A Different Landing

by RhinoMouse

Summary

The drop ship was always going to have problems coming down. Unfortunately for the 100 they ended up in Ice Nation territory where the locals were far less forgiving. With all the wristbands gone and the survivors unable to contact the ark, the ark never came down. Now four years later the surviving members of the 100 have been assimilated into Nia's army. When Lexa calls for the armies of the coalition to march on the mountain Clarke finds herself leading the Ice Nation forces.

Notes
So this story is way darker than our Harry Potter fic. The main story takes place four years after the initial fall to earth, although there will be a lot of flashbacks to their time in the ice nation. There aren't a lot of established grounders outside of the command structure Lexa is involved with in the show. In a true show of laziness for the many, many soldiers who we needed in this story, we just imported them from the Fire Emblem game series. Mostly from Fates. Like I was going through some rage quits and thought, hey look disposable characters. They are all super altered to fit this world however so we didn't tag them for the game. The Mountain stuff is just happening now in the story because unlike in cannon, Lexa never had a bunch of sky people running around killing her warriors. So she didn't bring her army down till the coalition was more secure.

Hope you all like this fic and we look forward to any feedback you might have.
Chapter 1

The gods, if they existed, must be laughing at Clarke and her people. She tightened her grip on the hard reins in her hands, ignoring the cold and the creak of the leather. If someone had told her four years ago, when she was young and soft and seventeen sitting in prison for the crime of believing in people, that she would someday be leading an army for a woman who had ordered the murder and torture of most of her friends she would have laughed at them. But here she was, wearing the brands and tattoos of a savage people, wrapped in white furs and painted with white paint, weapons strapped to her body and warriors prepared to die on her orders following her.

Out of habit she found her eyes seeking the blond head of Charlotte riding beside her. Long cold, pain filled nights curled round the child who was on the brink of death had hard wired a constant need to be aware of Charlotte’s location. Out of an army of four hundred that she was leading south only five of the members were among the original group that had come down in the dropship. Charlotte, Octavia, Atom, Raven, and Monty. Bellamy would take care of the others but the queen would never allow more than half of their group to be in one place at a time unless it was inside her dungeon. It felt like a lifetime ago that there had been 101 prisoners crashing to the earth reveling in their first breaths of clean air. Now there were twelve of them left and they were all scarred and weathered by blood and death.

Her horse snorted shaking its head slightly pulling her out of her dark thoughts. Pulling herself upright she surveyed the troops she was leading. They were all battle hardened warriors but they were her warriors and their relaxed presence soothed Clarke. Monty was grinning while chatting with the warriors around him. Raven was half asleep on her horse and looked like she was barely keeping herself upright. Charlotte was bright and curious, eyes sharp and searching for threats. Atom calmly riding to her left and back, a silent pillar. Octavia was arguing with another warrior. Everything was in order with her people. The army was well equipped and making good time. Pushing her heels into her horse's sides she sped him up slightly till she crested the hill. A mile further and they’d be joining the largest army gathered since before the war, all at the command of Heda Lexa.

“It’s beautiful isn’t it?” Octavia said from beside her startling Clarke slightly.

“And deadly, keep your guard up, I don’t want any of you going out on your own while we’re in Trikru territory.” Clarke turned a serious eye on Octavia the most likely to go wandering.

“Yes ma’am, general, ma’am. What are we to call you now? Do I get to call you princess again?” Octavia grinned at Clarke.

Rolling her eyes Clarke sighed, “You know the rules. Grab a dozen warriors and ride ahead. Get an audience with Heda and return with word of where she wants our army to set up camp.”

Octavia nodded recognizing that her friend had become her commanding officer again. She turned her horse around quickly calling out the required warriors before riding off down the beaten path.

Lexa was not fiddling with her dagger, that would be childish and unbefitting of the commander. According to her scouts the Ice Nation contingent of her army was arriving today and like every other time she heard anything to do with them anger and suspicion started turning her gut. Anya finally arrived her face grimmer than usual. It wasn’t a good sign. “Speak Anya, what do the scouts report?”
Anya didn’t twitch but her posture was anything but comfortable. She was obviously on edge like most of the Trikru warriors. “A small contingent of Ice Nation forces is approaching. They carry the symbol of ‘General Klark kom Azgeda the undefeated’ and the recently confirmed heir to the Ice Queen.”

Every guard and general in her tent stiffened at that pronouncement. Every one of them had heard of Klark kom Azgeda, the warrior who had moved up the Azgeda ranks unbelievably quickly. She was still spoken of with fear among the nomads since her time fighting along the southwest border against their forces and the barely veiled attacks of the sand tribes. Lexa had also heard stories of Klark the pauna hunter, who had killed more pauna than any other two people combined could claim. That Klark had also led so many battles and skirmishes as a captain, and now general, and never lost was enough to make Lexa very wary of the general. However, the fact Klark had challenged Roan to single combat and won was what had finally pushed Lexa to label her as a credible threat. After all legends could be faked and exaggerated, but Lexa had fought Roan herself when she was still a second and knew first hand of his prowess in battle.

Before that much of Klark’s legend could have been dismissed as an Ice Nation intimidation tactic. After all, almost nothing was known of the woman. She seemed to have come from nowhere. Just suddenly appearing with her military victories and her strange healing that allowed her to breathe life back into fallen soldiers. Before Klark’s time on the border, there had not been a whisper of a second with her potential. Her best spies couldn’t even tell her what village the woman came from. That Klark was surrounded with such mystery and yet was now through trial by combat the undisputed heir of the Ice Queen was worrying. Still, there was no use contemplating that now though. Redirecting her mind to the current business, Lexa turned to Indra. Indra’s village was closest to the border out of the assembled soldiers and she was the most likely to have pertinent guidance. “Tell me what do you think it means that Nia sends her new heir here Indra?”

“Nia makes threats.” Indra spoke evenly.

Gustos clenched his jaw, “You should be careful Heda. They may intend to attack while you’re in the open outside of Polis.”

She turned back to Anya, “Anya, what do you think?”

“It could be many things, but the threat may not be to you.”

“Explain,” Lexa thought she knew where Anya was going with this but she wanted to be sure.

“Nia has often said that slaying the mountain was folly. Now she sends her general and heir who is increasingly beloved by the people of her nation to a war she believes cannot be won. This might be a ploy to get revenge for her son’s death.”

Lexa sighed no one was going to like what would be required. “Whatever Nia’s reasoning is we will treat Klark as the general of an allied force. Anya I want you to keep watch on the Azgeda forces, carefully though. No one is to insult our allies. Is that understood?”

The room echoed with the reluctant assent of her people. It was only luck that the Azgeda forward group arrived before one of her advisors could try and dissuade her from her course of action. Trikru and Azkru had been at war for generations. The current peace between them was incredibly delicate. Bringing their armies together would always be a risk.

Hearing the sounds of her troops outside pick up she wasn’t surprised to see the flaps of her tent open and three Azgeda warriors to step through. The clearly higher ranking warrior stepped forward bowing the minimum required. “Heda.”
“Warrior of Azgeda, why have you come before me and not your general?” Lexa slouched carefully in her thrown. It was a calculated gesture meant to show that the Ice Nation could not discomfit her, and not a slouch of actual comfort or relaxation.

The warrior straightened sharply watching her carefully, the white paint and brands of her nation stark on her face. Her dark hair was braided back and a single sword was strapped to her back along with knives that littered her body. She was young, but Lexa didn’t let it enter her mind for even a second that she wasn’t also highly dangerous. “I am Octavia kom Azkru and my general Clarke kom Azkru, sent me ahead to announce our arrival and request the location of where our army shall pitch our tents.” The girl’s tone was tight and resentful.

Lexa let the warrior stand for a moment before replying, “Welcome then Octavia, inform your general her troops are to make camp between the Floundkru and Trikru forces. Anya will lead you there.” She gestured at Anya as she spoke watching the annoyance in the girl’s eyes as she realized that a Trikru warrior would be sent with them. Good, best to keep the Ice Nation off balance as long as possible.

Octavia bowed stiffly and left with Anya close behind. Gustos spoke up as soon as the flaps lowered again, “Is this really wise Heda? You would have the Ice Nation in the middle of our army.”

She frowned, “I would have them surrounded by those I trust till I know why Klark is the general Nia has sent and if their forces can be trusted.” Standing she exited and made her way through her troops ensuring everything was orderly. If it also kept her busy and not obsessing over the Ice Nation, then it was just a side benefit.

____________________________________________________________________________

Octavia was angry that she would be returning to Clarke with a Trikru spy. They already had to deal with Nia’s informants they did not need to deal with another fucking ferret. Gritting her teeth, she kicked her heels into her horse speeding up as they got closer to the army.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya had faced Azgeda forces several times in her life, but she’d never seen as orderly and organized an Azgeda force as the massive army she rode to meet at the side of the young warrior from the Ice Nation, Octavia. It was clear the soldiers recognized her as Trikru immediately. The glares gave their animosity away as well as the slight change in their stances.

A young warrior rode up, she had to be the same age as the one beside her. This warrior had blond hair braided out of her face with blue fabric and beads twisted into it. Her clothing was light colored leather and hide with white fur. It was decorated and enforced with carved pieces of bone. The clasps seemed to have been made from teeth. Blue and black fabric was stitched into her coat of white fur and into her light hide pants. She didn’t have a proper sword attached to her person but rather several knives of various lengths and a bow slung over her back. Although the gloves she wore looked like dangerous weapons in their own right fitted out with metal and bone. The shoulder pauldron was made with what looked like a wolf's skull with black Azgeda patterns etched into it. It identified who this was even if the absurd amount of pauna remains that were used in her outfit didn’t give it away. It was her face that cleared any doubt that Anya was looking at Klark kom Azkru. The blonde’s blue eyes were hard and her face blank of all emotions, several scars stood out on her pale face that only had blue war paint leading towards her eyes.

“Octavia report.” Her voice was hard and crisp. Anya felt herself straightening in her saddle, this girl
may be young, but like the commander she was not to be underestimated.

The warrior beside her frowned. “Heda sends Anya kom Trikru to lead us to our campsite. It is between the the Trikru and Floundkru encampments.” The clear distaste in the girl's voice and disrespect for Lexa had Anya on edge. This was could go very badly.

Surprisingly it was the general before her who dealt with the girl’s disrespect. The general raised her voice so that the surrounding warriors could hear her. “It would seem Heda trusts us to guard her flank, let’s show her why we’ve never lost what we protect.” She turned to Anya. “Anya you intend to lead us to our campsite?”

“Yes.” She held the general’s gaze feeling herself being measured.

Dipping her head slightly in acknowledgement the girl spoke again. “Good, Atom take what forces you need go with Anya kom Trikru and mark out the camp. Use a holding pattern with defenses on all sides.” She seemed to pause thinking for a moment before adding. “And take Brady with you.”

A warrior, also young rode, forward calling those under his command to follow. He ignored her, just heading off ahead with his men. Anya found herself repressing a growl as she tapped her horse’s sides with her heels wheeling it around and following him.

As the sun was setting she made her way back to Lexa’s tent. Passing the guards, she saw Lexa hunched over the map. “Heda.” She walked next to her former second.

Lexa straightened giving her attention to Anya, “What can you tell me?”

Anya spoke slowly and deliberately. “I accompanied Octavia to the Ice Nation forces as instructed. General Klark sent me with a small contingent of her forces to mark out their camp boundaries. She is young, younger even than our reports mark her. Under twenty-five summers if not younger. She carries herself well and explained any slight of your positioning of them as you trusting her forces to guard your flank. Her forces were hostile but none did more than glare or make rude gestures towards any Trikru they encountered. Their camp is organized defensively with guard rotations.” Anya paused considering how to go about speaking of her other conclusions, though they were really just conjecture at this point.

“What else?” Anya startled looking up at Lexa, “I know you Anya what do you suspect.”

“I’ve never seen Ice Nation troops behave in such a way before. They were orderly and efficient. Clearly organized into multiple smaller units capable and trained to act independently. It's not natural. And Klark is not what I expected. Not only did she speak well but her soldiers listened and respected her words. They do not follow her simply out of fear. If her attire is any indication the tales of the many pauna she has killed are not exaggerated. There are at least two pauna hunting teams in her forces as well as several assassins if I’m not mistaken. She is dangerous Lexa and I don’t know what she intends.”

Clarke rubbed down her horse carefully brushing out any dirt or seeds that had gotten into his hair. He was warm and drinking from the trough that had just been set up for the horses. The sounds of the temporary paddock being erected and other warriors brushing down their horses, of fires being started, and of tents being put up, filled the air. The wagons were being unloaded. It was organized chaos and it was calming to her. Jake, her horse, pulled his face from the trough and twisted so that he could nuzzle her. Smiling softly, she scratched his nose before leaning her forehead against his.
“Clarke, Gunter wants you.” Charlotte walked up to her, Brady, her surly second, followed right behind Charlotte.

Turning Clarke reached out and ruffled Charlotte’s hair. “Move Jake into the paddock while I go deal with him.” She handed the reigns to the girl before walking off. She didn’t need to wait for an affirmative answer she knew Charlotte would take care of her horse. “Brady help set up the medical tent, Cassite will keep you busy afterwards.”

“Gottch ya boss,” He grunted before heading off towards where the medical tent would soon be put up.

As Clarke walked through the camp, her warriors nodded and glanced at her while respectfully moving out of her way. She eyed the camp critically assuring herself that it was all moving like the well-oiled machine she’d trained them to be. It all seemed to be going to order. Keeping her face carefully blank she held in a snort at the sight of one of the seconds dealing with a horse that very much didn’t want to cooperate. The girl looked like she’d been dragged through a lot of bushes and mud before her first had grabbed the reigns. She made a mental note to have a word with the girls first about her horsemanship training. While amusing such antics would be ill suited for the battlefield.

As she approached the edge of the camp, she saw Gunter standing tall and imposing his grey hair pulled back, clean shaven and scarred face stoic and grim as always. He was clearly monitoring the construction of a tree blind for a guard post. His shoulders were rolled back, hands clasped behind him.

“Gunter, you sent for me.” She came to a stop next to him watching the blind getting finished.

“Careful with that hammer!” He shouted at a second who looked like they were about to hit someone. Turning to face her he spoke. “General, the standard outer defenses are almost complete. I must ask, is it wise to only go with the standard defenses?”

Clarke sighed, she disliked the Trikru as much as the next person but politics made certain behavior unavoidable. “To put up more would be an insult to the Trikru and they’d respond by building up their defense until Heda ordered us to stand down. Such posturing aids no one. All we can do is make sure the guards are well rested and ensure that everyone is prepared to go at a moment's notice.”

“Surely the Commander would forgive increased defenses with the mountain near.” He grumbled.

“The Commander,” she sneered, “would love nothing more than to wipe us out and I don’t intend to give her reason to do so. Speaking of which, when I present myself to her after the defenses are up I want you to accompany me.”

“I would be honored. Who will be in charge of the camp in our absence?”

Clarke smiled watching the seconds that had been building the blind jump down from the tree after putting in the last nails. “Xander will be able to help get everything settled properly. He has promise at command.”

Gunter nodded thoughtfully. “Indeed, how long till we leave to meet with the Commander?”

“Have the defenses done within the next hour, then come and get me.” She replied. Clarke clasped his shoulder tightly in recognition. She turned and started moving back towards the center of camp. Her tent had already been set up for her and she began unpacking and preparing it. Being able to use
a general’s command tent was a recent development. Having use of things she didn’t have to keep on
the back of her horse was strange, but in some ways welcome. The real bed was a luxury she hadn’t
had the use of in years now, not since the ark.

Four years ago:

“They dropped us on the wrong mountain.” Clarke frowned at the map. She wasn’t even sure where
the right mountain was. The others were enjoying the ground but she knew the snow would sap the
energy out of them quickly. Without the supplies in the mountain they didn’t have anything to
provide warmth or food to eat. None of the others seemed to care, too caught up in the beauty of the
ground. She gave herself a moment to stare in awe at the sparkling blinding whiteness around them.

“Come on Princess, enjoy the moment. I mean it’s snow! Real snow!” Bellamy’s face was lit up like
the white powder around them.

She didn’t have time to reprimand him or point out what they should be doing, before a snowball hit
the side of her head. Reaching up she wiped the snow clumps from her hair before she turned and
saw a grinning blond girl looking at her from a few feet away.

Present day:

Clarke pulled on her formal shoulder covering of white fur. It was from a large wolf like pauna, the
first pauna she’d killed. Its skull served as her pauldron identifying her as a general. Streaking the
white paint of the Ice Nation across her face she leaned against the table for a moment. Sometimes it
still pained her to wear the colors of the queen who had taken so much from her and her people but it
was a necessary evil. Standing straight she left her tent and joined Gunter outside of it. The two of
them began the trek to the Commander’s tent. It was dark out already but her camp was mostly
settled and she could breathe easier. She didn’t have a fixed home, her home was camps that
constantlly moved or the tense, cramped quarters at the queen’s home. Really this was almost relaxed
for her now a day’s she thought as she walked through the Trikru camp.

The Trikru watched her suspiciously as they walked and she was sure there were Trikru she couldn’t
see in the trees. It was why she’d been pleased Gunter had put up the blinds as high as he had. After
all, it’s hard to travel through trees unseen if someone is already up them.

Heda’s tent was lit and there were several guards posted by it. Clarke fought a sneer down. The great
Heda, guarded like a weakling that couldn’t protect herself. It wasn’t fair but she didn’t care. She’d
spent the last year fighting the ‘nomads’ incurring on Ice Nation territory. They were armed and
clearly supported by the sand tribes, who would never have dared to do so if the great Heda hadn’t
turned a blind eye to it. She detested leaders who let others do their dirty work for them. It reminded
her uncomfortably of the faults in her old home in the sky. Letting pointless prejudices cost the lives
of hundreds of common people forced to fight because of their leader’s petty political maneuverings
was not the work of a good and caring leader. If the commander would not treat the Ice Nation as her
people, then why should they treat her as their commander. As far as she was concerned the
mountain was in Trikru territory and should be dealt with by the Trikru.

It wasn’t true and she knew it. After all, her first, Echo was either killed by the mountain or by the
Trikru. She wasn’t sure which she wanted to be guilty of her mentor’s death. Her fists clenched at
the memories of Echo, strong of body but weak of mind letting Nia inform her every thought. The
perfect laky really. She swore to do better by her second Brady. Flexing her hands, she tried to pull
herself together. The long march had led to her being more introspective than usual and being overly emotional in front of Heda could get her and the people she cared about killed.

She came to a stop at the sight of the two guards at the entrance of the tent baring her way. Raising an eyebrow challengingly she stared them down. She wasn’t going to say anything. The Commander would have been informed of her approach the moment she crossed into the Trikru camp. It was silent between her and the guards, who were shifting nervously under her stare. She could feel more than see Gunter stiffening behind her. Finally, the tent flap was pulled open by a clearly annoyed Anya. The guards stood down, she didn’t bother giving them a second look, Gunter would protect her back. Striding in she walked till she was in front of what could only be called a throne.

Huffing in disbelief, she took in the fact that Heda had honest to god brought her throne with her. Sitting on the throne was Heda. She looked exactly as she’d been described to her. Piercing green eyes and war paint included. The ‘fearless’ Heda was playing with a dagger while watching her back in turn. Clarke grit her teeth slightly before playing the part Nia had sent her to play. She dropped to one knee and bent her neck as little as possible.

“Heda, I bring the army you called. We are here to be commanded.” Clarke knew her voice was cold, but well she was from the Ice Nation she was allowed to be cold.

Heda brought the knife down to her lap giving her a measuring gaze. She seemed to be considering the words she would say. However, the general to her left, who if Clarke wasn’t mistaken, was Indra, spoke. “You dare make the Commander wait. We should have your head.”

Clarke fought her anger and stayed in place saying nothing. There was nothing to gain by antagonizing or interacting with the general in any way. She felt Gunter take a measured breath from his position kneeling directly behind her. Reaching out she grabbed his calf in a vice like grip. Indra was a howling dog. For all the noise, she wasn’t a threat here.

“Enough, Indra.” The Commander spoke. “We begin to plan our destruction of the mountain tomorrow at noon. Don’t keep us waiting again.”

“Sha, Heda.” Clarke rose from her position on one knee so that she was standing meeting the intelligent eyes watching her.

____________________________________________________

Four years ago:

Charlotte was woken from her fitful sleep by the screams. Sitting bolt upright from her place in the drop ship she winced as she felt the cold. Leaving the ship, she saw the campsite Griffin had forced them to make, being overrun by what could only be monsters. The other members of the one hundred were being grabbed and beat into submission as wraiths of white clad men and women with fearsome scarred faces came out of the trees and snow. She made to run but found herself lifted into the air, an arm around her waist keeping her arms pinned to her sides. She let out a scream in fear as she smelt blood from the figure gripping her in arms that might as well have been steal. Her legs kicked out uselessly as she tried to break free. Her attackers only response was to laugh. The sound sent shivers down her spine as she heard the screams of the other one hundred.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Atom ducked into Clarke’s tent. His shift at the edge of camp had ended and he knew Octavia and Raven had most likely found company for the night. Monty had been his replacement so that meant it was just the blonds. He felt a familiar sense of warmth at the sight of the already prepared palette of furs next to the bed. He supposed they were predictable. None of them liked to sleep alone and gravitated towards each other at night taking comfort in the familiarity and safety in their friends, their family.

Quietly as he could manage in the dark, he stripped down till he was just in his pants and a shirt. Yawning, he stretched his arms over his head before crawling onto the palette. Before he lay down all the way he checked that Clarke and Charlotte were asleep. He was slightly disappointed but not surprised to see the half lidded blue eyes of Clarke watching him from the bed above the pallet. She smiled at him before closing her eyes and pulling Charlotte closer into her arms. He lowered himself into the comfortable furs and fell asleep easily encased in warmth. It had been a long day and he was sure he’d sleep like the dead.

Clarke roused herself reluctantly at the sound of the morning shift getting the fires going. She gave herself a moment to appreciate the soft sleeping face of Charlotte, who was lying nestled into her. Blaming the commander for forcing her up so early even though she knew she’d have forced herself up early anyways, she slipped out of the bed. It was a bit of a challenge to do so without waking Charlotte but she managed. Reaching down she pulled the furs off Atom and woke the snoring boy enough for him to groan at her. Laughing quietly, she helped him into the bed. It didn’t take him more than a grumbled swear to understand before flopping in and pulling Charlotte to him. They’d all learned that Charlotte had debilitating night terrors and should never be left to sleep on her own. Without even thinking about it she moved the furs up and tucked the two in while Atom grumbled before his snoring resumed.

She walked to the trunk of clothing she was forced to bring with her due to her new position as a general. Sometimes it felt like she had been a general for longer than two assignments but then her new luxuries, like the trunk, would remind her of the newness of her position again. Clarke was not even sure what to do with her many new possessions. She pulled on her usual wear. The only ceremonial gear she would wear was the ceremonial throw and pauldron. The fools who dressed formally and impractically to impress could go float themselves. The familiar weight of her coat comforted her as she buttoned it up. The coat was made from the fur and hide of her first kill, just as were her shoulder throw and pauldron. Echo had insisted she keep the pieces as trophies of her skill. Over time her jacket had grown and changed with other pieces sewn on from later kills but it still mainly consisted of the white two headed mutated wolf monstrosity. It had been terrorizing a northern village when she was first sent on a pauna hunt.

Down south she assumed her fur lined jacket may get hot but she didn’t care. It had become an extension of herself. The sides had the bones of an aggressive bear pauna sewed in as protection. Pulling out her daggers, Clarke started strapping them on and slipping the smaller ones into various hiding spots. She could feel the calm settling into her like always. After pulling on her boots and strapping the last of her weapons on her person she picked up a jar of white paint. After some consideration she lathered it across her face in broad strokes. If the Trikru disliked the Ice Nation so
much, she’d remind them of who exactly they had invited into their lands.

With her head held high she made her way out into the morning light. It was still softly lit. The fires were burning low but they were being stirred up and she could see breakfast rations being prepared. Her morning routine called with the smells of leather, horses, men and women, and metal. Her first stop was the healing tent. Forrest was passed out on one of the cots. Clarke rolled her eyes before kicking his leg.

He startled, jumping up on guard before spotting her. “Clarke, you scared me.” He ran a hand through his surprisingly long and luscious hair.

“I’ll assume by the position I just found you in that the medical equipment is stowed away” She raised her eyebrows, amused by his clearly unprepared state. It was unusual to find Forrest in a state less than perfect. He was one of her pack of ‘lost boy’ medical apprentices that she’d started collecting when she realized how woefully lacking the Ice Nation was with good medics. She’d picked him up in a village bordering Trikru lands where his father had ostracized him for his preference of women's clothes and dislike of violence. Honestly the boy was usually the best dressed in the army and his love of sewing meant he had the best sutures out of the medical apprentices.

“Yes, we finished unloading around second watch. Cassite left us to sleep here till you gave orders.” The young healer in training pulled the soft sides of his frilled shirt together just realizing it had been open.

“Let Cassite know I want a full inventory of all the supplies brought to me before noon.”

Forrest paled some, “Of course.”

Clarke took some pity on the second, “I’m assuming the others will be helping you. I’ll send Brady to assist after his morning training. Speaking of which, based off the snores I’m assuming he’s passed out in the back?”

Forest nodded, “Brady and Lisa are back there and Elise is probably with Xander since it’s the first night in a new camp.”

Smiling at the kid, she clasped his shoulder. “Wake them up and send Brady to the training pit would you? And feel free to rope Charlloote and Atom into helping you after the next guard shift.”

The discussion she had with the smith was similar to the one with Forrest. She wanted a compiled list of what they had available before noon. Turning up to the Commander’s strategy meeting without a perfect reckoning of her own forces would be disastrous. The long march from the eastern border could have led to any number of weapons or other supplies being lost along the way. After that she made her way through her camp making sure, one by one, that her division heads were all aware she needed their reports.

She was halfway to the training pits when Raven intercepted her. The slightly limping gait was a clear give away of who was approaching her, even if she didn’t know her friend like the back of her hand. “Raven, what are you doing up so early.”

“Stuff it. A second’s horse decided to try and eat my tent.” Raven rolled her eyes in frustration. “But that’s not the problem, Clarke the radio isn’t working. I can’t contact Bellamy and the others. I just get white noise.” The frustration at not being able to figure out why a piece of her beloved tech wasn’t working was clear on the woman’s face.

Clarke frowned concerned. “Do you need anything or anyone to help you get it fixed?”
“I could use Monty but he just got off his guard shift. Clarke you’re not understanding me, it isn’t that there’s something wrong with my radio, something is interfering with the signal.”

“The ground has basically returned to the iron age what could be interfering.” Clarke wasn’t used to dealing with Raven’s tech not working.

Raven shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’m going to find out.”

“Tell Gunter I’ve excused you from the guard rotations and any other duties around camp for the foreseeable future. I want your full attention on this.” The radios were their only connection to the others. They might objectively be far safer than them at the Northernmost fort in the Ice Nation but that didn’t keep her from worrying and she knew Bellamy would have a fit once he realized they couldn’t be contacted.

“I’ll figure this out, but we may be looking for some kind of tech that got fried and is still running from when the bombs dropped.”

“Is that even possible?” Clarke asked dubiously.

“Best guess I have till I can figure out where the interference is coming from. If anyone spots any old radio towers though it could help.”

“I’ll make sure our scouts are aware to keep a look out for that.”

Finally, she made her way to the training pits. Dropping her shoulder wrap and pauldron on the wooden fence surrounding the pit, she grinned at the tired and grumpy form of her second. “Come on Brady grab your axe, you have inventory to get to after this.”

Her second just groaned and brought up his axe prepared to get his ass handed to him. She’d picked him up in the northern territories. His first had abandoned him to die from a large slash wound along his side. She’d treated him and found a grumpy, emotionally withdrawn and intimidating teddy bear in her patient. Nia had suggested she take a second after her last trip to the capitol, so she’d taken him under her wing. He had promise as a warrior, but the empathy he hid behind layers of slang and glares was what would make him an excellent healer.

Four years ago:

Bellamy tripped and was only prevented from face planting by Dax’s body being immediately in front of him. Shaking his head, he looked for his sister but couldn’t see her from where he was. He worried his wrists again but stopped at the sharp pain it caused. He’d rubbed them raw trying to get them out of the rope bonds hours ago. They were tied brutally tight behind his back. His neck tied to a long rope that the rest of the drop ship prisoners had been tied to as well. A slightly hysterical part of him compared his current situation to the chain gangs of old. Blinking rapidly, he tried to clear the blood from his eyes. He’d been clobbered over the head early in the chaos and while the bleeding had mostly stopped it still stung when the occasional drop made its’ way into his eye.

One of the warriors walking beside them tripped one of the kids ahead of him before laughing at the ensuing choking before he could be straightened up by the people tied in front and behind him. Bellamy grit his teeth glaring at the laughing monsters walking alongside them. It seemed they’d left one prison for a new one. This one was even worse than the last. Any time one of them tried to talk a harsh punishment was doled out and they had long since stopped trying to protest their treatment. He wasn’t even sure they understood English. He ached, his muscles not used to being used like this and his injuries burned, not to mention the blisters he could feel forming on his feet. The ever present
cold was no longer fun. It seeped into everything, his fingers, toes, nose, and ears were all numb and his clothes were soaked in a mixture of sweat, blood, and melted snow. But worst of all was the fact he hadn’t seen his sister since they were first being tied together back at the drop ship.

And so it went for hours upon hours of miserable walking before they and their captors sighted a large ice covered wall of stone. Bellamy estimated it was a good two or three stories high. There were guards on top of the wall dressed similarly to their captors. The worry in his gut increased, there was far less chance of escape in a fortress than in a camp. Passing through an archway he kept his eyes wide memorizing everything he could. After all, in an escape attempt knowing how to get out would be vitally important. There were people watching them from inside of their homes and shops. A part of him dimly noted that it wasn’t a good sign that what seemed to be the civilians were silently getting out of the warrior’s way.

In fact, the atmosphere was oppressive and he felt the need to run. Ignoring the pain, he started straining against the bonds on his hands hoping to get at least one hand free so he could get out as soon as no one was watching. His hope was in vain as they were led into what he recognized as a court yard of some kind. The snow had been shoveled here and the stones were only covered with a clear and shiny ice. He and the others were shoved to their knees on the stones while one of their captors went into the ruin turned fortress in front of them.

His lungs hurt from breathing the cold air for so long and he desperately wanted to move as the cold seemed to migrate up his legs from where they were pressed to the ground inch by freezing inch. The doors of the building in front of them opened with a loud clang and a woman came out flanked by guards. Something in his gut told him to be afraid of her. The look in her eyes was hard.

“Take them to the dungeon. It shouldn’t take long to loosen their tongues.” The way she pronounced the statement sent a shiver down his spine. He wouldn’t even take in the implications of her speaking in English till much later.

As he and the others were dragged underground, some of them started fighting for the first time in hours. Suddenly, he understood why they were struggling. They wouldn’t be coming out of that dungeon. With that realization he began to thrash desperately trying to get away as well.

Present time:

Lexa frowned at the shouting match going on around her map table. Her strategy of surrounding the mountain and using scouts to scour the land for weaknesses was not being taken well. The general from the Boudalan was insisting on a full frontal assault, completely ignoring the acid fog and other dangers. He had support from the Sankru general, who had swung that direction after Klark had laughed at the folly of the Boudalan general’s plan. From there it had devolved. She knew she had to let them talk themselves around to her plan, at least slightly, before strong arming them, since her strategy required patience. Angry generals did not patient forces make. So, she was stuck letting them fight each other. At least there had been no bloodshed. Well, not yet. If the look Bassilo, the Boudalan general, was giving Klark was any indication that wouldn’t last long.

Pressing her fingers to the wooden table she came to a decision. “Enough!” The voices cut out as heads turned her way. “We reconvene in three days’ time. Till then we will send out scouts to better understand what options are available to us.”

The generals started filing out, though she could hear them muttering and if she wasn’t mistaken the Sankru and Boudalan generals meant to make the argument more physical as soon as Klark stepped out of the room. “Klark, remain.”
The Azgeda general turned to face her, eyes flashing in challenge. She hated everything about the blond woman, but was forced to admit she was clearly a capable leader. The woman was barely toeing the line of acceptable respect and she knew it was only because she had no other choice. She understood the sentiment. If she had any option besides respect she would have killed the woman wearing the colors of Azgeda. Even Klark’s face was obscured by the thick lines of white paint representing her allegiance to the Azgeda. The sight of Azgeda forces always made anger pool in her gut. It was easier to hate the soldiers of the nation than the politicians she was forced to deal with regularly.

“Do you require something Heda?” The general bit out. Her annoyance at being kept plainly apparent.

Lexa forced herself to remain calm, strides could be made here and she intended to make them. “You stand against the foolishness Bassillo kom Boudalan proposes, yet you ignore the obvious path before us. Why?”

Lexa watched the woman’s jaw clench before she replied to her. “At least Bassilo has a plan. Generations of terror and your people know so little about the mountain and now you wish to sacrifice more, attempting to learn secrets you have never been able to unearth. The lives of our soldiers must weigh little to you.”

Anger bubbled in her stomach and Lexa forced it down with pure will power. “I see, if you doubt my scouts’ abilities you are welcome to send your own.”

The Azgeda general’s mouth quirked up on one side, evidently pleased by the offer. “I’ll send my scouts and ensure my own people’s safety then.”

“As leaders, sacrifices are necessary Klark kom Azgeda. Your scouts are welcome to search the mountain but you will find losses will be inevitable in this war.” Lexa gripped the hilt of her dagger.

It had clearly been the wrong thing to say. Klark bit out her reply, “You don’t have to tell me about sacrifice Heda.” Her title was sneered. Klarke didn’t wait for a dismissal just turning on her heel and walking out of the room without a backwards glance.

Octavia had been enjoying her guard post more than usual. and the reason for that was the very hot Trikru guard in a tree across from her. He was drawing something in his book while comfortably lounging in his tree. He’d smile at her every time she managed to hit him with a pinecone. She also had a great view of the training pit where some of the seconds were getting schooled by their firsts. All in all, it was a good watch. Leaning against the trunk of her tree, her legs dangling out of the bind, she started carefully sharpening her sword.

Her ogling of the Trikru warrior was put to a halt by the angry storm cloud that was Clarke descending on the training pits. She glanced over at the Trikru hot dude and raised her eyebrows in an attempt to communicate ‘what the hell.’ His responding shrug did great things for his shoulders, but also told her he didn’t know what was going on either.

Octavia found that watching Clarke sink arrow after arrow into the center of a target was as impressive and scary as always and went back to her ogling. After all, Clarke would tell them what had managed to piss her off at the meeting. Or rather it wasn’t worth wondering about, the Sankru general had probably sneezed or something ridiculous. At least it hadn’t been Raven at the meeting, people would be on fire if that were the case.
Her hunk of a man was apparently not on the same page however, as he was quite attentively watching her friend shoot targets. That just wouldn’t do. Picking up another pinecone, she chucked it at him. It had a lovely arch through the air before hitting him square in the face. His startled and mildly affronted face was priceless. She fell into a giggling fit finding it hard to breathe. It surprised her slightly to find him sitting next to her. The Trikru could seriously travel through trees almost silently. A wide smile spread across her face.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya felt a headache throbbing in her head and knew it would only get worse. If her former second wasn’t Heda she would slap her upside the head for agreeing to let Ice Nation scouts join her expedition. The fact that Klark had joined her scouts and simply glared at any Trikru who came too close to her or her warriors was making it worse. To further compound things Indra’s former second Lincoln was mooning over Octavia, an Azgeda warrior who was clearly loyal to her general. The open divisions between the warriors was not going to end well. Turning, Anya saw the arrival of several scouts Bassilo kom Boudalan had apparently decided to send. Tense, she gestured to Tris.

The girl trotted over to her side ready to serve. “Go, get Heda and tell her that her presence is needed if she wants this mission to end without unnecessary bloodshed.”

Tris’ eyes widened but she quickly and silently went to do as she’d been told.

Anya watched the Ice Nation general carefully, she knew the Boudalan and Azgeda forces did not get along. They’re relations were almost as bad as the ones between her own people and the Azgeda. She was surprised to see a dark haired man standing slightly behind the general, a hand on her shoulder. They were clearly close and the open display of care was confounding to her. He was the warrior she’d sent with her to mark out the camp the day before, Atom, she believed. The fact the general was allowing him to touch her person so casually was unusual. But she supposed even Ice Nation generals were allowed to have lovers. Strange it was advertised so openly though.

Her attention was pulled away when an angry looking second with wild unruly blond hair, wearing the colors of Azgeda, came darting out of the woods making his way to his general. She tensed as he skidded to a stop and pulled himself up trying to look put together and hide his labored breathing. The general smiled widely at the boy and began to speak with him. Anya didn’t know how to judge Klark. One minute she was cold and emotionless and the next she was wearing her heart on her sleeve. Either or both could be a mask and she was unsure if there was a trap laying under the emotions. Klark presented her with quite the mystery but Lexa would not allow an open confrontation so all she could do was observe. It would seem she would have to wait and see. Anya had always preferred confronting those who confused her head on to the political games that Lexa was forced to deal with in Polis but for Lexa’s sake she would try and understand this most confounding woman.

____________________________________________________________________________

Four Years ago:

Bellamy stopped fighting the guards as soon as he saw Octavia in the cell they were trying to force him into. His body hit Octavia as he wrapped her in his arms burying his face in her shoulder. She gripped him back just as fiercely. The two of them clung crying into each other’s shoulders, relieved beyond words that the other was still alive.

The barred door clanged shut startling them out of their hug. Twisting so that Octavia was behind him Bellamy, took in their situation. They, along with ten other delinquents, were crammed into a cell that was clearly not intended for this many people. All of them had dried blood on them and
were coated in mud and damp clothing with a myriad of bruises forming on their skin.

Octavia grabbed his wrist, “Bellamy?”

He hissed jerking his wrist out of her hand. Staring down at his wrists he saw the blood and rope fibers sticking out his skin. It was gruesome and clearly had been ineffective as a way to free himself.

“You idiot, crap we have to clean that.” Octavia said eyes wide at the sight.

“What’s the point, we’re all going to die down here.” A gangly teen wedged into the corner muttered. He rubbed the end of his sleeve under his nose trying to clean some of the blood off.

Bellamy couldn’t accept that, this was his sister. “We’re going to survive this. We survived the ark, we can survive some iron age savages. We stick together and we pull through.” He growled, hoping they believed him because while he would fight to his dying breath for his sister, he wasn’t so sure it was going to work.

Chapter End Notes

Not sure how often we'll update this but definitely at least once a week. We're super stoked by all your lovely comments. Thanks a bunch!
Chapter 3

Atom carefully marked down a clearing on the map Clarke had given him for his rounds. He and the rest of the warriors under Clarke’s command had all been trained to mark maps with anything they found. It was part of the reason Clarke was undefeated, she always gathered information. Well now-a-days, he’d been there for some of their early fights with bandits when they were newly minted seconds.

“Should we head down to the river next?” Mozu asked from her position a few yards behind him.

“Do you have the list of medicinal water weeds we can look for while we’re there?” He asked, they’d split from the team they’d been assigned to for the day a few hours back so they could cover more ground while they were being allowed free access to the land.

“Of course, do we need any plant clippings first?” She asked cautiously.

Atom stretched, “Easy newbie, this isn’t a test. If you grab a couple of tree clippings, I’ll grab some of the grass.”

“How are you so calm, we’re in enemy territory?” She queried while adding some tree needles to her scouting journal. Clarke had made journals for mapping and information gathering mandatory for every scout working under her.

“We’re never not in enemy territory Mozu, if we stay tense all the time we won’t get anything but an early grave.” He explained while picking a flower and tucking it gently into his journal with a notation of where it was from.

“I prefer cooking to war.” She sighed, “I’m just scared whenever we’re out here.”

Atom scratched his head while starting to move towards the river. “I think we’re all scared or else we’d have to be pretty dumb. But if you would rather cook why aren’t you in a village somewhere. You’ve passed your trials, you obviously wanted this.”

“General Quint’s army came through my village a year and a half ago. There was drinking and a fight broke out. By the time it died out the village was gone. She shuddered. “Captain Bellamy offered me a place in his ranks and I had nowhere else to go.” She sounded sad when speaking of her village, her voice soft and slightly breathy.

“Ah a lost soul like the rest of us.” He jumped over a log so he could take a sample of some of the mushrooms growing on it.

Mozu stood guard while he was paying attention to the log. “This is my home now, I don’t think I could settle somewhere and just cook.” She kicked the ground slightly. “Besides what would you all eat

“Don’t tell the general this, but she is a terrible cook.” Atom winked at her pleased to see her blushing.

Mozu’s blush faded as she looked horrified instead. “You shouldn’t say that!” She glanced around carefully. “You could be whipped.”
Atom chuckled, “The general and I went through our training as seconds together. First time we set camp her first gives her dinner duty. We spent the entire night throwing our guts up. I’ve suffered through her cooking enough times I think she’ll forgive me for speaking the truth.”

Mozu’s eyes widened. “Then you served with Bellamy?”

Atom sighed at her star struck expression, so much for flirting with the newest addition to their forces. “Hell, you totally slept with the man whose didn’t you?”

Mozu turned red, tucking her chin into the top of her jacket. “No! He’s just very kind and I owe him everything.”

“Uh huh. That’s how it always goes. If you end up back in his division after this, you should notice how many of the girls are simply star struck by his smiles.” Atom groaned, “I swear he’ll sleep with anything with a heartbeat.”

“You are very disrespectful of our leaders. How are you still alive?” She asked very seriously as they approached the river bank. It was gurgling as it ran quickly over the rocks.

He crouched down by the bank eyeing the water. “I know when to shut up and when to be silent. Eight hour treks through the forest isn’t that time.”

Mozu looked at him disbelievingly. They heard something crashing through the woods toward them and they both straightened, hands reaching for weapons. Atom unsheathed his sword stepping back into the tree line. Mozu followed him her spear held ready. Two Boudalan warriors came crashing through the underbrush and dove into the river to get across it. They were heavily muscled, bulky, and struggled with the weight the water added to their thick clothes as they cut across the river hauling themselves up on the other side of the bank. Close on their heels and just as quick to jump into the river after them were three reapers.

Atom felt conflicted, the people from the Rock Line were not trusted allies like the warriors from the Plains. But they needed every man they could to take down an enemy like the Mountain. With a frustrated exhale through his teeth, he charged out from the underbrush swinging his sword into the jugular of the first reaper. Blood splattered against him as he yanked his sword out of the dying reaper.

The tallest of the two Boudalan warriors, seeing what he thought was an opening, swung his sword in an upwards arc only for it to get caught on the arm guard of the reaper. Atom charged the reaper that was about to stab the warrior and tackled it, stabbing his sword through the reaper’s heart as they toppled over into the shallows.

The second Boudalan was flailing trying to get away from the last reaper that had a grip on his leg. He was kicking up more water than anything. An arrow from across the shore drove into the reaper’s shoulder. It seemed to have just hit muscle since it didn’t stop the creature’s actions. Before the Boudalan soldier could fight it off, Mozu impaled it with her spear after coming running out from the tree line.

Atom turned sneering at the warriors that couldn’t even take on three reapers by themselves. He never managed to insult them though. He felt like someone had hit him in the chest and the air whooshed out of him. Looking down he saw an arrow protruding from his chest. “Wha…..”

There was a curse from the other side of river, “Fuck!”

The first Boudalan warrior looked panicked at his two partners before looking back at the wide eyed
Atom.

“Atom.” Mozu said staring at him unable to move her feet.

“We’ll be executed for this!” The first warrior exclaimed.

“Not if the reapers killed them. Besides, the commander doesn’t care what happens to Ice Nation soldiers.” The second replied swinging his sword in an arc towards Atom.

He leaned backwards avoiding all but a shallow gash along his stomach. A second thump and another arrow sprouted from his chest. Stumbling backwards he dropped his sword. Choking he felt something warm and wet running out of his mouth. Dazedly he reached up and wiped at it with one hand. Pulling back, he saw the red tinge to his finger. “Oh.” And the a third whump hit him and he toppled over into the water.

Mozu gave a shout, “ATOM!” She didn’t even think stumbling forward feeling a whoosh of another arrow fly by the side of her face, narrowly missing. Jerking to the side she looked up at the opposing bank where the arrows had come from. Standing just past the tree line was a third muscle bound Boudalan warrior with a cruel frown loading another arrow. She didn’t even think about it. She leapt into the water after Atom praying he was still alive. Hissing she kicked for the surface grabbing the back of Atom’s jacket and pulling them to the surface. Her side ached from what she realized was a sword slash she’d just missed. Spitting out water, she looked back at the two warriors she and Atom had just saved. The one she’d saved with her spear was holding a short sword with blood dripping off the tip looking like he was considering jumping in after them. His partner grabbed at him, keeping him from following.

Before she could wonder why, another arrow came whizzing through the air hitting Atom’s limp form in the shoulder. Desperately, she dragged Atom under water with her and into the middle of the river hoping the current would move them away. She stayed underwater as long as possible before pushing up and gasping for air at the surface. Afterwards, she immediately dragged them back down kicking desperately with the current.

Finally, after spending thirty minutes swimming with the current, her body screaming at her to get out, and her lungs seizing from not being able to breath properly, she hauled them to the bank. She collapsed gasping for breath against the rocks, dirt sticking to her wet cheek. Hacking up water she had accidently swallowed, she found herself vomiting onto the rocks. It burned her throat as the bile left her system. She didn’t give herself time to recover. Running the back of her hand across her mouth she dragged herself to Atom’s side. He was pale and cold and she didn’t know what was from the arrows and what was the water. And god he wasn’t breathing. But she’d heard General Clarke could breathe life back into the dead. She had to be able to help. Struggling to her feet she grabbed Atom under the armpits and started dragging him toward camp hoping she would come across another Ice Nation scout who could help.

Four years ago:

Atom shivered, his arms wrapped around his knees. He was curled up leaning against Pascal and Murphy. There was ice coating the concrete floor and walls. His entire body ached from the beating he’d gone through earlier. At the sound of a scream he shuddered pulling his hands up to cover his
He spat a mouthful of blood out, he’d only been brought back to the cell a half an hour ago. Clarke told him he was lucky his ribs were only cracked not broken. From the cracking sound and the pitch of the screams, Jasper was being whipped. How sick was it that he was starting to be able to tell different methods of torture apart by the screams? He heard a whimper and looked over to the corner. The little girl Charlotte was crying while burrowed into Clarke. Her screams had been the worst so far. They sliced into that little kid’s skin. She hadn’t spoken since.

“Why are they doing this?” He rasped out.

Murphy sneered from his position behind him similarly curled in on himself. “They are playing with us for fun.”

“They want information on the ark, they’re worried our people will invade them.” Clarke corrected sharply from her place near the wall.

“Oh please do tell princess, it’s not like we didn’t tell them everything days ago.” He snarled right back.

“Do they seem like the type of people to leave anything to chance?” She looked up from the girl in her arms for the first time. If looks could kill Murphy wouldn’t have to worry about being the next one pulled out. “Besides, our numbers are going to start dropping fast now, infection is going to start setting in. Make sure you all keep your injuries clean.” She swept a look over the other prisoners in the cell.

Atom unfolded himself and crawled over to where Clarke and Charlotte were before refolding himself and leaning against them. “Warmth in numbers right?” He smiled tightly.

“Hell, I’m down for a snuggle party.” Monroe groaned and moved over from her place near the bars at the front of the cage.

“God me too,” Dax added hauling himself over to the small group of freezing delinquents.

They sat shivering and listening till the screams stopped. Then they heard the scuffing sound of the guards dragging their latest victim towards the cells. The sounds stopped outside their cell doors. Atom opened his eyes and looked up at the bars that were being opened. Two guards threw the bloody and limp body of Jasper into their cell.

Atom cursed his inability to speak whatever language it was the white clothed warriors spoke when they didn’t want to be overheard. Maybe they would be able to help Jasper more if they knew what the guards were saying to each other in their scornful commentary. Then one of the guards strode forward grabbing Clarke and yanking. She made eye contact with him while she was hauled out, “Wash Jasper’s back and wrap it with the cleanest strips you can!” She grabbed the bars to keep herself from being pulled down the hallway. “Make sure you clean it!”

“Alright,” Atom assured her wide panic filled eyes. He watched as she was punched hard so that she’d let go of the bars, before being hauled out of sight.

It was gruesome using some of the little water they had to try and clean Jasper’s back. His back was oozing blood where the whip had ripped the skin off and all their clothing was filthy. To make it worse in some places his bone was actually showing the very flesh having been ripped off. Finally, he had to admit defeat, there wasn’t any thing to cover it with. Carefully he dragged Jasper over to where most of the others were grouped trying to stay warm. Maybe it would help if he was at least
not quite as cold. Before he could finish that thought, he heard a scream echo down the hallways. Clenching his eyes shut, he tried to drown it out with thoughts of the others.

Present Day:

Tris was picking her way carefully through the underbrush watching her charges carefully. Heda had personally assigned her to stick with the general. According to Anya, Heda didn’t trust the general farther than she could throw her and she didn’t trust the Sankru or the Boudalan not to make an attempt on the general. So, here she was moving through the forest with Klark and the surly looking Azgeda second she’d learned was Brady.

They were silent, the two from the Ice Nation only pausing to put pieces of the flora into leather bound books from time to time. The sounds of the forest; birds, wind, and insects, quietly whispered around them. It had been a long silent day and conversation did not seem to be in the cards. Tris had been over this stretch of woods before and she was looking forward to getting to the river. She wished she’d been allowed to go with Anya, but apparently it would have been some sort of political insult to send her with the Ice Nation general.

Tris found she didn’t envy Lexa her position. Politics made no sense to her, and she didn’t know how she could stand to be around their enemies and have to think of ways to protect them. But that was why she was soon to take her warrior trials and not the commander. Frowning she watched Brady stiffen.

“Clarke.” He whispered.

The general was fully alert and had a dagger in her hand immediately. “Report.”

“I heard something.” He replied tilting his head slightly clearly listening.

Tris strained to hear more than the ambient sounds of the woods around them. They were dangerously far into mountain territory and if the fog came escaping would be difficult if not impossible. She shifted uneasily, “We should keep moving.”

The general turned towards her, clearly about to say something, when Tris and the others heard a high pitched cry of pain. Quick as a shot, they were off toward the sound. Tris found she was the fastest out of the group at moving through the woods quietly and felt a thrill of pride at that fact. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the general splitting to the left. She made to follow but was blocked by the other second.

“She’ll be covering us in case of an ambush.” He hissed out while ducking under a low hanging branch.

Tris kept going, easily flying over the ground, as she realized her charge hadn’t slipped her watch. She was uneasy about having to trust the Ice Nation warriors to protect her back but it could be anything ahead of them. The sound was becoming clearer as they went. It was a cry for help from what sounded like a female scout. Tris wished Anya was here, for all that she was anxious to pass her trials having Anya here would have been a comfort because depending on which clan the scout belonged to this could be bad. Would her Ice Nation team even help if it was a Trikru scout?

Giving up on stealth, Brady crashed through a section of bushes and came tripping onto a deer trail. Tris followed using the path he was breaking to get closer. Her eyes instantly spotted the person who had been making the cry for help. It was an Ice Nation scout, dripping wet and covered in mud with
leaves and branches sticking off her, standing on the trail with a dagger clutched in one hand and the other clutching her side that had blood dripping down it. The scout had obviously been alerted to their presence by Brady’s carelessness.

“Mozu!” Brady exclaimed in surprise instantly moving to support the injured warrior.

Tris examined their surroundings carefully. She watched out of the corner of her eyes as the girl slumped at the sight of the second.

Her voice shook as she spoke. “Clarke! Please I need Clarke. He’s not breathing and she can bring him back.”

“Bring who back?” Brady questioned while gripping the shaking warrior’s shoulders.

“Atom, oh god there’s so much blood.”

Brady’s face paled. He quickly raised his fingers to his mouth giving out a sharp high pitched whistle.

Tris jumped as Clarke basically appeared out of the foliage in front of her. The general was next to her injured warrior in a second. The warrior just pointed to the underbrush trying to direct the general’s attention. Tris was not expecting the sound of distress and shock that came out of the general’s throat. The woman lunged for the underbrush quickly hauling a body out from under it.

The deathly pale man had four arrows sticking out of him two broken part way. His stomach was clearly cut and his clothing was coated in blood. He was covered in a similar amount of mud and water as the other Ice Nation warrior but he was also clearly dead. Tris watched as the general pressed her hand against the man’s throat. The bedraggled warrior shrunk into herself when the general shook her head. Brady seemed to pull himself upwards scanning their surroundings intently.

“Brady keep watch, Mozu sit so I can wrap your wound enough for you to be able to make it back to camp. Tris, take the packs we’re going to have to carry Atom out.” The general ordered, her voice eerily empty of emotion.

Clarke ached as she carried Atom’s body over her shoulder in a fireman’s carry. This was all wrong, one more death on her back. She started reciting the names of the living to try and keep the agony at bay. ‘Bellamy, Monroe, Harper, Dax, Miller, Monty, Raven, Octavia, Charlotte.’ Over and over again she repeated the names. It was how she slept at night reminding herself why she hadn’t just curled up and died over the last four years. They were her people, her family, her reason. And now one more was gone. Unbidden memories of Jaspers infection riddled body, Fox’s vacant eye’s, slashed in the throat by her own first, and countless other deaths came rising in her mind.

She was unable to bite back a sob at the memories of the bloody and broken bodies of so many of her people. They hadn’t lost one of their number in a year now, she’d thought they were finally going to get through. Hope was in sight now instead of something they were fighting just to believe existed. But the ground was hard and cold and being lax had cost her another member of her family.

Ignoring the looks the skittish Trikru second was giving her for her outburst of sound, she instead she focused on the hushed account of what had happened coming from one of her newer warriors. Anger, hot and dangerous, boiled in her blood at the warriors of Boudalan repaying her friend for saving their lives with death. In that moment, she didn’t care about the ramifications she would have their heads one way or another.
Finally, her armor digging into her from the weight of Atom, and cold water, blood, and mud, seeping into her coat from his body, she saw the outermost guard of their camp. It wasn’t two minutes later that several warriors came running.

“Get Gunter, now!” She ordered to the first one, ignoring the wide eyes as he turned and ran for her right hand man.

“Benny take Atom, be careful with him, his wounds are evidence.” She was reluctant to let the large intimidating warrior take her burden from her, but it had to be done.

Benny was gentle as he lifted Atom off of her shoulder. He turned to follow her with the body wherever she should direct him.

“Sophie go get Jakob and bring him to me.” She barked out, storming into her camp. Hearing a whimper from Mozu behind her she paused and looked at Brady. “Get her to the infirmary and see to her injuries. If you need help Cas can assist you.”

“Gotch ya.” Brady said, helping Mozu who had an arm thrown over his shoulders towards the medical tent.

Clarke measured the Trikru second that was staring at her clearly afraid of the situation she was in. The girl was well trained, and from what she had heard, was being trained by the same warrior who trained the commander. She could be useful Clarke decided. “You, follow me.”

Striding into her tent she threw the flaps open and quickly moved to the table with a map of the area spread over it, though there was an unfortunate stain from something on one corner of the map. Benny carefully followed her and laid Atom’s body on her bed at her nod. Stepping back, he stayed at the foot of the bed at attention. Gunter came jogging into the tent, face drawn with worry.

“General, what’s happened?!” He quickly took in the room, from the dead warrior on the bed to the Trikru second standing awkwardly to the side.

“Boudalan killed one of our men and attempted to kill another after they saved their lives from three reapers.” Clarke hissed. Drawing herself up to her full height, her eyes flashed. “Lock down the camp, bring our defenses to full. Until we have blood we are done with this farce of peace.”

Four years ago:

Clarke attempted to prevent the screams escaping from her mouth but it was impossible. Daniala had been stabbing her with a white hot brand for a while now. The sick scent of her own skin burning filled her nostrils overpowering the scent of old blood and rot that usually filled the woman’s work room. The woman had to get some sick sense of pleasure from doing this considering she liked to change torture techniques from prisoner to prisoner. Dear god, it hurt as her skin bubbled and melted where the brand was being held against her back. Finally, finally, it was lifted away and she was able to take deep gulps of air down. Throwing up wasn’t an issue anymore, she’d more than emptied her stomach since this had begun.

“Now, why don’t we try this again, yes? When do your people plan to invade?” The woman smiled. And god if that wasn’t disturbing, even the guards at the door seemed tired of the endless screams.

Clarke gasped in, feeling the pain from the air touching her abused throat and lungs. “I told you, the
ark isn’t planning on invading.”

The woman gave tsking sound while walking round so she could look Clarke in the eyes. “Now, now, why don’t we try that one more time, yes? Good. When are the rest of your people invading?”

Clarke glared at the foul woman. Closing her mouth, she considered what she could say that she or the others hadn’t already said. The answer was nothing. There was nothing left to say, even those of them who could resist torture didn’t have a reason to do so. There were too many of them for them all to reasonably be expected to keep their mouths shut. Tipping her head up she spat a glob of blood and spit into the woman’s face.

Daniala reared back, wiping it from her face in disgust. “Well, if that’s how you want to play it.”

Clarke lost sight of her as she went back behind her. It didn’t take long for her to find out what her newest torture was going to be. She screamed as she felt the wooden rod with rough edges thwacking into her and surely cracking some of her ribs. Clarke didn’t know how much more of this she could endure. So, she started reciting the names of those waiting for her in her cell hoping they would provide her with motivation to keep going.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all of the wonderful comments! We’ll go into why Clarke has issues with Lexa in the next chapter.
Lexa was feeling cautiously optimistic. While there was clear tension and hatred between the forces she had gathered together, a massive scouting expedition had been launched that would map out a quarter of the mountain in the span of a day. She did fear what would happen if there was acid fog but otherwise it had great potential. Examining the map, she plotted out routes for bringing in food from outer territories to sustain the massive army she had assembled. She didn’t look up when she heard Gustus enter her tent.

“Heda!” His voice was clearly distressed.

Looking up in concern she saw the tension in him. “Speak Gustus, what has happened?”

“The Azgeda camp, it’s swarming, their warriors are armed. They must intend to attack. We must prepare ourselves.”

Lexa straightened trying to understand what was happening. The Azgeda forces would not be moving like this without an order from their general. And while Klark was clearly hostile she had not seemed foolish. If her measure of the general was correct, then something must have happened with one of the scouts to trigger this and the fact she hadn’t received a message about maunon activity meant that it must be an internal issue. She tapped her finger against the hilt of her dagger. Azgeda was famous for their assassins, if the problem hadn’t just been taken care of then the general was planning something. Still, it didn’t make sense and that frustrated her. Azgeda couldn’t mean to attack in this blatant of a manner when surrounded on three sides by a larger force. So, the increased activity wasn’t likely an attack. It could be because the general expected one of her other factions to attack, but in that case she should have been informed of what was happening.

“Heda! Please give the order.” Gustus interrupted her thinking.

Lexa swore internally, she didn’t have time to find out what was happening. “Blow the horns, bring the scouts back.” She looked at the map where all of her warriors’ camps were located. “Discreetly take measure of the Ouskejon Kru and the Ingranrona camps.” The Plains and Blue Cliff had always been close with the Ice Nation, if this was indeed an attack those camps would be buzzing as well.

“We need to be prepared to fend off an attack.” Gustus protested when he realized she hadn’t given any orders considering their camp.
She spread her hand against the map, staring at it, trying to understand what was going on. “Switch out our guards with our most experienced warriors, double the guards on our food stores, paddock, and the healing tent. Do not increase our guards along the edge of camp.”

“But Heda!”

“No. I will not make the first move that could destroy this coalition and you will not do it for me. Do you understand.” She stared him down, daring him to disagree with her further.

Finally, Gustus looked down, “Sha, Heda.” He turned and left to see to her orders.

She breathed out in relief he hadn’t pushed her further. Walking out of the tent she headed for where she knew the scouts would be returning, she needed information and she needed it now.

“This is insane Clarke!” Octavia was pacing back and forth in the general’s tent. She was filled with too many conflicting emotions and didn’t know what to do.

“What would you have me do then.” Clarke sighed from where she was seated next to Atom’s body.

“Just order Burka or Niles to take care of the fuckers who killed Atom. To hell with the commander, just take justice. Nia at least would have already dealt with this.” Octavia ignored the clearly fearful Trikru warrior standing in the corner.

Clarke stood, an intimidating half snarl on her face that made Octavia wish she hadn’t pushed. “I am not Nia and I won’t just let this be swept under the rug. Its Atom, O.” Clarke choked on his name, falling silent.

“I know! That’s why I’m saying we should just kill the people who did this!” Her hands were clenching in anger and her eyes were burning with tears she wasn’t allowing to spill.

“I want them executed properly, this is not going to happen again. I will not sit here and let us get killed off one at a time. Juis drein Juis draun.” Clarke’s hands clenched at her side.

“You’re playing politics with the death of Atom! He deserves to be avenged!” Octavia hissed. “You know the commander will never hand over his murderers.”

“Enough, O go guard the edge of camp.”

Octavia was vibrating with anger, but she’d learned the hard way to listen when Clarke gave orders, even when she didn’t like them. She calmed slightly when she felt Clarke grasp her shoulder. Looking up she met Clarke’s eyes and could see her own grief echoed back at her.

“Atom’s death will not go unpunished, I swear. Trust me to see this through.” Clarke’s voice was measured but rough with emotion. Octavia nodded. She did trust Clarke. Clarke was the only reason any of them had survived so long. There were times though where Octavia hated the person that Clarke had been forced to become to get them this far. Reacting calmly and logically to the death of one of their family is something that Octavia hoped she would never have to do.

Three years and eleven months ago:

Jasper wasn’t sure whether he was awake or a sleep. The only time he was sure he was awake was
when he felt the more insistent pain of his back being cleaned. The agony was enough to bring him back into lucidity briefly. His dreams and reality were so alike, both cold and hot, filled with the echoes of screams, and soft touches on his face. Then he was pulled out of his constant state of dull throbbing pain that he had at least become accustomed to by an intense burning agony screaming through him. He tried to get away from it but he could feel he was being held down. Fighting with all of his might, he tried to escape from the flames that were licking his back. Finally, the flames were taken away and he was left to cry on the concrete floor.

Hours later he woke up for the first time from his fog. His whole body was one large ache. He let out a groan that turned into a whimper when his muscles tried to move.

“Hey, it’s ok. You’re ok.” His eyes burned some when he opened them but bending over him and looking down at him was Monty.

“Onty…” He croaked.

“Water.” Monty called, and soon was gently letting some water trickle down his aching throat.

“You’re going to be ok, we cauterized your back.” Monty was wiping sweat from his forehead.

Jasper hummed in appreciation. He felt so hot and his bones ached, everything felt like it was pulsing with his heart beat. He felt himself slipping back into sleep hearing only the faint echos of a conversation between Monty and a girl. Good for Monty getting the girl.

“He’s burning up…….water.”

“Nothing else…….I’m…….it’s been….late…..infection.”

“Something!…..friend….won’t..watch……….die.”

“I promise…….best…….not again…….”

Present Day:

Clarke knew who she brought with her to the commander’s tent would say a lot. She looked over her party. She needed her party to be threatening and to highlight that she was more than capable of taking care of the issue without the commander's approval or aid. For this reason, she had selected her two best assassins, Niles and Burka, to accompany her. Burka was serious and focused, her behavior would be rational and easily predicted. Niles was a terrible flirt but he knew when to be serious. Clarke would also be bringing Silas, the level headed attendant she’d been assigned when she became a general. Choosing to bring Octavia was a risk, but she was one of the best warriors in her army. Benny was the single largest warrior in her army and his shaved head with only the central stripe of shorn hair down the center was intimidating. Finally, she’d ordered Keaton to accompany her. He was rough around the edges but she trusted him, he’d been on her first pauna hunting team and she knew his clothing would easily give that fact away.

She stared at her party, again making sure they were all in order. They were all fully armed, faces painted with the thick white and red paint of their people. Tris, the Trikru second, was standing stiffly amongst them, clearly not convinced they would actually be turning her over. Nodding to her warriors, she turned and began the approach to the Trikru camp and to the commander’s tent. As she strode, head held high, her soldiers watched from their various posts. Clarke felt the weight of their trust in her and it strengthened her determination to see justice done in a way that would protect her people.
She met Raven and Monty’s eyes as she went. They were standing close, hands clasped in support. She would have taken them but Monty wasn’t intimidating enough and Raven would be needed in camp in case things went horribly wrong. Charlotte was waiting for them at the edge of camp, her eyes were hard and cold as she watched, she just nodded as they passed. Clarke felt a familiar pang at the expression on her face. They’d all been changed by their time on the ground but in some ways seeing the changes in their youngest member had been the hardest.

Steeling herself, she walked confidently out past the last lines of defense on her camp and into Trikru territory. She could practically feel the relief in Tris as they crossed the line. As they began to pass Trikru warriors, she could see the dirty looks they sent them but also the alarm they were trying to hide. Burka and Niles were clearly dressed and armed as assassins. She had no doubts that the commander would be made aware of their presence within minutes.

“Tree bastards sure are jumpy.” Keaton said, while scowling at the guards they were passing.

“Indeed.” Silas confirmed. He looked composed as he walked directly to Clarke’s left.

“They should be.” Octavia growled from her place to Clarke’s right.

Clarke sighed and just concentrated on calming herself, this was important. She was not going to let the eastern border incidents happen again. Standing outside of the commander’s tent, next to several more guards than had been present the last time she’d been at the tent, was Gustus.

She came to a stop in front of the tent, staring down the large man. She knew her warriors would stay silent. Octavia was the most likely to act out, but she had grown from the hot head she once was and knew to work out her anger in the training pits later rather than react when the insult occurred.

“If you even think about harming her I will cut your throat.” He threatened.

She watched him, but she hadn’t come to play nice. Her people needed her to protect them and playing nice wasn’t going to do it. “You will try, and you will die before you can even draw blood. Now move aside. I did not come to speak with you Gustus kom Trikru.”

He seemed to be physically pained when he stepped aside allowing her and her party through.

Coming to a stop in front of the commander, she did not bow. “Heda.” She took in the fact that the commander was in her full regalia, complete with war paint, while she sat in her throne. The room held several guards and advisors. Anya stiffened in her place behind the commander when she saw Tris.

“Klark, what cause do you have to bring your warriors before me and to lock down your camp. Several of my advisors assure me you must be planning on betraying the coalition. Explain your actions.” The even voice and stare from the commander pissed her off.

“My warriors, Atom and Mozu, were attacked by three Boudalan warriors during today’s scouting expedition. I demand justice.” Clarke stood firmly, watching the commander.

“If you speak true, then why have you brought your camp to war readiness. Surly, a single murder does not demand preparation for war.” The commander spoke calmly, her face masked even as her
advisors clearly showed emotion.

“My first post as general was on the eastern border of Azgeda territory. I’m sure despite your inaction you are aware of the ‘conflict’ there that only came to an end four months ago.” Clarke watched the commander straighten on her throne. Good, she should feel uncomfortable. “Hundreds of people died in that conflict and yet you did nothing. I trust you are not foolish enough to believe that the nomads were unsupported in banding together to carve out a territory of their own. On their own they would never be enough to cause such losses to Azgeda. That Sankru, a closely allied clan of yours, were supporting them in this endeavor is of course only a theory. But, I will not allow my people to be killed and their deaths to bring nothing but inaction once again.”

“You dare accuse Heda of such treachery!” Gustus growled, taking a step forward.

Clarke didn’t move, feeling pleased to feel and see Octavia step between her and the man, resting her hand on her sword hilt. “I accuse Heda of nothing, but she should be careful that I imply such things only.”

“Klark kom Azgeda, you stand in my presence and imply a great many things.” The commander paused flicking her eyes over her and her party. “You demand justice for your dead. What is it you want? Do you wish for the head of Bassilo kom Boudalan or perhaps even my own?”

Clarke breathed in carefully, displaying only anger and calm. This was critical, she’d stepped over several lines and she had to be careful she didn’t push the commander too far. That would be as disastrous as pushing too little. “I want the three murderers to face the penalty for their crime. This time tomorrow, I will burn Atom either with or without his murderer’s bodies. If it is without, then I will take the blood owed to him myself.” She gestured slightly to the two assassins standing behind her. “After I have taken their blood, I will take my army and return to Azgeda.” Dead silence fell over the tent. To leave without permission from Heda was treason and everyone knew it.

Finally, the commander spoke. “You would commit treason over the death of a single warrior?” There was genuine confusion in her voice leaking through.

“I would commit treason to protect my people and I can not protect my people if our allies are as much of a threat to us as the enemy. More even since they can stab us in the back. If Nia must execute me when I arrive back in Azgeda, then so be it. I will not stand by while my people are killed by allies.” Clarke could feel herself sweating under her coat. “The army she will send to replace me will not be the one I have sworn to protect and lead to the best of my abilities.”

The Commander stood and took several steps till she was directly in front of Clarke. Clarke internally cursed her height when she found that she was slightly shorter. “Very well, I will have this matter investigated. If you speak true and the event occurred as you claim, then you shall have your blood.”

Clarke felt a small measure of relief. She still doubted that the commander would give her all three murderers. Still, she might get the archer, and well Burka was very good at making deaths look accidental. This would be the last member of her army she would lose to allies in this war. She bowed her head barely before turning and leaving without another word. Either Heda would give her at least one of his murderers or she would have to move forward and change her plans for the Ice Nation quite significantly in order to ensure that all she had sacrificed was not for nothing.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years and nine months ago:
The twenty-three surviving members of the drop ship stood before the throne of the Ice Queen. She was staring down at them from her throne like they were bugs to be squashed. Dax’s entire body ached. His left hand in particular was in pain, his fingernails had been removed the day before. They’d been brought before the woman who had ordered their torture and now she just sat there staring at their dirty and blood crusted forms standing in front of her throne. Hatred for her burned inside of him but he swallowed it down, it wasn’t like he had the strength to act on it anyways. They were all only standing thanks to pure willpower. Finally, the voice of the tyrant in front of them spoke.

“You have been my guests for three months and thanks to the information you’ve given, your people will have died in their cage in the sky by now.” She seemed to take satisfaction in this fact. “Which makes you the last of your people. It would be easy enough to kill you and put an end to your sad existence. But, some of my subjects seem to think you’ve shown strength surviving as long as you have in my dungeons. So, I’ll give you a choice. Swear loyalty to me and prove your strength in my armies before the end of the year, or die.”

Dax hissed, straightening as much as he could, staring at her in disbelief. He would die rather than serve this woman. He noticed the others shifting with angry hard looks on their faces. What surprised him though was Clarke’s reaction. He hadn’t spent three months in a cell with her for nothing. She was considering the Queen’s offer and he was horrified at that. Then he realized why she was considering it, she’d do anything to keep them safe.

So, in a sort of frozen horror, he watched her walk slowly with her head held high till she was in front of their group. She seemed to be taking measure of the woman in front of them, before she dropped onto her knees with her head lowered. Their group let out various noises of surprise as they realized what she was doing. He heard Bellamy murmuring about his sister before he too walked forward and dropped to his knees.

Turning he saw the betrayal in Octavia’s face. Then she seemed to grit her teeth and move forward as well. And he understood. They’d been suffering and trying to survive just praying for a glimmer of hope and here was hope. The cost, however, was unacceptable.

He couldn’t do it. He couldn’t swear fealty to this woman. She had all but killed his mother, the only person he had left in the world. She had ordered the torture and death of everyone that had come down with him. He couldn’t let this anger go and serve this woman, even as he saw the group one by one kneeling till it was just him standing there conflicted. But then he saw Monty’s face from where he was kneeling. Sweet, forgiving Monty and his face was a mask of rage. Finally, he understood, he dropped to his knees because he would live another day, and some day he would kill the woman on that throne.

____________________________________________________________________________

Present Day:

Anya could feel the anger radiating from Lexa, and she knew it would be coming out when she watched Klark walk out of the tent with her warriors. She had seen her former second angry enough to know that she was fuming. If she was right, the parties responsible for this were going to be getting the full might of her fury directed towards them. Her current second was clearly terrified, caught between a general skirting the edges of treason and an angry commander. Anya couldn’t blame her. She glanced around the quiet tent as everyone let the information just given to them time to seep in. She saw the anger on Gustus’ face as well as on several of the guards but had a feeling they hadn’t quite understood why Lexa was pissed yet. Unsurprisingly, Gustus was the first to speak and the first to be sacrificed to Lexa’s wrath.
“You can’t let disrespect like this stand Heda!”

“We are past disrespect.” Lexa walked over to her map staring at it gathering her thoughts. She turned to one of her guards, Ryder if Anya wasn’t mistaken. “Go and inform Bassilo kom Boudalan that he is to present himself to me immediately.”

“Sha, Heda.” With that the man ducked out of the tent.

Anya watched her former second dig her dagger into the table sharply. “Gustus you are my general, and I have placed my trust in you. Klark kom Azgeda has no reason to trust me and many reasons to distrust me.” Lexa’s teeth were gritted and in an impressive show of will her anger was shoved down. “There will be no action taken towards her behavior.”

Carefully, and knowing Lexa was fairly close to steadying her anger so that she appeared calm to all but those who knew her best, Anya stepped towards Tris. “Tris, report.”

Tris with her gangly limbs from her recent growth spurt, straightened. “I accompanied the general, Klark, as instructed, along with her second Brady, on the scouting expedition. We didn’t find anything of particular note but they both took multiple clippings of plants. We were just west of the bend in the river in our section when Brady heard something. It was faint but both Clarke and I heard it the second time. It was a cry for help. Brady and I approached the person calling for help while Clarke circled and covered us in case of an ambush.”

“You allowed Azgeda forces to protect your back?” Anya found herself asking surprised.

Tris nodded. “We were unaware of the clan the plea was coming from and I was worried that if it was a Trikru scout they wouldn’t have intervened. We found Mozu kom Azgeda. She had clearly been injured and been in the river for some time. She indicated for us to go to her fallen companion that she had hid under the bushes. Clarke confirmed his death and insisted we carry his body out with us. Upon reaching the Azgeda camp, she ordered it be put on lockdown immediately. She ordered me to follow her so I stayed with her while inside of the camp. The fletching of the arrows in Atom, the dead warrior, are to the best of my ability to distinguish from the Boudalan forces.”

Tris breathed deeply, she’d been talking fairly fast. “According to Mozu, they intervened when two Boudalan warriors were being pursued by three reapers. During the fight a third Boudalan warrior who was shooting at the reapers hit Atom instead of his target. The warriors decided that it was better to kill the Azgeda scouts rather than risk being punished for accidentally harming one of them. Mozu was clear that they seemed to think that Heda did not care about the deaths of Ice Nation warriors.” She looked at her feet clearly afraid of having said that.

“Fuck.” Anya said. She knew Indra, Gustus, and Lexa would never express the reality of their situation, so she did it for them. “Did any harm come to you?”

“No, I was never threatened or harmed in any way.” Tris assured them.

Lexa sat in her throne while watching Tris carefully. “How important was the warrior Atom who died?”

Anya suddenly felt horror as she put together what she knew Lexa was starting to put together. After all, she was the one who’d mentioned the warrior who she believed to be the general’s lover. If that assumption was true, then they were fortunate that the general hadn’t attacked the Boudalan forces outright.

“I don’t know his position in the army. But Clarke was clearly upset by his death, near tears several
times. She referred to him as her brother.” Tris looked upset. “Heda I think she meant that as in blood. She ordered his body to be laid on her bed and he was clearly beloved by the other warriors. One of the female warriors, I believe she is close to the general, demanded that Clarke take the blood owed by his death. I am unsure of her relationship with Clarke but the general is clearly close with and allows companionship with her warriors to a degree I haven’t seen before.”

“Explain what you mean by companionship.” Indra ordered.

“Just that...she shows open care. The warrior who was angry that she wasn’t taking the blood, rather than demanding it, Clarke allowed the disrespect and even comforted the warrior.”

Anya watched Lexa digesting the news. “Indra take Nyko and his son with you. You may bring three other warriors, but go to the Azgeda camp and confirm what Tris has reported.”

“Of course.” Indra left the tent quickly.

Lexa seemed to mold further into her throne. “Tris, you’re dismissed. Be ready to be summoned back here, your testimony may be needed again tonight.” She looked at Gustus for a minute before continuing. “Gustus take a team and personally see if the site of the attack corroborates the Azgeda story.”

“Sha, Heda.” He bowed slightly before leaving.

Anya walked over to the table and poured two mugs of wine. Taking them, she handed one to Lexa before dragging a chair over so she could look at Lexa while they drank. She waited patiently for Lexa to begin to drink before speaking. “You knew bringing together the clan’s armies without an immediate battle would be a risk.”

Lexa was struggling with something, “I didn’t intercede in the eastern territory issue because Nia did not ask it and I hoped in her stubbornness her son would overthrow her.”

“And instead the future ruler of Azgeda you hoped for ended up dead and you now have a future ruler who hates you.” Anya swirled her mug while thinking. It was all a mess. “It was Nia’s responsibility to request you intercede and she didn’t because of her pride.”

Lexa huffed. “Klark was right though, I knew. I swore to protect the people of the coalition and I failed the people of Azgeda. Not for the reason the general believes but that doesn’t change that I did.”

Anya leaned forward, watching the self-recrimination grow in her friend’s eyes. “You hoped that by leaving the conflict alone a tyrant, who has done nothing but destabilize the coalition, would be removed. We both know it would be best for Azgeda to have a new ruler.” Anya hated politics, a trait she shared with her current second. “It may have been better for you to override the queen’s wishes and intervene. But what’s done is done. As you say ‘the living are hungry’.”

Lexa laughed. “Once a teacher always a teacher.” She took a deep drink from her mug. “What is your advice for the current situation then?”

“I think if this war against the mountain is to be successful you need this Azgeda general and not Quint. And if you don’t want bad blood between the clans to result in new bloodshed you need to make an example of those who would defy your peace.”

“Juis drein Juis draun then.” Lexa sounded old when she said it. “I am glad you are by my side for this Anya.”
Anya’s face softened as she looked at her former second who had become the greatest Heda. “I will always be at your side.”
“Fuck!” Raven shouted, chucking her latest attempt at a radio amplifier into the ground where the pieces scattered across the floor of her tent.

Monty burst into the tent looking around for a threat. His eyes wide and bloodshot from the lack of sleep, his face sporting a couple days growth of facial hair.

“I’m fine.” Raven bit out at his worried expression. She ran a hand through her hair in frustration.

Monty sat down next to her and watched her. “You don’t need to be here right now. We can fix the radio later.”

Raven shook her head, she needed to be useful. “No I can fix this.” She picked up a piece of an earlier attempt at an amplifier.

Warm hands clasped over the top of hers, stopping her from working on it. “Raven, this isn’t going to bring him back.”

“Then what good are we!” She burst out, yanking one hand to her face she angrily rubbed at where she could feel tears starting.

“The others need us right now.”

“I just thought….” She held in a sob with sheer willpower trying to focus on the crappy junk she was trying to make a better radio with.

Monty leaned his forehead against her shoulder, she could feel him shaking slightly. “I know.”

They sat in silence together for a while. Finally Raven shook herself back to as close to normal as possible. “Come on, we can work on the radio in Clarke’s tent.” She started shoving random tools and items into one of her bags of odds and ends.

“Hand me one of those bags, I’ll help carry them.” Monty held his hand out for a bag.

“Yes mom,” Raven sniffed before tossing a bag into Monty’s arms, he grunted when it hit.

“Ass.”

The two walked silently towards the command tent. Raven ducked in and saw a dark skinned Trikru warrior bent over Atom’s body. She didn’t even register the stiff form of Clarke to one side watching the proceedings vigilantly. She didn’t notice the tension in the room. She just lunged.

“Get off him!” She shouted while charging.

Her forward momentum was halted suddenly by two large arms wrapping around her and hauling her back forcefully. She kicked out trying to break free. She only calmed when she realized who it
was who had her in his arms.

“Are you done?”

She frowned. “Yes.” She bit out, glaring darkly at the Trikru who was examining Atom’s body.

She felt Gunter drop her her back onto her feet. Stupid stoic fucker, interfering where he had no business, like always.

Three years and nine months ago:

Gunter looked at the girl trying to pull herself off of the ground that he had been informed was his new second. She was a mess, full of rage, clearly no combat training, and injuries that would hamper her till they healed. But, the girl got back up no matter how many times he knocked her down. Finally, she managed to bring herself to her feet. She was swaying but staring him down.

“Again.” He ordered.

She charged him, it was sloppy but she was getting better. He side stepped her easily grabbing her by the back of her shirt and slamming her back to the ground. He watched her gasping for her breath again as she rolled over and began to climb back to her feet with sheer will power.

“Tell me Raven, why do you wish to be a warrior? Why do you stand back up when you know you will just be knocked back down.”

Her eyes flashed as she glared at him, “I’m not going to die here.” She growled before throwing a handful of dirt at his face and charging.

It was a good plan, unexpected and smart. He felt his mouth twitch in approval as he grabbed the girl and tossed her over his shoulder once more. “Good, again!” He ordered.

Present time:

Indra stood behind Lexa, watching with distaste as Bassilo kom Boudalan presented himself before Heda. She wondered if the fool even knew what his men had done. How close they had come to breaking the coalition.

“Why have I been summoned Heda?” He asked his tone loud and arrogant. The decorative feathers in his collar, and the gold coating on several pieces of his armor, a stark contrast to the practical tent where the throne was the only luxury.

“Three of your warriors killed an Azgeda scout this afternoon.” Lexa stated.

Indra watched the man balk, clearly surprised by such accusations. What sort of fool didn’t even know of a murder committed by his own men hours after the fact? Her warriors knew to tell her anything that could lead to their harm so she could protect them. She’d end the fight of any warrior who was foolish enough to think they could get away with such crimes in her army. If they told her, she would at least be willing to hear them out and grant them a more merciful punishment then they would receive otherwise. Anyone caught lying about such things however would receive no mercy from her. After all, in such cases as this, the actions of a few could affect the whole army and to not keep their general informed of such things was treason.
“None of my warriors did any such thing, surely you don’t believe the lying cowards.” He asserted still confident that this meeting would go his way.

Indra narrowed her eyes, this leader was as foolish as his men apparently. If he could not even tell the danger he was in then the branwada deserved his fate.

Lexa drew her dagger and began to spin it slowly. “I’ve had their claims proven.” She waved a hand towards Tris, who was standing as a guard. “I have a witness to the immediate aftermath of the attack.” She waved to Gustus, who had argued that Bassilo should pay for the death as well as his men. “I have had the site of the attack searched and the bodies of the three reapers involved in the fight were found killed exactly how the surviving Azgeda scout reported. The sword of the dead Azgeda warrior was even still in the gravel where it was dropped. You’re warriors didn’t even try to hide their actions.”

“So, some of my scouts killed some reapers and Azgeda planted evidence against them.” He puffed up his chest.

Indra was impressed, Lexa gave no tell for how truly angry she was.

“I’ve had the body of the dead Azgeda warrior examined by one of my generals and two healers, again confirming that your warriors killed an ally.” Lexa’s eyes bore into the unfortunate general before her.

The general before them laughed. “Then, good for my men taking care of one of those ice rats.”

“You would support murderers.” Indra found herself barking out. She was horrified and wished nothing more than to kill the man before her. Indra was offended to even share the same rank as such an idiot who lacked all understanding.

“Anything to reduce those monsters is good news to me. As it should be to any who have dealt with Azgeda.” He tilted his chin up towards the Commander. “You should know that better than anyone.”

“You dare,” Indra started but couldn’t continue. There were no words that could describe the sheer stupid temerity that the Boudalan general displayed. She could see Gustus shifting next to her and assumed that he also wished to destroy this apparently deathly stupid man before them.

“You have no defense for those under your command then?” Lexa asked calmly, ignoring Indra’s slight interruption.

“Why should they need one?” He shrugged his shoulders.

“Very well, I agree Bassilo kom Boudalan there is no defense. Leave, return with the three members of your scouting team who brought down the Azgeda warrior. They should receive their marks for such a kill. I would be honored to give them their reward personally.” Lexa sheathed her dagger standing, it was a clear dismissal. Indra had no idea what was happening, only her faith in her leader allowed her to keep her tongue.

“Of course Heda.” He bowed at the waist before turning to leave.

“Anya, escort the general to his camp and back. See to it that no harm befalls his warriors.”

As soon as Anya and Bassilo left, Gustus spoke out voicing Indra’s own concerns. “Heda, you can’t mean to reward the murderers! Klark will not abide by it and many of the other clans would support her over such a miscarriage of justice.”
“We do not have time to search for cowards hiding from their crimes. He will bring us the murderers and they will receive their reward.” Her face was alight with rage. “Bassilo is a fool, and as such he will follow a fool’s orders.”

Indra felt pride well in her, there was a reason the commander was revered and this was it.

Lexa spoke again. “Indra, take what warriors you feel necessary and bring Mozu kom Azgeda here. She will be able to tell us if Bassilo has brought the guilty. If a guard is insisted on for her allow it, no more than three Azgeda warriors though.”

“Sha, Heda.” Indra felt herself brimming with energy as she stalked towards the Azgeda camp. Justice would be done, the coalition would survive, and the mountain would fall to the Heda who had done what no other Heda could in creating the coalition.

Lexa was completely and totally exhausted. The soft early morning light was just starting to reveal her camp. She’d spent her entire night finding the truth and then finding the guilty parties. But, dawn was here and she had the three guilty parties locked in a cell, confirmed to be the guilty parties by Mozu. Bassilo was passed out and due for an awful hangover. Getting him and the guilty members incredibly drunk before arresting them had been an annoying but necessary ploy. It would be too late for Bassilo to attempt to intercede for his men by the time he realized they were going to be executed not rewarded. And well if Nyko had made sure their mugs held drugs guaranteed to knock them out, it was just good time management. This was enough of a mess as it was they did not Bassilo to make more of a fool of himself than he already had and add to the chaos.

She wondered if Bassilo would be imprudent enough to protest the execution when he was roused in a few hours. She was tempted to just hand him over to Klark after telling the general what he’d called her brother. Then, well, nature would take its’ course and she’d be free of working with a complete moron. Sadly, the murder of any of her warriors was bad for the coalition. Today’s execution was about more than just justice, it was a warning that she would not tolerate infighting.

Standing, she began to walk towards the Azgeda camp. Gustus and her guards were silent as they followed her. She doubted the general had slept either and it would be best to get any more distrust aired before the public execution. Indra would take care of the preparations and Anya would make sure Bassilo stayed in his tent till it was too late.

The camp was quiet, only the subtle sounds of shifting warriors and the quiet whinny of a horse could be heard. It was too early for more than just the required members of the army to be awake, the torches had been put out as the early light encompassed the camp. It didn’t take long for her to make it to the edge of the Ice Nation’s camp. A young warrior wearing dark clothing with white fur visible at the seams, dropped down from a tree as soon as they were in sight.

“Heda, are you here to see the General?” The girl enquired respectfully, if somewhat cautiously.

Lexa had to keep an amused smirk off her face, the girls hair had clearly been chopped off badly. There were still remnants of baby fat yet to leave her face. If the girl was a day over fourteen summers Lexa would eat her sash. “I have, will you be escorting me then?”

The girl nodded rapidly, obviously nervous at being in the presence of the commander. “Of course!”

The group, with their new addition, walked further into the camp. While there was a clear difference in the amount of guards up and about it was calmer than she had expected. It would seem sending Indra here to investigate the claims had already eased some of the tensions in the foot soldiers. After
examining the girl in front of her, who was clearly a second still growing into her role, Lexa decided this was the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Azgeda forces.

“Tell me what is your name second?” She asked watching the girl startle slightly.

“Sophie kom Azgeda, second of Silas kom Azgeda, Heda!” She pulled herself up proudly while stating her name.

“Is this your first battle Sophie?” She asked. She knew her guards were listening in curiously but the exhaustion that they all felt dragging at them was enough for them to hold their tongues and just listen as she learned about this second.

The girl noddedbrightly at the interest from the commander. Even if her people loathed the Trikru it’s still the commander! “Yup! I’ve only served on bandit patrols before! But my brother took me as his second after the victory on the eastern border.”

“He must have faith in your strength.” Lexa tells the girl. She almost laughs as she realizes she’s accidently gotten the girl rambling out a stream of information.

“I hope so! But, I think I’m disappointing him. I just can’t get Avel to behave at all.” The girl looks up at the confused expressions of the Trikru around her. “He’s my horse. My brother got him for me before we left for here and he’s a great horse but he has a mind of his own. He even ate my hair this morning! How can I be a great warrior if my horse won’t listen to me? Everyone in my family are warriors. So, I just have to keep trying cause if I can tame Avel I can tame anything. And he’s such a beautiful horse really, and he loves carrots the best but I have to clean them for him first………” The girl just kept going, talking about her latest attempts to tame her dread horse.

Lexa was half convinced the animal really was possessed by some sort of foul spirit after the story of the horse kicking an elderly woman into her cart a few days back. Letting her eyes find Gustus, she was amused to see his consternation at the sheer flood of chatter leaving this young girl. Chatter like this was highly discouraged in young warriors, so it was incredibly odd to hear it from a person over the age of eight.

“Has your first not taught you silence?” Gustus asked, with wide slightly horrified eyes.

“Of course!” Sophie looked at him like he had a second head. “But there is a time and a place to be silent and a time to talk. Silas says the general encourages conversation outside of one’s duties because it helps create bonds.”

Lexa, as well as her warriors, stared at the girl in surprise. That was definitely not a typical approach for, well, anybody. Lexa realized she was staring and began to move forward again. The command tent was visible in the soft light as they approached. She was surprised to see no guards outside of it. Seeing the second duck in without announcing her presence was even stranger to her. Still she followed, gesturing for her guards to stay outside, before following her in.

The inside of the tent was lit by a few candles and some soft light from outside was helping everything come into focus. On the bed, laying on top of the furs, was who she assumed was Atom. He had clearly been cleaned, his armor repaired, face painted ceremonially, and hands clasped on his chest. Leaning against the side of the bed, surrounded by pieces of scrap metal and wires, were two warriors passed out against each other. One was female with red sewn into her jacket, the other a man using her shoulder as a pillow. He had straight black hair and a couple day’s growth of beard. As her eyes continued to scan the tent, she saw that there were several stools around a table and she easily recognized Klark and Gunter sitting at the table. Though there was also a relatively stocky woman standing before them whom Lexa did not know. The woman honestly looked like a harried
mother of twelve and Lexa had no idea what her business was inside the general’s tent.

“Heda,” Klark stood up at her arrival, clearly surprised at her presence. “To what do I owe the pleasure.”

It was an odd turn of phrase and somewhat sarcastic. Lexa was not used to sarcasm being directed towards her and frowned before speaking. “I came to you in regards to your warrior’s death.”

The general straightened, before giving orders to those in her tent. “Cassite take care of the training of the medical seconds today.”

“Of course girl, you should get some sleep though. Don’t think I haven’t noticed you avoiding it.” The stocky woman said as she stood up. With a firm nod she patted the general’s face. “I’ll keep the young ones busy, you just take care of yourself.”

The general chuckled softly. “I’ll be sure to rest Cas. You just don’t let those kids run you ragged.”

“I’ve been bringing children into this world since I was a girl. You don’t have to worry about me.” With that parting the woman bustled out of the tent not even acknowledging Lexa.

Lexa stared in mute amazement at the familiarity the general allowed. Her thoughts were interrupted by Klark speaking.

“Sophie get back to your post, and tell your first I want to speak to him after his watch is finished.”

“Of course general!” The girl saluted, which was odd Lexa thought, Azgeda wasn’t one of the clans that used salutes.

“Do you require a seat Commander?” Klark offered her after the girl left the tent, the clear sarcasm in the tone was something that irked her.

“Mockery is not the product of a strong of mind.” She remarked while remaining standing formally.

“I’m aware.” Klark said flatly while returning to her seat.

Lexa felt her face twitch slightly in irritation. Spirits, she wished she could just lock this woman and Bassilo in a cell together and let them take care of each other permanently. “I have the three men responsible for his death detained.”

Klark sat back slightly, considering her. “You mean to use them as an example then.”

Klark straightened in her chair her face becoming deadly serious. She was clearly surprised and examining her for any sign of falsehood. “And will you turn them over?” She asked sharply.

Lexa noticed movement out of the corner of her eye. It would seem the sleeping warriors were not asleep at all. Clever ploy to keep her guard down, she realized suddenly. Or perhaps they had woken at the sound of a voice they didn’t know. Either way it was worth notice.

“I will not be turning them over to you.”

“On what grounds.” Klark responded, voice cold and tight with fury.

“They like you are a part of ‘my’ army.” She emphasized the ‘my’, the general’s lack of respect needed to be put to a stop. “As such it is my right to see to their execution. They’re bodies will be turned over for the burning of your warrior. However, they will face their sentence in my camp.”

Klark sat back slightly, considering her. “You mean to use them as an example then.”
Lexa nodded, at least this pain in her side wasn’t a moron. “The mountain is the greatest threat any of the clans have ever faced. Infighting will cause us to lose this war.”

“United we stand, divided we fall.” Klark said her voice calming, it sounded like a memorized saying although Lexa had never heard it before.

“Indeed. You aren’t stupid Klark. I need you to stand beside me for this execution.” She watched the woman’s reaction to that.

“Because if a Trikru commander and an Azgeda general can stand together than the others should fall into line. “ Klark sighed. “I’ll do it.” Klark stood and walked over looking down at her dead warrior. “Is there anything else or is that all you came to say?”

Lexa moved as well, recognizing grief when she saw it. “I’ll expect you, and any of your army that will be attending, at high noon.” Turning she left the tent, coming to where her guards were twitching clearly uncomfortable letting her out of their sight for even a moment. The walk back to her camp was easier she found. The first step towards her army functioning as a single unit had been taken.

Three years and eight months ago:

Octavia watched with the circle of jeering warriors and seconds as they observed the match going on. Her chest was clenched tightly. It was a route. No matter how hard or how smart Charlotte was trying to fight, she didn’t have the training or experience of her opponent. She cringed at the sound of fists hitting home on the girl’s body.

A part of her was praying for her to accept defeat but she also knew that to do so too soon would mean the removal of her head for her weakness. Bile rose in her throat at the memory of Fox. She’d given in too soon, thinking that by saving her strength she’d last longer. But god, Charlotte was just a child this had to stop soon. It didn’t matter that Anthony her opponent couldn’t be more than a year older than her. He had been in training far longer than the paltry amount of time any of them had.

“Enough Anthony.” Zola the boy’s first shouted. “You’ve done well.”

The boy wiped his forearm across his face smearing some of the blood from his bleeding nose, the only solid hit Charlotte had gotten in. “It wasn’t much of a match.” He sneered.

Charlotte had collapsed onto her knees as soon as the match had been called. Both her eyes were mostly swollen shut and her nose was definitely broken. Octavia was sure she had bruised ribs from the fight and some of her scabs from the dungeon had opened up again.

Anthony went to walk past his downed opponent but he paused. Laughing, he spat on her, “Weaklings should just accept death.” He was smug after the praise of his first.

Octavia snapped. How dare that little fucker say that about one of theirs! She wasn’t even quite aware that she was barrelling into the boy till she had him pinned beneath her as she wailed on him. Her fists hit him with dull thwacks, one after another. She didn’t care that her knuckles were bloody. She didn’t even notice when he tried to hit her back. A cry of rage came out of her throat, her blood pumping through her veins demanding he pay. She struggled when she felt hands grabbing at her trying to pull her off.

“OCTAVIA!” Bellamy shouted grabbing her round the middle and physically lifting her off of the
kid. “OCTAVIA STOP!”

She stopped fighting as she began to take in the scene. Anthony was a bloody mess, far worse than Charlotte, who was looking at her in shock. There were angry glares being sent her way from the warriors and dead silence as they all waited for the metaphorical axe to drop. Dread pooled in her throat, she could be killed for this she realized. Oh god, she was going to die for this.

Zola walked towards her, eyes bright like a cat who had caught a mouse as he examined her. Then she was being shoved behind her brother. “Whatever her punishment is, I’ll take it.” He was resolute, but she could feel his fear.

“Ah, but how will she learn her lesson if she is not the one given it?” He asked, seeming more amused than anything at Bellamy’s attempt to sacrifice himself.

“Bell,” she started to interject, she couldn’t let him take the punishment for her.

“No. She’s my sister, her actions are my responsibility.” He held himself upright daring the man to find otherwise.

The man seemed to consider his words. Octavia was sickened that he hadn’t even glanced at his second since she’d beaten the boy into the dirt. He was curled in the fetal position clearly in pain, but the warrior just watched her and her brother, as did the crowd.

“Very well.” Turning he looked at the other warriors who were at the pits to fight and watch the vicious sparring. “Tie him to the tree!”

Roars of approval echoed round and Bellamy was grabbed and dragged towards an upright log.

“Bell! No, take me. It was my crime!” She fought against the flow of people moving towards the tree.

“Octavia, calm down. Now.” Clarke hissed in her ear while covering her mouth with one hand and grabbing onto her shoulder tightly with the other.

She shot pure venom out of her eyes when she turned to look at Clarke. “They’ll kill him!”

“No, they won’t.” Clarke hissed, gripping both sides of Octavia’s jacket, she hauled her in close so that they were sharing the same air. “But, if you don’t calm down and stop acting on your feelings, you are going to get him killed.”

“How can you just be fine with this!” She threw back into Clarke’s face. Anger pouring out at the closest target.

“I’m not!” Clarke seemed to check to make sure the crowd was more interested in Bellamy being tied to the post before turning back to her. “But, Bellamy can survive a whipping. Just like Charlotte can survive a beating.”

“These people are monsters!” Octavia growled fighting to get away from Clarke.

“And if we want to survive we have to become monsters as well!” Clarke tensed further before yanking Octavia into a hug. “You have to let your brother bear this. He chose to protect you and you can’t change anything about that now.”

Octavia felt resentment bubbling under her skin, she didn’t want Clarke’s comfort. After shoving Clarke away, Octavia snapped at her. “I don’t need you babying me like you do the others.”
Clarke’s face shuttered closed. “Then listen to me. If you fight this, you and your brother will die.”

Octavia grit her teeth but shoved her way to the front of the crowd in time to see Zola pulling out a long length of twisted leather. She cringed as she heard it snap across her brothers back. By the third lash he was crying out, his back not healed from the cuts that covered it from the dungeon. By the tenth, she started forward. To hell with Clarke’s advice she would not let this happen to her brother. She was stopped by Clarke’s arms encircling her once again. Before she could fight her off, she heard the words Clarke was mumbling in her ears, and felt the full body cringe she gave at the sound of the eleventh strike.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, but you can’t. I can’t let you O.”

Octavia cried silently watching her brother take all twenty five lashes she had earned. Later, she held his hands while Clarke cleaned and wrapped his back. And she stroked his hair while she watched Monty and Clarke care for Charlotte and then to her surprise Anthony. When she looked up in question at Clarke she just replied, “They may be monsters but we have to live with them.”
Monty scrubbed his face with warm water before lathering soap across his stubble. He almost missed the days before he'd started growing facial hair, but living in the Ice Nation he’d gained a respect for beards. He kept himself clean shaven when outside of the mountains though. Taking one of his knives, he carefully began to run the blade along his face scraping the hairs off. The cracked mirror he was using wasn’t perfect but it was better than doing this based off his reflection in the water. The rhythmic motion and careful attention it required relaxed him. Far too soon, the last of the soap had been scraped off. Cupping his hands, he rinsed his face off before drying himself.

He pulled on his jacket made from the hide of a giant mutated bear. He’d ended up poisoning the creature which had ruined the meat, but then again that was one of the reasons he’d been given to an assassin for training. The others all had different relationships with their firsts. Raven, for all her bluster and sarcasm, deeply respected her first Gunter. Clarke acknowledged Echo but he wasn’t sure if she was sad the woman had disappeared in these lands or if she was relieved she wouldn’t have to kill her personally. Bellamy just plain hated his, and he had to give him that his was an idiot. And well Charlotte, Charlotte had killed hers. His first however, had been a man without emotion really. Burka had killed their first without a second thought. She had been his second before him. Just business, no feelings, practical, precise, perceptive.

He easily slid his various weapons carefully into their sheaths, after all they all carried poison on them, it wouldn't do for one to slip. His knowledge of plants from farm station had led to an easy familiarity with deadly flora. Knowledge Clarke was never slow to call upon when needed. With practiced fingers, he reached for the dark blue war paint instead of the typical white of their people. Clarke was making a statement at this funeral and part of that would be seen in the paint. Carefully, he dipped his fingers in it before painting the lines from his hairline above his ears to the sides of his eyes. Two lines in dark blue, a pattern that all of them from the sky wore when they meant to make a united front, a pattern Atom would be wearing on his pyre. It was their pattern that they had created for themselves.

Lastly, he picked up his most prized possession. Running his thumb over the curve of the goggles, he smiled at them. Pulling Jasper’s old goggles over his head, he let them hang around his neck where they belonged. Turning, he left his tent ready for the execution. His tent was next to Clarke’s so it was a matter of a few steps to enter and find her and the others already prepared for the trek. He felt a sense of belonging at the matching paint, and home in the familiar features.

He smiled when he saw Brady and the Kana twins wearing their matching war paint as well. It would seem Clarke and Raven had adopted their seconds into the family officially then. Atom would have been pleased to see their numbers increasing for once. Resting his hand on what he thought was the male Kana, he waited for a signal that it was time for them to depart. It didn’t take long before Clarke stood finally, “It’s time.”

With measured steps, they exited out into the noon sun. Solemn faced warriors began to fall into step with them. He noted that Gunter was staying in the camp, most likely to keep it together and
Three years and eight months ago:

Atom picked at the charred remains of what had formerly been a rabbit. They were on their first hunting trip and Clarke had been put in charge of cooking the animal the three of them had managed to catch. He made eye contact with Bellamy from across the fire, his eyes wide and panicked. After all they’d suffered through, who would have thought hurting a pretty girl’s feelings still registered as something to fear?

“Great job on dinner,” He plastered a fake smile on his face while looking at Clarke who was similarly picking at her charred rabbit.

Bellamy noticed Clarke’s frown and quickly interceded, much to Atom’s relief. “It looks great princess.”

She just raised an eyebrow at them. “It’s inedible.”

“Well, ah that’s completely not true!” He tried to comfort her. Sticking a piece in his mouth, he...
chewed the charred carbon as it cracked till he could swallow it. Coughing as it got stuck in his throat, he grabbed a water skin gulping down water trying to clear his airways. After a moment of breathing, he grimaced while trying to smile. “See, best dinner ever.”

Bellamy seemed to agree with Atom’s approach and shoved his into his mouth. Atom silently groaned before joining in. They cleared off their rations as quickly as possible while attempting not to choke or taste the remnants of what was once meat. Watching Clarke, Atom was relieved to see her smiling at them and then laughing hysterically as they finished off their meals.

“Oh god, I can’t believe you two just did that!” She laughed watching them fight over the water skin.

“Just couldn’t get enough of your culinary abilities.” Bellamy snarked, fisting his hand holding it against his throat clearly feeling something stuck in there.

Atom nodded enthusiastically. “Exactly.”

“You two do realize we could have tried to catch something else and cook it properly right?”

The two boys sat in horror. Atom looked at the untouched meat/charcoal on Clarke’s plate. “We’re idiots.”

“Yup.”

Two hours later Atom and Bellamy were both deeply regretting many life decisions as they threw up the charred rabbit. Atom felt a hand rubbing his back in comfort.

“I’m so sorry.” Clarke comforted him.

“How did you even screw up dinner that badly princess?” Bellamy croaked from his position. He’d refused Clarke’s offer for help which Atom had happily agreed to.

“I smelt it cooking and the smell…” She trailed off. “It reminded me of the dungeons and the smell when I was cauterizing wounds.” She grimaced. “By the time my stomach was settled dinner was, well, crispy.”

Atom understood, he still tensed whenever heard a snapping sound, his body preparing for a whip lash to land. “So you’re never cooking again then?” He asked from his hunched position.

“That’s not a question, you are never cooking again princess.” Bellamy groaned before beginning to heave again.

A cool cloth wiped at Atom’s head and he sighed in relief. “Worst camping trip ever.”

Present Day:

Lexa stood still and silent watching Klark stepping forward to the funeral pyre to light it. She was expecting the traditional phrase releasing him from his fight. Instead Klark surprised her, her voice was raspy and clearly pained as she spoke a funeral rite Lexa had never heard before.

“In peace may you leave this shore. In love may you find the next. Safe passage on your travels. Until our final journey to the ground. May we meet again.” With the final words, she lowered the torch.

None of the Azgeda warriors seemed surprised by the strange rite, so Lexa remained still her hands
clasped on the hilt of her sword. As the flames spread, she considered how the general continued to
baffle her. It was clear the warriors who shared her minimalistic war paint were close to the general.
Their connection though was not clear. Two were dressed as assassins, one as a traditional warrior,
another as a pauna hunter, and then there were three seconds attached to the group. The male
assassin and the most traditional of the warriors, were the ones she’d seen in the general’s tent. The
female assassin shared the general’s hair color and seemed to be the youngest of the group, excluding
the seconds. The hunter was Octavia the warrior sent to announce the arrival of their army. Clearly,
they all held some sort of rank within the army but even she could tell they were hardly the most
senior in the ranks. The seconds were unremarkable, although the identical twins standing behind the
warrior with a limp were amusing if nothing else.

She’d never seen someone in a position of power flaunt their connections like this before. Judging
this woman by who she expected her to be was clearly not working and she needed her
unfortunately. This was a prolonged war, with no army to stand against and point ire towards. The
coalition was held together through trade agreements, fear, and the fact that rival clans didn’t actually
have to deal with each other outside of their ambassadors and traders. Shoving over four thousand
warriors, all with various grudges, into a small location was a recipe for disaster. The Ice Nation may
not have allies in the same way her own people did, but they were feared, and they did have closer
relation to several of the clans than the Trikru did.

If Klark supported her the ramifications would be massive. But, she had no idea how to sway this
general who clearly held her nation’s regard. She forced herself to ignore the brands and marks of
Azgeda and really look at her. She was loyal and cared for her warriors, an accomplished healer
which was unusual for Azgeda. For the sake of her army she had been willing to face execution
without a second thought, obviously willing to move mountains for her people. Her victories seemed
less like propaganda the more she discovered about the woman. While the reason Nia had allowed
someone like this to rise in her ranks so far was unclear, it was clear that this general cared, she
empathized. Breathing in, Lexa realized she had an idea to gain a sliver of understanding with her
but it would mean ripping open her own wounds.

“I lost someone special to me too.” She began, forcing herself to focus on the flames consuming the
pyre in front of her to distract herself from the pain. “Her name was Costia.”

Out of the corner of of her eye she noticed the general shift. “You’re Queen had her captured
because she believed she knew my secrets. Because she was mine.” She paused biting the inside of
her cheek slightly before continuing. “She tortured her, killed her, cut off her head.”

Lexa swallowed down the bile in the back of her throat at the memories assaulting her. She wasn’t
expecting Klark to speak.

“I’m sorry.” Her voice was sincere, with none of the mocking or sarcasm that usually accompanied
any statement Klark made to her.

Eyes remaining locked on the flames, she kept going. “I thought I would never get over the pain, but
I did.” Lexa could feel that same pain threatening to overwhelm her again.

“How?” Klark responded hoarsely.

“By recognizing it for what it is,” she turned to make eye contact with Klark for the first time since
she’d started speaking, “weakness.”

Klark sounded surprised as she replied. “What is? Love?”

Lexa nodded looking back to the fire, being dissected by the general’s pained eyes was forcing old
wounds open that she did not want to deal with.

There was confusion in her voice as Klark continued. “So you what? You just stopped caring about everyone?” The general scoffed while turning back to the pyre. “I will never do that.”

“Then you put the people you care about in danger and the pain will never go away.” Lexa felt bitterness welling up that this general could be so naive as to think she could keep loved ones while Lexa could not. It was petty and she forced it down but it was there.

“You’re wrong. Love is strength, without the people that I care about I would have died in Nia’s torture chambers years ago.” Klark replied evenly.

Lexa stiffened, that was not what she would have expected in any way, shape or form. “Why would you have been in her torture chambers?” It slipped out but she couldn’t bring herself to care she was too interested in the answer.

“I was a prisoner before I was a warrior sworn to Nia.” Klark had unmistakable venom in her voice this time when she uttered the queen’s name. “I survived because the people I cared about needed me to.” She turned back towards Lexa. “How long was Costia kept?”

“Don’t you already know the answer to that.” Lexa felt the bitterness in her voice. Costia’s death had been one of the most notorious actions of Azgeda towards the end of the formation of the coalition.

“I don’t actually, though I’m surprised Nia never mentioned it to me.” There was a humorless tone to her voice.

“Five years ago, she was held for a week.” Lexa felt her throat closing, she hadn’t meant for this conversation to last.

Klark nodded before turning back to the fire. “It may not bring you comfort, but the woman in charge of the dungeons died and it was not a good death.” There was a satisfaction in the general’s voice.

Lexa head snapped towards the general, surprise flickering through her. “How.” It was a demand. She needed the answer.

“You are not the only one to have lost loved ones’ to that dungeon. And most were not constrained by obligation.” Klark spoke carefully. “That’s why we have peace isn’t it? You didn’t retaliate.”

Gritting her teeth, she replied. “No, I didn’t.”

Klark nodded but didn’t speak again. Lexa didn’t break the silence between them this time. Her heart ached and her mind was spinning with the new information she had gained and she had no idea if she’d gained any ground with the general. This had been a terrible idea but what was done was done.

“Right minions, heave! Put your backs into it. Nut, I can see Bolt is taking most of the weight.” Raven watched her seconds waddling with the barrel of moonshine from Monty’s tent to the command tent. To this day she still didn’t know how she’d let Bellamy convince her to take the two.

A snort sounded from behind her, spinning she saw Charlotte watching amused at the proceedings.

“Jesus, don’t sneak up on people like that!” She snapped, irked at the stupid assassin for sneaking up
on people all the time.

“I still can’t believe you named the twins Nut and Bolt.” Charlotte remarked, ignoring the reprimand for sneaking.

“They’re parents couldn’t tell them apart and gave them the same name. I was not going to deal with two identical Kana’s for the foreseeable future.” Raven snarked. There was alcoholic and checked out parents and then there was not even bothering to give the kids their own names.

“How do you tell them apart?” She sounded honestly confused.

Raven raised an eyebrow. “The one with slightly longer hair is Nut the girl one. Bolt has slightly shorter hair and is the boy.”

Charlotte laughed for the first time in days. Rolling her eyes, Raven just smirked. “It’s practical, you have to give me that.”

“Only you.” Charlotte snorted.

Raven ruffled Charlotte’s hair, “You were just a wee one not that long ago, don’t get cocky.”

“Do you have a setting other than cocky?” Charlotte asked while batting her hand away.

“Nope.” Raven nudged Charlotte lightly before turning back to her kids. “I see you there, three more feet and you are in the home stretch. I’ll even let you have a shot if you get it in there before I do.”

The two seconds eyes widened, as they practically tripped with the barrel into the tent. Slinging her arm over Charlotte’s shoulders, Raven grinned. “We’re going to get smashed tonight!” It was their custom ever since they’d been freed from the dungeons to take a drink for every member of their group who had passed. It had immediately become a group activity trying to get that many shots down between them. The hangover the next morning was going to be brutal especially since only half the group was there to drink the eighty-eight shots involved, well eighty-nine now.

Charlotte groaned, everything hurt. Her head was pounding, her mouth tasted like sour sandpaper, and everything ached. Squinting her eyes open, she looked around. The light burned her eyes but she pushed through to take in her surroundings. Brady and the twins were passed out in a heap on the floor. Looking to the side, she saw Monty drooling on Ravens hair where they were flopped out on the bed together. Octavia was contorted into a strange shape and was snoring. Frowning she searched for Clarke, only to spot her slumped on one of her stools holding a glass of water to her forehead.

It took some effort and her body protested every minute of it, but she managed to extract and roll herself off the bed. She landed on the ground with grunt. Swearing internally, she hauled herself to her feet, staggered over to Clarke and collapsed on one of the empty stools. She let her head hit the table top before lifting it back up in irritation.

“Why is the table sticky, it’s not supposed to be sticky.” She groaned.

“One of the Kana’s spilled.” Clarke rasped back. “Water?”

“God, yes please.” Charlotte replied reaching out blindly for a glass of water.

She felt a glass being shoved unceremoniously into her hand. Downing it in one go, she refilled it
from the pitcher before working on sipping at her fresh glass. Squinting at Clarke, she frowned. Clarke’s expression was way too thoughtful for the early morning, not that she didn’t also look like she had an awful hangover. “What’s happening?”

Clarke tilted her head before speaking. “Lexa spoke to me at the pyre yesterday. She doesn’t hate Azgeda because of a land feud. She hates us because Nia had her lover tortured and murdered.” There was an exhausted anger in her tone as she spoke.

Charlotte tried to put together what that meant but was too hungover without some more help. “So what does that mean for us?”

“That if we succeed then the coalition will respect Azgeda like any other clan. That this war we’ve been sent to die in is actually an opportunity for protecting our people.” Clarke let her head fall back. “Fuck, does Nia have some imperative to fuck everything up?”

Charlotte instantly began cataloging any hint of anyone within hearing distance and sighed when she came up blank. Although the adrenaline rush had helped some, she still snapped at Clarke. “Watch your tongue.”

“I checked already, we’re clear.” Clarke reassured her gently.

Charlotte buried her head in her hands, trying to work out some of her frustration. A single wrong word could spell death, even after all these years. “So, what do we do?” She asked.

“We start cooperating.” Clarke leveled the best look she could on Charlotte considering the throbbing in her head. Charlotte was relatively impressed. “You are relieved from watch and all other duties inside this camp till further notice. You are to report to Heda Lexa kom Trikru and follow her orders.”

Charlotte bit her lip, this was more Monty’s sort of thing then hers’. And Niles and Burka were both far more experienced than either her or Monty. “Why me? I can’t even sleep without you guys. Why not Niles, he’s the most experienced and social out of us.”

“Because, those are the orders you are going to give to Lexa when you report to her. But they aren’t your objectives.” Clarke kept their eyes locked, her tone completely serious. “I need you to demonstrate our willingness to cooperate. This is a war that may very well be won by assassins where warriors and armies have failed before. You are to put your life ahead of any orders she gives you and do nothing that compromises Azgeda.” Clarke was firm when she emphasized the name of their clan. “Learn what you can about the other clans while you’re in her camp. I need to know everything that could help secure our people’s safety. There is clearly important information we won’t learn inside of our own nation.”

She felt Clarke’s hand grasp hers’ and squeeze tightly. “You are to return to my tent for sleep whenever possible. But Charlotte, I trust you. If we want Heda’s trust you’re the best I have for that.”

“Why?” Charlotte insisted. She was bad at interacting with anyone outside of their group. It didn’t come easy to her and the tension set warriors nerves on end. Monty was the one who could act relaxed and get people’s guards down.

“Because at the time Lexa’s lover was taken Danialla was in charge of the dungeons. You will be safest with her out of all of us. After all, you killed your first. I doubt Lexa will let the person who killed her lover’s torturer be murdered if she can help it.” Clarke handed her glass of water over to her. “Drink up, you want the hangover as gone as possible before you head over.”
If Lexa hadn’t of been trained to keep her composure, she would have gaped like her guards and Gustus were doing currently. Standing in front of her was an Azgeda assassin waiting for her to say something. An Azgeda assassin that had just informed her and those in her tent she had been lent to her for the foreseeable future. Azgeda was famous for their assassins for a reason, even with the coalition she had never imagined that she would have one literally at her disposal.

However, here she sat staring at the impossible. It was not the outcome she was expecting from her brief conversation with Klark the day before. It wasn’t even on the list of improbable outcomes. This just didn’t happen. An Azgeda assassin had never reported to anyone outside of their clan ever. The whole thing reeked of a trap of some sort. There was no way that this woman didn’t have separate orders for inside her camp. Still, she couldn’t decline a gift like this without reason. Sadly, an assassin being lent to you by a historic enemy that had the day before seemed cool with your death wasn’t reasonable cause for declining a gift. She cleared her throat, wondering what on earth she was supposed to say to this. “Welcome then.” It would have to do for now. And she’d be sleeping with several extra daggers for the foreseeable future.

Three years eight months ago:

Charlotte wrapped her wrists and fists with ripped linen as Clarke had instructed to prevent further injury. It took a while before she began her daily trip back down into the hell hole that was the dungeons. Her first, Daniella, was sharpening her knives when she walked into the dark and pungent room.

“Ah just in time.” Danielle said cheerfully. “Wash out my flogger before we get started.”

Charlotte nodded silently before heading back up and into daylight. Moving with purpose but with her head down avoiding eye contact with anyone, she headed to the well. It didn’t take long to fill a bucket with freezing water and soon she was heading back down into the dim dungeon. The water sloshed and her legs were wet, the water feeling like knives hitting her skin. Setting down the bucket, she picked up the flogger. It was soaked in blood, pieces of flesh caught in the leather strips. Swallowing her revulsion at her task, she began to clean the tool.

It was a mindless task, so when she heard footsteps heading into the room she glanced up quickly to make sure her first wasn’t paying attention to her before checking the doorway. Tarba a tall and intimidating man entered, followed by Murphy who was sporting a new black eye. The warrior began to speak to Daniella.

“Our fair lady of pain,” His smile was sickening Charlotte thought. “I have a gift for you.”

“Oh you shouldn’t have.” She smiled excitedly, though her eyes seemed to sharpen. Charlotte felt horror spreading down her spine, nothing about this could be good. She prayed whoever the newest victim was it wasn’t one of them.

“My new second here overheard something you’ll enjoy.” He clapped Murphy on the shoulder. Charlotte noted how he cringed at the contact. “Ignatius has been in contact with those bothersome villagers in the Ebec territory. Of course, he’s willing to testify that the grunt said some unsavory things about our Queen.” Tarba wrapped his hand around his hilt. “My second will be happy to help you acquire Ignatius.”

“I'd love to get the latest rumors on those peasants. I can feel they are up to something in my bones.”
She giggled. “Second! Go and fetch my thumb biters!”
Octavia moaned as she felt Lincoln's mouth on her neck. She didn’t care that Bellamy would have a fit that she was allowing a Trikru warrior to court her. He was kind and soft spoken. His face wasn’t covered in brands that reminded her of the compromises she’d been forced to make. Most of all, she liked him, she really liked him. This had been supposed to be a hot fling but he had put a flower in her hair and showed her his drawings and she couldn’t help growing to like him. Gripping him, she pulled his mouth back up so that she could kiss him back properly. It was warm and comforting and hot, really really hot. She was just forming a plan for moving them out from behind this lovely tree and into a less likely to be tripped over position, when she heard a branch crack.

She had her sword to the intruder’s throat within seconds, the only thing saving the intruder from serious injury was the grip Lincoln had on her arm. She looked at Lincoln in question.

“It’s my second, Aden.” His voice was firm and comforting. “It’s alright.”

The tension slowly eased and she released the grip she had on the boy. With sharp movements she sheathed her sword, jittery from the adrenaline that was still in her system. This could be incredibly bad if people knew about it. She looked over her shoulder at her new lover, “My people cannot know about us.”

She saw the understanding in Lincoln’s eyes as he released her and pulled Aden a few steps away from her. Despite the distance she could still hear the entire conversation.

“Aden why are you here, you are assigned to guard detail for Heda at this hour.” Lincoln sounded concerned.

“The boy shifted. “Heda relieved me of guard duty today. Lincoln what is going on here?”

“Do you know why you’ve been relieved of guard duty?” Lincoln ignored the question.

“Heda didn’t say, but there was an Ice Nation assassin in the tent, why are you with an Azgeda warrior in the woods? What’s happening?” He sounded distressed at the happenings around him.

Octavia saw Lincoln look over at her, she understood his request. Reluctantly she walked over to the two.

“Aden, this is Octavia kom Azgeda. Octavia this is my second Aden kom Trikru.” He introduced them. Aden’s brow was scrunched in confusion as he examined her with evaluating eyes. “You can’t
tell anyone about this.”

“Why?” Aden’s voice was sharp and clearly suspicious.

Octavia spoke, seeing the position she had put Lincoln in. “Because there are members of Azgeda that would kill Lincoln if they knew.” She shivered thinking of Flora, the Queens stooge that flitted about sticking her nose where it didn’t belong. Or Tarba the sadistic loyalist.

“If they knew what?” Aden seemed to be piecing a puzzle together in his mind.

“That I have begun courting her and she has allowed me to do so.” Lincoln said calmly. “Can I trust you?”

Aden nodded slowly. “As long as no danger to Heda or the coalition comes of it I won’t betray your confidence.” His voice was measured and thoughtful.

Lincoln breathed a sigh of relief obviously convinced that any danger had passed. Octavia decided to trust his judgement in the matter. Although, she would need to tell Clarke and the others soon so they could make sure that nothing happened. She’d need their support if this became as serious as she felt it had the potential to become. Noticing the height of the sun in the sky she rolled her shoulders. “I should go, I have next watch and we chance discovery the longer I’m here.”

She felt Lincoln’s arms wrap around her waist, pulling her in for a far from chaste kiss. Holding him tightly to her, she breathed him in before pulling away, and with a final glance, left for camp. She hated to leave but it had to be done, his second finding out was bad enough. It would be disastrous if others found out. Also, she intended to ask Clarke why one of their assassins was in the commander’s tent. That couldn’t be right.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years and seven months ago:

Harper could hear her teeth chattering as she sat crouched in a tree waiting for a signal from one of the others stuck up in their own trees. They were practicing pauna hunting formations and they’d been in their blasted positions for over an hour already. She supposed it was one way to learn though.

A whistle sounded to her right. Listening carefully, she heard the three high pitched whistles followed by silence. Bear sighted, that was unexpected. That wasn’t the training exercise, so it most likely was an actual bear. Flexing her muscles, she prepared for an actual fight. To her right, she heard a different whistle announce information. ‘Bear, headed west.’

Several trees over, where she knew Clarke was, she heard a whistle informing them all to prepare for attack. That was interesting, technically they should have done nothing without an order from one of their firsts. She understood it though, if their firsts had gone and left them to sit silently for a while the opportunity could pass them by. Clarke was willing to risk the ire of her first for the prize and the chance to show initiative.

