped from her thoughts by a movement in her periphery. When she saw the living room curtains sway back into place, her face heated in embarrassment, thinking he now knew she was having an anxious moment alone in her car for who knew how long. Muttering oh, my God over and over again, she opened her car door and tried to climb out only to be pulled back by the seat belt that she forgot to unbuckle.

"Jesus, Clarke, relax," she muttered to herself, stilling for a moment to take a deep breath before nimbly pulling herself free and grabbing her back pack from the passenger seat on her way out.

She half expected Bellamy to be waiting for her at the door when she opened it, but the foyer was empty. There was soft music coming from what had to be Bellamy's room, but if his plan was to lure her in, he had another thing coming.

"I'm here, Bellamy," she called loudly, dropping her bag by the door and patting down her wet hair on the way to the bathroom.

She was wringing her hair out into a towel when the music grew suddenly louder as he opened his bedroom door. Clarke's heartbeat picked up at the sudden onslaught of explicit images zipping through her head, all of which featured Bellamy. Now that she was here, alone with him with the rain seeming to trap them inside, it was getting harder to convince herself that he wasn't going to try a certain something with her. Which was stupid, really, considering they hadn't even kissed, but ... she didn't really want to chance anything. That was why when he walked by the bathroom only to swing himself around and stop in the doorway with an easy smile, she gave him an exasperated look and
started to complain about the safest topic she could think of: the weather.

"Do you think this is the real life Noah's Ark flooding business?" she asked, looking back at her reflection as she kept herself busy with toweling off her hair. "'Cause we're gonna need a boat."

Bellamy chuckled, giving her an inviting smile, and she'd known this would happen if she came over, but she couldn't very well leave now. If she could go back in time and change her mind about this entire ploy, sad Octavia be damned, she would. Because Bellamy wasn't saying anything, just looking at her in that tempting sort of way (she was not tempted ... she was just wondering what it would be like to kiss him, but not because she wanted to ... she'd have to do it at some point, so it was natural for her to imagine it, wasn't it? Inwardly, Clarke groaned, because now things were getting weird).

From the looks of it, Bellamy was waiting for her to make the next move. She thought it might have been best to find a way to get them out of the house because in its coziness, it was feeling way too encouraging, like it was Sebastian from The Little Mermaid when he was trying to get Eric to kiss Ariel, except Clarke was not Ariel and Bellamy kind of was Eric. There was no Prince, and the house was definitely not her wingman in this instance, and Clarke really just needed some air.

"We should go do something," she blurted.

Bellamy quirked an eyebrow, crossing his arms as he leaned his shoulder against the door frame.

"You want to go out together like that?" he asked, nodding to her wardrobe.

A few seconds wasn't enough for her to analyze whether he was implying a 'date' or not. She tried not to get distracted by it as she tossed her head forward and wrapped the towel around her hair, setting it on the top of her head as she walked to Octavia's room.

"I have clothes to change into in Octavia's dresser," she said. "Since I'm here half the time-"

"Half the time?" he echoed, an unmistakable smile in his voice.

She bit the corner of her lip, squeezing one eye shut. "Yeah, I guess it's probably a bit more than that."

"Just a bit," he agreed, giving a small laugh.

"Anyway," she continued loudly, throwing him a look over her shoulder before letting herself into Octavia's bedroom, "just let me change and dry my hair, and we can go to ... the museum, or something."

Obviously, she couldn't care less about whatever was in a museum (she'd never been, obviously), but if she had to go there to get Bellamy to date her, she'd do it. As she closed the door behind her and laid a towel on the bed for her wet clothes, she heard Bellamy sigh heavily from the other side of the door.

"Why don't you want to stay here?" he asked, his voice muffled.

She frowned at the probable insinuation as she dropped her jacket from her shoulders, peeling off her shirt next.

"Well, what's there to do here?" she called, immediately thinking of his mouth on hers and rolling her eyes at the way her face heated. She decided her best bet was just to accept that she'd be nervous kissing him, whenever it happened, whether she hated him or not. It was weird in every aspect; he
was older, he was her best friend's brother, she went through puberty around him, and while she did see his attractiveness, it was in an objective sort of way. Yeah, he was good-looking and occasionally fun, but he was mostly just the asshole older brother she was glad she never had. It was a bit hard to get past that part.

"What's there to do every other time you come over?" he countered. "We could just watch TV or something. I don't really care."

When Clarke emerged from the room a few seconds later wearing sweatpants and a heavy sweater, the towel still wrapped around her hair, Bellamy looked victorious.

"Fine," she said, nodding once, crossing her arms and staring fixedly at his chest so that she didn't have to see the look in his eyes. "Let's just ... hang out."

"Mmm," he murmured, a lightness to his voice that Clarke chose to ignore.

Rolling her eyes, she walked away from him to the living room, asking him what was on the History Channel today and thinking that it was probably better that they stayed in; it'd be easier to get started on the final stage of Step One if it was just the two of them.

**Option 3: Just Bellamy**

- Once Clarke found a way to be alone with Bellamy, she had to milk the situation. Openly compliment him, ask him things that he would think she wouldn't ask in front of Octavia. She had to make it clear that she didn't want Octavia to know about her feelings. According to Raven, that would make him think her interest was real, because she wouldn't be willing to risk her friendship with Octavia if it wasn't, which would be the reason for her sneaking around behind Octavia's back. Or something.

+ If he was watching TV, she needed to join him and grin and bear it if it was one of those stupid *Discovery TV* shows. On every commercial, she had to talk to him about something, probably the show, since it would inflate his ego that she needed him to explain things to her.

"You look good today," she said, sitting next to him on the couch with her legs crossed toward him, a fair amount of space between them - he didn't ask her to sit closer, and she was indescribably relieved.

It was a stupid thing to say because then, she had to quickly glance over to his hair and what he was wearing (which of course he caught her doing) seeing as she didn't know if he actually did look good on the basis that she wasn't paying him any proper amount of attention.

"So do you," he said, gliding his eyes up to the towel on her head with a smirk.

"What, would you rather I took it off?" she said, raising her eyebrows at the indifferent look he gave her. She shrugged a shoulder and unraveled her hair, giving it a gentle tousle. "This is gonna look like a rat's nest in a few hours."

"Join the club."

"As if," she said, looking at the gentle curls on his head and taking a deep, silent breath as she reached over to lightly comb them through her chilled fingers.
Bellamy froze immediately, and despite that this wasn't that much more intimate than their cuddling a few nights ago, Clarke felt embarrassed. She pulled her hand away, muttering an apology and crossing her arms over her chest. She was staring pointedly at the ruins on the TV, hearing a man with an English lilt talk about their history when Bellamy spoke lowly, keeping his head turned to the TV.

"You could keep doing it, if you want."

This is so stupid, she thought stubbornly, her stomach tight as she rapidly bounced her foot in the air. Because okay, obviously this was the kind of thing she was supposed to do when pretending to be interested in someone, but she was aggravated that she liked the softness of his hair and that she could still feel it in the spaces between her fingers. And as ridiculous as it was, she felt like she was betraying herself with these thoughts, like touching him should make her want to vomit. It's not like she'd never touched him in the past, even if those times were generally a smack to the chest or a shove, though as everything else was already shifting between them, so was this.

Clarke moved closer to him until their hips were just barely touching. She rested her elbow on the back of the couch behind his head and let her hand fall gently forward until she felt his hair beneath her fingertips again. She was supposed to be watching the show, asking him about it so that he could answer and feel like a man, but mostly, she was trailing her eyes over his hair, noticing it was darker in some areas than others. And it really was so soft, and warm, and Bellamy was sighing a lot, and now Clarke was, too.

About an hour later, after they'd maneuvered so she was sitting at one end of the couch with her legs stretched across the cushions and Bellamy lying between them, his head in her lap and her hand still in his hair, Clarke was sure neither of them were particularly focused on the show anymore. She'd been doing half of what she was supposed to, asking him any questions she had about what things meant and if her hunches were correct (and finding herself surprisingly interested enough to hold onto his answers), but she still hadn't brought up anything personal, despite that the situation was begging for intimacy. She'd been slowly gliding the tips of her fingers over Bellamy's chest until she felt the warmth of his large hand settling on top of her cool one. He gently turned her hand over to trail his thumb over her palm.

It was all it took for her to decide to ask what was on her mind, hoping it wouldn't clue him in to anything.

"How come you've never had a girlfriend, Bellamy?" she asked. Her voice was meek, sad somehow, though that wasn't her intention.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he ran his fingers over the underside of hers in time with her caresses through his hair.

When he spoke, his voice was quiet, too. "I never really wanted one."

She nodded lightly to herself. "So, you're just in the sex phase?"

She'd only said it to get him to laugh, so when he didn't, she tensed, thinking it was the wrong thing to say.

"I guess so."

Bellamy quit playing with her hand, but when she started to pull it back, he stopped her by sliding his fingers in between hers. Her other hand paused in his hair as a shaky breath left her lips.
"With anyone in particular or just anyone?" she pressed, knowing she should drop it, but finding herself too curious to just let it go.

With a quiet sigh, Bellamy sat up, turning around so that he was facing her. He scooted closer, one leg crossed under him. His hand was still wrapped around hers.

"Why don't you ask that again, Clarke?"

"Will you answer if I do?"

He shrugged a shoulder, a playful smile on his face.

Clarke parted her lips and looked down. "With anyone in partic-

He cut her off with the press of his lips to hers. Clarke's eyes widened, her heart instantly picking up in her chest. A wave of heat washed over her entire body and she knew she was frozen, her fight or flight response definitely kicking in. She wasn't kissing him back because she just couldn't think to do so, but at least for the moment, Bellamy didn't seem deterred, continuing to move his lips against hers.

The way she saw it, she had two options: stay still and let him kiss her until he stopped, maybe thinking she wasn't interested (which she wasn't, but he couldn't know that), or ... well, this was what everything had been leading up to, and she'd known it was coming.

She brought a shaky hand up to his cheek and opened her mouth to him. As soon as she did, Bellamy deepened the kiss and moved closer. Her heart was pounding so hard that for a moment, she was worried she would have a heart attack. She forgot about it when Bellamy's hands slunk up under her sweater to grab at her bare waist, sliding her toward him on the couch. He fell slowly backward, pulling her with him. When they were lying down, Clarke completely pressed into Bellamy, she tried to move back so she wasn't crushing him, but his hands moved up to the middle of her back and held her tightly in place.

"I'm trying to give you room," she whispered against his mouth, letting him give her quick kisses on each of her lips even as she spoke.

He shook his head quickly, moving one of his hands from her back to cradle the side of her neck.

"Don't," he said roughly, arching up.

She felt his hardness press tightly into her and she gasped into his mouth, unintentionally spurring him on.

"Bellamy," she breathed, really not wanting to do ... whatever this was leading to. Thankfully, her voice must have held some of the panic she was feeling, because he let her move back.

Pulling his arm out from under the back of her sweater, he brought his hands up to brush her hair out of her face - his hands cradling her cheeks a surprising comfort - and looked back and forth between her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, guilt colouring his features.

"Don't be," she said just as quietly, giving him a reassuring kiss that had nothing to do with her plan. It didn't feel romantic, but it definitely wasn't platonic, either.

Bellamy kissed her back, but the heat was gone. After a short second, his hands grabbed her
shoulders and squeezed gently. Taking the hint, she pulled away again.

There was a poorly concealed smile on his face.

"You should go do your homework."

Clarke scoffed out a laugh, using his chest as leverage to push off of him.

"Way to ruin the moment," she muttered from her seat on his hips, her eyes finding the unruly mess of dark, curly hair she'd been playing with, sticking up in all kinds of directions.

He grabbed onto her hand. "We were having a moment?"

She rolled her eyes and Bellamy smiled with a light laugh, letting her go.

"Your hair looks good, by the way," he said, smirking as she climbed off.

Walking to the front door to grab her backpack, Clarke pressed her lips together to stop her smile.

"So does yours," she called over her shoulder, rewarded with a breathy laugh.

It already felt like they were dating, and not just for pretend.

A few minutes later, while Clarke was doing homework in the living room with *Discovery TV* playing in the background, Bellamy's steady breaths quickly reached her ears. When she looked back at him, his eyes were closed and his face relaxed in sleep, and as Clarke looked away, a small smile was playing at the edges of her mouth.

- If Bellamy stepped out/showered/went away for a moderate length of time, Clarke was to take a book or some activity into his room and wait for him on his bed. When he came in, she should lay herself out in some sort of 'enticing' position. When he inevitably asked what she was doing, she was supposed to blow it off casually, like it was no big deal. Saying she was just bored would be a good one, or complimenting the feel of his mattress, or the softness of his blankets. Making him associate her with his room was important. There was no way he'd be able to go to sleep without thinking about her.

After their kiss, Clarke found it was much easier to get Bellamy alone, mostly because he was seemingly having a hard time staying away. If she went into another room, he'd follow and come up behind her as soon as they were out of sight. Grabbing her and twisting his arms around her to pull her tightly back into his chest, he'd bury his face into her shoulder and press desperate, open-mouthed kisses into her neck, dragging his teeth over her skin as he did. It never lasted for more than a few seconds before he was walking away without a look, but she was always left shell-shocked and lightly panting, unable to shake the feeling of his arms closed around her. If they weren't alone, he'd let his hand drag across the middle of her back as he passed her, and he was giving her these looks all the time that made her think he was imagining dragging her to his room, locking her in, and keeping her there until he was done with her. When Octavia asked about this new, apparently obvious development, Clarke told her she was wearing him down. That was enough for Octavia, fortunately, since it would be way too weird to talk to her about how easily turned on her brother got and how every time he kissed her now - never on the lips since the first one - he was getting rougher, more frantic, more impatient. It made the next time they were alone together all the more worrying.

It happened a few days later and the timing was absolutely perfect for this element of the plan. It was mid-afternoon on a Sunday, the day Octavia and Aurora went grocery shopping every week. Bellamy had arrived home from the gym about ten minutes before they headed out and he'd been in
the shower ever since.

For her part, Clarke wasn’t feeling at all confident. Earlier, before all the flirting and the touching and the kisses that felt like nothing more than a substitute for what Bellamy really wanted to do to her, but couldn’t, yet - ‘yet’ being the bolded, italicized, capitalized word in the equation, especially since the time for ‘yet’ was now - Clarke had been all for this getting-Bellamy-alone-and-tantalizing-him thing. Now, though, she was at the brink of having sex with him while the whole point of this all, the dating him part, was nowhere to be seen. Even more nerve-wracking was the feeling that this was coming to a close. If he didn't ask her out soon, something told her this would all be for naught.

It took her hearing the shower cutting off before she had the nerve to bound across the house to Bellamy's bedroom, sneaking the door open as quietly as she could and leaping onto his bed, bouncing a few times as she crawled around. In her haste to find a position that looked alluring, or whatever Raven had said, she ended up knocking a book from Bellamy's nightstand onto the floor with a loud thump. She squeezed her eyes shut, wincing at the noise and her own sloppiness, but quickly regained composure as she heard the bathroom door click open. She yanked the book off the ground and flopped over onto her side, letting her back face the door. As coincidence would have it, she'd come over today wearing very tight jeans that would fit this moment perfectly. She opened the book to a random page and waited with heavy breaths for Bellamy to come into his room.

She heard his footfalls abruptly come to a stop in the doorway followed by a sharp exhale.

"I know you're not trying to give me any ideas," he started after a moment, "but I can't promise I won't get any."

Clarke rolled onto her shoulder to see him, keeping the lower half of her body facing him for effect. He was wearing a towel wrapped tightly around his hips. When Clarke trailed her eyes up to his face, she was surprised that he looked ... well, unhappy was the only way she could describe it.

"What's wrong?" she asked, sitting up and letting her hand slip from the book so that it shut with a flutter.

"Nothing."

She sat straighter, hesitating before speaking again.

"Do you want me to leave?"

He stared at her, his jaw clamped shut and his chest heaving with shallow breaths. Clarke was waiting for his answer, but when it was apparent she wasn't getting one, she sighed in disappointment, not caring enough to figure out what being disappointed meant, and slid off his bed. She set the book back on his night table and walked across the room, avoiding his gaze. Bellamy being unhappy with her presence in his bedroom wasn't exactly what she was going for. And what could he possibly have to be unhappy about? Seeing her lounging in tight jeans made him unhappy? Her butt suddenly wasn't something in his interest range?

Except that when Clarke walked around him to leave, his arm shot out in front of her and grabbed the edge of the door, swinging it shut with a loud bang. Clarke flinched, looking over her shoulder at him and the heated look on his face. When he advanced on her, grasping her arms to spin her around and then pushing her back into the door, she smelled his fresh, clean scent just before he bent his head forward and closed his mouth over hers in a needy kiss. Clarke responded immediately this time, kissing him back and touching the hard muscles of his chest, the small droplets of water that had lingered on his skin breaking under her hands. He was breathing heavily into her mouth, his hands finding their way under her shirt like before and squeezing her skin, dragging her toward him
just so he could force her back against the door to hear her make a tiny sound in the back of her throat that she couldn't stop no matter how hard she tried.

Bellamy moaned her name, his hands clamping around her waist and his tongue pushing into her mouth. If she didn't stop this now before it got out of hand, it would only get harder.

"Bellamy," Clarke said breathlessly, pushing back on his chest. "Wait. What are we doing?"

He stayed back the distance she'd made between them, but he was still staring at her with a dark hunger, like he would lunge as soon as she gave the word.

"I just-" he paused, groaning in frustration and pressing closer into her. "I want you, Clarke."

Clarke's eyes closed. She'd been telling herself this whole time to make sure he wanted to be with her instead of just wanting her, but she'd been too straightforward and she went and messed it all up. It was hard to feel mad at herself, though, because she didn't want any of this in the first place. It wasn't like she was an expert at making someone she didn't like, like her. But now that he brought up, Clarke realized if she didn't say something ... well, this was the best shot she was ever going to get to turn things around. If it didn't work, there was nothing else she knew to try.

So she took a deep breath and leaned back into the door, trying to look like she had feelings for him and hoping she wasn't giving him some kind of awkward look.

"I want more than that, Bellamy."

He recoiled, blinking rapidly, and Clarke thought, well, Octavia, I failed you, but then a different kind of light burned in his eyes. He clenched his jaw, swallowing hard, and pressed closer.

"So go out with me," he said quickly, trailing his thumb over her cheek, gazing softly into her eyes.

Her heart picked up. Did he just say ... wait, was it really this easy all along?

"You probably should have started with that," she said.

He shook his head, a small smile forming on his face as he leaned forward to hover his lips over hers.

"It's okay," he breathed, giving her a lingering kiss before pulling away to nuzzle her cheek. "As long as you say 'yes'."

Her next question was more to soothe her own curiosity than anything.

"What happened to you not wanting a girlfriend?"

He was looking at her like she was missing something vital.

"You're a little bit clueless, aren't you?"

Her mouth popped open and she shoved him, but he grabbed her hands and pinned them back against the door.

"Do you want me to go out with you or not?" she asked, trying to sound severe, but she couldn't quite catch her breath.

"I asked, didn't I?"

"Then don't be mean," she said, testing his grip on her hands, which prompted him to link their
fingers. He used his head to push hers to the side, giving him better access to her neck. "You're not exactly earning yourself brownie points there, buddy."

"You're stalling," he murmured, trailing his lips up to the base of her ear.

Clarke squeezed his hands, her eyes falling shut when he sighed into her neck, planting lazy kisses along her throat. She wasn't going to lie, she was enjoying this a little. Just a little. She hadn't been touched like this for so long. The same feelings from the first night she was with him in his room came back, that same sense of feeling wanted, and protected, and cared for. And besides, she was feeling a bit victorious considering everything was falling into place like puzzle pieces and it was hard to let anything bring her down in that moment.

"Fine," she whispered, arching her back to let her chest touch his. "Ask me again."

"Will you go -"

She cut him off with a kiss reminiscent of their first one. She knew Bellamy caught on when a breathy laugh left him as he lowered his arms to let his fingers graze either side of her neck. When Clarke's hands dropped to the warm skin of his shoulders, he used his hips to push her backward into the door.

"That better be your answer, Princess," he murmured, his lips brushing against hers with every word.

As they kissed, eventually finding their way to the bed where Clarke straddled his hips, holding his face in her hands while he drew long strokes up and down her back, she was more concerned with her technique, whereas Bellamy seemed locked in the moment. It was flattering, really.

It wasn't until they heard the van pull up in the driveway that they pulled apart. Instead of feeling guilty about the contented way Bellamy was looking at her, Clarke couldn't keep the small smile from her own face. The notion that she didn't want to leave him quite yet caught her off guard, and it was for precisely that thought that she slid from his lap and left his room, closing the door on him and that pleased look. She went to the bathroom to make sure she didn't look like she'd been making out with anyone, but when she went to help unpack the groceries and Octavia saw her, she widened her eyes, her lips parting in surprise.

Naturally, Clarke laughed, biting the inside of her cheek and giving Octavia a quick nod and a discreet thumbs up with one hand.

At that, Octavia's jaw dropped, followed by a delighted squeal as she yanked Clarke into a tight hug. When Aurora asked what was going on, Octavia didn't even answer, hugging Clarke harder and whispering, 'thank you' over and over in her ear. A second later, Bellamy came out of his room with a blank expression, but as soon as he saw Clarke looking at him, he broke out into a grin and shook his head, heading to the living room.

Clarke suppressed a smile, joking around with Octavia, who clearly wanted to head to her room immediately to discuss everything. To Clarke's credit, she refrained from saying anything revealing around Bellamy, waiting until it was late and she and Octavia were lying in her bed and giggling in hushed whispers as Octavia texted Lincoln about taking her out. Clarke didn't fall asleep for a while after that, but when she did, it was with a smile and the thought I can't believe I did it, running through her head.
Two days of flirting too soon for a first kiss? I hope not ... I thought Bellamy was feeling it, ya know?
Also, the reference to The Little Mermaid.. I'm not sure where that came from, but it's around 4:00 in the morning right now and being this tired, I'm feeling a little weird, so I'm gonna leave it in for now.

Anyway, next chapter will be up within a week!
Clarke had been playing the role of the doting girlfriend for four days now. It was ... different, to the
say the least. The hardest thing about it so far was not look off put by the blatant affection Bellamy
was giving her, coming seemingly naturally to him. It was such a stark contrast to how things usually
were that she was taken off guard over and over and over....

On the two dates they'd already had - one to a midnight movie at the theatre where Clarke could not
believe they actually bumped hands in the popcorn bag (multiple times); the other to a surprisingly
packed dive bar to see Bellamy's friend's band (The 100, they were called - and hey, they weren't too
shabby) - Bellamy couldn't seem to keep to himself. If he wasn't reaching for Clarke's hand, he was
touching the small of her back, or holding his arm around her shoulders. Instead of his usual, acting
like a brother by annoying her in every way possible, he was giving her long, tender kisses by the
door in lieu of a 'hello' and much steamier ones for 'goodbye', murmuring casual conversation topics
against her mouth all the while, which she was sure he only kept doing because she laughed
whenever he did it. Clarke felt (mostly) the same toward him as she had for the last week, though she
couldn't deny kissing him was nicer than she imagined and spending time with him alone wasn't very
hard at all. They still teased each other the majority of the time, but now, rather than rolling her eyes
and getting mad, she was laughing along with him, letting him grip her waist and pull her toward him
with a goofy grin on his face, letting him kiss her, smiling into it when he tickled her sides.

Alas, she wasn't doing this with Bellamy just for the fun of it, and Octavia was taking her sweet time
with Lincoln.

"It doesn't matter when I date him, Clarke," she said stubbornly, sitting at a corner table at the
restaurant where Lincoln worked. "You still said you'd keep this up for at least a few months."

Clarke folded her arms on the table. "I really don't remember agreeing to that part."

"Well, too bad because it was an implied, non-negotiable part of the deal."

Rolling her eyes, Clarke leaned back, crossing her arms and looking away.

"Don't act like it's so hard to keep up the charade," Octavia said smartly, a distinguishable hint in her
voice that Clarke could not believe. "I've seen you with him. You two look like you're having a
blast."

Clarke's shoulders slumped as she turned her wide-eyes back to Octavia.

"Do you think I'm enjoying it?" she asked, because of course she wasn't. Just because it wasn't
horrible, didn't mean she was jumping at the idea of having hour-long make-out sessions with
Bellamy, which (thank God) they hadn't done, yet. But really, it'd only been a few days. There was
opportunity for it soon enough, unfortunately. She wasn't about to dwell on it, though. "I'm trying to
make it believable, Octavia. For your benefit. No other reason."

Octavia's face fell in what looked like guilt, but a second later, a playful smile drove it away.

"Well, whatever you're doing, keep doing it. It's definitely working," she said, an eager look on her
face that she wasn't even trying to hide.
Intrigued, the corner of Clarke's mouth tilted up. So what if she felt good about herself for manipulating a man into dating her? If there was any shame to be burned under, it was keeping well away from Clarke.

"Why?" she asked, "Is something happening?"

"Well," Octavia started, drawing the word out and bouncing around in her seat before stilling dramatically, "today, I woke up to that song 'It's Magic' blasting from his bedroom."

Clarke's face was frozen for a few long seconds before a loud laugh tore it's way out of her.

"Are you serious?"

"Dead serious," Octavia said, her eyebrows raised.

But then ... then Clarke didn't think it was as funny.

"Oh, God."

Octavia laughed at that. "Yeah, who woulda thought he was the type, right?"

That wasn't what had Clarke worried, though.

"Doesn't this seem a little bit strange to you?" she asked hesitantly, trying not get paranoid.

"That he's blaring love songs in his bedroom? I just said it was weird-"

"No, I mean ... I feel like this whole thing is staged, and I don't mean on our part."

"Clarke, he's not onto us," Octavia said reassuringly. "Trust me, I would know."

"Isn't it weird that he asked me out, though?" Clarke pushed.

Octavia rolled her eyes, starting to say 'That was kind of the plan', but Clarke cut her off.

"This entire scheme started what, two weeks ago? And already we're together? This is a man who has never dated anyone in his life."

"I'm sure that was mostly just to stop me from getting a boyfriend," Octavia muttered, though she didn't look like she believed it.

"So, he suddenly doesn't care about that anymore?" she asked shrilly, definitely paranoid now.

If this was some kind of trick, like he was really the one playing her, like he knew what was going on this whole time ... she felt suddenly very defensive. Octavia sighed, standing from the booth and walking over to Clarke's seat to slide in next to her. She draped an arm over Clarke's shoulders.

"You need to calm down, babe," she said softly, squeezing Clarke's arm. "Just breathe. This isn't war, you're not dying, you're just dating my brother for a couple of months. There's no need to over analyze it."

Sighing, Clarke leaned into Octavia.

"I should never have agreed to this," she said grumpily.

Octavia laughed quietly.
"I'm glad you did, though," she said lightly. "And you know, maybe we're looking at this all wrong. Like, you might be the only girl who ever gave him the time of day, and now he's all, 'holy shit, Clarke's into me, I can finally lose my virginity'."

Clarke snort laughed, straightening her back.

"First of all: not happening," she said, trying not to picture it now that it was brought up. She very nearly succeeded. "'And Bellamy isn't a virgin, Octavia. Or haven't you noticed him coming home in the dead of night every single weekend? Not to mention that after his shift's over at the bar, he's never home until the sun's up.'"

There was a deep frown on Octavia's face when Clarke looked over, one at which she couldn't help but laugh.

"Wait, ewww. That's what he's doing?"

"Where did you think he was coming from, the toy store?" she said, and then much more sharply, "Wait, what do you mean 'ew', you were just calmly implying he wanted to sleep with me."

"That's totally different," she said, as though that much was obvious.

"Yeah, it is," Clarke agreed, "it's way more cringey. That would be your brother and your best Friend."

With big, round eyes, Octavia nodded once. "Exactly. That's easier to digest than him going off with a random girl."

Clarke bit the corner of her lip, wondering if she should say.... she probably shouldn't.... she did.

"I guarantee it's more than one random girl-"

"OKAY, we're done talking about my brother's sex life."

Clarke laughed, stretching as Octavia went back to her side of the booth.

