**Second Chances**

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**Second Chances**

by LadyLozz97

**Summary**

It has been a year and a half since Clarke walked away from her people, and things have changed drastically for the girl who fell from the sky. She has found love and lost it. Endured pain and tragedy and overcome it. She has even started a little family of her own. But amongst all of her growth and change, one truth remains unchanging. She is unable to escape Lexa, she is inevitable to Clarke, the only constant in her life that she cannot outrun. Despite her valiant effort to do so.

War is brewing in the shadows. A ruler hungry for power and adept in the use of tyranny to achieve her ends, is stirring impatiently. Will Lexa and Clarke be willing and able to set aside their feelings and the ghosts that plague them, to unite under a single cause? Or will their bloodied history simply be too much to overlook in the coming conflict?
Both women are on a collision course with each other, like two magnets drawn inexplicably
together. But what will happen when impact finally occurs? Will passions rise or will hearts
crumble?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
It had been one year, and six months since Clarke left her people. Since she killed hundreds and ran, as if she could outrun what she did on that mountain. She knew that the guilt would eat her alive if she stayed with the people she cared for, and she also knew that she wasn’t prepared to fight it. She was too tired and too scared to face what she did and the people she did it for. So she ran, as far and as hard as she could.

Clarke trudged through the muddy snow quietly, her footfalls silent against the cold, wet forest floor. Winter was finally coming to an end and the biting cold was slowly beginning to dissipate, as the days grew longer and the sun warmed the earth. The steady pressure of the bundle strapped to her chest, soothing the nerves about what she is preparing to do. She peered down at the little head of tight red curls to make sure she was still sleeping. Sure enough, her chubby cheeks were squished up against her sleeping head, rested between the valley of Clarke’s breasts, her ear pressed firmly above Clarke’s heartbeat, a steady stream of dribble sliding from her daughter’s pursed pink lips and soaking into Clarke’s tunic, her long eyelashes dusting the tops of her cheeks as she dreamed peacefully. Reassured that her baby would sleep for a while longer without needing to stop for a feed, Clarke picked up her pace, trying to cover as much ground as possible before a very cranky six month old began demanding her breakfast.

Clarke’s footfalls were completely silent, but her clothes rustled with the hastened movements of her body, Clarke’s eyes quickly darting from tree top to tree top, searching for any possible threats, knowing that she would have to put up a fight if she discovered anyone lurking in the canopy above her, the weight of her sword and quiver of arrows strapped to her back and the sturdy bow in her hand reminding her to stay sharp. Her grip on the bow tightened when Clarke heard a rustling in the trees to her right. With lightning speed and fluid movements, so not to wake the baby, she darted behind a large tree, drawing an arrow from the quiver and preparing to kill anything that posed a danger to herself and the warm little body harnessed on her chest.

Clarke peered around the tree trunk gingerly, the melting snow soaking into the knees of her black fur pants. She scanned the treetops for the source of the noise she detected moments ago, spying a large brown bird eating bugs from leaves in the tree 100 metres from her hiding place. Notching the arrow on the bow, she took aim, released a slow, calculated breath and let loose the taught string, feeling the cold burn on her fingers as the string grazed the freezing tips. The arrow found a home in the eye of the bird, just as Clarke had intended, the lifeless body dropping into the snow with a soft thump. Clarke picked herself up off of the cold ground, attempting to brush off the icy wetness that had seeped into her pants to no avail. Clarke silently admonished herself for crouching in the sludge instead of standing. Now she would have to spend the rest of the day trudging through the forest in cold wet pants, she let out a quiet growl of annoyance as she made her way over to the felled bird. ‘At least I won’t need to go hunting today,’ Clarke thought to herself.

Pulling the arrow from the bird and removing some rope strapped to her thigh, Clarke tied the feet of the bird together and slung it over her shoulder, resuming her journey through the forest once again.

The rest of the morning passed by without further incident, leaving Clarke alone with her thoughts. Which was often a dangerous way for her to pass the time, allowing her haunted history the perfect opportunity to creep back into the forefront of her mind. She recalled the mountain and the sound of the drill piercing her mother’s thigh as she was strapped to the gurney. She remembered the pained scream of Raven as her already broken body was bitten into and torn apart by the unrelenting drill. Clarke felt bile burn the back of her throat. She promptly forced the acrid liquid down again.
She thought of the anguished expressions of Bellamy and Monty as the lever was pulled, and the agonised screams as four hundred people’s skin bubbled and burned as radiation feasted on their bodies. The burn of bile intensified and she shook the image from her mind. Finally she thought of the days following her abandonment of Camp Jaha, how her mother must have cried herself to sleep every night in the absence of her daughter, not knowing if she was alive or dead or somewhere in between. Clarke had never thought about how broken her mother must have felt, until she had her own child to love and protect. Clarke shuddered to imagine her own daughter emulating her actions and behaviour. She abruptly shed the fear that gripped her.

Clarke continued her reminiscing thoughts. She thought of Raven, Octavia, Bellamy, Monty and even Jasper. The fleeting moments of happiness with them that she had experienced and the instances of heartache they had shared. Her friends, her family. Clarke thought of how she had abandoned them, guilt niggling at her heart. Clarke was pulled from her spiralling thoughts as the little body strapped to her chest stirred, Grace’s mouth stretching into a tired little yawn, her breath misting in the chilly air, her rounded fist rubbing at her eyes, as she attempted to brush away her drowsiness and her tiny features pulling into a frown as she began getting cranky.

“It’s about time you woke up, little miss.” Clarke cooed down at her daughter. It was late morning, nearly noon, and Clarke was surprised that Grace had remained asleep for so long. Clarke pulled the satchel from her shoulder and proceeded to pull out a thick fur to lay at the base of a reasonably dry tree. She brushed the snow from the trunk and set the fur down. Clarke quickly scanned the treetops again for any signs of danger and began the practiced movements of removing her weapons, followed by her jacket and the bird carcass, and then began untangling the bindings that secured her precious cargo.

Just as the bindings were loosened, Grace began to cry, awake enough now to realise she was hungry and very upset, the child’s face quickly reddening as her distress grew. Clarke lowered herself onto the fur by the tree to avoid further wetting her pants. Making herself comfortable, she untied the strings of her tunic and released her breast, her skin pimpling under the frigid touch of cold air. Clarke removed the dagger from her hip and put it within arm’s reach in case of a threat. Cradling her daughter on her side just below her breast, Grace’s tears immediately stopped and the anguished expression transformed into a cheeky toothless grin as the baby realised she was getting exactly what she craved, her arms and legs kicking out with excitement. Clarke’s face cracked into a smile as she laughed at her daughter’s antics.

Positioning the child’s head above her nipple, Grace latched on and began to greedily suckle at Clarke’s breast. Clarke smiled down at the bright blue eyes that were a carbon-copy of her own, Clarke’s fingers sifting through the soft red curls around the sides of her daughter’s head, the colour so similar to that of her child’s father. Despite the pain that bloomed in her chest to remember him, Clarke was glad that their daughter inherited his fiery head of hair. At least this way she would never forget him. The child at her breast sighed contentedly as she continued feeding, her chubby little fingers entwining themselves in Clarke’s braids, pulling gently.

Clarke grabbed some dried meat from the satchel and began to slowly chew as her daughter continued to drink. Clarke dutifully scanned the tree tops as they sat shrouded in silence, the occasional bird cawing in the distance to remind her that they were in fact alone.

By the time Grace had drunk her fill, her lids were beginning to droop again as sleep overcame her. Having slept until noon, Clarke knew her daughter would be full of life and energy for the remainder of the day. Clarke knew that she should wake her so they could continue their journey, but she couldn’t bring herself to disrupt the peaceful, relaxed expression adorning her daughter’s face in sleep. She resigned herself to 5 more minutes before rousing Grace. Reluctantly, she made the decision to continue on her journey, determining that they were no more than a few hours away from their
destination and that the Trikru territory they were currently travelling through was a fairly peaceful area, and even if Grace were to make lots of noise, it was unlikely to attract attention. The only people likely to be near were hunting parties in the trees, waiting for unsuspecting animals to pass beneath them. And Clarke felt reassured of their safety, knowing that she would be able to spy them just as they spotted her. Besides, no one would feel threatened by a young mother and an infant.

So with effort, Clarke lifted the still snoozing form of her daughter and strapped her back onto her chest, securing the bindings firmly around her chest and waist to support the weight of the tiny girl. Clarke shrugged her fur jacket on again, eager to recover some of the warmth lost from baring her chest to feed Grace. She pulled the big fur jacket around both her and Grace’s body, to both keep them warm and conceal her little bundle. She quickly secured her weapons to her back and packed the slightly damp fur back into the satchel on her shoulder. Grace began to wake again as Clarke set off onto their journey once more.

Content now that her belly was full, Grace snuggled into Clarke’s chest and proceeded to suck on her fist, the gentle sway of Clarke walking soothing the infant. After all, it was a motion the child was incredibly familiar with. Grace remained wide-eyed and alert to her surroundings as they walked, however she was quite happy where she was, not cracking a fuss for most of the afternoon. Clarke kept a steady but swift pace as they covered more ground, never seeing a soul as they gradually drew closer to their destination.

The closer they ventured, the more on edge Clarke grew, the nerves beginning to make their presence known and curling into a tight coil in her chest, making it hard to breathe, the anxiety squeezing her heart, ready to overcome her. Clarke clutched at Grace’s little form in an effort to calm herself, repeating in her mind the promise she made to Kadeon before the last of his life’s blood flowed from his abdomen. ‘I promise to go back. I promise to go to a place where we will both be safe and loved. I promise.’

Clarke repeated the words in her mind like a mantra. Determined to fulfil her friend and lover’s last dying wish, Clarke pressed on despite her growing anxiety. Kadeon wanted her to find peace and happiness, for her and their daughter. Deep down, Clarke knew the only way to accomplish those things was to stop running from her past and to finally face it. She knew that as Wanheda, she would never find any other place where people might accept her, in spite of the death and destruction she had caused.

For the past year and six months, she would settle in a new place, begin to find contentment in her life and then have it ripped from her whenever the villagers discovered who she was. Every time she became satisfied in a new place, someone would put the pieces together and send word to the Commander. Clarke would then be forced to vacate before the bitch showed her face, forced to run yet again, the process repeating itself in an infuriating loop.

Eventually this happened so many times that Wanheda visiting in a village became common folk law, the legend adapted and people began to believe that it was in fact Wanheda’s ghost wandering their villages, and that the girl herself had taken her own life. Foolishly believing that being death incarnate, her final act of strength and power would be to command her own death, giving her infinite power, which allowed her to wander the world as a ghost, unable to be killed by common men.

The first time Clarke had heard the legend, she had burst into hysterical fits of laughter. The first time she heard these rumours, she had admittedly been overly hormonal as she was in the middle stages of pregnancy. She had laughed until she had cried, tears and snot running down her face as she laughed and sobbed uncontrollably. She had comically questioned a very confused Kadeon how death could
create life as she had pointed to her growing bump. He had been unsure as to what to say, he just shrugged his shoulders and scratched his head, obviously uncomfortable with Clarke’s bizarre behaviour. Admittedly, they didn’t know each other very well at the time.

She had felt troubled that those she cared about might think she was dead but a hint of sadistic joy also pulsed in her veins as she imagined Lexa learning of her demise. She hoped that the thought created an empty black void in her heart that matched the one her betrayal had created within Clarke. Clarke knew that Lexa would feel justified in what she did on the mountain, she knew the girl well enough to recognise her self-righteous direction of thought. However she was neither willing, nor ready to listen to Lexa validate her choices, the bitterness in her soul preventing her from feeling any understanding or forgiveness for the young grounder leader. Clarke wanted nothing to do with Lexa and her world. She was happy to forget all about her and what she did. The hurt of her betrayal still lingered, but it had transformed into bitterness with time. That bitterness had seeped into her bones and become part of her, and Clarke knew that it would never truly go away. And in some darkened recess of her mind, Clarke knew that she didn't want it to.

Grace began to squirm in her makeshift seat, seeming to sense her mother’s dark musings. Clark snuggled the small child closer to her chest and Grace began to suck on her fist again, sending dribble down her arm. Clarke marvelled at how pure and innocent her beautiful baby daughter was. That someone so small could make her feel so whole and content with her life. She hoped that Grace continued to have that effect on her when she grew older and more opinionated. Clarke sighed, the tsunami of emotions inside of her growing larger and more powerful as she drew closer still to her destination, threatening to drown her.

There was a large, upraised hill in the distance that Clarke decided they would climb in an attempt to get a more accurate reading of their location, since climbing a tree was out of the question with Grace strapped to her front. Clarke began working her way up the hill. Although it wasn’t a steep ascent, her calves still burned with the extra exertion and strain. The trees thinned out as she reached the top, allowing her to spy out over the top of the canopy of trees below her. Clarke heaved as she tried to catch her breath, her lungs burning from the quick pace she had set and the extra energy it took to climb the hill. Clarke rested her hands over her head as her lungs screamed for oxygen. Clarke reached for her water skin after her breaths became more steady, taking a large mouthful, enjoying the soothing cold as it calmed the fire in her throat.

Clarke looked out over the expanse of green. Far to the south, she could see a break in the tree line, where she knew Ton DC lay. And, to the east, she could see the metallic glint of a structure soaking in the late afternoon sun, the dome of Mecha station twisting out of the clearing hidden by trees, part of the Ark that was once her home. It had a kind of haunting beauty, Clarke surmised. It was an eye saw in some ways, but in others it held an aspect of poise and elegance, a perfect mausoleum of the old world.

Judging by the distance, Clarke had a two hour walk until she would be standing before the gates of Camp Jaha, but she decided there was not enough daylight to arrive before dark. She spared a thought for Anya, the woman who was willing to help her long ago, but died before she could fulfil their bargain, who fell victim to Skaikru bullets, because of a combination of obscuring darkness, her grounder attire and the prejudices of her people. A shiver went down Clarke’s spine as she recalled the blood, so much blood, pouring in torrents from Anya’s chest, the scar marking her own shoulder a reminder that her people had opened fire on her also plaguing Clarke's thoughts. The fact that they had adopted a ‘shoot first, ask questions later’ mentality still sent a chilled shiver down Clarke’s spine. Clarke was not prepared to recreate that situation now, she refused to put Grace’s life at risk like that, unwilling to gamble with the knowledge that her people might have grown in the period of her absence, and expanded their limited perspective on grounders. She knew they would be safer spending another night in the woods, rather than hoping that the men with guns behind the walls of
Camp Jaha recognised her and granted her safe passage into their stronghold.

Committed to her decision, Clarke searched the expanse of the hill, hoping to get lucky and find a cave of some sort to camp in for the night. She spied a rocky area facing higher up the hill. Clarke began to slowly make her way towards it, keen to sit and sleep. Making her way closer, Clarke found a closely formed henge of sorts, where the rocks formed a protective circular barrier around a natural dip in the stone. The hollow was about two metres in diameter, large enough for Grace and herself to rest comfortably and enough space for a fire. The formation of the henge would conceal the light of a fire, making it safe to sleep with the extra warmth the flames would provide without fear of being spotted. Luckily enough, the snow seemed to have been mostly melted here as well, as it received more sunlight and warmth than the forest floor. Clarke was happy to have found somewhere dry to spend the night.

Clarke removed the bird carcass from earlier that day, the sword strapped to her back and the satchel at her side, stretching her stiff limbs now that they were free of extra weight. Clarke left their makeshift camp with only her bow, quiver of arrows, and the dagger at her thigh for protection, and began searching for reasonably dry fire wood and kindling. Clarke was lucky to find a few pieces of dry wood and kindling and some larger logs, she collected a few that were slightly damp, knowing that if the fire became hot enough they would also burn without issue. Clarke carefully made her way back to camp, keeping a sharp eye and ear out for any danger, and cautious not to trip on anything underfoot while her arms were full and Grace was still strapped to her front.

Arriving back at the henge safely, Clarke set the wood down near the tallest face of the rock and turned towards the satchel on the ground. Clarke pulled out the fur and set it on the hard stone, she also pulled out two fist sized rocks to start the fire. Clarke stood and began untangling the bindings holding Grace in place. Clarke knew that she needed to start the fire quickly before Grace got hungry again. Lifting the tiny girl from her chest, she brought her daughter up to her face and buried her face in the little girl’s neck, giving her kisses up to the side of her face, making Grace smile happily, her daddy’s dimples burrowing into her chubby cheeks.

Clarke set her baby down on the fur, flat on her tummy. Clarke remembered Kadeon telling her how he had read in an old world book that it helps make the baby’s muscles grow strong. Clarke had feigned ignorance, telling him she had had no idea, just wanting to watch his face grow into the broad smile that she loved so much as he enthusiastically went into detail about the book he had read. Kadeon himself had been a contradiction. He had been an Azgeda assassin many years ago, trained in the art of death. And he too had been haunted by his misdeeds, just as Clarke had been. He could be cold and calculating, brutal and swift, and above all, emotionless when it came to killing. He was able to take life as easily and effortlessly as drawing breath. Throughout the land of Azgeda and even further, he was also a legend, he was called Natmitta, or Black Mercy. However he was also warm and kind. He had a love for books and knowledge. He yearned to care for and protect those around him. When he found out he was to be a father again, he had cried tears of joy, thanking Clarke for giving him this gift. Pulling herself from the memory, Clarke left Grace on the furs and set about making a fire. After striking the rocks against one another next the kindling, the sparks finally latched onto the dried wood and became consumed as the fire took root. As the fire began to grow in strength, Clarke began putting slightly larger pieces of wood on top of the small flames. Clarke then went about plucking the bird from this morning and gutting it, cleaning the animal for dinner with practiced motions. By the time the bird was ready to be cooked, and the makeshift pit was hot enough, Grace began crying, wanting her dinner too.

Clarke quickly stabbed a long stick through the middle of the bird and bent over to retrieve her daughter from the furs. Grace’s wails slowed a little once she was picked up but didn’t truly stop until Clarke had sat down near the fire, freed her breast and offered it to Grace’s expectant mouth. The baby latched on ruthlessly, aggressively sucking on Clarke’s nipple, devouring every drop of
sustenance offered to her. Clarke winced, wishing Grace would quickly learn the virtue of patience.

Resigning herself to a rather painful feed, Clarke gingerly sat back against the rock and held out the stick with the bird over the heat of the fire, slowly cooking her dinner. By the time the bird’s meat was firm and white, Grace had long since finished her feed - much to Clarke’s relief - and had fallen asleep in her arms, still latched onto Clarke’s nipple, suckling occasionally to soothe her deeper into sleep. Clarke rose slowly from the ground, her movements sluggish and fluid at the same time, trying not to wake her snoozing daughter. Clarke gently placed a finger in Grace’s mouth to break the suction from her breast and lowered the soundly sleeping child onto the furs for bed. Lacing up her tunic, Clarke went back to her spot by the fire and ate half of the bird.

She knew that she was hungry, starving even. However the thought of seeing her mother tomorrow and every other person she had abandoned had given her an anxious belly, her body refusing to hold very much without feeling the urge to throw up and share her stomach contents with the earth. Clarke decided not to push her luck. Instead she put the other half of the bird in the satchel for breakfast. Placing a large log onto the fire that would burn throughout the night, Clarke looked over the sleeping form of her daughter, adjusting her tiny fur clothing where it had ridden up over her belly while she slept. Clarke laid herself down next to her daughter’s motionless body, tucking her up against the warmth of her stomach protectively. Clarke placed the dagger and sword just above her head and settled down for sleep. Using her arm as a pillow, Clarke rested her head down and watched the steady rise and fall of Grace’s chest, letting the sound of her breathing lull her to sleep.
Clarke awoke the next morning at dawn, to the subtle pinking of the sky as the sun began its slow ascent over earth. She had only been woken by Grace once through the night, much to Clarke’s relief. One diaper change and a feed later and her little bundle was sleeping soundly again, followed swiftly by Clarke. She didn’t dream last night, much to her surprise and relief. In the first eight months after the mountain fell, Clarke had fallen victim to nightmares, they would wake her from her sleep, swimming in sweat and her voice raw from screaming. They only began to disappear when Kadeon would gather her in his strong arms and hug her tightly to his warm, muscled chest. His embraces made her feel safe and loved and protected, even in her dreams, which allowed her to sleep in peace. Kadeon would often struggle with his own nightmares, the faces of those he had killed haunting his slumber. At first, he would not allow Clarke to see him that way, did not want to appear weak and frightened in front of Wanheda. Not until he discovered that she too suffered the affliction, would he allow her to hold him and comfort him also. With time, and as the familiarity between them grew, the nightmares slowly went away. Their minds began to heal each other and soothe the pain that constantly sat on their chests, suffocating them both.

Clarke rubbed the sleep from her eyes and checked over Grace as she slept, bundled snugly in her furs, her little breaths still slow and even, deep with sleep. Clarke scanned the area for any threats. Finding none, she ducked behind one of the rocks to relieve herself, close enough to Grace that she could reach her if something happened but far enough away that she wasn’t fouling their camp. Clarke stretched her aching body, sore from the exertion of travel over the past few days and sleeping on the hard ground. Clarke pulled the left-over bird from dinner out of her satchel and ate quietly, drinking deeply from her water skin when she was finished. Clarke kicked out the remaining fire, and decided to keep moving.

Deciding against waking her to feed, despite the heaviness she could feel settling in her breasts, Clarke prepared the bindings for Grace’s harness. Making her way over to the furs, Clarke gently lifted Grace up and held her closely to her body, wrapping the material around her sleeping daughter to hold her in place. Clarke shrugged on her jacket and weapons, rolled up the fur and picked up her now full satchel, preparing to finish the final stretch of her journey. Her legs were sluggish, not wanting to move as she slowly dragged her feet towards Camp Jaha. A million questions, thoughts and feelings, fighting for dominance in her head. She only held onto one the entire time. ‘I promise to go back. I promise to go to a place where we will both be safe and loved. I promise.’

Clarke continued her journey, regardless of the gnawing anxiety swirling through her stomach. Her body felt like it was weighed down by lead as she slowly dragged her feet towards Camp Jaha. A million questions, thoughts and feelings, fighting for dominance in her head. She only held onto one the entire time. ‘I’m doing this for Kadeon. He wanted this for us. I’m doing this for him. I promised.’ Clarke’s mind felt like a battlefield. It was becoming harder to concentrate on anything besides the thoughts searing her mind.

Clarke clutched tightly to Grace, hoping that her daughter would ground her, give her the strength and the courage she needed to do this. She was sure that the child would wake from the strength of her embrace, but she didn’t, her face slack and relaxed with sleep. Her cheeks a rosy red colour from the frigid morning, her soft auburn curls shifting in the morning breeze. After a while of just holding Grace, Clarke felt her tension begin to calm, her mind beginning to quiet from the chaotic symphony
that had been screeching at her for attention. Her feet started to move more freely, newly content with the decision to return to Camp Jaha than they had been moments ago, her baby daughter seeming to have the power to relax her. Clarke was grateful, she never would have returned had it not been for the sleeping baby strapped to her chest.

Finally the forest began to thin, an open clearing becoming visible in the distance, erected blue and red metal created a towering border around Camp Jaha. From the snippets Clarke had already seen of the camp, it had already changed so much. Evolved even. The electric fence had been replaced with a much bigger metal wall surrounding the grounds of the camp, which seemed to have also grown in size. Clarke knew she shouldn’t have expected it to stay the same. She had left a year and a half ago. Of course things were going to have changed. But Clarke felt a twinge of sadness all the same, dejected that everyone had moved on and lived their lives without her. ‘You chose to leave,’ Clarke told herself, ‘besides, you have done the exact same thing as them. You went and learnt how to fight, fell in love, made a home for yourself and then had a baby. You don’t get to be upset about that, Clarke.’ Clarke pulled herself together. Two hundred metres in front of her lay her destination. The place she had spent the past 5 days travelling towards. It was now or never. Clarke straightened her jacket and pulled it further around herself and Grace, concealing the baby in the soft fur of her jacket. Kissing the baby’s head, she steeled herself and called to mind every last piece of courage she could muster. ‘You can do this,’ she told herself.

Clarke tried to make certain that her stride was long and purposeful, confident even, regardless of the fact that she felt like the earth was shifting beneath her feet. Her hands shook, so she gripped her bow tighter to calm them, each step bringing her closer to the people that she had once loved and left. One foot in front of the other until she came out of the tree line and was faced with the entirety of Camp Jaha.

Clarke could hear authoritative yells, as the guards announced her presence to the camp, trying not to flinch when she heard the word ‘grounder’ being used with poorly disguised wariness, even after all this time. She continued at a steady pace, willing her legs to keep moving. She looked to the gate, and read Arkadia hanging above the entrance in blocky, welded letters. ‘Looks like they’ve got wise and have realised Jaha is a douche,’ Clarke smiled to herself. She continued walking closer to the gate, finding herself trudging on a well-used dirt track that was currently snowy sludge. The voices at the gate grew louder and as more people could be heard. Clarke moved her hand to Grace’s back to centre herself, to focus on anything outside of the heavy thumping of her heart beat in her ears.

Ten metres to go… Five metres… Two… One… until finally she stood before the massive gates as they slowly opened with a burgeoning groan as the metal protested. She stood where she was, seemingly frozen in place, not wanting to presume too much and walk on in. Thinking it was probably better if she waited outside for an invitation. When the gate was opened fully, Clarke was greeted by the wary, sun-kissed faces of the guard. Clarke scanned their faces, searching for anyone familiar, her eyes instantly gravitating to Bellamy, his expression a plastered mask of shock and confusion. A gun gripped in his hand, but thankfully not pointed at her. None of the guns were pointed at her, much to Clarke’s relief, tension slowly slipping from her bunched muscles. Bellamy opened his mouth as if to speak, apparently not trusting himself to do so, he began walking towards Clarke. His footsteps cautious until he stood in front on her. Bellamy’s face remained a picture of shock.

“Hi Bell.” Clark said slowly, seemingly unsure as to whether he would hug her or punch her. Ignore her or speak.

“Clarke,” Bellamy’s voice cracked, “You’re alive,” disbelief colouring his tone. He reached out a hand and touched her shoulder, testing to make sure he was truly seeing Clarke, his friend. He didn’t want this to be yet another dream. Finding her to be corporeal and present, not slipping away as he
woke from his fantasy, Bellamy stepped towards her and wrapped his arms tightly around her.

Clarke repositioned her body at the last minute to avoid squashing Grace and hugged Bellamy back tightly, tears springing from her eyes, relief flooding through her that he was alive and safe and hugging her instead of punching her, as she deserved. Bellamy pulled back after long minutes, seeming to remember where he was, clearing his throat and wiping his face roughly. He turned to the other guards who were regarding the scene with mild confusion, and addressed them.

“Go and find Chancellor Griffin, tell her that there is a visitor for her at the gate.” His tone was firm and brooked no argument. Two guards quickly set off to search for Clarke’s mother, excitement fluttering in her belly.

Bellamy turned to Clarke and gave her a broad smile.

“I’ve missed you, princess.” His tone light and filled with fondness.

“I’ve missed you too, Bell.” Clarke returned the smile. With each passing moment, her anxiety ebbed away, replaced with delight and elation. Two minutes later, the guards returned with a Chancellor Griffin following closely behind. Her eyes distant, lost in thought and trained to the ground. Not seeing Clarke until she was nearly right in front of her.

When Abby finally looked up, her jaw unhinged itself and fell onto the ground. Abby seemed to experience a moment similar to Bellamy, not truly believing what or better yet, who she was seeing. Abby’s brown eyes brimmed with tears. She ran the last few metres separating them and nearly crashed into Clarke’s body, obviously not noticing Grace strapped to her chest. Clarke again shifted at the last minute so that her side caught the impact and not the still sleeping baby.

“Clarke.” Abby breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Abby went to squeeze Clarke to her, but paused when she felt the lump across her chest. She ran the last few metres separating them and nearly crashed into Clarke’s body, obviously not noticing Grace strapped to her chest. Clarke again shifted at the last minute so that her side caught the impact and not the still sleeping baby.

“And who is this?” Abby asked. Her eyebrows raised, eyes still shining with happiness but also with insinuation.

Clarke swallowed thickly. ‘This will be interesting,’ Clarke thought silently.

“This is Grace.” Clarke paused and looked directly into Abby’s eyes, gauging her reaction. “Your granddaughter.” Despite being the mighty Wanheda, Clarke still paused under Abby Griffin’s withering ‘mom glare.’ If she was totally honest, it scared her a little. The intensity of that one glare, rivalled that of any intimidating figure Clarke had ever met.

“I see.” Abby’s gaze wandered over the curly red hair and the chubby cheeks and the delicately pursed lips. “Well, let’s talk about that later. I’m just so happy and relieved to see you.” Abby returned to her previous happy disposition. Abby took the opportunity to appraise her daughter’s appearance, searching for injury, and finding none.

She took note of the intricate braids adorning her daughter’s hair, the black cloth and coloured feathers, woven into the designs. The slight smudge of dirt across her sun-kissed face. She was dressed in the winter furs common to grounders and she had black fur boots on her feet. The bindings holding the child were dark brown, and beneath them she noticed the dark brown tunic, both garments the same colour in an attempt to camouflage the little body strapped to Clarke, she assumed. She wore a thick brown, fawn and grey jacket that looked much too large on her. The tunic
had a low neck, allowing the baby’s head to rest directly on the skin of Clarke’s chest. Abby’s eyes narrowed at the beginning of a scar peeking out of the tunic below her collarbone. She then took in the weapons spread across Clarke’s lithe, muscular body. A sword hilt could be seen through Clarke’s long blonde mane, strapped to one of her shoulders, slung across the other was a quiver of arrows. The bow clearly presented in Clarke’s hand. The metallic gleam of metal could be seen strapped to Clarke’s thigh… a knife of some kind. Clarke looked like a grounder. Gone was the girl she once knew, before her stood a warrior. Abby swallowed the lump in her throat, and moved to grasp Clarke’s arm guiding her through the gates of Arkadia. Guiding her home.

Abby pulled gently at Clarke’s arm, directing her through the gates of Arkadia. Clarke didn’t fight the pull, she allowed herself to be led. A small crowd seemed to have formed around the gates of the settlement, everyone appraising her from a distance. Scarce faces she recognised. She met the curious gazes of a few people. Some regarding her with fear or contempt. There were a few that looked at her with disgust, and then some of admiration and awe. Clarke was struggling to absorb all of that was occurring about her, struggling to comprehend the situation unfurling before her eyes. She felt her heart beat with joy, and unrestrained happiness blooming in her chest. She hadn’t been punched yet, so that was a promising start.

Her mother continued to lead her further into the camp. Clarke continued searching faces for her friends. Leaning against one of the structures, she spied Octavia. The joy in her heart shrivelled slightly when she met the hate-filled glare directed at her. She was dressed similarly to Clarke in Grounder winter ware. But all black in colour. Thick, relaxed braids fell down her shoulders and her eyes were smeared in black war paint. The muscles in her jaw clenching and unclenching with contempt as she regarded Clarke with distrust. Her eyes alight with fiery animosity. Clarke averted her gaze, attempting to quash the feeling of her heart breaking as she realised not all was forgiven.

Clarke continued to follow her mother, Abby’s gaze flicked back multiple times to make sure she was still following despite the firm grip on her hand. Abby led Clarke through a series of corridors and hallways inside Mecha station. She realised with a start that her mother was leading her to medical. Clarke’s mind raced, this wasn’t going to end well. Clarke considered the physical examinations her mother would perform in order to determine her good health and inwardly cringed. Clarke wasn’t ashamed of the scars covering her body. But she knew it would affect her mum. Clarke steeled herself for the questioning gaze she knew she would be met with shortly, and prayed she was not seen differently by the end of it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying to aim for roughly 4,000 words each chapter, but this one is a little shorter guys. Sorry.
I hope you all like it!
When they finally reached medical, Abby immediately snapped at the three medical assistants performing cleaning and paperwork filing tasks. “Please give us a moment everyone.” Abby’s voice was firm and filled with practiced authority. The assistants quickly filed out of the room, equally eager to be putting some distance between themselves and Abby Griffin’s short temper.

“I would like to examine both you and the baby, Clarke. Is that okay?” Abby’s eyes shone with maternal vulnerability.

Clarke recognised it, as she often looked at her own daughter with the same softness. Clarke nodded instead of answering. Finding words had all but escaped her. Clarke took off her jacket first. Watching Abby’s eyes wander curiously over the black ink of a tattoo that ran down her shoulder, Abby’s eyes met Clarke’s gaze and she lifted a questioning brow. Clarke smirked, amused by her mother’s palpable disapproval. Clarke answered the unasked question. “I got it when Grace was born and I became involved with Grace’s father. It signifies new beginnings. Second Chances. We both got tattoos to mark the fresh start.”

Abby listened intently, painfully curious about her daughter’s time spent away, but scared to ask and be denied an answer. She nodded her head in understanding. Unable to stifle her curiosity completely, she asked the next obvious question. “Who is he?” Abby prodded. Clarke seemed to mull this question over in her mind for a moment before answering. Her face grew guarded as she answered with no trace of emotion in her voice. It was unnerving.

“His name was Kadeon. He was also known as Natmitta by his people, which is trigedasleng for Black Mercy. He was an assassin for Azgeda but now he’s dead.” Clarke bit down on the emotion that threatened to bubble over, stripping her face of all feeling just as Kadeon had taught her to. Just as she had seen Lexa do a million times before. Clarke pushed away the reminder of the green-eyed girl violently. And returned her attention to gauging her mother’s reaction with baited curiosity, prepared to become defensive if the situation demanded. Clarke watched intently as a series of expressions flitted across Abby’s face as she processed this information. Shock, caution, fear and then pity. The last emotion confused Clarke, she was ready to hear her mother scream at her for being a naïve child and making poor life choices, but instead she quietly placed her hand on Clarke’s own and squeezed, offering her daughter silent comfort.

“I’m sorry you lost him, Clarke. How long ago did he pass?” She questioned softly. Imploring Clarke to continue.

“He died a month ago. He was killed by Azgeda assassins sent by Queen Nia. A sword to the stomach. It severed his spine and he bled out in front of us.” Clarke shivered at the memory and absentmindedly shifted her free hand to touch the infant still strapped to her chest. Her eyes filled with tears as she relived the moment in her own head. Quickly wiping her eyes of the offending wetness, Clarke gently squeezed her mother’s hand in return. A small smile touching her lips as she silently accepted her mother’s comfort.

“I’m sorry that you experienced that, Clarke.” Abby stated solemnly. The situation reminded her of the husband she had lost, and the role she played in his demise. Suddenly wishing for a subject change, Abby gestured to Grace’s shock of red curly hair. “So I assume my grandbaby inherited her fiery head of hair from her dad?” Abby smiled.
Clarke laughed quietly. “Yes she did. She also got his dimples. Everything else is me though, I think. However, I hope the curls stay to a minimum. Kade’s dad had a red afro apparently. I don’t think I could manage that much hair.” Clarke laughed again, louder this time. Shedding the melancholy that had seized her.

Abby laughed along with her daughter, grinning fondly at her as Clarke regarded the child sleeping on her chest with unrestrained adoration and love. Abby’s heart filled with pride.

“So do you want to start with me or Grace? If you start with her, I’m going to have to feed her first, she’ll be very uncooperative if I don’t.” Clarke smiled, surveying her mother’s response. At the reminder that Grace was yet to have her breakfast, she paid attention to the heaviness and almost pained, full feeling of her breasts that were filled with milk. She knew there would be a mess soon if she didn’t resolve the situation.

“Well why don’t you get started with feeding her and I will collect the equipment that we will need.” Abby began walking to the other side of the room, attempting to offer her daughter some privacy, whilst also separating herself from the discomfort that the situation evoked.

Clarke watched her mother walk away stiffly, obviously uncomfortable about watching her breastfeed. Clarke sighed to herself. The grounders viewed breastfeeding as natural and normal, the Arkers still apparently saw it as nudity. She quashed down the feeling of annoyance as she considered the fact that she might have to carry a blanket with her to cover her breasts if she chose to stay with the Arkers.

Clarke began untying the bindings that held Grace to her chest, knowing that in about two minutes her daughter was going to become a red-faced monster, demanding her food. As the bindings fell away, Clarke held Grace close to her body, careful not to put too much pressure on her pained chest. She felt Grace begin to stir, rubbing her little fists into her eyes and scrunching her face into a sleepy scowl. Before Grace had the chance to begin howling, Clarke had positioned her baby in the crook of her arm and untied her tunic, slipping free the breast with the most pain, she positioned it in Grace’s mouth. Grace began feeding gently, still not alert enough yet to suckle more aggressively as she had last night. For that, Clarke was grateful.

As she felt the pressure released by her daughter’s steady pulls, Clarke let out a sigh of relief. She saw Abby give her a quick sideways glance as she observed the scene from the other side of the room. When Abby realised she had been caught, she busied herself once more. Clarke smirked, finding her mother’s reaction beyond ridiculous. Ignoring it, she brought her attention back to her daughter. When her daughter was halfway through her feed, Clarke decided to switch sides, unable to bear the pressure in her second breast. She broke Grace’s suction with her finger and repositioned her. Grace’s eyes darted around trying to find where her prize had disappeared to. Her face reddening as she prepared to cry for her loss. She only managed to release a few whimpers before the fuller breast was presented to her. She attacked the nipple with fervour, like she was afraid it would disappear again.

Clarke winced as Grace aggressively suckled, however relief quickly followed the pain as the pressure was again released. Grace slowed her gulps at the end of her feed, finally growing full. She stared up at Clarke with big blue eyes, fingers gripping a braid of her mother’s hair. Clarke smiled down at her beautiful daughter and felt her heart swell as it did every time she looked into her innocent little face. Clarke ran her hand affectionately over Grace’s delicate curls and over the curves of her face. Grace’s eyes fluttered closed as she sank into the touch. Kadeon used to run patterns over Grace’s skin as a newborn to get her to sleep. She would fight slumber unless she was being touched. Kade would sit with Grace on his lap and run circles down her arms and cheeks until she drifted off to sleep. Clarke loved how gentle he had been with Grace, always making time to hold
her and be around her. If he was feeling particularly loving he would sometimes sing to Grace and herself as they both drifted to sleep at nights. Clarke’s eyes burned again as she remembered her gentle assassin.

Clarke stopped the calming patterns over Grace’s soft skin to break the suction between Grace and her breast. Grace’s eyes immediately darted open wondering where her breakfast went for the second time today. Clarke laughed at her daughter’s dazed expression. Confident that Grace wouldn’t begin crying as soon as she was set down, Clarke called her mother over as she re-tied her tunic.

“So, we might start with Grace now that she’s awake and has a full belly.” Abby stated, slipping into doctor mode. She knelt down to where Grace sat in Clarkes lap, and stared into the baby’s beautiful blue eyes, as the infant happily sucked on her fist. “She’s got your eyes.” Abby stated, smiling at her granddaughter’s chubby little face.

“Yeah.” Clarke agreed quietly. Her mother proceeded to check all of Grace’s vital signs, reflexes, eye acuity, weight and length and then finally took a blood sample that had Grace screaming and clutching at Clarke. Seeing her baby in pain broke Clarke’s heart and she felt her own tears splash across her cheeks, as she tried to soothe her little girl’s pain. Grace finally calmed down when Clarke fed her again, not because she was hungry but because she wanted the comfort. The baby occasionally whimpering as she suckled, telling Clarke about how much she disapproved of doctors and their pointy needles.

Abby again conveniently disappeared when Clarke breastfed her daughter, but Clarke was beyond caring. When Grace finally settled, Clarke pulled her fur out of the satchel and laid it down on a piece of low-traffic floor. Clarke lowered Grace down onto the fur, laying her on her tummy. She dug around the satchel again and pulled out a carved wooden whale that Kadeon had whittled for their daughter. She set the toy down in front of Grace, who reached out clumsily and brought the toy to her gummy mouth to munch on. Convinced that Grace wouldn’t create any further disruptions, Clarke sat back down on the medical gurney and waited for her mother to return. Clarke attempted to prepare herself for the pained expression she knew would adorn her mother’s face as she inspected her scarred body.

When Abby finally returned to the room, she prepared for the examination. Clarke’s demeanour had again visibly shifted as she sat atop the bed and waited for further instruction. Her face was guarded again, almost filled with dread. Abby ignored what she saw and began her exam. Abby took her vital signs, a blood sample and finally asked Clarke to remove her clothing. She was uncomfortable about seeing her daughter bare, and assumed Clarke was also, as she studied the reluctant set of Clarke’s jaw. It was an awkward situation, but a necessary one.

Abby saw it when Clarke puts up an emotional wall, a mask of stoicism slipping into place, and she felt nerves unfurl in her belly. Clarke proceeded to remove her clothes except for her underwear and turned to face Abby. Abby didn’t know how to react to what she saw. Her eyes were drawn to the scar she spied earlier at the gate, that had peeked out from under the top of her tunic, just above her left collar bone. Upon inspecting the rest of the scar, she saw that the pale raised skin travelled from her collarbone down towards her shoulder. A slight downwards curve like someone had tried to remove her head from above but missed at the last, crucial second.

Further down there was another large white scar that ran from the bottom of her sternum to just above her left hip. A slice that would have gutted her daughter had more force been applied. The thought made nauseas swim in Abby’s belly.

There were around 15 smaller scars, from the tips of blades, she assumed that were scattered around Clarke’s chest, stomach and back. Where she had only narrowly caught the sharp points of her
enemy’s weapons.

There was an ugly, jagged scar that ran over her shoulder blade down at a slight angle that ends at the base of her ribs on her back. This scar was uneven and obviously not caused by a blade. Abby wondered what could have inflicted so much damage to her precious daughter, and realised she likely would not like the answer. So she decided never to ask about the scar’s origin.

Further down, Abby saw two circular scars that run directly through Clarke’s right thigh, upraised scars that speared straight through the heavy muscle of Clarke’s thigh, only centimetres apart. These must have been caused by arrows. Or perhaps even bullets.

There were other smaller scars on her legs also but not as noticeable as the others.

Abby noticed that besides the scars, Clarke’s body had changed in other ways as well. There were faint stretch marks above her hips where her body had accommodated the growth of Clarke’s child.

Her muscles were toned and defined from dedicated use. While her body was still soft and feminine, she had a hardness about her, her body showing the tell-tale signs of adept weapon wielding, and preparation for a fight. Her body looked strong and imposing. Abby turned her attention back to Clarke’s scars, running her fingertips over the jagged scar on her back. Clarke shivered at the touch.

When Abby finally spoke, her voice was unsteady, laced with uncertainty.

“Do you have any pain?” Abby’s voice was soft and timid, barely audible as she imagined the agony Clarke must have experienced with each injury.

“No. They are all fairly old.” Clarke turned to face her mother, studying her expression with caution. She gestured to the scar that ran across her abdomen. “This one is the newest, but it is about five months old. I got it not long after Grace was born.” Clarke explained.

“How did you receive it?” Abby asked, dreading the answer but already having her suspicions.

Clarke paused a moment, considering her answer. “Queen Nia sent assassins after Kadeon. I refused to leave him despite how dangerous it was. I had limited skill in fighting but did my best with what I had and when they came, we protected each other.” Clarke stated, observing the anger in her mother’s eyes, Clarke knew she should have worded that differently.

“So you could stay with a man that you barely know, who had done terrible things. You could protect and fight for him, but you couldn’t stay with your family, your friends. People that would do anything for you. You could abandon your people but you refused to leave one man. One man, someone who if you stayed with them, you would certainly die! What is wrong with you Clarke?!” Abby’s voice rising into a piercing shrill with every word. A year and a half’s worth of anger and frustration pouring out all at once.

Hot tears streaked down Abby’s face and Clarke’s heart broke. She winced at the words but she had expected them at some point. A heavy silence settled in the room, pregnant with tension. Clarke began putting her clothes on again. When Clarke finally spoke, her voice was soft and unsure, resigned to sharing her story.

“I’m sorry, mum. I left because I couldn’t face what I had done on the mountain. The weight of my guilt was crushing me, I couldn’t breathe. I had no energy left to fight it. Not after what I did to Finn, and all the grounders I killed at the drop ship. The mountain…it… it broke me. I didn’t have the strength to fight it and see the faces of the people I had committed genocide to save. I couldn’t do both at once. So I chose the easiest way out that I could find. The only option that might bring me some peace, with time.” Clarke paused, unsure if she should continue. Abby gave a small nod to
encourage her to resume her account.

“I had been on my own for about 3 months, finding comfort in the beds of strangers for a night and being gone by the time they woke. Anything to numb my mind, to make me forget even for a minute… When I met Kadeon, he was running from his past the same as me, and coping about just as well.” Clarke’s small smile was sad, and wavered around the edges.

“He had been forced to kill for a woman who was dead and void of emotion inside. Who took pleasure in making people suffer. Kade had been a very skilled warrior before Nia turned him into her own personal killer. He had a wife and son before he met me… Queen Nia kidnapped them to make him compliant and force Kade into servitude. She trained him to kill without mercy or thought, and eventually he became known as Natmita, or Black Mercy by the people of Azgeda. He was called that for the black clothes and hood he wore to conceal his identity when he sought out his targets. People also said that he was called black for the tar-like colour of his soul. He inherited the Mercy part of his name, from the people, as his victim’s final words were often pleas for mercy. But being controlled as he was, he was unable to give it to them as much as he might have wished to. One day he attempted to retrieve his family from the clutches of Nia, however he was not fast enough. Nia slit their throats in front of him and then turned to kill him also, but he managed to fight his way out and escape with his life.” Clarke’s blood felt hot under her skin as she felt the familiar anger bubble to life.

Clarke grit her teeth. “So by the time I met him, we were both looking for an outlet. Both running from a past that was eager to catch up to us and an irreparably ingrained part of who we were. So we found oblivion in each other for the night and went our separate ways in the morning. With no intention of seeing each other again. Two months later, I realised I was pregnant. I knew that he was the father, so I hunted him down. Don’t ask me how I managed to find him, I still don’t even know. Luck, perhaps? Anyhow, I followed him for a few days trying to decide if he was someone that I wanted near a child of mine. I contemplated whether I should tell him at all, finally I decided against it. Figuring that he was broken, and cold and distant and in no way ready or prepared to be a father. Not a good one at least. So I went to leave him the next morning after a week of trailing him. When I finally decided on keeping my news to myself, he cornered me, put a blade to my throat and asked me why I had been following him for seven days. At first, I was shocked that he had known I was there the whole time and had said nothing. But eventually when I learnt his story it made sense. He had known I wasn’t an assassin. He called me a noisy child crashing through the forest, and decided that I was no threat. Out of curiosity, he let me keep following him.”

“Then he tied me up, and dragged me along with him as he made his way to an exile village called Rheuna. I stayed silent the entire seven days. Barely sleeping or eating because I didn’t want to rely on someone I didn’t trust, plus I had morning sickness pretty much every day, and was far too stubborn to simply tell him of my condition.” Clarke wrinkled her nose at the memory.

“Eventually when we arrived in Rheuna, he settled into life there quite easily and slowly began to trust me even though we didn’t form any kind of friendship or bond. He eventually found out I was pregnant when I was through my fourth month of pregnancy, and the village healer caught me throwing up. She demanded that she examine me, discovered my condition, and informed Kadeon to care for me because I was pregnant. When he finally found out, he connected the dots and realised why I had been following him.”

Clarke’s eyes filled with a soft fondness. “He brought me flowers every day for the next month to express his regret. From then onwards, he made me sleep in his tent. He soon discovered that I got nightmares and asked me what they were about. I eventually told him who I was, that people call me Wanheda.” Clarke chuckled. “He had to pick his jaw up off the ground, he was a little scared of me for a while there but eventually we began to form a bond. He would hold me whenever a nightmare
gripped me and I would calm him when he went through the same. As my belly grew, so too did out friendship.”

“Slowly both of our nightmares began to disappear and our minds began to heal. Our guilt for actions in our pasts began to dissipate. Then Grace was born. Kadeon chose her name. He was obsessed with old world books, and he read anything he could get his hands on. There was a religious passage that he read shortly after his family was slaughtered that helped strengthen him in his weakest moments. It was ‘Grace is when God gives us what we don’t deserve. Mercy is when God doesn’t give us what we do deserve.’ While neither of us believed in an all-powerful being that created all the eye can see, we both believed in the sentiment. We both felt that our daughter was our Grace; she was so perfect that neither of us believed that people so rotten to the core deserved something so good and pure. So we named her Grace, hoping that she would always stay innocent to the horrors this world has to offer.” Clarke’s eyes naturally drifted towards her daughter. Her expression softening as she took in the innocent roundness of her chubby little face.

“We stayed in Rheuna for another month until Queen Nia eventually caught up with us. Sending assassins to kill Kade. They failed, and Kadeon killed them for their trouble. I didn’t have much in the way of fighting skill, I had picked up a little, but when the assassins made a move to harm Grace, I tried to fight them off and was injured trying to protect her. From then we moved about between the exile villages and between the clans, all the while Kade taught me how to fight and use my body as a weapon, and we tried to live as a little family.” Clarke’s tone became wistful, and Abby found herself wishing that she could preserve this moment and just let Clarke return to that bliss of having a family.

“For a while we stayed with Kade’s sister Tallie, until that became too dangerous. She was so happy to meet Grace, and despite her being a very clean-cut picture of stoicism, we became friends.”

Clarke’s expression once again lost all warmth and emotion, becoming blank and void of human feeling. “Eventually Nia’s assassins caught up with Kadeon and I, and we again tried to fight our way out. Kade was stabbed in the stomach before I could get to him. I killed the assassin that had doomed Kade to his death and retrieved Grace from her hiding place under some raised roots in the earth. But there was nothing I could do for him. He made me promise that I would return to my people, to a place where we would both be safe. A place where we would both be loved and protected. So I did.” Clarke made purposeful eye contact with Abby for a moment to emphasise her point. Abby felt tears gather in the base of her throat as she realised that she was part of the reason Clarke returned. It made her happy.

“I returned his body to his mother and sister, and we burned him on the pyre. Then I began my trek here shortly after. He made me strong. He gave me a purpose and a reason to live again. He saved me.” Clarke’s voice a strained croak as she finished, hot tears streaming down her face, sobs wracking her body mercilessly. Her heart ached. When she dared look up at her mother, she realised that perhaps sharing that with her was a bad idea.

Regret began to climb up her spine, demanding that she distance herself from her emotions or be swallowed whole. But she pushed it back down when Abby captured Clarke in a bone-crushing embrace, burying her wet face in the crook of Clarke’s neck. Clarke immediately returned the embrace, clutching to her mother shamelessly, needing someone to hold her.

“I’m so, so sorry, Clarke. I shouldn’t have said those things to you. I’m sorry, please forgive me. You have experienced far more heartache than anyone your age should have ever gone through. I’m sorry.” Abby’s voice was muffled and broken but Clarke latched onto every word and held them close to her heart. Storing them away for the next time she felt alone and broken.
“I love you mum.” Clarke responded after long minutes, the sobs finally subsiding and her body calming. Eventually Clarke extracted herself from her mother’s soothing embrace.

Abby looked into Clarke’s eyes and repeated the sentiment. “I love you too Clarke.” Abby slowly put distance between herself and Clarke, wiping her face and drying her eyes, trying to compose herself, Clarke attempting the same. After a comfortable silence Abby got back to business. “Medically you are fine, I will test both your blood samples for any abnormalities and we should have a detailed analysis in a few days. But I don’t expect to find anything. If you have any problems with pain, I have an herbal tea that Lincoln taught me but otherwise you are both free to go. Let me show you to your new home.” Abby directed that Clarke follow her. Clarke picked up Grace from the floor and went to retrieve her toy whale and the fur from the ground. Her arms were completely full and yet she didn’t have a spare arm to grab her weapons. Slowly she turned to Abby and held out Grace to her.

“No want to carry her?” Clarke asked hesitantly, holding her breath.

“I would love to.” Abby smiled, her eyes alight with excitement. The little girl was then handed to Abby. Turning the baby to face her, she stared into Grace’s baby blues and grinned. The little girl grabbed a fist full of hair and stared at her with wide eyes for a moment, appraising this strange new person. Grace remained un-phased and pulled the hair into her mouth to chew on. Clarke grimaced playfully.

“Sorry about that,” Clarke apologised as she went to unclasp Grace’s fingers from Abby’s hair. “She does that with my braids sometimes.” Clarke explained.

“It’s okay sweetie. You used to do the exact same thing as a baby. Everything went straight to your mouth.” Abby laughed, remembering a blonde-haired baby very similar to the one she cradled now.

“Really?” Clarke asked, thinly veiled disgust colouring her tone, embarrassment reddening her cheeks.

“While it was very unsanitary, it was also very cute. The same as it is now.” Abby grinned, a knowing look shining in her eye. Clarke laughed.

Picking up the remainder of her belongings, Clarke followed her mother through the station and out into the daylight. Abby led Clarke to a series of huts in another residential segment of the camp. Secluded from the communal fire pits, cafeteria and training rings.

Finally Abby stopped just outside of one of the huts. Abby pushed open the door to reveal a fairly dark room. The walls were constructed out of a mix of scrap metal from the fallen station, and clay bricks that the Arkers had learnt how to create. There were large wooden support beams that held a straw thatched roof with a clear plastic skylight at the apex, letting in natural sunlight. There were two large windows in the back and side walls, with wooden shutters for privacy. In the far, right hand corner there was a fire pit, with a metal exhaust system in place to draw away smoke and fumes out of the roof of the hut. Obviously Raven has had some input into the hut designs.

There was a log in front of the fire pit for sitting on and a small pile of fire wood. There were four hooks in the far left hand corner for hanging hammocks. The two rough textile hammocks were folded neatly in a steel cupboard, along with extra furs and clothes. There was also clay cutlery and eight unburnt candles sitting on the top shelf. Towards the front of the hut directly near the doorway, was a row of smaller hooks meant for hanging weapons and winter coats, next to that was a heavy wooden table with two steel chairs. A clay water jug was sitting on the centre of the table. There was a small food bin for storing salted meat next to the table. In the final corner was a large wooden bed pressed into the corner. It was covered in furs and pillows. Big enough to fit three people easily.
While the floors were mainly dirt, the sleeping area had rough furs lining the ground to keep the chill out. Spread throughout the room fastened onto the brick walls are candle holders, to provide light during nights. After appraising the hut, Clarke turned to her mother, pleasantly surprised by how grounder-sheek the hut seemed to be.

“Wow, mum. Not too shabby.” Clarke smiled as she sat on one of the chairs by the table.

“The Commander sent builders to help us with constructing housing after we signed the peace treaty.” Abby explained, carefully gauging Clarke’s reaction towards the Commander being mentioned. Clarke stiffened, her face completely blank of emotion or expression. Her eyes became cold and distant. Her mouth a thin line.

“I’m glad that the Commander has been helpful to someone.” Clarke’s expression remained devoid of emotion and her voice dripped with tendrils of ice, her eyes dissonant revealing a perfectly controlled mask of icy stoicism.

Abby felt crushed glass spear her veins, her heart paused a moment, before continuing its frantic fluttering in her chest. Abby looked at Clarke and didn’t see her daughter anymore, instead she was greeted by Wanheda. Abby held Grace a little closer to her chest, feeling the need to be grounded by something. In this moment her daughter was truly frightening, and she slowly began to understand why the legend of Wanheda had only festered and grown in the time she was missing. Abby felt incredibly uncomfortable and desperate for a subject change. Abby bounced Grace up and down, earning a happy gurgle from the baby.

“So you can make the hut your own. I will go and talk to some of the builders about making a crib for Grace if you’d like and the seamstresses about some more clothes for the two of you. Lunch is served right about now so I will leave you two to settle in and maybe I will meet you down at the cafeteria?” Abby asked, only rambling slightly, still feeling unnerved and highly uncomfortable. Clarke’s face transformed yet again and she was once more her daughter, the Clarke she knew.

“Yeah sure that’d be great mum, thanks. I will meet you down there in a little while.” Clarke smiled, glad to be talking about something else almost as much as her mother, the discomfort on her face plain to read. Clarke stood again to retrieve Grace from her mother and waved goodbye as her mum walked away. A little faster than was necessary, Clarke smirked.

She kissed Grace on the forehead and set her down on the furs of the large bed. Clarke began to unpack her meagre belongings. She hung her sword, quiver of arrows and bow up on three of the four hooks. She set her satchel down on the bed next to Grace and decided to unpack it after lunch. Clarke fed Grace quickly, changed her nappy, strapped her dagger to her thigh and then began walking down towards the mess hall, with her daughter sitting on her hip cooing happily.

Clarke was greeted with a plethora of reactions as she walked into the cafeteria. Some stopped eating and talking in favour of gawking, others scowled and picked up their food to eat outside, some pointed and others smiled and waved. Clarke was extremely uncomfortable to say the least. Those that knew who she was whispered about her and the legend of Wanheda. Some stared at her and Grace, trying to piece together her time away. Most surmising that she had walked away from her responsibilities to go fuck every grounder she came across. Which was partly true, but she ignored them all. Trying to keep her head down and retrieve her food in peace.

She tried to subtly search the sea of faces for anyone she knew, anyone she knew that would talk to her that is.

Coming up empty, she grabbed the tray of offered food, not even looking at what it was and quickly moving to an empty table at the back of the room. Clarke didn’t even know what she was eating,
only knowing that the sooner it was gone, the sooner she could leave and run away from the magnifying glass that seemed to follow her around Arkadia. Shovelling the last few mouthfuls into her mouth, Clarke returned her dishes and planned a hasty exit.

As she left the mess hall, the conversation picked up again, louder than before even. She heard exclamations regarding her name and Wanheda being said numerous times.

‘Great, now the whole of Arcadia is talking about me,’ Clarke thought irritably to herself.

Clarke kept her eyes trained on the ground and tried to avoid the curious glances from those surrounding her. Clarke heard rustling accompanied by uneven footsteps behind her, struggling to catch up with her. Clarke inwardly cringed when she thought of someone talking to her now. After the reception she received first at the gate, and now at the mess hall, she just wanted to be left alone. Clarke gradually began to pick up speed, trying to escape the random person behind her. A familiar voice startled her.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all like the new chapter, I certainly enjoyed writing it! Hopefully it has answered a few of your questions. I'm not updating on any specific time schedule, just as I finish editing each chapter, so the next installation could be uploaded anywhere within the next 24 hours if you are all lucky! :D Keep the feedback coming guys, I really love hearing what you all think so far, ENJOY!
“Oi Griffin! Slow your ass down, stop running away from the cripple! Didn’t your mother teach you any manners?!” Raven called out breathlessly. She had heard that Clarke was back but refused to believe it. She needed to see for herself.

Clarke spun on her heel, as she recognised the voice as Raven’s. “Raven?” Clarke’s voice wobbled with uncertainty, she again didn’t know the kind of reception she would be greeted by. Was Raven going to punch her or hug her? Clarke gingerly walked towards Raven, hesitation painted across her features.

Raven continued her quick pace, well her version of a quick pace to reach Clarke. “Yeah, who else do you know that has a voice as sexy as mine? It’s seriously like soft spun silk.” Raven wiggled her eyebrows dramatically as her face broke out into a massive, self-satisfied grin. She continued to hobble towards her friend, who looked just about ready to pop an aneurysm. Raven stopped in front of Clarke and looked her up and down, appraising her appearance.

“Well it appears the rumours are true.” Raven teased. Clarke paled slightly before speaking again.

“And which rumours might you be referring to?” Clarke was again uncertain, feeling uncomfortable.

“Well there are a few of them. A) You’re alive, obviously true. B) You look like a grounder princess, again totally true. C) That not only did the Commander of Death get a makeover but she also got ripped, I still can’t tell if that true.” Raven gave Clarke a cheeky once over before continuing her list. “D) That you spawned, which I personally thought was a load of bullshit but the ankle-biter on your hip is telling another story. E) That you are insanely scary now, people reckon that you gave Abby one sideways look and she pissed her panties.” Raven went on and on. Clarke finally silenced her by speaking up.

“It’s good to see you too Raven, I missed you.” Clarke smiled at her friend who promptly stopped her rambling.

“So I need you to tell me everything! Where have you been? What adventures did you have? Was the sex good?” Raven wiggled her eyebrows again suggestively, her tone teasing and overly-enthusiastic. Her tone all of a sudden very serious, and her face an abrupt pillar of maturity. “And don’t even think about denying said sex, because it obviously happened!” Raven pointed directly at Grace, and Clarke laughed loudly, truly happy to have Raven by her side. Raven’s face cracked into a grin, mirroring Clarke’s.

“I’m so glad that we have bypassed the social constructs of oversharing, Ray. The sex was very good, thank you for asking. Grounders really are quite talented, you should take one out for a spin sometime.” Clarke retorted, a mischievous grin plastered to her face. Raven’s jaw unhinged itself.

“I totally thought that you were gunna turn into a blushing bride and play coy. At least get a little choked up, or at tell me to get my nose out of your knickers, but nope. Instead I get a straight answer, to the point, complete with a shameless admission of multiple fuck buddies! I have to say, I’m loving grounder Griffin way more than sky girl Griffin!” Raven exclaimed, clearly proud of her investigative skills. Clarke rolled her eyes at her hyperactive and way too cheerful friend. After a breath, Raven continued, eager to squeeze out every last piece of information that Clarke was willing
to share. “So how many sausages did you put in your hotdog bun before tomato sauce got you a baby?” Raven asked, clearly enjoying this conversation way too much.

Clarke paused for a moment, thinking the question over without cringing too visibly. The comparison between a hot dog and conception truly was atrocious.

“Okay for starters Ray, that analogy is terrible, you should be ashamed. Secondly I don’t play favourites with the sausage or the bun, they both taste good together or by themselves, I don’t discriminate. And thirdly, for the first three months I was in a new village every two weeks, with a lot of spare time on my hands, so you figure it out.” Clarke burst into fits of laughter as she admired the shock and awe expressed on Raven’s face. Her eyes comically widened, her jaw extended and a toothy grin stretching across her cheeks.

“Oh. My. God!” Raven clucked like a proud mother hen, raising an expectant hand, wanting to high five her. Clarke obliged, reluctantly slapping Raven’s offered palm. “I couldn’t be prouder if I had fucked them myself.” Raven stated, mischief dancing in her mahogany eyes. “So am I allowed to add Grounder pounder Griffin to the growing list of rumours floating around camp? It might get you some admirers?” Raven asked, clearly wanting to lay claim to the gossip she had extracted.

“Everyone already assumes I’m a grounder pounder, so you’d only be confirming what everyone else has guessed. And I hate to burst your bubble Raven but I already have plenty of admirers, I just wish I didn’t. Everywhere I go, people stare at me.” Clarke complained, her annoyance clear in her exasperated tone.

“It’ll blow over, don’t worry, Griff. So who have you seen so far? Besides my beautiful self that is?” Raven asked, guiding Clarke to a dry log to continue talking, her leg beginning to bother her.

“I saw Bellamy as soon as I walked through the gates, and my mum after that. I caught a glimpse of Octavia when I was taken to medical, and she honestly looked like she was contemplating the benefits of shoving a butterknife through my eye socket, and then you.” Clarke met Raven’s inquisitive stare and chewed her lip. “Honestly I’m scared to see everyone, I never really know if people are going to hug me or punch me.” Clarke finished, feeling tired all of a sudden, the emotional toll of the day getting to her. Raven looked at her and seemed to register the same thing.

“Look Griffin, it’ll probably take some time for people to come around to the idea of you being here again. Bellamy will be happy you’re back, he was pissed for a while but he slowly began to understand why you did what you did, and more than anything he missed you, hell that’s pretty much how I dealt with it too. Monty just plain missed you, he’ll be happy to see you. Octavia is so incredibly stubborn that you might have to beat an apology into her. She’s still pissed about the missile at Ton DC, even though it was ages ago. She’s also super mad about you ditching us for over a year and only saying goodbye to Bell, which by-the-way, was a total dick move, Griffin!” Raven’s eyes glint with iron for a moment, before she tucked it away and continued her impromptu rant. “Anyway, and finally Jasper, he has turned into raging alcoholic. I’d probably steer clear of him, we all do. After Maya died, he fell off the deep end and has been drowning ever since. Willing to pull down anyone ballsy enough to try helping him.” Raven finished, nudging Clarke with her shoulder, comforting her in typical Raven Reyes fashion. Feigned nonchalance and subtle affection.

“Don’t worry ,Clarke, you have gotten us out of more shit than anyone I know, I’m sure you can figure out a few angry teenagers.” Raven smiled, trying to lighten the mood again. “After all, you are our fearless leader.” Raven gave her a mock-salute and laughed at herself, quite proud of quip.

“I stopped being the Skaikru’s fearless leader the day the mountain fell.” Clarke pointed out.
“Yeah, you might think that, and a lot of other people would probably agree with you. But the one hundred still view you as our leader, so does the Commander.” Raven dropped the bombshell without even realising it was still a live explosive. Clarke decided to leave her emotional walls down this time, curious as to what Raven was hinting at, fighting an internal war with the bitterness demanding to be acknowledged.

“What do you mean?” Clarke asked cautiously, steeling herself for whatever came next.

“Well she’s constantly pointing out to Abby that you wouldn’t agree with some of the choices she’s made regarding how Arkadia’s run. She treats your mum like she’s in a temporary position, like she’s just keeping your seat warm until you come back. It drives Abby insane.” Raven paused, a distant smile touching her lips, obviously reliving a particular memory. Raven continued after a moment. “She also made a deal with all of the 12 clans plus the Skaikru for monthly reports regarding what they have heard about the whereabouts of Wanheda. Every month she sends out riders to make inquiries about any sightings of you.” Clarke nodded, absorbing the information, feigning indifference to what she was told. Raven looked pointedly at Clarke, pursing her lips, and raising a sly eyebrow. Clarke was confused by her change in demeanour.

“What?” Clarke asked. “Do I have baby puke on my shirt again?” Clarke inspected her clothing, finding her garments clean, Clarke turned her attention back to the confusing brunette across from her.

“So.” Raven began, an incredibly irritating sing song lilt in her voice. “You and the Commander, eh?” Raven's sly grin turned into a knowing stare. Clarke squirmed under the look. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Clarke shot back, unable to hide the annoyance in her tone. Raven squealed with childlike excitement, startling Grace in Clarke’s arms, who stared at Raven like she had three heads. Clarke noticed and ran soothing circles down Grace’s back, calming her fright. Also reassuring her own tumultuous emotions, roiling since the mere mention of the Commander. Raven calmed herself to a degree, a shit-eating grin replacing her knowing smirk.

“Oh please Clarke! You don’t scour the earth for someone you don’t have feelings for. I mean your mum loves you but after six months she stopped the search parties, realising that if you wanted to be found, we would have done so. The Commander never gave up, she still hasn’t. I’m not a fan of the girl myself, no scratch that. I do hate her. I mean she did tie me to a filthy post and slice me open, and then told everyone else to have a go too. So I’m one-hundred percent confident in saying that if a horse kicked her in the head, I’d laugh rather than help. But to keep searching after a year and half, that’s next level devotion.” Raven looked at Clarke with a much softer smile, unwittingly playing devils-advocate. Clarke stored away that information to think about later. Thoughts churning in her mind like white-water. She suddenly stopped, her foggy brain latching onto one thought.

“Raven, when does the commander send out riders for the next report?” Clarke’s eyes widening in fear and a mix of other unpleasant emotions. Raven paused for a moment and thought.

“10 days I think, why? Planning on doing a runner before then?” Raven gave Clarke a pointed stare, accusation clear in her narrowed eyes. Clarke gave her a sheepish look in reply. Raven understood and continued. “Clarke, you can’t keep running, you have a baby to think about now, not just yourself. Surviving on the road is not way to live. And besides, I will kick your ass with my one good leg if you leave again. You wouldn’t be leaving because you are broken and haunted, you’d be leaving because you’re a scared coward.” Raven’s eyes shine with anger, clearly imagining Clarke abandoning her friends again after sticking around for less than two weeks.

“Raven, chill. I’m not going anywhere. I made a promise to a friend a while go that I would make this work. I’m not going to let Lexa ruin it for me. I will keep my promise.” Determination shone
bright in Clarke’s oceanic eyes, steely stubbornness gripping Clarke’s features.

The same unbending look Raven recognised from Clarke’s time before the mountain. She saw that fire in her eyes and knew then that Clarke would be true to her word, she would do as she promised. The tension leaving Raven’s muscles and her anger quickly dissipating along with it. Pleased with Clarke’s response. Fondness for the girl before her filling her chest, she peered down at the curious eyes of Clarke’s baby and felt the undeniable urge to pinch cheeks for some reason. “So speaking of monsters, does Aunty Raven get a cuddle of yours or what?” Raven feigned offence, before grinning widely at the chubby baby enthusiastically suckling on her clenched fist.

Clarke laughed at Raven, glad that the tension had lifted. She picked up Grace and handed her over to eager, outstretched arms, smiling as her friend pulled exaggerated faces to make Grace smile and giggle.

“I need to know her name if you expect me not to call her ankle biter, mumma bear.” Raven sang. Clarke laughed under her breath.

“Grace.” Clarke answered.

“Aw that’s cute, Raven would have made a better name.” Raven crooned with a conspiratorial wink. “I’m still going to call you ankle-biter though!” Raven cooed softly, lifting Grace up into the air and blowing a raspberry on her chubby cheek. Clarke laughed as Grace fell into fits of infantile giggles, Raven loving every minute of the attention. Clarke watched on with contentment as her friend held her daughter and felt utterly whole, her heart overflowing with happiness in this moment. Raven continued to cluck at Grace and make silly faces, the baby enraptured by Raven. “And when you’re old enough to know the difference between your hand and your foot, I can teach you how to blow shit up, it’ll be fantastic! You’re mum is totally going to have a heart attack and maybe kill me, but it will be heaps of fun I promise!” Raven cast side-glance at Clarke to gauge her reaction and was greeted by a playful punch to her shoulder.

“There will be no explosions of any kind, Raven, especially not around my daughter.” Clarke bit back playfully, grinning at Raven’s efforts to bait her.

“You’re mum is no fun!” Raven pouted at Grace, almost expecting a head nod in affirmation, earning only a quizzical look of blissful ignorance. Raven laughed at the un-phased expression adorning Grace’s little face.

Raven and Clarke stayed suspended in their own little world for the next few hours, talking animatedly as they caught up and exchanged innocent stories from the past 18 months. Eventually Sinclair came looking for Raven, irritably reminding her that her lunch break was only half an hour long, not four. He told her unceremoniously to get her ass back to engineering and that the cooling systems for the generators weren’t going to build themselves. Raven told Sinclair not to get his panties in a twist and reluctantly handed Grace back to Clarke, hugging her friend goodbye, and promising to have lunch with her again tomorrow. Clarke was on cloud nine, the loneliness she had felt only hours ago, had ebbed away and was replaced with contentment.

Lifting herself from the log that Clarke’s arse seemed to have moulded itself too, Clarke stretched her cramped muscles. Cradling Grace in her arms, she smelt the tell-tale evidence that Grace needed her nappy changed and was in need of a bath as well. After five days of constant travel, they both probably smelt like a skunk’s long lost cousin. Clarke began making her way back to the hut in search of some towels and fresh clothes. When she finally walked inside of her new little home, she set Grace down on the bed and proceeded to change her cloth nappy. When that unpleasant task was completed, she made her way over to the metal cupboard she had seen earlier. Finding two towels, a bar of honey scented soap and some shampoo, Clarke rummaged through her satchel for Grace’s and
her own spare clothes, preferring traditional grounder garb than the torn and constricting clothing from the Ark. Satisfied that she had found everything necessary for a bath, Clarke began making her way to the communal showers, her items in one arm and baby in the other.

From memory, Clarke recalled that the shower block was inside Mecha station, and was located near medical. Walking swiftly and quietly down a series of corridors, Clarke eventually found the room marked with chipped paint, reading ladies across the swinging door. As she backed into it, a small waft of steam kissed her face as she walked into the room.

Clarke could hear a few voices in the large room and the squeals of other children as they played in the water. She walked down past the main privacy wall leading into the main showering area. There was a row of large sinks dominating the left wall that were deep enough and wide enough to bath small children and infants in, with what was once a large mirror sitting directly above it. The mirror had not fared well during the descent to Earth obviously, as it was smashed and jagged in different areas, leaving only random shards of reflective glass clinging to the mirror setting. The floors were made up of large, white, rectangular tiles, absorbent matting laid down on various parts of the floor to soak up any remaining water mess.

Along the right side, there were ten shower cubicles the colour of unappealing moss. Two were slightly bigger in size, designed to accommodate mothers and disabled Arkers. Clarke noticed that thankfully, the door went all the way to the floor, so that as Grace got older, she wouldn’t be able to crawl out of the stall while Clarke showered. Three of the shower cubicles were already in use, so Clarke made her way down to the far end and chose one of the bigger stalls, locking the door as she entered. On the floor, there was a fur meant for sitting children on and a separate changing and showering area, parted by a thin, white shower curtain, ripped at the bottom from extended use.

Clarke set Grace down on the fur, hoping that she didn’t roll over, and began undressing, hanging her dirty garments, clean clothes and towels on the hooks on the wall provided. Clarke got the water running and began untying her braids, carefully pulling out the feathers and strips of black cloth from her blonde hair.

By the time the water had warmed, her hair was hanging in loose curls around her shoulder blades. Grabbing the soap and shampoo from the mat next to Grace, Clarke stepped into the shower partition and slipped into the steady stream of warm water. Clarke let out an audible sigh as she felt the heated water sluice down her body, washing away a weeks-worth of dirt, sweat and grime. She watched as the water turned brown as it hit the tiles by her feet. The dirtied water stark against the pristine white tile. Clarke was adoring the spray of the water too much to be disgusted by her own filth, relishing the first real shower she had enjoyed since before the mountain. She could stay here forever and be happy, Clarke pondered to herself.

Reluctantly, Clarke went about washing her hair, pouring the shampoo into her dirty tresses and working the paste into a bubbly lather. Rinsing her hair and feeling instantly cleaner, Clarke set about scrubbing herself with the bar of soap, scouring harshly against her skin, trying to get it as fresh as possible. Eventually when she had rinsed away any remnants of soap or shampoo, Clarke grudgingly shut off the water and stepped out of the showering area, slowly dabbing herself dry and pulling on her clean clothes. Black leather tights, a fawn coloured shirt that hugged her curves and finally put on her black fur boots and slung the tri-coloured fur over her shoulder, too warm after her hot shower to wear. Also knowing that bathing Grace will probably end with Clarke wearing most of her daughter’s bath water, and not willing to saturate her coat knowing that it would take all day to dry out.

Gathering her belongings and gently hoisting up Grace, Clarke exited the stall, making her way to the closest tub. Setting her belongings down on the dry tile below her, Clarke spread out Grace’s
towel upon the bench space next to the tub. Gently setting Grace down on her back on top of the
towel, Clarke began running the bath water, making sure that the water was nice and warm. Filling
the tub until it was less than halfway full, Clarke then went about taking off Grace’s tiny fur clothing
for her bath. Clarke gently lowered Grace into the water, letting the baby sit independently but
keeping her arm firmly placed around her back and grasping her arm to keep her upright. Clarke
began to use the soap to clean the baby’s little body, as Grace splashed happily in the water,
squealing with delight as she made a mess. Despite the fact that the hem of Clarke’s shirt was now
saturated, she smiled in response to her daughter’s gleeful expression, falling in love with Grace all
over again.

Clarke washed Grace’s hair as well, careful not to get any in her eyes or mouth. Grace stopped
splashing and closed her eyes as Clarke massaged her head, seeming to enjoy the touch, before
Clarke washed the lather away. When she was finished, she pulled Grace out of the dirty bath water
and quickly moved her to lie on the towel, drying her off quickly and putting on a fresh cloth nappy.
Grace’s hair drying into tight little ringlets on the sides of her head. Clarke blew a raspberry on
Grace’s protruding tummy, earning a happy giggle as Clarke reached for Clarke’s hair and kicked
happily. Dressing her little rug rat, Clarke packed away their things, readying to go back to their hut.
Before leaving, Clarke threaded her fingers through her hair, untangling the knots that had formed as
her hair had dried, and then swiftly re-braided it. She added a couple of coloured feathers, but
choosing to leave the black cloth alone this time around. Gathering her belongings, and her daughter,
Clarke made her way back to her hut.

Outside the temperature had dropped as the sun kissed the horizon, signalling the end of another day.
The camp had come alive with activity, despite the cool air, people returning from their jobs and
preparing to go home to their families. Others making their way to the communal fire pits to meet up
with friends or mess hall to get food. Clarke found that she was greeted by less stares as she made
her way to the hut. Once inside, Clarke set Grace down on the bed and began starting a fire to warm
the hut for sleeping later tonight. Collecting the kindling provided to her, she pulled out the rocks she
had used the night before to strike a fire. After a while the sparks caught and soon pleasant warmth
was filling the hut. Clarke closed all the window shutters to keep the warmth inside, setting and
lighting a candle on the table so that they would have light to come home to after dinner, in case the
fire burnt out.

Peering up at the sky through the skylight, Clarke realised that darkness had settled around them
outside, and that she should probably go down to the cafeteria for dinner. Scooping up Grace in her
arms, she put on her jacket and made her way to the communal eating area. When she walked in, she
received a similar reception to what had occurred at lunch. Clarke tried desperately to go by
unnoticed and subtly scanned the room for Raven or Bellamy, or hell even her mum. In the far
corner she spotted both Bellamy and Raven sitting together. Clarke smiled, eager to be with her
friends. She grabbed a tray of food and made her way towards them. Clarke was a little nervous to
be around her friends, but she was also giddy, her stomach swirling with excitement. As she made
her way over, Bellamy saw her and waved her over, a grin clear on his face as he chewed on a piece
of corn. Raven, noticing Bellamy’s diverted attention, turned to see Clarke moving towards them,
she smiled also, gesturing for Grace. Clarke walked over to them and sat next to Raven. She had
finished her meal and was drinking a cup of tea, her arms free to take the baby. Handing Grace over,
Clarke sat down with her friends.

“There’s my new favourite Griffin!” Raven exclaimed to Grace as she pulled the baby into her arms,
casting Clarke a cheeky smirk.

Clarke laughed and sat down on the bench. “Don’t worry, we all know that I will go back to being
your favourite if Grace pukes on you.” Clarke retorted. Raven wrinkled her nose in disgust. Bellamy
smiled from across the table, lifting his hand for Grace to grab his finger. She reached for his hand
happily and pulled it to her mouth.

“Bell, I hope you’re okay with baby slobber, because your finger is about to be covered in it.” Clarke warned, a hesitant smile stretching her face, as Bellamy regarded his finger and Grace’s firm grip with cautious eyes. Seeming to consider the pros and cons of the impending assault, Bellamy chose to ignore Clarke’s warning. Grace, taking full advantage of a willing chew toy, pulled Bellamy’s hand to her mouth, happily gurgling around his finger.

“AH!” Bellamy cried out, “she bit me!” Gently extricating himself from the baby’s grip, and inspecting his finger. Raven burst into laughter, at Grace’s perceived dislike of Bellamy.

“Bellamy she’s six months old, she doesn’t even have teeth yet!” Clarke added, spoken between mouthfuls of mashed potato, chuckling quietly at Bellamy’s dramatic reaction. Raven guffawed and cackled harder, breaking into hysterical laughter, tears streaming down her face, finding the whole situation hilarious.

“I swear she bit me!” Bellamy insisted, raising his finger to Clarke for inspection.

Examining the light impression of her daughter’s gums on his finger, Clarke continued. “That is from her gums, not her teeth.” Clarke laughed loudly. To prove her point further, Clarke pulled back Grace’s lips to reveal her toothless smile. Bellamy’s eyes widened.

“Well shit! Look out when she does grow them, none of us will be safe.” Bellamy chuckled, laughing along with the girls.

Raven continued laughing hysterically, long after Bellamy and Clarke had stopped.

“Raven, you need to calm down and breathe before you pass out.” Bellamy warned, looking at his friend blankly. Raven began to take deep breaths to calm herself, before voicing what she had found so entertaining.

“Yo… your… your puppies,” Raven gestured crudely at Clarke’s breasts, “are gunna be your kid’s chew toys!” Raven burst into another fit of giggles as Bellamy and Clarke groaned loudly in frustration.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the continued support and helpful feedback guys. It’s made me feel inspired to get this next chapter out as soon as possible. The next instalment is called Ice and Fire. You can expect a few good laughs and some pretty intense moments between a few of our favourite characters. So stay tuned!

Once again, if you have any positive criticism or feedback for me, it would be appreciated, Thanks!
Once Raven had finally settled down and Clarke and Bellamy had finished their food, they walked out to the communal fire pits to sit and catch up some more. Raven handed Grace back as she became restless and cranky, clearly needing another feed. Knowing how the Arkers felt about public breastfeeding, Clarke felt rather uncomfortable about the notion of feeding Grace in front of them all. Not because she was ashamed, but because they would judge her. Clarke led her friends towards one of the more secluded fire pits just as Grace began crying, getting increasingly worked up.

Bellamy and Raven settled down around the fire, still deep in conversation, oblivious to Clarke’s inner turmoil, the stress she was feeling about whether or not her friends would take issue with her feeding Grace near them. Deciding that if Grace got anymore worked up, they would probably have more issue with their ears bleeding than coping an eyeful, Clarke began untying her shirt. Grace stopped crying as soon as she saw the laces being untied and began kicking out her arms and legs eagerly. Glancing up, she saw that Bellamy and Raven were still talking, Raven however was grinning as she cast a glance over at Grace getting excited for her dinner. Raven winked reassuringly at Clarke, having no issue with her breastfeeding. Clarke felt some of the tension lift from her shoulders as she uncovered her breast and let Grace latch on. Her daughter’s pulls were strong and steady, and nowhere near as aggressive as they had been earlier today, much to Clarke’s relief. ‘Grace must be getting tired,’ Clarke thought quietly.

A few minutes later, Monty found them armed with a big bottle, 7 cups and a massive grin on his face. His footsteps were hurried as he made his way over to the group. When he saw Clarke, he ran a little faster, bent down and wrapped her in a massive hug. He was careful not to interrupt Grace as she fed.

“I heard you were back! I couldn’t get away from the greenhouse all day to come and see you. So I brought gifts to make up for it,” Monty exclaimed happily, gesturing to the bottle of moonshine in his hand. His smile faltered when he realised that Clarke couldn’t actually drink the peace offering since she was breastfeeding. Raven piped up from behind Monty, ever the problem solver.

“In the meantime, why don’t you share your hooch with the rest of us irresponsible adults and when Clarke’s ankle-biter doesn’t need booby juice anymore, we’ll get her blind drunk to make up for all the fun she missed out on!” Raven offered, her excitement contagious. She rubbed her hands together and reached for the bottle, murmuring “come to mamma,” as her hand inched closer.

“Only if Clarke is okay with it.” Monty countered, keeping a close eye on Raven’s reaching hand, shifting the bottle just out of her reach.

“Of course!” Clarke laughed. Raven snatched up the bottle, before Monty could make any further move and did her best Gollum impression, crooning “my precious!” as she stroked the bottle endearingly. This earned fits of laughter from everyone at the old-world movie quote.

Shortly after the moonshine began flowing, Harper, Monroe, Miller and Bryan found their way over to the group. Almost all of the remaining members of their group huddled around the fire, deep in conversation, drinking and having fun. Soon after everyone made themselves comfortable and settled in for a night of intoxication and socialisation, Grace fell asleep, Clarke’s nipple still grasped firmly between her pursed lips. Breaking the suction with her finger, Clarke laced her shirt up and adjusted Grace in her lap, finding a more comfortable position for the hours that she would likely be sitting by
the fire with her friends, not wanting to leave yet.

Throughout the night, Clarke saw Jasper stumbling to his room, he launched a particularly loathing scowl in Clarke’s direction when he spotted her through his intoxicated haze. Clarke’s heart had constricted with guilt, as she realised that she had done this to him. It was her fault that his world had collapsed around him, leaving the boy she once knew a broken shell of a person. Clarke averted her gaze, unable to watch much longer. When she looked up a moment later, he was gone. Presumably back to his room.

Not long after that, Lincoln came jogging over to the group, crouching down next to Bellamy to be part of the fun. Refusing the offered moonshine, but happy to watch as the group revelled in their drunkenness. Lincoln had been sitting with the group for about an hour, the conversation growing more rowdy as more alcohol was consumed, when Octavia came storming over to the group. Fury shining in her jade eyes, she whispered low next to Lincoln’s ear and gestured angrily towards Clarke. Octavia met Clarke’s curious gaze and scowled, as though Clarke was trespassing on something private. But it was impossible not to notice she was obviously expressing her distaste for Clarke, ensuring that Lincoln understood that he was in trouble for indirectly spending time with her. Octavia cast Clarke one last withering glare, turned on her heel and headed towards the direction of the huts, presumably to the one she shared with Lincoln. Lincoln slowly stood, casting Clarke an apologetic smile, he nodded his head to her, said his goodnights to everyone else and slowly followed behind an enraged Octavia. ‘I really need to fix that,’ Clarke thought to herself.

After another ten minutes, the group had decided that a game of ‘never have I ever’ was a good idea. Clarke looked at Raven suspiciously for suggesting it to everyone, recalling their explicit conversation earlier that day. Raven gave Clarke a purposefully mischievous grin.

“I want Clarke to play too!” Raven enthused, raising an eyebrow at Clarke’s unimpressed expression.

“But Clarke can’t drink, Ray,” Bellamy slurred, his eyes hooded and contemplative, always the serious drunk.

“I will drink for the both of us!” Raven suggested, giving Clarke a shit-eating grin. “I hear that if you’re gunna live vicariously through someone, it pays to be besties with Griffin.” Raven enthused, her grin growing as red-hot embarrassment burned Clarke’s cheeks. All eyes were suddenly on Clarke.

“Princess! You’re naughty!” Bellamy admonished, frowning in confusion as his body swayed slightly.

“Okay so is everyone agreed?” Raven bellowed. “I get to drink for both me and Griffin. But Griffin has to answer just like the rest of us, okay? Oh and I’m setting a condition, no PG content, sexual confessions only people! I want to know all the dirty details!” Her questioning smirk was met with unanimous nods of approval. Raven looked over at Clarke and her wicked grin grew as she admired the cringe marring the blonde’s face.

“I will start,” Monty piped up. “Never have I ever kissed a boy.” He announced loudly, smirking directly at Miller and Bryan, cackling when both boys blushed a furious shade of scarlet. Everyone in the group drank except Bellamy and Monty. Raven went next.

“Never have I ever had sex with a grounder.” Raven smirked, giving Clarke a pointed look. Everyone looked at Clarke expectantly. ‘Damn Raven!’ Clarke knew that her conversation from earlier would probably come back to bite her on the ass.
“Drink.” Clarke said simply, Raven looked at Clarke victoriously, clearly proud of herself. To everyone’s surprise, Bellamy took a mouthful from his cup.

Harper was quick to question him. “What? Which grounder did you do the nasty with?”

“Echo.” Bellamy answered quietly, murmuring into his cup. Monty patted him on the back, congratulating him. Next it was Clarke’s turn.

“Never have I ever had sex with someone in this group.” Clarke grinned at Raven when she reluctantly glanced at Bellamy before taking a mouthful of her drink and playfully glaring at Clarke. To everyone’s surprise, the only people who hadn’t slept with someone in the group was Clarke and Monroe. Raven looked at Monty and Harper with curiosity, both of them studiously look at the ground as redness coloured their necks. Then it was Bellamy’s turn.

“Never have I ever been caught in the middle of having sex.” Bellamy tutted in mock accusation, his drunkenness making it sound more like he was sucking on his top lip, as Miller and Bryan drank.

“Don’t pretend that getting a glimpse of my fine ass wasn’t one of the most titillating experiences of your life.” Miller teased with a naughty smirk. Bellamy grumbled unintelligibly under his breath.

Bryan went next.

“Never have I ever had sex with a girl!” He announced proudly, pecking Miller on the cheek. Harper and Monroe drink, Raven shook her head signalling that she hadn’t and then again, all eyes were on Clarke.

“Drink.” She said plainly, Raven taking a swallow of her moonshine. Everyone looking at Clarke with shock, she shrugged it off, refusing to be ashamed or explain herself. Miller had the next turn.

“Never have I ever had sex outside.” Miller finished, looking longingly into Bryan’s eyes, the suggestion clear in his heated tone, Bryan licked his lips, staring at Miller’s. Everyone else shook their heads to tell the group their negative answer, before looking to Clarke.

Clarke nodded the affirmative, looking at Raven and saying the word slowly, emphasising the click of the K on her tongue. “Drink.” Everyone looked at Clarke again, making her squirm under the scrutiny. She chuckled nervously. Monroe made the next statement.

“Never have I ever had sex with more than one person at once.” Monroe’s eyes dance around the group, giggling when Bellamy took a swallow. Everyone else shook their heads no. All eyes again on Clarke.

“Bottoms up, Raven.” Clarke smirked at Raven as she looked at her cup of moonshine contemptuously, obviously not feeling so good.

“Seriously Griffin? Do I have too?” Raven whined.

“You set the rules Ray, now you gotta follow through.” Clarke smirked when Raven pouted and then took another gulp. Then finally it was Harper’s turn before they had come full circle.

“Never have I ever wanted a game of never have I ever to finish as much as this one.” Harper giggled as everyone drank, no one even bothering to chide her for breaking the sexual-content-only condition.

Soon after everyone began saying their goodnights and hugging one another goodbye, before stumbling back to their respective huts and rooms inside the station. Clarke stood gently, careful not
to jostle Grace as she continued to sleep and began walking back to their hut.

Walking inside, she saw the fire had burned down to just hot embers, glowing red in the fairly dark room. Her plan to have a warm hut before bed apparently having worked. Clarke climbed onto the bed and gently set Grace down amongst the furs, close to the wall. She grabbed an extra pillow and placed it between Grace’s small body and the wall so she didn’t roll and then turned to begin stoking and feeding the fire again. Clarke put two larger logs on the fire pit and then began undressing from her clothes until she was only in her shirt and underwear before blowing out the candle on the table and sinking into the inviting warmth and softness of the furs, putting an extra fur on top of Grace to keep her toasty and warm. Clarke closed her eyes and relived the roller coaster of the day, Clarke drifted off to sleep with a smile on her face.

The next morning Clarke woke feeling utterly refreshed, having slept soundly all night except for the two times she woke to feed Grace before promptly going back to sleep. Clarke again woke just as dawn broke, the pink light filtering through the skylight. Clarke took advantage of Grace still snoozing peacefully by preparing for the day quietly.

Clarke put a much smaller log on the embers to warm the chilly morning air, before dressing and braiding her long, blonde mane. Deciding to take advantage of the early morning rise and the possibility that the rest of the camp might still be asleep, Clarke decided to go for a walk. Clarke gently scooped up Grace and secured her to her chest, winding the deep brown bindings around their bodies before pulling on her boots, dagger and coat and then heading for the door.

Clarke was pleasantly surprised to see that most people were indeed still asleep, the odd person stumbling around, clearly not wanting to be awake at this hour. Clarke walked around the perimeter of Arkadia twice, enjoying the fresh crisp air and solitude, to be alone with her thoughts.

Clarke allowed her mind to wonder, trying to get a read on how she felt about her decision to re-join her people. She fondly recalled the warm reception she received from her mum, Bellamy, Raven, Monty, Miller, Harper and Monroe, and a smile played on her lips as she recalled the easy banter and the uncomplicated ebb and flow of the conversations she had had with them all. She felt content with the way things had turned out with most of her friends.

Clarke thought about the reunion she had with Abby yesterday. It had gone just as she had expected, Clarke knew her mother would be relieved and overjoyed to see her, but had also expected her resentment and confusion for leaving in the first place.

What Clarke hadn’t counted on, however, was telling Abby about Kadeon, or her time spent away, that conversation had been a spontaneous decision, borne out of trust in her mother to listen and understand her choices.

Somehow she felt lighter for having told someone, like the burden of shouldering her loss alone had been tempered, grateful that someone understood her anguish for having lost him. Clarke was at peace with her decision to tell Abby about the man that had given her life new meaning, and helped her heal.

Clarke knew that eventually her mum would demand to know more, that eventually the basic outline of her separate life, would only appease Abby for a short period. Clarke grimaced as she recalled her mother’s painfully curious gaze as she had examined her scars, knowing that eventually her mother would want to know how Clarke had earnt them.

Clarke desperately wanted to conceal those truths from Abby, however. Clarke felt shame when she thought of how her body had been scarred and broken in her frantic search for a fight. To find oblivion, Clarke had fucked and fought anyone that she could find. She had chosen warriors stronger
and faster than herself in the hope that they would kill her, and give her the ultimate oblivion from her pain, the everlasting kind. Too stubborn for suicide, Clarke had fought recklessly and without thought, uncaring of the damage inflicted to her body.

But somehow when the fight ended, her opponent would lie bruised and bloodied before her feet and ready to face their death by her hand. A death she could never give them, for fear of the guilt. So she would seek out the comfort of a strangers’ bed, finding temporary escape between their thighs for the night, and then hunt for her death the next morning. Each breath had made her feel guilty, the oxygen feeling more like acid burning her lungs, because she didn’t deserve the privilege of breathing. Not when she was the reason hundreds of people could no longer do the same.

Clarke shook her head to loosen those feelings before they have the opportunity to overcome her. Clarke thought about Lexa. Still feeling the bitterness in her soul about what she was forced to do because Lexa chose to save her people, leaving Clarke to die a painful death with those she loved. Clarke found that she couldn’t dislodge the information Raven had unwittingly given her yesterday, thinking about how Lexa had never given up hope of finding her. When her own mother had decided to let Clarke have her space, Lexa had fought to locate her, to bring her back into the life she once led.

Clarke was surprised to feel a trickle of warmth fill her chest, at the notion that Lexa refused to abandon her twice. Hope flared in the back of her mind. But it was dampened when Clarke thought about the rider expected to arrive within the next nine days, she felt prickly tendrils of dread creep up her spine. As she realised that she didn’t want Lexa to feel the relief news of her survival might bring, she didn’t want Lexa to find comfort in the knowledge that Clarke still drew breath. And yet, these truths were unavoidable and inevitable, Clarke sighed deeply, feeling the defeat sit heavy in her bones like lead.

Clarke drew upon her bitterness to fight the feelings of defeat consuming her. It surged to life and burns with fury when she thought of Raven’s words. “She treats your mum like she’s in a temporary position, like she’s just keeping your seat warm until you come back.” Clarke felt anger boil in her blood for Lexa’s self-righteous assumption that Clarke would want to lead again after everything she had endured. She felt the anger morph into rage, as she realised that Lexa must expect Clarke to forgive and forget the betrayal at the mountain and uphold the steady peace between Skaikru and the Coalition forged between Lexa and Abby. Clarke couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe, there was only white hot fury as it consumed her. The dangerous emotions drained away when Grace shifted in her sleep, calming Clarke instantly.

Clarke was astonished to realise that although the bitterness remained fused to her heart, there was also a glimmer of hope that seemed to be firmly rooted alongside it. Clarke knew that if she dwelt on that hope she would castaway her bitterness, but she was too stubborn not to give it up without a fight. Uncaring that the hope would save her while the bitterness would consume her. She was far too pigheaded to relinquish her pain, and far too proud to forgive Lexa for her betrayal, knowing now that her forgiveness was expected. Clarke veered away from thoughts of Lexa, unable to contemplate the feelings concerning her, because even now the lines were blurring. She didn’t know if she should hate her, she just knew that she wanted to. So she pushed the emotions aside, refusing to analyse them in case she didn’t like what she found.

Clarke continued her easy pace around the looming metal fence, listening to the crunch of snow and mud underfoot, the steady breaths of her daughter and the peaceful stillness of the sleeping camp. Further ahead, she heard the rhythmic clanging of metal on metal, coming from the sparring yards. Curiosity getting the better of her, Clarke abandoned her contemplative walk around the perimeter and set off towards the glorious sounds of fighting. Clarke strolled passed the large green house full of fresh produce and the barren fields for summer crops and the stables full of quietly whickering
horses, towards the clanging. Walking around the side of the locked armoury shed, Clarke found herself standing before the sparring yard.

Standing in only a singlet and tight grey leather pants was Octavia wielding a sword expertly, sparring with a shirtless Lincoln wearing only khaki guard pants. Sweat trickled off their bodies, as they danced around one another, swords clashing. Their ragged breaths pumping plumes of white cloud into the air around them. Attacking and deflecting blows at an easy pace.

Lincoln looked completely relaxed, his face expressionless, concealing his attacks from Octavia before swinging down a powerful strike aimed for an opening at Octavia’s exposed left shoulder. Octavia only barely twisting out of the way before the blade struck downwards, unable to bring her sword up fast enough to block the strike. The quick, jarring movement pushed her off balance.

Lincoln took advantage of her weak stance by twisting quickly and sharply, kicking out Octavia’s knee from behind. Octavia stumbled, her body hitting the soggy earth with force, making solid impact with her shoulder. She twisted away quickly, trying to breathe through her winded chest. But Lincoln was too quick; he was upon her before she could make a move to stand again. Lincoln’s trunk was heaving from exertion as he pressed the tip of the blunt sparring sword at the base of her throat. A victorious grin spreading across his face, as Octavia slumped in defeat.

“Do you concede?” Lincoln asked flirtatiously, leaning down closer to Octavia’s sprawled out body, covered in mud and sweat. Octavia huffed, irritated with yet another defeat.

“Fine.” She relented breathlessly. Lincoln smiled again, leaning down to plant a soft kiss to Octavia’s lips before he stood and extended his hand to her, helping her to her feet. She could feel a nasty bruise beginning to form on her right shoulder, where her body had slammed into the mud. Octavia knew it would be sore for a few days, without even looking at it.

Octavia had bent down to brush off the filth that now clung to her pants, when she felt Lincoln’s body shift beside her, suddenly becoming tensed. She stood abruptly when she felt eyes on her. Octavia quickly directed her gaze to where Lincoln was focused. Her pointed gaze landed on Clarke, and anger boiled her blood.

Clarke didn’t know what to say or how to behave around the two. Octavia obviously held a lot of animosity towards Clarke. But Lincoln seemed like he was just along for the ride, trying hard to support his girlfriend even if he didn’t agree with her anger. Unable to stomach the silence any further, Clarke spoke first.

“Good morning, O. Lincoln.” She nodded her head respectfully towards them both, hiding her tumultuous emotions behind a mask of indifference. Clarke absentmindedly moved a hand to grasp Grace’s leg, trying to find her courage.

“Clarke, good morning.” Lincoln replied, and slightly inclined his head in return. Lincoln spared a glance at Octavia, wondering what she will do in this situation. He felt uncharacteristically nervous. Not about what Clarke might do to Octavia but what Octavia might do to Clarke in the blindness of rage. Octavia’s face had morphed into a hateful glare.

“What do you want, Clarke?” Octavia spat, with as much venom as possible. Her hand tightening instinctively around the sparring sword.

“I heard you both sparring, while I was walking around the walls. I wanted to come and watch.” Clarke replied, her tone steady and confident despite feeling anything but.

“Yeah because watching is what you do best isn’t it, Clarke?! Just like how you watched all those
people die in Ton DC. How you were prepared to watch me die.” Octavia hissed, her voice wavering with indignation.

“You know why that was an unavoidable sacrifice. It wasn’t what I wanted, but it was the only way I could keep Bellamy safe. Keep our people in the mountain safe. I am sad that it happened, but I will not apologise for the choices I made that day. They were necessary to save our people. I have made my peace with it, you should too.” Clarke never broke eye contact, somehow managing to maintain an emotionless facial expression the entire time. Clarke held a little tighter onto Grace’s leg, trying desperately to ground herself for the inevitable confrontation.

“You might be able to dismiss all the death you are responsible for but for some of us, death means something. It matters, Clarke. You abandoned those people at Ton DC, and then you abandoned us too.” Octavia’s anger reaching a crescendo, she took a few menacing steps forward and noticed Lincoln stiffen beside her. Preparing to step in if required.

“Of course death means something, Octavia! When you are responsible for as much of it as I am, something inside of you breaks…” Clarke’s visage of emotionless cracked, her voice wobbling unsteadily. “It broke in me. When I left, it was because inside that mountain, I had lost a piece of my soul. I couldn’t be around the people that I loved because I didn’t deserve it. I was and I will always be a monster because of the choices I have made. I was too broken and too far gone to be redeemed, so I left before I could drag anyone down with me. I couldn’t face what I did, I was too weak, so I ran. I chose the cowards way out and I’m sorry…” Clarke didn’t notice the hot tears running down her face until she stopped talking, her voice a hoarse whisper. She wiped them away angrily. Infuriated with her body’s betrayal.

Clarke stared intently at the ground, unwilling to meet Lincoln or Octavia’s eyes. When she finally looked up, she met Lincoln’s gaze first. His eyes had softened, and his expression was apologetic and sorrowful, empathy billowing out of his pores. He offered Clarke a weak smile, unable to offer anymore comfort than that. Understanding her pain by comparing it to his own. He felt similarly after he was turned from a reaper back into a man.

Clarke finally met Octavia’s eyes. Her expression was hardened. While Clarke’s confession had softened Lincoln, it had had the opposite effect on Octavia. She clung to her hatred of Clarke the same way Clarke clung to her bitterness towards Lexa. She knew that the only way to reach Octavia now was if Clarke gave her a reason to respect her. Realising that similarly to her own situation with Lexa, where hope cancelled out bitterness. For Octavia respect counteracted her hatred, a skill she probably cultivated from Indra.

Clarke fought to compose herself again. Putting her defensive walls up to push down her traitorous emotions, and making her face a blank canvas.

“It doesn’t change what you did.” Octavia spat finally, before turning on her heel and marching away. Lincoln watched her go. It was long moments before anyone spoke again after Octavia had left.

“If it helps Clarke, then please know that I understand your pain. Maybe not to the same extent. But I understand it nonetheless. Even if Octavia doesn’t come around, please know that I am grateful to you for what you did on the mountain. You are the reason why Octavia was safely returned to me, and for that I will forever be grateful to you.” Lincoln’s voice was strong and sincere, his truth bared for all to see, and it helped. Clarke felt slightly better after hearing Lincoln’s sentiment. She felt appreciated, even if he was inadvertently thanking her for being a mass-murderer. She wasn’t being thanked for the death and destruction she had caused, as most people tended to do. Instead she was being thanked because she had saved someone’s life and returned them to their love. It was a
refreshing distinction.

“Thank you Lincoln.” Was all Clarke said in reply. Lincoln gave Clarke a small smile in return. He went to turn away from Clarke before he paused and faced her once more, his brow furrowed in thought, a curious glint in his eye, his tone becoming questioning.

“Why did you come to watch us spar? I’ve never seen you show much of an interest in it before.” Lincoln observed.

“While I was away I might have picked up a few things, I’ve learnt to appreciate the discipline and hard work that goes into training to fight well.” Clarke smirked, pleased by the surprised tilt of Lincoln’s eyebrows.

“Well, I would like to spar with you one day, and see how much you have ‘picked up’.” Lincoln mused, he smiled more fully now.

“Well I would like that, so long as you are prepared to lose.” Clarke teased, chuckling quietly at Lincoln’s amused snort.

“I train with Octavia at dawn and late in the afternoon, you are welcome to join us.” Lincoln replied, ignoring Clarke’s cocky jibe.

“I will be there.” Clarke replied, before returning towards the wall to walk again. Inspiration struck as Lincoln and Clarke parted company. Clarke knew from her confrontation moments ago that Octavia could not forgive her because she did not respect her. Not only that, but if her stance and white-knuckled grip on her practice sword was anything to go by, Octavia wanted to knock the living shit out of her. ‘Maybe I can resolve all of that at once,’ Clarke pondered.

Turning a final glance over her shoulder towards the sparring yard, Clarke struck at an idea. A terrible idea, that might just work. If she fought Octavia, she might earn back her respect while also giving her the chance to take a swing at her. Clarke decided with trepidation and finality, that this afternoon when Lincoln and Octavia sparred, she would join them.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for continuing to follow my story guys, you're support is truly appreciated!
I will update again as soon as possible, I'm currently editing the next chapter right now. However I am unsure as to when I will have time to upload it. But I will try my hardest to get it out to you all as soon as possible.
Please keep leaving comments and feedback for me, I really love to hear all your thoughts and opinions on what I have written so far! :D
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The rest of the morning passes in a flurry of activity. Clarke ate breakfast with Bellamy and Monty before Grace woke up and then proceeded to feed and change the baby before going for a shower. Clarke then visited her mum to see if she was free to watch over Grace for the afternoon. Her mother happily agreed to watch over the baby, as she had no patients for the rest of the day. Then Clarke went and had lunch with Raven. Clarke listened to Raven complain about how her sugar-snatch had given her a hangover big and bad enough to last an entire week, which Clarke had found utterly uproarious. Sinclair had to find her again as after an hour and a half of talking, the girls had lost track of time again. When Clarke finished with Raven, she fed Grace again before taking her to Abby for the afternoon. Once Clarke dropped off her daughter, Clarke sprinted back to her hut, excitement lying thick in her belly. She hadn’t realised how bad she’d been aching for a good fight.

It had been a little over a week since she had sparred with anyone, and was long overdue for some practise. When Clarke burst into her hut, she took off her jacket and shirt, finding a traditional grounder binding for her chest that she wore for sword practice when she had trained with Kadeon. She wrapped the soft material snuggly around her breasts, holding them in place in anticipation for the upcoming fight. Clarke found a dark coloured singlet top to wear instead of her usual tunic, better suited for fighting than breastfeeding. Clarke untied her loose braids, and redid them, so that they pulled hair away from her face firmly. Clarke kept her dagger firmly sheathed to her thigh over her black leather tights. Clarke quickly shrugged her jacket back on and began making her way over to the sparring grounds.

Clarke arrived earlier than Lincoln and Octavia. Making the most of her time alone, she chose her sparring sword. Kadeon had taught her how to use two swords at once with deadly accuracy, however she wanted to make this fight as fair as possible, so instead settled for just one. He had shown her that the best swords were sturdy but light, and evenly weighted above the handle. Clarke found a sword that fit the parameters.

Removing her thick jacket, Clarke folded it over a wooden post and began warming up. Clarke began swinging the sword around her front and back with flourish. Then switched hands and repeating the movement. Sending blood to her limbs and warming her body. Clarke twisted the blade in perfect arks as she familiarised herself with its weight, pleased with the piercing wring the metal made as it sliced open the air. Clarke bounced on the balls of her feet to loosen up her leg muscles and rolled her shoulders to ease some of the tension that had settled there. Waiting patiently for Lincoln and Octavia to make their way to the sparring pit.

When Octavia arrived before Lincoln, Clarke inwardly sighed, as she was greeted by a pointed glare. Wishing that Lincoln could be here to diffuse some of the anger infused energy rolling off of Octavia’s body. Octavia seemed to only then notice the sword held loosely in Clarke’s grasp, and the defensive stance of Clarke’s body. Her brow furrowed with confusion before realisation struck and her face fell into a mocking smirk.

“What are you doing here, Clarke?” Octavia asked, lacing her voice with as much disgust as possible, despite already having guessed Clarke’s response.

“I’m here to train. Same as you.” Clarke answered evenly, watching Octavia’s expressions and body language carefully.
“That’s adorable!” Octavia mocked humourlessly. Octavia, having assumed correctly that Clarke was here to spar, was mildly surprised that Clarke had learnt to fight, and mildly annoyed that she thought she stood a chance against her.

“I’m glad you think so, because I want to spar, with you.” Clarke kept her voice low and even, signalling her intent by the subtle lift of her sword. Clarke’s tone was dripping with challenge and confidence. Octavia’s disdain melted a portion, because when she laughed it was no longer scornful, but born of amusement.

“You’re kidding right?” Octavia’s tone became more serious a moment later. When Clarke made no move to respond and simply lifted her eyebrow, giving Octavia a look that silently said ‘Does it look like I’m kidding.’ Octavia shrugged off her jacket and chose a sparring sword from the shed and turned to face Clarke, planting her feet further apart, and nodding her head in a silent acceptance of Clarke’s challenge. Octavia’s brow furrowing in concentration as she made her way towards Clarke, readying to dish out a beating she wasn’t likely to forget.

“Bring it on, princess.” Octavia antagonised, as the two girls danced around one another, each eying the other for weaknesses. Octavia met Clarke’s gaze and was slightly horrified to see that her expression had become completely blank and icy to all emotion. Her intentions concealed tightly, even better than Lincoln’s mask of indifference when they fought. Octavia released a shuddering breath as she realised this might have been a bad idea.

Octavia was ripped out of her observations as Clarke made the first move, her sword slicing through the air with awe-inducing speed, which Octavia only just countered before it connected with her shoulder. Octavia realised with a start that Clarke was quicker and better trained than her far too late. She steeled herself for the ass-kicking she knew was coming her way.

Clarke’s quick downward slice was defended sloppily by Octavia with a staggered response. Octavia clearly wasn’t expecting the strike, as she put all of her weight behind the sword to protect her body. Clarke spun around Octavia’s body in one quick fluid movement, as Octavia fought to right herself and regain her defensive footing.

Clarke deftly pulled the blade towards herself, forcing Octavia to shift her body away from Clarke as she narrowly avoided the sword connecting with her head. Octavia moved swiftly away from Clarke a few steps to put some distance between them. Octavia had yet to master the art of guarding her expressions during a fight apparently, as Clarke easily predicted Octavia’s brutal upwards cut and effortlessly side-stepped her advance. Earning a howl of frustration from Octavia, as she twisted to face Clarke once again.

Clarke resumed her defensive stance and tracked Octavia’s movements as she lunged to attack once again. Clarke caught the blow with her own sword, ignoring the jarring pain that spread through her shoulder from the sheer force. Octavia was much stronger than she looked. Clarke’s body began to crumple under the weight, as Octavia bore down. Clarke summoned as much strength as she could and lurched forwards, throwing Octavia off balance. Clarke kept her momentum going and kicked out harshly at Octavia’s legs. Octavia buckled under the assault and quickly rolled away, trying to put distance between herself and Clarke once more.

However just as Octavia began to right her stance, Clarke was on her once more. Forcing her back with multiple strikes in rapid succession. Octavia fought to defend herself but Clarke was too quick and her aggressive advance kept her too off balance to catch every strike. Octavia tried to dodge the blows that were too rapid to glance off of her sword, but Clarke was faster. Clarke landed forceful strikes to Octavia’s thigh and shoulders, before seemingly growing bored of the fight and decided to quickly end it.
Octavia saw Clarke slow in her attack and took the opportunity to take a swipe at her head, however this was exactly what Clarke wanted Octavia to do, as she ducked under the movement at the same time Octavia began swinging her sword to follow through with the strike. Clarke struck out with crushing force against the back of Octavia’s legs with the flat of her sword, taking Octavia’s legs out from under her. Then slammed an elbow into Octavia’s rib cage, effectively winding her as she hit the ground with a heavy thump. Octavia had hit her head hard on the way down and was too dazed to realise that Clarke now had her sword poised directly above the juncture of her throat. It took her a few moments for Octavia to realise where she was and to clear the fog from her mind, to realise Clarke was speaking.

“Do you yield?” Clarke repeated a second time. She had to bite down a victorious smirk at Octavia’s current position.

“Yeah I guess.” Octavia finally conceded. She wheezed, in between wracking gulps of air, trying to catch her breath. Clarke removed her sword from Octavia’s throat and offered her, her hand. Octavia begrudgingly took it and let Clarke pull her from the ground.

“Are we good?” Clarke asked quietly. Barely breathing as she waited for Octavia’s reply.

Octavia looked up from her crouched over position as she still attempted to suck air into her lungs. She gave Clarke an incredulous side-glance before her face softened and she let out a long sigh. “Yeah we’re good.” Octavia finally breathed. Clarke’s guarded expression quickly shifted and a victorious grin split her face. Octavia was helpless not to return the grin, her animosity for Clarke all but gone.

“But next time, do you think you could not kick my ass quite so hard? I’m going to be bruised all over.” Octavia playfully wined. Clarke let out a breathy laugh.

“No chance. What doesn’t kill you makes you…” Clarke began.

“… Stronger.” Octavia finished. “I know, I know. But seriously, did I even hit you once?” Octavia asked, a trickle of awe colouring her tone.

“Nope.” Clarke answered, giving Octavia a smug smirk. It was only then that the girls realised that they had an audience, as slow clapping began to fill the air. Lincoln sat on the wooden fence surrounding the sparring pit with a massive grin on his face, his clapping speeding up in pace.

“You were trained by Azgeda, weren’t you?” Lincoln called out, a knowing glint in his eye. “I figured it out when I realised that Octavia didn’t land a single strike.” Lincoln laughed when Octavia’s eyes widened.

“How do you figure?” Clarke asked, playing coy. She began following Octavia over to Lincoln, where he held out two water skins to the girls.

“Azgeda are known for lacing their weapons with poison. Ice Nation warriors are taught to avoid the strike all together, as they know that a single cut can be equally as deadly as a sword to the heart.” Lincoln reasoned. He watched Clarke carefully as she took the offered water skin and took a few large pulls. He noticed a miniscule pull of her lips as she bit down a smirk. Lincoln’s face broke out into a victorious grin.

Clarke noticed the grin and finally conceded, knowing that she had schooled her expression a moment too late and Lincoln had noticed. Clarke shrugged her shoulders in nonchalance, to clue Octavia in on the cues she had obviously missed.
“That explains a lot.” Octavia enthused. Feeling slightly embarrassed that she had been so cocky before the fight, confident that she would be victorious.

“But it’s more than that too…” Lincoln continued, furrowing his brow as he analysed Clarke closely, recalling her earlier movements, and her style of fighting. “…You feigned weakness at different points, you slowed your movements to make Octavia overconfident. You drew her into certain positions that would allow you to strike out and finish the fight quickly.” Lincoln mused.

“Yeah I noticed that too. You played with me for a bit and then you knocked me on my ass like it was an afterthought.” Octavia chimed in, now equally interested in Clarke’s unusual fighting style. After a long few moments of silence and Clarke looking very sheepish, Lincoln realised.

“You were trained by an assassin.” Lincoln stated. His tone confident and sure of his assessment.

Clarke studied both of Lincoln and Octavia’s expressions before responding. She searched their eyes for any ill intention or ulterior motive. Finding none, she finally found her voice. “Yes. His name was Kadeon. He trained me after a few run-in’s with some dangerous people.” Clarke spoke carefully, gauging her friend’s reactions.

Octavia only then seemed to take note of the scars peeking out from underneath Clarke’s sleeveless shirt. A particularly nasty looking scar in specific caught Octavia’s attention. It stretched from the top of Clarke’s collarbone in a downward arc to her shoulder, ending just above a black tattoo that wound up Clarke’s arm. Octavia’s curiosity spiked. “Is that how you got those scars?” Octavia asked bluntly. Clarke stiffened slightly at the mention of her scars and absentmindedly ran a thumb over the black ink of her tattoo.

“No, not all.” Clarke answered, she let her tone cool a few degrees, trying to avoid further conversation on the topic.

Lincoln’s face tensed a little at the change in Clarke’s demeanour, but Octavia chose to store away that little nugget of information and ask about it later. Maybe Raven knows, Octavia thought to herself. Octavia pondered it a moment more, before a wave of dizziness made her unsteady on her feet. Lincoln righted her, before standing from his seat and inspecting her head. He cupped her cheeks and looked into her eyes, noting Octavia’s glassy gaze.

“I’m fine.” Octavia insisted, trying to bat Lincoln’s hand away.

“You landed pretty hard before.” Clarke pointed out, a guilty look crossing her features. “I’m fairly certain you hit your head when you went down. Let’s get you to medical to check you over. I’m headed that direction anyway. I’ve got to pick up Grace from my mum.”

Clarke looked to Lincoln, who nodded his head in agreement. Clarke moved quickly to put her and Octavia’s sparring swords away and pick up her own and Octavia’s jackets from the post they were laying on. Lincoln picked up Octavia into his arms despite her loud protests and they began walking to medical.

When the trio finally rounded the corner leading to medical, they were greeted by the echoing cries of Grace, as she howled unhappily. Clarke’s posture stiffened when she heard the cries, but then relaxed a moment later. Octavia noticed Clarke’s strange behaviour, having expected her to run off immediately to tend to her upset daughter.

“You can go if you want, I’m fine.” Octavia offered, giving Lincoln a quick pointed look as she exaggerated the last two words.
“No it’s fine.” Clarke insisted.

“No seriously go, your kid sounds like she’s about to die from starvation or something.” Octavia contended. Clarke let out a wistful laugh, and sighed quietly.

“She’s not. She’s chucking a tantrum.” Clarke laughed quietly. “She’s probably upset because she can’t find me. Or because she feels ignored.” Clarke intoned. Octavia raised her eyebrows in disbelief.

“But she’s tiny, only a baby. How can she be throwing a tantrum at this age?” Octavia asked quickly. To everyone’s surprise, it was Lincoln who responded.

“Just because she’s a baby means nothing. Children are known to start this behaviour even earlier.” Lincoln answered. Octavia’s eyes widened in shock, she looked to Clarke, expecting her to deny this information. Clarke only nodded in affirmation.

“We are never having one of those.” Octavia insisted playfully. Lincoln laughed loudly in response.

“Well I suppose I will have to convince you then, ai hodnes, because I want lots.” Lincoln retorted friskily, laughing more forcefully at Octavia’s shocked expression.

“Clarke, help me out here. Please tell Lincoln that babies poop all the time and spit up everywhere and drool on everything.” Octavia whined, looking to Clarke with her best imitation of puppy dog eyes. Clarke chuckled at the display between the two.

“Lincoln, babies, poop, spit up and drool everywhere.” Clarke responded in a dry tone. “But they also do a lot of other cool stuff too.” She whispered conspiratorially. Clarke and Lincoln burst into fits of laughter at Octavia’s exaggerated look of betrayal.

“Not cool Griffin.” She huffed finally.

Reaching medical, everyone grimaced as Grace’s wailing grew louder. They walked into the large room that smelled so strongly on antiseptic that Clarke’s eyes watered and her nose rankled in disgust. Abby was hunched over a patient, suturing a gash on his arm closed. Her hands were steady from the practiced movement, however her eyes flitted nervously between her task and Grace as she screeched in the corner of the room.

When Abby realised that she was not alone, she quickly glanced up to find Clarke staring at her with pity. Abby let out a relieved breath upon seeing her daughter. When Grace realised that Clarke was in the room, her insistent wailing calmed to a teary whimper, her blue-eyed gaze tracking her mother’s movements around the room. The baby’s cheeks and eyebrows a deep scarlet and fat tears streaked down her heated cheeks from crying so boisterously. Clarke took one look at her daughter and shot an ‘I told you so’ look at Octavia. Lincoln burst into laughter at the insinuation as Octavia’s eyes widened.

“I swear she was fine two minutes ago Clarke.” Abby quickly voiced, giving Clarke an apologetic smile. Clarke grinned in response.

“I know mum. Don’t worry. She used to pull this stunt all the time with her dad. She knew he was a big softy and could get away with it. She just wants your attention.” Clarke responded, extremely amused by the stunned expressions on all the faces in the room.

“Oh my God!” Octavia burst into laughter. “That’s unbelievable!” She exclaimed, after a moment. Clarke looked back over to where her daughter lay, the redness had begun to fade and the tears had
stopped falling. Grace still watched Clarke carefully, but now chewed on her fist contentedly.

Abby finished the last stitch and covered the wound with a protective bandage. Looking at the man pointedly, she instructed him. “I want you to come and see me every two days to have the dressing changed and cleaned. No heavy lifting for the next week and if I find out that you have pulled your stitches, I will not be impressed.” Abby ordered, earning a solemn head shake from the man in front of her, before he quickly headed for the exit.

“Now, what can I do for you two?” Abby asked, gesturing towards Octavia, who was still held firmly in Lincoln’s arms.

“Octavia was hit pretty hard while sparring. She hurt her head and has had some dizziness.” Lincoln summarised as he gently lowered Octavia onto one of the beds for examination. Abby shone a light in Octavia’s eyes to check for any neural damage, and tested the strength of her limbs to make sure both sides of her brain were functioning normally. Abby examined her head for any lacerations or swelling and then finally did a full set of vital signs just to be sure that Octavia was in good health. She also noticed the rapidly blackening bruises along Octavia shoulders with displeasure. Giving Lincoln a scornful look for inflicting so much damage.

“Nothing serious, just a bump on the head. The dizziness was probably caused by low blood sugar.” Abby diagnosed. “But never the less, it could have easily been a concussion! You should really be more careful you two.” Abby gave Octavia and Lincoln an appointed look, that had them both shrinking under her disapproval.

“It wasn’t Lincoln’s fault mum. I was the one sparring with Octavia.” Clarke interjected. Abby’s frustrated glare settled on Clarke. Clarke held her stare stubbornly, refusing to look away or show fear.

“You?” Abby spluttered, her withering glower faltering for a moment.

“Yeah she kicked my ass pretty good.” Octavia chuckled as she gracelessly stood from the bed, her form protesting the movement. Octavia concluded that her entire body was a throbbing mess from sparring with Clarke. Octavia only then realised the blanching fear in Abby’s eyes as she regarded her daughter. “It was a fair fight though, Chancellor. Clarke fought well.” Octavia attempted to defend. But Abby ignored her interruption.

“You did this?” Abby demanded, the fear and scathing disappointment now prevalent in Abby’s voice. Clarke immediately put her walls up and removed every last trace of emotion and humanity from her face, which only seemed to anger Abby further. “You did this to your friend?” Abby exclaimed hotly.

“Yes.” Clarke snapped, her voice cold. Clarke saw the distrust and fear in her mother’s eyes and felt her heart begin to shiver in her chest, realising that Abby was seeing a glimpse of the monster buried deep within her. Clarke dejectedly thought about her scars, and how her mother would have reacted if she’d known the story behind them as well. She reached out to trace her tattoo, trying to remind herself that this was her Second Chance, a new beginning. To not let old emotions consume her. Clarke watched helplessly as all the progress she had made with her mother since arriving, melted away into nothing. Her heart felt like it had stopped, and a physical pain could be felt gnawing at her chest as she looked into her mother’s eyes. She could feel the backs of her eyes burning as the emotions tried to break free of her internal walls, she decided she would not cry in front of her.