She could see the massive white animal lumbering forward, it had clearly heard the whistles and was curious about them. Gently, she pulled her bow back aiming for the eye. She gave a sharp whistle letting the others know she had a shot.

The reply came a second later with a command of take it. She loosed the arrow, watching it sink into the shoulder of the bear instead of the eye. Yanking another arrow out of her quiver and loading it on to her bow she cursed. She wasn’t the most reliable shot. She saw movement as Clarke dropped out
of her tree, two long daggers digging into the bear between its shoulder blades and she hung onto the animal as it reared, roaring in pain. Which was awful because she would have expected a dying bear not a pissed off bear.

“Fuck,” She drew back and tried to aim for the head again before loosing an arrow. It missed completely, though she was fairly sure it had nicked Clarke during its flight. As she aimed her bow for the third time, she saw Atom and Dax darting out with spears on either side of the great animal stabbing them into its flanks. Dax’s spear was shattered by the bear’s arm swinging for him. He dove backwards, avoiding the lethal claws.

Atom braced himself, his feet sliding as he tried to wedge his spear in deeper, hoping it hit something. Clarke yelled from her precarious position on the animal’s back. “Keaton! Distract it!”

The wild maned boy from one of the northern villages that had been training with them lately, crashed out of his hiding spot with a sword drawn, yelling trying to get the bear’s attention off of Dax. “Come on you big brute! Over here!” He chucked his whole sword into the animal. It impressively hit blade first, sinking into the animal's side.

A great roar that shook them all echoed round the clearing as the animal lunged towards Keaton, who dodged behind a tree that shook when the bear hit it at full force. Atom dived out of the way in time to prevent himself from being squished but he cried out clearly having taken a hit from the claws. Harper loosed another arrow this one sticking in the side of its neck.

Clarke, who had been hanging on for dear life for all of this time, grabbed the shaft of the arrow above her head and heaved herself up. Unsheathing a third dagger, this one with a serrated edge, she plunged it into the eye socket of the bear.

The animal reared back up and swayed for a second before crashing down onto the now blood splattered snow. Harper drew her arm back with another arrow, just in case. She watched Clarke pry her blood soaked knife out of its eye. Dax started laughing from where he lay in a snow drift. Keaton whooped in victory as he came out from behind the tree he’d used as cover. Harper grinned and let her bow go slack and dropped down to join the others. Atom was standing slightly pale faced and grinning all the same.

Clarke was glaring at the dead animal. “I hate polar bears.”

Present day:

Gustus stood at attention behind Lexa’s shoulder watching the mad house that was twelve generals each from a different clan try to make plans. Haar, the general representing Luna and the Floukru, was staring unflinchingly at the argument going on between Miciah of the Lake People and Palleas of the Glowing forest. Others were being pulled in. Gustus was surprised that Klark was the only general besides Haar not being pulled into the debate over lavatories. It was an absolute disaster. He breathed a silent sigh of relief when he heard Lexa bring it to an end.

“Enough!” The generals turned to face her.

Bassilo growled out at her, “Do you think the health of our warriors is beneath your notice?”

Indra interceded on Lexa’s behalf. “We have been at this for hours and yet here we still stand not having made any decisions.”

“We cannot keep this size of a force in a single camp much longer, the land will be destroyed!”
Miciah put in.

Before the fight could get going again properly Klark spoke, her voice surprising all of them. “We came to destroy the mountain.” She turned to Lexa, Gustus found himself narrowing his eyes. “Heda, how would you use your army? We’re here and for all that we can squabble amongst ourselves it is your decision. So, what is your decision?”

The room was utterly silent, if it had been Haar, Griffca, or Pelleas, her statement wouldn’t have been out of character, after all they were all generals of clans closely allied with the Trikru. Coming from Klark however, it gave Lexa an uncontested moment to put forward a strategy. It cut through hours of dispute. Gustus wondered if Lexa would take this opening, he wasn’t surprised when she did. Whatever the ice general’s game was it could be dealt with later.

“The mountain steals our people. We don’t know why or how important it is to them. So, let’s take away their ability to leave their mountain, to take our people. We lay siege to the mountain. If we do not let them cross their fog enforced boundaries they will lose much of their power over us. With our army spread over that much land we can prevent them from reaching our villages. Reapers and mountain men who venture across our line we kill. Let’s see what they’re response is to being unable to strike terror into our people.”

Ephraim from the Plain’s, a strong ally of Azgeda, stepped forward so that he was next to Klark. He looked at her and they seemed to have a silent conversation before Klark spoke to the room. “Azgeda will endorse this strategy.”

Both the remnants of the clans allied with Azgeda before the coalition and those allied with the Trikru before the coalition began to also voice their support. Gustus knew that this was the plan Lexa had intended from the beginning, but that she had been expecting it to take days if not weeks for the generals to come round. He heard Bassilo make a loud noise of dissent.

The oaf of a man opened his mouth and Gustus’ hand clenched on his sword’s hilt desperately wishing to cut his poisonous tongue out before he could speak. Sadly, he couldn’t do as he wished. “This plan is madness. You want us sitting on our hands for months not making any progress?”

“Do you have a way to attack without losing our men to the fog? Or even if we get through the fog do you know how to get into the mountain?” Klark challenged him, interceding once more for Heda.

Bassilo turned on Klark, clearly seeing a safer person to attack. “Oh, did Nia’s pet monster find herself a new master?”

Caineghis, the largest general in the tent and the leader of the Sankru forces, spoke then. “You are nothing without your clever traps and your queen’s favor to hide behind. Now you would have us picked off one by one by the mountain. You are a coward hiding behind those with more power than you.”

Gustus felt his knuckles whitening against his hilt, this was moments from turning violent. He understood why Lexa wasn’t putting a stop to it though. Klark’s behavior since her brother had been killed had been dangerous and unpredictable, this could be a chance to further figure her out. Still, this blatant of an insult could not be allowed to stand.

He watched as Klark took a step forward so that she was staring up into the eyes of the red maned giant of a man before her. Her face was hard and deadly serious. When she spoke, it was in a quiet, low, and clear voice that unnerved him. “You’re right that I am a monster. I have slaughtered my enemies without mercy, burnt villages to the ground, I have ordered hundreds of deaths.”
She unsheathed one of her many daggers while keeping eye contact. “I stand behind Heda not because I am a coward but because I will be leaving this cursed land victorious or dead.” Her voice was hard and Gustus wanted to drag Lexa behind him while she held that dagger.

Klark slammed the dagger, blade first, into the table leaving it quivering where it stood. “If you think me so weak challenge me, but you should remember who it was who slaughtered the nomads in ‘your’ territory that you were ‘unable’ to defeat, down to the last man.”

Silence descended on the room as no one stepped to take her dagger and accept her challenge. Klark nodded after a few silence filled moments. “That’s what I thought.” Reaching her hand back out, she violently yanked the dagger out of the table before sheathing it again.

Bassilo spoke again. “This war is folly.”

Lexa finally stepped in much to Gustus’ relief. “Your clans agreed to become part of this coalition because the mountain is a threat to us all. None of you will be returning to your clans to tell them that you were too afraid to fight their enemy. If any of you try, I will save them the task and remove the dishonor myself.”

Raven packed the last of her radio equipment before taking a second look around her tent. Nodding in satisfaction she walked out of the tent to where her seconds were waiting with her horse and a horse for them to share. Monty was already mounted on his.

“What took so long Reyes?” He called, while smiling from his perch on top of his animal.

Raven raised her middle finger before throwing her saddlebags over the horn of the saddle. “Unless you want to be digging up old cars for me to cannibalize for parts shut it, genius takes time and tools.”

Nut climbed on the third horse, before helping her brother up. “This is so exciting! We get our very own secret mission.” She was literally bouncing in the saddle.

Monty just laughed at the excited kids. Raven rolled her eyes and heaved herself up into the saddle. She checked all the straps on her leg to make sure it was secure before clucking at her horse for it start moving. As they moved, she looked over at her seconds and sighed. “Not a secret mission minions, we just need to find better reception.”

“Do you think we should aim for high ground or distance?” Monty asked.

Raven considered it as they rode away from the mountain. “Let’s try high ground first, then head for distance. We need to get a message to Bellamy soon or he’ll do something stupid.”

Monty nodded. “He’ll sit tight till he hears news.”

“Octavia,” Raven pointed out.

“He knows we’ll take care of her.” Monty defended.

“Like we did with Atom?” Raven snapped. She closed her eyes briefly before reaching out and grasping Monty’s shoulder. “I’m sorry.”

“I know.” Monty placed a hand over hers’ on his shoulder before pulling back. Relaxing into the easy motion of the horse below him.
“So,” she started. “you think any of the others will have a theory on why our radio isn’t working down here?”

“We’re the tech masters.” Monty grinned.

“So very true!” Raven frowned. “I still don’t understand what’s blocking our signal. It should be working. The scouts didn’t find any radio towers that could be interfering with it.”

Monty paused, “If I didn’t know better I’d say one of the clans was jamming us but there is no way they’re technologically advanced enough.”

Raven turned to her seconds who were eagerly listening in. “So, minions, if you want to boost a radio signal what do you do?”

“Amplifier!” They both chirped together.

“Good, while we ride why don’t you start reciting the parts of a four-cylinder engine.”

There were groans of annoyance from the kids as they realized that the ride was going to be educational.

Raven grinned, enjoying the pain her seconds were in. They were truly adorable sometimes. “And when we camp for the night I’ll even let you try and make your own amplifier!”

Penn kom Trikru was new to the honor of being a guard for Heda. He followed his charge and leader as she walked into the forest. As they moved he saw the Azgeda general, he noted that Heda didn’t seem concerned so he remained relaxed as they approached the blond woman. He was a few steps behind Heda when they came to a stop near the general.

He noticed the quirked eyebrow of the legend in front of him. “Heda, I see you also wanted space after that meeting.”

Heda was watching the general carefully and he wished he didn’t know he was completely out classed and unlikely to be much help against an opponent such as the general. “I do not understand you Klark kom Azgeda, you gift me an assassin, and now you back me with the other generals. Yet, two days ago you were willing to die rather than trust me to administer justice. Why the change of heart?”

“Do you need to know why? Can’t you just be happy that I am supporting you as you wished?” The general replied.

Heda lifted her chin slightly, “You expect me to give you the trust you yourself are unwilling to extend.”

Penn was unsure of what exactly they were talking about and it wasn’t his place to understand anyway, though he did find it interesting. He was a curious and competitive man by nature and the conversation between these two legends was sure to be compelling. His duties as guard came back to the forefront when he and both of the others heard a great roar and the echoing crash of a tree hitting the ground.

Heda breathed in, “Pauna.”

His heart was beating in his chest. This was not a foe he could protect Heda from. He was startled
out of his fear by the general shouting at them “RUN!”

With that, the three of them took off away from the animal and also unfortunately away from the army. His legs were burning as they leapt over logs and ducked below low hanging branches. He remembered suddenly that Klark was a famous pauna hunter. “Can’t you kill it?!” He called to her as they practically flew over the ground.

Klark glared at him, “First rule of hunting Pauna never attack without a fully prepared team! We don’t even know what species of Pauna it is.”

“We need to hide.” Lexa ordered.

Klark peeled away from them suddenly, “This way over here! I found something.”

Penn grabbed the metal grate with the two woman and hauled it back before following unquestioningly into the dark hole. As they came out on the other end, he felt horror at the smell of rotting flesh and the flies buzzing over the rotting remains of the monster’s meals.

“Its’ feeding ground.” Klark looked at Lexa who was also clearly not expecting that.

“Come on,” Heda called and soon the three of them were making their way up the rocks.

“We need to get as high as possible.” Klark ordered.

Penn stopped on the level below the top refusing to step out of the area between Lexa and danger. Through the fear and the feel of his heart roaring through his veins, he wondered when she became Lexa to him in his head and not just Heda. He heard Lexa drawing her sword, with a quick check out of the side of his eye he saw Klark standing, her bow drawn.

Breathing hard out of his mouth, he tried to think of something he could do but there was a reason his people didn’t hunt the monsters in their territory like the Ice Nation did. Instead they ran when encountering the beasts. The crashing of trees echoed down his bones. He saw them breaking and falling and then a giant beast came sailing over the wall. The last thing he saw was black fur and teeth.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years seven months ago:

Clarke moaned at the taste of the cooked bear. It was probably the best thing she had ever eaten. It was juicy and hot and whatever those spices Keaton had pulled out were amazing. The rest of the group were echoing her noises of delight.

“Clarke, I love you but Keaton is in charge of cooking from now on for infinity.” Atom groaned as he licked his fingers appreciatively.

“I don’t even care if we get in trouble for leaving our posts.” Harper sighed happily from her place around the fire they’d made at their camp site.

“No offense taken, and don’t worry I ordered the kill if there is a punishment it’s mine.” Clarke smiled, enjoying seeing her people happy for once. She didn’t care what the cost was this made it all worth it.

Dax grunted from the side where he was hacking a new piece of meat off the spit with one of his knives. “You don’t have to always save us princess.”
Clarke rolled her eyes before going back to watching the laughter as the group sat around the fire. Then, she had an idea, a really horrible idea. “Guys it’s been over eight hours since our firsts left us here. What if this is a test?”

Harper scrunched up her face. “Like how long till we break orders?”

Keaton slapped his face with an open palm. “No, we’re all in training to be hunters. The woods are our home.”

“That’s what I thought.” Clarke picked up a stick and started to poke the ground while she thought. “I say we build a shelter for ourselves, the temperature is only going to continue to drop when the sun goes down. Tomorrow, if our firsts still haven’t come to take us back, I say we try and bring in and smoke as much meat as we possibly can.”

“We barely survived killing the bear.” Atom pointed out. “Hell, I could use some more sympathy over here, ten stitches.”

Harper patted him on the back. “I barely hit the bear, we don’t have the skills.”

“But, we have our brains and we have to start somewhere. So, let’s list out what we did wrong that we can improve on.” Clarke insisted. If this was a test they needed to pass with flying colors.

“I should have used a spear and not a sword.” Keaton said morosely.


“Maybe lead the bear into a trap? Dax and I couldn’t keep it pinned down at all.” Atom pointed out.

“What about a pit trap?” Dax suggested.

“Grounds frozen how would we dig it?” Harper asked.

“More spears that you throw before moving in close might help though.” Clarke suggested.

“My dad’s spears have guards on them so the animal can’t keep coming for you after you spear it.” Keaton put in.

“Nets!” Harper exclaimed, “If we limit mobility we can take pot shots and no offense Clarke, as badass as dropping on top of the bear was, I almost hit you.”

“None taken, I can join you with the bow, we hit vitals and our prey should drop. The net would keep it relatively stationary for hitting.” She considered it, it would help immensely.

It took an hour but soon they had exhausted their ideas for new hunting strategies. Clarke nodded, grinning widely as they concluded their brainstorming. “Ok let’s build a lean-to we can sleep in tonight. Then tomorrow we start making more spears and a smoke house. Dax you ok with first watch?”

“Of course.” He patted his stomach, “It feels so good to be full.”

There were noises of agreement from around the fire. With a groan, Clarke heaved herself up and offered her hand to Harper. Time to get to work, they’d need shelter once the sun set soon. They’d survived another day. They were getting stronger. Her fractured bones may still ache as they healed but there was the beginning of hope and she wasn’t going to let go of it. The first step to that was getting better at hunting and proving that she and her people could be useful. The rest would follow.
Stomping her feet, she headed out into the three feet of snow to find a tree to climb and hack branches off of so they could make a shelter. Shelter, sleep, spears, practice.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

So it ended up working out and as requested we have a Nia point of view section here. Hope you guys like that chapter and thanks for all the comments.

Side story we were spelling gorilla wrong in our draft, apparently in an Italian fashion. So we've been joking about how he is the king pin of the forest. The dead bodies in his nest are warnings to the forest animals not to cross him. Great joy has been taken this afternoon with it.

Clarke could feel her blood bubbling through her veins as she drew the string of her bow back. The incredible pressure of the string causing her thumb ring made of bone to press into her, as she held it steady. Her back muscles pulled into a familiar taunt position. Breathing rhythmically, she aimed as the giant beast flung itself over the wall and into its nest. A part of her mind categorized it as a gorilla type pauna. The larger part of her mind was busy listing its attributes and quickly coming to the realization she was screwed. Seconds before Lexa’s guard was crushed, she had decided he was of no use except as a distraction. That left Lexa, who was clearly a close range fighter, and herself. While she had enough daggers and her bow to take down most predators, a pauna was a whole different ball game.

Attempting to kill it would be suicide, that meant she would have to distract it and run. She catalogued all of this in the time it took for the animal to clear the wall, grab Lexa’s guard, and beat him into the ground. When the dead body of the guard crumpled against the side of the enclosure, she released her arrow into the beast’s front paw causing it to pull back to roar in challenge. Using the opportunity, she struck one of Raven’s arrows against a rock causing a fire to light on its’ tip before taking aim and firing it straight into the animal’s eye.

She knew it wouldn’t keep the animal distracted for more than a few precious moments. Grabbing Lexa’s arm, she yelled “RUN!” She didn’t even bother to glance at the animal, who was screaming its pain at them, before she leapt over the railing and to the concrete below. Landing easily, she turned and started towards the narrowing at the lower section, hoping for cover. A cry of pain from behind her forced her to turn and notice that while she may have practice falling out of trees and continuing with combat, the commander clearly did not.

Sliding next to the woman, she grabbed her uninjured arm and started to half drag, half guide the commander towards where she thought there might be cover or at least a defensible position. The ground shook as the mighty beast crashed into the ground behind them, making Clarke’s teeth click together. Diving forward, she made it through the small gate and turned to help pull Lexa through only for her to be ripped out of her grasp by the pauna yanking Lexa back by her leg.

Lexa’s face already drawn with pain, contorted as she grasped the support of the grate they’d been attempting to go through. “Leave me!” She cried at her.

Clarke snapped at her, “No way!” She was not losing someone when she could save them. There was no way she’d be able to get her bow off her back in time to reload and fire it. She didn’t even consider it, just automatically reaching for the closest knife to her dominant hand and throwing it with all of her strength into the paw holding Lexa’s leg. Fortunately, it was the same paw she’d
already lodged an arrow into. It reared back in pain as its’ blood leaked from the wound. Grasping
Lexa firmly, she hauled her through the opening and kicked out the support letting the metal plate
drop blocking that route.

Lexa was clearly in a great deal of pain from the fall and being treated like the rope in a game of tug
of war by the pauna. Supporting most of her weight, Clarke hauled them towards a metal door.
Kicking it open, she got Lexa to a seat before grabbing Lexa’s sword and using it to bar the door.
Stepping back, she heard the animal beating at the closed grate, clearly furious that they’d gotten
away from it. Breathing hard, she felt some relief that at least for now they were safe.

Three years six months ago:

Nia stared at the kneeling seconds before her and considered the report she’d just received. It would
seem her advisors had been correct when they told her that the sky invaders held promise. Tapping
her fingers against the throne’s arm, she carefully pondered what to do next. Leaving them kneeling
would force them to fear her decision longer. The proper amount of respect and fear had to be
maintained.

It was traditional for seconds to be left in the woods on their own without warning. The length of
time differed from first to first. That these five had been left together had necessitated for a longer
than usual trial, staying a month on their own in the frigid forests. It was the first real test of these
four invaders. The Azgeda second grouped with them was a surprise but firsts decided on the
training for their seconds. Tilting her head, she tallied up their results.

They’d brought back the hide and meat of three bears, six deer, and an elk. For this late in winter it
was a massive boon to her capital and was an impressive haul for seconds just months into their
training, advanced age or not. She wondered if the other sky fallen would prove equally impressive,
she doubted it. Finally, she came to a decision. She needed pauna hunters, the great beasts came from
the north and were constantly invading her territory. Still, they’d need experience before she could
throw them at the beasts.

She focused on Echo, her favorite of the firsts in charge of the seconds assembled before her. “Your
seconds have performed...admirably. Take your charges to the northern outpost in Toba. There have
been reports of bandits terrorizing the villages there. Take care of the problem. Blood your seconds
properly and return.” She waved her hand in dismissal.

The warriors bowed low before departing, their seconds behind them. She beckoned for one of her
guards to approach. “Bring Gunter.” The warrior bowed and left on his task. She smiled, she
intended to see how her other little sky fallen were turning out. If even one of them turned into a
valuable resource, the time training them would have been more useful than she would have
predicted. Perhaps her advisors were not always idiots.

Present day:

It had gone quiet not long ago and Lexa had been forced to allow Klark to tend to her injuries. She
had her head tilted while Klark was tying her sling so that her arm didn’t dislocate again and to help
ease the pain. The situation was grim. They were both going to die and because of who they were it
would probably lead to the coalition fragmenting within hours of their deaths. She was too
exhausted, pained, and resigned to her fate to properly be angry with Klark. “You should have left
me to die. Now two will die here instead of one.”
She felt Klark’s hands leave her shoulder as the general walked away leaving her back facing her before speaking. “I’ve always hated that about your culture. When someone saves your life, my people say thank you.” Her voice was bitter.

Lexa frowned, “Your people? That is the way of Azgeda as well.” She watched as the general turned and seemed to become smaller slightly, or maybe it was just her shoulders dropping as she leaned against the bared wall behind her.

“I was not born in Azgeda.” She said simply.

“You’re Nia’s heir, don’t lie to me.” Lexa tensed, disbelief coursing through her.

Klark rolled her eyes, it was such an odd action that she considered the woman’s words for a moment.

“I earned my place but there is a reason Bassilo calls me Nia’s pet monster. I’ve done unspeakable things to prove the allegiance of myself and my people.”

Lexa couldn’t help but accept the general was telling the truth. It made several inconsistencies in her behavior make a lot more sense. Still, she needed more. “Why would Nia accept you, no matter what you’ve done for her?” Seeing the hesitation, she added, “We are most likely not going to survive this day.”

The general paused, seeming to consider her words. “My people were dying so our leaders sent 100 criminals into Azgeda in the hopes we’d be able to send back word that it was safe.”

Lexa’s mind was racing, “Your warriors who wear the same paint as you, they were all a part of this group of criminals?”

Klark nodded and she scoffed humorlessly. “Yes, most of us never committed a crime worthy of death but we were all sent anyways. Atom, he got in a fight and accidentally struck a guard who broke it up. Monty ate a plant similar to your gobi nuts. Charlotte, well, when the guards came to take her dead parents belongings, she fought to keep a memento of some sort and injured a guard in the struggle. We didn’t have enough food, or water, or anything, so every crime was punished by death unless you were still a child.”

Lexa understood the ruthlessness Klark was describing but she was still appalled by it. Curious, she prodded Klark, who seemed to have fallen silent, consumed by memories. “What crime did you commit?”

Klark met her eyes and didn’t even flinch as she replied. “Treason.” Shaking her head, she continued, ignoring the widening of Lexa’s eyes. “My father was a specialized laborer. He found a problem that would lead to our people’s death within months. They were going to execute hundreds of innocent people over time rather than risk a panic by telling the people that there was a problem and asking for their help. My father and I tried to warn the people but my mother betrayed us. My father was floated and I was sent with the others to see if the territory of Azgeda was empty and survivable.”

Lexa knew that nothing good could have come of what she was hearing. The drawn and pained expression on Klark’s face was sign enough without her knowledge of Nia.

“We had never seen anything as amazing as those woods. None of us had any combat training, nor weapons, our people had long believed that we’d die if we left our home so they saw no reason to train us in war or to prepare us for battle. Warriors came through the camp that night and captured us
all. We were brought to Nia and she sent us to her dungeons. By the time three months had gone by there were only twenty of us left and we knew that the rest of our people back home were dead. An entire civilization and twenty bloody children were all that was left.” Klark let out her hollow laugh again and stared up at the ceiling.

“I was in training to be a healer before I was arrested. I was able to keep some of us alive during those months. But, we wouldn’t have lasted much longer, between the cold and infection.” She shrugged. “Nia gave us a choice, kneel and swear fealty or die. I had to keep the people I had left alive so I knelt and they followed.”

Lexa let the conversation die while they stayed still, the silence a sign the pauna had yet to find them again. Thinking about the story, it explained why her spies had never been able to tell her where this general came from. It also explained the clear affection between specific warriors and why the general was so different from anything she would have ever expected. However, it confused her as well. “If you were once an invader how have you survived so long and risen so far?”

“By the skin of my teeth. Nia thought of us as disposable bodies to throw at problems and those of us that survived moved up the ranks quickly. It was the only way to survive. She knows we’ll do stupid suicidal missions because she never lets more than half of us be in one place at a time and that threat is enough to keep us in line.” She moved so that she was sitting next to her. “In a way you’re right, because I have people I love, Nia has turned me into her own personal monster. Without them though, there would be no point to any of it.”

“Why have you been backing me?” Lexa stared at the scarred face of the woman next to her, clearly weighed down by a burden similar to hers. She hoped that she would answer now that she had already shared so much.

“Because I thought you were like Nia, but you’re not.” Klark twisted slightly so their eyes could meet again. “I may not have been born of Azgeda, but I have bled, cried, and lost loved ones for Azgeda. I have met the people and I have sworn to protect them. They have become my people. You oppose Nia not Azgeda. For that I will support you.”

Lexa didn’t know how to respond to that. She was almost relieved by the sudden roar and pounding as the pauna finally found them. Spinning, they both leapt to their feet facing the door. She gripped her dagger when she realized Klark intended to fight to the bitter end. They both were balanced on the balls of their feet. The growling roars were followed by the scream of bending metal as it rammed the door trying to break in so it could kill them. Then, Klark let her bow’s string go slack as her eyes widened, “We let it in.”

She watched as Klark darted over to the door and she quickly followed when she realized the woman had a plan. Klark grabbed the hilt of the sword. “NOW!” Klark yelled as she freed Lexa’s sword which was all that was keeping the door shut.

The door slammed open as the great beast came flying across the room. Klark was out the door in an instant, her hand once again grabbing onto Lexa and pulling her to safety. Spinning, the warrior shut the door. Neither of them had time to react to their surprising escape before the door groaned under protest as the animal threw itself at the door of its new cage.

Speaking through her heavy breathing from the fear and adrenaline in her system, she managed to get out “Let’s go.”

Klark just nodded before helping her as they moved to get out of this cursed place. It burned for Lexa to allow a general from an enemy nation to see her injured, not only that but to let her help her, repeatedly. However, loath as she was to admit it to herself, she respected this general and she
understood her to some extent. The woman wearing brands and clothing she had never associated with anything honorable had earned her admiration. She was clearly loyal, and cared deeply, willing to do anything for her people. How could she not admire the strength in that? That she would knowingly open herself up to so much pain because her people needed her to care was amazing. Lexa had faced her conclave and the loss of her lover. This general had lost her entire people, many of them clearly in front of her. She’d endured torture for her people, and yet here she still stood, continuing to make bonds that could be used against her. Lexa looked up at Klark kom Azgeda as she stood on a ledge above her reaching her hand out to assist her and she realized that she found Klark extraordinary.

Indra was nervous as she observed the map where Haar kom Floukru was moving flags representing the various clans’ armies. They had been working on a suggested plan for a siege to present to Lexa. The plan of the distribution of their forces was actually quite impressive as far as she was concerned and would be effective if put into action. However, most of her attention was taken up with the Ice Nation assassin, who was clearly bored at her station as a guard for the room. She was unsettled by the girl’s presence but understood that till the ice general’s intentions were better understood, using the assassin as anything other than a guard would be foolish.

The problem was that she and the assassin were both getting twitchy and for the same reason. Lexa had followed Klark into the woods, intending to speak to her. Neither of the two had returned and it had been over an hour now. Hundreds of scenarios of things that could have gone wrong were plaguing her mind. She could do nothing about it because if the assassin realized that not only had her general disappeared into the woods and not returned but that the commander had followed her out there, well, there would be trouble. She did not know exactly what the girl would do but she had feeling a lot of her warriors would die.

Her worry’s and fears were interrupted by Ephraim of the plains striding into the tent like he owned it.

“I assume you two are plotting the siege then?” He asked while coming to the table, his eyes flickering across the map.

Indra had always been irked by the dyed green and blues and crafted metal the plain riders were famous for wearing as their armor. This arrogant man was exactly the problem with that clan. Always ready to ride away making allies with the strongest in exchange for their wealth. She remained silent, waiting to see what he would make of the plans. He may be arrogant but he was a general and his input could be of assistance.

Haar seemed to be following her train of thoughts, his single eye leveling on Ephraim. “Do you have any additions to make?”

“You shouldn’t place the Azgeda forces on the other side of the mountain.” He grinned. “People would think you don’t trust your allies, and we need Klark beside Heda if we want to win.”

“You place a lot of faith in a general from a different clan.” Indra asked watching him.

He gave an easy smile. “I escorted a herd of horses sent to Azgeda a few years back. I saw Clarke put down the revolt in Ebec. If there was ever a person I don’t want to stand against, it is her. I speak for the others with ties to Azgeda, we know Klark is our best chance at victory. If she supports Heda, then we will as well for this war.”

“The Trikru and Azgeda forces are our most experienced armies. Putting them together leaves our
“other forces without that experience.” Indra pointed out.

“You’re focusing on clan relations and experience.” Ephraim pointed out.

Haar nodded, “You think we should divide the forces by terrain then?”

“Yes, the woods are thinner here.” He pointed to the southeast side of the mountain. “Post my forces in this section. I can keep my men in line as long as the Boudalan are not beside us.”

“That section runs into the river.” Haar scratched his chin. “If we put my forces there the Boudalan can be on the other side of my army.”

Indra nodded it would work. “Greil and his men from Blue Cliff can work as a border between any of the forces except Glowing Forest which is helpful. The northern section of the mountain turns to desert. Sankru would be effective there.”

“Indeed.” Haar agreed. “Do you believe your men and the Azgeda will be able to work side by side together though?” He was looking at her critically.

“We have so far.” Indra replied, “My men know better than to disobey their commander.” Her doubt that Azgeda could say the same went unstated.

“If Clarke orders it, then it is done. She’ll kill any who disobey her.” The assassin stated from her place against the wall.

Ephraim sighed, “I agree, Klark can keep her forces under control.”

Indra swallowed back a retort and just acknowledged that in this at least she’d have to trust these…”allies”. “Then it’s decided.”

Haar rolled out a second map and began to draw out their plans while Indra moved the models back to their proper places. Staring at the mountain, she felt hatred well up inside of her. After all, it was the only reason she was willing to work with people she’d been raised to kill.

It was many hours later as the sun was starting to set that she found her anxiety over the disappearance of Lexa and Klark had grown into true alarm. She could no longer delay sending out a search party for fear of the political implications. All signs now pointed to some sort of emergency. So, she quickly made her way to Anya to order scouting parties sent out. She was conscious of the shadow like assassin following her steps as she went. Keeping this from her was clearly not an option. Although, she found herself impressed with the assassin’s composure in the face of such an anxious and strained situation. Her faith in her general must be great. Indra was relieved the assassin seemed to realize that Indra was as much in the dark as she was concerning the fate of their leaders.

As they approached Anya’s tent, she heard a commotion at the edge of camp. She sought out the assassin’s face oddly fearful of what she would find there. The startled and hard look on the girl’s face reassured her oddly. Together they took off at the fastest pace they could manage without causing alarm.

The sight Indra was greeted with was both a relief and a shock. Walking into camp, side by side, were Lexa and Klark. They had clearly been through something, both covered in dirt, dried sweat, and what she was fairly certain was dried blood on Lexa’s leg. Lexa’s arm was also tied in a sling and secured to her body. Lexa’s guard was conspicuously absent but what was startling was the easy distance the two were keeping. Her eyes sharpened as she came to a stop in front of Lexa. Ignoring the assassin, who had just flung herself into the general’s arms and was hugging her fiercely, Indra greeted her commander. “Heda.”
Lexa kept her face blank but a hint of fondness showed through in the slight crinkling around her eyes. “There is a pauna living just outside the reach of the fog. It slew Penn, but Klark and I managed to escape.”

Indra felt her heart nearly stop beating in her chest, but she knew her duty. “Would you have me send a detachment to kill the beast?” She was calculating expected casualties and the size such a force would need to be successful.

Lexa nodded, clearly in thought, “Yes, it's too close to our army for us to allow it to remain.”

“Lexa,” Klark spoke up from her side. “With all due respect, your army isn’t trained to kill that beast, mine is. Let me take some of my men and kill it.”

Lexa tilted her head and examined the general for a moment before giving her consent. “Do it, and bring me back it's hide.”

Klark bowed slightly before turning and placing her hand on the assassin’s shoulder. “Guard the Commander.” She ordered the girl her voice clearly an order. “I’ll send Burka to relieve you but from now on consider your orders changed to guard duty.”

“Of course Clarke, be careful.” The girl pulled the general into a second hug before releasing her.

Indra felt a trickle of suspicion as she noticed how Lexa was watching the encounter. She was concerned that an Azgeda general was acting to ensure the safety of the commander, especially since she was using assassin’s as guards. It didn’t sit well with her. Lexa surprised her by speaking to one of the warriors nearby.

“Ryder, escort General Klark to her camp.”

An amused eyebrow raise from Klark was the woman’s only response. Although, Indra was fairly certain she heard her muttering about her guard not being the one squashed by a giant gorilla.

Lexa ignored it and walked towards her tent, Indra easily falling in step behind her. Once inside, she sighed in relief while lowering herself to sit in her throne.

“Should Nyko be sent for Heda?” Indra inquired, eyeing the sling around her arm.

“No, Klark already tended to my injuries.” Lexa waved away the question, ignoring the startled look on Indra’s face. “Send for Gustus, he’ll want to replace my lost guard as soon as possible.”

“Of course, if I may ask, are you alright with the general’s order to her assassin?” She asked carefully.

Lexa seemed to pause in thought. “If the general speaks true then I believe she can be trusted in this battle. If not, Gustus will protect me and I am more than capable of doing so myself.”

Indra nodded and left to find Gustus. Lexa’s newfound trust in the general left her feeling uneasy, as did the easy way the two had walked beside each other.

____________________________________________________________________________

Octavia slipped towards the edge of camp to meet Lincoln after her guard shift. She was just passing the back of the fence when she saw a shadow stepping out from behind a tree.

“Octavia.” The empty voice of Burka caused her to slow.
She shivered at the emotionless tone of the closed off assassin. Tipping her head in acknowledgment, she spoke. “Burka.”

“Where are you headed Blake?” The small woman asked.

Octavia felt a shiver as she came to a stop. “None of your business.”

“It is if you intend to betray us.” She began to twirl a knife.

Octavia swallowed. “It’s just sex.”

Burka looked at her and she could feel the disbelief. “This is the fifth time I’ve seen you leave camp to meet your lover. That isn’t just sex.”

“Fuck you.” She spat. “What are you doing spying on me anyways?”

“My contract is owned by Clarke, if you intend to betray her I’ll end you even if she can’t.” The way she said it made it sound like it was completely normal to threaten murder.

“Like you wouldn’t kill Clarke or any of us if you were hired to.” Octavia felt her distaste for the woman before her show through in her tone.

“If the price was right, but for now Clarke owns my allegiance.”

“Well good for you, but I would never betray my family so Fuck. Off.” She spoke clearly.

“Feelings mean nothing, but as you say it’s just sex. See that it doesn’t change. If it becomes a threat, I will kill you and him.”

She felt a shiver of fear go down her spine. What made it all worse was she knew it was true. Burka was an assassin of the first order. If she decided it was necessary, she would kill her without a second thought or a moment of hesitation or regret.

“Then you can go mind your own business.” She headed off, she didn’t bother trying to lose Burka. If Burka followed her she wouldn’t know or be able to prevent it. Monty would have been able to give her the slip, probably Charlotte too, but she couldn’t.

Once she made it to the appointed tree, she saw a white flower resting in the bark. Smiling, she felt her fears and worries wash away. Octavia followed the trail of flowers to a cave where she found Lincoln drawing in his journal. She smiled as she saw the sweet man grinning up at her as soon as he realized she was there. Her heart fluttered in her chest and she thought, ‘Yes, this is worth it.’

Keaton grinned as he started hauling cross guarded spears from the armory with Veloria, his second, and Brady. This was more like it, pauna hunts made him feel alive and he hadn’t been on one in months. He wished Atom, Harper, and Dax were there from the old team but this was good enough. Silas and his second, Sophie, were wrestling the great wire nets onto a cart behind one of the horses.

He’d never hunted a pauna meeting the description of the one Klark had described, but the challenge would be amazing. Niles was double checking all of his arrows, clearly ready for the hunt. His second wasn’t coming for some reason, though he supposed between Silas, Klark, and himself, enough of them were bringing seconds. Trotting over to Klark, who was supervising the gear being loaded, he came to a stop. “So, ya sure we don’t need another spear on the team?”
Klark shook her head while slapping him on the back. “We’ll be fine. Brady will help you take out the tendons with his axe as soon as we bring the animal down.”

Keaton nodded, it made sense, “Just like old times huh?”

Laughing, Klark smiled at him. “I have a feeling you are forgetting how many brushes with death we had during those ‘old times’.”

“Details, details,” he waved off. “If Octavia doesn’t get back from wherever she’s wandered off to who are we going to replace her with?”

Klark hummed thoughtfully. “Leo is good with a sword. He’d make a decent replacement. Do you have a preference?”

“Naw, it’ll be fun to see his fancy face get a bit messed up.” Keaton rather disliked the whole family. The five children of one of Nia’s chief advisors we’re not people he trusted at his back in a fight.

Klark snorted, “That was definitely one of the deciding factors.” She said sarcastically.

“So, how big is this critter we’re killing again?”

---

Three years six months ago:

Bellamy followed his first Lloyd with murder in his heart. The asshat was the single greatest dipshit he’d ever met and he had muscles for brains. They had been sent to deal with reports of a thief on the road between the capitol and the western border. Of course, his moron of a first couldn’t be bothered to ask for information, or set a trap. No, they were just walking endlessly up and down the slush covered trek of mud for the third fucking time.

He was still annoyed over being left in the woods for a week by himself with no warning. It had been cold damn it. Walking along the road he found he didn’t have much to do except stew over the man and plot various methods of killing him.

For all that Lloyd was an idiot, apparently his training was actually working. Though training meant little more than daily beatings that were becoming less one sided over time, it proved its’ merit when Bellamy was dodging the arrow before he was even consciously aware that it was headed for his head.

Twisting as he dodged, he felt the burn of the arrow grazing his cheek. It was pure muscle memory that had his sword ringing out of his sheath as he turned towards where the arrow had come from.

A man came out of the side of the road, charging at them with a dagger in one hand and tossing his bow to the side. Bellamy used the back of his forearm to knock the knife to the side, plunging his sword into the man’s stomach.

Bellamy’s eyes widened as he felt the man fall against him. There was warm blood spilling around his hand and the man’s face was open in shock and pain. His weathered face showed the signs of a hard life, lines and scars covering it.

“I…” He stood there as the man’s legs finally gave out, he fell to the side hitting the slush and mud. Eye’s wide and vacant. Bellamy stumbled to the side of the road, vomiting into the ditch.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the wonderful comments as always! Question we might have been a bit bored and actually written a one shot where the rabbit Clarke use's in 3x01 as bait is the chosen champion of the forest. And like overthrows the pauna gorilla and his jaguar henchcats. And then basically follows Clarke around fixing everything wrong with season 3. Its total crack and we're slightly ashamed but oddly pleased with it. If we uploaded it would you guys be interested?

Sophie walked, carefully following her first’s steps and trying to be completely silent. They were moving the spears to their stations around the trap. Valoria, Brady, and Leo were preparing the metal and bone net hung between two trees, ready to tangle the pauna once they lured it through the slight thinning in this section of woods.

She carefully double checked every one of her ten spears so that they would be in easy reach. It was her first pauna hunt and she could feel a cold sweat dripping down her back. Wiping her palms on her pants, she breathed in trying to calm herself.

“Don’t worry so much kid, this is old hat for us old folks,” Keaton said, leaning against a tree.

She blushed brightly at the hunter. “I’ve never been a part of a pauna hunt before.” Admitting it stung a bit.

Keaton grinned, leaning in and ruffling her hair. “Fear is the most natural thing in the world and nothing to be ashamed of, it is a part of life. On our first pauna hunt I almost bled out, Dax got knocked out, and Clarke broke her nose and screamed in a register she will never admit to.”

Sophie opened her mouth in awe listening to him. After all, his old pauna hunting team was a legend. They had killed more than any other pauna team ever, all within two years. “But... if you almost died what about us?!”

He snorted, she noticed the other two seconds were listening in on the conversation. “You’ve got four experienced hunters and an assassin on your side. We were all a bunch of untrained seconds sent out to take care of a ‘wolf’ problem. Wolf my ass.”

She stared in open surprise, wondering if she could get the whole story from him. After all, that hunt was beyond legendary. Everyone knew a version of the tale of the giant two headed wolf in the northern reaches that was slain during a blizzard. To get to hear the tale from one of those actually on the hunt was an honor. “What happened on the hunt?”

Keaton had moved so that he could reach and double check the knots on the net. He seemed to consider it. “Alright, I’ll tell you lot the story while we wait for Klark’s signal. Get to all your places first though.”

Sophie quickly moved to her slightly covered spot on the ground with a stack of spears. She watched Brady rolling himself under some cover just in front of the net while Valoria moved to her spear vantage point behind where the net would fall. Glancing up a tree, she saw Niles sitting at ease on a
branch, his legs dangling. He gave her a flirtatious wink causing her to blush bright red and look away.

Keaton, who was also hidden carefully in front of where the net would fall, cleared his throat. “So, back when I was an itsy second.”

“You’re not a particularly big boy now,” Niles snarked from his position up a tree.

Keaton chucked a pinecone at him before continuing. “Anyways, we were on the edge of Azgeda territory before it turns into the snow plains. Where the ice and snow never melts, and the white outs come in the wind, and the sun never sets in the summer, and never rises in the winter. Toba, the furthest outpost, was being plagued with bandits and we’d been receiving reports of a larger amount of banditry than expected. So, when the villagers came and begged for help with a wolf that was killing their livestock, the captain of the outpost sent us lowly new seconds out into the wild plains to track and kill the beast.”

“We tracked the animal through the snow, barely finding tracks, when Harper, our archer, spotted a paw print the size of my head in the snow.” He paused dramatically. “Realizing it must be a pauna, we argued on whether to push ahead and slay the beast or retreat and call for more experienced warriors. Klark argued we should head back, that we would surely die against such a fearsome beast. But, Atom fought to stay the course, reminding us of the hunger the villagers faced because of its hunting.”

Sophie shivered, everyone knew the northern forts were frozen wastelands and that hunger and cold were the people’s constant companions. Running her thumb over the wooden shaft of her spear, she reminded herself that they were in the south.

“Before we could decide though, a great howl echoed across the snow. There was no cover, and we were not equipped for a pauna. Klark held true however and ordered us into formation even though there was no hope. The beast was twice the size of a horse with great white fur and massive slobbering jaws. It had two great heads ready to eat us alive!”

She gulped, listening with rapt attention. Brady let out a curse from where he was hidden under a log. Glancing at Silas, her brother and first, she saw him nodding along and she stared wide eyed. If Silas accepted the story it must be true, after all, he had served on Klark’s team for several months.

Keaton continued, clearly well aware he had a spellbound audience. “Harper and Klark fired arrows into the beast’s face and managed to blind one side of the right head, but most of the arrows were grabbed out of the air by its’ gaping mouth. Atom and Dax threw their lone spears into its sides and the animal thrashed. Its’ tail hit Dax in the head, sending him flying like a doll and he didn’t get up. I charged with my spear, wedging it into the flank while it slashed at Atom. It turned on me and I saw my death in its’ red eyes. Its’ right head bit into my side before sending me careening into a snow drift. From where I lay in the red snow, I saw the greatest fight of our age.”

Sophie could feel herself holding her breath.

“Klark screamed for Atom and Harper to get us out of there. Then, she did what no man should ever or has ever done before and survived. She charged the great wolf straight on, armed with nothing but a bow and daggers. I’ll never forget the sound of her scream as she challenged the beast intending to die, giving us time to run. She got three arrows into it before it reached her and they went tumbling over a drift together in a mess of blood, snow, limbs, growls, and cries. It all went silent.” He paused for a moment his voice oddly serious towards the end.

“Then, as the blackness seeped into my vision, I saw her, Klark kom Azgeda standing on top of that
drift with a dagger in hand, blood dripping from it. Her whole body was coated in the red liquid, her other hand holding her injuries closed. That day, I believed in the god of the hunt.” There was a reverence in his tone.

“What happened then?” She asked awe in her voice.

He rubbed the back of his head bashfully and laughed a bit, “I passed out. Woke up after nightfall in a hastily dug trench in the snow next to the pauna’s body. We ended up eating raw meat and cuddling for warmth through the night. Let me tell you, there is nothing romantic about shoving your feet in a girl’s armpits for warmth while she shoves her’s in yours. Still, I like my toes and was not going to lose them in that god forsaken plain.”

______________________________

Three years five months ago:

Clarke ached all over and she was bone tired. Dragging the damn pauna back to the Toba outpost with Harper and Atom while Dax and Keaton limped along was exhausting. Her breath was crystallizing in front of her, her fingers and toes were freezing while sweat soaked her badly fitted jacket. It didn’t help that she had some claw marks she’d sewn shut on her arm, as well as her thigh, and hip. She knew there was a greater chance of infection but as soon as they got back to the outpost and had wood, she was going to burn the injuries shut. Who knew when the bandits were going to attack and she needed to be combat ready as soon as possible. Although, why anyone would engage in illegal activities in this godforsaken frozen ice cube she didn’t know.

“I see it!” Harper cheered!

Sure enough, there on the horizon was the grey outline of the fort. “Good eye.” She praised while adjusting the rope over her shoulder, it was digging in painfully. “Keaton, you think you’ll make it?”

“Yeah.” He grunted clearly pained.

Dax shook his head from where he was supporting most of Keaton’s pale and shaking form. “He doesn’t look good.”

Clarke bit her lip, the sooner they got to the fort, the sooner they got medical attention, she doubted Keaton would last another night in the snow. “We’ll have to push on, if he gets worse we leave the carcass.”

The others seemed to accept that as they continued to crunch through the snow. Their legs sinking in with every step.

“You know I want snowshoes. Why can’t we have snowshoes?” Atom asked rhetorically.

“We’re wearing snow shoes.” Dax replied, “Moron.”

“No like those weird baskets for your feet in the old earth films.” He clarified.

“Those let you walk on top of the snow right?” Harper asked.

Atom grunted as they started up another drift. “Yeah, and no sinking in with every step. Think we could make some?”

“Don’t the villagers have ski like things? We could just borrow those.” Harper suggested.
“God, another thing to learn.” Dax lamented. “I mean how are we ever going to become warriors?”

Clarke spoke up, noticing the downward spiral of their mood which they couldn’t afford while in this precarious of a situation. “We keep on doing what we’re doing. Haven’t you noticed we aren’t losing in spars with the other seconds as much. I know we’ve been mainly training with each other but you took down that other second at the outpost Atom. Harper, you took out this monster’s eye while it was moving from a distance. We’re improving.”

“How do we know we won’t die first?” Dax asked.

“We haven’t died yet and I’ll let you die over my dead body.” She set her jaw feeling it pop from the pressure. She wouldn’t let anyone else die, not after everything they’d been through.

Present day:

Brady lay on the ground waiting for the signal when his thoughts suddenly came to an abrupt stop. “What is the signal?” He asked, his brow crinkling in confusion realizing they’d just been referring to an unspecified signal.

A great roar shook the forest. The ground began to shake from what he realized was trees crashing.

“That’s the signal, keep that sweet face of yours down, the fun is about to begin.” Niles’s face took on a dangerous light and he drew back the string of his bow as the crashing came their way.

Brady felt his teeth rattling in his head, his knuckles whitening as they gripped his axe. The crashing and roars were getting closer. Then he saw Clarke’s back as she went tumbling over the log he was under sliding beneath the net where Silas was able to grab her arm and haul her out of the way.

Not a moment too soon, the largest creature he had ever seen went careening into the net taking it to the ground with a giant earth shattering crash. It was trapped, it started to fight to free itself but only succeeded in tangling itself more.

“NOW!” Clarke ordered.

The others started hurtling spears into the animal while Niles’s shot well aimed arrows into it.

Adrenaline pumping, he was out from under his log and he pulled his axe back for a swing. Using all of his strength, he brought his axe down on the rear knee of the massive beast’s left leg. He didn’t even bother attempting to free his axe from its sinew, just backpedaling as quickly as possible. Grunting, he felt the air get knocked out of him when he took a backhand to the chest and face, sending him out of the immediate carnage. Dizzily, he hauled himself up while gasping for air.

He saw the animal, filled with weapons, screaming its’ rage and pain at them as a final arrow went straight into its’ mouth. The creature swayed before falling to the side with a final boom.

Stumbling towards it, he marveled at its size. Before he could get too close, Clarke halted him with an order.

“Don’t approach it! We don’t know yet if it’s dead for sure.”

Hefting a spear, he saw her approach carefully before stabbing the spear into the side of the animal’s neck severing what he knew to be an artery. Once a large measure of blood had spilled from the injury, she walked forward motioning for the others to do so as well.
“What did I tell you kids, you did fine.” Keaton declared as he began to rip some of the unbroken spears out of the animal.

Carefully, he approached before grabbing the haft of his axe. It wouldn’t budge. Glaring at it, he stuck his foot just below it on the monster’s leg and put all of his strength into it. It gave way with a sick squelching sound and sent him falling onto his butt.

Looking up, he saw Valoria laughing at him. Grunting in annoyance. he got back up pretending he wasn’t blushing in embarrassment. He felt himself well with pride though at the approving smile on Clarke’s face. Moving back to his task, he helped them prepare to move the pauna’s body.

____________________________________________________________________________

Tris grunted with the effort of blocking Aden’s strike. The vibrations went up her arms as she prevented him from driving his sword down. Leaning back on her left leg, she kicked him in the stomach causing him to stumble backwards. Taking the opportunity, she swung her sword in an upward strike hitting his sword right above the guard. With a sharp twist of her wrist, his sword went spinning from his hand. Reversing the direction of her swing, she brought it down stopping a centimeter from his neck. Panting, she watched him groan in defeat before she lowered her sword.

“You’re getting better, but you depend on your strength.” She said while sheathing her sword.

Aden wiped the back of his arm over his forehead, accepting the criticism. “Again?”

Tris rolled her shoulders, she didn’t want to, she’d already been sparring with Anya earlier and was getting tired, her muscles burning. Aden really would overpower her if they kept this up. Still, he was a nightblood and possible future commander, her duty was to stand by him like Anya stood by Heda. Before she could decide though, she heard the soft sound of feet hitting the ground.

“I’ll take you. I could use a warm up.” The Azgeda assassin remarked from where she had jumped over the fence being used to prevent loose horses from taking down tents.

Before Aden could do something stupid like accept, Tris put herself between him and this threat. “We’re fine.” Her hand itched to draw one of her swords sheathed on her back.

“So old and you haven’t passed your trials yet? Are you sure you should be working with the little future commander?” The assassin taunted, easily flipping a knife in her hand.

Tris narrowed her eyes, grabbing Aden’s forearm in warning, knowing he wanted to defend her honor. “Trikru believe in training warriors, not sending them unprepared for slaughter.” And it was true, Azgeda may have the largest army but their death rate was higher than any other clan.

The assassin had her hair braided up and away from her face and neck in a halo of blond. Her jacket of brown and white blended in with whatever she stood next to, creating quite a pleasing image. Everything about her, from her light boots to her knives and the short sword along the small of her back, made the hairs on Tris’s arms stand on end.

Tris noticed the assassin’s jaw clench briefly. “Azgeda knows that the strong will survive and that wasting time on the weak is pointless. Clearly, something your first never learned.”

“You think you’re so much stronger just because you have those foul brands on your face.” Tris snarled, she could feel Aden’s muscles bunched in anger under her hand that still rested on his forearm.

The assassin stepped forward. “I could take you both, but if you’re too scared…” She tapered off,
her tone challenging, a smirk and raised eyebrow daring them to back out.

Aden answered for both of them before Tris could stop him. “No kill blows and till the forfeit.”

Tris’ grip on his arm tightened, this was a terrible idea, but she couldn’t help but be relieved that Aden had accepted the challenge. However, she intended to make sure nothing serious happened to Aden. “No poison, no armor.” She knew the Ice Nation wore heavier armor sewn into their jackets for protection then her people did. Removing as many advantages from the assassin as possible was necessary if they were going to survive this, regardless of whether they all were the same age or not.

“Fine, just don’t go complaining to your Heda when you lose.” The assassin snapped while undoing her jacket with quick fingers.

Tris hauled Aden over to a corner and whispered hurriedly to him, capitalizing on the few minutes they had to plan. “Don’t let her get close to you, her weapons are short ranged but don’t trust she won’t throw one of those knives at us.” Biting her lip, she started pulling her training armor off till she was left in nothing but a long sleeved grey shirt, her pants, and tight boots. It made her feel vulnerable but she knew it was less of a disadvantage for them then for the assassin. Aden was dressed similarly, though the traditional black clothing of the nightbloods set him apart.

Turning back towards the assassin, Tris froze in horror. The girl was left in a loose sleeveless shirt, pants, and boots that looked like a weapon all on their own. It wasn’t the boots that scared her, no, it was the skin that could now be seen. Her uncovered arms were a patchwork system of scars, many of them overlapping. Running up each forearm were the sharp angled tattoos marking her as a deliverer of death. The fact most of the scarring had been tattooed over was intimidating. She knew torture when she saw it. The assassin had several scars that seemed to twist up from her torso and up along the side of her neck that were particularly eye catching. She was seemingly unconcerned, strapping her daggers back to her body now that her jacket and pieces of protective gear were stripped off.

“So, what should I call you two idiots?” The assassin asked, walking over and twirling her sword to warm up her muscles.

Aden drew his sword and fell into a ready stance. “I’m Aden and this is Tris kom Trikru, you will regret challenging us.”

Tris felt a mix of pride and concern at his confidence in their victory when she was anything but, overconfidence would lose them this match. Then, she saw the way his grip was tighter than it should be and realized he was as nervous as her. Stepping beside him, she drew both of her swords, falling into her own ready stance.

“I’m Charlotte and I’m going to enjoy destroying you two.” Charlotte replied falling into her own stance.

Tris knew they had to keep the assassin on the defensive or they would lose. She moved without warning, striking out with her left sword while bringing her right to block her torso. Aden moved in time with her lunging.

The assassin seemed to bend around Aden’s blade while blocking her strike with a dagger. She wasn’t expecting the kick that slammed into her right side. Trying to move with the blow, she sliced for the leg but it was already retracted, the only thing saving her from a knife to the throat was Aden getting between her and the assassin.
Lexa frowned as she heard cheering from outside of her tent. Standing she walked out, ignoring the Ice Nation guard following her among her normal guards. As she approached the crowd, she saw Anya standing at the front of the crowd and from her posture she knew something was wrong.

The crowd parted for her and she understood as her heart lodged in her throat. The spectacle before her was terrifying. Tris and Aden were engaged in a dance of metal with the blond assassin. Both of the seconds were breathing hard and covered in thin slices along their arms and torsos. Aden had black blood running down the side of his face soaking his shirt. Charlotte, the assassin, on the other hand was clearly bruised and battered her nose bleeding down her face. Her mouth open in a snarl and her teeth stained red with blood.

Watching them move around the sparring area was impressive. The fluid way the Ice Nation girl was moving was awe inspiring, deflecting the strikes from her opponents, keeping them off balance, using her whole body to strike with elbows, knees, feet, everything. Aden and Tris were both also performing well, working together as a single unit, covering for strikes to vital areas, and shrugging off damage as they were trained to do. Though the fight was impressive, that in itself was part of the problem. This clearly had gone on too long.

Before she could order it to stop, an Ice Nation warrior shoved through the crowd, striding straight into the middle of the fight. There were shouts of protest from the crowd and Anya stepped forward ready to protect the seconds but it proved to be unnecessary. In a single low to the ground spin, the warrior swept both the second's feet out from under them. Continuing her momentum, the warrior rose up, grabbed Charlotte by the throat, and hauled her back.

“This spar is over. Get your things, we’re headed back to camp, now.” Her voice was firm as she glared down at the assassin, who was glaring right back at her.

Lexa recognized the warrior as Octavia and was surprised she’d intervene like that. Though she was pleased as it gave Anya time to move forward and haul the seconds’ to their feet. She was distracted from her evaluation of the state of Tris and Aden by the argument that was taking place between the two Azgeda warriors.

“It’s none of your business O.” The blond snarled before pausing to spit a mouthful of blood out onto the dirt.

“We’re supposed to be working with these people not beating them up. Get your things, Clarke can talk some sense into you when she gets back.” Octavia was clenching her hands, clearly furious.

“Like you’re one to talk, it’s just a spar. They deserved it too. I heard them making disparaging remarks about the general the other day.” Charlotte shoulder checked the brunette warrior as she moved towards her pile of poisoned weapons and protective gear. A pile, Lexa was just now noticing in horror.

Octavia was shaking with anger Lexa noticed with apprehension. “You are not a melee combat fighter. Plus, you know Clarke can take care of herself.”

“So what, I’m still better than those Trikru weaklings.” She spat in reply.

“Then why were we beating you?” Aden snarled from where he had been mulishly gathering his things up from the ground under Anya’s watchful eye.

Lexa was suddenly extremely glad most of the crowd had been disbanded now that the violence was over.
Octavia whirled around after placing her hand firmly on Charlotte’s chest to prevent her from advancing. Walking till she was staring into Aden’s eyes, she spoke in a calm and clear voice. “This was a spar, in which both of you would have died if it was real. Charlotte may be a hot head but combat isn’t her specialty, torture is and if you think even one of her knives wouldn’t be poisoned in a real fight then you are fooling yourself. She was trained by Daniella till she killed her first in single combat. Entering a ring with someone you don’t know is foolish and you should be thankful you still breathe.”

Turning, Octavia walked till she could grab Charlotte by the shoulder and started pulling her back towards the Azgeda camp.

Lexa could hear them still bickering, but found herself concentrating on the part that this was the person who had slain Costia’s torturer. The reason why this was the assassin assigned to her made far more sense suddenly.

“I can’t believe you of all people called me hot headed!”

“You’re as bad as I used to be pipsqueak.”

“No way!”

Wishing she could rub the building ache behind her eyes, she walked over to where Aden and Tris were hissing as they tried to pull their jackets on over their thin slices. Seeing Lexa standing behind them, they both straightened to attention. Looking over at Anya, she accepted the nod from her former first.

“I expect better from both of you in future.” She said watching their shamed faces carefully. There could not be a repeat of this event.

“We were winning no matter what that warrior said.” Aden protested.

Anya slapped both of them over the head as Lexa sighed in disappointment. Clearly, having him train with the warriors had led to Aden becoming over confident. “How many slices do you have Aden?”

“Sixteen.” He straightened seeming to sense her disappointment.

“Then you should know that you earned sixteen deaths for yourself in that fight. When fighting an assassin even a nick means death. Bring Lincoln with you to my tent later, it seems your training has been remiss.”

“Sha, Heda.” His eyes were burning with shame.

“And you Tris, surely you knew better than to engage in a fight with a member of another clan without your first present?” She continued.

“Yes, Heda. I allowed her to rile me up and failed to think with my head.” The girl admitted, biting her swollen lip.

“I’ll leave your punishment for this foolishness up to Anya. For now, both of you go to Nyko and see to it that your cuts are cleaned.”

“Heda!” Both of the seconds scampered off towards the healing tent.

“Anya, walk with me.” Lexa began to slowly walk between the tents, examining her men.
“I’ll make sure Tris learns her lesson.” Anya’s voice sounded annoyed. Lexa recognized it, it was a tone she’d heard throughout her training.

“I’m sure you will, but that’s not what I wanted to speak to you about.” She breathed out in frustration at her own compromised judgment.

“Is this about the Ice Nation general saving your life then?” Anya guessed the matter easily as Lexa should have expected from her.

Nodding, Lexa came to a stop by the stables, watching her stallion whickering.

“You’ve already made a judgment Lexa. I saw it in how you walked with her at your back.” Anya said, watching Lexa’s face for a sign that Lexa knew she couldn’t help but give away eventually. After all, Anya had known her since she was a girl and knew all her subtle tells.

“I cannot trust my judgment alone Anya. I believe that she is a trustworthy ally worth listening to, but if I am wrong… My head tells me that this is too easy, that Nia would never let a general like this into her army, let alone let her rise to this rank. I fear it’s a trap designed to destroy me and I am going to fall for it. However, if it’s not a trap and I rebuff this opportunity out of fear I don’t deserve to be Heda.” She clenched her hands together behind her back, nervous that maybe she had revealed too much, even if it was to Anya.

“You want me to observe the general and make my own judgment then?” Anya asked.

“Yes.”

“Why not Gustus or Indra, both of them will advise you on her whether you ask for it or not?” Anya shifted so that she was looking at Lexa curiously.

“Because I trust you to be objective where they won’t be and because you know me better than either of them. You will know if I am being manipulated.” Lexa clenched her teeth, angry that she even had to fear this.

“I will do as you ask.” Anya reached forward clasping Lexa’s shoulder. “But, you give yourself too little credit. I think your measure of her may be correct. That assassin of hers had the ability to kill a nightblood and claim it a training accident and didn’t. What does this tell you?”

Lexa breathed a sigh of relief. “That the Azgeda troops have not been ordered to work against us.”

Anya nodded. “I’ll stay by your side as always but doubting yourself will not help.”

Lexa fell silent watching the horses, appreciating her mentor’s presence. She was relieved that it was Anya by her side and not Titus, who would have never given her positive suspicions about Klark the time of day. Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of horns. They weren’t the horns used to signal the coming of the fog, but rather the loud deep cry of Azgeda hunting horns.

“It would seem the pauna hunt was a success.” Anya commented as she turned towards the sound.

“Indeed.” Lexa felt nervous as they made their way to meet the hunting party.

Crowds of warriors gathered around her as she stood with Anya at her shoulder. She watched as the forms of the hunting party came into sight.

Riding at the head of the procession, sitting high on her horse, was Klark, her hair shining gold in the evening light. It gave her a halo and she struck a triumphant figure. Her war paint was done in blood
and she didn’t doubt for a second that it was the pauna’s. Riding with her, were two Ice Nation warriors, both sitting proudly as they cantered towards her. One a man with short hair sticking upright on his head, black skins and fur strapped to his body. The other an archer with a single eye. His hair was down about his shoulders, braids and beads worked into a blue jacket lined with white fur that he wrapped around himself. She recognized him instantly as one of the two assassins Klark had threatened her with after Atom’s death.

Coming to a stop before her, Klark smoothly dismounted, motioning her two men forward. Strung between their two horses was the head of the massive pauna that had chased her and Klark just that morning.

“The beast is dead. My warriors will prepare a feast from its flesh for us tonight. You and your warriors are invited to the celebration.” Klark was standing proud, clearly uninjured as her men dropped the head in front of her feet before moving backwards.

Noticing the mood of the crowd, she took a step forward offering her arm to Klark. “I accept your invitation.”

As Klark gripped her arm, Lexa had to fight off a smile, allowing only a soft upward tilt to her mouth as her men cheered their approval of the news of a feast. Her faith, at least in this, had not been misplaced. The answering smile from Klark made her heart beat faster in her chest.

---

Three years and five months ago:

Octavia woke with a cry of shock, sitting bolt upright as the frigid water washed over her face and shoulders. “HOLY SHIT!” Spluttering, she glared up at her first.

Jakob stared impassively down at her, “We have a mission, get dressed.” Turning, he left the now empty jug of water hanging by one hand.

Groaning, she dragged herself out of her pile of furs and began searching for a dry shirt in the limited light.

“O, that’s my arm not a shirt.” Monroe hissed at her.

“Not my fault my first is a slave driver that thinks waking up at ungodly hours is appropriate.” Octavia snarked, finally finding a dry shirt and yanking it over her head. Braiding her hair out of her face, she started to go through a mental checklist of everything she’d need. She chucked someone’s shoe that didn’t fit her at the lump she was relatively sure was Raven.

“Urg. What do you want?” Raven groaned, “I will kill you when I’m awake.” she mumbled, lifting her head off the floor.

Octavia strapped on her sword and started rolling up her furs. “I need a radio, not sure what the mission is or how long it’ll be.” She whispered.

Several of the girls groaned and mumbled curses at her for keeping them awake. Raven lifted an arm out of her pile and pointed to a bag hanging from the wall. “In there, grab one and shut up.”

“Yes, sleeping beauty.” She snarked back picking her way to the bag and triumphantly pulling out a radio, stuffing it into her own pack before making her way out to the courtyard. It was still dark out and easily below freezing. Rubbing her hands together, she hunched trying to conserve heat.
“Finally, you must aspire to preparedness at all times.” Jakob criticized her. He gave her a once over before looking heaven ward as if to ask for divine intervention. “Your slovenly appearance will not be tolerated. I want a hundred push-ups when we make camp. Unfortunately, we don’t have time for you to fix your appearance before we leave.”

Octavia held back some choice swear words for her first, already knowing the punishment awaiting her if she let them fall past her lips.

“Right then, come along we’re heading north, the outposts have asked for a prisoner transfer and we’ve been assigned.” He strode towards the stables, not even bothering to check that she was following.

Octavia hated her stupid proper first, who could beat her into the ground with ease, and his stupid perfect hair. Her feet dragged in the snow as she followed, wondering how sore she was going to be from whatever pace he was going to set for their journey. Today was going to be a long day.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

So for the people asking about updates and stuff, we don't have a schedule. We're averaging about three chapters a week which is pretty doable though so we don't see that changing any time soon. We have no idea how many chapters this is going to end up being, but we do have a timeline with all the events to come planned out. After some discussion we've decided that while we definitely plan on finishing this (like we're having a ton of fun) but if something happens and we have to stop we'll publish all our notes and the timeline and stuff as a final chapter so we won't just leave you on a cliff hanger. That said, that probably won't happen. We love this story, we love writing as a team, and posting it is super exciting! But if that's something you worry about we won't just leave you hanging. So breathe easy I guess? We promise not to just stop suddenly. Seriously though we plan on finishing this, its like a highlight of our days working on stories together.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Raven was beginning to have a sinking suspicion that something was truly and terribly wrong. They had been traveling for two days now and the signal was just starting to begin to clear up. Something was interfering with the signal and it wasn’t a faulty amplifier or troublesome geography preventing the signal from getting out. She knew Monty shared her fears if the side glances he kept giving her were any indication. Nut and Bolt were fortunately distracted by the amplifier she was having them work on while they rode. They were such good seconds, eleven years old and already building their first amplifier on horseback. On the return trip she might even let them try their hands at a bomb.

“That is not a good look, why are you happy, you should not be happy right now.” Monty said from his position beside her.

“I should totally be happy. My minions are getting closer to being able to build bombs every day.” She grinned enjoying the look of terror that was taking over Monty’s usually calm face.

“You’re not serious? They’re eleven!” He protested.

“And they’re already armed.” She waved him off moving her horse forward at a trot.

Monty kicked his horse forward after her, “They’ll blow up the camp, and swords are not bombs! Do you really want the twins to have access to that type of destruction? We’ll all be grey by the end of a week if we aren’t charred and crispy.”

“Oh live a little, they’re my minions and I’m confident they will only blow up the people they want to blow up.” They really were smart little buggers.

“Spirits preserve us.” He muttered.

Raven heard the static of the radio reception coming in, her horse long used to strange sounds just tossed his head in annoyance. Raven was overjoyed, finally! “Reception!”

Diving for her saddle bag, she pulled the radio out while the others pulled their horses to a stop. It
took a few seconds of fiddling with the controls but she got it, a clear connection.

Whooping in joy, she hit the button. “Bellamy come in! Bellamy you fucker come in!” She released the button. Monty and the twins stayed still, anxiously waiting.

“Raven!” Harper’s voice came in after a few seconds. “Raven are you guys alright? What took so long?!”

Raven grinned, “Hey, boy have we got a tale for you guys. Are Bellamy and the rest of you all there?”

“Dax is getting them, we’ve been keeping a rotating watch on our end.” Harper replied, her voice clearly happy.

“You have no idea how good it is to hear your voice Harp.” Raven leaned back in her saddle. Reaching out a fist, she bumped it against Monty’s.

It didn’t take long before the nervous voice of Bellamy came across the line, causing the speakers in the radio to vibrate. “Raven! Is Octavia there? What happened? Why didn’t you contact us on schedule?”

“Cool it hot stuff,” Raven cut him off before he could keep going. “Your sis is doing fine. Something is jamming our signal down here and we can’t find out what.” She was still annoyed about that, though her suspicions were turning into fear.

“So, you’re all alive and unharmed then?” The relief in his voice was palpable and it felt like a punch in the gut.

Raven could feel her smile sliding off her face. Clearing her throat, she pulled the microphone back to her mouth. “Atom died.”

There was silence on the other end, Raven closed her eyes biting the inside of her cheek.

“What happened?” Bellamy’s voice shook.

“Boudalan scouts murdered him on a sweep of the mountain’s defenses. The three warriors involved were executed by the commander and turned over to us for Atom’s burning.”

“Did they suffer?” Bellamy asked.

“Yes, death by a thousand cuts, none made it to the blade at the end.” Raven leaned her head against the radio for a second. “How are you guys up there?”

“We’re…..we’re fine. No injuries all still alive.” He replied.

“Good, that’s good.” Raven looked at Monty, who was serious as well. “Is Miller there?”

“Yeah, he’s here.”

“It’s just Monty, the twins and I over here so I figure we could let the lovebirds have a moment when we’re done.” She knew Monty missed his boyfriend.

The radio crackled again. “So, any clues on what’s jamming the radio?”

Raven felt relieved they were moving onto business. “It’s probably some old tech that’s still running somehow.”
“But, you don’t think that’s it?” He was frustratingly perceptive sometimes, she thought.

“I think someone is jamming every channel on purpose, stuff like that doesn’t just happen on accident, but there’s no one down here who could do it.”

Monroe’s voice came from the other side after a moment. “What about the Mountain?”

Monty choked and grabbed the microphone. “That’s not possible!”

“Why not?” Monroe said from the other side. “Look if it’s not one of the clans, it has to be the mountain.”

Raven punched Monty in the shoulder while grabbing the microphone back.

“Ow,” He rubbed his shoulder sullenly.

“I don’t have the equipment here to crack into communications if they’re using the radio waves.” Raven complained.

“Could you do it with some of the tech left up here?” Bellamy asked.

Raven rolled her eyes in exasperation. “Who do you think you’re talking to? Of course I could.”

“Alright, I’ll go to Nia, find an excuse to send Dax and Miller down with the equipment. Want them to just bring everything?” He asked.

“The whole motherload!” She grinned looking over at Monty who returned her smile.

“Can you prove the signal is coming from the mountain without the equipment? Clarke could probably use that information.” Bellamy suggested.

“Not definitively but I can be pretty sure.” Raven had various ideas running through her head, “I can at least prove the jamming signal is coming from the mountain. Not if it’s deliberate or not.”

“Do it, I’ll see what I can do with Nia. Anything else on your end?” He asked firmly.

“No, I’ll hand the radio over to lover boy then.” She handed the radio over to Monty with a kiss on the cheek.

“Stay safe guys.” Bellamy signed out before Miller’s voice came over the line greeting Monty.

Raven dismounted and waved her seconds over. Waiting till they were standing in front of her, she crossed her arms. “So, how do you think we’re going to prove the signal is coming from the mountain with shit tech on our side?”

Bolt bounced on the balls of his feet. “Like a super amplifier?!”

“Nope, Nut?”

“Well our radio is working cause we’re away from the mountain.” She started.

“We just have to prove it doesn’t work near the mountain!” Bolt explained.

“So, we ride a perimeter round the mountain checking reception!” Nut high fived her brother as they both looked up at her in excitement.
Reaching out, she ruffled their hair. “Good job, we don’t have to do a complete perimeter, that would take too long. Ten miles will be enough to prove a curve to the interference.”

Three years five months ago:

Echo walked into the room where the seconds were treating their injuries, or rather she noticed her second was treating all of their injuries. When Nia had ordered her to take a prisoner as her second, she had been honored and dubious. Ever since she was taken in as a child and trained as a warrior, an opportunity she’d never have gotten as an orphan in a remote village if not for Nia, her loyalty to Azgeda had been absolute.

As a warrior, she would never be allowed to return to her home village but that didn’t concern her. The army was her home and her duty was her purpose. So, when she’d been given a girl covered in mud, blood, and undesirable grime, dressed in the remains of a strange outfit, ribs showing, and covered in all manner of injuries, she’d expected her new second to drop dead within a week. However, she’d been surprised.

Clarke was a fighter, vicious, and like a wounded animal incredibly dangerous. She sniffed out her enemy’s weak points fast, instinctively almost. She had an intuitive grasp of knives and a good eye. Training her in those fields produced progress at an incredible rate. The girl’s training as a healer before she’d been given to her explained a great deal, but there was something else about her second that had impressed her. It was how the other seconds listened to her, not only those who had fallen with her from the sky but those born in Azgeda as well.

Leaving her second out in the woods for the traditional survival training had been the moment she realized she’d underestimated her second. Considering it was winter, they brought in the largest haul any group of seconds had been able to in a long time. The size of the bears alone would have been impressive. Yet, it would seem her second wasn’t done impressing her. She and the captain of the outpost had spent the last hour arguing about what should happen to her second since she’d just brought in a pauna of unbelievable size. According to the others, while the animal had been injured it would have survived until Clarke scored the killing blow and sliced an artery under its leg.

The captain of the outpost, as well as the other’s present, had agreed, Clarke had earned her marks as a warrior. Echo however, feared it was too soon. She had barely begun to train the girl and yet here she was being nominated to receive her marks. Still, it wasn’t for her to question the captain. Speaking up, she got her second’s attention. “Clarke, follow me.”

It didn’t take long for them to make it to the central room where the captain Zhara was waiting along with Dwyer his assistant. “Good, step forward.”

Echo watched her second step in front of the intimidating and scarred man, keeping any nerves she had hidden. Pride warmed her when she saw that.

“To become a warrior a trial must be passed. The one facing this trial must show strength, courage, intelligence, and above all loyalty to Azgeda. This trial is usually combat against a superior foe under the supervision of a general or captain.” He crossed his arms, staring down at Clarke.

“However, in cases where a second demonstrates these attributes in the field, it can be taken as a trial. You’re slaying of the pauna is impressive, it showed strength and courage. That you knew victory was unlikely and attempted to use your own life as a distraction showed both intelligence and loyalty. I and the others at this outpost agree, you will take your position as a warrior of Azgeda this day and receive your marks.”
Echo watched as Clarke bowed, “Thank you sir.”

Zharra motioned forward at two of his warriors. Looking back at Clarke, he ordered, “Kneel and prepare to take your marks.”

Echo stepped forward to stand behind her second. One of the warrior approached with a brand red hot. She reached out and pushed Clarke onto her knees as gently as possible.

“For your deeds you take the mark of the brave,” Zharra intoned.

The brand was pressed onto the side of her face, the skin sizzled and the scent of burning flesh hit her nose, but her second didn’t so much as whimper. The iron was finally removed as the second warrior pulled an identical brand out of the fire and approached before pressing it onto the opposite side of Clarke’s face. Again she stayed silent, though Echo didn’t fail to notice how every muscle in her body was clenched. Once it was done, Zharra nodded in approval and Echo again felt pride at how her second was faring.

“Now, you’ve earned the vines of the hunter and your first leaf on those vines. But, your first tells me that you are a healer as well. Do you wish to receive the mark of a healer as well?”

Clarke stood up, though her voice was tighter than normal she showed no pain and Echo felt that maybe it wasn’t too soon as she’d thought. “I’m a healer first, I’d be honored to take that mark.”

“Then it is done. Your marks will be inked tonight after watch change. For now, Echo will help you move your things from the second’s quarters to the warriors.” With that they were clearly dismissed.

Once they were outside of the room, Clarke paused and looked at her. “I have only been studying under you for a few months?”

Echo nodded. “Yes, and I will continue to train you, but you earned your marks and proved yourself. As long as we are stationed together, I will not allow you to slack off.”

“Good, thank you.” Clarke offered her arm to Echo and Echo quirked her lips as she grasped it. Her second may not be her second anymore, but she still had much to teach her.

Present day:

Lexa wasn’t sure what to expect from an Azgeda celebration, but she strode confidently into the camp with thirty of her own warriors at her back. All the attending men and women were people her generals assured her could be trusted to not initiate any violence. They were greeted by Gunter waiting for them, the scent of meat roasting over the fire, and the sounds of combat.

“Heda,” Gunter bowed slightly. “Don’t be alarmed, the men are competing for the right to drink at the feast tonight. Follow me if you would.”

“Of course.” As they made their way further in, she saw various sparring circles set up that were filled with warriors going at it and surrounded by cheering bystanders. Her own warriors were clearly interested in the spectacle.

As they approached a large table, she saw Klark stand in greeting. Sitting next to her at the table, she recognized Ephraim of the plains and several of his guards. At a signal from Klark, a large war drum was beat and the Azgeda forces came to a stop, the sounds dying out.
Klark stepped up onto the table, grinning widely. “Welcome Heda to our humble feast.” There were cheers from the clearly excited crowd. “Welcome Trikru, we look forward to seeing if you are worthy adversaries in drink and dance as well as battle!”

Roars of approval from the Ice Nation soldiers went up, Lexa felt herself tempted to smile at the excitement as well.

“As our guests, the rules of the night are simple, eat, drink, dance, and enjoy the party. If you start a fight outside the sparring rings, you’ll be put in the stocks by the latrine ditch, till your commanding officer collects you in the morning. I hear my men like to use the stocks as target practice so fair warning.” She grinned slightly maliciously at the hoots and hollers at the punishment for fighting.

Lexa felt an eyebrow raise, being pissed on by drunk warriors all night sounded like a truly unfortunate fate. Also, an effective deterrent if she was being honest.

“Now, regiments! Send in your champions that have fought for the right to battle here tonight and let’s see who earns the right to drink with our guests tonight!” Klark jumped off the table and waved Lexa over to the table and the seat at the head.

“That was quite the speech.” She remarked as she took the offered seat.

Klark laughed easily. “It does them good to have something other than death to look forward to enjoying.”

Lexa nodded seeing the wisdom in that. Indra’s disapproving stare from her place at the table didn’t dent Lexa’s curiosity at all. She saw her own warriors being pulled into the crowd of onlookers as they created a ring in front of the table.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me there are some final preparations I need to oversee.” With a respectful nod of her head, Klark was off into the sea of bodies. Lexa absolutely did not watch her walk away, that would have been ridiculous.

Ephraim leaned over from his seat. “Heda,” he greeted.

“General,” she replied, turning away from staring at where Klark had disappeared in the crowd.

“Clarke has eight regiments of fifty men, each one will send a single champion into the ring. The last two men standing win their regiment the right to drink.” He leaned back in his chair. “The two remaining champions can challenge the general to a fight then. If they win, their men get their morning shifts off to nurse their wine sickness. If they lose, they get the first shift of the morning.”

Indra spoke up from her other side. “You seem to know a lot about these events?”

Ephraim snorted. “There is always a competition going on in this camp. Our warriors have families, homes, things to return to after the fight is over, the Azgeda do not. None of these warriors have seen their homes since they were children nor will they see them again.”

“Their barbaric practices are well known.” Indra scoffed.

“True,” he shrugged. “It is why Klark indulges them with feasts and competitions as regularly as possible. Since she’s taken over, her divisions and territory have seen an upswing in productivity and survival. She gives her men something to live for other than fighting.”

“You think highly of her.” Lexa noted watching his face carefully.
He smiled. “One of her captains, Bellamy, spent some time helping me hunt down some bandits in my territory. He drank me to the ground and then told me tales of a short blond general who could drink him under the table.”

Lexa’s attention was pulled away from the conversation as the eight way melee began. She could instantly tell that the warriors fighting were all highly skilled. It became clear that Octavia and a quick footed swordsmen were the favorites. They had clearly agreed to work together before hand. She was pleased to see her assumption that Octavia was a dangerous warrior was correct. She attacked with a recklessness and skill that the other warriors were having a hard time matching. Her partner seemed to dance quick footed around her, covering for her, and slipping under his opponent's guards.

A tall broad shouldered warrior was also clearly in the running. He was handling a massive sword with ease and long familiarity as he cut through his opposition. The assassin that helped drop off the pauna head, sat irrelevantly on the table next to Indra.

“Tall, broad, and handsome out there is Xander, he’s the captain of his division and one of the most skilled fighters in the army. Course, he has nothing on you tall, dark, and hot.” He winked at Indra who looked like someone had slapped her.

Lexa was glad she wasn’t drinking or she would have choked at the statement.

“The two cheaters are Octavia, who I have no doubt is a firecracker in bed, and Laslow who will most likely volunteer himself as a lover to every female warrior including your fine self.” He was happily still focusing on Indra and Lexa idly wondered if the throbbing vein in Indra’s temple was going to burst from anger.

Deciding to save Indra, Lexa spoke up. “Who do you think will win?” She was genuinely curious what the man’s opinion on the matter was.

He tilted his head in thought for a minute. “Laslow will remain standing, Octavia will fight Xander head on. If Laslow helps her with Xan it will probably go to them, if he just lets the sparks fly, so to say, Xander will be the other champion.” He cheered as one of the fighters was thrown out of the ring bodily.

Turning back to the table, he grinned, “If Xander and Laslow are our champions, the general will wipe the floor with them. Xander is ill suited for her style and Laslow is talented, but not that talented. If Octavia and Laslow are though, you may get to see the general lose.”

“She would fight a losing match?” Lexa asked surprised, showing weakness like that in front of her men was unthinkable.

Niles scoffed, “Of course, it wouldn’t be fun if she won every time. Also, a friendly match where she can’t maim her enemies hinders her and that is understood by the men. Though seeing her move is always a treat.” He ran his tongue along his bottom lip before leaning in towards Indra. “Almost as much of a treat as seeing you move would be my dear.”

Indra stood with a jerk, nearly knocking the man over. Seemingly beyond words, she walked off. Lexa bit the inside of her cheek, trying not to laugh. The assassin had no such qualms and laughed heartily at her departing back. Winking conspiratorially at Lexa, he jumped to his feet. “It would seem I have a target to catch, excuse me Heda.”

Cheers went up as she saw Octavia’s sword go spinning from her hand and Xander’s massive sword leveled at her throat. Octavia bowed her head in defeat before Xander helped her to her feet. Laslow
yelped as Octavia punched in the arm, “Traitor.”

There was laughter at the display and then wild cheers as Klark walked out next to the two men. Holding up her hand, she waited for the sound to mostly die down. “Congrats to your divisions, now let’s see if you’ll be working through those hangovers of yours.”

She grinned playfully and drew a short sword Lexa recognized as not a staple part of the general’s gear. Tilting her head towards Ephraim, she spoke while the combatants circled each other. “I didn’t know the general favored the sword?”

Ephraim laughed, “Hardly, but her knives won’t be enough to deflect Xander’s blows.”

Laslow broke first, lunging in a perfect form aiming for Klark’s heart. She easily spun around the blade, driving her empty fist into his diaphragm brutally. He stumbled back as Klark brought her sword up in a sharp line for his throat only to have to dive backwards to avoid Xander’s descending blade. Her dive easily turned into a roll bringing her back to her feet. Her feet had barely touched the ground before she was moving again straight for the two warriors.

She seemed to flow under a wide swing of Xander’s sword, her back bent backwards yet still moving forward. She brought her own sword up blocking and then deflecting his follow up strike with the hilt of his sword. She didn’t even look at Laslow as she used a serrated dagger to catch his blade lunging for her, turning it aside and then twisting, sending his sword skidding out of his hand. Then, her blade was at Xander’s throat, just long enough for him to know he was beaten before she was on Laslow who had drawn a dagger. He went down fast landing on his back with Klark on top of him, knees holding down his arms and her sword buried in the ground millimeters from his skull.

Lexa understood now how Roan would have lost against the unrelenting force that was Klark. Not that she thought it would have been an easy fight, but the lack of showmanship and viscous method was impressive. The reaction of the crowd surprised her, there were groans from several of them and cheers from the rest. The good natured reaction of the defeated warriors was also surprising. There were no grumblings of disappointment just good natured ribbing.

Klark helped Laslow to his feet and slapped his back clearly saying something to him too quietly for Lexa to hear. Raising her hand for silence, the crowd quieted. “BRING OUT THE DRINK!”

The crowd roared and soon barrels were rolled in and she found a mug of a strong smelling spirit dropped in front of her by a happy Klark. “Heda, I hope Ephraim here kept you entertained while I was busy.”

“Indeed, your assassin seemed rather confident you would have lost if Octavia had been your opponent?” Lexa paused the question left hanging.

“She’s hard to beat.” Klark took Indra’s empty seat as the meat from the pauna was carried out. “She’s fast and physically stronger than me. Where did Indra get to?”

“Your assassin was rather enthralled with her.” Lexa stated carefully.

Klark snorted into her drink. “Niles doesn’t know how to speak without thinking about sex. He’s harmless though.”

Lexa stared at Klark in disbelief.

“Well, his flirting is harmless.” Klark shrugged easily. “Speaking of my assassins, I heard about the fight Charlotte had with two of your seconds.”
Lexa wondered where the general was going with this, it was a small incident. “Octavia put an end to it. I didn’t think it would be worth your notice?”

Klark nodded. “Ordinarily not, but it’s Charlotte. She earned her brands as a warrior at age fourteen and she did it by killing one of the most feared people in all of Azgeda. Outside of those of us who are family, she has a difficult time interacting with my warriors.”

“Such is her burden.” Lexa said.

“It is one I wish she did not have to bear however. We need our forces to integrate. These aren’t politicians, traders, and carefully selected guards with whom peace is difficult but doable. This is an army made of people trained to kill each other, that don’t have an immediate enemy to distract them. Sieges like the one we are embarking on take time and patience.” She gestured at the enthusiastic crowd.

Lexa blinked in surprise and understanding. “You want me to let Charlotte train with the Trikru in an effort to help integrate our forces.”

“Yes,” Klark nodded. “I also think our healers should work together. A gathering of healers from every clan has never happened, the sharing of knowledge could be incredible.”

“And healers are less likely to slit each other’s throats?” She asked amused.

Laughing, Klark tipped her mug at Lexa. “There is always that. I have four hundred warriors and I’m the only marked healer amongst them. I have several apprentice’s and a midwife but a chance to have my apprentice’s train with actual healers would be priceless.”

“I had heard you were quite a skilled healer, a rare thing for Azgeda.” Lexa took slightly more pleasure in eating the pauna then she probably should have while she waited for Klark to formulate a response.

“Healers were prized in my home.” Klark tapped her fingers against the table thoughtfully. “It still is strange to me that healers are not as respected here as they were there. It is one thing about my home that I intend to bring to Azgeda. Midwives are the closest to healers we really have due to the lack of training in the field. It will take time to change that, but I think this is an excellent opportunity to begin.”

“Will you work with Sankru?”

Klark’s face twisted for a moment before smoothing out. “My people will not work with them. We only just stopped fighting them months ago. Their strategies of raising villages without warriors in them to the ground, has made them incredibly hated by my men. I have maybe twenty warriors I would trust not to kill Sankru if given the opportunity. And I don’t trust them not to do what the Boudalan did to Atom to another one of my men.” She practically spat the last part out.

Lexa felt her spine straightening but curiosity forced her to continue. “Do you feel the same about Boudalan then?”

Klark scoffed. “He is fortunate that if he died during this siege there would be no doubt I was behind it. A large percentage of my men would be at risk if forced to work with Boudalan after Atom and to be honest I can not be sure that a few of my men would not look for vengeance of their own.”

Lexa swallowed. “And if I order you to work with Sankru or Boudalan?”

Klark’s eyes bored into her’s and she felt unsettled, like she was seeing too much.
“Then I will work with them and try my best to keep my soldiers under control. I fear that my success would not be assured.” She drained her mug before slamming it down on the table.

The silence was tense and Lexa spoke before it stretched too long. “Then let us hope I never have to order you to do so.”

She knew she had said the right thing when the line of Klark’s shoulders softened. They sat companionably as drums were brought out and dancing began. The beat was quick and catching. Lexa was less startled then she ordinarily would have been when Octavia flopped over Klark’s shoulders.

“Come dance with me!” She exclaimed eagerly in the general’s ear.

“O, go find a different partner.” Klark laughed while not bothering to remove the excited warrior from her person.

“Spoil sport, come on! I know you want to, please?” She begged sticking out her lower lip ridiculously.

Lexa watched in a sort of confused state of acceptance. She had come to the conclusion that Klark was a strange type of person that couldn’t be understood, one moment the serious general and the next joking with her men.

“Urg, O, really?” Klark complained, looking over her shoulder into the face that was pressed close to her’s.

“Yes really!” Octavia drew back and pulled Klark out of her seat. “I’ll even work with your little baby medics for you like you’ve been asking, without complaining.” She wheedled.

“Fine,” Klark let herself be pulled out into the swirling mass of bodies and soon her laughter floated out from the dance.

Lexa was confused by the uncomfortable sensation she was experiencing seeing the general spinning around with various members of her army, although generally in the arms of Octavia. Her feet flew over the ground and her head fell back in laughter that was carefree and musical. The light of the fire lit the dance and she thought the flickering light suited her. She wished she knew this dance or was as drunk as several of her men who were joining in anyways, but she had an image to maintain and watching the general spin about was as much as she could do.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years five months ago:

“Captain Zhara,” Clarke said coming to a stop at a respectful distance.

“You require something?” He asked.

“I would like permission to go into the village and offer medical aid to the civilians.” She was standing at attention, face stoic, ignoring the ache in her arm and back from her new tattoos and the pain from her face, where her new brands set.

“That’s a waste of your time.” He returned his attention to the training going on in the courtyard of the fort.

“Respectfully sir, we need information on the bandits here and the villagers are more likely to talk to
a medic than a warrior.” Clarke spoke carefully.

He looked at her, his face hard. “If you have reason to believe that a villager has information and isn’t sharing it drag them in and they’ll talk.”

Swallowing, Clarke had to force herself not to flinch. “Sir, they may not know that they know anything. I’d like to learn the village gossip.”

“And you think they’d welcome you into their homes?” He looked her over condescendingly. “They support us because we protect them but they are not like us. You are a warrior. They won’t welcome you into their homes.”

Clarke grit her teeth, reminding herself that she needed this man. “I’m not asking to be excused from any duties, I would just like permission to go into the village during my free hours. If I’m wrong you’ve lost nothing, if I’m correct you’ve gained information.”

She waited while he looked down at her, clearly considering her words. Finally, he looked away from her. “Fine, but if it interferes with your duties you’ll pay the price.”

“Of course,” She had to resist making some sign of victory. The abject poverty of the village had struck her and she wished to help. Now that she’d been given her marks, she had a legitimate reason to do so. If she could prove that compassion was useful perhaps she would be able to aid those destitute villagers she had seen on her journey.

Chapter End Notes

We’ve published our rabbit crack fic so go check that out! Brutus the rabbit is the chosen champion of the forest and student of Clarke. Its ridiculous but we enjoyed it.
Anyá was amused by her assignment in the early morning. She’d heard the revelry in the Ice Nation camp from her boring position next to Gustus running their own camp. Indra had been incredibly flustered when she’d returned from the celebration. Lexa had confided in her that an Ice Nation assassin named Niles had decided to pursue the woman rather brazenly throughout the night. She would have paid good money to see that debacle.

Sadly, all she would see would be the aftermath. As she entered their camp, a rather hung over second fell into step with her. Stifling a laugh, she asked, “So, are you my escort then?”

“Unfortunately.” The boy’s eyes were squinted in an attempt to keep the light out and his shoulders were hunkered down.

Anyá enjoyed observing his suffering as they walked towards the general’s tent. The camp was more alive than she was expecting. It was being packed up and prepared for the move to their new position for the siege that was formally beginning that night. The warriors not looking like death warmed over seemed to be delighting in making loud noises next to their unfortunate brothers. She saw a clearly still waking, Charlotte pass her with a nod heading towards her duties guarding Heda.

War camps were interesting organisms and Anyá found that despite the different colors and marks they all tended to be remarkably similar. The general’s tent was still pitched so she ducked in easily, having been informed that apparently asking or announcing your presence wasn’t a thing in this camp.

She regretted that decision when she found the general pulling a shirt over her head inside of the tent. Averting her eyes, she tried not to think about what the vast amount of scar tissue that she’d glimpsed meant.

“Anyá,” Klark acknowledged, seemingly uncaring about her state of relative undress.

“Klark, you have some of our warriors.” She explained her purpose here.

A short rasping laugh from the general surprised her. “Let’s go get your trouble makers then.” She started walking towards her, not even bothering with a jacket before stopping and groaning. Turning, the general approached her bed before hauling off the furs.

Anyá felt her eyebrows raise at the sight of a clearly unhappy to be awake Octavia.

“What did I ever do to you Clarke?” The lump groaned.

“That would be a long list O. Get up I need you to get the armory ready to move by noon.”

“But, it’s so early.” She grumbled into the pillow.

“Not my fault you didn’t get in from your latest paramour till dawn.” Klark grabbed a sheathed
sword and chucked it at the warrior. “And we’ll be talking about whoever your latest fling is that has left you smelling like sex recently. Clean the sheets while you’re up, it's your fault they stink.”

Leaving the unhappy woman despite the annoyed sounds the warrior was making, Klark gestured for Anya to follow her.

Anya was confused by the whole thing and she felt irritated that the general had obviously picked up on it when she paused and spoke with an amused lilt to her voice. “I am not like Lexa or you Trikru, or even most Azgeda. I will not hide the people I care for in fear. We’re all we have left, we’d all die for each other and we will all kill for each other.”

Anya understood. She’d seen orphans that relied on each other becoming closer than blood. As a leader, she was in charge of the lost children and she recognized that in Klark. However, that meant she also knew why it was dangerous. “You are not satisfied with the deaths of your brother’s murderers are you?”

Klark didn’t reply, which was an answer in and of itself Anya realized. She just kept walking towards the latrine ditch where she came to a stop. There were six men in the stocks who all looked incredibly miserable. Two of them were Trikru and Anya found herself surprised by the hopeful looks the Ice Nation warriors were giving Klark.

“Well hello boys, it seems like you had a nice night.” She gestured for a guard, who was standing to the side to unlock the men. “See that you don’t need to enjoy these accommodations again.”

“You had three of our warriors?” Anya questioned.

“Oh, the alcohol poisoning case.” She turned back to the men, who were truly miserable as they stood up for the first time in hours. “Go get yourselves cleaned up and then report to your division captains.”

“Alcohol poisoning?” Anya didn’t like the sound of that, poisoning was serious.

“Don’t worry,” Klark reassured her. “Your man got involved in a drinking game and drank far too much. We had him vomit up most of the drink but he’ll be in a lot of pain this morning. You can drag him back with you now or I can have him sent to you after he’s able to stand without turning green.”

“Why was poison involved in a game?” She demanded.

“Alcohol, wine, moonshine, it is all harmful to the body. When too much is drunk, it can be used as a poison. If you know how to, you can make it a far more effective poison than that. Your man just drank too much of a stronger drink than he was used to drinking. There’s no need to worry.”

Anya sighed and considered what to do. “Once I can be sure he’s well, I’ll leave him here till he’s able to move under his own power.” She finally decided.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years four months ago:

Dax wasn’t sure if he hated the ground or the sky more some days. Both were so cold all the time. Space was cold in a way that seeped into your bones, the heating never enough to be truly warm. The ground was colder still, but there were roaring fires and fighting that let your blood pump through your veins. He’d been truly warm for the first time here on the ground. The cold was more vicious cutting into him but the ability to truly warm yourself up made it worth it.
In the sky he’d always been hungry, never enough food to be truly full and it was lonely with fear surrounding everyone. After all, a single misstep and death was waiting. Like most things in the sky death was silent. Here on the ground he also felt hunger and it was agonizing, it lasted longer and left his stomach trying to eat itself. However, if he was able to bring in a kill he could eat as much as he wanted and feel painfully full and content in a way he’d never known. It was like that on the ground. The pain was excruciating, hundreds of times worse than anything he could have imagined in the sky but he felt more alive than ever before. He experienced joy, and pride and hope in way’s he’d never have dreamed of on the ark.

He was currently sitting around a fire, with a warm fur thrown over his shoulders. Octavia was leaning against his knees and he was braiding her hair. He was content. He was surrounded by people he trusted, people who he knew would have his back in the morning when he had to face the harsh world outside of their room. Octavia had even brought them a radio so they could stay connected to their comrades while they were spread throughout the country. Clarke had already proven that they could do this, that they could make it and truly become warriors. It may be full of pain but he was alive for the first time in his life.

______________________________

Present:

Clarke sat on the back of her horse and watched her men building a permanent camp for themselves along their section of the siege. She had four hundred men and fifteen miles to keep on lock down against a hostile force with unknown weapons and troop numbers. It was the sort of thing that would give a person nightmares. Shifting in her saddle, she looked over to Gunter. “How long till we have the defenses up?”

“At least a week for preliminary defenses to be up.” He replied watching the men setting up the various smaller camps along their line. They were at the central command camp.

Frowning, she considered what should come first. “I want you to put up the signal system and tree binds before dawn.” She tugged at her reins pulling her horse around. “And Gunter send out the scouts, I want anything that could be used as sniper perch outside of our camp destroyed.”

“Sha, general. Will you be escorting the medics to Trikru territory then?” He asked respectfully. “Yes, I’ll leave Cassite with you for any injuries. If anything serious occurs send a rider and I’ll return immediately.”

“Of course, do you require an escort?” He prompted.

Clarke sighed, he didn’t approve of her taking any risks, which was silly considering taking risks was how she’d survived this long. “Are you planning on ordering an escort to follow me from behind after I leave?”

“Yes, general.” He didn’t look ashamed at all, curse him and his dignified grey hair.

“One non-medical second?” She asked hoping he’d accept that.

“And Niles, he’s better suited to escorting you than building anything.” He bartered.

“Fine, but I expect my tent to be a last priority. Just stick up Octavia’s and I’ll bunk with her till we have time for non-essential equipment and structures.” She offered back.

“Done, general.” He agreed with a pleased twitch to his lips.
Rolling her eyes, she made her way to where she knew her medics were waiting. As Jake trotted happily enjoying the day of riding, she saw a second dragging a barrel of provisions. Pulling up on her reins she came to a stop next to the second, who straightened at the sight of her.

“General! Ma’am!” The second was sweating and clearly trying to hide how out of breath she was from moving the barrel.

“Soleil correct?” She looked down in a relatively fond manner even if she was keeping her face straight.

The second straightened even more if that was possible. “Yes, that’s me! At your service general.” She was trying to wipe her palms on her pants.

Clarke kept her amusement contained. “Report to the easternmost outpost in twenty minutes with a horse and gear for a week. Tell your first I’ll return you in a week’s time.”

The girl’s eyes widened in awe, “Of course general!” She was practically vibrating in excitement.

Nodding at the girl, Clarke kicked Jake signaling him to start moving again. She was amused by the sounds of another second tackling Soleil with a cry of, “Why does the general want you?!?”

“Shut up Percy!” The girl yelled back.

Allowing herself a quiet laugh as she left their bickering behind, she headed to the easternmost outpost herself. As she passed she was forced to pause and go over her orders with three of her division captains. Fortunately, Xander had his men working like a well ordered machine so that was a relief. Finally making it to where her baby medics were, she smiled as she saw them double checking their packs. Brady and Forrest seemed to be debating over whether Forrest had over packed shirts while Elise and Lisa were watching the boys in amusement. She didn’t startle at all when Niles dropped from a tree next to her horse.

“Niles.” She acknowledged.

“General! Trying to sneak off without me, you’ll break my heart.” He winked at her from his position.

“Gunter sent for you then?” She asked resigned to her fate.

“I wouldn’t miss another opportunity to woo that tall dark and handsome warrior.”

“Try not to get slapped this time Niles.” She sighed, she’d long given up on trying to curb his tendencies.

“Of course, I hear some of the men over there are equally scrumptious.” He grinned up at her.

Clarke snorted, “Are you going for a three way or are you trying to discover my type again?”

“Oh I already know your type Clarke, you’re married to your duty.” He snarked.

“Exactly,” she laughed. He really was incorrigible.

Bellamy double checked that all of his weapons were strapped in properly, that his hair was mildly under control, and that his clothing was as straightened out as possible. He was one of three captains in charge of security in the capital and he knew Nia was a stickler for formality. The whole shock
and awe part of putting fear into the heart of normal people with souls. Once sure his appearance was as good as it was ever going to be, he made his way to the entrance to the throne room. The guards at the door opened it and let him in on sight, as they should they both worked for him. Moving into the room, he bowed deeply at the waist before Nia on her throne.

“Bellamy, this is unexpected.” He heard Nia acknowledge him.

Straightening, he noticed Ontari standing behind the witch like usual. Zola was hovering behind the queen as well so the confederation of boot lickers was fully assembled. Keeping his face impassive, he addressed the queen ignoring her advisor and pet nightblood. “I came to request that a small party be sent south with some supplies.” He kept his tone even and face blank.

Nia tilted her head considering him. “And why should I allow that?”

“Because if we send additional wine, furs, and surplus luxury items to our warriors it would be a show of force.” He explained carefully. He needed her to think it served her image not his and Clarke’s agenda.

“And your friendship with general Clarke has nothing to do with this suggestion?” She tapped her fingers on the arm of her throne examining him like a bug.

“I will admit I would be more at ease knowing my sister was better guarded. The general’s and my friendship has been...strained for some time. As you know.” He shrugged off the queen’s suspicions as best he could. During the last winter, there had been a great deal of rumors about he and Clarke fighting. No one needed to know that it was her keeping him from doing something stupid after finding out his sister had been sleeping with several guards.

“We need what supplies we have, the winter snows will be coming soon.” Nia challenged him.

“It just has to appear that we have the supplies to spare. As long as the carts appear to hold those items the other clans will believe it.” He explained.

“Go on,” she appeared intrigued.

“We can send two carts to the army. One with straw covered in some furs and another with barrels of wine actually filled with water.” He laid out the plan carefully. He wished he wasn’t the one having to give this speech, he hated dealing with Nia.

“Thus giving an appearance of wealth without losing much from our stores.” She said thoughtfully.

“Exactly your majesty. Five warriors would be all that would be required for moving the equipment, hardly a dent in our forces.”

Nia seemed to think about it, leaving him sweating before her. “Very well, see to it that it is done. Oh, and Captain, don’t think I’ll forget your suggestion.”

“Of course.” He bowed hoping she meant that as a positive thing, it was hard to tell sometimes. Rising, he strode out of the throne room and headed for his room. As soon as he entered, he breathed deeply before looking up at his friends who were anxiously waiting for his arrival. “She said yes.”

“Oh thank god.” Harper breathed.

“Yes!” Miller pumped his fist.

Bellamy, as well as the others, looked at Miller fondly, “Missing your boyfriend?” He asked.
“Shut up,” Miller grouched.

Lexa was pulled from her maps in the building given to her in TonDC by Gustus walking in after knocking on the door. Looking up, she waited for him to explain his presence.

“Heda, the Azgeda general as well as six of her warriors are approaching.” he reported.

“Send for Nyko, I’ll go to greet her.” She walked confidently out among her warriors towards where she could see the Azgeda horses approaching. The party was made up of what were clearly seconds and the flirtatious assassin. She was torn between sending Indra on a task several miles down the line and summoning her. Deciding to let fate decide, she came to a stop waiting for Klark to approach her.

The general rode up with her companions. They had doubled up so that they only had four horses between them. Coming to a stop, Klark helped her second off the back of her horse before easily swinging out of the saddle. She was wearing what Lexa was surprised to recognize as formal Azgeda wear. If her face had been painted, she would have been looking at the general she’d been expecting. Her jacket had bone, metal, and blue fabric sewn onto it, along with an embroidery of the Azgeda symbol for a general.

Lexa raised her eyebrow as the seconds scrambled off the horses. The one with a sword strapped to her back was clearly attempting to stand at attention while also swiveling her head around taking in TonDC. If Klark had come with more than one full warrior or assassin she’d have been concerned. As it was she was merely curious.

“Heda.” Klark greeted, walking towards her.

“General, is there an occasion I’m unaware of that prompted your visit?” She pointedly looked at the jacket.

Klark laughed, “Unless being vomited on by a patient is an occasion worth mentioning.” She offered her arm in greeting.

Lexa clasped her forearm, feeling amused and pleased by the reply. She had been right to think it hadn’t been a statement. “Welcome then Klark. We were not expecting your healers for another day at least.”

“Gunter and my captains are capable of locking our section down without me. They get twitchy when I try and help set up defenses.” She gestured to the people she’d brought with her. “I have three healer apprentices as well as my second here to work with your healers. The rest I’m afraid are the guard Gunter insisted I bring with me since the army is so spread out.” Klark was clearly keeping from rolling her eyes at being forced to take a guard with her.

“We are honored by the trust you are giving to us.” She acknowledged with a nod. “Come, Nyko the healer of this village, will host your apprentice’s while they remain in this camp.”

“Of course.” Klark turned to her people. “Niles and Soleil take care of the horses and get the saddlebags off of them. Minions fall in.”

Gustus gave her a look and Lexa touched his arm briefly to let him know she understood. Their party walked the short distance to Nyko’s home where the poor healer paled slightly before welcoming them. The house was warm and the walls were covered in dried plants. She introduced the general and Nyko, pleased that they both seemed amicable towards each other.
“I appreciate your willingness to work with the apprentices.” Klark spoke to the healer.

“Comparing healing style’s is a worthy pursuit.” He replied watching the general curiously.

“The three healers in training are Forrest, Elise, and Lisa.” She gestured to the three as she spoke. They ranged in age but were all clearly quite young. “Don’t let their age’s deceive you they are quick studies and have more experience than most.”

Lexa watched as the apprentices puffed up under the praise, practically beaming.

“My second Brady will help you manage them. He’s the oldest and a skilled healer already in his own right.” She clasped the surly boy’s shoulder proudly.

“How long will I have to work with them?” Nyko inquired.

Klark looked over at Lexa. “If it’s acceptable with you Heda, I would like to leave them with you for a week. We can discuss if it would benefit both our peoples for them to stay longer. Although, I doubt I’ll be able to spare all of them longer than that.”

Lexa tilted her head in assent. “That is acceptable,” turning to Nyko she continued, “if that won’t interfere with your duties?”

“No Heda, the extra hands would be useful.” He assured her.

“Excellent, behave you lot and listen to Nyko while you’re here.” Klark watched her kids carefully before continuing. “I’ll come back and make sure you’ve settled in before I leave.” Turning towards Lexa, her tone changed from commanding to questioning. “Would we be able to speak?”

“Of course.” Lexa stepped out and walked towards the center of the village to see to it that things were going smoothly. She came to a stop and looked curiously at Klark. “What was it that you needed to speak about?”

“I brought a second as a part of my guard. She’s second to Laslow, the sword master who fought for his division at the feast.” She explained.

Lexa nodded. “He was impressive.”

Klark seemed pleased that she remembered the man. “If we want our forces to integrate as much as possible she’s a good place to start.”

Lexa waited curiously for Klark to continue.

“She, like her first, is quite charming, skilled, and popular amongst her peers. I love my healers but they tend to stay apart from the rest of the seconds in my army for various reasons.” Klark shook her head fondly. “But, Soleil is blunt and personable, as well as young enough to not have the hatred between our peoples as deeply ingrained as my older warriors.”

“You want to leave her here for the week along with your healers?” Lexa concluded easily.

“Yes, and if you sent one of your second’s with me I can have them work under me for the week. I swear to let no harm come to them.” Klark said seriously.

Lexa agreed with Klark’s logic and gave herself a moment to consider who she should send with her. Knowing that Gustus would know better, she looked up at her bodyguard and trusted advisor. “Gustus, who would make an acceptable candidate for this?”
Gustus twitched, he clearly didn’t like the idea of one of their own going into the Azgeda camp but he spoke evenly. “Kjelle the second of Sully is a respectable and skilled warrior.”

Lexa didn’t know the exact warrior or second Gustus was referring to, but accepted his council anyways. She trusted his judgment in this matter. “See to it that she is informed of her assignment and is ready to depart with the general.”

“Sha, Heda.” He seemed torn about leaving her side but finally left to go find the girl.

“Thank you.” Klark was watching her.

“You’re plan to ease tensions between our men is good. It would be foolish to ignore it.” She replied feeling herself stepping back internally. The look the general was giving her made her uneasy.

“Still, you are surprisingly reasonable.” Klark’s eyes finally left her.

Lexa rested her hand on the hilt of her sword. “I lead with my head.”

Klark turned back to her, frowning slightly. “Sometimes what’s illogical is the correct path. My Captain Bellamy is in charge of my duties inside of Azgeda while I’m here. If he so chose he could easily convince Nia to have me executed on my return and usurp my position. I trust that he won’t. It’s not logical.”

“If your position is so tenuous, why would you trust someone with that ability not to betray you?” She asked genuinely curious, she couldn’t imagine that sort of trust.

“Because I trust him.” She replied simply.

Lexa didn’t understand such unshakable faith in another person. Then again a part of her whispered, did she not trust Anya to never betray her? Gustus? Indra? Shaking her head, she continued to watch her men letting her thoughts fall back behind her walls.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three years four months ago:

Monroe hated bandits, they were all trained warriors and surviving bandit hunting duty was a long shot at best. After all, bandits were just warriors who decided to leave the army and then realized there was nowhere they were welcome. Bellamy had spent hours explaining why Nia’s army structure was evil, but ingenious.

As she blocked another sword strike from her larger opponent, she really didn’t care that he was as much a victim of the vile woman as the rest of them. It would be so much easier if she could just hate all the grounders. She had tried but she couldn’t, the others couldn’t either. How do you hate people removed from their villages and homes at young ages and then trained to be warriors? That the survival rate was low, and healers were mostly irrelevant was enough to make her grit her teeth in disgust. The pain from the bandits strikes didn’t help, this guy was really strong.

In some ways she and the others were fortunate, they still had each other. The Ice Nation recruits were torn from their homes and were never allowed to return and were rarely able to keep any sort of connection with other kids recruited from their village. Gasping in relief, she watched her opponent topple over a dagger sticking out of the side of his head. Nodding in thanks to Raven, she darted to help Miller with his opponent.

She and the others had no home and nowhere to belong outside of the army and as she helped Miller
cut down the bandit, she knew that these men were the same. No village would risk housing a deserter and none of them had family or friends they were close enough with to ask for shelter. Which left banditry, a practice that further kept the villages in poverty. The whole thing made her sick. Bellamy had complained about medieval bullshit for an hour after they’d realized how the military worked. Clarke had just gotten that stupid hard look on her face and gotten quite, which was bad.

Groaning, she hobbled over to a tree and sat down. Yanking out some moonshine and bandages, she started cleaning her wounds, nothing serious fortunately. Raven thumped down next to her with a grunt. Miller was just holding his knees and breathing hard next to the body of the last bandit.

Hissing as the moonshine hit the wound in her thigh, she powered through making sure it was clean. Clarke had beat first aid and injury care into all of their heads before she’d left for some place the native seconds referred to as the frozen wastelands. Nothing about that sounded good. She dutifully finished cleaning and wrapping her thigh before moving to the slice the back of her forearm before handing the moonshine over to Raven. They would all make it through this somehow and maybe someday things would be different.
Hey! Sorry it's taken us so long but I got sick and there was a lot of vomiting and writing something together doesn't go well when half the team is out of it. Hope you guys like the chapter and thanks for all the amazing comments last chapter.

Brady was not easily intimidated, he was Clarke’s second and as such he’d spent a lot of time around a lot of very scary people. Scariest of all was when Clarke was truly angry. He still remembered the first time he’d met her. He didn’t think she realized he’d been conscious when she ran a sword through his first’s chest. Clarke wasn’t like his original first, she would never leave him to die because it was easier. So, Heda’s guards didn’t scare him like they intended with their glares as he followed Nyko into the commander’s building. It was only their second day in the Trikru camp and already he was being dragged in front of Heda. At least, he thought it was because of something good, he was pretty sure. Nyko seemed excited not angry.

“Heda!” Nyko exclaimed, bowing briefly before eagerly looking back up at their leader.

Brady dipped his head cautiously, his arms full of the papers Nyko had insisted he bring. Why Heda needed to see the medical sketches he had no idea, but whatever.

“Nyko is there a problem?” Heda questioned.

The man was practically vibrating next to him. “No problem, Brady show her the papers! Heda it’s amazing the knowledge!”

Brady shuffled over to the table and started laying out the pages of the medical text Clarke had been helping them each make. The pages were loose in his volume since he hadn’t finished up all of the pages yet. Once they were spread out, he took a step to the side giving Heda room to look down at the table.

He scrunched up his face, watching as the woman stepped to the table and slightly shifted several pages to see them better. Clarke had trained him to watch people, to examine them, to understand, but he couldn’t read much from the commander. Her eyes were bright and sharp clearly taking in information, but he wasn’t sure what she thought of it.

“These drawings of the inside of a body, how did you get these?” She looked up at him, face blank but focused.

He felt himself swallowing. “Eh, Clarke likes us to draw our own diagrams from experience so we cut up the bodies of some of the dead to practice on.” He shrugged.

“The dead?” The commander’s voice was hard.

Brady was careful, “Our enemies, before we burn the bodies, or bury them. You got to learn through experience and a mistake on the dead is no big deal.” Shrugging, he thought about how to word it better. “Like if ya gotta take a leg offa someone if ya already have done it on a dead person ya’ll do alright with the live one.”
“Do you ever kill people to be able to study them?” The commander asked watching him with sharp eyes.

“Naw, Clarke hates pointless killing. Though she does want to get ahold of a reaper. If she can see what’s wrong with em on the inside maybe she can fix em.”

The commander’s eyebrows rose in surprise he noticed. He’d thought Clarke would have mentioned that but then again despite Clarke working with them, Trikru weren’t trustworthy. He noticed Nyko looking excited though.

“Has your general captured any reapers yet?”

Brady shook his head. “Naw, keeping a prisoner like that when the camp isn’t settled is stupid.”

Nyko nodded, “Still, if she’s able to save the reapers.” He drifted off in thought before snapping back to attention. “My apologies, with all the legends about the general being able to breathe life back into the dead I didn’t know what to expect. Clearly, she’s taught you well.” He moved to pull a drawing of the digestive system forward.

“Eh, you mean CPR?” Brady scrunched up his nose. “It’s not like it’s magic.” He pulled a sketch of the circulatory system out of the pile. “See, a person ain’t really dead till their brain stops working. And tha’ takes a bit dependin’ on the injuries.” He pointed to the heart. “So if ya can get the heart pumping again and get thuh person breathing some of thuh time ya can still heal someone.”

“You’re saying the general truly can breathe life back into the dead?” The commander asked clearly surprised.

“Naw, dead is dead. But, if ya ain’t all thuh way dead just mostly dead than sure. Anyone can do it if they know how.” He shrugged, it was one of the early lessons Clarke had beat into all of their heads.

Nyko clapped him on the shoulder. “How does this work exactly?”

He pointed to a diagram of a man. “See here? Ya compress thuh heart to keep thuh blood going. Than if they ain’t coming back ya haf to breath for them. Close thuh nose, make sure the throat is clear then breath into their mouths. Then more compressions. I can show ya on a person better than a pic though.”

“Heda!” Nyko turned to look at the commander, he was actually smiling.

The commander held her hand up. “Yes, go learn this technique.” She leveled her gaze on him and he felt the weight of it. “I thank you for sharing this knowledge with us Brady kom Azgeda.”

He bowed slightly as he gathered up his papers and left with Nyko back to the medical tent. Clearly, Clarke underestimated herself when she said she wasn’t a great healer. He’d been expecting to be completely overwhelmed by Trikru medicine. Oh, their medicinal supplies were far superior to theirs but technique wise clearly Azgeda was superior. He felt a slight hop in his step at the well of pride he felt at that.

Three years three months ago:

Octavia and Jakob were galloping south as fast as their horses could take them. The bandit problem in the north was worse than anyone had thought. The fort had been attacked the night before, sixteen dead of their own to the twenty dead of their enemies. As they road Octavia hissed in pain as the
stitches in her side pulled. Shifting so less stress was on them, she rose up higher in her saddle.

Riding was amazing, she could feel her heart beating in time with her horse’s. Their muscles straining as they worked together to fly over the roads, the wind biting into what little of her face was showing. She’d wrapped a piece of linen around her face to help with the stinging sensation of the freezing air battering her face. According to Jakob, it would be warming soon. She wasn’t able to enjoy the experience properly though. No, they were riding desperately to the nearest outpost to beg for reinforcements. Half the fighting force in the outpost was dead, it was dubious whether they’d survive the week without more manpower. The only good thing to come out of the whole thing was Dax and Harper earning their brands in the battle.

“Pay attention to the road.” Jakob snapped at her.

She clenched her teeth. “Easy for you to say, your friends aren’t back there.”

“Worrying about things outside of your control is weakness. Control yourself and maybe you’ll make a warrior.” He replied in his usual condescending manner.

“You’re not worried about the others?” She asked incredulously.

“If they die they die, if the fort falls it falls. It is outside of my control. Our task is to rouse the next outpost to either reinforce or to retake the fort. Complete your task, let anything that is useless in that endeavor fall away or you will fail. It is not the warriors place to question or to worry. That is the leader’s burden.”

Octavia glared at his back as he and his horse galloped beside her. “I won’t just forget my friends.”

“Then a time will come when you will fail where you could have succeeded.”

Present time:

Monty easily swung out of the saddle before handing his reigns to a second, Percy if he was right, who had run up to help. He smiled at Raven, who was helping Bolt off of the horse the seconds were sharing. He’d fallen asleep a few miles back and didn’t seem too keen on waking up.

“Need any help there?” He asked, grinning at the fond expression that would filter across Raven’s face anytime she showed affection for her seconds.

“I’ve got my minions. Nut wake up your brother you two need to get your horse taken care of before you can rest. You can sleep in my tent tonight till we can find out proper sleeping arrangements for you later.

Monty groaned as he realized they still needed to report to Clarke. God, and figure out how to contact Bellamy again because there was no way he’d be ok without another report soon. He was brought out of his musing when he was physically lifted into a tight hug. Wheezing, he twisted slightly, “O, I can’t breathe.”

“Too bad,” Octavia huffed into his shoulder as she let his feet touch the ground but kept her arms wrapped around him.

Huffing, he wiggled enough so that he could return the hug. He laughed when he felt Raven’s arms encircle the two of them.
“You losers are leaving me out!” Raven complained.

“Never.” Octavia replied. Finally, she pulled back. “Did you guys get in contact with everyone?”

Monty felt the smile on his face fall. “Yeah, but we need to talk to Clarke. Can you take our horses so we can go report immediately?” He felt bad about it but he was dead on his feet and Clarke needed to know about the mountain as soon as possible.

Octavia instantly became serious as well. “Of course, Bellamy and the others are alive?”

“Of course.” Raven said like it was a given even though life was hardly a given here on the ground. “But, we found out what’s causing the jamming and Clarke needs to know. We’ll fill you in tomorrow.”

Octavia nodded, “Go, I’ve got the minions and the horses.”

Monty gripped her arm in thanks before following Raven towards the command tent. He noticed that Raven was noticeably limping, riding for long periods of time always made her limp more pronounced. He didn’t mention it though, she’d give him the silent treatment for days if he dared do so. The tent was organized the same as always and he felt relief at seeing Clarke bent over a map. She looked up and he found himself and Raven being pulled into a tight hug again. He wrapped one of his arms around her while he grabbed Raven’s hand with the other. It was good to be back.

Clarke finally pulled back. “Were you successful then?”

Raven snorted. “Of course we were successful, when are we not?”

“Bellamy and the others are alive and unharmed.” He added quickly before Clarke could ask.

Her shoulders fell, tension draining out of her. She sat down on one of the stools easily. “Good.” Pushing some of her hair behind her ear, she looked at them. “But, it’s not all good news is it?”

He hated seeing the resigned expression on her face and wished he could do something about it. However, he’d long ago accepted that hiding bad news was unacceptable. They survived because there were no secrets, no lies. Trust, dedication, and luck were how they’d survived and how they would continue to do so. “We know why the signal was being jammed.”

Clarke’s face shuttered to her command face, considering and firm. “Tell me.”

Raven half sat half collapsed on the bed letting her leg rest. “The mountain, they’re like us.”

“Explain.” Clarke’s voice was an order.

Raven ran a hand through her hair in frustration. “They have tech. The jamming signal is coming from the mountain. For a multi-channel signal like that with that level of amplification it has to be intentional. If I had to guess, they have their own communications on a separate encrypted channel. Without better tech and tools I can’t even begin to crack into their communications. Clarke I think they’re like the ark. Technologically advanced, insular, it fits and our orders were to go to the mountain.” She trailed off.

“You think the ark knew about the mountain?” Clarke asked seriously.

Raven bit her lip. “I don’t know. I mean thanks to you we know the ark’s air systems were failing but the ground wasn’t supposed to be survivable. Why waste a drop ship on a test doomed to failure?”
Monty decided to add his opinion. “I don’t agree with Raven, if the ark had known, they’d have come down.”

Clarke seemed to think for a moment before speaking again. “If the council knew about life on the ground, there would have been no purpose to my father's actions or his execution.” She leveled her gaze on Raven consideringly. “If Jaha’s message to us was correct, Mt.Weather was a military bunker. It would make sense for some survivors to colonize a defensible position like that. It would mean the fog is definitely a weapon then and not the curse the Trikru think it is.”

Raven seemed to cave slightly. “I’m sorry. I just...I don’t want the ark to be gone and for a moment I could think they might have survived. That Finn might have.”

Clarke stood up. “If the ark is still alive, then they’ve killed thousands of people to keep themselves that way. You know better than anyone that the chance of that is slight.” She gave Raven a look of empathy. They all knew any loved ones left on the ark were in all likelihood dead.

They talked long into the night about their trip, Bellamy’s discussion with Nia, the wagons that should arrive within the month, and anything else they could infer about the mountain. Finally, Clarke left them to get some sleep striding out into the night. He didn’t even bother to change, just stripped off his weapons and face planted on the bed.

