Red Skies, Black Waters

by MercuryM

Summary

“You’re not in here.” He smiled toothily and tapped on the leather cover of the captain’s log. “Care to tell me what your name is?”

Her gaze stopped on his pistol and on the metal basket-shaped guard of his cutlass, before moving onto Monroe and giving her the same quick assessment. She drew her legs away from him, and took another sip of water before letting her hands rest in her lap, grimacing as the shackles rubbed against the raw skin of her wrists.

“Pirates.” Her voice was low and hoarse, husky from dehydration. “Of course it would be pirates.”

His smile took on a sharp edge. “What were you expecting, princess? A rescue mission?”

Notes

A while ago, Kayla wrote a Bellarke Black Sails AU, one which I really adore and enjoy, and around discussing our mutual love for Charles Vane and Eleanor Guthrie, as well as Bellamy and Clarke, she insisted on seeing my take on a pirate AU set in the Black Sails world.

This is something that I’ve been thinking about ever since the second season of Black Sails, but I never got around to writing it, simply because I was never truly inspired. But for the past couple of months, I’ve been struggling with everything canon-related to the 100, and as
such, I can't get around to writing canon Bellamy/Clarke fics (cue all the modern AU's I've been posting lately, and why Crown is yet to be updated), and I thought that this will be a nice way to overcome writer blocks. That said, I don't think I'll have a regular updating schedule for this fic, if one at all, but it will definitely be something that I'll be working on when I get frustrated with my other fics.

I hope you all enjoy reading this!

See the end of the work for more notes.
The deck of *The Arion* swayed with the waves and the thick ropes of the grappling hooks connecting it to *Good Fortune* creaked ominously. The English merchant ship was devoid of life and Bellamy’s boots sounded all too loud when he boarded the otherwise empty foredeck.

“Captain?”

Bellamy turned around and his quartermaster, Miller, who had followed behind, pointed at the red hand-print along the railing of *Good Fortune*. It trailed off and disappeared overboard, as if the person had been swept away by the waves. Or something else.

“A sedition perhaps?”

Bellamy unsheathed his cutlass and cocked his flintlock pistol ready. His uncanny sense to foresee trouble had been tingling ever since they had caught sight of the big, seemingly deserted ship, and despite his hesitation on the matter, he had ordered boarding. If it was a trap, as he suspected, Bellamy was confident that *The Arion* could easily outrun the merchant ship. But, if his sister’s information proved to be right, it was an opportunity they couldn’t really miss; as such, it was more than worth the risk.

Yet, for all its silence, *Good Fortune* could have passed for a ghost ship.

“Search below deck.” Bellamy’s voice raised over the wind and his fellow pirates boarded one by one, pistols ready and daggers and swords filling the deck with swooshing sounds. “Monroe, find me the captain’s log. The rest of you know the drill. I want all of the cargo up here.”

Monroe gave him a quick nod and Bellamy watched as his crew upturned every barrel, every hatch, in search of *Good Fortune’s* crew and cargo. His sister had insisted that this was supposed to be a gold mine for medical remedies, something that Nassau was desperately lacking.

“Captain!” Miller’s head popped up from the hatch leading to the ship’s hold and gestured towards the opening. “We found the crew.”

Bellamy made his way towards the quartermaster and jumped down the stairs, his eyes quickly adjusting to the darkness and narrowing as he observed the scene in front of him.

The hold was filled with shivering men and the off-putting smell of vomit, sweat and piss.

“It looks like yellow fever.” Miller kicked one of the laying men; he wasn’t breathing.

“But to get all of them?”

Bellamy put away his cutlass and pistol, and turned to Sterling and Atom who were waiting behind him.

“Grab what you can, as fast as you can. I want us as far away from this ship as possible.” Then he turned back to the quartermaster. “We need those medical supplies. *Find them.*”

Miller disappeared in the darkness and Bellamy climbed back up the stairs, breathing in the salty air that chased away the sickness from his clothes. Just as he was about to go look for Monroe, she appeared by his side and handed him the captain’s log. He cursed when he opened to the last page and saw the low quantities of medical supplies the ship was transporting. It also had four barrels of
sugar, twelve casks of brandy and tobacco, which, if nothing else, would sell well.

“And Captain, there’s something you might want to see.”

Intrigued, he followed her back to the captain’s cabin. Upon opening the doors, he was hit with stagnant air and the smell of perspiration. But what really caught his attention was the messy blond hair hidden behind the captain’s desk.

The woman was sitting with her back to the window, dress wrinkled and sodden with sweat. Her skin was pale and her face spoke of hunger, but her eyes — blue like the ocean before a storm — were lucid and watching his every step. Her lips were cracked and Bellamy found himself reaching for his flask, offering her water.

He expected her to lung for it but instead she cocked her head to the side and kept on watching him. It was then that he noticed the chains binding her hands together and tying her to one of the wooden beams. Her presence on the ship had been unexpected, but seeing her bound and held against her will rankled something inside of him.

“Drink.” He thrust the flask in her hands and this time she obeyed, the chains rattling as she tipped the flask and took a few small sips.

He observed her as she swallowed, noticing the dried blood around the shackles on her wrists and the broken dagger that was embedded in the beam next to the link connecting her chain. Her dress, despite its state, spoke of wealth, as did the golden thin necklace around her neck. The stubborn tilt of her chin and the way she held herself despite her situation — proud and unflinching — cemented his observation.

She was an aristocrat, there was no mistake about it. And a stupid one on top of that; after all, there was a reason why pirates were the stuff from nightmares, and yet, here she was, trying to stare him down into submission. How he hated the likes of her.

“You’re not in here.” He smiled toothily and tapped on the leather cover of the captain’s log. “Care to tell me what your name is?”

Her gaze stopped on his pistol and on the metal basket-shaped guard of his cutlass, before moving onto Monroe and giving her the same quick assessment. She drew her legs away from him, and took another sip of water before letting her hands rest in her lap, grimacing as the shackles rubbed against the raw skin of her wrists.

“Pirates.” Her voice was low and hoarse, husky from dehydration. “Of course it would be pirates.”

His smile took on a sharp edge. “What were you expecting, princess? A rescue mission?”

The nickname didn’t faze her as much as he hoped it would, and she hummed in response.

“You’re hoping for a ransom.”

Bellamy crouched down to her level and let the log fall between them, dropping all pretense. “Surely your pretty face is worth something to somebody back home.”

Her laugh was sardonic and quickly transformed into a coughing fit that she subdued with some water. Her dry lips had cracked some more and she licked the drops of blood before they could make their way down her chin.

“My father is dead. Unfortunate, as he would have gladly paid any ransom you could have asked of
him. My mother, on the other hand, would never parley with a pirate, even for her only child. So you see, you either leave me with them, or you kill me now, as I’m of no use to you.”

She was taunting him to do just as she had suggested, but the fire in her eyes was something he was used to seeing in his sister’s — a burning flame that could only ever grow and never diminish, a challenge to cross her and taste her blade.

Bellamy, however, didn’t plan on getting burned today.

“Mm, I have a feeling we’ll be able to persuade your mother on the matter.”

Her fingers clenched around the flask and her gaze narrowed. It seemed that he was finally getting some reaction other than disdain.

“The moment my mother learns of my capture, she would gladly watch you burn.” Her words were vicious and for a moment he was taken aback by the ferocity behind them. “Then again, she doesn’t have to wait too long for that to happen.”

Monroe shifted nervously behind him and Bellamy felt trepidation sinking in his stomach.

“What do you mean by that?” he demanded and barely resisted the urge to impale her on his cutlass when she had the guts to laugh at him.

“Oh, you poor soul, you still don’t know,” she mocked and leaned forward, blond dirty tresses framing her face. “Earl Jake Griffin was murdered for treason. His work on pardoning pirates on behalf of the Crown was seen as conspiracy to turn New Providence and Nassau into his own little domain, apart from England.”

Bellamy froze, as did Monroe. The Earl had been well known for his efforts to pardon the pirates and incorporate them into the British Royal Navy, and make New Providence and Nassau self-governed English colonies. His death came as a shock to him, and it didn’t speak well for him or his fellow pirates.

The woman continued, unfazed by his stony silence. “The Royal Navy has a new decree now. Every captured pirate is to be hanged without a trial. And your precious Bahamas got a new Royal Governor.” She took a breather and grinned wickedly, as if taking pleasure from all of this. “Marcus Kane.”

Bellamy got to his feet in an instant and pushed the door open, letting it bang against the stairs leading to the quarterdeck with no remorse. Monroe followed him out and few of his crew members looked up at the sound but he waved them away.

He had met Marcus Kane twice in his life, both times back when he was still living in England, and he wasn’t eager to revisit those memories or the repercussions that came with them. Marcus Kane was bad news, he was bad news for him, for his sister, for Nassau, for every pirate sailing these seas. If he was coming for them, it would be with guns blazing and aiming to conquer, and no amount of negotiations would help them.

“Miller!” The quartermaster gave his cargo over to Connor and turned to face him. “Gather the crew, we’re leaving, now!”

Miller didn’t seem happy about it. “We still haven’t found the medical remedies.”

“Doesn’t matter. Tell Monty to set course for Nassau.”
For a moment, Miller looked like he would oppose his decision, but then repeated Bellamy’s orders and the crew was swiftly transporting the acquired cargo atop *The Arion*’s deck.

“And the girl?” Monroe asked.

He looked back at the cabin and the echo of chains rang in his ears.

“We’re taking her with us. She might be lying about the ransom, and if not, if what she said about the Earl is true, then we’ll need all the information she has.”

*Good Fortune* rocked gently under his feet and Bellamy itched to set the ship and all its occupants, annoying blondes included, on fire. News of Marcus Kane was anything but good fortune.

“Go back on *The Arion* and help Raven with the cargo.” With that, Bellamy left Monroe and went to fetch the girl.

She hadn’t moved from her place, save for having stretched her legs again, and he hated how she didn’t seem to fear him even as he unsheathed his cutlass. He was, however, smug to be met with her surprised gaze when instead of plunging the steel into her body, he brought the hilt of the cutlass down on the link in the beam, pulling it out after few hard hits.

“Sorry to ruin your fairy tale, princess,” he coiled the chain around his hand and pulled her up, grabbing her upper arm to steady her when she wavered, “but you’ve yet to see the last of me.”

“Aren’t I lucky?” The bite of her voice was betrayed by her shaking legs.

“You are.” His smile was nothing short of hostile. “Nobody boards *The Arion* alive unless they’re a crew member.”

And with that, he walked her to the railing of the main deck, where he passed her off safely to Monroe aboard his ship. He was one of the very few pirates that were yet to go back to *The Arion*, and he took great pleasure in unhooking the grappling hooks and leaving the miserable form of the merchant ship behind.

The deck of *The Arion* was bursting with life, and the wind was strong, as if sensing the captain’s urgency and trying its best to get them to Nassau as fast as possible.

Bellamy caught sight of the aristocrat and watched her as she closed her eyes, letting the wind play with her hair. Something squeezed his heart and suddenly he wished he had left her behind. Somehow he knew that if it wasn’t for Marcus Kane, this woman would be responsible for his downfall.

She opened her eyes, met his gaze and held it, until Monroe rushed her below deck.

She was going to be a challenge to break, and Bellamy would enjoy doing so.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

You didn't think I've forgotten about this fic, did you?

I recommend you re-read the prologue before going forward with this chapter. It's been a long time since I've posted the prologue and a quick refresher will definitely help you get back into the story. I've written a bit more of this story but I'll hold on to that until I can put more words on paper and have some semblance of plot going on because I'd hate to have to go back and re-write part of the story that I've already published. Thank you for your great feedback on this, I often re-read your comments when I need motivation to write in this verse!

Forever grateful to my beta for her constant support and encouragement, I don't know what I'd do without her. Believe me, she's my biggest cheerleader when it comes to this project so one day you'll definitely see it complete!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clarke tipped her head back and let the sun caress her face and warm her chilly sides. The salty air filling her lungs felt like freedom after days of being chained alone in Good Fortune's captain's cabin, smelling nothing but her own waste and sweat, and she took breath after breath with relish.