"That's part of what I mean," Clarke went on, more thoughtful now instead of nervous. "He's young, he's good looking, he apparently has an endless stream of women who'd just love to get in his pants-
"

"Still don't get it," Octavia said dully, a half-disgusted look on her face.

"-and yet," Clarke continued, "I get a date after a few days of flirting. Me, the one who's been mean to him for ever."

"Maybe that turns him on," Octavia suggested, a teasing look in her eyes.

Clarke screwed up her face. "Don't talk about your brother that way. Gross."

"It wasn't weird until you made it weird, Clarke."

"Believe me, it was."

Scoffing, Octavia laid her arms out across the table. "Whatever, so what do you want to do, now, huh?"

Clarke gawked. "This was your plan! You tell me."
Octavia rolled her eyes. "I don't see a problem with any of it. You're the one doubting the reality of the situation."

"Not the reality," Clarke said defensively, "the credibility. Bellamy's an ass when it comes to me and I'm the same way back. I just don't understand it."

Octavia sighed heavily. "Why don't you just talk to him about it, then?"

"Like that's not obvious."

"If you ask me, it's more suspicious if you don't bring it up."

"How?" Clarke asked, dumbfounded. "How is that more suspicious?"

"Because, Clarke," Octavia said, looking exhausted. "He's probably just as confused about all of this as you are. One day you were calling him 'the mistake of the family' and the next, you're using his actual name and flirting with him. It's sort of cause for suspicion."

"Oh, God," she groaned, dropping her head to the back of the seat. "You're right. So, what do I do? How do I bring it up?"

"Don't ask me. You've had more relationships than I have."

"I've had one," said Clarke, and Octavia gave her a meaningful look.

"Yeah, exactly. Look, fine, if you really need me to spell it out for you - if you insist on the help of me, the extra virgin-"

Clarke rolled her eyes. "Octavia, come on."

She heaved a breath. "If I were you, I would ask about it during a romantic moment. Right? Like, watching the stars, or cuddling, or something like that."

"Do I have to do that with your brother?"

The prospect of cuddling with him wasn't all that hard to stomach - they'd done a lot worse already - but forcing herself into such a setting and then sharing feelings ... it seemed extremely phony, especially when it came to her and Bellamy.

Octavia raised her eyebrows, looking like she didn't much care about the conversation anymore.

"I didn't want to talk about it, either, but you made me. That's all I've got, take it or leave it."

Clarke nodded, impatient. "Yeah, okay, fine. Then what?"

"Then just ask," she said with a shrug. "Ask him why you, or why so quickly, or however you want to word it. You're pretty much together now, at least in his eyes, and I don't know much, but I know couple's talk about these things. Don't make this harder than it needs to be."

"That's kind of what I do," she said, lowering her voice as Lincoln came into view on his way to wait their table.

Octavia chuckled, pressing closer across the table to Clarke. "I've noticed."

Just to be sure she was making the right choice in asking Bellamy, Clarke decided to give Raven a
call at the soonest opportunity, which happened to be that night in the bathroom of the Blake house. Bellamy was asleep in his room after the long work day and Octavia was presumably where Clarke left her, on her bed texting Lincoln. It wasn't that Clarke didn't trust Octavia's judgment, but as she herself said, she was 'the extra virgin', whereas Raven had a bit more experience than both of them. As the phone rang, Clarke turned the faucet on to help muffle her voice. Even with that added security measure, she still whispered when Raven answered the phone.

"Finally," Raven said accusingly. "I thought I was going to have to kick your ass for blowing me off."

Clarke gave a short, surprised laugh. "What?"

It was quiet for long enough that she spoke again.

"Raven, what's going on?"

"Clarke?"

"Yeah," she said, frowning.

"Oh, Clarke, hey! Why are you whispering?"

Clarke narrowed her eyes in suspicion.

"I'm at Octavia's and I don't want Bellamy to hear what I say," she said quickly, getting her explanation out of the way so she could ask what was really on her mind. "Who'd you think I was?"

"What? No one," Raven said, faux-innocent, but then she sighed, clearing her throat. "Just - some guy, you know?"

"You're talking to a guy? On the phone? I thought you hated doing that with guys."

Clarke could very nearly hear Raven roll her eyes.

"Stop. We can talk about me later. How's everything going with Bellamy?"

She lowered her voice even more, glancing at the door. "I made it work. He's my ... boyfriend, I guess."

"You're pulling my leg," she said, a surprised smile in her voice.

"No, it's true."

"What are you, a seductress?"

Clarke's suspicions were right, then. "It's weird that it happened so fast, right? I knew it was."

When Raven spoke, her voice was much more serious.

"Hold up. Explain."

She started from the day of the downpour, skipping out all the mushy details and getting straight to the part where she implied she wanted long-term romance and Bellamy jumped on the bandwagon.

"What? Just like that?"
“Yeah. Just like that.”

“That’s insane,” she said, sounding more than a little impressed. Normally, Clarke would be flattered, but she was still unsure about it since her earlier talk with Octavia. “Wait, how long has it been since you’ve started dating?”

“Tomorrow will be day five.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me until just now?” Raven asked, sounding hurt.

“It’s not like he’s my real boyfriend.”

“Still,” she insisted, “this is a monumental time in your life.”

“I genuinely hope that’s not true.”

Raven ignored her.

“So, tell me: what’s it like dating Blake?”

Of course, she would go for that. It was a good question, to be fair. Raven knew about the tumultuous past of the two of them and had seen her fair share of arguments, which were, admittedly started by Clarke most of the time. She couldn’t help how annoying he was. It was like he knew how to get under her skin and did so just for the Hell of it. At least she hadn’t heard any Robin Thicke while she was at their house for the last couple weeks, though. Progress.

“He’s a lot more attentive than you would think,” Clarke said thoughtfully after a moment.

“Really?” Raven asked, surprise in her voice.

“Yeah. He took me out twice and he already introduced me to some of his friends, which is good, right?”

“Does he look happy when you come over?”

The sudden, new undertone to Raven's voice was impossible to place, but it rubbed Clarke the wrong way.

“I mean ... yeah, I think so. It’s only been four days, so I can’t really tell.”

“But, things are different?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” she started, getting more intense, “he’s being nice? He wants to be around you? He’s kissing you?”

“Again,” Clarke said, “we’re not really dating. You don’t have to worry how well he’s treating me.”

“Just answer the questions, Clarke.”

She sounded like she was on the brink of something, and Clarke couldn't deduce from her voice alone if it was good or bad.

“Yeah, Raven. ‘Yes’ to everything. It’s like we’re a ‘real couple’,” she said, mockingly lowering her voice on the last two words.
"Ho-ly shit."

The fear Clarke was feeling was unbelievable. It was like she was getting ready to hear she had ten days to live or something.

"What?" she asked warily, a worried frown etched onto her face. "What's wrong?"

"Okay, Clarke," Raven said lowly, "I'm gonna say something and I need you to stay calm."

"Don't go all dramatic like that, Raven!" Clarke hissed, taking a deep breath to relax herself. "Tell me."

The silence seemed unnecessarily stretched, and when Raven spoke, Clarke's entire body slouched at the anticlimax.

"I think Bellamy's been into you this whole time."

Of all the things she'd been setting herself up for....

"He has not, Raven," she said, rolling her eyes and tucking her hair behind her ears.

"Are you sure?" she asked, sounding unfazed. "Because it sounds like that's exactly what's happening. Every part of the plan went off without a hitch, and you said so yourself, you were surprised that he was buying it, then, boom, as soon as you mention you want a relationship, he's game. Now, you're saying he's totally into this, even though he's never been committed to anyone before, and you've only been going out four days. The guy took you on two dates already! You think he can go from disliking you to being head over ass in two weeks? Nuh-uh. Not unless there was something else there in the first place."

Clarke didn't know how to describe her emotions right then. Panic didn't seem strong enough, horror was too gaudy, and dread just didn't fit right. It was something along those lines, though, because the more Raven spoke, the clearer Clarke's head became. If Raven was right, that meant Clarke was, for lack of better phrasing, a giant, enormous, colossal bitch. It was one thing to agree to fake date Bellamy if he only started liking her because she liked him (in her experience, those kinds of 'crushes' were easy to overcome, and that was all she thought she was doing to Bellamy), but it was an entirely different thing to play with someone who was already deep into it.

Closing her eyes, hoping it wasn't true, Clarke took a deep breath and swallowed her fear.

"I'm going to have to call you later, Raven."

"Why? Is something wrong?"

"No, no," she reassured her, though the knot in her stomach said otherwise. "Everything's okay."

"Okay, well, call me if you need anything, right?"

"I will."

When she hung up the phone, she turned the tap off and sat in the bathroom with her head in her hands for at least ten minutes, just trying to calm herself down enough to get into the right frame of mind to do what she had to. When she felt like she was taking too long, she swallowed and quietly left the bathroom, unable to quell the pressure in her chest. Skipping over Octavia's room, Clarke walked straight to Bellamy's. No, she shouldn't wake him up in the middle of the night and ask him if Raven's hunch was true, but there was no way she'd be able to sleep with this on her brain. She
snuck inside, gently closing the door behind her and tip-toeing across the room to his bed. His curtains didn’t do much to dispel the moonlight, so Bellamy was bathed in a dim glow, the contours of his face and chest outlined clearly. She gingerly sat on the edge of the bed, touching his shoulder to wake him up. It took a few gentle shakes.

"Clarke?" he said roughly when he saw her, rising on his elbow and rubbing his eyes.

She took her hand off his skin.

"I couldn’t wait until morning," she said quietly, trying not to let her worry bleed through her voice, but the look on Bellamy’s face told her she wasn’t doing very well. "I just need to know something and then I’ll let you go back to sleep."

When he sat up, they were close enough that she would barely have to lean forward to kiss him, if she wanted to.

"Okay."

Clarke's mouth was suddenly dry. "How come you asked me out?"

He frowned, reaching out to gently hold her elbow, as though to reassure her.

"Isn't that what you wanted?"

"But it’s not what you wanted?" she asked, unable to mask the hopefulness in her voice.

He was looking back and forth between her eyes, an uncertainty in his.

"If it wasn’t, I wouldn’t have asked."

Obviously, she thought, feeling stupid. She moved so that she was facing him, her leg folded in front of her, her knee falling onto his thigh.

"Why, Bellamy?" she asked, steeling her voice.

"'Why' what?"

"Why do you want this?" she asked, her face falling at the vulnerable way he was watching her. It was too hard to ignore. "You told me you stayed single because you didn’t want a relationship."

He looked away, moving his hand from her elbow. Even with it gone, she could still feel the pressure.

"I didn’t."

"Is that the truth?" she asked quietly. "Because if it is, you need to tell me."

Furrowing his brow, he met her eyes again, a slight tilt to his head. "Clarke, I don’t understand."

"Please, just tell me," she said again, wringing her hands together on her lap, hoping that he would prove her wrong, but thinking she knew better. "When you said you’ve never been with anyone because you didn’t want a relationship, was that true?"

He looked sad, seeming to catch on that she knew the answer and it wasn’t what she wanted.

"No."
Clarke nodded, frowning.

"So, what's the truth?"

His voice was low when he answered, baring all.

"I stayed single because of you."

An unwelcome shiver rippled through her chest.

"You did," she said regretfully, avoiding his eyes. It wasn't a question.

Bellamy clenched his jaw and nodded, leaning closer to her. His head was bent forward, staring at his hands, his fingers gliding over each other.

"How long?" she asked, both wanting to reach out and hug him in an apology and to move away so as not to encourage him. Like she hadn't done enough of that already.

"Not that long," he said, but there was something in the way he said it that made her think it wasn't true.

"How long?" she asked again, meeting his eyes.

He blinked once and with a heavy sigh, looked away.

"About three years."

Not that long, she thought glumly, not knowing how to deal with this, how to move forward. This changed so much. How was she supposed to keep up this ploy when his feelings were sincere? And all this time, how didn't she know? Three years ago, she was fighting with him over things that had nothing to do with him, making him drive her back and forth from her house when she needed something and didn't feel like walking, but never had there been signs that he cared. She'd broken a chair over him, for God's sake. Even with her feeling so guilty about this whole thing, it crossed her mind that maybe he was a little insane for liking her in the first place, because really, that made him seem a bit dysfunctional, all things considered.

Yet, there he was, sitting there looking like a puppy she'd just kicked, making it seem like his falling for her was the most natural thing that could have happened, and stupidly, Clarke was blaming herself for buying him that one book that one time because maybe that was where this all started.

With a heavy sigh, she stood from the bed and started toward the door, but his voice called her back.

"Clarke, wait."

She looked over her shoulder, her eyes crinkling at the pleading on his face, and she went back.

Kneeling on the bed, she took his face in her hands and gave him a long kiss, meaning to reassure him of something she wasn't even sure of, yet. As soon as she did, he grabbed her waist, hauling her onto his lap and circling his arms tightly around her, holding on for dear life. His kisses were fervent, panicked, and Clarke's chest caved because everything pointed to him being scared she was going to leave him. God, if he was in love with her, they were both screwed, though him obviously more than her. Really, she should have broken up with him right then. She could have. It would have saved him pain, it would have been the most opportune time, now that he wouldn't suspect she was only dating him for Octavia, to get around some rule, but she felt wetness on her thumb where it still touched his cheek and when she pulled back, she saw that his eyes were wet, and something in her didn't want to add to that. Her shoulders sagged as she used the hem of her shirt to wipe his cheek.
"Hey, it's okay," she said, dropping her shirt.

He clenched his jaw, looking away and pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I shouldn't have told you all that, should I?"

With a light sigh, Clarke slid her arms around his shoulders and leaned into him, almost wishing she could tell him it had nothing to do with what he was thinking, whatever that might be. Instead, she kissed the base of his throat, feeling him bury his face into the space where her neck met her shoulder and release a shuddered breath against her skin.

Clarke probably shouldn't have ever come in here at all, or said anything about it at any point in time, because it accomplished nothing productive and instead, made her feel like she wanted to call this off, but finding it much too difficult.

"You're still my boyfriend, whether you want to be or not," she said lowly, giving his cheek a light kiss and his arms a gentle squeeze before climbing from the bed. "Go back to sleep, Bellamy. I'll see you tomorrow."

He still looked unconvinced, but Clarke didn't know how to assure him any more than she already had. So she left with a small upward tilt of her lips, closing the door behind her, and went to O's room. The smile dropped off Octavia's face as soon as she saw the look on Clarke's.

"Clarke, what's wrong?" she asked, setting her phone down and sliding off the bed.

"He said he's liked me for a while," she said, almost forgetting to be extra quiet, considering he was just down the hall. "That's why it was so easy to get him to date me."

Octavia didn't look at all surprised, but she was definitely trying to seem like she was. Clarke's jaw went slack, her shoulders falling.

"You knew about it?" Clarke demanded, feeling betrayed.

Octavia winced and stepped toward her. "I'm sorry. Please don't be mad."

"Don't be mad?" she echoed, shocked that Octavia would even say it, given the circumstances. "Octavia, are you not grasping the severity of this situation?"

Octavia just shrugged, looking guilty, so Clarke lowered her voice and closed the distance.

"You conned me into dating your brother, but conveniently left out the small fact that he already had feelings for me."

"Like you said," she murmured hopefully. "Small fact?"

Clarke rolled her eyes. "I was being sarcastic, Octavia, it's huge! It's huge, okay? This is going to break his heart when it's over. Don't you feel bad about that?"

"I don't know," she said, crossing her arms and averting her gaze. "I didn't think about it."

"Oh, my God," Clarke drawled, her eyes falling shut. "Oh, my God, Octavia. What the Hell do we do now? Just what the Hell - what the Hell?"

"Okay, Clarke, relax-"

"I have no idea what this is anymore!" she said, throwing her arms out before dragging her hands
through her hair.

Octavia shushed her, stepping forward and putting her arms on her shoulders.

"Clarke, would you calm down?" she whispered, looking over Clarke's shoulder at the door. "This was the plan the whole time. You were going to make him like you enough to date you and then break it off when the time was right. The only difference in this case is it was easier because he was already there."

"That's not the only difference, Octavia," Clarke said, running her hands over her face. "I'm breaking up with him soon. Do you get that? He's wanted this for years and it's not even real for me. When he finds out what's going on, he's going to hate me. He'll be crushed."

"Why do you care?"

"Why don't you?" Clarke countered, and Octavia dropped her hands from her shoulders, looking away.

With a shake of her head, Clarke went to the door and shut the light off before crossing back to the bed and throwing herself on top of the covers.

"I'm too tired for this right now," she said, tossing her arms above her head and feeling the bed dip a few seconds later as Octavia got in. "Let's just go to sleep and figure it out later."

When Clarke woke up the next morning, she was alone in Octavia's room feeling rejuvenated and not nearly as upset as the day before. When she gave a heavy sigh as the previous night came back to her, wondering if she was really going to have to keep this up for months, a strange thought wiggled its way into her head that she'd never thought before.

If she could make herself feel something real for Bellamy, this whole thing would be a non-issue. She wouldn't have to break up with him, she wouldn't have to worry about the awkwardness that would follow whenever she came over afterward - which, frankly, she hadn't even considered up until this point - and there would be no need for anyone's feelings to be hurt. Except it wasn't some simple thing, to make herself fall for someone she'd never thought of as anything more than a pain in the ass. Not that she did anymore, though. In fact, if last night taught her anything, it was that she was now prone to comfort him by use of hugs and kisses, which was a far cry from how things used to be. What was stranger, though, was that she did it because knowing that he was upset because of something she did was honest to God physically hurting her, whereas regular her, the part of her she really, truly missed, wouldn't have given a thought to Bellamy's feelings, and that was someone she was last month. 'Why do you care?' Octavia had said, and Clarke really didn't have an answer. It was probably time to get up.

Clarke had just enough time to use the bathroom, brushing her teeth and hair and scrubbing her face, before Bellamy cornered her outside the door, instantly pressing his lips to hers.

"Morning, Princess."

It seemed he was feeling better, at least.

"Morning, Bellamy," she said, bumping her shoulder into his as they walked down the hall to the kitchen.

"You want to come on a road trip with me?"
Clarke snapped her eyes over to his. "Today?"

Smirking, he nodded. "And tomorrow, and Monday."

"Well, I have school," she said, her excitement dissipating just like that. "And you work three jobs."

"O said she'd get your homework," he said, nodding to Octavia without missing a beat, "and I can miss a day or two."

Clarke eyed Octavia suspiciously, but from where she sat on the couch, she was doing an expert job at avoiding Clarke's gaze.

"Where to, then?" Clarke asked, looking back to Bellamy and saying a quick good morning to Aurora, who sat at the kitchen table reading the newspaper.

Bellamy smiled victoriously, shrugging a shoulder.

"Nowhere in particular," he said suggestively, and Clarke narrowed her eyes. "I just need to get away for a bit."

"So, when do we leave?" she asked, pulling a box of cereal from the cupboard and immediately putting it back at Bellamy's next words.

"As soon as you're ready."

Chapter End Notes

HOW DRAMATIC.

I just want to say that even though Bellamy started liking Clarke when she was fifteen, he is not, has never been, and will never be a creeper. At least not in any of my fics. It has nothing to do with age for him (meaning he's not like, into young girls or anything) and his feelings for her are of the innocent variety. It's cute little puppy love stuff. Also, given her age (as this is a set-in-high-school fic) and considering that I wanted Bellamy to be diggin her for a while, there was only so much leeway I felt like I had. Two years didn't seem enough, four years seemed like it was veering into weirdo territory, and so there we have it.

Now that that's out of the way, I really hope you all enjoyed this update, and if so, are looking forward to the next one! Clarke's got so many issues coming up about this mess she's in. So many. Next chapter's like a fricken therapy session, except the therapist is herself and she is 100% not qualified. Also, it's exclusively Bellarke. And things only go up from here. So, there's that.

Stay tuned!
Oh, Zut

Chapter Notes

This chapter title is, as I learned in grade five french class, the french equivalent to Winnie the Pooh's 'Oh, bother', and we all know by now that that roughly translates to 'mother fucking shit'.. so take from that what you will about the developments of this chapter *wink*.

Also, if anyone is interested, I made an 8tracks playlist to accompany this chapter. I played it while writing to help me get into the mood, so if you're the type to listen to music while reading, there you go!

One other quick thing: I just want you all to know that I read all of your comments and I cherish them and I never delete any from my inbox because they're precious ahah. Honestly, all of your comments/kudos/everything else are much appreciated and I love knowing that so many of you are feeling the dreaded things because of this fic.. so nice to know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke hadn't thought to mention to her parents that she was dating Bellamy until just before she told them she'd be taking a trip with him.

"He's your what?" her mother, Abby asked, looking completely dumbfounded at the word 'boyfriend'. "I thought you hated him."

Abby was frowning, apparently unable to grasp the idea of Clarke dating someone she complained about to her parents at least a few times a week.

Clarke opened her mouth to respond, but she was cut off with a sudden, loud laugh from her father.

"Jake!" Abby scolded, smacking the back of her hand into his stomach.

"What?" he asked, still laughing, and then he turned to Clarke and gave her a tight hug and a kiss on the head. "Hey, kiddo. Whatever makes you happy."

"How, uh ... how did this happen?" Abby asked, and it was clear to Clarke that she was trying her hardest not to sound surprised.

"Oh, come on, Abbs," said Jake, pulling away from Clarke, but leaving an arm around her shoulders. The fond look he was giving Abby seemed to evoke something in her, because the confusion fell from her face, replaced with a knowing look and a small smile. Jake continued, "It's like us when we were young."

A deep frown settled on Clarke's face and she moved away to look at them fully. "What does that mean?"

"Oh, nothing," Abby said dismissively, trying to give Jake a severe look, but the smile wouldn't drop from her face. "Your father and I just got off on the wrong foot when we first met. Like you and Bellamy ... apparently," she added helpfully, and Clarke raised her eyebrows. Well, that was news to
her.

The doorbell rang a few seconds later, and speak of the devil. Clarke had driven home after Bellamy's suggestion of a road trip and she currently had all of her things packed and sitting by the front door, which was hidden from her parents' view for the time being. Before she went to answer the door, she cleared her throat and acknowledged the questioning looks on their faces.

"Bellamy's taking me on a trip," she said, trying to sound much more sure about the whole thing than she really was. "We'll be back sometime on Monday."

Her father wasn't laughing anymore, and Abby wasn't smiling.

"Are you sure you want to do that, kiddo?"

"Were you not even going to ask us about this?" Abby asked, sounding motherly again.

Squeezing his wife's arm, Jake lowered his voice. "She's eighteen, Abby."

"But he's older, Jake," she said pointedly, giving him a stern look. Clarke's stomach clenched at the insinuation in her voice.

Stupidly, she'd failed to recognize the situation she'd put herself in until that exact moment. Sure, she was having some reservations about playing games with him, but she was definitely not sorry enough to have pity sex with him. Not that he'd said anything about it, of course, but who was she kidding? That had been on her mind since day one, and from the heady way he was watching her during that first interaction in the laundry room, she knew it had been on his, too. Apparently even longer than that since he had feelings and all that. And now, she'd willingly walked into a three-day/two-night long trip with him, and she wasn't naive enough to think they'd be sleeping in separate beds. If this was anyone's fault, it was unquestionably hers, but she was still irked at Octavia for this poorly thought out plan she'd tricked Clarke into, and so she was happy to shoulder the blame onto her on this one. Somehow it was Octavia's fault. Somehow.

"Well," she said awkwardly, pointing behind her as she started to back away down the hall, choosing to ignore the nervous rolling in her stomach. "I'm gonna go, then."

"Wait," said Abby, crossing her arms. "Where are you two going on this trip?"

Clarke shrugged a shoulder. "I don't know. He said 'nowhere in particular'."

Abby looked like she wanted to say something else, but then Jake gave her another squeeze and she stayed quiet, opting for hugging Clarke and telling her to 'be safe'.

When Clarke opened the front door, Bellamy was standing there with his head bent and his hands in his pockets, his foot toeing the deck. Like Clarke, he'd changed his outfit since earlier, now wearing a navy blue t-shirt and jeans with his hair slightly tamer than his morning bedhead. He looked up with raised eyebrows, his eyes easily finding hers, and they both smiled at the same time. Clarke grabbed her bag from beside the door, glancing once over her shoulder to see her parents very conspicuously watching her. She only just noticed Bellamy giving them a small wave before she closed the door, blocking them from sight.

"I've got it," he said, taking her bag from her.

She had been about to thrust it into his chest with the expectation that he would carry it for her, but his way worked, too.
"What a gentleman," she said anyway, fluttering her eyelashes at him.

He smirked and when they got to the car, he opened her door for her. She wasn't smiling. (Maybe just a bit.)

Bellamy climbed in next to her after depositing her luggage in the backseat with his. For a moment, he just sat there, giving a little sigh, but then he glanced over at her with an excited look on his face that Clarke couldn't help but return.

"Ready?" he asked, sliding the key into the ignition.

She took a deep breath and nodded, buckling herself in. "Let's get this show on the road."

To someone who wasn't experienced with the likes of Bellamy Blake, it might have seemed like they were driving aimlessly down the freeway, but she refused to believe that careful look on his face was accidental. He was trying not to give the destination away, and boy, if that didn't eat away at her, almost as much as the question of what the Hell was going to happen when night came. When they'd first started driving, Clarke had been able to convince herself that he wasn't going to try anything with her considering they'd only officially been together for five days. That was way too soon for sexual intimacy, even for a real relationship. So she'd relaxed, turning on the radio and quietly singing along to Taylor Swift, but then she felt Bellamy's hand on her knee and she looked over to an especially eager look on his face. A memory slammed into her head of his husky voice telling her he wanted her, and Clarke's heart started pounding in her chest.

A few minutes later, they were passing through a small city. They'd been traveling for nearly three hours, staying mostly silent on the drive because whenever she'd asked about where he was taking her or why they had to be gone until Monday, Bellamy either shrugged with a smile on his face or gave her unhelpful answers, content apparently to keep her in the dark. When he pulled into a self-serve gas bar connected to a convenience store, though, he slid his hand off her leg and spoke more than he had the entire trip.

"I'm gonna head in and get some stuff. Can you fill 'er up?"

"Yeah, sure," she said, getting out of the car at the same time he did.

When they walked toward each other - Clarke on her way to the fuel tank and Bellamy to the store - he stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. She thought he planned to kiss her, but he just gave her a grateful look and dropped his hand.

"Thanks for coming," he said, nodding once. "I know it was weird for you, what I said ... last night."

"Hey," she said, stepping toward him and putting a reassuring hand on his shoulder. "That was me, that wasn't you. It wasn't because of you."

There was a light frown on his face when he dropped his gaze, but Clarke touched his cheek to get him to look at her again.

"I mean it," she said sternly, raising her eyebrows. "Stop worrying about it, Bellamy."

Swallowing, he nodded, locking their eyes for a long moment before heading inside, which left Clarke staring hesitantly at the gas pump. She'd filled her car with gas countless times, of course, but that was her car. She didn't know if Bellamy used regular, or if she should go with premium, and did it even matter, or maybe she should hit the middle 'plus' button ... was he paying for gas, or was she?
If she was, she might as well hit premium - she wasn't exactly poor, considering her mother was a family physician and her father was an environmental engineer - but at the same time, Bellamy never let her pay for things in the past, always taking the bill for her and Octavia's take-out, or their movie tickets, or their bus fares (not that she would have fought him on it back then). So to think he'd let her now, now when they were on some kind of road trip date, when he'd so courteously relieved her of her baggage and opened her door for her, well ... that just wouldn't make any sense.

So she hit 'regular' and stuck the gas pump into the fuel tank. She'd been standing there for a few seconds, idly looking around and trying to seem unapproachable because there was a man giving her the eye from the next pump over, when her stomach growled. It probably wasn't the best idea to ditch cereal that morning, but oh, well, what could she do? When the trigger of the gas pump clicked, Clarke pulled it out and closed the gas cap back on, quickly glancing at Bellamy in the store and hoping he was getting something good.