Lexa was awoken by a commotion outside of her house. Deciding to leave it to her guards to take care of the issue till morning, she rolled over intent on getting what rest she could. When she heard the voice of general Klark angrily demanding to speak to the commander though she accepted defeat. She didn’t bother doing more than pulling a jacket over her sleeping clothes before opening the door.

“General, what brings you here at this hour?” She took in the scene. Klark was glaring down her two guards. She was fairly disheveled and unaccompanied.

Klark looked up at her, clearly determined. “We need to talk.”

Motioning for her guards to stand down, she spoke. “Come in then.”

She poured herself a glass of water from a clay pitcher before turning to face the general. “So, what is so urgent?”

“I have information on the mountain.” Klark replied.

Lexa narrowed her eyes. Something was very wrong, the general was being guarded and was clearly not pleased with whatever information she’d gotten. “Why are you afraid?” Because that’s what this was. The woman before her was scared, and not of the mountain.

Klark huffed, “Because if how the information was found exactly gets out, you won’t be able to keep the other generals from taking my head due to the implications.”

“What implications?” Lexa’s eyes narrowed, she was wide awake now.

“I told you before I wasn’t born in Azgeda.” Klark sat down and seemed to search for words. “I was born in the ark. That’s not important, what’s important is that when they sent one hundred prisoners we were told to go to Mt.Weather, that there were supplies there our people had left there generations ago. Of course, it all went to hell and we ended up Nia’s ‘guests’. So, I assumed that my people’s ancestors left supplies and long ago some other group colonized the mountain, that there was no connection.”
“But, something has changed your mind.” It wasn’t a question, Lexa gripped the hilt of her dagger as she watched the general.

“Yes, my original people used old world tech. The weapons that ended the old order, we could use them. Guns, bombs, poisonous gases. Raven is my expert on old world tech, we’ve done our best to use what we could scavenge to give us an edge. It’s not much, but we were able to scrounge enough to be helpful, especially with communication. Particularly a piece of tech called a radio. It allows us to communicate over great distances. If you want to understand how I’m not the one to ask. However, when my army arrived our radios stopped working. I sent Raven to ascertain where and why. Without communication I can’t stay in contact with my forces within Azgeda. She found out why. The mountain is releasing a signal to break up communication. The only reason to do that would be to prevent any of the tribes from using that tech against them. It means they’re using it themselves.”

“Are you implying that your people are allied with the mountain?” Lexa found keeping calm was getting incredibly difficult.

“No, if that were the case my family would not be the only members of my people left alive. Even if I’m wrong and some of them have managed to scrape by and survive until now they’ve done abominable things to do so. If they were allied with the mountain I would have been executed and you’d be fighting an enemy with far more firepower than you are prepared to handle.” Klark pinched the bridge of her nose. “But, you could have guessed that.”

“Indeed.” Lexa sat on her throne examining the general before her.

“Raven is brilliant. Within a month a convoy from Azgeda should arrive that will contain the tools she’ll need to break through the jamming signal. If she does that we can listen in on the mountain.”

“Explain.”

“Radios are used to communicate over distance. The mountain is a stronghold. Who do you think they’d use their radios to talk to?” Klark raised an eyebrow at her.

“To give orders to their soldiers.” Lexa breathed. The opportunity was incredible. If they knew their enemies orders the possibilities were endless.

“Not to mention now that I know that the mountain is similar to the ark, I have a better idea what strategies they will use during this siege and how my family can help turn their advantages against them.”

“If you appear too knowledgeable about the mountain and how it works the others will believe you are connected to the mountain.” Lexa nodded in understanding. If the generals decided that Klark was working for the mountain, or worse Azgeda was working with the mountain she wouldn’t be able to stop a war from breaking out. “So, you came to me.”

Klark waved a hand in a vague shape. “Azgeda is my home and my warriors are my people. I will not sit on information that could win us this war because it would be safer for me. We have some routes to explore in ways to move against the mountain with this new knowledge while we wait to see what they do in response to our siege. I am hoping we will be able to hide my and my people’s direct involvement with the new strategies and ideas as much as possible.”

Lexa released her dagger and drummed her fingers against the arm of her throne. “Am I correct in assuming that the courses of action you’re referring to would involve this radio, any equipment we can get off a dead mountain soldier, and the reapers?”
Klark nodded. “If you can hold any items we get from the mountain men in your camp, I hope that will put off suspicions. You can call healers, scouts, and anyone who knows anything of old world tech to consult on the technology of the mountain so that the contributions of my warriors may be more anonymous and be made as a tribute to your command.”

It was a tempting proposition. Not only would it provide a plausible way to use Klark’s potential knowledge of the mountain but it would force relations between the armies as well. “Tell me what’s your plan for the reapers?”

“Capture several of them, see if I can find a way to cure them. If I can, capture and heal as many as possible. If I can’t kill them all. They are a weapon of the enemy. If we can’t take it, we break it.” Klark’s eyes were hard and Lexa had no question she would kill every reaper personally if that was what was required.

“Why bring all this before me now?”

“It was vital that you know this information and I need your help if I am to protect my people from the fall out of using it. You would not have blindly accepted any information I gave without knowing where I got it.” Klark scoffed. “We don’t trust each other but for now at least we have the same goal, to take the mountain. I will do nothing to endanger my people and you won’t endanger the alliance. Call it a calculated risk.”

Lexa leaned back in her throne and considered what the general had brought to her. This could lead to the fall of the mountain and it would give her the credit for any successes, second hand at least. Still, Klark was right, she didn’t trust this general. She did trust however that this woman would do anything to protect her people. So, that was the question, if this was a trap how would it benefit the general’s warriors? She frowned slightly, with the formation of the siege they were all cut off from close allies if the coalition disintegrated. Klark’s forces were in enemy territory. Even if no one attacked them, it would take at least two days to cross the border into Azgeda lands. With Trikru attacks though it could take longer, the losses would be catastrophic. So, at least for now open war wasn’t a goal and if they took the mountain any plans to discredit her as Heda were pointless.

Standing, she offered her arm. “Then it seems we have a common goal.”

Klark was clearly relieved. She stood as well and clasped their arms together. Her grip was firm and Lexa wondered if she was falling into a trap as she gripped Klark’s arm in return. If it was, she was unsure if she could avoid it since she couldn’t see it. Staring at the brands on the general’s face, she had to remind herself that for all the qualities of a leader this woman exemplified she was still from an enemy clan and not someone that should be trusted. She could not trust the safety of her people merely to her instinctive sympathy with the leader of an untrustworthy clan. No matter how admirable Klark may appear.

____________________________________________________________________________

Octavia slipped silently to the cave where she and Lincoln had been meeting. She needed to speak to him, she couldn’t avoid telling Clarke any longer. Lincoln needed to know so he could inform Indra before she heard from someone else if it hit the gossip chain. It amazed her how war camps were gossip hotbeds.

Upon entering the cave, she instantly knew something was wrong, there had clearly been a struggle. The remains of the fire had been kicked around and the carefully arranged pots of salves were shattered across the floor. Examining the remains of the fight more closely, she found droplets of blood dried on the ground. Someone had hurt Lincoln and taken him somewhere afterwards. The only person who knew about them was Burka. Octavia clenched her hands and turned before
heading back to the Azgeda line as quickly as her feet would carry her.

Three years three months ago:

Clarke ran her short sword through the chest of the bandit in front of her. His hands scrabbled over hers before going limp and his whole body crumpling. She tried to pull her sword out of his chest but it was stuck on one of his ribs. Cursing, she rolled away, barely dodging an ax swing where her head had just been. They were being overrun, holding their ground was going to get the rest of them killed. Waiting for reinforcements was folly.

Scrambling back to her feet, she tackled her newest attacker who was still over extended from his ax swing. She didn’t even bother to draw one of her knives as they toppled to the ground. She just raised her fist and started pummeling him. He kicked his legs wildly trying to unseat her. She lost her balance for a second and that was all he needed to get a hit in across her face. Her left hand yanked the knife out of her boot while with her right she swung at him again. He crossed his arms over his face to protect himself from her strike. She didn’t hesitate, driving her dagger into his armpit. He cried out in pain. Taking the advantage, she grabbed the handle of his dropped ax.

She didn’t have the strength or the room to properly swing at him so she just yanked the hilt as hard as she could into the side of his head. It hit with a wet thunk. The body under her went still. Her lungs were heaving with the effort to breath in the cold air that was burning her lungs from the inside out. She rose into a crouch quickly looking for her next target. She was in time to see Zhara, captain of the outpost and man in charge of this pride filled lunacy, get his head cleaved in two. Swiveling her head, she took a quick measurement of the fight since none of the bandits seemed to have noticed her yet. There were only eight of them left. Echo was clearly unable to stand. Keaton was bleeding heavily from a head wound. Dax had an arrow sticking out of his arm and was being pushed back by the two enemies he was trying to face off against.

She didn’t bother checking the others conditions visually, there wasn’t time. “FALL BACK TO THE CELLAR!”

Clarke had no authority over the Azgeda warriors, not even the seconds, but they listened to her. She ran to Echo’s side, heaving her arm over her shoulder, and started to drag the woman with her. Harper made it to the cellar first ripping the doors open. Clarke felt her left foot give way under her, toppling her and Echo onto the flagstones hard. Swearing, Clarke rolled over onto her back. There sticking out of her calf was an arrow, she was pretty sure adrenaline was the only reason she couldn’t feel the pain that should accompany such an injury.

Harper darted forward to help her but Clarke snapped at her when she realized her intention. “Get Echo in!”

Harper did as ordered without question, grabbing Echo under the armpits and dragging her into the cellar. Echo was half unconscious and didn’t struggle. Clarke yanked out a knife from around her waist and threw it with all of her strength at the archer who had hit her and was now aiming for one of the last standing warriors. It didn’t hit a vital point that she could tell, but a knife in the thigh had to hurt the woman.

With the last of her energy, she struggled to her feet once more half limping half stumbling towards the cellar. Atom grabbed her arm and pulled her the rest of the way into the room. The doors were slammed shut with a resounding crack.

Clarke didn’t even bother to breathe a sigh of relief. “Barricade the door!”
In a series of movements that caused excruciating pain to all involved, they managed to drag several crates and barrels and create a semi reliable barricade. Clarke limped to Echo’s side while ripping a piece of fabric off her shirt before dropping beside her and trying to stop the bleeding. “Everyone put pressure on anything bleeding that you can’t fix yourself. Harper heat up a dagger, we don’t have time for stitches.”

Clarke may not have any authority but the others were listening to her orders. She had no idea what they would do now that they were effectively trapped. Still, they had at least bought themselves some time. An hour at most before the bandits got tired of waiting and trying to break their way into the cellar and started a fire. Hopefully, it would be enough time to come up with a plan.

Present:

Charlotte jerked upright, screams echoing around her. She felt hands on her shoulders and she struggled against them. She was unable to dislodge the person on top of her though. Panic flooded her veins as she bucked wildly all of her training falling by the wayside. Her lungs burned and she couldn’t seem to breath. It was only when she felt the suffocating pressure in her lungs that she realized the screaming had stopped.

Her eyes finally registered Brady’s form above her trying to hold her down. Gasping, she stopped struggling. She folded into the fetal position as soon as he released her on realizing she wasn’t fighting back anymore. Great wracking sobs broke out amongst heaving breaths. She tried to concentrate on the feel of the furs under her, the fabric against her skin, the firm hand on her back. She felt the uncomfortable sensation of cold sweat rolling down her back and face. She was unsure of how long she lay there before she opened her eyes again, her chest aching but her heart beat calm. Brady was sitting next to her in all his gangly glory, it was accentuated by the way his sleep clothes hung off him all wrong. He was glaring across the room. Letting her eyes follow his gaze, she saw Anya leaning against the wall of the room she’d been given. The woman’s eyes were closed but her position spoke of discomfort. She glanced at the door and saw Aden and Tris standing guard.

Slowly, she sat upright. She didn’t shake it off when Brady wrapped a fur around her shoulders. Her eyes flickered round the room again. “My apologies if I woke you.” Her face was burning as she stared at the floor in shame.

“If you don’t need anything I’ll leave.” Anya said.

Charlotte shook her head, unwilling to look at the Trikru there any longer. She heard the steps of the woman leaving and her door being closed. Brady pulled her into a hug.

“I’m a staying with ya whether ya like it or nawt.” Brady pronounced.

She looked up at the stubborn set of his jaw. Leaning her head into his shoulder, she nodded. It was weak to take comfort from someone outside of her family like this. He was Clarke’s second though so she supposed that made it better. She didn’t think she could handle being alone right now anyway, with the nightmares so close to the surface. Her time sleeping and training in the dungeon, hearing the prisoner’s screams, still haunted her. Especially when there wasn’t anyone there to remind her that she wasn’t alone in the damp and cold with nothing but screams for company.

She didn’t fall asleep again, just stayed pressed into Brady’s side. The second’s snores told her he had fallen asleep. She sat and gathered herself, letting the ache in her chest slowly dissipate with each breath and beat of her heart.
Only one flashback this chapter. The present story line was running long and we were already longer than usual so we decided to just go with the one. Thanks for the comments and we hope you all enjoy the latest chapter. Also it’s really cool that you guys seem to be ok with the grounders we’ve had to add to the story. I mean seriously the show should have given us more named people to work with. Thank god for Fire Emblem cause coming up with enough characters on our own would have been really annoying.

Burka stood silently behind her general’s shoulder eyes scanning for threats. Most of her attention was on the reaper tied to a post next to Nyko’s house like some sort of rabid dog. It wasn’t the greatest threat but it interested her. The creature had once been a tall and broad man, Trikru by the tattoo she saw peeking out above his collar. The man, who had been reduced to a snarling monster was salivating, eyes bloodshot and dilated, muscles flexed, fighting against his chains. It was futile and she found herself interested in the creature’s hapless struggles.

The true threat lay in the other healers arguing over a method for sedating the husk of a man. Five of the clans were represented. She did not know why it was necessary for healers from the other clans to be present, or why they were conducting this experiment in Ton DC but it wasn’t her place to question.

The healer from Sankru was the only one from an enemy clan other than Trikru present which made things slightly more bearable for her. She let her fingers run along a line of poisoned needles that were hidden in the lining of her sleeves. It comforted her that she could kill any threat to the general without even pausing to draw a blade. Hetzal, the Sankru healer, was a slight man, tall and weedy. He was balding and his head looked almost cracked from being burned in the sun a few too many times. There was a slouch to his stance and he evaluated those around him with a wariness that pinged Burka’s senses. He was either a coward or had something to hide. Possibly both.

Ephraim of the plains had sent a small party including two healers and a handful of warriors. It was a show of good faith and Burka paid less attention to them, the plains and Azgeda had long been allied. Besides, stout Moulder and his former second the willowy Natasha were unarmed. A rarity even amongst healers. None of the other healers were within striking distance of the general so she ignored them.

She moved so that she was beside the other Azgeda guard Benny. She knew he was an effective deterrent, he was an intimidating warrior. They stood together and watched as Clarke seemed to get sick of the discussion on sedation methods. She walked straight up to the monster and stuck a needle she knew was coated in a paralyzing poison into the side of its neck. She turned to face the now silent healers.

“He was hurting himself and I’d rather not have to treat additional injuries to the ones he has already.” Turning towards the seconds, she gave orders. “Get him into the healing hut. Clean him, bandage any injuries he may have, and send for me once you’re done.” With that, she left the circle of healers pausing only to give a nod of acknowledgement to Nyko.
Burka easily slid behind Clarke as she walked towards the house given to the commander during the siege. Benny remained in place to make sure none of their apprentices or Brady were harmed by the foreign elements present. They passed the house and made their way to where some of the Trikru were sparring. She noticed that Charlotte was working on knife forms with a blond teenager.

She came to a stop just out of arm’s reach of Clarke as the general came to a stop besides the Commander, who was watching the knife training with interest. She was more relaxed here, where weapons were in the open. From the side of her eyes, she saw the way Clarke marginally settled and a certain tenseness in her neck seemed to dissipate while standing next to the commander. Interesting.

“I’ll have you know, a gaggle of healers is almost as bad as a gaggle of generals.” Clarke remarked in an annoyed tone.

The commander tilted her head to the side. “I was unaware, but you have my sympathy.”

Clarke snorted, “Glad to hear it; and to think I asked for this.”

The side of the commander's mouth twitched. “You did say you made foolish decisions on occasion.”

Clarke narrowed her eyes but her face wasn’t hard. “I still stand by that.”

“Then you must suffer the consequences of your foolish decision.” Lexa replied dryly.

Burka didn’t show it but she was surprised by the...banter between the two leaders. Her eyes caught on the commander's guard standing a respectful distance away. Flickering her attention back to the general, she noted that whatever moment the two leaders had had was over. Instead, they silently watched Charlotte schooling her opponent on how to fight with a knife as a primary weapon. Oh he was capable, she could see that, but he was also the honorable sort if his fighting style was anything to go by. Charlotte would eat him up and spit him back out if he didn’t start fighting dirty.

“What do you think?” The commander's voice interrupted Burka’s thoughts.

“Of the second?” Clarke gestured towards the boy and then continued once she saw the commander nod in response. “He’s talented.”

The commander seemed to consider her next words. “Working with your warrior has helped him improve.”

Burka felt herself frown slightly before her face smoothed out. The boy was clearly good, but in a true fight to the death she doubted his ability to survive.

“Charlotte is a good choice to iron out the flaws in his approach.” Clarke echoed Burka’s thoughts, if much more diplomatically. “He’s ill-suited for an opponent who attacks without honor.”

“And Charlotte is without honor?” The commander asked, Burka was concerned to realize she was baiting Clarke slightly.

“Honor is for when you’ve already won. There is no honor in killing.” Clarke replied.

“After the mountain falls, we may be allowed some small measure of honor.” The commander shifted so that her hands were clasped behind her back.

Clarke smiled at the commander briefly before turning her attention back to where the boy was picking himself off his ass once more. “Maybe in Trikru lands that will be true.”
“And not in Azgeda?” The commander was watching the general closely and Burka felt herself stiffening.

She had always known that Nia was foolish for letting the sky fallen live. Letting them live had only let warriors filled with nothing but hate for her and no loyalty to her thrive in her armies. Course, she had never mentioned her thoughts. She didn’t trust Nia, she didn’t trust anyone. However, she had come to trust that she was secure by Clarke’s side so long as she remained useful. There was no threat of an undeserved death or punishment. Which was more than most Azgeda generals could say, hence why she was loyal to the general, for the moment.

“Azgeda is a hard territory and to survive in it one must also be hard. Even if honor is ever something available to us, I will never be one to possess it.” Clarke replied, it was a good answer that wasn’t a risk if Nia heard of it. Burka relaxed again.

“I would have expected you to desire to be better.” The commander observed.

Clarke’s face hardened, her voice was sharp and clear. “I wish I could be the good guy. But I became a monster a long time ago and there are things I have done there is no coming back from.”

“Nia’s monster.” The commander observed.

Nodding, Clarke’s fist clenched. “I earned my rank by slaughtering an entire village down to the last child and if I was ordered to I would do it again.”

Burka wondered at the loathing that was thick in her general’s throat. Emotions that strong confused her. Her perspective, where there was only survival and the task at hand was far simpler, safer. She was pleased to have been born without the ability to feel like those around her seemed to do.

Over the course of her life, Burka was surprised by few things. Noting the approach of Octavia, clearly upset about something based off the tension and anger bleeding off her, wasn’t surprising. Octavia not slowing her approach as she neared the general wasn’t either, the woman never showed the proper respect. Burka flickered her eyes to make sure that the Trikru guard wasn’t taking her approach as a threat. Which is when the side of her face was struck, sending her stumbling back a step, pain blossoming across her cheek.

“YOU KILLED HIM!” Octavia half snarled half roared as she raised her fist for a second strike.

Burka snapped her left arm into a block, directing the punch to the side. She wasn’t expecting the kick to the gut that sent her to the ground, the wind knocked out of her. There was a split second, as she watched Octavia lunging for her again, where she realized she couldn’t fight back. In a fight of grappling, it would take her seconds if that to end the hot headed warrior. If she did so however, she wouldn’t live to see nightfall. She would not survive killing one of the general’s favorites. So, she prepared herself for pain.

It didn’t come and Burka had her second surprise in under a minute when Clarke close lined Octavia, sending her crashing to the ground, wheezing from her throat that had just been struck.

“The fuck are you doing Octavia?” The general demanded, putting herself in front of Burka.

Octavia pushed herself back up onto her feet and growled, clearly wishing to take another shot at Burka, “She murdered Lincoln!”

Burka’s eyes widened, she hadn’t killed the man. She watched in awe as Clarke struck Octavia across the face knocking her back onto the ground. Her glove had caught on the side of her face tearing a gash that was now bleeding. Clarke’s voice was hard. “Stay down or I’ll make you.”
The situation was surreal, seeing the general strike one of her favorites to protect her. Burka knew that those like her, who killed like she did, were looked down upon and distrusted. Yet, here was the general defending her. As she rose to her feet, she took in how everyone around them was watching this exchange, and the Trikru did not look happy. Actually, if looks could kill she would be dead several times over.

She was startled to feel the general’s hand on her chin. The general turned her head slightly so she could see where Octavia had first struck her. Dropping her chin, the general took a step back. “I expect you to report to the medical team for your chest to be looked at.”

“Of course general.” She said still confused by what exactly was going on.

Clarke turned towards the commander. “Is there a place we can deal with this?”

The commander was clearly stiff, her hand on the hilt of her sword. “Follow me.”

Three years three months ago:

Harper hissed in pain as she dragged another crate towards the door. The skin where Clarke had burned several lacerations shut was painful and every time she heaved the stupid crate it went from a dull burn to a sharp pain. They didn’t have time for pain though, and she was one of the lucky ones. Dax and Clarke still had arrows stuck in them. They’d just broken off most of the shaft and then wrapped around the area since they didn’t have time to remove them. Orson had a tourniquet above his mangled forearm. She didn’t need to be a medic to know that the handsome warrior with the scraggly beard who reminded her oddly enough of her father, would have to have a significant portion of his arm amputated.

Glen was in the best shape out of the eight of them, he was uninjured somehow but had lost his sword somewhere during the fight and was down to two daggers. The worst was Echo who had passed out fortunately while Clarke was burning her injuries closed. The whole room stank of blood and sweat and burnt flesh. But they were still alive and that was all that mattered.

“Keep moving, we need a wall up between us and them. Bottlenecking this room is the only way we’ll live to see the sun rise.” Clarke barked out while she shoved her own crate into the defensive wall they were making to funnel the enemy so that they would charge into the trap. It wasn’t much but it was the best they could do.

“How many do you think are out there?” Keaton asked while rolling a barrel over with Atom.

“Twenty-five inside the fort.” Orson groaned, “at least that’s what there were last count.”

“It doesn’t matter, we stick in pairs, one to block and distract while the other kills. Keep them from using their numbers against us. We kill them all. We aren’t taking any prisoners.” Clarke replied.

A loud thunk at the door warned them that the enemy had started using an axe to take the door down. They didn’t even pause in their efforts just hauling the barricade back into the defensive wall they were making now that the enemy wasn’t trying to push the door in. They had minutes left at most. Harper didn’t know how they were going to survive this. Falling back to her position by one of the openings in the defensive wall they’d made, she crouched beside Orson.

“Don’t over think it kid.” He chuckled while gripping his sword.

Harper grit her teeth, if a man who should have passed out from pain and had a mangled mess
hanging from his elbow could still hold a sword in his other hand and fight then she could too. “I never saw myself dying here.” She muttered.

“Then don’t die.” He grunted.

The door was finally broken down and the bandits spilled into the room. After that it was chaos and Harper couldn’t tell what anyone else was doing. It was a mess of stabbing, blocking, and covering for Orson’s open side. She wished she could have fallen into a rhythm but there was no rhythm to the chaos around them. The air rang with the sounds of battle. She’d been surprised at first, that the sound two swords made when hitting each other was more similar to kettles being banged together than anything else.

Her mind was clear and filled with nothing but instinct and training as they fought. As she ripped her sword out of a woman’s throat, she felt her arms burning, her legs ached. Everything hurt. She wasn’t going to last much longer. Just as she was about to collapse, she realized no one else was there attacking her. The sounds had died away. She looked across the room and saw the bodies piled around their barricade. There were six dead on the ground, splayed out at her feet. With a sick twist of her gut, she stumbled to the side before collapsing on the ground. The ground was wet with what she realized was blood but she was too numb to move. She saw Orson sinking to the ground, his face truly pale. Maybe he was finally going into shock.

“Anyone dead?” Dax’s voice piped up from across the room.

“Orson and I are still here.” Harper croaked.

The others started speaking up as well. It dawned on her they were all still alive.

“How many dead?” Clarke asked. Harper was both surprised and unsurprised to see Clarke limping out amongst the dead enemies.

“Twenty-four I think.” Atom spoke up from where he was leaning against a crate.

Clarke nodded. “Who can still stand?”

Glen stumbled forward with Dax beside him. They both looked horrible but were standing. Harper grunted and started using a barrel next to her to haul herself up. She saw Keaton try and move from where he was hunched over and just fall over with a curse.

“Right, Keaton stay with Orson and Echo, try and keep them from bleeding out. Dax, you’ve taken too much damage, help Keaton. Harper, Glen, Atom, you three are with me. We need to do a sweep of the fort and make sure there aren’t any survivors.” Clarke’s voice was strained but firm.

Harper wasn’t sure how she did it but she managed to walk along with what was left of her comrades as they swept through the grounds that were littered with dead bodies. It was strange that she wasn’t feeling more than a sort of removed sense of horror at the sight of the battle. They came upon a boy, clearly under the age of fifteen. He was one of the bandits but was still breathing. He had a knife embedded in his leg and was bleeding from what was sure to be a fatal slash to his side.

Clarke collapsed on her knees next to him. Using the back of her hand, she slapped him across the face. Harper startled at the action.

“Wake up.” Clarke ordered the kid.

His eyes widened as he took in that they were standing above him. “Just kill me!” He spat out.
“Oh I will. You just have a choice of whether it will be fast or painful.” Clarke replied, resting her hand on the knife embedded in his thigh.

Harper turned and hobbled several paces away and turned away from what she knew was about to happen. Squeezing her eyes shut, she concentrated on her breathing. Trying desperately to ignore the screams that started up. She was unsure how long she stood there, feeling the blood against her skin freezing, listening to the dying screams of a boy while her friend tortured him. Finally, it fell silent. Harper looked up when she felt a hand rest on her shoulder. Clarke was looking at her like she was barely holding herself together as well.

“I can’t Clarke. Whatever it is you need me to do, I can’t.” Harper croaked.

Clarke nodded. “I know. Go help take care of the others. Burn everything closed. I’ll take care of it properly when we get back.”

“Clarke…..why does it have to be tonight?” She knew they were going to the bandit camp now that they finally knew where it was located.

Atom spoke up from where he was picking up a sword from the ground. “Because we can’t hold the fort if they attack again.”

“We’ll be ok.” Clarke reassured her. “We’re not going to fight them. We just need to poison their food stores. They won’t be expecting us.”

Harper felt tears making their way down her face. “I’m sorry.” She choked out.

“Go get a fire going or something and get people to the dorms kid.” Glen said.

Nodding, she made her way back to the more gravely injured. It was going to be a long night.

____________________________

Present:

Ryder stood behind the commander in the arms tent they’d retreated to after the earlier commotion. He was on guard, it practically burned not being able to draw a weapon. Indra was practically shaking with rage from where she was standing arms crossed, back to the entrance of the tent. The commander was clearly unhappy and the stance and body language of the Azgeda general was enough to frighten him. He watched the general turn on the warrior who had blood dripping down her face.

“You mean to tell me that you took a lover with enormous political ramifications and didn’t inform me.” Her voice was shaking and Ryder was intensely glad he wasn’t at the receiving end of it. “When the massive incident you were creating was brought before you and it was made clear that it was no longer a secret, you did not come to me. When Burka threatened to commit a murder that would have put every one of us in mortal peril, you still said nothing! Not only that but you were fool enough to risk his and your own safety and even the very purpose of the blockade by meeting unguarded within its bounds.” The general stepped into the personal space of her warrior, glaring her down. “And when you thought for even a second that one of our own had actually murdered a Trikru warrior you still didn’t tell me!”

“Burka killed Lincoln I had to...” Octavia started.

“ENOUGH!” Klark boomed. “Burka’s failures are her own they do not excuse your own.” The general waited till the warrior ducked her head. “If you had come to me, like you’re sworn to do! I
would have told you that Burka was escorting the healers from Ingranrona here to Ton DC. Meaning unless she can be in two place at once she, couldn’t have killed your lover.”

“What?...I was sure...” The warrior let out a surprised sound. Ryder was surprised the general didn’t strike the woman for the impudence of speaking at that moment.

“That’s because you didn’t think! You lost control, again! Jakob isn’t here to die for you and Bellamy isn’t here to take your punishment for you! Has the pain and death of those you love not taught you any measure of control?!” The general seemed to breathe in, forcing herself to calm slightly before continuing. “For attacking another member of our army you will receive ten lashes. For falsely accusing a comrade of murder without evidence you will receive ten lashes. For doing these things in front of our allies and publically shaming Azgeda you and your division will spend the next month on sanitation duty.”

The warrior pulled herself up her face grim. She made to speak once more but was cut off by the general, who clearly noticed her movement and not open to hearing any defense. “Keep your mouth shut!” The warrior closed her mouth with an audible snap. The general turned on her assassin who had been watching the entire exchange with wide eyes. “And you, you knew one of my warriors was risking an incident like this and you failed to inform me. Why?”

The assassin seemed to shrink slightly but her voice came out even without inflection. “Octavia is one of your favorites, she often shares your bed. I believed you would allow her to continue to see her paramour. The risk was unacceptable so I took action to protect you. It seems I was mistaken. I will accept any punishment you deem fit.”

The general pinched her nose and breathed in before dropping her arm. “You will train the second Sophia kom Azgeda and that demon horse of hers till it’s no longer a liability to our forces. I also expect you to join Octavia and her division in sanitation duty for the next week.”

It didn’t sound like a terrible punishment but if the paling of the assassin at the mention of the horse was anything to go by, it wasn’t good. Maybe the horse was code for something more dangerous? He remained silent as he watched the two Azgeda warriors step back, clearly knowing that their lecture was over for now.

The general turned to face Heda and Indra, he was surprised that she looked more tired than anything else. “Commander, I apologize and will take any punishment my warriors have earned from you by their behavior.”

Indra spoke up through her gritted teeth. “To fight in the presence of Heda without cause is punishable by up to fifty lashes.”

Heda raised her hand indicating for Indra to fall silent. “Seeing as you’ve already punished your warriors for their transgressions, you need only take twenty-five.”

Ryder shifted surprised by the commander’s judgment but also seeing the wisdom in it. If the general was taking the punishment for her warrior than reducing the number of lashes was understandable. He felt his stance relax, sensing that the danger of the situation was passing.

The general bowed slightly, “Thank you for your mercy.”

“What of Lincoln, commander?” Indra spoke up.

The commander’s jaw clenched slightly. “We must assume he was taken by the mountain.”

Ryder noticed the warrior who had started all this stiffening.
“We should send a search party for him before declaring him dead.” The warrior, Octavia, bit out.

The general closed her eyes for a moment before speaking. “What my warrior means to say is that Azgeda will assist if a search is permitted.”

“The fool knew the risks in venturing within the blockade.” Indra stated.

“He’s been gone for too long for a search to yield results.” Heda said. “We’d be risking our warriors lives on a fool’s mission.”

The general nodded. “Is there anything to be done then?” She was asking Indra, Ryder noticed.

“No, once the mountain has claimed someone their fate is sealed.” She pronounced.

“With your permission Heda, I would send these two back to my camp.” The general requested.

“Go, if you insist on taking the punishment for your warrior still, it will need to be administered here.”

“Then I will see you after I’ve seen to their departure.” The general bowed before turning and leaving with her two warriors.

Once they were gone, Indra slammed her fist down on the table causing Ryder to jump slightly.

“That fool, what was he thinking?”

“He wasn’t thinking.” The commander replied. “I will oversee Aden’s training till another first can be found.”

“Heda, I cannot account for his betrayal.” Indra seemed pained to admit it.

The commander drew her dagger and flipped it idly in her hand. “He wasn’t a traitor. You should still be proud to have trained as skilled a warrior as him. He let his heart rule him and it brought him his death.” With that, she slid the blade back into its sheath. “See to it that the men learn that Azgeda did not kill one of our own.”

“Sha, Heda.” Indra replied.

Lexa knew that she was showing more emotion than usual based off the look Anya was giving her. It was difficult to do nothing but swallow when her first stood beside her. There was so much and so little for her to do. It was the problem with being the commander sometimes. So much to do but so few tasks her position allowed her to perform.

“Do you wish to speak about it?” Anya asked.

“There is nothing I can say, she was born to lead even if she does so in such a foolish way.” Lexa tried to keep her cringe from showing as she watched the post being slotted into place for the punishment that would soon be taking place.

Anya was silent for a minute before replying. “I would not say she is foolish. Her men would die for her. Why does this weigh on you so?”

Why indeed. “She is everything I have been raised to despise.” Lexa paused wondering how to word her thoughts. “From the brands on her face, her loyalties, to the freedom with which she demonstrates her love so openly. Yet, I cannot help but respect her.”
“Not everything can be understood second.”

“But, I should understand this.” Lexa felt her frustration leaking out. “How can she be so unaffected by the pain she brings on herself?”

Anya shifted. “I was summoned to Charlotte’s quarters two days ago. She was screaming in her sleep and we couldn’t wake her.”

Lexa watched her former first’s face. There was a haunted edge to the woman’s words. “I’ve rarely heard a warrior scream like that before. Then Brady shoved his way into the room. He was able to wake the girl and to calm her. I believe he stayed by her side last night as well. I asked him how he knew how to calm her so quickly. Half an hour and she was coherent. He wouldn’t answer me, but from what I’ve seen between the general and those she calls family I doubt Charlotte is the only one haunted like that. I doubt the general is unaffected and I know you don’t believe that either second.”

Scoffing, Lexa turned back to the post. “I haven’t been your second for many years now Anya. Still, you’re right, that was unfair of me. I do not understand her and yet sometimes I feel like I understand her completely.” She shook her head at her foolishness.

“Lexa we both know she shares a similar burden to yours. It is not strange at all that you would empathize with her. Just don’t forget that while she serves you now her loyalty lies with Nia.”

Swallowing thickly, Lexa nodded her understanding. That was the problem. The blond was Nia’s and as such would always be a threat. No matter what respect or empathy she felt for the general, she could never show it. To show even the slightest hint of weakness to the general would be suicidal, even if a part of her told her that she could trust the general.

Indra walked to the center of the village that was full to the brim with soldiers before raising her voice. “Octavia kom Azgeda violated the laws of this village by attacking a comrade. To compound her sin, she did so within view of the commander.”

There were whispers around the crowd. Lexa knew it was because no one was exactly sure what had happened that afternoon but they knew something significant had happened. After all, Octavia hadn’t exactly chosen a private place to stage her foolishness.

“Due to the commander’s mercy she only requires twenty-five lashes be administered.” Indra stepped slightly so that she was facing the Azgeda general. “General Klark will be taking her warriors punishment in her stead.”

The whispers quieted as everyone craned their necks to watch as the general walked proudly her shoulders thrown back, her formal gear on for all to see her rank. Lexa felt like something was lodged in her throat as she watched the general come to a stop in front of the post. It was obvious how short Klark was though it hadn’t truly hit her before now. Her face was impassive and proud. Her second standing behind her frowning.

Klark didn’t wait for a prompting from Indra. She just reached up and unbuckled her pauldron before resting it in her seconds hands. She calmly and methodically unbuckled and unbuttoned her jacket before also removing it and laying it on top of her pauldron. With deft fingers, she braided her hair up and away from her back. It was remarkable how calm she was as she reached down to the hem of her shirt and then she paused for the first time, but only for a moment. Then like with everything else she quickly pulled it over her head. She turned to Indra, calm and unashamed, wearing nothing above her waist save for bindings around her breasts.

Indra opened her mouth and nothing came out as she seemed frozen for a moment. The crowd had
fallen dead silent. Lexa felt her own eyes widening. The general’s body was a patchwork quilt of scars. Some of the scars on her back were obscured by the winding vine tattooed up her spine with dozens of leaves coming off of it. Lexa knew that each leaf represented a pauna kill. She also had known Klark was reported to be the most successful pauna hunter to have ever been born. There was no doubt that was true, the numbers were truly staggering.

It wasn’t the proof of the woman’s prowess in the hunt that had struck the crowd dumb. It was clear someone had sliced a knife across most of the general’s body some of the scars disappearing into her pants. There were brands that she and everyone else there knew were not ceremonial, burnt across her entire body. They differed in size and made it difficult to tell which injuries had been from combat and which were from torture. The scars made it clear she’d been tortured, brutally. There were also four deep claw marks across her right shoulder that stood out due to being clearly burnt closed.

Klark seemed to understand that Indra was at a loss for words. She walked to the post and wrapped her arms around the rope hanging from the top, taking a position it was clear she had taken before on more than one occasion. Indra finally seemed to come out of the shock she’d been in, walking so that she was the appropriate distance before unfurling the whip.

Lexa felt her knuckles pop from the pressure she was using to grip the handle of her sword when the first strike cracked through the air. She wasn’t sure if she was relieved or not when Klark didn’t make a sound as the whip sliced across her back. By the fifth crack, blood began to run down the woman’s back, yet she still didn’t make a sound. Lexa refused to accept why but it tore her up to watch this, to allow this. She should have never let Klark take her warrior’s place. It took all of her strength not to call for this to end, but she stood rigid and still, her jaw aching from keeping it closed. Finally, the twenty fifth strike cracked through the air before lashing across the woman’s back. Indra let her arm drop to her side. “It is done. Let all know that breaking of laws will not be tolerated.”

Lexa let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding as she saw the general’s second start forward to help her off the post. However, Klark was already unwinding her own arms from the ropes. Brady clearly said something to his first but she just smiled tightly at him before shaking her head. Lexa could tell she was in pain, but she still walked on her own power towards her. Lexa felt herself frown not understanding why the general was coming towards her.

“Lexa, Anya.” Klark rasped out. “Would you join me in the medical hut?”

Lexa ignored how hearing her name from Klark made her feel and agreed, falling into step with the general. She understood not showing weakness but no one would judge the woman for at least letting her second help her walk to the hut. Yet she walked, slowly and carefully, but under her own power.

She was relieved when they finally reached the hut and Clarke promptly lay down face first on one of the beds with a groan. Brady quickly set her gear on the floor beside her before grabbing a bowl of already prepared water.

Lexa noted the arrival of Nyko, who went immediately to Brady’s side to help with cleaning out the general’s back. She stood silently as Klark’s wounds were cleaned and a clear liquid that caused the general to hiss washed over it before a needle and thread were used to sew several lacerations shut. It was while her back was being stitched with careful precision that Klark finally spoke.

“I’m sure you’ve heard that our reaper died this afternoon.”

“Yes, it is regrettable that they are to remain lost to us.” Lexa replied, sitting down on the bed next to
Klark’s, ignoring Anya’s presence behind her.

“I don’t think so. I know what’s wrong with them.” Klark let out a hiss before continuing. “They’re going through withdrawal, like a drunk when their wine is taken away only far more severe. If we can keep them alive through the process, we may be able to save them.”

Nyko spoke up. “I agree with her Heda. I had not believed that there was anything that could save someone from withdrawal to this degree. However, with her CPR we may be able to keep at least a handful of them alive long enough to return to being men.”

Lexa breathed out in disbelief and yet felt hope. “Truly?”

“Yes, at the very least it’s worth attempting.” Klark said.

“Then do it.” Lexa was conflicted on whether she should leave now that Klark had clearly told her what she’d wanted to say. Deciding to stay, she stared at Klark’s golden hair. “Why did you take your warrior’s punishment?”

Klark laughed into the pillow under her head. “I swore to protect them and it won’t take long for my back to heal. It was an easy decision.”

Nyko made a noise of dissent in the back of his throat. “Warriors and your pride. We’ll have to burn your back shut if you push yourself.”

Klark moved her arm where the braided design of a healer wound around her bicep. “I know how to care for my injuries. As long as the blockade stays in place, I can let my back heal naturally.”

Lexa felt her lip twitch at Nyko’s consternated face and the clearly disbelieving look Brady was giving the general’s back from his position stitching her up.

“Where did you get all those scars?” Anya asked curiously from her position behind her.

Lexa stiffened, realizing she’d told no one about Klark’s tale of being tortured in the queen’s dungeons.

Klark spoke with considerable venom. “Nia is not a kind ruler.”

“Why serve her then?” Anya asked.

Lexa wanted to tell Anya to shut up, but she also desperately wanted to hear the answer. Klark kom Azgeda was nothing like what she had expected and she wanted to know why it was that she was forced to distrust her.

“Because I swore to protect my family.” Klark replied.

It was an echo of her reason for taking the whipping in place of her warrior. Lexa stared at her wishing she could hate her. It would be so much less dangerous if she hated her. Instead, she found that she could not. Indeed, Lexa couldn’t help but admire Klark’s devotion to her people and the dedication she had consistently showed for them since their first meeting.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the lovely comments last chapter! Keep up with the questions we love answering them. We haven't finished the draft for the next couple chapters yet so it may be a day or two. If there is anyone's perspective you want let us know.

Anya pulled Gustus aside and guided him into her tent. Ignoring his stoic face, she started speaking. “We need information on Klark, and we need it now.”

Gustus frowned. “We’ve needed information on her for a while, why now?”

“Because Lexa is starting to trust her.” Anya didn’t mention that it wasn’t the trust necessarily that was worrying her. No need to send Gustus off to do something stupid. Despite what Titus and Gustus may believe, feelings were not weakness.

“I’ve noticed she listens to her council.” He was clearly displeased with this.

Anya was careful with the next part. “The general’s council has been wise so far. Still, she is Azgeda and we need to know that she doesn’t plan on betraying Lexa. If she doesn’t mean her harm, having an ally in Nia’s court would be a boon.”

“You would ally with Ice Nation scum?” He asked, clearly outraged.

Not rolling her eyes was a burden sometimes. “I would have the coalition secure and we both know that Azgeda is a part of that coalition, whether we like it or not.”

Gustus narrowed his eyes, “Even if you want more information on the general, it’s impossible to get it without violating the coalition.”

“Not everything is torture. We have the perfect opportunity tonight to gain information.” She replied.

“You intend to get information out of the assassin, how?” Gustus crossed his arms looking confused.

“She’ll be the only Ice Nation warrior in Ton DC tonight. The healer, Brady, will be with Nyko helping with their new reaper and the others departed this morning. If we get her drunk enough, her tongue may loosen. She is clearly close to the general, she may be able to give us enough information to help protect Lexa.” Anya was rather pleased with her plan. The problem was getting Gustus to agree to it.

He laughed in his booming voice. “You will sooner see a pig fly then see an assassin lose her head in drink. She’ll know your game as soon as you place the mug in her hand.”

Anya closed her eyes for a second. Gustus was a good leader, a good warrior, and uncannily attuned to Lexa. For all that, he was not particularly good with politics or plots. “She won’t if we get more than just her drunk.”

“Explain.” He looked thoughtful, she figured he was understanding.
“Convince Indra to reward the men for acting appropriately while the village was crawling with foreign healers and warriors. Break out the wine and ale. I can see to it that the girl’s training partners encourage her appropriately before I question her, casually.” She laid out her plot.

“You think this will work?” He asked seriously.

“I think it’s our best chance to learn more about Klark and thus better learn what type of a threat she is to Lexa.” Anya answered honestly.

“Then it will be done.” He said.

Three years ago:

Bellamy stood at attention behind Nia’s throne, his ceremonial spear clasped in his hand, a mask of bone concealing most of his face. Petitioners to the throne were being allowed to speak with the queen today. He hated guarding her, but it was his duty and kept his family safe. He’d thought gaining his brands would have given him more rights, but it truly hadn’t. Now the civilians avoided him when possible like he had the plague and they would catch it just by touching him. He did have more freedom to move throughout the capitol but his duties were stricter. Clarke was lucky. She had received her own hunting team after the disaster where she had to take charge of an outpost after a bandit attack. Having her own hunting team meant getting to stay in the countryside far away from Nia and her foul stench.

He needed to move up the ranks as well if he was going to be able to protect the others better. If they were his to command, he could keep them safe. Being a foot soldier and guard was worse than his tasks would have been if he’d never been kicked out of the guard back on the ark. The ark, god that was a lifetime ago or it felt like that sometimes. Fortunately, Octavia was safely on bandit duty in the south. Bandit duty was dangerous but you could trust your comrades generally if not completely to have your back. In the capitol, a single whisper wrong and your comrades would turn on you and you’d disappear into the dungeons not to come out again unless it was to be nailed to the wall.

One of the petitioners, an older man, grey hair at his temples and peppered throughout his beard, had just reached into his robes. Bellamy stiffened, dropping his hand to the sword hanging from his belt. It was proved to be the correct choice when the man charged.

“For my son!” He cried, while lunging for Nia with a wicked looking dagger.

Bellamy was in front of Nia in a moment. With one hand he grabbed the man’s arm that held the dagger and pulled it up so it was no longer pointing at the queen. With his other hand he sheathed his sword into the man’s chest.

The man choked, eyes looking up at Bellamy. He was looking at him like he had betrayed him. It made his skin itch to feel the warm blood pouring over his hand as he twisted the sword still in the man’s chest making sure he died from the wound quickly. He would not sentence this man to the dungeon. Dropping the now limp arm, he shoved the body off his blade where it collapsed onto the floor.

Revulsion rippled over him as he felt Nia’s hand on his shoulder. “Well done. You two,” she gestured towards two of the guards by the door, “dispose of that filth.”

With that, she returned to her throne and Bellamy returned to his post behind her, grabbing his ceremonial spear once more. His hand and forearm still wet with blood.
“Bring the next petitioner.” She commanded in a bored tone.

Bellamy felt himself freeze in place as he watched two guards dragging Dax in behind a cowed looking Murphy and his first Tarba, a tall and cocky man. He knew something was wrong. Dax should still have been in his quarters healing from the last pauna hunt he’d been on with Clark’s team. He’d been injured and been forced to remain behind while his leg healed. Now, here Dax was being dragged in for no apparent reason and Bellamy couldn’t even move. If he moved, it would make everything so much worse. He caught his friend’s eyes and saw the panic in them.

Facing Murphy, he tried to catch his eye to get an indication of what was going on but he was avoiding looking at him. That was a bad sign.

“My queen!” Tarba bowed lowly. “My second here has once again sniffed out a traitor to your person.”

Nia shifted in her throne, visibly interested, causing Bellamy to swallow down bile as he realized what was about to happen. “Oh, pray tell.”

Tarba’s eyes glinted with excitement. “This ‘warrior’, He spat. “was heard referring to you in terms I will not repeat.”

Nia seemed to shift her attention to Dax. “Tell me boy, do you show such disloyalty to me lightly?”

Dax was sweating. “I was angry and spoke poorly, I beg your mercy!”

“Did you say the things your friend here claims you said?” She waved away his plea.

“Yes, I know I shouldn’t have referred to you in such a way.” Dax’s eyes were wide and panicked.

“Fortunately for you, a group of my warriors were killed earlier this week and I don’t feel like being wasteful.” She pronounced.

Bellamy and Dax both relaxed at that. Although, Bellamy was still considering what on earth to do with the fact Murphy had stabbed a member of their family in the back like this.

“Zola, grab a hot coal from the fire.” She continued.

The weedy man didn’t question his orders just grabbing a pair of tongs and lifting a coal out of the fire used to keep the throne room heated. Turning, he faced the queen. Unthinking obedience was a good quality for a spineless lackey, Bellamy thought snidely.

“Place it in that boy’s mouth so he may never speak ill of me again.” She commanded.

Bellamy’s face paled as he felt his leg jerk, desperate to step forward but knowing the punishment to be more severe if he did so.

Dax started jerking wildly in the arms of the guards holding him, trying to get away. Another one of the guards had to step forward, prying his jaw open. Zola shoved the coal into his mouth and the guard forced his mouth closed. His muffled screams echoed around the room, tears streaming from his face as fought desperately.

Present:

Aden loved this mission! He had always been ordered to keep a clear head at all times, drink was
only to be drunk in small measure at formal events. However, tonight his task was to get Char to drink as much as possible and he was allowed to drink as much as necessary to encourage her. As an added bonus, he’d get to get the stupid arrogant girl to break her stupid stoic facade. So what if she was the better fighter, he was going to see her fall on her ass even if he had to get her drunk to do so.

Wrapping his arm around the girl’s shoulder, he grinned. “Come on you have to try Nyko’s wine! It’s the best in Ton DC.” He pulled the dubious looking girl with him towards the barrel of wine before filling a mug for each of them and shoving one into her hands. “Cheers!” He clunked his mug into hers and began to drink, watching her do the same.

Smirking, he pulled her to where some of the warriors were playing a drinking game where the strongest didn’t have to drink. It was perfect, Char may be annoyingly perfect at dodging and striking but strength wasn’t her strong suit. The amused look Tris gave him as she joined them just filled him with mirth. After all, she had the same mission as him. Not to mention the same level of frustration with being knocked on her ass all day.

Seeing it was Kjelle with her freakish strength that was currently challenging another of the seconds to a match, he knew it wouldn’t be long before Char was drunk as a skunk. After all, Nyko’s wine was the strongest in the village.

Lexa watched amused as a swaying and very clearly intoxicated Aden made his way to her table for dinner. He had the Ice Nation assassin’s arm slung over one shoulder and Tris was wobbling along behind them with a dopey smile on her face. Oh, Aden was going to be in so much trouble in the morning, being publicly intoxicated was not acceptable for any nightblood and possible successor of hers. Still, it warmed her to see him happy and bonding with comrades, despite the questionable choice of an Ice Nation assassin.

She wondered when that had happened. As of that morning, he’d been attempting not to swear under his breath when he realized he’d be training with the girl again. Now, they were sloppily sitting down together at the table and he was proudly stacking food on her plate for her. It was rather adorable how they were using each other as support by leaning heavily on one another to remain upright. Well, after a fashion. Glancing at Anya, she frowned when she saw the pleased expression on her face as she also watched the kids.

“Char,” Aden said, far louder than she thought he intended. “Why do you haff to be sooo mean?!” He whined.

The girl turned her cloudy eyes on him before sloppily kissing his cheek. “I don’t want you to die.” She replied slowly, carefully enunciating each word.

“Why?” His face scrunched up, trying to understand her.

“You’re fun...to play with.” She nodded solemnly.

Aden looked lost for a moment before picking up a piece of bread and chewing on it thoughtfully. Lexa attempted not to snort into her own mug of watered down ale as she saw him chewing with his mouth wide open.

“How long have you served Klark?” Anya asked leaning her head on her hand, looking over at Charlotte.

The girl’s head tilted till it was almost being supported by her shoulder, her face screwed up in
thought. “Not long….like a…few months. I served in the dungeons and then with Bellamy and….then as one of the queen’s assassins.” She righted her head nodding, that the information was correct. “But Clarke is….she’s amazing!”

“How is she amazing?” Anya asked. Lexa narrowed her eyes, her former second was up to something and she had a feeling the kid’s drunkenness wasn’t an accident.

Charlotte’s eyes lit up. “She an’ Bell are like our parents!” Her words coming faster now. “It’s safe with ‘em!!” The girl grinned widely.

“Why’s it safe with them?” Anya asked leaning forward a bit more.

“Cause Nia woulda’ killed us ages ago!” Charlotte gravely nodded. “She doesn’t like us much.”

“Why would she dislike a loyal general like Klark?” Anya asked, eyes locked onto the girl.

Lexa had realized what was happening by now and didn’t know whether to be angry or impressed with Anya. It was a brilliant way to get information on the Ice Nation forces they were working with without insulting their allies. However, the fact Anya hadn’t come to her with this plan irked her. There was also the risk that Klark would find out about their snooping and take it as a breach of trust. They would be having words after this was over.

Charlotte looked at Anya like she was stupid, which was impressive given how inebriated the girl was currently. “Cause Clarke is so popular with thuh people.” The girl frowned trying to make her mouth move properly. “Everyone loves Clarke and nobody likes the queen.” She got out a sentence fairly coherently. “The queen is just so….. insecure. She doesn’t like anyone who might be better than her no matter how loyal, but she can’t afford to kill Clarke. Clarke is just too awesome!”

“Why can’t she afford to kill Klark?” Anya asked quickly.

The girl drank deeply from the mug in front of her before replying. “Not enough generals. The queen should of known better than to kill all her best men. That’s what she gets.” Charlotte paused, almost long enough for Anya to prompt her again, before continuing. “Plus, Clarke’s too awesome to kill. The people would revolt.”

“Hey,” Aden poked Charlotte in the side directing her attention to him. His head was lolling slightly, clearly he’d had even more to drink then the blond. “Why’s Klark heir if Nia doesn’t like her?”

Charlotte looked pleased at the question. “I told you everybody likes Clarke! Specially the civilians cause of all the rules she changed. Besides, she beat Roan, that momma’s boy, in a challenge. Who else were they going to make heir?” She scrunched up her nose. “He smelled gross anyway.”

“What rules did she change?” Anya cut in before Aden could ask another question. Lexa found herself intrigued by what the girl was saying. Ice Nation politics were notoriously dangerous and she was relieved that Clarke and Nia apparently didn’t see eye to eye.

“Crime’s against a normal person are double the punishment than if ya hurt another soldier.” Charlotte held up her hand ticking off a finger. “An’ when hosted by a village…. you gotta help like plant, an’ harvest, an’ build things.” She ticked off a second finger. “Half of all spoils go to thuh nearest people.” Her next finger went down. “Rewards gotta be earned, it don’t matter who ya know. Even her! Like O is good but she ain’t a captain yet……. Too angry.” Charlotte looked at her hand in confusion like she hadn’t seen it before. “An’ Monty, an’ Raven, an’ Harper, an’ Monroe and everybody else ain’t captain’s either. Even though Clarke could make em. Just Bell, an’ probably Miller soon.” She pronounced proudly.
Lexa smiled slightly watching the girl. She clearly adored the general and was more than happy to brag about her. The rules she was outlining were good and she had no doubt that Klark was immensely popular with the common people with how she seemed to enforce respect for them like that. How she got her soldiers to obey those laws she wasn’t sure. Doing manual labor most warriors saw as beneath them and giving up spoils was not how a loyal army was formed. It seemed Anya was on a similar wavelength with her next question.

“That can’t have made her men happy?” She asked pointedly.

Charlotte frowned. “Why?” She slapped her chest in pride. “We’re Azgeda’s protectors! It’s our duty……. to protect our people. They’re our family. We have to be thuh best! How’re we any better than the bandits if we hurt our charges? It’s an honor to serve.” Her eyes were alight with pride and conviction.

Lexa spoke up then, several things clicking into place all at once. “That’s why you all wear blue stitched into your clothing and woven in your hair isn’t it? It’s a symbol you serve Klark and her laws.” Loyalty, making it about unity and pride was clever. Men would do anything to belong, to be superior.

“Yup! Cause we’re family and family stick together.” Charlotte proudly pronounced.

“Family? I thought the Azgeda separated their warriors from their family?” Anya asked curiously clearly confused by the use of the term when Azgeda warriors were traditionally not supposed to acknowledge any family ties.

Charlotte nodded again, “Maybe from our blood family, but our fellow soldiers and our people become our family.” The girl’s glazed eyes seemed to drift for a moment before she was jolted back by Aden’s head falling on her shoulder and a loud snore leaving his mouth. “Found family is better anyway."

Lexa found herself smiling warmly at the girl. The sentiment was truly sweet. She wondered if this philosophy was shared by others in the Azgeda army. It would definitely explain the increased camaraderie between the Azgeda warriors that her people had observed.

Anya seemed flabbergasted with this break from all Ice Nation tradition and paused in her interrogation. It was one thing to see a single general devoted to her people and another to realize it might have become the prevailing belief system, overcoming generations of previous thoughts on the issue. Charlotte appeared to be swaying in her seat and it was clear that she would pass out soon like Aden so Anya rushed to continue her questioning.

“Did Nia like Klark before she killed Roan?” Anya asked quickly.

Charlotte scrunched up her face in thought for a moment before straightening a bit. “I’m gonna be sick.” With that she turned and threw up onto Anya’s lap.

Octavia’s back felt like it was on fire. She was laying face first on the bed, her shoulder brushing Clarke’s. They were both letting their backs rest for the moment. Gunter had definitely not held back when he’d whipped her, stupid hard ass. It wasn’t her back that hurt the worst though. She squeezed Clarke’s hand and desperately fought back frustrated tears. All she could think of was trying to find Lincoln and she just couldn’t.

Clarke turned her head so she was facing Octavia and leaned her forehead against hers closing her
eyes. “I’m so sorry O.”

“I’m an idiot.” Octavia muttered. She’d messed up again, she’d lost her temper and gotten the people she cared about hurt.

“Could you say that a little louder?” Raven said from where she was working on a defibrillator with Monty.

Octavia cringed.

“Leave it, she’s been punished enough.” Clarke said, pulling back and pushing herself up with a groan.

Monty passed Raven a piece of wiring he’d been repairing. “Are we going against the Commander’s orders to rescue the stud?”

Octavia felt warmth bloom in her chest for Monty. He was always there and steady. She wished that she could hug him but the thought of moving was cringe inducing. Really, she wasn’t sure how Clarke had managed to sit up.

“Lexa was right. It’s been too long for a search party to do any good.” Clarke said while running a hand through her hair.

Octavia bit her lip savagely to stave off tears. She couldn’t accept that he was gone. She just couldn’t.

Raven spoke up, “Oh cheer up, I saw big hot and studly a couple of times. If anyone has the body the mountain prefers for making into a reaper, it’s him. We just gotta wait and grab him. Princess here should be able to cure him by then. We just need to get this blasted thing working first.” She glared darkly at the pile of parts she was trying to turn into a machine.

“Thanks.” She said thickly, praying that her friend was right, that Lincoln could still be saved.

Monty spoke next, his voice as reassuring as always. “So, what about this Trikru was different from your usual flings?”

“He was kind, and he saw me.” Octavia tried to shrug but had to bite back a yelp when she felt her stitches pulling from the movement.

“Easy, I don’t want to put those back in.” Clarke gently rebuked.

“Well you ordered them put there in the first place.” Octavia snapped before swallowing her irritation. It wasn’t fair to lash out at Clarke and she knew it. “Sorry, I know you didn’t want to do it.”

Clarke smiled at her. “Maybe next time tell me about politically stupid stunts before they bite us in the ass.” She started braiding the hair around her face up and away and putting in her customary beads and strips of dark blue fabric.

“I think you get the award for biggest screw up of the campaign.” Raven snarked from her seat.

“What do you call teaching Nut and Bolt how to make Molotov cocktails? That’s a disaster just waiting to happen.” Monty joked while elbowing Raven.

“My minions will light things on fire responsibly.” Raven defended with a grin.
Octavia felt lighter surrounded by her friends, she’d get through this just like everything else. Reaching out, she gripped Clarke’s hand again to make sure she knew that she wasn’t angry with her. Clarke squeezed back before slipping out of the hold so she could keep on braiding. She let the chatter of her friends wash over her. They would get Lincoln back, it didn’t matter how unlikely it was, they’d catch every single reaper if that was what it took. She knew Clarke would make sure she saved Lincoln even if she failed to save any of the others. Raven would get the defibrillator working. Monty would fix the wiring. The destructive minions would help them burn the mountain to the ground.

“Come on, let’s get some more pain tonic into you.” Clarke said noting her glassy eyes.

Octavia grunted in protest as she was moved so that the mug of liquid could be tilted in a way that ensured most of its contents went into her mouth. God, it tasted as bad as ever. She watched Clarke’s face scrunch up in distaste as she drank her dose before lying back down beside her.

The furs were soft and getting to sleep on a real bed was still a treat. Sighing, she closed her eyes. In the morning, she’d start helping catch more reapers. The mountain would pay for taking Lincoln, she’d see to it.

Three years ago:

Murphy threw up in the alley outside of the tavern he’d been in since he’d been excused by Tarba for the day. He was a survivor and surviving in the Ice Nation meant he had to stay in Tarba’s good books. It was dark and filthy in the alleyway. Dirty slush from the remains of the snow yesterday lay in small drifts along the walls of buildings that had been built too close together. It was foul just like him.

The bile burnt in his throat as he leaned against the cold stone wall. He’d never been one for guilt or morals or questioning his decisions once made. Betraying Dax however, was a low point even for him. He’d had too. His arm had never recovered from what that torture bitch had done to it. He couldn’t fight like the others. He just couldn’t move his dominant arm properly. So, he had found a way to assist his first that didn’t require excelling in combat like Bellamy and Dax. He listened and learned. Rumors were full of truth if you knew how to listen. Picking up the language had been hard but worth it in the end.

So, all those months ago he’d turned over a second who he knew was connected to the Ebec territory that was rife with dissent. After that, for the first time since he’d arrived in this cursed place, he’d had enough food to eat and his first hadn’t beat him to a pulp. As the day’s past his first’s good mood had left and with it his good will. His training had once more been closer to beatings than to training. No matter what he had done, he couldn’t keep up. His arm worsened from the continued use. The bruises had started to build up till finally, he’d found himself listening for dissent once again. A baker had spoken treason in soft whispers and he had been in his first’s favor once more.

The months had passed and he found himself more spy than warrior. He watched and listened as his fellow sky fallen were awarded brands he could never get through battle prowess. With renewed desperation, he’d listened harder and slipped into dark corners. He could still earn his brands if Tarba or Nia found his information valuable enough.

Unfortunately, he’d gained a reputation and finding rumors and whispers had become harder. He was once again the punching bag for his first, his entire body aching. Dax had helped apply the salves that Clarke had left with them into his aching side. Dax, his friend, had cursed Nia for allowing this to happen. Murphy had had a choice and like always he chose what he would always
choose, himself.

He heard the wet crunch of slush being stepped on and looked up at Bellamy standing in the mouth of the alley. “Here to curse me?” He bit out before spitting out the last of the bile in his mouth. His throat still burning.

“Why did you do it?” Bellamy asked, taking a step into the alley.

Murphy rolled his eyes, of course Bellamy the good soldier wouldn’t understand. “Because I had to.”

“Would you do it again?” He asked his voice dark. “Would you betray your family again?”

Murphy laughed, it came out cracked and hysterical. “Family? We’re not family Blake. Go fuck yourself.” He spat.

Bellamy tilted his head down, his bangs covering his eyes. “I can’t let you do that again.”

“What are you going to do?” He mocked. “Cut out my tongue?” He stood up and moved to walk past Bellamy. The alley seemed to roll and he instead walked into him.

Bellamy gripped his arm. “I’m sorry.”

Murphy opened his mouth to snark at him when he felt a sharp pain in his chest. Looking down, he saw a dagger shoved into his chest. It was in his lung, he noted impassively. Looking up, he saw Bellamy’s face, it was drawn but resolved. He crouched, feeling blood trickle out of his mouth. “Didn’t know you had it in ya.” He wheezed again as his vision started to fade. His legs went out from under him. He didn’t hit the ground outside the alley though. Bellamy’s arms caught him lowering him down gently. The cold slush soaked into his clothes. It was fitting that he’d die in a place like this he thought.
Aden blocked the strike from Lexa, he could feel the force of it traveling up his arms. It echoed in his still very sore head. Apparently, his reward for accomplishing his mission to get Char drunk was an extra hour of sleep before being hauled to the training grounds. His head felt like it was full of rocks and he hadn’t managed to eat at all. Just the smell of his morning rations had sent him running for the bushes.

“Keep your arms up!” She instructed, “Don’t let a larger opponent lock you into a match of strength.” She ordered while using their locked swords to shove him several steps back.

Trying not to squint, he feinted to the right while bringing his knee up aiming for her ribs to the left. She used her sword to knock his blade flying out of his hand while stepping into him cutting off his momentum with the knee. The next thing he knew, he was hitting the ground hard with a grunt.

“What did you do wrong?” She asked him staring down at him.

“Over committed.” He groaned, wondering if she’d let him just lay there for a while.

Lexa was clearly waiting for him to expand but his brain just couldn’t come up with anything else. Finally, she spoke. “Why do you think I assigned you to train with Charlotte, Aden?”

He frowned, squinting up at her. “Cause if I am chosen as the next Heda I need to be able to defend against attacks by an assassin.”

“Tell me how many commanders have been killed by an assassin?” She asked. When he didn’t answer, she answered for him. “None, they died in war, from illness, or killed by their advisors. Learning to defend against an assassin is a skill that few possess. There is a reason a single assassin will kill many warriors before being struck down.”

“Then why have me train with her?” He asked confused. He was sure if his head hadn’t felt like an open wound he’d have followed her train of thought.

“Because a commander is most likely to die at the hands of an enemy force since as commander you must lead your army from the front. However, with the coalition formed that mode of death is less likely. So, tell me Aden, how will I most likely die?” Her eyes bored down onto him.

Aden swallowed, he didn’t like talking or thinking about Lexa’s death. Still, he knew it was a reality, after all she was already one of the longest lived commanders ever. “You will likely die from sickness or betrayal.” He finally replied.

She nodded. “And if you succeed me how will you most likely die?”

“Sickness or betrayal.” He said thickly.
“Why does the Ice Nation use assassins as bodyguards?” She asked next.

He knew this one, Titus had spoken of it at length in Polis in the glade where the nightbloods trained. “Assassins are the tool of betrayal, so they can see it before anyone else.”

“And how would you kill me if you tried to do so?” She asked, voice flat at the mention of him killing her.

“I would never!” He protested, Lexa was as close to a parent as he’d ever known. To kill her would be unthinkable.

“I know, but if you were to try how would you do it.”

Frowning, he looked down and thought about it slowly. How would he? The commander was always guarded. Even if he had her alone he wouldn’t be able to do more than mildly injure her, if that. He decided to start over. If he was Char, how would he kill the commander? She could do it during sparing couldn’t she… he’d earned dozens of ‘deaths’ at her hands every time he trained with her. He looked back up. “Poison, I’d poison you.”

Lexa squatted down and looked him in the eye. “An assassin will never fight fairly. They will use tools and methods, lies and weapons, that no one else would for it would bring dishonor on them. An assassin is without honor. The problem is that everyone is capable of acting the part of the assassin. Learn to defend yourself against her and learn how to think like her and you will see betrayal before it strikes.” She held his eyes seriously.

“Sha, Lexa.” He responded solemnly.

“Good, now get up. You still have much to learn.”

Two years eleven months ago:

Monty slipped silently into the dungeons. His footsteps didn’t echo against the stone floor as he walked softly. The light of the flickering torches left enough shadow’s that he went unnoticed as he crept along. Carefully, he pushed a wooden door open the barest amount before slipping in and closing it again.

“It’s alright, it’s just me.” He raised his hands in surrender, looking into the eyes of Charlotte, who had a knife to his throat.

Her eyes widened and she quickly backed off. “What are you doing here?”

“Shh,” He gently pushed the door shut before turning back to face her. “No one can know I’m here.”

“How are you here? You’re supposed to be replacing Dax on Clarke’s team till we figure out a way to properly deal with his injury without him becoming a liability.” Charlotte’s face scrunching in confusion.

Monty pulled her so that they were sitting on her cot before speaking. “You’re fight with Daniella is tomorrow, we couldn’t let you do that alone.”

Charlotte stiffened. “There’s nothing you can do for me. I have to fight her on my own. If I don’t earn my brands, I’ll be killed. The deadline is up.” She said quietly, head hanging.
“Hey, no we’re not going to let you die.” Monty said while resting his hand on her shoulder. “You just need to kill her, there’s no way you won’t be awarded your brands if you kill that bitch.” He bit out the last word with a great deal of venom.

“But I can’t!” Charlotte was shaking slightly. “I can barely keep up when we spar. It’d take a miracle and we both know those don’t happen.”

“Well, I’m here to give you the miracle.” He squeezed her shoulder in comfort. “Clarke and I worked out a poison, it’s not deadly. It took a while but we figured out the proper ratio of dilution. I’ve already poisoned her. Tomorrow, when you fight she should be off, not much, but enough you should be able to take her.”

Charlotte’s eyes widened, “But if anyone finds out!”

“No one will if you kill her.” He pulled out a dagger from his sleeve and pressed it into her hands. “Bellamy says to slay your demons.”

“What if I still can’t do it?” She asked, her voice strained.

Monty’s throat closed because how could he tell her that if she still couldn’t there was nothing that they could do? Pulling her forward, he hugged her tightly. “You can do it. We all believe in you.”

Her arms wrapped around him holding him tightly, he could feel her shaking with silent tears. “How long can you stay?” She finally asked.

He smiled down at her. “I’m not leaving till you win. Don’t worry, Clarke will cover for me. No one but us will ever know I was here.”

Present:

Clarke didn’t bother acknowledging the Trikru guards as she strode into the commander's house. She noticed that the commander was reading a letter of some sort. It didn’t matter though, she and the commander were having words whether the woman was busy or not. “Lexa.”

Lexa looked up from her letter and seemed surprised to see her there. “Klark, has something happened?”

Clarke glared, stalking forward she placed her hands on the table leaning down so that she could glare down at the commander. “Why don’t you tell me what the hell you think you were doing getting my warrior drunk and then squeezing information out of her.” She snarled.

Lexa’s eyes widened in understanding. “I’m sorry if I offended you but I needed to be sure of your intentions.”

“My intentions?” Clarke snapped. “I’ve done nothing but aid you! I have done nothing to cause your mistrust.”

Lexa’s face hardened. “You are a general from a clan that just five years ago would have been a sworn enemy! You serve a queen who has done nothing but try and undermine and discredit me. Of course I find your cooperation suspect.”

Clarke felt an amount of anger she rarely experienced trying to escape. “Damn it Lexa, that’s bullshit and you know it. Why can’t you trust me?!”
Lexa stood clearly angry as well. “It’s the truth. Do you think I like distrusting everyone? For some of us trust is a luxury we can’t afford. I must lead with my head.”

Clarke stepped around the table and into Lexa’s personal space. “If you’re so high and above it all why is it that you are still haunted by Costia? You think I haven’t noticed how much you care for Aden? Or Anya or Gustus? You are lying to yourself if you believe that you are above feelings.”

“You would have done the same in my position.” Lexa gritted out.

“No, I wouldn’t have. I have entrusted my force’s into your hands. I have given you information that if you shared would be the death of my family. I left my healers in your camp for a week with nothing but a second as their guard! What have you done with that trust? You have used one of my own to in a plot to gain information on me.” Clarke advanced forward once more, causing Lexa to step back. “How can you expect me to trust you with my troops if you intend to use them as weapons against me?”

“I am the Commander!” Lexa snarled. “Your troops were always mine to use.”

“Do you even understand the consequences of what you’ve done?! You got her to speak ill of Nia, in public!” Clarke slammed a fist onto the table. “If anyone from my army finds out, she is dead as soon as we cross back into Azgeda. Do you always endanger ‘your troops’ so casually?”

Lexa’s face blanched slightly. “I did not intend her death. If she dies though, it is a sacrifice that I as a leader have made before and will make again. To be a leader is to tell your men to go and die for you!”

“You could have asked me! If you had stepped out of your head for one goddamn minute and just asked, I would have told you.” Clarke snarled.

“Get out! This conversation is done.” Lexa snapped at her, her voice quiet but intense.

Clarke pulled back finally. “Fine, but if you try and use my men like pawns again I will take my men and we will leave. I will kill anyone who tries to stop me.” Clarke paused before beginning again. “Was the information you gained worth losing my trust?”

After a dark look, she turned on her heel marching back out of the house. Slamming the door, she exited the house. Clarke had begun to respect Lexa even trust her to an extent. She had even started to feel a certain fondness for her and this betrayal of that trust hurt more than she would have expected. She should have learned her lesson by now, you couldn’t trust anyone who wasn’t family.

Monty enjoyed watching Ephraim jump when he entered his tent. He was seated in the man’s chair waiting for him.

He rested his hand over his heart. “You Azgeda assassins, next time maybe wait till I’m here to come into my tent?”

“I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.” Monty smirked, watching the general roll his eyes and come in while pulling off his pauldron.

“What do you want then?” He asked leaning against the table he had maps laid out on.

Monty leaned forward, “Clarke has a favor to ask of you.”
Ephraim frowned. “Why wouldn’t she ask me in person?”

“It would seem the commander is less trustworthy than we thought.” Monty felt a twinge of anger at the reminder of the position Charlotte was in thanks to the betrayal and stupidity of the Trikru forces. “They got one of our top warriors drunk and then pumped her for information last night.”

“If she talked it’s on her own head.” The general replied, tapping a finger, he tilted his head slightly.

“Oh, she didn’t say anything that would compromise Clarke or Nia, for that matter. She did however, speak honestly on her opinions of them.” Monty replied.

“Well fuck. Is she still alive?” He asked.

“Yes, and we’d like to keep her that way. As you know Nia has her informants inside our force.” A fact that irked Monty greatly since if Clarke would just let him he could take care of all of them and eliminate the threat they presented. Clarke said it was too likely they would miss someone and that it was better to control the flow of information rather than tip Nia off that they knew about them. Monty was still of the opinion that killing them would make him feel a whole lot safer but he supposed that was why he wasn’t a general.

Ephraim pushed himself off the table he was leaning on. “You want me to keep the girl here where Nia’s loyalists can’t touch her.”

Monty nodded. “We don’t know who knows yet. Until we can be certain who knows what she said, she can’t return to our camp. Which means she’s still in Ton DC. You can understand why Clarke would want her out of there.”

“I will gladly offer your warrior sanctuary.” He said after a moment. “If the Trikru are taking advantage of our people’s cooperation then it is time to show them that we are not to be trifled with. I’ll send a small detachment back with you. Has General Palleas been informed yet?”

“He should be being informed as we speak.” Monty replied.

“Good, I’ll send a small detachment to him as well then. Tell Clarke I expect a detachment from her to replace the men I’m sending her by tonight.” His voice was hard and commanding.

“I’ll be sure to pass on your message. She does not intend to act against the commander if no further insult is offered however.” He cautioned.

“Of course not, but reminding the commander that our clans are allies and have friends should be warning enough. I don’t intend to let an insult occur to my people as well.” His face hardened.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya knew something was wrong as soon as she entered and saw Lexa. She hadn’t trained her for nothing and she could practically see the turmoil surrounding her. Approaching slowly, she decided formality was the best approach. “Heda.”

Lexa stopped pacing and her authority seemed to wrap around her. “Anya, explain why you manipulated our ally last night without informing me?”

Anya tensed, “We need more information. I saw an opportunity and I took it.”

Lexa’s face remained impassive but Anya could feel her displeasure with her answer hanging in the air. “Tell me, what made antagonizing a general who has helped bring the coalition forces together
Swallowing, Anya spoke carefully. “She was gaining your trust. You allowed an Ice Nation assassin to join your guard. Since this blockade has been in place you have accepted her council. If she was planning on betraying you, we needed to know.”

“Do not lie to me. I have no doubt that was Gustus’ reasoning for helping you but I know you better than that Anya.”

“Lexa,” Anya felt her shoulders tightening, “you were becoming close to her. If this was some sick game Nia was playing at, I needed to know.” Anya barely prevented herself from flinching at the anger she saw in the commander’s face.

“I see.” Lexa turned and walked towards her throne and taking her seat, face still impassive to the untrained eye. “Have you gained the information you sought? Did this interrogation put your doubts to rest as you hoped it would?”

“To a degree.” She replied.

“Only a degree? I hope that peace of mind is worth the consequences.” Lexa said evenly.

“Consequences, Lexa?” Anya knew something had to have happened now, this wasn’t just Lexa having time to stew over it during the night.

“General Klark came to me this morning. She was rightly furious over the breach of trust. The steps we have gone to create an actual alliance with the Ice Nation, at least with the army here, have been reversed.”

“Surely, she is just making idle threats?” Anya protested. The girl hadn’t been hurt other than what would no doubt be a horrible hangover.

“She was quite serious. Your stunt has quite possibly sentenced Charlotte to death.” Lexa’s hands gripped the arms of her throne viciously. “She spoke ill of the queen, publicly. Just returning to the Azgeda camp could be fatal for her now.”

“That’s...you have to know that I didn’t think she would say anything that could get her killed.” Anya protested.

“No, just something that she could be whipped for I’m sure.” Lexa’s reply was biting. “Did you even think about the consequences of your actions for Charlotte? You know that the Ice Nation punishments are harsh.”

“General Klark has seemed to be fair in her treatment of her people, I assumed she would do similarly here.” Anya said, trying to mount a credible defense though she already knew it would be futile.

“Did you also assume that she would be kind enough to ignore the insult and lack of trust conveyed by such an interrogation? You have seen that Klark is devoted to her people and yet you thought manipulating one of her own in such a blatant manner and trying to use them against her would be easily over-looked? Please explain to me what you were thinking Anya because I would not expect such foolishness from you, one of my most trusted advisors.” Lexa’s spoke in a calm voice but Anya could see that her expression was fierce.

“I was thinking of how Costia’s death destroyed you and how I never wanted to risk letting the Ice Queen manipulate and hurt you in such a manner again. I knew you were beginning to care for the
general and while I am not of the opinion that love is weakness like your other advisors, I did not want to see you risk your heart on the uncertain and perilous fealty of an Ice Nation general.” Anya snapped back.

“You dare bring up Costia! Do you think I have forgotten her death? I know as well as you do the treachery of Nia. It is my choice where to place my trust and my decision on how to deal with threats. I am your Heda and I have proven that I will put MY people before all else. There was no need nor justification for your interference in this matter. Now, I must deal with consequences of your actions.”

Lexa released her hold on the arms of the throne. “You will put aside your distrust and assumptions. The faith that had been built put us closer than we have ever been to defeating the mountain. This war is what united the clans. I will try and fix your mistakes but if you ever do anything of this nature again, you will not like the consequences.” By the look in her eye, it was clear that it was more than just an expectation, it was an order that Anya comply and show willingness to cooperate.

Anya nodded her head and left the room.

____________________________________________________________________________

Gustus straddled the reaper and began punching it in the face till it finally passed out, or died. He felt for the pulse and nodded, alive then. Standing, he grabbed the creature and threw it over his shoulder.

“Four reapers spotted half a mile down the line.” Semmet reported from where he was standing.

“Double up the guards, they’re becoming more aggressive.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Lexa frowned looking at the report she’d just been sent by one of her scouts, twenty men from the Plain Riders had been seen heading to the Azgeda position and another twenty to the Glowing Forest camp. She had no doubt Klark would be doing the same. This could quickly spiral. She heard Klark entering.

“You sent for me?” She asked.

“Yes, I wanted to speak with you again about what happened.” She said while turning to see the stony faced general.

“There isn’t anything left to be said.” Klark replied.

“There is,” she disagreed softly, “one of my advisors came up with the ridiculous plot to intoxicate and question your assassin. You are correct that it was a massive breach of trust and that there are consequences for that.”

Klark’s brow furrowed slightly. “If it was one of your advisors, why would you take the blame when I was here earlier?”

“Because like you I am responsible for my men. I also realized what was happening and did nothing to stop it.” Lexa shifted slightly and tried not to show how much this conversation made her uncomfortable.

“Why tell me this? It changes nothing.” Klark replied.
Lexa struggled to keep her face impassive. “I can protect Charlotte. It was my advisor and my carelessness that has risked her life.” It wasn’t much but it was a step towards making this right. This truce, was tenuous at best and the slightest problems grew out of control.

Klark’s face softened slightly around the edges, which was hopeful. “Why should I trust that she will be unharmed? After all, the last time she was in your camp she was manipulated into a drunken interrogation.”

That wasn’t a no. Lexa kept her body posture soft, not wanting to try and strong arm the general, that wouldn’t work at all. From what she could tell, the woman was hard wired towards reacting defensively to the slightest threat. “Because I give you my word and if you wish I will bind us in blood.”

Klark looked surprised and slightly taken aback. Finally, she relaxed clearly having come to a decision. She lifted her hand and pulled out a wicked sharp and curved blade attached under her arm. “I’ll take that deal with a few caveats. I will show that I still trust you by returning Charlotte to your camp but she will not be returning alone. Betrayal must have consequences and I do not want any member of my forces to be alone in your camp among those who would entrap them.” She looked thoughtful for a moment, “Are you still willing to take the deal?”

Lexa pulled herself up, a reminder of her authority. “I am.”

Klark didn’t question her again. Instead, she pulled her gauntlet off before pulling the blade across the palm of her hand swiftly. Flipping the blade, she offered the handle to her.

Lexa took the knife and pulled it across her own palm without flinching. She offered her hand. As Klark’s hand gripped hers, holding their cuts together, she felt relief that her offer had been taken with so little trouble. She met Klark’s gaze and wondered what the woman was thinking. After a minute, Klark pulled back.

Looking down at her hand, Lexa found it strange to see the red blood mixing with her own black. It almost gave the appearance that she bled red like everyone else. Looking back at Klark, she saw that the general was wrapping a piece of the decorative blue fabric around her injury. “I do trust you Klark.” She felt herself compelled to say.

“If you trust me, then why would Anya act on her own?” Klarke asked.

Lexa felt surprised at the mention of Anya. “How..?”

“Charlotte was informative about who asked her questions. If it wasn’t you who plotted the scheme, then the obvious alternative was your former first the one who actually asked the questions.” She said.

Lexa sighed at the general’s correct deductions. “She acted because I trust you Klark.”

“Why would she not trust your judgement?” Klark asked curiously.

Lexa paused, looking at Klark’s face no longer full of anger as she looked back at Lexa. The familiar warmth she felt when the general was present filled her. So, she acted without thinking. Reaching out, she rested her hand against the side of Klark’s neck and gently pulled her forward, kissing her softly.

At first, Lexa feared she’d made a grave mistake and then she felt Klark returning the kiss. For a few moments it was perfect. The general’s hand came up to rest on her hip. Tilting her head to change the direction of the kiss slightly, she leaned back in only for the general to pull back a step. It hurt to see
the confusion on Klark’s face.

“I...I’m sorry.” The general seemed to try and say something else but then stopped. Nodding briefly, she turned and left.

Two years eleven months ago:

Charlotte could feel her hands sweating as she stood in the courtyard before the queen. Daniella was demonstrating her second’s growth. If she didn’t meet with approval and gain her brands, she would be executed. After all, Nia had only given them a few months to prove themselves. The others impressive deeds had bought her some time but now it was time for her to stand on her own. Daniella, her first, was preening at the attention.

Charlotte found herself trying to stay out of sight as she carefully prepared her daggers and sword. As soon as the signal was dropped though, Charlotte was off. She put her height to its greatest advantage going for her first’s legs to keep her off balance while avoiding the woman’s strikes.

It was a dance where a single nick could mean death. Charlotte could feel that their rhythm was off though, Danielle was indeed slower than usual. Taking advantage of it, she made a move far too risky to try ordinarily. Rolling under a swing, she came to her feet standing up inside the woman’s guard. Using her left hand, she caught the dagger coming for her and turned it away while burying her own into the vile woman’s heart.

Daniella fell to the ground and there was a shocked silence. Charlotte had done it. She’d really done it.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the comments!

Silas sat straight and alert in his saddle. He didn’t like being anything less than his best. He’d trained his entire life for perfection and he didn’t feel comfortable being sloppy. His comrades could jest all they pleased, but being clean shaven, hair neat, clothing straight, and armor clean, made him feel at peace. It was a source of pride to always be his best. He knew he wasn’t as skilled as Octavia, or Laslow, or some of the truly fearsome warriors in the army, but he was dependable and Klark trusted him and that was all that mattered. He’d been rewarded for his loyalty by being allowed to take his sister by blood as his second. She had more talent than him and training her would probably be his greatest contribution to Azgeda.

Being trusted to protect Charlotte was an honor. He knew why he’d been chosen. It wasn’t because he was intimidating like Benny or a threat like Niles. He had been chosen because he was dependable, and Klark knew his loyalty was to her and not Nia. He’d sacrificed everything to become a warrior because his best friend as a child had been taken by a passing company. He’d needed to find his friend again, and he had. Corrin was the reason for everything, and Corrin had been second to Xander, and Xander was loyal to Klark. So, by default, he was loyal to her.

He watched as Charlotte engaged in a game of catch with a dagger. The boy she was casually tossing the blade back and forth with was clearly pleased with the game. He had no doubt that the black eye the second was sporting was from Charlotte. He was riding with them among the party going out to evaluate the blockade line and how all the camps were doing. The blockade had been getting reckless. Armies were meant for action and the tension of the constant threat of attack, combined with boredom, could be deadly. While the commander was riding across the entire blockade to inspect it, more like iron out any tensions before they could explode, Klark would be forcing her men to engage in added training to keep them busy.

Hearing the jingle of metal, he turned to where a Trikru warrior had increased their horse’s speed to come abreast to him. He clenched his fists around the pommel of his saddle. “Anya,” he acknowledged.

Her face was blank but he knew she wasn’t in the position of power here. They may be in a company of Trikru traveling through the Floukru section of the blockade but he was here as both a threat and a gesture of goodwill. It didn’t surprise him that she said nothing merely acknowledging his presence with a look. Wondering about her motivations was not his job, so he ignored her.

He was surprised when he barely caught the dagger being thrown just past her ear. Glaring at Charlotte, he spoke. “You should be more careful.”

She laughed, “And you should pay attention to your surroundings.” The boy Aden was smirking from beside her.

“You could have harmed someone.” He rebuked.

“Please, it would have hit that tree, it wouldn’t have even nicked your ear.” She protested with a
“It’s careless,” he said more out of habit than any real rebuke.

“Oh you’re going soft. I was expecting you to be way stiffer from what the others told me about you.” Charlotte replied.

He raised his eyebrows in disbelief at the girl.

“What? It’s true.” She replied.

Groaning in defeat, he chucked the knife back at her and she easily snagged it out of the air. “You really should find a way to train your knife abilities that doesn’t involve the risk of accidental murder.”

“The kid needs to learn how to catch a knife, he’s plain awful and this is how I learned.” She shrugged.

“Hey!” Aden yelped from the side. “Just cause I’m not freaky attuned with knives like you doesn’t mean I’m awful!”

“You’re first trained you by throwing knives at you?” Tris asked.

Charlotte quieted down but nodded.

Anya spoke up surprisingly. “My first used to make me stand on a rail for hours in the rain to work on balance.”

“You made me do that!” Tris said indignantly.

“I didn’t chuck rocks at you while you balanced on it though.” Anya said shrugging.

The commander made an aborted snorting sound. “Because I broke my arm when I slipped when you had me do it.”

Silas decided to accept the verbal olive branch offered for what it was. “To get the attention of the warriors we used to run on the ice in front of the palace. A lot of us broke things doing that.”

“Weren’t there less foolish ways to get the warrior’s attention?” Aden asked.

“A second is a burden, during the trials most die. A dead second gives you nothing but wasted time. You have to convince the warriors that you’d survive training.” He remembered long days and nights training desperately. The mud and dried blood seemed to constantly be caked to his skin.

Charlotte leaned back in her saddle. “Daniella used to give the prisoners a single knife. They’d be injured from her time with them and desperate. I’d be left with them till only one of us was alive.”

“That’s sick.” Aden said looking at Charlotte with concern.

Charlotte shrugged. “She liked to play games, to win you survive.”

Silas noticed the look that passed over the commander’s face at the mention of Charlotte’s first. He was fairly certain he knew why. The murder of her lover had been widely spoken of some years ago.

“I remember one warrior I fought with who used to make his second run through the forest with a blindfold. I’m not sure what it accomplished other than bruises and broken toes.” Ryder said from his
position on the other side of the commander's horse. And thus the conversation flowed easily round the party of miserable things their respective firsts had had them do.

Two years six months ago:

Harper felt sweat dripping down her face and her muscles burning. She would have never guessed how much work it was to harvest potatoes. Shoving her shovel back into the ground, she turned more dirt over before picking out the roundish lumps that fed them during the coldest months.

“Water?” A villager asked holding out a ladle.

“Oh thank god.” She dropped her shovel unceremoniously and accepted the ladle drinking the water with relief.

The man laughed, the lines in his face deepening with his mirth. “You kids don’t know how much you’ve helped us.”

Harper smiled wanly at him as she handed the ladle back. “Just doing our duty.”

He clasped her shoulder, his face turning more serious but still warm. “We lost four men to that cursed beast in the last month. Now we’re free from it. Not only that but you’ve helped repair the damage it did to our fences and now you’re helping bring the crops in before they rot in the ground. That’s not even counting that you gifted the creature’s meat to us.”

Harper shrugged the thanks off. They’d only been a team for a short time and already the locals welcomed them with open arms when they arrived instead of the cold shoulder they’d been treated to beforehand. The villages were poor and every little bit helped. After a few months of sharing their spoils and helping where they could, the thin people with hard lines of weariness seemed to flock to them. Their first day gathering information for their hunts was always filled with Clarke being pulled to treat everything from common colds to easing the pain of the dying. She’d already helped deliver two children so far and she had no doubt there would be more.

How anyone could pass through these villages and not help was beyond her. The work was hard but the smiles and warm hands that clapped them on the backs were worth it. They never spent long in the villages. Usually a day before and a day after the hunt. Now that the snow was gone, they could do more than just help patch up roofs and haul in more firewood.

She knew the snow would be back soon enough, especially since the pauna could be found venturing farther afield obviously preparing for the winter months. From what they could tell the giant beasts lived primarily in the uninhabited areas farther north and migrated down to find new hunting grounds. Leaning down, she picked her shovel back up. Running a hand across her forehead, she wiped the sweat away. “Right, so how many fields of potatoes do you have anyways?”

Present:

Burka was developing an eye twitch. She liked staying in the shadows, being silent, and keeping order. Sophie and her god forsaken horse were the antithesis of everything in which she found peace. The second could not keep her mouth shut for more than an hour at most, and that horse… Avel she thinks it was called though she thought a better name would be demon... was a wild monster. It seemed to have a vendetta against every life form it encountered.
When loose with the other horses in the pens it was the head horse. It bossed the others around and seemed to enjoy chasing them about occasionally. It bit, kicked, bucked, every bad thing it could do it did. She’d been bucked off the damn thing six times in a week. She knew the other warriors were taking bets on when she’d snap and kill the thing. Really, it was the only reason she hadn’t done so yet. No need to prove those annoying gossips right, even if she desired it with a rare fire.

Burka did not do passion. Yet, here she was lunging at the blasted animal trying to get it to burn some energy off and acknowledge her as its superior, all while passionately longing for the opportunity to kill it. Sophie was standing on the pen rails looking on and excitedly shouting encouragements at the animal. Burka grit her teeth. It could be worse however, she had no doubts that had she been caught going behind any other general’s back, it would have been worse. Octavia was one of the general’s favorites but she had still been defended. Klark was fairer than she had given her credit for being.

“Burka!”

Letting her eyes wander towards the sound, she saw Octavia standing next to Sophie. Frowning, she brought the horse in before leading it carefully to the side of the pen and handing the rope to Sophie. Eyeing the animal closely, she swung under the fence and came face to face with the hothead that had gotten her into this situation.

“Octavia, what do you need?” She asked blandly, although dealing with the hothead was a welcome break from dealing with the horse, not that she’d say that willingly.

“Look, I owe you no matter how much I don’t like you.” Octavia started.

Burka stared at the woman incredulously.

“Oh, don’t give me that look, it’s not like it actually bothers you.” Octavia snapped slightly. She breathed in, clearly pulling her temper back. “That horse knows what I know. You’re hollow inside. It won’t work for you. There’s a reason you avoid the horses as much as possible. They don’t like you.”

Burka’s face smoothed out. “Is there a reason for telling me this?”

“If you help me get revenge on a couple of the guys in my unit for being assholes, I’ll help you train the horse. You know I’m good with the animals.” Octavia crossed her arms. “So what do you think?”

Burka thought it out, she was awful with horses, foul creatures. Plus, the chance of getting to see Octavia get bitten by the blasted thing would be…..rewarding. “You have a deal.”

Lexa was disappointed to see the Floukru camp go. Haar had been easy to work with and evaluate. The man was a dependable ally. Now however, entering the Boudalan section she felt her mask settling firmly into place. Bassilo was one of the more likely candidates to cause issues. This long on standby and he would be getting antsy. The general was a man of action, not patience.

She reached out, stroking the side of her horse’s neck to calm it. Its muscles had started to tense up, having sensed her own stress. It had been antsy for the entire day. Though that hadn’t been about having to stay firmly aloof like now. No, she had been spending most of her inspection trying to understand what on earth had happened with Klark. What did ‘I’m sorry’ mean?

There were so many ways to interpret it. Was Klark sorry for not returning her affections? For not
being able to return them due to her position? Was the kiss horrible enough to make her run? What? It was too vague and she did not like vague. Had she ruined everything? Or fallen into an Azgeda trap? Or had she surprised the general? She didn’t know and it was killing her. As it was, she was blessing her luck that Anya and her guards seemed preoccupied with Silas and Charlotte. Now, entering hostile territory she could no longer agonize over a kiss.

She examined the encampment, the placement of troops, the defenses in place. It was clear that the Boudalan forces were not used to thickly forested areas. Their defenses and warriors were all on ground level. They were spread evenly and she had no doubt that her own troops would easily overrun this camp if they were fighting them. The question was if the reapers would overrun it.

A dark haired warrior stood in their path staring them down. He held the markings of a Boudalan warrior, the high protective collar and visible arms. Lexa pulled up on her reigns, coming to a halt in front of him. “Do you bring a message from General Bassilo?”


Lexa narrowed her eyes. Bassilo was up to something and she didn’t like it. “Then lead on.” She ordered. She trusted her guards would protect her.

The man grunted before turning and jogging at a light pace. Lexa squeezed her legs together, prompting her horse to follow him. It didn’t take long before they came to a tent that was clearly the general’s judging by its size. Glancing around, she noted this was the only camp she’d seen with such a buildup of troops she’d witnessed this entire trip. The other clans had been using several small camps with scattered guard positions in between them. Bassilo seemed to be going with one large encampment with a stretched out line of troops and guards spanning from the central camp to his entire section. It made the line weak and made it hard to get additional reinforcements where they needed to be in time in case of attack. Not to mention, the single large camp gave a sizable target if the mountain wanted to make a statement.

Clenching her teeth, she realized she was going to have to order this thick headed idiot to distribute his troops properly. He wasn’t going to like it. Looking over at Anya she saw her mentor had come to the same conclusion. She was surprised to see Charlotte and Silas tensing up, clearly reading the situation as well. Actually, if she wasn’t wrong her entire party of twenty warriors had all recognized the weakness of this encampment. Coming to a stop, she came to a quick decision.

“Ryder, Anya, Silas, Charlotte, Tris, Hector, Aden, Harken, Pent, dismount. The rest of you stay with the horses and stay vigilant.” Without checking to see if her orders were going to be followed, she swung out of her saddle with the ease of long practice.

She could feel her warriors falling in behind her. She was surprised to note out of the corner of her eye that Charlotte had taken the position to her immediate left. Although, if the body language she could see was any indication, the position was because of orders not because of any actual loyalty to her.

“Ah, the great commander humbles us with her presence, at last.” Bassilo’s voice boomed as he walked out of his tent to meet her. The dark haired warrior who had led them here fell in behind the man automatically.

“General Bassilo, your defenses are quite...interesting.” She settled on saying in a polite manner since they were in public.

“We’ve already killed fifteen reapers that thought they could push past us.” He bragged.
Lexa felt anger cause her entire body to stiffen. In a low and a dangerous voice, easily recognizable to those who knew her well, she spoke. “And how many have you attempted to heal as I have ordered all healers to attempt?”

“I don’t care what black magic that Azgeda bitch uses, I won’t have my men learn it.” He barked.

Lexa clasped her hands behind her back. “I didn’t ask. I gave an order.”

“That witchcraft hasn’t worked yet. If you want your men to be cursed, you can let your men be cursed.” He crossed his arms over his chest, clearly defensive and trying to let his arms look their most impressive.

Lexa had found it exciting to be challenged by Klark, being challenged by this oaf was disgusting. Her blood was running with rage and she considered how to crush him. This kind of moronic posturing could not be allowed. The arrogance alone was cause enough to call for his head. However, she was in his area of control so straight up having him executed at this moment was dangerous. So, she would have to be more subtle about this and let him weave his own fate. Lexa was sure she could get him to humiliate himself in front of his men and if they lost their respect for him that would be half the battle won.

“And you would rather let your fear rule you? Are you really so afraid that you see witchcraft in the very beatings of our hearts?” She asked in a low voice that carried.

Bassilo raised his shoulders puffing himself up. “I fear nothing. I just know better than to test the gods with black magic.”

“Does pressing against the chest of your men really seem so magical to you? That is what Klark kom Azgeda has taught your healers. If it were the dark magic you think then why are my healers able to do it as well?”

“If you’re healers will curse themselves it’s hardly surprising.” He scoffed.

“You’re so full of fear you can’t even separate medicine from curses. I find I am not surprised, everything about you is fear and arrogance. Your army is placed to keep you safe, not to defend the land your men are risking their lives to hold. Of all the armies I have assembled from the twelve clans, yours is the only one as shameful as this.” She stayed standing, an immovable force watching the man before her falter.

It was clear from the looks he was receiving that he was not popular. Still she’d pressed as hard as she could without making his men feel obliged to turn against her. The fact the men were standing back willing to watch how this played out told her a great deal. Her own forces were only staying in place because those were their orders. The difference was distinct.

“Your war on the mountain is folly. I don’t know how Flava allowed our people to sworn into your coalition but I’ve fought in wars longer than you’ve drawn breath.” He ground out.

“You insult your Khan and your Commander in one breath. Is there a limit to the treason your fear leads you to attempt?” She asked coldly.

“I insult a child playing at war.” He snapped, his control leaving him completely, not that he had much of it in the first place. If everyone was this easy to goad, life would be far easier.

Lexa took a single step forward, just enough to make it clear she was challenging him to push back. “Yet, you have followed that ‘child’s’ orders till now. You’re all talk trying to cover for your weakness.”
“You think I’m afraid to challenge you?” He growled, stepping so that it was clear he towered over her by a good foot.

She’d long ago learned how to make it look like she was staring down someone who was twice her size, which made his move remarkably unsuccessful. “Challenge me if you think I am such a child, or admit that you’ve let your fear endanger your men’s lives and condemned our warriors who might still be saved for the same reason.”

“Consider yourself challenged.” He boomed.

Her lip pulled up in victory and disdain. “I accept your challenge.”

Lonqu had served Bassilo for years and he had always known that the man would get himself killed because of his recklessness and temper. He’d seen their Khan, Flava, beat Bassilo into submission several times. He also knew the men were waiting for a signal to act but that otherwise they would watch this occur without lifting a finger.

It was possibly the worst match up the oaf could have made. Well, except perhaps the assassin he saw twitching, clearly uncomfortable with her charge being put in danger she couldn’t protect her from. Bassilo was strong, stubborn, and lethal with his axe. The problem was that he focused on strength and strong defences. Yet, here he was challenging a fighter who was built for speed and skill.

The assembled warriors easily formed a circle as the two combatants drew their weapons and faced one another. He wasn’t going to miss Bassilo he realized, quite a few of the men would complain but he had won his rank years ago when defending the border posts. It was a different kind of war and the man had never adapted.

He watched with sharp eyes as Bassilo made the first move, the fool. The commander flowed back avoiding the swing and then to the side to avoid the follow up jab with the sharpened pummel of his axe. He’d give Bassilo that much credit, he was good, but not good enough to win against the commander’s superior speed and deadly skill.

The general lashed out with a kick intended to push his opponent back and give him enough space to move his axe back to his center ready for another strike. It didn’t work. The commander twisted, barely dodging the kick and slicing one of her dual swords up through the back of his boot and into his tendon. The man howled in rage and pain, stumbling back, his foot refusing to support his weight. Off balanced, his axe too far back and with only one foot to work with, it wouldn’t take long.

The commander was on him in an instant. The blade she had just yanked up to slice the tendon, twisted before coming down, slicing mercilessly into the forearm of his dominate hand. Her second sword came up in a stabbing motion, clearly aimed for his throat. He managed to tip it to the side, avoiding the blade narrowly. It didn’t save him for longer than the split second it took for her to turn her arm so that the blade was facing his throat and yank it so that it sliced his throat open.

His throat became a fountain of red as he keeled over hitting the ground. Lonqu watched impassively as the general bled out, twitching slightly. It was an anticlimactic death for such a large man. He knew the men were watching him to judge what their response should be to what had just happened. Though after that show of power and after the conversation Bassilo had let himself be manipulated into, he knew no one would attack without ample prompting.
He stepped forward with measured steps until he came to stand in front of the commander, who was sheathing her weapons and ignoring any threat he might present. To be honest he didn’t like his chances against the woman. He knew what he had to do, the fact that Bassilo had not proved what a fool he was. He dropped to one knee, his head facing the ground now stained red with the general’s blood.

“I swear fealty to you Lexa kom Trikru, commander of the twelve clans.” He stayed kneeling. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the others slowly dropping down. It was hard for them. They’d never been friendly with the Trikru. Still, it could always be worse. Really, if their Khan had already bowed, then what was it for them to bend the knee?

“I accept your vow Lonqu. You’re a captain correct?” She asked, voice even, not even out of breath from the short fight.

Standing slowly, his head still bowed in submission, he spoke. “I am.”

“Then I appoint you acting general for these forces till Khan Flava can send a replacement or promote one of your members to the position.” She decreed.

“I’m honored Heda.” He replied before raising his head to look at the impressively stoic face of the commander.

“You have an hour to see to your affairs and then we will need to speak. The defenses of this section are unacceptable, I will not allow a part of MY army to be slaughtered because of a fool’s orders.”

“As you say Heda, you and your entourage are free to the late general’s tent while you wait.” He replied respectfully.

____________________________________________________________________________

Clarke swore as she started chest compressions on the latest reaper they’d caught. “Don’t you die on me.” She snarled while pushing hard enough she could feel his ribs fracturing under the force of it.

“He’s gone girl.” Cassita said firmly while pulling at her shoulder.

“Damn it.” Clarke spat out sitting back on her heels. “Why won’t they just stay alive long enough to let us save them?!”

Cassita slapped her over the head. “Don’t go being silly, you can’t save everyone and you know it. Go work your frustration out elsewhere.”

Clarke snorted looking up at the no nonsense midwife. Healers weren’t well respected in Azgeda and midwives were the only real healers that practiced when she’d first started. She’d grabbed Cassita from a village to help her train a new generation of healers. She may not have had a lot of knowledge of war injuries but civilian life was difficult as well. What she may have lacked in experience with arrow and sword injuries, she made up for in the ability to stay calm and to learn.

“Fine, I’ll leave you to it. Summon me if any of the others start to worsen.”

She saw Forest working on one of the other reapers they had tied down. Forrest was trying to get the former man’s fever down and so far his heart hadn’t given out on him. She was proud of her healers and how they were growing. Ruffling his hair slightly on her way out, she headed for her tent. She saw Raven sitting in the middle of the floor with parts spread around her, the twins working on what looked like wiring.

“Is the defibrillator done yet?” She barked.
Raven looked up from her work. “No, and what crawled up your ass and died?”

“We lost another one, we can’t keep putting them through this.” Clarke said while dropping heavily onto the bed.

Raven stared at her for a moment. “Minions, go spend some time sparring with some of the other seconds.”

“Do we have too?” Nut whined.

Raven chucked a piece of metal at Nut’s head. “Yes, go get some fresh air, I don’t want to see you for another hour.”

They both grumbled while getting up before a shoving match ensued as they made their way out of the tent.

“So, want to tell me what’s really bothering you because it’s not having to wait on the defibrillator.”

Clarke cursed her friend’s ability to see straight through her. “Nothing important, just something silly that is distracting me from my duties.” She was trying to convince herself that was all it was.

“Yeah, no, I’m gonna need more details than that.” Raven said while snapping two pieces together.

“Look, I just,” she paused not knowing how to explain it. “It’s not anything big, just a distraction. It’s not like anything is actually going to happen.”

“Clarke.” Raven said in an entirely unimpressed tone.

“Fine, someone just…” She didn’t know what to say. Just kissed me, would be most accurate, but Raven would jump all over that. What could she even say about the kiss when she didn’t know what to feel about it. Lexa had just kissed her out of the blue. What did that even mean? Lexa was the commander, if there was anyone less able than Clarke to pursue any sort of romance, it was Lexa. I mean sure, they had become sort of friendly and certainly Clarke had grown to respect her more than she had ever expected to after the border wars. Still, she had thought they had both been totally focused on the war with the mountain and keeping their men safe. What was she even supposed to do with a kiss? It was all so confusing and complicated.

“Wait, does someone have the hots for you?” Raven asked with a smirk after realizing that Clarke had gotten lost in her thoughts and wasn’t likely to continue.

“We’re at war! And we still have to worry about Nia. There’s no point in thinking about it.” Clarke replied with a finality in her tone. Not bothering to deny Raven’s fairly accurate assumption.

“Those are excuses and you know it. If you want to be with someone just do it.” Raven said.

“They’re not excuses. It would be incredibly complicated and risky. Plus, I don’t even know if I want to start something.” Clarke ran a hand through her hair in frustration. Sure, Lexa was striking but she’d never considered anything other than their current working relationship.

“Slow down, why is this so complicated?” Raven asked.

“Trikru, and they’re important.” Clarke replied deciding that keeping the fact it was the commander quiet was for the best.

Raven’s eyes widened a bit in understanding. “Well damn, you and Octavia pick the most difficult
“Ray, I don’t even know if I like her like that, or what exactly she wants from the relationship.” She protested. For god’s sake it was all such a mess. Lexa was interesting and finding someone who understood made it easy to fall into a rhythm with her. However, she didn’t even know if she was capable of taking a proper lover. She hadn’t dated anyone since the ark. Since the ground, single nights were all she could afford. She may be confused but she knew the idea of a single night with Lexa wasn’t what she wanted. That was troubling in and of itself really. The fact being in an actual relationship with the woman was appealing was startling. It had felt right when Lexa had kissed her.

“She huh? Monty owes me a week of training the twins.” Raven pumped her fist. Clarke was mildly impressed at Raven’s ability to remain unflinching while she tried to bore through her head with a glare.

“Look, the way I see it. There’s a risk, and you’re doing your thing where you only take risks if it’s for us. You’re worth risks too you know. So, if you think this girl is worth it, you should take the risk.”

“I can’t risk everything we’ve worked for just for the chance that maybe we’d be able to work something out. It’s not worth it and I can’t be that selfish.” Clarke felt her decision really settle. While disappointing, it was a relief to have made her decision. Now, she would just have to figure out a way to tell all this to Lexa without destroying all the progress they had made toward a more friendly relationship with the Trikru. Or making things so awkward they couldn’t work together for the rest of the war with the mountain. Clarke groaned internally at this new challenge. Why did Lexa have to make things so difficult? Things had been going so well before that kiss.

“Fine, at least sleep with someone please, you’re getting wound way too tight. God, the whole army is wound tight as a drum.” Raven muttered under breath.

Clarke rolled her eyes at Raven’s remark. “The hunting parties get back tomorrow and we are having the usual competitions. It should help get some of the excess energy burnt off.”

“Yeah, that won’t help you. You’ll spend the whole day making sure no one gets carried away. Why don’t you take Niles to bed? He’s always up for some no strings attached fun.” She suggested.

Clarke grabbed a block of wood that was being used as a paperweight and chucked it at Raven. “Why don’t you?” She snarked.

“I might,” Raven laughed, “but seriously, you need to lighten up or you’re going to keel over.”

Clarke grumbled under her breath. She knew Raven was right, well not about needing to find a bed partner, but the part about being wound too tight. The stakes were incredibly high right now and it was getting increasingly difficult for her to take it easy for even a minute. Not that she had ever been good at taking it easy. Still, she could take it one task at a time. Keep her men in line, heal the reapers, take the mountain, return to Azgeda, kill Nia. Perhaps she could let Gunter take the reins for a while tomorrow so that she could take part in some of the archery contests. Clarke had always found archery relaxing especially when she challenged herself. Focusing everything on her bow and her target allowed her to forget everything else for a time.
“He’s seizing!” Lisa yelped as she jumped out of the way so Klark could get to the reaper. As the newest of the apprentices, she didn’t dare try and start chest compressions. She didn’t even know if she had enough strength or weight to do them properly. She was only thirteen and still on the small side for her age. Relief hit her as Klark was at the reaper’s side instantly turning him on his side so he didn’t choke.

“Get the defibrillator over here, now!” Klark ordered while slicing open the reaper’s shirt with a knife.

Lisa turned and grabbed the large box on one side. Looking up, she met Forrest’s eyes as he grabbed the other side. Together they managed to haul the thing over to where the reaper’s jerking was tapering off. She watched carefully as Klark’s fingers went to the side of the man’s neck to feel for a pulse.

“Fuck,” Klark was grabbing the two paddles from the machine. “Roll him onto his back!” She ordered.

Lisa dropped down and pulled his shoulder over letting him flop back onto his back. She backed up quickly, Klark had drilled them in how dangerous this new healing tool could be to use.

“Clear!” Klark barked while placing the paddles one above his heart and one on his side. The man’s body arched upwards. Klark’s fingers were quickly pressing checking for a pulse. “Clear!” She yelled while pressing the paddles back. His back arched again and Klark’s fingers returned to his neck.

Lisa watched as the general’s shoulders slumped in relief. The general leaned back from the man who was now taking rattling breaths. “Lisa good catch.”

Lisa sighed as she slumped on her cot in the medical tent. They’d been taking turns watching the man and were all exhausted. This was the third time he’d had to be revived and it was wearing on all of them. The quiet wait followed by the adrenaline rush. She felt the cot dip as Klark and Forrest sat down on either side of her.

“Do you think he’ll make it?” She asked looking up at Klark who was still in sleeping clothes, her hair pulled up into messy bun.

“Maybe, he’s stayed alive the longest. We need to get water into him soon though.” She sighed.

“Think he won’t choke if we try and get some water down him now?” Forrest asked.

Klark wrapped her arm around both of their shoulders. “We can try again in a minute.” She said.

Lisa hoped that he survived. He was the sixth reaper they’d tried to save and watching them die was
difficult. It was nothing as bad as the eastern border conflict though. Those had been awful days full of blood and dying. The regular soldiers may not like the blockade but it relieved her to be around the relative peace. She leaned her head against Klark and closed her eyes. She would be needing to work more soon enough.

Two years ago:

“General.” Clarke said while standing at attention.

“Ah, good. I assume your last hunt was successful?” Dozla said gruffly from his seat in the tavern.

“Three pauna sharing a cave. No significant injuries or deaths.” She reported watching the man carefully. He wasn’t a terrible person really, just a drunk. He wasn’t overly cruel which made him better than some general’s she could be serving.

“Well that’ll make a good last hunt for ya.” He laughed before tipping his mug back and standing up.

“Last hunt sir?” Clarke asked carefully.

“Yes, one of my captains went and got herself knocked up. Which means I need a new captain, with your reputation I’m sure you can handle it.” He stroked his beard while staring at her. They were of a similar height, he was a short and stocky man with thick wiry hair. His breath stank of stale beer.

“It’s an honor to be given a captaincy.” She breathed out, she would finally have the power to protect some of her people, her voice would actually matter.

“Honor?” He laughed. “Just don’t get yourself knocked up and you’ll do fine. I’m giving you Fort Tawa. Your official purpose is to protect the surrounding territory from bandits, thieves, and any uprisings. Nia needs someone to keep an eye on things in Ebec though. I want you to report any rumors concerning that region. Understood?”

“Yes sir!” Clarke’s mind raced at the information. “Will I be allowed to take my hunting team with me to my new post?”

“No, they’ll be given new assignments. I can’t afford to lose my entire team of my best hunters. Is that a problem?” His voice was dangerous and Clarke knew she didn’t hold enough value to argue with the general.

“No sir. Thank you for the post.” She kept her voice even.

Present:

Aden had to admit the Plain Riders had a brilliant setup that worked to their advantage. They had staggered outposts with patrols running through the open area’s in-between. If anyone tried to cross the land a company from any of the outposts could descend in minutes. It gave the impression of there being large holes in the defense while the holes were exactly where they wanted any potential enemies to go. It was brilliant and he understood why Lexa wanted him to observe all the various nation’s encampments with her.

It was an incredible opportunity to learn about the different clans and how they waged war. He’d seen the strengths and weaknesses of each camp and so far he couldn’t say which one was better
than the others. Although, he definitely preferred the defenses that used the trees more to give them height over the enemy. Sitting on the ground seemed vulnerable to him. Not every clan had the tall trees of Trikru land though he supposed.

As they moved forward, he was surprised to hear Char snap her fingers three times. He turned to her frowning, wondering what she was doing. Movement caused him to look away from her and he noticed Silas the formal and stiff Azgeda warrior moving his horse forward so that he was beside Lexa while he snapped his fingers once. Snapping his head back to Char, he realized she was dropping to the back of group. Something was really wrong. Carefully, he loosened the sword strapped to his saddle while using his peripherals to look for a threat. Clearly, Char had noticed a threat he and the others hadn’t yet.

Straining his ears, it suddenly struck him that he couldn’t hear any birds and they’d be going through a small clearing in a few minutes. Ambush or waiting archers then, he realized. He checked on Char and felt a shiver of nerves at the realization that while her horse was still moving with the group she wasn’t on it or anywhere he could see.

The others were stiffening and he saw Anya moving so that she was on Lexa’s other side. However, they weren’t all looking out for their attackers. Some of them were eyeing Silas. He frowned while dropping to the side, giving him room to set his horse to a sprint if he needed to charge down an attacker. If the others were too busy worrying about betrayal, they could miss an attack by the mountain men.

Why they would suspect for even a minute that the Ice Nation was betraying them right now was beyond him. Sure, the Plain Riders and the Ice Nation were allied but Char would be the one to make an attempt on Lexa not Silas. The fact she’s vanished meant it wasn’t them. Something Lexa clearly agreed with him on since she was giving the signal for holding the course. Good he hadn’t missed anything.

His left hand tightened on the reigns, pressing the hard leather into his palm when he realized the guards were still maneuvering so that Silas could be killed quickly if he made a move against Lexa. What were the fools doing?! How dare they question Lexa like that?! Gritting his teeth, he shared a look with Tris, who had taken the charging position on the other side of their party. Good, at least one other person was sane. Apparently, Anya as well since she’d taken the blocking position opposite Silas keeping Lexa blocked on both sides making her a difficult target to hit.

Lexa made the hold course gesture again, sharper this time. Slowly, the guards dropped backwards back into their holding positions. They were still twitching towards Silas with their eyes. It irked him that they would distrust Lexa like that. Still, he didn’t have time for it. He kept his eyes moving across the trees as they began to enter the clearing.

They were about half way through the clearing when a loud crack sounded. Anya gave grunt as she swayed in her saddle like someone had struck her in the shoulder. He drew his sword while clinging to his horse, who reared back in fright. The other horses were fighting against their riders. He tried desperately to stay seated. A second crack sounded, causing the horses to frighten even more.

Dropping his sword, he grabbed onto his horse’s reins with his newly free hand. He didn’t know what was happening. Finally, he managed to get his horse back down onto four feet. Instantly, he swung his head round to make sure Lexa was alright. She was facing the direction he thought the sound might have come originated. There was blood soaking the sleeve of her jacket. She was still using her arm though so she wasn’t injured badly, he realized with relief. There was also blood leaking from a wound on Anya’s side much more serious than the wound to Lexa. One of the guards who had some training as a healer was already moving to bind her wound. Since Anya was still on
her saddle he was sure she would be fine.

Swinging his horse’s head around, he pushed forward till he was into the tree line. He heard the others behind him. Once they were in the tree line, they stayed there till a loud whistle echoed out to them. He started, swinging around to the direction it came from.

“She’s got him.” Silas said before directing his horse towards the sound. Aden and the others quickly followed. As they broke through, they came upon Char perched on top of a man wearing a strange suit. She had one of his arms twisted viciously behind his back and her knee pressed into his back, holding the struggling man down with a dagger to his throat. He felt pride for her deep in his bones. She’d taken down the mountain man assassin and protected Lexa.

Niles tested the string of his bow and enjoyed the thrum of the taut string. He never felt as in control as when he held his bow in his hands. Of course, he was handy with knives as well but he preferred to keep a distance between him and his victims. As much as he liked being up close and personal with warriors, that wasn’t how he liked to kill.

“Ready to defend your title?” Klark asked in a challenging tone.

“Oh, I’m always up and ready to please.” He smirked. He enjoyed watching the general roll her eyes.

“Oh, I hope someone kicks your ass, you could do with being taken down a peg or two.” Klark snarked.

Niles thumbed the string again hearing the low thrum of it. “If it’s you, I don’t mind a good spanking every now and then.”

“You really don’t know how to stop do you?” Klark asked in an exasperated tone.

“Nope,” he grinned back up at her. “And you’re never going to take me up on the offer are you?”

She laughed. “No, although I hear you’ve been busy recently.”

“Why did I let you talk me into taking a second?” He asked while standing up.

“Because I asked and you picked the girl.” She responded, unslinging her own bow, a shorter style than his own.

“I’m usually so much better at picking girls.” He winked at the general. “I picked you after all.”

“If I remember correctly Dozla picked you and you requested my division. I wouldn’t call that picking me.” She replied.

“I just had to see the captain with the blue eyes and golden hair, who helped the common folk. Rumors like that are too good to ignore.” He drew an arrow from his quiver and spun it round his fingers, testing its weight.

“How did you get him to give you the assignment you asked for anyways?” She asked while inspecting her own arrows.

“A game of odds, and I never lose at odds. It must be my dashing good looks.” He said while sticking his arrows into the ground in front of his feet so that they’d be easy to grab.
“I’m sure your sticky fingers have nothing to do with it.” She said sarcastically.

“I prefer the term clever, I am very good with my hands after all.” He replied.

“Thank you for agreeing to practice with me.” She said ignoring his comment.

“Competition gets the blood pumping, can’t take that away from our gorgeous general now can we?” He bowed mockingly.

“Oh hush.” She chuckled.

“Only if you make me.” He strung his bow and prepared to draw. “The pine cones?”

“Sounds like a target to me.” She drew her string back.

“First to twenty?” He asked drawing his bow as well. He didn’t even bother to check Klark’s stance. Her style of using her thumb to draw was common amongst the Plain Riders and some sections of Azgeda but uncommon elsewhere. He much preferred holding his string notched back to his jaw with two fingers allowing for more control.

“You’ll be supervising the archery contest again.” Klark taunted.

“Oh, I think you will be, Harper isn’t here to be my match.” He said while finding the first pinecone he could see.

Charlotte stood and considered her tools for this interrogation. The suit might be necessary for the man to live. Which meant she needed to get him to start talking without damaging it too badly. So, blunt trauma it was. She looked up at Ephraim, who was standing, arms crossed, irritated that the commander had commandeered his tent. Lexa may have been grazed by one of the bullets but she hadn’t needed any more attention than for her wound to be cleaned and wrapped before she was ready to witness the interrogation of the captured mountain man. Anya on the other hand was still in the healer’s tent. Though from the volume of her complaints at not getting to witness the interrogation, it was clear she would be fine. Still, even if the commander was present, it was Ephraim’s camp and it would be better and more efficient to ask him for the tools she needed.

“General, I need a mallet and a belt, leather with a narrow circumference.”

“Are you confident you can get him to speak?” The commander asked while Ephraim ducked out of the tent.

“No, some men will talk, some will not. It’s the ones that are unsure that torture works on. If he won’t talk, I don’t have the tools I’d need to get him to speak.” She said bluntly.

“Meaning?” She asked stiffly.

“I don’t have a comrade of his to play him off of, nor I do I have loved ones.” She explained.

Ephraim returned and handed her the mallet and belt she’d asked to be brought for her. She thanked him quietly.

“Do it.” The commander said clasping her hands behind her back.

Charlotte nodded before turning to the man strapped to the chair in the center of the room. His face was set, clearly prepared for torture. Well, time to live up to his expectations and to confirm Clarke’s
theories about the suits they’d heard the mountain men wore. If they were for plague or illness prevention due to compromised immune systems like Clarke thought, cutting into it wouldn’t harm him. If Raven was right and it was for radiation, then he’d die if she released the air.

Picking up the belt, she walked forward and gently slipped it under his wrist before tightening it painfully tight with a jerk. She stared into the man’s eyes, trying to get a read on him. Clearly a soldier, but no experience with torture, he was far too rattled for this to be anything but the first time he’d faced real pain he couldn’t stop. Stepping back, she went to the table where the items found on him were laid out.

The broken radio, that he had obviously been ordered to break if captured, was the first item she noticed. There was no other reason for him to risk losing his only chance of escape to break a piece of tech if it wasn’t orders. The pictures of Lexa and her guard said a lot as well. It meant surveillance, remote since no one had been killed trying to take them. The repair kit, which she recognized from years of trying to make everything last on the ark, pointed towards the suit being incredibly important. A point towards Raven’s theory then. The cylindrical device she didn’t recognize could be anything. She’d have to get it back to Raven along with the busted radio and gun. Other than that, there was just a map, a detailed map, that suggested that the surveillance was widespread.

That was it. No food, no water, or any other supplies for any kind of prolonged trip. Just the necessary items for a hit. So, either he had a rendezvous point somewhere nearby or this was a day trip from an unknown entrance to the mountain. The answer to that question lay in how arrogant the man was. If his arrogance was justified, he would have a team out there prepared to come and get him. If his arrogance was just the naivety of an overconfident fool, then this was a solo mission. Grabbing the repair kit, she approached while drawing a small dagger out of the braids wrapped around her head. Reminding the Trikru present that she was always armed was a good idea after how twitchy they had been earlier.

Staring down at the man, she considered whether it would be a good idea to reveal she could speak English before or after testing the suit. She needed him to feel out of control so after would probably be best. With a swift movement, she sliced a thin half inch tear in the hand of the suit below the tourniquet. In the same motion, she easily slid the knife back into her hair.

The mountain man started screaming. He fought against his bindings, screaming in pain, the word ‘no’ coming out between cries. Charlotte had what she needed, that was physical pain, the air was hurting him. She ripped the backing off the patch and quickly covered the tear. She waited till he quieted completely.

Turning to the commander, she spoke. “Permission to speak Gonaslang?”

“Granted.” The commander said not moving her gaze from the bound man.

