Don't Be Afraid

by sailor8t

Summary

Not the last thing she said, but it was important.
After Lexa's death, Clarke wonders if she's losing her mind. Or is something else happening?

Notes

The 100 belong to Kass Morgan, The CW, He Who Shall Not Be Named and probably a bunch of other people. They definitely aren't mine, and I will put them back where I found them when I'm done.
Before witnesses, Lexa will not say to Clarke what she truly wants the other woman to know. As she feels her heart slow, Lexa wishes she said the words to Clarke at least once. Instead, she makes Titus swear, as she made Aden swear, that Klark kom Skaikru will be safe. She tells Clarke, who struggles against all odds to save her, not to fear what is coming. Lexa isn't afraid. She tells Clarke, "The next commander will protect you."

"I don't want the next commander. I want you."

Because Clarke will not accept that Lexa is dying, she does not say the words, either. She tries to stem the weakening pulse of blood even though her training tells her that it is unlikely Lexa would survive even if she were shot in a state of the art operating room staffed with the best surgeons.

Clarke does the only thing she can. She stares into Lexa's eyes. Lexa stares back, listening. "In peace, may you leave the shore. In love, may you find the next safe passage on your travels until our final journey on the ground. May we meet again."

The last words choke Clarke. Lexa said them to her twice in lieu of goodbye.

And then she is gone.

Clarke feels herself break. The men in the room with her see her break. She kisses Lexa's still warm lips, smears the black blood over her eyes when she pulls the eyelids over glazed green eyes. She wants to stay there with her until Lexa is cold, in the bed that is soaked with the natblid that ran through Lexa's veins.

Instead, she watches Titus roll Lexa over and cut through the scar at the back of her neck, one Clarke saw and kissed but never got to ask about. He removes something that looks like it has roots and as they retract, she asks, "What is that?"

Conflicting answers, and she can't think about them right now. Titus puts it in a tin, and the tin in his pocket, and he carries Lexa away. Before she can move, she is locked in with Murphy, who must be the luckiest bastard on the planet. Or maybe the unluckiest. Even he can't decide.

He starts to comfort her, and she shakes him off. There is nothing he can do or say to make her feel better, and she wants this time to fix in her mind all she shared with Lexa. She wants it to be as clear as saying goodbye to her father, as clear as walking through Mount Weather after pulling the lever. After hours, curiosity overrides grief. She needs to know everything she can to keep both of them alive. Titus said, "The Commander's spirit," but Murphy said, "A.I."

Clarke carefully doesn't look at the bed when she approaches Murphy. "What did her take out of her?"

Murphy sighs and looks at Clarke. He thought her soft in the beginning, and learned better. "Jaha left to find the City of Light. I don't even know where he got the idea, but we walked forever. We crossed a fucking desert, and he locked me in a bunker for three months. He was even crazier when he let me out. He's talking to some fucking hologram, thinks it can take everyone to heaven or nirvana. All you have to do is swallow a chip like the one Reverend Crazy cut out of her."

"What's it do?"
"I don't know. I didn't drink the kool aid. They picked me up for robbing people. Emori left me out there, and when they searched me, they found the chip Jaha put in my pocket before I left him. Next thing I know, I'm in a dungeon getting beaten half to death again. Even when I told the truth, he didn't believe me. Guess he drank somebody else's kool aid."

"They're down there getting ready to pick a new commander."

"So what?"

"Murphy, they're gonna kill us."

"Not you, Princess. Just me. I heard her tell him to protect you."

"I won't let them kill you."

"Right," he said slowly. "You gonna bang the new commander, too?"

She slapped him.

Murphy laughed. "There's the Griffin charm."

"Just tell me everything you know," Clarke demanded.

"A is the first letter of the alphabet," he began.

"I'm trying to save your life," Clarke answered through clenched teeth. "So I'd appreciate it if you'd stop being an asshole for 30 seconds."

Murphy looked at her. He didn't know anything that happened after he left with Jaha, but he'd wager that this woman had a rougher go of it than he did. "There's an emergency pod in the basement, like Reyes came down in. Polaris was stenciled on it, but two of the letters burned away, leaving Polis. There were images on the wall, a woman under a mushroom cloud, a woman gathering something, maybe people around her."

"Polaris was the 13th station."

"The crazy A.I. is portable, so Jaha probably brought it back. I'm sure it wants something besides a personal roboarmy."

"Does the A.I. control people after they swallow the chip?"

"I don't know. Jaha talked to it, and it talked back, so maybe not."

"It's not reincarnation, it's just what's stored on the chip," Clarke said slowly. "I need to talk to someone who knew the previous commanders."

"Yeah, that's gonna happen."

"Shut up and let me think."

Murphy rolled his eyes and leaned back into the chair. Clarke went to the balcony.

She looked out over Polis. Octavia was gone. Clarke wondered what she would think when she heard about Lexa's death. She planned to leave with her friend, but she had to say goodbye to Lexa. She hadn't intended it to be a permanent absence, and neither had Lexa.
Clarke forced her mind away from Lexa. The conclave would choose the next heda; by a fight to the death if necessary. Aden was Lexa's choice, and Clarke wanted to believe that he could survive the selection process, but she thought it more likely that Ontari would be chosen. She was older and more experienced than Aden, and had years of tutelage under Nia. Ontari wouldn't hesitate to kill her, Murphy, and the rest of Skaikru. The other clans would support her.

In the unlikely event that Aden became heda, Clarke hoped he would keep his promise to Lexa. He is young, and Titus will tell him Skaikru are a threat to everyone else, that Lexa's plan to contain them is stupid. Would he believe Clarke if she had the opportunity to tell him that Skaikru will correct its problem? Would he hear Lexa's voice calling for peace even as everyone around him howled for blood?

The doors opened and Clarke turned to see Titus, followed by a dozen warriors. She and Murphy were taken to the jail. Clarke was shoved into the same cell she occupied before, and Murphy was put far enough away that they can't speak without shouting.

When the door slammed, Clarke backed into the wall and slid down it. There was no one to free her this time, no one to send good food, clean clothes, and hot water. She was as alone as she was at the door to Mount Weather after Lexa left, but this time, there is no coming back.

Clarke put her head on her knees and allowed herself to fully feel Lexa's absence.

*Don't be afraid.*
Clark woke with a start. Her cell was dark. The torches weren’t lit, probably an indication of how Titus intended to treat her. She called Murphy, and he answered in an aggrieved tone.

“Just checking in,” Clarke yelled back. If she could get out, she would do everything she could to take him along. Technically, once dawn came, they were behind the demarcation line and subject to Lexa’s kill order.

Don’t be afraid. Clarke shivered. It felt like Lexa whispered that in her ear. Clarke took a deep breath. She’d been locked up alone after a great loss before, and the parallels between her father’s intentional death and Lexa’s accidental one were too great for her to ignore. She subverted her grief for her father into drawing the Earth he so wanted to see. Clarke had nothing except darkness and a frenemy this time, and she sank into grief, curled in on herself to muffle its sound.

Even so, Murphy heard her. It didn’t sound like she was freaking out about the dark. Her sobs were something more raw, and he swallowed the lump in his throat. He might beg for his life, and maybe for hers, but he would never let the Grounders see or hear him cry. What he told Jaha was still true: “Pain, hate, envy; those are the ABC’s of me.” He thought for a while with Emori that he might be able to change, but days in Reverend Crazy’s dungeon brought it all back.

Clarke Griffin was the last person he expected to see here. He expected even less her description of him as her friend. They had never been friends, and he doubted they would be in the future. But if she got him out of this, he’d reconsider. Murphy understood owing someone, and if they got away from the crazy fucking grounders, he would make sure he repaid her somehow.

Grief was exhausting, and Clarke was quiet again. That was worse somehow, and he yelled, “Griffin.”

“Still here, Murphy.”

“What's the plan?”

“Do I look like I have a plan?”

“You always have a plan, Griffin.”

“I don't know enough to have a plan.”

His snort echoed down the hall. “Where are we, anyway?”

“Polis. Le...Grounder capital.”

Murphy groaned. Grounder central, just fucking wonderful. “What's going on at Camp Jaha?”

“Arkadia,” Clarke corrected. “It's a mess.”

“Tell me.”

“They found Farm Station, set most of them up in Mount Weather. The only surviving Mountain Man blew the self-destruct and they all died. Everyone at Arkadia blamed the Grounders and the Ice Nation did have a hand in it. Lexa declared war on them and sent an army to protect Arkadia. They had an election right after Skaikru became part of the coalition and elected a guy from Farm Station
instead of Kane. The first thing Pike did was massacre the army in their sleep.”

Clarke sighed. That was another image that would never leave her, hundreds of bodies in the field, warriors sent to protect her people murdered. And the way Indra looked at her after, as if she didn't know Clarke, as if Clarke would walk the fields shooting the wounded in the head.

“Good idea,” Murphy called back.

“It was a terrible idea, but Lexa agreed not to wipe out Arkadia.” Clarke stopped for a second as a fresh wave of grief passed through her. “She sent her army to blockade Arkadia, give them time to see how dangerous Pike is and let them elect someone else.” She faltered again. “Without Lexa, they're dead, Murphy.”

“Automatic weapons against swords? I don't think so.”

“Ten people with automatics against a bunch of sleeping people is different than even 50 automatic weapons against thousands who expect them.”

The door to the dungeon opened and someone walked in applauding sarcastically. “You learned your lessons well, Wanheda,” Roan said.

He approached her cell, holding a torch. He was alone, and in the uneven light, she could see the fresh scar on his face courtesy of his fight with Lexa.

“What do you want, your majesty?” Clarke asked, the last two words mocking him. To her, he would always be the man who dragged her to Polis against her will.

He looked at her. “I was coming to save you, but perhaps you don't need it.”

They stared at each other. Clarke gave in first. She put her back to him and tried to get her emotions under control. He could have killed Lexa but didn't. That was another image that she would keep despite how worried she had been at the time.

“Wanheda, I come to offer you the protection of Azgeda.”

“You understand I'm wary of such an offer after all that's happened.”

“I do not want war,” Roan said softly.

She whirled around and threw herself against the bars. Roan stayed where he was. “Did she ask everyfuckingbody to take care of me? Did she still believe me incapable of surviving?”

“She knew you would try to save everyone, Clarke, and everyone doesn't deserve to be saved.”

“Thanks a lot, asshole,” Murphy yelled.

“Charming,” Roan said to Clarke. “I suppose he's part of the deal.”

“My deal, yeah,” Clarke sighed. “What's happening with the Conclave?”

“Ontari will be Heda,” Roan said confidently.

Clarke's heart sank. Aden would die attempting to do what Lexa charged him with, protecting her, protecting Skaikru. Ontari would order her army to destroy Arkadia at the first opportunity.

“And Skaikru will be eliminated.”
“Perhaps. Or perhaps the commander's spirit will move Ontari to continue conciliation. Skaikru has many assets that will benefit Azgeda.”

“You mean the coalition.”

“Ontari does not have the temperament to hold the coalition together, but you and I together could succeed.” Roan sighed. “I do not want war, Clarke. I will fight if I must, but I am tired, as Lexa was tired, of the aftereffects, of children starving because those who are supposed to tend fields, hunt, and fish are dead over some petty squabble.”

“What do you want, Roan?”

“I told you, Clarke, I offer you the protection of Azgeda. You will be my ambassador to Polis. I trust you to balance Azgeda's needs and Skaikru's.”

“What, exactly, are Azgeda's needs?”

“They will be few with Ontari as Heda. Azgeda supports itself. We will not seek war as my mother did. Once the matter of Skaikru is settled, we will work to keep the peace.”

“How do I know I can trust you?”

“Lexa did.”

Clarke closed her eyes for a few seconds to hold tears at bay and heard Lexa again. *Don't be afraid.*

“I am sorry for our loss, Clarke.”

She opened her eyes to look at him, and saw that he was sincere. She nodded and took a deep, uneven breath.

“Do you accept my offer, Klark kom Skaikru en Trikru en Azgeda?”

“Sha.” She lowered her head.

“Do not bow to me, Wanheda. There will be enough of that in public.” He removed a key from his pocket and unlocked her cell.

He started down the corridor, and she followed him. Murphy waited near the gate at his cell. “What deal did you make this time, Princess?”

“One that keeps you alive, Murphy.”

“Are you certain you want him?” Roan asked.

“Yeah,” Clarke said. She looked at Murphy. “Keep your mouth shut.”

“Whatever,” Murphy answered while Roan unlocked his cell.

They walked out of the dungeon. Roan put the torch back in its holder and returned the keys to the jailer. They followed him up to the floor assigned to Azgeda. Roan left them in the care of his entourage.
In the bath, Clarke allowed herself to grieve for few minutes, taking advantage of the water to disguise her tears. Then she forced herself to concentrate on the matters at hand. She didn't want to trust Roan, but had no choice. She had some leverage with Titus if she could convince Murphy to stay quiet about the terrible events in the suite across from Lexa's. She shivered thinking of anyone else in the bed she and Lexa shared, and again stopped herself from going further with that thought. It benefited no one, and she had to keep her wits about her to have any chance of saving her people.

Clarke went under the water. Bellamy was so angry and lost. She understood that completely, and part of it was her fault for leaving him alone while she tried to escape everything. The rest was on him, though. She knew there were Arkadians who didn't support what Pike was doing. Finding a way to save them had to be her priority.

She took her time bathing, trying to think of a way to get them out. There were too many variables still in play, starting with the outcome of the Conclave. Clarke questioned whether Roan would continue to protect her if Ontari somehow failed to become heda, and then wondered whether he had somehow rigged the proceedings. She could see him convincing Titus that Ontari was the better candidate, untainted by Lexa's insistence on moving past jus drein jus daun.

And then she wondered what of Lexa would survive on that chip. Would Ontari hear Lexa? Would Lexa speak through Ontari? Could she bear to hear it? That thought sent her under the water again, and she stayed until her brain demanded oxygen. It was all too much. Clarke left the tub, dried herself, and put on the sleep clothes piled on the bench. She went into her assigned bedroom and put her hair into a single braid before laying down to try to get some sleep. Dawn would bring hours of work, and she needed to think clearly.

While Clarke bathed, Roan's healer worked on Murphy. He had Murphy bathe before tending to the many wounds Titus left on his body. Most were too old to benefit from stitches and would leave scars, especially on his face and back. The healer stuffed them with salve and bandaged them. It hurt, but nowhere near as much as getting the wounds had.

When the healer finished, he forced Murphy to empty a mug of dark, bitter liquid. Half an hour later, he was passed out in a comfortable bed.

In the morning, while they waited for breakfast to be served, Clarke asked Roan about Murphy. He got up from the table and gestured for her to follow. Roan led her to Murphy's room and opened the door. He was deeply asleep, and Clarke saw that his back and cheek were bandaged. One of Roan's warriors sat in the room. Clarke nodded that she was satisfied, and held her questions until the door was closed.

“Is he a prisoner?”

“No, the healer said someone should stay with him. He will have a guard, just as you will have a guard.”

“What's our game plan?”

“Today, we observe the Conclave.”

“I don't want to watch children slaughter each other.”

“The rules do not require death, and I have instructed Ontari to spare her opponents, especially
They stopped talking while food and drink were placed on the table. As they served themselves, Clarke asked, “Why?”

“There has been enough death, Clarke. Did Lexa tell you about Costia?”

“Only that your mother took her and returned her head.”

“My mother did that to make a point with Lexa. Everyone knew that Lexa would be heda. She was calculating and ruthless except where Costia was concerned, and there were great fears that Lexa would surrender to Costia, even though Costia was too weak to rule.”

“What was her point? I'm a sadistic bitch?”

“That was one of them,” Roan answered with a grim smile. “The other was that the heda is alone. Heda can have no attachment greater than duty.” He paused to sip some wine. “You made Lexa weak. She made an error in the Mountain, and compounded it by insisting that Skaikru join the coalition. She had many other options, but chose the path she did because of you.”

“I didn't do anything,” Clarke protested.

“You did a great deal, Wanheda. You took down the Mountain after Lexa abandoned you to Maundae. She believed you and your people would die. The deal she made was short-sighted. There was no way Maunon would uphold their part of the bargain. As soon as they could be outside, they would have taken control of all our lands and ruled as my mother did. She would have made a deal with them, as long as it meant she had some control over lands beside our own.

“Lexa helped Skaikru survive winter, and insisted they become part of her alliance. She could have simply given Skaikru land and put them under her protection, but she wanted you, Clarke, and knew the way to get you was to elevate your people. Winter would have killed most of them except for Lexa's order that Trikru keep them alive.”

“What's your point, Roan?”

“Your people have consigned themselves to death if they do not submit to Heda. Ontari cannot tolerate any weakness in the beginning of her rule. The leaders of your rebellion must die publicly, in our way.”

“How does that benefit Skaikru?” Clarke struggled not to yell although she was becoming angry.

“It will keep the rest of them alive. Your mother, your friends.”

“One of my friends is following Pike.”

“I sorry, Clarke, but he will have to die. You will not be permitted to spare him as you did your lover.”

Clarke pushed her food away. “I'm supposed to deliver that message to them,” she said flatly.

“Sha. I am sorry for that, too.”

“Yeah, I can tell.”

“Clarke, I have not lied to you. We have the same goal now, and we can succeed only if we work together.”
“Does Ontari know your plan?”

“Sha. She hated and feared my mother. She knows that she did not learn all that heda should, that her exclusion from Natblida training leaves her at a disadvantage. We both know she cannot rely on Titus.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” Clarke muttered.

“Do not keep his secrets. If he is dangerous, we must eliminate him.”

“I am dangerous to him,” Clarke answered. “Murphy, too.”

“What do you know?”

Clarke debated telling him, and decided to keep what she knew to herself for now. “Can I speak to Ontari?”

“No one speaks to the Natblida once the Conclave begins. The only reason I was able to give Ontari instruction was that we had to travel.” Roan left the table. “We must go. The Conclave begins shortly.”

He led her through the tower. Guards went ahead of them and followed them to the viewing area set aside for the coalition's leaders and ambassadors. Titus didn't see Clarke right away, but she made sure to smile at him when he did. He flushed red and barked an order.

The warrior approached them warily. “Fleimkepa asks under whose authority Wanheda attends.”

“He can ask me himself,” Clarke barked.

Roan smothered a chuckle. “Mine, as King of Azgeda.”

“Tell Titus to float himself,” she added before the warrior left.

“Do not antagonize Titus yet, Clarke. He can be a powerful ally.”

“He will do everything in his power to keep Ontari from you.”

“She will not trust him,” he said confidently.

“She shouldn't trust anyone.” She stared at Titus, waiting for him to look at her again, but he did not.

Fight after fight took place below them. One by one, Ontari defeated her rivals, leaving them battered on the ground, expecting her to finish them. She followed Roan's instruction and accepted their surrender in violation of the training Nia forced on her. Night was approaching when Aden entered the ring. Clarke's heart sank. If he was anything like Lexa, he might force Ontari to kill him rather than surrender.

It was the longest fight of the day. Aden was unwilling to surrender, and Ontari had instructions not to kill him. Finally, she pinned him to the dirt, her knees on his elbows, her blade at his throat. She leaned close and said something to him, and Aden nodded. Ontari stood and helped Aden stand. He bowed at his waist to her and left the arena.

Clarke saw the rage in Titus' body language. She knew Lexa told him to make Aden the next heda, but Ontari was the clear victor. Her refusal to kill her defeated foes infuriated him. Still, he did his duty and declared Ontari the new commander. She left the arena with him to the crowd's chant of “Heda! Heda! Heda!”
Roan stood up as soon as Ontari was led away. “Come, Wanheda, we are to witness her tattooing.”

’But not the transfer of the commander spirit,’ Clarke thought as she followed Roan. Their guards stayed very close, and Clarke wondered what worried them so much. Two more guards joined them as they entered the tower, containing Clarke and Roan behind their bodies.

Ontari was in the bath when they arrived. As they walked, Roan explained that they could not speak with Ontari yet, merely watch this part of her investment. He would tell her about the rest of it over supper.

Clarke remained beside Roan and watched Ontari be bathed by two attendants. Ontari looked unsettled about their attention, but regained control when Roan nodded at her. Clarke bit her lip so she wouldn't say something about the many horizontal scars on Ontari's back.

They watched Ontari get out of the bath. The attendants dried her and she laid on a table covered with a fur. The tattoo artist sketched the design onto her bare back, but before he could begin, Roan stood.

“She will accept her marks only from Azgeda,” he said firmly, and Clarke realized that he did not trust Titus. Titus glared at Clarke and Roan when one of the warriors with them went to the table. He removed his tools and ink from his cloak and spread them beside Ontari.

It took hours to complete the tattoo. It was similar to Lexa’s, but there were more marks representing the participants she defeated than Lexa had. Sometime during it, Ontari fell asleep and woke again. Roan smiled when she woke but didn't flinch.

When that tattoo was finished, the artist carefully wiped away blood and ink before gently rubbing a healing salve along her spine. He then tattooed the sacred symbol on the back of Ontari's neck, cleaned it and rubbed in salve. He returned to Roan's side and they waited. Titus deliberately kept his back to them while he made the incision and placed the chip. His sutures were slow and clumsy, but he put salve on them and bandaged it before putting her hair over her neck.

“You may rise,” Titus told her, and Ontari got off the table and stood. The attendants appeared again and dressed her. Clarke nearly chewed through her lip so she wouldn't cry when they put Lexa's pauldron on her shoulder and Lexa's red lined cloak on her back.

Roan stood when that was complete and knelt before her. While on his knee, he removed the scabbard from his shoulder and offered it and the sword in it to Ontari. She accepted both, and looked at Clarke.

It took her a few seconds to realize what Ontari wanted, and when she did, Clarke stood as tall as she could while she approached. She heard Lexa while she took those steps: Don't be afraid. The next commander will protect you. She went to her knee beside Roan, giving her the same honor she gave to Lexa. Wanheda offered fealty to Heda, but Clarke remained uncertain about her role in all of this.

“Rise,” Ontari said softly, and she and Roan got to their feet. Ontari gave them both a small, sneaky smile. Clarke was certain that Ontari's eyes were brown, but they were now the same green as Lexa's. “Tomorrow is my Ascension Day. You are my most honored guests.”

Roan grinned at her. “It is our pleasure, Heda.” He bowed and took Clarke's arm to remove her from Ontari's path to the door. Clarke watched her leave, frowning. Had she looked at Titus, she would...
have seen the same look on his face.

Murphy woke with a thumping headache. He raised his head and looked around. A very large grounder sat in a chair near the door, and he was glad that at least this time, his prison was comfortable.

When the grounder saw him, move, he got up. Murphy frowned while he watched him approach. The man stopped at his bedside, poured liquid from a pitcher into a mug and offered it to Murphy.

Murphy pushed up on his elbow and took the mug. The water was cool and fresh and it eased the burn of his throat. “Thanks.”

The man nodded and put the mug back on the stand. He returned to his chair, and Murphy sat up, groaning. He was sore and stiff. He put his hands through his hair and grazed the bandage on his cheek. He felt the ones on his back when he stretched. “Is there anything to eat?”

“Sha, but you must dress.” The man pointed toward the dresser.

Murphy got out of bed and went through the drawers. He found his cargo pants and put them on, and picked up the first shirt that came out of the drawer. “Seen my boots?”

The man nodded and put the mug back on the stand. He returned to his chair, and Murphy sat up, groaning. He was sore and stiff. He put his hands through his hair and grazed the bandage on his cheek. He felt the ones on his back when he stretched. “Is there anything to eat?”

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The man pointed to the floor beside the dresser. Murphy was pleasantly surprised to find that his boots were clean, and a clean pair of socks was in the top of one of them. Once he had his boots on, he stood up and stretched again. He approached his guard. “I'm Murphy.”

“Sha,” the guard agreed.

“You are?”

“My guard.” He opened the door. Murphy went through and stepped aside so the guard could lead him to the food.

Murphy looked around while they walked. These were swank settings by grounder standards. He wondered who Clarke made the deal with to get them released. Their conversation wasn't loud enough to be clearly heard except for Clarke's outburst about Lexa and the guy's answer. He knew it was stupid to insult the person who could free him, but he couldn't help himself.

The guard pointed at the table and Murphy sat. There were pitchers and mugs in the center, and he pulled the first one of each he could reach. The pitcher held water, but that was fine because he felt dehydrated. He drank two mugs of water and looked around while he waited for whatever would happen next, which turned out to be the delivery of a bowl of stew and a plate of bread and cheese. His stomach rumbled. He'd been hungry when the guards arrested him, and since had been given only enough to survive.

He ate slowly, savoring the food, and ate until everything was gone. He stretched again, and got up to walk around a little. Before he got anywhere, the healer intercepted him. He packed Murphy off to bathe again, and after, checked all of his wounds, and applied salve and bandages where needed before allowing him to dress.

He went back to the room where he ate just as Clarke and that other guy came through the door. Clarke stopped when she saw him, then walked up to him.

Her voice was quiet, her tone urgent when she spoke to him. “Murphy, do not be an asshole. There's
a lot going on and I'm not sure how safe we are. I know it's hard for you, but be quiet.”

He rolled his eyes at her, but nodded, and Clarke backed away. He got a good look at the guy for the first time. He was obviously somebody important. He was clean and well dressed, and Murphy suspected he was, as most grounder warriors, a pile of muscles under the layers of clothing.

“Roan, this is Murphy kom Skaikru. Murphy, this is Roan, king of Azgeda.”

“An actual king?”

“Murphy, shut the hell up.”

Roan looked amused. “Yes, Murphy kom Skaikru, an actual king. I rule the Ice Nation. Perhaps you've heard of us.”

“Nothing good,” Murphy answered.

Clarke groaned. “Do you want to go back to jail or worse?”

“Let him speak, Wanheda. He is amusing.”

“He's an asshole, Roan. He drove a little girl to her death, and shot Raven.”

“C'mon, Princess, you slit that guy's throat and killed Finn.”

“Murphy, for the love of all that's holy, shut up.”

Roan laughed. He had never seen Clarke so rattled.

“Well, then, I'll let you two sit here and talk shit.” She started to leave the room.

“Clarke, Ontari wishes to see you.”

“This day just keeps getting better,” she grumbled, and turned to face Roan. “When did she tell you that?”

“Before the Conclave began. Go,” he urged. “I'm going to get to know your friend better.”

Clarke heard the unfriendly undertone in his voice and hoped Murphy did, too. She left them.
In the hall, two guards accompanied her to the lift. Neither of them spoke, but they were careful of her safety, not letting her enter the lift until they checked it thoroughly and making her wait before letting her exit it.

Two Azgeda warriors stood at the door outside the heda's suite, and they hurried to open the doors for Clarke. She took a deep breath before entering the space, but stopped as soon as she was through the door. It looked the same.

The chair she sat in to sketch, the couch where Lexa napped. The bed. She closed her eyes, then covered them when she couldn't stop the tears. She wiped her eyes and looked toward the balcony. Ontari stood there wearing black leather, her hair intricately braided. She looked at Polis, and Clarke wondered what she was thinking.

She didn't have to wait long to find out. Ontari turned and walked to her. "Wanheda."

"Heda."


"Sha."

"Don't be afraid," Ontari said softly.

Clarke's stomach lurched. "You aren't her."

"She is in me with all the commanders who came before. She swore you an oath, and I am honor bound to uphold it."

Clarke stared at Ontari, watched her eyes shift from green to brown.

"You are under protection of Azgeda, and now you are under my protection. I am sending you to Skaikru as an ambassador to attempt to crush their rebellion with a minimum of bloodshed."

"Roan said Skaikru will be welcomed back to the coalition if those who massacred the army are surrendered for execution."

"Roan speaks true. I will not wipe out your people if they will act sensibly."

"If they won't?"

"They will force my hand. My army awaits me."

"What about those who have nothing to do with the new chancellor's stupidity?"

"I cannot tell innocent from guilty. If you can, they can leave, join what kru they choose. But there will be no more Skaikru if they persist. This is the best I can do, Wanheda. They cannot make me look weak as they made Lexa look weak."

"Lexa wasn't weak."

"We both know otherwise. You made her weak. Hodnes laik kwelnes. First Costia, then you."
Clarke struggled to control her breathing as her hands became tight fists at her side.

"You leave tomorrow night, after my ascension ceremony. Take that thieving Skaikat with you unless Roan has other plans for him. Either way, make sure he knows there will be no reprieve if he repeats his actions." She pointed at a pile of cloth and furs on the floor at the foot of the bed. "Take that with you. It stinks."

Clarke did as instructed. She walked out holding the bedding. She wanted to bury her face in it, but refrained. She wondered whether Ontari was being cruel or kind with this gift. When she reached the Azgeda suite, she ignored Roan and Murphy to go to her room. She closed the door, leaned against it, and gave in to her desire. Clarke buried her face in the fabric and fur, smelled Lexa at first, and the two of them next. She stumbled to her bed, dropped the pile on its foot and climbed in. She was careful not to cry on it, but kept her face close enough to keep the scent in her nose.

Clarke silently cried herself to sleep.

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While she was gone, Roan and Murphy shared a drink. It was easier for Murphy to not be an asshole when Clarke wasn't around. Something about her brought all of his snarkiness front and center. It probably had to do with their different stations on the Ark, and her actions versus his after they landed.

He knew Roan was sizing him up, deciding his future. Murphy was truthful when he told Roan he'd heard nothing good about Azgeda. He'd always heard they had a queen, though, so apparently there had been a regime change. There was probably a story to go with that, too. He doubted Roan would tell him, but maybe Clarke would.

When he poured the second round, Roan asked, "What is Titus' interest in you?"

Murphy sighed. "Reverend Crazy?" he asked.

"Sha."

"When I got picked up, the guards found something on me he was interested in."

"What was that?"

"I think I should talk to Clarke before saying anything about it."

"Why are people so loyal to Wanheda?"

"She's an inspiration to us all."

Roan laughed. "You do not like her."

"I'm grateful she didn't let that nutbag kill me and that she got me out of that cell."

"Still, you dislike her."

"I don't know any more," Murphy admitted. "I keep getting mixed up in all this crazy shit, and I'm tired of it. I'm down here and I want to live, but you fuckers are crazy with your tattoos and your drama and your feuds. I'm sure we haven't helped things any."

Roan shrugged. "In my opinion, Skaikru has been a great help. I am sure there are others who disagree."
Food was put on the table, and a second bottle was put near Roan since the one they were drinking from was almost empty. Murphy ate again, glad to have food. It felt wonderful not to be hungry. Plus, it would soak up some of the alcohol so he didn't say anything to get him in more trouble. He recognized that his status as a guest was tenuous, reliant on his ability to stay in both Roan's and Clarke's good graces.

"I have a task for you, but I am not certain you can complete it."

"Depends on what it is, and what my incentive is."

"I believe your life to be sufficient incentive," Roan answered.

"True."

"So you will do as I ask, and if you are successful, we will see what happens next."

"Anything you say, your highness."

"Your majesty," Roan corrected.

"Your majesty."

Roan refilled their drinks. "Clarke is going on a dangerous journey. You will accompany her, keep her on task, ensure her safety."

"I can't fight," Murphy protested.

"You will have guards. There are other ways to keep her safe."

"Oh, make sure she doesn't lose her shit over Lexa."

"Sha."

"You don't know her very well, do you?"

"Well enough. Wanheda is dangerous as both ally and enemy."

"Yeah, that's true. It's probably safer if she's pissed off at you."

"I will bear that in mind."

"Where are we going?"

"Wanheda will carry a message to Skaikru."

"Why do you keep calling her that?"

"It is the title she earned for taking down the Mountain."

"I thought you guys blew it up."

"After Wanheda removed the danger."

"Crazy fucking grounders," Murphy muttered. "So we're going home?" he asked Roan bitterly.

"Sha, to save at least some of Skaikru."
"Good luck with that."

"You should hope for that, Murphy kom Skaïkru, for you have no inherent value. You are here because that was the price for Wanheda's agreement to aid me."

"They don't want me back, trust me."

"I cannot imagine why."

Murphy laughed. "I'll give you the top five reasons when we get back."

"Good."

The door opened, and Clarke raced through, carrying something in her arms. Murphy saw only her side, but Roan saw her face and realized what she carried. While Clarke was upstairs, Ontari had two trunks delivered to Clarke. They held Lexa's clothes and personal items. Clarke carried something more intimate and probably more precious to her. Roan couldn't tell from Clarke's face how Ontari gave it to her, but knowing the new heda, she'd been at least rude about it.

Roan sighed and returned his attention to Murphy. "You leave tomorrow night on horseback."

"I don't know how to ride."

"There is no time to teach you. You will ride with a guard."

"Whatever you say, your majesty."

Roan drew his dagger and slammed it into the table between Murphy's fingers. "You are responsible for Wanheda. If she returns with as much as a scratch, you will pay ten times over."

Murphy sat up straight in his chair. "Got it."

"Good," Roan said and retrieved his dagger. "Rest," he ordered. "It may be the last you have for a while."

---

Hôdnes laik kwelnes. = Love is weakness.
Skaiskat = Sky boy
Clarke dreamed of Lexa. It started as one image, two, and burst into a stilted reel of what they shared.

*Your heart has no weakness.*

*May we meet again.*

*I swear fealty to you...*

Clarke rolled over and sat up before Lexa finished. Still, she heard Lexa. *Don't be afraid.* Clarke wondered whether she was losing her mind. She had no time to indulge her grief. She was expected to be present today. She wondered what clothes Roan had for her. What she wore, although nice, was not suitable for anything as important as the day's events. She got up and notice the trunks beside the wardrobe. Clarke went over and knelt to open one. She immediately wished she hadn't. It held Lexa's things. Clarke immediately recognized the scabbard on top and the hilt of Lexa's sword sticking out of it and slammed the lid shut.

She stood up and decided to get a drink. Maybe someone out there could tell her where to find her clothes. Roan was all ready at the table, several sheets of paper in front of him.

"Hungry, Clarke?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"You must eat. It will be a long day and a longer night."

"Yeah," she sighed.

"Your clothes will be here shortly if you wish to bathe first."

"Why are Lexa's things in my room?"

"Would you prefer someone else have them?"

"No."

"That is why."

"Thank you."

"Thank Ontari."

Clarke twitched. "I'm going to take a bath."

"I will have your clothes taken there. We will eat when you are finished."

Clarke nodded and headed for the bath. She didn't linger this time, and was getting out when one of the guards brought in a pile of clothing and a new pair of boots. "I will braid your hair while you eat," she told Clarke.

"Mochof," Clarke answered, and finished drying herself before putting on her new clothing. It took longer than she expected. There were buckles, buttons, and ties to figure out. The boots, at least,
were simple. The clothes were black, and Clarke wondered why for a moment. It had to mean something, but she couldn't figure out what.

Murphy was at the table when Clarke arrived. Roan called for food, and Clarke asked for wine rather than the water she usually drank. Had she been in Arkadia, she would have asked her mother for a mild sedative, but in Polis, wine would do.

Clarke stayed still while she ate, and the guard stood behind her putting in the numerous braids the grounders wore. Murphy was thankfully silent, but kept giving her looks that she couldn't read. Roan was engrossed with his papers, probably reports from scouts and spies. When he finished, he looked at Clarke and Murphy. "This is an important day. It has been many years since Ascension Day."

Clarke bit her lip and took a deep breath before finishing her wine.

"You are to observe. Do not engage anyone in conversation," he told Murphy pointedly. To Clarke he said, "You are an ambassador. No one there can touch you. They fear Wanheda. Remind them why."

She nodded. She had plenty of rage to share. "No ceremonial daggers?"

Roan laughed. "Not today, Wanheda. The guards will thoroughly search everyone, even Fleimkepa. There will be no weapons except those Heda bears."

"Probably for the best. Should I put on warpaint?"

"Sha. It is not war, but it is a day for warriors. I can apply yours, if you wish. I remember the design."

"Please. I only got a glance in the mirror."

"Look well when I finish and sketch it." He pulled a leatherbound pad from under his papers and handed it to her. "I will ensure that your other drawing materials are retrieved by the end of the day."

"Mochof, Roan." She smiled at him briefly, and tried to keep the last time she drew anything out of her mind.

"Come, Wanheda, we must leave soon."

She followed him to his room and stood while he painted her face. When he finished, he handed her a mirror and left her.

Clarke studied her face for a few seconds and wondered if she would ever recognize herself again. She took a deep breath, opened the small sketch pad and took one of the charcoal sticks from the small pouch on the inside of the cover. It didn't take long for her to get her warpaint design down on paper. She put the mirror on the nearest dresser and tucked the book into one of the pockets on her pants, took another deep breath and returned to the main room.

Murphy came out of his bedroom without bandages on his face, dressed in new clothes. His wounds were sealed, but far from healed. Roan was nowhere in sight, so Murphy went to Clarke. "What's happening today?"

"A ceremony to recognize the new commander."

"And tonight we leave for Camp whatever."

"How the hell are we going to save those idiots from themselves?"

"I don't have a clue," Clarke admitted. She walked to the table and poured some more wine. She drank it quickly and put the cup down before turning to Murphy. "This is important. Do not fuck it up. All you have to do is stand around and look interested. Don't get separated from your guard."

"Got it."

"I mean, it, Murphy."

He joined her near the table. "Roan threatened me with my life last night. I get that it's important. We're in this together now, Griffin. I have your back, because if I don't, I'm a dead man."

"All right."

"Time to go," Roan announced as he came from a part of the suite they hadn't seen yet.

Clarke had no idea what to expect. Given the nature of the ceremony, there would probably be blood, declarations of fealty, food, and alcohol. She expected to kneel before Ontari again, last in the line of ambassadors, kings, queens, and generals representing their krus. Skaikru was hanging on by a thread, and she had to figure out how to keep them from cutting it.

She was surprised that Roan had a seat beside him reserved for Clarke. Murphy would sit below them, with the guards who weren't on duty. The other clans sat with similar arrangements in a semicircle facing heda's throne. A red carpet covered a path to the throne and ended behind it. Azgeda guards already waited behind it, and the area was ringed with guards holding spears.

Clarke saw the place where Lexa lay defenseless on her back and worked on controlling her breathing. She would be glad to leave Polis tonight, even if the road she traveled would also be full of memories of Lexa. Here, they were too fresh, and being around Ontari confused her. Maybe someone in Skaikru could tell her something about the A.I.

Clarke watched the ceremony. Ontari walked the carpet, two guards between her and Titus. Everyone stood when they saw Ontari and remained standing. She stood in front of the chair; Titus stood to the side.

"The commander's spirit has chosen wisely," Titus bellowed. "Ontari kom Azgeda is Heda."

The crowd roared its approval, but became silent when he raised his hands. "Heda belongs to all of us. She protects us, shares in our joy and our sorrow, swears to lay down her life for us. She swears this by her blood. On this day, the first of her reign, she shares her blood with you, as she will on the last."

He called each clan and one by one the highest ranking member present walked the red carpet. "Yujleda. Boudalan. Louwoda Kliron. Ouska Ejon Kru. Ingranarona. Defilkru. Podakru. Sangedakru. Floudonkru. Trigedakru. Azgeda. Skaikru." Each representative knelt and offered a palm. Ontari sliced each one and squeezed a few drops of her black blood into it. She said a few quiet words to each leader when he or she rose.

Clarke recognized several of the leaders who came forward, but not the Trikru representative. She worked again to steady her breathing when her turn came. Clarke ignored Titus and focused on
Ontari, who seemed to squeeze extra hard to force more blood from her fist into Clarke's palm. Clarke was the only one to whom Ontari offered her hand to rise, and Clarke wondered what was going on as Ontari pressed her bleeding palm into Clarke's. "Ride quickly, Wanheda. Their lives depend on you."

Clarke lowered her head and answered, "Sha, Heda."
Seven

She returned to her seat, aware of the many eyes on her, especially Titus'. When she was seated, Ontari spoke. "We are one people, made of many. We are joined today, and hereafter. As you have trusted me with your lives, I trust you with mine." She looked around the assemblage, smiled, and yelled, "Let the feast begin!"

Everyone around her stood and cheered, but Clarke remained seated, her brow furrowed in thought, until Roan put a hand under her elbow and pulled her to her feet. While the crowd cleared, he spoke to her quietly. "You will make an appearance at the feast. You will make a toast to Heda. Make sure both you and Murphy eat. After two hours, you will leave. Go directly to the stables. Everything you need will be in the saddlebags. I have arranged for you to change horses at several places along the way. Do not stop until you reach your destination. Your guards have the clearances you need, but if there are any problems, there are papers in your saddlebags to clear the way. Speak to me before you leave."

Clarke nodded. When the Azgeda delegation left the arena, she walked with them, and excused herself just outside the feast hall. She grabbed Murphy before he entered. One guard waited outside to keep an eye on them. She relayed Roan's instructions.

"Got it," he answered.

She nodded and went in. He followed a few minutes later.

Clarke did as was expected. She ate, drank sparingly, and raised her goblet to Ontari at the appropriate time, wishing the new heda many victories and a long life. A few warriors banged on the table when she finished.

Two hours into the feast, she moved next to Roan. He smiled at her. "Wanheda."

"Your majesty."

The people near them wandered off, but Clarke knew Ontari and Titus were watching. She saw Murphy leave, and hoped that his stumble was an act.

"Much rides with you, Clarke. I look forward to your return. Ontari rides to her army in the morning."

"No pressure," Clarke answered.

Roan smiled at her. "No more than you've faced before. Go. Do your duty to your people."

Clarke nodded.

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy waited at the stables. He looked uncomfortable. Six guards waited, too. The horses were saddled, and Clarke wasted no time mounting up and getting underway. The only thing the guards said once the passed the gates was, "Hurry." The one in the lead kicked his horse into a gallop, and the rest followed.
Every few hours they left the road. It took seconds for their saddlebags to be transferred from one horse to the next, and they were galloping down the road again. Clarke battled exhaustion, and Murphy hung on to one soldier after another. They did not let him ride with Clarke, probably due to Roan's orders, or perhaps Ontari's.

With repeated changes of mount, they reached the army's rear near dawn. Clarke was surprised that no one challenged them, and too tired to care. They stopped once more, long enough to tie white cloth to long branches, making three truce flags. While they did that, someone handed Clarke a cup of coffee. She hadn't had any since before being locked up in the Skybox, and didn't care that it was black and unsweetened. She drank it as quickly as she could, and followed the two guards to their horses. Each of them took a truce flag and rode toward Arkadia.

They ran into a scouting party a mile outside Arkadia. Miller and Harper trailed an older man Clarke didn't recognize. She saw relief on their faces for a few seconds before they jumped to enforce the orders barked by their leader.

Clarke and the others got down from their horses. The saddlebags were at the camp, and none of them carried any weapons. After they were searched, the man demanded, "What do you want?"

"I'm Clarke Griffin"

"I know who you are. I asked what you want."

"Heda Ontari kom Azgeda sent me to speak to Skaikru. All of Skaikru," she added.

"Not interested."

"You're all going to die if you don't at least hear me out."

"Still not interested."

"Fine. Let me say goodbye to my friends and we'll leave."

"One minute."

Miller and Harper hurried to Clarke.

"Give up Pike and the others and the new commander will spare your lives. If that's not possible, anyone who's not loyal to him needs to leave. Please get everyone you can out."

"Goodbye, Clarke," Miller said loudly, and hugged her. "I'll do what I can," he whispered directly into her ear.

"May we meet again," she answered.

Clarke hugged Harper. "The new commander isn't kidding. If you won't turn them over, she's going to kill everyone. Get them out. They'll be safe, I promise."

"May we meet again," Harper answered, and squeezed Clarke.

"May we meet again," Clarke answered, and let her go. To the man waiting impatiently, she said, "Please tell Chancellor Pike that I'm here on behalf of Heda Ontari. If he wants to speak with me, have him approach with this flag." She picked up the white flag and handed it to Miller. He nodded almost imperceptibly.

The man snatched the flag from Miller and threw it to the ground. "We don't want your flag. Get
outta here before I change my mind about shooting you."

Miller handed the flag back to Clarke. She took it and mounted her horse. Her guards did the same, and they rode back the way they came. Along the way, they ran into another patrol. Bellamy led this one, and Clarke didn't bother to get off her horse.

"Lexa's dead," she told him. "The new commander will be here soon, and she's going to destroy Arkadia and kill everyone there unless Pike and the rest of you who killed the army Lexa sent to protect you surrenders to face justice."

"Grounders have no justice," Bellamy answered.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

"You're here with them and you ask me that? Who blew up Mount Weather, Clarke?"

"It was Emerson. You know that, Bellamy. Are you willing to sacrifice everyone in Arkadia to your anger?"

"Why not? You were willing to sacrifice all of us to Lexa."

"Tell me exactly how many of us Lexa killed."

He looked away.

"For every one of us who died before we made peace with Trikru, she lost at least 50 of her people, probably more. I would have done exactly what she did, Bellamy. I would have taken a deal to have all of you returned no matter how many of her people were left inside there."

"You didn't do that, Clarke, and more of us died."

Clarke looked past him. She didn't recognize the people with him. "Surrender Pike, Bellamy, and the others who massacred the army. Otherwise, you die. Are you willing to die for the hate of a few people?"

Bellamy fired one shot into the air. "Next one will be in your head."

"Goodbye, Bellamy." Clarke tapped her heels into her horse's side and rode toward the army.
Eight

Murphy slept in the tent assigned to them, but Clarke couldn’t sleep. Caffeine and stress kept her pacing around the outside of the tent. Around her, warriors talked softly while they made sure their gear was ready. Heda Ontari was coming, and they would be prepared.

She knew from listening that more troops would arrive with Ontari, doubling the size of the already large force. There was no doubt that she would do as she said.

When night fell, Clarke was still worried and awake. Murphy watched her pace but didn’t say anything. He got food for her and made her eat, and offered to find some alcohol, but she declined.

She had finally fallen into an uneasy sleep when he reluctantly woke her. Two guards went with her to the front line. The people she saw had their hands up, and every one held something white plainly visible. The pressure in her chest eased when she saw the dozen wary Arkadians.

She stepped out to greet them. Harper was at the back of the group, but stepped forward when she saw Clarke. "Miller will be here with another group soon. There will be one more group after him, and maybe another, I'm not sure."

"My mom?"

"Last group. She and Kane insisted. There's a bunch of Trikru at the drop ship. Except for Lincoln, they're sick or hurt."

"We'll get them," Clarke said. "I'm sorry, but you're probably going to be prisoners until the new commander arrives."

"As long as we're alive," Harper answered.

Clarke nodded and turned to her guards. She asked one to stay with the Arkadians while the other took her to whoever was in charge of this sector. He told Clarke to stay with her friends and jogged off.

Half an hour later, he returned with an Azgeda general. "Wanheda, I received orders from Heda and Haihefa Roan to assist you."

"Thank you. There's a group of Skaikru here now, and at least two more coming. Heda said they would be safe if they surrendered."

"Do you know these people?"

"Most of them." She turned for a second and called for Harper. While she waited for her, she asked his name.

"Kemp."

She nodded. "Kemp kom Azgeda, this is Harper kom Skaikru. She came to Earth with me." They exchanged nods before she continued. "Do you know everyone with you?" she asked Harper.

"Yes. I'll vouch for them, Clarke. None of them support Pike. None of them were allowed to patrol because he didn't trust them."

"You must surrender your weapons," Kemp said.
"We don't have any weapons."

"We will search you."

"We have nothing to hide," Harper said.

Kemp ordered Clarke's guards to search the Arkadians. Their pockets were empty. No one had anything except the clothes on their backs.

"Can you get them something to eat and a place to sleep?" Clarke asked Kemp.

"Sha, Wanheda. They will be under guard for their protection."

"That's fine. Mochof." Clarke turned to Harper again. "How long before Miller's group gets here?"

"Any time. We were an hour apart."

"Ok. Go with them. I'll see you as soon as everyone's here." Kemp gave orders to Clarke's guards, and they escorted the group into camp. "More are coming?"

"Sha. There is a group of Trikru in the lockup at the ship that brought us to Earth. When all my people are here, I can take you there."

"Can anyone else guide us?"

"I don't know."

"Heda's orders were explicit. You are not to be exposed to any danger."

"How much danger can I be in with Azgedagona?"

Kemp smiled, but not completely. "If no one else can lead us there, I will allow you to go." He raised his head. "Your friends."

While they neared, a group of warriors came from camp and stood behind Kemp and Clarke. Like the first group, they approached with raised hands, holding something white. This group, to Clarke's relief, was larger.

"May I speak to them?" she asked Kemp.

"Sha. It is easier if you explain to them."

"Mochof." She approached the group, met them about ten feet from the general. "I am so glad to see you all."

Miller moved to the front of the group. "Hey, Clarke."

She hugged him again. "Thank you so much."

"The others are coming. Two more groups, maybe 30 more people. If there are more than that, one of the next groups will know."

Clarke nodded, and greeted everyone she knew before speaking to all of them. "Here's what's going to happen. Those warriors are going to search you for weapons. If you have any, please give them up before they search you. Then they'll take you to the others, give you something to eat and
someplace to sleep. You're their prisoners until the new commander arrives. She promised you would be safe. I'll come see you as soon as everyone's here."

They nodded. Miller handed her a pistol and several knives were passed forward. Clarke took them all, and asked Miller, "Can anyone take a group to the drop ship?"

He shook his head. "We're beat. We've been on quarter rations for a week."

"Ok, go get something eat. I'll see you soon."

"Thanks, Clarke."

She nodded and walked ahead of him, arms full of weapons. One of the guards held a satchel for her and Clarke carefully placed the knives in it, saving the pistol for last. She made certain the safety was on and removed the magazine. She got the bullet from the firing chamber and put it in the magazine before placing both pieces in the bag.

"We will return them when Heda approves."

"That's fine."

"Will you wait for the others?"

"Sha."

He left her for a moment to speak to the guards, then returned. "How was Heda's Ascension ceremony?"

"Interesting. Have you been to one?"

"No. Did she share her blood with you?"

"Sha." Clarke held out her palm, and realized for the first time that it was healed. She tried to remember the last time she noticed it, and realized that it must have healed before she left the feast because handling the reins didn't bother her. All that remained was a thin, white line across her palm. The only evidence of what happened were traces of dark dried blood in the creases of her palm.

Kemp nodded and traced the line with his index finger. "Tell me about living in the sky," he asked, and she told him everything she could think of until they saw the next group approach.

Clarke expected to see her mother or Marcus Kane and was disappointed again. This group was most of the rest of the people who came down in the drop ship. She greeted them and explained everything again. This group gave her two knives, and when they were gone, Clarke went back to telling Kemp about living on the Ark.

The last group arrived two hours after the previous one. Clarke hugged her mother and shook Marcus Kane's hand. "Where's Raven? And Monty?"

"Raven's with Jaha. I told him what was coming, but he insisted they'll be safe in the City of Light."

"He's an idiot, Mom. Do you have any of those chips?"

"Marcus has one."

"I need it."
"You're not going to use it, are you?"

"Not a chance."

Marcus fished it out of his shirt pocket and handed it to Clarke. "It's dangerous."

"You're telling me." She slid it into a pocket. "If you have any weapons, give them to me. The guards are going to search you so it's better if you just give them to me. They'll take you to get something to eat and rest. You're prisoners until the new commander arrives."

"Clarke, are you ok?"

"I'm fine. There's a lot to do. I'll see all of you as soon as I can."

"Lincoln's at the drop ship with the others. They're sick and starving."

"I know. I'm going to get them now, unless anyone else is coming."

"I don't think so," Marcus told her. "All that's left are Pike's supporters and Jaha's followers."

"Mean and crazy," Abby muttered.

"And dead," Clarke added. "Go, I'll see you soon."

Haihefa = king
Clarke led a dozen mounted Azgeda warriors through the woods. She had one of the white flags with her in case they ran into anyone, and to ease Trikru's minds about seeing Azgeda. She stopped them just within sight of the gate, and approached it alone.

"Heya," she called.

Lincoln appeared in one of the watch stands. "Clarke?"

"Lincoln, I am so glad to see you."

"Where's Octavia?"

"Probably still on her way from Polis. It's a long story, but we're here to get everyone and get them the help they need. How many of you are there?"

"Eight."

"Can they ride double?"

"If it means getting out of here, they will."

"Ok, don't freak out at the Azgeda."

"Azgeda," he repeated slowly.

"It's a long story and as soon as I have a chance, I'll tell you everything. Right now, I just need you to trust me."

"Did Heda send you?"

"Sha, but not Lexa." Clarke closed her eyes and fought back tears again.

"I am sorry, Clarke."

"Me, too." She waved the warriors forward. "The coalition still holds. I promise you're safe."

"They cannot walk."

"Open the gate."

It took a minute be he got it open, and the warriors followed Clarke into the enclosure. She looked at the drop ship and sighed, then gave directions to the men with her. It only took a few minutes to gather the ill and get them on horses. Most were so weak they had to ride in front of the warriors.

Lincoln rode behind Clarke. "What happened?" he asked when they were underway.

She sighed. "Lexa died."

"How?"

"I don't know the official story."
"Clarke, what are you not telling me?"
"I can't," she choked.
"Who is heda?"
"Ontari kom Azgeda."
"Aden?"
"Alive. All the strikon Natblida are alive."
"Then how is Ontari heda?"
Clarke sighed again. "Nia challenged Lexa, so Lexa and Roan had to fight to the death. Except it was Nia's death. Roan is king of Azgeda.Ontari was Nia's personal Natblida, and a couple days after Nia died, Lexa died. The riders caught them on the road, so they came back. On the way, Roan told her not to kill her opponents. He's determined to keep the coalition going. Ontari sent me to give Skaikru a chance to survive, but Pike's completely delusional. There are thousands of gona here, and when Ontari arrives, they're going to attack."
"Is everyone still there?"
"No. Fifty or so snuck out and surrendered."
"Your mother?"
"Sha, and Marcus and a lot of the people who came down with me."
"Bellamy?"
"No. That's gonna kill Octavia. He flat out told me he doesn't care. I don't know what's wrong with him."
"He's angry."
"So am I, but I'm not willing to die for it."
"What will happen?"
"Your ill will be tended. You'll be fed and put with the others. Until Ontari arrives, you're all prisoners. She promised me you'll be safe, Lincoln."
"I hope she spoke true."
"Me, too."
They rode the rest of the way in silence.

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy almost charged Clarke when he saw her. "Where were you?"
"I have things to do, Murphy. Chil au. Is there any coffee?"
"You haven't slept since before we left Polis, Clarke."
"Murphy, what the fuck is your problem?"

He stepped closer to her. "If anything happens to you, if you even break a nail, Roan's gonna kill me."

"I'm fine. I'll be better with some coffee and something to eat."

One of the guards approached her with a plate and mug. She accepted it and told her, "Mochof."

Clarke found a place to sit and quickly ate her food. The coffee was no longer steaming when she finished eating, and she chugged it. She handed everything to Murphy. "I'm going to see who all got out of Arkadia and make sure they're all right. You're welcome to come with me."

Clarke asked the guard to take her to her people. Murphy followed her silently. At the rear of the encampment, a small detachment stood guard around a separate group of tents. Clarke saw several people standing near the fire. She started with them, pleased to be told that yes, they'd been fed and had a place to rest. After that, she went from tent to tent. Lincoln was missing, as was her mother. She was glad to see Marcus, who explained that Abby and Lincoln, as well as the ill Trikru and several Arkadians were with the healers.

"You're sure everyone's ok?"

"I'm sure, Clarke," Marcus reassured her. "No threats, no raised voices. They brought food earlier and promised more later. They left us with water. There are plenty of furs in the tents. It's a little crowded, but we'll be fine for a few days."

"Good."

"I'm sorry to hear about Lexa."

"Please don't, Marcus. I can't."

"It's all right, Clarke. You'll have time."

She stared at the ground and nodded.

"Tell me about the new commander."

"Ontari kom Azgeda."

"That doesn't sound good."

"Nia is dead. Roan is king now. He wants the coalition to continue, and that's what Ontari is doing. She sent me to try to save Skaikru. I failed, so you guys are going to have to join other clans. I don't know if it's going to be voluntary or if she's going to farm you out or what. I kinda doubt Trikru's interested in hosting anyone."

"I suspect you're right."

"I'll try to keep you and Mom with me in Polis."

"Why would you stay in Polis if Skaikru is disbanded?"

"Another long story," Clarke sighed. "If you see my mom, tell her I'll see her soon. I need to get some rest before Ontari gets here."
"Is that Murphy?"

"Yeah."

"Another long story?"

"You got it."

"Get some rest, Clarke. I'll take care of everyone here."

"Thanks so much, Marcus."

"We should be thanking you."

"Not until we find out what Ontari plans."

He nodded. "Go," he told her.

Clarke didn't wait for another conversation to delay her. She left the camp and followed Murphy and their guard back to their tent. Clarke laid down and tried to calm her racing mind. It took a while, but she fell asleep.

strikon = young
guna = fighters
Chil au = Chill out
It was dark when Murphy woke her. "The commander sent a guard to get you."

"Ok," she answered groggily. "How long was I out?"

"Don't know. Four or five hours maybe."

"Better than nothing." Clarke stood and stretched. She ran her hands over her hair. The braids were still in place. She straightened her clothes and left the tent.

"Wanheda, Heda requests your presence."

"Lead the way."

Ontari’s tent was larger than the others, but only so it could hold a table and a few chairs as well as a bed. It looked much like the tent Lexa used, and Clarke swallowed all of her feelings before entering.

"Wanheda, what is Skaikru's answer?"

"Fifty-three surrendered to Kemp. The rest will not. Some follow Pike. The rest follow Jaha, and believe the City of Light will protect them."

"Fools."

"Sha," Clarke agreed.

"We attack at dawn."

Clarke nodded.

"You have no weapons. You will stay and assist the healers."

"Sha, Heda."

"Fifty-three is not a Kru."

"I know."

"We will discuss what to do with them after the battle."

"Sha, Heda."

"They are safe, Klark."

Clarke's head jerked up. She saw Ontari's eyes waver between brown and green. Her palm itched, and she heard Lexa. *Don't be afraid.* "Mochof."

"I do not trust the Skaiskat with a weapon. Make him use of him with the healers. We will speak after the battle."

Clarke left before she had to see Ontari's eyes change again.
The fight ended early the next afternoon. Clarke was summoned from the healers' tents to Arkadia, and rode there beside a guard. Ontari paced in front of the open gate.

"Walk with me," she ordered as soon as Clarke was near. "Which one is Pike?"

"I don't see him yet."

They walked all over the enclosure. Clarke knew this would give her fresh nightmares. They entered the Ark. The main hall was full of bodies. The found Pike's at the far wall in the meeting room.

Ontari made Clarke give her a tour of the Ark. Clarke did her best to overlook the corpses, and wondered whether Lexa had received the rites due her. As if Ontari read her mind, she said, "Heda Lexa's funeral pyre will be lit tomorrow. Bring to it whoever you want."

"Thank you."

"I have many questions about your technology."

"I'll answer what I can, but I don't know much. Others know much more." Clarke thought of Raven and realized she hadn't seen her body. She saw Bellamy's body, and Monty and Jasper, but not Jaha.

They moved through the Ark, going from one area to the next, stepping over and around bodies when necessary. Ontari was, to Clarke's surprise, very interested in the Medbay, and they spent longer there while Clarke explained the equipment. "You need a fisa to take advantage of everything."

"Like you."

"Like my mother." Clarke paused for a moment, trying to think of a way to explain it. "I might be able to keep you alive until she gets to you, but she can save your life."

"How?"

"She's a surgeon. She can stop bleeding on the inside that you can't see but will kill you anyway."

"She will come to Polis," Ontari said. "We will bring this with her. She will teach the healers to do what she does."

It wasn't what Clarke had in mind when she wanted Abby in Polis, but it would suit her mother. She loved teaching as much as she thrived on doing her job. *Don't be afraid.* "There are others who want to come to Polis."

"They all will come to Polis until I decide what to do with them." Ontari's eyes shifted to green. "As guests." Her eyes returned to brown.

Clarke's palm itched furiously, and she made a fist to distract herself from it and Lexa's constant whispering. *Protect you, Klark. May we meet again. Our people.*

The other place that held Ontari's attention was Raven's workshop. Clarke had no answers for Ontari's questions. She didn't know whether anyone who surrendered knew enough to satisfy Ontari's curiosity, and wondered again where the missing Arkadians were.

"We will speak to your people. They will be truthful if you are present."
They rode to the encampment, gave their horses to guards, and walked to the rear where the Arkadians camped. Ontari was correct that Clarke's presence made them more likely to speak to Ontari without caution. After asking each a few questions, Ontari pointed at the two who appeared, from their answers, to know the most about the Ark's tech. "I will send for you later. Wanheda, with me."

"One moment, beja, Heda." Clarke got together with Roger and Fay. "Don't be afraid." Clarke frowned for a moment, but kept talking. "She wants our tech, and without Raven, you guys know the most. She's probably going to want radios, so talk with each other now about what you know and what you can reasonably do."

They nodded, but still looked worried.

"It's ok. You'll be fine."

Marcus caught her eye. "I'll be back," she told him, and joined Ontari, who waited impatiently outside the ring of guards.

They went to the healers' tents. Ontari checked on each of the warriors treated by Abby, then went to watch her work. When Abby saw Clarke, she said, "I need a hand here."

Clarke grabbed the bottle of alcohol on the table and poured some on her hands, and took hold of the piece of skin impeding Abby's removal of a bullet from the warrior's upper arm. Seconds after Clarke helped, Abby pulled the bullet out and dropped it into a wooden pail near her feet. It clinked against others when it landed. Clarke held the skin together so Abby could suture it. She put a piece of red seaweed over the stitches and wrapped a bandage around it.

The guard standing in the corner helped his compatriot from the table while Abby gave instructions. As soon as he left, another was helped in.

"Is he in danger?" Ontari asked.

Abby assessed him. "Not immediately."

"We need to talk."

"I can do both, Commander."

"Wanheda, help this gona while I speak with Fisa."

"Sha, Heda." Clarke was sick of saying those words, and closed her eyes for a second as Lexa whispered for her to be calm. While her mother left the tent with Ontari, Clarke pulled the soldier's shirt from her side. She wiped around the entry and exit wounds with alcohol and warned her, "This is gonna hurt."

The only sign that the warrior felt it was that one foot moved in circles while Clarke pulled an alcohol soaked cloth through the wound. She stitched both sides closed, put seaweed on the wounds and bandaged them. "Take it easy for a couple days. See a healer in a week or so to get the stitches out."

"Mochof, Wanheda."

"Pro."

While she left, Clarke checked supplies. They were nearly out of seaweed. She held up a piece. "Do
"You know where to get this?" she asked the guard.

"No."

"Murphy!" Clarke yelled.

A minute later, he entered the tent ahead of another injured fighter. "Please tell me that's not your blood."

"Not my blood." Clarke held up the seaweed. "I need you to go to the river and get some of this. It's below the waterfall, where the water is calmer. Get as much as you can, but not all of it." She stopped the guards who were helping bring the wounded in for treatment. "Find someone to go with him."

"We have no time for him."

"Heda and Haihefa say otherwise," Clarke answered, and started examining her patient.

beja = please
Abby came back about an hour later, and looked better for the break. "She wants me to come to Polis," she told Clarke.

"I know. I sent Murphy for seaweed, he should be back soon. Did you get something to eat?"

"Yes, we sat and ate while we talked. She's..."

"She's heda," Clarke interrupted, and moved her eyes toward the guard while she finished tying off the last suture. "How many are out there?"

"Not many, and they mostly need stitches. Murphy triaged them for me. Why is he here?"

"Long story," Clarke told her mother, and gave her patient instructions.

Another guard appeared in the entry. "Wanheda, Heda wants you to join her."

"On my way," Clarke answered. "I'll see you later," she told her mother, and rinsed her hands in a bucket before following the guard.

Ontari waited in her tent, and someone followed Clarke in. While Clarke sat, a plate was put in front of her. "Mochof," Clarke said to her server.

"Eat, Wanheda," Ontari instructed.

"Mochof, Heda," Clarke answered, and did as instructed.

"You must take better care of yourself."

Clarke's palm itched again, but she stayed focused on her plate. She didn't want to see Ontari's eyes change color, but she couldn't stop Lexa's whispering. Safe. Ste yuj. More.

"Your mother has many ideas."

Clarke nodded.

"She argues that there may be other sky people out there and that disbanding Skaikru is premature."

"There may be. The last two years we were up there were bad. Stations failed and fell." Clarke looked up. "Farm Station landed in Azgeda land, and many of them were killed. That's why Pike was so adamant in his argument that Skaikru should kill and take land."

"Nia was shortsighted. There was much we could have learned."

"Sha."

"Where are the rest of them?"

"I don't know. I haven't had a chance to ask Marcus or my mom."

"Who is Marcus?"
"He was a chancellor on the Ark. He took the brand for Skaikru. He was going to be the next chancellor, but Pike wouldn't listen to him. He told lies and made people afraid. Fear is a powerful motivator, and logic is easy to discard."

"I will speak with Marcus."

"You should. He's smart and good at politics. He and my mom are a good team. They complement each other."

Ontari nodded. "Why does Titus fear you?"

"I don't know," Clarke lied. She rubbed her palm against her thigh, seeking relief from the itching. *Protect you.*

"You will return to Polis tomorrow after Heda Lexa's funeral pyre is done. Haihefa requests your presence. The Skaiskat will stay here to assist your mother."

"I'll tell him."

"Heda Lexa's pyre is being prepared. You may assist if you wish."

"Mochof." Clarke pushed her plate away. She ate half of what was on it.

Ontari pushed it back to Clarke. "Finish it. You have not eaten today."

Clarke suppressed a sigh and worked to finish the food while Ontari watched. When she finished, Ontari told her, "Your guard waits to take you to TonDC."

"Mochof," Clarke answered, and left.

100 – 100 – 100

Helping Trikru gather wood was a welcome change from the constant talking. She saw Lexa everywhere, though and clearly heard her, but they were memories. When she returned with her third armload of fuel, she saw Octavia and Indra.

Clarke dreaded talking to them, but knew she had to. Both women stared at Clarke, who saw the fury in both sets of eyes. They looked at each other for several seconds before Clarke said, "I'm sorry."

"You're sorry?" Octavia exploded. "That's all you have to say, Clarke?"

Clarke nodded. "I'm sorry for everything that happened."

"What happened to Heda?" Indra demanded.

"I can't tell you. It's not safe. I tried to save her. I tried and I couldn't." Clarke didn't try to stop her tears this time. "That's why I didn't leave with you. We said goodbye, and I was getting my pack and." Clarke stopped. She had to protect them, keep Titus focused on her and Murphy. She knew fear made people reckless. "I'm sorry," she repeated.

"Bellamy?" Octavia asked.

"He's dead, too. I don't know what Ontari's going to do with their bodies."

"Did anyone survive?"
"Miller, Harper, and my mom got about 50 people out. They're together at the back of the Azgeda camp. My mom and Murphy are with the healers."

"Murphy? That cockroach is still alive?"

"Yeah."

"What about Jaha and his cult?"

"I don't know. I didn't see any of them, so maybe they left, too." Clarke wiped her face. "Stay with Trikru, Octavia. I'll send Lincoln to you as soon as I can."

"He's alive?"

"Yeah. Tell me where you'll be and I'll send him to you."

Octavia and Indra exchanged a look. It was clear they didn't trust Clarke, and Clarke didn't blame them.

"Tell him to come here," Indra said. "We'll make sure he knows where to find us."

"Ok." Clarke cleared her throat and repeated, "Ok. I'm sorry for everything."

"That doesn't change anything, Clarke," Octavia said, and stalked away. Indra followed her.

Clarke walked in the other direction, into TonDC. A guard stood at Lexa's tent. Clarke didn't recognize him, but he knew her and held the flap open so she could enter.

It was as Lexa left it. Clarke found matches beside a lamp on the map table and lit it. She stood and turned in a slow circle, but stopped when she saw the bed and the trunk at its foot. Exhaustion and grief caught up to her, and Clarke got into Lexa's bed. It smelled like her, like the forest, wood smoke, and leather, and like Lexa. She inhaled deeply and began to weep. Lexa whispered in her brain. Safe. Meet again. Ste yuj. Your heart. Don't be afraid. Klark. More. Ai hod yu in. Don't be afraid.

Ste yuj. = Stay strong.
Ai hod yu in. = I love you
Clarke sat up, startled from sleep by someone sitting on the bed. It took her several seconds to wake fully. Her first thought was Lexa, and when she realized who it was, Clarke was glad she hadn't said anything. "Heda, why are you here?"

"I brought fresh clothes and food." Ontari stroked Clarke's hair.

"Mochof."

"The ceremony begins at dawn, Klark. The bathhouse is ready."

"Mochof," Clarke repeated, a little freaked out by Ontari's attention and they way she stroked her hair, as Lexa had.

_Klark. Meizen._

"Skaikru will be here. The Trikru with them, as well. He is free to do as he wishes."

Clarke nodded. She wasn't completely awake and wondered if this was some weird dream, to be engulfed in Lexa's scent and feel her touch, but hear her only in her head.

Ontari stood up. "Come, Wanheda. Your food grows cold."

Clarke got out of bed. She stretched and rubbed her eyes before moving to the table. She didn't want to eat, but knew Ontari would insist, so she mechanically cleared the plate and emptied the mug. Finished, she stood up and looked for her clothes.

"Go to the bathhouse, Wanheda. I will bring them to you."

Clarke nodded, still not certain that she wasn't dreaming. The cool, fresh air outside the tent woke her completely, and she walked to the bathhouse, a guard trailing her.

The hot water felt good. It removed what remained of Clarke's warpaint and the blood in the crevices of her hands. She took out her braids and washed her hair. Her clothes waited on the bench beside the towels, and Clarke didn't know when Ontari brought them in. Not that it mattered. They were clean, and her boots were cleaner than they had been.

Clarke dressed. This outfit was black leather, too, and she wondered whether that was her new theme. She ran her fingers through her hair until it was untangled, but left it down. The guard waited outside the bathhouse, and followed her toward the gathering crowd. He remained near her, but let her go through them.

When Ontari saw her, she waved Clarke forward. _Ste yuj, Klark._ Clarke joined her at the pyre. There was only one torch, in the hand of one of Ontari's guards. Clarke looked around. She recognized nearly everyone in the crowd. Lincoln stood with Octavia and Indra. Her mother and Marcus were surrounded by the few remaining members of the 100. The rest were Lexa's warriors and the survivors of the missile attack on TonDC. At the edges were other Trikru warriors.

Slowly, the darkness lifted, but they all stood still until the first bird broke the silence. Ontari reached and the torch was placed in her hand. "Lexa kom Trikru, yu gonplei ste odon," she pronounced, and put the torch in the pyre.
Clarke stared at the rising flames. It took all of her strength to stay upright and not cry. To her right, she heard Skaikru. "In peace may you leave the shore. In love may you find the next. Safe passage on your travels until our final journey on the ground. May we meet again."

*We will meet again, Klark.*

Ontari stood beside her until the pyre was fully engulfed. Clarke chewed the inside of her lower lip bloody while she watched the fire burn. She was the last one there, watching embers.

Ontari approached silently. Clarke didn't know she was there until she scooped ash into a metal container. She stood and sealed it, handed it to Clarke. "Your duty awaits, Wanheda."

Clarke looked at the container. It was still warm, approximately body temperature, and she shivered. "Sha, Heda," she answered quietly, and walked away.

Her guard waited outside TonDC's gate. Clarke put Lexa's ashes into her saddlebag, mounted her horse, and rode for Polis. Ontari's order was clear, and Clarke had no time to speak with her friends, or tell Murphy he would stay.

She rode at a steady pace, but they stopped to rest each night. Clarke tended her horse and put up her tent while her guard gathered wood and started a fire. He had food in his saddlebags so they didn't need to hunt. They split the watch. Clarke wasn't sleeping anyway.

When they arrived at Polis, she left her horse in the stable, took her saddlebags, and walked to Roan's suite. It looked empty, but Clarke knew there were servants around. She dropped her saddlebag in her room and went to the bath.

This time, Clarke soaked. She was sore, tired, and heartsick. Little more than a week had passed and Clarke had been on the move the whole time. It was starting to sink in that she would not see Lexa again. *Meet again,* Lexa insisted. Clarke went under the water and stayed as long as she could. When she came up, she rested her neck on the edge and soaked, letting the water ease her soreness.

She didn't know how long she was in there, but fell asleep. She woke waterlogged with a sore neck and slowly got out of the tub. Clarke dried herself slowly, and wrapped a towel around her body and another around her hair so she could walk to her room to dress.

She put on sleeping clothes, dragged the pile of bedding so it filled half the bed, laid down facing it, and went back to sleep.

100 – 100 – 100

Roan woke her in the morning. He knew she hadn't slept well, heard the whimpers and moans that escaped during Clarke's dreams, but they had things to do, and being busy would keep Clarke from dwelling on her losses.

She dressed in the black outfit she found in the wardrobe. She was getting tired of the color, but since she wasn't offered a choice, took what was there. Breakfast waited on the table. There was a pile of papers beside Clarke's place. "What are these?"

"Reports. You must always know what is going on so you can guard the interests of those you seek to protect."

"Azgeda," Clarke said flatly.

"Trikru and Skaikru as well. Ontari has not yet decided whether to disband them."
"She told me that there aren't enough of us left to constitute a kru."

"Perhaps. Eat. Read the reports," he told her, and took his own instruction.

Clarke opened the first paper on the pile and read it while she picked at her plate. It was a report of troop movements and the supplies required for troops to return home from Arkadia.

She continued to read through the papers. Most were straightforward reports about inconsequential matters in other lands. One caught her attention. She read it twice and passed it to Roan. "Does this say what I think it does?"

He glanced at it. "What do you think it says."

"The Boat people are considering withdrawing from the coalition because they do not trust an Azgeda heda. They think Ontari will favor Azgeda over the needs of all."

"That is what it says, Clarke. What are you going to do about it?"

She sighed. "Talk to the Floukru ambassador."

"Exactly. I knew you were the right person for this job. I will return to Azgeda shortly after Ontari arrives in Polis. No more than two days. Messengers are always available to you. If there is an urgent message, the round trip is three days. Otherwise, it is three days in each direction. You will receive the same reports I receive. Ontari will receive them as well. She is not trained in statecraft as the other Natblida are, and she will rely on you."

"I am the wrong person for that job."

"You will be fine. Marcus kom Skaikru will be here to assist."

"What do you want from this, Roan?"

"I told you, Clarke, I want peace. I want my people to thrive. I want all the clans to prosper. Hungry people have nothing to lose. People need hope that things will improve. We can do that. It is what Lexa was trying to do. Her error was trying to force change too quickly. Blood must have blood until it doesn't. I know she said she would give Skaikru a chance, but Ontari could not wait that long. The other clans see that she is strong. She will not allow rebellion."

"Rebellion."

"What would you call it? A few of your people started another war because they refused to live by the rules they said they would. They killed sleeping soldiers even though they knew they were there to protect them. They said that their rules are more important than the rules that kept us alive through the worst times imaginable."

"Rebellion," Clarke sighed in agreement.

"Ontari will keep bloodshed to a minimum. That is the duty I gave her. She needs help to understand when to stand tall and when to bend. You will help her. Marcus will help you, and perhaps her directly. We will change history, Clarke." He smiled at her, a real smile. "We will build the world you want, the world Lexa wanted. It will not be easy, but no great undertaking is. Finish your breakfast and your reports. Then we will decide what to do today."
Yu gonplei ste odon = Your fight is over.
Thirteen

Roan decided they would spend the day introducing Clarke to the other ambassadors and any other high ranking person remaining in Polis. He left the Azgeda for last; because Clarke would be his eyes and ears, they would all meet for dinner so Roan could reinforce to them that Clarke spoke for him.