She'd been climbing into the passenger seat when the man who'd been staring at her stopped her with his hand on her shoulder. She visibly recoiled, one foot braced in the car and the other on the ground. The man didn't take the hint, giving her shoulder a light squeeze, which was more than unwelcome.

"Morning, ma'am," he said lowly, his cheeks dimpling when he smiled. "I couldn't help but notice you're not paying for your gas."

Clarke stuck her chin in the air, thinking he was either an idiot or playing at one, because why would she slide into the passenger seat if she was about to 'drive off' with a tank full of fuel?

"My boyfriend's paying inside," she said sharply, raising her voice on the word 'boyfriend' to get the message across.

"Is that so?" he said, glancing over his shoulder into the store as he removed his hand. "What's a girl who looks like you doing getting tied down?"

Clarke visibly shivered, goosebumps rising on her arms.

"Well, have a nice day, sir," she said loudly, grabbing for the car handle, but he moved to block it.

"Aw, that's not very nice," he said, tilting his head and frowning. "We're just talking, is all."

"Can I help you?"

Her shoulders drooped in relief, a sigh escaping her mouth. She'd never in her life been so happy to hear Bellamy's voice.

The man looked back at Bellamy, who was standing a few feet away, his arms crossed over his puffed out chest.

"No, thanks," said the man, turning back to Clarke. A second later, Bellamy grabbed his shoulder and yanked him back so he stumbled away, nearly falling.

"Back off," Bellamy said darkly, towering over him with a threatening glare.

The man glanced at Clarke, who - despite that she always denied she acted like a princess - huffed and slammed the door shut. She watched in the rear-view as the man stalked away to his car, glaring over at Bellamy every few seconds. Bellamy didn't seem to notice as he made his way to the driver's side.

"I got breakfast," he said casually as he got in the car, setting a plain, white grocery bag on her lap.
and watching her rifle through it, his smile growing when her face lit up.

Inside were five things: her favourite candy (Mike and Ikes), her favourite pastry (apple strudel), double of her favourite type of sandwich (roast beef), and her favourite crackers (Rosemary and Olive Oil Triscuits).

"I love all of these," she said idly, pulling out the sandwiches and handing one off to Bellamy, who set it in his lap.

"I know," he said, putting his car into drive and pulling back onto the main road.

Clarke exhaled sharply, hesitantly glancing over at him. Of course he knew. This wasn't the first time he'd done something like this.

"Thanks for that back there," she muttered, expertly avoiding his gaze while she popped open the plastic container that held her sandwich.

"Didn't do it for you," he said, his voice unreadable. He didn't elaborate until she looked over at him, and then he shrugged a shoulder, a small smile playing on the corners of his mouth. "Thought if I didn't step in, you'd kick his ass."

Laughing, she rolled her eyes. "Yeah, I might have."

"I was almost too scared to do anything at all," he continued playfully, an all-too familiar teasing note in his voice, and Clarke was oh-so ready to hear where he was going with this. "I thought, what if I help her out and last Summer happens all over again? I know you remember last Summer."

She did. Of course she remembered. It was one of the most exhilarating moments of her life, giving the groper on the beach a piece of her mind when he tried to feel her up and then going off on Bellamy when he went all big brother and got into a fist fight with him. 'Exhilarating' might not have been the best word, though. It was more along the lines of 'aggravating'. In fact, 'big brother' might not have been the best wording, either, now that she knew how he felt about her at the time. That knowledge was making a different moment of her life so much clearer.

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Two Years Ago

It was a grey Saturday morning, which was fitting after the night Clarke had. She was standing on the steps of Octavia's house waiting for her to open the door. The chances were good that her best friend would be up and at 'em - it was already past eight and Octavia had always been a morning person. Clarke had been crying all night and all she wanted was to see Octavia's familiar face, bury her face into her shoulder, and let it all out. Except when the lock of the door clicked and Octavia pulled it open ... it wasn't Octavia.

At the sight of Bellamy's disgruntled face, Clarke immediately ducked her head, hastily wiping away any stray tears before looking back up at him and clearing her throat. He looked tired, wearing nothing but baggy boxers, which, as she'd come to know, meant he just woke up. Apart from that, there was the barest of frowns on his face, and his lips parted as he took in her puffy eyes, red nose, and tear-stained cheeks.

"I'm just here for Octavia," she mumbled, ducking under Bellamy's arm and into the house only to stop a second later at Bellamy's words.

"She's not home, Clarke."
Her chest caved and her face pulled together in a mask of frustration. She rolled her head back to the ceiling and squeezed her eyes shut, resisting the urge to scream, because God, she'd been waiting all night.

Sounding apologetic, he added, "She stayed over at Raven's yesterday."

Which, of course, Clarke knew. She'd been a part of that sleepover until ... until Lexa.... Clarke hadn't wanted to spoil her friends' fun, so she'd waited until this morning, but clearly, she hadn't waited long enough.

"Oh," she said dully, staring straight down the hall for one long second before nodding and turning to go back the way she came. "I'll come back later, then."

"Are you doing okay?" he asked quickly, before she'd taken a step.

Clarke scoffed, turning her incredulous expression on him. "Did you really just ask me that?"

Bellamy knit his brows together, dropping his gaze to the ground and giving his head a quick shake before looking over to the living room.

"Why don't you, uh - come in? Have a seat?"

She jerked her head back. "What?"

"Just," he started, breaking off with a sharp sigh and purposely avoiding her eyes, scrunching his face up. "Did anyone die?"

She couldn't help herself; she laughed. It wasn't a loud, hearty, happy laugh, more of a breathy, surprised one that, for one reason or another, made her want to cry again. Afraid that her voice would waver if she spoke, she just shook her head.

Bellamy nodded and glanced between his bedroom and Clarke.

"Give me a second."

He jogged over to his room, leaving Clarke to cross her arms and lean against the wall. He emerged about a minute later, clothed now and with his bangs pushed back into a cap.

"I'll be right back," he said, striding across the room with his car keys in one hand and using the other to tuck his wallet into his back pocket. "Stay here."

With that, he left the house, closing the still-opened door behind him. Clarke stood staring, more than a little shocked, but after a few seconds, she wiped at her eyes and glanced around the empty room. She realized with a droop of her shoulder that without anyone inside, the Blake house wasn't any more comforting than hers. Still, she kicked off her shoes, and when she heard Bellamy's car start up, she crossed the floor to the couch, curling up in the corner. The floor-length, lilac curtains on the window were transparent, so she could see Bellamy driving down the road.

She didn't really know why she stayed. Maybe she didn't want to be alone for too long, or maybe she'd just rather spend her day fighting with Bellamy than thinking and crying and wishing to go back in time and end everything before it began.

The whole time he was gone, she wondered what he was doing, eventually settling on picking up Octavia from Raven's. She'd maintained that idea when she heard his car pull back in roughly half an hour later, which was the amount of time it took to get to Raven's house and back, give or take.
However, when the door opened and Clarke peered hopefully over the back of the couch, Bellamy was alone, carrying a plastic bag of groceries in his hand. She waited for Octavia to walk in until Bellamy closed the door and she knew they were alone.

"Getting groceries couldn't have waited until I was gone?" she deadpanned, lying back on the couch when he didn't answer.

A few seconds later, after the sound reached her ears of the freezer in the kitchen opening and closing, a disembodied hand floated above the couch and dropped the bag onto her stomach. Clarke grunted at the sudden invasion of space, reflexively jerking up. She narrowed her eyes at Bellamy in irritation, but he only nodded to the bag in her lap, taking a seat on the arm of the other end of the couch. Keeping her suspicious gaze on him, she felt around in the bag until she found -

A box of candy. She looked inside to find a large assortment of her favourite treats. Kettle corn flavoured popcorn, a few boxes of Nerds, sour Skittles, various chocolate bars (all that she liked), and the list went on. Clarke glanced up at him to see he was watching her nervously, as though waiting for her to tell him he did good. She exhaled sharply through her nose, a barely there smile on her face.

Sometimes, he really beefed up that older brother act with her. She wondered if it was an obligation of his, because she was friends with Octavia, or if she'd actually, Heaven forbid, grown on him the same way he'd grown on her: like a wart that had been there since birth to which one just couldn't help but get attached. When it was gone, it would be strange to be without it, but soon enough, well ... no one exactly wanted warts.

"Don't tell me this was a lucky guess," she said, pulling Mike and Ikes from the bag and giving them a little shake so they rattled around inside.

Bellamy shrugged a shoulder, looking to the other side of the room, and that was answer enough for her. It wasn't all that surprising that he knew the kind of junkfoods she liked. It wasn't like they were strangers. But then she was frowning, because the only things she knew about him were that he was a huge history buff who liked his coffee black. Maybe she should take a page out of his book and start paying attention to things.

"What happened?" he asked quietly after a moment, breaking her out of her thoughts.

The question was all wrong coming from him, all concerned and not annoying and just not Bellamy, at least not the Bellamy she'd come to know and hate. Oddly enough, it put her on the defensive.

"I don't want talk to you about it," she spat, but then a pang of guilt erupted in her chest. It wasn't his fault Octavia was still at Raven's ... besides, he was being terribly kind, if she were being honest, so maybe she should be honest. Why not give it a try? "It's my girlfriend."

She bit back a sob at the word, clearing her throat and shaking her head to dispel her tears.

"We, um ... we broke up - I broke up with her."

Bellamy's eyebrows shot up. "What?"

She shrugged, wetting her lips.

"Irreconcilable differences, and all that," she said glumly.

It all happened very quickly, making it an easy moment to detach from so that it seemed like it happened such a long time ago.
Last night, Lexa called Clarke away from Raven's to a midnight café they frequented. Clarke had known there was something wrong by the look on her face, but she never expected ... as it turned out, Lexa drunkenly cheated on Clarke a few weeks ago. The way she'd worded it, it was like she couldn't go on without telling Clarke, because it was eating away at her and she felt guilty. Lexa had wanted to work through it, to mend whatever she'd broken, but while Clarke believed in second chances, she knew there was nothing to fix. From that moment forward, she would never be able to remove from her mind the image of Lexa with a faceless woman, doing things she wouldn't describe to Clarke when she asked.

Clarke didn't much feel like going into the details to Bellamy, though, deciding that what she'd told him was enough. Not only would he have been indifferent to any further explanation, she also thought the look he was giving her was one of insincere apology. It was too soft, even if it would have been directed at Octavia. He just didn't look at people like that.

"It's nothing candy and Mario Kart can't fix," he said after a long stretch of silence, arching his eyebrow, as though in challenge.

An unbidden laugh escaped her, which only made her angry and abruptly cut the sound off.

"You're such a weirdo," she said, but the heaviness was lifting from her chest. Leave it to him to suggest they do the only thing she could stomach doing at the moment. "Pass me the white controller, then. We're doing the Banshee Boardwalk course first."

He snickered, shaking his head as he stood and walked to the gaming console. He tossed the controller at her, keeping his eyes on her until she caught it easily in her hands before he crouched down to set it all up.

After Clarke beat him in Banshee Boardwalk and he won at Rainbow Road (she'd never been able to come in first on that one), they gave up and resorted to surfing the TV channels while Clarke's popcorn popped in the microwave. She'd stuffed her face full of half her candy already and was currently going to town on bubblegum icecream (Bellamy had bought that for her, too, but stashed it in the freezer and didn't tell her about it until a few minutes ago).

A couple hours later, Bellamy was sitting slumped on one end of the couch with a pillow and Clarke's head resting on his lap, both pairs of eyes glued to some old timey horror movie. When she'd gotten the pillow from Octavia's room and slapped it down on his lap, thinking she'd rather recline this way than put her feet on his legs, Bellamy gave an incredibly weak protest that made her think he really didn't care very much at all. She didn't feel like it would be fair to kick him out of his spot after all the hospitality he'd shown her, so she settled for this, occasionally letting out a whiny sound when he shifted and moved her into an uncomfortable position.

She wasn't sure when she'd dozed off, but at the sound of the front door creaking open, she woke alone on the couch with the pillow under her head and an olive green blanket draped over her. When Octavia started humming happily, Clarke rose up onto her elbows to see her better. Octavia, though, walked right past the living room and down the hallway, sliding her faux-leather jacket from her shoulders. There was a light knock on a door before Clarke heard it open, followed by Octavia's cheerful voice greeting Bellamy, who gently shushed her because 'Clarke's sleeping'.

"What?" said Octavia, her voice sharp and confused.

"Yeah, she's gotta talk to you," he said lowly. Clarke couldn't see their faces, but it wasn't hard to picture a frown on his right then. "Something went down with Lexa."

There was a small gasp. "Oh, no. What?"
"You should ask her when she wakes up," he said.

As soon as Octavia came back into sight, she spotted Clarke watching her and she came to an abrupt stop, her face falling at whatever she saw on Clarke's.

"Oh, no, Clarke," she breathed, dropping her bag from her shoulder to the ground and hurrying over, taking a seat next to her. "Oh, no. No, no."

Clarke closed her eyes and sighed when Octavia hugged her, and when she opened them again, they followed Bellamy on his way to the kitchen. When he met her gaze, they both gave the other a small smile. For Clarke, it was in thanks. For Bellamy, though ... she couldn't know for sure.

Presently, she was leaning forward and staring wistfully out the windshield at a sky full of hot air balloons. She wasn't sure where she and Bellamy were, flanked on either side of the road by sprawling forests, but she didn't think she'd ever been before. If she'd driven through this sight in the past, she never would have forgotten it.

"I wonder what it's like up there," she said absently, tilting her head. "Would it be scary or would it be fun?"

Bellamy took a deep breath and said, "Well, you're about to find out."

There was a dreamy look on her face when he said it, because she still hadn't processed his meaning. When it hit her, she snapped her head over to see him, her eyes wide.

"You're taking me on a hot air balloon?"

He chuckled, glancing excitedly over her, and gave her a nod. Clarke's heart swelled.

"Bellamy," she crooned with a wide smile on her face, resisting the sudden and surprising urge to lurch across the seats and kiss him. Looking back out the window, she reached out to touch his arm instead. He released the steering wheel with his one hand so he could hold hers, giving her a tight squeeze as he turned left down a road with an archway over it that read *Kings Hot Air Balloon Rides*.

The road was short and lumpy, and Clarke couldn't tell if she was bouncing around because of the terrain or because of the adrenaline rushing through her body. When they broke through the trees into a clearing with flat, paved cement, she knew for certain it was the adrenaline. As soon as they stopped in a small parking area with various other vehicles, Clarke jumped out of the car and waited for Bellamy, never taking her eyes from the balloons in the sky. It wasn't until Bellamy walked to her side that she spotted him pulling a rectangular slip of paper from his wallet.

"What's that?" she asked, nodding toward it.

"Ticket for the ride."

She frowned. She hadn't even thought they'd have to pay in advance.

"Where'd you get it?"

"I bought it online, the night you said you'd go out with me," he admitted, looking a little timid. "This weekend was supposed to be our first date."

Oh, he was just milking this for all it was worth and Clarke couldn't deny how easily it was working
Warmth flooded her chest, and this time, she didn't stop herself kissing him. She threw herself into his chest, sliding one hand around his shoulders and cradling his face with the other. His arm came around her at once, while his other hand squeezed her waist, holding her against him. The smile she could feel on his face coaxed out one of her own, and after a few short seconds, they were pulling away in breathless laughter.

"Come on," he said, taking her hand and tugging her along. "There's a hot air balloon with your name on it, Princess."

After the short speech about safety precautions, don't lean over the side, don't wrestle around, don't jump (honestly), they were inside the basket of a hot air balloon that was coloured in splashes of red, white, and black. Bellamy had bought a ticket for two people and the lady piloting the ride gave them a cheeky little smile after verifying through his ID that he was, in fact, Bellamy Blake.

"New couple?" she asked as they began their ascent, already having told them her name was Alicia.

"This Monday will be a week," said Clarke, not knowing why she even answered such a personal question, but then -

"It shows," said Alicia, giving them a knowing look. "Couples who've been together for a while and know each other inside and out don't look as happy. Learning each other's quirks'll do that to people."

While Clarke was busy feeling offended at whoever this Alicia lady was, sharing her unwanted opinions, she heard Bellamy snicker behind her. She looked back to his eyes on her, a gentle smile on his face, and Clarke shook her head, returning the look. They'd known each other for nearly a decade; they'd both gone through puberty around each other and Bellamy developed feelings for her 'about three years ago'. She knew plenty of his quirks, and there was no way he didn't know all of hers (his house was like a second home to her), and yet, there they were in a hot air balloon, smirking at each other like they knew a huge secret. Alicia was clearly just a bitter, middle-aged woman who knew nothing.

But Clarke wasn't going to dwell on it because they were above the trees now, drifting over to a river that ran through tall cliffs, and there was nothing as important to her in that moment as that. When Alicia dipped them down to float above the water, taking them along the river's path, Clarke looked back at Bellamy to see if he was enjoying this as much as she was. He was looking around in awe, staring over the side of the bucket and Clarke laughed, taking his hand and pulling herself closer to him. He snapped his eyes to hers, his face lighting up when he saw her smiling. He kissed her cheek as he moved to stand at her back, curling his arm over her chest so it rested just below her collarbones. Clarke reached up with both hands to hold his arm just as their hot air balloon glided over the end of the river, which gave way to a waterfall and a huge lake below. There was a city in the near distance, a bridge crossing over the lake, and Clarke guessed it was where they were spending the night. That was the last time she thought about the sleeping bit of this trip until later that night, after they'd flown the balloon back to the start, after driving to the city, after dinner, after finding their hotel, and then there they were.

Bellamy kissed her as soon as they were in the room, gently pressing her up against the wall and asking her in a murmur if she wanted to join him in the shower. His voice was deep and quiet, no hint of teasing. Clarke's palms were tingling when he kissed her again, a small noise sounding in the back of his throat when she pressed closer to his chest, grabbing at his shirt and honest to God considering his offer. That's when she broke away, staring into his darkened eyes and trying not to focus on the way his lips were parted or the shaky breaths gliding over her face.

"Maybe not today," she said shyly, and then a small panic set in because she wasn't sure if she'd
implied that it would be better tomorrow or on Monday, because she was feeling very confused about this sudden change of heart on her part - since the beginning, she'd been adamant that she was not having sex with Bellamy. He only nodded, giving her a long, soft kiss and insisting that she take the shower first, then.

She'd been done now for something like fifteen minutes, blow drying her hair on the bed in a pair of light blue shorts and a loose t-shirt. As soon as her hair was dry and she shut off the blow dryer, she heard the water in the bathroom stop running. She put all her things in her bag and lay down on the bed, kicking the blanket down to the end and staring up at the ceiling. She restlessly rolled around, imagining what it would be like to properly kiss Bellamy, when the bathroom door swung open and he stepped out wearing sweatpants and drying his hair with a towel. Clarke was staring at him, but he only glanced at her once as he moved around the room, turning off the lights, closing the curtains, taking his time doing mindless things that definitely could have waited until tomorrow. When he finally walked over to the bed and lay down next to her with a quiet sigh, Clarke immediately rolled onto her elbow, her other arm draping over his chest and her fingers gingerly touching his jaw. Bellamy was watching her, his heartbeat picking up under her arm and Clarke took a deep breath, suddenly nervous. They'd already had their first kiss, and while it was real for Bellamy, for Clarke.... She wanted to know what it would be like to kiss him and to want it like he did.

Closing her eyes, she slowly leaned forward and pressed her lips to his. Bellamy slid his arm around her back, his hand closing around her waist. She sighed, inching her fingers up his jaw until her hand was caressing his face, their lips moving together in tender kisses, content sighs drifting between them every few minutes. When she deepened the kiss, Bellamy tightened his hold on her and rolled them over so his chest was hovering over her, his arm locked underneath her back. He sank down, his free arm bent at the elbow and resting next to her to prop him up. Clarke took the opportunity to let her hands trail down his arms. He murmured in appreciation, kissing his way across her cheek and to the base of her jaw. He littered her skin with quick, small pecks that got her laughing, and she clasped her hands together around his shoulders, smiling at him when he pulled back.

"Thanks for today," she said quietly, playing with the hair at the nape of his neck.

"My pleasure, Princess," he murmured, pressing a gentle kiss to her cheek before sitting up and reaching for the blanket at the foot of the bed, falling back to his pillow and bringing the cover with him.

Flipping around so her back was to his chest, Clarke cuddled into him, her body fitting comfortably against the length of his. She closed her eyes when he drew his arm around her, trying to pull her even closer, and she wondered about what he would think if he was aware how much this one day was already changing everything for her.

Chapter End Notes

Phew, I hope that was a satisfying read and nothing seemed rushed.. I love writing these two, but sometimes it gets pretty hard, I tell you.

So there you have Clarke realizing that maybe Bellamy is kind of a sweetie and that being with him isn't so hard and she maybe even likes it a bit and is getting confused about it because, wow, where did all these feelings come from? Oh, zut, man. Oh. Zut.
Trying To Find Proof That This Isn't A Dream

Chapter Summary

*Chapter released 8/23/2015*

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the hiatus.. I was very doubtful about where to start this chapter and every time I tried to think about it, I couldn't get past the writer's block. Hope you're not disappointed with what I've written!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke's little getaway with Bellamy ended much too soon for her liking. She wasn't used to being so pampered by anyone other than Octavia, but Bellamy didn't seem averse to treating her like the princess he apparently thought she was. The way she felt for him on Saturday night was nothing compared to the way she ended up feeling on the drive home from their trip. He was just so good at loving her, so good that she would have had to use all her energy to reject his affection. Everything he did had her heart growing fonder of him, from absently reaching for her hand when they were walking down the sidewalk (as though it was so natural to him that he didn't even have to think about it), to letting her in on his desires and goals (most of which weren't surprising, but hearing that he wanted two children - like she did - and that he wanted to climb mountains - like she did - and that he wanted to end up with someone who got along well with his family - like she always had - among countless other things they had in common ... well, it was getting to her, and not in a bad way). They were on the home stretch now, less than thirty minutes away from the city after a wonderful weekend, and Clarke was peacefully, easily, oddly ... happy.

After their hot air balloon adventure on Saturday and the intimacy they shared alone in their hotel room, Clarke had awoken the next morning to Bellamy lying next to her on his back, his face turned to hers and their hands clasped loosely on his chest. He looked as sure of himself as always, even in unconsciousness. She'd never seen him sleeping before, or at least she'd never seen him sleeping and decided to leave him be. Usually in the Blake household, if Bellamy was asleep and Clarke was over, she was tasked with waking him up, mostly because neither Octavia nor Aurora felt inclined to be grumbled at so early in the morning. And, as it happened, Bellamy never seemed to complain when Clarke was the one carelessly yanking the pillow from under his head and tossing it on his face as she left the room (and of course, at the time, she'd assumed that was because he wasn't comfortable properly chastising her since she wasn't family, but now that she knew better....).

While she presently had no intention of giving him a rude awakening, some sort of awakening was inevitable - she'd never been one to let others sleep once she was awake. Carefully freeing her hand from his grasp, she gently rolled toward him so that her chest was pressed into his side, half of his body covered by the whole of hers. She snuggled closer, dipping her head into the crook of his neck, her lips pressed to his warm skin. When his lack of alertness to her affections caused her grumpiness to surge forward all at once - was he really ignoring her advances? Maybe she should pull his pillow away - she wasn't even the slightest bit surprised.
Clarke prided herself on being true to her emotions, so it wasn't like she was about to pretend she was already used to expressing friendly feelings for her ex-nemesis (though, of course, 'friendly' didn't exactly cover it ... 'lovey dovey' was more the gist of it), but there was something in the way he acted with her that made her want to ease up on how tentative she was being with him. She didn't have much to compare with in the area of romance - lately she'd been trying very hard not to let her bitter grudge against Lexa surface and she wasn't about to brood over it at the moment - but she had a hunch that as far as boyfriends went, Bellamy was a pretty good one. Of course, not all boyfriends were in love with their partner before they started dating, so that undoubtedly played a huge part. And sure, maybe the two of them were going about things a little backward, but it wasn't like that was the only thing wrong with their relationship. Not that Bellamy would ever know about how the whole thing started if Clarke had any control over the matter. But still; if they began in an unconventional way, why couldn't they keep it up in the same manner? Because as far as she knew, the hot air balloon date, the one that Bellamy confessed he'd wanted to be their first date ever ... well, it wasn't exactly typical first date material.

Not that she was complaining in the slightest; she was having such a great time so far, and as it turned out, the rest of their weekend was destined to follow the same deviously fun scheme.

Once Bellamy finally awoke 'on his own' - it had been dozens of awkwardly discreet waking attempts by Clarke and many minutes later - they were finally able to start their day (after Bellamy's adorably goofy morning smile when he saw her and his mouth's decisive attention to any part of Clarke that she would let him kiss). There was nothing in particular he had planned for the day, telling Clarke he intended on letting her do whatever she wanted, as long as she took him along for the ride. As it turned out, there were worlds of things she was interested in.

It was early when they left the hotel and as per Clarke's instructions, they asked around to the locals and quickly found a mini-golf course that was unsurprisingly unoccupied (it was a Sunday morning). What was surprising, though - to Clarke at least - was that Bellamy was absolutely terrible at putt-putt. Granted, he did seem more intent on staring googly-eyed at her than his mini-golf, but to his credit, when Clarke's golf ball rebounded into the pond a few times, Bellamy was the one to fish it out for her without complaint. Hole after hole later when Bellamy was actually focused on putt-ing his ball into the miniature windmill, Clarke stood by idly wondering if this treating-her-like-a-princess thing, pampering her to no end, doing chivalrous things for her when she didn't even think to ask him to, was something that would last for a while or if he was in his own little honeymoon world by himself.

And then she felt like kicking herself for being stupid. It must have been a part of his character seeing as he'd been pampering her since before he even had feelings for her. Not that she'd ever deserved it; not back then, or after then, or any point since. Then something popped into her head that she hadn't really considered before, and as she watched Bellamy carefully putt his ball to the slowly spinning windmill that blocked the path to the hole and miss by a huge margin, she really thought she'd like to know.

Squinting thoughtfully at him, the palm of her hand resting on the top of the golf-club handle, she clicked her tongue and tilted her head.

"Can I ask you something?"

He looked over, already smiling, and nodded once.

"Why did you like me?" His smile faltered only slightly, and assuming that he was just confused, she elaborated. "We were never nice to each other. Even when you did like me, you made it your mission to annoy me. Plus I think I probably almost killed you a few times. Unless you're into that or
something."

It took him a moment to react, just shrugging and raising his eyebrows as if to say 'I guess you'll never know' as he started toward his ball.

"Are you really not gonna tell me?" she asked, her shoulders slumping in disappointment. She didn't even realize she was all that eager to find out the answer.

"Maybe I just don't know," he called loudly.

She knew that was a lie. "Come on, I'm curious."

He snickered, his back to her as he tried to line up his shot.

"I knew what kind of person you were from what I saw with you and Octavia. You didn't have to be kind to me for me to know that you are."

With that, he putt-ed his ball to the windmill and instead of bouncing off, it glided straight through. He laughed cheerfully, looking over to Clarke on his way to the other side of the windmill, obviously expecting her to celebrate with him. And she would have, if she wasn't feeling entirely thrown off at the moment. He'd called her kind, but he'd take it back in an instant if he found out why she started things with him in the first place.

Not for the first time since she started dating Bellamy, Clarke's heart broke a little.

Sunday flew by as quickly as Saturday had (Clarke won mini-golf and received a 25 cent ring from Bellamy as a prize; she forced her feelings of guilt away for the rest of the day as they walked through the streets hand-in-hand, browsing through shops and acting the part of the happy couple. At night, they sat up for a while playing slaps, which somehow progressed into a game that simply entailed Bellamy chasing Clarke around the room and kissing her silly once he caught her. They fell asleep in each others arms again, teasing each other in murmurs until they fell asleep) and finally, to end it all off, Monday came and went with a bang. Their last day entailed finding an empty beach where Clarke managed to convince Bellamy to skinny dip after promising that she would be doing it, too (she didn't), and eating lunch at three restaurants without having to pay by pretending they were newlyweds (Clarke's ring from Bellamy came in quite handy). Right after lunch, they went to the carnival that was passing through. A grande reversal occurred at the fair as Bellamy was suprisingly good at carnival games and as it turned out, Clarke was only good at mini-golf apparently. It didn't seem to matter to him; he looked happy enough to win enough tickets to trade in for a giant, black teddy bear for Clarke, which was currently laid out in the back of his car.