The captain of The Arion — for that was the name of the pirate ship that had taken her hostage — had finally relented and let her have few minutes above deck.

Clarke had refused to thank him for it; the bastard didn't deserve her gratitude for allowing her some semblance of courtesy. However, she did appreciate it, no matter how much she hated herself for it. She hadn't expected it from him, after all, pirates were not known for their kindness, but this one at least had some common sense in that pea sized brain of his.

She hadn't counted on any of this, yet here she was, standing among pirates, shackled for a second time, and wishing that just for once her life went according to plan.

But her father was still dead, her lover had still betrayed her, and she had most definitely ran away from her impending wedding, leaving both her fiance and her mother to repent for their actions. Her one regret was that Wells, her best friend, had to stay behind. It had been the only way to keep him out of this mess. Then again, if he had been with her in the first place maybe she wouldn't have been recognized and caught aboard the merchant ship, let alone be residing on a pirate ship.

But God worked in mysterious ways, as her father loved to say.

Clarke wasn’t quite sold on that — there was nothing mysterious in her father’s death, just pain and absence, and too many regrets to count.

The ship swayed and Clarke gripped the handrail tighter, loving the feel of the worn wood beneath her fingers. She had sailed twice before this fiasco, her father could never say no to her pleas, and he himself encouraged her adventures and curious nature, much to her mother’s displeasure.
She could imagine her mother’s face if she saw her right now and the company she was keeping, albeit unwillingly. Abigail Griffin was a Countess through and through — she was born an aristocrat and married an aristocrat and nothing could make her believe that the common folk was deserving of her attention, let alone the resources she sometimes bestowed upon them. Her donations were a mere show to impress Commodore Marcus Kane and win the approval of the other Royal Navy Admirals; the scorn of their wives was nothing but another notch on her already long list of accomplishments. Her husband, and Clarke’s father, Jacob ‘Jake’ Griffin had been a Navy Captain himself and an honorary member of the Royal Navy board, active both in the army and in the political scene, revered and ridiculed alike for his visionary ideas.

But when it came to the crunch, his impeccable name and good position couldn’t help him keep his life.

He died for an idea he never saw become a reality, betrayed by a woman he called his wife; he died still believing and Clarke resented him for that — her faith and hope had died with him, and she was left stranded in a household that was her own personal hell. Running away had been easy when there had been nothing to keep her there.

Clarke sighed and pulled her hair free from her messy braid. She would have liked to have something to comb it with, but alas, pirates cared little about combs or brushes. Or maybe they did but were afraid that she would attempt to kill one of them with the pointy end.

(It certainly wouldn’t have hurt to try.)

But until she acquired a real comb, her fingers would have to do. Thankfully, after dealing with few stubborn knots, the rest of her hair was in an agreeable mood and she braided it again with little to no effort. She still itched for a shower, sick down to her bones from the way she smelled, but fresh water was another thing pirates didn’t have in bulk. And for all that they were surrounded by the sea, Clarke had no wish to take a plunge into the dark blue salty depths, and only partially because she was afraid of drowning. The other reason was because she wasn’t sure she would actually fight the pull of the water and that was a scary thing to admit to oneself.

The crashing waves against the hull of their ship and the shouted orders all around her were just another part of the scenery that she had gotten used to, but one particular set of boots brought her out of her pensive mood.

Purposeful and steady, the captain of The Arion halted next to her, leaning on his forearms against the railing without sparing her a single glance.

Clarke let him have his moment. If he thought he could make her address him first, he was sorely mistaken; she had learned to keep her mouth shut the hard way, and she had time to waste in spades.

“Enjoying your stay?” he said at last, his head turning to the side. He was trying to keep a blank expression, Clarke could tell, but it wasn’t quite working for him.

“I’ve had better,” she answered if only to see him clench his jaw in annoyance.

Clarke might have been the one in shackles — admittedly, the ankle ones they had imposed on her were much better than the wrist ones she had been wearing before — but she had no intention of bowing down to the whims of a man who had chosen to steal and kill to feed his greedy heart. If she was going to meet her end by the blade of his cutlass, then she was going to do it like her father — believing that hers had been the right way.
(Maybe it hadn’t been the right way and that was a thought she refused to even entertain; too much heartbreak and destruction laid in that path.)

The captain turned to face her fully, the handle of his flintlock pistol glinting under the morning sun. Another little reminder that she was outnumbered, weaponless and helpless save for her wit. Maybe she should have tried to be polite and agreeable, maybe she could have acted a bit scared, playing a damsel in distress the whole nine yards, but that had been doomed the first time she had laid her eyes on him.

Clarke never did deal well with arrogance, and the captain lacked none.

She was aware that she was at his mercy and nothing would stop him from letting his men have their way with her, so she took a steadying breath and smiled. It came out as a pained grimace but at least she tried.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your company this fine morning?”

The pleasantries her mother had insisted on drilling into her head seemed to finally pay off — he closed his eyes as if already tired of their whole conversation, no matter the fact that they had only exchanged a few words.

Who knew that a pirate could be bested by few empty words?

“I want your name, for starters.”

And ah, there it was, the commanding tang to his voice. Clarke could understand why so many men and women had joined his crew — he emitted confidence and strength, and his voice broke no arguments. She was sure he had managed to inspire quite few of his crewmembers. To what lengths their loyalty stretched was something to ponder upon.

“Clarke.” Her smile was cordial and a much better attempt to look as nonthreatening as possible. Not that she had any illusions of being a proper threat to him.

But scheming did take quite a while to bear proper fruits and she had no intention of tipping him off in advance. In the position she was, scheming was all she had left and she planned on making the most of it.

“Clarke…” he trailed off, obviously fishing for her last name, but she just kept on looking at him. Her last name was, for better or worse, rather well known and she would hate to give him something he could exploit.

“Yours?” She didn’t expect him to have kept his real name, but he answered with “Blake.” and something niggled at her from the back of her mind. Why did that surname feel familiar to her? That begged further investigation but for now she pushed it back.

“Well, Captain Blake, you’ve got a fancy ship for a lousy pirate. Who did you steal it from? The Spanish?”

Blake bared his teeth in a mockery of a smile. “The French actually. They were quite the agreeable sort, gave it up without much of a fight, really.”

“What a shame. I’m sure you had been looking forward to an honest fight to make a real man out
of you.”

His bronzed skin darkened with his angry flush and Clarke tasted victory at the back of her throat. It had been a while since she had a worthy opponent for her tongue.

He regrouped rather fast, “Ah, I’m sorry to say that if a real man hasn’t been able to make a woman out of you yet, then you’re out of luck; even I can’t help you, though I’m sure it won’t be too much of a chore to give it a try.”

His insult stung and Clarke felt her own skin redden with her ire.

“Can’t properly satisfy a lady then? That’s a shame, but what else is to be expected from the likes of you.”

“The likes of me?”

Clarke waved her hand to encompass the whole ship. “Volatile, brash, thinking yourselves to be kings above the law. Dirty and lacking manners, polluting the rest of the world with your greed and disregard for what is right and what is wrong.”

“Are you seriously trying to read me a lecture about morals while you’re on a pirate ship?”

His question felt like cold water splashed across her face and she froze, just now paying attention to how worked up she was, and how her going toe to toe against the captain of the ship was far from being the ideal option.

“I’m sorry, I thought everybody was free to express themselves on this ship. You pirates stand for everything that England does not, don’t you?”

“Who we are and who we’re supposed to be are two very different things, Clarke.”

His overly familiar address had her gritting her teeth, his words nothing but an empty excuse to her ears.

“Indeed?” She looked back to the sea, the sight of his narrowed brown eyes unsettling her and making her feel aware of all her flaws.

Of all the pirates she could end up with, she just had to go and pick an honest to God intellectual. Clarke wouldn’t have been surprised if the captain ended up being some lowborn English aristocrat, maybe even Spanish if she had to take his darker complexion under consideration, though, now that she was really looking at him, there was something distinctively Asian about his features.

It didn’t matter in the end — he was a pirate captain and she was his most valuable card, not that he was aware of it. Yet.

Clarke hadn’t lied when she’d said her mother would refuse to parley with him or any other pirate for her freedom; instead, she would let Marcus Kane run loose off his chain and watch him bring death upon pirates and Royal Navy men alike, smiling sadly as if that had not been her intention all along. Above anything else, Abigail Griffin cherished the law, and in her humble opinion those outside of it had brought it on themselves.

If Blake was smart, he would kill her right now and never let her mother know that it was his doing.
The captain, however, was trying to prove wrong every pirate tale she had heard.

“I was made aware that you’re enjoying our hospitality to the fullest,” what hospitality Clarke wanted to ask, “but I’m sure you’re aware that the food and water we give you is cutting back on our rations, and some of my crew members are not happy with it. They do all the work around here, and yet you seem to get the better deal out of it somehow.”

If he was implying that they were going to stop giving her food then she would accept it as cordially as she could. Clarke had gotten to know hunger quite well the past few weeks while sick abroad Good Fortune. That did nothing to scare her but the resentment the crew seemed to be already harboring towards her was disconcerting to put it lightly. The pirates might be loyal to their captain but she still couldn’t tell if they would go behind his back and take what they thought they were owed or not.

He continued, ignorant of her inner turmoil. “They wouldn’t mind getting something in return. Say, you wouldn’t have something of great value on you, would you?”

Clarke barely stopped herself in time from reaching for her throat where her necklace laid nestled under the high cut of her dress, carefully hidden under the folds as to not be visible at all.

The too casual way he mentioned valuables had her become suspicious at once. If she had any valuables, they would have been part of the cargo that his crew pilfered from Good Fortune, something that he was no doubt conscious of. Somehow, he knew about the delicate golden chain hanging from her neck, that was the only explanation for his seemingly random question.

It had been her father’s and she had no intention of surrendering it so easily, if at all.

“I don’t make a habit of having any valuables hidden on my persona in case I required them for an exchange.” Her cheeks hurt from smiling so politely but his calculating gaze had her insides twisting and turning, bubbling with apprehension that for all she knew was actual acid.

“Oh?” Blake said slowly, as if truly distraught by her answer, but they both saw it for the farce it was. “You wouldn’t happen to have some earrings on you, or maybe a necklace?”

The fucking soulless bastard.

“No,” Clarke lied in return, her jaw hurting from gritting her teeth so much.

His fingers tappened on the banister thoughtfully, his other hand reaching for the small dagger tucked into the front of his belt. “You see, Miss Clarke, here on The Arion we don’t like liars. It’s a bad habit to have.”

Despite the obvious threat she held still, refusing to let go of her father’s only memento willingly. But when he raised his hand, set on putting an end to this parade, she trembled and her fingers clenched the dirty skirt of her dress so tightly her knuckles went white from the pressure.

“Please, don’t.”

 Barely a whisper, her plea was swept by the ploughing ship but the small upturn of his lips let her know that he had heard her perfectly clear. She was a fool — she had showed him just how much she was dependant on her only treasure and there was no greater incentive for him to take it now.

“Please,” she begged again, biting her tongue until she tasted blood as his calloused fingers slipped under the collar of her dress in search for the necklace.
Clarke saw the moment his fingers caught on her chain, the perverse pleasure he got from depriving her from her only important thing in life lit his eyes from the inside, and she felt like she was staring right into the fires of Hell and couldn’t do a thing.

He pulled, albeit keeping his touch gentler than she thought him capable at this moment, and the chain went according to his wishes easily enough, lifting with it the small pocket watch attached to the end. His surprise was evident across his face — he knew about the necklace but not of the watch hanging from it.

Bile piled at the back of her throat and Clarke could only watch helplessly as Blake tugged the chain over her head, his fingers curling against the watch like they were old friends.

“Well, would you look at this. You did have something of great value under that dress after all.”

Clarke was deaf for the veiled taunt, uncaring about her pride, uncaring about anything really, aside from her father’s watch that shone brightly under the sunrays.

“Give it back.”

The captain didn’t even deem it necessary to look at her, so entranced he was by his newly seized treasure.

“I don’t think so, princess. You refuse to tell me your full name so I’m deprived from collecting a hefty price for your safe return, and you haven’t said a word about Marcus Kane either, despite the fact that my quartermaster has visited you several times already. If you don’t cooperate, then you’re of no use to me. This little thing,” he turned the golden watch in her direction, blinding her when the sun reflected off the shiny surface of the dial, “is the only reason why you’ve yet to be tossed overboard.”