Roan made introductions, and left Clarke to do the rest. Watching her made him understand why so many people were loyal to Clarke. She had something, a spark that made people pay attention. Most of them were interested anyway, wanting to know what power Wanheda held that she could destroy the Mountain and convince Lexa to change customs held for generations.

Clarke was bored and tired by lunch, which she and Roan were eating with the Sankru ambassador. Clarke answered questions and asked a few before asking about the City of Light.

"Pah. A myth."

"I know someone who says he's been there."

"He lies. There is desert, there is the great lake, but there are no cities and no City of Light."

"Guess he got into the Jobi nuts too many times," Clarke said, and the ambassador laughed and agreed.

100 – 100 – 100

Dinner was more of the same, except this time Roan did most of the talking. Clarke mostly sat beside him and answered the few questions sent her way. She paid attention and memorized the names, faces, and titles of everyone at the table. She listened while they drank and talked. Clarke stayed sober although all she would have preferred to drink until she was numb. Lexa whispered to her throughout the day, one word appraisals of everyone Clarke met. Clarke mostly agreed with those assessments.

She was happy when Roan finally sent everyone away. He was sober, too, she noticed. "It has been a long day, Clarke. Tomorrow, you will train."

"Train?"

"To fight. A gun is insufficient protection."

"Ok."

"You have questions?"

"More than you can imagine."

"Can they wait?"

"Sha. Reshop, Haihefa."

"Good night, Clarke."

Tired as she was, Clarke couldn't get to sleep. She didn't know who to trust. She wanted to talk to her mother about the A.I. chip, and Marcus about how to deal with Titus. Most of all, she wanted
Lexa beside her. The furs still bore her scent, and it was the only comfort she had.

100 – 100 – 100

Roan woke Clarke again, even though she was tired. He heard her cries through the night and knew she carried burdens beyond Lexa's death. No one knew how Lexa died, and some rumors in Polis laid responsibility on Clarke; Heda failed to take Wanheda's power, and Wanheda took her life for the attempt.

Having spent time with them, he knew that was untrue. He suspected Clarke knew how Lexa died; Murphy may have been a witness, as well, given that Titus locked them both away and separated them. Murphy knew something important, something he would not discuss without Clarke's approval. Clarke was holding her cards close to the vest, but it was taking its toll.

Breakfast was quiet. They ate and read reports, and when they finished, Roan took her to one of the practice areas. It was obvious that Clarke hadn't been formally trained, but her instincts were good, and Roan was pleased when he finished assessing her. He knew who would continue her training when he left.

They returned to their quarters to clean up and have lunch. After, Roan gave her a pouch of coins and the afternoon off. She went to her room, closed the door, and laid on the bed beside the pile of furs and cloth from Lexa's bed. After a while, she drifted to sleep, and dreamed of Lexa.

It was like they were in fog. She couldn't see or hear Lexa clearly or understand what she was trying to say. Lexa was frustrated, too, and even in her dreams Clarke was grief stricken when Lexa disappeared. What followed was bad: hundreds of bodies in a field, hundreds in Mount Weather, hundreds around the drop ship, dozens in and around the Ark. Clarke worked to save the dying, and could save none of them. Her friends lay dead around her, and she tried again to save Lexa.

Clarke jerked awake and sat up. She looked at her hands, expecting them to be covered in blood. Instead, they looked as they always did. She checked her pocket for the disc Marcus gave her, relieved that it was still there. She needed to talk to someone she could trust about all of it, and didn't know who that could be.

None of her options were good. She could remove Titus from his position, but replacing him with someone less experienced could cause more problems. Exposing the secret behind the commander spirit would destroy their culture and probably lead to yet another war. More likely, it would get her killed. Letting anyone know how Lexa died left her with the same conundrum. Staying quiet would keep her protected by both Roan and Ontari, but if she wasn't able to navigate the minefield of coalition politics, she would wind up imprisoned, banished, or most likely, dead.

Clarke swung her legs off the bed to the floor. It was still bright out, so her nap was brief. Maybe she should just go to the market, or walk through Polis, or ride through the woods. Anything to get out of here for a while.

She got up and left the suite, two guards trailing her. Roan changed them all the time, and she didn't have time to get to know them. Unlike Trikru guards, they weren't interested in anything beyond their duty to keep her safe.

The streets were busy and loud, the market more so. Stall after stall offered food, weapons, clothing, and odds and ends. She wasn't interested in any of it, and went to the stables, wanting some quiet. She missed exploring the forests around TonDC, missed the dappled light and fresh smell. Clarke wondered whether she would ever be free of this. Roan would not let her escape as she had after taking down Mount Weather.
She thought about visiting Niylah, but didn't want to expose her to danger again. News traveled fast, so Clarke was certain Niylah knew she was alive. Clarke felt as if she still owed a debt to the other woman, but had no idea how to repay her.

There was little forest left around Polis, so Clarke followed the road toward TonDC. It was habit, sticking to places she knew and spent time with Lexa. She veered off the road when she saw the large company approaching, and didn't notice the riders who left that group to follow her.

They met her at a stream where Clarke stopped to let her horse drink. Clarke's palm began to itch and she realized Ontari must be near. Clarke looked around and saw her coming out of the trees. She suppressed a sigh. "Heda." Safe.

"Trying to avoid me?" Ontari asked with a small smile, her eyes green.

"Not you, Heda, everyone."

"Something on your mind?"

"Much," Clarke confirmed.

"Skaikru is with me, even that loathsome Skaiskat. Is he truly your friend?"

"It's complicated."

"Relationships often are."

Protect you. "Can I see Skaikru?"

"When they are settled. Roan wants the Skaiskat. Your mother and her lover will stay near you in the tower. The others will share one floor. Acceptable?"

"Very generous of you."

"I am glad it pleases you. Ride with me."

"Sha, Heda."

"You may call me Ontari, Klark."

Safe, Klark. Hod yu in. Clarke nodded and tapped her horse's sides.

"How is Roan?"

"He is well. He plans to return to Azgeda in a few days."

"There is much there he needs to personally address. I will speak with him before he leaves."

"I'm sure he will appreciate that."

"I will need your help to keep the coalition together."

"I'll do as you wish."

"I was led to believe that peace is your desire."

"It is." Together.
"Then we should have no problem working together."

'Yeah, except for the part where I'm going crazy because I hear and see Lexa half the time I'm around you.' "No problem," Clarke echoed. Hodnes laik uf. "I talked to the Floukru ambassador a few days ago, convinced him to suggest Luna give you time to show your intention before withdrawing from the coalition."

"Well done, Clarke. Mochof."

"Pro. Is there anything else you want me to do?"

"Meetings," Ontari sighed. "You will stay with me at meetings."

"Isn't that Titus' job?"

"Titus has not left Polis in many years."

"Do you trust him?"

"I trust no one."

"A lesson from Nia?"

"Many lessons from Nia." Ontari's jaw clenched.

In that moment, Clarke saw Ontari as she was, another young woman like herself, like Lexa, thrust into a position she didn't want and uncertain about how to best do her job. "I'm sorry you had to go through that," Clarke said. Ai hod yu in.

Ontari looked at Clarke. No one ever suggested that she didn't deserve the way Nia treated her or offered any sympathy for the many severe punishments she endured. Ontari was at a loss as to how to answer.

They rode through the forest without talking for a while. Clarke was glad for the silence because every time Ontari spoke Lexa whispered. Seeing the other woman's eyes change was disconcerting. It had to be a function of the A.I. chip. Could Lexa's personality overtake Ontari's? Clarke didn't want to think about the ramifications of that, or how strong Lexa must have been to overcome the others, or that Lexa may not have been Lexa, but the powerful voice of one of her predecessors.

"The forests at home look nothing like this."

"What are they like?" Yu laik ai houm.

"Green all the time. There is always snow deep in the forest. It is beautiful at night."

"The leaves will change color in fall."

"Fall?"

"Between summer and winter." Sanch at the lake.

"Harvest."

Clarke nodded.

"We should return. They will not enter Polis without us."
"Without you." _Ogeda._

"Without us, Klark. My army did its job, and you did yours. This victory belongs to both of us. You will sit with me at tonight's feast."

"I don't think that's wise."

"Do not fear Titus. I will protect you."

"I don't want to make things difficult for you. People will assume all the wrong things."

_Protect you._ "That I'm a bad influence on you, as I was on Lexa. That you do not know your mind, or that you can't lead alone."

"These things are not true."

"I know that, Ontari, and you know that, but gossip causes problems. I can serve you just as well seated with Azgeda or Skaikru." _Don't be afraid._

"You are the bridge between the old ways and the new, Clarke, and you will sit with me tonight."

Clarke sighed.

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Jobi nuts = the hallucinogenic nuts the 100 ate in episode 1.08, Daytrip
Reshop = Good night
Hodnes laik uf. Love is strength.
Yu laik ai houm. You are my home.
Sanch = lunch
Ogeda = together
Fourteen

The streets of Polis were lined with people cheering the victorious return of their heda from battle. She and Clarke remained on their horses to make it easier for their guards to protect them from the crush of bodies.

They went to the arena, and Ontari stood in the center of the risers as people filled the space. When it was full to capacity, she raised her hands and the crowd quieted.

"The Skaikru rebellion is over. Those who attacked us are dead. Their bodies will feed scavengers, and their bones will be separated before they sink into the earth. Our armies fought with valor and honor, and the warriors who fell were honored at the site of the battle. Many were injured, and many wounded were saved by the knowledge of Skaikru's fisa.

"Some Skaikru were prisoners to those on the wrong path, and they have been spared. We can learn much from Skaikru. They are my guests in Polis and will be treated as such while the future of their status as a kru is decided. Until then, speak to them. Teach them our ways and learn theirs. We are not as different as you think.

"Blood has had blood. The debt is settled. Tonight, we feast in honor of our fallen and in celebration of our victory."

The crowd began cheering again, and when Ontari went down into it, her guards stayed close, but let her greet everyone. Clarke watched her until she couldn't pick Ontari from the crowd, and walked at the edge of the arena to the street that would take her back to the tower. Her guards walked beside her, but for once, no one was interested in Clarke. Walking through the streets in something like anonymity was a relief.

Murphy waited in their quarters. "Nice of you to show up, Princess."

"Sorry. Ontari ordered me back here before I had a chance to talk to anyone."

"Your mom isn't happy."

"I'm not happy, either, Murphy. Did you hear anything about Jaha?"

"They looked for them, but didn't find anything, not even tracks. They left a bunch of troops guarding the Ark, though, so they won't be able to come back if they left."

"What if they didn't leave?"

"What?"

"What if they're hiding on the upper levels or in the ventilation system?"

"They'll have to come out for food and water. Why does it matter?"

"You're not stupid, Murphy. You know why it matters."

"It doesn't matter to me, though."

"It should."

"All I want, Griffin, is to live my life without being somebody's bitch."
"Life's never that simple. Go get cleaned up. There's a feast tonight."

"For the record, I hate grounders, I hate horses, and I don't like you too much."

"The feeling's mutual. If you don't shut up, I'll show Roan a hangnail."

"Go float yourself," Murphy muttered, and headed for his room.

Clarke sat in a chair and thought about her afternoon. It seemed like Lexa was overriding Ontari, replacing the Azgeda with Lexa's thoughts and feelings, but during Ontari's speech to Polis, Clarke felt none of that. Perhaps Ontari, too, was sick of war, or feared Roan enough to walk the path he dictated.

When she and Ontari were close enough to touch, Clarke heard Lexa clearly and understood her Trigedasleng. Clarke learned quite a bit, but was still a long way from fluent, and some words she heard in her head were new to her, so she couldn't understand why she didn't need to ask someone what they meant.

She sighed and picked up the pile of papers waiting at her seat. She found nothing new or important in the reports, and went to her room to undress so she could get a bath.

When she returned from a lengthy soak, a second pile of bedding was on her bed, as was a new outfit, again in black. The shirt with it was blue, at least. She saw a third trunk near the other two and pushed the bedding aside to sit and think. Clarke was still undecided about Ontari's motives for giving her all of Lexa's things. She didn't know when she would ever look at them without feeling like she'd been sucker punched.

She forced herself to her feet and dressed. Outside her door, the guard who braided her hair before waited, and Clarke let her lead her to a chair and sat while she put her hair in braids. Roan came out of his room and smiled at Clarke. "You made quite an impression on Heda."

"That's me, making friends everywhere I go."

Roan laughed. "You still don't see how you affect people, Wanheda."

"What are you going to do with Murphy?"

"I think I will take him back to Azgeda with me for a while. It will do him good to see the world."

"He's seen more than I have."

"Oh?"

"He's been to the City of Light."

"Why did you not tell me this before?"

"You didn't ask."

He gestured for the guard to finish and leave. Before she left, he cautioned her, "Not a word, or I will take your tongue myself."

"Murphy would not speak of Titus' interest in him without your approval. I assume it has something to do with that."

"Maybe."
"Clarke, keeping such secrets can get you killed."

"Sharing them with you can get all of us killed."

"I can keep a secret. You can keep a secret. Can Murphy?"

"I don't know."

"Don't talk about me behind my back," Murphy said as he entered the room.

"What did you tell him?" Clarke asked.

"Nothing."

"I told you, Clarke, he would not share anything until he spoke with you."

"Tell Roan about the City of Light."

"I didn't actually go there but I traveled to it. Jaha is just as crazy as Titus. He swears the city of Light is real. All you have to do is swallow a computer chip."

"What is a computer chip?"

"It's a piece of technology with a set of instructions. These chips are advanced. They interact with your brain. Jaha was recruiting people to go to the City of Light. He brought back the AI that controls the chips. The same A.I. that launched the nuclear weapons that ended the world."

Before Roan could ask, Clarke said, "Artificial Intelligence. It's a computer program that simulates human thinking. It doesn't have emotions so all of its decisions are purely based in logic. That's probably why it launched the missiles."

"What does that have to do with Titus?"

"When the guards picked me up, they found a chip when they searched me. Then they started asking what I was doing with the commander's sacred symbol. There's nothing sacred about it. It's a mathematical symbol for infinity, but on the chip, it's a manufacturer's logo. It tells you who built it," Murphy explained.

Clarke removed the chip Marcus gave her from her pocket and displayed it on her palm. "Like this, right?"

"Yeah. Where'd you get that?"

"Marcus had it. I don't know how he got it, and I haven't had a chance to talk to Mom or him about it."

"May I?" Roan asked.

Clarke nodded and he gently removed it from her hand and examined it. When he was finished, he returned it to her and Clarke put it back in her pocket. "Tell him the rest, Murphy."

"The guards brought me here. I woke up tied to a chair and Reverend Crazy started beating the hell out of me, demanding answers. I told him the truth, and he kept beating me and whipping me. There's a shrine down there, and an escape pod, and some crazy pictures on the wall."

"An escape pod is a small vehicle designed to be launched from a space station in an emergency,"
Clarke explained to Roan. "It holds one or two people. The pod Murphy found has the name Polaris on it, except some of the letters burned away and all you can see is Polis. Polaris was the 13th space station, but it never joined the Ark, and no one would ever say why."

"What pictures are on the walls?"

"I saw two big ones. One has a woman standing under a mushroom cloud, which is the signature of a nuclear detonation. The other had the same woman calling a bunch of something to her. They may have been people, but it's hard to tell."

Roan looked from one to the other. "There is more you are not telling me. Why did Titus imprison both of you when Lexa's death was announced?"

"Tell him about the City of Light," Clarke told Murphy again.
Fifteen

"I don't think it's a real place," Murphy said. "Jaha as much as said that the only way to reach it is to swallow the chip. Last time I saw him, he found a way to make the A.I. portable. He called it Allie or something, talked to it, listened to it. I saw it. It's a hologram of a woman."

"A hologram is like a statue that's alive. It looks, sounds, and moves like a person, but you can walk through it. You can't kill it with a sword or arrow," Clarke explained.

"What about a gun?" Roan asked.

"Same thing. It's not tangible. The only way to destroy it is to shut down the program or destroy the power source," Clarke said.

"So this Jaha has a woman who is not a real person who instructed him to give computer chips to people. Why?"

"I don't know. There were a lot of people missing from Arkadia, including him. They might still be hiding there, or they might have escaped to the woods or hid in a cave," Clarke said. "I really need to talk to Marcus about it. Mom might know something, too. I imagine she asked for a chip so she could study it, see what it does."

"We know what it does, Griffin,"

"We don't know for sure, Murphy." Clarke thought for a minute while Roan looked from one to the other. "Did you know the heda before Lexa?" she asked Roan.

"I knew three of them. Lexa lasted longer than any other."

"Did you know them well?"

"No. The only person who knew all of them well is Titus."

"I don't want to talk to him yet. I don't know enough."

"This is all frustratingly mysterious to me, Clarke."

"I wiped out one entire culture at Mount Weather. I don't want that to happen again."

"This has something to do with Lexa's death and Ontari's ascension."

"It does."

"Is Ontari in danger?"

"I don't think so," Clarke answered, remembering the look on Titus' face when he realized what he did.

"I will double your guard. I believe Murphy will be safer away from here."

"What?" Murphy squawked.

Roan looked at him. "Titus will not move directly against Wanheda."
"He won't," Clarke agreed. "Lexa made him swear not to try to hurt me."

"You know something, Murphy. You and Clarke do not wish to share it with me yet, but it puts you in danger. Clarke is safe here. She has a rank and power. Ontari will protect her. Clarke desires you to be safe, so you will come with me to Azgeda lands."

"And if I don't want to go?"


"Fuck," Murphy said.

"Guess you're gonna be Roan's bitch," Clarke smirked, and Murphy gave her a dirty look.

The door to the suite opened and a guard entered. "Heda sent me to find out why you are not at the feast."

"We are on our way," Roan said, and the three of them and their guards made their way to the feast hall.

It was immense, even bigger than the arena. Clarke thought it occupied most of the first floor of the tower. It was full of torches, people, tables of food, tables to sit at to eat. There were open spaces for dancing and the drunken brawls that sometimes broke out late in the evening.

Roan's guards took Roan and Murphy to a table very near Ontari's. The guard sent to fetch them led Clarke to Ontari's table and seated her next to the heda.

"Why are you late, Klark?"

"Roan and I had to discuss something."

"Is all well?"

"Sha, Heda. There is nothing to be concerned about."

"Then enjoy your meal. After you eat, you may visit your Skaikru. They are over there," Ontari pointed, and Clarke saw Skaikru seated together at two large tables. "Tomorrow, we will get to work."

Clarke nodded and sipped her wine. A few seconds later, heaping plates were delivered to her and Ontari. She ate, knowing Ontari would insist. It was impossible to clear her plate, but Clarke put a significant dent in it. She sipped her wine and accepted a refill. When she ate her fill, Clarke leaned back in her chair and looked around. Despite the size of the room, it was loud, and Clarke knew if she went into the streets, they would be loud, too.

Ontari touched her arm, and Clarke startled. She immediately apologized, but Ontari wasn't insulted. "A toast, Wanheda," she said softly. "May this be the first of many successes."

Clarke didn't answer, but she tapped her goblet against Ontari's and drank.

"Go to your friends. They are as concerned for you as you are for them. I will send for you tomorrow."

"Until then, Heda," Clarke answered, and stood. She left her wine goblet at the table and tried to ignore the eyes following her.

Abby stood up when Clarke was near. They hugged liked they had been separated for months. "You
look wonderful, Clarke."

"I am so glad you're here," Clarke answered. "Is everyone all right?"

"Yes. We're all safe. The commander has been quite solicitous of our needs."

"Good," Clarke answered, adding, 'I think' to herself.

"I need to talk to you and Marcus about some things. Can we meet for breakfast?"

"That's fine with me, but you should check with Marcus."

"You guys aren't locked up or anything, are you?"

"No, but we're separate from the rest."

"And the others?"

"I don't know. Ask them. How do we find you?"

"I'm with the Azgeda delegation, but I'll come to you."

"There's a story behind that, I'm sure."

"There is," Clarke agreed. "It can wait. I'm going to talk to the others. Enjoy the evening. I'll see you for breakfast."

Abby hugged her again, and Clarke accepted her comfort for a few seconds.

Clarke spoke to Marcus next, and he agreed that a breakfast meeting was ideal. She spoke to Roger and Fay next, crouching between their seats so she could hear both of them. They told her she was correct that Ontari wanted radios first, but had so many questions about other things that they'd taken to writing them down. "She said there's a library here that might help us."

"Then take advantage of it," Clarke said.

"There's supposed to be a workshop for us, too," Roger said. "I'm scared as hell, Clarke. I don't know much."

"You know more than me," she comforted him. "Learn as much as you can. Maybe we'll get lucky and find Raven or Wick or Sinclair."

"I hope so," Fay said.

"You'll be all right. If you need me, send a message with the guards. They always know where I am. Enjoy your evening." Clarke stood and looked around. She went to Miller next, knowing he would tell her the truth.

The seat beside him was empty and Clarke slid into it. "How's it going?"

"Too good to be true," he answered. "I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop."

"Me, too," Clarke sighed. "How's everybody else?"

"We're all cautious but glad to be eating regularly."

"Anything I need to know?"
"I don't think so. They put us in a bunch of rooms on the same floor. There are guards, but we were told we're allowed to come and go as we please."

"I think you're safe. The commander gave a speech telling everyone to get to know Skaikru, to learn from us and teach us. She said Skaikru are her guests, so if anyone messes with any of you, they'll have to answer to her. If I find out different, I'll make sure you know. Pick your lieutenants, Miller, because you're in charge of them now."

"What about your Mom and Mr. Kane?"

"Heda has plans for them. You won't see them much. Besides, they were never in charge of us, were they?"

Miller smiled for the first time. "No, they weren't."

"Am I still your leader?"

"Always, Clarke."

"You're my seken, my second in command. If you need me, send a guard to get me or give me a message. I'll try to check in with you every day. I'm going to talk to everyone tonight. You take care of each other, and I'll do my part to keep you safe. Deal?"

Miller offered his hand, and Clarke shook it. "Deal," he answered.
As she spoke to her friends, Clarke was glad to see that they weren’t getting drunk. They all seemed a little uneasy, and she did her best to allay their fears. She told them that Miller was in charge, but she would be around if they needed her, and repeated the gist of Ontari’s speech many times to reassure them.

Clarke’s palm began to itch, and she knew Ontari was near. She finished speaking to the last two Arkadian refugees and stood. When she turned, Clarke saw Ontari watching her from a few feet away. The light wasn’t bright enough to make out her eye color. "Do you need something, Heda?"

"I need many things, Wanheda. I came to ask how your people fare."

"They are well. Thank you for everything."

"Do you need anything?"

"No, Heda."

"You need only ask."

"Mochof, Heda." *Protect you.*

"Join me, Wanheda."

Clarke nodded. *Happy.*

Ontari walked out of the feast hall and down two flights of concrete steps. Clarke followed her out of the tower into a garden. It was empty, but they could hear noise from the feast hall and the sounds of celebration in the streets. Ontari signaled the guards to remain at the tower.

She and Clarke walked side by side on the manicured paths.

"I am not fond of feasts," Ontari admitted.

"Why?"

"They are loud, and there are always fights. Nia made me fight the winner of each."

"Why?"

"To make me strong."

"And angry." *Not with you.*

"Sha," Ontari sighed. "I do not understand what is happening, Klark. My thoughts are not my own."

"Is it the commander spirit?" *Yu, Klark.*

"Perhaps. It happens most often when I am near you, although when I am not around you, you, you are in my thoughts."

"I don’t know what to say." *Ain.*

"Can I trust you, Klark?"
"You can."

"Haihefa Roan speaks highly of you, but Titus says you are the cause of Lexa's death."

Spicha. "Says to whom?"

"Only to me. I forbade him to say it again."

Protect you. "Be careful around Titus."

"What do you know?"

"He has his own agenda." Lexa snorted in Clarke's head. Ron ai ridyo op.

"Klark, I will not let him hurt you. You can speak true."

"All I can say is be careful." I will protect you.

"Why do you not speak my name? We are alone. Are you still angry about how I treated you at Nia's direction?"

"No, you didn't hurt me."

"Then say my name."

Beja. "Ontari." Ontari took Clarke's hand and stopped her. She dropped to her knee. Clarke tried to free her hand. "Please don't." Ai hod you in, Klark.

"She compels me."

"Please, don't," Clarke repeated. Ai hod yu in, Klark. Osir keryon ste teina. She knelt so she and Ontari were face to face. "I don't know you. You don't know me."

"I know you, Klark." Ontari put her hand on Clarke's cheek, ignoring how she flinched. "Your heart holds no weakness."

Clarke covered her mouth to muffle her sob. Tears streamed down her face. Ontari moved to both knees and let go of Clarke's hand. She pulled Clarke close and held her while she sobbed.

"I'm sorry, Klark. I did not wish to leave you. You must be strong until we meet again."

"Stop."

"I cannot leave while you are so sad."

"Beja, Ontari, hod op."

"Ai laik Leksa. Yu get ai in."

Clarke tried to get away, and when that failed, she beat her fists on Ontari's back and continued to sob on her shoulder. Ontari rocked them and held Clarke until Clarke calmed a little. "Ai keryon now ban yu op."

"Stop, please stop. It's not fair to Ontari and it's not fair to me. It's not fair to you. I released your spirit."

"We will be together soon, Klark. You will find the way."
"What way?"

"Jus drein jus daun."

"That's not the way. We agreed."

"Jus drein jus daun," Ontari repeated. She stood, bringing Clarke along, dropped her hands to Clarke's thighs, and lifted her. "You will sleep tonight."

Clarke was still crying, and buried her face in Ontari's neck. Their guards saw them coming. One went ahead to clear the way so that no one saw them. The others surrounded them as Ontari carried Clarke to the lift.

By the time it reached the top floor, Clarke's chronic exhaustion caught up to her. She slept. In Heda's suite, a guard turned down the covers before leaving them. Ontari laid Clarke in the bed. She removed Clarke's boots and jacket and removed her boots, jacket and outer shirt before getting into bed and bringing Clarke to lie beside her. Clarke threw a leg across her, secured one hand at Ontari's hip, and sighed against her collar bone.

The sky was just beginning to brighten when Clarke woke. It was the first full night's sleep she had since Lexa's death, and as she woke, panic set in when she realized she was in bed with someone. She recognized Ontari and recalled the night before. Clarke felt terrible for Ontari, who was losing herself to the A.I. That raised more questions than Clarke could catalog, much less answer.

She began to slowly disengage from Ontari. Ontari made a cross noise and pulled Clarke closer. Clarke sighed. The physical comfort felt wonderful, but Ontari deserved better than to be the A.I.'s pawn. "Stop thinking," Ontari said.

"I have a breakfast meeting," Clarke said, hoping Ontari would let her go.

"No one will be up for hours yet."

"Please, Ontari."

"No, Klark. It's been so long."

Clarke couldn't help her uneven inhalation, but she was able to prevent tears. Ontari returned to sleep, but her grip on Clarke was unbreakable, so Clarke began to ponder some of the questions keeping her awake. Was Lexa ever real, or was she just the manifestation of the A.I.? How could the A.I. override all the things that made a person, the experience and chemistry, but leave enough for that person to be recognizable to anyone who knew her? If the A.I. was consuming Ontari, would it lead her to the same conclusions it led Lexa to? How did it affect her brain chemistry? What memories did it take, and what of the ones that were left? If the A.I. turned Ontari into Lexa, could Clarke still love her? If Titus realized what was happening, what would he do? Could the chip be removed without the carrier's death? How long would it take for the person to return to herself? Would the long-term effects of removing the chip be any worse than those of leaving it in?

Each question led to another, and none had answers. At least Clarke heard only her own thoughts. Lexa's constant whispering was thankfully absent. Ontari slept deeply, and Clarke slowly moved out of her hold. She picked up her boots and walked to the door. She looked back for one second before leaving, and her breath caught in her throat. If Clarke didn't know better, she would have sworn that Lexa slept in the bed, all loose limbs and dark curls, tattoos and scars. Clarke jerked the door open and ran for the lift.
Ain = mine
Spicha = liar
Ron ai ridyo op. = Speak true.
Osir keryon ste teina. = Our souls are entwined.
Ai laik Leksa. Yu get ai in. = I am Lexa. You know me.
Ai keryon now ban yu op. = My soul can't leave you.
Jus drein jus daun. = Blood must have blood.
No one except the guards were awake, and Clarke was able to reach her room without being seen. Her heart still pounded, and her thoughts whirled too quickly for her to catch one. So much happened, and the only good that came of it was that she finally had a night of unbroken sleep.

The sky was lighter than when she woke, but it was still far too early for anyone to be up. She checked the wardrobe and found a few more sets of clothing, all black. The shirts were gray, blue, or green. Clarke didn't feel like bathing, but she wanted to change out of the clothes she slept in, and took a gray shirt and a black cloth pants from the wardrobe. She was still getting used to the way clothes fastened, and had more trouble with the bindings for her breasts than the pants.

When she finished changing, Clarke made sure to transfer the A.I. chip and the small sketch book Roan gave her to her new outfit. She made a mental note to search the market for additional drawing materials, and that sent her to the saddlebags resting on one of Lexa's trunks. She got the pouch of coins Roan gave her from it and opened it to see how much it held. The coins were small and oddly shaped, but there were a lot of them. Clarke took them, too.

When she went to the main room, Roan was sitting at the table reading dispatches. "I did not expect to see you so early," he smirked at her. "Did you have a pleasant evening?"

Clarke wasn't sure how to answer him. Part of it was ok and the rest was terrible except for the uninterrupted sleep. "Yes. You?"

"Not nearly as nice as yours, since I slept alone in my bed. Whose bed did you warm, Clarke?"

"That's really none of your business."

"It is, since you are my ambassador."

"You already know, so quit being a jerk."

"I don't know," he answered. "Last I saw you, you and Heda were speaking near Skaikru tables."

"Then trust me, Roan. I didn't spend the evening with anyone you don't approve of. I didn't talk about Azgeda or Skaikru. You got me out of jail, you're keeping Titus at bay, and I won't do anything to betray your trust."

"I will find out."

"It will cost someone their tongue if you do."

He smiled at that, thinking that Clarke was adopting their ways.

She pulled out the pouch and put it on the table. "How much money is this?"

"Money?"

"What's the value of the coins?"

"One coin will buy a snack in the market. Three coins, a meal. Ten coins a bottle of passably good wine. Clothing costs 15 or more coins for each piece, depending on the materials and workmanship."

"How much is in here?"
"Five hundred coins. Do you need more?"

"I'd like to give some to Skaikru. They came to us with only a few weapons that haven't been returned and the clothes they wore."

"Heda provides clothing and food."

"I know. But they have nothing to barter. The easiest place for them to start learning about your ways is at the market."

Roan nodded. "I will make sure they have some coin and trade items. They did well at the feast last night. They retired early and no one had to be carried out."

"Good."

"Should I order breakfast?"

"No, I'm having breakfast with my mom." Clarke finally sat down. She poured a mug of water and started reading the reports on her side of the table. Again, there was nothing out of the ordinary, and when she finished, she looked at Roan. "Anything I should do today?"

"Train. Be available for Heda. We will dine with two of our longtime allies tonight."

"Ok. Thanks for taking care of Skaikru."

"Pro, Clarke. I will see you at supper."

Clarke nodded and left him. In the hall, she asked the guard who came to follow her to take her to Skaikru, and then to her mother.

Skaikru was two flights up, so they climbed the stairs. The corridor was lined with doors and she had no idea where to find Miller. She turned to the guard. "Do you have any idea who's in what room?"

She pointed at a sheet of paper tacked to the wall. The writing was messy but legible, and she finally saw Miller's name and noted his room number. She headed down the hall, and finally reached his room. "Please wait here," she told the guard, and knocked on the door.

Miller's boyfriend, Bryan, opened it soon after. "Hey, Clarke."

"Hi, Bryan. Is Nathan here?"

"Yeah, c'mon in."

"Morning, Clarke."

"Hey, Miller, I just came to check in with you."

"We're all good. We left before the party got too rowdy last night."

"Good. Someone will bring some coins and some stuff for you guys to trade at the market, so divvy it up. The only thing I'll say is that no one should go alone until we're sure that there won't be problems."

"Got it. I picked Harper and Monroe for my backups."

"They both have good heads on their shoulders."
"Yeah, and long fuses."

"Need anything?"

"Nah, I think we're set."

"I'm busy for the rest of today, but I'll try to see you tomorrow. Send a guard if you need me."

"Ok. See you later."

"Have a good day, guys," Clarke said, and left their room.

The guard led her to the lift and rang the bell. The lift arrived after a few minutes, and took them up to the 10th floor. The guard led her to a room. Clarke knocked, waited, and knocked again before Marcus opened the door. "Good morning, Clarke."

"Hey. Is Mom up?"

"She is."

Clarke turned to the guard. "I'm sorry if this isn't your job, but can you get breakfast delivered?"

"Sha, Wanheda."

"Mochof."

Clarke entered the suite while the guard left.

"Did you enjoy the feast?" Clarke asked.

"It was interesting. The food was wonderful."

"Yeah, they know how to throw a party."

Abby came out from the back. "Good morning, Clarke."

"Hi, Mom. My guard's getting us some breakfast."

"Good. I hope you're going to tell us some of the long stories you keep mentioning."

"Some of them." Clarke gestured toward the table and they all sat. She pulled the sketch book out and jotted, "The walls have ears."

Marcus and Abby nodded.

"Do you have any idea what happened to Jaha? Who all was with him?"

"He disappeared while we were rounding up people to get out of there," Marcus said.

"He got a lot of people, but whatever that chip does to them, it's not good," Abby added.

"I didn't see Raven or Wick."

"He got to Raven. She said she didn't have any more pain, Clarke."

"How is that possible?"
"I don't know, and he did his best to keep me from checking any of the people who swallowed a chip or seeing the chip itself."

"Why did he come back? What's he looking for?"

"I don't know," Marcus answered. "I honestly wonder whether he's delusional. He was always talking to nothing."

"He forgot Wells," Abby added.

Clarke closed her eyes for a moment and sighed. She missed Wells. They made up just before Charlotte killed him. "I miss him."

"I know, honey."

"Why was Monty with Pike's people?"

"His mother was there. He didn't want to leave her. I saw Octavia and Indra with Lincoln at Lexa's service."

"She's really mad at me. She thinks I chose Lexa over you guys."

"What happened?" Marcus asked softly.

Clarke looked down and shook her head. Her mother got up and hugged her. "She cared about you," Abby admitted. Clarke nodded and fought tears. Ste yuj.

Clarke's palm began to itch and she tried to ignore it. "I need to talk to both of you someplace safe," she said softly.
The door opened and Ontari entered, followed by two guards bearing trays. Abby squeezed Clarke and stood. "Good morning, Commander."

"Clarke, is all well?"

Clarke looked up and did her best to smile. Miss you. She wanted to scream with frustration. "I'm fine, Heda. How are you?" Clarke put her sketchbook in her lap.

"I am well. I wish to join you for breakfast."

"Of course," Clarke answered. Soon.

Ontari sat in the only empty chair, across from Clarke. "Good morning, Fisa. Good morning, Marcus."

The guards put the food on the table and went to stand in the hall.

"I did not know what you like, so I brought some of everything."

"That's very kind of you, Commander," Marcus said.

"I do not understand why all of your equipment cannot be brought here," Ontari said to Abby while everyone served themselves.

"It requires electrical power."

"Can we not move the power source with it?"

"It's built into the Ark. I don't know how that would happen."

"Where are your people who managed that?"

"A few of them died in the battle," Marcus answered, "and the others went with Jaha."

"Where did he go?"

"No one knows, Heda," Clarke answered. "I understand you left troops at the Ark?"

"Sha. There are many useful things there. I do not want scavengers taking them."

Safe. "No one saw Jaha or his people leave the Ark. I wonder whether they might be hiding in the less accessible spaces."

Both Marcus and Abby looked at Clarke.

"Raven would know where they could go safely," Clarke continued. "No one's been in the upper parts since you landed. There were supplies up there. Smart."

"I will have it searched," Ontari said.

"No, Heda, it isn't safe."

"It is safe enough for them."
"Raven is a mechanical genius," Abby said. "She knows the blueprints." Abby stopped. "She was on the computer a lot the last few days."

"Clarke is correct, Commander," Marcus said. "It is not safe for your troops."

"Wanheda, do not withhold information."

_Speak true._ "I'm not certain about all of it, Heda, and I do not want to tell you something now that turns out to be incorrect. As soon as I know everything, I will tell you."

"Who is Jaha? Why would anyone follow him?"

Clarke's mouth was full, so Marcus answered. "He was chancellor when we were in space. Our leader. He got down here on his own, and somewhere heard about the City of Light. He left to find it and took a few people with him, including Murphy."

"Why would the Skaiskat follow?"

"He wasn't well liked and didn't fit in."

Clarke choked at Marcus' understatement, and indicated she was fine when Ontari looked at her. Ontari's eyes flashed green. Abby looked between them and wondered what her daughter was getting into now.

"Continue," Ontari directed.

"Jaha returned a few weeks ago with a grounder dressed like none of us had seen. By that time, Pike was in charge, and his guards murdered the man. They let Jaha in, though. He carried a case that he guarded, and spent all of his time recruiting people to enter the City of Light."

"People were sad and scared, and he told them he could take away their pain, both physical and emotional," Abby said.

"The City of Light is not real," Ontari said.

"I don't believe it is," Abby agreed. "I think he was deluded and the people who agreed to follow him were desperate."

Clarke nearly sighed with relief that neither Marcus or Abby said anything about the computer chips. She pushed her plate away and sipped from her mug.

"You didn't eat enough," Ontari and Abby said simultaneously.

"Please don't do that again," Clarke said. "I'm not hungry."

"You will eat," Ontari said firmly. Her eyes turned green while Clarke watched. "You cannot aid me if you are ill."

_Safe. Strong._ "I'm not hungry," Clarke repeated. "I have an appointment." She put her mug down, got out of her seat, slid her sketchbook into her pocket, and kissed her mother's cheek. "See you soon." Clarke waved at Marcus.

Ontari watched Clarke walk to the door. "Join me for sanch. There will be a meeting after, and I wish to discuss it with you."

Clarke paused, her hand on the door. _Miss you, Klark._ She hoped her voice was steady. "Sha,
Heda."

Ontari returned to her breakfast. "I will have a guard take you to the healers when we finish here," she told Abby.

"Thank you, Commander."

"You should learn much from each other. Marcus, I would like you to attend the meeting. An hour after sanch."

"Of course, Commander."

"I will send someone to bring you."

"Thank you."

"If you don't mind me asking," Abby said, "what's your interest in Clarke?"

"Wanheda is familiar with the coalition. I was not trained with the Natblida, and require assistance with the agreements. That is why I also ask Marcus to join the meeting."

Abby nodded although her bullshit detector was going nuts. "Marcus should be a great help to you. Clarke, too."

"Sha. People want to follow Wanheda, and she speaks highly of Marcus."

"What will happen to Skaikru?" Marcus asked.

"I have not yet decided. You will be safe."

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke ignored her guard and charged down the hallway. She hit the steel door at the staircase with her shoulder and went down them as fast as she could. She had planned to go back to speak more with her mother that afternoon, but Ontari hijacked her schedule again. Maybe this evening, after supper with whoever it was Roan wanted her to meet.

She flew down the stairs, grabbing the rails to help her make the turns, and finally pushed out the final door open. She stopped for a second to see where she was, saw the manicured path, and abruptly turned right and began running again. She couldn't deal with any of that right now.

She nearly collided with someone when she reached the street, and had to slow to a fast walk until the streets cleared out closer to the training area.

"Wanheda," a voice boomed as she passed through the entrance.

She turned to see an Azgeda warrior about Roan's size.

"Azhefa Roan said you need training."

"Sha."

"Come."

Two hours later, Clarke was covered in dust. Sweat cut through it in some places. She was certain she would be bruised everywhere, but especially on her ass, where she repeatedly landed. There was
no laughing or mockery, though, just repeated instruction and demonstration.

"Come before breakfast tomorrow. Perhaps you will be quicker."

"Doubt that," Clarke muttered, and did her best not to limp as she started back to the tower.

When she got there, she surprised both her guard and herself by taking the stairs up to the fourth floor.
The common area was empty. Clarke went to her room. She removed her sketchbook and the chip from her pockets, and turned to put them on the bedside table before she bathed.

Another chip sat there. She stared at it for several seconds. The only other chip she knew was in Polis was the one Titus took from Murphy, so he must have left it in her room to provoke her. She slowed her breathing and picked up the chip. It was identical to the one she’d been carrying around. Clarke tucked both of them into the notebook and finished undressing.

While she soaked in the tub, Clarke tried to think where else one of the chips might have come from, and kept coming back to Titus. Even if someone from Skaikru had the chip, they wouldn't have been admitted to Azgeda quarters if Clarke or Murphy weren't there. If Murphy were there, he would have kept the chip. She made a mental note to have Miller gather any chips Skaikru had.

Why would Titus surrender a chip to her? Was he trying to set her up? If so, what was his plan and why would he violate the oath he swore to Lexa on her deathbed? She didn't think Titus would dishonor himself or his heda in such a fashion, but fear made people do stupid things. Were these chips different from the one in Ontari's neck? Was Titus suggesting that Clarke had a chip or should use the one he left?

Clarke knew strategy was not her strong suit. She spent hours learning to play chess, and lost most games because she couldn't envision all the possibilities. Since coming to Earth, she'd been flying by the seat of her pants, but she couldn't count on that good fortune against people who spent their entire lives making plans, backup plans, and counter plans. She wasn't even positive yet that Roan wasn't setting her up.

*Miss you.*

"Aargh!" Clarke went under the water. In her head, she said, 'Will you please give me some time to think?'

She stayed under as long as possible, and was relieved to hear nothing but her heartbeat. Clarke surfaced and began washing up. She removed the braids from her hair, rinsed it again, and got out of the tub.

She went to her room and dressed, put the chips in one pocket and the sketchbook in another. When she went into the common room, Murphy was waiting. "Griffin."

"Murphy."

"Where the hell is he taking me?"

"To his capital, I guess. You'll be safer there than here."

"Reverend Crazy was here earlier."

"Yeah, I figured. He left the chip he took from you on my night stand."

"The guards didn't let him in."

"Are you sure?"
"Yeah."
"Did anybody else come?"
"Not while I was here."
"Make sure Roan knows Titus was here. Don't tell him about the second chip, though. Not yet."
"I hope you know what the hell you're doing."

"Me, too." Clarke sat at the table. She picked up one of the morning reports and tore it in half. She wrote a quick note and picked up the pouch of coins she left on the table earlier. Clarke handed both to Murphy. "Take this note to Miller, please. They're two floors up. Then go to the market. Haggle. Get yourself a decent knife. There's more than enough there to cover it."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Until I figure out how to fix this mess, we're kinda stuck with each other. I don't like you walking around here without a weapon. I know the guards are supposed to protect you, but somebody got in here today and that means the guards can be bought or persuaded."

"You don't have a weapon."

"I'm an ambassador." She grimaced. "I'm supposed to fight with my words."

"You're screwed."

"I know." Clarke sighed. "I have to go."

"Later, Griffin. Thanks." Murphy raised his hand.

Clarke raised her hand in acknowledgment while she walked to the door.

100 – 100 – 100

As she suspected, it was only the two of them at lunch. Lexa started as soon as Ontari laid eyes on Clarke. Miss you, Klark.

"Heda."

"Ontari," she corrected. "I should not have intruded on your breakfast with your mother."

"It's your house and your food. If you want our company when you eat it, we can't really complain."

"Sit." Ontari gestured toward a new table near the balcony. "Lunch will be here soon."

"Mochof." Clarke sat parallel to the door and balcony. She didn't want to put her back to either, and carefully didn't look at the bed.

Ontari sat to Clarke's left and faced the door. "You know something about why I act this way."

"Sha," Clarke sighed. Speak true.

"Why will you not tell me?"

"I don't know everything yet, and I do not want to put you in danger."
"I am heda, Klark. I am not in danger."


"You did not kill her."

*Speak true.* "No." Ai hod yu in, Klark. I will protect you. You are safe. Clarke bowed her head and covered her ears.

"Klark," Ontari said quietly and put her hand on Clarke's wrist. She gently pulled it away from her ear. "I will say what she says if it will help."

"It won't." She felt like her heart hadn't stopped breaking since she saw Lexa's eyes open wide in the doorway.

"You know who killed her."

Clarke could hardly hear her over Lexa's attempts to comfort her. "Yes," she whispered back.

"Tell me."

"I can't. Let her tell you. Ron ai ridyo op, Leksa." Death of a thousand cuts had nothing over the grief that grew and lessened but never left. "Oh, now you're quiet," she muttered.

"She is not quiet, Clarke, but she will not tell me."

"I'm sorry this is happening to you, Ontari."

"You are the only person who speaks kindly or truthfully to me."

"I'm sorry for that, too. You should bring someone from Azgeda you trust."

"I trust no one," Ontari said. "Not even you."

"I won't betray you, Ontari."

They looked at each other for several seconds. The sound of the door opening broke what was happening between them. Plates of food were put in front of them, with mugs and two pitchers, and then they were alone again.

"We meet the Floukru ambassador today. Luna is still uncertain about staying in the coalition. We will talk to the ambassador. You will help me convince him that the alliance is vital. If that does not work, someone will have to travel to their capital to speak with Luna."

"I'll do what I can to keep that from happening. So will Marcus." Clarke paused. "Titus will not like two Skaikru giving you advice."

"Titus is full of words, but they do not serve me." Ontari paused and looked at Clarke. "He fears you. He fears no one else, not even me, but he fears you."

Clarke nodded. Every time she heard his name, it came back in a rush, the stunned look on Lexa's face, the black blood on her hands, Lexa's last words. *Life is about more than just surviving.* She lost her appetite and pushed the plate away. Clarke got out of her seat and walked around the table to the balcony. She looked out across Polis without seeing it, her hands clenched. Clarke didn't realize at first that she was shaking.
I will not leave you, Klark. Clarke walked to the far end of the balcony and leaned on the low wall. She thought about climbing over it and flying to her death. *You will not leave me.* She decided against it, not because of Lexa's voice, but because she couldn't leave her friends, her family, unprotected. When she told Lexa that there might be a day in the future that they no longer owed anything to their people, she knew it would never happen.

Clarke turned, put her back against the wall and slid down it. She wrapped her arms around her legs and tried to get some control over her emotions. Clarke lost that battle when Ontari knelt beside her and put her arms around Clarke.
Murphy caught Miller in the hallway. Miller and Bryan were on their way to the market. Murphy didn't bother with small talk. He handed Miller the folded paper. "From Clarke."

"Is she all right?"

"Yeah."

Miller opened the paper and read it. He looked at Murphy. "Who is it?"

"I don't know. Be quiet about this. She doesn't want anyone to know. It's not safe."

Miller looked at Murphy. Even in the dim hallway, he saw Murphy's healing face. "Who did that to you?"

"Long story."

"Come with us so you can tell me."

Murphy looked over his shoulder at his guard and sighed. He and Miller would never be friends, but this was probably his last chance to spend time with any Skaikru. It was easier to talk to people when he didn't have to explain everything. "All right."

They took the stairs down and went out the main entrance. Murphy stopped for a second and turned around. He asked his guard, "Where's the market?"

The guard walked in front of him and signaled for them to follow.

"What's going on?" Miller asked as they entered the crowded street.

"I really don't know, exactly, but it has to do with the things Jaha was handing out."

"He was talking about all kinds of crazy shit."

"Believe me, I know. You need to find out who this is before shit blows up."

"I will."

Bryan spoke for the first time. "How dangerous is it?"

"The Azgeda king is taking me when he leaves."

"What?"

"Clarke made a deal with him to keep me safe."

"What do you have on her?" Miller asked.

"Nothing. I owe her, all right?" Murphy lowered his voice. "Be careful who you trust. Remember someone's always watching and listening."

Clarke said the same thing in her note. "We owe her, too."

Murphy nodded. He hoped there were enough coins in the pouch to get Miller a blade, too. He was
going to need it to protect Clarke and the others.

100 – 100 – 100

It was a 15 minute walk to the hospital. Abby tried to pay attention to the route, but was constantly distracted by everything in Polis. She didn’t get to look around much last time she was there. She was uncertain why the guard stayed with her once she arrived.

It was a pleasant surprise to see Nyko again. She thought he had been part of the massacred army. She smiled at him, and he nodded back and sent the guard away. "I'm so sorry about everything," Abby said.

"Words do not make it right."

"I know."

"Will you ask Clarke to visit? I wish to discuss some things with her."

"Certainly. What can I do to help?"

"Heda said we are to learn from each other, as we did at your camp. She said your tools will be brought here."

"They won’t be much good without power."

"Raven kom Skaikru can figure that out."

"Nyko, Raven's not with us."

"I am sorry."

"I don't think she's dead, but she went with Jaha."

"To the City of Light."

"Is that a real place?"

"People believe it is real."

"We have a saying: Anything that sounds too good to be true probably is."

Nyko smiled. "My nomon said that before we came to market."

"She was a wise woman."

"Sha. Come, I will introduce you to the others."

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari knelt on the concrete, her arms around Clarke, her chin on the top of Clarke's head. She didn't say anything for a long time and Lexa was silent, too. Everything happened so fast. Roan’s shock at Lexa's death confused her. He should have been happy that the woman who murdered his mother was dead.

Ontari didn’t mourn Nia. Azplana was unrelentingly cruel to her without teaching her anything she needed to know as heda. Ontari knew that had Nia survived Lexa, she would have slaughtered all
the strikon Natblida on Nia's orders. It never occurred to Ontari at the time that becoming heda would be an escape from Nia.

But she was here now, Heda of the Alliance of 13 Clans, and Roan's instructions were clear and precise. He didn't threaten her, as his mother would have. Instead, he explained all that was at stake as they rode back to Polis. He told her that Lexa was not weak because she envisioned a future where there was no war and the clans settled their disagreements with words instead of armies, where children didn't starve to death because their parents went to war and invaders burned their fields.

He talked about Clarke, told her how Clarke took down the Mountain after Lexa left with her troops, how she fought him at every step until one of her people was in danger. Ontari prevented Clarke from poisoning Nia, but that was to save her own skin, for Nia would have killed her when she realized what Ontari allowed to happen. She saw no fear on Clarke's face when she threw her onto the table, only a kind of relief replaced by anger when she covered Clarke's face with her blood.

Since defeating the other Natblida in the Conclave, Ontari felt her life was on fast forward. Titus put something in her, and Heda Leksa's voice and thoughts sometimes overrode her own, sometimes blended with them. Clarke was at the center of it, even her own thoughts. Clarke was beautiful, honest, and kind. She bowed to Ontari without being asked or told, and after she publicly swore fealty and accepted Ontari's blood, Ontari hated being away from her. The need to be near Clarke was a constant itch at the base of her skull. She had relief from it only at moments like these, when she held Clarke. She wanted more with Clarke, and knew Clarke would not accept or offer anything at this time, as she struggled with her grief for Lexa and her fear for her people.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispered.

"Do not apologize to me, Klark. You have done nothing wrong."

"We need to get ready for the meeting."

"I am heda. Floukru can wait."

"That's not the message you want to give. Make him feel important."

"This is why you advise me. Titus would have me insult and threaten."

"My dad used to tell me, 'You'll catch more flies with honey than vinegar.'"

"Why would you want to catch flies?"

"I asked him that, too." Clarke lifted her head. "He never explained it but told me it meant I'd be more likely to get my way if I was nice. I know you think nice is the same thing as weak, but it isn't. It's just a different approach."

"I will try to catch Floukru flies."

Clarke smiled. "Marcus is much better at the honey thing than I am."

"Anyone is better than I am."

"Most people aren't like Nia, Ontari. They don't enjoy inflicting cruelty or suffering on others."

"I am learning that." Ontari stood up and offered Clarke her hand.
Clarke let Ontari pull her to her feet.

"Finish your lunch while I send for Marcus."

"I'll try."
"Hey," Murphy tried to get his guard's attention. "Hey."

The guard stopped and turned around.

"Who's the best smith? I want to get my friend a knife."

The guard didn't answer, but turned around and began walking again. Murphy muttered, "asshole," under his breath, and took it back when he led them past the market to a smithy. All three Skaikru admired the weapons on display. They picked them up, testing their balance and weight. Miller checked out swords, too. He'd been learning to use one when Pike hijacked Arkadia.

Murphy's guard tapped Miller on the shoulder and pointed at a different sword. Miller picked it up and immediately noticed the difference. He turned his head and thanked the guard. "Mochof."

One of the smith's apprentices realized then that they weren't just window shopping. Bryan, Miller, and Murphy showed their knife selections to the guard. He pointed to another for Bryan and Miller, and nodded his approval at Murphy's selection.

Murphy started trying to find out how much all this would cost. He got the apprentice down to 300 coins and pulled out the pouch Clarke gave him, but his guard stepped up again to tell the apprentice to give him the bill. "Azhefa Roan will send payment no later than tomorrow."

The apprentice went to get approval from the smith, who came to the front of the shop. He talked to the guard and smacked his apprentice in the back of the head for not providing scabbards for the weapons. The smith wrote out the sum expected for each and gave the paper to the guard.

They went back to the market tried to ignore the constant calls for Skaikru to shop at different stalls. Bryan stopped at a few, and all three bought new shirts at one. Murphy found another pair of cargo pants at another. His guard tapped his shoulder again and pointed at lined pants. "Azgeda is cold."

"Thanks. Mochof."

The guard nodded and Bryan helped Murphy pick out pants, shirts, and sweaters. Murphy found a lined leather coat and gloves, and Bryan added a hood. After all that, the pouch was still half full. They grabbed a snack before walking toward the tower. Along the way, they met Harper and Monroe. Bryan went ahead with Murphy to give them a minute to talk with Miller.

Miller gave them Clarke's message and conveyed Murphy's urgency. They agreed to begin checking rooms that evening when the others went out. He suggested that they, too, get weapons. Harper smiled grimly and tapped the scabbard at her side, and Monroe showed him two knives. He smiled at them. "I knew I picked the right people," he told them, and winked before hurrying to catch his boyfriend.

Marcus came in while Clarke fought against stress-induced nausea to eat. Ontari kept his attention from Clarke while she explained who they were meeting and why. He patiently walked through strategy: Listen to the ambassador until he had nothing to say, address his concerns, finish with the reasons the coalition was the best idea. He coached Ontari while Clarke listened.

Ontari looked at her occasionally, and Clarke nodded encouragement. Lexa wasn't speaking to
Clarke, which made it easier for her to concentrate on what Marcus was saying. Clarke hoped Lexa was being quiet for Ontari, too, to give her a chance to understand what Marcus was teaching her.

They went to another room on the next floor up. It was Marcus' suggestion; the throne room was a demonstration of power, and that wasn't the message they needed to give Floukru. Luna knew the strength of the armies; they needed the ambassador to understand, by word and deed, that Ontari had no interest in using them now that the Skaikru rebellion was defeated.

When the Floukru ambassador left, Clarke and Marcus were convinced that Luna's issues had been adequately addressed. They talked together for a few minutes after, and Marcus praised Ontari. She was young, and had much to learn, but she was a quick study. When he left them, Ontari asked Clarke's opinion.

"You did great," Clarke smiled. "You answered all his questions. You didn't raise your voice or lose your patience, and you made your points."

"Thank you for helping. Can you stay for supper?"

"I can't. Roan wants me to meet some people."

"After."

"I can't, Ontari."

"You will come to my bed tonight, Klark."

"No, I won't. You can't do this. You can't," Clarke insisted as Ontari moved close. "I don't want you to die, and the quickest way to get a no confidence vote is for the other clans to think that I'm influencing you."

"You are. If Skaikru remains as the 13th clan, a no confidence vote will fail, will it not?"

"In a year, it might not matter. Right now, I don't know. Give me some time to work out everything that might happen."

"Klark, look at me." Clarke reluctantly did as Ontari asked and saw brown eyes. "I am speaking, not her."

"It doesn't make a difference, not right now."

"I will see you tonight, Klark." Ontari left the meeting room. Seconds later, she heard the door again, and turned to see Titus.

"Wanheda, we must talk."

"No. Leave me alone or I will scream loud enough to wake the dead."

"You are playing a dangerous game."

"Three. Two."

Titus backed away. At one, he put his hand on the door handle. "You will not take another Heda from me." He opened the door and left.

Clarke waited a few seconds. The hall was empty. She didn't know where her guards were, but knew Roan would be pissed off when she told him what happened.
The suite was empty when Clarke got back there, but she knew it wouldn't be for long. She went into her room and closed the door. She looked at Lexa's trunks and took a deep breath. She opened the one she'd opened earlier.

Despite her trembling hands, Clarke searched the trunk. She didn't find what she was looking for, and closed it. In the second, she found several of Lexa's daggers in a leather roll. Under them were the scabbards, including the one she wore on her thigh nearly every day.

She unrolled the bundle on the floor, and picked a knife with a nearly pristine handle, showing that Lexa didn't use it often. She touched the one she immediately recognized. Be safe, Klark. You are strong. Clarke rolled the bundle again and tied it closed. She went through the scabbards, chose the one that looked newest, and checked to make certain the knife fit in it.

While she was putting everything back in order, she saw a small tin like the one Titus put the A.I. in after removing it from Lexa's neck. This one had the infinity symbol on it instead of the skull on Titus'. Clarke's hands shook even more, and it took her several tries to slide the lid off.

Inside was a place for another A.I. chip. More questions screamed through her brain while she closed the tin and returned it to the trunk. She closed the lid quietly, put the dagger in the scabbard, and put both on top of the trunk.

She heard someone enter the suite and got up from the floor. She opened her door and saw Murphy heading to his room with an armload of clothes and followed him.

"You suck at sneaking, Griffin."

"Because I'm not sneaking, Murphy."

"Bryan helped me pick out some clothes. My guard was surprisingly helpful, too."

"Huh."

"Close the door."

Clarke did while Murphy dropped his purchases on his bed. He showed her the knife and she nodded her approval. "Miller got one and a sword, and his boyfriend got one, too. The guard told the smith to send the bill to Roan. That's why I had enough to get clothes." He pulled the pouch from his pocket and offered it to Clarke.

"Keep it. Did Roan say anything to you about supper?"

"No. He told me to pack because we're leaving tomorrow."

"I want you to have dinner with my mom. Tell her about the City of Light. She'll ask about Lexa, but don't tell her." She looked around Murphy's room and saw paper and a pencil on the dresser. She walked over and wrote a note to her mother. "Give this to my mom so she'll talk to you."

"She talked to me plenty."

Clarke rolled her eyes. "Just come and tell me what she said after you talk."

"This cloak and dagger shit worries me."

"It should. Titus threatened me today. I'm pretty sure Roan's gonna execute some guards. Keep your
weapon on you all the time, Murphy."

"Sha, Heda," he smirked, and realized a moment later it was a monumental mistake.

Clarke grabbed his dagger from the bed on her way to pinning him to the floor. She held the blade to his throat. Unlike when she threatened Lexa, the honed edge pressed right under his Adam's apple. "This isn't a game, Murphy. I'm nobody's heda."

"Commander of Death," he smirked again, unable to help himself.

Clarke punched him in the mouth. "You are such an asshole," she said, and stood up. She tossed his dagger on the bed and left him on the floor.
In the common room, she poured a mug of wine and drank it. She refilled it and looked at her hand, which was starting to hurt. Her knuckles were bruised and one had a small cut on it, probably from one of Murphy's teeth. Clarke stuck her finger in the wine and rubbed it on her cut.

She sat down with a sigh. Not knowing who to trust was making everything worse. She pulled the notebook from her pocket and started to jot down notes while she drank. Clarke started with Lexa's death. She went from there to what Murphy told her about being in Titus' custody, the Polaris escape pod, the woman under the mushroom cloud, and the first Natblida. After that, she went on to Jaha, the City of Light, the hologram A.I. that Murphy mentioned, and the two chips in her possession.

She stopped there. She hadn't kept track of how much wine she drank and was feeling the effects. Clarke carefully returned the notebook to her pocket and checked the other pocket for the chips. Then she stumbled to her feet and carefully walked to her room. She put the dagger on and wished for a pistol.

Two large piles of bedding took up half her bed, and Clarke sighed again. She was getting tired of crying, but grief overwhelmed her at times. This was one. She was drunk and Lexa was silent, and she never felt more alone in her life.

She heard Roan's voice, and Murphy's, and dropped to her knees. She buried her face in her bed to stifle her sobs. She didn't hear the door open, but she heard Roan's sigh, and felt him kneel beside her. He put his arm around her, but said nothing until her breathing returned to something like normal.

"Perhaps we should move her things," he suggested, his voice soft.

"No." She raised her head, looked at him and sniffled. "I miss her, and taking her things away isn't going to change that."

He nodded. "You still have to do your duty."

"I'm well aware of my duty," Clarke spat. She hated that word. "I'm doing everything you want. I spent most of the day with Ontari. She hijacked my breakfast with my mom, who I haven't seen in weeks, and then I had lunch with her. We met with the Floukru ambassador and convinced him again that the alliance is best for his people. And then I find out that someone's been in my room, and Titus tried to get in, and he threatened me to my face. I'm tired and I'm scared and I can't figure out what's going on. You're leaving, and Murphy's leaving, and I'm going to have to sleep with one eye open because I can't trust anyone." Trust her.

"Titus tried to get in here."

"Yeah. Murphy was here, and he said the guards did their job. But somebody came in and left another chip in my room."

"Where did it come from?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to find out if any Skaikru are spying for Jaha. Did you miss the part about Titus threatening me?"

"I heard, Clarke. I must return to my capital. There are many things that should have been done. I will take care of your guards tonight. You will be safe. I will leave Murphy here, if you wish."
"He's safer away from here. He's your insurance policy."

"Insurance policy?"

"If anything happens to me, he knows the most important parts of what I know."

"Why did you hit him?"

"I lost my temper."

"He said something."

"Sha." Clarke sighed again. "I know he's branwada, but don't hurt him."

"I will have him trained to fight."

Clarke barked a laugh. "Ok. That sounds good."

"I will return to Polis as soon as I can. If you must leave, come to me. The documents in your saddlebag will ensure safe passage through my lands."

"Thank you."

"I wish I could do more, Clarke." Roan stood. "We must leave soon. Wash your face and come to the common room."

She nodded, and after he left, she got up and went to the bathroom. She washed her hands and face, and ran her fingers through her hair. She took a few minutes to put a few braids in and adjusted the dagger on her thigh.

100 – 100 – 100

Shortly after Clarke and Roan left, Murphy and his fat lip went up to knock on Abby's door. Marcus answered, and the first thing he asked was, "What happened?"

"Clarke punched me."

Marcus stepped back to let him in. "Abby, someone's here to see you."

She came out of a room in the back and sighed when she saw Murphy. "What did you do now, John?"

"I pissed off your daughter," he answered and held the note out.

Abby came and got it. She opened it, read it, and handed it to Marcus. "Is it safe to assume we're going to hear one or two of the long stories you and Clarke have been holding back?"

"Yeah."

"Let me see your face first."

He tried to duck away, but she was used to people trying to avoid treatment and caught his chin. He winced, but let her move it and open his lip. "You'll live," she said. "Marcus and I were headed to a pub one of the healers recommended, but we can eat here if you rather."

"No, the pub's a good idea."
Murphy had two guards tonight, and Abby told them where they were going. One guard walked ahead and the other behind. Murphy hated small talk and sucked at it, but he tried. "How was your day?

"Not nearly as exciting as yours."

"Mine was very boring, very interesting, and very boring again," Marcus volunteered.

"Do tell."

"Wait for a meeting," Marcus said. "Go to the meeting. Wait for supper."

"I went to the market with Miller and his boyfriend, and then Clarke punched me in the mouth."

"For going to the market?"

"No, I said something to her that I know now to never say again."

"Something about Lexa?" Marcus guessed.

"No, it was about Clarke."

"Good for her," Abby said. "I learned how to prepare herbs for salve. What I wouldn't give for a food processor."

"What do you have to do?" Marcus asked.

"Grind them up with a mortar and pestle. It's harder than it sounds."

"What's the hospital like?"

"It's actually pretty nice. Very clean. Very professional. Very 1800s. I'll be glad when my things arrive."

"They should be here soon. Heda Ontari sounded very excited this morning."

"I think that had more to do with Clarke than anything else."

"You've got to be kidding me," Murphy said.

"John, do you have an opinion?"

"Not one I'm willing to share. But Clarke will probably punch me again later."

"Maybe this time you'll duck."

"She's a lot faster than you'd think," he answered, remembering how quickly he hit the floor with a knife at his throat.

Abby laughed. "Clarke has excellent reflexes."

"I noticed."
They stopped and waited outside while one guard went in to check it out and clear a table if necessary. He came out a few minutes later and sent the other guard to the back door while Abby, Marcus, and Murphy went in.

The owner met them and took them to one of the more private tables. As soon as they were seated, he left and a server brought mugs and two pitchers. All three started with wine. A few minutes later, heaping plates were brought to them.

"Why did Clarke send you, John?"

"There's a lot of crazy shit going on, and she's going to ask for your help. Please help her."

"Of course I'll help her."

"Not like that, Abby. She needs to tell someone what's been going on, and you guys can't tell anyone what I'm going to tell you or what Clarke's going to tell you. It could get you killed. Clarke's sending me away with the Azgeda king because she thinks I'll be safer out of here, and she doesn't even like me."

"But you know something," Marcus said.

"Yeah, Clarke and I saw something that I can't tell you about. But I can tell you about the City of Light."

Abby rolled her eyes, but Marcus looked at Murphy, appraising him. "Go on," he said.

"I left with Jaha because there wasn't a place for me with you guys. He's seriously, seriously disturbed. The City of Light is probably real, but it isn't a physical place." He drank some wine. "I'm getting ahead of myself.

"We walked and walked and walked. We walked across a goddamn desert, but only he and I survived that because it was mined and people panicked. And then out of nowhere, a drone appears. We followed it into a bunker, and he trapped me in there for three months while he went completely off the rails with this hologram. He made her portable and tried to get me to swallow one of the chips, but I got away with this girl I met."

"We came back here. She's from here, and we knew Jaha was coming here, and she hoped we could get her brother away from him. We were ambushing people and stealing their stuff, and I got caught, but I think she got away.

"The guys who caught me searched me and found the chip in my pocket and that's when things went all to hell," Murphy sighed. He stopped long enough to eat some food and wash it down with wine. He emptied the mug and refilled it with water. "They found a chip in my pocket, like the one you gave Clarke," he said to Marcus.

"They asked what I was doing with the commander's sacred symbol and dragged me here. Next thing I know, I'm in some weird ass shrine, tied to a chair while some wacko dude with crazy head tattoos is beating the hell out of me. Wants to know how I got the chip. I told him. I told him the truth the first time, and he kept coming. I got loose while he was out one time and got to look around."

Murphy leaned across the table. "He had an escape pod from Polaris, except the A and R got burned
off. On the wall, there were these huge murals. A woman under a mushroom cloud, and the same woman getting some people to come to her. They didn't look like people, and Titus said they were the first Natblida, whatever the hell that is."

Abby and Marcus looked at each other, then at Murphy.

"There's more," Abby said.

"Yeah. We kinda have to do a time jump thing, because that's the part that will get us killed. Titus locked Clarke and I up and left us in the dark. I don't know how long we were down there before Roan came and let us out. Clarke agreed to be his ambassador and he agreed to protect us from Titus."

"How much does he know?" Marcus asked.

"At least as much as I'm telling you. I don't think Clarke told him a lot more." Murphy wasn't hungry, but ate more from his plate.

"Finish your story, John," Abby prompted.

"Like I said, the City of Light is real, but it's not a physical place. You swallow the chip, I don't know what it does to your brain, but it lets you into the City of Light. I saw the A.I. while we were at the bunker, but after he packed her up, I think the only way to see her was if you had a chip in you. I don't know what they want, but I'm going to tell you what Clarke told me this morning. Go to the market. Get a weapon. There's a smith out past the market that has good blades. Ask one of the Azgeda guards to take you there or give you directions. Tell them you're Skaikru, with Wanheda."

"Weapons won't help," Abby said.

"I'm not willing to die without a fight, and whoever comes is going to be armed."

"Does this have something to do with Lexa's death?" Marcus asked.

Murphy nodded, but didn't say anything. He emptied his plate and added wine to the water in his mug. He sat back in his chair and looked at them. "Clarke isn't my favorite person, but I owe her. So I'm asking you again to be the people she can trust with this. Not like you trusted her at Camp Jaha. Trust her for real."

"Thank you for telling us," Marcus said.

Abby looked at him and scoffed. "You believe him?"

"Why else would Clarke try to protect him?" Marcus answered.

"We only have his word for that."

"I'll be gone tomorrow," Murphy told him. "I gain absolutely nothing by lying to you. You can verify everything with Clarke after I'm gone. I know you don't trust me, and I don't blame you, but like I said, I owe Clarke. She could have left me down there, and she didn't." He got out of his chair. "I'll ask one of the guards to stay to take you back to the tower."

Marcus stood, too, and held out his hand. Murphy shook, and they both said, "May we meet again."

Murphy nodded to Abby and put the pouch of coins on the table.

100 – 100 – 100
Clarke had a headache, and Lexa insisted on talking all through the dinner with the other ambassadors. Clarke did her best to pay attention, but quickly came to the conclusion that the others wanted to crow about having an ally in power. They made not so subtle suggestions about the ways their relationships with Azgeda could benefit their clans.

*Trust her. We will keep you safe, Klark. We love you. These branwada waste your time. Spicha. Love you. Nomonjoka. We will take his tongue.*

Experience with meetings involving Skaikru allowed her to look like she was staying on task. She smiled, agreed, nodded, and um-hmmmed at appropriate times, and drank enough to stay pleasantly buzzed. Roan kept looking at her like he was afraid she would do something inappropriate, and Clarke mulled that idea between Lexa’s running commentary.

By the time Clarke and Roan left the dinner, the other ambassadors were completely tanked and singing bawdy songs together. In the hall, Roan told her, "In another hour, they will be trying to attack each other with knives, and an hour after that, will swear undying loyalty."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"You are not yourself tonight, Clarke."

"I'm fine."

"I will take care of the problem with the guards before I leave."

"Thanks."

Neither of them said anything else until they reached their suite. Murphy lounged in the common room. Clarke ignored him, and Murphy got up and followed her.

"Well?" Clarke asked as soon as he closed the door.

"Kane will have your back, but your mom doesn't believe me. Maybe he'll change her mind. They were talking about it when I left."

"Figures."

"You all right?"

"No, Murphy, I'm not all right, thanks for asking."

He put his hands up, although Clarke hadn't turned around and couldn't see him. "I'd ask if there's anything I can do, but I know better. Take care of yourself, Griffin. May we meet again."

She turned around. "May we meet again, Murphy."

He nodded and left her. A few minutes later, Clarke went to the common room in search of more wine. Roan was sitting at the table reading the reports that came in since they left for dinner. The pitchers held nothing but water, and Clarke knew Roan cut her off. She glared at him.

He ignored her. "Why was Murphy waiting for you?"

"To say goodbye."

"Are you certain you don't wish to tell me why he is so valuable?"
"Yes."

"Or why you are attempting to drink yourself insensible?"

"Yes. Where's the wine, by the way?"

"Put away for a few days. You need to be alert."

"I haven't been drunk since the first time I caught out in acid fog. That was, I don't even know how long ago. Both of the people who were with me are dead. More than half the people who came down here with me are dead. Almost every fucking person on every fucking station is dead."

"Angry is good. Drunk is not. You will sleep tonight, and go for training tomorrow. I will wait for you to return so we can go over last minute things. Go to bed, Clarke."

Clarke was about to say something she would regret. We cannot protect you from yourself. Instead, she said, "Good night, your majesty," and stomped toward her room.

Roan waited to laugh until Clarke closed her door.
He was still working at the table two hours later when the door to the suite opened. He was surprised to see Ontari. "Is there something you need, Heda?"

"Not from you," she answered, and went to Clarke's room as if she had been there before. He looked toward the hall and waited, expecting to hear an argument, and wondered why there was none.

When he finished with his work, he quietly walked to Clarke's room and opened the door just enough to see inside. Both women were dressed except for their boots. Clarke lay on her side and Ontari lay behind her, her arm across Clarke, their hands joined.

While Roan went to his room, he debated speaking with Ontari about Clarke and the dangers of getting too close to her so soon in her reign. He decided to see her before he left although he knew she would, at a minimum, ignore his counsel. Clarke was sensible and probably warned her already.

He undressed and got in bed but sleep was slow to come. Ontari's presence in Clarke's bed probably explained where Clarke was the night of the feast. If Titus was already upset with Clarke, Ontari spending time with Clarke would do nothing to remedy the situation although it would keep Clarke safe. Roan sighed and cleared his mind.

Marcus and Abby spent the rest of their evening debating the believability of Murphy's story. Abby did her best to refute every argument Marcus raised while insisting Murphy told the truth. She remained unconvinced by the time they went to bed, but withheld a final decision until she spoke with Clarke.

Clarke woke early again. She couldn't move because Ontari lay completely on top of her. They were both dressed, which was a relief. She couldn't believe Ontari came to her bed after she was asleep and laid down without being invited.

"Sleep, ai niron." Ontari kissed her neck.

"Why are you here?" Miss you.

"Sleep," Ontari insisted, and wouldn't budge.

"I have things to do," Clarke insisted. Stay. Miss you.

"Alba will not be at the training ring for at least an hour."

"Let me up."

"You are grumpy in the morning."

Adorable. "Do not start," Clarke said. "Let me out of the bed and go back to yours."

"I prefer yours, if it is where you will sleep." Ontari kissed Clarke's neck again and hummed.

"Don't do that." Miss you, Klark. We love you. Stay, beja.
"Both of you shut up and let me out of bed. I have things to do." She finally got an arm loose and pushed Ontari's shoulder. When that didn't work, Clarke checked to see whether Ontari was ticklish. She was, and squirmed until she had to roll off of Clarke, but her giggles continued unchecked.

Clarke got out of bed. Ontari looked at her unhappily. "That was not fair."

"All's fair in love and war," Clarke answered, and gathered the clothes she wore the day before. It made no sense to dirty more clothing when these had to be cleaned anyway. She got fresh underclothing from the wardrobe and went to the bathroom, making certain to close the door. The last thing she needed was for Roan or Murphy to see Ontari in her room. Murphy's voice echoed. "You gonna bang the new commander, too?"

Clarke growled and splashed water on her face and neck, then changed from yesterday's clothes. She went back to her room. Ontari lounged on her bed. Lexa's bedding was on the trunks, and Clarke made a mental note to get trunk to store it. She tried to ignore Ontari when she sat on the bed to put on her socks and boots, but Ontari rolled over and curled around Clarke.

Clarke finished with her boots, stood up, and left without saying anything. She left the suite and headed to the training area. Polis was quiet at this hour. Nothing was open yet, and there were few people in the streets. The training ring was quiet, but Alba waited for her.

"Wanheda, you are here."

"You said to come before breakfast."

"I did not think you would listen."

"I'm full of surprises. Shall we?" Clarke gestured toward the ring.

For the next two hours, Clarke poured her frustration into hitting and being hit. She didn't talk, and got up every time Alba put her on the ground. She felt a little better when they finished, and she told Alba, "See you tomorrow," before jogging back to the tower.