Clarke wordlessly bent to pick up Grace and walked steadily from the room, away from the questioning looks, and the judgemental stare of her mother. Clarke clutched Grace to her chest and sprinted to her hut. Earning a few startled looks as she careened for the safety of her home. Bursting
through the door and swiftly barring it behind her, effectively shutting out the world around her. Clarke collapsed to the hard-packed dirt floor and did not fight it as a tsunami of tears assaulted her cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoy the new chapter, please leave some feedback on your thoughts in the comments!
I don't know when I will be posting the next chapter, I have family in town the next few day and will probably be very busy, so I will update whenever I have the chance.
Clarke couldn’t bring herself to go down for dinner that night, she didn’t have the energy to face the curious glances and pointed looks of the Arkers. She wouldn’t have been able to eat anyhow, her stomach felt like it was overflowing with stomach acid, she could feel it burning in the back of her throat, waiting for an excuse to bubble up out of her.

Clarke’s exchange with her mother kept replaying on a loop in her mind, her brain desperately trying to wrap itself around the situation. But for the life of her, Clarke couldn’t understand her mother’s reaction. Clarke had thought that she and Abby had made progress, that her mother understood her a little better since divulging some details about her time away. But apparently it had made no difference, her mother stubbornly refusing to see Clarke as anything but a monster.

She was used to other people looking at her that way, in fact she expected it, however it tore her apart to see the same expression of fear in her mother’s eyes. Clarke felt a small twinge of relief knowing that she hadn’t told her mother about the months before she met Kadeon. It would have only cemented her mother’s opinion that she was a heartless butcher even further.

Clarke couldn’t help feeling angry with Abby on top of everything else. She was so willing to see the worst in her, ready to assume that Clarke would purposefully injure her friend without a second thought. Clarke had long since learnt to block out other people’s opinions of her actions in the past, as she was determined to turn over a new leaf and start fresh. However she had allowed Abby to see into part of her soul, she had emotionally bared herself to her mother and then had it thrown back into her face. Clarke felt betrayed and furious that her mother held so little regard for Clarke’s trust, that she cared so little for how her actions would affect her. She sensed the resentment boil in her veins and explode in her chest because she felt utterly helpless to alter her mother’s view of her. She had already tried and had failed, the defeat cracking at her heart like a whip.

As it started getting dark, Clarke began a fire and closed the shutters to keep the warmth inside the little hut. She lit some candles around the room and tried to settle in for the night. Clarke breastfed Grace and held her close long after she had fallen asleep suckling at her nipple. She couldn’t bring herself to separate the little girl, her proximity comforting her broken heart and soothing her racing mind. She needed to feel close to someone right now, as she tried desperately to hold back the waves of emotion that wanted to rip her apart.

Clarke stared into the fire, wishing she could simply burn away the anger and the guilt, and all the other emotions demanding her attention. She envied the log amongst the flames, as the fire licked at its bark and slowly feasted on its timber. Transforming it from something cold, hard and lifeless into a fiery ball of living energy as the wood converted itself into red hot coals. Clarke wished she could change so easily. The world saw her only as Wanheda, nobody wanted to see Clarke Griffin anymore. She doubted many knew that she still existed.

When Clarke felt her arms beginning to ache beneath her daughter’s weight, she walked across the room and gently laid Grace amongst the furs of their bed. Clarke sighed heavily, her mind was exhausted and her eyes burned in her skull from the heat of the fire and her crying from earlier. She wanted to sleep, she needed to sleep but she knew that her mind would not calm. When she had experienced these nights of restlessness in the past, Kadeon had pulled her into his powerful arms and held her to his chest. He would tell her to close her eyes and listen to his voice. Then he would sing or hum a tune, his voice low and deep, and perfectly pitched. Clarke would rest her head against
his chest and listen as the sound reverberated in sync with his steadily beating heart through his broad chest. He would rock her from side to side and continue his tune in Trigedasleng until her body grew heavy and her breathing evened out.

But Clarke didn’t have Kadeon to sing to her, nor did she have anyone willing or able to hold her and provide the comfort she needed. So Clarke set about calming herself. Digging into her satchel, Clarke retrieved a large leather binding full of thick blank paper and a skin pouch brimming with sticks of charcoal. Bringing her supplies over to the table, Clarke lit another candle to work by.

Clarke selected a blank page and chose the most firmly packed piece of charcoal in her collection to draw thin, light lines on the page. She drew the outline of a strong jawline and a noble brow. The curve of an ear and the straight ridge of a familiar nose. The mischievous curve of smirking lips and the faint outline of mirth-filled eyes.

When Clarke was pleased with the beginnings of the face she wished was here to hold her, she selected a softer piece of charcoal to begin shading Kadeon’s facial features. Clarke lost herself in her work, the practiced motions of her hands against paper and the black dust collecting on her fingers stilling her uproarious thoughts. Her mind going gloriously blank and her emotions pouring freely out into the paper. The confident lines of charcoal depicting not just an image but a story as well.

Clarke didn’t know how long she spent leaning over the sketch, but when she finally put down her charcoal and dusted off her black tipped fingers, a perfect likeness of Kade stared back at her. Almost like a snapshot of him frozen in time. His kind brown eyes laughing and his mouth pulled into a teasing grin, dimples burrowing into his chiselled cheeks. Kadeon’s unruly braided and beaded red tresses, whipping in the wind. He looked alive in the page, and it filled Clarke with a warming sensation of comfort, she felt at peace. For the first time that night, Clarke’s mind was at rest.

Clarke slumped with exhaustion against the back of her chair, and she smiled sleepily at the silence in her head. Clarke dragged herself from her seat, to the furs of her bed. Clarke curled her body around the resting form of her daughter and fell into a deep, dreamless slumber.

To Clarke’s surprise, the next time she woke, was not to the hungry cries of Grace but from the persistent knocking on her door, followed by Octavia’s terse whisper.

“Clarke! Are you awake?”

Clarke cracked an eyelid open reluctantly, she looked up at the skylight and found muted purple light beginning to fill the room. It was almost dawn, and Grace had slept the whole night through. Which was fantastic in terms of extra sleep, that Octavia was now rudely interrupting, but also awful when Clarke noticed the persistent throbbing in her breasts. Clarke dragged herself out from under the furs and slowly made her way to the door, rubbing sleep from her eyes with each step. She unbarred the door and leaned heavily against the door frame. Crossing her arms gingerly around her body when the cold morning air bit into her exposed skin.

“I am now.” Clarke whined. Octavia stood before her, jumping from foot to foot trying to keep warm, far too chirpy for this hour of the morning. She was completely dressed for the day and ready to spring into action.

“Oh come on, don’t be like that.” Octavia intoned merrily.

“It’s freezing out here, do you want to come in?” Clarke asked, as she felt her arms already starting to go numb with cold, goose bumps pimpling her flesh. Octavia nodded quickly, loping into the warmth of the hut immediately after Clarke. Clarke closed the door behind them and followed Octavia over to the fire. Octavia sat down next to the warm coals and held her hands out over the
small flames. Clarke grabbed another log to put on the fire.

“So Lincoln and I are rostered on for the early morning patrol of the forest, we wanted to know if you would like to join us?” Octavia asked quickly, looking up at Clarke from her crouched position over the fire.

She considered the offer for a moment. If Clarke was being completely honest with herself, she would love to be surrounded by nature for a while. Clarke grew excited as she considered being out from under the stares of the Arkers and putting some distance between her and Abby for a few hours. She definitely wanted to go.

“Are you both fine with me bringing Grace?” Clarke asked slowly. Knowing she wouldn’t last a few more hours without feeding her, and not having anyone to care for her daughter while she was away.

“Yeah of course. Lincoln and I already swapped our regular route to one of the more secluded areas of forest close to camp. There’s less foot-traffic there and should be safer for you to bring Grace. Lincoln and I set it up yesterday with Captain Miller after everything went down with your mum. We thought you might appreciate a break away from all this for a while.” Octavia finished, her face softening drastically, sympathy plainly displayed on her features.

“I would really love that, thankyou Octavia.” Clarke was brimming with affection for her friend. Touched that Octavia had been thoughtful enough to offer Clarke a respite before she became overwhelmed. Octavia smiled brilliantly before standing and walking to the door.

“We leave in 20 minutes, meet us by the stables.” Octavia said over her shoulder, before she opened the door and braved the frigid morning once again.

Clarke quickly zipped around her hut to ready herself. She had yet to wash her clothes since arriving to Arkadia and was unfortunately only left with the spare Skaikru clothes provided for her. Clarke begrudgingly set about pulling the navy-blue blouse over her head. The material was too starched and prickly to be comfortable but luckily had buttons clasping at the front that would make breastfeeding reasonably easy. Clarke stabbed her legs into tight black jeans that were torn at the knees from years of use and bristled at how constricted she felt. Her movements feeling stiff and regulated. Clarke silently vowed to wash her own clothes the moment she returned from her morning excursion.

Clarke donned her Black fur-lined boots and braided her hair with nimble fingers. She interwove the black strips of cloth and feathers in her hair to obscure the blonde colour of her mane, in case they stumbled upon anyone in the woods who might recognise her.

Finally Clarke scooped Grace into her arms and bound her to her chest with practiced movements. The light pressure of Grace’s body against her straining flesh caused the throbbing to intensify. Clarke quickly wrapped herself in her fur jacket and donned her weapons. Securing her dagger to her thigh, sword and quiver to her back and bow in her hand. Clarke had not realised how much she’d missed the reassuring press of unyielding steel at her back in the two days she had been in Arkadia, until she was reunited with the familiar weight draped over her shoulder. Clarke wrapped the material of her coat firmly around Grace’s fragile form to help capture her body heat before stepping out into the crisp morning air and made her way to the stables.

When Clarke reached the stables, she was greeted by Lincoln holding the reigns of three quietly shifting mares. When he spotted her, his face split open into a wide grin that Clarke was helpless not to return. His eyes shone with joy.

“Tonai morn klark. Ai laik awai yu totu kom seca osir.” Lincoln beamed, only realising as he
finished that he had spoken in Trigedasleng, and that Clarke likely had no idea what he had just said. He opened his mouth to translate but stopped when Clarke interrupted him.

“Am glad I chose to join you both as well.” Clarke gave him a knowing look, which returned the broad grin to his face.

“I should have guessed you had learned our language.” Lincoln chuckled. Clarke smiled widely in return,

“I had to learn a great many things.” Clarke responded.

“So I assume riding a horse properly is one among those many things?” Lincoln questioned good-naturedly, handing her the reigns to a majestic chestnut mare.

“Yes, you assume correctly.” Clarke responded as she accepted the offered reigns and petted the beast’s snout soothingly, letting the creature familiarise itself with her.

“Octavia spends much of her free time in the stables amongst the horses. So she has picked an animal she feels will be gentle and calm and not easily spooked, while you have Grace with you.” Lincoln stated kindly.

“Speaking of Octavia, where is she?” Clarke asked finally, wondering where the brunette had disappeared to. Clarke removed her quiver of arrows and fastened it and her bow to her saddle for easy access later on, if she needed it.

“She is collecting dried meat and water skins for our patrol. She will return in a moment and then we can be on our way.” Lincoln finished just as Octavia bounded around the side of the metal walls of the station, arms laden with supplies. A victorious grin lighting her features.

“Guess what I snagged!” Octavia enthused. When she was met by confused expressions, she held up a little bag, she continued. “Cookies!” She exclaimed. “Heidi is going to realise I stole some in a few minutes though so we should probably clear out before she finds me and beats me with her rolling pin.” Octavia chuckled, as she divvied up the supplies between them, filled her saddle bag and mounted her horse.

Clarke and Lincoln followed suit. Clarke planted a foot in the stirrup and swung her body up over the horse’s strong back in one fluid movement as she attempted to avoid jostling Grace too much. Once all three riders were firmly planted in their saddles and Clarke was certain the swaying of the horse would not disturb Grace from her sleep, they set off at a steady trot towards the gates of Arkadia.

The trio made their way to the western forest surrounding Arkadia for their patrol. They stuck to the shallow woods closest to the fallen space station, never veering further than a kilometre into the thick canopy of trees, always keeping the looming metal fence of camp within sight.

As soon as Clarke had passed through the gates of Arkadia, she felt a weight lift. She felt lighter with every step closer to the forest. She couldn’t feel the curious stares boring into the back of her skull anymore, she couldn’t hear the rushed whispers that seemed to follow her every movement and she couldn’t see the mixed fear and awe in the expressions of her people as they regarded her. She felt free, like she was floating in the clouds, and it was glorious.

Clarke breathed in the cool air and basked in the smells of the forest. The earthy scent of wet earth, the aroma of pine filled her nostrils as the wind sifted through the leaves above her. Clarke listened to the methodical thump of hooves striking soft earth and the moist squelch that resounded as mud
grasped at the horses’ feet. She heard the soft creaking of wood as tree limbs bent in the breeze.

Clarke let the familiar smells and sounds wash over her, and she felt calmer than she had in weeks. Here, in this moment, no one was judging her or expecting anything from her and she felt deliciously burden-free. She relaxed in her saddle and loosened her grip on the reins, allowing the mare to follow Octavia’s horse in front of her. She was at peace and it felt wonderful.

They continued to travel in silence like this for an hour before Clarke could no longer ignore the pain of her overfilled breasts. Clarke rode up alongside Octavia and asked if they could stop for breakfast. Octavia voiced no issue with the request and they stopped in an alcove of ancient looking oak trees. Their ancient limbs twisted in hauntingly beautiful disarray. Clarke’s breath hitched as she surveyed her surroundings, and she felt her fingers tingle with the need to sketch their splendour and magnificence. She vaguely wondered how much time these ancient trees had stood sentry to. If perhaps they had lived long enough even to have seen the world before it had descended into flames.

Clarke dismounted and pulled a fur, some dried meat and her water skin from the saddle bag. Clarke set the fur down against the trunk of the largest oak, placed down her food, water, sword and coat, before unwinding the material of Grace’s harness and settling down against the ancient tree. Clarke swaddled Grace into the crook of her arm gently and began unbuttoning her shirt. Clarke picked up her daughter’s hand and began gently shaking it to rouse Grace from sleep. Clarke felt poorly for disturbing the baby but was in desperate need of release. Her breasts feeling ready to burst with unyielding pressure since Grace had not woken in the night to feed.

Grace whimpered in her sleep, as she slowly began to wake. Her eyes cracked open slowly, to reveal her dazed and drowsy blue irises. Her eyes becoming more focused as she grew more alert, her whimpers, transformed into a frown and then prepared to become a wail. Before things devolved that far, Clarke released her breast from her shirt and offered the puckered tip to Grace’s scowling mouth. The baby latched on swiftly and gently began suckling. Clarke had to bite down a moan of relief as the milk was instantly freed from its fleshy prison. Clarke relaxed against the solid dusky trunk of the Oak tree.

Lincoln and Octavia were sitting against the tree directly next to Clarke’s, separated by a couple metres of snow sprinkled earth. They talked quietly between them and ate their dried meat and cookies. Clarke observed the way that Lincoln regarded Octavia with vulnerability, pride and affection, completely entranced with her. She watched the way they seemed to exist in their own plane of reality, where they were the only two inhabitants. Octavia leant into Lincoln’s familiar touch and a rare unguarded smile took over her features as she talked with the man in front of her. The couple always touching each other and gazing into the others eyes with affection. Clarke wonders to herself, if she had ever truly looked at someone with that much love and adoration. Coming up blank and empty, as she considers all of the past relationships she has had.

With Finn, Clarke had felt a strong sexual attraction and had admired his ability to find the good in others. It was the naïve and easy love of children, but then reality had smacked them both over the head and their immature romance had ended in tragedy and his death by her hand.

Clarke’s relationship with Kadeon had started with non-committal sex, which accidentally gifted them a child. With time, they learnt to love one another. They had had sex once, became enemies, then became friends and then much later on, did they become lovers. It was a relationship that was comfortable, they were partners in parenthood and shared similarly painful pasts. But it wasn’t a passionate romance, filled with longing looks or hand-holding. Then he too, had died. Murdered.

Then in between there had been Lexa. Clarke had been drawn to her strength and shared understanding of the weight of leadership and responsibility. She had felt as though their souls were
bound by some inexplicable force, she had felt inevitable to Clarke. They had shared a single kiss and her world had caught fire. Then Lexa had betrayed her, and any feelings of affection for her were buried in the darkest pits of her heart, under layers of loathing.

Clarke let out a heavy exhale of breath, upon realising that she had never experienced the bond that Lincoln and Octavia shared. She felt a twinge of envy, that Octavia had found a love so rare and precious with Lincoln.

Clarke looked down at Grace as she felt her suckling begin to slow. Her daughter’s eyes were heavy lidded as she fought falling asleep yet again. Clarke broke the suction at her nipple and shifted Grace to her other breast to relieve the remaining pent up pressure. The sudden movement, startling the baby awake. Grace latched onto the fuller breast and began suckling with renewed vigour, her hand fisting into the fabric of Clarke’s shirt to pull herself ever closer to Clarke.

Clarke began eating her cookies first, and relished the fresh warmth of the biscuit. It had walnuts scattered throughout, and gave the treat a nice crunch when bitten into. They were sweet and delicious, unlike so many other things in this world, unlike the jerky that Clarke reluctantly consumed afterwards. Clarke pulled out her dried meat and began chewing unenthusiastically on the bland and flavourless strap of dead animal. Silently wishing the Skaikru had used herbs to give the meat flavour as the grounders do.

Clarke finished five strips of the dried meat before she had had her fill, obviously skipping dinner the night before was catching up with her. Grace finished feeding and independently detached herself from Clarke’s nipple, growing distracted by a butterfly flitting near her curly red head. Clarke seized the opportunity to button up her shirt and lift herself from her seated position against the old oak. She quickly pulled her sheathed sword over her shoulder and made her way over to Lincoln and Octavia, where they still sat talking between themselves.

“Ready to go?” Octavia asked from her relaxed position against Lincoln’s side.

“Not quite.” Clarke stated. “Do you mind taking Grace for a moment, I won’t be a minute.” She quickly finished, gesturing her need to relieve herself by tilting her head and gaze to the bushes just beyond the alcove. Octavia glanced at Grace nervously, feeling very uncertain of herself all of a sudden. Clarke watched Octavia’s face contort in discomfort with thinly veiled amusement, and decided to reassure her unvoiced concerns. “You’ll be fine, I promise. It’s only for a moment. She’s had a feed and she’s a pretty laid-back baby.” Clarke assured. Octavia’s face softened slightly, and she took Grace into her arms nervously. Clarke quickly made her way to the bushes.

Octavia held the baby in her arms like she was a live grenade. She didn’t know what to do with her. She glanced at Lincoln for direction and she was annoyed to find him, choking back laughter, his face turning red with the effort.

“This is not funny.” Octavia growled. She glanced at the baby, who was sucking on her fist -and regarding her with a curious gaze, trying to determine if she liked this new person. Her eyebrows drew together a moment later and her contented sucking stopped. Her eyes began to water and her bottom lip trembled. Octavia panicked.

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“Lincoln she’s going to cry! What do I do?” She fretted nervously. Lincoln, held out his arms to take the baby. Octavia had to force herself not to throw her to him, in her haste. Lincoln cradled Grace in his arms and cooed at her softly, rocking her in his arms. The little girl’s lip stopped its worrying and she looked up at him in the same appraising way she had moments before with Octavia. Deciding that she liked this stranger, Grace resumed her contented fist sucking and kicked out her little leg happily.
“How did you do that?” Octavia asked baffled by the easy way Lincoln had calmed the infant.

“It’s easy,” he assured. “Just don’t act like you’re afraid of her. Relax and hold her like she’s apart of you.” Lincoln paused a moment and noticed the doubtful expression of Octavia’s face. He thought of another way to explain.

“You have to hold her with confidence and without fear, the same way you wield your sword. It stops being a weapon when it’s brandished, it becomes an extension of yourself. It’s the same with a baby. You must hold them calmly, firmly. Nestle them in your arms like they are part of you.” He finished, hoping he had made even a modicum of sense. In that instant Clarke made her way back from the bushes and regarded them with curiously.

Clarke returns to the alcove to find Lincoln cradling Grace tenderly, and Octavia looking frazzled. She was about to tease Lincoln about being a clucky mother hen when a stick snapping behind her made her blood freeze. Clarke twisted on the spot with freakish speed and pulled her sword from its sheath in one fluid movement. She quickly surveyed the area, her eyes darting over the landscape before her, trying to find the threat she had heard only moments ago. She heard Lincoln and Octavia scramble for their weapons behind her and assume defensive stances.

Clarke’s focus landed on three forms lurking behind trees, 200 metres in front of her. Clarke’s stomach lurched and her heart painfully constricted with fear as she detected the threat and realised her precious baby was in harm’s way. Again.

She quickly chanced a look back at Octavia and Lincoln, knowing it wasn’t smart, and a well-aimed arrow would end her fight if she didn’t pay attention to the threats in front of her. But she needed to see Grace, needed to protect her. She relaxed minutely when she saw Octavia standing between Lincoln and herself protectively and Lincoln cradling Grace in the crook of his strong arm. Her little body pulled firmly against the side of his chest and shielded by his body. The other arm held his sword, ready to attack.

“How many?” Octavia whispered harshly.

“I can see 3. I can’t recognise their clothing but they have black smeared across their faces.” Clarke surmised as she returned her attention to the threats looming in front of her.

“Chon ste der? Who is there?” Clarke yelled out to the black faced people hiding deeper in the forest. “Tan yudou! Show yourselves!” She commanded.

One man, presumably the leader of the group ahead, stepped out from his hiding place amongst the trees. Signalling his people to follow him, they began to walk towards the Skaikru with their own meagre weapons poised. They stopped when they were 20 metres away, figuring that it was a safe distance from the Skaikru in front of them. The leader stepped forward again to address Clarke.

“Ton odon yu hos, en osir hud ley yu aki. Turn over your horses and we will let you live.” He threatened, drawing out a dagger from his belt to accentuate the warning. The black mud on his face cracking as he sneered grotesquely.

Clarke recognised the furs they were dressed in now that they had ventured closer. They were cloaked in the white and grey furs of Azgeda. Clarke’s rage boiled as she recalled what the ice nation assassins did to Kadeon. She knew that the scum that stood before her would be no different in their thirst for blood and pain. Clarke knew that even if they handed over the horses that these men would kill them all afterwards anyway, and that’s if they didn’t rape them beforehand. Clarke refused to gamble her daughter’s life and the lives of her friends on the slim chance that these pigs would simply leave once they had the animals they demanded. Clarke’s mind was made up, these men
would die today. Clarke twisted in a blur of movement. She ripped the dagger from her thigh and hurled all of her body weight behind it. Sending the knife careening through the air with deadly precision before embedding itself into the leader’s throat. He made unintelligible wet gurgling sounds as he clawed desperately at his airways, trying to suck in breath. His eyes went wide and his body collapsed beneath him with a heavy thump as he died.

The dead man’s two grubby companions looked on with horror, momentarily dazed by the sudden demise of their leader. But Clarke took advantage of their hesitation and lurched into a sprint, throwing her sword in a similar manner to the dagger but with more force and an even greater feat of pin point accuracy. The much heavier weapon glided through the air with ease and found a home in one of the men’s chest. The sword impaling him with enough force to pierce his sternum, lance through his heart, shred his spinal cord and come out the other side of him. The second man was dead by the time the firsts body hit the ground.

The final man realising that his companions were dead, seemed to shake himself out of his daze and clutched his daggers tightly, and began sprinting towards the emotionless woman that was running towards him at a dizzying pace. Her legs eating the distance that separates them with ease. Clarke slid to the ground as she reached the final man. He had not expected her to drop and had been preparing to defend his chest and face with the two daggers he wielded. But Clarke did not want to give him the chance to cut her with his blades that were likely laced with poison. Clarke kicked out the man’s legs with as much force as she could muster, that in combination with the momentum of her sprint, caused a sickening crunch as the bones in her enemy’s legs shattered from the impact. The man’s agonised scream pierced the air as his body crumpled forward. The bones in his shins were skewering the muscle and skin of his lower legs. Clarke leapt to her feet again and she was at his back as he tried to break his fall and lift himself onto his devastated lower extremities. Clarke leaned over the man and grasped his head between her hands. Giving the man’s neck a savage twist, the bones in his neck broke with a revolting crunch. His body slumped instantly, and his screams of pain died in his throat as his life fled him.

“Yu gonplei ste odon.” She whispered. Clarke’s breathing was laboured and a slight sheen of sweat covered her face from the sudden exertion. Her legs gave out from underneath her, and she fell to the cold hard ground amongst the carnage she had created. Clarke tried desperately not to look at the mangled corpses surrounding her, she tried to block out the devastation she had managed to inflict in only a few seconds, but she couldn’t restrain herself. Her gaze fixated on the lifeless eyes staring up at nothingness, a silent accusation on their lips, ‘you’re a monster,’ they seemed to whisper.

Clarke tried to push everything she was feeling away, but her emotions demanded to be heard. Nausea clawed at her gut, and not a moment later Clarke was retching her stomach contents into the mud. Bile burned her throat, and the acrid smell of her sick clung to her nostrils. Her abdominal muscles heaving until there was nothing left to share with the earth. Clarke coughed and spat into the dirt, trying desperately to placate the feeling of acid eating at her airways. Clarke only then noticed a hand rubbing circles on her back. ‘Has that been there the whole time?’ Clarke thought to herself.

Clarke looked up to see Octavia at her back, attempting to calm her. To Clarke’s relief, she didn’t look disgusted with the death shrouded around them, instead she looked relieved, grateful even. The pity she saw in her eyes was directed solely towards Clarke, not the dead men littering the ground.

Chapter End Notes
I've got to say this is one of my favourite chapters so far, it was a tonne of fun to write and I hope you all feel the same way.
Thanks for all the amazing feedback guys, I really appreciate it! Reading all your comments is one of my favourite parts of the day, so please keep them coming!
Again, I have family in town for the next few days so I don't know when I will have a new chapter ready for you all. But I will try to upload new content whenever I have the chance.

Tonai morn klark. - Good morning Clarke
Ai laik awai yu totu kom seca osir. - I am glad you chose to join us
Chon ste der? - Who is there?
Tan yudou! - Show yourselves!
Ton odon yu hos, en osir hud ley yu aki. - Turn over your horses and we will let you live
Yu gonplei ste odon - Your fight is over
The ride back to Arkadia was a solemn one. While Clarke did not regret her actions, she felt the guilt keenly, for having taken more life. Worse still, she felt too dirty and tarnished to be touching her innocent daughter. Clarke had asked Lincoln if he would be opposed to riding with Grace as they returned back to camp. He had been very understanding and agreed.

Admittedly they had all laughed when Lincoln donned the chest binding to harness Grace to his body willingly, since typically it was a woman’s garment. He had responded by saying that he took his responsibility very seriously, and that while Grace was under his care, he was not willing to allow his pride to jeopardise her safety. After the outburst of laughter, the trio had travelled in silence, each in deep conversation with their own thoughts as they returned to Arkadia.

“So what happens now?” Clarke asked hesitantly.

“You will need to speak with the Chancellor and Captain Miller, about what happened when we return to camp.” Octavia said gently.

“I figured.” Clarke answered back. Un-phased and not at all surprised by this development.

“Captain Miller will want to know specific information about the situation. Like why you felt the need to use deadly force to eliminate their threat.” Lincoln explained. Upon Clarke’s contemplative expression, he continued. “They will send people to retrieve the bodies and then he may ask for specific details about how they were killed. The manner in which they died so that we cannot be accused of unnecessarily inflicting pain and suffering. Also so that the deaths can be explained to The Commander.” Lincoln finished.

Clarke stiffened at the mention of The Commander. She quickly righted her posture to conceal her response but Lincoln’s eyes betrayed his curiosity, and she knows that he saw her reaction. There was no use hiding now. “What do you mean, when you say, explain them to the Commander?”

Clarke inquired, her face cautiously guarded.

“Although Azgeda is not a friend to the Commander, they are still part of the coalition. So she is bound by duty to investigate their deaths. Since Skaikru became the 13th clan, there have been no deaths in or around our lands in a little over ten months, we have been accepted by the clans. It will likely peak the Commander’s curiosity to hear that three Azgeda men were killed after such a long period of peace. And with the tensions between Azgeda and the coalition being so high right now, the Commander may choose to personally investigate this incident. The coalition is preparing for war with the ice Nation, they continue to provoke the Commander and soon she will be forced to respond. These deaths may also be an indication that the Ice Nation has begun to move against the Commander, so either way, she will need to understand why these men were so close to our lands.”

Lincoln finished finally. He noticed the way Clarke’s shoulders bunched with rigidity, and her face paled as he had explained the likely events that can be expected to surround this happening. He saw the ghost of an emotion pass over Clarke’s face before she had quickly tucked it away behind impenetrable walls. Lincoln silently wondered what inner turmoil she was currently fighting. He did not think it was guilt for her actions, neither did he think it was regret. Whatever she was fighting to hold back was in direct relation to the Commander somehow and she didn’t want anyone to know what she was feeling. It fed Lincoln’s curiosity, made it big and fat, and the unasked question burned his throat.
“How long until we can expect the Commander to arrive?” Clarke asked finally. Dread chewing on her intestines like a parasite. While Clarke was indeed freaking out about the possibility of Lexa coming to Arkadia, she also wondered to herself if perhaps the Azgeda men were searching for her. There was a chance that Queen Nia knew of her involvement with Kadeon. Perhaps killing him was not enough payment for losing her best assassin. Maybe she wanted to destroy everything he held dear as a warning to others. Clarke’s mind swirled with the possibilities, her thoughts beginning a downwards spiral that threatened to make her sick. Again.

“Within a day, most likely.” Octavia said nonchalantly, remaining oblivious to Clarke’s straining distress.

Clarke’s brain snapped back to the threat of the Commander arriving, and fought to remain calm and in control of her body with this new information. Her lungs felt like they were filling with water and she couldn’t inhale breath. She was drowning in her anxiety. “What do you mean? How could she possibly get here so quickly? A rider would take at least two days to reach Polis to deliver the message and then it would take another three days for the Commander and her travelling party to ride from Polis to Arkadia.” Clarke bit out, tension making her voice tight and her tone clipped. Octavia inclined her head to Clarke in contemplation, either in absorbance of Clarke’s words or in study of Clarke’s tone, she wasn’t sure. But Octavia now had that all too familiar look of calculation in her eye, and it made Clarke squirm self-consciously in her saddle.

“Raven made radios for various clan leaders that the Commander felt could be trusted with the technology a few months ago. They are only used for crucial clan business that is time sensitive. This situation falls under those guidelines because the Azgeda men that you killed could be part of a larger force and were obviously looking for horses to speed up their travel. So the implications of them trespassing on our lands could mean a number of things, none of them good. The Commander will probably be here within a day, maybe a day and a half, because she isn’t in Polis, she is currently in TonDC inspecting the completed repairs caused by the Mountain Men’s missile.” Octavia answered. She noticed Clarke’s complexion pale further, and her hand begin to tremor as she gripped the reigns of her horse with all of her strength. The muscles in Clarke’s jaw clicked and her lips thinned into a narrow line. The horse beneath Clarke whinnied nervously at its riders change in demeanour, and Octavia wondered whether this sudden display of aggression came from her mentioning the mountain, the missile or the commander. Or perhaps even a deadly combination of all three.

Clarke’s mind was running a million miles a minute, her brain trying desperately to digest the information she had just been given. The dread and anxiety that Clarke felt about seeing Lexa’s riders in ten days had been uncomfortable but manageable. But the intensity of those feelings had now been amplified tenfold, now that she only had a day until Lexa herself, was kicking down her door and disrupting her life. The dread she felt presently was almost unbearable, the pit of her stomach felt hollow, like she was missing vital organs somehow. Clarke wanted to run, to get away from the impending doom Lexa would surely bring down upon her. Clarke wanted to run so badly that she almost didn’t care that her friends would hate her again or that her mother would never forgive her.

The only thought that tethered her to her horse was that Grace was with Lincoln and the promise she had made to Kadeon on his death bed. It burned in the back of her mind, searing her like a white-hot brand. She had promised him that she would return to her people, to surround herself and their daughter with people that would love and protect them. Clarke clung to her promise like a life raft. She forced herself to put her trust in her friends, that they would in fact love and protect her and be reason enough for her to stay with them. Clarke prayed with all her might that her friends be enough to stop her from floating away like a balloon without a tether, because Clarke was scared that soon, her promise wouldn’t be enough. She feared that the emotions she felt for Lexa would be stronger than her promise, and send her running, before Lexa had the chance to catch up with her.
Clarke took a deep calming breath, before responding.

“*I see.*” Clarke intoned. She did not trust herself to say more without betraying her innermost thoughts. She was only just managing to reign in her emotions, her control only hanging by a thread. Lincoln continued to watch her with growing curiosity, and she silently cursed him for being so observant.

Luckily Clarke was saved by the bell so to speak, or saved by the gate as luck would have it, because before a new line of questioning could ensue, they had arrived back at Arkadia. The conversation was dropped abruptly when the trio spied a livid Abby Griffin storming towards them as they passed through the gate. Apparently not even Clarke Griffin was that lucky, because judging by the look she was currently receiving from Abby, she was in deep shit.

“*Where in the hell have you been Clarke?*” Abby exclaimed as Clarke slipped off the back of her horse with practiced grace.

“*Out.*” Clarke replied icily. She did not need Abby’s drama right now, especially after the morning she has had. Clarke was still very angry with her mum from the events that had transpired yesterday afternoon after sparring with Octavia, and she didn’t trust herself not to say something she would regret. So she kept her answers short and frosty.

“You have been gone all morning! I thought maybe you had left again!” Abby nearly shouted, drawing the attention of the Arkers nearby.

Clarke bristled. Abby knew more about Clarke’s past than any other person, so she knew about the promise that she had made to Kadeon. She knew how much Kade had meant to her and how determined she was to fulfil his last dying wish. The anger that had been simmering on the backburners since yesterday was suddenly pulled to the forefront of her mind and amplified. The rage came alive in her chest, and Clarke had no intention of killing it. She wanted the rage, it gave her something to grasp onto, and give her strength. Clarke did not respond to Abby’s outburst with words. She simply directed the rage she felt, to shine brightly from her eyes, and hopefully melt holes into Abby’s skull. Abby swallowed thickly and took a step backwards. Octavia piped up from behind her to ease some of the gathering tension in the air.

“*Lincoln and I invited Clarke to patrol with us.*” Octavia spoke up gently. The information she offered however, seemed to give Abby renewed power and purpose to face her daughter with.

“You went patrolling. With your six-month-old!” Abby spat. She crossed her arms over her chest and her face contorted with disgust. “Do you have no care for her safety?” Abby questioned with what was meant to be an authoritative tone but only sounded judgemental. Abby watched as Clarke’s face drained of emotion and her expression became deadly. Her tone sent shivers down her spine as she spoke.

“I am her mother. No one cares more for her safety than me. If I want parenting advice, I will ask anyone before I ask you.” Clarke kept her voice low and threatening. The rage boiling in her bloodstream making her spiteful and full of hate. Clarke didn’t bother restraining it, nor did she fight the hurtful words that spilled out of her mouth and struck her mother square in the chest. She didn’t feel remorse when she looked at her mother’s pale face and hurt expression. She felt sadistic glee. She was glad that her words had hit their mark, and that her mother was now hurting the same way she was. Clarke was so overcome with rage that she couldn’t stop these feelings, and she couldn’t help but wonder if the Arker’s surrounding them, watching the heated exchange, could see a glimpse of her inner monster. If they could see Wanheda peeking out from the black parts of her soul.

Clarke’s rage began to dissipate when she heard Grace begin to fuss in Lincoln’s arms, and it was
like she suddenly woke up. Somehow Grace had grounded her just enough to tuck away Wanheda and become fully autonomous of her actions once more. When she looked at the tears in her mother’s eyes, she felt her heart crumble. The regret stung her like alcohol to an open wound. Clarke searched behind her for Grace. When she found her, Clarke began making her way over to her daughter, she needed to hold her. To feel her comforting weight in her arms.

Lincoln had undone the chest bindings and held Grace out to Clarke, a look of understanding shone in his kind eyes and Clarke was grateful to him. She scooped up Grace into her arms and held on tight to her little form. Her familiar weight against her body and the sweet smell of her head calmed Clarke. The baby in her arms gave her the strength to grab the reigns of her horse and walk away from the accusatory glare of her mother and the nosy glances from the milling Arker’s, without another word or a sparing glance backwards. She heard Lincoln and Octavia follow her lead.

Clarke and the others walked back to the stables in silence. When they arrived they slowly began removing the saddle bags, weapons, saddle, bridle and blankets from their horses’ backs. Clarke managed to complete all of these tasks, one handed, with limited help from Octavia, as she refused to put down Grace. She still needed her reassuring weight in her arms.

When Clarke went to start brushing down her mare, Octavia took the makeshift brush from her grasp and stepped in to continue cleaning Clarke’s horse as well as her own. Clarke took this opportunity to feed Grace, before she got too hungry again. By the time Grace had finished feeding, the horses had been cleaned, watered and led into the stable yards. The trio then began walking towards the guard tower, to report in with Captain Miller. It was only during this walk that someone finally spoke up and broke the silence.

“Well…” Octavia began. Her quiet voice carving the silence like a knife. “…Your mum’s a dick.” She finished, shooting Clarke a cautious smile. One that Clarke quickly returned.

“Definitely.” Clarke replied sarcastically. Offering a small chuckle to put her companions at ease, before the trio descended into another, more comfortable, silence. Clarke didn’t have the energy to talk or be sociable in any way, and much to her friends’ credit, they seemed to understand this.

When they reached the guard tower, Lincoln immediately sought out Captain Miller, leaving the two girls on the first floor of the guard tower, where most of the Skaikru guns were stored, under lock and key. There were a few swords and knives. But primarily guns and ammunition, as the Arker’s hadn’t yet learnt how to fight like the grounders. Still relying heavily on technology to defend them, instead of transforming their body’s into their weapons. Clarke tended to agree with Grounders, viewing guns as a weak man’s weapon.

The guns proving only to remind Clarke, just how much she had changed in 18 short months. Back then Clarke had been one of those weak fighters that relied on technology to defend her, but now she was a true warrior, able to defend herself without any weapon if she needed. It made Clarke feel proud of her accomplishments, despite the unavoidable truth that these learned skills now made her even better at killing than she already was before. Clarke shudders and pushes the errant thought down for reflection later on.

Clarke’s reminiscing was interrupted when Lincoln returned a moment later directing Clarke and Octavia to Captain Miller’s office on the third floor. Clarke’s calves burned as she climbed the seemingly never-ending flight of stairs to the third floor, breathlessly cursing whoever had designed the building to be the literal embodiment of a cardio-workout from hell. Clarke’s figure was weary from the fight earlier, the fatigue finally catching up with her now that the adrenalin had evaporated. But she persevered.

Arriving at the door to Captain Miller’s office, Lincoln knocked quietly, and respectfully waited until
Lincoln opened the door and led them inside. The office was stark and grey. So boring, that Clarke wondered how Captain Miller didn’t claw his own eyeballs out to save them the horror of ever seeing this ungodly monstrosity of a room ever again.

There was a large, metallic, square desk in the centre of the room, with maps and charts sprawled across it in unorganised disarray. There was a single chair facing the door, sitting behind the desk, with a weary-looking Captain of the Guard seated upon it, poring over the maps before him. Throughout the room there were various larger maps detailing territories and lands, hanging on the walls. There was a large steel shelf that ran across the length of one of the walls, filled with books and other neatly stacked documents. The rear wall, was broken up by a singular and very small window. One just big enough to crawl through if a dire situation demanded it, Clarke noted. Otherwise the walls and floor were all a solid and bland shade of grey.

Captain Miller looked up from his maps to regard the visitors entering his office. He stood and offered them each a tired smile, his brown leathery skin slightly creasing the deep laugh lines of his weathered face. He greeted them all as they entered his office, giving them all a respectful head nod.

“Lincoln. Octavia. Clarke. How did your patrol go?” He asked kindly, expecting the answer to be no different than it was yesterday and the day before.

“We ran into some trouble sir.” Octavia stated respectfully, her brow furrowing into a serious frown.

“What kind of trouble? Explain yourselves.” Captain Miller stated, his voice rising slightly as his eyes filled with concern.

“We encountered three Azgeda men. They demanded our horses in exchange for our lives.” Lincoln said grimly, his face mimicking Octavia’s serious expression.

“How did you respond?” Captain Miller asked firmly, looking between his two warriors questioningly. Captain Miller was surprised when it was Clarke that responded to his question.

“I killed them.” She said flatly. Pointedly ignoring the shocked expression overcoming the Captain’s features. She had no energy left to even try being apologetic, or remorseful. She was tired, and she didn’t care if she appeared cold and callous.

“All of them? By yourself?” He asked incredulously, his eyebrows lifting in disbelief. Captain Miller looked between Lincoln and Octavia for an explanation.

“Yes.” Clarke retorted, returning his attention to her, she kept her expression carefully blank. She tried to conceal her annoyance at having her actions and decisions being doubted by people in this god-damned camp. She bit down on the inside of her cheek to keep her lingering anger with Abby at bay. It was not appropriate to take out her frustrations on the Captain of the Guard. Her entire day had been an unpleasant, emotional roller-coaster, she couldn’t afford to lose it until she was in the confines of her own home, away from prying eyes.

“I see.” He said after a long pause. “Do you need to visit medical?” He asked finally, his authoritative tone returning.

“No.” Clarke said evenly. She ignores the disbelieving expression on Captain Miller’s face, until he rights himself and becomes authoritative once more.

“How were they killed?” He asked quietly.

“One was stabbed in the throat. Another had a sword plunged through his heart, and the other had his neck snapped.” Clarke answered coolly, as she tried hard not to relive their deaths in her mind’s
eye. Captain Miller nodded his head slowly as he digested this information. He looked to Lincoln and Octavia, who both nodded in confirmation.

“Where are the bodies located?” He asked Lincoln.

“The western side of the forest, about one kilometre from the wall of Arkadia. There is an alcove of oak trees. The bodies are in the twenty metres surrounding the alcove.” Lincoln stated.

“I will send out a squad of guards to collect the bodies and have Raven send a message to the Commander straight away. Lincoln, I may need you to direct the recovery team to the location. The rest of you are dismissed for now. But Clarke, the Commander will probably want a first-hand account of the situation from you since you are responsible for their deaths. Is this okay?” The Captain asked, in a tone that indicated Clarke really didn’t have much of a choice in the matter, so she slowly nodded her head in acceptance. The three friends bristled at the Captain’s choice of words, but stay silent as he remained oblivious.

“Good. Dismissed.” He commanded before returning to poring over his maps a second more before unhitching the radio at his belt and shooting off a few more commands.

As the trio left the office and began descending the stairs, four guards stumbled past them to carry messages to Raven and the Chancellor and then assemble the recovery team. Clarke’s arms began to feel heavy and sore the longer she cradled Grace. All Clarke wanted to do was have a nice hot shower and some food and then sleep.

Clarke said her goodbyes to Lincoln and Octavia before heading to her hut. It was only noon and already so much had happened today. Clarke was exhausted and ornery, and not at all fit for human interaction. Clarke navigated her way through the masses of people on their way to lunch, she attempted to keep her head low and avoid the stares of the Arker’s but to no avail. By now the entire camp had heard about Clarke’s confrontation with Abby, and now it was the hot gossip on everyone’s tongue. So no matter how hard she tried to remain invisible, she still stood out like tits on a duck. Clarke ignored them all and continued walking to the sanctuary of her home.

When Clarke finally made it back to the safety of her hut, she sunk down against the heavy door and let out a massive breath. Uncaring if she dirtied her pants. Clarke sat Grace in her lap, where blue eyes stared up at her innocently. Grace appraised her mother for a moment before sucking noisily on her fist.

Clarke stared blankly at the wall ahead of her and wished she could return to the peace and quiet of the alcove of oaks. She wished she could surround herself in the tranquillity the ancient all-seeing trees had to offer, and knew it was naïve to live for moments passed.

Clarke’s eyes fell onto the pile of dirty laundry staring accusingly at her, and sighed once more. It looked like Clarke had chores to do before she could shower, eat and then sleep. Clarke vaguely recalled her mother saying something about blood results, and organising a crib for Grace when they first arrived. Plus Clarke was starting to run low on firewood and candles, meaning she would need to source them out somewhere. Plus she also needed some more clothes for herself and Grace, because three sets each really wasn’t going to cut it. Clarke groaned in annoyance as her list of chores seemed to grow every minute she sat doing nothing.

Reluctantly she stood up and began collecting her dirty laundry pile to put in her satchel. Clarke secured Grace in her chest binding and slung the satchel over her shoulder. Clarke then set off to find the area designated for washing clothing.

Clarke had to ask a few people where to find the laundry area, and she inwardly sighed every time
someone completely ignored her out of fear. Clarke silently cursed and wondered how threatening she must look with an infant strapped to her chest and a pile of dirty laundry slung over her shoulder. Eventually she asked an old woman who Clarke later realised was blind, and probably only spoke to her because she had no idea who she was.

Eventually Clarke found the laundry area. It was a large open area, with a massive trough in the centre that was about ten metres long. The trough was filled with water and was completely decked out with a filtration and heating system to keep the water clean and stop it from icing over during cold winter months.

Obviously Raven had been instrumental in creating this contraption also, Clarke thought to herself. There were large metal grates welded to the sides of the trough for sorting and scrubbing clothing, and a separate area with wooden poles sticking out of the earth every few metres. The poles were then tied with thick wiring to create makeshift clotheslines. The huts each had a clothesline at the back of them, but this larger one must have been used for the residents who still lived in the station and hanging linens from medical. Clarke also noticed in the corner of the enclosed area that there was a small pen-like structure filled with soft furs and toys for mothers to leave their small children while they cleaned their clothes.

Clarke set her befouled clothing down next to a free spot next to the water trough and then began unwinding her chest bindings to put Grace in the play pen. Once satisfied that Grace would remain settled, Clarke made her way over to the workstation to begin scrubbing. Clarke dunked each item of clothing in the warm water, and then with the bar of soap on the grate, began scrubbing each item of clothing. When they were lathered, she scrubbed them against the metal grate to loosen any lingering dirt or grime and then washed the clothing clean in the warm water again, before then ringing the fabric out until a large portion of the water had left the clothing, leaving it damp. Clarke continued this process until each item of clothing was clean and damp.

Even here in this quiet area, away from the main population of Arkadia, Clarke could still feel eyes on her. The hairs at the nape of her neck standing on end with the sensation of being watched. There was only six other people here cleaning their clothing, and yet all of them whispered in rushed voices and stared at Clarke shamelessly. Clarke wondered if they were all still talking and gossiping about her fight with Abby, or if rather than that, news of the three dead Azgeda had spread. Now instead of being a disappointing daughter to the people of Arkadia, she was instead a ruthless killer once more. Clarke shuddered.

Finished with her work, Clarke stuffed the wet clothing into the bag, retrieved Grace and began her trek back to the hut. Clarke had never paid much attention to her neighbours before now, but she noticed them now as they loitered around outside her hut, all conferring in hushed tones. They had yet to notice her, and she observed some of them pointing at her hut and speaking animatedly, some in fear others in disgust and then a few in awe.

They had obviously not paid any attention to their neighbours either until recently. Now they all realised that Wanheda had moved in next door, and they didn’t seem happy about it. Clarke begrudgingly continued walking towards her hut. She gave the Arker’s polite nods and continued to move past them. Content to pretend they didn’t exist. Until one man stepped out in front of her blocking her path.

Clarke had to crane her neck to look up at the beast of a man. He was bulky, but not exceedingly strong, Clarke surmised. The people here probably chose him to speak with her because he was large and intimidating in stature. But he did not scare her, with one well-placed kick, she could have him crying for his mother. But Clarke knew that these people were probably scared, and by sending someone big and threatening to confront her, they were sure to feel a modicum of safety. Clarke
allowed them to have their false-sense of security, if it meant this ghastly ordeal was over with sooner.

“Can I help you?” Clarke asked nonchalantly.

“Yes actually. You can.” The big man boomed. “The people here do not feel safe with you being so close to them. We want you to move.” He stated dictatorially. Clarke fought the urge to burst into fits of humourless laughter, this was so not her day.

“May I ask why they do not feel safe?” Clarke asked quietly, casting her gaze to the people milled around her. She was met with a moment of silence.

“We have heard the stories of you Wanheda. You kill without thought and without mercy. You are called the commander of death for a reason. And it’s not because you like unicorns and chocolate cake. You have done things that make you a murderer, a monster. We don’t want your kind around here anymore.” The man rumbled. He crossed his arms across his chest in a display of dominance and pig-headedness.

His words are like a punch to the guts. “I am sorry you all feel this way. But the stories you have heard are just that, stories. The only times I have ever taken life is to protect the people I care for. I was labelled Wanheda when I destroyed the mountain. The only reason I did that was because I cared for our people. For all of you…” Clarke gestured around the group of people. She fought to keep her tone even and her back straight. She refused to cower in front of these morons.

“I killed the mountain men, because they wanted to kill all of us. I was protecting all of you. Because I care. I shouldn’t have to explain this to you, all of you know what happened on the mountain. Anything outside of that, is likely the result of rumour or gossip. Please don’t believe it. Have I killed? Yes. Do I regret making those choices to save the lives of our people? No. Does it make me a monster? Maybe. But I want the same things all of you do. I want to be safe and loved and protected. I want that for myself and I want that for my daughter. You have nothing to fear from me.” Clarke implored the gathering crowd to see reason and not pull out the pitchforks like she feared they would. The crowd was silent, the distant noise of camp life and a gust of frigid wind rattling loose sheets of metal, was all that could be heard for long moments.

“But is it true that you killed three Azgeda warriors today?” Someone from the crowd questioned.

“Yes. I did. They threatened the lives of my friends and my daughter, so I protected them.” Clarke answered with a tired sigh. Her energy completely drained. Clarke didn’t know what they were searching for. She didn’t know what they needed to appease their angry and curious minds. The urge to give up was becoming stifling, these people were frightened of her and did not want her in their midst. There was nothing that she could do to earn back their trust, they thought her a monster, and she was weary of defending otherwise.

For some reason, Clarke was yet to pinpoint why exactly. The crowd began to thin. The people seeming to give up on shooing Clarke out of their presence. If not happy, then at least contented to let her remain for a while longer. Clarke decided to take it as a win, and returned to the safe confines of her hut. She gently set Grace down on the bed, and put pillows on either side of her little frame to stop her from rolling and then quickly darted outside to hang her washing on the line before coming back inside, as a bone deep weariness settled over her. It was a just after late afternoon, but Clarke climbed up onto the furs of the bed and settled down next to Grace. Clarke let her mind go deliciously blank and let the oblivion of sleep claim her. Too tired to face the world any longer.
Hope you all enjoy the new chapter, there is a lot of content in this one, so I hope I have explained it all well enough for everyone to comprehend.
Please keep the comments coming. Tell me what you did and did not like about the chapter and I will keep it all in mind for the next instalment.
Thanks chicky-dees!
Clarke awoke the next morning, many hours before dawn. Her body completely rested in spite of the three feeds and two dirty diapers Grace gifted her with throughout the night. Clarke knew that her ridiculously early bed time yesterday was the partial cause of her current restlessness. But Clarke also acknowledged that the second half of her early rise was Lexa’s fault.

The Commander would be arriving in Arkadia today, and she was not ready to face her. She honestly doubted if she ever would be. Clarke knew that, logically, Lexa’s choice to abandon her on the mountain was sound, smart even. However Clarke was not thinking logically and her emotions screamed at the unfairness of it all. Clarke didn’t blame Lexa for the extermination of the mountain, in fact even with Lexa’s help to defeat the mountain men, severe loss of life or genocide, were both likely results. They were all possible outcomes even with Lexa’s assistance. Instead of leaving Clarke broken and alone, she could have had someone to bear the burden with her. They could have helped one another, but instead Lexa had walked away from Clarke and left her to save her people by herself. Which resulted in the extermination of an entire civilisation, leaving Clarke decimated.

Clarke knew that ultimately it was her own decision to murder hundreds to save the few, and that Lexa wasn’t responsible for who she became because of her actions. But the betrayal of trust, of a friendship and a budding romance were all things Clarke could not and would not forgive. While Clarke could fathom why Lexa made the choices she did, Clarke couldn’t forget the pain and suffering her people needlessly endured because Lexa chose to save her own hide and that of her people. That she betrayed Clarke. It was the moment where Lexa left her behind, knowing she might die that stung more than anything. Clarke had felt something with Lexa. Something strong enough that if the roles had been reversed, the betrayal would have torn her heart to ribbons of bloody flesh. Or was the affection only one sided? Clarke thought sullenly.

Clarke tried to shove the feelings down. But apparently they were acquiring the properties of a bouncy ball, because the harder Clarke smacked the feelings down the higher and harder they came back up moments later. Clarke gently extricated herself from around Grace’s sleeping form, and crawled out from underneath the furs. Clarke looked down to find her boots had been removed, only she didn’t recall having taken them off yesterday evening. In fact she was fairly certain that they had been stubbornly clinging to her feet, which was why she lost patience with them and just left them be. Resolute to sleep with her legs tossed carelessly over the side of the bed to avoid getting mud on the furs. Clarke tucked her query away for examination later.

Standing from the bed and stretching, Clarke smiled as she felt her joints pop. Marveling in the awesome feeling of tension being released from her sore body. Clarke felt her muscles protest with the movement, aching from yesterdays… Activities.

Clarke made her way to the fire pit and started a fire, since she had carelessly overlooked the benefits of starting one yesterday evening. She had forgotten many things she had planned to finish yesterday it would appear. Her long list of chores had been discarded after her encounter with the perturbed locals. At least she would have clean clothes to wear, right? Clarke thought to herself with forced enthusiasm. Clarke stared into the fire and tried to get a handle on her feelings. Today was going to be difficult as it was without adding a befuddled brain to the mix.

Clarke tried to gather her thoughts into a neat little pile, but was proving difficult, as they were so numerous in quantity and each demanded to be given equal attention. It was like being in a kennel
full of excitable pups, they all fought to be given affection and your undivided attention, which only proved to create chaos and disaster. But Clarke stubbornly persevered, starting with something simple.

Clarke knew that she had killed three Ice Nation warriors. She did not regret separating them from their lives, and she would do it again to save her friends and Grace. She felt guilt for taking life in general but not for those lives in specific.

Clarke knew that her mother probably thought her a monster for injuring Octavia, leaving the camp without telling her, putting Grace in danger by taking her into the forest and for killing three men. Clarke felt anger for Abby, rage even, for her blatant disregard of Clarke’s happiness, and holding her to an unascertainable standard of morality. She felt resentment towards her mother for making her feel like an inadequate friend, daughter and mother. She didn’t know if she could forgive Abby for betraying her trust and ignoring the personal information she had shared with her, so that these kinds of conflicts did not occur. If forgiveness was achievable, it would take time to come about.

Clarke knew that there was a chance that the three dead Azgeda, could have been men sent from Nia. In which case she would continue to kill anyone that is sent to harm Grace or herself, until she found a more permanent solution to the problem.

If the three Azgeda were not sent to Arkadia to kill her, and instead were sent to spy on Skaikru, then Clarke would do whatever was necessary to help her people, but only in her capacity as a warrior. She did not want to assume a leadership position, it nearly cost Clarke her sanity last time, and Grace deserved to have a mother who is present and mentally equipped to care for her. Although it may appear selfish to help even as a warrior, and risk Grace losing a mother as well as a father, Clarke could not abandon her people again entirely. This was the compromise that she must make, in order to help save her people and be a good mother to Grace.

If the three Azgeda were scouts for an army, then Clarke knew she would fight for her people, despite their distrust of her. Not for Lexa or the coalition, but for her people and for Kadeon. She would avenge his death, and the deaths of his family.

As for Lexa, Clarke refused to look any deeper than the bitterness towards the young leader. Unable and unwilling to see any further without being drowned by the whirlwind of emotions she felt for her. Clarke knew that deep down, buried within the deepest, darkest parts of her soul, there was a flicker of light that shone only for Lexa. And the knowledge scared the shit out of her, so she pushed it down and locked it away, and buried it in a tomb of bitterness, trusting that it would disguise the desperate stench of hope. Clarke shook her head violently at the realisation, and pushed the unbidden thoughts aside.

Clarke surmised that she had decided to deal with any and all other situations that may come from recent events, as a warrior. So she would also approach this situation with Lexa as a warrior as well. She would build her walls up high and keep her emotions securely concealed behind them. She would serve Heda, not the girl who hid behind the mask. She would interact with the Commander, not with Lexa. As Clarke knew better than anyone that the two were two distinct personalities and people. Lexa was void when Heda was present, and vice versa. Clarke would behave as a warrior, she would interact with Heda as a warrior, and she would conceal Clarke Griffin behind the safety of her inner walls.

Today, Clarke would let Wanheda off her chain, and ignore the emotions she has for Lexa. ‘I can do that,’ Clarke thought to herself encouragingly. Clarke knew that although her intentions were sound, the likelihood of her having the strength and willpower to treat Lexa indifferently were close to non-existent. Fate would likely gift Lexa with a bruised and bloodied face by the time Clarke was
When Clarke finally stood from her crouched position from the fire, time had escaped her. She had not even realised that while she had been preparing her battle strategy, dawn had broken, and the birds of the forest were hailing a new day. Clarke jiggled her legs about to get blood flowing back into her limbs, and chase away the numbness that had settled in her ass. Clarke remained in her clothes from yesterday, and braided back her hair into neatly intricate patterns. She wove feathers and brown beads into the design to make it decidedly more grounder. Before pulling out her weapons to clean them and sharpen them from their adventure yesterday.

While Clarke had wiped the majority of the blood free from her weapons, some still remained. Clarke poured some water into a clay bowl and fetched a clean cloth from the steel shelving. Dipping the cloth into the water, Clarke began to run the material across the flats of first the sword, then the dagger. By the time she was finished, the water was tinged red and the weapons were cleaned to a brilliant shine. Clarke fetched her whetstone from the steel shelving and settled back into the chair next to the heavy wood table. Clarke began to methodically run the stone along the slightly dulled edges of her blades, with practiced movements. She continued honing the blades until they surpassed razor sharpness. Once pleased with her work, Clark wrapped the dagger sheath around her thigh and placed the weapon back in its leather cover. Clarke then returned the sword to its scabbard on the wall. By the time these tasks were complete, the camp was alive with activity. The people making their way down to breakfast.

Clarke opened the shutters on her windows to her hut, to let in the fresh air and morning light, before turning to where Grace slept peacefully. She scooped the soundly sleeping bundle into her arms and positioned her on the familiar place between her breasts, before winding the soft leather material around Grace’s body, fastening her to Clarke’s. Clarke shoved her boots on and shrugged her fur coat onto her shoulders, before leaving her hut and following the crowds of Skaikru to breakfast.

Clarke hadn’t realised how ravenously hungry she was until she smelt baked beans, sausages and eggs wafting from the kitchens. Clarke thought about the last time she ate something. Realising that breakfast yesterday didn’t count, because she had thrown it back up not half an hour later. She was shocked to realise, her last meal was at lunch time two days ago with Raven. Clarke listened to her stomach gurgle angrily from her neglect, as she went to the end of the breakfast line.

The tables were filling up with bleary eyed Arker’s, and the cafeteria slowly began to come alive with activity. Clarke smiled broadly and without restraint to hear that the conversations around the room were not focused on her, but the smile faltered when she realised they were now speaking about the Commanders arrival with animated excitement and enthusiasm. Clarke felt jealousy rear its ugly head, as she thought of the fearful and angry reception she has received from the Skaikru, after nearly sacrificing her sanity to save them from the mountain. But they could be excited for Lexa’s return, after she had left them to their deadly fate.

Clarke pushed the feelings of resentment down. She couldn’t afford to get lost in them today. She needed to focus, so Clarke directed her attention to a small victory. She was greeted by less staring than usual, and Clarke’s heart did a little flip as her previous happiness returned. Clarke took the offered tray of food and made her way to the table she had sat at with Bellamy and Raven days before.

As soon as she sat down, she tore into the food on her plate, uncaring what it tasted like. Instantly appeasing her stomach when food was offered to it, in apology for past forgetfulness. Clarke was half-way through stuffing her face, when Raven, Bellamy, Octavia and Lincoln all took seats around her. Clarke smiled contentedly to her friends in welcome, and she received sleepy grumbles in reply. Octavia and Lincoln still sweating profusely from an early morning sparring session, were the only
ones at the table besides Clarke who looked awake. Nevertheless, conversation ensued.

“So Raven, I hear you are working on a new project.” Lincoln grinned down at the young mechanic slouched over a cup of coffee with her eyes half closed as she took eager sips. Raven glared at Lincoln like he had just personally affronted her.

“Uh uh! No way grounder boy! Do not try to make friendly conversation with me until I have at least started my second cup of coffee for the morning. It is ill advised and potentially life-threatening. For you.” Raven threatened. “Just ask Bell what happened last time he tried it.” She grumbled sleepily, as she rested her head against the cold metal table. Bellamy paused mid-bite of his eggs and glanced up. Several sets of eyes gazing at him questioningly.

“Uh she lunged at me from across the table and bit my cheek. We both fell on the ground and she still wouldn’t let me up, until I told her she was the top dog.” He mumbled quietly as his cheeks reddened.

“Why?” Clarke asked between halting chuckled.

“I don’t know. She didn’t even remember doing it to me hours later when I smacked her over the head for making my face bleed. So warning from the wary, keep away from top dog until she has drunk her black engine oil over there. She goes crazy without it.” Bellamy laughed as Raven scowled at him. “So I heard you guys ran into some Azgeda yesterday while out on patrol.” Bellamy stated, looking between Lincoln and Octavia.

“Yeah we did. We were just lucky that Clarke was there with us. She sorted them out.” Octavia smiled fondly at Clarke, grateful for Clarke’s intervention. Octavia wasn’t sure that she and Lincoln would have beaten the Azgeda and escaped unscathed on their own.

“Really? You fight?” Bellamy asked incredulously. Clarke offered a small grin, saying nothing more on the subject. “I’ve picked up a little hand to hand combat myself, Lincoln has taught me a few things. Maybe we should spar some time.” Bellamy enthused. Octavia burst into fits of hysterical laughter. “What?” Bellamy asked, oblivious.

“Bell, even I can kick your ass! You stand no chance against Grounder Griffin over there.” Octavia chuckled at his dumbfounded expression.

“No way! I don’t believe you.” Bellamy retorted adamantly. Looking between Clarke and Octavia’s knowing smirks.

“Don’t believe me, check this out.” Octavia exclaimed as she pushed her jacket to the side to reveal a nasty black bruise. “I’ve got more than one bruise that looks like that. And that’s when Griffin was going easy on me. Plus I didn’t even get a single shot in. She hasn’t got a mark on her. She well and truly kicked my ass!” Octavia beamed. Bellamy frowned at the bruise a moment before turning to Clarke and giving her a questioning stare.

Clarke simply shrugged, not wanting to rehash the story of being trained by an assassin in a room full of wandering ears. The people were already uncomfortable around her, she didn’t want to give them any more reasons to fear her.

“Holy shit.” Bellamy mumbled under his breath.

“Even Lincoln thinks you could beat him without much effort.” Octavia smiled, chuckling at Lincoln’s shocked and embarrassed expression now that the cat was out of the bag.

“I only meant that you would be a formidable opponent Clarke, I.. well.. jok.” Lincoln stammered,
trying to recover from his embarrassment.

Clarke smiled fondly at Lincoln and gave him a knowing look, communicating that she understood what he meant. “It’s okay.” She reassured.

Everyone’s attention drifted to Grace as she began to stir from her sleep, probably preparing to squawk hungrily in about three seconds. Clarke began to hastily untie her chest bindings and lower Grace into the crook of her arm. With one final sweep of the cafeteria for judgemental glares, Clarke unbuttoned her shirt and freed her breast, offering her nipple to searching lips. Grace latched on greedily and grasped a braid in her chubby little fist. Clarke watched as Grace slowly opened her eyes and rubbed them as she woke. Her beautiful blue orbs staring happily at Clarke, who smiled fondly at her dozy daughter. Clarke returned the happy grin with a drowsy lopsided one of her own, the nipple temporarily falling from Grace’s mouth as she smiled.

Clarke returned her attention to the conversations around her as Grace resumed her suckling. Everyone around the table was talking animatedly, except for two; Raven who was murmuring unintelligibly into her coffee cup and Octavia, who was staring curiously at the exchange between Grace and Clarke. Octavia offered a slightly embarrassed smile, which Clarke returned. Clarke silently wondered if Octavia had been thinking about the prospects of one day having her own children. From what Clarke has observed so far, Lincoln has planned for children, whereas Octavia hasn’t given it any thought. Plus she’s incredibly uncomfortable around babies, which Lincoln seems to find amusing. Clarke ignores Octavia’s attention, and tunes into the conversations going on around the table.

After breakfast Clarke sets out to complete the chores she had neglected the day before. She bounced Grace on her hip as she went about collecting firewood, candles and two extra sets of clothes for the both of them. Clarke hauled the supplies back to her hut, before heading out once again to continue with her list.

Clarke tried valiantly to keep busy so to stop her mind from wandering to Lexa’s arrival. But she wasn’t having much luck. Every few minutes her attention was diverted towards the gates to double check that the Commander wasn’t here yet. Despite knowing that repeatedly checking was irrational and she would probably hear the commotion at the gates when Lexa arrived, Clarke continued to double-check anyway.

Clarke was viciously fighting an internal war, between her body and her emotions. The dread she felt continued to grow in strength and was strangling her with every passing minute. She fought desperately to keep her mind and body on the task of completing her chores, instead of racing to the stables, saddling the fastest horse available and leaving Arkadia, as her emotions demanded she do.

By lunch time, Clarke’s body was an anxious mess and she was struggling to keep her emotions tucked away inside. Her hands shook and her breathing had grown rapid. She was headed in the right direction for a panic attack, Clarke diagnosed. But alas, she pushed the powerful emotions down for the millionth time this day and continued her chores.

Next on the list was to find Grace’s crib that Abby had ordered completed the day she had arrived. Clarke wandered around the camp grounds, trying to locate the carpentry shack. When she finally found it, a kind older man, by the name of Jay greeted her. The wooden cot had been finished late last night after a solid day and a halves work had been put into constructing the wooden structure. It really was breath-takingly beautiful work. Jay had painstakingly carved little butterflies and the outline of a thick forest, into the delicate wood on the flat head and end boards of the crib. Along the wooden bars that made up the sides of the crib, that would stop Grace from rolling out of the little bed, there were also intricate carvings. Jay had created a scene of gentle forest animals frolicking and
playing between blades of grass and drifts of snow. Rabbits, butterflies, deer, there was even a little turtle. The crib had been sanded and polished to a beautiful shine. Clarke was awestruck by the attention to detail and clearly masterful craftsmanship of the piece of furniture.

Jay had beamed with pride as Clarke had praised his labour, and then loaded the crib onto a little hand pulled wagon to help Clarke take the furniture back to her hut. He chattered to Clarke the whole way, seemingly un-phased by who and what she was. He didn’t seem to care that she was Wanheda, and Clarke found it refreshing to be around someone who was un tarnished by hate and fear. Jay was kind and gentle and he was overtly gregarious, but he eased some of Clarke’s distress about Lexa’s arrival. Clarke was grateful for the distraction.

Once the crib had been delivered to the hut Clarke thanked him and asked about payment. Jay had informed her about the Chancellor having already compensated for the work. Clarke inwardly sighed as she realised that she needed to thank Abby for the gift.

Once Jay had left, Clarke went about placing the crib in the perfect place and finding extra furs and a little mattress for Grace’s new bed. Clarke set the little bed up next to her own and pushed it up against the wall, so that they were side by side. The crib was big enough that Grace would be able to spend the next couple of years sleeping in it.

But Clarke quietly loathed imagining a single night when Grace wasn’t firmly tucked up beside Clarke’s own body. The little girl’s presence was a soothing balm to Clarke’s frayed nerves, and helped keep the nightmares at bay. Clarke knew that she would need to learn how to sleep without Grace by her side soon, and that that day may be quickly approaching. But Clarke pushed down the realisation. Having too much on her mind as it was without worrying about anything more.

It was late afternoon by the time Clarke had finished her chores and had nothing left to do. Clarke had made it down to a late lunch, but had barely touched her food. Her stomach was twisted in painful knots, as she continued to fight with her choice to remain in Arkadia. Her friends had all eaten earlier in the day, so Clarke had sat by herself, glaring menacingly at the innocent meat and bread on her plate. Unable to consume a bite of it in fear of throwing up.

Clarke’s panic over Lexa’s arrival was beginning to consume her every thought. It was becoming increasingly hard to keep herself inside the camp, she felt like the walls were boxing her in and constricting. Arkadia felt claustrophobic and suffocating. She wanted nothing more than to disappear. But her promise to Kadeon continued to play on a loop in the back of her mind. By this point it was being screamed at her to be heard over the erratic pounding of her heart and the rushing of her blood in her ears. Clarke’s nervous ticks had become more prevalent, her leg bounced every time she sat for too long, and her hands continued to fidget. Clarke was unable to stay in one place for an extended period, constantly needing to move her feet.

Grace was in a particularly sour mood this afternoon also. The baby girl constantly grumbling, and wanting to be held and comforted, and despite how many times Grace was fed or entertained, she was still very upset and unsettled. Clarke wondered if Grace’s distress was in response to her own. If her baby daughter could somehow understand that Clarke was scared, angry and fighting to stay present. But Clarke also questioned if Grace was experiencing some kind of distress of her own, she would begin teething soon. Maybe she was starting? If so, the next few days were about to become even more unbearable.

Clarke still needed to find out the results from Grace’s and her self’s blood tests, and she needed to thank Abby for the crib. But Clarke was in no mood to face her mother. She was a mess right now, too many emotions and not enough walls to hold them all in. Clarke decided that she wasn’t a complete masochist, and that she would deal with one painful problem at a time. First Lexa, then
Abby. She reasoned that the blood results would simply need to wait.

So it was late afternoon and Clarke had nothing left to do for the day. She could try to find her friends and take her mind off of Lexa. But she knew that her friends would immediately know something was up, and the last thing Clarke wanted to do was explain her feelings regarding Lexa to anyone. Deciding that she was unfit for human company, Clarke prepared for a walk around the perimeter of Arkadia. Inside the walls of course, because allowing herself to walk around outside was just asking for trouble. Clarke doubted that she had the self-control by this point to stop herself from running if she was greeted by a glimpse of the forest. So Clarke strapped a cranky Grace to her front, slipped her coat on, and strapped her sword on her back. Clarke knew there was no plausible reason for carrying the weapon with her. There were no threats, well besides Lexa. And Clarke doubted that when Lexa arrived and learned of Clarke’s survival, she would want to kill her. But Clarke donned the sword, because it made her feel safe and she felt protected as the familiar weight of the weapon grasped her shoulder. The hard press of steel helping to ground her. That and Grace’s warm little body pressed into her chest, helped make Clarke feel bound to the earth again.

Clarke set off to the wall to walk. Her mind never stopping its anxious spiral. Clarke began to increase the pace of her walk, her legs scissoring quickly as she hastily walked around the wall. Some of the guards looked at her with quizzical expressions, probably wondering what Clarke was doing. But she didn’t care. She needed to do something. Clarke continued to walk laps of the camp until her legs burned. It was nearing dusk now and camp was beginning to come alive with people rushing to finish work and settle in for the night.

Clarke was on what she thought must have been her fiftieth lap of the perimeter, when she heard the guards yell out to open the gate. The people of Arkadia began to murmur excitedly about the Commander having finally arrived. Clarke froze in her tracks, as she surveyed the crowd beginning to gather around the gates just one hundred metres in front of her. The gates groaned and protested loudly as they were pulled open for the Commander and her travelling companions to enter through.

Clarke recognised the figure seated proudly atop her horse, and her heart stopped beating in her chest.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it has been a while since I updated, I’ve been with my family and time has escaped me. But I promise I will have more chapters uploaded soon to make up for it! Thanks so much for all the feedback guys, it has really helped me become inspired, and has given me an idea of what you all enjoy about my work. So keep the comments coming, they really help! Thankyou for all your continued support, it really means a lot. Hope you all like the new chapter!
Lexa sat atop her black stallion, as she and her travelling party entered the gates of Arkadia. Lexa couldn’t stop herself before she was searching the crowd for one familiar face. For the shock of blonde hair that she dreams about, and the mesmerizing blue eyes that are unlike anything she had ever seen on this Earth. She couldn’t stop the crushing disappointment that seized her lungs and made it difficult to breathe as she scanned the crowd and did not find Clarke’s face amongst the throng.

Lexa had developed this particularly unhealthy habit after she had learned of the decimation of Mount Weather. When she was told that Clarke had remained at the stronghold of their enemy after she herself had walked away, and then had destroyed the grounders fiercest adversary in one deadly strike. Ever since that night, and ever since learning that Clarke had not returned with her people to Arkadia, Lexa had searched crowds for that one face and as always, she was greeted by the vicious lance of pain to her heart as she realised Clarke was nowhere to be found.

It had been a whole year and a half since Clarke was last seen. And every day without her had felt like a piece of Lexa’s soul was missing. Her heart and lungs felt like they had been encased in red hot, liquid brass. She felt like the brass cooled and set a little harder every day that Clarke remained missing, constricting the beating of her heart and the expanding of her lungs with each breath. Every day, the pain became a little bit more unbearable. Because, no matter how hard Lexa looked for the girl who had taught her that life was about more than just surviving, she remained lost to Lexa. Clarke didn’t want to be found. And it killed Lexa inside.

Lexa pushed down her stifling disappointment, positioned her mask in place firmly and brought her mind back to the present. To the task at hand. Three Azgeda men had been killed inside Arkadia’s borders only yesterday, signalling a possible uprising on Nia’s behest. She needed to find out what the Azgeda were doing so close to Skaikru camp, and whether this was a provocation or a mere coincidence.

Lexa guided her horse through the creaking gates of Arkadia. She dismounted swiftly, and in one fluid movement. Her red pauldron flaring dramatically behind her. Lexa strode forward with authority and control dripping from her pores. She appraised the gathered Skaikru around her, and was greeted by the familiar looks of awe and respect. Lexa heard her travelling companions dismount their own horses, and move to flank their Heda.

Out of the corner of her eye, Lexa saw a figure push his way passed the tightly packed crowd that had formed around the gate. She turned her attention to Bellamy as he made his way to Heda. He stopped a few feet in front of her and bowed his head respectfully.

“Heda, welcome to Arkadia. We have been expecting you.” Bellamy raised his head and inspected the woman in front of him. Her face a blank mask of stoicism and her posture straight and rigid. Her cheeks looked hollower and gaunter than the last time he’d seen her. Bellamy kept his observations to himself and said nothing.

“Bellamy. Where is the Chancellor?” Lexa’s tone was short and clipped. She was slightly irritated that the Chancellor could not spare a moment to welcome them properly.

“Chancellor Griffin is currently held up in surgery, Heda. She sends her apologies for not being here
in person to welcome you. But she has asked me to attend in her absence.” Bellamy kept his tone even and confident, despite feeling intimidated by the expressionless face that stood before him.

“Very well. Bellamy of the Sky people.” Lexa gestured for him to continue. Without looking behind her, Lexa handed her reigns to the warrior near her. Ontari took the offered reigns.

“Follow me please Commander.” Bellamy cleared a path among the crowd and leads the Commander and her party to the Commanders barracks.

Lexa continued her habit of searching faces as she followed Bellamy towards her accommodations. She couldn’t help it, her eyes seeming to have a mind of their own as her gaze washed over the sun-kissed faces of the Skaikru. Out of the corner of her eye she thought she saw a blonde head of hair, but it was gone before she could examine it. This would not be the first time her mind had played tricks on her, and shown her what she wanted so desperately to be real. Nevertheless, Lexa stutter-stepped as her brain registered the golden hair, which earned her a disgusted scowl from Titus as he walked just behind her. She fought down the blush that wanted to spread across her cheeks, and up her neck.

Titus knew that she was searching for Clarke, and he thought her weak for caring about her. If he had any say in the matter, he would simply find and kill Clarke so that Lexa’s focus returned to her people. He despised Clarke for the weakness she had created within Lexa, and in turn resented Lexa for allowing her weakness to be broadcasted across the coalition as she sent riders out every month in search of her. Titus had always been an angry and hateful soul, but his sour personality had been amplified as Lexa’s attention continued to wander.

Lexa shook away the feeling of disgrace, and raised her chin minutely to intimidate those around her. She saw Titus shrink back slightly in her periphery, and she bit down a satisfied smirk.

Lexa continued to walk by the crowds of gathered Skaikru, and kept her footfalls even and steady, so not to slip in the mud. That would be unacceptable. The weather was beginning to warm now that winter had run its course, and the snow had melted as the air grew warmer. Signalling the birth of Spring.

Lexa admired the Commander’s barracks as they draw ever closer to the structure. Lexa had sent men and women of various trades to teach the Skaikru the necessary skills to survive and thrive on the ground. It had taken many months, but eventually the Skaikru began to learn, and their skills improved. The Commander’s barracks was one of the first structures constructed after the Skaikru builders were taught how to create a structurally sound building, that would not blow over with the next strong gust of wind. They erected it to show their appreciation to Lexa for allowing them into the coalition and for sending people to help them learn trades. Lexa had been proud of the Skaikru for their achievements, like a parent would as their youngest and most stubborn child learnt a new talent.

The grey building was long and had two stories, the building itself was positioned directly next to the guard tower. The first floor was designated for Lexa’s travelling companions. It had at least twelve bedrooms, a sheltered communal fire pit and wash rooms. The second story of the structure was for the Commanders use only. There was a large room designated for war councils and meetings, a massive bedroom that could easily fit twenty people to sleep comfortably. There was also a bathroom and fire pit. It was very luxurious, and the closest in magnificence to her own chambers in Polis than any other accommodations within the coalition.

The Skaikru had explained that they had considered building a kitchen and separate stable for the Commander and her envoys use only, but they decided against it so to encourage mingling between the two cultures. Which they were right about, Skaikru now happily mixed with the other clans of
the coalition and had no issue with interacting. It made Lexa proud of her accomplishments.

Bellamy stopped just in front of the building, and turned to face the Commander again.

“I trust you know your way around the barracks Heda?” Bellamy asked, he offered the woman before him, a small knowing smile. He knew very well that the Commander was familiar with the barracks. The Commander had spent many nights here in her pursuit of Clarke, coordinating search parties with Abby.

Bellamy swallowed nervously as he thought of Clarke. The Chancellor had given strict instructions that no one tell the Commander that Clarke had returned until she had spoken to Clarke. Which she had wanted to do today, but had been pulled into an emergency surgery, plus Clarke was avoiding Abby. Which was understandable. But now the Commander was here and she still didn’t know that Clarke was alive and well. Bellamy knew that it could be perceived as an insult to keep this information to himself. Nevertheless, he had orders and he was determined to follow them. So he pushed the nerves down and persevered.

“Yes, thankyou Bellamy.” Lexa nodded quickly.

“The Chancellor has arranged a meeting with the Captain of the Guard tomorrow morning after breakfast. You can inspect the Azgeda bodies then and hear the accounts of the warriors who killed them. The Chancellor has asked that we convene in your war room to discuss this incident. Is this acceptable?” Bellamy asked in a gruff tone as he continued to fight down his apprehension. He knew Clarke would not cope well with these events. She would probably need someone to talk to, he thought solemnly to himself.

“Yes this is acceptable. Thank you Bellamy.” The Commander nodded once again to him.

“In the meantime, you are welcome to lead your horses to the stables, dinner is held at sundown in the dining hall. You are welcome to join us.” Bellamy offered her another small smile. Despite the fact that Clarke would not be happy about Lexa’s arrival, he was genuinely pleased to see her. She had done so much for the Skaikru, and helped them become stronger as a people. He was grateful to her.

“Thank you Bellamy. I will be there.” Lexa said firmly. She did not return his smile, but she didn’t smile anymore. Not since Clarke, so it did not surprise the man. Bellamy nodded respectfully and left.

Lexa sent a handful of warriors to take the horses to the stables and tend to them. She ordered the remaining warriors to pitch tents and settle into the barracks. Since she travelled with fifty warriors, excluding her generals and advisers, the warriors would be forced to camp in tents outside.

Lexa had two warriors bring in her belongings and set them up in her quarters, so she could retire there for a few hours before dinner. Her room was spacious and very comfortable, the walls were a mix of materials, stone, metal and wood. The room had a large four poster bed dominating the centre of the room. It was piled high with furs and pillows. There was a large dark wooden desk in the corner of the room, which was decorated with intricate carvings patterning the soft wood. There were two chairs tucked up under it.

A large fire pit was built into one of the stone walls of the room. Lexa had been told that this type of fire pit was once called a fireplace in the old world. There was a large couch seated in front of the fireplace, that was also covered in furs, and a large bear skin covered the wooden planked floorboards.
A sturdy cupboard sat proudly next to the desk that was designed for holding clothing and a full length, standing mirror placed beside it. This artefact had initially surprised Lexa, as reflective glasses such as this were very rare, and to find one unmarred by time or damage was almost impossible.

There was a row of ceiling high windows that opened out onto a balcony. There were soft materials of various colours, draping from these windows to break up the harsh sunlight that shines through them at dawn. Along the right wall is a little partition that leads to another room used for bathing. In this room there is another, much smaller window to allow natural light in, plus a strange, clear Skaikru material that allows sunlight to shine in through the roof, but stops the weather from getting in. It had a large porcelain bath tub in the centre of the room, bigger than any Lexa had ever seen. It could easily accommodate two people. Not that Lexa would ever have reason to share her bath with another. There would only ever be Clarke for her. The bathroom had running water, and even a flushing chamber pot. Another artefact from the old world apparently, called a toilet.

But by far, Lexa’s favourite parts of her accommodations were the beautiful paintings that lined the walls. She had later learned that they had been retrieved from Mount Weather, which had initially made her uncomfortable. But eventually she had looked past the dark history of the art and had been able to appreciate the beauty and talent of the works.

Lexa walked into her luxurious room and shut the heavy double doors behind her. She let out an audible sigh as she leaned against the door frame. She felt so tired. Not physically, but emotionally. Her despair for Clarke grew with every minute separated from her, and there was nothing Lexa could do to remedy it. Clarke did not want to be found. Lexa went to her clothing chest and riffled through the materials until she found the rolled-up parchment hidden beneath them all. Lexa took the maps and laid them out across the large table tucked away in the corner. Lexa began poring over the charcoal landscapes.

They were dotted with various coloured lines and markings.

Green crosses marked where there had been confirmed sightings of Clarke, along with a number, signalling the week since Clarke’s disappearance. Sadly there were not many green crosses on her map. As many villagers could not provide proof of Clarke’s presence. And the ones that could, displayed their badly beaten bodies to her scouts as proof, saying that Wanheda had attacked them and tried to kill them. Those reports in particular had made her heart constrict, she had felt guilt and regret for Clarke’s pain. Blaming herself for the young Sky girls suffering.

The Red markings showed where villagers had spoken of seeing Clarke but had no proof, there were hundreds of red markings on the large map. Lexa felt disheartened when she looked at these marks, as she had no way of knowing if these had really been Clarke or just stories told by the villagers as they told tales of seeing Clarke’s ghost, many believing that the Commander of death had killed herself to fully harness the power of death. Becoming death itself. Lexa had felt tears burn her eyes when she first heard of those rumours, she believed Clarke too stubborn to commit suicide, but she had no way to be sure. So she had wilfully pushed the possibility aside and ignored it, continuing her search. However there had been fewer and fewer reports of Clarke after the first five months of Clarke’s disappearance. Until they had eventually been constricted to a mere trickle. Lexa had only received seven reports in the past nine months, and none of them could be verified. Either Clarke was dead, or she had become smarter at hiding her tracks. Both notions made Lexa’s fist bunch in frustration.

Lexa now scoured the map, and desperately searched for a pattern between the markings. Trying to figure out where Clarke might have journeyed to next. But like every other night she had examined the diagram, she did not have enough information to identify a pattern and even less data to predict her next movement. Nevertheless, she scanned the map studiously, looking for any clue. Grasping
desperately to any ounce of hope she still possessed.

By the time Lexa looked up from the maps, it was because she could no longer see the scribblings. Night had fallen over the camp, and now the Skaikru were making their way down for their supper. Lexa begrudgingly stood from her seated position, and stretched her muscles, that had grown stiff from her poor postureing bent over the maps. Lexa made her way out of her quarters, down the creaking steps and out into the night air.

The warriors around her stood to attention as she exited the barracks.

“Disha sheidgeda osir eit kom skai kru. This night we eat with the Sky people.” Lexa commanded her warriors. She was answered by several ‘Sha heda’s’ and then they all set off towards the dining hall. Ontari and Jameson, her personal guards, flanking her as they walked.

Lexa led her people past the Skaikru, who regarded them with awe and respect. The people parting like the red sea to allow a path for her and her warriors to walk. Lexa continued her habit of scanning faces, even though she knew she would garner the same disappointing results as before. Lexa continued her brisk walk to the dining area. The harsh fluorescent lighting, still made her eyes ache as she entered the hall. The conversations of the Skaikru becoming louder and more animated as she entered and made her presence known. She could hear them speaking enthusiastically about her arrival, many of them speculating as to the reason she was there. She heard many mentions of Wanheda, and Lexa’s ears perked up, as she detected many other people speaking about Wanheda as well. She had never witnessed so many people gossiping shamelessly about Clarke before. Perhaps there was news of her? Lexa thought to herself, as she fought to keep the giddy excitement off her features.

Lexa and her warriors joined the line for food, as Lexa continued to listen to the conversations being had around her. She hoped that the gossip might provide some actionable information as to Clarke’s whereabouts, but it only proved to confuse Lexa. She heard some Skaikru speak of how Wanheda was a ruthless killer now. That she was fierce and frightening, and no one could stand under her emotionless stare. Lexa furrowed her brows at that revelation. How could these people possibly know these things about Clarke unless they had seen her. Lexa’s mind abruptly halted on one conclusion. These people had seen Clarke.

Hope bloomed in Lexa’s chest, strong and powerful, and completely blinding. Lexa searched the crowds frantically for the golden hair and eyes like the sky. Her gaze landed on the remaining adolescents of the one hundred. She saw Bellamy, Octavia, Raven, even Lincoln, who had a red haired infant in his arms, there were a few others that Lexa recognised but could not remember the names of. But more importantly, there was a head of golden blonde hair.

Lexa’s heart sped up at the sight, her body beginning to feel weightless as the giddy excitement began to make her body fill with helium. The blonde hair was braided, with beads and feathers adorning her mane. Across her back was a sword and her body was covered predominantly by a large fur coat. The blonde head turned to speak with Raven, and Lexa recognised the face immediately. The face she never thought she would see again, and her heart soared free from her chest. Lexa felt sweet relief fill every pore of her body as she realised Clarke was here. Clarke was alive and she was safe. She wasn’t dead. ‘I’ve found her,’ Lexa nearly yelled with pure and unrestrained joy.

Lexa felt the solidifying brass around her heart and lungs chip away with every second she looked at Clarke, until she could finally breathe normally. She sucked in a massive lungful of fresh air and felt as though it was the first time she had breathed in a year and a half. She felt her heart beat speed up as the adrenalin coursed through her veins. Lexa appraised the blonde shamelessly, and before she
knew it, a joyful grin had escaped past her carefully constructed mask. And for the first time in one year and six months, Lexa smiled, truly smiled. Without thought or reservation, she smiled.

Chapter End Notes

It's all happening now guys! Lexa and Clarke are finally in each other's cross hairs - exciting! I hope you all enjoy the chapter, it was super fun to write!

Just a heads up guys, I have my end of term uni exams in the next few weeks so I will be studying pretty hard core, but I will try really hard to keep the chapters coming. Even if I cut their length in half so that you all don't have to wait longer periods, while I find time to write. Just wanted to warn you all. Anyway.

Keep the comments coming! As always I love, love, LOVE hearing your thoughts on my work! Thanks so much for all your continued support, it's very much appreciated!
After Lexa had arrived, Clarke had gone into an emotional tail-spin. She did not want to be anywhere near the Commander, so she made herself as busy as she possibly could. Clarke had had a shower and bathed Grace, and in an effort to calm her mind that was haemorrhaging chaotic thoughts and emotions by this point, she began drawing in the safety of her hut. It had helped a little, for a small period, her mind was absent of thought or care, but as soon as she had stopped, the riot began once more. She had just finished a sketch of Grace giggling, when she heard a knock on her door. Clarke had been very surprised to see Bellamy standing before her. He came in and they talked for a few hours, his presence proved comforting, to Clarke’s astonishment. Then night had come and he had asked Clarke to join him and the others for dinner. Clarke had wanted to protest, knowing that she might see Lexa. But somehow Bellamy had convinced her to come down.

So that’s how she found herself seated at the groups usual table, surrounded by her friends. Staring at, rather than eating her food. Her stomach was in no way ready to accept sustenance, it was still a roiling mess of anxiety and distress. The group had eagerly begged for cuddles with Grace, much to Clarke’s relief. Her daughter had been grumpy all day and Clarke was tired, unable to deal with anything more. So the baby had been passed around her friends. First to Raven, then Bellamy and now Lincoln cradled the little girl protectively in his arms. Octavia watching on with fascination, as Grace stood up on Lincoln’s thigh’s and bounced her little legs playfully, the baby giggling as Lincoln made comical faces.

Clarke tried to tune into the conversations around her but was struggling to focus on anything besides Lexa. She had purposefully positioned her back to the entrance of the dining hall, as she didn’t want to give herself an opportunity to obsess over whether Lexa would be at dinner or not. Raven was seated next to her, and she had been curiously staring at Clarke for the past ten minutes. Something Clarke also chose to ignore.

“Are you okay Clarke?” Raven asked quietly, so the rest of the group could not hear. Her tone was solemn, which was very unlike Raven.

“Yeah I’m fine Ray.” Clarke murmured absently, her voice distant as she ran her fork haphazardly through her mashed potatoes.

“You don’t look fine Griffin.” Raven points out, using her worried tone of voice. Something that she only pulled from her arsenal when shit was getting real.

Clarke offered her friend a weak, wobbly smile. Which she knew was a mistake as soon as her lips tried to form around the alien expression. She couldn’t even pretend to be fine. Clarke was beginning to wonder if she could even face Lexa tomorrow during the hearing. She couldn’t even keep her shit together when it was just her friends around.

“It’s going to be okay Clarke. You are safe with us.” Raven offered quietly, her voice becoming soft and vulnerable. Raven grabbed Clarke’s hand under the table and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

Clarke was thoroughly moved by her friends care, and she felt unshed tears burn the backs of her eyes. Clarke pushed them back down with force, refusing to cry in public, where anyone could see.

“I think I will go back to my hut for a bit.” Clarke said quietly to Raven, who released her hand and
gave her a warm smile.

“I can keep you company if you would like?” Raven asks as she scoops a final mouthful of steamed vegies into her mouth. Chewing quickly so she could leave with her friend if her company was welcome.

“I would like that Raven.” Clarke finally answered. As she began to stand from her seat to go and clear her tray of uneaten food. Raven quickly following behind her. Clarke rubbed her hand absentmindedly across the back of her neck as she felt eyes boring into her. She felt suddenly uncomfortable, like a spotlight had been shone on her and she had nowhere to hide. Clarke knew of only one person that could affect her so much with so little contact, without even seeing her in the room. Clarke knew Lexa was somewhere in the dining hall, and she was staring at Clarke right at that moment.

Clarke summoned every ounce of strength, resentment, anger and bitterness into the forefront of her mind, as she slowly turned on her heel and searched the crowd for the face she knew she would find.

Clarke felt breathless, and her lungs heaved as the memory seized her. Clarke physically shook her head to break her minds grasp on the… Incident. Something she had purposefully chosen to never think about in a year and a half. Clarke searched frantically inside herself for the bitterness that she clung to like a life raft. She located it after long moments and clung onto it with every ounce of her strength, letting it overcome her. Clarke allowed the familiar heat of rage to simmer in her blood, and in her fury she gripped the hilt of her dagger strapped to her thigh.

Clarke’s confused and dazed expression transformed, replaced by an icy glare. Clarke reminded herself that Lexa had left her to die. She did not deserve to feel relief now that she knew Clarke was alive. She did not deserve to feel the joy that shone brilliantly from her irises. Clarke didn’t want Lexa to feel happiness. Clarke wanted her to feel the anguish that Clarke had battled, for the past year and a half. She deserved that pain. Lexa seemed to recoil from Clarke’s icy, hate filled glare. Her eyes flicked to Clarke’s white-knuckled grip on her knife, and her irises betrayed her hurt as Lexa visibly replaced her vulnerable expression with her mask of indifference.

Clarke smiled menacingly as Lexa disappeared and Heda took her place. Clarke let Wanheda take control of her expression and she noticed a number of Lexa’s warriors begin to shift uncomfortably and avert their gaze as they observed the exchange, warily tracking Clarke’s grip on the still-sheathed weapon. Clarke revelled in the heartless joy she felt as she saw the battle-hardened warriors shy
away from her gaze in fear. Clarke’s grip tightened even harder on the handle of her dagger.

Somewhere deep in the recesses of Clarke’s mind, she heard a small voice telling her to restrain herself, to not make any rash decisions in the heat of her wrath. The voice of reason sounding eerily similar to Kadeon’s. In the same palliative tone he would use when he had patiently trained Clarke to control her breathing as she mastered her skill with the bow and arrow. The thought of Kade, and the disappointment that would surely reflect in his kind brown eyes, if he had seen her in this moment, cooled her rage a fragment. Allowing her conscious mind to regain a fraction of control over her body. Clarke reluctantly released her death grip on the dagger hilt.

Clarke had completely forgotten Raven standing behind her, because she nearly jumped when she tapped Clarke on the shoulder. Breaking her trance. Clarke smacked down Wanheda, and built up her walls to appear emotionless but no longer ominous.

“Okay… Clarke. Let’s just go okay? Come on, Grace is cracking the shits with Lincoln. She’s probably hungry. Let’s go.” Raven stammered nervously. She had caught a glimpse of Clarke’s expression and was thanking any God that existed that it wasn’t directed at her. Griffin could be seriously pants-shitting scary when she felt like it. Raven looked over at Lexa, who stubbornly refused to look away from Clarke, but whose face had become just as guarded as her friends. Somehow Clarke had managed to express her rage and bitterness in one seething glare, and it had unnerved every single person sitting at the Commander’s table, plus any other fool who had braved a sticky beak and met Clarke’s eyes. If Raven didn’t know any better, she would say that the she-demon was hurt, and Raven almost felt sorry for the Commander. Raven returned her attention to Clarke, who was gazing at Lincoln trying and failing to calm a distraught Grace.

The baby girl’s face was bright red and her wails drawing the annoyed attention of the tables sitting nearby. Clarke quickly disposed of her tray and walked rapidly towards her daughter. Grace calmed a little as she saw Clarke coming towards her. The little girl was leaning her body towards her mother and holding her arms out to Clarke to be picked up. Her little fists clenching and unclenching impatiently, her wails died down to a whimper as Clarke picked Grace up from Lincoln’s arms. Clarke gave Lincoln an apologetic smile before focusing on her daughter again. Grace sniffled and whimpered, but the big fat tears had stopped flowing. Grace buried her face in Clarke’s neck and clung onto her mother. Clarke ran pacifying circles along Grace’s back, and whispered soothingly into her little girl’s ear. Grace sucked on her fist to comfort herself and rested limply against her mother’s chest.

Clarke grasped Raven’s wrist and led her out of the dining hall, stubbornly refusing to spare Lexa a second glance. Clarke somehow felt better now that she had faced Lexa, now that she had expressed her rage and let the other girl know that nothing was forgiven. For some reason the anxiety had dissipated to an extent. It was still very prominent, but it was less toxic now, less suffocating. Clarke wanders if part of her anxiety over seeing Lexa was because she knew that Lexa might have expectations about how their reunion might occur. She recalled the hurt expressed in Lexa’s eyes and Clarke felt pride bloom in her chest. She had taken away that small shred of happiness, the way that Lexa had stolen Clarke’s the day she had left her for dead. She knew she was being vengeful and vindictive, but it felt good, and Clarke didn’t care.

Clarke couldn’t bring herself to feel guilt or shame for consciously making the effort to hurt Lexa. It had felt too good and cathartic to spend an instant of her time regretting. Clarke felt blissfully out of control and let the anger and bitterness take on a life of its own. The tumultuous emotions consuming her and shoulder barging the confines of Clarke’s ribs in a desperate attempt to be released from their fleshy prison. A sentient being trying to escape.

Clarke inhaled a deep lungful of crisp night air and held Grace a little closer. She walked at a steady, almost lazy pace back to her hut, with Raven hobbling by her side. She gazed over at Raven who
was studying Clarke with calculated eyes.

“What?” Clarke asked after a moment longer of uncomfortable staring.

“What was that back there?” Raven asked curiously, her voice was not accusatory or judgemental but simply interested. Raven raised a single eyebrow, her signature Raven Reyes interrogation expression.

Clarke groaned inwardly as she immediately recognised the look. Perhaps asking Raven to accompany her was a foolish idea. Clarke mulls the question over in her mind, wondering how best to describe and explain why she needed to do what she did.

“I needed to make her feel it.” Clarke says quietly, her voice almost inaudible as a gust of wind tried to snatch away Clarke’s whisper.

“Make her feel what exactly?” Raven asked, highly confused, but mostly curious. She knew Clarke had unresolved feelings for Lexa, she knew it as soon as she had mentioned the commander to Clarke the day she had returned to them. But Raven didn’t understand the depth of those emotions, or the toxicity of them until she had caught a glimpse of Clarke’s hate face. In mechanic speak, it was like someone had poured mud into the carburettor of a machine and by some miracle it still had found a way to function. Clarke was the carburettor, and Lexa was the idiot that had added the mud. Raven honestly didn’t understand how Clarke managed to function with all the dark emotions swirling around inside of her. Raven returned her attention back to Clarke, whose expression had turned contemplative once more.

“I needed her to feel everything. I don’t know how to describe it Ray. I just… I needed her to feel a fraction of my pain.” Clarke murmured, as she looked at the ground, deep in thought. After a moment of silence, Clarke looked up to gauge Raven’s reaction. Raven typically was the friend that was light hearted and provided comic relief, she wasn’t usually very good at expressing her feelings, or making efforts to understand the emotions of others. Noticing Raven’s confused expression, Clarke elaborated. “She was sitting there with a goddamn smile on her face, acting like she hadn’t betrayed me, that I didn’t still hate her with every atom of my being. She doesn’t deserve to feel happiness, not after what she did to me. I needed to make her feel it.” Clarke said finally, a fire burning in her eyes, as her anger flared. It wasn’t directed at Raven, it was fused to her words, to the person she spoke of. But nevertheless, it made Raven look up at Clarke and reluctantly meet her emblazoned gaze. Clarke was surprised to find understanding adorning her friend’s face, not fear or wariness, or even admonishment for being so cruel and vengeful.

“I get it.” Raven answered finally, her voice tapering off slightly at the end of her statement, before she continued. “I felt similarly at a point in my life.” Raven says, almost sheepishly, her posture straightening slightly as nervous energy comes alive inside her. Raven isn’t sure if her friend is ready or willing to hear what she has to say, but she soldiered on anyway. Prepared to deal with the fall back from her words. “I felt that way about you when you killed Finn.” Raven glanced cautiously at Clarke, expecting to find anger in her expression or even worse the cold blankness that she wears like armour. But instead she was taken aback to find a sadness in Clarke’s eyes, and a silent apology on her friends lips. She continues before Clarke can say anything.

“When Finn died, I felt like my will to live was ripped from inside my chest. I felt like I had died with him, but somehow my heart continued to beat. I needed you to feel every ounce of my pain, but I didn’t know how. I let bitterness consume me and I had an anger in my chest that was so powerful that it filled the hole in my heart that had been created when Finn was taken from me. I channelled every fibre of that anger towards you Clarke. Until the Commander tied me to that post and started carving me like a Christmas turkey, and then understanding melted away the rage I felt. When I
finally comprehended why you killed Finn, that he had died by your hand so that he wouldn’t suffer a torturous death by the Commanders, the anger dissipated. I couldn’t hate you anymore, because I understood your actions, appreciated them even. I know that deep down, if I had taken the opportunity to make you suffer the pain that I had felt, I would have regretted it, and irreparable damage would have been inflicted to our friendship.” Raven paused a moment before delivering the punch line of her statement. “I am not saying that my pain for Finn is the same as your pain for Lexa. But I do know that when the cloud of anger disappears and the sun comes out to shine a light on the actions you committed whilst under the influence of that anger. When you are clear headed and in control of your actions again, you will regret any hurt that you caused her. It’s like an old world saying that I heard on the Ark. You can’t see your reflection in boiling water; similarly truth can’t be seen in a state of anger, so always analyse before you finalise. I know that you may not be ready to hear this or admit it, but the reason you are so hurt by Lexa’s betrayal, is because some part of you cared for her. From every conversation I have had with you, I can see that you have accepted what you did on the Mountain. While you feel guilt for taking their lives, you do not regret your actions, and you have made peace with your decisions. Yet you still harbor so much animosity towards Lexa for abandoning you. You can punch me for saying this if you want, but I think the reason that you can’t seem to move past Lexa leaving you behind, to face certain death, is because you felt something for her, and you believed that in turn she felt something for you as well. Don’t let your anger cause any further damage between you and Lexa. You will regret it later.” Raven finished just as they reached Clarke’s hut.

Clarke listened carefully to everything that Raven said, pushing aside the shock that had surfaced that her friend was being so open about her own emotions and then providing some insight into Clarke’s own. Raven was right, Clarke wasn’t ready to admit that she had possessed feelings for Lexa and that the reason she had felt so broken by her betrayal, was because she believed that Lexa shared her affection. But regardless, Raven was correct, whether Clarke was ready to accept these proclamations as truth or not. Clarke felt the anger and bitterness that she clung to so tightly being slowly extracted from her bones. There was a little less of both harmful substances in her body now, her emotional outrage permanently dampened by Raven’s insight.

Raven might hate the Commander, but she was proving to be the devil’s advocate more often than not. Her friend was forcing her to abandon some of the bitterness that she clung to so desperately, and Clarke could feel the hope that she buried deep within her chest advance a few inches out of the darkness. Making itself known. Only this time, Clarke couldn’t summon the same levels of rage or the bitterness to push it back down.

Clarke had thought making Lexa feel her pain had been liberating, but it paled in comparison as some of her emotional baggage was stripped away, her friend unburdening her of it without even realising she had done it. Clarke felt weightless as the lead-like bitterness was partially harvested from her marrow. The anger and bitterness were definitely still inside her, but they no longer choked her whenever she tried to breathe. Their strength and toxicity had abated.

Clarke felt tears well in her eyes, and she didn’t bother fighting them back down this time. She let them fall silently, as she gazed at her friend’s confused and slightly wary expression. Clarke smiled radiantly at Raven and pulled her into a bone-crushing hug. Unsure how else to express her gratitude. Raven had removed a burden that had slowly been dragging her into darkness for the past year and a half. Kadeon had helped her fight the darkness concerning the decimation of the Mountain Men, he had helped her combat the nightmares and accept her actions. Allowing her to find the strength to acknowledge that Wanheda was part of who she was, whether she liked it or not. But he had never been successful in easing the pain caused by Lexa, she had refused to even speak her name to him. Yet not even a week after arriving back in Arcadia, Raven had managed to accomplish what no other person had in in eighteen months. Clarke felt like her heart had sprouted wings and was ready to take flight, she felt so relived and grateful. Clarke knew words could never
express how truly divested she felt.

“Thankyou Raven.” Clarke cried into her friends shoulder. Raven and Clarke stayed like that for long moments. Raven returning her embrace, seeming to know that her friend needed the contact.

“You’re welcome Clarke.” She replied. Raven was a little startled by Clarke’s reaction at first but had folded into the hug once she realized that her boldness and candour was appreciated.

Eventually Clarke pulled back from Raven, and wiped away her tears with one hand, the other still holding Grace close to her body. The little girl still nestled into her mother’s neck contentedly. Clarke sniffled and tried to stop more tears from falling, she offered her friend a warm smile and a shaky laugh before saying “when did you get so wise?” Clarke asked playfully, shoving Raven’s shoulder good-naturedly. Earning a cocky grin in return.

“I’m a genius remember? Wise is just part of the job description!” Raven intones sarcastically, giving Clarke a mischievous eyebrow waggle. The girls both laughed at the ridiculous gesture and made their way into Clarke’s hut.

The two of them spending the next few hours talking and joking, the sombre mood from earlier forgotten.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoy the chapter guys! Let me know what you all like about it and I will try to include more in chapters later on. Thanks for the comments, keep them coming. I really love hearing from you all! XD
Lexa had been unable and unwilling to sleep that night. She had simply sat by the warm glow of her fireplace until the soft pink hues of dawn filtered through the colourful drapes of fabric that hung haphazardly from her windows. Lexa’s brain churned with a million unasked questions. Questions she hadn’t even thought to ask until Clarke had looked at her with icy hatred. Lexa had never stopped in her search and considered anything past finding Clarke. She knew that Clarke probably didn’t want to be found, but she had not spared a second to think that perhaps when she was found safe and alive, that Clarke might not want to see her. The hate in Clarke’s gaze, had confirmed this as fact, and yet it wasn’t an outcome that Lexa had foreseen. It would have been if she had looked at the situation from an unbiased perspective. If she had searched for Clarke as Heda, instead of Lexa, the love struck branweda. Moron.

Lexa itched to scour the camp for Clarke, so that she could ask her where she had been. She wanted to know what kind of life she had lived in a year and a half. Had she found peace? Happiness even? Or maybe even love? Lexa’s heart crackled with jealousy as she considered Clarke with another. Lexa had observed the way Clarke had cradled a child with fire-kissed curls and eyes that were an exact replica of Clarke’s own. The way the girl had reached out to Clarke and begged to be held, it was obvious that Clarke was familiar with the child. But it had only been a year and a half, Lexa told herself. There was no possible way that Clarke could have moved on and found love again with such haste, was there? If Clarke had felt similarly to Lexa, then finding love so easily and starting a family would have been an impossibility. Even now, Lexa was not prepared to find another, she was so hooked on Clarke she could not even look at another that way. Clarke was the reason she woke up every morning. She had become part of Lexa ever since the kiss they had shared. There was no way that Clarke could have discarded her feelings for Lexa if they had shared the same intensity of affection, unless of course, Lexa’s feelings were not reciprocated. Lexa felt like her heart was bleeding in her chest. Like a mortal wound had been inflicted.

Lexa felt tears sting her eyes and run hot rivulets of salt down her cheeks, as she thought about the possibility of Clarke having discarded her. It hurt, too much. So just like with the notion that Clarke had taken her own life during her time missing, she pushed it aside and stubbornly refused to believe it. The child could not be Clarke’s, Lexa reasoned. It could have been any one of the remaining one hundred. They are all young and healthy, they could easily have had a child of their own. Perhaps the child was Octavia and Lincoln’s, they both regarded the baby with awe and wonder. Clearly they have a fondness for the infant. That must be it, Lexa decided, Clarke wouldn’t do that. But deep down she knew that she recognised the blue of the baby’s eyes, they were eerily similar to Clarke’s. This was not a coincidence. But alas, her stubbornness won out, and she pushed the unwelcome knowledge into a dark place, so she could cling childishly to her denial.

Lexa’s mind continued to wade through the dark, murky waters of her emotions as she tried to piece together a plausible explanation for Clarke’s behaviour the previous night. Lexa knew that her betrayal on Mount Weather would be painful, but she did not think that Clarke would take the mountain without any aid and then take the lives of hundreds. Lexa had thought that Clarke would return to the Skaikru camp and gathered reinforcements at least, and perhaps if she had waited then Lexa could have offered her assistance once more. She did not want Clarke to live with the burden of killing so many. Lexa knew the kind of emptiness and heartache that kind of responsibility can create, she had experienced it firsthand herself, many times. But Lexa felt like there was more to the glare she was given the night before. It was more than hate and resentment for turning her into a
mass murderer. She felt like there was an undertone of something else that Lexa couldn’t quite place.

Clarke’s face had been so emotionless and blank, bar the fury in her blue eyes, that Lexa had been unable to read her emotions as she was once able. Clarke had changed so much in her time away that Lexa felt she barely knew the girl who now existed in her Clarke’s place. Clarke had built thick walls up around herself that stopped emotion from escaping and stopped people from getting close to her. Lexa had not failed to observe how rattled her warriors were as they stared into the face of Clarke, of Wanheda, of their own death if they had aggravated her. She was hard and cold like marble. Lexa concludes that either way, she is responsible for this change in the young sky girl. Guilt imbeds itself into her heart like a hook, pain searing her as the rusted metal tears at her flesh.

Lexa thinks bitterly to the way Clarke had responded to Raven’s touch, her ominous expression had fallen away as the dark haired girl had whispered things to Clarke, calming her. Jealousy crawls up Lexa’s spine like a weed after rain, and unbidden, images of Clarke kissing the other girl fill her mind. Lexa forces herself to stand and move to the balcony, for fresh air, uncaring if the whole of Arcadia sees her in her night clothes.

Her chest heaves as she tries to shake away the scene that had seized her mind moments ago. Lexa extricates herself from her wandering thoughts and turns her attention to the camp surrounding her. The sun is beginning to climb the horizon, the soft pink of dawn transforming into a brilliant orange as the sky warms with colour. The morning birds sing happily as the camp comes to life. People begin to wander down to the dining hall, some are gathered around the communal fire pits, warming their hands from the nip in the cool air. Others are already making their way to work details around Arcadia, the camp is alive with activity. Everyone working in tandem to function as single organism.

Lexa directs her gaze to her own warriors, many sit beside a cook fire, preferring to hunt, clean and cook their own food rather than eat the Skaikru fare, finding its texture and quality to be similar to rubber. Some of her warriors have already headed over to the sparring rings for a morning practice, and the particularly lazy ones are still dragging themselves out of bed, rubbing sleep from their eyes.

Lexa walks away from the balcony and back into her quarters, her mind is weary from a lack of sleep and the assault of thoughts she battled with all night long. But she ignores it and readies herself for the day. Lexa pulls on a fitted green shirt over her head, which matches the green of her irises, and black leather riding pants. She chooses the most comfortable garments she has, as she knows today will be long and draining. Lexa had almost forgotten her purpose for being in Arcadia as she had been so pre-occupied with Clarke’s sudden arrival in her life again, she had been unable to focus on anything else. Nothing could hold a candle to Clarke. She was Lexa’s priority. Although Lexa knew this was wrong and she had an entire coalition to care for.

Azgeda were making advances against her and she had heard reports of guerrilla activity along the border between Azgeda and Trikru territories. The Ice Nation scum sending three or four men at a time to steal and kill her people unprovoked. The Trikru that were slain in the scuffles had been dismembered, their heads skewered on spikes on the Azgeda side of the border as a threat. The behaviour was unacceptable, Grounder culture believed that the soul becomes trapped in this world to become a ghost when a warrior does not die honourably or if their body is befouled after death. All clans in the coalition have similar death rituals that require the body of the fallen warrior to be burned. The flames cleanse their soul, and prevent them from being forced to wander the land of the living as an apparition. Only once their soul is cleansed can they be reincarnated into their next life. The fact that Azgeda is devastating the Trikru warriors chances of being born again, makes them worthy of death a thousand times over. Lexa’s rage sparks to life as she thinks of the many trapped souls that now exist because of Queen Nia. Costia being one among their number. Lexa sheds her anger before it can foul her entire day. So far the Azgeda attacks had been contained to Trikru lands, but now it would seem, the Ice Nation were growing emboldened and had ventured further East than
usual. All the way to Skaikru’s gates. She needed to find out as much as she could about this occurrence, meaning she would have to inspect the bodies and speak with the warriors who had dispatched them.

Lexa pulled her pauldron and red sash on over her outfit. Stuffed her feet into her Black leather boots, braided her hair into intricate patterns, and applied her war paint in thick black slashes across her eyes. Then she began the tiresome task of concealing her weapons. There was a total of ten blades that she carried on her person. She had two daggers sheathed at her thighs, another tucked under the waistline of her pants. Two small blades were tucked up under the sleeves of her pauldron, a sneaky knife hid between her breasts, the blade secured there by her chest binding, and the final four were kept inside her thick black trench coat. The sheaths sewn into the course black fabric. Lexa strapped her sword to her back and exited her quarters, appearing menacing and ready for war.

Lexa chose Ontari, Jameson, Indra and Malik to accompany her to the Guard Tower for her meeting with Captain Miller to inspect the bodies and speak with his warriors. Lexa chose not to invite Titus along for this gathering, as he would likely have heard of Clarke’s sudden reappearance and would demand Lexa forget the girl and return to her duties as Heda. She wouldn’t abandon Clarke again, not after just finding her once more.

When Lexa arrived at the Guard Tower, she was greeted by Bellamy, and two other guardsmen, who led them up a winding staircase, past Captain Miller’s office and into a large room at the end of the hallway. The room was cold, an unnatural chill that seemed to seep into the bones, Lexa stifled her shiver. The room was all painted white metal and had ten large metallic gurneys bolted to the floor. There was a large wall full of cabinets that contained various tools, with purposes that Lexa did not even attempt to fathom, as a disturbed shudder ran down her spine. This room was unnerving. There were no windows and it smelt of chemicals and death. Each gurney had a white cloth folded at the end of them, with a metal pail hanging from a bar along the edge. Seven of the gurney’s were unoccupied, but three along the far end of the room had large lumps that resembled human bodies. The white sheets folded over their forms.

Bellamy left as soon as they had arrived to retrieve Captain Miller, the Chancellor and his warriors. He returned five minutes later with a trail of people following him closely. Captain Miller entered and offered Lexa a warm but tired smile, before bowing his head respectfully and moving further into the room. Captain Miller was followed by Abby, Lincoln and then Octavia. Lexa saw Indra stiffen in the corner of her eye at recognising her former disgraced sekken. Lexa closely observed the way Octavia’s throat bobbed nervously as she recognised Indra. And then finally Clarke entered the room, and Lexa had to fight to keep her face neutral. She was unaware that Clarke would be joining them, and she was woefully underprepared. Her heart sped up in her chest and her eyes fastened themselves to the blonde as she walked into the room.

Lexa silently promised to have Abigail Griffin reprimanded and possibly beaten for keeping information from her. For not telling her that Clarke was alive and that she was in fact back in Arcadia. The older woman had some nerve to believe that Lexa wouldn’t be offended by her treachery and that she would not be punished for her insolence. Lexa took stock of Clarke in order to fight her growing urge to throttle the Chancellor in front of everyone.

Up close Lexa could see that Clarke had changed physically, her body, from what Lexa could see of it was toned and muscular. She now wore traditional grounder clothing. She had a black singlet shirt on that hugged her curves in all the right ways. She also wore dark grey leather riding pants, similar to Lexa’s own and she also sported a thick fur coat of various colours. Clarke had the same sword and dagger from the previous night strapped to her thigh and back. As Clarke entered the room, Lexa noticed that the sky girl’s hair had grown in length and was now worn in intricate braids, with black fabric woven into the designs. Her skin was tanned and her toned muscles peeked out from the sides
of her tank top straps. Lexa also noted with dread, that Clarke had a scar that ran along the length of her right collarbone. Lexa grimaces at Clarke’s marred skin, skin that had once been untarnished and perfect. She wonders how she could have earned such a mark. Finally Lexa observes Clarke’s facial expression, which is completely blank. Clarke stares directly through Lexa, like she isn’t even seeing her at all. Lexa doesn’t see any emotion present in the sapphire blue that she adores so much, whatsoever, and it hurts. Lexa’s heart develops a stutter as she appraises the former Skaikru leader.

She quietly wonders if Clarke’s mask of indifference even rivals and surpasses Lexa’s own. She recognises the hair and the body of the woman before her. But the emotionless expression and the lifeless eyes are foreign, and Lexa feels her own mask of indifference begin to crack, tumultuous emotions trying to bleed out.

Lexa’s attention is pulled away from her appraisal when Clarke’s eyes flick past Lexa and land on Ontari. A repulsed scowl darkens Clarke’s features as she stares accusingly at Ontari.

“What is Azgeda scum doing here?!” Clarke demands. Her tone low and threatening, as she recognises the scars of the Ice Nation marring the young brunette’s face.

Lexa notices Ontari flinch almost imperceptibly at Clarke’s insult, and then her posture stiffen as she prepares to lash back. Lexa raises her hand slightly to stay Ontari’s reaction, and answers on her behalf.

“Ontari is a trusted ally. She is an enemy of Queen Nia’s, and my loyal servant. She is my personal guard.” Lexa defends, keeping her voice controlled and authoritative, despite feeling anything but. Upon noticing Clarke’s distrustful expression hardening she continued. “You can trust her Clarke.” Lexa witnesses a slight shiver run through Clarke’s body before it is stifled as Lexa’s tongue clicks over the K in Clarke’s name.

“You might trust her, Commander but I do not.” Clarke growls, before turning on her heel and walking over to the other side of the room, keeping her gaze firmly focused on Ontari. Unknowing if she was a spy for Nia, and glad that she had left Grace with Raven for the morning. Clarke stubbornly refused to meet the curious gazes in the room, and makes a deliberate point of ignoring her mother, as she stares at Clarke with pity, or was that disgust. She didn’t have energy to care right now.

Lexa silently questions Clarke’s distrust for the Ice Nation, and can’t stop her curiosity from spiking as she ponders the possibilities. The Captain of the Guard interrupts the argument before it can continue, returning the conversation to the appropriate course.

“Commander. Two days ago, these three warriors encountered the dead Azgeda that you see laid before you.” Captain Miller stated evenly, proudly even, as he gestured to the three corpses on the tables. Everyone in the room turned to the dead bodies and gathered around them for a particularly gruesome show and tell.

“What happened?” Lexa asked immediately, keen to get this uncomfortable task over with, she directed her gaze to Lincoln, Octavia and Clarke.

Octavia and Lincoln cast a quick glance at Clarke, as if asking permission, Lexa noticed with slight amusement. Despite not wanting to be a leader anymore, she was still regarded as one by her people. Clarke gave them a small nod, gesturing for them to continue. It was Lincoln who began the story.

“We had stopped for some breakfast and to let the horses graze for a moment. Three Azgeda men were spotted in the bushes…” Lincoln began, but was quickly interrupted. “Spotted by whom?” Indra asked impatiently, her tone short and clipped with annoyance. She
directed her glare to Octavia.

“Clarke.” Octavia answered quickly, recalling that her former Fos, did not like to wait for an answer, she expected them immediately and without hesitation.

“What did you see Clarke?” Lexa asked gently.

“Three men, about one hundred metres out. I recognised them as Azgeda by the colours of their furs. They had mud on their faces to conceal their scars.” Clarke answered coolly, her response quick and precise like a skilled sword strike.

“How did you respond?” Lexa questioned again. Clasping her hands behind her back to hide the anxious tremor that had begun since Clarke had first spoken to her. Even though the conversation was formal and brusque, Lexa couldn’t stifle the feeling of euphoria that bubbled enthusiastically in her chest as Clarke responded to Lexa’s questions. Although Clarke’s voice was not relaxed and carefree as it was before the Mountain, Lexa felt like her ears were listening to the most melodic music as Clarke spoke. Lexa pulled her head out of the clouds as Clarke answered her previous question.

“I demanded that they show themselves and identify who they were.” Clarke replied curtly.

“How do you know that they understood you?” Indra sneered, clearly doubting Clarke’s motives and intentions.

“Because I communicated my demands in Trigedasleng, to which they also answered in. Lincoln can confirm.” Clarke finished, keeping her tone even but allowing a drop of venom to lace her words, Indra’s satisfied smirk fell from her face.

“It is true.” Lincoln corroborated firmly. His brow furrowing into a frown, clearly not liking the insinuation that Skaikru are stupid and uneducated. Nor did he appreciate people doubting Clarke like she was incapable or weak. Lincoln held Clarke in high regard and he had the utmost respect for the young woman. She had saved Octavia’s life in the Mountain and then returned her to him, for that, she had his unwavering loyalty.

“They responded by coming out from their hiding places, and threatening our lives unless we surrendered our horses.” Clarke stated. She continued to keep her tone cold, happy to see almost everyone in the room unnerved by it, except for Lexa. Clarke was slightly annoyed that Lexa seemed to be so unaffected by Clarke.

“Obviously you did not give up your horses. Explain your reasoning.” Ontari piped up, her arms folded protectively in front of her.

“I have encountered Azgeda before.” Clarke began, giving her mother a cautious side glance to ensure that she would not interrupt and divulge the extent of those encounters to the group. But was pleased to find her mother’s face enraptured by the story, if not a little scared as she imagines the scene unfolding in her head. Confident that Abby would keep her mouth shut, Clarke continued.

“These men were armed and had already threatened our lives. I know that the Ice Nation has a pension for rape, torture and painful deaths, so I took a calculated risk by assuming that those three men would be no different and attacked.” Clarke gives Ontari a pointed look, and only returns to her story when Ontari’s face pales slightly, and she looks away. This time Clarke stares pointedly at Lexa as she says, “I will always protect my people.” Clarke controls her smirk as Lexa swallows and her eyes widen at the double meaning. Silence reigns for a moment before the interrogation continues.
“Who killed these men, and how did they die?” Lexa asks after composing herself once more. Looking between the trio. Biting back the sting of guilt as she remembers the devastation Clarke was responsible for on the mountain, and her role in forcing Clarke’s hand. Lexa knew that Clarke would probably have difficulty taking life after her experience with the Maunon, even scum such as the Ice Nation would have been hard to stomach, Lexa surmises. So she directs her gaze to Lincoln and Octavia, expecting them to have delivered the fatal blows.

Once again Octavia and Lincoln look to Clarke but not as before. This time instead of asking permission, their eyes are silently encouraging her to continue her account. Which confuses Lexa for a moment before she turns back to Clarke and directs her questioning gaze back to her, awaiting an answer.

“I killed them all.” Clarke answers fatly. Her tone so cold and icy, it felt as though they had been rapidly transported to Azgeda itself. Even Clarke was proud of the deeply disturbed looks of those around her.

“How?” Lexa asks finally, after long moments of silence. Lexa swallows thickly, her eyes narrowing as she studies Clarke’s every movement. Her stomach in her throat as dread claws at her. Surely Clarke isn’t responsible for all of this? She asks herself silently, unbelieving of the information presented before her. Clarke was not a fighter, she was a force to be reckoned with yes. But she was not a warrior. At least the Clarke from before the Mountain wasn’t a warrior, it would appear that this version of Clarke however, was. Clarke moves from her place at the back of the room and walks around the gurney’s, stopping at the end one and lifting the white sheet.