Clarke’s head felt light and the next sway of the ship had her hanging onto the handrail for dear life. God, this was not possible. That watch was her life, she couldn’t lose it, not right now, not ever.

“Unless, of course, you have something else you’d like to trade for it?”

He tried to sound interested in her answer but his attention was solely focused on the watch and Clarke couldn’t blame him for that — the watch was made masterfully, an exquisite work of cogs and glass and gold, with a small black pearl at the center.

“I’d like to have it back now,” she insisted.

Blake’s laugh was deep and throaty, sounding harsh and unkind to her ears.

“That’s not how this works and we both know it.”

The flimsy corset of her dress felt too constricting and Clarke stepped away from him and his cruel intentions, just short of fainting right there, in front of everybody.

“Then get out of my sight,” she was proud of the venom in her voice, “unless you want me to cut that lying tongue right out of your mouth.”

He lifted an eyebrow, impressed by her spiel, before tipping her with his hat and making a show of turning around and leaving her behind on the deck.

Clarke’s breath rattled inside her lungs, every mouthful of air just another dagger in her heart,
every step of his away from her adding another nail to her coffin.

*Oh Wells, what have I done?*

Bellamy closed the door of his cabin behind him, pulling the latch after some thought. The golden watch sat at the palm of his hand, warmed by the sun and ticking softly, cogs turning in perfect synchrony.

Of all the things that could have been hanging from her chain, this one he had not foreseen at all. He turned the watch around, careful not to damage the delicate necklace, and brushed his thumb over the back cover.

*J. A. G.*

Was that her lover back home or somebody else?

It was plain as day that this watch meant a lot to his reluctant guest and not because of the metal it was made of. Bellamy traced the letters again as he sat in his chair, the wood creaking beneath him, a complaint that went unheeded.

She had refused to talk about England or the new Royal Governor — quite brave of her when one knew of her situation. (Or maybe foolish; the two were, after all, quite often mistaken for one another.) Then again, Bellamy had not wanted to push at all. Just thinking about Kane was enough to have the blood from his face drain, his hands shaking as he was thrown back in the memories of their second and last meeting. But they were going to reach Nassau at dawn and then he wouldn’t have a choice.

It would be them or her, and Bellamy knew what he was capable of doing to do to protect his sister and his people, the place they had carved lives out of.

Bellamy had tried to outrun his demons by leaving England behind.

But now it seemed that those same demons were on a hunt for his blood.

And that was something that he couldn’t allow.

Clarke closed her eyes, unwilling to watch the captain walk away from her, to walk away with *her* watch.

She waited until her stomach stopped rebelling, until she no longer felt like puking, until her angry tears were pushed back. Then she waited few more minutes, making sure that she could square her shoulders back and lift her chin, pushing back the grief and humiliation that had become her world
with few short sentences.

The pirates around her threw her not so subtle glances, probably thinking her pathetic for the weakness she had displayed mere minutes before. But Clarke had not survived her mother’s atrocious tea parties back in England by letting an unfortunate situation like this one be a major setback.

With the lack of her watch her plans would have to be altered, yes, but they were far from being an impossibility.

Calm once again, Clarke tucked a wayward curl behind her ear and fixed the collar of her dress, smoothing down the wrinkled skirt and casually brushing her fingers over the hidden vials, scissors and needles beneath the fabric.

For a second there Clarke had been afraid that he knew about the medical supplies too, but he had been bluffing, asking just to stress on the fact that she had nothing else to offer in return for her father’s watch.

But that was fine with her, she would bide her time and then she would take her watch back, even if it meant that she had to put a bullet between his eyes.

Nodding to herself, Clarke pushed back from the handrail and made her way below deck, the chains binding her legs jiggling loudly behind her.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews and kudos are greatly appreciated,

- M.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience and support, it means a great deal to me <3 Have a 5k update as my appreciation for your interest in this story! I hope you enjoy it because I'm just getting started with this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They docked easily enough, Raven more than familiar with these waters and the dangers they held for everyone that wanted to reach Nassau. She and Monty were an amazing duo — a boatswain and a sailingmaster that shared one mind — and The Arion took its place next to Scorned, their pirate flag winking joyfully at the bystanders.

Bellamy felt the tension that had sat in his shoulder for days now finally drain, leaving him haggard and beyond tired. The ship usually did a great job of lulling him to sleep but this time he had spent his nights restless, turning and tossing around, his few dreams turned nightmares with the appearance of Kane in them.

He took the first boat to the small harbor, leaving Miller to take care of their cargo, one blond vexing prisoner included.

Her watch sat inside the small pouch hanging from his neck and hidden under his shirt. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t included it in their cargo — it was going to fetch them a hefty prize and his crew would be more than happy — but the way she had looked at him, first with desperation and then with anger had him doubting what was best.

God, he needed to get away from that woman. She was nothing but one headache after another.

He was a captain for God’s sake, of The Arion no less, a pirate ship that he was proud to know was feared by the French and Spanish alike, a constant thorn in England’s side, capturing treasures that other crews could only dream of.

Yet, one word from her pink lips and he was torn apart by doubts and past regrets. He hadn’t forged a name for himself for doing what it took just to have her stir unwanted feelings in his heart, making him falter when it really mattered.

Bellamy scoffed and glared at The Arion over his shoulder where he saw her blond head traveling this way in the next boat. He had left her in Raven’s care; his boatswain wouldn’t stand for Clarke’s snub-nosed attitude and he needed somebody trustworthy who would make sure their prisoner didn’t end up with her throat slit before the night was over.

Shaking his head, Bellamy pushed the matter of the watch and its owner back into his mind, and let his legs take him to Jasper’s tavern; he could use a drink.

Or maybe two.

On the way there, Roma smiled at him from the front of Niylah’s house and he mentally added a note to save some coin for her bed afterwards. The release she would grant him would be more
than a welcomed distraction from his clusterfuck of a life.

As expected, his sister was at Jasper’s, nursing a glass of wine like it was water. Gina, their harbormaster, was sharing her table, as was Lincoln, his sister’s current beau and the only decent local carpenter. Bellamy frowned at Octavia’s closeness to her lover — she was perched upon his lap, but he wasn’t in the mood for an argument, so he pulled a chair from the closest table and drank straight from her glass.

“Bell!” Octavia’s yell nearly burst his eardrum, and for once he was grateful to Lincoln that he managed to hold his sister back until he had gulped down all the wine.

“You three usually only sit together when you’re planning something,” he said as a greeting and filled Octavia’s — now his — glass to the brim with more wine before swallowing that down as well.

Gina pulled the half-empty wine jug towards her when he went for it for a second time and met his scowl with a smile.

“I take it you didn’t have much luck with your latest run?”

Octavia leaned forward eagerly, her posture turning all businesslike despite the fact that she was using Lincoln as a chair.

“Something like that.” Bellamy swirled the last few drops of wine inside his glass and then tipped the glass over, watching it roll towards the center of the table dispassionately. “Good Fortune was a bust.”

Octavia exhaled loudly and Gina pressed her lips together, a little furrow appearing between her brows. Lincoln’s people, a substantial part of Nassau’s permanent residents, had been counting on those medical supplies, and all Miller and the rest had found was barely enough to clean and bandage a knife wound.

“We got some tobacco and brandy, some sugar too; selling them will be easy, the barrels are clean and I’m sure your contacts will get us a good price for them.” He nodded to Gina who hummed in agreement. “But there were none of those medical supplies you assured me of, O.”

“That’s impossible, my resources-”

“Your resources were wrong.”

She glared at him but didn’t deny it; after all, he was the living proof that things hadn’t gone the way she had foretold.

He winced when she pulled back from him and he let his hands rest on the surface of the table, tracing an old jagged line in the wood over and over again without even realizing it. “The ship’s crew was sick, Miller suspected yellow fever so we didn’t stick around for long. They might have used up all the supplies or we might have not looked for them hard enough. Either way, we haven’t brought anything of use.”

“We can always buy them,” Gina suggested with a soft voice.

“We no longer have time for that.” O cursed and Lincoln rubbed his palm over the knobs of her spine, trying to calm her down. His sister always had a short fuse on her temper. “Bell was supposed to steal those supplies because our treasury is running low and we couldn’t justify spending so much funds when not all the captains were in agreement.”
“The price of the sugar went up two weeks ago; just selling that will allow us to buy enough opiates and hiera picra to last us for a long while.”

“Yes? And how long will that takes us? Another nine or ten days? Indra doesn’t have that long!”
By the end Octavia was screaming and the other patrons were giving them curious looks.

“Calm yourself, O,” Bellamy hissed and met her venomous look with a glare of his own. “Yes, the circumstances are far from ideal but we’ll make do, like we always do.”

She wasn’t placated but she nodded.

“Besides,” Bellamy continued once she had settled down, “that might end up being the least of our worries.”

Gina took a sip of her own glass. “Do tell.”

“There was a prisoner aboard Good Fortune. An aristocrat by the looks of it. She was sick like the rest of the crewmembers, but she had some interesting information to share.” He stopped drumming his fingers against the tabletop when Gina’s hand covered his; he thought he had gotten rid of that nervous tick years ago. “Apparently, Earl Griffin is dead and the Bahamas have a new Acting Royal Governor. Marcus Kane.”

Octavia gasped and Gina pulled back as if he had slapped her. Lincoln was the only one completely unfazed by the revelation.

But the ship maker caught on the tension running through the group and leaned forward, his arms tightening around Octavia’s waist. “Who is Marcus Kane?”

“He’s--”

Bellamy smoothed his hands down his uniform coat, making sure that there were no wrinkles in sight, his cutlass dangling from his belt and brushing his breeches with every step he took.

He wasn’t nervous; or, at least, he tried to convince himself of that.

This was going to be his first official sailing as a Navy man and as his luck had it, it had to be under the notorious Marcus Kane, one of the best Captains the British Navy had. If rumours had it right, he was also soon to be granted the rank of Commodore.

His mother had laughed herself silly when he had received his assignment letter, assuring him that Captain Kane wasn’t as scary as the tales had made him, but Bellamy wasn’t so easily convinced. Besides, a healthy dose of fear and respect would help him keep his tongue in check.

The man-o’-war was still docked, waiting for its captain, and Bellamy had few more moments to get acquainted with the ship. He had trained on smaller square-riggers before, but the man-o’-war was by far the biggest ship he had the pleasure of seeing. Thirty guns on the upper deck alone, with an additional two rows on the middle and lower deck respectively, the three masts making it possible for Reverence to compete against the smaller and lighter ships despite its heavier build.
The ship was a piece of art and Bellamy nearly had a meltdown when he was allowed to board it. And now, he would get to serve on it, under a captain that represented the best traits nurtured by the Royal Navy.

This was what dreams were made of.

The sharp cry of “Captain on deck!” had him straightening his back, hands by his sides, chin up and looking forward. With his peripheral vision he saw Marcus Kane climbing aboard the Reverence.

This was Bellamy’s first time seeing the man — just shy of forty years of age, tall and broad-shouldered, Kane was clean shaven, his face blank and stern-looking, his uniform pressed and his boots shining. He cut an impressive figure, intimidating even, and Bellamy wasn’t looking forward to being faced with his reproval.

As if he had heard him, Kane did a quick sweep of the deck and did a double-take when he noticed him.

Bellamy froze but kept his posture ramrod straight, despite the fact that his knees were on the verge of shaking. This was his first time seeing the man, it was impossible for him to be in trouble!

That, however, didn’t stop Kane from approaching him, his calculating gaze sweeping over Bellamy’s form, once, then twice.

“Officer.” Kane’s voice exuded power. “You wouldn’t happen to be Lady Aurora’s son, would you?”

Blinking owlishly at him, and feeling like a complete fool, Bellamy could only nod. “Yes, sir.”

“I wasn’t aware that she was back in England.”

“We arrived a few months ago, sir. For my draft in the Royal Navy.”

Kane clasped his hands together, his smile wide but lacking any warmth. If anything, the captain looked like he had smelled something unpleasant. “A fine choice, indeed.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The sailors around them were already racing up the ropes, readying the ship for sailing.