With that she returned her attention to the captive. Now, to see if his society was a leftover from before the bombs or a group that had settled in a technologically advanced military base post bombs. He was expecting her to start taking him apart physically, time to break his expectations.

“What should I call you?” She said tilting her head while looking down on him.

The reaction was instantaneous. He stiffened, eyes widening in surprise. Charlotte smiled, the use of gonaslang being banned in the presence of mountain men had been successful apparently. “Want to tell me your name or am I going to have to assign one to you?”

“Get on with it!” He snapped.
Her smile widened. Well then, he was clearly not well trained in resisting interrogation at all. His nerves were betraying him. Speaking had been foolish on his part. Once a person started speaking, they tended to keep on doing it. Which was exactly what she wanted. She turned and grabbed the medium sized mallet she’d requested before pulling a chair over and sitting down in front of him.

“Well since you won’t tell me your name, I guess I’ll have to call you John Doe.” She said conversationally. The twitch he gave at that told her he recognized the significance of the name. Pre-war society then, the grounders had lost sayings and social references like that. She doubted the mountain was immune to that.

“So, tell me John, are you always so arrogant?” She asked.

“You’re just a savage! Knowing English doesn’t change that.” He snarled.

“You hide in the mountain and take innocent people and you call us the savages.” She shook her head.

She had no doubt he’d have spat at her if he wasn’t wearing a helmet. Leaning forward in the chair, she started again. “I’m surprised you aren’t begging for the lives of your loved ones. You must know they’re all going to die soon.”

He leaned back and laughed.

“You must think your defenses are impenetrable to think it so impossible. Your leader doesn’t think so if they’re ordering the death of our commander. You don’t attack pests so far below you that they can’t harm you.” She said while watching him carefully.

“You’re just a nuisance, you people are nothing.” He sneered.

“A nuisance and yet here you sit, a few nice toys and you think you are superior. Your leader obviously knows what you don’t, that we’re coming for you. Tell me, a man in the prime of life like yourself, you must have a family. Maybe a kid.” She saw his eyes harden. “Oh, you have a kid. I’ll be sure to pay special attention to them when we slaughter your home.” She added voice malicious.

“Fuck you!” He attempted to lunge forward his bonds straining against him. “You’ll never touch him you filthy blood bag!”

“And what’s to stop me?” She twirled the mallet. He was losing control, now to push him over the edge. Make him fight for a position of power. With a quick movement she brought the mallet down on his shoe with enough strength she felt bone give way. Leaning back in her chair, she listened as he cried out in pain before taking great shuddering breaths to control himself before finally glaring at her from behind his mask.

“I wonder John. Do you have a uniform on under that suit? Because if you do you probably have your name on it don’t you?”

“Go to hell.” He spat.

“I see. I’ll be sure to find the kid who share’s your name. Tell me, how do you think he’ll like it when I break every bone in his body just like I’m going to do to you?” She swung the mallet into his calf aiming for the tibia. There was an audible crack as the bone snapped.

She waited till he quieted again. Reaching out with the mallet, she tapped the side of his mask with it bringing his attention back to her. She didn’t even have to speak for him to start talking. Not that he would realize he was telling her exactly what she wanted to hear.
“This army of savages will burn and die in the fog. You won’t even touch the doors of the mountain.”

“We learned how to move through the fog ages ago.” She waved her free hand carelessly. “Every acidic base has a neutralizing compound after all. Perhaps you mean the reapers, well addiction may be hard to help a person through but they are hardly a threat. We’ve been taking care of them one at a time for weeks now. Soon, there won’t be enough to even be worth mentioning.”

“You think that will help you?” He said grinning. “Those are just the start of our defenses. As soon as you get through the fog your villages will burn. We can strike you anywhere we want.”

“Missiles then?” She asked casually. Ignoring the way the others in the tent were tensing and hoping he didn’t notice their reaction and the fear it implied.

“Oh yeah missiles, when your villages burn and we shoot you where you stand you will get what’s coming for you.” He sneered.

Charlotte nodded along before swinging the mallet into the side of his knee aiming to do the most damage to the tendons and bone there as possible. He screamed, throwing his head back. As his head dropped back down, she noted the saliva dotting the inside of his mask now. The sweat and clear signs of pain contorting his face. Good, he was breaking, he just didn’t know it. After all, if she was punishing him he wouldn’t think he was giving them new information.

“You think burning a village down intimidates us? We’re savages after all. Why would we care about that when we could have your people screaming like you are now?” She asked.

“Oh, we can burn down more than one village we could get up to five of your villages without warning and without any chance of retaliation. And that’s without having to physically attack, and we can do that too.” He taunted.

“How would you do that? As you know quite well, you’re no match for us on the ground.”

“We can see everywhere!” He bragged. “You’re still on horses, we have jeeps with mounted turrets. We’ll wipe you out, you pieces of shit.”

“You think we don’t have mines ready to take out your jeeps?” She asked sarcastically. She was going to have to talk to Raven about actually building some mines or some other sort of way to deal with what sounded like the tanks she’d seen in history books. Still, first they needed to know what else the mountain had.

“Even after all that, you think you can break our walls?” He asked like it was the ultimate trump card.

She rolled her eyes theatrically. “Blowing your doors open won’t be difficult.”

“You’d have to be able to plant a bomb first. Even then, it’s not like you could make something strong enough to take the front door down.” He sneered.

“Who said anything about the front door, it’s not the one you used to get here to try and kill our commander is it?” She took a guess. Everything added up to there being at least one other entrance, most likely in the tunnels.

He didn’t say anything to that. Just glared and Charlotte sighed, he’d realized he was giving her information. It was inevitable but it was always worth a shot to see if straight torture would work now. Standing, she swung the mallet slamming it into his shoulder. “Now why don’t you tell me
Octavia felt relief and fear warring inside as she helped haul the unconscious body of Lincoln towards camp. Laslow had the man’s other arm slung over his shoulders helping move him. As they came into sight of the foremost watch-post she shouted. “GET THE GENERAL!”

Sweat was running down her back as they moved onwards. She saw a warrior running ahead to fetch the general. Gritting her teeth, she dug deep and kept moving. She knew the stitches in her back were ripping but she didn’t care as blood followed the path of her sweat. All that mattered was that he was alive. She would kill everyone who had harmed him, if it was the last thing she did.

They came stumbling out into the central camp and started for the medical tent. Two large warriors were there hauling him up, an arm over each of their shoulders so they could carry him the rest of the way. Before she could panic, she saw Clarke tearing across the clearing for the medical tent.

“CLARKE!” She shouted.

Clarke changed direction, heading straight for them. She came to a stop, walking backwards while taking Lincoln’s pulse. “What’s his status?”

“He’s a reaper. We had to knock him out to control him.” She bit back the flood of tears that wanted come out at the thought of him charging her, unseeing, unthinking.

“Right, Laslow go make sure the apprentices are getting bindings ready for him.” Clarke barked.

“Yes ma’am!” He said before darting forward and into the medical tent.

It didn’t take long for the four of them, plus Lincoln, to come crashing into the tent. Brady and Lisa were there and soon they were strapping Lincoln to the ground. Lisa started cutting his shirt off while Brady grabbed a bowl of water.

“Clarke he’s seizing!” Forrest yelled from where he was leaning over another reaper strapped to the ground.

“Shit.” Clarke was at that patient’s side in a split second. Swiftly unbuckling him, she rolled him on his side as he jerked uncontrollably before he slowed to a stop. Clarke shoved his shoulder and pressed the paddles from what Octavia recognized as the defibrillator to the man’s chest. “CLEAR!”

“Clarke, what about Lincoln!” Octavia cried seeing Lincoln starting to go into a seizure of his own.

Clarke swore loudly as she pulled her fingers away from the man’s neck. “Brady get him on his side. CLEAR!”

As the man’s back arched again, Octavia made to get to Lincoln’s side. She was stopped by Clarke’s voice as she gave out a clear order. “GET HER OUT OF HERE!” Laslow get her out!

“No, LINCOLN!” She shouted as she was dragged out to the sounds of him choking and Clarke yelling out again, “CLEAR!”

Bellamy smiled at the sight of Orslow standing next to Glen in the tavern. Maneuvering his way
around various patrons, he came up to his two fellow captains. “What are you doing here?” He asked, slapping Glen on the back and looking happily at the one handed Orslow.

“Bellamy!” Glen cried, pulling him forward. “Drink with us! We’ve been moved to the capital until further notice. Seth’s orders.”

“I hadn’t heard Quint’s rotation for security was up?” He questioned while accepting a drink from Glen.

Orslow set his arm stub on the counter before answering. “Seth requested internal security. With half of Klark’s troops at the mountain, he volunteered so it wasn’t both of our northern districts short troops at the moment. Nia accepted a week ago. I’m surprised you weren’t informed.”

“I knew Klark and Seth had talked about security while she was gone but I didn’t know they’d come to an agreement.” Bellamy said while taking a large drink of the ale.

“No more of that political crap, any new stories?” Glen asked.

“Well, Harper had an adventure a month back.” He said grinning.

“The kid?” Orslow grinned. “What has she been up to?”

“Not much, but she spent six hours chasing a would be assassin who attacked using snowballs. Fast little bugger.” He said conspiratorially, fondly remembering Harper’s glare when she’d returned with their ‘assassin’ a street kid who had thrown snowballs at the guards.

“I’m surprised she didn’t kill him.” Orslow laughed. “She always was accurate with that bow of hers.

“We wanted the assassin for questioning so no lethal force.” He laughed. “The man who had accused the boy of being an assassin has spent some quality time hanging from the outer wall by his wrists for that mistake.

Orslow set his mug down and rubbed his thumb across some of the blue fabric sewn into his jacket. “It’s good to see you again.”

“You have no idea how thrilled I am to have allies here as well.” He said.

“I could drink to that.” Glen said, raising his mug.

____________________________________________________________________________

Two years ago:

Clarke rode towards Fort Tawa with her new second in command Laslow riding beside her. He wasn’t hostile towards her, which was a good sign. It probably helped that the captain she was replacing had retired the only way a warrior could without dying. Dozla had allowed her to move to a village to live out her life as a mother. Her new second seemed like the friendly sort. A bit on the flirtatious side but serious enough that she wasn’t worried about him.

As they came around a bend in the road, they left the trees behind and she took in her first sight of the fort. It wasn’t much, it was made out of logs standing upright towering a good three persons high. She had no doubt there was dirt built up on the inside to keep the wind out and the wall’s strong. The flag bearing the hand of the Ice Nation flew from the walls. The area around the fort was clear, leaving clear lines of sight.
They were near a body of water that she could hear rushing. When the snows came, this fort would be the guard post against forces using the frozen water as a road into the Ice Nation. The first frost of the winter had already come and past. She wouldn’t have long to get the fort buckled down and prepared for the cold months ahead.

As they came to the gates, she saw them opening, no doubt the guard recognizing Laslow. Once inside, she pulled at her reins bringing Jake to a stop as she looked around the fort. There were a good fifty men assigned to this fort but she only saw a couple dozen out and about, they were looking at her carefully. No doubt they understood that she was their new commanding officer. Rising up in her stirrups a bit, she raised her voice.

“I am Clarke kom Azgeda, and your new captain.” She turned to Laslow who she had at least had some time to interact with and get to know. “Assemble the men, they need to know what I’ll expect of them.”

“Yes captain.” He replied before dismounting and moving towards what she recognized as the sleeping quarters.

Six villages, over a hundred square miles of land and fifty men. Squaring her jaw, she dismounted and tied Jake’s reigns to the hitching post before moving to the natural center of the fort. She could do this, and she would do it.

Chapter End Notes

We’re sorry for freaking you all out about the one night stand thing. We meant it as a joke, but apparently we didn’t make that more clear, so...oops?
Tris wasn’t happy to be entering the Azgeda camp again. Her last trip after finding Mozu with the body of Atom hadn’t been pleasant. Also, she didn’t like being separated from Aden and Charlotte. The two Ice Nation warriors, Aden and three of the commander’s guards had returned to TonDC instead of continuing with them to the Azgeda camp and the last of the inspections. The looks they were getting from the Azgeda warriors were not friendly and she recognized them. It was how the Trikru warriors looked at Char when she and Aden were sparing with her.

The Azgeda camp was clearly well organized, she had no doubts it was one of the most secure sections. The underbrush had been cleaned up outside of their section making it incredibly difficult to sneak up on them. Then, they were organized into a series of tree binds with spaced out camps allowing for fast reaction times if a threat became apparent. Also, thanks to spending time with Char, she was picking up on their communication method. A series of clicks and whistles from the trees followed their movements. She had no doubt the signals were being used in such a blatant manner in part to announce their presence to the commander’s guard. She was fairly certain that snap, pause, snap was the signal for allies.

They’d passed through two smaller camps so far and the captain in charge of each one had reported to the commander. The first camp was run by a captain who introduced himself as Xander. He was a tall broad warrior with neatly groomed hair and a large sword strapped to his back. His entire camp was clearly ready to scramble at a moment’s notice and was designed to be highly defensive. The warriors tended towards heavier armor and being more physically fit. The next camp had been less defensively set up and was captained by a man named Leo.

Leo looked strikingly similar to Xander but with a smaller frame and several years younger. The differences hadn’t stopped there however. Leo had been dressed in lighter armor as were most of the warriors milling about. She also was fairly positive she’d spotted a pauna hunting team around one of the tents. The use of large bones and teeth in their armor was distinctive.

Now, they were making their way into the lead camp and it held several differences. Most strikingly, it was larger, there were far more warriors about, and the blue of the ice general was prolific. She recognized the tall grey haired form of Gunter standing at attention waiting for them to approach. She dismounted along with Anya and Ryder as had been their orders ahead of time. Leaving her reigns with the warrior beside her, she made her way to Anya’s side.

“Greetings, the general is in the medical tent supervising patients. If you’d just follow me.” Gunter said with enough deference towards the commander to be polite.

“Lead on then,” Heda said.

Gunter nodded before waving over a warrior. “Mozu, see to it that our guests are taken care of and
given the proper hospitality.”

The medical tent was surprisingly large Tris realized as they approached. Once inside, she saw the clean cots ready for injured as well as four reapers tied down to the ground with rope attached to metal stakes. She only knew they were reapers because they were tied down. Curiously, she examined the unconscious men. They all had had their shirts removed and there was a strong scent of vomit in the tent. She guessed that the buckets had been used and then cleaned recently.

There was a medical apprentice, the one she had never been sure if they were a boy or girl, slumped across a cot snoring. Brady was applying a salve of some kind to a large burn on the chest of one of the reapers. There was also Lincoln strapped down with the angry warrior, Octavia, watching over him.

“Lincoln!” She exclaimed surprised to see the man they had all assumed was dead.

Klark appeared from a sectioned off part of the medical tent and greeted them with a tired smile. “We caught him two days ago. He’s through the worst of it as far I can tell.” She said while wiping her hands down with a rag. She had the sleeves of her shirt rolled up to her elbows and hair braided back and away from her face. “I’m sorry I wasn’t able to greet you personally when you arrived in my camp, but as you can see we’ve been wearing ourselves thin keeping these guys alive.”

Now that she mentioned it, the general had dark circles under her eyes and she could see another of the medical apprentices drooling on a box behind one of the cots. She was disappointed she hadn’t noticed the girl earlier, Tris was supposed to be more aware of her surroundings.

“I understand.” Heda said. “You’ve had progress with the reapers then?”

Klark smiled tiredly. “Yes, Cormag here,” she gestured to blond reaper with a scared face and severe burning on his chest and side. “He was able to tell us his name and ask for water when he was awake earlier. I’ve been keeping them sedated so they sleep through most of the process but I think I can keep most of these ones alive.”

“It’s working?” The commander breathed out in awe. Tris, and surely the others as well, felt the echo of her awe. It was an amazing thing to see those thought dead brought back to life.

Klark nodded. “Yes, I’m unsure of what damage is irreversible but these men have most of the drug flushed out of their systems now.”

“Drug?” Anya asked from her position.

“I’m sorry that’s not a term used often. It is like a poison or the nuts I’ve heard tell of that cause you to see things that aren’t there. It is addictive. Similar to a drunk addicted to alcohol, these men would have an uncontrollable urge to get more of whatever the mountain men have been giving them. That, plus, I’m beginning to believe that they have been in a highly altered mental state due the effects of the drug and thus they weren’t completely aware of what they were doing.” The general frowned slightly. “Of course, until they’re recovered enough to speak properly that’s just a guess.”

“You believe they will recover enough to tell us what happened to them?” The commander asked.

“Perhaps, it depends on what sort of drug they were put on. Drugs are literally a poison designed to affect the person without killing them. Although, I’m certain the reason all the reapers are physically similar is because they are the only ones who could survive the poison.” The general replied, her eyes narrowing and starting to flicker over their party in concern. “You’re injured.”

Tris watched in shock as the general stepped forward, touching the commander’s arm inspecting the
bandage on it.

“It’s nothing.” The commander said, although she didn’t pull away from the contact or indicate the general should release her which Tris found strange.

“This doesn’t look like nothing.” The general corrected frowning. “Here I’ll redress that for you.”

The commander stepped back then. “Anya was more seriously injured than me. I only have a scratch.”

The general looked over at Anya her eyes quickly focusing on the side where she’d been hit. “If I treat her, will you let me redress your ‘scratch’?” She asked.

One year and eleven months ago:

Bellamy was sharpening his sword waiting for the radio to crackle to life. They had a scheduled conference call coming up at sunset. Or well, as close to sunset as possible. He was ignoring Monty and Miller canoodling in the corner. He was happy they had found each other, but they were disgustingly cute. He rolled his eyes while running the wet stone down his blade. He hoped someone put him out of his misery if he started revolving around someone like that. Smiling at them curled round each other, he went back to watching the radio.

“Oy, losers!” It crackled, surprising the three of them.

Bellamy laughed grabbing the mic. “Raven, you’re a bit early over there.”

“Border rotations are boring as dirt. I have been staring at the same trees for hours.” She complained. “I miss my tech guys.”

Harper’s voice came over then. “I’ll trade you anytime Reyes. I got a new scar for the collection yesterday.”

“Are you alright?” Atom’s voice chimed in.

“Fine, burnt the gash closed since we had to haul the stupid beast out of the woods still.” Harper said.

Monty pulled the mic out of his hand. “You should try working with Burka sometime. I swear the girl gives me the creeps.”

Bellamy and Miller both nodded solemnly. There was something not right about the senior assassin Monty was often paired with for missions.

“I have news,” Charlotte’s voice came through.

There was a mess of noise as everyone tried to ask what was up. Finally, the din died down and her voice came through again. “Dozla is moving me to your division Bell!” She said excitedly.

Cheers resound round the room and Bellamy fist pumped. They’d been trying to get Charlotte out from under Nia’s thumb for a while with little success. “That’s great!” He exclaimed into the mic. There would be four of them in one place now, that hadn’t happened in ages.
Lexa was unsure if asking to speak to Klark alone had been the correct decision. The general had been acting the same as before and she didn’t want to interrupt the working partnership they had built. Still, she owed the woman an apology for letting her emotions get away from her. Their position was delicate and she hadn’t even considered the ramifications of her actions, which was unlike her. The time she’d had while inspecting the blockade had given her the opportunity to think. Klark was undeniably beautiful and she was drawn to her kindness and the care she showed for her men as well as her strength. Acting on that warmth however had been a mistake.

Whatever feelings the general inspired in her it was unrealistic to believe that they would be or could be returned. She didn’t even know if the general had a lover back in the Ice Nation. Of course, that wasn’t even taking into consideration that she was an Azgeda general. The woman would literally be returning to Nia after the mountain fell. There wasn’t a world in which the risk was worth it, especially if Nia already had issues with Klark.

So, here she was trying to bring herself to apologize for the position she had put Klark in by kissing her. However, she was missing her chance, the graze on her arm had already been cleaned and Klark was wrapping it in clean bandages. In fact, she watched with some horror as Klark pulled back having rewrapped her arm. Swallowing her nerves, she forced herself to speak while reaching out and halting the general’s retreat before releasing the arm. “I put you in a difficult position last we spoke. I owe you an apology.”

“Lexa, it’s fine.” Klark said, her eyes softening around the edges.

“It’s not.” Lexa shook her head, letting her hands clench over her knees for a moment before continuing. “I am Heda, and I…” She swallowed thickly, struggling for words that usually so easily came to her. “You had no way to know if I would take a refusal out on your people. Not only that but to have accepted my advance would have put you in mortal peril. It was foolish of me and I won’t allow my emotions to cloud my judgment like that again. Truly,” she looked up at the thoughtful face of the general before continuing, “I ask only that you not let my actions harm the progress we’ve made against the mountain.”

She heard a sigh and watched the general lean against the table in her tent while looking at her like she was peeling back layers one at a time. It made her feel exposed and uncomfortable. “I think I know you well enough by now to know that you wouldn’t allow a private matter influence your role as commander.”

Lexa felt relief that she had at least not crossed that line with Klark. She knew of past commanders who had used their rank to take lovers whether they wished for the honor or not. She had long ago, when she was a nightblood tripping over herself around Costia, sworn to never be like those leaders.

“Lexa,” Klark pushed her braid off her shoulder, “you just surprised me, I shouldn’t have left how I did.”

“You don’t owe me an explanation Klark.” Lexa said hoping that this conversation would end soon so she could lock her bruised heart back away where it belonged. Letting herself indulge in the beginnings of warmth and attraction to the general had been a mistake and one she was paying for now.

“I...” Klark let out in a frustrated tone before stepping into Lexa’s personal space. Lexa was surprised by the sudden proximity before she felt Klark’s hand on the side of her face. She let her eyes flutter shut at the gesture soaking up the warmth from the calloused hand. Then, she felt the gentle press of lips against her own.
It was soft and she responded slowly letting Klark control the kiss. She carefully slipped her hand around Klark’s waist while leaning into the other woman. She hadn’t let herself imagine this and it took her breath away. Klark was holding back, she could tell by the way she was almost vibrating under her hand and against her mouth. Lexa pulled back, breathing through her mouth before changing the angle.

She felt herself being spun and walked into the table behind her. However, Klark didn’t lean in and return to kissing her, instead she rested her forehead against hers. She could feel Klark’s breath across her face and blinked her eyes open and pulled back slightly. They were still pressed together, leaving Lexa with the chance to count each of Klark’s eyelashes if she felt like it. Instead, she found her eyes scanning the faint scar across her temple and the vertical scar that went from the side of her jaw disappearing into her shirt.

Klark’s voice came out with a faint rasp that made Lexa’s toes want to curl. “This is an incredibly stupid idea.”

“I know.” Lexa breathed out, watching as Klark opened her eyes.

“If the wrong person found out it would be disastrous.” Klark continued. “There are warriors in my camp who would try to kill me if they found out and others who would gladly report to Nia if given the chance.”

Lexa’s hands clenched where they rested on Klark. Swallowing bile at the thought of what Nia would do if told that this general made her want and feel things she hadn’t in years.

“It’s absolutely insane, but I want to know what this feeling is and where it leads. I have given up so much for my people. Perhaps, it is time that I try to live life rather than just survive it.” She said finally looking at Lexa with something she had never seen Klark show her before, open vulnerability. Klark didn’t have a proverbial knife ready to defend the weakness she was displaying and Lexa found it breathtaking.

Lexa closed her eyes and leaned into Klark, trying to come up with a response. She was terrified of what it would mean, but oh how she wanted it. Standing here, most of her weight resting on the table behind her, Klark pressed close, the feel of her breath brushing across her face, the smell of medicinal herbs and leather around her, she couldn’t find it in herself to do the smart thing. To think with her head. “I want to know what this is as well.” She settled on saying finally.

Klark let out a breath and nodded against her. Lexa let herself enjoy the moment, knowing they would have to separate soon to go back and deal with their men and duties. For just this moment however she let herself enjoy this. With a smile she tilted her head reclaiming Klark’s lips.

Raven rolled her eyes at the looks the Trikru were giving her as she sat fiddling with wires working on trying to repair the broken radio they’d brought to her. She wasn’t going to touch the cylindrical object till she was on her own and could safely make sure it wasn’t some kind of weapon.

She wished her seconds were here, they would at least make things interesting, but no, apparently meetings over the information obtained from tortured mountain men were too important for her seconds to join. Which left her trying to fix broken tech, as usual, and people watching. It really was an interesting collection of people, all trying not to look like they were expecting a knife in the back. Gunter was standing as formal as ever and giving her incriminating looks every time she made a particularly loud click or clunk sound with the radio, spoil sport. Anya was looking rather pale and Raven inwardly smirked having no doubt Clarke hadn’t been gentle while checking her injury. The
commander seemed overly stiff and Raven wondered how high she could get the woman to jump if she stuck her with a needle. Last but not least the weirdest acting person in the room, Clarke. She had been acting formal, and polite which was just strange.

“So, basically Char lied her ass off, got us information so we now know how screwed we are in this war against the mountain.” Raven summarized from her position. She enjoyed the affronted looks from the Trikru.

Clarke pinched the bridge of her nose. “Yes Raven, now as the only tech expert in this army what do you think?”

She sighed setting her tools down. This was the problem with being brilliant, people depended on you. “Look, there was a lot of bs there. You’re asking me if I can get us through acid fog without a lab or actual supplies, blow through a door designed to survive bombs, somehow prevent missiles from being fired and oh yeah, deal with fucking tanks.” She rolled her eyes, “What do you think?”

“You will be polite in the presence of Heda.” Anya snapped.

“I’m really not going to be.” Raven snarked.

“Ok,” Clarke interjected before the conversation could spiral. Raven pointedly ignored the glare she was getting from Gunter. “Let’s start with that list of things one at a time. From what I can tell our largest issue at the moment are the missiles and whatever type of armored vehicles they seem to have.”

“The surveillance is also quite troubling.” Heda said.

“Not a large problem though.” Clarke said frowning. “Raven if they are using mounted camera’s do you think you could help narrow a range of possible locations we could use to find them?”

Raven hummed thinking. “They’d have to have regular maintenance to keep plant life from growing over them so yeah I think I could narrow down the possibilities.”

“Lexa, would it be acceptable for Raven to return to TonDC with you? She could help your warriors find and destroy the tech that is allowing the mountain men to spy on us. It should be easy for you to have the knowledge passed on along the blockade.” Clarke said facing the commander.

“You believe this would work?” She asked.

“Yes.” Clarke answered without hesitation and Raven felt the pride she always enjoyed when her family trusted her completely.

“What about the missiles?” Gunter asked. “They seem to be the greatest challenge to me. We can’t strike fire out of the skies.”

“Is there any way to deal with the missiles without entering the mountain?” Clarke asked looking at her seriously.

“No way, even if you got me or Monty into the mountain we wouldn’t be able to do much. The security to protect weapons of that size would be incredible, we’d need insider knowledge just for the codes. At least not without a massive amount of time we can’t afford.” Raven drummed her fingers thinking about possible solutions. “If we could get to the launch mechanism we might be able to keep them from being launched for a while but…”

“How do they even get the missiles out of the mountain?” Anya asked in frustration.
Clarke answered that one while Raven stayed silent thinking. “Silos. They’ll have a retractable lid on
the surface of the mountain that retracts when they are ready to launch them.”

“Could we damage them?” Anya asked.

“No.” Raven ran a hand through her hair in frustration. “Look our problem is we have one of me and
broken pieces of crap. The mountain clearly has dozens of me and a couple of Clarke’s that actually
have the tools and materials needed to do their thing.”

“Raven, you’re exceptional, I’ll eat my coat if they have a single mechanic as good as you.” Clarke
rebuked gently. “I, on the other hand, never finished medical training. Anyone they have trained
fully is probably better than I am without the equipment.” She added bitterly.

“Clarke correct me if I’m wrong but if you had access to the ark you could make your own reapers?”
Raven said challengingly. She wasn’t going to let Clarke undersell herself. Especially after the
lecture about being honest with the commander so they could plan properly.

Clarke made a choking noise while Anya and the commander both snapped towards her in surprise.
“Maybe,” she conceded, “but that would break every oath a healer is supposed to take. It would go
against everything I stand for as a healer. The mountain men are monsters. To develop a drug
capable of creating the altered mental state of the reapers as well as training them to perform tasks
while drugged would take endless tests. It would take years! Even reverse engineering the process in
hopes of better treatment options is beyond me without better equipment. Even if I do measure up to
the healers they have, there is nothing I can do about it.”

“They think we’re savages, idiots far below them.” The commander said slowly. “What if we don’t
attack them?”

“We kinda have to attack them to win.” Raven said, confused by the sudden turn in conversation.

“No, I think I understand.” Clarke said placing her hand on Raven’s shoulder. “You want us to keep
them underestimating us?”

“Yes, if they do not see us as a threat why let them know that we are one?” The commander said.

“With the blockade we’re putting pressure on them. Clearly, since they attempted to assassinate you
they perceive us as a threat.” Anya observed. “We don’t have a lot of time if we intend to win this
without them striking back.”

“Once you have your tools how long will it take you to break into their communication machines?”
The commander asked while watching her carefully.

Raven tilted her head. “Three days at most.”

“So we plan to make our move against the mountain four days after your caravan arrives.” The
commander declared evenly.

“If we can get the air from out here into the mountain we’ve won. We don’t even need to fight
them.” Clarke said gripping a dagger on her belt. “Raven could you build a bomb that would blow
the doors outwards if we got you and it inside the mountain?”

“Yeah, I could do that.” She said grinning.

“So, we hope the reapers hold answers to the questions we have about where the doors in the tunnels
are located.” Anya said.
Clarke nodded. “It’ll be at least a day before I feel comfortable taking any of them off the medicine
that’s keeping them asleep or highly groggy.”

“So, the plan is once more to wait.” The commander sighed.

Clarke wet her lips. “I can bring any recovered reapers with me to TonDC disguised as my guards. If
we’re being watched and don’t want to let on that we are a true threat, we’ll have to leave their
observation methods alone.”

Gunter crossed his arms. “General you take too great a risk. Take proper guards with you. With the
mountain having failed to kill the commander, they may turn their attention to the generals next.”

“It’s a risk we’ll have to take. I can stick to more densely wooded area’s though.” Clarke conceded.

The commander clenched her jaw before speaking. “If we do this, how do we get the general’s to
TonDC or somewhere else in the blockade to plan our attack?”

“We don’t.” Anya said suddenly. “We do this with a small force. If we try and use a large force, the
mountain will realize when we’re coming. That means the generals can’t be assembled from their
respective camps.”

“So, Azgeda and Trikru together then.” Clarke said smiling viciously, “I like it.”

“The coalition won’t be pleased,” the commander cautioned, “but I am the commander and my word
is law.” She said firmly and Raven decided that she was terrifying, especially with the look like the
one she wore that said she would crush anyone who crossed her.

“We have some Plain Rider’s in our camp that will work with my forces.” Clarke said thoughtfully.
“Can you get any Floukru to make TonDC their base of operations? It would give us four out of
twelve clans in the taking of the mountain.”

“Do we need an excuse for you to be in TonDC?” Raven asked looking at Clarke.

Clarke tilted her head, “Lisa could dress like me. We have a similar hair color and she’s not that
much shorter than I am. I can dye my hair red and go without my pauldron. That way I could help
transport recovering reapers to TonDC and come up with plans.”

“You can’t be away from camp for that long.” Gunter said. “The amount of time you’ve spent
traveling into Trikru lands to keep the peace is already excessive.”

Raven wasn’t really sure what she should do, between her former first and Clarke she trusted both
implicitly. They both could do with giving themselves a break however. She could feel herself
backing out of the way slightly while the Trikru looked surprised they were being allowed to see a
general get criticized by her second in command.

Clarke turned to face Gunter and despite his considerable height advantage it felt like she was the
taller one. “We both know why this army has never been defeated and it’s not because this army
needs me to be present. It’s because you are far more qualified to be general of these forces. You run
this camp and I run around developing medical training programs throughout my territory, deal with
internal security in the capital, and take care of warriors harming the villagers under other generals. If
I had anyone else as my second in command this army would have fallen apart long ago.”

“You’re important now.” He protested. “If you do this the army won’t be able to protect you and we
both know you won’t last a week if you take yourself out of the open.”
Before Clarke could rebuff his statement, the commander’s voice interrupted. Her voice was cold and hard. Raven was certain she was upset. “What is he talking about general?”

Clarke breathed out. “There are at least two assassin’s Nia has ordered to kill me inside this camp. If I drop out of the open, I give them the perfect opportunity to strike. While Lisa may be able to pull off impersonating me to the mountain, it won’t work on my men. This entire section of the blockade will know within an hour.”

Raven noted that the commander was clearly angry while Gunter looked conflicted about how pleased he should be that the commander was about to put an end to this line of planning. Sometimes, she doubted her survival instinct. “What about if you take Monty with you?”

Everyone turned to her. “Go on,” the commander ordered her.

“Well Monty is one of our top assassins and there is no doubt that he’s loyal to Clarke. If I’m going to be busy building a bomb, I won’t be able to give technical advice while you all are putting plans together and getting organized to infiltrate and make the doors go boom. You need Clarke and someone with tech know how to make this plan work. Monty is a computer geek. He’s the next best thing after myself of course.” She grinned, hoping to cut down on the tension. “Brady and Cassette can run medical while you’re gone. Monty can keep you safe from any attacks while you’re staying out of the army’s sight for the most part.”

Gunter relaxed slightly, “Monty alone may not be enough.”

“I agree, if you die, do you think your forces would continue to work with me even if Gunter here tried to continue on with the plan?” The commander asked.

“No,” Clarke admitted. “If Bellamy was here they would. However, we don’t have time nor would it be realistic for him to get here.”

“Who’s Bellamy?” Anya asked.

Gunter answered much to Raven’s surprise. “As you know Azgeda is ruled by Nia, under her are four generals that control the territory inside our borders. Currently the generals are Quint, Seth, Clarke and our newest general Frederick. Each general will have between two and four high captains that control smaller areas within their territory and take command when they aren’t available. Clarke has three, myself, Bellamy, and Tiki. Of the three of us Bellamy is Clarke’s overall second and anyone under her command would answer to him without question. If Clarke dies, the assassins and hunters would be unlikely to follow my command since my experience was mainly earned in the capital and Nia’s pets are rarely trusted.”

“So, this plan is far too risky.” Anya summarized.

Raven could see it the moment Clarke snapped. “This war is too risky! Look around, we are trying to take out a pre-war military bunker with guns, missiles, chemical weapons, advanced medicine, and an unknown number of soldiers with swords and arrows! It’s been a fool’s mission from the start. If we want this to work, we have to take risks. If we’re transporting reapers and making plans, you need me there. You need me for my rank inside my forces, you need me for my knowledge of pre-war tech, and you need me for my medical expertise. If we need to, there are people I trust that I can use as bodyguards and as my team for transporting reapers, information, and tech. Gunter you can and you will run this camp while I’m doing this.”

The tent was silent as everyone digested what Clarke had said. The commander spoke first. “Can you build a team that you know won’t betray you?”
“Yes.” Clarke answered with unwavering certainty.

“Then do it.” She commanded.

Any shift. “Heda, is the risk worth it?

“She’s right.” The commander swallowed. “If we intend to make a targeted attack from TonDC, then we need her able to move freely between camps. This is the only plan we have with any hope of success.”

“Thank you.” Clarke said, she turned to Gunter. “Will you do this.”

He looked like he’d swallowed a lemon. “Yes, but I wish you would cease with throwing yourself in front of the enemy. I’ll order a discrete watch kept on Flora she’s clearly one of Nia’s.”

“Do it. Raven can you start making a bomb or probably several bombs that can be placed at weak points?”

“Yeah, I can get my minions on collecting the supplies tonight and get to work on detonators tomorrow.” She said.

“Good, Gunter you get the medical team to stay up at the next shift change, we can explain their role in the plan. Since keeping my movements and Lisa’s impersonation of me secret isn’t going to happen we need a cover a story to spread through the army.” Clarke frowned.

“I don’t know about you guy’s but the commander and her captain here got shot at. It won’t be hard to believe that it’s a preventative measure while we learn how the mountain men are observing us. After all, it’s not a stretch the mountain could try and go after the generals next.” Raven enjoyed the surprised faces around her. “What didn’t think my brains and beauty ended with the mechanical did you?”

Clarke snorted. “That would work, what do you think?” She turned to the commander.

“We have a plan then.” She replied.

“Raven go get the kids gathering the supplies you need and send Monty to my tent.” Clarke squeezed her shoulder before letting go.

“Fine,” Raven had to resist sticking her tongue out at her friend. She gave a mocking salute before making her way out of the tent. Glancing back over her shoulder, she saw Clarke’s eyes tracing the commander’s face and oh..that was bad. It took more willpower than she knew she had not to cackle as she made her way out to get her supplies. High up in the Trikru army her ass. That wasn’t high up that was the very top.

____________________________________________________________________________

Octavia wiped sweat off Lincoln’s head wishing she could take the pain away from him. He’d woken up for a short time earlier. Long enough to get some water down him and a bit of broth. He hadn’t done more than try and croak a few words before losing consciousness. She understood why they were keeping them sedated. Since they’d started, they hadn’t lost any of the reapers.

It let their hearts be relieved of some of the stress of coming off whatever drug they’d been shot up with by the mountain men. Pulling a bowl of water and soap over, she began to lather his face before pulling out a sharp knife. Carefully, she scraped it against his skin removing his growing beard. She knew Lincoln liked being clean shaven and it was something she could do to make him more
comfortable. She took her time letting the sound of the knife scraping across the man’s face sooth her.

Taking a rag, she wiped his face free of the lather she’d put on it before resting his head on her lap and lathering up where the hair on the top of his head was beginning to grow out as well. Again she began to rhythmically scrape his hair off. Once finished wiping his head down, she looked at the man she loved. She knew it was fast and silly but she loved him. His face was drawn and clearly pained. Dark bruises under his eyes, his neck a mess of needle marks and bruising. It made her sick to see him like this and she wanted nothing more than to take his pain away but she couldn’t.

Moving, she curled into his side and closed her eyes. She could sleep again for the first time since she’d found his cave destroyed. He’d made it through the first night, he would make it through the next, she knew it. He was strong and she’d kill anything that tried to harm him. Resting her head against his shoulder, she sighed letting herself drift off into a deep sleep. The days of mourning and worry for him had taken their toll.

____________________________________________________________________________

One year eleven months ago:

Echo made her way to the major outpost just south of the capital. She was carrying letters to be moved throughout the border containing orders. Having a second outrank you within such a small time frame came with perks, like her own promotion. Being entrusted with moving orders to the border was an honor. She was going to enjoy seeing her second again and making sure she wasn’t letting her new rank get to her head and forgetting her training. First, the letters for the southern post. Riding through the gates, she was met by a grinning Bellamy.

“Well, look who finally found time to visit.” He said, dropping down off the wall of the fort and to the ground.

“It’s been a while.” She replied, pleased to see that the young warrior and friend of her second was alive.

“Any interesting gossip from the capital?” He asked curiously.

Echo swung herself out of her saddle. “General Dozla got into a bar brawl again. Garon’s youngest will be old enough to be taken as a second soon.” Which was interesting news. Garon was one of Nia’s chief advisors and as such his children were promoted quickly. She’d only met his oldest son Xander but he was a talented and serious warrior. If his siblings were anything like him, it would be a boon to have them.

“That’s not the juicy gossip you know we thrive off of out here.” Bellamy complained good naturedly. “Do you at least have a letter with new orders for me?”

Echo sighed, “For your captain yes, for you no.”

Bellamy became serious quickly. “Captain Tiki is dealing with an accusation against one of our warriors in the village. I’m in charge of the fort while she’s gone.”

“That’s a step up.” She said impressed.

“I can take the orders.” He said.

Echo saw that none of the other warriors had raised an eyebrow at Bellamy’s assertion of his place in the hierarchy. Examining him, she noted the slightly more decorative than average bone designs on
his coat. She reached into her satchel and pulled out the letter for the captain stored there. Bellamy smiled as he accepted. “So, do you need a place to stay for the night or are you moving straight on?”
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait, but as with the last update life happens and finals suck. But the essay from hell was written and turned in so we're back up and running. That said I still have no idea what that thing was on despite having read sections of it while Mouse was working on it. Like I don’t know how mathematical crazy talk has to do with food and why people pick it, but it sounded very smart so I think she'll get a good grade on it. Fingers crossed and all that.

Thanks for the comments and please let us know if there is a perspective you want. We love having your feedback and honestly it makes our day. That said just a heads up we won't be writing a sex scene. Like it will be blatantly implied but half this team is asexual and not into that stuff so we're just not going to do it. Of course Clexa interaction will continue throughout the story but we're not going past the PG-13 place with sex.

Octavia grunted with effort as she helped the woozy Lincoln into the back of a cart. She was amused by his clear displeasure at being dressed in Azgeda colors and having the white paint slathered on his face. She’d taken a great deal of pleasure from putting the white war paint of her people on his face. He’d grumbled slightly but allowed it, not that he could have fought her off, still far too weak to do much.

It was early, first light not quite having arrived. The field was filled with a natural fog, making the passing men appear and disappear like ghosts. The damp stuck to her skin and she could feel her hair frizzing. The horse hitched to the wagon shook its head, causing a slight jingle to be heard. Settling Lincoln down so that he was on one of the two benches along the back of the cart, she pulled a fur off the floor and wrapped it around him. Once sure he was situated, she darted forwards kissing him roughly, desperate to be reassured he was alive.

“That’s enough of that.” Clarke said, slapping her lightly on the shoulder.

Octavia glared slightly at Clarke, who was helping another of the recovering reapers into the cart. “You’re a spoil sport you know that right?” She asked while leaving an amused if sick looking Lincoln behind as she jumped off the cart.

“I’m aware.” Clarke said dryly while settling her patient in for the ride into the Trikru controlled section.

Octavia waited for Clarke to be done and to join her before they moved back towards the medical tent. Once they were mostly alone, she looked over at Clarke seriously. “Want to tell me why a secure guard detail involves Peri?”

“She’s good and I know she’s loyal to me.” Clarke replied before adding, “Plus, it means most of the others will be relieved they weren’t picked for the assignment instead of insulted.”

“Because she’s unhinged. She like’s killing, she’s psychotic.” Octavia protested. The way the woman smiled while killing people in the most painful ways was disturbing.
“Which makes her invaluable when there are people to be killed who others would balk at killing.” Clarke said. “What’s really bothering you?”

Octavia rolled her eyes. “Well besides the fact you’re taking Peri with us, which I am totally bothered by, your group is built entirely out of assassin’s, Peri, and Keaton! Like, why does a guard detail mean the most outlandish members of our army gathered in one place?”

“We need their expertise and we both know they are loyal.” Clarke said, ducking into the medical tent.

Octavia rolled her eyes sensing the conversation was closed. Clarke’s belief in the loyalty of the assassins under her command confounded her. Of course Monty and Charlotte were family and could be trusted. Burka, Niles, and his second Nina, however were different. There was something deeply unsettling about them, Burka especially. Peri and Burka lacked empathy to a degree that was noticeable. While Peri flaunted her strangeness and took open pleasure when allowed to kill, it was Burka’s silent pragmatism that scared her. She had no doubts if offered enough incentive Burkha would turn on them without warning, but Clarke wouldn’t listen to reason on the subject. She and Monty would just have to keep their eyes open.

With care, she helped lever up a recovering reaper. As she helped him hobble towards the exit, she saw a pale Lisa standing there in Clarke’s jacket, fiddling with the sleeves. Her face had been painted thickly to make it harder to identify her. With her hair braided up and the distinctive clothing, she made a passable Clarke. Octavia grinned at the girl as she passed her. “Take care ‘general’.” She teased.

Lisa flushed but said nothing looking rather like she was going to throw up if she tried to speak.

It was slow going but she managed to get the large man to the cart and settled down in it. Once she did, she let her eyes find the company that was assembled. Clarke with her hair dyed red with berries, leaving it more filthy looking than red, Monty tense and silent, Niles slouching by his second Nina, Burka half hidden by the cart her eyes slipping every which way, Peri practically bouncing with excitement, and Keaton sitting on the cart holding the reigns waiting for the signal to move. It was going to be an interesting adventure.

____________________________________________________________________________

One year ten months ago:

Laslow stood horror struck. He looked at the new captain and saw she felt similarly about their new orders, her face had shut down blocking out all emotions. He opened his mouth thinking to protest but closed it again when the captain spoke before he could.

“General, why not simply kill the guilty parties?” The captain asked flatly.

Dozla glared at the captain who dared question him. “You will raise Ebec to the ground, kill every man, woman, and child. Salt the earth, burn everything, the animals included. If you don’t think you can carry out our queen’s justice, you can throw yourself on your sword and I’ll find someone who will.” He growled.

“It will be done then.” She said calmly.

Laslow paled and stared at her in horror while Dozla grunted and made his way out to go find the liquor supply in fort Tawa. He turned to Clarke horrified, feeling like he had surely misjudged her. “When?” was all he could bring himself to ask.
“Laslow, I want a team of the best warriors at infiltration we have assembled in my quarters tomorrow as soon as the general leaves.” The captain said, ignoring his question.

“Captain?” He asked, still feeling sick to his stomach over the genocide they’d just been asked to commit against their own people.

“It would seem we’re going to be forcibly recruiting as many children as possible.” She said. “Get the extra quarters prepared for our new recruits, we may need to take on some extra hunts for added furs before the snow gets here.”

“But, we should be preparing for the attack the general ordered us on?” He asked confused, why on earth would they forcibly recruit children?

“I will muster our forces and arrive at Ebec prepared to raise it to the ground in a week. If some of the children were recruited before I arrive, they’d fall under my protection wouldn’t they?” She looked at him meaningfully.

“Of course captain!” He moved with purpose, there would need to be a lot of preparations made for the amount of children he was going to be kidnapping after all.

Present:

Charlotte stood at a attention by the entrance to the commander’s house listening to boring conversations between the woman and her generals about food, rations, and an apparent shortage of soap. She’d long become used to conversations about the logistics of running a nation, so it was easy to ignore it. Guarding Nia, listening to Clarke complain, and Bellamy stress over everyone, had left her completely done with these sorts of conversations. She wanted her shift to be over so she could work on teaching Aden and Tris more about poisons. They were improving at knife work quickly and the constant sparring was helping her improve personally, if she was being completely honest. She hadn’t had a regular sparring partner, who wasn’t Octavia or Monty, in ages. There was a lull in the conversation before her attention was brought away from her thoughts and to the words at hand.

“Where should we place the Azgeda convoy when it arrives?” Indra asked.

“In the village, near Nyko’s. The recovered reapers may need medical aid still.” The commander said.

“There isn’t appropriate lodging for a general by Nyko’s, just a spare tent for overflow in injured. Can we afford to affront her?” Indra cautioned.

Charlotte couldn’t help herself, she snorted. She tried to cover it up but had clearly failed as all the eyes in the room turned on her.

“Do you have an opinion on the matter assassin?” Indra asked eyes narrowed.

She cleared her throat. “It’s just Clarke isn’t going to care where you have her sleep. As long as there is space for a bedroll she won’t mind.”

The commander nodded. “Then we will place them by Nyko’s.” She turned her attention away from Charlotte and their conversation went back to logistics.

Charlotte was almost ready to cry in relief when Ryder arrived to replace her and relieve her from her boredom. She gave the large man a sympathetic look while clasping his shoulder. He looked slightly
alarmed as she left. Despite an unfortunate amount of experience as a guard, she had come to loath the post. Charlotte itched to move about, not stand listening to the most boring conversations known to mankind. How her friends actually participated in these talks she didn’t know. Shaking her head, she made her way to where she knew the seconds were bedded down. It was still early and she doubted Aden and Tris would be up already.

As she was passing the village well, she had a truly evil thought. Whistling happily, she grabbed a bucket and lowered it into the water. With her now full bucket of cold water, she continued on her way easily, ignoring the hostile looks she was receiving. Really, the Trikru had been getting used to her presence and the glares seemed more obligatory than actually hateful.

Slipping silently into the house converted into a barracks for the seconds was made slightly difficult by the bucket, but it wasn’t overly difficult. She waited for her eyes to adjust before making her way towards the sleeping forms in the back corner she knew would be her friends. Once there, she realized that Tris’s bedroll was already put away and her friend missing. Shrugging, she raised the bucket up, she allowed herself a moment to enjoy the anticipation before dumping the contents over Aden’s head. Really, he was guaranteed to have a better reaction than Tris anyways.

He jerked up sputtering with a cry of outrage. She saw him realize what had happened and then he was launching himself out of his wet bedroll and tackling her to the ground. “I’ll get you for that!” He shouted.

Charlotte let out a surprised squeak as they fell. Using her core, she twisted them round so that Aden ended up on the ground with her on top. The advantage after that was easy to keep, she slapped him hard enough to disorient but not damage and then took off out of the barracks. She laughed when she heard him cursing as he stumbled out after her.

“Get back here you sneak!” He shouted, chasing after her.

Turning so that she was running backwards, she just laughed at him. “Nope, loving the hair.”

This turned out to be a mistake. Since she was no longer looking where she was going, she barely had any warning that she was about to run right into someone. She felt their presence before she hit. Twisting on the balls of her feet, she spun around them. There was a rush of air as they tried to grab her when she passed the tall form. Her back bent as she went under the outstretched arm before snapping back to her upright position, her momentum clearly still carrying her forward. Her forward movement was stopped by an iron grasp on the back of her coat abruptly pulling her back.

Getting a good look at the person in front of her, she suddenly understood the sudden silence that had fallen through the village square. “Heda.” She said, feeling nervous seeing the serious leader in front of her. A quick glance to the side showed the person she’d almost run over was Ryder. Looking over her shoulder, she realized the person holding her by the scruff was Anya, the commander’s captain.

“Heda!” Aden gasped out surprised as he skidded to a halt, a guilty look on his face.

Charlotte wondered if there was a way out of this situation without getting stuck with an unfortunate duty like mucking out horse stalls. By the look Anya was giving her, she didn’t think so. “I can explain.” She started.

“You were just waking up Aden here with a bucket of water.” The commander said, the side of her mouth twitching slightly.

“Yes,” Charlotte admitted trying to stand properly and look like the respected warrior that she was.
She was fairly certain that having the back of her coat held by Anya like she was a misbehaving cat took away from the effect. Though, Aden, who was pouting and dripping water looked more like a hurt puppy than she ever could.

She was saved by everyone’s attention turning to a cart full of Azgeda warriors rolling into the village, which explained why the commander had left her incredibly boring logistics conversation she realized. It took her less than a second to spot Monty and Octavia amongst the others and barely a second more to recognize Clarke wearing her old jacket from when she’d been a second though her hair was some sort of red abomination. Ducking and twisting, she broke Anya’s grasp and took off for her family.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya watched in some surprise as the Ice Nation assassin flung herself into the arms of one of the approaching warriors, laughing with joy. It still struck her as odd how the Ice Nation warriors acted sometimes. She doubted that it would ever not surprise her. She shook her head slightly as the dark haired man spun the assassin in a circle, the two of them laughing happily.

Checking on Lexa, she sighed in resignation when she saw how she was staring at the general, completely ignoring her surroundings for the moment. The general had definitely noticed Lexa but Anya found herself frustrated with the fact that she didn’t know how to read the confounding woman. Thanks to her earlier attempt to understand what type of person Lexa was becoming infatuated with, she didn’t think she could ask now either.

“How can they act like children?” Indra scoffed watching the display.

“Because they believe that their bonds are what makes them strong.” Lexa said, to the surprise of those around her. “I do not know if they are right, but I do know that loyalty like that cannot be bought and should be feared.”

Indra made a noise of disbelief but didn’t say anything more. Anya watched as the general, who was looking decidedly not like a general, approached. She felt herself wanting to smile, that was certainly one way to hide her identity. The general was wearing a beaten and old jacket that had clearly seen better days, standard wear for Azgeda seconds actually. Her hair had been crudely dyed red with berries and she’d left it hanging down without the beads and braids she typically wore. To be blunt, she looked like a second who had been left out in the woods a bit too long. Not to mention, she was wearing different weapons than usual. In place of her bow and multitude of knives, was a short sword strapped to her side and a couple of unadorned knives.

“Heda, we are at your disposal.” The general bowed lower than was expected for a general but it was an appropriate depth for a second.

“I welcome you, a tent has been prepared for you beside the healing house.” Lexa said evenly, although Anya could see the amusement in her face.

“Thank you for your generosity.” The general said politely before turning back to the group of warriors and helping them move the drugged former reapers into the healing hut.

“Lexa, is it wise to invite them into the heart of TonDC this way?” She asked quietly, knowing that this was their last chance to change her mind.

“No,” Lexa gripped the handle of her knife, her eyes tracking and cataloguing the fact that the guard the general had brought was, except for two its members, made up entirely of assassins. “But the decision is made.”
“I agree that the general is an exceptional leader to her men. I just fear that her loyalty is to her queen.” Anya said carefully.

Lexa’s face hardened some. “It’s a risk but I do not think the queen holds much of Klark’s loyalty.”

“She certainly has the scars to prove that.” Anya said shuddering, at the thought of the story behind that much scarring. “However, those not in a position of favor will do truly awful things to secure their place.” She warned.

“What are you trying to say Anya?” Lexa bit out.

“That if she betrays you, I fear it will do more than threaten the coalition.” She said.

“The decision has been made. Do your job and protect me. Do not go against me.” Lexa warned before leaving her side.

Anya walked over to Gustus and shared a look with him. “We’ll need to increase her guard while we host the Azgeda warriors.”

“Do you believe the commanders faith in our new allies is well placed?” He asked gruffly eyeing them warily.

Anya considered it. “Yes, but I fear what will happen if we are wrong. Make sure none of our people offer insult to our guests. Encouraging this alliance is the best we can do to support the coalition.”

Lincoln’s whole body ached, his muscles burned, but it was the bone deep ache and visceral longing for the red that truly shook him. The misery of finding out that back muscles could be pulled from vomiting was just that little bit extra. Still, he was in his right mind, mostly, and back with his people, his lover holding his hand. It was worth everything to be here again, even the memories of eating human flesh that haunted his waking thoughts.

“Disregarding your stupidity in going inside the blockade, what happened? Leave nothing out.” Lexa ordered.

Lincoln glanced at Cormag, who was having broth poured down his throat by the Azgeda general. Squeezing Octavia’s hand, he began to speak, his voice rough from lack of use and screams. “There were four reapers, I was mostly unarmed and they overpowered me.” He hung his head in shame at how easily they had grabbed him.

“I was blindfolded and bound before being forced to walk into the tunnels. I was brought to a door and forced to kneel with two others the reapers had caught.” He felt the clammy sweat on his face being wiped away by Octavia. He smiled at her, amazed she would even look at him after he’d been turned into a reaper. “A man in a strange suit came out of the door. They selected me for something called cerberus. Then we were brought into the mountain.” He fell silent, swallowing bile at the thought of what had happened inside.

“Guardians of the underworld.” Octavia murmured.

“What?” Anya asked, looking at his lover with hard eyes.

“In our legends, cerberus are giant three headed dogs that guard the underworld, the place your spirit goes after it passes. Our people haven’t held those beliefs for many generations but the stories still
persist. It fits what they turn the reapers into.” She spat.

“Go on Lincoln.” The commander said.

“They put metal collars on us so they could control us and then they sprayed water at us and caked us with a yellow powder that burned, the water was boiling hot. They stuck us with needles and I passed out.” He stared at the ground, afraid of what came next.

Klark spoke up, explaining what had happened to him. “Decontamination so you didn’t bring in any radiation that could have harmed them. The needles must have contained a sedative so you were easier to control.”

“They strapped me to a table. Then a man came in, he was pale and unnaturally clean. He pulled out a vial of red. He said the first dose hurt the most. I tried to fight! But I couldn’t and he injected it into me. It was like nothing I’ve ever felt before. Pain and pleasure twisted inside, consuming me, I passed out. Then they would make the noise and make pain go through me, over and over again. I could only tell time passed by when they’d inject more red and the pain would stop. Then they’d leave a bottle of red and two of us to fight to the death over it. I couldn’t…..I had to have it, it was all that mattered.” He clenched his teeth in shame.

Klark’s voice was hard as she spoke. “You are not weak. Don’t even think that for a second. What they did to you was... It goes against every oath, every code of being a healer.” She dropped down so that she was looking him straight in the eye. “No one could have made it through that without breaking.”

He swallowed back his emotions that she was stirring up. “Then they shoved me into the tunnels. Attack for them, bring back the living, and they’d give us red. All that mattered was the red. When we were hungry, the bodies fell through the shoot, dead or nearly dead.” He choked. “There was very little blood in them. So, we ate them and when I killed I had to see if the blood was red. If it would sate the need for it.” He shook violently at the memories.

“So, the cannibalism was an accident.” Klark stood, walking so that she was near the commander. Turning back to him she asked, “How many of the dead did they give you?”

Lincoln shook his head. “Two while I was there.”

Klark narrowed her eyes. “You were gone for over a week.” She turned back to the commander. “They take more than one person a week from throughout the territories correct?”

“Yes, far more. Although they tend to take groups, they take especially large numbers of the banished and traitors.” The commander said.

“They’re keeping our people in that mountain alive. Even with the reapers and the dead they feed to them that’s not enough. Very little blood...they’re taking our blood.” She frowned. “I don’t know why but they’re harvesting our blood.”

“What does that mean?” The commander asked.

“It means, that some of the people taken by the mountain may still be alive inside. I don’t know why they’d harvest our blood but it means that we may be planning a rescue mission if we can manage it.” Klark said, looking rather stunned.

“Any other details?” Anya asked looking down on him with contempt and pity, he hated it, but accepted he deserved it.
“Just that when they wanted to control us they used these metal tubes that made this terrible noise. It made my head feel like it was going to split open.” He stared at Anya, burning with shame but hoping that what he had told them was helpful.

“That’s enough.” Klark dropped back down next to him and her fingers returned to the side of his neck. “It’s hard on his system to be conscious right now. We can bring Cormag up and out of it tomorrow and confirm Lincoln’s information then. Lincoln, do you think you could draw us maps of the caves tomorrow if I wake you up properly again?” She asked seriously.

He nodded. “Yes, I can do that.”

“Good.” She reached over and grabbed a mug from Octavia that held the foul tea they’d been forcing him to drink.

He took it without complaint and felt the familiar heaviness of the sedative hitting his system. His muscles relaxed as he fell back into Octavia’s arms.

“Lexa, if we could talk privately before we go over the new information with your advisors?” He heard Klark ask.

“Of course Klark.” The commander responded.

He sighed, it looked like there was hope that he wouldn’t have to desert and follow Octavia to Azgeda after all, if their leaders were getting along. He’d been prepared to do almost anything to stay by his lover’s side.

____________________________________________________________________________

Clarke grabbed the red sash that showed Lexa’s rank the second the door shut behind them and hauled her in, kissing her hard. She knew they only had moments to spare for this, that their duties would come first. For just this moment though, she enjoyed the hasty press of lips and reassurance that they represented. Pulling back panting slightly, she held Lexa close to her.

“Klark,” Lexa said, somewhat breathlessly.

“I know, I just couldn’t help myself.” Clarke said, finally releasing the commander and stepping back.

Lexa’s face was soft, a small smile stretching across it before she pulled back. Her face returned to the mask of the commander, though there was a crack in the mask allowing an openness Clarke was realizing was rare. “What do you think of the information Lincoln gave us?”

“I think we can get into the mountain.” Clarke said.

“With the mountain watching us, would dressing as reapers get us in?” Lexa asked deferring to her technical knowledge.

Clarke thought about it, carefully considering what they knew. “I’m not sure, but we can probably get several small teams into the tunnels. We’ll need a distraction to make sure the mountain isn’t paying attention to the reapers though.”

“It wouldn’t be surprising if our two forces devolved into a fight.” Lexa suggested. “If that fight moved slowly into the territory covered by the fog, we may be able to have some ‘reapers’ catch a large haul of us to bring back to the mountain.”
“That would be incredibly dangerous.” Clarke cautioned, running through scenarios in her head. “It could easily turn into a true fight. The hatred between our people runs deep. If just one person takes this as an opportunity to kill, it could spiral quickly.”

“If we both stayed in the field to keep control it could work.” Lexa argued.

“Laslow is the captain controlling the border between our people and I trust him and his division.” Clarke considered.

“Enough for this?” Lexa asked warily.

Clarke smiled at Lexa’s caution. “Yes, after all it was my division when I was a captain. Of course it’s changed, but the core of it has remained the same, especially Laslow. He was my second in command when I was in charge of the division.”

“Then I will trust your judgement.” Lexa said. “Gustus is in control of the border and I trust him as well. He’s been by my side since I was called to lead.”

“Then we have the start of a plan. If we both have to stay here to control the chaos, the forces we’re unleashing going into the mountain will need to be led by people we trust as well.” Clarke considered who she trusted and who would need to be there for it to work. “Raven and Monty can lead my forces going into the mountain initially.”

Lexa seemed slightly nervous and reached out entwining their hands. “I know you do not trust her and for good reason after her recent actions, but Anya is a capable captain who I rely on often.”

Clarke pulled Lexa gently to her, kissing her softly. “I may not like her but I understand she was trying to protect you. If she is who you trust for this, then I will as well.”

Lexa sighed in relief and Clarke could feel her loosening against her. For that matter, she felt the stress of recent days melting out of her own system. Clarke breathed in before speaking again, knowing they didn’t have long before someone would be needing either one or both of them. “May I come to you tonight?”

Lexa looked at her startled. “You may.” She said before pulling Clarke into her arms.

One year ten months ago:

Brady was past thought, he was just reacting, feeling the overwhelming horror as a dull ache at the edge of his vision. Letting his energy from the battle fuel him. Not that this was a battle, it was a massacre. The snow was soaked in blood and covered in soot. The attack was brutal and efficient. They’d lit the buildings on fire and now they were killing the people running out of their homes. He felt his lungs burning from breathing in smoke as the eerie light from the flames cast dramatic shadows across the village.

Grunting, he blocked a sword strike from a man half dressed, wielding a sword face twisted in rage. The man was larger and stronger than him. He planted his feet, trying to free his axe, but the snow was a mix of slush and blood that didn’t give him any footing. He slid and was forced to drop his axe to save his fingers from being sliced off as the man ran his blade down the haft of his axe.

He had a second to look at the man wide eyed and completely unsure of what to do before he stumbled backwards trying to dodge an upwards swing of the sword. It hit him in the hip and sliced viciously upwards till it was free of his body at the shoulder. He cried out in pain falling backwards
into a snow drift. The sky was a mix of smoke reflecting the colors of the burning flames back down, stars barely visible. The man he’d been fighting moved away, not even bothering to finish him off. He tried to move but found the slightest twitch of his fingers caused agony to erupt through every pore of his body.

Staring to the side, he saw his first looking down at him. He gasped out a plea for help, only to watch the man turn and leave him lying there. Bitter tears ran down his face as he watched the people of Ebec being cut down. Peri was laughing while slicing down the unarmed that were trying to flee to the woods. Bodies littered the red snow. He’d heard tales of streets running with blood but never believed them till now.

A great wet cough wracked his system, distracting him from the tableau of death laid out around him. His eyes fluttered open then and saw his first standing before him again with the captain by his side. His ears couldn’t seem to understand what was being said but he got the sense somehow that the captain had forced his first to find him again. He wasn’t sure if it was a dream or not when he saw the captain’s sword sheathed in his first’s chest. Then he was looking up at the captain and he was in awe as she kicked his first off her blade.

She stood there, blood splattered across her face, her boots soaked in it. Soot and ash and blood coating her hair that still seemed to glow in the light given off by the fires. Her eyes hard as she looked down on him. She was death given human form and he was sure she had come for him. He was at peace with that as his eyelids, that were so very heavy, flickered closed. The screams, the crackle of the fire, and the clanging of weapons became distant as he felt himself sinking into a welcoming warmth.

He was pulled out of it in agony when he felt flames consuming him. Struggling, he was brought back to awareness, screaming himself hoarse. His eyes locked onto the determined stare of the captain. She was leaning over him and a part of him that wasn’t on fire with agony, realized his wound was being cauterized. He fell back into unconsciousness again, finally free of the agony of this night.
Lexa came to awareness suddenly. Keeping her eyes shut and her body loose, she listened carefully for what had woken her. The soft creak of her window being closed announced someone had come in through the window. Her hand clasped around the dagger hidden under her pillow as she waited for the assassin to approach for the kill. She scoffed internally, deciding this was a very poor assassin as they reached out letting their center of balance to shift.

Grasping the outstretched arm, she yanked hard, pulling the startled and badly balanced assassin down. Apparently, they weren't as incompetent as she'd thought, because the dagger aimed for her attacker's throat was blocked by an elbow driving into her forearm holding it off. Twisting hard, she flung them both to the ground intent on using the drop to stun her attacker. She could have called for her guards but she could handle a single assassin on her own.

Only, apparently not, as the assassin didn’t even pause after hitting the ground back first, just twisting powerfully, forcing her off, and rolling into a crouch across the floor. She didn’t waste time throwing the dagger still in her hand straight for the assassin before diving for where her sword lay, drawing the weapon in a smooth motion while spinning on the balls of her feet to deflect a follow up attack. It didn’t come and she thanked her good fortune while moving in a sharp slashing swing to take the head off her opponent that she could barely make out in the dark room.

She heard the dagger hit the floor as the assassin lunged inside her guard so the sword didn’t take her head and instead her arm was stopped by hitting the shoulder of her opponent. Dropping her sword, she twisted sending the assassin tumbling towards the floor. She knew she didn’t have time to go for a weapon and followed the falling form that was trying to right itself midair, which under other circumstances she would have thought was impressive. Falling down, she placed her weight so that it was on her knee and would crush the chest of her enemy. They clearly realized the death coming for them, hitting the inside of her thigh hard diverting her fall so that she landed straddling their stomach instead of crushing their sternum.

Her fist was already moving automatically. Again it was deflected to the side and her movement was brought to an abrupt halt at the choked sounding gasp of her name from the clearly winded form below her. “Lexa!”

Pulling back, she froze, a stupid and dangerous thing to do but she knew that voice.

“It’s me!” The raspy voice coughed out from underneath her.

“Klark?!” She asked in horror, stumbling off the general. “What are you doing?!”

Lexa watched the dark shape of the general roll onto her side, coughing heavily. “Well, I was going to wake you up but I can see that was a mistake.” There was a sarcastic bite to her voice that Lexa really didn’t pay attention to in her surprise.
“I thought you were an assassin!” Her eyes widened in horror, “I tried to kill you! Did I harm you?” She moved forward, dropping down hovering her hand hovering awkwardly over Klark’s shoulder, not knowing if her touch would be welcomed after she had attacked Klark so viciously.

“Fine, you just knocked the breath out of me.” Klark said, sitting up.

“Why did you come in through the window?” She asked in confusion but glad to feel Klark accepting her arm as she helped her up.

While helping the general to her feet, Lexa looked at the shadowed face of the woman, waiting for an answer.

Klark made an amused sound in the back of her throat. “If we don’t want to be the hot topic of gossip inside the blockade by dawn, I thought not being seen going into your house at this god awful hour at night was a good idea."

Lexa reluctantly released Klark’s arm and moved to light a few candles so that there was some light in the room. Striking a match, she lit several of the candles on her table. Klark’s words made everything seem obvious now. Of course, the general couldn’t just come pay her attention late at night. Battle camps like this one were hotbeds of gossip and as commander her private life was always of interest to her people. After lighting a seventh candle, she turned back to Klark. “I apologize, I didn’t think.”

Klark smiled at her, tugging her over gently. “I broke in through your window, I should have realized you’d assume I was trying to kill you.” She pressed their mouths together.

Lexa sighed into Klark’s mouth as she felt the strangeness of allowing this closeness with another person. Klark’s lips were chapped and her hair smelled of the bitter berries she’d used to dye it. It was perfect. Klark shifted, resting their heads against each other. “Hi.” She said softly.

She tilted her head confused at the greeting but understanding the sentiment behind it. “I didn’t expect you to come.” She said finally.

“I wasn’t sure I’d be able to either.” Klark rested her head on her shoulder yawning. “We didn’t lose any of your men though.”

Lexa breathed easy, relieved that the reaper hunting team that had been ambushed by the mountain men was intact, mostly. Five of them were still unaccounted for. “The poison that caused them to sleep is out of their systems then?”

Klark nodded against her. “Yeah, they’re still sleeping it off but they’ll wake. We kept the darts, they could be useful. Nyko and I stitched up the others. The one warrior with the mangled leg is going to be alright. I was worried I’d have to take his leg but we were able to repair most of the damage. I don’t know if he’ll ever have full use of it again though.” She cautioned.

Lexa closed her eyes, thankful that Klark would understand the pain of failing to protect all of her men. It was a burden that ate away at her and it was nice having someone who understood and gave her a quiet moment to be relieved the attack hadn’t done more damage. The fact Klark had, without being asked, instantly helped her men when they returned to TonDC, bloodied and several members seemingly dead, had reassured her that her faith in Klark was not misplaced. “He is alive, that’s what matters. His family will welcome him home.”

Klark pulled back and her eyes looked sad. “I want that for my people. To have family and homes outside of the army. To have a reason to live besides surviving another day, to soak their hands in
blood because they were ordered to do so.” She ended bitterly.

Lexa pulled Klark down onto her bed so that they could sit in silence while Klark’s words echoed through their minds. It struck her that Klark was toeing the line of treason against Nia in speaking badly of her policies like this. Entwining their hands, she thought of how to respond to that. “You were born to be a leader Klark. Your people would die for you. You’ve given them a home and family. My men have been confounded by how different your army is than we expected.”

The barest hint of a smile flickered over Klark’s face. Turning serious she looked at her consideringly. “How old were you when you were called to lead?”

Lexa blinked at the question. “I was discovered to be a nightblood when I was three summers. I was trained for this burden till the conclave in my sixteenth summer.” She said, it was common knowledge and it was a reminder that Klark wasn’t born into her coalition.

“I was never supposed to be a leader.” Klark said softly. “When we first arrived in Azgeda, I was a prisoner, my own people resented me and wished me gone.”

Lexa frowned slightly. “But you are family, your bonds seem unbreakable. How could they have hated you?”

Klark laughed lowly. “They thought of me as someone who lorded my higher status over them, too spoiled to understand their troubles. Sometimes they still call me ‘princess’ but it’s fond now. At first it was an insult. My mother and father were both important people on the ark. Their status gained me certain privileges that few of the other prisoners that were sent were able to enjoy. The dungeons however, treated us all equally.” She squeezed her hand briefly. “There were so many moments once we were in Azgeda where my people needed someone to take risks.” She trailed off.

“You are a leader Klark, you were called and you answered it.” Lexa said absorbing the new information.

“I need to return to my tent soon or Monty will get worried. Charlotte is covering for me at the moment.” Klark said changing the topic.

Lexa felt a pang at the thought of the woman beside her leaving but understood the necessity. “Does she know?” She asked, forcing herself to be practical.

“She’ll guess soon enough, if she hasn’t already. Although, you can thank her for my method of entering your quarters.” Klark said smiling at her.

“She had planned my assassination then?” Lexa asked, wondering if that had been the girl’s original orders.

Klark laughed again and Lexa found herself glorying in the sound. “She hates guard duty. It bores her and she keeps herself entertained by plotting out various people’s deaths. Some of them get quite creative. The complexity of her plans increases the more time she is forced to spend as guard. Bellamy’s is the most creative since she has spent the most time guarding him and involves being drugged and killed in such a way that it would look like a miffed lover fed him to wolves.”

“She plots out the deaths of those she guards?!” Lexa asked alarmed that the assassin may be a threat inside of Klark’s army.

“Of course, I believe my fate would be an ‘accident’ while working with the seconds.” Klark waved off her concern. “Nia’s assassins rarely kill outside of Azgeda. You need not worry. They are her agents to keep us in line. Charlotte is loyal to me anyway, for her it is just a thought exercise to work
out her frustrations.”

Lexa swallowed thickly at the reminder of who this woman served and the risks that brought with it.

“Hey,” Klark’s hand released hers and went to the back of her neck, pulling her in so that their breath skittered across each other’s faces. “I can handle Azgeda. The assassin’s in my guard won’t betray me, even if Nia orders them to do so.”

“This, us.” Lexa choked on her words. “It will get you killed.”

“I have survived being ordered to my death dozens of times already.” Klark said. “I will survive this. It is my choice to make.” She said firmly.

Lexa lunged forward, gripping Klark tightly, pulling them together to reassure herself that the woman was here, and safe. Her soft kisses quickly turned hungry and possessive. It was a terrible and beautiful mistake to indulge in this and she found that she couldn’t find the resolution to stop herself.

____________________________________________________________________________

One year two months ago:

Dozla was furious with his captain Klark. He’d let her do as she pleased after she put down the stirring rebellion in Ebec. A drunk he may be but a fool he wasn’t. He’d noticed the blue fabric being sewn into his men’s coats and woven into their hair. The changes in behavior as the upstart captain’s code spread through his army were not subtle. It was a threat he couldn’t allow to continue. If that girl thought she could make him a fool and puppet commander, she was wrong. She’d already gotten captains Xander and Seth to follow in her footsteps and wearing her ridiculous blue. Now, his newest captain Bellamy wears her colors as well. He knew a coup when he saw one.

Having to deal with her smug indifference as she escorted him to the capital, had made his anger worse. The final straw was how the inhabitants of the capitol had recognized her and come out to greet her. He knew how to deal with ladder climbing backstabbers, he’d been dealing with them ever since he’d made general. A few words with Nia and she’d be sent to the eastern border, where those blasted nomads had been giving Roan hell, to die quietly. Comforting himself with those thoughts, he walked into the throne room with his annoyance of a captain and several warriors behind him.

____________________________________________________________________________

Present:

Gustus was a proud man and there was nothing he wouldn’t do to protect Lexa. The girl was like a daughter to him and he’d sooner cut off his arm than let her be harmed. Still, he’d failed repeatedly to keep her from harm. Sure, he’d saved her from the blades of her enemies more than once. Especially in the early years while she brought the coalition together kicking and screaming with sheer force of will. However, he would be the first to admit that he was not a politician. When they were in Polis, he knew he was out of his depth with the backstabbing and verbal banter the ambassadors engaged in trying to gain an upper hand on the commander. He was no fool, though.

So, when he saw the Azgeda general brush against the commander in passing and the way the two of them seemed to revolve around each other, never far apart, he knew. He’d spent his entire life recognizing the brands and colors of Azgeda as the signs of an enemy. When Lexa had kicked the arrogant Azgeda ambassador out of a window three years ago, he’d been proud. Not taking the ice queen’s life after Costia had burned. However, he saw a warrior he could respect in Klark kom
Azgeda, something he had never seen in the queen or any of her ambassadors and he understood her because of it. Not completely but enough. The general had supported Lexa and had her top assassin work as a guard for the commander for several weeks now without any signs of duplicity.

It was unnecessary and had confused him, but seeing the two leaders now it made sense. It felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He need not look for danger from a direction from which he’d long most feared it. Strange, that he had an ally as powerful and unexpected as an Azgeda general in protecting the commander but useful. For all the problems this match could cause, he rejoiced in seeing Lexa’s eyes soften just that slight amount when the general neared her.

He approached the warrior guarding the general, Octavia kom Azgeda. It wasn’t subtle but he nodded towards the outside of the room while making eye contact with her. She followed him, her eyes suspicious. That was good, he already knew she was a talented warrior and out of the general’s party the most likely to be sympathetic to the bond between their two leaders. He led them into a part of the woods where he knew they would have privacy. Turning, he focused on the warrior, whose eyes were flickering about warily.

“I mean you no harm Octavia kom Azgeda.” He said.

“Why take me out here then?” She asked carefully.

“You would die for your general?” He asked, ignoring her question.

The warrior tightened her focus on him, no doubt plotting out multiple ways to incapacitate him if there was a need. Not that he’d make it easy for her if it came to it. “I would.” She finally replied.

“Good.” He purposely loosened his stance, not that he was defenseless like this, but the gesture was important. “You are aware that the partnership between Heda and the general is imperative to our fight against the mountain?”

“I’m aware.” He could see the thoughts flying around behind her eyes.

“Then you would do anything to protect that partnership?” He asked. This was important. He knew this warrior was close personally to the general and was highly unlikely to betray her. She was his safest option for an ally in protecting Lexa within the Ice Nation forces he’d encountered.

“As long as it’s best for Clarke.” She said carefully.

He nodded accepting that was as close to assuring her loyalty as he could get. “I do not know your general well, but I do know the commander and I believe I know your general well enough. They have clearly gone past being reluctant allies. It is imperative that we protect this information and them if it gets out.”

Octavia’s jaw dropped slightly. “Wait, you think Klark and the commander are bumping uglies?” She asked in surprise.

Gustus frowned at the crude terminology but ignored it. “Heda’s last lover was killed by your queen. I cannot allow such a thing to happen again.” He said firmly.

The warrior face turned serious immediately as well as thoughtful. “Klark can handle Nia.” She said. “How sure are you that they’re more than just making heart eyes at each other?”

This warrior had the oddest way of speaking but he understood her meaning well enough. “I’m sure.”
Octavia bobbed her head in acknowledgement. “There are a few in our camp that would cause problems if it gets out. They are already being watched though, so there is nothing else that can be done without arousing suspicion.”

He gave a nod of understanding, pleased she’d come round to his way of thinking quickly enough. “Titus, the flamekeeper, will be the greatest obstacle with the Trikru. If this war is won with our leaders side by side, the general’s will accept it.”

“Oh hell, Nia won’t accept it and general Quint and her advisors follow wherever she leads. My brother and Clarke can handle them though.” The warrior said carefully. “How sure are you that this isn’t just some fling that will end as soon as the war does?” She asked.

Gustus scoffed. “Heda rules alone. To take a lover is a risk she would never take just to warm her bed for a few nights.” He narrowed his eyes. “If you’re general uses her in such a way, I will slit her throat and accept my punishment for doing so.”

The warrior growled lowly. “You wouldn’t live long enough to draw your sword.” She seemed to force her anger down through sheer will power, clenching her teeth. “But, if you are right, I doubt Clarke would risk this for a fling.”

He calmed his own anger, remembering his purpose here. “You will do all in your power to protect them then?”

“Yes,” Octavia said, “but next time you want to speak to me none of the cryptic eye gestures.”

“Very well.” He replied, relieved he had found an ally in protecting the commander in the enemy’s camp. Allies camp, he corrected himself. It would take a while to get used to that.

Harper watched the kids trying to impress the warriors to prove they would make good seconds. She’d been considering taking one for a while now. Not till after Clarke returned though. A second with that little training would be a liability in the days to come. She saw Bellamy working with several of the kids, helping them with their stances. He had been throwing himself into work, duty, and anything he could think of to distract himself from the fact that since they’re family had gone to war they had only contacted them the once. It was hard on all of them, but she knew Clarke and Bellamy carried the weight of all of them on their shoulders. She smiled at seeing one of the kids tackle his legs while he wasn’t paying attention, taking him down as the other kids leapt on top to keep him down.

“The capitol is a far kinder place than I remember.” Orson’s voice came from her side.

“Orson!” She exclaimed, turning and hugging the warrior tight. “Bellamy said you arrived a few days ago but you didn’t visit.”

He grinned wryly. “I’ve been a bit busy getting my men settled in the barracks kid.”

She rolled her eyes at the term he’d been using for her since Toba when she was a second herself. “You were just being lazy.”

“Maybe, I hear congratulations are in order for making second in your division.” He nodded to the decorative beading and bone work on her jacket.

“I’m going to replace you when you die. I had to get promoted before you finished going grey.” She said, smirking at his affronted look at the mention of his age.
“I don’t plan on dying any time soon kid.” He said, turning his attention back to the kids who were victoriously keeping Bellamy pinned beneath them. “Planning on taking on one of the ankle biters?”

She hummed under her breath. “Not yet, it’s the calm before the storm and I want to be ready for the storm.”

He sighed in understanding. “I don’t know, the one who just kicked Bellamy in the bits looks like a firecracker.”

She snorted, watching Bellamy curl in exaggerated pain before lunging for the aforementioned rascal. “Oh, I think Octavia will want that one.”

Orson laughed as they stood side by side watching the mayhem below them.

Octavia had spent most of her morning focusing on Lincoln and making sure he didn’t push himself too far while he and Cormag were helping draw maps of the tunnels. Now, after her rather baffling conversation with Gustus, she found herself paying attention to Clarke. Sure enough, she saw what the bearded giant had been talking about. Oh, they were subtle, but she’d held Clarke while she shook with silent tears, been held back from committing murder by her, ate and slept beside her regularly for years. So, while yes, Clarke was purely business as they reworked the map of the mountain with the new information they were getting, she noticed the small things. The accidental brushes of hands. The way her eyes flicked to the commander first when a question was asked or conclusion drawn.

She was never going to let Clarke live this down. After all the crap she’d gotten over Lincoln, this was a gold mine. Of course, she was also certain that it was new. When either of the two leaders had time for it, she didn’t know, but it made sense. If Clarke hadn’t mentioned it yet, it meant she didn’t see how it interacted with their plans yet. To a certain extent, it wouldn’t matter if Nia found out, they were already planning on killing the vile woman soon. Of course, it would matter if they arrived in the capital after the news had already reached Nia. In that case, they might find an executioner awaiting them on the way back home.

Still, other than a conversation she was going to enjoy immensely, it really wasn’t a pressing matter to her. Lincoln was sweating and she wished they’d just sedate him again for the night so he could rest. He was recovering but Clarke had cautioned that the recovering reapers shouldn’t push themselves to hard yet. She knew she and Burka would be escorting Clarke to Laslow’s encampment so he could start switching out the men he worried might take advantage of a fake battle with Trikru to make it real. That would provide the perfect opportunity to interrogate Clarke about this.

Finally, the meeting came to a close, well after dinner hour, the sun having set several candle marks ago. Fortunately, she and Burka had already prepared for their trip back to their camp line. She felt like she could breathe freely for the first time as they left TonDC. The sounds of the forest were comforting. The fungus and lichen glowed in various shades, giving enough light to travel by while also adding beauty to the night. Their footfalls made almost no sound. Burka was just out of sight, keeping them safe from ambush.

Seeing it as her best opening for a conversation, she spoke softly so that her voice didn’t carry. “So, you and the commander huh?” She smirked at the jolt that went through Clarke.

“How’d you find out?” Clarke asked, an eyebrow raised at her, clearly taken by surprise but not upset at her knowing.
“Funny story that.” She smirked. “Gustus, the big grizzly, pulled me aside and asked me to swear to protect you and the commander from any fallout. He’s planning your future relationship from now till death do you part.” It was hard to keep from laughing at the look on Clarke’s face. Gob smacked didn’t even begin to cover it.

“She what?” She was clearly struggling to keep her voice low so that it didn’t travel.

“Oh yes, he wanted to know who in Azgeda would be opposed to the match.” This was worth every minute of tension the meeting with Gustus had caused her. It was rare to see Clarke squirm.

“And what did you tell him?” She asked, with a sense of dread in her tone.

“That I’d protect you and that you and Bell could take care of any concerns in Azgeda.” Octavia looked at her seriously.

Clarke gripped her shoulder and Octavia could feel her gratitude. “I was going to tell you. Things have just been moving quickly.”

“I’m still going to hold it over you forever.” Octavia said grinning playfully.

Clarke rolled her eyes. “And here I was planning on requesting Lincoln be a military advisor and peace representative when we leave.”

“Wait really?” Octavia asked, barely daring to hope that Clarke was serious.

“Of course, do you really think I was going to tell Bell that his sister ran off with a wild Trikru man with a six pack?” Clarke easily jumped over a log before turning.

Octavia smiled, opening her mouth to reply when she felt a sharp pinch in the side of her neck. She spun reaching for the hilt of her sword. Her aim was off and she missed the hilt. The world turned sideways, stretched strangely as she tilted and hit the ground. Her hand dropped to her neck, pulling out the dart and trying to keep herself awake. Her limbs weren’t responding and her eyes were heavy.

Fighting desperately against the effects of the drug in her system, she tried to move, to do anything. She was not going to be taken by the mountain. Where was Burka?! Her eyelids were closing and she knew she wouldn’t be able to open them again. She saw Clarke leaning against a tree before she stumbled to the ground a dart clamped in her hand. She tried to scream, to do anything to alert someone. Where was Burka?! However, she couldn’t seem to keep herself from sinking into unconsciousness.

____________________________________________________________________________

One year two months ago:

Nia sat on her throne, watching her drunken general sway in like he owned the place. He was a known entity. He was safe and reliable. The man was loyal to her and held no ambitions greater than a new pretty girl to warm his bed and a bottle of wine. Predictable and dependable. His years of actually being effective were past but his captain's still followed him and had yet to stage a coup against him. That told her that while he was an objectionable human being, he was still tolerable for the most part and held enough authority to last a while longer. What interested her was the young captain escorting him.

The girl was the sort that she had no doubts would be replacing Dozla soon. Her age and lack of experience the only reason she still had to deal with the distasteful general. She was popular amongst
the people and Nia knew that could be a powerful tool. While she had no doubts that the girl hated her, she was loyal. It wasn’t the smart move for the captain to stand against her. For the sake of her few remaining sky fallen, she would never cross her.

“General, I was expecting you.” She said as he and his escort dropped to their knees in front of her.

“I’m honored.” He said in his thick and raspy voice.

“You will be personally taking your forces and assisting Roan in destroying the Sankru forces at the border.” She stressed the personally, she was still displeased that he’d let his rookie captain take care of the rebels in Ebec, instead of taking care of it himself.

“Surely my captain here can handle it. She needs the experience.” He said.

Nia narrowed her eyes, it would seem she wasn’t the only one who had noticed the captain’s promise then. “Do you think you can question my orders?”

“No.” He said, clearly realizing the danger he had stepped into with his last remark. “I merely mean to give you my advice.”

“Go on,” She said. She was curious what he was planning, her orders were not changing however.

“Sankru are not a threat to us. Let my upstart captain give aid to Roan if he needs it. She could do with a wakeup call to the realities of her position.” He said gruffly.

Nia found herself watching the captain’s response to this. The girl had stiffened slightly and seemed to be considering something. Letting her focus return to her general, she decided to humor the man to see if the captain would react. “You have served me for many years, and my predecessor before me as a lowly guard. What makes you think I have not considered sending a smaller force to the border?”

“Border skirmishes are messy and bloody. If you wish for a larger force from my army, then let me send my younger captains so they can learn.” He said, ignoring her question.

Now that she examined him, she had no doubt the man was suffering from a hangover. She may not wait for his captains to overthrow him, after all, if he had lost his head this far to drink already. Before she replied however, the captain spoke.

“Permission to speak.” Her head was bowed respectfully and her tone was firm.

“Very well.” Nia said, curious to see what the captain thought she could do in a disagreement between her superiors.

“General Dozla, you show disrespect to our queen, you question her orders and appear before her suffering wine sickness. You no longer perform your duties, letting your subordinates do them for you. Now, you intend to throw away our lives because you are too cowardly to lead us to war yourself. I challenge you for your rank that clearly you are not worthy to hold.” Her voice was cold and hard, never wavering as she spoke.

“You dare!” Dozla roared, standing and turning on his captain.

The captain remained kneeling but she looked up and met his furious glare without flinching. “You are an arrogant fool. It would be breaking my oath to Azgeda to allow you to further endanger us all.”
Nia slowly clapped her hands, pulling everyone’s attention back to herself. This was better than she had expected. Of course, the new captain didn’t stand a chance against a man of Dozla’s experience. It was a pity such a promising warrior in her forces would die. However, this was the end for Dozla, he wouldn’t survive a week now that one of his captains had openly stood against him. One of the older, more experienced captains, would challenge him soon for the rank. Garon, her advisor, would be pleased if his son Xander earned the position. “Well then, I will oversee this challenge.”

Dozla looked shocked but furious as he unhooked his war axe from his back and stepped so that he was ready. Her guards, as well as the rest of his escort, moved back so that there was an open ring before her throne for the challenge. The captain, Klark, stood drawing her short sword and swinging it in a quick pattern to warm her body for the upcoming fight.

Nia raised her arm. “To the death.” Dropping her arm, she leaned back in her throne prepared to enjoy the fight. Her day had been boring so far and this would certainly liven things up.

Dozla and Klark circled each other looking for openings, never looking away, nearly unblinking. With a loud cry, Dozla swung his axe, Klark dodged backwards before moving to strike at him. He was already bringing his axe back against her, using the fact he wielded a double headed axe to his advantage. With a grunt, Klark raised her sword in time to block the haft of the axe but it drove her a good foot backwards with the force of the blow. Twisting her blade, she dived to the side missing a third swing. Over balanced, she was unable to dodge the vicious jab Dozla followed with, striking her with the butt of the axe across her face.

Cheers went up at the sight of first blood. Nia sighed, the captain was putting up a decent fight but she wouldn’t last long. Apparently, Dozla knew it as well because instead of pressing his advantage, he was letting his captain have a moment to recover from the stunning blow he’d dealt her. Klark spat out the blood in her mouth while using the back of her glove to wipe away the blood running down from her clearly broken nose.

This time it was Klark who lunged in for the attack with a sharp feint before slashing towards his throat. The two exchanged several blows, both blocking deadly swings from the other. Klark was clearly being pushed back by the general’s superior strength. With a solid kick to the sternum, she tumbled backwards, gagging as the air left her lungs. Dolza didn’t give her time to recover this time, following her and bringing his axe over his shoulder before swinging it for her still downed form.

She managed to get her sword up in time to divert the blow so that she only took a glancing blow to her bicep but her sword shattered from the force of the swing. Her body swiveled to the side even from just a glancing blow. The force of her sword being shattered and the hilt ripped from her hand by the power behind the blow, putting her off balance. She used the force, turning with it back onto her feet while drawing a dagger in each hand. Not waiting for the death blow, she lunged in a suicide attack straight into his guard.

Dozla raised the haft of his axe up to block the unexpected attack which turned out to be exactly what Klark was betting on him doing. She drove her left dagger through his hand causing him to lose control of his axe. He cried out at the unexpected pain before letting out another battle roar, smashing the haft of the axe into her side with his still intact hand. Klark took the damage not even bothering to dodge, there was an audible crack from her ribs, but she had dug her feet into the stone floor. With her right hand, she used the fact both of his hands were engaged, and drove her second dagger straight through his eye.

Nia stood watching as the general’s lifeless form dropped to the ground before her and the victorious captain stood over his body. She was injured, severely, but she’d won against an opponent who was her superior in combat. It would be interesting to see what she would become for her.
“Congratulations Klark, general of my northern forces!”

The warriors in the room began to cheer for the victor. The other members of the former general’s escort converging on their new general, pride shining in their forms. It would be interesting, Nia thought, to see what sort of a leader Klark would become when faced with true warfare. After all, her glory was Nia’s glory and she was off to the eastern border to fight for her as soon as the celebration ended. There was a war to win and this new general would do her part or die trying.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, DustyPath was awesome enough to write a one shot about Lexa and Clarke's first time based off this chapter! Check it out they did a fantastic job!!!
http://archiveofourown.org/works/8146978
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Chapter warning, in Anya's point of view we kinda go the darkest we've gone so far. So if you're sensitive to medieval execution like skip it. Like we don't go crazy with describing it but we're clear as to what happens and we kinda realized it was disturbing. Just you should be able to tell who dies from the other points of view if you skip it so just keep that in mind.

Burka was a weapon and she was alright with that. She’d been a small orphan running around the capitol stealing to survive when her first had found her and began to train her. She was good at killing, it didn’t burden and break her like it did others. Orders were orders and life was simple. She killed when she was told to and in exchange she had food, a roof over her head, and tasks to keep her occupied. It wasn’t much and she wouldn’t say she was happy but she was satisfied. So, when Nia ordered her to kill the man who had saved her from the streets and trained her, giving her purpose, she did it without question or shame.

Standing in the shadows, she’d seen Octavia and Klark both get hit by darts and fall to the ground, the drug clearly an effective one. She’d been expecting it to happen, Flora had been ghosting them for a mile now. Using recovered darts to disguise the attack as a hit by the mountain was clever. She was rather impressed by the blow gun the warrior was storing before slipping out of her hiding place towards the two knocked out women. Deciding it was time to make her presence known, she slipped forward on silent feet.

“Took you long enough.” Flora snapped, kicking the general in the side as she pulled out some rope. “Help me tie up Octavia, we need to drop her down a small ravine.”

“Is it just us taking care of this?” Burka asked, accepting the rope and beginning to tie Octavia’s hands while Flora tied her feet.

“I’m not sharing the reward for the general’s head with Tarba. The oaf can deal with Nia’s disappointment at failing his orders when we return.” She scoffed, pulling the rope bonds around Octavia’s feet tight.

“And yet, you offered me a chance to assist in your take down of the general?” She questioned.

Flora rolled her eyes. “I don’t feel like waking with a knife in my back.”

“Fair,” Burka said while slipping a gag into Octavia’s mouth. “You have an appropriate place to make it look like the mountain men dropped her?”

“Of course, I’m not an amateur. We just have to drop her, make you look a bit bloodied, and the mountain will be blamed.” Flora laid out.

Burka nodded. A few more questions to be prudent, after all she had a target to take care of and she was very good at these things. “You have a location to hide the body?”

Flora sighed, “Do you have to be so chatty? Loosen up, we can have some fun with this. I intend to
get some payback for the shit jobs I’ve been performing for the bitch.” The assassin walked over to the unconscious general and straddled her form after rolling her over onto her back. “I intend to do this up close and personal.”

“Before we have a dead body, I’d like to know how you intend to dispose of it. Scouts would notice if we just bury it.” Burka said, watching as Flora’s hands wrapped around the general’s neck and began to squeeze.

“That pauna she took down the other day, its lair isn’t far from here. We can dismember the body there. It won’t be recognizable by the time anyone stumbles on it there.” She huffed while gripping Klark’s throat with all of her might.

“I see.” Burka stepped forward and in one smooth motion brought a rock she’d grabbed smack into the side of Flora’s head with a sick thump. Impassively, she watched the would be assassin’s body slump down to the ground. Leaning down, she rested two fingers against Klark’s neck to assure herself that the woman was still alive. She blinked slowly at the confirmation that she’d judged the length of time she’d allowed Klark to be strangled correctly. Moving over to Octavia, she began to untie her before moving to the prone form of Flora and tying her, far more tightly than she had bound Octavia. She did leave the gag in Octavia’s mouth, she was annoyed with the woman after all. Tame that fucking horse her ass, it was as much of a demon as it’d ever been.

With that done, she gathered some loose branches and started a fire. After a walk of the perimeter, she returned to her three unconscious companions and pulled out some rations. She’d been saving them for this since they’d been handed out. It took around three hours for the first signs of life to come from one of her companions. Octavia was giving a pained groan. Burka considered her options. Picking up a nearby pinecone, she bounced it off Octavia’s head. It amused her greatly.

Octavia gave another sound of coming out of her stupor before she could practically see her remember why she was unconscious. The warrior moved as fast and as coordinated as she could, it honestly looked more like a blackout drunk trying to move, but she had to give the woman credit for trying. It took three tries for her to pull the gag out of her mouth before she was able to prop herself up enough to look for Klark and for danger. Burka could practically hear the wheels turning as she took in the unconscious Klark, the tied up and unconscious Flora, and lastly Burka sitting nonchalantly by the side of a small fire.

“The fuck happened?” Octavia finally got out, her eyes still glazed partially and a bit of drool going down the side of her face.

Burka was particularly enjoying the leaves and dirt in her hair even if it was petty of her. “Attempted assassination. It all went according to plan.”

Octavia frowned, “What?”

Burka sighed. “Flora hit you and Klark with tranquilizer darts, she scavenged from the mountain’s attack earlier today. I captured her before she could cause any lasting damage.”

“How did she even get close enough?” Octavia asked, suspicion starting to set in now that the drug was leaving her system. “And why was I gagged?”

“The conditions that Klark set for trapping the assassins after her was that I was allowed to do whatever I needed to do to draw them out as long as no permanent harm occurred. It was within my authority to let their plans play out in any way I saw fit as long as it met that condition. You’ll have a headache, Klark will have that and some bruising. No lasting harm and I have the attacker alive.” She explained like the warrior was an idiot.
“You knew this was going to happen?!” Octavia yelped in realization.

“Of course, Nia ordered several of us to kill Klark.”

Octavia attempted to draw her sword but was unable to stand up her limbs still not cooperating.

“You’re a traitor! A dirty fucking traitor!”

“Well yes, I just did go against orders from the queen.” Burka said, frustrated by Octavia’s inability to understand the situation.

“Are you saying Klark knows you were ordered to kill her?! You’re delusional if you think I’ll believe that.” She growled, trying to get to her feet before her arms gave out on her again and she dropped down on her face with a grunt of pain and surprise.

“You should stop trying to get up till your muscles start working again.” She said, enjoying watching Octavia hissing in rage while trying to move properly. “And yes, I informed her of my orders to kill her after I realized my future was more secure with her as queen then with Nia holding the throne.”

“When was that, after you let Flora stab her in the back?!” Octavia demanded.

“I only allowed Flora to drug you both and attempt to strangle Klark so I could get her talking. There was no stabbing.” Burka explained patiently. “I realized that Klark was a better person to belong to after she protected me from you. You’re one of her favorites. If she’d protect me from you, she’s more trustworthy than Nia. I explained my change of allegiance shortly afterwards.”

Octavia stared at her like she’d never seen her before. “You’re absolutely crazy.”

Burka frowned. “Your comrade Monty described it as ruthlessly practical. I chose the leader who best guarantees my safety and continued survival as well as standard of living.”

“What’s to stop you from changing sides again when someone new comes along?” Octavia spat, finally having given up on standing for the moment.

“Nothing, but have you ever met a person as willing to sacrifice for those loyal to her as Klark. Do you think I will ever meet a person in her position as trustworthy as she?” Burka asked seriously.

“No.” Octavia grunted. “Still, she’s done shitty things, and sacrificed people. Killed people sworn to her though.”

“I will fulfill her commands to the letter and not give her cause to have me disposed. With any leader there is the risk of being thrown away, at least with Klark I know there would be a reason.” Burka shrugged, she’d long ago accepted the risks of her position.

“You’re a psychopath.” Octavia said, but the anger had gone out of her voice.

“I do not know what that means but I will accept that you are most likely correct.” She replied.

____________________________________________________________________________

One year ago:

Roan frowned at the general sent to support him. “We pursue our enemies. If they hide from us, we flush them out like prey from the bushes.”

“We cannot do that while protecting our people. You need twice the force to attack a spread out enemy like this as to defend.” Klark the blond general said, clearly frustrated.
“If we kill the nomads and Sankru, the villages won’t need protection.” He insisted, confounded trying to figure out why this general didn’t seem to understand this basic tenet of how they fought. They could afford to give land. Come winter anyone who had taken the land would die from the cold anyways.

“Throwing the lives of our citizens away for a quick resolution is folly. We should garrison our troops in the villages to keep them secure and hunt down the nomads in small mobile teams.” She said firmly. “I will not abandon our people to the deaths these bastards are bringing.”

“A few burned villages is a small price to pay for victory. A quick victory benefits the people as much as it does the army.” The longer this war drug on the more limited supplies were going to get and the higher the death toll would rise. A quick end to this was what was needed to protect their people. Conceding these losses now saved them from larger ones later.

Klark leaned onto the table and took a deep breath before looking at the map again. “What if we do both? I take my men and clean up the enemy that has already breached our border and secure our villages. I’ll be spread thin but it’s workable if we utilize the manpower in the villages. You take your army and push forwards and kill anything that moves in the dead zone before you reach Sankru territory. You’ll have to keep their forces busy since I won’t be able to hold the land if they marshal a proper attack. Still, it would allow us to minimize the loss of Azgeda life.”

He let himself consider her words. It was a compromise and his mother would dislike him taking such a path, but it was workable. He’d largely been forced to give up on miles of land in an effort to take the fight to the enemy. If Klark retook the land, it would give him a safe location to retreat to if there was a need. “That could work.” He pulled out a more detailed map of their current position. “The largest village you’ll want to retake is Alb. We retreated there a month ago. If anyone is still alive, it’s a defensible position. You can retake our territory from there.”

Present:

Clarke was not having a good day, or rather night. Her throat hurt and she sounded like she was getting past a bad cold. Her reflexes were shot and she doubted she could take a trained second down let alone actually fight. She and Burka would be having words about how far attempted assassinations were allowed to go, privately. Of course, they had dealt with one of the blasted traitors in her camp for all the effort. The whole thing was beyond frustrating. Clarke had sent Octavia to discuss their plans with Laslow in hopes that she would be able to stave off a search party being sent out by a worried Lexa if she returned to camp immediately.

Turns out the first actual problem to arise from allowing feelings for the commander of the coalition to develop was worrying about a rescue party. She knew it was an issue because if their positions were switched it would be her reaction as well. It was hard to be annoyed about that, but she had a blister forming on her heel, she was damp and dirty, had rope digging uncomfortably into her shoulder, and was still dealing with the side effects from being tranquilized. So, she was annoyed. She missed her horse and her comfortable jacket that had armor built into it. She glared darkly at Burka, who was walking beside her helping haul the stretcher they’d made to carry Flora.

When they’d first arrived on the ground, she’d found Azgeda punishment excessive and barbaric. If her coup against Nia went as planned, she would be changing things, the crucifixion of those who dissented was nauseating. As was slaughtering innocents to stamp out rebellion. The liberal application of torture was also horrifying. However, she had come to appreciate jus drein jus draun. It was a simple principle and could be broadly applied. Having just almost been killed, she found she did not regret the fate she would be sentencing the bound woman behind her to when they arrived at
As sickening as it was, it was necessary. If she showed herself as weak she’d be dead within a fortnight. The mercy she was allowed to show was only possible because her men knew to cross her was to die, painfully, and slowly. The punishment demanded for the treason Flora had acted out would need Charlotte’s expertise. So here they were, dragging the still unconscious assassin back to TonDC.

“Get down out of that tree and come help us.” Clarke ordered, eyeing a tree she knew had a Trikru scout hiding in its branches.

Two heavily bearded men dropped out of the tree, looking at the scene curiously and somewhat cautiously. “What business do you have in our section Azgeda?”

Clarke narrowed her eyes, she was not dealing with this right now. “You will help us transport this traitor to TonDC or you will have to deal with the commander.”

The two men exchanged looks before moving to help. The larger of the two simply grabbed Flora’s limp form and threw her over his shoulder. Clarke sighed in relief as Burka moved and ducked under her arm to help her keep her balance. She’d fallen several times due to her numb uncooperative muscles making her trip. Letting the assassin take some of her weight, they began to move towards TonDC once more, only this time at a faster pace.

Clarke had never been so glad to see TonDC. As they stumbled in, the Trikru from the village recognized her immediately and the village turned into a disturbed beehive in moments. They’d barely entered the town and Charlotte was already barreling into them. Clarke accepted Charlotte's hug and breathed easy at feeling her sister in all but blood clinging to her. Keaton and Monty were hot on her heels and soon she found herself being checked over by her people.

She let Burka deposit her into her friend’s care. Burka’s slight frame was tiring from dragging and assisting in getting her and Flora out of the woods. Monty’s strong shoulders under her arm reassured her. Noticing Peri standing at the edge of the group under her command, she spoke, her voice firm if somewhat hoarse. “Take the traitor Flora to the Trikru prison. Guard her until we have permission from the commander to give her the punishment her actions have earned.”

Murmurs spread through the crowd at the word ‘traitor’. Clarke looked and saw the crowd parting as Lexa approached. She knew the look on Lexa’s face and she knew she needed to get Lexa on her own so she could reassure her. “Heda.” She dipped her head in respect before flickering her eyes towards Lexa’s temporary house.

Apparently, the woman didn’t get the message. “Bring the general to the command room.” She ordered before turning on her heel and moving to the large room with the beautiful map and models detailing the mountain and the surrounding blockade. If only it wasn’t also a place where other people would be and where she couldn’t properly reassure her.

Clarke sighed and let Monty help her stumble towards the large room. Face-planting because her legs weren’t reliable was worse than accepting help. As they entered, she made note of Gustus' form standing behind Lexa’s throne. Coming to a stop before the throne, she stared at Lexa. She was tense and her posture had none of the slight openness Clarke had grown accustomed to as their relationship had grown.

“What happened?” Lexa asked, and it was unmistakably an order.

“A traitor from my army attempted to assassinate me. No one was seriously injured. Octavia is delivering the message for captain Laslow. I decided it was important to return with the traitor intact. Any useful information she had has already been extracted. I ask permission to have her executed
according to the laws of Azgeda in your territory.” Clarke finished, watching Lexa’s mask twitch slightly at the mention of injuries.

“You can barely stand and you claim no serious injuries?” Lexa’s voice was low and dangerous. Clarke wished that there weren’t half a dozen other people in the room. “I’m not injured. I was hit with a tranquilizing dart from the mountain. My would-be assassin decided to try and make it look like the mountain killed me. My muscles aren’t working properly yet. I’ll be fine once the drug has worn off.”

Lexa stared at her and she could feel Lexa trying to bore a hole straight through her with her eyes. Finally, Lexa raised her hand. “Leave us, all of you.”

Clarke pulled her weight off Monty, who looked at her in concern. She smiled slightly at the two day’s growth of scruff on his face. “I’ll be fine. Look after our men.”

As the last of the men left the room, Lexa moved towards her and Clarke knew they needed to truly be in private before they spoke. This room was too accessible. She raised her hand to stop Lexa’s movement. Lexa stopped instantly, her face looking hurt as she swallowed. “Can we go to your room? I don’t think we should have this conversation here.”

Lexa gave her a nod of understanding. “Of course. Do you require Monty to assist you across the street?”

Clarke shook her head, smiling in reassurance to Lexa. “No, I should have proper control of myself in another half hour or so. As long as we go slow I shouldn’t fall.”

“Very well.” Lexa walked to open the door for her.

Clarke felt her heart warm at the consideration Lexa was showing. Clarke reached out stopping her before she made it to the door. “Thank you.”

The remaining hurt from Clarke’s refusal of her approach melted from the girl’s shoulders and they proceeded out the door. It was slow going, but Clarke managed to get the commander’s quarters without tripping or requiring assistance, even if she was sure Lexa was itching to offer her aid. As soon as the door closed, she slumped, accepting Lexa’s arms that wrapped around her, helping to support her.

Lexa half carried her, half pulled her to the bed and sat her down, her hands cupping her face. “Klark…”

“I’m right here, I’m alright.” Clarke reassured her.

Unfortunately, in this position Lexa noticed the bruising around her neck that her collar was hiding. Lexa’s hands were instantly on her jacket, opening the first of several buttons so that she could see the damage. “You call this nothing?” She hissed in concern.

“It’s just bruising.” Clarke reached out, covering the hand hovering over the bruising in an offer of comfort. “It will heal. Burka ended things before anything could happen. I knew the risk of making myself bait to draw out my assassins.”

“What do you mean make yourself bait?” Lexa asked, her tone dangerous.

Clarke brought their hands to her lap, knowing she needed to handle this carefully. Especially if she didn’t want Lexa killing several members of her army and destabilizing the uneasy peace she had
managed to maintain there despite a few of its member’s questionable loyalty. “I told you that there were members of my army who would take this opportunity to try and kill me. That Nia had ordered my death. I was aware of two, I needed to know the names of any others in my army. I now have a third name.”

Lexa frowned. “You let the assassin attack you so she’d spill information while high off victory.”

Clarke nodded. “Yes, Burka came to me and informed me of her orders and confirmed Flora also had orders to kill me. While Octavia and I were unconscious, Burka was able to play the part of being in partnership with Flora and get another name out of her.”

“You knowingly let an assassin you knew had orders to kill you, protect you while you were incapacitated?” Lexa’s voice was deathly calm.

“It was an internal matter of my army.” Clarke felt irritated Lexa wasn’t accepting this. “I handled it how I saw fit, and it worked.”

“You casually risked your life and you think that doesn’t matter!” Lexa stood up suddenly and began to pace. “You are a general in my army! And I will not have you risking everything on the word of a double crossing assassin.”

Clarke narrowed her eyes. “I am not Trikru. It was an Azgeda matter and I handled it. I am sworn to Azgeda not you.”

“You serve the coalition and I am the coalition.” Lexa snapped. “You will not do this again.”

“What we have between us does not mean you can order me about on internal matters.” Clarke said angrily.

“What we have between us? I am more than capable of separating what we have from my duty as commander. You risked everything on nothing! You swore you could trust your guard absolutely! Now you tell me you lied? You accuse me of not trusting you and then you take risks that threaten everything without telling me!” Lexa was clearly furious, her fists clenched at her side, nose flaring.

Clarke swallowed back a retort. It galled her but Lexa was right. The silence stretched before she spoke finally. “You’re right, I wasn’t thinking.” She shuddered with an effort to keep herself centered. “I’ve never had this with someone before and I haven’t had a superior I trusted not to stab me in the back since well, ever. Honestly, my life has never been as valuable as it is now. Normally, it has been the cheapest thing I could risk.”

The fight seemed to drain out of Lexa as well. She sat back down next to Clarke heavily. “Promise me you’ll tell me the next time you have a crazy plan like this. You might consider your life cheap but I value it quite highly.” She begged.

Clarke reached up tangling her fingers in the hair at the back of Lexa’s neck. “I promise.” She pulled her into a kiss reassuring them both that they were here now and fine. That their argument hadn’t changed anything between them.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya stood behind Aden and Tris as they watched Charlotte checking the edges of several wickedly sharp looking blades. The Azgeda detachment were all serious as they constructed a wooden frame and began to strap down the traitor to it. The overly cheerful warrior, Peri, seemed to be bouncing in excitement which was an odd contrast to the dark looks and tension spreading through the others.
“What are they going to do to her?” Tris asked watching the proceedings.

“There are several fates for a traitor in Azgeda. However, for a traitor who attempts to assassinate a superior there is only one fate. She’ll be flayed alive.” Anya worked hard to keep her disgust from showing.

“You mean they’re going to skin her?” Aden asked in muted horror.

Anya kept her face impassive. “No, Charlotte is going to skin her. If she survives the process, her guts will be removed and burned.”

“Why is she gagged?” Tris asked, looking rather pale as she watched the trembling traitor struggling to break free of her bonds.

“I don’t know. Most likely so that she cannot reveal Azgeda secrets to us in an attempt at revenge.” Anya assumed she was right. An assassin aiming for a general would be sure to know things that no one would want shouted about for anyone to hear.

“Do we have to watch this?” Tris asked.

“Yes, you need to understand why Azgeda is the most brutal of the clans in the coalition and why their general should not be underestimated. If she can keep men as brutal as this under her control while freely showing weakness, then know she is capable of brutality greater than this for them to still respect her.”

“We execute our traitors by a thousand cuts, is it so different?” Aden asked seriously.

Anya considered the question. “You’ll understand when you see. No doubt, Charlotte will keep her alive as long as possible to prolong the pain. We allow our convicted to die in their own time.” It wasn’t much, but she remembered before the coalition when being captured by Azgeda was a horror spoken of in whispers. She knew Tris and Aden knew those tales as well as anyone else. However, they hadn’t been of age to face those fears.

Lexa re-entered her quarters. She sighed in relief when she saw Klark was still asleep on her bed. She’d summoned Nyko when Klark had passed out shortly after their argument. He’d assured her that Klark was fine, just tired and working the drug through her system. She’d left the general to sleep in her quarters while seeing to her duties for the day. Her first stop had been to grant Monty permission to begin the execution of the traitor who had tried to kill Klark.

Under normal circumstances, she would have been disgusted by a display of grotesque violence like the spectacle that was Flora’s execution. This however, was not normal circumstances and while she did not enjoy it, she did appreciate that the woman would never be a threat to Klark again. Since the blockade by necessity delegated much of her duties, she was able to retreat back to her quarters not long after the muffled screams had started. She’d pulled off her heavy pauldron and coat before laying on the bed besides Klark to reassure herself that she was alive.

She traced the shape of the brands across Klark’s face with her eyes. There was a strength to the shapes etched into the woman’s skin that she found inspiring. The brands of the Ice Nation had always filled her with hate and pain but looking at them now she found those emotions missing, instead she was only filled with a warm affection and relief.

“I can feel you staring.” Klark said, her eyes staying closed.
Lexa smiled. “You are supposed to be asleep.”

Klark opened her eyes and rolled onto her side so that they were facing each other. “Oh really, and why is that?”

“You have to get the drug out of your system.” Lexa said, although she was pleased to see Klark’s eyes were no longer slightly glassy.

“That wore off a while ago. You let me sleep far too long.” Klark said.

Lexa reached up and gently ran her fingers along the bruises surrounding her throat. “I worried for you.”

“I’m here.” Klark assured her.

“You may not be next time.” Lexa said quietly.

“We both face death every day. We wouldn’t be us if we didn’t.” Klark said.

Lexa frowned. “I know that when I die my spirit will move on. That it will not be a sad day for my spirit will continue, but it is not like that for you.”

“Your spirit is staying right where it is.” Klark said firmly. “Both of ours are.”

“I hope that you are right.” Lexa whispered, almost afraid to voice such a thing aloud. It was selfish, but she would not be at peace with the spirit moving to the next host. Not when it would mean an end to the happiness she was just beginning to feel.

Lexa sighed, leaning in and brushing her lips along the bruises, wishing she could cause them to fade or take them onto herself, even though she knew she could not. That Klark had gone through worse, that Lexa had ordered she be whipped! Just the thought of that made her shake in horror at what she’d been forced to command.

Klark rolled her over onto her back with herself on top of her. She propped her head up while looking down, “Enough about death and fate.”

Lex leaned up, connecting their mouths. She let out a whimper as Klark pushed her down into the bed.

Eleven months ago:

Bellamy put his full weight into it as he lifted the charred beam onto his shoulder and began to move it towards the unsalvageable pile. It had to be done as soon as possible. He could hear the hammers as some of his men helped rebuild the village. His face was coated in the ash that still floated about on the wind. There was a lot of work to be done and not a lot of time to do it in. They needed the village capable of standing for the night. Then he and his men were going after those pieces of shit nomads.

He knew his orders were to hold the village but that wouldn’t happen if the nomads escaped with the food they’d stolen from the village they’d attempted to burn to the ground. The snow having put most of the flames out by the time his men arrived.

“Sir!” A warrior came to a stop by him.
“Report.” He ordered, not looking up from the pile of burned wood they were turning into a temporary wall.

“There are sixteen members of the village unaccounted for among the dead and the survivors.”

He grit his teeth. Looking up from his work, he examined what was left of the village. Around a third of it had been burned to the ground, another third damaged to varying degrees. The store houses had been emptied, leaving only the food stored in basements under the houses. Thirty-six villagers had been found cut down and killed and now sixteen gone. This was an abomination. Who attacked villages and then fled at the first sight of the army? This was not a war, it was a bunch of fucking savages and he would kill them all.

He stopped working and walked over to the body of a nomad lying twisted grotesquely on the ground. Anger was boiling in his belly and he had an idea to put the fear of god into them.

“Sir?” His warrior asked from his position at his elbow.

“Feed the bodies of the enemy to the pigs. We will put the fear of a final death into them.” He clenched his fists. They may not fear death enough to stop attacking but maybe they would fear not being re-incarnated. At the very least, it would give him some satisfaction to get one over on these bastards even in death.

“But the dead must be burned…?” The man asked cautiously.

“Our dead shall be burned. These monsters don’t deserve to have their souls freed.”
Chapter 22

Sorry for the wait. I've been blocked and Mouse has had life and we've just been stuck on this one.

We love all of you guys and treasure all of your comments. Please feel free to ask questions or start a conversation with us, we'd love to reply. And you regular commenters we know notice and are totally touched by your comments. Really you guys make our day's every time you comment. If you ask for spoilers we won't answer but otherwise we're up for talking about just about anything involving the story.

Also Rhino has a tumblr under the name bibliophile-rhino-nerd . Feel free to hop over and start a conversation. Or ask any questions or anything like that.

This chapter has a lot of Flora's head in it...so like we're sorry but it's necessary to the characters actions.

Clarke woke surrounded by warmth and completely content. The room was dark save for the light the flickering candles gave off and she knew she had been here far too long. However, her arms were around Lexa’s warm body, their skin touching, the gentle rise and fall of her chest a siren’s call luring her to stay in bed. Kissing her lover's shoulder blade, she began to extract herself, careful not to wake her. Lexa’s eyes flickered open, locked onto Clarke’s and then closed again. Clarke hummed under her breath. “Sleep Lexa.”

Leaning back down, she trailed several kisses over Lexa’s shoulder and neck before pulling back, enjoying the half smile on the woman’s face. With a sigh of regret, she slipped out from under the furs and began to pull her clothing back on so that she could be ready to start the day. Glancing in the mirror, she realized her hair was a lost cause. She threw it into a sloppy braid and made sure her collar was fastened all the way up. The bruising was still just visible without her hair down though. With a final check that she was as together as she was going to get, she looked back over her shoulder at Lexa who had fallen back to sleep.

It felt wrong to leave like this, letting Lexa wake up to a cold bed as if she was ashamed of her. She pried some of the blue cloth that was sewn into her jacket off and held it in her hand. Approaching the bed on soft feet, she bent over and tied it around her wrist. Pressing a last kiss to her hair, she turned knowing she would never leave if she didn’t. Slipping out of the window proved easy and she made her way between the shadows to her people’s tent.

She saw Flora splayed on the wooden frame and cringed internally. Knowing that returning to her tent would have to wait, she turned and walked towards the training area. No longer having to slip between shadows, she made good time and came to the hard packed ground quickly. There was a lone figure going over their stances in the dark. Clarke felt her heart drop and a mess of twisted up emotions almost choked her.

“Charlotte.” She called softly while approaching.

The girl just kept on going over her forms, ignoring Clarke’s presence.
Clarke grimaced and stepped into Charlotte’s space and blocked a high strike. Charlotte’s eyes were burning and they quickly began to spar. It was fast and without weapons. The fought each other purely with strikes and blocks as they pushed each other across the training area. Clarke could tell her sister was tiring though and just kept pace with her, waiting for her to slow enough to talk it out. She could feel sweat dripping down her back when Charlotte finally slumped and stopped coming at her. Reaching out, she grabbed Charlotte’s shoulder and hauled her into a hug and began to rub the girl’s back as she began to shake with silent sobs.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry. I wish you didn’t have to do these things.” Clarke said quietly.

Charlotte burrowed her nose into Clarke’s shoulder. “I’m a monster, I know that.”

“But it never stops hurting.” Clarke finished understanding exactly what Charlotte felt. The weight of their sins weighed heavily on them and in order to continue to draw breath they had to add to that weight.

“I’m the best at pain. I know that is my job, but I…” Charlotte’s body shuddered.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there today.” Clarke gripped Charlotte tighter to her. “You keep us all safe, never forget that.”

“Through fear.” She spat. “The people love you, and Bell. You’re hero’s! I’m the monster parents warn their children about.”

“We may be heroes to the people of Azgeda but who do you think is the monster the Sankru tell their children to fear? Or the Trikru tell their children to fear?” Clarke said bitterly. “We all became the monsters we needed to be to survive. I only regret I wasn’t able to keep that fate from your and the others shoulders.”

“You won’t be anyone’s monster for long.” Charlotte scoffed. “When you win this war and stand by Heda’s side you won’t be their monster. I will be though.”

“No matter how many people fear you, you will always be my hero Charlotte. Out of all of us, you’ve borne the heaviest burden and you have been triumphant. I am in awe of you.” She felt herself choking over a lump in her throat.

“I’m losing myself.” Charlotte whimpered. “I’m turning into her.”

“That what you do still troubles you separates you from your first in every way. I will make sure you will never flay someone again. It is a sick practice and I won’t have it in my forces any longer.” She leaned in breathing the familiar scent of the girl’s hair. “It’s time for you to come home.”

“What about what I said about the Queen?” Charlotte protested, pulling back eyes wide in fear.

“Any rumors that may have spread have not reached my ears. You will also have additional protection. You will take Flora’s head and you will ride across our camps and announce the traitor’s death.” Clarke said firmly anger lacing her tone. She knew the message it would send. The death of a traitor would remind any who would cross her that she was not to be trifled with lightly. The image of Charlotte being the one trusted to remind them of the fate of traitors would confirm that any rumors were just that, rumors. After all, if she killed one traitor why not another?

Charlotte nodded. “Thank you.”

“Of course, we’ll have to organize a party for you to lead though when you return with the head.” Clarke began calculating the message she needed to send as well the security and wellbeing of her
friend. “Silas and Peri are both skilled and trustworthy. Not to mention well known throughout our army. I’ll speak to Lexa about sending some Trikru with you as a sign of our continued alliance.”

Charlotte stared at her feet. “Can it not be Aden or Tris?”

“Why?” Clarke asked, frowning in concern.

Charlotte shuffled some. “I don’t want to see them fear me.”

Clarke felt her heart ache as she understood. “They watched the execution.” It wasn’t a question.

The cracked girl in front of her nodded anyways. “They were...friends. I don’t think I can see them hate me.”

Clarke squeezed Charlotte’s shoulder firmly in comfort and understanding. “Talk to them, you may be surprised. If you change your mind, come to me before you depart. For now, you should sleep. You have a long day ahead of you tomorrow.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Nine months ago:

Octavia slashed her sword across an enemy’s throat ruthlessly cutting him down. The edge caught in his spine. Jerking her arm harshly, she freed her sword and spun to face her next enemy. Only there wasn’t a next enemy standing there. Panting harshly through her mouth, she stared in disbelief and horror as they retreated, again. With a cry, she charged after their retreating figures.

Swinging her sword, she slashed it through the back of a running warrior. Not pausing, she slid past his still falling form, ripping it out as she went. The next warrior was female and managed to dodge her initial upwards slash.

“Octavia! NO!” Jakob yelled at her.

She ignored him and kept pressing forward. She would not let them get away, not after the destruction they had brought attacking civilians over and over again. She would kill them here and now. She was not going to let them run away like cowards. A battle roar ripped out of her throat as she brought her sword down crushing the head of the female warrior in front of her. Her sword really was stuck this time. It took a second for her to get it free and ready to swing. Turning back towards the enemy, she was surprised to find her vision blocked by Jakob’s form as he stood in front of her arms outstretched. “Jakob, get out of the way, they’re getting away.” She said trying to move past him.

His hands were iron as he grabbed her and held her in place. She froze when he heard him grunt. Wide eyed, she stared as she saw a trail of blood leaking out his mouth. “Patience second.” He grunted.