“This man was the first to die. He was the leader. I threw my dagger, stabbing him in the throat.” Clarke’s tone was completely dead and void of emotion in this instant. She pulled her thigh dagger from its sheath for a moment, presenting it to the room full of curious eyes, to indicate the weapon used to end the man’s life. Before re-sheathing it with practiced grace.

Lexa listened intently, beginning to recognise Clarke’s cold demeanour as a smokescreen for immense emotional pain. She was hurting right now, Lexa realised with a start. She couldn’t help the feeling of understanding and empathy welling in her chest. She fought the urge to hold Clarke in her arms, and refocused her attention to the presentation before her. Clarke moved to the next corpse.

“This man died from a sword to the heart. I threw the sword at him in a similar manner to the dagger.” Clarke stated, using the same deadened tone from before. Indra scoffed at Clarke, expressing her doubts with the single disgusting sound.

“And how far away was your enemy, when you accomplished this feat?” Jameson asked, as he tried and failed to disguise the awe in his tone.

“Twenty metres.” Clarke answers matter-of-factly. No hint of pride in her voice that many warriors would have brandished when telling others of such an accomplishment.

“I do not believe that one such as yourself could accomplish such a thing.” Indra spat, her tone scathing and accusatory.

Lexa was equally astonished by this information, and noticed Octavia, sloppily conceal a smirk, as she listened to Indra’s remark, obviously knowing something few others in the room was privy to. Lexa wonders how the Clarke she knew could have accomplished something so extraordinary, but Lexa forcibly reminds herself, that this Clarke is not the one she is familiar with.

“Believe what you wish Indra.” Clarke retorts with indifference, not caring what the General thinks at this point. Clarke moves to the next gurney and continues her explanation before Indra can insult
her further. Clarke reluctantly removes the final sheet, knowing that this body was the most gruesome.

“By the time I killed this man, I had no weapons left. So I charged him, kicked his legs out from beneath him. Breaking the bones and incapacitating him. Before I came around to his back and snapped his neck.” Clarke cannot look at the mangled body before her, she cannot stomach the shredded legs or the misshapen neck, of the dead man before her.

The room descends into silence as eyes travel over the distorted and broken body before them. Lexa observes the looks of disgust, awe and fear in the eyes of those around her. All of them directing these jumbled and inconsiderate expressions towards Clarke as they regard her. Many of the Skaikru regard Clarke as a monster, Lexa notices with disgust. Even Clarke’s own mother looks at her like she is an abomination of sorts. It makes Lexa’s anger boil in her chest. None of them were entitled to look at Clarke like she was less than human, or more than human for that matter, as she examined the appreciative and reverential expressions of her own warriors. Lexa pushed down her fury and studied Clarke a moment. Her jaw ticked almost imperceptibly and her eyes were cold and hard, like she was struggling to bite down her anger similarly to Lexa, after witnessing the range of emotions expressed on the faces before her. Lexa didn’t spare the corpse a second look, she had seen what she needed to see. She did not want to make Clarke any more uncomfortable than she already was.

Clarke met Lexa’s understanding gaze for a moment and her eyes softened slightly as she observed the expression of understanding on her face, but the moment was gone far too soon for Lexa’s liking, before Clarke’s gaze hardened again. Lexa continued to watch the people around the room as Clarke returned the sheet over the dead men. Lexa was pleased to find Lincoln and Octavia regarding Clarke with respect and gratitude, rather than the typical disgust and fear on most of the Skaikru’s faces. But Lexa stopped a moment as she started putting pieces of the puzzle before her together. If Clarke was busy dispatching the Azgeda, what were those two doing in the midst of the fight? Lexa thought quietly, but before Lexa could give voice to her query, Indra seemed to have come to the same conclusion and beat her to the punch.

“What were you two doing while Clarke was busy killing the Azgeda?” Indra asked incredulously. Her question directed to the both of them, but her glare remained firmly planted on her disgraced former Sekken.

“We didn’t have a chance to react. Clarke was closer to them then we were, and the whole fight was over in a few seconds.” Octavia defended hotly, not even bothering to conceal her anger at being accused of laziness or worse, cowardice. Octavia purposefully left out the part about Lincoln and herself protecting Grace, knowing Clarke probably wouldn’t take kindly to that information being shared unless she offered it up herself.

Lexa raised her eyebrows, impressed by Clarke’s prowess as a warrior, she doubted even she could have bested the three Azgeda in such an efficient and effortless manner. Lexa directed her curious gaze to Clarke, as did every other person in the room.

“I know that Azgeda often lace their weapons with poison, I could not risk them throwing a knife and harming my… Friends, so I killed them quickly, before they had a chance to consider it.” Clarke answers the unasked question, but is quickly becoming tired of being the sole focus of everyone’s curious stares.

“You seem to know an awful lot about Azgeda; our clothing, our ritual scaring, even our fighting tactics. How is this?” Ontari asks meaningfully, implying that Clarke was perhaps in league with the Ice Nation.

Clarke bristled, and fought hard to contain her anger towards the petulant and incredibly nosy Ice
“Like I said earlier, I have encountered Azgeda before. I have learnt things during my time away.” Clarke spat, her fury beginning to flood her walls of indifference, and trickling out over the top.

“What kind of encounters?” Indra asks impatiently.

“The deadly kind.” Clarke growls, as images of Kadeon’s crumpled and lifeless body flit across her mind’s eye. She turns her glare to Lexa and continues. “I have fulfilled my duty to answer any and all questions regarding the deaths of these men. My previous encounters with Azgeda have no relevance here. Neither is it anyone else’s business but my own. So if that is all, I will be taking my leave now. Heda?” Clarke fumes, her fury unleashed for all to see. Clarke feels Wanheda stirring excitedly, begging to be released, but Clarke pushes her down. Clarke had already created more of a scene here than she had been prepared to, and did not wish to further incite the fear and disgust of the people in this room.

Lexa’s heart constricts as she sees Clarke’s pain slip free from her mask of indifference and is again startled to perceive how much agony there truly was. She had seen it last night of course, but it was still unnerving, and incredibly uncomfortable to witness.

“You are dismissed, Klark kom Skaikru.” Lexa says gently, hoping to placate a little of Clarke’s anger before she stalks out of the room, and disappears down the hallway.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all like the new chapter! You're all in luck! You all get two updates in one day because I got a heap of writing done yesterday. Please let me know your thoughts, as I always love to hear feedback. Thanks for reading! xx
Clarke left the Guard Tower hastily, eager to be out from under the scrutinising stares and judgemental looks from the self-important assholes in that far too small room. Clarke’s blood was still boiling with residual anger from the encounter. However Clarke was shocked to discover that her fury wasn’t entirely directed at Lexa this time. Her rage was fuelled by Ontari’s accusations of being in league with Nia, and Indra’s insistence that she was an incapable warrior. She had also demanded and expected an answer regarding her involvement with the Ice Nation, probably beginning to believe Ontari’s ridiculous allegations. Not just that, but Abby remained impassive and continued to look at Clarke with the same distrust shared with the rest of her audience. Not even bothering to defend her, or offer her any kind of sign that she didn’t support the notions of her implied involvement with an Azgeda revolt. Especially after everything she knew.

Clarke had only just managed to reign in her rage and exercise her self-control. She did not want to put Wanheda on full display to those people. Not after the way doing so recently had backfired immensely. Letting people see the monster within, only seemed to make people fearful of her, and now almost every Arker, along with her own mother were scared and distrustful of her. Clarke couldn’t stomach anyone else looking at her like she was something that belonged only in nightmares. She didn’t want Lexa to see her that way. Despite the fact that still resented and hated Lexa, she didn’t want to be seen as something savage and feral. She still wanted someone to see past Wanheda and know that Clarke Griffin still existed beneath. Even if that person was Lexa, she didn’t care.

Clarke had been surprised to note that while most people shied away from Clarke’s anger, like it was something foul and dirty, her friends did not, and neither did Lexa. But Clarke was far too stubborn to even contemplate setting aside her remaining bitterness and anger towards Lexa, just because she had treated her with decency, in one argument.

But Clarke had indeed felt the familiar sensation of sameness, as she had inspected Lexa’s expression, as she had studied Lexa’s eyes. She had always possessed such soulful eyes, able to communicate her innermost thoughts with a single glance. If one knew how to decipher the message. Clarke had almost forgotten how expressive Lexa’s eyes were, even as her face remained a pillar of stone, unmoving and unflinching. But Lexa’s conveyed compassion and empathy towards Clarke’s plight was in no way enough to melt away Clarke’s anger and resentment.

Her heart to heart conversation last night with Raven had helped to alleviate the worst of her rage, so that it did not consume her, but it was in no way gone. Her anger still sat patiently beneath the surface, biding its time and waiting for an excuse to break free. But in this moment her fury had well and truly broken free of its bonds, and she needed an outlet unless she was willing to risk exploding at some random and potentially innocent individual unlucky enough to come across her.

Clarke knew that punching things probably wasn’t a healthy way of expelling pent up rage but she was overwhelmed and that was all she wanted to do. Like craving chocolate cake and being told to eat an apple instead. Clarke wasn’t willing to enact the healthy option, she was going to indulge herself. So Clarke left the guard tower and headed towards the sparring rings. Clarke kept her head down and her angry gaze firmly planted on the ground to avoid the stares of the Arker’s, knowing that there was a chance she could accidently high five one, or all of them in the face if she met their disgusted and fearful expressions. Clarke kept her pace brisk, and soon she was standing before the
Clarke took inventory of the ten warriors currently occupying and milling around the pit, all of them grounders from Lexa’s envoy. Clarke was relieved that none of them were Skaikru, that way there was less chance they would shy away from a fight. During the first three months of Clarke’s self-imposed banishment from everyone she ever knew. She relied on the pride of the grounder warriors to respond with violence when she mercilessly taunted them, and goaded them into attacking her or defending themselves against her. She knew that they would not back down from a challenge, and it was that knowledge that had made them easy targets for her, and unwittingly aided in her search for oblivion. Right now, in this moment, their reliance on violence to solve their problems and reverence for a good fight was what she would need to expel the pent up anger the felt right now. Clarke almost felt sorry for them, as she sized them up and tried to get a handle on their skill sets.

Clarke knew that she probably didn’t need to goad them and make her opponents angry, but it often helped those who faced her. Whenever Clarke was angry she tended to have an unfair advantage over her adversaries, and it was only fair that they be given the chance to even the playing field. A fair fight was a good fight in Clarke’s mind.

Clarke spots two warriors that look to be the fiercest warriors of the bunch, the only two that stood a chance of beating her. She takes to nick-naming them nose-hair and creaky-bones, as she didn’t know their real names and insulting them in her head made it easier to do so in reality. It was also funny. Clarke went and stood next to one of the warriors she had surmised to be of a high skill level, and interrupted her quiet appreciation of the ongoing fight before them.

“So who’s next?” Clarke asks with feigned enthusiasm, as she drums her fingers loudly and irritatingly on the wood of the fence.

“There are another two warriors after these to battle each other.” The middle-aged woman replied nonchalantly, slightly annoyed to have been pestered by the younger Skaikru girl, whom she did not recognise as the mighty Wanheda. The black bolts of cloth in her hair and the child-like tone of her voice disguising her true identity.

“Well, I would like a turn whenever a spot frees up. I haven’t had a good fight in a couple days now. It would be good to show you all how it’s really done.” Clarke states loudly and boastfully. She bites down her satisfied smirk as creaky-bones turns to give Clarke her full attention. A few of the warriors around the ring have tuned in to the conversation also, probably eager to see a cocky little Sky girl get her teeth knocked out. To Clarke’s relief, Nose-hairs is one among them.

“Boastful children get hidings in my culture.” The creaky-bones retorts, as she crosses her arms over her chest and flexes her defined muscles, clearly trying to intimidate Clarke. Clarke gives the woman an indemnified smirk, and scoffs exaggeratingly as she stirs her up.

“I bet you have a bit of trouble catching up to the boastful children now though.” Clarke states with mocking enthusiasm, earning a questioning look from the woman before her. Clarke happily obliges the woman by exaggerating her point. Readying to deliver the final insult with a giddy glee. “Well now that you have grey hairs sprouting from your head and your tired old bones can’t carry you well anymore.” Clarke delivers the final jibe with a shit-eating grin that would rival even Raven’s. Clarke truly enjoys riling creaky-bones up and smirks at the woman with self-assurance and feigned overconfidence.

“I’m not so old that I cannot teach you a lesson still, you goufan branweda. Childish Moron. Prepare yourself, you face me next.” The creaky-bones growls menacingly. As she turns to walk away.

“That’s not very fair now is it!” Clarke mocks chirpily. She chuckles as the woman turns on her heel.
and gives the Sky girl a befuddled look.

“You already intend to submit before the fight begins Sky girl? Have you no shame?” The woman sneers, clearly disgusted by Clarke’s perceived cowardice. The warriors behind her snickering as they watch the scene unfold between Clarke and the older woman.

“Oh no of course not!” Clarke croons cheerfully. “I meant that it isn’t fair for you. As I said before, you are very old and your bones are frail and weak. You may choose another warrior to help teach me that lesson. That way you are not completely shamed, when I knock you into the dirt. How about that fat gentleman over there. The one with the long bushy nose hairs.” Clarke lets out an amused cackle when nose-hairs face turns bright red in anger and he begins making his way over to creaky-bones and Clarke. Creaky-bones gives Clarke a rueful expression, as she obviously knows what Clarke has assumed. She had indeed just riled up, two of the Commander’s fiercest warriors. This will be fun, Clarke chirps happily to herself.

“I accept your challenge, Sky girl. No weapons, hand to hand combat only.” Nose-hairs states with an element of calm as he restrains his anger.

“Agreed.” Clarke beams.

By this point every set of eyes around the sparring pit, were focused on Clarke, and by the looks of things, the crowd had grown as some of the young Sekkens had eagerly spread the word about the fight. There was now, roughly, thirty Trikru warriors marshalled around the sparring grounds, eager to watch the branweda Sky girl, get her ass handed to her. Clarke was pleasantly surprised to note that no one seemed to recognise her as Wanheda. The black pieces of cloth having had the desired effect and making it harder to recognise her, plus they probably don’t assume Wanheda would need to resort to petty goading in order to secure a challenging fight. Which she didn’t, but it was always more entertaining when she did.

Creaky-bones and nose-hairs enter the ring with practiced movements and grace, removing their extra articles of clothing as they did so. Clarke pulled off her sword, jacket, and dagger from her body with feigned clumsiness, trying and succeeding to make the warriors underestimate her. Creaky-bones and Nose-hairs try to disguise their amusement at Clarke’s purposeful display of discoordination.

Clarke falls into a defensive stance, but bows one of her legs slightly to give the false impression that she is weaker on her right side. She knows it has worked when the warriors eyes fill with a predatory gleam, as they study her movements. They believe that they will win. Clarke almost laughs. She rolls her shoulder to release some of the gathered tension from her stress filled morning and loosens her muscles. Clarke grips her rage from earlier and brings it to the forefront of her mind, eager to burn it up in this fight and not have to bother thinking about it for a while. Clarke hoped that the fight would simply draw it out like a poison and there would be none left by the time she finished here. She was sick and tired of constantly feeling angry. She just wanted a little bit of release, even if it was promised to be temporary, what with Lexa sticking around like a bad smell.

She begins to circle them with purposeful movements, selling her over-confidence to the two warriors as she strikes first. Clarke lets her emotionless expression fill the curves of her face, as she initiates the fight. Clarke lunges for Nose-hairs and feigns to his right, purposefully leaving her own right side exposed. Clarke shifts her body weight slightly backwards and then crouches low in one lightening movement, as Nose-hairs fist swings out savagely to connect with her ribs. Despite the man’s burly body, he was surprisingly quick, and he was smart. His eyes constantly calculating and strategizing as he studied Clarke’s movements. But Clarke was smarter and faster. Nose-hairs had taken the opening to throw a powerful punch, just as Clarke had expected. Which leaves his back
and hindquarters exposed. Clarke twists rapidly and savagely in the air and lands a powerful kick to the man’s legs. The man stumbles forward, catching himself unsteadily.

Clarke resumes her defensive posture just as creaky-bones lunges for Clarke, trying to take advantage of Clarke’s lack of balance after her strike. But Clarke is too fast and easily arches her spine to shift her head backwards as the older woman’s fist strikes the air in front of Clarke’s face. Creaky-bones is lithe, agile, and quick and sly as a snake. Similar to Clarke’s own fighting strengths. Clarke grabs the woman’s outstretched arm with her left, and yanks her forward, using her own momentum to knock her off balance. Clarke speedily sweeps the woman’s legs out from underneath her with a swift sweeping kick to her shins. The woman begins to fall forward. Clarke then slams her elbow into Creaky-bones’ ribs to propel her downwards with more force. The blow sending her sprawling into the dirt with a heavy thump.

Clarke heard heavy footsteps and laboured breathing behind her, as Nose-hairs lumbered towards Clarke’s vulnerable back. Clarke spins quickly, to find the man attempting the same strike as Creaky-bones had a moment ago, aiming for her face while she was seemingly off balance. As Clarke had assumed earlier, this man was smart about the way he fought, probably presuming that Clarke would respond with the same combination of strikes that she had used to take out Creaky-bones. He was relying on Clarke’s muscle memory to flare to life and perform the most fluid and easy to remember sequence of attacks. But Kade had taught Clarke to think quickly on her feet, and to always be unpredictable in her combative movements. Clarke covered the distance between herself and Nose-hairs with a couple of quick steps forward. This time she did not dart backwards as the man’s fist came crashing towards her, instead Clarke blanched to the right of his extended left arm. Clarke’s reflexes were lightning fast, but her opponent was also quick, and he had advanced while Clarke was still reeling from her previous take-down. So when his fist came crashing down for Clarke’s face, his meaty hand grazed her cheek. The force making her face sting and her eyes water. But Clarke pushed it all down and continued her assault. Clarke quickly grabbed Nose-hairs chunky fist with both of her hands and used his gathered momentum to twist his arm towards Clarke and then proceed to pull the chunky limb under his body and up again with all of her might. Attempting to flip the heavy man onto his back, with one movement. Clarke felt her own muscles strain with the effort of shouldering the man’s body weight, he was extremely heavy, and much bigger than Clarke. With a grunt of effort, she sent his body sprawling in a near perfect arc before landing with a heavy thud on his back, slumped in the earth.

Clarke quickly turned on her heel to prepare for Creaky-bones’ next attack but found none. The woman was still crumpled on her back amidst the damp, hard packed earth, struggling to catch her breath after being severely winded by her landing. Clarke appraised Nose-hairs down on the ground and found that he was also wheezing and gasping desperately for breath. His eyes looked a little dazed and glassy, he probably hit his head. The fight was over just as quickly as it had begun. Clarke makes a mental note to add another warrior next time to even the odds.

Clarke looks up at the stunned crowd and smiles triumphantly, before stepping over towards Nose-hairs to offer him her hand. The man gripped the palm gratefully, and Clarke pulled him from the dirt. Nose-hairs gave Clarke a small smile.

“You fought well sky girl. You obviously had a very good teacher.” The man complemented Clarke reluctantly, impressed by her prowess it would seem.

“Thanks.” Clarke said favourably. “If it’s any consolation, I didn’t mean any of the things I said earlier. I just wanted to rile you both up. I didn’t know if you would both fight me otherwise.” Clarke gave the man an apologetic and slightly sheepish smile.

“You’re right, I probably wouldn’t have.” The man gave Clarke one final grin before limping over to the sidelines of the ring.
Clarke then walked over to Creaky-bones, and attempted to offer her the same assistance. The older woman smacked away Clarke’s offered hand and pulled herself up from the ground, wincing as she did so.

“I’m sorry if I hurt you. It was not my intention.” Clarke apologised. “And I didn’t mean any of what I said before the fight. You are a fine warrior, and you fought well.” Clarke stated, in a firm voice.

“I would thank you Sky Girl, but it would appear that I will be bruised for at least a week. So I am not so grateful. You did however, fight very well. You should consider imparting some of your skill and knowledge with some of the Sekkens while Heda is in Arcadia. They would benefit greatly from your tutelage.” The woman said with a small smile.

“I will consider it.” Clarke smiled, before bowing her head respectfully and walking from the sparring ring. Clarke marvelled at how light she felt now that she had channelled her rage into something. There was still a little that lingered, but it had mostly dissipated for the time being. Clarke made her way back to the sidelines where her belongings were laid in a neat little pile. Clarke noticed familiar facial scars and an unfortunately acquainted face staring at her with impassive eyes. It would appear that the garbage had followed her from the Guard Tower when Clarke had left, and now Ontari stood before her. Clarke absent-mindedly wondered how much of the fight the other girl had seen. She was Azgeda so she would be very familiar with the Ice Nation fighting style. But Ontari made no mention of it.

Clarke refused to let her good mood sour now that she had found an outlet for her rage. She refused to let the rude Azgeda girl rile her up and make her angry again. Clarke built her walls up high and made her face completely blank.

“What do you want Ontari?” Clarke asked impatiently, as she bent to pick up her fur jacket and weapons. Donning her belongings in their respective places, before turning to face the Ice Nation girl. Giving her a disinterested glare.

“I came to apologise and to explain myself.” Ontari stated firmly. She watched as Clarke’s eyebrow lifted in question and subtle curiosity, before elaborating. “Heda admonished me thoroughly for my accusations regarding you. I have had very bad experiences with my people, and am distrustful of anyone who associates with them. I apologise if my prejudice made you feel uncomfortable or offended. I was wrong.” Ontari finished before offering Clarke a small, hesitant smile, turning on her heel and walking away as quickly as she had appeared.

Clarke didn’t quite know what to make of that interaction. She was a little annoyed that Lexa seemed to be protecting Clarke and defending her. Clarke didn’t need others to fight her battles for her. She was not weak and defenceless; in fact she was quite the opposite. It made Clarke’s anger spark a little as she realised that Lexa must think her feeble and in need of guarding. But Clarke was too tired to let her anger consume her again, and Clarke was glad for it.

It would also appear that Clarke may have more in common with Ontari than she previously imagined. From the brief overview of Ontari’s confession it sounded as though the Ice Nation had done something deplorable to her also. So perhaps she was worth a second chance, Clarke thought to herself quietly.

It was noon and Clarke needed to find Raven and relieve her of Grace. Her daughter was due for another feed now and would probably be getting very cranky with Raven by this point. Clarke had felt a little raised lump under her daughters gums late last night as she had been feeding her. It would seem that Grace’s discomfort and clingy behaviour could be attributed to her beginning to cut her first tooth. Clarke had been overjoyed that her little girl was growing up and meeting all of her milestones. But it had also made Clarke sad to think of everything Kadeon would be missing out on.
The things he would never get to see his little girl accomplish. He would miss Grace’s first steps and words. He would never see her learn to read or shoot a bow. He would never watch his fiery headed child ride a horse or find a partner. The melancholy that this direction of contemplation brought threatened to lodge itself in Clarke’s chest and grow like a cancer. She quickly quashed it down and killed it before it had a chance to take root.

Clarke began walking back to the main thoroughfare of the camp, and admired the beautiful day now that her anger has been temporarily cured. The sun was shining brightly and brilliantly, taking the chill out of the air. The day was pleasantly warm, as the last effects of winter were melted away. There were still some lingering spots of sludgy mud, where the thickest of snow had finally melted, but now the ground was beginning to dry out and harden as the final droplets of moisture were absorbed by the sun. There was a cool breeze that blew through Clarke’s long hair and made her braids dance gently against her chest. Clarke took off her sword and jacket as she walked, concluding it wasn’t cold enough to wear the jacket right now. The sun felt so delightfully warm on Clarke’s skin. That she sighed contentedly. Clarke continued her walk back to Raven’s oversized hut, that also served as a workshop.

Clarke knocked on the door frame and poked her head into the hut when she heard no reply. Raven wasn’t there. So Clarke left again and made her way to the mechanics bay, one of the largest structures in the camp. Clarke met Sinclair at the threshold as she arrived.

“Have you seen Raven?” Clarke asked politely, as the man juggled an armful of engine parts. Sinclair looked up and sighed with relief when he saw Clarke.

“Yeah I have actually, she’s been looking for you everywhere. Grace was not a happy camper. She was here just a few minutes ago and was headed for the dining hall to go find you.” Sinclair finished quickly.

“Thanks!” Clarke called over her shoulder as she sprinted towards the dining hall.

Clarke knew her friend would not be coping well if Grace was getting hungry and upset. So Clarke barrelled towards the dining hall, hurrying to relieve her friend of her possibly very angry six and a half month old.

When Clarke reached the dining hall, she was breathless, and was met by startled glances as the Arker’s heard quickly approaching footsteps. Clarke scanned the crowd rapidly for red curls and the sound of her wailing infant. Clarke found them soon enough as Raven spotted her at the exact same moment and hobbled towards Clarke as hastily as her leg brace would allow. Her daughter gasping massive gulps of air before screaming irritably.

“Jesus Christ Clarke! Where the hell have you been? Your ankle biter has been seriously pissed for the past twenty minutes. I went to the Guard Tower to find you but the guy at the entrance said that you had left a while ago.” Raven exclaimed, the incessant crying obviously putting her on edge.

“Sorry Ray, I lost track of time.” Clarke quickly apologised.

Clarke scooped Grace up from Raven’s extended arms, and cradled her against her chest, cooing in Grace’s ear as Clarke found a spare table for her and Raven to sit at, so that Clarke could feed Grace and Raven could get her lunch.

“Yeah I bet.” Raven uttered, as she grasped Clarke’s face and inspected the big red welt on her left cheek. Raven gave Clarke a playfully irritated frown. “Please tell me that I didn’t burst my eardrums just so you could punch people.” Raven placed her hands on her hips in exaggerated annoyance.
Clarke offered Raven a sheepish smile, obviously guilty. “Sorry?” Clarke questioned playfully before offering Raven an embarrassed grin.

Clarke’s attention was abruptly brought back to Grace as the toddler gripped at Clarke’s shirt and tried to suckle through the fabric. Clarke didn’t even bother making sure no one was watching, as she untied the top of her shirt and pulled her breast free from the material. Grace got straight down to business and eagerly attacked Clarke’s nipple as it was offered to her. Clarke grimaced, and harshly exhaled as Grace ruthlessly suckled, drinking as quickly as she could to placate the hunger in her little belly. The baby behaving as though she hadn’t been fed in weeks.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow! Fuck!” Clarke swore under her breath so that only Raven could hear her. Raven laughed at Clarke’s discomfort.

“Serves you right for leaving your kid with me, with no food.” Raven chirped smugly.

“Not funny Ray.” Clarke hissed through the biting soreness in her chest. Clarke offered a pained laugh.

“It totally is. You just don’t think so, because your boobs are being attacked like they are the last set of knockers on Earth.” Raven cackled happily, finding the whole situation rather amusing.

“You would feel the same if it was you. Trust me.” Clarke grunted.

“Seriously though, when will she start eating real food. Don’t people usually start that around now?” Raven asked, genuinely curious.

“Yeah usually it’s around now. But I haven’t started anything yet because up until recently I didn’t have any permanent home, we were living on the road. Not exactly the ideal setting to be trialling solid food for the first time. Grace has just started cutting her first tooth as well. I can feel it under her gum. That’s why she’s been particularly grumpy lately.” Clarke looked over at Raven and found the expected triumphant smirk.

“Come on Griffin say it!” Raven squealed excitedly.

“Say what Raven? I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Clarke answered.

“You know exactly what! Don’t play dumb with me Griffin, it’s insulting. I totally called it! I told you that your kid was going to turn your puppies into her chew toys!” Raven guffawed with unrestrained amusement and glee, believing she was right and therefore victorious by default.

Clarke laughed and shook her head at Raven’s shit-eating smirk. She was feeling extremely proud it would seem.

Clarke’s carefree smile fell from her face when someone clearing their throat nearby caught Clarke’s attention. When Clarke looked up and away from Raven she was met by steely jade eyes, highlighted by black oily war paint. The Commander stood before her with an expressionless face, but her eyes betrayed her fury. Clarke met Lexa’s almost unnoticeable glare with one of her own.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you all think of the new chapter guys, I am always really keen to hear your opinions!
Thanks so far for all the support, you guys are awesome. The story will start getting pretty interesting from this point onwards I think. There will be lots of twist and turns that I think you will all like!

Enjoy!! xx
After Clarke had left the gathering Lexa had asked a few more obligatory questions about the incident, before admonishing her warriors for their childish behaviour. Lexa had then dismissed all except the Chancellor. Lexa had noticed with pride, that the colour had drained from Abby’s face and a fine sheen of sweat had layered her top lip. Her eyes flitting nervously between her only escape and Lexa, the towering tornado readying to rip Abby’s limbs free from her body. Lexa had waited until the door had clicked shut, leaving Abby and Lexa alone, before attacking.

Lexa had pushed Abby up against the wall with force. Crushing the Chancellor’s throat with her elbow and forearm, against the white metal wall. The woman had tried to protest and pry Lexa’s hands free to breathe, but to no avail. Lexa had told the woman that if she ever deceived her again and deliberately concealed information from her, she would bear the scars of her punishment for an eternity. Abby had nodded feebly, before Lexa had reluctantly freed the woman, as she reigned in her bubbling fury. Abby had gasped and wheezed as her hands rubbed the tender flesh around her throat before scampering out of the room like a rodent. Lexa had been pleased with the interaction. It could have been much worse for the Chancellor had Lexa wished it to be.

Lexa had then set out to prepare for the meeting in her war chambers, and decided that Clarke should be there in her capacity as Wanheda, but also the rightful leader of Skaikru. Clarke was much better suited to the role of leadership than her snivelling mother. Abby was weak and irritatingly obtuse, Lexa found. She had neither the tact, strength of character nor the intelligence to make a truly great leader, not like her daughter. So despite Clarke having shown no interest in regaining her position of authority that she had possessed before, Lexa made the executive decision to have her present for the meeting anyway. Clarke had a sound military mind and was able to strategize attacks that were both bold and unexpected. Even if Clarke was not the official Skaikru leader, Lexa still trusted her judgement, and wanted her endeavour to benefit from Clarke’s advice. So Lexa had set off the find a mane of hair the colour of the sun and eyes that reflected the sky.

Which was how she found herself in the dining hall yet again. But greeted with a sight so profoundly bittersweet it knocked the wind from Lexa’s chest. Lexa let out a harsh exhale of breath, as she appraised the scene before her. Clarke sat at a table with Raven. Clarke held the red haired infant from the night before in her lap, where the child squirmed angrily. Raven leant over and pulled Clarke’s face into her hand and inspected a raised red marking on Clarke’s cheek. The two girls lost in their own little world. Lexa felt anger and jealousy unfurl in her stomach. Aggressive tendrils of savage emotion lashing at her abdomen. Lexa balled her fists by her sides and tried desperately to conceal the scowl that she felt fighting for dominance across her face.

The baby in Clarke’s arms then began to suck at Clarke’s shirt, whining with frustration. Lexa’s stomach dropped and her blood turned cold as Clarke unbound her shirt, freed her breast to the scarlet cheeked infant, and offered it to expectant lips. Lexa felt her heart stutter in her chest, her breathing becoming rapid and shallow as dread clawed at her heart, with ugly scaled talons.

The baby was Clarke’s. It was Clarke’s child. Clarke had a daughter. Lexa tried to digest the information, but she felt like someone had poured dirt into her empty skull to fill the space her brain had once occupied. Lexa was absolutely distraught and gobsmacked and unbelieving of what her eyes revealed as truth. Lexa watched as Clarke grimaced at the aggressive nature of her child’s feeding and felt a small article of satisfaction bloom in her chest that Clarke was also uncomfortable,
while Lexa suffocated in a room full of oxygen.

Lexa tore her eyes away from the evidence of Clarke’s unreturned affections and focused on her breathing. Lexa vaguely discerned a number of people watching her intently, obviously flummoxed by her display of unusual behaviour. Lexa took a shaky breath in, held it a moment and then exhaled. She did this a few more times, until she felt her fibrillating heart begin to calm in her chest. It felt like the organ was trying to beat out of Lexa’s chest like her ribs were the bars of a prison cell. Like her heart was a sentient organism, wanting to escape and wave its fist angrily at the injustice of the world. Lexa had first lost Costia to death, and now she had lost Clarke to someone else. Lexa felt fury awaken in her chest, alongside her angry heart. It appeared they would be cellmates.

Lexa adjusted her mask of indifference, clasped her shaking and sweaty hands behind her back and walked calmly towards Clarke, like she hadn’t just shattered her world. Despite Lexa’s jealousy and feelings of betrayal, she still needed Clarke’s help. The coalition needed Clarke’s help, and Lexa needed to put aside her feelings. But that didn’t mean that it would be easy.

Lexa now stood directly behind Clarke, who was deeply immersed in conversation with Raven. Lexa refused to wait, her hibernating rage making her impatient. Lexa cleared her throat.

Lexa was greeted by a glare from Clarke, to match her own. Lexa forced herself to meet Clarke’s eyes and not let her gaze wander to the perfect breast on display that was currently being gripped and suckled aggressively by Clarke’s daughter. Lexa almost smirked when Clarke grimaced and grit her teeth as the child took a particularly ruthless pull from her mother’s teat. Clarke’s face turned a bright crimson red as blood tinged her neck and cheekbones, as she seemed to realise that Lexa was pointedly averting her gaze from her exposed chest. Lexa felt a little indemnified that Clarke at least had the decency to appear embarrassed. Clarke was the one to break their uncomfortable silence.

“Commander, may I help you?” Clarke asked coolly, keeping her tone even and controlled.

“The meeting in the Guard tower has just concluded, and after a brief recess, everyone of importance will be returning to my war chamber to discuss strategy. I would like you to attend.” Lexa asked stiffly, her posture rigid and her jaw ticking with barely contained anger. Lexa tried to stuff her emotions securely behind her mask but was struggling. Clarke, her Clarke was here before her, cradling someone else’s child. A child with the hair and smile of a stranger, but with Clarke’s eyes. A child that was living proof that Clarke did not care for Lexa. And every moment in the presence of that truth was becoming increasingly painful; every second caused a new fissure to form as her heart broke.

“I have no role of importance within Arcadia. I am not needed in your strategy meeting.” Clarke retorts sharply. She was not a leader anymore, and there was nothing Lexa could say or do to change her mind on the matter.

Lexa tried to calm her wandering mind, and absorb Clarke’s words. Her brain felt like it had developed a ten second delay in its ability to process information, as it was still flailing helplessly trying to comprehend the implications of the child before her. Eventually Lexa refocused her mind to the conversation before her for what felt like the hundredth time. It felt impossible to concentrate.

“You are important to the coalition in the capacity of Wanheda. The clans revere and respect you. You have value to us.” Lexa stated stiffly. Despite her words being clipped and abrasive even. She felt like she was giving Clarke a compliment at the same time, and she resented her befuddled brain for not being more trustworthy.

“Well I don’t care, commander.” Clarke spat. “I do not want to be of importance to you or your war. I am willing to fight by your warriors, but no more.” Clarke’s anger began to flare.
“We cannot change who we are Clarke.” Lexa softens her tone as Clarke seems to become more agitated. Clarke blinks her surprise at Lexa’s response, apparently taken back. After a few tense moments of silence Clarke finds her voice once more.

“Besides, I don’t have anyone to care for Grace, now that my babysitter is on strike.” Clarke gives Raven a meaningful look, and her friend shrugs in response, not at all apologetic. Lexa observes the exchange curiously, slightly confused that Clarke wouldn’t just have her partner care for the child. “Then have the child’s father care for her.” Lexa stated simply. Eager to know why this wasn’t an obvious solution. Lexa observes Raven shoot Clarke a cautious and wary glance. Clarke’s expression hardens and her eyes become fiery with her fury. Lexa was surprised to notice that Clarke’s wrath didn’t seem to be directed at her, but rather at some other inner turmoil she was battling, some memory or emotion.

“He’s not around anymore.” Clarke answered through gritted teeth. Stubbornly refusing to offer Lexa the article of solace, that the knowledge of Kadeon’s demise may bring. Clarke’s answer in combination with her unusual reaction made Lexa’s curiosity skyrocket. She considered all the possibilities that this new information could indicate. Perhaps the man had run off with another woman. Or maybe he had simply abandoned them. Maybe he was dead. Although Lexa knew that she shouldn’t cling to hope, now that Clarke’s mysterious lover was no longer part of her life, Lexa couldn’t help it. She felt the hope shine brilliantly in her chest, and giddy excitement begin to wriggle in her abdomen.

“Then bring the child with you.” Lexa suggested finally. While Lexa didn’t necessarily want the child to be right under her nose, as her presence still made Lexa question whether Clarke ever felt anything for her at all. Lexa needed Clarke in that room more than her eyes needed Grace out of her sight. Lexa knew that she shouldn’t cling to hope, now that Clarke’s mysterious lover was no longer part of her life, Lexa couldn’t help it. She felt the hope shine brilliantly in her chest, and giddy excitement begin to wriggle in her abdomen.

Clarke studied Lexa for a moment, seeming to search her expression for something. Lexa doesn’t know if she finds what she was looking for, but after another moment, Clarke finally nods her agreement.

“Good. I will meet you in the war chamber in half an hour.” Lexa replied before turning on her heel and walking away stiffly. Feeling Clarke’s eyes boring into the back of her skull the whole way out of the dining hall.

As Lexa exited the dining hall, Ontari and Jameson fell into step behind her from where she had left them by the dining hall entrance, before confronting Clarke. The trio made their way through the crowds of Skaikru and back towards the barracks.

When Lexa reached the structure, she noticed a crowd of her warriors standing around a pair of her warriors, who were recalling an encounter that they had had with a Skaikru girl. Lexa noticed the warrior’s dishevelled and muddy appearance, signs of having been in a fight. Among the gathered crowd she saw Indra and Malik listening intently to the tale. Out of curiosity, Lexa stopped at the outskirts of the gathered audience to listen also.

“The tiny Skaikru girl was fast and tricky. She purposefully pretended to be weak so that we would underestimate her. She kicked out Jonyon’s legs out from under him before he could land a single punch.” The older warrior cast an amused glance at her comrade before he retorted with equal delight.

“Don’t forget that she also told you that you were old and slow before she sent you sprawling into the dirt Hanli!” Jonyon boomed happily, holding a hand to his stomach as he laughed at his friend’s red face.
“You act as though you stood a chance against her!” Hanli cried exuberantly. “She turned on you as soon as you stood again, and then flipped you like you were a leaf in the wind!” She exclaimed.

The whole crowd of warriors were enraptured by the account, and Lexa was rather impressed by the Skaikru’s skill, whoever they are. Lexa turned to Jameson and asked him. “Do you know of whom they speak?” She kept her tone low and quiet, but it was Ontari who answered.

“They speak of Klark kom Skaikru Heda. I saw the end of their fight when I sought her out to apologise.” Ontari stated.

Lexa fought the urge to crack open her jaw in comical surprise as she listened to both the continued story telling occurring from the two warriors, and the information Ontari had offered. Lexa knew that Clarke had gained some proficient fighting skill when she had examined the dead Azgeda, and she had accepted that she definitely had prowess in her talents. But Trikru were notoriously difficult to beat in a fight, and it was considered a great feat to beat one of them if from another clan, let alone two of them. In that moment, Lexa began to fully comprehend that she really did have no clue about the life Clarke had led in the year and a half she had been missing. Clarke had changed so drastically that Lexa wondered how much of the old Clarke still remained, if any at all.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all like the new chapter, even though its a bit shorter than the others.
I know Lexa is a little close-minded in this chapter, but I promise that after she gets over the initial shock of everything, she will step it up and be mature about Grace, to an extent.
I just want to thank everyone who takes the time to leave comments on my work, it really means a lot that you all are supportive of my story so far!
Please keep reading and commenting, it makes my day to hear from each of you xx
Lexa turned from the group and headed inside to prepare for the next meeting. She walked up the stairs to the second floor and entered the expansive war room. Pushing the heavy double doors open. The room was large and spacious, the walls were made from panels of wood and metal, with a timber floor, in typical Skaikru fashion. There was a long rectangular table in the centre of the room. The table was designed to seat twenty one people comfortably and was made of a beautiful umber brown coloured wood. There were carvings of warriors in various stages of battle along the edges of the timber, and was polished to a striking gleam. There were ten chairs on either side of the table, constructed of the same beautiful wood as their counterparts. There were also plush furs draped over the backs of the chairs, to provide soft comfort when meetings went for extended periods. At the head of the table was a throne very similar to Lexa’s seat in polis. Made of the warped and oddly shaped branches and wood of a small oak. This throne was lighter in colour and much smaller than her seat in Polis, but it was an appreciated sentiment that Skaikru wanted to make her feel welcome. There was an impressive chandelier of candles overhanging the centre of the table that was fastened securely to the roof. The lighting element was constructed from deer antlers, in a way that cast eerily beautiful shadows along the walls at night. In the far right corner of the room was a wall of large windows, draped in large white bolts of fabric, which made the room bright and airy. There was another large table with a detailed, three-dimensional diorama of the coalition and the thirteen clans. It was breathtaking, painted in various shades of green, blue, yellow and white to designate the territories of different clans. There was also a large fireplace built into the wall to warm the room in winter months. Along the left wall, there were large maps and diagrams stuck to the wood of the wall, provided for further consultation if necessary. The room was truly magnificent.

No one was inside yet, and usually Lexa liked to be one of the last to arrive at meetings such as this, to enter with a flourish and accentuate her authority. To prove that Heda waits for no one. But Lexa could not be bothered with such theatrics right now. Her mind was heavy, after the astonishing revelations she had learned about Clarke. She had become a formidable warrior, and she had a child. So much had changed for the girl who fell from the sky, that Lexa had no idea how to digest the information.

Lexa strode into the room and reclined herself in the throne amongst the numerous furs. She slouched against their pillowy softness and lost herself to her thoughts.

Eventually others began to arrive, forcing Lexa to adjust her posturing and resume her usual air of commanding authority. She slipped behind her mask of expressionless stoicism and assumed the role of Heda.

Slowly people trickled into the room and took a seat at the table.

Captain Miller arrived with his trusted lieutenants, Bellamy and Lincoln by his side. They assumed three seats along the left of Lexa, Captain Miller closest to Heda, but still two seats away from her position. Probably leaving space for Abby and Clarke. Next Indra and Titus stepped into the room, along with two more of her generals, Olga and Thane. They took the seats closest to Lexa on her right, Titus sitting a seat down from her. Lexa’s guards Ontari and Jameson stood watch at the entrance to the room. Studying each person that entered, with calculating eyes, ensuring that none present posed a threat to their Heda. The Chancellor eventually made an appearance, keeping her gaze low and reluctantly took the seat nearest Lexa on her left. Lexa almost smiled to see that Abby
wore a long necked shirt to hide the marks that must cover her throat, she doubted the Chancellor would ever willingly deceive her again. It appeared she had learned her lesson. Finally Clarke entered, with her scarlet haired infant gurgling at her hip. The child gripping a carved whale in her chubby little fist happily.

Lexa allowed her eyes to rest on the child for a moment. The little girl was chewing toothlessly on her carved toy, a steady stream of dribble running down her chubby fist to collect in a damp patch on her sleeve. The child truly did have Clarke’s eyes. The colour, shape and inquisitive alertness were a perfect carbon-copy of Clarke’s. The baby regarded her surroundings curiously, taking everything in. Despite the fact that the child bore the alien characteristics of a stranger, like her red head of curls and the deep dimples that burrowed into her plump cheeks. Her face resembled Clarke. The child looked like her mother. Her little button nose and pursed lips were all identical to one, Clarke Griffin. Lexa was powerless to look at the child and not feel the ice around her heart thaw towards the child. While at first Lexa had looked at the baby and seen the features of a stranger staring back at her, now however, Lexa could see Clarke. She was helpless to stop it, as a small article of affection bloomed for the infant.

Lexa tried not to dwell on this new development however, as she was still feeling betrayed by Clarke, and she needed to hold onto that so long as Clarke continued to hate her. Lexa needed to be able to match Clarke’s anger without fear of being hurt. So she clung desperately to that feeling of betrayal and forced herself to see the baby as proof of Clarke’s duplicity. It worked to an extent, but it wasn’t as concentrated and powerful as before. Because now Lexa saw Clarke when she examined the child. Lexa forced herself to focus on something else, on someone else.

Now that Clarke was not breastfeeding, Lexa noticed that Clarke did not wear her usual jacket over the black sleeveless shirt she was dressed in. Now that Lexa wasn’t making a conscious effort to block out Clarke’s body from the shoulders down, Lexa noticed the scars, and the tattoo on Clarke’s arm.

Lexa ran her appreciative gaze over the intricate design of the tattoo. The black ink a stark contrast to the pale, and yet slightly tanned skin of Clarke’s body. Lexa quietly wondered what the marking symbolised to Clarke. Lexa thought of her own tattoo’s, which were heavy laden with significance, and wondered what part of Clarke’s life the swirling black ink represented.

Lexa ran her gaze up Clarke’s arms and noticed a few faded white scars. Lexa burned to ask what had happened, but knew the question would need to wait until a moment that they were alone. If they were ever alone.

Lexa internalised a heavy sigh and let her gaze travel up to the more prominent scar just below Clarke’s right collarbone, that slashed in a downward arc against Clarke’s beautiful skin. Marring it for all time. Lexa felt bile rise in her throat as she imagined the various scenarios by which Clarke might have earned the mark. How it must have burned as the blade tore through her flesh. Lexa’s fist clenched as she imagined Clarke lying in a pool of her own blood, as she clutched at the injury, trying to staunch the flow and ease her pain. Lexa felt the undeniable urge to kill whoever was responsible for hurting Clarke.

She silently admonished herself for not being there to protect her. Lexa knows it would never have happened if she had stayed by Clarke’s side and helped her defeat the mountain. That injury, that pain, that scar was Lexa’s fault, she knew. Lexa pulled herself out from the onslaught of chaotic thoughts as Clarke appraised Lexa with a confused expression.

Her sapphire orbs peering at Lexa’s emerald gaze and seeming to look inside of her. Like her eyes were the windows into her soul. Lexa stifled the urge to squirm uncomfortably. Clarke was the only
one who had ever truly seen her, been able to look past the mask and the stoicism and find the real Lexa amidst it all. It once made her feel whole and appreciated, but now that they had no shared understanding or mutual respect for one another, the action was unnerving. It made Lexa feel naked and exposed.

Clarke continued to study Lexa a moment more before she made to move further into the room. Ontari stepped in front of her, pushing against her shoulder to stop her advance. Lexa watched as Clarke gave Ontari a half-hearted glare. Ontari did not shy away from the look, in fact she maintained eye contact as her hand moved to Clarke’s thigh to remove her dagger. Ontari held the blade up and cast Clarke a questioning glance, to which Clarke smirked in response, as she regarded the blade between them innocently. Clarke then pushed past Ontari and sauntered over to the chair next to Lincoln. Stubbornly refusing to sit in the chair next to her mother, that had been reserved for her.

Lexa nearly smiled as she realised that even if Clarke had changed, her Clarke would have done the exact same thing. Perhaps there was more of her Clarke under the surface than Lexa had previously imagined. The thought made hope bubble in her chest for a moment. Before Lexa pushed it to the side and returned her attention to the task at hand. Lexa leaned forward in her seat a moment and cleared her throat, so every set of eyes were trained on her.

“We are here today to discuss the growing threat of the Ice Nation. The conversation about to be had must remain within these walls, is this understood?” Lexa pauses a moment before fixing every person in the room with a pointed glare, until she was met with unanimous nods of understanding. “Queen Nia has been making small movements against the borders of her lands to kill our warriors. So far it has been limited to Trikru territories, until recently. When three Azgeda were found and killed outside the gates of Arcadia, two days past. Our reports suggest that Nia has been restricting her movements to small groups of men, no more than 3 or 4 to attack and kill as many as possible. Before then having the bodies of their victims dismembered. Skewering their severed heads on spikes along the neutral zones between the territories. We have yet to capture any of those responsible for questioning, so at this point we have no actionable intelligence to announce war with the Ice Nation. The closest we have come, has been when Skaikru warriors dispatched the three Azgeda. We believe that this is the Queen’s intention, to deliver continual blows to our people but being able to claim innocence and plausible deniability, if cornered. She knows that without launching a full frontal assault, we have no grounds to call upon the armies of the 12 loyal clans to annihilate her. So she continues to kill and disrespect our fallen warrior’s bodies, causing our numbers to slowly dwindle and leaving souls trapped for eternity.” Lexa finishes. She looks around the room to study the various expressions of contemplation.

“So what is the plan?” Clarke asks finally. Breaking everyone’s thought filled silence, before continuing. “It’s obvious you cannot call upon an army, it would show you to be weak to the other clans. They would assume that you start a needless war out of fear of the Ice Nation’s strength. You cannot confront Nia about her actions, because she will simply deny any knowledge of it. Allowing her to blame the assaults on restless villagers, or even bandits. You cannot send spies or assassins to gather intel, not unless you already have some positioned within Nia’s courts, as she will be expecting this kind of response, and would certainly torture and kill them. Leaving you exposed for a more calculated attack, with the benefit of new information. The only option I can see available to you at this point, is sending warriors from both the Trikru and Skaikru clans to guard the borders and lie in wait for the guerrillas. This way if your actions are questioned by Nia or any of the other clans, you too have plausible deniability. You can claim that there has been increased bandit activity along the borders and are taking precautions. Only once you have captured one of the Azgeda warriors, and forced him to spill his knowledge, will you have the evidence necessary to amass an army and take action.” Clarke stated firmly.
Lexa could see the cogs in Clarke’s mind turning rapidly as she found all the points of weakness in any possible plan, and discovered the one that would result in their success. Lexa almost smiled as the pride welled in her chest. Although Clarke did not want to be a leader, she still thought as one and behaved as one. It was something she could never truly run from. She would always be someone that people looked to for guidance and leadership.

“I agree.” Lexa responded finally, running Clarke’s reasoning through her own mind, coming to the same conclusions. Lexa looked around the table and was greeted by a number of nods of approval. The only two refraining from saying anything were Chancellor Griffin and Captain Miller. Abby obviously having doubts, and Miller, refusing to say anything without first knowing Abby’s stance on the suggestion. Ready to support whatever decision the Chancellor made.

“You do not agree.” Lexa stated plainly as she looked at Abby with disinterest, uncaring what she truly thought, but needing her onside since she was the official leader of the Skaikru. Abby swallowed thickly before responding. Lexa could see that it took great effort for Abby to keep her tone even and confident as she spoke, still obviously rattled from her conversation with Lexa earlier.

“No Commander, I do not.” Abby glanced quickly at Clarke, who was looking at her mother with annoyance. “I am sorry Clarke, but this is not our fight.” Abby began, but was immediately silenced when Clarke interrupted.

“It is. Mum. It became our fight the moment that the Ice Nation came directly towards our camp. If I hadn’t been on patrol with Lincoln and Octavia that morning, those men might have made it past our guards. Then who knows what they might have done. Our walls are not impenetrable, we are not safe simply because we hide behind them. If we are not willing to fight for ourselves, then why should anyone else?” Clarke asked, her tone firm and commanding. Clarke saw her mother flinch back from her, at the fiery undertones of her words. She felt guilty for making her mother more uncomfortable around her, but the woman wasn’t thinking about this reasonably. There was no logic to her opinion.

Lexa watched with amazement as the Clarke she knew so well surfaced from beneath the hard, cold exterior that she had seen the last few days. This passionate, commanding and inspiring part of Clarke was what had drawn Lexa to her in the beginning. Her strength and her need to protect her people. Even if it meant protecting them from the idiocy of her own mother. Even if the people did not want Clarke’s protection, or appreciate it. Lexa’s heart soared and the hope in her chest blossomed into something beautiful and permanent. Lexa knew that while Clarke was different and changed from her time away, she was still her Clarke. Lexa again tuned into the conversation around her, biting down the joyful smile that wanted to kiss her lips.

“I.. I. You.. You have only been here for a week Clarke, you haven’t been here long enough to make an informed decision. Arcadia is strong, we will be fine.” Abby defended weakly. Clarke did not miss a beat however and fought back.

“I might be new to Arcadia, but I am not new to the ways of the Ice Nation, nor am I naïve enough to believe that walls will keep them out. If you had any sense you would see that.” Clarke growled, becoming more irritated with every second. Clarke knew that all it would take for Arcadia to fall was one well-trained assassin and some rope. Her people stood no chance against the Ice Nation on their own.

Abby was becoming more agitated as well. Today alone she had been nearly strangled by a hormonal teenager, and now she was being humiliated in front of some of the most prominent members of the coalition by her own daughter. With each passing second, Abby’s pride was becoming more wounded, until eventually she had struck out cruelly to protect herself. “You weren’t strong enough to protect Kadeon! What makes you think that we need your help! You are not the
Chancellor. I am. And what I say goes!” Abby shouted. As soon as the words were out of her mouth and she saw the pain flash across Clarke’s eyes, Abby regretted them. But there was no way to take back what she had done now.

Lexa was unbelieving of what Abby had just said to Clarke. She had known that Abby could be unreasonable and stubborn when her authority was tested, but she did not think she could be so cruel. Whatever the statement had meant, it had truly rocked Clarke. The girl looked like she had been struck. Her blue eyes shimmered with fury, and betrayal and heartbreak. Lexa thought she could hear Clarke’s heart shatter in her chest for a moment. Lexa noticed the way Clarke clung to the baby on her lap, like she was the only thing keeping Clarke tethered to this world. Lexa felt something surge up inside her, something that demanded she protect what was hers. All of these things sparked Lexa’s fury as its heat seeped into her bones, making her blood a sea of molten lava, ready to explode. Lexa prepared to direct it all towards Abby, but Clarke beat her to it.

“Do what you will Chancellor Griffin.” Clarke spat with icy menace, as she built her walls up so high and thick she wondered if she would be able to let them down again. “I am not here to challenge your authority. I am here to help my people as a warrior. But do not expect me to step aside as you sentence our people to death. If we don’t stand and face this threat, then we deserve the pain and suffering that the Ice Nation will inflict upon us. I will fight for myself, my daughter, my friends and my people, even if you are too cowardly to do the same.” Clarke growled. Clarke knew that in that moment she was threatening and frightening. Her mother’s pale face and trembling hands were proof of this. But Clarke refused to be judged and insulted further by the woman. She knew that she deserved better than that.

“I am sorry Clarke… I…” Abby began, her voice shaky and quiet. But she was interrupted before she could finish.

“Don’t you dare.” Clarke spat with unrestrained fury. Her mother did not get to apologise to appease her own guilt. If she truly cared for Clarke she would never have mentioned Kadeon in a room full of people she did not trust. Abby was the only one who knew most of her history with Kade, she knew what he meant to Clarke and yet she had wielded this knowledge like a weapon, with the sole purpose of inflicting as much damage as possible. That was unforgivable.

Lexa watched proudly as Clarke rose above Abby’s cruel attempts to reopen old wounds. Lexa did not know who this Kadeon was, but he had been important to Clarke, and she had lost him if Abby’s comment was to be taken as truth. To bring up such a painful part of Clarke’s history with no care for her feelings and to publically humiliate Clarke in a room full of mostly unfriendly faces was incomprehensible and completely unforgivable. Lexa felt the urge to resume her earlier attempts to strangle Abby, but thought better of it when she observed the faces of those around her.

While everyone seemed uncomfortable by the sudden personal nature of discussion, they each regarded Clarke with respect. She had shown them all true power of character and strength of will to push down her devastated feelings and continue to fight on. To rise above Abby’s painful taunt and not sink to her level by dredging up Abby’s own personal baggage. Clarke showed everyone in the room how a true leader responds to insult and injury. It was awe-inspiring and a thing of beauty to behold. This was a leader that warriors would fight and die for, and Clarke had no idea how powerful she was. With a few words, every person in that room had a fierce shine in their eye and a determined posture, all inspired by Clarke’s willingness to fight for her people and for a cause she believed in.

The sight before her melted away a portion of Lexa’s fury, and murderous rage, as she felt a tingle run down her spine. Clarke truly was a force to be reckoned with and Clarke had no inkling as to how much people listened to her. Even Titus, who thought Clarke would serve better dead in a ditch,
had a passionate determination blazing in his expression. Clarke had managed to inspire him of all people without knowing she had done something. Eventually Clarke tore her emblazoned gaze from Abby’s nauseatingly guilty face, to Lexa.

“Even if Skaikru do not join this fight, I will stand against my enemies.” Clarke says simply.

“As will I.” Lincoln said, looking from Clarke to Lexa. Lincoln ignored the irritated expression of Captain Miller. He did not care what the man thought, Lincoln could make his own decisions and he had. If this fight was good enough for Clarke than it was good enough for him too.

“Me too. I will fight with you.” Bellamy states firmly, his jaw jutted stubbornly. He looked between Clarke, Lincoln and Lexa, to emphasise his intent. Abby chose that moment to find her voice.

“I do not support this action, I believe that Arcadia will remain safe. We have guns and technology that could hold back any warriors Nia sends our way.” Abby paused as several people around the table shot her disgusted looks, she fought the urge to shut up and shrink into a ball. “But, I will not stop any Skaikru that willingly volunteer to help you Commander.” Abby finished, looking hesitantly between her daughter and her friends, before focusing on the Commander.

“I will remember your unwillingness to support me this day Chancellor. And I do have a long memory. But I will accept any Skaikru that decide to join this fight.” Lexa declares after a long minute of glaring at Abby. “Indra I will need you to travel back to TonDC right away to gather a force to face the Ice Nation. Gather as many fighting men and women as possible, and then join us at Alton. It is one of the closest villages to the border. That is where we will wage this guerrilla war.” Lexa commands to her general, who perks up as soon as she is called upon. Ready to spring into action.

“Sha Heda. Yes Commander.” Indra replies quickly.

“Thane and Olga, you too shall return to your villages to gather warriors. You shall also meet us at Alton, but your forces will remain stationed in the miles of forest surrounding the village. I do not want Nia to get suspicious and withdraw her fighters. Nor do I want her to have an accurate number of warriors to prepare for if all goes according to plan and we wage war with the Ice Nation.”

“Sha Heda.” The two generals declare at the same moment.

Lexa turns to Titus finally. “You and I will remain here to gather Skaikru warriors, before we travel to Alton. We shall leave tomorrow at first light with any volunteers.” She commands.

“Sha Heda.” Titus replies curtly.

Finally Lexa turns to Abby and Captain Miller. “You two shall address every one of your warriors and request that they volunteer to help protect their home. You will not tell them of a possible war brewing, but you will tell them that warriors are required to defend your lands from attacking bandits along the Azgeda borders. Is this understood?” Lexa asks coolly, but her tone is commanding and authoritative, clearly not giving either of them any choice.

“Yes Commander.” They both answer hesitantly. Sharing a look of reluctance.

“Good. Dismissed.” Lexa finishes. She remains seated until everyone begins filing out of the room. Clarke begins to stand but Lexa stops her. “Clarke wait.” Lexa pleads quietly. She watches as Clarke’s body tenses, and the blonde haired girl slowly turns on her heel to face Lexa. “Guards, leave us.” Lexa commands. Not another word is said until they are alone. Lexa’s guards having discreetly left the room and closed the door behind them.
Hi all! Hope you like the new chapter, let me know what you all think! XD
Salted Water

Chapter Summary

Hope you all enjoy the new chapter!
So our girls have finally had their first honest conversation with each other since the mountain, and I think we all knew that getting the emotions out in words would help to a degree. There is still way too much rage from Clarke's side for there to be forgiveness in play, just yet. But it's a good start.
Let me know what you all think of the update, I love hearing from you all! xx

Clarke felt her stomach drop and a cold sweat soak through her clothing as Lexa called out to her.
“Clarke wait.” The girl pleaded.

Clarke felt her anger bubble in her chest. She did not want to be anywhere near Lexa. But the other girl didn’t seem to realise this. Seemed to be ignoring Clarke’s hatred because it was easier than accepting responsibility for what she had done. For what she had made Clarke become. But Clarke stopped anyway. Needing to make herself clear, in case she hadn’t already. She hated Lexa. She didn’t want to be near her, or talk to her or even breathe the same air as her. She didn’t want to forgive Lexa and she honestly didn’t think that she was even capable of it anymore. She had clung to the bitterness for so long, and it was such a large part of who Clarke was now, that she didn’t think she could kill it without killing herself too.

“Thankyou...” Lexa begins, but Clarke cuts her off swiftly.

“I didn’t do it for you.” Clarke spat, her expression cold and uncaring. She did not want to be here, she did not want to talk to Lexa, and it was time she knew it.

“I know, I just...” Lexa started but again was interrupted by Clarke.

“You just, what Lexa? Thought that I would forgive and forget what you did to me!” Clarke roared with fury, unable to restrain it. Feeling a twinge of satisfaction when Lexa’s face framed her shock.

“No of course not. I know that you probably hate me for what I did.” Lexa tried to explain, but her excuses were lame and she knew it.

“You must have rocks in your head if you thought that I would probably hate you!” Clarke growled angrily. “I do hate you! Because you abandoned me on that mountain, I was forced to murder hundreds of people. Not just soldiers Lexa, but children too. I wiped out an entire civilisation. I watched as their skin bubbled and melted from their bones. I listened to their agonised screams as they took their final breaths. My hands are soaked in blood, and it’s because you were a coward and walked away.” Clarke shouted angrily. Clarke felt hot tears burn tracks down her cheeks, and she wiped them away harshly, her clothing scratching at her face. “You turned me into Wanheda, you broke something inside me and let a monster loose on the world. I am a monster!” Clarke screamed, her frustration and her anger making her voice tight and scratchy.

Clarke held Grace a little closer, needing to feel grounded. She needed the comforting weight of her daughter to bring her back to earth again. She spared a glance down and noted the wide owl-like stare Grace had fixed on Clarke. The way Grace regarded Clarke with confusion, her intelligent little
eyes studying Clarke’s face. Seeming to read the emotion expressed there. Once finished her examination, the little girl pulled herself closer to Clarke, and rested her head on Clarke’s chest, her ear against Clarke’s thrumming heart. Clarke felt her anger dwindle at the comforting little gesture, and she sent a silent thankyou to Kade for giving her the soothing balm of their child. Reluctantly Clarke returned her attention back to Lexa.

Clarke noticed the way the other girl watched the exchange between Clarke and her daughter curiously. Clarke pushed it aside. It would be easier to hate Lexa if she treated her like an emotionless harpy, instead of the vulnerable human being that she knew, deep down, Lexa was. Lexa’s eyes were full of unshed tears, and her hands kept moving as if they were trying to reach out and touch Clarke but Lexa wouldn’t let them.

“I am so sorry Clarke.” Lexa said softly, her eyes swimming in an ocean of unshed tears. Finally the salty droplets broke free of their dams and fell down her face silently.

Clarke watched as Lexa cried unashamedly. The sight tugged at something deep within Clarke, sending muted pain into her chest. Clarke watched the young woman before her, as she seemed to break and Clarke felt… Sad. Clarke fought the urge to raise her eyebrows at herself questioningly. Not knowing where this sudden empathy for Lexa was coming from. She honestly had thought that any that was left had withered and died a long time ago. Like a flower without any water.

“So am I.” Clarke sighed heavily. The fight all but left her now. There were still lingering tendrils of anger but mainly, she felt melancholy weight down her bones.

“I never meant for any of it to happen Clarke. I never wanted that for you.” Lexa said slowly, trying to control her breathing and stop her voice from wavering. But it stubbornly shook with emotion.

“But it did. Nothing can be done about it now.” Clarke replied after a long moment of rolling Lexa’s words around in her head. Trying to decide how she felt about them. Clarke knew that the apology was sincere, but she didn’t have the energy or the compassion to forgive Lexa. The energy had fled when her mother used Kade’s memory as a weapon, and the compassion, when she walked away from a lifeless mountain.

“I know.” Lexa whispered, almost inaudibly. “If there had been another way, I would have taken it.” Lexa offered. She warily noted a strange gleam in Clarke’s eyes, but it was gone before she could analyse it.

“There was Lexa. You could have stayed with me.” Clarke answers immediately. Wondering if Lexa understood the double meaning of Clarke’s words. Wanting Lexa to know that her betrayal of Clarke’s affections is what stung the most, without saying it to her. Clarke watches as Lexa’s eyes fill with understanding and something else that Clarke does not recognise. Or refuses to identify.

“I wish I could have. I have never wanted anything more.” Lexa responds with as much vulnerability and sincerity as she could muster, before she stated the sad truth of the situation. “But I needed to save my people Clarke. I could see no other way of getting them out of the mountain, without some of them being lost in the fight.” Lexa states apologetically, her tears had stopped now, but her eyes were red and puffy.

Clarke’s heart stutter steps at the first half of Lexa’s sentiment, but then feels her cardiac muscle harden as Lexa delivers her swift punch to the stomach. Clarke feels like the wind was knocked out of her, as her bitterness comes rushing back into her chest like a tidal wave. The white water washing away any empathy Clarke had felt for Lexa moments ago. Reminding Clarke who Lexa was and what she had done. Clarke straightened her posture and squared her shoulders. Determined to forcibly make Lexa understand how she feels. Make her understand that Clarke hates her with a fury
that engulfs her, and a bitterness that has fused itself to her soul.

“So instead you bargained my life and the lives of my people, in return. You sacrificed me and mine to save you and yours. That kind of betrayal does not get forgiven Lexa. So you can stop wishing and dreaming about a day when I feel something towards you that cancels out my hate and bitterness. Because it will not happen! Not after what I endured on the Mountain and not after the battles I fought in the months that followed.” Clarke spat, rage making her chest burn and heave. Clarke saw the hurt in Lexa’s emerald green eyes and felt justified in her pain. “I have had a year and a half to cultivate and grow my rage towards you. I have a strong and healthy crop of fury now, and I will be harvesting it. You don’t deserve forgiveness Lexa. So I will not give it to you. I don’t want to see you unless I need to; I don’t want to talk to you unless it has to do with this war. I don’t want you in my life!” Clarke hissed.

“I know that I did the wrong thing when I walked away Clarke. I know that I am partly to blame for what you became on the mountain. I know that I am responsible. But so are you Clarke. You cannot simply lay the blame at my feet and expect me to bear it all. No one forced you to enter the mountain, and no one forced you to kill everyone inside.” Lexa reasoned firmly. She knew that she was guilty for Clarke’s actions, but so was Clarke. And Lexa refused to be blamed for all of it. They both had roles to play that ended with the death of a race, a culture. They were both responsible. Lexa watched as Clarke’s fury consumed her features and immediately knew she had said the wrong thing.

“You don’t think I know that!” Clarke screeched, her fury and her frustration leaking out over her inner walls. Clarke couldn’t contain the emotions. “I blame myself for my actions, but I blame you for putting me in that situation in the first place. Because of what you did to me, I became a monster. It broke me and then worse still, it unlocked a darkness that constantly threatens to consume me. After the mountain, I needed to escape it. I didn’t care how that happened, I just knew I needed to get away from my reality. Because of your actions, or inaction as it were, I committed mass-murder and then searched every day for a way to forget what I had become. That is your fault and it is my fault also. You don’t get to pretend you are innocent here, and you don’t get to play the victim. You made me your casualty, and then I made every person in that mountain mine. We are both guilty.” Clarke sneered heatedly. Clarke felt the blood rushing in her ears and her heart beat furiously in her chest. Clarke’s anger was coming alive in her chest again and she did not fight it, she was helpless to.

“I am sorry Clarke. I did not expect you to return to the mountain. I thought you might return to your people’s camp and regroup. That I might be able to find some other way of aiding you later. I wanted to help you but I needed to cater for my people first. I had a duty.” Lexa states, her voice becoming firmer and more controlled as Clarke seems to lose hers.

“You had a duty to be a decent human being. But you weren’t!” Clarke yells. “Do you know what would have happened if I hadn’t gone into the mountain when I did Lexa? Do you?!” Clarke screams.

Lexa gives no answer, just patiently waits for Clarke to continue. Clarke’s voice becomes distant and infused with pain as she delves into her memories and relives the horrors from the mountain. Making sure Lexa heard every horrific word.

“When I entered the mountain, their warriors had rounded up and captured more Skaikru from our army. Among them was my mother. When I found a way in and made my way to the control room. I saw my people, my friends all chained to a wall, in a room smeared with the blood of my dead friends. There was a table in the middle of the room where they drilled into my friends bodies, taking what they wanted from them. Their agonised screams and pleading only stopping when their life fled the scene of horrors. But even then the mountain men kept drilling, not even allowing their bodies a
reprieve in death from their abuse. Only when they had drained every drop of their marrow would they throw the bodies away, to be consumed by monsters. My friends were thrown away like the scraps of a carcass. Like they didn’t matter. When I got to the control room, they had just strapped Raven to the table, the drill was piercing her flesh and scraping at the bone of her leg. She screamed in agony as they tortured her. I tried everything to stop the drilling, I even shot Dante Wallace in the chest. I made his son listen as his father died. But that only angered Cage more, so he sent Emerson to capture us, while he went to the harvest chamber to enact revenge for his father’s death. He had Raven removed from the gurney and strapped my mother down in her place. The drill bit into her skin and tore through her bones, sucking the marrow from her body. Her screams shattered something inside me. It destroyed my resolve to give these people a second chance, I decided then and there that I needed to save my friends. I needed to save my mother. I couldn’t lose her too. So Monty hacked their computer systems and prepared to direct radiation into their shelter, to poison their air. In the moments before I pulled the lever, the mountain men had captured Jasper and were preparing to kill Octavia, all while my mother’s body was drilled into like a sack of meat. If we didn’t do something, everyone we cared about was going to die a torturous death. Bellamy pulled the lever with me, and we murdered a civilisation. I killed everyone and saved my friends, and destroyed my soul in the process. That’s what your betrayal cost me, and you will never be able to pay me back. There is nothing you can do to fix what you broke. So don’t bother trying Lexa.” Clarke said quietly. Her voice thick with emotion and relived memories. Her mind focused on haunting screams and blood soaked walls, and the bubbling skin of people burnt alive.

“If I am sorry Clarke.” Lexa whispered. Her heart twisting painfully in her chest as the guilt gripped her. Wringing the muscle tightly and squeezing every drop of blood out from its chambers. The organ feeling bone dry and empty of life.

“It doesn’t matter.” Clarke replied quietly, unable to look Lexa in the eye and witness her pain. Clarke stared dutifully at the carved whale toy in Grace’s hand. The little girl’s head still rested above Clarke’s heart. The child still managing to calm her, to a degree. “Why did you look for me?” Clarke asks. Her curiosity genuine, but the possible answer making her wary.

“I need you.” Lexa whispers.

Clarke waits a moment to digest the words, before nodding slowly, turning her back to Lexa and heading towards the door when she realised the conversation was over. Until a soft and emotion laden whimper stopped her again. Clarke did not turn to face Lexa, only listened.

“I will not give up on you Clarke. I scoured the 13 clans for a year and half in search of you. I refused to give up then and I refuse to give up now. You can hate me if that is what you need to do. But I won’t stop fighting to earn your forgiveness and your trust back Clarke. You are too important to lose twice.” Lexa promised, her tone becoming strong and determined.

And with that Clarke stormed out of the room, leaving Lexa alone. Some small traitorous part of Clarke trembled with excitement and thanked all that was holy that someone had not given up on her. That someone refused to give up on her, even now. But the majority of Clarke filled with annoyance. Clarke just wanted to be left alone, she didn’t want Lexa to be invading her life and infiltrating her tenuous peace. Clarke just wanted her solitude, free from Lexa and the feelings that she incites. She didn’t want Lexa to be a part of her life, not anymore. She hadn’t needed Lexa in over a year and a half, nothing had changed. Clarke just wished the infuriating girl would get it through her thick head. Clarke didn’t want her, or need her. The only outcome of this façade, would be Lexa’s feelings becoming injured.

Clarke stopped before Ontari who stood outside the large double doors, and held out her hand expectantly. Ontari looked at Clarke cautiously, studying the blonde girl’s face. Probably examining
her tear streaked cheeks, before reluctantly handing back Clarke’s dagger. Clarke took the weapon wordlessly and walked away. Away from the Azgeda warrior, away from the large war room and away from the green eyed girl within. Clarke walked away, stubbornly refusing to look back.
Clarke spent the rest of the afternoon and night in her hut, replaying her conversation with Lexa on a continuous loop in her head. Unable to concentrate on anything else. Clarke didn’t know how she felt about Lexa now that they had aired some of their thoughts and feelings. All Clarke knew was that she was not ready to confront what she felt and what those feelings might indicate. So in typical Clarke fashion she pushed it down for examination at a later date.

Clarke had spent the evening packing her bags for tomorrow’s journey, ensuring that she had plenty of supplies for herself and Grace. Clarke had secured all the essentials. Food, clothes, weapons, furs, drawing supplies, and even a thick leather poncho to protect them both from the weather if it soured. She was ready for their trip, prepared physically to leave Arcadia, but was in no way emotionally able to face what she was about to do.

It was just before dawn, and Clarke was dressing for her journey. She pulled a navy blue singlet top with buttons that lined the front over her head. Followed by a light grey pair of riding pants and her boots. Clarke braided her hair with the familiar black bolts of cloth through her hair to disguise its natural golden colour, the feathers and beads. Clarke picked up Grace from her spot on Clarke’s bed where she still slept soundly, and secured the dozing child to her chest. Despite now having a bed designed specifically for her daughter, Clarke couldn’t bear to sleep without her warm little bundle sleeping directly next to her. She tucked the child securely against her body.

Clarke donned her fur jacket, thigh dagger, sword, quiver of arrows and bow, before bending stiffly to pick up her heavy satchel to sling over her shoulder. Clarke blew out the candles in her hut, then left, headed for the stables.

The early morning sky was mixture of dark purple and violet hues as the sun hadn’t peeked up and over the horizon yet. But either way, it would be an overcast day, as a heavy blanket of thick clouds lined the sky, promising rain. Clarke was suddenly very glad that she had packed a poncho. It would not be good if she and Grace were to become cold and wet. Her daughter would probably grow sick, and there was no way Clarke was going to risk Grace catching pneumonia as they travelled.

There were some area’s of the camp where the clouds had drifted especially low, creating a blanket of fog to cover the earth. The fog, in combination with the violet and plum purple of the sky, making the morning eerily beautiful and yet threatening all at the same time.

Clarke’s muscles were tired from her session of anger management therapy yesterday with the two Trikru warriors, her body felt stiff and awkward. Unwilling to move with its usual fluidity and grace, and protesting with each leg stride, the exhausted muscles groaning with annoyance. Clarke pushed her discomfort aside and continued her walk to the stables.

Clarke felt like there was a thunderstorm of thoughts and emotions running wildly in her brain, and she was unable to find any shelter from the onslaught.

Clarke’s heart was screaming in its need for vengeance over Kadeon’s death, demanding that she hunt the Queen down and tear her throat from her body. She was eager for her chance to avenge Kade’s murder. She was ready to fight in this war and put an end to Nia, once and for all. Her stomach fluttered with excited anticipation as she thought of enacting her revenge.
Her battered soul also wept for the mother who seemed to have turned her heart cold towards Clarke. Clarke mourned the loss. She felt like her mother had simply died. The person who had taken Abby’s place was cruel and uncaring towards Clarke, and Clarke couldn’t reconcile this version of Abby with the woman who had embraced her at the gates of Arcadia. Who had experienced pain as she listened to Clarke recall her time with Kade. And yet somehow Abby had been able to turn on Clarke and wield Clarke’s confession like a blade. Cutting her deeply.

Clarke’s mind felt like it was stuck in quicksand whenever she thought of Lexa. Like every time she tried to analyse her thoughts and feelings following their conversation, she sunk further into the abyss. The darkness dragging her under. Only this time the darkness wasn’t made from her rage or her bitterness, it was instead thick with confusion and unasked questions. Clarke felt as though she had only scratched the surface with their conversation. She felt like Lexa was holding back, and if Clarke was being honest with herself. She had been holding back also. Unwilling to share any more about her life than she already had.

On top of all these competing emotions, Clarke felt nerves unfurl in her belly and anxiety grip at her heart. The village of Alton was one of the many places Clarke had visited in the first three months after running away from her people. She had spent three and a half weeks, living in a cave in the nearby woods, only travelling the short distance to Alton to find new conquests for her bed and willing warriors to fight. Clarke knew that many would recognise her, only it would not be as Wanheda, or Clarke Kom Skaikru. In Alton, she would be known as Sara, the trouble-making harlot. Clarke knew she would not receive a warm welcome there. She didn’t want Lexa or any other person she knew, to learn of this part of Clarke’s past either. She wanted to bury it. Just as she had buried other things…

Unbidden the memory of standing over a shallow, unmarked grave, the rain whipping at her face, and lashing at the open wound on her back seizes her mind. It was the first time since the mountain that she had taken another life. Clarke tries to shake it off but the memory stubbornly demands to be recalled. Clarke limps away from the disturbed mound of mud that conceals the devastated body. Clarke holds her broken arm close to her chest and begins gingerly picking a path to climb back up the ravine. The bullet holes in Clarke’s leg oozing blood despite the bandages. The mangled flesh, biting at the nerves in her thigh, sending jolts of pain up and down her leg. Making her pace agonisingly slow and her head fuzzy. Clarke tried desperately to keep her back from jostling too much. The deep gash over her shoulder blade radiated a pain so hot and angry that she struggled to inhale breath. Clarke vaguely wondered if you could see the bone peeking out. Nevertheless Clarke climbed the gradual incline, careful to choose her footing wisely in the pouring rain, the stones now slippery and dangerous. Clarke grunted through the pain but wilfully trudged onwards, pushing down the pain that ravaged her body in a tight vice-like grip. Until she finally reached the top.

Clarke shook her head violently trying to shake the memory and to dispel the lingering taste of bile in her throat that the recollection had forced upon her. Clarke felt her heart thump wildly in her chest at the memory, at the relived trauma. Clarke felt ghost-like pain sting her ragged scar on her back, and the two bullet holes in her leg throb accusingly at her. All gifts from the last mountain man. Parting scars for her to look at for the rest of her life and remember him by. To remember what she had done to him. Clarke felt a shiver run down her spine, and it was not due to the crisp morning air. Clarke felt disturbed and unnerved by the memory. A memory that she had not thought of since it happened. Clarke had forced herself to block it out the day that she had left Alton. When she had shed the allice of Sara the trouble-making, harlot murderer, and then assumed the new name of Jane, as she journeyed to the next village. Continuing this action many times over, shedding her identity, only to adopt a new one. Only stopping the cycle when she had learned of her pregnancy.

Clarke blamed Lexa for this unwelcome memory’s reappearance. If she had chosen any other village other than Alton, the memory could have stayed buried and forgotten. Just as she wanted it to. But
no, it appeared the universe was toying with her, making it her fate to relive her misdeeds over and over again.

Clarke let out a heavy sigh as she stopped in front of the stables, her breath disturbing the white clouds around her. Making it swirl in tantalizing little circles around Clarke’s face. Clarke inspected the group of combined Skaikru and Trikru, who were already gathered around the stables. Clarke noticed Octavia, Lincoln, Bellamy and Raven all standing together, happily conversing, whilst firmly holding the reigns of their readied horses. Clarke makes her way over to her friends.

“Good morning.” Clarke greets warmly, offering her friends a small smile. It was Raven who responds.

“It is not a good morning Clarke.” Raven whines. “I haven’t even had my coffee yet.” The dark haired girl pouts dramatically, earning amused laughter from everyone around her.

“Yeah, so everyone just tread lightly around top dog, she’s a little moody.” Bellamy teases lightly, earning an annoyed frown from Raven and another burst of laughter from everyone around them.

“So how many people ended up volunteering to help?” Clarke asks, as she tries to count the Skaikru heads that continue to disappear in the fog bank.

“From what we have counted, there appears to be about twenty-nine people, including us.” Lincoln offers, a little sadly. Feeling very disappointed in his people for not caring enough about their own safety to fight for it.

“That’s disappointing.” Clarke replies, her tone annoyed and slightly disgusted with her people, but mostly with her mother.

“Yeah it is. But we have a wagon full of guns, ammo, food, medicine and even a few bombs and other contraptions that go boom.” Octavia offers enthusiastically.

“The things that go boom are courtesy of me, by the way.” Raven grins proudly.

“At least if the Chancellor refuses to offer warm bodies to fight in this battle, she has given us the means to win.” Clarke states dryly, the sarcasm dripping thickly from her words.

“Yeah, small problem with that. There are more weapons on that damn wagon than there are people to use them, and the Trikru still fear guns. They won’t touch them. So we have the weapons to win the fight, but not the manpower to use the weapons. That makes no sense.” Octavia exclaims with exasperation.

“Yeah, no offense Griffin, but your mums a dickhead.” Raven chimes.

“You don’t have to tell me that. I know.” Clarke retorts sadly. Clarke shakes it off.

“We saved you the same horse from our patrol Clarke. We still thought that it would be best if you again had a placid mount while you have Grace with you.” Lincoln says politely, handing the reigns of the chestnut mare to Clarke.

“Oh thankyou guys.” Clarke beams, a grateful smile pulling at her cheeks. Clarke takes the offered reigns, and sets about securing her supplies onto the saddle. Clarke ties her quiver and bow to the side of the saddle, and attaches her satchel to the rump of the horse, at the end of the seat.

Shortly thereafter Clarke is ready to leave, as is every other warrior from the Trikru, and the willing men and women from Skaikru. The combined group of fifty warriors make their way to the gates of Arcadia, to await further instruction from the commander, who had yet to arrive.
Clarke notices warily that the Trikru warriors stare and point at her, talking in rapid Trigedasleng. It would appear that many of them had now realised who she was and were gossiping much like the Arkers had. Only this time they pointed not just at her, but to Grace as well. Clarke bristled when she heard a large group of Trikru warriors point at Grace’s sleeping form and refer to her as “Goufà kom wamplei. Child of death.” It had been bad enough that the Skaikru, Clarke’s own people had gossiped about Clarke, and had speculated about how Grace came to be. But their fascination and abhorrence had been directed purely on Clarke, and the decisions that she had made. The Trikru, looked at Grace the same way they looked at Clarke, their fascination equally focused on both of them. Regarding them both with awe, respect and fear. It took all of Clarke’s will power and self-control to stop herself from knocking each of them on their asses.

Grace was a baby, an innocent child and they were looking at her as if she had killed the mountain men with Clarke. Clarke’s protective maternal instincts kicked in and Clarke tried her very best to shield Grace from the calculating gazes of the people around her. Clarke pulled a light fur from her satchel, and used it to conceal Grace’s limp body. Lincoln seemed to register Clarke’s discomfort and muted distress, he moved to walk alongside her.

“I heard the Trikru talking last night at dinner. They did not know that you yet lived. They had all believed the rumours that you had commanded your own death to roam the realms of men as a ghost. They believe that because you can command death that you could not re-join the land of living without clinging to another life as it reincarnated. The warriors now believe that you attached yourself to Grace’s soul when she was reborn, and now her life force is shared with you. Meaning that if one of you die, so too does the other. But also that the power of Wanheda is shared, they call Grace the child of death because she has a fraction of your power as Wanheda. You are both Wanheda in their eyes, you both have the power to command death.” Lincoln murmured quietly, keeping his voice low so they were not overheard.

“That’s so messed up.” Clarke hissed angrily. Grace was nothing like Clarke, and she never would be. Clarke would always protect Grace from the cruelty of this world. Clarke and Kadeon had been determined to protect their daughter, to ensure that she did not fall victim to death and destruction as they had been.

“Yes it is.” Lincoln offered after a moment. He had also been disturbed when he had heard the rumours circulating about Clarke and Grace. The Trikru had always been a superstitious people, but even he felt that the legend of Wanheda was beginning to get out of hand. He just hoped that his former people saw the error of their beliefs soon. Before Clarke kicked the crap out of all of them. “If it affords you any modicum of reassurance, know that Grace will be safe with the Trikru. They would protect her life, and your own with every ounce of their strength, just as they would the commander. They all believe that since you have mastered the power of death, that to kill either of you would result in them being forced to roam the Earth as a ghost for eternity. They believe that your power would not allow them to be reborn after they die. No one would dare hurt you or Grace, for fear of the repercussions.” Lincoln offered with a small uncertain smile.

“Well I guess it’s something.” Clarke finally answered with glum sarcasm. “But it’s still messed up.” She conceded after a moment of silence between them. Lincoln chuckled quietly, at Clarke’s response.

“Yes Clarke. It is.” He says before moving to stand beside Octavia, leaving Clarke alone with her thoughts.

Clarke stood away from the gathered Trikru and Skaikru warriors, trying hard to remain unseen and invisible to the warriors around her. Unwillingly to draw any further attention to herself or Grace, if she could help it. But apparently that was not to be, as Ontari made her way over to Clarke and stood
beside her. The girls remained silent, neither of them speaking for long moments, until Clarke curiosity eventually became overpowering.

“What do you want?” Clarke asked quietly. Giving the Azgeda warrior a swift side glance before dutifully averting her attention to the crowd of warriors again.

“For some reason Lexa trusts you.” Ontari states plainly, not bothering to look at Clarke, but knew without looking, that the other girl’s brow was furrowed in confusion.

“And?” Clarke asks, unseeing the point of her statement.

“And, I need to know that her trust is not misplaced.” Ontari, chose that moment to look at Clarke with a fierce protectiveness shining brilliantly from her chocolate brown eyes. “I overheard your conversation with Heda yesterday, an unavoidable element of guard duty. However I did hear what you each said to one another. I did not know you before the mountain Klark kom Skaikru, but Lexa did. Whether she is willing to admit it or not, she is still viewing you as the girl she once knew. Not the woman that you are now. She is trusting you because she trusted the old version of yourself. That is not to say that you are not trustworthy, but Lexa is blinded by her feelings for you to see that you are a different person now. Which makes her vulnerable. I refuse to leave my Heda vulnerable, so from now onwards I will be shadowing you, to ensure that you can be trusted and that Heda allegiance towards you does not get her killed.” Ontari stared at Clarke for long moments, unblinking, to emphasise her unbudging commitment to this task.

Clarke’s traitorous heart skipped a beat and stammered as Ontari’s words clung to her. ‘Lexa’s feelings for you kept playing in her head,’ but Clarke forced the revelation from her mind, and refocused her energies on the conversation before her. Clarke appraised Ontari’s stony expression, which wasn’t necessarily unfriendly but definitely screamed ‘don’t fuck with me,’ and was impressed. This Azgeda warrior was fierce and loyal and protective to a fault, unlike every other Azgeda that Clarke had ever met up until this moment. Clarke respected Ontari for these qualities, and although her new role as Clarke shadow should irk her, Clarke found it strangely endearing that Ontari cared enough for Lexa to assign herself this task.

“Very well Ontari Kom Azgeda.” Clarke says finally, after a minute-long staring competition. Clarke resigned herself to the girls presence after a moment further of contemplation, and returned her attention back to the crowd of warriors.

Ontari’s eyebrows shot up, surprise obvious upon her scarred face. “That’s it?” She asks incredulously, disbelief making her voice shrill, and distinctly feminine.

“What’s what?” Clarke asks, slightly amused by the confused expression adorning Ontari’s face.

“You aren’t going to argue with me over it, you’re just going to accept my near constant presence in your life until I trust you?” Ontari asks, finding it difficult to reign in her disbelief and prevent it from marking her tone.

“Yes.” Clarke says simply, and without hesitation.

“Why?” Ontari frowns as she obviously contemplates all the angles, and possible motives for Clarke’s support of the idea.

“Because Ontari, there is nothing I value more than loyalty.” Clarke says darkly, as she thinks about her father’s death, the betrayal on the mountain, her mother’s treatment of her lately. Her eyes burning holes into Ontari’s head with their intensity.
Ontari swallowed thickly, as she comprehended the insinuation about Lexa buried beneath Clarke’s words. Ontari quickly averted her gaze, unable to maintain eye contact. In this moment, Ontari truly understood what made Clarke such a fearsome warrior and leader, she didn’t cower from her pain, she cultivated it and then used it to elevate herself. Someone like that would never truly be put down. She was like the legendary phoenix, she would always rise from the ashes, stronger than before, and Ontari was helpless to feel admiration for Klark kom Skaikru bloom in her chest. She was exactly the kind of person that Lexa needed in her life. Someone resilient and smart and brave to the point of pure stupidity. Ontari smiled inwardly as she realised what both girls were too stubborn to admit to themselves. They both needed each other, they made up too halves of a whole, and they would forever flail helplessly without the other.

It was at that moment that Lexa rode to the gates of Arcadia atop her black stallion, flanked by her personal guards. Lexa says a few inspiring words to her pathetically tiny army and then a loud battle horn sounded. The Trikru and Skaikru warriors alike mounted their horses and prepared to ride for Alton. And fear twisted uncomfortably in Clarke’s stomach.

Chapter End Notes

Hello my lovelies!!
I am so sorry that I haven’t posted anything new in so long, but I had university exams that I needed to study for. But that is all over now so hopefully I will be able to get back into the swing of writing again, fairly quickly. I am currently on holidays with my extended family so I doubt that I will be updating as regularly as I was initially. However I am hoping to be able to give you guys a couple of new chapters every week. That’s the goal anyhow.

Thankyou all so much for your patience and continued support throughout the weeks of silence, I appreciate it! You guys are amazing!!
I hope you all like the new chapter, the story is going to get pretty interesting in the next few chapters, we will get to see a few more glimpses into Clarke’s checkered past in the year and a half that she was away, so stay tuned and keep reading.
As always I love, love, LOVE feedback, so leave me a comment and let me know what you guys think about the new chapter!
Thanks!!
xxx
The day was dark and bleak, mirroring Lexa’s current mood. She had been leading her traveling party of mixed Skaikru and Trikru warriors, for the better half of a day, and the constant drizzle of rain was dampening everyone’s mood. Lexa’s saturated hair clung uncomfortably to her face, and her back ached from the wet coldness from the material of her pauldron, seeping into her bones. The stiff posture that she had been trained to maintain, as an insignificant symbol of power, made her cold muscles twitch and quiver painfully. Lexa bit down her grimace and fixed her gaze firmly ahead, vainly attempting to distract herself from her discomfort.

Lexa had caught sight of Clarke a handful of times throughout the day, but only in her periphery and only for a brief second. Not nearly long enough to linger as her eyes so wished to. Lexa glumly surmised that Clarke’s distance was probably intentional, both to reiterate her insistence that she didn’t want to be anywhere near a leadership position, or anywhere near Lexa. Lexa pushed the dark reminder down, refusing to dwell on the matter.

Lexa’s mind wandered to the conversation – more like argument – that she had had with Clarke yesterday. She recalled the venom in Clarke’s tone and the bubbling animosity between them. The pent up anger and unspoken words, that all lay neatly tucked under the surface, stubbornly refusing to step into the light on account of both Clarke and Lexa’s combined pigheadedness and overflowing pride. Lexa sighed quietly as she relived Clarke’s declarations of hate, her self-proclamation of being a monster, and Clarke’s haunted recollection of the events within the mountain. Lexa felt her heart constrict as she reimagined the conversation - argument - in vivid detail. Forcing herself to feel the emotions she had tried to push down during their confrontation. She felt anger, sympathy, understanding, guilt, anguish, and heartbreak all warring for supremacy in the depths of her heart.

Lexa knew that Clarke would hold resentment for her, for her actions on the mountain, or the lack thereof. But she hadn’t expected the ferocity in which Clarke would cling to that hate and bitterness after a year and a half of distance. She half-expected that Clarke would understand her reasons after she had explained herself, but that had only seemed to enrage Clarke further. Upon reflection now, Lexa realised what a complete branwed she had been, how utterly foolish it was to believe that Clarke would relinquish her hate and bitterness because Lexa conveniently had a good excuse for abandoning her, for betraying her. Lexa felt the familiar beginnings of self-hatred bubbling in her chest, and she internally recoiled from the disgust she felt for herself. She had been selfish to expect Clarke’s forgiveness, when it was now clear that if she wanted it, she would need to earn it, to work for it. Lexa had been sincere when she said that Clarke was too important to lose twice, and she would not lose her again. She could not lose her again. She was not strong enough to survive it twice. Lexa felt an unexplainable pull towards the young sky girl, she felt like she was drowning and Clarke was oxygen. She needed her, and the magnetism she felt towards her was undeniable, indescribable.

Lexa’s jaw set into a hard, determined line, as she came to a decision. She would earn Clarke’s forgiveness, no matter the cost, because she wasn’t sure how she was going to carry on existing in the same world as Clarke, if Clarke hated her. She would fix this. She would mend what she had broken.

It was at that moment that Titus chose to ride up alongside Lexa. The stern, unflinching mask of stoicism that he usually wore was replaced by a dark scowl of annoyance, alerting Lexa of an
impending lecture.

“Fleimkepa.” Lexa greeted coolly.

“Heda.” He intoned stiffly, the word coming out more as a grunt than anything truly articulate.

Lexa waited a moment in silence for him to continue. Being in no rush to hasten the conversation.

“We must speak about Wanheda.” Titus finally growls. His tone verging on accusatory, of what though, Lexa was unsure of.

“What of her Titus.” Lexa states with feigned disinterest. Lexa keeps her eyes planted firmly ahead of her, focusing on a rather large puddle of muddy water ahead of them, to avoid turning her questioning gaze on Titus and betraying her lack of concern in the subject.

“She is not dead, as many originally believed. Her power directly challenges your leadership as Heda.” Titus chances a glance at Lexa’s side profile, her eyes stubbornly set in front of her, but the agitated bob of her throat and clench of her jaw indicate her ire. Titus swallows nervously before continuing. “After the mountain fell, the clans questioned your ability to lead, because one insolent sky girl could defeat the mountain where you could not. You were counselled to kill Wanheda and take the power of the fallen maunon, mountain men, for yourself, but the girl could not be found. She was assumed dead, so your grip on power as Heda remained, however weakened. But now that she is seen to be alive and well. Flourishing even, the coalition will doubt you once more. They will see you as weak and unfit to hold your power.” Titus states firmly.

Lexa stiffens as Titus voices his concerns. She had been expecting this conversation of course. Ever since she had learned of Clarke’s survival, Lexa knew that Titus would have an issue with Wanheda, and the power she holds. Lexa knew that her most trusted advisor could be blunt on occasion. But he almost seemed affronted with Lexa. Like she had personally offended him, and his choice of words were on the dangerous side of blunt, verging on disrespectful. Lexa couldn’t help the confusion and bubble of anger that rose in her chest.

“What would you have me do Titus?” Lexa hisses with anger, allowing her irritation to seep into her tone. Lexa turns to gauge Titus’ expression, allowing her anger to be seen in her eyes, hoping that Titus understood that while she values his counsel, she would not tolerate disrespect, even from him.

“I do not believe that killing the girl would be beneficial to your rule at this point Heda. It would trigger a war with the Skaikru, and since they have been the 13th clan for some time now, they have made allies within the coalition. A civil war would break the coalition at this point Heda. The girl herself is feared to have the power over life and death by the people. They would not support her execution, as they fear that anyone who offends, harms or kills her would risk her wrath. They believe she is not bound by human concepts of life or death. I would suggest that you have her swear fealty to you and become part of your court to ensure her power cannot be used against you, but I fear that she would not support this. Her ire for the betrayal on the mountain appears to be strong.” Titus says plainly, a glint of smugness shining in his eyes as a plan unfolds in his mind.

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“You make it sound as though my fall from power is all but inevitable Titus. What would you suggest to ensure this does not occur?” Lexa asks hesitantly. Her tongue feeling like sandpaper in her mouth as Titus speaks of Clarke’s death as though it is of no consequence. Lexa swallows down her wrath at his insolence and urges him to continue as she recognises the gleam in his eye when a plan of mad genius overcomes his mind. Fear settles in Lexa’s stomach and she holds her breath as she waits for Titus to continue with his explanation, it hits her like a blow.

“The child.” Titus chirps with smug glee.
Lexa’s stomach drops as she imagines what horrific fate Titus has planned for Clarke’s baby. “What of the child Titus?” Lexa keeps her tone eerily calm and even, as chaos begins to unfold in her mind. Lexa had a strong clue as to what Titus might be considering. As Lexa had heard the folk law surrounding Clarke’s reintegration into the land of the living, just as everyone else had. Her people believe that she shares a soul with her child, that they both share the power of Wanheda. Even if this was not true, the belief in this fact would be enough to exclude Clarke from any and all plans regarding the power of Wanheda if she was believed to be too difficult to control. However the same could not be said of her baby. Lexa felt nausea burn her stomach lining and slowly creep up her oesophagus as she guessed what Titus would say next.

“We take the child.” Titus says finally, the smug gleam in his eyes transforming into a self-satisfied smirk. He was evidently proud of his suggestion and the perceived ingenuity of it. While taking the child would secure the Commander’s hold on power, it would also ensure Clarke’s hatred and wrath. Titus believed that love is weakness, and although he knew Lexa would never admit such a thing, she loved the sky girl. Lexa’s weakness, was destructive to the entire coalition, and the coalition was more important than a single person. Even if that person was Lexa. His job as Fleimkepa was to protect the flame, preserve the history of the Commanders and ensure the future of the Commander’s yet to come. That included protecting the flame and all future commanders from a current Heda if necessary. If Lexa did not make efforts to reclaim her power then she would weaken the coalition to the point where there would be nothing worth ruling over for the next generation. Titus knew that this plan would neuter any affection that existed between Lexa and Clarke, restoring the clan’s faith in the Commander’s power.

Lexa felt physically ill as the words she had expected come tumbling out of Titus’ mouth. Lexa could never take Clarke’s baby from her, she knew that that betrayal was one that they would never recover from. Lexa was determined to repair the damage already existing between them, she refused to endanger the rebuilding of that trust for anything. Not even her tenuous hold on power. Especially when there were alternate options available to her that didn’t involve tearing apart a mother and her daughter. Lexa knew firsthand how damaging separating a child from a parent could be. It had been done to herself many years ago when it was discovered that she was a natblida. It had made her feel as though she had no home, and that she didn’t belong anywhere. There was no way that Lexa would subject an innocent child to the same fate, just so that she could keep her grasp on power for a short time longer. She couldn’t do that to Clarke’s baby, and she couldn’t do that to Clarke.

Lexa’s mind briefly flashed back to the way Clarke had clutched to the child every time she felt threatened or out of control. There was a special bond between them, and the child was the equivalent for Clarke, as Clarke was to Lexa. That baby was Clarke’s oxygen whenever she was drowning. Taking away that lifeline would surely kill Clarke, driving her to insanity. Lexa couldn’t bear the thought of losing Clarke like that.

No, the child would remain with Clarke and that was final. Titus would need to find an alternate solution to the coalition’s lack of faith in Lexa. Separating Clarke from that baby was not even an option.

“No Titus. You will find another way.” Lexa says firmly, her tone authoritative and dripping with stubborn finality.

Lexa refused to listen to Titus’ reasoning or logic any further, so she kicked her heels into the flank of her stallion and sped ahead of the travelling party, flicking up lumps of clay and mud in her wake. Lexa childishly hoped that a chunk of it hit Titus in his brainless head. The rain whipped Lexa in the face and the wind slashed at her cheeks, the added momentum serving to make her entire body shiver as the wind and rain tore through her lightly veiled body. When she was a solid two hundred metres ahead of the rest of her warriors she finally slowed, stopping short of the scouts ahead and allowing
her personal guards to catch up to her. The warm beast between her legs breathed heavily, and the horses flesh steamed in the contrasting cold air.

Lexa wondered how much further the travelling train would be able to venture in this weather, the ground was becoming increasingly wet and slippery. Which in turn was tiring the horses much faster, and the wagons were struggling to keep up, constantly getting stuck in the thick clay. Not to mention Clarke, who was travelling with a baby. This weather was sure to result in the little one becoming ill, Lexa thought grimly.

The weather itself looked as though it had set in for the rest of the day and night, the entire sky blanketed in a sheet of varying shades of white, grey and angry patches of black. The rain appeared unlikely to stop until tomorrow, at the earliest. At this point, there was only a few hours left of daylight. Although in normal circumstances this would indicate that they had plenty of time left to continue travelling. However in these horrid conditions, it would take longer to find dry firewood and set up camp. Lexa took stock of the aching in her back and assumed that many of warriors trailing behind her would be feeling similarly. Lexa spared a thought for Clarke, and figured that with the added weight of an infant strapped to her stomach, her back would be in far worse shape than anyone else’s. That thought alone was what made Lexa slow her horse and stiffly dismount. Shouting orders to her personal guards to inform everyone that they would be stopping for the night.

When the rest of the warriors finally caught up to Lexa, Skaikru and Trikru alike dismounted and quickly went about preparing for the night, everyone appearing overly keen to don dry clothing and sleep. The weary lines of exhaustion were clear on the faces of everyone. Lexa had made the right decision to stop it would seem, as her ragged army looked completely drained of energy, barely able to stand on their own two feet.

Lexa warily searched the faces of the crowd for blonde hair and blue eyes, the old habit refusing to disappear even knowing that Clarke was among her army’s number and undoubtedly safe. Lexa observed the face she was looking for tucked under a protective poncho, the only areas of her body showing signs of having been subjected to the rain were her wet pants, damp face and a few strands of hair that had fallen away from the protection of the poncho, darkened by rain. Lexa allowed a miniscule smile to lift the corners of her lips as she watched Clarke fuss over the poncho and the little bundle safely secured beneath the protection of the thick leather material.

The sight once again reminding Lexa how much Clarke had truly changed in her year and a half of absence from her family and friends, from her people. Lexa realised with a start that the poncho in itself indicated a vast knowledge of preparation skills for travel that one typically only ever has use for when they have lived on the road for an extended period of time. Lexa glanced over the rest of the crowd and realised that only five other warriors, besides Clarke had possessed the foresight to bring protective clothing, and they were all Trikru scouts. Men and women who typically spent most of their time on the road, travelling between villages, and picking the safest routes to destinations for a larger caravan of travellers, such as this. The comparison forced Lexa to realise that she had no idea how Clarke had spent the past year and a half of her life, only that whatever happened it had involved a man and resulted in a baby. Lexa was determined to fix that, she wanted to know about Clarke’s life. Despite knowing that the details might be painful to hear, she was maddeningly curious. Eager to know this newer version of Clarke as well as she had the last.

Lexa forced herself to focus on her current situation rather than daydream aimlessly. She set about aiding her warriors construct her makeshift tent, smaller than her usual travelling accommodations but still much larger than many of her warriors, if they had tents at all. Lexa felt a small flash of concern creep into her mind as she wondered whether Clarke had a tent for the night. Despite knowing that Clarke would have likely survived worse conditions than this if she’d had no shelter in the past, Lexa couldn’t squash the protectiveness that she felt towards the sky girl. Lexa
contemplated offering for Clarke and her child to sleep in her own tent, but knew that it was ill-advised. Clarke was civil towards Lexa in the public eye out of necessity, not out of affection. Clarke did not wish to be anywhere near Lexa she knew.

Lexa allowed her eyes to wander over the faces of the crowd once more. Spotting a poncho-clad Clarke huddled on a wet log with her small band of friends and Ontari, Lexa began thinking of possible ways to convince Clarke to sleep somewhere warm and dry. Lexa knew that Clarke would sacrifice to ensure her child remained dry and warm, but her baby was both of these things already. Tucked safely against Clarke’s chest, away from the discomforts associated with the rain. Knowing how stubborn Clarke could be, Lexa knew that Clarke would happily sit outside in the rain with no care for herself, as that choice would not directly impact the child. Lexa furrowed her brow in thought, attempting to find an alternate way for Clarke to join Lexa in her tent tonight. To offer protection from the weather, yes, but to also keep her close. Lexa’s brain was still struggling to accept that Clarke was real, and often found herself fearing that Clarke survival and safe return were a cruel dream, designed to make her suffer for abandoning the young Skaikru leader.

Lexa observed the way Clarke and her friends spoke together in hushed tones, and inspiration struck. By offering Clarke’s friends the same accommodations, protected from the weather, Clarke might feel safe to share the Commander’s space. As a sidenote Lexa realised that Clarke might agree to this invitation if only out of duty to her friends, sacrificing her animosity for Lexa, if only temporarily, in an attempt to afford those closest to her some shelter from the harsh elements. The thought of Clarke refusing to stay with Lexa for her own benefit stung, but was to be expected. Satisfied that this plan would offer the results that Lexa craved, she set it in motion. Lexa turned to one of her personal guards and instructed them to prepare her tent for extra inhabitants, before walking briskly towards the group of Clarke and her friends.

Ontari and Bellamy noticed her approach and quickly stood to respectfully acknowledge her presence, followed by Octavia and Lincoln as they trailed Bellamy’s gaze. Lexa watched curiously as Raven remained seated and made a show of rebellious defiance by leaning back against her forearms, shooting the Commander an amused smirk as Lexa subtly raised her eyebrow at the display. Lexa turned her attention away from the young mechanic and focused on Clarke, who had her back facing Lexa. Probably a purposeful placement, Lexa acknowledged glumly. The errant thought igniting a flare of hurt in her chest, which Lexa studiously ignored.

“Heda.” The four warriors intoned in synchronisation. Lexa bowed her head in acknowledgement and the warriors each relaxed a fraction.

“I wish to speak with Clarke.” Lexa says evenly, allowing her eyes to cast down to where the young woman sat. Lexa observed the muscles in Clarke back tense minutely and her head turn a slight fraction in silent acknowledgment of her presence. But the young woman remained eerily quiet, no verbal response came, as Lexa had expected, and her heart sank. Lexa pushed through the uncomfortable situation and continued with her offer. “There are limited tents and the weather is harsh. I propose that you, your child and your friends share my tent for shelter tonight.” Lexa says firmly, surprised by the steadiness of her own voice despite the unease she felt in her bones. Lexa carefully phrased her words as a statement rather than a question, purposefully removing as much choice as possible. She wanted Clarke to agree, she needed Clarke to agree.

Clarke’s body twitched slightly as the Commander’s words reached her ears. Lexa found it difficult to gauge a reaction without seeing Clarke’s face, and yet Lexa silently realised that that was probably done purposefully also. Lexa observed the hopeful glances among Clarke’s friends, all of them recognising this offer for what it was, a chance for Lexa to be close to Clarke. They all knew that this was Clarke’s choice. Clarke seemed to be absorbing the expression of her friends also, determining their stance on the offer based on facial expression alone. Lexa watched with bated breath as
Clarke’s head twisted slowly as she studied each face. After another moment of tense silence, Clarke slowly rose to her feet, unfolding her lean body, and turned to face the Commander.

Lexa’s breath hitched as her eyes raked over Clarke’s face, and the expression that seemed to have taken up residence there. Clarke looked utterly detached, exhausted and… Haunted. There was something going on behind Clarke’s lost eyes that Lexa was unaware of, and her heart clenched painfully as she saw this agonised glimpse of Clarke’s damaged soul. Clarke looked as though she had been waging a silent war within herself for most of the day, and had come out the other side of it as the loser. It made Lexa feel utterly helpless to watch Clarke try and fail to stuff these emotions behind the wall that she seemed to have constructed. Clarke’s response served to yank Lexa out of her observations and return her focus to the conversation at hand.

“That would be appreciated Heda.” Clarke finally states, her tone dejected and filled with exhaustion even to her own ears. Clarke had no energy to fight the Commander on the issue and she knew that at least with her friends present, that she would have a barrier between herself and Lexa.

Lexa’s heartrate spiked as her proposal was met with approval, and despite the pain she felt as she watched Clarke struggle, Lexa couldn’t stop the happiness she felt bubble up as she contemplated having Clarke close for the night. Lexa fought to keep a brilliant smile from engulfing her face and struggled to maintain her mask of stoicism.

Lexa watched Clarke for a moment more before nodding her head in dismissal and walking away from the small group. Lexa chanced a look back at Clarke and her friends, and her heart stopped beating in her chest as she witnessed Clarke staring off into the direction of Alton, an unrestrained expression of dread and fear lining her face. The joy that Lexa had felt so keenly only moments before fled, and an icy chill slipped into her bloodstream as the realisation struck. Clarke was scared.

Chapter End Notes

Hi all!
Thanks for all the comments and support, I really appreciate it! My exams went really well, thank you all for asking. Aced them. I think, haha!
Anyway, I hope you all enjoy the new chapter, there’s some pretty heavy stuff in this one, but it is all part of a bigger picture, so I hope you all like it!
As always, please leave me some feedback, I am always keen to hear from you guys, it means a lot that I have such a supportive group of people reading my story!
Thanks guys, you’re all awesome!
Let me know what you think! xx
Clarke was unable to muster the energy to rightly care about the fact that she would be spending the night in such close proximity to Lexa. She had been battling with constant flashbacks to that night when she had killed Carl Emerson, the last Mountain man. The night that she had truly become responsible for the death of an entire civilisation.

Clarke had been able to offer herself the tiniest sliver of comfort by rationalising that while he was alive, she wasn’t truly responsible for the annihilation of an entire race of people. But that action ensured that she had fully morphed into the role of Wanheda. Before that fateful night at the bottom of that ravine, with the rain lashing at her back and blood pouring from her body, she hadn’t really been Wanheda. She had just been broken, a sad little girl who was abandoned and betrayed. Someone who had killed hundreds of people to keep those she loved alive. She felt guilt for the sheer amount of life she was responsible for taking, but until that defining moment, when she had squeezed the life out of Emerson. Her hands tightening around his throat, crushing his larynx, she hadn’t crossed the line that separated mass-murder and genocide.

By killing Emerson, she finally crossed that border and the guilt had been so heavy that it crushed her lungs in her chest, her heart swelling so full with guilt and something far more predatory and demanding than guilt, had filled the empty chambers of her heart where her blood once was. The responsibility and dark swirling disgust she felt for her actions ate her alive. With every step closer to Alton, that dark and dangerous emotion that she had first felt the night she buried Emerson’s broken body, grew stronger in her chest. Solidifying her heart to iron, the organ sinking to the depths of her stomach like a lead balloon. Killing Emerson was something that she had been unable to reconcile even with herself, and was one of the few things she had kept hidden from everyone, including Kadeon. She knew that he would likely understand why she did what she did, but he would have looked at her differently, just as she likely would have viewed him if he had shared every horrific deed he had committed. She was ashamed of her actions, disgusted by the evil atrocity that she had become.

Every step closer to Alton, was a step closer to her friends seeing the monster she truly was. Because she hadn’t killed Emerson to save her people, not to save herself either really, because Clarke’s life wasn’t worth anything. That man had deserved his revenge, she had killed his brother, wife and two sons. She had burned them alive, and she deserved whatever terrible fate that he had planned for her. But no, she had killed him because the guilt was too much, his face was a walking, talking reminder of what she did on that mountain, and Clarke had channelled every ounce of self-hatred and loathing she possessed towards him.

Squeezing the life out of his body, killing him like she wished she could kill the writhing guilt she felt, like she wanted to kill herself. She didn’t need to take Carl Emerson’s life, but she did anyway. He died because Clarke couldn’t face what she had done. Only Clarke had no idea that the responsibility for murdering Emerson would simply amplify the guilt that she was already harbouring. She didn’t know that it would grow and intensify and be so stifling that taking a breath in, felt impossible, like she had a psychological pneumothorax that sucked the air out of her lung and trapped it in her chest cavity, slowly and painfully leeching her life away.

Every step closer to Alton, every step closer to the rotted corpse of Carl Emerson, felt a little bit heavier. Clarke had fought so hard to stop the guilt and fear from consuming her but their strength
were over-powering the walls she had constructed to keep herself safe. Those walls soon turned into a prison, her personal mausoleum once the tide of emotions finally broke through, trapping Clarke in a spiralling pit of despair.

Clarke had spent the entire day riding silently, only occasionally speaking when absolutely necessary. Ontari had stayed close to her side, even when her friends had chosen to ride ahead of her. Ontari’s distrust for her was the only reason she was by Clarke’s side, however the knowledge that someone was with her as she struggled, had been a comfort. Even if no one knew that there was a battle raging inside Clarke, for the control of her emotions. Knowing that she had people around her was a relief in itself. Clarke had barely eaten when they stopped for short breaks, preferring instead to fuss over Grace, ensuring that the wet weather did not reach her. The poncho ensured that it wouldn’t, but Clarke needed something to occupy her mind. Something that would draw her focus away from herself.

But now Clarke was busy staring off into the distance, towards Alton, and she was defeated. Lexa had offered her a dry place to sleep and she couldn’t imagine saying no. Even if she knew that deep down she needed to hate Lexa, she had no energy left to fight. She was done. Depleted.

Clarke pulled out a few dry strips of jerky, quickly eating them. Not even tasting the morsels, before making her way to Lexa’s tent with her bed roll, satchel and weapons. Grace still tucked comfortably against Clarke’s chest, sucking on her fist happily.

Clarke slowed as Lexa’s guards stood to attention as she neared the Commanders tent. However they did not bar her entry as she pulled back the flap and walked inside, away from the drizzling rain and the billows of wind. Clarke had just enough energy to be relieved to see that Lexa was not inside the tent, and that six extra cots had been constructed to accommodate Lexa’s guests for the night. Clarke knew that Lexa was playing a game. That Lexa had planned and designed every detail of her proposal meticulously, so that it was near impossible to say no. But at this point, Clarke couldn’t find the energy to feel enraged by Lexa presumptuous attitude. She was far too tired. Clarke chose the cot that was farthest from Lexa’s, refusing to give the other woman the luxury of having her close. Apparently still finding energy for small acts of defiance.

Clarke quickly deposited her belongings at the foot of her bed, removing her soggy poncho, laying Grace on the cot, and then changing into her sleeping clothes. Once Clarke was reasonably warm and dry, she changed Grace’s clothing and nappy, before settling down on the cot to feed her daughter.

Clarke was in the process of unlacing her shirt when Lexa walked into the tent. Clarke silently cursed her timing, and stubbornly refused to meet Lexa’s gaze as she turned to the side to obscure Lexa’s view of her breast. Grace kicked happily, gurgling with excitement as she watched with wide eyes as Clarke offered a pink nipple to her searching lips. Grace latched on quickly and began to feed with gusto. The little girl wrapped a chubby fist around one of Clarke’s braids to pull Clarke closer. Grace stared at Clarke for a long moment, in between gulps of milk, a small trail of white dribble ran down the side of Grace’s cheek. Clarke wiped the mess up with her index finger, the pad making contact with a sensitive patch of Grace’s skin, causing the child to wriggle and squirm as she smiled around Clarke’s nipple. Dimples denting into the baby’s full cheeks. Clarke was helpless not to return the smile with a small, tired one of her own.

Clarke could feel Lexa’s hot, discerning gaze on herself and Grace, but pointedly ignored her, not willing to invite Lexa to be part of this intimate moment, as observing it and being part of it were two very different things. And Lexa had not earn the right to share moments like this with Clarke. Not yet anyway. A traitorous and quiet voice in Clarke’s mind whispered. Clarke didn’t have time to analyse this errant thought however as Raven barged through the tent flap, instantly diffusing the
tension filled air between Clarke and Lexa.

Clarke’s best friend unceremoniously plonked herself on the cot next to Clarke’s, breathing heavily and slumping with exhaustion, her braced leg, hanging stiffly off the side of the bed. Clarke could only imagine how painful it must be after a full day of riding in the cold rain. But Raven didn’t complain, she never did. After another moment or two, Clarke heard Raven’s breathing even out as she slipped into a deep sleep. Her arm resting heavily over her face. Clarke wondered when Raven would wake and realise that she hadn’t changed her wet clothes, and still wore her brace and mud-slicked boots. Clarke sighed quietly and vowed to wake her friend in a few minutes time.

Clarke realised after a moment that Lexa was standing awkwardly in the corner of the tent, near her own cot. Clarke never thought that the word awkward could be used to describe the mighty Commander of the thirteen clans, but here she was, loitering at the end of her bed, oozing discomfort and uncertainty. Clarke looked at her more openly now that Raven was asleep, Lexa looked weary from the travelling, but there was a latent energy hiding beneath the surface, giving her emerald green eyes a spark of life. Clarke realised with annoyance and mild trepidation that she was familiar with this expression, coupled with Lexa’s awkward behaviour. Lexa wanted to ask Clarke a question, personal in nature if she was really unlucky. Only Lexa didn’t know how to ask, or whether she truly wanted to ask. Clarke wondered if perhaps she should put the young woman out of her misery. Clarke relented finally, becoming rapidly annoyed with Lexa’s uncharacteristic fidgeting.

“What do you want to ask me Lexa?” Clarke asked plainly, the exhaustion creeping into her tone, expressing her impatience. Lexa jerked her head up to meet Clarke’s eyes. Surprise had slackened her jaw, and curiosity burned brightly in her eyes, more intense than before. Probably in relation to the fact that Clarke read Lexa so easily, leaving the brunette to wonder how Clarke had done it.

“I do not wish to upset you…” Lexa says quietly, her gaze becoming uncertain once more, vulnerability shining in the forests of her eyes.

“Well right now, your nervous fidgeting is upsetting me, so please… Out with it.” Clarke says simply, studiously ignoring the conflicting emotions of dread and gratitude that welled up in Clarke’s chest at Lexa’s confession.

“I have noticed that you have struggled emotionally with this journey. I wanted to convey my concern, and offer myself as a confidant if you should need one.” Lexa states. Her tone becoming more certain with every word, and the vulnerability in her face hardening for the expected rejection.

Clarke bristled, she knew that she had been unsuccessful at hiding her conflict over their proximity to Alton, however she did not realise that Lexa had been paying such close attention. She would need to put more distance between them, Clarke decides finally. Clarke calms the anxious flutter of her heart, by reminding herself that it didn’t matter how observant Lexa was, there was no way that she could possibly know that Clarke’s distress was associated with Alton. No one knew what happened in Alton, no yet anyway.

Clarke considers Lexa’s observation and her offer, Clarke glances at Raven’s sleeping form warily. Reminding herself that there is a reason why she never told anyone this secret. That not even Kadeon had been privy to her misdeed, for fear of him and anyone Clarke cared about looking at her different when they finally knew the truth. Clarke’s brain skated over every possible argument for both the pros and cons of sharing this with Lexa. You don’t truly worry about what she thinks, you could tell her, she won’t care. She’s not trustworthy, she betrayed your faith in her on the mountain, this will be no different. But it was neither of these arguments that settled her mind and made the decision for her.

“It is not your burden to bear.” Clarke says darkly, her ire directed inwards instead of at Lexa. Clarke
was not petty enough to blame her current turmoil on Lexa. She had nothing to do with Carl Emerson’s murder, however Clarke knew that Lexa would blame herself for the guilt Clarke felt. Lexa didn’t deserve to carry that weight, it was Clarkes, and Clarke’s alone. Clarke’s mind reeled as she fully comprehended what she was thinking and feeling. Clarke wondered when her feelings towards Lexa had shifted. When had she started caring about how the other woman felt, when had she started taking Lexa’s feelings into consideration, to shape her actions? Clarke caught herself before her jaw became unhinged and betrayed her inner discoveries to Lexa. Clarke focused on Lexa’s reaction to her words, now that she was capable of some semblance of thought again.

An unrecognisable emotion seemed to be primarily expressed on Lexa’s face, something inscrutable but vaguely resembled suspicion, like Lexa didn’t believe a word Clarke had said. Clarke would have laughed at the situation if it wasn’t so serious and sombre.

“Maybe not, but you don’t need to bear it alone Clarke.” Lexa says softly, her earlier vulnerability had returned. Her eyes softened as she studied Clarke, gauging her reaction to the words. Lexa was pleased to note that Clarke sucked in a sharp breath, and her body shuddered almost imperceptibly. Lexa knew that her words had hit their mark.

Clarke didn’t know how to respond to that. Such a simple statement, and yet it was exactly what she needed to hear. It was the simplest reassurance that she was not alone, and yet, Clarke had been unable to find a single person able to tell her those words. Clarke fought to hold back tears that burned the backs of her eyes. Pressure began building in her head with the effort it took to keep the salty seas at bay. Clarke released a breath that she hadn’t realised she was holding and let out a watery exhale. When Clarke looked up at Lexa, she saw the girl that had been her… Something, before the mountain. The vulnerability and impossible softness of her eyes was so startling and yet so warm, it was like coming home. Clarke tried to remind herself that she was meant to hate Lexa, that she had to maintain her death grip on her bitterness and hate. But in this moment, Clarke couldn’t remember why it was important. It’s the exhaustion, Clarke told herself. You’ve been exhausted physically, mentally and emotionally today. Your usual boundaries are no longer in place. Clarke swallowed thickly, trying desperately to push away the light shining brilliantly from the depths of her soul. Like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. Clarke knew that the butterfly would never be that pudgy little caterpillar again, no matter how hard she wanted it to. Clarke knew that now that the light had a foothold, it would push away some of the darkness. The realisation stunned Clarke, and quickly turned to fear. It was dangerous to be surrounded by light, the darkness allows the monsters to hide. Wanheda was the biggest monster of them all, and Clarke didn’t want anyone to see it. The thought of those Clarke cared for, staring down the aberration that resided in the deepest darkest depths of Clarke’s soul, sent a disturbed chill down her spine. Fear coiled in her guts and Clarke’s breathing quickened, to the point where hyperventilation was a likely possibility.

In her anxiety, Clarke must have clamped down, because Grace began fussing as she sucked with more force but received no milk in return. The little girls face contorted into a confused and agitated grimace as she tried to understand where her dinner had disappeared to.

The fussing infant was the distraction Clarke needed, as she focused on her body instead of the mental and emotional anguish that was boiling her brain alive. Clarke closed her eyes, and took a few deep breaths, forcing herself to relax. Eventually she felt the milk come down again and the cranky lines of Grace’s scowl softened, quickly becoming content once again.

When Clarke allowed herself to look up at Lexa, she detected a look of understanding and empathy etched into the soft planes of Lexa’s face. Her eyes were soft and accepting, but freakishly alert. Like she had just witnessed firsthand a physical depiction of the inner turmoil that Clarke had suffered through. It had always unsettled Clarke, the amount Lexa seemed to see. Like she had access to layers that the rest of the world could only dream of, allowing her to see through, around and under a
problem or a person and see what lay within. Clarke felt unsettled right now, as she recognised that razor sharp alertness glinting in Lexa’s eyes, peeling back the layers and peeking underneath. Seeing Clarke’s monster. Clarke slammed her inner defences up the moment she recognised the expression. She recognised the precise moment that Lexa realised that she had been shut out, because she similarly placed the mask of Heda firmly in place, tucking away her emotions neatly.