“I look forward to working with you, Officer. And send my regards to your mother if you will.”

“Of course, sir, thank you, sir.”

That said, Kane left him behind, no doubt already forgetting about their conversation, and Bellamy breathed a sigh of relief, his heart rising from where it had sunk into his heels.

Throughout the two week journey, that was the only time Bellamy actually saw the captain from up close. Bellamy was convinced that it was not a mere coincidence.

Something, that later on, he was immensely glad for.
Clarke stepped on the pier, grateful that the ground beneath her feet stood firm for the first time in weeks. If it depended on her, she wouldn’t be sailing any time soon; she didn’t mind the sea in as much as she just preferred feeling packed soil under her boots.

Raven, her guard of the day, grabbed her by the elbow and pulled her along, the two of them moving with surprising speed despite Raven’s limp and the use of her cane. Clarke suspected a gunshot to the thigh or even a torn tendon somewhere around the knee area that had led to her left leg not being fully operational. Either way, the boatswain hadn’t deigned to satisfy her curiosity on that matter, despite the fact that Raven had caught her looking at her hurt leg several times since Clarke had boarded their ship.

The most Raven had done when faced with Clarke’s not so subtle glances, was to lift her left eyebrow in question, her face set in harsh lines, daring her to go ahead and ask and get bitten in return.

Clarke liked all her body parts intact, thank you very much, so she had refrained from breaching that subject no matter how much the scholar in her itched for some answers.

“Stay close,” Raven said, her fingers like vice around Clarke’s arm. “Keep your head down and your mouth shut or you’ll find out that not everyone on this island is as gracious as our captain.”

“You call taking somebody a prisoner being gracious?”

“We’re pirates, Miss Clarke. You better get used to that, and fast, because it doesn’t seem like you’ll be going anywhere any time soon.”

Clarke contemplated digging her feet into the ground and making a scene, but these people were Raven’s people, Blake’s people, and while there might be somebody who would gladly stab them in the back, Clarke had yet to begin her search for them. In the meantime, giving the rest of them something more than a fleeting impression was not fitting her description of being discreet. The less people knew her, knew of her, the better.

“Where to then?” She met Raven’s suspicion with a shrug. “It’s not like I know where to run, not yet at least.”

To her surprise, Raven laughed at that and her grip relaxed. “To think I would have liked you if things had been different.”

“What is stopping you from liking me now?”

“For starters, that dress of yours.”

Clarke looked down at herself — her dress was unrecognizable, dirty and torn, once a sunny yellow color that now barely passed for a brown. Captain Blake — Bellamy, as Raven had called him — had refused to let her change into one of her other dresses, or in any other clothes for that matter. Something about how he could sell them and that she would end up dirtying the others too; Clarke hadn’t been listening if she had to be completely honest, too busy refraining from slapping his smug smile off his face.

Just thinking about it was enough to bring back her bad mood.

“I admit that it needs some washing but blame your captain, he’s the one that refused to let me have a change of clothes.”
“Oh, he did you a favor all right.”

Clarke stumbled, her mind suddenly thrown in disarray and Raven winced when she had to take all of her weight for a moment.

“You can’t possibly believe that!”

“I do, and if you don’t see it then you’re stupider than I thought you were.”

Clarke couldn’t decided what she was more offended by — the fact that Raven did find her stupid or that Bellamy had acted in her defense. But she didn’t want to aggravate the possibly only semi-friendly face in this godforsaken place so she settled for patting Raven on the hand.

“If you say so.”

“I do, you should listen to me. I’m a genius.”

“You most definitely are,” Monty piped up from behind them, having caught up to them while the two were slowly making their way towards the tavern. “And whatever she tells you,” here he threw his arm around Raven’s shoulders, “is most definitely the truth.”

“Green, with that sweet tongue of yours it’s no wonder Niylah’s girls fall over themselves to have you for the night.”

The sailingmaster smiled cheekily and ran ahead, deftly sidestepping the heavy end of Raven’s cane that had been aimed at his feet.

“Men,” Raven shook her head, “always putting their energy into things that don’t matter.”

Clarke caught herself grinning, agreeing with Raven’s statement, and she tried rather unsuccessfully to scowl her features into something more befitting a person of her situation. Alas, her poor attempt only made Raven roll her eyes.

“A little laughter won’t kill you, you know.”

At that, Clarke smiled and entered the tavern when Raven shooed her in. Blake was sitting in the center, his table full of people Clarke didn’t know, his head thrown back in laughter and Clarke felt sweat trickle down her temple and join the perspiration gathered at the hollow of her neck.

“You know, it just might,” she mumbled in reply.

“Gina, the cargo is traveling for your shack. You might want to head that way soon lest Harper ends up miscalculating something again.” Raven’s dry tone belied her warm welcome as she hugging the harbormaster one-handedly, affection noticeable in the subtle way she squeezed her a bit too tightly, their embrace lasting longer than a simple greeting between friends often times did.

Bellamy’s mood soured at once — just for a moment he had forgotten about the sword hanging over their heads, but Clarke’s presence behind his back was more than enough to bring him back to the real world.
Octavia tilted her head to the side, trying to catch a glimpse of the newcomer and Bellamy closed up, hating how the blonde was making him go on defence without having spoken one word.

Back to business then.

“Was she any trouble?” he addressed Raven, taking notice at the way Clarke bristled at being spoken about as if she was not there. Good, she had looked way too composed for a prisoner.

“The day I can’t handle something you’ve thrown my way is the day that you fail at sailing, Blake, and we all know you can sail blind and deaf if it comes down to it, unwilling to cut ties with your sea.”

“You can make fun of my elusive mistress all you want, Raven, but don’t forget that I’ve heard you talk to your little creations as if they’re alive.”

“Those little creations as you call them have saved your life numerous times.”

“You won’t hear me objecting, but they’re still bizarre.”

“Your face is bizarre if I dare say so myself.”

“I remember you enjoying my face quite thoroughly.”

Raven narrowed her eyes and Bellamy grinned a mouth full of teeth — their past tryst was a sore subject between the two of them ever since it happened. They both hated talking about it yet they both used it to antagonize the other when they were trying to prove a point.

Gina shot him a disapproving look and entwined her fingers with Raven’s, tugging the other woman’s hand away from the death grip she had on her cane. “I believe we’ve heard this conversation enough times to know how it unfolds, so, instead, why don’t you introduce us to your new companion, Bellamy?”

Bellamy’s face resembled a thunderstorm in a bottle, with the glass ready to burst at the gentlest waft of a breeze. “The disheveled lady behind me goes by the name of Clarke.” Nobody on the table seemed impressed by his childish pettiness and he sighed, tuning his head in a circle until he heard his spine crack; the young woman might have brought him unfortunate news and she was quite infuriating, but that still didn’t excuse him for acting like a right bastard to her.

Though right now he wished it did.

“She’ll tell us more about Kane and the current situation in England.”

Clarke stepped forward, her hands deceptively calm by her sides. “I wasn’t informed of that.”

“Now you are.”

“My, you pirates sure are a surly lot.”

Bellamy ruffled his hair and kicked out one of the empty chairs that he had added to their table early on for this specific reason. “Sit down, Clarke, and start talking.”

“Or what?”

Exasperated and annoyed by her constant refusal, Bellamy untied the cord from around his neck and let the little duffle bag fall on the table. The watch ticked softly in the followed silence, and Clarke’s eyes widened as she involuntarily came a step closer.
“You still have it.”

“I can assure you that it’s not out of sentimentality, but as a safeguard for your good behaviour. The moment you do something that I don’t like, talk to people I don’t approve of, the second I suspect that you’re not being truthful with me — then it will be the very last time you lay your eyes on this.” He rapped his knuckles across the back of the watch, the cloth in between softening the otherwise hard knock.

Her cheeks bloomed red with her anger, her eyes lighting up from within and for the time it took him to blink, Bellamy had the feeling that he was staring at the heart of the sea. He had to commend her for her self-control — she did not slap him like he expected her to do, maybe had even looked forward to seeing her try.

“I’m no one’s property, Captain Blake, you might want to write that down somewhere. Of course, if you can’t write I can always do that for you though I can’t promise that I won’t make a small addition to it about what a wretched man you are.”

Lincoln coughed to cover up his chuckle, jostling Octavia in the process, whose calculating gaze was solely trained on her brother’s face, catching even the miniscule ticks in her brother’s jawline. Well, well, would you look at that. She couldn’t recall the last time her brother had been so riled up over something so trivial. Bellamy had shared how their initial meeting had gone but maybe he hadn’t been fully truthful; or, maybe, he hadn’t been truthful with himself.

No matter, they had bigger concerns right now.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” he stood up, nearly a head taller than her petite form, “but it’s probably this same attitude that got you chained on that merchant ship, no?”

She lifted an eyebrow at his poor intimidation tactic and sat down in the offered chair, tucking her ankles under the seat with an elegant move meant to peeve him more than anything else.

“What I did to end up in the state you found me is none of your concern. And seeing how you’ve also taken me against my will, I don’t understand how you expect me to agree to help you with whatever it is that you pirates want my knowledge for.”

“For starters,” Octavia drawled out, “we won’t kill you.”

Clarke pushed her braid over her shoulder, adjusting the neckline of her dress. “There are things worse than death.”

That, Bellamy thought, was something they could definitely agree on.

Monty, who had gone for more wine, finally came back with two more jugs and sat them on the table, spilling some much to Gina’s displeasure.

The harbormaster dabbed away at some of the wine that had managed to stain her corset and rose from her chair, pushing Raven to sit in it insistently when the younger woman tried to protest.

“I’ll take that as a sign for me to get back to work. Let me know what this--” here she struggled for words, “ragtag squad comes to agree upon.” The last she directed to Raven, and with a final wave she made her way out, grinning as her friends vehemently revolted against her comparison.
Clarke observed the group of — dare she say it — *friends* with a detached sort of feeling, Gina’s comparison ringing softly in her mind; they really were a ragtag bunch; misfits and rejects, criminals, unfit for the social norms their world tried to impose upon them, struggling to make a place for themselves out of a barren piece of land.

She didn’t belong among them, nor their world. And not at all because they were pirates and she was what they considered easy prey.

But her life depended on them, on their *whims*, and for now, she would follow their lead, hoarding resources and information until she had figured out a way out of this disaster.

Keeping that close to her heart, Clarke folded her hands in her lap and met Blake’s heavy stare. “What is it that you’d like me to tell you exactly?”

Her pulse was galloping through her veins, visible under the thin skin on her neck where her muscles were still recovering from her sick says, the arteries and veins underneath a stark contrast against her still ashy skin.

She didn’t like talking about Kane, but her father’s watch was tempting her from the table and she was too weak to resist its pull.

“All right. Everything.”

“Everything is a broad concept. Kane comes from a long standing aristocrat family in England. He studied at the—”

“Not that.” Bellamy leaned his forearms against the table, face set in harsh lines. “Tell me how he got Earl Griffin’s position. Why him and not Lady Sydney’s husband? Why was Earl Griffin killed in the first place? And what does Kane plan on doing with us, with the Bahamas as a whole?”

“He wants to eradicate you, of course,” she stated coolly, hiding her displeasure at his brisk demand under a blank mask. “You pirates are a disgrace to England’s ideals and inheritance, and most of all, you’re a weakness England still hasn’t been able to overcome. It makes the King look weak and that’s not something the British Empire can afford right now.”

She reached for the wine jug and poured herself a whole glass, sipping just enough to sate the sudden dryness in her throat.

“All right. Kane has been appointed as the Bahama’s Royal Governor by the King himself. His orders are rather simple when you think about it — make sure that the pirates are no longer a threat by any means necessary.”

“And Earl Griffin?”

Bellamy’s sister, Clarke had heard Blake refer to the dark-haired woman that way, tucked a stray lock of hair back into her elaborate hairdo, the dagger on her left hip drawing Clarke’s attention to the myriad of knives she was carrying on her person. One to look out for then, especially if she knew how to use them.

“All right. Kane has been appointed as the Bahama’s Royal Governor by the King himself. His orders are rather simple when you think about it — make sure that the pirates are no longer a threat by any means necessary.”