Clarke was reclining in the passenger seat, and her feet were up on the dash, and the windows were rolled down, and Bellamy was singing along to the radio, holding Clarke's hand in his and squeezing when he sang louder and caressing her fingers when he didn't, and there was a small, contented smile on her face that didn't seem keen on leaving her alone anytime soon. No matter what she thought about, like the uncharted territory she knew she would be thrust into with Octavia when she and Bellamy returned home, she couldn't find it in herself to be upset. She was, however, slightly nervous about what would come when she saw her again. Admittedly, it wasn't as though things were turning out badly with Bellamy. Clarke had real, genuine feelings for him now, which wouldn't have happened without Octavia's intervening, and she was finding that when she and Bellamy weren't trying to annoy each other, they had a lot in common and they got along well and why couldn't things work out for them? Why couldn't she just give it a real shot and see where things went?
She looked over at Bellamy, at the lightness and ease in his face, and she had her mind set: no matter what happened, no matter where she stood with Octavia, Clarke wouldn’t be the one to take that ease away from him. There was no reason he needed to know of her initial intentions, especially not when she was no longer intending them. Whatever happened, she wasn’t going to tell Bellamy about the plan.

Bellamy and Clarke arrived back home just after six in the evening. He carried her bag and the bear to the door and as Clarke turned toward him to say goodbye, she saw the quickest glimpse of his cheeky grin before he surged forward and caught her against the door, his lips immediately on her as he pressed the length of his body against hers. Like a little girl, Clarke started giggling into the kiss, every inch of her instantly relaxing and melting into him. She let her hands gently grab onto his waist, his body hard and taut under his sweater, before wrapping an arm around him. Catching her off guard, her heart lurched in her chest, suddenly picking up the pace tenfold. It hadn't beat so hard since the day in Bellamy’s room when she was still trying to seduce him, and that was because she was afraid he'd try to get in her pants. Now, she was almost afraid that she wanted to go there with him. Not right then, not immediately, but God, she was close to caving.

Bellamy dropped one of his hands from where it was locking her against the door and dropped it to her hip, dragging it around her back to the other side of her body and grabbing on, pulling her closer. He hummed into her mouth, sighing happily as he kissed her once more and pulled back just enough to see her.

"I feel like I haven't kissed you for ever."

His eyes were soft around the edges, so full of love, and her heart was still racing.

"We kissed this morning," she reminded him, lightly trailing her hands up to his chest and over his shoulders to clasp behind his head.

Bellamy shook his head and leaned in again. "That's too long."

After a few minutes of him touching his lips to any part of her face and neck that he wanted to, occasionally dragging Clarke flush against him as though he could never have her close enough, she told him she had to go inside.

"Are you coming over tonight?" he breathed against her ear where he’d been slowly kissing her neck.

Swallowing, Clarke nodded, a small shiver rippling through her.

"Good," he said, kissing his way from her neck up to her mouth. "I'll be awake after everyone goes to sleep."

"Why's that?" she asked, her hands tingling.

Bellamy paused for a moment, and his voice was rough when he answered.

"In case you want to sneak in my room."

She wasn't even sure if he was really implying anything, but the apex of her thighs was suddenly pulsing, and she thought maybe her whole 'no sex with Bellamy ever' idea wasn't so great. What was wrong with having a little fun with him, regardless of whether they lasted as a couple or not? If not sex, then at least something. All this affection was really doing it for her.
A while later, Clarke finally managed to get Bellamy to drop his hands and head off. He waited at his car door for her to go inside, his crossed arms rested on the roof of the car and his chin resting on his arms. She closed the door on his playful smirk and finally allowed herself to feel the nervous excitement building in her. She closed her eyes, a smile coming easily to her as she leaned into the door, her head falling back with a light thud.

When she got a hold of herself, images of Bellamy running through her head, she announced her arrival and heard a muffled 'oh!' from a distant part of the house. Seconds later, her mother was rushing from the kitchen to the door. She pulled Clarke into a tight hug, sighing and pressing her cheek against Clarke's head.

"Oh, sweetheart, I've missed you."

Hidden from Abby's view, Clarke rolled her eyes, giving a small smile as she returned the embrace.

"You're not gonna cry, are you?"

She didn't answer, and Clarke wasn't sure if the sniffle she heard was her imagination or not.

"I wasn't even gone three full days, Mom."

"But now I know what it will be like when you leave for college."

So the sniffle definitely wasn't imagined.

"I'll only be an hour away," she said, trying to extract herself from her mother's embrace, but Abby wasn't having any of it. Sighing, Clarke wrapped her arms around her again and tried to soothe her so that she'd be released.

"You said you might not even come home every weekend," Abby said, her voice wavering.

"Well, considering I'm going to Med school, I figured I might be just a tad busy. Anyway, what are you getting so sad about? I'm hardly even here, I'm always at Octavia's."

She gently pushed her mother off, giving her an exasperated look.

"I might not even get in, so there's nothing to worry about until I do."

Suddenly, Clarke's dad appeared around the corner, his hands behind his back and a warm look colouring his face.

"Hey, kiddo," he said, giving Abby a mischievous wink.

Clarke narrowed her eyes, staring particularly at Jake.

"What's that look?"

"What look?"

"You're really bad at pretending to be innocent, Dad. What's going on?"

Chuckling, he brought his hands out from behind his back, a letter held between his fingers that had Clarke's name almost shining out to her like a beacon. Gasping, she lurched forward and snatched it away from him. In the upper right corner was the address of ARK University, the only University she wanted to attend. Their medical program was rumoured to be the top in the country, which meant that it was more than a little difficult to get in. She was sure she had enough qualifications, but she
wouldn't know for sure until she opened it. Her heartbeat quickened as she flipped the envelope around and tore it open. She hastily pulled the letter free and rapidly shook the envelope in the general direction of her parents until one of them took it from her. With clumsy fingers, she flipped the letter open, her eyes flying to the first words, and then-

"I GOT IN!"

Abby gasped, a new batch of tears (happy ones, or so Clarke assumed) welling in her eyes as Jake laughed, pulling Clarke into a tight hug that lifted her off the ground. Once her dad put her down, she excitedly hugged Abby and eagerly hurried to the stairs. She took them two at a time, and in her impatience to get to her bedroom, she ignored her parents calling to her and asking where she was going. But the smile abruptly dropped from her face and she gave a pathetic falter mid-step, halfway up the stairs. Her foot slipped, nearly causing her to fall to her death, but she caught herself on the railing, sliding down so she was sitting on the edge of the step, her head leaning against the railing.

She was still for a moment, not doing anything, and then she lifted the letter in front of her, scanning the 'congratulations' over and over and feeling infinitely less excited each time. It was an odd feeling to have her heart still racing while her disappointment coursed through her.

She wanted to tell Octavia about her acceptance ... she'd been so eager to get to her room and call her because somehow, she'd managed to forget what Octavia did by selfishly throwing her at Bellamy just so she'd be free to date, despite the emotional turmoil it would have caused Bellamy.

*Could have caused Bellamy*, she mentally corrected herself. *Could have ... if I didn't happen to develop feelings for him.*

Somehow, that one thought caused a hefty portion of her annoyance to evaporate. She liked Bellamy. If it wasn't for Octavia, she still would have found the mere thought of him repulsive. Now though, as his face popped into her head, she huffed a breath from her nose, a quiet laugh, and shook her head as she took a deep breath. In that moment, while she was still contemplating whether to call Octavia or not (leaning closer to calling), the doorbell rang and snapped her from her thoughts. Still holding the letter in her hand, she headed to the door, thinking Bellamy had shown up again and feeling eager about sharing the letter with him. Her parents had already gone, so she was alone again. Using her foot, she gently nudged the bear and her travel bag away from the door, and ran her fingers over her hair to make sure it was nice. She was trying to steel her expression, because she thought it might be fun to pretend she didn't get in and then surprise him, but just as she reached for the handle and turned it, a wide grin broke across her face.

And then her expression froze, her smile slackening with each passing second after she saw who was standing at the door.

"Clarke," Lexa said, her voice slightly breathless. She smiled timidly, brushing her hair behind her ear. "Hi."

Any happy emotion she had immediately evaporated and she slammed the door in her face, locking it for effect and hoping that Lexa heard the click.

Clarke huffed out a breath, shaking her head and standing staring at the door.

"This is un-fucking-believable."

Now she *really* needed to talk to Octavia.
WHAT WAS THAT?!? WAS IT CRAZY! DID YOU GUYS LIKE IT!@!?! I'M REALLY NERVOUS!!

Side note: Tomorrow, I'm leaving home for the first time and moving in with my brothers who live in a different province, and it's a 9 hour drive to my new home(!!!) so I won't be able to work on the next chapter until Monday, but it might not be done until Tuesday or Wednesday, so this is forewarning that the next chapter won't follow immediately and I am sorry, but I'm doing my best!!

If you guys liked this chapter, I'd love to hear your feedback, because this is the first time I'm writing ANYTHING in months, so I might be a little rusty.. and I'm also sorry for the shortness of this chapter and lack of loveable Bellarke.. I would have added another three thousand words to this, but that would mean I wouldn't have this out for a long time and that just wouldn't do.

And for those of you commenting and asking, I WILL be updating this to completion, probably steadily from now on. Please don't think I won't. I want to find out what happens, too :))
As always, thanks so much for reading, commenting, leaving kudos, subscribing, BOOKMARKING, and all that good stuff.
And like.. sorry for the cliffhanger, oops.. it seemed like a good place to leave off? I guess I'll find out with your comments :)}
Clarke stayed rooted to the spot for a moment, unsure of what to do, unsure of how to make sense of what she was feeling, unsure of why she was wishing Bellamy would show up then more than usual. She was confused, she was frustrated, she was _fuming_, but more than that, she was panicking. What if Lexa wanted to get back together? What if Clarke discovered that she wanted that, too, despite that she was now with Bellamy? The thought sent a pang of guilt coiling in her stomach, a feeling she was now accustomed to after being with him for a short time. When she was with Lexa, Clarke had always found herself wading in a hesitant unsurety of Lexa's feelings; with Bellamy, she was stuck feeling guilty of her own.

And now, to make matters worse, Lexa decided to show up unannounced after two _years_ of not communicating, and Clarke couldn't figure out if the way she was feeling about it was good or bad, or if she even knew which was which at the moment. There was, however, one thing about herself she knew for absolute certain: if she didn't confront Lexa immediately, she wouldn't stop thinking about her until she did, and the last thing she wanted while she was with Bellamy was to have her ex on her mind.

So she bit her lip hard (thinking that would help with keeping her from screaming in frustration) and set her acceptance letter on her bag as she reached for the doorknob. She wrenched the door open to Lexa's fist poised to knock.

---

_Two Years Ago_

It had been a month since Clarke broke up with Lexa and a week since all communications between them came to an end. Lexa, as per her personality, had continued to call, message, and attempt to meet her at her school. It lasted until Clarke put a definitive stop to it with Octavia's help. Since the day Clarke told Octavia the news of the Lexa's infidelity and their inevitable break up, Octavia didn't leave her side. They were always together either at school or at the Blake house or at the Griffin house, but never separated. That, paired with the fact that Clarke had stopped checking her phone every time it lit up with a message (even if it ended up being from Raven or her other friends) seemed to give Octavia the idea that if she herself took the lead and responded to Lexa's incessant calling, the problem would be fixed.

She'd started answering Clarke's phone with wordy 'greetings' that left no room for a reply ("From one bitch to another, my amazing best friend who is too good to date someone who doesn't treat her the way she deserves to be treated, doesn't want to talk to you, Lexa. She doesn't want _anything_ to do with you, so please, do us all a favour and leave her alone."). Eventually, likely in an attempt to get through the barrier that was Octavia, Lexa ended up visiting the Griffin house unannounced. When Clarke answered the door, she froze in place, completely unprepared to see Lexa's face and too surprised in the moment to come up with an appropriate course of action (cussing Lexa out, slamming the door on her and locking it, shouting for Octavia, who was of course in the next room
... those all would have been more than satisfactory). Taking advantage of Clarke's stunned silence, Lexa quickly and quietly sputtered out that she wanted to talk, that she knew they could work things out, that she loved her, she loved her, she loved her, she loved her.... Clarke's heart constricted painfully in her chest at the words she used to long to hear, but she wouldn't let herself believe them anymore, no matter how enticing they were. If Lexa had really loved her, she wouldn't have been able to betray Clarke the way she did.

Clarke's brain finally unfroze, releasing unbidden from her mouth the threat that Octavia suggested mere days earlier: Clarke told Lexa if she didn't stop stalking her, she'd seek a restraining order.

Lexa's face scrunched together, her eyes shocked as they appraised Clarke.

"A restraining order, Clarke?" she said, taking a step forward. "If you would just talk to me-

Octavia, the life saver that she was, seemed to finally hear the exchange. Down the hall in the kitchen, there was the sharp scrape of chair legs grinding on the floor. Seconds later, quick footfalls sounded as Octavia raced to the door, gently folding Clarke behind her.

"Why can't you get it in your selfish, cheating head that Clarke doesn't want to see you?" she snapped.

Lexa clenched her jaw and glanced away, her face suddenly rigid and cold.

"Why don't you let her decide for herself?"

"She has decided, you pompous moose. I've already told you that over the phone three hundred times."

"I wouldn't have had to call so much if you would mind your own business and let her answer her phone."

Octavia huffed, her jaw dropping. "I'm not holding her back from talking to you, Lexa. She doesn't want to, so I'm making it so she doesn't have to."

Lexa looked over Octavia's shoulder to Clarke, her arms crossed as she avoided Lexa's eyes.

"If you don't want to work this out, tell me. I don't want to have to go back and forth with Octavia."

Octavia started to reply with a string of insults, but Clarke quietly interrupted her.

"Fine," she said, moving to stand next to Octavia and meeting Lexa's eyes for what would be the last time. "I don't want to get back together. I don't need to think about it or talk about it any more than I already have. I broke up with you for a reason and I'm not going to change my mind."

Lexa sighed heavily, her face dropping slightly before she composed herself. She stood there for a moment just looking at Clarke before wordlessly turning and walking away, not looking back as Octavia turned to Clarke and carefully ushered her back inside.

She didn't see Lexa again after that, and she didn't receive any calls or messages or unexpected visits. She was fine with it for a while, slowly letting her heart heal. It was difficult, considering she dreamed of Lexa every night and thought of her every day, but she was managing. As best as she could, she was managing.

It wasn't until a few weeks later when she was deleting all the pictures of Lexa off her phone that she started doubting herself, thinking maybe Lexa was right, that maybe they were good together. They
looked so happy together, so right with each other, that Clarke started to panic. She immediately tried calling her, but after two rings, she was greeted with the message that the number she was dialing had been disconnected. Clarke hung up the phone and dropped it on her desk, sinking down onto her bed and holding her forehead in her hands, unable to stop from crying.

Knowing it wouldn’t be a good idea to invite Lexa in lest she get the wrong idea, Clarke left her house, closing the door behind her and forcing Lexa back as she emerged. She crossed her arms and looked into Lexa’s eyes properly for the first time and felt … nothing. Well, nothing but a sharp irritation, which was currently giving her a dull, pulsing headache.

Lexa looked more at ease now that Clarke was submitting to her rather than avoiding her as she did years ago.

"I didn’t know if you were actually going to talk to me," she said, a small smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Clarke nodded, sighing and looking away. "What are you doing here?"

"I want to talk to you," she said, suddenly serious.

"What about?"

She shrugged a shoulder, lightly shaking her head. "Everything."

"That always annoyed me about you … how it takes you so long to get to the point."

Clarke didn’t find pleasure in the hurt look on Lexa’s face, but she sure as Hell didn’t feel bad about it.

"Sorry. I guess I’m just glad you’re actually talking to me."

"Is there something you wanted, or did you just come to chat?" she asked, about to add more when Lexa spoke up.

"I wanted to know if you were still upset," she said at once, looking nervous. "About what happened."

She absolutely was. She was still mad at Lexa for doing it, but more than that, she was mad that she’d made her believe she was unwanted and unimportant for nearly a year afterward. But she wasn’t about to say any of that. The last thing she wanted was to act vulnerably in front of her ex-girlfriend.

"It’s been two years," she said instead, trying to keep the sad edge out of her voice. "I’m over it."

"It doesn’t seem like you are."

"Well, you did have sex with another girl while we were together, so forgive me if I’m not one hundred percent thrilled to see you."

Lexa lowered her chin, staring down at her feet.

"I regret that everyday, Clarke," she said, her voice quiet. "It was the biggest mistake of my life."

Shocking herself, Clarke felt tears pricking in her eyes. She’d known she wasn’t completely over what had happened, but she didn’t think she’d still be crying over it, not two years later. Her
momentary lapse in composure left as quickly as it came, though, with Lexa's next words.

"Oh, baby, don't cry," she said, reaching out and grasping Clarke's arms, attempting to pull her into a hug.

Clarke backed away immediately, so far and quickly that her back bumped into her front door. She crossed her arms again and blinked away her tears, her mind feeling much less foggy.

"Don't call me that," she said sharply, sniffing. "We're not together and you don't have the right."

"I want to be together, Clarke," she said, her voice laced with desperation. Clarke wasn't surprised; she'd guessed it would be something similar. "I still want that. I've never stopped loving you."

"Well, I don't love you," she said immediately, mostly because she was experiencing a sudden and strong urge to hurt Lexa as much as she'd been hurt by her. "I'm with someone else."

She felt a cruel happiness as her words had the desired effect. Lexa's lips parted, her shoulders drooped, and that hopeful look slid right off her face. Clarke didn't have long to celebrate it, though, because in the next second, she spotted a dark head of long hair behind Lexa that she hadn't even noticed walk up.

Octavia was standing halfway up the path to Clarke's house, looking almost betrayed and completely confused.

"Lexa? Clarke, what...?"

Despite that she had no reason to feel guilty, that familiar sensation bubbled up in Clarke's stomach. She wasn't doing anything wrong - in fact, she'd just told Lexa she wasn't available and had been moments from telling her to leave - but she still felt like she had to offer an explanation and quickly.

"I didn't invite her," she said, trying to step back more, but just hitting the door again. "She just showed up."

Octavia's betrayed expression snapped immediately into one of exasperated outrage and it was now focused solely on Clarke's ex.

"We were *not* kidding about getting a restraining order," she said, stomping up the path.

Admittedly, there were still things with Octavia that Clarke felt needed working out, but at that moment, she was more than a little relieved that she chose that moment to show up. *It's just like old times*, she thought bitterly, looking around at the both of them.

Lexa looked like her thoughts were following the same path as Clarke's as she clenched her jaw, her annoyance covering most of her sadness.

"Hello, Octavia."

"Don't 'hello' me," she snapped, just as aggressive as she was back then. "What are you even doing here? It's been two years, give it up."

Uncharacteristic of her, Lexa looked about ready to do just that. She glanced at Clarke again, but looked away almost instantly.

"If things don't work out," she said, backing away, "I'll be staying with my parents for a while. You can find me there."
"She won't *find* you anywhere. You White Witch of the West."

Lexa didn't respond, only rolled her eyes at Octavia and walked to her car, but Clarke was suppressing a smirk.

"It's not *white* witch, it's *wicked* witch," she said, leaning back against the door and sighing heavily.

"Yeah, that, too," said Octavia, her eyes on Lexa. When she glanced back at them just as she was pulling out, Octavia waved, giving her an exaggerated smile. "God, she's got issues."

They were both quiet for a while longer, Clarke calming down from laughing and Octavia looking more timid by the second.

"Are you okay?"

Clarke nodded, glancing down at her feet.

"She's still trying to get back together, isn't she?"

Again, Clarke nodded. She didn't say anything or meet Octavia's eyes, despite that she knew they had to have some sort of talk, but Octavia nervously cleared her throat, seeming to read Clarke's mind.

"Bell said you had a good time," she started, her voice meek. "I thought it would be better to talk when you're in a good mood."

Clarke took a deep breath and pushed away from the door, opening it for Octavia. Really, she didn't like being on unstable ground with her. It was much harder to be cross with Octavia than she'd thought, though in fact, she was more confused than anything. No matter how many times she thought about it, she knew how much Octavia loved her brother ... it was completely uncharacteristic of her to be disloyal to the people she loved, *that* Clarke had experienced firsthand. Somehow, she couldn't imagine Octavia screwing over Bellamy for a handsome waiter, no matter how much she liked him. And yet, she'd done it, and Clarke wasn't really sure what to make of that. Speaking of Lincoln, it hadn't skipped over Clarke that Octavia hadn't said anything about him since she and Bellamy started 'dating', despite that the whole idea sprung from Octavia's teenage rebellion. All of this lead Clarke to believe she and Octavia would be having quite the discussion. She was envisioning a long talk filled with Octavia's apologies (that was just how she operated after making royal mistakes), followed by forgiveness (of course) and finally, girlish squeals and junk food when Clarke would tell Octavia what happened on the trip, all the while trying to get the nagging though of Lexa out of her head.

But, unexpectedly, everything happened quite differently and much quicker.

As soon as Octavia walked in, she spotted Clarke's bag next to the door and went to grab it, presumably to take it upstairs, but when she noticed there was a letter on top - the one that had completely slipped Clarke's mind, despite how monumental it was - she faltered. She picked it up, looking as though she was just going to hand it over to Clarke, but as she was reaching her arm behind her, her eyes zeroed in on the large representative crest on the upper left corner and she froze.

"ARK Univer-" she broke off with a gasp and yanked the letter back in front of her face. Before she fully opened the folds, she hesitantly looked back at Clarke and gestured to the letter. "Can I?"

Clarke gave a small nod, trying to suppress her smile and feeling suddenly shy, biting the inside of her cheek.
"I'm sure you got in, Clarke. Don't be nervous," said Octavia, giving her arm a gentle squeeze.

Clarke tried not to laugh at her awkward comforting - as though she believed Clarke would have opened the letter without reading it (although in fairness, she actually didn't read it ... she only scanned over the 'congratulations') - and watched as Octavia did nearly the same thing Clarke had earlier. Hardly two seconds after she started reading, she gasped and threw one arm out toward Clarke, grasping at her shirt.

"Octavia," Clarke laughed, prying her off, but as soon as she released her hand, she whirled on Clarke and threw her arms around her.

"Congratulations, Clarke! Oh, God, this is amazing! I knew you'd get in!"

To say the excitement was contagious would be an understatement.

Hugging her back, Clarke laughed, taking a deep breath. When she sighed it out, a thick, heavy weight in her chest lifted that had been bogging her down since she saw Octavia minutes ago. She thought she should probably stay upset at Octavia for a while longer, because what she did by using Clarke for her own gain knowing that it could potentially break Bellamy's heart really did warrant Clarke's anger, but it wasn't exactly easy to stay mad at her. Sometimes Octavia lost her mind a little bit. It happened. That was how Clarke was justifying it to herself anyway. It still didn't make sense to her that fuck-with-my-big-brother-and-die Octavia would be the one to ... well ... fuck with her big brother.

Clarke desperate wanted to talk to her about it, and a pile of other things, when she pulled away and saw a pained expression on Octavia's face and tears running down her cheeks.

"Hey, what's wrong?" she said quickly, alarm immediately wiping away her excitement.

Octavia just shook her head and wiped her face. "Nothing."

"Octavia, you're crying."

"I can't help it!" she cried, pulling Clarke back into another tight hug. "I'm so happy for you!"

"Oh, Octavia," she said, patting her back as if to say 'there, there', her worry going as quickly as it had come.

"I remember when we got all our Uni applications and we filled them out together," she started, sniffling, "and at first, you would only do the one for ARK University, but I was even filling out ones for community college."

Clarke laughed, her own throat closing up as they pulled away and Octavia wiped her tears away again.

"This is just so ... I'm so, so happy you got in, Clarke. Hopefully I'll get accepted somewhere close so we won't be too far apart."

"You haven't gotten any letters back, yet?" Clarke asked.

Octavia shook her head. "Bell says it's still a bit early, so I have nothing to worry about, but...."

"Don't be worried. Everything will work out, I know it."

Octavia smiled and looked back down at the letter in her hand.
"You should tell him. He'll be happy for you, I think."

"I will tell him," said Clarke, nodding. "Tonight or tomorrow or ... I don't know when, but I'll tell him."

"You shouldn't wait too long," Octavia said, a grim look slowly settling over her face. "The longer you wait, the harder it will be."

Clarke had a feeling she wasn't actually referring to Bellamy, but Octavia spoke up before she could ask about it.

"I have to tell you something, Clarke. I think you'll be really mad, but I've been feeling really guilty about it and if I don't say it now, I probably never will."

Well, if that didn't drive a spike of fear right through her spine....

"I'm sure it can't be worse than what you told me last week," she said, though she wasn't sure if she believed that, given the look on Octavia's face. It was much more nerve-wracking than the one she'd seen when Octavia confessed she knew about Bellamy's feelings.

"Can we go to your room?" Octavia asked, sheepish, as she grasped the handle of Clarke's bag.

"Yeah, okay," Clarke murmured, grabbing the teddy bear neither of them had mention and then lead Octavia up the stairs to her room.

When Clarke opened the door, Octavia dropped the bag on the floor and the letter on her dresser, standing awkwardly by as Clarke set the bear down. Octavia didn't waste any time.

"Just try to keep in mind that I wasn't trying to screw around with you or Bellamy," she said, avoiding Clarke's eyes. "It wasn't even my idea, Jasper suggested it and I thought it was great until I followed through with it and then ... I know it was really stupid and I'm really sorry."

The longer Octavia spoke, the bigger the dread in Clarke's chest grew. She glanced down at Octavia's hands and noticed them shaking.

"Maybe just don't tell me," Clarke said, her eyebrows pulled together. "If it's going to ruin our friendship, I don't want to know. Really."

Octavia looked at her then, defeat etched in her features. When she spoke, her voice was resigned.

"You think it will?"

"I don't know what it is, but you're really freaking me out right now."

"There isn't a no-dating rule."

Clarke's expression was frozen on her face for a long few seconds, but when she snapped out of it, she gave her head a light shake, blinking and frowning at Octavia, wondering if she misunderstood her.

"What do - what do you mean? Your mom-"

She was shaking her head. "I made it up. My mom didn't have any rule. I started dating Lincoln the day after I asked you to date Bellamy."

Clarke was speechless, gaping at Octavia without a single thought running through her mind. She
was coming up blank, an empty sound somehow loud in her head, and Octavia went on.

"I just kind of thought you'd start caring about him. I wasn't really thinking about the repercussions if you didn't. You're both so similar, so I thought you'd be good together, and I thought you'd think so, too, after a little while. I thought you might finally quit hating him if you were together. You never stopped since all that stuff happened in third grade."

A rush of feelings washed through Clarke all at once, like a lightbulb going off above her head, mixed with a lightweight floating feeling, mixed with a horrible constricting in her chest, mixed with disbelief and stunned silence and-

*How did I forget?*

It hit her like a brick wall, the reason she started hating him in the first place, a reason that had somehow slipped her mind in favour of her not having to think about why she didn't like him throughout her adolescence.

Clarke spent nearly the last ten years of her life hating Bellamy Blake for something that had absolutely nothing to do with him, yet she never once questioned herself. She'd been so blind. She'd wasted ten years on nothing, and she'd been so blind.

---

*Ten Years Ago*

There were two things about Octavia Blake that everyone who met her became aware of very quickly. The first was that she had a fighter's spirit and would honest to God kick someone in the shin so hard that it would never fully heal, if they ever touched her when she didn't want to be touched. That included her clothes, her hair, her face, her foot, she didn't care. Touch her when she didn't consent to it and she would have no reservations about beating some ass. And secondly, she absolutely would not tolerate anyone saying anything mean about her big brother, Bellamy. That, too, warranted a something like a crippling kick in the shin or sharp punch in the chest. She was a seven year old, sure, but she had one Hell of a fist.