“Thankyou Heda. Sleep well.” Clarke says stiffly. The moment of vulnerability had passed but both Clarke and Lexa recognised the shift in feelings towards one another. The reduced animosity between them, the less stifling rage and sense of betrayal. Clarke knew that Lexa would feel elated by this development, but Clarke only felt dread. The fear of allowing anyone to see the monster inside her, was all-consuming.

Soon after Lexa changed her clothing – which Clarke dutifully did not watch – and slipped into bed. Clarke woke Raven, so that she could do the same. Eventually Grace finished her feed and fell into a deep sleep, which Clarke soon followed, tucking the tiny bundle of warmth firmly against Clarke’s chest. Clarke was soon fast asleep. Tomorrow she would be in Alton.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone!
Hope you are all having a fantastic week so far!
Here is another update for you all, its a little on the dark side but necessary for Clarke to overcome her demons, so I hope you all enjoy the new chapter.
Let me know what you all think, I love to hear from you guys!
Thanks for reading!! XD
Clarke woke the next morning before the rest of her friends. The soft snores of peaceful slumber filling the darkened tent. Clarke could hear that the rain had finally stopped sometime during the night, and the forests songbirds were beginning to hail the rise of dawn. Clarke peered around in the darkness of the tent, and watched her friends sleep for a moment. She was oddly surprised by how carefree, serene and young they each were in sleep, even Lexa. Her stoic mask completely absent, only slack muscles and pursed lips adorning her face. Her brown hair tumbling into beautiful disarray around her head, a halo of curls.

Clarke forced herself to look away from the sleeping grounder. Now that she was awake and refreshed from a rested sleep, Clarke knows that her exhaustion was to blame for her inconvenient revelations last night. Clarke vaguely wonders whether or not Lexa knew just how fatigued she really was and if she had used that information to her advantage. Brandishing the knowledge that Clarke had no energy to push the other girl away, and forcing her to let Lexa in. It sounded like something she would do, Clarke thought bitterly. But deep down, she knew that it was untrue.

Clarke pulled Grace closer to her body as she laid her head against the soft furs of her bed, listening to her deep and steady draws of breath. Grace looked so much like Kadeon as she slept, her little arms slung above her head, her tiny hands fist ed loosely. Her jaw slack and slightly ajar. And her eyebrow twitching as she dreamed, exactly like her father. The thought brought a small smile to Clarke's lips. It hurt less to think about Kade every day. Instead the pain of his loss was beginning to morph into a unique feeling of gratitude and fond appreciation. She was starting to feel like she had been blessed with the short amount of time that she had been given with him. Like their time together, however brief had been a gift. Something she would forever cherish and be grateful for.

Of course the pain of his loss was still raw and agonising, like an exposed nerve. And she would exact her revenge on the Ice Queen for taking him from them. But she was starting to be able to separate his death from his life, and appreciate the time and memories she had shared with him. Able to remember Kadeon with fondness instead of blinding grief alone.

Clarke laid on her bed contemplating the complexities of her life for the next hour, until the rest of the camp began to stir and prepare for the day ahead of them. Clarke found that while the thought of returning to Alton still sent a disturbed, vertebrae rattling shiver down her spine, and a lump of dread settle so thick and heavy that she felt like the weight of it would simply drag her to the depths of hell, she felt better about her fate today. The news was troubling at best to Clarke, as the only person who had any inkling of her struggle and had offered words of comfort, had been Lexa. Infuriating, presumptuous and perceptive Lexa. Somehow she had known that Clarke was dying on the inside and had offered her relief, an escape from her pain. Clarke had been exhausted, so of course her fatigued and sleep-deprived brain had determined THAT was a good idea. Now Clarke felt better and she had Lexa to thank for it. NO. She wouldn’t thank her for it, she was far too proud to acknowledge her gratitude, especially to Lexa. Someone who had betrayed her. It was bad enough that Lexa had barely opened her mouth at all and yet Clarke had found solace in her words, Lexa shouldn’t have that effect on her, Clarke thought angrily. She had no right to make Clarke feel unburdened like that.

Clarke needed her hate and her bitterness, she didn’t have room for light amidst the darkness. And yet Clarke knew that was a lie too. Last night had shifted something fundamental inside of Clarke.
The sun had started to shine, chasing away the night, and Lexa was responsible. Clarke was annoyed at herself for allowing Lexa, of all people, to catch a glimpse inside. It was stupid, and irrational, and dangerous. Lexa must have seen the monster within, Clarke reminds herself dejectedly. That thought alone was strong enough to pull Clarke from her thoughts and ready herself for the day at a rapid pace.

Clarke quickly dressed into warm, dry clothes. A black pair of riding pants, with a faded red singlet shirt. Clarke pulled on her boots, weapons and jacket, scooping a still sleeping Grace up into her arms, and binding her to Clarke’s chest. Clarke grabbed her satchel and poncho and quickly exited the tent, unable to remain near Lexa or the others any longer. The warmth of the tent and the soft snores of her sleeping friends no longer comforting, now it was stifling.

Clarke breathed the morning air deeply, revelling in the crisp freshness of a brand new day. Although the sun was only just peeking out over the horizon, there was not a cloud in the sky. The brilliant hues of pink and orange, were unmarred by yesterday’s harsh weather. Clarke readied her horse for the long ride, and decided that she would join the scouts ahead of the main band of travellers in an attempt to put some distance between herself and fierce emerald eyes.

Clarke quickly ate some more dried strips of jerky and set off to find the scouts, who would be readying to leave around now. Clarke found the scouts as they were packing their belongings onto their horses and preparing to set off. Clarke made her way over to the gathered group of scouts, five in total.

Clarke immediately recognised nose-hairs and creaky-bones, from her anger fuelled sparring match, amidst the group of gathered warriors, and another man from Lexa’s guard, Malik. Clarke allowed a cautious smile to grace her lips as she led her mare towards the scouts. Deciding that her company might be better received by nose-hairs she approached him first.

“Na ai mafia op yo al on yu skot kromdai? Can I follow you all on your scout today?” Clarke asked with a confidence and an energy she didn’t genuinely feel, eager to get away from everyone who cared, at least for a little while. Clarke watched as recognition, awe and respect washed over nose-hairs face, followed by an excited grin.

“Wanheda! yo sai trigedasleng? Commander of death, you speak trigedasleng?” Jonyon greeted happily. He felt truly honoured to be approached by the Commander of death. He struggled to disguise his excitement but failed miserably, so instead he allowed the emotion to have free-reign of his expression.

“Sha ai da. Yes I do.” Clarke answered evenly, stifling a smirk. It did not go unnoticed by Clarke that nose-hairs danced away from her question and changed the subject. But his excitement dampened Clarke’s annoyance and so she persevered.

“Tonai. Good.” Jonyon responded happily. There was a moment of silence between them, and he watched carefully as Clarke purposefully darted her eyes towards the rest of the scouting party and then directed a pointed, questioning stare towards Jonyon. Silently steering the conversation back towards her initial inquiry. Jonyon internally groaned as he imagined what Heda would say when she realised that Clarke had ventured ahead of her. Jonyon thought it through carefully before responding. Deciding that any communication issues between Heda and Wanheda needed to be addressed between the two of them. He would not intervene. “Sha ai wia enja yu Komyo. Yes, I would enjoy your company.” Jonyon replies finally, retrieving some of his earlier enthusiasm.

“Tanyo. Thankyou.” Clarke exclaimed gratefully. She released a breath that she hadn’t realised she was holding, and allowed a relieved smile to kiss her lips. Nose-hairs grinned at her knowingly.

“Beja sai ai Klark. Please, call me Clarke.” She mentioned as an after-thought, growing rapidly
annoyed with hearing Wanheda more often than her actual name.

“Sha Klark. Yes Clarke.” Jonyon replied immediately, his smile brightening. It was a great honour to address a legend like Wanheda by their true name.

As Clarke finished her thought about names, she realised that she didn’t actually know nose-hairs name, and that if she wanted to be afforded the courtesy of choosing how she was addressed, she should offer this man the same courtesy. Realising that it would be incredibly rude if she was to actually refer him as nose-hairs, to his face. “Howe ste yu naim? What is your name?” Clarke asks finally.


“Em ste an ona krom se yo jonyon. It is an honour to meet you Jonyon.” Clarke says kindly, offering him her forearm to clasp. Jonyon exchanged the greeting swiftly, his smile widening even further, if such a thing were possible.

Clarke quickly mounted her horse and set off with the rest of the scouts. Clarke realised that while she was technically leaving before everyone else and inadvertently hurrying her arrival into Alton, she was also giving herself the solitude and space from her friends and Lexa that she needed. A necessary evil.

The scouts spread out and covered ground quietly, leaving markings low on the trees to signal that the passage was safe. While most of the scouts preferred to complete this task on their own, Clarke made sure to stay close by Jonyon’s side, just in case they ran into any trouble. Clarke was fairly certain that they would be alright, but while she had Grace with her she didn’t want to take any chances.

The morning passed rather quickly with Jonyon by Clarke’s side, he talked to Clarke about trivial and brainless topics like fighting styles and signature combat moves, the differences between Trigedasleng and gonaslang languages. Before long it was late morning and Grace had stirred from her sleep and protested the state of her empty stomach, rather loudly. Jonyon offered to stop so that Clarke could feed Grace, but Clarke assured him that she was able to feed her on horseback with the help of the strategic placement of Grace’s harness and a slower pace. Jonyon had regarded Clarke with surprise and a little awe at that confession, but kept his thoughts to himself. It was a common occurrence for grounder women to juggle obstacles such as horseback riding and breast feeding, however Clarke was probably the first Skaikru mother to deploy such a skill.

The rest of the day passed comfortably, much to Clarke’s surprise. Jonyon’s effortless charisma and friendly company seemed to chase away Clarke’s darkening thoughts as they rapidly approached Alton.

Soon after noon, Clarke and the scouts had finally reached the outskirts of Alton. Jonyon and Clarke stopped atop a ridge that overlooked the valley where Alton rested, and admired the view. While the memories of Carl Emerson had soiled the place for Clarke, it really was a beautiful area. Alton was one of the closest villages to the Azgeda border, so the air was slightly cooler than it was in Arkadia, but it was in no way cold. There were a series of mountain ranges that ran parallel to the village, with a sizeable lake that fed from waterfalls and springs from the tops of the mountains. The natural rock formations were in no way ‘snow-capped,’ but they did reach high into the sky, disappearing into the clouds. Between the valley of the two largest mountains was both the large lake and the bustling village of Alton. The Azgeda border beginning on the far side of the lake.

Clarke’s eyes were helpless to not wander towards the largest mountain, to where she knew a chasm dropped off the cliff face, and the broken bones of the last mountain man lay. The taunt scar along Clarke’s shoulder blade tingled with accusation, and her bullet wound scars ached with phantom
Looking at the village from a militant perspective, it was surrounded on three sides by treacherous mountains, fast moving beds of water and a wide stretching lake. While it was definitely protected on all three sides, it also appeared to have only one point of entry and exit. Deceptively giving the impression that the villagers would be trapped if a sizable force was to come knocking. Only there were hidden passageways that stretched up high into the mountains that only the residents of Alton knew of. Well the residents and Clarke. She had spent enough time here on her own to map out the terrain and familiarise herself with the area. Clarke had spent a little over three weeks living in a cave along the side of the mountain, hidden by thick foliage and woods. So she was intimately familiar with the wilderness surrounding the village. She was also intimately familiar with about half of the locals too, but Clarke quickly pushed that particular thought out of her mind.

Clarke was fully expecting a similarly warm welcome from Alton as in the old-world movie, pirates of the Caribbean. Jack Sparrow was not slapped nearly as much as Clarke was bound to be. Clarke thought wryly.

Clarke and Jonyon continued their descent into Alton. As they neared the village, they noticed the tell-tale evidence of a large force of riders amidst the still drying mud. Hoof-prints and a few wagon-wheels imprinted the soft earth, evidence that presumably, Lexa’s generals had arrived ahead of them.

Jonyon marked the nearest tree with the usual linear slice to the base of the trunk, however he added an extra, shorter slash on top of the marking to signal the evidence of a large force. Clarke knew enough about Trikru scouting to recognise that one shorter line means unidentified third party. Two shorter lines means proceed with caution. Three shorter lines means that the unidentified party is friendly in nature, and if the marking had an X through the middle, it means to tuck tail and retreat - Danger ahead.

Jonyon and Clarke re-joined with the other scouts and journeyed the final two hundred metres of the trek together. Clarke’s gaze became increasingly alert as they ventured closer and closer to the village. Clarke knew that to the untrained eye she would appear calm, collected and in control. However she knew that someone like Lexa, who could apparently read Clarke’s micro-expressions like a damn book, she would appear as anything but. Clarke was truly freaking out as they entered the village.

Clarke didn’t even have time to admire the structure of the buildings as they entered the village. Clarke’s favourite part of Alton, as they were all built off of the ground and heightened on stilts so that in the wet season, their homes didn’t flood as the lake temporarily expanded. A feat of construction and engineering genius, amongst the grounder culture at least.

Clarke couldn’t concentrate. With baited breath and oozing trepidation, Clarke waited for a flicker of recognition to flash in the eyes of those around her. Every face that she saw, was in her mind someone that Clarke had either slept with or fought with. And in every dark corner, the ghost of Carl Emerson lurked, demanding his revenge for Clarke murdering his family, and massacring his people. Clarke would have felt relief if she wasn’t so wound up, for having the foresight to venture ahead of her friends and Lexa, so that none of them saw her reaction to being here. Clarke felt like she had literally just stepped into her own personal hell, a waking nightmare. Clarke wanted to run, but instead she infused her will with iron and dismounted with the rest of the scouts, tethering her horse to the closest post.

Clarke clutched Grace’s leg like she was the only thing keeping Clarke from sinking into her own
mind. Clarke peered down at inquisitive blue eyes and released a trembling breath. Clarke closed her
eyes a moment and allowed Grace’s familiar weight and the feel of her face nuzzled against Clarke’s
chest to ground and centre herself. Willing her mind and body to calm down. It would do no one any
good if Clarke suddenly had a panic attack. Clarke inwardly cringed as she imagined showing that
kind of weakness in a village full of her ghosts and demons. People she could not trust.

Clarke constructed the strongest interior defences she had and pushed all of her emotions down deep,
burying them behind those walls and ignoring them for them foreseeable future. Clarke knew that
she tended to become dejected and despondent when she distanced herself from her emotions like
this, but right now emotions would only cloud her thoughts and distort the clarity of mind she would
need in order to survive the coming weeks, without sacrificing her sanity.

The village chief came out to greet Clarke and the scouts, offering them all an alcoholic beverage to
welcome them to the village. Clarke had drunk a lot of the brew when she was here last. The locals
called the drink Ton-ton, meaning berry spirit. But Clarke liked to refer to it as Hell Juice, because if
you drank a mouthful too much of the stuff, the hangover would last a week, and that’s if you were
lucky. It burned going down and burned ten times worse coming back up, for seven days straight.
The only time that Clarke had ever spewed a fraction as much in her life, was in the beginning stages
of pregnancy with Grace, but Ton-ton was potent stuff, and way worse. Clarke politely declined the
offered drink, indicating Grace as her excuse. The chief smiled mischievously at Clarke, a knowing
glint in his eye, as the other scouts quickly downed the contents of their cups. The poor bastards
would be feeling that for the next few days, Clarke thought with mildly veiled amusement.

It was another hour before the rest of the travelling party arrived. Clarke took one glance at Lexa and
knew she was in trouble. Lexa’s eyes were bright with her fury. There were other emotions present
there also. Concern, relief, a tiny flicker of affection – maybe. But her anger was plain in her eyes.
Clarke only noticing the emotion portrayed in Lexa’s green orbs, as she had become intimately
acquainted with Lexa’s tiny micro-expressions and slight depictions of emotion before the mountain.
To anyone who wasn’t Clarke, Lexa would appear regal, poised and domineering. Her body
language and firm line of her jaw screaming power and control. Clarke looked into Lexa’s eyes, saw
the anger, and knew that it was directed at her. Clarke was in trouble, and she had tucked away her
emotions so tightly, that she couldn’t even feel bad about it.

Despite Lexa’s obvious anger, she would not be able to express it until much later. Clarke took this
opportunity to disappear for a while. Clarke gathered her belongings and discreetly parted from the
main body of the travelling party, and headed towards one of the more secluded and veiled areas of
the many waterfalls and rivers surrounding Alton. Keen to have a bath and wash away the dirt and
grime of travel and relax a portion before the inevitable confrontation with Lexa.

Clarke didn’t notice the shadow that followed her.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again lovelies!
Hope you all like the new chapter update, let me know what you all think. I love the
feedback, as always. Also if you guys would like to see some more of something in my
story, let me know and I will take any suggestions under consideration.
Thanks guys :D
Clarke reached the crystalline water’s edge and sat on a dry log near the slowly flowing creek. The shade shielded Clarke and Grace from the late afternoon sun and the cool breeze rustled the braids framing Clarke’s face. Clarke pulled off her satchel, jacket and unwrapped Grace’s bindings. Allowing the small child to bounce enthusiastically on Clarke’s lap, Grace gurgled and cooed happily, obviously enjoying her newfound freedom. It was beautiful and tranquil here. Clarke had enjoyed her time in Alton more than any other village, until the Emerson incident. She had been content to make a home in the mountains, in one of the many cave systems. The solitude, the nature that cocooned this village, made it feel like a sanctuary. But in this world, safe havens do not exist, and eventually the inevitable had occurred. Clarke’s past had caught up with her and she had run. Running was something that Clarke had gotten so good at that it became near impossible to stop. Even now, Clarke was consciously making an effort to stop the instinct to escape her problems, rather than face them. Clarke inhaled a deep lungful of the clean air. It smelled of wood smoke, rain and fresh grass, the familiar scent of Alton.

Clarke kept her body completely still, and forced herself to maintain a relaxed disposition as she heard a twig snap and a bush rustle slightly behind her. Clarke cautiously slipped her hand to the dagger sheathed at her thigh and positioned Grace in one arm, gripping her firmly and shielding her form with her own body. Clarke listened a moment further to pinpoint the exact location of the intruder, before twisting her body around forcefully and throwing the dagger with deadly accuracy. The intruder yelped as the knife handle hit them hard in the head. Clarke stood in one fluid motion, unsheathing her sword and positioning Grace firmly to her side, safe from any attack from the intruder. Clarke’s eyes immediately swept the area for multiple assailants before landing purposefully on the slumped form of their stalker.

Ontari slowly pulled herself up into a sitting position, clutching her slowly bleeding head wound. Applying pressure to the shallow cut and groaning at the subsequent pain. Clarke sighed in relief, before her face morphed into an irritated scowl.

“What the hell were you thinking, sneaking around like some goddamn spy! I could have killed you!” Clarke bellowed, as she quickly walked and then crouched over Ontari to inspect the gash just below her hairline.

“I told you yesterday, that I was going to shadow you branweda! And if you hadn’t slipped away this morning at the butte crack of dawn, I wouldn’t be forced to ‘sneak’ around after you!” Ontari hissed angrily. Her head ached and she felt woozy. Ontari watched curiously as Clarke’s anger dissipated and her indignation fled her in a rush of breath.

“I am sorry I hurt you Ontari.” Clarke finally relented after a moment of silence. Clarke’s fingers gently prodding the head wound to identify any foreign bodies imbedded in the flesh or any signs of a more serious injury. Clarke watched as Ontari’s eyes narrowed with suspicion and annoyance.

“But you aren’t sorry for sneaking away.” Ontari deduced with a snarl, brushing Clarke’s hands away from her injured head. Ontari pushed herself up onto shaky legs, leaning heavily on the tree behind her to support her weight. Ontari observed the nonchalant expression of emotion of Clarke’s face and the disinterested shrug of her shoulders.

“I am capable of caring for myself and my daughter. I do not need a babysitter. Nor do I want one.”
Clarke replies evenly. It was the truth. After watching how Lexa had dissected Clarke so easily the night before and managed to see inside the walls Clarke had so painstakingly constructed, she didn’t want anyone getting that close to her again. Especially not someone who’s loyalties lay firmly with Lexa. She didn’t need someone reporting her every action, reaction and interaction back to the commander. It was hard enough to keep her secrets as it was without adding the nuisance of an unwanted shadow. While at first Ontari’s loyalty had been admirable, now it was just plain annoying, and Clarke wanted nothing to do with it.

“You forget that you do not get a choice in the matter Wanheda!” Ontari near screams, her frustration building with every passing moment. “I do not trust you! Heda is important, and she does not see you for who you truly are now. She is blinded by her affection for you, so I must protect her from you.” Ontari hisses, she was agitated, tired and her head hurt. She did not have the patience to explain herself to the ignorant Sky girl. Ontari struggles to veil her confusion as Clarke laughs bitterly, her voice bare of amusement.

“You think she sees too little?” Clarke asks the air around her, directing the question to no one in particular, as she turns her back to Ontari and moves to collect her discarded dagger a few feet away, and then resumed her seat by the river. “That’s ironic.” Clarke says quietly to herself, unable to tamp down the bitterness in her tone. It was Lexa’s seeing too much that had fuelled Clarke’s need to escape this morning, not the other way around. Clarke hears Ontari’s uneven footsteps as she moves to join Clarke at the riverside. Sitting amidst the dirt, grass and leaves of the shore, still clamping a hand gingerly over her injured forehead.

“I do not understand.” Ontari says finally, her tone much softer than it was before. Laced with curiosity and confusion. She waits patiently for a long moment while Clarke seems to find her words. Ontari watches with interest as a series of semi-formed emotions cross over Clarke’s face, a torrent of competing feelings. She feels much, Ontari muses to herself.

“I left this morning because I felt like Lexa was seeing more of me than she should. I don’t want her to know me as I am now.” Clarke says quietly, her brain rioting with the emotions she had made prisoner behind her walls. She didn’t want to reveal much to Ontari, but she decided it might be okay to share just enough, so that the girl left her alone and if Lexa was to hear of her confession. Then she would know to stay away.

“Why not?” Ontari asked after a beat. Her hand moving away from her no-longer bleeding head, to regard Clarke carefully. Ontari knew that she should keep her distance from the Sky girl, but the internal war with herself that Clarke appeared to be fighting, intrigued her. It felt familiar to her own life in many ways. We might be more alike than I imagined, Ontari thinks quietly.

“I… I am not a good person. Death follows me wherever I go. And, those who try to know me get hurt or killed. I am not good, I think maybe I never was.” Clarke says calmly, the war in her mind becoming background noise as she focuses on the patterns of the water as they ripple over a stick protruding from the mud beneath.

Ontari stares at Clarke for a long moment, the pair falling into a heavy silence. The kind not filled with awkwardness, but thick with private thoughts and relived memories. Ontari did not expect that confession. Something that, while vague and elusive, was still somehow soul-baring. Ontari felt it was only fair to share a small piece of herself in return. “My mother is the Queen of Azgeda.” Ontari says slowly, as she pushes down the feelings of neglect and bitterness that arise with the statement. “I felt similarly to you. Where you question if there was ever any good in you to begin with, especially if you are capable of doing such awful things. Or in my case, when you come from a place so dark and malevolent, that nothing good ever survives. My mother is evil, there is no doubt in my mind. But for the longest time I felt like I had no hope of being anything positive because darkness tends to snuff out the light. But eventually I found the courage to escape my mother, when she killed one of
my closest friends. I ran from Azgeda and came to Polis. Lexa offered me sanctuary, and I have been loyal to her cause ever since. She gave me the chance to be the light and the goodness that I wanted for myself.” Ontari says, her voice thick with unshed tears, but strong and steady like her heartbeat. Ontari chanced a glance at Clarke to gauge her reaction. She was pleased to find a trickle of empathy, understanding, acceptance and respect shining in her blue eyes, but also noted the underlying wariness. Clarke understood the feelings Ontari spoke of. Although her story was glossed over and simplified exponentially, her point had been delivered. As an afterthought, Ontari added. “Don’t push away the light because you are so used to living in the darkness. Everyone has done terrible things in their life, and those that haven’t, aren’t being honest. The people who care for you, will accept you. Don’t be fearful of losing someone because they might not like who you are. Keeping secrets will push them away anyway. You will achieve what you fear most, if you hold yourself back from people. You will be alone.” Ontari says seriously. She observes Clarke’s slack-jawed expression, and has to bite down a satisfied smirk. Ontari knew that her words had had their desired effect on Clarke, so with that she stood, brushed off her pants and walked away. Abandoning her unwanted sentry duty, because somewhere during that conversation, she had grown to trust Clarke.

Clarke watched Ontari walk away until she had disappeared in the trees. Clarke was struck speechless by what Ontari had said, and Clarke still had no idea how to respond to what she had been told, even now that Ontari had long since left. Clarke had been flummoxed by the level of understanding the young ice nation woman had for Clarke’s situation and felt a deep respect uncurl in her chest. She had seen the horrors of the world but hadn’t let it spoil her outlook on life. It was something Clarke envied.

When Ontari had mentioned who her mother was, Clarke had stiffened, every muscles tensing so taunt that she wondered if it were possible for the fibres to simply snap under the strain. Clarke wondered where Ontari’s loyalties lay. Whether or not she could be trusted with Lexa’s plans for the Ice Queen. Clarke also questioned whether or not the secret of Grace’s parentage was safe around her.

Did Ontari know Kadeon?

Did the Queen Nia know that Kadeon had a second child?

And if so was Ontari aware of that information?

Questions zapped inside of Clarke’s mind in such quick succession of one another that Clarke felt nauseous. Clarke recognised the pain of betrayal and abandonment in Ontari’s eyes as she had recalled her story. However Clarke felt her distrust for the girl grow in magnitude. She was a direct connection to Queen Nia, and Clarke didn’t know nearly enough about her in order for her to feel any small modicum of trust for her. Yet she had offered Clarke comfort in a way that not many could. They say that same recognises same, and that between the two comfort will be shared. Clarke felt like that saying was becoming increasingly difficult to deny.

Clarke prided herself on a steadfast poker face, but Lexa and Ontari had both seen straight through it because in a way, they both maintain their own versions of a disguise to hide behind. They were the same as Clarke, they battled with their inner demons every day and understood the toll bad decisions takes. And yet this knowledge was not comforting, instead it was unnerving and instilled fear inside of Clarke. Despite knowing the truth behind Ontari’s sentiments, Clarke knew that it would take a lot more than pretty words in order for Clarke to trust someone enough to let them in. And not just that, Clarke needed to trust herself enough to let them in. Because what she had said to Ontari was true. Everyone who gets close to Clarke gets hurt in one way or the other.
Kadeon had died because he had two extra people slowing his travels, allowing the Azgeda assassins to catch up. Clarke had left Bellamy and Monty to deal with the fallout of killing the mountain, abandoning them to the same guilt that nearly swallowed Clarke whole. Clarke had killed Jasper’s girlfriend. Octavia had watched a village full of Trikru burn, people who were beginning to feel like home to her, because Clarke had been willing to sacrifice them and hurt her friend to further her agenda. Clarke had outright killed Finn. She had closed the dropship doors while her friends were still outside, leaving them to be burnt alive. She couldn’t save Charlotte or Wells. She killed Atom. She betrayed Raven when she slept with Finn. The list goes on and on. Everyone she loves gets hurt. Anyone who loves her gets hurt. That wouldn’t just change overnight.

Clarke felt tars prick at her eyes uncomfortably, so she let them fall. Clarke held her baby daughter closer to her chest. Finding comfort in the warm press of her tiny body, the familiar tug on her braids and soothing scent of her hair. Clarke sat by the river holding her daughter and crying for the better part of an hour. Sniffling and wiping her eyes to get control of herself Clarke stood, collected her belongings and headed back towards the main drag of Alton, prepared to face the music.

As Clarke walks back into the village, she tries to keep her head down and pace unhurried so to avoid drawing unwanted attention to herself. Clarke knows that it is only a matter of time before someone recognises her as Sarah, and airs her sordid history with Alton. Clarke really, truly is not looking forward to explaining that to her friends or Lexa. Her friends have a brief idea about her time away, especially Raven. But Clarke knew that Raven Reyes could keep a secret, and more than disgust, she had actually been proud of Clarke’s conquests. As unconventional and highly strange as that was. But more than anything else, she didn’t want her friends and Lexa to know how low Clarke got before she began picking herself up putting the broken pieces of herself back together again. She didn’t want Lexa to know, and she wasn’t even sure why that was.

The pain and guilt that Lexa would undoubtedly feel when confronted by Clarke’s search for escape through sex and fighting, should have sent an excited shiver down Clarke’s spine. But that was no longer true, Clarke didn’t want to purposely hurt Lexa, and she didn’t know why. The knowledge frustrated Clarke to no end. She was supposed to hate Lexa. She betrayed and abandoned Clarke, she should feel angry about it, she should want to hurt her for the suffering she caused. But Clarke couldn’t summon the same fury and rage that had consumed her mere weeks ago. It was concerning to say the least, and proved to be an endless source of annoyance and confusion for Clarke when she actively contemplated this information.

The only explanation for the sudden robbery of her rage and bitterness was that the people in her life had slowly been chipping away at her resolve to maintain those negative emotions. Raven playing devil’s advocate, and Abby giving Lexa credit for the continued prosperity of Arkadia. Octavia and Lincoln both explaining some of the Commander’s recent movements and motives. Ontari imparting world weary wisdom upon Clarke, and showing her a new perspective. And then there is Lexa herself, telling her things that caressed her soul and chased away the darkness. All of these blessedly annoying individuals had carved out a chunk of Clarke’s resolve that made her cling to her wrath, and half of them didn’t even realise that they were doing it. Hell, Clarke didn’t even realise that they had been doing it.

Clarke released a resigned sigh and continued walking through Alton, towards the communal fire pits in the village centre, undoubtedly where Lexa’s combined Trikru and Skaikru army had setup camp. It was just beginning to grow dark, as the sun made its descent for the day, obscuring visibility throughout the village, for which Clarke was grateful. However Clarke’s eyes remained alert and calculating as she observed each villager with equal suspicion. Looking for any hint of recognition, or ill-intent.

When Clarke eventually found herself surrounded by the familiar faces of her travelling band, she
relaxed minutely. But that was short-lived as Octavia and Raven found her, both looking equally annoyed with Clarke. She realised that she probably should have told them where she was going. Clarke resisted the urge to cringe as her friends invaded her personal space.

“Where the hell have you been Griffin! You disappear this morning like some vampire that needs to find shelter before daybreak, and then you ditch us again when we finally get to Alton? What the hell dude!” Raven bellows, her eyebrow scrunched into an irritated frown and her arms barred across her chest. Raven was pissed, Clarke had just disappeared without telling everyone where she was going. No one knew if she had just stepped out for some air or if she was ever coming back.

“We were worried that you had left again.” Octavia says lowly, expressing her aggression and annoyance through the steady clenching and unclenching of her jaw and the fire in her blue eyes. It all clicked into place for Clarke, she realised why Lexa looked so angry with her, and why her friends were equally agitated by her sudden disappearance. Clarke’s stomach dropped, as she realised that while everyone was happy to have her back, they didn’t trust her enough to stay with them. Which was hurtful but also warranted in the same instance. Clarke didn’t even trust herself not to run, how was anyone else supposed to believe that she was dedicated to remaining with her people, when Clarke wasn’t even sure she could herself.

“Ahh shit… Guys I am so sorry. I didn’t even realise… I didn’t think… I am so sorry.” Clarke let her eyes drop for a moment before taking a deep steadying breath and attempting to speak a sentence that was comprehensible. “I guess I am still not used to having people around me that worry where I am going. I am still so used to being on my own, it’s probably going to take a little while for me to acclimate to being part of a group again. I will try to remember to tell one of you the next time I need some space.” Clarke said evenly, her tone becoming more confident as she decided on the compromise. She knew that she wouldn’t be able to break the habit of disappearing when she needed a time out in the near future, but the least she could do is inform someone of her departure – compromise. Clarke watched her friends expressions carefully as they considered her explanation.

“Okay I am cool with that. You just scared us, is all. I get it. When you need some space, and some time to get out of your own head, you don’t really think about what others are feeling. I do the same thing. Just tell us next time, yeah?” Octavia asks softly, the jaw clenching seemingly forgotten and her eyes soft, as she regarded her friend. Clarke nodded quickly and without hesitation, eager to appease her. Octavia offered Clarke a small smile before bouncing off towards the cook fires in search of some dinner, leaving Clarke and Raven alone.

“I am still pissed at you for being dumbass.” Raven says finally, a hint of mirth hidden under the tone of irritation.

“I know, I am sorry.” Clarke says again, trying to convey here sincerest apologies for her oversight.

“Fine.” Raven relents after a moment. A second later, a mischievous smirk had overtaken her expression as a devious plan for compensation, crossed her mind. “But… I am afraid that I demand baby cuddles for the rest of the night, aaaand you have to get me my dinner.” Raven wore her trademark shit-eating grin, as she watched as Clarke tried and failed to bite down her bark of amused laughter.

“Fine, deal.” Clarke relents after a moment of carefree laughter. Something she never thought she would be able to do in Alton of all places. Raven pulls Clarke into a quick, reassuring hug before Clarke deposits Grace into Raven’s expectant arms and stalks off to find their dinner.
Hello guys!
Here's another chapter update for you all, I hope you all enjoy it!
Leave me some feedback in the comments section and tell me what you liked about this new chapter, so I can keep it in mind for next time!
Thanks lovelies :D
Lexa had spent the entire afternoon, since arriving in Alton, in meetings with the Village chief and her generals, preparing for their guerrilla war. However Lexa’s focus had been split, she needed to see Clarke. She needed to make sure she was alright and she needed to know that she was still here. Afraid that if she blinked the girl with sunshine in her hair and the sky in her eyes would simply disappear if she took her gaze off of her for even a moment. Which was exactly what had happened when she had awoken this morning coincidentally. She had woken just before Clarke’s friends, however Clarke’s cot had been empty and cold. Telling Lexa that the young Skaikru leader had been absent for some time.

Unknown to Clarke, or anyone else, for that matter, Lexa’s greatest fear since finding Clarke again, was that she would disappear once more. Only this time Lexa would have no hope of finding her. Hell, she had had no hope of finding her in the first place. The only reason that Clarke was part of her life right now was because Clarke had allowed it.

No one had been successful in finding her during the year and a half that she was missing; she had come back because she wanted to. Lexa wondered what might have given Clarke the courage to face this world again, she wanted to know, and she needed to know. There were just so many unasked and unanswered questions, that Lexa felt like the curiosity was driving her insane. And yet she knew that Clarke held all the power here, just as she had held the power over her return. Lexa’s curiosity could only be sated if Clarke chose to tell her. Lexa was utterly helpless to do or decide anything when it came to Clarke. That fact alone frustrated Lexa beyond belief.

So during all of these meetings and duties, Lexa’s focus had been split between obsessing over Clarke and trying to absorb the information shared in these woefully tedious meetings. She was twitchy and restless and she had to fight her body’s urge to run out of the meeting hall and find golden hair and blue eyes.

So when darkness had fallen over Alton and her meetings finally drew to a close, that was exactly what Lexa had done. She immediately sought out Clarke, Ontari and Jameson following at a respectful distance as her personal guard. While she at least had the strength of will to slow her movements to a determined walk instead of a frantic run, Lexa knew she probably wasn’t hiding her emotions very well. She was a mess by her own omission.

Her eyes yearned to rest on Clarke, to offer her mind some peace as they provided evidence that she was still tangible and present. Her fingers twitched and ached to hold Clarke against her body in a warm embrace, to feel that she hadn’t disappeared again, or worse still, that Clarke wasn’t just the whisper of a memory. Her ears burned to hear Clarke’s breath fill her lungs, and laughter bubble in her chest and know that she was safe and happy. And her lips tingled, wanting to caress Clarke’s face with affection, as she convinced herself that Clarke would never leave her again.

But Lexa knew that she probably didn’t deserve any of those reassurances, and even less likely was it that Clarke would allow her to ease her mind in these ways. Clarke hates you, Lexa reminds herself. She uses that sobering knowledge to slow her pace even further and give herself a much needed moment to compose herself.

Lexa focuses on her breathing a moment, trying to keep her jumbled thoughts and emotions in check and at least resembling composure superficially, even if she didn’t honestly feel it. Lexa found that
while she was very good at reading Clarke when she was vulnerable and had lowered her guard, she found it difficult to identify what Clarke was feeling when she built up her walls again. The way Clarke was able to appear completely unaffected and unafflicted by the world around her. Lexa envied the way that Clarke was sometimes able to simply push away the emotions, or seemingly disguise them so well that even Lexa. Someone who was intimately attuned to Clarke’s subtle emotional variances, struggled to see what truly lie within. Like when Clarke had described killing the three Azgeda scouts. It was like she had disconnected herself from what she felt in that moment. Becoming completely shut off and dejected. Not allowing herself to feel.

Deep down Lexa knew that this skill was not in fact a trait to be envied. Instead it was a self-defence mechanism, a form of self-preservation born out of the need to distance oneself from emotions too strong to face directly. Lexa knew, that although it made people wrongly assume that Clarke was cold and unfeeling, the exact opposite was in fact the truth. That Clarke felt too much, that what she was experiencing emotionally in that moment was too intense for her to process, forcing her to shut down. Lexa knew that this learned skill was her fault also. These habits do not exist unless extreme trauma and pain have been perpetrated, and Lexa had inflicted the mountain onto Clarke. She had irreparably damaged Clarke. This was her fault too.

Lexa’s mind briefly wanders to the sight of Clarke as she had arrived in Alton earlier that day, and realises that she recognised Clarke’s expression. Her beautiful blue eyes were an emotionless void, her face slack and perfectly stoic. If the saying was true, and the eyes really were the windows to the soul, then in that moment, Clarke’s soul was icy cold and hardened by life. Lexa recognised the expression from Clarke’s report detailing the deaths of the three Azgeda. She was detached, disconnected from her feelings, from the world around her. Clarke had been suffering and had pushed the emotion down deep, instead of facing it. That meant that something had triggered her, she was hurting because something had happened, but what? The last time Lexa had seen that expression, it had taken the deaths of three Azgeda for Clarke to become so despondent. What could have possibly been bad enough for Clarke to shut down so dramatically?

Lexa’s mind was rattling with possibilities as scenarios bounced around the inside of her skull. Lexa’s mind latched onto a specific memory from the day before. Of Clarke gazing off into the direction of Alton, her face awash in misery, despair and fear. A heavy burden weighting her steps and casting shadows upon her eyes.

It was Alton. Lexa realised with a start. Clarke had put more distance with herself and her emotions the closer they drew to Alton. The nearer they were to this village, the further Clarke’s emotions were buried. There was something about this village that traumatised Clarke to the point where her feelings were overwhelming her. But what could have caused it? Lexa thought to herself.

Lexa was skilled at clinical reasoning, logical thought and the power of deduction, but she had not a clue as to why Clarke was so fearful of this place. Lexa concluded that the only way she would garner an answer was if she asked Clarke directly. And if Clarke decided to answer, Lexa thought darkly.

As Lexa pulled herself from her thoughts, she realised with a touch of embarrassment that she had stopped in the middle of the main thoroughfare, villagers casting curious and befuddled glances in her direction. Lexa stole a glance backwards at her guards, who were waiting patiently for their commander to continue. Lexa only then noticed the dried blood upon Ontari’s temple. When did that happen? She mused silently. Lexa gently pushed away the thought and quickly continued her walking towards the burning cook fires in the distance, where she was confident that she would find Clarke.

Lexa reached the congregational area with no further incident. Her eyes magnetically drawn to the
only blonde head in a sea of blacks and browns. Plus the one head of scarlet hair. Lexa noticed that Clarke sat with her black haired friend, Raven, who also held the sleeping form of Clarke’s infant daughter. The child stretched contentedly across Raven’s thighs, Lexa wondered how the mechanic’s bony legs could ever be considered comfortable, but admired the baby’s adaptability.

Lexa’s eyes wandered to Clarke again, allowing her gaze to linger on deliciously full lips, pulled up into a small uncertain smile, Lexa’s heart stuttered at the sight. It had been so long since she had seen a smile grace Clarke’s lips, that she felt a small one of her own flitter across her face in response.

Clarke seemed to sense Lexa’s gaze as her eyes flicked from her friend to Lexa in an instant. The smile falling from her lips, her face becoming impassive as walls were put in place. There’s the Clarke I’ve come to know, Lexa thought bitterly.

Decidedly unphased by Clarke’s inner defences and lacking enthusiasm to see Lexa, Lexa pushed forward. Undeterred from her initial purpose for seeking out Clarke. Lexa allowed confident strides to devour the space between them, until she was standing mere feet away from Clarke and Raven. Clarke stood to meet her, her arms crossing protectively across her chest and her posturing placed perfectly to obscure the baby from Lexa’s line of sight. Clarke’s blue irises were reinforced with steel. Her entire posturing and countenance reminded Lexa of a fierce lioness, protecting her young. But the pang of hurt was unavoidable as Lexa realised that in this circumstance Lexa was the threat.

Lexa forced herself to remain strong, and determination filled her beating heart, the systolic pressure increasing slightly as her confidence grew. Lexa met Clarke’s steely gaze with one of her own, refusing to back down from the silent challenge.

“Clarke.” Lexa greeted coolly.

“Lexa.” Clarke ground out, a hint of venom laced with ice in her tone.

“I wish to speak with you privately.” Lexa says plainly, gesturing slightly to the commander’s lodgings, a lavish hut built in the epicentre of the village. The heart of her people.

“Pity. I don’t wish to speak with you.” Clarke says with feigned nonchalance so believable that Clarke saw Lexa pause, her bravado faltering momentarily, before her gaze turned calculating. Clarke couldn’t risk going into such a public place, a place where the entire village could see, and potentially recognise Clarke as Sarah. It was bad enough being seen with the commander as it was. Such a spectacle drew attention.

Lexa swallowed thickly, trying to ignore the sting of rejection in her heart.

“It’s a pity indeed that you would reject an opportunity to discuss the future of your people and Skaikru’s role in the upcoming war.” Lexa says evenly. Fully aware that she had delivered a blow below the belt. It was a dirty play, manipulating Clarke’s loyalty to her people in order to gain some alone time with her. But Lexa was willing to play dirty, if it meant winning the end-game, or in this case, the girl.

“In which case, you would be better suited speaking with Bellamy and Lincoln. They are more familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of Skaikru and how they would best serve you in the coming war. I am afraid that my …. Extended period of absence has left me out of touch with the intricacies of the Skaikru. I am afraid that I am simply of no use to you.” Clarke’s spits icily. Her tone becoming more brisk with every extra moment spent talking to Lexa. She needed to put space between them. And fast.

Lexa was slightly taken aback by Clarke’s response. Clarke knew that Lexa was playing dirty, and yet the simple manipulation would have worked a year and a half ago. However now, Clarke was
simply deflecting the crafty manipulation. Refusing to relent to Lexa’s agenda, but also refusing to have her loyalties to her people called into question. She took the diplomatic approach, one that was completely driven by logic alone. Playing Lexa’s own game and beating her at it, it would seem. If the circumstances hadn’t been so troubling for Lexa, she might have been proud of Clarke’s ability to shrug away Lexa’s words like a snake shedding skin. But alas, the circumstances were not different and Lexa felt anger begin to simmer in her chest, born from her mounting frustration.

Lexa needed to talk to Clarke, not knowing was slowly driving her insane, it felt. Lexa could feel Clarke slipping through her fingers, and it settled dread in her guts, dark and heavy. Making her eternally nauseous. Lexa decided to change tactics, despite the presence of a particularly inquisitive mechanic.

“Please Clarke…” Lexa begged, allowing the hopelessness she felt to bleed into her tone. Lexa watched with relief as Clarke’s internalised walls seemed to fracture under Lexa’s tentative gaze. Having no doubt that in this moment she looked pitiful and small, but Lexa couldn’t bring herself to care. Because her choice to shed the façade was working. Showing Clarke her genuine emotions seemed to be smashing the other girls resolve. The relief Lexa felt was palpable as Clarke’s expression changed from steely determination, to startled confusion, to uncertain vulnerability in the blink of an eye.

Lexa watched as Clarke glanced warily at the commander’s lodgings and recognised the trepidation there. Lexa wondered if Clarke was worried of what the other warriors would think if they both entered the hut alone for an extended period of time. Clarke had never been one to concern herself with idle rumours before, but Lexa supposed now that she had a reputation as Wanheda to maintain, gossip of the commander of death having sex with the commander might have concerned her. Lexa might have smirked smugly if again the circumstances were different but they were not. So Lexa afforded Clarke an alternative.

“If you are concerned of what the other warriors might think, we can speak somewhere else.” Lexa offered quickly, not willing to give Clarke the opportunity to deny her request. Clarke’s cheeks flamed scarlet, at the insinuation of the camp assuming that they would be sleeping together, but nodded in agreement despite her reservations. Lexa felt hopeful once more, as her offer was accepted. Clarke’s friend Raven speaking up, suddenly reminded Lexa that they were not alone.

“I will look after the kid for you Griffin. She’s zonked out anyway. It’s not like I have to worry about her busting my eardrums while she’s unconscious.” Raven quipped playfully, enjoying the startled expression on the Commander’s face and the small knowing smirk on Clarke’s lips. They both knew what Raven was doing. She had sworn black and blue that she would not be left alone with Grace again after the last time she had babysat, and the kid had screamed so loud that Raven had wondered if her ears would ever stop ringing. So offering to look after the kid now was her not-so-subtle way of making Clarke deal with her shit.

“Thanks Raven.” Clarke says in response, fighting hard to stop the eye-roll that begged to be released. “Come and find me if she wakes up.” Clarke says as an after-thought, not wanting to put her friend in the same position as last time. Raven only nods in affirmation.

“This way Clarke.” Lexa gestures towards the meeting hall, where she had been occupied for the afternoon. While she was loathe to return to the ghastly room, she was willing to make this concession if it made Clarke feel more at ease.

Lexa allowed Clarke to set the pace, her guards following closely behind them. The walk to the meeting hall was met with complete silence, and it was uncomfortable. Neither Lexa nor Clarke knew the correct way to interact with each other in a social setting where small talk might be
appropriate. The only way they seemed able to communicate with each other now was through war strategy and hurling accusations at each other. What a healthy relationship, Lexa snarked sarcastically in her head.

When they arrived at the meeting hall, Ontari and Jameson took up their sentry by the entrance, but not before Ontari gave Clarke a meaningful look. The only reason that Lexa noticed it, was because the exchange made Clarke visibly stiffen. Lexa wondered what was going on between the two of them. Not in the jealous lover sense, but more in the way of wondering what had transpired between them for common ground to have been found. The last Lexa had been made aware, Ontari had been distrustful of Clarke and had been shadowing her, and Clarke seemed to hold a strong dislike of Azgeda. Meaning that neither of them liked each other. And yet somehow meaningful glances are now being exchanged? Lexa decided she would question Ontari on the matter later. In the meantime she would take full advantage of this moment alone with Clarke.

The two stubborn women stood in silence for a moment, neither willing to be the first to speak. Five minutes into their soundless meeting, Clarke finally broke the quiet, seeming to lose her patience.

“What do you want Lexa?” Clarke’s asks stiffly. Her heart speeding up as she contemplated the many nosy questions Lexa could ask her.

“Why are you afraid of Alton?” Lexa asks softly. She allows her expression to remain vulnerable and open, so as not to startle Clarke into fleeing. Lexa suddenly knew that asking about Clarke’s fear may not have been wise, as her face instantly became impassive and hard as marble. Her eyes calculating and critical, her body unmoving. She’s not even breathing, Lexa noticed with concern. Lexa left the question hanging thickly in the air, like an axe above an exposed neck. Someone was going to lose their head.

“Now who have you been speaking with, I wonder?” Clarke says coldly, her tone void of life. Clarke had temporarily shut down, as soon as the words passed Lexa’s lips. How the fuck did she know? Clarke asked herself angrily, expecting a small voice in her head to answer the question for her, so she could ignore Lexa’s explanation entirely and get the hell out of there.

“I haven’t spoken to anyone. I came to the conclusion myself.” Lexa offers as justification. She studies Clarke’s reaction to her words closely, and is startled to find fear laced with her general expression of annoyance. Fear of what though? Alton? Being questioned?... Me? The thought made the dread from earlier, return with a vengeance.

“And how, pray tell, did you reach the conclusion that I am scared of Alton?” Clarke asks with mocking attitude, her tone taking on a malicious sing-song lilt. Clarke unconsciously crosses her arms above her chest. Unknowingly expressing to Lexa her need to protect herself.

“It doesn’t matter how I arrived at the conclusion. What does matter is whether or not you are in danger here, are you safe? Is it a person that is tormenting your mind, or is it just the place? I can help Clarke, please let me help.” Lexa pleaded. She was well-aware that begging was not an attractive form of coercion; however she did not have the patience to employ more dignified tactics where Clarke was concerned.

“I do not need anyone’s help, especially yours. Do not speak to me about Alton again.” Clarke all but hisses. She feels like a snake rearing up to strike, and she knew that if Lexa kept pushing, she was going to get bit. Thankfully Lexa kind of let it go.

“What doesn’t make sense however is why you left earlier this morning to reach Alton at a faster pace. I know what I saw, you are fearful of this place. But what could have unnerved you enough to simply abandon your friends without offering a word of explanation? Why did you leave this
morning?” Lexa growls. Her frustration mounting, growing rapidly into anger again.

“I don’t owe you an explanation Lexa. The people who had the right to know how and why I spend my time the way I do, know why I left this morning. It is none of your business.” Clarke spat. Her ire growing rapidly. Clarke felt regret coil in her abdomen for even contemplating agreeing to speak with Lexa. She should have known that Lexa would abuse the time alone to ask inappropriate questions, and demand answers she had no right to know.

“It is my business when you are part of my travelling party. I am the commander, and your life is my responsibility. As is anyone else’s who travel with me and aid me in my endeavours. This includes you, your friends, even your daughter. You are all mine to protect. And I can’t do that when I don’t know where you are Clarke!” Lexa yells. Her exasperation at the situation making her choice of words questionable and her tone highly unprofessional. Plus she had just played the ‘I am the commander, do as I say card,’ which Lexa knew Clarke wouldn’t appreciate. They were equals, but Lexa was struggling to maintain her practiced level-headedness whilst in the presence of Clarke.

“I don’t need, nor do I want your protection Lexa! And don’t you dare bring my daughter into this. If I was incapable of caring for her, we would both be dead right now, the same as her father! I am strong enough to care for her, I don’t need the commander to assume responsibility of my child’s safety. If I had relied on your protection on the mountain, that little girl wouldn’t even be here today. Because me and every other Skaikru person would be dead right now! So don’t you dare bring Grace into this, you have no right to speak of her!” Clarke bellowed. When she finally finished her exclamation, her throat was raw and pained from shouting, and her lungs heaved to suck in breath. Clarke knew her eyes were ablaze with fury without even looking into a mirror, she could feel the heat of her own gaze burning her eyelids. A thrill of satisfaction shot through Clarke’s body as she watched Lexa cower away and flinch from her hateful statement. The green eyed girl looked like she had been slapped with a brick. Her mouth hung agape, her cheeks flaming red with shame and her eyes unable to meet Clarke’s fearsome gaze.

It was Lexa’s turn to be incapable of drawing breath now. Shame burned through her veins, heating her cheeks and neck. I can’t believe I just said that, Lexa scolded herself. Lexa forced herself to meet Clarke’s eyes. It took effort. The heat of Clarke’s glare was stifling. Her rage and fury completely untethered and clearly visible. Lexa wished she had guarded her words more carefully. She had not meant to insinuate Clarke was an unfit mother, or that she was incapable of caring for her child. Grace, it is a good name, Lexa muses in the back of her mind. Lexa forced herself to push away her shame and remorse, she needed to take control of this situation, before more irreparable damage was inflicted.

“I am sorry Clarke. Truly. I did not mean to question your abilities as a mother. I have seen you with Grace, and I know only from observing your interactions with the child that you would die for her. I struggle to choose my words when I am upset. I apologise.” Lexa offers quietly. She felt close to tears. But not for herself, for Clarke, and the pain she must be suffering right now. Even though she refused to share her burden, Lexa knew that Clarke was struggling, and it broke her heart. Clarke looked astonished by Lexa’s confession, and seemed to instantly deflate.

“I am sorry for snapping at you… Kind of.” Clarke relented after a moment of terse silence. Lexa cracked a wry grin in response to Clarke’s almost-apology, before sobering.

“I was worried that you had left again.” Lexa whispers, feeling naked before Clarke, as she bares her secret. Lexa watches as Clarke’s throat works, as she swallows thickly.

“I made a promise to someone not long ago that I would surround myself with people who would protect and love, myself and my daughter. I am not going anywhere.” Clarke assured softly. She was slightly shocked by the vulnerability in her own voice, and the tenderness she was showing Lexa in that moment, and silently cursed Lexa for what felt like the hundredth time today. Lexa smiled
unabashedly, tears running down her face in small rivulets. She looked so relieved, and it made Clarke feel guilty for inflicting the pain in the first place.

“Thankyou.” Lexa says gratefully, her voice tinged with desperation and joy. A heady, confusing combination of emotions that portrayed her obvious relief. A moment later, Lexa examined the words Clarke had spoken. Who was this person that she felt so loyal towards? “Who were they?” Lexa asks quietly, fully expecting to be rejected or brushed off. Clarke’s face briefly contorted into an expression of anguish, and Lexa felt stupid for even asking the question.

“He was Grace’s father.” Clarke says after a moment. It wouldn’t hurt anyone to divulge that information, Clarke surmised. The memory of Kadeon brought the ghost of a smile to Clarke’s lips as she remembered him cradling their daughter and singing to her at night. He was so gentle. Lexa’s voice startled Clarke from her reverie.

“Was?” Lexa prodded gently, wanting desperately for Clarke to elaborate but not knowing whether or not she truly wanted to know the answer at the same time.

“What?” Clarke asks, not fully understanding what Lexa was asking her, out of purposeful or accidental obliviousness, she wasn’t sure.

“You said he was Grace’s father. Past tense. What happened to him?” Lexa asks quietly, timidly even. She hated that she felt so worried of the answer and fearful of Clarke’s rejection. Lexa fidgeted with her fingers absent-mindedly and bit the inside of her lip to stop her nerves from showing so blatantly. Right now Clarke was being open and honest with her, so Lexa decided that she would take advantage of Clarke’s sudden candour in order to appease her own curiosity.

“He died. Queen Nia ordered his death.” Clarke says after a moment’s hesitation. She stares at Lexa critically for a moment, assessing her reaction and determining whether or not Lexa knew anything about the event. Kadeon had been one of the most famous Azgeda assassins amidst the 13 clans. He was Natmitta, the legendary Black Mercy, the commander would surely know of his demise. But Clarke needed to know if Lexa had made the connection between Kadeon and the renowned assassin. Clarke knew that the smart move would be to remain mute on the topic of Grace’s paternity, however she felt compelled to share this with Lexa. Something traitorous inside of Clarke trusted in Lexa’s ability to keep a seemingly unimportant secret, even if she didn’t trust Lexa to betray her in a second if it benefits her people. Skaikru is the 13th clan now, technically we are all one people, a small irritatingly rational voice inside Clarke’s head whispered. Clarke pushed it aside, unwilling to disregard her smouldering distrust on a whim. Lexa needed to earn that trust back, it was not just freely given.

“He was killed by Queen Nia?” Lexa asked. Shock, surprise and curiously, outrage toned her voice. Lexa felt angered that Clarke had suffered a similar pain to her loss of Costia, by Queen Nia’s hand. Clarke had suffered so much pain already, and she did not deserve to bear the loss of someone else she cared for. Lexa felt angry on behalf of Clarke. Lexa would enjoy killing Nia. It was going to be slow and painful.

“Yes.” Clarke answered simply.

“Why would she kill him, what was his significance?” Lexa asked hesitantly. While right now she was trying hard to be a concerned friend, she couldn’t turn off the part of her brain that thought only as the Commander. The part of her brain that always looked for an angle to further her agenda, and in this case, defeat Queen Nia in this war of shadows. Little did Lexa know that her greatest weapon in the fight against Nia and her forces was standing not 10 feet away from her. Clarke had been personally trained by one of the most fearsome and brutal assassins ever to have been created by Azgeda. Clarke knew how to fight like Natmitta, how
to manipulate, deceive and infiltrate as he did. And Lexa had no clue. Clarke didn’t want her to know either, she was content to leave that secret buried until it was necessary for it to come to light.

“I don’t know. He and I did not have the most conventional of relationships. It was one we formed out of necessity not out of choice.” Clarke lies flawlessly. Skating around the truth rather than outright fibbing to Lexa’s face. Realising that Lexa hadn’t caught onto the untruth but rather was confused by the overly vague description of their relationship, she elaborated. In more explicit detail. “We drank, we fucked. I got pregnant. I hunted him down to tell him. We agreed to be co-parents. Then we kind of fell in love, much, much later.” Clarke bit down her urge to laugh as Lexa cringed and went red for the second time tonight. It’s the simple pleasures in life that make it enjoyable.

Lexa latched onto the last part, pointedly ignoring the visual image of Clarke and this mystery man creating a child together. “You loved him?” Lexa asks quickly. Too quickly. In her hastiness to clarify, she had unveiled her jealousy. Lexa watched as Clarke raised a single eyebrow, in curiosity, and cursed her inability to remain in control of herself around Clarke.

“Yes, I did.” Clarke answers slowly. Unwilling to divulge any more information that night, Clarke decided that she had shared enough of her past with Kadeon for the evening. “I had better get back to Raven and Grace. Goodnight Lexa.” Clarke says evenly. She was halfway out of the meeting hall before she heard a quiet reply.

“Goodnight Clarke.” Lexa near-whispered. Her heart was in her throat after listening to Clarke’s last confession. She had loved this mystery man. He had spent a year and a half with Clarke, getting to know her, loving her. He had had more of a life with Clarke than Lexa had. And it made Lexa green with envy. She wanted that. She wanted to love Clarke, and be loved in return. To have a family with her and live in domestic bliss. That man is dead Lexa, she told herself. While that is sad and horrible for Clarke, it also means that you have the chance to have those things with her. While the conspiratorial voice in her head whispered words of encouragement. Lexa’s own doubt seeped into her bones, devouring the positive voice like quick-sand. Lexa knew that she still had a long way to go before Clarke ever forgave her for her actions on mount weather, let alone until she trusted her. Both of those goals felt so far away, that Lexa couldn’t even begin to fathom how long it might take for Clarke to love Lexa. And that was what she truly desired.

Lexa wanted Clarke’s love.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!
This chapter is a bit longer than usual, only because there was so much content to cover. I felt like this confrontation between our girls was a really pivotal moment, and needed to be done perfectly, so it took a couple of days extra to get it exactly the way I wanted it. So I hope you all enjoy the new chapter!
As always I love hearing from you all, it seriously makes my day! Even though I may not reply to every comment, please know that I do read every single one of them, and they never fail to bring a smile to my face! You guys are awesome!
Thanks again for all your amazing support and feedback, I look forward to hearing what you each thought about the new chapter! xx
Clarke left the meeting hall as quickly as her legs would carry her, uncaring of what everyone looking on might think. Clarke made a point of purpose to ignore Ontari when the Azgeda girl tried calling after her. She probably heard most of the conversation anyway, and Clarke didn’t feel like receiving a lecture from her. Clarke knew she had been unreasonable in there. She knew it, and she didn’t need to be reminded. Clarke kept moving until she reached the hut that had been designated to herself and Raven for the duration of their stay. Clarke leapt up onto the porch and bounded inside, knowing that Raven would already be inside and likely awake still.

Clarke walked into the simple hut made of wood and bricks, and immediately began pacing the room. Raven had been busy reading something by candlelight when Clarke stealthily burst through the door, momentarily startling the young mechanic. Clarke allowed her eyes to flicker over Grace’s sleeping form, sprawled out on her bed and relaxed minutely, appeasing Clarke’s maternal instincts to lay eyes on her daughter.

“So, how was your date?” Raven asks teasingly, her eyes twinkling with devious mirth. Raven pulled herself up from her position on the bed so she could watch her friend’s reaction. Raven regretted her attempts at banter instantly, when she took stock of Clarke’s appearance. The girl was running her hands through her braids, and pacing like it was her life’s mission to wear a hole in the floor. Clarke shoulders were slumped and her eyes darted around the room frantically, like she was trying to find something. “That bad huh?” Raven asks cautiously, setting down her book and turning to face her friend.

Clarke let out a heavy sigh, her shoulders slumping with the force of her exhalation, as she scrubbed her face with her palms.

“It was so bad Ray. I was such an ass.” Clarke exclaimed with frustration. She hadn’t meant to be so biting and harsh with Lexa, but it was habit. Clarke couldn’t just ignore the pain and resentment she had felt for a year and a half of her life. Those feelings didn’t just go away overnight. And while Clarke’s feelings for Lexa were undoubtedly evolving into something new, Clarke was now struggling with breaking the habitual behaviours she had developed towards Lexa. Like not being so defensive, and allowing Lexa to see a fraction of Clarke’s vulnerability.

“Why?” Raven asks after a moment of silence, her brow quirked in confusion and her lip worrying between her teeth as she ponders the question herself. There was something going on with Clarke that Raven didn’t know. And she intended to find out what it was.

“You know, that question seems perfectly innocent and reasonable. But it really isn’t, and it has a really long and confusing answer to it. And I don’t even know how to begin to answer it.” Clarke says in one breath. Clarke felt overwhelmed and she didn’t know how to process her feelings or how to open up with Raven, or with anyone really. Clarke looks at her friend pleadingly, wishing that her friend could hear her thoughts in this moment and make sense of them all for her. After another moment of silence, and it becomes clear to Raven that Clarke doesn’t have any answers for her yet, she begins talking again. “I don’t know what to feel anymore…Everything is jumbled up.. And I don’t know what to do Raven.” Clarke says, a hint of desperation in her tone. Clarke was so confused her head felt like it was going to explode. Every emotion and feeling she had for Lexa was slowly being replaced and altered, and Clarke didn’t know what to do with the new additions. Her life felt like it had been tipped on its head.
During the year and half of Clarke’s absence, her life was in a constant state of flux. Nothing was permanent, but she could always rely on her hate for Lexa to remain unaltered. But now when Clarke went searching for the bitterness and anger she felt towards Lexa, she comes up empty. Finding her oh-so-dependable resentment missing. It was like a foundation had shifted and now Clarke’s entire being was unstable, threatening to fall down if she didn’t find something else to prop herself up on. She needed something sturdy to replace those emotions. Clarke felt the desperation and confusion beginning to overwhelm her, until she felt calming pressure on her shoulders. Sometime during Clarke’s internalised tail-spin, Raven had moved over to where Clarke stood. Her hands gave a firm, reassuring squeeze, before directing Clarke to sit on the edge of the bed with her.

“Clarke. It’s going to be okay. Just start from the beginning, tell me what happened tonight. I can’t help unless I know what’s going on.” Raven says slowly, like she would if she were explaining something to a child. Whatever it was that was bothering Clarke, was a big deal. Her friend looked like she was on the verge of passing out, throwing up and crying. All at the same time. Clarke hesitates a moment, before meeting Raven’s eyes and nodding slowly.

“Okay.” Clarke says slowly, hating the uncertainty in her own voice. The word coming out shaky and broken. Clarke knew she needed to talk to someone about what she was feeling. Keeping it all bottled up was slowly driving Clarke to the brink of insanity. And Clarke knew that Raven could be trusted. Clarke didn’t even need to question whether her friend’s loyalty was unconditional; she already knew that it was. Taking on board Ontari’s advice from earlier that day, Clarke decides to let someone in, while Ontari had prescribed allowing someone to examine every dark corner of her soul, Clarke knew she wasn’t ready for that yet. But she did need to relieve herself of the burden that was Lexa. Or more accurately the confusing whirlwind of emotions that shrouded Lexa. So with a final fortifying breath, Clarke began to explain what she was feeling.

“After the mountain I hated Lexa. I resented what she did to our people, and I hated what she did to me. But more than that, I hated what she turned me into. Lexa created Wanheda the moment that she abandoned me on the mountain. She gave me two impossible decisions. Either walk away, knowing that everyone I love would be butchered, or stay and fight, hoping for peace but preparing for war. Those were the options Lexa gave me, and I refused to watch another person I love die. It isn’t common knowledge, but Lexa and I were something to one another. I don’t even know what. But it was like my world caught on fire while she was near. She brought everything into focus, exhilarated me. She made me feel alive and understood. She knew about the ghosts that haunted my nights even back then. She knew the toll that hard choices took, and didn’t judge me when I struggled to reconcile with those decisions. It was like our souls collided and became entwined. I can’t describe it. Something just clicked with her, and I felt whole and complete. Lexa knew me, she knew the kind of person I was, so she knew what decision I would make that day on the mountain. She understood me on a level that no one else ever has. So she knew that instead of watching the people I love get hurt, I would fight until my last breath to save you all. Lexa knew, and yet she walked away. She left me to whatever fate awaited us all on that mountain, and just walked away. She broke my trust, my will to live, my sanity, and my heart. I was a shell. Her betrayal sucked out all the goodness inside of me, and left behind the husk, discarded. So I hated Lexa with a fury that boiled my blood and fused itself to my bones. I let the hate fester, because it was the only emotion I felt that was strong enough to drown out my own guilt and self-loathing. My hate for Lexa grew and rankled beneath the surface for a year and a half, and I let it. I knew it was there but I didn’t care enough to face it, to move past it. Then I was faced with everything I had tried so valiantly to run from. My friends, my family, my people and Lexa. She waltzed back into my life like nothing had transpired between us. Like I had no valid reason to hate her with every ounce of fury and passion I could muster. She acted like I should forgive her because of the pain she endured when she abandoned me. Like our reunion would simply cancel out our tainted history. And I wanted to make her hurt, to make her understand exactly what her actions on the mountain did to me, what she broke. I needed her to know that she would never be forgiven. So that’s what I did. But Lexa being the stubborn idiot that she is, decided
that my rousing confession of resentment wasn’t enough to deter her. So she promised she would never give up on me. She said a lot of other pretty words that didn’t mean much at the time. But our encounter chipped away at my hate, and stemmed my righteous fury. And my feelings changed. It was subtle at first. Something as simple as thinking about Lexa or the mountain didn’t evoke the same level of bitterness and anger that it once did. Those feelings faded into the background, and have nearly disappeared completely now. But since those feelings have near evaporated, they have begun to be replaced. And I don’t even know how to identify those emotions, let alone process them or even come to terms with them. My hate and my bitterness were like part of me, a foundation of who I am even. But now that they are gone, the foundation is cracked and the earth is moving and I feel like I am going to come tumbling down.

Those feelings were so reliable and dependable, I felt like they were a part of me and then suddenly they were just gone. Now I don’t know how I am feeling or what I should be feeling towards Lexa. So instead of trying to figure it out I am behaving exactly as I did before my emotions started to change. It’s like treating her badly is a habit now, being angry and cruel is some kind of perverted instinct. Something I am falling back on now because I don’t know how to treat her anymore. It’s my only defence because I can’t recognise if she is truly a threat, so instead of facing things with dignity I am lashing out savagely. But it makes me feel so guilty and wrong. I am hurting her, and I don’t want to. I don’t know what I am feeling right now, and I am not even certain that I want to know. I am just so confused right now it’s overwhelming. I’ve been so full of hate for so long that its sudden absence is terrifying. I keep asking myself, what if Lexa betrays me again? What if by letting her in, I am only ensuring I get hurt once more? Or worse what if my misplaced trust puts Grace in danger? I just don’t know what to do Raven.” Clarke says finally, her tone pleading and beseeching for understanding, acceptance and guidance from her friend. Clarke was at a loss. She felt so much, and yet the words fell short of describing them accurately. Clarke had pointedly stared at a crack in the floorboards throughout her entire tangent. Studiously avoiding Raven’s gaze until now. Clarke hesitantly looked up at her friend, and prayed that she didn’t think she was insane. Raven’s face was a stunned mix of confused, surprised, overwhelmed and thoughtful. Great, Clarke thought glumly to herself, she’s just as confused as I am.

“Wow. Alright. That’s a lot to take in Griffin.” Raven says distantly, her genius brain sorting through Clarke’s long-winded statement trying to find something solid to latch onto and offer her friend some well-needed advice. Clarke looked small and vulnerable as she sat on the end of Raven’s bed. Uncertainty and self-doubt shone brilliantly in her eyes. Raven felt her heart crumble in her chest, as she observed her usually so strong and confident friend fall apart. Seeing someone as formidable as Wanheda brought to their knees by something as trivial as human emotion was truly humbling, and Raven hated it. She hated that Clarke was so broken that feelings confused her and made her helpless. Because it wasn’t something that Raven could fix for Clarke, not immediately at least. But that didn’t mean that she wouldn’t try to help. Determination strengthened Raven’s resolve to help her troubled friend and she sat a little straighter, wanting Clarke to absorb every word she was about to say. Hoping that her limited wisdom might help Clarke in this moment.

“Clarke, I am not going to sit here and pretend like I know anything about how you are feeling right now. Your situation is unique from every other circumstance I’ve come across, and by far more complex. But I do know you, Clarke Griffin. You are strong and stubborn and smart. That means that while you might be feeling desolate and lost in the emotions you can’t decipher, you will find a way to conquer them. You take on impossible situations every day and come out on top, even stronger than when you were when you started. And this is no different. Just because you are struggling right now, means nothing. You will find a way to get through this because you are Clarke Griffin, and you always do. You are a leader, you take control of situations. So take control of this one. You know what you are feeling, but fear is preventing you from expressing it. Don’t let fear rule unchallenged. You are strong, fight it, push it aside and soldier on. I know that emotions can be just as damaging as a sword strike, but you need to fight through the pain, grit your teeth and push
through your discomfort and exhaustion. You have fought worse battles than this and won, don’t let the war for your heart be forfeited because of that fear. Choose to fight through it. You say that those negative emotions were your foundations, well guess what Griffin, you can choose to fill the void with something positive. Something that breathes hope back into your body. Fill it with love and forgiveness. You might be worried that Lexa will betray you again, that your heart won’t be able to withstand being broken twice, but that would be a risk with anyone you chose to love. It’s what makes it so wonderful and beautifully deadly. Love is the biggest gamble in existence, you just have to be brave enough to take the plunge. And while yes you probably aren’t ready to start throwing around the L-word, and probably not even at the point where you can honestly say that you forgive or trust Lexa again. You have always loved that girl, don’t even think about denying it. The betrayal on the mountain hurt so much because Lexa walked away from you. It didn’t sting because she walked away from our people, but because she walked away from you. And that is what this is really about. That betrayal of love cut deeper than any mortal blade and left a scar that will likely always bleed. But you need to look inwards and decide if you think that taking the chance that you can still find happiness with Lexa is worth it. Habits can be broken, and again take control of your circumstance. If you want to treat Lexa better, make a conscious effort to do so. If you want to break the vicious cycle of cruel words and angry cadence’s, take control and make it happen. I know that you have felt broken for so long Clarke, but that can change. But you must also realise that no one else can do that for you. You need to look inwards, and discover what changes you need to make in your life in order to heal. It won’t happen overnight, but it will happen. The same goes for Lexa. If you want that relationship to improve, it will only take time. But the biggest piece of advice that I would offer you in regards to Lexa, is be honest. Being truthful, even about the uncomfortable and frightening things in life makes a relationship stronger. It builds trust for both people involved, and people need trust in order to function, else they go insane. Trust that Lexa won’t judge you Clarke, trust that she cares for you also.” Raven says with a confidence she hadn’t realised she possessed. She had nearly bored holes into Clarke’s head with the intensity of her gaze. Raven felt impassioned and invigorated to help her friend, and it looks as though it had worked. Clarke was meeting her gaze openly, her eyes brimmed with tears. Raven worried she had overstepped for an instant before Clarke’s face lit up into one of the brightest smiles Raven had seen, since Clarke’s return. Albeit a watery smile, but alas, Clarke was positively beaming. Clarke pulled Raven into a bone-crushing embrace, and held her tightly to her chest. Raven noticed with amusement that this was becoming the pairs habit after a deep and emotionally-revealing conversation. Clarke would have a problem in need of addressing, Raven would offer some sage words of advice, Clarke would realise her mistakes and be tearfully emotional, and then she would crush Raven in her arms with what many would deem a hug, only much more constricting. But Raven didn’t mind, Clarke obviously needed the physical contact. Even if she did hold on far too tight.

“Thankyou Raven.” Clarke says with genuine gratitude lightening the room by a few shades. Clarke felt like a weight had lifted from her shoulders, like she wasn’t crazy for having these feelings. But she also felt enlightened now that she knew what the feelings swirling in her guts were indicative of. Determination brimmed in the chambers of her heart, making Clarke feel more empowered than she had in a year and half to fix herself. While Clarke knew that there was a lot that she still needed to come to terms with, she could now quietly acknowledge what had been building ever since Lexa had become apart of Clarke’s life again. Forgiveness. It had been subtle at first, but now Clarke knew that it was happening, and she didn’t need to fear it anymore, because she knew that forgiveness did not equal trust or love. While yes, it was stepping stone to the two, it was separate. So Clarke could in good conscience say that the fact that Lexa’s betrayal on the mountain was hurting less, because somehow Clarke was letting the pain and resentment slip away. She was forgiving Lexa.
Hey all!
Hope you all enjoy the new chapter update. I haven't had much time to write in the past week as I am with family currently. I probably won't have much time to spare for in the next ten days either, so just be aware that I will try my hardest to have at least one chapter out in a week, but likely no more than that.
As always, give me some feedback in the comments and let me know your thoughts!
Hope you all have a fantastic week, and I will see you next update! :D
Clarke awoke the next morning to Grace kicking her lazily in the flank. Clarke groaned at the intrusion of pointed toes making contact with her ribs, and reluctantly sat up in her cot. The room was dimly lit from the muted morning light streaming through the shutters of the hut. Clarke glanced over at Raven and smiled as she observed the mechanic still sleeping soundly. Her arm and leg strewn off the side of her own bed frame, with her head rested atop her elbow. She lay peacefully on the edge of the bed and looked ready to fall off the structure entirely.

Clarke reminded herself that startling her friend so that she purposefully fell off the bed would be rude, and settled down again next to Grace.

The contented baby continued to kick out her chubby little legs happily, pushing the furs up in disarray by her feet. Grace’s arms flailed about recklessly as she tried to grasp one of the many braids that hung over Clarke’s shoulder. Clarke planted a kiss against the cushioned cheek of her daughter and smiled on reflex as the baby’s face contorted into a grin far too wide for her face. So she kissed her again to see the glorious sight twice.

Clarke took a moment to bask in the peacefulness of the morning. Grace was awake and happy, not yet squalling for her breakfast. No one was badgering Clarke with a new expectation or potential judgement, and there was next to no noise drifting into the private space of her temporary hut. But best of all though, was that Clarke felt liberated and divested of her heavy emotions. They still lingered of course, but today they were less prominent. They were neatly tucked away in a box labelled ‘forgiven but not forgotten.’

Clarke felt more alive and more like herself than she had in a year and a half, and all could be accredited to last night’s personal revelations. Clarke was in the process of forgiving Lexa for leaving her on the mountain. But more than that, Clarke did not feel the same level of self-loathing for her own atrocities committed on the mountain. She didn’t feel as repulsed by her actions as she once did. She was beginning to make peace with her own transgressions, and it was liberating. Clarke felt like she could finally begin to breathe after a year and a half of suffocation, and in truth it was all thanks to Lexa.

If Lexa hadn’t waltzed back into Clarke’s life when she had, then Clarke would not have been forced to face her own demons. While the process was painful and highly uncomfortable, it was necessary in order for Clarke to move on. She needed Lexa to come back into her life so that she could forgive herself, and Lexa for their individual roles on the mountain. Clarke smiled absentmindedly at the feeling of emotional freedom and the lightness welling in her chest.

Clarke felt the familiar prickle of fear as a small voice in the back of her psyche reminded her, that darkness cannot survive in the light, and that monsters have nowhere to hide in the harsh brightness of day. But Clarke forcibly pushed the feeling aside, discarding it entirely. She was not willing to allow her fear to rule her anymore. Just as Raven had reiterated the previous night. Clarke was allowing her fear to dictate her life and the choices she made. She needed to face and conquer that fear if she was ever to be whole once more.

So Clarke pushed the fear away and fought it. While it was indeed terrifying to allow herself to feel so unburdened and hopeful again after such an extended period of surviving in its absence, Clarke now welcomed it. The lightness was like a delightful mixture of a warm embrace and coming home. It was wonderful, and yet so foreign.
Reluctantly, Clarke dragged herself out of bed and prepared for the day. She dressed Grace in a long sleeved violet coloured onesie that she had found in Arkadia, as well as dark purple socks and a pair of fawn furred pants for the infant. Clarke dressed herself in a navy blue singlet shirt, black leather riding pants and her fur coat. Clarke then donned her weapons and boots, and braided her hair. Ensuring she weaved the black bolts of fabric into the design carefully, trying to mask as much of the yellow coloured mane as possible, and then collected Grace and her chest bindings, before leaving the confines of her hut.

Clarke breathed the fresh air optimistically, she was determined to make the most of her day, and at some point, wanted to speak with Lexa, and have the honest conversation that Raven had prescribed. Although if Clarke was being perfectly honest she wasn’t sure if she was ready to confess her true feelings to the older girl. It was nerve-wracking and petrifying allowing herself to be so vulnerable around someone she wasn’t sure she should trust. And yet Clarke knew it was something that must be done, something she needed to do. Wanted to do, even. Lexa deserved the same peace of mind that Clarke was just now experiencing. She deserved the same serenity Clarke felt, that could be acquired through absolution. Clarke just needed to acclimate to the inevitability of the situation.

Clarke remained true to her new routine in Alton. She kept to the shadows as much as possible as she traversed the village, avoiding large groups of people, specifically Alton natives – so as not to be recognised as Sarah. Clarke kept her head down and avoided drawing attention to herself, wherever possible.

Clarke went about her morning quietly and unnoticed. She collected some wild oats porridge from the cook fires, breastfed Grace and ate her meal in relative silence. Clarke was pleased with her efforts thus far to remain unnoticed and essentially invisible. That is until Octavia located her.

Sadly the younger Blake sibling, knew nothing of subtlety, and called out her name loudly from across the other side of the village centre, waving enthusiastically. Drawing many eyes, much to Clarke’s chagrin. In the girls defence, she didn’t know that Clarke was avoiding detection, so the fault was not her own.

“Clarke!” Octavia yelled breathlessly. Her enthusiasm could be attributed to the orders she had received from Bellamy and Indra early this morning. She was being sent out tonight for her first shift in guerrilla warfare, and she couldn’t be happier. Octavia had been annoyed with how slowly things seemed to be developing around their efforts to protect the borders from Azgeda attacks. But she supposed it must take a great deal of planning and strategic finesse in order for a force of this size, to remain hidden, and their actions to be precise and meticulous so to go unnoticed by their enemy. Octavia bounded over to her blonde friend, not noticing the slight grimace that adorned Clarke’s face. The expression lost in her excitement.

“Hey O.” Clarke says evenly, but in a low tone, so to discourage further attention, as her friend draws nearer. Clarke forces herself to smile at her friend, despite the discomfort she feels as their interaction falls under scrutiny. “What’s got you so chirpy this morning?” Clarke asks after another nervous glance around the area.

“I just got my orders from Indra and Bell. I leave tonight with the first group of scouts to patrol the woods closest to the Azgeda borders.” Octavia beamed. She was practically vibrating with excitement. It wasn’t every day that you got to play a deadly game of cat and mouse, and Octavia was keening.

Clarke smiled genuinely now that she knew the reason for her friends boundless energy this morning. In truth, Clarke should have guessed the reason for Octavia’s overzealous happiness. She only ever truly became so eager when there was fighting and bloodshed was involved. Which
probably wasn’t healthy, Clarke silently mused. “Oh that’s great O. I didn’t realise that the Commander had already set plans in motion. I thought they would be fine-tuning their strategy of attack and such, today.” Clarke pointed out.

“Yeah so did I. But apparently, Heda spent the entire afternoon yesterday organising everything, so that we could jump straight into the action. So while everyone was getting drunk on Ton-ton, Heda and her generals were busy manoeuvring troops and discussing military tactics.” Octavia explained, her enthusiasm never wavering.

“Oh okay.” Clarke glanced around the groups of gathered people near her, and realised that there were less villagers and members of Lexa’s army up and awake than usual, at this time in the morning. They must be all hung-over and busy throwing up in their huts. “There’s less people out this morning. They must all still be in bed nursing their hangovers.” Clarke comments dryly, she stares pointedly at Octavia a moment. “You don’t look too bad though, so you obviously didn’t try any of the hell juice.” Clarke comments with thinly veiled amusement.

Octavia lets out a bark of laughter before answering. “No I didn’t. Lincoln warned me never to try the native brew of any village. He says it’s always prudent to assume that their home-brews are potent enough to make chest hairs curl.” Octavia answers breezily. Her response garnered a chuckle from Clarke, who tried and failed to bite down her laughter.

“That’s always a good assumption to make.” Clarke agreed wryly and shook her head with delight.

“I was actually just about to head over to the training grounds. Do you want to join? I know you probably don’t need the practice, but I do.” Octavia says a little sheepishly. Her stance becoming slightly uncertain, as she rolls back on the balls of her feet. “Besides, I’d really like to learn your fighting style, if you’re willing to teach me?” Octavia asks. Her eyes betraying her desperation to improve and better herself. Clarke smiled at her, and nodded quickly.

“Of course I will teach you O. I would like that.” Clarke says. She wasn’t sure how good she would be at instructing Octavia in the art of combat. Certainly not as good a teacher as her own, but she would try. If only to see her friend as carefree and happy as she was in this moment. Octavia was one of the hundred that had been forced to change more drastically in their time on the ground. While Clarke had become Wanheda, Octavia had become a strong, and independent warrior. She had grown so much since her time on the ground. Since she was the scared little girl that lived under the floorboards. Clarke relished seeing her friend so liberated, and divested of worries, she was happy to see each of her friends this way.

“Awesome. Thanks Clarke.” Octavia grinned, her excitement magnifying. If that was possible. Octavia wanted to be a superior warrior, so who better to learn from than Clarke. The girl who could kick everyone’s ass two times over and likely not break a sweat.

Clarke adjusted Grace on her hip and followed her friend towards the training yards. Clarke was slightly worried about creating a spectacle with her fighting technique and risk being recognised. But she wasn’t as concerned this morning. Grateful that a hungover camp, meant that not many would venture near the sparring pits.

When they arrived at their destination, Lincoln greeted them. He had just finished with his own sparring session with one of Lexa’s guards. Jameson, was his name if Clarke’s memory serves. Lincoln was heaving in laboured breaths, sweat dripping from his shirtless torso. Clarke laughed quietly when Octavia stutter-stepped next to her from the sight. Lincoln shot Octavia a suggestive grin and sauntered over to the girls.

“Good morning ladies.” Lincoln offers a warm smile for Clarke and a chaste kiss for Octavia. Lincoln gave Octavia a cocky grin when she quietly whined as he pulled away.
Clarke took a step away from the couple and averted her gaze to give them a moment to themselves. Feeling like an intruder into their private moment.

“Here to spar?” Lincoln asks the pair once he and Octavia have parted.

“That’s the plan.” Octavia says with an excited smile. “Clarke has agreed to teach me.” She says with a victorious smirk. Lincoln’s eyebrows shot up towards his hairline, and an equally eager tug of his lips, portray his surprised enthusiasm over the situation.

“That is very kind of you Clarke.” Lincoln says with genuine gratitude colouring his tone. He nods his head in a silent offering of respect. Lincoln’s expression becomes thoughtful for a moment before a mischievous gleam lights his eye. “Although be warned that she can be as stubborn as mule when being taught new things. You may have your work cut out for you.” Lincoln’s tone whilst teasing, holds no malicious intent, and he gazes at Octavia with unbridled affection. The comment earning him a swift and playful slap to the arm and an indignant “I am not!” In reply from his romantic counterpart.

Clarke burst into laughter at the display. “Trust me. Octavia will be far easier to teach than I was. I was a stubborn student, and my own teacher had to fight the urge to pull his own hair out. But the man persevered and today I have the skills necessary to protect myself. Octavia will be the same.” Clarke says wistfully, her mind caught in memories of Kadeon attempting to reiterate the importance of protecting her non-dominant side from vulnerabilities. The continuation of the conversation pulled her from the grasp of the memory and returning her to reality.

“Then how are you so good? You fight like you have spent your entire life training. If you were difficult to teach, it should have taken longer.” Octavia states as she attempts to find the connection between Clarke’s time spent away and her proficiency in fighting.

“I had a very good teacher and I spent all day, every day training for five months after Grace was born in the sparring ring. I was afforded no breaks and my teacher had to be a hard-ass for the lessons to stick. But I did learn, and quickly too.” Clarke answers carefully. Not wanting to divulge too much more about her year and a half away. Lincoln seems to understand Clarke’s discomfort with the direction of conversation and changes angles.

“Well if you are going to spar, you can’t do it with Grace hanging from your hip. I can care for her if you would like?” Lincoln offers with an anticipatory glint in his eyes. Eager to familiarise himself with caring for an infant, as he and Octavia had agreed that once the conflict between Azgeda and the coalition had been won, they would try to have a baby of their own. Octavia gave Lincoln a knowing smile, smaller than most of her previous ones this morning, but more meaningful and private. She knew what he was thinking, and it warmed his heart to see that she was accepting of his eagerness to have a family with her.

Clarke tried not to notice the looks exchanged between her friends and instead focused on the question asked of her. “That would be great Lincoln. Thankyou.” Clarke says, breaking the trance that had befallen Lincoln and Octavia. Clarke hands Grace over to Lincoln and admires the way in which he handles her daughter.

He moulds her body against his chest, allowing her head of red curls to rest against his shoulder. Grace grasps his forefinger in her chubby little fist and takes it directly to her mouth and begins toothlessly chewing. Lincoln does not complain, instead plants an affectionate kiss on the crown of Grace’s head, holding the baby closer still. Grace coos happily around the finger in her mouth.

“You’re good with her, she likes you.” Clarke comments. Lincoln turns a soft shade of pink, almost unnoticeable against his dark skin, and offers Clarke a smile in thanks. Lincoln quickly returns the
girls attention to the task at hand.

“We will be waiting for you both by the stables when you are finished training for the morning. I am going to show Grace the horses.” Lincoln says in an effort to redirect attention away from himself.

“Yeah okay. Come on Clarke.” Octavia grabs Clarke’s arm and pulls her towards the sparring swords.

The two girls select their respective dulled blades for their practice fight and shed any extra clothing, leaving them both in singlet tops and pants. They step into the sparring ring, and Clarke is relieved to notice that it is completely vacant. Not a soul to be found aside from the two girls.

They both fall into fighting stances and begin to circle each other, looking for weaknesses. Clarke allows her face to remain impassive and non-expressive and her body to be relaxed and non-committal. Disguising her own fighting prowess. Octavia however takes on an overly-confident stance that betrays her own skill in fighting. Allowing herself to become transparent.

“You need to loosen your stance. In battle, an enemy has one chance to determine how much of a threat you are. Right now you are broadcasting your own skill with a sword. You want to be impassive in both your expression and your body-language so that your opponent underestimates you. Emphasise your perceived weaknesses. You are young, you are a girl and you are smaller in stature. To an enemy this will translate as naïve and weak, and will ultimately give you an advantage.” Clarke instructs carefully. Allowing her expression to become critical in this instance, breaking her carefully crafted stoicism.

Octavia scowls at the notion of being perceived as weak. “But I am neither of those things.” She bites out, growing irritated.

“That is your pride talking. In battle, no such thing can exist. Pride will get you killed. So discard it now. Being perceived as weak does not mean that you are. It is simply a ruse to confuse your enemy.” Clarke says evenly. She knew that Octavia would not appreciate the idea of others assuming that she was weak, that her pride would get in the way of her truly adopting the cunning of a warrior, of a spy.

“Doesn’t that fall under the category of dishonourable? Purposefully manipulating and tricking your enemy into a fight that they will surely lose because you were dishonest about your capabilities?” Octavia says, trying to keep in mind Clarke’s tutelage despite her qualms over the morality of the tactic.

“I guess it could be perceived by some as dishonourable. But in a fight, when it is a choice between your own life and your enemy’s. Would you rather sacrifice your honour or your life? Which holds more value? It could just as easily be said that an honourable person would resolve conflict through a civilised discussion instead of bloodshed. But that isn’t the world we live in. Our reality is harsh and bloody, and honour means nothing when you are in the middle of a fight. There is only the living and the dead. It is your choice which side you belong to.” Clarke says in monotone. Reciting the exact same words that Kadeon had once said to Clarke as she had begun her training. She had felt the same way as Octavia. Only she was also hesitant about taking life at all, especially after all the death that she was responsible for. But Kadeon had taught her that some death was inevitable and fate had a way of disregarding our morality in situations where it is owed a life.

“I suppose I can understand that. I am not saying that I completely agree with it, but I will try to keep it in mind.” Octavia relented after a moment of thoughtful contemplation on the matter.

The girls then went through the process of attacking each other, lunging and dodging blows in
Clarke manoeuvred around Octavia with practiced ease, but tried to limit her display of skill in case someone was watching. And Octavia valiantly attempted to keep up with her fighting counterpart. They moved together in sync, attempting to anticipate the others movements and tip the scales to their advantage. Octavia’s fighting style was far more course and unrefined compared to Clarke’s, but with Clarke’s instruction, she slowly began to make slight alterations to the way she fought. Adjusting her stance, her grip on the sword, the angling of her footwork and the positioning of her body, in order to amplify her strength, speed and agility. Under Clarke’s instruction, Octavia gradually began to make small improvements to the way she fought. Progress was slow, but Octavia absorbed the new information like a sponge. Eager to learn and better herself.

After an hour and a half of sparring, the pair were covered in a sheen of sweat from exertion and the sun’s gentle ministrations. The girls both heaved in breath, and their cheeks were flushed pink from their activities. Eventually they both decided it best to stop so that Octavia wasn’t completely depleted of energy for her duties that night.

“Your technique has already improved.” Clarke comments, a tinge of pride colouring her tone. Octavia smiled broadly at the compliment. “Tomorrow we should work on strengthening your defence of your non-dominant side. You tend to leave it exposed when you fight. You rely on the quickness of movement of your right hand, rather than training your left to defend with the same level of precision and skill. It is important for a warrior to be able to fight with both hands, in case they are injured and still need to defend themselves.” Clarke instructs.

“Can you fight with both hands?” Octavia asks after a moment of catching her breath and mulling over Clarke’s words.

“I wouldn’t be much of a warrior if I couldn’t.” Clarke says sarcastically. The comment earning a bark of breathless laughter from Octavia.

“True.” Octavia relented in good humour.

Clarke had enjoyed her morning immensely so far. The peacefulness of a burden relieved, the quiet energy of a new day, and the burn of muscles from a sturdy training session, had put Clarke in a very good mood. But her mind continued to wander to the upcoming confrontation with Azgeda, and Clarke couldn’t help but feel a little clueless when it came to the strategies and plans of attack, that were being devised. Although Clarke had willingly – forcefully even – given away her right to know these things, when she chose to no longer be a leader. She couldn’t stem the need to know what was going on. Clarke loathed to admit it, but she did not cope well, when she was excluded from important decisions. Unable to curb her insatiable curiosity on the matter, she decided to question Octavia in the hopes of garnering more information.

“Earlier this morning, you said that the Commander and her generals have already devised a strategy, do you know what they have decided?” Clarke asks, her tone losing its good humour and becoming more serious. Octavia shook her head in the negative. Her expression becoming thoughtful for a moment, before apparently deciding on something.

“I don’t know the ins and outs of everything, I only know what Indra and Bellamy have told me, but I would talk to them if you wanted more information.” Octavia says with a knowing smirk, recognising Clarke’s quest for knowledge, as nothing more than a need to be in control, to know everything, just as a leader would. Octavia’s mind latched onto a conversation she had overheard late last night, as she contemplated everyone who knew something about Lexa’s plan. “Also I am fairly certain that I heard Titus expressing his unease about you participating in the stake-outs late last night with someone. I think he worries that you intend to bring Grace along.” Octavia says with a slight frown. One mirroring Clarke’s own. “Why would Titus care what you did with Grace? I mean she’s
a cute kid and she’s adorable and everything. But Titus is about as caring as a sack of potatoes. Why
would her give rat’s ass about what you did with your kid? He doesn’t even like you that much.”
Octavia explains to the air around her. Voicing her internal conversation aloud.

Clarke was utterly confused by Titus’ interest in Grace, but it unsettled her all the same. It caused a
slick, slimy feeling to develop in the pit of her stomach, like an eel had made a home inside her.
Clarke’s instinct to protect her daughter flared up with a vengeance and she tried not to allow her
distrust for Titus to suffocate her. She didn’t even know why she felt so ill over the notion of Titus’
concern for Grace’s wellbeing, all she knew was that her instincts were screaming at her to guard her
child.

“You’re right, it makes no sense.” Clarke says distractedly. Her eyes growing vacant as she tries to
see the bigger picture, Clarke’s brow furrowing in concentration. Despite her best efforts Clarke
couldn’t identify the reason for Titus’ sudden interest in her daughter. Clarke didn’t have all the
information, so she couldn’t see the purpose no matter how hard she looked. “Do you know who he
was talking to?” Clarke asks, determination steeling her tone, as her maternal drives went haywire.

“No I don’t. It was dark, and it was obvious that whoever Titus was talking to, he didn’t want the
conversation to be overheard. At the time I didn’t think much of it. But now... It feels like it is
important somehow.” Octavia remarks. She studies Clarke intently for a moment. Watching the way
her face contorts as she wills herself to figure out what was going on. Like sheer determination will
solve the riddle alone. Octavia admired her friend’s tenacity, but knew that it was pointless until they
had more data. “We won’t know why it is significant until we have more information Clarke. Don’t
strain yourself trying to figure it out now, we don’t know enough to come to a conclusion. We can
keep an eye on him, but until we know more, we can’t do anything.” Octavia warns softly.

“Okay.” Clarke nods tersely, and walks over to her belongings, depositing her practise sword and re-
brandishing her weapons. Octavia emulated Clarke’s actions, and then followed her as they walked
away from the sparring pits and towards the stables.

The duo walked in companionable silence for the next few minutes, both girls pre-occupied with
their own thoughts. Clarke’s mind was so full, she forgot to adhere to her routine of sticking to the
shadows to remain unseen. She got careless, and that mistake would cost her.

Clarke didn’t see the girl watching them with rapt attention, until it was too late. The black haired girl
walked cautiously towards the Clare and Octavia, intercepting their path. The girl didn’t even
acknowledge Octavia’s presence, her eyes firmly planted on Clarke’s form as recognition fluttered
across her expression. By the time Clarke looked up, saw the girl and recognised her, she had
nowhere to run.

“Sarah?” The girls tone was cautious and questioning, but there was something else buried beneath
the shallow emotions.

“Fuck.” Clarke cursed under her breath, as dread coiled up her spine and choked her. Clarke’s blood
turned to ice in her veins and she couldn’t breathe. This girl knew Sarah. Knew her.

Chapter End Notes
newbie fanfic writer, so I am still learning. So don't be afraid to offer me some advice on how to improve, because I am eager to learn and improve my writing whenever I am given the opportunity. Do not be afraid to offer me some constructive criticism, I promise I am a big girl and can take it. I want to do better, if not for my own sake, then yours.
As well as constructive criticism, let me know if there are some interactions between characters that you would like to see more of, and I will try my best to make that happen. And as always, feedback is always welcome!
I hope you all like this new instalment, please let me know your thoughts!
Thanks for reading guys!! :D
Clarke stood stock-still, unable to move herself from her frozen position. Her mind running through all the possible scenarios that could play out now that she had been recognised. Clarke was vaguely reminiscent of the moment she had stepped into the gates of Arcadia with Grace strapped to her chest after such a long period of absence, and again wondered if she was going to be punched. She knew that she deserved it. Knew that she wouldn’t fight whatever punishment was dished out to her.

Clarke stared at the girl, waiting for her to initiate the first move. To set the tone for her arrival back into Alton.

Clarke was aware that she probably looked quite the comical picture. She knew her jaw unhinged itself by a few sizeable centimetres and her eyes had bugged out of her skull in shock. She was vaguely aware of Octavia watching the interaction with rapt attention, and wisely remaining silent and still. Her curiosity demanding she uncover the secret bared before her, approaching the exchange like a hunter its prey. Silent and unmoving. Undoubtedly recognising the situation for what it was. A reunion of sorts. But as for the nature of it, Clarke was still unsure.

“It is you, isn’t it.” The raven haired woman spoke quietly, more to herself than anyone else. The woman’s dark blue eyes appraising Clarke blatantly, watching her expression and body language with barely concealed interest. Her own face revealing nothing of her inner thoughts. After another terse moment of silence stretched between them, the woman’s face stretched into a brilliant grin, her voice becoming boisterous and jovial. “I must admit the black cloth is a nice touch, I almost didn’t recognise you.”

Clarke released a breath she didn’t realise that she had been holding. The exhalation of air sounding exactly like the sigh of relief that it was. Clarke’s own lips twitched up into an uncertain smile, as the woman bounded over to Clarke and pulled her into a rough, friendly embrace.

“Tanga. You look well.” Clarke commented after the hasty hug was ended by Octavia’s unsubtle cough, reminding them of her presence. Clarke turned a shade of pink, as she remembered that O was still there.

“Are you trying to get me into bed again?” Tanga asked in teasing tone, elbowing Clarke in the ribs. “Not that I am opposed, but most would offer to eat and drink with me first.” Tanga threw her head back and laughed loudly as scarlet embarrassment creeped up Clarke’s chest and colouring her cheekbones.

“N-No!” Clarke sputtered helplessly. The banter wouldn’t affect her typically, nor would the insinuation. But Clarke was painfully aware of the fact that Octavia was standing right next to her and watching the exchange with unbridled curiosity. Her friends eyes lighting with understanding and mischief as she realised the implications of Tanga’s comment. Clarke wasn’t ashamed of her checkered history, but she preferred to talk about on her own terms, and to be able to control the direction the conversation took. Plus Tanga knew some horrifically embarrassing stories involving Ton-Ton and poor judgement, that Clarke would rather no one heard about. Ever.

Excluding her drunken proclivities towards the unsavoury, Clarke was also uncomfortable about the second guessing that was currently raining terror on her brain. She didn’t know if Tanga knew that she was Wanheda, or if she was playing dumb in order to gain petty vengeance for not divulging the
truth when Clarke last saw her. It was entirely possible for either option to be true, and it made Clarke nervous. If Tanga didn’t know then, she soon would. And Clarke worried that her old friend would realise the differences between the person she allowed herself to be as Sarah and the person she is forced to be now as Clarke. As Wanheda. Plus she didn’t want Tanga to look at her differently once she knew how much death Clarke was responsible for. No one ever looked at her the same after they knew that. Well except for Kadeon, and Lexa. But Clarke didn’t want to think about that right now.

“Octavia this is Tanga. Tanga this is Octavia.” Clarke hastily introduced the two, in an attempt to place the focus on anything other than herself. Using the small distraction as an excuse to compose herself. It was embarrassing to be blushing and stuttering like a simpleton, especially in a place where she needed to be seen as strong and unaffected.

“Nice to meet you Tanga. So how do you and Clarke know each other?” Octavia asks with false innocence. She had noticed the way Tanga had addressed Clarke as Sarah, and how Clarke had done nothing to correct her. Out of her own burning curiosity, Octavia purposefully placed Clarke’s name in the question to see what kind of response she would get from the strange black haired girl. Octavia watched the way Clarke swallowed nervously and how Tanga raised her eyebrow almost imperceptively as she regarded Octavia with laser-like focus. Octavia wondered for a brief moment if the stranger’s curious expression was directed at the casual use of Clarke’s name, but realised not two seconds later, that Tanga’s gaze lingered on Octavia instead of moving her questioning stare towards Clarke. It was then that Octavia understood that the woman was unsurprised by the revelation of Clarke’s name, but was more interested in Octavia’s purposeful use of it. Recognising her enquiry for what it was. A ploy for information. Tanga smirked dangerously before answering.

“Oh Clarke and I go way back. We met at a rather raunchy bonfire. Ton-Ton was consumed in copious amounts, bad decisions were made and nakedness ensued. But I can tell by Clarke’s blushing virgin expression that she didn’t tell you about that. I didn’t see her again until a few weeks later when my sister and I found her on the edge of a cliff high up in the mountains, bleeding and half dead. We took her home to our Ma, she’s the village healer, and got her patched up. Clarke stayed with us for about four days and then when she was strong enough to walk, she disappeared in the middle of the night, taking a good portion of Ma’s health tonics and slaves with her. Hadn’t seen her since, until now that is.” Tanga says with a forced airiness and purposefully frilly attitude. The atmosphere alive with dangerous electricity. Tanga could tell that the other two could feel the tension, and both undoubtedly knew that the story was glossed over to a startling degree. Well Clarke knew, and Octavia probably suspected. Tanga observed the way Clarke’s face became eerily still, like she had receded to the back of her mind, reliving memories and unaware of the world around her for a moment. Tanga recognised the instant she returned, as her expression became void of emotion and blank. Confirming what Tanga already knew. There was a reason Clarke or Sarah, or whatever the fuck her name is, was up on that mountain, and it wasn’t just happenstance. There was a secret there. And judging by the way Clarke always became a shell whenever it was brought up, Tanga knew it was a secret she didn’t want to know.

“Well. You guys probably have a lot to catch up on, so I am going to leave you both to it.” Octavia cut in awkwardly, clearly uncomfortable. Turning her attention solely to Clarke, she continues, “I will find Lincoln and help out with Grace. So you can take your time here if you need it. See you both later.” Octavia inclined her head to them both once Clarke expressed her acceptance and gratitude of the proposal, and hastily left.

“That one is sharp as a tack.” Tanga observed. “She’s got a nice ass too.” She says with a suggestive wink. Easing the lingering tension between the two.

Clarke laughed softly at her – friend, acquaintance’s? – observation. “You don’t change do you?”
Clarke says with a feigned tone of long-suffering.

“Noope!” Tanga says happily, popping the P dramatically.

“So how have you been?” Clarke asks cautiously.

“Since you left or in general?” Tanga asks with slight edge. Reminding her of the fact that Clarke left in the dead of night without a single word, and expressing her lingering annoyance over the action. Clarke gives her a pointed look, and Tanga wilts slightly under it’s intensity.

“Fine.” Tanga relents. “I’ve been good. Ma’s been good, she’s getting old now but she’s still the village healer. Milly is bonded now, to a scrawny warrior in the next village over. So she doesn’t live here anymore, plus they’re trying to have a kid. Everything is pretty much the same as it has always been. For us at least. What about you?” Tanga asks after a moment.

“Well that’s a very long and complicated story. But I am fine. I returned home, and I have a daughter now too.” Clarke admits. She had shared a brief overview of her life with Tanga, but had left out the details that would identify her as Clarke of the Skye People, as Wanheda. So Tanga knew that she had left home after an incident where many people died. She knew that Clarke had felt guilty so she had fled, and that every decision she had made since then was designed to help her forget.

“See I told you that if you kept sleeping with men that would happen.” Tanga says with a fond smile. “That’s why you should have stuck to muff. There’s less risk of a lifetimes worth of crying, snotty noses and shitty arses.” She says with pleased guffaw.

Clarke rolled her eyes playfully. “You also told me that smoking the Gorka weeds in the clearing would make me fearless. And we both know how that turned out.” Clarke says with a throaty laugh and juvenile shove at her friends shoulder.

Tanga released a scandalised snort. “I didn’t know that you would actually try it. And it definitely wasn’t my fault when you took off all your clothes and ran through the village naked.” Tanga teased.

“I was so high, I couldn’t remember my own name, so I am really glad that I don’t remember anything from that day. Hearing stories is mortifying enough.” Clarke and Tanga’s laughter dies down as they are reminded of the lie surrounding Clarke’s name. And of who she really is.

“So…” Tanga begins. Her eyes becoming vulnerable and soft and she considers how best to phrase her next question. Clarke beats her to the punch.

“I didn’t tell you my real name for a lot of reasons. I was ashamed of who I was, and I was consumed by guilt. I didn’t want to be Clarke Griffin anymore. Plus I was running from what I had done. The people I had hurt, and the people I had saved. I couldn’t face what I did, or the people I did it for. So I hid from them. Everyone was out looking for me and I didn’t want to be found. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to burden you with the weight of my actions, not because I didn’t trust you. And I guess I didn’t tell you, also because you were my friend, and I didn’t want you to look at me differently. Like I was a monster.” Clarke says with a slight quaver in her voice. Her words shaky.

“I wouldn’t have Clarke.” Tanga interjects quickly.

“Yes. You would have. Everyone does. I’ve only met a couple of people that don’t look at me like I am something to be fearful of, or worse, someone to be praised and exulted for my actions. The only people that can truly look at someone like me and understand me, to look at me and see me. Are people who have the same amount of blood on their hands and have tried and failed to wash it off.”
Clarke paused a moment, unable to hold Tanga’s gaze any longer, as her expression becomes more hurt. “I am not trying to dismiss your friendship or belittle the acceptance you might have shown me. I am just trying to be honest. To speak my truth. And that is that, through no fault of your own. You will never truly understand how horrific it is to be responsible for so much carnage until you have caused it yourself. And then after that, people look at you differently. Perhaps not all the time. But in certain instances. Like when I kill something or when I get angry, people wilt away from me. For an instant they see the monster inside of me and they fear for themselves. Or they see the monster and they are thrilled to have stared death in the face and survived it. Either option, makes me sick to my stomach, and the worst part is that people often don’t realise that they do it. So they make no effort to stop.” Clarke explains.

“So instead of giving me a chance to prove myself, you just assumed that I would be the same as everyone else?” Tanga questions. Her tone merely curious instead of the accusatory that Clarke had expected.

“Yes.” Clarke says dejectedly, a tinge of shame shining through her tone, causing her to deflate.

“Well, I can’t say that I am not disappointed. Because I am. But I also feel like I understand a little better than I did before. And I am sorry if I ever treat you differently, I will try my hardest not to.” Tanga says earnestly, squeezing Clarke’s arm in an effort to reassure her.

“Thankyou.” Clarke says with a small smile, accepting the comfort her friend offered. Deep down Clarke knew that her friends vow to treat her the same was probably pointless. She knew that when push came to shove, most people could not stifle their response in the face of something as terrifyingly awful as a monster. Hell, Clarke’s own mother couldn’t help her reaction, so she severely doubted her friends ability to maintain appearances when the shit hit the fan. But she appreciated her effort none the less. After a moment of thinking it through, Clarke stumbled upon a realisation that truly astounded and confused her. “How are you so okay with this? I lied. It may have been for a good reason but it doesn’t change the fact that we were friends and I lied.” She points out.

“I always knew that you had secrets Clarke. But I also knew that if you wanted to share them you would.” Tanga answers simply. Her shoulder lifting into a nonchalant shrug, like it didn’t matter.


“It doesn’t take a wise man to figure it out Clarke. You hated talking about yourself. You never offered us a piece of your story willingly. The things I do know about you, I know because you had to share them to maintain the rouse of socialising. And even then, there was no detail in what you told me, just the basics. But it didn’t matter to me. I knew that you were honest about the things that mattered. And your past wasn’t, and still isn’t something I care about.” Tanga answers quickly, the air of nonchalance remaining.

Clarke smiled a wide, genuine smile. Feeling accepted in this moment, more than she had in a long period.

“So tell me about this kid of yours. Is she cute?” Tanga says cheerily, angling for a smooth subject change. She had desperately wanted to know why Clarke hadn’t told her the truth, but she didn’t fully comprehend the depth of the water she was swimming in. Not until Clarke had actually begun explaining herself. And now Tanga wished, on some level, that she didn’t know. Because the truth was dark and ugly, and not at all what she had expected.

“Definitely. She’s six months old, and her name is Grace.” Clarke gushes fondly.

“Did you bring her with you?” Tanga asks, with a strange expression on her face.
“Yeah, why?” Clarke asks cautiously. Not out of concern for Grace’s welfare but out of concern over Tanga’s ability to get into mischief.

“Well you definitely need to let Ma babysit.” Tanga says with a jovial smirk.

“Why?” Clarke asks, her eyes narrowing playfully at her friend.

“So that she can get off my back about getting married and giving her grandbabies. If she’s got a cute kid to distract her, maybe I can fly under the radar for a bit.” Tanga says with a proud grin. Clarke bursts into laughter, as she considers the situation for a moment.

“So you are going to use my innocent and adorable kid to get you out of hot water with your mum?” Clarke asks with pursed lips and a raised eyebrow.

“Absolutely!” Tanga says immediately. Clarke laughs harder at her confession.

“Naomi knows that you like women though right?” Clarke asks after a moment.

“Oh yeah, she knows. But she just chooses to ignore it.” Tanga answers easily, smirk still in place.

Clarke is momentarily confused by Tanga’s revelation. Generally when someone’s family didn’t agree with their sexuality on the Ark, they were more upset about it, and yet Tanga appeared wholly unaffected by it. After a moment, Tanga elaborated.

“It’s not that she doesn’t disagree with it. She’s completely supportive, but she really wants grandbabies, and happens to know enough about the human body to realise that two women having sex, isn’t going to make a baby. So she insists that I find a nice man to put one in my belly and then proceed with my life however I want.” Tanga explains.

Clarke still struggled to understand how exactly that kind of mindset and mentality doesn’t negatively impact someone, but chooses not to question it. Clearly it wasn’t bothering Tanga, so she decided to leave the subject alone.

The pair continue to talk long past lunch time, and Clarke finds a sense of comfort in the fact that despite the way they had left things Tanga was still a friend and was willing to give her a second chance now that the truth about who she is and the atrocities that she is responsible for had come to light she was still willing to be kind towards Clarke. Eventually the girls parted ways when Octavia came ambling towards them with a distraught Grace, holding the infant awkwardly in front of her. Like she was scared that Grace would puke on her at any instant. Octavia hastily handed the wailing infant over, claiming that Lincoln had been summoned by the commander and had left Grace in her ineffectual care. Clarke had realised with amusement that Octavia was almost as upset by the turn of events as Grace was. Tanga excused herself, explaining that she had work to do, and left Clarke alone with Octavia and Grace. Both equally distraught.

Clarke directed them both to sit on a log under the shade of a low-hanging tree, breastfeeding Grace while Octavia calmed herself down. Clarke tried hard not to laugh at Octavia’s inability to hold Grace without looking like she was going to pass out, but failed.

“It really isn’t funny Clarke.” Octavia groaned with mild indignation.

“It kind of is.” Clarke retorted.

Octavia released a long-suffering grunt in response, and buried her head in her hands. “Lincoln wants to start a family.” She says after a moment of quiet. Octavia lifted her head from her hands and stared directly ahead, watching the bustle of villagers going about their day, and the purposeful
marching of warriors preparing for battle.

Clarke had guessed as much, but by Octavia’s tone, she didn’t sound too thrilled by the prospect. Clarke allowed the silence to stretch on, giving Octavia a moment to continue.

“He’s so excited about having kids. About being a dad. You see how he is with Grace, he loves her. He would be a great father. But I don’t think I am cut out to be a mum.” Octavia confesses quietly. “I am not good with babies. I can’t even hold Grace for five minutes without her screaming. I would make a terrible mother. But I don’t want to destroy Lincoln’s dream for children of his own. I know how much he wants it.” Octavia says with a resigned tone as she pulls apart a fallen leaf.

“You are still young Octavia. You don’t have to do everything right now. You can’t know whether you are good with kids or decide if you’d be a good mother when you haven’t had any practice. And just because you aren’t good with babies now, doesn’t mean that you won’t be later. Maybe you just aren’t ready for kids right now, but who knows, maybe you will be in ten years’ time. Don’t make up your mind right now. If it’s something you think you might want one day then tell Lincoln that, but also make sure that he knows that you aren’t ready for it now. That you need time to know what you want.” Clarke suggests. Octavia’s face becomes thoughtful and pensive for a moment as she thinks it through.

“Yeah.” Octavia agrees after a moment of contemplation. She looks up from the shredded leaf in her hand and offers a small grateful smile to Clarke. Happy that Clarke seemed to know exactly what she needed to hear in that moment, without making her feel childish or judged for having concerns over her future.

The moment is interrupted when Ontari jogs towards them, sweat sprinkling her face lightly from exertion. Both Octavia and Clarke look up abruptly as Ontari nears them. “Clarke, Heda wishes to speak with you.” She says in a rush of breath, as she sucks in mouthfuls of air.

Clarke nods gravely, before standing to follow. A snoozing Grace sprawled in her arms. A tap on the shoulder from Octavia draws her attention away from a sweaty Ontari. Octavia gestures to Grace and holds her arms out invitingly, a look of determination hardening Octavia’s features.

“I just need more practice, right?” Octavia asks resolutely, as Clarke gently places Grace into Octavia’s outstretched arms.

“Right.” Clarke relents happily, a smile pulling at her lips and her tone uncharacteristically warm.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all, I know I haven’t written in a little while but I have been short on time and wasn’t entirely sure how I wanted to portray Tanga. I am pretty happy with how it all came together, but as always, leave me some feedback. I really appreciate it. Thankyou everyone for your continued patience with me. I know I am a little jerky with stopping and starting but I do value your continued support. I hope you all enjoy the new chapter!!

To anyone curious, for the purpose of this story, Gorka is a mutated strain of cannabis. Just for a touch of mischievous fun.
Lexa had spent the day contemplating specific battle strategies with her generals and assigning specific warriors to different sentry duties, scouting missions and faux hunting parties. It had been long and tedious work. Ensuring that each small guerrilla battalion had a mixture of warriors that would work well together, but also had an even Skaikru to Trikru ratio of warriors. After all, it was precision and careful planning which would win this war, not brute force and thoughtless action. And the combined strengths of both clans would make this venture a success.

Lexa had just finished assigning Lincoln to the provisional position of squad leader in his own group and had discussed which warriors he wanted in his party. He had mentioned Octavia and Clarke, as well as other various Trikru warriors. However Octavia had already been requested and assigned to Indra, and Lexa had decided to let Clarke decide what role she wanted. Having learnt the hard way that Clarke did not want a position of leadership, and had also realised that in order to at least build a sense of repour between them, Lexa needed to allow Clarke the opportunity to make her own decisions. After all, they were equals.

Lincoln had just left, when Lexa realised that she had finally worked her way through her entire list of people to speak with, all except Clarke. Butterflies flitted nervously in the pit of her stomach as she summoned Ontari to seek out Clarke. Giving her specific instructions to request Clarke’s presence on her behalf, not demand it. Lexa chose to ignore Ontari’s proud half-smile as her orders were given to her. Lexa watched with amusement as Ontari sprinted off to relay her message with more enthusiasm than she had seen in the girl all day.

Lexa tried to stifle the nerves that had settled into the pit of her stomach, making her question the sanctity of having eaten lunch that day. The endeavour proved fruitless, as not two minutes later Lexa found herself pacing with nervous energy bouncing off of her form in waves.

A sweaty and breathless Ontari returned shortly after, with Clarke following at a much more leisurely pace. Lexa raked her eyes over Clarke’s form, observing her body language and expression to try and prepare for their conversation. Trying to get a clear picture of the tone of their encounter.

She was slightly surprised to note that Clarke did not appear overly affected by her proximity to herself. In fact Lexa found that her blonde companion was almost at peace with her circumstance. And not in the begrudging resignation that Lexa had come to expect from Clarke in the past few days. But more along the lines of serene acceptance. Sure she appeared slightly apprehensive, obviously nervous about the reason for being summoned, but otherwise unafflicted. If Lexa had less self-control, her jaw might have unhinged itself and clattered to the floor in a mess of blood and sinew.

“Heda. You requested me?” Clarke says evenly. Purposefully emphasising the requested part of her phrase in an inadvertent and subtle display of gratitude towards the dark chestnut haired girl.

Lexa bit down her urge to smile at the small display of appreciation from Clarke. Her facial muscles twitching in their need to rejoice over the small victory, and her heart skipping in elation.

“Yes, Clarke. I wished to discuss which role you wanted in the upcoming days.” Lexa says carefully. Choosing her words purposefully, so not to evoke a response of anger. Desperately wanting to make some lead way with Clarke, and begin achieving her forgiveness.
“I see.” Clarke says after a moment. Her brow furrowing a fraction as she tries to uncover the reason for Lexa’s sudden concern. Seeming to dissect Lexa’s motives.

Lexa recognised her confusion and elaborated. “I have realised in our past… discussions, that I have treated you poorly. Having unfair and unreasonable expectations of you, and attempting to dictate your actions. I have struggled to accept that you are a changed person, and that I may not fully know nor understand who you are right now. I have recognised my error, and I apologise for that. I am trying to alter my behaviour.” Lexa says earnestly. Her tone quaking a little at the end as her emotions begin to get the best of her. Clarke looks at her with untampered shock. Her eyes wide with her surprise, and Lexa tries not to be too irritated that Clarke would truly think her incapable of positive change.

“Oh.” Clarke says after a long moment of silence. The lack of conversation, turning the atmosphere awkward. Clarke was at a loss for words. She didn’t truly know how to react to Lexa’s confession. And she struggled to decipher the meaning of the warmth flooding her chest cavity and the insistent burning behind her eyes. A small voice in her head identified the stray emotion as affection. But Clarke quickly dismissed it, trying hard not to cry. The sentiment expressed continued to bounce around in Clarke’s head for a moment, as her brain tried in earnest to digest this revelation. After a moment Clarke recognised the confession for what it was. A plea for forgiveness. Clarke knew that she needed to share with Lexa her own revelation concerning her feelings for her, and knew that there would not be any better chance to do so than right now. Clarke took a deep fortifying breath, attempting to strengthen her resolve and summon her bravery. Clarke looked up from the spot on the ground that her eyes had gravitated to in the period of time in which she had been deep in thought, and stared directly into Lexa’s vulnerable and fearful expression. Clarke realised the kind of strength of character it must have taken for Lexa to admit her fault, apologise for it and make an active effort in rectifying it, and applauded her bravery.

“I forgive you Lexa.” Clarke says with a steely determination and warm vulnerability inflecting her tone.

Lexa’s breath hitched in her chest as the words caressed her ears. She felt as though her beating heart had slammed painfully into her sternum, the strength of Clarke’s words were so powerful. But Lexa did not truly know if she was simply being forgiven for her actions from recent days, or if it extended past that. Lexa waited with baited breath for Clarke to continue, and tried not to allow the hope blooming in her chest overwhelm and choke her. Lexa held her breath and silently begged Clarke to continue.

“I forgive you for everything Lexa. For the mountain. For everything. You are forgiven.” Clarke says softly, allowing a watery smile to curl her lips. The small smile abruptly vanished as Lexa released a strangled sob.

Lexa felt as though she were dreaming. While she had hoped and longed for Clarke’s forgiveness, she had never truly thought that she would receive it. Lexa feared that she was deep in slumber, and her brain was again playing tricks on her. She struggled to suck in air, her eyes brimmed with salt water and released a floodgate of relieved tears down her face. Lexa’s throat made a series of undignified noises, unbecoming of the commander, and yet she couldn’t bring herself to care. As the full implication of Clarke’s words enlightened her mind.

Lexa openly sobbed and her legs grew weak beneath her body as a burden was removed from her chest. The crushing weight of her guilt and regret that had slowly been killing Lexa, had been cleared away. Clarke had chosen to take away that burden, and the relief was palpable. Lexa could breathe freely for the first time in a year and a half. As Lexa openly wept, and her legs fell out from underneath her, she felt strong arms catch her before she hit the ground.
Through Lexa’s tears, she recognised the person holding her as Clarke. Her Clarke, was holding her firmly against her chest. Her Clarke had forgiven her, and Lexa didn’t know how she had survived so long without hearing those words.

Lexa clung to Clarke’s chest and wept. Clarke’s tunic absorbing the moisture of her tears.

Clarke had not expected Lexa to react the way she did. Sure she had expected her to be happy and perhaps shed a few tears. But she had not prepared for the possibility that Lexa would completely break down emotionally. Clarke felt guilt niggle at her for not relieving Lexa of her burden sooner. It was obvious by now, how much Lexa needed to be forgiven. How badly she needed to be unburdened from her guilt over the events at the mountain.

Clarke had been so swept up in her own suffering for so long that she hadn’t truly considered how horrifically Lexa might have suffered. How selfish she had been to imagine that her pain was the only one that mattered, and now looking back, Clarke felt ashamed of the way she had wished for Lexa’s pain. How she had wanted Lexa to ache for her choices. Clarke just hadn’t realised that Lexa had suffered. Up until this moment, she had been wracked with the guilt associated with her choices on the mountain.

Clarke hadn’t realised she was moving to catch Lexa, until the young woman was firmly nestled in her arms. Her own actions in that moment startling Clarke. But she soon grew accustomed to the weight of Lexa, buried against her chest. A small part of Clarke that had been dormant for so long, rejoiced at the contact. The closeness of their bodies. And Clarke couldn’t help but notice the way Lexa’s form moulded perfectly against her own. She revelled in their proximity, in a way that had never existed between she and Finn. Nor with Kadeon either. The fulfilment she felt in this moment was reserved only for Lexa, Clarke realised.

After a few moments, Lexa finally regained her composure and reluctantly extracted herself from Clarke’s comforting embrace. The warmth and strength of Clarke’s body had been so reassuring and calming, and yet so alluring and desirable in equal measure. Lexa had calmed herself, but her breathing had increased for an entirely different reason. She attempted to banish the thoughts from her mind, and yet they persisted.

Pulling herself away from Clarke’s embrace, Lexa turned away from Clarke, embarrassed by her emotional display. She knew that while forgiveness had been granted, trust had not yet been restored between them. And while she trusted Clarke’s character implicitly, she knew that the same could not be said of Clarke’s trust of herself. And despite her emotional display being genuinely out of Lexa’s control. She did not want Clarke to think of it as a manipulation.

Lexa dried her eyes hastily and took a few deep, grounding breaths before turning to face Clarke again.

“Thankyou Clarke.” Lexa whispers gratefully, fighting hard to keep her voice from wavering and the tears from restarting. “I am sorry about the tears. That was horribly embarrassing.” Lexa says earnestly, releasing a slightly awkward chuckle in an attempt to disguise her discomfort.

“It’s okay, I don’t mind. You have nothing to be sorry for.” Clarke reassures gently.

Lexa inclines her head regally in response.