“His passionate defense of those who had decided to become pirates, for one reason or another, and his work on making Nassau and New Providence self-governed British colonies led some
people to believe that he had too much of a personal interest in the whole ordeal. He was put to trial and found guilty for treason against the King and His laws.

“He was sentenced to exile but he refused and tried to lodge an appeal, expecting to be supported by those who had lent him a hand in the past.” Her words sounded hollow to her own ears. Her whole energy was put forward to keeping her voice steady, emotionless, the topic too close to her grief for her comfort. The wound in her heart too fresh for her to talk about this unflinchingly. Yet, she managed to keep her eyes dry, the covered watch the only thing she could focus on.

“Unfortunately for him, he had lost the King’s favour and his appeal was seen as an insult. He was executed the very same day and soon after Kane was announced as the Bahamas’ Governor, with a substantial number of ships under his command.”

Monty’s usual cheery mood had evaporated the more she had talked, and now, Clarke couldn’t recognize the carefree sailingmaster that had tried to tell her dirty jokes while they were on The Arion. “The ships, what type are they? Numbers?”

Clarke shook her head. “That I do not know.” She wasn’t lying but she wasn’t telling the truth either — she had seen most of the ships docked in the harbour when she had made her escape, and she had a good idea which ones were there for Kane.

“Then guess.” She had to give it to Blake, he had an uncanny ability to know when there was more to something than the eye could see.

“Maybe five or six, maybe even ten. My knowledge of ships is non-existent and I can’t make an educated guess as to how many there are in reality.”

Blake cursed, his features set in a frown, his dark unruly curls falling into his eyes and making him seem attractive, in that roguish way authoritative passionate figures could easily achieve. Clarke had always been appreciative of strength of character and Captain Bellamy Blake definitely fit in that category, with his outer appearance as well as with his inner qualities, much to Clarke’s irritation.

She didn’t want to find him attractive, but she did and that peeved her to the point that she was ready to see him ruined only if so that she could get over her unwanted fascination with his person.

“When can we expect them?”

“Earl Griffin died two- no, three weeks ago.” Clarke frowned, unsettled at how fast the time had went. “Commodore Kane most likely left soon after that.”

“Which means that he could be here at any point in the next week.” Octavia tusked and got up, and for the first time Clarke noticed that she wore britches instead of a skirt, just like Raven did. Social norms really did not mean much here. “We’ll need to have a meeting with the other captains. If Kane is coming for us, we need to do something about it.”

“What do you have in mind?” Lincoln craned his neck back to look at her, his calm demeanour the only thing keeping Octavia from going off completely.

“We need to fight back, of course.”

Clarke snorted unlady-like and took another gulp of her wine. “Good luck with that,” she said, oblivious to the intense calculating look Blake was observing her with.

Unbeknownst to her, her role in this pirate war had only just begun.
Reviews and kudos are greatly appreciated,

- M.
Clarke had to give it to Blake — there had been some thought behind his actions after all.

Looking at herself in the smudged mirror she could see what Raven had meant when she had insisted that there was a reason to Blake’s lousy refusal to let her change her dirty clothes.

The dress she was wearing right now — pale pink in colour, with dark blue trim on the corset — was in good condition, clearly well-kept and of decent quality, but nothing about it stood out. In comparison, her old dress, despite its unkempt look and overall sorry state, hinted of wealth and of a standing far beyond that of a normal citizen. She could only imagine the stares and reactions she would have gotten if she had dressed in one of her cleaner ones, the whispers that would have spread among pirates, thieves and prostitutes alike. From what little she had the chance to observe over the last four days, gold here was scarce despite the piracy they all took part of, and greed was a dangerous thing when wielded by the desperate.

There was no doubt in her mind that the attention she would have gathered wouldn’t have been enough to persuade people to stay away from her despite the fact that she was considered to be under Blake’s protection. (Something that she had found out about just this morning and that had made her hurl a cup after Blake’s retreating back, much to his delight.)

She touched her reflection, noticing the subtle changes since the last time she had a chance to look at a mirror. She had lost some weight leaving her face looking worn and tired; there were dark circles under her blue eyes and her hair had lost its luster, days out in the sea and under the sun making it brittle and dry. At least her skin was returning its healthy glow, but days of frequent food and fresh water tended to do that.

Her stomach still rebelled against most foods, throwing up anything that was too heavy on the seasoning or on the fat, but other than that Clarke was starting to look like she did before catching that blasted fever. Except for her eyes — they were still as dead and lost as the day she had witnessed her father’s last struggle for air.

Maybe she should have helped her mother with the sudden ostracization they were faced with after her father was accused of treason. Maybe she could have used the tragedy as a way to broaden her connections, solidify her engagement and enter the court to try and win the King’s favour back. Maybe, maybe, maybe. Clarke didn’t like thinking about maybes and what ifs. Lost opportunities, as Lexa would say.

But she didn’t want to think about Lexa either.

Clarke scratched her nails down the mirror’s surface, letting the chilling sound and the pain in her nail beds bring her back to the present.

“I do believe that my mirror has done nothing to deserve that treatment.” The soft lilt of Niylah’s voice sounded from the door and Clarke guiltily dropped her hand, flashing her a sheepish smile.

Niylah was the owner of the brothel that shared the street with the small house Clarke was currently living in. Often addressed as Madame by the other girls despite the fact that their age gap didn’t seem that big, Niylah had accepted Blake’s offer to have Clarke live in her house with little
to no fuss. Clarke had sensed a shared history between the two of them but no amount of snooping around had provided the much desired insight.

“I’m sorry, I was lost in thought.”

Niylah crossed the few steps to the small bed and dropped few fresh linens onto the straw mattress.

“I’ve found that sharing what weighs heavily on your mind can be quite freeing.”

“Does that line work with your clientele?”

Niylah froze from where she was tucking the linens underneath the mattress and Clarke grimaced, regretting her sharp derisive tone.

“I’m sorry, I did not meant to-”

“To imply that I spread my legs for coins? Why? It’s what most of the girls here do.” Her hands deftly folded the white sheet on top of the blanket and shook away the wrinkles from the pillow case before putting it on. “You’ll be residing across from a pleasure house, Miss Clarke, and if you plan on staying sane in this little hovel, you better get used to it quickly.”

Clarke licked her lips, choosing her words with care. “It’s your body, your choice; but you shouldn’t feel obligated to pleasure men in exchange for basic living necessities.”

“Obligated? God no,” her laughter was light, as if Clarke had entertained her greatly. “Every girl in my house is here voluntarily. You probably won’t take me for my word, but we sign an agreement when they first express a wish to work for me. The coins they bring in the house for the first two years come to me to pay for their accommodations and food and clothes, as well as for safekeeping. I set some of those coins aside, a fund that they’re free to cash in when the two years are up and they want to buy something expensive or even get away from this island.

“You would be surprised at how many girls choose to stay. Despite your reservations about it, it is good money, and we’re treated well.”

“Are you really?

Niylah made Clarke sit on the bench in front of the mirror and started twisting her hair in a french braid, letting small pieces frame her face.

“Yes, we are. I admit that this has not always been the case — men tend to take and take and take, as if we’re objects created to sate their lust, their gluttony and sin, desired and scorned for making them want us just by breathing. But when Captain Blake came and started making Nassau the port you see before your eyes, he came to me and offered me a business deal — the information my girls collect for his patronage; his and the exiled one’s that is. And these might be lawless men that roam Nassau day and night, but even they fear the repercussions from crossing the infamous captains of The Arion and The Silent Wrath combined.”

“The Silent Wrath?”

With few final tugs, Niylah tied off the braid with a cream coloured ribbon. “That’s Captain Roan’s ship. When you see it coming for you, you’re better off running, mark my words.”

“I’ve never heard of him.”

“He prefers to terrorize the Spanish ships from what I’ve heard, something about a personal grudge
if the rumours hold any truth.”

Intriguing but not vital information for her future plans.

“Why do you stay here? Why do you live like this?”

“As you noted, it is my choice and this is the life I picked for myself. My father died young and foolish, leaving my mother and I with a debt we couldn’t possibly return. When I got tired of the stares and the pity, of the lashes across my back, I gathered what little money we had and bought my mother and I a ticket to America. We never made it; instead, we ended up here. It’s all I’ve known since then, all I’ve loved. You can say that I don’t know how to live otherwise and I’m fine with that.”

“Truly? You don’t wish for a different life?”

“No,” Niylah helped her stand and took her chin in her hand, turning her head first to the left then to the right, nodding approvingly once she passed the inspection. “Why, do you dream of another life?”

Clarke gazed at her reflection, her hand poised over her braid afraid to touch it and ruin Niylah’s work.

“Sometimes,” she said, her whisper lost in the morning bustle coming through the open window.

“How sure are you that what she’s telling us is the truth?”

“O, please don’t start again.”

Octavia circled around Bellamy’s bed, shoving his sheets away to perch next to him, unperturbed by his disgruntled look and unhappy face at having been woken up so early.

“I am starting this again. She has been here for four days and our alliances with the other captains are already getting shaky.”

“They’re fools refusing to see what’s before them. The last few cargos each of them has brought in have been lesser and lesser than the ones before that, the sea lacking in the merchant ships and galleons that usually populate it at this time of the year.”

“We’ve been rather persistent lately, they’ve probably just changed their courses.”

Bellamy flopped back on his bed, his hair sticking in all directions and making Octavia hide a smile at the picture he made; at times like this, she expected their mother to come knocking on the door, only to scold Bellamy for indulging in her wishes and letting her share his bed at night when Octavia’s nightmares refused to let her sleep all by herself in the dark.

But she wasn’t six anymore and it had been years since the dark stopped being her biggest fear.

“Do you believe that or are you saying it for the sake of the argument?”
She huffed and unbuckled her belt, letting it lay on the ground, her knives dangling from it almost innocently. She nudged his shoulder and stole his pillow to his annoyance before laying next to him and focusing on the cracks in the mortar above the bed.

“Somebody has to. You haven’t been yourself ever since you learned about Kane’s possible elevation to a Royal Governor.”

Bellamy shrugged, his shoulder jostling her and she pushed back just to hear him grumble and complain half-heartedly. Her brother was never one for early mornings and Octavia liked to remind him of it every chance she got, and only partially because she liked to think of it as payback for all the times he had laughed when their mother had tried to teach her how to dance. The other reason, the one she had never confided in him let alone anybody else, was that mornings like this made him softer, more approachable, more like the silly loving brother she grew up with and less like the fearless pirate captain that everybody trembled before.

They all wore different masks, kept different secrets, but in the rare moments like this she liked to pretend that there was nothing the other didn’t know. A child’s dream even between siblings.

“I believe her, you know. I don’t want to but I do. Maybe it’s the way she talks,” Octavia said softly, turning to look at his face, noting the worry wrinkles that had gathered around his eyes and mouth, “she reminds me of you.”

“God,” he shuddered and got up, pulling the sheets with him to preserve some of his modesty; he had slept naked, the moist warm air too much to keep his underclothes on, “refrain from saying things like that. I have nothing in common with that irksome woman.”

Octavia turned away when he started dressing, gotten used to his stubborn nature long time ago. She let him have it his way this time and changed the subject.

“Murphy still refuses to take us for our word and he’s starting to gather support amongst the smaller pirate crews. It will be a problem if it continues on like that, especially with Roan still at sea.”

“Murphy is a fucking bastard. He refuses to dedicate himself to guarding the harbor just to spite me. I should have put a bullet in his head when I had the chance.”

You should have, she thinks, but murder in cold blood has never been your thing.

“Find a way to deal with him. We can’t afford to lose more standing in Nassau, not with Indra still in the state she’s in — if she ends up dying, there’s no reason for Anya to have our backs.”

That seemed to sober him up faster that the cold water he had splashed on his face.

“How’s Indra doing?”

“She’s getting worse. Her wound is infected and Nyko barely manages to keep it from spreading further.”

Bellamy crossed the room and laid his warm hand on her knee. “I’m sorry, O.”

“I know,” she smiled and sat up, looking at her dusty boots, “I know.”
“Care to repeat that?” Blake’s skeptical tone grated on her nerves and Clarke had to count to ten inside her head before she felt like she had control over her welling up indignation.