Clarke already knew all of this, considering she and Octavia had been friends since the first time they spoke. It was on the playground during recess in Grade two when two boys decided to gang up on Clarke, pushing her around and pulling her hair. Octavia was known as the crazy girl in their grade and she didn't have any friends because of it, but then, neither did Clarke, and when Clarke was struggling to fight off the boys, Octavia swooped in. She pulled one boy's pants down and kicked him in the butt so that he went flying forward, and then stomped hard on the other one's foot, knocking him over, too, when he started hopping around. It was impossible for the two girls not to be friends after that, and a few months later, their little group had expanded by two wily boys named Jasper and Monty. They were all quite friendly and didn't want to make anyone feel left out, so when a girl named Monroe Rae transferred into their elementary school at the beginning of the next year along with a slew of other children, Octavia quickly took her under her wing. She treated her like one of the group and always invited her over whenever Clarke was planning on visiting, as well.

Things were great at first and Clarke thought Monroe was a lot of fun, but things took an unexpected turn when Octavia got into a fight with another girl in their class, Catherine who spent quite a lot of time with Monroe. Currently, though, she looked as though she was picking on her. Octavia came to her rescue, unsurprisingly, until Catherine laughed at Octavia and told her that she was being stupid for sticking up for her because Monroe didn't even like Octavia or Clarke and the only reason she pretended to was so she could go to her house and see Bellamy.

Clarke's heart hurt more for Octavia than for herself, especially when she saw the vulnerable look of
betrayal on her best friend's face.

Considering the emotional state Octavia was in, Catherine probably should have chosen her next words more carefully, but alas-

"I don't get why she wanted to see your brother, anyway. I've seen him before and he's really ugly."

Without even half a second of hesitation, Octavia balled her hand into a fist and slammed it into Catherine’s face. She was pushed back with the force of it and then her hands came to her face and she started to wail. Octavia and Catherine were both suspended for ten days after Clarke, Jasper, and Monty all gave the teacher their false account of what happened ("Catherine started it! She shoved Octavia and kicked her!") and no one else in the class took Catherine's side, not even Monroe. When Clarke told her mom about it, she made Clarke pass on to Octavia not to listen to the bullies and to try to rein in her fist.

The next time Clarke saw Octavia, she tearily asked her if she was only friends with her so she could see Bellamy. Clarke reassured her that of course she wasn't, that she was friends with Octavia because she liked spending time with her, and she promised that there wasn't even the slightest chance that Bellamy would come between them.

The thing about Bellamy was that he was way too old for Clarke. She saw him as an older brother, the same way Octavia did, and didn't understand how Monroe could have a crush on him when she knew he was already in grade eight. But as it happened, Monroe wasn't the only one with screwed up preferences. Octavia tried to make friends with girls time and time again, but every time, it was revealed through one way or another that they didn't actually like Octavia and that they only stayed friends with her to be able to go to her house and see her older brother.

This ended up causing a rift between Octavia and Bellamy, which he didn't seem to understand and Octavia wouldn't explain. It was such a shift from the loving sibling dynamic they normally had where they protected and cherished each other that it was impossible not to notice. Now, Octavia didn't care what mean things anyone said about him. They could say rude things about him right to her face and she wouldn't react. Clarke knew Octavia blamed Bellamy for all her fake friends, thinking that if he didn't exist, people wouldn't be using her all the time. Clarke was inclined to agree. Not only was she inclined, she was obligated and bound, of course, by loyalty and friendship.

It lasted for quite a while, Octavia's resentment - and by extension, Clarke's - toward Bellamy. But after a few months, Octavia was already warming back up to him with every kind thing he did for her and all the patience he showed. He bought her gifts and made her breakfast and played with her all the time, volunteering in their mother's place to take her to the movies and the playground and the dog park, with Little Miss Griffin in tow, of course. He was trying to do the same with Clarke because before she even met Monroe, Bellamy treated her and Octavia quite similarly and they both loved him, but now, Clarke didn't want anything to do with him. She rejected any gifts, she rejected any time he offered to her, she rejected the ways he tried to make her laugh or have fun. Octavia seemed to see the error of her ways over time, coming to understand that none of what happened was actually Bellamy's fault, but Clarke remained affronted. She remembered how sad Octavia was for months and months until she eventually just stopped trying to make friends altogether. Maybe Clarke knew that she couldn't justifiably blame Bellamy for what happened, but she wanted to blame someone and his kindness made him an incredibly easy target.

From that moment on, he was always trying to include Clarke in things, and she was always perfectly happy to ignore him. As time passed, she forgot why she even started hating him, but that didn't stop her from doing it.
Clarke and Octavia had been sitting on Clarke's bed in silence for a while, leaning against the headboard and staring at the opposite wall. After Octavia finished explaining herself, repeating that she really did think if Clarke dated Bellamy, she'd stop hating him, she apologized and asked Clarke if she was mad.

"I don't really know," she'd said with a heavy sigh, feeling incredibly burnt out. "Just don't talk to me for a few minutes. I have to think about some things."

Octavia willingly obliged, leaving them in their current state of silent, tense companionship.

Overcome with mental fatigue, Clarke decided that if she just let all her thoughts travel through her mind without focusing too hard on any of them, she'd get them all in order.

First, there was Bellamy. There had always been a distinct crack in their relationship, right from the day they started dating. It was the thing that caused Clarke to feel guilty about what how she was treating him, while still adamantly going along with the plan; it was the thing that had made her want to break things off with him eventually; it was the thing that made it seem confusing to her that she was developing real feelings for him. But that crack had filled in when Octavia unintentionally reminded her of why she'd started disliking him, and now things somehow seemed to make more sense despite that nothing was particularly confusing in the first place. But now that she knew she didn't have any logical reason to hate him, any memory she reflected on felt different. It was blindingly obvious to her now that, in all honesty, she'd massively overreacted over so many things. It was a wonder he could have liked her when she was acting so insane.

Then there was the matter of Lexa, otherwise known as firmly-in-the-past. That much was clearer than ever at that moment, but she couldn't understand how she'd ever had doubts about it. For starters, Lexa betrayed her in the worst way she could. Clarke knew Bellamy would never follow in her footsteps. It wasn't a guess or wishful thinking, and she really didn't even have a proper reason for why she believed so, but she just did. She just knew it. Bellamy was loyal and he would be loyal to her and he wouldn't make her feel unloved or under-appreciated or unimportant or any other un-word that she felt when she was with Lexa. Which meant that she should probably go tell Lexa not to wait for her. She didn't particularly want to, but maybe tying up all her loose ends would be good for her.

And then there was Octavia. They'd never been through anything turbulence like this because of each other, and it was more than a little ironic that it was over Bellamy. It was like everything in her life was suddenly doing a one-eighty and becoming opposite. She especially didn't like the weird feeling she was getting from being more aggressive than Octavia. They were either equally aggressive or Octavia was more, no exceptions, and Clarke preferred it that way. Having Octavia sitting next to her looking shy and guilty and keeping quiet, not brushing things off like she usually did, was really rubbing Clarke the wrong way.

With a deep breath in, she slid off her bed and started toward her door. She was going to go downstairs and eat because she was seriously famished, and then she would settle things with Octavia in the most concise way possible so that Octavia would turn back into her regular, sarcastic self. Then she would take a nap and recharge her batteries, and then ... then she wasn't sure.

"Are you hungry?" she asked on her way to her door.

"Are you really pissed at me?" Octavia asked instead of answering and Clarke spun around, walking back toward the bed and falling onto her back with a thick sigh. All right, so she'd concisely work things out with Octavia and then go get something to eat. That worked just as well.

"I'm too exhausted to go through that with you again," she said, closing her eyes, "so I'm choosing to
get over it. It irks me and I think it was out of line, but ... I'm not mad."

"Okay."

Her voice was quiet, but it wasn't as despondent as it had been, so at least things were moving in the right direction.

Clarke lurched up then and gave her a stern look.

"Never do any stupid shit like this again, Octavia. I'm serious."

She nodded and apologized again, looking down at her lap.

Clarke lay back again, shifting slightly as she thought about what part Bellamy played in all this. She didn't even have to think about it to know she wasn't going to say anything to him. She'd planned to keep him in the dark when all she knew of was a no-dating rule that she needed to help Octavia get around. Now that she knew far too many other intricate details? No way. That wouldn't accomplish anything except making him hate her and Octavia, and that was the last thing Clarke wanted. She was finally in a place where she really wanted to see where things went with him, where she was ready to put in effort and make it last. She wanted to really get to know him and start fresh. She wasn't sure that a fresh start was possible, though, what with it involving confessing everything, but still, it was what she wanted.

"This stays between us," she said after a moment, thinking she should tell Octavia as well. Clarke stood from the bed and ran her hands through her hair as she slowly paced the room. "Bellamy doesn't find out."

"I don't know if that's the best idea, Clarke," said Octavia, looking disproving.

"What would I say?" she said, taking on a faux sweet voice with her next words. "'Oh, by the way, Bellamy, I only started dating you because your sister asked me to for some game, not because I actually wanted to. In fact, I really didn't want to. I didn't want to kiss you, I didn't even want to touch you, but I did it anyway because I thought it was fun how easily I could get you into it, and all the while I was making fun of you in the back of my mind. How do you feel about that?'"

Huffing, Octavia rolled her eyes.

"Obviously, don't say it like that."

"Obviously," she said, pulling her phone out of her back pocket to give him a call and see if he wanted to get out of the house later. She wanted to do something new and refreshing and real after this weird afternoon. Just the two of them. She wanted to start from scratch, even though he wouldn't know any different.

"And what about Lexa?" Octavia asked, looking like she was forcing herself to bring her up. "Do you ... do you want to get back together with her?"

Obviously not, but the fact that Octavia even felt the need to ask made Clarke feel defensive, so she feigned uncertainty. It was stupid, but she was grumpy. Sue her.

"I don't know, Octavia, but when I do, you'll be the first to kn-"

When she saw her phone, her voice cut off, leaving an awful, abrupt, frigid silence in its wake. Her face was suddenly hot, her heart was immediately pounding in her chest, and her stomach sank, giving her the worst feeling she'd ever experienced. She was trying to breathe, but no air would
come. Octavia seemed to see something horrifying in Clarke because she leaped off the bed and promptly started freaking out.

"Clarke, what the Hell?" she said, her voice fearful and her words rushed. "What's wrong? Do you need to go to the hospital?"

Clarke could barely hear her over the blood pumping in her ears. She was staring at her phone, at the name of the person she'd unknowingly called, at the length of the call steadily rising.

00:44

00:45

00:46

00:47

"I butt-dialed him," she whispered, more to herself than Octavia, but she responded anyway.

"What?" she asked, not having heard her.

"Bellamy," Clarke said, her eyes glued to her phone.

00:51

00:52

"I butt-dialed Bellamy."  

00:53

00:54

00:55

The number froze there, the words 'call ended' flashing under it three times before the call screen disappeared.

"What do you mean you butt-dialed Bellamy?" Octavia demanded, her voice all at once reflecting the disaster happening inside Clarke.

Clarke ignored her, though, hastily calling him back with shaky fingers. The phone just kept ringing, like an endless, depressing string of it's over, it's over, it's over echoing in her ear. It wasn't like she even expected him to pick up, but the fact that he didn't meant he heard something. She didn't know how much, or if her voice had come through clearly, but he'd been on the phone for almost a minute and he wasn't answering her now and she was absolutely losing her shit, succumbing to the almost painful dread that enveloped her.

"Octavia, did you walk here?"

"Yes, I walked here, Clarke!" she snapped, wild panic on her face. "You saw me walk up! What the fuck, what the fuck do we do?"

Those words propelled Clarke into action. She dialed Bellamy again as she raced from her room and down the stairs, hearing Octavia barreling along after her. She grabbed her mom's keys from the kitchen, ignoring her inquiring voice as she ran outside and jumped in the minivan, pulling out just as
Octavia jumped in the passenger seat.

"What are you gonna say?" Octavia asked, breathless, and then quieter, "Fuck, what am I gonna say?"

"I'll be fine," Clarke said, nodding to herself, but her heart was pounding in her throat and her hands were shaking on the wheel and she really had no fucking idea how to remedy this. She said awful things in that minute, she knew she did. She didn't even mean most of them, she'd just been feeling snappy and decided to vent, so how the fuck did this happen? She wasn't even going to tell Bellamy anything about the plan or the no-dating rule or whatever else, but then she went and fucking butt-dialed him! And then she said something about Lexa and she couldn't even remember what it was, but she knew it was something that would definitely not sit well with him, and she didn't know what to say, she didn't know, she didn't know, she didn't know.

But as it happened, when Clarke pulled down the Blake house street, she soon realized she would have a while to think about it.

They only lived a few blocks apart from each other, which meant it took mere minutes to drive from one house to the other, but when Clarke pulled up across the street and she and Octavia tore from the vehicle and shot across the street to the house, it didn't skip over her head that Bellamy's usual parking spot was empty. She registered it immediately, but she didn't want to believe that he left, so she ran inside anyway, unable to quash the horrible unease in her stomach.

She knew right away that he was gone, as soon as she stepped foot inside, because his shoes weren't there. She still ran to his room and so did Octavia, and when she saw his bags from the trip were missing and so was his laptop and so was his phone ... she completely lost it.

Her breaths were rapidly getting more restricted so that they sounded like gasps and every one burned in her throat. Everything she was feeling at her house suddenly broke over her, unrestrained, and she couldn't calm down. Octavia was at her side, tears rolling down her cheeks in her own distress, but still she tried to help Clarke. Octavia shushed her, touching her arms and instructing that she match Octavia's breaths, but her voice sounded faraway and even though Clarke was trying to do as she said, she felt like she was spiraling out of control.

It took a good five minutes for her to get a hold of herself, which finally happened after Octavia coached her breathing and told her everything was okay and that she was right there with her. Over and over, she repeated comforting words like a mantra, sitting Clarke down on the edge of Bellamy's bed and taking a seat next to her. Octavia held her hand, she calmed her down, she breathed with her, all while her eyes were bright and red from crying.

As soon as Clarke managed to relax herself, though, her next reaction matched Octavia's. She couldn't hold back and she leaned into her with a drawn out whimper, letting herself cry against Octavia's shoulder, grasping one of her arms when Octavia wrapped them around Clarke.

"It's okay, Clarke. He'll be back. We'll explain. We'll get to explain."

Clarke was shaking her head, staring at his door. Her vision was blocked by her tears, but she could still perfectly make out the place she and Bellamy officially started dating, and then her tears were coming harder. She took him for granted so she deserved the pain she was feeling. But she didn't want him to hurt, and she knew he was, and it was all because of her.

"What did I do, Octavia?" she sobbed, clutching tighter to Octavia, who was shushing her and gently rubbing her arm. "What the Hell did I do?
They stayed there in his room until Clarke started to feel sick, started to smell him even though her nose was way too stuffed to smell anything. She left his room and walked down the hall to the kitchen with Octavia at her side, her arm linked through Clarke's. That was when Clarke saw the dining table and came to an unintentional halt. There were flowers on the table, an assortment of different kinds, and sitting right next to it was a shopping bag. Forced up against the plastic from the inside was the barely distinguishable, but unmistakable outline of a box of *Mike and Ikes*.

The anguish tore at Clarke's heart, and her face contorted as another round of sobs wracked her body, her only comfort being Octavia's constant presence and reassurance of, "He'll be back."

Chapter End Notes

Another chapter coming as promptly as I can churn it out. Thanks for reading, everyone! I hope you all liked it, and thanks for all the comments, kudos, subs, etc. They mean the world to me!
When Clarke met Octavia at the school entrance the morning after everything happened, the glum look on her face took away any hope she'd had that Octavia managed to talk to Bellamy. To make matters worse, Octavia hit her with a bomb right after she said hello.

Clarke wasn't allowed over anymore.

"Oh," she said, her stomach sinking.

Octavia linked her arm through Clarke's and dragged her along into the school.

"I got into it with my mom when she got back from work," she explained, her voice just as disappointed. "Bellamy called her and told her what happened I guess. He said he'd be staying at his friend's house for a while."

"Which friend?"

She wasn't going to show up at his door and try to make him forgive her - she didn't want to push him - but she thought that if she knew, it would give her some peace of mind.

Octavia shrugged a shoulder, though, steering them down the halls to their lockers.

"I don't know either. Bellamy asked her to keep it to herself," she said absently, her voice quiet. "He doesn't want to see me."

"Or me," Clarke muttered. "So they both hate me now?"

"My mom doesn't hate you," she said, shaking her head. "She just wants Bellamy to come home."

What did it matter if Aurora still liked her anyway? Bellamy didn't, and Aurora shouldn't either.

She was about to respond when she saw Jasper and Finn messing around in the hallway, dodging each other's punches and laughing. After Octavia told her what happened, that the no-dating rule was just a scheme devised by Jasper to try to get Clarke to feel something other than distaste for Bellamy, she thought the next time she saw him she'd be jumping at the opportunity to rip him to shreds. But she only felt the same thing as she had with Octavia; a dull, aching resignation about everything that had happened as a result. Neither of the boys seemed to sense the dark mood, though, and as soon as they noticed Clarke and Octavia walking toward them, they closed the distance.

"Hey, Clarkey," Jasper said cheerfully, ruffling her hair and ignoring her attempts to bat him away. "You've been gone for a while."
There was a knowing to his voice, a teasing knowing. So Octavia must have told them she was off with Bellamy. Finn was smirking as they all walked down the hall, and Octavia threw Jasper a warning look.

"If you like having a head, you might want to quit it before she tears it off."

"What did I do?" he asked, sharing a confused look with Finn.

Clarke exhaled sharply. "You told Octavia to lie to me about a no-dating rule so that I'd date Bellamy."

Jasper's eyes crinkled at the edges.

"Mmm," he said, barely sounding guilty at all. "I thought you'd like him by now."

Clarke rolled her eyes and opened her mouth to retort, but Octavia beat her to it.

"Bellamy's pissed at both of us because he found out, Jasper," she muttered, tightening her hold on Clarke's arm. "About your dumb idea."

"FYI, I'm famous for dumb ideas," he said, shrugging. When Finn agreed, Jasper gently shoved him and added, "It's not like you've never followed my advice before."

That was why Clarke couldn't find it in her to be mad at him. It was her choice to go along with everything in the first place. Looking back, though, she could see how no reason would be enough to do what she did, even if it didn't seem so problematic at the time. Because of that, she imagined she could understand how Octavia was feeling, to do something reckless at the expense of one person and the supposed benefit of another ... it was irresponsible and it was unfair, but that didn't stop either of them from doing it. It didn't stop them from trying to fix things that weren't their responsibility to fix. And now, they had to live with it.

Probably the most surprising thing, to Clarke at least, was how devastated she was feeling in the aftermath. Two months ago, if Bellamy told her he was never going to talk to her again, she'd have probably thanked him. Now, though, with him having disappeared without a word, thinking that Clarke had been screwing around with his feelings for a game and that she still didn't care about him (why did she have to say those things when he was on the phone?), the regret was eating away at her insides. It felt like she hadn't taken a proper breath since she saw his name on her phone, and the longer she spent without hearing from him, the worse she felt. It wasn't just because of the guilt of involving him in such a stupid plot, or the guilt of being insincere with him when he really cared, or the guilt of saying exaggeratedly 'true' things and then finding out he'd heard every word. It was also that she could see him in a different light now that she wasn't blinded by her illogical hatred.

There was nothing wrong with Bellamy; no crack in his loyalty to those he cared about, no discomfort in expressing his feelings, no end to his want for Clarke to feel cared for and appreciated. She wasn't in love with him, not at all. But spending time with him one on one, just the two of them, she was forced to acknowledge the fact that she didn't hate him either. She was forced to acknowledge that with time, she could love him. Easily. It wasn't a scary thought like she expected it might be, but it was painful. After what she did, she didn't know if Bellamy could come around to forgiving her. She didn't know if she would get time.

And things weren't looking up at all. After three days, Bellamy still wouldn't answer any of Clarke's attempts to get in contact with him. Still, she made a concentrated effort to live normally, going to school and making sure not to let her grades drop, despite how difficult that was since her thoughts were drifting worriedly to Bellamy every few minutes. If her visits with Octavia were any indication,
she wasn't faring much better.

"I can't believe this," she was saying on Clarke's bed, her voice tense. "Whatever he heard was a misunderstanding and my mom won't tell me where he is so I can go explain."

Clarke nodded to herself, sighing lightly. That was undoubtedly the hardest part, not being able to explain. Maybe even harder, actually, was that she didn't even want to tell him anything about it in the first place, never mind in such a harsh way.

Octavia closed her eyes, letting her head fall forward.

"I wish I could back and change things."

"So do I," said Clarke, her voice just as quiet.

Octavia was shaking her head.

"No, it's not the same ... he's my brother. I know how stupid it was, getting involved like that - and I really didn't even consider how awkward it would be if you two ended up splitting - I just thought it would be nice if you were finally on the same page with each other."

"Look how that turned out," said Clarke, trying not to let any resentment into her voice.

Groaning, Octavia fell back against Clarke's headboard.

"Sister of the year, huh?"

"Yeah," Clarke scoffed. "Right next to girlfriend of the month."

It was quiet for a minute, their quiet breathing the only sound in the room, when Octavia spoke up, her voice meek

"You know what's weird? I almost wish he wouldn't forgive me. I'd feel better if he never looked at me ever again."

"Come on, Octavia, stop it," said Clarke, nudging Octavia's leg with her own. "Like you said, you didn't know it would be like this."

"Still. I'm really sorry, Clarke."

"It's not just your fault," she said, feeling like she'd said something similar a hundred times already.

"It's mostly my fault, though."

"Let's just stop doing this, okay?" she said sternly. "It happened, we both screwed up, it's over, that's it, there's nothing that can be fixed by hating ourselves. I've been feeling like a really shitty person, too, but ... just, who cares anymore? Bellamy will come home and you can apologize, and so can I, and we'll figure something out. And if he doesn't want anything to do with me, then that's on me, not you, and you have nothing to worry about. Just stop beating yourself up over it."

Octavia sounded nervous when she responded.

"I already apologized."

"So did I, but he won't read my messages."
"No, I mean," she paused, glancing over at Clarke. "He texted me back a few times."
Clarke snapped her head around, her nerves suddenly pulsing.

"What? What did he say?"

"Well, I said I was sorry for everything and that I needed to talk to him and I asked if he was okay, and he said he was fine and we'll talk later."

"What about when you told him it was all a misunderstanding?" she asked, far too anxious.

"I didn't."

"What do you mean you didn't?" she asked sharply.

"I didn't tell him," said Octavia, getting defensive. "I can't tell him that through a text."

"Octavia," Clarke groaned, dropping her head into her hands. "He might actually talk to me if you did. I miss him, too, you know."

Octavia didn't say anything, and Clarke realized then that she never actually mentioned to anyone that she was really developing feelings for him. Though, Clarke doubted there was any confusion about it after her breakdown at Octavia's house when she realized Bellamy was gone. When she'd left, she didn't take the flowers or the bag of groceries he got for her, but she was starting to really regret it. Aurora probably threw out her flowers.

"I know we've only been together for a week," she said, pausing to get her thoughts together, "but it seems like longer. Maybe because I've known him forever, or maybe just because we didn't have any awkwardness when we started, but ... I just want to talk to him."

As soon as the words left Clarke, Octavia's phone went off with a message. Both girls glanced at it and both girls saw that it was from Bellamy.

Are you with her?

Her. He was calling Clarke 'her'. He wouldn't even type her name.

Octavia glanced apologetically at Clarke as she grabbed her phone and texted him that no, she was at home.

A few seconds later, he responded.

Mom already told me.

Octavia groaned and asked Clarke what to say.

"Tell him I told you to text that," she said glumly, picking at her cuticles. "He already hates me so it doesn't matter."

"I don't want to do that," she said, shaking her head and tapping on the side of her phone

Clarke snatched it away and jumped off the bed before Octavia could grab her. She texted out the message, pretending to be Octavia, and sent it without hesitation before tossing the phone back on the bed and leaving her room. She went downstairs, meaning to go to the kitchen to eat something and mope, but on her way, she glanced into the living room to see her parents together on the couch watching a movie, her father's arm tucked around her mother, and she had a sudden thought.
Backing up, she peeked at her dad and cleared her throat. They both looked back at her.

"Hey, Clarke," said her mom.

Clarke walked into the room, her arms folded behind her.

"Hey. Um, can I talk to Dad for a second?"

Jake nodded once, looking at Abby as he retracted his arm and gave her a quick kiss on the side of the head.

Clarke left the room, returning on her path to the kitchen and sitting at the island counter, her arms stretched out so her hands were flat on the counter top. Jake followed her in a moment later, looking curious.

"Something on your mind?" he asked, walking to the other side of the counter, watching Clarke swivel around on the chair.

"Yeah, I was just wondering about something you said a few days ago."

He folded his arms on the counter. "All right, go ahead."

"So," she started quietly, "this is sort of out of the blue, but last Saturday when I told you and Mom I was dating Bellamy, Mom was confused or something because I used to not like him, and you said that you and Mom didn't like each other at first either."

Jake smiled. "I remember. What's this about?"

Clarke huffed, falling forward onto the counter.

"I just want to know how, or why ... or how and why," she paused to heave a sigh, "you and Mom went from not liking each other to dating."

"Oh, I never didn't like your mother. I always liked her, she was the one who took a bit longer."

Clarke could have laughed. It was just like her and Bellamy.

"So, what did you do to make her change her mind?"

Jake shrugged a shoulder. "I think she did that all by herself."

"Dad," Clarke whined, and he chuckled. "I'm serious, I need to know."

"You need to know?"

She nodded, looking down. She could tell he was curious to know the reason, but he didn't pry.

"Well," he said, looking at the counter top, a smile growing on his face as he reminisced. "At first, I gave her time. Mind you, not very much. I wasn't a patient teenager."

Clarke smiled, rolling her eyes, and Jake went on.

"When that didn't seem to be working, I started leaving flowers at her locker every morning. She didn't know I was sending them, though. I think she would have thrown them out if she did. Then after a week, I left a note with the flowers, asking her out. I told her I wanted to make her smile every day, like I always saw her doing when she got the flowers. Took her a few days, but she came
around. However, I had a lot of explaining to do before she said yes."

"About what?" Clarke asked, propping her chin in her hand.

Jake laughed once and scratched the shadow of a beard on his chin.

"Everything between your mom and me started with a big misunderstanding. I teased her a lot and she didn't like it. The whole time I thought we were just flirting."

Giggling, Clarke clapsed her hands together on the counter, feeling infinitely better. Things had been desperate lately, had felt hopeless. But hearing the way things worked out for her parents gave her at least some reprieve. Maybe she was doing the right thing by not seeking Bellamy out. But then again, like her father, Clarke wasn't the most patient person around.

"Thanks, Dad," she said, smiling at him.

"Sure thing, kid," he said, returning the look. A second later, he looked up at the door and then back to Clarke, drumming his knuckles on the counter. "Well, if that's all...."

Clarke looked over her shoulder to see Octavia leaning against the door frame, one hand folded behind her back to hold her other elbow. Jake walked off with a quick greeting to her and left the two of them alone. They were quiet for a moment, quiet enough that Clarke could hear her mom whispering about what Clarke and Jake talked about, and Clarke felt like if she didn't speak up, she'd be inclined to ask about what Bellamy said. If he talked about her.

"Are you hungry?" she said, hopping off the stool and going to fridge. "I was just gonna make myself a sandwich if you want one."

"Sure."

While Clarke searched around for condiments and sandwich meat, she heard Octavia settle into the chair Clarke had just vacated. Hardly a few moments later, just when Clarke was getting the bread, Octavia broke the silence.

"I'm glad you're not pissed at me."

She swallowed, resisting the urge to turn around and see her.

"Does that mean Bellamy is?"

"Probably. He didn't really say much."

Clarke couldn't help herself.

"Nothing about me?"

She was silent for a long few seconds before answering.

"Not really, no."

"Not really?"

Octavia sighed quietly. "No, Clarke, not really."