“Jakob!” She caught him as he fell forward and they fell to the ground. This time it was her grabbing him and dragging him behind cover. He had been shot by several arrows and she knew by their placement they were fatal. He’d covered her. She choked trying to get him to respond but she could feel his pulse slowing. “Jakob!”

____________________________________________________________________________

Present:
Charlotte woke up and felt the emptiness that could only come after crying oneself to sleep. She pulled herself out of Monty’s grip and rolled out of their bedroll. It didn’t take long for her to exit into the early morning. She didn’t cringe at the sight of Flora’s body still suspended as she’d left it. Well not quite. Her head had been removed and placed on a pike. Charlotte swallowed, knowing Clarke had done it so that she wouldn’t have to do it.

Her feet led her away from the grisly reality of her position and towards the temporary barracks for the seconds. Somewhere along the line, she’d become fond of, even friends with Tris and Aden. She needed to know that their friendship was at an end from their own mouths after yesterday. It didn’t matter that she knew it would be, she still had to face them so that it could be declared. What she did was gruesome and evil no matter if it was her people’s way or not. Even her own people reviled her or at best feared her. It was something she’d thought she’d accepted but she was finding the further away from Nia she was the less she could hide behind duty.

She knew her footfalls were heavier than usual but she didn’t care, it was probably for the best that she announce her presence. Glumly, she moved to the where Aden and Tris’ cots were set up near the back corner of the room. She sat down at the foot of Tris’ cot. Tris seemed safer to her. She had no doubt they’d both hate her, but Tris was not one for acting out on that hate.

“Char?” Tris croaked as she woke up squinting at her.

Charlotte pulled her legs up to her chest as she sat curled up on the foot of the cot. “I’m returning to the Azgeda camp today.” She said evenly, praying her voice wouldn’t crack.

She heard Tris moving and then a dull thump and Aden letting out a low grown. “Tris, why?”

“Wake up, Char needs us.” Tris hissed as she sat up on her cot.

“Shut up!” Another second yelled from their cot across the room.

Charlotte looked at Tris, who was narrowing her eyes in anger. “Right we’re going someplace else.” Tris stood up, still in her sleep clothes and grabbed Aden’s arm, dragging him out of his bed.

“I’m not dressed!” He yelped indignant, only wearing a pair of pants.

“Doesn’t matter.” Tris said.

Charlotte watched in awe as she was grabbed and pulled along with Aden. Tris pulled them along past confused Trikru, who looked at them strangely and into the stables. Once they were in the stall that housed the commander’s horse, she turned and shoved Aden and her down onto the clean straw.

“Right, what’s this about you going back to the Azgeda encampment?”

Aden startled next to her. “What?! But they’ll kill you!”

Charlotte looked down, not able to look up to see any revulsion they may have in their eyes for her, but she felt the beginnings of hope that they at least didn’t want her dead. “I’m taking Flora’s head across our encampment as an example of what happens to traitors.”

Tris hissed. “And what the first idiot who wants favor with the general flays you too?”

“No,” Aden said. Charlotte looked up at him then hearing the serious tone of his voice. “It’s a statement having you carry the head isn’t it? You’re not a traitor, you kill traitors.”

She nodded.
“Will you come back?” Tris asked after an awkward pause.

“Not till the fake war most likely.” Charlotte said quietly.

Tris frowned. “Then you’ll leave to return to Azgeda.”

Charlotte nodded again. “Assassins don’t leave the borders often.”

“Lexa would never let us enter Azgeda territory while Nia is queen.” Aden said in frustration.

“You really aren’t disgusted by me?” Charlotte finally asked.

Tris dropped down on the other side of her so that she was between her and Aden. “I understand that that is your people’s way. You don’t like hurting people do you?”

“No,” she shook her head. “But I don’t feel it much anymore.” She admitted.

“Same here, I have twenty marks now.” Tris said, a hint of pride in her voice. “They are from battle and at night I see them, but I don’t hesitate to kill when it is needed.”

Aden nodded. “It’s who we are as warriors. Our burden to bear. We must never forget that they are humans we are killing but also must not forget who it is we protect by doing so.”

Charlotte reached over and ruffled his hair. “Thank you.”

“Of course,” Tris said.

They sat in silence for a while before Aden spoke up again. “I don’t know how but we’re comrades and you leaving for Azgeda changes nothing.”

Tris reached over, slipping her hand into Charlotte’s and squeezing. “Maybe Lexa can summon you to the capitol some day? Or when Aden is commander he can.”

Charlotte smiled softly. “I’d like that.” She reached over taking Aden’s hand so that the three of them were a chain. “I’ll find you when the fake war starts.”

“Good,” Aden said.

“If I ask her to, Clarke will ask the commander to allow you to accompany me into the encampment to further our continued alliance.” Charlotte said hopefully.

“That gives us a few days to a couple weeks to remain together then.” Tris, ever the practical one, said thoughtfully.

“So, we’ll still be separated.” Aden said angrily.

“How long do you have till you have to leave?” Tris said suddenly, her eyes bright with sudden excitement.

“I leave at noon.” Charlotte glanced at Aden, who shrugged and they both turned to look at Tris curiously.

“Come on, we’re going to bind ourselves together.” She said decisively, standing and pulling Charlotte up, who in turn pulled Aden up with her.

“What?” Aden and Charlotte said simultaneously in confusion.
“We are not of the same clan, nor of the same blood, but we can swear to always have each other’s backs.” Tris pulled them along towards a hut on the edge of the village. She reached up and banged on the door loudly.

A gruff and tired looking old man with rather wild looking bed head opened the door with a scowl on his face. “What do you want at the crack of dawn?”

“We need the knot of brotherhood. We’ll pay for your time and for the inconvenience but it has to be now.” Tris said firmly, daring him to disagree.

The man eyed them warily before grunting. “Well get in here then, kids.”

Charlotte was overwhelmed with something she couldn’t describe as she saw her two friends arguing over where they should all have the tattoo placed. She felt like she was going to cry and she didn’t know why. Normally it was only her family that made her feel like this. She didn’t say a word as she sat on the stool by the fire place and pulled her shirt over her head leaving her ribs open for the new mark. These people knew her, they had seen what she was capable of and they still wanted her. They were willing to bind themselves to her. Swallowing thickly, she spoke lowly. “Thank you.”

Monty didn’t question where Charlotte had disappeared to that morning, though he did raise an eyebrow at the fact that the two Trikru seconds she followed around came with her, clearly intending to join the band leaving for their encampment. They both had daggers strapped to their persons made of bone with sheaths holding the hand of Azgeda engraved upon them which was quite an interesting development. He laid a hand on Charlotte’s back and gave her a smile of approval. She blushed and ducked her head. Chuckling, he stepped back as she mounted her horse and pulled it up to her party that was waiting to escort her. Silas and Peri were already saddled and ready to go, along with Anya kom Trikru. He was happy she had found acceptance and friendship even if she’d had to go outside of their own people to do so. He understood though, after all he was an assassin as well.

“General, do you think this is a good idea, bringing so many Trikru into our camp?” He asked standing next to Clarke as they watched the party mounting up and heading out through the gates of TonDC.

“We don’t have a choice but to work together with them.” She said. “Things are starting to move and we need to be ready. Better to test our ability to work together now than in the field.”

“Are you sure about this alliance with the Trikru? Not too long ago we were prepared to cut ties.” He asked seriously, cautious but knowing none but their own could hear this conversation.

Clarke breathed out her eyes flickering to the commander. “She gave me a blood oath and I trust her Monty.”

“That’s not what I asked.” He said, smiling slightly, though it confirmed his suspicions that Octavia wasn’t the only one to have taken a Trikru lover.

Clarke laughed lightly. “My apologies. No, it’s good for us. A true alliance with the Trikru will benefit us long past the finish of this war. Whether we can pull it off in the short term and make a good start of it depends on the cooperation of the warriors we have brought. I have faith in our people, they will present themselves with honor. After generations of war perhaps we can make this peace last.”

He nodded thoughtfully. It changed things, they’re original plans of seceding and becoming an
independent nation would not be happening but that would make the transition of power easier in some ways. Azgeda was the single largest of the twelve clans and had the largest standing army as well as the most hostile environment. Staying in the coalition saved them from worrying about potential conflict as well as helped keep their trade routes open. Not that Azgeda participated in much trade outside of its borders. Nia had only joined the coalition out of fear of the collected armies of the coalition. However, Nia had been building up her army to leave the coalition for years now. Peace would mean letting warriors retire, settle down, and make homes. It would mean increased production and opportunity for skilled laborers.

“Miller and Dax were spotted a day’s ride outside of TonDC last night.” Clarke said evenly after a period of silence.

He felt his heart leap into his throat as he spun to face her. She was smiling at him and he could have hugged her or sluged her for not telling him sooner. “When will they get here?” He asked eagerly, energy racing through his body.

“A few hours at most.” Clarke bumped his shoulder with hers. “They’re on the main road. Now that Charlotte is no longer in need of an escort, Keaton and Burka can stay by my side for the rest of the day. Go meet up with them. I know you’ll want your reunion to be more private than what can be had in the middle of the village.”

Monty turned, pulling Clarke into a tight hug. “Thank you!” Then he was off to the stables. He didn’t even bother to saddle his horse. He barely even bothered with the bridle. His steed seemed to understand the urgency and was stamping, eager to be off. He threw his leg over the back of his horse and at once they were off. They were out the main gate within a few minutes.

He could feel the road thundering under his horse's hooves as they flew over the road. The startled Trikru scouts could question his rush all they wished. As he came around a bend in the road, he saw the large wagon hitched to a four horse team hauling it forward. Dax and Miller seated on the back. He didn’t dismount so much as send himself flying off his horse and into Miller’s arms. They collided and Miller was there and solid under his hands, holding them both steady. He laughed with joy, they’d been apart without contact for far too long.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya sat high in her saddle as they rode along the Azgeda line. As they approached the first camp, Silas pulled out a dark horn with red lines carved into it. Breathing in deeply, he blew into it. It let out a great low sound that echoed throughout the clearing. She could feel it in her bones. The response was immediate. She watched carefully as Azgeda troops poured out of their tents, clearly looking for what was calling their attention. Captain Laslow came out with his hair sticking up and wearing his very wrinkled captain’s jacket. He came to a halt in front of the horse.

“What news?” He demanded, coming off surprisingly serious for a man who had clearly just been woken.

Charlotte brought her horse forward and raised her hand that held the pike with Flora’s mounted head. The blood had stopped flowing but it had still leaked over the girl’s hand staining it red. She’d painted war paint on her face with the blood. She looked terrifying. Charlotte’s face was hard and empty as she spoke. “Flora kom Azgeda tried to kill our general. For her treachery, she was executed according to our laws. Know that she suffered greatly.” Charlotte’s horse stamped its feet and Anya was sure it had been trained to do so. The entire camp had fallen silent. “General Clarke kom Azgeda is our leader, heir to the throne of Azgeda and to strike against her is to strike against all of us. What say you?!”
Anya felt her heart beating in her chest as the warriors started smacking their weapons against their chests. Laslow raised his voice and began a chant. “Death.”

Soon the entire camp was echoing with the cry of death, death, death. As they beat a loud rhythm with their clanging armor. Charlotte raised the pike above her head as the chant reached a crescendo before dying out. She waited till it was silent once again. “We are Azgeda! We do not suffer traitors!”

The army roared in approval. While they were still roaring, Silas raised the horn to his lips again blowing deeply as they began to move again. Anya was surprised but glad to be moving away from the fired up warriors, who seemed ready for battle and not cowed by the fate of a traitor. As they made it further away from the camp Charlotte dropped back between Tris and Aden while attaching the head to the side of her saddle.

“They love your general.” Aden said solemnly.

Charlotte smiled softly at him. “Yes, she is ours and she leads well. We care for her as we know she cares for us. If someone managed to kill her, we would make the ground run red with blood in retribution.”

“She is like Heda,” He said. “A great leader, loved by her people.”

Anya watched curiously as Tris seemed to agree with Aden’s statement. The three of them had been closer than usual since the ride had started. Narrowing her eyes, she noted Tris had her sword strapped over her shoulder slightly higher than was common. “Second, why is your sheath attached high?”

Tris stared at her straight on and Anya knew instantly she wasn’t going to like the reason. “We saw the marker this morning and took the mark of brotherhood along our ribs.”

“You and Aden?” She asked praying Tris didn’t mean what she thought she meant.

“Charlotte, Aden, and I.” Tris replied. Her chin raised, clearly ready to defend her decision.

Anya considered this carefully. Her gut reaction was horror, to grab Tris and shake her demanding why she had done such a thing. However, she remained seated in her saddle as they rode, thinking on this revelation. She could feel the entire party waiting for her response, Azgeda and Trikru alike. Commanders died young, it was a fact. No Commander had lived past the age of twenty-seven and Lexa was a long serving Commander. Aden was the most likely to succeed her. Tris being bound to him was a good thing. He would need warriors he could trust to stand by his side, to guard him and guide him as she stood by Lexa’s. Charlotte could be a liability but also a massive boon. When he became the commander, it would help maintain the alliance between Azgeda and Trikru. Charlotte was family to the heir to that clan. To have her bound to the next commander was the sort of things that made solid alliances.

She wondered if any of them had thought about what they’d done meant politically. When Aden took the position of commander, if he won his conclave, he would do so with the likely support of Azgeda. Even if not, the support of an assassin of the skills Charlotte possessed was not to be ignored. Finally, she came to a decision. “Next time, inform me before you bind yourself to the family of the heir of Azgeda and a nightblood.”

Tris’ face looked relieved and tension bled out of the group. “Of course Anya.”

Peri spoke up. “This means no killing Trikru doesn’t it?” She asked like a child that had had it’s toy
Anya stiffened, staring at the woman incredulously.

“I’m sure Klark will be happy to put you on bandit duty when we get back and before that we get to kill everyone in the mountain. There was a lot of blood when I killed Flora as well.” Charlotte said dryly, almost appearing to roll her eyes in exasperation. Silas just looked mildly annoyed by his fellow warrior.

“True! She screamed nicely.” Peri said perking up. “I love bandit duty.”

Anya stared at how easily accepted this by play was. Deciding not to ask, she instead focused on keeping a mental tally of where all the Azgeda watches were located as they passed. Her horse was moving beneath her and the sounds of the forest surrounded her. It was strange to be at ease and on guard at the same time. However, she was beginning to trust at least some of the Azgeda warriors. The one’s like Peri she would make sure to kill first if the coalition fell. For Aden and Lexa’s sakes she hoped it stood. She would bleed and die to see to it that it did so.

Charlotte dropped back beside her. “Anya.” She reached into one of her saddlebags and pulled out a dagger. Its handle was made of bone as was the sheath. The hand of Azgeda was carved into it and the lines painted red. Charlotte looked up at her seriously. “If you betray Klark, or Azgeda, I will kill you myself. Still, you are Tris’ first and as such you should have this.”

Anya accepted the dagger carefully. She knew what it meant. It was Charlotte’s way of declaring her under her protection. While under normal situations that would have been insulting, when riding through a riled up army of bored Azgeda warriors with only two Trikru seconds it suddenly meant a great deal. Not to mention it was unheard of. It would seem Aden and Tris had chosen well. “I thank you, warrior of Azgeda.”

Charlotte’s lips twitched with a pleased smile at being referred to as a warrior and not an assassin. “Try not to die. Tris would be quite sad.”

“Apparently the same to you.” Anya replied evenly, watching Tris shamelessly eavesdropping in on the conversation. Really that girl. Rolling her eyes, she strapped the new dagger to her thigh. A sudden thought occurred to her. “So, what type of animal was used for the knife?”

Charlotte turned back to her with a wicked grin. “It was made from a sand dwelling creature that unwisely attempted to cross our borders.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Nine months ago:

Raven limped out of the medical tent and away from the scent of death. She knew Clarke was doing her best to keep the tent clean. However, disease had set in a week ago and between the injuries and the vomiting there was only so much Clarke could do. So now she was trying to keep everyone who wasn’t dying out of the healing tents to prevent them from getting ill themselves. Raven was only staying in it because it made her feel slightly less pathetic than staying in some poor villager’s house that was already hosting warriors. She’d taken a battle axe to the leg. It was nothing short of a miracle her leg hadn’t had to be taken. She’d never be able to walk without a limp again. It left her feeling like a burden when she was unable to help out with the chores in the village.

As she worked her way across the street on her crutches, she noticed a kid, about ten years old, carrying a large bucket of water. It was clearly too heavy for the kid but they were valiantly trying to
get it to their destination.

“KANA!” A man roared.

Raven narrowed her eyes at the man standing in the doorway of the hut. He was thin with a swollen nose. His face was red and splotchy, everything about him was dirty and messy. She knew a drunk when she saw one. The kid carrying the bucket seemed to hurry towards the man but tripped unable to see their feet. Thanks to the weight of the bucket heavy with water the kid and water went crashing into the street.

“You piece of shit.” The man growled, stalking forward. “I ask you to do one thing for me and you can't even do it.”

Raven started making her way towards the scene. She knew what was going to happen. It reminded her more of the ark than anything had in years. When she was almost upon the kid, a second kid identical to the first came barreling out of the house and skidding to a stop beside their twin.

“Oh, you both want to have your hides tanned red for this huh?” The man growled, glaring down at the two kids, who were both hanging onto each other for support.

“Excuse me.” Raven said her voice hard. She may be injured but she was still a warrior with many marks and a reputation that was not to be ignored.

It was rewarding to see the man pull back and duck his head in acknowledgement and respect. “My apologies warrior. I was just about to teach my kids here the error of their ways.”

“I can see that.” Raven had to resist the desire to clobber the man to death with one of her crutches. “Stand.” She ordered the two kids.

They both stood up promptly, looking up at her nervously. They were completely identical. Both had choppy hair that had been hacked off with something dull and wore thin jackets with patches sewed in several places. They were skinny, underfed, and dirty. Although she could see the effort they’d both clearly gone through to scrub their clothing and their faces clean, even if it was also clear they hadn’t had a bath in some time. Looking at them, she could see a younger version of herself. With a sigh, she realized Bellamy was never going to let her live this down. “What is twenty divided by five?”

The two kids shared confused glances. “What?”

Raven rolled her eyes. “How many fives are in twenty?”

“Four.” They both promptly answered.

“Do you both like to build things?” She asked. They seemed smart enough. Not that she’d asked enough to be sure but she was sure she could pawn them off on Bellamy if she was wrong. Bellamy was a sucker for big eyes and sob stories.

Both of the kids looked excited though. “Yup!” The one on the right said while the one on the left just nodded.

“Will you work hard?” She asked seriously, measuring them carefully. Trying to pretend she hadn’t made her decision the moment the drunk had yelled at his child.

“Yes ma’am!” The one on the right said while elbowing the one on the left, who jumped slightly before adding in their own “Yup!”
“I’m sure my children will perform whatever task you have for them.” The man said gruffly while cowing the kids down with a glare.

Raven looked up at him briefly. “Of course.” Looking back at the kids, she came to her decision, or came to peace with the decision she’d already made really. “My name is Raven kom Azgeda. I was trained by Gunter kom Azgeda. Before he took me as his second, I was a highly trained mechanic, a type of skilled laborer. Now that I’m injured and recovering, I’ll be making specialized weapons for the other warriors. It is the appropriate time for me to take a second. Would you two consent to taking the oath? To swearing yourself to Azgeda, to live and die for it. There is no going back. What I tell you would be law. You would work hard, bleed, there will be cold nights, and you will rarely see the inside of a house. Will you be my seconds?”

“Yes!” Both of the kids yelped, their eyes wide in awe and excitement. She could see in them that they saw her as a path to freedom. They saw their chance to escape their abusive father. There was no doubt, no second guessing.

“Well then, follow me. The general will need to formally approve it since taking two seconds at the same time is unusual.” Raven turned and started to move, ignoring the gob-smacked look on the drunk old man’s face as her new seconds tripped over themselves to follow her.

“Will the general really let you take us both?” One of the twins asked anxiously.

Raven noticed the nervous looks they were exchanging back and forth. “The General owes me a favor. She’ll approve.”

Both kids seemed to come alight at the promise and it made Raven feel lighter than she had in a long time. “So, what are your names minions?”

“Kana.” One of them replied.

Raven waited for a second name to come. She stopped limping along with her crutches. “You have the same name?”

The other twin nodded. “Da said that he couldn’t tell us apart with our pants on so there wasn’t a point in giving us different names.”

“So you’re…?” She trailed off looking at them questioningly.

The more assertive of the twins, she thought...she wasn’t sure, spoke. “I’m the girl Kana and he’s the boy Kana. No one can tell us apart so it’s ok.”

Raven blinked taking in the new information. She at least had had her own name. This just wouldn’t do. She remembered an old earth movie she’d watched back on the ark that had talked having to take responsibility for your pets. Keeping her crutch stable under her arm, she raised her lower arm and pointed to the female Kana. “I’m not doing that shit. From now on you’re Nut.” Moving her finger so it was pointing towards the male twin she spoke, “You’re Bolt. Congrats you both have names.”

The twins blinked at her in surprise before seemingly shrugging to themselves and smiling widely at her. Raven rolled her eyes. Oh god, they’d imprinted like ducklings. “We can keep Kana as a last name. In my village everyone had two names. So Kana can be the second one. Now let’s go, Clarke is half asleep most of the time and will be completely asleep if we don’t get to her soon.”

“You call the general by her name?!?” Nut asked in awe and they tagged along beside her.

Raven sighed. “Yes.”
“Do you know her?” Bolt chimed in.

“Yes.” Raven said.

“What does a mechanic do?” Nut asked.

“A mechanic fixes and builds machines out of old world tech.” Raven answered.

“Like the mountain men?” Nut asked aghast.

“No, not like the mountain men. You know those arrows that were on fire that our army used to retake the village?” Raven asked.

“They were so cool! The army is amazing.” Bolt said dreamily.

“I made those.” Raven said.

Both of the twins looked at her with stars in their eyes. “Will you teach us how to make arrows that light on fire?”

“Of course minions.” Raven said.

“What are minions?” Bolt scrunched up his face looking at her in confusion.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the great comments! We'll try and get a Peri point of view in there in the next chapter but it didn't fit in this one, sorry.

Indra had sat through many strategy meetings. However, listening to the Ice Nation representatives discussing what they’d need to set up their tools for their warrior Raven here in TonDC was ridiculous. Apparently, the Ice Nation had been under the impression that their mechanic, whatever that was, would be working in her specialized tent in their own camp.

“For the attack to run smoothly the distance needs to be cut down. Surely, your mechanic can be brought here?” Lexa asked.

Klark looked truly frustrated. “Raven is an invaluable resource. I cannot allow her and her seconds inside TonDC without a full company. To have that many of my men in your village would make the fake skirmish between our forces look less convincing.”

“Then put them in Trikru colors.” The commander suggested.

Indra stiffened. “You can’t be considering this. A full company of Azgeda wearing our colors inside TonDC!?” The destruction and chaos they could cause was monumental.

The tall blond warrior that had yet to speak glared at her from over Klark’s shoulder. He tapped his finger angrily against the hilt of his dagger. His gloves had studs in the fingers that made a sharp clicking sound as he did so. Several of the Azgeda delegation turned to him curiously. The general rolled her eyes as the tapping came to an end. “Take it or leave it. I may trust you but I cannot risk a resource like Raven on that alone.”

“And why should we trust you?” Indra growled stepping forward. “You want a full company, and your weapon maker who makes fires that burn down your enemies, within my village, next to the commander.”

“Indra.” Lexa bit out.

Indra ignored her. She would take the lecture later. “You have moved more and more of your deadliest within my walls, within reach of the commander.”

“What would you have me do then?” Klark said, stepping into her space

“I would have you who believes so much in ‘trust’ give it back. You ask me to risk my village, Heda, her army, for what, a single warrior of yours?” Indra spat.

“ENOUGH!” Lexa declared. Indra took a step back but never let her eyes waver. “Klark is well within her rights inside a foreign clan’s land to demand protections for her men. Especially after what happened with the Boudalan forces.”

“Can’t we all be right?” A voice drawled from a corner.
Everyone turned to where the assassin Niles was leaning against the wall, watching the room with his single eye, a smirk on his face. “The trouble seems to be that the General is playing both sides trying to protect us.”

“What do you mean?” Indra demanded of the insufferable man. Ignoring the way everyone in the room was tensing.

“Not you, our General, Klark.” He replied. “You Trikru and your honor and death grip on tradition. What you’re asking of us is a death sentence. What you want is proof of Klark’s loyalty to you. The thing is, she can’t give it to you because if she does she, as well as anyone allied with her, won’t last more than a month at most once we return to Azgeda. She’s already pushed too far on being this ‘friendly’.” He twirled an arrow around his fingertips.

“Niles I assume you have a solution then?” Klark asked, looking at him somewhat frustrated.

Indra wanted to hit things but waited.

Niles pushed off the wall and walked further into the circle. He waved around at the group of people gathered. “Monty, Dax, Miller, and myself, would all die for you. We are loyal to you and no one else. Not Nia, you.” His eye was serious.

Indra felt herself stop breathing. That was treason to claim loyalty to a general over a queen. The fact none of the Ice Nation members present were doing anything in protest was telling in and of itself.

He turned to the Trikru in the room. “And well, you tall dark and angry.” He pointed the arrow at Indra. “As well as those two bearded bears, Gustus and Ryder, I believe. Well, your absolute loyalty to the rather gorgeous Heda here isn’t hard to guess.” He smirked. “I’d imagine anything said in this room if forbidden by Klark and Heda here wouldn’t leave this room.”

The commander narrowed her eyes slightly. “You believe there is information that would prove the loyalty of the Azgeda and make a contingent of your soldiers in Trikru colors an acceptable compromise?”

“Niles, where are you going with this?” Klark said her voice guarded.

“Give them Ontari.” He said simply.

Indra didn’t know who Ontari was but the reaction throughout the Ice Nation warriors was instantaneous. The tall blond warrior had Niles by the throat and pinned to the wall in seconds. Niles throwing his hands up in surrender as his back hit the wall with a thump. The warrior, she believed to be Miller, went for his sword only for Klark’s hand to grab his arm keeping it in place. Monty put himself between the sudden chaos and the Trikru, clearly willing to intercede if anyone dared make a move.

“Stand down. NOW!” Klark commanded. Her men fell back grudgingly except for Dax who kept Niles pinned but released the man’s throat.

“What is the meaning of this?” Lexa hissed, her eyes flickering over the Azgeda detachment.

Klark looked over her shoulder. “Niles just asked us all to commit high treason against Nia that’s what just happened.” She snapped.

Indra fell back into a stiff position to watch the proceedings. Whatever was going on was important
and involved Nia and the Trikru. She could see the tension in the commander’s back as she seemed to also settle prepared to watch and learn.

“Why do you know the importance of that name?” Klark asked, looking at Niles carefully.

“Please it’s Nia’s worst kept secret.” Niles waved his hand. “You’re already taking steps to prevent that particular plan of Nia’s from happening in the event of your death. You lose nothing by telling.”

Klark closed her eyes and seemed to be lost in thought for several long moments before she nodded. “Release him Dax.”

The tall warrior with the well-trimmed beard unceremoniously dropped the assassin. As he turned away from him, Dax tapped against the hilt of his sword again in a quick pattern. Klark shook her head and laid her hand on his shoulder. “It’s alright.”

Klark came to a stop in front of her group facing the Trikru. Her feet were set and her hands were clasped behind her back. She was looking straight at Lexa. “I need a guarantee that what I’m about to say does not leave this room.”

Lexa held her gaze and finally inclined her head slightly. “You have my word.”

Breathing in, Klark opened her mouth. “You fear Nia plans to kill you, declare war, or attempt to break the coalition. While she surely would take such a chance if given one, it is not where you should fear her. The threat isn’t to you, it’s to your legacy.”

Gustus let out a choked sound. “The nightbloods.”

Lexa’s eyes widened, “Aden, if you have harmed him.”

“He’s safe.” Klark said firmly. “Charlotte has orders to keep him that way. Azgeda holds no orders against the nightbloods. However, during the next conclave, Ontari kom Azgeda will go to Polis and she will slaughter your nightbloods in their sleep and claim the position of Heda by default as the last standing nightblood.”

The room went dead silent. It was surprisingly Gustus who broke the silence. “You are already acting to prevent this?” His voice was gruff but threatening.

Klark nodded. “Yes. Aden at least will be trained thanks to Charlotte to avoid that death. I do not plan on allowing Ontari to live much longer.”

“Why not tell me this earlier?” Lexa asked. If Indra wasn’t mistaken, there was an undercurrent of hurt in her voice.

“Because it was never going to matter. Ontari is a mad dog. She may have been made that way but she still needs to be put down. Her having any power would be disastrous, she’s a butcher. If Roan was still alive, I would have told you. Now that Roan is dead, Quint is the only general who wouldn’t see to it that she died before she made it to that conclave. We know what her reign of terror would be like. Charlotte is not the only person Daniela helped train, just the only she took as a second.” Klark’s face twisted in disgust.

“Is this nightblood in your army?” Lexa finally asked.

“No,” Klark shook her head. “But if Raven’s work is successful I can order her death three days from now.”
“How?” Indra asked. She was not used to this general yet but she did not like this at all.

“The radio, if I order one of my men in the capitol to kill Nia’s shadow it will be done. Again the girl’s days have been numbered since Roan died. He and Quint both supported the expansion of Azgeda beyond our borders. With Roan dead, Quint is too much of a fool to know her value.” Klark bit her lip before speaking again. “What’s important is that if I betray you, if I use this opportunity to attack this village or make an attempt on Heda’s life. Well, Gunter and I should be the only members of my army who know Ontari is a Nightblood. Nia will take care of your revenge for you.”

“You can’t be considering this?” Indra demanded.

Gustus spoke up again. “Heda made you a blood oath Klark kom Azgeda. You are blood bound to her in return. Do you acknowledge this bond?”

“Yes,” Klark replied without blinking, without hesitation, and without removing her eyes from Lexa.

“Then it is done.” Lexa pronounced. “No one is to speak of this outside of this room. The Azgeda company will be disguised and the war will be won.”

Klark sent a glare at Niles, “Go, prepare Raven, her seconds and the explosives they’ve managed to build. Do not bring the explosives into this village!”

Niles bowed. “Of course.”

“Ryder, accompany him and see to the disguises for our allies, and that the guards know of the plan.” Lexa ordered.

“Sha, Heda.” He said, bowing before leaving with the assassin.

Indra grit her teeth knowing what would happen next.

“Indra, prepare TonDC for our guests.” Lexa gave her a look that told her it was not optional or negotiable.

Klark spoke up quickly as well. “Monty and Miller go, help the general.”

Indra resisted growling at the two dark haired Ice Nation warriors following her as she left.

____________________________________________________________________________

Eight months ago:

Laslow could feel his lungs burning as he ran for the small town of Yart. His team had been ambushed an hour ago by a group of nomads using weapons bearing the marks of Sankru. If he had the air in him to spit properly, he’d have done so. However, he needed all the air in his body to keep putting one foot in front of the other. He had been the only survivor, from either side, he thought viciously. The horses hadn’t survived either so here he was running, trying desperately to get to the town before the forces that had been spotted could get to it. They had to be warned. Klark would be there by dawn with reinforcements and would route the enemy. Till then they just had to hold on.

It was dark and his feet were slipping in the sand beneath his feet. One last hill. He could see the soft light from cooking fires, not the burning inferno of a town in shambles. Spirits, there was still time. Gasping for air, every muscle in his body burning, he ran. His toe caught on something in the sand and he fell too tired to catch himself properly. He lay there for a second just breathing. Running in full gear after a skirmish and an hour of riding had exhausted him. He was mush, he was made of
mush and pain. Finally, he pushed himself up and spat the sand out of his mouth.

That was when he finally registered something was terribly wrong. How could he have missed that? The sand was wet and tasted of copper. Looking down in horror, with nothing but the soft glow from the gentle evening fires in the village and the stars and moon above him, he was still able to see that the sand itself was red. Slowly, feeling dread building up his spine, he stared behind him and saw what he’d tripped over. It hadn’t been a rock. It was a body. Oh god, since when had the smell of bodies no longer registered to him. It was a woman. Her long dark hair splayed out across the sand, her mouth open in a silent scream, white eyes staring upwards. She’d been cut open like a fish.

He barely managed to keep from vomiting. Staggering to his feet, he drew his sword. Staring back at the woman his breathing still heavy he paused. His war paint had long since been sweated and rubbed off. He dipped three fingers in her blood and swore to return and see that she was burned. He ran his now bloodied fingers across his face. With that, he began to approach the town this time slower, listening for sounds. Coming over the top of the hill, he felt like the air had been knocked out of him even though nothing had touched him. The town was gone. The soft lights he’d thought were cooking fires were the embers of all that remained of the houses. It was a charred ruin. The lack of bodies was concerning however. Gripping the hilt of his sword with his right hand, he pushed his sweaty limp bangs out of his face and began to walk through the remains of the town.

As he approached the town center, he could feel his feet sinking into the ground. The ground was soaked. Practically mud, but he knew there hadn’t been rain. The town center, where traders should have set up, where the town elders should have gossiped, pretty girls tried to get pretty boys or girls if they wanted to court them, was instead full of piles of bodies. They’d been thrown on top of each other, like trash.

His fists clenched. The enemy was gone. If he had a horse, if he had men, if he wasn’t past exhausted and empty of energy, he would ride these monsters down and kill them all. There were no words for what he was looking at. The young, the old, no one had been spared. He wanted to scream his useless fury and rage out to the sky, but knew it could bring them back and he knew if he wanted them to pay he needed to live. He hated Klark sometimes. Hated her for making him hold the weight of his duty to his people on his back.

Which is when he heard the crash. Spinning on the ball of his left foot, he took off in the direction of the sound. Running into the ruins of one of the houses, he saw a trap door had been forced open. He could hear the coughing coming from underneath. A girl, covered in soot, holding a sword, came charging at him from out of the hatch. A war cry ripped from her throat. She was young, he noted. With a flick of his wrist, her sword went crashing into the burnt debris that was the former roof of the house. The girl now weaponless kept on charging. He had a hunch about her identity. Not wishing to kill her but knowing there were others down that hatch, he struck. He caught her outstretched arm and twisted it harshly while kicking her legs out from under her. He brought her to her knees, her arm behind her back, his sword at her throat, with them facing the hatch. Before she could try to fight more as he was sure she intended, he spoke. “I’m Azgeda!”

The girl’s struggles stopped. She remained taut, ready to fight at a moment's notice but she was listening. There was a scuffling sound and several children of various ages made their way out of the cellar. They were all covered in soot, the whites of their eyes standing out starkly against their blackened skin. One of the larger children picked up the sword and placed himself between Laslow and the other children.

Laslow saw the kids were somewhat more calm than he would have expected considering how frightening the situation was. Pulling his sword away from the girl’s throat, he pushed her away from
him, backing up a few paces. Slowly, he sheathed his sword.

“How do we know you’re one of us?” The girl asked glaring at him. “You could be lying.”

“I’m Laslow, captain of the Tawa division. I serve General Klark.” He pointed towards his jacket at the blue fabric sewn into the seams. “I uphold the code. I am a warrior of the people. I was sent to warn your village of the attack but we were delayed. I’m all that is left of my party. Without the horses I couldn’t reach you in time.”

“So what, you’re sorry?” The girl spat on the ground. “Our town is gone.”

“Jus drein Jus daun. The general will arrive by dawn. You survived, none of them will.” He snarled.

One of the smaller boys tugged on the girl’s sleeve. “If he serves Klark, he’ll protect us.”

There were quite murmurs round the small circle of about sixteen children.

“Blue warriors are good.” Another girl said carefully.

Laslow decided to interrupt before they all gave their opinions. “Are any of you injured?”

Present:

Lexa closed her eyes as she leaned against the map table in the empty planning room. She knew it was secure. She knew that Gustus and the blond warrior, Dax, who Klark clearly cared for and trusted, were guarding the door. Still, she was frightened by the conversation she knew was going to happen now that it was just them.

“You know what I’m going to tell you don’t you?” Klark asked.

Lexa opened her eyes and stared at the look on Klark’s face and her chest ached. She wanted to stop this, to bring them back to that morning when she’d woken to blue fabric and memories of warm touches. However, she was Heda, and as much as this was personal and the business of Lexa, it was also the business of the commander, of Heda. It was complicated and twisted up. She couldn’t bring herself to speak, her throat clogged and blocked any words trying to twist their way out. She nodded slowly.

Klark’s shoulders seemed to slump a bit. “I tried but…” She trailed off.

“Niles forced your hand?” Lexa said thickly.

“Yeah.” Klark walked over and leaned against the table as well so that they were side by side. “How long have you guessed?” She finally asked.

“Since we were in the cage with pauna trying to get in I think. I just did and didn’t want to believe it.” Lexa said slowly, feeling the truth settling over her.

“You really are wise.” Klark said, tilting her head so that she was looking at her. “Of course, that’s why we’re here.”

Lexa snorted dismally for the first time in her life. “Please do not ask this of me Klark, I cannot bear it.” She said, her voice soft and cracking halfway through.

“Hey,” Klark pushed off and was in her space immediately cradling her face with her warm hands.
Lexa closed her eyes, soaking up the comfort being offered. She felt the heat of Klark’s body soaking into her everywhere that they were touching and in the air between them. Klark pressed their heads together. “You know it’s the right thing to do.” Klark finally said.

Suddenly it was all too claustrophobic and Lexa had to move. She gently but firmly pulled away, pushing herself into the empty space in the room that just earlier had been full of warriors. She began to pace. Klark was silent and let her walk back and forth organizing her thoughts. Finally, she spun so that she was facing Klark once more, this time at a distance that allowed her to keep a clear head. Although that was a lie, her head was never clear around Klark. “I cannot send you away. I will not.”

“You have to,” Klark said simply. “We both know what will happen if you march into Azgeda, with me in your bed and obviously in my confidence. I’d support you but we both know it’s a miracle that half the blockade doesn’t already know and Nia is no fool. If you march, there will be war. A long bloody drawn out war.”

“It is my right! My duty!” Lexa protested, her voice strong, her emotions boiling up and over the walls she used to contain them. “I have put my duty above my feeling for years, and now you ask me to sacrifice both. To stand by and do nothing while you go to your death!!” Her voice had risen. She let her shoulders slump, realizing she’d been projecting her anger at the situation and directing it at Klark. She wasn’t angry at Klark. She understood and that made it so much worse.

Klark’s eyes were so very sad and Lexa wanted nothing more than to wipe that away but knew she couldn’t. “Lexa, it is your right, and by the laws of the coalition it is your duty. I know,” her voice was pleading, “I know that you want Nia’s head for what she’s done to you. You can cite treason. After the mountain falls, march the twelve armies into Azgeda, take Nia’s head. Revenge, justice, Jus drein Jus daun. Costia will be avenged, the greatest threat to your people will be gone, but the cost Lexa!”

Lexa blinked. Her hands, that had been gripping each other behind her back, fell away shaking slightly as she digested that. “Klark, you are asking me to send you, my lover into the arms of a woman who hates me, hates you, and you think what I care about is revenge and duty?” Her voice was incredulous, because yes, she cared about those things, needed them even, but they were not what was tearing her up inside.

Klark’s eyes widened and then she was closing the distance again and kissing her like she could consume her. Spirits, Lexa wished she could, that they could never be separated, that she could keep her safe. They both panted as they finally parted. Klark pulled back this time and Lexa had to resist pulling her back in with all of her strength. “I’ve been planning this since I first bent the knee. Since I first saw her face. She has only considered me an enemy for months. An upstart of her own making at that. If I kill her, if it’s an internal military coup, the loss of life will be minimal. If you do what is your right, it will be a long drawn out and bloody conflict. Thousands of my people will die. Beja, Lexa.”

Lexa did pull her back into her arms. It was comforting having Klark encircled in her arms, and protected, even if it was an illusion that was only lasted for a moment. The comfort was for both of them though. “Tell me you can win.”

“I will win.” Klark said, tightening her own hold on her.

Lexa hated this, hated feeling this, knew it was weakness. “I cannot lose you to her. I cannot...”

Klark slid a hand into her hair and pulled their heads far enough apart that they could look at each other without going cross eyed. “If I lose, I won’t, but if the worst happens, then know I do not
blame you. That none of this was your fault. My fate was chosen when I swore my allegiance to a woman I wished to kill with every fiber of my being. Whether I live or die is the result of my own decisions. However, I’m the undefeated. I think there is more hope than you would think.” Klark joked weakly.

“Do not lose. You have two months after the fall of the mountain. If she is still queen at the end of that time, I will marshal the armies once more and declare Nia a traitor.” Lexa breathed in leaning back in and resting her head against Klark’s shoulder.


Lexa stiffened, pulling back. “Klark, you don’t have to say that.”

Klark darted in kissing her briefly. “You better be the longest living commander to have ever been.”

Lexa opened her mouth. She wasn’t sure what she was going to say. That her spirit would pass on? That she was merely a vessel for the commander’s spirit? That love was weakness? That she was already the second longest reigning commander? None of that was helpful. She was saved from responding by Klark speaking again.

“No more death. We are both going to live. You will reign on as Heda, and you will be the only one I bow to as Queen.” Klark smirked slightly at the end of her proclamation.

Lexa smiled, “You would bow to someone other than me?”

Klark laughed. “Never, I will never bow to anyone other than you again.” Klark pushed her lightly into the table behind her. Leaning in and nipping at her ear, she said. “Let me show you.”

Seven months ago:

“Miller what did Roan say?” Clarke asked as soon as he entered her tent.

Miller grimaced. “He won’t allow us to poison the water.”

He watched as Clarke physically shook in rage for a moment before calming herself. “He’s going to get us all killed.”

Xander spoke from his position on the bed with his arm in a sling having just had it set properly. “We are petitioning to poison every source of water in the dead zone making travel between our borders and Sankru impossible. You knew he would only accept if desperate.”

“We are desperate,” Miller said. He understood what Xander was saying but he had no patience for ineptitude in his leaders.

“You’ve embarrassed him. Every victory in the war has been won by our forces.” Xander said. It was a hollow reason, true, but it did nothing for them.

“So, we do it against orders.” Clarke said lowly.

Miller felt his eyes widen. Looking at Xander, he saw the captain looked equally floored. “Clarke you’ll be executed!” He protested.

“True,” She said, closing her eyes and breathing deeply. “But it is the price that must be paid if we are going to protect our people. Roan is too desperate to please Nia. Our people are dying, people we
swore to protect. If my life is the cost to end this war and bring the slaughter to an end, then so be it. I’ll lead the teams into the dead zone personally. Xander will you hold our line?” She looked at him dead on.

“Of course,” He said finally. “It has been an honor to serve under you.”

Clarke’s lips quirked to the side. “And I’d be lost without you and Gunter.”

Miller’s fists clenched, he couldn’t let this happen. They couldn’t lose Clarke, not after everything. “There has to be another way!” He protested.

Clarke looked at him sadly and with an air of resignation. “If there is, tell me, please.”

“If we’re harder on them. If we make them fear us more.” He suggested desperately, already knowing it wasn’t an option.

“We already are eviscerating them and flaying them. For god’s sake, we crucified them along the border a month ago. We have weapons made of their bones now. What else can we do to them Miller? It’s not working. They keep coming like ants. No matter how many we kill, new and fresh nomads, banished, and Sankru, are crossing our border and our men are tired and injured.” Clarke looked like she was holding on by a thread.

Miller felt like screaming about the injustice of this. Why couldn’t Roan let them put an end to this? He insisted on fighting this like it was another sort of war and not the perverse battle of attrition it had become. Clarke was right. There was dried blood that could no longer be gotten out of his clothing. He had a new sword with a bone handle because his old one had been shattered by a battle axe. He couldn’t count the number of gruesome deaths he had witnessed and participated in, this war needed to end.

“Death is not the end.” Xander said evenly as he stood. Easily towering over Clarke and standing a few inches over Miller as well. He turned to Clarke. “How long before you’ll depart?”

Clarke seemed to settle, her stoic mask returning. “I’ll take a company of forty men. Monty will come with me for the poison. Raven will help us trap the largest oasis in the dead zone. We’ll be weighed down and slow. However, if we stay mounted we should be able to flee if there is a need. If something happens, send a rider.” She turned to Miller and he felt heavy. “Miller go to Bellamy. Make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid to try and stop me.”

Miller grit his teeth. “Clarke, be careful.”

“Of course,” She pulled him into a tight hug. He could feel her shaking against him as he gripped her back. He ignored Xander leaving the tent to begin giving orders. He just held the girl who had become his sister and wished things were different. So very different.
“Careful with that!” Raven snapped at the warriors that were lowering the explosions into a bunker near TonDC. If those bombs she’d spent days making were ruined, she’d personally kill the moron responsible.

She walked over to where the dark angry looking general was standing watching the proceedings. “Chillax, the detonators aren’t connected. Even if an idiot drops one, they won’t turn your bunker here into a ball of fire.”

“I hope your skill is worth this.” The general said stern faced.

“Oh, my skill is so worth this.” Raven said. She shifted in the badly fitted brown coat she was wearing, though it was missing her usual colors she didn’t mind it too much. She shifted in her specially designed saddle that allowed her to fight just as well as anyone else despite her injury. “I have sixty-three kill marks and yet Clarke won’t allow me on the front lines if she can help it. I’m worth it.” She smirked.

The general looked surprised but quickly returned to being stony faced. Raven ignored her as she watched Bolt stick his head out of the bunker. “All squared away boss!”

“Lock it up and let’s get to work then.” She ordered.

The clearly uncomfortable looking warriors under her command moved efficiently as they locked up the bunker and began the now short trip into TonDC. They were all perpetually itching and picking at their new clothing which was used civilian Trikru wear. It amused her greatly. Entering TonDC was not the experience she was expecting. The warriors gave her and her party slightly uneasy looks but generally her party was ignored. She raised an eyebrow at the laid back attitude.

“Raven!” Clarke greeted her cheerfully.

Raven grinned from her position up on her horse. “I see your hair is still a disaster as planned.” She snarked.

Clarke just laughed, moving forward and unbuckling some of the straps keeping her leg attached to her saddle. Raven had long since gotten to the point where she just rolled her eyes when Clarke or the others tried to help out. They all knew not to push it, but kind things like this, she had learned to allow. She slid out of the saddle and quickly was pulled into a hug. “I’m sure you heard Dax and Miller got in yesterday?”

Raven smiled brightly. “Of course! Have the lover boys come up for air yet?”

“Mostly,” Clarke laughed. “Come along, I’ll show you where you and the others are being hosted.”

“Come on slow pokes, we have a camp to settle.” She ordered over her shoulder.
She let out a surprised squeak when she felt herself bodily lifted off the ground and twirled around in strong arms. She also felt the familiar scratch of a beard against her neck. “DAX!” She cried out happily, clinging onto him just as tight.

He finally put her down, smiling widely at her, his fingers tapped out questions and greetings at a speed she couldn’t keep up with. “Woah, hold up you giant. I can’t understand you when you go that fast.”

He rolled his eyes and tapped out everything again slower this time.

“Well, I’m excellent and I totally understand what you mean about her looking like she has a stick up her ass. You look good too big guy.” She punched him lightly in the shoulder. He was physically the largest of their group. They weren’t even sure he was done growing. Like most people from the ark there was a certain thinness that had never gone away despite the change in their circumstances. Still, he was taller and broader across the shoulders than the rest of them. His hair once blonde and now almost brown, was thick and he wore a neatly groomed beard. It hid most of the damage done when his tongue and parts of his lips had been burned. He wore the distinctive bone decorations that marked him as a hunter of experience and prestige.

“I hate to cut this short but we need to get you started.” Clarke said, touching both of their arms. “We’ll catch up at dinner?”

“Of course,” Raven said as they continued towards the tents pushed to the side of the village, and separated as much as possible from the rest that were clearly intended for them. The nicest and clearly most carefully constructed one was obviously going to be hers.

“Just ask for anything you need and I’ll see to it that you get it.” Clarke said seriously.

“Anything?” She wiggled her eyebrows. “And what if I want the sexiest Trikru in my bed? I hear you and Octavia have been busy.”

Clarke blushed slightly. “I’ll introduce you at dinner if that’s what you want but I doubt I’ll be seeing much of you.”

Raven laughed, Clarke was right she was going to be busy. She sighed in relief and happiness, looking at her tools and materials carefully laid out on sturdy tables, well lit by lanterns hanging from the ceiling of the tent. “Dax, you took care of my babies.”

He tapped out ‘Of course’.

“Now get out so I can get to work!”

Seven months ago:

Harper notched an arrow and pulled back, aiming carefully. She didn’t hesitate to put an arrow through the soft fleshy uncovered joint behind the banished man’s knee. She had another arrow drawn in seconds and was aiming for his dominant right hand. He screamed in agony as he fell. She quickly drew another arrow and waited. It didn’t take long for a woman warrior to come running to drag her companion under cover. This arrow hit, going straight through the woman’s throat. She jerked before collapsing onto the ground. Harper ignored it, already notching another arrow. Rinse and repeat. By the time the rest of the Sankru were out of range there were twenty dead. Attempting to climb her tree had been a mistake.
Once she had gone ten minutes without firing, she raised a small war horn to her lips and blew signaling her position to her unit. She waited till she spotted Bellamy on a horse heading down the road towards her position. Dropping out of the tree on all fours, she slowly stood. “Twenty dead, five injured and unable to run. I estimate another six fleeing towards the border.” She reported succinctly.

Bellamy turned to the ten warriors at his back. “Anthony take four of us and help move the dead and injured back to camp.” He wheeled his horse around. “The rest of us are riding these dogs down. Harper good job, your relief will be here in another hour.”

Harper just nodded before climbing back up her tree to cover the warriors who dismounted and began to tie the bodies, living and dead, to the back of their saddles by their feet. Before they rode off, her arrows were returned to her. She watched them ride off dragging the bodies behind them, uncaring if the living joined the dead.

Leaning against the trunk of the tree, she stayed put waiting. There was no new movement before her replacement arrived and took their own perch, leaving her to make her way back to their camp. As she walked over the hard ground, she felt uneasy as the trees quickly tapered off into nothing. They were at the edge of the Ice Nation territory. There was a steep drop along most of the border into the dead zone, where sand was all a person could see. They’re current camp was on a cliff overlooking the dead zone. They were attempting to kill the enemy as they tried to infiltrate their borders in the night, keeping as many out as possible.

Coming into camp, she stared at the posts where the bodies were impaled along the edge of the cliff. Some of the bodies were dead before they impaled them, but many were not. She could hear the groans even when she slept. That people still invaded their land when this was the view of the border, boggled her mind. The scent of death had long since become ingrained into her skin and she was unable to scrub it off.

“Hey,” Octavia greeted her from her seat by one of their fires where she was sharpening her sword. “Want me to give you your new marks?”

Harper noticed the dull look to her sister’s eyes. This war was breaking them all down piece by piece. “Yeah,” She dropped her gear and removed her outer coat and shirt, dropping down by Octavia’s feet.

“How many?” Octavia asked hoarsely. She hadn’t sounded the same since Jacob had died.

“Twenty,” She replied. She was the best shot they had, and she was very good at what she did.

She took her new marks without flinching as Octavia heated the edge of a dagger and gave her each of her new marks carefully. She did flinch when the soothing cream was rubbed over her shoulder. It was surprising when the shudders of great wracking sobs began to wreck her. She was silent as she sobbed staring at the flames licking at the wood in front of her. Octavia’s arms wrapped around her and they just sat there.

Present:

Gustus watched with some amusement the antics of the Azgeda group as they ate. One of the warriors had pulled out a small set of drums out and was beating a dancing rhythm. A couple of the seconds were spinning around to the steps laughing and carrying on. Some of their own seconds had been pulled in and were being taught the steps so that they could keep up. What specifically was
catching his eye was the general and her family. The great tall blond warrior was jumping around with one of the twins on his back. The other laughing and jumping along behind in his footsteps.

Klark was laughing and leaning against the shoulder of Octavia who was talking with one of the new warriors of theirs who had arrived. He had to resist the laugh he could feel bubbling up inside his gut at the look the commander was giving the warrior Octavia’s arm that was casually thrown over the general’s shoulder. The male assassin, Monty, and the dark warrior who had recently arrived, Miller he believed, were quietly curled against each other, talking in low whispers. Bits of food were sticking out of their hair where it had been chucked by various members of their company at different points.

“They act like children.” Indra complained lowly under her breath from where she was seated.

Gustus considered how to reply. “They do, but I’m beginning to think that isn’t a bad thing.”

Indra looked at him curiously. “Why would you say that?”

“We have fought against Azgeda many times you and I.” He said, placing his hands on his knees as he spoke and noting Lexa’s interest in their conversation. “I have seen many warriors of that clan and never have I not been afraid I’d find a dagger in my back after seeing their eyes. Now, I don’t believe any of these would stab me in the back without orders to do so.”

“Just because they are less objectionable, does not mean we should lower our guard. I did not survive by trusting Azgeda warriors just because their general seems to have morals when it suits her.” Indra said.

“When it suits her? We are warriors. She wins wars.” He replied.

“Through poison. Two promotions for killing her superior. We all know the rumors about the things her army did on the eastern border. Have you forgotten Ebec? There used to be a village there but it’s gone now, and those were her own people. So no, I don’t trust this side of her we’re being shown.” Indra stared at him seriously.

“There are a lot of things said about both of us are there not? We have both done things in wars that are unspeakable. This coalition means that we have peace and while it goes against all that we know, they are our allies now. You are fortunate your rudeness has not been noted.” He cautioned.

“It’s been noted.” A voice came from the side.

Gustus’ head snapped to see who had approached the commander and relaxed when he saw Klark with the tall blond warrior standing behind her. “Klark,” He stood offering his arm to grasp which she took easily.

“Gustus,” She turned to look at Indra and nodded. “Your distrust of us is understandable and as long as you do not harm those under my protection, you may watch us looking for treachery as long as you like.”

The warrior behind her tapped his finger against a piece of bone on his thigh in a quick series of sharp sounds. Klark laughed and rolled her eyes at him. Turning to the commander, she bowed her head slightly in greeting. “I wished to present one of my warriors to you properly who was unable to introduce himself earlier. This is Dax, one of the members of my original pauna hunting team and my brother.”

The tall warrior stepped forward and bowed politely. Gustus examined the man and decided he seemed like a warrior to be feared in combat. He was clearly physically strong and quite successful at
his chosen profession.

Lexa stood, “It is an honor to meet you Dax kom Azgeda. I assure you the meeting you witnessed last night was not how most of our negotiations go.”

The man’s beard twitched slightly as he tapped against his leg again. Gustus had no doubts it was a code and he was communicating with Klark, but he disliked that he would be rude enough to use it in front of Heda.

“He says that it was certainly more interesting than he was expecting.” Klark said.

“Can’t he speak on his own?” Indra interjected, seemingly frustrated by the slight to the commander he was giving by not speaking directly.

Gustus wished he could roll his eyes. It may have been a slight, but it was a small one and could easily be explained by any number of things. He saw Klark going to speak, no doubt to give a reason, when the warrior placed a hand on her shoulder and just opened his mouth. Gustus found it difficult not to recoil and saw the same stiffening in Lexa and Indra. The man’s mouth was a twisted mess of melted flesh that must have once been a tongue. His lips, he could see now, were uneven and clearly damaged by whatever had happened to him.

Klark spoke as the warrior closed his mouth. “He was found guilty of speaking ill of Nia. The hot coal was left in his mouth for an hour.” While her voice was even, he could feel the anger lacing her tone.

Gustus’ stomach rolled. This was why he and Indra both hated Azgeda with a fiery passion and why he understood the woman’s reluctance to admit that Klark and her army could mean good things. Dax was still likely alive only because the infraction had been small. Cruel punishments and inhumane actions had characterized Azgeda for so long.

Lexa spoke. “Well Dax, welcome to Trikru lands. I believe you will perform admirably.”

The man nodded again before slipping back off to the fire with the others. Klark remained however. Her eyes were tracking Lexa before she turned to Gustus. “I have been meaning to speak to you, if you wouldn’t mind.”

Gustus looked at her curiously but nodded. “Of course,” He didn’t miss the disappointed look on Lexa’s face. Nor did he miss how Klark’s eyes didn’t leave her till the last second.

As they walked to the village wall and were assured of at least a semi private conversation Klark spoke. “I owe you my thanks for supporting the cooperation between our clans.”

“You owe me nothing.” He replied. “Commanders are at risk from their own people. If that is so maybe the best people to protect her are not her own.”

Klark looked at him in understanding. “I understand, and I swear I will let nothing happen to her if I can stop it.”

Gustus nodded pleased. “That is all that I ask.” He paused considering. “I am not supporting cooperation between our clans. I’m supporting cooperation with you.” He saw the understanding in the general’s face.

“I would not have expected you to be an ally.” She said.

Gustus nodded. “I would not have expected you to be anything but the monster Indra fears. Yet, I
believe Heda has chosen well.”

Klark seemed to think for a moment. “I understand her distaste for my people. After all, I came prepared to fight against Lexa every step of the way.”

“Indra will realize you are not the enemy she should be focusing on but till then her anger will rule her.” Gustus said, knowing his fellow Trikru well.

“We should find someone for her to beat the crap out of to work that anger out.” Klark said, only half joking.

Gustus considered the idea. “A spar with a warrior of yours may help earn her respect if not trust.”

Klark looked at him seriously. “I think I know just who to send. Can you get her to agree to such a thing?”

“Indra has settled with age but she has a temper. I can get her to agree.” He assured the general.

“How are you getting into my quarters anyways?” Lexa asked from where she was laying against the furs.

Clarke smiled at her and rolled over onto her side. “The store house roof is jumping distance from the map room. Which has that lovely beam connecting it here. Once on your roof, slipping in the window when the guards aren’t looking is easy.”

“So, I’ll have to have the beam removed.” Lexa said thoughtfully.

“Now, why would you go and do a thing like that?” Clarke asked, running her finger down Lexa’s chest.

“Not until you have to leave then.” Lexa breathed out, rolling inwards as well and bringing their mouths together.

Clarke sighed into Lexa’s mouth before letting her head fall back as they fell back onto the bed together. “You wish to know something.” She said finally.

Lexa stared at her for a minute before replying. “Indra was right that your story, as I’ve heard it, is one full of blood and death.”

“It is, but isn’t yours as well?” Clarke asked in return while running her fingers along Lexa’s spine.

“Are the reports I heard true though? Lexa asked more seriously this time.

Clarke breathed out, considering how to respond. “I’m not sure what exactly you’ve heard, but I doubt it was a fraction of how bloody the border war got. As to the rest well, Nia has elevated small achievements from when I was a captain or a hunter to a legendary status. As for the border...no, I doubt you know how far I went.”

Lexa cupped her face and leaned in offering comfort. “I shouldn’t have asked.”

“You have every right to ask.” Clarke said thickly.

“That doesn’t mean I should have.” She said simply.
“Did you have anyone during those years?” Lexa asked.

Clarke adjusted them so that she could watch Lexa’s face. “You mean besides my family?”

“Yes, I know your family is close, but you’ve never mentioned a lover from before.” Lexa said carefully.

Clarke considered the question. “On the ark I had dated a couple of my peers. Nothing serious however. Since I’ve been in Azgeda…” She paused humming wondering how to word it. “I’ve taken people to my bed before. More than once. However, nothing that was about more than release or an attempt to forget for just a while, the horror all around.”

They laid there for a while before Lexa spoke again. “Stay the night?”

Clarke didn’t answer her in words, just rolling them over. She was fairly certain Lexa understood her confirmation.

Aden woke up to an incredibly full bladder. Rolling out of his bedroll, he headed straight for the ditch to relieve himself. As he was heading back, planning on getting a few more minutes of shut eye, he saw some of the Azgeda warriors sparring. Lured over by the impressive skills they were demonstrating, he found himself walking towards the clanging and cursing.

He watched in awe as the man in the center fended off three attackers using quick feet and sharp movement to keep them off balance. He was clearly winning. There was a finesse to the fighting he was watching that he didn’t usually observe in sparring and he quickly realized it was because they were only using their swords, no punches, kicks, or daggers, just their swords as they spun and fended each other off. He watched spellbound till he was startled by Char speaking beside him. He hadn’t even realized she was there.

“That’s Captain Laslow, he’s one of the greatest sword masters of Azgeda.” She remarked.

“Do you think he would spar with me?” Aden asked excitedly. “To fight against someone like that would be an invaluable opportunity.”

Char bumped his shoulder with hers. “Go get your sword and you can ask.”

Aden didn’t waste time running back to their tent, pulling on his lightweight leather armor and strapping his sword to his back.

“What are you doing?” Tris muttered from her bedroll, clearly unhappy at being awoken before she had to be.

“I’m gonna try and spar with the captain. Char says he’s the best sword master in Azgeda!” He said excitedly.

Tris dropped her head onto her roll with an audible thump and let out a groan. “I hate you sometimes.” She started crawling out of her bedroll and pulling on her own gear.

“You can sleep longer if you want.” Aden offered, knowing they’d stayed up far too late sharing stories last night.

“And let you get yourself killed? I’m supposed to protect your black blooded ass.” She griped while pulling on her fur lined boots and lacing them up.
Aden shrugged and left to let her finish and to make sure he didn’t miss his chance. Jogging back to the sparring circle, he came to a halt by Char’s side. He turned to her expectantly. “How should I ask him?”

Char rolled her eyes and cupped her mouth before turning and shouting at the sparring warriors. “Hey Laslow! Aden here thinks you don’t have anything on Trikru swordsmen.”

The sparring warriors stopped and all turned to face them and Aden felt his face paling. “Char!” He hissed in horror.

She raised an eyebrow at him before pushing him forward. “Just don’t get killed and you’ll be fine.”

That was not comforting, he thought, as the man who had been wiping the floor with his fellow warriors stepped forward, clearly taking his measure. He most definitely did not look friendly. “Well, let’s see how long you last boy against an inferior swordsman.”

Aden gulped while drawing his sword and taking up his ready stance. He ignored the sounds of Char and Tris arguing over his current position and focused on the man who was obviously dissecting his stance.

With a sharp lunge, Laslow began the dance. Aden dodged, physically bringing his own sword into a feint. Laslow ignored the feint and slid his blade along Aden’s before twisting his wrist and sending Aden’s sword to the side. Aden was barely able to roll out of the way before the man’s follow up lunge almost hit him. He was barely holding onto his sword from the force of the hit. Coming up to his feet, he stood ready for the next strike.

There were cheers from the others. He heard one warrior shout, “Show the tree rat his place!”

Gritting his teeth, he charged this time swinging his sword in a downwards slash. What followed was one of the single most mortifying experiences of his life. He’d always considered himself a decent swordsman. He was soon to take his mark and become a warrior in full. Over the course of the next few minutes he was schooled. Laslow would continuously flip or knock his sword too far away to block properly and then strike him with the flat of the blade in a vital spot. Effectively announcing his death. Even losing to Char had not been this humiliating. Laslow only tripped him a few times, rarely touching him physically, relying almost entirely on his sword.

As he hit the ground for the umpteenth time with a grunt he struggled to stand up again. He heard the sound of a sword being put back in its scabbard. Glaring, he saw Laslow had sheathed his blade. “I can still fight!” Aden protested, scrambling up with new energy at being dismissed like this.

“I know,” The man said, folding his arms behind his back with a friendly look on his face now, instead of the serious one from before. “But I have learned what you have to offer in pure swordsmanship and while impressive it’s lacking.”

“Get knocked down, get back up. It’s how you get stronger, better.” He insisted.

Laslow laughed. “True, but if you wear yourself too much today, you won’t have as much to give tomorrow. You don’t need to have Charlotte insult us to get a spar tomorrow.” The captain turned and made his way off the sparring ring and Aden felt his shoulders slump.

Tris patted him on the back. “Come on, I plan on kicking your butt as well while you’re tired.” She said, clearly planning on doing just that.

“Can I get some water first?” He asked dismally.
“Sure, but don’t take too long, I plan on using some of those moves I just saw.” She grinned.

Rather morosely, he went over and dumped a bucket of water over his head after taking a long drink. Shaking out the water, he moved to go back to the ring. Char stopped him briefly however. “You did well. No one faces Laslow with a sword alone and uses only sword skills and wins. If you want to do better tomorrow, use everything you have. You’ll be surprised.”

“He wiped the floor with me Char.” Aden said gloomily.

“Yes, because like a fool you fought with his weapon, using his rules.” Char said.

“If I want to get better at the sword, I must spar with it.” Aden said resolutely.

Char sighed and looked at him like he was an idiot. “Then instead of trying to defeat him, tomorrow try learning from him. Laslow is talented but he’s not physically the strongest. Nor is he the fastest. He’s quick, and deadly, but he wins with his skill and by wearing his opponent down. Try emulating what he did to you when you spar with Tris, I know she plans to do that towards you as well.”

Aden nodded in thanks before moving over to where Tris was warming up. He still had a lot to learn as a warrior and as a nightblood.

Octavia hovered beside Lincoln’s shoulder, waiting to see if he would need help as he walked towards the sparring area. She knew reaching out to help him would be unwelcome here in the open when he no longer looked like death, merely pale with dark circles under his eyes.

“Go, I’m fine.” He said as she lingered by his side.

“If you need anything.” She said watching him carefully, she’d come so close to losing him after just finding him.

Lincoln sighed and pushed her gently towards the sparring warriors. “You cannot stay cooped up forever, neither can I.”

Smiling in thanks to him, she moved into the sparring area and beckoned Clarke over who was just walking out of the map room, which was odd. “Clarke, get over here I’m feeling rusty and could use a good workout.”

Clarke just sighed and made her way over, unsheathing two of her longer daggers as she walked. “You’ve been sitting on your ass for a few days now, I think I might actually have a chance at winning today.”

She easily ignored the horrified expressions on the Trikru’s faces at her casual address of her sister. They really ought to be used to it by now anyways, she knew the others were just as bad about not standing on decorum around each other. “I’m going to knock you on your ass and there is nothing you can do about it.” She grinned, getting into a ready position.

Clarke surprised her by making the first move. They fought viciously, having learned long ago that to go easy on one another was an insult that could get them killed. Octavia hissed through her teeth as Clarke managed to knee her hard in the side. Using the momentum, she allowed herself to be pushed back, giving her some space. That was the dance between them. Once Clarke was in your space with her daggers and vicious strikes to tendons and vital points you were done. To beat Clarke, you had to hit her before she got that close to you, and well ridiculous risks, like leaving holes in one’s defense to lure Clarke in, were her specialty.
By the time they were done, both of them were panting and both had ended up on their backs or with a blade to a vital spot and forced to concede defeat several times. Octavia panted, enjoying the familiar burn in her muscles and the high it brought. Her new bruises ached a familiar beat that was comforting nowadays. “I totally won.” She said, grinning at Clarke.

Clarke pushed her braid over her shoulder, “I don’t know what match you’re thinking of but I got a good three more death hits on you than you got on me.”

Octavia shrugged, “You’re a general, you have to win by five for it to count.”

“Since when?” Clarke asked, sounding amused as they walked over to the well.

“Since forever, younger sibling makes the rules.” Octavia said firmly. They both were companionable as they washed off the sweat from their faces before heading back to where Lincoln was standing watching the various warriors who were using their morning hours to spar.

“I need to speak with you and Lincoln about a job.” Clarke said, her voice going serious.

Octavia felt her back straighten, “He’s still recovering.”

“But he has information we need. As do the other former reapers.” Clarke said.

Lincoln stepped forward, clearly having heard part of their conversation. “What do you need from me general?”

“I need you to teach my men to impersonate reapers so they can get into the tunnels without notice.” Clarke said.

Octavia frowned. “You can’t send him into the tunnels Clarke.”

“I’m not, sending a recovering addict back to their dealer is a terrible idea. However, we need our men ready to play the part. Can you do it?” She was looking at Lincoln seriously.

He nodded thoughtfully. “I can do it. We can teach the warriors to play at being reapers.”

“Good,” Clarke said, nodding in acceptance at Lincoln.

Octavia saw the look on Clarke’s face. “What else?” She asked, resigned to some crazy plan. That look was never a good thing.

“I need you to knock some sense into the Trikru general’s head. Feel up for a formal spar?” Clarke asked, looking at her rather challengingly.

“Oh, I was born ready.” Octavia said, looking forward to getting to fight the woman who had bothered Dax the night before.

Seven months ago:

Roan was moving with a small detachment through the woods back from inspecting where the largest part of his army was camped. He was staying with a forward detachment, hoping to lead them to a swift victory if they could find and kill whoever was in charge of the attacks. It was then that he heard the distinctive whistle of an arrow traveling through the air. Suddenly, the air was thick with arrows. His horse reared and he was thrown off as it bolted in the chaos.
He leapt to his feet, drawing his sword. Running as fast as he could, he hit the tree line and came upon an archer. He cut the warrior down mercilessly. A sharp pain in his side had him turning to where another spineless piece of shit nomad had just thrown a dagger from his blind side. Ignoring the dagger still in his side, he returned the favor with a quick flick of his wrist, his dagger burying itself in his opponent’s eye.

The screams and cries of his men being killed echoed around him as he grabbed the fallen fool’s spear and hurled it into the back of another archer. With a grunt, he ducked a swinging axe, but was unable to avoid being tackled to the ground. He flipped the warrior, pinning their arms and rained his fists down onto their face till they stopped moving and he heard the sick wet thunk their skull cracking. He went to stand, looking for his next opponent, when he felt a heavy hit on the back of his head.

Stunned, he fell on top of his downed opponent. Before he could regain his bearings, another body was pushing him and pinning him to the ground. He fought and struggled but face down on the ground his positioning was poor. The warrior bound his hands and feet and turned him over. A large man, clearly a member of the banished, stood over him and grinned. “Well, looks like we have a fine prize. I wonder what the Sankru will pay for a prince?”
Monty stared at the thirty warriors from both Trikru and Azgeda alike gathered before him. He would not let down the faith showed in him. They were gathered in the map room, the largest room that allowed them to meet without danger of the mountain spying on them. Stepping forward, he called for their attention.

“I am Monty kom Azgeda and I will be the leading you in training for the attack on the mountain. General Indra will be leading our attack. Our job is complicated, dangerous and if you don’t think you can face the danger get out now.” He waited, watching as no one left the room. Nodding in satisfaction, he gestured to the recovering reapers, who were still somewhat sedated to help with the cravings but they were conscious enough for Monty’s purposes. “Thanks to the healers of the coalition, we have saved our brothers from the curse of the mountain. With the knowledge they can give us, we are going to disguise ourselves as reapers, infiltrate the mountain through the tunnels, and then blow a hole that will let the poisonous air in to kill the mountain for us. So, welcome to reaper school. We will be making reaper clothing for ourselves, learning how to act as reapers, and memorizing the maps of the tunnels underneath the mountain. So get ready to learn, to listen, and to prepare, so we can show those monsters why they should fear our alliance.”

There were murmurs of agreement from throughout the crowd. He sighed, this was going better than expected, but then again if there was anyone the warriors before him hated more than each other and having an assassin as in charge of them even temporarily, it was the mountain.

“We have three days to learn this so all your other duties have been excused. I don’t have time to deal with anyone who can’t work with the rest of us because of clan. If you can’t work together, you’re out and a different warrior can take your place.”

Peri, who was one of the Azgeda warriors under his command spoke up then. “So, we doing anything interesting here boss?”

He sighed, well at least it got them moving. “We’re going to divide into groups. One group will be working with Nut and Bolt on how to handle the explosive materials we’ll be carrying as well as how to work the tone generator so we won’t be attacked by actual reapers in the tunnels. The second group will be working on cannibalizing some uniforms for us. The third group will be memorizing the maps of the tunnels, the rest of you will be working on learning how to be a reaper. We’ll rotate so that every group understands every part of the plan.”

“Team leaders will be Miller, Ryder, Myself, and Indra.”

A Trikru warrior frowned and spoke up. “Why are all the leaders from the Ice Nation or the Trikru? Won’t the other clans be offended?”

“That’s not for you to worry about, this comes from the commander herself.” Monty replied, it had been decided that the men were not to know about the leadership’s concerns about Mountain
surveillance.

Miller stepped up, “Let’s get into groups people, we don’t have all day.”

Six months ago:

Peri stayed lying low as she watched the watering hole and the fools who had chosen to drink form it. The men were writhing in agony as they foamed at the mouth. She’d never gotten to watch so many men die quite like this before and she was enjoying it. There was a beauty to their suffering. She was loath to leave and report that the poison had been successful. It would mean leaving this scene.

Sighing finally in disappointment, she rose and carelessly made her way over the dune, looking at her party who were hiding in the shade it offered. “Success, none of them look like they’ll survive.” She reported happily.

Klark nodded solemnly. “Good, the next one is going to be difficult. It’s the largest watering hole in the dead zone. It will be protected and we’ll have to fight our way in to achieve our goal.”

Peri grinned at the thought of more bloodshed as she mounted her horse cheerfully. The group was silent mainly as they made their way across the barren sands. She would have sang but last time she did Monty had glared at her till she desisted. She may like death but pissing off assassins would lead to her own, and she wasn’t so fond of that idea. Instead, she began to hum.

It took hours before they began to approach the largest watering hole.

“We’re locking down till night fall.” Klark ordered bringing them into the shadow of a large dune of sand. “Monty take Peri with you. Scout out the area and report back on the enemy’s numbers.”

“Got it.” Monty replied, pulling a bow and quiver off of his saddle and hooking them onto his person. Peri caught his eye. “Ready?” He asked.

“Of course, people’s murders to plot.” She grinned.

Monty just rolled his eyes as they moved around the dune and began the slow process of approaching on foot in the fading light of the day. As they got to the top of the edge of the crater they were able to peek over and get a look at the inside of the crater. It wasn’t a particularly defensible position, but the sixty odd men meant it would be a long and bloody battle. There was no way Monty was going to be sneaking in and poisoning the water directly. Besides they needed that water for themselves or they wouldn’t survive much longer.

She was surprised to see Monty letting out a hiss of surprise and anger. Following his gaze, she saw the battered form of the prisoner they had tied to a post. It took a second to realize why, but the pauldron on the man’s shoulder made his identity easy to guess. She and Monty shared shocked glances before they both began to carefully map out the positions of the motley group of banished and nomads and even some bandits who had turned the crater into a sort of base camp. Foolish of them to think Azgeda wouldn’t strike out into the dead zone though.

The trip back was quicker without the need to be as careful about not being spotted. With night having fallen, two dark shapes on the sand were far harder to spot, not to mention they now knew the enemy didn’t have guards watching the desert. Fools. Sliding down the coarse sand, they came to a halt at their own party’s camp.
Peri began to empty her boots of sand while Monty gave his report.

“Fuck,” Klark exclaimed when he got to the part where Roan was a prisoner. “Is he alive?”

“He was an hour ago.” Peri said, paying attention. This was the part where they planned how to kill the meat bags in the crater.

“We can’t take those numbers.” Klark looked around at their party who were all listening to this conversation, weariness in their bones. Peri didn’t understand the exhaustion when there was blood to be had but at least she could see the fight in them.

Raven spoke up from where she was seated next to her two seconds. “We can burn them.”

“What?” One of the warriors asked.

“The greek fire I’ve been working on, it’s not perfect. Right now, it’s more of a gasoline accelerant, but if we pour it into the crater and they try to put it out it’ll only grow.” Raven said, slowly gesturing to the barrels they’d been lugging along with them for the trip.

“We have to get Roan out before we can light the fire.” Klark said evenly, staring at the barrels with consideration.

Peri smiled at the thought of burning their enemies alive. “What if we burn some of them and while they spread the fire we grab Roan?”

Monty took the tip of a dagger and began to outline the enemies camp. He made a large X where Roan was being kept.

Raven bent down and pointed to the far side of the crater. “We light my bad boys and roll them down they’ll explode.”

Klark nodded. “Peri, you up for causing some chaos by shooting down on them with what arrows we have left after the first reservoir?”

“Yup!” Peri said cheerfully.

“If we poison the water first they shouldn’t be able to defend themselves while we extract Roan.” Monty said thoughtfully.

“We need that water though,” Raven said, “and just the makeshift bombs here could make the water undrinkable. I’m not sure.”

Klark’s face went serious as she said her next words. “Our water will run out halfway back to our borders. If we slice one of the horse’s minor veins and collect some of their blood, we can make it. Though we might have to kill one of the horses for some lymphatic fluid to dilute the iron in the blood.”

Peri laughed. “And I guess we really will be the bloodthirsty won’t we?”

“Do we really have to rescue the prince?” Raven asked into the awkward silence as they all looked rather sick at the idea of using their precious horses that way.

“He’s one of us,” Klark said firmly. “and the heir to the throne, his life is worth more than ours. Monty you poison the water from a distance with a slingshot. If they don’t notice, we give it an hour before we execute the rest of the attack. Those bombs and the few arrows we have left won’t be
“This plan is a disaster waiting to happen.” One of the men grunted. “Stupid prince getting himself captured.”

“We have a rescue and a mission to complete. Monty you poison the water. When the first of them start showing signs of sickness Raven you send in the bombs. Peri, you keep our men on the ridge and shoot downwards, kill them all. I’ll extract Roan while everyone is distracted.”

Peri grinned in anticipation, this was why she followed Klark. Nia could talk of death all she wanted but she didn’t think Nia would ever personally impale a living prisoner on a pike and mount them on the border. Nia may be bloodthirsty, but Klark led the bloodbaths. Nia was talk, Klark was action.

Present:

Lexa stared at the map in front of her. “Klark how are we going to keep our forces from truly killing each other?”

“What if we make it a brawl?” Klark suggested from her place around the planning table.

“A brawl?” Lexa asked curiously.

“No weapons drawn, just let our men beat the crap out of each other with their fists. The mountain just needs to be focused on us and think we’re disintegrating.” Klark said slowly and thoughtfully.

Gustus nodded. “It could work, less chance for fatalities.”

Lexa considered it, “How long will it take for your men to be informed?” She looked at Indra and Klark.

“I can have Laslow briefing his men and spreading word down the line within half a day. For everyone to be informed…. a day at least for something this delicate.” Klark tapped a finger meaningfully against the table. “I’ve already sent for my healers to be moved to the edge of the line so they will be on hand for any injuries.”

“I can have our men briefed in half a day, but as the general said, more time may be needed to be sure. Especially since I won’t be there when this brawl breaks out” Indra said shortly.

Lexa raised an eyebrow at Indra’s lack of bite towards Klark. There was a story there and she had a feeling it had to do with the woman’s black eye. “How is the training of our strike team going?”

“They’re being trained as we speak.” Indra said. “We need a week but they can be ready in three days if need be.”

“Will your forces in TonDC be fighting for or against Azgeda in the brawl?” Lexa said curiously looking over Klark.

Gustus smiled. “I do believe they should be fighting for us, repayment for our hospitality.” He said gruffly.

“I’m sure they’ll be glad to face some of their comrades in battle.” Klark said with some amusement.

“I want snipers in the trees.” Lexa said seriously. “They can function as our eyes during the chaos.”
“With Raven’s gear we have six radios. We send one with the strike team and Indra, one for myself, one for Anya, one for Laslow, one for you, that leaves us with one for any forces in the trees to signal us with warnings. Wouldn’t it be better to leave the last radio with our healers so they can be summoned immediately?” Klark suggested.

Indra spoke up then. “In a brawl none of the injuries should be severe. We should be more worried about anything unexpected occurring.”

Klark nodded in acceptance toward the Trikru general. “When the twins are done working with Monty’s strike team, they can get radios to their respective destinations and teach you how to work them once Raven can break through the jamming signal.”

“Then we have a plan.” Lexa said evenly. “Go, see to it that your tasks are set in motion. Klark if I could speak with you when you’ve seen to it that your messengers are sent.”

“Of course, Heda.” Klark said looking at her curiously but accepting the summons.

Her war counsel, quickly departed to see to it that their forces were coached on what was about to occur in the following days. She let herself sit in her throne and consider various outcomes from the war. The other clans would be unhappy with this. However, the victory would keep them from complaining outright. If spoils from the mountain were divided evenly, then their rulers if not the generals would accept the turn of events.

The coalition would be delicate after the fall of the mountain though. A fact she would have to deal with once she returned to Polis. With no common enemy, peace would have to hold through politics, not hatred and promises of war. Titus would want her to assure her position as the commander of the coalition not just the Trikru. As if this victory wouldn’t do that. It would take some adjustments as the coalition would settle from a state of war preparedness to peace. Hopefully, there would be a boom of births to keep her warriors home and settled.

She wasn’t sure how long she sat there going through possibilities before Klark entered the room closing the door behind her to ensure their privacy. “Lexa, what do you need?”

Lexa swallowed thickly. She did not like the conversation they were going to have but it was necessary, given she had accepted Klark would be allowed to perform her military coup. “We need to discuss Azgeda while we can before we are at war in earnest.”

Klark looked surprised but understanding as she grabbed a chair and pulled it over before dropping into it. “What do you need to know?”

“If we win against the mountain, the coalition will be delicate. It has never functioned in a time of true peace. I need to know if you’re coup will upset that.” Lexa said, hating having to be Heda here and now with Klark but knowing it needed to be done.

Klark looked serious as she replied. “I control the capitol’s interior security right now. Bellamy has been securing it and finding every one of Nia’s loyalists inside and assigning them to a member of the guard. My territory is the northeastern one inside our borders. Thanks to the still tight bonds with south east section, the new general Fredrick would be a fool to stand against me. He served under Roan, but he knows his territory would have starved without my assistance after the border dispute. Not to mention, my efforts secured his border for him. The bulk of his army would follow my orders without question. He has stayed out of politics since he was a captain. Seth is aware of the coup and will support me. He controls the southwest territory. Several of his captains have served under me and are closely allied with my forces. He won’t step in politically but he hates Nia.”
“And Quint?” Lexa asked, though she supposed she knew the answer to that one was obvious having had the misfortune to meet the man before.

“Quint is in the northwest. He won’t have time to intercede and he’d be outnumbered greatly.” Klark said with some venom in her voice.

“How has Nia allowed you to gain such influence?” Lexa asked, confused on realizing Klark was confident she controlled three fourths of her clan’s territory.

Klark hummed, tilting her head, seeming to organize her thoughts. “Because I wasn’t a proper threat till she forced me to be one.”

“What do you mean?” Lexa asked curiously.

Klark wrapped her fingers around her knee. “I wasn’t the one who challenged Roan.”

Lexa felt her eyes widen. “He was meant to kill you after the eastern war when you suddenly became a credible threat.”

Klark nodded. “It did not work out that way, I rose too quickly for her to realize the threat I was becoming. Her reign will end because of her arrogance.”

“And if you’re wrong and Frederick chooses to defend Nia along with Quint and they get her out of the city?” Lexa asked.

“Then we will have a civil war.” Klark said seriously.

“How sure are you of Frederick's loyalty?” Lexa asked.

“Even if he chooses to stand against me, the majority of his men and the civilians from his territory will stand with me. If it comes to civil war, Nia won’t be able to win. Even Quint is not well liked amongst the army, though he is the greatest threat. The risk comes when I challenge her for the throne. If I don’t claim the throne legitimately, coup or not, my reign will be called into question later and seen as illegitimate.” Klark’s hands fisted. “I have to defeat her in single combat or I will always be the general who stole the throne.”

“There’s no other way is there, not with you lacking a claim by blood?” Lexa asked, already knowing the answer.

“No,” Klark said, “However, if I succeed I can open our borders to trade. If Azgeda complies with a peace time coalition, our allies will follow. Your peace will be secured.” Klark stared at her seriously.

Lexa stood, walking forward and pulling Klark to her feet. “Don’t lose.”

“I won’t.” Klark said, gripping her hips, holding them close.

“If it comes to a civil war, I will take what I now know of Ontari and Nia’s plans for her and declare her a traitor to the coalition.” Lexa said.

“I know, but I pray it doesn’t come to that. The amount of deaths would be devastating. My people cannot go through a civil war and still protect ourselves. We’d need coalition protection afterwards.” Klark said slowly.

“Azgeda are my people as well Klark. It is why I am allowing you to risk everything on this coup
when by right I should march my army to Nia’s gates. I know the needless death of your people must be avoided if possible.” Lexa said hoarsely, wondering what it would take for Klark to trust her people with her.

Klark breathed out, shaking slightly. “The coming days are going to be filled with blood. If I die, protect my people Lexa. If nothing else, having met you has reassured me that my death will not mean the end of the hopes of my people.” Klark looked at her, her eyes full of emotion as she watched her carefully.

“I will protect your people Klark, I swear it, I have already sworn it.” Lexa replied.

Klark pulled her into a kiss that tasted of desperation and Lexa felt herself returning it with equal measure. She was going to be sending a second lover to the Ice Nation, to Nia, and this time willingly. Her hands clenched in Klark’s hair as she held her close to her as they reassured each other of each other’s presence. Panting, she turned her head, adjusting the angle with urgency as she felt Klark walking her backwards back into her throne.

Klark pulled back with a groan from deep in her throat at the loss of contact, her heavy breath hitting Lexa’s face. “We’ll survive.”

“We have to.” Lexa replied, pulling Klark back down into her, wishing that was true. However, there was nothing left to do but to roll the dice and see where the odds fell. Their decisions were made, and the course set.

Tris did not want to move from her current place on the ground. Her head was comfortably resting on Char’s stomach while Aden was using hers as a pillow. Anya had run them to the ground after finding out about Laslow. Everything hurt and she never wanted to move again. It was kind of Char to join them in hell despite not being ordered to do so. “Aden please say you aren’t going to spar with Laslow again tomorrow.”

Char reached over and poked her in the cheek. “I won’t let fancy pants sword captain to hurt our nightblood.”

“That won’t stop Anya from hurting us for the man.” Tris said, annoyed by Char’s willingness to support Aden in his foolishness.

“Tris he’s the most skilled swordsman I’ve ever seen!” Aden said.

She rolled her eyes, “So, watch his forms and sparring, don’t let him wipe the floor with you.”

“This is a chance I’ll never have again.” Aden protested. “I don’t understand why it’s such a big deal.” He said in frustration.

“Char, you take that one since you’re encouraging this madness.” Tris said in annoyance.

Char groaned. “Because you are a candidate for Heda. Azgeda and Trikru are still at odds with each other, even with this alliance. If Laslow decided to kill you as a blow to the Trikru, he could so in a spar and claim it was a training accident. Your death could start a war. Tris and I are disposable, you are not.” She explained patiently.

Tris could feel Aden shifting his head on her stomach. “You are an assassin of Azgeda, and Tris you’re going to be important in the army. Why should my life weigh so much? I’m not Heda, I’m just an initiate.” He sounded indignant that they would value their lives so little.
“When you are Heda our lives will be yours to do with as you wish.” Tris harshly. “You are not a simple warrior. You are destined to be a leader. We are followers.”

“I refuse to accept that.” Aden said stubbornly.

“I think I liked you better when you still sounded like Titus’ puppet.” Tris complained remembering how proper and aloof Aden had tended to be when he’d first been Lincoln’s second.

“I’m sorry for ever acting like that.” He said, she could feel him cringing.

Tris sighed. “He is an ass.” She conceded.

Char giggled and the sound spread through the three of them before she managed to choke out, “We call him the Ass Keeper in Azgeda.”

That did it. Tris could barely breath as she laughed. “It’s true.” She managed to get out.

Aden let out a snort. “I used to think he was super wise till I left the tower.”

Tris sighed as the laughter faded. Reaching down, she ran her fingers through Aden’s hair.

“He was always telling us love is weakness, but he’s wrong. We’re not better than anyone else. We just have black blood and will be able to inherit the spirit someday.” Tris could feel him shaking slightly. “He speaks as if Heda’s death should not be mourned, but Lexa…”

“She’s your Klark.” Char said, voice full of understanding. “If she dies, it will be a tragedy, something to be mourned. However, you will continue her work and we will protect you as you do it.”

Tris hummed in agreement. “If you could just stay alive, that would be great.”

“I’m still going to accept Laslow’s invitation to spar with him tomorrow.” He said resolutely.

She groaned. “Try not to lose then idiot.”

“Of course,” he replied.

“Are you going to be this obstinate when you’re Heda?” She asked in resignation of a future of trying to keep him from getting himself killed.

Raven was woken from her position of drooling on her work table by the arrival of the twins who just face planted onto their bedrolls and didn’t move. Reaching her arms back, she let her back let out several deeply satisfying cracks. With a grunt of satisfaction, she went back to working on her radios. She’d gotten past the jamming signal last night before she’d passed out. Their radios would work now. All she had to do now was find the signal the mountains broadcasted on and they would be able to listen in on the mountain’s ‘secure’ communications.

Being ahead of schedule was a lovely feeling and the sleep and meal she’s allowed herself had been lovely. Getting back to work, she slowly and methodically noted down which stations weren’t working when she heard it. It was scratchy and not tuned in properly but she heard something.

Adrenaline rushed through her system as she tuned the radio carefully. Suddenly, she could hear voices coming through and she raised her hands cheering in victory! Then she listened to what they were actually saying and felt her blood run cold. Not stopping to think, she got to her feet and ran for
the commander's quarters. Clarke would be there, they needed to know. They’d waited too long.

Ignoring the surprised guard, she pounded on the commander's door. The guard reached to pull her back but she just snapped at him. “The commander will have your head if you prevent me from getting this message to her.”

The man stepped aside, giving her room as she continued to beat on the door with her fist.

It flew open and she stared at the commander, her hair was in disarray, her jacket pulled on over sleeping clothes. “Raven?” She asked in surprise.

Raven didn’t have time for formality or any other delays. Shoving her way in past the stunned commander, she spotted Clarke yanking on her clothing next to the bed.

Clarke walked over as soon as she fastened her pants. “Raven, what’s wrong?”

The commander seemed to have decided it was worth hearing her out because she’d closed the door and waved the guard off.

“The radio I got is working, we’re able to listen in on Mt. Weather communication.” She said quickly.

Clarke lit up, grabbing her by the shoulder in happiness. Raven had a feeling the only reason she wasn’t being hugged was because Clarke was still in nothing but a pair of pants and a breast binding and she figured hugging someone else in front of your lover while half naked was bad form. “That’s amazing! We weren’t expecting you to get in for another day at least.”

“It’s not great.” Raven said interrupting the praise. “They are sending out a spotter for a missile strike on TonDC right now. We have four hours at most before they strike.”

Six months ago:

Clarke lay against the top of the ridge above the crater where the enemy was camped. Their lack of guard and belief in their safety would be their undoing. She waited there, lying under the stars that stood out brightly in the dark of the dead zone, the only break in the overwhelming emptiness. Monty had used a sling to get the poison over the ridge and into the water. They feared for a few moments that someone would notice the soft plop of the bundle of deadly material hitting the water. However, no one had raised an alarm. Finally, she heard it, the thumping sound of the bombs rolling down the opposite side of the crater.

Closing her eyes, she waited for the boom. The screams announced the bombs had blown. With quick movements, she slid over the edge of the ridge. As soon as she hit the ground, she was off for the post where Roan’s unconscious, hopefully still alive, form was tied. Staying low and in the shadows as the chaos drew the enemy's attention, she dropped down behind Roan. Slipping the knife out of her boot, she sliced his bonds with one hand while covering his mouth with the other to make sure he didn’t give away her presence in surprise. She need not have worried though. The man was clearly unconscious but she could feel his breath against her hand and the heat of his still beating heart in the cold descending on the dead zone.

A quick check let her know Peri and the others were adding to the chaos and flames. Men were also falling over writhing in agony from the poisoned water. Good, everything was going according to plan. Lifting Roan and carrying him in a fireman’s carry was out of the question, someone would surely notice that. Hooking her arms under his armpits, she dragged him towards the rim of the crater.
she came down earlier.

Roan was heavy and the light from the burning men and horses was lighting up the crater more and more, increasing the chances of her being seen. Gasping with effort, she managed to secure Roan to a rope. Giving it a sharp tug, she watched as he was hauled up by the two warriors she’d taken with her to her position. Which is of course when her position was spotted.

She barely managed to dodge the axe sent flying her way. Going up the sides would be too slow and leave her too open, it wasn’t going to happen. The reservoir and all that remained of the enemy force was between her and the flat exit from the crater. Drawing her daggers, she bared her teeth and stood her ground. Her only option was to kill every enemy in this crater or die.

The first one on her was a large burly man who charged with a war cry, his wild mane of hair gave him a frightful visage as he came crashing down on her position. Spinning, she avoided being cleaved in two. While his axe was in the sand, she moved in driving a dagger straight up under his chin and into his brain. Leaving it there, she spun, unsheathing the short sword her opponent wore at his side.

Bringing the blade around with her, she slashed deeply into the side of the second warrior. After that, it was a dance of ducking and weaving. She moved through their attacks, striking them down, till finally no one else on the field was moving. Nothing but corpses and the burning corpses of some of the fools. Looking down at herself, she realized she was coated in blood. She’d sliced too many throats open and the spray had soaked her. She could feel it dripping down her face and in her hair. Moving through the bodies, she gathered her various daggers, cleaning them and then sheathing them before exiting through the entrance to the crater.

Following the line of the edge, she came to her men who were arguing rather loudly over whether to go back in and grab her to hell with her orders. She was touched they all wanted to do it. She cleared her throat. “Not that I mind the sentiment but it’s unnecessary.”

“Holy shit,” Raven said looking at her wide eyed. “Did you bath in their blood?”

Clarke raised an eyebrow at how she only sounded half kidding. “Let’s get out of here. The further we get before sunrise the less water we’ll need.”

The party was oddly silent as they followed her orders. She saw how they were looking at her. She must really be a sight. Moving to her saddle, she started pulling the bedding off and leaving it on the ground. “Take anything that’s not necessary and leave it. We can’t afford for our horses to be burdened with extra weight if we’re to survive this.”

Slowly daggers, axes, armor and other pieces of weaponry and bedrolls began to hit the ground. She stripped her own armor off, leaving only the pauldron and three knives on her person. As general, taking it off felt like a betrayal of her people’s faith in her. Pulling herself into the saddle, she noted Monty had Roan’s form laid over the front of his saddle. Some emergency bandages had clearly been applied.

“Move out,” She ordered.

They pushed their horses as fast as they dared in the cool night air. As the sun began to peek out from over the horizon, she gulped. Their border was still not in sight and she could feel the burn of thirst in her throat. Closing her eyes, she called out, “Hold up.”

The exhausted, dehydrated troops stopped at her order. Looking around, she wished she did not have to do what she was about to do, even if she’d already decided it hours ago. “Dismount. Rok, your
horse is the darkest. It’ll overheat the fastest now that the sun is out. I’m sorry.”

The warrior didn’t protest. She and the others gave him what privacy they could as he held his horse’s face against his and murmured to it softly. They didn’t have much time. Finally, she approached and unsheathed a sharp thin blade. “I’ll make it fast.”

The man nodded but she could see tears in his eyes as he stroked the nose of his horse.

She didn’t cringe as she drove the blade into the animal’s brain. Slitting its throat and letting its heart pump out its life saving blood would have been wisest. However, warriors were bound to their horses. They cared for them deeply and she would not ask that of Rok, nor any of her warriors. The animal died quickly and the warrior only let out a choked sound as he stroked it through its final shudders.

It was a nasty business, emptying the animal’s blood into their canteens. Once the blood was emptied, she cut into the lymphatic system, draining the liquid in that into their canteens as well to help dilute the blood. It was a foul process that further coated her in a mixture of hot blood over the top of her already dried blood covered form. Once they had the precious liquid mixed they began to mount up again.

She’d used the opportunity to force some of the blood mixture down Roan’s throat and to do what she could to treat his injuries. She had no doubt he’d have an infection wrecking his system by the time they made it back to the border. Swallowing thickly, she and the others silently mounted up, Rok being pulled up behind another warrior as they continued on their way.

The sun continued to rise and the heat baked down on them, driving them to drink the blood in their canteens before it could congeal from the heat. However, they did not stop, moving forward unrelentingly. She could feel it in the air that was beating down on them, though her men were exhausted she knew that they felt hope run through their bones. So, they moved forward hitting the border as the ground became more stable and trees began to appear almost suddenly from the sands. She’d had many hours to wonder what had killed almost all life in the dead zone with such sharp borders, though she assumed it was the bombs that ended the previous world.

Shaking off those thoughts though, she pulled herself up in the saddle and pulled her war horn off of her saddle. She wasn’t entirely positive of where the nearest village was, they could have easily overshot their arrival, ending up farther north or south than they had intended. However, they needed assistance and hopefully the ones summoned by her horn would be Azgeda troops.

The road they’d come across indicated they must be close to some sort of border village. Bringing her horn to her lips, she raised it and blew the deep bellowing cry of her people. It echoed through the trees. Moving her horse forward so that she was clearly at the head of the procession, they kept moving. She prayed for a stream or for a detachment of the army.

Then she heard it, the thundering of hooves. They came around a corner and saw a village laid out before them and she saw what was left of Roan’s once impressive army. Fredrick, his highest ranking captain, would be managing the men camped round this village. There was a detachment coming up towards them that came to a startled halt at the sight of them. They were wide eyed and clearly unsure of what to do.

She looked over her shoulder at her men. “We head straight to the well to hell with formality.”

They nodded in exhaustion.

Sitting upright, she rode down that road like it belong to her. The Azgeda warriors backed their
beasts out of her way, she saw the warriors roused by her horn coming out of their tents flocking and following her into the town center as she road. When they hit the town, the civilians began to pop their heads out and stream into the streets as they came to a stop at the well. Staying mounted, she realized she’d have to say something as her men began to dismount.

Raising her fist for silence, the murmuring of the crowd of civilians and warriors fell silent. “The dead zone is impassible. The oases within it offer nothing but death to our enemies. Roan has been returned to our people! We have only to hunt down the last of the rats that plague our land. Victory is ours!”

The crowd swelled with cheers at the thought of this long awful war being at an end. She wasn’t sure where it started but the crowd began to chant “Klark, Klark, Klark.” It spread with a great swell of sound becoming a roar.

Staring down at them, she was sure that everything had been worth it to protect these people. Her body was exhausted, barely holding itself together. Her skin, throat, and clothing was caked with sand and blood but she was triumphant. No one else would get through the border, a few weeks of smoking their enemies out of the forests and hills and it would finally, finally, be over. Raising her fist, she watched the crowd around her as they continued to cheer.
A lot of you have been bringing up the ark in the comments. So we figured we'd answer the question up here instead of individually. What happened with the ark will be in the sequel to ADL. Clarke and co will find out what happened but whether that is that they all died, they came down, they will come down, or something else you'll have to wait to find out. We'll be taking a few months break after we finish ADL before we start on the sequel but we have the sequel plotted out and will be starting it sometime this winter or late fall. During that time we'll be writing some other stories and will put out a few oneshots in the ADL world to tide you over. Hopefully that answers your questions.

Clarke could hear the wind whistling in her ears as she pushed her horse as fast as he could go. Their hearts were beating as one as they flew across the ground heading for the Azgeda line. She didn’t have time, she must look a fright wearing only what clothes she could grab off the floor of Lexa’s room, her shirt on backwards, her hair wild and flying about her. None of that mattered though, what mattered was the time, and they had so little of it if they were to save the lives of those in TonDC. It was a part of war that Clarke had not missed, the long monotonous waiting before adrenaline fueled blur that was the actual fighting. The blood was pounding in her ears and she let herself fall into the rhythm of movement, letting her endless list of plans fall away as she focused on moving with her horse.

She was brought out of her almost focused trance when she came charging into her camp. Flinging herself out of the saddle as she brought her horse to a stop, she threw the reins at a warrior who had come running to see what was happening. “Bring Anya to the command tent now!” She ordered as she moved to the trough set out for the horses and dunked her head straight into the water.

“General?” Laslow asked, running up to her, clearly having been summoned while she was getting the berries out of her hair.

She stood straight, deciding a brief dunk in a trough was all she had time for to get the blasted red out. “Wake everyone, our brawl with the Trikru starts as soon as we can get our men up and moving.”

His eyes widened before he was off shouting orders.

Clarke breathed a sigh that he didn’t question why they were moving out days earlier than planned. She just knew he’d have their army marshalled in under an hour. After all, she’d trained these men to be ready to move out as quickly as possible. They were a well-oiled machine. Entering the command tent, she didn’t even bother waking Lisa, who was sleeping in what was normally her bed. She was in her trunk and pulling on her uniform in moments. She was fastening her jacket when Anya came in without announcing herself.

“What’s happened?” The Trikru captain asked urgently.

“The radio is working, the mountain is preparing to bomb TonDC, if we move now there is a chance they’ll delay to allow us to destroy ourselves.” Clarke tightly braided her hair out of the way, some red still showing through, but mostly it was back to its usual gold.
“Change of plans.” Clarke said, halting the captain’s movement. “You and a team of your choosing are to find and kill the spotter from the mountain to further prevent the launch of a missile. You are to make it look like an accident due to the spreading chaos and not a targeted hit.” Clarke tossed her a radio. “Gustus is taking command of TonDC and the brawl in your stead, his place on Lexa’s guard has been filled by Dax.”

Clarke sheathed several of her knives, ignoring the startled and clearly terrified form of her medical apprentice, who had woken up at some point in the last few minutes.

“Are the men even ready for the attack?” Anya asked in confusion holding the radio clearly not knowing what to do with it.

“They don’t have the choice not to be.” Clarke replied, sheathing a short sword along her back with her bow and pulling on her pauldron. “Give that radio to Charlotte, she should be able to help you find the spotter using it.”

Anya finally gave a nod of assent. “It’ll be done.”

“Good hunting captain.” Clarke said as the woman turned to leave. She saw the serious look on Anya’s face but also the slight approval.

Turning to Lisa, who was now pulling on her own clothing, clearly realizing something was happening, she began giving more orders. “Get to the medical tent, rouse everyone. They need to be ready to start treating patients soon. Tell Brady he’s in charge of the tent until further notice.”

“Yes, General!” Lisa answered before darting out of the tent as well.

Clarke strode out of the tent, shoving the war paint into a pocket as she walked, she could apply that later. She could see her men marshalling themselves. Breathing deeply, she grabbed the reigns of her horse back from the warrior who was still holding them for her. Swinging herself into the saddle, she began to ride making sure the men were prepared. As she rode, she lathered her white war paint across her face. They were heading out to war again.

____________________________________________________________________________

Six months ago:

Nia stared at the messenger in front of her, who had just interrupted her day, and somehow knew it was not going to be good news. “Rise,” She ordered as she examined the man, clearly from her son’s army though he wore that unfortunate blue those idealistic fools in Klark’s army had been sporting.

“My queen, General Klark has won the war!” The man was clearly vibrating with excitement at being the given the honor of bringing her the news.

She swallowed thickly. “And Prince Roan?” Her son was her nation’s future ruler. He was her greatest ally.

“He was captured. However, General Klark rode into the desert and brought him back to our people.” He said excitedly.

“And how has this war been won exactly?” Nia asked carefully.

“Every water hole and reservoir in the dead zone has been poisoned. No sand rat will be able to
survive the journey across it.” He proclaimed.

Nia felt herself settling back in her throne as she accepted this information. Clearly, this was a forward messenger and she’d get a formal report from her son as well as Klark within the next few days. Still, the news was dire. With the water poisoned, conquering their neighbor across that border was impossible. She grit her teeth. While it had not been a prominent plan of hers, it had been a possibility she had not wanted to discount. Gripping the arms of her throne, she waited as the messenger opened his mouth to speak.

“The people are calling her the Undefeated because she did not lose a single battle!” He proudly informed her. “The army is under her command till Prince Roan is well enough to travel, and she can come here to proclaim the victory properly.”

She felt her knuckles turning white. A single general commanding half her armies was unthinkable.

“The death toll from poisoning the water.” One of her advisors said in some horror, finally overcoming his shock to speak. “Those who live and travel across the dead zone will die. It will be catastrophic, thousands will perish.”

Nia wanted to huff in annoyance, the man was weak. The death was significant but a decisive win for Azgeda. She was more concerned with the closing of an entire border when it came to her plans for expansion as well as the fact her son had been captured and his army usurped. Killing war heroes was unfortunately not how to keep a stable clan. She would need to speak to her son, as well as Klark.

Present:

Lexa stared as Nut and Bolt set up a radio relay station in the command room. They both were acting very serious and professional and their expert handling of the machines clearly showed that they knew how to use them. Deciding that they had it in hand and were in the most fortified building in TonDC, she moved to leave. If the missile couldn’t be delayed, they had orders to take the tunnel and flee, their knowledge and mastery of technology too valuable to be wasted.

Moving quickly, she felt the weight of her command as her men pulled on their weapons and began to prepare to move out. Gustus was marshalling the civilians with their orders to flee for the woods once the brawling started. The reaper teams were out of the village. She’d seen them slipping out a half hour earlier with Indra in the lead. Mounting her horse, she felt it moving uneasily below her, clearly sensing her tension. Reaching down, she stroked its neck waiting for it to settle. Walking the creature to the center of the village, she gazed around and was impressed with how quickly her people had marshaled themselves.

The town hushed as she sat there on her horse. Most of her men were on foot. The trees and terrain meant horses didn’t do well off roads here. Clearing her voice, she spoke loudly knowing no one from the mountain could understand her words.

“Today we take the mountain! While our forces do this we must keep the mountain’s eyes firmly on us. So fight, do not kill, but fight like the warriors that you are!” She roared.

There was an answering roar from her men as they moved out to face their allies. Everything depended on this looking real. She only prayed it didn’t become real.

They moved in silence and eager anticipation as they moved through the woods until the first
Azgeda warrior dropped from the trees, tackling one of her forward warriors. After that, chaos reigned. She heard the war cries of her people and the Azgeda forces. They all were clobbering each other with an unholy glee. Turning her horse, she felt hands gripping onto her leg. With a sharp fist, she cracked the idiot trying to grab her over the head, forcing him to let go.

Dax seemed to appear from nowhere, lifting the would be attacker up and tossing him bodily away. It was in impressive show of strength, she thought, as she kicked at another approaching Azgeda warrior. She fell into a rhythm. The push and pull of knocking people off of her as Dax would throw them about like bales of hay for the horses. The man had a bleeding nose and some incredible bruising across his face just beginning to show. With sharp eyes she could see that no one had been crushed by the ever moving forces. The Azgeda warriors in Trikru colors seemed to be enthusiastically assisting in clobbering their brothers.

Then there was Klark, cresting a hill in full regalia, her hair golden once more, she was yanking some of the more violent members of her clan back and ordering them to the rear. Lexa kicked her horse forward, continuing with her task of moving to wherever things were getting out of hand and separating people. Bloody teeth and bruising faces were becoming the norm the longer this lasted. They were well into the fog zone by now though, their reapers would be grabbing some of their warriors and making the attack on the mountain. She gave out a cry and grabbed the back of one of her warrior’s coats, yanking him off an Azgeda warrior he was beating.

Monty cursed under his breath as he tossed an explosive up over his head, they didn’t have time to do this slowly or carefully. The men above him were attaching the explosives to the underside of their furs to disguise their presence. Reaching back down, he grabbed the last brick of explosive and chucked it up, praying someone caught it before it broke and Raven murdered them. With that, he was up and out of the bunker in seconds, several detonators inside of his clothing.

“All clear general.” He reported to Indra, who was buckling a bomb under her armor.

“Finish securing your cargo.” The woman ordered harshly as the men continued to strap themselves with explosives.

Monty shared a concerned look with Miller before they started getting their teams in white war paint and blood smears around their mouths. The Trikru made affronted faces as they painted white marks on their faces. There was general discontent as they smeared animal blood across their faces. Examining his men, he nodded in satisfaction, they made passable reapers as long as no one noticed that there was a distinct lack of self-mutilation. What was important was that from a distance it was passable.

Indra had no need for inspirational speeches or words. The men knew the importance of what they were doing and just the orders would do, “Move out.”

He moved swiftly and looped the false binds around Indra’s wrists. Only fearing for his life a little bit as he tied a blindfold around her head and began to lead them through the trees to the caves. Their group was splitting into individuals with their ‘prisoners’ so that they didn’t look like too organized of a mass. He knew a few of the fake reapers would be grabbing people out of the chaos that was rising up around TonDC if possible to help add to their numbers. He wasn’t going to risk that, just skirting round the chaos and heading straight for the tunnels. There wasn’t time to worry about much else.

He could hear some truly creative insults being hurled through the air as they skirted around and away from the brawl. How Clarke and Heda intended to stop this chaos once they no longer needed
the distraction he had no idea. The heavy wear of the reapers weighed down on him, he could feel sweat dripping down his back, making his shirt stick to him.

Indra tripped slightly and Monty cursed under his breath. “Sorry.”

“Avoid killing me.” Indra snapped while following him as he pulled her along the woods at the fastest speed he dared with a blindfolded prisoner. Which, considering they were both highly trained, was quite a quick clip. It helped that Indra’s blindfold was tied in such a way that she could see the ground immediately before her feet. The heavy reaper gear was far too hot for the sunny day and he wished for nothing more than his regular clothing as he felt himself sweating.

Monty felt his lungs burning slightly as they arrived at the mouth of the tunnels. Scanning the area, he was surprised at the lack of any actual reapers they’d encountered so far. The remaining reapers had been increasingly aggressive but despite being deep inside the blockade now, he hadn’t seen so much as a hint of a true reaper. Ignoring it for the moment, he moved to a log clearly used by the actual reapers to attach their prisoners to while they waited to enter the tunnels. It took some effort but he got Indra attached to it in such a way she could break free quickly if needed. He spun on his heel, sword drawn, at the sound of someone approaching from the woods. A breath of relief left him as he saw it was some of their party.

It was Miller arriving with Peri, tied and blindfolded behind him, along with a few of the others. An hour to start the brawl, at least an hour to grab and haul their load in, time was precious, they would have to be quick if they had any hope of preventing the missile. The only reason they had any time at all was because the brawl was doing its job and distracting the mountain but they couldn’t depend on that. He shared a wide eyed panicked look with Raven as Indra gave new orders.

“Into the tunnels, Raven stay in the middle.” It was truly surprising Indra could be so commanding and in control, despite being tied and blindfolded.

The tunnels were dank and smelled of rotting human flesh. He could feel himself gagging as they moved deeper and deeper into them. The comforting presence of Miller at his elbow was keeping him settled enough to examine their surroundings. Signs of the reapers activity were all about, from footprints to human waste. Yet, even with the overwhelming darkness, they didn’t see or even hear any actual reapers.

“General, something isn’t right.” He said cautiously as they continued on through the maze only some of their number had had the time to memorize.

“We cannot control it,” She replied, “but I agree, this is too easy.” There was a snarl to her voice as she spoke.

Looking at Raven, who had moved forward some, he asked lowly. “Is there time to send a scout to inspect what’s waiting for us?”

She shook her head. “We’re already hitting their estimated time of launch.” Her voice was strained and he could feel the fear between all of them who knew why the plan had been accelerated.

He’d had enough of the death of civilians and having entire groups of people wiped off the map at the border. He didn’t think he could survive that again, really that any of them could. Reaching out, he gripped Miller’s hand in the dark reassuring himself that at least they were together for this. Miller gripped his hand back tightly as they moved through the tunnels. Coming around a corner, he saw the door. Swallowing thickly, he stepped towards the door.

Moving quickly, he was at the door and examining the locking mechanism and pulling out the tools
he’d brought with him. The obvious camera above his head was shattered by Miller. He looked up at his lover in surprise. “Why did you do that?”

“A reaper could break that, but you hacking the door might raise some red flags.” Miller explained as the others started untying and rearming their ‘prisoners’.

Indra’s voice broke out as Monty pried the face of the card scanner off so he could get into the inner workings. “Listen up, we go in, kill anyone in our paths, and we hold our ground till Raven kom Azgeda gives us the signal to run. You three,” she gestured towards three of the warriors, “stay here and hold the door.”

“General!” Came the positive response.

Monty hissed when he shocked himself on one of the wires as he pulled them out.

“You alright there?” A Trikru warrior asked from over his shoulder.

“Just dandy.” He snarked, pulling out a pair of pliers and snipping one of the wires. Glancing at the door, he cursed when he saw that the door hadn’t opened yet.

“Do we need to blow it?” Raven asked in concern, watching over his shoulder as his frustrated murmurs increased.

“Almost have it.” He said, connecting the last two wires and completing the circuit. With a metallic sucking noise, the door opened.

“Holy shit you did it.” Peri said in awe.

“Front guard move in.” Indra ordered.

Monty wiped his forehead before following the front guard into the mountain.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya swore as she kicked another Trikru warrior off her. The damn brawl had devolved from Azgeda vs. Trikru into ‘whoever the hell you can punch’. It was maddening and was making swinging around to the likely position of the spotter damn near impossible. They only had a general area the spotter could be in based off the chatter Char was listening to on her radio through the chaos. That the girl was managing to dodge other people while still listening to the black box was honestly one of the most impressive feats of flexibility and situational awareness she’d ever seen. Even so, when they got to the location Charlotte had indicated they would need to do a broad search and that would take time.

Aden was sporting a busted lip as well as brilliant grin and he was clearly enjoying the brawl. Tris was watching his and Char’s back, being the reliable warrior just as she was trained. The rest of her team was built with seconds from the Azgeda camp who Laslow had assigned to her in the chaos. She trusted his judgement that they would be useful and honestly shouldn’t be in the brawl. Sadly, things weren’t going according to plan. The only fully ranked warrior besides herself was Mozu. With her were the seconds Sophia and Percy. Percy was hardly twelve summers old and his armor barely seemed to fit on him, but he was quick and was avoiding most of the brawl with some skill. As they fought off attackers though, she could see why Laslow had assigned them to her. They were all fast, light on their feet, and small targets, able to weave through the brawl in ways that larger warriors couldn’t.

A crack of broken bone caused her to turn and see a large warrior stumbling back from Aden, who
had just elbowed him in the face. She shoved a warrior away as she moved with their small group. “CHAR!”

“We’re getting there!” She called back.

Anya just groaned as she hauled another warrior back before slugging them in the face. “We need to get out of this.”

Looking around, she saw the edge of the fight. Using her momentum, she swung a Trikru around her and into someone behind her. Pointing, she shouted. “THERE!”

Her band of small warriors seemed to breathe easier as they broke out of the thick of the fighting and began to move quickly following Char’s lead. They were moving uphill to the elevated land above TonDC. Anya realized with some fear that it was going to be hard to make this look like an accident so as not to alert the mountain. A crashing sound as two warriors wrestling with each other went rolling across their path almost made her laugh. She quickly sobered, it would seem the chaos had spread this far as well.

“Spread out and be on guard.” She ordered to her team when she realized they were getting close to the assumed position of the spotter.

She was impressed by how quickly everyone spread out, disappearing into the woods. Then again, this team was made of small targets with skills in stealth, so it wasn’t that surprising. As she was sliding over the top of a log and beginning to move across a small clearing for the cover on the other side, she heard the first crack of a gun. Tris let out a pained yelp from behind her.

Anya didn’t think, just diving for the trees to the side of her and turning to search for her second. Tris was collapsed behind a small bush that provided almost zero cover, clutching her leg that was clearly wounded. She could see Char and Aden flat on the ground behind the log at the entrance to the small clearing, Char preventing Aden from moving to help their friend. “Stay down!” She ordered.

Another crack and splinters from the top of the log went flying. Examining the situation, she could make a good guess at the position from which the spotter and apparently sniper were firing. Gritting her teeth, she hoped all of her men could hear her. “Stay under cover, Char keep the sniper distracted. Percy and I will loop behind the enemy and kill them.”

There was a chorus of assent from the woods around her and the small second Percy dropped next to her. “Captain.” He looked at her seriously.

“How good are you at moving through the trees?” Anya asked seriously. With his small size, he had the potential to be very good at it.

He grinned, “I’m awesome!”

“Good. Get up into the branches and follow me from above.”

“Yes, ma’am!” He said before scrambling up the tree she’d taken cover behind. He easily disappeared into the branches.

Taking a deep breath, she moved, keeping herself low to the ground and behind cover as she began to get a better angle for approaching the mountain men who threatened her people.

____________________________________________________________________________
Gustus waved civilians into the command hall and into the tunnel that would lead them out if it came to that. For now, the tunnel would provide some cover from the potential destruction. Seeing a small child trip, he scooped it up and handed it to a passing civilian. Gustus noticed the blacksmith, an old warrior forced to retire because of injuries, trying to carry some of his precious tools with him. Gustus growled lowly, they didn’t have time for this.

Striding over to the blacksmith, he grabbed the tools out of his arms. “We don’t have time or space for your possessions. Get to the tunnel!”

“I’m nothing without my work!” The man protested, looking like if he didn’t know Gustus’ rank he would have punched him for touching his tools.

Gustus didn’t have time for this, but the man was right. A blacksmith’s tools were rare and important for his craft. However, if he allowed an exception for the blacksmith, he would have to allow everyone to bring their valuables with them. The tunnels would barely hold the civilian population, there was no room for their stuff. Gesturing to two of his guards, he spoke loudly. “Get this man into the tunnels.”

He turned, ignoring the man’s upset sounds, as he quickly deposited the tools back in the man’s house before returning to oversee the evacuation. He could hear the shouts and cries of battle from here inside the village. It sounded real enough which was some comfort.

With great long steps, he moved to the wall and hauled himself up to see the chaos erupting throughout the woods. The fighting had mainly moved within the bounds of the blockade as planned. A small detachment of Azgeda were fighting their way towards TonDC, they’re excuse for hiding the civilians in a central building. The warriors were clearly starting to tire. They’d been fighting for almost an hour now. Even for a trained warrior, an hour of intense combat like this, where taking some damage was necessary, would tire them. Not only that, but they had been roused rudely and sent running for their gear and then out to war. It was inevitable that the fighting was going to slow soon.

He saw one of Indra’s team come running for an Azgeda warrior who was towards the edge. He frowned that shouldn’t be happening, Indra and her team should have reached the tunnels already. What was one of her ‘reapers’ doing back in TonDC? Even as he watched, he realized there was something wrong with the warrior when he charged like he was possessed. Suddenly Gustus realized what was wrong, but it was too late. The reaper, the true reaper, had plunged its sword into the side of the Azgeda warrior, who like Gustus had assumed the creature was an ally. The warrior fell over clearly dead, from the red blooming across his side.

Gustus roared in warning as he saw more movement in the trees. “REAPERS!”

The warriors seemed to pause confused and then turn, seeing the dozens of reapers coming out of the forest. Gustus ran for the gates of TonDC, hurling the doors open, he shouted at the men who were clearly still unsure of what was happening. After all, they’d been told that their allies would be dressed as reapers. Gustus bellowed at the frozen men. “GET BEHIND THE WALLS!”

That seemed to spark something as they made a run for it, desperate to get out of the small army of reapers coming out of the forest. Gustus cursed and turned to his men in TonDC. who were realizing what was happening in horror. If he counted the men trying to get to safety, he had maybe fifty warriors with which to protect the village. It wouldn’t hold against at least a hundred reapers. Sweet spirits, the foul beasts must be taking advantage of the chaos to work together. A group this large was unprecedented.

“HURRY!” He shouted as the warriors started tumbling in through the gates Two more warriors had
been cut down trying to get to the safety of TonDC. With the last of them coming through, he yanked the gates closed.

Six months ago:

Frederick stared warily at the young general he was answering to at the moment. They were discussing the future of the territory. Since Roan still hadn’t woken from his injuries, it left him as acting general of the region. He had no doubts however, that if he stood up against this general, he’d be dead by morning. Acting general until Roan woke up, simply meant he was the one general Klark was discussing logistics with not that he had any actual say. He wasn’t foolish, she’d proven to be a ruthless leader and he did not intend to leave his men without what small allowances he could make for them.

“The first heavy snows will be here before the end of the month.” The general said, looking down at the map.

Frederick swallowed. “If you’re army remains for the winter, there won’t be enough food to last till harvest.”

Klark nodded thoughtfully. “Still, we need the manpower my men can provide to rebuild as much as possible before the snow gets here.” She tapped the table where the layout of her forces were illustrated on the map.

Gunter, her second in command, cleared his throat. “General if I may, our orders have been completed. You need only return Roan to the capitol and announce our victory formally and our forces can return to our own territory. It would prevent the over taxing of resources.”

Frederick took the opening. “General, you have helped enough by beating off this threat. My men can handle the rest.”

The general shook her head. “With the close quarters the people are being forced into right now and with the amount of rations so low, camps are going to be a hotbed for disease and infection. I did not sentence thousands to a painful and torturous death by poison so that our own people could die from disease instead of war.”

“The queen will want you to report to her soon.” Frederick tried, knowing that the longer the general stayed the more likely she would try and take control of this territory as well. Civil wars started this way and his people couldn’t handle more death.

“True.” The general glared at the map. “I’ll take Roan and an advance guard to the capitol. Bellamy, can marshal our forces and return them to our territory.” She ordered finally.

“Of course general.” The stiff man replied. “And myself?”

“I’ll need you in the capitol.” She replied to her second’s question.

Frederick let out a breath of relief.

The general continued. “Leave Xander and his division here to aid in the rebuilding effort. In the spring, we will send an eighth of our surplus meat from the elk herds here to help the rations stretch longer. Any excess food we can afford to part with needs to be sent to this territory while they rebuild. We can send some of our carpenters and farmers to assist in the planting of new crops as well.”
“Is that really wise?” Gunter asked.

The general shook her head. To Frederick she looked thoughtful. “I will not abandon this territory to die even if it is the wise decision. What will your people need to recover other than manpower and food to help through the winter?” She asked.

He stared at her, she couldn’t be serious. People did not make such offerings without strings attached. The question was did he accept it? This sort of support would not come from the capitol, where to ask for help was a weakness that could not be afforded. The general was right. His people would be dying by the dozen when the depth of winter came if he didn’t accept aid. His eyes found the blue fabric so many of her men, and a growing number of his own, wore. With a sigh, he accepted he would need to take some assistance. “We need livestock, a great many of our horses have been killed and we’ve lost goats and sheep as well. The elk herds we moved inward with the rest of the livestock as soon as we realized they were being killed. Still the losses will be felt keenly.”

The general nodded. “We can help rebuild your herds but I cannot leave my own territory stripped of resources. I will beg the queen to lift your food taxes for two years to help you to recover.”

Frederick opened his mouth to cautiously thank the woman, when a warrior walked into the tent. “General we need your help in the medical tents.” She said clearly distressed.

The general breathed out. “We’ll finish discussing the logistics of the rebuilding of your territory before I leave.”