“You heard me the first time. I’ve been behaving well, listening to your every word and answering all your questions.” He scoffed at that and she smiled cordially. “I’d like my watch back now.”

“No, I don’t think so.”

Clarke wanted to throttle him; smashing his wine glass on top of his perfect curls also sounded tempting.

“You said—”

“I remember perfectly well what I’ve said, Miss Clarke. Now sit down, I’ve reached a rather interesting part of my book and I’d hate to have to put it away.”

“Is that a threat?”

He unfolded his legs from where they had been resting atop one of the tables inside Jasper’s tavern and put his book down with more force than needed, almost overturning his dish.

“If it was a threat you wouldn’t be asking me this. Now please, would you honor me with your presence this fine morning so that I can get back to my breakfast?”

Sensing a losing battle, Clarke pulled out a chair and sat down, throwing a cursory glance to the book cover to her right — *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Interesting choice of reading matter.

She watched him eat for few minutes, uncaring that her staring could be considered quite impolite. When she judged him to be nearly over with his breakfast, she tugged his book closer to her and opened it at a random page.

His hand holding his fork froze halfway to his mouth. My, he made a fetching picture gaping at her like that.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

She turned the next page, reading the words but not really immersing herself into the play’s plot.

“I’m not allowed to leave this tavern unless it’s with somebody of your little pirate circle. I’m not allowed to talk with anybody that is not you, your sister, your boatswain or Niylah. I’m not allowed to do anything that doesn’t include you asking me to answer the same questions again and again and again until we’re readying to tear at each other. I’m rather bored if you will, staring at walls can be so unbelievably dull.”

His eyebrows went up and he washed down the next bite of food with more wine.

“I fail to see how this is less preferable than the dungeon cell in the tower.”

Yes, Clarke remembered that discussion rather vividly. After they were done grilling her for information the first night, the matter of what they would do with her had come up. To say that his sister had argued strongly to put her in a cell would be an understatement. But Raven had taken
Blake’s side, citing that if they threw her in the old tower, she would gather more attention as to why she was there in the first place than if she was staying in plain sight.

Clarke, of course, had no choice in the matter either way, but she did appreciate Raven’s solid logic. Blake’s pragmatism, however, wasn’t high on her list of things she was grateful for. If she overstepped a line there was no saying what he would do; what was best for him hadn’t always coincided with what was best for her.

“I can’t just sit in one place all day and do absolutely nothing!”

“I don’t see how that is any different from what you’ve done in the past, or is it the tea parties that you miss so much?”

There he went again, trying to dig around her past, set on finding out who she really was. He hadn’t had much luck the past few times, somewhat thanks to Clarke’s refusal to return home and thus her intrepid stance when it came to death. It put them in a limbo of sorts — he didn’t know how to push to make her spill her secrets since she didn’t seem fazed by violence, and she was unsuccessful so far in her attempts to convince him that she was of no use to him any longer and that he should let her leave this place.

“Surely you can understand how maddening it is to feel like you’re wasting your life away?”

“I don’t give a fuck about your life, Clarke.” His crudeness didn’t surprise her as much as his lack of proper address did — he had forgone using miss when he spoke to her for the second time now.

Even Lexa hadn’t dared address her so lovingly, and Lord Collins, her fiance, had always called her Miss Griffin. Clarke detested how Blake had ruined that for her now — she didn’t think she could handle being called by her given name by another lover without remembering his dark face, his freckles nurtured by the sun, his scent of sea and gunpowder.

Captain Blake was becoming a permanent feature in her life, albeit an undesired one, and she didn’t like it one bit.

He pushed his plate away and stood up; she always forgot that he was taller than her, enough to make her crane her neck upwards to look at him comfortably.

“If you’re eager to work so much I’m sure you can find a place at Niylah’s — her girls would be happy to take a break.”

Clarke gawked at him, refusing to believe what she had just heard. But before she could regroup and put her thoughts in order, he had picked up his cutlass from where he had propped it against the table and left without a backward glance.

Jasper whistled behind her.

“You know, I’ve never met a person that can set him off so fast.”

“Did you hear what he said?”

Jasper laughed and picked up Blake’s dish, wiping down the table with a cloth that had seen better times.

“I did.”

Clarke worried her lower lip with her teeth, accidentally biting in too hard and wincing when she...
tasted blood.

“Would he really have me working at Niylah’s?”

“Oh, he would, if only to prove his point.” Jasper gulped down the leftover wine and headed back to his bar. “And then he will spend all his time sitting in the brothel, glaring at anybody who as much as looks at you.”

She gritted her teeth, the iron taste in her mouth fueling her anger. God, she couldn’t remember the last time her feelings had been all over the place like this because of somebody. Her interactions with Blake led mostly to rage and annoyance, frustration and hopelessness at times. But it was his actions that confused her — where his words were cold and biting, he was shockingly thoughtful in comparison and there was always a rational explanation for his otherwise random and harsh decisions.

If you’d ask her, Blake took his *who we are and who we need to be* motto too close to the heart. It left her perturbed and she felt naked when off balance.

Jasper started washing the dishes behind her back and Clarke curled her fingers around Blake’s book; he had forgotten it in his haste to get away.

She hadn’t been able to change his mind about her current house-arrest, but she did notice something very important — the cord around his neck was missing. Which meant that her father’s watch was lying somewhere away from his reach.

And Clarke intended to find it.

__________________________________________________________________________

Clarke glanced quickly over her shoulder, making sure that she had stayed unnoticed in the dark crook right across from Blake’s room.

It hadn’t been hard to convince her reluctant guard, Atom, to walk her to the Blakes current residence — it had been noticeable from the first time she had seen him look at Octavia that the poor boy had a crush on the captain’s sister. And he was more than eager to find a reason to see her, even one as superficial as the lie Clarke had clearly told him.

But that didn’t matter now. He was searching the lower level of the building, looking for Octavia and Clarke had crept behind his back, climbing the stairs with urgency, her heart almost giving out on her when she mistook Blake’s black coat for his actual shadow.

Fortunately for her, Blake was still inside Gina’s study — not that she could call in good conscious the shabby but spacious room in Jasper’s tavern a *study* — along with his sister and the other pirate captains, trying to convince them that they should lend him their ships to defend Nassau from the Royal Navy. From the little eavesdropping Clarke had done, she was convinced that those talks had a long way to go before reaching some middle ground.

Which left her with ample time to go through his room and look for the velvet pouch containing her father’s watch. She hadn’t yet figured what she would do once she found it but one step at a time seemed like a good strategy. For now anyway.
Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. The line from the play flickered through her head, making her feel nervous, her hands shaking with trepidation.

God, she didn’t want to think what would happen to her if Blake, or somebody else for that matter, found her rummaging about his room. The more time she wasted, the more likely that was to become a reality, so Clarke stilled her shaking and pulled the lever, surprised to feel the door opening under her touch.

She didn’t know if luck was on her side that Blake had clearly forgotten to lock his room, or if it was his arrogance that made him keep his belongings accessible to every curious soul on this island, but she wasn’t going to complain. Frankly, picking locks had always been more Wells’ thing than hers, something that her father had always refused to believe; Wells did pull off the innocent face better than she did, and she was glad that she wouldn’t have to break her only pick to try and circumvent the problem.

The room was bigger than the one she had at Niylah’s house, brighter and airier too. Two of the walls were mostly windows with the bed pushed against one of the remaining two, tucked behind the changing screen separating the small tub from the rest of the room. There was a wooden chest right next to the door and Clarke started there, pushing knick-knacks and clothes aside, her fingers catching on splinters from the worn wood and not caring at all. The books she found in the chest she searched through thoroughly, hoping that one of them had a secret compartment, and when that bore no fruit, she started knocking along the inner walls of the chest, listening for an echo that shouldn’t have been there.

She was desperate the find the watch. Maybe that was why she hadn’t noticed that she could no longer hear Atom from the floor below. A mistake on her part, one that cost her greatly.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

She yelped and tripped over the hem of her dress, landing on her ass and bruising her right palm when she braced her hands against the fall.

Blake was standing in the doorway, his face twisted with his fury.

Bellamy wasn’t sure what to feel about her, watching her scramble to the other end of the room, clutching a hand against her chest, her ribs expanding with her panic-induced exhales. He had clearly startled her and judging by her wide eyes she hadn’t expected to bump into him of all people.

His nails dug crescent moons into the skin of his palms. He had to give it to her — she had timed her entry perfectly, and if it wasn’t for his intuition tugging insistently at his navel, he would have never caught her in the act. He had expected her to try and go for it though, he had been watching her closely the past few days, surprised at first, then impressed when she didn't try to steal the watch back from him right from the start. Instead, he observed how she adapted to her surroundings, altering her responses when needed, keeping her mouth shut when she clearly had something to say, hiding her thoughts under a disgruntled spoiled mask.
But the memory of their first meeting still shone brightly behind his eyelids every time he headed for bed. Even now he could see the broken dagger blade stuck inside the wooden beam, her raw wrists and the look she had given him when he had offered her water — as if she was daring him to do her worse.

A woman like Clarke did not sit quietly when taken against her will, let alone for a second time.

Bellamy had braced himself for the eventuality of this, but he was not prepared for the conflicting emotions battling inside his chest.

Grudgingly proud of her wit, impressed by her manipulation, yet agitated that she had not listened, that she had insisted on fighting him every step of the way. He had people to protect and between his success and his failure there was only her and the secrets she kept under lock and key.

Today, he was putting an end to this charade.

"Looking for this?" Bellamy untucked his shirt and took out the black pouch hidden under his belt.

He hadn’t planned on hiding it today, it had been an afterthought, a silly experiment to take his mind off more unpleasant matters. But Clarke was sharp and she had noticed the lack of cord around his neck; how could she have not when this blasted golden watch seemed to be her only concern in the world?

He watched her get up and her cheeks flushed, her humiliation at having been caught red handed spreading down her neck and disappearing under the corset of her dress.

“Yes.” She met his gaze defiantly and crossed her arms under her breasts, waiting for his next move.

He hated her for it, for putting him in this position, for leaving him no choice, for staring at him with her blue eyes unflinchingly and making him wish he was a better man.

But he wasn’t.

“I tire of this game we play.” Bellamy untied the cords holding the pouch together and pulled out the watch, the letters on the back side mocking him for his giving in so easily. “So, this is what we’ll do — you have thirty seconds to tell me who you are and why this watch matters so much to you or I’ll blow it to pieces.”

The pistol slid easily out of its holster on Bellamy’s belt and he felt hollow when Clarke blanched as he cocked his flintlock ready, resting the barrel of the pistol against those blasted initials.

*Tick tock* *tick tock* *tick tock* *tick* the watch went -

*tick*

his heart clenched at her prolonged silence, the finger he had on the trigger feeling implausibly heavy,

*tick*

Clarke lurched forward only to stop as if only just comprehending that he was not bluffing, not even close.

“Don’t do this,” hearing her begging him like that, her voice wobbly and on the verge of tears felt
like somebody was breaking his ribs one by one, pulling him from his chest before twisting them back in, prolonging his suffering until his lungs felt like they would collapse on themselves.

Bellamy had spent less than ten days in her company and he was only just realizing how often he had let her have a sway over his actions.

But not in this.

“The clock is ticking, Clarke.”

“Blake, you don’t understand, if you put a bullet through that watch, it will be like you’re pointing the pistol at me.”

He ignored her, the hand holding onto the watch’s chain cramping because of the tight hold.

“Who are you? Why do you speak of Marcus Kane as if you know him intimately? Is he coming for us because he’s looking for you?”

Clarke shook her head, her golden hair spilling from her braid, the tears wetting trails down her burning cheeks glinted almost prettily if not for the tragedy of it all.

“Don’t make me pull the trigger, Clarke, because I will.”

“I’m not, I’m not.” She tried to tug the watch free from his grasp, her nails digging red lines into the skin of his arms, desperate to make him lower his hand but he pushed her back, keeping himself still when she stumbled and he wanted to reach for her.