She dropped it then. Obviously, anything he did say wasn't good and Clarke wasn't sure if she could handle hearing it in that case.
While she continued with the sandwiches, Octavia sat by patiently, occasionally tapping her nails on
the counter. The silences between them weren't hard to endure anymore, which Clarke attributed to
them being on perfectly stable ground with each other again. Partly because Clarke found it hard to
remain angry with her closest friend, no matter what she did, and partly because it was easier to get
through no communication with Bellamy when they were both in it together. Or ... were in it
together. Maybe she should just stop thinking about it.

It was easier said than done, though, because as soon as she set the sandwiches down on the island
counter (she cut the crust off Octavia's) and went to take a seat next to her, she was itching to voice
her thoughts. Octavia had mentioned something off-handedly shortly after Clarke found out there
was no no-dating rule. She'd said that she never should have gone along with Jasper's plan, that she'd
only done it because of what she'd heard Bellamy saying on the phone to his friend about Clarke.
Clarke had been super curious about it ever since.

She was picking at her sandwich crust, bouncing her knee, when it spilled from her mouth.

"What was Bellamy saying about me that one time on the phone to his friend?"

Octavia looked up, her eyebrows raised. She'd been in the middle of chewing when Clarke said it,
but she stopped for a moment in her surprise before starting up again and looking away.

"You're still thinking about that?"

"I've been really curious since you said it," she admitted.

Octavia bent her head more and took another bite.

"I don't think it's something you should hear from me," she mumbled around her food.

Clarke frowned. "Why not?"

"It's Bellamy's business," she said with a shrug.

"So it's a secret?" Clarke asked, her appetite disappearing.

"Not really, but," she paused to shove the rest of her sandwich in her mouth in true Octavia fashion,
"it's probably personal to him."

Clarke was pouting. "I really want to know."

"I wish I never heard it," Octavia said, watching Clarke drop her sandwich on her plate. "Maybe I
wouldn't have gotten involved in all of this if I didn't know."

"Didn't know what?" she pressed. "Can't you just tell me?"

Octavia ignored the question, swallowing her last bite and glancing at the clock.

"I should probably go."

"Okay, no," Clarke said quickly, sitting straighter in her chair and immediately backtracking. "I'm
sorry. You don't have to say anything."

There was a small smile on Octavia's face.

"I was going to go to home soon anyway. It's getting late."
"Oh," she murmured, nodding to herself. "Okay. Make sure you text me when you get there."

"I will."

When Octavia rose, so did Clarke with the intention of walking her to the door, but Octavia quickly shook her head.

"It's okay, I know the way," she joked. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

Clarke nodded, slowly sitting back down. "Yeah, see you."

Octavia leaned in to give her a hug.

"'Night, Clarke."

She pulled away, smiling as she turned and walked off.

"'Night," Clarke said quietly, leaning back against the counter with a heavy feeling in her chest.

She sat there for a long moment, staring at the wall, before getting up and heading to the stairs, taking them two at a time on the way to her room. She made a point not to look at the teddy bear Bellamy won from her, sitting on her floor with a permanent smile etched onto its features, reflecting the opposite of how Clarke was feeling. She headed straight for her phone only to see that there were no messages. When she opened her conversation with Bellamy, she saw he still hadn't even read any of them. It hurt, but she knew she deserved it, so she just tossed her phone back on her bed, refusing to scroll through her conversations with him, knowing sweet words from him were only a few messages up.

It was raining at school during the last class of the day, Law 30. As usual, Monty was sitting in front of her and Mr. Jaha was droning on in the front of the class while they all took notes from a powerpoint. The class was coming to a close when Clarke's phone vibrated in her purse. It was impossible not to hope Bellamy was the one contacting her, and it was even harder to check to see if it was. Her purse was on the right corner of her desk, directly in front of Jaha's view, and her phone vibrated again.

Keeping her eyes on the teacher, Clarke carefully leaned forward and gently touched Monty's shoulder. He looked up at Mr. Jaha and then gave an almost imperceptible nod, his note-taking hand stilling on his desk.

A moment later, he fell back against his chair and Clarke moved closer before whispering as quietly as she could, "Can you move a bit to the right?"

He did as she asked, leaning over and pretending to be grabbing something from his backpack. It lasted only a second, but it was enough for Clarke to snatch her phone from her purse and hide it on her lap, her hands quickly going back to her notes just as Monty straightened out and Mr. Jaha turned his steady gaze to them. She waited a moment before sliding a hand to her lap to check the message.

It wasn't Bellamy.

But she wasn't all that disappointed.

Guess who's back for the Summer!

An unbidden smile broke across Clarke's face at Raven's message. She glanced up at Mr. Jaha
quickly before reading the second text.

*You wanna get together?*

**Duh**, she texted back. **Where have you been since the end of April?**

She was peeking down at her phone every few seconds for a reply, but it didn't come until a few minutes had passed.

*We'll talk about it in person ... my house after school?*

She replied immediately.

**Sounds like a plan.**

*Great. See you soon, Grif! ;)*

Smiling, Clarke dropped her phone and went back to note-taking, but she found she couldn't really focus. It wasn't that big of an issue, though, because the whole class had been given a print-out of the powerpoint, so she could just go over it later. Clarke was just bursting to get out of there and see Raven, so when the bell rang less than ten minutes later, she nearly jumped from her seat and rushed out of the room right after saying a brief goodbye to Monty.

Raven's childhood home was fairly close to the school, fifteen minutes away if there was traffic (which there was; after-school rush and all that), but Clarke wondered if she should take her time getting there. She knew she'd been sort of off the radar where Raven was concerned, seeing as the last time they spoke was when Raven clued her in to Bellamy's feelings and after that, things were just too hectic and too hard for her to want to explain it all. After the trip with Bellamy, after she accidentally called him at the worst possible time, she hadn't really been taking any calls that weren't her parents or Octavia. The memory of ignoring at least six of Raven's calls was fresh in her mind. Two of those times, she'd been in the middle of crying and really could have used Raven's ear, but that would have meant she'd have had to relay everything, every bit of how she fell for Bellamy and how she ruined it all hardly a few hours later. It was painful enough to think about, let alone go through it again, and yet, she was headed to Raven's right now, stuck at a red light, and she knew she'd have to give her an explanation. It was hard not to want to go there anyway, though. Raven's University classes ended nearly two months ago, but she hadn't come home, which begged the question of where she'd been staying and why she hadn't come back for a visit.

The light turned green and Clarke kept on driving. Raven had always been the most reasonable of the three of them, so chances were that she'd know exactly what to say if the topic of Bellamy came up (of course it would). Clarke had been feeling antsy about what to do about his obvious lack of communication, but after her talk with her father, she felt at least partially more relaxed, and she had a feeling Raven would add to that.

After having realized her antagonistic behaviour toward him was unfounded, and knowing he was invested in her in a way she'd never experienced before, and with her *still* being able to feel the floods of happiness he unleashed within her on their little vacation, she wanted to give it a real try. She wanted a new start with him, and she knew it was a pipe dream at this point, that she'd be lucky if he forgave her at all, but if she didn't at least give it a try, she knew she'd regret it. She wasn't about to be wondering 'what if' for the rest of her life. Not this time, not with him.

And because Raven had always been so sensible, Clarke felt her best advice was cooped up in Raven's genius of a brain.
So when Clarke spotted Raven's old school, black camaro parked on the road in front of her house, she was nervous, sure, but she was also buzzing with excitement. It had been too long since they'd seen each other, and Clarke was ready to fix that.

She parked on the other side of the street and had only just left her car and closed the door behind her when she saw Raven bouncing out of her house, her ponytail swaying as she came to a halt on the steps. She was wearing black jeans and a loose, grey tank-top, and she was beaming at Clarke. Feeling just as cheerful, Clarke hurried across the street, meeting Raven in the middle on her lawn, both of them hurtling themselves into the other's waiting arms.

"Oh, I've missed you," Raven said, and Clarke held on tighter.

She felt the peculiar sensation of oncoming tears, but she hastily blinked them away before plastering a smile on her face and pulling away, letting Raven throw her arm around her shoulders and pull her along inside. At first, after Raven poured them both a glass of water and sat them at her kitchen table, they mostly exchanged pleasantries. Clarke asked Raven why she came back ("Home is home, you know? Plus I missed you two knuckleheads," she teased, referring to Clarke and Octavia), and Raven asked Clarke if she was excited to be done high school in a week and then promptly congratulated her when she said she got accepted into ARK U. But then, as per Raven's no-nonsense approach to everything, things took an immediate and swift turn when she set down her water and clasped her hands on the table, leaning forward.

"So," she started, her eyes level on Clarke. "We've got some stuff to talk about."

Clarke nodded, pressing her lips together. When she didn't say anything, Raven went on, her eyebrows raised.

"You wanna go first or should I?"

Clarke snickered. "You go ahead."

"Good, 'cause I wanted to start," she said with a smile and pulled back slightly. "You mind telling me why you've been awol? I called you a bunch of times and you never picked up. Even phoned your house once or twice and Mama Griffin said you weren't available."

Clarke looked down.

"Sorry. There was some stuff happening and I just didn't much feel like talking."

Raven's tone shifted. "What's going on? Are you okay?"

Clarke smiled sadly, quickly meeting Raven's eyes before looking away again.

"Not really."

"Hey," Raven said gently, her brow knit in concern when she got up and pulled her chair closer to Clarke, gently touching her arm after she sat down. "Tell me. What's wrong?"

So Clarke opened up. She'd been more than a little anxious about up until that point, but as soon as she started talking, it was like she couldn't stop. She didn't start in the right order, or end that way either, but she got it all out. That Bellamy found out about the plan and how he found out, how she couldn't get a hold of him and didn't know where he was, how she regretted it and she realized too late that she wanted to be with him, but he probably wouldn't forgive her anyway after she screwed around with him like that, how Lexa came back and complicated things - not that Clarke was interested in getting back together with her, but still. Raven gave running commentary through it all,
saying it was a bummer he found out that way, get it? Bummer? (Which Clarke didn't appreciate that much). She also said she wasn't even that surprised Clarke ended up liking him, something about years of tension can do that to a person, and when Clarke brought up Lexa, Raven only rolled her eyes and said 'nut case'.

Finally, though, Clarke told Raven how she was right when she said that Bellamy was into her before everything started.

"I fuckin' knew it," she said, her eyes narrowing as she gave her head a light shake. "Did he tell you how long?"

"Three years," said Clarke, her face in a grimace.

Raven was silent for a moment, an odd expression frozen on her face. Her eyebrows pressed together, Raven shot forward so suddenly that Clarke jerked back.

"You're shitting me, right?"

Clarke blinked a few times, confused.

"How are you surprised? You just said you 'knew it'."

"Yeah, but I thought maybe a few months," she said, her shock lacing her voice. "Like, he actually said that, three years?"

Clarke nodded. "I was surprised, too."

"No, that's not," she said quickly, a short breath of air leaving her lungs. "That's not what I mean."

"What are you talking about?"

"Here, let me show you something," she said, rising from her seat and heading down the hall to her bedroom. She pushed her door open without making sure Clarke was following (she was) and then dropped to her knees beside her bed, quickly locating a specific board under it and pushing on it. It popped up enough for her to grab it and lift it off.

Clarke balked. "Are you kidding me? You have a secret floorboard stash? I didn't think floors actually did that."

Raven smirked, but didn't respond; didn't even look up. Clarke crossed the distance and sat herself down on Raven's bed while she dug through the hole. After fiddling around some, she pulled out a fairly large box with a ribbon on top, setting it on her bed before placing the board back in place.

"Check this out," she said, rising to her feet and sitting on the bed next to the box, taking off the lid and rifling around. She found what she was looking for a moment later and took it out, grasping it on each side as she proudly held it up for Clarke's gaze.

"Why are you showing me a hundred dollar bill?" she asked. "Spend it, you hoarder."

Raven rolled her eyes.

"This," she started, her voice demanding attention, "is mine courtesy of Bellamy Blake. It was the first bet against him that I actually won."

Clarke shrugged a shoulder. "Okay, and?"
"And," she said, giving Clarke a meaningful look and waving it around in front of her face, "you'll never guess what we were betting on."

"What does this have to do with anything?"

Raven glared at her and Clarke let out a short laugh, rolling her eyes.

"Fine," she conceded. "What were you betting on, I'm dying to know."

Raven answered without missing a beat.

"You, sweet thing."

Clarke frowned. "What? Me? Me, how?"

"Well, this was during his I'm-the-best phase, if you remember."

Raven dropped her voice into a poor imitation of Bellamy's, "'I could make any girl fall for me,' and like, the whole neighbourhood knew you and Bellamy didn't get on, so I was like 'You can't make Clarke fall for you'. I wasn't even expecting anything to come from it, right? Like, I thought he'd agree or whatever, but then he was just like, 'You wanna bet? A hundred dollars says I can'. So obviously, I couldn't resist that because I was like, 'shit yeah, I'll win this hundred bucks for sure', so I called him on it and ... well," she paused, a smile on her face. "Dummy actually tried it. He kept it up for a while, too. Just would not back down. It was the longest bet we've ever had, I think. Lasted something like five months, and he was making a total fool of himself the whole time. I was loving it, obviously, because you fucking hated him and anytime he tried to talk to you, you just had this what-the-fuck-do-you-want-Bellamy face, which was hilarious. Then, you started dating Lexa, and he backed off, paid me, was suitably annoyed. That was three years ago. And then, yeah, I guess things got weird after that, but I never really thought about why. Makes a Hell of a lot of sense now, though, why he was always grumbly whenever you brought Lexa over and his weird like, careful way of handling you. I always thought he was just being a weirdo, but you know," she trailed off with a little shake of her head. "You both made these failure plans to seduce each other and look where that got you. Backfired for him then, backfired for you now."

Clarke thought she should probably be offended that Raven made a bet on her, but she really didn't care in the least. Aside from the few months of discomfort with having to deal with Bellamy, it wasn't a big deal. Plus, Raven got an extra hundred dollars out of it. A hundred dollars that she kept hidden in a box under her bed, but all the same.

"You know," said Raven, a barely there smile on her face. "You two might really be meant for each other."

Clarke scoffed. "Yeah, tell him that."

"He knows, Clarke," she said, her voice tender.

"He hasn't looked at any of my texts," Clarke said, because she didn't know how else to convey her dejection, and if she was being honest, it was seriously grating on her nerves that he hadn't.

"That doesn't mean anything. From what he knows, none of it was real and you still don't like him.
He's probably just looking at it all from the wrong point of view. I say get up off your ass and go to him. Go talk to him, tell him what you're really feeling."

She just shook her head. "I don't even know where he is, Raven."

She snickered. "Well, I guess it's a good thing that I do."

Seven hours later, Clarke was standing outside the bar Bellamy worked at. Raven had sought him out when she arrived in town and took him out for coffee where he'd made the colossal mistake of confiding in her. He'd told her where he was staying (Nathan Miller's apartment, his friend from the bar) and with a small prompt from Raven, he revealed he had a shift tonight. Initially, Clarke thought it would work against her to go seek him out, like maybe he just needed time to cool down and maybe if he saw her, he'd explode and they'd get nowhere, and maybe she was kinda sorta scared about what would happen with a confrontation. But she'd talked to her dad, and she'd talked to Raven, and Bellamy had talked to Octavia (so incredibly nice of him to ease up on one of them, but not the other; Clarke was so very happy about that), and as it was turning out, the last conversation that needed to happen was from Clarke to him. Besides, he clearly wasn't intent on coming home anytime soon and her patience was waning.

Raven had dropped her off there after spending the day together (throughout which, Clarke learned Raven had been seeing someone seriously for a while, Kyle Wick, and she'd been staying with him in his apartment since school ended. She also found out that she'd gotten her certificate in Heavy Duty Mechanics and was still looking for a job, but she had a bunch of interviews lined up for the next few weeks). Before Raven drove off, she wished Clarke luck with a soft smile and told her she'd need a briefing afterward.

Though hardly a few seconds after Clarke actually managed to step into the bar, she was feeling so many types of ways that she didn't know if she could go through with talking to him.

First, she spotted Bellamy almost instantly. He was standing behind the bar wearing his uniform, a white button down, black pants, and a black apron that tied at the hips. There was a tea towel slung over one of his shoulders and a playful smirk on his face.

Second, Clarke saw who that smirk was directed at, a tanned brunette wearing a tight tank-top, her hair up in intricate braids, and whoever she was, there was no doubt that she was interested in him. Bellamy said something to her and she laughed, lightly punching him on the shoulder and then propping her head in her hand. She downed the rest of her drink before holding it out to Bellamy. He took it, grinning, and made her another drink, saying something to her and getting reactions that made Clarke wonder if they'd known each other for a while. Her body was on fire and she didn't want to look, but she couldn't look away.

Third, a dark-haired, tall, muscular man who was at a table close to her suddenly shoved his chair back and left his group of watching friends, making his way over to Clarke.

"Hey, pretty thing," he said, drawing her eyes away from where Bellamy was laughing with the girl at the bar. "You okay?"

"Fine, thanks," she said, looking back to Bellamy and clenching her jaw. It was like he only had eyes for the girl talking to him. Honestly, what the fuck.

"I'm Roman," said the man next to her.

"Awesome," said Clarke, crossing her arms.
Roman chuckled. "You got a name."

"Nope."

The idiot was unfazed, somehow not getting her message.

"How about I buy you a drink?" he said, leaning a bit closer to Clarke.

The door to the building opened behind her and Clarke moved out of the way to let a group pass. Unintentionally, she'd pressed herself into Roman. She wasn't really paying attention, though, because she was trying to make sure Bellamy wasn't about to kiss that girl or anything. She should probably just storm over and demand he speak to her. Or whatever angry girlfriends did. She couldn't picture him cheating, that wasn't in his character at all, but if he thought that he and Clarke were no longer together (make no mistake, they were one hundred percent, absolutely, without a doubt, tell everyone about it, dating), he might be motivated to go for another girl and Clarke was not having that.

While she was distracted, Roman, still an idiot, curled his hands over her waist and pulled her tighter into him.

"Should I take that as a yes?" he whispered, his breath fanning across Clarke's neck.

She scrunched her face up in disgust and moved her head away from him, trying to step away, but he wouldn't let her go.

"I'm underage," she said pointedly. He still wouldn't release her.

"I won't tell if you don't."

"God, you're disgusting," she snapped, shoving his hands off and whirling around to face him. He had to be nearing forty, the creep. "What the Hell is the matter with you?"

He grabbed her again, this time by the hips, and pulled her roughly to him. He seemed to be taking advantage of how loud it was in the bar, how distracted everyone was.

"Keep it down, honey," he said, giving her a crooked grin and snaking one of his arms around her. "You don't want me to tell everyone you shouldn't be here, do you?"

"Take a hint, jackass," she said, her voice loud and clear, trying in vain to push him away. "Get the Hell off me while you're at it."

It took her a second to realize the bar had gone silent, and it seemed to take him just a moment longer, but when he did, he let her go. There was a cocky smile on his face when he took a step back, raising his hands in surrender.

Clarke looked over to the bar, only then remembering she didn't come to this place to get in a stand off with a gross old man, and her eyes instantly found Bellamy. He was one of the few people not looking at her, though. His gaze was focused instead on Roman.

"This girl here is underage," Roman called loudly, his eyes on Clarke. "You should probably get her out of here."

Most people started laughing, the girl Bellamy was so brazenly flirting with included. She looked at Bellamy to get him to join her, but he wasn't even smiling. He grabbed the tea towel, yanked it off his shoulder, and left the bar, not moving his eyes from Roman as he approached, quickly closing the door behind him.
distance. Bellamy gently took Clarke's arm and pulled her behind him before releasing her and
grabbing onto Roman. He gripped his shoulders and shoved him toward the door.

"What the Hell, man?" said Roman, stumbling and nearly tripping over his feet.

Bellamy didn't say anything. He forcefully pushed him again and followed him out onto
the sidewalk. The people Roman was with got up and shoved past Clarke to get outside, one of them
going to the bar first to pay the tab. Everyone in the establishment was converging at the windows to
see what was going on outside, so Clarke looked, too. It didn't seem very dramatic at first; Bellamy
was saying something, his voice muffled, and one of Roman's friends stepped forward to get in
Bellamy's face, but Roman pushed him back and took his place. He shoved Bellamy hard, and
Bellamy didn't do anything, just clenched his jaw. But then, Roman stepped forward again, his fist
poised to hit, and Bellamy shoved Roman's fist away and connected his own into Roman's face. The
force was so strong that Roman fell backward, hitting the ground hard.

"Oh, my God," Clarke breathed, hurrying outside into the warm, Summer air.

No one looked at her, not even Bellamy, not even when she pushed him back and went to stand in
front of him. All of Roman's friends shot forward, though, and again, Bellamy curled Clarke behind
him. This time, though, he didn't let go of her. Half a second later, the door banged open and two
burly men wearing dark shirts stormed out of the building and straight at Roman's group. They
backed off at once, seeing as the two men were much taller and far broader, and with a little more
prodding, they all walked away, disappearing around the corner and throwing dirty looks back at
Bellamy. Then, he did release her.

She let out a sharp breath and the two security men nodded at Bellamy before heading back inside.

"Jesus, Bellamy!" Clarke said, running a hand through her hair and gesturing the way the group of
men had left. "They could press charges against you."

Bellamy turned toward her, meeting her aggressive eyes with his soft ones.

"Are you okay?" he asked, his voice gentle, his hands light on her arms.

She was thrown off for a second, not expecting this treatment would be the first she'd receive from
him.

"I'm fine," she said after a moment, clearing her throat when he nodded and crossed his arms.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

That, she was expecting.

"Me?" she said, a surge of anger and defensiveness rushing through her. Really, the emotions hadn't
actually disappeared since she saw him with the girl at the bar. "What the fuck are you doing?"

Bellamy screwed up his face for an instant and then misunderstood. "That's my job, Clarke, what do
you expect?"

Before she got a chance to say anything, the girl Bellamy was with stepped out of the bar, hanging
off the door as she looked between them.

"Come on, Bell," she said lowly, smiling.

Clarke huffed. Who was she that she would call him that? No one called him that but Octavia. What
the Hell was going on?

"Let the kid be," she continued, her voice sultry. "She can find her way home. I, however, was really
interested to hear if you were coming over tonight."

Clarke's nostrils were flaring, her heart beating almost painfully hard in her chest. She didn't know if
she even had a right to be pissed off, but she was fuming. She flicked her eyes up to Bellamy to see
that he was already watching her, looking like he was caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"What is this?" asked Clarke, her voice so quiet that she almost didn't even hear it.

It wasn't just anger that she was feeling, it was betrayal and it was hurt and it was Lexa, all over
again. She didn't let herself believe it earlier when she first saw them, because this was Bellamy and
he wasn't like that, he would never do that to her, especially not when he was the first one to see her
after the break-up. And then Clarke was angry, because was this all her fault? Did she make this
happen? Did she make it happen with Lexa, too? Was she wrong to give things time with him,
should she have gone after him immediately, and why the fuck was that girl still standing there?

Bellamy sighed sharply and went to the door, ushering the girl inside and-

And going with her.

Clarke felt like the air had been knocked out of her. She could hardly breath and she could hardly
think and she could hardly even see through the tears flooding her eyes, but she forced herself to turn
around and start walking. How pathetic would it be if she stayed outside staring into the bar at him,
watching him slip back into flirtatious banter with that other girl? Her breaths were coming shallow
and fast, so she tried her best to slow them and keep walking and try to remember how to get home
because she'd never actually been to the bar before and it was almost midnight and she was fucking
lost.

Thankfully, she did manage to calm her breaths down after a minute or so, but all that happened
when she did was that an onslaught of tears flooded her eyes and sobs tore through her throat and the
pain in her heart increased tenfold, feeling like it was crushing her. She kept walking, crying and
walking and feeling pathetic, until she realized she was seriously in unfamiliar territory. Her hand
was shaking when she pulled her phone from her pocket and looked around the deserted street,
quickly dialing Raven's number. She answered on the second ring.

"Already?" she said, a smile in her voice, but when she heard Clarke's quiet sobbing, her voice grew
d Louder. "Clarke, what happened?"

"Can you come get me?" she asked, her voice thick with tears. Her phone beeped once with an
incoming text, but she didn't check it. "I got lost."

"God damn it," Raven hissed, loud sounds and banging and car doors echoing on the other
end. "Use your phone, tell me where you are. I'm already on my way.""

"Just a second," she said, sniffing and blinking the tears from her eyes to actually see her phone as
she put it on speaker and checked her location. There was another text, but she swiped it away
without looking.

"Still there, Clarke?"

"Yeah," she said meekly, waiting for her phone to sync up. "I'm on Scarth Street."

"Okay," said Raven. "Stay there, I'll only be a few minutes."
"Don't speed," Clarke mumbled.

"Like Hell," said Raven, and then the line was dead.

Locking her phone, she looked behind her before wiping her eyes and sitting down on the curb right under a street light. She brought her knees up and crossed her arms over them, leaning her head on her arms and trying not to wipe her nose on the sleeve of her jacket.

A few more seconds passed when her phone lit up, signalling another text.

"God, what?" she groaned, raising her head and unlocking her phone.

She went to her messages to see they were all from Bellamy.

*Where are you?*

That was the first one.

*Are you okay? My call won't go through.*

That was the second one, a few seconds after, and then most recently-

*Clarke, for fuck's sake, where are you?*

She was crying harder, a quiet, distressed moan escaping her, and she didn't even really know why. She was tempted to text him back, ask him why he cared, tell him to go back to his girlfriend or fuck buddy or whatever she was. Clarke's stomach tightened when she realized it was probably someone he'd been with before he and Clarke started dating ... back when he used to come home early in the morning. He was probably always off with her. And now he was with her again.

He wasn't texting her anymore. Clearly, three messages was his limit. She didn't know why it hurt so much, because it wasn't like she was going to respond to him anyway, but he'd been worried about her. At least for a few seconds, anyway.

Clarke checked the time to see not even three minutes passed, and just as she was locking it again, a dark figure appeared at the end of the street from the direction she'd come.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," she whispered to herself, standing and hurrying off down the street in the opposite direction. She hastily wiped her face, panic immediately replacing her heartache, and she was off, muttering, "Please fucking go away."

But then he called her name, and it was just Bellamy.

And there was that heartache again.

She was tempted to run away when he started jogging toward her, but she really didn't have the energy, emotional or otherwise. Besides, at least he would keep her safe out here, even if she didn't really feel like seeing him right then.

"What the Hell, Clarke?" he shot out as he came to a stop beside her. "Why did you leave? I've been looking all over-"

"What do you want, Bellamy?" she asked, meeting his dark gaze with her teary one. "I went to your work so I could apologize. I wanted to see you and tell you I wanted to be with you and that I missed you."
He swallowed, and Clarke went on, her voice rising.

"And then I see you with some other girl who you're, what, you're fucking now? Because I wouldn't put out?"

She knew it wasn't because she wasn't having sex with him (they'd only been together a week), but she was hurt and she wanted to make him feel it.

Bellamy took a step forward. "She's not-

"Oh, don't give me that, Bellamy!" she said shrilly, backing away from him so that her back nudged the street lamp. "I saw you with her! That's just great, fucking fantastic, this whole time, I was worried that you were sad and that I fucked up, and I've been feeling so shitty and guilty, but you move on pretty fucking fast, you know that?"

He exhaled sharply. "It's nothing like that, Clarke. She doesn't mean anything."

Her chest caved.

"That's what Lexa said. After she told me she cheated."

A determined look settled on Bellamy's face and he tried to close the distance between them, but Clarke moved out of the way before he could reach her, not wanting him to touch her with hands that touched someone else.

"But we're not together, are we?" she said, nodding to herself and hastily wiping her eyes. "You didn't think it was real, so I guess you didn't cheat. You're allowed to do whatever the Hell you want."

Turning away, she tried to force the tears to stop coming while preparing to ignore him. Until Raven showed up or he walked away, whatever came first. But then his hand was around hers, gently tugging on her.

"Will you give me a second to explain?" he said, his voice quiet.

"Why?" she said, tearing her arm away from him and stepping back, her eyes locked with his. When she spoke again, the accusation in her voice was palpable. "You didn't give me one."