Frederick straightened as he watched the general leave the tent closely followed by her second in command. Deciding he should also see to his duties, he followed them out into the light of day. The air was cool and he could feel the hint of snow in the air. He watched as civilians reached out to touch the general in greeting. She accepted their careful touches and reverent thanks.

He understood their awe and the loyalty that she inspired. However, he feared what secrets she hid, and he had no doubt she had them. He hadn’t spent years as a senior captain to Roan without learning that even a truly great person could be twisted up by their desires and goals. He’d seen how Roan’s banishment had changed him. The way he’d struggled to re-earn his queen’s approval.

He’d fought in wars with Roan before and never had he seen Roan stick to a plan he knew was doomed to failure until this war. It may be better for all if the prince never woke again. However, he knew Roan had been in a no win situation. If he had listened to the general, maybe his life would have been preserved, but Nia would not have been kind. Roan would have lost his ability to protect his people. His rank would almost certainly have been stripped. After having fought for so long to come back from his banishment, Frederick did not think that Roan could face being brought so low again. He was pulled from his thoughts by his quartermaster coming to his side and clearing his throat.

“He ordered.

“Sixteen more dead nomads, the other captains believe they have almost finished rooting out the sand rats. Our position is secure and we have a sixteen mile confirmed clean area surrounding us. We need an estimated twenty additional cords of wood for the winter. I’ve assigned some of the men to begin harvesting it.”

“Food?” He asked in resignation.

The quartermaster flipped through his books. “If we ration it our warriors and the villagers should make it through the winter. Although if the snow’s last longer than may we won’t survive without
Friedrich frowned looking at the quartermaster. “General Klark has offered to assist with food, livestock expansion, and man power. Can we survive without her aid?” He asked seriously.

The man frowned. “Perhaps, without aid we will likely be forced to allow the elders to die to preserve supplies, maybe the sick as well.”

“Then we have no choice but to accept.” He said in resignation.

“What will we owe her for the assistance sir?” The quartermaster asked carefully.

“I don’t know, and that is what gives me pause.” Frederick said.

“Surely we can wait for prince Roan to wake and make the decision?”

Frederick clenched his hand. “The prince may never wake. We don’t have time to waste. I must make the decision and it seems I must accept the General’s aid and hope the cost is not too high.”
Miller led the forward guard through the cold metal hall till they reached what he realized was a decontamination room. It felt foreign and wrong to be inside metal walls, the air was a mix of the filtered dry air of the mountain and the stench of the tunnels. It reminded him of the ark, of things he tried to forget about, like his father and his friends. It was all gone, but here in this mountain it was like he was seventeen and in the skybox again. The sick stench of the tunnels following them into the dry air of the mountain let him keep his head from getting lost in memories.

There were two doors leading out of the decontamination room, the large block letters CERBERUS above the door on the right was a helpful indicator of where it led. He leads the group to the left hand door after grabbing a warrior’s arm and gesturing to the Cerberus door. “Guard it.” He ordered quietly. Seeing a camera, he hurled a knife into it. They didn’t have long before the mountain realized they’d been breached. Destroying the camera’s may alert them earlier, but it kept at least their numbers from being discovered.

Once at the door, he stepped to the side, standing guard as Monty popped the electrical lock off and pulled out wires. He was tense, standing listening for even the barest hint of noise, the first clue they’ve been discovered. However, all was silent except for the breathing of the warriors around him. Raven broke the uneasy silence as they waited for Monty to break through the electrical locking system without accidentally triggering anything.

“We should be prepared for the alarm to go off once we breach this door.” She says seriously.

“What do you mean ice girl?” Indra hisses nervously.

Raven gestures to the door. “This room is designed for having radiation filtered out before they enter the mountain. Once we get through that door, you can bet anything they’ll have a way to detect if there is any radiation leaking in with the air that comes in when the door opens.”

Miller hissed under his breath, realizing she was right. This was the airlock, if the mountain functioned like the ark had, it would automatically shut itself down as soon as the tainted air made it past this door. Looking at Raven seriously, he asked, “Is there anything we can do?”

She shook her head. “Just move quickly. We need to find a generator, the missile silos, or the oxygen system to blow.”

“I’ve got it.” Monty interrupted. He glanced up from where he was crouched. “Ready?”

“Do it.” Indra ordered.

Miller felt a swell of pride and fear as he saw Monty turn and connect two wires causing the door to unlock. He grabbed the edge and shoved. The door swung open, he and the advance guard rushed in, prepared to cut down any mountain men in their way. However, there were no mountain men only hundreds of cages with their people in them, stripped down to bandages, dark circles under their eyes. He found himself choking at the horror of this room. Chancing a look at the general’s horrified and frozen form, he moved his gaze to Monty. They’d all stopped in pure horror at this room. Of course, that’s when the alarms went off, blaring loudly and red lights flashing. The mountain knew they were here.

Six months ago:
Brady stared in awe as they rode into the capitol. He clung to Klark’s back as he sat behind her in the saddle. The people had come out cheering for their returning hero, the people’s general. He saw the sea of blue and felt his heart thud in his chest at the sight. He’d never thought he’d be in the presence of greatness, let alone be the second of someone like Klark, but here he was. It had taken weeks of following her around, begging to learn how to heal others the way she had healed him before she had relented and agreed to train him, but he’d succeeded. It hadn’t been long after he had become her second, when Klark was called to war and there was nothing else for him to do but follow her. The war had been brutal but he’d watched Klark win victory after victory. What had impressed him the most though was joining her after the battles as she healed the injured. It had been a long bloody war but here he was now accompanying her to announce Azgeda’s greatest victory since the forming of the coalition.

To their side, rode Prince Roan, his face was pale from pain and dark circles lingered under his eyes. Brady knew the man was in terrible pain, Klark had cut out the infected flesh before they’d departed for the capitol, but it was still taking its toll. That was not even considering the extensive injuries that were still healing. The Prince had been polite and reserved as they’d traveled. If Brady were to guess, it came from both his position and pain. The fact he’d woken at all, was testament to his strength.

Turning his attention back to the crowds, he smiled widely. The story of what his first had done had clearly traveled across the clan. He’d noticed several of guards they’d passed, proudly bearing blue fabric sewn into their clothing. Surely, Nia wouldn’t punish her for going against orders since she was so clearly a hero. Klark had gone against order but it had been the right thing to do. His hands gripped the sides of Klark’s jacket tighter. She was the closest thing he had to a parent and he didn’t know what he would do if something happened to her. He understood enough about politics to know that she was in danger, despite her clear popularity.

Coming into the main square, he slid off the back of the horse and took the reins while Klark and the rest of the party dismounted. He proudly led her horse to a hitching post and tied the animal before returning to Klark’s back.

Entering the throne room was awe inspiring. He’d never been before and the way the ceiling lifted up high and great chandeliers made of bone hung above their heads, along with the large roaring fireplace, made the room something incredible to behold. The guards all wore masks hiding their faces and were standing at attention with decorative spears and pikes in their hands. At the center of it all, sitting in the stone throne of Azgeda was Nia, the Ice Queen.

He had almost expected her to be larger than life, a beautiful dark goddess dripping in blood. In some ways she met that expectation and others she didn’t. Her clothing had a practical edge to it despite it’s obvious finery that he would not have expected. Her face hard and lined, paint and brands making the angles sharper and more deadly. He had no doubt she held the power of death in her hands. There was no question of her power or authority and he fell to his knees with the rest of the procession automatically and without thought.

“Welcome my victorious army.” She said, her voice was cold and sent chills up his back.

They all remained silent, even Klark and Roan. He wondered what would be the signal for them to speak.

“Tonight, we feast to the glory you have brought Azgeda! Before we begin, let us hear of your exploits and how you won us this war.” She continued.

Klark and Roan both rose at this and Brady let out a relieved sigh. Nia wasn’t angry. That had to be a good thing. He listened carefully as Klark and Roan laid out the course of the eastern border
conflict. Bracing himself, he listened carefully as Klark described the end of the war.

“The human cost was too high for the fighting to continue.” Klark said carefully. “The amount of death and the loss of resources would have weakened Azgeda if it was allowed to continue. So, I made an executive decision to close the border without permission.” Her voice was clear and strong. “I took a band of thirty warriors and poisoned the larger watering holes and reservoirs in the dead zone while I had several smaller groups strike out and poison the smaller wells along the northern edge of the border. When my force reached the crater reservoir, my scouts reported the Prince’s position as a prisoner in the camp. I marshaled an attack and rescue for the Prince and was able to recover him while killing the forces inside the crater.”

Brady watched the queen’s face tighten as she clearly understood the unstated fact Klark had gone against orders to end the fighting, but she didn’t interrupt or give any sign of displeasure. She remained still as Klark described the measures taken for rebuilding the region and stated her request that Roan’s territory be given leniency on their taxes while they rebuilt. It was Roan’s place to ask for such things, and he was aware of the queen’s advisors surprise that Klark would intercede on his behalf like this.

Finally, the report was done and the queen stood from her throne. Raising her head, she spoke clearly. “You have brought much glory to Azgeda, I shall consider your requests in the coming days.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Present:

Clarke heard the ringing of the bell from TonDC and knew something was wrong. Looking up in the trees, she shouted, “Niles!”

The archer and assassin dropped easily down beside her without question, diverting an incoming Trikru with a sharp kick before looking at her for orders. “General?”

She reached down grabbing his arm and hauled him up behind her on her horse. Tilting her head, she saw Laslow avoiding several attackers clearly unhappy about not being able to use his sword. Not caring about the chaos, trusting Niles to keep her and the horse from being overrun, she shouted for her captain. “LASLOW!”

The man looked up at her as he punched one of his own men in the face.

“Get the men under control and move those you can towards TonDC!” She ordered, kicking her horse so that it moved closer to the man.

“How?!” He panted in distress as grabbed a man into a headlock. “We didn’t exactly get to the part where we gave a signal for them to stop this!”

Clarke cursed the timing of the mountain’s missile attack. Thankfully, it hadn’t happened yet so obviously either Anya had been successful or the distraction ploy was working. She swore again at the unfortunate fact that her radio had been broken earlier, leaving her unable to check in and figure out what was happening. An idea, a horrible one, but an idea all the same, came to her and she grabbed her war horn and brought it to her lips. She prayed that her men would take it as a signal to follow her and not as a signal to make this brawl an all-out war. This had quickly gotten out of hand and she had no idea how else to get it under control.

The great bellow of the horn caused the warriors to pause and turn to look, clearly having not
expected it. Clarke felt relief and hope that things could be controlled as Lexa, looking a bit worse for wear but still clearly Heda, appeared at her shoulder.

“TonDC?” She questioned, praying Lexa’s radio had been left undamaged.

Lexa turned to her, face strained with stress, “The reapers have massed and are attacking it. Go ahead and try and lure them off while I get our forces here facing the village and moving that way.”

“I’ll need more than just Niles and I.” She said cursing. If TonDC was being pressured, it was more than just a few reapers and she wasn’t skilled enough to take more than three maybe by herself if she lost her seat in the saddle.

Lexa grimaced. “If you take my horse you can take at least two more with you. Pass the orders ahead to marshal and move to the village.” She said already swinging out of her saddle.

Clarke scanned the nearby warriors who were mostly looking at them trying to figure out if they should keep fighting or not. Seeing Ryder, she breathed a sigh of relief. He was clearly an archer of some skill, they’d need that. “Ryder take the commander’s horse. Grab a warrior you trust to ride it into battle and follow me.”

“Sha, General.” He said quickly, mounting the beast and offering his arm to an Azgeda warrior Selena and hauling her up behind him.

Clarke nodded, tossing the war horn over to Lexa while turning to Laslow, “Do as the commander orders.” With that she spared herself one last desperate look at Lexa before she shot off towards the village. Niles hanging onto her as they went, Ryder following on her heels.

They leapt over a log as they careened through the chaos that was slowing down as the men started to realize what was happening and why the horn and bells had been sounded. They parted for her and she prayed her men listened to Lexa. It wasn’t long before they were out of the mass of men and flying limbs and heading for the village. As she approached, she could smell the unclean stench of the reapers. Breaking out of the woods, she saw what had to be every last living reaper trying to get over the wall into TonDC like so many ants.

“Niles get into a perch and shoot to kill.” She ordered. “Ryder do the same, you need to keep us from being flanked.”

Niles grabbed a low hanging branch and hauled himself up and off the saddle leaving her staring at this horde. Tossing him her quiver of arrows she turned towards the hoard drawing her short sword. She needed to distract them. She had a horse and speed on her side but would easily be overpowered if she lost her saddle. It would take ten minutes for Lexa to get even a few of their forces here which, when it came to this sort of thing, was an eternity. Battles were won in that length of time. Looking to Selena, she gripped the reins in one hand her sword in the other. “We ride them down and move them away from the village. Stick to the edges, don’t let yourself be surrounded.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Aden bit his lip as more splinters went flying from the log he was hiding behind with Char. “Tris!” He called out, praying she could still answer.

“Don’t do anything stupid!” Tris cried out, her voice clearly pinched from pain.

“I’m not going to leave you there!” He insisted, trying to see if there was a way to get out from behind this log and to Tris’s side without getting himself shot as well.
Char gripped his shoulder tightly. “Aden you’ll die. Wait for Anya to take them out.”

“We don’t have time for that!” He said. Tris was behind a bush, a single stray bullet and she could be killed.

“If you fucking dare try and get to me, I’ll end you myself.” Tris grunted.

Aden glared at Char, who was holding him in place with an iron grip. Another crack of the gun rang out and Tris let out a sharp cry of pain. He felt Char cringe as she held him. Grabbing her hand, he stared at her seriously. “Please!”

Char bit her lip. “Aden you’re a nightblood. Your life is not worth a suicidal rescue attempt.” He could hear how it pained her to speak.

“Heda is a servant of their people! If I cannot even protect my friends, how am I to serve the people?” He said desperately.

“We can’t get her out without getting shot.” Char said firmly. “Your life is worth more.”

“Aden don’t you dare.” Tris added, he could hear that she was getting weaker by the strain in her voice.

Char looked pained as she continued to hold him down. She looked up at the sky and shouted a question to Tris. “Tris what’s your status?”

“I got grazed by that last one, but it’s just my leg that’s hit.” The girl replied.

“Keep pressure on your leg.” Char instructed, clearly concerned by the tone of Tris’ voice as well.

“Please!” Aden said looking at Char. “She’s our friend.”

“Tris and I are expendable, you are not.” Char said reluctantly.

“I am one of many nightbloods. My fate is to serve and to die for my people. I am worth no more than either of you!” He insisted desperately.

Char looked conflicted before she finally nodded. “I’ll cover you.”

Aden nodded in confirmation and began to crawl along the length of the log aiming to get around it so he had a better and more covered angle to make a dash for Tris. Once around the log, he moved cautiously along the tree line till he was perpendicular to Tris. He caught his friend’s eyes. Her face was drawn with pain and pale, her hands stained red where they gripped tightly at her calf that was bleeding freely, despite her attempts to stop it.

“Don’t you dare.” She hissed staring at him in horror.

He glanced at Char, who was yanking her shirt off before pulling her jacket back on covering her breast bindings. With the shirt now clutched in her hands, she tied one of the sleeves to the handle of a knife. She shared a serious look with him. “Don’t get hit.”

He nodded. “I won’t.”

“Grab her and get behind the log, there won’t be time to get back to the tree line.” She cautioned.

“What are you going to do?” He asked carefully.
“Distract them, hopefully they’ll be too busy shooting at my shirt to get you. You have to be fast though.” She said seriously.

“I can do it.” He said preparing for a mad sprint to Tris. She was only three yards in front of the log that would mean safety

“Oh, three.” Char said, pulling her arm back ready to throw the knife.

“One.”
Aden tightened ready to sprint.

“Two.”
He edged forward ever so slightly, his heart thumping in his chest.

“Three!”

He was off, staying low in order to avoid the deadly bullets that could be sent flying any second. He heard the sound of a gun, but there was no pain, they must have gone for the bait. He had six seconds before the next shot if their count was right. He dropped on top of Tris and listened for the next crack. Sure enough there it was. He could feel Tris shaking under him. His adrenaline was rushing through him as he grabbed Tris with an arm under her legs and the other under her arms and heaved.

With a gulp of air, he braced himself and leapt with all of his strength over the log, another shot rang out as they fell towards the ground. As soon as they hit the ground, he ripped the lower section of his shirt. Without pausing for breath, he quickly scanned his injured friend to see what most needed treatment. She had a graze along the side of her arm but it was bleeding sluggishly and he internally dismissed it as unimportant. Reaching down, he pressed the piece of his shirt into her gunshot wound in her leg. Moving his hands quickly, he unbuckled her belt and yanked it off of her with a sharp movement. She let out a pained cry as he tightened the belt round her injury as tight as he dared.

“It’s ok, you’re going to be ok. We got you.” He assured her. The belt and fabric were stopping the bleeding mostly. With a sigh of relief, he leaned his head into the side of the log. Finally letting his body shake with the nerves he’d been repressing.

“You’re an idiot.” She croaked from where she lay, trying desperately to stay awake.

He chuckled hoarsely. “I know, but we swore that we were united in brotherhood didn’t we? What sort of Heda could I possible be someday if I let you die when I had the chance to save you?” He asked.

“A wise one.” Tris said with a roll of her eyes. “You’re going to be insufferable now aren’t you?”

He grinned at her. “Of course.”

“Char?” She asked.

Aden leaned his head to the side and called out. “Char, sound off.”

He felt a wave of cold dread when no reply came.

Tristan shoved his sword down the throat of a reaper who was trying to scale the walls. His arm was
bound to his body unusable and that was the only reason he’d been in TonDC. He had left his
rangers under the command of his second after a training accident that had broken several bones in
his arm. When the attack on TonDC had begun, he’d run out of the healing hut and joined the fight
to keep the foul beasts out of their command center and away from those too injured to be moved.
With only one arm though, he doubted his ability to keep his self-appointed position on the wall for
long.

Snarling at the foul monsters, he waited for the next one to make it to the top of the wall. One of the
children had been ringing the bell above the watering hole meant to signal a fire for some time now.
It was their only hope to signal the warriors to return to the village and defend it before it was totally
over run.

Then, he saw the Azgeda general come riding out from the tree line with her sword drawn. She rode
up almost trampling the stragglers of the reaper hoard, one of her warriors flanking her side and
moving in tandem with her. He raised his voice, “The Azgeda heard our signal. Fight the bloody
monsters off. Reinforcements are here!”

He quickly realized he was wrong as the general turned away from the creatures pulling back and
then charging again. No other warriors were coming out of the woods. He watched in horror as she
used her horse to get the reapers to chase after her as she moved her beast around the clearing more
and more of the reapers moving towards her trying to box her in and surround her. Her only saving
grace was the second warrior covering her back who struck down reapers and created space with the
threatening hooves of her own horse. “Fuck.”

Turning to where Gustus was shoving a reaper off the wall, he yelled his question. “Where’s the
army?!”

Gustus quickly glared at the general when she made a risky maneuver using a short sword and spear
she’d clearly grabbed off a reaper. “She’s buying them time.” He said in horror at the risk involved
and the almost certain death that the general courted.

Tristan was surprised by a reaper grabbing him. He took a sharp blow to the face before he managed
to gut the beast. He had taken his attention away from his post on the wall for a solid minute to watch
the general and he knew that he had let his attention wander for too long. The wall hadn’t been
overrun, most of the reapers had moved off from trying to get in to circle the general but some were
still trying to climb the wall. The one he dealt with seemed to be the only one able to get close to the
top so far with their reduced numbers.

While his position may not be in much danger, the same could not be said for the general and her
fellow warrior. He could see with a glance that the general was about to be overrun. Her horse was
reared up using its hooves to crack the skull of an approaching reaper while she beheaded another.
An arrow from the trees was the only thing that saved her from taking an axe to the back. He
scanned the trees and realized there was at least one sniper perched in the branches of a tree, trying to
cover the general, but he doubted even with that help she would last long. He heard Gustus’ shouted
orders. “Shoot the reapers closest to the general! I want all our archers focused on keeping the area
around her and her companion clear. If they die before the reinforcements arrive we’ll be
overwhelmed.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Indra had never seen something as heart wrenching as her people held in cages like animals. She
wanted to save them, but that wasn’t what they’d come for and they had a mission to complete.
Gritting her teeth, she gave her orders. “Move on, we don’t have time to free our people.”
The warriors all moved on quickly, walking through the rows of their brethren, who had noticed their arrival and were rattling their cages. She hardened her heart as they moved forward. They quickly came upon a door on the opposite side of the room that Monty got open in half the time as the others. While he worked, she raised her voice and spoke to their caged people. “We will return for you!”

With the door forced open, they charged the next room. For the first time there were mountain men. They were screaming and writhing on the floor as their skin seemed to burn despite there not being any fire. Her forward guards cut them down regardless. She watched as Raven stopped in this room and looked around it critically, staring at the strange machines and the white beds before she spoke.

“Holy shit,” The woman breathed. “Monty don’t open the next door!”

“Why?” Indra demanded.

“This is their healing room. They have pure oxygen tubed into this room. Those tubes should connect to their main air filtering system. We blow that we should kill them all.” The woman said viciously as she started pulling her explosives out from under her fur shoulder throw.

“What do you need?” Indra asked while quickly calculating how many men would be needed to hold this room.

“Monty and I need thirty minutes to set up a chain reaction blast the size that we’ll need. If you keep that door shut, we can get it done.”

Indra turned to her forces. “Drop all of the explosives on the beds in here and then make your way to help get our people out of their cages. Miller, take two of the men and hold that door.”

Without bothering to check that her orders were being followed, she started unburdening herself of her load before swiftly moving back to the cage room. Seeing a few of the men following her lead, she made her way toward the cages, desperate to free her people from their cruel imprisonment.

“Break the cages open.” She ordered.

Drawing her sword, she used it as a wedge to pry open the door of the first cage she came across. The woman with Azgeda brands and marks, helped add her own strength to wrenching the door open. It snapped open finally and the woman crawled out. Her legs were shaky but she stood regardless. “How can I assist?” She asked, clearly having realized that Indra was in charge.

Indra gave a nod of approval at the woman’s spirit. “Help move the others into the tunnels through the door across the hall there.” Indra said while pointing at the door that they had used to enter the mountain.

“Consider it done.” The woman moved on her shaky legs towards a cage that had been opened by another warrior and began to help get that prisoner out and moving towards the tunnels.

Indra was satisfied her orders were being carried out and moved to the next cage. There was a young boy inside this one, who could only have been a second for a few years. “Stay strong.” She assured him.

“They’ve been feeding us. We can help.” He assured her as his door was pried open.

She clasped his shoulder before moving to the next cage.
Six months ago:

Nia paced back and forth in her private quarters thinking of the disaster that had been created by her son. Turning on the man who was sitting stiffly in a wooden chair she spoke softly. “How did you get yourself taken prisoner?”

Her son shifted clearly in pain and uncomfortable. “I was ambushed as I reported in the throne room. I was knocked unconscious before I could fight back. They injured me extensively for sport and to ensure I wouldn’t attempt to escape.”

She scoffed at his weakness. “And yet Klark was able to save you while outnumbered. If the rumors are to be believed she killed half the force that took you on her own.”

“I don’t know if those rumors are true, though however well she carries it, she’s injured. She’s like a bear, most dangerous when cornered.” He replied.

Nia closed her eyes at her son’s inability to see the mess he had created through his foolish actions and ineptitude... “Do you think you will be able to secure the throne with a general like her in your army?”

He straightened more at her words. “She’s loyal to Azgeda.”

“And if she decides she’d rather rule it, then bow to a weakling she had to save from his own foolishness?” She demanded

“Then she will be executed as a traitor.” He said firmly.

“And you think Seth and Quint will follow you when your strength is in question? Again?” She bit out.

“They follow the throne.” He said.

She began pacing again. “So, you have no plan to deal with the fact your own army wears her colors then? That your territory will recover because of her actions indebting you to her.”

“If she is such a threat, then have her executed, but don’t ask me to do your dirty work for you. You have assassins at your beck and call, have them make it an accident if that is what is needed for the stability of our clan.” He said, frustrated with this conversation.

“And be held responsible by the people for the death of their new hero? Do you honestly believe that even if she were to die in an accident, I wouldn’t be blamed?” She asked sharply.

“What would you have me do?!” He demanded. “I cannot turn down her aid. My territory would be devastated. I cannot call for her head for disobeying my orders because I owe her my life. I do not think she should be killed. It is only because I was arrogant enough not to listen to the advice of a junior general, who I saw as an upstart, that I am in this position right now. If I had listened to her and worked with her, I would be the one returning the hero. She is an asset to our clan. Why not use her to bring us victory in other battles?”

Nia lifted her lip in derision at his inability to see the threat he was defending. “Every victory you won at the border, all the loyalty you gained and the glory you achieved during the war, it all goes to her. You are at best the damsel in her story, a footnote to be forgotten. That cannot be accepted if you intend to remain my son and the heir to this nation. I should banish you for the embarrassment you’ve brought onto yourself, again.” She was considering it seriously.
“Mother I earned the lifting of my banishment. The price you brought on us by killing the commander’s lover.” He defended himself.

Nia stopped her pacing to stare out of her window at the city below her. “Is there a chance she would bind herself to you?” That could work. If she bore her son heirs her new reputation as a bringer of death and hero of the people could be a boon.

Her son let out a surprised sound. “No, outside of war council and her treating of my injuries, we’ve barely spoken and I doubt she would consider me. Also, according to her, she is barren. She remarked that she was relieved she need never worry for a child of her own suffering as the children of my territory have suffered.”

Nia cursed. She remembered from when the sky fallen had been in her dungeon that there had been mention of some device implanted inside the women to prevent pregnancy. It was a dull memory and one she hadn’t thought of in years now. However, it prevented the neat and elegant solution of a union between her son and the upstart from being a viable option. Taking the people’s hero who could bring the dead back to life as a daughter in law would have been a move that not only saved her son’s position but elevated his strength as an heir. “If Dozla hadn’t of been a fool, I wouldn’t have to be dealing with this.”

“We both know Dozla would not have survived long after you ordered him to the east.” Roan said.

“I’m aware.” She snapped. “If you were as good at surviving certain death as our current upstart, I wouldn’t be forced clean up the mess you’ve created. Perhaps that is our solution, she challenged Dozla and her victory brought her position and glory. If you challenge her and defeat her, you could make her glory your own.”

“I cannot challenge her for her position!” He said finally losing his temper. “She ranks lower than me. I cannot bond with her without bringing an end to our dynasty. I cannot call for her head. Can we not let her return to the north to continue to kill pauna and teach new healers?”

“And when I die what is to stop her marching south to claim this throne? Your birthright?! That is a fool’s hope! I will not surrender this seat to a woman not even born into our clan.” Nia said through clenched teeth.

“Then send her to war for you, let her lead your armies and bring honor and glory to our clan till she dies. No matter how lucky she may be, eventually an arrow will find it’s mark.” He said.

Nia considered it as she watched her son’s face. She could tell he did not wish to sentence his fellow general to death. Which is what made the possibility of killing her in such a way an impossibility. If her son himself, the one most threatened by the rise of Klark, would defend her, what would those who plotted behind her back do? Surely, they’d see the opportunity that the woman offered. This war had given Azgeda a new horse in the race for the throne after her death. She could not allow this. A civil war would destroy her nation. She aimed for expansion, control of the coalition. To have that all threatened because of a single upstart could not be allowed. No matter how much good Klark could do for her clan, for the armies, to strike fear into the hearts of her foes, she could not allow her to live. No, her son’s attempts to find a way for the blond general to live were useless, she needed to die and that was that.

“Mother, surely her popularity will fade, given a year and the passing of winter.” Roan said.

“We both know that it will only spread. You may have underestimated Klark of the sky fallen but I will not.” Nia said harshly.
“Then what?” He asked.

“You will challenge her to a fight to the death. And soon before her popularity can settle.” She ordered.

“On what grounds?” He asked confused.

“She disobeyed your orders. She also has yet to move the last of her army out of your territory. Accuse her of treason and be done with it.” Even injured, she knew her son could defeat Klark. After all, Nia had seen Klark’s fight with Dozla and she had won that match only due to luck, she was no match for Nia’s skilled and experienced son. “Just kill her quickly and don’t give her an opening.”

Roan stood and stared at her, seeming to try and decide if he could fight against this order before bowing his head. “It will be done.”
Anya felt victorious as she saw the two men in the strange suits of the mountain. One held a gun and was taking shots down the valley at her team. The other stood by carrying a strange old world device. With a hand gesture, she signaled Percy to drop down on top of them. In the initial shock of his entrance, she followed, slicing the throat of the man with a single brutal slash. She saw that despite Percy’s size and age, he had easily killed his opponent as well. Swinging her blade, she flicked the blood off of it before standing tall. The fools had given her every reason to ambush them when they shot at her party. By doing so, they made her orders to disguise their deaths as an accident if possible, completely unnecessary. Turning to look down towards the clearing, she prepared to shout the all clear so Aden and Char could get to Tris. The shout lodged in her throat as she took in what she saw.

“CHAR!” Aden’s voice carried up to her as he cried out sticking his head foolishly above the log.

Anya didn’t wait, taking off for the clearing. When she arrived, she saw that Aden had his hands pressing down on Char’s side. His hands were coated in blood.

She dropped down on her knees beside him, instantly scanning the girl to assess her injuries. Looking up at Aden, she demanded an explanation. “What happened?” Ripping fabric, she shoved a wad of it onto the injury to try and stop the precious blood from leaving the girl’s body.

Aden’s face was stricken. “Tris was bleeding out, she wouldn’t have lasted much longer. Char said she’d cover me. I didn’t know.” His breathing was picking up speed.

“I don’t have time to baby you, snap to it. Is Tris alive?” She asked while yanking one of Char’s knife belts down and viciously tightening it to keep the blood in her body. Yanking her own belt off, she wrapped it around the girl’s shoulder where a second bullet had hit and yanked the belt tightly, trying to limit the bleeding.

“She’s alive. I stopped the bleeding.” Aden said.

Anya nodded. Grabbing Char, she slung her limp body over her shoulder. “Get Tris and the others back to camp.”

She stood with the girl hanging over her shoulder her blood already soaking into her. “Stay strong.”

Six months ago:

Silas frowned as Prince Roan entered the general’s quarters without announcing himself, his face was drawn and clearly burdened. This couldn’t be good. He watched carefully as the wayward prince came to a stop in front of his general.
“You are a traitor to the throne.” He declared in a harsh voice.

Klark stood carefully, her eyes narrowed as she stared the man down. “On what grounds do you accuse me of treason?” She demanded.

“You have disobeyed the direct orders of a superior and shown clear intent to rebel by occupying another’s territory.” He said and it was like a death toll had rung and everyone in the room fell completely silent.

“I left only Xander and his division in your territory and they are there as support, to help you rebuild. The rest of my army has or is in the process of returning to my territory. As for my breach of your orders, my doing so saved your life.” Klark replied lowly.

Silas could see it in the line of the prince’s shoulders. He didn’t believe the shit he was saying. He was clearly here reluctantly, though why he would challenge Klark at all, mystified Silas. Klark had saved his life and her support was vital for the recovery of his territory. Her death would cause chaos in his own territory with no reward to compensate for it that Silas could see.

“The reason you give does not change the truth.” He responded.

Klark set her shoulders, staring down the older and taller man. “Then why am I not in chains and being dragged to the Queen’s dungeons?”

“As my subordinate in this war, it falls on me to deal with your disloyalty and regain this army’s honor. I challenge you to single combat before the throne. If you prevail, you have proven your claims that you are loyal. If I win, I have cleaned the shame from this army with your blood.” He said.

“To the death then?” Klark asked in resignation.

“To the death. Tonight before the sixth candle mark in the central courtyard.” He nodded and turned, having clearly accomplished what he’d come to do.

The moment the door was shut, Silas was out of his position at the wall and speaking in outrage. “He cannot do this! He owes you his life! Petition the Queen!”

Klark looked at him sadly and he felt like he’d been punched in the chest. Gunter laid his hand on Klark’s shoulder and spoke slowly. “The Queen has certainly commanded this.”

Klark breathed out through her teeth while Silas stumbled back in horror.

“I knew the cost to going against orders. I expected it to be an assassin's blade however.” She said dryly.

“Why?!” Brady protested from his corner. “You’re a hero!”

“Exactly! Why would she want her greatest general killed?!” Silas added.

Gunter responded surprisingly enough. “Because she made Roan look weak by rescuing him like a damsel from a tale told around the fire. And because even if it resulted in victory, she acted against her orders. Both of these offences are subject to death.”

“That’s not just!” Brady protested angrily.

“Enough.” Klark ordered firmly. “I will fight Roan. If I die, I die knowing I did what was right for
my people.”

Gunter bowed his head in respect. “What would you have me do in the event of your death?”

Silas watched in horror as Klark swallowed thickly. “Return my body to Bellamy. Take him as your second in command when you are given my position.”

“And if you win?” Gunter asked.

Klark laughed. “Then I’m afraid I’ll be demoting you so Nia doesn’t have an easy replacement waiting in the wings.”

Gunter grinned at Klark. “I would expect nothing less. I’m sure Bellamy will make a fine second for the army.”

“You’ll protect him?” She said.

“Of course general.” He said straightening.

Silas walked forward till he was in front of the general. “You will win. You are the undefeated. The general of the people. You must win.”

Present:

Raven stared at the tech in this room and mourned slightly for the fact she was about to blow it all to hell. Once she found the oxygen line, she yanked it out of the wall with a heave. Breathing deeply, she grinned. It was pure oxygen. It would burn up in seconds and cause quite a boom. “Monty can you start getting the detonators set?”

“Sure thing.” He replied, carefully beginning the process of arming her explosives.

Pulling out a crowbar, she stuck it into the siding of the wall and heaved. It took some maneuvering but she got the wall paneling off. Looking inside, she grinned. The electrical, oxygen, and what looked like blood lines all ran through the walls. This was a gold mine. The oxygen would burn straight back to the filtering system and then, well, boom!

Grabbing the first armed explosive from Monty which was set to ten minutes, she got to work, inserting it carefully to cause maximum damage to the enclosed systems. Three more packages and she was sure this whole wall and it’s connected systems were done for. Grabbing the siding, she shoved it back into place. It would blow off easily enough but it would help redirect some of the force internally. With that in my mind, she quickly instructed one of the nearby warriors to move one of the heavy desks filled with files in front of the bulkhead. Hopefully it would further direct the force inward by making it harder for the bulkhead to be blown outward.

Dragging one of the beds over to where she could see a vent, she pulled it up against the wall before getting on top of the bed. Looping her crowbar into her belt, she pulled out a screwdriver and started pulling out screws. It didn’t take long before she was removing the grate across the vent and taking a peek inside. She wasn’t sure what all was down this but an explosive bursting this open had to be helpful. Once she had one hooked up she was out of the vent and taking panels off the ceiling. They needed to breach as many of the walls as possible. The important thing was causing more damage than they could fix if anyone in the mountain survived.

“THEY’RE HERE!” Miller called out from the door as he a drew his sword and rammed his
shoulder into the door to try and keep it closed with a grunt.

“Fuck,” Raven set another bomb into the ceiling before reattaching the panel and moving to the next explosive. “How long can you keep them out?” She asked.

“How long do you need?” Miller asked back.

Monty piped up. “We have five minutes before these things blow whether we’re ready for them to go or not.”

“Shit,” Raven swore as she yanked down another ceiling panel. Raising her voice so that Indra would hear and reminding herself they had to stick to Trigedasleng, she shouted. “WE’VE GOT FIVE MINUTES TO BE CLEARED OUT!”

A hiss escaped her lips as she caught her fingers in the paneling. Ignoring the pain, she yanked the ceiling panel down, revealing more wiring that looked rather important. Grabbing another bomb, she wedged it in as deep as she could reach before shoving the panel back up and sticking two of the eight screws that had been holding it in back in. Jumping down, she saw the remaining explosives and knew she didn’t have time to get them into the walls, not with mountain men trying to break down the door and Miller and two other warriors being the only things keeping it shut. Grabbing them, she did a quick sweep of the room. “Get out and barricade the next door!”

With that, she turned and fled with the extra bombs in her arms. Once in the room filled with cages, she moved straight to what she recognized as a bank of electrical wires being routed through the room for the purpose of running the blood extraction machines. Setting the bombs down, she grabbed her crowbar and began ripping the siding off before shoving the last of the bombs into it. Turning, she wiped the sweat off her brow and checked to see what Indra was doing.

The general had the arm of a warrior slung over her shoulder as she helped him out of the room. A quick check told her they had all the prisoners out who could be moved. Raven turned back towards the door when she heard a scream. Miller’s arm was pinned in the door. Running to his side, she saw what had happened. They’d gotten out of the medical room but as they were trying to close the door the mountain men in their radiation suits had grabbed onto Miller’s arm and it had been crushed between the door and the wall. They tried to pull Miller’s arm out but the mountain men had a good hold on it and were using the opportunity to attempt to pry the door open. Seeing a gun being raised, she didn’t think just ordered, “DUCK!”

Miller dropped his head without question and she rammed the end of her crowbar into the face mask of the man with the gun. She felt the sick sensation of it crunching through the mask into the man’s face. Dropping her hold on the metal, she grabbed Miller and hauled. Thanks to the distraction of the front man falling, she managed to get Miller back as they slammed the door the rest of the way shut. However, it was not before a grenade came flying through the crack in the door. “Monty!”

He caught the screwdriver she threw at him and wedged it into the door track before reaching down and grabbing the locking mechanism he’d hacked to get in and just grabbing the wiring and yanking it out with his fist. She grabbed the grenade that was spewing orange smoke and chucked it to the far corner of the room.

“We have to go, NOW!” She ordered, grabbing Miller and hauling him toward the exit, his face was pale and she glanced at his mangled hand and arm. There was bone showing in his arm, breaking through the skin. It didn’t look good, well that just meant that they would have to get to Clarke quickly.

Monty’s face was awash with emotion as he grabbed Miller’s legs and they both hauled him along.
The other warriors, who had been holding the door, grabbed onto Miller as well and they moved as fast as possible to get out. They had to get to the tunnels before the bombs blew.

Tris hissed as she stumbled along with the others. She had an arm over Aden’s shoulder and another over an Azgeda second by the name of Sophie. Her leg was dragging as she half hopped and was half carried as they jogged towards the Azgeda line. She felt sick, and it wasn’t from the blood loss. Char had willingly taken two bullets so Aden could get her out of the line of fire. She hadn’t wanted that. Aden hadn’t wanted that! Why she had to be stupid and brave and self-sacrificing she didn’t know. She just had to be alive. The deathly pale and limp form she’d seen over Anya’s shoulder scared her straight through. She swallowed down bile at the thought of one of her friends dying for her, it was...it wasn’t acceptable is what it was.

“We’re almost there! The fighting isn’t in our way this time.” Aden said, his chin and shoulders set in determination as they moved.

“Something is wrong. It shouldn’t have moved.” Mozu said from where she stood glancing around at their surroundings warily, clearly prepared for an unexpected attack.

Tris grumbled at the warrior through her pain. “It is not a warrior’s place to worry about what they cannot control.”

“We may want to head to TonDC instead of our camp.” Mozu suggested. “It’s possible we’re walking towards a trap.”

“No, our orders are clear. We get back to the line. Unless we are given further orders, we guard the healers.” Aden said firmly.

Percy snorted from the side. “Now you’re all about orders.”

“Seriously?” Tris hissed out. “This is not the time.”

“Charlotte is probably dead because you didn’t follow orders.” Sophie defended hotly, from under Tris’ arm.

“I suppose that doesn’t matter to you Trikru though.” Percy said, clearly outraged.

“Char is our friend and comrade, of course it matters.” Tris snapped, finally having had enough.

The Azgeda section of their party quieted. Sophie spoke up carefully. “To die protecting your comrades is the highest honor we can earn.”

Aden shifted slightly under her other arm. “I would never have asked her to sacrifice herself like that.”

“You didn’t have to.” Sophie said finally.

Tris grimaced and squeezed Aden’s shoulder in warning to drop it. She hoped they stayed silent now as they moved. She didn’t know how much longer she could keep going realistically. A cold sweat had broken out a mile back and she knew the beginnings of shaking she felt going through her body was not a good sign. Nor was the way her vision was blacking out around the edges.
Lexa drew her swords as she and the army approached TonDC. As they approached the edge of the woods, they broke out into a run. She wished for the comfort of her war horse and the steady thrum of his hooves as they broke out from the trees. A last branch brushed past her as she came hurtling out of the woods and began to charge straight for the reaper forces she could now see. There were over a hundred of the foul beasts on the field. There were a lot of unmoving corpses of reapers lying across the field, proving the effectiveness of Clarke’s distraction tactics. Quite a few of them had arrows sticking out of them. There, skirting the edge of the disorganized army of the monsters, was Klark and one of her warriors slicing down at the fastest of the reapers before pulling back and then circling in again.

She opened her mouth and let out a war cry as she charged across the beaten ground. The men and women behind her picked up the sound as over two hundred warriors followed her, roaring out their rage. Pulling her sword back, she allowed herself a deep breath in before she hit the rough line of the reapers.

There was a roaring in her ears as her heart pounded and hot blood splashed across her face after she sliced the throat of the reaper before her open. Before she finished the slice, she was already turning to block the incoming attack of her next opponent. Out of the corner of one eye, she saw Dax driving an axe in a backhanded swing across a reaper’s stomach, almost cutting him in half. Strangled cries and the sound of battle surrounded her and she lost herself to it. Swinging her swords around her body in flashes of steel, she cut down all in front of her in a whirlwind of death.

Then she saw Klark, her golden hair was grabbed in the hands of a reaper and she was being pulled off of her horse. Suddenly terrified, she tried to cut through the men between the two of them, but she couldn’t, the distance and numbers between them was too great. They just kept coming and she could barely see Klark between the gaps in the forces as she used her knives to try and defend against the reapers descending on her. Lexa knew Klark couldn’t last long against the crazed reapers while on the ground.

Lexa cut too deep in her fear and anger, getting one of her swords stuck in the creature's side. Releasing her grip, she kept moving, pulling out her knife for her now sword less hand. Even so, she was getting isolated, she couldn’t get to Klark. Even if she could, it would be useless because she wouldn’t be in a much better position herself. She felt like she was choking as she had to slow her pace, letting Dax stay abreast with her, praying that Klark could hang on for just a few more precious seconds.

Which is when she heard a roar. Silas kom Azgeda had a spear and he was charging, ignoring the hits he was taking, cleaving a path to the general with his body. Blood was running down his arms and sides from hits he’d taken as he charged. She watched in horror as he took a sword to the side. It was clearly a death blow. It went half way through his body, but he didn’t stop. Just stabbed his spear through the reapers head and pushed on the blade still in his side. He was almost to Klark when a reaper swung an axe for him. Unable to block, he raised his arm. His arm was sliced clean off, the axe digging deep into his side. Clearly that was the end. She watched in awe as he spat at the reaper even as he toppled towards the ground.

Then Klark was there and stabbing her knife in through the reaper’s ear, killing it instantly before whirling around standing protectively over the body of her warrior. Lexa let out a roar of her own as she sliced down another reaper before making it to Klark’s side. Silas had cut a path and she used it. She placed her back to Klark after a brief glance to make sure Klark saw and acknowledged her presence. She felt Dax fall into place, allowing them to form a group. They quickly fell into a rhythm. Klark slicing tendons and throats, tripping the disabled or dying reapers towards Dax or Lexa to finish off. Dax was using his axe to cut down the enemy with brutal efficiency while Lexa used her remaining sword to neatly dispatch her foes.
Lexa’s arms ached, she could feel the burn of several small lacerations but the end was in sight. The reapers wouldn’t last now that they were outnumbered. The cries of Klark’s horse dying were horrible but tapering off. She didn’t have time to feel bad for the animal or for Silas or for any of the reapers who if given time may have been saved. All she could do was cut the next reaper across the inner thigh knowing she hit an artery as she brought her blade up bringing the hilt down onto its head with a sick thunk.

Ryder sat in his perch and kept an eye on the slowly moving battlefield. He’d run out of arrows before the commander and the army arrived but he’d lasted long enough. The last of the reapers had been cut down. He could see the warriors carefully looking around them as they reassured themselves that the danger was gone. The quiet after a battle had spread leaving only the sounds of the wounded and the sounds of shifting weapons and men. He startled slightly when he heard the general’s voice over the sound as she started giving orders.

“Put pressure on the injuries of any wounded and move them off the battlefield but not into TonDC. Selena take the horse and get back to our camp and get our healing tents moved here with what supplies they can carry.” She ordered. Her voice carrying easily with the lack of the sounds of battle.

The warrior he’d brought with them on Heda’s horse just nodded and turned pushing Heda’s horse off in the direction of the Azgeda camp. He glanced over at the assassin in the trees and decided that he could stay up there alone being unproductive, after all they only need one lookout and dropped out of his tree. Moving through the warriors, he made his way towards the general and Heda.

“Ryder,” The commander noticed him.

“Heda, what would you have me do?” He asked seriously avoiding looking down at the damp and turned earth where the bodies of the fallen lay.

The commander looked around at the chaos left by the battle and quickly handed out her orders. “Let the healers attend to wounded and follow any order they give to you. If the healers do not need your aid attend to dead. Get what warriors you can so that they may be moved. We can’t leave them laying here. Lay them out away from the walls of TonDC though, we can’t risk having the dead so close. Be respectful of even the reapers, they were our brothers once.”

The general, busy tending to an injured Trikru warrior, briefly looked up and nodded in approval. Turning he began grabbing warriors and starting the grim task of moving the bodies and searching for those still alive and in need of help. It was hard and grim work. Ryder had been forced to end the fight of a warrior who was beyond the reach of help, and then carry his body to the join the rows of the dead. It was on his third trip back to the field that he went to help Nyko move the body of a fallen Trikru off of another warrior whose feet were twitching. He grabbed the fallen warrior’s torso and, with as much gentleness as he could afford for a dead weight, lifted it up into his arms and began to make his way back to the slowly building rows of the dead. He was stopped by a strangled grunt.

Dropping the body in his arms, he spun in his heel while drawing his sword. It was too late though. Nyko was kneeling next to what he now realized was the body of an injured reaper, the creatures blade sticking straight through the healer. “No!” Ryder cried out as he cut the head off the cursed creature.

Falling to his knees next to Nyko, he grabbed the man’s shoulder. “Tell me what to do!” He demanded anxiously, placing his hand near the wound awkwardly trying to stop the bleeding.

Nyko just let out a rasping cough as he clearly choked on something.
“KLARK!” He cried looking up for the general, she had to be able to save Nyko. She was able to bring back the dead, surely she could help Nyko. “HELP! KLARK!”

“Shit,” He heard Klark say as she dropped down beside him, her sleeves rolled up and arms covered in blood.

Ryder watched her, desperate for his friend and the best healer they had to be saved. She opened Nyko’s mouth and looked in though Ryder wasn’t sure what she was trying to discover. Mumbling under her breath she started listing problems. “Internal bleeding, definitely a punctured lung.” She pressed on Nyko’s chest, examining where the sword entered his body. “The artery almost certainly damaged, the sword is the only thing keeping him from bleeding out.”

Ryder felt his throat closing in panic as he saw Klark’s hands fall to her sides as she made eye contact with Nyko, who was wheezing great rattling wet breaths. “You can save him though right?”

Klark laid her hand on Nyko’s shoulder. “Your fight is over.” She intoned softly while reaching for the handle of one of her daggers.

Ryder grabbed the general’s hand before she could pull the dagger across his throat and end Nyko’s fight. “No! You have to do something. You can bring the dead back.”

Klark shook her head. “I can’t, the damage is too severe. I can make it quick though, he’s drowning in his own blood. It’s a painful death.”

Ryder swallowed thickly before releasing her hand. Turning to Nyko, he breathed out a promise. “I’ll protect your son, I swear.”

Nyko let out a wheeze that he thought might be gratitude before Klark dragged the dagger across his throat with a quick almost gentle motion. Ryder watched as the light left Nkyo’s eyes and they seemed to glaze over.

“I’m sorry.” Klark said as she stood and then moved off to where someone else was calling for her.

Ryder stayed put staring at his friend’s body, he couldn’t move. Healers weren’t supposed to be murdered by their patients. Nyko shouldn’t have been the one to die. It was wrong that he made it through the battle only to die like this. He stayed kneeling on the stained ground for some time before he reached out and closed his friend’s eyes. He didn’t look up when he heard the horns blowing, warning everyone of the swift approach of the deadly fog. He only moved when he felt himself being dragged to his feet. He saw the fog billowing over the ground not reaching their location and he began to laugh.

Six months ago:

Gunter stood beside Klark holding her pauldron as she stood ready to walk forward for the challenge. If she lost today, he would become general of her forces. It was a position he had never thought to fill. He was not made to be a leader, he’d always known he was a follower, a second, never the master of others fate. Like most Azgeda warriors, he’d been taken from his home when he was a boy and then left to fight tooth and nail to be taken as a second to a warrior. He’d been good at it, but his rise through the ranks had been slow and had more to do with his superiors seeing him for exactly what he was, the guard dog. They knew he was no threat to their leadership and so they trusted him with more authority than they would others.

He didn’t have much time as a warrior left. Another ten years at best. His hair had long since gone
grey, his face lined with scars and lines that were slowly turning into wrinkles. He’d accepted his fate years ago. Advancement, honor, glory, riches, power, family, these were things he’d never dreamed of or aspired to gain. All he wanted was to complete his duty well and die an honorable man, a respected warrior.

So, when he’d been ordered to take as a second a skinny injured girl with dark skin and angry eyes, who had recently been pulled from the queen’s dungeons, he’d done so without question. It had changed his life in ways he never could have guessed, because with Raven came the rest of the sky fallen. It hadn’t taken long to realize that they were communicating somehow, that they were dangerously linked together with a bond forged through shared hardship. Nia and the captains they served had not realized the danger in such bonds, only seeing them as a way to manipulate their forces. Gunter was different. He had been in battle all his life and he had seen the bonds formed by it and the power they had to inspire and motivate people to try the impossible. He had silently observed others as he quietly did his duty for years and he knew that it was not the ambitious who were the most dangerous. Nia saw and recognized the ambitious, she knew them and how to manipulate them and bring about their downfall. They were no threat to her. Far more dangerous was a warrior with a cause who would be willing to sacrifice and bleed and die for the sake of their brothers and sisters or for an ideal. Nia did not know how to deal with such threats because she didn’t understand their motives which made them unpredictable.

When he had realized what a strong bond had formed amongst the sky fallen and the anger they could not hide yet in their eyes, he knew that they had the potential to spell Nia’s doom if they were allowed to advance and grow. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t just killed the girl and her fellows as soon as he’d realized they were a knife waiting for an opportunity to steal the life of his queen. He hadn’t, perhaps because even he hadn’t thought that they would live long enough or rise high enough to truly become a threat to the queen. Or perhaps he had been curious to see what these children would do and how far they would get. He hadn’t been prepared for Klark.

It wasn’t just idle curiosity and passing fondness that caused him to stay his hand after he met the girl who clearly commanded the sky fallen. He was an old soldier and he had seen legends rise and fall and in that girl, with her deceptively short stance, he’d seen greatness. Not that his second was going to be anything other than a legend and he was proud of the part he would play in that. However, Raven like him was not a leader, she was a weapon to be wielded and she was wielded by Klark. He had never warned Nia of the danger she was creating allowing these children to be forged into weapons. It had taken him until he heard news of Klark’s rise in rank to captain for him to truly realize why he had kept his silence. He’d known then that it was the hope of a better ruler that Klark represented that had stayed his hand. He had seen the ruin his queen was leading them all to and Klark with her band of sky fallen was hope for a different fate than a clan and nation reduced to ash under the commander’s heel.

So, he had waited and watched and listened. He wouldn’t have noticed otherwise what everyone else had clearly failed to note till now. He doubted Nia even realized the extent of the threat standing before her, standing beside her son preparing to fight to the death. Nia only saw an ambitious general who may have gained some popularity but who could be dealt with just as she had all the ambitious generals who came before her. She did not realize that Klark had started a movement and a change that could no longer be quelled by her death. The blue fabric slowly spreading through the ranks, ideals of justice, duty and loyalty to something more than just a throne sat on by a frozen queen. The way civilians stopped fearing the army and started to ask for help. Klark had not just fanned her own popularity for the sake of ambition as Nia would view it. No, she had thawed the hearts of the Azgeda warriors and shown them a better way and that was not something that Nia could kill or destroy as she had dealt with all other threats to her throne.

Still, it would be a waste if Klark were to die for she was a true leader. The war at the border had
been illuminating in that regard. Klark knew how to wield her weapons. Bellamy, the loyal soldier, had served his part. Like Gunter, he was a fantastic second in command who rallied the troops and kept things organized. Raven’s knowledge had been used and abused to gain victories where otherwise there would have been defeat. The assassin’s deadly skills had been used to keep her forces in line and to attack the enemy where they were weakest. Not only that but she had protected the people and looked after their interest gaining their loyalty and support. Klark had been a revelation and he’d cast his lot.

He’d never considered himself as the sort of person to be a traitor but on this day he knew if Klark commanded it he would even strike against the queen, the third ruler of Azgeda in his lifetime. The fact he was not given that order confirmed he’d made the right decision. Klark wasn’t power hungry like Nia, she wanted power so that she could protect. He’d never served a leader willing to die for their people before and Klark by disobeying orders and accepting the challenge was doing exactly that, she was risking death for her people. He had faith in her though and believed in her victory. Watching Nia announce the fight and watching the gathered crowd murmuring confused about why this was happening, he didn’t feel a moment of doubt. If Klark won, he would continue to follow her. If she did not and he was forced to become general, he had been given his orders and had a path to follow. She had guaranteed her will would still be done even if she did die, he would have an ally in her loyal soldier Bellamy and together they would be able to continue her work.

So he didn’t waver or tense like the others from the army sworn to Klark’s service when she stepped forward drawing her daggers as she turned to face Roan. He looked at the top of the stairs where Nia stood flanked by her guards and advisors. His eyes narrowed at the large hulking form of Garon, the covered form of Anankos, the commander of the queen’s assassins, and Iago, the tall and angled arrogant toad. Zola, the simpering fool, was also there standing to the side but of all of them he detested Garon the most. The bearded man served a purpose though, he was probably part of the reason Nia didn’t recognize the full threat of Klark. Garon had been an obvious threat for years and Nia playing the political game with him had probably distracted her from Klark and the threat she posed. After all, Garon was the type of ally you always had to watch knowing they would stab you in the back if given the chance. He’d willingly sacrificed four of his five children to the army, the fifth a prisoner in all but name to the plains as a guarantee of their alliance. Xander, Garon’s son and a captain in the forces, was everything his father was not and Gunter was glad of it. The other siblings appeared to be cut of the same cloth as their eldest brother but he had only served with the eldest.

He was brought from his thoughts as Roan made the first move. The clash of weapons was predictable. Roan was using his reach and sword to keep Klark at arms length and out of striking range, while Klark was all quick thrusts and feints trying to get close. He had to commend Echo for how she’d approached Klark’s training. With Raven, he’d hammered the basics into her head but had focused on the sword, drilling it into her till she was a force to be reckoned with in the field. Echo on the other hand had observed her seconds gift for spotting weakness and exploited it by teaching her the basics of many different types of weapons so she could recognize the style and weaknesses of her opponent’s approach. Then, she had drilled Klark in knives and short swords, which were some of the most versatile weapons, until she could take advantage of the weaknesses she saw. The result was that Klark was all calculated speed, aiming for stressing the weaknesses of her opponent. He had no doubt there was a reason for every step she took. Right now, it appeared she was forcing Roan onto his left leg as often as possible.

Roan on the other hand was a work of deadly art, clearly trained and proficient in more than one singular weapon. However, Gunter could see something he doubted the rest of the audience could see, Klark was keeping him on his good leg, she was letting his bad leg rest. There had to be a reason for it. His best guess was that she was letting him get comfortable. Roan seemed to have decided that even if her strategy was letting his injuries rest, it wasn’t wise to allow her to dictate the
fight. With a sharp turn of his blade he was on her, pushing her back using his reach and strength to overwhelm her.

Gunter saw several thin lines of red appear across his general’s arms as she barely avoided blows. Then, as she was being herded into a corner of the courtyard, Roan’s right leg buckled. It was a testament to his skill that Roan moved his weight to his other leg almost instantly, but for that single moment his blow had been altered and it was the opening Klark needed. She was under his sword inside his guard in that split second. Gunter was surprised when she didn’t go for a death blow, though seeing how Roan dropped his sword without a second thought moving to block the expected attack, he could see why. Instead, Klark drove her left dagger straight up into the arm Roan was bringing up to block while her right dagger rammed into his already injured leg viciously.

Roan faltered from shock and pain which allowed Klark to drive her knee straight up between his legs hard enough to lift him slightly. The shock caused his arms to drop, with a jerk she yanked her knife out of his arm before driving it through his ear. The prince’s body dropped like a toy that’s strings had been cut, blood pooling outwards from his fallen form. Gunter stood there watching as Klark stood over the body panting, blood running off her from several thin slices as the crowd cried out its approval.

He continued to watch attentively though knowing her next action would be important, vital even. So he remained still as those around him cheered and chanted their approval of her success. Klark finally pulled her shoulders back as she walked slowly towards Nia on the raised steps. Gunter was not disappointed in her actions, a small smile twitching his lips as he watched her drop to her knees lowering her head. Now was not the time to challenge the queen and showing respect might save her later trouble. Letting his eyes move from his general to the queen, he examined her face for danger.

Nia’s face gave little away, it was hard and shuttered closed but he could see the disgust and anger in it. However, he did not see the fear she should be feeling. He decided to take a chance and took a step forward before dropping to his knees as well. It didn’t surprise him to hear and see out of the corner of his eyes the rest of his party following his example, clearly confused but doing so anyways. From there it spread as the crowd slowly silenced itself falling to their knees before their queen. Gunter was pleased, there was no need for the queen to see the danger in front of her right now. Klark was too green, too new for Nia to truly fear her as she should.

Nia stepped forward, raising her hand, and Gunter knew Klark had won. Nia feared the chaos if someone else used Klark against her and the potential she had to be a threat later and did not realize the very real threat she posed now. She thought Klark was a problem that she had time to deal with, the beginnings of a threat not the immediate danger she really was. So he watched as the queen stood and announced Azgeda’s new heir. He watched as the crowd swelled back to their feet, rushing to touch their new heir and champion. Standing slowly, he remained in the back watching as Klark was surrounded by ecstatic warriors and common folk and felt at peace with his decision to follow this girl who had greatness in her. He felt pride that he had trained one of the greatest weapons she would wield, and pride that he would be a steady rock behind her.

Chapter End Notes

One of our comments by roger asked about what would have happened if Nia hadn't known about the implant making Clarke unable to get pregnant. Which is a fabulous question by the way. So Mouse and I talked it out and we think what would have happened would be fairly similar to the story actually. Clarke for political and self
sacrificing reasons would have most likely agreed to such a proposition. Roan isn't evil
more like under his mother's thumb and trying to do his best for his people, which he
can't do if he's out of favor with Nia. So as in cannon it wouldn't be hard for Roan to be
turned against his mother. Assassinating Nia so he could take over wouldn't take them
long. Once Nia's dead Roan takes the throne. From there we see Clarke and Roan's
relationship going one of two different ways. Either they do the whole 'i know we
married for political reasons but oh no I'm falling for you.' Or they could go the 'we're
friends and work together for the good of our people, any lovers either of us take have
to be discrete so our marriage is never questioned.' Either way they'd end up being allies
pretty quickly, since while their positions are very different they do have similar goals.
With Roan on the throne Clarke would still be the general sent to the mountain only in
that scenario because she's their best chance. The make up of the army would be
different though. Clarke and Roan would want to send forces that hadn't been in combat
so recently so they could gain experience as well as not be as personally embroiled in
hatred for the other clans. Not to mention when you have a new ruler you keep the loyal
soldiers as close to home as possible to keep the peace. The mountain would go about
the same only no Clexa because it would be way too risky for Clarke, not to mention
Lexa doesn't seem the type to ever make a move on someone who is already married
even if it's a political union. Post mountain Roan would basically end up the one who
deals with taxes, internal trade, justice, and other day to day tasks of ruling while Clarke
would totally end up as the one in charge of the military and diplomacy with other clans.
Eventually it would probably be in their best interests for Clarke to have her implant
removed so they could have a kid, whether the normal way or just in a 'crap we have to
do this don't we,' way.

On the implants it can be inferred that it needs to be removed to lose affect cause we
know in S3 Abby was removing them. So the Blake mom probably sold her's on the
black market or something. Like accidental pregnancy doesn't seem like a thing on the
ark....or maybe she had to have it removed for medical reasons and didn't think anything
of sex because she was so used to it just being safe. Cause we know it has to be
effective because of all the sexicapades the 100 get up to on the ground without
condoms. And it would make sense. Like religious cults use sex to control their
members by either denying sex or by providing it. If you have a bunch of people locked
up in space with not a lot to do outside of their work hours making sex as easy, safe and
socially acceptable as possible would be a fantastic way to keep your population under
control.
So we got a lot of neat feedback on the Roan and Clarke arranged marriage tangent. If anyone wants to write that go for it. We're fine with it. Both of us really do like Roan and were sad to kill him off and basically keep him stuck in a role forced on him by his mother. Also totally an interesting pairing.

Monty heard the last door out of the mountain clang shut just moments before a massive explosion caused the ground to rock and dust to fall from the ceiling. Covering Miller with his body and protecting him from the falling debris, he hissed when a piece of rock bounced off his shoulder. Finally, the shaking settled and the dust began to clear. He coughed, trying to get the dust out of his mouth before turning his head towards Raven in surprise. “What the hell did you put in those explosives!”

Raven was wide eyed staring back at the mountain with shock. “Nothing that should have caused that.” She sounded rather awe struck.

Before Monty could further question how the hell an explosion large enough to almost cause the tunnels to cave in could have happened, he heard Miller cry out in pain. “I need a tourniquet.” He demanded while letting Miller slide to the ground.

He heard shuffling and coughing before a belt hit the side of his head. With quick hands he grabbed it and quickly wrapped it around Miller’s arm above the damage and tightened it as tight as he could get it. One of the Trikru warriors was holding onto Miller’s shoulders to keep him from jerking too much at the pain. “It’s ok, you’re going to be fine.” He murmured reassuring his partner.

Miller let out a hoarse whisper. “I’m not going to keep my arm.”

“Clarke will fix you up good as new.” Monty said thickly, stroking the dark hair behind Miller’s ear and pulling the pained man into him as they sat in the tunnel. He didn’t know why they weren’t moving but he knew Raven or one of the others would find out soon enough.

He felt Miller’s breath on his neck as the man shuddered against him. He felt sick from the sight of the mangled remains of what had once been a strong and capable arm. Injuries like that ended warrior’s careers and he knew it. Miller was right, even Clarke couldn’t save the limb. He felt himself shudder when Raven laid her hand on the back of his neck while she crouched protectively in front of them as best she could with her leg.

“Skia brats!” A familiar voice called out.

Looking up, he saw the tall thin form of one of the prisoners wearing next to nothing stumble towards them. Blinking, he examined the woman for a minute before recognizing her. “Echo...?”

“Holy shit,” Raven echoed before standing and hauling the weak woman into her arms and hugging her.

Monty wiped at his eyes as Raven led Echo to him and Miller. “It’s good to see you alive.” He said
finally.

“You as well.” She said dropping down ungracefully next to him and Miller. “Is he going to make it?” She asked in concern while clearly trying to see what had caused Miller’s current state.

“His arm is injured but he’ll make it.” Monty said firmly.

There was a long silence as they sat waiting for the orders to move or stay, interrupted only by coughing throughout the tunnel. It was broken as Indra walked towards their section of collapsed former prisoners and members of their attack team. “Status?” She asked.

Raven shifted before standing again. “Our team made it out, we have one serious injury.”

The general frowned. “Can anything be done about it here?”

“Nothing other than what's already been done.” Raven replied, her hand resting on Monty’s shoulder.

“I’ll be fine.” Miller wheezed from against Monty’s neck.

“We need to get him to Clarke.” Monty bit out, gripping him more firmly.

Indra’s face was tight. “The mountain released the fog. We’re trapped as long it remains. I have scouts posted at the entrance to the caves. We will move as soon as possible.” The grim reality that they were trapped settled over the group but no one responded to her news.

“What is a Trikru warrior doing in charge of Azgeda forces?” Echo asked from her position against the wall. Monty could practically feel the interest of the various former prisoners within earshot.

Raven answered. “The coalition laid siege to the mountain. Indra is the general in charge of the direct attack on it.”

“Klark let you lot out of her sight under the command of a Trikru general?” Echo asked sounding surprised and askance.

Monty snorted, he understood Echo’s surprise. “You’ve been gone for almost five months. We were sure you were dead. Things have changed.”

Echo made a clicking noise while shutting her mouth in surprise. “That long?” She finally asked.

“How can you even walk?” Raven asked.

“They started feeding us more, taking less blood, keeping our prison warmer. I’m not sure how long ago but the dying slowed.” She said, her eyes hollow as she seemed to fold in on herself slightly.

“The blockade.” Monty realized. “They had to keep you alive since easy replacements weren’t available.”

Indra coughed from the dust still settling around them. “Do we need a guard at this door?” She looked darkly at the entrance to the mountain they had just used.

Raven frowned and tapped her fingers clearly thinking. “In the event of a breach standard procedure should be to shut down and close off all access to the damaged areas. The fog is a defence mechanism so it should be safe to say the survivors are trying to limit damage. We should have several hours before they marshal a reprisal at least.”
“At best?” Indra asked.

“We destroyed their air filters, they expand all remaining manpower to repair their systems. If they fail, they suffocate.” Monty said viciously hoping that they all died as he felt the unsteady breaths of Miller against his throat.

“Is our radio working?” Raven asked.

Indra handed the black box to her. “I am unsure.”

Monty felt amused at Raven’s huff as she grabbed the device.

__________________________________________________________

Five months ago:

Camilla walked up the stairs to the general’s quarters. She knocked sharply before opening the door and heading in, not bothering to wait for an invitation. Ignoring the slightly exasperated look on General Seth’s face, she continued to the desk he was tabulating food stores on and dropped a letter on top of his work. “General,” She greeted.

“What’s this?” He asked, setting down his pen and clicking shut his ink well.

She raised an eyebrow at his disheveled appearance and the stubble along his jaw. “You spent the night up here again.” She commented.

“You’re a captain not my caretaker.” He sighed.

Camilla ignored him, moving to the side and pouring a glass of water and handing it over to him. “And I won’t have a general much longer if you don’t start sleeping and taking care of yourself. If you haven’t noticed, generals are dropping like flies lately.”

Seth snorted, accepting the water and taking a deep pull from it. “I have no intention of making a challenge while half dead or taking up unfortunate drinking habits so I’m afraid you’re stuck with me.” Reaching down, he picked up the letter she’d dropped on his desk. “From Xander?”

“Yes, my brother wrote to confirm I didn’t need to start looking for a new general anytime soon. His general holds no ambitions for your territory as far as he’s aware.” She said, dropping down onto Seth’s bed ignoring his glare at the liberty. She’d been his second and she knew she could take certain liberties without fear of repercussions.

Seth rolled his eyes before turning serious. “What is your brother’s take on this General Klark?”

Camilla sighed at him not taking the bait, riling up her former first was one of the highlights of her day. Turning her thoughts to this latest letter her eldest brother had sent her, she considered the news from her other siblings who also served under the new general. “Xander trusts and respects her. He speaks very highly of her. He purposely requested she take Elise as a medical apprentice which is more telling than anything else because it means his praise isn’t because he fears his letters are being read.”

Rubbing his chin thoughtfully, Seth spoke. “And Leo?”

“He made captain,” Camilla replied with a hint of pride in her tone. “He’s serving as the quartermaster of the army now, Klark has placed a great deal of trust on his shoulders.”
“Three captains in the army, your father may even concede to acknowledge you all by name.” Seth remarked.

“Hardly, he won’t be pleased till he’s on the throne and we are the four generals of the nation.” Camilla said bitterly.

Seth’s face softened. “He’s a bitter old toad.” He stood stretching and letting out a yawn. “What do you think we should do about the new heir?”

Camilla tilted her head slightly. “She’s not going to die as easily as Nia expects if my brother’s words are true. With the south east already in her debt it may be wise to look into allying with her. It would help with dealing with Quint’s incompetence.” She really was sick of Quint, if he wasn’t actually a capable general, she would have suggested they have him killed ages ago. Alas for all his unpleasantness and his horrid temper, he was a decent general with well marshalled forces.

“Are the rumors that she’s assisting in our neighboring region’s rebuilding efforts true then?” Seth asked.

“Xander and his division are still there helping with rebuilding but will be withdrawing now that the snow is here in earnest.” She reported easily.

Seth leaned against his desk. “Then I suppose with the winter snows here I can afford a trip to the north to deal with the logistics of aiding Klark’s efforts to rebuild the border regions this coming summer.”

“You want to use our reserves on that?” Camilla asked in surprise. After all, the generals were responsible for their own territories and using up resources to help another territory could weaken their position of strength. With the two of the four territories weakened, Seth was in a position of power at the moment.

Seth pulled off his jacket. “Nia is planning a war and I would like to have as many allies for it as possible. Putting Frederick and his forces in our debt will be helpful. It also gives me an excuse to get to know our new heir.”

Camilla stood up, recognizing the conversation was at an end and that Seth would be listening to her advice and getting some sleep for once. “Shall I arrange a party to travel north then?”

“Do that, and send word to General Klark so she is expecting our company.” He ordered sitting down on his bed and pulling his boots off.

“I’ll take care of it.”

Present:

Lexa strode into the command center, stepping around civilians huddled in clumps along the walls, walking straight to the radio set up with the twins. “You said you had news?”

One of the two looked up, pulling a contraption off their head. “News from the mountain Heda.”

Straightening, Lexa replied. “And?”

The twin grinned widely. “Success, Raven or Indra haven’t hailed us yet but there’s been disruption to the signal.”
“How are you sure it was a success then?” Lexa questioned, frowning at the news the team in the mountain hadn’t sent word yet. With the fog out, all sort of horrible scenarios had been running through her head.

The other twin looked up and replied. “We got a burst of communication about invaders in the harvest chamber from the mountain followed by what sounded like an explosion.”

“The plan to make it go boom worked!” The other twin added.

Lexa wished she could tell them apart. This was going to get old fast. “And the missile?”

“Their spotter stopped reporting in a while back. Since the explosion, we’re just getting bits and pieces of mountain communication. Everything has been about repairs and closing off damaged levels though.” The first twin reported.

“Is there any way to get a message through to the team in the mountain?” She asked quickly, wondering if there was any way to take advantage of the current weakness being posed by the mountain.

“They went dark before they hit the tunnels so the radio feedback wouldn’t give their position away.” One of the kids said. “Until they turn it on, anything we try and send to them won’t be heard.”

Lexa gripped her hands behind her back as she ran through options. Further attacking the mountain while it was weak was the only way forward, they’d given up their advantage of surprise now. Klark was running a field hospital and her time was better served caring for their people than planning future maneuvers at the moment with the fog down and no way to contact those in the mountain if they had managed to survive. The explosives seemed to have been effective though. “Did your first leave more explosives than she took with her into the mountain?”

“Of course!” The twin who answered looked insulted she’d even ask that.

Lexa resisted shaking her head at their enthusiasm. “Can one of you remain at this station while the other helps recover the remaining explosives?”

The twins looked at each other and seemed to have a silent conversation. “Sure,” one of them piped up finally. “I can take you to the explosives, I’m better with them anyways.”

“Not really,” the other twin huffed.

Lexa raised an eyebrow at their jabs.

“Right, if I can use your radio I can keep us in touch with everything.” The twin replied jumping up from the bench.

“Good, we leave now.” She handed the radio to the second who barely came up to her shoulder. The kid grinned brightly and attached the radio to their belt and looked up clearly waiting to follow her.

Lexa turned and left the command room and headed for Gustus. As soon as she stepped out of the command room, Dax fell in beside her. She noted out of the side of her eye how he ruffled the hair of the twin following her. It was starting to bother her that she wasn’t sure which one she had with her. She could just try one of their names, she did have a fifty percent chance of being right. It was a thought for when they got to the explosives. Finding Gustus was easy enough, his towering frame was standing in the center of the village gesturing warriors this way and that way, off on various tasks that needed to be carried out. Good he had it under control. It was an odd situation being the commander, while she commanded a great deal of power, the running and basic logistics of war
were not hers to command unless she needed to intercede.

“Heda,” He acknowledged her, sending a warrior off towards the healing house to grab more medicine for the field hospital Klark was having constructed.

“Gustus, do we have the manpower to spare to send additional forces into the mountain as soon as the fog clears?” She asked while pulling herself into a formal stand, eyes quickly taking stock of her friend. He had fabric wrapped securely around his torso that was seeping red.

Gustus frowned. “Is the threat of the missile still present?”

“At the moment it seems to have passed.” She replied.

“But still a risk?” He frowned, clearly seeing the answer in her face. “Of course, the warriors could be sent but with the wounded and dead, not to mention having to keep ourselves spread out like this, it’s a risk. We’re extremely vulnerable.” He moved as if to cross his arms before aborting the motion, his side clearly paining him.

A sharp series of clicks from Dax drew both of their attention to the tall blond warrior. He was tapping out a series of clicks against the side of his dagger’s hilt. Lexa was confused at how he thought they would be able to understand him, till the twin spoke up translating for him.

“Dax says Klark sent for the Azgeda healing tent and supplies to be brought here. According to Klark’s orders, they’ll come with a full division of our forces to protect the injured and provide support. Gunter’s section will hold the line and Captain Xander will take control of this region while Laslow’s forces are allowed to re marshal. It should take an hour for the first section to arrive, four hours to be organized and Xander to be in control of our forces here.” The kid frowned at Dax. “You’re so boring.”

Dax rolled his eyes pushing the kid’s shoulder lightly.

Lexa nodded in acknowledgment, it was a good system. It had most likely been in place for longer than just the siege, having a senior captain take control while the injured forces marshalled themselves was smart. Turning to Gustus, she spoke. “Send a rider to Tristan’s camp, I want half of his forces to make camp in the woods just outside of the village. We can send the civilians out of TonDC and into their protection till the mountain is taken care of.”

“That would work, Tristan is in the village already. I can send him to his troops with his orders.” Gustus responded. “A force can be spared to head into the mountain as soon as the Azgeda forces get here and help secure our injured and worn down.”

“I’ll need ten at least to help prepare for the incoming party in the meantime. Where have you sent the uninjured warriors?” She asked.

“They’re all injured.” Gustus blew out a breath in frustration. “I’ve never seen so many broken noses and swollen shut eyes in all my years. Even without the reapers the army is a mess. The ones that don’t require medical aid are moving the dead or standing guard at the edge of the southern field.”

“I’ll take ten from there then.” Lexa cringed at the reminder of how reckless the brawl had been. Over two hundred warriors beaten black and blue just for a distraction. At least there were no reports of any of her warriors dying in the chaos before the reapers arrived. “And get your side checked by the healers as soon as you’re able. I can’t have you passing out.”

Gustus looked properly rebuked. “Sha, Heda.”
Lexa gave him a nod of approval before heading out of the village and for the medical field. Klark would need to be updated, or at least a warrior of hers informed who could update her when she wasn't elbow deep in one of the injured. Once out on the field, she realized giving the update directly to Klark wasn't going to happen. She had clearly conscripted several less seriously injured warriors into helping her treat the injured. She was using a serrated blade to remove a warrior's mangled leg. Interrupting that was out of the question. Surveying the area, she saw Laslow directing men as they moved the dead.

“Captain!” She summoned, stopping a short distance from him.

The bedraggled man glanced at her and gave her a quick nod before going back to giving his orders to the warrior before him. Lexa waited for him to finish. As she waited, she examined the captain who’d helped her end the brawl and get the men moving to the reaper battle. He was favoring one leg and if she wasn’t wrong, he’d injured one of his ankles. There was a strip of cloth wrapped around the top of his head where an injury and clearly bled significantly as head wounds were prone to do. The blood had soaked his collar but it looked like the bandage had stopped the bleeding mostly. He also had a dramatic black eye that was already swelling and standing out darkly against his skin.

Finally, he limped over to her, his shoulders drawn in exhaustion. “Heda,” His voice was tired but she could sense the steel behind it, he wasn’t done yet.

“Klark is unavailable but we need to send a second force into the mountain to finish this before they can retaliate.” She began.

He straightened his back and asked. “How many of the men do you need?”

“Nine for now, Dax and I can assist with the work. We need to get the equipment together now. When the reinforcements from your camp arrive with the healers I’ll take more for the actual assault. You’ll need to inform Klark when you can.” She said.

“I can do that, take from the men gathering the dead.” Lexa nodded in assent before moving to the neatly organized rows of the dead that were ever growing. There was an even mix of Trikru and Azgeda working together following the orders of an Azgeda captain. It surprised her and pleased her to see the warriors working so well together. The bodies were being treated with respect regardless of clan. She heard a shaky breath behind her and turned and saw the face of the twin she’d brought with her. Tears were running down the kid’s face as they tried to wipe at their eyes. Dax laid his hand on the kid’s shoulder.

“Nut,” she guessed at a name, hoping it was the correct one. “You do not need to disguise your grief. This is not a time where sorrow is to be hidden.”

The girl gave a snifflle and didn’t protest the name leading Lexa to realize she’d guessed correctly. The girl made eye contact and spoke softly after a moment. “I’ve seen worse, but it shouldn’t have happened. This wasn’t…”

Lexa reached out and clasped the free shoulder of the girl that Dax didn’t already hold in comfort. “There is no safety in war, these warriors fought well and they will be honored as the heroes that they are.”

“I know.” She whispered looking back at the ground. “It’s just they were supposed to be safe, Bolt and I were supposed to warn them.”

“You couldn’t have known the actions of the reapers. You are a second, do not take the burdens of
leaders and of the enemy onto your shoulders.” She waited till the girl nodded before straightening her back. Dax gave her an approving look before she turned away to begin recruiting warriors who were in the best condition to prepare for a second strike on the mountain.

Octavia paced anxiously outside the tent that had been erected as a temporary medical hold while they waited for orders to move closer to the army. Charlotte was still in there with Brady and Cassita. They hadn’t heard anything which meant she still was alive, but it also meant that she was still in danger. Octavia’s heart felt like it was lodged in her throat. She needed something to hit or kill. But she was stuck in charge of security for the medics and medical supplies.

“Pacing will not help your friend.” Anya snapped from where she was posted standing rigidly still waiting for news on her second. The Trikru boy, Aden, stared darkly at the ground next to her, clearly vibrating with suppressed energy and the drive to do something.

Octavia snapped back. “She was under your command!”

“It was my fault.” Aden interrupted before Anya could speak. “She said she’d cover me while I grabbed Tris out of danger. I didn’t know she meant she’d take the hits herself.”

Octavia stopped pacing and stared at the kid. He was tall, all gangly limbs he was still growing into and a frame that was still filling out with muscle. His eyes were red rimmed. It was clear he was holding it together by a thread. “You’re the nightblood. She spoke highly of you. You’re not a warrior like Charlotte and I. You don’t get to make decisions off what you feel.”

Anya scoffed. “I don’t know you and I already know you have less control over your emotions than him.”

“And I’ve paid for that.” Octavia’s fists clenched. “Clarke isn’t the first of my family to cover for me, taking punishment that belonged to me. My first died protecting me.”

“How do you look at your family when you’re responsible for their pain?” Aden asked hoarsely.

Octavia sighed, letting her muscles relax ever so slightly. “By reminding myself that I may have screwed up but I can still protect them. By knowing that I would and have done the same for them.”

Aden nodded, stiffening like he was imprinting it on his mind.

“You truly care for them then?” Octavia asked watching him.

“We took the knot of brotherhood. They are the most trusted friends I have.” He replied.

Octavia paused and then began to pace again. Internally she swore, it seemed she and the others were going to be sworn to protect some skinny nightblood by proxy of their sister’s oath. Still, it made her feel proud at the same time that Charlotte had finally found friendship and brotherhood outside of their family. It was a rare thing for their family and had to be valued. Her pacing was interrupted by Brady coming out of the temporary tent. She and the others outside all snapped around staring at him, waiting for news.

“Tha’ Trikru girl is fine. We got thuh bullet out an’ patched her up. Charlotte needed a lot o’ blood. I think we got it, but till she wakes I don’t know.” He shook his head in frustration and raised his arms in a helpless shrug.

Octavia grit her teeth. “Is there anything else? She can have my blood. Charlotte and I are
Brady shook his head. “Naw, we already set up a line tween her and Elise.”

Before Octavia could reply she heard a commotion as a rider galloped out of the tree line and straight for them. Raising her arm, Octavia cried out, “HOLD!”

She recognized the rider as Selena one of Laslow’s warriors. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Anya and Aden straightening. “What?” She questioned their sudden tension.

“That’s Heda’s horse,” Aden said quietly.

Octavia felt like a live wire as she itched to reach for her sword. An Azgeda warrior riding the commander’s horse couldn’t be good. Jogging forward, she waved Selena over to her. The warrior pulled up on the reigns of the animal that Octavia realized was exhausted, it was frothing, sweat standing out against its hair, blood and dirt liberally splashed across its hide. Something was terribly wrong. The warrior dismounted, “He needs to get walked.” She gestured to the horse.

“Percy!” Octavia summoned the smallest of the seconds. “Take care of the horse, walk it out then rub down, no cold water till it’s breathing has evened out and then only in small amounts.”

The boy nodded, grabbing the reins and pulling the animal away. Octavia turned to the warrior who was also covered in a great deal of blood and dirt. “What’s happened?”

Anya was straight as a ruler and standing behind Octavia’s shoulder. Selena opened her mouth and spoke, despite her relatively heavy breathing. “Reapers attacked TonDC in the chaos. You need to get the healers and a full division to act as guard to the village now.”

“How did you get the commander's horse?” Anya demanded.

The warrior glanced at Octavia, who gave her a nod of assent, before answering. “We were too far out when word reached us of the attack. General Klark, Niles, a Trikru scout Ryder, and I, took the general and the commander’s horses and distracted the reapers from the village till the commander could get our forces to the village.”

“The general?” Octavia asked quickly. She needed to know Klark was safe.

“She organizing the men to take care of the wounded while Heda was taking charge of the forces.” Selena said.

Octavia could feel the Trikru warrior and second behind her relaxing at the news their commander was still breathing. She felt the same at the news of Clarke’s continued survival. “Get a fresh horse and head for Gunter’s camp he’ll need to know what’s happening.”

“Of course,” Selena tilted her head in assent before heading off towards the horses.

Turning, she moved back towards the healing tent and Brady. “Can Charlotte and Tris be moved?”

He shook his head. “Nawt happening.”

She grit her teeth before giving orders. She was in charge of this camp while Laslow was gone and she intended to do what was right. “Brady get your warriors and get the healing tents and tools moving now. Leave Elise here with Charlotte and Tris in the makeshift tent we have up for right now. Choose two full warriors of your choice to guard them. We’re leaving for TonDC, now.”
Five months ago:

Ephraim hated the winter, the cold that seeped into your bones was the bane of his existence, he was sure. Still, here he was considering not just dealing with more of it than necessary but actually going further north into Azgeda territory. The things he did for his sister. Opening the thick wooden door in front of him, he quickly entered and slammed the door behind him, keeping the cold out. The sounds and warm light of the tavern quickly filled his senses. Stamping his feet, he shook the snow from his person before moving towards the fire and the Azgeda captain who had entered his territory the night before. “Bellamy,” He greeted.

The dark haired man stood, his short beard neatly trimmed and wearing warm furs, though fewer than Ephraim himself was wearing. “General, it’s an honor. I didn’t think you’d come to a place like this.”

Ephraim snorted. “I have no intention of spending the entire winter holed up in my fort. Isn’t that what your own general is all about, mingling with the people?”

Bellamy laughed his eyes crinkling. “Of course, but mingling doesn’t necessarily mean getting drunk off your ass with them. You’re the son of your King.”

“Eirika is our heir not me, I get to drink.” He waved the bartender over and gratefully accepted the mug of ale. “You mentioned your general would be amenable to me escorting the new horses to her territory personally?”

Bellamy nodded, taking his seat by the fire again. “Of course, an opportunity to meet a general as well spoken of as you are, is welcome. Klark wishes to ensure that the trade between your clan and her territory isn’t harmed by the transfer of power.”

“That was entirely scripted then?” He asked raising an eyebrow. He and Bellamy weren’t political speakers, it showed when the man was parroting someone else’s words.

The captain snorted, taking a drag of his own ale. “Eirika mentioned your general would be amenable to me escorting the new horses to her territory personally?”

Bellamy set his mug down. “Look, things are settling down and Klark wants peace and the increased trade from that peace. The other stuff,” he waved his hand with a shrug. “I don’t know, I just know that our men need peace and our infrastructure needs work. The horses I’m here to trade for are an important part of that.”

Ephraim could see the honesty in the man. “Then I’ll need to speak with her before we can guarantee more trade beyond the forty horses you’re here to buy.”

“Of course, we can deal with the logistics tomorrow.” Bellamy grinned. “However, if you plan on coming to Azgeda in the winter to meet Klark, you need to practice holding your ale. After all, there isn’t much else to do this time of year, and she can drink most of us under the table.”

Ephraim looked at the captain in surprise. “Really, I’ll have to challenge her to a drinking contest when I arrive.”

He wasn’t sure how many hours later it was when he stumbled back through the snow into his quarters. Seeing his sister sitting in a chair by the fire in his room, he groaned. It had to be a mirage, his sister shouldn’t have arrived for another day at least. Ignoring the form of his sister that was
looking at him with concern, he face planted on his bed. He was asleep before he’d even shut his eyes.

The next morning, Ephraim woke to the sensation of a herd of horses stampeding in his head. Squinting, he saw the laughing face of one of his warriors standing beside the bed. With a grunt, he felt his stomach rebelling. “Bucket.”

Hauling himself over the edge of the bed, he felt himself purging the ale from his system into the bucket. Finally, his stomach was done emptying itself. Spitting out the foul bile, he could feel in his mouth, he looked up at his far too amused warrior. “Forde, please tell me it was a hallucination of my sister I saw last night.”

“Afraid not sir. She’s commandeered your paperwork and a corner of the mess hall. You might even be caught up with your paperwork, if you pretend to sleep for another few hours.” The man had far too cocky of a smile.

Ephraim groaned, letting his head hit his pillows again. Perfect, he’d be drinking that horrendous healthy post drinking concoction Eirika swore by soon then. Just the thought of it caused his stomach to roll traitorously. Maybe he could hide till this hangover passed? Yes, that was a great idea he decided, keeping his eyes closed and hoping his lack of movement would clue Forde into the fact he wasn’t moving anytime soon. His peace was disturbed by the door opening and the usually comforting, but momentarily painful, voice of his twin.

“I know you’re awake Ephraim, you can stop pretending.” She said, moving for the shutters and pulling them open.

Ephraim glared at Forde as the man covered up his laugh with a fit of coughs.

The man looked unrepentant as as he shrugged at Ephraim before speaking to Eirika. “It’s lovely to see a sight as radiant as you this early ma’am.”

“Get out.” Ephraim croaked.

“Just telling the truth sir.” Forde had the audacity to wink at his sister.

Ephraim rolled over and sat up, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. Resting his arms on his legs he looked up at Forde through his bangs. “Leave us.”

“Yes sir.” Forde sent a last wink at Eirika before leaving the room.

Once the door had been closed for a few seconds, Eirika spoke. “I assume your night was productive brother?”

He ignored the amusement in her tone. “Captain Bellamy is a good soldier and loyal to his general, almost fanatically so. I had forgotten why drinking with Azgeda warriors was a terrible idea.”

His sister sat down beside him and rubbed his back in sympathy, he enjoyed the floral scent that seemed to cling to her. “When do you go back to Polis?”

“Next week. I can’t trust that old fool with the other ambassadors if I’m gone much longer.” She hummed softly after she finished speaking.

“You should be the one meeting the new heir to Azgeda.” He said finally. It was true, Eirika was the
brains and diplomacy of their family.

Eirika brushed his bangs out of his eyes. “You’ll be fine. Get her measure and send word with what you find. Ingratiate yourself to her as best as you can and know she’ll want to do the same to you. We can’t afford to affront our closest allies after all.”

“Do you ever wonder how we gained so strong of an alliance with Azgeda? They’re strong, but they are insane.” He muttered.

“They’re the largest clan of warriors and have the largest territory out of the clans. Our alliance with them is why we are safe from our enemies despite how spread out our towns are. Still, I agree, the Ice Nation tends to be arrogant and blood thirsty. Honestly challenging Heda openly in front of the court, of course the fool was kicked from the window.” Eirika frowned clearly still baffled by the show of stupidity.

Ephraim laughed quietly, he still remembered the long letter she’d sent him ranting about their allies in the coalition, who wouldn’t know how to politic if it bit them in the ass. “The new ambassador hasn’t been too bad though.”

“No, but now that Azgeda has won its war with Sankru and the banished decisively I fear they will become more aggressive.” She wrapped her arm around him pulling him into her side. “You must get the measure of this Klark the Undefeated.”

“Of course, I know the importance of my task, you can depend on me.” Ephraim said.
Clarke tied off the knot on her last stitch and sat back on her heels and gave herself a moment to breath. The severely injured had either been treated or had died waiting for treatment. She couldn’t save them all, she never could. She had to choose who to treat and who would have to wait for treatment while she was caring for their comrades who were in equally dire straits. This calm without patients in dire need wouldn’t last but she had a few precious minutes she could afford herself now that her apprentices had arrived and were helping the injured. Standing, she moved to the building set aside for quarantine built just outside of the walls of TonDC. She’d seen Lexa and a small band of warriors hauling something into the building, though enough time had passed since then for her to treat a perforated lung and impaled side.

Having Lexa there to take charge had allowed her to get straight to treating the injured, which had been a relief and a luxury she was not often afforded. However, letting Lexa carry the future movements of the army on her shoulders alone wasn’t acceptable. Even ignoring how it was desperately unfair to her lover on an individual level, Clarke was still a general first and healer second. It was her duty to her people to lead them properly and not let her need to heal the injured get in the way of that. The opportunity to save those that she normally would be unable to because of her duties as a leader was an unexpected luxury but it was time for her to return to command.

Waving away anyone who approached her, she made her way towards the quarantine hut on tired legs. Clarke was enjoying the stretch in her aching limbs and the brief moment where she didn’t have to think and plan. The dozens of injured had taken so much out of her, as always. She felt tired and her head was pounding. Everything hurt, the aches of combat, the draining of the adrenaline in her system, the grief from the loss of warriors. It was a bit selfish of her but she found that she was almost numb to the deaths of her men while the death of her horse was hitting her hard. He’d been by her side since she’d become a captain.

Slogging through the torn up ground, she finally made it to the hut and opened the door without bothering to knock. She was far too tired to bother with formality. As she came in, she saw Dax move for the hilt of a knife before recognizing her and relaxing his stance again. He tapped out a quick greeting. She smiled at him, ignoring the rest of the room noticing her.

“Klark?” Lexa questioned from she had been helping the others attach explosives to belts.

Clarke raised her eyebrow at the sight. Glancing around the room, she took in Nut’s presence as well as the collection of semi-stable warriors working under the seconds directions. “Lexa, could we talk?”

“Of course,” Standing, she brushed her knees off. Turning to the warriors who were looking curiously around, she gave them their orders. “Keep working, I expect progress when I return.”

Clarke left the hut. Once they were outside of it, she pulled Lexa into the side of the building behind the water barrels and out of sight from any prying eyes. Burying her head into Lexa’s shoulder, she held onto her just breathing her in and reassuring herself that they were both still alive. Lexa gripped
onto the back of her jacket, crushing them even further together. Clarke just breathed in, soaking in Lexa’s presence before finally forcing herself to release Lexa and pull back. “Lexa, you’re planning on going into the mountain then?” She felt her voice closing slightly at the fear that statement gave her.

“We can’t give them time to retaliate.” Lexa said. Clarke could feel the woman pulling back prepared to defend her decision.

“I know.” Clarke stroked the side of Lexa’s face with her thumb reassuring the commander that she wouldn’t oppose this. “What news do we have from the Indra’s team?”

Lexa relaxed again reassured by Clarke’s actions and words. “They contacted us an hour ago. Raven says they planted the explosives on an oxygen line in their healing room. She believes the explosion burned through the oxygen and destroy or seriously damaged their filtering tech. I must confess I do not understand completely. However, I understand that the mountain is damaged and we must not let them repair or reorganize themselves.”

Clarke felt a knot easing as she heard that Lexa had spoken directly with Raven. “Any injuries on the team?”

Lexa hesitated for a second. “Miller’s arm was damaged and they are concerned about him. They had to deviate from the plan. Our people in the mountain are still alive Klark!” Lexa was clearly filled with disbelief at this news still. “They have recovered over a hundred of our warriors. They’re weak and will need you.”

“You plan to leave me here to continue seeing to the injured then?” Clarke said roughly, frustrated that she couldn’t argue since it was the smartest course of action. “What is your plan for going back into the mountain?”

Lexa sighed. “One of us needs to remain here with our forces gathering like this and the chaos. Without one of us it could spiral out of control. You’re the best choice for this, you’re many of our men’s only hope.” Lexa looked apologetic.

Clarke nodded reluctantly, knowing that Lexa was correct. “Go on then, what’s your plan?”

“Raven and Monty are uninjured. The fog is thinning already. I’ll take a force with me into the fog zone as soon as it finishes clearing. We’ll meet Indra’s team. Some of my force can help the rescued people back here. Any of their team that feel unable to continue can return as well. As for the rest we need to move into the mountain. You explained we need only open the doors. With Raven’s explosives we can do this.” Lexa stopped waiting for Clarke’s response.

It was a good plan and Clarke knew it. It was a tad simplistic and did not account for whatever actions the mountain could take against them but it was the best they could do on the spur of the moment with only a fraction of their forces and a time crunch. “It’s the best we can hope for.” Clark pulled Lexa back into her. “Your spirit isn’t going anywhere. You understand?” Clarke demanded.

Lexa melted into the embrace, “You as well Klark.”

Clarke buried her hands in Lexa’s hair before pulling her in for a desperate meeting of mouths. She was drowning and Lexa was there. Gasping, she chased Lexa’s mouth as she pulled back.

“Klark,” Lexa said mournfully.
Breathing heavily, Clarke nodded against Lexa. “We don’t have time.” She finally released her grip. “I know, I just…” She trailed off. “I’ll keep the peace. You break our foes.”

“I’ll take some of your warriors who just arrived.” Lexa said, partially a statement and partially a request.

“Of course, do it. End this.” Clarke said finally pulling herself out of Lexa’s arms.

Lexa looked as displeased with the separation as Clarke was sure she felt as well. “Clarke, if I fall,”

“I’ll make sure the coalition doesn’t fall.” Clarke said firmly. “But don’t you dare fall.”

“Thank you,” The hard line of Lexa’s shoulders fell back, “…I…” She seemed to choke on her words. Clarke stepped back in kissing her again if only briefly. “I know. Me too.”

Four Months ago:

Harper frowned from her perch. Over her time in Azgeda, she’d come to a rather unsurprising realization, she hated the winter. Not that it was ever particularly warm in the north, but when winter fell, the lakes and rivers froze, the snow piled up into massive drifts deep enough to swallow a man. It was also oddly the highest time of trade for Azgeda. As the new head of a pauna hunting team, her team was posted along the trade route from the plains to keep any of the massive beasts away from the trade route. With the lakes and rivers frozen, sleds full of goods could be moved across the massive bodies of water without fear of the monsters that lurked below.

It was relieving to Harper that they didn’t use small ships during the warmer months along the edges of the lakes like the Lake people did. It seemed foolish to court death with the massive creatures lurking under the water. Then again, as a pauna hunter she was already courting death. Blowing out a breath, she watched it crystallize in the air as she shifted slightly. She and Miller were holding down the post while the rest of the team was off in snow shoes hauling in some trees that had fallen in the storm the night before for the nearby villagers to use as fuel.

“I almost miss actively hunting down the pauna.” She remarked in a huff of annoyance.

Miller shoved her shoulder lightly. “I don’t feel like any more scar tissue thanks.”

“You’re just being grumpy because you haven't seen Monty in a while.” She muttered.

“At least I have a boyfriend.” Miller groused.

Harper rolled her eyes, “You got lucky. I don’t think I could be with someone who wasn’t from our family and at this point that would just be gross.”

“Sticking your feet in someone's armpits to keep from losing toes does take some of the magic out of it.” Miller said with a grin.

Harper wrinkled her nose. “Dax’s feet smell like dead fish.”

Miller gave his own full body shiver at the mention of Dax’s feet. “Nia should have taken his feet not his tongue.”

Harper nodded before falling silent again. She and Miller both were able to find peace in just sitting in silence. Reaching one of her gloved hands up, she adjusted her facial wrap so that it covered
everything under her eyes. At times like this, she was jealous of the boys and their seasonal beards. Lucky bastards and their natural face warmers. It was as she was returning her gloved hand back under her arm that she heard something. Stiffening, she signaled Miller as she drew her bow and notched an arrow waiting to see what was approaching them.

It didn’t take long to hear the sound of hooves crunching the snow below them. Coming over the ridge, she saw the colors of the Ingranrona on the lead horsemen and she lowered her bow. However, Harper was careful to keep her arrow notched. They hadn’t been told of a caravan coming through today. Frowning, she squinted trying to see more. It was a large party, made mostly of unmounted horses attached to more warriors than should have been present in a trade convoy. Before she could motion for Miller to run to warn the nearest settlement and trade post, she noticed the blue of their forces. Relaxing, she let out a high pitched whistle.

The lead rider of the convoy she now recognized as one of theirs, gave off two short whistles in acknowledgement. Breathing out, she slung her bow back and returned her arrow to its quiver. It would seem Bellamy’s diplomacy and trade mission had gone well. Dropping from the tree, she prepared to greet the party.

Present:

Echo refused to lean on anyone as she stumbled along with the party. There were others far weaker than her. It wasn’t cold out but she still shivered, wishing for her gear and armor, for the strength she’d earned and slaved to gain. Instead, here she was legs wobbling like a new fawn as she hobbled along with the others. It burned to be this weak in front of others. She couldn’t help the suspicious glances at the Trikru. Being imprisoned for months with a lot of Trikru and Ouskejon kru, and a couple of Floukru had left her feeling less hateful towards her people’s enemies, but she would still kill them without a thought if ordered to do so.

Glancing at the others, she noted that at least in some way the world still made sense. Her fellow Azgeda prisoners were grouped together, clearly not trusting the Trikru not to turn on them. However, if she turned her head just slightly, she could see Peri kom Azgeda was carrying a weak Trikru over her shoulder. She never thought she would see the day that Peri of all people helped anyone let alone a Trikru. Five months ago, she’d been scouting in Trikru territory on Nia’s orders before being taken by reapers. Nothing made sense now.

“You’re thinking too hard.” Raven remarked from her side where she was walking with one of the younger Azgeda prisoner’s arms slung over her shoulder.

Echo considered what to say as she took deep breaths. “This peace...how has it happened?”

Raven let out a sound of amusement. “How do you think? Clarke marched into the commander’s tent and since then, besides a few bumps, it’s been smooth sailing. Rumor has it she drove a knife into the Commander’s table during a meeting between the generals and dared them to challenge her. So you know, typical Clarke stuff.”

Her second was a truly confounding human being. “She did what?”

“Yup,” Raven popped the ‘p’. “You know how Clarke is, she doesn’t know the meaning of the word reasonable.” Raven shook her head fondly.

Echo had to admit that Raven was correct, Klark had never been one for following the logical laid out path. It was clear the other Azgeda prisoners were pleased with Klark’s reported actions. Having
their general marching into the Commander’s tent and threatening the other generals was a reassuring show of power. The mix of Trikru and Azgeda rescuers wasn’t because something had hurt Azgeda’s standing. It still made her uneasy. Her task from Nia to find weak points along the Trikru Azgeda border for a possible future invasion still in her mind.

“Shouldn’t Prince Roan be leading our forces against the mountain?” She asked carefully. Last she had heard he was injured but the war was won. She prayed their heir hadn’t been forced to retire due to his injuries.

Raven and all the warriors suddenly fell sharply silent at the question. Echo shifted uneasily, some of the other prisoners were wearing the same suddenly guarded expression while some were clearly as confused as she was. “Raven what happened to our Prince?”

“He challenged Clarke and did not win. Clarke is the new heir now.” Raven said carefully.

Echo was dumbfounded and tripped slightly over a root, almost falling. Staring wide eyed at Raven, she realized in horror that Raven wasn’t lying. “What happened?” She finally asked.

Raven looked uncomfortable as she continued to walk with her uneven gait from the war. “What was the last report from the war you heard?” She asked finally.

“That the war was won, Klark had saved an injured Roan from capture. I left for the border before more news could arrive.” Echo said, watching Raven cautiously. It didn’t escape her notice that not only were her fellow former prisoners listening, desperate for news, but so were the Trikru warriors.

Raven made a sharp sound under her breath and Echo could tell her words were carefully measured as she spoke. “Clarke went against orders when she rescued Roan. He accused her of treason and challenged her as a proof of her loyalty. She won.”

“How could she have won?” Echo asked in shock. Klark was her second and Echo knew she wasn’t skilled enough to win against someone like Roan. She’d been shocked enough with Klark’s accomplishments throughout her career as a warrior, but a warrior of only a few years becoming heir was ridiculous.

Peri made a scoffing noise from the other side of their party. “Cause he was an idiot and was humiliated that he almost lost the war and Klark won the war in a single week. He didn’t even wait till he was healed to challenge her.”

There were nods from the other Azgeda members of the party. One of the warriors behind her spoke up. “Clarke went against orders when she rescued Roan. He accused her of treason and challenged her as a proof of her loyalty. She won.”

“How could she have won?” Echo asked in shock. Klark was her second and Echo knew she wasn’t skilled enough to win against someone like Roan. She’d been shocked enough with Klark’s accomplishments throughout her career as a warrior, but a warrior of only a few years becoming heir was ridiculous.

Peri made a scoffing noise from the other side of their party. “Cause he was an idiot and was humiliated that he almost lost the war and Klark won the war in a single week. He didn’t even wait till he was healed to challenge her.”

There were nods from the other Azgeda members of the party. One of the warriors behind her spoke up. “Challenging your healer who knows all your weaknesses is foolish.”

Peri laughed, “She destroyed him, a couple of scratches for her and he had three daggers stuck in him.”

Echo swallowed painfully. She didn’t know what to think. “How can you speak of our Prince like that?” She settles on questioning at the sheer lack of sorrow her brothers in arms were showing.

“He owed General Klark a blood debt, she saved him knowing her life could have been forfeited for it.” One of the taller warriors still dressed as a reaper said in a deep and steady voice. “He spat on everything being a warrior means challenging her. Klark will make a better Queen than he would have made a king.”

Echo noticed the lines in Raven’s face, there was more to it then what these warriors thought, but it was close enough that Raven wasn’t disagreeing. Swallowing, she fell silent mulling over what she had heard. Roan had been different since returning from his banishment but the actions they
Before anyone else in the group could start another conversation, Echo heard the sounds of a large party moving. It didn’t take long to see an approaching party of unknown size, though it was clearly more than fifty warriors, that came to a stop just in front of them. Thanks to the ridiculous blue and the lighter colored pelts, she could easily tell that these were for the most part her own people. It was not Klark leading them as she would expect, instead it was the recognizable features of the commander that lead the forces. She had only seen the commander from a distance but her pauldron and red sash were very distinctive. Echo came to a stop, allowing herself to wheeze slightly as the Trikru general greeted the commander.

The commander looked up and addressed their group after a moment of conferral with the Trikru general. “All of you who are injured or do not believe you are able to fight are to continue onto TonDC. Several of my warriors will escort you, General Klark kom Azgeda is in charge and you will have your injuries treated. The rest of you are returning to the mountain with us to end this.”

The commander dismounted from her horse and walked through their party as her own began to relieve their warriors of former prisoners too weak to walk on their own. Echo straightened, even though it cost her precious strength to do so, as the commander headed straight for her, or straight for Monty she realized belatedly.

“Monty, I need you to return with me to the mountain. Without your and Raven’s skills this force will mean nothing.” She was clearly giving an order.

Monty looked up at her his confliction apparent, “I can’t leave him.” He had Miller’s good arm over his shoulder and was supporting almost all of the pale and sweating man’s weight.

The commander gestured behind her. “We brought a stretcher to transport Miller to TonDC. Klark’s field tent is already erected. He’ll be treated immediately upon return. I am not asking you, Monty kom Azgeda.”

Echo glared, shifting slightly towards Monty in support. Watching his face carefully, she saw his face hardening as he nodded firmly. The commander stepped forward immediately helping take some of Miller’s weight. Echo twitched but didn’t step between them when she saw Monty and the others did not protest the action. Frowning, she followed till they loaded Miller onto the stretcher. Clasping Monty’s shoulder, she spoke lowly. “I will not leave his side. I will protect him.”

Monty reached up, gripping her hand tightly. Speaking thickly, he responded. “Thank you.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya decided that she was going to personally murder Gustus when the fool woke up. He’d gone and passed out shortly after her arrival. Leaving her the most senior Trikru warrior and in charge by default of integrating the newly arrived Azgeda section with the Trikru already there and those who were quickly arriving. It was a nightmare and if Klark hadn’t already ordered several idiots out to sit in tree perches to act as look outs, it would have spiraled out of control already. She crossed her arms, taking in the newly arrived Azgeda captain here to take charge since apparently Laslow was as big a fool as Gustus and had been dragged to the medical tent against his will. She wished she could get Klark to deal with this mess, but sadly the general looked truly frightening with her sleeves rolled
up and covered in blood from her patients. Anya had no doubt the next fool to require summoning Klark from her healing tent would not survive the encounter. Delegation was the sign of a good leader, she just hated it when she was delegated the task of babysitting hundreds of unruly warriors who hated each other.

“Xander,” She greeted stiffly.

“Anya, I’ve assigned my men to scout the surrounding woods from positions a stone’s throw away from TonDC.” He said evenly, it irked her he was taller than her.

“Your men cannot completely encircle the village. It will be taken as an aggressive action while Heda is absent.” She narrowed her eyes slightly.

He blinked and seemed to think but she had to admit his mask was impressive. “Your men are not numerous enough at the moment to take care of the protection of the village. Would you rather we protected you from within the walls and left us without a scouting force and a way to protect against another sniper or spotter?”

Anya wished she had an alternative. “We have to do something to prevent a fight. If the other Trikru arriving from the other camps see your forces surrounding the village, they might believe you are initiating an attack.” She crossed her arms in frustration.

Xander closed his eyes and looked almost pained before speaking again. “I know what Klark would order and it will not be pleasant.”

Anya raised an eyebrow, “If it prevents the destruction of the coalition due to the foolishness of a single warrior deciding to attack an ally, I’ll take it.”

He nodded in understanding. “We integrate our men, no lines.”

Anya almost choked. “That has only been working where Klark or Lexa enforce it or the men are prepared for it!”

“The Trikru here have had their divisions and parties broken up thanks to the fighting. Assign them in small groups to my divisions. We’ll spread them out.”

It took her a few seconds before she was able to force herself to remember that insanity was apparently the order of the day anyway. “If we pull half the force in TonDC to add to the line, we can replace them with your men. It would increase the mix of soldiers and the appearance of a united front.”

“I can do that. Will your men listen?” He asked seriously.

“If yours do.” She snapped. Breathing deeply, she forced herself to relax. She had gotten used to this new sort of Azgeda, from Klark’s strange intensity to Charlotte’s devotion. Even Laslow’s casual flirting with anything that had two legs had grown on her. Xander however was exactly what she would have expected of an Azgeda warrior before the beginning of this campaign against the mountain. He was cold and emotionless, a blank face hiding any emotion and it was setting off every internal instinct she had to fight and be wary. “Which section would you suggest we begin with? The healers are already integrated. We’ll need to do this one section at a time so we can control any tension it causes.”

Xander gave her another nod. “Protection for the civilians and the healers should come first.”

“Tristan will not take kindly to interference with his forces. I can manage that section.”
“I will see to the further protection of the healers then.” Xander offered his arm.

Anya reached out and gripped his arm, she noticed a flash of emotion on his serious face. It seemed she wasn’t the only one deeply uncomfortable with their current situation. Somehow, that made this significantly easier. “I’ll see you in a candle mark then.”

______________________________________________________________

“Burka.”

The assassin remained passive at the acknowledgement of her presence. She examined Klark and quickly found her to be relatively uninjured. Why she had been summoned she didn’t know, but she had no doubt Klark needed her unique skills for something. Although, if she was ordered to babysit foolish warriors and make sure they didn’t cause trouble for the coalition, she would have to rethink her views on killing without orders. “General.”

Klark stepped into her personal space, her hands quickly beginning to apply a false bandage to her neck allowing the general’s face to be near her own. Burka tilted her head slightly, taking in who was within earshot. Only one conscious and if she had to guess the man was drugged enough to be a non-issue. It was clearly not a coincidence that she had been summoned to the tent at this time, not that she’d ever thought it was.

“We have run out of time to handle Tarba and any other assassins Nia may have sent.” Klark said lowly. “They are likely to cause unrest between our forces during this delicate time and we cannot allow them to have free reign in this chaos. Kill Tarba and anyone you seriously believe has orders from Nia to kill me. Add their bodies to the dead. This is not permission to continue to kill past today. Do not harm anyone who is only loyal to Nia. Just the agents with orders against me.” Klark’s fingers stilled against her throat where they had been finishing up the false bandage.

“I understand, am I to wait till night falls?” Burka asked carefully. Klark had never given her orders to kill more than a few individual rapists or murderers in other general’s territory before now.

Klark’s eyes were unflinching as she replied coldly, “As long as they die before causing chaos, I trust your judgement.” She pulled back and moved straight to one of the unconscious men and began removing bandages and preparing to sew up his gash.

Burka didn’t wait for any more pointless talk, she had her orders. Slipping out, she made her way towards Niles’s post. He would know where Tarba was and would never link her to any of the upcoming deaths.

______________________________________________________________

Dante Wallace sat in the control room and saw the way his son and the guards looked to him for answers, but he had none to give them. Ever since the savages had breached their security through the harvest chamber, chaos had reigned. Whatever they had used to cause the explosion had been devastating. Two entire floors had been breached and the damage caused to the medical bay and the harvesting chamber was beyond their ability to repair. They were fortunate that they were able to seal off the other three floors so quickly or they would all be dead. As it was they had lost almost half of their population who had been gathering in the mess hall. They had never been more vulnerable and while his men scrambled to repair key systems the savages had returned to finish their attack. He stared at the screens as the cameras they were connected to went black one by one starting from the Harvest chamber.

“Dad, what do we do?” Cage asked, looking at him like he held all the answers.
He swallowed and watched as another screen went black as yet another camera was shot with an arrow. “Emmerson, how many surviving guards do we have?”

The man looked uneasy. “Twenty capable of combat, the oxygen tanks were destroyed in the explosion. We have enough air to suit up half of them.”

Looking at his son and Dr. Tsing, he asked something he wished he would never have to confront. He had been avoiding dealing with the cruelty of his son and the doctor for years. “Do you have any weapons or projects of which you have not informed me?”

“We have a variant of a chemical gas we were designing to replace our missiles as a fear tactic.” He admitted.

Dante wondered for a moment how he’d produced a child like this who delighted in cruelty and fear. However, now wasn’t the time for navel gazing. As president he did not hold the luxury of time for reminiscing and regretting. “Can you get to it?”

“No,” Cage said bitterly.

Dr. Tsing spoke up. “We kept it with the Cerberus project, the savages now stand between us and it.”

“Mr. President, I think you should look at this.” One of the guards said suddenly, in a shaky voice.

Turning towards the screens, he stared. Standing in front of one of the cameras, feet squared, shoulders back, and staring down the device, stood the commander. She was in her full savage regalia and he felt fear, she knew they were watching. It was the only camera left working in the area, the other screens were blank which meant she wanted them to see her, to know where she was.

“What is the savage bitch doing?” Cage asked, stepping forward to take a better look.

“That isn’t important. Cage take Emmerson and what soldiers we can outfit in the suits. Use the vents and get to the Cerberus wing. Release your gas before they can blow more of the doors open.” He continued to stare as Cage and his men left. There was something unsettling about seeing one of the outsiders standing in his walls of their own volition. He knew that he was just prolonging the inevitable, but for the sake of hope he could not concede defeat. The radio crackled and he heard his son’s voice come in over it.

“We’ve made it to the vent system. We’re beginning our trip to the Cerberus section now.” His voice ended in static.

Reaching over, he hit the radio button and spoke into the mike. “Go dark, the sound of the radio picking up static from the explosion could give your position away.”

A moment later there was a click and he knew he could only wait. Their remaining doors were locked but with most of their grenades gone and not enough suits, there was little he could do if Cage failed. It was as he prepared to wait that he saw the commander smile. It was not a good smile, it was a vicious thing, barely human. Then again, the savages had always been barely human vicious things. He watched as she pulled her hand out from behind her back revealing a black box. A black box that was horrifyingly identifiable. He watched as she brought it to her mouth. Her voice echoed through the control room as everyone beside him stopped breathing in horror.

“Hello President Wallace.”
Four Months ago:

Lisa’s eyes were sore from staying awake for too long. There was an illness, Klark had called it the flu, going around the village and she hadn’t had time to sleep in over two days now. Shuffling through the deep paths dug between buildings in the snow, she kept her eyes on the ground. She couldn’t slip and drop the medicine she was carrying. Thanks to her staring at the ground, she almost crashed into a person, barely stopping in time. “What?”

“I’m looking for general Klark.” The tall man with the reddish hair and beard said while looking down at her.

Lisa felt her jaw wanting to drop as she took a second look at the man, his pauldron made of shaped metal and the detailed stitching on his heavy clothing told her she was looking at one of the three other generals of Azgeda. However, she was unsure which one having never met them. “Of course!” She squeaked, turning bright red under her face wrap.

He raised an expressive brow at her while one of the warriors she could now see behind him snorted in amusement. “Lead us to her.”

Nodding nervously, she carefully moved toward the central building in the village. They were in one of the three largest villages in their territory. Lisa herself was from a community of elk herders who lived in movable communities that followed, protected, and butchered the animals. To her, the large central building in this stable village was strange, with its sharply angled roofs going straight to the ground and plentiful stores to take them through the winter. Shuffling to avoid falling, she finally made it to the door and reached out with one hand, holding the medicine closely to her chest with her other, and pushed the heavy door open. Once inside she stepped back flush to the wall to get out of the way of the clearly important people.

“General Seth, I wasn’t expecting you for another week.” Klark said, standing up from where she had been teaching Elise and Forrest how to prepare a chest rub to help their patients breathing.

The tall man stepped forward offering his arm. “We were able to depart sooner than planned. I hope this isn’t an inconvenience?”

“Of course not, we could use the extra hands at the moment.” Klark said with a tired shrug and reached out, clasping his arm with her own. “It’s an honor to meet another general as renowned as you.”

Lisa frowned slightly at the way Klark was acting like this general was her equal. Roan had never treated Klark as anything but his subordinate, but then Klarke rarely made sense. She watched the way the other general and his party had all relaxed though and thought she might understand some of it after all.

“Likewise, it’s an honor to meet our new heir. Congratulations on your position.” He said.

“Please, come sit and let your outer furs dry before we need to be out in the snow again.” Klark said, waving them over to the rugs placed around the central fire. She turned to Lisa. “Lisa, bring the herbs here we need to finish making more paste before our patients need it. Help the others with their work since you already know the recipe.”

Lisa nodded moving to Forest and Elise’s sides who looked equally surprised and confused by general Seth’s presence. Setting down the leather bag of herbs, she unwrapped her face scarf and shucked off her outer layer of warm fur before settling down beside her fellow apprentices. She and the others made eye contact before agreeing silently to eavesdrop shamelessly on their hero.
“Three seconds?” Seth asked, his tone curious as he settled down beside the fire.

Klark laughed, “I’m afraid that would be beyond my abilities. These are three medical apprentices who work with me and a talented midwife to help with the healing as well as assist my assassins with herbs. I only have one second, he’s seeing to the quarantine cabin at the moment.”

A female warrior at Seth’s side spoke slowly. “Why so many healers?”

“They are needed. I was frustrated when injuries that I knew could be healed lead to losses we could not afford in the east and I am hoping that by training up healers such losses could be prevented in the future. It’s a valuable skillset that constant fighting has not allowed us to foster in our territories. Now that we have a brief period of peace, we have the luxury of training more healers. Once my apprentices are trained they can train others. I intend for every party under my command to have a healer of their own within ten years. It is really quite a practical decision. Everyone knows that experienced warriors are the most valuable. If by training more healers we can get more warriors to survive to gain that experience, we will have a better and more prepared army. We Azgeda know that pain is a valuable teacher but that is only if you survive it. I have also found that having healers about to deal with the common illnesses of the people is a wonderful boost to morale.” Klark spoke confidently and firmly. Lisa had learned early on that she cared deeply about healing.

“A noble goal, but surely the armies cannot be expected to afford such a luxury.” Seth said looking at Klark measuring.

Klark remained calm her confidence never wavering and stared the other general down. “A luxury it may be, but it is a luxury that is well worth its cost. What do you lose in training a healer? One soldier who could fight for the cause. Yet every healer saves the lives of many warriors. If you were to lose one warrior to save a dozen of your men, would it not be worth it? A well trained healer will save far more than that. Not to mention our hunters, farmers, and workmen. Having healers in easy reach will help them as well. Aiding them increases the productivity of your territory. There is very little to lose and very much to gain.”

Lisa could feel the tension in the room as the general considered Klark’s answer. Glancing at her friends, she saw they were also holding still trying to avoid drawing attention as they listened to the conversation.

Finally, general Seth spoke. “I see you are everything the rumors say you are. It’s impressive your bleeding heart has not gotten you killed.”

“I am a healer at heart and it has carried me this far. Perhaps there is a wiser path but this is the one I have traveled thus far and I see no reason to abandon it now.” She spoke boldly.

Seth laughed shaking his head. “How would you recommend I begin your healer system in my own territory then?” He clasped his hands as the room eased as they realized some sort of understanding had been reached between their leaders.

“Well you’ll need a competent healer to begin it, but to swell your numbers the midwives have been functioning in all but name as the healers of their communities. I’ve been seeing to it that the midwives in my territory receive what knowledge and help I can give them. I have learned much from them as well.” Klark gestured around her. “Then there are children taken for our army that are not suited for a battle field.”

Lisa ducked her head, she knew she and the others were unsuited for war but it still hurt her to hear it sometimes.
“They are one of our greatest untapped resources. I couldn’t be prouder of what my apprentices have accomplished.” Klark continued causing Lisa and her fellow’s cheeks to fill with red as they tried to act like they weren’t listening avidly. “Although they may have untapped potential as spies I see.”

Lisa snapped around and looked guiltily at Klark at the amused but knowing tone in her voice. “We’re sorry.”

Klark waved her hand. “It’s fine, but next time keep moving your hands while you listen and it will be much more unobtrusive.” She rebuked.

Ducking her head, Lisa grabbed a pestle and began to grind the roots needed for the paste.

“You are a wise general though far more experienced than I am. You already know how best to go about things in your own territory.” Lisa heard Klark shifting. “So, I can only assume you are here for some other reason.”

“It is only prudent to meet with the new heir to the Azgeda throne. I’ve heard of your beliefs for some time now, nearly half my men wear that damnable blue. I’m sure you wouldn’t mind explaining why that is would you?” The smile in his voice could be heard.

“That is actually a funny story. The blue is entirely one of my captains Bellamy Blake’s fault.” Klark began to tell the story of how the blue had started to spread its way through the army.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the lovely comments. To the person who asked if we were going to do a oneshot of Lexa and Clarke’s first night we’re sorry to say we won’t be. It’s just not something both of us are comfortable with. If someone want’s to write a oneshot of that and cite us that would be awesome though!

Artigus walked out of TonDC weighed down with an armful of blankets as he made his way to the three healing tents. There was the tent for the injured but stable patients, a tent for the patients in need of constant supervision and a third tent that they were preparing for the warriors rescued from the mountain. He concentrated on walking across the uneven ground as he got to the newest and largest tent. Several Azgeda warriors were building cots inside of it. He saw the blond healing apprentice wave him over.

“Great, thanks for gathering those for us.” She said, reaching out to help take some of his load.

Nodding carefully, he helped her pile them in the corner neatly so they could be grabbed as needed. “What’s next?”

“Can you go to the camp where Xander will be setting up a dinner fire? You need to request he have enough broth made for two hundred people.” The girl let loose her messy hair before pulling it back into a new and more secure bun.

“I can do that.” He cursed the way his voice cracked.

“Good, tell him Lisa sent you on an errand for Klark.” She smiled tiredly at him before turning suddenly to snap at a warrior who’d just dropped a wooden box. “Be careful with that!”

Knowing himself to be dismissed, he slipped out of the tent and began heading for the wooded area where the Azgeda captain had set his forces up. He needed to stay busy, thinking about his father Nyko’s face as he lay among the dead was enough for him to feel agony lancing through him. Shoving those thoughts out of his head, he pushed on towards the fire where he could smell food being prepared. Despite not knowing what captain Xander looked like, it wasn’t hard to spot the man. He was tall with angular features and the decorated edges of his clothing gave away his rank. Approaching the man, he dipped his head in a slight bow.

“Captain Xander.” He greeted pulling the captain’s attention to himself.

“What do you need?” He asked brusquely, clearly wanting the conversation to be over and done with quickly.

Artigus straightened. “Lisa requests that you have enough broth for over two hundred people prepared.”

Xander looks at him properly for the first time and Artigus wished he could tell what his blank face meant. The man finally spoke. “Why is that amount of broth needed and why is a Trikru bringing me a message from a healer who has a full compliment of warriors at her beck and call as is standard
Artigus frowned as he replied. “My father is...was a healer. I’m assisting and Lisa said this is what was needed so I’m bringing you the message. The wounded need it, and we expect a lot more injured to come in from the mountain.”

“What is your name boy?” He asked his eyes narrowed.

“Artigus.” He replied.