The slight improvement in her mood evaporated when she saw Roan and Ontari talking at the table in the common room. Clarke ignored both of them and went to the bath. As much as she wanted to hide in the warm water, she bathed quickly, went to her room, and dressed for the day.

She sat down and started reading the pile of papers at her seat. Breakfast was served to the three of them a few minutes later, and Clarke ate while continuing to read. When she finished, she looked from one to the other. "What have you decided now?"

"You will sleep with Ontari," Roan said.

"I told her and I told you, it's not safe for her."

"No, but it is safe for you, and it is what your Heda wants."

"And what I want doesn't matter."

"In this instance, no. Ontari told me about hearing Heda Leksa, that you hear her as well."

Clarke glared at Ontari, who shrugged.

"I assume this has something to do with what you are hiding from us. We have been patient, Clarke, but you must tell us what you know."
"I need to figure it all out before I drag anybody else into it."

"Clarke, this has gone on too long," Roan said. "If what you know puts Ontari in peril, if it puts you and Murphy in danger, we must take steps to neutralize it."

Clarke dropped her head and closed her eyes. Ontari moved her chair closer and put her hand on Clarke's shoulder. "Klark, I cannot keep you safe if I don't know what threatens you."

"I don't want to tear apart everything you know. I don't want any more war."

"Neither do I. Neither does Ontari."

They didn't hear Murphy come in, but heard him say, "Clarke, you need to tell them. This is tearing you up."

"The more people who know, the more difficult it is for anyone to act against you," Roan said.

Clarke looked at Murphy. "Get my mom."

"Kane, too?"

"Yeah."

"Get a guard in here," Roan instructed Murphy.

Roan sent the guard to get Abby and Marcus and more food. Clarke left the table and went to her room. She got the tin from Lexa's trunk and retrieved her notebook. She checked to make sure the chips were in its pouch before returning to the room.

*Speak true, Klark. We will protect you. We love you. You will be safe.* Clarke sat in her seat and looked at Roan. "Please tell me there's something to drink here."

Ontari moved her chair next to Clarke and put her arm across Clarke's shoulders. Roan looked at them and left.

"I'm sorry for what this is going to do," Clarke said.

"There is nothing to be sorry about."

A guard entered the room. "Wanheda, a Skaikru wishes to speak with you."

"Who?"

"Miller."

"Bring him in."

Miller looked uncertain when he came in. He wasn't expecting to see Murphy, or Roan returning to the table with two bottles in his hand, or the new commander comforting Clarke.

"What did you find?"

"It's Sora."

"Where is he?"

"Tied to a chair in my room. Bryan and Monroe are watching him." Miller moved closer and held
out yet another tin with Polaris' infinity trademark.

Clarke took it and opened it. There were dozens of chips in it. "Who else got one?"

"Don't know yet."

"Roan, you need to send extra guards up there until we can talk to him."

Abby and Marcus came in next. "Clarke, what's going on?" Abby asked.

Roan poured alcohol into a mug and put it in front of Clarke. He gave the bottles to Ontari. "One moment."

He opened the door and gave the guards more instructions.

"Miller, you did good. Don't let anyone leave. I'll be up as soon as I can."

Roan heard her, and added another set of instructions. Clarke emptied the mug in two swallows.

"Clarke, what's going on?" Abby repeated.

"It's a long story," Clarke sighed, "and I'm gonna tell it."

"You will be safe, Klark, I swear it," Ontari murmured.

Clarke nodded and pulled two mugs toward her. She took the open bottle from Ontari and put some in each mug. She offered one to Murphy. He got the only vacant chair and put it next to Clarke before sitting down and taking the mug. "We really gonna do this?"

"Yeah," Clarke sighed.

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ai niron = my love
beja = please
She waited until the traffic died down, until everyone had a chair and food and something to drink. She was still sipping the moonshine Roan provided, grateful for its cushion against the devastation she was about to unleash. Murphy and Roan were her drinking partners, and Abby watched, disapproving, while Clarke drank. Marcus looked curious as he watched Ontari and Clarke, and wondered whether what he saw was real.

She put down the mug and ate a little at Ontari's quiet urging, and refilled the mug before she started talking.

"I don't know what Pike did, but some Trikru brought Octavia to Polis on Lexa's Ascension Day. She was their prisoner, and they threw her on the floor. Senet said the Fleimkepa told him Heda would hear them. Senet said Skaikru destroyed his village, that it was unprotected because the army that was massacred left them without anyone to protect them.

"Lexa said there would be no revenge, no more jus drein jus daun. Instead, she ordered the armies of the 12 clans to put a five mile circle around Arkadia to give Skaikru time to peacefully remove Pike from power. Senet objected and Titus killed him for threatening Lexa. Any Skaikru who tried to cross the blockade or was on the other side of it by dawn the next day would be subject to a kill order.

"I brought Octavia to my room to clean her up and find out what happened, but she was so angry. She thought I would choose Lexa over Skaikru, and told me she would be leaving in an hour and I should go with her. If I didn't, I wasn't the person she thought I was." Clarke looked at the table, remembering how Octavia looked at her with barely suppressed fury, and drank again. She wondered for a moment why Lexa had nothing to say.

"I went to say goodbye to Lexa," she continued. Not goodbye, Klark. Death is not the end. "She asked me to stay. I wanted to stay, but we both knew I couldn't. So I went back to my room to get my pack. Murphy was tied up. He looked like shit. I was taking the gag out of his mouth when Titus told me not to. He had a gun. Told me he was going to kill me because Lexa wouldn't do her duty as long as I was alive."

Beside her, Ontari tensed. Clarke put a hand on her thigh. "Don't do anything until I'm finished, please. Please," she repeated.

She waited and tried not to see the others watching them. Clarke knew their position was intimate and suggested things that hadn't happened, that might never happen. "Beja, Ontari."

Ontari finally nodded, and put her hand on top of Clarke's. Clarke was grateful for her support. It meant different things to them, but Clarke accepted her comfort. She emptied her mug and refilled it, and Murphy's and Roan's when they held them out.

"I don't know where the guards were. I guess Titus sent them away. I wish I noticed they were gone before I opened the door." Clarke sighed. "He was going to blame Murphy. 'Skaikru weapon, Skaikru thief.' He started shooting at me. He's a lousy shot, that's why Murphy and I are here, and Lexa's not. I threw a stool at him and he fired the gun while he fell. Lexa opened the door, and the bullet hit her in the middle of her torso." Clarke lowered her head again, unable to stop her tears. Osir hod yu in, Klark. We love you. We will protect you. You will be safe. We will be together.

Murphy picked up the story. "Clarke tried to save her, but there was no way." He pointed at his
chest, showing where the bullet entered Lexa's body. "She bled to death, but she had time to talk to Titus and Clarke before she died. I don't what she said to Reverend Crazy, no offense," he told Ontari. "But as soon as she was dead, he moved Clarke away and turned Lexa onto her stomach."

"Murphy, Ontari doesn't know about the City of Light."

He sighed, preparing to tell that story again, but Roan interrupted. "I told Ontari that, but she does not know what Murphy found while Titus had him."

Murphy sighed again and drank more alcohol. Like Clarke, he was grateful for its cushion against this shitty reality. "When the guards picked me up, they found something on me, and next thing I know, they're talking about the commander's sacred symbol and I'm tied to a chair getting my ass whipped and beat. He left me alone for a long time, and I got loose. I couldn't get out of there, but I had time to take a look around. There's an escape pod down there, and drawings on the wall. Reverend Crazy said one of them showed the first Natblida."

Clarke stepped in to translate. "An escape pod is a small vessel for one or two people to come to Earth from the sky," she told Ontari. "Natblida are Nightbloods. Heda is chosen from a pool of people with black blood," she explained to her mother.

"That's not possible," Abby said.

Ontari removed her arm from Clarke's shoulder and pulled Clarke's dagger from its sheath. "Your hand, Klark," Ontari asked. "I will not waste the blood."

Clarke nodded and held out her hand.

"What are you doing?" Abby asked while Ontari sliced Clarke's palm, then her own.

She showed Abby her hand, the black blood welling from the cut. As she had on her Ascension Day, Ontari squeezed blood from her hand into Clarke's. She pressed their palms together and returned Clarke's dagger to its sheath. Abby stared, and her brain started searching for answers.

"How many people have this?"

"I don't know, but when they are identified and reach eight summers, they are to come to Polis for training. Nia did not permit many Natblida to leave Azgeda. Many were killed for reasons known only to her," Ontari said.

"I'm sorry," Clarke murmured to her. Don't stop now, Klark. Tell them everything. We will keep all of you safe.

"It is not your fault. You have nothing to be sorry about."

Love you. Love your heart. Love your strength. Love your courage. Love your compassion. Clarke put her head on Ontari's shoulder for a few seconds, and Ontari put her head on Clarke's until Clarke sat up again. Before she returned to the story, she emptied the mug again, and refilled it.

"He moved Lexa's hair out of the way, and on the back of her neck there was a tattoo of the infinity symbol and a vertical scar. He cut along that scar and pulled something out. It was a chip, but it had a huge web of tiny filaments that retracted into it. He waited for them to retract, then put it in a box like this one, except it had a skull on it." Clarke tapped one of the tins on the table. "He took her away and locked Murphy and I in there, and a little while later, guards took us down to the basement. They put us in cages and left us in the dark. Roan came and got us out. In return, I agreed to be his ambassador."
"That is why he fears you," Ontari murmured.

"There's more." Clarke drank again. There wasn't enough distance between her feelings and all she still had to say and do. She topped off her mug and Murphy's and Roan's.

"Clarke, you've had enough," Abby said.

"I don't think there's on the entire planet," Clarke answered, and Roan and Murphy raised their mugs in agreement. Marcus reached for a mug and Clarke put moonshine in it. Do not run, Klark. You are brave. You can do this. We love you. When the talking is finished, we will stay with you. Sorry, so sorry for your pain.

"Titus was really pissed off at the end of the Conclave. Ontari defeated the Natblida, but none of them died. Even Aden surrendered." She turned toward Ontari and tilted her head. "What did you say to him?"

"That I would keep you and your people safe, as Heda Leksa made him promise."

"How did you know about that?"

"Leksa told me," Roan answered. "Before you and she left for TonDC and I left for Azgeda. We spent an afternoon talking. She told me many things I did not know, things my mother kept from me or lied about."

"Azplana rarely told the entire truth," Ontari said.

Clarke squeezed her hand. She was surprised that their hands were still together. She caught a glimpse of Ontari's past and squeezed again.

Roan gave Clarke a brief break. "We went down to watch Ontari receive her tattoos. When they were complete, Titus put his back to us and did something."

"I need to show them," Clarke whispered to Ontari.

Ontari shrugged her jacket off and pulled her hair up. Roan and Murphy saw it first, and Clarke skated a fingertip down the scar. "Show the others."

Ontari turned in her seat so Marcus and Abby saw the tattoo and the scar. "Done?" she asked Clarke.

"Sha."

Ontari returned to her original position in her chair, her arm around Clarke's shoulder, holding Clarke's hand, keeping their palms together although the bleeding was long finished, the injuries healed except for faint scars.

"He put the chip he took out of Lexa into Ontari. That's how the commander spirit gets transferred. It's not reincarnation. It's an A.I. It learns. It teaches the next commander. It's how the previous commanders speak to the current one, usually through dreams. Lexa speaks to Ontari, and somehow I hear her. It's stronger when she's near me."

"I do not like to be away from Klark," Ontari said. "I do not understand, but Heda Leksa says to trust Klark, so I do."
Twenty-Six

Abby got out of her chair and stood behind Ontari's. “Do you mind?”

Ontari looked at Clarke. “She just wants to examine it, make sure you're ok,” Clarke told her.

Ontari nodded, and Abby moved her hair aside. “I've seen blankets stitched better than this was,” Abby said. She probed around the scar with her fingers, and found the chip. It wasn't deeply embedded and felt like it floated over Ontari's vertebra. “Thank you,” she said, and replaced Ontari's hair on her back. “May I see your hand? Yours, too, Clarke.”

They displayed their palms. Their palms were healed, the only indication that anything happened the dried black and brown blood on both their hands. “How can that happen?” Abby asked quietly, and returned to her seat while Ontari put her hand against Clarke's. She put her fingers between Clarke's and curled them over her knuckles, and Clarke did the same, her hold much looser.

“Before you guys got here, Miller was here. He brought this tin.” Clarke opened it and displayed the contents. “Jaha put a spy in our group. Miller's got him, and he's trying to find out if anyone else took one of the chips.” She smothered a giggle, relieved that she was finally drunk enough not to care. “I know you want to research them, so you can have a couple to look at, and you can take the one out of Sora so we can see what it does,” she told her mother.

“And since Jaha has a spy here,” Clarke looked at Ontari, “you're gonna have to lock down the city so he and the A.I. can't get in, or out if they're here. They're probably looking for that escape pod for some reason.”

“They want the chip,” Murphy said. “The one in her.”

“They can't have it,” Clarke said. “Nobody's taking Lexa from me again. Or you,” she added and leaned against Ontari.

Ontari smiled.

“Clarke, don't you think you're rushing into this?”

“Mom, just shut the hell up about my life before I start asking you about yours.”

The others ignored Clarke's outburst, and Abby decided to hold that discussion for a time she and Clarke were alone and Clarke was sober.

“We must do something about Titus,” Roan said.

“He will not act directly against Klark, but he may encourage others to act. Heda Leksa made him swear that would not directly attack Klark.”

“I see why you called Murphy an insurance policy.”

“Marcus, you've been quiet,” Clarke observed.

“It's a lot to take in. I see why you were hesitant to tell anyone, Clarke.” He held out his mug for a refill and ignored Abby's dirty look. “I think that first, we have to help Miller determine whether there are more chips or spies in our group. I'm not certain what to do about Titus. I doubt he'll trust anything we say.”
“He will not,” Ontari said. “He hates Skaikru, especially Klark. He believes Klark unduly influenced Heda Leksa and that all Skaikru should be punished for the actions of a few.”

“This threatens his power. He has been Fleimkepa for many years, as long as I remember,” Roan said.

“Is he training an apprentice?” Marcus asked.

“He should be, but resists.” Roan took a drink, his brow furrowed in thought. “Perhaps he has a chip, too.”

“Does he have a scar on his neck?”

“It is always covered.” Roan emptied his mug and set it aside. “I think Azgeda will wait a few more days.”

“I'd like to look at Ontari's blood under a microscope.”

“One drop,” Clarke answered.

“Microscope?” Ontari asked.

“It has powerful lenses so it can see things so small they're otherwise invisible. Like a super spyglass.” Clarke was impressed with her ability to make sense, and that she wasn't slurring words. She finished yet another mug and was going to refill it when Ontari moved the bottle away.

“That is enough for now, Klark. We still have much to do.”

“Sha.”

“Eat a little more. When we finish everything we must do today, you may drink more if you wish.”

*It will not make you feel better, Klark. You will do as you must, but being drunk leaves you slow and vulnerable. It makes it harder for us to protect you. Stay with us, Klark.* Clarke rolled her neck and picked at her plate.

“Skaikru won't have scars,” Murphy said. “You swallow those chips.” He finished his mug, too, and like Clarke, started to eat.

Roan looked across the table. “We have not been introduced. I am Roan kom Azgeda.”

“King,” Murphy added.

Marcus introduced himself and Abby and explained who they were.

“I thought the Ice Nation had a queen,” Marcus asked when he finished their introductions.

“That is another long story for another day,” Roan said.

“Damn,” Murphy muttered.

“Problem, Skaiskat?”

“No problem, Commander. I thought I might find out how the Ice Nation got a king.”

“Another day,” Roan repeated. “It is a very long story and will distract us from what we must do.
When Skaikru finishes eating, we will go upstairs and see the rest of them.”

“Don't forget Roger and Fay,” Clarke said.

“Sha. They may be in the library, or perhaps the workshop.”

“I will send a guard for them,” Roan said and got up. He went to the door, and sent another guard. The hallway was full of them. His guards were there, as well as Ontari's, Clarke's, Murphy's, and those who watched the doors.

Clarke pushed her plate away and ignored both Ontari's disappointed look and Lexa's suggestion that she eat more. She looked at Murphy, whose plate was empty. “Let's go,” she said, and stood up.

Roan watched her shake off Ontari's help and walk across the room. She was looser, less stiff, but didn't sway or stumble. It took a few moments to sort all the guards, but Clarke didn't wait. She went for the stairs and was up the first flight, Ontari on her heels, before the others reached the door.

They waited for the rest of them on the landing at the floor assigned to Skaikru. “When we're finished,” Clark said, “I'm going to drink an entire fucking bottle of moonshine.”

“Why?”

“This is the first time I can breathe.”

“You can breathe with me, Klark.”

“Not yet.”

“You can, Klark,” Ontari insisted. “Look at me.”

“I don't want to see her.”

“Look at me,” Ontari repeated. She raised Clarke's chin and waited.

She had one green eye and one brown. “I hate when you do that to her, Leksa.”

“You do not hate us, Klark.”

“No,” Clarke sighed.

“I do not force her now. She agrees. She understands, Klark.”

“That makes one of us.”

Ontari glanced toward the stairs and dropped her hand. She opened the door and followed Clarke down the hall. Clarke knocked on the door to Miller's room, and it opened immediately.

“Hey, Clarke,” Monroe greeted her. “Commander.”

“Hey, Monroe. Who's here?”

“Me, Sora, a couple guards.”

“Where are Miller and Bryan? Where's Harper?”

“They're in my room waiting for you guys.”
Ontari turned around and told one of the guards to get them.

“It’s gonna be crowded in here.”

“Not for long,” Clarke said.
Clarke entered the room and nodded at the guards. Sora was tied to a chair and gagged. Clarke removed the gag while the others came in. "Hi, Sora."

"Hello, Clarke."

"How's the City of Light?"

"It's beautiful. There's no pain, just love and happiness."

"Why did Jaha send you?"

"Allie wants you to join her in the City of Light."

"Crazy A.I.," Murphy murmured. He spoke up. "She wears a red dress, right?"

"You've met Allie, John?"

"Yeah, we've met."

"Why haven't you joined us in the City of Light?"

"Because you motherfuckers have a bunch of screws loose. You don't know what she did."

"All she's done is give us peace."

"That's not all she's done," Murphy said. "She launched the missiles, and she'll launch more of them if she can find them."

Marcus, Abby, and Roan looked at Murphy. Clarke and Ontari remained focused on Sora.

"Who's here with you?" Clarke asked.

"I made a few friends, but I don't remember who."

"Where is Jaha? Where is Allie?"

"They're coming, Clarke. They'll bring peace to all of us."

"Lexa brought peace, but Skaikru wouldn't keep it."

Ontari put her hand on Clarke's back to steady her.

"Peace between tribes is fleeting. Allie's peace is eternal."

Clarke sighed. "Ok, Sora, we'll deal with you later." Clarke replaced the gag and turned around.

"How are you going to tell who's chipped and who isn't?" she asked her mother.

"I could feel the commander's chip under her skin."

"Let's start with that. We'll get to surgery later."

Abby walked behind the chair and pushed Sora's head toward his chest. "There," she said.
"So you can find it?"

"Yes," Abby confirmed.

"Ok." Clarke looked at Monroe. "You're here, we'll start with you."

"I didn't do anything, Clarke."

"I know. Call me paranoid. Mom's going to check all of you." She looked at a guard. "Go get the list."

"It won't hurt, Monroe," Abby reassured her. "I just need to feel your neck."

"Why don't you trust me, Clarke?"

"I don't trust anyone, Monroe. If it will make you feel better, Mom can check me first."

"Ok."

Clarke put her back to Monroe. Monroe watched Abby move Clarke's hair aside and probe her neck as she had Sora's. "There's nothing there, Monroe. Feel Clarke's neck."

Ontari watched while Abby guided Monroe's hand over Clarke's vertebrae.

"Now feel Sora's." Abby pushed his head down again, and let Monroe touch his neck without guidance.

"I don't," she started. "Oh, there it is." Monroe lowered her head and felt her neck. "I don't think there's one there."

"I don't think so, either," Clarke answered, "but humor me."

A few seconds later, Abby told Clarke, "She's clear."

"Thank you," Clarke told Monroe. The moonshine was starting to wear off. She pulled Sora's gag down again. "How many chips did you bring?"

"Fifty."

Clarke put the gag back and pulled the tins from her pocket. She put the empty one back and opened the one Miller found. Clarke counted quickly and closed the tin again. "Six are missing." She looked at Sora again. "Did you put one in my room?"

Sora nodded.

"Did Jaha tell you to do that?" Head shake. "Allie?" Another nod. "You joined the City of Light before leaving Arkadia, right?" Another nod. "Did you give one to anyone who isn't from Arkadia?" Sora shook his head.

Clarke hoped he was telling the truth. She turned to face the room. "There are five out there. We're going through this list until we find them." She handed the list to Marcus. "Mom, can you guys get started? I need to talk to Miller and Harper. Monroe, come with me, please." She looked at the guards behind Sora. "If he breathes funny, knock him out."

Clarke left the room and the others followed. Ontari stayed right behind her, her hand on Clarke's back. "Which room is yours, Monroe?"
She moved to the front and took them to her room. Clarke stopped her from opening the door. "I need to check them, too."

Monroe nodded. Clarke turned around and slid her hand around Ontari's neck. She closed her eyes while she moved her fingers and finally felt the chip. It moved easily under her fingers, but was too smooth to be bone. *We will inspect you later.* Clarke removed her hand and rolled her eyes. She turned around and nodded at Monroe.

"Hey, Clarke," Miller said, and stood up.


"What's going on?"

"Sora handed out five of those chips. Have you found any?"

"We didn't search anyone," Miller answered.

Clarke took a deep breath. "I know you aren't gonna like this, but I need to check you guys."

"Seriously, Clarke?"

"Yeah."

"Clarke let me check her," Monroe volunteered.

"Ok," Miller said doubtfully, but did as Clarke asked. Bryan and Harper submitted to Clarke's examination, as well.

"Wanna tell us what that's about?"

"Jaha sent Sora to spy on us. There are five chips missing. My mom's checking everyone else. Once we figure out who has them, you guys can go back to life as usual. Well, as usual as it gets."

"Who are all these people?" Bryan asked.

"Oh, uh, this is Heda Ontari, and that's Azhefa Roan. You know Murphy."

"That explains all the guards."

"Yeah. I really appreciate everything you guys are doing."

"No problem, Clarke." Miller stood up and approached Roan. "Thanks for the weapons."

"It is my pleasure, Miller kom Skaikru." Roan clasped Miller's forearm, and Miller returned greeting.

"Sorry, Haihefa. This is Monroe kom Skaikru, Harper kom Skaikru, and Bryan kom Skaikru. Miller, Monroe, and Harper came to Earth with me. Bryan was on Farm Station. It landed in Azgeda lands and Azplana Nia tried to destroy them."

Ontari immediately turned and spoke quietly with a guard. Roan nodded his agreement with the directions. "Do you know where your sky craft is?"

"Uh, on a mountain near the border with Trikru."

"Go," Roan ordered the guards. "We will put guards there to protect it from scavengers."
"Uh, ok."

"There are things there that will benefit all of us," Ontari said.

Marcus pushed his way in the room. "Clarke, what do you want us to do with the others we find?"

"Where can we segregate them?" Clarke asked.

"Jail." Ontari said.

"Hospital," Roan said at the same time.

"It is easier to limit access to them in the jail," Ontari said. "They can be taken to the hospital when Fisa Abi is ready."

"Clarke?" Marcus asked.

"Jail. Don't leave them in the dark, though. Light the torches. Make sure they get fed."

"They will be treated well, Klark."

"Thank you."

Roan left the room with Marcus and sent for more guards. When they arrived, he took them to find Marcus. Clarke slipped out to tell Sora's guards to move him to the jail. She waited in the hall to watch the others go by. She recognized them, but didn't know them well. After the last one was taken away, Marcus returned the paper to Clarke. There was a small check mark by the name of each of the six Skaikru who accepted the A.I. chip.

"Thank you."

"What now?" Marcus asked.

"Sanch," Roan answered. "It has been a busy morning and we need to regroup. Heda, do you have anything scheduled this afternoon?"

"No, and if I did, this is more important."

"It is," Roan agreed.
They returned to the Azgeda suite. Roan ordered food and fresh drinks to be delivered. While they waited, he disappeared into his room and returned with an armful of bottles.

“Klark,” Ontari cautioned her quietly.

“One,” Clarke answered.

“One mug,” Ontari clarified.

“Sha,” Clarke agreed. *Keep your wits about you, Klark. A desperate man thinks he has little to lose.* Clarke rolled her eyes, filled her mug, and took two mouthfuls. “Mochof.”

He nodded. “No business until we eat,” he announced.

Murphy slouched in the chair next to Clarke and drank, too. Ontari was the only one to abstain. She filled two mugs with water and set one in front of Clarke.

This was much stronger liquor than she drank this morning, and halfway through the mug, Clarke was back in the place where the alcohol insulated her from everything. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She tried not to think about the many questions still going through her mind. She hoped they gathered all the chips, and wondered what to do with those left. Abby would get a few to study, but there were a lot of them. Clarke didn't want the responsibility for guarding all of them. *You know who to trust with them. It is dangerous, yes, but less dangerous than keeping them in one place.*

Clarke sat up and sighed. She took another healthy swallow from her mug and looked at Murphy. “Well?” she asked.

“Deep subject,” he snarked back, and they both laughed.

“You're still an asshole.”

“You're still a princess. And bossy. But you're handling this better than I would, so cheers.” He tapped his mug against hers. “I guess I'm still leaving with his majesty.”

“Sha. I have an idea. A lot of ideas.”

“No business until we eat,” Roan repeated.

Clarke was the first to push her plate away, despite both Abby and Ontari trying to force her to eat more. Murphy was the last.

“You have ideas,” Roan said to Clarke.

“We need time to find out exactly what the chips do and if they can be removed. And I'm still worried about what will happen if your people find out that the commander spirit is something that came from the sky. That's a bedrock belief in your culture, and I don't want to tear everything down.”

“Reasonable,” Roan answered.

“Change takes time,” Marcus said.
“So let's take our time and be slow. Titus doesn't know what we know, except that Murphy and I saw him kill Lexa and remove the A.I. And while I feel the death of a thousand cuts would be a generous punishment, for the time being, I think we're all better served by maintaining the status quo.” Clarke looked at Ontari. “I'm so sorry you're in the middle of all of this.”

She shrugged. “It is interesting.”

“I guess that's one way to look at it.” Clarke picked up the mug of alcohol and drained the last bit from it. She took a deep breath. “Lexa already started changing your culture. Ontari, you need to continue what she was doing. We'll help, but you need to keep pushing that violence and vengeance aren’t the best way to resolve conflicts. And then you need to start them thinking about the idea that the commander can be chose by a way other than duels between contenders. Or find a way to separate the heda from the head of government, so heda is in charge of the armies but someone else leads the coalition.”

“I do not understand how that will make things better,” Roan said.

“That's for the long term. Right now, just working on making people think before pulling out their knives is enough. And I need to come to an agreement with Titus.”

“Klark, he hates you.”

“I know, Ontari. Part of it now is that he worries what I'll do. Murphy and I saw what he did to Lexa, even if it was an accident. Who else would have seen her body?”

“No one,” Roan said. “Fleimkepa prepares Heda's body.”

“Then I guess my question is who would believe two Skaikru over him?”

“There are some,” Roan said. “Soon there will be more, as they see you ensuring that all are treated fairly.”

“Clarke, this is a dangerous game,” Abby said.

“It's my life, it's not a game. I think you'd trust me by now, Mom. I've pulled Skaikru's ass out of the fire how many times? And you still think I'm a stupid kid.”

“I don't,” Abby protested.

“Then act like it,” Clarke snapped. She put her elbows on the table and put her head in her hands. Both Murphy and Ontari put a hand on her back.

Murphy looked at Abby. “This is exactly what I asked you not to do.”

Clarke frowned, but didn't look up.

“This has nothing to do with you, John.”

“My life's on the line, too. You don't know everything, especially how Grounders think. Trust Clarke to make the right decisions for all of us.”

Everyone watching could see Abby's anger increase. Marcus put his hand on her forearm. “Abby, everyone is telling the truth. You can help us most by finding out how those chips work and if they can be safely removed. Let Clarke deal with politics. We both know it's not your strong suit.”

“I hate when you're logical and reasonable,” Abby told him. “Fine, Clarke, do what you have to. Just
don’t tell me about it.”

“Ok,” Clarke said, and sighed. She picked up her head again. “I need to talk to Titus, and I won’t do it alone.”

“You won’t,” Ontari said. “There will be no secrets. You and I will speak to Titus. He will do his job or I will take his life.”

Protect you, Klark. “That’s exactly what we’re trying to change. I’m tired of explaining everything and I know I’m not getting it right, so I’m just going to tell you all what I need you to do.”

She started with Roan. “You’re going to leave for your capital tomorrow. I will send you an update every day. I will protect Azgeda’s interests, and when you can, come back.”

“Sha, Wanheda.”

“Mom, I need you to work on the chips.” She glanced at Ontari. “If you need something, we’ll get it for you. When you learn something, let me know. Marcus, I need you to help Ontari and I with the coalition. Politics isn’t my best thing and I’m sure there’s a lot that Ontari missed by not being trained with the other Natblida. Murphy, you’re going with Roan.”

“And me, Klark?”

“You are heda, Ontari. I can’t tell you what to do. There are things I think we should do, like talk to Titus together, and meet with the other ambassadors individually before meeting with them as a group, but it's your call. Even things that are my idea need to look like they’re coming from you. The last thing you need is a civil war.”

“We will do as Klark asks,” Ontari said. “We are finished here. Haihefa, Skaiskat, travel safely.” She inclined her head toward Marcus. “We will speak tomorrow while Clarke nurses her head.”

Murphy guffawed. Everyone, including Clarke, ignored him.

Ontari stood and pulled Clarke up with her. “Haihefa, should you need anything from your ambassador, she will be with me.”

“Sha, Heda.” He stood and gathered several bottles of moonshine, then walked around the table to present them to Clarke. “A parting gift, Wanheda.”

Clarke smiled at him. “Mochof. Safe travels. Don’t kill the branwada.”

“Sha. Now go, as your heda commands.”

Clarke took the bottles from him and followed Ontari to the door.

When they were gone, Roan looked at Marcus and Abby. “Murphy is correct,” he told Abby. “You need to trust Clarke. Her instincts are good, and Marcus will rein her in when necessary.” He focused on Marcus. “Let Wanheda do the same for Heda when needed.”

“For the record, I don’t like any of this,” Abby said.

“Noted,” Marcus answered. “Do you need anything else from us?”

“No.”

Marcus stood. Abby took the hint and stood, too. “May we meet again, Haihefa.”
“May we meet again, Marcus com Skaikru.”
Ontari took Clarke to her rooms. Clarke pulled a chair onto the balcony and took one of the bottles. She leaned back, put her feet on the low wall around the balcony, and settled in to spend the rest of the day in the lovely point between stupid drunk and mildly buzzed. She knew it wasn't the best use of her time, but she had to at least slow the constant onslaught of questions her brain produced.

Ontari pulled another chair out to sit with Clarke. She brought two swords and a couple smaller blades and was cleaning and sharpening them, not that they needed it. It gave her something to do other than stare at Clarke.

Clarke watched the sky and took a swallow from the bottle every time she felt her mood slip. She was enjoying the quiet afternoon, and as soon as she thought it wouldn't last, heard her name.

“What, Leksa? You really need to stop doing this.”

“I know how to deal with Titus since you will not allow me to punish him as he should be punished.”

“He'll punish himself plenty.”

“When we speak to him, I will show myself.”

“Oh, that won't freak him out at all.”

“It will, and that is the point. Do not let him know that anyone other than you, Murphy, and we know what he did.”

“He killed you.”

“Sha.”

“When that's done, Leksa, you need to leave Ontari alone. She needs to make her own way, and she'll never be able to do that if you keep taking over her body.”

“It is only until you free me.”

“You're dead. Your body is dead.” Clark took three long swallows from the bottle and put beside her chair.

“My body is gone, but my soul is here, Klark. I will not leave you.”

“You have to,” Clarke insisted, and started crying. She made no sound, but tears streamed down her face.

“Osir keryon ste teina. My soul and her soul are the same. We will not leave you, Klark.”

“Leksa, beja.”

Ontari got up and knelt beside Clarke's chair. She put her hand on Clarke's cheek and turned her face. When Clarke saw Lexa's green eyes, she made a noise of distress, and Ontari stood. She swung her leg over Clarke's and pulled the blonde up so she could hold her.

Clarke sagged against her. “You can't keep doing this to me.”
“Ai hod yu in, Klark.”

“Sha, Leksa, I love you, too.”

“Look at me.”

When Clarke did, she saw the same affection they shared on Lexa's last afternoon.

“You will find the way, Klark. Jus drein jus daun.”

“I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you want.”

“Trust her, Klark. Love her. She needs you as I need you.” She kissed Clarke's forehead, her cheeks, and finally, her lips.

Clarke sighed, and stayed forehead to forehead when the kiss finished.

“Klark,” Ontari said.

Clarke immediately knew the difference between them.

“I am sorry I am not her.”

“Don't. Don't say that. You didn't ask for any of this.”

“Neither did you.” Ontari continued to hold Clarke.

Clarke let her. She put her head on Ontari's shoulder and leaned into her, realizing for the first time just how drunk she was. Ontari moved one hand to cradle Clarke’s head and stood still. It was too long for Clarke and not long enough for Ontari when Clarke said, “I have to sit down.”

Ontari lowered Clarke to the chair and returned to her seat. Clarke leaned over, picked up the bottle and drained it. She laid her head back and closed her eyes. She listened to Ontari work. The regular sound of metal on the sharpening stone was calming, and Clarke let her mind drift until it carried her to sleep.

100 – 100 – 100

“I can't believe she talked to me like that,” Abby fumed.

Marcus sighed. It was the third time Abby said that in as many hours. “Abby, Clarke is your child. She will always be your child, but she is not a child. You need to stop treating her like one.”

“She doesn't know what she's doing.”

“If she didn't know what she's doing, we would be dead. Ontari’s army would have slaughtered us along with Pike. Lexa would have attacked us long before that if Clarke didn't convince her to change her mind. Clarke is intelligent and capable, and I trust her to do what's best for all of us.”

“Did you see how she is with the new commander?”

“Can you imagine how confusing it must be for both of them to hear Lexa? And that's on top of how difficult their jobs are. Clarke is under an immense amount of stress. She's justifiably worried about what Titus will do. So is Ontari. You heard them. Ontari did not receive the training she should have. Her leader is leaving. He trusts Clarke to do what's right, to help Ontari do what's right.”
“Do you know how much I hate it when you're reasonable?”

“One of us has to be, don’t you think?” Marcus smiled at her. “Everything will be fine. Clarke will apologize in a few days, and you two can have the talk you've been putting off for months. I'll keep Ontari busy so you can have an hour or two together.”

“All right,” Abby conceded with a sigh.

“It looks like we have the rest of the day free. Let's explore Polis.” He stood and held out his hand. Abby smiled and took it.

100 – 100 – 100

With their population reduced by six, Miller gave everyone the opportunity to switch rooms and roommates. When they finished, he found a piece of paper and a pencil and went from room to room writing down who was where. The biggest change was Harper and Monroe moving into the room across from Miller and Bryan in the center of the hall.

Once that was settled, Miller gave them the go ahead to do what they wanted. He posted the new room assignments in the hall to make it easy for anyone Clarke sent for them. Then he sat down with Harper and Monroe to speculate about what was going on. They all smelled alcohol on Clarke's breath, and saw that Ontari acted with her as Lexa had. The company she kept was interesting: the king of the Ice Nation, John Murphy, and former chancellors Marcus Kane and Abby Griffin.

They trusted Clarke, and worried for her. She looked as tense as they had ever seen her, despite the alcohol. Harper suggested they walk through different parts of the city every day looking for other Skaikru.

“What do we do if we see someone?” Monroe asked.

“Try to follow them,” Miller said. “Find out where they're hiding or how they're getting in and out.”

“What if it's Octavia?”

“Octavia won't come here,” Harper said. “I talked to her at the ceremony for the other commander. She's staying with Lincoln and Indra, and as far from Clarke as they can. Octavia thinks Clarke betrayed us.”

“Idiot,” Bryan muttered.

“She's not stupid,” Monroe said. “She's mad. Her brother went crazy. Clarke didn't leave Polis with her. She's happier with Trikru anyway, has been from the start.”

“Yeah,” Miller agreed. “Anything else?” When there was no answer, he told them, “Let's get to work.”
Clarke was still passed out in the chair on the balcony hours later. She was quiet and still for the first hour, but since twitched, groaned, and occasionally muttered and shook her head. Each time, Ontari stopped her busywork to watch.

Everything she heard today compounded her confusion. She wasn't familiar with technology. Nia didn't permit Azgeda to possess or use anything other than what they made or traded other clans for, and forbade those clans from bringing any tech into her lands.

It made its way in despite the ban. Ontari saw a few examples. The one that interested her most was a music player. The sounds it produced were much like the music played at festivals. She coveted it, and knew it would cost her life. It was a difficult decision, made when a friendly guard tapped her shoulder to warn her of Nia's approach.

Clarke said there was technology in her body, put there by Titus. He called it the commander spirit, but Clarke and Skaikru called it by letters. A.I. It collected memories, and shared them, and was why Heda Leksa spoke to them, and through her. She heard another commander in her dreams the night before, but he did not speak for long before Heda Leksa silenced his demand for war.

Ontari didn't understand Clarke's need for alcohol today. Roan was Haihefa, and could do as he pleased, and the Skaiskat was a thieving piece of shit of whom she expected nothing good. He surprised her by standing up for Clarke and comforting her. She didn't understand their conversation, either. They insulted each other, but without venom. Roan explained why Murphy was with him, but she didn't understand why Clarke would bother with the branwada, even if he was part of her kru.

She knew the final decision about Skaikru rested with her. Clarke and Marcus would make their arguments, Titus and the other ambassadors theirs, and she would have to decide. Heda Leksa demanded she protect them, and Ontari would do that no matter what.

Every thought circled back to Clarke. She wasn't certain whether it was Heda Leksa's influence or Clarke's charisma. She was forced to the background when Heda Leksa spoke with Wanheda. It bothered her only because it distressed Clarke.

Clarke sat up suddenly and tried to stand. She was obviously panicked about something, and Ontari jumped up and caught Clarke before she fell. “Shh, shh, you are safe.”

“He killed you, too.”

“Shh, I am here. No one else has died.”

Clarke frantically ran her hands over Ontari, and Ontari let her. When she finished, Clarke took a deep, shuddering breath and put her arms tightly around Ontari. “You're all right.”

“Sha, Klark. It was a dream.”

“Now I remember why I don't drink.”

“Perhaps you should eat.”

Clarke released her and tried to step back. “Did Roan leave?”

“Not until tomorrow.”
“I need to see him.”

“One minute, and I will go with you.”

Clarke knew she couldn't stop Ontari from coming along, or run fast enough to get ahead of her in this state, and nodded. Ontari let her go, and Clarke swayed before falling into her chair. She sat while Ontari gathered her weapons, and walked to the door while Ontari returned them to their places.

Clarke waited at the door, debating whether to take the stairs or the lift. She decided on the stairs. Her stomach was unsettled, and the lift's jerkiness would only make it worse. It took a long time to walk down the stairs, and she hoped Roan had bread or something on the table.

He and Murphy were still drinking, but there were plates of dried meat, cheese, and bread, as well as a basket of fruit on the table. Clarke fell into a chair and grabbed some bread. Ontari sat beside her and poured water for them.

The bread settled her stomach a little, and Clarke pulled the tins from her pocket. She looked at them and frowned. “I need something small.”

“Got it.” Murphy got up and stumbled toward his room.

Roan looked at Clarke. “What now, Wanheda?”

“We need to scatter these chips. I'm gonna send some with you.”

“And the rest?”

“I'll find places for them.”

There was a racket from the back of the suite, and Murphy stumbled back in a minute later holding a small cloth bag. After he sat down, he dumped the contents on the table and pushed them toward Clarke.

She looked at the collection of small metal tins. “Bag.”

It took Murphy a second to understand what she wanted, and he picked up the bag and tossed it to her. Clarke pulled her knife out, and Ontari took it from her. “Hey,” Clarke protested.

“What do you want?”

“Pieces about the size of my hand.”

“That's a nice bag,” Murphy said.

“It was,” Clarke agreed. She started opening the tins and put them in an uneven line in front of her. She took a piece of the bag and put it in the first tin before pulling the others from her pocket. Clarke put four chips in each tin and stuffed the extra fabric in before putting the lid on. It took several tries to complete the first one.

“I will do it,” Ontari said, and Clarke shrugged. She got another piece of bread, put some meat and cheese in it, and folded the bread over it before stuffing it in her face.

When Ontari finished, Clarke tossed a tin to Murphy and another to Roan. Murphy's landed in his lap, Roan's closer to the middle of the table than to him. Clarke closed up the rectangular tin and put it in her pocket. Ontari took the others.
“I think it's time to lay down,” Clarke said.

She wobbled toward her room. Ontari followed. She removed Clarke's boots and put her legs on the bed.

Ontari sighed and left Clarke. 'Drunken idiots,' she thought, and left the suite without saying anything. After spending so much of the day sitting, she wanted to do something, and ran up the stairs to her suite, got her sword, a bow, and a quiver of arrows, and went to the stable. She really just wanted to ride, but knew she couldn't leave the city unarmed.

Her guards rode a little behind her as Ontari circled Polis' walls. She was looking for evidence of anyone sneaking in, as Clarke suggested Jaha might try, and found several places where it would easy to move in and out of Polis without being noticed. She reached the gate where she started and sent one of her guards to bring a dozen warriors and the one who scheduled watches. When they arrived, she led them from one possibly entryway to the next, leaving two guards at each.

Her second city of the circle complete, she left the horse at the stable and waited for additional guards. Nearly all the exterior entrances led to underground tunnels. Guards were left there, as well, until they could be sealed. Footprints in the mud of the last told her it might be too late.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven Reyes wasn't happy about having to pretend to belong to Trikru. The clothes were interesting, but the braids were a pain in the ass and she missed her boots. It was a small price to pay for admission to the City of Light. Allie assured her that someone in Polis would know where other pieces of the Ark were. Allie and Jaha and the rest waited for her in the upper portions of Arkadia. There was plenty of food and water there, and they could move around as long as they were quiet.

From Farm Station recruits, they knew that piece was closer than Polis, but Allie wanted to know where all the stations landed before they set out for it. It was easy to sneak out during the battle and stay at the edges of different groups as they left. She saw people she knew from a distance, and stayed away from them. Raven moved through the woods, searching with binoculars for weaknesses and watching patterns. After two days, she found a way in, and that night, snuck into Polis.

Finding her way to the surface was difficult. Finding the information Allie wanted was harder. People in Polis didn't care about Skaikru or their former homes. They were concerned with their own lives. She was surprised to see Skaikru walking freely through the city. Allie was certain they were being taken to Polis for public execution.
“Klark, it is time to rise.”

“No.”

“Sha. Alba will work you twice as hard if you are late.”

Clarke sighed and forced her eyes open. Ontari stood beside her bed, a mug of water in her hand. Clarke sat up and took it. She emptied the mug and handed it back to Ontari and bent over to get her boots and fell out of bed.

Clarke laughed and rolled on to her back before sitting up and reaching for her boots. Once they were on, she held up a hand. Ontari took it and pulled her up. “Roan and the Skaiskat are on their way to the stables. Roan left a satchel for you.”

“Mochof.”

“Come to my quarters for breakfast after your training. Marcus will eat with us. We meet with Trishana and Podakru this afternoon. Titus will join us for supper.”

Clarke sighed. “Anything else?”

“I would like you to return to the chambers you previously occupied.”

“No. That's not gonna happen.”

“I want you near.”

“You better find someplace else because I am never going into that room.”

“We will discuss this later.”

“No, we won't. It's not going to happen.” Clarke checked her pockets for the tins and her notebook.

“Where are the other tins?”

“I have them. I will return them to you.”

Clarke nodded. “I have to go.” She stepped around Ontari and went into the common room. She picked up the satchel on the table and the papers beside it. She put the papers in the satchel and went out the door.

Clarke realized she was still drunk when she had trouble navigating the stairs. She slowed down and concentrated on what she was doing. By the time she reached the training ring, she was seriously considering skipping it, but decided that if Grounders could fight drunk, so could she. She left her satchel on the ground near the rack of practice weapons and covered it with her jacket. Before starting, she got another drink of water.

Alba assessed her and smirked. “Long night, Wanheda?”

“Something like that. Let's get to work.”

His opinion of Clarke improved a little with that statement. She spent the next two hours getting her ass handed to her, but showed improvement. He pulled her upright and sent her on her way when
they finished for the day.

In the Azgeda suite, Clarke ordered bread, meat, and wine before going to bathe. She needed to go over the morning reports and whatever Roan left for her.

Her head was starting to pound by the time she finished bathing and dressing. It didn't help that Ontari and Marcus were sitting at the table in the common room.

“I was coming up when I finished,” Clarke said.

“I did not want to wait,” Ontari answered.

“Clarke, your mother asked me to bring her two of the chips when we take a break.”

“Ok,” she said. “Give him one of the tins.”

Ontari nodded and pulled one from a pocket.

Clarke poured some wine in a mug and pulled papers from the satchel. Before she started reading, she said, “I hope breakfast is coming.”

“Sha.”

Clarke nodded. She read the dispatches and set two aside to be dealt with later. The food arrived, and Clarke went through the rest of the papers Roan left in the satchel while eating. It also held a few vials, a knife, and two pouches of coins. Clarke sat it aside and passed the two reports to Marcus, who passed them to Ontari when he finished them.

Ontari glanced at them and put them aside. Clarke looked at her speculatively. “Marcus, will you give us a minute, please?”

“Certainly Clarke.” Marcus went into the hall.

“Did you read the dispatches, Ontari?”

“I cannot read.”

“Did Nia teach you anything except how to fight?”

“No.”

“Ok.” Clarke got up and went to the other side of the table. “These are important because they are about Trishana and Podakru. Trishana wants to change the trade agreement. Right now, they are obligated to provide 500 pounds of meat each year in exchange for 100 pounds of salt and 100 pounds of fish. They want twice as much salt and no fish.”

“That sounds fair.”

“Yeah, except salt is expensive, and then there's the question of what happens to the fish.”

“Oh.”

“Right.”

“Podakru wants to send more warriors to Polis for training, but they don't want to pay anything for it.”
“We are supposed to train others.”

“Sha, but they are to supply weapons, clothing, and food for their warriors while they are here.”

“Oh.” Ontari looked at Clarke. “This is difficult.”

“More annoying than difficult. This is where Marcus and I help you. We'll talk about this when he comes back. I'll help you learn to read and write. It's important. You need to send and receive messages. It won't be easy, but I know you can do it.”

Ontari nodded.

“We'll keep that to ourselves for now. We'll go over the reports at breakfast every morning.”

“Mochof, Klark.”

“Pro.” She looked toward the door. “Marcus.”

He returned. “Everything all right?”

“Everything is fine,” Clarke answered and returned to her seat. “You saw the dispatches. We're meeting with those ambassadors today.”

“Who's first?”

“Podakru,” Ontari answered.

“What should we do about their request?” Marcus asked.

“Polis cannot support them. They must supply food, weapons, and clothing as the other clans do when their warriors train here.”

“That's reasonable. We will use the same strategy as before. You let the ambassador talk until he's finished. You address his questions and concerns. You tell him what you expect from his clan. Calmly. Podakru should send no more warriors than they can support.”

Ontari nodded.

“And what should be do about Trishana?”

“Half as much salt as they request, and ask what they want instead of fish, other than salt.”

“You'll still have to deal with the fish issue, but we'll see what happens. Every time you meet with the ambassadors, you want to let them talk until they finish, unless they're out of line. Then you answer their concerns, tell them what you want, and go from there.”

“You make this sound simple,” Ontari said.

“It's not always simple, but doing it this way shows that you respect them and welcome what they bring to the coalition. It will ease their fears about Azgeda, which is important given your history with the other clans.”
Thirty-Two

After the first meeting, Ontari looked ready to run someone through. The Trishana ambassador was adamant that their heda would not bargain. In the end, nothing changed. Ontari didn't threaten the ambassador, but it was a near thing.

The lunch break between meetings gave Ontari a chance to calm down. Marcus left Clarke and Ontari to eat on their own. He wanted to have lunch with Abby and give her the chips. Clarke's hangover only got worse during the meeting, and she wanted to stab the Trishana ambassador a few times herself.

Instead of eating in Ontari's quarters, Clarke suggested they go out into the market to find something to eat. She drank two mugs of water before they left. The bright sunlight didn't help her headache any, but it was her suggestion, so she had to tough it out.

“Klark, I have nothing to barter,” Ontari said as they approached the market.

“Roan left me some coins. We'll ask Titus tonight. I'm sure he'll say something stupid like you aren't supposed to pay, but that's not fair to the merchants. What do you like to eat?”

“Anything is fine.”

“You don't have any preference?”

“No. Azplana,” Ontari started and stopped.

Clarke fought to keep temper under control. Nia's cruelty damaged Ontari, and each time Klark learned more, she wished that Nia's death had been far more painful than it was. “You don't have to talk about it. Just, if something looks good or smells good, stop and we'll try it, ok?”

“Sha.”

“Many of them will call you, but you aren't obligated to answer.”

“There is so much to learn.”

“Sha, but you will.”

It seemed like Ontari sampled everything in the market. Clarke was content with a skewer of meat and another of vegetables, but Ontari wanted to try everything. Clarke managed to pay for about half of it. Many vendors flat out refused to accept her coins for anything their Heda took. It frustrated Clarke, but she thanked them and made note of who they were. She could send the guards back with coin, or ask Skaikru to pay more to make up for it.

Ontari was still eating as they walked back to the tower. Marcus was waiting for the lift, and they rode up together.

The meeting with the Podakru ambassador was much better. Their request was a test for the new heda, and quickly resolved. That clan was also concerned about an Azgeda heda using the armies to wipe out smaller clans, but Ontari was adamant that she wished to maintain the peace. She used Roan's words about their children to convince her that so long as Podakru met its obligation to the coalition, they would be left in peace.
When the meeting finished, Clarke and Marcus offered a critique of both meetings. They were both careful to stress the positive. Clarke and Marcus left together. Clarke needed to re-read the messages Roan left for her, and she wanted to talk to Marcus.

They went back to the Azgeda suite together.

“You wanted to talk?” Marcus said.

“Yeah, I don't even know where to start. Please tell me Mom isn't going to kill me when she sees me again.”

“She's upset, but I doubt she'll kill you.”

“Thanks for talking her down.”

“You're welcome, Clarke, but I somehow doubt that's all you have on your mind.”

“You don't know the half of it.”

“I'm here to help.”

Clarke sighed. “There's so much going on. There was stuff I left out yesterday, and stuff I'm finding out every day, and I'm meeting Titus tonight, and his crazy ass scares the hell out of me.”

“One thing at a time, then. What did you leave out yesterday?”

“Lexa and I made up. And we didn't just stand around and say, 'I'm gonna miss you, be safe.' We really made up.”

“I'm sorry, Clarke. I can't imagine how much that must have hurt you.”

“I appreciate the thought, Marcus, but it doesn't help. It feels like I'm losing my mind when I hear her in my head, and she takes over Ontari's body. And Ontari, she's a mess. You can't let her know you know, but she doesn't know how to read. The only training Nia gave her was in how to fight. She didn't feed her properly. She wasn't allowed to have any attachments to anyone. I don't know how she's not a basket case.”

“The A.I. may be helping with that.”

“So far, the A.I. is almost entirely Lexa.”

“That's not necessarily a bad thing. If she's giving Ontari advice and helping her keep the coalition together, it can't hurt.”

“I guess, but it’s seriously weird when Lexa takes over. I hate it. It's not fair to anyone. I've told Lexa that, and she keeps coming around with these cryptic messages. She tells me that blood must have blood, but I don't think she's talking about war.”

“What else would she be talking about?”

“I don't know. She keeps telling me I'll figure it out, but all it's doing is making me feel bad. She's been quiet today, though.”

“Any idea why?”

“Maybe she's waiting until we talk to Titus tonight.”
“We?”

“Ontari won't let me talk to him alone, and frankly I'm glad. Lexa said she's gonna come out and talk to him. I'm worried he'll just use that as an excuse to kill both of us. He can control Aden. He's a child. Titus can't control Ontari. He can't control me.”

“What do you want from him?”

“I want him to keep his word to Lexa and leave me alone. I want him to teach Ontari what she should have learned, but keep his opinions to himself. I want him not to bother Murphy.”

“Why should he?”

“Because I can destroy everything he believes in and burn this world down.”

“Would you really do that?”

“If it will keep me alive and Skaikru safe.”

“What is Ontari going to do about us?”

“I don't know. We haven't had a chance to talk about it. She told me at Arkadia that 50 isn't enough for a kru.”

“There might be survivors from other stations, like Farm Station.”

“I don't think bringing up Farm Station is going to help us any.”

“You know what I mean.”

“What are the odds, Marcus? Realistically.”

“Infinitesimally small. What happens if Skaikru is disbanded?”

“She won't banish us. The first time we talked about it, she said we could join whatever kru we wanted. I don't think Trikru will accept any of us.”

“Doubtful.”

“Can we just stay in Polis without belonging to another group?”

“You, me, and Mom, for sure. The others, I don't know. I'm kinda part of Azgeda now, though. Both Roan and Ontari refer to me as Klark kom Skaikru en Trikru en Azgeda.”

“Will Trikru acknowledge you?”

“I don't know. I'd kinda like to keep it because of Lexa, though.” Clarke sighed. “I thought we'd have so much more time. Feels like the story of my life. Dad, Wells, Leksa.”

“None of us is given any guarantees, Clarke.”

“I know. I just want a chance to catch my breath.”

“I thought that was what you were doing after you left us.”

“I was running. I was so mad at everybody. Lexa, the Wallaces, myself. Do you know how much blood is on my hands? I killed people by the hundreds, and they weren't all warriors.”
“But you survived, and you're trying to keep anyone else from having to face the same situation.”

“I am so tired.”

“That doesn't change. Being a leader is a full-time job.”

“I know. And I know you know, but it's different down here. There's a lot more at stake.”

“You're doing a good job, Clarke.”

“Thanks.”

“Anything else?”

“Not now. I have some things to do before supper. Tell Mom I love her and I'll see her as soon as I can.”

“I will. I'm here if you need to talk again.”

“Thank you, Marcus. I really appreciate it.”

“I'll let you get back to work,” he said, and left her at the table.
Clarke opened the satchel again and pulled out Roan's message. It was brief, and the bottom line was that keeping Ontari alive and making peace last were Clarke's goals. The vials were Azgeda poisons, to be used as a last resort. The knife was a gift, as was the satchel. It had two secret pouches where Clarke could hide things of importance.

She didn't need to read between the lines, and promptly stored the two tins, one empty and the other half full of chips, in one of them. She thought about where to hide the others. As much as she hated to drag Niylah into anything, she would safeguard a tin if Clarke asked. Octavia would, too, despite being angry at Clarke, because she knew they needed to be protected until they could destroy them. She didn't want Skaikru to hold any of them, and she didn't think they would be safe anywhere in the Tower. Maybe she could stash them in the forest. Ontari's tracking skill would be sufficient to lead her back to them, and they would both enjoy a ride through the woods.

Clarke checked her watch. She needed to get up to Ontari's suite. She wanted to be there before Titus arrived.

Ontari was pacing when Clarke entered her quarters. "What's wrong?"

"She won't be quiet. I have asked many times."

"What is she saying?"

"She worries that I can't protect you from Titus. She keeps going on about a box she took from him."

"The box is safe. I trust you to keep me safe, but I don't think it will come to that. Come sit down."

Ontari did as Clarke asked, and Clarke stood behind her. Clarke massaged Ontari's neck and shoulders and eased the tension she carried. There was a knock at the door, and Clarke said, "Remember, you are heda, and he is your subject."

Ontari nodded and stood. "Enter."

Titus came in. The kitchen staff followed with their meals.

"Sit," Ontari directed. "Eat. We will talk after." She sat with her back to the balcony. Clarke sat to her right, Titus to her left. They didn't even look at each other, and no one talked while they ate.

When all of them were finished, Titus asked, "Heda, why have you brought me here? Why is Wanheda here?"

"She has some things to say to you. You will listen, Titus."

He nodded at Ontari and looked at Clarke.

"You killed Leksa," Clarke began. "I know you were trying to kill me, but you killed her. I hear the rumors around Polis, rumors that you encourage, even if you didn't start them, that I killed her."

"I did not," he began.

"Silence, Titus, until she finishes."

"So I know two of your secrets. Murphy was there. That makes two of us who saw what you did."
You may think no one will believe Skaikru over you, but we told others, including Ontari. Your heda knows what you did, yet you live. She knows how the commander spirit is preserved and transferred from one heda to the next."

Titus looked shocked and a little ill. That secret was the foundation of his power.

"You know what I can do with that information," Clarke continued. "So we're going to come to an agreement tonight."

"Teacher," Ontari said, although it was Lexa speaking. Titus looked at her, frowning. The furrows in his brow became deeper when he saw Lexa's eyes.

"Ontari kom Azgeda is your heda. You will do as she commands, and support her endeavors no matter how you feel about them. You will not go behind her back to create dissension. You will keep your opinions to yourself unless asked to share them."

"I do not understand, Heda."

"I am not a fool, Titus. You understand quite well. Remain seated and bow your head so Klark can examine you."

Clarke got out of her seat and waited for Titus to do as he was told.

"Now, Titus."

He reluctantly bowed his head, and Clarke pulled his collar down. He had the same vertical scar at the base of his neck. He flinched when Clarke ran her fingers along it. Clarke nodded and returned to her seat.

"Who are you training to replace you?"

"No one, Heda."

"You will bring the candidates to me and I will choose. And do not think I forget the oath you swore to me. You will not attack Klark kom Skaikru, or encourage others to do so. She, not you, is Ontari's chief adviser. You will assist her."

"I will not."

"Then you will die at my hand, not Ontari's, not Klark's. You will die for your actions and pretension to know my mind."

"So be it," Titus said.

"I ask again, who will replace you?"

"No one."

"Titus, the people who know aren't going to tell anyone," Clarke said. "We don't want to destroy you or your beliefs. We want to continue what Lexa started, to make a lasting peace."

"Blood must have blood," Titus insisted.

"Enough blood has been shed," Clarke said. "I am sick of death."

"You will never escape it, Wanheda."
"I am asking you not to do this to your heda and your people. She needs you."

"I will assist her only if you are gone."

"Klark stays, Titus. Do your duty or pay the price for your treason."

"I do my duty every day," he roared, "yet you listen to her."

Ontari's eyes flashed back to her regular brown, and she called for her guards. "Take Titus to his quarters. He is not permitted to leave, nor is he allowed visitors or to send or receive messages."

Titus glared at Clarke before he left.

"What do we do now?"

"I have an idea, but it will make the other clans angry."

"What is it?"

"We can ask Marcus to take over while you find another Fleimkepa. You can keep Titus secluded while we figure something out. I'll send a message to Roan tonight."

"Klark, she wants him dead now."

"She'll have to wait. Where's your paper?"

Ontari pointed at a cabinet across the room. Clarke opened it and pulled out some paper. She froze. On top was the sketch of Lexa napping on the couch. It hurt like a knife wound, not the sharp pain of it entering, but the unending burn when it was removed. Lexa napped on the sofa and Clarke sketched her until a nightmare woke her. Clarke comforted her, and Lexa looked at the paper in Clarke's hand.

Clarke didn't hear Ontari come up behind her, barely saw her hand reach around and take the paper from her hand. Seeing it silenced Lexa. Ontari carefully rolled it and reached around Clarke to slide it into one of the cabinet's cubbyholes. She picked up a pencil and steered Clarke to the table.

They sat quietly while Clarke calmed herself. After a few minutes, she wrote a note to Roan and sealed it with one of the many candles. She pressed her thumb into the wax before it hardened. Ontari picked it up and went to the door. Her guards were back, and she gave it to one of them with instructions to get it to Roan.

Clarke's headache was back. She couldn't imagine why Titus would be willing to die, leaving no one to protect his legacy or his culture. Marcus could teach the young ones diplomacy, and there were plenty of fighters to train them. Maybe he wanted war and thought that the others would blame Skaikru. Maybe he felt guilty. Maybe it was because it was no secret that Ontari was relying on Clarke instead of Titus or someone from Azgeda.

Ontari returned and sat near Clarke.

"What are we doing tomorrow?" Clarke asked.

"Meeting with Sangedakru and Yujleda ambassadors."

"What do they want?"

"They have asked for nothing yet."
"Ok. I'm going to bed."

"Klark, I want you to stay. I do not care what the others will say."

Clarke sighed. "You, or Lexa?"

"Both of us."

"I can't. And I can't move across the hall. I'm Azgeda's ambassador."

"And Skaikru's. I do not like it when you are so far from me. I will replace everything there. It will look nothing like it does now."

"It will always smell like cordite and blood. I will see her every time the door opens. I'm going to my quarters, Ontari. I will see you there for breakfast so we can go over the dispatches. Good night."

Clarke walked away with more confidence than she felt.

Ontari let her go. She would go to Clarke's room later, slip into bed with her. Being close to Clarke made her feel better.
Clarke didn't go directly to her room. She detoured to Titus' quarters. It took some talking but the guards let her in. She stayed near the door and waited for him to acknowledge her.

“Here to change my mind? Tell me that Heda won't execute me?”

“She will, if she must. She doesn't want to. I'm not your enemy. I'm not trying to take anyone from you.”

“You don't have to try, Wanheda. She comes to you as a moth comes to a flame. She will not know how dangerous you are until it is too late.”

“I was leaving, Titus. I was going to Arkadia to try to get Skaikru to see reason, even though both Lexa and I knew I would be imprisoned and possibly executed.”

“It was her duty to get vengeance on those who wronged us.”

“You don't want vengeance or justice. You want to eliminate Skaikru. Would you tell Lexa to destroy any other clan for the actions of a few of its members? It wasn't all Skaikru. Not all Skaikru approved, and only 10 killed the soldiers. If 10 Azgeda attacked a village, would you recommend wholesale war?”

“Sha, for that is what they understand.”

“We can be better. We don't have to act like children whose toys have been taken.”

“It was not toys that were taken.”

“I know. I saw them. I do not regret asking Lexa to be patient. Skaikru would have surrendered the guilty.”

“When? They would still be defying Heda if you had your way.”

“They would be starving if I had my way, and beginning to understand that they were on the wrong path. They would have removed Pike from power.”

“It would not matter. There was no coming back from what they did. No one would trust them.”

“Really? Because Lexa took the Ice Nation as an ally, even after they tortured and murdered Costia.”

“One girl is not the same as 300 warriors.”

“Because of numbers or because it was Skaikru?”

“Three hundred warriors, Wanheda. All the able bodied adults from several villages. Villages that were left with only the protection of the old, infirm, and very young. Villages that will now disappear because there is no one to farm, hunt or fish.”

Clarke watched him silently for several seconds and changed tactics. “Ontari needs your assistance.”

“She does not want my assistance. She does not trust me.”

“The Natblida need you.”
“They do not. There are fighters to train them.”

“You teach them more than that.”

“You will teach them what you want them to know.”

“I don’t know your history, Titus. I don’t know how your people survived. I don’t know why you believe some things are more important than others.”

“You did not ask. You came in and demanded we change, that we accept your ways.”

“I asked for peace. Lexa sought peace before she ever knew me. Skaikru ended the Mountain without any more of your people being lost. Skaikru gave back people you thought long gone. Lexa did everything she could to avoid war with Azgeda, and succeeded in that. How many lives did she save? How many children will grow up knowing their parents? How many more will live to become adults?”

“Jus drein jus daun.”

“It benefits no one. You heard Ontari. She said the debt is paid. The guilty are dead. There is no reason for you to die, as well.”

“I am guilty.”

“You are. But you forget her last instruction to you.”

“I forget nothing.”

“’Badan neson-de op kom we yu don baiyin ai op.’ You will disobey her, even though you know her spirit lives?”

They stared at each other. Clarke waited for his answer, but none came.

“Good night, Titus,” Clarke said, and left him.

He stared at the door. She had the audacity to repeat to him the last direction Lexa gave him. Wanheda had power over him, as much as any heda had. She should have been screaming for his head, but she was still trying to prevent bloodshed, even that of her enemy. He did not understand her or her ways.

But the last thing Lexa said to him stuck with him. He served four hedas before Lexa, and none lasted as long as she did or accomplished as much. Her power was immense. He never before saw a dead heda speak through the living one. She asked him to serve. It would mean serving Wanheda, as well, for neither heda would set her aside. He did not know whether he could bring himself to do that.

Surrendering his pride would give him time to properly train the next Fleimkepa. Since he was living on borrowed time, it was important that the next was trained. Perhaps Aden. Would Lexa approve? She intended for him to be heda, but being Fleimkepa was important, too.

Titus sat down and began to think through his options.

Several floors below, Clarke changed into her sleeping clothes and got into bed. She was tired, and it never seemed to stop. The position she was in now was so much worse than being Skaiprisa. There was no room for error if she was to keep everyone alive, starting with Ontari.
Clarke sighed, rolled onto her back, and closed her eyes. She was still awake an hour later when Ontari got in bed beside her.

“Why are you here?”

“If this is where you sleep, it is where I sleep.”

“You're not going to listen, are you?”

“I listen as you do, Klark. You spoke to Titus. What more was there to say?”

“Nothing. He does not wish to hear reason.”

“If he changes his mind?”

“He should live.”

“She wants him dead.”

“I know.” Clarke rolled onto her side and put her back to Ontari.

Ontari turned onto her side and slid one arm under Clarke while putting the over her. She found Clarke's hand and held it. “Reshop, Klark.”

“Reshop, Ontari.”

Badan neson-de op kom we yu don badain ai op. = Serve the next as you have served me.
Thirty-Five

Raven found it increasingly difficult to blend in. Although gonasleng was the language of Polis, the way she spoke made it obvious she wasn’t Trikru. The way she dressed fooled many, but once she began to talk, they began asking questions. When she got to ask questions, she didn't get the answers she sought.

On top of that, her exit from Polis was now blocked by guards. The only way in or out of the city was through the gate, and guards checked everyone who went by. She saw Skaikru walking through the city every day, and even saw Clarke and the new commander together in the market. She also heard all of the rumors: that Clarke killed Lexa; that she was unduly influencing Ontari; that Titus disappeared, possibly killed by Clarke; that Clarke was preparing to become heda. There was no proof of anything, and no evidence that anyone had the information Allie wanted.

Raven was bored and tired, and spent an evening drinking in a pub. She didn't notice Harper and Monroe enter, and knew she was screwed when they stood on either side and put their arms around her waist.

Raven sighed. “Let me finish my drink.”

“No problem,” Harper answered. With her free arm, she waved at one of the guards who regularly stood watch on Skaikru's floor. He came to see what she wanted.

“Wanheda wants to see our friend. Will you help us make sure she gets to her?”

The guard nodded and stayed near them. Raven finished her drink and stood. Harper and Monroe took a firm grasp on her arms and the guard followed them from the pub. In the street, he flagged down another, and the four of them walked silently to the tower.

The guards on Clarke's door refused to let them in, but one of them reluctantly went in to wake her and give her the message that Raven was there.

Clarke sat up when she heard her title, and woke completely when she heard the guard's message. “Bring her in to the common room. Anyone who's with her, too. I'll be there in a few minutes.”

“Who is Raven?”

“She's a tech genius,” Clarke answered while getting out of bed. “We need her. If you want Mom's machines running, we need Raven.”

“Then she will stay.” Ontari sat up.

“She has one of Jaha's chips.” Clarke found pants and a shirt and pulled them on. She jammed her bare feet into her boots.

“Do you wish me to come with you?”

“No, I'll tell you everything later. Get some rest. At least one of us should,” Clarke added before slipping out the door.

She looked at her friends. Except for the guards, it would have looked like they came to visit.

“We found her in a pub,” Monroe said as Clarke approached.
“Thanks. You can go if you want.”

“We'll stay, if it's ok,” Harper answered.

“Hi, Raven.”

“Long time no see, Clarke.”

“How are you?”

“I'm great. There's no pain, and nothing to worry about.”

Clarke nodded and walked behind her. She pushed Raven's head down and pulled her hair aside. After a few seconds, she found the chip and returned Raven's hair. She walked around so she could see her face. “You know it's not real, right?”

“Of course it's real. I walked here from Arkadia with the army. Allie's going to bring the City of Light to everyone.”

“No, she's going to destroy the world again. Do you think Finn would want that?”

Raven looked puzzled.

“Yeah, that's what I thought.” Clarke sighed. “Why are you in Polis, Raven?”

“Allie sent me.”

“Why?”

“She wants to find the rest of the Ark.”

“Why?”

“I don't know.”

“Are you the only one she sent?”

“I think so.”

“Where are you guys hanging out?”

“We stayed in the Ark.”

“When are you supposed to go back?”

“Next week, with or without information.”

“How many of you are there?”

“Not enough.”

“How many, Raven?”

She looked puzzled again. “I don't know.”

“How do you not know? You know everything. You keep track of all kinds of random information.”
“I’m here to do a job.”

“Answer the question, Raven. How do you not know how many people are hiding in Arkadia?”

“I,” Raven faltered, “I forget.”

“What else have you forgotten?”

“Is that a trick question?”

“More rhetorical,” Clarke sighed. “Harper and Monroe are going to search you.”

“I have nothing.”

“No chips? No weapons?”

“Nothing,” Raven repeated and stood. She slowly moved away from the chair and stood with her legs spread and arms out. “Nothing to hide. You look sad, Clarke. You should join us in the City of Light.”

“I have too much to do here.”

“Are the rumors true?” Raven asked while Harper frisked her and Monroe searched her jacket.

“What rumors?”

“Did you kill Lexa and Titus?”

“No.” Clarke blinked away the tears that wanted to fall. “What will happen if you don’t return when you're supposed to?”

“They will move to Farm Station.”

“How will they leave Arkadia? There are soldiers everywhere.”

“Not everywhere. There are many exits.”

Monroe handed Raven's jacket to her. Harper finished checking the seams of Raven's pants and stood up. “All she has is a few coins.”

“Ask the guys on the door to get a few guards to take Raven to the others.”

Monroe nodded and went to do as Clarke asked.

“You're going to be locked up with some other people who want to go to the City of Light. You'll probably see my mom soon.”

“Nothing you do can hurt me.”

“I know. And we won't do anything to hurt you. It's just while we figure out what's going on.”

Two guards entered the suite.

“Take her down and lock her up with the others.”

“Sha, Wanheda.”
Clarke, Harper, and Monroe watched Raven leave with the guards. “Thanks for finding her,” Clarke said.

“It was luck,” Monroe answered.

“Let Miller know in the morning. I'll try to see you tomorrow.”

“Good night, Clarke.”

“Night,” Clarke answered distractedly. She stood and debated whether she should wake her mother now or tell her in the morning. Clarke decided to see her mother after her training session and walked back to her room.

Ontari was waiting for her, and Clarke shook her head. She put her night clothes back on and got into bed. When Ontari pulled her close, Clarke went without protest. She was surprised by how quickly she drifted toward sleep.
Clarke woke to Ontari comforting her.

“Shh, you’re safe, Klark, it is just a dream.”

“I’m awake,” she answered hoarsely, and opened her eyes. It was still dark, and the dream was vivid, the dead at Mount Weather around her while she knelt beside Lexa’s body. Clarke tried to get out of bed, but Ontari held her tightly. “Let me go. I need some air.”

“You need rest. Dawn is still many hours away.”

“I don’t want to sleep.”

“Then rest your body.”

Clarke wanted to argue. She didn't want to sleep, didn't want to face whatever her brain dredged up next, but Ontari wasn't going to give in. Clarke tried to relax her tense muscles and regulate her breathing. She stared out the window and tried to think of something that would relax her. The things that once did now made her angry and sad. In their place, she had confusion and uncertainty. She understood the draw of the City of Light. What it offered was tempting. What she was doing now would never stop. There would never be at time when the needs of her people – not just Skaikru, but Trikru and now Azgeda – didn't come first. If she and Ontari succeeded in keeping the coalition together, the other clans would have a claim to her, as well.

What she needed or wanted mattered less than ever. She might find an occasional day to call her own, but her responsibilities would always stay in the back of her mind. It wasn't supposed to be like this. She was supposed to fix things in Arkadia and come back to Lexa.

Instead, Arkadia was finished, her friends dead, Lexa dead, Raven and Octavia gone. Clarke felt hollow much of the time, stripped to her essentials. It was good that she had so much to do because she didn't know what would happen if she had to feel all of it.

Ontari slept again, but held Clarke tightly. She set off another whole chain of thought and feeling that Clarke had no idea how to handle. In many ways, she was like Lexa, and since seeing and hearing Lexa through Ontari, Clarke wasn't certain how much of Ontari’s thoughts and actions were her own. She wondered why Lexa was quiet tonight. She thought Lexa would have something to say about Clarke's visit to Titus, and immediately scolded herself. She couldn't have it both ways. Either Lexa was gone and remained silent, or Clarke had to accept her constant presence. She was still undecided which she preferred.

Ontari shifted and let go of Clarke. She eased out of bed and dressed again. She grabbed her satchel and closed the door behind her.

There was already a pile of dispatches on the table, and Clarke looked through them quickly before she left the suite. She wanted some fresh air, to get out of Polis for a few hours. The stars were beginning to fade when Clarke rode through the gate, two guards trailing her.

Instead of riding toward Arkadia and TonDC, Clarke went the other way. She stayed on the road and turned right when she reached a crossroad. The road soon turned into a path through a forest, and Clarke felt like she could breathe again. She didn't realize until she was in the trees how much she missed just being outside hearing the breeze move through the leaves and the other sounds always present in the woods.
She took a little time to just sit on her horse and listen before turning back to everything that waited. 

Abby opened the door and when she saw Clarke asked, “Are you hurt?”

“No, I'm fine. Harper and Monroe brought Raven to me last night.”

Abby stepped aside so Clarke could enter and closed the door. “Is she ok?”

“No, she's not ok. Whatever that chip is doing, it's not good. She said someone called Allie sent her here to find out where the other pieces of the Ark landed.”

Marcus entered the room. “Allie is the A.I., Clarke. John told us about it.”

“They're holed up in Arkadia, and are going to move to Farm Station soon.”

“So it doesn't know everything,” Marcus said quietly.

“Looks like.” Clarke looked at her mom. “Do you think an electrical shock will have any effect on the chip? I was thinking maybe you could hit it directly with some power and see if it disengages.”

“Clarke, that's dangerous.”

“Those chips are dangerous. Raven forgot things, Mom. She never forgets anything. Like I said, start with Sora. If you can get those chips out of them, we can use their help. Especially Raven.”

“You'll have to help since you don't want anyone else knowing about them.”

“I'll find some time, but I don't know when. It depends on what Ontari has planned.”

“Meetings with two more ambassadors,” Marcus said.

“Clarke, are you sure you know what you're doing with her?”

“I'm trying to keep the alliance alive so we have time to figure everything else out.”

“Personally, Clarke.”

“I'm doing the best I can, Mom.”

“I'm worried about you, honey.”