Bellamy's shoulders slumped, and Clarke continued.

"I was just trying to give you time," she said, her lips quivering, her eyebrows pulled together. "I was giving you space, but I didn't think you'd cheat on me. I never thought you'd cheat on me."

This time, Bellamy stepped toward her and gripped her arms before she could get away, forcing her in place, forcing her to look at him.

"I didn't cheat on you, Clarke," he said, his eyes boring into hers. "I'm trying to tell you that I didn't do anything with her, all right? I just met her tonight. Yeah, I was flirting, that's what we do to get tips, but I wasn't gonna go home with her. She asked me to, but I was about to tell her 'no' when I saw you in the bar. Sorry if I was a bit more preoccupied with you than with finishing my conversation."

There was still one thing, though. The one thing that was the hardest to hear.

"She called you 'Bell'."
Bellamy didn't think much of it.

"That's how girls flirt," he said, shrugging a shoulder. "They all call me that."

Sniffling, she extracted herself from his grasp and took a step back, wrapping her arms around herself and feeling a bit stupid. Knowing everything, she was back to her nervous self, feeling embarrassed because she'd freaked out without hearing his side of things.

"Are you good now?" Bellamy asked, craning his head to see her eyes, but she was too shy to look at him.

"You can go back to work," she murmured. "Raven's coming to get me, I'm fine."

"Raven's the one who called and told me you're here," he said, straightening out. "I told her she didn't have to come."

"What, Bellamy?" she said weakly, wiping her sleeves over her cheeks. She probably shouldn't have felt annoyed about Raven just handing her over to Bellamy like that, but she was. "How am I supposed to get home?"

"I'll take you," he said, like it was obvious.

She shook her head, pulling out her cell. "I'll just call her back. You can't take off work."

"I already did," he said, snatching her phone away and stuffing his hands in his jacket pockets.

Clarke tried to grab it back, not even realizing what she was doing when she stepped toward him and he didn't move back, when she reached into his pocket and tried to pry her phone from his grip and he wouldn't let up. All she succeeded in doing, though, was caressing his hand because his hold on her phone kept tightening.

"Trying to cop a feel?" he asked breathlessly, a smile on his face when she looked up at him.

Her face reddened and she quickly retracted her hand.

"Sorry," she said, and then realized she wasn't the one who should be apologizing. She held out her hand. "Can I have it back?"

Bellamy shook his head once, his face serious again.

"I'll give it back when I drop you off," he said with finality, taking a step back before turning and starting off in the direction he'd come from.

When Clarke didn't immediately follow, he stopped and turned halfway toward her.

"You coming?"

She cleared her throat and scratched her cheek.

"It's a bit unnerving that you're not more mad at me," she said, chancing a look at him.

Bellamy clenched his jaw and looked down, nodding to himself.

"You said you want to be with me," he said, his voice low and contemplative. "Before I jump to conclusions like you did earlier-" Clarke winced "-I want to see what you have to say."
If she knew he was going to be so easy about it, she would have come to him sooner. But it was just like him, wasn't it? To be so calm, so fair, so stable ... she didn't know why she expected anything less. So when he nudged his head down the sidewalk, gesturing for her to come, she sighed and walked toward him. He waited until she was next to him before he went with her, looking down at her once, but not saying anything. They were going to talk. After the week that felt like months, she finally got to explain herself. Of course, she was hoping everything would work out, but that was up to him. Like he'd said, Clarke already told him she wanted to be with him. If the way he chased after her was any indication, he wasn't done with her, either, and all she could do was hope that wouldn't change after she told him the truth. About everything.

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, sorry as Hell that I cut it off here. I really wanted to get through the big conversation by the end of this chapter, but it's already long as it is. Next chapter, though. Prob like 1/3 of it or 1/2 is just gonna be them working their shit out. Anyway. Nearing the end of this fic now, and I almost wish I could go back and rewrite everything to fit a different tone, but *shrug*. Oh, well. What can you do? Thanks for reading and I hope you weren't too disappointed with everything that went on (I think some of you probably wanted Bellamy to be a bit more pissed for quite a bit longer, but idk.. I did my best and next chapter, it all comes together). Hopefully you're still excited to read it to its resolution :)

And again, thanks so much for reading, it means a lot. Leave feedback if you'd like, it's always appreciated.
Next chapter within a week or two.
Instead of taking Clarke home, Bellamy drove them out to a very popular hangout spot that overlooked the city. He turned his truck off and sighed heavily through his nose, settling back into the seat. Clarke looked away from him at the same time he looked at her, and she quickly looked back, lips parting. She was expecting some kind of punishment or argument from him, something to show her how displeased he was. But he didn't do any of that.

"So you wanna tell me what's going on?" he asked.

"Um..." She braced her hands on the dash as she took a deep breath in, and then let her hands drop back to her lap. "Where do I start?"

Bellamy didn't give her a chance to decide.

"Are you still in love with Lexa?" he asked.

She glanced at him and then quickly back down to her lap.

"Right," she muttered. "The phone call. Well, obviously you were never meant to hear any of that. Whatever you heard, I didn't mean it. I was just mad at Octavia and being immature and ... saying all kinds of stupid things. I don't want to be with Lexa."

Bellamy was quiet for a moment, his face impassive, and she couldn't tell if he believed her or not. He clicked his tongue, tapping his fingers on the driving wheel, drawing Clarke's eyes to him.

"You know, I'm having a hard time understanding why you would agree to date me just because Octavia asked you to."

Clarke bristled at his tone, her face heating. "Yeah, that's ... a pretty stupid thing to do."

"Then why did you do it?"

It took her a second to build up the courage to answer.

"She said that your mom had a rule against her dating." Bellamy looked over, and Clarke looked
away. "She said she wasn't allowed to until you did."

"What?" he said, a frown in his voice. "And you just agreed to it?"

"Not at first," she said quickly, fiddling with her fingers. "She just kept pressuring me and pressuring me and guilt-tripping me, and then when I started thinking about it, I thought ... dating you might not be the worst thing."

Bellamy looked away again, nodding to himself.

"Not the worst, huh?"

He was completely missing the point.

Clarke turned in the seat to face him turned toward him.

"I didn't know you liked me," she insisted. "I really didn't. I didn't even think you'd go for it, I just told her I'd try it to get her off my back. I thought I'd be flirty for a few days and you'd eventually call me out on it and tell me to stop being weird, and then things would go back to normal. I didn't ... I never, ever intended to hurt you. I mean it."

He was quiet for a while, staring out the windshield at the city lights in the distance below.

His throat bobbed. "I must have made you pretty uncomfortable, didn't I?"

She didn't want to hurt his feelings, but she didn't want to lie to him anymore, either.

"In the beginning, a little," she confessed, and then rushed on when he dropped his head. "But it's not like you have to worry about that. It's not your fault. I knew what I was doing."

He didn't say anything, and Clarke let out a short sigh.

"Come on, Bellamy. You know I wouldn't have come to see you tonight if I still felt that way."

"Were you ever going to tell me?" he asked suddenly, accusation clear in his expression when he looked at her. "About ... all this shit with Octavia, about how you didn't even like me, were you... were you going to tell me?"

Clarke looked away, swallowing, and shook her head.

Bellamy nodded. "Great."

"Look ... the reason I wasn't going to tell you about the stupid deal was because it didn't matter. When I agreed to it, I wasn't thinking about you or how it would make you feel because I didn't think you would feel anything. And then when I realized you liked me, I just didn't want to hurt you. I know that's irrelevant at this point, but ... I just want you to know I was trying to do what I could to hurt you less, not more."

"Well, you still shouldn't have done it, Clarke."

She nodded, because she knew. "If you need time, or if you don't want to do this anymore, if you don't want to see me anymore, I want you to know you don't have to feel guilty about it. You're not in the wrong for that."

Just a beat before she finished speaking, there was the sudden pressure of his hand on her leg, as though he were trying to reassure her. For a moment, she only stared at it where it sat unmoving and
firm over her thigh, and then she lifted her head to look at Bellamy. He was looking ahead, and he didn't say anything, and while she stared, he swallowed.

Hesitant, Clarke lifted her hand and set it over his, gently caressing his skin with her thumb. He splayed his fingers a bit wider, still not saying anything, but that was okay. Her nerves were nevertheless settled some by the fact that he was touching her, by the relaxed look on his face, by the way he let her touch him, too.

They let the silence drag on for a moment, Clarke too uncertain of what was happening to say anything. She didn't know where his head was at.

Bellamy opened his mouth and breathed in as though to speak, but then he paused, stilling.

"What?" Clarke pressed. "You can say it."

He remained quiet for a breath longer, and then he clenched his jaw and asked.

"You meant it earlier, right? When you said you like me now?"

Clarke blinked quickly, parting her lips. "Yeah, I meant it."

He nodded, posture tense. "What do you like about me?"

She didn't expect the question, but considering the circumstances, she really should have. It struck her then that Bellamy was probably just as insecure about the whole situation as she was, likely even more so. She didn't want him to be. She wanted him to know with certainty that she really did have feelings for him.

"Do you remember when I came into your room to watch a movie with you?" she asked.

The change of topic was sudden enough that it caught Bellamy's attention. She swallowed, bravely tightening her grip on his hand.

"I was scared, and you told me I could come closer," she said. Bellamy said nothing, his brow lightly furrowed as he listened. "And you put your arm around me ... and you didn't even try anything else. That was when it started.

"And then later, that day when it was raining, I went to your house when you were there alone, do you remember?"

He hesitated for a moment, but then nodded once.

Encouraged, Clarke went on. "We were sitting on the couch together, and I couldn't stop wanting to touch you, so I did. And when you kissed me in your room ... all I could think was that it was nice, and that I didn't want to stop."

Bellamy was watching her now, eyes jumping briefly from feature to feature, searching for insincerity. He wouldn't find any.

"And in the hotel room," she continued, looking down to their hands when her face grew hot. "In the hotel room when you asked me if I..." She stopped, too shy to continue, but she was sure he'd know what she was referring to. "I considered joining you. I wanted to. I kept wanting to kiss you, and touch you, and ... do other things with you. It was just all happening so suddenly that I got scared. But I wanted to," she said, looking up at him. "I promise I did."
Bellamy looked away from her face down to where their hands were still touching on her thigh. He moved his thumb in one long, slow stroke, and then flipped his hand to link their fingers.

"I got nervous every time I saw you," he said quietly, and then shook his head, looking down. "I should have told you that I loved you a long time ago. Maybe none of this would have happened."

Clarke glanced from his eyes to his mouth and back. "What about now?"

"What about now' what?" he asked. "Do I love you now?" She didn't elaborate, but she didn't need to. "Of course I love you now."

"So what do we do?" she asked warily. "What do you want?"

He was quiet for a few seconds longer, his fingers idly grazing along hers.

"I meant what I said, I meant all of it, but I can't just act like nothing ever happened."

Clarke nodded like she understood, though she didn't. "Okay. I can stay away."

"No, that's--" he started, shaking his head. "I don't mean you have to stop coming over, or that I don't want to see you or something stupid like that. But I think it would be best if we just went back to how things used to be. At least for a while."

Clarke didn't even know how things used to be. "Then ... how do you want me to act around you?"

He knit his eyebrows, surprised. "Like you used to."

"I can't do that," she said, like it was obvious.

His frown deepened. "Why not?"

"Because I don't feel like I used to."

He stared at her, blinking softly, and then closed his mouth and swallowed. "Then act how you want."

She couldn't act how she wanted, obviously, but she knew what he meant.

"Just don't avoid me," he said as an afterthought. "I won't avoid you, either."

She could live with that. She'd be happy to.

"So ... friends?" she said, needing his confirmation.

"Yeah," he said, drawing his hand back to the wheel and starting the truck. "Friends."

The next few weeks took forever. Clarke put a definite end to things with Lexa, arriving at her house and telling her that she had feelings for Bellamy. It was an awkward, tense conversation, but once it was over, she was glad to have done it. Then she turned her focus to preparing for University, and she did her best to be Bellamy's friend. It wasn't that hard, really, since her feelings for him were so fresh and she was glad to spend any time around him at all. He was kind enough to her that she didn't feel anxious about where they stood. Sometimes she would see him goofing around and laughing with his friends, and while she wanted to be involved, she never pushed it. The least she could do for him was give him what he asked for. But even with her not making any move to be involved, Bellamy tended to involve her anyway.
It wasn't weird with him, not at all. She often caught him looking at her, and he caught her looking at him, and she didn't feel the need to do anything more. Neither of them even addressed it. It felt an awful lot like the shy, innocent way first crushes flirted.

She felt pretty peaceful about the whole thing, glad that Bellamy knew the truth about everything now, and patient with letting things between them evolve in their own time. She wasn't sure if that would happen, really, but she had hope.

And even if things fizzled and died, she knew things wouldn't become weird, though. At the very least, their mutual connection to Octavia prevented an awkward fallout.

Clarke easily forgave her a few days after her conversation with Bellamy. It was a little tense at first, but then they had one big fight about boundaries that ended in the most girly way imaginable with both of them crying and hugging and saying they were sorry for everything. Then Octavia did whatever she could to make up for things, and Clarke couldn't help but to forgive her. They were best friends. Even the best of friends fought.

But now that Octavia was frequently going on outings and dates with Lincoln, Clarke had a lot of free time on her hands. When her dad suggested filling it with a part-time job, it seemed like a no-brainer to Clarke. She'd be leaving for school in a few months, which meant her life as a teenager would be officially over. She was an adult now, and even though she knew her parents had every intention of paying her tuition, she liked the idea of having at least some of her own independence. So Clarke applied for and got a job at the grocery store in her neighbourhood.

It wasn't a very exciting job, but it was easy and gave her some extra spending money. And Bellamy offered to drive her there and pick her up whenever he was free, which was an opportunity Clarke wasn't likely to pass up. The drive there and back was a whole hour she got to spend alone with him. They didn't talk about anything significant on the drive, but he was always in a good mood, always smiling and making her laugh, and it tended to be the best part of her day.

Mid-morning on one of the days Bellamy was too busy to drive her for her shift, Clarke was awoken by the chime of the doorbell. Since her parents were both at work, she made her groggy way downstairs to answer it. She couldn't hide her surprise when she saw it was Bellamy, standing sheepish on her porch, hands in his jean pockets.

"Hey," he blurted, looking ready to say something else, but then he stopped to take in the state of her. "Did I wake you?"

"Oh - no, I ... look like this. Sometimes." She cleared her throat, fixing her posture, and leaned against the edge of the door. "Uh - hi."

Bellamy smiled. "Hi."

"Are you..." she paused, vaguely pointing out the door, "driving me today? I thought you had work."

"I do, I just thought I'd stop by on my way. Sorry. I should have called."

"No, no!" she said in a rush. "Don't worry about it. You can show up unannounced whenever you want."

It was difficult not to cringe at her own enthusiastic, not-at-all-vague invitation, but she somehow managed. Bellamy just gave her a small smile.

"I just came to congratulate you," he said. "Octavia told me you got accepted to University."
Her shoulders deflated, feeling inexplicably nervous

"Yeah, I did. A few weeks ago."

Bellamy nodded, chin slightly lowered. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I ... I don't know. I wanted to, but it was right before things got all weird and ... I didn't want to make you uncomfortable."

He blinked. "Why would I be uncomfortable?"

"Well," she started, unconsciously hiding half her body behind the door, "you were pretty mad at me and I didn't want you to have to ... pretend to be happy for me, or something."

"I'm not pretending. I am happy. I'm really happy for you, Clarke."

She bit the inside of her lip. "Thanks, Bellamy."

"It's pretty far away, hey?"

"Yeah. It's not ideal, but ... it's my dream school."

He smiled. "You must be pretty excited."

She pressed her lips together, softening her own smile, and nodded.

"I really am."

He was quiet for a moment, gazing at her a bit too long. "Are you ever going to come back?"

She let out a short, breathy laugh. "Well, my parents do live here."

He nodded. "Right, yeah. I guess you'll probably want to see O, too."

Was he ... was he implying...?

"Yeah," she said, voice a little airy. "I'll come over whenever I'm in town."

He nodded and looked down again, wetting his lips. When he made no move to leave, Clarke abruptly stood out of the way of the door, holding it open.

"Do you want to come in?" she asked, hopeful and nervous all at once.

"Oh - no, that's fine. I should get going. I just came to say congratulations. So ... congratulations."

She smiled, leaning her head on the edge of the door.

"Thanks. I hope you didn't feel obligated to come over or anything."

"Not at all. I wanted to see you anyway." He shook his head and frowned, clearing his throat. "I'll, uh ... I'll see you around."

"I'll see you," she said.

She closed the door and turned to lean back against it, breathing deeply through her nose. She was trying very hard not to get her hopes up just in case she was reading into something that wasn't there. She already knew he loved her - he'd been clear about that - but that didn't mean he wanted to be
with her. She didn't want to hope for it.

She couldn't think of much else at work, though, mindlessly facing shelves and zoning out while she was tilling customers. Hours had passed already since the morning, time flying by until it was nearly her lunch break. Because of how distracted she was, she didn't realize that Bellamy was in her line at the till until he was right in front of her.

"Something on your mind?" he asked, a teasing smile on his face.

All he was buying was a freshly-baked muffin from the grocery store's bakery, which made Clarke think he'd only come by to see her. And then she knew he only came by to see her when he lifted her lunch kit above the till and gave it a little shake.

"Came by to give you this," he said, setting it to the side of the scanner. "You left it in my truck after I drove you home the other day."

"Oh," she said, feeling a little stupid since she hadn't even known it was missing. "Sorry about that."

"No worries," he said, reaching into his back pocket for his wallet. "I washed what was inside."

She pulled her head back, surprised.

"You didn't have to do that."

He shrugged a shoulder. "It's no biggie. $2.50, right?"

"Oh - yeah," she said, scanning the bar code on the muffin's bakery tag. "You want to stay for lunch?" Bellamy handed her a five. "They sell this pretty amazing burrito bowl across the street."

"I have to get to work actually," he said, and then drummed his fingers on her lunch kit. "I just wanted to bring this."

Clarke's stomach dropped in disappointment, but she tried to ignore it as she handed him the muffin and his change.

"Okay, well ... thanks."

He nodded once and set the muffin down beside her lunch kit. "Chocolate blueberry's still your favourite, right?"

He smiled, backing up a step before turning and walking away before Clarke even realized that he only bought the muffin to give to her.

She was ... dangerously hopeful. Was this merely friendly behaviour? Or was it flirting?! He brought her her lunch kit, and he bought her a muffin.

It wasn't until he was out of the store and out of sight that Clarke lifted her lunch kit and started off toward the break room to put it with her other things. It took her a moment to realize it was heavier than it should be. Confused, she set her lunch kit down on one of the tables and zipped it open. Her containers and cutlery were inside, but they weren't dirty and empty. She opened the lid of the one on top and saw stir-fried rice and vegetables in one half and bite-sized saucy chicken in the other. She pulled the container out and set it on the table before opening the one beneath it. There was a well-presented vegetable salad inside with black sesame seeds on top, dressing on the side. Clarke pulled that one out, too, and a sharp, breath of a laugh left her unbidden at what she saw remaining.
There was a box of Mike & Ike's on the very bottom with 'dessert :)' written right on the box with a black sharpie in Bellamy's writing. A smile built slowly on Clarke's face until she was standing there grinning like an idiot at her lunch. If anyone were to walk in and see her, they'd think her insane.

Her heart was thrumming beneath her ribs as she pulled a chair up to the table and dug in. It tasted ... amazing. Part of that was probably enhanced by the knowledge that Bellamy very likely cooked this for her, with his own hands on his own time. She couldn't stop thinking about that. He'd gone out of his way to prepare her lunch.

She pulled out her phone to send him a text.

> You made me this food, right?

She kept eating, stuffing her face and beaming. It took him a few minutes to text back, which was okay. She knew he was driving.

> I'm not an expert or anything. I tried, though. Hope it tastes okay.

The confirmation that he did actually make her lunch made her heart soar. She couldn't have contained her hopes if she tried.

> It is SUPER delicious. Thank you very much, Master Chef. The sesame seeds are a nice touch.

His reply came quicker this time, one text after another.

> Haha I thought they were weird af but seemed cooler than boring white ones:) I'm glad you like it.

> You coming over after work?

She stared at the text, touching her bottom lip.

> Yeah, Octavia wanted to have a movie night.

> You don't mind if I crash it, do you?
"Crash it, crash it," she demanded in a mutter, fingers flying across the screen.

*Nope don't mind :D*

She kept her phone open on their conversation as she waited for his reply, refusing to let the screen fall black for more than half a second.

*Kk see you later then.*

The rest of her shift went by slowly, but Clarke was too happy to care. She kept catching herself smiling and giggling, getting a few uncomfortable looks from customers, but that didn't upset her either.

Bellamy bought her a *muffin* and made her *lunch.*

When she'd arrived at the Blake house that night, Bellamy and Octavia both answered the door, wearing equally pleased smiles.

"You look really nice," he'd said, smiling at her while Octavia enthusiastically agreed.

Clarke had taken an extra thirty minutes on her make-up before coming over in the hopes that Bellamy would notice, so she was pretty stoked that he did.

Octavia and Bellamy argued over a movie while Clarke popped popcorn, which was a perfectly regular situation, but it felt different. Everyone seemed happier. Or maybe she was just imagining things because she was so happy herself. But the more she watched the Blakes, the more convinced she was that something else was going on. Octavia was behaving like her normal self, but Bellamy was lighter and more playful. He was happier, she knew it.

Once they were all settled with blankets and snacks, they all took their respective seats with Clarke on the arm chair and the Blakes on the couch. Octavia tried *literally* kicking Bellamy off the couch before the movie even started, and in retaliation, he threw a handful of popcorn at her. She gasped and lurched across the couch to get to him while Clarke watched them, amused. But her amusement turned quickly to something else when was distracted by the sound of Bellamy's laugh as Octavia chased him around the living room and through the kitchen. There was a tug in Clarke's heart, fondness mingled with longing. She still wanted him - more now than before - but she wasn't going to push it. If she wasn't misreading his intentions, then he wanted her, too, but wasn't ready to move forward with it. If she *was* misreading things, then telling him how she felt wouldn't do anything in her favour anyway.

It was okay, though. With the way things were going, Clarke couldn't complain. It was so light and easy and fun, and she could tell that Bellamy was warming up to her more and more everyday. She knew it would likely take a long time for him to trust her again, but she hoped she was doing a good job at showing him that he could.
After baseless threats and Clarke needing to step in as a mediator, she ended up sitting between Bellamy and Octavia on the couch in order to stop them annoying each other. She sat a little closer to Bellamy's side, her leg touching his, and he reclined a little with his arm on the back of the couch. When she dropped her head back halfway through the movie, letting it rest against Bellamy's arm, he didn't pull it away. A few times, she was even sure she felt his finger lightly grazing her upper arm, but she was too scared to look in case she was wrong. So she let herself believe what she wanted, more focused on Bellamy than what was happening in the movie.

"Man, I wish I had a sweater like that," he said suddenly, adjusting his position so that his leg pressed closer against Clarke's.

She brought her attention back to the movie to figure out what he was talking about. One of the men was wearing a woolen, knit sweater with elaborate stitches.

"Looks warm as Hell," Bellamy muttered.

Clarke frowned at him. "Are you serious?"

Octavia rolled her eyes. "Bell has a problem with big-chain clothing. He says they're never warm enough."

"Yeah," he said, plucking at the fabric of the hoodie he was wearing, eyes steady on the TV. "Shitty store-bought sweaters."

Clarke let out a short laugh. "You too good for regular people clothes?"

He scoffed, feigning haughtiness. "Yes."

She smirked, pulling her bottom lip into her mouth when he smiled and lightly pushed her shoulder as he stood to get a beer from the kitchen.

When Clarke got home that evening, she looked up knitting classes on her computer and signed up for the one with the best feedback. She'd make him a sweater, a non-shitty, handmade one.

A few months ago, Clarke never would have expected she'd be taking a knitting class, yet there she was, fumbling with knitting needles and a ball of dark green yarn. She'd asked Octavia to get Bellamy's measurements without letting him know what was going on, which Octavia said was the most uncomfortable experience of her life, but she'd managed to get them despite his apparent displeasure.

But knitting was not Clarke's forte. She used the money she recently made to pay for the lessons and materials, and the teacher was nice enough to spend a lot of time with her, but Clarke seriously sucked at it. She practiced during all her free time, feigning ignorance when Bellamy told her about the 'super weird' encounter he'd had with Octavia trying to measure him 'for some reason, the freak'. The only thing getting Clarke through long and boring and extremely difficult hours of knitting was the thought of Bellamy liking the finished product. She really hoped he would.

It took over a month, but she finally finished a few days before his birthday. It was dark green, his favourite colour, and knit with soft wool. It would be really warm, which is what he'd said he wanted. It even looked professionally made. Well, not really, but she was sure Bellamy wouldn't mind the few ugly, uneven stitches. At least it was better than the several botched attempts that were still crumpled around the bottom of her closet.

She waited until his birthday to give it to him, though. She'd got him a joke gift and given it to him
earlier, a two liter bottle of bubbles with a manual on how to create bubble shapes. So he wasn't expecting it when, just before she left the house at the end of the night, she brought the sweater out from its hiding place in Octavia’s room and went to his bedroom to give it to him.

"What's this?" he asked, holding it out to look at it.

"It's a gift," she said, hands held behind her back. "I made it for you."

He looked up, and she realized she was biting the edge of her lip, so she quickly released it.

"It's nothing special," she said, though it was very special. "If you don't want it, I can ... unravel it. It's not very good, is it? I shouldn't have - I can just--"

She made to take it back, but Bellamy pulled it out of her reach.

"Are you kidding?" he said, enthused. "Of course I want it. This is really cool. Did you actually make this?"

She relaxed, nodding and trying to hide her smile. Bellamy rubbed the material through his fingers.

"I didn't even know you could knit," he said.

Clarke bit her lip.

"I couldn't," she confessed, shifting her weight when he met her eyes. "I learned how after you said you didn't like store-bought sweaters. I thought I should make you one."

He stilled, watching her. "You learned how to knit just to make me this?"

She chose not to answer that. "So you like it?"

"I - yeah, I love it," he said, pulling it on over his shirt and smoothing his hands down the front.
"Wow, it fits perfectly," he said, and then recognition dawned on his face. "Oh, is this why Octavia was trying to measure me that one day?"

Clarke let out a burst of a laugh, and Bellamy matched it.

"I knew something was going on," he said. "That was so awkward."

Clarke was still laughing. "Sorry. I wanted it to be a surprise."

"Well, colour me surprised," he said, grinning as he leaned in to give her a hug that she eagerly returned. "This is really, really awesome. Thank you, Clarke."

She pressed the side of her face into his chest, linking her hands behind his back.

"My pleasure," she murmured, not even bothering to contain her smile. "Happy birthday."

"Thank you," he said softly, adjusting his arms so he was holding her tighter. "You got me the best gift."

With how often he wore the sweater after that day, Clarke knew he meant it.
I'm not saying that the secks is neckst, but it could be tho.. it could be... ;)

At the end of August, a week before Clarke was to start school, she was staying the night at Bellamy's. He'd had a dual housewarming/last hurrah party at his new condo since the Summer was winding down, and he'd offered to help Clarke move in to her new dorm, so they both thought it made sense for her to just stay the night after the party. He'd already loaded all her things into his truck anyway.

Bellamy's new place was small, but really nice, and the window looked right out into downtown. There was something dreamy about it at night, and Clarke quite liked being there.

It was her first time alone with him at his place. The last guests to leave had been Octavia and Lincoln - who were now going steady - and Raven. Raven was the one who had to deal with Clarke's frequent and sad spiels about Bellamy all Summer, but she'd been really nice about it. Before she left Bellamy's place that evening, she'd given Clarke the old, tattered hundred dollar bill from their bet. Even though Clarke and Bellamy weren't together, he'd still technically made her fall for him and was therefore the winner.

Clarke had told Raven it would be incredibly weird to give it to him and she absolutely would not be doing that. Raven made her take it anyway. 'Just in case,' she'd said, 'It's just collecting dust under my floor anyway'.