“So you wanted to talk about the role I wanted to play in our guerrilla war?” Clarke says after a moment of quiet. Eager to change the subject to something less emotionally charged for the both of them.
“Right, yes.” Lexa latches onto the new topic and assumes her role of commander flawlessly, sliding into the familiar persona effortlessly. “What role do you wish to play in our war?” Lexa says evenly.

“Where am I needed commander?” Clarke counters. Only wanting to be helpful, but not missing the way in which Lexa seems to genuinely want Clarke to choose her role and be happy in fulfilling it.

“Strong warriors are needed for night time explorations. From what I have been told, and from what I have witnessed in Arcadia, you have exceptional talent with a blade?” Lexa reaffirms cautiously. She had of course heard the rumours of Clarke’s fighting prowess and had seen the carnage left in her wake when she had examined the Azgeda warriors, and yet Lexa felt as though she was only seeing a small part of the picture. Like she was missing something fundamental.

“Yes indeed. I have some skill.” Clarke says evenly. To any who did not know Clarke better, they would simply assume she was being humble. However that was not the case. It was dangerous to know just how much skill Clarke possessed as a warrior, as it would become glaringly obvious who had trained her. Being protégé to one of the most ruthless assassins to have lived in a hundred years was a dangerous thing. And Kadeon’s enemies, specifically Queen Nia would target her, for her affiliation with him. Or worse, coerce her to become the Ice Queen’s personal death dealer.

“Then you are willing to fight?” Lexa clarifies. She had of course heard what Clarke had said in their previous confrontations. That she was willing to be a soldier in this war, but not a leader. However Lexa had also seen the lost expression on the young Sky girl’s face, when she had been confronted by the three dead Azgeda, back in Arcadia. She was not someone who wanted to kill, but was willing to in the most dire of circumstances.

Clarke hesitated before answering, silently confirming Lexa’s suspicions, before her face morphed into one of grim determination, and eerie resignation.

“I am.” Clarke says with steel in her tone. She needed to be certain and strong in her conviction. She needed to make peace with this war, and the casualties sure to befall it, in order to survive.

Lexa admired Clarke’s tenacity, but it also tugged at her heart. Clarke had seen so much death, that Lexa loathed to present her with only more of it. Clarke deserved better than that. Lexa was reminded of a phrase her mother had whispered to her the night before she had been taken to train as a Natblida in Polis.

A true leader will face a fate worse than death for the benefit of their people, they will face life.

Lexa’s five year old self had not understood the turn of phrase at the time, but time and hardship had ultimately bred enlightenment. Lexa eventually understood that a leader that died for their people were not haunted by their choices, but a leader that lived for them, would face their worst nightmares and be forced to carry-on. And right now, in this moment, Lexa looked at Clarke and saw the literal embodiment of what her mother had spoken of.

Despite Clarke’s vehement dismissal of leadership, she was fooling no one but herself. Leadership was not something one could simply walk away from. Once its talon’s had sunk into flesh, there was no escape. Not even for someone as strong-willed and resolute as Clarke Griffin. And despite Clarke’s insistence upon her sudden character change, Lexa knew that deep down. Clarke was fundamentally the same. She was still the girl who would walk into the depths of hell to save those she cared for. She was still the same person who would make an impossible choice because no one else could. She was still the girl who was capable of consuming passion and unwavering loyalty. She was still the same Clarke Griffin. The only change had been in the way she viewed herself.

Sure some might look at her and only see Wanheda. But those who truly love her will still see the
girl who is awed by nature and loves to draw. Lexa wishes in that moment that she could teach Clarke to see herself the way that she does. To teach her how to love herself the way that Lexa does. To look back at her actions in the past and recognise them as a series of hard, but necessary choices. To learn from her mistakes and continue living. Instead of simply existing in the past and dwelling on the death she had caused. Lexa wanted so much more for Clarke.

Lexa pulled herself from her internal train of thought and returned her attention to the conversation before her.

“Lincoln has requested you join his group of fighters. They leave at midnight and do not return until dawn, if you wish to join them.” Lexa offers with only momentary hesitation as she contemplates her options. Lexa meets Clarke’s eyes to gauge her reaction and does not miss the secret smile that pulls at her lips, but a second later and it had disappeared.

“I would be happy with that.” Clarke says quickly, eager to work with someone who knew her fighting style, and had seen her action before. People tended to become intimidated easily when they saw Clarke fight, and that moment of distraction could cost lives. Plus Lincoln had not been judgemental in the past when she had been forced to kill, and she was able to rest easy knowing that it was unlikely he would in the future.

“Do you need help arranging for someone to care for Grace while you are gone?” Lexa asks cautiously. Clarke had not reacted well when her child had been made a point of conversation in the past and was not eager to incite that kind of fierce maternal protectiveness again.

“No. I have it handled. A friend’s mother might be willing to care for her while I am away.” Clarke says after a moment of contemplation. Remembering Tanga’s comment about Naomi’s love of babies, Clarke decided to ask the kindly woman about babysitting for her. Reasoning that she would be better equipped to deal with a six month old than Raven, Octavia or even Bellamy.

“Very well.” Lexa says regally, her stance becoming slightly stiffer. “I wish you good luck on your mission tonight Klark kom Skaikru. I hope all goes well.” Lexa says softly. The statement a clear dismissal, but only due to lack of other topics regarding the war to justify keeping Clarke longer. Lexa silently cursed their need for a professional topic in order to speak with one another. But knew that whilst Clarke was willing to now be civil, she was likely unprepared to discuss anything of emotional substance with Lexa. After all, she had been forgiven, but she was not yet trusted.

“Heda.” Clarke said quickly, taking the queue to leave. Clarke offered Lexa the smallest of smiles and promptly left the tent, missing the way Lexa’s eyes honed in on the movement and her heart beat slightly faster at the action.

As soon as Clarke’s retreating form was no longer visible, Lexa’s face split into a grin. This was by far the most civil and almost friendly conversation she had with Clarke since their rocky reunion, and Lexa could not stifle the potent mix of hope and happiness that had unfurled in her chest.

Lexa quickly schooled her expression back to her signature mask of stoicism as Ontari strode into the room. And chose to ignore the knowing smirk that lifted the girls lips as she appraised Lexa for a brief moment.

“So how did your meeting go Heda?” Ontari asks with mirth lacing her tone. The teasing lilt in her voice giving away the fact that the young girl already knew that the meeting went very well.

“It was fine Ontari.” Lexa answered quickly, far too quickly. And Lexa nearly groaned with frustration as Ontari’s smirk grew in size. Lexa scrambled for a quick subject change. “Have you seen Titus today? He failed to show up for his duties this morning.”
Ontari’s brow furrowed as she considered the question for a moment. “I have not. Perhaps he is ill?” Ontari suggested. “After all, many of our warriors are sick today after drinking too much Ton-Ton last night.” She elaborates.

Lexa however knows that this is not the case, as Titus vowed never to allow spirits to pass his lips when he took up the role as Fleimkepa. Lexa felt a tendril of unease unfurl in her stomach. Titus had been distant ever since she had dismissed his plans for Clarke’s daughter Grace, and had not approached the subject again. But somehow Lexa knew that the quest had not been abandoned. Titus was far too stubborn and pig-headed to give up on a plan he truly believed in. The thought that he might be making moves without Lexa’s knowledge scared her more than anything else. She had only just garnered Clarke’s forgiveness and was well on her way to earning back her trust, but if something happened to that little girl. Lexa would never forgive herself. But more importantly, Clarke would never forgive her.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all!

Hope you guys enjoy the new chapter, please let me know what your thoughts are, I always enjoy reading your feedback!

From here on out, Lexa and Clarke will be less focused on placing blame and more concerned with moving past their spotty history, so if there are any specific moments of fluffiness that you want to see in the future, now is the time to put in your requests! (Please note: That I will consider every one of them, but if they don’t match up with the direction of the story, I’m afraid I wont be using them, soz!)

Note: I have just begun re-reading my work from the very beginning and doing some editing. So I have made some slight alterations, just in case anyone wanted to re-read the small changes. I will be doing this, as well as simultaneously writing new chapters. So please bear with me. So far I have only updated chapter one.

Hope everyone has a fantastic week!!
Clarke leaves the Commander’s tent with an uncharacteristic spring in her step. She felt lighter than she had in a long time and she did not doubt that it had everything to do with her interaction with Lexa. Forgiving her. It had been therapeutic for the both of them if Lexa’s tears of catharsis were anything to go by.

Clarke would have been lying if she said she was certain about her feelings concerning Lexa. Because she wasn’t. While forgiveness had enlightened Clarke in some aspects and opened her heart to Lexa, there was much she was still confused by.

She didn’t know if she was ready to feel anything outside of indifference for Lexa, and yet she knew she was already past that point. Clarke’s unexpected embrace with Lexa had proven that, when she felt affection bubble in her chest and hope infuse her heart with strength.

She had not been immune to having Lexa so close to her. The way their bodies slotted together so well. The way Lexa’s head had rested so naturally against the juncture between Clarke’s neck and shoulder. The scent of her hair as it brushed against Clarke’s chin. Like fresh rain and the freshness of spring. It was as if she was designed to be there. And Clarke’s body had reacted upon instinct. Instinct that seemed tuned, only to Lexa.

Clarke’s heart had thundered in her chest rapidly, her breathing quickened, and her cheeks warmed. Lexa was intoxicating and addictive, like Clarke’s personal Gorka bush, designed to make her fearless. Clarke was unsure how she had gone so long without her in her arms. Clarke wanted desperately to remind herself that the only reason that she had lived without Lexa, was because she had been betrayed. But Clarke couldn’t summon the same fire that once ignited at the thought. But more than that, she found that she didn’t want to remind herself of the mountain.

Of course she still felt the guilt of her own actions eat away at her. But Lexa’s role in the matter seemed inconsequential. Like it no longer held value or importance. The sudden change was unnerving, and Clarke found that she feared the affect Lexa seemed to have on her.

In the space of three weeks, Lexa had taken Clarke’s hate and bitterness and transformed them into their polar-opposites. Where once only darkness and anger resided, Clarke now found hope and happiness. The depths of her soul, where Wanheda thrived, were filling with light and hope so rapidly is was like water submerging a leaky boat. Unstoppable and briskly inevitable. Clarke felt Wanheda thrash uncomfortably as her home became smaller each day. And while Clarke knew that others would feel pleased with this development, she felt only fear.

Clarke believed that no one should hold that kind of power over another, it made it too easy to become hurt. And while Clarke had forgiven Lexa, she did not trust her to not hurt her again. Not yet anyway. There is an old world saying that Kadeon had told her once, that Clarke felt described her feelings in this moment.

Once bitten, twice shy.

Clarke pushed away her mess of conflicting and contradictory thoughts and contemplated her upcoming patrolling mission with Lincoln. Reminding herself that she still needed to ask Naomi to watch Grace.
So Clarke set off to find Octavia and collect her daughter. Hoping that O hadn’t gotten completely overwhelmed by caring for Grace by herself.

It was late afternoon and the sun was beginning it’s descent across the sky. The mountains surrounding Alton meant that the village was shrouded in darkness before night fell. Covering the settlement in shadows. In this moment the sun was beginning to crest the peaks of one the mountains, signalling the end of day. The air was cooling, promising a more frigid night.

Clarke found Octavia in the village centre by the fire-pits, with a still sleeping Grace laid gently in her lap. Raven sat next to Octavia, talking animatedly, her arms gesturing enthusiastically as she spoke. Clarke took a moment to appreciate the scene before her. Her friends and her daughter, completely at ease and happy in that moment. Clarke silently wished there were more of these instances to go around for those she cared about. A traitorous part of Clarke’s brain added Lexa to that list.

“I see Grace hasn’t given you too much trouble O?” Clarke says with a smile as she gets closer to her friends.

Octavia’s face splits into a proud grin. “Hey, Grace was a little angel. She slept the whole time, which made my job pretty easy.” She says enthusiastically. Octavia’s excitement was palpable by this point. Raven rolled her eyes.

“That’s great. I knew you could do it.” Clarke declares happily. She was truly glad that Octavia had done well with Grace. She knew how nervous she had been about the prospect of caring for a baby on her own.

“Thanks. What did the commander want?” Octavia asks after a moment of basking in Clarke’s praise. Her grin still firmly in place.

“She wanted to know what role I wanted to fill while we are fighting in Alton. I decided to join Lincoln, we leave at midnight.” Clarke glosses over the professional aspects of she and Lexa’s meeting, eager to banish the intimate embrace from her mind for just a moment.

“Wow that’s going to be difficult with Grace. What do you plan on doing with ankle-biter while you are gone?” Raven asks quickly. Her brow furrowed as she thinks over the situation and finds the situation lacking some crucial pre-planning. “I would offer to do it but since I am the only mechanic that volunteered to come on our little excursion, I will be manning the radio and monitoring each groups status on a near 24/7 loop until this thing is over. I doubt I will be getting any sleep in the next – however long we are here.” Raven says mournfully.

“Jesus Ray. That’s not maintainable. You should have someone sit with you so you can train them while you work and then take it in shifts.” Octavia suggests.

“Have you met the idiots that volunteered to come with us? There isn’t a single intelligent human being amongst them. There’s no way that they could keep up.” Raven huffs with irritation. Scrubbing her hands across her face and sighing loudly.

“Did you just call us stupid?” Octavia asks with mock offence. Her mouth agape and eyes comically wide.

“Yes. Yes I did.” Raven challenges playfully, shit-eating smirk firmly in place.

“Not that this direction of conversation isn’t absolutely riveting, but I think I might have a solution for your problem Ray.” Clarke cuts quickly, before either girl has a chance to digress further into
petty jabs.

Clarke thinks about Raven’s situation for a quick moment and comes up with the perfect solution. How wise that decision might be in the long-run, could be decided at a later date, she supposed.

“My friend Tanga is really smart, and picks things up really fast. I think she might be able to keep up with you if you wanted to teach her about the radios.” Clarke mentions quickly. Giving Octavia a quick cursory glance to see how much she might have told Raven about Tanga already. Clarke is annoyed and not at all surprised when Octavia sucks her lip between her teeth, studiously examines the ground and turns a shade of pink. Confirming her inability to keep juicy gossip to herself.

“Isn’t Tanga the girl that you did the dirty with Griff?” Raven asks saucily, fluttering her eyelashes innocently, and then bursting into laughter shortly after.

Octavia turns an even brighter shade of magenta and mumbles a quick “Sorry Clarke,” under her breath.

“Something like that.” Clarke quickly dismisses the topic and continues. “So do you want her help or not?” She presses.

“Yeah of course I do, and if she’s not an idiot and she can keep up, it will be a bonus.” Raven says enthusiastically, her arms gesturing excitedly.

“Bonus to what?” Octavia asks a moment later, oblivious to Clarke’s urge to face palm.

“Bonus to finding out a few embarrassing Grounder Griffin stories of course.” Raven hoots proudly, giving Octavia an unimpressed look that said ‘duh.’ Octavia groaned as she caught on.

“Anyway, I need to go see someone about babysitting for me while I am gone.” Clarke hastily declares, eager to avoid the topic of her sordid history, especially in this village. Plus she got the distinct feeling that Raven and Tanga would get along like a house on fire, which made her rather nervous.

Octavia settles Grace into Clarke’s arms gently and Clarke vows to catch up with her friends later for dinner. Clarke’s sets off towards Naomi’s healing hut and hopes that her reception there goes as well as it did with Tanga.

Guided by memory Clarke weaves in between the huts and buildings until she finally stood outside of Naomi’s. It was much bigger than all of the other huts, as it served as both Naomi and Tanga’s home, and the place of healing for the whole village. The bamboo structure was risen a solid metre off of the ground the same as rest of the village so that they didn’t flood during wet season.

Grace had woken up by the time Clarke was standing in front of Naomi’s door. Bright eyed and alert to her surroundings. Grasping a fistful of Clarke’s braid and gummily chewing. When Clarke knocked on the solid structure of the door, Naomi opened the door almost immediately.

“Ah it’s you!” Naomi exclaims cryptically. Her weathered face gathering in the corners like a folded tablecloth as she smiled lopsidedly at Clarke. Her midnight blue eyes shining like opals in the sun.

Unsure of herself for a moment Clarke responded in the only way she knew how. “Yep. It’s me.” The waver in her voice betraying her nerves. Clarke was unsure if Tanga had already spoken to Naomi and explained the situation. If she already knew who Clarke really was or not. And Naomi appeared unwilling to give anything away. Her aged face perfectly passive.

Naomi looks at Clarke critically for a moment, grasping her chin between her thumb and forefinger
and tilting her face left and right. Sucking on her teeth loudly, her brow furrowing in disappointment after a moment of apparent deliberation. Before she pinched Clarke’s ribs and then seemed to come to a conclusion. “You’ve gotten skinny girl. Your bones are sticking out at me for attention.” Naomi says disapprovingly. “I have some broth on the fire, you’ll come in and eat with me.” She declares. Turning away to fetch the food, leaving Clarke standing by the door awkwardly.

Clarke had expected a number of reactions from Naomi, but this certainly wasn’t one of them. “Did Tanga speak to you?” Clarke asks hesitantly before stepping cautiously into the hut. “About me?” She clarifies nervously.

“Sha, she did.” Naomi says with disinterest a she scoops broth into two clay bowls.

“And you’re not mad?” Clarke asks tentatively. Feeling like a small child in that moment. Her chest squeezing her lungs tensely as the silence between them stretched out. Clarke watches Naomi pause in her ladling of soup and then begin again after a moment, and feels her stomach drop.

“I did not say that.” Naomi states smoothly, feeling a small amount of satisfaction as the young girl squirmed uncomfortably for a moment. She had after all, lied, stolen and then disappeared. Naomi felt entitled to a small amount of petty retribution. She watched as the girls face paled, and felt her annoyance fade. Releasing a heavy sigh Naomi deposited the bowls on the table and swiftly walked up to the young girl, pulling her into a brief embrace. The girl clung to her for a moment, positioning her body so that the child on her hip did not get squashed. Naomi pulled back, gave the girl a disapproving eyebrow raise and quick, swift slap to the shoulder.

“I deserved that.” Clarke accepts the discipline easily, and gives Naomi a sheepish grin. Clarke felt her heart beat a little stronger in her chest, she knew the worst of it was over now. Naomi had always been quick to forgive when she felt like it was deserved.

“Yes you did.” Naomi says with no small amount of exasperation, before directing Clarke to a seat at the table and placing a bowl of broth in front of her. “Sit and eat. You are withering away to nothing before my eyes.” Naomi chastises lightly.

Clarke quickly followed as directed and bites down her urge to smirk. Naomi had always had a soft spot for her, despite her poor choices and tendency to leave her disappointed. For which Clarke always felt guilty about, but was unable to avoid sometimes.

“So I assume you have already heard the story then?” Clarke asks quietly, hoping that she wouldn’t need to relive the ugly truth of her mistakes again. Even if it was for someone who deserved to know, especially since Clarke had lied to her.

“What I have heard is gossip. And you know that I don’t put any value on gossip. So girl, you can tell me the story when you are ready, but until then, I am choosing to ignore it.” Naomi shrugs nonchalantly as she finishes her statement and spoons some of the steaming broth into her mouth. Relishing the taste of the salty vegetable concoction. “You know very well that I don’t like to be told things second-hand. More chance of being told an untruth”

Clarke was constantly surprised by Naomi. Back when Clarke had first met her, she had disapproved of Tanga’s tendency to lean towards single nights of pleasure with strangers and then forget them the next day. Finding the nature of those relationships to be undignified and immature. So when Tanga and her sister Milly brought Clarke down from the mountain, bloodied and broken, for Naomi to care for. No one expected her to treat the stranger that had shared a bed with her daughter with unwavering kindness. To not only treat her wounds and nurse her back to health, but to accept her and treat her as one of her own. Sure she can be blunt and a little insulting at times, but underneath it all, she cared. Which was more than Clarke could say about her own mother.
“Okay then.” Clarke steels herself and begins to retell the main areas of her story. “My name is Klark kom Skaikru, but recently I am better known as… Wan Hedra.” Clarke swallows down the lump in her throat that develops as she spits out the title. The name meant as a symbol of respect, that felt more like an accusation, a prison sentence. She watched as Naomi’s eyes widened in recognition for a moment, before she schooled her features and continued to eat her soup. Clarke appreciated the attempt at nonchalance, even if it was forced. Clarke went to open her mouth and say more, but found that she truly didn’t want to. She didn’t want another person hearing this story and seeing her differently. Even if she knew that Naomi was one of the few people likely not to. Naomi seemed to sense her hesitation.

“It’s alright girl, you may keep your secrets. I have long since accepted that there would be some things that you would not tell me. And it is okay.” Naomi reassures. Hoping that Clarke understood the meaning of her words and not mistake her intentions as a passive aggressive jibe. Meant to inspire guilt.

“I am sorry that I lied to you. I just didn’t want to disappoint you.” Clarke says resolutely. “I know how you about secrets, and I apologise for keeping them from you.” She says earnestly, leaning forward to lay a palm on Naomi’s wrist to express her sincerity.

“I don’t like secrets when they get people hurt. This is different. This secret was kept because it was in protection of yourself, and those around you. I know the difference, and I do not fault you for it.” Naomi reassures gently, placing a hand atop Clarke’s to offer the girl some comfort.

“I can tell you now if you want me to. It’s not protecting anyone now.” Clarke says with uncertainty.

“It is alright. You don’t need to say anymore if you do not want to. You have shared enough to sate my curious mind.” Naomi offered a small reassuring smile, as she mentally tallies everything she had learnt about Clarke in this moment. “It is good to finally meet you Klark.” A brilliant smile replacing her smaller lip curl. “Although I must confess, Klark is a very strange name.” Naomi teases.

Clarke chuckles. “I can’t fault you there.” She agreed with good humour.

“Speaking of names. Who is your young companion?” Naomi asks with a knowing glint in her eye. She of course knew that Clarke had a child. Tanga had said as much when they spoke earlier in the day, but she wanted Clarke to share this with her. Knew that Clarke would want to tell her herself.

“This is my daughter Grace. She’s actually who I came to see you about.” Clarke says with a soft smile, allowing herself to fold to the brief inclination to stare into brilliant sapphire blue of her daughter’s eyes. Grace smiled at the attention, wide and gummy.

“Is she unwell?” Naomi appraises the child thoughtfully, inspecting her general physical health and finding nothing amiss. Naomi raises her eyebrows questioningly.

“No, she’s fine. Tanga actually mentioned that you might be willing to care for her while I join the Commander’s hunting missions.” Clarke asks respectfully. Trying to dampen the hope that flares in her chest, knowing that the disappointment would be uncomfortable if she were to say no. Especially considering that she had no one else willing and able to care for Grace while she was gone, and taking the child with her was not an option. Clarke was a little surprised by how much she wanted to go tonight. Her urge to help seemed to extend outside of her need for vengeance for Kadeon’s murder, and was now partnered with the selfless urge to protect her friends and be part of a cause she believed in.

“Of course I will care for your youngon. I would enjoy that very much. Leave her here an hour before you need to leave so I can get her settled.” Naomi replies immediately, eager to be around a
baby again. And she smiled as Clarke expressed her gratitude and offered Naomi a bright smile.

Naomi thought back to what Clarke had said a minute before, and recalled her mentioning that Tanga had suggested her involvement in caring for the baby. She took one look at Clarke and recognised the game her daughter was playing. “Tanga thinks that if I am caring for someone else’s baby it might stop me from encouraging her to have one of her own, doesn’t she?” Naomi says with a wicked smirk. Feeling infinitely proud of herself for uncovering Tanga’s artless strategy.

“She may have mentioned something about that, yes.” Clarke relents with a humoured grin, as she tries hard not to laugh at Tanga’s mistake in believing her mother wouldn’t see straight through her plot. Despite the fact that Tanga’s plan had fallen flat on its nose, the situation in general made Clarke’s chest fill with warmth. The closeness between Naomi and Tanga. The way they know each other well enough to guess what the other is thinking and doing. To be able to predict their actions and intentions because you know that person as well as you know yourself. That kind of bond between mother and daughter, was unique and special. And Clarke wished that she had the same kind of relationship with her own mother, and more so, hoped that one day she and Grace shared a similar bond. Clarke returned her wandering mind back to Naomi.

“Cheeky Skrish.” Naomi laughed with a hint of resignation. She knew that she should let Tanga live her life the way she wanted. But she wanted more for her daughter. For her to experience all of life’s joys and to feel like she had accomplished much in her time on earth when she was old and haggard, like herself. She didn’t want Tanga to miss out on the joys of motherhood. “Well as smart as she might think she’s being. It’s not going to work in her favour. If anything it will only serve to increase my desire for grandchildren.” Naomi says wistfully, her teasing tone indicative of her small rebellion.

Clarke chuckles at the antics between Naomi and Tanga. Always trying to outdo each other, neither willing to back down when they set their mind to something. Each as stubborn as the other. It was obviously a family trait.

Naomi stares at Grace for a moment, adoring the fullness of her cheeks and the innocent wide-eyed gaze of a child who has never seen the horrors of the world. And her hair, Naomi marvelled at the child’s locks of auburn vibrance and silently wondered where she had won the genetic jackpot.

“Grace is a very lucky girl. Her hair is kissed by fire. It is very rare. I have only seen its like, twice in my entire life. It’s such a beautiful colour.” An awed reverence making her tone longing and pensive.

Clarke smiled fondly down at her daughter, and lost herself in memories of Kadeon. “She gets it from her father.” Clarke’s tone sombre, as she recalls quiet evenings spent by the campfire as Kadeon read an old tome from the ancient world. Regaling Clarke and their unborn child with the tales of ‘Moby Dick’ and ‘Gone with the Wind’. Of the rare moments that he smiled so brilliantly that he was like the moon reflecting the sun’s glorious light. And his laugh, deep and hearty. A sound near never heard, but seemed almost effortlessly extracted from him when Grace directed her smile his way. Clarke thought about how their love, while precious, was fleeting. And lasted only a moment. How his life’s blood poured from his opened belly and the promise he made Clarke swear to uphold. Clarke’s heart contracted painfully in her chest, reminding her of the vengeance she had yet to deliver upon Queen Nia. The vengeance that Lexa could help her achieve. Lexa… Clarke’s mind drifted back to the symphony of chaotic and disordered feelings surrounding the girl with chestnut hair and refracted images of an enchanted forest in the greens of her eyes.

“What is plaguing your mind Klark?” Naomi asks quietly. Her voice barely above a whisper as she breaks Clarke out of her memory induced trance. The girls mind had wandered and drifted so seamlessly, that Naomi had simply allowed herself to watch as it happened. Studying the emotions that projected across her face as she retreated into her own mind for a moment of sanctuary? Of peace? Or perhaps it was to torment herself? Naomi was unsure, but it was obvious that the girl was
conflicted over something. It was writhing behind the iron cage of her chest, like a trapped snake.

Clarke was immediately snapped back to reality and transitorily startled by Naomi’s observation. “I... Recent... I. Recently I have forgiven someone. Someone who hurt me badly in the past. And I am finding that my emotions are so conflicted and confusing, I can’t decide exactly what it is that I feel.” Clarke spits out with effort. Her mouth struggling to form over the words.

“Ah, a matter of the heart is it?” Naomi’s eyes held a knowing glint, as she appraised Clarke’s stuttering countenance and inability to be articulate. Clarke’s eyes go wide, and Naomi knows that her guess was correct.

“No... Well maybe... I don’t know. Perhaps once, but I am not so sure anymore.” Clarke stumbles over an explanation once more, and tires not to be intimidated by the widening of Naomi’s victorious smirk.

“Sounds like a mess.” Naomi observes quietly, her face a thoughtful expression of contemplation.

Clarke laughs without humour. A dry, self-deprecating cackle of cracked vocal chords and uncertainty. “Yes it is.” Clarke agrees. “We were once something. It was young, premature. But it was something, and then she betrayed me and trust was broken. I hated her for a long time. But my feelings have constantly been shifting since she became part of my life again and I found myself forgiving her for her past transgressions. But... My feelings are still shifting. And I don’t know what I am feeling now. I still don’t trust her, but there is... Something blossoming. It’s all very confusing.” Clarke releases a heavy sigh as she finishes her explanation, in the hopes of Naomi having some weather worn advice to spare.

Naomi swiftly stands from her wooden seat and walks over to her rack of copious glass bottles filled with spices, herbs and remedies, without a word. The clinking of glass can be heard across the room as Naomi searches for something. She comes back a moment later with a small glass jar, and hands it to Clarke for inspection.

“Tell me Clarke. What are you holding?” Naomi asks cryptically. Upon Clarke’s blank expression of confoundment, Naomi elaborates. “What do you see, describe it to me.” Naomi gestures with her hand in an impatient manner as the blonde hesitates.

Clarke examines the bottle for a moment, perplexed. She eyes Naomi wearily for a moment, wondering what point she was trying to make. Naomi’s stoic face revealed nothing of her intentions, so with a heavy sigh Clarke focused her analytical gaze onto the object in her hand.

“I see an amber bottle. Made of glass.” Clarke says carefully. She sniffs the opening of the bottle for a second to identify the thick brown substance inside reluctantly. Worried for a moment that it might be some kind of cruel joke and Naomi was purposefully making her inhale excrement. Before recognising the rich earthy tones of wet dirt, with a subtle undercurrent of sulphur. Obviously it was collected from the hot springs deep within the mountains. “And it’s filled with... Mud?” Clarke’s voice rises a little at the end as she questions herself and Naomi.

“Yes, that’s correct. Now swirl the bottle’s contents around for a moment, until the mud coats the innards of the amber bottle.” Naomi instructs. Her eyes glinting with something akin to mischief.

“What is the purpose of this Naomi?” Clarke asks with barely masked suspicion. Still believing that Naomi was going to play some kind of trick.

“Stop whining and do it.” Naomi chastises impatiently. When Clarke finally does as instructed, she continues to direct her. “Now hold the bottle up to your eye.” Clarke observes Naomi warily like a
rabbit about to walk into a snare, but reluctantly holds the amber bottle near her iris and gestures for Naomi to continue. “What can you see?” She says softly, like the contents within the bottle held the very meaning to life. Which in a way they did if Clarke was smart enough to recognise the bottle and its contents as a metaphor for something greater.

“I can’t see much of anything.” Clarke answers lamely. Not understanding the purpose of this fruitless exercise.

“Be more specific.” Naomi says patiently. Sounding suspiciously like a teacher explaining the simple logic behind why you shouldn’t touch poison ivy, to a child.

Clarke lets out an annoyed huff, before complying. “I can’t see anything clearly. I can see through some areas of the mud, where the water has cleared away the smaller particles of filth, leaving the glass free of obstruction. But then the amber bottle itself, obscures my vision and distorts everything I see. Nothing is clear.” Clarke says with a thoughtful frown.

“Exactly.” Naomi exclaims triumphantly. Clapping her hands together with excitement.

“How is this relevant to anything?” Clarke asks, still perplexed by the exercise.

Naomi rolls her eyes when the purpose of the task does not become immediately obvious to Clarke. “Feelings are not always black and white. Sometimes they are easily understood, but often, they are not. Whenever you are struggling to understand what those feelings might be, remember that recognising feelings and their significance is like looking through an amber bottle filled with mud. It may not help ease your burden, but it sometimes helps to know that not all things are meant to be understood. Some feelings are so interconnected that one begins where another ends. And others are so interwoven that you cannot have one without the other. They become indistinguishable from one another.” Naomi says with a soft smile. She lets silence reign for a moment as understanding and enlightenment fuse themselves to Clarke’s mind.

“So what you are saying is that some emotions are meant to remain a mystery?” Clarke elucidates an instant later, her brow still furrowed in thought, and her eyes rooted to a spot on the floor. “But how does that help me? I am so confused, that I feel like I cannot and should not act without knowing my own heart first. It would be disservice to myself and anyone else involved.” Clarke raises her gaze pointedly to Naomi, and awaits an answer.

“This is also true. But here is your next problem Klark kom Skaikru. You are a smart girl. Probably too smart, like my Tanga. So when you see something you do not understand, you feel that you must know it. Find out how it works. Yes?” Naomi resumes her seat from before and allows her voice and eyes to soften further as she speaks to Clarke.

“I suppose.” Clarke relents after her own careful deliberation.

“Your problem is that you are always thinking. Always analysing and studying what you feel, that you don’t simply pay attention to what you are actually feeling.” Naomi pauses for a second to ensure Clarke was still following her thought process, before continuing. “Studying how you feel, and feeling what you feel are two very different things Klark. It is choosing between being led by your head or your heart. Listen to your heart, it will know what to do. It’s instinctual.”

“But what if what my heart tells me to do makes my head fearful?” Clarke’s mind was a strife with the implications of a statement so profound and tries to apply the situation to Lexa. Her heart was telling her that her feelings from before the mountain were not as dead and forgotten as Clarke had first believed they were. But her head was screaming that Lexa was not to be trusted, that she had made the choice to betray Clarke once when their interests did not align. And that she would have no
qualms about making the same decisions twice. Her head and her heart were at war with each other and it was beginning to make Clarke feel nauseas. The constant back and forth between the two conflicted halves of her being, between her head and heart made Clarke feel like she was being torn apart from the inside. Clarke quietly questioned the universe, why nothing could be simple, and earned no reply.

“All things worthwhile, require a small amount of fear. Don’t let that fear dictate your actions.” Naomi says knowingly, her eyes depicting the truth behind the statement and the understanding she held in her eyes.

And not for the first time that day, Clarke felt overwhelmed.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again ladies and gents! Hope you have all had a fantastic week so far, and are enjoying the festive season! I hope you all enjoy the new chapter update, let me know what you all think! I love reading your feedback, it brightens my day! :D I will try to have one more chapter out before Christmas.

Edits: Chapter 2.
Shortly after her conversation with Naomi, Clarke left to have a much smaller, second dinner with her friends as she had promised. It had been nice to spend time with her entire group of friends for the first time in a few days. Clarke had missed the friendship and comradery. Shortly thereafter Clarke had returned to her hut for an early night, only to find armour and matching garments laid out neatly against her pillow. Someone had been inside her hut.

The breast guard was made of thick black leather, soft to the touch and yet sturdy enough to defend against a blow. Meshed together with cobalt blue stitching, that suspiciously complemented the hue of Clarke’s eyes. The tunic was a dark navy colour, made of some of the softest wool Clarke had ever felt, and had a hood big enough to obscure Clarke’s bright blonde hair and face in the dark. The long black pants were made of a coarse and durable fabric that conformed to movement, but protected against piercing weapons. Reinforced in areas of high friction and areas of weakness, like between the thighs, knees and ankles. There were also heavy black leather boots that met mid-calf and could be tightened and readjusted with laces. They had thick soles made from a soft rubber, to absorb sound more easily. Strangely enough there were also a pair of black leather gloves, with the tips removed, to protect the hands, and armguards, all were constructed with supple leather, for ease of movement. There was also a black fleece coat, which was formfitting and soft. Clarke’s perfect size, and far more comfortable than Clarke’s own coat. To round off the entire ensemble, there was a container of kohl war paint, and Clarke knew only one person who could have afforded such a thoughtful, yet lavish gift. Lexa.

Clarke inspected the gift curiously for a moment longer and found herself vaguely wondering why Lexa would have bothered extending such an extravagance to Clarke. A small voice in the back of her mind suggests that it might be an expression of gratitude for her forgiveness, but Clarke didn’t want anything in return for something so personal. It lessened its value if it was exchanged for luxury.

But Clarke pushed that thought down as well, unwilling to simply assume the words for the first time in an age. Upon closer inspection, Clarke realised that the armour was worthy of a commander, and instead of any gesture of kindness, Clarke realised the armour was designed not for Clarke Griffin, but instead for Wanheda. It was armour meant to strike fear in the hearts of Wanheda’s enemies.

The thought made Clarke temporarily nauseas, as she contemplated the fact that she would need to purposefully display herself as the Commander of death in situations where death was sure to follow. And a scouting party tasked with hunting rogue Azgeda warriors sent to kill, rape and steal by the Ice Queen, promised death. The Azgeda flirted with death and seduced them into its eternal embrace of oblivion. And Clarke must fulfil her role as temptress.

Despite despising the symbolism behind the armour, Clarke knew that at midnight, when she set out to join Lincoln and his war party, she would be wearing it. Resigned to the role she was now forced to play in response to the decisions she made on the mountain.

Clarke settled herself and Grace in for the night and drifted into the sweet nothingness of sleep.

Clarke woke to the soft sound of Octavia knocking on her door and calling out her name quietly, the noise instantly rousing Clarke from her sleep. Extracting herself from around the sleeping form of her daughter, Clarke climbs out from under the blankets to answer the door before Octavia woke Raven. Who was slumbering peacefully in her cot. Clarke opened the door and stepped outside quickly, and
shivered when the frigid midnight air stroked her flesh.

“Hey, glad you’re awake. Lincoln is heading out in 30, so you’d better get ready.” Octavia whispers lowly, unwilling to risk waking anyone in the sleeping village, especially Raven. Since she wouldn’t be getting much sleep in the next few days anyway.

Octavia looks exhausted. Her eyes are dim, and her pallor dull. Her body sagging against the wall of the hut, as she supports her weight.

“You look wrecked. How was it?” Clarke asks, referring to her just ended shift and nighttime exploration.

Octavia groans quietly, and her mouth stretches into an annoyed grimace. “It was pretty shit. We walked for hours in complete silence. Only stopping when we heard noises in the distance. Which nine times out of ten turned out to be a stray rabbit, or a wild dog. And the other one time, turned out to be our imaginations playing tricks on us.” She exclaims with exasperation, running her hands through her braids with quick, agitated movements. “We didn’t see a single soul, Clarke. It was a total bust.” Octavia huffs with disappointment. “And now I am hungry and tired, and my goddamn feet cane like a bitch.” She complains with a deep set scowl.

“Shit.” Was all Clarke could say in reply. It was rather disheartening to hear that the scouting missions had not yielded any results yet, but it was only the first night, and there would surely be many more nights spent combing the woods for Azgeda. “Well go eat, and sleep, and hopefully Lincoln and I will have more luck.” Clarke says with a wry grin. Earning a small tired smile in return from Octavia.

“Later Clarke.” Octavia says over her shoulder as she drags her tired bones back to her own hut.

Clarke quickly goes back inside and gently wakes Grace for a speedy feed before getting dressed and leaving her in the care of Naomi. To say the little girl was unimpressed to have been woken was an understatement, and the tears were falling almost as soon as she realised what was happening. Clarke quickly untied her shirt and offered a pert nipple to angry pursed lips. Grace immediately settled and began drinking with gusto, making small noises of contentment as she fed. Grace was soon full and drifting back off to sleep. Clarke softly placed a kiss in her daughters hair and then gently laid the sleeping infant on the bed until she was ready to leave.

Clarke swiftly and inaudibly begins donning the new armour laid out for her. Rapidly preparing for the scouting mission. When the armour was firmly in place, Clarke went about braiding her hair in simple plaits to pull her hair away from her face. Knowing that in a fight it could obscure her vision. She laced her hair with the black bolts of cloth to help hide the colour of her hair, knowing that its pale colour would make it extremely visible in the moonlight. Clarke strapped her dagger to her thigh, sword and quiver to her back and then went about applying the thick tar-like war paint.

Clarke spread the oily substance in a straight and thick unbroken line of black around both her eyes and the bridge of her nose. With a single finger she drew a thinner line of black just above her eyebrows, stretching against the entire width of her forehead. Then applied another broken line under each eye, the stripe stopping on either side of her nose. For the final stroke, Clarke dipped two fingers into the dark paint, and dragged them both from her bottom lip down to her chin, leaving two thick, dark lines, were her fingers had tracked across her face. Clarke inspected herself in the small reflective surface hanging against the wall. Her normally sky blue eyes, looked cold and unforgiving as ice against their black field. Soulless and challenging. In this moment, Clarke knew that she looked every bit like the Commander of death, and it was unnerving.

Clarke quickly collected her bag full of supplies for Grace, gently picked up the sleeping infant into
her arms and left the hut in search of Naomi. After Clarke had left Grace in Naomi’s care, she quickly made her way to the village centre where she would meet up with Lincoln and the rest of their scouting party.

They were all waiting for Clarke, when she finally arrived. Lincoln and Bellamy were the only faces that she recognised amongst the gathered six warriors. The hairs on the back of Clarke’s neck stood to attention as all eyes gravitated towards her, and Clarke had to fight her urge to disappear into a darkened corner. Instead she pushed her shoulders back, set her jaw into a stubborn line and strode towards the groups with purpose. Two of the warriors she did not recognise took an unconscious step backwards when Clarke was a metre away from them, and she tried hard to ignore the way the action stung like she’d been slapped.

“Wanheda. We were just speaking with our… Leader, before we set off.” A big bulking man grumbled to Clarke’s left. His tone reeked of scorn as he referred to Lincoln as their leader.

Clarke shot the man a withering glare for his lack of respect. The man’s eyes widened as he realised his mistake and bowed his head in quick submission.

“As I was saying before you arrived Clarke. We have been assigned to patrol the South East forests surrounding the Ice Nation borders. Heda has assigned us Bellamy, as he has the most experience with a gun and radio in case we need them. Tobias and Mercy, are from Alton, so they are familiar with the surrounding terrain. They will be our guides. And these two are Mallion and Angus. They are the extra muscle, I suppose you could say.” Lincoln says calmly, explaining everyone’s role. He hadn’t requested Mallion and Angus in his group, but rather they had been assigned to him because no other hunting party wanted them. While they were tall and broad and packed with muscle. They were both slow and stupid, and had issues following authority. Especially Lincoln’s. Apparently they had taken issue with Lincoln’s choice to abandon his Trikru roots to integrate himself in Skaikru society. And hence did not respect his leadership. “Angus and Mallion have skill with great swords, and Mercy and I have skill with all manner of blades. But I need archers to be our eyes in the sky. I’ve been told that Tobias is one of the best marksmen in Alton, so he will watch out backs from the trees. Clarke how are you with a bow?” Lincoln asks with raised eyebrows.

“Decent.” Clarke admits. Though Kadeon had taught her how to be far more extraordinary than just decent, she didn’t feel the need to express that. And Clarke was almost certain that Lincoln knew that as well as she did, even if he had never seen her shoot a bow before.

“Excellent. Then you will join Tobias in the trees.” Lincoln instructs with the easy calm of a leader.

Lincoln was good at this, Clarke realised. And warmth filled her chest that there was someone else capable and willing to step up and be a leader, even if she wasn’t ready to yet.

Half an hour later, Clarke found herself perched high up amidst the canopy of the trees, fifty metres behind Lincoln and the rest of their party. It was dark, but the full moon above, cast a silver glow over the night. Illuminating the world in soft, muted greys. Because there was more light than usual, Clarke had pulled her navy blue hood up over her head to obscure her face and hair from view. And took great pleasure in the fact that when she moved through the trees she was completely silent. Not even her clothing and armour rustled. The only noise in Clarke’s ears being her own steady heartbeat and even breathing.

When she skipped from one shadow to the next, she was completely invisible to anyone watching. She had spotted Tobias a few times scanning the tree tops for her presence, and had stifled her urge to grin victoriously as he squinted into the night, straining to spot her, and failing to do so. Only when Clarke would allow herself to be seen, did he know where in the trees she was placed. Kadeon would have been proud of her stealth.
Clarke watched keenly from her crouched position on a sturdy branch and surveyed silently as Lincoln and the others moved slowly and noiselessly along the forest floor. They were spaced out so that roughly ten metres lied between each warrior as they stalked through the timberland. All five warriors staying in a disciplined V formation. Putting Lincoln in the middle so that his hand signals could be seen by all. The hulking masses of Angus and Mallion were placed along the outer edge of the group, so that the radio-bearing Bellamy and navigator Mercy, were closer to Lincoln. Clarke and Tobias had been placed on opposite edges of the pack, and left to linger and follow at their own pace. Watching over the group on the ground, and scanning the horizon for danger. Simply tree hopping, when the group moved too far away.

Two hours passed in complete calm, and nothing out of the ordinary occurred. They stopped a few times whenever a sudden noise could be heard, or an unexpected flicker of activity up ahead caught their attention. But it was always likely a wild animal, and disappeared as quickly as it had come.

The night birds continued to sing their nocturnal lullabies, reminding the group that there was no imminent danger ahead. Clarke was admittedly inclined to agree with Octavia’s conclusion about these scouting missions. That they were utterly boring and completely underwhelming, when movement up ahead alerted her of something or someone’s presence. Clarke quickly notched an arrow into her bow and scanned the horizon for further movement. No one had noticed the short burst of activity that had disturbed some of the shrubbery, so the group below continued their steady trek. Clarke watched the area surrounding the bush with laser-like focus, and held her breath as her eyes scanned the terrain. A few bushes over, more movement disturbed the low-lying forestry, and Clarke pulled back the drawstring in response. Ready to shoot whatever lurked behind.

Lincoln must have noticed something a few seconds after Clarke did, because he stopped in his tracks and held a fist up to direct others to do the same. Everyone scampered for the cover of darkness and froze for a moment, waiting for Lincoln’s next orders. He stayed completely still for a moment, and cast a quick glance up into the general direction of where he thought Clarke might be lurking, for confirmation. Clarke released the practiced owl hoot that Kadeon had taught her to confirm that whatever was up ahead probably needed to be checked out, before Lincoln gave his orders. He made purposeful eye contact with each member of his team before holding his hands up and out and pointing out to the sides, before bringing his hands down straight ahead of him in quick flicks of his wrists. Indicating that everyone should spread out and surround whatever it was that was up ahead. Everyone gave him a quick, firm head nod in understanding before stealthily enacting his commands.

Clarke quickly stood from her position and began balancing her way across the tree trunk, to get a better vantage point of the area up ahead. Clarke’s new boots gripped the bark of the trees effortlessly, and her rapid and sure footsteps put her just ahead of the group. Finding an adequate shadow to sink into, Clarke aimed her weapon again. Now that she was closer, she could hear the distinct sounds of wild dogs or perhaps a couple of wolves, snarling. Clarke imitated the quick call of a dove, to stop the advance of the rest of her hunting party. Clarke watched as they all halted their movement and looked around, trying to spot where Clarke’s noise had come from.

Clarke continued to hop between trees noiselessly until she had a Birdseye view of the commotion below her. Two wolves were fighting over three dead grounder bodies. The beasts were so busy snapping and growling at one another that they had not realised that there were humans near. From what Clarke could see the bodies were fresh kills, and from this distance, Clarke could identify Azgeda arrow shafts protruding from the fallen Trikru warriors. Clarke pulled back the bowstring once more, took aim, and let the arrow loose, followed in quick succession by a second arrow to target the remaining wolf. Each arrow finding a home in the eyes of their marks. Clarke whispered the death rights for the fallen and called out her practiced owl’s song to signal the all clear to her companions.
Clarke watched from her perch as Lincoln signalled for everyone to continue their advance.

A few minutes later, the entire group that had been contained to the ground, were surrounding the three dead warriors, looking for tracks and clues of their death. Clarke had stalked closer so that she was directly above them so she could listen to their whispered conversation and continue to scan the area for potential threats.

“The colours and craftsmanship of the arrows are clearly Azgeda.” Mercy comments quietly. Earning unanimous head nods of agreement from the rest of the group.

Tobias had jumped down from his perch by this point and had sauntered over to the gathered warriors crouching near the bodies. He pulled one of the arrows out of the corpses, with a wet crunch, that made almost everyone cringe. “Judging by how deep the arrows are imbedded in the flesh, I would say they were shot from about thirty metres out. But if you look at the marksmanship, it’s sloppy. The fact that the killer was able to slay these men at all is a stroke of luck on his behalf. Whoever killed these men, was inexperienced and green.” Tobias speculates thoughtfully.

Lincoln grasps the arm of one body and tests its manoeuvrability, finding that he struggled to twist the limb in its joints. “The body is already in the beginning stages of rigor mortis. These men have been dead for the past six hours at least.” Lincoln surmises. When he is greeted by looks of confusion from Mallion and Angus, he simplifies his statement. “Their bodies are beginning to stiffen. Meaning they have only been dead for a few hours.”

The group had all but forgotten Clarke’s presence until she dropped down out of the trees, and pointed out the things they had all seemed to overlook. “While you are all right in your observations, you are also wrong.” Clarke says evenly. When she is met by looks of confusion, she elaborates. “Test each body for the same data. See if the circumstances for each slain man is exactly the same.” She instructs.

Tobias pulls the arrows out of each body and examines the depth in which they had struck. “Each man was killed at a different distance. While the first was killed by someone inexperienced from thirty metres. The second was shot with an arrow from a much greater distance, closer to sixty. And the third an even more impressive distance of roughly a hundred metres out.” Tobias whispers with surprise.

“And because they all share the same level of inaccuracy, they could not have been shot by the same person. Because an archer becomes more accurate the closer they are to a target, and sloppier the further away they are, depending on their skill.” Clarke explained. “So, we have three separate archers. Mercy, are the arrows all Azgeda?” Clarke asks quietly.

“Sha Wanheda. They are.” Mercy confirms after a quick re-examination of the weapons.

“So all three archers are Azgeda.” Clarke reiterates for the slower members of the group. “Lincoln, can you check each body for stiffness again?” Clarke asks. Earning a firm nod in reply, as he begins to analyse the bodies a second time.

“According to their varying levels of stiffness, the three men died at different intervals. The oldest body has been dead for about ten hours, whereas the freshest body is still warming, meaning he can’t have died longer than two hours ago.” Lincoln comments with a frown.

“So what does this mean Clarke?” Bellamy asks nervously.

“It means that these bodies were not killed here. They were dumped for us to find.” Clarke says with disgust. Clarke looks around the group and registers their identical expressions of horror and
revulsion, tinged with the just the right amount of fear to be healthy.

“How do you know they were dumped?” Lincoln asks, after a moment of stilted silence as everyone attempted to absorb what Clarke had just told them.

“There is no pooled blood, or spatters anywhere. The area is completely clean. And the bodies are practically laid on top of one another. Any group of warriors with a brain, do not stay so close together, as it limits the amount of cover in case of an attack. The positioning of the fallen warriors is staged. Plus there are drag marks a few metres ahead that I noticed when I killed the wolves.” Clarke says simply, choosing to ignore the astonished and amazed expressions of her companions.

“What does this mean Clarke?” Bellamy asks in a voice far weaker than she had heard in a long time. His fear bleeding into his tone.

“It means the Azgeda are playing games with us.” Clarke whispers solemnly. Her stomach filling with slippery eels as dread settles heavy in her bones.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your thoughts lovelies! :D
Clarke was met with six sets of fearful eyes peering back at her as she uttered her conclusion. The Azgeda warriors were playing games with them. Making her vertebrae feel stiff and brittle beneath skin and muscle. Clarke swallowed down her own anxiety, and straightened her stance, squaring off her shoulders and setting her jaw into a stubborn line of determination. Right in this moment, she knew that she needed to be the pillar of strength for her squad. They needed to look at her and see Wanheda, the legend strong enough to look into the eye of death and remain unwavering. Clarke hardened her resolve and cast a cursory glance towards Lincoln. Lexa had tasked him with the role of leadership, and Clarke did not want to undermine that, but currently he was looking a little green and overwhelmed, if the wide eyes and pale face were anything to judge by.

“What do we do now?” Mercy asks uncertainly. Directing her question to Clarke, as no one else had even made the connection between the three dead Trikru scouts and the circumstances of their death, until she had pointed it out. This whole situation was unnerving, and had left her shaken.

Clarke surveyed the surrounding area for a moment, before turning back to the expectant faces of her peers. “First we need to secure the area, in case the Azgeda are surveilling this region or if they return. We need to be prepared for every eventuality.” Clarke addressed the others in a low commanding tone, so that her voice didn’t carry. Receiving unanimous nods of approval, Clarke continued dishing out orders. “Tobias, I need you up in the trees. If there are any Azgeda in the area, you will be the first to see them.” Tobias nodded sharply, before climbing the nearest tree and disappearing above them. “Mallion and Angus, I need you both to fan out and form a perimeter of about thirty metres to be safe.” Clarke directed firmly. The two men stared at Clarke for a moment, challenge clear in their eyes. But with a stern glare from Clarke they begrudgingly set off to complete their task. Clarke watched the two lumbering forms of the Trikru men leave, and felt slightly more at ease now that their presence was further displaced.

Bellamy who addressed the next part of the plan, as he held up the crude radio that Raven had given him the day before. “We need to report what we found back to the Commander.” He says simply, the tick in his jaw and the terse set of his shoulders, the only indications of his nerves surrounding their grisly discovery.

“Agreed.” Lincoln says weakly. His eyes downcast as he seems to recover from his initial shock. Tensions now being replaced by grim-faced resolve. “We need to know if the commander wants us to return to Alton with the bodies, or if she needs us to continue scouting ahead.” Lincoln suggests confidently. His earlier shock and horror, completely absent now that he had been afforded a moment to compose himself.

Bellamy tuned the radio and began broadcasting in low tones. Awaiting a response. Lincoln, Bellamy and Clarke knew that it would be a few minutes until they heard back from Raven. She had been sleeping when they left, so a grounder or an Arker would have been left to monitor the radio in her absence, and fetch her if anything of importance was broadcasted.

After ten minutes of radio-silence, they were finally greeted by the exhausted, sleep thick voice of one, Raven Reyes.

“This better be important chump.” Raven grumbled through the static.
Clarke could almost imagine the scowl that would be scratching at her lips, and the heavy droop of her lids, as she attempted to focus on her task.

“Reyes. It’s Bellamy. We’ve got something.” Bellamy reports gravelly. His face sparing a quick, horrified glance to the dead men a few feet away.

Raven’s voice immediately became alert over the radio, and her tone grew serious and business-like as she requested all the details of their current circumstance. Bellamy relayed everything they knew so far and heard Raven’s mumbled “fuck,” on the other end. Clarke and her three companions, waited silently as Raven ordered the commander be woken and brought to the tent immediately.

A few minutes later, Lexa’s voice came over the static. “Clarke?”

Clarke observed the way Lexa’s voice did not sound gravelly and sleep slicked, as Raven’s had. She obviously had not been asleep, and Clarke wondered what could have kept her from it. Clarke recalled she and Lexa’s time before the attack on mount weather, and how it was not unusual to spend many a night poring over maps and strategy before the attack. But in their current situation, the strategizing and militant manoeuvring phase was over, and the plan was now being implemented. It had been Lexa herself that had stated to Clarke in a moment of incessant worrying over their plan, that it does nobody any good to second guess plans already made and put into motion. And yet Clarke wondered what could have occurred in order for Lexa to ignore her own philosophy.

Clarke grasped the proffered radio from Bellamy’s outstretched palm, and spoke into the transponder with only slight hesitation. “Yes, Heda?” Clarke says coolly. Preferring to use Lexa’s formal title, in an attempt to subtly relay the need to maintain a professional tone in their conversation.

“Raven has just informed me of the situation.” Lexa states plainly.

Okay good. We need to know if you would prefer us to return the bodies to Alton, or continue to comb the woods for any Azgeda soldiers?” Clarke relays patiently. Turning her back from the group to wait for Lexa’s response.

There is a pause, where only the crackling of static can be heard, before Lexa finally answers.

“What would you do Clarke?” Lexa says evenly. Wanting to encourage Clarke to step up and re-assume her mantle of leadership, but willing to take a step back and allow Clarke to remain adrift in her sea of indecision if she felt truly unready to choose. She lets the question hang between the two of them ominously. Neither the girl of the sky, nor the girl of the ground, knowing if the suggestion was threat or a simple suggestion.

Clarke knew what Lexa was doing. She had been delicately pushing Clarke to pick up the torch and continue to burn bright as a leader of her people. She had not been oblivious to Lexa’s nudges. But Clarke was under no illusions that she had been ready and willing to step in for Lincoln and lead the scouting party, in case he grew too over-whelmed by the responsibility, only moments ago. She might not have been prepared to lead anyone a month ago, but much had changed since she was the girl standing before the gates of Arcadia. Clarke finally broke the tension that had befallen the two girls.

“I would not choose between the two tasks, as they could both yield promising results. The bodies could tell us more about how and where they died. Which in turn could reveal more about the Ice Nation’s tactics. By continuing to scout the area, we might find the perpetrators of the crime, if not others roaming the area still. So to accommodate both missions, I would split the scouting party in half. Send the warriors with larger muscle mass and one of the Alton navigators to return the bodies of the murdered Trikru warriors for further investigation and funeral rights. And then the rest would
continue to scout the woods as we did before.” Clarke says evenly.

“Then do precisely that Clarke.” Lexa says kindly, a proud tone of voice present that had not been only moments before. There is another minute of silence that stretches, before Lexa speaks again. “Be careful Clarke.” She near-whispered through the radio.

Clarke has no misconceptions as to which mission she will be venturing on. She will be continuing to scout the lands until morning. And she knows that Lexa knows this. Clarke feels a flutter of warmth come to life in her chest like a beautiful butterfly taking wing, as she realises that Lexa not only knew Clarke’s mind, but also supported her decision despite perhaps not seeing the wisdom in such an action. Especially since it poses such great risk to Clarke’s person. “I will.” Clarke assures softly, before switching off the radio and returning the device to Bellamy.

Clarke turned to her friends a moment later when the small smile that had arisen, unbidden, had been firmly tucked away again. “Mercy, please tell Mallion and Angus that they will be joining you in returning these dead men, back to Alton.” Clarke commands easily. The role of leadership so easy to slip into that, it feels like a second skin. Clarke watches as Lincoln gives her a small, secret smile. Like he knew exactly how much this realisation both heartened and unnerved Clarke simultaneously.

“Sha Wanheda.” Mercy whispers, a determined frown furrowing her sculpted brow, before quickly disappearing to relay the message.

“Lincoln and Bell, you both will accompany Tobias and myself on the rest of the scouting mission.” Clarke commands breezily. A moment later, Clarke feels a little more self-conscious with her strong-arming behaviour and her demeanour becomes markedly uncomfortable. “If you are both okay with that…” Her sentence tapers off uncertainly.

“I assure you Clarke. We both trust your judgement, and are willing to follow your commands.” Lincoln bolsters, placing a reaffirming squeeze on Clarke’s shoulder. Clarke can’t stifle the brilliant grin she beams towards her two friends in reply.

“Just a quick question. Why do you want to bring me along with you? I mean sure I have a gun and a radio, but it’s not like you both don’t know how to use them yourselves. I am a good shot, but I am not very good with close quarter combat. I am not as good a fighter as the two of you.” Bellamy points out. His tone resolute and confused, and his shoulders lifting in a self-deprecating little shrug.

“I trust you.” Clarke says simply. Like it’s the most obvious answer in the world. And this time it was Bellamy’s turn to grin so wide his face looked too small to contain it.

Before any further conversation could be had. Mallion and Angus were approaching with heaving, angry footsteps. Their faces set into reproachful scowls that carved their faces into stone gargoyles. Strong yet ugly. Mallion stopped just before Clarke, Angus a step behind him. Their arms crossed across their beef-laden chests.

“Wanheda. What is the meaning of this!” Mallion whispered hoarsely. His voice shaking with restrained rage. “You would have us fulfil the task of babysitting corpses, whilst you reap the glory of hunting down and killing the Azgeda scum!” He spat accusingly.

Even in the pale silver light, Clarke could see the shade of crimson his rage had transformed his face into. He looked as though someone had poured pigs blood onto his head…

Clarke turned her gaze to ice and hardened her facial muscles to resemble marble. The intensity of her gaze in and of itself enough to turn Mallion into someone bearing more resemblance to the corpses at their feet. And yet his anger continued to seethe below the surface. Bubbling dangerously.
“Are you saying that you value glory over your honor Mallion?” Clarke says lowly, the threat in her voice becoming a living, breathing thing looming over Mallion’s head, eager to remove his chalk-white face from his body. “Because seeking out a bloody battle when you have been ordered otherwise is dishonourable, and makes you an untrustworthy soldier. And no person will trust a man to guard their back if he will abandon his post in search for something as vain and self-serving as glory. Which means I cannot trust you and therefore you have no use to me.” Clarke’s tone had reached sub-zero temperatures, and Mallion looked ready to paint his pants brown. Yet Clarke continued to slowly ascend on him. Like a predator stalking its prey. So sure in her impending victory, it seemed almost lazy and careless, like a cat playing with her food before she killed and ate it. Clarke knew that when she unleashed Wanheda in small doses, it caused men and women to freeze to the spot in their fear. And that was only after a mere glimpse of the monster within.

Clarke wondered if the war paint gifted by Lexa, altered the way Wanheda writhed beneath the surface. Because unbeknownst to Clarke, the kohl smeared around her eyes made the young girl look like the angel of death come to collect the souls of the unjust. Like a black void in space with two all-seeing orbs the colour of the most arctic ice. The image was thrilling and terrifying all at once. The kind of beauty so immense and so deadly that it turned her victims to stone with one glance.

“So are you of use to me Mallion?” Clarke smirks wickedly, as her fingertips flirt with the handle of her dagger, caressing the cold, unrelenting metal.

“Yes Wanheda. I.. I… I am sorry Wanheda.” Mallion quickly amends, his bottom lip quivering helplessly. And some dark, twisted part of Clarke’s soul took immense pleasure in destroying a man with only a few words and a glare so cold that even the Ice Queen would tremble and freeze under its intensity. And yet another conflicting part of Clarke — the side she recognised vaguely as the home for her humanity. Recoiled from the sight of her own actions. Repulsed by the threats and sadistic revelling of Wanheda. Clarke was broken out of her blood-lusted stupor, when Angus pushed past Mallion and addressed her. Stupidly, but bravely.

“I thought Lincoln was in charge here. Not you.” Angus sneered pettily. But before Clarke could defend herself and Angus could continue his verbal assault, Lincoln had stepped into his face and glared at him ruthlessly.

“This is Wanheda you speak to. The Commander of Death. You are a fool if you think she does not have the right to command something as base and simple as men. Show some respect you dim-witted worm.” Lincoln says with bravado and malice that only Clarke and Bellamy know is false.

Despite what many people thought of Wanheda, Clarke knew that Lincoln didn’t look at her and just see Wanheda, he saw Clarke first and foremost. It wasn’t Wanheda he respected and nurtured a friendship with, it was Clarke Griffin. And in his own way, Clarke knew that Lincoln was protecting his friend the best way he knew how.

By threatening them with the darkness that crept inside Clarke’s soul.

By intimidating them with the wrath of Wanheda.

And it worked too. Angus scrambled back a safe distance and mumbled something about Mallion smelling like shit, as he passed his friend.

Shortly thereafter Clarke, Bellamy, Lincoln and Tobias left Mallion, Angus and Mercy, to continue on with their hunting party. Trusting that now the two lumbering oafs had the fear of god... No that was inaccurate. The fear of Wanheda instilled so deep in their bones, it pained them like a phantom limb. That they would return the bodies to Alton without further incident or molestation.
The squad of four continued to venture deeper into the forest, drawing closer with every step to Azgeda territory. Following the drag marks, with the glowing silver coin hung in the sky as their only guiding light. Tobias and Clarke continued to move through the treetops as they did before, but they stuck much closer to Bellamy and Lincoln now that their group was smaller. It would otherwise be too difficult to defend them in a larger space.

Clarke had again pulled up her hood and crept through the shadows with ease. Her eyes attuned to every rustle and sway. Scanning relentlessly for signs of danger, while Lincoln studied the ground for clues in the mud and dirt of the mossy forest floor. Clarke vaguely wondered how sore his neck must be from bending down constantly.

Clarke continued to keep Tobias in her peripheral vision as she surveyed her surroundings meticulously. Eager to find the sick bastards that had murdered the Trikru warriors, but also unwilling to sacrifice her friends in order to accommodate a dark, twisted vendetta for revenge. Despite Trikru not being her own clan, Clarke felt responsible for them. She had a new value for human life that had only developed after the fall of mount weather, and after she had ruthlessly murdered Carl Emerson in the mud. And while Clarke’s first instinct was to protect the innocent, her second instinct also screamed for her to destroy those who would do so to her in the same heartbeat.

Her compulsion to protect and her urge to kill. Were so conflicting and painfully contradictory, and yet they both coexisted within the confines of a single human being. Clarke often times felt like the strain of such a feat would tear her apart from the inside out. Or at the very least send her mad. And while it was in no way a peaceful cohabitation, Clarke felt as though her need to preserve life and rip it away were both necessary forces, to maintain some kind of balance between the two. After all, no one could truly preserve all life without endangering some. And one could not extinguish life, without saving some of it simultaneously.

For example saving the life of a serial killer, would in turn endanger the lives of his future victims. But by ending the life of a serial killer, you inadvertently save his future victims from the horrible fate they would have suffered at his hands. One could not exist without the other. The world wasn’t so black and white as to dictate matters as complex as this. It was less to do with simple wrong or right, yes or no ideals and more to with the balance of the world. A set of scales that demanded to be equalised, no matter the cost. And Clarke found that if she contemplated the topic too hard, a migraine would threaten the wellbeing of her head, through a piercing and relentless ache.

Clarke and her remaining hunting party continue to follow the tracks for a solid hour and a half, making excellent time without further incident. The men that had either placed the three dead Trikru along their path or killed them were only a few minutes ahead of them. Their tracks fresh and easier to follow in the slight pinkening of the sky. From what they could tell, the group that they hunted was larger than their own. Consisting of at least eight in their number, and that was discounting the fact that they might have archers in the tress.

Clarke was confident in their chances of success, however she didn’t want to force her friends into a battle they did not feel comfortable fighting. However before Clarke could ask, Lincoln and Bellamy gave Clarke a thumbs up to signal their support of the plan regardless. Tobias giving her a slight nod in approval also.

Clarke signalled for the group to continue following the trail, and prepared herself to move quieter and faster than before. Knowing that if her friends were to remain unscathed, she would need to take out the archers and as many warriors as possible.

Slinking into the shadows once more, Clarke ran silently along the branches, displacing her weight evenly to keep the branches from swaying and jerking with her movements. Clarke was a solid ten
metres ahead of her friends when she noticed the first Ice Nation soldiers.

Clarke notched an arrow in her bow and took aim, scanning the trees for their archers. Spotting two, Clarke grimaced, knowing that the fight before them was about to become much more difficult, now that they had at least ten foes to defeat amidst the four of them.

Azgeda tended to lace their weapons with poison, meaning that if her friends were to be cut or stabbed during combat it would likely be fatal. Clarke however had been exposed to the Azgeda poisons before whilst Nia assassins hunted Kadeon. Each time exposed to it, the poisons toxicity decreased. And Clarke knew that she would have built up a sturdy immunity to the compound by this point. So in order to protect her friends, Clarke knew that only she would be swift and deadly enough to dispatch most of the warriors before her friends were exposed to mortal danger.

Taking aim, Clarke trained her weapon on the slowly moving target before her. And then she released, knowing that the arrow would hit its mark, she rapidly pulled a second arrow from her quiver to launch at the second archer she had spotted in the trees. Hastily placing a third in the cradle of her bow, she took aim yet again at the closest warrior on the ground, and released the taught bowstring in her hand. The tips of her fingers burned as the arrows whistled through the air. All three projectiles finding their homes in mere seconds of each other.

The two archers plummeting limply from their trees with foreign bodies imbedded in their eyes. And the third warrior on the ground falling with a loud stumble and cry as the arrow pierced his heart from behind, killing him mere moments later. Clarke took aim for a fourth kill but by the time the arrow was being released, the other warriors had taken note of their fallen comrades and had moved to take up defensive positions from her onslaught, and her arrow narrowly missed its intended victim, imbedding itself in a tree by his head.

Clarke quickly darted between tree limbs to get a better vantage point, moving swiftly and silently amidst the shadows. The enemy of the ground craned their necks to scan the forestry above their heads and locate her hiding place, but to no avail. The precious moments the Azgeda took to search for Clarke’s position was all her friends needed to launch a further attack upon them. Sneaking up behind them and then moving to kill them quickly.

Lincoln levelled a blurring strike to an unsuspecting Azgeda’s neck, and severed it from his body with one debilitating blow. Blood splashing across his face in as his artery relinquished their quarry.

Clarke heard a gunshot go off from Bellamy as he killed an Ice Nation woman running at him with a crude machete, killing her instantly, but before he could take aim again, he had been swarmed by a man twice his size, and had engaged in close-quarter combat. The man swung out viciously, and jerked Bellamy’s arm at an unnatural angle, dislocating the joint. Just as the lumbering man disarmed Bellamy of his gun, and prepared to land the final, fatal blow, Lincoln was rushing between them and catching his blade with his own, stepping in to shield his lovers brother. Lincoln and the man were evenly matched, and engaged in the dance of combat. Parrying and glancing blows off of one another for a few moments while Bellamy scrambled to retrieve his gun. The fight ending when Bellamy promptly shot the man in the head. Scattering his brains to the wind in a puff of pink mist.

Tobias quickly shot a man with an arrow, missing anything vital the first time, but delivering his death with a second arrow to the heart. The man falling with an anguished cry. An enemy arrow glanced past him as he moved to find a better vantage point, only missing him by mere inches and alerting him to a third archer hidden in the trees. Finding cover behind the thick trunk of a tree, and notching another arrow to return fire. Tobias and the enemy archer engaged in their own personal war of accuracy and speed. Both dispatching arrows, and both either deflecting them or moving quickly enough to dodge them before they found a home in their bodies.
The Azgeda beneath Clarke were all moving too quickly and dodging behind trees and forestry to counter any arrows she might launch towards them. Realising that she was least useful above the fight, Clarke gracefully climbed down the trunk of the tree, before dropping out of it completely when she was low enough to avoid injury.

Clarke sprinted to intercept the remaining three warriors that had begun advancing upon Lincoln and Bellamy. Her muscles straining, and the breeze lashing at her face in her haste and effort to reach the enemy before they reached her friends. Silently placing herself behind one woman, Clarke unsheathed her sword from her back and savagely ran the razor sharpness of her blade across the exposed softness of her throat. The gargled exhale of the woman’s final breath, and the warmth of blood splashing against her hand, eliciting the feral excitement of Wanheda.

Clarke quickly ran towards her next opponent, slashing his legs out from underneath him. The man’s body arching in the air to fall backwards. Clarke swiftly swirled and lifted her sword to impale his still beating heart and drive his body into the cold dirt. The man died with a pained grunt.

Clarke reefed her sword out of the dead man’s chest cavity, blood spraying across her face, just in time to block the savage downwards swing of the next Azgeda man’s great broadsword. Clarke staggered backwards as he beared down on his weapon. Clarke locked her legs and pushed forwards with all of her might, knocking the man temporarily off balance. Clarke took a quick step backwards to prepare for the man’s next heavy downwards thrust. Her foe had manoeuvred his sword to attack single handed, and Clarke easily deflected his blow, but the man had reached into his belt with the second hand and brandished a dagger. When Clarke positioned her body to deflect the blow of his sword, she inadvertently left her right flank vulnerable. The man quickly thrust out his dagger with hasty speed, using the momentum created from his failed sword strike to drive his dagger forward.

Clarke felt a jolt of fear pass through her body as she realised the strike too late. Swiftly shifting her body to try and outmanoeuvre his strike.

Clarke felt sudden burning pain as the dagger made contact with the flesh above her ribs. Tearing through her new black armour and slicing through the muscle beneath. Clarke bit down her cry of pain, and pushed her discomfort aside. Clarke twisted her sword around, and used it to cut the man’s dagger wielding arm clean from his body. Severing the limb just below the elbow. The man released an anguished shriek, as his arm fell away. Clarke twisted her blade in a rapid figure-eight, before driving her blade through the man’s chest. Clarke kicked off of the man’s limp body as he fell, to pull her sword free from the bone it had imbedded itself within. The sword came free with a grinding squelch. Clarke wiped the bloody blade along the now dead Azgeda’s clothing, before sheathing her weapon.

Turning around in a careful arc, Clarke scanned the surrounding area for any surviving Azgeda. Tobias was still locked in combat with the sole remaining archer, and having no luck in pinning her down Clarke quickly began climbing up the closest tree, and started creeping ever closer to the remaining Azgeda. Hopping between tree limbs and remaining hidden in the little remaining shadows provided in the growing light of dawn.

Clarke removed her dagger from its home at her thigh and aimed at the Azgeda’s head when she was only a few feet away from her position. Oblivious to her presence, the young woman continued her assault upon Tobias. Clarke aimed her dagger carefully, only wanting to knock her out instead of killing her. After all their orders were to capture if at all possible. Clarke threw the dagger with pinpoint accuracy and winced at the dull crack the dagger made as it collided with the young woman’s skull. The Azgeda archer fell limp from the tree, unconscious instead of dead, just as Clarke had intended.

Dropping gracefully from the tree Clarke retrieved her dagger from its resting place amidst the dirt,
next to the insensible girl. Clarke surveyed the area carefully once more to check for any lingering threats. Finding none, she made her way over to Lincoln and Bellamy. The latter who sat uncomfortably on a log, clutching at his dislocated shoulder with a pained groan.

Clarke approached him wordlessly, and avoided looking at all the death she had caused. Of the eleven enemies they had faced, she was responsible for six of their deaths. The nausea lashing at her stomach threatened to empty itself in the bloody battlefield.

“This is going to hurt.” Clarke warns emotionlessly, desperately trying to ease the battle sickness she was now afflicted with, by distracting herself from the gore. Grasping Bellamy’s arm, she carefully twisted it in a slow arc to pop the joint back into its proper place. With a final sickening crunch, the head of the bone manoeuvred back into its rightful place. Bellamy released an agonised grunt. His breathing laboured and sweat heavy along his brow, Bellamy mumbled out a brief thanks. Clarke retrieved a length of cloth from one of the dead, and used it to tie Bellamy’s arm in a sling.

“There’s one unconscious over there.” Clarke indicated with a brief flick of her wrists. “We’ll take her back to Alton for questioning.” Clarke watched impassively as Lincoln stiffened slightly as she mentioned the word ‘question’, knowing that it was really indicative of torture. The thought made Clarke queasy, again, but she forced herself to push it down. She couldn’t afford to show her weakness on the matter. For she knew that Tobias would still be watching from the trees. And despite her self-loathing over the name. Wanheda needed to be seen as unaffected by death.

Lincoln makes his way over to the unconscious warrior and begins fastening rope around her hands and propping her up against a tree, before restrictively tethering her to the trunk there as well.

In an attempt to liven the atmosphere that had stagnated since mentioning questioning the prisoner, Clarke turned her attention back to Bellamy and offered him a weak smile. “You need to work on your hand to hand combat Bell.” She teased lightly. Bellamy released a pained chuckle and a wry grin.

“Yeah, I wondered if you saw that.” Bellamy says breathlessly.

“Yeah. I saw.” Clarke retorts with genuine humour in her tone.

“Ah, well that’s embarrassing.” Bellamy complains happily. “You did pretty well for yourself.” He points out, gesturing to the destruction around them. “Now I know why Octavia smarted from her sparring with you for days after your impromptu fight. I didn’t realise you were such a badass princess.” Bellamy says lightly.

“Yeah.” Clarke says absentmindedly, brushing off the comment as inconsequential. Ignoring the way the good-natured comment made the nausea churn once more.

“How did you get so good? You were only gone for a year and half, and already you’re better than most grounders are after training for battle all their lives.” Bellamy says with a strange cadence. One Clarke recognises as calculating suspicion. While Bellamy wasn’t accusing Clarke of anything untoward, he was curious as to how she had surpassed many other warriors skill level in such a short period.

“Fast learner.” Clarke dismisses. Eager to avoid talking about it right now. Out in the open with a warrior nearby whom she did not fully trust.

Lincoln chose that moment to return to the group, breaking the tension. “We need to return to Alton. We were only meant to be away for six hours, and we have already been gone for seven easily. We
have a two hour walk ahead of us at least. Now that the sun is up, and visibility is improved, we can move at a faster rate.” Lincoln states plainly. Rubbing a mixture of sweat, blood and war paint from his brow.

“We should radio ahead and tell them we’ve been delayed.” Bellamy suggests. Pulling the radio from his belt. Lincoln and Clarke nod their agreement.

“Reyes. It’s Bellamy.” He says into the transponder once. Fully expecting to be made to wait twenty minutes like last time, he was surprised when Raven replied immediately.

“Bell, thank god! Are you okay? What’s happening? You were all meant to be back an hour ago!” She screeched.

“Raven, we’re all fine.” Bellamy interrupts. “Don’t worry. We’ve only been delayed. Ran into some trouble but we’re all safe. We have a prisoner for questioning for the commander. We will be back in a few hours.” Bellamy reports with a fond smile.

“Oh thank god! I’ve been up all night worrying about you guys!” Raven yells with anger born from concern.

The trio burst into laughter as they each imagine Raven staying up half the night without the aid of caffeine. And the fates that must have befallen those that came near her in the time that followed. They all know how Raven gets when she is denied coffee.

“Well we’re fine Rae. Go get some sleep and we’ll see you when we get back.” Clarke says into the radio. A small smile playing at the corners of her lips.

“Okay sounds good to me. Mama’s gotta get some shuteye. Be careful guys. See you soon.” Raven says enthusiastically over the static, and then promptly signs off.

After checking in with Raven, the battle tired group began the long trek back to Alton. They constructed a make-shift stretcher to keep the unconscious prisoner tied to. Tobias chose to travel along the ground with Lincoln, Bellamy and the Azgeda captive, while Clarke remained poised in the trees above. Watching both ahead and behind their route to ensure their safety. After a few hours of travelling in silence, the group finally reached the outskirts of Alton, where they were greeted by the Commander, Ontari, Raven a few other trusted guards.

Clarke bit down her urge to smirk as Lexa gifted her with tiniest of relieved smiles. Unnoticeable to any others in their proximity except Clarke, the expression was so miniscule. Only the most insignificant twitches of facial muscles and lightening in the eyes. But Clarke saw it and furthermore, knew that Lexa had been worried about her.

Clarke’s heart was fluttering like a hummingbird in the gilded cage of her chest. It had been gradually speeding up in the past half-hour of their journey. And yet it seemed to be reaching its crescendo now. A part of Clarke wanted to blame the physiological response to Lexa’s proximity, and yet she knew it was not the case. Something was wrong. Her vision began to swim, and her legs stumbled.

As black spots invaded her vision, Clarke recalled the dagger that had been dragged across her ribs. The pain that she had felt as her foe’s metal kissed her flesh cruelly.

I must have been injured, Clarke’s mind surmised. Only she hadn’t even noticed the wound as they travelled. So she had not realised the poison now coursing through her body.

Her poison-addled brain offered two faces to her mind’s eye before blackness consumed her. Grace
and her grounding, calming presence. With the inane ability to melt Clarke’s heart with a single smile. And… Lexa. Whose eyes could unravel her secrets and lay bare her soul with one glance. Who knew her so well, and accepted her anyway.

Clarke tried to clasp onto the faces, but the darkness of oblivion was too inviting. And a moment later, she was lost to it.

Chapter End Notes

Here's a new chapter for all you lovelies!
Really hope you enjoy it, I certainly had fun writing it.
Please, please, please! Leave me some feedback guys! I am always looking to improve my writing, and by letting me know what you do and do not like about my story, lets me become better. Plus I really do love hearing your thoughts. So please, comment, provide feedback, I WANT to know! :D

On another note: Merry Christmas ladies and gents! (It might be a day too late but too bad!)
Hope everyone had a fantastic holiday!
The moment Clarke lost consciousness, felt like it was occurring in slow motion for Lexa. Her body reacted on pure instinct as Clarke’s eyes rolled to the back of her head and her body fell limp to the ground. Lexa was the first one by her side, holding her head in her lap, while she screeched at Jameson to fetch the village healer. Lincoln, Bellamy, Raven and even Ontari were quickly by her side, fretting over Clarke and speculating what was wrong.

“Was she injured in the fight?” Lexa questions hoarsely. Her throat felt constricted and tight as her heart hammered in her chest with fear and worry. Adrenaline burning hot and white through Lexa’s veins. It was Lincoln who answered Lexa’s fevered query.

“I don’t know, she didn’t say anything if she was.” Lincoln says calmly. The anguish was clear on his face, but he fought to keep his tone even. Everyone else around him was out of their minds with disquiet, he needed to be the one with the level head. Part of Lincoln watched the Commander lose her control, and wondered if her concern was born out of something far more tangible than care for another leader, but for someone who held a piece of her heart. It would explain why Clarke was so volatile towards Heda in the beginning. Lincoln calmly ordered the remaining guards to take the prisoner to the village dungeons, and to speak to no one of what they had seen here.

Lexa immediately began running her hands along Clarke’s body, inspecting it for damage. When she reached Clarke’s ribs and her hand came away bloody, her heart sank into the pit of her stomach like a lead balloon. Nausea clawed uncomfortably at her oesophagus, as her breakfast attempted to spill itself on the ground before her. Lexa forced herself to maintain her composure, and pushed her discomfort aside, refocusing her energies on Clarke. Lexa unfastened the beautiful new chest armour she had had designed and made especially for Clarke, and lifted up her blood soaked tunic to inspect the damage.

The nausea crawled further up her throat. Feeling like it was burning a hole in her body. There was a deep gash that spread across at least three of her ribs for roughly twelve centimetres. The wound looked cavernous and deadly to Lexa’s biased eyes. But she knew that if the victim was not Clarke she might have admired the wounds clean edges and simply be thankful that the blade had not pierced the bone or the precious organs that rested beneath. The wound was spilling blood at a steady rate, and Lexa was momentarily shocked to see Raven move quickly to apply pressure to the wound. Clarke released a pained groan as Raven’s hands pushed against her injury.

“You’re hurting her!” Lexa growled menacingly. Her brain not fully comprehending why Raven was touching Clarke and eliciting more pain purposely. Lexa’s mind was fuzzy with alarm and distress for Clarke, and her thoughts were jumbled and confusing. Not making sense to even herself.

“I have to slow the bleeding. It’s been open and losing blood for hours now. I am surprised she didn’t pass out sooner.” Raven says slowly. Her voice shaking, but her tone soft and surprisingly strong. Brooking no further argument from Lexa.

“If she was cut by an Azgeda blade, it may already be too late for her. They lace their weapons with deadly poison.” Ontari utters gravelly. Her face turning an unhealthy shade of white, as she considers the odds of Clarke surviving the Ice Nation’s treachery.

“She is not dead yet, so stop talking like she is.” Bellamy shouts angrily at Ontari. “Let’s get her up
and to the healer. She needs medical attention now. So stop standing around arguing about it!” He bellows with frustration.

They each grabbed a limb, with Raven continuing to apply pressure and attempting to keep up as they began running towards the village healing hut. Trying not to jostle Clarke too much, and endeavouring not to move too quickly for Raven’s brace-bound leg. As they ran Lexa’s mind began to clear from its earlier stupor and her thoughts finally began to catch up with the situation and a thought sprang to mind. “We can’t let the villagers see Clarke like this. They believe Wanheda is invincible. To know she can be weakened by poison and a blade will embolden assassins to attempt in killing her and taking the power of Wanheda for themselves.” Lexa says breathlessly. Bellamy and Raven shoot Lexa incredulous looks of annoyance but do not argue with her decision to skirt around the village instead of travel through the middle of it.

When they arrive at the healers hut there is an older woman, with greying hair and dark blue eyes feverishly working to gather all the herbs required to treat Clarke’s wound. She barely looks up from her work when they arrive, simply commanding them to lay Clarke on the cot and for anyone unnecessary to aiding her, to step outside and wait. Bellamy leaves straight away, probably to inform Octavia of Clarke’s condition, but Lexa pays him no mind.

In the corner of the room, Lexa watches as Jameson stokes the fire and heats a blade in its flames, just as the older woman had instructed. And another young woman with raven hair and the same dark blue eyes as the healer, tries to calm the tear-stained face of Grace. Lexa hadn’t even noticed the incessant crying in her haste to help Clarke. Lincoln quietly walks over to the young woman, explains that the child knows him, and snuggled the small child tightly to his chest. The little girl clinging to him as her sobs begin to lessen. Before leaving the hut, Lincoln turns to the healer and whispers something in her ear. Lexa moves subtly closer in order to hear better and catches the tail end of their hushed conversation.

“… There is a chance the poison will not kill her, if she has been exposed to it before.” Lincoln says quietly. The healer’s eyes widen momentarily before nodding in understanding and continuing with her work.

Lexa felt her own eyes widen as the implications of the overheard conversation comes to mind. The first point Lexa’s brain chose to latch onto, was that Lincoln was obviously privy to information that Lexa was not. Clarke had obviously confided in him about some of her past. The truth of that knowledge stung, like salt in an open wound. But Lexa pushed it aside, as she considered the phrasing of Lincoln’s words. There was a chance that she might not die from the poison. But that would mean that she had had encounters with Azgeda before, and not just that but her body had begun to undergo the process of immunity to the deadly toxin. Meaning that she had been exposed to it on numerous occasions, not just once or twice. It probably explained why Clarke was not dead already. From the size of the wound, Lexa surmised that there must be a large quantity of the poison in her body. Only someone with a tolerance to the substance could survive its effects for this long.

Lincoln then left the hut, cradling Grace in his strong arms. The raven haired stranger following closely behind him, her eyes fixed on Grace with protective intensity. Lexa vaguely wondered what the connection between the raven-haired girl and Clarke’s daughter was, to warrant such intensity and protective instinct.

Refocusing on the scene before her, Lexa watches as Raven continues to apply pressure to Clarke’s wound and Ontari rips the navy blue shirt from her body, leaving Clarke in nothing but her chest bindings and pants.

Lexa heard a sharp inhale of breath as Clarke’s scarred body comes into view, unknowing that it
came from her own mouth. Lexa appraises the dreadfully blemished skin in horror, wanting and needing to know how they had occurred. She had of course seen the scar above her right collarbone peeking out from Clarke’s clothing, but she had no idea that the rest of Clarke’s body was so marred. It was the body of a warrior, and Lexa found herself viewing Clarke as such. Even though Lexa had known of Clarke’s skill with a blade, had seen the body’s left in her wake when they were in Arcadia. It hadn’t truly become real until she was staring at Clarke’s battle-scarred body. Beautiful and muscular, but slightly disfigured from battles won and lost. Just like her own.

“Heda, I mean no disrespect, but you are in my way. So kindly wait outside. You too guard boy.” The old healer scolds impatiently towards Lexa and Jameson. As she mixes together what looks like carrot and charcoal into a disgusting, thick brown paste. Jameson quickly leaves without further argument, leaving only Lexa behind, gaping shocked at the woman’s audacity.

“I am not going anywhere.” Lexa announces stubbornly.

The woman fixes an impressive glare at Lexa’s person, as she continues to grind the paste. “Fine. But you wait in that corner.” The woman points to the furthest corner from Clarke with an irritated flick of her wrist. “You move, and I will kick you out.” She promises with a scowl. “This is not your domain Heda, it is mine. And I will not let Clarke’s care be compromised by your stubbornness.” The old woman threatens.

Lexa is temporarily taken aback, both by the woman’s obvious familiarity with Clarke, but also by the tone in which she had addressed her Heda with. Lexa however, could not bring herself to be offended by the woman’s brashness, but instead did as she was told. Grateful to be allowed in the room at all.

The woman quickly darted over to Clarke when the paste was complete, and began inspecting the wound.

“It’s poisoned isn’t it?” Ontari confirms with eerie calm and soberness.

Lexa feels her heart constrict painfully in her chest, as the healer nods sadly, her face going momentarily slack in her melancholy. Before perking up again as she contemplates something deep in thought. Leaving Lexa to wonder if she was thinking about Lincoln’s earlier confession.

“The blood vessels surrounding the wound are beginning to turn black. And I know of only one substance that darkens the veins near a fresh cut. It is Azlipa-Tozu.” The woman utters miserably.

“The size of the wounds guarantees that it was probably a lethal dose. She will likely be dead in the next day.” The woman reports with tears in her eyes. Ontari’s face whitens and Raven’s slackens as the woman confirms that Clarke will possibly die.

“What is Azlipa-Tozu?” Raven asks weakly. She had already guessed the answer, but she just needed to hear it spoken aloud.

“It is a deadly poison from Azgeda. Its literal translation means venom from the ice fish scale. It is very rare and there is no known antidote. It does not harm the Ice Nation warriors who use it, because they poison themselves purposefully in small doses to build up a tolerance to it.” Lexa says emotionlessly. Her tone deadened and weak even to her own ears. But underneath the astounding grief she felt over the prospect of Clarke dying, Lexa found herself clinging to the conversation she overheard between Lincoln and the healer, and felt hope flare in her chest dangerously.

“It ensures that if their blade does not kill you, their poison will. They are cowards.” Ontari says angrily. Ignoring the pointed looks in the direction of her facial scars identifying herself as Azgeda. When it appears that Ontari will not dignify their obvious curiosity with a response, the attention in the room drifts back to Clarke.
Silence reigns in the room for a moment. The four women each watching the steady rise and fall of Clarke’s chest as she sucks in laboured breath. It is the healer to break the stalemate, as she pulls the dagger from the fire and prepares to cauterise her wound.

“What are you doing?” Ontari asks quietly. Knowing that continuing to treat Clarke’s wound would only ensure that she suffered a long and painful death. It would be more merciful to give her a clean death now and save her the agony.

“If anyone can survive this. It is Clarke. That girl is as stubborn as a mule, and kicks just as hard. She will pull through this.” The woman says simply.

The healer pulls away Ravens hands and prepares to flatten the white hot blade to her flesh. “Hold her down.” She commands. The three women, each secure a part of Clarke’s prone body, and apply their weight. But nothing prepared them for the unholy shriek that tore itself free from Clarke’s lungs as the blade was pressed against her flesh. The smell of burning skin, permeated the air. Clarke’s body bucked to be free of their grasp, and she nearly succeeded a number of times. Every person in that room aside from the healer seemed surprised by the display of bodily strength, and they each exchanged wary glances as they considered if they would be enough to restrain the struggling girl.

When the wound was finally closed and the knife was pulled away, Clarke stopped fighting them and again fell limp to the cot. The healer then began applying the carrot and charcoal paste as a poultice against the injured flesh of Clarke’s ribs.

“How is that disgusting concoction meant to help Clarke?” Raven asked breathlessly. The exertions it had taken to restrain Clarke had left her winded and exhausted. She was not used to using so much physical strength to achieve a goal. Tending instead to utilise her brain and technology to solve her problems for her.

“The carrot and charcoal will help draw the poison out from her bloodstream. The wound is only fresh, so we might be able to stop the toxin from overwhelming her body and killing her if enough is extracted.” The woman explained. “I will also give her some tea made from crimson seaweed of the lake, to help expel the poison and prevent the wound from festering.” The healer tells the group patiently. Her gaze firmly fixed on the task before her, as she begins to cover the wound in a clean bandage. “Lift her so I can place the cloth around her back.” She orders.

The three women gently sit Clarke upright, and all three let out a collective gasp as their eyes gravitate towards the big, jagged scar along Clarke’s shoulder blade and spine. “How the hell did she do that?” Raven yelped with disbelief and shock. Looking around the room to the expressions of Ontari and the Commander, who shared her look of surprise as they examined the obnoxious mark.

Lexa noticed with barely concealed confusion and burning curiosity as Naomi stroked the edge of the scar and smiled a small private grin. “You know how this happened don’t you.” Lexa says gently. Fighting hard to keep the accusation from her tone, and bottle up the hurt that lingered in her heart when she realised that Clarke still didn’t trust her enough to tell her about something like this herself.

“Maybe.” The small woman replied cryptically, her smile widening when Lexa, Ontari and Raven frowned in response. “It is not my story to tell.” She says simply, clearly dismissing the topic.

The healer continues to wrap Clarke’s ribs and begins boiling the seaweed for the tea. Studiously ignoring the three women’s looks of annoyance, inquisitiveness and small expressions of hurt, over gossip being withheld from them.
Lexa’s mind was going into overdrive as she attempted to put together the pieces of the puzzle that she had inadvertently been given over the past few days. Lexa thinks back to the fear and apprehension Clarke had displayed while they had travelled and her need to escape Alton, leading Lexa to the conclusion that she had been here before, and moreover, was fearful of this place. Either from memories of the village, or perhaps the people of the place, Lexa was unsure. But it was obvious that this strange woman knew Clarke, and was even familiar with an injury she had sustained, presumably while Clarke had been staying in Alton. So she would have needed a healer to help tend to the wound. And the woman’s reaction was so clearly one of pride, that it was not a leap to assume that it was her own work that the woman was proud of, as she examined the now healed injury. So whatever had caused that damage had occurred during Clarke’s time in Alton. The shape and indentation of the wound track was unlike that of any blade or weapon Lexa was familiar with, begging the question, how the horrendous injury was inflicted? Judging by how well the scar had healed, and the whiteness of its colour, it was not a recent wound and it probably happened not long after the fall of the mountain men.

Lexa’s mind drifted to the map littered with colourful markings sitting in the bottom of her clothes chest. The extensive search Lexa had conducted in an attempt to locate Clarke. In an attempt to ease her own mind and know that Clarke was indeed alive and not dead in the forest somewhere. Her soul wandering the spirit world because she had taken her own life, as the legend of Wanheda had stated. Lexa felt a surge of anger directed towards Clarke come to life in her chest.

Lexa had not allowed herself to feel slighted by Clarke’s actions in the time that she had been missing, because Lexa’s own self-hatred outshone any negative emotion that she might feel towards Clarke’s abandonment. And she knew that Clarke would be suffering enough as it were, without the added burden of Lexa’s anger on top of that. But in this moment, she allowed herself to feel her ire.

Lexa was angry with Clarke for disappearing and allowing Lexa to think her dead.

And angry for engaging in a fight with an Azgeda force that outnumbered them nearly three to one. She was angry at Clarke for not valuing her life.

Angry at the Ice Nation for nearly taking away a second person her heart has latched itself to.

Angry at the sky girl for not seeing herself as the amazing person Lexa did, and always undervaluing her worth.

And most importantly, Lexa was angry at herself, for allowing her anger to breathe freely for Clarke, while she lay dying on a bed.

Lexa’s self-loathing was interrupted when the young woman with raven black hair and eyes the colour of midnight from earlier, came quickly barging through the door. The young woman’s gaze immediately zeroed in on Clarke, ignoring the three women that were standing vigil by her bedside, and addressing the healer.

“Nomon how is Clarke?” The girl asked softly. Her eyes full of warmth and fondness for the injured sky girl.

So she was the healer’s daughter, Lexa realised. Now she knew why they beared such a striking resemblance.

“Tanga, you shouldn’t be in here. It’s crowded as it is.” The healer says with an irritated head gesture towards Lexa, Ontari and Raven in the room.
“I know, but there is a small crowd of Clarke’s Skaikru friends outside the hut, waiting for news on her condition. The only reason they have not entered is because I told them you would probably flay them living if they tried.” Tanga says with an amused smirk.

Raven interrupted the moment between mother and daughter, with a loud exclamation as realisation dawned on her. “Wait a minute! You’re Tanga? The Tanga?” Raven huffs incredulously. A joyous expression of mischief spreading across her face as she realises that this girl is the one Octavia said Clarke had a sordid, and oh-so-entertaining history with.

Tanga nods warily, and Raven’s face splits into a victorious smirk. One that did not hold its usual vibrancy, but was easily enough understood.

“Oh shit! I’ve heard all about you. Kind of…” Raven relents with a frown as she tried to recall everything Clarke had told her about her grounder friend. Dismissing it when she couldn’t recall what had been said, Raven continued with her train of thought. “But more importantly, I was told you have some hot gossip concerning Clarke, alcohol and a saucy romp between the sheets.” She says with conspiratorial wink and an exaggerated eyebrow waggle. While the atmosphere had taken a decidedly lighter tone, Raven was only hoping to distract the occupants of the room from their worry and potential grief over Clarke’s imminent demise. And it looked to be working if the healer’s annoyed glare, Ontari’s raised eyebrows, Lexa’s unhinged jaw and Tanga’s calculating gaze were anything to go by.

Lexa’s heart freezes as soon as the words pass Raven’s lips, and any vulnerability on her face promptly disappears as the mask of Heda falls into place in the presence of her jealousy. Her sudden possessiveness of Clarke burning so hot and bright, Lexa wonders if it is as obvious to those in the room with her as it is to herself. This striking black haired beauty had been with Clarke in a way Lexa never had. In a way she potentially never would. And the sting of her envy, threatened to turn her skin green.

Lexa felt the indescribable urge to cover Clarke’s body from the eyes of this person who had beheld something as glorious as Clarke’s nakedness. Whose hands had caressed the soft flesh of Clarke’s form, and brought her pleasure in ways that Lexa never had.

You bring her only death, a dark and miserable entity whispered in Lexa’s ear.

Despite the jealousy and twinge of self-pity she felt, Lexa refused to give up on her endeavour to win Clarke’s trust and earn her love. If anything, the sudden appearance of a past lover, was the kind of motivation Lexa might have needed to double her efforts in the task. Lexa quickly tunes back into the exchange between Raven and Tanga, eager to learn all she could, to benefit herself when the information became useful.

Tanga’s wariness is quickly replaced by a predatory smirk as she recognises her new source of endless entertainment. But that expression quickly disappears when her mother slaps her up the backside of her head, with a firm frown directed her way in reprimand.

“Tanga, you know how I feel about gossip. Keep your dirty little stories to yourself.” The older woman scolds, before turning on Raven. “And that goes for you too. If you want to know something, you ask Clarke when she wakes.” The woman says firmly. Nobody in the room failing to note how the older woman remained optimistic that Clarke would indeed wake.

The woman’s positivity and hopefulness concerning Clarke’s prognosis and the way she reprimanded both Raven and Tanga for their mischievous shenanigans bringing a smug smile to Lexa’s lips, which she promptly bit down.
“Now, I know many of you do not want to leave Clarke’s bedside, but the day is yet young, and there is work to be done. None of you are useful here, and we won’t know Clarke’s condition until she wakes. So each of you be gone from my hut, and do something constructive. I have a seaweed tea to boil and an angry infant to feed.” The older woman says with a quick flick of her wrists and a loud clap to scatter the gathered women.

Lexa opened her mouth to protest but was quickly cut off by the healer.

“I know you are concerned for her wellbeing. As am I. But you are of no use to me here. And you are Heda. You have duties to perform.” The healer informs her staunchly.

Raven, Tanga and Ontari reluctantly leave the room. Raven stroking Clarke’s cheek softly before departing, whispering a farewell. Lexa’s remained planted to the floor, unmoving. “And what if she dies while I am gone? What if she dies while I am performing some medial task that does not matter? What if she dies alone, when I could have been there for her?” Lexa’s voice as close to pleading as the role of Heda allows, her voice threatening to crack under the weight of pent up emotions.

The older woman watches Lexa’s reaction closely, her gaze analytical and calculating for a moment, before her frown turns into a pleased smile. “So you are the one.” The woman says so softly that Lexa almost misses it.

“The one what?” Lexa asks quizzically. Confusion making her mind feel slow.

“The one who loves her.” The woman says slowly, her eyes once again turning critical as Lexa blushed and flounders for words. “There is no use denying it girl. Your words may lie, but your face tells me the truths I seek.” She says with a content chuckle, before her face becomes stony once more. “Fine. You may stay. But if your presence hinders Clarke’s recovery, you will wait outside with the others.” The healer promises.

“Okay.” Lexa concedes. Her face still feeling hot and flustered despite her efforts to slip the emotions neatly behind the mask of Heda. But Lexa was quickly learning that when it came to Clarke, it’s like the mask was forcibly ripped away, and there was no place left to hide. No place she wanted to hide. In some ways finding that she liked the honesty where Clarke was concerned.

Pulling up a stool beside Clarke’s cot, Lexa sat herself down and prepared to sit vigil by her bedside. Lexa took a gamble and clasping Clarke’s warm, limp hand in her own. Threading their fingers together, and prepared herself to wait however long it took for Clarke to wake. Praying and silently hoping with every fibre of her being, that Clarke survived. Vowing a bloody retribution upon the Ice Queen should she live. And even bloodier one should she die. Either way the woman would drown in her own blood. The only question at this point was whether Nia’s death lasted days or weeks.

Lexa sat staring at the steady rise and fall of Clarke’s chest and willed the body before her to draw just one more breath, to keep living for one more moment. Squeezing the hand in her palm gently, every time she felt like Clarke would simply float away if she did not hold on tight enough.

When Clarke’s hand squeezed back, Lexa’s heart stammered in her chest, and tears welled in her eyes. And she knew Clarke would live. Now it was just a matter of waiting until Clarke woke. When her body was strong enough to regain consciousness. Because when that happened, Lexa had a lot of questions for Clarke.

Questions that she needed answers to. The lying and secrets needed to stop here.
Hello again my lovelies!
As always, I hope you each enjoy the new chapter! I will have a new one to you all by Friday at the latest!
Just want to say a massive thankyou to everyone who gave me some feedback! It really did help me get an idea of what I should do more and what I should avoid in my story. So again, thankyou, you guys are brilliant, amazing, fantastic people! And I value your support so much!!
If you could spare a moment to give me some feedback again this week, I would greatly appreciate it. See you all Friday! :D
Happy reading guys! X
Clarke felt like she was floating. Wherever she was, it was like being submerged under water, drifting aimlessly. No pain, no true awareness of everything around her. Just peaceful serenity, soft light and joyous noiselessness. Clarke felt at peace for the first time in so long. Since the last time she was under the influence of Ice Nation poison, which right in this moment, Clarke couldn’t remember when that was. In fact she couldn’t rightly remember anything of importance. She knew her name, and the people who loved her. But the details were murky and distorted by the toxin, pumping through her bloodstream.

In the distance Clarke could hear her name being called, but it was like an echo. She could hear it, but not really. Like it was travelling over a distance so vast it was immeasurable by any human means. Some part of her mind recognised the frantic voice as Lexa, and Clarke felt the need to smile, but none of her muscles were willing to comply with the command. With her need to express emotion.

Clarke brain tried to wrack through what happened in her previous exposures to the toxin. But came up blank. All she was aware of was that she went somewhere for a period, and then when she returned she couldn’t remember anything of her experience.

With each new exposure to the Azgeda poison, its harmful effects were minimised if they were survived. A tolerance or immunity building to the foreign compound. Clarke wondered how much poison was currently coursing through her veins, whether or not she had been dosed with enough to kill even her. Someone who had been exposed to the poison a handful of times.

Clarke’s voiceless musings were interrupted by the realisation that the world was darkening, like she was sinking further into the dark water. In a sea so deep, that not even sunlight could penetrate. Clarke tried to force her limbs to kick, to take her to the surface. But again her body refused to cooperate. Clarke’s mind began to slow and grow dim. Heavying with each moment. Until she was aware of nothing. Her mind incapable of thought.

When Clarke awoke, she was sitting in a makeshift tent. Upon closer inspection, she realised it was the shelter she had shared with Kadeon while they travelled between villages. Clarke took a moment to pull Kadeon’s furs closer to her. Breathing in the comforting scent of her dead lover and best friend. It smelt like pine needles and cinnamon. Warm and fresh. Reluctantly she deposited the fur back on Kadeon’s side of the sleeping pallet, and exited the tent.

It took a moment for Clarke’s eyes to adjust to the blinding light, before she recognised where she was. Rheuna. It was a small village on the edge of the dead zone, where life was still sustainable, but by no means comfortable. It was where all those who had been banished either by the commander or by self, tended to reside and seek refuge. It was a place where Lexa could not touch her, and she doubted that the grounder commander even knew of its existence. It was the village that Clarke and Kadeon had stayed in for seven whole months. This was the village where Grace was born and took her first breaths. It was the one place that had felt like home to Clarke since the fall of the mountain.

Clarke surveyed her surroundings for a moment. There was not a soul to be seen around her, and yet the whole place looked exactly as it would if it were teeming with activity and the bustle of busy men and women. It looked like the inhabitants had just stood up and walked away, leaving everything as it was.
Clarke began wandering down the dusty streets within the village, careful to walk around the fresh piles of horse dung or potholes in her way. It was eerily quiet and Clarke not for the first time wondered where the people were.

A small breeze stirred the dust and heat in the air. And the soft whispers of cool wind kissing along the base of her neck felt delightful. Rheuna had always been a hot little hellhole when the sun was unobscured by clouds, and the breeze went into hiding. And soon Clarke had a light sheen of sweat clinging uncomfortably to her skin.

For the first time since arriving in Rheuna, Clarke took notice of her clothing. The plain black singlet shirt and tight black riding pants struck her as odd. As Clarke distinctly remembers wearing beautiful new armour not long ago. Only when she tried to recall when she wore the clothing and for what purpose, Clarke found her memory lacking, and unable or perhaps unwilling to provide her with details.

Clarke continued to walk until she found herself nearing Kadeon’s favourite place to read. A massive, looming tree, that looked mangled and heat shrivelled, but never seemed to die. No matter how harsh the weather. In the seasons of sparing rain, the tree would even bare a fruit. One that appeared deceptively sweet and wholesome, but literally turned to sand in the mouth. They were called ‘Ditta Appo’ by the locals, and literally translated into Dust Apples in Gonasleng. As they were red and round whilst still on the tree, but were actually filled with loose earth inside.

A wave of heat obscured the large tree and the lands surrounding, to see with any certainty or clarity, but Clarke thought she spied two figures standing in the shade provided by the dry wood of its trunk. As she moved closer, the figures remained, despite the ever shifting illusions crafted by the gathering heat along the hard-baked earth.

When Clarke finally reached the tree she was shocked to find none other than Kadeon, sitting under the tree, with his copy of the Sound of Music in hand. Next to him stood Jake Griffin, studying the shrivelled remains of the now deadened Dust Apples hanging from the trees tortured limbs. For a moment the sight filled her with panic. As her mind immediately jumped to the conclusion that she must be dead, and she imagined leaving Grace all alone in the world, as an orphan. But some force seemed to suck away her panic and replace it with peace and a preternatural calm.

“Kade. Dad. What are you both doing here?” Clarke asks cautiously. Like if she talks to loudly, they might be carried away by the near non-existent wind. Hoping, wishing for her eyes to be honest with her. And praying that they are not deceiving her in this moment.

“Klark ai hodnes! Clarke my love!” Kadeon exclaims happily, snapping his book shut as soon as he observes her presence. Standing up swiftly to scoop her into a powerful embrace. Squeezing so tight that Clarke wonders for a moment if he will ever let go. Slowly releasing her, he stood back, kissed her softly on the forehead and offered his most brilliant dimpled smile. His brown eyes sparkling with joy. “I have missed you so much.” He says so softly Clarke nearly misses his confession.

When she is finally released from Kadeon’s arms, Clarke is immediately swept into the far less constricting hug from her father.

“Clarke baby! It’s so good to see you.” Jake exclaims enthusiastically. Holding her at arm’s length to inspect her fondly. “You’ve grown into a beautiful young woman.” He applauds with a small, sad smile. “So strong and brave and smart. God look at you.” Jake says with a larger, cheerier smile, as he engulfed her in a strong warm hug for the second time. Clarke squeezed him ferociously, as her overwhelmed mind finally got over its initial shock and responded with fervour.

Clarke looks the two up and down with curious and hungry eyes. Eager to ensure that she commits
every detail of them to memory, despite somehow knowing deep down that she would not fully remember this encounter when she awoke.

Her dad’s sandy brown hair was longer than it had been on the ark, more unkempt, and he had more stubble than he ever did whilst he was alive. But his smile lines and wrinkles were fractionally deeper than when she had seen him last. His ocean blue eyes were watery pools full of different emotions. And Clarke struggled to name them all. She recognised pride, joy, affection, melancholy and even a tiny spark of anger, but towards what remained a mystery to Clarke. She was just so happy to see him.

Kadeon on the other hand looked exactly as she had remembered him. His long red hair, tied into braids at the tops of his head, the sides shaved and tattooed with thick black swirls of ink. Eyebrows that were thick and so expressive. He often used them to talk for him when he believed a verbal response was just too much effort. Dancing chocolate brown eyes that twinkled with superficial mirth to obscure the pain he still felt every day since the loss of his first wife and young son at the hands of Nia. Unlike Clarke’s father, who only had lines of happiness and laughter indenting his facial features, Kadeon had just as many lines of sorrow as he did of laughter.

Both men were so different, and yet they both occupied special parts of Clarke’s heart.

“What are you both doing here?” Clarke asks again, more firmly this time. “You are both dead. How is this possible?” Clarke’s curious mind now going into overdrive to sate her need for answers.

Jake and Kade shared a small secret smile with one another, before both seeming to come to a mutually agreed upon understanding and dodging the question all together.

“So how is Grace? Has she grown? I bet she’s so big now. And so beautiful, just like her mother.” Kade deflects with a charming smirk and the pride of a father. He asks the questions, despite already having their answers.

Clarke recognises the tactic of avoidance and levels a half-hearted glare at her dead lover in reprimand. Kade simply snickers at the expression directed his way.

“You do realise that your little glares might make weaker men piss themselves, but not me right?” Kadeon teases. His eyebrows quirking in mirth.

“Watch your language in front of my daughter Kade.” Jake scolds lightly, with easy familiarity.

Earning a grin from Clarke and the playful roll of Kadeon’s eyes, as his scolding was ignored by the fiery haired man and he continued to speak as though nothing had happened.

“In fact, I always found your threatening expressions, to be rather endearing and dare I say... Cute.” He drives the playful comment home with a quick smirk and mischievous tug of Clarke’s braid.

“Did you just call me cute Kadeon?” Clarke says with a mocking low tone and a twinkle in her eye.

“I did indeed, Sky girl.” Kadeon quips.

Clarke ignores his childish behaviour by answering his previous questions instead. “Grace is amazing. She is using her legs more now and she’s beginning to grow teeth. Her hair is longer too, soon her curls will be in her eyes, just like yours Mud Man.” Clarke says with a wistful tone and fond smile, reserved only for her daughter.

“I wish I could have been there to see her grow into a woman.” Kadeon says sadly, his dimpled smile from earlier had disappeared, and his eyes sombre and full of sorrow.
“I wish you could have seen it too Kade.” Clarke offers wretchedly, tears welling in her eyes as she contemplates the life he could have shared with them. It surprises Clarke when Jake places a comforting palm on Kadeon’s shoulder in a silent offering of support. His watery gaze flickering between Clarke and Kadeon respectively.

“How is your mother?” Jake asks hesitantly. He knew of course, but he wanted to hear Clarke’s take on the matter.

Clarke stiffens in response for a brief moment, before attempting to put on a brave face. Jake tutts disapprovingly before Clarke can even open her mouth.

“Don’t even think about lying to me Clarke. I know you too well for that to work.” Jake scolds lightly, a fond smile still in place.

Clarke stifles a wry grin, before swallowing thickly and speaking her mind. “She is in good health. She’s still the chancellor. But she doesn’t agree with my choices and many of my decisions.” Clarke says brokenly. Her voice hoarse and thick with unspent emotion.

“I am so sorry hon. I wish I was still there to help smooth things over.” Jake offers sadly.

“I know, me too. You were the only reason we both tried to get along in the first place you know.” Clarke confides softly. When Jake arches an eyebrow expectantly, Clarke continues. “We never got on. I don’t know if that was because we were too similar or if our personalities dictated that we clash. But we never were able to see eye to eye. But the one commonality we shared was you. And the love and respect we had for you. So when you told me to try harder with mum, it wasn’t out of a want to be nice to her. It was because I knew it would make you happy.” Clarke explained, choosing to skip over the all too familiar tale of how her mother betrayed her father, resulting in his death. She and Jake were both far too familiar with the saga by this point, and Clarke saw no reason to bring up bad memories for them both.

Jake chortled proudly at Clarke. “I know. And I am proud of you for making that sacrifice for me. I know how special a bond between parent and child can be, and I wanted you both to have that with each other. I guess you understand what I am talking about, since you too have a child of your own?” Jake suggests with a pleased and knowing smirk.

“Yeah I do dad. I get it now.” Clarke says softly, blinking away tears. Clarke sniffs and reigns in her emotions. “You both didn’t answer my question. How is this possible? How are you here? Is this even real? Or am I unconscious in a ditch somewhere?” Clarke asks with an analytical gleam in her eye. She watches the men before her exchange a wary glance between them, before each giving her their own version of a cryptic smirk. Kadeon’s lips puckering into a fish-like cone and a single eyebrow lifting curiously, while his eyes fill with mischief. Jake’s face splits into a suspiciously innocent looking smirk. His eyes filling with knowledge and understanding that he refuses to share.

“We are here because you called us. We are as real as we need to be. And you are here because you felt safe in this place once.” Jake explains mysteriously, gesturing to the great expanse of desert and salt flats of the area surrounding Rheuna.

“That’s still an overtly vague answer and you know it dad.” Clarke points out with annoyance.

“It’s the only answer you need right now Clarke.” Kadeon says gently, his tone placating and mournful.

“Okay then. Why did I call you then?” Clarke asks with unbelieving sass. Her arms folding across her chest and her jaw jutting stubbornly.
“Because your heart is in turmoil.” Jake says evenly. He knew of the struggle Clarke faced with her feelings for the one called Lexa. And her pain broke his heart.

“My heart is in turmoil.” Clarke laughs without humour. “Dad, you have no idea.” She says sadly. Her head beginning to feel heavy on her shoulders.

“I know that you are constantly at war with yourself. You view the part of yourself that kills and takes life as a separate entity and try to distance yourself from it. I know that you are fearful of the day Grace becomes a woman and sees you not as her mother but as the woman who could not save her father. I know that you felt something for Lexa before the mountain. I know that you have buried those feelings deep since that fateful day. Scared to let anyone see you, to let anyone love you, lest they betray you as she did. Or worse, that they see the ugliness inside and tremble in their fear of you.” Jake says with a tone of steel, but with a heart filled with so much passion and love and understanding, the organ ached in his chest. “Your heart is in turmoil. You are hurting deep within your soul Clarke, and if you do not heal soon, you never will.” Jake says gravelly.

Clarke stood with tears burning hot marks down her cheeks, to rival even the heat of Rheuna. The scalding wetness felt like they were being wrenched deep from her soul. Jake wrapped Clarke into another powerful embrace, Clarke’s tears soaking into his shirt.

“I am so proud of the person you have become.” Jake whispers into her ear.

Clarke’s body falls apart as sobs wrack free of her chest. The torrent of tears so profound, Clarke wonders if there will be any moisture left in her body.

“How could you possibly say that? I am a monster. I have done things that the mind struggles to comprehend. How could you possibly be proud of what I have become?” Clarke yells. The brief flare of anger directed inwards, instead of towards her father.

“Because I know the type of person you are Clarke. You are stronger than you give yourself credit. Your people would be dead and rotting in the ground if you had not done what you did on the mountain. The death that you carry with you now is nothing in comparison to how heavy your burden would be if your friends had died inside that mountain instead of those strangers.” Jake explains in a tone that encroaches into the territory of certainty and doubtlessness. “Don’t hate yourself for what you have done Clarke. And don’t distance yourself from the parts of you that are capable of taking life. For they will be your salvation one day.” Jake assures with a soft smile, as he gently squeezes Clarke’s shoulders. “If you remember one thing of what I say here when you awake. Remember this. Whatever you believe about yourself on the inside, is what will manifest on the outside, Clarke.” Jake finishes with a sadder smile.

“And what about Lexa? What am I meant to do there? I don’t even know if I can trust her.” Clarke exclaims, frustrated. Her arms flicking up into the air to express her exasperation.

“Have enough courage to trust love one more time.” Kadeon says simply, with a small shoulder shrug to emphasise just how obvious he thought the answer was.

“It’s not that simple…” Clarke began, before she was abruptly interrupted by Kadeon.

“Yes it is. That girl loves you, or can you not see that?” Kade asks with irritation bleeding into his tone. “Or can you see it, and choose to ignore it anyway?” He says with slight accusation in his expression.

“I don’t know okay. I try not to look too hard. It just reminds me of what we once had and then what she threw away on the mountain. I don’t know if I am ready to view her that way again. I forgave
her, isn’t that enough?” Clarke yells, her exasperation threatening to shoot steam out her ears.

“You are lying to yourself Clarke. You have already begun to feel that way again. But you do not trust that those feelings are enough for Lexa not to betray you again.” Jake encourages softly.

“Because it wasn’t enough last time. She still abandoned me at that mountain. She left me despite what she might have felt. Who’s to stop her from doing it twice?” Clarke whispers in defeat.

“You.” Kadeon says simply. “Fight for her. Fight for her to stay. Everyone will inevitably leave you if you don’t give them a reason to stay. So give her a reason, fight for her. Be brave enough to trust that your love will be enough.” Kadeon says, impassioned by his need for Clarke to understand.

Clarke just stares at Kade for long moments, before nodding slowly. “Okay.” She says simply. Her response while lacking verbally, was made up for by her tone and the twinkle in her eye. For they were full of promise and acceptance. A moment later the trance was broken when Clarke’s mind stumbled upon a single thought that brought a smile to her face. “I thought you of all people would have a problem with me moving on.” Clarke says simply, staring into Kade’s chocolate brown eyes.

“I am not so selfish that I would expect you to spend your life waiting on a dead man Clarke. I want you to be happy. And if Lexa will do that for you, I support your choice.” Kade wraps Clarke into a second, comforting embrace, as he whispers the words in her ear. Reminiscent of their times spent in their tent together on the friendlier side of a nightmare. Seeking comfort in each other’s arms.

“What about Grace? Do you want Lexa to be a part of her life too?” Clarke asks uncertainly.

“I want my daughter to be surrounded by people who will love her and protect her unconditionally. Lexa has the potential to do both.” Kade says simply.

“I kept my promise, you know. To go back to my people and surround myself and Grace with those who would care for us.” Clarke explained.

“I know.” Kade whispers, a single tear leaking from his eye, as he regarded Clarke with as much warmth and affection he could muster.

“I love you.” Clarke whispers, against his broad chest.

“As I love you.” Kade promises.

“Clarke, you do not have much longer, before you are drawn back to your body.” Jake warns from his place a few metres away, where he had lingered to give the pair some privacy.

Clarke extracts herself from Kade’s arms, to launch herself into another final hug with her father before she was pulled away from them.

“Your mother.” Jake begins, with deep sigh leaving his lips. “She does not hate you. There is more to the story Clarke. You must give her chance to explain it. Promise me you will let her explain. Please don’t shut her out. She does love you.” Jake pleads urgently. He felt Clarke begin to slip away.

“I promise.” Clarke says stalwartly. “I love you dad.” Clarke declares with tears in her eyes again.

Clarke hears her father whisper ‘I love you too Clarke. May we meet again,’ just as she was once again consumed by darkness.

Clarke felt herself being drawn up to the surface of the dark water. The murky navy hue of the deep
sea drifting away as Clarke began to reach the surface. Her body floating weightless and her mind deliciously blank once more. Clarke slowly became aware of a reassuring pressure on her hand, and a scalding pain in her ribs as the light grew brighter. Clarke’s thoughts became more ordered and organised. Thoughts and memories of Kadeon and her father slipping from her mind, and the conversation had whilst under the effects of the poison beginning to drift from memory until only fragments remained.

A kind smile and grin too broad, reminding her that whatever you believe about yourself on the outside is what will manifest on the outside.

Chocolate brown eyes pleading with her to have the courage to trust love once more.

And then the light finally faded, and Clarke became aware of her body once more. With that self-awareness also came the lashing pain along the distance of several ribs, making her groan, and the ability to control her body once more. Opening her eyes, Clarke noticed the darkness and lack of light from the window, indicating the fall of night. Her eyes then drifting down to a firm weight draped across her thighs. It took a moment for her brain to catch up with what they were seeing. Because there was no way Lexa was sleeping by Clarke’s bedside, and using her legs as a substitute pillow, right?

But alas, there she was. Lexa, in all her preternatural beauty and soft chestnut curls, laid in Clarke’s lap. And the sight pulled a contented smile from Clarke’s lips.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was so fun to write. It's the first time we get to really meet Kade and have a look at Rheuna. Personally I really enjoyed it, so I hope all of you do too!
Please give me some feedback, let me know what you all think!

Edits: Chapter 3
Clarke tried to remain unmoving for as long as possible. Not wanting to wake Lexa by shifting her body. Lexa who had fallen asleep in Clarke’s lap, looking so young and peaceful while slackened and relaxed in slumber. Clarke remained in her horizontal position as her murky mind tried to make sense of her surroundings, and the events leading up to her present situation, outside of the realisation that Lexa was stretched out comfortably against Clarke’s lower body.

It was dark outside, but the gentle chirping of birds signalled the impending birth of a new day. The last thing Clarke remembered was travelling back to Alton after fighting a swarm of Ice Nation warriors with her squad. She recalls spying Lexa from her place amidst the trees, and jumping down from her perch. Like a graceful feline. And her heart, had felt ready to beat out of her chest as the poison from a wound that she had forgotten, surged through her bloodstream. Then there had been darkness, unending and relentless until she arrived... Somewhere. Brief flashes of words and two faces she recognised, but couldn’t recollect with any clarity. Then waking here. In what she identifies as Naomi’s healing hut. Staring at the familiar thatched ceiling and laying supine in a cot she is intimately acquainted with. Lexa sleeping against Clarke’s immobile body.

As Clarke’s mind readjusts to her reality, she becomes aware of the pain in her body. Specifically the radiating throb originating in Clarke’s ribs, growing steadily in intensity. Partnered with the persistent ache of overfull breasts, complaining from disuse. Leaving her chest bindings wet with milk and uncomfortably clinging to her sensitive flesh. If Clarke was to guess how long she had been unconscious, using the condition of her breasts as the only indication, she would say twenty four hours.

Clarke’s musings about the her bodily discomfort, was interrupted when Naomi walked through the partition dividing her healing and personal quarters. The woman looked sleep deprived and weary, but when she noticed Clarke’s watchful gaze, her face split into a beaming grin.

“Finally, you are awake.” Naomi whispered. Not eager to disturb the commander, who had been a constant annoyance to Naomi ever since Clarke had been struck ill. Persistently wanting to know how each herb and spice might affect Clarke’s recovery, and refusing to leave Clarke’s side for intervals longer than a few minutes.

“How do you feel?” Naomi asks in a hushed tone.

“Like crap.” Clarke answers breezily. Her voice hoarse from screams she can’t recall. Naomi raises an expectant eyebrow at Clarke’s vague response. With a playful roll of her eyes, Clarke elaborated. “My ribs smart, my throat hurts, I am tired. And…” Clarke hesitates, casting a nervous glance down at Lexa to ensure she was still sleeping before continuing. “And my boobs ache.”

The last comment earnt an amused snort from Naomi, followed by soft laughter as she attempted to restrain herself. “Yes the mother’s milk will build up if you don’t feed your goufa Clarke.” Naomi sniggers.

Clarke gives Naomi an unimpressed glare in reply.