“Whose watch is it, Clarke? Whose watch is it?” He was yelling by the end of it, his fear and frustration from the past few days making him lash out, his whole being torn apart by the terror Kane was still able to instill in him, even hundreds of miles away, even years after he had last seen him face to face.

She collapsed before his eyes, her whole body trembling with the force of her tears.

“It belonged to J-Jake Griffin, to the Earl— it was my father's favourite watch,” she choked out at last.

The chain slipped through his loose fist and the watch hit the pile of clothes at Bellamy’s feet, rolling to a stop after few turns.

*Tick tock tick tock tock* the watch went as the room fell to a hush.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for taking so long to update this, but here you go! And what a comeback this is, ops? ;D

- M.
Bellamy didn’t know how much time passed while he stood there, back leaning on the creaky door, for once his mind blank and coming up short on things to say.

Clarke was Earl Griffin’s daughter.

Clarke was Earl Griffin’s daughter.

During his short stay in the Navy and on British soil, Bellamy had had the chance to meet the Earl up-close exactly once, so he didn’t blame himself for not seeing the resemblance Clarke shared with him, but it still grated on his nerves. Now that he knew what to look for, it was so plain to see yet he had been blind for it all, mesmerized by her defying nature instead. The shape of her eyes and the way she furrowed her brows, the line of her jaw and the way she gritted her teeth — nothing but ghost relics of a man whose life had ended before it was truly his time to go.

At some point, Clarke had found the pocket watch among the clothes she had pulled from the chest while unavailingly searching for it, and was now clutching it to her chest, gently rocking back and forth, her sobs having died down to the occasional hiccup.

The picture was finally taking shape in his head, with few things still left unclear, as when he was sailing in the early morning mist and he had no visibility, no way of knowing if they were too close to the underwater rocks and rifts or not, relying only on Raven and Monty’s honed abilities and hoping they wouldn’t steer him wrongly.

But even if Raven and Monty were here, they still wouldn’t be able to help him navigate through this mess.

Her father’s loss must have hit her hard and he could feel just how deep that wound had carved her heart out. Clarke gave the occasional twitch, her breath stuttering inside her lungs on every third inhale, her eyes closed to the outside world. If he had to guess, by the strength of her grief, the way she broke down before him — a stranger, a warder, a person she clearly despised — she hadn’t let herself mourn her father, not until this moment.

Her knuckles were white, her hands clenching the watch so tightly he was sure the ornaments on the lid would stay embedded into the skin of her palms for a long while after.

Bellamy had felt the death of the Earl greatly for what it meant to him and his people, their freedom, their dreams, but his pain and fear were incomparable to hers in every aspect. It was no wonder that she had no wish to get back home, why she preferred the chill grasp of death around her neck than the very real chance of walking out of Nassau alive, if a little traumatised.

Bellamy had no experience in dealing with Countess Griffin, and aside from the few brief stories his mother had deigned to share (none of which very complimentary to her character), he was unfortunately scarcely prepared to deal with her. But Clarke didn’t seem to harbor any love towards her, not the way she seemed to love her father. That was an unfortunate obstacle in his plans — there was no longer any guarantee that Clarke’s mother would pay the ransom they would ask of her.

Not that there had been one to begin with, but he had been more inclined to distrust Clarke’s words
and see for himself. But now witnessing first hand how much her father had meant to her and remembering the way she had spoken about her mother — now he was more prone to taking her at her word.

But standing there and watching her as she valiantly tried to pick up her broken pieces, thoughts of ransom and gold, and impending danger were the last things on his mind.

Bellamy fidgeted, the wooden planks beneath his feet creaking and making him flinch. Clarke didn’t notice.

There was a foreign feeling residing in his chest, spreading icy cold, dark tendrils inside his veins and masterfully lodging itself under his stomach, squeezing his muscles and whispering wretched things inside his ears.

He felt guilty, he realized with a jolt, and he didn’t know how to elevate that feeling, how to fix this. It was eating at him and he loathed that.

This little spoiled girl wasn’t supposed to be able to invoke such sense of empathy and protectiveness inside him, but Clarke refused to follow any of his rules, insisting on prowling through every single one of his walls.

He took a few steps closer to her, hesitant and slow, his shock giving way to his concern.

“Clarke,” her head snapped up and he was met by the full force of her blue eyes, red-rimmed and glassy from her tears. He faltered but not for long, “I didn’t know.”

She just blinked and continued to stare at him. As if that would have changed anything her eyes appeared to scream at him and he bit down his helpless, angry retort.

Refusing to give up so easily, Bellamy’s hand reached for her shoulder, unheeding the little voice in his head that told him that he was once again playing by her rules, but before he could make contact, heavy, hurried steps climbed up the staircase and came to a halt behind his back.

“Bellamy,” Miller was struggling for air, his forehead wet with a sheen of sweat. “You need to come with me.”

Blake’s hand was clenched tight around her upper arm, his fingers burning hot through the sleeve of her dress, yet Clarke didn’t care about the pain.

The watch was hanging from its chain around her neck and she was still having a hard time comprehending what had just occurred.

Their steps were brisk, Blake almost dragging her along, following closely behind Miller’s fast strides. The quartermaster gave an occasional look over his shoulder, his gaze lingering on Clarke’s tear-stained face and Blake’s grip but keeping his silence. Must be one of the reasons why Blake had chosen him as his second.

Clarke herself was keeping the words she was itching to say from bubbling out of her lips. This was
not the time nor the place for them. All her careful planning and scheming had died a quick death the moment Blake had found her in his room. It was not supposed to happen but it did, and she had forgotten to make a contingency plan for that, an unfortunate lapse on her part.

There was no saying what the pirate would decide to do with the information she had given him.

She shook herself out of her daze and finally wiped the wetness still lingering on her face. When she glanced back up she nearly stumbled over her feet, saved from an embarrassing fall by Blake’s hand around hers.

He would throw her in a dungeon it seemed like, for the fort looming over Nassau was now welcoming them in its shadow.

Her throat suddenly felt as dry as it had been when she had been burning with that blasted fever, her hands clammy with sweat.

He had no right to do this to her, none at all, but this was a lawless place and Clarke had stalled long enough, dropping pieces of information and hoping it would sate his thirst.

Apparently, it hadn’t.

Clarke wanted to fight him, to dig her heel into his shin and wrench her arm out of his fingers, to make him chase her through the woods until her legs burned from the effort. But all her strength had left her and she felt heavy with heartache.

She was tired, so tired, and right now, laying in a cold cot in a dusty, dank dungeon didn’t sound like the worst thing that could happen to her.

The fort was deserted save for a few people of Blake’s crew that were looking around, jittery with a nervous energy that made Clarke tense up, and judging from the scowl on Blake’s face, he was also aware of the heavy air around them.

That sparked some curiosity in her but her own predicament was preventing her from getting too invested in the sudden mystery. The tension continued to run high the deeper they went inside the fort, Miller’s shoulders drawn tight, his hand staying on his pistol at all times.

They went for the lower part of the fort, towards the dungeons just as she had suspected. But there was already somebody there, a lit torch pointing them in the right direction.

Octavia was the one holding the torch, her trousers caked with mud, the left sleeve of her shirt ripped open. Lincoln saw them first and waved them over, his mouth curved down, worry flickering through his eyes. Raven and a person Clarke hadn’t seen before were sitting on an upturned cask, the latter twirling a knife between his fingers.

Beside them, sitting on the ground and clearly in a bad shape was a young man, covered in dust and grime, blood trickling from the high cut on his brow. His hands were bound by rope and despite the beating he had taken, the clenched jaw spoke of yet unbroken spirit.

Clarke frowned and moved closer to the torch, trying to take a clearer look. The shadows thrown by the light played along his dark skin in a way that reminded Clarke of the dark nights she and her best friend had spent sneaking around her house, with a sole candle in hand, playing chess and reading books they were not supposed to. But Wells was back in London, working hard under the watchful eye of her mother.

Wishing for his steady embrace wasn’t going to change that.
When the man turned his head, his blood glinting macabre under the torchlight, Clarke had to remind herself that leaning against Blake for support was far from ideal.

Yet the pirate captain didn’t object, having sensed the jolt of shock that went through her body.

“Wells?” she said unbelievingly, meeting the narrowed eyes of her best friend.

Wells had known Clarke Griffin all his life; well, the conscious part of it, the one he could clearly remember. She was there in every memory of his, a dash of golden hair and blue eyes, of smiles and temper that could bring her Governess to tears if she was in the mood. Of mischief and many scraped knees.

Growing up in the Griffin household was relatively safe and easy for people like him and his father. Others still looked down on them, the prejudices weren’t gone, but in the Griffins’ house that was not tolerated, partly because Countess Griffin had a certain reputation to uphold and partially because Earl Griffin was a good man who valued Wells’ father and his family.

For Wells, his presence and work there had been pleasant for only one reason — Clarke Griffin. They had been thick as thieves from the moment they could walk and he was ashamed that he hadn’t seen just how despaired she had been over her father’s death. The signs had all been there — Wells had known about Lexa’s abrupt departure, about Lord Collins’ behaviour, he even knew about the hand Clarke’s mother had in the death of her father. Clarke had confided all of that in him and they had talked it out, both crying tears of frustration and sadness, and Wells had left that night with a lighter heart and the thought that in the morning he would take Clarke out for a ride with her favourite horse and that they would figure out how to move forward, as they always did.

But come morning, Clarke was gone with nothing but a scant letter left behind.

And he was unsurprised to note just how much he had expected that, on some subconscious level at least. It had still hurt, however, to be left behind.

But the hurt faded when he was faced with the disarray her disappearance spread. And amongst all the chaos, he had slipped past his father and the Countess’ inquiries and had ran to the docks, determined to find his best friend, no matter the cost.

Not to bring her back, no, *never* that, but to make sure that whatever mess she had gotten herself into this time hadn’t dragged her in too deep — because Clarke Griffin knew how to make an impression, and not always a good one — and Wells could help her figure it out, figure their lives out.

He loved her deeply, yes, but he wasn’t in love with her, not anymore. Clarke was his sister in all but blood, and Wells was adamant that he would catch up to her only to smile at her, ruffle her hair and call her a fool for thinking she could abandon him just like that.

His tentative idea how to reach her, however, ended up being terribly executed. So much that he was found sneaking around a pirate fort by said pirates themselves and instead of playing the innocent card, he had panicked and tried to talk his way out of it, resulting in a skirmish that still
had his ears ringing.

God, but that big guy could throw a punch.

The worst of it all — he still has no idea if he had gotten the right place.

(And pirates, really Clarke, you couldn’t have gone to some God-forsaken French village instead?)

And yet, all that adventure and misfortune stopped mattering the second he heard her tentative voice in the darkness.

“Clarke?”

To say that Bellamy despised the raw sob that was thorn out of Clarke’s throat was an underestimation. The way she flung her body at the dark-skinned man across the room, completely oblivious to O’s battle stance and the greedy gaze of Murphy as he twirled his knife between his fingers, the bloodlust in him still burning bright in his eyes, made something dark and ugly rear its head inside him, and Bellamy found himself reaching for his pistol.

Was it to stop her or protect her, he did not know.

(And frankly didn’t want to know for that train of thought led to dangerous waters.)

His head still rang with her admission, and the bitter truth of it was stuck behind his teeth, until it felt like he was choking on it, on his inability to somehow make everything better, because of her, for her. His mind was a jumbled mess of emotions, of memories of her tear-stained face and shaking hands, of fear and despair and disbelief.

Here she was, Clarke Griffin, the daughter of one of the greatest Earls England had had in the past century alone, and she was hugging a man he didn’t know like it was the end of the world.

Dear God, but in the short time he had gotten to know her, she had completely turned his worldview upside down.

Unwilling to let her out of his sight, but equality averse to pulling her back from the unfamiliar man, not when she was grinning so brightly, Bellamy turned his attention to his sister.

“So, this is what you’ve been hiding from me, Blake.” Murphy spat on the ground, far enough from Bellamy’s boots not to be seen as an insult but close enough for him to know it was a mockery of his power.

Of all the people that could be mixed in with this, Murphy was the last person on his list. How the other captain had gotten involved in all of this when the Captains Council meeting had finished barely half an hour ago was a mystery to him.

“What is he doing here?”