“You don't have to be. I'll be fine. I have to go. Marcus, we'll be in the Azgeda suite if you want to join us in a couple hours.”

“I'll be there.”

“Thanks. Bye, Mom, I'll find you when I have time.”

“Clarke,” Abby began, but Clarke was gone. She turned to Marcus. “You see what I see with them, don't you?”
“I do, but you need to let them work it out.”

“This was so much easier when she was younger,” Abby sighed.

Ontari wasn't in her suite when Clarke returned, but she was at the table with breakfast when Clarke finished bathing. Clarke sat beside her, and they slowly went through the reports while eating. They were still working on them when Marcus came in.

Clarke and Ontari finished with the reports, and the three of them discussed the day's meetings. They were no different than the others. These ambassadors hadn't asked to meet so Clarke hoped they had no issues. This time, Ontari spoke with Marcus when he reminded her how to handle the meeting. Clarke smiled and Marcus praised her.

The cheerful mood ended when Ontari asked, “Where is the girl who came in last night?”

“Locked up with the rest of the chipped Skaikru,” Clarke answered.

“Can she not work with the chip?”

“It's not like the ones you and Titus have. It messes with her memory. All Raven knows now is that she wants to be in the City of Light.”

“Why is she here?”

“The A.I. sent her to find out where the other pieces of the Ark landed.”

“I can ask the ambassadors.”

“No. It's safer if we don't know. Raven did say they're holed up in the Ark right now, and will be moving to Farm Station soon. I suggest you send extra troops to both locations and have them keep scouts on the watch for them. If you can catch them, maybe we can put an end to this idiocy.”

“Clarke, if they are captured, we can't let Ontari or Titus near the A.I. Their chips are obviously different than the others. John said she wants them.”

“Probably upgraded source code. This is why we need Raven.” Clarke looked at Ontari. “I need some time to help my mom try to remove one of the chips.”

“We will speak with her tonight.”

“I'll talk to her,” Marcus volunteered. “How many more meetings after today?”

“Four more krus,” Ontari answered.

“So two days.”

“Sha.”

“On the third, Clarke and Abby can work on getting the chip out of Sora, if that's satisfactory to you, Heda.”

“Sha, Marcus.”

“I'll tell Abby tonight so she can prepare.”
“Have you heard Lexa?” Clarke asked.

“She is angry that you spoke to Titus alone.”

“So she's taking it out on you?”

“And you.”

“When did you talk to Titus?”

“Last night. He's still a jerk, but he might have listened to me.”

“What did you say to him?”

“In the interest of him possibly getting along with me, I'd rather keep that between me and him.”
Both meetings were routine and boring. Ontari listened to the ambassadors, answered the few questions they had, and asked them to stay with the coalition. They finished earlier than expected and were about to break for the day when a guard came and said that Titus wanted to speak with both Ontari and Clarke.

Marcus waited with them in the meeting room. Titus didn't look surprised to see him there. Lexa started talking as soon as he entered the room. She quieted when he knelt before Ontari. “I will serve you as I served other hedas. I am here to advise when asked, to teach what you should know, and to support your plans.”

He rose and bowed to Clarke. “Wanheda, I will do the same for you, if you wish.” Do not trust him, Klark. Do not turn your back on him. Fear makes men desperate.

“Return to the Natblida,” Ontari directed. “I will call you later.”

“Sha, Heda.” He took a few steps back before turning around.

When he was gone, Clarke turned to Ontari. “I wish he could hear her.”

“Sha,” Ontari agreed. “She is still speaking.”

“What is she saying?” Marcus asked.

“That we cannot trust him.”

“Probably good advice. She knows him better than any of us will. Do you need anything else from me?”

“Not today.” She paused for a moment, then refocused. “Thank you for your assistance.”

“You're welcome. Same time tomorrow, Clarke?”

“Yes. I'll see you then.”

Marcus left them.

“I liked it better when she was quiet.”

“Is there anything else you need to do today?” Clarke asked.

“No.”

“Let's get out of here, then. I'm tired of being inside all the time.”

“Stairs?”

“Sha. Race you to the stable?”

Ontari smiled and nodded. They took off for the door, blew through it, and hit the fire door on the stairs with Ontari in the lead. They were three flights down before they heard guards trying to catch up, and lost them in the streets.
They reached the stable together and prepared their horses themselves. A few minutes later, they rode out of Polis. Ontari took the lead, and Clarke let her. She left the road as soon as possible and slowed the horses to a walk.

“This is much better,” Clarke said.

“Sha. I did not realize how much time I was inside.”

“Maybe when things calm down, you can do some hunting or something.”

“Or something,” Ontari agreed.

“What would you rather do?”

“I don't know. I am still adjusting to the idea that I can choose.”

“The hard part is thinking everything through.”

“It is like planning for battle.”

“Yes, but plans don't last when the battle starts.”

“Sha, but going in without a plan is foolish and dangerous.”

“Sometimes you just have to wing it.”

“Wing it?”

“Act without a plan. React. Change things on the fly.”

“Is that why you went to see Titus?”

“Lexa, let us talk,” Clarke said in response to the flood of words his name provoked. She was surprised when Lexa quieted down. “Yes. We know how he feels, but he knows things that only he can teach you. I don't like him and I don't trust him, but it's better for everyone if he stays where he is. And can we stop talking about business, please?”

“Sha. Tell me something about you, Klark.”

“You have to tell me something in return.”

“I will.”

Clarke thought for a while, and a small smile came to her face when she decided what to share. “My dad called me princess long before I came to Earth. I went through a phase when I was five or six when I couldn't hear enough fairy tales. I wanted to be a princess, meet a prince and live happily ever after like he and Mom. So when I got down here and they started calling me princess as an insult, it didn't bother me. It reminded me of my dad, and how much he loved me. That was the first title Trikru gave me, Skaiprisa, and every time somebody said it, no matter what tone they used, I thought of my dad, and it was ok. I was ok. I miss him so much. He would have loved seeing all of this.”

“Thank you for sharing that, Klark.”

“Your turn.”

“I was six when they discovered I have natblid. Until then, I lived with nomon en nontu en ai sis en
bro. All my family lived in the same village, so all the children played together and slept in whatever house we ended the day in. Riders came one day and killed everyone. I do not know how I survived, but I woke on a horse, wrapped in a fur, held tight by a young warrior. It was Roan. He brought me to his mother. She was pleased with him, and promised me great things. I was with the healers for a long time, and every day Roan came to visit. He always brought something he thought would cheer me. He tried even then to protect me, and to warn me about Azplana. He was the only friend I had, and then he was gone. I thought he was dead. Azplana never spoke his name, and forbade everyone else to say it. I did not see him again until the day Heda Leksa killed Azplana. He remembered me, and apologized for leaving me alone with her. He said that even when he left, I would not be alone.”

Ontari smiled at Clarke. “I do not know what you and he shared, but he trusts you above others, and he promised that I would be safe with you.”

“Well. That's. That's a lot. I'll do my best to live up to it.”

“You already have. I am curious how you know Roan, though.”

“You heard about the Mountain?”

“Everyone heard about the Mountain. Azplana did not believe until Emerson came, and then admired your ruthlessness.”

“After that, I left my people. I did not want to be Skaiprisa, and I really didn't want to be Wanheda. I wanted to be no one, to be invisible. I stayed in the woods and came out only to trade. I was at a trading post when he came in with another man and showed the trader the wanted poster. She lied to them for me. She’d been lying to everyone to protect me since the first bounty was put on my head.”

Clarke paused, frowning. She didn’t get a chance to thank Niylah for all she did.

“I tried to sneak away, and Roan caught me. I thought he was going to take me to Nia. I tried to kill him to get away. I fought him every step of the way. I was stunned when he pulled the bag off my head and I saw Lexa. She locked him up. I was locked up, too, and he asked me to kill Lexa so he could get back into his mother's good graces. That didn't work, and you stopped me from poisoning her, and I thought he was going to kill Lexa.”

Roan and Lexa made a deal. The fight was real, but Roan threw it. Lexa wanted Nia dead for what she did to Costia, and Roan wanted to go home, so Lexa killed her.”

Clarke heard Lexa laugh.

“Roan and Lexa made a deal. The fight was real, but Roan threw it. Lexa wanted Nia dead for what she did to Costia, and Roan wanted to go home, so Lexa killed her.”

It did not change anything. It did not bring her back. It did not ease that pain. You did, Klark.

Clarke felt Ontari watching her.

“I owe him a lot. He brought me back to Lexa. He kept her alive. He rescued me from Titus and put me in a position that would keep me safe.”

“He brought you to me,” Ontari said.

Clarke tried to smile. She liked Ontari, and hated the reason Ontari held her position. Lexa was woven through their every interaction, and Clarke doubted they would ever be free her influence.

They rode through the woods without talking for a while longer before Ontari turned them toward Polis.
Clarke sent another message to Roan, making certain to include the exact words Titus said to them both. She also gave him her impression of the most recent meetings, and told him that she and Abby would be working together when the meetings finished.

That done, she pulled out her notebook and added to the notes until everything she knew about the A.I. was there. She flipped the book over and went a few pages in. She sketched herself and Lexa, Clarke sitting against a tree with her sketch pad, Lexa in her armor and cape standing across from her, slightly disturbed water between them that distorted their reflections. *Meizen, Klark. Soon. You will figure it out. Jus drein jus daun.*

Clarke sighed and turned the page. She sketched Ontari’s face to show the ritual Azgeda scarring. After that, she drew Raven when she first landed, smiling up at the rain, and finally Octavia when she was happy, unlike the last times Clarke saw her. She missed her friends and hoped Octavia was well.

Clarke closed the notebook and thought about what to do with the remaining chips. She could imagine the look on Titus' face if he knew how many she had. He should have been a great ally to both she and Ontari but his thinking belonged in the past. Clarke would never trust him completely. If she counted those she trusted completely on one hand, she would have fingers to spare. That brought her back to Niylah, and Clarke decided to trust her again.

She put her notebook in her satchel and left the suite. She went to the stables and prepared her horse again. Clarke rode out of Polis for the third time that day, two guards following. She rode west of Polis, along the road that followed the river a long way, then curved away from it.

Clarke reached the trading post near midnight. She dismounted and told her guards to stay and went to the back of the building. She knocked on the door to the home part of the building and waited.

Niylah opened it and gasped when she saw Clarke. She stepped back to let Clarke enter, and closed the door. Niylah put her back to it and asked, “Why are you here?”

“Thank you for everything you did for me. I never said that, and I should have. Mochof, Niylah.”

“No thanks is necessary.” Niylah smiled. “You never got your supplies.”

Clarke smiled back. “I don't need them, but thank you.”

“Why are you here?” Niylah asked again.

“To ask a favor. I know I don't have any right to, but I'm going to ask anyway.”

Niylah waited.

“I need you to hold something for me. I'll come back for it when it's safe. If you hear that something happened to me, bury it and forget it ever existed.”

“You trust me with another secret?”

“Sha. You kept the other without me asking. Thank you for keeping me safe.”

“You look sad, Clarke.”
Clarke nodded. “Will you help me again?”

“Sha.”

Clarke opened her satchel and after several seconds removed one of the small tins. She took two steps toward Niylah and held the tin out. Niylah looked at it for a few seconds before picking it up from Clarke's palm.

“Thank you so much.”

“Will you stay?”

“I wish I could,” Clarke answered honestly. “If things were different, you wouldn't have to ask.”

Niylah nodded.

“Be safe.”

“Mebi osa na hit choda op nodotaim.”

“Mebi osa na hit choda op nodataim,” Clarke answered. She stepped forward before Niylah could open the door and kissed her cheek.

A minute later, she was riding back to Polis. The closer she got to the city, the more she felt both Ontari's and Lexa's anxiety over her absence. Half an hour from Polis, her palm began to itch, and a few minutes later, she met Ontari and her guards.

“Are you well?” Ontari asked.

“Sha. I had an errand.”

Ontari nodded and turned her horse toward Polis. She waited for Clarke to ride beside her.

“Sorry I worried you.”

“When you are far from me, I can think of nothing else. I cannot control it.”

“Compulsion. We'll talk about it later.”

Ontari nodded and they rode the rest of the way in silence. They left their horses at the stable and Ontari steered Clarke toward the tower with a hand in the small of her back. She didn't give Clarke the option of refusing tonight, and took them to her suite.

They stripped down to underwear and a light shirt before getting into bed. Ontari moved close to Clarke. “She is unhappy with you.”

“I don't hear anything. Are you unhappy with me?”

“Your errand must have been important to take you from Polis in the middle of the night.”

“It was.”

“What did you do?”

“I took some of the chips somewhere they'll be safe. I'll need a messenger tomorrow, someone from Trikru.”
“I will have someone by midday.”

“You didn't answer my question. Are you mad at me?”

“No. I was worried when I could not find you, but your guards were gone, too.”

“Tell me about the compulsion.”

“Another time, Klark. We must rest.”

“Good night.”

“Good night, Klark.” Ontari answered, and rolled into Clarke's side. She put her arm across Clarke and quickly fell asleep.

For the rest of the night, neither moved or dreamed.

100 – 100 – 100

Although she was tired, Clarke went to Alba for training before breakfast. As usual, she spent much of the time getting knocked down and getting up, but she was starting to see improvement.

After, she jogged to her suite. She knew that when she finished her bath, Ontari would be waiting with breakfast so they could go through the morning reports. Meetings today and tomorrow, and then she could work with her mother to find a way to get the chips out of their people. Clarke especially wanted Raven's out. They needed her mechanical genius, and Clarke missed her friend, the one who never gave her a break, who always had a smile and a smartassed comment.

She got cleaned up, and took a few minutes to put some braids in her hair before going to the common room. Ontari waited there with their breakfast, and Clarke sat beside her. They went through the reports together. There was no hurry. Ontari was starting to recognize words, and Clarke slowly went through the reports with her. They finished before Marcus joined them. He had nothing new to say, and they were quiet until they went upstairs to the meeting.

That meeting and the one following went as expected, and Clarke was glad when they were over. She and Ontari went down to watch and listen to the Nightbloods' training. Today's lessons were important to the young ones, but not to Ontari. She suggested that she and Clarke spar, so they walked to the practice grounds.

Ontari's fighting style was different from Lexa's, and Clarke held her own for the first several minutes. After that, it was more like her morning training sessions, and Clarke kept getting up until Ontari was done.

They walked back to the tower. Clarke climbed the stairs to her suite while Ontari took the lift to the top floor.

Mebi osa na hit choda op nodotaim. = May we meet again.
Titus waited for Ontari outside her suite. She debated letting him come in and decided to allow it.

“The Natblida would like you to spend time with them.”

“Why?” Sha. They need to hear from you and Klark.

“It is customary for heda to participate in the training of the candidates.”

“All I can teach them is how to fight like Azgeda.” There is much more.

“That is enough to start with. As you learn more, you can share it with them.”

“I will go to them when I finish with business tomorrow.” Good.

“Is there anything I can assist you with?”

“No, I am meeting the ambassadors of each kru to find out what they want and tell them what I expect.”

“What is that?”

“Peace, Titus. I expect them to talk at length before taking any action.”

“As you wish, Heda.”

“Have you chosen your successor?”

“I think Aden is a good candidate.”

No. Aden has another destiny. You pick from the Natblida. Klark will help you. “We will choose someone else.”

“Why?”

Ontari's eyes shifted to green. “Do you question me?”

Titus didn't notice. “Not your authority, Heda. I wish to know what you see in him that I do not.”

“Aden will be a great general. He thinks ahead. He does not get drawn into a fight by his emotions.”

“I will adjust his training.”

“Mochof, Titus.” Her eyes switched back to brown.

“Is there anything else you need, Heda?”

“No, Titus.”

He bowed and left her.

Ontari went to bathe. She enjoyed the facilities in her suite, even if she wasn't quite used to everything. It was much different for her, having so much done for her. It made her restless. Nia's court was far from opulent, and Ontari was used to finding her own meals and sleeping rough.
In the bath, she sorted out the things she did and didn't miss. She missed Roan; it was good to spend time with him after so long apart. She missed the expanses of Azgeda land and the lights in the night sky. She missed hunting in the mountains, and the infinity of the sky from their peaks. She didn't miss Nia, or the stream of orders that were impossible to comply with, or the punishments that would follow. She didn't miss being cold and hungry.

She definitely liked the huge tub that filled with hot water on demand, but she was still getting used to the servants that appeared and disappeared and the guards who followed her everywhere. She knew that it was childish of her and Clarke to run from the guards yesterday, but Ontari wanted fresh air and time alone with Clarke, not that she ever had it for long without Lexa interrupting. She was grateful for Heda Leksa's guidance, but it was hard sometimes to remember who Ontari was. Not for long. Ontari snorted.

She soaked in the tub for an hour before washing up, and spent most of another hour putting her braids in. Ontari went onto the balcony and looked out over Polis. Its size still amazed her. The city held so much life. She didn't think she would ever see all there was to see. There were many important buildings. Perhaps Clarke would see them with her.

Ontari knew Clarke was still in the tower, probably with her friends. Close enough that the nagging urge to be close was manageable, and Clarke probably would not appreciate Ontari joining her there, either.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke sat in the common room on Skaikru's floor. Miller, Harper, and Monroe sat closest to her. Bryan sat beside Miller, and nearly all the rest of their peers were in there with them. They passed around bottles of liquor from the market, and the late afternoon turned into an impromptu memorial for the many they lost. Clarke knew the true number, and remembered each of them.

They broke up early; everyone wanted dinner. Before anyone left, Miller stood and began reciting the Traveler's Prayer. By the time he finished, everyone was standing and saying the words with him.


“I miss you guys.”

“Any news about Sora or Raven?”

“Not yet. Mom and I are gonna start the day after tomorrow. You guys can visit them if you want.”

“No thanks,” Harper said. “It's too sad.”

“It is,” Monroe and Clarke agreed.

“I'll see you soon,” Clarke said. “Stay safe. You know how to find me if you need me.”

“'Night, Clarke,” Miller said for all of them.

Clarke went up to her suite and got into the tub. She got out, found the lavender oil, and poured some in before getting back in the tub. One more day of boring as hell meetings and she could start figuring out how the chips worked, at least until one or another of the ambassadors decided to throw a fit over something inconsequential. They were tiringly consistent in that regard.

Clarke rested her head on the edge of the tub and relaxed her body even though her mind wasn’t
cooperating. It worried the questions about the A.I. like a dog with a bone, chewing here and there, sometimes stopping to concentrate on a tiny area before restlessly moving again. They needed information, solid facts, and Clarke wondered again whether Titus was truthful when he said her would assist her. She suspected he knew things that would help. Whether he would share them was another matter.

Clarke sighed and got out of the bath. She dried off and wrapped a towel around herself for the brief walk to her room. She dressed casually and went to the common room to order dinner. A guard waited for her with Ontari's request that she join the heda for supper. Clarke grabbed the afternoon dispatches from the table and went with him to the top floor.

Ontari smiled, but said nothing until they were seated, their dinner before them. “How are Skaikru?”

“They are well. It was nice to have time to talk.”

“I hear good things about them.”

“Oh?”

“They are polite. They deal fairly with merchants and traders. They work hard at the training grounds. They also talk too much and ask many questions.”

“How else will they learn?”

“I did not say it is a bad thing.”

Clarke smiled at the light teasing. “Have you decided what to do about us?”

“No. Do they worry?”

“Some. This is all new for them, too.”

Ontari nodded and paid attention to her plate for a few minutes. Clarke pushed the food around more than she ate. She was still distracted by questions about the A.I. and Niylah’s quick agreement to keep another of her secrets. When Ontari finished eating, Clarke pushed her plate aside and moved her chair closer so they could go over the reports together. Ontari was starting to recognize words, and Clarke patiently worked with her. They spent a little time practicing writing, and when that was finished, Clarke excused herself.

“Where are you going?”

“I want to talk to Titus.”

“I will have him brought here.”

“I’d rather talk to him alone.”

“You keep too many secrets, Klark.”

“No secrets, Ontari. I have questions, and I hope he’ll answer them.”

“So why can’t I be there?”

“I think it will be better if he and I talk alone. You can order him to do things and I can’t.”

“This is one of those flies things?”
“Sha,” Clarke smiled.

“You will return when you finish.”

“We’ve talked about this.”

“You will come here, or I will come to you.”

“I’ll see you in the morning,” Klark answered.
Forty

Clarke walked to Titus’ room and knocked. The guard opened the door for her when Titus called for her to enter.

He looked surprised to see her. “Good evening, Wanheda. Do you require something from me?”

“I’d like to talk, if you have time.”

“About?” he asked, and gestured toward the chairs.

She sat down and waited for him to sit before asking, “Will you tell me about the commander spirit?”

“Why?”

“I want to understand.”

“I will not share that with you.”

“Have you chosen a trainee?”

“No. I suggested Aden, but Heda said his destiny is to be a general.”

“Huh.”

“Heda said she will choose one from the Natblida.”

“How were you chosen?”

“Fleimkepa Aren chose me.”

“So you didn’t participate in the Conclave?”

“No.”

“Did you continue to train?”

“Everyone is trained to fight, Wanheda.”

“What else did he teach you?”

“I learned what all Natblida are taught, and the things the Fleimkepa knows.”

“Are all the Fleimkepas male?”

“No.”

“So it’s a judgment call? To pick one with the right temperament?”

“Sha. Must also be smart. Patient. Willing to study. There is much studying.”

“To learn the rituals?”

“And history.”
“How much history?”

“Everything since the world ended.”

“You know all of that?”

“Sha.”

“Will you tell me about that?”

“No. Much of it is about the first heda.”

“What’s so special about the Natblida?”

“The natblid is the mark of a future heda. All Natblida are to come to Polis for training when they are discovered. Only Natblida can hold the flame. It will kill others.”

“Do you know that for a fact, or is it something that’s been passed down?”

“Long ago, a clan leader killed heda and demanded the flame. It was given to him, and three days later he jumped from the tower.”

“So it didn’t kill him directly.”

“It caused him to jump. Another attempted it later with the same results.”

“How many hedas have there been?”

“Eighteen.”

“That’s like five years each.”

“Most did not last that long, and there were years without while we searched for the next.”

“So Lexa was an anomaly.”

“Anomaly?”

“An exception.”

“Sha. She was heda longer than any in my lifetime.”

“Do you think Ontari will succeed?”

“Is that your wish?”

“I wish for peace, Titus.”

“We have peace, Wanheda.”

“Only as long as Ontari can keep it. I ask again, do you think she will succeed as heda?”

“No,” Titus answered after a long pause. “She was trained for battle, not leadership.”

“You don’t think she can learn?”

“She can.”
“But.”

“No buts. She may survive a no confidence vote, and she may survive a challenge, or many challenges, but it will take much for people to overcome fear of Azgeda. They will not trust her.”

“How can we help that to happen?”

“It takes time, Wanheda. You know that.”

“Sha.”

“Will you be patient?”

“I’m trying to.”

“It is not your strength.”

“No,” Clarke agreed. “It never has been, but I’m doing the best I can.”

“You need to do better.”

“You, too.”

They looked at each other for many seconds. Titus blinked first. “I have much to do.”

“I want to be part of the training. I don’t care about your religion, but I care about your history.”

“No.”

“Sha,” Clarke answered firmly. “It’s not a request.” She stood up and left without giving him a chance to respond.

She used the stairs, not wanting to alert Ontari with the noise of the lift. Everything felt like a fight, and she was tired. Clarke tried not to think of what she wanted most, but grief overcame her and she dropped tiredly on the cool concrete step. She leaned against the wall and let tears come.

Clarke heard Lexa well before she heard Ontari’s soft steps on the stairs. Ste yuj, Klark. Soon, we will be together again soon. Ai hod you in, Klark. “Time for bed,” Ontari said quietly while she put her arm around Clarke.

Clarke let Ontari help her up. She shrugged Ontari’s arm from her shoulders. “Not tonight.”

Sha, Klark. We will keep you safe. Ontari kept pace while Clarke continued down the stairs to her floor. They went to Clarke’s bedroom. Clarke sat on the bed and removed her boots. She laid down and stared at the wall while Ontari settled in bed behind her. For the first time, Ontari respected her obvious desire to be left alone. She stared at the ceiling, steadied her breathing, and closed her eyes.

It took Clarke longer to drift off, and when she did, Lexa pulled her into an afternoon they might have had. Everything was vivid to Clarke, but nothing more than the relaxed smile that reached deep into Lexa’s green eyes. She leaned back on her hands and watched Clarke sketch her, smiling at Clarke’s focus on her task. It grew whenever Clarke looked up, and became larger when Clarke allowed herself to be distracted. She knew Lexa was humoring her, but they deserved a few hours alone together after tiresome hours of meetings. There would be more of them when this interlude ended.

The next time Clarke looked up, Lexa was inches away. She felt her warm breath, smelled the oils in
her hair, the leather of her pants and boots. *Ain.*

“Sha,” Clarke answered and set the paper and charcoal aside. “Ain.”

*Feva en otain.*

Clarke woke hearing Lexa’s voice. *I vow fealty to you, Klark kom Skaikru.*

*Ain* = *Mine*  
*Feva en otain* = *Forever and always*
Forty-One

It rained overnight, and the training ring was muddy. Clarke was managing for most of the session, but toward the end she slipped while trying to avoid Alba’s lunge. Instead of blocking his sword, he opened a deep wound on her side. Clarke landed on her ass in the mud, but that was nothing new, so it took several seconds for her to realize that she was hurt. She looked at her shirt, torn open, darkening with her blood. “Son of a bitch,” she said softly, and got up.

It was deeper than she thought, and Clarke was losing blood quickly due to her accelerated heartbeat. She stumbled again while trying to get back into position, and dropped to her knee, a stunned look on her face.

Alba caught her before she landed face first in the mud. He turned her so he could easily carry her and started for the tower as quickly as he could. Along the way, he encountered a guard and sent her ahead.

Ontari met Alba at the tower door. “Turn her,” she ordered, and he moved Clarke enough for Ontari to see her wound. Ontari pulled out her dagger and cut Clarke’s shirt away. Then she sliced her palm open and squeezed her blood into Clarke’s wound, opening and closing her hand as needed to keep her natblid dripping into Clarke’s side.

She watched Clarke’s wound carefully. The bleeding slowed, and finally stopped. Ontari took Clarke from Alba and carried her to the lift. He followed her.

“How did this happen?” Ontari demanded while the lift slowly rose. Abby should be waiting in Ontari’s quarters.

“Wanheda slipped in the mud.”

“Why is she training in the mud, Alba?”

“She may have to fight in it, Heda. She got up, and then fell again.”

“Stubborn,” Ontari muttered. In her head, Lexa had a few choice words for both Clarke and her trainer.

Abby waited at the lift. “What happened?”

“She was injured training.”

“Where? How?”

“She is cut on her side.” The guards opened the doors to Ontari’s suite, and she carried Clarke toward the bed.

“At the table,” Abby said. “Move it into the light first. I need towels and hot water.”

Alba hurried around the women to drag the table into the light, then ran for the door to send guards to get what Abby wanted.

Clarke’s legs hung off the table. Ontari pulled Clarke’s shirt away from the wound, which was closed. A fresh pink scar went across her side, showing plainly through her drying blood and traces of black blood. Abby looked, not believing what she was seeing. “I thought you said she was hurt.”
“She is,” Ontari said. “There was too much blood so I put mine in the wound. I did not think it would heal it completely.”

Alba returned with a pail of hot water in one hand and a fistful of cloth in the other. He put both where Abby could reach them and fled. Abby moistened a cloth and gently began wiping away the dirt and mixed drying black and red blood. There was a small part still open at the top of the wound, but it was scabbed over.

“Where did you get your blood?”

Ontari showed Abby her healed palm.

“We need to talk about that,” Abby said.

“Why is Clarke not waking up?”

Abby saw how pale Clarke’s face was. She felt her forehead. Clarke was clammy. “She needs to get warm.”

Ontari removed Clarke’s boots, crossed to her bed, and threw back the furs. She picked Clarke up and carried her to the bed, covered her, and sat on the bed beside her.

“All we can do is wait,” Abby told her. She got a fresh cloth and wiped the table clean, then dragged a chair to the bed. “Do you always heal so quickly?” she asked Ontari, partly because she was curious and partly to distract the commander.

“Sha. Natblida heal quickly. It is necessary for heda to be strong.”

“Would you mind if I drew some of your blood to examine it?”

“I will ask Clarke.” Ontari looked at Abby. “Will she wake soon?”

“Yes. She’ll probably be tired for a few days, and she’ll probably tell you she isn’t. She needs a bit more than usual to make sure her body replenishes her blood supply. She will make a complete recovery. Thank you.”

“Klark is always our priority,” Ontari said. She looked at Abby again, Lexa’s green eyes focusing on Abby. “We always try to keep her safe. She makes it difficult.”

“Lexa?”

“Sha, Chancellor.”

“Is there anything you can tell me about the other chips?”

“The lesser chips are inferior. They are not meant for control but have been subverted.”

“Can they be removed safely?”

“I do not know.”

Clarke groaned, and both women looked at her.

“Klark, speak to me.”

She opened her eyes and first saw Lexa’s looking back. “I’m fine,” she tried to reassure her.
“You were injured. Ontari gave you our blood.”

“Thanks.”

“You will rest for the remainder of the day.”

“No, I’m good.” Clarke sat up. “Hey, Mom.”

“Clarke, you should rest.”

“I feel fine. I’ll get a bath and we’ll go over the dispatches with breakfast.”

“No, Klark.”

Clarke threw the covers aside and rolled out of the bed on the side opposite her mother and Onari. “I’m fine. Really.”

Ontari scrambled across the bed and caught Clarke’s arm. “Klark.”

She sighed and looked into Lexa’s green eyes. “I promise you I am well,” she said gently. “I’m sorry I scared you.”

“I am not ready for your fight to end, Klark.” Strong arms wrapped around Clarke.

A few seconds later, Clarke gave in and returned the embrace. “Neither am I.”

Abby watched. The intimacy between her daughter and the commanders made her uneasy. She had no doubt now that Ontari had feelings for Clarke, or that Clarke and Lexa shared something more than a working relationship. What was happening had to be difficult for all of them, but Abby’s concern was for Clarke.

She saw Ontari’s lips move, but couldn’t hear what she told Clarke. Clarke nodded and backed out of their embrace. She went around the bed and found her boots, shoved her feet into them but didn’t bother with the laces. Clarke stopped in front of her mother. “I feel fine. If I don’t, I promise I’ll come and see you.”

“Clarke, you really should rest. You were stabbed, you lost a lot of blood.”

“Mom, please just trust me. Ontari and Marcus will be with me most of the day.”

“I don’t want to lose you, too,” Abby said softly and stood. She wrapped her arms around Clarke and they shared a long hug.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Clarke promised.

100 – 100 – 100

Lexa spoke to Clarke during her walk to her rooms. You are strong, Klark. But you must rest. You are not natblida. You are not invincible. No one will think less of you if you take a day to recover. Marcus can help Ontari at the meetings.

Clarke ignored her, walked into her suite and went directly to the bathroom. She stripped out of her muddy clothes, including the ruined shirt, and sank into the hot water. Lexa continued to talk, and Clarke swore she felt Lexa’s hands following her own while she bathed. Meizen, Klark, hodness. I miss this. I miss you, Klark, ai niron. You will find the way. Jus daun jus drein.
Lexa continued to speak while Clarke finished bathing, and while she dressed and pulled her hair back. She stopped when Clarke entered the main room, where Ontari waited with breakfast.

Meizen = beautiful
hodness = love
ai niron = my love
Forty-Two

The way Ontari kept looking at her was working on Clarke’s nerves. She felt fine, not even sore, although the small scab itched. Lexa was quiet at the moment, at least for Clarke. Ontari was distracted while they tried to get through the morning reports, and Clarke finally asked, “Is she?”

Ontari nodded.

“Lexa, please be quiet so we can work.”

*She let this happen.*

“No, she didn’t. This is important. Let her work.”

*We will talk about it later.*

“Later,” Clarke said emphatically, and looked at Ontari, who nodded. To make sure she hadn’t missed anything, Clarke flipped the pile over and started at the beginning. They were still working their way through them when Marcus arrived. Clarke gave him two messages that she had set aside earlier. They had to do with today’s meetings.

He sat at the table with them and watched while Ontari slowly read each sheet of paper. When she finished, she asked Clarke questions to make sure she understood what each said. Clarke sat back in her chair when they finished.

“Clarke, if you don’t feel well,” Marcus began.

“I feel fine. Yes, I got hurt; yes it’s fixed; yes, I’m going to be at the meetings today. The next person who tells me to take it easy is going to be sorry.”

Marcus held up his hands. “Your mother said you were seriously wounded.”

“She didn’t mention the part where I was miraculously healed?”

“She did.” He looked at Ontari. “Abby would very much like to examine your blood.”

“Don’t you think we have enough to do?” Clarke asked.

“I’m the messenger, Clarke.”

“Right, sorry. I’ll talk to Mom about it later.” She shifted toward Ontari. “You don’t have to let my mom turn you into her new favorite guinea pig. She’s going to be plenty busy with the chips.”

“If it will help, I will allow it.”

“We’ll see what happens. Today’s meetings are the last ones. They should go just like the others. We should get up there.”

100 – 100 – 100

The meetings were boring, which was a good thing. The ambassadors were relaxed, having spoken with the other ambassadors about what to expect. There was polite conversation, a little testing of boundaries, and Ontari’s pledge to act in the best interests of all. When they broke for lunch, Clarke slipped away.
She went to the training ring to find Alba. He looked incredibly relieved when he saw her, and rushed to meet her. “Wanheda, I am so sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault, Alba. Accidents happen. I’m sorry Heda and my mother blamed you. I doubt they’ll apologize, but they’re really protective of me. I came to tell you I’ll be here in the morning.”

“We will work on keeping your footing.”

“Probably a good idea.” Clarke looked at her boots, then his. “Should I get different boots?”

“No, it is best if you wear what makes you comfortable. Your foot is the same no matter what covers it.”

“Got it. I need to get back before Heda sends guards to find me. See you in the morning, Alba.”

He nodded, and Clarke left. She went to the market this time, and got something to eat while she walked back to the tower. She went to her suite and checked messages before heading upstairs for the last meeting.

Ontari and Marcus waited in the meeting room, and soon the last ambassador joined them. Sankru’s ambassador was full of questions, and got answers to all of them before he was dismissed. Marcus excused himself shortly after.

“We should go watch the Natblidas,” Clarke said. “We need to find the next Fleimkepa.”

“Are you sure you are up to it, Klark?”

Clarke turned her side to Ontari and pulled up her shirt. “I’m fine.”

Ontari nodded and Clarke dropped her shirt.

“C’mon. Maybe we can play with them.”

“I thought we were going to watch.”

“We are. But they’re still kids. They should have some fun.”

Ontari didn’t answer, but she walked toward the door and Clarke followed. They didn’t talk while they took the stairs to the ground floor or on the way to the place behind the tower where the Natblida took their lessons.

They stood and watched them spar, sword against staff, sword against sword. Aden was paired with the youngest and smallest, Fair from the River People. She was quick and used her size to her advantage. Aden was patient with her, correcting her mistakes and praising her when she did something correctly.

When Titus noticed Ontari, he stopped their sparring and the Natblida ran toward her. Aden smiled at Clarke before greeting Ontari. “What did you do today?” he asked.

“More meetings, but they should be the last for a while. I will spend tomorrow with you.”

Clarke watched while Ontari answered questions and asked some. She became more relaxed the more time she spent with them. When one of them asked a question Ontari didn’t have an answer for, she said, “I don’t know,” and waved Titus forward.

The impromptu lesson didn’t last long. Ontari paid as much attention as the others to what Titus said.
While he spoke, Lexa talked to Clarke. *His lessons have not changed. He does not wish to accept that the world is changing. It is changing, Klark, and the next Fleimkepa must understand that. I would choose Fair. She is good with books and words and numbers. She is not afraid even though every opponent is larger. She will challenge Titus. He does not truly believe his days are numbered. He thinks that because Ontari has not yet executed him he is safe. He is not safe, Klark. When you figure it out, when we are together again, if Ontari has not ordered his death, I will kill him for the disrespect he showed you, for immediately breaking his vow to protect you. It will not be long. I would tell you if I could, but I cannot. You must learn on your own, and you will. Jus daun jus drein.*

“Klark.” Ontari shook her gently.

“Sorry.”

“Perhaps you should rest.”

“I’m not tired.” Clarke looked around. They were alone, the Natblida and Titus gone. “I was listening. She thinks Fair should be Titus’ apprentice.”

“The little one.”

“Yes. She’ll challenge him, and she learns quickly.”

“They have been dismissed for the day.” Ontari raised her hand and summoned a guard. She sent her to bring Fair to them in the garden and steered Clarke in that direction.

“I’ll start working with Mom tomorrow.”

“Let me know if there is anything you need.”

“I will.”

“It will be strange, to be apart from you.”

“You’ll be fine with the Natblida.”

“Will you join me for supper?”

“If I can.” Clarke looked at a large bush which was full of yellow flowers. “Don’t suppose you know that that is.”

“No idea,” Ontari answered. “There is nothing like it in Azgeda.”

“What’s it like there?”

“Cold. There are a few large cities, but it is mostly empty space and the occasional village. Lots of forest, lots of mountains. The sky is very different, full of colors at night. The game is much larger.”

“Do you miss it?”

“Yes and no. Mostly no.” She heard footsteps and looked over her shoulder. Ontari turned around and Clarke did the same. They watched the guard stop, but Fair kept moving.

She bowed to them. “Heda. Wanheda.”

“Hello, Fair. Please join us,” Ontari said.
“Sha, Heda.”

Fair stepped between Clarke and Ontari, who continued their walk in the garden.

“Titus needs an apprentice, a seken,” Ontari said. “I have chosen you.”

“Because I am too small to fight,” Fair answered with a sigh.

“Not at all. You fight very well. But you are better with books, with words and numbers.”

“Sha.”

“You will continue to train with the Natblida but there will be lessons from Titus, too.”

“I’ll be there, too,” Clarke said.

“Do you not trust me, Heda?”

“Wanheda wishes to be part of your lessons for her own purposes.”

“I believe you will do very well,” Clarke said.

“Will you talk to me about Skaikru?”

Clarke looked at Ontari, and knew they both heard Lexa saying yes. “Sha, Fair, I will tell you about Skaikru, and let you speak to the others if you wish.”

“Mochof, Wanheda.”

“Your lessons begin tomorrow after supper,” Ontari told Fair. “I will speak with Titus tonight so he is prepared.”

Fair nodded.

“You may return to your dorm.”

“I would like to speak with Wanheda.”

Ontari and Fair both looked at Clarke. “As long as both of you return to your rooms for supper,” Ontari said.

“Mochof, Heda,” Clarke and Fair said in unison.

Ontari nodded and turned for the tower.
“You have questions?” Clarke asked.

“Sha. Heda Leksa held you in high esteem. She said Skaikru would help build the future, but she did not say how.”

“Part of it is our technology. We have much of the technology that was lost on the ground when the world ended. I think the rest is that she and I worked for peace. Heda Ontari is doing the same, trying to change jus drein jus daun to *jus drein nou jus daun.*”

“Why?”

“Everyone can thrive if peace prevails. *If Heda Ontari did not believe this, you would not have survived the Conclave.*”

“She spared all of us.”

“There are few Natblida. It makes no sense for you to slaughter each other.”

“That is not what Titus said.”

“Titus believes the old ways are best, but the world is changing. Even Azgeda are turning away from war now that Roan is king.”

“He should have killed Heda Leksa for what she did.”

“Why?”

“She killed his mother.”

“Nia brought death to herself. *If Heda Leksa was not merciful, the Azgeda would have been eliminated. Instead, she brought them into the coalition. Although they joined, Azgeda fought every step. Nia challenged Heda Leksa, and appointed Roan as her champion. That was her error. She believed that offering Roan the opportunity to return home after being banished was sufficient enticement for him to defeat Heda Leksa.*”

“Why was it not?”

“When Heda Leksa defeated Roan, when he was on his back with her foot on his chest and her spear at his throat, Azplana screamed threats and insults at her son. Roan and Lexa spoke with each other about the futures they foresaw, and knew they would never come to fruition as long as Nia lived. She was starting a war that no one could win.”

“So you are telling me Azhefa Roan chose the good of his people over the life of his mother.”

“Sha, Fair.” Clarke smiled at her. “This is why you are the best choice to be the next Fleimkepa. It requires more than just listening or reading. You must hear what is not being said.”

Fair nodded. Clarke pointed at a bench, and they sat. Fair fidgeted for a few seconds before composing herself. “Titus has all but said that you are the cause of Heda Leksa’s death.”

Clarke looked away and bit her lip. She took a few deep breaths before answering. “I did not. You will hear many things from Titus, and not all of them are true.”
“How will I tell the difference?”

“You can ask Heda Ontari. You can ask me. Do not be afraid to question Titus. In the end, only you can decide what you believe.”

“You will be at my lessons, Wanheda?”

“Sha, Fair.”

“ You really believe that Heda Ontari wants to keep the peace?”

“I do.”

Fair nodded again. “Thank you for your time, Wanheda.”

“I am in Azgeda suite if you wish to speak with me. If you have questions for other Skaikru, I will make sure they are available.”

“Mochof.” Fair bowed to her.

Clarke swallowed a sigh. “Pro.” She sat on the bench for several minutes longer, enjoying the quiet, before getting up and walking toward the tower. Dispatches and reports waited for her attention. She needed to speak with her mother. Ontari expected her to join her for supper. All of it made Clarke tired. She went to her rooms, pushed her boots off, and laid down for a nap.

It was late when she woke. Ontari slept beside her, and Clarke rolled out of bed. In the common room, she lit the lantern at the table. A pile of papers waited for her, as did a covered plate of food and pitchers of wine and water.

While she ate and drank, Clarke went through the reports. She was surprised to find a letter from Murphy.

Hey, Clarke, I’m in Grounder Central, part two, also known as used to be Ottawa, Canada. Roan has decided to train me as a warrior. I think he mostly enjoys seeing me have my ass handed to me.

These Grounder are nothing like the others I’ve met so far. I like them. We understand each other. I’m pissed off, they’re pissed off, so we all dispense with the niceties. I suck at them anyway.

I wanted to let you know I’m alive, and I owe you, and I’ll find a way to pay you back some day.

Be careful with Jaha when you find him. Dude is certifiably crazy, and way dangerous. If he thinks you’re trying to stop him and his AI girlfriend, I don’t know what he or his roboarmy will do. Watch your back.

Murphy

Clarke wrote a quick answer, folded the note and sealed it. She jotted her daily dispatch to Roan and sealed it, as well. She left them on the table to be picked up by the morning messenger.

She looked through the rest of the reports, and left the pile to go over with Ontari during breakfast. When the plate was empty, Clarke doused the lantern and returned to bed.

Ontari was awake when Clarke got up to go for training. She offered to come along, and Clarke declined, partly because she didn’t think Alba would be safe if Clarke fell too many times.

There was less hitting this morning as Alba worked with Clarke on her balance and footwork. She
still ended up on the ground a fair bit, but accepted it as part of the process. At the end of the session, she thanked Alba, grabbed her satchel, and returned to her suite to bathe.

Ontari was already at the table, and Marcus arrived while Clarke bathed and dressed. He was going through the dispatches with Ontari with more patience than Clarke had today. She was eager to get to work on the chips, and shoveled her breakfast down.

“You guys OK with that?” she asked, gesturing at the paperwork.

“Sha,” Ontari answered absently, her brow furrowed while she read yet another short report.

“We’re fine, Clarke,” Marcus said.

“Great. Thanks. Have fun with the Natblida.” She hurried out the door, down the hall, and started climbing stairs. When she reached the floor where her mother was staying, she found her room and knocked on the door.

Abby let her in and went back to the table to finish her breakfast. “Are you ready to start?”

“Yes. I want to get our people back.”

“Any word about Jaha?”

“Not yet. It’s just a matter of time.”

“I’d like to examine the Commander’s blood.”

Hearing Lexa’s title stopped Clarke for a few seconds before she remembered that her mother meant Ontari. “Let’s see how far we get with the chips first.”

“The Commander gave us some rooms in the tower to work in. I’ve spent the last couple days bringing supplies over.”

“What do we have to work with?”

“A microscope, a couple shock sticks, and some basic medical supplies.”

“Have you done anything with the chips yet?”

“No.”

“I’m going to catch Titus before he gets busy with the Natblida and then I’ll be there. What rooms?”

“They’re on the second floor. The only ones with guards.”

“OK. I shouldn’t be too long.”

Clarke got up to leave.

“Did you eat breakfast?”

“Yes.”

“OK.”

Clarke was out the door before Abby could find a reason for her to stay. She hurried upstairs to Titus’ suite. The guards nodded at her when she knocked on the door, and went in as soon as Titus
called for her to enter.

Titus sighed when he saw her. “Wanheda.”

Clarke pulled one chip from her jacket pocket and showed it to Titus.

“Where did you get that?”

“That’s not important. When you took the chip from Lexa, you did something that made the filaments retract. What was it?”

“I will not tell you.”

“Titus, a bunch of my friends are under the influence of these things. It’s not like the chip you put in Ontari, or the one that’s in you. It takes away their memories. It takes away their free will. It makes them slaves to the thing that ended the world.”

“I will not tell you, Wanheda. Your friends are not my concern.”

“Will it be your concern when more of them infiltrate Polis? When they find you? When they take Heda? When will it become your concern, Titus?”

“You seek to strip my power.”

“I don’t care about your power. You’re a dead man walking.”
Forty-Four

“Heda needs me.”

“If you don’t help me, she’ll need you a lot less.”

“You overreach, Wanheda.”

“You continue to underestimate me, Titus. What did you do to make the filaments retract?”

Titus stared at Clarke. All the anger he felt toward her for Lexa’s death showed plainly on his face. Clarke kept hers impassive, unwilling to give him anything. When she was tired of waiting, Clarke left.

She went down to the second floor and found her mother examining one of the chips under the microscope.

“I wish it was more powerful,” Abby said. “I can see something, but I’m not sure what it is.”

Clarke looked. “It’s the filaments it attaches with.” She turned away from the microscope and toward her mother. “The one in Ontari’s neck, the one Titus took from Lexa, when he removed it, there was a huge number of them. He did something to make them retract, but he won’t tell me what.”

“I’ve tried pressing on it, at different places with different amounts of pressure, but it doesn’t make any difference.”

“Maybe these are different because they’re swallowed.”

“Or maybe they’re just different.”

“Have you tried the shock stick on them yet?”

“No, that’s the next thing I’m going to do.”

Clarke removed the chip from the microscope and put it down on the wooden table. “Have at it.”

Abby charged the baton and put its edge on the chip. She pressed the discharge button, then lifted the baton. The chip was no longer pink. It had a black burn mark across its length and was an odd brown color. As they watched, it slowly regained color, but the burn mark remained.

“Hit it again. Full power,” Clarke directed.

Abby did. This time, the chip was completely dark. They watched it for a few minutes but there was no change.

“Do you have what we need to try to remove one?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll have the guards bring Sora up.”

“I’m really not comfortable with this, Clarke.”
“I don’t see any other options. We don’t know what the chips are doing to them. We don’t know that they aren’t sending information back to Allie. What we do know is that the chips make them different.”

“I don’t think we should do this.”

Clarke looked at her mother. “What color were Dad’s eyes?”

“What?”

“What color?”

“Blue.”

“Where did you meet?”

“Clarke, what are you doing?”

“Just answer the question.”

“He came into the Medbay when I was interning. He almost tore a finger off trying to fix something.”

“OK. I’m going to have the guards bring Sora up.”

“Wait a minute, Clarke. What was that about?”

“I had to be sure you didn’t take a chip.”

“Why would I do that? Why would you think that? Because I think we should be cautious?”

“We don’t have time to be cautious. The sooner we can get the chips out of them, the sooner we can be sure that Allie doesn’t know anything about us.” Clarke walked to the door and opened it. She gave the guard instructions and closed the door.

“Clarke, I don’t know why you’re in such a hurry to do this.”

“Mom, if I was in a hurry, we would have done this the day I told you what’s happening.”

“I don’t like it.”

“I don’t care.”

“What happens when we get the chips out?”

“Well, for starters, we get Raven back. I miss her. I miss all my friends, and she’s here, but she isn’t. Octavia probably won’t ever speak to me again, Murphy’s off with Roan. Miller and the rest don’t really see me as a friend.”

“How does Ontari see you?”

“What?”

“She watches you all the time. She looks at you like a lovesick kid.”

“I can’t do anything about that.”
“Can’t or won’t?”

“Really, Mom? What difference does it make anyway?”

“You’re spending a lot of time with her.”

“I’m trying to keep all of us alive.”

“Is that all?”

“That’s all. Are we done with the interrogation?”

“You don’t talk to me, Clarke. I hardly see you.”

“Mom, I’m busy. I’m busy with Ontari and the Coalition. I’m busy with Azgeda’s business. I’m busy with training. I will try to see you more often, but I can’t promise anything.”

The door opened, and Sora entered. He had a guard on either side, and they stood at the closed doors. Abby approached him first. “Good morning, Sora.”

“Hi, Dr. Griffin.”

“How do you feel?”

“Wonderful,” he answered, smiling. “The City of Light is beautiful.”

“Hey, Sora, will you sit in that chair, please,” Clarke directed.

“Hello, Clarke, how are you?” he asked while walking toward it.

“I’m well, thanks.” Clarke turned to the guards. “We need to tie him to the chair so he doesn’t fall.”

One of them nodded and left. While they waited, Abby checked his vital signs. When the guard came back, she tied Sora to the chair, fastening the rope around his chest.

“I wish we had more light,” Abby said to Clarke. To Sora, she said, “I’m going to give you an injection to put you to sleep for a while.”

“Why?”

“I need to check on something, and I can’t do it while you’re awake.”

“Alright,” he agreed.

Abby injected the sedative in his upper arm. Within a minute, his head dropped. Clarke picked up a scalpel from the surgical kit and offered it to her mother, who shook her head. Clarke felt along the vertebrae in Sora’s neck, and made an incision the length of the chip. She made a second, short, perpendicular cut and pulled the skin aside.

Clarke put the scalpel down and picked up a shock stick. She put it on the lowest setting and carefully placed it on the chip. She pushed the button. Sora’s body jerked and Clarke set the baton aside. She grabbed the chip, which was no longer its usual color, and tugged gently. It came loose, and a second tug freed it. She lifted it clear of Sora’s neck.

Abby stared at the filaments. The longest was a foot long, and there were dozens of varying lengths. She took it from Clarke and set it on a tray. “I’ll close the incision.”
“Thanks.” Clarke immediately went to the tray and looked at the chip. She looked around and saw a bottle of alcohol, picked it up and rinsed the chip. She returned it to the tray and watched.

While her mother sutured Sora’s neck, the chip slowly regained its natural color. The filaments began to move, sluggishly at first, then with increasing speed. Clarke looked up for a second and told the guards, “I need a jar or bottle, preferably clear, with a cork or seal.”

The same guard who fetched the rope left the room. She was gone longer this time. When she returned, both Clarke and Abby were watching the chip. The filaments moved frantically, seeking something to latch onto. The guards were both wearing gloves, and Clarke asked the one who had been their gofer to use a long pair of tweezers to pick up the chip and drop it into the bottle. She looked uncertain, but did as instructed. Clarke capped it as soon as the chip clinked off the bottom. She looked at the guard and smiled. “Mochof. Can you get me six more of these?”

“Sha, Wanheda.”

“And both of you know not to say anything about this to anyone, correct?”

“Sha, Wanheda. Haihefa Roan made that clear.”

“Good. Will you get the jars, please?”

“Sha,” the guard nodded, and left again.

“You,” Clarke pointed at the other guard and gestured for him to come to her. “We need to lay him down on that cot. On his side.”

The guard nodded. With one hand, he untied the rope holding Sora upright and held him in place with the other. He carefully picked Sora up and moved him to the cot as instructed.

“Mochof,” Abby said to him, and he nodded before returning to his place at the door.

Abby knelt beside the cot to check Sora’s pulse and breathing. “He’ll be out for a couple hours,” she told Clarke.

“Maybe we don’t need so much sedative?” Clarke asked.

“I’d rather make sure they’re out so it doesn’t hurt.”

“OK. It just means we go slower.”

“We aren’t doing anything else until he wakes up and I’m sure he’s well.”

“What else do we need in here?”

“At least one more cot and a better light source. More alcohol.”

“I’ll get that stuff and be back soon.”

Abby nodded. Clark carried the chair to her, and Abby sat without saying anything. Clarke left her there after a quick glance at Sora.
Clarke decided to go to the hospital first. Nyko would know where she could get what she needed. She turned to her guards and asked them to take her there. The walk was longer than Clarke thought it would be, through a part of Polis she hadn’t seen.

When they reached the hospital, she asked them to wait outside. Inside, she was suddenly uncertain, despite the message that Nyko wanted to see her. Clarke tamped down her anxiety and asked the first person she saw where she could find Nyko.

She didn’t get a verbal answer, but a gesture to follow. Clarke carefully noted the turns and thanked her guide. She knocked on the door and waited for it to open.

“Klark, I thought you forgot,” he said, smiling.

Clarke didn’t hide her relief. “Sorry, Nyko, Heda has been keeping me busy.”

He stepped back and closed the door when she entered. He pointed at a chair and he pulled his near it. “How are you?”

“As well as can be expected.”

“I know Titus lies about Heda’s death.”

“Sha.”

“You know what happened.”

Clarke swallowed and nodded.

“You would not hurt her.”

“No.”

“You will speak of it when you are ready.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever be ready,” Clarke answered with a wan smile.

“Time is a great healer. You are strong, Klark, or you would have slipped away again as you did after taking the Mountain.”

“I seem to leave dead people behind me wherever I go.”

“Only when it is necessary.”

Clarke scoffed and changed the subject. “How are you?”

“I am well. I decided to stay in Polis for a while.”

“I’m glad you did. I know my mom was glad to see you.”

“I was glad to see her, too. Did she send you for more equipment?”

“Yes, but you aren’t supposed to know about that.”
“I don’t know why she needs it, just that she does. What this time?”

“A couple cots and a bright light. Oh, and some alcohol.”

“Come back in an hour and I will have everything you need ready.”

“Mochof, Nyko.”

“You have many friends, Klark. We are happy to help.”

She nodded. “I’ll be back soon,” she told him, and left.

Clarke was glad to be back outside. Nyko reminded her of many things Clarke didn’t have time to think about, and the open sky helped push them aside.

An hour wasn’t really long enough to do anything, so Clarke walked through this part of the city. There were some businesses, mostly having to do with the hospital, but it was overall a residential area. The homes were neat with small green patches of vegetables and herbs. It was quiet, a nice change from the market and the tower.

When she thought enough time passed, she returned to the hospital. This time, her guards came with her to help carrying the items she needed. Nyko was waiting at the entrance and pointed at the pile of goods. He handed Clarke a small pack and a lantern with a focusing lens.

“Perfect,” she said, and thanked Nyko again.

When Clarke got back to the impromptu surgery, Sora was sitting up and talking with Abby. They both looked up when the door opened. Clarke pointed where the cots needed to be put up and put the lantern and the small pack on the table. She joined her mother and Sora.

“Hey, Sora.”

“Hi, Clarke.”

“How do you feel?”

“My neck hurts but OK other than that.”

“I removed the chip.”

“I know. I thought it would be good, and it was at first, and then I couldn’t remember things. I could only do what Allie said to do.”

“Did you see her while you were here?”

“No, just heard her. Raven sees her, though.”

“Are you hungry?”

“Yeah.”

“Tell you what, it’s time for lunch, so you and Mom can come with me to eat and after that, I’ll get you a room.”

“Everyone’s still here?”
“Everyone’s still here,” Clarke confirmed.

“Great.”

“Ready to go, Mom?”

“I’m ready, Clarke.”

Clarke looked at her guards, who were struggling with the cots. “We’re going to my rooms.”

One of them immediately stood up to accompany them. Clarke wondered whether they figured out in advance who would stay with her if they had to separate.

They climbed two flights of stairs to Clarke’s suite. Before they went in, she asked one of the guards on the door to get lunch for the three of them.

Clarke grabbed the dispatches from the table and put them in her satchel, which was hanging on a chair. “Want a tour?” she asked.

“That would be nice,” Abby said.

“Common area slash meeting room,” Clarke said and waved for them to follow. She showed them her room and the bathroom, and pointed at the doors to Roan’s room and the guest room that Murphy had occupied.

“That’s it,” she said cheerfully and led them back to the main room.

“What are all those trunks in your room?” Abby asked.

“It’s just,” Clarke paused, swallowed, and lamely finished, “stuff.”

“You didn’t have that much before.”

“Mom, I really don’t want to talk about it. The stuff in them is only important to me.”

Abby looked at Clarke and tried to decipher what Clarke wasn’t telling her. Clarke was glad to be spared by the arrival of their meal.

They talked a little about Polis, and when they finished, Clarke asked Sora to wait in the hall for a moment while she talked to her mother.

“Have the guards bring Raven up,” she said. “We really need to have her back.”

“Clarke, what’s in the trunks?”

“Lexa’s things.”

“Why do you have them?”

Clarke took a deep breath to calm herself. “I’ll explain while we’re waiting for Raven to wake up.”

“I feel like there’s so much you aren’t telling me.”

“Only little things, other than this.”

Abby nodded. “We’ll be waiting for you.”
“I’ll be there soon.”

Abby left first, but stopped in the hall to repeat the instructions about caring for the incision to Sora. Clarke took that time to calm herself. She was glad Lexa was quiet and hoped it was because she and Ontari were happy spending time with the Naadbida.

Clarke left her quarters and waited with Sora for Abby to finish talking. She nodded to her mother and followed her to the stairs, Sora in tow. Abby went down, and Clarke and Sora went up.

When they reached the hall, Harper and Monroe were standing in the doorway to Nathan and Bryan’s room. They looked surprised to see Sora.

Clarke smiled at them. “Hey.”

“Miller’s in there.”

“Can we all go in for a few minutes?”

“Sure.”

Miller was waiting. “Hi, Clarke.”

“Hey,” she said. “Sora is back to normal. We got his chip out, so he needs a room. He’ll need to see a healer if he has any problem with his neck.”

“What kind of problem?”

“There are stitches, so blood is bad. Pain is bad.”

“Got it,” Miller said and looked past Clarke. “Sora, it’s good to see you again.”

“You, too, Miller.”

“I’m sure Clarke has to get back to work, so we’ll find you a room and get you settled in again.”

“Thanks, guys. I’ll see you later.”

As she walked down the hall, she heard Miller begin to explain things. His voice was lost in the opening of the fire door, and Clarke hurried down the stairs. The sooner Raven’s chip was removed, the better for everyone.

Raven was already out when Clarke arrived. She, like Sora, was tied to the chair, which had been moved to take advantage of the light Nyko sent. It was on the long table. Clarke saw other things spread out, bandages and some containers of salve, and several bottles of alcohol. The jars she asked for were there, too.

Clarke put some alcohol from the open bottle in her hands and rubbed it all over them. “Ready?” she asked Abby.

“I’ll make the incision and close it, but you’ll have to do the rest.”

“Whenever you’re ready.”

Abby had prepared Raven so all she had to do was make the incision with the scalpel. She took a few moments to do it, making it longer than the one Clarke made on Sora’s neck. The extra length allowed her to hold the sides clear when Clarke zapped the chip. She hurried to remove it.
There were far more filaments than had been on Sora’s chip, and Clarke wondered whether it was because Raven was more intelligent or because she had her chip longer or some combination of the two. She quickly rinsed it with alcohol and dropped it into a jar. She capped the jar and wiped her fingers, then watched while Abby quickly sutured Raven’s neck.

Again, Clarke had a guard move Raven to a cot. She and Abby took chairs over so they could keep an eye on Raven until she came around.
“Raven is gone. How is that possible?” A.L.I.E tilted her head to the side.

“I don’t know,” Thelonious Jaha answered. “Is she unconscious?”

“No. She is gone. I cannot reach her. She is the second. One other has been taken.”

“Perhaps we should advance our plans.”

“Perhaps.”

100 – 100 – 100

So far, the best part of Ontari’s day had been the lunch break with the Natblida. Titus left her with them, and for the first time, they began to open up to her. She decided then that Titus had the afternoon off. She needed to speak with the Natblida, and they with her, without interference or worry that anything they said would get back to Titus.

When he returned, Ontari excused herself to them and walked toward Titus. He waited at the door, and all of the Natblida turned to watch what would happen.

“Heda,” he acknowledged with a brief dip of his head.

“Fleimkepa,” she answered. “The Natblida and I will spend the rest of the day together. Your services are not needed.”

The Natblida recognized the look that crossed Titus’ face, and so did Lexa. You must order him.

Titus began to protest, emphasizing the lessons they all needed, and Ontari raised her hand. “Return to your quarters, Titus,” she said firmly.

He looked at her for several seconds, then past her to the Natblida, who immediately lowered their heads. “Sha, Heda,” he finally said, and turned to go, muttering to himself about the disrespect shown him despite his position.

When Ontari returned to the Natblida, they looked much happier. Ontari felt Lexa’s joy at being with them again. She was fond of them, and made certain they were treated better than she had. It was one of the first things she argued about with Titus, and she didn’t give up until she won. Aden was the first Natblida to come to Polis after her ascension, and Lexa spent as much time as she could spare with him. As others joined him, she made time for them every day she was in the city.

They all preferred to be outside, even behind the city walls, so Ontari stood up. “Show me your favorite places in Polis.”

They began chattering immediately, reminding Ontari of the small flocks of game birds kept at Nia’s court. She let the two youngest take her hands and pull her forward, and looked over her shoulder to see Aden shepherding the rest behind her.

Polis was larger than it seemed when she rode around its walls. The Natblida knew every nook and cranny. She thought they would be fond of the market, but instead brought her to different places: the armorer; the library; an old church whose stained glass windows somehow survived; an old well with water that tasted like the forest; shortcuts through alleys; and finally, the stables. Fair left them...
there, talking with the horsemaster and grooms, so she could attend her lesson with Titus, which had been moved to the hour before dinner to allow her time to read after her meal.

Fair was surprised when the elevator stopped until she saw Clarke, who smiled at her. “Heya, Fair, how has your day been?”

“It was good, Wanheda. Heda asked us to show her around Polis after lunch.”

“Bet that went over well.”

“We will see. Heda sent Titus to his quarters. What did you do today?”

“I worked with my mom. She is a fisa, and some of my friends need some help.”

“The ones in the cells.”

“No one’s supposed to know about them,” Clarke answered with a frown.

“We go everywhere,” Fair told her. “Heda Leksa gave us the run of Polis.”

“Have any of you spoken with them?”

“No, Wanheda. If you put Skaikru in the cells, there must be a reason.”

“They didn’t do anything wrong. They just need to be away from the others until my mom can help them.”

“Does Fleimkepa Titus know?”

“Sha. He could help us help them, but has refused.”

Fair nodded. “He does not like you.”

“No, he doesn’t,” Clarke agreed. “We don’t have to like each other to work together.”

“Like Heda Leksa and Azgeda.”

“Exactly.”

The lift shuddered to a stop. Clarke and Fair walked down the hall to Titus’ quarters. Guards stood on either side of the doors, and Clarke told hers to wait with them before knocking on the door.

Titus called for them to enter, and the guards opened the doors for them. Titus stood on the far side of the room. He pointed at a table with three chairs and Clarke and Fair sat. Titus joined them a few seconds later.

He began without preface. “The world ended in fire, and people nearly ended in ice. The first commander came from the sky and saved those she could. The Natblida were the first clan. They walked the land without fear, ate the animals and drank the water. They made shelter in the Tower. When others came, seeking what the Natblida had, the strongest were initiated into the clan and the weakest destroyed. There were few Natblida then, as there are now, and each was precious. Each life lost had to be balanced by the death of the one who took it. Jus drein jus daun.

“The Commander sent the Natblida into the world after the first winter to learn what it was like, who survived, and how. She sent them to seek the knowledge they needed to thrive, and before the second winter, they returned, bringing gifts and trophies, telling tales of others who survived. Winter
passed in planning who would survive, who would join them, which of them would remain in the world gaining knowledge.

“When spring arrived, the Natblida went into the world again. They were instructed to choose the strongest as mates, for the clans needed to be greater in number to survive. People were needed to hunt, fish and farm; to prepare skins and furs for clothing and bedding; to gather firewood; and to protect those who had those skills.

“The clans we acknowledge now, except for Skaikru,” he added sourly, “are those the first Commander deemed strong enough. Yujleda. Boudalan. Louwoda Kliron. Ouska Ejon Kru. Ingranarona. Defikru. Podakru. Sangedakru. Floudonkru. Trigedakru. Azgeda. Each was chosen by its strength, skill, and knowledge. The Fleimkepa is the only one who knows the reasons each kru was selected. Each year, the clan sends one person to add to the history.

“The Fleimkepa holds the knowledge of all the clans and their histories. With that and the help of previous fleimkepas, the fleimkepa aids heda. He shares with heda the relationships of the krus, their strengths and weaknesses, who is reliable, who is not, who can be trusted,” he finished with a look at Clarke.

“If the first commander came from the sky, why do we not honor Skaikru?” Fair asked.

“The first commander brought knowledge. She was wise and strong. Skayon are weak. They know only violence, and bring death to all near them. They do not know how to hunt, how to protect themselves, how to do anything without their precious guns. Guns are the weapons of cowards, those who unwilling to face their opponents.”

Clarke was glad that Ontari was occupied with the Natblida. She was certain that both Ontari and Lexa would have plenty to say in return. Clarke held her tongue despite the look of disgust she received from Titus and the one of curiosity from Fair.

“How did the first commander recognize the natblida?”

“She made them from the most strong and intelligent.”

“How did she make them?”

“That is a lesson for another day.”

“Does the fleimkepa write the history?”

“Sha, the records are kept in the sacred space.”

“Can anyone read them?”

“Only Heda.”

“Why? Doesn’t the history belong to all?”

“It does, and it is told every year in the hall of each kru. Not all of the details, but the things that must be known by all.”

“So the future will have stories of Skaikru?”

“Sha,” Titus said sourly.

“And Wanheda.”
“Sha,” he repeated.

Clarke bit her lip to keep from laughing. She would speak with Fair later about antagonizing Titus, but for now, she was enjoying it.

“How did you aid Heda Leksa?”

“I listened to the ambassadors and sorted the truth from their exaggerations. I told her all of her options. I reminded her of the lessons she learned in her youth: Love is weakness. Heda must be alone, for she belongs to all and cannot belong to one. Jus drein jus daun.”

“Heda Leksa said jus nou drein jus d aun.”

“Lexa was wrong.”

“Heda Ontari says the same. Is she wrong, too?”

“Jus drein jus daun is our way. Heda will understand why it is the way of our people.”

“Can we not change?”

“We are done for today,” Titus said. “Leave me, Fair. Wanheda, I wish to speak with you.”

“I can’t,” Clarke said. “My mom needs me. I’ll see you tomorrow.” She followed Fair to the door. In the hall, she bit her lip again and said, “Come with me. We’ll take the stairs.”

“Sha, Wanheda.”

Clarke told her guards to give them space to talk. They waited for Clarke and Fair to reach the first landing before following.

“You don’t have to fight my battles, Fair.”

“I do not understand.”

“Your questions.”

“I want to know the answers.”

“Titus thinks I’m coaching you to ask them.”

“You are not, Wanheda.”

“You know that and I know that, but Titus won’t believe.”

“I will ask questions. It is necessary to learn.”

“It is,” Clarke agreed, remembering how she pestered Pike with questions when he was her Earth Studies teacher. “Go find the Natblida. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Leida, Wanheda,” Fair said, and raced ahead.
Clarke entered the room quietly, but had her fingers crossed that Raven was awake. She was thrilled to see Raven sitting up and hurried across the room. Raven looked up when she saw the motion, and smiled at Clarke.

"I am so glad to see you, Raven," Clarke said, and bent down to hug her.

"Good to see you, too, Clarke."

"How are you feeling?"

"My leg hurts like hell and so does my neck, but I'm OK other than that."

"I'll see if I can get you some crutches."

"I sent someone, Clarke," Abby said.

"Everyone else is a couple floors up."

"I'll see them later."

"Raven's going to stay with me until we're sure she can get around."

"I'll make a new brace tomorrow and be out of your hair," Raven told her.

"We'll see," Abby answered noncommittally.

"It's almost time for supper. When the guard gets back with your crutches, have dinner with me. You and Marcus, too, Mom."

"We'll be there soon, Clarke," Abby answered.

Clarke bent down to hug her mother, too. "Thank you."

"Once I'm sure Raven and Sora have no aftereffects, we'll remove the chips from the others."

"Actually," Raven said, "we should probably talk about that."

"Over dinner. We'll catch up on everything then," Clarke said, and left as quickly as she came.

She gave instructions to her guards while they followed her up the stairs and made a mental note to ask Ontari to give Raven a guard, too.

In the Azgeda suite, Clarke changed into lighter clothes before sitting at the table to go through the dispatches. As usual, she sorted them into two piles: Ones that weren't important, and the ones that Ontari needed to see.

She wrote a quick report to Roan and asked whether he thought they should include Fair in the morning and evening discussions. She cleared the table and got her sketchbook out to pass the time. She drew Fair's serious dark eyes and studious expression before making a quick sketch of the tattoo on Titus' head. When the door opened, she looked up to see Ontari entering.

"Titus is annoyed with both of us today," Ontari reported with the biggest smile Clarke had seen
from her.

"Oh?"

"I sent him to his quarters for the afternoon and had the Natblida show me their favorite places in Polis. They know much about the city."

"I bet they do."

"And you had Fair ask questions that made him angry."

"I did not have Fair do anything. Those are her questions. I spoke with her after the lesson."

"He is also angry that you did as you said you would and only listened."

"I can't do anything to please him," Clarke said.

"Apparently not."

"My mom and Marcus and Raven are joining us for supper."

"Raven is the one who can fix everything."

"Sha. We removed the chip from her neck earlier today."

"So it is possible."

"It is. Mom wants to wait a couple days before we remove them from the rest."

"Why?"

"To make sure there are no aftereffects."

Ontari nodded and raised her hand to her neck.

"Their chips aren't like yours. We aren't taking anything from them."

"I know. Heda Leksa explained."

"Did she let you have time with the Natblida?"

"Sha. She said nothing, but she was happy. Just like she is happy when we are together."

Clarke tried to smile and couldn't. A moment later, Ontari's hand was on her arm and she looked up to see Lexa's concerned green eyes looking back. "You will find the answer soon, Klark."

"I'm trying, Lexa. Thank you for letting Ontari spend time with the Natblida."

"They are hers now, but you are always mine."

It was Ontari's hand that cupped Clarke's cheek, but she felt Lexa's touch. Clarke put her hand around Ontari's wrist. She pulled her hand from her face. "You need to let her be," Clarke said.

"Soon," Lexa promised. "I will trouble her no more than the others when we are together."

"Mochof."
"Ai hod you in, Klark."

Clarke closed her eyes and wished again that Lexa said those words while she was alive. Clarke had been too afraid to say them, too afraid they would mean goodbye. Now they frustrated her.

The raps on the door startled them. Lexa receded and Ontari looked sadly at Clarke while Clarke kept her eyes closed and tried to compose herself.

"Enter," Ontari called after several seconds.

Marcus came in first. Raven followed him and Abby was behind her. Clarke waited for them to sit down before saying anything. "Raven, this is Heda Ontari kom Azgeda. Heda, this is Raven kom Skaikru."

"I have heard much about you," Ontari said.

"I've been out of the loop. What happened to Lexa?"

Clarke sighed. "It's a long story, and we'll go over all of it after we eat."

"Klark, we do not have to," Ontari began.

"We do. And we need to know what Raven knows so we can decide what to do next." Clarke got up and left the room. She returned with two bottles of moonshine, two bottles of wine, and a fistful of mugs. She put everything in the center of the table. "Pick your poison," she told them, and pulled a bottle of moonshine and a mug along when she took her seat.

"Clarke, that's not a good idea," Abby said.

"Mom, have a glass of wine. Have two. It's going to be a long night. Dinner will be here soon. We can just talk."

Ontari got up and went to the door. She said something the others couldn't hear to the guards. A few minutes later, he returned with two more bottles and two pitchers.

"Whiskey, better wine, beer, and water," she explained, and poured beer for herself.

Abby gave in and got a glass of wine. "Two glasses of beer or wine and no more," she told Raven. "You still have the sedative in your system."

"Beer," Raven said, and Ontari filled a mug and passed it to her.

Marcus opened the bottle of whiskey and poured half a mug. He sniffed it and smiled. "Mochof, Heda," he said, and raised it in her direction before taking a sip.

She nodded to acknowledge him, and since one else was talking, took the lead. "I spent the day with the Natblida. They are the young ones. One will be heda after me. We spent the morning in extraordinarily boring lessons, but in the afternoon they showed me around Polis."

"Where did they take you?"

"I thought we would go to the market, but they all have a favorite place, and that is where we went. There is a library full of books and pictures. It is huge. There is an old building called a church that has many colored windows. It was very peaceful and beautiful."

"Where is the church?" Clarke asked. She'd been to the library to kill time while Lexa was in
meetings with her generals or the ambassadors.

"I am not certain, but the Natblida can take us there if you wish."

"Sounds good." Clarke swigged from her mug. "Where else?"

"The armorer was interesting. She showed us many different armors and let us try to beat some into the proper shape. The others were small places except for the stable. They all like the horses. We are going to ride later in the week."

The door opened before anyone could say anything and guards carried in several trays of food. The last tray had plates, cutlery, and additional pitchers of water and beer. When they were gone, Ontari began to fill her plate. Everyone else did the same. Clarke took small amounts of everything and ignored the looks her mother and Ontari gave her.

Klark, you must eat.

"Stuff it," Clarke muttered.

Raven looked at her quizzically. "Clarke, do you feel OK?"

"I'm fine."

"You are not eating enough."

Clarke turned in her seat to glare at Ontari. "No tag team heda tonight."

"Eat," Ontari insisted. "You are the one who said it will be a long night."

Clarke turned back to her plate. Nothing looked good, so she ate mechanically until the plate was empty. She looked at her mother and Ontari. "Satisfied?"

"No," Ontari said. "You did not eat enough."

"That wasn't much, Clarke," Raven agreed.

"I'm not hungry."

"If you're going to drink like you did last time, you need to eat more," her mother said.

Clarke twitched. Eat. You need to be strong to tell all and hear the rest.

Clarke closed her eyes for a second, then drained her mug. She pulled her plate back and handed it to Ontari. Ontari put the same amount of food on it that Clarke took initially while Clarke refilled her mug.

She looked at the plate and sighed when Ontari put it in front of her, and forced herself to eat everything. When she pushed her plate away this time, everyone else was finished, too.
"Tell me about the chip, Raven. Why'd you take it? What did it do? Why were you in Polis?"

"I was tired of being in pain all the time. Jaha said there wouldn't be any pain in the City of Light. He was right. It was beautiful," Raven said wistfully. "But it's not someplace you can stay. You still have to eat and drink and everything. There isn't any pain, not physical or emotional. It's calm and peaceful and perfect." Raven emptied her mug and refilled it with water. "Until it's not. A.L.I.E. seems nice, but she's cold and manipulative and will do whatever she has to to get what she wants."

"What does she want?"

"You know she ended the world, right? She targeted the most populous areas on earth. She launched the missiles. She thinks humans are a plague on the earth. She wants to eliminate all of us, and replace us with something else. But before she does that, she wants her updated source code."