“Oh please. Stop before you embarrass yourself.” Naomi whispers, her shoulders shaking in silent glee. “Grace will be most displeased, but you must wait another day before feeding her from your
body again. The poison must be completely gone from your system, else you risk accidentally passing the substance to her through your milk. Your fussy daughter will just have to continue to make do with the goat’s milk for a time.” Naomi reports with a smirk.

The mention of Grace draws Clarke’s attention to the fact that in her haste to protect her squad and dispatch the Azgeda gonas, she nearly left Grace an orphan. The realisation makes Clarke’s stomach flip and nausea churn uncomfortably.

“I nearly died.” Clarke mutters solemnly to the silence in the room. Her eyes locking onto Naomi’s for affirmation. Naomi’s facial features become more angular and stern, as she nods her head gravely.

“With the amount of poison in your body, you should have died. An ordinary man or woman would have succumbed to the toxin, and left this life.” Naomi says unobtrusively. Her awe over the feat expressed internally only.

“And why do you think I survived?” Clarke asks curiously. Her eyes sparking with intrigue as Naomi’s lips thin. Each woman knowing the answer before it was verbalised.

“I think you have been exposed to the poison before, and have gained a tolerance.” Naomi says easily. Her gaze ablaze with interest for Clarke’s response. Eager for her observation to be either confirmed or denied.

Clarke rebels against the muted expectation, and simply nods in understanding, her scrutiny flickering to the window near the door, appraising the grey skies and the disappearing stars. “How long was I unconscious?” Clarke inquires.

“A full day. You were brought to my hut yesterday morning.” Naomi replies nonchalantly. Turning towards her work bench to begin mixing some herbs, and boil water to make a tonic for pain. Naomi was familiar with the girl before her well enough to know that she would purposefully fail to mention her discomfort, choosing instead to suffer in silence.

“And how long has she been here?” Clarke asks, the timbre of her voice softening considerably, as her eyes gravitate towards the sleeping form of Lexa, crumpled atop her thighs. Pursed pink lips twitching as she breathes deeply. The flutter of eyelashes on sculpted cheekbones as her eyes flit beneath the fine membrane of her lids, lost in dreams. She’s so beautiful in sleep, Clarke’s mind whispered encouragingly.

Since returning from wherever it was that her mind, or perhaps her soul had wandered, Clarke felt more at ease with the feelings blossoming in her chest for Lexa. Although she could not distinctly recall what had occurred, or where she had been transported. Her recent near-death experience combined with the events of the poison induced visions had Clarke re-evaluating the things in life that held value. She found herself viewing the past as something that indeed helped shape the person she is today, but was ultimately inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. Clarke needed to begin looking to her future. And somehow, amidst Grace and her friends, Lexa had become someone that Clarke found herself wanting in her life.

As to the role she wanted Lexa to fulfil, Clarke was yet unwilling to admit, even to herself. But nevertheless Clarke knew that in order to look towards the future that she would need to cast off her past. Like a snake shedding its skin, so it could grow and thrive. And that meant confiding in someone. Clarke could think of no one who would understand better than Lexa. Despite the tendrils of nerves that unfurled in her stomach at the prospect of sharing parts of her history, like killing Carl Emerson, Clarke knew that ultimately Lexa would be sympathetic and non-judgemental.
“Heda has refused to leave the entire time you have been ill. And has been by your side ever since you arrived in Alton bloodied and wounded.” Naomi says lowly with a quick cursory glance towards the commander to ensure she still slept. Then directing a more loitering gaze towards Clarke. Naomi mused that it was much like observing an animal in the wild. Witnessing something so unfiltered and rare as Clarke staring openly at the brunette girl, with hearts in her eyes. Naomi bites down the urge to smirk. It was so obvious to her, that Clarke and the commander had a deep soul binding connection. Despite tending to avoid gossip, Naomi had heard rumblings of the events at the mountain, and the way Heda left Clarke to save her people alone. Naomi surmised, that the love these two shared must be powerful, to survive such a cruel fate. “You chose well Clarke.” Naomi commends softly.

Clarke is broken from her momentary daze, and blinks owlishly when Naomi speaks. When her words finally click in Clarke’s brain and understanding dawns, Clarke turns a dark shade of scarlet. Resembling a ripe tomato. Her eyes briefly landing on Naomi before recognising the knowing gleam of her expression, and then promptly finding a spot on the wall to focus on instead. Deeming it much safer, and far less questioning. Clarke knew that denying the woman would only confirm Naomi’s suspicions, so Clarke chose to say nothing in response.

“Is she not the one who you spoke to me about days ago? The one who has you so confused that only an amber bottle filled with mud was able to help you accept your feelings?” Naomi asks quietly, her gaze wandering to Lexa to ensure yet again that she remained lost to her dreams.

Clarke considers her answer carefully. “I think you already know the answer to that question Naomi.” Clarke says quietly. Ensuring her face remains impassive and her voice steady, yielding no hidden truths.

Naomi nods thoughtfully. Knowing that pressing the matter would do herself and Clarke no favours. “You should wake her.” Naomi suggests. Her hand gesturing towards where Lexa still rested against Clarke’s legs. “She would be most upset if she was not roused when you regained your senses.” Naomi warns softly. Hungry eyes devouring Clarke’s response inquisitively.

“I will. Just give her a few more minutes. In wartime she does not sleep much.” Clarke avows to the quiet of the room.

Naomi’s eyebrows raise to her hairline. Surprised not by the Commander’s poor sleeping habits, but instead by Clarke’s thoughtfulness. However chooses to say nothing. Suppressing her smirk by biting the inside of her cheek.

Clarke was astonished that Lexa had not been roused from slumber by she and Naomi’s whispered conversation. As Lexa was a notoriously light sleeper. The only time that she ever slept so soundly and unaware of the world surrounding her, was when she had not slept for days. A stab of compassion impaled Clarke’s ribcage as she realised that Lexa had been planning a guerrilla war for the past week with next to no help, with no one to alleviate a portion of the burden. Clarke felt a snippet of guilt rear its ugly head, as she contemplated how much easier this venture would be if Clarke had stepped up and lead as Lexa had wanted. Despite knowing that Clarke was not yet truly prepared for that kind of responsibility again, the gnawing guilt remained.

Clarke’s lungs heaved with a weighted sigh, running her hands across her face to vent some of her frustrations. Studiously ignoring the way the skin and muscles surrounding her wound vehemently protest.

Naomi observes Clarke’s sharp inhale of breath, and astute wince. Depositing the concoction of herbs and boiled water into a clay cup, she hands the natural analgesic remedy to Clarke, with an unimpressed eyebrow twitch. Clarke never was one to complain where she could help it. Clarke
accepts the vial of bitter tasting herbs and swallows the contents wordlessly.

“Your friends saw the scars while you were unconscious.” Naomi declares cautiously.

Clarke whole body tenses, and pain lances through the gash along her ribs with the sudden jarring action. Mouth abruptly dry, becoming an unyielding desert, cracking under the hot sun. Her eyes wide and face suddenly drained of colour, Clarke turned her inquisitive expression to Naomi with a quick snap of her head that would turn most dizzy. “And what did you tell them?” Clarke asks hesitantly. Hoping that the fear in her voice is not audible or noticeable to anyone but herself.

“I told them nothing. I said that if they have questions that they should direct them to you.” Naomi says evenly, hearing the quaver of Clarke’s voice and her mistrust of the world so clearly, she may as well have it stamped on her forehead.

Clarke breathed a heavy sigh of relief and sagged against the pillows propped up against her back.

“Of course I couldn’t tell them anything, because I don’t know how you got the scars in the first place.” Naomi comments seriously. “I may have treated the wounds. But I know nothing of how they were inflicted.” She prods gently. Her own curiosity had gnawed at the lack of information ever since she had first met Clarke, and when those questions remained answerless over a year later, when the same girl reappears with even more scars scattered across her body. Naomi’s desire to receive the truth was startling.

Clarke recognised Naomi’s passive tactic of asking the question of how she was injured, without actually asking. And felt her expression become stony.

She had never told anyone about what happened on the cliffs near Alton. About the events that led to the death of Carl Emerson. As no one except perhaps Lexa might understand. And even then, Clarke was ashamed of her actions.

Clarke had been so desperate to relieve her own suffering, she had not realised that by adding one more death to the mountain of rotted corpses she was responsible for, that it would threaten to break her sanity, as Wanheda became more powerful and eager for bloodshed. Her hands were soaked in so much crimson warmth that she would not be able to wash it off if she was given lifetimes to complete the task. She was swimming in a sea of death, or perhaps drowning was the correct term. And she didn’t want anyone to know that Carl Emerson was a corpse floating among their number.

If anyone knew what she was responsible for, they would not look at Clarke the same. There was no honourable purpose for Emerson’s death. It didn’t serve a higher design. It was done out of selfishness, self-loathing and a guilt so stifling, that it was like breathing with lungs full of cement.

There was no way that Clarke would ever tell anyone that story. At least not someone like Naomi, who wouldn’t understand the motive behind the action. An encouraging voice in Clarke’s brain whispered in her ear, reminding her that Lexa would understand. Clarke’s eyes instantly wandered to the brunette arranged across her legs, and a large of Clarke knew that the statement held merit.

“Oh Clarke. One more thing before I go to sleep. Since no one knew if you would survive the night. Your friends sent a Skaikru rider back to Arcadia to inform your mother of your condition.” Naomi says with a strange little smile. One that Clarke couldn’t quite read or place.

The thought of seeing her mother filled Clarke with a stilted feeling of dread. Like a piranha swimming in the waterways of Clarke’s digestive tract. “Will she come here?” Clarke asks timidly.

“You tell me Clarke.” Naomi responds sedately. “If it were Grace, would you come?” Naomi
suggests piously. Her eyes alight with questioning interest. Naomi then stalks out of the room, leaving Clarke to ponder the question privately. She did not need to be clairvoyant to know that there was tension between Clarke and her mother.

Since it was still dark outside, Naomi soon went back into her sleeping rooms, where Tanga and Grace were snoozing soundly, and presumably went to sleep again. Clarke contemplated Naomi’s question, knowing that if it were Grace lying mortally injured, there would be no power on earth that could keep her from her daughter’s bedside. But somehow, it felt different with Abby. After the words exchanged between them, Clarke was uncertain that her mother would truly care. Her direction of thought began taking a decidedly dark turn, so she diverted her focus onto something more positive.

Clarke spent a few more blissful minutes watching Lexa sleep, and felt a finger of embarrassment caress her cheeks, as she realised just how entirely enraptured she was by the simple pleasure of watching the chestnut haired girl sleep in her lap. Clarke tried to ignore just how nice Lexa’s body weight felt on top of her own. How the pressure was reassuring and her proximity oddly comforting. With effort, Clarke pulled herself into a sitting position, ignoring the way her wound objected the movement. Clarke placed a hand on Lexa’s shoulder and gently shook her to awareness.

Lexa’s eyes fluttered open hesitantly for a brief instant as her brain shed itself of its drowsiness. A moment later, her eyes cleared of their sleep induced fog and straightened to attention abruptly. Her irises widening and her lungs sucked in a loud breath when her attention landed on Clarke.

“You’re awake.” Lexa stated obviously. Her lips pulling into a brilliant smile full of relief, before catching herself and toning down its intensity. Her brain could barely process the discovery of Clarke sitting up and fully cognizant once more. And some part of Lexa’s mind wondered if perhaps she was still asleep.

“I am.” Clarke confirmed simply.

Lexa took stock of Clarke’s appearance. Her face was pale and there were beads of sweat dotting her brow from pain. Her arms shook slightly from the exertion of holding her body upright. And the bandages covering Clarke’s ribs was tinged red from blood. Lexa also noticed that Clarke’s chest bindings were darkened unusually from peculiar dampness. Ducking her head to obscure her blush as she realised what must have caused the moisture. “I am glad that you are recovered.” Lexa says softly.

Her eyes shimmering for a moment with what looked like tears. But when Clarke leaned slightly closer for a better inspection, the assumed wetness was gone.

“I thought you were going to die.” Lexa confesses softly, her head lowering to look at her hands gathered in her lap.

Clarke says nothing for a moment, just stares at Lexa speechless. Her mind whirring over the implication that Lexa was worried and upset by that knowledge. Finding that the information sparked something warm in Clarke’s chest. Her heart beat faster with an unfamiliar emotion akin to affection, blazing in her chest for the woman before her.

“I am glad that you did not.” Lexa whispers. Her throat working hard to swallow around the sudden lump that had formed in her throat. Lexa felt temporarily overcome with sweet relief at observing Clarke’s conscious countenance and alert posturing. She tried desperately to stifle a fraction of it and tuck it away where Clarke would not see. But Lexa knew it was a pointless endeavour. Clarke’s pleasantly bewildered expression, informing Lexa that she had both seen it and simultaneously was
“As am I.” Clarke agrees easily. “Naomi told me when I first woke up, that you have been here since I was injured.” Clarke voice lilting at the end of the statement, as though asking a question.

Lexa nods in confirmation. Her eyes remaining firmly fixated on Clarke’s, as the blonde continues.

“Why?” Clarke asks hesitantly. Her voice cracking with unspent emotion.

“Because, if you were to die. I did not want you to die alone.” Lexa says simply, as though it were the most obvious explanation.

Clarke’s breathing hitched in her throat, the warmth she felt before was stoked and fed until a raging inferno of endearment blazed in Clarke’s chest. The presence of its astonishing heat was enough to overwhelm Clarke. But the moment of intense feeling was interrupted when Lexa spoke again.

“I have questions Clarke.” Lexa states ominously. Her mind drifting to the scars littered across Clarke’s body, and every other small fleeting, and seemingly inconsequential detail that made no sense at the time. But was now indicative of truths being withheld and secrets hidden.

“I know.” Clarke responds simply. Forcibly keeping her walls down. The ones that screamed for Clarke to protect herself and not reveal too much, that vulnerability was sure to equate with emotional injury. Wanting to stay true to her resolution to shed the skin of her past and confide in Lexa. To have the courage to trust her in this small way. “And I want to answer them.” She confides. Her tone and facial expression completely open and readable for the simple purpose of reassuring Lexa.

Lexa couldn’t quite believe what she was hearing. Clarke had been so volatile and harsh every time Lexa dared to question her, and learn more about her past. She had been so secretive and uncommunicative up until this point, that Lexa felt as though her spine were going to snap in two from the sudden change of direction. The unexpected one-eighty was startling, to say the least. But Lexa felt lightened by the revelation, and revealed a small smile for Clarke’s benefit.

Lexa had been ready to walk away if Clarke didn’t start being honest with her. Not because she didn’t want to know the answers, or because she didn’t care enough to continue asking the questions. But because at a certain point, Lexa needed to start protecting herself from being let down. It would be self-destructive if she persisted in pursuing Clarke, if Clarke was going to continuously reject Lexa.

“I am glad. But my questions can be answered in the morning Clarke. You need more rest. We will talk more when your strength returns.” Lexa decides calmly. The sweat of her brow, and tremor in Clarke’s arms had become more prominent. And although Clarke was awake and responsive. Lexa knew that Clarke was still weakened from the poison. Her body needing more recovery time to recuperate from her ordeal.

“Okay.” Clarke relented. Slumping back against the pillows of the bed and drifting off to sleep once more. The herbal tonic, helping Clarke limp towards oblivion.

When Clarke awoke again, the sun was shining brightly in the sky, indicating it was around noon. It felt strange to be waking so late in the day. Lexa was not by her bedside this time, and Clarke missed her reassuring presence. Naomi changed the dressings on her wounds, allowed her to have a more private reunion with Grace, and then permitted her friends to visit. Clarke was soon bombarded by Raven, Octavia, Bellamy and even Ontari, peppering her with questions and exclaiming the worry they experienced while Clarke was unconscious and dying.
Eventually her friends were called away by their varying duties. Clarke asked Octavia, if she and Lincoln could come and talk to her together when they had a moment to spare, and the confused brunette agreed, before disappearing. Curious but compliant. Leaving Clarke alone with only Ontari. The Ice Nation girl had remained near silent while Clarke’s friends had been in the room, her expression guarded. But seemed to instantly deflate and relax when she was alone with Clarke.

“I will be accompanying you on any missions you participate in, from this point forward.” Ontari says with bashful authority. If such combination existed, it was in this moment. Her expression and body language concealing the fact that she felt uncertain and vulnerable, but the waver in her voice, laying the emotions bare for Clarke to see. “I have decided that you are an important asset, and must be protected. For the sake of the war and for Heda.” Ontari states simply. As thought she were providing a formal report to one of the generals.

Clarke fought the urge to smirk, before giving up entirely and allowing the smile to spring free unhindered. “Admit it Ontari, I’ve grown on you.” Clarke teases gently, a soft smile pulling at her lips as Ontari’s face pinkens by the slightest shade.

Ontari shrugs her shoulders hesitantly, a small embarrassed grin teasing at the edges of her mouth. But there is a heavy undertone of self-doubt and uncertainty as she speaks. “While it did pain me to see Heda so distraught. I found that my concern was not only for her wellbeing, but yours also.” The almond eyed girl admits hesitantly.

Clarke smiles a small, pleased simper.

Ontari shifts uncomfortably on her feet, before speaking again. “Where I come from…” Ontari pauses, reluctant to continue for fear of ridicule. She casts her eyes to the floor for a moment before meeting Clarke’s gaze. Finding only acceptance and understanding inscribed in the sapphire of her irises, Ontari becomes emboldened and continues. “Making friends is discouraged, even having a close bond with your family can be a deadly gamble.” Ontari pauses, drawing in a deep steadying breath before continuing. “You remember how I told you that my mother killed my best friend?” Ontari clarifies, her eyes misting.

“Yes.” Clarke responds softly, thinking back to their conversation by the river. Where Clarke had mistook Ontari for an attacker, and injured the brunette. Considering Ontari’s direction of conversation, she recognised a heavy feeling of dread stir low in her belly. Somehow she knew that whatever Ontari said next would be difficult to hear, but even harder to vocalise.

“What I didn’t tell you was that the friend my mother killed, was my older brother Roan.” Ontari’s voice cracks, and the tears in her eyes spill down her cheeks with the current of a river. Ontari swallows thickly, before continuing with her tale. “I was two years younger, so we grew up together. We were thick as thieves and were each others bestfriend.” Ontari whispers fondly, her eyes vacant as she loses herself to memories. “Eight years ago, when my brother was eighteen, he was tasked with the chore of kidnapping the lover of one of Nia’s enemies as a test of his loyalty to Azgeda, and to our mother, the Queen.”

Clarke feels the coil of dread wind tighter, as Ontari continues speaking. Somewhere in the recesses of Clarke’s mind, a flicker of recognition flares to life. Something about this story felt familiar. Like she had heard part of it before. Clarke diverted her attention back to Ontari and listened intently.

“Normally a task so important would be given to one of my mother’s assassins, but Roan was a tender-hearted boy, and our mother wanted to toughen him into a worthy heir. Someone deserving of her throne when she passed. Someone ruthless and cruel, much like herself. So she sent Roan to Polis, to kidnap Costia from under Lexa’s nose.” Ontari pauses, and looks purposefully into Clarke’s eyes. Curious to know if Clarke was familiar with the tale already. Wanting Clarke to be enraged for
Lexa’s loss, but compassionate towards her brother’s circumstance, despite his role in Lexa’s suffering.

Clarke felt the coil of dread release as everything clicked into place. The story sounded familiar, because Lexa had already told Clarke part of it. She knew how this tale ended. With Lexa returning to the bed which she shared with her lover Costia. Only to find her severed head in the place where she once slept.

How instead of gaining her vengeance and exacting retribution upon the Ice Queen, she had been forced to accept the spiteful, evil woman and her clan into the coalition, all in the pursuit of peace.

Clarke felt her blood boil in her anger on Lexa’s behalf, but it stopped short when she realised that if Lexa had forgiven Ontari for her brother’s apparent guilt in Costia’s death, then Roan’s fate must have been much, much worse. And so the coil of dread tightened once more, and her blood turned cold as she realised that Nia had done something unspeakable to her own child, as she cultivated and amassed power. Clarke had thought that Nia butchering Kade’s family was cruel and cold, but deep down she knew that whatever Ontari’s said next, would be immeasurably worse.

Ontari watched as Clarke’s expression transitions from familiarity and understanding, to anger and empathy, before her eyes became vacant as her mind wandered to a memory, and then morphed into fear, and dread, before settling on venerated iciness. The expression was unsettling, but Ontari knew that it was not directed at herself, or her brother. That look was reserved only for her Nia, and Ontari visibly relaxed. The tension of her spine lessening, before she resumed her account. “Roan did as was asked of him. He travelled to Polis and stole Costia away in the dead of night, and then began the trek back to the Azgeda capitol of Fortis. However as he travelled with Costia, my brother began to respect the young girl, he grew fond of her even. So when they reached the Ice Nation border, my brother decided he could not let his friend Costia suffer at the hands of our mother. He prepared to whisk her away to safety, but my mother had anticipated his inability to hand Costia over. Knowing that being the tender-hearted boy that he was, he would be unable to leave Costia to such a cruel and painful fate.” Ontari spits out. Her eyes brimming with salt water, and her hands shaking with rage as she relived the event as though it had only occurred yesterday.

Clarke felt her own eyes begin to water as the imagined scene played out in her mind’s eye. Her heart clenching painfully for Lexa, and Costia, and Roan and for the girl before her. Clarke felt a fraction of Ontari’s pain, and wished she could release the girl of her suffering. “What happened to him?” Clarke asks softly.

“My mother imprisoned him in the cage right next to Costia, so that he was forced watch as she was tortured. To the rest of the world, it was done under the guise of learning Lexa’s weaknesses, but in reality, Nia wanted to break Lexa, so that the coalition would fail. Leaving the powerful position of ruler over the twelve clans vulnerable and easily controlled.” Ontari words slice, as though they were razors. Her hate for Nia so tangible. “My mother’s torturer flayed Costia’s skin from her body over a period of eight days. And forced my brother to watch it happen, ensured that he listened and bore witness to her suffering as punishment for his insolence. He spent most days trying to escape, to free Costia from her fate, and return her to Lexa. But after the eighth day, she was too weak, and was sure to die. The torturer ensured to keep his cuts to areas where she would not bleed excessively, but where the nerves were abundant. Prolonging her life, so that she would suffer extraordinary pain before she was released from her fleshy prison. But Roan kept fighting to find a way to free himself from his cage, to save Costia. In whatever capacity that might entail. When he finally succeeded, he was unable to free Costia from the Ice Nation’s cold grasp, and sustaining her life would have been a fruitless and unnecessarily truculent. In the end, all he was able to do to ease her agony, was by granting her a swift death.” Ontari goes quiet for a moment. Her expression pensive and proud as she remembers the way her brother helped Costia’s doomed cause, knowing it would end in his own
death. “And that was how my mother found him. Cradling Costia, his friend, in his arms. The queen was enraged by Roan’s perceived betrayal, and in her madness, sentenced him to death for defying her. He was torn apart by captured Ice wolves, in the Azgeda fighting pits, as a spectacle to the people. Nia wanted to show the nation what she would do to anyone who dared challenge her authority. To show them, that not even her children were exempt from this ruling. I was forced to watch my brother die, for being a good person, and my mother did not even mourn his death. Simply began grooming me to become her heir, to take her place once she died. To take the position meant for my brother.” Ontari whispers lifelessly. The only emotion prevalent on her face, being the loathing and enmity she held for the woman who birthed her.

When Ontari is silent for long moments, her gaze firmly fixed on the floor by Clarke’s bed. Clarke realises that while the story was not yet finished, Ontari’s mind had ventured to a place where she imagines her own mother’s end. Fantasises about how she will enact her vengeance. Clarke idly wonders if Lexa and herself were entitled to their revenge upon Nia, in the face of Ontari’s torment.

She and Lexa had both lost a lover to Nia, but their desire for retribution paled next to Ontari’s. And in that moment, Clarke realised that if given the chance to avenge Kadeon’s death by killing Nia, she would pass up her vengeance, so that Ontari could have her own. So that she might find peace, after all she had endured. “How did you escape?” Clarke asks quietly, her voice extracting Ontari from her imagined vengeance.

“I knew that I could not escape my mother straight away, as she would likely be expecting my betrayal. So I bided my time. I waited a full year before disappearing in the dead of night, and fled from Fortis. I evaded all of my mother’s assassins sent after me, and made my way to Polis. I told the commander an overview of what happened, and threw myself at her mercy. Hoping that she would grant me my life, but knowing that should she demand my death for the actions of my mother, I would not fight her judgement. Lexa kept the new information regarding Costia’s death a secret, so that Titus or her advisor’s could not demand my death. Lexa took pity on me and gifted me with a second chance, and protected me from my mother’s killers. She became my first friend since Roan.” Ontari says with a small affectionate smile.

“Why are you telling me this?” Clarke enquires gently. While she was intrigued by the story, and the relationship between Ontari and Lexa made more sense to her now, she was unsure what purpose it served.

“When you lay dying from the poison in your body. I realised that the idea of your death saddened me. While I am glad to have been given sanctuary by Lexa here in Trikru lands. In this place, no one wants to be friends with someone from Azgeda. The mistrust is generations deep and it is a rare instance where someone looks past my brands and sees me as a person. You do that Clarke, as does Lexa. You have been a friend to me, when you did not have to be. So I guess in a way, you have indeed ‘grown on me,’ however I must protest your analogy. It makes you sound like some kind of parasite.” Ontari says playfully, exaggerating a full body shudder of disgust, in an attempt to relieve the tension that had befallen the two of them moments before.

Clarke chuckled in response. Ignoring the way her ribs smarted from the jarring movement. “Thankyou Ontari. I view you as a friend also.” Clarke took a deep breath and decides to confide in Ontari in return for her soul-baring candour. “It is in no way the same thing as what you have experienced. But I understand the feeling of not fitting in anywhere.” Clarke says softly.

Ontari studies Clarke with kind eyes, like she knew that Clarke would understand, and already had an inkling of what she would share with her.

“When I returned to my people after being away for so long. Everyone looked at me differently.
Either they judged me for my actions on the mountain, and the events that lead to it. Or they critiqued me for my choices after I killed the mountain men. They either saw me as someone who slaughtered their enemies or the girl who abandoned them afterwards. There was not very much in the way of grey area between the two. I wasn’t seen as Clarke anymore, I was viewed as Wanheda. And people expected me to behave as such. Savage and cruel. So I was greeted with reactions of awe and fear and distrust. I wasn’t a person anymore. I was an idea, a belief, and an angel of death. People who didn’t know me before the fall of the Mountain men, didn’t want to know me. Not for honourable reasons at least. And my friends from before the mountain. They regarded me warily. They had been so hurt by my actions that it took a lot for some of them to forgive me. It has almost resolved itself, now, but some people still struggle to see the real me. So I understand it.” Clarke explains. Her tone a appearing a little monotonous and unaffected by her confession. But that was not the case. Clarke was trying hard not to dwell on the hurt.

“Then why did you return to your people?” Ontari asks confusedly. Not understanding why someone would return to a place where ridicule was abundant, especially when she had the option to be anywhere else.

“I made a promise to someone. And while it wasn’t the only reason I returned. It did give me the courage to face my past. But I am glad that I was nudged back in their direction. My friends have been understanding with time, and I didn’t realise how much I missed them, until I was back amongst them. I suppose I took their friendship for granted in a lot of ways.” Clarke admits quietly.

“And Lexa understands you too, doesn’t she.” Ontari comments wryly, a mischievous gleam in her almond eyes.

“Yes.” Clarke answers hesitantly, sensing a proverbial trap closing in around her person.

“If you can both get past your history, you two will make a good match.” Ontari says with a pleased smirk. Enjoying the way Clarke’s eyebrows hike up the cliff-face of her forehead, and make a home there for long moments. Her cheeks turn a pretty shade of apricot as embarrassment seized her. Clarke doesn’t know how to respond to that, and she doesn’t need to, as moments later Lexa’s guard Jameson storms into the hut, interrupting them.


“Jameson.” The girls address simultaneously, their earlier relaxed disposition evaporating in the face of the intrusion.

“My apologies for interrupting. But Heda has requested your presence Ontari. We have begun the interrogation of the Azgeda gona, but are not yielding any results. She says you have some knowledge in... Interrogation techniques.” Jameson intones carefully.

Ontari’s facial expression turns to marble, and the muscle in her jaw ticks with agitated energy. Before nodding tersely, saying her farewells to Clarke and leaving the hut, with Jameson following close behind.

Clarke remained seated on her bed, stomach acid nipping at her oesophagus, as nausea churned. It would appear that Lincoln and herself had assumed correctly when they had hypothesized that the Ice Nation Archer would be tortured for information. And judging by Ontari’s less than pleased countenance when she left. Lexa needed her to conduct the torture, or at least direct it. Clarke felt the nausea increase tenfold.

Chapter End Notes
Okay my loyal readers, I hope you enjoy the new chapter!

It took me a little longer to get this chapter out to you all, as I have received some very specific feedback in the past week that has suggested a number of slight alterations I can make in order to improve my writing.

So I have been diligently working to try and take under advisement what has been said, and really hope that this chapter addresses some of the issues raised and is improved from previous chapters.

This is my first fic, and I am sure no one expects it to be perfect. But that was not the reason I began writing it. I started writing this story because it is relaxing and fun. And I love the characters. So as long as I continue to love writing, I am open to specific feedback that is constructive in its nature.

As always tell me what you all think, because feedback does help me get a feel for where you guys heads are at. And almost always makes my day a little brighter.

Happy reading lovelies! A new chapter should be uploaded within the next few days! xx
Lexa had left Clarke’s bedside shortly after she drifted to sleep. During the day that Clarke had been knocking at death’s door, Lexa had shirked many of her duties in an effort to be by Clarke’s side in case she departed this life. It might have been selfish, but Lexa had wanted to claim every moment with Clarke that she could.

Lexa had been so relieved when Clarke had recovered. When she had woken up and Clarke was simply sitting there, staring at her with expectant eyes and a small smile. It had made Lexa’s heart clench pleasurably in her chest, like a subtle reminder of who the organ belonged to. Calling out for recognition from its blonde counterpart.

Clarke had even agreed to answer any questions Lexa might have. The sudden change was slightly disconcerting, but Lexa couldn’t bring herself to worry about. The idea of finally knowing, was far too alluring to ignore. A big part of Lexa questioned whether this was the first step of earning back Clarke’s trust. Lexa’s soul sung triumphantly in its possible victory.

But now that Clarke was recovered, Lexa had many obligations to attend to. Most pressing was the Azgeda archer that had been captured by Clarke and Lincoln’s raiding party. So far none of the other scouting groups had yielded any promising results, and the imprisoned young girl was their only new source of intelligence.

Lexa had hoped that the girl would be cooperative and that extreme measures were not necessary to extract the information they needed, but alas, the girl had remained tight lipped and unresponsive to every tactic that they had employed thus far. Lexa had spent the last six hours asking questions and garnering no results to show for her efforts.

It was midday now, and the sun was hanging hot and overbearing at the sky’s peak. The air was thick and humid, and Lexa’s clothes were sticking uncomfortably to her skin. Sweat glistening prettily in the yellow light as she took a break from the dark and humid cells of the dungeons. Hoping to catch a breath of fresh air and cool breeze against her boiled skin.

There was an angry bank of clouds on the horizon that shimmered in the heat and cast a debilitating glare to any who stared too long. The clouds were rolling in fast, tinged with grey and black bruising, promising a thunderstorm later in the day. Lexa longed for cool water from the heavens to make their debut, as the heat and the fruitless interrogation of the prisoner was wearing Lexa’s patience thin.

Lexa was tired of being confined to the dark depths of the dungeons. They were part of what the Skaikru identified as an old world subway station. Where mechanical transportation trekked between cities. Lexa had seen images of a train in old world books, but hadn’t realised their significance until recently.

Lexa was informed that the partially collapsed subway tunnel would flood in the wet season, making life exceptionally uncomfortable for any prisoners confined to its depths as punishment. And part of Lexa hoped that the incoming rain made the pit in the earth a soggy mess for the Azgeda girl. After six hours standing in the sticky, suffocating heat – which was somehow worse underground than it was above. Forced to wear her ceremonial pauldron, Lexa was hot and tired and ornery.
Jameson and Malik had been tasked with guarding the cell, whilst Lexa, and two of her generals, Indra and Thane, aided her in the interpellation of the prisoner.

Lexa knew that if the girl did not cooperate soon, then more painful measures would be implemented to extract the information they required. And that meant summoning Ontari.

Since Azgeda was one of the most ruthless and brutal environments to live within the thirteen clans, the people who resided there were taught the best and most efficient ways of surviving. This often meant that men and women from Azgeda were exceptionally cruel and were dishonourable in their dealings and interactions.

Their children were taught to fight by beating them to pulps and seeing if they survived. And if they did, they repeated the action every day until they were strong enough to kill their master.

Their poisons were tried and tested by cutting themselves first before their intended victim. If an Azgeda warrior was foolish enough to die from their own experimentation, they were not mourned.

Information was extracted by torturing their prisoners and causing them immeasurable pain before they died. And if their own bodily pain was not enough to force a confession, then their families fell victim to the same fate. Under the rule of Queen Nia, these atrocities were only exacerbated by their leaders own vindictiveness.

Growing up as Ice Nation, ensured that Ontari had an extensive education in the arts of torture and coercion. But because she grew up as the daughter of Queen Nia, she was a master at both.

However Ontari loathed putting her knowledge into practice. Especially after what happened to Costia and her older brother Roan. Lexa knew that by asking Ontari to torture this young woman, she would suffer. That Ontari’s emotional pain would rival even that of the archer’s physical agony. But there was no other choice, and both Lexa and Ontari knew that.

The thought of purposefully inflicting this pain upon her friend, caused bile to climb up Lexa’s airway and threaten to strangle her. It felt too similar to the pain she forced Clarke to endure on the mountain. The agony that Gustus suffered as she killed him for his blinding loyalty. The torture Costia experienced because Lexa dared to love her. Somehow, Lexa always found herself in these impossible positions, where her role and duty as Heda, forced her to injure those close to her. It was moments such as this that made Lexa resent her command.

With great reluctance Lexa sent Jameson to find and escort Ontari to the village cells.

Ten long minutes later, and Ontari was standing before Lexa, just outside the dark, clamminess of the cells. Her face a stony mask of indifference. Her eyes distant and cold. And Lexa knew that despite loathing the task assigned to her, Ontari was prepared to enact it. Because Lexa had asked her to.

“Leave us.” Lexa commands to her generals and guards loitering by them, who had been awaiting orders and further instruction. Those surrounding the duo dispersed immediately, all disappearing in search of a cool patch of shade until Lexa needed them once more. Lexa turned her gaze towards Ontari as soon as they were alone. “I would not ask this of you if there was another choice. I…” Lexa stammers in a rush of breath.

“Relax Lexa, I know.” Ontari reassures with a miniscule smile that doesn’t quite reach her eyes. She knew that it wasn’t much, but it was all she could muster at the moment. In order to complete her task without complication she would need to distance herself from her emotions, and that process needed to start before entering the room and coming face to face with the prisoner. As humanising the victim, made inflicting pain near unbearable for people with a conscience. For people like Ontari.
“I know how difficult this is for you Ontari, and I am so sorry for putting you in this situation.” Lexa pleads softly. The guilt and shame that wracked her body in retaliation for making her friend endure this, was excruciating. The two heady emotions were engaged in tug of war with Lexa’s insides. Neither emotion winning the game, but managing to cause Lexa discomfort in the process.

“I know you are. And I also know how difficult it is for you to watch something like this happen. I know it makes you think of… her.” Ontari whispers. Costia’s name remained unspoken, and yet both women knew that it was her torture and death that Ontari was referring to.

Lexa had been firmly pushing the details of Costia’s death to the back of her mind. Else she invited the nauseating disgust and rage evoked by the event back into her heart. Lexa had barely dragged herself out from beneath the weight of emotions in the days surrounding Costia’s death. And until Nia no longer lived, Lexa knew that those feelings had the power and potential to overwhelm her if given the chance. Lexa sucks in a deep grounding breath and turns her face up to the heavens, blinking away the tears that had gathered in the corners of her eyes. When the offending salt water had finally evaporated, and her composure had been returned, Lexa directed her attention back to her almond eyed friend. Lexa implies her gratitude with a small, watery smile.

“Shall we do this?” Ontari asks with reluctant bravado. Returning Lexa’s attention to the task at hand.

Lexa simply nods her head and stands to the side, allowing Ontari to lead the way.

Following Ontari back into the brick oven that was the dungeons, Lexa allowed her friend to take the lead and control the situation. Thane, Indra, Jameson and Malik all following shortly after. Not needing to be summoned as they had kept a close eye on their Heda’s movements.

Thane handed Ontari a leather bound parcel of tools that rattled as its metal contents struck one another. The sound and sight of the red stained material made Lexa’s gut churn uneasily.

Lexa was careful to tuck away the expression of disgust and kept her face completely neutral. A perfect mask of stoicism, despite the conflict of morals currently whirling through her head. On one hand Lexa did not want someone within her coalition to suffer, especially by her command. But Lexa also knew that the information that this girl might know, made her valuable. And she only remained an asset if she shared her knowledge. And in the grand scheme of things, this one woman’s pain might prevent hundreds of others from suffering at the hands of Nia. Logically, Lexa knew she had made the smart choice, but the principle of torture still weighed heavily upon her conscience.

The girl before them looked to be no older than eighteen. She had white blonde hair, almost silver in colour, and eyes the same hue of ice. The pigment so light, that it was barely visible. The iris appearing almost non-existent unless close observation was lended. The girl’s skin was pale, and her hands and face were caked in soot from the dungeon. Her face was raised where scalding hot branding irons of the Ice Nation, had marred her face, the markings still an agitated red colour indicating their freshness. There was a single shackle tethering her foot to the wall, and her hands were secured behind her with a rope. The girl sat awkwardly on the floor, propped up against the wall behind her. Her eyes and facial expression vacant of emotion. But her gaze was wary, critical and focused purely on Ontari.

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The girl had obviously seen Ontari’s facial scars, identifying her as one of her clansmen. But the girl betrayed none of her fear, despite knowing that Azgeda styled torture would likely be inflicted upon her should she refuse to cooperate.

Ontari stalked closer to the girl, her facial expression menacingly detached. Her eyes were alight with a cruel fire. What no one else in the room could see however was the layer of fear buried beneath the
threatening façade. And Lexa felt the nausea amplify tenfold. The guilt was hungrily devouring Lexa’s intestines.

Azgeda torture techniques, varied in severity. But almost always included a build up to the truly excruciating pain. In the hopes that the victims fear of that pain would break them before the actual endurance of the pain killed them. Azgeda was all about mind games, and making the anticipation of the pain worse than what it might be in reality. It was all about the suspense. And many prisoners exposed to Azgeda torture went insane before they ever died.

Except for Costia.

Ontari placed the leather bound instruments on the table, and began purposefully unwinding the crimson fabric. Ice blue eyes following every slight movement with rapid flicks of her eyes. Her nervous glaring switching between both the commander and Ontari was the only indication of her fear. Her eyes attentively analysing the situation, alert to the danger closing in on her. She was painfully aware of the fact that she was the prey in this situation, and there was not a single thing she could do to remedy it.

Ontari picks up a pair of brass knuckles, and examines the metal curiously, giving the piece of equipment her undivided attention as she spoke. “Taim yu assa ai qwessa nau, den der wi wei nou joita. If you answer my questions now, then there will be no pain.” Ontari promises, as she licks a finger and scrubs a small fleck of dried blood from the gleaming metal. “Ba taim yu nou. Den der wi bei loz. But if not. Then there will be plenty.” Ontari declares ominously, her eyes finally finding the Azgeda girls to drive the threat home. The girl flinched almost unperceptively. Her body tensing slightly, and her throat working hard to swallow. “Teik osir beega, wi osir? Let us begin, shall we?” Ontari says with a small grotesque smile, her fingers interlacing themselves with the brass, as she threats her fingers into the weapon.

With a small flick of Ontari’s wrist, Jameson and Malik, rush the girl in a blur of movement. Lifting the thrashing female up onto her feet and then fastening her to the wall roughly. Her hands tied above her head. The girl spits and hisses as the two lumbering men resume their posts by the door.

“Sumtin easa kom beega kom… Something easy to begin with…” Ontari pauses, caressing her fingers across the cool metal adorning her hand. “Chon yu bilaik? Who are you?” Ontari asks with poisoned sweetness.

The girl stares defiantly at Ontari. Resolute in her decision to remain mute.

Ontari replies with a swift blow the girl’s stomach. The girl gasped loudly as her breath was forcibly knocked from her body. Ontari fought her urge to cry. She hated herself right in this moment. For inflicting this pain.

Lexa pushes aside her urge to look away. Forces herself to watch what is happening as a result of her orders.

“Chit laik yu hisha au de trigedkru mas? What are you doing in the woods clan lands?” Ontari asks this time.

Again she is met with stony silence from the young girl.

Ontari strikes the girl in the stomach again, harder this time. The archer keels over as best she can to protect her exposed abdomen, and gasps for breath. Tears springing up in the girls eyes, as the pain rolled through her body.
Ontari’s breathing was beginning to labour. The physical exertion and the will power it was taking to remain unmoved by the girls suffering was exhausting. Pushing aside the disgust and self-loathing once more, Ontari continued with her questioning.

“Laik yu hir ona hedus kom de kwin? Are you here on orders from the queen?” Ontari demands, her tone icy. Her hand shaking as she mentions her mother’s title.

The girl predictably remains silent.

Ontari punches the girl in the face this time. The force of the blow spraying blood across the room and against the cement behind her as the metal collides with her cheek. The skin on the inside of her mouth breaking with the impact. The girl gargles on her own blood for a moment as she cries out in pain. Before spitting the crimson substance onto the floor and levelling a fierce glare upon Ontari.

“Chit ste de kwin strat? What is the queen’s plan?” Ontari ground out between gritted teeth.

Silence reigns once more.

Ontari punches the girl in the same place on her cheek as before, yielding the same spray of blood, and a resounding crack as her skull makes impact with the stone supporting her weight. The girl gargled cries and icy glare make Lexa’s stomach roil. As Ontari prepares to ask her next question, the girl speaks. Brokenly at first as she finds her voice, but then it grows in strength after a moment.

“Ai laik Greya kom de Azgeda. I am Greya from the Ice Nation.” The battered girl spat, her body hanging unsteadily from the wall. Her left cheek already beginning to swell and bruise from the abuse. Her anguished expression turning into a self-satisfied sneer, as she continued. “En yu laik Ontari, de Azprisa. Scramed dorta gon kwin Nia. And you are Ontari, the Ice Princess. Disgraced daughter of Queen Nia.” Greya mocks.

Ontari feels icy hate fill her veins for her mother, and for this insignificant girl before her for reminding Ontari of whence she came. Ontari punches the girl twice in the stomach, harder than before, leaving the young girl gasping for breath, and crying out pitifully as her body is assaulted without mercy.

When the Greya finally regained her breath, Ontari stalks closer to her. Grasping the girls head between her hands roughly, Ontari placed her face directly next to Greya’s, and whispered darkly into her ear. “Taim bilaik ste tru, den yu beda nou bei brat ba fana strik gada. If that is true then you should not be smug, but fearful little girl.” Ontari released a feral smirk, as the girl’s face visibly paled. The blood smeared across her cheek standing out against her stark white skin. The chalk bleakness only breaking where the green and blue bruises had begun to form. Ontari pushed the girls head sharply as she stalked away, so that her head collided with the stone once more. The heavy thunk and a small grunt of pain the only noise that could be heard within the room besides steady breathing.

Lexa watched on with muted disgust and guilt. She knew that Ontari went to a dark place when she was put into these situations but it somehow it felt different to be told about it then to witness it firsthand. Ontari hated inflicting pain to achieve her own purposes, and Lexa knew that underneath the stormy smokescreen that Ontari had carefully constructed, that this entire scenario was hurting her friend. But Lexa would have been lying if she did not admit that watching Ontari transform before her eyes into a calculated persecutor, had left her rattled.

“Ontari, daun ste pleni gon nau. Ontari, that is enough for now.” Lexa says evenly. Her tone commanding for the benefit of everyone in the room. Including Ontari. The authoritative intervention seemed to be enough to bring Ontari back to herself, after getting carried away by her hate for Nia.
“Sha Heda. Yes Commander.” Ontari obeys immediately. Returning the brass knuckles into the leather pouch, and retying the equipment before handing them back to Thane and following Lexa out of the room.

Lexa leaves her guards to watch over the prisoner, and dismisses her generals, before leading Ontari to a secluded portion of the lake.

Ontari follows wordlessly, her eyes vacant as her feet drag through the dust without energy.

When the duo reaches the isolated area of the lake, Lexa is only just fast enough to step of the way as Ontari retches in the thistle by the water edge. The brunette girl, struggled to draw in breath as the acidic burn of her breakfast exiting her mouth, clung to her tongue. When Ontari has finished, Lexa helps her to her feet again, and helps guide her to another area, unsoiled by vomit.

Lexa settles Ontari next to the water’s edge and begins washing the blood from her hands silently. When Ontari’s palms are clean, Lexa pulls a cloth from within her pauldron that she typically used to clean weapons in moments of boredom, and wets it in the cool of the water. Lexa draws the damp cloth over Ontari’s face, gently scrubbing the vomit, blood, sweat and dirt from it. Cooling and cleaning Ontari’s skin.

When the task is complete, Lexa seats herself next to Ontari and waits for her to speak. Knowing that there would be a cacophony of thoughts and emotions flitting behind the confines of her skull, and that when she eventually grasped onto one, she would talk. She would need to talk. Ontari was like that. She would retreat inside herself to try and process things on her own and then seek out someone’s help to decipher their meaning when the time came that she couldn’t do it on her own.

They sit by the waterside for another ten minutes, lazily gazing out across the crystalline blue of the lake and admiring the way the wind licked at the surface of the water, creating ripples.

The sun had now disappeared behind the dark, angry clouds, however the heat stubbornly remained.

“I lost myself for a moment in there.” Ontari says dejectedly, her tone bereft of emotion. Ontari felt as though she were mourning a loss of self, even a momentary one made her feel like she could morph into her mother without her knowledge. “I don’t want to become like her Lexa.” Ontari confesses quietly.

“I know. And you won’t.” Lexa reassures softly. Her eyes meeting Ontari’s questioning gaze.

“How do you know that? Nothing is written in stone. The only inevitable thing in life is death.” Ontari comments sadly.

“I know that you won’t become your mother, because you’re worried about becoming her.” Lexa says simply.

Ontari’s frown deepens as she tries to comprehend what Lexa was telling her.

“You want to be a good person, and Nia is incapable of worrying about such trivial things. She doesn’t care about people. The only time she thinks about them is when she can use them to gain more power. She is incapable of empathy and compassion. You are the polar-opposite of her. You only pursue power when it helps others. You love people more than yourself, and you care about their wellbeing. You’re a leader, she’s a dictator.” Lexa bolsters quietly, her tone confident and doubtless. When Ontari’s uncertain gaze searches Lexa’s for reassurance, she allows a small smile to cross her lips. Ontari smiles in return after a moment.

“I am truly sorry that you had to do that Ontari.” Lexa apologises again, her face mutating into one
laden with guilt and a tinge of self-directed antagonism. She hated that she was obligated to put her friend through that, for the sake of her people.

“Stop apologising Lexa. You and I both know that you didn’t have any better options. None that you could think of at the time anyhow.” Ontari stresses, her expression transforming into one of loyal determination.

“I bet Clarke could have come up with something better than torturing the prisoner.” Lexa comments. Her tone was not one of self-doubt or self-pity, but merely acceptance. Like the statement was a fact with little to no consequence.

“Then why didn’t you ask for her advice?” Ontari asks simply.

“Because she has said that she isn’t ready to lead and make those decisions.” Lexa explains. When Ontari still looks dubious of Lexa’s logic, she continues. “And the last time I encouraged her to assume leadership, she was poisoned.” Lexa says evenly, the guilt she felt over that particular detail, sometimes made it difficult to breathe.

“That wasn’t your fault. Clarke made her decisions, and you are not responsible for them.” Ontari presses urgently, wanting Lexa to see things from her perspective.

“To be a leader, is to be responsible for those around you. Of course I am responsible for her.” Lexa retorts hotly. Her patience beginning to erode with the direction of conversation.

“Clarke might not think she is ready to lead, but what she has yet to realise is leadership is not a choice. She is and always has been a leader, and that makes her responsible for her actions, not you.” Ontari exclaims. To drive her point home she continues by saying, “And you’re the one who taught me that.” Ontari smirks, as Lexa narrows her eyes. “Talk to her about it. She might be able to give you some perspective. And even if she can’t, still talk to her, because you can’t do all of this on your own.” Ontari suggests.

“I can do it on my own.” Lexa mutters, just as a fat drop of rain falls and lands on her face.

Ontari pauses for a moment, her expression thoughtful. “Okay. You probably can do it alone. But you shouldn’t have to.” Ontari decides immodestly, a broad smile lifting her scarred cheeks.

Lexa chuckles, just as the skies open up and rain begins to pour down atop their heads in sheets. The two girls stand and begin slowly making their way to shelter. Both taking joy in the way the cool rain soothes their heated skin, and washes away the humidity of the day.

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone enjoys the new chapter! I had some really amazing feedback with my last chapter, so thankyou to everyone who made the effort to comment. It really made my day!

Just a heads up, I have currently got a heap of family staying with me right now, and I don’t get much quiet to write. So my next chapter update might take a little while, so please be patient with me.

Let me know what you all think, I really enjoy knowing how all of you are feeling with
the new chapters!

Love Loz x
Clarke was seated out on the veranda, watching the rain fall and basking in the water-cooled air. The thunderstorm had been building all afternoon and the heat up until the point where the skies opened up, had been stifling. Within the confines of the hut, the temperature felt equal to that of burning rocket fuel, the heat gathering and pooling within those four walls.

Despite wearing only chest bindings and a pair of pants, sweat had continued to pour off of Clarke’s body. Her hair sloppily clinging to her forehead, and the salty excretion stinging the edges of the wound across Clarke’s ribs.

Grace had been near inconsolable by the excessive warmth. Clarke had stripped the toddler down to her cloth nappy, and sponged cool water over her flushed and overheated skin. But Grace had continued to cry with frustration. Unfortunately the baby wanted nothing more than to be comforted by her mother’s milk, and there was still a chance that remnants of the poison could be passed to Grace through breastfeeding. So Grace had to make do with goat’s milk, water and sweaty cuddles with Clarke.

Grace had been especially clingy since Clarke had awoken, as she had broken her first tooth. The razor sharp front incisor had pierced Grace’s bottom gum. The red upraised flesh looked angry and inflamed from its recent infiltration, and Grace was grisly from the intrusion. Wanting to be near her mother, but loathing the added warmth that was coupled with the proximity.

Clarke had felt a little overwhelmed by the whole scenario. Naomi had left hours ago as she was required to help treat villagers that had fallen ill with heat sickness. However before she left, Naomi had left specific instructions that Clarke was not to leave her bed, as too much physical exertion could reopen her injury. That left Clarke alone to care for Grace, in the suffocating heat of the hut.

That is until the rain started, and Clarke couldn’t stop herself from taking Grace, some furs and her sketching equipment out onto the veranda to enjoy the blissfully cool air.

Clarke settled herself onto the thick wooden slats of the small veranda. Her sketch pad in hand and Grace stretched out comfortably on the soft furs beside her. The near naked child enjoying the way the wind dried her sweaty red locks into their naturally curly state. Clarke was pleased to note that Grace’s discontented crying had abated and the unhealthy scarlet of her cheeks were beginning to fade with each minute spent in the cool air.

Clarke allowed herself a brief moment to simply be enamoured by Mother Nature around her. Although Clarke had been on Earth for two years now, she still found that some aspects of the world around her still had the ability to enthral someone even as damaged as herself.

The force of the breeze sent a fine mist of liquid into the air. Miniscule speckles of water kissing Clarke’s face like butterfly wings. The wind licked at the falling droplets of water, slanting their descent at an angle, so that the rain pelted the earth with fury, leaving deep divots and gouges in the slickened mud. The rain pooling into small lakes and rivulets, all making a hasty descent downhill towards the lagoon, at the far end of the village. Green forestry glowed with an unnatural brightness against the stark backdrop of the weeping clouds. The air that previously reeked of dust and sweat now pleasantly fragranced with woodland nectar, wet bark, fresh grass and a general sweetness that sang of vitality. Birds twittering with joy all around.
Thunder rumbled in the distance and sheets of lightening brightened the dark grey skies sporadically. The abrupt sounds occasionally startling Grace, and earning a confused whimper from the chubby seven month old. A few comforting pats on the bottom later and Grace would return to her happy gargling self, and dribbling over her toys.

Toys that upon closer inspection, Clarke realised were new additions to the one carved whale that belonged to her daughter. Clarke recognised the brown stuffed bear’s stitching to be from Naomi’s skilled hand, and the tastefully whittled horse, resembled the mare Lincoln always insisted Clarke ride when Grace was with her. Then there was a ball, held in shape by some kind of durable rubber, and encased by stretchy leather, something one might expect if Raven and Tanga had combined their efforts.

All beautifully thoughtful gifts from her friends, to her precious daughter. Showing how much they cared for Grace even when Clarke was not there to witness it. The thought of Grace being loved and protected by her friends, sent a flare of hopeful light into her chest. Affectionate warmth flooding her thoracic cavity, that rivalled even the heat of the passed day, with its intensity.

Clarke threaded her fingers through Grace’s wispy auburn curls and marvelled at both the softness, and her daughter’s uncanny ability to make people around her fall in love with her. Grace swivelled her head in the direction of the attention, and grinned happily when Clarke smiled at her daughter. Grace’s tiny tooth peeking out from her lips as she expressed her content, and her big blue orbs twinkled. Clarke planted a soft kiss on the top of Grace’s head and breathed deeply of the clean scent of her daughter’s crown, honey and ginger, and undoubtedly Grace.

Clarke redeployed her attention to the stormy weather as Grace’s focus drifted back to her toy horse, and the flavour of the sanded wood in her mouth.

Despite the severe weather, Clarke was pleased to note that most of the villagers from Alton were enjoying the respite from the heat. Many children were running in the rain and splashing in the puddles naked, as their mother’s watched on with small smiles born of maternal pride. Father’s often joining their children in the rain, with far more restraint in their glee, as their wives watched and wondered if they would ever grow up. Warriors sprinted in the mud towards the sparring pits to gain some practice fighting in the rain. And teenagers ran around dodging and hurling balls of sludge at one another, trying and often failing to keep their balance on the slippery ground. The atmosphere was so peaceful and blissfully content, that Clarke struggled to remind herself that there was a war of shadows taking place just outside this village.

Clarke pulled her booklet of loose papers and sack of charcoal sticks from beside her, and began idly doodling. Basking in the clarity of the calmness surrounding her. Soaking up the squeals of laughter, the steady falling of rain, and the rhythmic tapping of Grace colliding her toy horse with the floor, intrigued and delighted by the noise she was able to create.

Clarke’s first sketch was of a young boy holding his toddling sister’s hand as she valiantly attempted to remain standing upright in the slippery mud. The naked children looking to only be about four and two years of age, respectively. The mud slicking their bodies almost invisible against the onyx of their skin.

The second sketch was focused on a father laying patiently in the wet earth as his four children buried him in the sludge. The young children giggling happily as more mud was piled onto his body and the muck stuck to his long black beard. His wife standing to the side in the rain, holding their youngest baby against her hip, encouraging the children to cover their father’s legs more.

The third sketch was of a young couple, sitting it the tree nearest Clarke’s hut. The pair sitting high up in the branches, kissing in the rain, oblivious to the world around them. The two boys, seeming
no older than fourteen, sharing an intimate moment isolated from the bustle of the village. Embracing each other passionately, unaware that Clarke’s sharp eyes had spotted them. Clarke felt like a voyeur capturing this moment, but it was much too pure and untainted to ignore, so her hand skated across the thick parchment, leaving thick black scars in its wake.

By the time the third sketch was finished and safely stored back in the leather pouch that protected the sheaths of clean white paper, Clarke recognised the forms of Lincoln and Octavia walking towards her. The pair were lathered in mud and laughing happily. Clarke was suddenly glad to have come outside, as having their meeting inside the hut whilst they were so caked in grime, would have earned Clarke a swift smack to the back of the head from Naomi. Injured or not.

Clarke spared one last glance at Grace, who was still happily chewing on her toys, to steel her resolve, and remind herself why she had called her friends here to talk with her. Reassured, Clarke brought her attention back to the approaching forms of her friends.

“Looks like you guys have been having fun.” Clarke comments wryly, gesturing to the mud sticking to their light clothing, and faces. Her lips quirking into an amused grin.

“Lincoln issued a challenge while we were sparring. Then it started raining, and I might have deliberately tripped him in the mud, and then made fun of him…” Octavia trails off as giggles spring free from her chest. Her eyes playful as she makes a pig noise in Lincoln’s direction.

“She likened me to a pig in mud, and I retaliated.” Lincoln finishes for his laughing girlfriend. His eyes full of mirth, but his expression crafted into an exaggerated look of displeasure.

Clarke bit her lower lip in an attempt to stifle her own laughter, and failing. The noise coming out a little choked at first, but then springing to life as soon as Clarke stopped fighting the impulse.

“You missed the best part Lincoln.” Octavia reprimands with a laugh and a half-hearted shove.

Lincoln blushes, and quickly looks to the ground before freezing his embarrassment and soldiering on. “Then Indra kicked us out of the sparring rings, for both behaving like pigs.” He finished with a small grin.

Octavia was wiping tears from her eyes, as her laughter ebbed off. “Anyway. We thought we would come and see you, since we can’t spar, and you mentioned wanting to talk to us earlier today.” Octavia chimes happily.

“Is everything well Clarke?” Lincoln asks more solemnly when Clarke doesn’t respond straight away. He cast a quick cursory glance between Clarke and Grace, attempting to discern any obvious issue. He was greeted by a wide grin from Grace, as he made eye contact with the baby.

“Yeah, of course. We’re fine.” Clarke assures, as Lincoln and Octavia seat themselves along the veranda near Clarke and Grace. Careful not to spread their mud and wetness amidst the others. “Before I say anything though, I just want you two to know that you can say no, if you aren’t comfortable.” Clarke says carefully, her eyes earnest and searching between of the two friends she considers family.

Octavia glances at Clarke warily, before exchanging a look with Lincoln. They both seem to communicate quietly amongst themselves, ensuring that the other was comfortable with whatever was said next. Seeming to come to the same conclusion, they diverted their attention back to Clarke. Their expressions open, but non-committal.

Clarke takes a deep breath before beginning, in order to ground herself. “Since waking up, I have had some time to re-evaluate what is important to me.” Clarke looks between her friends once more, to ensure that they are so far willing to contemplate what she wishes to ask of them. Clarke glances down at Grace, who was studiously eyeballing Lincoln, who seemed to be her favourite person outside of Clarke. “I realised that if I had died from the Azlipa-Tozu, then I would have left Grace as an orphan. And I don’t want her to grow up without parents if something was to happen to me…”

“Wait a second. Are you asking us what I think you are asking us?” Octavia asks cautiously. Trying to conceal the terror and excitement she felt from her tone.

Clarke observes the conflicting emotions in Octavia’s eyes, a mix between delight, fear and self-doubt. Making a deliciously complex cocktail of confusion for the younger Blake to contemplate.

Lincoln on the other hand, had the smallest of smiles plastered to his face. His eyes filled with affection and longing as he watched Grace. The baby wiggling happily now that her near continuous staring had been rewarded with Lincoln’s attention.

Both Lincoln and Octavia’s reactions had been what she had expected, so Clarke chose to view it as a good sign thus far. “Yes. I want to ask you both to be Grace’s god-parents.” Clarke says evenly. Lincoln’s smile widened, and Octavia’s expression grew more conflicted, as her eyes took in the sight of Lincoln and Grace staring at each other blithely. Octavia’s face paled as she was seemingly backed into a corner. Clarke watched as Octavia began panicking, and quickly cut in before she could fall too far down the rabbit-hole. “Of course I have no intention of dying anytime soon. And if something tragic was to befall me, I just wanted people that I knew would love Grace the way I do, to raise her the way I would. I know that it is a lot to ask of anyone. But you are family to me. And amidst all of our friends, you are both far more stable and capable of caring for a child. But again, like I said. It would only be a precaution. You both would only care for Grace if I died, and I don’t plan on doing that any time soon.” Clarke reassures softly.

Octavia’s expression relaxes minutely, and Lincoln refocuses his attention back to Clarke.

“Are you not sure that you wouldn’t want your mother to care for Grace instead of us?” Lincoln inquires cautiously. Only asking out of curiosity, instead of a handy escape to get out of the situation entirely.

“Yeah.” Octavia agrees, with a sliver more vigour than Lincoln. “We might feel like family, but Abby is your mum, your blood.” Octavia points out.

Clarke contemplates the question carefully before answering. Unsure how to explain that she didn’t want Abby to care for Grace when it was obvious that she struggled to find common ground with her own daughter, let alone her granddaughter. That while Clarke loved her mother, Abby was only supportive and loving when she felt like it. And Grace deserved more than that. “My mum is the Chancellor, and she is a doctor, both are very demanding jobs. She has far too much responsibility to care for a baby. And I worry that she would be overwhelmed by the task of raising another child alone. She struggled enough as was, when she was chief of medical on the ark and had a supportive husband to help her. I don’t imagine she would be able to give Grace the attention she needs.” Clarke explained. “And you guys are young and have lots of energy to raise a child. And I trust you with my daughter. I know that you both will love and protect Grace like she is your own, and that’s what I would want for her. To have two parents, if I was no longer there.” Clarke finishes solemnly.

Lincoln and Octavia nod thoughtfully, both contemplating Clarke’s explanation and each considering their individual thoughts on the matter.

“You don’t need to have an answer right now, but please think about it.” Clarke says softly. Casting a purposeful glance in Octavia’s direction she reiterates. “You can say no. It is a big responsibility to
ask of anyone.” Clarke says evenly.

Octavia nods her head attentively, as she maintains Clarke’s eye contact. Her mind drifting back to the conversation had with Clarke about parenthood and her reluctance to have children of her own. Octavia remembers the way Clarke had told her that it was okay to say no to Lincoln, if she wasn’t ready for kids just yet. And knew that Clarke’s advice from then was applicable to this conversation now. That Clarke was encouraging Octavia to apply the same counsel to this circumstance if she was not ready for this kind of responsibility. Octavia observes the way Lincoln is staring at her, his gaze warm and understanding, and yet earnest and excited simultaneously. Octavia knew what Lincoln wanted. He would say yes right now if the decision to become Grace’s godparent was his decision alone, but it was Octavia’s choice also, and he was being considerate towards her feelings on the topic. It just made Octavia love him more for his unfettered devotion. Octavia turned her appraisal towards Clarke and Grace, before finally responding.

“We will give it some thought.” Octavia says uniformly. Not wanting her tone or expression to betray her innermost feelings on the proposal, Octavia attempted to keep her face blank as the Trikru. But relented when she realised that because she had not fully mastered the emotionless expression of nonchalance, that she probably resembled a stunned fish more than a fierce Trikru warrior.

Clarke smiled at Octavia’s attempt at a mature response.

“Thank you for asking us Clarke. In the village where I was raised, it was considered a great honour to be awarded the care of an orphaned child. We appreciate your trust, and we will consider your offer carefully.” Lincoln reassured with a bright smile. His expression positively gleeful. Dark brown eyes alight with the possibilities presented to him. Of being more than just a family friend to the blue eyed baby that had captured his heart, and made him hungry for his own family.

“That’s all I can ask.” Clarke articulates around a pleased smile. Clarke hoped that Octavia and Lincoln would agree to the arrangement, but knew that O would be hesitant at the very least. Not out of any malice or discontent for Grace or babies in general, but for her own skills as a parent. Doubting her ability to care for another human being, when her own exemplar for the role thought it was good idea to raise her under the floorboards for sixteen years. “So how have the scouting missions been going?” Clarke asks curiously, drawing attention away from the topic of Grace’s guardianship for the moment. She had been highly intrigued to know what she might have missed while she was out, but so far no one had told her anything substantial. Clarke had of course tried to convince herself that she was only asking out of concern for their combined war effort and the safety of her friends, which was true, but it wasn’t the entire actuality. Clarke would be blatantly lying to herself if she was to claim that part of the reason she was so curious was because she liked to be in control. To have all the pieces of the puzzle, whether she was directly involved in putting the pieces together or not did not matter. So long as she knew what the pieces were in advance. The control a leader held, was what Clarke wanted. Even if she had adamantly shied away from those roles of governance recently, Clarke was finding that her hunger for leadership was returning. With vigour.

“I have been out another two times with Indra’s hunting party.” Octavia supplied, before looking at Lincoln to continue where she left off.

“Our scouting group has not been out again.” Lincoln confesses, a secret smile pulling at the corners of his mouth.

“What, why?” Clarke asks, slightly dumfounded.

“Because almost everyone in our hunting party refused to leave without you.” Lincoln confesses with a broader smile. One stained with loyalty and pride abundant.
“Why not? The mission is far more important than my recovery.” Clarke points out with furrowed brow.

“Everyone had a different reason, and for some I cannot speak with complete certainty. But for Bellamy and I, it was a matter of not wanting to leave our friend while you were so ill. For Mercy and Tobias I believe it had a lot to do with the fact that they felt safe with you by our side. Like nothing could harm us while the commander of death fought with us, for our cause. And Mallion and Angus… Well let’s just say they didn’t want to anger you again.” Lincoln chuckled wryly. Both he and Clarke recalling the interesting and vaguely thrilling conversation that they had had with those two lumbering oafs in the dead of night, whilst hunting the Azgeda.

Clarke’s breathy laughter was released into the afternoon chorus of rain, thunder and playing children. Octavia glanced between Clarke and Lincoln, obviously confused, but not curious enough to ask any further questions regarding it.

“Well thankyou Lincoln. It means a lot.” Clarke’s gratitude was palpable, but so to was her surprise. She had not expected to have earnt, or in Mallion and Angus’ cases, demanded their loyalty, and didn’t quite know how to process this new information. So Clarke stored it away in the recesses of her mind and prepared herself to deal with it later. “Ontari has decided to join our squadron when we return to the forests. Did you know?” Clarke asks.

“Yes, she mentioned something about it in passing.” Lincoln admits, his eyes growing pensive before continuing. “I believe she will make a good addition.” He comments vaguely.

Clarke merely nods in response. “Have any of the other hunting parties found anything helpful?” Clarke asks, hoping for an air of nonchalance and apparently failing as Octavia hikes an eyebrow up to her hairline before she answers Clarke’s inquiry.

“Yours and Lincoln’s group has been the only team to garner anything helpful so far.” Octavia admits with a sigh of defeat. Irritated and overly frustrated that she hadn’t seen any blood or battle so far.

“Has the Azgeda archer said anything yet?” Clarke asks cautiously. Knowing that the topic had the potential to become rather hot if she didn’t choose her words prudently. The casual mentioning of torture tended to become rather messy within the Trikru, as they preferred to find more cunning ways of extracting knowledge than outright bodily harm. And Clarke knew that Ontari had been summoned earlier that day to inflict pain in exchange for intelligence. The thought made Clarke’s stomach churn, but she promptly pushed the impending nausea aside.

“Indra said that Ontari was sent to… Interrogate the prisoner.” Octavia supplied with a small grimace.

Clarke nods along in an attempt to be told more, despite already knowing this. “Was she successful?” Clarke asks after a moment’s hesitation. She should really be asking Ontari these questions.

“No she was not.” Lincoln answers solemnly, his lips thinned into an expression of disappointment and disgust.

Clarke wonders if he is thinking about the time he was tortured by the hundred in the early days. Clarke spares a glance in Octavia’s direction, and knows that the brunette was thinking the exact same thoughts as Clarke was. The younger girl threading her hand into Lincoln’s in a silent offering of comfort and support and apology.

Clarke was extremely unenthusiastic to ask the next question, as she was slightly concerned about
the answer she might receive, but forced herself to spit the question out anyhow. “What method did they use to extract the information?” Clarke asks, her voice wavering slightly, and her tongue feeling like sandpaper in her mouth, scrubbing the endothelium off of the roof of her mouth.

Lincoln’s eyes widened in surprise at the question, before narrowing into two calculating and assessing points. “Brass knuckles.” Was all he said in reply.

Clarke released a deep breath. “It could have been worse.” Clarke admits quietly, to no one in particular. Clarke found herself feeling exceptionally lucky to have never been exposed to torture before, but sobered when she realised that while her torture might not have been physical, it was just as painful. The mountain being her unending torment.

“Yes it could have been.” Lincoln admits gravelly. His eyes dulling a little as he contemplates what pain the young girl might have endured.

“Apparently the commander wants to ask you for advice on how to proceed.” Octavia comments with a sly smirk, before it was promptly bitten back and shoved down. Her eyes filled with insinuation, as she speaks again. “What’s that about?” She asks, with a quick eyebrow waggle that looked suspiciously similar to Raven’s.

“I have no idea. Who told you that?” Clarke deflects easily. Ensuring she kept her facial expression blank and tone even, despite her consuming curiosity.

“Indra did.” Octavia replies swiftly, too swiftly to be a completely benign comment. The truth was that Octavia had eavesdropped and heard snippets of conversation between Indra and the other General, Thane, when she had been waiting to spar with Lincoln.

“Wow, you two really have mended fences.” Clarke comments. Honestly surprised by the turn of events.

“I wouldn’t say we’ve mended fences. It’s more like, she has grudging respect for me and my skill as a warrior, but she doesn’t shy away from any opportunity to insult me.” Octavia chuckles and runs a hand through her dark braids, shaking water and drying mud free from the brunette strands.

“So you’re saying that she trusts your skill as a warrior, but doesn’t like you as a person.” Clarke clarifies, her eyebrow rising in question.

“Yeah.” Octavia utters with certainty. Lincoln smiles wide as he realises the trap Octavia is about to step in, and tries to stifle his mirth. Octavia remains oblivious.

“So she wouldn’t be telling you gossip about the commander, because gossip is typically something one tells to a friend, not someone who they dislike?” Clarke asks with an amused expression pulling her lips into a wide smirk, her eyes crinkling in the corners and her cheeks lifting several inches as her muscles contracted around her smug expression.

Octavia spluttered for a moment, while Lincoln throws his head back and laughs at his girlfriend’s blunder. Finding the whole situation beyond hilarious.

“I… Um… Well… She… I guess… Yeah, I totally eavesdropped.” Octavia admits rapidly, her cheeks a burning crimson shade, and her eyes darting between gaps in the floorboards. Studiously tracing the wood grain with her baby blue irises.

Clarke and Lincoln both fell into fits of giggles, as Octavia’s face was steeped in colour and her shoulders shuddered with quiet, self-deprecating laughter. Clarke’s ribs protested from the sudden jarring movements, but Clarke studiously ignored her discomfort, in pursuit of her amusement.
“Busted O!” Clarke guffaws, her laughter racing free from her chest in a rush of breath and melodic uproar that earned her the confused stare of Grace, as she ogled her mother laughing at something she didn’t yet understand. Clarke ruffled her fingers through Grace’s hair playfully. The little girl content with the attention smiled brightly and kicked her legs out with a happy squeal.

“Annyway.” Octavia drawled exaggeratedly. “Back to what I was saying before I was so rudely called out. Apparently the commander wants to talk to you about alternate interrogation strategies that you might be familiar with, in order to get the prisoner to divulge any secrets she might know.” Octavia says in a rush of breath, eager to divert attention away from herself and her stealth less mishap.

“Okay.” Clarke concedes with a confused shoulder shrug. “And?” She asks expectantly.

“Well! Do you know of any interrogation techniques that your super-secret assassin taught you?” Octavia rolls her eyes at Clarke’s perceived dim-wittedness. Her face melding into the perfect expression of ‘this is completely obvious, are you stupid,’ without actually saying the words verbally.

Clarke supressed the urge to groan as she realised her mistake in telling Octavia and Lincoln about being trained by an Azgeda assassin. Well less regretting her decision to tell them, as that would imply that she consciously made the choice to share that information. The more correct statement would be, she wished her friends were less observant, and hadn’t put two and two together.

“I was taught a lot by Kadeon. But everything I learned was for my protection, and self-defence, he never really instructed me in the arts of torture. It was something he abhorred in his own reluctant education, so he refused to divulge anything he might have known, with me. Plus I haven’t had any personal experience with painful interrogation techniques, so I can’t recount anything from familiarity. So I really don’t think I will be much help.” Clarke admits pensively. Her mind running through all of her training, and coming up blank. Clarke was equally astonished to find that the only reason she was so invested in this was because Lexa needed her help. It wasn’t because she wanted to interrogate the prisoner, or because she felt anger towards the girl for being Ice Nation. Her urge to help was fuelled only by Lexa, and her supposed request for Clarke’s assistance.

“I am sure that you will think of something Clarke.” Lincoln encourages quietly. His eyes and tone sharing with the world the way he believed in Clarke’s ability to accomplish the unimaginable. As she had been able to return Octavia, his heart, safe from the clutches of the mountain. A feat only contemplated in legends, and stories so fantastical, there was no chance of truth lying within.

“Yeah, you always come up with something.” Octavia supported, but with far less enthusiasm. Her mind drifting to the missiles at TonDC on its own accord. Octavia abruptly pushed the memory away, as she knew that it would make showing kindness to Clarke difficult. Despite the fact that Clarke had found a way to save Bellamy, and preserve the mission to infiltrate Mount Weather, Octavia struggled to justify the hundreds of lives lost when those bombs fell and flattened Lincoln’s village. She was just glad it hadn’t been her decision to make. She did not envy Clarke’s position, that day or any day following. And the toll those decisions must have taken, Octavia’s shoulders ache just thinking about the burdens Clarke must carry.

Clarke’s mind was going into overdrive, as she tried to think of all the different things that they could try. But most of them involved trickery or pain. And Azgeda did not tend to respond well to either of those tactics. Azgeda were far too harsh for such strategies to bear fruit. Clarke’s mind somersaulted as it skidded over an idea, that while it was a lot of effort and work on Clarke’s behalf to enact, might be helpful.

“I think I have an idea.” Clarke says excitedly, her eyes alight with a passion to succeed.
“Well spill Clarke, we aren’t mind readers.” Octavia huffed good-naturedly, her nose scrunching as she scratched more mud out of her hair.

“Azgeda are cruel and ruthless, but that is because they grow up in a harsh world. Where no one is trustworthy and kindness is a non-existent concept. So this girl has probably never experienced either. What if we show it to her?” Clarke suggests, her face alight with interest and enlightenment as the cogs in her brain turned rapidly.

“So what? You’re going to good cop, bad cop her?” Octavia asks incredulously. Her tone disbeliefing and full of doubt. Her expression wary and concerned, like she was contemplating the chances of Clarke having finally lost her sanity.

Lincoln’s face becomes blank as the old-world expression is lost on him, and Clarke quickly elaborates before he can ask the inevitable question for clarity. “There was a great man in the old world who once said ‘Have I not destroyed my enemy when I have made him my friend?’ The phrase good cop, bad cop is basically an old interrogation technique from before the bombs, which was based on this ideal.” Clarke explains, her hands gesturing wildly, as a plan begins to formulate in her mind.

“So you will make a friend and build a trust with your enemy so that they will share their knowledge?” Lincoln reiterates for further illumination.

Clarke nods swiftly, her damp braids shifting with the motion.

“Hold up. You want to become friends with the enemy?” Octavia asks incredulously, her voice heightening an octave, as her forehead furrows into a frown. “Have you lost your marbles Clarke? Ice Nation isn’t trustworthy. This is a stupid idea!” Octavia exclaimed, impassioned.

“Clarke does not need to reciprocate the trust, so long as she earns the prisoners.” Lincoln points out calmly. “Plus this also avoids further torture, unless that will still be happening in order to heighten the girls desperation for kindness and a reprieve from her suffering?” Lincoln directs his questioning gaze towards Clarke.

“If gaining the girls trust takes longer than a few days, then a steady combination of both the torture and my kindness might become necessary. But I would like to avoid that, if I can.” Clarke says evenly. The thought of purposefully inflicting pain in a situation where the victim is helpless and vulnerable makes Clarke sick to her stomach, even Wanheda seemed to be repelled by the notion. There was no honour in exacting agony upon someone who lacked the ability to fight back. It would be like purposefully injuring a child. The thought churns the stomach. “I would like to avoid torture if I can. There is no honour in it.” Clarke intones solemnly.

Lincoln nods his head firmly in agreement.

“Let it be stated on the record, that I think you are risking too much by doing this.” Octavia states protectively.

“And what would I be risking?” Clarke asks curiously. “The girl will be chained to a wall in a dark dungeon somewhere. She will be weak and tired, unable to physically fight me. She does not sound like a threat.” Clarke says playfully, a small smile pulling at her lips.

“You risk exposing your own secrets Clarke. You are a legend, there’s no way the Ice Queen doesn’t already know about you. And it’s likely she’s curious, so the rest of her clan probably is as well. To gain someone’s trust you need to give up a piece of yourself in exchange for a piece in return. Otherwise there is no trust, it is an illusion, and if this girl is smart she will see through any
kind of falsehood or trickery on your part. So it needs to be real and authentic, the trust between you and this girl needs to be real enough that she can’t poke holes through it when you aren’t there. And what if you go in there and actually begin to trust this girl? What if you accidentally share something personal that points out a weakness, a flaw in the impenetrable wall that is your box of secrets, that sends them all unravelling? What if you accidentally name the people you care about? You paint targets on their backs.” Octavia rants, sucking in a deep lungful of breath, before continuing on her tirade. “There is so much that we don’t know about you Clarke, so much that we and the rest of the world is curious about. And you are good at keeping your secrets, you are. But not so good as to keep hidden the fact that there are secrets to be uncovered. To know that secrets are being withheld from you, makes a person distrustful. So you are going to need to pull off one hell of a performance in order for this plan to work. So again, I think this is a stupid idea.” Octavia exclaims bluntly.

Clarke gapes at Octavia for a long moment before staring at her hands thoughtfully. Her eyes tracing the smudges of black charcoal along the tips of her fingers from sketching earlier, as her mind chews on the feast of new information before her.

“It would appear that I have a lot to think about before I actually put anything into action. And this plan might not even be put into practice, depending on whether or not Lexa even wants my help, as you have said earlier. But I will think about it all.” Clarke responds contemplatively. Her expression completely sincere and genuinely gratuitous for Octavia’s input, despite how bleak her observations made their chances of success appear.

Long after Octavia and Lincoln left, and darkness fell. The rain was still steadily falling, and Clarke’s mind was still tinkering with her plan for the Azgeda girl as she drifted off to sleep, with Grace tucked snugly against her side.

Chapter End Notes

Hi all! I hope you all enjoy the new chapter! Please leave me some feedback in the comments, I really love hearing from you each time I update!!

Things are going to start heating up from here on out in regards to the war with Nia. It is a slow build but the pressure is definitely beginning to be applied. Next Chapter will be the long awaited heart to heart between Clarke and Lexa, and Clarke will finally come clean about her time away. So stay tuned!

If you have any suggestions for reactions and specific interactions between Clarke and Lexa for this next chapter, let me know, and I will take them under advisement. Just also be aware that while I will read your suggestions and consider them carefully, I am afraid they won't be included if they alter the course of my timeline. So nothing drastic, but small moments of fluff are welcome ladies and gents!!

Happy reading lovelies!

Love Loz X
When Clarke awoke the next morning, the rain had finally stopped and the skies were clean of clouds. Clarke was enthused to find that her wound hurt much less, and the skin surrounding the injury was beginning to lose its inflamed redness from the cauterisation. Naomi was of the opinion that the wound would probably scar, but that infection was highly unlikely so long as Clarke continued to apply the carrot and charcoal poultice, until the rawness had scabbed over. Naomi had also pointed out that Grace could be breastfed once again, as the Azlipa-Tozu would be out of her system by now. Grace was so excited by the new turn of events, that she had squirmed and wriggled animatedly, her fists and feet randomly kicking out and her smile so large as she drank from Clarke’s breast, she wondered if her daughter’s cheeks hurt.

Clarke left Naomi’s hut with Grace melded to her hip and a bag of herbal based Trikru soaps to wash both herself and Grace in the river. Clarke walked a little slower than usual, as the exertion of moving and simultaneously carrying Grace, had her ribs protesting with a sharp ache with each step.

Clarke was aware of the eyes that surveyed she and Grace, as they made their way down to the river’s edge. Grace was ever oblivious to the extra attention, but the scrutiny made Clarke’s skin crawl, like someone had dumped a barrel full of cockroaches down her shirt. Holding her head a little higher, Clarke studiously ignored the curious eyes burning holes into the back of her head, and fought her urge to shiver in disgust.

By now the village was alive with the news that Clarke had killed a handful of Azgeda gona while she was out on patrol, and that she had been struck down by Azgeda poison, only to survive. The legend of Wanheda and subsequently goufa gon wamplei, the child of death was being spoken by near every villager and warrior within Alton. The tale growing ever fantastical and unbelievable with every new telling. Clarke was horrified to be talked about like she was something inhuman. Both, of the positive and negative nature of the sentiment.

Many people were drawing hope from her miraculous recovery, and deciding it was a good omen for the war. That Clarke’s survival was nature’s way of assuring their swift victory. But it also stoked the fires of distrust. Many had begun to wonder if Clarke truly was something spewed up from the belly of the underworld. And if that be the case, does she truly possess any humanity. Querying what was stopping Clarke from abandoning a side and slaying all mankind in the pursuit of their combined power.

The legend was growing and the knowledge made Clarke’s stomach writhe like an eel, caught with a rusty hook in its mouth. Her blood feeling frozen in place, and willing to shatter her body into a million icy pieces if she were to react to the Trikru in any way.

So Clarke kept her face carefully blank and emotionless and kept on walking until she was away from the intrusive magnifying glass that had been refocused on her. The undesired attention reminded her of her first few days in Arcadia.

Clarke found a secluded spot by the river, where the canopy of the trees shaded the water from the harsh rays of sunlight. Rays that would definitely have burnt Grace’s fair skin.

Clarke removed first her own, then Grace’s clothing, and then used Grace’s chest harness, to attach the infant to her person, so that she was unable to wriggle free from her grasp. Then sunk them both
into the cool depths of the water. Stopping her steady descent into the river, when water wet her navel, aiming to avoid getting her still healing wound damp. Grace inhaled sharply at the lowered temperature of the water, and splashed excitably, releasing a high pitched squeal as the water was displaced under her chubby fists. Clarke held Grace in place firmly, despite the child’s tether, to ensure that the slippery toddler did not fall from her grasp. Her water slicked skin making the job of holding her steady, as difficult as juggling bars of wet soap.

And then began the methodical task of removing the grime that had built up over the past few days. Grace was significantly cleaner than Clarke, and the job of freshening the squirming infant was considerably less involved than it was for Clarke to achieve the same level of hygiene.

Clarke scrubbed the dried blood free from her hair, which had been splattered there since the night of their mission. Sweat, blood, dirt and grime was washed away from her body, turning the murky water a darker shade as the filth was diffused into the water and then sunk to the river bed.

Clarke left the water to lather both she and Grace with soap and shampoo, before walking back into the river to wash the foam away. Clarke stayed in the water for a few minutes longer, just enjoying the way the liquid caressed her skin like a lover’s sweet touch. Grace was completely enraptured by the water, and seemingly intrigued by the way the fluid slipped through her fingers no matter how many times she tried to grasp it. Clarke smiled softly at Grace’s discovery, and wondered what kind of woman she would grow to become, with a mind so curious.

Clarke eventually pulled herself from the calming tranquillity of the water and began drying and redressing herself and Grace. Choosing to stay seated by the waterside when she was finished as the silence was blissful in contrast to the whispers and gossiping within the village.

Settling Grace on a fur by her side, allowing the infant to have some of her own space. Grace stabilised her arms beneath her body and began lifting herself with her two shaky limbs. Propping herself up so that she could see around independently. Clarke knew that she would be crawling soon, and the thought of babyproofing everywhere she went, sent a shudder down Clarke’s spine. Kadeon’s sister Tallie had three children, and the youngest, Jotham, had mastered the art of crawling everywhere. He was so freakishly fast at it, that Tallie and her husband Col had to constantly watch him like a hawk, else he would sneak off on them.

Clarke sat on the embankment for the next half hour, simply basking in the delightful solitude. Until she heard approaching footsteps, similar to the circumstance that had occurred when she arrived in Alton with the commander. Clarke would have vaulted for her dagger, but the sound of the footsteps halted her instinct. Whomever they belonged to was being deliberately loud, so not to spook Clarke. Purposefully announcing their arrival, by being needlessly flamboyant with their footfalls. Whoever it was was either Skaikru or someone who had talked to Ontari, as the girl had received a rather bloody blow to the head after sneaking up on Clarke.

Her head pivots to where a familiar body emerges from the trees. Eyes as vast and luminous as the forest meet Clarke’s assessing blue gaze, chestnut hair tumbling over her shoulder like a web of spun silk.

“Naomi told me you would be down here.” Lexa says in lieu of a greeting. Her stance slightly uncertain as she stops mere feet from Clarke’s seated position. Lexa’s cheeks fill with blood and a light pink blush embraced her sculpted cheekbones. “I would not have come whilst you were bathing, but Naomi mentioned that you would be a half hour and then you still had not returned. And then I became worried, as you are still injured, and I thought that perhaps something had happened so I left my guards and came looking for you.” Lexa rambles, her cheeks darkening in their hue with each word.
Clarke finds the sight utterly adorable. The thought temporary startling her as it rattled around her skull. Clarke’s brain having temporarily stepped out for morning tea apparently. Clarke tried to reprimand herself internally for the term of endearment, but couldn’t bring herself to deny the fact that while Lexa was rambling and awkward, she was completely charming and wholly delectable. Clarke felt her own cheeks warm at the realisation.

“It’s fine Lexa. Thank you for your concern.” Clarke says softly, her own demeanour turning shy in the face of her kindness. Clarke silently questions why she’s making such an effort to show care towards Lexa’s feelings. To go beyond civility and journey into waters much deeper and harder to navigate. Seas wrought with turbulent waves and gusty winds. A part of Clarke’s mind whispered uncooperatively, shattering the illusion she painted for herself and reminded her of her reality, that those waters were a smokescreen for her own fear. And the boundary she so feared to cross, was the line drawn between friends and… more. Clarke shakes her head minutely in an attempt to dislodge the thoughts dancing in her brain like a ballerina at an old world rock concert. Entirely confusing.

Both women’s thoughts are interrupted when Grace begins to make delighted noise from her place on the ground. Her head craned to stare at Lexa with bright blue eyes. Grace gaped at Lexa for a long minute, her sapphire orbs large and owlish as she studied the new person. So innocent and trusting. When Lexa meets Grace’s curious gaze, the infants face splits into a victorious grin, her dazzling dimples on full display, and over-excited giggles break free from her chest. Grace drops her head down onto the fur, and lays still for a moment, before propping her body up on her hands once more and staring at Lexa intently. When Lexa meets the little girl’s mischievous blue eyes once again and spares a smile, Grace’s features stretch to accommodate her charming smile, and throaty giggle. Grace continued to repeat the action over and over again. Stealing both Lexa and Clarke’s attention, and captivating her audience entirely.

Clarke instantly recognised Grace’s antics for what they were. A game, and a request for Lexa’s attention. The sight of her daughter so shamelessly making friends with Lexa melted her heart, and turned any lasting resolve to remain distant with Lexa, to ineffectual mush.

Lexa was enraptured by the little girl that reminded her so much of her mother. From the eyes that looked like they were carved from the heavens themselves, to the way the orbs twinkled in the light when they laughed. The way their lips quirked identically, with a brief moment of reluctance, before their smile broke free of their face and became supernova in its brightness and intensity. Sure Grace had features that were dissimilar to Clarke’s. Like her auburn curls and dimpled cheeks, but everything else about that little girl was her mother, so wonderfully Clarke. Lexa was utterly helpless to avoid the snare of this child, her eyes so trusting and innocent. So un tarnished by the world they lived in, and Lexa’s heart throbbed in her chest. She found herself wanting to protect this little girl’s purity with every fibre of her being.

Lexa chanced a glance in Clarke’s direction and her breath was stolen a she observed the look of pure maternal love and pride directed towards the child before her, and Lexa felt affection bubble in her chest. She relished the way Clarke allowed her emotions to be depicted so vulnerably on her face. And knew that even a week ago, Clarke would have never allowed herself to be so open and exposed to Lexa’s scrutinising eyes. Lexa recognised the progress that had been made and longed for the day when Clarke might look at Lexa with loving emotion so intense. Feeling hopeful that it was an accomplishable feat.

“If you don’t sit down, she’s just going to keep doing it until she wears herself out.” Clarke says wryly, lifting Grace and shifting her over so that Lexa had a place to sit on the furs. Lexa stifled her surprise over the clear invitation for her to invade Clarke’s personal space, and bit down the satisfied sigh that threatened to release itself, as she caught a hint of Clarke’s scent on the breeze, sweet and exotic like vanilla and elderberries, and yet somehow still managing to smell like
When Lexa was settled amidst the furs next to Clarke, with Grace sandwiched between them, the toddler continued to crane her neck and attempt to shift her body to see Lexa better. The infant whining with frustration when her body wouldn’t move the way she wanted it to. Her muscles still too weak to support her weight correctly.

Clarke watched the child’s frustration mount and knew that if she didn’t remedy the issue promptly, a screaming toddler would be her reward. Clarke observed the way Lexa’s fingers twitched as though she wanted to reach and comfort Grace, and decided to steel her nerve and reservations, and take a chance. Lifting Grace from her place on the ground and depositing her softly in Lexa’s lap.

Lexa was admittedly stunned when Clarke placed Grace softly in her arms, and couldn’t stifle the subsequent inhale of breath that rattled through her chest. Recognising the gesture for what it was, a display of trust. The faith Clarke had placed in Lexa, to be gentle and kind to her daughter in this moment, made Lexa’s body feel like its fundament carbon base had been stripped back and replaced with helium, and that with the next substantial gust of wind she would simply float away. Lexa felt liberated and hopeful in this moment, and it was addictive. Basking in the contentment she felt in this moment, Lexa held Grace close to her chest, in a way she wished she could also hold Clarke, and simply breathed in the moment. The scent of the infants head, smelt like honey and ginger and Clarke.

Lexa looked at the sweet blue eyes of Grace, which reflected the heavens identical to her mother’s, and couldn’t ever imagine someone hurting her. Lexa’s thoughts strayed to Titus in that moment, and a sour taste invaded her mouth, as she contemplated the way he had desired to steal Grace away from Clarke. It was incredibly disconcerting to Lexa, that Titus was yet to be found, and had been missing for days now. It left Lexa wondering whether he was simply off pouting, or perhaps something else had happened. And the thought sent an unpleasant chill down her spine. Lexa banished the direction of review from her mind for the time being, and refocused on the tiny person before her that had just placed one of her braids in her mouth.

Clarke watched Lexa cradle Grace like she was made of porcelain glass. Like she was fragile and delicate and in need of protection from the world, and Clarke’s chest flooded with warmth. Clarke felt the excess heat threaten to leak from her eyes, but bit down the onslaught of tears before they had the chance to fall. Something about watching Lexa with Grace, felt right. Like it was meant to be. And as confusing as it all was to Clarke, she didn’t shy away from the emotions, she embraced them with open arms. Deciding to take on board Naomi’s advice and trust that her heart might know what was best, even if her head didn’t quite understand what was happening.

When Lexa’s braid went straight to Grace’s mouth, she knew that any concerns she might have had, about whether Grace and Lexa would get along, had been unfounded. That if not in any other area, Lexa could be trusted with Grace. The realisation was astounding to Clarke. Especially when she wasn’t entirely certain that she trusted Lexa in any other substantial way. But she trusted Lexa with Grace – the one person in this world who was precious to her above all others. “She likes you.” Clarke whispers quietly, reverently.

Lexa’s reply was abruptly cut off when a line of saliva dribbling down the infants chubby, grasping fist and landed on Lexa’s chest. Lexa was no novice when it came to children, as she interacted with her night bloods on a regular basis. However the youngest among them was brought to her when she was four years old. And Lexa was unaccustomed to the vices of an infant a small as Grace, and the gift left on her chest momentarily surprised her. Eliciting a small noise that Lexa would later deny was a squeal, and a bemused expression consisting of a nose scrunched in playful disgust, and her eyes widening comically as the wetness slid down her cleavage.
Clarke burst into laughter at Lexa’s reaction to Grace’s dribbling, and couldn’t help but find Lexa’s response entertaining and strangely endearing.

“Do not laugh, I am not accustomed to children this small.” Lexa protested weakly, her tone lacking all seriousness, and the words simply serving to draw further laughter free from Clarke’s chest. Lexa revelled in the melodic timbre of the sound, and decided then and there, that she would strive to drive more of it free from Clarke in the future.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Lexa, you’re a natural!” Clarke exclaims sarcastically, around another fit of giggles. The sound wreaking a similar response from Grace as she participated in the display of humour, despite having no idea what it was directed towards.

Lexa levelled a playful glare in Clarke’s direction, only thinking it might have been a bad idea afterwards, but she had been swept up in the moment and reacted without the filter she usually has in place around Clarke. Grace’s presence seemed to have stripped the defence mechanism away, making it inert. Her concern however, was unfounded as Clarke continued to chuckle in the face of her expression.

Long moments later when the laughter died down, Clarke’s expression became thoughtful. “So what did you want to see me about?” Clarke asks quickly, before her mind is presented with the opportunity to regress.

Lexa looks momentarily puzzled, like she can’t rightly recall her purpose for being there either, outside of her concern that Clarke had drowned in the river. Then the fog clears and she soldiers on. “Well there were a few reasons for my visit. One of them being that I have been advised to seek out your counsel on a matter.” Lexa states evenly, her eyes searching Clarke’s expression for any indication that she was unwilling to help. Clarke simply raises her eyebrow in a silent invitation for Lexa to continue. “Yesterday we began interrogating the Azgeda girl that you and Lincoln’s patrol captured for questioning, and so far we have had no luck extracting any useful information. As you are aware, our mission here is time sensitive, and the sooner we can know what she does, the quicker this guerrilla war can step out of the shadows and Nia can be crushed, once and for all.” Lexa states firmly, her voice becoming more impassioned with every word spoken. Her eyes alight with calm fury, as her mind flits over the prospect of ending Nia’s reign and life.

Clarke nods her head silently, her own mind combing over the plan she had formulated yesterday, and the tweaks she had put into place since Octavia had pointed out the flaws in her fledgling strategy. “Yes I was told the interrogation did not go well.” Clarke utters resigned.

“Would you be willing to… help me?” Lexa asks timidly, her throat working as she swallowed down her pride and her nerves. Lexa’s eyes imploring Clarke to give her aid. Lexa adjusts Grace’s weight in her arms as the toddler’s head grows heavy in exhaustion.

“Of course I will help.” Clarke affirms gently, and watches with interest as Lexa’s body seems to cave in her relief, and she holds Grace a little closer to her chest. “Tell me what tactics have been deployed so far.” Clarke urges.

Lexa spent the next few minutes explaining the events that had transpired since Greya had been brought to them and the strategies Ontari utilised in an attempt to get her talking. Clarke listened with rapt attention and became more assured in her own plan with each word spoken. When Lexa finally finished Clarke took a deep breath.

“It seems as though while Greya is fearful of pain, as we all are, she will not respond to it. It is likely that growing up in the Ice Nation that she has been taught to mentally distance herself from it.” Clarke comments offhandedly. Lexa raises her eyebrows curiously, but before she can comment or...
ask any further questions, Clarke answers the unasked question. “I spent some time with someone from Azgeda.” She explains.

However Clarke’s enlightenment, only served to fuel the fires of Lexa’s burning curiosity. And the lack of forthcoming information was slowly driving Lexa to the brink of frustrated insanity. She wished Clarke would just be open and honest with her about her time away. Lexa forcibly, with immense effort, pushed her rising ire down and soldiered ahead. Refocusing on the conversation at hand and ignoring her own personal upset. “So do you have a plan?” Lexa asks tersely, her tone more clipped than she had intended. Clarke’s eyes widened at the tenor of her voice, and Lexa silently cursed her inability to remain emotionless around Clarke. She could don her carefully constructed stoicism in every other aspect of her life, except where Clarke was concerned.

“Yes I do.” Clarke says slowly, practising caution in the face of Lexa’s unexpected reaction. Clarke knew that it was probably fuelled by Lexa’s frustration over Clarke concealing things from her. But Clarke wasn’t ready to tell her about Kadeon. Not because of any convoluted loyalty she still bore to her dead lover and friend, but because then Lexa would know everything, and Clarke would have nowhere left to hide. And that thought unnerved her considerably. Especially since the darkness, where secrets were abundant and Wanheda thrives, was where Clarke had existed for so long. Even when she was with Kadeon, the shadows remained. Without them, Clarke felt naked and exposed to the world. And while she was willing to share some truths with Lexa, she would not be pressured into divulging information she was not yet ready to reveal. She would step into the light, she would do that for Lexa, but at her own pace. “I think we should take the direct opposite approach to her interrogation than what has been used so far. Since she has been conditioned to not respond to pain, I suggest that we weaponise kindness, something she has no idea how to react to. Those that grow up in Azgeda, are ruthless and cruel, but they are never shown compassion, even as children. If we were to expose her to it, there is a high likelihood that she will not have any defence mechanism in place to protect her from it being used against her.” Clarke states with a self-satisfied smile.

Lexa expression morphs into one of surprise and then pensive thought, as she thinks about all the different ways this might go wrong. “So you’re plan is to gain her trust?” Lexa asks dubiously.

“Yes. And before you say it, I know that in order for trust to be earnt, trust must be given. Which in itself creates a problem, as she is our enemy and if our own secrets were to be exposed, and she were to escape, we put ourselves at a distinct disadvantage.” Clarke cuts in.

Lexa nods her head in solemn agreement. Having total faith in Clarke, but not in her plan thus far. “So how do you plan on eliminating the threat that trust poses?” Lexa asks.

“Well for starters, I would be completely honest about the fact that certain things she might want to know about me are off limits…” Clarke responds immediately.

Lexa disturbs explanation, by interrupting with her own exclamation. “Wait, YOU want to be the one to enact this plan?” Lexa questions incredulously.

Clarke bristled at the clear disbelief in Lexa’s tone, and her eyes hardened momentarily. “Yes.” She says simply.

Lexa used one hand to scrub across her face, pushing her fingers through her hair with frustration. “Do you not see the irony here Clarke?” Lexa asks with a tired, almost defeated sigh. “You refuse to share your secrets and trust anyone, yet you are willing to risk both for a perfect stranger, your enemy no less.” Lexa explains with a humourless chuckle.

Clarke inhales sharply, having not expected Lexa’s disbelief to be directed towards Clarke’s urge to maintain secrecy, but instead in her ability to be kind perhaps. Lexa’s words pull painfully on her
heart strings, as she observes the defeated set to Lexa’s shoulders, and the tired set of Lexa’s eyes. “I am willing to share some secrets with you Lexa. But not all at once, and at my own pace. When I am ready.” Clarke says softly, her tone infused with vulnerability and calming reassurance.

The sound forcing Lexa to meet her eyes, her gaze helpless not to seek out the blue sapphires ensconced by Clarke’s face. “Are you ready now?” Lexa asks hopefully, trying and failing to keep the desperation she felt from colouring her tone.

Clarke remains quiet for a long moment, her eyes clouding over with memories and experiences she would rather forget, but is willing to share with Lexa if it meant preserving… whatever it was that existed between them. “Yes.” Clarke answers seriously, her voice not wavering despite the lack of confidence she felt within herself.

Lexa’s heart beat a little faster, and her whole body thrummed with energy as Clarke purposefully expressed her belief in Lexa. A trust that while it perhaps did not extend to all areas of Clarke’s life, was present in this moment. Lexa’s mind scampered rapidly over all the unexplainable clues that had made themselves known since Clarke had re-entered her life. Choosing one at random, Lexa asks her first question. “How did you survive the Azlipa-Tozu?” Lexa queries gently. Although she had guessed that Clarke had been exposed to it in the past, she wanted to hear the truth come from Clarke’s lips, not her own assumptions.

Clarke steeled her resolve and ploughed through the explanation unblinking. “I have been poisoned with it in the past.”

Lexa does not miss a beat, and continues with a rapid follow up question. “How many times have you been poisoned?” Lexa asks more gently.

Clarke averts her eyes for a brief moment and goes quiet as she counts each cut that had nearly taken her life through dishonourable means and relives the experience.

Lexa clarifies when Clarke doesn’t respond immediately, mistaking Clarke’s pensive expression for reluctance. Hastily jumping to her own conclusions without truly studying Clarke’s expression first. “It is obvious that it has happened more than once, else you would have remained ill for longer.” Lexa points out sternly, her brow furrowing again in frustration.

Clarke eyes dart up to Lexa’s with a reprimand hot on her lips. “This is not an interrogation Lexa. I have told you I will be honest, be patient.” Clarke growls, her own fears and annoyance’s making her tone harsher than intended.

Lexa blanches. “I am sorry Clarke I didn’t mean to…” Clarke interrupts her apology.

“No I am sorry. I… I am not used to sharing. I didn’t mean to bite your head off.” Clarke amends with a frustrated exhale of breath. Silence is the unwanted third party to their conversation, as neither of them speak for long moments. “To answer your question, I have been poisoned by Azlipa-Tozi on three separate occasions, including the one from a few days ago.” Clarke says gently.

“What happened?” Lexa prods cautiously, her curiosity flaring to life again, as questions emerge in her mind.

“I… that’s a long story… One I would rather not share right now.” Clarke stutters out in answer. She wasn’t prepared to talk about Kade yet, so she decided to avoid the question all together, knowing that any answer she might provide would only end in Lexa’s curiosity becoming intrigued further.

“Okay.” Lexa relents with disappointment.
“Ask another question.” Clarke encourages placatingly, knowing that Lexa would be dissatisfied with the current direction of their discussion.

Lexa is reluctant to ask the next question, as she fully expected it to be brushed off and remain unanswered like her previous inquiry. And the rejection still stung. “Can you tell me about Alton? You have obviously been here before. What happened?” She asks with a slight waver in the middle, her insecurity evident to herself.

Clarke takes a deep steadying breath and wonders how best to explain her complex history here in Alton. How best to tell someone that they transformed into an even bigger monster, than they already were when they left from this place. Clarke was fearful and disinclined to answer, but knew that she needed to share this with Lexa. Deep down she knew that Lexa would understand, and that she would not judge Clarke. But also that if she continued to dodge questions that made Clarke uncomfortable, that Lexa would give up on her, and Clarke wasn’t willing to allow Lexa to slip through her fingers. So she attempted to turn her will to titanium and push away her fears. But it wasn’t working, so she tried a different tactic. “Can I ask you a question first?”

“Yes of course.” Lexa says softly. Beginning to be unsurprised by Clarke’s need to distract from the task at hand, and becoming rapidly maddened by the tactic.

“I can trust you, right?” Clarke asks so small that the question could have come from a child. “I can’t be hurt again.” She says mournfully.

Lexa feels melancholy and defeat settle in her bones and is readying to simply drop the topic altogether and never ask again, when Clarke stops her.

“I am not asking for you to apologise for the mountain again. You have been forgiven for that. I just need to know that you will listen to what I say and not judge me for what I have done.” Clarke pleads in a way she could only describe as, pathetic.

Clarkes tone stops Lexa dead in her tracks, and empathy blooms in her chest like an exotic flower, breathtakingly beautiful and delicate. “Clarke we all have history that we are ashamed of. And I would like to think that when you learn things about myself, you would not judge me for my actions and mistakes. Just as I will not judge you for your own.” Lexa reassures smoothly.

“Thankyou.” Clarke whispers brokenly. She cats one last glance at Lexa, and the now softly sleeping form of Grace, tucked against her arm. She registers the understanding and the patience of Lexa’s discerning green gaze, and feels herself relax. Clarke takes a deep breath and lets it out shakily. Wiping her sweating palms against the fabric of her pants, and slowly beginning. “I first came to Alton about six weeks after the mountain fell. I was in a pretty dark place and was looking to forget. Forget my people, my friends, my family, and you.” Clarke says softly, in an attempt to lessen the blow of her words. It doesn’t accomplish its task, as Lexa’s shoulders fill with tension, her eyes wary. “Are you certain you want to hear this Lexa?” Clarke implores gently, not wanting to inflict pain onto Lexa if it wasn’t wanted.

“Yes. I need to know.” Lexa says shakily. “Please continue.” She requests calmly.

Clarke nods and then continues, stifling a wince as she quickly glosses over the next part. “I found ways of forgetting by fighting, and drinking, and… sleeping around.” Clarke pauses, feeling blood pool in her cheeks, embarrassment heating her face.

Lexa had suspected as much, but to hear it spoken aloud was another thing entirely. Unbidden Raven’s comments regarding Tanga come to mind and her jealousy once again flares. “Is that how you know Tanga?” Lexa asks with baited breath. “You slept with her?” Lexa Clarifies, her voice
struggling to break free from the lump in her throat. Her possessiveness rearing back, like a viper before strike, threatening to overcome her, and testing her iron control.

“Yes.” Clarke answers hesitantly. “She was part of the purpose that drove me to Alton, to forget. Plus it was a small, obscure village where no one would think to look for me.” She elaborates hastily, eager to draw Lexa’s attention away from her past sexual partners.

“Was it serious?” Lexa’s jealousy inquired, refusing to be denied.

Clarke bit back her urge to smirk in the face of Lexa’s green eyed monster. “No. It was just one night, and then we became friends after that.” Clarke gently reassures.

Lexa nods her head stiffly, absorbing the new information like a sponge. “What happened to make you fearful of this place though?” Lexa asks stubbornly, her mind reliving all those moments along the road to Alton, where Clarke’s emotions of dread and anxiety, were omnipresent and so unchanging it was like they had been petrified in place.

“I.. I am… Not scared.” Clarke protests weakly. Her eyes darting to the soft earth, avoiding direct eye contact with Lexa’s scrutinising gaze.

Lexa smiles at Clarke with understanding, before continuing. “Clarke I watched you as we travelled to Alton. Every step closer to this place we got, the more distant and conflicted you became.”

Clarke’s brain seizes on the knowledge that Lexa had watched her, and does an internal happy dance. But then the implication of Clarke’s fear, tested her pride, and Clarke opens her mouth to deny it. However, is interrupted before her old habit of deception has the chance to kick in.

“I thought you were going to be honest with me Clarke.” Lexa says softly. It’s a low blow, she knows, but the lying was becoming tediously embarrassing to even watch at this point, and painful to endure. Like Clarke thought of Lexa as a simpleton incapable of coming to the conclusion that she was being dishonest.

“Fine.” Clarke relents with a defeated huff. Her shoulders slumping under the weight of the story Lexa had just requested to hear. Clarke looks around the landscape briefly to gather her bearings, and then finally spots what she is looking for. “Do you see that cliff face over there, peeking out behind the tree canopy?” Clarke points to the cliff that was just visible in the distance from their position, if they craned their heads up and spied through the tree tops obscuring the view.

Lexa squints her eyes in a way Clarke tries to tell her heart, is not charming, as the brunette follows Clarke’s finger. Her fine breath tickling the skin on the back of Clarke’s hand, and sending a jolt of something delicious through Clarke’s body, increasing the timbre of her heartbeat.

“Yeah.” Lexa replies, oblivious to the effect her close proximity was having on Clarke.

Clarke swallows back the strange reaction within her body, and tries to mentally prepare herself for the onslaught of unpleasant memories that she knows will be coming her way shortly. “That cliff face drops twenty metres into a ravine. And a hundred metres directly horizontal to that drop is a cave obscured by shrubbery.” Clarke points out.

“Okay?” Lexa’s speech lilts at the end, voicing her urge for the significance of this information to be made apparent.

“I lived in the cave for most of the three weeks I was here.” Clarke admits, before taking a few deep breaths to combat her mounting fear. Her breaths becoming shallow, and her face paling as she tried and failed to avoid reliving the death of Carl Emmerson. Clarke casts one last pleading look towards
Lexa, as if silently begging her to provide a plausible reason for her to avoid sharing this. When none was forthcoming she reluctantly continued. “And at the bottom of that ravine… Is where...” Clarke turned her watery gaze towards Lexa once more. “The bottom of that ravine is where Carl Emerson’s body is buried.”

Lexa was struck momentarily speechless by the new information, but now her curiosity was a raging inferno, demanding answers. “What happened?”

Clarke sniffs quietly and scrubs at her eyes to remove the offending wetness. “He wanted revenge for his family.” Clarke explained wearily, pushing past her body’s biological need to keep the secrets locked inside, as her throat constricts around the words and her voice tremors with emotion. Her figure feeling exhausted and drained as she resigns herself to the inevitability of this conversation. In a few minutes Lexa would know Clarke’s most shameful secret, and Clarke just hoped that Lexa’s eyes did not glimmer with disgust or disappointment with the new knowledge. The fear of being critically judged by Lexa felt wholly unbearably. Clarke sucked in a lungful of breath before labouring on.

“When I irradiated level five, Emerson’s wife, brother and two young sons were murdered. He wanted to kill me for what I did.” Clarke admits smoothly. The knowledge not provoking the anger it might have in others. But Clarke couldn’t bring herself to feel like his attempt on her life wasn’t justified. She knew that she deserved death for her actions, and even now, was at peace with what Carl Emerson attempted to do to her. It was only Clarke’s own actions, that she felt disgusted and ashamed of. Clarke shook herself and continued. “I had just finished returning from fishing in the nearby stream, but hadn’t had any luck catching anything. So I had climbed a tree and waited for some game to come my way. I had a crudely crafted bow and some arrows that didn’t quite shoot straight, and my aim was absolutely terrible. But I waited in that tree for a while, right near the edge of that cliff. When it became apparent that I had probably scared away all the game, I prepared to jump down from my perch. And that’s when I felt it.” Clarke grimaces as she recalls the memory. “White hot pain in my leg and the distinct sound of a gun going off. Once and then twice.” Clarke gestured to her thigh and gently ran her finger over the material clad scar tissue. The resounding ache reminding how much the two shots had hurt, as the pieces of hundred year old metal tore through the muscles in her thigh and both exited on the other side.

“I am so sorry Clarke.” Lexa’s voice is soft and empathetic as she listens to the story. Her heart in her throat, as fear coils in her belly. Despite knowing that whatever Clarke had endured, she had come out the other side alive. Lexa still found it incredibly difficult to hear about Clarke’s pain, even if it was from an old wound. Her heart ached for Clarke’s suffering.

Clarke picked up a stick and began drawing into the damp riverbank, before continuing with her story. Studiously avoiding meeting Lexa’s eyes. “I was temporarily dazed by the pain in my leg, so he used that to his advantage to attack. I fought back as best I could, but I was extremely unskilled, and anything I had learned and employed, was no match for him. At first I didn’t understand why he hadn’t just shot me in the head, and killed me outright. But then I realised that he wanted me to suffer before I died. The same way his family did. We grappled until eventually we got too close to the edge of the cliff, and both fell. On the way down I collided with a sharp and ragged piece of rock that jutted out from the cliff face. The impact tore open the skin and muscle all the way to the bone on my left shoulder blade. And the impact sent my body careening into a fallen tree, which had tumbled over the edge of the mountain, where I hit my arm. It slowed my descent, but also broke my humerus. When we reached the bottom of the ravine, I fell on top of Emerson. The force of the fall, combined with the impact of my body crushing him, left him in pretty bad shape.” Clarke paused, as the bile climbing up her oesophagus was making it near impossible to breathe. Clarke blinked away tears and tried to bite down her blinding shame. Unable to make eye contact with Lexa, to gauge whether the brunette girl was as disgusted in her, as Clarke was herself.
“He would have died anyway. But I wanted to kill him. For being the living embodiment of my guilt. For making me confront what I had done on the mountain. I did it because I wanted to wipe him and the memory of his people, of what I did to his people from the face of the earth. Like they had never existed. I wanted to relieve myself of the suffering my choice had inflicted upon myself, so I wrapped my hands around his throat and squeezed until he stopped moving, until his life fled from him. I killed him, like I killed every other living mountain man, woman and child.” Clarke’s body shuddered from the gasping sobs that now wracked her body. Tears streaming down her cheeks like torrents of blood, spewed up from the corpses of all the people she had killed.

Lexa simply listened as tears fell silently from her eyes. The anguish Clarke felt reverberated in her own heart, making the organ clench painfully for Clarke.

“I didn’t realise at the time that my guilt would skyrocket when my largest crime in life stopped being mass-murder, but graduated into the category of genocide.” Clarke whimpered pathetically, as her mind whirred over all the faces of those she had killed. The nameless faces of people who had died in the name of saving her people. And Carl Emmerson, who had died in the name of Clarke’s consuming guilt.

Lexa reached out to offer Clarke a hand of support, of comfort. But the blonde sky girl flinched away from the contact. Lexa swallowed down the ounce of hurt that flared in her chest at the rejection. And prepared to put some distance between herself and Clarke emotionally, but then Clarke spoke. So softly, that if the wind had picked up in that moment, the words would have been swept away forever.

“I do not deserve your comfort, for what I have done.” Clarke whispered.

And Lexa’s heart spontaneously opened up, sharing her life’s blood in empathetic pain for the broken person before her. Her previous emotion of wounded feelings disappearing as quickly as they had come. Lexa didn’t want to push Clarke any further but she needed to hear the rest of the story. And something inside of Lexa told her that Clarke needed to speak the tale aloud, for her own cathartic purposes. “Then what happened?” She prodded gently.

“It started raining hard, the droplets so large and brutal that they stung my skin. Blood was pouring out of me at an alarming rate. I knew that if I didn’t bind my injuries soon that I would share the same grave as Emerson, and despite my shame, I didn’t want to spend eternity rotting next to him. So I tore my clothes into makeshift bandages, wrapping them around my thigh and shoulder to staunch the flow of blood. And I made a sling to fasten my broken arm to my body. It was dark and the rain still hadn’t lessened, and I was so cold. But I couldn’t just leave Emerson there as carrion for the wild animals to devour, so I kicked the loose mud up over his body. I figured a shallow grave was better than nothing, and began to slowly climb back up the side of the mountain, in an area that wasn’t so steep. It took me all night to reach the top, and when I did, I collapsed from exhaustion and blood loss.” Clarke’s tears were beginning to abate as she finally passed the most difficult and confronting part of the story. Relaxing minutely as she recounted the rest of the memory.

“When I next awoke, I was in Naomi’s hut. Tanga and her younger sister Milly rescued me and took me to their mother for healing. They had been headed towards the sulphur springs at the peak of the mountain for the mineral rich mud that Naomi uses in healing salves, when they stumbled upon me.” Clarke recalls with a small grateful smile.

“Did the villagers not hear the gunshots?” Lexa asks with a furrowed brow and confused edge in her voice.

“No they thought it was thunder rolling off of the mountain, as there had been a large storm building that afternoon.” Clarke explains patiently, sniffing still to calm herself from her earlier tears.
“I see. Continue.” Lexa nods, appeased by the explanation, and significantly annoyed that it had taken so long for someone to help Clarke while she was wounded so gravely. The knowledge that Clarke could have died during her encounter with Carl Emerson prompted bile to claw at her throat, and some part of her soul to cry out desperately. Urging Lexa to hold Clarke close and never let her go again. To protect what little purity yet remained.

“Anyway, I stayed with Naomi and her daughter’s for about four days, and when I was strong enough to walk on my own, I stole some herbs and medicines, and left. Moving on to another village.” Clarke finishes. Her eyes finally leaving the basic outline of a flower that she had drawn in the mud, to face Lexa once more.

Lexa is silent for a long moment as her mind processes the chunk of information she received. “Clarke, have you ever told anyone this?” She asks shyly. Her expression vulnerable and unsure of herself as words tumbled free from her lips. Looking much younger than her age of twenty three.

Clarke’s eyes widen in shock, before she finally regains the ability to form a coherent sentence and answers. “I never wanted to.” She admits with a thick swallow.

“And what about Grace’s father? Did he know?” Lexa asks bashfully, her cheeks growing red with the effort it took to keep both her envy and hope in check, as she awaited Clarke’s reply. Both emotions tearing at their cages like feral dogs fighting to free themselves. Wanting desperately to share something with Clarke outside of the fall of the mountain men, that not even Clarke’s previous lover had had access to. Something, that while painful, was entrusted only to her.

Clarke simply shakes her head in the negative, and Lexa’s heart grew wings and soared like a proud eagle.

“May I ask why not?” Lexa asks anxiously. A mutinous voice in her head telling her that the only reason that Clarke shared this experience with her was because Lexa had backed her into a corner, offering her no other alternative but to speak, whether she wanted to or not. Because perhaps Clarke didn’t truly care about what Lexa thought of her, so was willing to risk deflowering any kindly thought or affection Lexa felt for her.

Clarke contemplates the query for a moment, her eyebrows furrowing as she asked herself the same question. “Well part of the reason I told you was because you asked.” Clarke admits, and watches mournfully as Lexa deflates. “But also because some part of me hoped that you would understand. That if anyone was going to listen to the atrocities I was responsible for and still treat me like a human being afterwards, it would be you… I feel like you and I are the same.” Clarke reveals, and hopes that Lexa doesn’t perceive the last part of her comment as an insult to her integrity. That Clarke was implying that they both shared shaky morals and the ability to kill someone in cold-blood for no good reason.

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Lexa smiles a genuine, carefree smile as Clarke’s words caress her eardrums. The words and the
sound of her voice alike, sending a pleasant shiver down her spine. “I understand Clarke, and I will never view you as less or as more than human. To me, you will always be Clarke.” Lexa reassures softly, her voice full of enraptured vulnerability and affection, and she watched with pleasure as Clarke’s lips tilted into a relieved smile. Lexa watched as a weight was removed from Clarke’s shoulders, her world weary eyes losing some of its age, by a hundred years. Making her look more like the young girl that she really was.

But before the conversation could progress any further, there was symphony of noise coming from the direction of the village, and the sound of running feet as someone rapidly approached. Both Lexa and Clarke turning towards the intrusion in case it was a threat. Lexa curling her arms protectively around the sleeping infant in her arms, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Clarke.

Ontari burst around the side of a particularly large tree, and stopped short at the sight of Lexa and Clarke sitting so close in each other’s space and the tear-stains adorning both their cheeks.

“I apologise for my interruption. But there are Skaikru visitors just arrived in Alton.” Ontari reports around a wheezing lungful of breath.

Clarke and Lexa both shared an equally confused glance between them before Lexa spoke up. “Who is with them?” Lexa demands.

“The Chancellor, some guards and young warriors I recognise as Clarke’s friends.” Ontari states calmly, even as Clarke’s eyes widen comically and her jaw shutters open. Like a frog preparing to catch flies.

“What are they doing here?” Clarke asks with fevered indignation, her tone heightening an octave in her confusion and distress, as Ontari’s news washes over her, and the thought of being in close proximity with her mother churns her stomach uncomfortably.

“They are here for you Clarke. They heard of your injury when we sent word to Arcadia.” Ontari states simply, a small smile softening the statement, so that Clarke can see how utterly sympathetic she is for Clarke’s plight. After all she had heard some of the conversations that had transpired between the mother and daughter back in Arcadia. The life of a guard is excellent if unintentional eavesdropping was something one enjoyed.

Clarke’s stomach dropped like an anchor in harbour.

“We will be there in a moment Ontari.” Lexa dismisses her fiend easily, more concerned about Clarke in this moment, as the girl looked utterly overwhelmed by the news of her mother’s impromptu visit.

Ontari left swiftly, casting Lexa an amused smirk, and a conspiratorial wink, before disappearing entirely. Knowing fully well that the commander was relishing her time alone with Clarke.

“Clarke, are you alright?” Lexa inquires gently. Her eyes fixated on Clarke’s face with worry illuminating her forest green irises.

“Yeah I will be fine. My mum and I didn’t leave on the best of terms is all.” Clarke points out, releasing an ironic chuckle and a huff of breath.

“I remember.” Lexa supplies, unhelpfully.

Clarke laughs again, this time with a hint of genuine humour in her tone. “Oh god. This is a mess” She sighs.

“Perhaps give her a chance Clarke.” Lexa suggests carefully. Knowing fully well, that her providing
advice, fell into a category that Lexa hadn’t been included in since before the fall of Mount Weather. Lexa braced herself for a rejection that never came. Clarke eyes alight with curiosity as she motioned for her to continue. “Well. Um… Your mother would not have journeyed all this way, if she did not care for you.” Lexa says cautiously.

“It’s more complicated than that Lexa… Someone can still…”

“…Hurt you even when they love you?” Lexa finishes for her. Tone wavering and her voice just above a timid whisper, as she silently begs Clarke to understand the double edge of her words. Her eyes vulnerable and willing to be hurt in this moment, if Clarke was to only recognise the depth of Lexa’s feelings for her. Feelings that had begun to blossom from the first moment she had laid eyes on her, and had only grown more intense in their time separated.

Clarke breath froze in her lungs, as the words resonated in Clarke’s soul, and images of Lexa’s anguished face as she left Clarke at Mount Weather rattled free in her mind. Clarke felt the atmosphere, thick with tension. Of what kind, Clarke was unsure. Expectation perhaps? Chemistry? All Clarke knew was that her heart responded before her brain had a chance to craft a dismissive rebuff. “Yes.” She breathes, confirming Lexa’s question.

“I am intimately familiar.” Lexa whispers. Her voice cracking under the weight of the confession. Lexa maintained purposeful eye contact. The moment becoming infinitely more intimate the longer her jade irises bored into Clarke’s.

Clarke’s breathing stopped altogether, as her world tipped on its axis and words that felt so familiar, but not attuned to any specific memory warmed her mind. Prickling at some undercurrent of consciousness that seemed unreachable.

‘Have enough courage to trust in love one more time…’

Clarke’s blue eyes darted to the greens of Lexa’s, and her heart filled with comprehension. Sweet, sweet understanding.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all! I hope you all enjoy this chapter!

There has been a lot of build up to this chapter, so I hope it lives up to everyone's standards and expectations!

This chapter is twice the size of my normal chapters, coming in at a whopping 8,000 words! So I really hope that you guys enjoy the content in this chapter, despite how longwinded it might be!

Please give me some feedback, as I always look forward to hearing from you guys. Let me know what you did and did not like, and I will try to keep all your comments in mind as I continue with more chapters!!