“Know that if this is a foolish attempt at sabotage I will have you tied to a frame and flayed alive for wasting time and resources. This is your one chance to leave if this is a lie.” Xander was facing him his face set.

Artigus felt his throat closing as he swallowed. The captain had authority leaking off of him and Artigus felt like an ant standing before him. There was no doubt in his mind the captain would follow through with his threat. Straightening himself up, he spoke. “We need the broth for the injured. You can ask the general if you don’t trust me.”

The captain gave a short nod. “Go, the broth will be done and delivered.”

Artigus let his breath out in relief before turning and heading back to the healing tents. Working with the healers from the north with his father had made him forget for a moment that Azgeda were war hardened people and to be feared. He moved as quickly as he could without looking like he was running. Coming back to the field where the battle had taken place, he noticed that the last of the dead had been moved off the field. His jaw clenched as he choked down the knowledge that his father Nyko had died there.

He didn’t give himself long before ducking into the central tent where General Klark’s hands were literally inside of a man. Moving quickly to her side, he avoided Forrest who was assisting. “Where do you need me?”

The general didn’t even look up. “Wash your hands then grab the forceps.” She ordered brusquely.

It took him a minute to scrub his hands to the necessary level of cleanliness required before moving beside her and handing her the strange tool she’d been training them on how to use. He could do this. He would be the healer his father had been and to do that he would need the general’s help.

Four months ago:

Bellamy rode into the central fort of their territory and jumped out of his saddle. He was sore, and cold and everything was aching from days of riding through terrible conditions. However, he didn’t care, he was back home and his sister would be either in the fort or out scouting. Grinning, he yanked his face wrap off before taking off at a dead run for where he saw Clarke standing in the courtyard to greet the party.

He always forgot how short she was. She had a way of filling a space with sheer personality and aggressive eyebrow lifts. The two warriors bracketing her ignored his approach clearly recognizing him as he ran at a sprint for Clarke before grabbing her and pulling her into a hug. He felt relief at being back, sporadic radio calls were not enough, he’d missed his family.

“Bellamy!” She laughed as she hugged him back.
With a broad grin, he set her back down on her feet. “Is Octavia here?” He asked.

“Hello to you too. No, I left her as a guard with Brady and the healing apprentices as they make sure that flu is truly ended.” She reached up and tugged lightly on his beard. “Looks like you finally broke and joined the others in growing a beard.”

He rubbed the back of his head, “Riding in this weather is brutal.” He shrugged. “Figured it was time.”

“You should take a page out of Dax’s book, you’re getting quite scruffy there.” She clasped his shoulder while her face became more serious.

He pulled back and opened his stance and waved his arm. “General Ephraim kom Ingranrona.”

Ephraim dismounted and approached pulling off his face wrap looking amused. “Greetings Klark, I’ve heard a great deal about your victories.”

Clarke stepped forward offering her arm. “As I have of you general, welcome to my territory. As an ally, you are always welcome here.”

Bellamy sighed in relief when Ephraim took her arm saying, “As you are welcome in my clan.”

It wasn’t that Bellamy disliked Ephraim or that he expected any issues between the easygoing general and Clarke but that he had gotten used to things going sideways unexpectedly. Smiling widely, he decided to move them out of the cold. “Clarke I hope we have enough vodka, I’ve promised Ephraim here some of our national brew.”

“I hope you you’re able to handle your drink.” Clarke said, stepping to the side to allow Ephraim to walk beside her toward the entry way. “We’ll slaughter an elk for the night. General Seth is with us as well.”

Bellamy frowned slightly at the news the other general was here. He was aware how tenuous Clarke’s position was. If Seth challenged her, it could end badly. Of course, if Seth actually did challenge, Clarke would be an idiot and refuse to choose a champion like always. Carefully, he turned catching the eye of Selena, one of Clarke’s guards. She wasn’t overly tense, actually she looked bored. Some of the tension bled off him as he followed Clarke and Ephraim into the fort. If the guards weren’t tense, then things were going well with Seth.

Present:

Lexa had been dubious about whether the arrogance of the mountain would hold now that they had proved to have explosives. However, standing in front of the remaining camera in the hall as a distraction as her men set up explosives strategically, she realized she’d underestimated their arrogance. The sounds of the mountain men came crackling through as they described their plans to take out her men on the radio, not even pausing for a second to think that the line may not be secure. She didn’t move but she heard Raven at her side giving orders.

“Peri, take half the men and go hunting. We can’t let those men get to the reaper rooms.” Raven snapped.

Lexa waved her hand behind her back signalling that Raven’s orders were to be followed. She didn’t look away from the camera as she heard Peri shouting, “Come on, let’s go spill some blood!”
As the team moved down the hallway, she lifted the radio to her mouth. She knew her role in this moment, she had to keep the mountain focusing on her. If the leaders were watching her, they were not planning the deaths of her men. If the voices on the radio were to be believed, they had already won. The mountain had proven to be weak once broached, just as Raven had thought. Smiling, she raised the radio to her mouth. “Hello President Wallace.”

She waited, her blood boiling under her skin before the radio crackled to life. “Commander, it seems you have me at a disadvantage I don’t know your name.”

Lexa tilted her chin upwards. “I am Lexa kom Trikru, Commander of the twelve clans. You are Dante Wallace, last president of Mt.Weather.” She emphasized the word ‘last’. Until they were all dead there was a chance that this may not be over. However, she had no doubt that even if she died, the coalition would destroy the mountain. The mountain was finished, they were inside and could win a war of attrition.

“I have clearly underestimated you Lexa.” The voice came through again.

She felt anger course through her. “Your people’s arrogance is what has cost you this war. Not only have you underestimated me, you have underestimated all of my people.” Her left fist clenched as she continued to speak. She took a breath to make certain she would not give away how deeply her anger ran. She would not present the mountain with any sign of weakness. “I am prepared to allow you to surrender yourselves before I have you all slaughtered where you hide.”

“I believe you know I cannot do that.” Cracked out of the radio.

Lexa expected that. “The radiation. Tell me, when did you decide the lives of a few hundred of your cursed people was worth the lives of thousands of mine?”

“Would you not have done the same in my place? I have seen your people for generations, fight wars and execute your own in brutal ways.” The voice questioned.

Lexa felt the side of her jaw twitch. “My people have honor. We fight in war and in defense of ourselves. You’re people steal our families from their homes so that you can bleed them slowly in cages like animals. Yet you dare compare us?”

“It is regrettable but we do what we must for our people to survive. You will kill all of my people if this war continues but you must know that hundreds of your people will die winning this victory.” The voice came out calm and reasonable sounding.

Lexa lifted a brow wondering what the mountain thought it could offer at this moment. It was a sign they were grasping at straws, Peri and her men should be arriving at the reaper chambers soon. “Do you believe that my people would not sacrifice whatever the numbers it requires a hundred times over so that our families no longer live in fear of your shadow?”

“You’re coalition between your clans won’t last once my people are gone. I’ve watched your endless wars and that long held and ingrained hatred won’t go away because of a few measly years of enforced peace.” The man remarked. “If you defeat us, it won’t be long before you are at war again and this time you will be significantly weakened by the forces you will lose in your fight with us. If you want security for your people, you must ask yourself who are your people.”

Lexa narrowed her eyes as she watched the camera. “Continue.”

“The clan to the north of you is violent and bloodthirsty even by your standards. My people don’t require blood from more than one clan. Your people have been at war with them for my entire life,
Peri jogged down the hallway with fifteen other warriors to head off the mountain men coming down the vent system. They needed to head them off which shouldn’t be difficult. Niles and a couple of other archers would be at the top of the vent to shoot them down if the fools tried to escape out the other end. The broken rubble cracked under her and the others feet. Sliding round the corner out of the destroyed cage room, she broke into a full sprint down the hallways of the already cleared reaper chambers. Raven had told her just where to look for the vents and she easily came to it.

Grinning, she motioned for her men to fall silent as they pushed themselves flat against the wall on either side of the vent. They’d take out the mountain men as they left the vent. Like shooting fish in a barrel. She had to hold back a laugh at the thought of how many they would get to cut down.

It didn’t take long before she heard the sounds of shuffling from the vent. She flexed her hands, ready to haul the first one out and into the waiting blades of her team. She couldn’t help but bounce slightly in anticipation. The men all stood filled with nervous energy. She ignored Selena, who stood opposite her across the vent opening, rolling her eyes at her.

Finally, after an almost interminably long wait, the shuffling sounds came to a stop and then the vent was kicked out with a clang as it hit the ground. Peri felt herself floored by the stupidity of the mountain men. They weren’t seriously coming out backwards were they? Yes, they apparently were, it would make killing them almost boringly easy. With a sigh, she prepared to get to work.

Feet first a man, at least she thought it was a man, came out of the vent in his bulky suit. Before he could raise his gun or even properly notice their presence, she grabbed him and sent him tumbling towards the warriors on to her right. She heard the strangled gurgle that came with a slit throat. Grinning, she watched as Selena grabbed the second one to come out, sending him towards her side of the line.

As she was tripping the third man through the hole one of them realized something was wrong. There was the sound of some panicked movement and Peri saw the black flash of a gun. “GRAB COVER!”

She dived behind an overturned metal table leaving her sword impaled in the chest of the man she had just been yanking out of the way. She was barely behind cover before a hail of bullets rained across the inside of the room. “Fuck.” She grabbed the small radio she’d been handed and spoke quickly, careful not to use gonaslang. “Niles we’re a bit pinned down. Fill their asses with arrows already!” With that she clicked the radio off before grabbing a dagger and waiting for the gunfire to die down slightly. The moment it went silent, she popped up flinging a knife at the shoulder of the man who was shooting from the entrance of the vent. She barely dropped back down before more gunfire rang out again. There was a satisfying cry of pain followed by a scream which assured her that she had hit her target. She grinned, how excellent was a target that hitting it anywhere would lead to death!?

Selena swore from the trashed metal she was curled behind. “PERI, a plan would be great about now!”

“Why don’t you come up with something?” She replied, feeling really quite pissed about this. In the past her role had been very simple, her leaders pointed her at a target and she killed it. It was an excellent role. Now thanks to stupid commanders she was in charge of people. Maybe she’d gotten
too good at the killing people thing?

Selena’s eyes narrowed from where she was curled. “Oh for fucks sake!”

It surprised Peri to see Selena unsheathing a knife, clearly about to follow her earlier example and try to take out this newest gunman that way. The implementation of that suicidal plan was halted by a scream from inside the vent. Peri felt her blood thrumming, Niles and his archers were doing their job then. “TAKE THEM NOW!” She ordered, vaulting over the table she had been hiding behind. As she came out she cut down a man who had the temerity to come out of the vent. He obviously hoped they would be able to gain some ground to fire with but instead was caught in an awkward position as he transitioned to the ground.

Monty hissed as a low charge zapped his fingers when he ripped out another locking mechanism. His mind was running at high speed, almost fuzzing round the edges. The constant adrenaline surges and high emotional stakes were taking their toll on him. This was the last floor. The Mountain was not designed to hold against an internal threat. Each floor had a central hall system that connected to all the rooms on the floor. His job was rather simple. He got the doors open so that the warriors carrying the explosives could gain access to all the floors’ central halls and place explosives to blow out every door. So far it hadn’t taken long to get access to any of the floors. The problem was level four.

This level was clearly the heart of the mountain. He was having to hack each and every room to let the men in to place the explosives. On the fourth floor they had already found rooms containing the internal generator, and what he was sure were the machines controlling the acid fog. It was a back up plan of sorts. If they couldn’t conquer the mountain, they would destroy it. They would blast everything they could and hope they escaped the blast. The charges they were using now were low powered in comparison and should mainly just blow the doors inwards effectively letting in the air.

Carefully, he crossed two wires causing the door’s lock to release. “I got it!”

Indra gave him a nod of approval before grabbing the door and hauling it open while another warrior went in to place the explosives that were already armed and set. He let himself fall to the ground and stared at the ceiling for a moment. That had been the last door. The entire mountain would be ready to blow in minutes now. With a groan he huffed and rolled onto his feet and walked towards where he knew the commander still stood attracting the attention of the mountain. He knew Clarke would have his head if anything happened to her lover.

The inside of the mountain was unnaturally clean and silent. There were flickering lights in some sections that gave it an odd appearance. It was similar to what he remembered of the ark. It made him uncomfortable. He wasn’t the same boy who ran around with his best mate Jasper, ignoring responsibility and rules. At the memory of Jasper, he reached up and touched the goggles he wore around his neck at all times. Sometimes, in his darker moments, he wondered if Jasper would be able to recognize him any longer. It didn’t matter of course, the dead were gone. On silent feet, he came into the hall where the commander stood staring into the undamaged camera.

She was holding the radio in her right hand tightly enough that he was amazed she hadn’t broken it. Her posture was one of command and he appreciated how she seemed to have authority wrapped around her like a shroud. He spotted the furious faces of the warriors who had remained as guards just outside of the range of the camera. He came to a stop next the guards and waited for further orders.
Lexa stared at the camera, the president couldn’t be serious. Then again, she doubted he was aware that two thirds of the men who came with her into the mountain were Azgeda. Surely they had at least noticed that the Azgeda contingent was securing TonDC. Still, the man was arrogant, she could drag this out. After all negotiations could last for days. She needed to buy Raven, Monty, and Peri the time they needed to finish their tasks. “You don’t even know the name of the clan you ask me to betray. How would you even know you were attacking the correct clan?”

“I’m afraid we’ve been unaware until now that your people spoke English which has prevented us from starting any sort of negotiation in the past. Now that we know negotiation is possible I’m sure you could enlighten us on the name of your enemy clan and how they can be identified. Though their facial scars are distinctive enough.”

“They are called Azgeda, or I suppose you’d understand it as the Ice Nation. Your belief that my people are savages is the reason we have not negotiated before president. Yet you propose a war against the largest and most vicious clan in my coalition without even knowing their name. What alliance can be built between people so different and so ignorant of the of each other’s concerns? Is such foolishness common under the mountain?” She rested her free hand on her knife hilt.

“We may not know the ways of your people but that does not invalidate our martial ability. You think a single clan could stand against us when it took twelve of you to breach this far into our defenses?” The voice came through.

Lexa stared at the camera and was relieved his deal was as foolish as it was. She had no doubt if he had known herself or any of her general’s on a better level he would have been able to negotiate his way out of this. Before the blockade, his offer would have been tempting. He was correct, the coalition would be on the brink of collapse with the uniting force of the mountain gone. The trade routes and fear of being the first one to break it and face the full might of the coalition would hopefully be enough to keep it going until the clans were more used to peace. However, jockeying for her position would begin almost immediately and in that jockeying Azgeda would have been the one to push the coalition to its breaking point.

Now, she knew that that would not be Azgeda’s future. Klark’s coup meant that Azgeda had the potential to be one of her greatest allies in the future. Even if Klark’s coup failed, the fact Nia had trained a nightblood in secret was blatant treason against the coalition which would cost them the support of the rest of the coalition forcing them into an untenable situation if they ever tried to rebel. So his offer meant nothing. He had no prisoners to ransom for a respite, no missile prepared to launch, and she stood inside his fortress just waiting for the information that the mountain was ready to be given its death blow.

“You underestimate Azgeda, and you overestimate yourself.” She tilted her head in question. “What is to stop me from simply taking your weapons and using them without your assistance?”

“You may be able to take them, and even use them after a fashion but could you truly use them to their greatest effect?”

“I’m sure the warriors who built explosives, radios, and even hacked your encrypted channel, could use your weapons well enough. Besides, I have no desire for your guns and missiles.” She waved her left hand dismissively. “I have no need for them. My coalition is not as weak as you imagine it and even if it was, the death of your people is worth more than your aid could ever gain. So I ask you, surrender or die?” She kept her face impassive as she heard the sound of footsteps coming along the hall towards her. It would seem Peri’s team had returned.

For the first time in the conversation, she looked away from the black device she’d been informed was how the mountain observed so much. Looking at the approaching party Peri was leading, she
had to resist the desire to cringe. It wasn’t that she hadn’t expected it so much as it brought back memories she’d rather not be reminded of. The warriors were holding the severed heads of the men they’d just wiped out. Without trees nearby, they hadn’t been mounted on spikes but rather the burned and peeling heads were being carried by fists clenched in their hair. Though she found it distasteful it was a valid intimidation tactic and could serve well as a distraction. They wouldn’t need it for much longer. She knew Monty had returned a few minutes ago. Only Raven and Indra’s teams remained and she knew they would be nearly done. Her distraction was coming to an end.

Peri was distinctly unsettling to Lexa as she took in the group. They were all splattered with the gore of battle. However, Peri had an arm over a stocky man’s shoulder and was holding what Lexa realized was a bullet wound on her side. Despite the pain Peri should obviously be in, she was grinning almost deliriously.

The radio crackled again, “Are you truly willing to sentence hundreds of your warriors to death in that attempt?”

Lexa ignored the baiting of the president and made a quick decision. Raising her arm, she gestured to the coming warriors. “Bring the heads here, Selena take two warriors and get Peri back to Klark, now.”

Turning her attention back to the camera, she raised the radio again. “President Wallace, I have my answer.”

Dante watched in horror as the heads of his men, his son, were carelessly dropped at the feet of the savage commander. His heart felt like it was in a vice grip in his chest. He stepped back falling onto a chair as he stared at the screen before him.

“Sir, what do we do?” the technician asked.

So this was the end then, closing his eyes he spoke calmly. “Turn the screen off.”

“Sir?”

“Turn it off.” Exhaustion weighed him down as he opened his eyes again to see the gruesome scene on the screen blink off.

“Your orders sir?”

“Should I prepare the self destruct sir?”

His people had lost, their last chance was gone. “How long will it take to set off the self destruct mechanism since my office is not accessible?”

“Fifteen minutes sir.”

“Do it, and may God have mercy on our souls.” He stood from the chair and watched as they tried to start the self destruct mechanism. He would stand here in the control room like the captain of a sinking ship while watching over the end of his people. The question was now how many of the savages they could take them with them to hell. Holding the course was all that they had left so that was what he would do.
Raven handed the trigger to the commander. “Wanna do the honors Heda?”

The commander accepted the trigger.

Four months ago:

Seth walked through the narrow hallways of the compact fort with Camilla following behind him. The men from the plains would be asleep for some time still after the amount of drink they had put away the night before. He had come to his decision the night before and the early morning gave him the opportunity to act on it. He didn’t bother to knock on the door to the general’s quarters, he had no doubt she was awake already, if she’d even bothered to sleep at all. Walking in, he was rewarded with seeing Klark sitting on her bed with a pile of parchment in her hands. The captain who had arrived the day before was perched on the edge of a rickety wooden chair clearly arguing with his general. A bemused looking warrior was leaning against the wall. It didn’t pass his notice that the moment he opened the door every single one of them reached for the hilt of a weapon.

“General, this is a surprise, do you require something?” Klark looked at him curiously but he could see that she was guarded.

“I believe we have much to discuss.” He said, entering as Camilla closed the door behind them. He knew this meeting would be private, after all the only entrance to this hall was being guarded by one of his warriors.

Klark’s eyes narrowed slightly but her expression smoothed quickly. Gesturing to the standing warrior, she spoke. “This is Octavia, she arrived earlier this morning. Now what business do we have that is pressing enough for you to come unannounced to my quarters?”

He grabbed a second rickety chair that was leaning against the wall and pulled it forward before sitting down. “How are you planning on handling Nia’s plans for your death?”

The captain and warrior both stiffened although Klark surprisingly seemed to relax almost. “What is your interest in my continued survival?”

Seth frowned, “You expect me to believe you are not planning on killing our queen?”

“It did not go well for the last person who accused Clarke of treason.” The tense warrior said clearly threatening in her posture and tone as she was no longer was leaning against the wall.

“Octavia!” The captain snapped from his chair.

Klark cut in while her two men glared at each other. Seth had no doubt they were related, their features and bearing were too similar for anything else. “You want Nia to fall then?” She asked sharply.

Seth could feel the tension but he had obligations and this ambitious general was his best chance at achieving them. “Nia is power hungry and she will not stop until she has dragged us all back into an unending war. You have changed the balance of power, her plans will be accelerated now.”

The general set the papers she’d been holding to the side and eyed him carefully. “You refer to the commander’s call to the mountain when winter ends?”

“You know you’ll be sent.” He said, pleased to see Klark already knew this. “You should also know you’ll be assigned the security of our capital at the same time. It will stretch your army to its limits.
Key members of your army will quietly die and be replaced. By this time next year you and your men will have been neutralized and Corrin will be the new heir.”

“Corrin?” Bellamy asked startled. “He may be Nia’s nephew but he’s a kid, he only just earned his marks and he’s an idealistic idiot.”

Seth nodded, “Which is why it can’t be allowed to happen.”

Camilla interjected in defense of her brother’s former second. “Corrin shows promise but Nia will destroy him and build him back in her image.”

Klark raised her hand before her captain could say anything else. “Nia cares too much about blood to allow anyone but Corrin succeed her. If I can hold down my territory while I’m at the mountain, I can buy myself enough time to secure my position. If I survive the year, I can deal with politics from a firmer position.”

“True,” Seth leaned back, “but what do you think Nia will do if the mountain falls? And that is the only way you’ll survive that war.”

“Ontari.” Klark said with a deep frown. “You want her overthrown before she can destabilize the coalition with her nightblood lackey.”

“My territory is the one we’ll be marching through and waging a war on the Trikru through. We also are the heart of our farms. If we go to war against the coalition my people will starve.” He flexed his hands. “Nia doesn’t care that when we are at war we cannot produce as much food as during peace. She expect the same yields and taxes us accordingly. She doesn’t care that marching an army through our territory harms our farms. We still have to produce the same amount of grain and potatoes and crops for the rest of the clan.” He breathed hard at the injustice of it all.

“I have served Nia faithfully and in return my territory holds the highest burden for food, the highest burden in times of war. I have the territory best positioned for trade but our trade goes through Quint’s land. Are the winter sleighs truly the best method of trade? Nia’s attempts to buy the loyalty of Quint and his territory have cost the my territory and the Ice Nation as a whole dearly. The poverty of our clan can’t continue.” His fists clenched his nails biting into his palm.

“You’re not considering this?” Bellamy asked startled at an expression Klark’s face.

“We have to do something, Nia is monster that needs to be killed.” Klark said with a sigh, watching Seth. “Why have you not made a move for the throne yourself? You have the experience and reputation to do so.”

He cleared his throat slightly. “I am a general.” He frowned at the floor slightly. “If I make a grab for the throne our clan will devolve into a civil war. Quint and the advisers would never accept me on the throne. You and Fredrick backing me would be the only way to hold the throne. Even then, I’m not popular. You have the popularity with the people to have a far less bloody coup and I’ll be blunt, negotiation is not my strength.”

“You want me to be a figurehead then?” Klark asked seriously. “I’m far too invested to be your puppet Seth. Nia’s head is mine.” Her tone was low and viscous when referring to Nia’s death.

Seth ignored the venom though he was surprised to hear the hatred leak through her tone. “I want you to uphold the values you have upheld in your army. I want you to do what Nia would never do and accept our borders. We need someone who will either hold the border and leave the coalition or stay in it and not try and conquer it. If we remain in it, I want to be able to trade with the clan’s we
border so we can bring in more food.” He leaned forward in his seat. “We are the largest and most populated clan yet we are the poorest, this must change. I think you care about our people and will accomplish much for them if given the chance.”

Klarke hummed, looking at him thoughtfully. “What do you want in exchange for your support?”

“Clarke?!” The captain reached out, clearly confused by the direction of the conversation.

She sighed and turned towards him. “Bel, he’s right. You already knew we had to do something if I was to survive being Nia’s heir. We both decided that bowing to the woman was worth it only for the chance to end her.” Her attention returned to Seth as she looked at him expectantly.

“Trade has to be allowed to move through my territory.” He started. “Farming in our other territories has to be increased so the burden does not rest so heavily on my people. No wars of expansion or attempts at conquering the coalition. Ontari either dies or is turned over to the commander. Our dungeons are reduced in size and use.”

“And in exchange, what do you offer?” Klark asked seriously clearly considering his offer.

“I’ll assist in holding your territory while you are at the mountain. See to it that your captain assigned to the security in the capitol is informed of Nia’s loyalists and those who would oppose you. When you challenge Nia I will back it and see to it that you aren’t simply executed for offering the challenge.”

“Treason it is then.” Klark said standing and offering her arm.

Seth stood as well and took her arm clasping it firmly. “For the future of our people.”

“You’re being overly dramatic,” Camilla scoffed from behind him.

He glared at her as the warrior, Octavia, snorted.

“It must be a general thing.” Bellamy said standing.

“So what’s next?” Octavia crossed arms. “Since we’re apparently plotting a military coup, and the murder of our bitch queen. Finally.”

Klark rolled her eyes as she dropped his arm. “Now, we go and see to it that our guests from Ingraron are recovering from their hangovers.” She glanced back at him. “I assume you’ll stay long enough for us to make plans?”

Seth nodded. “Of course, we have a lot of work to do.”
Chapter 32

Raven stayed hunched in the alcove she’d taken cover in with her arms wrapped around her head to protect it. The thundering crack of several explosions echoed through the halls. The vibrations could be felt in her teeth. Then the screaming and cries of pain started. They didn’t last long and quickly changed to groans. Slowly unfolding herself from her position, she pushed herself to her feet. Her limp was more pronounced as she moved towards the Commander. “Heda.” She waited for orders as she stood at attention.

“Raven you will come with me to the control room where the president should be.” She ordered before turning to where Indra had come jogging to their position. “Indra, take the warriors and sweep the mountain, make sure every mountain man is dead. Take Monty with you to open any doors that were not blown.”

She nodded stepping back. Running the back of her glove over her forehead, she wiped at the sweat and grime that had built up on her skin. The sounds of agony and death were dying out as she leaned against the wall, letting it take some of the weight off her bad leg. She stood there silently as the Commander organized the men to search the whole of the mountain. No surprises would come from this cursed place. She smiled slightly, her explosions had done it.

Finally, the Commander caught her eye before starting down the hallway towards the control room. Pushing off the wall, Raven limped along just behind her along with several of her fellow warriors. The ground was gritty, the lights blinking. It looked worse than the ark ever looked, which was saying something considering the ark was junk. The dry air filled with dust made her lungs itch.

As they approached the door to the control room she noted how the explosives had blown a hole through the lock of the room. The Commander raised her hand halting their approach. With a glance and a wave two of the warriors moved forward and gripped the doors and and pulled them open.

Raven barely grimaced at the sight of the bodies collapsed where they had been standing before the door blew. Their skin was raw and coated in radiation burns. Raven moved to the computer bank where it looked like the mountain men had last been working. She shoved the corpse collapsed on top of the computer off and onto the floor. It fell with a thud and she sat in the now free seat.

It was strange having tech as advanced as this that wasn’t hodge-podged together with spit, prayers, and personal brilliance. Speaking of her brilliance, blowing the internal generator hadn’t affected the power inside the mountain. As she’d hypothesized, their primary power came from the dam. The idea had been to blow the internal source so that if they died it would easier for the outside army to take the mountain. She’d been right, thankfully, since they didn’t have candles or torches with them and getting out of the mountain would have been a nightmare without lights.

Fiddling with the keyboard, she brought up what the mountain technician had been working on before he’d been burned alive by radiation. It took her seconds to realize what he’d been doing. She
stared in horror as she felt her stomach roll and nausea sweep through her. The mountain’s self destruct had been activated. “Shit.” She exclaimed staring at the screen any guilt at the murder of the civilians vanishing as she desperately began typing while yelling at the commander. “GET MONTY HERE NOW!”

She barely registered the commander’s voice in the radio demanding Monty’s presence. Her fingers were out of practice at typing, it had been years since she last even saw a keyboard let alone used one. Code had never been more than a side project to work on for her and now suddenly her life and everyone else’s in the mountain rested on her ability to shut down the self destruct.

The ticking of the clock was painfully unhalting as suddenly Monty was skidding into the room “What’s wrong?!”

“Self destruct! Pull up the other terminal I can’t get through the firewall fast enough.” Raven barked out.

Soon, she saw the numbers and letters that represented Monty adding to her code and advancing it far faster than she was capable of doing. It felt like she couldn’t breath as she and Monty worked side by side destroying the digital mechanism for self destruct. For a few tense minutes the room was filled with nothing but the sound of the clicking of keys. Finally, she breathed out leaning back letting her hands come away from the keys as the red ticking numbers stopped moving.

“What just happened?” The commander, or she supposed she should start thinking of her as Lexa all things considered, asked sharply.

Swallowing the bile in the back of her throat, she spoke. “They were going to self destruct the mountain.”

Lexa frowned staring at the screen without comprehension.

“We used small explosions to break down the doors. They were going to set off an explosive large enough to blow the whole mountain to hell.” She explained watching the Lexa’s face as her eyes widened slightly in muted horror.

“Could the mountain still explode?” She asked stiffly.

Raven shook her head while carefully closing down the window with the code up on it. “Not without someone capable of using these systems. If you need me to, I can make the whole thing go boom. However, it would take someone who knew how to use old world tech to set it off.”

“If it’s not an immediate threat, ignore it. What else does this...machine tell you?” She asked watching the systems cautiously, barely sparing herself a glance at the gruesome bodies decorating the floor.

Raven gave a hum of assent and began to pull up the cameras that hadn’t been in the hallways on the central monitor. Monty began typing as well, helping her pull up cameras at a faster rate. She felt inclined to roll her eyes, if her heart wasn’t still thundering in her chest from the almost self destruct. Monty was also simultaneously shutting down power to the missile silos so nothing could trigger them somehow.

With a final click and the camera images came up and Raven cringed at the image of the burned little bodies of children in their classroom. Panning across the other cameras, Raven found that they showed nothing but rooms, some empty some with bodies in them. Examining the rooms, she nodded to herself. Pulling up a map, she quickly switched between cameras to find where she knew
their men were moving through the mountain checking the rooms. Some of the screens now showed their warriors entering and checking the rooms that had been blown open. Swiveling in the chair, she faced Lexa. “Heda, the mountain is ours.”

Four Months ago:

Bellamy unclasped his coat dropping it over the back of the chair before sitting down heavily next to Clarke on the bed. He lay back beside her their sides touching as they both stared at the ceiling. He heard her sigh next to him.

“Say it already, I can feel you thinking it.” Clarke said while reaching out and clasping their hands.

He squeezed back and grunted slightly. “Do you really trust this Seth? I thought we trusted family only. That’s how we’ve survived, but now you want to trust some stranger.” He couldn’t keep his dislike at the current situation out of his tone.

“I don’t trust him.” Clarke blew out a breath. “But he has as much of a reason to want Nia dead as we do. Or maybe not quite as much as us but still.”

“If this is a trap?” He asked turning his head so he could see her face that was drawn with stress.

He felt her hand tighten around his. She tilted her head so that she was staring into his eyes. “Then we have a greater hurdle to overcome. We have survived this far, we will not go down without taking our enemies with us.”

They both fell silent and went back to staring at the ceiling. He startled slightly when Clarke spoke to him again. “I know you won’t like it but I need you to control the security in the capitol while I’m at the mountain.”

“Clarke no! You are not going to war without me.” He sat up and glared at her still prone form, upset at her for even suggesting he not stand by her side.

“Bell…” She sat up as well and curled her knees up to her chest as she watched him. “One of us has to remain behind and it’s not an option for me. If Seth plans on betraying us, or if I die, you need to finish this. We have one chance, if we fail none of us will survive.”

“Which is why we need to be united! This isn’t the time to be a self sacrificing idiot.” He protested vehemently.

“We will be! Just because we stand united does not mean we need to physically be beside each other.” She ran a hand through her loose hair that was out of its usual braids. “I need you to hold the capitol. Find who needs to be eliminated if Nia’s rule is to be ended. I don’t trust the names Seth says he’ll give us. Investigate, solidify our hold, and isolate Nia.”

Bellamy clenched his jaw in frustration knowing that Clarke was right. He hated it, he could see the logic in her plan but it went against all of his instincts. Finally, he found himself replying. “I’ll do it, but Clarke you better not die.”

“Haven’t you heard, I can’t be killed apparently.” She gave him a wry grin.

“You’ll be queen if this works you realize.” He teased, deciding to ignore the possibility of Clarke or any of their family who went with her dying.
Clarke shifted, “Don’t remind me.”

“Oh, I’m going to remind you. You already have gone and become a princess for real.” He grinned, poking her playfully.

Clarke snorted, “You and Atom are going to start calling me Princess again aren’t you?”

“Yup!” He smiled, pleased to see Clarke looking lighter.

Clarke’s expression turned serious again. “What are we going to do about Corrin?”

“Traditionally when ending a dynasty you kill all the members of the family so they can’t challenge you. Well that or you marry them into your family.” He shrugged.

Clarke rolled her eyes, “Nia’s already done that for us thanks to her ridiculous paranoia. We’re not killing Corrin, he’s barely older than Charlotte.”

“I didn’t say we should,” Bellamy tilted his head. “We could always send him to a border post away from any political schemes?”

Clarke looked thoughtful. “We could send him to Polis as an ambassador.”

“Polis would chew him up and spit him out. I don’t know how he became this way growing up in Azgeda under the watch of Nia but that kid is a soft idealistic child. He’d either insult everyone or get himself killed. How he’s related to Nia I don’t know.” Bellamy hadn’t spent much time with the kid, but he’d seen the boy trailing his first Xander often enough to get a reasonable gauge for him.

“He could train under our current ambassador. He needs the experience and if he learned to be more realistic he could be an asset.” She explained.

“You’re thinking of him as a possible heir?” Bellamy asked surprised, though he supposed it made sense. It would give legitimacy to Clarke’s position.

“We’ll need to have the hierarchy solid if we want our coup not to lead to a civil war. You’re enough of a history nerd to know coups either go fast or devolve into long and bloody wars. Corrin may be idealistic but he cares about our people. There are far worse options than him.”

It was true and he knew it. “So, assuming our coup succeeds. You’re on the throne, at least 90% of the advisers will be dead. Your position as general will be empty. Following Seth’s conditions, it won’t be long before Quint challenges you.” It was a daunting series of problems.

“You’ll take my position in our army.” Clarke said, gripping his shoulder. “So you should start considering how you’ll want to structure the army once I’m not there.” She smiled at him slightly.

Bellamy frowned, he didn’t want to be a general but it seemed it was in his future regardless. “Who will you use as advisers?”

“Gunter obviously,” Clarke said. “Leo is tactical and has been an excellent quarter master. I’d like to use him to replace his father’s position. From there, I’ll pull out one of Seth’s captains. If you could gauge them while I’m at the mountain, that would be useful. Other than that I’m unsure. Thoughts?”

He nodded agreeing with her choices. “Raven would make an excellent adviser and honestly her leg isn’t going to allow her to rise up through the ranks. Her skills are more useful in training more people as well.”
“You know she’ll throttle me for implying she can’t keep up in combat?” Clarke laughed, “And considering that saddle of hers she really can keep up.”

“Raven’s smart, she’ll accept it.” He at least hoped she would. “Xander would make a good replacement for Quint,” he suggested.

“He’s loyal and capable, though we might want to consider someone from Quint’s own forces.” Clarke agreed. “However, this is all pointless speculation till we have the throne.”

“We’ll have to kill them all as close to simultaneously as possible.” Bellamy said seriously. He felt a headache just thinking about the logistics of it all.

“It helps we are in charge of the security of the capitol. As foolish as Nia’s insistence on changing the general in charge of her security every year is, it helps us here.” Clarke replied.

“So when do we strike then?”

Present:

Gustus grimaced as he woke up feeling a sharp ache in his side. His eyelids were crusty and felt heavy as he blinked them open. He could see the fabric of a tent above him and he groaned. It didn’t take him more than seconds to realize he’d passed out from blood loss. Sitting up, he could feel stitches pulling across his side.

“Careful!” A voice rebuked him from across the tent.

He stared in disbelief at the boy who’d just yelled at him. The boy had his hair pulled up and braided into a loose bun on top of his head, though the blood splattered across most of his front was distracting. Gustus recognized him as Forrest, one of the Azgeda healing apprentices. Deciding to ignore the instruction, he went to stand up.

He had barely managed to swing his legs off the cot and start to rise before a firm push against his head knocked him back on to the cot. “Stay down, you lost a lot of blood and shouldn’t be standing till after you’ve eaten and we’ve changed your bandages again.” Forrest narrowed his eyes at him.

“I am the commander of TonDC and must return to my post.” He said firmly, preparing to make his move to get back to the village. He shuddered at the thought of what could have happened while he was unconscious.

The healer crossed his arms across his chest, clearly intending to push him back onto his cot if he tried to move again. “Anya and Xander are in command of TonDC. Klark is commanding the army and Heda has led a second attack against the weapon.” He said while cocking an eyebrow. “You need to rest or you’ll make your injury more serious.”

Gustus felt himself pale at the information just given to him. He made to get onto his feet only to be pushed back down before he could get all the way up again. The healer glared at him. “Stay.”

Before he could reply to the ridiculousness that was a boy, not even a full warrior from another clan, ordering him around, a Trikru warrior came bursting in, “They’re here!”

Forrest was off and out of the tent before the man could even finish his statement. Gustus used the lack of supervision to finally get to his feet. The world tilted slightly but he managed to stay on his feet. As he moved, he noticed that the others in the tent were bandaged and had clearly already been
seen to by the healers. Walking slowly as not to lose his balance which felt off, he made it out into the clearing. His limbs felt heavy and not quite right. The sun was low on the horizon, the day nearly at an end. He saw the progress that had been made while he was unconscious. The field had been cleared of the dead and the warriors of the two clans were working together barely a sideways glance to be seen between them.

With careful steps, he headed towards where he saw movement. Klark’s form stood out even though her pauldron wasn’t on, nor her decorative jacket. She was clearly in healer mode as she stood surrounded by the other healers and apprentice healers. It didn’t take him long to see what they were waiting for, a large group of people were making their way towards them.

The breath caught in his throat as he came to a stop next to Klark, ignoring the glare from Forrest. Coming out of the woods, alongside and helped by Azgeda warriors, were his people, the prisoners taken by the mountain. He felt so much pride in Lexa at that moment. She’d done the impossible. “General.” He said, letting Klark know he was there.

She looked at him skeptically. “I already sewed you up once. Try not to pull any stitches or I’ll be less kind when I fix you up again.”

Gustus grunted in assent, having no desire to have a pissed healer treating him. “How many did Heda free from the mountain?”

He felt her hand on his arm clearly understanding his fear for Lexa. “No one has given me an exact number but over a hundred.” She let go of his arm and moved forward at a light jog as the men broke through the trees.

Echo could barely stay on her feet any longer as she stumbled along beside the stretcher that held the strained form of Miller. It was as she was taking yet another step, her bare feet aching, that her foot caught on the turned over earth and she tilted falling forward without the strength to right herself. Instead of hitting the ground like she expected, she felt arms catching her. She attempted to pull out of the strong arms holding her, refusing to show weakness, only to feel herself being hauled into a hug. Pushing at the person holding her, she tried to pull back.

“Oh, stop being stubborn Echo!” A voice laughed, thick with emotion next to her ear.

Echo stopped struggling and wrapped her arms around the woman holding her. “Klark!” She let herself rest her weight on her former second and felt relief. If Klark was here, they were safe. They had survived.

“Of course you’d refuse help walking here.” The amused voice of her second vibrated through her. “Come on, let’s get you to a cot and looked over.”

Echo pushed out of her second’s arms again this time the woman let her pull away. “Miller is hurt, you need to see to him first.” She insisted.

The relieved expression on Klark’s face fell as she snapped her attention to Miller clearly blanching at the extensive damage and visible bone. Her face smoothed out instantly as she began snapping orders. “Get Miller to the central tent, move the former prisoners to the right tent. Any serious injuries I want in the central tent, now!” She snapped her head round. “Brady! You’re in charge of the right tent.”

“Gotch ya.” Brady replied. Echo was surprised to see he’d grown and was even more gangly than
he’d been last she’d seen him.

“Move people!” She gestured at them as people began following her orders.

Brady came to her side and pulled her arm over his shoulder. Echo glared and started tugging her arm back to herself when Klark just glared at her. With a frown, she slumped against her second’s second and allowed herself to be half carried towards the right hand tent.

He didn’t release her till he’d maneuvered her onto a cot. She let herself slump onto the clean cot. It was relieving to see her fellow prisoners being laid to rest on cots around her, she wasn’t the only one showing weakness. It surprised her slightly to feel a calloused hand on her shoulder. Looking up, she saw Brady had returned and was smiling down at her with surprising warmth given she hadn’t interacted with him much. Dropping down on his knees, he began to clean where the needles had been inserted when the mountain would bleed her.

“It’s good ta see ya. We all thaught ya were dead.” He said while wiping more grime away.

Echo let him clean what he could of her. “I see you’ve been training hard to be trusted with so much already.”

The boy flushed slightly despite the bag’s under his eyes. “Thanks.” He pulled a bowl of a paste and began to rub it over her needle marks. “Klark is a good first.”

Echo reached out and fluffed the kid’s hair. “Are we secure?” She asked, carefully mindful of the Trikru nearby.

He looked at her in understanding. “Heda an’ Klark hav’ been gettin’ on. We’re safe.”

Echo laughed, of course Klark would be able to get along with the Commander. It explained a lot. She wondered how much was Klark manipulating the woman. She’d seen Klark play a part before and knew that if Klark had played the loyal general, then the seeming corporation made some sense. Still, she had to have given a hell of performance for this level of trust. She’d stopped trying to understand how Klark bent the world around her some time ago. Her eyelids felt heavy as she felt Brady’s fingers wrap bandages around her needle marks. The last of her energy had left her as she allowed him to lay her back and pull a blanket over her.

Clarke finished the final wrap of the bandage she was securing around Miller’s stump. He’d passed out an hour ago. It had been delicate work removing the damaged flesh and then closing up the and tying everything off into a stump that would be capable of having a prosthetic of some sort attached to it. His days as a warrior were almost certainly over though. She wiped some the sweat off his brow and gently eased some of the lines of pain around his face. Leaning forward, she kissed his forehead gently before standing and leaning back, letting her back crack.

Moving to the trough of water for washing, she began to scrub the dried blood off her arms and face. Her whole body ached from the day’s stress and she knew she couldn’t keep going at this rate much longer. Her old injuries were taking their toll on her, especially her back. Miller had been the last of the patients she needed to see to personally though. Just to be sure, she made her rounds through all three tents, making sure it was all in hand. She paused to check specifically on Echo’s unconscious form.

Dealing with her former first would be difficult in the coming day’s. Echo was a staunch nationalist and loyalist to Nia. Despite all the problems Echo could pose to her plans Clarke could not help but
be relieved at her first’s survival. She didn’t have time to do more than check on the woman before she headed to where Cassette was settling down a patient who had woken with a cry of fear.

As the patient was soothed back to sleep, Cassette turned to speak, “Girl, you need to get some rest yourself.”

Clarke barked out a laugh at the midwife’s lack of reverence for her rank. “I’ll sleep once I have made sure everything is stable. Do you have a system for the night and tomorrow in these tents?”

“Of course, what do you have me here for?” Cassette wiped her hands off on a rag. “I’ve sent Lisa and Brady to bed. They’re our most senior healers and we’ll need them if the men in the mountain have any injured. Forrest and I can hold things down tonight. Elise and the injured that had to remain at Laslow’s old camp will be moved here tomorrow.”

“Good, and the Trikru healers?” Clarke asked, she’d been in constant surgery for hours and was fading fast.

“The same, I have the senior healers sleeping while the young ones watch the injured tonight.” The woman smiled shaking her head. “Nyko’s son, who helped you with that collapsed lung earlier, has been helpful. You should expect him to follow you around tomorrow.”

Clarke was sad about the loss of the kind man. “I’ll keep that in mind. Anything else that needs to be done tonight?”

“Well you have a new name people are referring to you as.” The woman pinched Clarke’s side.

Clarke yelped slightly and jumped back. “Cassette!” Shaking her head at the woman, she decided she ought to know what she was being referred to as. “Do I want to know what they’re calling me?”

“Wanheda,” Cassette said, falling uncharacteristically serious. “You won’t be human much longer to the men at this rate.”

“We’re all human.” Clarke said, feeling the weight of that name in her bones. “If that is all, I need to see to how Xander and Anya have dealt with securing the village.”

“Go on then, but you need to get some food down you and get some sleep. You’re no use to us half dead.”

She smiled at the midwife and blessed her stars that she had taken the women into her healing program. “Thank you, keep up the work.”

The camp was clearly in a ready to move form she noted as she walked through it. Most of the warriors had simply laid out their bed rolls on the ground and forgone tents. Their weapons within easy reach. Torches were limited and light around target rich areas were almost non existent. Most of the camp was asleep but she could see guards placed at every route into or out of the army’s area. Xander and Anya were in the command room in TonDC much to Clarke’s amusement. They were arguing rather passionately about the stabling of the horses.

She didn’t want to know unless it was necessary so she interrupted. “What’s our status?”

“General!” Xander pulled himself up to full attention.

Anya straightened her posture as well, “General.”

Xander shot her a dark look for the lackluster greeting before giving his report. “Trikru and Azgeda
forces have been integrated at every level to prevent either of our forces making the mistake of believing one or the other side is acting out of aggression. The civilians have been settled with Tristan kom Trikru’s troops for the night. I’ve sent pigeons along our line to inform the other captains of what is happening and to prepare them for moving to this position or into battle at first notice. The healing tents, village, and stables are all fully secured. We are having difficulties with how to deal with the dead however.” Xander’s face twitched slightly in clear irritation at not having everything taken care of already.

“Anything else to add before we deal with the dead Anya?” She asked hoping to get through this meeting as quickly as possible.

“What should we tell the men is happening with the mountain? We haven’t heard anything since we received a stand down order.” Anya was clearly tense at the unclear status of their people in the mountain.

Clarke pulled her shoulders back, refusing to show how that worried her as well. “Our best and bravest are in the mountain. Our first attack was a success. Until Heda returns victorious, we hold the line. That said, send messages with the pigeons to the entire line. They all need to prepare a quick action force to attack the mountain with if it is necessary. We won’t be able to send out the numbers necessary for another assault with just our two clans. Not with the numbers that we have lost to injury and death. If by dawn we have received no new news, then we send in scouts to determine if a rescue party or a full scale attack will be required.”

“Sha, general.” Anya replied, clearly relieved to have a plan of action laid out before her.

“Until then the army needs to be prepared and ready to march in force if necessary. See to it that the other generals are informed.” She looked at Xander and saw him nod.

“It’ll be done.”

“Good. What is the issue with the dead then?” She asked.

Anya answered her. “The trees in the area are not suited for a pyre. The sap burns when touched or when burned. We would have to take out valuable trees needed for the winter if we were to cut down enough. For the number of dead we have, sending men out to gather the trees from far enough afield to not deplete a single area will leave us more vulnerable.”

Clarke frowned, they couldn’t wait for the war to be decided to deal with the dead, the bodies would begin decomposing and producing a terrible risk of disease soon, even if they had been moved away from the walls of the village. She’d suggest a mass grave but burning was the way of their people. It was disrespectful of the dead to do anything else with them. “Anya have some of your men familiar with these woods lead parties to gather what wood can be brought in without hurting the village. Sacrifice what wood is already in the village as well. It will not cause our army harm to go without hot meals for a few days.”

She turned her attention to Xander. “I need you to gather some of our men and dig a mass grave. We will burn our men inside of it. What ash and bone does not burn away entirely will be buried into the ground they died to defend.”

Neither Xander nor Anya looked upset by this so she was reasonably confident it was an acceptable course of action that would not dishonor the spirits of the dead. “Is there anything else that needs to be taken care of tonight?”

“No, we can have the burning of the dead prepared by high noon tomorrow if we are not forced to
“Good, I’ll be in the commander’s quarters since it’s closest to both the healing tents and the radios. If anything needs my attention, come and get me.” She made sure both captain were satisfied with her answer before tiredly making her way for Lexa’s quarters.

The fact it was intended for any high ranking guests and not specifically Lexa, and that her own tent would be a luxury not worth putting up for a while, made her use of them acceptable. She was grateful for the fact, needing to be close to Lexa in any way that she could at the moment. Once inside the small quarters, she shed her grimy clothing.

Looking at her shirt in disgust, she realized it would have to be burnt, there was no saving it. Opening Lexa’s trunk, she pulled out a shirt and a pair of pants and pulled them on quickly. She knew Lexa wouldn’t mind her borrowing her clothes and Lexa would mind her sleeping in her bed in filthy blood caked clothing. With a groan, she lay down and pulled the furs over and let her body rest for the first time since all the craziness had begun. The surgery had taken more out of her than the fighting had. Not to mention the stress of hundreds of lives depending on her. Closing her eyes, she let herself drift off.

It was a restless sleep and her dreams were plagued by ominous shadows. She wasn’t sure how long it was, although it was still dark, when she was awoken by the door opening and a warrior speaking, “Wanheda, your presence is needed.”

Clarke left the comforting warmth of the bed and pulled on her jacket and boots quickly following the Trikru warrior out of the house. “What’s happened?” She questioned, the last vestiges of sleep leaving her mind as she walked.

“Four of the mountain team have returned.” He informed her hurriedly as they moved quickly out of TonDC.

Panic swept Clarke, only four. Raven, Monty, Lexa, so many of her warriors she had fought beside were in that mountain. A strange calm sense of purpose swept through her as she broke into a run towards where she spotted dark shapes moving.

Coming to a stop, she saw Anya was already there. She recognized her warriors who had returned. It took her seconds to note Peri’s pale and still form with blood soaking her torso which was being carried between two warriors. The warriors were all breathing hard and she could tell they had returned at high speed.

“Get Peri to the healing tents now!” She ordered, gesturing to the two carrying the unconscious woman. Not bothering to watch them hurry to follow her orders. Focusing on Selena, who was panting, she demanded, “What news from the mountain?”

Selena stiffened at her tone and pushed some of her hair over a shoulder. “It should have fallen by now.” She led with before giving a more detailed answer. “The mountain’s attempt at defending themselves was ended, it’s how Peri was injured. She’s our only injury so far. The doors were all rigged to explode when we left. Heda has been negotiating with the mountain to keep them from noticing our movement. There have been no casualties. She didn’t want to risk tipping off the mountain to our actions by radioing in with news.”

Clarke felt like she could breath again as she made quick calculations in her head. “Go get your men who came in with Peri. Get yourselves some food and rest. You won’t be called on for the rest of the night.”
“Thank you general.” Selena bowed slightly, clearly relieved at the news she could rest before moving to go give the news to the two able bodied warriors who had come with her.

“Your orders?” Anya asked quickly.

Clarke measured the situation for a minute before replying. “Send a message to the Azgeda and Trikru lines, I want them here as quickly as they can move. Prepare a party of fifty warriors at our front to be ready to move out at a moment’s notice to either assist in bringing in those in the mountain or serve as messengers to the other clans if they are needed. Then send your fastest rider with a secure radio to mountain, we need to know what is happening now.”

“Sha,” Anya replied before turning to give orders and see to it that it was done. Clarke was pleased to see that Anya agreed with her orders.

Jogging, she pulled off her coat and made her way into the healing tent and prepared to take over Peri’s care. She owed the crazy woman the best chance she could give her.

Four months ago:

Monroe moved into the thin walled shack that had been re-purposed as sleeping quarters for the warriors so that the villagers could use the small fort as shelter. They had let the snow cover the shack to help hold heat in. It looked like entering a snow bank shoving the door open and then closing it again. Pulling her face wrap off, she began to shake the snow off of her. With her mind buzzing, she began to pull her outer furs off, leaving only her lighter weight coat.

“Try not to track snow everywhere.” Her former first and current captain Leo snarked at her from his position by the fire where he was neatly organizing grain distribution in his ledger.

If she had been in her normal mind, she would have snarked right back. As it was, her mind was buzzing with the news she’d just gotten over the radio. Coups and rebellions filled with risks and gains filled her head. She just absently nodded at Leo while moving to her cot and carefully storing the radio back into her pack which she kept under it.

“What news from Klark?” Leo asked without looking up.

Monroe felt her heart stutter. “How would I have news from Klark? I was on the wall as look out.” She replied as evenly as possible.

Leo looked up at her clearly unimpressed “I don’t know how you do it but your family has a way of communicating over distance, and have done so since you were a second. How you get news before the messenger pigeons arrive I don’t know, but you do.” He narrowed his eyes at her, clearly annoyed at not knowing something.

“I…..” She choked. What did she say? She trusted Leo but his sister was a captain serving Seth. Out of everyone, she understood that family always came first. Klark had asked to see if Leo knew anything, but to be discrete about it. She didn’t do discrete.

A slight groan came from Leo as he put his ledger down. “Tell me, we both know you’ll do so eventually.”

“What do you know about General Seth?” She asked, watching him carefully. As his second, she’d learned to read his face and she saw the way his face tightened.
“He’s gone and proposed something dangerous then.” Leo stated clearly thinking. “He’s been frustrated with the state of his territory for some time. However he’s an honorable and competent leader.”

Monroe bit her lip while thinking, finally she looked at Leo again, and it was Leo. He was her first, her captain and the closest friend she had outside of her family. “He’s asked Clarke to stage a coup against Nia.”

Leo’s eyes widened. “He’s finally done it.”

“You knew he wanted Nia gone?” Monroe asked carefully.

Leo closed his ledger. “Very few in the army outside of Quint outright support Nia. I’ll have to organize our stores for the possibility of a civil war then.”

“But your father is one of the chief advisers?” Monroe asked confused.

“He’s a monster.” Leo snarled. “Nothing would please me more than to stab him through his heart.”

“Oh...I knew you disliked him.” Monroe wondered how she had managed to miss that deep of a hatred on Leo’s part towards the man. “How did I not know you hated him?”

“Do I talk about my father?” Leo asked her simply.

“No.”

“And that is why.” He sighed looking tired. “My family are nothing but pawns to him. Five children, one all but sold as prisoner to Ingrorana, three of us given to the army, the youngest and last saved from that only by Klark taking her as an apprentice healer. He cares nothing for us.” His fists clenched tightly.

Monroe sat down next to him carefully. “That’s why you’ve always been understanding of my family isn’t it?” She said in understanding.

“I may not know how you communicate faster than the carrier pigeons can fly, but yes I understand. Klark is your Xander, and Bellamy your Camilla.” He said.

“So if Camilla supports Seth, then he does not plan to betray Klark?” She asked watching him seriously.

“Seth has never wanted the throne, and he has no patience for Nia’s games. He’s serious and and plain spoken. It’s why Camilla finds him worth her loyalty.” Leo explained.

Monroe nodded, she trusted Leo implicitly and he had proven here that he could be trusted. He knew enough information now to send them to their deaths if he chose. It seemed ridiculous to continue to hide the radio from him now. He might not be one of those fallen from the ark but he too had grown to be family in a way. She stood up and moved over to her cot and pulled out the radio. “Then I believe you need to tell that to Klark.”
Chapter 33

Gustus was hobbling as quickly as he could without tearing his stitches, Klark scared him and he’d gained a healthy respect for the healing apprentices no matter how tiny. However, he had heard the clamor in the camp as torches were being lit and knew it meant Lexa had returned. Moving swiftly, if jerkily and awkwardly, he came round and saw Lexa and Klark clasping arms formally. As he got close, he saw Lexa drop Klark’s arm before raising her own and the murmurs came to a stop. She raised her voice her arm still lifted.

“THE MOUNTAIN HAS FALLEN! VICTORY IS OURS!”

Joy and pride swelled up inside of him as the warriors began to roar their approval. Those that had slept through the commotion of Lexa arriving were jolting awake and joining in as soon as they realized what had happened. Lexa reached down, grabbing Klark’s hand and raising their clasped hands over their heads as the roar of approval swelled.

Gustus let his head tilt back and he joined his voice with the others. It was a great and thunderous wave of sound. He was buoyed up on the great crescendo of cheers. Finally, Lexa lowered her and Klark’s joined hands and waited for the sound to taper off. Once silence fell, Lexa opened her mouth and roared out her announcement.

“TONIGHT WE REST VICTORIOUS! TOMORROW WE FEAST!” She cried out and the crowd once more swelled with approval.

Gustus moved forward once more and saw the returning warriors from the mountain being slapped on the backs. He noticed the dark haired assassin of Klark’s slipping from the celebration towards the healing tents. Finally, he made it to Lexa’s side and he smiled, wide and proud. “Heda!” He bowed at the waist, ignoring the painful pulling of his stitches, just knowing he had to tell her how proud he was of her.

“Gustus,” Lexa was splendid in her victory and clearly feeling the crowd in her veins. “You need not bow tonight friend.”

He didn’t know how to respond to that and just straightened. “Sha, Heda.”

“Heda, the army is yours.” Klark said formally, bringing Lexa’s attention back to her.

Gustus felt warmth as he heard Klark briefing Lexa on the situation and what had been done in her absence. A look around him showed that the celebration had barely died down throughout the camp.

Four Months ago:

Camilla swore loudly as she hit the ground from a hard kick to the gut. Glaring up, she saw the warrior Octavia standing above her, hand held out to help her up to her feet. It hurt her pride some but she accepted the hand. She wouldn’t lose again. She hadn’t been expecting the scrappy way the girl fought and had been pushed onto a wrong foot. It would not happen again though, she thought, as she hopped on the balls of her feet and adjusted her hold on her ax.

“Again.” She ordered.

Octavia moved forward with a swift slash that Camilla caught along the haft of her ax. Twisting her
ax, she swung the haft towards the girl’s face while directing the other girl’s sword downwards. She was forced to retract her lower hand as Octavia slid her sword down the haft of her ax, shoving in close. However, she was expecting it this time and clenched her suddenly loose hand and brought it across the girl’s face in a brutal cross punch. Stumbling backwards, Octavia spat a mouthful of blood out while trying to bring her guard back up. Camilla had seen her opening though, dropping low under the next swing and only managing to stop her ax when its blade was centimeters from Octavia’s open gut.

“I give,” Octavia said, dropping back respectfully. “Again?”

Camilla grinned “I could go for another.” She swung her ax, getting her muscles loose again. “Try to keep up.”

“You’re the one who is going to need to keep up.” Octavia goaded while falling into a ready position. Clearly excited at finding a challenger who met her skill.

They met again in a clash of weapons before Camilla felt an elbow drive into her shoulder violently while a foot stamped down on hers. Gritting her teeth, she dug in and drove the haft of her ax that was locked with Octavia’s sword into the girl’s gut. She wasn’t expecting the headbutt that left her reeling before she ended up hitting the ground hard.

“You’re the best ax user I’ve sparred with in ages.” Octavia announced excitedly as she stood back letting her get up.

Camilla raised an eyebrow, “What about that mute warrior of yours?”

“Dax, uses hand axe’s. You use a proper double headed one.” She explained like that was obvious. “Plus, he spends most of his time with the hunters. He is just here for a short time.”

Camilla found the girl odd, but she could see what Xander had meant when he’d written about a hot headed warrior with almost unnatural skill with a sword. A few more years of experience and few would be able to defeat the girl. For now, she was an excellent sparring partner, and an opportunity to get to know Seth’s new allies and her brother’s brothers in arms. “Again,” She demanded.

Octavia’s slightly bloody grin widened. “Of course.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Present:

Lexa woke up slowly, her muscles aching from the stress of the day before. She could hear the soft snores of Klark from where she was sleeping on her stomach beside her. Rolling onto her side, she let her eyes track over Klark’s golden hair spilling across the pillows. It was still early, the sun barely rising. If she was smart, she would let herself sleep some more but she didn’t want to be smart. Instead, she just let herself soak in this moment. She was victorious and safe, at least for the moment, laying beside her lover. Klark’s snoring slowly evened into deep breaths.

“I can feel you staring.” She rasped, her voice thick with sleep.

Lexa smiled before leaning forward, with her hand she gently swept Klark’s hair away from her neck before pressing a chaste kiss onto it. “Morning.”

A low grumble came from Klark. “Too early, go back to sleep you sap.”

Rolling into Klark’s side, Lexa closed her eyes and just breathed in the peace of the moment. Klark
smelt like leather and the plants used by healers, a hint of coppery blood clinging to her. It was perfect and relaxed her as she curled into Klark’s side soaking up the other woman’s presence. Time passed and Lexa was unsure of whether she truly slept or merely drifted. She was pulled into wakefulness by Klark rolling so that they were facing each other. Leaning in, they exchanged soft kisses, lazily trailing lips across faces.

Lexa ran her fingers along the collar of the shirt Klark was wearing. “I seem to recognize this shirt.”

Klark smiled at her. “Well I assumed you wouldn’t want my clothing in your bed after a day of surgery.”

“I don’t mind, it suits you.” Lexa said, finding it touching that Klark would wear her clothing.

Some of the happiness seemed to leave Klark’s face, “We need to leave soon. I’m surprised we haven’t been summoned to deal with a fight yet.”

“You should have faith in our people.” Lexa said, “I am Heda, I should be able to remain in bed for a few hours.”

Klark laughed, “You’re pouting.”

“The commander doesn’t pout.” Lexa protested.

“Lexa does though.” Klark leaned forward, kissing her again with slightly more energy this time. “Still we need to prepare for the other generals to arrive. We’ve laid in bed for too long already.”

Sighing, Lexa gave Klark a last peck before sitting up reluctantly. “My night bloods are children and they are better behaved.”

“Oh, I don’t know about that.” Klark said while swinging her legs out of the bed. “I’ve seen Aden and he may worship the ground you walk on but I’m afraid Charlotte has been a terrible influence on him.”

Lexa smiled fondly at the mention of her most promising nightblood. “It would seem the weakness of the Trikru is beautiful Azgeda warriors.”

Klark narrowed her eyes playfully, “I’ll have to inform my army that they need only clean up and wear better clothing and our enemies will fall without battle.”

Lexa breathed out a quiet laugh while standing and stretching her arms above her head. Warm hands wrapped round her waist and she tilted her head to the side exposing her neck for soft kisses. She let out a surprised sound at the feel of Klark’s teeth at her throat and sucking sharply before pulling away. Raising an eyebrow, she glanced at Klark who was looking entirely too innocent behind her. “That’s quite daring, marking your commander.”

Klark leaned in, nipping at her ear carefully before replying, her hands pulling Lexa’s back tight against her front. “I’ve never been good at playing it safe.”

Letting her body melt into Klark, she had to remind herself that they really did have to leave this room and that pulling Klark back into her bed wasn’t an option. Later, she thought to herself before pulling away. She began to pull on her gear and weapons and felt her role as Heda slowly falling over as she put on her armor not just physically. Carefully, she opened her jar of kohl only to feel Klark’s hand on top of hers stopping her from applying it.

“Let me?” Klark asked, looking at her seriously.
She couldn’t bring herself to answer, just dropping her hand to her side and turning to face Klark. Klark seemed to understand her assent because the cool touch of kohl started along the side of her face. She studied Klark’s face while it was this close, she still didn’t know what had caused the scar that ran from her chin down her neck. She found herself focusing on the traditional scarring along her face though. Scars that only a few short months ago would have filled her with nothing but rage. However now, they spoke to her of strength, honor, and pride. It hurt how full her heart felt in this moment. Finally, she closed her eyes trusting Klark to paint her face. The cool sensation of the kohl spreading in its familiar pattern was all she concentrated on until Klark’s fingers pulled away at last.

Wordlessly, she opened her eyes and reached out for Klark’s jar of white paint and gave Klark a questioning look. Klark’s mouth just quirked at the side and she closed her own eyes. Painting the white paint on her lover’s face was strangely meaningful. This was what strength looked like, she thought as she lowered the jar and looked at the result of her work. Klark’s traditional paint on her face, looking every inch the Azgeda general, her pauldron and weapons strapped to her body, her hair braided out of her face, face painted. Yet, there was a softness to her that let her know that she was still standing with Klark and not the general.

Klark reached out entwining their fingers. “We have tonight, and many nights after it.”

Lexa wanted to believe it with all of her heart. “We do.”

Anya sat down heavily next to Xander, she’d found him to be capable and reasonable. She wasn’t sure how, but over the course of the night they had fully integrated their two armies. It helped that the warriors sporting black eyes, broken noses, and various other mementos of the brawl from the day before, seemed quite chummy. It was disturbing and felt rather like the world had been turned on its head. However, it was more progress towards peace than she had ever seen before. The last of the Azgeda forces had arrived an hour ago and under Xander’s orders had spread themselves as directed, readying places for the last of the Trikru who should arrive any time now. Coordinating their defenses had been interesting since they’d been fighting each other for generations. They were all therefore incredibly familiar with each others defenses and it made things run disturbingly smoothly.

She stared at the side of Xander’s head. “Did you think this would happen?”

“No, I expected to be forced to execute at least a few warriors to enforce the peace. Not just stick a half dozen in the stocks.” His mouth twitched. “Captain Bellamy is the one who came up with that punishment, it’s rather ingenious. Men will do much to avoid being pissed on.”

Anya shared his humor at the memory of the faces of the arguing warriors they’d sent to the stocks earlier when they’d been informed of their fate. Apparently, rumors from the Pauna feast had spread through the Trikru army. The unholy glee some of the men showed, at the realization that their sworn enemies were in stocks along the latrine ditches, had been unsettling as well. It was difficult not to laugh sometimes. Instead of continuing to dwell on it, she moved the conversation along. “Do you believe this peace will hold once the other armies arrive?”

Xander seemed to think on it. “If Klark orders us to hold, then we will do so. The Ingranrona will follow our example. General Ephraim spent a month with Klark this last winter agreeing on terms for the coming year’s trade. Where Ingranrona goes, Trishana will follow. If the Floukru and Ouskejon kru follow Heda, then the others will follow out of fear.”

It was a fair assessment and Anya felt some relief that this other captain saw the situation the same as she did. “Then peace should hold as long as Boudalan or Sankru don’t act out of turn and against sense.”
He dipped his head in acknowledgement. “Nia’s trade restrictions in the south of our territory has cut their preferred trade routes in half and limited their growth. They do not favor us.”

“That’s one way to put it.” Anya replied dryly. Another would be that she had crippled their trade and Lexa had been powerless to stop it without interfering in internal clan affairs something none of the clans would have tolerated.

Standing she looked at him seriously. “It has been an honor commanding this camp with you.” She finally settled.

He stood slowly and offered her his arm. “And with you Anya kom Trikru. The spirits have clearly blessed this meeting.”

She grasped his arm before releasing it and turning to where she’d seen Lexa heading towards the village center. From behind, she noted how the line of her former second’s shoulders was more relaxed than she had seen it in years. She hoped and prayed that this was a good thing. She was coming round when it came to the Azgeda general but she was still wary. Though, she supposed the current state of things was a testament of the woman’s genuine support of Lexa. Still though, it bothered her that she had no clue how the woman was getting in and out of the most secured location in the camp. It irritated her that there was a clear security risk to Lexa’s life and the two of them were ignoring it so they could be foolish and bed each other.

“Don’t look so serious Anya. We have won the greatest victory in our people's history.” Lexa greeted her.

Anya gave a nod of assent and briefly clapsed Lexa’s shoulder in solidarity. “I just worry for how the general’s will react to the battle being won while they were sitting on their asses.”

“They will know that they did their part and they will accept that.” Lexa replied calmly, but with a hint of steel in her tone.

“And if they don’t?” Anya asked carefully.

Lexa shot her a glance sharply. “Then they will find out why I am Heda and others are not.”

Anya stared incredulously at Lexa’s neck, realizing that from her angle and close position there was a particular bruise visible against her neck just behind her collar. “Tighten your collar.” She said while glancing at it pointedly.

Lexa’s face flushed slightly as she moved to do that, hiding the incriminating bruise from view.

“You should be more careful. Too many people know of your bed partner already.” Anya remarked, carefully, mindful of any ears too close.

“She’s more than that Anya.” Lexa said sharply.

“You don’t do things by halves do you?” She questioned in resignation. Noting that no one was within earshot of their position, she continued. “Have you told her you love her yet?”

Lexa shifted as she walked uneasily. It wouldn’t be noticeable to anyone except someone who knew her well. “I can’t.” She finally said, voice hardening. “She returns to Azgeda once the conference between generals is over. I cannot lay that burden on her when she still has obligations she cannot be distracted from lest it cost her life.”

Anya looked heavenward and prayed to the spirits for the strength to deal with her hard headed
second. “While I may not be the greatest supporter of your new lover, even I know that that is moronic.”

Lexa looked at her incensed. Anya continued before she could interrupt. “She is going on a suicidal mission that will result in her either dying or becoming queen. If you want her to have any reason to return to your side to do more than swear her fealty to the coalition, you need to give it to her. If she is to die, then you will regret not having told her.”

Lexa’s jaw clenched, the muscles in her neck twitching slightly from the pressure. “She will not die.”

Spirits grant her strength, “Don’t tell me you believe the rumors that she is some mystical Wanheda? I know you don’t. You may not have her for long, and your love is hardly a burden to bear.”

“I can’t lose her.” Lexa finally whispered.

Anya gave in and rolled her eyes. If she couldn’t slap the girl over the head, she could at least express her frustration in a suitable manner. “Then give her a reason to survive, branwada.”

Octavia watched Clarke gathering up several empty journals dubiously. “You seriously are going to go into the mountain after the feast?” She finally asked. It helped to have something to distract herself from Echo’s disapproving looks at Lincoln which were an unwelcome reminder of the difficulties that their relationship would face when the army was dismissed.

“It needs to be done. The clans will want to loot it as a consolation for not participating in its destruction. The weapons need to be sectioned off so no one get’s a hold of them. We’re the only ones able to identify them.” She responded idly while digging through a chest for more charcoal.

“And it needs to be prepared now because?” She asked curiously from where she was seated against Lincoln in the healing tent for the least injured. Echo silently watched from the cot next to Lincoln’s.

“Because this entire camp is going to get drunk tonight and nothing productive is going to be achieved once the feast starts.” She replied over her shoulder.

Octavia stared incredulously at Lincoln, hoping he would back her up here. He just shrugged, clearly wanting to stay out of it. “You’re no help.” She deadpanned at him before returning her attention to her insane friend. “You’re not assigning someone else to do this why?”

“It’s not your place as a general to do such inane tasks.” Echo added from her place.

Clarke sighed before turning and facing her. “Because I’ve trained our forces too well. There is legitimately nothing for me to do. If I try and assist, they’ll just gently shoo me away saying they won’t let me do so ‘menial’ a task.” She looked pointedly at Echo.

Octavia couldn’t help it she laughed. “Wait you trained them to carry on without you so you could work with your little healers and now that your healers are competent enough that they don’t need your supervision all the time you have nothing to do?”

The blonde crossed her arms with a huff. “Essentially.”

Lincoln was clearly amused as well. “It is a testament to their loyalty to you.” He offered.
Echo shifted, clearly uncomfortable to be agreeing with Lincoln but she nodded her agreement anyways.

“Oh I know,” Clarke complained. “And I’m very proud of them. It’ll be very useful when I have to sit with those bores in the general meeting in two day’s time. However, until then, the everyday running of a camp is done and somehow during the night our army and the Trikru army became friends.”

“You realize that’s because you’ve been pushing them to integrate for weeks right?” Octavia asked, deeply amused by this. It was a Clarke sort of problem, to have men too competent and therefore have nothing to do.

Clarke waved her hand. “It’s unnatural, two days ago we were barely keeping them from erupting into war. Now, apparently an afternoon of beating the crap out of each other and they’re the best of friends.”

“There are sixteen men in the stocks for starting fights and Leo had to get some men making more stocks because we’re going to need them. So not exactly the best of friends.” Octavia remarked. She let her face fall suddenly. “You could check on Charlotte.”

A sigh of frustration and sorrow came from Clarke at that. “I’ve done all that can be done. Brady and the others did an excellent job. Elise kept her stable before and during the move. She’ll wake up when she wakes up. For now, there is nothing I could do except sit by her side. Tris and Aden have that covered.”

“I think that boy would walk through fire if she asked him to when she wakes up.” Octavia remarked, cringing at the memory of her conversation with him when Charlotte had first been brought into the healing tent.

Lincoln moved ever so slightly closer, offering comfort. “It is an honor to sacrifice oneself for your brothers and sisters in arms.”

“He’s right.” Clarke said, looking at her with knowing eyes.

Octavia ducked down slightly but didn’t reply. She knew she carried guilt over her family taking hits for her that she could have avoided and even those she couldn’t have. Knowing that they forgave her didn’t change how she felt about it.

“Now, hold out your arm Lincoln. If your pulse is stabilized, I can let you out of this tent.” Clarke said while gesturing for his arm.

Octavia got up so that she wasn’t in the way as Clarke checked Lincoln’s pulse and then double checked his other systems for signs of the extreme stress the red had put him under. Octavia stood next to Echo, knowing the woman would support her even if she didn’t understand the relationship she had with Lincoln. Finally, after what felt like forever but was really only a few short minutes Clarke stepped back. “You’re showing real improvement. You can move about camp. No alcohol, sparring, or other strenuous activity.” She shot a glare at Octavia. “I mean it.”

“Why are you looking at me?” Octavia protested while holding her hands up in innocence.

“Because I know you, and he has abs.” Clarke replied, without a pause and a surprising lack of humor in her voice.

Echo piped in dryly. “She’s right.”
“Fine,” She conceded. Smiling widely down at Lincoln, she saw his amusement at her and Clarke’s interaction but also the relief at being allowed out of the healing tent. She knew he had been itching to get out of it for days now. “Come on! We can go cheer on the seconds in the sparring pit!”

Tris swatted Aden’s hands away when he tried to help her up to her feet. “I can stand up on my own.” She glared at him. It was sweet but getting on her last nerve.

Aden looked lost as he hovered.

Tris groaned. “She’ll wake up soon, her hand has been twitching a bit.”

“I know, I just….I need to see her eyes.” He said miserably.

She hissed under her breath as she reached for a water bowl. “And then you can stop hovering over me for a change.”

“What was that? Do you need something?” He asked anxiously.

She closed her eyes and just breathed for a second. “Aden sit down on my cot.”

He dropped down on it and looked up clearly waiting for her next orders. She sighed and dropped down again before turning and laying down. His lap made an excellent pillow. “Now just stay still.”

She could feel him almost vibrating under her. However, it tapered off and soon she felt him slump. Carefully picking herself up, she sighed in relief to see he’d finally nodded off to sleep. Stupid boys, she thought, while smiling at him fondly. Some slight movement from a ways down the rows of cots brought her attention to Monty wrapping an extra fur around his lover’s sleeping form before crawling back into the cot with him. He caught her eye and gave her a quick wink. The tent was full of injured who were too hurt to join in the celebrations going on outside. She could hear the drums of Azgeda beating to a dance rhythm. The boisterous sounds merged into an understandable rumble. A choking sound from the cot next to her caught her attention.

Charlotte was coughing roughly, her face drawn with pain. Tris grabbed the water she’d gotten earlier and half hopped over to Char’s side. Sliding a hand behind Char’s head, she brought the bowl to her mouth. “Here, drink.”

Char followed her directions. Her coughing trailed off as she drank the water. Tris watched carefully before pulling the bowl away and setting it on the ground. “Easy,” She said as she lowered Char back down to the cot.

“Tris?” Char croaked. “What happened?”

Tris smiled in bemusement at Char’s confused face as she blinked up at her. “You took two bullets protecting Aden while he got me to safety.” Seeing the next question coming, she spoke before Char could even start. “And yes he’s fine. He just fell asleep so let’s try not to wake him. He’s been a nervous wreck with both of us injured.”

Char let out a relieved breath. “Are you okay?” She looked up at Tris cautiously.

“I’m fine.” Tris waved off. “I’ll be limping around for a while but I’m in better shape than you. You’re not allowed to so much as sit up till Klark gets in here to check on you. She’s making another round before they pull the meat off the spits.”
Char tilted her head, clearly curious about what was going on and listening in on the sounds from outside the tent. “They’re having a feast. Did we win then?”

“Yeah, the mountain fell.” Tris felt relief and pride in her bones at that fact.

Finally, the tension in Char’s prone form seemed leak out of her. Looking at Tris cautiously, she spoke quietly. “My family, are they all okay?”

Tris blanched but spoke quickly before Char could read that wrong. “They’re all alive.” She pointed with her chin towards where Monty and Miller were curled around each other. “Miller’s arm was badly injured though. When Klark comes through we can see about moving him over here so you two are close to each other.”

Char breathed out and ducked her chin. Tris could tell she was trying to prevent herself from crying. Tris wasn’t really sure why but did what she could do. Leaning forward, she kissed Char’s forehead. Being careful not to hurt Char, Tris lay down on her side on the edge of the cot so that she could be beside her friend. Careful of her injuries she laid her arm over her and just held her as she cried. Looking back at her own cot, she saw Aden sitting up watching them carefully. There was a look of peaceful relief on his face as he watched them.

Clarke helped carry Miller towards Charlotte and her two companions with mischief in her eyes. He was sweating and was a bit pale, but was doing better than she would have expected. Artigus was holding up his other side while Monty trailed behind them worriedly. They lowered him down on the cot, careful to make sure they jostled him as little as possible. Once he was down, she reached out to take his pulse. It was fast, but not abnormally so.

“Thanks.” He said, looking at her gratefully.

Leaning forward, she pulled him into a hug. “You’re my brother, you didn’t even have to ask.”

“Then how’d I end up on the boring side in the first place?” He grinned at Charlotte over her shoulder.

She tapped him lightly on the head. “Idiot.”

“Think Raven can make me a new arm?” He asked playfully, “I could be half robot.”

Clarke felt pain on hearing the unstated question in his voice asking if something could be done to keep him useful. If they could give him a new arm. She couldn’t keep the false cheer on her face. Gripping his shoulder tightly, she looked him in the eye and waited for him to hold it. “You will always have a place at my side, arm or no arm.”

He ducked his head. He replied thickly. “I know.”

“Don’t be so serious, I’ve got holes in me!” Charlotte interrupted.

“Char!” Tris’ voice protested, slightly high pitched.

Clarke laughed at the panicked look on Tris’ face. “Let’s try not to add to those holes alright. Though, it’s good to see that pain tonic is helping.”

Charlotte grinned up happily from her cot. “It’s the best! I’m the best!”
Affectionately, Clarke moved a lock of hair behind Charlotte’s ear. “Indeed you are, and now you have your brother with you for the night.” She looked up at Tris and Aden, who were watching her carefully. “Come get me immediately if anything happens to either of them.”

Aden nodded seriously. “Sha, General.”

“Good, Tris stay off that leg.” She leveled a knowing look at the second.

Standing properly, she noted the way the other patients were watching her interactions with her family. Ever since the war at the border, she found the eyes of men following her. Sometimes she wondered how they could see her in person and yet still enlarge her image to something inhuman. Shaking her head slightly, she looked down on her family. Monty was setting up a small chess board for him and Miller, who had a hollow look about him, but was clearly trying for Monty’s sake. Charlotte was drugged and unfocused, Tris seated beside her on the narrow cot, Aden hovering about. They would be alright.

Leaving the healing tent, she faced the celebrations. The alcohol had been watered down because of the necessity of keeping the men from getting too drunk. Music filled the air as groups of dancers moved around under torch light. There would be little hot food, most of the food being served cold so that the burning of the dead could occur the next day. Still, it was overall a boisterous and joyous affair. She smiled at the sight of bruised Trikru and Azgeda interacting together while those without bruises joined in cautiously.

The people parted before her as she headed for where she knew Lexa and the captains would be overseeing the festivities. It was time to start the feast part of this celebration and allow the men this night of freedom before duty returned in the morning.

Four Months ago:

Garon stood before the throne with the other advisers after the end of the day’s court. The winter months slowed what they were able to do. He had great swaths of time to consider whether he should have more children. His current ones were proving to be useful, but not yet entirely worth the time he’d poured into them. “Your highness, have you considered returning your nephew to my son’s care?”

Nia stared at him consideringly. “What say you Iago? Do you think it’s the best use of my bloods time to serve Xander in the north?” There was a mocking quality to her voice that told them all exactly what she expected the answer to be.

He grit his teeth as Iago stepped forward to answer the queen. His silken tones escaped. “Your nephew should come to the capitol, his training could be...furthered better here.”

Garon frowned considering the possibilities. The boy was partial to his family. He’d raised the boy in his house till he was old enough to be trained after all. Nia couldn’t be bothered with caring for her former brothers child. However he had always seen the opportunity. He’d let the child remain weak and untested as long as possible. After all, a puppet never served well when battle hardened. Letting the boy anywhere near the other advisers would be dangerous. Iago hadn’t held his position for all these years for no reason. “Is it really best to risk the last of your line in a place as dangerous as the capitol?”

“Are you suggesting any would dare attack my dearest nephew?” Nia said, her eyes focused on him like a bird of prey.
Zola intervened as always. “I’m sure he meant nothing of the sort. However, we do have a lot of…deaths here, for those unused to the atmosphere.”

“If he is to be a candidate for heir, he must survive his trial by fire.” The robed form of Anankos said softly.

“I’m sure he’ll prove himself adequate.” Nia said, shifting in her throne.

Anankos shifted, his robes rustling. Garon glared, he’d always hated the assassin. “If he fails his trial, he is not worthy of the throne. He will find the capitol his first test, while Klark finds her latest test at the mountain.”

“One she won’t be passing.” Nia said sharply, turning her full attention to Anankos.

He dipped his head. “Of course, the mountain poses many dangers.”

Garon felt the weight of his heavy furs, darting his eyes to Zola, he saw the slight man cringe at his attention. Good the two of them would be needing to have words after this meeting. Returning his attention to the foul woman who sat on the throne, he spoke. “I’m sure Xander has proven his ability to take that upstarts position when she falls?”

“We’ll see.” Nia stated.
Leo’s fingers hurt from filling out lists of items in one of his ever present ledgers. He glared at where Klark was sorting through crates of medical supplies. “Why is it necessary to record everything? Better yet why must I be in charge of it?”

Klark didn’t even bother to move from where she was double checking the items with the mountain’s records. “Because you’re my quartermaster. There aren’t very many of us that even understand this.”

He knew she was right. It didn’t help his mood. “I am a warrior, not a village elder recording crops for the winter. Or god forbid the next Iago.” He shuddered at the thought of the foul man who handled the accounts of the nation. Noting the way Klark tensed slightly, his eyes narrowed. “Klark, please tell me I’m not a candidate to replace Iago.” He said darkly.

Klark finally looked up from what he was fairly certain was a tub of needles. “See the thing is Leo, you’re a perfectionist with a nose for sniffing out corruption and you already understand how the government works.” She patted his shoulder in comfort before moving to the next crate.

He stood rooted to the spot in horror. There was no way this was acceptable. “Does Xander know?”

“How long have I been an option for this?” He asked finally. He easily ignored the nervous looks the warriors checking items against lists were giving him as he watched Klark with laser focus.

“Since Seth visited.” She shrugged. “You’ll serve well at the post.”

Leo wanted to yell but of course that wasn’t an option. With the coup coming ever closer there was only so much he could say without compromising them. Although, this explained why Bellamy had agreed to a meeting with his cursed father. Deciding that standing here stewing on his frustration at no one telling him this tiny detail wasn’t going to help. He turned on his heel and headed out of the remains of the medical storage room. “I’ll be back.”

With even and sharp steps, he made his way quickly towards the missile silos. Men gave him nods of acknowledgement as he passed them. Winding through closed corridors, he wondered what sort of people would accept a cursed life like this. However, that was neither here nor there. Arriving at the larger more military based sections of the fortress, he began to pass warriors hauling the bodies of the dead. They were neither respectful nor gentle with the fabric wrapped corpses. Following the train of dead being moved, he finally arrived where the missiles were kept.

Raven was ordering men around, directing them to various sides of the large room. There was one
corner where the bodies were being tossed. The various weapons that were found were brought to
Raven to confirm that yes it was a weapon before being taken to a series of large bins and tossed in
to be later destroyed. All in all, it was running smoothly and he could tell he was unneeded. Giving
Raven a nod of appreciation, he left and headed to the floor above where the acid fog was kept.

He did not understand the fog, but he’d been assured that the remains of the ravaged room was
where it was made. It seemed too small to him, but the twins had stared at him like he was an idiot
for a moment too long and he’d decided to not question it further. It only took him a minute of
looking in at the room where the twins were darting about doing….something, to decided that he
was unneeded here as well.

He was stopped by a hand on his shoulder. Klark looked more serious than she had before. He
frowned. “General?”

“I need to return to TonDC for the burning. I trust you to keep things running here. I need the correct
and itemized records of the mountain by the morning. I cannot arrive at the meeting without it.” She
said.

It was something he’d always appreciated about serving with and under Klark. She always informed
him why things were important. “Of course, and I am honored you consider me an option to replace
Iago with someday.”

She smiled at him. “Good, we can speak of it further during our return trip. For now, I am required to
attend the burning.”

Once she was gone, he left for the control room where he knew Monty would be waiting. He’d need
to double check with the teams on their itemized lists afterwards. He really hated paperwork.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three months ago:

Atom followed Bellamy towards Nia’s throne room. He had spent less time in the capitol than
Bellamy. His time had mostly be spent by Clarke’s side with Miller, Harper, and Dax. Off hunting
down pauna, interacting with the villagers, and traveling with hunting bands and elk herders. The
rigid way the guards they passed held themselves, the shifting eyes, it told him a lot about how
Bellamy had become so much quieter over the years, and more reasoned. He still joked politics
weren’t his thing but it was truly a lie. Bellamy had become quite adept at doing what needed to be
done, no matter how distasteful.

“Remember, say nothing.” Bellamy ordered Atom and the other two warriors that were presenting
themselves to the queen.

Atom nodded knowing the plan. He saw the others doing the same and straightened his spine in
preparation for the coming events. It was fortunate he would be leaving with Clarke for the mountain
in a month’s time. He was not suited for the political games and intrigue of the capitol.

Bellamy strode forward confidently as he walked through the doors into the throne room. The room
was cold, the walls mostly cement with furs and trophies from wars mounted upon them. As soon as
they reached the middle of the room in front of her throne, they all dropped to their knees, heads
bowed. Bellamy’s voice was clear as it rang out.

“We have come to serve your majesty.” He said.

Nia stood from her throne. “And I entrust the safety of my city on your shoulders. See that you don’t
disappoint.” Her voice was cold and clearly uncaring of their fates.

“It is our honor.” He said.

She turned uncaring and waved her hand absently. “Report to Garon then.”

“Yes my queen.” Bellamy stood and gave a sharp jerk of his wrist telling them to stand as well as they left the throne room.

Three turns and a long hallway later, they arrived at Garon’s personal quarters. The large bulky man, in his thick rich furs, was waiting for them. Atom didn’t question how he’d beaten them from the throne room to here.

“Captain Bellamy, I assume you already know your duties inside the city?” He asked, looking bored with the change in guard.

Bellamy kept his face even as he spoke. “Yes, I’m to provide the warriors needed for you to do your job securing the city for six months before handing it off to a different captain. This is done to prevent you from gaining the forces necessary to overthrow our beloved queen.”

Garon practically growled, “Are you mocking me boy?”

Atom was surprised to see Bellamy not even shift. “Hardly, I and my general find the distrust you’ve gained as a reward for your years of loyal service to the throne deplorable.”

For the first time since they’d arrived in the capitol, Atom saw one of those in power really look at them. The cruel man in front of them was watching them with laser focus now. They were now toeing the line of treason so closely it was nerve wracking. He could see the way the other two warriors with them were barely breathing. Selena’s lips were positively white.

“You would dare act against her majesty’s judgment?” He said darkly.

“No,” Bellamy said clearly, “I would act to aid her in removing advisers that have clearly acted against her best interest. Notably, Iago has become corrupt. He receives rewards and power he uses against our clan’s interests. My general would offer her services to right this wrong.”

Garon sat down a calculating light in his eye. “Explain.”

Bellamy shifted slightly. “When my general succeeds at the mountain, she will return victorious, her fame and reputation will have increased. All in her army will hold some of that fame. If an accident were to occur to Iago, and his staunchest supporters, having Leo step into his role would only be natural. With a more loyal adviser in charge of the accounts and trade of our nation, surely we will further prosper.”

Atom found this part of the plan terrifying. They needed to break up Nia’s supporters. Garon had long coveted the throne. Getting rid of his rivals would appeal to him, and he need not know what he was supporting was a coup. Atom caught Selena’s eye and gave her a slight upturn of the lips in reassurance before returning his attention to the man in charge of the security of the capitol.

“You general proves herself wiser than most.” Garon said carefully. “However, why should I believe that she does not merely wish to replace those behind the throne to make it easier for her to claim it for herself?”

Bellamy replied instantly, sounding slightly indignant. Which was honestly impressive since Garon’s implications were true. “General Clarke has no designs on the throne. She is aware she does not
carry the blood of our kings and queens. When a proper heir presents themselves, she will willingly step aside.”

Garon seemed to come to a decision. “Then we have much to do to protect our queen don’t we?”

Present:

Sophie kom Azgeda, second...former second of Silas kom Azgeda, her brother, stood in front of the massive pyre and felt lost. She watched, not hearing as the commander gave a speech that she knew must be honoring the dead. All she could do was stare blankly though. Her eyes were painfully dry, her tears already all spent. Everything had been about making her brother proud and now he wasn’t there. He wouldn’t laugh at her trying to work with her horse. He wouldn’t smile at her when she managed land a hit on him while training. He wouldn’t make her run laps when she slept too late. Small sweets wouldn’t be left on top of her bedroll. It was all just gone.

She was startled out of her swirling thoughts by the feeling of a hand on her shoulder. Looking up to the side, she saw the form of Octavia, one of the most skilled warriors in all of Azgeda. She started to stiffen, feeling shame at someone like her seeing her in such a state.

“It’s alright.” Octavia said, squeezing her shoulder. “Your grief is yours and brings no weakness or dishonor to anyone today.”

Sophie let out a sniffle and focused back on the pyre that was being lit by the general. As the flames spread across the wood, she found herself asking in a quiet voice. “What happens to me now? He was everything I had.”

The hand on her shoulder moved so that she found herself being pulled into the warrior’s side. Her shoulders just slotting under the arm of Octavia. “You have us. You are a warrior of Azgeda, we never abandon one of our own.”

Sophie reached a hand up, wiping away some tears that had begun to fall. She hadn’t known she had it in her to cry any more. “But I still need training. I was just starting. He was supposed to train me, to be there when I received my marks.” She choked slightly on her tears.

The arm wrapped around her shoulders squeezed slightly. “You will finish your training and receive your marks. You will honor your brother and make him proud.”

“How can you be so sure?” She asked, still staring at the flames that were spreading. Her hand clenching around the short piece of braid in her hand.

“Because I’ll train you till you are the best warrior in Azgeda.” Octavia replied.

Sophie started, looking wide eyed at the warrior. “But...you’re one of the general’s chosen warriors? Why would you train me?!” Her voice shook. Being trained by a warrior like Octavia was a high honor.

“Because Silas was a friend and brother in arms and this is my way of honoring his sacrifice. He always spoke highly of you. I expect you to be prepared to work hard starting tomorrow. For now, grieve and remember your brother.”

“Sha, thank you.” Sophie said while returning her attention to the flames but a new emotion was welling up inside of her.
Artigus stepped away from Ryder’s side. He knew the man was just watching over him to honor his promise to his father, but it was suffocating and he needed to prove himself. If he was to be half the healer his father was, he needed to be trained by the best healer available and he knew who that was. After all, she had earned the title of Wanheda for her ability to both deal death to her enemies at mass levels and to bring back those that had been claimed by death and felt its kiss. Standing as formally as possible, he walked like he belonged there as he came to a stop near the general.

“Artigus isn’t it?” The general asked while looking at him seriously. “What do you require?”

“Train me.” He bowed trying to compensate for his inability to ask that politely.

“There is no need to bow.” Wanheda said as she turned so that she was facing him instead of the fire. Straightening, he noticed that Heda and her guards were watching him out of the corner of their eyes. Some more blatantly than others.

She was looking at him with a neutral expression. “Why should I train you? You are Trikru, and my army returns to Azgeda soon.”

“Nyko was the greatest healer in all of my clan.” He said with pride, ignoring how his voice wavered slightly. “You are greater still. If I am to be the healer my father wished I would become, I must train under you. Please.”

Wanheda stared at him, clearly thinking. “You would have to be granted permission to leave your clan. Azgeda is not a welcoming place for Trikru.” She said, her voice serious. He ignored the warning in her voice, she was open to the idea. “I don’t care what is needed. I’ll do it. I’ll follow your every order.” He said eagerly.

“I already have a second, you would have to accept being trained by other healers often.” She cautioned him.

He could prove himself worthy of her time though, he knew it. “I don’t care. Teach me please.” He bowed again.

Her voice came out again this time clearly not directed at him. “What do you think Heda, should I accept his request?”

He peeked slightly at the commander who was looking at him with an unreadable expression. “As long as he is returned when his training is complete.”

“Well then, Aritigus kom Trikru, after the pyre report to the healing tents. You should say your goodbyes to any you will be leaving in the next few days. You won’t be seeing them for some time.”

“Sha, Wanheda!” He said standing up. “I’ll make you and my father proud.”

“Why don’t you start by referring to me as Clarke, or general.” She commented looking less serious.

Indra stared at Lexa in horror where she sat in her throne. “You can’t be serious Heda!”

“You question my decision on my own guards?” Lexa asked, it was a challenge though and she knew it.
She jerked back, gritting her teeth in frustration. This was foolish and reckless in a way she had not known the commander could be before the Azgeda’s new general had worked her way into the commander’s good graces. “You would trust an Azgeda assassin in your personal guard, in Polis! Your tolerance for such things to keep the peace while we’ve been forced to work with them is admirable. However, it is not a necessary risk any longer!”

“Are you accusing my warrior of something Indra?” Klark said from where she’d been silently listening to the Trikru meeting.

Indra swung her attention to the scarred general. “I think you have ingratiated yourself with my army and Heda like the snake you are.”

Klark raised her eyebrows, but before she could reply, Gustus, who was still slightly pale from his injury, spoke up. “You insult our ally and guest Indra.”

“And you risk Heda by trusting these wolves in sheep’s clothing!” She could not understand why the usually wise and cautious Gustus would support this.

“Enough,” Lexa raised her hand. “Indra, general Klark has my support in her coup. However, the assassin, Charlotte’s promotion has nothing to do with that.”

“How could it not?” She asked frustrated that Lexa would allow an Ice Nation general to be the one to deal with Nia’s treachery at last. Lexa stared at her, daring her to continue. Indra stepped back, biting more words back that begged to burst out of her.

“Charlotte almost gave her life for one of our nightbloods. Proving not only her bravery and willingness to sacrifice for her duty but also her loyalty to Aden and to the coalition.” Lexa replied, as if such a sacrifice negated the obvious threat of entrusting an Azgeda assassin with the safety of the commander.

Klark moved slightly. “Indra, our people have hated each other longer than either of us have lived.” She wrapped her fingers around a dagger hilt. “Another war between our clans is not what either of us wish. I trust that the Commander will not break the coalition as completely as a war against my clan would cause. However, you need not trust me. Charlotte bears the knot of brotherhood with two of your own and has proven how seriously she takes that bond. You should accept that.”

“Does that mean you will release Charlotte to my service then?” Lexa said, watching Klark closely.

The general looked uneasy but finally nodded her assent. “Yes, I will release her to your personal guard under Gustus.” She breathed heavily. “I request that Lincoln kom Trikru be sent as a trade relations representative to my territory.”

“Lincoln is Trikru! He belongs with his people.” Indra protested.

Anya scoffed. “If you think he won’t be following that Azgeda warrior of his regardless of permission, you haven’t been paying enough attention.”

“Then he will be named a traitor.” Indra growled at the foolishness of her former second. Lincoln was throwing away his place as Aden’s first and his place amongst their clan for a pretty face. Such foolishness should not be indulged. It irked her that she understood why it was this particular pretty face. The girl was a spirited warrior. If she’d been of her clan, she would have made an excellent match for the man, but she wasn’t.

Klark snapped at her then. “If he is declared a traitor, I will take him into my own clan.”
Indra looked at the general in surprise. Taking a traitor from another clan in was almost an unheard of risk. She supposed there was no question that the general cared for the warrior, Octavia, if she would do that. “You humor the foolishness of your warriors.”

“No, I recognize a talented and loyal warrior when I see one. That is not even accounting for his healing skill.” Klark said narrowing her eyes at her.

Lexa, clearly tired of the argument, spoke. “I give leave for him to accompany your army as a trade emissary.”

“Heda!” Indra feared what this changing dynamic between their two clans meant and feared the death it could bring.

“You will accept this Indra.” Lexa said firmly.

Tilting her head slightly, she accepted there was nothing she could do about it.

“Now, general Klark what news from the mountain?”

Klark straightened. “We’ve secured the dead and the weapons beside the missiles. I have a rotating guard at the entrance. Once a decision is made, we can destroy the ruins of the mountain along with their cursed weapons.”

“And the goods?” Gustus asked from where he stood beside Lexa.

“We destroyed most of their medical supplies with our explosives but what remains is incredibly valuable. The tools and tech inside the mountain is varied. Most of it will be of little use to the clans. There were six vehicles they used as horseless carts, but not enough gas to sustain them long term. Clothing and personal belongings are minimal and clearly old. What is significant is the art. There are thousands of paintings, statues, and musical instruments.” She clasped her hands behind her back, a motion, Indra realized, she’d picked up from Lexa. “I will be suggesting to my allies that when the loot is divided that they lay claim to what piping, hoses, and radios they can.”

“Hoses and pipes?” Anya asked, clearly curious.

Klark nodded. “I can lend Raven out to our allies over the next several years. She will be able to use them to run water from wells and rivers into the villages. The use of radios I believe is evident at this point.”

Anya’s lips quirked slightly in amusement. “Indeed, but are you volunteering to lend your prized warrior to us then?”

“Yes,” She shrugged slightly. “I’ll need to take the brand and swear Azgeda to the coalition if the coup goes as planned.”

“And if it doesn’t?” Anya asked carefully.

“Well,” Klark’s eyes snapped to Lexa for a moment before returning to Anya in a gesture that made Indra frown. “In that case, during the ensuing civil war, I would encourage that you attempt to secure Raven and her seconds as quickly as possible.”

Indra knew there was something going on here that she didn’t understand. Gustus and Anya were both far too accepting of Klark. There had been no anxiety when the men had begun to whisper about Wanheda. She knew Klark was unlikely to stab them in the back. However, the fact she was willing to stab her queen in the back made her uneasy. Once a traitor, always a traitor.
“How sure are you in your success?” Lexa asked, gripping the arms of her throne.

Klark tilted her chin up. “As sure as I can be, but at this point it depends on my captain Bellamy.”

Indra couldn’t take it any longer, she just couldn’t. “How do we know you won’t do to Heda what you are doing to your queen?”

“Because everything I have done has been for the good of my people. Would overthrowing Lexa help my people?” Klark just watched her.

It made sense and she was inclined to believe her but at the same time it pained her to the bone to believe a member of the Ice Nation. However, she saw in the general a warrior that she understood, even if it burned.

Clarke sat down beside Charlotte, her hand stroked the side of the girls face waking her from her uneasy sleep. The girl blinked, her eyelids heavy with drugs, sleep, and pain. “Hey,” She said, smiling at the quickly focusing face of her sister.

“Clarke,” She croaked, shifting.

“Easy, it’s time for your next draught.” She explained with a sympathetic smile. The draught for pain and the prevention of infection was notoriously bitter.

Sure enough, Charlotte's face scrunched up in displeasure. “Do I have to?” She asked plaintively.

“I’m afraid you do. You need to be able to travel by the end of the week.” Clarke said while helping Charlotte sit up and propping her back up with rolled up furs. Once the girl was reclining close enough to upright, she let her settle. Pressing the mug into her hands, she said, “Drink up.”

Charlotte’s nose wrinkled as she drank the foul concoction as quickly as possible. Letting the mug drop from her lips, she glanced around the tent. “Where’s Tris and Aden?”

“Aden is uninjured and has duties to attend to around camp. Tris needed to head to the latrine ditch and demanded that I stay with you till she could get back.” Clarke smiled fondly. “I think she was convinced making that demand would cost her her life.”

Charlotte laughed lightly before cringing from the pain of it. Clarke reached out quickly, soothing the girl. “I’m going to miss them when we return.”

“About that,” Clarke noticed the way Charlotte's face was suddenly laser focused on hers. It hurt her to do this but it needed to be done. Lexa had agreed to let Clarke be the one to inform Charlotte. “You’re bravery and sacrifice to protect a nightblood have been noticed and will be rewarded.”

“Like a mark for bravery?” Charlotte asked, sounding rather stunned but excited at the idea of earning so coveted a mark.

“Yes, but that’s not what the Commander has ordered. You are to join her personal guard, in Polis.”

Charlotte’s eyes widened but in horror. “No, I can’t leave you!” She protested.

It felt like a stab but Clarke persevered. It was for the best no matter how she loathed separating their family even more. “Charlotte it’s an honor to our clan.” She cursed that the other injured could hear this. That she couldn’t tell her that the true reason was to keep her safe in case the coup failed so that
at least one of their family survived. “You are too injured for the return trip to Azgeda as well. If you return to Polis, the road is easier. You’ll be actively serving the Commander in several months time.”

“But...you can’t leave me. Family stays together.” She pleaded.

“Oh sweetheart.” Clarke leaned forward pressing her lips to her forehead. “It won’t be forever. For now, it is the safest choice for you, and it truly is an honor.” She gripped Charlotte’s uninjured shoulder. “You’ll have Tris and Aden with you. I’d never allow this otherwise.”

Charlotte’s eyes watered. “I don’t want to leave.” She choked.

“Char!” Tris exclaimed as she approached at a limp.

Clarke pulled back slightly as the girl moved as fast as she could with her injured leg and put herself between Charlotte and herself. The girl looked terrified of what she was doing but was clearly protective of her.

“It’s alright Tris,” Clarke said in hopes of preventing her doing anything foolish that would require punishment. “Charlotte has been honored by Heda.”

Tris looked confused but her protective stance faltered slightly as she chanced a glance at Charlotte to make sure she was okay. Clarke reached out and grabbed Tris’ arm. “She will be returning to Polis as a member of Heda’s guard instead of returning to Azgeda.”

Tris’ eyes widened before looking excited and then seeming to snap around to Charlotte. “That’s amazing Char! Only the best warriors are allowed into Heda’s guard.”

“I’m Azgeda.” Charlotte finally said.

It took a minute before Clarke saw understanding on Tris’ face. The girl dropped down onto the cot next to Charlotte looking helpless and clearly not knowing what to say. Clarke swallowed painfully, knowing that Charlotte liked to be away from whoever she was upset with at the time. “I’ll be back before the meeting tomorrow. Rest till then little sister.”

Making her way to Lexa’s room, her mind was filled with unwanted thoughts. She hated this part of war. The initial killing and the craise of desperate actions she was forced to in battle were almost a blur when they happened. It was afterwards when the faces came back to haunt you. Or in this case the duties she wished she did not bear weighed on her shoulders. She entered Lexa’s room through the window as usual. She saw Lexa sitting on the edge of the bed, unlacing her boots and felt her heart and mind calm. Closing the window behind her, she pulled off her pauldron before dropping it to the floor, her fingers quickly unbuttoning her jacket and letting it drop as well.

“Klark?” Lexa said while looking up, her brow furrowing slightly in confusion. “What’s wrong?”

Clarke pulled her shirt over her head and kicked her boots off, she was pleased she had laced them loosely earlier. Not bothering to say a word, she pressed into Lexa kissing her hungrily while pushing her down on the bed. Lexa responded as soon as her back hit the furs beneath her. Her hands coming up and wrapping themselves in Clarke’s hair. The slight pull of Lexa’s hands in her hair spurred Clarke on as she continued. She rolled them further onto the bed as she moved her mouth down Lexa’s neck.

“Klark?” Lexa gasped while arching slightly into the unexpected assault.

A hand came to stop on Clarke’s chest and pushed her back slightly. Clarke allowed herself to be stopped and looked down at Lexa with her beautifully kissed lips and mussed hair as she panted
below her.

“Klark what’s happened?” Lexa said carefully as she trailed her hand from Clarke’s chest to her cheek just holding her face.

“I can’t.” Clarke choked on her answer the day hitting her all at once. “There were so many Lexa.”

Lexa’s face softened in understanding as she gently pulled Clarke’s head down to the crook of her neck and wrapped her arms around her. “We cannot save them all.” She whispered.

Clarke felt her body going boneless on top of Lexa as hot tears burned across her cheeks. “I know.” She replied softly. Closing her eyes, she breathed in Lexa and let herself just be in the moment. She let her grief and burdens take her for this one moment and knew that Lexa was with her through it, and understood exactly, because they had been Lexa’s men as well, it was her burden as well.

____________________________________________________________________________

Three months ago:

Nia stood facing her window watching the deep blue of the sky just before sunset. She heard the soft rustle of fabric that was Anankos announcing his presence in her quarters by allowing himself to make a sound. Not so much as a muscle moved as she waited for him to tell her what he’d come to say. A moment later, his raspy voice echoed about her chambers.

“General Klark conspires against Iago.” He reported.

She turned and raised a brow at him waiting for him to continue.

“It would seem she understands her position is tenuous. She means to make Garon her ally.” His thin lips pulled up into a humorless imitation of a smile.

Nia spoke, “Do you think she aims for the throne?”

“No, not yet. She means to secure her position. In exchange for ridding Garon of Iago, she gives Leo to you as a replacement, an inside man for her and Garon. Effectively giving her two allies in your court and amongst your advisers.”

Nia tapped a finger against her bicep and considered her options. The upstart general was the least of her issues, soon to be taken care of by the mountain. Garon on the other hand, well he was an issue she was long used to dealing with and for which she had ready made counter measures. “Do you think Garon will use this an opportunity to make a grab for the throne?”

“No yet, he waits for his children to gain enough power he need not convince the generals to support him as he has always done.” Anankos scoffed.

Nia chuckled, “He never was any good at getting people to trust or like him.”

“No, Zola is terrified of him though. Should I return his son’s body to him?”

She shook her head. “Let the fool continue to hope, he still has his uses while he believes Garon keeps the boy alive. It is always better to let those with pretensions think that they have more power than they actually do.”

“As you wish.” Her assassin bowed slightly. As he returned to his slightly slumped posture, he spoke again. “Iago, though, grows restless. Should we allow him to be killed? He would need to be
Nia considered her options. It was always fun to keep her advisers on their toes. It wouldn’t do for them to become too comfortable in their positions. If she let Garon take out Iago, he’d turn his attention to Anankos next. Anankos controlled her assassins and letting an assassin gain too much power was always dangerous. However, dealing with him required a more subtle touch than Garon was capable of, though perhaps he might provide an interesting distraction for her own moves. “Let them play their games. Select options to replace him, I can’t have the plan go exactly as planned after all.”

“As you wish your majesty.”
Ephraim spotted Palleas standing beside Klark outside the healing tents. Picking up his pace, he and his two guards cut through the war camp. As he approached, he saw both of them look up at him. Both were in formal wear. He grinned at the sight of Klark in her decorated and formal coat with its truly alarming amount of pauna remains, and daggers strapped to every inch of herself. She even had war paint slathered on thickly. Palleas was in the soft greens and blues of his nation, also wearing formal clothing, although his clothing was more robe like than Klark’s ever practical gear. Palleas was the oldest of the three of them, his face clean shaven though his dark black locks shone almost blue when the light hit it just right. “Generals,” Ephraim greeted the other two.

“Ephraim,” Palleas stepped forward and offered his arm to him. “It’s good to see you again so soon.”

He smiled while taking the offered arm and gripping it firmly. “And you. I see you arrived before me.”

Klark laughed, “I believe he, unlike you, makes a habit of waking early.”

Ephraim grinned. “Only because you northerners drink far too much. No one can keep up with you.”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe you southerners are just weak when it comes to proper alcohol?” She said while taking his arm in greeting.

Palleas scoffed, “Your vodka is foul, how you drink it I will never know.”

Ephraim let himself fall more serious, they didn’t have much time before they would need to move inside for the meeting. “So, your last message was vague.”

Klark sighed and nodded. “As it must be while we are in such close quarters with allies that are barely better than enemies. You received the message then?”

“Of course,” Palleas looked smug.

Ephraim nodded, “You were surprisingly brief.” He enjoyed the rather brilliant idea of using ink that only showed when held near a flame. The standard messages the pigeons had brought him were spaced in a specific manner indicating the true message underneath. The orders to bring his army to a defensive position around TonDC had hidden the note that he should treat the Trikru as a part of them. The message detailing the fall of the mountain had hidden the message that their position was secure. It was not much information, but enough to prepare him for where the lines were going to fall in the upcoming meeting.

“There is only so much weight the pigeons can carry. Ordering the rest of the army to gather here took up quite a bit of their time and energy.” Klark said with a shrug.

He noted that there were several people who could hear them besides their guards, who were grouped loosely talking amongst themselves. “Why do you have a captain with your guard?” He
said, having noted the blond with the large ledger and dark circles under his eyes standing to the side, his jacket had a stiff collar and decorative trims that indicated he was a captain.

“Oh, Leo has been in charge of the itemizing all that can be taken from the mountain. He’ll need to speak at the meeting.” She spoke, sounding truly proud of this fact.

Palleas narrowed his eyes slightly. “What has happened with the commander? First we are working together, then she is entrapping your assassin, and now she is victorious and we are supporting her again. Can she truly be trusted?”

Klark shifted, matching his seriousness instantly. “Yes, the incident with my assassin was a subordinate of hers that has been punished for her offense. Lexa’s goals are broad, so long as they align with ours, standing against her brings us nothing. At the moment her goal is for our clans to be appeased and returned to our homes.”

“And once we return?” Ephraim asked calmly.

“Now that the mountain is vanquished, her goal is to find a way for this peace to hold. However, the state of the coalition is for our rulers to decide on not us.” She replied.

Palleas snorted, “So, you support the coalition then.”

Klark just smiled at him and didn’t reply.

Three months ago:

Clarke and a small party of her people were pulling a sleigh through the snow as they approached a small hunting village in the north west of her territory. A horn blew ahead of them and she smiled, it would seem they’d been spotted then. The crunch of snow under her horse’s hooves and the sliding of the sleigh calmed her. This was where she belonged, it was her home more than the ark ever had been.

A small child completely swaddled in furs, only their eyes poking out from the many wraps, came sliding down a snow drift make excited cries of delight. A second, larger child, clearly an older sibling or playmate, tripped and rolled down the snow bank. Clarke barked out a laugh and dismounted. Crunching through the snow, she righted the older child that was partially buried in the snow bank. With a smile, she brushed some of the snow off of the kid that she could now tell was a dark skinned girl. The girl’s likely sibling was staring at her with that childlike curiosity that all children seemed to have at that age from his position next to the sled. A quick glance noting that they had the same skin tone and Clarke was almost positive they were siblings. “Careful there, wouldn’t want to be swallowed by the snows.”

The smallest kid looked up at her and his eyes spotted Clarke’s pauldron. His eyes widened and he let out a squeak of surprise. The girl followed the other child’s eyes. She stood up fast, “General!”

Clarke watched in amusement as the girl backed up, bowing lowly while reaching out and forcing the little child’s head down as well.

“We’re sorry general!” She exclaimed, clearly panicked.

Smiling, she stayed crouched down. “It’s alright, you don’t need to bow to me.”

The two kids straightened slowly and looked at her with wonder in their eyes. Clarke sighed, it was
still odd to her being looked at like that. “So what are you two doing outside of your village?” She asked, smiling fondly at them.

The oldest spoke, carefully enunciating her words. “We wanted to see the army ride in!”

Clarke smiled, “Well how would you like to ride the rest of the way in with us?”

The littlest child reached his arms up in the universal symbol meaning he wanted to be picked up. Clarke stood up and picked up the surprisingly heavy child shaped ball of furs. Lifting the kid onto her hip, she offered her other hand to the little girl. The mitten wrapped hand slid into hers cautiously. Together they walked back to where her party was waiting patiently.

“I see you got us some new recruits there.” Keaton called from his place on the sleigh with a chuckle.

Clarke passed off the kid in her arms to him. He easily grabbed the child under the armpits and lifted till he was situated safely in his lap. “It seems we’re getting the royal welcome today.”

She easily lifted the girl up onto her saddle. Putting her foot in the stirrup, she swung herself up into the saddle behind her. “So what’s your name little one?” She asked snapping her heels into Jake’s sides and motioning for the party to resume movement.

The little girl was clearly vibrating with excitement at being on the general’s horse. “Tasha! And that’s my brother, Tuck.” She said gleefully. While reaching out to gently pat at Jake’s mane.

With one hand holding the child firmly against her and the other on the reins, she rode into the small village. They quickly saw the fur wrapped forms of villagers standing out in the snow to greet them. Pulling her horse to a halt, she swung herself down so that she could greet them at a more equal level. “Ready to dismount there Tasha?” She asked

“Do I haff to?” She asked, clearly enjoying her perch.

“I’m afraid so.” She ignored the shocked and aborted move by a woman to the side to move towards her, definitely the children’s mother then. “I’ll tell you what though, you can come on a proper ride with me some time while we’re in the village.”

“Really?” The little girl asked in awe as she allowed Clarke to grip her and lift her off the horse and down to the ground.

“Really,” Clarke said, patting the girl on the back and pushing her in the general direction of her mother. Looking up, she spotted what was obviously the town leader. He was a tall man wearing slightly nicer furs than the other villagers. His beard was sprinkled with grey and he looked in awe of her as he approached.

Bowing, he spoke in a gruff voice. “You honor us with your presence general Klark.”

Clarke sighed, she was going to have to get used to the bowing thing apparently. “You honor me with your service.” She replied. “You sent a request for a healer three days ago. My apologies it has taken me so long to get here.”

He stood his face clearly shocked. “I did not dream that you would come personally.” Clearly pleased, he waved. “One of our hunters was gored by a moose. We saved him but I fear the fever will take him soon.” His face turned serious as he reported his hunters condition.

Clarke nodded. “Show me where he is and my second and I will see to him.” She waved Brady over
from the sleigh. “If you could show my men where they may stay and where to leave the horses that would be a great service.”

“Of course, though I don’t know if we have room for your sleigh.” He looked concerned and apologetic at that.

“The contents of the sleigh are what is important.” She said easily. “We brought food, furs, and wine for your village.”

The man bowed again even lower this time. “Thank you general.” his voice was thick of emotion. “You are greater and kinder than the stories say you are.”

She reached out pulling him out of his bow. “I am a servant of the people. You need not thank me for performing my duty.”

Present:

Lexa stood on the hill overlooking the camp of her combined army. They were waiting on her. She needed to speak to them before their various generals could spend hours arguing with her behind closed doors. This was an important moment and one that would be remembered. A flick of her wrist and the warrior to her side blew the war horn as loud as he could, bringing the focus unflinchingly to her. Staring down at her army, she projected her voice so that the whole army could hear her speech.

“Armies of the 12 Clans!” She felt power thrumming through her veins. “Today we gather because we have done what none of our ancestors could do. What no one even believed we could do. WE HAVE SLAIN THE MOUNTAIN!”

A roar went up from the army. She raised her arm, signaling the horn to be blown, silencing the army. The sound of the horn vibrated down to her bones. She needed to keep control of this.

Clearing her throat again, she continued. “The siege that YOU HELD crippled the mountain, allowing a strike team of warriors to infiltrate and kill those inside. Now together we have done the impossible and defeated the mountain that has plagued us for generations! WE ARE VICTORIOUS!” This time she raised her arm and let the army roar.

She looked behind her at the captains near her. “Give the men ale and let fires be made for a feast to celebrate our victory as one army.”

Cheers rose up from those that heard her. She smiled at the swell of noise. With the men pacified for now she need only worry about the generals.

Lon’qu stood in the central building of TonDC with his arms crossed watching carefully the lines that were being drawn clear as day just by where the other generals were standing. As the temporary general of the Boudalan forces, he was aware that he was the lowest ranking member of this council. Not to mention that thanks to Bassilo’s foolishness, he was being looked at with contempt. His one ally in this was Caineghis, the great red mained giant of a man. As the general of the Sankru, they were allied because of the long standing friendship between their clans, but he was wary of the man. Micah, of the Podakru, with her grey hair and wiry frame was another possible ally to him.

That said, the people of the lakes had been at war with his clan a generation ago. He just hoped that her people’s hatred of Azgeda and loose ties with the Trikru would mean she would back him if there was a need. Truly, the one goal he held was to leave this mountain without ending up like
Bassilo. He watched carefully as Klark kom Azgeda entered with Ephraim kom Ingranrona and Palleas kom Trishana. The three were from allied clans but the united front was intimidating, they were from the block that avoided joining the coalition longest.

Tibarn kom Delphi, the hawkish weathered general, stepped forward greeting the new arrivals. Which was interesting, Delphi had survived being squished between Azgeda and Ingranrona by becoming a subjugated territory to them in all but name. Still, it was Azgeda and Ingranrona that assisted Delphi in protecting itself from his own clan that lay to the south. All of the clans assembled had been at war with each other for the sake of treaties or because of shared borders for their entire lives. The fact that General Klark had approached Heda and the two seemed to be speaking politely was disconcerting. Although, it explained Tibarn’s behavior. He’d clearly seen which way the wind was blowing and made sure to group himself with the new power block.

Heda sat down in her throne and spoke, bringing the rooms attention to herself. “Greetings generals, we have much to discuss today.”

Greil, general of the Ouskejon kru, an older and well respected warrior, spoke. “Heda, why were our forces not alerted that an attempt on the mountain was going to take place?”

She looked almost bored in her throne. Lon’qu felt like scoffing, it was a good front but he had no doubt it was a mask. He’d spent enough time as Bassilo’s shadow to know that no leader was genuine, especially when surrounded by enemies. She spoke easily. “We captured a mountain man and learned our forces were being surveyed. He also bragged that soon they would take us out with their missiles to put us in our place.”

He let out a hiss at the news and felt his hands clenching.

She continued. “The blockade was obviously no longer an option and we needed to prevent the use of such weapons if at all possible. It was decided to use their surveillance to our advantage to sneak in a small but carefully chosen force disguised as reapers while the blockade kept their interest. The threat of a missile forced us to act quickly and use what forces were immediately available to us.”

Greil seemed to think over what had been said before speaking again. “And Azgeda’s involvement out of all of our clans?”

Klark spoke from where she was positioned near the throne. “Who do you think got the information out of the mountain men? Also my forces had the most success in curing the reapers.”

The man nodded thoughtfully before stepping back clearly accepting of the answer. Lon’qu himself could see what had happened wasn’t meant as a slight. An opportunity had been seen and taken. The fact it left his men in the lurch was unfortunate, but not dire. He would need a prize to bring back to his Khan however.

Haar of the Floukru spoke then. “What of the remains of the mountain Heda? Surely, you don’t intend to keep it for Trikru.”

Lon’qu looked at Haar in surprise, that was new. Floukru were normally quite closely tied to Trikru, so it was odd of him to be the one to bring that up instead of waiting for a more traditionally hostile clan to do so. Indra, unsurprisingly, was the one to respond harshly. “Trikru have no interest in keeping that cursed place.” She practically spat the last part.

Caineghis spoke in his normal deep but carrying voice. “You think any of us will believe that the temptation of their weapons and the power it would bring will never cause you to change your minds?”
“Hardly,” Klark said, cutting into the conversation. “Heda Lexa and I came to the agreement that all weapons inside the mountain would be locked inside of it and guarded by both of our people until its fate is decided. However, you can be sure Azgeda will not be leaving those weapons in anyone’s hands, let alone Trikru.”

“Azgeda and Trikru seem to almost be the same army these days.” Caineghis scoffed. “I would want the weapons of the mountain in your hands even less.”

Pelleas shifted slightly and spoke calmly with his typical easy manner. “The weapons of the mountain should be destroyed in view of all of us here so that we need not fear a single or even several clans gaining weapons as dangerous as them.”

Tibarn added his thoughts. “How would we destroy these weapons though?”

“We have discovered how to use the missiles.” Heda said. Lon’qu, along with everyone else in the room, stiffened almost violently. “We will let one destroy the mountain and all that is inside of it. Let the home of the Mountain Men be destroyed by their own weapons.”

Lon’qu darted his eyes about and saw the other generals were still frozen from the surprise that the commander now controlled the missiles of the mountain even if for a short time. “If you plan to destroy the mountain that utterly, what of the treasure inside the mountain? Surely, we may be allowed to return with prizes for our clans.”

Heda nodded. “Indeed,” She waved for an Azgeda warrior, captain by his gear, to step forward. “Leo, with the aid of my warriors, has taken an account of all that is hidden underneath the mountain. The weapons have already been secured. From these lists we may divide what remains.”

“Again, Azgeda trusted so close to the mountain weapons.” Caineghis spat. “Why am I not surprised.”

Ephraim cut in with a hard glare. “What exactly are you implying Caineghis?”

“I’m implying nothing. I don’t trust you or your frozen shit allies near weapons.” He growled.

Lon’qu had the sudden urge to step away from the mass of anger that was his fool of an ally. Clearly, he hadn’t realized that they had nothing to gain here by starting a fight. So long as no weapons left the mountain they would all be returning to their clans victorious, and with spoils of war. Sadly, moving would draw attention to himself and that was the last thing he wanted or needed. Instead, he waited to see who was going to cut Caineghis to size. It seemed Ephraim would be the one to do so.

“I’m surprised you speak that way when it is clear your clan had something to do with the nomads attacking Azgeda’s border. They have not asked for reparations as they are entitled. Yet here you stand, asking for spoils when you had little to do with the victory and even disparaging those far more honorable than you” He snarled.

“Sankru had nothing to do with the nomads attacking Azgeda,” Caineghis denied violently, which impressed Lon’qu to some degree. It was dangerous waters to test though. He had no doubt Nia’s arrogance was the only reason his own clan as well as Sankru had not been held accountable for their actions.

“ENOUGH!” Heda ordered loudly. The room fell silent instantly as everyone turned to face her. “You are generals not bickering children. The Azgeda border dispute is not the topic of discussion here, nor is the standing of any of your clans.” She leveled a glare at Caineghis. “If you distrust your allies so much, know that the weapons are being guarded by Trikru as well as Azgeda, and you
wouldn’t be so foolish as to accuse both clans of treachery would you?” Her eyes narrowed as she
finished.

“No, Heda.” He grit out, lowering his head slightly.