"Replace us with what?" Abby asked.

"I'm not sure. She uses the chips to gain information. Everyone who has one is connected to her. She can see what they see, hear what they hear. When she's close enough, she can give instructions."

"Why were you in Polis?" Clarke repeated.

"I told you, she wants her updated source code. She thinks it's on one of the Ark stations. She sent me here to find out where they landed. The only one she knows about is Farm Station."

"Why does she think it's on the Ark?" Marcus asked.

"I don't know. She had me go through all the code at Camp Jaha. She's going to Farm Station next. I'm supposed to go back and tell her where the others are, but nobody here knows."

"There's only one person who might know," Clarke said.

"Titus?" Ontari asked.

"Sha."

"The plot thickens," Marcus said softly.

"Yeah," Clarke said. You can do this, Klark. You are strong. Raven has many answers. You will find the rest. She rolled her eyes and drank more. "Everyone here has heard this before, so I'm going to hit the high points. Stop me if you have a question," Clarke told Raven, who nodded.

"I don't know when you took the chip, but the important part starts when Jaha returned to Arkadia. Murphy left with him, but he came back alone, with a chip that Jaha gave him, and got picked up by the guards for ambushing travelers to steal their stuff. The guards found the chip on him and instead of putting him in jail, they turned him over to Titus, who is the Fleimkepa. He's a cross between court historian, professor emeritus, and shaman. Titus doesn't like me, and we'll get to that in a bit." Clarke paused to drink again, and noticed her hand trembling.

Ontari noticed, too, and put her hand over Clarke's on the table. "Marcus can finish," she offered. Clarke shook her head, drank again, and took a deep breath. "Pike came from Farm Station. There wasn't room for everyone from Farm Station at Arkadia, so Mom reopened the Mountain and put
them there. She and Marcus came to Polis so Skaikru could join the Coalition. The minute it was official, Bellamy and Pike busted in, and a minute later you radioed to tell us that Mount Weather was gone. We knew then that the Ice Nation was behind it. Emerson was the only one who escaped Mount Weather, and he went to Azgeda. They sent him back to bide his time, and as soon as Farm Station was in there, he went in and set off the self destruct. Lexa ordered Indra to take 300 warriors to guard Arkadia against an attack from Azgeda.

"In the meantime, Nia stirred up shit here. She challenged Lexa to a fight to the death with her son, Roan. Lexa won the fight and killed Nia and Roan became king of Azgeda. Lexa and I were bringing Nia's body to Arkadia to show them that the Ice Nation had been punished when we found the army. Everyone but Indra was dead. They were slaughtered in their sleep by Pike and his followers, including Bellamy. Pike somehow got elected as chancellor and he rejected the alliance. His stance was that the only good grounder is a dead grounder."

Clarke hung her head, eyes closed for several seconds. Ontari squeezed her hand. You can do this, Klark. It is the past. Raven must understand so she can help you. Ste yuj, Klark. There is not much more to tell.

"I should have let Lexa call the armies then to take Arkadia and put Pike on the tree like the traitor he was. But I convinced her she could be better, that change had to start with her, so she called for her armies to put a five mile blockade around Arkadia, to give them time to realize that Pike's way was wrong, to starve them out. A lot of people weren't happy about this, especially Titus. He thinks I made Lexa weak.

"Part of blockade was that any Skaikru on this side of it would be subject to a kill order starting at dawn the day after all the armies were in place. I was getting ready to leave, and when I went to my room to get what I needed, I found Murphy there. He was gagged and tied and when I went to help him, I found out Titus was there. He planned to shoot me and blame it on Murphy, but he was a bad shot. Lexa came to see who was firing a gun because weapons are forbidden in the Tower, and when she opened the door, Titus accidentally shot and killed her.

"After she died, he removed a computer chip from her neck and threw Murphy and I in jail. Roan came back with Ontari. He got us out of jail and made me Azgeda's ambassador. Ontari beat the other Natblida in the Conclave, and the chip that was taken from Lexa is in her now. They call it the Flame. It's how the commander's spirit is passed from one heda to the next. Titus has a chip, too."

"Why is he alive?" Raven asked.

"Strategy," Ontari answered. She squeezed Clarke's hand gently. Lexa had been talking nonstop since Clarke mentioned the slaughtered army, and from the look on Clarke's face and the way she moved her head from time to time, Ontari knew Lexa was talking to her, too.

"I can hear Lexa. Ontari can hear Lexa. Sometimes she takes over Ontari's body, but I'm trying to convince her to stop doing that. Oh, and Murphy told us that Titus has some crazy shrine in the basement. It has an escape pod from Polaris Station and some drawings on the wall that represent the first commander and the first nightbloods."

"It's a good thing A.L.I.E. doesn't know any of this," Raven said. She drained the water in her mug and refilled it with beer. "That's probably where the source code is."

"Either there or in Ontari or Titus. Can you duplicate the programming of their chips?"

"Probably, with enough time. Why would you want to do that?"
"It's just an idea."

"A.L.I.E. is dangerous. She knows you're removing chips from her followers. She'll try to stop you."

"How can she do that?"

"I don't know. Jaha has her. She's in a case. He's the only one who's allowed to touch it."

Clarke dropped her head. Questions raced through her mind. There were still big pieces missing, but she was getting closer to seeing the big picture.

"What's wrong, Clarke?" Abby asked.

"Nothing. I'm thinking. I want Raven to stay here tonight. She's safer with me than she is with you, Mom."

"You need to check on her every few hours."

"We'll probably be up talking so that won't be a problem. If something happens, I'll send a guard for you."

Abby looked at Raven. "I'll be fine with Clarke," Raven told her.

"You come and see me first thing," Abby ordered.

"I will," Raven answered.

Abby sighed and stood up. Marcus stood up without the theatrics. "Good night," he told everyone and shepherded Abby to the door.

"You didn't tell me everything," Raven accused Clarke as soon as they were gone.

"You didn't tell me everything either," Clarke answered. "And there's stuff Mom doesn't need to know."

"I have a bunch of questions."

"Ask," Clarke told her while refilling her mug.
Forty-Nine

There was a long silence. Clarke drank and ignored the looks from the other women and Lexa's warnings. She needed some way to separate herself from all of it or she would fall apart and none of them needed to witness that. She didn't want to put Ontari in that position again, where she comforted Clarke because it was what Lexa wanted.

"How is her chip different than the one I had? Does it take her to the City of Light? What does it do, exactly. What do you mean, you hear Lexa? Why would you hear Lexa? What does Murphy have to do with this? How many of us made it out of Arkadia? Who has a chip and where are they?"

"Slow down, Raven. I can only handle one question at a time. The chips that Ontari and Titus have don't look like the ones Allie sent here. They collect, store, and share information with whoever has them. The catch is that only Natblida can use them. Nightbloods."

"What does that mean?"

Clarke sighed and put her mug down. She held her palm out to Ontari. Ontari removed a dagger from her side and sliced Clarke's palm open. Dark red blood welled up. She did the same to her palm and held it beside Clarke's so Raven could see the difference.

"I need to see some of that up close," Raven said.

Ontari put her palm against Clarke's and held it there for half a minute.

"Take a number. Mom wants to look at it, too."

When Ontari let go of Clarke's hand, they displayed their palms again showing healed wounds and drying blood.

"Nanites," Raven said.

"What?" Clarke and Ontari said simultaneously.

"Nanites," Raven repeated. "Microscopic robots. Some of them are obviously programmed for healing, but I bet there's a ton of other things they do that you take for granted, including interfacing with your chip. But it won't take you to the City of Light," Raven told Ontari. "You've blown right past that. I don't know whether you can interact with her. You might be able to override her," Raven thought aloud, and changed the subject before Clarke or Ontari could respond. "What's Murphy got to do with this?"

"He's seen Allie without having to take the chip. Wherever Jaha found her, there's a huge facility. He was locked in a bunker for almost three months while Jaha listened to it and made whatever deals he made with it. Does Jaha even care that it ended the world?"

"No. A.L.I.E. told him he'd survive to be a leader in the next new world. The programming has two goals: to find the updated source code and to restart the world. I don't know how, exactly, maybe by chipping everybody. How do you hear Lexa? When did it start?"

"I'm not sure. I thought I heard her when I was locked up, and I thought it was just my brain trying to deal because what she said was something she said to me while she was dying. It started for real after Ontari's ascension."
"Sha, the night of the feast she took over completely for the first time."

"Did you share blood before that happened?"

"Yeah, it's part of the ascension. Ontari shared blood with all the clan leaders or their ambassadors."

"Have you done it since?"

"A couple." Clarke stopped for a second. "I hear Lexa louder and clearer after every time. Since I got hurt, it's like she's beside me all the time."

"What happened?"

I had an accident while I was training and Ontari put her blood in the cut to seal it up. It was a big cut.

"Your blood was darker than normal, too. I think you got enough of the nanites for them to multiply."

"What does that mean?" Ontari asked.

"Clarke's becoming a nightblood."

Clarke laughed and they both looked at her like she was losing her mind. "Titus," she gasped, and Ontari laughed, too.

"Gonna let me in on the joke?"

"Titus is the Fleimkepa. He transfers the commander spirit from one heda to the next. He does not like Clarke."

"The only reason he doesn't attack me outright is that Lexa made him swear her wouldn't."

"This is some kind of crazy, Clarke."

"Yeah, and we aren't anywhere near done." Clarke drained the mug and filled it with water this time. "There aren't a lot of us left. Fifty-three sneaked out of Arkadia and surrendered before the attack. Everybody who wasn't with Jaha was killed. Except for me, Mom, Marcus, and Murphy, they're two floors up."

"Who?"

"Miller and Bryan. Monroe and Harper. Sora. Roger and Fay. They'll be glad to see you. They've been struggling to build radios. I can't remember the rest. Their names are posted in the hall with their room assignments."

"Where's Murphy?"

"He went with Haihefa Roan," Ontari answered.

"Who's that again?"

"King of the Ice Nation. Murphy's with him because he knows the whole story. He was there when Titus shot Lexa."

"Insurance policy."
"Exactly."

"What does that mean?" Ontari asked.

"In the old world, people bought insurance policies for their transportation and homes and lives. It was kind of like a bet, but not really. For example, you had insurance on your home and there was a fire, the insurance would pay to fix your house and replace your stuff. With Murphy, we mean that with him out of Titus' reach, he's available to be a witness if anything strange happens to you or Clarke. How many people know all of this?"

"Me, Murphy, Roan, Ontari, Marcus, Mom, and Ontari."

"Are there more of A.L.I.E.'s chips?"

"Not anywhere they can be used," Clarke lied. "Mom has a couple and I have a couple."

"How many more people are there that you know are chipped?"

"Four, and if Mom won't help, I'll remove their chips myself. Especially since you said she can see and hear through them."

Raven put her elbows on the table and rubbed her temples. "I'm so tired I can't think. I'm missing something big or a lot of little somethings that add up to something big."

Clarke stood up. "C'mon, I'll show the bathroom and the guest room."

"Bathroom. Like a place to bathe?"

"Yes."

"Does Abby have one in her room?"

"I don't know."

"No, she has a shower."

"Clarke, you have a new roommate," Raven announced. She turned in her chair and got her crutches. "Lead the way."

Ontari stayed at the table while Clarke led Raven to the room Murphy had used and showed her the bathroom and how to work the knobs. It always had soap, shampoo, hair oils, and towels.

"I'll get you something to sleep in and something to wear tomorrow," Clarke volunteered.

"I'll be in here for a while."

"If you're going to soak, use a towel for your neck. Otherwise you'll get a lecture about keeping your stitches dry."

"Noted."

Clarke left Raven and went to her room. She took shorts and a light shirt from one drawer; underwear, breast bindings, and socks from another; and two sets of shirts and pants from the armoire. She carried all of that into the room Raven would use and stuck her head in the bathroom. "Yell if you need help getting out."
"Will do."

Clarke returned to Ontari.

"Why did you lie to Raven about the chips?"

"What if we didn't get all of it out? What if some tiny piece is still transmitting to Allie?"

"There is no way to know."

"I know that. Raven seems like herself but I can't be sure until we get Jaha and the case he uses to transport the A.I. Raven and I will talk about it more tomorrow. She needs someplace to work."

"She can use the workshop the others were using. They can stay as her assistants if they are all agreeable."

"Thanks. First thing she has to do is make a brace for her leg. Once that's done we can decide what her priorities are. And you need to give her time to just do her thing. She's probably the smartest person you'll ever meet."

Ontari nodded. "She will have as much time as she needs as long as she spends some on the things I need."

"Radios, right."

"And power, so we can move the medical equipment here."

"We can talk to her about all of that tomorrow." Clarke poured some moonshine into her mug. "I want to stay up until she gets into bed, in case she needs help."

The door opened and a messenger entered. He bowed his head to them and put several sheets of paper on the table.

"Mochof," Clarke said as he left, and sighed when the door was closed. She got up and got her satchel and the papers she set aside earlier. When she sat down again, Ontari moved her chair closer to Clarke and they began going through the reports.
When they finished with the reports, Ontari went to Clarke's bed. Clarke went to check on Raven and found her sleeping soundly, then went to her room. Ontari had removed her boots and turned the furs down. She sat on the bed with her back to Clarke.

"You all right?" Clarke asked cautiously.

Ontari nodded but didn't speak. Clarke sat down and removed her boots and stood to remove her pants before blowing out the candles and getting into bed. Ontari got into bed, too, but kept her back to Clarke. She sniffed occasionally, and Clarke gentled her tone before asking, "What's wrong."

"Nothing is wrong."

"I know I can't be what you want, Ontari, but I'm your friend. You don't have a cold, so there's no reason for you to be sniffing unless you were crying. It's OK if you were. We're going through all kinds of crazy stuff. Titus may tell you it's weak, but I won't."

"I have not had a friend other than Roan."

"You have one now." Clarke turned toward her and put her hand on Ontari's shoulder.

"Yes, but you will leave."

"And I'll return. I have a job here."

"Will you? Even if you get Heda Leksa back, will you return to Polis? What do you think will happen if the old heda and the new are together in the city?"

"I don't know."

"The citizens will insist that she issue the challenge."

"But you're heda. She'll just be Lexa." Clarke paused. "When she's done with Titus, I'm sure she can help you. Why can't she be the Fleimkepa? Fair is too young."

"You speak as if her return is a certainty."

"That's what she says, Ontari. You hear her."

"Sha." Ontari sounded tired and defeated.

"I'm sorry this is happening to you. I wish there was another way."

"Klark, if you cannot resurrect Lexa, what will you do?"

"I have a job here," Clarke repeated.

"So you will not leave forever."

"No."

"Reshop, Klark," Ontari said after nearly a minute of silence.

"Reshop, Heda," Clarke answered, and turned over again. After another minute, she felt Ontari's arm
cross her body. Clarke was asleep soon after.

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari was gone when Clarke got up to go to training. She moved the night's messages off the table in case Raven was up when she got back.

Alba split her training between weapons and other skills. Clarke's balance was improving, and her footsteps were becoming quieter. She continued to spend a fair portion of her weapons training looking up at the sky, but could tell that she was still improving.

When Clarke got back to her suite, Abby and Ontari were there. "I'll get cleaned up and be right back," she told them.

When she came back to the meeting area, Marcus was there, but her mother wasn't. She looked at Ontari.

"Your nomon is checking on Raven. Breakfast will be here soon."

"What's the agenda for today?" Marcus asked.

"We need to get Raven set up in her workshop so she can make a new brace and Mom needs to check on Sora," Clarke said.

"I will help Clarke," Ontari volunteered.

"Great," Marcus said.

"Actually, I have an idea for you," Clarke said.

"Oh?"

"Skaikru's history needs to be recorded. Feel up to it?"

"I can do that," Marcus said confidently.

"I will make sure you have paper and ink," Ontari said.

"Thank you, Commander."

They all looked toward the sound of Raven's crutches. "I thought there was going to be breakfast," she said as she entered the room.

"It is coming," Ontari answered.

Abby was behind Raven, and when she sat, Clarke asked, "Well?"

"She's healing up nicely."

"She would appreciate it you would ask her if you want to know something about her," Raven told Clarke.

"How do you feel, Raven?" Clarke asked in the sweetest possible tone.

"I feel fine, Clarke, thanks for asking. How are you?"

"I'm well, Raven, thanks for asking."
Ontari looked from one to the other and shook her head. Sky people were odd. Nice, so far, but very different from anyone she'd met.

Their breakfast was delivered, and everyone began to eat. There wasn't any conversation while Raven shoveled food down as fast as she could swallow and Clarke pushed her food around more than she ate it.

"Does this not suit?" Ontari asked Clarke when she noticed.

"It's fine," Clarke said. "I'm not really hungry."

"If you don't want it, Clarke, I'll take it," Raven volunteered, and Clarke sent the plate across the table. She took bread from the tray in the center of the table and ate it slowly.

Marcus and Abby left as soon as they finished eating. Raven leaned back in her chair when Clarke's plate was empty and asked, "So what's up for today?"

"We're going to get you to your workshop so you can make a new brace. And Ontari's gonna tell you some of the things she wants you to build."

"Something fun, I hope?"

"Radios and a power supply so we can move the medical equipment from the Skaikru camp."

"I'll see what I can do," Raven said. "Step one, make it so I can get around."

Clarke and Ontari reduced their normal walking speed by half so Raven could keep up with them. Raven wasn't expecting to be greeted when she entered her new workspace, but Roger looked up and said, "I am so glad to see you," while Fay ran to Raven to give her a hug.

"Uh, hi, guys, what's happening?"

"We're trying to build some radios for the Commander."

"OK, we'll work on that later. First, we need organize this place better." Raven made her way to a stool and sat down. "I need leather, some metal, a way to hinge it, and probably some buckles." She looked at what was on the table and said, "You're on the right track with the radio."

"We don't have any leather," Fay told Raven.

"Looks like I'm going to the market. Straighten this place up while I'm gone," she directed them while getting up.

Outside, she told Clarke, "I'm broke."

"I'll take care of it," Clarke assured her.

"We should see the smith," Ontari suggested. "He can forge what you need."

"Maybe," Raven said.

They walked through the market. Raven took everything in. Ontari and Clarke took her to two stalls on the way to the smith. Both were stocked with bits and pieces of tech, and Ontari told both of them to sell Raven whatever she needed and send the bill to the tower. When they tried to protest, Ontari told them, "Raven kom Skaikru works for me, and I will pay for what she needs."
"Otherwise, you'll be bankrupt," Clarke added before they protested.

When they reached the smith, his apprentice had enough sense to immediately call to him.

"Heda, how may I assist you?"

"This is Raven kom Skaikru. She is working for me and needs a brace to support her leg."

"My sister's daughter, in the market, can help her better than I can."

"Who is that?"

He gave directions, and a dagger with a sheath to Ontari, and went back to work as soon as the women left. Fortunately, the store they needed wasn't too far away.
Ontari's suggestion that Marcus work in the library helped him settle into his task. Before sitting at a table to work, he explored the collection, thrilled at the volumes. Books were a luxury on the Ark due to paper's weight. Nearly all reading was done from a screen. He brushed the spines with his fingertips as he walked down the first row of books.

After the initial thrill wore off, Marcus found a seat at the table the librarian told him was reserved for his use. It had a pile of rough paper and a cup full of ballpoint pens as well as an ink bottle and a few dip pens.

Marcus started outlining what needed to be told. He started with the space stations, and where their stories diverged, with the destruction of Polaris station and the escape of one person before it occurred.

He didn't realize how long he had been working until one of Ontari's guards disturbed him to tell him that Abby was looking for him.

100 – 100 – 100

As the discussions with the smith's niece became more technical, Clarke and Ontari knew they would only be in the way. They didn't think Raven noticed their goodbyes or exit so Ontari left a guard there to lead Raven back to her workspace and then the tower. On their walk back, Ontari agreed to put guards on Raven, to Clarke's relief.

They talked as they walked about what they learned from Raven about A.L.I.E., and Clarke suggested that Ontari send new orders to the warriors at Arkadia, Farm Station, and the land between. They decided that only Jaha would be captured. The others would be detained, searched, documented, and released. That would give them vital information about how many followed Jaha and Allie. Additionally, Farm Station had fewer hiding places and would be easier to contain.

They walked to the tower and climbed the stairs to the hall with Clarke's suite. They sat at the table and went through the dispatches together. Clarke was no longer surprised at the amount of outright gossip they contained since she realized that no matter how outrageous, it all contained some truth.

They were still working their way through them when a guard brought lunch, and continued while they ate. They finished the reports half an hour after their meal, and Ontari suggested they check on Raven.

They found her in her workshop, sitting on a stool giving directions to Roger and Fay about where things went. She explained as they went along why things should go the way she wanted.

"Hey, guys!" she said when she noticed them. "My brace will be ready tomorrow after lunch."
"Good. Is there anything you need from us, or should we just stay out of your way?" Clarke asked.
"Something to eat would be good."
"Why didn't you guys get something from the market?"
"We don't usually eat lunch."
"Why?" Ontari asked.
"Uh, we, uh," Roger started.

"Let's go," Clarke said. "You, too, Raven."

Clarke herded them to the market. She told Ontari quietly, "I think they're still afraid."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure, but can you have Raven's guards make sure they get fed?"

"Sha, Klark. They should not be hungry."

Ontari hung back so the merchants would let Clarke pay for their food and drink. She found a bench in the shade on the way back to Raven's shop, and made them sit down to eat.

Roger and Fay remained silent, and Clarke sighed mentally. She would speak with them this evening, and for the moment settled for telling them to slow down and enjoy their food.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke skipped dinner with Ontari to eat with Roger and Fay. They told her they were still frightened of what the new heda would do to them, and were concentrating as much on staying under her radar as learning how to build radios.

Clarke reassured them that Ontari wouldn't harm them. They were to continue in the workshop as Raven's assistants. Clarke stressed that they were to make sure Raven ate regular meals, and they were to join her.

"She's not mad that we haven't gotten anything done?" Roger asked.

"Have you been doing your best to learn what you need?"

"Yes," they both answered.

"Then she won't be mad. I know you guys have heard all kinds of stuff about Azgeda, but HedaOntari is not a bloodthirsty tyrant. She's reasonable, and as long as you keep showing progress, she'll leave you to do your jobs. Got it?"

"Really? Because we heard about Nia," Fay said.

"Really. Nia's dead. The new king isn't interested in war. Neither is Heda."

"You spend a lot of time with her," Roger commented.

"I'm Azgeda's ambassador."

"I thought you were Skaikru's ambassador."

"I am. I'm doing everything I can to keep us together. You do what you're supposed to and that will help a lot. And keep an eye on Raven. If she acts strange, let me know."

"Strange how?" Fay asked.

"You'll know if you see it. I have to go. I have a meeting. I'll stop by the workshop tomorrow if I get a chance."
The lift stopped and Clarke stepped on. "Good timing," she said to Fair. "Heya, Fair."

"Heya, Wanheda," Fair greeted her. "I still have many questions for Titus."

"Ask him. I'll stay after tonight to make sure he knows they're your questions."

"Mochof."

"How was your day?"

"Like any other. Lessons and training. Heda was busy."

"She will make time if you, any of you, need her."

"We do not always have time to see her."

"You have a lot to learn."

"Sha."

The lift creaked to a stop and Clarke suppressed a sigh. She and Fair walked down the hall together. The guard opened Titus' door and they entered. An hour later, Fair left the room, but she waited in the hall for Clarke, who stayed to speak with Titus.

"Are you trying to bore her to death?"

"This is the way the Fleimkepa learns."

"The things you're telling her now, the history of each clan, she can read. I can read. You can test us on it. Make us write papers about it. Make us analyze it. Anything but the unending list of names."

"It is our way, Wanheda. You do not have to be here."

"I want to be here, Titus. I want to learn the differences between each clan, their customs and leaders. But there's a difference between that and making us memorize things that have no context or meaning."

"It is our way," Titus repeated. "I will see you tomorrow," he dismissed her.

"For the record, I only see Fair at these lessons. The questions she asks are hers."

"They sound as if they come from you."

"I can't help that. I'm not coaching her, and I'd appreciate it if you would answer her when she asks something."

"You do not dictate her training."

"I understand that. I also understand that she won't grasp everything you're telling her if you don't allow her to ask questions. Just because don't like them doesn't mean they're invalid."

"Os nat, Wanheda," Titus answered and turned his back to Clark.

Clarke glared at his back for several seconds before leaving. She took a deep breath to calm herself when she saw Fair waiting.
"What did he say, Wanheda?" Fair walked toward the staircase and they talked on the way down.

"He said it's his way or no way." Joka growled through Clarke's head.

"That is how everyone is trained."

"I doubt that. It may be the way you've been taught so far, but it's important to be flexible. You can't really understand if you all you're doing is memorizing and regurgitating information, even if it's important." Clarke sighed. "If you have questions Titus won't answer, Heda and I will do our best to get answers for you."

"He will not aid you."

"No."

"I will come to Heda if I need to."

"I'll make sure she knows."

They walked without talking. Clarke said good night to Fair at the floor her mother was on.
Fifty-Two

Marcus answered the door. Abby was sitting on the couch with a book. "Hi, Mom."

Abby put a marker in the book and closed it. "Hello, Clarke."

"Raven seems fine. Roger and Fay are going to keep an eye on her during the day. I'd like to get the chips out of the rest of them tomorrow."

"I think we should wait."

"We can't wait. The longer they're in, the more Allie is learning about us and about Polis. We need to cut her off."

"Clarke, I'm not convinced there aren't side effects."

"They're better than the side effects of the chip. They don't remember anything except what Allie allows. I'm worried about Raven. She was walking around without any support. What did that do to the bullet? Did it move closer to her spine?"

"Stop, Clarke."

"Tomorrow, Mom. I'd rather you do it, but I'll do it on my own if I have to," Clarke said and left.

Abby looked at Marcus. "Is she serious?"

"I think so. Can she do it?"

"Yes. It's not difficult."

"But you'd feel better if you were there."

"I don't know. I don't recognize Clarke at all any more."

"This is who you raised her to be, Abby."

"No," Abby shook her head. "My child was a healer and an artist. She wasn't hard like this. She didn't make demands and issue orders."

"She took every lesson you and Jake gave her when we sent her down here. Both of you taught her to stand up for what she thought was right, to protect those who can't protect themselves, to be a leader."

"I just want her to be my baby again."

"That won't happen. Clarke's in charge of Skaikru. She's Azgeda's ambassador. She's the Commander's primary adviser. The plans she's making aren't just about her or Skaikru. It's no different than the Ark, except that there's no veneer of niceness over it."

Marcus put his arm around Abby and squeezed her close. "Do what she wants tomorrow or you'll be worried about everything that might go wrong."

Abby nodded. She sighed and leaned into Marcus.

"Everything will be fine," he reassured her.
Raven looked up from the thick book on the table in front of her. "Hey, Clarke, where've you been?"

"I have a meeting after supper every night."

"That sounds dull."

"It was tonight. What do you have there?"

"Brush up on electrical engineering. Moving the Medbay here isn't as easy as disconnecting everything and putting it on a cart."

"Yet you'll do it and make it look easy."

"Duh."

Clarke laughed. It was good to have Raven back. "How's your neck?"

"Fine. My back's a little sore."

"You might stop in to see the healers. Maybe they can help."

"I think it's from the crutches, but I'll think about it."

"So, Ontari stays here?"

"No, Ontari's rooms are on the top floor."

"But she was here last night and wearing the same clothes at breakfast." Raven smirked at Clarke. "Something you want to share?"

Clarke sighed. "Nothing like that is going on."

"Seriously? Because she's got it bad for you."

"It's probably Lexa."

"No, it was Ontari who sat there giving you sad puppy eyes this morning."

"Raven, don't. It's complicated."

"You like her."

"She's my friend. Of course I like her. I like you, too. It doesn't mean I want to have a romantic relationship with you."

"Why not? I'm awesome."

"And extremely heterosexual."

Raven shrugged. "Kinsey says everyone's bi."

"We are not having this conversation. If you're horny, go upstairs and find one of the guys. I'm sure they'd love to scratch your itch."

"Easy, Princess," Raven laughed.
"Are you done?"

"Maybe," Raven laughed again, and more when Clarke glared at her. "I missed you, too."

"No, you didn't. Allie didn't let you."

"Her name's an acronym. A. L. I. E."

"Wow, that's appropriate. What's it stand for?"

"I'm not sure. Probably something soothing and reassuring."

"Probably," Clarke agreed. After a moment, she told Raven, "I'm going to pull the chips out of the rest of them tomorrow."

"That's a really good idea. She's learning way too much from them. The guards talk to them."

"Skrish." Clarke got up. "I'll be back."

The door opened just before she reached it. "Klark, is something wrong?" Ontari asked.

"The guards are talking the Skaikru in the cells."

"Sha, you said to treat them well."

"Everything they learn, A.L.I.E. learns."

Ontari nodded and turned to her guard. She told her to go to the basement with the order that the guards were to stop answering questions. She closed the door and entered.

Raven smirked at Clarke, and Clarke glared at her.

"Hello, Raven."

"Hi, Commander. I'll take this to my room. See you tomorrow."

Ontari looked at Clarke. Before she could ask, Clarke told her, "She thinks we're more than friends."

"I will explain," Ontari volunteered.

"I already did. Talking about it more will just make her more convinced she's right." Clarke pointed at the small stack of dispatches that arrived since they last went over them. Ontari moved the chairs so they could sit side by side and they went to work.

100 – 100 – 100

Abby was waiting when Clarke arrived in the morning. She had everything set up and was ready to start.

"Thank you. I really didn't want to do it by myself."

"I know."

Clarke went to the door and sent her guards to get the first patient and two additional guards to help keep everything moving.

By lunchtime, five Skaikru slept on the cots. The chips they removed were in jars lined up on a table
against the wall. The filaments moved sluggishly in the alcohol. Clarke asked her guard to get them some lunch and he told her it was on the way.

"What's next?"

"For you? Work in the hospital with the other healers until Raven gets the Medbay equipment moved here and working."

"For you."

"Waiting. Meetings. Training."

"What are you waiting for?"

"Jaha to be caught."

"He's still alive?"

"Yes. Probably still holed up in the Ark, but he'll have to come out eventually."

"What will you do when he's caught?"

"First, I'm going to have a long chat with A.L.I.E. And then I'm going to start removing chips. She doesn't have any power without followers."

"If you bring them here, I'll remove them."

"I will if I can, but it probably won't work out that way."

"I'll pack up what you need."

"Thanks. Once Raven's settled, I'm going to give her one of these to check out."

"What do you think she'll find?"

"I don't know, but if anyone can figure them out, it's her."

"True."

Their lunch arrived, and they ate without talking. After, they kept an eye on their patients. The first woke an hour after lunch. At the end of the work day, Clarke and her guards escorted them up to Skaikru's floor and turned them over to Miller while Abby went to meet Marcus at the library.

Once Clarke was sure Miller and the others would get them settled, she took the lift up to Ontari's floor. They ate, Clarke told her that to her knowledge, there was no longer anyone in Polis with one of A.L.I.E.'s chips. Ontari dug up the one message she held aside, from the soldiers at Arkadia. They caught six of A.L.I.E.'s followers in the woods, and, as instructed, took their names and sent that information, with a general description, back to Polis.

When Clarke finished eating, she copied the names onto another sheet of paper, and put it in the satchel that she always carried, and went downstairs to meet Titus and Fair.
That night’s lesson was more memorization and regurgitation. Fair recited the names Titus reeled off the night before. Clarke didn’t really care, but she sat attentively and silently, and when Titus dismissed them, Fair followed her down to Skaikru’s floor.

Clarke checked in with Miller and showed him the list she copied from Ontari. He told her a little about each one. Most of them were from Farm Station, and he told her that there were possibly 20 others who hadn’t been seen yet.

She introduced Fair to him and explained who she was, and explained to Fair who Miller was. She left Fair with him while she checked on Sora and the others who had chips removed. They all felt fine, and their necks showed no sign of infection. Clarke could tell by talking to them that they were no longer under A.L.I.E.’s control.

She wanted to talk to them to learn what they knew about A.L.I.E. and the City of Light. While Fair talked with Miller, Monroe and Harper gathered Sora and the others in the room they had designated as a common area.

It was hard in the beginning. They were all torn between being glad to be free of A.L.I.E.’s control and angry with Clarke for bringing back into this reality that they wanted to escape. Clarke let them vent. She felt that she deserved it. If she’d returned sooner, things would have been different. If she’d been in Arkadia, Pike wouldn’t have been able to take power. Bellamy wouldn’t have followed him. The others would still be alive. Lexa might still be alive.

Clarke listened until they finished talking. She asked about A.L.I.E. How much did the A.I. know? How did it obtain information? How much control did it have over its followers? At what distance, if any, did that control abate? What was its plan? What did they see in the City of Light?

She got little usable information. Most of it was still a dreamy haze to them. The only thing they knew for sure was that their pain had been gone and was now back.

Clarke didn’t share her pain with them. She didn’t tell them that she worried what the A.I. might do. She didn’t tell them that the new heda was just as young and unsure as they were, or that Skaikru might not survive the coming months. She told them to join the others in training and to trust Miller, Harper, and Monroe. Clarke told them that she was available if they needed her.

She was drained when they finished. The others returned to their rooms. Clarke went to check on Fair and found that Bryan joined the conversation. She reminded Fair that she had to get up early and that Skaikru would be there to speak with her another time. Fair told Clarke she would leave in a few minutes. Clarke nodded, sure that Miller would end the conversation before it got too late.

Clarke trudged down the hall and took the stairs down to her floor. In her suite, Raven was teaching Ontari to play chess. Clarke picked up the dispatches and sat down to read them. When she finished, she said good night to both women.

Clarke closed the door to her bedroom. It wouldn’t prevent Ontari from entering later, but she wanted some quiet. It was good that Raven was doing something with Ontari. The commander needed someone other than Clarke, and chess would teach Ontari skills that Nia neglected in training.
her Natblida, failing to foresee the slightest chance that Ontari would lead without Nia pulling the strings.

The unanswered questions about A.L.I.E. whirled through her brain. Clarke tried to stop those thoughts, and succeeded in pushing them aside momentarily while she wrote to both Roan and Murphy. It still amazed her that Murphy was the truest friend she had at the moment. He understood everything that was happening in a way that no one else did. He’d seen her at her weakest and watched her struggle to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Clarke set those notes on her nightstand and got ready for bed. She drifted off and didn’t notice when Ontari got in bed with her.

100 – 100 – 100

“Chess is the ultimate war game,” Raven explained as she set up the board. “You have a king whose capture ends the game. Beside him is a queen, the most powerful piece on the board. She can move in any direction without restriction, so you have to be careful with her. The knights move in an odd pattern, but that is often to their advantage. The bishops beside them move diagonally because historically the church tried to keep its political maneuvering on the down low, so these pieces don’t attack head on. Rounding out the back row are the rooks. They can go head on, sort of like siege weapons. The front row is all infantry. Their moves are limited, but if one gets through the lines to the last row on the other side of the board, it can ransom a stronger piece.”

“So this is Titus,” Ontari said, touching the king, “and me,” the queen.

“OK,” Raven agreed.

“You,” Ontari continued, touching the knight. “Roan and Clarke,” she said, her fingers brushing the bishops. “I do not know who the castles are, but the pawns would be the armies.”

“Yes. I’m sure you’ll figure out who holds the other positions as time goes by.”

“How do you know Clarke?”

“Her mom, Abby, got me to fix up an escape pod. She and I were going to come down to find out whether Clarke was alive after her monitoring bracelet went black. We got caught, and Abby bought enough time for me to launch the pod. Clarke was the first person I met after I landed.” Raven moved a pawn forward two spaces.

Ontari mimicked the move.

“My boyfriend slept with her, and he kept mooning after her even when she told him she didn’t want anything to do with him.” Raven made another move, and Ontari mirrored it.

“He went crazy and massacred a village. All old men and women and children because the warriors were with the Commander’s, I mean Commander Lexa’s army getting ready to take on Mount Weather. She was going to give him the death of a thousand cuts and Clarke killed him before they could start. I was so mad at her for that.” Raven continued to move pieces on the board while she talked, and Ontari continued to mirror her moves.

“She did that for me. She endangered the tentative alliance we had with Commander Lexa so I wouldn’t have to watch him die slowly. It took me a while to see that, though. I didn’t want to see what it cost her, how it made her feel. Even after she killed all those people in Mount Weather, I was mad at her, and then she left.”
“Left?”

“She took off and the next we heard of her, she was in Polis with Commander Lexa and Skaikru had to join the alliance or be destroyed by the Ice Nation. Emerson had the self destruct codes for Mount Weather, and the Ice Nation sent him to wait for the right time. He set it off when Mount Weather was full of refugees from Farm Station.”

“Sha, Azplana took him in when he came after the fall of Maun-de. He said he knew how it worked, and that he, alone, could destroy it. She sent him back to wait for the right time.” Ontari carefully moved a knight as Raven had.

“He picked a good one. The only people who survived were me and Sinclair. He’s with Jaha now. That was the thing that pushed him over the edge.”

“What pushed you over the edge?”

“Fear,” Raven answered bluntly. “Abby sidelined me, and the pain wasn’t ever gonna get better, and I was afraid of spending the rest of my life sitting on the sidelines watching, never getting to do anything fun again.”

“You are in pain now?”

“Every second.”

“I will call a healer.”

“That’s not necessary. I deal with it and move on.”

“What will you do now?”

“What do you need me to do?”

“I want radios. They are very useful. I want the medical machines from your Ark, and any other tek we can use from there and the other section.”

“I can do that.”

“Good. If you need anything, come to me. I will make sure you get it.”

“Thank you, Commander.” Raven moved another piece and Ontari mimicked the move. “What’s with you and Clarke?”

“What do you mean?”

“I see how you look at her.”

“Clarke is my friend,” Ontari said stiffly.

“Friends don’t usually share a bed,” Raven pointed out.

“I must protect Klark.”

“Hate to disappoint you, Commander, but Clarke’s pretty good at taking care of herself.”

“Be that as it may, I will protect Clarke. It is my wish, and Heda Leksa’s order and Haihefa Roan’s instruction.”
“What’s Clarke got to say about all that?”

“She does not like it,” Ontari admitted. “Clarke is too valuable to risk.”

“Both of you said Commander Lexa speaks to you. I don’t understand. Frankly, it makes you both sound as crazy as Jaha.”

Ontari sat up straighter and her eyes shifted to green. “You doubt me, Reivon kom Skaikru?”

“What the fuck?”

“I asked you a question.”

“Commander?”

“Sha. You will assist Klark. She is very close to finding all the answers she needs. You will do as she asks.”

“OK,” Raven said slowly.

“It is important, Raven,” Lexa said. “She and I, we are not finished with what we must accomplish in this life, and those things cannot wait a generation or more for us to find each other again.”

“I hear you, Commander.”

“Good.” Lexa moved a piece. “Checkmate,” she said, and returned Ontari’s body to her.

“Son of a bitch,” Raven said, staring at the board. She looked at Ontari. “That’s, I don’t even have words for what just happened.”

“I am ready to retire.”

“Good night, Commander,” Raven said distractedly and watched Ontari walk toward Clarke’s closed door.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay. Had to deal with some personal stuff. Updates will be twice weekly, on Monday and Thursday. Thanks for reading.
Clarke was asleep when Ontari got into bed. When Ontari pulled Clarke close, her front to Clarke's back, Clarke put her arm over Ontari's, her fingers sliding between the other woman's.

Her dreams that night were disjointed. She rode with Lexa toward Arkadia; she was pushed to the ground by the pressure wave from the Mountain's death; Roan stood over her with a spear. Lexa looked up at her with hope, longing, and love, but Clarke couldn't move. She couldn't breathe, and came up for air in water red with blood, amid bodies burned, blistered, and bleeding.

She woke and tried to sit up, but Ontari held her too closely. Clarke panted. She felt the panic attack coming and could do nothing to stop it, so she struggled to get from from Ontari. That woke her, and Ontari realized what was wrong. "Stop, Clarke. Breathe. Clarke," she said sharply, and Clarke twitched. "Breathe. It is a dream."

*A dream, hodness, it cannot hurt you now. Breathe with us.*

Clarke tried, but her third breath turned into a sob. She could manage dreams, or Lexa's death, or all the pressure that rode her shoulders, but not all of them tonight.

Ontari wasn't certain what to do. She bore her nightmares alone, in silence, another lesson learned from Nia, and this time was relieved when Lexa took over.

"Klark, it was a dream."

"You're dead."

"Yet I am here, and I promise we will be together soon. But you must rest. Dreams have only the power you give them." She kissed Clarke's shoulder, her neck, below her ear. "Do not allow them to take you."

"It's too much."

"Yu ste yuj, Klark. Rest, niron. It will be better in the light."

Clarke sniffled and turned her pillow over. "Don't go."

"I will stay until you sleep," Lexa promised. "Ai hod yu in, Klark."

Clarke nodded and squeezed the hand under hers. Lexa stayed until she was certain Clarke slept. When she returned Ontari's body, she heard Lexa singing a lullaby, and it wasn't long before she, too, returned to sleep.

*100 – 100 – 100*

Clarke woke in the morning with the dread of her nightmares in the back of her mind. She dressed quietly and left Ontari sleeping while she went for her morning training. She felt uneasy about the guards trailing her, and regularly looked over her shoulder at them. She spent extra time with Alba, and that helped Clarke settle her mind.

By the time she returned to her suite, she felt better. She didn't see anyone before she went to bathe and change into fresh clothing, but by the time she returned to the common room, Ontari, Raven, Marcus, and Abby were at the table.
Abby left first. Clarke told Raven where to find the chips removed from her neck and the others and that she would come by the workshop later to talk to her about them. That left Marcus and Ontari, and the three of them went through the morning reports before Marcus returned to the library.

"I am going to hunt today," Ontari told Clarke. "Will you join me?"

"Next time. I have some things I need to do here."

Ontari nodded and stood. "I will see you for supper."

"Sha."

Ontari left, and Clarke removed her sketchbook from her satchel. She had questions about the chips and she wanted to be certain she remembered to ask Raven all of them. The biggest one was whether Raven could duplicate the chips in Ontari's and Titus' necks. She also wanted to know why only Natblida could carry those chips, and what would happen if someone tried to carry more than one. That led her to another flight of curiosity. Could the nightblood be engineered? Could Raven do it? How many nanites did it take to turn blood from red to black and what were the side effects?

She wondered, too, what Titus knew about it. He tried to keep secrets. Knowledge was power, especially now when it was the only thing keeping him alive.

While she thought, her hand moved effortlessly on the paper. When she was ready to leave for Raven's workshop, she closed her sketchbook without looking and put it in her satchel.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven's workshop looked much different than it had the last time Clarke saw it. Now, she saw organization in place of chaos. Roger and Fay each had a workbench and were working from schematics pinned to the wall.

Raven sat on a stool, a magnifying loupe over one eye, examining one of the bottled chips. "Hey, Clarke."

"Find anything?"

"Nothing unexpected." Raven put the jar down and raised the loupe. "Need something?"

"Answers."

"What are the questions?"

Clarke pulled a stool over and sat beside Raven so they could talk quietly.

100 – 100 – 100

Jaha waited until the darkest part of a moonless night to leave the Ark. A.L.I.E. told him, her voice tinged with curiosity, that all of the others had been briefly detained by warriors, but ultimately allowed to continue to their goal. They now waited at Farm Station for them.

Like the rest of Skaikru, Jaha's footsteps were loud. He got past one patrol, but the second one caught him. A.L.I.E. was taken from him and he was returned to the Ark. He sat in the holding cell wondering what would happen next.

100 – 100 – 100
"I don't know, Clarke," Raven said for the dozenth time. "I'm pretty sure I can replicate those chips, but I need to be able to contact them to get the data from them."

"Tell me what you need," Clarke said, and pulled out her sketchbook. She opened it and looked at the page.

"What's that?"

"I don't know."

"You drew it, how can you not know?"

"I was thinking and not paying attention."

"Maybe you should get a check up from your mom."

"I'm fine." Clarke turned the page. "What do you need?"

"I'll have to make everything unless you know where there's a microchip factory."

"Where did Jaha get the chips he was handing out?"

"He brought them from the City of Light."

"Did he tell you that or is that a fact?"

"I don't know," Raven said again. "Damn it."

"We'll figure it out, Raven. I'll ask Murphy."

"Get me some of Ontari's blood and I'll get started on the nanites."

"Work on the chips first. Without them, the nanites are immaterial."

"OK. Let me get back to work."

"See you later."

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke stayed after Titus finished his lesson and Fair departed. She opened her sketchbook and showed him the page that stumped she and Raven earlier. "What is this?"

"Where did you see this?" Titus demanded. "Have you been sneaking around?"

"What is it?"

"It is the first Natblida," Titus growled. "Where did you see it?"

"I drew it. Explain what it is. Please."

"The first commander." Titus finger shook as he jabbed toward the figure in the foreground. "Those she saved. They were the first. This is sacred. You should not have it."

"No one else will see it."

"Give it to me."
"No." Clarke closed the sketchbook. Titus reached for it. "Get away from me," Clarke said, and took a step back while twisting away from him.

Titus moved with her.

"Gona!" Clarke yelled.

The door popped open and Titus snarled at Clarke as he backed away. "You create chaos everywhere you go."

Clarke ignored him and left the room. She met Fair in the stairwell. "Why are you here?"

"The Fleimkepa tells me different things in private than he tells everyone during our lessons."

"Some things aren't meant for everyone to hear."

"Secrets."

Clarke nodded.

"You must know many to have reached such a position in so little time."

"Sha, Fair." Clarke sighed and sat down. Fair sat beside her. "Carrying them is hard work."

"Can you not share them?"

"Some secrets are heavy no matter how many carry the weight." Clarke sighed again. "Go to the dorm. You shouldn't be late."

"We are free tonight."

"Then go enjoy it. Have fun." Clarke got to her feet. "I'll see you tomorrow," she said, and hurried down the stairs.
The next day went according to routine. Clarke went to training and had breakfast with Raven, Marcus, Abby, and Ontari before she and Ontari went through the morning dispatches. Abby went to the hospital, Raven to her workshop, Marcus to the library. Ontari went to spend the day with the Nightbloods. Clarke was free to do what she wanted until supper. She went into her room and knelt in front of the first of Lexa's trunks. After several seconds, she opened it.

Clarke went through it deliberately, and searched for secret places when it was empty. She found nothing unexpected and carefully returned Lexa's clothes to storage. The next trunk had her every day weapons on top and two cloaks in the bottom. There was a slight bulge in the lining at the bottom of the trunk. Clarke felt around it carefully before taking one of Lexa's daggers and slitting the fabric along one edge.

She pulled folded paper. It was old and not in the best shape so she carefully opened it. It was a map, but Clarke didn't recognize any of the markers. She held it so the top of the page was north, but that didn't help.

Clarke got her sketchbook and carefully copied the map into it before refolding the paper and returning it to its hiding place. She repacked the trunk, her fingers lingering on the scabbard holding Lexa's sword, something Lexa touched every day.

The third trunk held more clothing. She didn't bother to open the fourth, which held the furs from Lexa's bed. Clarke put her back to the trunks and studied the map in her sketchbook, but she still didn't recognize anything on it. It had to be important, and Clarke hoped she would understand it when the time came to use it.

100 – 100 – 100

The next morning brought the report of Jaha's capture. Clarke dashed off notes to Roan and Murphy, and one to Marcus asking him to help Ontari with the reports while she was gone.

"I'm coming with you," Ontari said.

"You can't. We don't know what A.L.I.E. can do. We can't risk it. You'll stay here. Titus will stay here. I'll be fine."

"I am heda. She cannot do anything to me."

"You saw what those chips did to Skaikru. She controlled them. We can't let that happen to you."

"You will take guards."

"I know. And I'll be back as soon as I can. I'll send a message every day."

Clarke got up and went to her room. She stuffed some clothes into her pack and took a sword from the trunk. She put the belt on so it hung at her side and adjusted it until it was comfortable.

"I will meet you at the stable," Ontari said.

"I thought we agreed you aren't going."

"I have something you will need."
"I'll wait for you there."

Clarke hurried to the stable and tacked her horse herself. She put grain and a few treats into one saddlebag and her pack in the other. She was ready to go when Ontari arrived. She stood in front of Clarke and put a cloak on her shoulders. "It is still cool."

"Thank you."

"Be safe, Clarke kom Skaikru en Trikru en Azgeda."

"You, too, Heda. I'll see you soon."

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke's guards clearly had orders directly from Ontari. She was never alone, and never allowed to do anything for herself. Her guards took care of her horse, put up a tent for her each night, gathered firewood, hunted, and cooked. When Clarke went into the woods to relieve herself, all four of them followed her. They kept their backs to her, but kept her safely surrounded. Nothing would be allowed to harm her.

It was a small relief to reach the Ark. It hadn't been her home for a long time, but it was familiar. She stopped in her mother's quarters to look for anything she might need, and planned to do the same in the Medbay before she returned to Polis.

Because they didn't arrive until the middle of the afternoon, Clarke decided to put off meeting Jaha until the next day. She sent a messenger to TonDC, hoping that Octavia would see her even though she knew Octavia was still angry.

She was surprised when Lincoln returned with the messenger. They sat outside by the fire, Clarke's guards close enough to see but not to hear.

"How is everyone? How's Octavia? Is Indra recovering? How are you?"

"We are all well, Clarke," he reassured her. "Indra is much better. Octavia helps her. Octavia is pregnant," Lincoln said with a proud smile.

"Congratulations."

"We got your earlier message. What you sent is safe."

"Mochof."

"What's happening in Polis?"

"Skaikru is still there. Ontari hasn't decided yet what to do with us. I don't think she knows what to do with us."

"Skaikru cannot return to Trikru lands."

"I know."

"You do not understand, Clarke. The only reason you weren't attacked is because you are under the Heda's protection."

"I understand."
He hesitated before saying, "There are rumors that you caused Heda Lexa's death."

Clarke shook her head violently. "I tried to save her." She fought tears at the sight in her head, Lexa's pale body on the bed, still warm but never to move again, black blood everywhere. "I would never hurt her, Lincoln."

"I know that, Clarke, but the others, they see Wanheda and think that perhaps Heda tried and failed to take your power."

"It wasn't like that. The truth will come out eventually, but I can't tell you right now. I won't put you in danger again."

Lincoln studied her. He knew Clarke spoke honestly, but still wondered what she knew that could endanger him. He nodded once and changed the subject. "Do you like Polis?"

"Yes. I find something new there every day. Oh, will you tell Octavia that Raven's back to normal?"

"How did you do that?"

"A.L.I.E. sent her to Polis to get information, but she ran into Harper and Monroe in a bar one night. Mom and I removed her chip. If Octavia wants to come to Polis to see her, I'll make the arrangements."

"I will tell her."

"I'm sorry about everything, Lincoln. I don't think any of this would have happened if I didn't leave."

"You can't know that, Clarke."

"Do you need anything? Is there any way I can help you?"

"No to both."

"If I ever can, please ask. Please."

"I will. We will." Lincoln stood. "I promised Octavia I wouldn't be long."

"Tell her I'm sorry for everything."

"She does not want to hear that yet."

Clarke nodded. "Then tell her congratulations. I'm very happy for both of you."

"Chof, Clarke. Stay safe."

"You, too." She offered her arm, and Lincoln ignored it to hug her. Clarke squeezed him once and he let go.

"May we meet again," he said, and she repeated the goodbye to him.
Clarke slept in her mother's bed that night. She didn't sleep well. The Ark creaked and groaned. The small bed with a thin mattress over metal was cold and uncomfortable. Her dreams were vivid. She walked the blood saturated ground outside the Ark, picking her way through the bodies of the Trikru army and what was left of Skaikru after the battle. The Ark's halls were full of blood. The floor was slick with it: spatters, smears, and handprints filled the walls. She heard the fighting still going on behind closed doors, muted clangs, thuds, and screams.

She sat up, sweating and hyperventilating, after she found Bellamy's body, and knew she wouldn't sleep any more that night. She got out of bed and fumbled her way to the light switch. Clarke went to the bathroom and checked the sink for running water. She was delighted to find that not only was there water, there was hot water, as well. She stripped and showered.

When she was clean and dressed in clean clothes, she walked toward the holding cell, two guards trailing her.

Thelonious Jaha sat with his back to the far wall, speaking quietly. He looked up and saw her after almost two minutes, and came to the bars. "Clarke Griffin. It's been a long time."

"Tell me about A.L.I.E."

"You wish to join us in the City of Light?"

"Tell me about A.L.I.E."

"Do not trust her," A.L.I.E. said.

"Don't be ridiculous," Jaha told A.L.I.E. "I've known her since she was born."

"Who are you talking to?" Clarke asked.

He smiled at her. "A.L.I.E."

"What does she want?"

"Her updated source code. It was on the Ark."

"Why does she believe that?"

"It's where the Creator was."


"The City of Light," Jaha began.


"She's here to take all of us to the City of Light."

"I don't care about the City of Light."

"It's so beautiful. All of us can live there in peace while Earth recovers."
Clarke suppressed the shiver that ran down her back. "It needs to recover because she tried to destroy it."

"Her target is people. That's why the City of Light exists."

"I want to talk to her."

"You have to take communion."

"You mean take one of those chips."

"Place it on your tongue," he agreed. "Join us in the City of Light."

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari was restless. Clarke's absence worried her. She understood Clarke's reasoning for returning to Arkadia alone, but didn't like that she went. The messengers she sent to the leaders of the warriors at both sections of the Ark and to TonDC were brief and specific: Protect Wanheda.

She tried to find things to do to fill the time. The first night, she joined Titus and Fair in Fair's evening lesson. After, she and Fair left together, and Fair followed her up the stairs. Ontari brought her into her suite and they sat on the couch together. Ontari waited for Fair to begin.

"Fleimkepa was different tonight."

"Oh?"

"I think it was because Wanheda was absent."

"Why would he do that?"

"He does not like her. He does not trust her, and he will not speak true while she is there."

"How do you know?"

"The things he said tonight, I do not think he would share with Wanheda."

"Will you?"

"Sha."

"Where is Wanheda?"

"She will return soon." 'I hope,' Ontari added silently. *Klark is strong.*

"Good. I like her."

"I like her, too."

"I must study," Fair said, and rose.

Ontari stood, too. "Thank you."

"Mochof, Heda. Os nat."

"I will see you tomorrow, Fair."
When Fair was gone, Ontari went to the table and sat down. She laboriously read the missives that arrived since her last check, and when she finished, went down to Clarke's suite. Raven sat at the table with a thick book, but closed it when Ontari sat across from her.

"Chess, Commander?"

"Sha."

"No cheating tonight."

"I do not cheat."

"I'm talking to Lexa."

Ontari's eyes flashed green. "I did not cheat."

Raven laughed. "Just checking."

Ontari's eyes returned to their usual color.

"Could you get the board?" Raven pointed to the cabinet holding it.

Ontari got up and retrieved it. While they set it up, Raven said, "I'm reading about chip design. I think I've got it figured out."

"So you will be able to do what Clarke wants?"

"I think so. It's gonna take some trial and error, but I'm working on it. Roger and Fay are building radios. They should have a pair ready to test tomorrow."

"That is good."

"You start tonight," Raven said, and the game got underway.

When they finished it, Ontari went to Clarke's room to sleep in her bed.

Ontari slept restlessly. She missed Clarke. Lexa missed Clarke. They both worried about the multitude of things that could go wrong. After hours of intermittent sleep, Ontari got up. She walked down the stairs to the deepest level of the tower. They ended in a hallway. Ontari knew the jail was to the right, so she went left.

She opened each door along the way. She recognized one room, where she had been bathed and tattooed after her Conclave, and kept going. The hall ended in a door, as it did at the other end. Ontari opened it and when she saw what it was, signaled her guards to stay back.

Ontari closed the door and went down the stairs. She slowly walked through the room, examining everything without touching. It was as the Skaiskat described it: altar, escape pod, murals.

She studied the murals before moving to the escape pod. It had two seats and more dials, buttons, and switches than she had seen in one place. The altar was her last stop. On it, she saw a book with a dirty orange cover. Curious, she picked it up. A patch was sewn to the front, but she didn't recognize the word. Ontari opened the book, and after a few seconds realized what she held.

She debated what to do, and decided to take it with her. Clarke would understand the contents. Sha,
Klark needs to see this. You have done well. Ontari felt a surge of pride. Her Heda was pleased and Wanheda would be happy as well.

Ontari returned to Clarke's suite and wrote a message to her explaining what she found.
Chapter 57

Clarke didn't bother taking Jaha to the Medbay. She left and returned with her satchel, which held what she needed to do the surgery. Her guards had what she needed waiting outside the door.

She was surprised that Jaha didn't fight being tied to the chair. As an extra precaution, she had them bind his legs, as well, before she administered the sedative. As soon as he was out, she made the incision on his neck, temporarily short circuited his chip, and tugged it free. Her guard waited with a container of alcohol, and Clarke dropped the chip in it before carefully stitching Jaha's wound.

"Get me when he wakes up."

The people under watch at Farm Station had been agitated all morning. Shortly after noon, they reached critical mass and marched out of Farm Station, headed toward Arkadia.

"Damn it," Raven muttered as the circuitry hit another dead end. Clarke gave her three chips to work with and she already destroyed one. It was just a circuit board. A tiny circuit board, but no different than the breadboards she soldered to repair and create electronics they needed since landing. She stretched on the stool, appreciating the quiet in her workshop. Roger and Fay were out testing the limits of the radios. They were nice, and took direction well, but Raven liked to work alone.

She wondered whether Ontari would join her again that night. She could deal with nightly chess games. It gave her mind time to think about other things and she was enjoying teaching the Commander.

Her quiet was gone when Roger and Fay returned to report that the radios reached from one end of Polis to the other. Raven grinned, gave them high fives, and set them to making more of them.

The scouts outside Farm Station trailed the group of Skaikru. Once their destination was clear, a few of them peeled off in different directions to bring warnings. They knew Wanheda was at Arkadia, and that Heda would not be happy if she received the slightest injury.

Clarke heard Jaha's yells as soon as she passed into that section of the Ark. His voice echoed off the metal walls, his words unclear until he saw her.

"What have you done?!" he shrieked.

Clarke just stared at him.

"You've condemned all of us. She was going to take us to the City of Light so she could start over."

"Start over?"

"There weren't enough missiles before. People survived, and they've gone right back to doing what they've always done. We're a blight."
"I've been called worse."

"This isn't a joke or make believe or an illusion. She's going to eliminate us and begin again with the best of us."

"And you in charge."

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. You've ruined everything."

"I'm not the one who launched nuclear missiles. I'm not the one taking people's memories from them."

"You don't understand."

"Explain it, then."

"She wants her source code, so she knows for certain what her creator meant her to do. The missiles were the first step. People take and don't give back. They kill each other for the pettiest of reasons. Those with power refuse to release it. Without people, Earth can be what it was meant to be."

"Earth is nothing without people. We are more important than any computer program. It's faulty if it came to the conclusion that our lives are worthless and if it's faulty, it has to go."

"You don't understand," Jaha repeated.

"I understand quite well," Clarke answered. "Enjoy your stay."

One of the Azgeda lieutenants waited outside the door to the holding area. "Wanheda, you must return to Polis. Skaikru is marching this way."

"Stop them. Capture them."

"They will not be captured."

"What do you mean, they won't be captured?"

"They swarm the gona who approach. They know secret ways into here. You must go."

"They want that case. Bring it to me."

"You must go."

"I'm not going anywhere. They'll stop. Bring me the case."

He sent one of the soldiers with him to fetch it and followed Clarke out of the Ark. "Bar the gate," she ordered, and climbed up into the watch area.

A few minutes later, a warrior brought her a case. She waited, watching as more Azgeda fighters came out of the woods. In the distance, she saw a group of people. Eventually, they resolved into a group of Skaikru.

They looked terrible, too thin with ragged clothes, but they all had the same look on their faces. When they were close enough, Clarke held up the case and a pistol. They stopped when they saw her.

"Surrender or I'll destroy her."
They talked among themselves for a minute, then let up a howl and charged the gates. "Disable them," Clarke yelled, and repeated it in Trigedaslang.

Weak and unarmed despite being driven by a force that overcame those deficiencies, they were no match for the more than 100 Azgeda warriors who gathered outside Arkadia's walls. They did their best to follow Clarke's direction, and only six were killed. A dozen were unconscious, and the rest had a variety of injuries that prevented them from moving quickly. Clarke decided not to waste any time. She sent a guard to get her satchel and the jar of alcohol holding the chip she removed from Jaha and climbed down, leaving two warriors to guard the case.

While she waited for them to return, she triaged the Skaikru. She recognized Jasper and two others, but none of the rest. The Azgeda lieutenant shadowed her. She told him what she needed – hot water, bandages, and wood or metal for splints - and asked him to have any nearby healers brought to help.

When she had her satchel, Clarke debated what to do. Knocking them all out would prevent any mass uprising, and they could be carried away to recover. She pulled the first bottle of sedative from her bag along with the first hypodermic needle. They were in short supply, so she sterilized it in alcohol after each injection.

A few minutes later, they were all unconscious. She had them carried into the Ark, and began removing the chips. A healer showed up after the third removal, and Clarke had her tend to other injuries after the chip was out.

Most of them were moved to makeshift beds in the Medbay. The most seriously injured got beds while the others lay on furs spread on the floor. When she finished, Clarke counted heads to make sure she hadn't missed anyone. The bottle of chips was stuffed full, the tendrils snarled.

Clarke stretched and washed her hands. She looked at her clothes and sighed, and went to change before going back to the holding area to check on Jaha again.

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari sat in with Fair again that evening but had trouble concentrating. Clarke's absence gnawed at her, and she heard Lexa's ongoing dissatisfaction. When she closed her eyes, she saw Lexa's angry pacing. Ontari struggled to maintain her own calm.

She knew from the looks that Titus gave her that he was unhappy with her lack of attentiveness to his lessons, but she didn't care at the moment. Every time he looked at her, Lexa growled. The session finally ended, and she and Fair walked down the stairs together, but there was no talking this time.
Chapter 58

Clarke ignored Jaha’s ongoing complaints. “How many of you were there?” she asked while checking his incision.

He didn’t answer. “You don’t understand what you’ve done.”

“I understand completely. I know exactly how many deaths I’m responsible for. You, on the other hand, have yet to acknowledge that you sent a hundred children, including your own son, down here to die, or that you suffocated 300 more, or the mess you’ve made by being the pawn of an insane computer program.”

“You don’t understand,” Jaha insisted.

Clarke huffed and rolled her eyes. She left the holding cell, and on the way out told the guards, “You can untie him, but keep an eye on him. He’s going back to Polis with me.”

In the yard outside the Ark, Clarke stopped the first soldier she saw. “I need to know how many Skaikru you stopped on the way to Farm Station.” She stood and waited for an answer.

It took almost an hour before the ranking Azgeda warrior came to her. He had a sheaf of papers in his hand, and she took him to the Medbay to do a head count. Only three Skaikru weren’t there. He assured her they would be found.

Clarke had the case containing A.L.I.E. brought to her room. She sat at the desk and wrote out messages for Ontari, Roan, Raven, and Murphy. Clarke handed the messages to the guard outside her door, and settled at the desk with her sketchbook. She wrote down the things Jaha said and described the attempted attack by A.L.I.E.’s acolytes before getting down to the questions that needed immediate answers.

If she destroyed the case, would that destroy A.L.I.E.? What effect would that have on the City of Light? What effect would it have on anyone who still carried a chip? Could A.L.I.E. in a box be near Ontari and Titus? What, if anything, could Raven learn from the box?

Clarke sighed. As always, she had more questions than answers. Jaha had some of them, but he wasn’t helping. She turned to the front of her notebook, where she jotted notes from Roan’s letter describing the contents of the vials in her pouch. One of them was a truth serum. Giving it to Jaha was an option. Maybe the Azgeda healer could tell her more about it.

Clarke took her satchel along so she could make certain which vial to use. She found the healer taking a break in what had been her mother’s office. Clarke thanked her for her help before starting the conversation she came to have.

The healer assured her that the serum had no long term effects. It made the person who ingested it drowsy and lowered their resistance, making them more likely to answer questions truthfully. Since the healer didn’t know what was in the Skaikru sedative, she recommended that Clarke wait at least a day before administering it.

That evening, Clarke’s guards moved her to a tent. With three Skaikru still at large and knowledgeable about how to sneak around the structure, they didn’t want her inside. She didn’t mind; the fresher air was a relief after hours of the Ark’s air which carried the scent of death.

When she retired, her tent was ringed with Azgeda warriors.
Ontari was distracted during that evening’s chess game. When Raven asked why, Ontari looked at her.

“Right,” Raven said. “Clarke’s not here.”

“Sha,” Ontari sighed.

“Are you two hooking up?”

“Hooking up?”

“Sex. Are you having sex or a relationship or what?”

“No. Klark still grieves and Heda Leksa swears they will be reunited soon.”

“No offense, but that sounds insane. Wait, Clarke and Lexa?”

“Sha.”

“She definitely did not tell me everything.”

“Klark holds many secrets.”

“That’s one way to put it.” Raven drummed her fingers on the table for a few seconds, then brightened. “Good news, Commander, two radios are ready. I’m going to send Roger and Fay out of the city tomorrow morning to test how far they can transmit. The preliminary tests had good reception from one side of the city to the other.”

“Good,” Ontari agreed. “Radios will be helpful, even if they can only be used in the city.”

“I’ll get better range on them, but Clarke wants me to work on the chips now.”

Ontari nodded.

After another minute of silence, Raven said, “I’m gonna read in my room.”

“Good night, Ontari answered. She remained at the table, fighting the urge to get a horse and ride to Arkadia.

A messenger entered and handed her a folded and sealed sheet of paper. Ontari opened it, unsure what to expect, and was happy to see it was from Clarke. Her writing was clear and Ontari read the message without difficulty. Clarke was well, and foresaw no problems, and would return as soon as she could.

Ontari took the paper to Clarke’s bed, and held it while she fell asleep.

In the morning, Clarke sent a note to TonDC asking them to keep an eye out for the missing Skaikru. If they caught them, they should be brought to Arkadia if troops remained there, or to Polis. She ate quickly and went to the Medbay. Nearly all of the Skaikru could travel. A few needed to ride in a cart, but the rest could walk. Except for Jaha, they would be free in Polis until Ontari decided what to do. There were still fewer than a hundred of them, but Clarke would make an argument for them to stay together. She decided they should leave as soon as arrangements could be made, and spent the
morning working out the logistics with the Azgeda warrior in charge.

Clarke left after lunch with her guards and Thelonious Jaha, who rode bound and gagged in front of one of them. They made good time before they had to stop for the night. Clarke let Jaha walk around with her while the guards made camp. She made it clear that he wouldn’t like what happen if he tried to run away or if he yelled to attract attention.

This time, he tried a different approach with her. “I’m sorry, Clarke.”

She shrugged.

“I know you had to do a lot of things you wish you didn’t. That’s part of what it is to be a leader.”

“Doesn’t make it right,” she said.

“No, it doesn’t. That’s why I was trying to fix everything.”

“Killing everyone doesn’t fix anything. If you aren’t going to tell me about A.L.I.E., don’t talk.”

“The City of Light,” Jaha began.

Clarke turned her head to look at the guard trailing her. “Gag him. Watch him,” she instructed, and walked away.

In her tent, Clarke wrote brief messages to Ontari and Raven. She thought for a few moments and wrote a single message to her mother and Marcus reporting that she had Jaha and nearly all of his acolytes unchipped and on their way to Polis. Her final message was to Miller warning him about the oncoming influx of people. Clarke didn’t want them staying in a group together, and instructed Miller to rearrange the quarters so that the two groups mixed.

A guard brought her supper. Clarke thanked him, ate her food, and got into her furs. She hoped the messenger would bring her some answers in the morning.

100 – 100 – 100

“Holy shit,” Raven said softly after reading Clarke’s note. The messenger waited, at her request, and she took a few minutes to dash off an answer. It was an acknowledgment of Clarke’s message and a promise to sit and think about what she knew. She handed it to the messenger, and he left her.

While she and Ontari played chess that evening, Raven let her mind sort through everything she learned about A.L.I.E. She wasn’t certain whether destroying the case would destroy the A.I. It could contain a copy of the software; it was what Raven would do. There were never too many backups. She tried to recall anything she heard about the physical location of the City of Light and came up blank.

Her distraction kept the game close and Ontari nearly won. Raven went over the game with Ontari, showing where she weakened herself and missed opportunities for successful attacks. After, they lingered at the table, Raven still rummaging through her memories. She glanced at Ontari.

“Something bothering you, Commander?”

“Is it safe for Clarke to return?”

“Is there a reason she wouldn’t be safe here?”

“Polis is safe. What she brings may not be.”
“I’m pretty sure you’re immune to any effort A.L.I.E. would make to overtake you. As long as you don’t use one of the other chips. I don’t think that would work. I think yours would recognize it as an invader and neutralize it.”

“Is it safe to have it here?”

“Yeah, as long as she doesn’t control anyone, which she doesn’t anymore.”

“Are you sure?”

“95 percent on all counts.”

Ontari nodded. She looked through the messages on the table again, hoping one from Clarke would have appeared. A messenger entered and handed her a message. Ontari was thrilled to hear from Clarke, and happier still at the news that she was on her way back to Polis.
Clarke's first message from Arkadia put Murphy on edge. He knew how dangerous Jaha could be. The time away from him gave Murphy perspective to see how Jaha manipulated him from the start.

Murphy liked Azgeda. He liked learning to fight, how to protect himself and deal some damage. It made him feel strong. No one coddled him because he was Roan's charge. He even found some friends. They taught him things outside the training ring, how to hunt and fish, how to build a fire and put it out, how to keep warm in Azgeda's unforgiving cold. They explained their scarification and their scars. They talked about how glad they were that Roan returned to lead them. Nia's mother was fair and just, and in a generation, Nia nearly destroyed Azgeda. Roan was fixing things. Everyone knew it would take time, but as long as they saw progress, they were satisfied.

One of the things Murphy liked most about the Ice Nation and its people is that there was nothing other than what you saw or were told. Nothing was sugarcoated. When he made a mistake in the training ring, it was pointed out and he was taught how to correct it. When he made it again, his trainers exploited it until he fixed it himself. He learned quickly not to whine or complain as it drew nothing but contempt.

When Murphy got Clarke's second message, he went to his quarters and stuffed what he would need into his pack and went to see Roan. He waited patiently until Roan finished his meeting, and Murphy was allowed in within a minute of Roan being told he waited to speak with him.

"Murphy, why are you here?"

Murphy handed Roan Clarke's note. He read it quickly and handed it back. "You are returning to Polis."

"Sha, Haihefa."

"Your orders are the same. If Clarke is injured, you will pay."

"Got it."

"Let me know what's happening there. Clarke's missives are maddeningly short on detail. Remind her that she is my ambassador, and we need some trade agreements set up with other clans. I will send a list of what we have available with the next messenger."

"Anything else?"

"Watch your back. Titus lives, and continues to be a danger to you and to Wanheda. I will send some guards with you to ensure you arrive safely. Have you eaten?"

"Not since breakfast."

"Join me, and you may leave after."

"Whatever you want, Haihefa." The mocking tone was gone from Murphy's voice.

"Come."

Murphy followed Roan to another room. Roan stopped at the door and gave orders for guards to prepare to travel with Murphy before they entered the room. It was large, sectioned by screens, but
they stayed in the main area.

Their conversation was easy during the meal. Roan asked about Murphy's training and whether he would return when Clarke was finished with him.

"I'd like to," Murphy said.

"You are welcome here, Murphy kom Skaikru, so long as Wanheda is safe." Roan sighed. "I wish I could go with you, but there is still too much that must be done here."

"I'll tell Clarke you miss her," Murphy said with a small smile.

"Heda, as well."

"She doesn't like me, but I'll tell her when I get a chance."

"Perhaps she will grow to like you as I have."

"I'm not holding my breath for that to happen."

The door opened and a guard reported that everything was ready for Murphy's departure. Roan left the room for a moment and returned with a small pouch of coins. "This should cover your expenses."

"Mochof."

"May we meet again," Roan said, and offered his hand.

Murphy grasped his forearm in return. "May we meet again," he echoed, and headed for the stables.

100 – 100 – 100

Frustrated, Raven left her workshop for the day. She walked to the hospital. She wanted to speak with Abby about her experience with the chips and to ask for those she removed. When she got there, Abby was busy. Nyko was glad to see her, though, and offered to help with her leg. This time, Raven accepted.

She explained everything that happened while he examined her. Nyko had Raven remove her brace, boots, and pants. He moved her leg this way and that while she moved from her back to her side to her front, and he learned all he could, he left her on the table while he fetched something that would help.

The green salve he massaged into her muscles smelled pleasant, and the massage eased some of the pain. While she dressed, he told her to return the next day for another treatment.

"If I can."

"Make time for this, Raven. It will make a difference."

"OK, Nyko. I still need to talk to Abby."

"She will be busy for the rest of the day, but I will give her the message."

"Thanks."

100 – 100 – 100
"I came here to get away from Skaikru," Octavia said angrily.

"They asked for you," Lincoln answered.

"I don't care."

"I think they're the ones Wanheda seeks."

"Oh, that's just dandy," she snarled. "Where are they?"

Lincoln walked with her to the gate. Three Skaikru waited outside. Octavia took one look at them and turned to Lincoln. "They're definitely the ones Clarke wants. Bring them in, truss them up, send them to Polis."

"Octavia, they are your people."

"You my people. Trikru is my people. They're just a bad memory." Octavia turned on her heel and returned to the training ring.

100 – 100 – 100

The rest of Clarke's trip back to Polis was quiet. She stayed away from Jaha and spent her evenings going over the messages that reached her during the day. She composed answers and handed them off to the messenger. Before retiring, she jotted notes in her journal. Questions continued to come to her about the City of Light, the chips in Ontari and Titus, and how things might play out.

She was more than ready to return to Polis, to a comfortable bed and the people who might have answers for her. She wasn't ready to dream of Lexa again, of Lexa protecting her from Quint and Major Byrne's death, the leap that injured Lexa's shoulder, their time in its lair, their escape. Waking to Lexa's assurance of safety for the first time sent more thoughts than she could count or remember spiraling into her brain. It did the same in her dream, and Clarke couldn't look away from Lexa, entranced then and now by her green eyes.

"Soon, Klark," dream Lexa promised, and Clarke woke with a start as she had then.

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari was restless and couldn't sleep. Lexa paced, and that didn't help. Neither of them liked having Clarke so far away. Despite doing anything she could think of to fill her days and tire herself out, Ontari lay awake, looking out the window, holding Clarke's pillow. She knew it was silly and weak. Not weak. He is wrong. Love is not weakness.

Clarke's last message said she would arrive late today, possibly after dark. Ontari wanted nothing more than to ride out and find them and bring Clarke back to Polis. They would move faster together than Clarke would with a group.

At the same time, Ontari knew she couldn't. There was already enough talk about she and Clarke in Polis, not that Ontari cared. Any idiot who thought Wanheda's power greater than Ontari's was welcome to take a crack at her. If anything, they should be impressed that Ontari, as Heda, had Clarke under her control. She chuckled to herself at that. Clarke was under no one's control, although she understood the value of appearances.