Okay, quick question guys. How do people feel about a possible Raven and Tanga pairing? I know we haven't explored the dynamic much between those two, but I am conflicted. I am not sure how I feel about Raven receiving Clarke's sloppy seconds, but at the same time I feel like they are kindred spirits, and would really hit it off. The
decision won't alter the end result or the timeline progression, but it may be a source of extra cuteness if you guys want it. I leave in you guys capable hands to decide. Let me know if you are open to the idea or if you think its a little inbred. Anyway, let me know in the comments, yeah? Good luck!!

Have a fantastic day, and enjoy the rest of your week!

Love Loz XXX
Parallels and Realisations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke and Lexa walk in companionable silence until they reach the gates of Alton, Ontari following not a step behind them. Grace had been returned to the care of Naomi, where she would be spared the confrontation between Abby and Clarke, should one take place.

Abby sat astride a beautiful pearl coloured gelding, a travelling party of five flanking her. Clarke recognises Monty and Harper amongst them, but the other three do not appear familiar. Their horses were lathered in sweat and their riders breathed heavily in exertion, from the hasty pace they had set in order to reach Alton. Abby’s eyes are frantic as they searched the small crowd of gathered faces for Clarke. She had ridden a full day and all night to reach Clarke when she heard she had been poisoned, and was knocking on death’s door. She was angry with herself for not accompanying Clarke to Alton to lend aid in the war effort. As she could have been with her daughter as she lay sick and dying, and putting into practice her knowledge as a doctor, instead of allowing her injured pride to dictate her actions.

When Abby’s eyes finally spot the head of golden hair belonging to her daughter, she instantly relaxes. All of her worries concerning her daughter’s survival finally stopped spinning hysterically like a whirlpool of chaos. Abby’s face lit up into a relieved smile that mirrored the same maternal grin Clarke reserved for Grace, in a matter of seconds.

Clarke felt guilt and dread dance low in her belly, and her toes curl in response to the intensity of her unease. Clarke’s watchful gaze, absorbed the sight of her mother, and tried to draw some comfort from the fact that she had cared enough to come. The familiar eyes, brown as bark and flecked with golden amber. Hair like mahogany in hue, and streaked with honey and silver at the temples. Crow’s feet and frown lines carved into her skin from a lifetime of heartache and happiness in abundance. The face of the woman who had raised her and soothed her as a child.

Abby swiftly dismounted and hastily walked towards to her daughter, engulfing her in a desperate hug, born out of fear for Clarke’s life.

Clarke at first stiffened at the contact, and her uncertain, conflicted gaze darted around the crowd of gathered faces that were now firmly rooted on the exchange between mother and daughter. The scrutiny made Clarke squirm uncomfortably, and she felt a touch of embarrassment colour her cheeks. Clarke’s eyes fell to Lexa all on their own accord, like the forest eyed girl had her own gravity. Clarke felt her tension drain away like bath water.

Lexa broke her stoic and emotionless mask of Heda, and smiled an almost invisible beam, it was so small and unnoticeable, to lend Clarke some strength amongst their curious company. Knowing how incredibly confused Clarke was amidst the seas of emotions regarding her mother that warred for supremacy. And despite the walls Clarke had constructed in front of so many people whom she could not afford to show weakness to, Lexa could easily see the menagerie of guilt, love, dread, and melancholy looking back from the windows of her soul.

Clarke’s mind drifted back to Lexa’s encouragement to give Abby a second chance, and knew that deep down, it was all she wanted. So Clarke pushed aside her reservations and simply basked in the moment presented before her, and hugged her mother back fiercely. Deeply inhaling and allowing the crisp scent of celery and antiseptic that was so unique to Abby, fill her nostrils.
“Clarke, honey. I am so glad to see that you are okay.” Abby fusses gently, her hands cupping Clarke’s cheeks, and her assessing eyes scanning Clarke’s body for injury. “When we heard that you had been poisoned we left immediately. But I was so scared that I wouldn’t get here in time.” Abby chokes on a sob that inches close to the surface, and her eyes prickle with unspent tears.

Lexa stepped forward and spoke in low hushed tones. “Perhaps we should move this reunion someplace more private.” She suggests with a subtle nod in the direction of the eyeballs glued to the exchange.

“That’s a good idea.” Clarke concedes, extracting herself from Abby’s firm grip, and guiding her mother to follow as Lexa leads them to the large tent that served as the Commander’s war pavilion.

When they reach the entrance, the guards pull back the flap to allow them entrance. Abby walks in first, followed by Clarke. Lexa offers Clarke one last reassuring smile before leaving the pair to speak alone, and making herself scarce.

Abby appraises the room with interest. Taking in the magnificence of the carved round table, and the hand painted maps. The lavish furs within the confines of the textile room, and the racks of swords and other deadly weapons on display. Abby finds it suspect that the Commander would loan such important quarters to Clarke, so that she could have a private meeting. And her mind drifts back to the time before the mountain when Clarke was afforded such luxuries, as the leader of Skaikru. And feels her old abused pride whine pathetically at the reminder of her inadequacy.

Clarke settles into a chair by the large table littered with maps, and tries to prepare herself mentally for whatever came next.

“So what happened? Are you okay? Should you even be up? I was told you were dying Clarke. I thought I was too late.” Abby sobs helplessly. Her eyes watering from the regret and fear that had overwhelmed her body for the past thirty six hours. Her nerves frayed from the mind-numbing stress that had sent pulses of fire through her neurons, as one thought played on repeat in her mind ‘your daughter is dying, and she thinks you hate her.’ Abby was under no illusion that her behaviour when it came to Clarke was nothing less than despicable. She had criticised Clarke’s desire to defend herself and accused her of needless cruelty when Octavia came to her bruised and battered. Publically humiliated her and personally attacking her by bringing up Kade’s death. Something she had been told about in confidence. She had also questioned Clarke’s ability to be a good mother. All of these breaches of trust, left Abby feeling ashamed and disgusted with herself upon reflection, and she so wanted to atone for her sins.

“I am fine mum. We had a run in with some Ice Nation warriors, one of them nicked me with a poisoned blade. But I okay now. I promise. The poison is out of my system and the wound is healing nicely. I was well-cared for.” Clarke reassures her mother soothingly, in an attempt to calm her frazzled nerves.

Abby’s worried and frenzied eyes relax as she comprehends the words slipping free from Clarke’s mouth. Her body sagged under the weight of her fears being lifted, like a room full of suffocating smoke freed from a room without windows. Abby sunk into the closest chair, and hung her head in her hands, as tears began rolling down her cheeks. From the plethora of emotions she felt breaking free of their levies. Relief, fear, shame, regret, all mingling into a cocktail of salty feeling.

“Clarke I should have been here. To protect you, to help you.” Abby sobs, helpless to stop the onslaught of water streaming down her face like a rock spring. Her lungs heaved with the effort to draw in breath between grief sodden gasps. Her face hot with pressure as a league of water promised to break free of her eyelids.
Clarke moved to place a comforting hand on her mother’s shoulder. In an attempt to abate some of the guilt she must be feeling. Clarke felt her resolve to keep her mother at a distance, crack and crumble. She knew that allowing her mother into her life and heart again would give her the power to potentially be hurt once more, but Clarke was powerless to maintain her anger and wounded feelings, when her mother was so clearly in pain – even if it was of her own making. “It’s okay mum. You were needed in Arcadia, you can’t be everywhere at once.” Clarke reassures.

“I know that. But I would have been here, I could have been here.” Abby says mournfully. Her body seeming to fold in on itself, making it so much smaller than what one would think possible.

The comment confused Clarke. Not understanding her mother’s meaning she pushed for clarification. “What do you mean mum?” Clarke’s eyebrows furrow in thought.

Abby’s crying pauses for a moment as she attempts to reign in her emotions and stifle her sobs. She takes a deep breath and pushes through her own terrors, a fear of inadequacy and never being forgiven. “If you hadn’t been involved in the decision to lend aid in the war effort, I would have sent more fighters to help the commander. I probably would have come myself.” She confesses quietly. Abby’s tear filled, and red-rimmed eyes imploring Clarke to forgive her. To accept that she was a flawed woman, but that she was sorry for her actions without saying it aloud.

Clarke snatches her hand back from her mother’s shoulder as if it had been burned. Clarke straightens and stands to her full height. When Clarke next speaks, her tone is icy and flat. Her eyes calculating instead of understanding. “Are you saying that you deliberately disadvantaged us in this war, because you didn’t want me to, what? Get credit for saying we would help first? For stepping up and questioning your leadership?” Clarke hisses.

Abby stays silent for long, guilty minutes. Clarke’s eyes boring into Abby’s head as the older woman purposefully avoided eye contact. The lack of response was damning, and Clarke felt her wrath flare to life for the first time in days. Strangely feeling alien and cumbersome, as it consumed her body. Clarke ignored it and refocused her rage on her mother. “This is a war mum. You chose to withhold men and women that could help stop needless death. You chose to limit our chances of success.” Clarke grinds the words between her teeth before she spits them out, sharpening them for maximum damage.

Abby flinches back from the accusation but again says nothing in her defence.

“Why would you do that?” Clarke asks, as steam billows from her ears. Her mind drifting to the close call, she and her squad had faced mere days ago. How the danger wouldn’t have been as high, if they had been awarded more warriors.

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Abby takes a deep breath as tears slip silently from the slits of her eyes. The chest-wracking sobs abandoning her so she could talk coherently. Only she didn’t know how to explain her actions to Clarke in a way that wouldn’t enrage her further. Not without starting from the beginning. When Abby finally drags her gaze from the fur covered floor, she reluctantly meets the glacier blue glare of her daughter, and tries not to shiver from its intensity. I felt like her daughter’s eyes were seeing into her soul already, peeling back the layers of her lies to find the awful truth buried beneath. Swallowing thickly, Abby begins to speak. Her voice shaking under the toll of her emotions, but she valiantly pushed through them. “While you were away, I struggled to lead our people.” She spares a nervous glance towards Clarke, to gauge her reaction, but is met with a stoic brick wall, revealing nothing.

“I don’t have the same effortless talent for it, as you do. I was struggling with you leaving, and feeling inadequate as a mother, because as much as I wanted to, I couldn’t help you. You were in pain and so tormented by the mountain, and I couldn’t help you. And then our people were looking
to me, expecting me not to cave under the pressure of that responsibility, plus the grief I felt for your self-imposed exile. I felt like I had lost my baby girl.” Abby’s voice rises with frustration as Clarke remains impassive, her lips twitching minutely at certain intervals, but otherwise remaining unmoving.

Clarke struggled to keep her face blank. Being reminded of how her absence impacted the people she cared about was confronting and heart wrenching. Especially when her abandonment left them as broken as she had, at the time, felt. But despite the guilt she now felt bubbling in her stomach, it did not overpower the anger that had lit her veins on fire. So she imagined her face was marble and hoped it resembled it.

Abby swallows loudly as she begins to recount the next part of her story, and feels her own unresolved feelings spur at her heart like a prickle. “At the time, I had started a romantic relationship with Marcus Kane. It was a like a soothing balm, a relief to have something to focus on besides you being gone. Until it wasn’t.” Abby tears begin to gather in her eyes again like a deep unending pool. Her voice cracking under the weight of every word.

Clarke feels the marble of her face begin to crumble. Her traitorous empathy choosing now as an appropriate moment to unveil itself to the world.

“Then there was the commander breathing down my neck every couple of weeks, demanding to know if we had located you yet, and I was so angry with her. I thought that perhaps if she had stayed that day, then you wouldn’t have to bear the deaths of the mountain men alone, and that she was partially responsible for you being gone. For you choosing that leaving everything you cared about, would be easier than facing it. It was her fault, and it was my fault, and then she was suddenly offering for us to join the coalition. And I didn’t want to accept it in the face of the hate I felt for her. She actually had the audacity to tell me that my decision wasn’t what you would want. That I was dishonouring you, by being so short-sighted that I couldn’t make the same decision that you would, should you return.” Abby’s tear-slicked cheeks burning red as she relives her anger.

Clarke feels her mouth begin to loosen in its joint, threatening to clatter to the floor. Clarke had been told by Raven that Lexa had treated her mum like she was the second choice as the leader of Skaikru, but had never actually believed that Lexa would have actively sought to inflict those feelings. Clarke felt pride and embarrassment flare in her chest over Lexa’s actions. That Lexa had believed in her even when Clarke had hated the very air she breathed.

“In the end I knew she was right. I knew that you would make the hard choice and set aside your personal feelings for the sake of our people. So I took the brand of the coalition and Skaikru became the thirteenth clan.” Abby says plainly, the raw emotion from earlier gone. She observed the way Clarke’s mask of indifference seemed to be faltering and tried to find some solace in the fact that she was eliciting any kind of reaction from her daughter, as opposed to the grounder-like stoicism she tends to revert to now.

Taking it as a good sign, Abby continued, despite how difficult it was to dive into the memories so wrought with pain. “After six months of searching for you, I stopped sending out search parties. I felt so defeated that we hadn’t found you yet. That you didn’t want to be found. Either that, or you were dead. But either way I knew that any further searching for you would be fruitless. So I gave up, and Clarke baby, I am so sorry for giving up on you.” Abby’s eyes turn pleading and she watches as a single tear falls from Clarke’s eye, in her otherwise unchanging expression. “But at that point I had given up on myself, and anything that might bring me happiness. Marcus couldn’t help me so I pushed him away. The commander offered him the position as Skaikru ambassador, and he left, he hasn’t been back since. I was struggling to cope with my new reality. I was a failure as a mother, and a failure of a partner, and then… Then I became a failure of a chancellor as well… The commander
treated me like I wasn’t really a leader. Like I was temporary until you came back, and deep down I had given up all hope that you would return to us. I just felt so overwhelmed and conquered by everything in my life. There was no joy left.” Abby’s voice tapers off, her tone defeated as she recalls the feeling of hopelessness and despair. Her eyes shadowed in memories that played across her vision, taunting her, mocking her failures.

The admission was like a lance to the heart, so sharp and painful, that Clarke wondered how her mother had survived her pain. Clarke absentmindedly moved a step closer to her mother. So enraptured by the story and engulfed in her remorse and despondency for being part of the reason her mother hurt so acutely.

Abby’s heart lightened by the slightest shade as she watched her daughter edge closer to her, and knew that she was reaching some part of Clarke. Perhaps not the part that consciously directed thought and action, but it was something. She chanced a watery smile, small enough to go unnoticed but big enough for Abby to feel seen. “Then you came back. And you were just as beautiful and as strong and as determined as ever, and I was again reminded of how incredibly inadequate I was next to you. I failed you as a mother, and yet you had thrived. I failed as a leader, and yet you remained unbroken by the weight of the responsibilities you shouldered.” Abby wiped the tears from her face, that had refused to lessen ever since beginning her explanation. Trying to emulate the woman Clarke once looked up to and idolised. Trying to be worthy of that responsibility despite knowing she didn’t deserve it.

“And then I lashed out. Like a wounded animal, I hurt you in a vain attempt to make myself feel better. I thought that by hurting you and making you feel like less, would make me feel like more. And instead of making myself feel better, all I accomplished was pushing you away, and alienating myself from the daughter I cherish more than life itself. And I am so sorry Clarke…” Abby fell silent as she finishes her tirade and prays to any god that exists that Clarke forgives her.

Clarke feels like a sledgehammer had collided with her ribs. Her heart hurt and her head was full. And Clarke didn’t know how to react, so she tried to identify what she felt. Deciding that in this situation Naomi’s advice was not applicable.

The anger from earlier had fizzled out without any kindling to fuel it, and instead guilt had bloomed in its place. Sucking away her contentment from earlier, like a parasite. She felt responsible for at least part of her mother’s suffering but not for the choices Abby had made in response to that pain. Clarke might have hurt her mother when she chose to leave, but Abby was responsible for the choices from that point onwards. The mistakes she made afterwards, were of her own design.

“I am sorry that I hurt you mum. I didn’t mean to.” Clarke relents with heavy sigh, closing the distance between she and Abby and wrapping her mother in a tight hug. Clarke knew that while her mother’s actions were her own, Clarke was responsible for inflicting enough pain to influence Abby’s decisions. And for that she was willing to take responsibility.

“Do you forgive me Clarke?” Abby’s voice is muffled into the fabric of Clarke’s shirt. Her tears wetting the material, as she burrowed deeper into her daughters neck.

“I forgive you for hurting me, but you still need to make amends.” Clarke whispers hoarsely. It might have been selfish, but Clarke also granted her mother forgiveness because she refused to carry around her anger and resentment for the rest of her life. Which she could easily do, Lexa being a prime example. Plus Clarke was trying to turn over a new leaf, and in order for that to happen, she was determined to cut out all the negativity in her life. She wanted to be a better person.

“I don’t understand Clarke, I have already apologised to you.” Abby pulls away from the embrace to direct her confused stare directly into Clarke’s oceanic blue eyes.
“No. Not me. This isn’t about me. This is about our people and this war. And the choices you have made that has endangered lives and crippled our chances of success. You need to supply us with soldiers mum. You need to rectify the wrongs you created.” Clarke says sternly, her irises imitating strong iron, hot from forge. She had no problems accepting that her mother was needlessly cruel to her for her own selfish reasons, but to endanger lives because your pride was wounded, was not something Clarke could, or would ever stand for.

“So your forgiveness is conditional now. Is this an ultimatum? Is that how this works?” Abby hollers with lively frustration and anger. She had bared her soul to Clarke and her daughter had simply dismissed it and moved on like it held little or no consequence. Rationally she knew that there was a bigger picture in play, but her pride whimpered pitifully at the perceived oversight.

“No. This isn’t about me mum. I might have caused your pain, and for that I am sorry. But you need to take responsibility for your actions.” Clarke states firmly, her words like brandished steel, strong and sharp.

“Like you have taken responsibility for your actions on mount weather Clarke? Or are you still blaming Lexa for that too?” The words had already left Abby’s lips before her brain had been given the chance to catch up. She was horrified with herself for devolving back into her defensive and cruel self that seemed to emerge whenever she felt cornered. To her surprise though, Clarke did not storm from the tent as Abby expected she would. Instead she seemed to reel back as though slapped and then her face morphed from offended to contemplative, and then softened under the weight of some internal realisation.

“I… I did blame Lexa. But deep inside, I blamed myself more. It was just easier to place the responsibility on her shoulders, than admit to myself that it was MY choices that ended the lives of 350 people. I hated Lexa for abandoning me to make the choice alone. But I hated myself more because I killed all those people, without a second thought. But Lexa had nothing to do with that decision. She might have inadvertently placed me in the situation, but ultimately it was my choice to commit mass-murder. I have taken responsibility for my actions, it is time you did too mum. Stop hiding behind me.” Clarke declares hotly. Her patience wearing thin.

“But it is hard to fix this. It’s embarrassing to admit that I was wrong.” Abby admits slowly, her eyes again drifting to the floor.

“Mum at least you get the chance to atone for your sins. I will forever carry the weight of my decisions. Fix it before you are forced to do the same thing.” Clarke exclaims around a chuckle laced with bitterness. Its thickness threatening to choke her where she stood.

Abby released a lungful of breath, the force of it stirring the strands of hair that had fallen around her face. “I will try.” She promises, her tone infused with confidence that she hadn’t felt in a long time.

“Good.” Clarke says softly. She presses a chaste kiss to her mother’s forehead and whispers gently. “I am glad you came.”

“Nothing could have stopped me Clarke.” Abby reassures smoothly, observing the lost look in Clarke’s eye and knowing that she needed the comfort. One of the only expressions that Abby was acquainted with these days.

“Thankyou mum.” Clarke says honestly. Her face completely free from barriers and walls for the first time since her mother came to Alton, and smiled.

Shortly after, Clarke left the Commander’s war pavilion in search of the woman herself. There had been a number of realisations Clarke had had during her conversation with her mother. But none was
as pressing as her need to speak with Lexa.

It was midday and the entire camp was bustling in meal preparation and other duties. Clarke found Lexa seated on a large rock, under the shade of a tree with Ontari, the two conversing quietly. Clarke was loathe to interrupt but she needed to talk with Lexa before she lost her nerve. Clarke approached the girls slowly, stopping a few feet from where they sat comfortably. The two brunettes turning their heads in the direction of the newcomer.

Lexa’s face immediately relaxed and brightened when she realised it was Clarke. Ontari’s face morphed into an expression of respect and smiled in welcome to their mutual friend.

“Did everything go well?” Lexa asks hesitantly. Her eyes studiously tracking Clarke’s facial expressions, even as her face flushed red when Ontari turned a teasing and inquisitive stare her way. Just a few days ago, Lexa would never have been so bold as to ask Clarke a personal question without fear of rebuff and humiliating retaliation, and Ontari knew this. Clarke and Lexa had made remarkable progress so far, and Lexa was rejoicing in the evolving dynamic.

“It went as well as could be expected. I was actually wondering if I could speak to you Lexa?” Clarke asks rapidly. Her face flushing a colour similar to Lexa’s when Ontari directed her inquisitive eyes to Clarke.

Obviously realising that Clarke wanted to speak with Lexa alone, Ontari made the choice to be purposefully obtuse in an attempt to turn both girls an even brighter hue of scarlet. Ontari stayed firmly planted to her spot next to Lexa and stared at Clarke with an exaggerated expression of innocence.

Clarke recognised what Ontari was doing, but couldn’t bring herself to rightly care in this moment. So she clarified. “Alone.”

Ontari smirked as Lexa’s cheeks flared with warmth and then sauntered away. Calling out over her shoulder as she went. “Just give me a yell if you need me.” She cried in a sing-song voice.

Lexa chuckled quietly at her friend’s retreating form, before refocusing on the beautiful blonde before her. “Is everything alright Clarke?” She asks seriously.

“Yes. Well, no not really.” Clarke stumbled over her words slightly as she seated herself down next to Lexa on the rock, and tried to navigate her next sentence.

“Okay.” Lexa’s voice trailed off at the end, her mystified expression growing.

“My mum and I fought.” Clarke admits with a sigh, her brain still stumbling over a million different ways to sashay into the topic she really wanted to talk about. “I am sorry to hear that Clarke.” Lexa says solemnly. She felt a little guilty for pushing Clarke towards Abby if the outcome left Clarke hurt and reeling from the encounter.

“Thanks. But that’s not actually what I wanted to talk to you about.” Clarke admits, her eyes ducking down to the ground to locate her words and her bravery. “Oh?” Lexa inquires with a single sculpted eyebrow rising questioningly. Her body leaning slightly towards Clarke subconsciously.

“Yeah. She said some things that made me come to a realisation.” Clarke pauses when the distinct scent of fresh rain and the soft undertones of spring wafted from Lexa’s chestnut locks. Clarke observes Lexa’s proximity and wets her lips, oblivious to how the action immediately draws Lexa’s eyes. “When you first came to Arcadia, I said some things to you that were uncalled for and
needlessly hurtful. And I placed the blame for my actions on the mountain onto your shoulders.”

Clarke pauses and watches with admiration and affection as Lexa battles to keep her face impassive in light of Clarke’s words but fails miserably. Hope was shining brilliantly from the enchanting forests of her eyes. “I was wrong to have done that and I am sorry. I have realised that while I have taken responsibility for my actions on the mountain privately, I needed to make sure that you understood that I don’t blame you for what happened. You were put into an impossible situation, and you chose the best option available to you at the time. And I am sorry if my behaviour has made you feel otherwise.” Clarke pauses for a brief moment, and switches her tone and cadence to one slightly less formal. “I am not angry anymore, and I understand the decision you made. But mostly, I am sorry if I made you feel guilty. I was aching, which is no excuse, but I wanted you to hurt the same way I did. And I am sorry.” Clarke admits quietly, ashamed of how petty and vindictive she had been, but feeling liberated now that she had spoken the words aloud to a certain brunette.

Talking with Abby had given Clarke some much needed perspective and enabled her to draw parallels between her mother’s situation and her own. Opening her eyes to how needlessly awful she had truly been towards Lexa. All because she had struggled to deal with her own guilt. And Lexa deserved better than that. Now that Clarke knew what it felt like to be blamed for someone else’s mistakes, Clarke wondered how Lexa had managed to remain civil to Clarke all this time, friendly even. Clarke had barely managed it with her own mother, and that was after one confrontation. Lexa had valiantly remained neutral, even when Clarke was hurling insults and responsibility in her lap, because she couldn’t deal with it herself. Clarke felt ashamed of her behaviour, but more than that she was apologetic, wishing that she could take back what she had done.

“Clarke, I could see how broken and haunted you were over the mountain, and I was willing to help you carry that burden if you needed me to. I deserved to bear that encumbrance with you. It was meant to be a choice we both made, to destroy the mountain men. But I left you alone with that responsibility, and if there had been another way for me to save my people and save you. I would have done it.” Lexa confesses softly. Her heart thudding heavily in her chest, as the words come spilling free. It was both liberating and constricting to be so honest with Clarke. She knew that by revealing this truth, she would ultimately feel free, but the moment between speaking the words and waiting to witness how Clarke would react, seemed to have stolen her breath.

Clarke’s eyes shimmered with something primal and all encompassing, and Lexa felt all her blood rush low in her belly. There was not enough oxygen in the world to fill her lungs in this moment.

Clarke wondered if she were asleep and this was all a dream. Because there was no way that Lexa would be staring at Clarke like she alone had hung the stars in the sky, or like she was the reason oxygen existed. Both the cause for life and the reason it was so beautiful, simultaneously. Clarke knew she was undeserving of someone as enchanting and thoughtful as Lexa in her life. But was too selfish to relinquish her now that she was part of it. Clarke didn’t know how she had managed to last a year and a half hating this person, when it was obvious that she was the living embodiment of perfection. To Clarke, at least.

“I don’t deserve someone like you in my life.” Clarke whispers reverently.

“We all deserve someone Clarke.” Lexa places a hesitant hand on Clarke’s knee in a silent offer of support and affection.

Clarke’s brain freezes in its internal rambling as soon as Lexa’s palm touches her. Her breath hitching in her throat as all the pleasure centres in her brain lit up like a Christmas tree. There was a rip in Clarke’s sinfully tight riding pants that she was suddenly appreciative of, as Lexa’s slim finger made direct contact with Clarke’s flesh. Her skin felt like it had been doused in fire and then ice cold water, every nerve was alight with energy. Clarke’s eyes lifted to Lexa’s face and took inventory of
the sight before her. Lexa’s pupils were blown wide and her breaths were coming in short, shallows puffs, and Clarke knew that Lexa felt it too. Lexa ran her finger in a tight circle against Clarke’s knee. Teasing feather light touches at first, and then more insistent, greedy kneading.

Clarke’s eyes zeroed in on Lexa’s lips and tried to recall how sweet they had tasted a year and half ago. She wondered if she still tasted as fine. What noise Lexa might make if she took the plump flesh between her teeth and nibbled. Would her skin be as soft as she remembered if she cupped her cheek, and ran a thumb along the sculpted cheekbone?

Clarke had never responded to such a simple, innocent touch so fervently in her life. No one had ever set Clarke’s world on fire with such little effort as Lexa.

It was the awakening and delicious pulling of something low in her belly that finally broke free of her haze. The positively sinful tug sent curls of pleasure through her body, and ignited a fire that was demanding and hungry for something only Lexa could provide, and the thought sent a bolt of awareness through her body, that allowed her lust addled brain to realise that this was moving into territory that was woefully inappropriate in the middle of the village and in full view of anyone who might walk by. Plus Clarke wasn’t entirely certain she was ready to take her relationship with Lexa any further yet. There was still so much that remained unsaid.

“I should probably go.” Clarke admits lowly. Her voice hoarse and more gravelly than normal, and Lexa’s nostrils flared in response.

“Yes you should.” Lexa agrees breathlessly. Her mind following the exact same course as Clarke’s and knew that they shouldn’t be behaving this way before the eyes of so many.

Reluctantly Clarke extracted herself from Lexa’s grasp and walked away. Her head turning back to meet Lexa’s darkened green gaze twice before she disappeared from sight.

Chapter End Notes

Hi guys!

I hope you all enjoy the new chapter!

Just a heads up, my laptop was busted a few days ago (my little brother fell on top of it, and smashed the screen), so I will try to keep writing on my tablet, but it will be slow going. So please be patient with me until I can replace my laptop yeah?

Anyway, I hope you all have had a wonderful weekend and enjoy my work this chapter.

As always, please leave me a comment and if you feel up to it, some feedback. It always brightens my day hearing your thoughts.

hanks for the support and continued readership, it really means a lot!! XX
Conservation of Energy

Chapter Notes

Later that evening Clarke and her fellow delinquents were all seated around a campfire. Breathing in the wood smoke and the atmosphere of relaxed comradery. They spent the time catching up on events that had transpired since they were together last, and enjoyed the company of their friends.

The sun was just beginning to crest the mountain in the west, dipping the valley into darkness, and casting a bruised shadow over the gathered group.

Clarke found a seat on a log next to Monty, and made herself comfortable. Placing a fur down on the grass by her foot, so Grace could have some space to herself. Clarke remained silent for long minutes, simply content to bask in the serenity of the moment. Soaking in the tranquillity of the night, the pleased murmurings of conversations amongst her friends and the crackle of the fire as it devoured a piece of green wood.

Clarke’s mind was full. Full of her mother and full of Lexa.

The former, was throwing her for a loop. She felt conflicted over how her confrontation with Abby had taken place, and was honestly a little disappointed in her mother. She had purposefully endangered the lives of countless people as a result of her wounded pride, which was unacceptable. And yet, Clarke still found that on some level, she understood her mother’s pain, even empathised with it. After all, Clarke was partially responsible for its infliction. But with saying that she also felt a prickle of urgency squeeze her cardiac muscle, and the need to fix her mother’s blunder filled her veins. She knew that Abby needed to take responsibility for her actions, and that part of that process was amending for your own mistakes. But Clarke was struggling to just sit by and watch as her mother continued to make unnecessary errors in judgement, and Clarke’s desire to take the reins and control the situation was only mounting. Her need to lead was becoming overwhelming, and soon, she knew that her instinct would not be denied. It was inevitable that eventually, her resolve to remain a passive soldier in the fight, would crumble, and her need to guide and strategize would overcome any lingering respect she held for her mother. Respect that in this moment was forcing her to bend to the older woman’s will, and give her a chance at achieving redemption on her own.

Clarke’s eyes wondered over the gathered faces, and tried to locate her mother. The woman had been nowhere to be seen ever since their argument, or was it an apology? Clarke was still unsure what their interaction would be classified as. She only knew that it was extremely confusing. When Clarke saw no sign of the woman, she instead focused on her mind’s current obsession.

Lexa.

Lexa and Clarke had shared some wicked moments of touching earlier that day. Touching that had grown heated and addictive without much encouragement. Like their bodies had decided to discard any lingering hesitation and followed some base instinct to be near one another. Everything past that initial skin on skin contact, had been electric, and had left Clarke craving more. Of course, she and Lexa had shared some intense conversations that day, but somehow, Clarke felt like they had only been the preludes for that interaction. They were significant, of course, but they felt like they were necessities when paired next to the intimate moment shared that afternoon. Something that wasn’t expected, purely spontaneous and utterly delectable. Clarke’s skin tingles with the memory, and a delightful shiver passes down her spine.
Clarke’s eyes leave the contemplative depths of the fire, and the swirling colours of red, orange and yellow. Her gaze lifting and automatically falling on the graceful form of Lexa. She sat around a campfire of her own. Flanked by Ontari and Jameson, surrounded by her generals. Indra was absent, as she and Octavia were out patrolling, but there were two others that Clarke recognised, as Thane and Olga. Lexa was not actively participating in the conversation surrounding her, much the same as Clarke, but she was listening contently. Her irises shining when something was said that she agreed with or perhaps found amusing. In the settling darkness, Lexa’s eyes looked completely black, and yet when the dancing flames before her touched the typically green pools, colour rapidly flooded back into view. The two orbs flickering between that sultry pitch blackness and the mesmerising green, depending on how the flames licked - the sight was jarringly beautiful. The soft lighting made Lexa’s skin look like it had been painted by the most brilliant rich golds. She looked young and stunning and so full of life. And Clarke wanted to touch her. To trace every contour of her face and cast it to memory.

“Clarke.” Monty’s voice slowly drew Clarke’s attention back to her own group, and his hand gingerly waving in front of her face, finally broke the spell Lexa had unwittingly placed her under. Clarke blinked rapidly and sucked in a deep breath as her ogling was interrupted. She cast a quick glance towards Monty, and flushed crimson when she noticed his smug smirk. “Sorry what?” Clarke says lamely. If it was possible for a voice to blush, Clarke knew hers would have.

“I said, do you know where Raven is?” Monty repeats for the third time. His smirk disappearing as his eyes wander over the expanse of faces outside of their group in an attempt to locate the girl with hair the same hue as dark chocolate.

Clarke imitated the exact same action of scanning faces, and came up empty. “No, I haven’t seen her all afternoon.” Clarke answered with a shrug of her shoulders. “She might be in the radio tent. She is in there a lot because no one else is qualified to use the technology, and she monitors the hunting parties.” Clarke explains.

Seemingly mollified, Monty lets the subject drop.

Twenty minutes later, Raven finally made an appearance. Her hair suspiciously mussed, and her lips swollen. There was also a hickey marring the skin of her neck, that her collar was doing a ghastly job of concealing. Raven dropped herself heavily on the log next to Clarke, her breathing laboured and her cheeks flushed. Clarke found the whole sight of her friend rather suspect. And if she didn’t know any better, she would say she looked well-fucked… The thought immediately died in her head when Tanga came sauntering over to the camp fire in a similar fashion. Hair mussed, lips swollen and a hickey pressed against her collarbone, stark against the ivory of her skin. The taller girl sat across from Clarke and Raven, next to Bellamy. Their strategic timing ensuring that no one realised that they had obviously been together mere moments before. A broad smirk pulled at Clarke’s lips and a chuckle burst free from her chest as she put the pieces of the puzzle together.

Raven did her best to ensure her expression remained innocent as her eyes were drawn to Clarke’s random burst of laughter. “What’s so funny?” Raven inquired warily. Her eyes unconsciously drifting to Tanga, unknowingly broadcasting her secret. Raven’s eyes softened and Tanga met her gaze, a self-conscious grin breaking free from the girl’s lips, at the attention. The sight earning another fit of laughter from Clarke. Raven lifted a single eyebrow in response, attempting to portray nonchalance, but failing miserably. The lone eyebrow quivered uncertainly like a caterpillar having a seizure, and Clarke laughed harder.

“Sorry Ray. I am just really happy for you.” Clarke leans in close to her friend to say the words, as it was becoming blindingly obvious that her friend wasn’t quite comfortable with people knowing
about her relationship with Tanga, and she was willing to respect her privacy.

“What do you mean?” Raven’s voice came out as a nervous squeak, her eyes large as saucers. The brunette’s heart beating hard in her chest like an exerted racehorse. Both from her earlier activities and from Clarke’s direction of conversation.

Clarke took pity on her friend and wrapped an arm around her slim shoulders. “You and Tanga will make an amazing couple.” Clarke assures quietly, a smile firmly in place.

“I promise I was going to tell you. But it has only just started and I didn’t want to bring anyone else into it unless I knew it was going somewhere.” Raven blurts the explanation out unceremoniously, her leg beginning to thump nervously against the hardpacked dirt, right near Grace’s place on the ground. The movement drawing the toddler’s attention, and she pulled herself closer to the foot, grasping at the laces of Raven’s black combat boots and trying to suck on them.

Clarke quickly picked up her daughter and deposited the squirming youngster in her lap, before turning her attention back to Raven. “Ray, you don’t need to justify yourself to me.” She says with simple understanding. Like it was the most obvious and uncomplicated answer in the world.

The response only proved to confuse Raven, so she continued to elaborate on the situation. “It’s just sex, I swear. We got closer while you were sick, and we bonded over stories about you and some of the dumb shit you did. And then stuff just happened…” Raven gestured lewdly with her hands and her eyes widening as she relived the more detailed version of her story in the confines of her mind. Her reveries were interrupted when Clarke spoke up.

“Raven, I meant what I said before, you don’t need to justify yourself to me. It is perfectly fine if you and Tanga start something. You’re both adults, you can make decisions for yourselves. You don’t need my permission. And besides, I am so delighted for you both. Whether it’s just sex or more, it doesn’t matter so long as you are both happy.” Clarke reiterates calmly.

Raven is quiet for long minutes before she opens her mouth to speak. “Are you sure that you are okay with it? Because I know that you two have a history and…” Clarke cuts off Raven’s nervous rambling before she had the chance to overwhelm herself.

“Raven, I am more than okay with it.” Clarke says warmly. “You and Tanga are two of my closest friends, and I want you both to be happy. And if that is achieved by the two of you being together than I am over the moon for you guys. Truly, I am so pleased for the two of you. You will be amazing together.” Clarke says through a bright smile.

Despite Clarke’s history with Tanga, she couldn’t be happier for her friends. Sure, it was a little ironic that she and Raven seemed to have initiated a game of swapsies. First with Finn and now with Tanga. But the circumstances were vastly different, like night and day. The situation with Finn had been messy because feelings were involved, and Finn had cheated on Raven. Whereas Clarke and Tanga had a one night stand that was so full of alcohol, that Clarke couldn’t recall the events of the evening. Plus, they were never anything more substantial than a quick romp in the sheets. Clarke knew just by looking at Raven and Tanga that what they had was so much more. They looked at each other the same way Octavia and Lincoln looked at each other. A small voice in Clarke’s head wonders whether she and Lexa look at each other similarly.

“Really? Are you sure it won’t be weird? Because I know that you two…” Clarke cuts Raven off again.

“Raven. Tanga and I didn’t have anything romantic between us, it was just drunk sex, which meant nothing and neither of us remember it properly anyway. When I was away, I slept with heaps of
people, all under the same circumstances, and it never meant anything. The only difference with
Tanga, is that I bothered to learn her name and we became friends afterwards. We are just friends,
we always have been and we always will be. You and Tanga have something different… Something
special, and I am ecstatic for you.” Clarke gently urges, her arm coming down from Raven’s
shoulders to clasp her hand, and squeeze reassuringly. Trying hard to help eliminate her friends
insecurities.

“Thankyou Clarke,” Raven says around a relieved rush of breath.

“There’s no need to thank me Ray.” Clarke says softly. Her eyes twinkling with happiness and
mirth. A moment later, Raven’s insecurities seemed to have slipped beneath her usual sassy exterior,
and her sarcastic self, returned full force.

“If you are happy for me, then why were you cackling like some witch stirring a potion at her
cauldron before?” She asks expectantly, with a refined eyebrow raise, and pursed lips. Her eyes
scrutinising the mirth that seemed to come back to life in Clarke’s expression.

“Oh! That was because you two can’t keep a secret to save yourselves.” Clarke says quickly, her
laughter returning when Raven’s jaw dropped and her lips gaped like a fish out of water.

“How? We were discreet.” Raven argues, her brain running over all the contingencies she and Tanga
had purposefully put in place to avoid detection.

“While you planned your timing well, but you both look like you just had sex, plus you both have
matching hickeys, aaand…” Clarke tapers off in a teasing tone, her eyebrows waggling to ensure
Raven was sufficiently mortified.

“Oh god, there’s more?” Raven cringed exaggeratedly.

“Yup!” Clarke says happily, popping the P. “And, you guys couldn’t stop making heart eyes at each
other for five minutes.” Clarke announces with feigned innocence and sweetness.

“Pssht! That’s… no… I do not make heart eyes.” Raven argues indignantly, her cheeks flaming red
and her eyes unable to meet Clarke’s teasing gaze.

“Oh Ray.” Clarke says with a sigh. “You so do.” Clarke pats her friend on the shoulder and chuckles
as Raven grapples for a defence, any word would do. But she couldn’t string together a coherent
sentence at this point. Her cheeks resembling a ripe tomato.

“Well. You… You make heart eyes at the commander.” Raven retorts childishly. She knew it was a
lame come back, but her brain was struggling to find its footing and digest the information just
presented to herself. Even if it was spoken in jest, Raven wondered if there was any truth to what
was said.

It was Clarke’s turn to blush now. “What? No… Please, that’s ridiculous. She’s the commander.”
Clarke defended weakly. It was a pathetic retort even in her own ears, and she knew Raven would
pounce on the opportunity to return the teasing favour.

“Yeah, and I am not blind. You two are always making googly eyes at one another. It’s nauseating.”
Raven chirps playfully, elbowing Clarke in the arm with good humour and faux gagging.

“We are?” Clarke asks. Aiming for nonchalance but missing her mark by a long shot, her tone came
out as hopeful. Reflecting the light blooming in her chest, and making her soul dance. And Raven
noticed.

“Oh. My. God!” Raven hisses in disbelief. Her eyes narrowed as she examines Clarke’s body
language. The way she chews on her lip subconsciously as they talk about the commander. The way she leans forwards, eager for a response. Her eyes shimmering with cerulean interest. Her chest remaining unmoving while she waits anxiously for Raven to answer her question. Raven decided that Clarke would be less obvious if she had ‘I have the hots for Lexa,’ written in bold black ink on her forehead. “You actually like her.” Raven paused to relish the redness creeping up Clarke’s neck. “As in you like her, like her.” Raven squealed excitedly, earning a few turned heads in their direction. Raven glared to dissuade their curiosity before attacking the new scraps of information. “So the hatchet has obviously been buried. As in like, you haven’t just forgiven her now. You… You trust her?” Raven clarifies, her eyes calculating as she tries to catch a glimpse of the whole picture.

“I… I guess I trust her in some aspects. I am still a little guarded, but even that resistance is melting. We talked today, about a lot of stuff and it really helped clear the air. We both have a much more distinct idea of each other’s circumstance, and feelings…” Clarke tries to continue speaking but Raven interrupts her. An olive-skinned arm dashing out grasping Clarke’s forearm and squeezing with excited energy.

“Wait a minute! Feelings?” Raven asks quickly, her voice shaking with giddy excitement on behalf of her friend. “As in emotions feelings? Or like, sex feelings? You need to be more specific right now.” Raven enthuses.

Clarke rolls her eyes at her friend’s antics and then quietly elaborates. “There are no sex feelings with Lexa. Well there is chemistry, but we haven’t… Um.” Clarke gestures wildly with the hand that was not busy holding Grace in place. Her cheeks were full of embarrassed blood, as Raven’s eyes widened and her lips twitched into her signature shit eating grin, with a side of shocked silence.

Raven clearly comprehended the information her friend was relaying, however her mind struggled to process the depth of emotion between the two girls without sex being involved. “Clarke, that’s… Holy shit.” Raven paused as her mind sifted through all the instances of affection and longing she had witnessed between the two of them, and tried to understand how two people could possibly have that level of connection, without there being a sexual one to support it.

Clarke felt her stomach drop out from beneath her and tried not to hyperventilate. Raven was looking at her like she was some kind of, freaky side-show and it was extremely uncomfortable. Her friend’s expression was a smorgasbord of emotion, as she seemingly studied Clarke. Awe, disbelief, confusion… And all because Clarke had said that she and Lexa hadn’t had sex. It wasn’t a big deal… Unless it was? Clarke was so confused right now. “What?” She finally squeaked.

“Oh sorry. Just. Do you realise how incredible the connection that you and the commander share is? I mean… Clarke just try to look at it from a different perspective. You and Lexa know each other for fourteen days in the middle of a war. You guys forged an alliance on the death of the boy you loved, and yet you two still managed to build something so strong and so everlasting between the two of you. Something that it is powerful enough to survive a betrayal, the mass-murder of three hundred and fifty people, and a year and half of complete radio silence. In which time Lexa kept searching for your ever-elusive ass, never giving up on you even when your mother did. Then when you did return you had another person’s baby in your arms, and a hate in your chest so hot that it melted faces if you got too close to it. You directed that fury towards Lexa, and yet she just took it, knowing that you needed to release it on her in order to heal. And then, not another fourteen days later, all the hurt and betrayal and loss that you both feel, it just seems to disappear, and you are left with a love that is so incredibly pure that it is still there. A love so strong, that it doesn’t need sex or anything tangible between you, it just exists. That’s amazing.” Raven breathes out slowly, her eyes awestruck like she had just witnessed the birth of a star or perhaps the formation of a galaxy, something so profound and indescribable, that the human mind struggles to comprehend it’s enormity.
“You make us sound like Romeo and Juliet Ray.” Clarke attempts to try for a lighter hearted tone, simply because the conversation had become really deep, really fast, and her brain was struggling to keep up. Raven’s words made sense but she still struggled to see exactly what Raven saw when she looked at Clarke and Lexa’s relationship. Perhaps it was because she was too close to it.

“In some ways, you guys are. Minus the double suicide, because that shits depressing. But that isn’t the point of what I am saying. What I am trying, and probably failing to point out, is that even when you hated her and she was a lost puppy. The intensity of your feelings for one another, no matter whether they were positive or negative in nature. That never changed. The intensity has not faded, despite all the shit you have been through. It has simply changed forms, like the conservation of energy in physics. Where energy can’t be created or destroyed, only transformed from one type to another. And that is exactly what has happened between you and Lexa. For you it was probably admiration first, then it transformed into sexual attraction, and then maybe it was love, then after the mountain it was betrayal and then hate and then it became bitterness. And now that you are back it has been all over the place, but it will end on love again I am sure. But my point is that the intensity of those emotions between the two of you, is unlike anything I have ever seen. It’s like legendary shit Griff…” Raven’s tone is reverent as she explains the way she views Lexa and Clarke’s connection. Raven took stock of Clarke’s flawed expression and unhinged jaw, and questioned whether or not she had made any kind of sense whatsoever. “Am I making any sense? Or have I officially boarded the crazy train?” Raven asks playfully.

Clarke glances in the direction of Lexa, and tries to see what Raven sees. She scrutinises the way Lexa’s eyes dance, and bare her soul to anyone observant enough to notice. The way the corners of her lips twitch when she wants to smile, but knows that she can’t. The way her hands seem to itch to touch and be part of the world around her. The way Clarke’s soul seems to call out for its other half when Lexa isn’t by her side. And then suddenly, Clarke’s mind, clicked with comprehension, like a bullet gliding into the chamber of a gun. “No, I understood it Raven. It was… deep, but it was also beautiful as well. Thankyou.” Clarke says coarsely, her throat feeling full as emotion overwhelmed her and tears stung the backs of her eyes. Swallowing was a challenge and it was difficult, but Clarke pushed the sudden influx of feelings down and away, into the recesses of her mind. Choosing to analyse them and their significance at a later date.

Raven smiled brilliantly, clearly enjoying the compliment and basking in the praise of her perceived wisdom. A thought struck Raven and she felt the need to clarify something before everyone got the wrong idea. She holds up one finger and infuses as much sass as possible into her tone. “Oh, by the way. This doesn’t mean I like Lexa. I still think she’s a bitch for cutting me up.” Raven says around a wry smirk.

The two girls burst into fits of laughter. Enjoying the rest of their night.

Chapter End Notes

Hi Ladies and Gents!!

I hope you have all had a pleasant Monday so far! In Australia school has just started again so I have had a blissfully quiet house to myself, which I have spent working on my story - it was so delightfully relaxing! I have also gotten a new computer to replace my old broken one. So updates in Second Chances shouldn't take as long as this one did.
So, in this chapter, we see our first glimpse of the relationship between Raven and Tanga, and I am stoked to find out what you all thought, so please leave a comment. I also just want to send a grateful thankyou out to Lowiiie, who helped me sort through a few plot ideas I had concerning this pairing, your advice helped me so much, thankyou for your assistance.

In the next chapter update we will be seeing more of Greya, and specifically the long awaited interrogation between Clarke and her. For which I am super excited about, I hope you guys are too. We will be getting a more detailed view of Nia's political manoeuvrings and intentions in this war with the next few updates, so I hope you all enjoy them as much as I do!

As always, please leave me a comment and let me know what was hot and not. I always look forward to hearing from you guys!!

Have a lovely rest of your day,
Love Loz X
Almost a Victory

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clarke woke earlier than usual the next morning. She had spent the night in the hut shared with Raven, now that Naomi had given her the all-clear to continue with life, as per usual. So long as she did not take any unnecessary risks. Grace was still snuggled into Clarke’s ribs, sleeping soundly. Her face relaxed in sleep.

Clarke was reluctant to do so, but she began moving herself out of her comfortable cot and readied for the day. It was still dark outside, probably an hour before dawn, but Clarke knew she would not find sleep once more. Plus, the solitude of the hour would ensure that Clarke had time aplenty to search her head and heart for answers and clarity regarding some of the events in past days that she had pushed aside for examination.

Clarke pulled a black singlet shirt over her head, and squeezed into a pair of dark green riding pants. Clarke braided her hair into intricate plaits that clung to her skull for a way away from her face, and then tapered off into loose tresses, to keep her blonde mane away from her face. Strapping her dagger to her thigh with practised proficiency, Clarke then cradled Grace to her chest and bound her there with the sturdy strips of light brown leather. Once the still sleeping infant was secure, Clarke donned her old multi-coloured fur coat, as at this hour there was a slight chill on the air, and Grace could use the extra warmth.

Stepping outside of her shared hut, Clarke inhaled deeply of the early morning air. It was fresh and cool, and smelt decidedly like dew and midnight, if such a scent existed. Carefully shutting the door behind her quietly, Clarke then set off into the dark morning. The sky wasn’t pitch black, but it was drenched in shades of grey, the village of Alton existed in shadows at this hour. And Clarke found the eerie stillness, combined with the muted colours, somehow calming.

Clarke set a steady pace through the village, walking aimlessly and weaving between random huts, careful to keep her footsteps light so not to wake anyone. Not a soul was awake as far as Clarke could see, and some part of her wished that she could simply exist in this moment. Where no one saw her, and she was safely immersed in the shadows, invisible. Where no one judged her, or expected anything of her. She was just Clarke, and she simply existed. There was a strange serenity that filled Clarke’s bones with the realisation that she enjoyed the prospect of being invisible.

Her mind wandered to the situation she found herself immersed in with Lexa. They had managed to bury a lot of their differences and grievances, and for that, Clarke was grateful. It was exhausting hating someone so fervently. But now that the hate had dwindled, Clarke found that the emotion had immediately been replaced with something equally as intense, just as Raven had predicted it would. Only Clarke wasn’t entirely certain that she was ready to go digging and attempting to uncover which emotion the anger had been replaced with. Whatever it was swirled in her chest lightly, like a technicolour helium balloon. It was happy and hopeful and yearning… And it was frightening to know that in such a short period, Clarke feelings had simply been swapped out, like replaceable parts of an engine. Clarke was genuinely surprised that her rage and bitterness had dissipated so easily. After all, those emotions had felt as though they had fused themselves to Clarke’s very being, and had no intentions of leaving, any time soon. And yet now, those negative emotions that had swum so dark and viciously close to the surface, weren’t just gone. But Clarke found that she did not even miss their absence.

She felt lighter and warmer, like some dead part of her soul had rekindled its life force, and had been
resurrected. Like some kind of post-apocalyptic Lazarus. Clarke felt… whole. Or at least, as close to whole as she had been in a year and half. And Clarke couldn’t help but wonder if the sudden change could be attributed to returning to her people, or if it as more than that. If the healing process had been jumpstarted and spear-headed by a certain green eyed beauty.

Clarke decided that it was probably pointless asking herself the question, because the truth was, she would likely never know. But ultimately, she was just grateful that for whatever reason, she was healing, and that was all that truly mattered.

Clarke’s thoughts went quiet when she heard the tell-tale sounds of a fight in the distance, the clanging of metal on metal warning her of the fact that someone else was awake at this ungodly hour. Clarke found herself wandering closer to the noise, deciding that watching others fight might be more fun than the brain bruising thoughts that she had been battling with before.

When Clarke stood not ten feet away from the sparring rings, she knew she should have stayed away. For before her stood Lexa and Ontari, practice fighting. Lexa was dressed in a shirt that was so loose on her that she practically swam, but at the same time it looked as though it were meant to. The black shirt bared her strong shoulders, and a tattoo that Clarke had never noticed before, curling around her bicep in tantalizingly intricate patterns. The arm holes of her singlet, were purposefully torn down to her ribs, revealing the dark cloth of her chest bindings, and the flex of her muscles as she moved.

The greying morning light glinted off a thin sheen of sweat that clung to Lexa’s body, and Clarke found her mouth transforming itself into the deserts of the dead zone, where Lexa was her oasis. Feeling as though her tongue would simply crack and crumble to sand if she were to attempt any action with the dehydrated muscle. Whether it be licking her lips, or perhaps licking the taunt skin of Lexa’s gloriously divine physique. Clarke wonders if it was circumstances such as this, that inspired the old-world term, ‘thirsty.’

Clarke watched as Lexa’s body twisted and turned with all the fluidity of a calm sea. She looked so natural with a sword in her hand and the solid ground of the sparring pits beneath her feet. She looked like she was born to be there, as she did in all endeavours. The was a slight breeze in the air, disturbing the chill of night, and swirling it around their bodies. Lexa’s chestnut tresses stirred under the wind’s gentle guidance, and Clarke found herself minutely more mesmerised by the sight.

Internally shaking herself when Clarke recognised the beginning tendrils of desire warm her veins, she forced herself to focus on the fight itself instead of the celebrated human specimen that was Lexa.

Ontari moved swiftly to attempt a swift slash to Lexa’s exposed side, but at the last moment Lexa simply twirled out of the blade’s reach.

Ontari quickly regained her footing and brought her sword up just in time to defend Lexa’s powerful downward thrust. The force of the blow initially knocking Ontari off balance as her legs grappled and struggled to keep herself upright. Lexa pressed forwards, trying to keep Ontari off balance as metal scraped against metal. It was a battle of strength now and both women fought hard to pin the advantage.

Ontari tried valiantly to piston her legs upwards in a final showing of strength, but Lexa predicted the move and forced all her body weight behind her sword as Ontari launched forwards. Lexa’s foresight gave her the advantage, which she manipulated instantly. She kicked out Ontari’s dominant foot as she pushed down. Landing Ontari hard onto the ground. The Azgeda warrior quickly twisted out of the way of Lexa’s falling sword, the blunt edge of the iron impacting with the hard-packed dirt beneath her, spraying earth against her face and into her eyes.
Ontari was quick to pounce back to her feet, but the grit in her almond orbs caused her lids to blink rapidly, and then the two brunettes began a rapid dance of exchanging blows. One moment Lexa would be on the offense, pummelling Ontari into the side of the ring, then in the next moment the tides would turn and she would be defending Ontari’s own assault.

The two women were evenly matched from what Clarke could assume, and then it happened. Lexa seemed to unleash some kind of latent power that channelled every ounce of her swiftness and agility to display an amazing feat of athleticism and prowess. She slapped away Ontari’s sword with the face of her own. And then twisted her body swiftly and jumping into the air. Clarke was in awe as Lexa kicked out her booted foot, connecting solidly with the junction between Ontari’s neck and shoulder with a heavy thump. The strike was strategically placed to ensure that the blow did not break Ontari’s neck and kill her instantly, or inflict any lasting damage. It was a move that had obviously been practiced for many years, and Clarke wondered if she could someday accomplish such a feat.

Kadeon had taught her much, but there was only so much that one could learn in five months. And what Lexa had just accomplished was something that required a great deal of strength, agility, flexibility and precision that could only be harnessed after a long period of practice.

Ontari fell to the ground with a dull thud and a strangled groan. The young brunette gasped for breath as she attempted to recover from the wind being ripped free of her lungs. Lexa smiled broadly at her victory, her mask of stoicism slipping in the non-judgemental presence of her friend.

Lexa’s body heaved with each breath, a beautiful soft scarlet colouring her cheeks from her exertions. The green-eyed girl bent down to offer Ontari assistance in picking herself up from the ground.

Ontari grasped the proffered hand immediately, and struggled to hoist herself to her feet, even with Lexa’s assistance. Lexa held Ontari steady while she centred herself and found her bearings again.

“Are you good?” Lexa asks with a wry smile, her hand wiping away the dirt that had somehow found a home on the lapels of Ontari’s clothing. “You went down pretty hard.” Lexa points out. Beneath her mischievous smirk, she was a little concerned that she had potentially injured her friend, but Ontari’s carefree smile quickly dispelled her worry.

“Sha, I am fine Lexa.” Ontari reassures quickly, her chest heaving around her ragged breaths. The almond-eyed girl swatted Lexa’s fussing hand away with an exasperated and playfully annoyed expression. “Although next time, perhaps you could avoid kicking me so hard? I think my head rotated a full circle before returning to its proper position.” She comments with a sarcastic smirk.

“Sorry.” Lexa concedes sheepishly. Her eyes darting to the ground and her bottom lip finding a home wedged between her teeth as she nibbled self-consciously.

“Don’t be. You fought well.” Ontari says with a proud smile. “You’ve practiced that mid-air kick for years, your dedication deserves to be seen.” She chirps supportively. Ontari knew that Lexa avoided fighting to her full potential in case she inflicted serious injury. The only time that she would train freely was when she was with her night bloods back in Polis. As the blackness of their blood somehow bestowed upon them with the uncanny ability to learn a skill rapidly, as well as move with more strength and speed than an ordinary warrior. It was part of the reason they were chosen to be Heda – well that was how the rumours went at least. Lexa had never divulged whether the belief was truth or idle gossip, as it was one of the many sacred secrets that shrouded the position of Heda. Ontari had decided years ago, that if Lexa was unwilling to share, then Ontari would not ask.

“However, I know that while you wish for my dedication to be witnessed, you do not wish that it
was felt so keenly.” Lexa retorted, as she pressed gently against the speedily darkening skin of where her foot had connected with her friend.

Ontari winced and jerked away from Lexa’s probing touch. “Ah! Don’t touch it!” She whines with exaggerated irritability.

The pitiful noise earnt a bubble of rare, carefree laughter from Lexa.

Clarke watched on with awe as Lexa laughed so liberally and wished with all of her being that she would one day illicit a noise so melodic and breathtaking from Lexa. She was a little shocked to realise that above all else. She wanted to be the responsible for the way Lexa smiled bright enough to rival the sun. She wanted to ensure that she was accountable for Lexa’s giggling song being shared with the world. She wanted to be the reason Lexa’s eyes twinkled with so much happiness and warmth. She wanted to be the reason Lexa looked her actual twenty one years of life, instead of the aged and burdened woman that she was forced to be as the leader of her coalition.

It was Clarke’s small gasp – that she was so sure she had internalised – that alerted the two brunettes to their audience.

Lexa’s laughter immediately died in her throat, and Ontari went on guard instantly, until they realised who the intruder was. Clarke waved awkwardly as she stepped out from the shadows that she hadn’t realised she had sunk into instinctually.

Lexa smiled a small, soft smile. One that Clarke was quickly beginning to recognise as one reserved purely for herself. Clarke returned the gesture and Ontari’s defensive stance immediately relaxed.

“How long were you watching?” Ontari asks with a coy little smirk. One that promised mischief.

Clarke felt the need to wriggle free from a trap, only she wasn’t yet sure where the trap was located, so she instinctually proceeded with caution. “A while.” Clarke says vigilantly, her eyebrow quirking upwards as Ontari’s grin broadened exponentially.

“Did you like what you saw?” Ontari says in a faux-seductive tone, dipping her head subtly in Lexa’s direction. Lexa blushed furiously, however her gaze turned curious as she waited for Clarke’s response with rapt attention.

Clarke bit her lip in an effort to avoid grinning like the cat who got the cream. Her mind wandering to the way Lexa’s muscles had clenched and contracted with each of her flawless movements. The way her sweat had allowed the dim grey morning to reflect off them in stunning silver tones. The way Lexa’s face had remained emotionless, save for the determination in her steely green eyes. Her small grunts of exertion. It had all been deliciously sordid and yet completely innocent, and Clarke had indeed seen plenty that she liked. However, she decided to deny Ontari’s satisfaction and in this instance, and shy away from her need to express her desire.

“Yes.” Clarke says in a tone as close to unperturbed as she could manage. And she looks directly into Lexa’s eyes as the single syllable word left the safety of her lips. Some part of Clarke’s mind wondered if she had just watched Lexa shudder in the wake of the comment. “Your proficiency for fighting is amazing.” Clarke says simply.

Ontari released an impatient huff of breath, her shoulder slumping unevenly in defeat over her failed attempt to fluster one or both of her friends. The impish gleam from earlier returned a moment later. “I’ve heard that you aren’t too bad yourself. Care to go a round?” Ontari asks sweetly, gesturing vaguely in the direction of the sparring pits.
Clarke thinks the offer over for a moment, and ignores her better judgement that reminds her that fighting in front of these women might unwittingly divulge her training origins. Clarke isn’t entirely sure why she decided to pay no heed to the internal warning. Perhaps it was her desire to lower her defences around Lexa. Maybe she wanted to be honest with Lexa, either way, she knew her secret regarding her fighting origins would exist in obscurity not much longer anyway. A secret like that does not remain hidden so easily. “Sure. I suppose that would be alright…” Clarke says quietly, an ounce of her uncertainty bleeding into her tone.

“But of course, you will need to fight Lexa, as her artful kick has rendered me quite useless I am afraid.” Ontari says with a Cheshire grin. Obviously feeling pleased with herself. Clarke turns her gaze directly to the forests of green that she would happily lose herself in. “Only if you’re okay with it?” Clarke offers quietly.

Lexa smiles a little brighter and nods. A brief moment later she frowns and turns her questioning gaze towards Grace and Clarke’s injured ribs both. “Are you sure you can fight while your wound mends?” Lexa asks hesitantly, her voice soft and worried.

“Naomi says I can return to my normal routines, but to avoid strenuous activities if possible.” Clarke replies breezily, her hand gesturing her flippant disconcert.

“Doesn’t this count as strenuous Clarke?” Lexa asks with authority laced in her tone. Her finely sculpted eyebrow lifting in question and disbelief.

Clarke felt a pull deep in her belly as Lexa’s expression transforms. Swallowing thickly Clarke replies huskily. “Not if you go easy on me.”

Lexa’s eyes darken at Clarke’s words, as she imagines all of the different ways she could be decidedly strenuous with Clarke.

Clarke’s lust-addled brain is in the exact same place as Lexa’s as it would seem. As her mind projects a mental picture of Lexa and she, sweat slicked and wearing far fewer clothes. Perhaps with Lexa bent over her war table, or spread wide and willing on her wooden throne as Clarke does wicked things to Lexa’s sinfully gorgeous body.

Lexa somehow finds the willpower to turn her wandering thoughts away from the path it had happily been detouring down. “I don’t like to go easy.” Lexa whispers.

To Clarke’s ears it sounds like a promise, and her belly fills with warm, liquid excitement of the sinful variety. “I wouldn’t imagine you do.” Clarke responds breathily.

“Well I hate to interrupt… Whatever the hell that was. But there’s the small problem of the tiny human strapped to your chest that I would like to point out.” Ontari interrupts awkwardly. Sure, she had been aiming to stir up some sexual tension and perhaps a little embarrassed blushing by prodding the two girls towards one another. However, she had not expected nor did she want to be here as they humped each other publicly. It would appear that the situation was far direr than she originally thought. Lexa and Clarke’s sexual chemistry probably had the potency to start wars and end dynasties, and while she was happy for her friends, she was also a little disgusted. Ontari shook herself back into the moment and the situation at hand. Gesturing with a small nod in the direction of Grace, Ontari offered quietly, albeit a little hesitantly. “Do you want me to hold onto her?”

Ontari’s voice ruptured the little lust bubble Clarke had encapsulated herself within, and Clarke became instantly grateful for the interruption as she realised she had somehow gotten closer to Lexa in the midst of their innuendo fuelled conversation. Clarke refocused her brain onto Ontari’s question. “Yes, I would appreciate that if you don’t mind.” Clarke counters with a small smile.
Clarke efficiently unwraps the bindings holding Grace secure, and then gently deposits the sleeping child into Ontari’s reliable arms. Ontari swaddled Grace into her coat to keep the chill in the air away from her skin, and then backed away to a log by the sparring rings to sit and watch the fight unfold.

Clarke unstrapped her thigh dagger and dumped it and her coat on the ground. Dawn was rapidly approaching and the sky was beginning to blush a light peach hue. Clarke felt, more than saw Lexa’s eyes tracing the soft edges of her body, the scars and the tattoo. Green skating over expanses of creamy skin, eliciting a delightful shiver from Clarke.

Clarke picked out a practice sword to train with and warmed up her limbs by swinging the piece of dull metal in wide arcs around her body. Blood rushed to Clarke’s extremities and an excitement she feels only when in combat thrums in her veins, lending her power and energy for the fight. With some movements, Clarke’s wound protested with small twinges, but otherwise remained unbothersome. Clarke carefully cleared her face of all emotion and began to ready her body for whatever Lexa threw at her. Lexa mimicked a very similar pre-fight ritual, however did not take nearly as long, as she was already warmed from her earlier sparring match with Ontari.

The two girls stalked each other around the edges of the ring, each eying the other critically for weakness. The lust from earlier seeming to have fizzled out. For which Clarke was grateful. As she had learned early that distractions result in defeat, and fighting a superior opponent as she was, Clarke could not afford to be distracted by anything.

After five minutes of carefully guided manoeuvrings Lexa attacked. Clarke wondered briefly whether it was Lexa’s own impatience or perhaps if Clarke herself had broadcasted some kind of subconscious intent in the moments preluding the strike, that encouraged Lexa to take an offensive position.

Nevertheless, Clarke moved to raise her sword, but feinted to the right of Lexa’s assault, attempting to confuse her opponent and tire her more quickly. Clarke knew that in order to stand any chance of beating Lexa, she would need to outsmart her. However, Lexa was not a clueless branweda, and she could anticipate Clarke’s strategy almost as soon as it had been deployed.

Lexa countered Clarke’s easy dodge with another strike, somehow swifter than the one previous. Clarke used the flat of her sword to deflect Lexa’s strike as she knew she was not fast enough to outrun it. The defence temporarily knocking Lexa off balance as her body followed through with her momentum. However, she recovered too quickly for Clarke to push the advantage.

Clarke rounded on Lexa’s weaker side and moved to strike at her ribs as quickly as she possibly could. However, she did not put her full weight behind the blow, instead choosing to attempt to land a shallow strike, that would enable Clarke to move much faster when Lexa retaliated.

Lexa caught Clarke’s blade and twisted it on her own, deflecting Clarke’s attack. Lexa spun her blade in a savage circle that would have connected with Clarke’s skull had she not chosen to withhold her full force from her earlier attack. Clarke leant back rapidly, as the sword brushed the fine hairs on her chin, and a wave of air disturbed the braids settled around Clarke’s face from the whistling swiftness of the sword.

Clarke quickly pushed upwards on her arms and kicked her legs out to meet the knees of Lexa’s leg, just as the brunette’s sword handle whipped down to strike Clarke in the sternum. Clarke’s attack knocked Lexa backwards and fouled her strike on Clarke’s exposed chest. The commander fell backwards and Clarke heard the wind get kicked free from her lungs. However, the green-eyed girl did not stop her momentum as she hit the ground. Instead she rolled away from Clarke just as she was about the level her sword at Lexa’s throat.
Both girls scrambled back to their feet, and began circling each other again, like carrion birds over a carcass. Their fight continued on in this manner for another twenty minutes, neither able to better the other. However, in a real life and death fight, Clarke knew her enemy would have exposed her obvious weak point at her ribs, by smashing the pummel of a blade into the tender flesh. Clarke knew that Lexa had gone easy on her.

By the end of the fight, Clarke and Lexa both were flushed crimson, and lathered in sweat. Their lungs burning in their need for oxygen. Neither of them had been the true winner, but they were both contented to leave the score as a tie, as equals.

Ontari slow clapped from the sidelines. “That was awesome guys. But Lexa definitely went easy on you Clarke.” Ontari bragged cheerfully.

The comment earnt a wry grin from Lexa and a hearty chuckle from Clarke, as the duo attempted to catch their breath.

“I figured.” Clarke relents as she wipes the sweat pooling along her brow free. Clarke quickly changes the subject before Ontari and Lexa have the chance to question her on her fighting ability. “Why were you guys up so early anyway?” Clarke asks with a quizzical expression painting her face curious.

“It’s the only time I can train without people witnessing.” Lexa replies stoically, her voice laced with a sternness that threatened to give everyone a crick in their necks.

Clarke chewed the inside of her lip as she realised that for whatever reason, she had just stumbled on a topic of a conversation that was a controversial. One that Lexa was obviously uncomfortable to discuss. Either in front of Ontari, or Clarke or perhaps anyone. Clarke’s curiosity piqued, but she stowed the topic away for later dissection.

“So what is everyone’s plans for the day?” Clarke asks, in an attempt to alleviate the tension that seemed to have befallen the trio. Rocking backwards and forwards on the balls of her feet, as if she could just will the weirdness away if she tried hard enough.

“T will be shadowing Heda.” Ontari says evenly, her expression of youthful carelessness evaporating and being replaced by the loyal Azgeda servant.

Clarke found the sudden transition a little disconcerting, and briefly wondered if this was what she did to people whenever Wanheda came out to play. It wasn’t any wonder why people were a little wigged out when it happened, if that was the case. Watching the girl before her, Clarke realised just how fully the Ontari she knew. The girl who expressed vulnerabilities, like her brother’s death, or her friendships with Lexa and herself, had receded. Clarke realised that this must be how Azgeda coped with their lives. The Ice Nation were known to be cruel and cold and callous. However, it was all a mask. Similar to the one Lexa wore as Heda, and identical to the one Clarke wore between being herself and Wanheda – only she wasn’t quite sure which personality was the façade. At times, they both felt equally false and in other instances, it was like slipping into a second skin.

Kadeon wasn’t like Ontari, he hadn’t grown up as Ice Nation, so this response had not been conditioned into him. He had been stolen from a village called Tato in the Banished Lands. An area of Ice wasteland that laid sandwiched between Azgeda, Trikru, Floukru and the sea. He had shown great promise as a warrior, so Nia had kidnapped his wife Mila and his at the time, four-year-old son Halen, to coerce his cooperation. He had learnt to conceal his emotions, it did not come naturally. It was not bred into him. He had had the reaction beaten into him, unlike Ontari, and unlike Greya.

“What about you Clarke? What do you plan to do with your day?” Lexa inquires softly. Her earlier
caged expression having long since disappeared.

Clarke visibly relaxed again, however she wondered how Lexa might react to her plans. After all, she had expressed concerns that Clarke idea to earn Greya’s trust and extract information free from her by weaponizing kindness, might have been a bad idea.

“I plan to interrogate the prisoner.” Clarke says after a measured beat of silence.

Lexa’s expression hardens minutely, and a muscle above her eyebrow twitches. “And do you plan to use the same method of interrogation as you suggested to me yesterday?” Lexa asks pointedly.

The tone of the conversation had shifted. This was no longer a discussion among friends, it was conversation between leaders. Tacticians in wartime. So, Clarke straightened her spine and squared her shoulders appropriately. “Yes, I intend to implement the plan I discussed with you.” Clarke answers calmly.

Lexa released a long sigh as she pinched the bridge of her nose. “Ontari can you please leave us for a moment?” Lexa directs her piercing green gaze towards Ontari, who still cradled a sleeping Grace in her arms. The infant snuggled warmly into the furs of the Azgeda girls thick fur jacket.

“Sha, Heda.” Ontari says immediately, standing at a much slower pace to ensure Grace did not stir.

Ontari turns her gaze back to Clarke to reassure her. “I will not go far with Grace, I promise.” She says solemnly.

Clarke has no doubts that her daughter would be safe with Ontari, so she nods her head and turns her attention back to Lexa as Ontari walks away.

“Why are you being so stubborn about this Clarke?” Lexa says around a world-weary sigh, her eyes heavy with the burden this war had placed on her slim shoulders. “You know as well as I that this plan is flawed.” Lexa says with as much peaceful calm as she could muster. However, her frustration was mounting as Clarke’s stubbornness on the matter grew.

Clarke is struck temporarily dumb as the words hit her. She feels a tendril of hurt tug hard on her heart, like it had been skewered by a rusty fishing hook, as she realises that Lexa might not believe in this plan because she no longer believes in Clarke’s leadership. Clarke doesn’t get angry as she expects herself to, but instead sighs heavily in defeat and pushes past her injured pride in an attempt to explain herself. After a moment of finding the right words, she finally speaks. “Because I want to prove to myself and to the world, that there is still a part of me that is capable of solving a problem without resorting to inflicting pain and death on those around me.” Clarke says evenly. Her voice steady despite the quivering of her heart in her chest.

Lexa feels like the world had shifted slightly. She knew that Clarke had felt driven to enact her plan to show Greya some kind of kindness, however the motive had not made itself apparent until this very moment. And Lexa felt the urge to face-palm her ignorance, and chastise herself for not having seen it sooner. “You are capable of greatness Clarke. But sometimes the only way to achieve it, is to know when inflicting pain and death is necessary. And right now, in this circumstance. I am afraid that your strategy will not accomplish this.” Lexa says softly, her irritation and frustration from before, having evaporated instantly.

“I believe we can be better Lexa. I need to believe that we can be better.” Clarke responds immediately, her tone earnest, almost pleading. For what though, Clarke was unsure. But she knew she needed Lexa to understand. If nothing else was accomplished here, she needed Lexa to understand.
“Why?” Lexa asks hesitantly, her tone completely soft and face vulnerable. She wanted to know the answer to her question, for no other reason than the fact that it would put Clarke’s mind at ease.

Clarke runs a hand through her braids, and inhales deeply. Hoping that a little extra oxygen might help her words string together in a coherent sentence. “Because I want to be remembered as more than just the girl who slayed the mountain.” Clarke admits with a frown, her unpleasant expression directed to the ground by her foot like the earth itself had affronted her personally.

Lexa answers immediately. “You already are Clarke. You liberated your people…” Clarke interrupts her.

“But so did you Lexa!” Clarke retorts heatedly, passionately.

“No! I offered my people a temporary truce with the mountain men. But you… You freed your people and mine, for eternity. Gave us lasting peace, and offered us justice for our dead. Accomplishing more in your six months on Earth than any Commander in the hundred years since the bombs fell.” Lexa says with just as much fire in her tone. Two volcanoes readying to blow their tops. Not out of anger or hatred, but out of earnest care. Each one needing the other to understand.

Clarke sucks in a deep breath of air, like suddenly the world was only full of carbon dioxide and she was slowly suffocating. She did not expect the words to come tumbling free from Lexa’s mouth. The words almost implied that Lexa felt herself to be weak. Like she viewed herself as less, because she could not give her people what she had promised. Clarke had never considered that maybe Lexa felt like a failure as well. The thought seemed ludicrous and wholly ridiculous. Clarke decides that Lexa might not appreciate it if Clarke were to bring up the topic of Lexa’s insecurities, so instead she addressed her own. “But I killed innocents to achieve it. Doesn’t that transgression alone cancel out the good I did there?” Clarke whispers brokenly.

Lexa considers the question for a moment, her brow furrowed in thought. “Let me ask you this. If we all have the capacity to do evil, are any of us truly innocent?”

Lexa stares into Clarke’s eyes with an intensity that makes Clarke shiver, and wonder what Lexa sees hidden in the depths of her soul. Somehow Lexa had always possessed that ability. To peel back the layers of Clarke to uncover the scared little girl that truly existed within. “Then what is the point of this war Lexa? If we don’t fight for the innocent, then what is the purpose? Why do we do it?” Clarke bellows with frustration.

“So that we can choose what we want to be. So that children like Grace can have the freedom and autonomy to decide what they become. Have faith that those that come after us will make better choices than we did.” Lexa answers simply, like her answer was the most obvious thing in the world.

“So what? I am just supposed to resign myself to the fact that I can never exact the good I want to see in the world? That goodness can only be achieved by future generations?” Clarke asks incredulously. Her arms flailing around her, in an attempt to make sense of Lexa’s words.

“No Clarke. Resign yourself to the fact that sometimes, to achieve a good outcome, you need to do bad things.” Lexa utters almost reverently, a haunted look in her eye.

Clarke recognises Lexa’s lost expression, and wonders what she was reliving that made her feel so broken. Clarke shakes herself free from the gravity of Lexa’s green orbs, and refocuses her mind to the task at hand. “But not today. I still think this plan can work Lexa. I believe that in this one moment, goodness will be repaid in kind.” Clarke pleads earnestly. She needed to believe that there was some goodness left in the world. Even if she had to manufacture it herself.
Lexa regards Clarke pensively for a moment, before she finally provides her verdict. “… Fine Clarke. You have two days. But if your plan does not work, we do things my way.” Lexa stipulates, the edge of command leaking back into her voice.

Clarke felt a flare of hope in her chest and wonders whether it was there because she was being given the chance to atone for her sins in a way, or because Lexa seemed to believe in her. “Thankyou Lexa.” Clarke says with a genuine smile.

Lexa nods, and after a moment of silence, Clarke prepares to walk away. “I do believe in you Clarke.” Lexa calls out softly to Clarke’s back.

Clarke’s heart skipped a beat, and the hope in her chest brightened. And she knew, without a doubt, that it was there because of Lexa. “I know.” She whispers in reply.

Chapter End Notes

Hi all! Happy Australia Day!

Please leave me some feedback, you all know how much I enjoy reading your opinions!! :D
Clarke entered the dungeon-like structure armed with a bag full of supplies and her optimistic attitude. Choosing to leave all her weapons and any instrument that might be perceived as a threat, outside. The room was dark and cramped and strangely hot. It felt like walking into a sauna, but without the damp humidity in the air. The room smelt like dust and despair, if such an aroma existed, and Clarke assumed that the image of the young Azgeda girl shackled to the wall only amplified the oppressive atmosphere of the space.

The girl’s face was caked in dirt, blood and angry bruises of mottled green, blue and purple. The uncomfortable sight obscuring the facial scarring that Clarke knew would be present, as well as the features of the girl. There was also a bloody halo of stained concrete behind the girl’s head, undoubtedly from where her skull had impacted with the concrete repeatedly. The left side of the girl’s face was injured the worst, from what Clarke could see. The entire left cheekbone was swollen and disfigured, her eyes almost completely sealed shut from the expansion of her cheek. Dried blood crusted Greya’s face and a track of the crimson substance streaked down her neck and had dried into her clothing. Clarke felt a twinge of sympathy flare in her chest for the girl.

As soon as Clarke entered, Greya’s eyes were on her. Steadily tracking Clarke’s movements and assessing the new threat. Recognition flared in the girl’s eyes, and Clarke wondered if she was being recognised as Wanheda, or Clarke or perhaps just the girl who had killed a handful of Azgeda a few nights past. Clarke looked into the girl’s eyes to try and extract some kind of understanding, and wished she hadn’t.

Clarke decided that if the eyes truly were the windows to the soul, then this girl’s soul must have been frozen solid. Her irises were a startlingly pale shade of glacier blue, that resembled the freezing ice fields of Azgeda. An involuntary shiver danced across the vertebrae of Clarke’s spine as she stared into their cool depths. There was no trace of warmth there. Only mistrust and wariness, and Clarke realised just how impossible her task might be.

Clarke quickly stifled the defeat that seemed to taunt her, reminding her of the chances of failure this endeavour posed. She needed to believe that there was some good left in this world that seemed to leach away any positivity and good intention. Clarke needed to reassure some broken part of her soul, that goodness and kindness still existed in the midst of something truly horrific such as war.

Deciding that now was as good a time as any to get introductions out of the way, Clarke opened her mouth and spoke in the gentlest tone she could muster. “My name is Clarke. And I am told yours is Greya, correct?” Clarke asked the question slowly, hoping to avoid startling the girl. She of course did not expect an immediate answer, and allowed a small smile to grace her lips.

The prisoner remained completely silent, however her calculating gaze that had been perusing Clarke’s body for weapons and any further threats, momentarily expressed something akin to confusion. A moment later, and the expression was gone, her scrutinising and analytical glare directed back to her task of assessing Clarke. The ice Nation girl’s eyes instantly zeroing in on the bag that was slung over Clarke’s shoulder, a minute expression of both curiosity and fear flitting across her face. Obviously, the girl expected some heinous torture device to be weighting the bag.

Clarke decided to answer the unasked question in an attempt to put the girl at ease. After all, she didn’t need any extra suspicion thrust upon her attempts to win this girl’s trust. “Don’t worry, there’s
nothing dangerous in the bag.” Clarke assured gently.

To prove her point, Clarke bent down and balanced on the balls of her feet, and began slowly pulling out items from the bag, and explaining what they were as she went. “Bandages. Healing tonics. Poultice mixes. Needle and thread for stitches. A water skin. Clean cloth. A blanket. Bread.” Clarke laid each of the items out on the outer layer of the bag, and fought the urge to smile when Greya relaxed minutely. The fear from earlier having disappeared, however the curiosity seemed to have only intensified.

Clarke stood slowly again, raising her body to full height and took a hesitant step towards the bound girl. Greya flinched back from the movement and Clarke instantly stopped in her approach, and held her arms out in a placating gesture. Clarke found herself comparing the whole experience with approaching a wounded and cornered animal. Knowing that the beast might strike at any moment, but choosing to trust that it won’t. “I won’t touch you unless you give me permission.” Clarke says slowly, the expression of confusion only growing on Greya’s face. Her eyebrows furrowing unevenly around her swollen face.

Clarke swallowed down her nerves over the next words the left her mouth. “If I were to lower your chains, so that you could sit comfortably on the floor, would you promise not to strangle me with the slack?” Clarke asks around a small smirk.

Greya’s eyebrows hiked up her forehead and the girl winced when the movement pulled on her wounds. Obviously she was startled by the offer and was probably considering the mental state of the person before her, but Clarke chose not to care. Clarke knew that in order to earn Greya’s trust, she would need to show some in kind. And this, while positively foolish, was one of the only ways Clarke knew of to help the girl place them on equivalent footing.

Clarke knew that she couldn’t trust the girl not to try anything and make her escape, in fact Clarke predicted she would probably try it. But by allowing herself to be vulnerable in some way around the girl, would ensure that Clarke was seen as less of a warden and more of an equal. Plus she liked her chances in a fight against the girl, if it came to that.

Greya didn’t verbally respond, but instead nodded minutely, her eyes still wary and calculating, but somehow more relaxed than they had been a mere moment before.

Clarke swallowed down her nerves over the next words the left her mouth. “If I were to lower your chains, so that you could sit comfortably on the floor, would you promise not to strangle me with the slack?” Clarke asks around a small smirk.

Clarke stepped over to the lever that would slowly lower the chains that shackled Greya into a standing position against the wall, and pulled. The girl’s legs collapsed beneath her body weight now that the chains weren’t holding her upright, and she slumped against the ground with a sharp intake of breath and a pained grimace.

Clarke moved back to her bag and pulled out the water skin and cloth, and wet the material. The girl’s eyes fused themselves to the sight of the water, and she licked her dry lips. Clarke offered the girl the water skin a moment later and the she instantly ripped the offering from Clarke’s grasp, swallowing down the liquid in desperate gulps. Her breathing was laboured by the time the girl finally pulled the skin from her lips, and she sighed in what Clarke thought might have been satisfaction.

Holding up the damp cloth in her hand, Clarke gestured to the girl’s bloodied face. “Can I clean your wounds?” Clarke asks when the girl seemed to have calmed down.

Greya eyed Clarke warily, her eyes hardening with her distrust. But with much reluctance the girl slowly nodded her acceptance.

Carefully, Clarke scrubbed the dried blood from the Azgeda girl’s face. Mindful to keep her strokes
soft, so not to inflict more pain and damage to her already battered face. Nevertheless, Greya winced with each brush against her skin, and Clarke felt a little morsel of guilt nibble at her heart like a rat with cheese. It was partially her fault Greya was in this position and had suffered the pain she had, and for that, Clarke was remorseful. However, she knew that this was an inevitable aspect of war. An uglier one, to be sure, but necessary in some cases. And Clarke felt her frustration mount within herself that she was being purposefully obtuse and naïve in the face of her own insecurities and perceived faults as a human being. She knew Lexa was right when she said that some horrors were necessary in order to achieve a positive outcome, but her need to be forgiven and atone for her sins, was almost overwhelming.

When the crusted blood was washed away and Greya’s face was unobscured by the dirt and grime it had accumulated, Clarke swiftly went about applying healing salves and potions to all the open wounds on the girl’s face. Greya blanched away from every new substance until Clarke had explained them to her.

“This one eases pain.”

“This stops infection.”

“This aids the healing process.”

Clarke fell into the easy familiarity of the role of healer, and realised just how much she had missed it. She had subconsciously veered away from all healing activities in her time away, as some part deep inside of Clarke’s soul had found the conflict between being a killer, someone who takes life, as opposed to a healer, who returned it, to be far too oppositional, and in its own way ironic. It had felt wrong. Until now.

When Greya’s face had been treated, she moved onto the back of the girl’s head. Cleaning and stitching the wound. The injury to her scalp had been far worse than her face, as the constant impacts with the wall behind her had enabled an uneven portion of the jagged concrete to split the tissue open and tear. There was a gash approximately six centimetres long that exposed the girl’s bone underneath. The sight had been disgusting and kind of fascinating in a morbid sense. It had taken much more persuasive and patient tactics to have the girl allow Clarke anywhere near her with a needle, but in the end Clarke had prevailed. She stitched and applied a poultice to the wound, and wrapped a bandage around the girl’s head to create a barrier between the exposed flesh and potential bacteria. She even washed the scarlet tinge in her silver hair, free from the strands, and took care to untangle the matted tresses, so the girl was more comfortable.

Clarke then washed and applied some salves to the raw flesh of Greya’s wrists as well. Both Clarke and Greya were beginning to relax in each other’s company, however when Greya moved her hands, Clarke couldn’t stop the way her body would seize up and track the movement. Preparing for Greya to make an attempt to wrap the rusted chains around her neck and strangle her life free from its fleshy home. Nevertheless, Greya never tried anything, so Clarke kept working.

Assuming that she had finished her task, Clarke began to pack away her tools, but the girl halted her movements by grasping Clarke wrist. It was only due to Clarke’s iron self-control that allowed her to avoid flinching from Greya’s grasp. Clarke shot the girl a weary and contemplative look, as Greya gingerly lifted the hem of her shirt to expose the blue, black and purple bruising marring her ribs. Clarke understood the gesture for what it was, a display of trust, fleeting though it may have been. But nevertheless, Clarke’s heart soared in the wake of the small victory.

Clarke gently prodded the area to determine whether or not the ribs under the skin had been broken. Most of the bones seemed to be intact, but then her fingers prodded over one of the ribs on Greya’s right side, the bone shifted and writhed under skin and muscle, like an eel. It was a very unpleasant
sensation to feel beneath Clarke’s finger tips, but judging from the agonised grunt and the tears that welled in Greya’s eyes, it was far worse for her. Clarke apologise for inflicting the pain, and wrapped the girls ribs with a long piece of bandage.

“The swelling in your face should go down in a few days and the bruising should be completely gone after two weeks. The gash on the back of your head should heal in roughly the same amount of time, but I will need to remove the stitches in seven days. You have one broken rib; the rest are very bruised. You will be extremely sore for the next few weeks. But I am confident that no internal organs have been punctured.” Clarke reports, her eyes not meeting Greya’s but instead still focused on the task of winding the fabric around the girl’s tender ribs securely.

When Clarke finally looked up from her work, she was met with the inquisitive eyebrow raise from her prisoner and a silent question in her eyes. Clarke answered the questions she assumed were on the girls lips without further encouragement. “I know all of that because my mother is a healer, and typically internal bleeding presents with swelling and discolouration of the surrounding area. From the position of your broken rib, you would risk puncturing your lung. So you would be in a large amount of pain, you would struggle to breath and there is a chance your lung could collapse. Plus you might have been coughing up bloody sputum. And none of those things have happened, so you should be fine. Also these injuries were inflicted more than twenty four hours ago, so if anything was to happen, it would have occurred by now.” Clarke elaborates.

Greya looks temporarily stunned as her brain processes all the new information, but ultimately she appears impressed by Clarke’s knowledge, and her guarded expression that had been present since Clarke entered began to lessen. Clarke packed up her tools, leaving the bread, water skin and blanket with Greya. Just as she stood and prepared to leave, deciding that this session had reached its limit for being possibly beneficial, Greya’s voice crackled behind her.

“I know who you are.” Greya’s voice was hoarse and wiry from disuse, but the sound instantly had Clarke turning around to face the archer.

Clarke considers Greya’s words for a moment. “Well I did introduce myself, so I am not at all surprised.” Clarke comments sarcastically, a wry grin stretching her features.

Greya remains unamused, and continues. “You’re Wanheda.” She says it as though the title holds next to no importance, which temporarily startles Clarke. Most people say the word with reverence or disgust, but not this girl, and Clarke finds herself intrigued.

“And how do you figure that?” Clarke narrows her eyes and studies every miniscule expression change from the girl. Greya’s lips lift in a contemplative smile, almost nostalgic in nature, and Clarke’s curiosity builds.

“I’ve heard the stories. Of you. On the mountain.” Greya pronounces in heavily accented Gonasleng. Greya winces a little with each word, her throat scratchy and sore.

“I see.” Clarke expression becomes guarded as she constructs walls around her mind, hoping that she built them high enough to conceal the unease she felt in that moment, staring into eyes that reflected a frozen wasteland.

Greya’s lips quirk into a victorious grin, or perhaps it was a grimace. With her face so swollen it was difficult to tell, and the sight was by no means attractive. “I didn’t recognise you at first. The stories say you have hair the colour of sunlight, so the black cloth threw me initially.” Greya tilts her bandaged head in the direction of Clarke’s lazy disguise.

When Clarke remains silent, Greya’s eyes brighten into a predatory smirk, and her eyes filled with
something akin to bloodlust as she moved in for the kill. Her tongue practically slavering for the bitter tang of blood as her jaws closed over Clarke’s vulnerable neck. “But then I saw how you fought all those nights ago. When you killed my comrades, and I knew instantly who you were.” Greya says with a dangerous edge, like if Clarke listened too closely, she would slice her ear off from the razor sharpness of them.

Clarke realises how quickly this conversation seemed to have devolved and scrambles to redirect it into waters she could more easily navigate, as these ones were becoming too cold for Clarke mind to think properly. “I am sorry that they had to die.” Clarke says softly, and she knows without needing to see her own face, that her expression is haunted. It always was when she spoke of lives she had taken.

Greya chuckles humourlessly, and her eyes grew distant as she seemed to become immersed in her own mind-bound world for a moment. “This is war. Casualties are inevitable.” There was such a defeated and sad tone to the words, that Clarke instantly knew that for whatever reason, that comment was laden with meaning. It contained a secret message that Clarke could not understand, not yet anyway. Clarke surmised that Greya must have known her emotions would bleed through her tone with the phrase, so on some level, she might have wanted to tell Clarke something. So she remained silent, deciding to allow Greya to continue on, if she felt inclined.

Silence stretched onwards, and then the lost expression on the Ice Nation girl’s face receded, and Clarke realised the moment had slipped away. Annoyed that she hadn’t taken advantage of the opening, but not deterred. Clarke changed the topic in order to keep Greya talking.

“So what gave you the impression that I am Wanheda?” Clarke asks hesitantly, hoping that by arcing the conversation back around to herself, Greya might engage with her.

“Your eyes.” Greya answers immediately. Her own staring intently at a crack in the floor. Clarke was confused, admittedly. So she just allowed Greya a moment to elaborate. Her brows furrowed to wordlessly express her intrigue. Sweat beaded along her brow from the stifling heat of the small room.

Greya glanced up from the crack in the floor when Clarke didn’t answer straight away. And a smug smile danced at the corners of her mouth when she observed the Sky girl’s confusion. “When you kill, your eyes change.” Greya elaborated plainly.

Clarke’s brows furrow together, tighter than before, as an uncomfortable feeling of dread flickers dangerously in her belly. “How so?” She asks calmly. Despite knowing what direction, the conversation was going, Clarke was intrigued to know what someone like Greya - an impartial third party – witnessed when Wanheda came out of the shadows.

Greya watches Clarke with morbid curiosity, staring at her the way one might a corpse. Seemingly fascinated by death, but not eager to get to close in case it drag her to the underworld too. “They grow cold, and distant. Lifeless like a corpse. Your eyes reflect death itself.” Greya’s voice holds no wonderment or horror over the declaration. Instead, Clarke compares it to grim understanding, like she was all too familiar with the expression. Clarke questions whether the girl seemed so unaffected because warriors of Azgeda spoke of Wanheda often, or if she had experience with someone similar to Clarke, who was responsible for far too much death for one soul to bear.

Either way, Clarke stifled her urge to squirm uncomfortably. So instead of dignifying Greya’s observations, she deflected. “That’s overly dramatic.” Clarke intoned with bored disinterest.

Greya smirked at the easy dismissal. “Maybe. But it’s true. They are the eyes that only one who
commands death could possess.” She says with a small trace of humour. Like she knew that Clarke had attempted to feign her nonchalance, but was secretly rattled by the declaration.

Clarke’s silence all but confirmed Greya’s suspicions. But Clarke’s expression had become guarded once more, and so Greya left the topic alone. She had enjoyed riling Ontari up when she had… Visited. But there was something about this sky girl that intrigued Greya, made her feel like cruelty would be uncalled for. And for the first time in Greya’s life, she found herself deciding that using Clarke as her punching bag, was a thought that she did not savour. So she changed the subject. “So what? The Commander thinks I am going to spill my secrets because Wanheda is being nice to me?” Greya raises a single eyebrow and simpers when Clarke simply chuckles in response.

“Do you want the truth?” Clarke asks serenely, like she couldn’t be bothered to know what Greya said in response. Like her reply didn’t actually matter in the slightest. And in some ways, it didn’t.

“I would not have asked you to answer if I wanted a lie.” Greya answers drily, as she folds her hands together in her lap expectantly.

Clarke snorts, before answering. Deciding that this could be a defining moment, and that by being completely honest here, she could win Greya’s trust much faster than she had planned. “Okay. No. The commander doesn’t agree with this plan. She thinks that it is too risky.” Clarke says evenly.

Greya’s eyebrows furrowed in thought, her expression pensive as she contemplated what was said in between the lines. “But you don’t. You think this will work?” Greya asks in a measured tone. Her eyes dancing with curiosity, that she is surprised to find is completely honest.

Clarke leaned back onto her elbows in her seated position, getting more comfortable as she spoke. Clarke considered the best way to explain the situation, and sighed as she realised there was no way of saying what she needed to say, without showing her hand. So she did. “Look. I don’t think that any tactic will be successful in extracting the information we need, unless YOU decide to share what you know. There is a chance that this might not garner the results we want, there is a chance of failure, but I know that torture will not work with one hundred percent certainty.” Clarke answers simply, her shoulders shrugging in resignation.

Greya is completely surprised by Clarke’s honesty. She had expected a half-truth at most, after all, she was a prisoner, and not an overly important one at that. But the display of trust was strange. Greya wondered if the trust was being shown, because she wasn’t seen as a threat anymore. Perhaps they would execute her tomorrow, and this was a last ditch effort to learn something new. But something about the thought rankled, and felt false. More troubling however, was the way Clarke seemed to know that torture wouldn’t work on her, like she had insider knowledge. “And how do you know that?” Greya asks after a moment.

Clarke’s response was almost immediate. “You’re Azgeda. Your people are taught to resist pain and push it from your mind.” She says with feigned disinterest, keen to see how Greya might react to Clarke confirming her familiarity with Azgeda customs. It was common for other clans to have a limited knowledge on their neighbours, however Skaikru was notorious for its obliviousness.

Greya stared incredulously at Clarke as her brain tried to assemble pieces of the puzzle, and Clarke watched on happily.

Both women stared at each other for long moments, challenge clear in their eyes, as they navigated their next moves. It was a terse few seconds, until Greya finally spoke.

“There’s only one way you would know something like that.” Greya says slowly, suspicion and accusation both heating her tone by the slightest degree.
“Do tell.” Clarke says with forced enthusiasm. The way one might if they were confronted with gossip they weren’t entirely ecstatic to be hearing of. Clarke knew where this was going, but thought it important to allow the Azgeda girl to put pieces of the puzzle together on her own. Made to feel like she was gleaning something from this encounter on her own, not simply swallowing everything Clarke fed her. Ensuring that Greya felt like she was actively uncovering facts that Clarke might not want bared and sating her own curiosity. Clarke’s purposeful obtuseness allowed the archer to ask her questions and keep the dynamic between them equal. So trust could be harvested.

“You’ve obviously had close dealings with Azgeda before.” Greya surmises with a slight eyebrow raised, almost asking for Clarke to confirm or deny the fact, but also expectant. Like she knew that either way, Clarke would answer her.

“Perhaps.” Clarke answered noncommittally. Kadeon might not have been born Azgeda, but he was trained by them, and assimilated into their society.

The non-answer frustrated Greya, but she persevered through her irritation with the other blonde. “Who was it?” She asks sceptically. “Ontari maybe?” She scoffed around the name, but when Clarke’s face remained unmoving and expressionless Greya was left to wonder if there was someone else implicated in this. “Or someone else?” She asks inquisitively. Her curiosity growing into a fever-pitched crescendo. But still Clarke didn’t react.

Clarke smiled a small self-satisfied smirk that was just short of appearing smug, when Greya’s frustration became visible on her face. The girl’s eye narrowing and her jaw clenching as a rush of quiet breath left her mouth in an inaudible sigh. “Is it important who told me? The fact of the matter, is that my suggestion has saved you from a morning of torture.” Clarke says evenly, her smile slipping away.

Greya let out a bark of laughter that held no trace of humour, and sounded like fingernails running down a chalkboard. The sound was defeated and sarcastic and pained, and it was by no means easy to listen to. “And you expect me to be grateful?” Greya asks incredulously, unbelieving of this Sky girl’s nerve.

Clarke’s head tilted to the side expectantly, and her eyebrows rose judgementally as she spoke. “Well where I come from, people would generally say thank you.” She says simply.

“If you say so.” Clarke says slowly, hoping to somehow goad the girl into elaborating.

“Your people are so weak.” Greya says quietly, the tone not accusatory or hateful, but filled with resentment and a strange mournful quality. Like the girl wished that that weakness had been thrust upon herself, instead of the cruel ways of Azgeda, that forced her to be strong and heartless.

Clarke felt sympathy flare in her chest for the girl before her. The girl that was obviously far more complex than anyone had given her credit for. She was broken in her own way and damaged by the life she had lived. And Clarke could empathise with those qualities. But there was a determination that lurked behind the glaciers of her eyes that piqued Clarke’s interest. She only wondered if that determination was put there by Nia or someone else. “Maybe. But at least our humanity is still intact.” Clarke begins slowly. She pauses when Greya seems to appear apprehensive, like she was waiting for Clarke to continue speaking. Her eyes telling Clarke that on some unspoken level, Greya wanted to hear what Clarke said next, but the tension in her shoulders, also suggested that she dreaded it also. Clarke pushed past her discovery. “Can you say the same of your people?” She
intones lightly. Ensuring that her voice holds no malice or accusation. Just simple curiosity.

Greya’s shoulders slumped slightly, with defeat and her eyes lost their intrigued edge, growing dim with acceptance. Telling Clarke all she needed to know about how Greya viewed her own people. She was ashamed by their cruel customs and their lack of humanity. In a way that was both dangerous and revolutionary. It made Clarke wonder if perhaps there were others that hated their heritage within Azgeda as much as this girl seemed to.

“I didn’t think so.” Clarke amends softly.

“No, not all of us are the same…” Greya defends weakly. The ‘I am not like that…’ Remains unspoken, but hangs in the air like oxygen.

“And not all of Skaikru are weak.” Clarke points out gently. Hoping to subtly reassure her that she knows that not all people are good and not all people are bad, based solely on the clan they come from. That she knows that Greya can be capable of goodness even if she is from the Ice Nation. Clarke’s mind, the traitorous organ, decides to choose this moment to remind her that there were good people on the mountain that she killed because of the atrocious actions of a few. That she chose to view them all as evil in an attempt to soothe her guilt, but the truth of the matter was that there was good on the mountain. There were children and allies, friends even that had been kind and good, and they all died in spite of it. Clarke was their judge, hurry and executioner, and she found them all guilty because of the actions of a minority. Clarke pushes the thought abruptly from her mind, unable to think too deeply on the matter now if she was to learn anything new from Greya.

“I guess.” Greya chuckles bitterly, and her face contorts as though she were sucking on something sour and wholly unpleasant.

Silence fills the air between them as Greya slips into her own thoughts and seems to lose awareness of Clarke’s eyes studying her intently. When Greya’s eerie blue gaze finally sheds its glazed expression, Clarke continues speaking. “So, are you one of those people?” She prods gently.

“What people?” Greya’s light blue eyes snap up to meet Clarke’s own.

“One among the Azgeda with intact humanity?” Clarke asks seriously, her tone curious but fused with a quiet authority.

“Why does it matter to you?” Greya asks softly. Resembling in this moment, a child, unsure of her place in the world.

Clarke is quiet for a moment as her brain chews on the retort. “I suppose it doesn’t. But it should to you.” Clarke encourages, whilst also pointing out the knowledge which she already knows to be fact. That Greya did care about the kind of person she was. She wanted to be good, and in touch with her humanity. Only it was her circumstance that seemed to be holding her back. Her heritage. Clarke hoped that by openly stating it, it would remove the pretences that they had been talking around, and perhaps force Greya to be brave with her honesty, and remove the riddles from her insights.

Only Clarke’s strategy did not have the desired effect.

Greya tensed, and the relaxation that had allowed her to be so unguarded with Clarke vanished, as her insecurities were pushed into the light. It was startling and a little terrifying to know that this girl from the sky had seen the truth behind every word. That she had pulled apart every utterance and removed the hard outer exterior and sucked the marrow beneath the protective bone. “And why is that Sky girl?” Greya’s voice had gained a sharp, hard edge, as her guard slammed back into place.
Clarke recognised the sight of a brick wall behind Greya’s eyes and cursed her mistake, but pushed through her reservations. Knowing that while Greya might not take to heart the words spoken next, it would at least give the girl something to ponder when Clarke finally left. She knew that at the very least, her next statement would plague Greya’s mind and force her to question herself. “Because. If you value your morality, then this war…” Clarke pauses and gestures wildly around them. “It is not something you would support.” She says calmly, but under the calm, there was iron, and Greya felt it.

Greya chose to keep her mouth shut, despite the truth of Clarke’s words. She knew that the other blonde was right, but she had a bigger picture to consider. And she could not afford to lose sight of it, even though, she agreed with every word that came from Clarke’s annoyingly righteous mouth.

Clarke observed Greya’s stony silence and knew not to expect any response from her, but continued speaking anyhow. Hoping that her words would penetrate some part of her brick wall. “There is no honour in killing men and women in the dead of night. And then removing their heads from their bodies so they can never reincarnate.” Clarke becomes impassioned with each word, and more frustrated by Greya’s stony expression, that did not even flinch in the face of her words. Clarke wonders if it is a conditioned response, to remain unreactive when confronted with atrocity, or if the girl truly was unaffected by the thought of people being denied the chance to be reborn. A belief so ingrained in grounder culture, that it was one of the few things that truly had the power to frighten them.

Greya’s ire leaks into her voice. Only it was more in response to the fact that Clarke, the one person who had shown Greya any form of kindness and understanding, was under the impression that Greya was just another heartless branweda to fill the ranks of Nia’s army. And for some inexplicable reason, that knowledge stung. “Have you not heard? Azgeda has no honour. Why should this bother me?” Greya lashes out, trying to distance herself from the uncomfortable feeling in her chest, that was only growing stronger, the longer Clarke looked at her with disappointment.

Clarke takes a deep breath, to keep her mounting frustration under control. “Because you said you are not all alike. And if you have any humanity, like I think you do, then this war will not rest easily on your conscience.” She words fall from her mouth like they were tied to a lead anchor, which then they collided with Greya’s chest painfully.

The words strike hard at Greya’s resolve, but she forces herself to remain stubborn to her cause. There was too much resting on Greya’s ability to keep quiet and in control of herself. Too much that she stood to lose if Clarke was to be successful in disarming her defences and learning the secrets within. Greya’s eyes darken as she imagines what would be taken from her if she were to fail. “Do not presume to know me.” She growls threateningly.

“Fine.” Clarke holds her hands up in a placating gesture of submission, and Greya seems to calm by a fraction. “But you should think about it.” Clarke says with finality, knowing that this conversation was not going anywhere constructive.

“I do not need to. I know where my loyalties lie.” Greya says with grim determination, a shadow lurking behind her eyes that she hopes Clarke does not notice.

Something about the statement feels… off to Clarke, so she presses the matter. “And what has Nia ever done for you, to inspire such loyalty?”

Greya’s teeth clench with a force that would have ground them to dust, her cheek muscles bulging as they attempt to contain her aggression. “I am done talking to you.”

Clarke is a little startled by the display of hostility, and realises that it was only present in their
conversation when Nia was brought up. When Clarke had insinuated that Greya’s loyalty belonged to the woman. And she wonders if there really is a chance that this war might fall in their favour, if there were more warriors within Azgeda like Greya. Who appeared to hold contempt for their current leadership. Hope blooms in Clarke’s chest like an exotic flower, promising both beauty and a wondrous scent. “That’s okay. I will be back this afternoon.” Clarke says with a small smile, hopeful for their victory, now that she knew there might be some chance that this endeavour would truly end in their favour.

Clarke picks up her belongings and walks out of the hot dungeon, feeling eyes of ice tracking her every step. Deep down, she knew that she had made progress with Greya, but now the ball was in the archer’s court. She just hoped that she was prepared, for when the girl finally opened up.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!

I hope you all enjoy the new chapter, it was really fun to write, so I hope it is equally as entertaining to read.

In the next chapter you will get to see more interaction between Clarke and Lexa, and all the chaos regarding Clarke keeping secrets about Kade and the drama surrounding Titus will come to a head. SO I hope you are all as keen as I am.

Please leave me some feedback, your comments make my day a little brighter, and always bring a smile to my face, so please, please, PLEASE let me know your thoughts!

Anyway, until next time, I hope this chapter satisfies your need for more.

Loz, :D
Lexa walks through the streets of Alton as the sun begins to warm the morning and chase away the last vestiges of night from the sky. Inhaling the fresh morning air deeply, Lexa relishes the way a breath of frost tickles her trachea.

Despite her outward appearance of tranquillity, Lexa was writhing with discomfort on the inside. Her mind continuously traversing back to the unexpected session of sparring with Clarke earlier that morning. Lexa knew her mind should be more pre-occupied with Clarke interrogating their prisoner, but alas her jumbled brain seemed to have missed the memo.

There was just something about Clarke’s fighting style, and the fluidity of her attacks that set Lexa’s nerves on edge. She recognised certain aspects of her technique, but her brain struggled to pinpoint exactly why it seemed so familiar. Where she had seen skill such as the blonde’s before.

Clarke had been swift and sure in her movements, in a way that Lexa had only witnessed a handful of times in her life. Her picturesque face was so carefully stoic as she defended and attacked in kind, her eyes shining like sapphires in the sun, with cold, emotionless beauty. It was breathtaking to behold, and yet a startling transformation from the girl Clarke had been moments before the fight.

Lexa’s curiosity grew as she contemplated the fight, and so too did her confusion. Clarke was cunning and brutal in some areas of the contest, and Lexa had noticed that in those particular moments, Clarke had seemed lost in her own mind. Like she was aware of every controlled action, but somehow vacant as well. Like she had fallen victim to a strange bloodlust. Techniques used commonly by Azgeda warriors.

But then her fighting style would change, as her conscious mind seemed to drift back into her corporeal body, and then her movements would become calculated and non-specific to a particular style of combat. Mimicking movements similar to Trikru, Floukru and even the Yujleda tribes. It was like she was forcing herself to fight in a multitude of different styles to confuse anyone who watched her.

If Lexa didn’t know any better, she would determine that Clarke was trying to obscure her origins as a warrior. Lexa’s heart froze in her chest as the thought danced across the battlements of her mind, and her feet stopped their steady trek through the village.

Blood drained from Lexa’s cheeks as suspicion crept up her spine. What if Clarke was trying to conceal her fighting style?

Lexa brain churned over the new realisation rapidly, as she began to piece together a puzzle that had remained a mystery to her for as long as Clarke had returned to her life.

How had she managed to become so proficient and deadly with sword, in such a short period? It was obvious that she had a spectacular teacher and that whomever this person was, had been very gifted in combat and probably even possessed a rather specific skill set.

Lexa began to analyse all the information she knew about Clarke. But after a few minutes of attempting to fill in the blanks of Clarke’s story, Lexa realised that she did not have enough pieces of the puzzle to make any educated or informed conclusions about the enigma that was, Clarke Griffin.
The lack of insight was beyond frustrating, as she realised that the only person who could shed some light on the subject, was a certain blonde who had proven to have a certain proclivity for secrets and lies when asked about her past. Frustration boiled in Lexa’s veins and lit her blood ablaze, as she continued her trek towards the meeting hall.

She and Clarke had been making extraordinary progress recently, and Clarke had even shared some of her experience in Alton with her. A rather gruesome and frightening tale centring Carl Emerson’s deserved demise.

But Lexa couldn’t help but feel like she was only just beginning to scratch the surface of Clarke’s sordid and troubled history. A year and a half was plenty of time to live an entirely different life, and Lexa had no doubts that Clarke had done just that.

Lexa knew that Clarke had fallen in love with a man and given him a daughter, but then he had died by Nia’s hand – a matter which Clarke had refused to speak about and had skilfully dodged the topic completely when questioned about it. A detail that had not gone unnoticed by Lexa.

The whole situation with Clarke was maddening. Lexa was beyond curious about Clarke’s time away, but Clarke was so secretive and measured with every interaction. Like she was constantly on high alert so to avoid spilling any truths she had hidden. Which made Lexa wonder, what was so terrible and shocking that she would go to such lengths to conceal this secret from everyone she knew and cared for.

A dark and ugly voice reminded her that perhaps Clarke hadn’t hidden things from the people she cared about. Maybe she was just keeping things from Lexa.

The stray thought held some value, but Lexa quickly dismissed it. She had been making slow progress with Clarke, and she was not going to allow her own doubts and insecurities to permeate her mind and stain her decisions. Clarke had asked that Lexa allow her to divulge her story when she felt comfortable and at her own pace, and Lexa would honour this cardinal rule. After all, there were some stories of Lexa’s own past that she would rather not speak of, and yet Clarke had not demanded she be told of them.

Lexa decided that she would express her curiosity to Clarke, the next time she saw her, and hope that Clarke would ease her probing mind. And trust that Clarke would eventually be honest with her.

Lexa’s day passes in doleful boredom, but not for a lack of duties to attend to. She is kept busy with meetings with all of the scouts that had ventured out into the forest the previous night. Hearing their reports and learning where Nia’s warriors seem to be concentrating their movements. Boredom quickly melted away as white hot rage took its place in Lexa’s chest.

Eight more of her people had been found dead during the night, one being a child of nine years. Every person in the room had roared with outrage at Azgeda’s audacity to condemn a child to an eternity alone. Several people had directed hate filled glares in Ontari’s direction, despite the girls well-known innocence. Ontari and Lexa both knew that the anger had to be directed towards someone, however that someone was sadly Ontari. Lexa watched with pride as Ontari squared her shoulders and weathered the contemptuous glowers that rested heavily upon her person without flinching.

As the reports were relayed, Lexa learnt that all eight Trikru had had their heads removed and skewered on spikes along the border between Azgeda and Trikru, however none of their bodies could be located. Leading all of Lexa’s generals and advisors to believe that they had been
desecrated and destroyed, trapping their souls in an eternal limbo between life and death, never able to be reborn.

The thought of a child being cursed to such a fate sent a wave of nausea across Lexa’s entire body. So thick and potent it made her toes curl. Her abdominal muscles clenching hard in an attempt to reunite her breakfast with the outside world. Lexa stubbornly swallowed down the acrid bile that burned in her throat, and pushed through the meetings nevertheless. Listening to every new report. Her sense of unease growing.

By the end of all the meetings, Lexa learned that nearly all of her scouting groups had found evidence of Nia’s warriors in the forests surrounding Alton, some even had violent encounters with them. Leading to the well-deserved deaths of five Azgeda insurgents. Luckily none of her own warriors whom had patrolled the woods had lost their lives during the night, for which Lexa was grateful.

Lexa came to the conclusion that Nia was becoming bolder in her guerrilla attacks, sending more warriors at a time and at a swifter frequency. The Ice Queen must somehow know that a sentinel army laid in the lands edging the Ice nation border, waiting for her soldiers to promptly kill them. And was becoming more enthusiastic in her quest for power. Lexa had met the woman a handful of times, and had been sufficiently rattled with each encounter.

The first time was when she had been newly proclaimed Heda, and the woman had come to pay her respects and undoubtedly scope out her competition for supreme power. The woman had broached into the realm of disrespect when addressing her, and Lexa had been advised to kill her and set an example for the rest of the tribes. But at the tender age of fourteen, and fresh from spilling the blood of seven of her brother’s and sister’s in the conclave for Heda, Lexa had been loath to sully her hands in even more blood. She couldn’t stomach it, so she had let the woman be free.

The second-time Lexa met the woman, was when the ghastly creature had come to accept the brand of the coalition and become the twelfth clan, only days after sending Costia’s severed head to Lexa’s bed. Lexa had been so filled with rage, not with Nia but with herself. If she had only possessed the strength to kill the woman when she first ascended to Heda, her lover would yet draw breath and exist in safety. But alas, she had been a weak child, unable to do what was needed at the time, and she had paid dearly for her mistake. Costia, had paid dearly for her mistake. And now that the woman had accepted the brand, Lexa was unable to exact revenge on the scat that had killed an innocent girl, lest she crumble the coalition and her life’s work.

And the third time was when the woman had visited during the summit of the coalition four years ago to discuss trade routes and other matters of importance amongst the twelve clans. That visit had also been the one where she had seen with her own eyes the betrayal of her daughter Ontari, and had made an attempt on her life for her perceived treachery. Nia had obviously heard rumours of her daughter being willingly placed under the protection of Lexa, however she had not truly believed until she saw with her own eyes. The rage that simmered beneath the ice queens eyes had filled Lexa with a twisted sense of satisfaction. To know that she had injured her enemy by offering a scared young girl kindness, had been gratifying in a way that killing the woman wouldn’t have been. She had inadvertently weakened her enemy by befriending someone who needed shelter and friendship, and it was sublime.

Lexa hoped that the last time she saw the woman’s cold and unfeeling eyes, it would be as she drove a sword through her heart. When she stole the woman’s life and watched as her blood soaked into the snow of her lands. Lexa wanted to look into the woman’s cold deadened blue eyes and watch as she realised that Lexa had won, and she had lost. And then dismember her body so that her evil would never be reintroduced into the world again. Ensuring that her reign of terror died with her.
However, all of these meetings with Nia had coincidentally taught Lexa one thing. One thing that would help her win this war.

Lexa knew that the woman was far too proud and stubborn to relinquish an endeavour even when it had taken an abrupt turn for failure.

Like when she had Roan kidnap Costia. Nia had failed in her endeavour when her son befriended her prisoner and then tried to free her. Nia had been too stubborn and too proud to allow her son to own this small act of defiance. Instead she had him killed in a spectacle.

Or like when she killed Roan in front of all of Azgeda. Nia had failed when she then expected her daughter to remain loyal to her when her only friend and brother was now dead by her own hand. The act of slaughtering her son had cost her, her only remaining heir, as Ontari fled her mother’s madness.

Nia was capable of enacting brilliant plans and had a mind made for militant strategy. However her one fault was that when she made a mistake, she was unable and unwilling to alter course. Instead the ripples soon grew into a tsunami and the woman loses all control of a situation. The fate of her strategies lying in the hands of the universe.

And in this moment, Nia’s failed endeavour was this rebellion.

The only advantage that Nia held, was her element of surprise, and the fact that she was only killing Trikru sporadically. Stealing goods and supplies to make the attacks look like the work of bandits or even disgraced men and women who had been sentenced to the Stoubana Mas, the banished lands. An area of land that was wedged between Azgeda, Trikru, Floukru and the frozen sea. Supposedly the area was known for winter’s harsher even than Azgeda, and was completely unsurvivable. At least that was what Lexa had been told. It was a wasteland, where nothing grew or thrived. And every child of the coalition knew that to be sentenced there, was certain death.

Apparently a Heda three ascensions past had been a brutal man and had favoured banishment as a punishment above all else. Sending hundreds to their deaths when Trikru campaigned against him and his tyrannical rule. Or at least that is how the legend goes.

Nia was too smart to provoke the commander into open warfare, as Azgeda did not possess the numbers necessary to beat the might of the opposing twelve clans that would surely support Lexa. However Lexa knew that Nia was not above sowing the seeds of dissention amidst the thirteen clans. If she could emulate bandits and banished men stealing, raping and murdering along the borders of Trikru, then the other clans would begin to question Lexa’s ability to protect her own people. The clans would view her as weak and begin to doubt Lexa’s claim as Heda. Allowing them the opportunity to declare a vote of no confidence, and begin the conclave to select a new Heda.

Lexa had no doubt in her mind that this was Nia’s intent. However the queen’s impatience for victory had made her overzealous, and she had made her first mistake by sending more men than a group of bandits or banished men could be held responsible for. Her mistake was her impatience, and it was all the fuel Lexa would need to call upon an army, and declare war against Azgeda.

Nia had made her first mistake, and now Lexa would strike.

Only there was just one issue.

Clarke.

Lexa felt like she needed to speak with the blonde, consult her on her choice. Not only did Lexa feel
that the blue-eyed beauty could help provide views from alternate angles, some part of Lexa ached for Clarke’s approval. And yearned for the comradery that the pair had shared before the mountain. Scheming and plotting within the confines of her war tent, with only the other for company.

Lexa kept all of these thoughts to herself however, and watched as her generals and advisers walked from the tent, leaving Lexa alone once more.

Lexa was so deep in thought that she did not notice as Clarke silently walked into the tent, only startled from her musings when the young sky girl spoke.

“I know that look.” Clarke comments with a smirk.

Lexa jumped in her seat and her eyes widened in surprise by the sudden presence of another person. Lexa cursed her ineffectual ears or perhaps Clarke’s silent feet for the sudden thumping of her heart. “You startled me,” Lexa explains weakly, when Clarke raises an eyebrow at her reaction with curiosity.

“Ohuh.” Clarke intones with a touch of sarcasm.

“How did your interrogation go?” Lexa asks with genuine curiosity. She wanted to know which one of them had been right regarding the Azgeda archer, both dreading and gleefully anticipating the smug look that would surely dance across Clarke’s face with her victory.

Clarke’s eyes twinkled with something that Lexa could only compare to mischief before she answered, and suddenly Lexa throat was parched and rough as sandpaper. “Good and bad, a little of both.” Clarke relents with a small pleased smile.

“Do I get anything more than that? Any details?” Lexa prods gently, unable to keep the mirth she felt from softening her tone.

“Well you did give me two days to get the results I wanted sooo…” Clarke trails off. Unwilling to admit defeat, but not yet wanting to gloat in case things didn’t go her way.

Lexa read between the lines and realised that Clarke was aiming for humble shrewdness with her answer, and found her respect for Clarke growing impossibly larger. Clarke had obviously gotten further than many had expected with Greya, however it was apparently not far enough to elicit any kind of excitement in an impending victory. “That is quite alright Clarke. You may keep your results to yourself if you wish until the allotted time is ended.” Lexa reassures.

Clarke releases a deep breath and smiles gently. Lexa’s heart thuds happily in her chest at the sight of the small private smile that she hadn’t seen since before the mountain. The one that only Clarke could give Lexa. The smile that spoke of Clarke’s determination, self-belief and assurance in her ability to make a good decision. And Lexa realised that this opportunity with Greya might be just what Clarke needs to regain her confidence as a leader of her people. Lexa smiled in answer, but hers was only filled with pride and soft adoration for the woman before her. And Lexa could almost hear Anya’s voice in her head telling her to stop drooling like a love-sick puppy.

“So how was your meeting? I saw your generals and advisers leaving just as I got here. None of them appeared too happy.” Clarke comments.

“Ah yes… That.” Lexa scrubs at the back of her neck in an attempt to relieve some of the gathered tension there. “Eight Trikru heads were found mounted along the borders between Azgeda and Trikru lands last night.” Lexa confides with a world-weary sigh. While Lexa was eager to know Clarke’s take on the matter, she was also tired of constantly fighting. Of bearing the weight of this
war on her shoulders.

Clarke’s face turns pensive for a moment, as her beautiful mind churns through the implications of that information. A few moments of silence stretch on, and Lexa watches with rapt attention as Clarke’s eyes spark with fire and her face sets into one of determination and finality. She had obviously come to a decision.

“The only reason you did not declare open war on Azgeda was because there was no irrefutable proof that Nia was ordering these attacks on your people. And a war without reason would cause the coalition to crumble. But something has changed for Nia, and she has given up her ruse by killing eight innocents in a single night. That in itself is an act of war, as those deaths cannot be attributed to bandits or banished men, as to kill that many people, it would require a reasonably large force. And you and I both know that bandits and banished men do not travel in groups big enough to draw attention. Leaving only one feasible culprit, an enemy that all the coalition will agree is threatening Trikru. Azgeda.” Clarke concludes, her explanation abruptly cut off as indecision flashes across her eyes.

Lexa recognises the uncertainty and knows that it is not caused by a doubt in Clarke’s own abilities, but more likely in her unknown place in the moment. She had insisted upon only fulfilling the role of a warrior in this war, and yet telling Lexa what she should be doing in this particular situation to save her people felt presumptuous and disrespectful. Lexa gave Clarke the gentle push to finish. “And what would you do if you were me?”

Clarke’s eyes alight with a content happiness that seems to leak light from her very pores, and then continues. “I would call upon the loyal clans of the coalition to lend you their armies. The war of shadows is over now that it has been forced into the light. The clans will accept the evidence you have offered them, and will see Azgeda as a true threat. They will undoubtedly align with you to destroy them.”

Clarke says with passionate fire licking her words. The very heat of them sent Lexa’s heartbeat into overdrive. The organ pounding against her ribcage like it was an obstacle standing in the way between it and Clarke.

“That is exactly what I would do.” Lexa says proudly.

“Then what is stopping you?” Clarke asks inquisitively, her oceanic blue eyes seeming to see into the depths of Lexa’s soul and draw out the hesitance.

Lexa is momentarily stunned by the observation and finds herself comparing her expression to a gaping fish. Reminding herself she should probably guard her reactions around Clarke if she doesn’t want to reveal too much emotion. Lexa ponders the best way to answer for a moment. “I wanted to hear your thoughts on the matter first.” Lexa concedes, albeit sheepishly.