The Azgeda captain with the large armful of various ledgers and papers set them down on the central
table while clearing his throat. “Here, this is the itemized lists of everything that can be removed from
the mountain.”

Lon’qu stepped forward and scanned the pages carefully. Interesting, there was a truly
overwhelming amount of art inside the mountain apparently. It would be an impressive gift for his
Khan and his people. Flipping through several pages, he noted the large number of statues as well.
Truly, his men could return with a great deal of treasure for their clan. Nodding to himself, he noted
the other generals following suit. Good, it would seem material gain was enough to keep them away
from threats and distrust. Though, the seeming alliance between Azgeda and Trikru was interesting,
he’d have to be sure to report on it in detail to the Khan.

Charlotte managed to sit up for the first time properly and allowed herself to be helped to her feet.
Aden helped her and she was mainly able to walk some with his support. It hurt, and she knew
Clarke would be angry with her over it but she didn’t care.

“What are ya doing!?” Brady’s voice cried as he suddenly rushed to her side. “Put her down, ya
idiots!”

Aden quickly lowered her back to her cot while Tris hopped out of the way. “We’re just helping
her.” Tris excused.

“She coulda really hurt herself!” He was red in the face as he quickly reached out and began to
check her bandages. He made a huff of annoyance at the blood staining her bullet wound in the side.
“Char, ya shoulda known better.” He chastised. Turning to Aden, he glared. “Grab the bandages.”

“I was fine.” Charlotte snapped as he carefully pulled her shirt up and began to unwrap her side.

“Lay down an’ don’t start moving again.” He said, ignoring her attitude handily.

Charlotte grunted but did as she was told. She was all too aware Brady was more than capable of
tyng her to the cot if she struggled, and Aden and Tris wouldn’t help her now that they realized
she’d been hurting herself.

She gritted her teeth as she saw Brady pulling out a needle and fresh gut string. “This is gonna hurt,
but ya already know tha’.” He said looking fairly disappointed in her as he began to clean her injury
before fixing the stitch she’d torn.

Aden and Tris were standing nearby, looking fairly helpless and unsure of what to say. Tris spoke
carefully. “Our apologies, we didn’t mean to harm her.” It pained Charlotte to see the guilt on Tris’
face at that.

“Naught your fault.” Brady replied without looking their way. “Char here shoulda known better.”

“Traitor,” She muttered under her breath at him. Stupid Clarke lackey.

“Charlotte,” Miller’s hoarse voice said softly from his cot where apparently their noise had woken
him. “Hurting yourself to punish Clarke won’t change your orders.” He looked at her
sympathetically.

“You don’t know that!” She protested. “I’m not leaving my family. If I can prove I’m capable of traveling, she’ll have to take me with you.” She said, tears burnt at the edges of her vision.

Miller grunted as he sat himself up while attempting not to jostle his arm. “You know Clarke hates separating us as much we hate being separated.”

“Then why?!” She asked feeling the first hot tears burning as they rolled down her cheeks. She raised her arm on her uninjured side and covered her eyes. “Why leave me?!”

Brady reached out gently holding her hand on her injured side. “Cause, protectin’ us is wha’ she does.”

Charlotte heard the thump of Tris sitting down next to her and she felt the cot shift slightly as Tris settled into her position. “Aden and I will be by your side while you’re with us.” She said firmly.

“I know,” She choked out. “But I can’t…”

Miller sighed. “Char, you’re the youngest of our family and have been offered a chance at safety for the rest of your life. Safety beside friends with whom you took the mark of brotherhood.”

“I don’t want to leave you! You need me!” She protested.

Brady grunted. “Sure, but we’re an army, we can all cover for each other, and you give us ears in the capitol.”

Aden snorted. “You’d think Tris and I were worth nothing to you, if you keep this up.”

Charlotte moved her arm and her eyes flew to Aden’s face where he was looking at her with affection and understanding. There was slight humor in his voice that was echoed in his face. “That’s not it! I love you two, we’re of one blood now, but I….”

“You’ll be fine.” Miller said calmly. “It’s not like we’re leaving you with no way to talk to us, and I’m sure you’ll be recalled to Azgeda soon enough.”

Charlotte fell silent as Brady finished wrapping her injury before giving her a soft squeeze and moving off to work with other patients. Aden eventually sat down on the floor between her and Miller’s cots and pulled out the small chess board Monty had left. Miller remained sitting and with a smile began to continue teaching Aden how to play. She was relieved her friends and family knew to leave her to her thoughts after the earlier display of weakness. She felt shame crawling through her as she lay there. Tris’ hand in hers was all that kept her grounded in this moment. She owed several people apologies.

Octavia easily approached Lincoln with a skip in her step as she left the sparring area where she had just schooled a warrior from the Plains. Lincoln was collecting his winnings from betting on her with the warriors from the Plains that were surrounding the pit. “Babe!” She greeted walking to him and kissing him firmly before pulling away.

“Well fought.” He congratulated her with a proud look.

Before she could reply, a Sankru warrior stopped by with a couple of his friends at his back and glared at them. “Makes sense, the ice whore would take a weakling monster like that to her bed.”
She felt rage as she spun on them only stopped from advancing on them by Lincoln grabbing her shoulder and halting the motion. “You cannot fight.” He warned while looking at the approaching warriors. “Leave,” He ordered them.

“Leave,” The warrior chortled. “I don’t know about that, you couldn’t touch me, reaper scum.”

It took everything inside of Octavia not to attack this loud mouthed arrogant fool. However, she knew she couldn’t, discord would not be allowed by any of the officers. Out of her peripherals, she could see the Plains warriors falling into a defensive position behind her and Lincoln. Heading their way, clearly having noted the discord, was Burka. The small assassin almost materialized rather than stopped next to her. A couple of Trikru had stopped and were watching now as well.

“If you wish to keep your tongues where they are, I suggest you close your mouths.” Burka said easily while her sharp eyes scanned her surroundings.

The Sankru warrior scanned Burka carelessly before dismissing her. Meeting Octavia’s eyes, he sneered. “I heard you were some sort of warrior, but if you need help just to deal with some friendly conversation, maybe you’ll be up for sleeping with a real man?” He shifted his waist pointedly.

Octavia felt and tasted blood in her mouth from where she was biting her cheek. “Oh, you think you’re the real man? Which one of us truly fought against the mountain and which of us was a stinking coward who had to fight as a damned nomad.”

Lincoln seemed to understand that she wished to hurt with more than words, clearly he could feel her tensed and ready to spring muscles under his hand. He spoke firmly and with a threat in his tone. “If you value your life and this peace, you should leave, now.”

“Oh, you think your precious general or Heda going to come sweeping in and save you because you like fucking weaklings?”

Something happened then Octavia wouldn’t have expected. Burka and Lincoln made eye contact for a split second before they moved. With her shoulder released, Octavia moved as well. To hell with the consequences. She drove her fist into the shocked warrior’s face, the feeling of his nose breaking beneath her fist was deeply satisfying. She heard a thump and sharp cry from one side and saw Lincoln out of the other side of her eye lifting one of the Sankru warriors up by the front of his jacket like a misbehaving child.

Grinning, she brought her leg up and kicked the fool in front of her in the gut, hard. Looking up from her fallen foe she noted that no one around them had moved. The warriors from the Plain and their fellow Azgeda and Trikru all had hands on the hilts of weapons and were clearly daring any of the warriors from the other clans that were nearby to attack. Burka was standing, straightening her right glove, the warrior beneath her groaning in pain. Lincoln had dropped his like rag doll and looked truly murderous.

Anya came running into the scene. Octavia cursed internally, she’d gone and done it hadn’t she. The fool had deserved it and she was not going to regret this but a fight was exactly what they didn’t need. Anya glared everyone down. “Release your weapons now.” The captain waited till hands left weapon hilts before speaking. “What the hell is going on?” She demanded.

Burka spoke up emotionlessly and flatly from her side. “These men questioned Octavia and Lincoln’s strength, propositioned Octavia, and then insulted not only general Klark, but Heda as well. We were just teaching them a lesson.” Her eyes flashed dangerously.

Octavia blinked, looking at the assassin. She would never have expected to be defended by the
woman.

Anya looked positively dangerous as she took in the meaning of the words. “Is this true?”

“Yes,” Octavia replied while Lincoln nodded beside her.

“Well then, grab those idiots. All six of you will be going in the stocks for fighting.” She frowned. “However, the three of you will be going in the ones we haven’t put against the latrine ditch yet. You were defending Heda.”

“Yes ma’am.” Octavia poked her downed foe with her foot. “Get up. You hear that, you get to keep your tongue this time fool.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Three months ago:

Bellamy spotted Corrin laughing with some of the younger warriors over drinks. Making sure to catch the boy’s attention, he gestured for him to follow him. Moving further into the tavern, he headed up the stairs in the back up to the room above it where he spent quite a lot of time. After all, the barracks were cold drafty places that gave him the creeps and as captain it was now his right to reserve alternate lodgings if he so desired. Once he had arrived at the door, he unlocked it and waited for Corrin to enter before he followed.

Closing and locking the door, he waited till Corrin was looking around curiously before sitting down in one of the old chairs and staring at the boy with a measuring stare.

“Why am I here Captain?” Corrin asked curiously.

“Sit,” He ordered and sighed. “Do you know why I was ordered to bring you with me to the capitol?” He asked finally.

“Because my aunt wished to see me.” Corrin replied, tilting his head slightly.

Bellamy rolled his eyes. “You’re worse than I used to be at not seeing the big picture. Think kid, why would your aunt want to see you now when she hasn’t given a shit about you till now?”

Corrin’s eyes widened in shock at how he’d referred to the queen. “Captain!”

“Relax,” Bellamy waved off. “This room is secure. Nothing said in here can be heard from outside this room. The noise of the tavern makes listening at the door impossible and the roofs thatch is too thick to be listened through.”

Corrin seemed to relax before looking confused again. “Nia wished to speak to me because I earned her recognition by attaining fifteen kill marks at the border.”

Bellamy laughed. “Yeah no. Try again kid. Take your time, this politics shit can take a while.”

The kid’s face scrunches up as he thought things through. His face paled some. “She or Garon want to use me for something don’t they?”

This was going to take a while. Bellamy frowned as he thought about how to say this. Straight to the point it was, after all it was him. “They want you to be her heir.”

“What?!” Corrin exclaimed. “But I’ve hardly earned my marks? I hold no rank! I’m a nobody!”
“You’re the last blood relative Nia has now that Roan is dead. You secure her position as queen if you take the position of heir.” He leaned forward, watching the kid carefully. “Garon would use you as a puppet ruler for him, Iago would like to do the same. Whether you’re ready or hold enough rank or not, you’ve been thrown to the lions and you won’t survive if you don’t choose your alliances carefully.”

Corrin looked at him sharply. “You want something from me.” It wasn’t a question.

“I do,” Bellamy fiddled slightly. “Nia is a tyrant and will lead us all to our deaths. Right now, there are three factions you could lend your support to, Garon, Iago, or Nia. If you choose Garon or Iago, you will be a puppet forced to bond into one of their families and killed as soon as you produce a child. If you support Nia, you will be rather painfully molded into her ideal heir and killed as soon as someone overthrows her rule. Don’t be a fool and think she’ll last much longer with how she antagonizes the coalition. Though, I suppose you could be lucky and get killed off early by one of the many assassins here in the capitol.”

Corrin swallowed and looked at him nervously. “And you, what faction do you support?”

Bellamy grinned. “I support Clarke, and I want Iago, Garon, and Nia all dead.”

Corrin blinked and frowned. “Why tell me this? What do you need from me?”

“Not much, just to keep you out of the clasp of any of the others. You, whether you wish it or not, have been born to hold power. The question is how you will use that power. So what are you going to do?” He asked, watching the kid carefully. He knew he’d been picked to do this because he was good at picking out liars, and Clarke knew he could kill Corrin if he doubted his choice or if he chose wrong. After all, she knew about what he’d done to Murphy.

“What is going on Captain?” Corrin demanded.

“If we kill Nia, Clarke is queen. If Clarke is queen, then we’re safe and Azgeda will be safe. As it is, we’re not far from a war with the coalition that will utterly destroy us.” Bellamy spoke with passion. It was the truth, and he didn’t want to kill the kid. “You can’t tell me you think the way things are is alright.”

“The way things are?” He asked carefully.

Bellamy ran a hand through his hair, how could explain there were other ways of doing things? “Do you think flaying those who speak out against Nia is just? Or that what we forced to do at the border was okay even though Nia could have prevented it by sending out a larger force and kept us from receiving further aid by angering the commander enough that she ignored our plight? Nia cares nothing for our people. Do you honestly think Garon or Iago would be any better on the throne?”

“No,” Corrin shook his head. Looking at him, he spoke seriously. “Why tell me? Why not kill me? Klark would be a better queen, you’re right, but my potential to inherit the throne would be a risk to her.” His hands were shaking slightly.

“Because you’re a good kid and don’t deserve to die.” Bellamy said honestly.

Corrin nodded. “I’d always be a threat.”

“If we want a better future we have to create it ourselves, and that means not killing people just because they are a risk when they have done nothing wrong.”
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

So here we are approaching the end. We're sorry for the wait but we wanted to get the drafts from now till the end done and organized as a single block. Had to make sure we didn't forget any plot threads or anything. So from today forward there will be an update a day till we reach the end. Figured you guys would rather that then just having four chapters dropped on your laps in one go. Thank you for the comments as always, they literally are like the high points of our day when we get them.

Keaton grinned victoriously as he walked into camp with Niles and Nina. He and Niles each had one end of a long branch resting on a shoulder, their prey, a large elk, hanging from it between them. Nina, Niles’s second, was walking beside her first and humming happily. The warriors they passed all looked excited and slaps on the back were given as they passed. He felt pride, he was a hunter and getting to hunt finally after weeks of acting as a soldier had been excellent. He’d been honored by being asked to retrieve a kill for the command table at the upcoming feast.

The large cooking fires were up and lit. Setting the kill down carefully, he slapped Niles on the back. “Good shooting there. You drove him right to me.”

“As if I’d ever miss.” The archer said theatrically a gleam of amusement in his one eye.

Keaton snorted. “Yeah, yeah, your ‘skills’ are well known.”

Niles winked at him. “I’d be happy to demonstrate some other skills with you any time hunter boy.”

“And here I thought you were still pursuing that Trikru general?” He said as he untied the animal and pulled out his knife to begin the process of skinning it so it could be set over the fire. They had already done the field dressing when they’d first caught the animal.

Nina rolled her eyes. “Don’t get him started on that. It’s hopeless and he’ll just sulk.”

The assassin clutched his chest. “I’m wounded, utterly betrayed. My own second doubting my prowess.”

“And yet still true.” She deadpanned at her flirtatious first.

Keaton barked out a laugh at the ridiculous pair. “Come on and help me get this critter ready for the fire.”

Niles helped him lift the carcass and hang it from a wooden frame designed for just such an event. With the initial cuts to aid in the skinning already done, Keaton quickly moved to remove the head. Using an antler, he tossed it at Nina. “Get that ready for the presentation will ya?”

She looked at it as she held it as far from her as she could without dropping it due to its weight. “You hunters are so gross.”

“Hey,” Keaton protested. “We’re efficient, thank you very much.”
Niles nodded along before speaking up. “No, you’re gross. You get much too close to your prey afterwards. Truly, the lack of finesse and cleanliness is...unappealing.”

“Just for that I’m not dancing with you later.” Keaton said as he removed one of the hooves so the hide could be pulled off more easily. He grinned over his shoulder at the quiet footsteps he’d noticed a moment ago coming to a halt just behind him. “Heya Klark!”

“Congratulations on the successful hunt.” She said with a smile. “Wouldn’t want those Trikru thinking they were better hunters than us.”

“Never.” He said, laughing at the affronted looks on a couple of nearby Trikru’s faces. “Azgeda pride must be upheld.”

Klark snorted, “Yes, national pride with you two as our mascots.”

“That hurts.” Niles said. “I’m a charming mascot.”

Keaton patted his companion on the shoulder. “Yes, between you and Laslow, I’m sure they all think we’re nothing but flirtatious fools who care for their hair far too much.”

“That’s low, Laslow never gets them into bed, and he only flirts with the women.” Niles scoffed. “I on the other hand am open to far more interesting options and am quite good at getting them into bed.”

Nina, who was working on preparing the head for the feast, looked up from where she was crouched. “Yes, how many times has that Trikru general turned you down again?”

Klark interrupted before Niles could defend his honor. “I need to go soon but you’ll both be allowed to eat from your kill and be allowed to eat from the command section during the feast. See to it you’re both in cleaner clothing and are on your best behavior. Especially you Niles, we can’t afford to insult our allies.”

Keaton laughed at the downtrodden expression on Niles’ face and accepted the easy side hug from Klark before waving her off. “Thanks for dropping by Klark.”

“Of course, I can’t go and forget the members of my first command.” She smiled at him before heading off.

Nina spoke up as he returned his attention to the carcass. “Did you really serve with Klark when you were both seconds?”

“Indeed I did.” He felt pride in his history with the general. “She was just a scrawny second like any of the rest but she had this way of looking at you that let you know she was the one in charge. Most reckless hunter I’ve ever had the honor of working with, which is saying something.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Two Months ago:

Bellamy hugged his sister to him as tightly as he could. Breathing deeply, he tried to imprint everything about this moment in his mind. He knew he couldn’t protect her as he once had, he hadn’t been able to do that since the ark, but he still desperately hated having her out of his sight. “Promise me you’ll take care of yourself.”

He felt Octavia huff in exasperation against him. “Duh, you too Bell.”
Reluctantly, he released her and tried to return her smile, he knew his was weak but it was the best he could do. His eyes darted over Octavia’s shoulder to Clarke and he felt some relief as she gave him a hint of a nod in understanding. He knew he could trust Clarke to take care of their family while they were apart but nothing was ever certain.

The real problem was who would take care of Clarke. There wasn’t anyone else that he trusted to watch Clarke’s back and make sure she didn’t risk herself unnecessarily. His family was going to war without him and there wasn’t anything he could do about it. He trusted Clarke to take the hits for Octavia that he couldn’t but who would keep Clarke from sacrificing herself for the cause. She would totally do something stupid like let herself be bait for one of the assassins after her. He would just have to trust that Monty, Octavia, and the rest wouldn’t let her do anything too stupid. Stopping Clarke from getting her way could be an exercise in futility though, he should know, she’d frustrated him enough times over the years.

He focused back in on his surroundings when Raven hit him on the arm. “Aren’t you going to say goodbye to me, you big lug?” Raven said with an affronted expression.

“You’re so annoying how could anyone forget you? Don’t you have any patience?” Bellamy snarked back.

“Patience is for people who aren’t awesome! Like you. Where was your head you big geek?” Raven asked with a slight twinge of worry in her voice.

“Oh, I was just glorying in the fact that I won’t have to worry about hiding random explosions with you gone. I’m going to have so much less to worry about with my trouble children all gone.” Bellamy said, trying to make light of his fears.

“Right, you know that you secretly enjoy the worrying. You’re going to miss being a mother hen while we’re gone. Don’t pretend differently.” Raven didn’t press him to reveal what he was truly worried about and he was thankful.

“What, you think I’m going to miss covering for your ass while you’re laughing maniacally about my troubles? You must be dreaming.” Bellamy snarked back.

“You know we’re going to be fine right? We haven’t survived torture and wars to be killed by a little thing like a mountain. After all we’ve done, the mountain isn’t going to know what hit them.” Raven assured him.

“I know. I just hate us being separated again. So many of us died before we could really get together again, it just doesn’t feel right to fight apart from each other now.” Bellamy responded with a sigh.

“I know, but after this hopefully we will never have to be separated again.” Raven replied.

Present:

Dax had found that the loss of his tongue had led to him becoming a better listener. He had learned to let the anger that had filled him almost without end in their early days in the Ice Nation simmer instead of run boiling over. Oh it was still there, just the thought of Nia was enough to make his teeth grind in fury. However, the mutilation of his mouth had left him spending weeks with the injured warriors who never would be able to return to their war parties. He’d listened to them and empathize with them. They had seen him as fortunate, he could return to his hunting team, he had family. It had come late to him in comparison to some of the others but in listening to them and
hearing their stories and perspectives, he’d found his place as a member of Azgeda.

Watching his people interact with their allies filled him with warmth now, and pride in how the others respected and feared them. He belonged here on the ground and those he had once seen as savages were his people and he’d never been happier. He felt mirth as he saw several of the warriors clearing away the central area before the table. The smell of the various specialties of the different armies wafted about the clearing. He snorted at the sight of Keaton and Niles arguing where their catch was roasting over the fire.

“What are you laughing to yourself about?” Selena’s voice snapped from his side.

He glanced at his companion for guard duty. They had both volunteered to stand at Clarke’s back throughout the feast. He liked the redhead groucher well enough and she took guard duty seriously and didn’t seem to mind his inability to speak. However, she wasn’t a hunter and his method of communication was not yet common among the rest of the army so he doubted she’d understand him. Improvising, he jerked his chin meaningfully towards the two Azgeda warriors bickering over what looked like spices.

Selena followed his glance and let out an aggravated sigh. “Why do those two have to be part of our party for this feast?”

He gave her a curious raise of an eyebrow.

She rolled her eyes. “Keaton is a scruffy ruffian. I mean look at his hair! Does the man even know what a brush is?” She sounded truly incensed over this. Honestly, Dax could see it. Keaton had long thick hair he tended to let fall freely and it tended to have an unfortunate amount of twigs in it. Selena continued. “And Niles is a creep. I mean, does he have to try and sleep with anything with two legs?”

Dax couldn’t help it, he let a hoarse bark out in amusement. Her measure of the two was accurate, if slightly colored. Clarke turned from where she’d been speaking lowly with Xander at the sound. Xander looked rather disappointed in them while Clarke just looked amused.

“Go do something useful you two, would you?” He said.

Selena moved as if to speak but Clarke raised her hand silencing her. “I agree with Xander. I’ll be safe enough for the time being. Go mingle and help prevent anything from getting out of hand. You can return to my side when I’m separated from Xander here for the actual feast.”

Dax nodded understanding what Clarke wanted and grabbed Selena’s arm and pulled her gently away, knowing she’d want to argue. The truly venomous look she shot him confirmed that. He released her arm as she fell into step with him, although she was still giving him dirty looks. He approached the Trikru warrior, Ryder. The two of them had both been on guard duty for their leaders together on several occasions. He had a feeling he would make a decent companion while they waited for the last of the preparations to be finished. Ryder was talking with general Haar of the Floukru. Dax stepped into his line of sight and gave a short nod of acknowledgement to the general.

“Dax, Selena.” Ryder greeted. “Allow me to introduce you to general Haar. Haar, these are general Klark’s personal guards, both acquitted themselves admirably in the fight against the reapers.”

“An honor then.” Haar said, acknowledging them, though he did not offer his arm or further greeting before returning his attention to Ryder. “Do pass my condolences on to Artigus over his father’s death. Nyko’s skill in healing will be missed.” With that he spun on his heel and left.
Selena waited till the man was out of earshot. “Is he always that rude?”

Ryder seemed amused by the question. “He is an interesting man, but a good ally.”

Dax nodded in understanding. After all, many of the older warriors were quite reserved, not that he could judge anyone else for being quiet. He let himself take in the atmosphere as he tuned out Selena and Ryder falling into conversation. He could hear one of the Plain warriors playing a dance tune on one of their wooden flutes. Percy had dropped down and was beating a rhythm on a small drum along with the flute player. He smiled at the second, he’d been running messages all day and should have been exhausted but still seemed as hyper as ever.

Brady was attempting to flirt with a warrior wearing the colors of the Podakru. It was clearly not going well for the lanky and intimidating looking healer. His face was beet red and he could practically see his thick accent getting worse as he tried to talk to the pretty girl. Soleil, Laslow’s second, was apparently playing wingwoman and seemed to be making an effort to dig Brady out of whatever hole he’d managed to dig himself into with his awkward words.

His examination of the crowd of mixed clans was brought to an end by the sound of the horn declaring the beginning of the feast. Without hesitation, he and Selena both headed straight back to Clarke as they watched others fall into line and their various positions. There were only several hundred warriors in this particular section of the celebration which was only a portion of the entire army but it was still a lot of people. Once he was behind Clarke’s shoulder, he felt easier. The noise level fell as everyone turned to where the commander was standing, her arm raised signaling for silence and attention. Once it seemed the crowd had settled, she began to speak.

“Warriors of the twelve clans, tonight we gather to celebrate the greatest victory any of us from any of our clans have ever known! On this day, we commemorate that the strength of all of us is greater than the strength of any one of us alone. That by standing shoulder to shoulder mountains will fall.” She looked intimidating and almost god like as she stood lit by torches, fires, and the dying light of day. He understood how the Trikru could see her as a living spirit. Her words seemed to echo around the clearing and he knew they were important. Since losing his voice, he’d gained a newfound appreciation for the words others chose to say and not say.

The commander continued voice filled with power and certainty in her words. “When I received the spirit of Heda, many laughed at the idea of the coalition, at the idea that the mountain could be defeated. However, on this day we have accomplished the impossible. When I was a child, I was told stories of the demons of Azgeda, how they were monsters in human skin.” She let her eyes find the various white and blue clad warriors, Dax felt her eyes settle on Clarke for a moment. “And now I am proud to say that those monsters have proven to be strong and true allies that I am honored to have fought side by side with against our common enemy. Together, when we set aside our differences and see instead what we have to offer each other, we are undefeatable.” Reaching toward a mug set before her, she raised it. “To the coalition! TO THE BEGINNING OF A NEW AGE!”

Dax raised his own mug though he did not drink, after all it wouldn’t do to allow his sense to be compromised while on guard duty. All around him, the warriors and leaders drank and cheered and stamped their feet in approval. He watched in some surprise as Clarke stepped forward into the empty space before the table set for the generals and other leaders of the army. She waved her arm at a group from Laslow’s division. The crowd grew quiet as they watched her with curiosity. “May I present a piece of our culture for your entertainment.”

Dax almost laughed when he realized what Clarke was doing as she stepped back to his and Selena’s sides while Laslow stepped out in his cleanest gear and gave a deep bow to the table of leaders and Percy began to beat a rhythm into his drum. Two of the other seconds pulled out the three stringed
balalaka and began to strum out a common dance song.

Laslow rose from his bow and signaled Soleil to join him and she quickly did, sending a wink to a pretty warrior as she went. They were off almost instantly. Dax had always been impressed by Laslow’s dancing and he knew that it was used as a training tool for sword dominant warriors for a reason. Laslow would drop nearly to the ground and then back up staying on his toes and creating a surprising amount of height with his leap and high knee kicks. Soleil matched him, using a piece of blue fabric at the end of her right hand to add drama when she snapped it theatrically as they spun. It was a fast and energetic dance and eye catching. It was a mesh of twirls, high steps, and quick turns with sharp movements and drops.

Dax could tell that the warriors of Azgeda and Ingranrona were into it as they cheered and clapped along with the beat. The others seemed to be joining in as they got more and more caught up in the energy of the dance. Keaton and Niles joined Laslow and Soleil, easily forming a new pair. With that, several other warriors joined in, spinning around and leaping. As the song came towards an end, he could hear the players changing to a more well-known dance and soon warriors from several clans were joining in on the fun as others ate. Grinning, he saw Clarke stand and approach the commander. He was unsure of what exactly she said but there were cheers as she led the commander out and they joined the twisting and spinning bodies.

He’d rarely seen Clarke this free and it was a good sight. She was laughing as she spun and allowed Heda to spin her. It was clear the commander was actually familiar with the dance and Clarke quickly gave her the role of lead, following her steps easily. He snorted as he saw Ephraim drag the general of the Delphi forces, Tiberan, out into the fray. It was clearly a true celebration, and the mixing of the clans seemed to be working at least on this night with food and drink to grease the wheels of cooperation.

Caineghis, general of the Sankru forces present, felt more than heard the mug of wine in his hand crack from the pressure he was applying to it. Azgeda should have never been allowed into the coalition and now the commander would have them be ‘friends’. His gut rolled at the thought. They may be laughing and dancing now but he knew their true colors. They were monsters and the blond general of theirs was the worst of the bunch, a monster among monsters.

He still felt bile and rage at the memories and images burned into his mind of what that bitch had done to his men. The border was lined with the impaled corpses of his men, some still alive begging for death. He remembered the scenes caused by poisoned water that left those who drank it convulsing on the ground. They had used the pain of their prisoners to bait his companions into range of their archers. Hundreds of his men had been slaughtered and mutilated. He’d been there and fought under the colors of a nomad. He had no doubt Nia’s pet knew it too.

The flames of his anger licked at him as he watched the commander spin the foul Azgeda bitch about as they danced. Klark had the audacity to laugh as she spun and lifted her feet with the beat. She might be able to pretend to be human, but he knew what was behind her mask and the coalition would fall to ruin if she was allowed to continue deceiving the commander. She was a poison that had to be removed. Clenching his jaw hard, he felt his teeth creaking against each other in his frustration. He reminded himself that it was not his place to rid the world of the blond monster.

Rising from his seat, he threw back his wine, swallowing it in one go. He ignored the other generals, who gave him questioning looks as he headed back to his army. He would not sit through this charade of ‘friendship’. Let the commander dance and feast, he would prepare his men to leave. When he returned to his home, he could prepare them for the war that surely was coming. Azgeda
would never remain peaceful for long and when they showed their true colors he would be prepared to fight to the death.

Lincoln panted as he refilled his mug with drink and watched as Octavia pulled the reluctant Dax into a dance. The neatly bearded warrior looking at Klark for help that she didn’t seemed inclined to give, if the crinkling around her eyes was any indicator. He couldn’t keep up with the pace of the dances but he still enjoyed watching Octavia spin about. She was so alive, and bright. It was the first thing he had ever noticed about her. She was free in a way he’d never known another human being to be and he’d felt a pull to be closer to her from the first time he’d seen her.

He was drawn from his watching of the love of his life by an arm being settled over his shoulders. “You picked a good one.” A playful female voice stated.

Tilting his head, he recognized the dark skinned warrior who was responsible for the explosions. He knew she was like a sister to Octavia but he had yet to actually speak to her. “Raven, it’s an honor to meet a sister of Octavia’s.”

The woman tilted her head back and laughed. “I can see why she likes you. Hot and polite, how did you ever stay single all this time?” She teased.

He felt fairly ruffled but tried not to shift in an effort to keep from showing his unease to the woman. After all, her approval would mean a great deal. “I am glad I was without a partner when I met your sister. She is the most amazing person I have ever laid eyes on in my life.”

“You’re so whipped.” Raven said, shaking her head but her face still pleased looking.

Lincoln frowned slightly. “Whipped? Why would I need to be whipped to find your sister inspiring?”

Raven let out a choking laugh as she slapped his shoulder. “Don’t worry about it, it’s a good thing.”

He decided to just go with it and let Octavia explain the strange use of terms later. With that decided, he spoke again. “Why are you not with your kin?”

“I had to come meet my new brother in-law properly.” She said with a light tap on his shoulder where her hand still lay.

“I... thank you. I am glad to have met you as well Raven.” He felt at home for the first time in his life, surrounded by Azgeda warriors, being called kin by them, and watching Octavia approaching him. He didn’t care about anyone around him and stepped out from under Raven’s arm and pulled his love into an embrace.

Charlotte was so tired of being confined to a sick bed. It had been alright when the others had time to visit her and entertain her. Well, it had still been awful but it had at least been bearable. Now however, everyone was at the feast and she was beginning to regret urging Aden and Tris to attend and not stay by her bedside. Not that Aden would have been able to avoid attending regardless.

Miller had conked out awhile ago, he was obviously on better drugs than her. She would have to talk to Clarke about that. Or she would if she was currently speaking with Clarke.

Just as she was about to attempt to stand up and leave, despite all medical advice to the contrary,
Echo sat next to her with a huff.

“What are you doing? Shouldn’t you be out there enjoying your new found freedom?” Charlotte asked, feeling a bit grumpy at her plans being interrupted.

Echo grumbled her reply. “Some celebration. Klark may enjoy spending time making nice with our enemies but it is not my preferred way to spend my time. I’m sure the drunken revelry will go on just fine without me.”

“What’s your problem with having a bit of fun? I’d be out there enjoying myself if I wasn’t injured.” Charlotte said petulantly.

“It’s not the fun I have a problem with, it’s the company. Klark may be playing some sort of game with the commander but I haven’t forgotten what those damned Trikru have been doing to our people for generations. They act like we’re the barbarians when they have done just as bad if not worse. The Trikru are dirty backstabbers and I’d prefer not to give them the opportunity if I can help it.” Echo snarled out, almost growling.

“They may have done horrible things, but so have we. Can’t we move forward and work together if it’s best for our people? After all, we conquered the mountain together surely that means something.” Charlotte was uncomfortable with Echo’s reminder of Azgeda’s common opinion of the Trikru. It reminded her that this time of peace between the clans may soon be coming to an end. She shifted awkwardly, her position would be a bad one if war between their clans came.

“You’re young, you don’t remember the wars we fought in the past but I do. The horror of the war along the border with Sankru was short, our wars with the Trikru were not. There was no Klark to swoop in and end it before they were fought to their bloody conclusion. You think the mutilation and torture from the border war was bad? They were just as foul if not worse. However, there finally came a point when neither of our armies could support a continued war and the fighting died down, our territory destitute from the fighting. Then in a time when our clans were recovering, the Trikru weaklings went and formed an alliance against us and threatened to annihilate us with their numbers. They humiliated us and subjugated our people. It is only because of the ingenuity and cleverness of our queen that our disgrace was not complete. These are the people you want me to make peace with? No, leave me to my enmity and I will not judge you for your grudge against Klark.”

Charlotte wasn’t sure what to say to that, there was a great deal wrong with it. The coalition hadn’t subjugated their clan. Nia had bowed to Lexa but there had been minimal amounts of direct control. Nor had they been the last hold outs against the coalition. Still, she didn’t know how to say that so she decided to focus on Echo’s last comment about Clarke. “It’s not that I hate Clarke, it’s just that she is forcing me to abandon my family and I couldn’t stand it if any of them died while I was away”

“I don’t know much about families. Klark is the closest thing I’ve got to family. I do know that people die whether you are there or not.” Charlotte yawned and focused her eyes back on Echo. “You need to rest.” Echo said in a surprisingly caring voice. “I just came in for some more welcome company before I went to bed. I’ll let you get some sleep.” With that, Echo exited the room before Charlotte could protest that she didn’t need to rest.

Echo hadn’t been gone long before Clarke entered the tent. “Hey Charlotte, thought I’d check in before I went to bed. Was that Echo who was just leaving?” Clarke greeted with a slightly bewildered look on her face.

Charlotte still caught in the melancholic mood Echo had brought with her comments, didn’t answer Clarke’s questions. Instead, she pondered what it would be like to have no family at all. It was a dismal prospect.
Ignoring Charlotte’s lack of response, Clarke approached and examined her quickly double checking that her bandages were still neat and that no new bleeding had occurred. “Are you alright Charlotte you look troubled.”

Suddenly overwhelmed by the thought of what her life would have been like without her family, Charlotte broke. Reaching out with her good arm, she grabbed Clarke making sure she couldn’t leave. “Clarke, I’m sorry, you’re my family. Please don’t die.”

Two Months ago:

Seth watched as Camilla disappeared into the traveling army to find her siblings. He let her go as he headed to the tent he knew the other general would be occupying. It was mildly surprising to see no guard posted at it but he shrugged it off as he entered. He nearly laughed in realization of why no guards were needed. An assassin was asleep on the general’s bed. He had never met the dark haired man but it explained her lack of fear of death. Having an assassin in your bed was an effective deterrent.

“Seth, please come in.” Klark said, noticing his presence from where she was seated going over maps of the mountain.

He took a seat opposite her and glanced meaningfully at the bed. “Should we maybe have this conversation elsewhere?”

Klark waved off his concerns. “Monty and his bonded Miller had a rather...enthusiastic send off. I doubt he’ll wake. If he does, there is nothing you could say that I would not inform him of later.”

Seth couldn’t help his concern. “You would risk the displeasure of an assassin’s bonded by taking him to bed?”

Klark snorted. “I’m not that foolish. Monty is a member of my family. Don’t worry I have no intentions of letting who I allow into my bed influence or risk our goals.”

He let out a relieved sigh, though he was unsure of how they were related, maybe the assassins bonded was the one related to his fellow general? It was a question for later if they managed to secure their nation. “Good, I am happy to add to your armies stores and supplies while you travel through my territory.”

She gave him a pleased hum. “You should double up on your border guards while I’m gone. If the Trikru or any of the other members of the coalition turn out to be traitorous, I may need to make a quick retreat.”

“I can do that, but try to stay near Ephraim and whichever general from Trishana ends up being sent. If the coalition breaks, they will be in nearly as much danger as we will be.” He said seriously. The coalition was still new and delicate. It was too likely to fail for them not to prepare for that eventuality.

“If I must retreat quickly, you’ll need to be ready to intervene to stop Nia from claiming that I have abandoned or failed in my duty as she will no doubt attempt to do. Surviving one betrayal will be hard enough. Returning vulnerable to a queen who wishes me dead might be asking too much of my luck.” She cautioned him.

He leaned back in the chair. “All I can do there is try and persuade Nia that blackening the name of the commander will do more for her then having you killed as a traitor. Whether that will work will
depend on her mood. Do you think we will be able to eliminate all the threats to your rule before you challenge Nia? I’m sure your men in the capitol can dispose of Ontari and Garon. Anankos is the one I’m worried about, the other advisers will be easy in comparison.” He admitted.

Klark glanced at the assassin sleeping in her bed. “Monty was trained by Anankos’ second. As was another assassin in my army. I’m unsure of her loyalty but I know Monty’s loyalty lies with me.”

Seth’s eyes widened, deciding that the sleeping assassin was far more dangerous than he’d thought. “That could work. Are you sure?”

She tapped the map thoughtfully. “Yes, I’m confident in their abilities. If anyone is able to put that man in the ground, it would be them.” She looked pensive. “I’m only concerned about the loyalty of Burka. If what I know of her is true, she won’t agree to work against Nia without a guarantee of success.”

“Which we cannot give.” Seth said. “It is a risk we are taking, and one that holds no certainty.

Klark tapped the mountain’s location on the map. “However, it is one we must take nevertheless. If she proves to be a problem, I’ll take care of her.” Her voice was hard and without mercy. In that moment, he held no doubts that she’d murder anyone in her army that she thought would betray her.

“I will have my borders secured. All of them.” He would do it no matter the difficulty. They would need a defensible position to retreat to should they fail to kill Nia and her advisors. Any one of them left alive could make a challenge on the throne and throw them into a civil war.

“We will keep our people safe.” Klark said before standing, her fists were clenched tightly. “I will not allow them to continue to be treated like cattle.”
Monty stayed at Clarke’s back as she made sure that their warriors had removed what she’d instructed them to from the mountain. He had to hide a snort at the confused looks the warriors kept giving her as they helped cart out pipes, boxes of mechanical supplies, wires, and books. They sent longing looks at the passing warriors from other clans who were carrying out magnificent paintings and sculptures. It was a testament to the trust they held in Clarke that they didn’t ask why they were getting subpar loot.

“I would excuse you from your duty for another day if I could.” Clarke said, looking at him cautiously.

He shifted so that his body was leaning against hers. “I know,” He felt her arm wrap around him, pulling him into a slightly awkward side hug but he didn’t care. He was just comforted by her presence. “I’ve missed you.” He found himself saying.

She shifted, changing it so that they were in a proper hug. “I haven’t been around all that much have I?”

He snorted, pulling back but entwining their fingers so that they didn’t lose their connection. “I understand. You don’t have much time left.” He looked at her meaningfully. He had seen her getting more antsy as the ever looming time of departure neared.

“Still, we’re family. I should have been spending more of what time I have with you.” She said.

“We’ll have a month of time in tight quarters on our journey home.” Monty said. “You and Raven can even start working on a prosthetic for Miller while we’re traveling.” He couldn’t keep the slightly hopeful lilt out of his voice.

She squeezed his hand in understanding. “He won’t be recovered enough for a prosthetic till his stump has healed, but we can work up some idea’s while we move.”

He grinned suddenly, “He’s rather attached to the idea of getting a bionic arm.”

She laughed and it echoed down the cold dusty halls and rubble of the mountain passageway. The warriors passing by with arms full of loot stopped and stared before moving on with their burdens. “I don’t know about that, but we could definitely go for a Captain Hook look?”

“Maybe a couple different ones for different tasks?” He suggested, knowing that the more versatility they could give Miller the better. Miller wasn’t suited for being a ceremonial palace guard or adviser. He was made for action and loyalty.

Clarke looked thoughtful. “We could definitely make a more lifelike one for more standard daily tasks. I’m sure Charlotte is going to insist on a sword arm for him.” She smiled sadly at the mention of Charlotte.
“She still not speaking to you?” Monty asked carefully. He knew how much Charlotte’s anger at Clarke was affecting her.

Clarke looked at him with a raised eyebrow. “She’s speaking to me but I’m pretty sure she’s still mad at me. She’s far too much like me in some ways. She’ll hold onto her grudge for some time yet.”

“If she was like you, she’d never let it go.” He teased lightly.

Clarke just smiled widely. “True enough.”

He enjoyed seeing her like this, open at least for her, not concentrating on the next task. Of course, the fact she was overseeing the next task probably helped. Their time as warriors had changed them all in different ways. It made him infinitely glad he’d had Miller by his side. Without him, he feared he would have ended up as self-hating as Clarke or Charlotte, or falsely open like Bellamy. It was odd but sometimes he thought Dax was the sanest out of all of them.

Selena walked over to where they were standing. “General, we’ve finished extracting the equipment from the medical and mechanical rooms.”

Clarke’s face lost its easy look as she focused on the task at hand. “Good, and the texts from the library?”

“We are about half way done with that, but most of the men can’t read so separating what is ours and what the Trikru have claimed is taking some time.” She replied sharply.

“Well done, take the extra men and help finish up the library.” She ordered.

“General,” Selena acknowledged before leaving.

Monty stayed where he was, hand in hand with his sister, and decided to give her what reassurance he could. “Don’t worry about our family for now. Spend what time you can with who you want. We both know our family will be here when we leave.”

“Thank you,” She said thickly.

____________________________________________________________________________

One Month ago:

Monroe stared at Leo’s quarters and the piles of ledgers. She could feel the desire to run itching along her spine. When she’d agreed to work as the quartermaster for the region with Leo gone to the mountain with Clarke, she had conveniently forgotten how anal Leo was about keeping everything completely in order. Noticing the endless paperwork she was going to be responsible for, she wanted to run and scream because she would mess it up….and Leo would not be pleased.

He clearly didn’t trust her completely because he’d done as much of the paperwork ahead of time as he could, so she only really had a limited amount of his usual load to do. Still, it was horrifying. If Clarke made her take over as quartermaster for him, she was going on strike or get paperwork minions. She could do minions. Raven had minions and they were adorable. She needed minions.

Nodding to herself, she grabbed an empty ledger and headed to the pigeon tower where the day’s messages from the various forts and villages of the territory had come in and were stored if they were non-vital and didn’t need immediate attention.

The pigeon tower was one of the most valued buildings in any village. The military fort Monroe was in charge of for the foreseeable future was a truly impressive one Leo had requisitioned for himself
recently to accommodate his need for a space to store his stuff and receive messages after his appointment as quartermaster. It was three stories and held store rooms for paper and other necessities for the sending of messages, not to mention a great deal of the pigeons favored feed. She scratched Ark, one of her favorite pigeons, that had flown down to her as she entered the pigeon coop. He was a dignified bird and his presence meant Clarke had sent them a missive.

Reaching to his leg, she carefully removed the rolled piece of paper attached there and read through it quickly. Closing her eyes in frustration, she pocketed it for later. Apparently, Clarke wanted the warriors staying behind to be ‘encouraged’ to take seconds to help keep their numbers up even after the expected losses with the war on the mountain. It would be a nightmare, most warriors hated taking seconds and avoided it unless forced. Deciding to worry about that later, she began checking that no other new messages had come in during the night.

Present:

Palleas noted the tension in Nolan’s frame as they walked through the combined Azgeda and Trikru camp that held warriors from several of the different assembled armies ambling about on different tasks. “Peace friend, Klark controls this section there is no danger to us here.”

“I’d feel better if we were only dealing with one of the most vicious clans, not both of them grouped together. It’s disturbing to see them cooperating.” He muttered as he shifted so that his frame was more easily able to block him from attack.

“If the Trikru have bestowed a name such as Wanheda upon Klark, I doubt we’ll see the rivalry so ingrained in these nations rear its head, for now.” He noted the way the clans seemed almost ambivalent to each other’s presence as they moved to break down tents and build carts to load their equipment in for their journeys home. The sound of hammers and the creak of wood filled the air. “Besides, Ephraim trusts that the peace will hold.”

Nolan grunted, “I’ve never seen an Azgeda warrior this….” He looked at a couple of passing warriors warily, “cheerful.”

“It is strange.” Palleas admitted watching a warrior laugh when a second got thrown from her horse and release an impressive number of curses.

“Downright unnatural.” Nolan said with irritation in his tone. “I didn’t even know the frozen bastards could do cheerful.” He paused and seemed to think. “Or the assholes with trees up their asses for that matter.”

Palleas snorted. “Easy Nolan, you don’t wish to insult our allies.”

Nolan quieted but continued to mumble under his breath about things being against the natural order while Palleas ignored him. Rather, he found himself watching his surroundings with curiosity. The Ice Nation had removed its share of the loot from the mountain the day before, as had his own clan. As nations that had further to travel, they had been given that allowance. Or in the case of the Ice Nation, as a nation directly involved with the fall of the mountain, they’d been given that right. Tomorrow, his own forces would be departing. It was a long journey and they would be accompanying the Azgeda army till they hit the pass to the north.

The Azgeda warriors had taken down most of their tents and were in the process of rebuilding their carts and loading them with their supplies. Watching a camp be disassembled was always a good way to judge the competency of an army. What he saw was orderly and clearly well practiced. He
had no desire to face this army in combat. They had clearly moved camp often, and in incredibly short periods of time. The amount of experience and drilling it spoke to was frightening and incredibly intimidating. The Ice Nation army was obviously well led and well organized and such forces were worth their weight in steel.

His own army hadn’t faced combat for over fifteen years now since the last conflict between his forces and the Boudalan. The alliance between the Plain and the Ice Nation had aided in ending that war in his clan’s favor. Since then, his clan had faced few border conflicts as it sat so close to the radiation soaked land further south. He had always found the Azgeda nation to be distasteful and foul. However, their alliance was a necessary evil for the protection of his people. If this Klark was the face of the future of Azgeda, he was moderately hopeful that in the future their alliance would be more genuine and less forced. He was brought out of his musings when they finally arrived at the healing tents.

General Klark exited the tent and headed straight for him. “General, welcome. What can I do for you?”

He offered his arm in greeting and was pleased with the firm grip with which she responded. “I wished to make sure that our forces are prepared for setting out together tomorrow.”

She nodded. “Of course, my army will be prepared to leave at dawn.”

“Good, my own will be ready then as well. Do you have a desire to march in a formation other than a standard train?” He asked curiously.

“No, we won’t be covering hostile territory between here and the pass. I would be cautious as you go through the Boudalan territory considering our clans’ alliance and the current state of distrust between Azgeda and Boudalan.”

“We won’t be in their territory long, and we aim to move into Delphi territory as quickly as possible, even if it makes our journey longer.” He found himself telling her. Although, he found it odd that she wouldn’t refer to the Trikru territory as hostile. Then again, she had seemed to be on amicable terms with the commander. “Will you be sending any messengers south with my forces?”

Klark shook her head. “Sadly, no. My men have been at war almost nonstop for two years now, some of them longer. I couldn’t ask that of any of them.”

“I may not know you well Klark kom Azgeda but I would like to get the chance to get to know you in the future.” He considered his invitation for a moment before settling on it. “I would be honored if you came to visit my clan once your army is settled in the north.”

She smiled at him warmly, something he never expected to see from a member of her nation. “It may take me a few years before I can accept that invitation but I am honored.”

____________________________________________________________________________

Gunter worked on picking the packed earth out of his horse’s hooves. He was giving himself some time to properly care for his steed before they began the long trek back to the capitol. Not that he’d allowed his horse to receive any less than the absolute best care. As a warrior his horse was his life. While not every warrior was given the honor of having a personal horse, any warrior with the means and rank to do so acquired one as soon as they could. A well-positioned first would often provide a horse for their second as well. However, for weeks he had been so busy with his duties that he hadn’t been able to spend a great deal of time with his horse other than the time necessary to complete his duties. So, he was taking the chance to check and clean the hooves of his horse
personally. Afterwards, he planned on giving his beauty a good brush down.

“Gunter!” The squeaking voice of a young second announced.

He closed his eyes and wondered if he counted to ten if the child would leave him alone. It was doubtful. He leveled his best glare at the second, though it was admittedly hampered by the fact he was crouched cleaning his horse’s hoof. “What do you need Percy? It had better be urgent.”

Percy, who looked awkward in his too large clothing that he was still growing into, perked up seemingly oblivious to the danger of an annoyed captain. “General Klark would like to know if you’ll be accompanying Raven when she helps close down the mountain in an hour.”

Gunter considered it. His former second had truly been instrumental in the destruction of the mountain, and unbeknownst to most of the coalition, the one actually setting up the complete obliteration of it now that it had been looted properly. He would have to speak to her. He neither wished to insult her by not standing by her for it and ignoring her accomplishments or insult her by acting as an overprotective superior. “Tell the General I have yet to decide and I will inform her once I have.”

“Yes sir!” The boy puffed up slightly at being given another message and rushed off in a flurry of movement back towards wherever Klark was currently holed up. Probably overseeing the transfer of wounded to their respective clans and divisions.

He stiffly stood up after lowering his horse’s leg back to the ground. Scratching along the animal’s back, he sighed. So much for his plans. “I’ll get to that rub down on you done one way or another.” He assured the beast before leaning back and letting his back crack back into place. With a last scratch, he walked towards where he knew his former second would be at this point in the day.

Sure enough, he found her by the carts holding the tech Klark had secured for their clan during the negotiation for loot. Her two minions were underfoot snapping at grizzled warriors like they were the ones of rank. It amused him that they listened to the children without question. “Raven,” He drew her attention away from the carefully packed items.

“Gunter!” She grinned before hugging him excitedly. “Look at all this! Isn’t it amazing!?”

He frowned at the various pieces of tech that he could neither name nor recognize. “I’m sure it’s...useful.”

“Old man, you are going to be blown away by what I can do with this.” She bragged.

“I’m sure, I always am.” It was true enough, her arrow design that allowed them to be lit on fire with minimal effort had been revolutionary. “I came to ask if you would like me to accompany you on your trip into the mountain this evening.”

She looked slightly serious as she frowned. “Don’t you have a traditional brush down of Lady to be doing before we depart?”

“Yes,” He admitted, “but this will likely be one of your greatest accomplishments and if you wish me by your side for it, I will be there.” He was distinctly uncomfortable with this much open emotion but he persevered. Raven and her family were already getting him used to more affection than he had ever known.

“Then, I would like you there.” She seemed equally uncomfortable so he was pleased when she easily changed the topic. “How is Lady?”
Gunter felt his face soften from its usual drawn lines. “She has been biting the seconds, but a few handfuls of oats and her temper is soothed.”

“So the same as always?” She asked with a grin.

“Indeed.”

Burka may not be capable of many emotions but she found she really could be very good at smug. She and the two lovesick idiots had been freed from their stocks the day before within an hour, and no one had attempted to take advantage of her vulnerable position. Being an assassin had some perks in its power to intimidate others. She enjoyed the solitude that intimidation brought, as well as the lack of the usual hazing and other army practices.

She found guarding the commander in Charlotte’s place for the day...interesting. It had taken her a few days to realize what was occurring between the general and the commander. She didn’t understand it or what Klark meant to gain from such a relationship. However, she had no doubts that Klark had a plan and that it wasn’t her place to demand those answers. The peace between their two clans at the moment was testament to the fact that it was having beneficial results already. It would be interesting to see if such results would continue after their departure.

It was subtle, but she’d noticed a slight tension in the commander as the day had progressed. Various messengers from different camps were coming in almost continually with updates. Internally, she scoffed at the Delphi messenger, who had clearly not known whether to be ingratiating or distant. The messenger’s humiliation was interrupted by an Azgeda messenger rushing in with a massive grin on his face.

“How?” He bowed respectfully but almost tipped over.

Burka cringed, he was at the stage where he was all limbs he hadn’t grown into yet. Percy did hold some promise though, his training as a warrior was ill suited for his current stature though.

“What news?” Heda asked while waving the Delphi messenger to the side.

Percy straightened up, his hair sticking up in various ways. He was clearly trying to be as proper as possible in front of the commander and he spoke as slowly as a hyperactive child could manage. “The team from the mountain is just now returning. Our outer scouts spotted them. General Klark ordered that you should be informed immediately.”

The commander nodded. “Go, inform General Klark that I will be joining her shortly.”

“Sha, Heda!” He bowed quickly before darting out of the building.

The commander stood. “We are done for the day.” Turning to the Delphi messenger, she spoke. “Inform Tiberan that if he does not trust the Boudalan forces at his back, he is welcome to entreat the Azgeda and Trishana forces to allow him to travel with them. I also believe Ephraim may allow him to join rank with the Ingranrona for the journey, but I will not order any of them to do so.” She paused slightly before continuing. “And remind him that the mountain is being destroyed and he should keep an eye on the horses.”

With that, she swept out of the room and Burka followed beside the other guards on silent feet. The field outside of TonDC allowed a clear view of the mountain’s peaks and she could understand why this was the location Klark had chosen to watch the mountain’s obliterion. She had long since learned that the general’s favorites were her favorites for a reason. Raven in particular gave Burka
pause. The woman was capable of terrifying feats of death.

Heda Lexa’s voice carried as she greeted Klark, who was speaking with Raven. “General.”

“Heda,” Klark dipped her head in acknowledgement. “I’m surprised you didn’t bring several of the generals with you.”

The commander shook her head. “No, this was not a moment that I wished to share with them. They will see it for themselves but it was our forces that won this victory.”

Burka bit back a grin. She’d gained a new respect for the commander, watching as she managed to not only keep from murdering the incompetent fools but deal with them in a way that got her exactly what she wanted. So, she settled back on her heels knowing that the area was secure. She noted the way the chaos twins were practically vibrating.

Raven offered a black box. “Commander, would you do the honors?”

The commander accepted the box before looking back to Klark. “Together?”

“Together,” Klark repeated, stepping forward before touching the box as well. “On three?”

“Sha. One, two, three.” Together, both of their hands pressed down on the raised button on the box.

Burka and the other warriors tensed as at first nothing happened. She looked over at Raven and noticed the girl was counting internally, her lips moving silently.

“Wasn’t something supposed to happen?” Ryder, the Trikru guard beside her, asked.

Burka smirked and replied before Raven could. “Don’t underestimate Raven’s ability to destroy things. If she says that the...” Her sentence was cut off by a massive boom. The ground shook. Turning wide eyes back to the mountain, she saw that it quite simply wasn’t there. Fire was roaring up where once the peak had been. It died down quickly enough although smaller explosions went up several times just as she thought it was over. Finally, silence settled.

She coughed slightly, noticing the heavy dust that was settling over the camp. Blinking, she realized it was the dust created by the destruction of the mountain that was just now hitting them. A gust of air whipped by them. She turned back to Ryder. “If she says it’ll go boom, it goes boom.”

The tall bearded man nodded, his face pale. “Oh.”

Raven spoke up. “So, think the other clans enjoyed that.” Her voice filled with laughter and no small amount of sarcasm.

____________________________________________________________________________

Anya could still feel jitters from the massive explosion earlier. She had heard the Azgeda warriors involved refer to it as ‘obliterate’ but she hadn’t quite taken that seriously until it had actually happened. Ignoring the way she could feel unease still in her system, she stayed by Aden’s side as they searched for Lincoln. Lexa had insisted that the boy speak to his former first before he departed with the Azgeda contingent in the morning. She understood, though she was curious who Lexa would assign the place as Aden’s first now that Lincoln clearly would not be returning to the position. At least it couldn’t be her since she already had a second. Training one nightblood had been enough for her. Tris still had some training to go, especially if she intended to keep going off and bonding herself to future Heda’s and the family of foreign generals soon to be queens. Really, it would have been reckless enough if the girl had just chosen a warrior of some standing and an
assassin.

“Anya, is it strange I do not feel...regret over the loss of Lincoln as a mentor?” Aden asked, looking up at her, his face carefully blank.

She sighed, “No, you had only been with him for a year and had been trained by others for years beforehand. Your bond with him was always...less sure. It is the burden of those in your position in some ways to have weaker bonds to their firsts.”

“But Lexa and you hold such a strong bond.” He said, his face scrunching up in some confusion.

Anya smirked, “Did she not tell you that story?”

Aden shook his head but looked at her excitedly.

“When Lexa was a young nightblood, younger than you are now by several years, she fell in love with one of the girls who worked in the tower.” She watched Aden nod having already known this part of the tale. “Of course, Lexa was young and foolish and it soon came to Titus’ attention that she was using her free time to meet with this girl. He decided that she should be moved away from such foolishness.”

“So, she was given a first much younger than most of us.” He said, clearly putting the pieces together.

Anya nodded. “She was trained outside of Polis from a much younger age than most nightbloods and in a way more traditional for a warrior of our clan. Of course, she was exceptional and earned her place shortly before her conclave was called.”

Aden’s face visibly fell. She knew why as well, speaking of a conclave was simply not done around a nightblood. The practice was one that made her heart lurch. If it wasn’t a challenge necessary to prove that the initiates were worthy of receiving the spirit of Heda, she would never condone such wasteful death. However, it was and it was not something she could change. Changing her step, she bumped into the boy slightly. He looked at her and she could see the tenseness leaving him ever so slightly.

They walked the rest of the way in silence. Lincoln spotted them and hurried to meet them. “Aden,” he only nodded to Anya, clearly understanding this visit was not for her.

Aden toed the ground slightly. “I wish you well on your journey.” He finally said.

Lincoln’s shoulders seemed to drop slightly as he sighed. “I am sad I will not be by your side as your first any longer, and that I have not been at your side these past weeks. Training you has been an honor, and not because of your blood.”

Aden asked with genuine curiosity. “Then why are you leaving?”

Lincoln glanced over to where Octavia was moving supplies for a moment. Focusing back on Aden, he spoke. “Someday you will understand.”

Lexa waited impatiently for Klark to arrive while fiddling with her dagger. She wished she could go out and join Klark where she was but knew it was impossible. They’d pushed the levels of what was possible in public. With the way an army served as a bed of gossip, it wasn’t safe to been seen together outside of an official capacity. She wished she could pace but again it was a small room and
she knew it would just tire her out. After what felt like hours, but was probably a fraction of that, she heard the quiet almost non-existent sound of her window being opened and closed moments later. Sheathing her dagger, she stood and pulled Klark into her arms. She could feel tension uncoiling from her belly as she held her in her arms. Strong arms wrapped around her as well.

“What kept you?” She asked, once she felt she could breathe again.

A cold nose dragged against her neck as Klark placed soft kisses along her throat. “Politics, Paleas wanted to speak to me.”

She pulled back slightly so that she could see Klark’s face properly. She was clearly tired, there were dark circles under eyes and her hair was pulled into several messy braids that were half falling out. Reaching a hand up, she cupped the side of her lover’s face. “Can I help?”

Klark sighed, closing her eyes and leaning into her hand. “No, things are...difficult between the Trishana and my clan.” She opened her eyes and pulled back slightly, heading over to the table and pouring herself a mug of water. “They are quite different and find our clan barbaric.”

“That’s...” Lexa tapered off not sure of what to say to that. The raised eyebrow from Klark told her that she understood exactly what she meant. She sighed, the practices of the northern clan were barbaric and she knew it. At the same time, she was aware of her clan of origin and how that colored her perception of them. Giving up, she pulled the piece of fabric off the top of the plate of food she’d had brought to her quarters for Klark.

“Well, you know the food here is almost worth being abandoned by the ark all on its own.”

Lexa smiled, sitting down on the edge of her bed and watching Clarke. “Oh, what was the food in your home like?”

Klark hummed as she chewed and swallowed a bite of meat. “No meat for one, we had plants, but not very many. We mostly ate beans with whatever other vegetables we could grow in the limited space we had.”

Lexa frowned, “What about milk or cheese?” She couldn’t imagine not having meat.

Klark shook her head. “No animals so nothing like that. Grains took too much space so no wheat or barley either. I had never had bread before I arrived in Azgeda.”

She felt her face twisting in distaste at the idea of what the food must have tasted like, or rather not tasted like. “The more you tell me about the people of your birth, the more I find their ways unpleasant.”

“It has been a while since I thought of them as my people, I’m not sure if they ever were.” Klark looked unbearably sad but Lexa knew to stay where she was while Klark found the words she was looking for to describe the situation. “I never was a part of them, as the daughter of a councilor I was always apart.” She tilted her head looking at Lexa before continuing. “Like a nightblood with no hopes of winning their conclave. Azgeda is my home and my people, no matter how barbaric we may be, her voice firm and proud of her place.

Lexa felt an ache at the image Klark had painted. “You are very strange for a member of your clan, but I know your blood runs for them and of them.”

Klark’s face was peaceful as she nodded before continuing her meal. They sat like that for the short
time it took for Klark to finish her meal. Lexa looked up as Klark stood and approached her. She recognized the face her lover was wearing though and it was not one of passion. “What is wrong?”

With a sigh, Klark sat beside her on the bed. “I leave tomorrow.” Lexa barely concealed a flinch at that reminder. “I need to tell you everything I can for if I fail.”

“You will succeed.” She said, forcing herself to believe it. “But you are right, we have put this off for too long.”

“If I fall, Seth’s territory as well as my own will follow you. I will leave Raven and her seconds outside of the capitol, if I fail, their orders are to make for the border as quickly as possible. Seth will be positioned to hold the lower territory. You will need Ephraim to challenge Quint to keep his forces from moving into the battle.” Klark gripped her hand seeming to understand how difficult this conversation was. “I swear, Ontari will not live past my arrival in the capital regardless of what happens. I gave Bellamy the order to end her tonight.”

Lexa nodded believing that if Klark said the woman would be killed, she would be killed. “Who is the greatest threat to the coup?”

“Anankos,” Klark said bluntly. “He’s in charge of our spies, assassins and the movement of information inside our borders and outside of them. Never underestimate his reach, nor his ability to kill those inside that reach.”

“Are you sure he is not aware of your plans?” Lexa asked carefully.

Klark shook her head. “He knows we are preparing something. If things have gone to plan, then he believes I am preparing for a political move to solidify my role, however certainty is never possible with Anankos. There is a great deal of infighting, Bellamy is using that to his advantage. Monty and Burka were both trained by Anankos’ second. If anyone knows him well enough to kill him, it’s them.”

“If they fail?” Lexa asked, cursing the way just the thought of this failing wrenched her chest.

“Nina, Niles’ second will be with Raven. Charlotte will be with you. Between them, they know as much if not more than I do about the assassins and how they work.

“And Fredrick?” She asked after the fourth and final general of the Ice Nation.

Klark sighed. “I don’t know. His territory is still weak and ravaged from the eastern war. He’ll attempt to stay out of it, if I know him at all. They took the heaviest toll during the fighting.”

Before Lexa could say anything else, she saw Klark pulling a small book out of her jacket. She accepted it when Klark handed it to her and looked at her curiously. “What is this?”

“Everything I can give you to aid you in conquering Azgeda quickly, and with as little loss of life as possible. You have to remember to make any warriors wear blue. The people will be more likely to respect you and not fight to their last breaths if you do so.” Klark stared at her seriously.

“Klark,” Lexa felt her throat closing with emotion as she stared at the small book in awe. Not even the closest of allies would consider giving her something like this, it was suicide. Carefully flipping through it, she saw estimates of the number of warriors in various outposts, the locations of outposts and communication lines, codes used inside of Azgeda, villages that would hold the bulk of the food, and locations of key military figures. It was a gold mine of information. With this she could cripple Azgeda in just weeks, conquer it in months. “I…”
Klark reached out, taking the book from her and setting it beside the bed carefully before pulling her into a kiss. Lexa let herself be lost in it before they pulled back panting. Klark spoke softly. “I trust you Lexa.” She emphasized her name before leaning in again and bearing her down onto her back on the bed. “I trust you.” She repeated before lightly drawing her lips across her face. “I trust you.”

One month ago:

Harper made a short hand notation in her ledger about another person she’d noticed leaving Anankos’ chambers. She had an excellent view of his window from the tree branch she’d become fond of since being forced to return to the capitol. It was clear that the man knew she was there but it also gave an excellent view of where the hopeful recruits trained trying to catch the eye of the warriors. The lack of trees had also been bugging her since she had been brought out of the pauna rich woods to the northernmost edges of their territory, so it was a relief to retreat to the familiar.

Her task was simple, mark down who went where and talked to whom inside the central stronghold of the capitol. She made a sound of annoyance, feeling a small pebble hit the side of her head. Looking down, she saw Bellamy waiting for her to acknowledge him. “Really?”

“What?” He shrugged. “You were ignoring me.”

Rolling her eyes, she dropped easily to the ground in a crouch, softening the landing with a bend of the knee. “What do you need?” She asked while putting her tiny ledger away inside of her coat.

“Ontari needs a new sparring partner and I fear if I let Dax fight her again, she won’t survive the match.” He said frankly.

Harper grit her teeth. She didn’t want to fight the stupid brainwashed bitch any more than Dax did. “Why can’t you do it?”

“You could try to bond with her, girl things and all that.” He suggested, looking decidedly like he wanted to run for it.

Harper narrowed her eyes. “Girl things. What do you think we’re going to bond over, how to murder stupid men who think we engage in ‘girl things’?”

Bellamy shifted uneasily. “Look, she needs a sparring partner or Nia will be upset, and you’re talented and honestly the least likely to try and murder her.”

“And why can’t you do it?” Harper repeated.

Bellamy’s eyes hardened and his cheerful gaze fell away. “We both know I’m not the right one for fighting her.”

The meaning that he’d kill her if she opened her mouth about any of their dead family members went unsaid but was heard all the same. Harper groaned and looked up at the clear sky. “Fine, but you owe me.”

She felt a hand on her shoulder keeping her back. Looking over her shoulder, she saw Bellamy his face still hard and serious. “It’s beginning. Be careful.”

“Don’t worry. We’ve got this.” She said and prayed that she was right, that they did have this.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

Yes that's right, no more flashbacks. The story of how the hundred became Azgeda has finally caught up and we get nothing but the present.

Lleweyln leaned against the bars of his cell in the depths of the Azgeda dungeons. He had no need to wonder how he’d gotten there, or rant and rage over the injustice of it. He’d known what he was doing when he’d stolen from those villagers and enjoyed taking what his strength and training allowed him to take. In truth, all he wished is that they’d get on with it and kill him already, the waiting was irksome. The scent of damp and rot that permeated the air clung to him. He looked up when he heard the echo of footsteps coming down the cold tunnels towards him. He knew they were close due to the fact he could hear the footsteps over the echo of the screams. The figure coming towards him finally came into view and into the light of the flickering torch hung on the wall across from him. Sneering, he spoke to the figure. “What brings a great captain down here?”

Bellamy, the captain responsible for his capture, glanced at the cell coolly. “This was once my cell years ago.” The man remarked.

Lleweyln scoffed, “What, think I’ll repent and die begging if you make some sort of connection here?”

“No, you’re a monster and your death is inevitable but I will take no joy in it.” He said, his eyes seemed to almost glow in the flickering light. “I know that this cell is designed so that sound travels to it easily but does not so easily come out. After all, who wants to listen to the begging of those doomed to death.” He continued. “Which means I know the conversation we’re about to have will remain private.”

“Oh, interesting.” Lleweyln said, cocking his head. “What do you want then?” He leaned further into the bars. “Want to hear about how they screamed when I killed them?” The captain’s face showed nothing but disgust which caused him to laugh. People like the captain were such hypocrites. They had drawn just as much blood as he had and caused just as many screams. You didn’t do that without enjoying it at least a little.

Glaring darkly at him, the captain spoke. “You will die tonight but you can choose how you will die. I have a job for you. It’s compatible with your tastes.” He spat. “If you complete the job, I will kill you personally and I will make it painless. You refuse, I will have you impaled alive and left on the walls to die slowly and painfully.”

Lleweyln narrowed his eyes at the threat. He knew this captain and his forces had made impaling a human being an art form. They were capable of keeping a man alive for days while impaled. “I’m listening.”

The captain drew a shiv made of bone out from under his jacket. “The man who was in this cell before you made this out of his last meal. Pointless, I killed him with it personally before he could escape but it is useful to me now. The job is as follows. I will let you out of this cell. You will take this weapon and kill the warrior who will be in the interrogation room with our newest acquirement. You will be killed resisting capture.”
Lleweyln laughed and a wide smile split his face. “You’re not the noble leader they say you are, are you? Of course, no one who is as good at killing as you ever could be.”

“Yes or no.” Bellamy snapped, clearly out of patience with his mocking.

It was a good deal, and it would let him go out with blood on his hands. “It’s a deal.”

“Good,” The captain pulled out a key and quickly opened his cell door before stepping back.

He stepped out into the hall and cracked his neck from side to side. Without blinking, he caught the sharpened bone tossed at him. A glance at the captain told him that talking was not an option. Instead, he just grinned at the man before turning and making his way up towards the interrogation room. The screams made it easy enough to find. The sound of the metal of his former cell's door being damaged told him what the captain was doing, which was interesting. Not that he cared in a more than abstract way.

His feet fell heavily and he didn’t bother to try and keep them silent as the sound they made was easily covered by the sounds of screaming as they got closer. Coming to a door that he knew separated the torture chamber from the rest of the dungeon, he flung it open and charged through. His eyes barely took in the room, just focusing in on the slight warrior girl standing over the strapped down form of a prisoner. He brought the shiv straight into her kidneys even as she turned in a late attempt to fend him off. He used his size to shove her into the wall while yanking the bone out of her gut and then stabbing her in the side of the neck with it. He hissed as he felt the sharp pain of the crooked instrument of torture she’d been using embedding itself in his side.

Cursing, he stumbled back and stared at the woman clutching at her throat as black blood poured out. He felt a rush as he saw the light in her eyes dim. His feet betrayed him, causing him to trip and hit the ground himself while he used one hand to hold in place the wicked instrument impaled in his side. Looking over his shoulder, he saw the the captain standing in the doorway surveying the scene. He grinned, “Fulfill your end of the bargain.”

The man walked over to the prone form of the woman and carefully unsheathed one of her knives and walked back over to him. Staring down emotionlessly, he held his gaze. “I said it would be painless. I lied.”

Lleweyln made to stab the shiv into the captain’s leg but his arm was kicked viciously, knocking the shiv across the room. Then the knife was being plunged into his lung. The captain ignored him as he gurgled out his last breaths. His chest was burning from the blood filling his lungs but he saw the captain killing the man strapped to the table with a swift slice of the dagger before tossing it to the side. He felt a smile on his face as he watched the captain wiping the blood off his hands before leaving the room.

Clarke could feel Lexa’s fingers running along her scars. She kept coming back to the long one that ran from her chin down to part way down her chest. “Daniella knew that I was a healer and would know how dangerous a cut like that would be. Flickering her eyes open, she looked over at Lexa’s face. “She started with knives on me.”

Lexa’s face was filled with sorrow as she gently ran her finger down the scar again. “I always saw the brands and scars of your people as barbaric.” She flicked her eyes up to hers, her hand gently encircling her neck. “I still do, but I can see the strength and bravery they hold as well now.”

Rolling onto her side, Clarke pressed her mouth against Lexa’s, losing herself in the warmth. Pulling
back, she bit at her lip slightly before releasing it. Opening her eyes, she saw the hooded and dark
eyes staring back at her. “I have to go.” She said sadly, the sun would be rising soon and she needed
to be there to lead her army home.

Closing her eyes, Lexa pulled her into her more closely keeping their foreheads pressed together.
“Promise me you will come back to me.”

Clarke’s eyes opened completely in surprise as she automatically held onto Lexa more firmly. She
hadn’t expected that. “I promise if I win, I’ll come back. I’ll bow to you and take the brand. Your
peace will last Lexa.”

“Klark I…that’s not...” Lexa seemed to choke on her words.

Clarke tilted her head, catching Lexa’s mouth with her own. She
knew they didn’t have long but she
was loath to end this a moment sooner than she had to since these were their last moments alone
before she left. Lexa’s finger ran up into her hair, pulling her closer. Clarke allowed Lexa to
take control and for herself to be rolled onto her back. Breaking apart panting, she ran her hands up
Lexa’s arms partially in comfort, partially in a signal to stop. “We don’t have time.”

Softly, achingly softly, Lexa pressed her lips against hers again before sitting up, still straddling her.
“You will come back to me.” She said it with all the power and command of her rank, it sent a shiver
down Clarke’s spine.

She didn’t know how to reply but knew she needed to say something, but what could she say, ‘yes’,
‘always’, ‘I need you’, ‘as long as you’ll have me’? The truth was she was going to go north and she
could die, it was even probable that she would die. At the end of the day, she didn’t want to give
Lexa a promise she wasn’t sure she could keep. Instead of answering, she lifted her shoulders off the
bed and brought her face to Lexa’s shoulder and pressed a kiss to it. “There is no where I’d rather
be.” She murmured against the warm skin of her lover’s shoulder.

Lexa seemed to slump slightly before she slid off of her. Clarke didn’t pull her back even though she
wanted to more than anything. Swinging her legs out of the bed, she began to gather her clothing
from where it’d ended up flung the night before. Pulling on her pants, she turned realizing she hadn’t
heard Lexa leave the bed. Instead, she was sitting there, her shirt hanging off one shoulder, watching
her and everything inside of Clarke demanded that she go back and wipe the expression of longing
and pain off of Lexa’s face. However, she knew she couldn’t, so she swallowed her regret and
pulled a shirt over her head.

Getting dressed in the morning was such an ingrained habit that her clothing was soon on and her
hair braided and out of her way. She didn’t bother with paint. She wasn’t going to war, she was
traveling. Clothed and ready to leave, she couldn’t bring herself to shift the window and exit. She
just couldn’t, spinning on her heel, she returned to the bed, straddling Lexa and kissing her
desperately, trying to communicate what she couldn’t bring herself to say. Gasping as she pulled
back to change the angle of her mouth, she breathed out a simpler truth. “I don't want to leave you.”

Lexa dropped her head, reaching up and resting her hand against Clarke’s mouth to stop her insistent
kisses. Confused, Clarke let her mind clear as she was pushed into a seated position and Lexa sat up,
moving her hand so that her thumb was stroking her cheek. “Klark,” Lexa pressed an open mouthed
kiss to her neck before pulling back. “I was taught and understood that the love you so freely show
and feel is weakness, but if this makes me weak, then I don’t wish to be strong.”

Clarke buried her face into Lexa’s shoulder, hugging her to her, wishing that she would never have
to let go. They just stayed like that silently holding each other, trying to find the strength to let each
other go into an uncertain future. Clarke found the resolve to leave when she heard the guards in
front of the house change. Pulling back, she gently gave a chaste kiss to Lexa’s lips before standing and moving to the window. She paused with her fingers on the latch. “I’m weak for you as well Lexa.” With that, she slid it open and easily hopped up onto the frame and was out into the dark.

Octavia grunted as she wrenched the taunt hide over the top of the cart full of medical supplies to help keep them dry during the journey. The sky was lightening though the first rays of sunlight had yet to break up the morning mist. Puffing, she moved over to her horse and started double checking the saddle bags. The sound of someone tripping behind her caused her to spin, catching the falling body.

“Sorry,” An embarrassed sounding Sophie mumbled as she righted herself.

She found herself sighing, taking a second was more work than she was expecting it to be. Maybe because the girl was already half trained and already had a set schedule and habits that she hadn’t had a chance to figure out or change yet. “Did you lunge your mount already and get him more settled?”

The girl nodded. “Yup! Hopefully he won’t be frisky today.”

‘Frisky’ was not the word Octavia would use for that damn horse. She liked horses, horses liked her. Generally speaking, she was a horse person, but that beast was evil, honestly it seemed to listen to Sophie only because the girl routinely snuck the thing snacks and spoiled it completely rotten. “Your saddlebags are secured then?” She double checked.

“Of course!” She said enthusiastically, nearly hopping on her toes.

Octavia cringed, it was way too early for that much energy. “Go stay at your post then, and don’t let Avel kick anyone, the wagons for the injured are full already.”

Sophie seemed slightly dimmed but resolute as she headed off to the shadowy form of that damn horse. Octavia sighed and almost jumped out of her skin when she heard a voice from directly behind her.

“And here I thought you’d have the horse tamed by now. I believe you said that you were ‘good with animals’ this has certainly proved your talent.” Spinning, she saw the annoyingly smug look on Burka’s face.

Glaring, she scoffed. “At least it didn’t try to eat me.”

Burka seemed to consider the point and then shrug her shoulders in defeat. “True.”

“What do you want?” It came out with surprisingly less venom than she was expecting the question to contain. Really, she was getting soft, although the looks the men sent Burka when they’d been in the stocks had been pure gold. Terror didn’t even begin to cover it.

Burka’s eyes flickered around them for a moment before she stepped forward and her voice dropped in volume. “Guard the General. I leave to ride ahead to bring news of certain ‘failures’ to Anankos.”

Octavia hissed slightly. “Will you be killed?”

Burka shook her head. “Doubtful, I’m a useful tool. A single failure when others have failed worse than I will not be enough for me to be discarded.”
The careless way she spoke of her death unsettled her. “You’re still creepy as hell, I hope you know that.”

A twitch of the lips was all that changed about Burka’s expression. “Don’t let it all be for nothing.”

“Don’t die.” Octavia replied. They stayed staring at each other and measuring each other’s resolve for a moment before Burka turned and left. Her dark clothing allowing her to vanish into the early light within an eerily short space of time.

Shaking off the encounter, Octavia headed to the cart carrying the wounded. Lincoln had been assigned as the driver of the cart since he was still weak but capable of some labor now. As she got closer, she could hear a murderous rant involving stabbing people with rather creative objects. Choking back a laugh, she stayed to the side as she watched the free show.

Peri was swearing and threatening the others as they moved her to the cart. “Be careful! When I can move again properly, I’ll put that pretty little spur of yours where the sun doesn’t damn well shine!”

Benny, the large and burly guard, seemed put upon rather than threatened as he gave her stretcher a slight shake on purpose. “My apologies.” He grumbled while Peri hissed her litany of threats that were slowing slightly due to the pain.

“Well do better or I’ll find a new use for your guts.” She snapped.

“I’m sure you will.” He replied evenly.

Even from a distance, Octavia had to admit the woman’s glare was impressive. “Don’t patronize me you fucking nitwit.”

Chuckling, she ignored the continuing drama and moved to where she saw Lincoln’s broad shoulders as he checked over the harness on the two horses pulling the cart. He looked up, clearly having noticed her approach. “Octavia,” He greeted.

“So, how does being a member of the Azgeda army feel?” She asked playfully.

He patted the horse’s withers thoughtfully. “We are more similar than we like to think.”

“You don’t do light conversation well at all.” She said but smiled as she approached him leaning into his warmth, “But you always know just what to say.”

Ephraim rode a small mare through the packed army, that was preparing to move out on their long journey home, towards where he knew he’d find general Klark. Sure enough, she was standing rigidly, more rigidly than he’d ever seen her before actually, speaking with the solemn Gunter. He dismounted smoothly, the beads in his clothing jingling slightly as he alighted on the ground.

“Klark!” He smiled widely at the woman.

“What brings you here general?” She questioned, her eyes flickering over him and the mare behind him. “And what are you doing on a different horse, I think your steed may never forgive you for the betrayal.” A small hint of a smile tugged at her lips but the strange tenseness of her body remained.

Grinning, he spoke. “I think Regulus will forgive me this once.” Waving his arm and theatrically presenting the mare, he spoke. “No, this mare is a new one. She was brought along to continue her training but I think you need her more than my army does.”
Klark’s face morphed into one of genuine shock. “Ephraim, she’s lovely.”

“She’s one of my Regulus’ offspring. Lovely temperament most of the time, but a bit on the vicious side when threatened, which I think will suit you just fine.” He watched with pride as Klark approached the mare and offered her hand, waiting for permission before beginning to run her fingers along the animal’s side clearly impressed with the creature. She was a beautiful horse, slightly on the small side but quick footed and fast. Her coat was a beautiful red that gleamed in the torchlight, with black flecks around her eyes.

Klark barely looked at him, her eyes and hands caught up in learning the animal in front of her. “She’s magnificent Ephraim. What’s her name?”

He could feel his chest puffing up in pride, after all, his people were prized for their horses and seeing someone not only noticing but acknowledging their skill in horse breeding was worth a great deal to him. “She hasn’t been named yet, I thought you could do the honors.”

Finally, she turned to face him. “I have nothing to repay you for this.”

He waved his hand. “She’s a gift. It is an honor to provide the mount for royalty is it not?” He saw the exact moment she realized exactly what he’d just said.

“I’m only heir, hardly a secure position.” She said with carefully measured words, but her hand had stopped gently running across the mare’s neck.

He was tempted to laugh. While his sister was the one who dealt with politics and read deeper into situations, he was not a fool. The Azgeda he’d been associating with ever since his diplomatic journey to the North regions before the mountain campaign had been edgy and full of unrest. It felt like the air was thick with bubbling energy. The signs of turmoil were everywhere. He had known instantly that Nia would be needing to give her people something else to focus on or she would soon be facing an uprising. The mountain had seemed like a temporary fix to the problem. However, his weeks spent with the army during the assault on the mountain had convinced him that the difference in ideals between the Klark’s people and Nia’s was too extreme to stand for long. He was sure that the mountain hadn’t been the solution that Nia had been hoping it would be. He had a feeling that the general he had seen take on the mountain with the Trikru commander wasn’t quite finished with her awe inspiring rise through the ranks. “Someday, when you sit on the throne of Azgeda, princess, do remember this gift.”

She laughed, stepping forward and pulling him into a hug. “I will. You are always welcome in my territory Ephraim.”

“And you in mine.” He replied. Stepping back, he nodded at Gunter, who was standing protectively behind his general. “For now, I need to get back. Safe travels.”

She reached out taking his arm. “May we meet again Ephraim of the Plains.”

Nia sent the items on her table scattering across the room, several of them breaking as they crashed to the ground. Turning on the unfortunate Garon, she half growled half spat at him, “You useless waste of space!”

Garon didn’t flinch, which only served to raise her ire further. “If your pet had been more careful and not been unaccompanied in the dungeons, again, this might not have happened.”

She turned on him, her teeth flashing. “You think I care for your excuses! You’re in charge of
security, how did the prison fail?"

“No prison is inescapable while the prisoners are still alive.” Garon said slowly. “It was bound to happen eventually. It is...unfortunate your pet was forced to pay the price.”

“My pet, MY PET!!” Nia grabbed a pitcher and sent it flying into the wall where it shattered into hundreds of pieces. “SHE WAS OUR BEST CHANCE AT FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE COMMANDER!”

Garon shifted back slightly in the face of her rage but kept his composure. “She was reckless and arrogant. It is only surprising that her death was an accident and not murder.”

Nia clenched her jaw and had to force herself not to kill the man in front of her where he stood. Closing her eyes, she forced herself to remember why she kept him around. For all his disrespect and lust for power, he was correct, most of the time. It was unpleasant but he was right. Ontari was everything he’d said and had been dancing the line between nuisance and disposable nuisance for years now. She felt a sudden dawning feeling of comprehension. “You said she was stabbed with a bone shiv, how could the shiv have survived being used to open the cell door?”

The large man frowned before seeming to startle slightly. “It wouldn’t have survived.” He said matter of factly. “In fact, only a piece of metal could have caused the damage to the door.”

“And did you find any piece of metal on the prisoner to explain this?” She asked, her mind running scenarios in her head.

“No,” Garon said simply. “The only people with the access to have done such a thing....” He trailed off meaningfully.

She didn’t need him to tell her. Only her advisors would have had access to the guard time table, the motivation, and the necessary ears to know when Ontari was there. It clearly wasn’t Garon, the fool would have tried to pin it on Iago to get rid of his rival if he’d realized earlier that it was deliberate or if he had been the mastermind. Zola was a possibility but she discarded him immediately. No, he was too weak and not adventurous enough to do something like this on his own. Which left Iago and Anankos. So that was the question. Both were capable and neither cared for Ontari. It certainly held a certain dramatic flair that she knew Iago was capable of but the neatness and calculated risks pointed towards Anankos. Before she could ponder more who was openly defying her, there was a knock on her chamber doors.

“Come in!” She ordered as she turned away from her pacing.

One of Zola’s men burst in breathless from a run, before dropping to his knees in respect. “My queen.”

“Get up, and tell me what you’ve come here for and it better be important.” She snapped, she didn’t have time for this, she had a traitor to sniff out.

The man stood up and spoke quickly, his tone telling her he was delivering good news. “The mountain has fallen! General Klark is victorious and returns soon!”

Nia stopped moving completely. “Is that so?” She said before walking towards the man. With a sharp swing of her arm she unsheathed a knife and slashed the startled man’s throat. He gurgled before tipping over. Not bothering to look at Garon, she gave orders. “See to it that the trash is taken out. Garon, if a word about what we’ve spoke of here is shared, then I will be having you taken out with the trash as well.”
“Yes, my queen.” He said bowing low.

“Good, and summon captain Bellamy. It would seem our garrison will be going on a rat hunt for us.” She said, already planning ways the garrison could be used to help find her traitorous advisor who had somehow outmaneuvered her and managed to kill a valuable asset.

“And the mountain?” Garon asked carefully.

She glanced over her shoulder. “If the general survives the return trip, I may have a position to move her to that removes her from my army.” After all, she was liked by the people and it would seem she’d have a post amongst her advisors open soon. The general’s survival was a mystery but she couldn’t have had enough time to gain enough support to be a true threat yet. Klark had spent most of her time at war and hadn’t had enough down time in the capitol to gain the political power to challenge the established players.

____________________________________________________________________________

Tris hopped on her good foot, balancing on her new crutches and following the hyper young second, Percy of Azgeda, towards general Klark. She’d been summoned and had no idea why. She knew it most likely had to do with her attitude, or her connection to Char. Hoping it was the latter she moved slowly, careful not to trip. She was getting quite adept at the crutches.

Percy looked over his shoulder. “Are you sure you don’t need help? I can go grab Benny, he could totally carry you.”

It took a moment for her to gain the control necessary not to give in and whack the kid upside the head with one of her crutches. Actually, that really was an idea wasn’t it. She bet she could turn them into effective weapons. A thought for later. “Percy, if you ask me if I need help one more time, I will use you to test if these crutches can be used as effective weapons.”

The kid frowned. “But fighting between clans is not allowed.”

“And who would believe you got taken out by the cripple?” She asked, ignoring the warriors passing by who were hiding their mirth, stupid eavesdroppers.

“Right! This way.” He turned and continued at a slightly slower pace. She heard him muttering under his breath “Stupid girls.”

Deciding not to answer that, she followed, taking in the early light of the first rays of the sun coming up over the horizon. Through the glare of the sunlight, she could make out the form of the general saddling up a beautiful horse. She coughed lightly to alert the general to her presence while Percy peeled off and headed off into the bustling army. “General, you asked for my presence.” She was proud that her voice did not waver.

The general, who Tris had noted was both terrifying and at times kind, buckled a leather strap securing the saddle before walking over to her. The general’s face was drawn and tired, she wondered if the general, like Heda, rarely slept due to carrying so many duties. “Tris, I’d ask you to walk with me but as your healer we both know you’re already pushing it.”

Tris felt herself blushing at her weakness and looking down. “Sorry general.”

“No, it’s impressive you’re getting around as well as you are already.” The general said easily. Reaching into her jacket, she pulled out a folded piece of paper. “I need you to give this to Charlotte for me.”
Tris frowned. “But you already spoke to her earlier?” She still remembered the awkward encounter and hug as Char had apologized and they bade each other farewell.

“I did,” The general leaned her weight onto her left leg. “However, we both know she’s still angry with me.” She held up her hand, stopping Tris’ protest. “I know my sister and I do not hold it against her. If our roles were reversed, I have no doubt I’d be far angrier than she is with me.”

“Then why?” Tris asked.

The general sighed. “Because the world is uncertain and despite having apologized she would never forgive herself if something happened and our meeting earlier was the last time she’d seen me.”

Tris startled. “You’re a general and it’s peace time! Nothing is going to happen to you.” She was confused. As a hero of the fight against the mountain, the general before her would likely be safer than anyone.

The general looked at her slightly bemused. “Things are different in Azgeda little warrior. Assassination is common and like in all nations, illness can kill even the strongest of men. I am not immortal, none of my family is. I want her to be secure in her knowledge of our places with each other.”

Tris nodded, still surprised the general would speak of such things to her. “I’ll take the letter to her, but…” She cut off her question it wasn’t her place.

“Why not give it to her myself?” The general chuckled. “She’s too angry right now for it to do any good. In a few weeks’ time, when she has truly come to accept what has happened, give it to her. I trust you’ll know when.”

“Sha, general.” Tris said, surprised in the trust being bestowed upon her. “I’ll take care of her, I promise.” She added, settling herself in a position as close to attention as she could muster with crutches.

“Good,” The general seemed to measure her for a moment before speaking again. “Charlotte is my sister and I am entrusting her to you and Aden. Don't prove me wrong.”

Tris felt a shiver of fear at the tone of her voice and the look on the general’s face. She had no doubt if she failed Char in any way, her head would not remain on her shoulders long. “We won’t let her down.”

The general nodded like she expected nothing less. “Here,” she handed over a strip of blue cloth that all the warriors of Azgeda wore. “Charlotte will tell you what it means. Know that you and Aden will always be welcome where I hold power. You are family to my sister which means you are family to me.”

Tris straightened and remembered what Anya had said about the ramifications of taking the bond with Char. She’d dismissed them and only thought of them in an abstract way. However, it wasn’t until she was standing here in front of the heir of the Azgeda throne, Wancheda, the Undefeated, greatest pauna hunter ever, that she realized exactly what she’d done. A promise of refuge from someone like this was not to be scoffed at or dismissed. The word ‘always’ implied even banished from her own people she would be allowed to seek refuge with this general. Bowing her head, she spoke seriously. “Thank you for your kindness.”

Lexa let the weight of her shoulder pauldron settle on her as she snapped it into position. She had
duties to attend to and seeing off Klark to face a more dangerous fight than the one they had just won was just one of the duties required of her. With care, she slipped the small ledger Klark had gifted her into a small pocket hidden beneath her pauldron. She did not trust anyone besides herself to handle the information she’d been given. The risk Klark was taking giving it to her was breathtaking.

Closing her eyes, she tried to breathe out the panicked and unsettled feelings inside of her. With that, she opened the door and headed out into TonDC. Anya and Gustus were instantly by her sides to accompany her to bid farewell to the Azgeda and Trishana forces. Glancing at Anya, she spoke. “Do see to it that the beam connecting the command room to my quarters is removed. It’s been brought to my attention that it is a simple thing to enter through my window once on the roof.”

Anya let out a curse. “The window! It’s been the window this whole time!?”

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about but I’m sure it is nothing important.” She replied, ignoring the quiet swears the woman was muttering about compromised security.

“An unfortunate security flaw.” Gustus said seriously but she had no doubt his eyes were twinkling.

Deciding not to reply, she made her way through the morning light to the massive army that was prepared to move out. Nearly eight hundred warriors prepared to leave in a single block. It was impressive in many ways. Walking to the head of the line where she knew Klark and Palleas would be, she noted the way that warriors who before the mountain she would have expected to spit at her on principle, nodded their heads to her in deference. With a practiced eye, she observed that while the Trishana warriors were clearly just finished preparing to leave, the Azgeda warriors seemed almost bored. They had reason to be, she could tell that they were experienced with moving as a single unit and the wait for the Trishana to meld into their formation had to be irritating.

She hadn’t mounted a horse for this, she did not wish for the elevated height or added speed this morning. Arriving at the head of the line, she saw Palleas on a large black steed next to Klark, who was mounted on a smaller but gorgeous horse. Lexa instantly resolved to ask Klark how she’d gained a war horse of the plains, they rarely parted with such animals. The thought was immediately crushed when she remembered she would not be speaking to Klark again for months if ever.

Coming to a halt before the generals, she waited till both of them had dismounted and bowed in greeting. “Generals, I thank you for your service, your loyalty, and your courage. May the spirits bless your travels.”

“And you Heda.” Palleas replied bowing before stepping back.

Klark stepped forward and clasped her hand, pressing something into it. She was unsure of the contact but allowed it, tilting her head in silent question. “May we meet again Heda. A token of my thanks for leading my army to victory.”

“It has been an honor to serve with you.” She replied, letting her hand drop.

Klark and Palleas moved back and remounted their horses. Klark spun hers around so that she was facing their waiting army. Pulling a horn off her saddle, she brought it to her lips and blew, the sound sinking into her bones as it called for the armies to head out. Lexa fought off a smile as Klark glanced at her as she wheeled her horse around and winked. With that they were off.

Lexa and her two companions stood in silence and watched as the massive army departed. After what felt like hours, Anya spoke from behind her. “What did she give you?”

Lexa looked down at her hand and looked at it. There in her hand was a braid of golden hair, with beads and blue fabric woven into it. Anya let out a sharp breath at the sight and she heard Gustus
move a step closer. “She’ll return to you Heda.” He said gruffly.

Looking at the army that was quickly moving out of sight, she replied. “I hope so.”

Bellamy feared the worst as he approached the queen’s private chambers that evening. He had heard of the body removed from those chambers earlier in the day. In court, an unusually large amount of petitioners to the throne had been sent to the dungeons. He’d escorted two petty thieves to be mounted on the walls personally. The news of the victory at the mountain had spread and while the civilians celebrated, the upper levels of the capitol waited in fear. They knew Nia would not be pleased with the power Lexa had secured with her victory over the mountain. After Ontari’s death, he knew that Nia had met with all of her advisors in private. If she had found out it had been him, he had no doubt he would never leave her dungeons.

Knocking on the door, he waited for her to summon him before opening the door and stepping inside. “My queen,” He said, dipping his head in deference.

“Bellamy. It’s been some time since we last spoke.” She said from where she was leaning against the wall looking out the window. “Since you were one of my guards some years ago in fact.”

“Yes, your majesty.” He could feel everything inside of him demanding he run, but his feet stayed firmly planted.

“We have a traitor in our midst.” She said easily, finally looking at him. “What do you think about that hmm?”

What little color was in his face drained and he thanked the spirits that he had a beard that would cover some of the loss of color. Though he had no doubt Nia had noticed. “Traitor? Who is it?”

“Yes, a traitor, a foul serpent in our capitol. Ontari’s death was no accident and it was meant as an attack on me.” She said while walking towards him slowly.

His eyes widened and he had to force his voice not to raise in pitch. “I thought an escaped prisoner had killed her. That is what Garon reported in the court.”

“No, it was quite intentional and I know it was one of my advisors, I’m just unsure of which one.” She reached up, her hand curling around his throat. “You however, you are an unknown quantity here. Find my traitor and bring me their head. Is that understood captain?” Her eyes were sharp and her fingernails dug into his neck.

“Yes, your majesty!” He said, feeling every beat of his heart as she kept her hand on his throat. His skin nearly breaking beneath her nails.

Releasing his neck, she lowered her hand. “Good, you are in charge of the investigation from this moment forward. You have one month or it will be your head I will mount on a pike. Now get out.”
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

And here we are. Thank you everyone for sticking with us to the bitter end! We just want to thank you all for the comments and kudos and bookmarks and every other kind thing. It’s meant the world to us. Hope you guys like the conclusion.

Charlotte stood silently in the shadows behind the commander’s throne. It was her first day back at full duty since they had returned from the mountain. Her side still ached dully and was tender, restricting her movements when bending beyond what the average warrior could handle. However, she was capable of serving as a common guard. She was also finding it amusing to watch the way she could practically see the hairs rising on the back of the bald, sour faced advisers neck at her presence. The other guards had seemingly accepted her easily thanks to her bond with Aden and Tris. It was the stiff adviser who was paranoid and untrusting, he’d do well in Azgeda.

She saw Aden standing with a few of the other nightbloods. She’d found them all to be excellent training partners and looked forward to being back in top shape so she could do so. For now, at most, she just showed them up with her ability to throw knives with pinpoint accuracy. They were a strong group but the way they behaved changed when they were together. They were far more polite and submissive when grouped together or if Titus was passing nearby.

The ambassadors on the other hand made her want to sheath her daggers into something a little more alive. They were foolish, jockeying for position and gains for their clans that didn’t matter at the end of the day. Really, she was surprised Lexa had only kicked the one out of a window and that was a story she really ought to ask Aden about sometime.

Her attention snapped to where Lexa seemed to be idly tapping on the arm of her throne. She understood it as her family’s bastardized form of Morse code. Shock seemed to roll down to the tips of her toes, she had not known Lexa knew that. Clarke must have taught it to her. It wasn’t exactly a secret considering they had been teaching it to civilians in the Ice Nation in order to help with those who shared similar struggles to Dax. Still, it wasn’t something that she would have expected Clarke to share with Lexa. Paying attention, she made sure she had the message she was repeating down before she slipped easily out of the room.

She was unsure about why she’d been ordered to Lexa’s private chambers but she didn’t ask either just quickly doing as told. The passageway was exactly where Lexa had informed her it would be and she easily dropped from the ceiling into the room. Deciding on a defensive position, she found a corner where a tapestry ended, leaving it shadowed and melded herself into it and waited. It didn’t take long for the doors to open letting in Lexa, Gustus, and Anya. Charlotte stepped out of the shadows as soon as the doors closed.

“Sweet spirits!” Anya exclaimed as soon as she noticed her. “How do you do that?!”

Charlotte grinned. “An assassin must always be the knife in the dark. They must become one with it. It is their role to be unnoticed until death is already inevitable.”

Anya stared at her rather blankly. “Cheery, I’m sure you’re full of other hopeful lessons.”
“Anya enough,” Lexa said clearly wanting to get to business as quickly as possible. “I didn’t summon you all here to argue or snark at each other.”

“Why did you summon us Heda?” Gustus asked.

Lexa sighed and seemed to tense along her shoulders. “To plan the invasion of Azgeda in the event of Klark failing in her mission.”

Charlotte hissed but settled quickly. She’d known this was coming. After all, she’d been told to inform Lexa that the army was within a day’s travel of the capitol just that morning via radio. The letter from Clarke rested in her inner breast pocket where it was safe. Swallowing, she spoke first. “What do you plan Heda?”

Anya and Gustus both looked at her in surprise but she ignored them and watched Lexa. Lexa met her stare and replied. “We need an excuse to have our army near the border and prepared to move in without delay. I’ve already assigned our border patrols to be increased and sent some of our interior security to the border for ‘training exercises’. I can’t increase the number of warriors on hand without declaring war on Azgeda. The ambassadors are already uneasy.”

Gustus frowned thoughtfully. “I thought that was why you were increasing our manpower along the border. You could recall our men along the Floukru border here to Polis. Still Heda, if a war against Azgeda does occur, Trikru alone cannot hope to win, let alone hold the territory.”

“He’s right.” Anya said. “The army would retreat north burning as they went and then sweep down slaughtering us as soon as winter set.”

Lexa paused and shifted her shoulder as she seemed to consider her next words carefully. “Klark has informed me that Nia’s position is tenuous enough that we have better odds than you think. In the event of the failure of her challenge, her territory and Seth’s will still support the coalition in a fight against Nia. The other two regions should not be as much of a threat, and Klark does not even think that Frederick’s territory will fight very hard for either side.”

Charlotte was surprised at Lexa’s knowledge of the situation in Azgeda. The only way she could have gotten that information was if Clarke had revealed it to her. Charlotte had known they were getting close but this was a level of trust she would not have expected. This along with Lexa’s knowledge of Dax’s code was enough to convince her that Lexa had Clarke’s full trust and support. It did a lot to allay her concerns about going along with such treason against the people of Azgeda. “You should be careful who you reveal such knowledge to, not many could have given it to you and it could complicate things if it is revealed too early. Still, Clarke obviously trusts you, so I will trust your judgement as well. She even taught you Dax’s code.” Charlotte added quietly. “I’m impressed you learned it well enough to signal me as casually as you did.”

“Why would she betray her people in such a manner?” Anya asked shock lacing her tone. “It could be a trap.”

“It’s not,” Charlotte said before Lexa could reply. “You don’t know what living under Nia is like. I’m sure that Clarke revealed this for the good of our people. So that as many of them could survive Nia’s fall as possible.”

Gustus reached out, resting his hand on her shoulder. “The girl is right. This information should be kept to ourselves and not shared with any of the ambassadors until we know for sure that Klark has failed.”

Lexa nodded. “I know, but I felt that you as my most trusted advisers should know that there was a
plan in place in case the worst happens.”

“I have known nothing but hate for Azgeda since I was a child, but it pleases me to know that we will not have to fight against those who have so recently aided us in a great victory.” Anya said brusquely. “The Azgeda I hated is being destroyed with Nia, the Azgeda I have fought and bled with will make valuable allies.”

Charlotte felt a sudden surge of affection for the warriors as she saw Gustus nod his head in agreement, few would have bothered to make that distinction and the comradery it showed warmed her.

“I am glad to hear it. All we can do for now is get as many soldiers as we can to the border so that we can aid our comrades as soon as possible in case the worst happens and there is a civil war. Charlotte, do you have any suggestion on how that might be done?” Lexa asked.

She shifted slightly surprised to be addressed on such a matter. “I do not trust your advisers nor the ambassadors. As much preparation should be done in secret as possible. They would see any attack on Azgeda as an opportunity subjugate our people and get revenge for crimes of the past. I don’t think much more can be done then what you have already put in motion. Though it might help if you ensured that those moved to border are those who have fought with us at the mountain and have seen for themselves that Nia’s treachery does not represent us all.”

Lexa nodded. “A valuable idea. Those men have earned some time closer to home and quite a few of them were injured but I will see if any of them are open to a brief reposting.” She walked to the fireplace, her face pensive in thought.

Charlotte considered what else she could add. “If Clarke fails, a civil war will be inevitable. The people love her and would fight in her memory. I think the biggest struggle will be making sure that the fight is controlled and that lives are not lost needlessly in the chaos. Seth and Clarke have done all they can to prepare so that the leadership of the revolt will not break down with her death but it is hard to predict how the people will respond. We don’t know if they will follow behind Bellamy or Seth as leaders of a rebellion and honestly your presence won’t help. The fact that you have gained the respect of Clarke has convinced the army of your worth but the civilians have not served with you personally. They know only what they hear and Nia has done much to blacken your name in Azgeda. It would help if you showed your allegiance to Clarke by wearing her colors.”

“She has a point Heda. The civilians could become an issue if they are not properly controlled.” Gustus said, dropping back into advisor mode easily. “If it comes to war, it will be important that we are not seen as invaders but as a rescue force. We will have to think of ways that we can appease the populace and change their view of you. Perhaps as well as wearing Klark’s colors, we could also bring gifts to give the civilians to show our good will.”

Anya dropped down onto the couch. “You should send Gustus and one of our generals up to support the regions that will stand with the coalition. They can bring with them some of our food that they would normally have to go out of their way to get in trade. Then take Indra with you and head to the Plains. If you have their help you can effectively cut off Nia’s faction from outside support. Podaku would sooner die than help Nia. Delphi would aid you as well. Azgeda does not have many friends. If the Plains support you, they will be left alone.”

Lexa clenched her jaw. “I can see your point. I can travel with the news and speed the time for the marshalling of our forces.”

“And if Clarke succeeds?” Charlotte had to ask. “Clarke has been matched with worse odds and always she has prevailed.” She felt the need to point out.
“Then I keep the ambassadors from calling for the coalition to step into the destabilized region.” Lexa said firmly.

Anya scoffed. “You just want to run to the rescue of your lover.”

Lexa narrowed her eyes. “Are you trying to say something?”

“My apologies, Heda.” She said quickly, bowing to the authority Lexa exuded when she truly took command.

Gustus chuckled suddenly. “I doubt that with Klark on the throne, Azgeda will be nearly as destabilized as the ambassadors will assume.”

Charlotte grinned and noticed the matching one on Lexa’s face. Before she could confirm Gustus’ thoughts, the chamber doors were flung open and Titus came storming into the room. “Heda!”

Anya was on her feet instantly and everyone in the room was immediately on their guard, prepared to face whatever threat would force Titus to burst into the commander’s private quarters without notice. Especially since she’d ordered the guards to ensure that everyone knew she was not to be disturbed.

“Titus, what has happened?” Lexa demanded. Charlotte realized there was an edge of panic in Lexa’s voice that she felt as well. She had to forcefully remind herself that she would have heard if the coup had failed or not via the radio long before Titus could have gotten any news.

Titus’ eyes took in the people in the room and seemed to blanch when they spotted her. Focusing on Lexa, he spoke. “I warned you about the assassin.” Pulling out a cracked and mangled box, he dropped it on the table in front of the couch. “I found stolen mountain tech among her belongings. We have no idea who she has been communicating with while she was here.”

Charlotte’s blood ran cold realizing that the box he had thrown on the table was the broken form of her radio. She didn’t know how to fix that sort of damage. No radio meant no way of getting news from Clarke, from Bellamy, from the rest of her family. It meant that whichever way the coup went, she wouldn’t know till days later. “What have you done?!” She said, stepping forward a knife sliding into her hand automatically.

Harper felt the brown pigeon that belonged to her land on her arm. Reaching up, she untied the smallmissive tied to its leg. She knew today was the day, Clarke had radioed to inform them of her approach, of course even without that she would have known. After all, a large army was conspicuous enough that news had begun to arrive of their victorious approach the moment they crossed the border.

Dropping from her perch in her tree, she moved casually towards the chambers of Zola, minister of trade and treaties. She cared little about the weak willed man. However, he did hold power and strings that if pulled by a more dangerous man, could pose a threat to a new monarch. It helped that it would be a mercy to kill the man before he found out that his son had long since been killed and would never be returned to him no matter what he did for Garon.

She acknowledged passing warriors, knowing that it didn’t matter if they proved she’d been the one to commit this murder. If Klark failed in her attempted coup, death was guaranteed anyway and if Clarke succeeded, she would be safe from accusation. As she approached the man’s office, she saw a warrior approaching without the blue of their forces. It meant he either served Quint, or was
directly below Nia. As soon as she was past him, she spun clasping her hand over his mouth and sliding a blade across his throat. He struggled against her for a few hapless seconds before going still. Removing her hand, she pulled him into the nearest room. It was the quarters of a servant, she felt mildly guilty about the unfortunate surprise the servant would have at finding a body in their room but it was her best option. Ignoring her guilt, she hauled the body in and shoved it under a bed.

With that, she moved on till she arrived at Zola’s chambers. A quick knock and she entered before being summoned. She saw the man hunched over what looked like reports from his various contacts outside of their borders.

“I didn’t tell you to enter hunter.” He said with a slight sneer. “What do you want?”

Harper stepped forward, “Nothing you can give me.” She said. He reacted too late, startling backwards but she’d already sheathed her knife into his side. Withdrawing it, she sliced through his throat brutally deep, hitting the spine slightly, making it so he couldn’t use his last moments to scream. After all, the plan depended on the bodies not being found for a few hours.

Once his body was still, she dragged the corpse and stuffed it under the bed. Then she stared at the blood stains and sighed. She’d have to clean that up in case someone did come looking for the fool.

____________________________________________________________________________

Raven watched Echo out of the corner of her eye. The woman wasn’t stupid. She had clearly noticed that something was going on in the army. Monty, Leo, and a small contingent of warriors, had ridden ahead of the army half an hour ago. It was also obvious that the warriors who knew what was coming had begun to fall into the mindset of preparing for an upcoming battle. The whole atmosphere was charged and only a fool would have missed the change. It was time for her to depart with those who would stand by in case of failure. It was a contingency plan, built in redundancy. Clarke had dropped back beside her as they rode. Silently, Clarke passed her a cloth damp with something. Looking curiously at Clarke, she tilted her head.

Clarke looked pained by what she said. “For a mutual friend.”

Raven grimaced but nodded and moved her horse closer to Echo while Clarke rode back to the head of the line. Dismounting, she internally balked as she greeted Echo. “Doing alright on foot?”

Echo gave her an incredibly unimpressed look. “I’m fine. Raven what has happened while I was away? The men act as if we are marching to war rather than to our queen’s side.”

“It’s not what has happened, it’s what’s about to happen.” She replied. She knew that around half of the men now knew what was coming and keeping her silence no longer mattered, it was too late for that.

The woman frowned and her face suddenly cleared as a look of horror replaced her confused and uneasy look. “No, Klark wouldn’t.” She defended weakly, turning violently towards the front of the line to look for some sign from her former second.

Raven took a quick step and brought the soaked cloth to Echo’s mouth and nose, covering them while wrapping her other arm around her to keep her still. “I’m sorry.”

Echo hadn’t been prepared and took a startled breath and only managed to struggle weakly before she slumped in Raven’s arms. Although, she managed one deeply betrayed look before losing consciousness.

The warriors nearby said nothing as Dax dismounted his horse and helped her lift Echo’s
unconscious form up over her saddle and began to tie the woman to it so she could be transported easily. Raven was thankful for the silence as she remounted her horse. Her party was mainly made up of seconds and some of the younger warriors. “Move out.” She ordered as she pushed her mounts head for the small guard outpost, they would be taking over while they waited for news.

Looking over her shoulder, she caught Dax’s eye and swallowed her guilt. She didn’t have time for it, she needed to have her party ready to make a ride for the territory controlled by Seth at a moment’s notice. After all, her and Seth were responsible for holding the line if Clarke lost. Facing forward, she led her group and prayed that she wouldn’t be taking them on that break neck retreat in only a few hours.

Leo sat in his father’s quarters across the table from the man and watched as the sorry excuse for a man and father, drank from his goblet while staring him down. He knew it was time to reduce Nia’s advisers to just Anankos, after all he knew Harper would have fulfilled her mission and Iago had suffered an ‘unfortunate’ accident the week before. Finally, Leo decided he’d drunk enough of the poison for it to be setting in properly. “The army proper will be arriving soon. I need to leave if I am to arrive with them formally.”

“You’re prepared for your role, try not to disappoint me.” Garon scoffed.

“I’ve never had the drive for power you have wished of me.” He said calmly. “None of us have.”

Garon narrowed his eyes. “You and your weakling siblings will do as you’re told or you won’t survive as Iago’s replacement for long. Do be careful not to be seen leaving.”

“I’m sure that Niles will be able to get me out without alerting anyone I was here in the first place.” He let his hand rest lightly on the hilt of the decorative dagger his father had given him years ago when he’d first earned his marks. “But that’s not your concern.”

“You think you can tell me my place? You, who is only now learning to follow my orders.” He spat.

“You orders?” Leo tilted his head with a slight smile. “Since when were you so arrogant as to think I was as biddable as that. It amazes me that you would think I, or any of my siblings, hold any loyalty to you after the way you have treated us.”

Garon made to stand up, his hand twitching as if to swing back ready for a strike but the motion aborted itself as his feet seemed to buckle and he slumped in his chair. “What have you done?!” He growled while his body twitched, refusing to move as he commanded it.

Leo stood, drawing his dagger. “I have learned a great deal while in the company of assassins. Your muscles won’t be capable of doing what you want for another hour.” He reached out grasping his father’s hair in a fist while yanking his head back so that he could stare straight into the man’s eyes.

“Leo, you will stop this foolishness at once!” He ordered, anger rippling through his voice.

“I don’t think I will.” Leo said conversationally. “I could hardly believe you were arrogant enough to think Klark would ever ally with you.” He spat the last part out. “Did you really think you were helping us merely play at politics and remove a single adviser?”

Garon’s eyes narrowed as he growled. “You won’t get away with this. Nia will have you and your traitorous general crucified for this.”

Leo laughed, it was sharp and without real mirth. “You still don’t get it do you. Nia won’t be queen
by the time the sun sets.” He tapped the edge of his knife against his father’s cheek. “She’ll be joining you in hell soon enough.”

Then he saw it, for the first time he saw his father really saw him without any of his masks of bravado as understanding dawned through his arrogant cruel mind. Leo felt his mouth twist into a cruel smile. “I should thank you father, our family will be a prominent force behind the new queen, but you won’t live to see it.” With that, he plunged the dagger straight into the man’s heart. He twisted it viciously and watched as the light died in the man’s eyes. Releasing his hold on the corpse’s hair, he stood up and wiped his hands. Without a backwards glance, he stepped out into the hall. He saw Niles and Odin leaning against the wall waiting for him.

“That took a while captain.” Odin remarked while pushing himself off the wall.

“Niles see to it that no one finds his body till we can attach it to the wall. Odin, let’s go. We need to return to the army before we’re missed.”

Bellamy stepped into Anankos’ rooms and could feel the hairs on the back of his neck rise. He wondered if he’d survive the next few minutes. The master assassin was standing in the center of the room with two shapes at his back, while Bellamy only had Monty behind him. He didn’t bother with trying to play a game, the man would have known as soon as he stepped foot in his rooms what this meeting meant. Drawing his sword in a smooth motion, he settled into a fighting stance.

“Treason then.” Anankos said conversationally. “Ah, our resident nightblood’s death. And Iago’s accident no doubt. Well done, I hadn’t put the pieces together till just now. I should have known you had it in you after you killed that foolish one, Murphy was it?”

Bellamy rolled his shoulders, letting them loosen. “You know of a man I murdered in an alleyway years ago but you failed to notice a coup right beneath your nose. So much for being the all hearing ear of the queen.”

“I always wondered how deep the bonds between your family ran all those years ago when we first captured you. Now, here you stand before certain death all because you’ve been ordered to by that blond monster you call sister.” Anankos casually flipped his hood back showing the gnarled and scarred face beneath. “You won’t survive this boy.”

Bellamy ignored the taunt and lunged knowing Monty would protect his back. One of the two shapes behind the man headed for him but Monty easily blocked his approach and engaged with the man. Meanwhile, Anankos had crossed his daggers, catching his blade between them. Bellamy grinned as he saw the second figure move.

Anankos opened his mouth, no doubt to make mention of his odd expression. He wasn’t able to get out whatever he was going to say before Burka buried a hand axe into the man’s back. Bellamy had no doubts that the axe was settled into a vital organ. He saw and heard Burka spinning Anankos around before crushing his skull open with an overhead swing of a second hand axe. He had a moment to glory in their success, which of course is when he felt his sword ripped from his hands. Raising one arm, he managed to divert the first knife into a glancing blow that only slashed his side and didn’t hit anything vital. The second knife slashed upwards and he jerked his head backwards but not fast enough. He let out a scream of pain as he felt the knife slice his face open. Stumbling backwards, his arm that had not been injured diverting a deadly blade, reached up to stop the flow of blood but he could feel the burning of the poison in his face, side, and injured arm.

Ignoring the pain, he smiled as he saw Monty leaping back to his feet from where he’d clearly been
sent flying which is what had allowed his opponent past him. The assassin with Bellamy’s blood on his blades didn’t manage to do more than dodge the first swing Burka made before Monty was on him from behind, driving a knife through his ear. Knowing that the last of their opponents was defeated, he felt his feet collapse beneath him as he fell and hit the ground.

“BELLAMY!” Monty cried, sliding to his side. Monty seemed to turn. “Burka the antidote!”

Bellamy blinked through the pain, blood swimming across his vision. Damn face wounds really bled, he thought idly, before hissing as something that somehow was more painful than the wound itself was poured across his face and then forced into his side and injured arm.

“We have to cauterize it, he needs to be by Nia’s side in an hour.” Burka said tonelessly while grabbing a torch.

Bellamy twitched as he felt himself being held down and a white hot blade was lowered towards his face. He passed out as a scream erupted from his throat.

_________________________________________________________

Clarke rode at the head of the lead detachment of her army as they approached the gates of the capitol. Looking at the walls, she knew they would soon either be decorated by the bodies of her men or of Nia’s supporters. Clenching the hard leather reins in her hand, she cursed her nerves. If the spirits had any mercy, they would allow her to remain calm through this no matter which way it went. As she passed under the archway, she saw the crowds of people and warriors amassed to greet her. There was a roar as she came into sight.

The people were cheering, some calling her name, others crying out their clan’s name with pride. She felt their roar rise up in her veins, boiling with power as she rode through the gates. It was so different than when she’d first come through these gates chained and dragged to the dungeons. Still, she followed that path of long ago, riding toward the central building of the capitol. As they passed, the people pressed in wanting to touch the warriors who had brought them yet another victory, to touch their heir who had protected them once again.

She could feel the press and was mildly amused by how uncomfortable it made Gunter and Dax, who were riding on either side of her. Reaching down, she stroked the neck of her horse hoping to keep it calm even stuck within this crush of humanity. As she moved slowly down the street, she saw the homes and buildings with blue hanging from the windows, some with the hand of Azgeda sewn into the fabric. It filled her with pride that she had done this, given her people something to believe in, and she prayed that she would not be taking it away from them in just a few short blocks.

Arriving finally at the courtyard in front of Nia’s seat of power, she turned on her mount. Raising her arm and drawing her sword, she gave out a shout. “AZGEDA!”

The crowd and her army took the cry up, chanting “AZGEDA, AZGEDA, AZGEDA, AZGEDA!” With that roar behind her, she dismounted and entered into the stronghold with Gunter, Dax, Keaton, Selena, and Xander at her back. She strode proudly forward towards the great doors leading into throne room. She gave Dax and Keaton a quick signal with her hand.

Both of them strode past her and shoved the doors open, ignoring the startled looks of the guards who were normally in charge of admittance. The doors slammed open with a great echoing thud and Clarke walked through them and took in the room with careful eyes. Nia sat on her throne, her advisers missing, but so was Bellamy. General Quint stood behind her throne and the guards were a mix of her own and his. She clenched her teeth, letting her face harden. Coming to a stop before the throne, she did not drop to her knee as was required, instead she looked straight into Nia’s face and
“Nia, Queen of Azgeda, as your heir, I challenge you to single combat for the title of queen and the right to rule this nation.”

Lexa sat in her throne and listened as Robin the ambassador of Blue Cliff proposed new tariffs on trade moving through the northern pass of his territory. She knew she should be listening more closely, but it had been weeks since Titus had destroyed Charlotte’s radio and she was waiting for news of Klark. Either she was the new queen or she was dead. She felt her hands clench at the arms of her throne.

“Which is why an increase of 2% to the existing tariff is reasonable. The burden of feeding the trading houses is unmanageable while Azgeda continues to refuse trade through their southern border.” Robin said, his dark purple over coat rustling as he moved his arms to give emotion to his request.

Erika kom Igranrona stood from her seat as Robin returned to his. “Your trade route is indeed valuable but Azgeda is not required to allow trade that they do not partake in to cross their borders. A rise in tariffs of that amount would cripple trade from the outer clans. Already they must pass through more than one clan on their way to the east.”

Lexa tuned the debate out again. She knew they’d settle it amongst themselves without input from her. Robin and Erika were both two of her more reasonable ambassadors and the others seemed to be fine with allowing them to be the ones leading this discussion today. She caught sight of Titus out of the corner of her eye where he was standing to her right. A flash of anger burned through her, a part of her wished she’d given permission to Charlotte to kill the man for his foolishness and need to challenge her authority. However, she was Heda and as flamekeeper he was vital and irreplaceable. Truthfully, without the knowledge of Klark that she and the advisers who’d been with her at the mountain had gained in their time there, his distrust of Charlotte was very reasonable.

Before the mountain, before Klark, she would have agreed with him and sooner faced a pauna than allow an assassin of Azgeda into her personal guard. However, the mountain had happened and she had met Klark, and that had changed everything. She was brought back into the present when the doors to the throne room were thrown open and a guard came forward before dropping to one knee before her. “Heda.”

Lexa barely shifted but could feel her heart trying to beat out of her chest, had news finally come from the north? “Speak, why do you interrupt a meeting of the ambassadors?”

The man remained kneeling, which was not a good sign. “Heda, riders from Azgeda have arrived. Two of them. They wait for entrance. They claim to have a gift from their queen.”

Every person in the room froze. Lexa felt like she’d been punched in the gut, the air leaving her lungs in a barely controlled wheeze. Her familiar mask of Heda fell into place, she couldn’t allow anyone to see the fear she felt. “Show them in,” She ordered.

No one moved, barely willing to let themselves breath as the warrior stood and exited to fetch the Azgeda messengers. She snapped her eyes to the Azgeda ambassador whose face had gone white as a sheet. Clearly, he didn’t know what was happening and feared for his life. Rightfully so. Titus shifted. “Heda?”

She snapped her hand up. “Silence Titus.”
The man fell quiet for once as they waited. Charlotte was barely holding it together Lexa noticed, her guards were all tight, ready to move at a moment's notice. Gifts from Azgeda did not often end well. After what felt like hours but was likely only minutes, two warriors approached with a box slung between them. As soon as they entered, Lexa’s eyes had been drawn to the box they held and she barely even noticed the presence of the messengers.

Lexa sucked in a harsh breath as she got a closer glimpse of the box. She knew what was in that box. The dried blood soaked into the wood at the bottom was a clear indicator of what was inside. She’d received a box just like this one once before and the memory of that day still haunted her. Standing, she felt herself acting automatically, unable to think properly due to the dread and horror in her gut. “What is the meaning of this?”

The slightly taller of the two warriors spoke but Lexa’s eyes never left the box. “A gift from the queen of Azgeda, Heda.” The warrior turned to their fellow and then pulled the metal lock on the box, allowing the front panel to drop. A head rolled out of the box, hitting the ground with a sick thump.

Lexa couldn’t help it, her eyes focused onto it instantly. The blonde hair made her want to retch till she saw the face. The eyes had been gouged out, the ears cut off, and the mouth sewn shut but it was still obvious to her that this was not Klark. Stepping down from the dais her throne was on, she reached down grabbing the head by the hair and raised it to her own level staring at it. “Queen Nia is dead.” She stared at the head for a moment before returning her attention to the Azgeda warriors, her heart warmed by the sight of the familiar blue that she now realized they wore. “Long live Queen Klark kom Azgeda, may her reign be blessed by the Spirits.”

Works inspired by this one

*Take Me From War and Set Me Free* by DustyPath

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!