Ontari wondered, not for the first time, whether her feelings for Clarke were her own, and wondered again whether it mattered. Lexa would remain in her, even if they found a way to resurrect her. If that happened, would Lexa be quiet like the other hedas?
Ontari sighed again. The sky was clear and the night temperature was cool. Many of those in Polis were breaking out their heavier clothing. To Ontari, used to Azgeda's constant chill, it still felt quite warm. She gave up on sleep and got up.

Ontari went to her suite, bathed, and dressed. She spent an hour redoing her braids. By that time, the sky was beginning to lighten. Ontari pulled the table and chair in her suite closer to the balcony and sat down to go through the accumulated messages.
Chapter 60

Clarke's dream and Lexa's words echoed and kept Clarke from returning the sleep. She rose and dressed, stuffed her sleep clothes in her saddlebag, and picked up it and her satchel. She walked to the picket line where the horses were tied and dropped her gear so she could get her horse's saddle. The guard offered to saddle her horse, but Clarke did it herself.

She fastened the saddlebag, fixed her satchel across her body, and led the horse clear of the others before mounting. All she had to do was follow the road. The others would catch up. She was about to leave when the leader of the Azgeda forces approached.

"Wait for guards," he instructed, and she saw two hurrying behind him.

"Send word if you stop for the night and don't let Jaha get away."

"Of course, Wanheda."

"You've done a good job," she told him. "Finish it the same way and I will make certain to tell Heda."

He nodded, and they waited silently for Clarke's guards to prepare their horses. A few minutes later, they were behind Clarke, waiting for her order to move.

"Travel safely, Wanheda."

"You, too," she said, and tapped her horse's sides with her heels.

Clarke set a quick pace. There was no traffic to impede them. The horses knew they were nearing home and didn't resist the pace Clarke set. She didn't bother trying to talk to the guards. None of them ever answered except to acknowledge an order.

They stopped at mid-morning to water the horses, and one of the guards offered her some fruit and bread. Clarke took it and ate while the horses drank, and they were soon back on the road. The landmarks were familiar to Clarke. She traveled the road between Arkadia and Polis enough times that she knew the route.

They stopped again in the afternoon. By then, Clarke could see the outline of Polis in the distance. The horses drank and grazed while Clarke and her guards ate. She washed her hands, face, and neck in the cool water of the stream before they mounted to make the last push.

Shortly before supper time, Clarke and her guards entered the gates. They passed through without being searched. Clarke left her horse at the stable, got her saddlebags, and thanked the groom who would take care of her mare. "Give her an apple," Clarke said.

The groom nodded and smiled. He patted the horse's neck before leading her into the stable.

Clarke started for the tower and detoured toward the market. It was more likely she would catch Raven in her shop, she thought, and was surprised to find it locked up. She headed back toward the tower.

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy traveled as quickly as he could, and reached Polis on the day Clarke was scheduled to
He went to the Azgeda suite and found someone's things in his room. He dropped his pack just inside the door and walked to the market to get a meal and kill time. When he returned to the tower, he went to Skaikru's floor. He found Miller, Bryan, Harper, and Monroe working to rearrange the roommates as Clarke asked. Murphy sat down and gave them a hand. When they looked at him, he reminded them, "I work for Clarke, too."

After that, they accepted his help, and accepted him. It was a strange feeling for Murphy. On the Ark and after they landed, he never felt welcome anywhere. Now, he could have a place in Polis and had a place in Azgeda, and willingly followed Clarke Griffin, Sky Princess, Wanheda.

They talked for a while after they finished, and returned to the Azgeda suite later.

Clarke arrived not long after, and smiled when she saw him. "Wasn't expecting you so soon."

He got up and took the case holding A.L.I.E. from her. "I wouldn't miss this for anything. Where's Jaha?"

"Still on the way here, but he'll be put in a cell."

"What're you going to do to him?"

"I don't know yet. I need to talk to Ontari and Skaikru. I think his punishment should be Skaikru's choice."

"As long as I get my hit, I don't care what happens to him."

"Good. Can you keep an eye on the case while I get cleaned up?"

"Yeah. Who's using my room?"

"Raven. Do you want to stay here or with Skaikru?"

"My orders from His Majesty still stand. You're my responsibility."

"OK, we'll figure something out."

Ontari entered the room but stopped when she saw Murphy. "Skaiskat."

"Commander," he answered, and inclined his head.

"Leave us."

Murphy looked at Clarke. She looked atOntari, saw a hint of green in her eyes, and sighed. "Murphy, can you give us some time?"

"Yeah, no problem. I'll go eat with Skaikru."

"Thanks. I'll make sure the sleeping arrangements are squared away when you get back."

"My stuff's in my room, so put it wherever I'll be."

"Thanks, Murphy."

He nodded at her, and again at Ontari, and left.

"What did you find?" Ontari asked.
"A.L.I.E.,” Clarke answered and pointed at the case. "Or some version of her. Raven should be able to tell us more."

"I do not want the Skaiskat near you."

"He has orders from Roan, too, Ontari."

"I will protect you."

Clarke sighed. "I want Raven to stay, and Murphy's staying, too. Can we get another bed in the other room or should I move to Roan's room temporarily?"

"You will move to Haihefa's room."

"OK. Can you start moving things while I get cleaned up? I smell like horse sweat."

"Sha."

"Mochof." Clarke started for her room, stopped and turned back to face Ontari, who approached her. She could still see the green tinge in her brown eyes. "I'm fine. I wasn't threatened. There was no chance for me to be injured."

"We missed you."

"I'm glad to be home."

Ontari smiled, but it was Lexa who said, "You missed the bath."

Clarke laughed on the way to her room. She grabbed some comfortable clothes and went to the bathroom. Clarke was thrilled to fill the tub with hot water. It eased her sore muscles, and she soaked for several minutes before beginning to clean herself.

When she finished bathing, she went to find Ontari. She was moving an armful of clothing into Roan's room. "Can I help?"

"This is the last of it," Ontari answered. "Dinner will be here soon."

"Mochof. I'll put Murphy's bag in his room."

"It is still your room, Clarke."

"It's his for now," she answered on her way out the door.

Clarke put Murphy's pack on the foot of the bed and went out to the common room. The case holding the A.I. sat discreetly in a corner, out of the way until they needed it. Ontari joined Clarke. "You arrived sooner than expected."

"The guards are bringing Jaha and the rest. Jaha should be here tomorrow, the others a day or two after."

"What do you wish to do with Jaha?"

"I know the final decision is yours, but I think Skaikru should have a say. He might talk honestly to my mom, especially if he thinks it will save his sorry skin."

"You do not wish him to live?"
"No. He made a lot of mistakes that cost hundreds of people their lives because he believed he was the only one who should decide who lived. He's never answered for any of the things he did. But the final decision shouldn't be mine alone."

"Send your mother to speak to him."

"I need to talk to her first, so she knows what to ask."

Ontari nodded. "And the others?"

"Their chips were removed and they'll move in to Skaikru's floor. When you decide what's going to happen to us, we'll deal with it."

"I still do not know what to do. You lack the skills to survive on your own, but you have much information that can help all of us."

"You could talk to them. I'm sure some of them have ideas about what they'd like to do."
Chapter 61

Raven paced in front of the hospital waiting for Abby to exit. She had somehow missed her the evening before and this morning, and wasn't taking the chance that it would happen again. When she came outside, Raven was on her in a heartbeat.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I have questions. I hope you have answers. Or ideas. Or the tiniest clue."

"About the chips?"

"Yes."

"All I know is that you can temporarily short them out with the direct application of electricity."

"Stun stick?"

"Yes. When you get a chance, I need a way to recharge them. They're great defibrillators."

"I'll add it to the list. What have you heard from Clarke?"

"She should be back any time."

"I wish she'd hurry."

"You know Clarke only moves at her own speed, much like you. Your gait is better."

"Nyko's been rubbing something into my back and leg."

"Do you feel better?"

"Yeah. Think, Doc. Anything you know about the chips will help."

"They maintained the filament network after they were removed. Whatever triggered them to deploy wasn't disturbed by the electrical interruption."

"Where are they?"

"In my room."

"I need to see them."

"You can see them now."

"Thanks."

"What are you working on?"

"The chips. I'm missing something about them. Roger and Fay are working on radios. I have a deal with the merchants in the market that I get first crack at any tech that comes their way. If I get enough solar panels, we can start figuring out a way to move all your machines here. That'll make the Commander happy, but that's a longer term project. Radios and chips."

"What does Clarke want with the chips?"
"I'm not sure. She asked whether I could duplicate the Commander's and that guy's."

"Why?"

"She didn't say. I'm not sure it's possible, but I'm gonna try. We owe Clarke. I owe Clarke. She's keeping us alive."

"She is," Abby answered with a sigh. "It's not something I ever wanted for her."

"I don't think Clarke would have chosen it either, but she's good at it."

Abby nodded, and the rest of their walk to the Tower was quiet. In her rooms, Abby opened a cabinet to display the chips. Raven pulled two bottles from the cabinet. "Thanks."

"Let me know what you find out."

"Will do," Raven said, and left as quickly as she could.

She took the lift down and walked to Clarke's suite where she found Clarke and Ontari talking at the table. She put the jars down on the table. "You're back, good," she said to Clarke, who got up to greet her. They shared a hug, and as they sat down, Ontari asked, "What is that?"

"Chips Clarke pulled out of Skaikru."

"The rest of them should be here soon," Clarke told them.

"I can't figure out why they won't retract. Do you remember anything that will help?"

Clarke shook her head, then heard Lexa. *Seek higher things. We are one.* She frowned and looked at Ontari. "Did you hear that?"

Ontari nodded. "Titus said something when he put the Flame in me, but it was not that."

"I don't remember if he said anything when he took it from Lexa. Maybe Murphy will remember."

"He's not here."

"He came when I told him about Jaha. He'll be here later. Since you're in his room, I gave him mine and took Roan's for the time being."

"I can stay somewhere else as long as I can visit your bathroom."

Clarke laughed, but Ontari was serious when she said, "You will stay with Clarke. It is easier to keep you safe at night if you are here."

They both looked at Ontari. "Something we should know?" Raven asked.

"No one can do what you do," Ontari explained.

Raven smiled at the recognition, then smirked at Ontari. "Don't think I'll go easy on you tonight."

"We will see."

"To be clear, I'm playing you, not Lexa."

"We will see," Ontari smirked back.
Their dinner arrived, and Clarke talked about her trip while they ate. When they finished, Ontari excused herself and said she would return shortly. "Mind if I look at A.L.I.E.?" Raven asked.

Clarke shook her head and pointed at the case. Raven got up and brought it back to the table. "Thought it would be heavier," she said. She sat it upright and looked at both sides, determined which was the top, and laid it down.

She opened it and looked down into the case. A moment later, she leaned over it so she could take a closer look. "Not bad."

Light pulsed out of it and Clarke jumped up and slammed the lid shut. "Raven!" she said urgently. Whoever looked back, it wasn't Raven. It wasn't Raven who answered, either. "Clarke Griffin."

"Leave her alone. Go back to wherever you were, and leave her alone."

"You took Raven from me."

"You took her from me first."

The door opened and both women looked at it. Murphy looked from one to the other. "Damn it," he said.

"John Murphy, why are you here?"

"Keeping an eye on you, bitch. You have about three seconds to get back in the box before I fuck it up. One."

"You would not destroy the box and risk Raven."

"Two."

Clarke pulled her dagger free. Murphy got his out and walked to the table. He threw the box open and raised his hand. Clarke did the same.

"Whoa," Raven said, and dropped to the ground. "Is this the line for the Matterhorn?"

Murphy closed the case and snapped the latches shut while Clarke kneeled beside Raven. None of them looked when Ontari came in.

"Talk to me, Raven."

"I forgot what a rush that is."

"Why could she take you over like that?"

"Don't know. Maybe because she did before. Who knows what the hell that low end tech does to your brain."

"Ontari, send a guard to get my mom. Tell her to bring her kit."

"Sha, Klark."

"Ready to sit up?" Clarke asked Raven.

"In a minute. Hey, Murphy, long time, no see."
"Yeah. Had things to do."

"I heard. Sorry about your room."

"It's OK. I can sleep on the floor."

"I moved to Roan's room so you can have mine."

"Thanks, Clarke."

"OK, let's try now," Raven said.

Clarke and Murphy each put an arm around her and helped Raven to her feet. They quickly moved her to a chair. Murphy took the case and moved it to his room. He wished he'd thrown it in the water like he threatened. He gave the case an annoyed kick before returning to the main room.
Chapter 62

Abby was there, checking Raven for aftereffects while Clarke and Ontari stayed out of the way. Abby finished. "Your vitals are fine. Your heart rate's a little high, but everything else is normal. Does somebody want to tell me why you had me run down here?"

"A.L.I.E. attacked Raven," Clarke said.

"How can an A.I. attack someone?"

"She took over Raven's mind and body," Murphy said. "Raven got too close and A.L.I.E.'s used her body before."

"Stay away from it, Raven," Abby said sternly.

"As much as I can. But we need things."

"We can get them without risking you," Ontari said.

"Where is this A.I.?" Abby asked.

"I moved it away from Raven," Murphy said.

"John, I thought you went to Azgeda."

"I did, and now I'm back. Clarke's going to need help."

"She has all of us."

"But I'm the only one who's been to the City of Light."

"I was there," Raven said indignantly.

"You were in the metaphysical place. I've been to the place it's generated."

"What's it like?"

"I didn't see most of it. It's big. I'll tell you all about it later."

"If you don't need me, I'm going back to my room," Abby said.

"Good night, Mom. Thanks." Clarke hugged Abby.

"You're welcome, Clarke. I love you." Abby hugged her back.

"Love you, too." Clarke gave her a squeeze and let her go. After she left, they all sat at the table.

"I think this will help," Ontari said, and laid the book she removed from the altar on the table. Clarke looked at it for a moment, and realized what it was before Lexa could tell her. "May I see it?"

Ontari pushed it toward her. Clarke opened it. The first date was a few weeks before the world ended and described efforts to build an improved artificial intelligence. Clarke didn't understand all the science, but she read enough to confirm her initial belief. "This is the journal of the first heda." She closed it and showed the cover to Raven and Murphy.
"That's from a space suit," Raven said.

"It was worn by Beka Pramheda," Ontari confirmed. "Those are her words."

"Holy shit," Murphy said softly.

"I need a day or two to read it, and we'll go from there," Clarke said.

"I'm going to bed," Raven said. "Being possessed takes a lot out of you."

"Yell if you need us," Clarke said.

"Murphy, give me a hand," Raven said.

He did without making any comments, and Clarke stared at their backs for a moment before looking at the journal again. "Titus will lose his mind when he realizes this is gone. He'll come for me right away," Clarke said. She left the room for a minute and returned with her satchel. She sat beside Ontari and got out her sketchbook.

"Look," she said, and opened it to the drawing of the first Natblida. "I showed this to him and it made him really mad. He accused me of sneaking around."

"What did he do?" Ontari demanded.

"What did who do?" Murphy asked as he rejoined them at the table.

"He yelled. That's all," Clarke said. *Speak true, Klark.*

"It is on the wall in the room this book came from," Ontari confirmed. *Titus does not just yell.*

"I never saw it before I drew it. Murphy described it a while ago."

"Me and the Commanders are the only ones at the table who actually saw it," Murphy pointed.

"Maybe Lexa's trying to tell you something."

"Heda Leksa is telling me you are not being honest about Titus' reaction."

"All he did was yell," Clarke repeated. "I called for the guards when he tried to take my sketchbook, and he backed off."

"Did the guards respond?"

"Instantly. He wasn't trying to hurt me. He just didn't want me to have the drawing."

"We can do better than the drawing," Ontari said, and stood up. "Come, Klark, Skaiskat. We will go to its location. You continue to do well, Ontari. Klark does need to see it. Raven may need to go there, too, but not tonight."

The took the lift down. Murphy fidgeted a little, and Clarke asked him, "You OK?"

"Yeah, just bad memories."

"You didn't have to come."

"You should have told the Commander that before we got on the lift. I'll be fine, Clarke."

"Thanks for coming."
"I need a few minutes alone with you when you get a chance. I have some messages from Roan."

"Before we go to bed," Clarke promised. She turned her head and saw Ontari watching them. She smiled at Ontari, and Ontari smiled back.

She still didn't like Murphy, but his time in Azgeda had been good for him. So far, he was more respectful of both her and Clarke. If it continued, Ontari decided she would return his name. She knew he would notice when it happened. For now, Ontari wished she could hear their conversation, which was drowned in the noise of the lift.

It finally reached the lowest floor, and Ontari led them to the Fleimkepa's chapel. She checked that it was empty before waving them in.

Murphy stayed on the landing. He'd seen all of it he wanted to see. Ontari followed Clarke around. Clarke took a quick walk around before turning her attention to the wall.

_This is the story of our people, Klark. Beka Pramheda made the first Natblida from the survivors she found. They dragged her craft here to protect it. The altar, the murals, they were made after her death. The first Fleimkepa, Beka Pramheda's Seken, made all of this after he transferred the Fleim to its new home. Beka chose her successor, and he chose his._

_When he died, there was no one trained to take his place. That is when the Fleimkepa consolidated his power. That is when he decided that he would train the next heda. That is when he demanded that all natblida were to come here after their fifth birthdays. He was senile, angry, and alone when he decreed that the Natblida would fight each other for the privilege of being heda. Since then, it is the way things have been done._

"That's not right."

"It is why Roan told me not to kill the others," Ontari said. "There are too few of us to waste the blood."

_And the knowledge. We will have a generation of warriors who are educated and trained to lead. They will see other ways to settle our squabbles. If they are trained to respect peace as much as power, they will change the world._

"Like you were trying to do."

"Sha," Ontari answered in conjunction with Lexa.

"Raven needs to see the pod. There might be something there that will help her."

"I will bring her soon."

"Titus is going to throw a fit and fall into it."

"Titus is my subject, and he will do as I command," Ontari said. "He continues to believe himself irreplaceable, but he is not. No one is." Except kept that to herself while she watched Clarke study the murals.

Clarke committed every detail of the murals to memory and took a slow walk around the chamber before she was ready to leave. They took the lift to Clarke's floor. She checked on Raven, who was asleep, before returning to the table.
"I need a few minutes with Murphy," she told Ontari. "Roan sent messages that I need to hear."

Ontari nodded and left them. Murphy waited for the door to close. "Roan's a little annoyed with you. He said to remind you that you are Azgeda's ambassador and he expects you to negotiate some trade agreements." Murphy pulled the instructions from a pocket and handed the paper to Clarke.

"He also said to tell you he misses you and that your reports are, and I quote 'maddeningly short on details.' So you need to step it up."

"I miss him, too," Clarke answered with a smile. "It's been quiet here. That's why the reports have been so dull. But I'll make the rounds of ambassadors tomorrow. I'd appreciate it if you would keep that thing in your room. I don't want Raven or Ontari close to it."

"No problem."

"We done?"

"Yeah. I'll get the Commander. I have a message for her, too."

Ontari opened the door as soon as Murphy knocked. He didn't immediately step aside, so she waited a second.

"Haihefa Roan sent a message for you, Heda."

"It is?"

"He misses you and would be here if he could. He is pleased with your actions."

"Mochof."

"Pro, Heda." Murphy lowered his head and stepped aside. Ontari strode down the hallway, and Murphy followed her.

Clarke was reading Becca Pramheda's journal. She didn't acknowledge either of them. Murphy went to bed. Ontari followed soon after. Clarke continued to read. The science parts were interesting, but her personal thoughts were more so. When she reached the end of Becca's time in the Polaris space station, Clarke shut the book and took it with her to her new room. She fell into bed, and quickly into sleep.

100 – 100 – 100

At the breakfast table, Raven looked exhausted and a little ill.

"You all right?" Clarke asked.

"I didn't sleep well," Raven said. "And my leg hurts more than usual."

"Maybe you should let Mom check you again."

"I'll see Nyko. I need to get another look at that box again, too."

"That's not going to happen," Murphy said. "Not unless you have some way to protect yourself from
"I need to talk to Mom and Marcus anyway," Clarke added.

Raven looked to Ontari for help, but didn't find it. "We cannot risk you. You will allow Clarke's nomon to examine you, and you will not touch the box again."

"Damn."

Clarke went to the door to ask that her mother and Marcus be brought to join them for breakfast. When she returned, she said to Ontari, "I think Raven should read the first Commander's journal when I finish. There are things in there that she'll understand, and they might help us."

"Really?" Raven asked.

"Sha, when Clarke finishes, you will read it, and then I will take it back."

"You and Fair should read it together. I can help if you want."

"Sha, Klark. That way Titus cannot twist her words."

Breakfast arrived, and Ontari sent them to get enough for Marcus and Abby, who arrived a few minutes later.

"Not that I don't like seeing you, Clarke, but you could give me some warning," Abby said as Marcus pulled out her chair.

"Some things came up overnight."

"Raven, are you feeling well?"

"I'm just tired and sore."

"I'll examine you after we eat."

"I'm going to see Nyko," Raven protested, scowled at the looks she received in return. "Fine, you can check me out and then I'll see Nyko."

More food arrived, and the table was quiet while they ate. Murphy finished first, then Ontari, Raven, and Clarke. Clarke waited for the older couple to finish their meal before she began talking.

"Jaha's in a cell," she told them. "He won't talk to me. I need you to talk to him. We need to know everything he knows about A.L.I.E. and the City of Light. I hope he'll talk to one or both of you."

"What happens if he won't?" Marcus asked.

"I'll drug him to get the answers."

"And when he's told you all he knows?" Abby asked.

"I don't know. His crimes are against Skaikru."

"I ask that you give him over to Skaikru for justice and accept the punishment we deem acceptable."

"What crimes, Clarke? What punishment?" Abby demanded.

"Let's see, he called Dad a traitor and floated him instead of letting him tell everyone the truth so they
could work together to find a solution. He put me in jail, and dumped me on Earth with other unprepared kids, some of whom were actual criminals, but were mostly doing what they had to to survive. He killed how many up there to 'save' the Ark? And how many deaths is he responsible for down here? He lied and manipulated vulnerable people to do the will of a fucking machine whose endgame is the complete eradication of the human race. Those crimes. And the punishment,” Clarke shrugged. "On the Ark, he would have been floated for one death."

"That's not the same," Abby protested.

"How is it not the same?" Murphy asked her. "Explain it to me. Because he – you – took back the promise he made to us. We were supposed to be pardoned, but you kept treating us like criminals, even after Clarke and the others repeatedly saved your asses."

"It's not the same," Abby repeated stubbornly.

"Fine, it's not the same," Clarke answered sarcastically. "But his punishment will be whatever the majority of Skaikru decides. If you want to defend him, it's on you."

"Skaikru will have its justice," Ontari said.

"That's not your decision to make," Abby protested.

Ontari looked at her, and Abby saw her as Commander. "It is my decision. If I choose to kill him now, it is my decision. Klark is Skaikheda, and her decision stands. She may permit you to challenge her, but I will not allow it."

Abby nodded and bit her lip to keep in what she wanted to say.

"Will you talk to him or not?" Clarke asked.

"No," Abby said.

"Yes," Marcus answered.

Abby turned in her seat. "What are you thinking?"

"I want to know what made him think a machine knows better than a person."

Murphy laughed. "He's crazy. That's the long answer and the short answer and the best answer you'll get."

"I'll talk to him, Clarke."

"Thank you, Marcus. Raven, go with Mom."

Raven began to protest, and Ontari ordered, "Go. When you finish there, see Nyko and return here. You will rest today. Your work can wait one day."

Raven and Abby left for the hospital.

"Is there anything specific you want to know, Clarke?"

"How to get to the City of Light, its physical location. What A.L.I.E. was doing there. What she plans."

Marcus nodded. "I can't make any promises."
"I know. I appreciate this. I know it's going to make trouble with you and Mom."

"We disagree on many things. It doesn't mean we don't love each other."

Clarke nodded. "I'll be here all day, so come back when you're finished."

"Of course," Marcus answered, and rose. "Thanks for breakfast, Commander. Good to see you again, John."

Both of them nodded at him and he left.

"Will your mother cause problems?" Ontari asked Clarke.

Murphy laughed. "It's what she lives for."

"Not quite," Clarke replied, rolling her eyes. "Everyone will have the opportunity to speak before a decision is made. The only real choice is his death. In exile, he can make his way back to the City of Light, we can't take that chance."

"They are your kru. It is your choice."

"Mochof, Heda."

Ontari looked across the table and made a decision. "Skaiskat, you are with me today."

"I am at your command, Heda."

"Don't be a jerk, Murphy."

"I'm serious, Clarke," he protested.

"We'll see."

"Klark, you will join me for supper."

Clarke nodded.

"Let's go," Ontari said to Murphy, and he followed her out the door.
"I'm fine," Raven insisted again to both Abby and Nyko.

"What, exactly, happened, Raven?" Abby asked.

"I opened the case to see what's in there, and next thing I knew, I wasn't in control of my body anymore. A.L.I.E. took over. She recognized Clarke and Murphy. I think the only reason she left was because they threatened to destroy the case."

"How can that happen?"

"Guess you missed a piece of the chip," Raven answered with a shrug. "It the only thing I can think of."

"I wish I could get a brain scan just to be safe."

"I don't think the Commander's going to let me leave Polis anytime soon."

"I don't know what to do to help you, Raven. I'll check on you this evening," Abby looked at Nyko. "The Commander said that Raven is to rest today."

"She will rest," Nyko promised Abby.

"I have things to do," Raven complained.

"They will be there tomorrow," Nyko told her, and pointed at the table. The massage was longer and more extensive than usual, and Raven fell asleep during it. When he finished, Nyko covered her and had one of Raven's guards stay in the room to make sure she remained safe.

100 – 100 – 100

"Thelonius."

He stood and walked to the bars of his cell. "Marcus, it's good to see you."

"How are you?"

"I've been better." His hand went to the back of his neck where the stitches were. "Clarke took her from me."

"Took who?"

"A.L.I.E."

"That is?"

"That is a long story, my friend."

"I have time."

"You know I couldn't come to Earth with the rest of you."

"We thought you died in what remained of the Ark."
"Not quite. But I landed in what the people here call, with good reason, the Dead Zone. There's not much there, some nomads, a lot of sand, the path to the City of Light."

"How did you hear about the City of Light?"

"The nomads who saved me told me about it before they traded me for a horse. We met up in the cell not long after that."

"What, exactly, is the City of Light?"

"It's paradise. There's no pain, no worry, no loss, no grief."

"Is it a real place?"

"Of course it's real. I know you think I'm crazy."

"I'm trying to understand."

"There's a huge solar array that's one part of the City of Light, but you can only truly reach it with A.L.I.E.'s help."

"Who is A.L.I.E.?"

"She. She's our savior. She's going to save the planet and us."

"You know she launched the nuclear weapons that nearly destroyed our species."

"Because we are a blight. We take and use and destroy and never fix or replace. Everything is about us."

"So she wants to remake the world in her image."

"She wants to make it better and keep us safe. If we are in the City of Light, it doesn't matter what happens out here."

"How did you find the City of Light, Thelonious?"

"I had faith, Marcus."

"What happened to the others who left with you?"

"They didn't have faith."

"What about John Murphy?"

Jaha smiled grimly. "He never truly believed. He wouldn't commune with us. He threatened A.L.I.E. Otan wanted Emori to stay with him, but John wanted to leave with her. He got hold of A.L.I.E. and threatened to drop her into the water, so we let him go." Jaha sighed. "Otan was killed at the gates of Arkadia, but I frequently saw him in the City of Light."

"So even if you die, some version of you will survive there."

"Exactly. It's beautiful, Marcus," Jaha said wistfully. "I miss it so much."

"Would A.L.I.E. have died if John dropped the case into the water?"

"She wouldn't die, but it would take time to revive her, and her memories would stop at the moment
she was transferred to the case."

"So there's no backup?"

"No."

"Why would you follow her, Thelonious?"

"Do you remember the first time you fell in love, Marcus?"

"Of course."

"Imagine feeling like that all the time."

"You can't feel one way all the time. Change is the human condition. We adapt. We evolve."

"But you can. You can always be joyful. You can always have a sense of wonder at everything around you. You can always be in love for the first time."

"I can't imagine surrendering this life, as hard as it is, for something so simplistic."

"That's because you don't have faith, Marcus."

"Perhaps."

"Whatever happens, happens. I have been to the City of Light. I will return to the City of Light, and I will always be there."

"Is there anything else you can tell me?"

Jaha put his hand through the bars. When he opened his fist, a chip sat in his palm. "It's not too late to join us."

Marcus picked it up and put it in his shirt pocket. "I'll think about it. Is there anything you need?"

"She provides everything I need."

"Goodbye, Thelonious."

"It doesn't have to be, Marcus."

Marcus paused and turned around. "Could you find your way there again? To the solar array?"

"I don't know. It's north of here. The path is treacherous by land and slightly less so by sea."

"Thank you."

"Thank me by joining me in the City of Light."

Marcus turned his back and walked away.
"Why are you really here, Skaiskat?" Ontari asked as they made their way down the stairs.

"I came for Clarke. She'll need help."

"I will give Clarke what she needs."

"With all due respect, Heda, you can't. I've been to the City of Light, and I can help Clarke reach it. You can't leave your duties for weeks or months."

"What have you been doing in Azgeda?"

"Learning."

Ontari headed walked them into the garden behind the tower and demanded that her guards give her their swords. She tossed one to Murphy. "Show me."

For an hour, Ontari challenged him. When she knocked him down, he got up quickly and resumed a defensive position. They didn't talk during this exercise, and Murphy was happy when it ended.

"Not bad for a beginner," was Ontari's assessment.

"Mochof, Heda."

"You cannot protect Clarke."

"Not alone, no. But I'll do whatever is necessary to keep her safe."

"Will you give your life?"

"If I must. I'd rather not, but if I'm in a position where it's me or Clarke, she'll be the one to survive."

"Swear it."

"I vow to protect Clarke Griffin with my life."

"You will continue to train while you are here. When Klark leaves, you will go with her. I expect both of you to return."

"Sha, Heda."

"Titus' time is ending. You will tell your story when the time comes. You will speak true."

"I will. I want my ounce of flesh. He owes me."

"He owes many debts, Murphy. It will soon be time to pay."

Ontari tossed the swords back to her guards and continued toward the training area, Murphy at her side.

He trailed Ontari for the rest of the day. A few times, he wanted to ask what she was thinking, usually when she stopped and turned to look at the Tower, but thought better of it. He got his name back and didn't want to lose it.
Clarke had no idea how to go about arranging the trades Roan wanted, and settled on being straightforward. She didn't have time to waste on niceties, and the letters she wrote to the other ambassadors were direct. Azgeda wished to trade, and had this to offer. They sought this resource in return.

It took half the morning to write out the messages to each ambassador, and Clarke spent a minute massaging her hand when she finished. She turned the messages over to a guard and poured some water before returning to Beka Pramheda's journal.

She wasn't far into it when she realized that directions for turning regular people into Nightbloods were in there. So was the schematic for the Flame. Two phrases were throughout, but Clarke hadn't studied Latin beyond what she needed for her medical studies and didn't understand them, but she wrote them down in her sketch book. She also copied the recipe the nightblood serum and the technical drawings of the chips.

She was working on replicating those drawings when Marcus returned and reluctantly put the journal aside to speak with him. "Did he talk to you?"

"Yes, and gave me this." Marcus put the chip on the table between them.

Clarke looked at it and at Marcus. "Do you think he took another one?"

"I think so. He answered my questions, but he was too calm."

"Am I wrong to think he should face Skaikru for justice?"

"No, Clarke, you aren't wrong. Can you accept that they might vote for him to live?"

"I won't like it, but I won't veto their decision. But if he has another chip in him, it has to come out before. I don't want him near anyone as long as he's under her control."

"He said the City of Light, the physical place, is north of here, and that it's safer to go by sea than by land."

"Do you believe him?"

"Yes."

"We'll see what Murphy has to say."

"I forget that he was with Thelonious."

"He's the only one who came back the same as when he left."

"He's not like that now."

"He is," Clarke said, "but he's learning to temper it. When we're finished here, I suspect he'll return to Azgeda."

"Will you allow that?"

"Absolutely. He didn't have to come back to Polis. I didn't ask him to come. I told him what I found, and he chose to help."

"You trust him," Marcus said.
"I do. Clarke laughed. "That's something I never thought I'd say."

"We all change Clarke, for better or worse."

"Sometimes it's hard to tell them apart." Clarke looked at the table for several seconds, then back at Marcus. "Talk to him any time you can. If he says anything interesting, let me know."

"Of course. Is there anything else I can do to help?"

"Not right now, thanks." Clarke stood and held out her hand. "Thank you for everything."

Marcus shook her hand. "No thanks are necessary. I'll see you soon."

Clarke released his hand and Marcus left. She sat down and soon was deep in the journal. Clarke was surprised that Lexa let her read it without commenting, but she was busy observing Murphy, the other witness to her death and someone who had more reason than most to dislike Titus.

Messengers interrupted her throughout the day. They brought lunch, answers and invitations from the other ambassadors, and the unending flow of reports. Clarke let all of the paperwork pile up. She picked at the lunch tray, unwilling to divert her attention.

As she read, Clarke recognized the roots of Grounder culture and how the things Beka said and wrote had been twisted to satisfy the needs of her successors. She made notes while she read, questions and ideas and things she wanted to discuss with others, and didn't stop reading until she was finished.

She didn't realize how late it was until she stood, stretched, and went to the windows to see that night had come. Murphy and Ontari came in and Clarke was put in a seat and told to eat while they watched.

"Where's Raven?"

"Your mother will bring her when Nyko finishes working with her."

"Sorry I missed supper," Clarke said to Ontari.

"Murphy took me to an inn."

"Did you have fun?"

"Yes," Ontari answered with a smile. "It was interesting."

Clarke looked at Murphy, who shrugged before asking, "Did you get up with any of the other ambassadors?"

"I sent them all a letter."

Ontari began going through the papers on the table and stacked the responses from the other ambassadors in front of Clarke's plate. Clarke reached for the top one, and Ontari said, "Not until you finish eating."

Clarke rolled her eyes but picked up her fork. "Murphy," she said between bites, "Marcus talked to Jaha. Jaha told him the City of Light is to the north, and easier to reach by sea than land."

"That's true. When I left, Emori brought us back here on an old boat. It took less than a week. Even if we ride, it will take at least a month. Going over land is treacherous. There's almost no water and
The Dead Zone is full of raiders and outcasts. None of them are friendly."

"What kind of boat?" Ontari asked.

"I don't know. It wasn't very big or fast."

"Did it have a motor or sails?" Clarke asked.

"A motor. For all I know, it's where she left it."

"Can you find your way back there?"

"Maybe," Murphy said slowly.

"What happened to Emori?" Clarke asked.

"Dunno."

"If I show you a map," Ontari said, "can you show the way?"

"I don't know. I'll try. What else did Jaha say?" Murphy asked Clarke.

"Nothing useful, but he gave Marcus a chip. Marcus said he thinks Jaha took another one."

Ontari got up and went to the door. She told one of the guards to go now to the cells and have Jaha and his accommodation thoroughly searched. Her tone sent the guard running down the hall.

When she returned, Clarke told her, "I finished the journal. I want Raven to read it. She'll understand the tech. Some of the stuff I read is way over my head."

"Give it to her tonight. It is what she is to do until she finishes. Fair and I will start on it after that."
"What about Titus?" Clarke asked.

"He will remain in his quarters. Do not go to speak with him. He has overstepped his last boundary."

"Ontari, he didn't touch me."

"He threatened you, Klark, after he swore an oath to Heda Leksa to protect you, after I told him that you are under my protection. _Jomp em op en yu jomp ai op_," Lexa finished.

Clarke put her fork down and looked at Ontari. Lexa looked back. Without looking away, Clarke said, "Murphy, will you watch in the hall for Raven and Mom?"

He looked uneasily at them before getting up and leaving them.

"Lexa."

"Klark."

"Tell me what you want me to know and leave Ontari alone. I'm doing the best I can."

"You are nearly there, Klark." She reached for Clarke.

Clarke didn't move. It was Ontari's body, but Lexa's body language, and Lexa's touch she felt when Ontari took her hand.

"You have been so strong, Klark, just a little longer. We will be apart, and then we will be together." She squeezed Clarke's hand. "It will be a long time before I let you go. Ai hod yu in, Klark. I am sorry I did not tell you earlier."

"What if I can't do this?" Clarke whispered.

"You can." Lexa put her other hand under Clarke's chin and raised her head. "You can do this, Klark."

"OK," Clarke answered shakily.

"Don't be afraid."

Clarke slowly closed her eyes. Just after, she felt Lexa's lips, and kept her eyes closed while she kissed Lexa back, fearing despite Lexa's words, that it would be the last time. Clarke put her hand on Lexa's neck to hold her in place.

Pounding on the door made them jump apart. Ontari's eyes returned to their usual color, and Clarke took a few seconds to get some control over her emotions. "I'm sorry."

Ontari nodded as the doors opened. The room filled with people again. Murphy hovered around Raven until she was safely seated. Abby and Marcus stood until Ontari waved them to the table.

"Somebody say something," Clarke said.

"I need to get back to work," Raven said.
Clarke pushed the journal across the table to her. "When you finish this, we'll talk about what needs to be done next."

"Sweet." Raven opened the journal. "Can I take it to bed? I need to lay down again."

"Sha. Return it to me when you finish," Ontari replied.

"Thanks, Commander."

Before she could ask, Murphy was there to help her stand.

"Thanks," Raven told him. "You wouldn't think enforced rest would be so tiring."

"What's that, Clarke?"

"One of those things you don't need to know about," Clarke answered her mother. "For your safety."

Another knock on the door temporarily prevented any more questions from Abby. A guard entered, his eyes glued to the floor. He held his palm out toward Ontari. In it were four pink chips.

Ontari took them. "Search him again," she ordered. "Different guards. And again in the morning. If you believe anyone accepted one, lock him up, too."

"Sha, Heda." He hurried away.

Ontari put the chips on the table between her and Clarke.

"Where did they come from?" Abby asked.

"Jaha," Murphy answered for Clarke.

"I thought you talked to him," Abby said to Marcus.

"I did. He gave me one. I gave it to Clarke earlier." Marcus paused. "He probably took another one."

"I'm not," Abby started.

"Wasn't going to ask you," Clarke interrupted. "I have stuff to do. I'll catch up with you guys in a day or so."

Marcus stood up and tugged Abby's arm so she, too, stood. "Good night, Commander, Clarke, John."

"Join us for breakfast, Marcus," Ontari said.

"Of course, Commander."

"Good night," Murphy said.

Clarke stared at the chips on the table for several seconds before getting out of her seat. She left the room without saying anything.

"Is something going on?" Murphy asked Ontari.

"Nothing to worry about." Ontari got to her feet. "Klark trains before breakfast. Go with her."

Murphy nodded. "Good night, Commander."
She left without saying anything, and Murphy sat at the table wondering what happened while he was in the hall.

Clark sat on the edge of the bed and slowly removed her boots. She knew Ontari would be there in a few seconds and had no idea what to say to her. She wanted to believe Lexa, wanted to believe that she was close to finding a solution that would bring Lexa back, but all she saw was obstacles.

Ontari hesitated in the doorway. "Klark."

"I'm sorry," she said for what felt like the thousandth time.

"There is no need for that."

"She uses your body and I," Clarke faltered. "I miss her so much," she said, her voice shaking with the effort not to cry again.

Ontari quickly came to the bedside and knelt so she could see Clarke's face. Clarke recalled Lexa in that position, and couldn't keep back the sob that came. Ontari said nothing as she put her arms around Clarke's waist. Clarke bent onto her shoulder and wept so hard her entire body shook.

As she began to calm, she felt as much as heard the humming come from Ontari's body, and it continued when she sat up. Ontari left her for a few moments and returned with a cool rag. She carefully washed Clarke's face and set the rag aside. Ontari moved silently to Clarke's wardrobe and got sleeping clothes for her.

She knelt before Clarke again, and the humming continued while she removed Clarke's boots and socks and set them aside. She stood and coaxed Clarke to do the same, and got her changed into lighter weight pants for sleep, then got her to change her shirt. Ontari threw the furs back and carefully guided Clarke into the bed and pulled the covers to her shoulders. She blew out most of the candles and quickly removed her boots and pants. Ontari got into bed, still humming, and wrapped around Clarke.

She and Lexa took turns guarding Clarke's sleep.

Jomp em op en yu jomp ai op = Attack her and you attack me.
Ai hod yu in = I love you
Clarke was surprised to see Murphy sitting at the table when she came out of her room to leave for training, and was more surprised when he asked, "Ready?"

"For?"

"You're going to training, right?"

"Yeah."

"I'm coming with you."

"OK." Clarke left the room, Murphy on her heels.

In the stairwell, he asked, "What happened last night?"

"None of your business."

"I'm not asking about your weird personal stuff with the commanders."

"If there's something you need to know, Murphy, I'll tell you."

"OK. I'm here if you need someone who doesn't give a shit."

Clarke couldn't help the laugh. "Let me know when you find somebody to do that."

"I meant me, dumbass."

"I know. I also know you didn't come back so soon because you're bored up there." Clarke slammed into the exit door and let them into the garden.

"No," he agreed.

"Roan told you to keep me alive."

"I told Heda I'd give my life to protect you."

"You didn't have to do that."

"I know." Murphy smirked at her. "If I die saving you, I'm going to haunt you worse than Lexa."

"I expect no less." Clarke turned and walked backward. "You know we're going to the City of Light."

"I figured. Raven's so excited about that book you gave her."

"Everything we need to know is in there." Clarke turned around again.

Murphy took an extra step to walk at her side. "What do you need her to do?"

"We'll talk about it later." Clarke opened the gate to the training area.

Alba, as always, waited for her. "Who is with you, Wanheda?"
"Murphy kom Trikru. He is under my protection, and Heda's, and Azplana Roan's. Murphy, this is Alba, who spends every morning putting me on my ass."

"Less often than when you began," Alba told her and looked Murphy up and down. "Have you been trained?"

"A little, in Ontario."

"Show me."

Murphy turned to Clarke. "What's your pleasure?"

"Sword."

He nodded and walked toward the storage hut. Clarke followed him, removed her satchel and jacket, and carefully placed the satchel under her folded jacket. Murphy chose two swords, put one back and got another. He handed his first choice to Clarke, and she smiled at him. "My favorite."

"Good."

"You can talk later," Alba reminded them. "It is time to spar."

Murphy attacked first. His skills had improved greatly. Clarke defended and launched a counterattack. They went back and forth, using every trick they learned, and were panting and dripping with sweat when Alba told them to stop.

For the next half hour, he corrected every error they made, and had them go again. Against each other, they were evenly matched, and he was satisfied with their match. He stopped them again and summoned two sekens. "Teams," he told them. "Skaikru against you."

The sekens bowed to Clarke and lined up across from she and Murphy. "Back to back," Clarke murmured.

"I'm not an idiot," Murphy hissed back.

"Go," Alba instructed, and the sekens immediately split.

Clarke turned to the right and Murphy pivoted so his back was against Clarke's and they both faced one antagonist. The younger fighters tested their opponents before circling around to trade. No matter how they moved, Clarke and Murphy moved as one. They let the sekens tire themselves by attacking before making a move.

"Now," Murphy said, and charged his adversary. Clarke did the same, pushing his sword away with hers and knocking him to the ground. She straddled him, hit the wrist of his sword hand hard enough to make him release his weapon, and laid her blade across his neck. "I yield," he panted.

She stood and helped him up before turning to watch Murphy. The girl fighting him was a bit quicker, but Clarke could see when Murphy tired of cat and mouse. He feinted toward her sword arm, and when she moved, he pulled her feet from under her with his foot. He stood lightly on her hands with the tip of his weapon in the skin of her throat. "I yield," she said hoarsely.

He stepped back and held out his hand. "You did good."

"I have much to learn if a Skai person can best me."

"I've been fighting for my life since we got here."
"Next time, I will win."

"We'll see."

"Wanheda, you and Murphy are dismissed for the day. I will see you tomorrow."

"Mochof, Alba," Clarke said.

"Mochof, Ticha," Murphy said with a courteous nod. He felt the eyes following him when they left.

"I'm impressed," Clarke said. "I've had extra training from two commanders, and you can keep up."

"His Majesty trains me once a week, but he still hasn't told me how he became king."

Clarke bit her lip before giving him the short version. "His mother challenged Lexa and named Roan her champion. Lexa defeated Roan, killed Nia, and declared Roan king."

"There has to be more to it than that."

"Maybe he'll tell you."

"Maybe," Murphy answered doubtfully.

"After training, I get cleaned up and get to work. As much as I enjoy your company, you can't stay for breakfast. I'll let you go first if you get cleaned up quickly. Go have breakfast with Skaikru. Tell Miller I sent you. Spend time with them. We need to know who should go with us and who should stay to hold down the fort. Talk to them about Jaha, too, get a feel for what they think should happen to him."

"Got it. Anything else you need me to do?"

"Help Raven. No matter what anyone says or asks or wants, reading that journal is her number one job. When she's finished, we'll talk, me and you and Ontari and her."

"Your mom?"

"No. Don't tell her anything important. She doesn't believe me."

"What about Marcus?"

"When we have a plan, we'll share it with him, but he's going to stay here to help Ontari."

"She'll want to go with you."

"She knows she can't. We've talked about it. She's Heda, and this is her place. Plus, we'll travel faster without her."

"How many do you think will go?"

"Us, anyone from Skaikru you think can help, and guards," Clarke sighed. "Way too many guards, but it will make Ontari happy so we'll take them."

"What about Raven?"

"I don't know, Murphy." Clarke jerked the door open and they entered the tower.

He followed her in. "I think we're going to need her."
"If we do, she'll come with us, but that case, that thing, it stays far away from her."

"Agreed."

Clarke began to jog up the steps, ending their conversation.
Chapter 68

He wasn't surprised to see Ontari at the table when they entered the suite, and nodded to her on his way to the bath.

"Where's Raven?" Clarke asked while pouring some water.

"I believe she is awake but I have not seen her. How was your training?"

"I didn't fall down today," Clarke grinned before emptying the mug. "I sparred with Murphy, and we sparred together against two sekens and beat them."

"You and Murphy defeated two sekens," Ontari repeated.

"We got them on the ground and they yielded." Clarke got some more water. "It wasn't really fair to them. You and Lexa helped train me and Roan helped train Murphy." She drank again, slower this time. "As soon as Murphy's done, I'll get him and Raven out of here so we can get to work."

"Raven is supposed to rest. Nyko will be by later. Gather what you need. Marcus will meet us in my rooms."

"I need Murphy to talk to Skaikru," Clarke answered with a slight frown. "Can we ask Raven to stay in her room until we're finished so he can do that?"

Ontari considered for a few seconds before agreeing. She got up and went to the door to tell the guard to have breakfast for four delivered here instead of her quarters, and when she returned to the table, told Clarke, "I will speak with Raven."

"Thanks. As soon as Murphy's done, I'll get cleaned up."

Murphy came out a few minutes later, clean, shaved, and dressed. "Need anything else before I head out?"

"Nope. Just come back and keep Raven company when you get done."

"OK, I'll see you later."

100 – 100 – 100

"Who is it?" Raven asked when Ontari knocked on the door.

"Heda."

"C'mon in." Raven put a marker in the journal and closed it. She was trying to sit up when Ontari opened the door.

"Do not get up," Ontari said sternly. "You are to rest."

"Right."

"I came to tell you that breakfast will be here soon. I will bring it to you, and ask that you remain in your room until Klark and I finish our meeting."

"Breakfast in bed?"
"Sha," Ontari smiled at her.

"For breakfast in bed, I'll do what you want."

"I will remember that."

Raven laughed. "I bet you will."

"How is the reading?"

"She was amazing. The things she was doing, she was generations ahead of everyone else."

"You understand her?"

"I do. Clarke gave me a notebook, so I'm keeping track of the important stuff I'll need to know, and all the sidetrips my brain is making."

"When Fair and I read it, we may need help."

"That sounds like Clarke's department. I'm tech, she's the boss."

"We should understand the tek, too."

"I'll do my best to explain it to you, Commander."

"I know you will. Nyko will come to see you today, and you may return to your duties when he gives his approval."

"You're a bigger mother hen than Clarke."

"You are important, Reivon."

"Thank you, Commander."

"I will return soon with your breakfast."

"Thank you," Raven repeated, but her mind was asking questions as her eyes followed Ontari's exit.

100 – 100 – 100

The room was empty when Ontari returned. She hoped that meant Murphy was gone. He would never be one of her favorite people, but he had a way of making himself useful. Clarke seemed fond of him although her mother clearly didn't like him. Raven tolerated him, too, and Marcus was courteous, although he acted the same toward everyone.

Ontari was tired, although she didn't show it. After taking care of Clarke, she waited for the blonde to sleep before closing her eyes. Throughout the night, Heda Leksa spoke with her, stopping sometimes to drive other hedas back into hiding or stop Clarke's nightmares. Ontari got the important points: Protect Clarke and her friends. Keep the peace and the coalition. Do not fear any challenge. Keep Titus locked up and under guard. Stay away from him and do not let Fair near him. Trust Clarke and take care of her. It won't be long until Clarke leaves, and things will be much different when she returns.

At the last, Lexa smiled at her. "You have done all I have asked, Ontari, and done it well. I will return with Klark and spend the rest of my days as your Fleimkepa."
"And Klark's beloved."

"Sha. There is someone here who will love you. You will not be alone. I give you my word."

"I love her."

"I am sorry you bear that pain with the other you carry, but when you recognize the one for you, your heart will become lighter."

"Klark," Ontari began.

"Klark does that for everyone who loves her," Lexa interrupted. "Watch her with others. Many say people follow her because of fear, but it is love. The rest do not understand that her power over death comes from love. Nia was wrong. Titus was wrong. Fear makes you weak, but love." Lexa paused to comfort Clarke. "Love will keep you going when it seems all hope is gone, when you think there is nothing good left, and it will guide you when fear tries to push you in the wrong direction. Do not fear love, Ontari. Embrace it. Follow it. Share it. There are many kinds of love, and each will keep you strong."

Lexa waited for an answer that didn't come. "Sleep now. I will watch you as I watch Klark."

Hard as she tried, the best Ontari could manage was intermittent dozing. She woke when Clarke moved and wondered how it was possible for pain that wasn't physical to match that of the worst injury.

When she saw the sky begin to lighten through the window, she left the bed and returned to her quarters to bathe and put on fresh clothes. Clarke and Murphy were gone when she returned, and Raven continued to sleep. Ontari took her seat at the table to wait for Clarke to return, determined to spend as much time as possible with her before she left on her quest.
Chapter 69

Raven finished the first commander's journal and set it aside. She turned to a fresh page on the pad Clarke gave her and began to outline what she needed to do. First was learn to control the chips, a precursor to cloning the chips in Ontari and Titus. She ruminated over the Latin phrases sprinkled through journal while looking at the jar on the bedside table. "Quaere superna," she mumbled, trying one out.

"Holy shit," she whispered a moment later. The jar, once a snarl of microfilaments, was clear. The pink hexagons drifted to the bottom. "Quaere superna," she repeated, and the filaments filled the jar again. Raven grinned and pumped her fist. "Yes. I am fucking awesome." She raised her voice. "Clarke! Murphy!"

Murphy hurried into the room. "Everything OK?"

"Where's Clarke? I need to show her something."

"Meeting with ambassadors."

"Watch this." Raven pointed at the jar. "Quaere superna."

"Not as cool as abracadabra, but you know, not bad for a corporate logo."

"You're an ass, Murphy."

"And you're a fucking genius, I know."

"I can do what Clarke wants me to do."

"So we're going to the City of Light?"

"Yeah. Your version, not mine, though I have a sneaking suspicion we might need to go there, too."

"Not you."

"Technically, I'm already there."

"One of you is enough."

"You're just jealous."

"Uh huh. You need your ego stroked any more?"

"Always, but I have a question for you."

"Mind if I sit?"

Raven shook her head and Murphy pulled a chair near the bed. She bit her lip before blurting out, "I think the Commander likes me."

"I am not getting into this, Raven."

"C'mon, Murphy, I know you spent the day with her."

"Yup, like a puppy on a leash. As big a blow as this might be to you, you never came up."
"But Azgeda's all about the broody and silent, yeah? More than the other Grounders."

"I don't even know what that means."

"You are no help."

"I told you, I'm not getting into this. You want girl talk, ask Clarke. I'll ask Harper or Monroe to visit, or your lackeys, or somebody who isn't me. You need a drink of water or a sandwich, I'm your guy."

"Your fucking shot me."

"Like a million years ago."

"I can't fucking walk."

"You've played that card to death."

They glared at each other for several seconds. Finally, Raven said. "Fine. Then get me a sandwich."

"On it," Murphy answered, and was out the door in a shot.

Raven sighed and picked up notepad. She began making a list of the things she needed. As soon as she was allowed out of bed, she'd get started.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke's good mood dissipated as she went from meeting to meeting with the other ambassadors. They all seemed less interested in trading with Azgeda than asking questions that would have Ontari threaten to remove their tongues. The third time her Yujleda counterpart attempted to ask casually why Heda spent so much time in the Azgeda suite, Clarke stood up. "Do you want to trade or not?"

"Wanheda?"

"Azgeda wishes to trade. We offer furs. Do you want them?"

"No."

"Your loss." Clarke turned for the door.

"This is not how one negotiates," he sputtered at her back.

"This is how I negotiate. I made an offer. You rejected it. I'm finished." She slammed the door and walked briskly for the staircase, her guards on her heels. She had an hour to calm down before the next meeting and went to her rooms.

She looked around for Murphy, but he wasn't there. She went to check on Raven.

"Clarke, I need to show you something."

"Where's Murphy?"

"He went to get me a sandwich. Look at this." Raven pointed at the jar. "Quaere superna."

"So there's probably a bit of every one left inside all of you."

"Probably."
"Do you notice anything other than that when you say the words?"

Raven frowned, thinking. "A tickle."

"Who can we experiment with?"

"Jaha," Raven answered, as if it were obvious. "Nifty failsafe," she added to herself.

"Say it again," Clarke demanded.

"Quaere superna."

The filaments expanded. "Did you feel it?"

"Yeah."

"Quaere superna," Clarke said.

Raven nodded.

"Can you make the other chips, like the one in Ontari?"

"Yeah. I need things that aren't here, but yeah."

"And copy what's on them?"

"Yeah."

"Do they have a code phrase?"

"Probably."

"There was a bunch of Latin in there," Clarke observed. "What's that," she asked, pointing at the jar, "mean?"

"Uh, something like, reach for the stars."

*Seek higher things.*

"Hey, Clarke."

"Hey, Murphy. Did Raven show you her magic trick?"

"Yeah. I like abracadabra better. What she said, it's a corporate motto, to go with the logo on the chips." He handed Raven a plate with an overstuffed sandwich.

"How do you know this?"

"It's on the escape pod."

Clarke closed her eyes, visualizing the pod. The words were nearly obliterated by scorch marks and scrapes, but she remembered seeing them in italic script over the door.

"We need to check something out. Get the case."

"OK," he answered slowly, but went to do her bidding.
"Anything in there translate into we are one?"

"Maybe. I didn't study languages."

"Marcus might know. Or Mom. There's a lot of Latin in medicine. Murphy and I are going to see if it works on Jaha. If it does, I'll turn off the rest of them tonight."

"Let me know," Raven said to Clarke's back. She shrugged and picked up her sandwich.
"C’mon," Clarke said impatiently.

"Where are we going?"

"Raven said she felt a tickle, which suggests that there's still a bit of that thing in her. Marcus is pretty sure Jaha took another chip. If we can turn it off in him, we can turn off anything that's left in the rest of them."

"What's to stop him from just saying the words to turn it on again?"

Clarke stopped so quickly Murphy almost walked into her back. "Skrish. I need to think about this. Put that back, stay with Raven. I have another meeting. I'll be there as soon as I can."

This meeting was much shorter and more productive. Clarke breezed through the niceties before asking the Boudalan ambassador, "Are you interested in a trade or just gossip?"

"Is there some reason we can't do both?"

"There are many reasons. If you wish to trade, make an offer for Azgeda furs. If you wish to gossip, I have other things to do."

"You are always so busy, Wanheda."

"I am. Please don't waste my time."

"I have sent the agreement to Azgeda."

"Thank you. Haihefa Roan thanks you. I will tell Heda of your cooperation."

"Remember Azgeda's friends. That is the thanks we need."

"Done." Clarke stood and gave a small bow. "Until next time."

"Perhaps you will say longer then."

Clarke gave him a tight smile and showed herself out.

100 – 100 – 100

The Natblida recited their lessons to Ontari. They were all a bit restless. Their ordered days were suddenly unstructured. The hours spent listening to Titus were yet to be filled with other duties, and there was only so much weapons training they could do each day.

When they finished, Ontari sat up. "What should we do today?"

Fair answered first. "Library. We should go to the library."

"Why?"

"We still have much to learn, Heda, and that is where the books are."

Ontari sighed.
"We can pick a book and take turns reading aloud."

"Heda used to read to us as a treat," Aden volunteered.

Ontari nodded slowly, made her decision, and stood. The Natblida scrambled to their feet. "To the library. We will find a story to share."

Clarke sat in the garden behind the Tower considering how she could say the words to turn off any remaining bits of A.L.I.E.'s chips without being heard. She decided that she would have to knock all of them out again. She had precious little of the sedative left from her trip, not nearly enough to do what had to be done.

She walked toward the hospital, and along the way saw Ontari leading the Natblida through Polis, away from the Tower.

Clarke went directly to Nyko. "I need your help."

"If I can."

"I need to put a bunch of people to sleep for a while."

"Why?"

"It's a long story, Nyko."

"Do they all have to sleep at once?"

"It would be easier."

"I can make some sleep aids, but it will take time."

"I need it now."

"I cannot help you. Perhaps one of the Azgeda healers knows of something."

"Maybe. Thanks. I appreciate your help."

The Azgeda healer Roan left with Ontari didn't ask Clarke why she needed to render a group of people unconscious. His questions were more to Clarke's liking. How many people? Out for how long? She left with a small pouch of vials, instructions, and a plan. Another set of vials was specifically for Jaha, to knock him out and bring him back to consciousness in a short period.

Clarke ran for her next meeting, apologized for being late, declined a drink, and got to the point. The Ouskejon ambassador had been warned that Clarke wanted an answer, and made a counteroffer. Clarke countered once, and the next offer was acceptable. They sat at opposite sides of the table and wrote it out, signed the pages, and swapped them. After quickly reading to ensure it said what it was supposed to, they countersigned. Clarke tucked the sheet into her satchel and stood up. "Mochof."

"There are other things I would like to discuss."

"I have other obligations, but if you could put it in writing," Clarke suggested.
"It is delicate."

"The border."

"Sha."

"You want access to the resources, not the land or the people. Make a written offer. No one other than Haihefa Roan and myself will see it."

"Those are our ancestral lands."

"The people are Azgedakru. Whatever claim you had three generations ago is long gone. As I said, I have other obligations."

"I will delay you no longer."

"Mochof," Clarke repeated. She waited until her back was turned to roll her eyes.

100 – 100 – 100

The common room was empty when Clarke returned to the Azgeda suite, but she heard voices from Raven's room. Raven sat on the side of her bed. Murphy was in a chair near her. They both looked at Clarke when she entered.

"We've been talking about Jaha and the chips and what you need to do," Murphy said.

"And?"

"A.L.I.E. doesn't need to be near Jaha for you to know whether you turned off his chip."

"OK."

"So you can go down and do that whenever. The others are gonna be trickier," Raven continued. "We don't want them to know the control phrase, but you can't just drug them for no reason."

"Wine," Murphy suggested. "Send them a bunch of wine with something in it. Once you're sure it works with Jaha, you can set it up with Miller. Once they're all out, they can go around and whisper it so you're not constantly turning them off and on."


"I'll have to check whether it's ok to use with alcohol," Clarke answered.

"Or you can go straightforward, get them in one place and say the magic words. Work them into a speech or something. Or have Miller bring them in one by one and say them."

"We don't want them to know it."

"Then go with sneaky."

"Let me see what happens with Jaha first. I'll be back soon," Clarke said.

Clarke's guards followed her down to the basement. She was glad they were there. If Jaha put up a fight, they could restrain him.

She stood outside his cell and watched for minute. Jaha's eyes were closed and there was a smile on
his face. She rattled the door. After a moment, Jaha opened his eyes. "Clarke, I didn't expect to see you again."

"Come here, please."

He slowly stood and stretched before coming to the bars. He stayed a foot away from the doors.

Clarke pulled the vial from her pocket and showed it to him. "You can swallow this or they can make you. Your choice."

"I can't do that, Clarke."

Clarke stepped away from the door. The jail guard opened the door and her guards followed him into the cell. They put Jaha on his knees and tilted his head back. One held his mouth open. Clarke poured the contents of the vial into his mouth. The guards immediately held it closed. One covered his nose. In the end, Jaha had to swallow.

Clarke and the guards left the cell. The jail guard locked it again and Clarke sent all of them to the entrance where they could see but not hear what she was going to say. The sedative acted quickly, and within minutes, Jaha was out. Clarke said, "Quaere superna."

Then she waited.

Nearly an hour later, Jaha began to wake. He sat up and looked around the cell. When he saw Clarke, Jaha said, "Damn you."

"You're free of her. You'll be put on trial in a few days."

"You're going to put me on trial."

"Yeah."

"And then kill me."

Clarke shrugged. "If that's what Skaikru decides. If another of those chips turns up in Polis, inside or outside you, there won't be a trial."

"So you're like these savages now?"

"No, I learned that lesson on the Ark," Clarke answered and walked away.
Before she entered her rooms, she sent a guard to bring Miller, Harper, and Monroe. The common room was still empty, and there was silence throughout this time. A few moments after the door closed, Murphy came to check that it was her.

"Well?" he asked.

"It worked. He's pissed off again. I told him that if I find any more of those chips, there won't be a trial."

"You probably should skip it anyway. It's not like he was going to give any of us one."
Clarke shrugged. "Miller, Harper, and Monroe should be here in a few minutes. You want to join us?"

"To talk about how to cut off the chips for good?"

"Yeah."

"Nope. I told you already, either drug all of them, or whisper it to them when they're asleep."

"OK. How's Raven?"

"Ready to get to work. If she made notes any faster, something would catch on fire."
Clarke laughed.

Murphy grinned. He felt proud of himself. It was the first real laugh he remembered hearing from Clarke. "Unless you need me, I'm gonna make sure Raven stays in bed."

"Good luck."

Clarke waited several more minutes for her Skaikru lieutenants to arrive. They sat at the table together, and Clarke explained what she learned. "So we need to say these words, but I don't want them to hear them," she finished.

"You have a plan, right?" Monroe asked.

"I have ideas," Clarke answered.

"Let's hear them," Miller said.

"I drugged Jaha and said it while he was out, but he's just one. I'm not sure how we'd drug all of them. We can try when they're all asleep, but I'm not sure how that would work."

"We could tell them the truth," Harper suggested.

"A.L.I.E. worries me, though."

"She's not here, is she?"

"Not for long," Clarke said nervously.

"There aren't any more chips, and A.L.I.E. won't be around much longer, so I think we should just
talk to them," Miller said.

"What if they don't agree?" Monroe asked.

"What if they do?" Miller countered.

Clarke rubbed her temples while she thought about it. The other options would still be available later. She raised her head. "Gather them tomorrow after supper. I'll come up and talk to them. Maybe Raven can come, too."

"That might help," Harper said. "She was one of them, right?"

"Right," Clarke answered. "Thanks, guys. I'll see you tomorrow, unless there's something you need from me."

"What's going to happen to us, Clarke?" Monroe asked.

"I don't know yet. Heda hasn't decided."

"Everyone's kinda worried," Miller said. "If they had something to do, it would help ease their minds."

"I'll talk to her tonight," Clarke promised.

"Thanks," he answered, and stood up. Harper and Monroe did the same. "We'll see you tomorrow night, right?"

"Right," Clarke answered.

When they were gone, she put her head in her hands. It felt like things were beginning to go too fast, almost out of control, like the drop ship as it rattled and bounced through Earth's atmosphere. There was so much in play, and so much at stake. One misstep could destroy everything she had left.

Clarke heard the door open but didn't move. She knew it was Ontari; anyone else would have been announced by the guards. Ontari didn't speak. She sat in the chair beside Clarke and tentatively rubbed her shoulder.

"I'm OK," Clarke said, although it was muffled.

Ontari squeezed Clarke's shoulder and put her hand on the table. She waited for Clarke to speak. It didn't take long. "I talked to some of my people tonight. They're scared because they still don't know what's going to happen."

"They are safe."

"I know, but they don't. They need something to do, a way to contribute."

"What can they do?"

Clarke sighed. "Not much. I mean, they had jobs in Arkadia, but I don't know what they were. You won't let them go back there."

"Skaikru is no longer welcome in Trikru lands."

"I know. I understand. If we're going to stay in Polis, it can't be as your guests. They want to earn their keep."
"Tell me what their jobs were in Arkadia. Tell me what they wish to do."

"So we won't be a kru."

"I do not know, Klark. There are many who would banish all of you. I still believe we can learn much from you."

"What about Farm Station? It's in Azgeda lands."

"That is a discussion you must have with Haihefa Roan. If he is amenable, I will permit it."

"I wish he was here."

"As do I."

Clarke stared at the table.

"Have Murphy take you to the inn for supper."

"What about you?"

"I wish to speak with Raven, and we will play chess after. Tomorrow we can speak of what happens next."

"OK," Clarke said after a few seconds. "I'll get Murphy."

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy stepped into the hall when Clarke summoned him. "What's up?"

"Ontari said you should take me to the inn for supper so she can talk to Raven."

"You'll have to buy."

"No problem."

"Ready when you are," Murphy said.

"Lead the way," Clarke answered.
Ontari knocked on the door and waited for Raven to answer before opening the door. She looked up from the papers in her hand and smiled. "Hey, Commander, wasn't expecting you until later."

"I thought we could discuss what you've learned over supper."

"Sounds good." Raven gathered her papers and began to move like she was getting out of bed.

"Has Nyko cleared you?"

Raven rolled her eyes. "He hasn't been here yet."

"Then you stay in bed. I will move things to make it easier for you."

"Don't you have people for that?"

Ontari shrugged. "I will be right back."

She returned a minute later with one of the tables from the common room. She slid it up Raven's bed so it would be comfortable for her, then pulled it toward the center of the room so there was room for a chair. She moved one there and took a seat. "Food will be here soon. What have you learned?"

"I can do what Clarke wants. I need some things from Arkadia, though."

"You will have them. I will send riders tomorrow."

"They won't know what I'm looking for," Raven protested.

"Who will?"

"No one. I need to go."

"We can send Murphy."

"Murphy doesn't know his ass from his elbow when it comes to tech."

"Your assistants," Ontari suggested.

"I need to go. If the machines I need aren't still there, I'll need to scavenge what I need to build them."

"You will have guards."

"If you insist."

"I do. You must be safe."

"I'd like to visit my friend Octavia, too. She's with Trikru."

"You may send a messenger."

"I'll leave as soon as Nyko lets me out of bed."

"We will speak with Klark first."
"Right," Raven sighed. "What's the end game here?"

"End game?"

"What is it that's supposed to happen when all of this is done?"

"Heda Leksa says that she will return from the City of Light with Klark to be Fleimkepa."

"What?"

"That is what she says, and what we work toward."

"You know that sounds crazy."

"Is it possible?"

"I don't know," Raven said after a few seconds.

"You read the words of Beka Pramheda."

"Yeah, but there's nothing in there about resurrecting the dead."

"Perhaps what you need is at the City of Light."

"Maybe."

Two raps on the door halted their conversation. Ontari went to the door, and stood back to allow their food to be delivered.

They were nearly finished eating when Nyko came. He stood and waited. When they were finished, he and Ontari moved the table so Nyko could examine Raven and massage her leg and back. When he finished, he told Raven, "You may return to work tomorrow as long as you do not overexert yourself."

"Thank you," Raven said. "Can I get up now?"

"Sha, but not for long. You still need to rest. Heda, I will help you return the table."

"Mochof, Nyko."

Together, they returned the table to the common room without anything moving from it. Nyko gathered the dishes and took them when he left. Raven came out to find Ontari setting up the chessboard. They were deep in a second game when Clarke and Murphy returned. They both said good night to the women at the table and retired to their rooms. When the game and the subsequent discussion of it was over, Raven and Ontari, too, went to bed.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke and Murphy went to training the next morning and spent two hours attempting to beat back the attacks of the warriors Alba recruited to work against them. They had the occasional success, but spent much of the morning being beaten to the ground. Neither of them talked on the slow walk to the Tower when they finished.

Clarke dropped into a seat at the table while Murphy went to clean up. It took him longer today, but he left as soon as he was able. Clarke spent longer than usual in the tub, and Ontari waited with breakfast and the morning's work. They went through the pile of messages together. When they
finished, Ontari told Clarke some of what she and Raven discussed the night before. "Raven says she must return to Arkadia. I will accompany her. She says there is still much tek at Arkadia."

"What does she need?"

"I do not know, but she was adamant that she must be the one to go."

"Before she goes, we need to talk."

"Tonight?"

"I need to talk to Skaikru tonight."

"Tomorrow, then. She and Murphy can stay so we can talk, and you and I can do what we must after."

"Sounds like a plan."

"I must go. The Nightbloods wait."

Clarke smiled. "Have fun."

Ontari smiled back. "We always do."

When Ontari left, Clarke sat with a pen and paper. She started by writing her regular report to Roan. That finished, she got a fresh sheet of paper.

"We owe you so much. I owe you so much, yet I must ask for your help again. Skaikru needs a place to call its own. Arkadia is not safe. Trikru does not trust us. The goodwill earned from the end of the Mountain was destroyed by the massacre of their army, and I doubt Skaikru will ever be welcome in their lands again.

"A second piece of the Ark landed in Azgeda. I think Skaikru could make a home there, if you are willing to give them some land. There aren't many of us left, but it's important that we stay together. Ontari said she will allow us to leave Polis and relocate if you approve.

"That's what I'm asking, that you give Skaikru a chance. The people in charge there will be my people. They aren't interested in anything except having a home of their own. If there's something you want in return, we'll do our best to provide it."

Clarke read what she wrote before signing it. She sealed it and placed it with her other report so the messenger would get it. She sat at the table for a few minutes before deciding she needed some air.

Clarke quickly walked to the stables. Her horse was ready a few minutes later, and she and two guards left through Polis' main gate. When the traffic on the road cleared out, Clarke gave her horse its head and leaned forward as they raced down the road. For a few minutes, she had nothing on her mind except the freedom of her ride. It was wonderful, but all good things end. The horse tired and slowed, and Clarke's thoughts turned to what she had to do. Everything could go wrong, moment by moment and it would take only one of them to bring everything crashing down.

Clarke realized, finally and for the first time, that she was alone in this. Everyone around her, everyone with her, couldn't make the decisions she needed to make, wouldn't agonize over the choices. The weight of Skaikru's trust, of Lexa's belief, of Ontari's reliance and Roan's faith was heavier than her other burdens. Any one of those things could take her to the ground.
She took a deep breath, and another, and one more before she turned her horse back toward Polis. She had things to do, and they waited long enough.
Chapter 73

Clarke went first to Raven's workshop. She was on her stool, bent over studying something on the table in front of her. "Hey, where are the minions?"

"Scavenging in the market."

"Speaking of scavenging, Ontari said you're going back to Arcadia."

"Yeah, they had a chip maker and if I'm lucky all my tools are still in my workshop. Plus there should be other stuff we can use."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Be careful."

"I will. Anything you want me to say to Octavia?"

"She won't listen, Raven. She thinks I betrayed all of you. She thought when I didn't leave with her, I was staying with Lexa."

"Were you?"

"No. I was maybe an hour behind her."

"Are you ever going to tell me what happened?"

"Not today." Clarke blinked back tears and took a deep breath. "Let me know if you need anything before you go."

"Will do."

"See you later," Clarke said and left. She walked through the market toward the tower, but didn't enter. She stopped in the garden, found a quiet corner and sat on the grass.

She remembered seeing Lexa meditate, calm in the chaos that swirled around them. It amazed Clarke then, and she could use some calm now, so she arranged herself comfortably and closed her eyes. It took a long time to clear her mind.

Murphy nudged her thigh with his foot. "You have a really comfortable bed if you need a nap, Princess."

"What time is it?"

"Almost time for you to meet with Skaikru. I talked to Raven for you. She's going to be there."

"Thanks, Murphy." Clarke stood, ignoring the pins and needles in her legs.

"Didja have any astonishing visions?"

"No. I was trying to meditate and I fell asleep."

"Well come and grab something to eat before you talk to them."
They entered the tower and climbed the stairs to the Azgeda suite. Ontari and Raven were setting up a chess game. A plate waited in Clarke's usual seat and Murphy poured her some watered down wine.

While Clarke ate, Murphy sharpened his dagger. Raven and Ontari debated opening moves. When she finished her meal, Murphy said, "It's time."

The three Skaikru left Ontari sitting at the table. The took the lift to spare Raven the climb up several flights of stairs.

When they reached Skaikru's floor, everyone was lounging in the doorways. Miller greeted Clarke. "There's no room big enough for all of us, so I figured the hallway would work. He pulled a crate into the center of the corridor and offered his arm to stead Clarke when she climbed onto it.

"Hey, listen up," Miller yelled, and all the chatter ended. People came out of their rooms into the hall.

"Hi, everybody. I know I haven't been here to see you as much as I should have, and I apologize for that," Clarke began. "Just so you know, I'm trying to get some land for us to live on. Heda said she'll allow us to stay together if I can find a place we can live. It won't be Arkadia. In the meantime, if there's something you can do, or want to learn to do, find somebody in Polis to teach you. It will take some work on your part, but the payoff will be worth it."

"Like what?" somebody asked from the back of the crowd.

"I don't know. It's up to you. Just walk around and look at the things people are doing. Talk to them." Clarke waited for more questions and when no one spoke, continued. "There are two other things we need to talk about. The first is about those of you who had A.L.I.E.'s chips. I'm going to let Raven explain the issue, and then I'll talk about the solution. After that, we need to talk about Jaha. Raven."

"I'm not getting up on that box, so if you can't hear me, now's the time to speak up." No one did. "I'll try to keep this simple. The chips integrated with our spinal columns and lower brains with tiny, microscopic threads, or filaments. When Clarke and Dr. Griffin removed the chips, they didn't get all the pieces because they are so small and hard to see without magnification. Problem is, as long as those bits are still in you, there's a chance that A.L.I.E. can still control you. And before you ask, no there's not enough for us to go back to the City of Light.

"We found out how to control the chips, how to turn off what's left. That's what Clarke wants to talk to you about."

"I'll be honest," Clarke began. "I was just going to drug all of you and do what has to be done. Miller and Harper said I should talk to you. So here's the deal. There's a phrase that turns the chips off and on. We used it on Jaha and Raven. Raven was awake, so she knows what the phrase is. I drugged Jaha because I don't want him to know it. He still has a chip, and he still communicates with A.L.I.E., and that makes him dangerous.

"So I want to know, if I say the words to turn off what's left, are you going to want to turn them back on?"

The people in the hall began talking quietly to each other. Clarke gave them a few minutes, and Murphy let out a deafening whistle to silence them.

"Tell you what," Clarke said. "Think about it. Talk to each other. If you want A.L.I.E. out of your head for good, come to see me and I'll say the words, but you have to promise that you won't repeat
"That brings us to the final topic: Thelonious Jaha. He needs to be brought to justice for all that he's done. I'm going arrange for a place big enough for all of us to meet and we're going to have a trial."