But Clarke knew nothing was going to happen between her and Bellamy. They were friends now, something a lot better than what they were before. Over the last few months, they'd seamlessly entered into a comfortable and light companionship. There was no drama, no frills, no unnecessary bickering or arguing or tension. She'd been patient over the Summer, analyzing his behaviour in case he was waiting for her to make the first move, but after a while, it appeared he was just ... fine with the way things were. It shouldn't have hurt her stupid heart, because she didn't even like him at the start of the Summer, and yet it suddenly felt like losing something big.

But even with her hopes dwindling with every passing week that Bellamy made no move to rekindle anything romantic, Clarke was pretty sure she understood. She'd thought about it a few times, how she'd feel if the roles were reversed, and she knew it wouldn't have been easy to learn to trust him again. She was lucky, really, that he was interested in even being friends. Now that she was about to go off to University, she knew nothing more than that was going to develop. She did this to herself, and she'd told him how she felt, and it didn't work out, and she was okay with it. It just wasn't meant to be. And it was better this way. Friendship was more stable and sure than romance, and with Bellamy, that was what she wanted: stability and surety.

So it was good. Everything was good.

"Hey."

Clarke looked over her shoulder at him as he approached from his bedroom, hands in his pockets.
"Hey," she said, smiling, and turned away from the window to face him, propping her hip against the counter.

"I made up the bed," he said, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of his bedroom. "It's ready to go."

"Thanks," she said. "You can still take it, though. I won't object to the couch."

She was teasing, but she really did mean it. Bellamy didn't acknowledge it. He didn't say anything, but he looked like he wanted to. Clarke waited, and waited, and waited.

Nothing happened.

"Are you all right?" she asked, just to break the silence.

He looked fine, really, but he was acting weird.

"I'm good, yeah," he said, swallowing and clenching his jaw, continuing to stare.

It was silent for another long moment. Clarke cleared her throat and took a deep breath.

"Well ... I guess I should get ready for bed, then," she said, pushing away from the counter and pointing toward his bedroom. "It'll be a long day tomorrow."

She'd only made it a few steps past him when he stopped her by blurting her name.

She stopped, looking back with raised brows. "Yeah?"

His mouth formed words over and over, but he said none of them, dropping his gaze as he struggled. He breathed in like he was about to speak, but again, said nothing. Instead, he lifted his eyes to hers, blinked a few times, and exhaled.

Clarke glanced briefly away and then back. "What?"

The question sounded a little stupid, but she didn't know what else to say.

A resigned sort of determination crept onto his face. His shoulders rose with a deep breath, and he exhaled heavily.

"I know how bad the timing is," he said, looking mightily uncomfortable. "I probably shouldn't even be saying this. But I ... if I don't tell you, then..."

He stopped, shaking his head. Clarke's entire body was frozen. She wasn't positive about where this was going, but ... she was pretty sure.

Bellamy swallowed again, took a step closer.

"I don't care anymore," he said, shrugging a shoulder and shaking his head. "I don't care about any of it; the deal you made with Octavia, the fake way we started dating, I don't care. Maybe I should, but I don't. I just ..." He paused again, still struggling, but Clarke wasn't about to interrupt. Her heart was racing, her hands lightly trembling, and she wanted him to keep going. She wanted him to say it. Whatever it was he was going to say, she wanted to hear it.

"I miss you," he said, and she blinked, her breath leaving her. "I've missed you everyday for the entire Summer. And I can't ... I can't get you out of my head. I kept going over it and over it about whether I should even say any of this, or if it even mattered, but I miss you." He shrugged again,
helpless. "And I want you. I want to be with you again, properly this time."

Clarke stared with parted lips, not realizing for a few seconds that he was finished. She still couldn't find words, though, doing nothing but staring dumbly at him while he stared back.

But then when she didn't say anything, he hesitated, doubt clouding his features.

"Do you ... still want me?"

Air left Clarke in a rush and she closed the distance, taking his face in her hands and surging forward to kiss him. He startled for barely a second before responding, kissing her back with all the eagerness she felt, his hands instantly lifting to cradle her face. It was clumsy at first, both of them more impassioned than the occasion called for, but it calmed down after a few seconds. Their kisses grew soft instead of fervent, relaxed instead of rushed, and now Clarke could feel it, the trilling of her giddy heart, the warming of every nerve-ending in her body. She'd given up on this. She would have been okay with staying friends - she truly would have - but not staying friends was so much better.

This was just such shitty timing. He waited to bring this up until very nearly the last day they had to see each other?

She was mad for all of two seconds before she reminded herself that it wasn't over yet, and Bellamy just confessed that he forgave her, that he missed her, and that he wanted her. After tomorrow, she wasn't sure when she would see him again, and she just ... didn't want to have to wait for him anymore.

Her heart was beating out of her chest when she pulled back, having a difficult time meeting his eyes, but still forcing herself to. This was ... fast. Well, it actually wasn't, but considering how their relationship had developed and then crumbled and was on the brink of developing again, yeah, it was fast. She didn't even know if Bellamy would want this. Was it too fast for him? If it wasn't too fast for her, then it wouldn't be for him either, would it? He wanted it for a lot longer.

"You good?" he asked, and she realized that she wasn't doing a very good job at disguising her emotions.

He was holding her waist now, gently massaging his thumbs into her skin as though to comfort her, and for some reason, that notion was really doing it for her. It was just him. It was just him touching her, it was all just turning her on.

She reached up and curled her fingers around his bicep with the barest touch, her palms as hot as his arms.

"I was just wondering if this means we'll be sharing a bed?" she asked, attempting seduction, but her voice wavered like the virgin she was.

The thought of having sex was scary, even if it was with someone she trusted as implicitly as Bellamy.

His eyelids twitched like he'd almost blinked.

"Oh - no, I wasn't expecting anything," he said, shaking his head. "I really wasn't."

She dropped her eyes, mortified. It wasn't exactly a rejection, but it felt an awful lot like one.

Her fingers curled into her palms, wrists still pressed to his arms. She cleared her throat and started to gently extract herself, but Bellamy didn't let go, quickly rushing on.
"No, not that - not that I wouldn't want to, I just meant ... do you want to?"

At the implication that he did want to, that they might actually be doing this tonight, Clarke's chest grew hotter, the sensation crawling up her neck.

Shy, she bit her bottom lip, and she nodded.

Bellamy swallowed. He just stared at her for a moment, looking just as eager as she felt, but then he grew wary.

"I just ... really wasn't expecting anything," he said.

There was some meaning in his words, but she couldn't place it.

"Okay," she said, because if this was about him trying to convince her he wasn't ill-intentioned, she didn't need convincing.

But apparently, it wasn't about that at all.

"No, I mean ... I don't have condoms."

"Oh," she said, shoulders dropping slightly. It would be at least thirty minutes to a store and back, and she really didn't care to wait. "Um ... I'm on birth control. To help with period pain. So if you want, we could ... just ..."

Bellamy's hands gripped her a little tighter.

"You're okay with that?" he asked, his voice a little breathless.

It was impulsive, but she was definitely okay with it.

In response, she pressed closer, her hips fitting snugly against his. He was already hardening, which just made her all the more excited. She'd never done this before, and knowing that Bellamy was a bit of a tomcat both helped her nerves and frazzled them. On the one hand, he'd know what he was doing. On the other, being with someone so experienced was a little intimidating. It was embarrassing, too. What if he spent all this time liking her only to have his feelings diminish when he realized having sex with her wasn't as great as he'd hoped?

She tried not to think about it, trying to convince herself that relationships didn't work like that.

"I'm ... I've never used any toys or anything with Lexa, so ... so ..."

He dipped his head to kiss her neck.

"I'll be gentle," he promised, making her shiver. "Tell me to stop at any time."

Clarke couldn't imagine she'd be doing that.

They undressed each other in a daze as they kissed and stumbled back toward his room, Bellamy giving her a hand with his belt when her fingers shook too much to unbuckle it. She was lying down naked on his bed first while he watched her, eyes trailing transfixed down the length of her body while he pulled off his shirt, then his boxers, then climbed onto the bed with her, lying down next to her and hovering half over her, propped up on his elbow.

But he stared at her a little too long without doing anything that Clarke grew nervous, resisting the very strong urge to cover herself.
"What?" she asked, meek. "What's wrong?"

He shook his head, looking a little dazed.

"I'm just ... I can't believe this is happening," he said quietly, and then he swallowed, unable to meet her eyes. "I'm nervous."

Well, she definitely wasn't expecting that. The thought of Bellamy being nervous was ... odd, to say the least. Especially when it came to sex.

"Don't take this the wrong way," she said with a little smile, drawing his eyes to hers, "but ... haven't you done this a lot?"

"Not with you," he said, like that made all the difference, and Clarke's smiled dropped right off her face. "I want you to like it as much as I will."

But that was just ... too much pressure. Did he think she was some sex master? She literally just told him she'd never done anything like this. It wasn't like she had a lot to compare to.

He, however....

"You never know if I'll be any good anyway," she said, trying not to sound insecure, but failing miserably.

He huffed out a breath, shaking his head and dipping his forehead to hers.

"I don't think you have any idea how you make me feel."

Oh, God. She didn't think he was even trying to turn her on, so the fact that he was doing such a bang up job at it was ... disgusting. She wanted him so badly.

And then he started to move down her body, pressing gentle kisses to her skin as he went. At first, she thought he was just kissing her, but then he moved lower, and lower, and lower, and then she realized--

"No," she blurted, grabbing his wrists to stop his descent.

He snapped his eyes up to hers, a question in his face.

This also wasn't something she was experienced with, but she didn't want to try it, either. She'd very nearly tried it with Lexa once, but Lexa wouldn't go through with it. She'd said she thought vaginas tasted bad. Clarke couldn't stomach the idea of Bellamy being disgusted while trying to turn her on.

She swallowed, wetting her lips and shaking her head, unable to meet his eyes.

"I don't ... um ... I don't know. This is weird."

"I don't want to hurt you," he said, as though that should explain why he wanted to eat her out, as though there weren't other things to do to get the same effect. "This will make you wet."

"I'm already wet," she said quickly. "I don't need it. Or I can just like ... masturbate or something."

"It feels good, Clarke," he promised, trying to reassure her with a soft touch above her thigh, assuming that what she was wary of was her own discomfort. "Let me show you."

Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh GOD. He wanted to do this. It was his own fault, then. She was
prepared for the absolute worst when she covered her face with her hands, nodding her assent.

But Bellamy didn't do anything.

"We don't have to," he said, sincere, kissing her knee. She still wouldn't look at him. "I won't do anything you don't want me to, you know that, right?"

She nodded, saying nothing, and Bellamy went on.

"If you really don't want me to, I won't. It's okay."

"I want to," she said, her voice muffled behind her hands. "I'm just embarrassed."

"Don't be," he said, voice gentle.

Clarke bit the inside of her lip, knocking her knees together, but Bellamy gently opened her legs again.

"I don't want you to think I ... taste gross. Or something."

"That's ... I won't," he said, sounding sure of himself.

But he might, though.

Clarke swallowed. "Okay, well, just ... try it, but if I turn you off, just stop. I'm not gonna be upset--"

She felt the flat of his tongue on her without warning, warm and damp as it glided up her slit. She squeaked, clenching more in surprise than pleasure, too nervous about his reaction to even think about enjoying it.

"Oh, fuck," Bellamy muttered, and then he did it again, sucking her into his mouth this time, his tongue making wet sounds against her flesh. "Taste gross," he muttered, like he couldn't fathom the idea. "You taste," he paused, sliding his hands up the plains of her abdomen, moaning against her as he lapped at her again, "so good."

Holy fuck.

She was still tense, but this was ... this was something.

"Can you relax for me, princess?" he said, the control in his voice a balm to her nerves. He knew what he was doing. "I promise to make it good for you."

She nodded, forgetting that she was covering her face.

"Your hands," he said patiently, pressing a kiss to her inner thigh. "I want you to watch me eat you out."

Her hands trembled as she lowered them to the bed. If she wasn't already seduced, the raw desire on his face absolutely would have done it. She clenched around nothing, watching, and then Bellamy dipped his face between her legs and went back to licking, his tongue warm and damp and so, so good. It wasn't long before she breathing quickly, spurred on by his every grunt, by his moans, by the way he'd started stroking himself while he ate her out, like he was too turned on not to.

"Have you thought about this before?" she asked, breathless, nervous that it wasn't something he particularly enjoyed, but was only pretending in order to make her feel good about herself.
But he groaned softly. "I think about this all the time."

_Fuck_, she couldn't take this anymore.

"Bellamy," she said, his name a plea. "Come here."

He didn't need to be told twice. He licked one more long stroke through her wetness, alighting her nerves, before pulling back and releasing his length in favour of crawling up her body.

She touched him when he was close enough, her hands gliding over his warm, muscled shoulders and the spattering of freckles there.

"Tell me what you want, okay?" he said in a rush, rubbing along her slit to gather her wetness before lining the head up with her entrance. "Make sure you tell me what you want."

She nodded, desperate, and then he slowly began to work himself into her, one arm bent and resting beside her on the bed, the other holding onto her hip. There was a slight burn, barely there and not unpleasant at all, but that was it. It added to the experience for her. It was so stupid, but the knowledge that Bellamy was the person she was sharing her first time with - that he was the first one her body opened for - only made it better. He went deeper and deeper, working himself in with rocking motions inch by inch until his hips were flush with hers. She clenched around him, finding there wasn't much room to do so, and a strange sort of tingle released at the base of her spine.

"Is this good?" Bellamy breathed, restraining himself.

Clarke swallowed hard, hands grasping his upper arms. "It's good, just ... just go slow."

He nodded, exhaling, and started moving at a languid pace. Clarke was feeling a little overwhelmed, the sensation unlike anything she'd ever experienced before. She had her eyes closed to keep herself focused, as though she could loosen up her body by sheer force of will. There was no pain, only a stretch and fullness, but he was so big that if he moved any faster, she might not be able to take it.

But he took his time, breathing through his nose deeply and slowly against her neck, stroking her cheek with his thumb to keep her relaxed. She realized then that Bellamy was also doing his utmost to hold concentration, preventing himself from going faster than she was ready for so as not to hurt her.

The thought forced her to tighten around him, and a tiny moan left her throat unbidden.

Bellamy let out a long exhale, pulling out more than he'd done so far, the length of him dragging against every inch of her. Her lips parted even more at the next slide in, face scrunching slightly at the incredible feeling.

"Does it hurt?" Bellamy asked, voice trembling.

She hadn't even realized that he'd started to watch her. She opened her eyes to meet his gaze and bit her lower lip, brows pressed lightly together, and she shook her head.

Bellamy swore, tracing her bottom lip with his thumb as he pressed closer, his entire body brushing hers with each pump. He was moving just a bit faster with every one. He let out a strained breath, dropping his head next to her shoulder.

"How's this?" he asked, voice tight, not slowing.

"It's good," she breathed, almost unable to speak. "It's really good."
And then he was moving faster, and each of Clarke's inhales was a small gasp, each of Bellamy's exhales a groan of pleasure. He kept pumping into her at the same quick pace, letting out soft and deep moans next to her ear. It was all so intense that tears sprung abruptly to her eyes. She blinked them away quickly, sliding her arms around Bellamy's shoulders to hold him, which he seemed to like. One of his hands drifted to her waist and he squeezed, his thumb rubbing her skin.

She didn't even know why she was crying. It wasn't painful at all. It felt so, so good.

"I'm not crying 'cause it hurts," she said after a quiet snuffle made him turn his head toward her.

He stopped anyway, pulling back to see her.

She shook her head and rushed on before he could get the wrong idea.

"It feels so good," she promised, brushing her fingertips against his throat. "I think I'm just overwhelmed. I like you so much."

He exhaled at the admission, eyes briefly closing when he leaned in to give her a soft, tender kiss. He still wasn't moving.

"We can stop anytime," he said when he pulled back, the sincerity in his face making her feel everything all the more strongly. "I won't be upset or disappointed. I won't be anything, I promise."

But she didn't want to stop. This was too good to stop.

So she shook her head, stroking his hair at the base of his skull.

"Keep going. Don't stop."

He let out a short, soft moan through his closed mouth, and nodded. One of his hands drifted to her face to softly wipe the tears from her cheeks.

"Anything you want," he murmured next to her ear, kissing her jaw. "I'll do anything you want."

And then he was moving again, but it was slow. Clarke had been right on the edge before he'd stopped moment's ago. He was being so kind, though, that it gave her the confidence to ask for something more.

"I want it harder, Bellamy."

He stilled, his back muscles tensing under her hands. If he'd waited even a second longer to respond, she would have shriveled away in embarrassment.

"Harder?"

"Yes," she breathed, sliding her arms snugly around his body. "Yes, please."

He exhaled sharply against her neck and pulled away to brace himself on the bed, leveraging himself just enough above her that he could start thrusting in earnest, pumping hard in and out, filling the room with the sound of their bodies wet coming together.

It didn't take long for Clarke since she was already right there, her walls eagerly squeezing Bellamy over and over. He kept groaning, seeming to like the way it felt, and the thought that he liked the way it felt - that he liked the way she felt - caused the most dramatic swell of an orgasm she'd ever felt in her life.
"Oh, God," she keened, eyes tightly shut and head pressed back into the pillows.

Bellamy groaned sharply and thrust faster as she tightened even more, leaning over her, and he moved a hand between them to rub quickly at her nub.

"Yes," he panted, dropping his forehead to hers. "Fuck - yes, Clarke, come on."

She gripped Bellamy's strong forearm seconds before it happened. She felt it everywhere, the tingling in her palms, the shiver arcing down her spine, the intense, new sensation of a powerful pulse of warmth exploding out from her heart. She'd never known what it felt like to climax when she was full up with something thick and hard and deep, and she couldn't believe how different it felt. It was so much more satisfying, and the knowledge that it was Bellamy just made it all the more intense.

He kissed her when she came, knowing just where to rub on her clit to draw out her climax the most intensely, watching her face for every sign of pleasure that flickered across it as her body jerked with his touch between her legs. The fact that she liked it seemed to do it for him, and a few seconds later, he was making the hottest, drawn-out groans she'd ever heard as he came inside her. He held her gaze up until the very moment he couldn't, cupping her cheek and releasing a wrecked moan against her mouth when he kissed her. He jerked his hips into her over and over as he emptied himself. She could feel it happen, could feel him twitching, felt the warmth of him filling her.

He stayed hovered above her while he softened, making no move to pull out until his arms started to burn with the exertion of supporting his weight. Taking extra care not to move too fast, he moved back and kissed a path down her neck to her collarbone and chest, one hand gingerly gliding over a peaked nipple. Clarke could barely move, couldn't even keep her eyes open at first, and she focused all her attention on the feel of his warm skin under her hands, comfortably heavy on her body.

"It's never been like this," he confessed in awe, more to himself than her, and pressed a long, soft kiss to the middle of her chest. "I've never felt like this."

The admission filled her with warmth, and she basked in it for as long as she could until they fell asleep in his bed, cuddled together with his face on her chest and her arms around his shoulders.

It was one of the better sleeps of Clarke's life while also being one of the tensest. Every time she woke up in the middle of the night to adjust her position, she remembered where she was and who she was with, and it filled her heart with such incredible warmth that it felt a little bit like love. But then she'd remember that time was ticking down, and she'd be leaving in the morning, and that wasn't something she wanted to think about.

When she woke up for the final time, it was to Bellamy's arms around her, gently stroking along her spine. Even with her eyes closed, she could see that the sun had risen, but she wanted to ignore it for as long as possible. She squeezed her eyes shut tighter, snuggling closer to Bellamy like he could protect her from having to move away today.

When he realized she was awake, he pressed a long, soft kiss to her forehead.

"Morning," he murmured, inhaling deeply in her hair.

"Mmm-rng." she grumbled back, and he chuckled in her hair, fondly nuzzling his cheek against the crown of her head.

They were both quiet after that, Clarke resting against Bellamy's chest, eyes closed while she listened to his heartbeat. He continued to caress her skin, not in any rush, and she rolled closer against him,
lifting her leg over his. Bellamy let out another breathy laugh against her head, bending his arm to brush her hair away from her face.

"Are you feeling all right?" he asked, lips brushing her skin as he spoke.

"I'm feeling," she started, pausing to take a deep breath, sighing, "amazing."

Bellamy hummed, and she felt him nodding against her head.

"That's good." He was still rubbing her arm, but there was more alertness to it now. They had to get out of bed. She knew he was going to make her. "We better get cracking. We've got a long drive."

She propped herself up on chest, giving him her best pouting sad face, but then easily let him lead her from his bed to the shower.

Clarke's dorm was a tiny room with enough space for a bed and a small desk, but not much else. She hadn't brought much from home aside from basic necessities and school supplies. Bellamy helped her set everything up, from the specific type of shelf she was allowed to hang to her new bed sheets and pillow. It was a five hour drive one way, and he didn't have much time to spare before he had to leave. He had the evening shift at the mechanic shop. He was going to quit soon. He told her about it on the drive over. But for now, he needed all the jobs he had.

Unfortunately for Clarke, that meant he couldn't stay much longer. He'd already been there an hour helping her get set up. He had to go. Both of them knew it, but it took them a while to get up from where they were cuddling on her bed and actually put it into action.

And then they still hovered, extending the stay for as long as possible.

In a move that was both adorable and unnecessary, Bellamy pulled out his wallet to give her fifty dollars.

"My parents are rich, you know," she said, but took it anyway because she didn't want to make him feel bad.

He nodded, tucking her hair over her shoulders. "I know. But I'd like to be able to provide a ritzy meal here and there."

She didn't know if he was joking or not, so she forced herself not to laugh, just in case.

"Does this mean I officially have a sugar daddy?" she teased instead.

Bellamy smirked. "I'll give you all the sugar you want."

Clarke laughed, leaning up to kiss his cute, smiling face. And then, just as she broke away to put the money in her wallet, she remembered something vital.

"Oh, my God," she blurted, grabbing her purse.

"What?" he asked, leaning against the wall beside the door, ankles crossed.

"Raven," she started slowly, containing her smile as she pulled out the familiar hundred dollar bill, "wanted me to give you this."

Bellamy frowned when she tried handing it to him, but he took it nonetheless.
"What's this for?" he asked. "Other than defeating the purpose of me trying to give you money."

Clarke laughed, visibly pocketing his fifty dollars to ease his mind, but didn't answer his sarcasm.

"From a bet, I think," she said, having a hard time suppressing her smile. "Apparently it's been ongoing for three years and you finally won."

For a moment, he only looked astonished, opening his mouth to dispute that. But then his expression froze, and after a very long moment, a smile grew slowly on his face.

Clarke laughed, tilting her head at him.

"I wonder what that bet could have been," she said.

He grinned broadly, knowing he was caught.

"I'm ... in trouble, aren't I?" he asked, playful, pushing away from the wall to come up to her.

She extended her arms to him, pulling him gently toward her.

"Deep, deep trouble," she said.

Bellamy's arms came around her, and his smile softened, his eyes tender as they appraised her.

"I'll make it up to you," he promised. "Next time I see you."

The reminder of their imminent separation put a bit of a damper on things. Clarke lowered her gaze, staring at his chest before dropping her forehead against it with a little grumble. She hated the idea of living so far away from him after only just starting to date.

"I already miss you," she muttered.

He brushed her hair behind her shoulder.

"It won't be forever," he said, but his words did nothing to ease her sadness. It would be long enough.

She turned her head to press her cheek to his chest. "It's going to suck."

"It is going to suck," he agreed, "but we'll make it work. I'm not worried." He gave her a tight squeeze. "You want to know why?"

"Why?" she asked, grumpy.

"Because I'm sure about you," he said quietly, kissing the top of her head. "And I'm sure about us."

Clarke bit the corner of her lip, blinking softly, and sighed, feeling a little lighter.

"Yeah," she said, propping her chin on his chest to meet his soft gaze. "I'm sure about us, too."

6 Months Ago - Bellamy's Phone Call To A Friend

"You sound weird," said Miller. "Everything okay?"

"No, yeah, it's fine," said Bellamy, pacing his room. "It's nothing, I'm just ... being stupid."
"What's up?"

Bellamy shook his head. "It's really nothing big. I don't know. It's just Clarke, same old stuff."

"Well, something new must have happened," said Miller. "You were fine earlier."

Bellamy sighed. "Yeah, I mean... she was over tonight, and she and my little sister were talking about graduation. It just made me realize she'll be going off to University soon. I'm kinda bummed."

Miller was quiet for a moment, sounding a little disbelieving when he spoke.

"You had to have known this was coming, though. I mean...." He trailed off.

Really, he had known it. But it was something he liked to pretend didn't exist. Like every other shitty thing that happened to him.

"I guess I tried not to think about it," he said. "I'm kind of freaking out, to be honest with you."

"Well, why?" asked Miller, apparently not realizing the gravity of the situation. "It's not like you'll never see her again."

"I know, but - it's like ... she's been right there, right under my nose all along, and I just ... I just missed it. I didn't do anything when I had the chance and now it feels like I'm too late. I don't know what to do."

Miller hummed, not saying anything for a minute.

"I don't know what to tell you," he said quietly, and then let out a soft sigh. "Do you love her?"

It was weird to admit, even for him. He was five years older than her, and even though she was eighteen now, she was a high school student. It was just ... a weird thing to say. But Miller was his best friend, and Bellamy was pretty sure he already knew the answer anyway. Plus he wanted to say out loud to someone other than himself.

"Yeah, I think I do," he said, getting a weird thrill from the confession. "She makes everything else make sense ... everything means more when I think of her."

"Look, man ..." Miller started. Bellamy could imagine him shaking his head. "I don't know much about love or falling in love or any of that. But if I met someone who made me care about life the way Clarke does for you ... I don't know. I guess I can't imagine I'd give that up."

Neither could Bellamy. But Clarke didn't want him, and he didn't know if there was anything he could do about that. Past childhood teasing tactics, he was absolutely fucking stumped. He'd never had to try so hard to seduce a girl before, especially not one who just would not budge. The matter was made all the more difficult by the fact that he loved her, and he knew he couldn't stop. He tried. He was a goner, and it was starting to take its toll.

"So what do you think I should do?" he asked, hoping Miller had a better answer than he could come up with on his own. All his own were stupid. None of them ended with him making Clarke fall in love with him.

"Go for it," said Miller. "Do something, at least. Better than talking to me about it anyway. Maybe it doesn't work out, maybe it does. But if it doesn't, at least you tried, right?"

That was the basic sort of answer Bellamy had for himself, and he didn't like it. He wanted
something failproof, like a fuckin’ ... guide book or something; rules and steps with detailed instructions on how to seduce Clarke Griffin with a 100% success rate. None of this 'might work, might not' bullshit.

Miller went on, though, not paying attention to Bellamy's sighs of irritation.

"And hey," he said cheerfully, "Bonus: if it does work out, then I have the perfect speech to give at your wedding."

_Six Years Later_

Clarke was holding Bellamy's hand under the head table at their wedding reception in the backyard at her parents' estate. The newlyweds were giving each other obnoxious googly eyes while Miller got up with his glass of champagne, looking alarmingly eager to give his best man's speech.

"Well, everyone, I've got a story for you," he said, grinning when Bellamy rolled his eyes, catching on very quickly. "And trust me ... it's a pretty good one."

Chapter End Notes

I didn't think I'd enjoy writing this chapter since the last one was so difficult, but this was actually a lot of fun! And I'm thrilled to be finished another fic, woo!

Also I'm sorry for all the obnoxiousness that went on in this story. This fic was the first piece of writing I ever posted, and I had super low confidence (in general, but also with writing) and didn't know what I was doing with this story. I wasn't even writing what I wanted to write, I was just trying to do what I thought other people wanted, which I obviously couldn't predict. Despite that, a ton of you stuck with it and liked it anyway and gave me really nice encouraging comments, so thank you from the bottom of my heart (also special shoutout to Reignfier and meremennen ... you're both so sweet to me, I can't even handle it).

Thank you all SO MUCH for your support with this fic. You're all the bomb dot com, and I'm so so thankful that you stuck around/read/kudosed/shared/commented/etc, and I hope you liked the ending ^_^

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