Octavia rolled her shoulders back, giving Murphy a nasty glare of her own.
“Oh you know, rats always find places to crawl through.” Murphy turned to look at O, face twisted in rage, but Lincoln stood steadily behind her, a reminder for him to keep his mouth shut if he valued his teeth. “He saw somebody acting suspicious,” here Octavia nodded at the newcomer that was currently talking with Clarke in a hushed whisper, clenching her hands too tightly he was probably close to breaking a bone, “and he followed him to the fort where Lincoln and I encountered him while mapping out some of the older cells.”

“Did he say anything? Name... reason for trying to infiltrate us?” Bellamy looked him over — dark skin, dark eyes, well-built, obviously used to manual labor, and somehow acquainted with one Clarke Griffin.

It was the last fact more than anything else that had Bellamy standing on edge.

It was barely noon and he was tired of surprises.

“No,” Octavia said. “He just kept repeating that he was looking for a friend. Then Murphy spooked him and he tried to run, and well, Lincoln took care of that problem.”

Bellamy chanced another glance at Clarke and the man — there was a sense of strong familiarity between them that Bellamy didn’t like. Everything Clarke Griffin brought with her was nothing but trouble and he dreaded finding out more information about their new guest.

Which reminded him—

“We need to talk.” He pursed his lips. “Alone.” He had to tell them about Clarke’s identity and what that meant for them, but Murphy wasn’t somebody he wanted to have all that information.

As if sensing his thoughts, the captain of Gluttony got up and tucked his knife back in his belt, giving a mocking bow to Bellamy and the rest.

“I know when I’m not wanted, Blake, don’t you worry your pretty little head about it.” His smile was all sharp teeth and deadly threats. “I’ll find out sooner or later. After all, secrets don’t stay secret for very long here. You should know that better than anyone else, Blake.”

A harsh reminder about a friendship that once was, and the consequences of what came after.

With that Murphy disappeared in the dark, leaving the stench of betrayal and unpleasant memories behind.

He was right, Bellamy knew — Murphy had the uncanny ability to sniff out secrets like nobody’s business. Bellamy gave him two days max before Murphy had all the information needed to confront him in front of the Captains Council.

Bellamy needed to act before that if he had any hope in getting the other captains on his side. With Roan gone and Murphy constantly undermining him, his hold over the other captains was growing shaky. There was no way he was giving Murphy more opportunities to climb the ladder.

They were still blind for the danger coming — fools, all of them — but Bellamy couldn’t just let them die, he needed them, as unfortunate as that was.

Octavia passed the torch to Raven and came to stand in front of him, taking in his ragged appearance. “What happened? Is the Council still giving you trouble?”

Bellamy shook his head, running his fingers through his tangled hair. “No more than usual. Anya is still staying neutral and the rest are more than happy to see where this leads us. No, we have
bigger problems to discuss.”

Lincoln frowned and came closer to them, still keeping an eye on their prisoners. “What problems?”

Bellamy huffed and tapped his fingers on his cutlass. “That there,” he nodded to Clarke, “is Clarke. *Clarke Griffin.*”

“What are you doing here?” Clarke’s face was covered in tears and snot and cold sweat but Wells hadn’t seen a lovelier sight in his life. God, but he had *missed* her, fiercely.

He let her fuss over him, using the hem of her dress to dab at his wound, and turn his head *this* and *that* way, sizing up his injuries with a well-trained eye and he smiled — some things didn’t change no matter how many miles they had put behind them.

“What’s the verdict, Miss Clarke? Am I going to live?”

She swatted at his shoulder, careful to avoid the bruise forming on his upper arm. “You’re not being funny. And how many times do I have to remind you to drop the miss?”

Wells simply chuckled, taking in her tired appearance and noting the changes in her posture and demeanor. Three weeks were too short a time for her to have changed so much, but God, it was like looking at a pale copy of the Clarke Griffin he knew and loved. It seemed her father’s death and everything that had followed after had drained her of spirit and energy.

It was so unlike her that his heart cried for her.

She glanced around, noticing the little circle the Blake siblings, Raven and Lincoln had formed and lowered her voice. “How did you find me?” *Are they coming after me* left unsaid but hanging heavily in the air.

“Frankly, I didn’t stay long enough to see your mother going off the deep end. I’m friends with few of the port sentinels. One of them had managed to catch a glimpse of you and the ship you had boarded on. From there I got onto the first ship that went in the same direction. The port was so busy with equipping Commodore Kane’s ships that nobody noticed me joining the crew.” Wells leaned back against the cold wall and let the weeks of worry and fear finally wash over him, leaving him tired but hopeful for the future ahead. “Unfortunately, we ran into some trouble — slave traders.”

At Clarke’s anxious look, Wells was quick to reassure her. “Not the nicest people I’ve met in my life.” His tone was light, upbeat, concealing the fright that still lingered in his veins just thinking about it. “But soon after we crossed path with some pirates,” Clarke snorted and Wells grinned, shaking his head. “They were— *decent* enough to bring us to Nassau after they slaughtered the crew and pilfered all they could. Imagine my surprise when I got off the ship, with no plan whatsoever and the first thing I hear is this delightful rumor about Captain Blake’s new kept woman — blond, feisty, with eyes as blue as the ocean. I couldn’t believe my luck.”

Wells wiggled his eyebrows at her and Clarke had to stifle her laughter, not wanting to attract
unwanted attention.

“Figured you were kept in the dungeons; with your name and Commodore Kane on the loose, it was hard to imagine you being somewhere else.”

Clarke swallowed and pushed her tears back — she had enough of them to last her a lifetime.

“They didn’t know who I was until today. You know my mother did her best to teach me how to act as my blood required — vapid, cold, polite, having dialogs without actually saying anything of importance.”

No matter how much she hated it, Clarke was good at playing politics, at spinning webs and using words as weapons, and when she was disgraced by somebody, her vengeance came swift and as cold as the white flames of Hell. There was no way she had tripped and spilled all her secrets on her own.

“Oh, they must have loved you. How did they find out?”

Clarke tugged at the neck of her dress, letting the pocket watch spill in her hand, the golden lid catching the play of the flames from the nearby torch.

Earl Griffin’s pocket watch.

“Ah.” He said at last. Words were meaningless, he knew all too well, so he went for actions instead — Wells clasped his hand over hers, trapping the pocket watch between their palms and imbuing the outer shell with their shared warmth.

She smiled, soft and small, and rubbed her thumb over his bloodied knuckles.

“What do you say I stitch that wound of yours, and then we parley?” She pushed her shoulders back and raised her head.

Wells allowed himself one small relieved sigh before he leaned forward, headache momentarily forgotten. “And what are the stakes?”
Octavia let out an impressive assortment of curses that had Bellamy feeling inadequate in his own swearing skills — he was far from the thought that he could have kept his sister a Lady, what with her living among pirates, but he was pretty sure that he hadn’t even *heard* some of the words she used to express herself.

“She’s a fucking Griffin? How do we know she’s not lying about it?”

“She has the Earl’s pocket watch. Plus, it would explain her knowledge about Kane and his policy, as well as give her a proper reason for her escape from England whilejustifying her refusal to share her full name with us.”

Bellamy nodded in agreement, throwing Raven’s argument around in his head. He still had a hard time accepting it himself and he had seen Clarke break down in front of his very own eyes — that was pain that couldn’t have been faked; it was too raw and deep to be anything but truthful.

“The Griffins are rich, are they not? I’ll write a letter to her mother.”

“No,” Bellamy put his hand on his sister’s arm, “from what I’ve heard, Abigail Griffin doesn’t play by anybody’s rules. She’s more likely to laugh in our faces than pay the ransom.”

“But,” Octavia glanced at Clarke, “that’s her daughter, her only child. Surely the Countess wouldn’t want to put her at risk?”

Bellamy’s laugh was harsh and lacking any warmth. “Do you remember the story mother told us when we were still living in the countryside, and you wanted to know how mother and father met?”

Octavia’s eyes lit with understanding and Bellamy turned to face Lincoln and Raven. “Our mother was no Lady, she had no standing in the King’s Court, but the nephew of one of his advisers, Baron Blake — mine and Octavia’s father, took an interest in our mother and pursued her with the blessing of the King. See, the King found it amusing and decided to be a benevolent ruler, and grant the Baron’s plea. Our parents got married soon after, but it quickly became obvious for everyone in the Court that the only reason the King allowed their union was because it provided ample entertainment for the Court members, testing our mother and reminding her every moment of her life that she could never belong among them.

“Countess Griffin was one of mother’s only friends in the Court. Until she too, turned out to be a viper like all the rest, and soon after I was born, mother decided to move to the countryside, leaving the Court and its glamorous life.”

Bellamy tugged at his hair, relishing the pain and wishing it could drown his world, his thoughts, with nothing but blissful emptiness.

“That woman doesn’t have an honest bone in her body. I wouldn’t trust her to keep her word, no matter what she promises.”


Lincoln sighed and rubbed his palm over Octavia’s back. “What about Miss Griffin then?”
“She doesn’t seem to harbor any warm feelings towards her mother. She does know a lot about Marcus Kane, though. I imagine she grew up knowing him, and any additional insight on the matter would be useful. If nothing else, we can use her as a bargaining chip once the Royal Navy’s ships aim their guns at us. It would buy us some time if nothing else.” Bellamy shrugged, not really putting much faith in his own words.

The reality was that they were screwed — the captains were fighting him, the Fort still wasn’t ready to defend the harbor and at any point Anya could decide to pull back her people, and their fighting forces would be halved just like that. And Bellamy knew enough of Marcus Kane to be able to admit to himself that even if all those things weren’t a problem, their chance at defeating the Commodore was slim to none.

Octavia threw her hands in the air and murmured something under her nose that Bellamy didn’t care enough about to hear. “God, I hate this. When I get my hands on Kane, I’ll—” She huffed and unsheathed one of her knives, desperate to do something, anything not to feel so helpless.

Having nothing else to do, she turned her ire to Clarke and her companion, and let her knife sail through the air with sharp precision, embedding it in the hard ground next to Clarke’s legs, drawing their attention their way.

“Stop making plans, you’re not getting out of here any time soon. Now, I want his name while you, Miss Griffin, are going to share every little detail about Marcus Kane that you were so kind to keep to yourself the first time around.”

Clarke looked at them, shock from having the knife sing next to her leg melting away and turning her face to stone.

It was such a drastic change from the broken visage he had sitting on the floor of his room an hour ago that it sent shivers down Bellamy’s back.

“How about we parley?” Clarke rose to her feet, brushing the dust and dirt off her skirts with a distracted motion, her vivid eyes jumping from Octavia to Lincoln to Raven to Bellamy, where they stayed, narrowing in thought.

Bellamy swallowed, suddenly feeling parched. “Finally willing to fully cooperate with us?”

“I’ll tell you everything I know about Kane and the ships he commands, and in return you’ll let me and my friend leave.”

“Now that is a very bad deal, Clarke.” Her name falling from his lips seemed to hit her where it hurt but she pushed through, blue eyes blazing in the darkness of the cells.

“And,” she continued as if Bellamy hadn’t said a thing, “if you can guarantee that we can board the first ship leaving Nassau, I’ll help you heal your friend, Indra.”

Clarke raised her left hand, a small vial glinting under the moving light from the torches.

Octavia gasped and clutched at Bellamy’s arm, her nails digging crest moons in his skin, and next to him, Lincoln went taut with tension while Raven’s dark chuckle echoed around them.

In Clarke’s hand was one of the medical supply vials he wasn’t able to find on board of Good Fortune. All this time what they needed had been right under their noses. She had made a fool of him.

In all his life Bellamy couldn’t remember a time when he had been more impressed, or more irked.
Clarke Griffin.

A fiery confident woman, a scared little girl.

A puzzle that Bellamy planned on unraveling.

Bellamy smiled wide, his white teeth painting a grim picture in the dark.

Things were finally looking up.

Chapter End Notes

Inner struggle for Bellamy and a glimpse of his past, an addition of a favourite character of mine and Clarke getting back in the game--a lot of things happened all at once, but man, if you know what's happening next ;D

Reviews and kudos are appreciated.
-M.

End Notes

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