"Like the ones on the Ark?"

"Yes and no. Yes, in that he'll be told of what he's accused of and allowed to defend himself. No because it's not a foregone conclusion that he'll be executed. So think about that, too. Anyone have anything to add?"

When no one did, Clarke said, "I'll be around." She used Murphy's shoulder as a balance when she stepped down from the crate. "Thanks, Miller," she said before she left. "I'll let you know when and where the trial will be."

"OK, Clarke. Thanks for giving them a choice."

"I hope they make the right one."

Ontari was reading when they returned. "Drink?" Murphy asked Clarke.

"Yeah."

"How did it go?" Ontari asked.

"Don't know yet."

"I do not understand why you do not order them to do what you want."

"That's not how we do things. In theory, the Ark was a representative democracy, so power flowed up from the people. We elected our leaders based on what they said they would do. If we didn't like how they acted while in power, somebody else was elected the next time."

"It makes no sense."

Clarke shrugged and accepted the mug from Murphy. He gave one to Ontari and Raven, as well, before sitting near Clarke and putting the bottle between them.

"So you're leaving for Arcadia tomorrow," Clarke said to Raven.

"I am going with her."

"What about the Nightbloods?"

"They are coming, too. It will do them good to get out of the city."

"Won't they slow you down?"

"No," Ontari said firmly.

Raven sniffed the mug and took a sip. She pushed it over to Murphy. Ontari gave hers to Clarke.

"I can do what you want, Clarke. I can duplicate the chips in the Commander and Titus. I'm still working out how to separate Lexa from the rest of the data. The Commander said the goal is for her
to come back here and be the Flamekeeper, which means she accepts the chip that Titus has now, so I need to figure how two can co-exist with one as primary and the other as secondary. I still don't know where you're going to get a body, though."

"I think that answer is at the City of Light."

"While you guys are gone, I'm going to see if I can find the boat," Murphy said.

"Guess I'll hold down the fort," Clarke said.

"You will go with Murphy," Ontari said.

"Why?"

"It is safer for you to be outside the walls with him than here alone."

"I'm not alone, Heda, and Skaikru has things to do as a group."

"Without Raven and Murphy?"

"Sha." Clarke looked at Raven. "Guilty or not?"

"Totally guilty. Float him. And float him again."

"Murphy."

"Crazy but guilty. He should have a slow, painful death."

"Noted," Clarke said, and looked at Ontari. "I want to deal with him sooner rather than later. The longer he sits down there, the more dangerous he is."

"Then we will postpone our departure until that is settled. What do you need?"

"A room big enough to hold all of us and some time."

"Use the feast room. Can you do this tomorrow?"

"Yes," Clarke said. "Murphy, will you go let Miller know to gather everyone there after breakfast?"

Murphy emptied his mug. "On it, boss."

"I'll go talk to my mother and Marcus," Clarke said with a sigh and emptied her mug. She followed Murphy out the door.

"Why isn't Clarke safe here?" Raven asked.

"Many blame her for Heda Leksa's death."

"She didn't kill her, did she?"

"No."

"Why won't anyone tell me what happened?"

"Until everything is settled, the fewer who know, the better. Titus has a great deal of power."

"We can take his chip without killing him, you know."
"How?"

"It's in the journal, where she talks about activating and deactivating the second generation chips. It's not necessary to cut you to put them in or take them out, as long as you know the phrase."

"Do you know it?"

"I'm still working that out," Raven admitted.

"Even without the chip, Titus is dangerous. Clarke does not always stop to think things through before acting. If she is here alone, she will be tempted to go to him."

"So you're sending her with Murphy for her own safety."

"Sha. Klark is too important to risk, as you are."

"You and the Nightbloods are going as my personal guards?" Raven asked with amusement.

"Sha. And it will be good for them to get out of Polis for a few days."

Raven nodded while she suppressed her laughter. "You start tonight, Commander."
Chapter 74

On the way down the steps, Murphy was glad he grabbed the bottle on the way out. He knew Miller would carry out Clarke's orders, but it wouldn't hurt to grease the wheels a little. Both doors in the middle of the hall were open, and Murphy found Miller in the room Harper and Monroe shared.

"Hey, guys," he said while rapping on the door frame.

"What's up, Murphy?" Miller asked.

"Jaha's trial is tomorrow. Clarke asked that you gather everyone in the feast room downstairs after breakfast."

"OK."

"Want a drink? This is good stuff from Azgeda."

"Sure."

Murphy entered the room and took the empty chair. He handed the bottle to Miller, and it was passed around the room.

"I don't see why we have to have a trial," Monroe said.

"Me either," Murphy answered. "I told her to just kill him and be done with it, but that's not how Clarke works."

"I don't want to listen to him any more," Harper said.

"Ditto." Murphy took another swig and sent it around the room again. "He was totally off the rails when we left Arcadia. We walked days through a desert. A bunch of people got blow up in a minefield right before we reached the City of Light. He locked me up in a dungeon. Maybe it was her. For three months, all I had was a video of a guy blowing his brains out because A.L.I.E. found a way to override her programming and launch hundreds of nuclear missiles."

"Shit," Miller said softly.

"He was even worse after he let me out and I got to meet A.L.I.E. Hot chick in a tight red dress. Neither of them wanted to tell me anything, but I kept overhearing them talk. It took a while to realize exactly how crazy they both were."

"Are you going to talk about this tomorrow?" Harper asked.

"Yeah." Murphy handed the bottle to Miller again. "I'll tell everything I know about Jaha and A.L.I.E." When he got the bottle back, Murphy emptied it. "See you in the morning."

"Clarke, is something wrong?" Marcus asked.

"No. Can I come in?"

"Certainly." Marcus stepped back to allow her in and closed the door. He saw Clarke's guards in the hall.
"Do you need something, Clarke?" Abby asked.

"No, Mom. I came to tell you both that Jaha's trial is tomorrow morning in the feast room. It's mandatory for all of Skaikru, including you."

"Clarke," Abby began, disapproval in her tone.

"Mom, he'll get a fairer trial than anyone on the Ark ever got. Whatever the majority of Skaikru decides is what will happen. Come down after breakfast."

Clarke turned to leave, and was surprised that Marcus, not her mother, stopped her. "What are the options?"

"Death or exile. Better odds than he ever gave up there." This time, Clarke didn't stop when they tried to call her back.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven and Ontari were deep in their game when Clarke returned. She started working on the mug of Azgeda liquor left at her seat and watched the maneuvers. Clarke lost her concentration when Murphy returned, but Ontari and Raven remained focused on the board.

"What did the former chancellors have to say?" Murphy asked. He checked the mugs and emptied one before picking up the other.

"I didn't let them say anything. Otherwise, I'd still be up there arguing with them."

"True." Murphy drank some and put his mug down. "I've been looking at maps. I think I know where the boat was."

"Think it's still there?"

"I don't know. It's not like I ever have a lot of luck."


"Like a cockroach, which, ironically, I haven't seen any of."

She snorted again and drained her mug. "I'm going to bed."

"Yeah, me, too. Leave the brainiacs to their game."

"Good night," Raven said distractedly.

"Reshop," Ontari echoed.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke woke with a feeling of dread. For all that she was called Wanheda, she was sick of death. It was why she spent so little time with the healers now. She didn't want to see anyone else die, and certainly didn't want any more deaths on her conscience. That might happen today, though. If Skaikru chose death for Jaha, she would be the one to carry out the ruling. Titus' words echoed in her head: "Skaikru thief, Skaikru weapon."

She sighed before lifting Ontari's arm and getting out of bed. Her pistol was in one of the trunks. She'd find it after training.
This morning, she had to wait for Murphy, and they didn't talk on their way to the training ring. It was a difficult session for both of them. Murphy was a bit hungover and Clarke was preoccupied with what would happen in a few hours. They both left the training ring with fresh bruises.

Murphy was quick to clean himself up. Clarke told him to stay and have breakfast with Raven. She would have breakfast with Ontari upstairs in her rooms and join all of them when she finished with the morning reports.

The morning meeting was becoming more habit than necessity. Ontari's reading comprehension was growing and she was also learning what questions needed to be asked before she rendered a decision. This morning, she put the papers aside completely.

"Are you ready for what you must do?" she asked Clarke.

"I don't know." Clarke pushed some food around her plate before finally taking a bite. "I thought I was," she said after swallowing it.

"Do you trust them to make the right decision?"

"Sha." She paused again. "Even if they choose exile, I'll end his fight. He is too dangerous, especially given what's coming. He can't be allowed anywhere near A.L.I.E. or the City of Light."

"How long before you leave?"

"Depends on Raven."

"You have much faith in her."

"Raven is the strongest person I know. She's the smartest, too. Lexa said that I can do what has to be done but I know it's going to be because Raven figured out how."

"I will go with her to Arkadia."

"You said that last night, that you and the Natblida would accompany her."

"Sha."

"You'll be careful, right?"

"Sha, Klark, very careful. I do not wish to hear Heda Leksa forever."

Clarke tried and failed to smile at Ontari's humor. Lexa's survival would have changed everything. Together, they would have found a way to end the rebellion in Arkadia without so many more deaths. Together, they could have prevented Jaha and A.L.I.E. from wreaking the havoc they did. Together… Clarke forced herself to stop. Lexa said they would have a second chance, and Clarke held fast to that.

"You should go," Ontari said softly after several minutes of watching Clarke lost in her thoughts. Clarke jerked back into the present. "Moba, Heda."

"Klark, go do what you must."

"Sha," she sighed, and stood up.
Chapter 75

A few minutes after Clarke joined Skaikru in the feast room, Jaha was escorted in. He was manacled, and guards remained on either side of him at Ontari's order. Clarke's and Raven's guards stood at the exits.

Clarke took a deep breath and began. "We're here because of one man's actions. He thought he knew better, that he could make promises that wouldn't be kept, that he could lie to and betray us. I'm going to speak first. Each of you who wants to will have a turn after, and then he'll have his say. After that, we'll vote on what to do.

"I'm going to start with his actions on the Ark, because they are the first reason we are here today. You know my mother, Abigail Griffin, was a doctor and chancellor. My father, Jake Griffin, was head of engineering. Thelonious Jaha was the head of the governing council. His son Wells was my best friend. He and my parents were friends. My dad found out that the air scrubbers were failing. There was less oxygen available each day, and no way to replace it. After nearly a century in orbit, other things were failing, too. Stations started to fall away. The ones that were left were suffering because of the oxygen deficit.

"Dad wanted everyone to know. He thought it was fair, that having that knowledge would let people make good decisions. Maybe one of them would come up a solution. That was a big secret for me to keep, and I told Wells. Not long after, Dad was floated and I was locked up in solitary confinement in the Skybox.

"Soon after that, the Council sent all of us in the Skybox to Earth. We were disposable. They were just waiting for us to be old enough to float, so if they sent us away, we wouldn't be using their precious oxygen. They drugged us and strapped us in, and sent us away, trusting in ancient circuitry and blind luck.

"Most of us survived the landing. But what we found here… Some died because of their own ignorance. Some died because there was no way to prepare for what we found. Grounders killed some. Disease killed more. The Mountain Men captured all of us, and I escaped Mount Weather with a Grounder general. Then the rest of the Ark arrived and nearly ruined the peace we were making with them.

"We got past that, though. We made a treaty, and attacked Mount Weather, and defeated its inhabitants although the Grounders broke that treaty. We were getting over that when he came carrying a box of lies and a fistful of false dreams.

"We made another treaty with the Grounders. They made us a full member of their Coalition, and one man's revenge and another's fear drove us toward war. While that was happening, he," Clarke pointed at Jaha, "was converting people by promising them an end to pain and fear. He didn't tell anyone that the cost would be their lives because the thing he brought back planned to finish destroying the human race.

"He continues to believe that machine. He continues to think that we would be better if only we allowed a computer to control our bodies and minds while it destroyed everything we need to survive.

"I fought like hell to keep us alive. I fought to keep us together. I'm trying now to find us a new home. The things he did were for his own benefit, to keep his power on the Ark and to regain it when he came to Earth." Clarke paused. "The floor's open. One at a time, please."
Skaikru looked uneasily at each other, and no one stepped forward. Abby broke the silence. "You can't hold him responsible for every bad thing that happened. It wasn't his fault that the Ark started to fall apart. It wasn't his fault that the systems failed. Whoever was floated while he was in charge aren't his fault. And you can't blame him for wanting something better and believing he found it, then wanting to share it with us. You can't kill him for making mistakes." Abby looked around and wondered whether her words made any difference.

Harper stepped up next. "Do you even remember me? Or my parents? Do you care that the tiny things we took were to try to stay alive? Do you care that the promise you made to us, that in exchange for being your guinea pigs we would be pardoned, was thrown out like we were, like trash?"

Monroe joined her near the front. "You locked me up when I was 12. For four years, I stayed in the Skybox. We all knew you were going to float us as soon as we were 18. We didn't get enough to eat or drink. We weren't allowed to exercise or read or continue our educations. Anything I got came from my parents, and when they stopped coming, I knew you'd floated them for dealing with the black market or trading with their neighbors or saving something from each meal to share with me. And sending us to Earth, I lost count of how many times I almost died. I remember everyone you sent with me, though, and how they died. Did you know your son was murdered by a little girl because you took her parents from her and left her with absolutely nothing? Wells was trying to be a good man and he lost his life because of what you did."

When Monroe stepped back, Harper put her arm around her waist and they waited for whoever was next. Clarke looked around and realized that only Miller and Murphy remained of the original hundred sent to Earth. Raven joined them soon after. The rest of room were mostly Farm Station survivors, with one or two from other stations that had made their way to Camp Jaha and Arkadia.

A few of them came forward to speak wistfully of the City of Light. When it seemed no one else would say anything, Miller stepped up. "I didn't actually do anything wrong. My dad was head of security on Alpha Station and he wasn't 'catching' enough people breaking the law so I was framed for stealing some food. After I got locked up, Dad did what he had to. And then I got kicked off the Ark. I'm still not sure how I survived to get here. I know now that I would have ended up down here anyway, but when it happened, it felt horrible. I felt horrible. The things that happened to all of us down here are because he was afraid. And what he did with those chips, that was criminal. He lied about what they did and what would happen if he got his way and we all took them. If he had his way, we would all be dead."

Raven was next. Murphy stood near her, making sure she stayed steady. "I came down not long after the Hundred. Dr. Griffin was worried about Clarke, so we worked together to refurbish an escape pod. She was supposed to come with me, but Nygel ratted us out. She held them off long enough for me to launch the pod. Things were messed up when I landed, but we kept trying to let the Ark know it was safe for all of them to come down. Guess they couldn't wait, because when we were launching flares to get their attention, three hundred and some people sacrificed themselves. Chancellor Jaha, as you see, wasn't one of them. When the last piece of the Ark landed and he wasn't on it, I thought he was dead, but he turned up again talking about the City of Light and convinced some really sad, messed up people to follow him. Only one of them survived, and what he brought back from there was worse than the worst sickness. The lies he told to convince people who were tired and sad and scared, people who trusted him because he used to be in charge, they were terrible. He promised an end to pain and sadness and it seemed to be that at first. And then I realized that it was some crazy drug and you couldn't get off of it. Once you took that chip and A.L.I.E. had you, it was impossible to leave. You weren't yourself any more, just another pawn. Until that chip came out of me, I didn't know how much I missed. And yeah, my leg hurts like hell now and I'm back to wearing a brace and limping around but what I do and where I go are my decisions. He had no right to take that from me.
"I went with Jaha to the City of Light because everybody justifiably hated me," Murphy began. "I was angry at everyone, including him, but he wasn't mad at me, and neither were the people who went with us. They were all killed along the way, though. We didn't stop to bury them. We had to get there, to the City of Light. And when we did, he locked me in a bunker by myself for three months. There was food and a pistol and a nonstop video of this guy panicking because A.L.I.E. figured out how to get around the programming locks they put on it. He'll talk about her and she, but it's a computer program. It's the computer program that launched nuclear missiles and blasted us back to medieval days. It's the computer program that wants to finish the job. And he'll help it any way he can because he truly believes its faulty logic, that people, that we are a plague on the planet. It has the tools to help us rebuild in a better way, but instead, it wants to wipe us out. My answer, to him and his stupid computer friend, is fuck you."

Clarke looked around. Her eyes rested on Marcus for a few seconds, but he shook his head. "Anyone else?" she asked, and waited for nearly a minute. "OK, then, we'll let him speak now."

Clarke nodded to the guards and stepped aside. They pulled him to the front of the crowd and took a step back.

"You don't understand," Jaha said in a conversational tone. "None of you understand. Those of you who followed A.L.I.E., you have some idea of what she's building. It's a utopia, someplace where all of us are safe. There's no pain, no longing, no missing what you've lost. The City of Light will survive, and we will survive there. There's no need to go through all of this, to constantly fight just to live. There's no need to live with the fear that we will be wiped out because of fear.

"You want to judge me for my actions, actions that I took to preserve the few survivors of the Ark. You think you have that right even though everything I have done has been to protect you, all of you. I hope that you'll see the truth."

When he finished, Clarke stepped up again. We're going to do this by counting raised hands. There will be no retaliation against anyone you disagree with. So first, how many think he's guilty?"

Nearly every hand went up. Clarke knew there was no need to count, but made a show of it anyway and announced the number when she finished counting. She repeated the numbers to the crowd.

"The next question is his punishment. Like before, there will be no retaliation if you don't agree with someone's vote. Who believes he should be exiled?"

A few hands went up and Clarke counted them. "Who believes he should be executed. She didn't need to count, but did anyway, and announced the decision. "Death, by vote of 48 to six." She turned back to Jaha. "Any last words?"

"You'll see one day that I'm right," he said. Clarke pulled her pistol from her jacket, took careful aim, and pulled the trigger.
Marcus kept a tight hold on Abby. He knew her instinct would be to try to save Jaha again, and that couldn’t happen. No one else in the room moved. Clarke stared at Jaha’s body. Everyone else looked at Clarke. Nearly two minutes passed before anyone moved.

Clarke finally raised her eyes and looked back. “You can go,” she said in a conversational tone, and the room began to empty. After a few minutes, nearly everyone was gone. Miller, Bryan, Harper and Monroe remained, as did Murphy, Raven, and the Azgeda guards. Clarke summoned one of them, and the others moved closer so they could hear what Clarke said.

“We need to dispose of his body,” she told the guard.

“We can build the pyre wherever you want.”

“He doesn’t deserve that.”

“There is a place,” the guard said tentatively, “but it is not close.”

“How far?”

“Too far to walk.”

“Get a cart,” Clarke ordered.

He left, and Skaikru remained in a group together. “We’ll take care of it,” Miller volunteered.

“I’ll do it,” Clarke answered.

“We’ll help,” Murphy said firmly.

For the first time, Clarke looked at all of them. After a moment, she nodded. Miller said something quietly to Bryan and he left, only to return a few minutes later with a blanket. They draped it over Jaha’s body while they waited for the cart to arrive.

When the guard returned, Miller and Murphy pulled the blanket off Jaha’s body. They spread it out beside him and rolled him onto it, then rolled him up. Everyone, including Raven, helped carry the body outside and put it in the cart.

Raven rode on the cart while the rest of Skaikru walked behind it. The guard led them through lesser trafficked streets and out one of the small gates. An hour outside Polis, they reached a dumping ground. No one said anything while they removed the body from the cart and carried it as far as they safely could, then placed it on the rubbish heap.

Clarke put Miller, Bryan, Harper, and Monroe in the cart with Raven for the return trip. The horse moved faster than Clarke and Murphy walked, and that was fine with Clarke.

“You OK?” Murphy asked when the others couldn’t hear.

“Yeah,” Clarke answered. “It’s almost finished.”

“We’ll leave tomorrow after Heda.”

“We going to walk?”
“Yeah, otherwise we’re going to spend a lot of time picking mud off the horses.”

“Sounds fun.”

“You know it.” Murphy put his hand on Clarke’s shoulder. “You did the right thing.”

“I know. Still sucks.”

“Most right things do,” Murphy answered, and dropped his hand. They walked the rest of the way back without talking.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke sat at the table with Ontari after Murphy and Raven went to bed.

“I have doubled the guard traveling with you,” Ontari told her.

“You don’t have to do that. We’ll be fine.”

“Klark, you must be safe. There are still people out there who would kill you to say they had taken your head.”

Clarke took a slow, deep breath before answering. “Lexa, stop. Too many guards will draw attention we don’t need. It’s bad enough you’re sending four. I’d rather it were two.”

“You will take the guards, Klark.”

“What about Raven and Ontari?”

“Many guards travel with them to protect the Natblida.”

“How many?”

“A unit.”

“How many?” Clarke repeated.

“Thirty.”

“You have to stop with the overprotectiveness. Murphy and I don’t need four guards, and Ontari doesn’t need 30.”

“Klark, we are close. All of you must stay safe.”

“Fine, just ease up on Ontari.”

“I do not know how long it will be until we are together again.”

“I miss you, too,” Clarke said, and squeezed Ontari’s hand.

“I will keep Raven safe,” Ontari said.

“I know you will. We’ll be back before you know it.” Clarke released Ontari’s hand. “Good night,” she said, and stood up.

Ontari waited a few minutes before following Clarke to the bedroom.
Clarke didn’t dream that night, but Ontari did. She and Lexa planned every step of the journey to Arkadia to ensure that all who were vulnerable would be safe. *You will give Raven a weapon of her choosing*, Lexa instructed.

“Guns are not safe.”

*Raven knows how to use that weapon. She is far more protected by that than a sword.*

“I will protect Raven,” Ontari answered, a little indignant.

*I know you will. Her weapon will be a last resort.*

“She wishes to visit a Skaikru who lives with Trikru.”

*Octavia*, Lexa answered with a sigh. *They were close to each other and Clarke. Her brother was once Clarke’s seken, but when she left, he lost his way. He was one of those who slaughtered the army sent to protect Skaikru from Azgeda.*

“He died in the battle. Clarke looked pained when she pointed at him.”

*She blames herself for the wrong that Skaikru did. She thinks that had she been there, none of those things would have happened. She will never say it, but Klark believes none of it would have happened had she stayed with Skaikru after Maun-de fell.*

“She cannot blame herself for the actions of others.”

*She does, but it is not anything we can address now. Rest now, Ontari. The coming days will be full.*

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Abby and Marcus joined the others in Clarke’s suite for an early breakfast. When she learned Raven was going to Arkadia, she asked to go as well. “I want to do a brain scan to see if there’s a reason the A.I. was able to take you over,” she explained to Raven, and looked to Ontari. “Raven and I can look at the medical equipment and determine what can be moved here.”

“Gather your things after we eat. I will leave a guard so you can catch up.”

“Mochof, Heda,” Abby answered, and ignored Clarke’s look and Murphy’s smirk.

Ontari looked at Clarke. “Be careful. Send a messenger when you return to Polis.”

“I will,” Clarke said. “Any chance you’ll let us leave two of our guards here?”

“None,” Ontari and Lexa answered together.

They finished the meal quietly. Clarke and Murphy were the first to leave.

The Natblida were waiting for Ontari at the stable, and Clarke stopped to speak with them. They were excited about the trip, and when Clarke finished with them, Aden and Fair pulled her aside.

“Why is Heda taking us?” Aden asked.

“Ask her,” Clarke answered.
“When we return, I would like to speak with you,” Fair said.

“Any time. You, too, Aden. But I need to get going now. Heda will be here very soon. She was just a few minutes behind me.”

“Travel safely, Wanheda,” Aden said.

“You, too. All of you,” Clarke answered, and she and Murphy walked to the gate.

Outside Polis, they moved off the road and into the forest.

“You know where we’re going, right?” Clarke asked.

“Yes. We’re going to the coast and then we’re going to work our way north until we find a boat or someplace I recognize.”

“Nothing like a definite plan,” Clarke answered.

“You’ll thank me when we don’t have to ride through the desert for two weeks.”
The Natblida settled down when Ontari arrived, and they were soon on the way. Abby caught up to them quickly. Raven rode in the middle of the pack, surrounded on all sides by Natblida, who were surrounded by warriors. For the first time, Raven got a sense of why Clarke protested about the number of guards accompanying her and Murphy.

The Natblida were entertaining, unlike the guards. They were full of questions about Skaikru and Arkadia, and Raven answered them as best as she could. The more involved questions, she skipped over, promising to answer them later.

For as large a group as it was, they moved quickly. Raven was impressed at the level of organization. When they stopped for the night, she and Abby were repeatedly asked to move until they gave up on trying to help. After the first tents went up, a guard came to get them and showed them to the one they would share during the trip.

Abby noticed Raven's increased limp and offered to massage her back and leg. She'd seen Nyko do it enough, and her last stop before leaving Polis was at the infirmary to tell him she would be gone and to get some of the ointment he used on Raven.

Ontari came into the tent while Abby worked on Raven. She sat nearby and watched while she talked. "The Natblida want to hear about how both of you came to Earth. Will you share it with them after tonight's meal?"

"Sure," Raven answered.

"Of course," Abby added.

"I am certain they will have many questions tonight, and more once we reach Arkadia."

"I guess Clarke's told you everything," Raven replied, then grunted as Abby hit a particularly tender spot.

"No. I heard the stories about Skaikru, but Klark has said little."

"She's been busy," Abby said in Clarke's defense.

"Sha," Ontari agreed and got to her feet. "I must check on the Natblida. We will speak again soon."

When they got ready to stop for the night, Clarke called their guards together. "I know Heda told you to take care of me, but I'm telling you right now I'm going to help. I can set up a tent, gather firewood, and get a fire going. Murphy and I can find water while you hunt."

The guards looked at each other uneasily. Finally, one said, "Heda said you would say this and she was adamant that you are our charge."

Murphy watched the interaction and wasn't sure who he felt worse for. He stepped in to break the impasse. "Heda and Haihefa sent me to guard Wanheda, too. Trust me, she's not delicate. She won't break. None of us want to be out here any longer than necessary, so let's just work together. The last thing any of you want is for her to be angry at you."
"But Heda said," he began again.

"I know what Heda said. I was there when she said it, and Wanheda told Heda what she told you. We can stand here and argue all night or you and you," Murphy said, pointing at the youngest guards, "can go find some meat for dinner while the rest of us set up camp."

"Go," Clarke added with a shooing motion, and the younger guards turned for the woods. Clarke looked at the others. "I'm going to gather firewood. If you think we need tents tonight, set them up. Otherwise, set up the rest of camp. C'mon, Murphy," Clarke added.

"Canteens," Murphy said, and the remaining guards handed theirs over as he walked past.

When they were away from camp, Clarke said, "Thanks."

"No problem. You guys would have argued all night and we would have all been hungry and pissed off."

They found a stream nearby and Murphy filled the canteens while Clarke picked up fallen branches for firewood. They returned to camp with those items and went out again for more firewood. When they returned this time, the fire was going. A little later, the hunters returned with a small deer.

Although Clarke didn't think they needed tents, they were neatly set up near the fire. Her pack waited outside one, Murphy's outside another, and a third had nothing in front of it. Clarke suppressed a sigh. She was going to have a tent to herself, while Murphy shared with the guards, who would take turns keeping watch. Under other circumstances, she would have appreciated Ontari's concern for her comfort. For now, she let it go.

100 – 100 – 100

Skaikru gathered in the hall the first night that everyone was away from Polis. Miller, Harper, and Monroe did their best to ease everyone's anxiety, but they were a little worried, too. Everyone who could protect them was away. To divert their attention, he got them to talk about their interests and how their warrior training was going. A few said they figured out what they wanted to do, and Miller agreed to go with them to talk with the people they wanted to learn from.

By the time everyone was settled down, it was late. Miller wanted to sleep, but didn't think it would come easily. He didn't mind being Clarke's middleman, but being in charge, even temporarily, kept him off balance. He worried about doing or saying the wrong thing and decided he would try to find some time the next day to speak with Marcus.

100 – 100 – 100

"Our people, the ones you call Skaikru, didn't all come to Earth at the same time. We were living on space stations that joined together shortly after the bombs fell," Abby began. "Each station specialized in something and shared what they made with everyone. They weren't built to last as long as they did, and the most important things on them began to fail. The end came with the oxygen scrubbers began to fail. There wasn't enough air for everyone, so the Council decided to send 100 prisoners to Earth to see if we could live down here."

"Prisoners?"

"Sha," Raven answered. "On the Ark, every crime was punishable by death, unless you were younger than 18. Then, you got locked up until you were 18 and your case would be reviewed. In theory, you might get a second chance, but that never happened. Most of them hadn't really done anything that warranted being floated."
"Raven," Abby reproved.

"You know it's true. You let them lock Clarke up so she would tell anyone about the oxygen situation. Most of them were there for taking something because they didn't have any choice. And Octavia was going to be floated just because she was born."

Abby sighed. "Most of that's true," she admitted.

"How did they get here?" one of the Natblida asked.

"We put them on a drop ship, a smaller vessel, programmed it to land near Mount Weather, and launched it. They landed successfully, but not as close to Mount Weather as we thought they would. We put monitoring bracelets on all of them, and they began to go black," Abby said. "I was worried about Clarke, so I asked Raven to help me find a way down."

"Smarest thing you ever did," Raven said cockily. "I got a decommissioned escape pod working. Abby was supposed to come down with me, but instead, she bought me enough time to launch."

"What is an escape pod?" Fair asked.

"The drop ship was big enough to hold a hundred people, but an escape pod only holds one or two."

"Like the one Beka Pramheda used."

"Exactly," Raven said. She noted Abby's look and told her, "I'll explain later, if I can." To her audience, she said, "I landed, but I got knocked out for a while. When I came to, Clarke and a few others were there. I was supposed to contact Abby to let her know we were safe, but Bellamy stole my radio and chucked it into the river. That was the start of our problems with Trikru. And that's enough for one night."

Ontari stood up. "To bed," she directed the Natblida. When they were left, she walked around the fire to sit beside Raven. "I have questions."

"OK."

"Clarke was a criminal? All of Skaikru were criminals?"

"Not all of them, only the first ones down were considered criminals," Raven answered while Abby looked into the fire. "And Clarke definitely wasn't. The council was afraid she would tell others what she learned from her father. They were promised pardons if they got down here and found out it was safe, but that didn't happen."

"Why not?"

"Why not?" Raven repeated, looking at Abby.

"They wouldn't follow the rules."

"See, that's the part you all got wrong. The rules aren't the same here. You made more problems because you wouldn't even listen when we tried explain. All you gave us was patronizing bullshit."

"We did the best we could," Abby said defensively.

"It wasn't good enough," Raven told her. "We did the best we could, so you got to live, and get help to survive, and still make a bunch of shitty mistakes that got most of us killed."
"I'm sorry you feel that way, Raven."

"But not for what you did. You're no different than Jaha."

Abby stood up. "Good night, Raven."

"Figures," Raven said bitterly. "Shit gets real, and you run."

Abby didn't even slow down as she continued to walk toward her tent.

"Sorry, Commander," Raven said after a few seconds. "You didn't need to hear that."

"Do all of those who came down first agree with you?"

"Yeah, not that there are many of us left."

"Yet you allow them to live among you."

"Abby has skills we can't risk losing. Marcus realized what they did wrong and he's trying to make up for it. Clarke executed Jaha. None of the others survived." Raven sighed. "I didn't realize how mad I still am about it."

"Are the others still angry?"

"I don't know." Raven watched the fire for a few seconds. She knew Ontari was studying her. "Maybe when we get to Arkadia, we can play chess."

"I would like that."

"Time for bed now, though."

"Sha." Ontari stood and offered her arm to Raven.

Raven took hold of Ontari's forearm and used it to help her to her feet. "See you in the morning."

"Sleep well."

"You, too," Raven answered, and began the slow walk to the tent she shared with Abby.

Abby was asleep or faking it well when Raven arrived, and she was glad that the talk she knew was coming would be put off for at least one more night.
Chapter 78

Clarke opened map on the floor of her tent. Murphy crouched beside her. "We're headed here," he said, pointing to place on the coast. "If we go though here, it should give us a direct path."

"What's it like?"

"Forest, like the rest of it. If you don't like it, we can find a river and follow it to the coast."

"What's there, besides, we hope, a boat?"

"Nothing. A hut and a pier."

"We should have just sent scouts out to see if it's there."

"But then you'd miss all this."

Clarke rolled her eyes, folded the map, and put it back in her pack. She and Murphy left the tent and started helping tear down the camp. When that was done, they began walking again.

100 – 100 – 100

"You said a girl came with the boat and saved you from Jaha," Clarke said.

"Yeah, Emori. Her brother was with Jaha."

"Who is she?"

"One of the outcasts from the Wasteland. Something was wrong with one of her hands, so she got kicked out as soon as she was big enough to take care of herself."

"Cold."

"Yeah."

"So what happened?"

"After we left the boat, we decided the easiest way to get what we needed was to ambush traders on the road, and you know how that went."

"She got away?"

"As far as I know."

"Maybe you'll find each other again."

"Maybe," Murphy said.

100 – 100 – 100

The second day on the road was exactly like the first. Raven and Abby were in the middle of the group with the Natblida. They weren't speaking to each other and the Natblida were mostly silent, too. When they stopped to make camp for the night, Ontari appeared to help Raven down off her horse.
"Thanks, Commander," Raven said, and stood for a few seconds with her hands on Ontari's shoulders to steady herself.

"Walk with me," Ontari requested, and Raven slowly limped away from the activity with her.

"Do you need something?" Raven asked.

"Company. The guards get annoyed when I try to help. I do not understand why. I can pitch a tent."

"Because you're Heda. They want to do things for you."

"Like people want to do things for Klark."

"Exactly. And sometimes the best thing both of you can do is let them do it."

"I am still getting used to it. Nia showed me no special favor, although she claimed to favor me above others, even Roan."

"From what I've heard, Nia was a sociopath."

"What is that?"

"Somebody concerned only with what she wants."

Ontari nodded.

"So I guess you want us to tell more stories around the campfire tonight."

"The Natblida are very interested."

"Only the Natblida?"

"I am one of them," Ontari answered with a small smile.

Raven laughed. "OK, so I'll tell you more about Skaikru's adventures."

"I will massage your leg, if you wish."

"I'd like that. I'm still really torqued at Abby, and I don't want to start a fight with her."

Ontari turned them around. "My tent is nearly ready. If you will wait there, I will get the ointment."

"Deal."

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke kept them walking as long as possible and they made camp in the twilight. There was no arguing tonight over who would do what. Murphy collected canteens and went to fill them. Clarke followed him and gathered firewood on the trip back. She and Murphy went again to collect wood. When they returned, the guard preparing their food asked for more wood, so they made a third trip.

While they waited for food to cook, Clarke took Murphy to her tent and opened the map again. She held a candle over it. "Any idea where we are?"

"Closer than we were yesterday."

"So no."
"Not really. All the trees look alike. But we can't be far. It took Emori and I four or five days to reach the main road, and we didn't rush. I think tomorrow we should start going more toward the east."

"OK." Clarke folded the map and tucked it away.

While they ate, Clarke told the guards what Murphy said. For the first time, they asked where they were headed.

"We're looking for a boat."

"What kind of boat?"

"We would call it a tugboat," Murphy said. "Not too big, really sturdy and powerful."

"Not one that Floukru uses?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen any of theirs." Murphy pulled a stick off one of the logs destined for the fire. In the dirt, he drew a rough outline of it.

Clarke snorted and took the stick from him. She scuffed his attempt out of existence and quickly sketched a tugboat from memory. It was another thing Wells was interested in, so she learned more about boats and ships than she ever wanted to know, but it was paying off now.

"Yeah, like that," Murphy said when she finished.

The guards all took careful looks at it and nodded once it was committed to memory.

When she finished eating, Clarke went to her tent and laid down. Sleeping alone was odd. She was used to having Ontari near. It took her a long time to sleep. Her dreams were disjointed and Clarke woke in the morning feeling off kilter.

Raven fell asleep while Ontari worked on her leg and back so Ontari covered her up when she finished and went to make sure a plate was set aside for Raven. After the meal, Abby talked about living on the Ark, something as foreign to those listening as Earth was to everyone who came down.

When Abby finished talking, Ontari sent the Nightbloods to bed and went to her tent. Raven still slept in Ontari's bed, so Ontari wrapped up in her cloak and stretched out on the ground beside it.

The breeze picked up and the air smelled fresher as Clarke and the others neared the coast. The forest slowly became sparser until it was replaced by dunes. The climb over them was slow, but the view was worth it.

"The ocean," Clarke said softly, almost reverently. She spent hours looking at the blue that covered most of the planet, but never imagined she would see it. She turned to Murphy. "You didn't tell me it was the ocean," she said.

He shrugged. "It's just water."

"It's not just water. It's where we came from. Our bodies and the oceans have nearly the same salinity."

"It's cold and wet."
"Beautiful."

"Whatever, Griffin. We're looking for a boat, not sightseeing."

"No reason we can't do both." Clark dropped her pack and pulled out her notebook. She took a few minutes to sketch the beach and try to capture the waves. She promised herself that when everything was settled, she would return. She felt relaxed and energized, and hoped the feeling would stay for a while.

100 – 100 – 100

"Raven, you must wake up."

"Huh?"

"We leave soon. The guards want to take down the tent."

"I was here all night?"

"Sha."

"You should have sent me packing."

Ontari shrugged. "You need to get up," she said. "You can wash over there," she pointed. "I will bring some food." She was gone before Raven could answer.

Raven sat up and sighed, then got out of bed and made her way to the basin of warm water. She quickly washed her face and hands, then tried to smooth her hair. She was on her way out of the tent when Ontari returned holding two plates and mugs.

Ontari put them on the table and pointed at a chair while she sat. Raven sat opposite her. "Sorry I took your bed."

"I am glad you rested."

"I do feel better," Raven admitted.

"We should reach Arkadia today."

"Then the work begins."

"Sha." Ontari paused to eat, then said, "I had Clarke give me a tour after the battle, but she did not know how to answer my questions."

"About?"

"Your tek. Its purpose and how it works."

"That's definitely not Clarke's strong suit."

"You will be able to explain?"

"I'll do my best," Raven promised.

"That is all I ask. You may visit your Trikru friends tomorrow, but after that, you have much to do. The sooner we return to Polis, the better."
"Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong. I feel better when all of us are together."

"All of us?"

"Clarke. You."

"Lexa."

"She is always with me, but she does not like to be away from Clarke."

"And you?"

"And I what?"

"You don't like to be away from Clarke, either."

"No."

"Why?"

"Partly because of Heda Lexa."

Raven nodded.

"One day, we will tell everyone the complete story."

"I can't wait." Raven finished her breakfast. "Can't wait for chess tonight, either," she said, and stood up.

Ontari stood, too. "I look forward to that, as well." She paused for a moment. "I am happy to massage your leg and back if you do not want Fisa Abi to do it."

"You have better things to do," Raven said, and started for the entrance.

Ontari stepped in front of her. "How I spend my time is up to me. If you do not want me to help you, I will not."

"I didn't say that," Raven said begrudgingly.

"Good. I enjoy our time together, whatever we are doing."

Raven smiled. "Me, too."

"Then it is settled. I will see you this evening." Ontari started to step aside, but Raven put her hand on Ontari's shoulder to stop her.

"Thanks."

Ontari smiled and Raven let her go.
When they reached Arkadia, Raven was in such a hurry to reach her workshop that her bad leg tangled in the stirrup. She landed hard and when she caught her breath, couldn't decide whether she should laugh at how ridiculous she must look or curse her clumsiness. The guard nearest her did neither. She quickly dismounted and got Raven free from the stirrup and on her feet.

"Thanks. Mochof."

The guard nodded and followed her through the group. Raven went as fast as she could, ignoring the new pain in her back and shoulder. She grunted while pulling the door to her workshop open. She hit the light switch on her way inside, and the lights slowly and unevenly began to come on.

Raven went outside and looked at the top of the Ark. The solar panels were covered with debris. She turned to her guard and asked, "How do you feel about climbing?"

The guard looked back, expressionless.

"Somebody needs to climb up there and clear all that stuff away so I can have power," Raven explained.

Ontari walked up and heard the last few words. "What do you need?"

"The solar panels are blocked. Look," Raven pointed. "See those rectangles? They provide power for everything here, but only when they're clear to catch the light." She looked at Ontari and saw the Natblida behind her. "I need somebody to climb up there and clear them. There's a ladder. I'll show you."

They all followed her around to the back side of her workshop. Raven looked at the rungs and remembered the times she used them as handholds in space. She lost that thought at the sight of all the Natblida scrambling up the ladder. Ontari went up last to keep an eye on them.

When the panels were clear, they stood and looked around. There wasn't much to see apart from trees and the collapsed remains of Mount Weather, but they enjoyed the height until Ontari ordered them down. On the ground, she sent them to set up their tents inside the fence while she went into Raven's workshop.

Raven leaned on her table. The lights were still dim but slowly becoming brighter. She wouldn't be able to do much until the lights were restored. She saw Ontari in the doorway. "Hey."

"You do not look well."

"I'm fine, but I won't be able to work until the batteries are charged."

"How long will that take?"

"A day. Tomorrow, if it's clear."

"What can you do until then?"

"Not much. There's not enough light to see properly, so I can't search for what I need, and there's not enough for any of my tools to work."

"The solar panels need to stay clear all the time?"
"Sha."

"I will ensure the guards who stay do that."

"Good." Raven shifted her stance and stifled a groan.

"Horseback riding does not agree with you."

"I'm fine on the horse, but getting off is hard."

"Why did you not say anything?"

"Abby usually helps me."

"I can help you."

"It's not"

"You will allow me to help," Ontari said.

"Sha, Heda," Raven answered with a smirk.

"Something amuses you?"

"You."

"Me?"

"You," Raven repeated. She and Ontari looked at each other for several seconds before Raven relented. "You're nothing like I thought you'd be."

"Oh?"

"I never heard anything good about Azgeda and the commander before you wasn't one of my favorite people."

"She likes you."

Raven shrugged. "I don't really care. And we're talking about you."

"You are talking about me."

"Do you want to hear the rest?"

"Sha."

"I like you, Commander. I appreciate that you're going out of your way to help Clarke and the rest of us. I know Skaikru isn't popular, but you're giving us a chance."

"I do not have a choice."

"Sure you do. We always have choices. Sometimes you have to choose between bad and worse, sometimes between good and better."

"Which am I?"

"Better, but I've never done this with a girl."
"We have done nothing."

"You want to, don't you?"

Ontari finally closed the distance between them. She kissed Raven's cheek and said, "Very much."

"OK," Raven answered, smiling.

"Show me your Ark."

"This is my workshop, in case you hadn't guessed. I'm going to take a lot of this back to Polis."

"Whatever you need."

Raven smiled again. She quickly kissed Ontari. "We won't be able to see much. There's only enough power to run the emergency lights right now. As soon as the batteries charge, I'll give you the tour."

"Fine."

"Is it OK if I go to TonDC to see Octavia?"

"Is there enough time for you to return before dark?"

"Probably not," Raven sighed.

"We will go tomorrow."

"Deal."

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke loved walking by the ocean. It gave her a measure of peace that she hadn't felt in months, and although she tried not to think about that afternoon, it stayed in her mind. As she walked, she tried not to think too much about how much she missed Lexa and the possibility of getting her back.

"You alright?" Murphy asked quietly.

"Yeah. Just thinking."

"You know all of this sounds crazy, right?"

"Yeah. But I can't not try."

"Crazy," he repeated.

Clarke shrugged. She knew he would help, no matter what he thought, or he wouldn't be walking beside her. "If we find this boat, what're we gonna do?"

"We have two choices. One, we leave some guards on it and head back. Two, we bring it as close to Polis as possible."

"Do you know how to run it?"

"I think so. It wasn't complicated."

"And we'll need the practice."
"Yeah. So we'll bring it back with us."

"And once Raven figures out the chips, we'll go. We need to figure out who to bring with us."

"The boat's not that big, so the fewer the better."

"OK."

"You sure you're alright?"

"Honestly? I don't know. I don't know how we're supposed to do this and I don't know what will happen if we can't and I really don't know what will happen if we can."

"You've been through worse."

"That doesn't really help," Clarke sighed.

"It's all I got," Murphy answered.

"Jerk," Clarke mumbled.

Murphy laughed.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven again fell asleep while Ontari massaged her leg and back. She saw the fresh bruise on Raven's shoulder and gently worked on that, too, after Raven fell asleep. She covered her when she finished and began to go through the papers that arrived with a messenger from Polis. She answered the messages that needed it and sent them back, then sent another messenger to TonDC telling them to expect her and Raven tomorrow.

After, she went out to walk through camp. Everyone was inside the wall. The Natblida had thousands of questions about the Ark and with Raven out of commission, Abby was left to try to answer them until Ontari sent them to bed.

Abby excused herself and Ontari watched her walk toward the Ark before returning to her tent. Raven was awake, sitting on Ontari's bed adjusting her brace.

"Chess?" Ontari asked.

"Maybe tomorrow."

"You may sleep here if you wish."

"I'm not putting you out of your bed again, Commander."

"I do not mind."

"I do."

"I sent a messenger to TonDC so they know we are coming."

"Thank you."

"Why is your friend with Trikru?"

"It's where she belongs."
"Heda Leksa says she is angry at Klark."

"Did she say why?"

"Something about Klark not returning here with her."

"That would definitely piss Octavia off." Raven forced herself to her feet. "I'll let you get some rest."

"I will see you in the morning."

"Good night," Raven answered, and dragged her fingers down Ontari's arm as she passed.

On her way to her tent, Raven met Abby. "The power's still not back," Abby said.

"Maybe by tomorrow night. The batteries need to charge tomorrow."

"So we just sit around?"

"Yup." Raven ducked into the tent.

Abby followed her in. "And after that?"

"We get to work. Good night."

"I think we need to talk, Raven."

"Not tonight." Raven removed her brace and boots and rolled into bed. She turned her back to Abby and pulled the fur up over her shoulders.

Abby got the message.
Clarke sat up and looked around. She thought Lexa woke her, would have sworn that she felt Lexa shake her gently and say her name. Clarke pulled on her boots and left her tent to see one of her guards being dragged away. She pulled her pistol from her waist band and fired one shot in the air.

In the firelight, she saw whoever it was drop the guard and heard the rest of her group scrambling to see what was happening. Murphy, surprisingly, was the first out. "Get him," Clarke ordered. "I'll cover you."

She stayed several feet behind Murphy as he went to get the guard. Another of them went to help him while one stayed with Clarke and the other two did a quick sweep around the campsite.

When the injured guard was close to the fire, Murphy went to Clarke's tent to get her first aid kit. He brought it back with a lantern. "Looks like they clocked him from behind," he observed.

Clarke ran her fingers over his head and on the back of it found a bloody lump. "I need warm water and some cloth to clean him up and see if he needs stitches," she said. One of the Azgeda guards got up to do her bidding.

"Did you see anything?"

"Just him being dragged away. Whoever it was was too far away."

"Didn't know you still had a pistol."

"All of Skaikru's weapons are in the armory at Polis. We can get you one if you want."

"Nah, I'm good."

The guard returned and stood holding a bowl of warm water so Clarke could easily reach it. Murphy held the lantern to give her as much light as possible to work in. To be safe, Clarke put two stitches in and bandaged the guard's head. "Now we just need him to wake up," she said. "Put him in his tent, on his side. I'll check on him."

"I'll stay with him," another guard volunteered.

Clarke nodded while she repacked her kit. Murphy followed her to her tent.

"What woke you?"

"Lexa."

"Score one for the ghost girlfriend."

"Yeah. Go get some rest. I'm gonna try to catch a few more hours."

"I'm up. I'll stay on watch."

"Thanks."

"Just doing my job," Murphy answered as he left Clarke's tent. She sat down on her furs and slowly removed her boots. She put her pistol near her head, laid down, and closed her eyes.
Raven, Ontari, and two guards left for TonDC after breakfast. The ride was easy; the path between TonDC and Arkadia wasn't yet overgrown.

When they reached the gates, Ontari dismounted and went to help Raven down from her horse. The guards took charge of all the horses while they waited for the gates to open. It didn't take long.

There was a lot of bowing, and Raven didn't recognize anyone who met them. Ontari went off with the new village chief. Raven waited. After several minutes, Octavia strolled up. "I didn't think you would really come."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"You're up in Polis with Clarke, aren't you?"

"Yeah. She got that chip out of my head."

"Good for you."

"Are you mad generally or just at me?"

"Both. You took that chip and you weren't Raven anymore."

"I know."

"And Clarke stayed with Lexa in Polis. She abandoned Skaikru again."

"There's more to it than that."

"I don't care, Raven."

"There's not a lot of us left, Octavia."

"There's no us here, Raven. There never was. We were always invaders. All we brought was death."

"You can be someone else now, but you're always the girl who spent the first 15 years of her life hiding under the floor. You're always the girl who wanted all those things she couldn't have."

"You're still the youngest zero g mechanic in 53 years, but it doesn't mean anything. I don't want to see anyone. I don't want to talk to them. And you can tell Clarke to float herself for me."

"You don't mean that."

"I do. Every word. I'm with Trigedakru. As far as I'm concerned, the sooner Skaikru dies out, the better."

"That won't happen."

"A couple years ago, coming to Earth wasn't going to happen, either."

Raven studied Octavia for several seconds. "I'll be at Arkadia for a few days if you change your mind."

Octavia didn't answer. She turned her back to Raven and walked away. Raven weighed her options and decided the best choice was to wait at the stable for Ontari to finish whatever it was she had to
do. Skaikru wasn't welcome in Trikru lands and Raven didn't want to create any problems for Ontari.

When she reached the stables, Raven took an apple from the basket at the entrance and found an out of the way spot to watch everything. Octavia was angry, but didn't realize that she was the only one to walk away from Arkadia relatively unscathed. She lost Bellamy, but that was his choice. She still had Lincoln and Indra, a place she felt she belonged. The rest of Skaikru continued to struggle and worry.

Raven worried, too. She felt the enormous weight put on her shoulders by Clarke, Ontari, and Lexa. They all trusted her to figure out how to bring Lexa back with the limited tools and information they provided. She was still working things out in her head, and continued to do that while eating an apple in a small patch of sunshine.

"Raven, are you all right?" Ontari repeated.

"Oh, hey, Commander, just thinking." Raven stood up. "We done here?"

"Yes."

They didn't talk while they walked to the gates, or for the first part of the ride. Ontari spoke first, when she felt they were far enough from TonDC. "How was your visit?"

"Not so good. Yours?"

"The same. They complain that I brought Skaikru back to Arkadia."

"We won't be here long, I hope. And I won't bother them again."

"In time, they will seek what Skaikru has," Ontari said. "The things you will build with help everyone."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Commander."

100 – 100 – 100

"I can walk, Wanheda," the guard insisted.

"How many fingers?" Clarke asked.

"Two."

"Nope. We can wait one more day. Rest. That's an order."

Clarke left the tent. Murphy waited nearby. "How is he?"

"He has a bad concussion. He's seeing double. Maybe tomorrow."

"I don't like waiting here."

"I don't like it, either, but no matter what we do, we're down two guards because somebody has to keep an eye on him."

"I'll talk to the other guards, see if we can set up some traps. I have a really bad feeling about us staying here."

Clarke nodded. She wasn't happy about having to lose at least a day of travel, but it couldn't be
helped. Murphy's concern added to her worries, as did the hypervigilance of the remaining guards. Whatever trouble was brewing was too close for comfort.

There was a fair bit of yelling during the night, but Clarke and the concussed guard slept through it. The others stayed in camp, and those who weren't on watch sat up until they were sure whoever made the racket was gone.

After sunup, Murphy and one of the Azgeda guards checked the traps they set the night before. They went first in the direction the yelling came from and found someone hanging from a tree by one foot snarled in rope.

Murphy climbed the tree and untied the rope so they could use it again. While he climbed down, the guard kept their prisoner still by keeping his sword to her neck. When Murphy reached them, he blinked a few times.

"John, tell him to let me go," Emori demanded.

"Emori, what are you doing here?"

"I didn't know it was you. We wouldn't have bothered you."

"Who's we?" Murphy knelt and removed the rope from her leg. The Azgeda guard didn't move, and neither did Emori.

"My friends. Nobody important."

"How many?"

Emori didn't answer.

"C'mon, Emori, how many?"

"Five," she answered sullenly.

"Is the boat still where we left it?"

"I moved it."

"Where is it?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Tell you what," Murphy said. "You come and have breakfast with us and we'll talk about it, see what we can work out."

"No." Emori shook her head. "They won't take me back if you do that."

"Good. You don't need to be out there." Murphy hauled Emori to her feet.

"You don't understand."

"I understand just fine. You can come with us or we can make you."

To be safe, the Azgeda guard walked behind them and prodded Emori with his sword when she
No one was in sight when they reached the camp, but Clarke and the concussed guard soon came out of his tent. He moved slowly to sit near the campfire while Clarke looked at Murphy and Emori.

"Who's your friend?" she asked Murphy.

"Clarke, this is Emori. She helped me get away from Jaha and the City of Light."

"With the boat."

"Right."

"Where's the boat?"

Emori didn't say anything.

"She won't tell me."

"What do you want for the boat?"

"It's not mine."

"But you know where it is?"

"Yeah."

Their other guards returned from hunting for breakfast. Beside the fire, they cleaned their catch and put it on to cook. Clarke and Murphy both saw Emori's attention to the food.

"You hungry?" Clarke asked her. When Emori didn't answer, Clarke asked, "What about your friends? Are they hungry?"

"We can help," Murphy said. "We can help you get food."

"You think giving us a meal or two will fix things?"

"It's a start," Clarke answered. "You have something we need. What can we give you in return?"

Emori looked at Clarke suspiciously, then looked to Murphy.

"Maybe I should have introduced Clarke properly," he said to Emori. "That," he pointed at Clarke, "is Klark kom Skaikru, also known as Wanheda. She is also Azgeda's ambassador to Polis and one of Heda Ontari's advisers."

Emori groaned. "I'll tell you where the boat is and you let me go."

"You take us to the boat and make sure we know how to work it, we'll pay you and let you go," Clarke countered.

They looked at each other for half a minute before Emori agreed.

"How far is it?"

"Less than a day's walk."

"As soon as everybody eats and we get our stuff packed up, we'll get going," Clarke said loud
enough for the guards to hear.

After that, things moved quickly. Emori pointed the opposite way than Murphy led them. He walked beside her. "When we came back, you left the boat back there, right?"

"Sha. I moved it a couple times."

"Does everything still work?"

"It did when I tied it up. What are you doing with her, John?"

"Clarke? We're friends. She needs to get to the City of Light. The boat's a lot faster than walking."

"Safer, too."

"What happened after they took you?"

"It's a long story," Murphy sighed. "Let's just say I ran into Clarke in Polis and we've been helping each other since."

"Helping her how?"

"You don't get to be jealous. You bailed on me."

"How would it be better for both of us to go to jail?"

"It wouldn't."

"What was I supposed to do?"

Murphy sighed again. "I don't know."

"Tell me about Polis."

"Later." Emori wasn't like he remembered, and he wasn't sure what was different.

After that, they walked without talking. Emori kept looking over her shoulder, and Murphy began to look back, too. He thought he saw movement and waved one of the guards up to stay with Emori while he dropped back to talk to Clarke.

"I don't know what's going on, but something isn't right."

"Like what?"

"Emori keeps looking behind us. I thought I saw somebody back there."

"Keep an eye out," Clarke said. She turned to the concussed guard. He didn't look well, but he kept up and didn't complain. "If something happens, you make sure she doesn't get away."

He nodded and moved up to the front. The guard he replaced dropped back behind Clarke and Murphy. A few minutes later, he reported to Clarke that they were being followed.

"Let's give them a chance to catch up," Clarke said. They moved away from the water into the forest and took a break.

Clarke went to Emori. "Are those your friends back there?"
"Probably."

"Attacking us is a bad idea. Can you give them a signal to come up and talk?"

"So you can kill them?"

"So we can talk."

"They won't believe that's all you want."

"All I care about is getting the boat, so if we can avoid a senseless fight, it's for the best."

"You're so sure you'll defeat them."

"I am," Clarke answered. "Look at us. Four Azgeda warriors, Murphy and me. They're outnumbered. If they're in the same shape you're in, it won't be a fight. I'd rather not see any more blood."

Emori stared at Clarke. Clarke waited for her to speak, and when she tired of waiting, said, "Let's get moving."

Everyone kept an eye on their followers, but they kept their distance. They reached the boat late in the afternoon. Clarke stood on the pier it was tied to and looked at it critically for a couple minutes before boarding. Murphy was behind her. One of the Azgeda guards went next, then Emori, followed by the rest of the party.

While Clarke looked around, Murphy and Emori got it started. Murphy jumped down to get the lines, tossed them to the deck, then jumped aboard. He returned to the wheelhouse. "City of Light?" Emori asked.

"As close to Polis as we can get," Murphy told her.
When they returned to Arkadia, Raven went to check on the power. The batteries were still charging, but the lights were on. Raven went to her workshop. She turned on the lights and looked at everything. After a minute, she began disassembling her workspace. She didn't pay attention to the time. Instead, she focused on gathering what she could take back to Polis. She had no idea how long she'd been sorting things when Ontari entered.

"You missed supper," Ontari said, looking around for a place to put down the plate and mug she carried.

"Sorry," Raven answered and kept working.

"You must eat."

Raven looked at Ontari. "Oh, yeah, sorry." She walked to Ontari and took the plate and mug from her. She looked around as Ontari had, finding no place to put anything else. Raven backed up to the closest wall and slid down it. Ontari sat next to her. Raven ate without talking, her eyes moving between her plate and the piles covering her workshop.

"Do you feel well?" Ontari asked.

"Sorry?"

"You are not acting like you usually do."

"I'm fine. My brain's just trying to do a million things at once."

"I thought," Ontari started, and stopped.

"You thought?" Raven prompted her.

"I thought perhaps I did something," Ontari said uncertainly.

Raven put her plate down and put her hand on Ontari's shoulder. "It's not you," she said and squeezed gently before removing her hand. "You did nothing wrong. I'm just, coming here made me realize how much you guys are relying on me. And Octavia was a jerk. She acts like she's the only one who lost something. I thought she'd be happy. She's where she wants to be, but she's still mad and she doesn't want to hear anything except what she believes."

"Change is hard."

Raven laughed quietly. "You would know."

"As you do," Ontari leaned over and picked up Raven's plate and mug, then stood. She offered her hand and Raven let Ontari help her to her feet. "It is late. You can finish this in my tent, and I will massage your leg."

"That's the best offer I've had today," Raven answered with a smile. She followed Ontari out of the workshop. She closed the door and let Ontari lead her through the quiet camp.

The first thing Raven saw in Ontari's tent was the second cot. While sitting down at the table she asked, "Tired of sleeping on the ground?"
"My guards think it unfitting."

"That you're sleeping on the ground or that you're sleeping on the ground because I'm in your bed."

"Probably both." Ontari filled a mug with water and put more in Raven's. "Finish your food."

"I'm really not hungry."

"You will eat," Ontari insisted.

"Do you bully Clarke like this?"

"When necessary."

It only took a few minutes for Raven to empty the plate. She got up and started to walk to the new cot, but Ontari intercepted her and pointed at the one Raven had been sleeping in. Ten minutes later, Raven was asleep, but Ontari continued to work until she finished.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke left Murphy to deal with Emori and went below to see how much room they had. She had no idea how much Raven would need to bring, and at a minimum, seven people would be making the trip there. If everything went well, eight would return to Polis.

The tug hadn't been cared for. Everywhere belowdecks was filthy, but there should be enough space for all of them. She hurried back to the deck and fresh air. In the wheelhouse, Murphy and Emori were talking, but the engine drowned out their conversation. Clarke checked on her guards. They looked uncomfortable, and it occurred to Clarke that they probably couldn't swim, not that they'd get far with the weight they carried.

Clarke climbed the ladder and sat on top of the wheelhouse. It was warm and she drowsed, enjoying the break. *Do not trust her.*

Why? she asked silently, but Lexa didn’t answer.

100 – 100 – 100

In the morning, Abby went to the Medbay and started inventorying what remained. Some of the equipment could be portable, but much of it was built into the Ark. There was a surprising amount of small usable items, including all of the medicines. There were other things, too, and Abby began gathering the things she could carry back to Polis.

Ontari and Raven entered the Medbay, and Abby looked up. "Everything OK?"

"Raven is giving me a tour," Ontari volunteered.

"And this is my stop. I'll let Abby explain all her things in here. If you get done before I get back, I'll be searching the storage areas."

"Are you looking for something specific?" Abby asked.

"Jaha had a chip maker. I hope it's still here in one piece."

"It's in my office. I took it to keep him from making more."

"Thanks. I'm still going to look around and see if there's anything useful." Raven smiled at Ontari.
"See you later, Commander."

Ontari smiled back and watched her leave before turning her attention to Abby. "What do you need to take from here?"

"I'd like to have everything, but the x-ray machine is portable, so it should be first to go."

"What does that do?"

"It lets me see inside a body. It will show broken bones, tumors, blood clots."

"You can fix those things?"

"Yes."

"You will have it. Anything else?"

"I'll show you what there is and you can decide what's a priority," Abby offered.

Ontari gestured for her to show the way and followed Abby.

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy climbed up to check on Clarke. "Everything good?"

"It's getting late. We need to stop someplace."

"Nah, the radar's working."

"Does it show rocks and shallows?"

"I don't know."

"Tell Emori we're stopping for the night. If there's no place to dock, we'll have to drop an anchor."

"OK." Murphy paused. "She's different," he said.

"Different how?"

"I'm not sure."

"We'll keep an eye on her."

Murphy nodded and returned to the wheelhouse.

An hour later, they tied up at a pier. The guards were nervous, and transmitted it to Clarke and Murphy. They declined to leave the boat and pulled food from their packs. When they set up watches, Clarke and Murphy both volunteered to help.

100 – 100 – 100

Cloud cover made it darker than usual and the gentle slap of water covered a lot of sounds, but not all of them. When Murphy heard voices again, he roused everyone. They were prepared when people jumped onto the deck, screaming.

It wasn't a long fight. The concussed guard remembered his instruction from Clarke and stood in the wheelhouse with his sword at Emori's throat. The others relied too much on the element of surprise,
None of them were badly hurt. Clarke bandaged the worst wounds after the guards restrained all of them, including Emori. Clarke started with her. "You really thought you could take this from us?"

"It's not yours."

"It's not yours, either. I thought we had a deal. You help me, I pay you for your help."

"You won't."

"I will if you keep our deal. Your friends are another matter."

"What are you going to do to them?"

"I don't know yet."

Clarke waited for Emori to say something, and left when she didn't. Murphy went in as soon as Clarke left.

"What the hell was that? Are you trying to get your friends killed? These guards report directly to Heda when we return."

"Heda can do nothing to us."

"Oh fuck," Murphy said. He closed the distance between them and put his fingers on her neck. He groaned when he felt the chip. "Damn it," he said, and went out on deck to Clarke, who was trying to talk to one of their prisoners. "Don't bother talking to them."

"What?"

He jerked his head to the side, and they climbed back on top of the wheelhouse. "What?" Clarke demanded.

"They're chipped."

Clarke closed her eyes and shook her head. "So A.L.I.E. knows we're coming."

"I don't know. But you can't really hold this against them."

"I can, but I won't. Do you think Emori's telling the truth about anything?"

"You see them, Clarke. They're dirty, they're skinny, and they aren't really in control."

"Fine, I'll remove their chips when we get to Polis, but Ontari's going to banish them."

"I'm not sure they'll think that's punishment, but whatever."

"She tells you how to get to the City of Light, or she comes with us."

"Explain it after you get the chip out."
Ontari finished with Abby's tour, and Abby suggested she check on the Natblida. She wanted to talk to Raven, and knew Ontari would end the conversation if Raven was upset. Abby found Raven in the Ark's largest storage area surrounded by boxes.

"Raven."

"Hey. You need something?"

"We need to talk."

Raven sighed.

"I made mistakes. I know that. I was trying to do what I thought best."

"Best for you, not best for everyone. Clarke did all the hard work. She made mistakes, too, but she owned up to them right away and didn't make the same ones again. You, Abby, kept doing the same thing and expecting it to turn out different. That's one definition of madness, you know."

"I'm not going to apologize."

"Didn't think you would."

"This isn't the life any of us were supposed to have."

"You're wrong again," Raven said.

"Why are we here?"

"I need some stuff to do what I have to do."

"What, exactly, is that?"

"If Clarke wants you to know, she'll tell you."

"Clarke's different."

"Aren't we all?" Raven pulled out another box, glanced at the contents, and set it aside. She reached further into the shelf and pulled out a small machine. She looked it over, then grinned victoriously. "Finally," she said to herself, and stood up. She shook off Abby's arm when she tried to help. "Don't," Raven snapped.

"I don't understand," Abby admitted.

"Have you tried?"

"Yes. I've watched all of you and tried to understand what you're doing and why. I don't. Frankly, Clarke sounds delusional and the rest of you encourage it."

"Clarke's kept us alive. We're safer than we've been since leaving the Ark, Abby, and if only for that reason, you should encourage her, too. We all know you won't, though. You'd rather complain because things aren't to your liking."
"Clarke is my daughter, and I am worried about her," Abby growled.

"You should be. She's in danger every minute. People want to kill her because they think it will give them some mystical power, and at the same time, they're afraid of her because what she did in Mount Weather. Clarke committed genocide to save us. If she wants to be a little crazy, good on her."

"No, not good on her. What happens when whatever plan you're hatching falls apart? Do you think the Commander will defy her people to humor Clarke? Do you think she'll be able to hold them back when they come for us?"

"They will obey or pay the price," Ontari answered from the doorway.

Raven gave her a slight nod and a slighter smile.

Abby's dander was up and she turned her attention to Ontari. "You're going to protect us?" she asked skeptically.

"Have I not done that? Have you been threatened?"

"Not by any grounders," Abby admitted.

"Who has threatened you?" Ontari asked. She looked past Abby to Raven, who used the shelves to get back on her feet.

"Clarke threatens all of us with her big secrets and ridiculous schemes."

"You will not speak of Klark," Lexa answered icily. "You have undermined her at every turn. She leads Skaikru."

"Clarke is out of control," Abby began to answer.

"You will not speak of Klark," Lexa repeated while entering the room. Raven saw her eyes and knew Lexa spoke, although Abby hadn't yet realized it. "That is an order from your heda. If you are not able to follow it, you will bear the consequences."

Abby was silenced by Lexa's tone and the unstated threat of violence. She valued her life enough to hold her tongue.

"We will deal with you when we return to Polis. Do what you must, but do not interfere with Raven's work. Are we clear?"

"Yes," Abby ground out.

"You are dismissed," Ontari told her. "Leave us." She turned her body sideways so Abby could pass. When she was gone, Ontari looked at Raven. "Do you require assistance?"

"Can you carry that?" Raven pointed to a box and Ontari moved to get it. "That was quite the display, Commander."

"We must protect Clarke," Ontari answered while she picked up the box.

Raven bent over and picked up the small machine. "I'm trying."

"Put that in the box."

"I have it. I want to show you something," Raven said, and walked past Ontari.
Ontari followed her through the maze of corridors. She opened a door and carefully entered the dark room. Raven used her elbow to flip on the light switch.

"What is that?"

"That is a rover. It's a vehicle. It can carry people and things and I'm going to stuff it full and drive it to Polis."

"It does not look safe."

"It's safe. I'll take you for a ride. There's a clear path to the gate, right?"

"No."

"We'll clear it, then," Raven answered cheerfully. She put her burden on a workbench and opened the rear hatch. "You can put that in there, if you would."

Ontari thought about it for a few seconds before doing as Raven asked.

"Thanks."

"You are sure this is safe?"

"I'm sure. And it'll keep me from falling off the horse all the time."

"Are you in pain?" Ontari asked with a frown.

"We covered that earlier," Raven answered with a smile. "You could kiss it and make it better."

Ontari blushed furiously.

"All right, too fast," Raven said, still smiling. "Like my driving, I've been told."

"How does it work?"

"Do you want the long technical explanation or will you settle for Skaikru magic? Because the long explanation is really long."

"Something in between, perhaps?"

"The engine generates torque to turn the wheels."

Raven saw Ontari's lack of understanding. "The engine has two power sources. There are solar panels on the roof and it can burn biofuels. Alcohol." Raven opened the driver's door and freed the hood. She walked around to open it and waited for Ontari to join her. "The engine transfers the power it makes to the transmission. If you look underneath, there's a drive shaft. That's what spins to run power to the wheels." Raven dropped the hood. "It's a lot more fun to do than explain." She returned to the driver's door and climbed in. Raven pointed at the passenger door. "Get in."

Ontari did as instructed. Raven started the rover and pushed the button to open the garage door. She slowly and carefully moved it into the compound, maneuvering around tents until they reached the gate. Raven leaned out the window and yelled for it to be opened.

Once they were outside, Raven sped up considerably. She hit the power button for the music system, adjusted the volume, and looked at Ontari. "Having fun?"
"Sha," Ontari grinned. The speed was a bit faster than her horse at a full gallop, and there was no worry that the machine would become winded.

"So I can fill it up and run stuff back to Polis?"

"Sha."

"Awesome!" Raven spun the wheel and slammed on the brakes, then quickly accelerated. She glanced at Ontari, whose grin was as large as Raven's.

When they got back to Arkadia, the Natblida were clustered outside the gate.

"Will you let them experience this?" Ontari asked.

"You bet, but if any of them puke in here, I'm not cleaning it up."

Ontari finally laughed.

"I'm serious," Raven protested before hanging out the window. "C'mon junior hedas, get in."

Titus seethed in his chambers. He saw Ontari lead the Natblida out of Polis and saw the two Skaikru with them. That could only mean that she was under their sway. Although he hadn't seen Clarke's departure, the messages smuggled in with his meals let him know that she, too, left Polis, but in a different direction.

In the meantime, he could do nothing. The guards on his door were loyal to Ontari and let no one enter. He certainly wouldn't be allowed to leave his rooms, and his spies were not privy to discussions in the suite occupied by Clarke or in Ontari's quarters. He had no idea why both Clarke and Ontari would leave Polis without leaving someone in charge. That was his job, to maintain order in Heda's absence, but as with his other duties, Wanheda convinced Heda that Titus was unfit to perform them.

He tried to meditate but spent much more time pacing. He worried about what Wanheda was planning, the lies she told Heda, her influence over Fair, who was supposed to be his apprentice. Skaikru walked freely through Polis. The coalition that Lexa worked so hard to create still held together. Nothing made sense, and he was blind without access to the world. Everything wrong in his life was Wanheda's fault, and he swore that she would someday pay, regardless of the oath he swore to Lexa.

Miller went with his Skaikru charges to shops and businesses to ask for training. He didn't anticipate much success, and was pleasantly surprised. Everyone was happy to get free labor. Unlike official apprentices, there was no duty of care. As long as Skaikru remained under Heda's protection in Polis, she provided food, clothing, and shelter. The only outright refusals came from Trikru merchants, who refused to trade with Skaikru and sent them packing whenever they approached their businesses.

Despite that, and as if they discussed it, Skaikru went to work in a variety of professions. Miller kept track of who was where, so he could pass the information to Clarke when she returned. If Skaikru ever got a home of their own, they would have people ready with the basic skills they needed to thrive.
Late on the second day after the attacks, Murphy and one of the guards tied the tug to a pier. Clarke sent one guard off to return with more troops and at least one horse. She wanted to get back to Polis to begin planning the trip to the City of Light, but didn't want to leave the boat unprotected. They would need help to herd Emori and her gang to the capital, as well.

Because Emori and the others were locked up below, she felt it safe to let two more guards hunt for dinner. Their traveling stores were nearly depleted, but there was enough for one more decent meal for all of them. While those below were still sullen, they were grateful to be fed twice a day.

The remaining guard stood at the entrance to the below decks area while Murphy and Clarke sat on top of the wheelhouse.

"What next?" Murphy asked.

"You good with the boat?"

"We're here, aren't we?"

"Yeah. I guess while Raven gets what she needs together, we gather what we'll need and get the boat cleaned up. Maybe I can get someone from Floukru to look it over."

"That's probably a good idea."

"I'll do what I can when I get back to Polis." Clarke closed her eyes and raised her face to the sky in an attempt to calm herself. She still felt uneasy and couldn't identify the reason. She flinched at an unexpected blast of happy excitement.

Murphy noticed. "Griffin."

"I think Lexa's having fun with the Natblida or something," she answered.

"That is one of the weirdest things I've seen since coming down here."

"Feels weird, too."

"I bet." He paused. "The day Raven figured out the chips, she wanted to talk about Heda."

"What about her?"

"She uh, she said she thought Heda liked her. Like your Heda liked you."

"Huh."

"She talk to you about that?"

"Neither of them."

"You OK with that?"

"If it makes them happy, absolutely. Life's too short to be miserable. What about Emori?"

"What about Emori?"
"I'm pretty sure I can keep Ontari from banishing her if you want."

"I don't know, Princess."

"We don't have to deal with it until we get her chip out."

"Yeah. I still don't understand why she took it. She hated that her brother did. Shit, I have to tell her he was killed."

"Sorry."

"Me too. Fucking Jaha," Murphy said bitterly.

"He won't be doing any more damage."

"I wouldn't put it past him to find a way to fuck with us anyway."

"How?"

"I dunno. Failsafes at the City of Light. Bullshit in the City of Light, you know, the crazy one. And who knows how many of those chips he distributed on the way back to Arkadia?"

"I didn't even think of that," Clarke admitted. "At least we can shut them down."

"You just wanna buff your legend status. Riding into battle without a weapon screaming Latin."

"Better than than killing them."

"Maybe," Murphy shrugged. "But let's face it, some people just need to be dead."

"Only as the last resort."

Murphy rolled his eyes.

"You weren't in Mount Weather."

"Heard about it. Story got crazier every time."

"It was bad." Clarke lowered her head and opened her eyes. She looked past Murphy at the broad reach of the bar where the river emptied into the ocean, thinking of Niylah asking why she had no kill marks. Her melancholy was driven away by another blast of happiness. She wondered what was so good and hoped Ontari was having fun, too.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven spent the rest of the day supervising the loading of the rover. It took a few hours, but before supper it held most of her workshop. She was itching to get it to Polis, but Ontari asked her to wait until morning, and Raven acquiesced without an argument. A backrub from and dinner with the other woman was too good to pass up, especially when she indicated she would ride to Polis with Raven.

After their meal, Raven set up the chess board while Ontari went to check on the Natblida one more time. Satisfied that they were all bedded down and guards were properly posted, she returned to her tent.

Raven had a mug of hot tea waiting. It was, by her standards, chilly. Like Ontari, Raven was used to
cold. The Ark was always cool because heating it took resources better used elsewhere, but it lacked the dampness of the ground.

While they played chess, they talked about what was in the rover and what Raven planned to do with it. Both stayed away from some topics, primarily Clarke, Lexa, and the City of Light. When the game and their conversation was over, Raven gave Ontari a brief kiss on her way to the door. Ontari pulled Raven into her lap. They kissed a few times, then sat quietly, enjoying physical closeness they couldn't demonstrate in public.

100 – 100 – 100

All of their guards were back well before sunset. Instead of going all the way to Polis, the one sent to get help conscripted a messenger from the first village he came to. What Clarke wanted would arrive the next day. The others brought a deer. While one cleaned it, the other built a fire.

It was a quiet night on the tug. Clarke bedded down in the wheel house while Murphy joined the guard rotation. Everyone got a decent amount of sleep for the first time since leaving Polis.

After leftovers for breakfast, Clarke sat on the wheelhouse with her sketchbook while she waited for reinforcements. She was content at first to sketch what she saw, but soon her mind drifted and her hand moved automatically. She was brought out of it by the greetings from the soldiers she was waiting for, and closed her sketch book without looking at it.

There were four horses and a couple dozen warriors waiting for instructions. She left four with the boat, told the rest to get the prisoners and bring them to Polis, and picked two of their guards to ride with she and Murphy.

The ride was a bit longer than Clarke thought it would be, and when they reached Polis, she was surprised to see a vehicle at the gates. When they got closer, Clarke dismounted and walked to the rear of the rover.

"Raven, what did you find now?"

"The rover was sitting in the garage at Arkadia. Seemed ridiculous to leave it there given how much stuff needs to be hauled."

"Did you find what you need?"

"Oh yeah. When this load's gone, we're going back for more."

"We?"

"Klark, was your trip successful?"

"Sha. I left some guards with the boat and will speak with the Floukru ambassador about having someone make sure it's safe."

"Good. I will return with Raven, but we will be back soon. When Raven is finished gathering what she needs, we will discuss what to do next."

"OK. I, uh, I have some things to do."

"You may go."

Clarke looked at Raven, but she was busy giving directions to the people unloading the rover, so she
entered the city and walked to the stable. Murphy waited there for her. "I think you're right about them."

"You think?" Murphy asked with a smirk. "Heda willingly rode in that deathtrap with Raven at the wheel."

"Yeah." Clarke picked up her saddlebags. "Good for them."

"I hope so," Murphy said, and followed her toward the tower.

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke went up to talk to Miller while Murphy bathed. Clarke was happy to hear about the successes Skaikru had in finding positions. She asked him to join her and Murphy for dinner before heading to her suite.

Murphy was in the common room, and Clarke hurried to get cleaned up. She felt much better after washing away the days of travel, and brought her sketchbook to the table. Murphy lounged there, nursing some wine, and continued to do that silently while Clarke started on the piles of correspondence that arrived during her absence.

"Miller's coming for dinner so we can start figuring out who's going with us."

"I don't think we'll need too many of them."

"Good, because there won't be enough room."

"I don't think we should take anyone who had a chip except Raven."

"We should bring your mom, too," Murphy answered.

"Yeah," Clarke replied tiredly.

"I don't really trust her, either, but she might be able to help with the medical stuff."

"So we leave Miller in charge and Kane to help him and Ontari?"

"We don't have a lot of options here, Princess. Raven's a tech genius and your mom does high tech medical."

Clarke exhaled heavily. Murphy poured wine into another mug and passed it to her. Clarke swallowed and returned her paperwork.

100 – 100 – 100

It took a few days of two round trips between Arkadia and Polis for Raven to move everything she could from Arkadia. Abby rode back on an early trip. To avoid having to talk, Raven played loud music and steadfastly ignored Ontari's questioning looks. On her last trip to Polis, the rover was full of the Natblida. Everyone else would follow on horseback, but Ontari wanted Raven and the Nightbloods safely behind Polis' walls as soon as possible.

On their first night back, Clarke, Murphy, Raven, and Ontari sat around the table in the Azgeda suite trading updates. Clarke removed the chips from Emori and the others, but they remained jailed. Murphy went down to talk to her a few times, but she remained angry so he stopped. Ontari ordered them banished.
Everyone returned to their routines. Twice a week, Murphy rode out to check on the boat. It was slowly being scrubbed clean. It had a few minor problems, which Floukru workers were busy repairing. Clarke continued to meet with Ontari each morning and study Becca Pramhed'a's journal each evening with Ontari and Fair. Other than that, she saw Ontari less during the day and evening. Raven spent most of her free time in Ontari's suite, but didn't talk to Clarke or Murphy about anything that happened there. When they asked, she shrugged, smirked, and said, "We play chess."
Chapter 84

It took Raven nine days to figure out how to physically replicate the chip carried by Titus and Ontari. She refused to ask Abby about the Latin terms she jotted down while reading the first heda’s notebook. Frustrated, she walked to the library and found Marcus Kane at his regular table. Together, they puzzled out the correct pronunciation and meaning of the other code phrase.

That evening, Raven explained to Ontari what she needed to do. Clarke sat across the table from them, watching as Raven found words to simplify what had to be done without speaking as if Ontari couldn’t understand.

“You will remove the Flame,” Ontari repeated back to her, “and somehow copy what it holds before returning it.”

“Yes,” Raven said.

“Without the Flame, I am not heda.”

“You are heda,” Clarke insisted. “With or without the Flame. We can start with Titus, but you cannot be there when we remove the chip from him.”

“Without it, he has no power,” Ontari said.

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” Clarke answered.

Ontari looked at Raven. “I trust you to do this.”

Raven smiled at her with relief. “Thank you. That means a lot.”

“You will take Titus’ power from him,” Ontari instructed Raven. She looked at Clarke. “I do not like that I cannot be there to protect both of you from him.”

“It won’t be necessary,” Clarke said. She paused. “Do you wish us to return it to him?”

“No, it will go to my new Fleimkepa. He will be moved to the dungeon until Heda Leksa returns and decides his future.”

“Until she puts him on the tree,” Clarke said.

“That is the most likely outcome,” Ontari agreed. “If that is her choice, one of you will make the final cut.”

Clarke nodded. She was tired of death, but would make an exception for Titus. *Jus drein jus daun* was all he understood, and any punishment other than forfeiting his life for the one he took was beyond his comprehension.

“Tomorrow?” Raven asked.

“For Titus,” Clarke agreed.

Ontari nodded.

“After we remove the chip, you can watch what we’re doing,” Clarke offered.
“I will not disturb Raven during such an important task.”

“I’d kinda like you to be there so you know what’s gonna happen while you’re out,” Raven said.

Ontari smiled faintly. “If that is what you want.”

“Sha, Heda,” Raven said, her tone almost teasing.

Clarke looked at them and smiled. “I’m gonna talk to Miller,” she said.

Neither Raven or Ontari acknowledged her exit.

100 – 100 – 100

Murphy waited a few days before he went down to speak to Emori. He stood in the corridor and looked into her cell. Emori sat on the bed, back to the wall, knees held to her chest. After observing her for several seconds, Murphy said, “Hey.”

Emori looked at him but otherwise didn’t move.

“I don’t know what happened to you after I got picked up, but I don’t think it was good.”

“It was not. I learned of my brother’s death.”

“That why you took the chip?”

“Sha.” Emori shrugged. “What did it matter?”

“You know why it mattered.”

“I was happy, John.”

“You were dying.”

“We are all dying, every day.”

“Will you help us?”

“No. I will not help Skaikru. You bring ruin and death.”

He nodded slowly. “Good luck.”

“I have been banished before.” Emori went back to looking at the opposite wall

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke entered Titus’ suite alone. He glared at her, but was still glad to see anyone after the weeks of solitude. He didn’t bother to greet Clarke. “Why are you here, Wanheda?”

“It was a mistake,” Clarke said. “You made a mistake when you tried to kill me. Did you really think Lexa would believe that one of Skaikru could sneak into her capital, into her home, undetected? Onto the floor with her quarters?”

“My only mistake was missing you.”

“You still won’t admit what you did.”
“You made her weak. You would have destroyed her and the coalition.”

“Yet I live, and the coalition lives despite the fact that you killed Lexa. You killed your heda, Titus. You believed that as flamekeeper, you knew better, and here we are.” Clarke paused for a moment. “Ontari kom Azgeda is heda. Skaikru survives. And your reign is over.”

For the first time, Titus felt fear. Clarke saw it in his eyes, but he tried to bluff her. “I am Flamekeeper until my death.”

“You are Flamekeeper only as long as you hold the Flame.” Clarke took a step back and rapped on the door, then took a few quick steps forward.

“You cannot,” Titus began as the Azgeda warriors entered.

“Hold him,” Clarke ordered.

Titus tried to avoid the many hands grasping him, but he was quickly subdued. They left room for Clarke to get between them at Titus’ head. Clarke flipped his collar down and heard Lexa. *Don’t be afraid.* She smiled faintly and spoke the Latin phrase Raven taught her, hearing Lexa say *We are one* as she said, “Et nos unum sumus.”

She watched Titus’ neck carefully so she could tell Ontari what to expect. The skin rippled before the chip appeared on the surface of the skin. Clarke could see the tendrils withdrawing. For a moment, they were a dark cloud between Titus’ pale skin and the ice blue of the chip. That cloud faded quickly, as did the chip. It became gray, and Clarke carefully picked it up. She stood and took the time to tuck it into the tin with the skull on the cover. “Take him to the jail,” she instructed and hurried to Ontari’s suite, where Raven and Ontari waited.

Murphy trailed Clarke up the stairs without speaking. Miller nodded at them when they approached Ontari’s rooms. Raven and Ontari, sitting side by side on the couch, both looked up when the door opened.

“Did you get it?” Raven asked.

Clarke nodded. Being in the heda’s suite still startled her. In her mind’s eye, she still saw Lexa napping on the sofa.

“Did he survive?” Ontari asked.

Clarke nodded again. “He, uh, he didn’t say anything, but he probably will later.”

“You should probably lay down,” Raven suggested.

It took Ontari a few seconds to stand up. She waited for Raven to stand, too, and the two of them walked to Ontari’s bed. BeforeOntari laid down, she and Raven spoke quietly.

“Clarke will stay with you,” Raven reminded Ontari. “I don’t know how long it will take, but I will be back as soon as I can. You are heda, no matter what.”

“It will be strange.”

“Probably, but it won’t be for long. Ai swega yu klin,(I promise)” Raven added and squeezed Ontari’s hand.

“Ai wich yu in (I trust you),” Ontari answered.
“A kiss for luck,” Raven said, and they shared a brief kiss.

Ontari laid on the bed, her arms outstretched. Raven sat on one side and Clarke on the other, and both women held one of Ontari’s hands.

In the end, it was Raven who said the words. Clarke was too distracted by Lexa. *I will not leave you, Klark. Soon, we we be together soon. Don’t be afraid. You are nearly at the end of this journey.* Ai

“*Et nos unum sumus,*” Raven intoned, and watched the chip appear and retract the filmaments. She picked it up and looked at it before picking up the tin from the bedside table and securely placing it inside. She leaned forward and kissed Ontari’s exposed neck. “I’ll be back soon.”

They heard her distinctive gait on the floor, heard the door open and close. Her guards, Clarke’s, and Miller accompanied her. Murphy stayed in the hall with the other guards.

“It feels strange,” Ontari said.

“I can’t hear her,” Clarke answered.

Ontari rolled onto her side in an attempt to see Clarke, who stared toward the balcony. She pulled on Clarke’s hand, and when that didn’t work, moved to put her arm around Clarke’s waist. Eventually, Clarke laid down, her back to Ontari, and Ontari curled around her. “It is not for long,” she comforted Clarke.

100 – 100 – 100

Miller stood guard beside the door while Raven worked. She was hunched over the screen on her workbench, picking her way through the code on one of the backups she made before starting. It took her an hour to see where changes occurred, and after that, it was just a matter of sorting through until she reached the most recent blocks.

Raven was certain she was in the right place when the code truncated and changed dramatically. She carefully copied the thousands of lines onto another blank chip and wished there was a way to understand it. She slid off her stool and landed on the floor with a thump and a groan.

“You OK?” Miller asked.

“Stiff,” Raven answered. She picked up the tin with Ontari’s chip and slid it into her pocket. “I’m done for now.”

Miller nodded and rapped on the door to alert the guards. The group made their way back to the tower at Raven’s speed. As they had on the trip to the workshop, the guards were more alert than usual.

Murphy opened the door just enough for Raven to enter once he verified it was her. Clarke and Ontari were still in bed together. Neither had said much all afternoon. Clarke slowly moved away and sat up while Ontari returned to her stomach. Raven laid the chip over the infinity tattoo on Ontari’s neck and again said, “*Et nos unum sumus.*” She watched it burrow into Ontari’s neck. The skin moved a bit longer than it had when it was removed as the filaments unspooled and returned to their positions.

Ontari remained still for several minutes, then squeezed Clarke’s hand. “She says we are nearly done,” Ontari said.

Clarke nodded. She couldn’t hear Lexa, but that Ontari could meant she was still there. Clarke
surpetitiously wiped her eyes, then squeezed Ontari’s hand in return and stood up. She turned around to look at Raven, who was focused on Ontari. “Are we ready?”

“Almost. I should be able to merge the code tomorrow.”

As Ontari sat up, Clarke released her hand. “You should finish preparing,” Ontari said.

“Can we talk about it later?” Clarke asked.

“Sha,” Ontari answered slowly.

“I need to,” Clarke began and drifted off as she walked toward the door. Raven and Ontari turned their heads to watch her, but neither moved.

Clarke opened the door. Before she closed it, they heard Murphy and Miller’s voices, but Clarke didn’t answer them. She walked toward the stairs silently and shook off Murphy’s hand when he tried to comfort her.

When they reached the Azgeda suite, Clarke went into her room and closed the door. She slid down it and sat on the floor. It hadn’t occurred to her that removing the Flame from Ontari would silence Lexa. She hoped that once it was back where it belonged Lexa would speak to her again. Clarke sat and waited.

When it began to get dark, she got up and lit two lamps. She went to her trunk and pulled out a sketch book and got charcoal from her satchel. Clarke sat in the light and began to sketch. Lexa in motion, her cape swirling around her, prepared to lunge forward with her sword, smiling at Clarke like she hung the moon.

Clarke stared at them for a while before setting it aside. She changed into her sleep clothes and for the first time in weeks brought one of the furs from Lexa’s bed into bed with her. She was asleep when Raven and Ontari entered. Ontari carefully folded the fur and returned it to its trunk before she and Raven got into bed with Clark.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven sat on the bed beside Ontari. “How do you feel?”

“As I did before.”

“You can still hear Lexa?”

“Sha.” Ontari sat up. “You have more to do?”

“It has to wait until tomorrow.”

Ontari nodded and moved to the edge of the bed. She sat beside Raven and rolled her neck and shoulders. “Are you hungry?”

“A little. Mostly sore.”

“It is your turn to lay down.” Ontari got up and went to the cabinet where she kept Raven’s balm. They began their evening routine. Ontari massaged Raven’s back and hip. Raven napped briefly. Ontari ordered their food and they ate.

They skipped chess that night and took the lift down to the floor where Clarke stayed. Murphy waited at the table. “Clarke hasn’t been out of her room,” he said.
Raven looked at him and raised an eyebrow. Ontari looked from one to the other.

“Since we got here,” he added. “No food, no drink, no sound, nothing. She went in there and she won’t answer when I knock.”

“We will take care of her,” Ontari assured him.

“I’ll be up a little longer. Yell if you need me.”
Ontari was awake when Clarke woke in the morning. Clarke looked at her, then at Raven. “Let me up,” she told Ontari quietly.

Ontari nodded and rolled out of bed. Clarke got out behind her and grabbed her boots. Ontari followed her to the common room after closing the door. Murphy waited for Clarke, but didn’t say anything.

Clarke wasn’t talking either. She sat down to put on her boots. When she tried to stand, Ontari’s weight on her shoulder kept her in place.

“I’ll wait in the hall,” Murphy said, and left them.

“Your hand, Klark,” Ontari said.

“No.”

“Heda Leksa does not wish you to be alone.”

“I need to go, Ontari.”

“Klark,” Lexa began, but Clarke stopped her.

“I have to go,” she said, and slid out the other side of the chair.

“Klark,” was the last thing she heard before she closed the door, and she wasn’t sure which heda called.

“You OK?” Murphy asked.

“Let’s go,” Clarke answered.

In the training ring, Clarke worked harder than usual. After the fifth knockdown, she got up and charged Murphy. He went down with a surprised look on his face and didn’t fight back. He covered his face at first, and when he realized no help was coming, defended himself until he was able to flip Clarke away. He held her on the ground. “What the fuck is your problem today?”

“Let me go.”

“Not if you’re going to hit me again. I’m not your personal punching bag, Princess.”

Clarke forced her arm free and it came up with her dagger. She held it to Murphy’s throat as she had before, as she had with Lexa. “Let me up.”

Murphy raised his hands and got to his feet. He backed away from Clarke.

She got to her feet and sheathed the dagger. Alba got between them. “Wanheda, you are finished for the day.”

Clarke nodded and walked past him. She ignored Murphy and picked up her satchel. She walked away quickly. He watched for a few seconds before excusing himself to Alba. Murphy followed Clarke at a distance. She went to the stables, and a few minutes after she rode out, he was behind her.
Clarke set a trap for him a short distance into the forest. She wanted to be alone, to grieve what was past. She wanted to try to get used to the silence in her head in case Raven was wrong, in case Lexa was wrong. Waking up between Raven and Ontari made her feel weak, as if they thought they had to care for her. She didn’t want them or anyone taking care of her like that. Her pain was her own, and she needed to work through it now.

She heard the trap spring, and heard Murphy hit the ground hard. She stepped out of the trees onto the path and caught his startled horse.

“What is your fucking problem today,” Murphy demanded as soon as he could sit up.

“Go back to the Tower, Murphy.”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“That’s an order, Murphy.”

“I don’t take orders from you, Princess. Well, I do, but I have orders from higher up, so I’m gonna make sure you don’t do something stupider than usual.”

“What stupid thing do you think I’m going to do?”

“I don’t know.” Murphy took a deep breath and stood up. “Tell me what’s going on and I might leave you alone.”

Clarke walked his horse back to him. “I just need to breathe.”

“Is this about yesterday?”

“No.”

“You can’t hear her,” he guessed.

She turned her back to him and began to walk toward where her horse waited.

“You’ll get her back.”

Clarke spun to face him. “And what if I don’t? What if this was all just wasted time and effort that should have gone into making Skaikru safe?”

“You don’t believe that.”

“I don’t know what to believe.” Clarke turned around again.

Murphy knew better than to touch her, so he dropped the horse’s reins and caught up. “Raven wouldn’t lie to you about this.”

“She thinks she can pull this off, but what if she can’t?”

“C’mon, Griffin, we’re almost there. Heading into the last lap. Nobody’s gonna let you give up now.”

They both turned when they heard hoofbeats on the path behind them. Murphy saw her first and walked toward Ontari to take charge of her horse when she dismounted.

Clarke watched Ontari approach. When she was close, she saw Lexa’s green eyes searching her face
with concern.

“Klark, I will not leave you,” Lexa promised. She reached out and picked up one of Clarke’s hands. A moment later, she cut her palm and Clarke’s and clasped them together.

“I thought you were gone,” Clarke whispered.

“I am here, and soon we will be together, you and I without an intermediary. I made you a promise, niron, and I will keep it.”

Clarke stared and a moment later heard Lexa in her head. *I swear fealty to you, Klark kom Skaikru en Trikru en Azgeda. We will meet again.*

“We have much to do before you leave, Klark,” Ontari said.

Clarke nodded but didn’t let go of her hand. Ontari put her other hand on Clarke’s shoulder. “Raven said to tell you that you snore,” she said softly, and smirked at Clarke.

It startled Clarke back into herself, out of the mix of grief and anxiety that drove her flight. She smiled back at Ontari. “I’m pretty sure that was you.”

Murphy snickered and covered it with a cough.


Clarke released her hand. She glanced at her palm, the bright new skin in the drying black blood, and watched Ontari take her horse back from Murphy. As she rode away, he approached Clarke again. “Better?”

“Yeah.”

“Next time, Ambassador, use your words.”

“Asshole.”

“Takes one to know one. You better hurry or I’ll eat your breakfast, too.”

100 – 100 – 100

“Me, Raven, Mom, Murphy, four guards”

“Eight guards,” Ontari interrupted.


“Sketchbook and charcoal. I want to see what this place looks like. And eight guards, Klark. You will make room.”

“Ontari, there literally isn’t enough room on the boat for all of our gear and 13 people.”

“Thirteen?”

“Coming back. Four guards. I can fight, Murphy can fight. Raven’s good with guns. Mom can use one if she has to. We will be fine.”

“Heda Leksa insists you will take at least six guards.”
“Four,” Clarke answered firmly and stood up. “I need to talk to my mom.”

Sis, Klark.

As she entered the hallway, Clarke said, “Fou, Leksa. Unless you have another boat stashed somewhere.”

Clarke quickly climbed the stairs. She knocked on the door to the rooms her mother shared with Marcus. He let her in quickly.

They sat at the table, and Clarke began without any preliminary small talk. “I need you to come with me to the City of Light.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because I’m asking you.”

“ Asking or ordering?”

“I’m asking, Mom. Will you please come with me to the City of Light?”

“And if I say no?”

“We don’t have time for this. I’m asking. We will need your help. Raven’s machine smart, but we’re going to need you to o, I’m going to need you. You’re the only one I trust to do this. Please.”

“How dangerous is this going to be?”

“I don’t know. We’re bringing some guards along. I think it will be safe once we get there.”

“And who is we?”

“You, me, Raven, and Murphy.”

Abby exhaled slowly. “What are we going to do once we get there?”

“Bring Lexa back.”

“Why is this so important to you?”

“If you could bring Dad back, wouldn’t you?”

“Clarke, you can’t resurrect the dead.”

“Not resurrect. But she’s coming back with us.”

“Do you know how this sounds?”

“Yeah, and I don’t care.”

“I can’t indulge your delusions.”

“OK, then, I’m ordering you to come with us. And Ontari will order you to come with us. And you’ll come in chains if that’s what it takes to get you on the boat. You’ll need a comprehensive first aid kit and a few changes of clothes. I’ll let you know when we pick a date to leave. It’s going to be soon.” She stood up. Before leaving, Clarke nodded toward Marcus, who hadn’t said anything. Before the door closed behind her, she heard her mother complaining to Marcus.
Raven sat with Ontari and Fair, partly to give Clarke a break and partly because Clarke had no idea how to explain the tech that dominated the portion of the first heda’s journal they were currently reading. Clarke went downstairs to meet with Skaikru. It would be her only opportunity before they left.

Doors were open the length of the hall. Clarke stopped in each to say hello, then made her way back to Miller’s room. He had extra seats, but only one empty one. Clarke took it and looked at them. “I guess you heard the rumors. I’m going to the City of Light. Murphy, Raven, and my mom are going with me.”

“Why?”

“Still part of that long story I can’t share yet. I will when I get back, no matter what happens while I’m gone.”

“Are we safe?” Monroe asked.

“I wouldn’t leave if you weren’t. Hopefully, by the time I return, Roan will have an answer for us.”

“What if his answer is no?”

“We’ll find someplace else. Keep everybody working and learning. We’ll need those skills soon.”

Klark’s palm itched and she frowned. The recent distance between her and Ontari was quickly receding as their departure neared. Clarke thought Ontari would be spending her free time with Raven, but Ontari had more time than Raven.

“You will be safe,” Ontari said from the doorway.

Clarke stood to greet her. “Heda, we did not expect you.”

“Continue.”

“We’re finished, unless you have questions?”

The others shook their heads.

Clarke told them, “Take care of each other,” and walked to the door. “Heda,” she repeated softly.

“Sha,” Lexa and Ontari answered together.

“I thought you were with Fair and Raven.” Clarke pushed against her shoulder to get in the hall.

“Raven got an idea so we had to leave.” Ontari followed Clarke while Lexa talked. “I sent Fair back to her quarters.”

Clarke waved when one of Skaikru caught her eye, but said nothing until they were in the stairwell.

“Leksa, you should let Ontari spend time with Raven.”

“I will spend time with you now and Ontari will stay with Raven later.”

Clarke stopped and sat on a step. “Say whatever you’re going to.”

“Soon, Klark.” Ontari sat on the step above Clarke but didn’t touch her. “We will be together soon.”
Don’t be afraid.”

“Little late for that,” Clarke muttered.

“Come, Wanheda,” Ontari answered and got to her feet. “You play chess. We will play tonight.”

Clarke stood and hurried down the stairs, Ontari close behind.
Chapter 86

Raven stood on deck and looked down, then up at Clarke. "It's gonna be a tight squeeze."

"Just get it all in there."

"Aye aye." Raven saluted lazily and went below. She had a limited amount of space, but was used to that after living in orbit. She moved things around to make room for one last crate that held extra tools.

"I think that's everything," she called to Clarke when she reached the deck again.

"OK," Clarke answered and joined her on the deck. "Guess we leave in the morning."

"I'm going back to Polis. I'm not missing my last night in a real bed. Murphy, you coming?"

"Nah, I'll just stay here unless Clarke's going with you."

"I'll stay here. Make sure you bring Mom in the morning."

"Do I have to?"

"Yes. So if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything."

"Sometimes, I don't like you," Raven complained to Clarke.

"So you've said. Go spend the night with your girlfriend."

100 – 100 – 100

Raven drove the rover to the dock. Ontari sat beside her on the front bench, with Abby sitting beside the passenger door. The rear was filled with the Natblida and a few last minute items. Murphy watched their approach, and grinned when Raven skidded to a stop a few feet from the dock. As soon as she turned off the engine, the Natblida poured out of the back. Abby was next out, and Murphy saw her lips moving.

Clarke joined him on the deck and watched the Natblida pull bags and boxes from the rover. Abby made her way over, and Clarke went to meet her on the pier. Abby looked doubtfully at the tug. "You're sure this is safe?" she asked.

"Floukru workers went over it. It's safe. C'mon, I'll show you where to put your stuff."

Abby followed Clarke onto the vessel and below decks while the Natblida hurried to bring the packages to the ship. Raven and Ontari stayed near the rover and each other, speaking quietly, so Murphy turned his attention to the little ones.

"Any of you ever seen a boat like this?"

"Sha, we have two," Sela kom Floukru volunteered. She carefully came aboard, and the others followed until the deck was full.

"I guess you know how to navigate and stuff."

"A little," she answered.
"We're going to stick close to the coast," Murphy told them.

"Where are you going?" Fair asked.

"To the City of Light."

"That's not a real place," one of them scoffed.

Murphy shrugged and glanced toward the rover. Ontari watched Raven walk toward the boat. When she got to the pier, she told Murphy, "Heda wants to talk to Clarke."

"I'll get her," he answered, and left the deck.

He interrupted an intense whispered conversation between Abby and Clarke. "Heda wants to see you," he said to Clarke.

"We'll finish this later," Clarke told Abby.

"Need any help?" Murphy asked Abby while Clarke left, and she put him to work moving her things from the deck to her cabin.

Ontari waited at the back of the rover. She watched the Natblida play until Clarke approached, and then turned her attention to the other woman. Clarke was relieved to see Ontari's brown eyes when she got closer. "You wanted to see me?"

"Sha, to wish you a safe journey and remind you that no matter what happens, you have a place."

"Thank you. We'll be back as soon as we can."

"It takes as long as it takes." Her eyes shifted to Lexa's clear green. "I will see you soon."

Clarke nodded and bit the inside of her lip.

Ontari spoke again. "Raven promised to take care of you. I am asking you do the same for her."

"Of course." Clarke looked over Ontari's shoulder at the rover. "How are you going to get back to Polis?"

"Raven taught me to drive," Ontari said, smiling proudly.

Clarke smiled back. "Be careful."

"I will see you soon," Ontari said, echoing Lexa's goodbye.

Clarke offered her arm, and she and Ontari clasped forearms for a few seconds before Ontari pulled Clarke into a tight hug.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven and Abby started as soon as they were out of sight of the dock. Clarke separated them but it didn't last. She talked to them for an hour, and the resulting truce lasted through the first day. She tried to hide in the wheelhouse, but had to come out to end yet another squabble.

Clarke laid down the law then. Her nerves were enough on edge. If they couldn't act like adults on their own, Clarke would treat them like children. "If you don't have something nice or helpful to say, don't say anything," she finished, and fled to the top of the wheelhouse. Murphy was there and he
discreetly handed her a flask.

Clarke took a healthy hit of Azgeda's finest liquor and sighed. "Chof. The Natblida act better."

"What's their problem?"

"Raven's still pissed off and Mom wants to either fix everything or be in charge."

"So same old stuff."

"Yeah."

"They have a week to work it out."

"Don't remind me."

Murphy smiled faintly and handed her the flask again. "I'll bring your furs up here."

"Thank you."

Murphy didn't say anything before dropping to the deck. He tossed two furs up to Clarke and went to get their meal. Nobody had to threaten him to take care of Clarke. It was second nature by now for him to make sure she ate, drank, and slept. Although he was certain Clarke would say he owed her nothing, Murphy disagreed. He owed her, and Roan and Ontari, and would serve any of them however they needed.

Tonight, that meant bringing Clarke something to eat so the liquor didn't burn quite so much, and leaving her on the wheelhouse after with the flask and her sketchbook while he took a turn refereeing between Abby and Raven until they were separated to sleep. The next time he checked on Clarke, the flask sat neatly atop her sketchbook. He was surprised it wasn't empty.

He looked around once more before getting into his furs, between Clarke and the short ladder up to the refuge.

100 – 100 – 100

By the next midday, Raven and Abby were emphatically not speaking to each other. It would have been a relief except for the banging, growling, and tension that spread through the small boat. As soon as they docked, Clarke leapt ashore and ran for the woods. Murphy tied the last line and loped after her.

Raven and Abby watched Clarke flee, shared a hateful look, and went to opposite ends of the boat. Clarke skipped the meal the guards fixed in favor of two small birds, a fish, and a rabbit she prepared while Murphy filled their canteens and gathered enough wood to last the night. Although Clarke kept the flame small, she knew the guards knew where they were. She didn't know what agreement Murphy made with them, but she was grateful for the quiet around them.

She was content to sleep on the ground, but Murphy woke her just as it began to rain and they ran for the wheelhouse.

100 – 100 – 100

They had to wait for the rain to clear before departing again. When Abby and Raven converged on Clarke while they waited for the weather to break, Clarke's quiet growl silenced both of them.

"I've had enough," Clarke said. "Work it out or I will." She turned her back to them. Murphy, beside
her in the wheelhouse, bit his lip to keep from laughing at the situation.

An hour later, they were back, and Clarke was done. She pointed silently at the ladder to the lower deck until they moved toward it, and followed them below. Clarke followed them into a tiny and incredibly overstuffed cabin. "Sit," she growled, and when they did, started. "What exactly is the reason that the two of you act like this? What's so damn important between you that you can't work together?"

"You know what she did," Raven said.

"Yeah, and I know what you did and what I did. It's ancient history. We can't change any of it. So again, what is the problem?"

"Raven won't see any viewpoint but her own."

"Abby insists she knows the right way to do everything."

"Stop it." Clarke loomed over them. "You're going to work together. You used to work well together. You're going to do it again. If you keep this bullshit up, I'm going to put both of you off the damn boat."

Raven scoffed, and Clarke turned on her. "You think this is a joke?"

"I don't think you can do what you want without us, so I'm pretty sure you won't put us out."


Clarke was vibrating with tension when she returned to the wheelhouse, but belowdecks was quiet.

"Did you kill them?" Murphy asked.

"Still thinking about it."

He snickered before pointing toward an opening in the clouds. "I think we'll be out of here soon."

Clarke nodded, slid down the bulkhead, and settled on the deck.

"You need something?" Murphy asked.

Clarke shook her head, and soon after he heard her quiet snores. He gestured to one of the guards and asked him to bring a fur to cover Clarke.

100 – 100 – 100

They made good time over the next few days. Murphy was impervious to the rough seas that stayed with them after the storm passed, but half of their guards, Abby, and Raven were green. When Clarke returned to the wheelhouse after handing out another round of motion sickness pills, Murphy smirked at her. "At least they aren't yelling at each other."

100 – 100 – 100

The fourth day after the storm was clear and bright. The sun's reflection from the glass of the solar panels was visible for miles. Clarke had the guards summon everyone. Clarke, Raven, and Abby stood in the wheelhouse with Murphy. The guards crowded the doorway.

"That bright thing up there is where we're going. The City of Light," he said bitterly. "A.L.I.E."
probably knows we're coming. She may try to attack us with drones, so get your weapons ready. Guns will be most efficient, but arrows might work, too.

"The place should be empty. There's the lighthouse, a bunker, and a huge building. I don't know what all's in there, but that's probably where what you're looking for is. Until we know what she does and doesn't control, jam the doors open before entering."

"I don't think Mom and Raven should leave the boat until we know it's safe," Clarke said.

"We can leave them here with two guards while we check it out," he suggested.

"We can do that," Clarke agreed over Raven's protests.

As they tied the boat to the pier, the first drone appeared. Raven shot it down and sent a guard to get the pieces. It would give her something to do while they waited for the all clear.

Murphy pointed out the bunker as they approached the main building. "She's probably going to be there," he warned Clarke.

"Good," she answered and kept walking.

They approached it cautiously, noting cameras that announced their presence to whatever was inside. The guards had picked up a few fist sized rocks. The first one was put in the juncture of the door with the outer jamb. The guard kicked it a few times to make certain it wouldn't move. He was first inside, cautiously moving into the interior. When Clarke entered, she was far less careful.

Murphy was correct. A.L.I.E. waited for them at the end of the entry. Clarke looked at him.

"Seriously?"

He shrugged.

"Clarke Griffin. John Murphy," it greeted them.

"Dead pixels," Clarke replied and deliberately walked through it.

"There is no death in the City of Light."

"There's no life, either," Murphy answered. "So I guess you're having fun with all the other dead people." He stayed between A.L.I.E. and Clarke while she opened door after door. When she found a stairwell, she had a guard block the door open while she made a mark on the wall with charcoal.

Murphy continued to keep A.L.I.E.’s attention while Clarke methodically searched each level. She found rooms full of terminals, all scrolling endless lines of text and symbols. She found several rooms of servers. In the lowest level, she opened a door and recognized a medical facility.

What she found in a room deep in that section brought her to a halt. She closed her eyes and steadied her breathing, then looked again.

There were rows of tanks large enough to hold an adult human. They held a bluish liquid and each had a pedestal in front of it. In the back of her stunned mind, Clarke wondered whether Lexa actually knew about this, and decided that she could not have consciously known. Still, she had driven Clarke to seek a miracle. She hoped Raven and her mother could create one from this.

Murphy stood behind her, his eyes just as wide. "This is your master plan?" he asked the hologram. "Your code is fucked up."
"I fulfilled every one of my creator's plans."

"Pretty sure she didn't mean for you to make people from scratch."

"Let's go," Clarke said.

A.L.I.E. followed them to the entrance, attempting to plead its case along the way. It was used to being argued with, and winning the arguments, and had no idea how to proceed with people who refused to engage.

100 – 100 – 100

On the boat, Abby stood on the deck watching for Clarke's return. She kept an eye out for more drones, too, while Raven examined the pieces of the one she shot down. They were nervous, as were their guards, and all of them tried to hide it.

The day was nearly over when they saw Clarke, Murphy, and their guards returning. There was no fire that night, no hot meal. They ate dried meat and washed it down with water while Clarke explained what they found.

Raven was excited about the prospect of having so much to work with. Abby thought about everything and willed herself not to destroy the hope evident on Clarke's face and in her voice.

They slept on the boat that night, and in the morning set out for the gleaming white building in the distance.
While they walked to the building that would be their home until the project was completed, Clarke and Murphy took turns telling Raven and Abby to expect. They repeatedly reminded both Abby and Raven to ignore A.L.I.E., who waited for them.

A.L.I.E. identified Skaikru as they came through, but ignored their guards. Clarke, Murphy, and the guards who accompanied them the day before were relieved to see that doors remained jammed open and Clarke’s markings were still on walls and doors. A.L.I.E. remained incorporeal, and that would make a great many things easier.

Raven wanted to stop at the first working terminal they found, but Clarke forced her to press on. She wanted Raven to see the medical facilities before she started doing anything.

When they reached the room furthest from the entrance, Clarke opened the door and stepped aside. Raven went in first. She took a few steps and stopped, then turned toward Clarke. “Did you know this was here?”

“No.”

“Know what,” Abby began, and like Raven, stopped just inside the room. While Raven continued to stare, Abby approached the nearest tank, a tall, transparent cylinder. She looked at it, frowning, before turning to her daughter. “What is this?”

“A.L.I.E. wants it to be Earth’s new start when she gets done nuking the rest of the planet,” Clarke said. “We can’t let that happen.”

“I’m going to take a look at the computers,” Raven said before backtracking into the facility. Clarke gestured for a guard to stay with her. Murphy went with them.

Abby continued to examine the tank and the pedestal with a small keyboard and a slot for something. After a few minutes, she turned around to look at Clarke. “I have no idea how any of this works.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

“I’ll do my best,” Abby answered.

“You OK on your own for a while?”

“There’s nothing I can do here yet.”

Clarke nodded slowly. “There’s some other places I want to look at again if you want to come with me,” she offered.

Abby nodded and followed Clarke through the building. They passed Raven, engrossed in a terminal display, and Murphy, who appeared to be lounging against a nearby wall. Clarke heard echoes of their guards in the halls while she re-checked each room.

Clarke and Abby eventually left the building and went outside. “Bunker or lighthouse?” Clarke asked.

“Lighthouse.”

They walked toward it without speaking, walked up the staircase and climbed up through a trap door
to reach the observation deck. Clarke stood and looked out at the water.

“It’s beautiful,” Abby said.

“Um hmm,” Clarke agreed.

“Have you thought about what will happen if”

Clarke interrupted her. “Not yet, not before we’ve even tried.”

Abby looked at her daughter for a few minutes, trying to reconcile this woman with the child she raised. Clarke looked tired and sad, and Abby saw for the first time all that Clarke carried. She didn’t know what comprised Clarke’s burden, but she saw its weight. “How can I help?”

Clarke managed not to scoff at the offer. She could have used Abby’s help many times, but Abby wasn’t willing. “Stop fighting with Raven,” she finally said. “You’re going to have to work together.”

Abby nodded.

“Let’s go see what’s in the bunker.”

By the time they reached it, two guards were with them and took the lead when the group entered the bunker. It was as Murphy described it. The television continued to play the looped video. Clarke ignored it but Abby stood and watched it twice.

“Who he’s talking about is what we saw in the other building?”

“Yes. And we have to stop it. It’s dangerous.”

“I didn’t realize,” Abby said as she followed Clarke outside.

Clarke stopped to talk to the guards in Trigedasleng. She directed them to begin carrying gear into the main building and to set up a small camp just outside the door if they weren’t comfortable inside. It still amazed Abby that men twice Clarke’s size bowed their heads and answered, “Sha, Wanheda.”

Clarke turned to Abby. “You’re free to do whatever until Raven needs you,” she said, and followed the guards to the boat.

100 – 100 – 100

For the next two weeks, while Raven and Abby learned about the facility, Clarke was an ambulating ball of anxiety. Murphy did all he could to distract her. They sparred and hunted. He kept her company while she sketched. After the second night she woke screaming, he moved his furs into her space and two nights after that, Clarke woke up to Murphy’s voice trying to soothe her. When she fell asleep again, he continued to hold her hand.

The next night, he moved his furs closer and took Clarke’s hand when they turned in. He didn’t make her ask, and Clarke was grateful for that.

100 – 100 – 100

On the fifteenth night, Raven joined everyone for the evening meal. Clarke waited for her to finish eating before asking, “What?”

Raven hesitated before answering, “You’re not gonna like it.”
“Spill,” Clarke demanded.

“I need to go to the City of Light. The other one.”

“Why?”

“I need something.”

“Just tell me.”

Raven took a deep breath. “Some of the stuff in Becca’s journal makes sense now, and I need to go back in to find the key that makes all the stuff in the basement work.”

“What’s the key?”

“Software. A.L.I.E. buried the key in there.”

“There’s no way to get from here?”

“I tried, Clarke. I’ve read every line of code four times just in case the notes were a false trail. What we need is in the City of Light.”

Clarke frowned and took a deep breath. She looked at the ground while she thought about their options and finally looked at Raven. “You’re not going alone.”

“I have to.”

“No, you don’t, and you’re not. I’m going with you. Somebody’s got to watch your back.”

“Not you.”

“Yes me. You’ll give me one of those chips and I’ll go with you.”

“No. But maybe there’s another way. Come with me.” Raven stood up and Clarke followed her to Abby. They had a brief conversation before the three of them returned to the main building with Murphy tagging along because he was curious.

In the basement, Abby put a drop of Clarke’s blood on a slide and looked at it under a microscope. When she finished, Raven looked and stood up nodding. Clarke looked, too, and was surprised at what she saw.

100 – 100 – 100

“Bring what you usually carry and a weapon,” Raven said while they ate breakfast. “I don’t know what we’ll need.”

“You’re taking a weapon, too.”

“Yup, and a couple little nifty bits of tech I found laying around. This place is a gold mine.”

“We do what we have to and I’ll make sure Ontari sends you back to take everything you want.”

“I’ll make sure,” Raven corrected her.

“It’s like that, huh?”

“You can’t be the only Skaikru with a heda of her own.”
Clarke laughed and Raven grinned triumphantly at her.

An hour later, they were in a small room. Abby and Murphy were with them.

“Ready?” Raven asked.

Clarke swept her hair aside and lowered her head. Raven placed the chip on her neck and said, “Et nos unum sumus.”

Abby stood on Clarke’s other side and watched with wide eyes as the chip burrowed into Clarke’s skin.

“All done,” Raven said.

“So how do we get there?”

“Close your eyes and think about your Commander,” Raven said, then settled near Clarke. She put one of the earlier chips on her tongue and looked at Murphy. “If she tries to take me over, shoot me again.”

“Don’t make it come to that.”

“We shouldn’t be too long,” Raven said to Abby and closed her eyes.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven was the first to arrive in the City of Light. It looked as it did every time she came, like a living city from a century ago. She immediately began walking toward the plaza where she was supposed to meet Clarke. Clarke stood there, looking around with undisguised interest, and absentmindedly wiped away the black blood slowly dripping from her nose.

Clarke heard footsteps and turned toward them while drawing her sword. When she saw who it was, she almost dropped her weapon in her hurry to meet Lexa. Lexa smiled broadly as she approached Clarke, and Clarke dropped her weapon so she could wrap her arms around Lexa. Here, she was solid and warm, more than just green eyes and a reassuring voice.

It took Clarke almost three minutes to begin to let go, and then only because Lexa, who held Clarke just as tightly, gently reminded her, “This is not real.”

Clarke kissed her briefly before letting Lexa go. When she turned toward Raven, she saw Ontari for the first time. She and Raven were looking at Becca’s journal and Clarke went to meet them. Lexa picked up Clarke’s sword before joining the group. Raven’s finger moved over a page and they all saw her processing the information. She finally closed the book and returned it to Ontari.

“Ready?” she asked everyone unnecessarily, her nervousness showing for the first time.

Ontari and Raven walked together. Clarke and Lexa followed, Clarke’s attention split between their surroundings and the warmth of Lexa’s hand on her back. They stopped unexpectedly, and Raven stared at the wall blocking their path. “This wasn’t here.” She got her notebook out and began flipping through the pages.

“Heda,” Lexa said quietly and inclined her head to the right.

“Sha,” Ontari agreed and pulled swords from the scabbards on her back as she turned to face the group that approached.
“Skrish,” Raven muttered, and Clarke would have laughed if they weren’t about to be swarmed by an angry mob.

“The map, Klark,” Lexa prompted before moving to help Ontari.

Clarke pulled her small sketchbook out and flipped through to the page with the map she copied from the one hidden in Lexa’s trunk. She handed it to Raven, who turned it a few times before saying, “OK, once we get out of here, we go left, take the third right, and go left again.” She handed the book back to Clarke.

“We must hurry,” Ontari said, and led them in the direction Raven indicated.

Clarke was glad she didn’t recognize anyone in the City of Light. She knew there would be people there from the Ark, and hoped they wouldn’t encounter any of them.

“Almost there,” Raven reported as they turned the last corner.

They stopped, and Clarke swore silently. Skaikru blocked their path, Thelonius Jaha in the lead. “We can’t let you pass,” he said.

“You’re dead,” Clarke said flatly.

“I tried to tell you. There is no death in the City of Light. No pain, no worry, no fear.”

“She lies,” Lexa answered. “There is death. Unless you step aside, you will meet yours again.”

“We will not allow you to destroy this.”

“Final warning,” Clarke growled.

It was a bloodbath. No one was armed except Lexa, Clarke, Raven, and Ontari. Clarke’s eyes leaked black tears but she did what had to be done. When the way was clear again, they followed Raven to the door. While she picked the lock, Ontari guarded all of them. Clarke’s tears continued, and Lexa comforted her, her words too soft for the others to hear.

“I am sorry, niron,” Lexa said while wiping tears from Clarke’s cheeks. She kissed Clarke’s forehead. “One day, there will be no more death.”

“There is always death,” Clarke answered. “It’s what I am.”

“It is not. Wanheda is a title of respect and fear, but it is not all you are. There is peace and it will continue. There will be no need for any of us to go to war again.”

“Got it,” Raven said.

“Our future is waiting,” Lexa said and turned Clarke toward the door.

Ontari entered first, weapons out, but quickly sheathed them. The large, bright room was empty except for screens and one terminal. The others came in behind her and Lexa pulled the door shut. She and Ontari remained on either side of it.

“I need the book,” Raven told Ontari. When she received it, Raven and Clarke went to the terminal. Raven flipped through the pages until she found what she wanted, and handed it to Clarke. Raven pulled out her notebook and went through it until she found the page she wanted. She looked back and forth between the books and the screen in front of her until she had typed in the exact sequence she wanted, and checked it to make sure there were no errors. She took a deep breath and pushed the
key to execute the code she input.

Lines of words and symbols scrolled through the screen faster than she could read all of them but she saw the important ones and turned to Clarke. “Just a few minutes for it to finish, and we can go back.” When she saw the despair on Clarke’s face, she said, “She’ll join us there soon. Go talk to her while you can.”

Clarke nodded and closed the book. She walked to the door and handed it to Ontari before turning her attention to Lexa. “Raven said it worked.”
Lexa smiled. “Do not be sad, Clarke. We will soon be together.”

“I want to stay with you until then.”

“You cannot. It is not safe here for any of you.” Lexa ended the small distance between them and embraced Clarke. “Don’t be afraid. It is not much longer.”

Clarke was silent. She breathed deeply, soothed by Lexa’s familiar scent.

Across the room, Ontari and Raven talked quietly. “This is all that needs to be done?” Ontari asked.

“Here,” Raven clarified. “The rest of it is in the world, and it’s just a waiting game.”

“How long?”

“As long as it takes. I don’t want to be here any longer than necessary.”

Ontari smiled. “I miss you, too.”

Raven smiled back and they shared a kiss. The screen emptied. “Finished,” Raven announced. To Ontari she said, “I’ll see you soon.”

“I look forward to it.” They walked to the door, where Clarke and Lexa quietly embraced.

“Clarke, we need to get back.”

“I will see you soon, niron,” Lexa said, and kissed Clarke again. She nodded to Ontari and looked at Raven. “Mochof. This is a great gift.”

“Thank me next time,” Raven answered. “Clarke, close your eyes and think about your mom or the boat or the lighthouse.” She was about to do the same when Ontari stopped her so they could share one more kiss before Raven left.

“Heda, you must go, too,” Lexa said.

“Leida,” Ontari answered, and disappeared.

Lexa looked around the empty room before departing, making sure the door locked behind her.
Chapter 88

Raven woke first. She sat up and stretched, then looked around. Abby and Murphy looked back. Raven looked at Clark, saw traces of the tears she shed in the City of Light, and sighed. She moved her hair away from her neck and said, "Quaere superna."

Murphy caught the chip before it slid down into her shirt. He presented it to Raven, who shook her head. The three of them sat, waiting for Clarke to wake. After many minutes, Raven shook her. "Clarke, you have to come back."

"No," Clarke said, her eyes still closed. "Don't take her again."

Raven answered, "Et nos unum sumus."

Clarke turned and glared at her, but didn't repeat the trigger phrase. She reached behind her head and pulled the chip from her neck. Murphy offered its tin. Clarke looked at the small thing in her hand for several moments before securing it and handing the tin to Abby. She stood and walked out the room. They heard her footsteps speed up as they echoed in the hallway.

"I'll keep an eye on her," Murphy said and left.

"Did you get what you need?" Abby asked Raven.

"Yeah."

"Why was Clarke crying?"

"Long story," Raven sighed again. "I'll tell you what happened after I verify everything."

100 – 100 – 100

"It is nearly time."

Ontari paced in her rooms. "What will happen?"

"You must meditate. We will meet Clarke and Raven. We must protect them."

Ontari didn't answer. Instead, she opened the drapes and sat in a patch of sun on the worn carpet. She calmed herself, slowed her thoughts, and slipped into the City of Light.

It was astonishing, completely unlike anyplace Ontari had seen or dreamed of. Lexa strode across the plaza to meet her. Ontari lowered her head and said, "Heda."

Lexa did the same.

"What is this place?"

"The City of Light. Raven and Clarke will be here soon."

"Why would they come here?"

"There is something here they need."

"What?"
"I do not know. I know that they are coming soon. We must wait here for them."

Ontari nodded and looked around again, and another time. She saw Raven loping across the plaza and smiled at her approach. She looked like herself, but different. It took Ontari a few seconds to realize that she wasn't wearing her brace or limping. As Raven came closer, Ontari saw that the ever present indicators of pain weren't on Raven's face, and she smiled.

Raven smiled back, and threw her arms around Ontari when they met. "I'm so glad you're here."

"Likewise," Ontari answered before kissing her.

Lexa smiled at them and looked for Clarke. She grew more anxious as she waited and began to pace while Raven and Ontari looked at Beka Pramheda's journal, Raven's fingers tracking lines of code and instruction

Ontari looked around, checking that they were safe, and saw Clarke in the distance. "Heda," she said, and pointed.

"Mochof," Lexa answered, her eyes fixed on Clarke's approach. She knew she had been selfish, forcing herself through Ontari to spend precious moments with the other woman. Seeing Clarke again through her own eyes was better by orders of magnitude.

Raven and Ontari gave them time to greet each other before they set out. Ontari looked around constantly, taking in the scenery, keeping an eye out for danger, and watching Raven move freely. She was happy and relaxed for the first time since Raven left. She covertly watched Clarke and Lexa, too. It was the first time Ontari saw Clarke look happy, and it transformed the blonde.

For half a second, Ontari wished she could be the one who made Clarke look like that. Then she looked at Raven, reading as they walked. Raven felt her watching, glanced over, and winked at Ontari, who couldn't stop the smile that came onto her face.

It wasn't until she was awake in her room, the sunlight gone, that Ontari realized that the best thing about the City of Light was that she was alone in her head

100 – 100 – 100

Clarke ran up the final flight of stairs, through the corridor, and out the door. She kept running until she couldn't, and dropped to her knees. She panted, chest heaving, and wept like she did in the prison cell, Lexa's absence again fresh. She hadn't wanted to leave the City of Light or surrender the chip, the one that would be Lexa's and now held a small piece of Clarke.

She didn't hear Murphy's approach. He stayed near enough to watch her, but didn't get any closer once he heard her. Clarke's grief brought back all of the horror of his first visit to Polis, most clearly her anguished cries in the dark cells. It wasn't something he would wish on anyone except maybe Titus, and Murphy doubted he could feel anything so deeply.

He waited until Clarke was quiet to come near, and made certain she could hear him. Leaves crinkled under his feet. He squatted beside her and waited for Clarke to acknowledge him.

"I saw her," Clarke choked out after a few minutes. "I touched her. She was alive." She gasped, inhaling unevenly. "I had to leave her."

Murphy didn't say anything. He had no idea what would be appropriate or helpful, so he stayed where he was and waited for Clarke to speak again.
She stayed there for a long time while she put herself back in order. It was harder than it had ever been, even though Lexa had not said goodbye, instead repeating her promise that they would be together soon. It was twilight before Clarke forced herself upright. Murphy didn't offer help or speak. She was glad he was near, though if it had been anyone else, she would have resented their hovering.

100 – 100 – 100

Raven went over everything three times. The last time, she made herself compare the code character by character. She didn't want to let Clarke down. After seeing her with Lexa, she realized how much Clarke relied on Lexa's promise.

This visit to the City of Light lifted Raven's spirits, too. She missed Ontari more than she thought she would. Seeing the other woman and spending the small amount of time with her helped Raven focus on what she was doing. She was certain now that they could recreate Lexa. She didn't care what word they used for the miracle they were about to pull off, just that it worked like it was supposed to.

Before she pushed the button that would compile the code, Raven took a deep breath. After this, nearly everything to come would be Abby's responsibility. She traced everything again in her mind to make certain it was correct and pushed the key.

A.L.I.E. flickered into existence beside her chair. "Raven, what have you done?"

Raven ignored her. She left the room and went to another. A.L.I.E. trailed her and watched Raven search desks until she found the last thing she needed. She went in search of Abby and had the older woman follow her to the tank room.

"Pick one," Raven said.

Abby looked at A.L.I.E. "What about her?"

"Who?"

Abby pointed at A.L.I.E.

"Don't worry about the artifact," Raven said. "Pick one."

"The third one," Abby decided.

Raven went to the pedestal in front of the tank and inserted a card into the slot. She tapped a password, using the symbol marked keys. Quiet motors started and the card ejected. "Abracadabra," Raven said.

"What?"

"Now we wait."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Lexa."

"You will not do that, Raven," A.L.I.E. said.

"Bitch, you're locked out. This is my system now. Go sulk somewhere else."

A.L.I.E. tilted her head to the side for a few seconds, then disappeared.
"I'm gonna get rid of her if it's the last damn thing I do," Raven said.

"Will you please tell me what's going on?" Abby demanded, her tone exasperated.

"We're bringing Lexa back from the City of Light."

Clarke sat on with her back to the lighthouse wall and looked up at the sky. Murphy sat nearby and waited for Clarke to talk. He knew she would. As the moon rose, she told him about the City of Light. He listened intently as she recounted nearly everything that happened there.

When he was certain she was finished, he hauled her up. The night was cold, and he had limits. For once, Clarke didn't argue, and that worried Murphy.

Because she wanted to keep an eye on things, Raven stayed in the tank room. Abby stayed with her because Raven was, finally, explaining everything. After the sixth time Raven shushed her, Abby stopped interrupting to tell Raven that what they were doing was impossible and began to listen.

When Raven finished talking, Abby was astonished. She was still uncertain that they would succeed, but Raven was positive enough for all of them. Raven monitored the machinery and Abby had her explain every action.

Neither of them know how many hours passed, but Raven was nearly ready to find someplace to crash for a few hours when the pedestal beeped. She jumped up to see why. Abby read the message over Raven's shoulder and looked at the tank. Abby gasped. Raven looked, too, and let out a whoop when she saw the small form floating in the previously empty tank.

After half an hour, Abby sent Raven off to get some rest. She promised to get her if anything happened. Raven's compromise was to bring her furs and sleep on a bench in the hallway outside the tank room.

When she finally fell asleep, Clarke slept deeply and without dreams. Murphy was up first and prepared food. He let Clarke continue to sleep. It was the longest she'd been out since they arrived, and she undoubtedly needed the rest. It was almost mid-day before she stirred.

Clarke sat up and stretched. Murphy handed her a mug of hot broth.

"Heard anything?" Clarke asked.

"Not yet."

"I'm going up there."

"At least eat first."

"My mom's here, you know."

"Yeah, but you don't listen to her," he answered. "Finish that and wash up. By the time you're done, I'll have something ready." When Clarke hesitated, he said, "Heda and Roan are still looking for reasons to kick my ass."
Clarke smiled faintly and got up to do as he asked.

When she finished eating, she set out for the gleaming white building. As always, Clarke ignored A.L.I.E.’s greeting and headed downstairs. Her first stop was the computer lab where Raven spent most of her time, but it was empty.

As she neared the tank room, she heard voices and walked a little faster. From the doorway, she saw Raven and Abby bent over the pedestal in front of one of the tanks. "Everything OK?"

Abby walked to her. "Everything is fine, sweetheart. Did you sleep well?"

Clarke tried to get past her, but Abby didn't budge.

"Clarke, I asked you a question."

"I'm fine, Mom. What's going on?"

"Raven left the pedestal and slowly walked to the doorway. "Everything's good, Clarke. Promise."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure. There's not a lot to see right now, but things are happening in the correct order at the correct time."

"How long?"

"I don't know," Abby answered. "But I'll make sure you're here."

Raven nodded to reinforce Abby's message. "Go do something. I won't let you miss anything important." Raven held her right hand up. "I promise," she said sincerely.

After a few seconds, Clarke said, "OK," before leaving.
Clarke paced. The truce she forced on Raven and her mother was tenuous, but they joined forces to remove Clarke from the lab so they could do the tricky final steps. The hall was long and Clarke’s steps were nearly silent. She wavered between fear that they wouldn’t be able to return Lexa and hope that they could. It had been weeks since Clarke last heard her. The night before they left Polis, Ontari finally stayed in Raven’s bed and Clarke’s night was full of Lexa, some dreams, some promises, some memories. She woke aching for the other woman. Their minutes together in the City of Light were a dream that Clarke repeated whenever her eyes closed.

And now she didn’t know what to do with all of the anxiety. From time to time, she saw guards at the far end of the hall, but no one approached her. She had no idea how long she’d been waiting when Murphy came for her.

“What?” she snapped.

“C’mon, Griffin, you need to get your mind off of what they’re doing. It’s almost time to eat. The guards will bring their food, but they won’t open the door if you’re out here.”

“What?”

“That’s what they said. So c’mon. You can try to kill me.”

“If I haven’t done it yet, it’s not happening,” Clarke answered, and reluctantly went with him.

The next time Clarke saw her mother, Abby looked haggard. “Are you OK?” Clarke asked.

“Exhausted.”

“Did it?” Clarke couldn’t bring herself to finish the question.

“We’ll know in a few days.”

Clarke nodded and walked her mother to her bed. Abby was out before Clarke covered her with the blanket.

It was a week before they let her into the lab again. Clarke stood in front of the glass chamber and stared. It wasn’t Lexa, not yet, but Clarke could see the changes. “How long?” she asked shakily.

“Another week in there, and who knows how long after that,” Raven answered.

“The chip?”

“It’s ready. It’s been ready,” Raven reminded her.

Clarke stared for another minute before she left them.

Raven and Abby looked at each other. “I’ll go,” Raven volunteered.

She came back half an hour later. When Abby looked at her, Raven said, “I didn’t find her.”
“Did you see Murphy?”

“No.”

“Good.”

“Good?”

“They’re sparring or hunting or doing something so Clarke doesn’t obsess over this.”

“Good,” Raven agreed, and returned to her terminal. She went back to reading code, looking for a way to completely contain A.L.I.E. and learning how the City of Light worked. It was ingenious and frequently elegant, but she expected nothing less after reading Beka Pramheda’s journal.

Clarkes laugh surprised her.

On the walk back, she answered all the questions he didn’t ask.

Murphy saw Clarke race out of the lab building and took off after her. He didn’t catch her until she stopped on a rock jetty. She stared at the water as she tried to believe that she would hold Lexa and be held by her in a matter of days.

“Princess,” Murphy said as he came up behind her.

She didn’t acknowledge him, and he stayed close enough to hear if she spoke, but didn’t touch her. It was a long time before she turned around, and her eyes were red.

“Everything all right?” Murphy asked.

“I hate waiting.”

“It’s just a little longer,” he comforted.

“I haven’t heard her since we left Polis. What if it doesn’t work?”

“Raven and your mom will blame each other and we’ll never hear the end of it.”

Clarke’s laugh surprised her.

Clarke spent the rest of the week in and around the lighthouse. She couldn’t be too near the lab; the process moved at its own speed, and she was impatient for the final result. She sketched and tried to meditate. Murphy checked on her regularly, but mostly spent his time with the guards, preparing them for what was supposed to happen. He was pleasantly surprised to find that Azgeda were fine with resurrection. The five of them had many long talks about what they believed. Murphy was relieved they wouldn’t completely freak out when Lexa returned.

Raven came to get Clarke. Clarke heard her climbing the stairs and waited.

“Nice view,” Raven said when she stepped out onto the walkway around the top of the light.

“Yeah.”

“We’re gonna open the tank and put the chip in. After that, it’s just waiting until she wakes up. No, we don’t know how long that will take. But her body’s ready.” Raven waited for Clarke to say
something. “Breathe,” she prompted when she saw Clarke’s white knuckle grip on the railing.

“When?”

“As soon as you get there.”

“OK.”

“You coming?”

“Yeah. I just need to get my things.”

“Don’t keep us waiting,” Raven said, and started the long climb down.

Clarke continued to stare out at the ocean. The hope she tried to suppress flooded through her, but she waited to see Raven crossing to the lab building before racing to the room she stayed in and shoving the few things that were out into her pack. Clarke kept her movements deliberate and resisted the urge to race to the lab.

100 – 100 – 100

Ontari had too much time on her hands. She spent time with the Natblida, sparred, hunted, and did anything else she could to stay occupied. Nights were the most difficult. Without Raven, Clarke, and even Murphy, she had far too much time to fill. She didn’t like being kept in the dark and worried that the length of time they’d been gone meant there were problems. She worried that Raven and Clarke weren’t taking proper care of themselves. She worried about bandits and the City of Light and that they might not return.

Miller worried, too. Things were going well, and in his experience, that meant that everything was about to hit the fan. When he took his concerns to Marcus Kane, the older man listened and did his best to ease Miller’s fears despite his own. He wasn’t sure what would happen if Clarke and the others returned. Abby continued to insist that while Clarke might look good and sound good, her belief, the one that it seemed everyone who spent any time with her soon accepted, was a textbook definition of legal insanity. “We’re supposed to raise Lexa from the dead,” Abby whispered to him in the dark before she left.

“Stranger things have happened,” he answered.

“Please tell me you don’t believe her,” Abby groaned.

“I don’t believe that she can have you literally raise the dead,” Marcus said cautiously. “But you’ve seen the commander.”

“I’ve seen Ontari.”

“Not Ontari,” Marcus chided.

Abby sighed. “I’m worried what Clarke will do if this doesn’t work.”

“Clarke will be fine. Eventually.”

“And in the interim?”

“She’ll do her duty.”

100 – 100 – 100
It was Lexa’s body in the bed, except for a few differences. She had no kill marks, scars, or tattoos. Her hair was short. She lacked muscle definition. But it was her face, her chest that rose and fell, her fingers that sometimes flexed. Clarke sat beside the bed and kept careful watch until she had to leave to sleep or eat. Her mother repeatedly came and left, checking on both of them.

When Lexa began to wake, she kept her eyes closed while she cataloged the external stimuli. Her last conscious memory was of Clarke bending over her, blue eyes full of tears. The voices coming from the combined chips didn’t bother her, except for Titus, and she commanded him to remain silent until she addressed him.

When she was ready, Lexa opened her eyes. She looked around the room, and stopped looking when she saw Clarke, who spoke her name tentatively.

Lexa smiled at her. “I told you you could do it.” Her throat was thick and her voice scratchy.

Clarke tried to smile back, but burst into tears. Lexa tried to sit up, but was too weak. She was able to reach out. Her hand landed on Clarke’s knee.

“Do not cry, niron.”

“I’m sorry,” Clarke said.

“There is nothing to apologize for.”

“I tried to save you.”

“I know, Klark. Come closer.”

Clarke moved from the chair to the bed. She hesitantly cupped Lexa’s cheek and covered her mouth to muffle her ongoing sobs. It took her several seconds, but Lexa was able to move her hand to hold Clarke’s hand there.

Abby came in, and moved more quickly when she saw Clarke sitting beside Lexa. She stood at Lexa’s bedside. She checked the monitors, and when both women ignored her, decided to return later.

“It’s really you?”

“Sha, Klark. Who else would it be?”

Clarke giggled, and her tears stopped. She leaned down to kiss Lexa, and was relieved at her response. When she sat up, she continued to stare at Lexa. She had a thousand questions, and none of them really mattered right now. Lexa was alive, and everything else could wait.

Abby came back. “I need to check my patient,” she said as she entered. She stood and looked at Lexa for a few seconds, and when Lexa tore her gaze from Clarke to look at Abby, said, “Welcome back, Commander.”

“It is good to be back,” Lexa answered, her eyes returning to Clarke.

“I need to check you out,” Abby said. “Can you sit up?”

Lexa tried, and Clarke moved to assist her. Lexa frowned. “I have no strength.”

“We’ll work on that,” Abby promised. “Follow my finger with your eyes.” Abby made other requests, and when she finished, said, “Everything seems fine. I’ll be back later.”
Raven’s whoops of triumph brought everyone running to the room she claimed as her work area.

“What?” Clarke demanded breathlessly.

“I got it,” Raven said, pointing at different places on the screen.

“You got what?” Abby asked.

“The code. I have her code. Watch.”

The others turned to look at A.L.I.E. who spent most of her time trying to talk Raven out of what she was doing. A.L.I.E. flickered.

“How’s that feel?” Raven asked smugly, her fingers flying over the keyboard.


Raven chortled and kept working. It took more than half an hour longer, but A.L.I.E. flickered and finally faded out. “Gotcha,” Raven said smugly and kept working.

“Is the show over?” Murphy asked.

“Yeah. Get me a sandwich.”

“Oh it,” he answered, chuckling, and left.

Abby looked from Raven’s back to Murphy’s before following Clarke out of the room. “What was that?”

“What was what?”

“With Raven and John.”

“Don’t know.”
Chapter 90

For all that Lexa wanted to immediately return to Polis, she acknowledged that she physically could not. She worked toward that goal with Clarke beside her every second. At first, everything exhausted her and Lexa spent a lot of time sleeping. While she slept, she learned all that she needed to know from the other fleimkepas, but deliberately stayed away from Titus.

Clarke was loath to leave Lexa, even when she slept, but slipped out to get updates from Raven about the City of Light. What Raven told her stunned Clarke.

Digital versions of everyone who accepted a chip were stored there. The dead went about lives they no longer had, even the ones that were killed in their visit. The others acted as they had under the influence of the chip. Raven talked about the facilities present and absent in that world. Despite Raven’s efforts, A.L.I.E. broke free and tried to rally her digital army. It was a futile effort, given how few of her followers still lived in the real world. Raven controlled the drones and kept them flying a patrol that would give them plenty of warning of anyone’s approach.

“What happens if we shut down all the servers when we leave?” Clarke asked.

“We lose the ability to bring anyone back.”

“Why wouldn’t we want to do that?”

“There’s no one you want to see again?”

“The only ones there are people who took the chip, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I need a list of everyone that’s in there, and we’ll decide what to do after that.”

Raven picked up several sheets of paper and handed them to Clarke. “Figured you’d ask that.”

“Thanks.” Clarke took the papers. “I’ll be back later.”

Clarke walked into the other room, where Lexa was finishing her physical therapy. She was stronger now, able to sit, stand, and walk short distances. Clarke watched her work with improvised weights, holding them and moving her arms in different ways.

When Lexa finished, she drank a glass of water before approaching Clarke. Clarke always smiled as she drew near. “What is that?” Lexa asked.

“We’ll talk about it outside,” Clarke said.

They walked at Lexa’s pace, which increased each day. Outside, they didn’t go far. There was a small alcove out of the wind that still received sun, and they sat there, Clarke’s back to the wall, Lexa between her legs.

“I am still weak as a newborn foal,” Lexa complained.

“You’re getting stronger. A week ago, you couldn’t walk out here with me.”

“I wanted to. I missed the sun, almost as much as you.” Lexa picked up one of Clarke’s hands, turned it palm up. She pressed the heels of their hands together, turned Clarke’s hand again so she
could see that her fingers were still a bit longer than Clarke’s. “Your hands hold much power. You do so much with them that others cannot.”

“Oh?” Clarke leaned forward and lightly rested her chin on Lexa’s shoulder.

“You draw beautiful things. You help those who are injured or ill. You set my body aflame.”

“We won’t talk about what yours do to my body until you’re strong enough to do it. Deal?”

“Sha, Klark. I am happy to be in your company. It is what I missed most.”

“Me, too,” Clarke answered and turned her head to kiss below Lexa’s ear. “You’re starting to smell like yourself.”

“Hmmm.” Lexa pressed back a bit more. “You have not mentioned the papers yet.”

“It’s the people in the City of Light.”

“May I see?”

“Sha. I need to decide whether any of them should come back.”

“You would do that?”

“If necessary.” Clarke skimmed the first page. “These are all Skaikru. No.” The second page was Skaikru, as was the third. On the fourth, Clarke saw Emori’s name, and names from there on were grounders. When she finished, Clarke folded the pages in half. “There’s no one we need. Raven can shut it down. Want to walk?”

“Sha.” Lexa got to her feet. It took longer, but she managed it on her own, and when she looked to see why Clarke hadn’t risen, saw her smiling. Lexa held out her hand and Clarke took it.

Lexa grew stronger every day. She did all the exercises Abby prescribed, and when they were finished, walked, ran, and trained with Clarke. She pushed herself, but Clarke prevented her from pushing too hard.

At night, they lay together and talked about the return trip to Polis. Neither wanted to speculate about what might happen. In any case, Lexa and Ontari had settled the basics long before the voyage to the City of Light began.

After two months, Lexa decided and Abby agreed that she was strong enough to travel. Murphy and Clarke spent most of the last days there helping Raven shut everything down. To ensure there was no way for A.L.I.E. to resuscitate itself, they shut down power at every breaker box and removed the individual breakers. There was no way for any power that went to them to be re-routed anywhere.

Raven took one last walk through the building to make sure she didn’t leave anything behind. Her guard waited patiently at the entrance. When she exited, they closed the doors together and walked down to the pier.

Clark hopped from the boat to the dock when she saw them coming. Raven got on board with a bit of help, her guard behind her. Clarke untied the bow line and tossed it aboard and hurried down the pier to free the stern line. She tossed it and jumped on the boat.

Clarke, Lexa, and one of their guards stowed the lines while Murphy got the tug underway. That job
done, the guard went to his bunk. Clarke and Lexa joined Murphy in the pilot house.

100 – 100 – 100

The trip back to Polis was more sedate than the trip away. Raven and Abby had come to an understanding, so there were no arguments. The weather made it miserable, though. They sailed through rain, sleet, snow, and rain again. Everything was damp, all of the people chilled.

Clarke and Lexa split piloting time with Murphy so they didn’t have to look for places to dock at night. They sailed close enough to shore to see landmarks. The few clear nights were bitterly cold, but their continued movement through them meant they would return sooner.

100 – 100 – 100

When they were close enough, Clarke scanned the dock with binoculars, but saw no one. “That’s weird,” she said softly.

“What?” Murphy demanded. He was ready to get off the tug and sit in front of a fire drinking until he was warm.

“No guards.” She handed him the glasses and held the wheel while he looked. Murphy handed the binoculars to Lexa when he was done. She slipped outside the pilot house to look carefully at the surrounding area.

Lexa gave orders to all the guards before returning. “I do not like it,” she said.

“Everything looks fine in Polis,” Clarke pointed out. The flame at the top of the tower burned brightly, indicating Ontari’s presence.

“Heda said she would leave a guard,” Murphy answered.

Clarke nodded and ducked out of the pilot house. The guards were strategically located around the deck, bows ready for use. She nodded as she passed them on her way below decks. She slid down the ladder and almost ran into Raven.

“Might be trouble,” Clarke told her.

Raven sighed. “We’ll stay down here until it’s clear,” she answered.

Clarke nodded and turned around. She went back to the pilot house. As she climbed the ladder, she felt the engines slow. Clarke stayed low as she reached the main deck and hurried to the pilot house.

“No change,” Lexa reported.

The atmosphere remained tense as they got closer to the dock. When Murphy slowed the engine to near idling, Clarke returned to the deck. She shouldered the stern line and when she was close enough, jumped from the transom to the pier. She wrapped the line around a post a few times and secured it before jogging toward the bow. Clarke caught the line the guard threw. As she fastened it, she heard a noise and quickly finished.

Something not identifiable sped out of the woods toward them. Clarke and everyone who was armed took aim at it. The thing slid to a stop near the dock with a familiar sound. A small head poked out through the roof, then disappeared.

The thing suddenly grew in size. Clarke held her bow and waited.
The Natblida tumbled out, shrieking in delight, and raced for the boat. Their guards, realizing it was safe, hurried to put their weapons aside. Ontari got out last and approached the dock at a more sedate speed.
Clarke smiled when she saw her, then laughed when she realized that the thing was Raven’s rover. In the time it took to catch her breath, the Natblida were aboard the tug. Lexa watched from the pilot house.

“Not gonna say hi?” Murphy asked.

She didn’t answer. She was too busy just looking at them, seeing how much they’d grown in the months of her absence. They looked healthy and happy, a little wild maybe, but given what Clarke told her about Titus, it was for the best that they didn’t spend time with him.

“Heda,” Clarke greeted Ontari, and inclined her head.

“Klark! You are back!” Ontari hugged her tightly. “You look well. Did it work?”

“Dokwocha!” One of the Natblida screamed, pointing at the pilot house.

They all wheeled to look. Lexa took a deep breath, then stepped out of the pilot house. Except for one, the Natblida backed up as one organism while Lexa took the ladder to the main deck. Aden stood in the middle of the younger ones, eyes fixed on Lexa. When she reached the deck and turned to face them, he studied her for several seconds before deciding to trust Clarke.

He made his way through the others. “Heda?” he asked hoarsely.

“Fleimkepa, Aden, not Heda.”

He launched himself at her, and Lexa staggered back but remained upright. She hugged him with one arm and stroked his hair. Soon, the others neared, and Lexa went down on the deck from their weight.

Clarke and Ontari made their way around the bodies on the crowded deck and descended the ladder. Clarke stepped aside so Ontari and Raven could have a brief reunion, then climbed the ladder again, Abby following.

Lexa was still mobbed by the Natblida. While Abby got off the tug, Clarke found an out of the way spot to watch from. Lexa looked for her once, gave a brilliant smile when she saw Clarke, and let the Natblida take her attention again.

Raven was thrilled to see Ontari and happy that she used the rover while they were gone. She sighed as she approached it. “What did you do?”

“Camouflage,” Ontari answered as if it were obvious. She turned her head and gave a loud whistle. The Natblida reluctantly left Lexa to answer their Heda’s call. They formed up, the smallest in the front rank. “Explain,” she said to them.

Aden began, but every one of the Natblida contributed. The rover’s color made it too easy to see. They tried paint, but it wouldn’t take. Boiled glue did, though, so they used to it attach moss, and leaves to the body. Every one of them contributed somehow to make the rover look like a hulking beast. They looked at Raven expectantly.

She shook her head and smiled. “Good job, junior hedas. Dismissed.”

100 – 100 – 100
They smiled proudly, but stayed in rank until Ontari nodded her approval of Raven’s order.

While the Natblida continued their reunion with Lexa, Clarke huddled up with Ontari, Raven, and Murphy.

“I don’t want word of this getting to Titus before Lexa’s ready to face him.”

“The Natblida are very resourceful,” Ontari said proudly. “I am certain they can get her into the Tower without anyone knowing.”

“Good. We can meet in my rooms and decide how to proceed.”

100 – 100 – 100

The Natblida worked so quickly that Lexa was waiting when the others arrived. The Natblida had raided the kitchens on their behalf, and when Ontari arrived, she sent Murphy and one of her guards to bring beer and wine.

What was meant to be a planning session quickly became a celebration. After a few hours of eating, drinking, and congratulating each other, Ontari left and took Raven with her. Clarke and Lexa retired to Roan’s room, where Clarke’s things still were. Murphy pulled his chair close to the fire, stoked it, and kept drinking.

dokwocha: something that watches from the shadows; a ghost. From trigedaslang.info

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