Clarke’s eyebrows furrow with curiosity. “Why?” She asks quietly. Already feeling the answer deep in her bones, but longing for Lexa to say the words aloud.

“Because I trust your judgement, and your opinion matters to me.” Lexa says softly, the sound of her blood thrumming in her veins with nervous energy loud in comparison to her timid words.

Clarke’s small smile falters in the wake of the confession, only to be replaced with a much more vibrant and pleased grin a short moment later. “Thankyou Lexa.” Clarke says gently, her words like a sweet caress against Lexa’s skin.

Lexa feels guilty that she has allowed herself to feel pleasure in this moment, and hates herself as she
steels her nerve for the next sentence that come out of her mouth. “Clarke I need to talk to you about Titus.” Lexa voice shakes and she prays that Clarke does not hate her.

Chapter End Notes

Hello lovelies!!

I know it has been a little while since I last posted, and for that I apologise, but I have been very busy getting things sorted for my return to uni in a couple of weeks. So sadly my time has not been my own.

I hope you all enjoy the new chapter, I have another ready and waiting for editing, so when I am happy with it I will post that too.

Please leave me some feedback if you have some time guys, as your thoughts about the chapter help me have a clearer picture of what I want to accomplish in the chapters to come.

As always, I hope you enjoy the update, and have a fantastic week!

Love Loz :D
Lexa feels guilty that she has allowed herself to feel pleasure in this moment, and hates herself as she steels her nerve for the next sentence that comes out of her mouth. “Clarke I need to talk to you about Titus.” Lexa’s voice shakes and she prays that Clarke does not hate her.

Lexa’s palms are slick with anxious sweat and her cheeks are flushed with heat. She was nervous and fearful of the consequences she would face for withholding this information from Clarke. However she fought through her discomfort that writhed beneath her skin like a parasite and attempted to harden her heart and soul for the ire that Clarke would surely rain down upon Lexa’s head.

“What about him?” Clarke asks, blissful ignorance making her look so innocent and trusting in the fact that Lexa would not hurt her again. A trust that Lexa didn’t realise had been laid before her feet until now. Clarke appeared unaware of the nature of the conversation about to take place, but not completely oblivious. Clarke could plainly see the distress Lexa was in, however she was clueless to its cause.

“Titus is missing.” Lexa says slowly. Indecision was making her tongue thick in her mouth and Lexa struggled to enunciate the correct words. Her lips resisting the movements necessary for words to be born, knowing that their birth would murder Clarke’s blossoming faith in Lexa.

Clarke’s eyes shone with confusion. She understood why Lexa might be distressed over the sudden disappearance of her closest advisor, however she failed to understand the importance of the matter. Perhaps he knew some kind of secret that would put Lexa’s role as Heda at risk, Clarke queried silently. The blonde remained quiet and simply waited for Lexa to continue speaking.

Lexa licked her lips, wetting them with saliva that was soaked in nervous energy. Cold sweat was clinging to her neck, and dampening the black fabric of her thick pauldron. Lexa was still unsure of how to tell Clarke of the situation surrounding Titus, and herself, and Grace. But decided that the beginning was likely as good a place as any to start. “When I left you at the mountain, I returned to Polis. My army at my back and my guilt weighing heavily in my heart.” Lexa pauses and studies Clarke’s expression, trying to gauge her reaction to the sudden subject change, an apparent non-sequitur in relation to Titus’ disappearance. Clarke’s eyes shimmered with a quiet wariness as the mountain was mentioned, but also sparked with curiosity. Up until this point, all of their conversations had been particularly one sided. With Clarke sharing her experiences from her year and a half of absence, and Lexa asking and listening to know more. This was one of the few times where Lexa had been forthcoming with her own experiences, and Clarke seemed intrigued. Emboldened, Lexa wet her suddenly cracked lips and went on.

“I was struggling to reconcile my feelings with my actions. As I felt joy at having liberated my people from our enemy, and yet I also felt deep shame for condemning yours to death. I knew that leaving you on that mountain would be the same as slitting your throat myself. And the knowledge that your death was my fault, was so guilt inducing and shameful to me. I grieved for your loss.” Lexa’s eyes bulge with grey storm clouds, and tears silently slip free from her lids, as she relives the loss she felt.

“But I needed to think of my people. As the commander, my first and only priority needed to be them. And so dishonourably, I sacrificed you and broke my own heart for the benefit of my people.
It took us a week to return to Polis, and by the time I had arrived the city was swarming with news of our truce, our near victory over the mountain. I spent two days trying to come to terms with your death, and mourn you, while my people celebrated their fresh liberty.” Lexa’s voice shakes and cracks loudly in the face of her intense emotion. Lexa allowed her glassy emerald eyes to drift to the face of the fallen angel before her, desiring to know what effect her words were having, but also hoping with every fibre of her being that she would find forgiveness in Clarke’s expression. But Clarke’s countenance was inscrutable and carefully blank, her emotions painstakingly tucked away from Lexa’s sight.

Lexa drew in a deep breath, hoping that the action would help solidify her courage to continue her account. “But then a rider arrived days later, it was Jameson. He told us of how you had not only survived the mountain men, but how you had annihilated them. Killing our enemy and wiping them from the face of the earth. At the time I was overjoyed to know that you were alive. That you still drew breath. But that only lasted a moment, before Jameson told me how he had watched you walk away from your people and disappear into the forest. And I felt fear nip at my heart. It was only a few months away from winter and you had vanished. I knew you likely wouldn’t survive the terrible cold. So I sent out more riders to find you, I doubled my efforts to locate you. I searched every clan, and followed every story about a young woman with sunshine in her hair.” Lexa’s eyes focused on the beautiful golden strands of Clarke’s hair, and allowed her eyes to soak in the sight. The sight that her eyes had ached for, for so long. Coming back to herself, Lexa rounded back to her story.

“For month’s my searching yielded no results. But in the meantime, your legend grew. The name Wanheda was being uttered by every tongue and praised by every person within the clans. They were awed by your defeat of the mountain and had begun to see you as the commander of death. One who could not be killed and yet could control the very ebb and flow of life.” Lexa watched as Clarke silently grimaced at Lexa’s description, but seemed nevertheless captivated by the recollection.

“People started comparing your actions to my own on the mountain, and decided that the Commander of death was more powerful than I. You were like a god to my people, whereas I was still a mere mortal. But then after six months of not finding you, the clans assumed you were dead, and the praises of your name quietened. I kept searching for you… I couldn’t just leave you out in the wilderness. At the very least, I needed to find your body and give your soul the opportunity to pass on, you deserved that much… And honestly, I needed the closure.” Lexa’s eyes spark with vulnerability, and Clarke’s hardened facade fractures like brittle bone.

“I pleaded and prayed that you were still alive, and I gave myself false hope every time I heard a new tale emerge about you. Sometimes I would even visit the villages myself to look for evidence of your survival when a story seemed believable enough. But I did not find you. I kept searching until eventually you came back. And now that you are here, I feel happier than I have in a long time. I know that there is still much strain between us, but I am gladdened by your survival and uplifted by the fact that I can see you with own two eyes every day.” Lexa says softly, her cheeks flushing red as she confesses the last part.

Clarke was riveted by the story, and helplessly intrigued by the information Lexa had been so forthcoming to share. The emotion she had so willingly displayed for Clarke’s benefit, so eager and earnest to earn Clarke’s trust. The sight had warmed Clarke heart and belly, but potent wariness commanded Clarke conceal these emotions. Some sixth sense warning her of impending disaster, like the old-world elephants before a tsunami. Clarke felt like the burgeoning warmth was about to be snatched away from her, and she was both protective of it, and scared that its heat would scald her. However, she was still confused by the story’s connection to the bald man. “So, what does this story have to do with Titus?” Clarke asks quickly, her brow furrowed and her attentive eyes studying Lexa’s subtle body language. An audible swallow, the anxious shuffling of her feet, the wide, dilated irises. Even the charming blush that painted Lexa’s cheeks raspberry, it all screamed of guilt.
Lexa swallowed her nerves. “Titus viewed my search for you as weakness. And now that you are returned, he believed that my people would continue to speak of you as my better now that you are so obviously alive.” Lexa says slowly.

“I never intended for that to happen Lexa, I…” Clarke is still confused, but apologises for herself anyway. The wariness in the pit of her stomach still writhing in warning.

“No, I know that Clarke. That is not the problem.” Lexa admits.

“Then what is, I don’t understand.” Clarke says slowly, her eyes searching for truth in Lexa’s green orbs.

Lexa releases a deep shuddering breath. “As the commander, my people need to see my word as unquestionable and unwavering in its strength. But your power as Wanheda, is shaking that foundation and causing my leadership to be called into question. Some do not think me worthy of my nightblood or my role as Heda.” Lexa reveals.

Clarke’s eyes flash with concern. She did not know what nightblood was, but she knew from Lexa’s tone that it was somehow important. “What happens to you if the clans refuse to follow you anymore?” Clarke asks quickly. Her heart pounding in her chest with a strange fear for Lexa’s safety.

“The ambassadors of the thirteen clans can call for a vote of no confidence and begin the conclave for a new commander.” Lexa whispers.

“But what happens to you?” Clarke is unable to keep the tremor of fear from her voice, as she asks the question again, reiterating the importance of Lexa’s wellbeing through this entire process.

Lexa’s luminescent green eyes meet Clarke’s ethereal blue. “I am banished.” She says simply. Everyone knew that banishment was akin to being executed. No one survived in the Stoubana Mas. But Clarke’s eyes did not water or show any signs of sadness over the prospect, and Lexa was puzzled, and truthfully a little wounded. Lexa had at least thought that Clarke would mourn her death, that she would be a little dismayed by her spirit departing this body. Lexa is interrupted from her musings of melancholy by Clarke’s smooth and confident voice.

“So how does Titus’ disappearance factor into this?” Clarke is still a little confused, but the knowledge that Lexa would still be able to live and lead a normal life if she was removed as the commander, offered Clarke a small ounce of reassurance. After all, Kadeon and his family had originated from the banished lands, and his life had been perfectly ordinary until Nia had interfered.

Lexa takes a deep breath to calm her growing panic as the subject of conversation veers back to its point of importance. But the air feels devoid of oxygen, worse than that, Lexa feels like mud was inflating her lungs. The breath suffocating as her anxiety squeezed her heart painfully. “Titus was trying to find a way to restore our people’s faith in my leadership. His role as fleimkeepa is to guide the commanders, and protect their legacy.” Lexa makes meaningful eye contact with Clarke and silently prays to any deity that listens that Clarke forgive her. “His suggestions to achieve this were both outlandish and I told him no to each ill-conceived remedy.” Lexa rushes to reassure, taking steps closer to Clarke to meet her steady gaze with her own. Lexa reaches out and holds Clarke’s arms, to reassure herself more than anything.

“And what were these suggestions Lexa?” Clarke asks hesitantly, her heart in her throat and dread curling in her stomach like coiled wire, taunt with tension. Suspicion making her joints weak, and her patella’s loosen.

“The first was to have you bow before me, offering your allegiance and power to me. Wanheda
swearing fealty to me as Heda.” Lexa states with little emotion. She had receded behind her mask as heda, in an attempt to shield herself from Clarke’s wrath.

Clarke’s nostrils flared at the thought of being publicly forced to place herself beneath Lexa’s authority. Up until this point they had always regarded each other as equals, and the notion of anyone believing otherwise made Clarke squirm with circumspection. After all, it was only due to Lexa and Clarke’s equal footing as respected leaders that had allowed Clarke to walk away from the mountain physically unscathed. If the choice had been left in Lexa’s hands, then Clarke and her people would all be worm food right about now.

But at the same time, Clarke felt a sense of duty and obligation to Lexa that she didn’t quite understand. She wanted to help Lexa maintain her position as Heda. Clarke had heard stories from Kadeon about some of the previous Commander’s. Their seduction with power and eventual tyranny. Lexa was by far the best and drastically saner commander that had sat upon the twisted throne of Heda, since the bombs that ended the world. But not only was she the most reasonable and just leader the clans had had in remembered history, but Clarke couldn’t bear the thought of Lexa sacrificing everything that she held dear, just so that Clarke could maintain her autonomy. The torrent of conflicting emotions were strong enough to inflict vertigo.

Clarke’s mind tripped over the fact Lexa had referred to two of Titus suggestions, like an uneven carpet. “What was the second suggestion Lexa?” Clarke asks with more calm than either of them had expected.

Lexa couldn’t meet Clarke’s eyes as she mumbled the next words that proceeded to freeze Clarke’s heart in her chest, and turned her blood to shards of ice in her veins.

“For the people believe that you share both our life force and the power of Wanheda with Grace. He thought it would be a prudent idea to have the child removed from your care and raised in Polis. Under the control of Heda, similar to the practice we enforce with nightblood children.” Lexa’s voice was small and filled with so much shame and disgust that it took Clarke a moment to process the words.

Lexa saw the moment her words were comprehended, and Clarke took an unconscious step away from Lexa. The brunette’s arms falling to her sides as their contact was broken by lack of proximity. Lexa’s heart turned to glass and promised to shatter if exerted with too much force. She waited with baited breath for Clarke’s reaction, almost certain that any trust that had recently been built, would now be irrevocably destroyed.

Clarke’s heart beat wildly in her chest with fear. The notion of her daughter being stolen from her, after everything else she had endured, was unthinkable. And Clarke knew that she wouldn’t survive it. Grace was her second chance at life. That red haired little girl was her opportunity to start again and be better. Grace was her world, the only person that gave her strength to continue drawing breath some days. And Titus wanted to take her away. Some part of Clarke realised that she did not blame Lexa for the fear she now felt. But she was angry with Lexa for waiting until now to tell Clarke about the potential threat Titus presented to her daughter.

“And you told him that you would not do it?” Clarke clarified, careful to keep her face blank despite the tidal wave of emotion currently tearing her apart on the inside.

Lexa was stunned by the impenetrable brick wall she found behind the blues of Clarke’s eyes. No emotion was evident on the blonde’s round face, and yet Lexa’s fear only skyrocketed. Her heart beating so rapidly she wondered if the muscle might exhaust itself and simply stop.

“I told Titus that I could not take Grace from you, yes.” Lexa clarified earnestly.
Clarke allows a beat of silence to stretch between them, and simply studies Lexa. The rapid moving of her chest as she inhales short, quick breaths. The frantic green of her eyes, pleading for understanding and forgiveness. The sweat running a tantalising line down her neck. Clarke decided that she believed Lexa, and didn’t hold any animosity towards her on behalf of Titus’ suggestion. However, while Lexa might not be the reason for Clarke’s fear, she felt a small piece of the already tenuous trust she had built with Lexa crumble away under the weight of the confession. Lexa had kept this information a secret and placed Grace in jeopardy, and for that Clarke was fuming with anger.

“You know I would never hurt Grace don’t you?” Lexa asks timidly, her eyes large and pitiful. Begging.

“I don’t know what to believe Lexa.” Clarke spits with venom. She hadn’t meant to bite Lexa’s head off, and the way Lexa’s eyes had flooded with resigned understanding made Clarke realise that Lexa had assumed Clarke would react this way. Ugly and contemptuous, only she hadn’t meant for it to come out, she was frustrated with the situation she now found herself in. She feared for Grace, she was angry with herself and her past actions that were now threatening her daughter. And she had snapped at Lexa, when Lexa was truthfully, only relaying a message. Lexa wasn’t the cause of the hurricane of emotions she felt right now, Titus was.

Clarke sighed heavily, and pushed away the emotions that demanded she inflict violence upon Titus, and forcibly softened her tone for Lexa’s sake. “Why didn’t you tell me this sooner? If Titus truly wanted to take Grace, then his sudden disappearance should have spurred you into a confession, but it has been days since anyone last saw him, and my daughter has been put at risk. What if someone captured and tortured him for information on our movements. Nia is already trying to turn the coalition against you, what if Titus revealed Grace’s connection to me and the beliefs your people hold surrounding her birth. What if she decides to steal my child to claim the power of Wanheda for herself. What if Titus wasn’t taken, and is instead betraying you right now, offering the ice queen information about Grace. Not telling me about this has put my baby in harms way!” Clarke bellows with frustration. Her earlier attempt to remain passive for Lexa vanishing as her mind drew these conclusions, and her panic rose. Clarke was no fool, while Titus had suggested that Lexa steal and raise Grace away from her, Nia would not be so kind, she would simply kill Grace and take the power of Wanheda for herself. And Clarke would sooner meet her own death than see that little girl harmed. Clarke’s eyes were wild and unfocused as her brain runs through all the scenarios that could possibly play out, and each of them surrounding her innocent, trusting baby girl.

“I know, and I am sorry Clarke. I didn’t think… I.” Lexa begins.

“You’re damn right you didn’t think!” Clarke yells hotly, tears springing into her eyes and blurring her vision. All Clarke wanted to do right now was hold Grace close and protect her from the ugly, violent world they lived in. The world where children were bargaining chips because of who or what their parents were. Clarke had never thought that her genocidal history would place Grace directly in the line of fire, and Clarke hated herself for her inability to protect the one person who she should be able to shield from the world.

Lexa watches with silent shame as Clarke begins pacing the floor to relieve her agitated energy. Lexa knew that Clarke was well on her way to a nervous breakdown, if she didn’t intervene.

Lexa quickly steps into Clarke’s personal space and halts her frenetic movements. And grasps Clarke by the chin to look her in the eye. The tears clouding the skies of Clarke’s blue eyes tugged sharply at Lexa’s heart, but she pushed through the pain she felt for disappointing Clarke. “Clarke, I will protect Grace with my life I swear it. I will not let any harm come to your child, I promise.” Lexa soothes gently, feeling relief when Clarke didn’t pull away from Lexa’s touch.
Clarke’s eyes focus on Lexa and she feels her lips tremble as Lexa’s words caress some part of Clarke’s soul that only responded to the brunette. She felt herself begin to calm somewhat, and her harsh breathing softened. Clarke rested her head against Lexa’s collarbone, and buried her face into the searing warmth of Lexa’s neck. Breathing in the crisp scent of fresh rain, the vitality of spring and something sweet and hopeful that was Lexa. Basking in the warmth of her proximity despite the fact that the day was heated uncomfortably.

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep Lexa.” Clarke mumbles against Lexa’s skin, her lips brushing against Lexa’s chest, and pimpling her flesh, a shiver shuddering down Lexa’s spine at the sweet contact.

“I will keep this one. I promise.” Lexa reassured, as she wrapped her arms tighter around Clarke’s frame, offering her the comfort of her body.

Clarke swivelled her head from the warm nest of Lexa’s neck, and met her emerald stare. Reassuring and steady.

“Trust me.” Lexa encourages with a whisper full of vulnerability.

And Clarke did just that.

Shortly after Clarke left without another word spoken between them, and Lexa felt a strange sense peace fall over her body. She knew that she had destroyed something when she kept the information regarding Titus to herself, but in the moment where Clarke had clung to Lexa and greedily accepted the comfort Lexa had offered to her. Something had also bloomed in the wake of the destruction. Something that would grow and thrive, stronger than its predecessor. And Lexa felt reassured by the presence of whatever had overcome them and begun to take root in she and Clarke’s hearts, that seemed to beat in tandem. Two halves of a whole.

Without further preamble, Lexa summoned her generals and her fastest riders, and sent them to the twelve loyal clans of the coalition. By this time tomorrow, every clan would know that the coalition was at war with the Ice Nation.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!

I hope everyone had an amazing Valentine's day yesterday!

So this chapter was really fun to write, and hopefully you guys enjoyed reading it just as much. I wanted a nice balance of negative and positive interaction and emotion between Lexa and Clarke, but I also wanted there to be some sort of constructive progress made between them in the wake of such a destructive confession. I feel like I have accomplished this, but ultimately it's you gus that I need to convince, haha :D

SPOILER for Chapter 42: If you don't want to know, just skip over this part. In the next chapter we will be having a curveball thrown into the mix. Something that will be great for those who love seeing Clexa family moments, but also will dictate the process of Clarke and Lexa being together. Something that will help decide the fate of their relationship in the future. - I really hope this description doesn't give it away, haha!
Anyway, please leave me some comments, I will try to reply to all of them!

Thanks for reading!

- Loz
Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes.

Not long after Clarke left Lexa’s tent, the village seemed to come alive with swarming people. News of the open-warfare with Azgeda had every man, woman and child, bouncing with unrestrained excitement. Clarke thought it was the honour of an honest fight, that brought this sudden giddiness. The Trikru had been uneasy with the war of Shadows that had befallen them. But now open war had been declared and the Trikru were abuzz with enthusiastic anticipation. Their blood thrumming with energy and bloodthirst. It cast an intoxicating atmosphere over Alton, and Clarke found herself emulating their eagerness for battle.

Riders were hastily packing their belongings and supplies, before selecting the fastest horses available and cantering through the gates of Alton. Twelve horses, for twelve clans. Armed with the message of war now at their doorstep. Azgeda declared as their enemy. The lumbering beasts kicked up enough dust to douse a raging bushfire, as they sprinted away from the village with startling speed. It took half an hour for the dust to settle, and for the air to become breathable once more. But then there was a much less subtle scent permeating the air. One that made Clarke wish that she were still inhaling the grit from before, plentiful enough to create a desert.

The smell was burning flesh. In the distance, Clarke could see a pillar of black smoke tarnishing the blue skies. Carrying the scent of wood fire and death heavy on its breath. The murdered eight heads that had been found, were being burnt. The souls attached to each corpse would be forced to wander the spirit world until their bodies were burnt similarly, but this, burning what remains had been located, was the closest equivalent to peace as they could be offered by their people. The pyre had bathed the valley in a thin haze of smoke, and Clarke could not escape the smell of human corpses licked by flame. The odour was sickening in a way that was strange.

If Clarke didn’t know that the smoke was fed from eight severed heads, she would think someone was preparing a late lunch over a cook fire. It smelled the way any cooked meat would, and that was the sickening part. The smell, it was appetising. The stray realisation made Clarke’s stomach lurch threateningly, promising to spill its contents into the dirt if she did not find another topic of contemplation, and fast.

So, Clarke allowed herself to think about Lexa, and Titus, and Grace, and Nia. Her brain tripping over itself in continuous unhelpful loops.

Nia’s whole strategy during the Shadow War, was to plant seeds of dissention amidst the twelve clans, and turn them against Lexa. And coincidentally, Clarke’s re-emergence from self-isolation was only bringing Lexa’s perceived failings as a leader into sharper focus. Unconsciously, Clarke’s assimilation back into society was aiding Nia’s cause, and Clarke could not, and would not let that ice hearted witch win. Nia had taken Kade, and Clarke vowed that she would not take Lexa too.

Clarke knew that if Lexa was removed from Heda, and banished by her people, Lexa’s sense of purpose would be lost, and Clarke knew from first-hand experience that a human being without purpose or direction, is a person whose breath is pointless. Clarke had only survived the mountain because she had found a new purpose, and that was as a mother to Grace. Her precious daughter with curls of flame in her hair.

Clarke didn’t know if Lexa had purpose outside of her people, unaware of any desire Lexa might find outside of her loyalty to her subjects, that would keep her spirit alive. And selfishly, Clarke
could not bear the thought of Lexa losing herself because of a sacrifice she made to spare Clarke’s need to maintain the illusion of autonomy, or to protect Grace. The thought alone made Clarke’s skin burn and peel with guilt. Clarke’s first priority since returning to her people, was Grace. Protecting her, feeding her, caring for her every whim and desire. And up until recently, Clarke’s second priority, was then her people. But now even that was evolving. Somehow, Lexa had wriggled into a position that placed her on par with Clarke’s people.

Despite the fouled history between them - filled with abandonment and resentment, there was a preternatural draw to the brunette. Something that enthralled Clarke and called to her like a Siren’s song. Like two magnets caught in the magnetic field of one another, only stronger. Something akin to gravity, and Clarke would be lying to herself if she did not openly admit, that Lexa was important to her.

If Raven’s conclusion was to be believed, then it was likely that Clarke was in love with the girl that possessed the most precious and priceless emerald’s set into the golden skin of her angelic face. Clarke’s soul recognised the mahogany haired girl on an atomic level. Small and yet infinite, and completely inevitable. Clarke’s being vibrated with a truth that whispered, she is yours as you are hers, and Clarke’s heart and mind was helpless not to pay heed to the phrase that sounded like a promise.

Clarke knew that despite her mind’s reluctance to comply with destiny or fate, or whatever it was that uttered these phrases soaked in a hope so bright, that she would protect Lexa, the same way she would try to protect her people, the same way she would always attempt to protect Grace. And so now Clarke was adrift in a sea of indecision. How could she help Lexa, without compromising her darling little girl. Because Grace would always be more important than any other person on this expanse of blue and green earth, and yet Clarke ached to help Lexa as well.

Clarke knew that if she bowed before Lexa and pledged the power of Wanheda, that she would be viewed as less than Lexa. She would be seen as someone lower. And while Clarke recognised the emptiness that engulfed her belly as pride, Clarke couldn’t help but hold onto it like a lifeline. The universe might have been whispering sweet nothings in Clarke’s ear about a certain brunette, but Clarke’s past experiences and general distrust of the world was equally as loud, and refused to be ignored.

Clarke knew that the only reason she had walked away from the mountain, was because she had maintained the power of equality between she and Lexa. She was not Lexa’s insubordinate; therefore, Lexa was unable to command Clarke walk away from the mountain.

And the equal rights of leadership they had shared, allowed the Mountain men to see her as a plausible threat, an enemy. Someone to be feared and listened to when needed. Like when she had used Dante Wallace’s life as a bargaining chip to vie for her people’s freedom. The mountain men knew she was a threat because no one was placed above her. She had elevated herself to the point where they knew her threats were not merely suggestions, but promises if they did not relinquish her friends.

But by bowing before Lexa, Clarke knew she would be offering that small piece of armour that had already saved her life at least once, and the thought of being so vulnerable and without protection made fear thrum thick and heavy in Clarke’s veins. Clarke knew that relinquishing this power to Lexa would not have any impact on her people. They were safe, part of the coalition, protected by the very woman who had once doomed them to agonising deaths.

But this sacrifice would leave Clarke’s heart bare, and unguarded to potential betrayal in the future. And while Clarke was slowly learning to trust Lexa once more, she was not yet ready to place
herself in Lexa’s hands and simply yield. Her self-preservation instincts demanded she stand firm. But then there was Grace, so small and weak. And it was Clarke’s job to protect her. That responsibility was more weighted and integral than any obligation she had had to her people. And for her, Clarke would sacrifice this piece of herself willingly. She would rip out her own beating heart and as an offering of good faith, if it kept would keep Grace’s innocence intact.

Clarke’s brain churned over the outcomes of each possible choice, and weighed the cause and effect with singular focus, over and over again. To continue to do something and expect a different result is the very definition of insanity, and Clarke concluded that she must indeed be insane. As no matter how much she thought about the problem she found herself confronted by, she could not find a solution that everyone would be happy with. A solution that didn’t compromise Clarke’s autonomy, or Grace’s safety, or Lexa’s empire. In the end, Clarke resigned herself to the fact that she would once again be the one to sacrifice, in order to save the greater good. And in this case, the greater good would be Grace and Lexa. She would do this for them, and pray that Lexa did not break her heart again. For if it happened twice, there would be no healing, just oblivion.

Clarke spent the rest of the afternoon within arms-reach of Grace. She couldn’t help it. She felt an overwhelming inclination to touch her child and reassure herself that the little ball of sunshine, that was her daughter, was alive and safe. Naomi, of course noticed the change in Clarke’s demeanour, but wisely chose not to comment on the new development.

Clarke took full advantage of the moments of solitude with Grace. And contentedly watched as Grace laid placidly on her belly, and worked to reach her toys spread in front of her. The little girl would be crawling soon if her reliance on her arms to move was anything to go by. Grace was beginning to kick her legs out and drag herself in order to get from point A to point B. The thought of babyproofing everything was not a pleasant notion.

Clarke stroked Grace’s scarlet ringlets of hair and took solace in the tactile reminder of the child’s safety, gnawing worry only then appeased. The infant leaned into the touch and lapped up all the attention being offered, her long black eyelashes fluttering closed in contentment and kissing the tops of her large cheeks. It had gotten too hot for comfort by midday, so Clarke stripped the toddler down to her cloth nappy, and used a wet rag to keep the child cool. All the touching and caressing had put Grace in a wonderful mood, and by the time she was hungry she barely complained, only manoeuvred herself in Clarke’s lap and pulled at her shirt to help herself.

Clarke pulled the softly grumbling infant ever closer to her chest and offered her a nipple. Grace instantly took the teat into her mouth and began suckling. Gurgling around Clarke flesh contentedly. Clarke stroked Grace’s chubby legs and smiled broadly when Grace kicked out playfully and grinned, dribbling breast milk down her chin. The sight softened Clarke’s frayed nerves, but did nothing to stop her wary glances to their surroundings, an irrational fear of a bald-headed man to creeping out of the shadows, constantly prickling at her subconscious. Taunting her.

Currently Clarke and Grace were seated under a large, leafy tree that covered the soft green grass in shade. There was a breeze that kicked up dust and gently shifted strands of red and blonde hair respectively.

Call her paranoid, but Clarke couldn’t help but feel like there were too many eyes on Grace. Too many people watching her. Clarke found herself shooting anyone who stared too long, a disdaining glare that was likely undeserved. But she couldn’t stop herself. Her daughter had been threatened, and now everyone who Clarke didn’t know was suddenly suspect if they showed the seven-month-old too much unwarranted attention. Clarke wondered if this was part of the reason Lexa had kept what she knew to herself. To avoid Clarke going completely bat shit crazy.
Clarke didn’t accomplish much else until it was late afternoon and her honour dictated she return to
the dungeons to visit Greya again as she had promised she would. Only Clarke did not have anyone
free to watch over Grace for her.

Naomi was out tending to different villagers that were sick within Alton. Tanga and Raven were
both sleeping, after spending all night manning the radios. Lincoln and Octavia had gone on a hiking
trip to the tops of one of the nearby mountains, presumably to have some time alone. And Bellamy,
Clarke didn’t know where Bellamy was.

The only other person Clarke felt even mildly comfortable leaving her daughter with, was Ontari and
maybe Lexa. And Clarke didn’t know whether or not either brunette would be receptive to having
such a responsibility thrust into their laps. Clarke’s traitorous mind pictured Lexa and how she would
interact with Grace slung comfortably on her hip. Cooing affectionately with the child, in a decidedly
un-heda-like way. It felt right somehow, but at this moment, Clarke didn’t feel that asking Lexa to
watch over her child was appropriate. It was one thing to promise Grace’s safety, but it was quite
another to babysit her when Lexa had an army to organise and a war to plan. Clarke decided that
asking Ontari to care for the infant might be better suited.

Reluctantly Clarke picked herself up from the ground, cradled Grace against her chest and began her
slow walk towards the commander’s tent. Assuming that she would find Ontari standing guard of
Lexa there. Clarke’s feet felt like they were weighted with bricks, and her mind continued wandering
to the conversation she had had with Lexa. Her brain constantly assessing and reassessing the threat
that Titus posed to Grace, and how best to combat it.

It was obvious that the best way to protect Grace, was to bow before Lexa and proclaim her fealty to
the commander of the thirteen clans. And her pride be damned, Clarke would do it to ensure her
daughter’s safety. Plus the added side effect of securing Lexa’s legacy in the process, was just icing
on the cake.

It was with these thoughts in her head that distracted Clarke from where her feet were going, and she
ran into the hard form of another person. Startled from her thoughts, Clarke quickly looked up, her
body bristling with tension before she recognised Ontari.

The ice nation girl’s arms shot out to steady Clarke and Grace, looking equally as dazed by the
events, as she too had been lost in her own musings.

“Clarke, I apologise. I did not watch where I was going.” Ontari quickly amends, her arms dropping
to her sides when she was sure that Clarke was stable on her own feet.

“Oh no, that was probably my fault. I was in my own little world.” Clarke brushes Ontari’s apology
away, and smiles gently. “You were actually the person I was looking for.” Clarke says with an
airiness and light-heartedness that did not feel honest.

“Oh,” Ontari mutters with as much interest as she could muster.

“I need to see Greya again, and I was wondering if you would be willing to watch over Grace for me
while I am gone.” Clarke says hesitantly, her teeth worrying at her lip as she waited for Ontari’s
response.

Ontari’s irises instantly dropped to Grace, and the infant offered a mostly gummy grin to the older
girl. A line of dribble running down her fist as she removes it loudly from her mouth, and offers it out
to Ontari. Like she was showing her something brilliant. “Sure.” Ontari confirms with a small ounce
of uncertainty. “I have not had much experience with youngon before, but I vow to keep her safe
until your return.” Ontari states seriously, having no idea that her words were exactly what Clarke
needed to hear in this moment, especially considering the situation with Titus.

Clarke released a breath she hadn’t known she was holding, and tension drained from her stiff shoulders. “Thankyou so much.” Clarke smiled widely, momentarily carefree.

Ontari nodded shyly, and it was then that Clarke noticed it. Ontari’s almond eyes looked haunted and sad, and Clarke wondered what was bothering the girl. It was obvious that something was playing on her mind. “Are you okay Ontari?” Clarke prods gently.

Ontari’s smile is small, but her eyes glint with a knowing light, that makes Clarke wish she had kept her mouth shut. “I could ask you the same thing.” Ontari counters with a half-hearted smirk.

Clarke chuckles stiffly, the hand not holding Grace scratching at the back of her neck awkwardly.

Ontari could read non-verbal cues as good as any warrior, and knew from a single glance that Clarke was struggling with some kind of internal debate, just as she was. “Maybe we can help each other.” Ontari suggests with an edge of uncertainty. It was not within the Azgeda custom to openly speak about one’s feelings. It was a practice that Ontari had learnt after seeking refuge within Trikru lands, and even though she had been under Lexa’s protection for the past eight years, the custom still felt alien to her. To openly admit a weakness, seemed so foolish to Ontari, suicidal even. And yet Lexa had informed her that this was a way of proving trust between friends.

Ontari seemed to know exactly where Clarke’s worries seemed to lie, and chuckled for a moment before answering. “Whatever is spoken, it won’t reach Lexa’s ears.” Ontari vows, amusement still dancing in her coconut husk brown eyes. “Although with how troubled you appear, I assume she already knows. Your eyes broadcast your feelings, but she seems to read the emotion there better than any other.” Ontari comments offhandedly, with nonchalance. She had of course noticed the way Lexa and Clarke seemed to communicate in a way that exceeded words. The way they each seemed so attuned to the other’s expressions and body language. Ontari was under no illusion as to why there was such an intimate bond between the two girls, and the knowledge that the two of them had such a special, and potentially romantic connection made her happy.

Clarke chose to ignore Ontari’s second comment, in favour of avoiding the burning flush that would surely stain her cheeks. Clarke relaxed minutely under the weight of Ontari’s reassurance of confidentiality, before relenting, deciding that Ontari might be able to offer her some insight. If not in regards to Clarke’s current situation, then at least in reference to Lexa’s thoughts on the debacle surrounding Titus’ disappearance. “Okay.”

Ontari’s smile broadened, and the two girls sat on a nearby log to talk.

“So what is on your mind?” Clarke asks quickly, eager to have Ontari share before her.

Amused, Ontari shook her head in response to Clarke’s tactic before answering. Her face becoming stony and serious as words begin to fall from her lips. “There were eight heads found last night on patrol. All of them skewered and left to be found along the neutral zone between Azgeda and Trikru territories.” Ontari states sadly, her eyes awash in silent grief, and shame.

“I was told.” Clarke responds, when Ontari levels a questioning stare on the blonde.

Ontari nods her head, confirming that she had assumed Clarke would know. “Well, the news of the
deaths have spread throughout the village, and ire towards Azgeda is growing.” Ontari says plainly. Her tone not accusatory, but resigned and sad. Grim acceptance making her eyes hollow and empty with her silent grief.

Clarke realises what Ontari means by her statement. “And you are Azgeda.” The blonde winces with empathy. Knowing that Trikru can be narrow minded and unforgiving when their clansmen are killed. Clarke would know, after all it was she who had been forced to burn 300 of them alive after accidentally starting a war when the dropship first landed.

Ontari nods slowly, a single tear slipping past the lid of her eye, before landing on her hand. The brown eyed girl seemed temporarily confused by the wetness on her face and palm, and looked heavenward for the responsible cloud. Only to find a blue sky and the lingering haze caused by the pyre, before then seeming to understand where it had come from. Ontari’s knuckles quickly slash across her face to dry the offending moisture, before anyone else could notice or comment. “I do not blame Trikru for directing their hate towards me. Their clansmen have been murdered, and then their bodies desecrated. Their anger is only natural.” Ontari reasons with herself aloud.

“But you are not the cause for their deaths Ontari, and it is wrong for them to be misdirecting that anger towards you.” Clarke says fiercely, irritated that someone like Ontari was being treated like it was she who had removed the eight heads from their corpses. Someone who has every reason to be cruel and hardened by life, but refuses to let her hardships turn her into a monster. Ontari was strong, Clarke recognised the power behind that, and knew that it deserved to be admired, not persecuted because of where she came from.

Ontari is surprised by the heat in Clarke’s tone and feels a flare of warmth flicker to life in her chest upon hearing the tone. Knowing that it was only present in Clarke’s voice, because she cared, and was willing to protect her friend. The idea of friends was still novel to Ontari, but she was beyond overjoyed to know that she had not one, but two of them now. First Lexa, then Clarke. “Thankyou.” Ontari says around a petite sniffle.

Clarke smiles warmly, glad to see the sadness that had been haunting Ontari’s eyes, gradually receding. “You know, there’s something about these killings that confuse me.” Clarke comments with a furrow of her brow. She shifts Grace into her lap, as her arm begins to ache. Her beautiful daughter’s voracious appetite meant that she was growing much heavier. Ontari perked up and turned a questioning gaze towards Clarke.

The blonde continues her observation without further prompt. “Before we came to Alton, all the reports from along the border stated that every single one of the dead Trikru found, had had their heads cut off and placed on spikes along the border. And so far, they have repeated this same ritual with each kill, except with three. The three warriors that my scouting group found when we went out on patrol, when I got injured.” Clarke states vaguely, her mind churning through all the facts she knew about the war thus far. Identifying patterns in tactics and behaviour.

“You are right. I had not noticed this.” Ontari comments with interest. The gleam in Clarke’s eyes reminded her of a hound that had caught the scent of blood, and Ontari felt a thrill go through her. Knowing that whatever Clarke was thinking would be important, integral even. And she was proud to apart of it. “What are you thinking?” She asks, barely restraining her curiosity.

“I am thinking that there must have been something special about those three warriors. Either in the way they were killed, or perhaps who they were when they were alive. They are a piece of the puzzle, I just don’t know how they fit yet.” Clarke admits, her eyes narrowed as the cogs of her brain turn over the new information.

“You know, there is at least one person in Alton that can give you the missing details.” Ontari
comments quietly, her own mind drifting to the Azgeda archer, currently chained in their dungeon. But wanting Clarke to connect the dots on her own.

“Greya.” Clarke answers immediately, Clarke’s eyes sparkling with something primal and determined as her mind instantaneously provided her with the name.

“She, she would know the three dead men’s importance, as it was her group of insurgents that killed them, or at least disposed of their remains.” Ontari comments, feeling proud to have contributed some useful information to the discussion.

Clarke smiles brilliantly, a dangerous gleam in her eyes as she looks forwards to her interaction with Greya with more vigour and enthusiasm than before. She now knew what information needed to be extracted, which questions she needed to ask.

“So what is plaguing your mind?” The brunette enquires softly, gently nudging the conversation back to its previous direction of sharing burdens. Eager to know if Clarke would return her gesture of friendship, by sharing her weakness as Ontari had done. Ontari almost regretted the subject change when Clarke’s eyes grew conflicted and heavy with indecision, and felt a sliver of guilt slice at her heart for having returned Clarke’s mind to an obviously uncomfortable topic. But Clarke spoke before Ontari had the chance to backtrack.

“Lexa told me that before Titus went missing, he had mentioned wanting to remove Grace from my care in order to restore the clans faith in Lexa. Because everyone seems to believe that the power of Wanheda is shared between us.” Clarke sighs heavily, the weight of the burden squashing her ribcage.

“I knew that Titus had gone missing, but not that he had plans for Grace.” Ontari admits fleetingly. Knowing that Lexa must have had good reason to withhold this information from herself and Clarke, trusting that her friend knew what was best, but understanding why Clarke would be feeling conflicted. “I am sorry,” Ontari says slowly. Having heard from various people that saying sorry during a weighted conversation with someone from the Skaikru clan, was not an admittance of guilt, but instead an offering of empathy. Ontari did not fully understand the Skaikru custom, but she was willing to try it if it brought her friend some peace.

Clarke smiles in gratitude, and Ontari feels proud of her effort and results.

Ontari also recognises that Clarke must have great faith in their friendship, if she was willing to entrust her daughter in a time of such uncertainty. Especially if the uncertainty was directly connected to the child’s safety and wellbeing. The realisation softened Ontari’s heart and made it feel as though it had been liquefied in her chest. Convincing that if she jostled herself slightly, that she sloshing of the fluid would be heard as it impacted with the sides of her chest.

“So you are upset with Lexa?” Ontari asks slyly, wanting to know how this new development might impact the romance that had been steadily growing between Lexa and Clarke since before the mountain.

“I am hurt that Lexa didn’t tell me sooner, because Titus poses a threat to my daughter... But at the same time, I know that Lexa never does something without a good reason. And in this case I think it might have been because she knew that her concerns regarding Titus might have been unfounded, and admitting that there was a potential threat to Grace in the vicinity, would have compelled me to disappear again. I think she kept it to herself because she was scared of losing me twice.” Clarke admits under a self-conscious sigh, her heart thumping distractingly in her chest with unnecessary strength and speed.
Ontari thinks about it for a moment, before realising that this is exactly why Lexa would have remained quiet about what she knew. Lexa didn’t want to give Clarke another reason to leave. “I think you might be right.” Ontari pauses for a moment, just thinking. “If it makes you feel any better, I don’t think you would have left if you had known sooner.” She admits with a certainty Clarke didn’t quite understand.

Clarke’s head snaps to the other woman sitting next to her, eyebrows climbing up her forehead towards her hairline, and eyes widened questioningly. “How do you know?” She asks a little incredulously. Disbelief and curiosity coexisting within Clarke’s indecisive skull.

Ontari snorts in a way that might be described as mocking if heard by someone who did not know the girl. “Because you need her just as much as she needs you.” She says plainly, as though it were the most obvious statement in the world. Like saying the sky is blue and the grass is green.

On some level Ontari’s words resonated with Clarke, and caressed something primal and needy within Clarke’s soul. Something that belonged only to Lexa. It was the fissure that was created when their soul was torn in half and placed into two bodies. The scar that called out for its other half. That demanded it be reunited with its other self, its mate.

“You know it’s ironic how true that statement is.” Clarke laughs humourlessly, the noise sounding bitter and scratchy to her own ears.

“How?” Ontari investigates gently, urging Clarke to elaborate.

“The only reason Grace is in danger of being taken from me, is because Lexa believed that I would not bow before her in order to save her.” Clarke’s answers with defeat. Ontari’s confused expression indicating that she still did not understand, Clarke expanded her explanation. “Because I killed the mountain men, the clans think Lexa is weak. And now that my legend has only grown in size since running away and returning, the clans are losing faith in Lexa’s ability to lead them. They doubt her strength. And the only way for Lexa to earn back their confidence, is if she controls the power of Wanheda.” Clarke grounds out, frustrated by the whole circumstance.

“I see.” Ontari mutters grimly.

“And the only way for Lexa to control the power of Wanheda is to either have me bow down before her, or if she takes my child away and raises her in Polis. As the clans believe that Grace and I share the power of the Wanheda.” Clarke says quietly.

Ontari’s brow furrows, before a devious smile quirks her lips upwards. “Those are not the only two ways for Lexa to exhibit control over the commander of death.” She says with a Cheshire cat grin, that rivalled even Raven’s self-satisfied smirks.

“What? How?” Clarke squeaks, her cheeks flushing a deep crimson, that makes Ontari wonder if she had any blood volume currently pumping to any other part of her body.

“Yes, bonding. I believe Skaikru call it marriage? Anyways, in all clan cultures, we view bonding as
a sharing of souls, hearts, minds, bodies and most importantly, power. Where two are melded into one. If Lexa were to bond with you, it wouldn’t just be you and Grace that were viewed as Wanheda, it would be Lexa too. Your power would be her power, and vice versa. She would be able to prove to the coalition that she controlled the power of Wanheda, because she would be regarded as Wanheda also. But by doing this she would still be able to treat you as an equal, as in our culture gender roles do not play any part in dominance. Equality between a bonded pair is an expectation and unspoken requirement. Which is probably why she refused to have you bow before her, she knew that the imbalance of power between the two of you would allow animosity and resentment to fester. And she is unwilling to risk any further damage to the relationship she is cultivating with you Clarke. She would be willing to risk banishment, rather than have you hate her once more.” Ontari says seriously.

Clarke was at a loss for words, and her mind felt like a jumble of frayed wires in a computer, incapable of transmitting or receiving data. Clarke silently wondered whether the idea of bonding with Lexa was something that she was even open too. If it was something she wanted for herself. Of course she wanted to protect her daughter, and she wanted to spare Lexa the fate of banishment, but she was unsure of how she felt about Lexa becoming her houmon, her wife. The thought sent a pleasurable bolt of warmth down her spine, and contentment fluttered in her chest as an image of herself and Lexa popped into her mind, five or ten years down the track. With their children happily playing with each other as Clarke sank into Lexa’s embrace. The thought filled Clarke with a sense of serenity that had never existed between she and Finn, nor with Clarke and Kadeon. Clarke somehow knew that it was a happiness only achievable with Lexa by her side.

Ontari stood with a knowing smirk, scooped Grace into her arms, and then left Clarke to her symphony of rabid thoughts, more confused than she was before.

Clarke’s skull echoed the rapid pounding of her heart, because suddenly her head felt empty and the space between her ears filled only with air and the remnants of that happy dream revolving around Lexa. Clarke was so screwed, and she knew it. There was no way she was going to be able to face Lexa without the thought of bonding with the woman slipping into her mind.

The very pleasant thought of bonding with Lexa.

God, stop it Clarke! She inwardly scolded herself. Standing from her position on the log, Clarke dusted off her pants and headed towards the dungeon, pushing any and all distracting thoughts of Lexa from her mind as she did so.

She had a prisoner to befriend and questions to ask.

Chapter End Notes

Heya guys!

I hope you all enjoy the new chapter!

So this is the chapter where the curveball is introduced. A politically inspired marriage between Clarke and Lexa. Will they do it, will they not? Will this move help or hinder their relationship? At the moment it is all just talk and idle suggestion, but it is a possibility. What are you guys thoughts? I am super curious, so please tell me your thoughts?
Anyway, next update will likely be Saturday or Sunday. Until then, enjoy your end of week. I hope to hear from you guys in the comments.

- Loz :D
Clarke knew something was wrong as soon as her eyes brushed over the two stationary forms of the guards, standing vigil outside Greya’s cell. Clarke recognised the two warriors to be Jameson, and another man by the name of Floki. There was a thick tension in the air, radiating from the stiff figures of Jameson and Floki.

Jameson whose entire body stood rigid and was surrounded by a sinewy nervous energy, at his post. His eyes constantly flickering between a tether in front of him and his immediate surroundings, like he was on the alert for an immediate danger. Jameson was usually such a friendly man, and when Clarke approached, his eyes instantly met hers. The brown depths of his irises flooded with uncertainty and discomfort like he was worried about something.

Floki on the other hand, wore a self-satisfied smirk upon his grubby, unwashed face. He was a hard man, unforgiving and cruel. And most important, was the fact that he never smiled. The grin he now had smeared across his face, showcased cracked teeth, covered in brown rot, and the expression of emotion was only sinister. The closer Clarke drew, the tighter the unease coiled in her stomach. Something was not right, and every one of Clarke’s instincts screamed at her to check on Greya.

Trikru were livid by the eight recently slaughtered clansmen. They were so angry in fact, that they had turned their wrath upon Ontari. Someone who had not been back to her homelands in eight years, who had more reason to hate Nia than any other, and had loyally sided against her own kin and clan, in support of Lexa. If the villagers were angry enough to direct their anger toward Ontari, then what would they do to Greya? Clarke asked herself.

Clarke’s legs pistoned faster with each step, every second drawing her ever closer to the dungeon and a sight that Clarke somehow sensed would be bad.

Clarke shot Jameson one last searching examination, and he shied away from the scrutiny. His head hanging with silent shame. It was all the confirmation Clarke needed. The blonde sprinted with as much speed as she could muster, and ran towards Greya’s cell. Her heart lodged in her throat.

Clarke could hear a barely audible whimper of pain and harsh, desperate breathing. An unknown entity’s dark, scornful laughter the only response to the outcry of pain, as Clarke zipped around the corner. The sight before Clarke made her blood boil and nearly combust in her veins like a flame to hydrazine.

A middle aged Trikru woman stood close to Greya, a wicked knife in her hand, as she carved lines into the archer’s exposed arms. Clarke recognised the woman from around Alton, and thought her name might have been Eve? Edith? No, Eden. Eden had tightened Greya’s chains, so that the girl’s feet were not even touching the ground. The exhausted Azgeda girl forced to lift her entire body weight whenever she wanted a breath of life-sustaining oxygen. A task made nearly impossible by her previously broken and badly bruised ribs and the eight fresh, long gashes that had been etched with a sharp blade and a cruel hand, into the pale and delicate skin of her arms.

Greya’s face was red, nearing a deep maroon colour, the crimson staining in her face somehow making the blackness of her bruises, and the swollen lids of her eye, more prominent. Greya’s blood streaked arms shook with fatigue and exhaustion from the strain and effort, to pull herself up once more. Her glacier blue eyes wide and terrified, but stubbornly brave. Blood marbled down her arms.
in angry slashes of scarlet, coating her pits and soaking into the fabric of the tunic she wore. A tunic
that was once a grey colour, now totally crusted in crimson.

Rational thought fled Clarke as she lunged for Eden, the ebony skinned woman was caught
completely unaware by the rapid movement, so absorbed in her sadistic torture. In her surprise, she
dropped the bloody weapon, from a hand equally sticky with Greya’s life’s blood. The knife
clattered to the floor, slick with blood and chunks of flesh caught between the teeth of the gnarling
steel. Clarke threw the woman like a rag doll against the hard-concrete wall and felt satisfied as the
woman collided with the immovable object with a loud slap, the woman’s breath forcibly knocked
from her lungs with a pained gasp.

“What are you doing!” Clarke bellowed with frustration, her ire making her tunneled vision red, and
her patience eerily thin. “Heda gave explicit instruction that this prisoner not be harmed!” She says
around an animalistic growl.

Hot tears of anger and mixed grief, streaked down Eden’s dark skin. Slipping into her native
Trigedaslang tongue, under the weight of her emotional agony. “Dei off ste Azgeda! Em kru gon
blam gon wamplei kom eit Trikru! Em kru ripa ai bro sheidgeda en kodon op em hed. Em serva
krom pan! That bitch is Ice Nation! Her people are responsible for the deaths of eight people! Her
clan murdered my brother last night and cut off his head. She deserves to suffer!” Eden spat around a
throat full of unspent salt, and unvoiced cries of anguish. Her grief making her heart ache and her
guts hollow.

“Greya is not the cause of your brother’s death. It is not she who your grief should be directed
towards.” Clarke says the words with as much calm as she can muster, whilst also keeping the
woman firmly pressed against the wall with a strong arm and a steady leg jabbed against her shoulder
blades and knees. Clarke understood this woman’s pain she truly did. Clarke even empathised with
it, on a base, human level. But this was a war and in war casualties are inevitable. And right now,
Clarke was thinking like a leader who had just witnessed an imbecile risk the entire war effort, so she
could have her five minutes of vengeance. In the grand scheme of things, those eight deaths did not
hold any value in comparison to the information Greya might know. And Clarke was angry. Angry
that Greya had been harmed, after all, the girl had enemy intelligence that Clarke still needed. But not
only that, the young woman had a fire within her, that Clarke was helpless not to respect. And
Clarke found that she was growing rather fond of the Azgeda girl.

Clarke cast a quick glance towards Greya, and to her horror saw the young girl’s body hanging
limply from the chains binding her wrists. Greya was unconscious, and given the position her body
was currently forced into, she would not be able to breathe. Her airways constricted by her own
body weight. The Azgeda archer’s own body was crushing her lungs and slowly suffocating her. In
a few moments Greya would be dead, and the knowledge she possessed, as well as that flame,
would die and gutter out when her spirit abandoned this fleshy prison.

“Jameson, get down here!” Clarke bellowed urgently. Choosing not to summon Floki, as she didn’t
trust the man to do as she commanded. He would likely finish the job Eden had started, if his blood-
curdling smile was anything to gauge him by.

Jameson was in the cell a moment later, his dark eyes taking in the sight of Greya and Eden. His
blood drained from his face, as he realised what had happened. Floki had been the one to search
Eden for weapons when the woman came to deliver the prisoner her food. And although Jameson
had felt uneasy with how long Eden had been down in the cells with Greya, he had not investigated.
Choosing instead to trust his fellow clansmen. Floki had allowed this to happen, and he knew that
Heda would now have both their heads, despite the kindness she had shown him in the past.
“Get Greya down from there, she cannot breathe!” Clarke shouts impatiently, her eyes frantic and her lungs aflame with a righteous fury. Clarke fought her urge to crush the woman in her grasp, more firmly against the wall. She battled with her need to hear the woman cry out in pain. Wanheda squirmed excitably under the surface of her conscious thought, begging for an excuse to break through the chains that bound her and assume control.

Jameson immediately jumps into action and operates the lever to release the young Azgeda girl. Greya’s body drops lifelessly to the ground, a small puff of dust displaced as she impacted with the hard and unforgiving floor.

“Check her breathing.” Clarke commands, her throat tight with anxiety, and a fine line of sweat prickling her face and neck. Clarke’s eyes firmly riveted to the scene before her, searching for any sign of life.

It felt like eons before Jameson finally reported the injured girl’s status, and Clarke held her breath the entire time. For so long, that when Jameson spoke, there were black spots in Clarke’s vision.

“She is alive Wanheda.” Jameson says with a small relieved smile.

Clarke sucked in the deep breath that her body screamed for, and tears of relief stung her eyes. Focusing her energies back on the woman in front of her, Clarke reigned in her emotions.

Eden was sobbing uncontrollably against the cold concrete wall, snot and tears mingling and running down her face in disgusting rivulets.

Clarke yanked the woman’s ebony arms behind her back, and snatched a piece of rope from Jameson’s person, to tightly bind her wrists. If some of the woman’s skin was torn off in Clarke’s efforts to keep her forcefully bound, then Clarke felt no remorse. The anger that pumped so thick and threateningly through her arteries numbed her to the emotions. Emotions that she would surely feel when she had had the chance to calm down.

When the woman was tightly secured, Clarke returned her attention to Jameson. “Take this woman to Heda, she can decide her fate.” Clarke ordered gruffly. Jameson quickly moved to enact the order. “Also, find Abby kom Skaikru, or Naomi kom Trikru, and send them here to help me tend to Greya’s wounds.” Clarke offhandedly, as she beds down to inspect Greya’s injuries.

“Sha, Wanheda.” Jameson utters respectfully, before roughly pushing Eden from the cell, and taking her to the commander.

Clarke ripped off a length of her own shirt, and pressed the material against one of Greya’s arms, attempting to staunch the flow of blood until Naomi or her mother were found and brought here to help her tend to Greya’s injuries.

After a couple of minutes Greya’s eyes fluttered open, and she groaned in pain. Now that oxygen had been restored to her brain, she was no longer in life threatening danger. And the fact that she was wakening so soon after the ordeal was a very good sign, indicative of no long-lasting damage. Clarke’s anger seeped away as relief flared to life, and took its place, thrumming around her body with each steadying beat of her heart.

“Shh, you’re okay. You’re okay Greya. I am here. You’re okay, I promise.” Clarke soothed the girl, as her dazed ice-blue eyes began to focus and her foggy thoughts began to clear.

Greya jerked away from Clarke’s touch before her brain recognised the figure leaning over her. “Wanheda?” Greya’s voice was quiet and weak, and she hated the sound of her own vulnerability.
“Yes, it’s Clarke. You’re okay Greya. No one will hurt you.” Clarke reassured softly.

“There was a woman…” Greya trails off as her murky brain tries to remember the events from before she reached blissful unconsciousness. She remembered pain, lots of it, and a woman. But not much else. Greya tries to prop herself up on shaky arms, and instantly hissed in agony. Clutching her bleeding and tender arms to her chest.

“Don’t try to get up, you are hurt.” Clarke reminds Greya gently. “Eden, the woman, she is gone. She will face Heda’s judgement for harming you.” Clarke promises with a stern edge of authority.

Greya says nothing for a few long moments. Moments which Clarke uses to inspect the severity of Greya’s wounds. There were four long gashes on each arm, that stretched from her elbow to her armpits. The cuts themselves weren’t very deep, but they had been torn into her flesh with a jagged blade with a dull edge. Designed to inflict maximum pain, but not enough damage to reach any of Greya’s blood vessels and kill her quickly. Eden had wanted Greya to feel unbelievable pain, before she suffocated to death. Anger bubbled threateningly in Clarke’s veins at the whole situation once more. Greya’s voice interrupts Clarke’s inner musings, allowing her hot wrath to fizzle out.

“More Trikru have been killed by Azgeda, correct?” Greya inquires softly, her eyebrows furrowed in pensive thought, intelligence lurking behind the icy blue irises as she analysed Clarke’s reactions.

Clarke raises her eyebrows at Greya’s line of curiosity.

“I smelt the smoke. I knew it couldn’t have been smoke from just any fire, there was too much, enough for a pyre.” Greya offers by way of explanation. “And then… She. She came down here, and my suspicions were proven correct I suppose. I knew that the commander gave you two days to gather information from me, but until your deadline had passed, no one was to touch me.” Greya says with a small smirk, a smirk that promptly disappears when Clarke prods at one of her wounds and it transforms into a whimper.

Clarke fingers become more gentle as Greya’s distress becomes apparent. “How do you know that?” Clarke asks with low inquisitiveness.

“Heda’s guards have big mouths, and noise carries in this echoey chamber” Greya shrugs with indifference. It was amazing the way the Trikru liked to gossip when they thought no one could hear. And in this chamber of echoes, every voice could be heard, every breath, every utterance of words, they all drifted down and into Greya’s awaiting ears.

“Right.” Clarke relents a little uneasily. Slightly concerned about what Greya might have heard in the days she had been kept prisoner in this dungeon.

Clarke’s concern dissipated as footsteps descended into the dungeons. Looking up, Clarke was gladdened to see Naomi standing before her, with a bag full of medical supplies in on one arm and a stern expression, assessing all before her on her face.

“What happened?” Naomi asks quickly, her demeanour turning brusque and business-like. Clarke noticed with thinly veiled intrigue as Greya’s face became still as stone. Her eyes hardening in the presence of a new person whom she did not know.

“A grieving sister of one of the eight dead Trikru decided to take her revenge on Greya. I got here just in time to stop the woman from killing her.” Clarke reported stiffly.

Naomi nodded absent-mindedly, and moved to touch Greya. Only intending to inspect the girl’s wounds as Clarke had done moments before. But Greya flinched away from the touch, bit down the
hiss of pain the movement had created and eyed Naomi warily.

“I will not hurt you child.” Naomi tries her best to soothe the girl, but Greya’s eyes are determined and cold. Distrust and wariness coming off of her body in waves designed to deter.

Clarke’s eyes sought out Greya’s ice blue ones, and tried to silently implore the girl to trust Naomi. “Naomi is a healer Greya, she can tend to your wounds.” Clarke tries to placate the young archer, but her words had no effect. Greya simply worked her jaw stubbornly, refusing to have anyone whom she did not trust touch her. “What if I inspect your wounds for Naomi. Will you allow me to do that?” Clarke asks quietly, slightly disappointed that Greya had shut down so severely while in the presence of other people. It also made Clarke realise just how cooperative Greya had been with her up until this point.

Greya bows her head minutely in acceptance, and Naomi’s eyebrows shifted sceptically, but she chose to say nothing.

The three women worked in silence. Clarke inspecting Greya’s wounds, cleaning them and stitching the flaps of skin together. Naomi passing certain bottles of tonics and salves to be applied, and offering small comments of direction when needed. And Greya, staying extremely still, and stubbornly refusing to show any indication of pain as the sewing needle pierced her skin and pieced her fleshy casing back together. When Naomi was finished, she offered both girls a small smile, and left.

Greya was quite the sight by the time Naomi and Clarke were finished with her. Covered in bandages, and bruises from the beatings she had sustained while under Trikru care. The thought caused disgust and shame to lick at her heart. She was ashamed on behalf of Trikru for the sheer number of injuries Greya had sustained, and the quantity of scars the young girl would surely leave this war with. But Clarke knew that it was all a necessary process. In war, one must do what is necessary, in order to protect their people. Even resorting to torture, and Clarke would not persecute Ontari or anyone else who was forced to do such a thing by this war’s end. Greya visibly deflated and relaxed when Naomi’s retreating figure was no longer in sight.

“You don’t like many people do you?” Clarke asks with no small amount of sarcasm colouring her tone.

Greya snorted in amusement, but winced when the action made her bruised and broken ribs smart in protest. “I don’t like anyone. I just trust some people more and some people less.” She states simply.

“Are you saying that you trust me?” Clarke asks directly. Her curiosity making her ask the question before her brain could stop the unwise action.

Greya’s lips curled into a grin, and her eyes crinkled with mirth. “Don’t let it go to your head Wanheda. I know you are only here because you want something from me.” Greya comments with a small edge of bitterness in her tone. Despite the fact that she knew Clarke was here for one reason, it had been nice to have someone to talk to. Someone who showed her kindness. It had been a long time since last someone did that.

“That might be true. And I am sorry for it. Under different circumstances we might have been friends.” Clarke says seriously.

It was Greya’s turn to raise her eyebrow now. “Maybe.” She admits with a faraway look in her eye. Her focus distanced from the oppressive four walls of the cell.

Clarke allows silence to fill the air between them for a few short moments, and Clarke makes herself
comfortable against a wall near Greya. The two of them sitting side-by-side in companionable silence.

“So how bad is it? Out there I mean.” Greya’s asks with a subtle inclination of her head towards the entrance to her cell.

Clarke’s sighs and scrubs a tired hand across her face. “The Trikru are angry.” She says wearily.

“As is their right.” Greya says automatically, with little or no emotion in her voice.

Clarke was startled by Greya’s response. “You are not angry that their wrath has been directed towards you?” She asks incredulously. Unable to gather the same level of nonchalance when imagining her enemies treating her a similar way, for something she did not do.

“I am not angry. If roles were reversed, I might have reacted similarly.” Greya’s expression turns pensive and her brows furrow seriously.

Clarke is a little awed by the girl’s inner strength. “That is very noble of you.” Clarke allows a small amount of the awe she felt, to seep into her tone.

Greya blushes under the light praise before sobering again. “It is not my intention to be noble Wanheda. But I do understand their pain, their grief. It is a horrible sensation to have your family and clansmen killed.” Greya’s eyes transform back to their usual haunted state, and Clarke wonders what horrors those eyes had seen that filled them with so much pain.

“You speak as though you are familiar with the sensation.” Clarke prods gently.

Greya is silent for a few moments, as she tries to discover the best way to elaborate on the area of her life that had obviously caught Clarke’s attention. “During one of the skirmishes along the borders between Azgeda and Ouskejonkru, before the coalition was formed. My mother and father left for battle, and never came home.” Greya mutters quietly. Hoping that the lack of volume would obscure the pain she felt in her heart from bleeding through her words.

Clarke was unsurprised by the revelation. She had guessed that Greya had experienced painful tragedies in her life, but her heart ached in empathy for the girl anyway. “I am sorry for your loss.” Clarke says quietly. The atmosphere in the hot dungeon turned solemn.

Greya inwardly shook herself and reigned in her emotions, feeling ridiculous to have entrusted such an emotion laden confession in the hands of Wanheda. But at the same time, struggling to bring herself to regret the action. She felt like Wanheda, or Clarke as she preferred to be called. Greya felt like she was trustworthy. Like if she put her faith in this girl, she would nurture it and protect it, until her very last breath. “Death happens in war. And they died with honour, as warriors. So, that is an offering of peace in and of itself. I know that my parents are gone from this life, but are now reborn. I am grateful that Ouskejonkru were not animals and left the bodies of the fallen dismembered and desecrated.” Greya spits the last part, allowing a small passionate fire to arise from the embers of her rebellious nature. A part of herself she feared had been extinguished many years ago.

Clarke was stunned by the heat of Greya’s tone, and leapt on the chance to learn more about the young girl’s opinion on the Shadow War thus far. “So you believe that Azgeda are being needlessly cruel by severing the heads of the dead Trikru?” The silence that followed was thick with expectation and both girls knew that the conversation they were having, now wandered into dangerous territory.

They were at a crossroads. Where Greya could betray her Queen and become a traitor to her people.
Or she could betray the faith Clarke held in her, and disappoint one of the only friends she had ever had. If you could call a kind interrogator a friend. But there was more at stake if Greya answered, than what Clarke realised, and Greya’s skin felt like it had been peeled off and then glued back on, inside out. Greya chose her words very carefully, and kept her tone and face impassive. “Just because I have followed orders, does not mean I enjoyed doing it. Or more so, that I agreed with them. I am a warrior, in a war. My job is not to question my superior’s commands, only to follow them.” The reply is rehearsed, and Greya feels dishonest by allowing the response to pass her lips.

Greya’s eyes were a fraction harder than they were a moment before, and Clarke inwardly sighed at the difference. “I understand.” Clarke says carefully, aiming to placate Greya before their discussion could devolve any further.

Greya’s expression becomes annoyed, and a red flush of indignation spreads up her neck and cheeks, dying her snow-white skin, crimson in the areas not mottled by blue and black bruising. “I doubt you do mountain slayer. You are the one who gives the commands, not the one who follows the orders. You’re a leader, not a warrior.” Greya meets Clarke’s eyes and stares her down. Wanting to drive her point home.

Clarke rises to the challenge and maintains Greya’s icy eye contact, ignoring the chill that crept up her spine. Staring into her soul and trying not to let the other girl see the ugliness that lies within her own. “You would be surprised by how much I want for that not to be true.” Clarke says coolly, her sapphire blue eyes still boring into the glacier blues.

Greya is silent, and the intensity of her stare lessens sporadically when her brain processes Clarke’s reply. Her eyes clouding with confusion and curiosity both.

Clarke breaks the eye contact and relaxes against the cool concrete wall. “You may not think I understand what it feels like to live with someone else’s choices, but I do. When I lived on the Ark, my mother made some decisions that ended with my father being sucked into the vacuum of space. She sentenced him to death, and sparked a series of chain reactions that had me arrested and sentenced to a radiation soaked death on Earth. I had no choice in any of the events that transpired. It was her decisions that destroyed my world, and I was the bystander, unable to affect any change. Unable to alter my own fate. So, I do know how it feels to be the powerless warrior at the mercy of someone else’s commands.” Clarke glosses over the story quickly, feeling the familiar anger and grief associated with her father’s death that always bubbled to the surface. The story was much more complex, but Clarke didn’t feel like reliving it for Greya or anyone else.

Greya’s expression slackens and becomes thoughtful. “But you are trying to only be the warrior, now that you have returned to your people. Why? If it is so terrible being the warrior, why purposefully place yourself in that position?” Greya asks with incensed interest.

“Because as bad as being the warrior might be, the role of leader is worse.” Clarke says slowly. Her voice thick with memories of the mountain and her shoulders slumping under the weight of responsibility that came with bearing the deaths of over eight hundred souls.

Greya is a little intimidated by the expression that had unconsciously drifted onto the Sky girls face. It was cold, and hard, but also haunted and full of darkness. Greya was gladdened by the fact that this girl chose not allow the world to see the blackened pit that must exist in her soul, as most men would surely fall into it if they peered too closely. Greya contemplated her own death for a moment, and found that the notion filled her with more dread now than it did even as a girl. There weren’t other people’s fates tied to her own when she was a girl, but there was now. And her death, would mean theirs also. “What are my chances of leaving here alive once this war is finished?”

The black clouds that hung, over Clarke’s head a moment before, quickly dispersed, revealing the
warm yellow sun once more. “Can I assume that your question is an admission that you believe, or at least, hope that Nia’s quest fails?” Clarke’s eyes narrow as she reads a truth between Greya’s words, that Greya herself hadn’t realised she had just given away.

Greya cursed Clarke’s quick mind. “It would be treason to admit such a thing, would it not?” She asks with a predatory gleam in her eyes, testing the boundaries of Clarke’s wit.

Clarke smiles loftily. “Well, we both know that if Nia wins this war, she will kill us both anyway. I will die, simply for being Wanheda, her enemy. And you will die, based on the principle that you might have told us something.” Clarke tilts her head to the side, assessing. The sight reminded Greya of the intelligent beasts that corner their prey before they ate them.

Greya nods slowly in agreement.

Clarke sucks on her teeth loudly, before replying. Her brain full of the different scenarios that could mean the doom or salvation of Greya’s life. “Your chances of survival greatly depend on how co-operative you are.” Clarke says seriously.

“And Nia? What are your plans for her?” Greya asks in quick succession, her eyes guarded. Her mind coming to a decision regarding her fate and stance in this war, rapidly.

Clarke’s eyes narrow as she hears Nia’s name, absent her title, and recognises the precise phrasing as a slight sign of disrespect for Nia. A small ember of defiance coming to life in Greya’s eye. “Nia will die.” Clarke promises coldly, her eyes deadened as she states Nia’s fate like it was a certainty. And Greya assumes that because in Clarke’s eyes, Nia surviving this war, wasn’t even a possibility.

Greya doesn’t pause and shiver at the detached gleam in Clarke’s eye, like her body wants to. Instead she pushes through her discomfort, and continues her rapid-fire questioning. “And what is your stance on collateral damage?” Greya’s keen icy eyes track Clarke’s every facial twitch, this was the moment of truth. Clarke’s answer would determine whether or not Greya would help her, or if she would suffer days of torture when Clarke’s deadline was up. The thought of being subject to Ontari’s methods of interrogation sending an involuntary shiver rattling down her vertebrae.

Clarke’s eyes glimmered with regret, not for the current situation, but for the children and the friends she killed on Mount Weather, as Greya mentions collateral damage. “I don’t want any more death on my conscience than what is already there.” She whispers brokenly.

Greya ignores Clarke’s display of raw emotion, and continues with her questions. Her heart beating stronger with resolve and hope for the first time, as Clarke answers each question correctly. “And the commander? What about her?” Greya is hanging onto every word like a lifeline now.

“She doesn’t want to see innocence sacrificed any more than I do.” Clarke answers immediately. Despite there being so much change between she and Lexa recently, Clarke knew that Lexa felt the same way as she did on that matter.

Greya almost cries with relief. “Okay.” She breathes lightly.

“Ohay?” Clarke enquires softly. She knew that Greya was working herself up to something, but she didn’t want to spook the girl, or make any false assumptions.

Greya breathes deeply, and a small smile kisses her lips like it was the first breath she had taken in her life. “Okay, I will help you.”

The words left Greya’s lips and sent a jolt of excitement so profound through Clarke’s body she nearly jumped for joy. Her pride being the only thing strong enough to stop her childish display.
“Than…” Clarke begins to express her gratitude, when Grey interrupted.

“I will help, on one condition.” Greya intones seriously, her voice steady and strong, like her heartbeat.

Clarke’s excitement evaporates as Greya lays stipulations upon her aid. Clarke bristled slightly. “And what is that?” She asks warily.

Greya licks her dry lips and summons her bravery. “When Nia falls. I need you to rescue her prisoners first.”

The words hang heavy in the air between them. And Clarke tries to process what the Azgeda archer is referring to. Clarke’s mind unhelpfully supplies the reminder that Nia had stolen Kade’s wife Mila and their son Halen and kept them prisoners to force his compliance to serve as an assassin. “What do you mean?” Clarke asks hesitantly. Both desiring to know the answer to the question, and dreading the next words that Greya might utter.

Greya inhales a deep, fortifying breath. “I mean, that Nia kidnaps family members of talented warriors, to enforce their compliance and fill her ranks with seemingly loyal fighters. She has my younger sister and brother held captive. My sister Talia, is only fourteen, and my brother Hardy, he is a boy of ten years. They are innocent, only children. I don’t care what happens to me, but when you take Fortis, please, save them. Their only crime is being related to me.” There are tears in Greya’s eyes as she thinks of her siblings. Her younger brother and sister who had been robbed of a mother and father, when their parents died ten years ago, and left only with Greya as a poor substitute. The responsibility to care for her siblings weighed heavy in Greya’s heart, and she was determined not to fail them. She would trust Clarke with this, because she somehow knew that Wanheda would not fail them either. Greya just hoped that her faith was not misplaced out of some misguided attempt to rebel against the Queen, and appease the person before her, whom she barely knew, but cared for anyhow.

Clarke sharply inhaled as the words left Greya’s lips, and she realised just how wide, and how deeply Nia’s cruelty might reach. Clarke had naively thought that Kadeon was somehow special to have had his family stolen as he did, she did not believe that there would be others tormented as he was. With the threat of their family’s death looming over their heads. “You have my word Greya.” Clarke vowed seriously. If not for Greya, and her knowledge of Kadeon’s family, Clarke would never have known that Nia was abusing her power so maliciously. But Clarke vowed she would put a stop to it, and if she could, she would save those families who had been stolen. Determination flooded Clarke’s veins and settled deep in her bones.

Greya watched as Clarke’s eyes came alive with a resolute fire, willing to burn a path through anything that got in her way. And she knew that flame burnt bright for people like Talia and Hardy, and gratitude warmed her heart. “Thankyou.” Greya whispered genuinely.

Clarke nodded politely, accepting the gratitude, and then refocusing on the information she needed from Greya, knowing that now she would not need to disguise her words in order to locate helpful intelligence. Now she could ask her question outright, and Greya would simply answer. “How is it that Nia is able to kidnap her own people and hold them captive, without the entire clan turning against her.” Clarke inquires.

Greya immediately began explaining the situation as best as she could. Nia’s strategy to keep people quiet was quite brilliant, but completely sadistic and complicated. Her plans all had contingencies, but as far Greya could tell, Nia didn’t have any contingency in place for the possibility that one of her warriors would be brave enough to risk their family and bring the whole scheme crumbling down, by informing Heda of its existence. “The clan does not know it is occurring. Those that have family stolen, are told to keep their mouths shut, or risk having their loved one’s tongues ripped free
of their heads, or worse. And the guards charged with catering for the prisoner’s basic needs are completely loyal to Nia’s tyrannical rule, and equally as cruel. When someone like me disobeys, Nia has them assassinated for crimes against the clan. The rest of the clan is oblivious. There are pauna larger than houses that roam the Ice Nation, any who go missing are thought to have been killed by the great beasts. So only those directly affected by Nia’s cruelty, know it is happening.” Greya says with a writhing hatred burning in her throat like bile.

Clarke’s mind helplessly drifts to Kadeon, and his family that were murdered because Kade dared to try and rescue them. He had brave, and stupid, and for that his family had been murdered in front of his very eyes. Clarke just prayed that Greya placing her faith in her, would not end with equally devastating results.

Greya watches as Clarke’s mind seems to wander, and just stayed silent for a few minutes. Letting her have the instant to herself.

Clarke finally came back to the time at hand, and cleared her throat, refocusing on the questions she needed answered. “So how many Azgeda do you believe might have had loved ones taken?” Clarke asks. Knowing that if it was a sizeable number, that with a little luck and some Raven-approved explosives, they might be able to free the prisoners and have some Azgeda turn against Nia and join their cause.

“Nia could easily have hundreds of people kept prisoner. She has a network of underground tunnels and cells that stretch deep beneath the belly of Fortis. She uses this as her dungeon.” Greya says with a small grimace. Both disgusted by Nia’s fear mongering tactics, and trying to suppress the shudder that runs through her body as she thinks of her brother and sister confined to such an environment.

Clarke goes quiet as she contemplates how this information might become helpful for a moment, and decides to simply pocket it for later examination. “Do you think those with kidnapped family would be willing to abandon Nia’s cause, if we were to prioritise freeing the prisoners?” Clarke asks hopefully.

Greya’s response is both immediate and emphatic. “Definitely.” She enthuses with wide eyes. Her heart speeding up with relieved excitement over the prospect of Clarke considering doing exactly as she had asked, and prioritising the liberty of the prisoners. Greya’s ribs ache at the sudden movement and her throbbing arms remind her of her body’s fragility, and Greya forces herself to be more measured and slow in her movements, or risk aggravating her injuries.

“Do you know the layout of the dungeon’s well enough to draw it?” Clarke asks quickly, a few different plans running through the halls of her brain, as she tries to find the best way to accomplish what is needed.

Greya sighs heavily, feeling annoyed at her own inadequacy in the moment. “No, I am afraid not. I have only stepped foot into a portion of the dungeons when Nia proved to me that she held my brother and sister captive. I was not permitted entry further than that. But I do know that the network system stretches for kilometres past the outer wall of Fortis.” Greya provides, hoping that the information was helpful in any way.

Clarke nods absentmindedly, her brain still trying to connect everything she had just learned, and formulate a plan for the war now that it had been officially declared. Then Clarke tripped over a realisation, if Greya’s brother and sister weren’t rescued before Nia realised that Greya was missing, then those children would be killed. That meant that whatever offensive manoeuvre they planned to make on Azgeda, needed to happen before Greya was expected to report back to Nia. “How long are you expected to be away on mission?” Clarke asks with serious eyes.
Greya was slightly concerned by Clarke’s tone, but answered without hesitation. “Two weeks.”

Clarke’s lips twiched into a confident smirk as she relayed her thoughts to Greya. “So that means we have a two week timeframe to launch an attack on Nia, and free the prisoners before she realises that you are gone and kills your brother and sister.” Clarke’s smile grows as Greya’s eyes fill with sweet relief.

Greya’s belly is brimming with excited butterflies, and her smile comes unencumbered for the first time in years, as she realises that placing her faith in Clarke was likely the smartest thing she could have done to ensure her brother and sister’s survival. “Thankyou Clarke.” Greya’s voice is flooded with gratuitous emotion and her smile is broad and carefree.

Clarke is briefly startled by the sudden lightness of the girl before her. The archer’s smile was by no means a beam of sunlight, more like the gentle light produced by a candle. But that small fraction of light, in a soul that was so entrenched in darkness beforehand, was a vast improvement. And Clarke finds herself wishing that she could remove the remaining remnants and vestiges of worry for her siblings, for that brightness to grow. Clarke pushes away the moment of sentimentality, and retrains her mind on the subject at hand. “Was it your group of scouts that killed the three dead Trikru bodies that we found, the night you were captured?”

Greya carefully shakes her head in the negative. “No. We only placed the bodies where we were told, but we did not kill them.” She says with a small sliver of remorse darkening her eyes.

Clarke offers a small smile of understanding as she recognises the guilt associated with your people committing a crime so heinous, in an attempt to silently comfort the girl. “Why were the bodies not dismembered like the others?” Clarke asks curiously. Ever since her conversation with Ontari this afternoon, her mind has been burning with that question. Clarke knew that if the question were a tangible thing, her brain would be branded by its heated intensity. Clarke felt like knowing the answer to why those bodies did not conform to the pattern set by all the other kills, that something monumental would be uncovered. Something big enough to help them win this war.

Greya sighed, a headache beginning to form behind her eyes, and exhaustion from the day’s ordeals weighing heavy in her bones. “All I know about that, is that they had importance. Apparently, they had a connection to someone central in your army. I don’t know who, or why they held value, but those three dead Trikru, they were meant as a message.” Greya says finally. Her brain desperately trying to keep up with the pace Clarke’s own mind was racing at, but failing. Her weariness catching up with her and slowing her thoughts.

Clarke didn’t notice Greya’s lag. “A message to who?” She pressed.

Greya’s brain stumbled over the question for a few moments. “The commander, maybe? I am not sure.” She says penitently. Annoyed with her fatigue and her brains uncooperative enthusiasm to be helpful.

Clarke watched the way Greya’s eyes drooped and felt a twinge of embarrassment for pressing Greya so hard, when it was obvious that her day’s torturous exposure to Eden, had made her exhausted. Clarke vowed to leave after one more question. “One other thing. Does the name Titus mean anything to you?” Clarke waits with baited breath, as Greya’s eyes try to focus and her brain tries desperately to be useful.

“No.” Greya slurs a little.

Clarke stands from her position against the wall and prepares to leave. “Okay.” She says quietly.
Greya’s eyes spring open as she recalls something important. “Clarke?” She calls out, halting Clarke’s exit.

“Yeah?” Clarke turns to face the Azgeda girl.

“One other thing. There is a traitor amongst the Trikru. I don’t know who they are, but there is someone from Lexa’s inner circle that has betrayed her to Nia.” She says with a hint of anger, her exhaustion tempering the emotion into a subdued warmth in her chest.

Clarke’s heart stops in her chest, as her mind flicks to Titus. “How do you know this?” She asks quickly, her breaths shallow and unsteady.

Greya perks up a little at the underlying edge of fear in Clarke’s tone. “The leader of my group, he spoke of it when he thought we were all asleep. And I overheard his conversation.” She says swiftly, trying to discourage the unsettling distress that had paled the other blonde’s face.

“Is it possible that there is a connection between the three dead Trikru and the traitor?” Clarke asks quietly. Her mind trying to draw parallels and find any connection between the two occurrences.

Greya’s tired eyes turn pensive before she answers. “It is possible.” She relents.

Clarke offers a small smile in gratitude for her help. “Thank you Greya.” She says softly, preparing to leave once more.

Greya’s voice is uncertain and vulnerable when she calls out again. “Clarke?” Greya bites the inside of her cheek as Clarke turns to look at her again.

“Yeah?” Clarke says softly. Her mind full of things to consider, but her eyes kind, imploring.

Greya inhales a breath to fortify herself, and only hesitates a second before relaying her request. “I know that you have what you need from me now… But I was curious. Will you continue to visit me while I am here?” Greya now held her breath, as Clarke contemplated her words. Clarke had been the first person in a very long time to show her any form of kindness, and Greya’s deprived soul was selfish to give it up now that it had received a taste. Greya wanted a friend, as alien as the concept admittedly was, she found herself craving that connection. Just having someone to care for her, even a little, was so powerful.

Clarke read the vulnerability in Greya’s eyes easily, and suppressed the urge to smile a pleased grin. Because this was the second Azgeda girl today, to have expressed their desire for friendship, and it warmed a part of Clarke that she didn’t know existed. It triggered a protectiveness that was different to what she felt for Grace, or her friends from the ark, or even Lexa. This protectiveness was unique, and she couldn’t quite place it. Clarke wonders if perhaps Bellamy feels this way about his sister Octavia, but can’t know for certain, as she had never had a sibling. “Do you want me to?” Clarke asks quietly.

Greya flushes pink at the non-answer. Realising that if she wants Clarke to visit again, she would need to express that desire audibly. “I wouldn’t be opposed to the company.” She says sheepishly, her eyes finding a crack in the floor to study as she answers.

“Then I will visit you.” Clarke says with a delighted smile. That protectiveness flaring up once more.

Greya’s eyes snap up from the crack in the floor, and meets Clarke’s gaze. “Thankyou.” She says earnestly, a giddy excitement flaring to life in her belly, at the thought of not being so alone.
Hello guys!!

I hope everyone had a fantastic weekend. I know I said I was going to update on Saturday or Sunday, but I got sick and everything I wrote during that period was just gross. So I decided to be extra nice and give you guys a longer chapter as an apology - well it wasn't done on purpose, it just kinda happened, but think of it as an apology anyway, haha!

So again, this chapter is twice as long as my usual chapters, so please enjoy!

Also, as always, please tell me your thought on the new chapter. There were a few big plot reveals in this update that have been hinted at for a while now, so I hope I have successfully sated some of your burning curiosity.

At this point, I will try to update again by Wednesday, Thursday at the latest.

Have an excellent week, and please leave me some feedback in the comments! :D
Clarke left the dungeons with so many thoughts fluttering around in her head, like hyper-active butterflies. Clarke was relieved that Greya had finally opened up and shared what she knew with Clarke, but she was stressed. Anxiety thrummed in her veins, and dread coiled tight in her rigid abdomen. There was a traitor in Lexa’s circle, and there was no true way to decipher who the natrona might be.

Clarke wondered if perhaps the traitor might be Titus, he had after all been missing for some days now. Plus, he knew enough intimate details of Lexa’s army and strategic thought processes to whisper in Nia’s ear, to be deemed a plausible threat. But Clarke also questioned if her suspicions regarding Titus was her own way of justifying her fear of him. Perhaps it was her brains way of finding him guilty of a crime outside of threatening her daughter. A crime that would be punishable by death, and would rid the world of his toxic influence. He would not face justice for threatening a baby, because they were only words. Actions needed to be present for someone to be punished, and Clarke wanted him to suffer for threatening Grace.

Clarke tried to shake away the anger that bubbled in her chest as she considered the whole situation with Titus, anger similar in intensity to what she had unleashed on Eden. Clarke felt the anger fizzles out when guilt crept into its place. Replacing the burning hot rage with a freezing numbness. Clarke knew she had been needlessly cruel with Eden. She understood the woman’s pain, losing a loved one was traumatic and painful, and yet she had reacted so violently. She was ashamed of her actions now that the anger had been given a chance to dissipate. Clarke knew she would need to make amends for her actions, but knew an apology would not be enough. Clarke didn’t know where the anger had stemmed from, or perhaps she did, and just didn’t want to face the burning feeling inside her chest. Either way, Clarke knew that Eden did not deserve Clarke’s wrath, despite the woman’s actions.

Clarke dislodged her tumultuous thoughts and quickly made her way to Lexa’s tent, needing to relay the new information she had.

Clarke let her thought wander to the green-eyed girl. She was so beautiful and strong. And Clarke’s mind kept travelling to the thought of Ontari’s suggestion. Bonding with Lexa. Clarke knew that the action would be smart politically, but she wondered if it was a feasible solution outside of that. Divorce was not a concept that the grounders accepted, so if Clarke was to marry Lexa, it would be a permanent, life-altering choice. On without escape except through death, and Clarke wasn’t even going to contemplate that option, it sent a stab of fear through her guts. Clarke could not imagine anything happening to Lexa. While the brunette and Clarke had a stained past, Clarke never wanted to see the other woman suffer. Clarke felt connected to Lexa in a way that defied logic. Clarke knew that she shouldn’t be letting herself trust Lexa, but she did. There was something about the girl that drew Clarke closer and put her under her spell. Not only that, but made Clarke happy to be there. Clarke was scared to let herself feel for Lexa, she was fearful of being hurt, of being let down. But Clarke wonders what good things were ever accomplished by being careful and guarded. Clarke didn’t want to be a seventy-year-old spinster that was too scared to love anyone. She wanted Lexa in a way she had never wanted anyone. She wanted Lexa not because she was scared for her life and needed comforting, like with Finn. And she didn’t want Lexa because she had accidentally fallen pregnant with her child, like with Kade. She wanted Lexa because Clarke knew that their love would be epic. She knew the green-eyed girl would bring joy to Clarke’s life in a way that no one
else was capable. The realisation lit a hopeful fire in Clarke’s belly, and made her feel more confident in the notion of bonding as a plausible solution to their current solution.

It was late afternoon, the sun was beginning to make its steady descent towards the horizon, preparing to be tucked away behind the mountains of Alton. The orange light that filtered through the glaring haze caused by the pyres, seemed to cast a surreal brightness over the valley. Clarke could still smell the remnants of smoke, but the nauseating scent of cooking flesh had cleared from the air. The atmosphere was pleasantly warm and the sensation prickled Clarke’s skin pleasantly. There was no breeze to speak of, which was why the haze of smoke yet lingered, but the stillness was somehow peaceful. There was low chatter surrounding Clarke as villagers went about their duties, but their voices all sounded distant, like she was surrounded by a bubble and her sense of sound was dampened.

Clarke eventually made it to Lexa’s tent. Two guards who Clarke couldn’t recall the names of, pulled back the tent flap and allowed Clarke to enter unhindered. It took a moment for Clarke’s eyes to adjust to the darkness of Lexa’s tent, the photoreceptors in her blue eyes distorting her vision with a temporary glare of technicolour. Blinking away the strange sensation, Clarke’s eyes immediately fell to Lexa’s form.

The green-eyed beauty was bent over the round table in the middle of the room, a map laid out in front of her. Lexa wore no pauldron, and no war paint. Her hair sweeping over her bare shoulder in damp, tantalising waves of feminine splendour. Clarke swallowed thickly, as Ontari’s suggestion of bonding flittered across her consciousness unhelpfully. A crimson blush kissing her cheeks in embarrassment and something… else. Attraction?

Lexa’s inquisitive green eyes looked up from the map she was nostalgically examining to inspect her new guest. Lexa quickly covered the map she was examining with a large tomb as she recognised the blonde hair and beguiling blue spheres, a sheen of guilty perspiration dotting her brow. “Clarke.” Lexa’s voice is too high, despite her efforts to keep control over the sound. The woman in question raises her eyebrows tentatively, a small smirk playing with petalled lips. Lexa swallows the metaphorical sand in her mouth.

“Lexa.” Clarke replies evenly, a great feat considering the direction of her thoughts now that she was in Lexa’s presence.

Lexa’s mind had been pre-occupied with the origins of Clarke’s fighting prowess most of the day. Her confused and painfully curious mind demanding answers to the questions she needed to ask. Only stopping her obsessive pondering when a duty was brought to her attention. Like the ugly mess with Eden.

But something stopped Lexa from going straight to the source and inquiring, a familiar nervousness filled Lexa’s belly every time she contemplated asking Clarke how she learnt to fight the way she does. So like a branweda, Lexa had fallen back onto an old habit. A habit she had not resorted to since Clarke had returned, she inspected that god-forsaken map. The one littered with evidence of Lexa’s search for her, half expecting the brown faded parchment and charcoal landscapes to yield an answer. The markings predominantly coloured red, mocking Lexa’s apprehension to ask Clarke a simple question. Lexa calmed her racing heart and decided to stop being so foolish, she straightened her spine, and removed the great tome.

“I want to show you something.” Lexa says slowly, a calculating gleam in her eye and nervous tremor in her left hand.

Clarke’s eyes betray her curiosity, but she wordlessly steps closer to Lexa. Two steps. Three steps. Four steps. Five. Now there is only a foot of distance between them, and Clarke can smell the soap
from Lexa’s bath, the fine scent of fresh rain and Lexa, mixed with pine needles and sweet apples. It was intoxicating. If Clarke’s eyes darken at the proximity, neither of them notice.

Lexa’s throat bobs with her nerves as she stretches the thick parchment out on the table, the edges of the paper curling inwards from the way it had been rolled.

Clarke’s inquisitive blue eyes caress the page. Taking in the delicate charcoal, depicting mountains and rivers, lakes and forests. Thick lines separating portions of land and portraying the borders of each clan. Whomever had drawn this map had possessed a skilled hand and an eye for detail, Clarke observed. The beautiful charcoal was broken by scarlet crosses, and hastily scribbled handwriting. A week inscribed next to each red marking. There were two sole green crosses, and the week printed in carefully neat script. Clarke couldn’t help but trace her fingers over the green, they somehow felt hopeful and bright compared to the desperate red. “What is this Lexa?” Clarke asks after a moment, her eyes seeing the map, but her brain not comprehending its importance.

Clarke did not see, but Lexa’s eyes shimmered with a longing that she usually never let herself feel as she watched Clarke gingerly touch the areas of green. Her gentle fingers careful not to smudge the charcoal or the coloured crosses. “It’s you Clarke.” Lexa says simply, her eyes never leaving the side profile of Clarke’s face. Her discerning eyes watching carefully as Clarke’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

“What do you mean, it’s me?” Clarke turns to face Lexa, the brunette’s eyes yielding nothing, and her mouth unmoving. Unwilling to offer further explanation. Clarke turns her eyes back to the map and examines it more thoroughly. Taking note of the placements of the red and green markings, the correlation between them and specific villages. Realisation dawned and guilt gnawed at Clarke’s gut. This was her map, as in the map Lexa used to find Clarke while she was missing. Clarke’s breath caught in her throat and turned to cement in her lungs. “Lexa… I…” Clarke stuttered apologetically.

“It’s okay Clarke. I did not show you this to make you feel guilty, or to have you apologise.” Lexa reassures quickly, her warm hand wrapping around Clarke’s wrist in comfort. The touch sending a delightful shiver down Lexa’s spine, and a warmth to flare in her belly. Clarke’s skin was so soft… Clarke looks down at the hand grasping her wrist and relishes the warmth of Lexa’s hand, comforting and soothing in a way Clarke knew she didn’t deserve. Clarke looks back to the map for a moment. “Are you asking me to tell you where I was?” Clarke asks quietly, unsure how to offer Lexa the same comfort she seemed capable of providing even in this moment.

“Would you tell me even if I was?” Lexa asks with a wry smile, her eyes held a subdued sadness, despite her efforts to expel the emotion.

“Yes.” Clarke answered instantly, without thought or preamble. The admission shocked even her for a moment, before she realised just how true the statement was. Clarke took in the surprised visage of Lexa. Her lips slightly pursed, eyes widened, and eyebrows higher up her forehead than usual. Clarke smiled a small nervous smile. Sucked in a deep breath she hoped would turn her resolve into iron, and began pointing on the map.

“The first few days after leaving Arcadia, I roamed through the forests and tried to survive off the land. I only had two bullets in my gun, and I didn’t know how to hunt, or start a fire. I was effectively useless, so I walked until I reached the closest village. The village was called Soyn. I stole clothes to make myself look more like Trikru, and wore a hood to cover my blonde hair. I even changed my name.” Clarke glances towards Lexa as her mind drifts back to the present, ignoring how her memories of that time were so filled with emotional pain, and hunger. She hadn’t eaten in days by the time she reached Soyn.
Lexa’s eyes were enraptured and empathetic, Clarke didn’t know if she deserved Lexa’s empathy either. After all, Lexa’s desperation and heartache was visibly etched into the red ink on the map, so bare and raw in the way the words are hastily scribbled. The blotches of smeared ink in the shape of tears. The sight pulled at Clarke’s coronary arteries, made them ache.

“Then what happened?” Lexa prods gently. She was so curious, and her heart felt lighter in her chest to know that Clarke was willingly offering this information up to her. Lexa didn’t need to fight for it, it was simply being presented to her, and Lexa wondered if her fear of rejection regarding Clarke’s warrior origins was irrational and unfounded.

“I got caught stealing food, and the villagers tried to cut off a finger for the crime, I escaped by fighting my way out. It was only by pure luck that I got out of there with my hand intact, plus the village was very small, and did not have many strong fighters. Mostly old men and women, a few young warriors and children. But I got a rush out of fighting them, it made me forget why I ran from my people in the first place, it was cathartic in a way.” Clarke explains with a small smile, her blue eyes searching Lexa’s green ones for any sign of discomfort in the story she was recounting. Lexa’s countenance is nothing but understanding. Clarke ignores the fact that Lexa’s expression would likely far less considerate if she were to mention the two people she had sex with in that village.

“Fighting can be a useful tool in some circumstances.” Lexa agrees with a small smile, forcing herself to forget the fact that Clarke was in pain because of the actions she took, and simply imagined Clarke fighting a handful of old people because they wanted to cut off her finger. The thought of someone trying to harm Clarke made Lexa feel queasy, but she also found the situation rather humorous. Clarke must have been a horrible thief to have been caught so easily.

Clarke nods in agreement. “After hastily leaving Soyn, I ventured to the next village, edging a little closer to the Trishanakru border, to a place called Feen. I stayed there for a little over a week before moving on. It was still too close to Arcadia, and I was nowhere near ready to go back to my people. After that, I headed towards the Azgeda border, knowing that anyone looking for me would be hesitant to follow me there. After all, everyone knew that Ice Nation was ruthless and cruel. I never went past the border, deciding that if I was struggling to survive in the forest alone, I definitely wouldn’t make it in the snow and ice fields of Azgeda. The next village I went to was called Osso, I stayed there for another week. By this point, I had been away from my people for five weeks.” Clarke explained.

“Why did you leave Osso?” Lexa inquires softly, loathe to interrupt Clarke’s account, lest she decide not to continue, but also unable to tame her curiosity. Clarke turned bright red, and Lexa wondered if asking that question was a foolish mistake.

“An-angry-father-chased-me-away-with-a-very-large-stick.” Clarke answers quickly, the sentence sounding not like individual words, but instead a large singular one. Lexa’s brow furrows as she tries to grasp the meaning behind the rushed confession. When understanding came, Lexa felt an uncomfortable twist in her belly. Her eyes brightening to the green of envy. Logically, Lexa knew that these single nights spent with strangers meant nothing to Clarke, but she was jealous of these faceless and nameless people, for having known parts of Clarke that Lexa wished she herself knew also. Lexa swallowed down her jealousy like a bitter pill, and tried to maintain her look of understanding, hoping Clarke would continue.

Clarke noticed the way Lexa’s nostrils subtly flared, with Jealousy? Anger? She wasn’t sure, but Clarke’s cheeks were aflame with embarrassment. It was different talking about her multiple sexual partners with Lexa than it was with someone like Raven. Raven celebrated her slutty history, whereas Lexa… Lexa made Clarke wish she had not cheapened herself. Like she had done herself a disservice for not waiting to fall in love before engaging in intercourse. Clarke knew that Lexa was
trying hard not to allow the admission affect her, but Clarke could see the touch of hurt in her eyes. “I am sorry Lexa.” The words were free and clear from Clarke’s mouth before she had even thought to say them aloud. Her eyes widening as Lexa’s zeroed in on Clarke’s moving jaw, her head tilting in an adorably inquisitive manner. Her cherry lips parting in surprise. “I… Just meant… that… umm.” Clarke’s jaw opened and closed a couple of times as her tongue effectively tied itself in knots.

“Clarke.” Lexa’s warm voice calmed Clarke’s furiously pounding heart a fraction and stopped her vocal stumbling before she embarrassed herself further. Her palm still gripping Clarke’s wrist gently. “I want to know about you. I want to know what has happened in your life. The good and the bad. The people that mattered and the people who didn’t. I want to know what makes you smile and what makes you cry, so that you only ever smile. I want to know you. Don’t ever apologise for the choices you have made, despite how they make anyone feel. Because they have all contributed to the strong person who stands before me now.” Lexa says softly, a vulnerability in her eyes that she only ever allows to leak through for Clarke. Lexa knew it belonged only to the blonde.

Clarke’s heart raced like a hummingbird, her lungs seizing from a lack of oxygen, because suddenly there wasn’t enough of the life-sustaining element in the air. Clarke’s eyes flicked between Lexa’s eyes and her mouth. Her blue irises unable to choose a place to direct their attention, the sight of both, far too captivating and enticing to choose between. The space between them shortened, and Lexa’s hand drifted from its grip on her wrist to clasp her hand gently in her own. Clarke’s fingers entwined themselves with Lexa’s, their metacarpals dancing in perfect synchronisation. Lexa lost herself in the blue depths of Clarke’s eyes, her heart pounding furiously in her ribcage, attempting crack open her sternum and jump free of its fleshy prison, wrapping itself around Clarke’s own cardiac muscle. Keening to become one with Clarke.

Clarke surged up to capture Lexa’s lips between her own and starbursts of light exploded behind her eyes. The warmth of Lexa’s mouth travelled down Clarke’s tongue, directly to her heart. A piece of her soul touching its mate. Clarke’s lips slanted and played with Lexa’s, and Lexa’s own mouth responded with equal fervour.

Some part of Lexa’s arousal soaked brain could not believe this was happening, it warned her that this was likely another dream that Lexa would soon awake from. Her body covered in a slight sheen of sweat, desire thrumming in her veins and a demanding dampness between her thighs. But the firm press of Clarke’s body against hers reminded Lexa that for once, this was real. Clarke’s breasts pushed against her own, the hardened buds of her nipples, the pearling tangible even through her tunic, was real. The sensation of a probing, delicate tongue licking into her mouth, was real. The feel of Clarke’s hand squeezing her own, tethering her to this moment, was real. Lexa moaned into the kiss, her throat helpless not to offer some audible exaltation to the universe for giving her this moment.

Clarke’s belly clenched sinfully as Lexa’s moan sent delicious vibrations into her mouth, her lips tingling from the reverberations of Lexa’s pleasure. Clarke’s veins filled with molten desire, thick and focused on her nether regions. Tingles of pleasure curling around her spine that forced Clarke’s body to arc into Lexa, their bodies to close that Clarke felt envy for the clothes Lexa wore. Clarke’s lungs burned for breath, but she refused to be the first to break the scalding kiss. Clarke was content to suffocate in the taste of Lexa.
Lexa revelled in the way it was not a battle for domination between their two tongues, but an equal offering and acceptance of pleasure. Just as it had always been between them. Just as it was in war, just as it was in leadership. In this kiss, they were equals, just as they always had been. Lexa was loathe to do so, but she was the first to break the kiss, her vision beginning to blur from the lack of oxygen.

Lexa’s free hand immediately sought out the touch of Clarke’s face, as their lips broke contact and they both heaved for breath. Lexa’s palm brushing against the soft skin of Clarke’s cheek, tracing the curve of her cheekbone. Lexa’s eyes opened and the breath she had been so desperate for a moment ago, lodged itself in her throat at the sight of the fallen angel before her. Clarke’s eyes were more black than blue, her pupils blown wide, her lids hooded and glazed. Clarke’s lips were red and swollen from Lexa’s unrelenting kiss. A delightful flush creeping up Clarke’s bosom, to her neck and cheeks.

Clarke’s eyes focused on the vision before her, Lexa’s eyes were black, her lips stained a cherry colour from the intense kiss shared between them. But the most beautiful part of Lexa’s image before her, was the radiant smile that pulled at those cherry lips that tasted like heaven itself. Clarke had never seen Lexa so carefree and happy before. Her smile rivalled the sun, and Clarke was awed by it. Lexa thumb brushed against her cheek, keeping the steady burn in her belly aflame. Clarke needed to be closer to Lexa, so with her free hand, she wrapped it around Lexa’s neck and brought their foreheads together, their noses brushing. Their slowly steadying breaths calming and mingling in the small space between them.

When the loud drum of Clarke’s heart had finally quietened, and their thoughts grew less clouded by lust and spontaneity, Clarke was saddened by the setting sun of Lexa’s smile. The radiance disappearing as uncertainty took its place. Clarke knew there was much that they still needed to address between them. Many obstacles that needed to be overcome between them. But this moment, where it was just the two of them and the world could not interfere, it felt right. Clarke felt whole.

“What is this between us Clarke?” Lexa whispers quietly, unwanting to break the spell between them, but needing to ease her own insecurities. Lexa wanted this, but she did not think she was strong enough to have her heart broken twice by Klark kom Skaikru. The first time had nearly been her ruin.

“It is whatever we want it to be.” Clarke responded breathily. The truth was, she didn’t know what this was, only that it was inevitable and right, and Clarke didn’t want to question that.

“What do you want it to be?” Lexa asks quietly, the tremor in her voice making her sound small and fragile.

Clarke pulled Lexa closer to her body, and tilted her head up to meet her steady blue eyed gaze. “I know that we have lots of things between us that need to be repaired. And I know it won’t be easy. But you feel inevitable to me. Like you are the other half my soul needs to survive. You are so special Lexa, and I am tired of trying to fight whatever this is. I just want you.” Clarke says earnestly, tears pricking her eyes as an invisible weight lifted from her shoulders.

Lexa’s eyes stung with her own salt water at Clarke’s confession, and her ears struggled to accept and comprehend what was being spoken to her. It truly felt like a dream. “Is this real?” Lexa asks the universe aloud, her voice shaking.

Clarke chuckles wetly. “Yes Lexa, this is very real.” Clarke reassures, her thumb running soothing circles against the nape of Lexa’s neck.

“Are you sure you want this… Me?” Lexa asks again, her insecurities making her feel foolish and
weak, but demanding she reassure herself. “Because I know that not long ago, you couldn’t seem to stand the sight of me. I just need to know you won’t change your mind tomorrow… I don’t think my heart could bear that.” Lexa confessed with a shudder.

“Lexa, the true reason I felt so angry with you, was because I thought you didn’t care for me when you left me on the mountain. I felt like you didn’t want me. That my death wouldn’t matter to you. That rejection, was unimaginable.” Clarke sniffs, and meets Lexa’s uncertain eyes with her own intense blue ones. “But if this time with you has taught me anything, it’s that leaving me on the mountain that day, broke your heart as much as it did mine. And I am tired of hurting Lexa. I am tired of living in the past, and existing in a world where there is only pain and death and suffering. I want to have more than that. I want to be the girl that said, life is about more than just surviving. I want to live and experience joy. And I know that there is a lot in our past that is ugly and uncomfortable, but when I think of my future, I can’t imagine it without Grace and I can’t imagine it without you. You make me better Lexa. I was away for a year and a half, and nothing could absolve me from the anger and guilt and bitterness I felt. Not even Grace could soothe the pain in my heart. But in the short time I have been back, I have healed more than I ever could have alone. And that is because of you. You have a goodness in you Lexa that makes me whole, you are a light in a dark night, and I want you.” Clarke has tears running down her face, and her voice shakes.

Lexa doesn’t answer, she knows words would fail her. So she surges forward and kisses Clarke again. She pours all of her heart and soul into the kiss. She expresses her fears, her doubts and anxiety. She tells Clarke about her joy and her sadness, her excitement and her dreads. She tells Clarke about the light in her life that has sunshine in the golden locks of her hair, and priceless sapphires for eyes. She tells Clarke all the sweet nothings that she doesn’t know how to articulate yet. And most importantly, she tells Clarke of the love she feels for her but is too scared to admit out loud. The kiss is sweet and full and transcendent, and Lexa never wants it to end.

Clarke feels so much, and yet she knows the emotions are not her own. She cradles Lexa’s heart in her hands, and she knows that it is scarred and broken, and knows that Lexa is trusting Clarke not to squeeze the muscle in her palms and turn it to ashes. Clarke feels the weight of that responsibility, but also the impossible protectiveness surge in her own heart. She knows that she will never willingly hurt Lexa again, but she just prays that Lexa holds her heart in the same reverently defending manner. Clarke knows that she would be lost to the dark water forever if Lexa were to hurt her again. There would be no rescue, no escape, only emptiness. Clarke feels foolishly brave, but she gives Lexa the keys to her heart anyway. It feels reckless and unwise, and childish, but it also feels right in a way that she has never felt with another soul.

“I still have so many questions.” Lexa says lowly, almost as a warning.

And Clarke nods her head resolutely. “I know, and I am ready to answer all of them. But first I need to tell you something.” Clarke says with bright beam, her grin proud and golden like a lioness. Clarke puts a small amount of space between she and Lexa in an attempt to separate their blossoming personal relationship from their roles as Heda and Wanheda. Lexa recognises the slight change in Clarke’s posture and knows that she is slipping into a headspace more suited for leadership than heated kisses, so Lexa follows suit. Straightening her spine and clasping her hands behind her back regally. Unconsciously exuding power.

“Greya talked. She gave me lots of useful information about Azgeda and Nia. But she mentioned something else. Something that is important to our cause specifically.” Clarke says with an edge of steel in her tone. Her anger over the situation only growing as she pondered it. With each second she was more certain that the traitor was Titus, but she wanted to know Lexa’s thoughts on the matter.

“What is it Clarke?” Lexa asks hesitantly. Her worry growing the longer Clarke says nothing. An
anger in her beautiful blue eyes that Lexa did not quite understand.

“Greya said that there was a traitor among your people. Someone who is in league with Nia.” Clarke says with an ounce of venom in her tone.

Lexa’s mind instantly supplies the image of a bald head, scalp covered in tattoos and the disapproving hazel eyes of Titus, and somehow, she knew that it was him. Titus had always expressed his belief that she was allowing herself to be seen as weak, and he could never accept that Lexa, while often forced to rule with her head, longed to make decisions with her heart. And Titus loathed that soft sentimentality, saw it as weakness. Everything somehow made sense now, Titus’ motives behind suggesting she kill Clarke or kidnap Grace. It was partly because he hated the way she felt about Clarke, but mostly because he saw her as weak. He believed she was unworthy of her nightblood, that she was a disgrace as Heda. His job was to protect the legacy of Heda, not the person fulfilling the role. And he believed that Lexa had sullied that legacy by caring for Clarke. He didn’t hate Clarke, so much as he hated Lexa. He didn’t want Clarke gone, or Grace gone, although that would be seen as a positive, he wanted Lexa gone so that the legacy of Heda conformed to what he believed was strength.

“It’s Titus.” Lexa whispered brokenly, her face pale and nausea burning her oesophagus. Lexa felt Clarke’s warm hand in hers and knew that despite the startling realisation, everything would be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Da-Da-DAAA!

Surprise guys! It happened! What you have all been waiting for, the kiss, the romance, the Clexa relationship has started – officially.

I didn’t actually plan for this chapter to go where it did, but it happened anyway. Personally I am really happy with how it turned out, but I defer the final judgement to you, my lovely readers!

I know I said that I would post on Wednesday or Thursday, but as soon as I finished this chapter I had a rather pressing case of – as we Aussie’s call it – ants in the pants. So I was super excited and nervous and impatient to get this to you all, and I suck at self-control haha!

As always, I really want to hear your thoughts on my chapter guys. And with this one especially. This entire story has been building to this moment, and I really want to know if I have done it right (first fic = glutton for reassurance, haha!). So, please tell me your thoughts, feelings, whatever, just please comment. Feedback is the light in my life, so don’t be shy, and I will try to respond to everyone. Promise!!

Also, please provide your thoughts on this possible relationship pairing… Ontari and Jasper. I know Jasper is a bit of a sour grape in my story atm, but I plan to bring him back and sober him up, turn him into a decent human being again. So please, if you have an opinion, share your thoughts on the matter??

- LOVE LOZ! xx
Clarke left Lexa’s tent floating on a silver-lined cloud of bliss. Encased in a content bubble where only she and the brunette existed, and nothing could bring her down from her Lexa-induced high.

That was the best way to describe how she was feeling. High. Lexa was like a drug, and Clarke felt affronted by her own ignorance to have not realised this sooner. Lexa was sweet and considerate and kind, but she was also strong and ruthless and stoic when the circumstance required her to be. And Clarke found her heart speeding up slightly at the mere thought of the other girl.

Clarke wondered if perhaps she was getting ahead of herself. If she was allowing her heart to become too invested too quickly, and only setting herself up for inevitable hurt and failure. But Clarke hastily pushed the singular, dark thought aside. Unable to bring herself to regret her moment of brave spontaneity that ended with a searing kiss and rising passion. In this moment, Clarke was proud of her effort to follow her heart instead of her head. She knew that in order to reap the rewards, she would need to take a risk. It just so happened that kissing Lexa was both the risk and the reward rolled into one delicious package.

Clarke was unable to bite back the smile that tugged insistently at her lips, as the thought danced across her conscious mind. And she couldn’t bring herself to care, as villagers stared perplexed at the strange smile that painted every inch of Wanheda’s face. Clarke assumed it must have been a comic sight, if the protruding eyeballs and agape mouths were any indication to go by.

Clarke’s gait, was more akin to a delighted prance than anything else, as she weaved through the streets of Alton, searching for Ontari and the auburn curled head of her daughter. Clarke spotted them in the distance, sprawled out on a large rug under a shady tree. Ontari seated next to Grace as the infant chewed on toys and played happily. The Azgeda girl sharpening a frighteningly large pile of her weapons and talking to the young child, whilst keeping an ever-watchful eye of the baby’s safety. Her almond orbs scanning the area for threats, and glaring at any who stared too long at the little bundle under her care.

As she neared, Clarke caught the tail-end of Ontari’s monologue with Grace. Innocent blue eyes watching fascinated as Ontari’s mouth moved and sounds came out, a line of dribble rolling down her chin as she concentrated.

“… think that you will make a fine warrior one day. You are obviously quite smart. You watch everything around you and are quite good at being silent. That is a very important trait to have as a warrior. But perhaps you would enjoy the life of a healer better? They are soft natured and kind, and they must have big minds to remember which herbs are healing and which are poisonous. Which spices will reduce pain, and induce it. Your nomon and olmonom are very smart, perhaps you have inherited their talent for leadership. What do you think Grace?” Ontari asked of the infant, knowing full well that she would receive no response. But somehow finding the action of talking to the child soothing, knowing that Grace would not judge her for what she spoke of, and that the child’s eyes would never glimmer with boredom or impatience as she talked. She did not notice Clarke’s approach.

“Personally, I hope she leans more towards the path of a healer.” Clarke comments with a broad smile. Her eyes bright and dancing with mirth, and her entire countenance singing with her happiness.
Ontari quickly shook off her surprise at being overheard and interrupted, and quickly relaxed once she realised the newcomer was only Clarke. “Oh yes? Why not a leader or a warrior?” Ontari asks playfully. Her eyebrow quiring.

“Well leaders are always stressed, and warriors are always bleeding.” Clarke retorts with a wry grin, her eyes alight with mischief.

Ontari guffaws and sets aside the sword she had been sharpening. “Then you my friend, should not have decided to be all three. Now you are stressed, bleeding and are covered in all manner of disgusting bodily secretions.” Ontari jokes.

Clarke snorts as laughter makes her belly tender. “I guess in some ways you are right.” Clarke laments with a small shrug and a final chuckle, before seating herself down next to Ontari and Grace.

Ontari studies her friend for a moment. “You seem in good spirits.” She observes with an edge of curiosity. Her chocolate irises gleaming with questions.

“I am.” Clarke replies offhandedly, as she threads her fingers through Grace’s hair softly. “Was she well behaved?” Clarke asks, cutting off any further inquiry into her sudden glowing contentedness.

Ontari allows the subject change to go unchallenged, and answers her friend’s question. “Yes, Grace was very good.” She says with a small smile. The child had been utterly placid and well-mannered all afternoon. Content to be laid out in the shade, on soft furs, and allowed the freedom to manoeuvre herself however she pleased. “Funnily enough, I encountered more problems with your mother than with Grace.” Ontari comments quickly, a small uncertain smile lifting the corners of her mouth, as she brought up the subject.

“What do you mean?” Clarke asks quickly, catching a glimpse of something dark in Ontari’s eyes before being softened forcibly by the girl’s willpower to appear unaffected.

“Abby was deeply offended that I had been given Grace to care for while you were indisposed. She tried to take the babe away when I explained that you needed someone to care for Grace while you interrogated Greya. She thought that you would be happier with her as a better substitute guardian than me.” Ontari says rapidly. Picking up her whetstone and dragging it along the gleaming metal of an already-razor-sharp dagger distractedly. Unwilling to meet Clarke’s eyes in case she was displeased with how Ontari had handled the situation.

“What did you do?” Clarke asks curiously. Interested to know how Ontari had deterred her mother, a woman with a stubborn streak almost as bad as Clarke’s.

Ontari looks sheepish for a brief instant. “I told her that even if you would have been happier with her caring for Grace, that I had been left in charge of the child’s safety and wellbeing. That you would be angry if when you returned from the dungeon’s you found me, absent your child. I knew you would have panicked, especially given the recent drama with Titus. So I told her that if she wanted to take Grace, that she needed to have your permission, but that you were busy interrogating a prisoner right at that moment.” Ontari felt so insecure with her decision to deny Abby what she wanted. She knew that Clarke would be very angry if she could not find Grace, had she relinquished the child to Abby. But she also did not want to be the cause of any strain between Clarke and her mother. She knew that not everyone had the same kind of destructive relationship with their parent as she did, and did not want to be the reason Clarke and Abby fought. Ontari was so lost in her own uncertainty, that she nearly jumped when Clarke placed a grateful hand on Ontari’s arm.

“Thank you for doing that. You’re right, I would have freaked out if I found you and not Grace. I would have assumed the worst, like Titus had taken her, or she had been hurt. Or something of the
like. And besides, I left Grace with you because I trusted you to protect her when I was not there to do so. I knew that you would care for her well, and you have. If I wanted my mum to look after Grace, I would have entrusted her with the task.” Clarke reassures gently, giving Ontari’s forearm a gentle grounding squeeze before dropping her hand into her own lap.

Ontari’s uncertainty evaporated, and a confident smile assumed its position on her face. Feeling accepted and appreciated, Ontari allowed her insecurities to recede back into the depths of her psyche. “So you and Abby… You do not get along?” Ontari asks gently.

Clarke’s smile dims a little, but remains stubbornly glued to her lips. “My mother and I, have a few differences of opinion on a number of important matters. I love her very much, but we tend to bring out the worst in each other.” Clarke answers very diplomatically, aware of the fact that Ontari’s mother was even worse than her own. There was no comparison really. Nia was a monster, whereas Abby was misguided. Clarke didn’t want to appear insensitive and ungrateful of the fact that the universe saw it fit to give her a mother who was not a raving lunatic with psychopathic tendencies, whereas Ontari had been cursed with exactly that.

“You don’t need to worry about offending me you know. I know many people feel uncomfortable when they know about my mother.” Ontari says with a small self-deprecating chuckle. Her usually inquisitive eyes resigned to her fate, and a little deadened to the world around her as she mentioned her mother. A familiar emptiness creeping up her spine as she pictured her mother’s eyes. The same hue and temperature as chrome in snow, like the dead, unseeing and soulless orbs of a corpse. Ontari thanked whatever deity that be, for the warm brown eyes she inherited from her late father, Johan. Another person she was certain her mother had ordered killed. The official story was that he had been killed by a great pauna whilst on a hunt, but Ontari did not believe the tale. Especially since it had been relayed to her by the mouth belonging to her mother. Ontari physically shook herself to dislodge the ugly thoughts swirling and picking up speed in her mind like an angry tornado.

Clarke waited until the daze cleared from Ontari’s eyes, before answering her. “I don’t feel uncomfortable now that I know about your mother Ontari. Never think that I am judging you because of Nia’s actions, you are my friend. But I do know that it must be difficult to hear about someone else’s trivial issues with their mother, when your own has been so cruel to you. I just don’t want to appear insensitive. I don’t want to upset you.” Clarke explained. Ontari’s eyes welled with tears and Clarke felt her stomach drop. “Crap, did I say something wrong? I am sor…”

Ontari interrupted Clarke with a soft smile. “No, you said something right. The only other person who has been able to look at me and see me, is Lexa. I am just not used to people showing me kindness.” Ontari confesses softly.

Clarke’s smile broadened as Lexa was mentioned, and her belly filled with butterflies. “Well we should fix that.” Clarke says with a small conspiratorial smirk.

Ontari flounders for a moment, still not understanding.

“My wound is healing very well, and I am no longer in pain with it, so I was thinking of going back out tonight on patrol with my group. And if you still want to join, I know I would be very happy to have you along.” Clarke explains patiently.

“Of course I am coming. You got injured last time. I will be there to guard your back.” Ontari states as though it was completely obvious. Her tone a little indignant that Clarke might assume she was so fickle as to change her mind since the first time she had promised to accompany them. After all, Clarke was too selfless to protect herself as well as her friends, if they were to encounter Azgeda once more. Someone needed to protect her while she protected everyone around her.
Clarke chuckled at Ontari’s reaction, and subsequent misunderstanding of Skaikru turns of phrase. Deciding she would try to educate the girl at some point in the future. “Okay. Well, I will see you tonight then.” Clarke says amicably. Standing and picking up a pliant Grace as she did. “Thankyou again for watching her. And for standing up to my mother. I appreciate it.” Clarke said as she curled her arm under Grace’s bottom and around her chest, pressing the child’s back into Clarke’s front.

Ontari’s brief annoyance quickly dissipated and her expression softened drastically. “You are most welcome.” Ontari smiles, wide and genuine.

Clarke moves to walk away, but is stopped by the subtle clearing of Ontari’s throat. The blonde turns around to meet the almond eyed girl once more, and observes Ontari’s outstretched palm clutching four small blades. Clarke’s eyebrows lift curiously.

“Take them.” Ontari says plainly, her arm reaching further towards Clarke.

Clarke steps closer, shifts, Grace so the child is resting on her hip, and takes the four offered daggers into her hand, gripping them by the soft leather handles. Her sapphire eyes inspecting the gleaming metal, and her hands becoming acquainted with their weight despite her blossoming confusion.

"Why?” Clarke asks dully.

Ontari smirks. “Because I heard that you have the suicidal tendency to throw your weapons in a fight. Which by the way, is extremely stupid. It leaves you defenceless and vulnerable…”

Clarke wonders who told the Azgeda princess about that, but pushes her intrigue to the side. “Ontari.” Clarke interrupts, before Ontari could lapse into a small tangent, and chuckles as Ontari casts an humoured grimace in Clarke’s direction.

“Right. Anyway. I wanted you to have extra protection if we are going out on patrol tonight. Plus, the fancy armour that Lexa had designed and made for you, has dagger sheaths sewn into the thick leather. Good for concealing weapons.” Ontari explains patiently, her irritation fading.

Clarke’s eyes widened as she remembers the beautiful armour that had mysteriously appeared in her shared living space with Raven. The luxurious leathers had been safely stored in the heavy chest in her room since her encounter with the Azlipa-Tozu, and since then, Clarke hadn’t spared the garments a second thought. Guilt nagged at Clarke’s diaphragm, as she realises she has yet to thank Lexa for her generosity. “You knew Lexa left that armour in my hut?” Clarke asks incredulously, her heart already knowing the answer, but her head demanding she ask the question anyway.

Ontari scoffs knowingly, and she raises a single eyebrow as Clarke maintains her ruse of obliviousness. “Of course I knew. Who do you think put the armour in your room? Lexa wanted to do it, but I reminded her that if you caught her in there, you would likely skin her living. That, and the fact that there are many curious eyes within this camp, meant that the commander could not be seen entering the sleeping space of Wanheda without rumours spreading like weeds.” Ontari finishes with a small chuckle.

Clarke stopped listening when Ontari mentioned skinning Lexa alive. Her mind fogging over and her heart speeding with remorse and an intense desire to rectify the common belief that Clarke hated Lexa. She knew it was far from the truth, and Lexa knew that too. But no one else would know how drastically things had changed between them. No one else knew that Clarke and Lexa were mending fences, and sharing heated kisses in the privacy of Lexa’s tent. “I don’t hate her.” Clarke blurs. A tinge of red colouring her cheeks and the bridge of her nose, as Ontari levels an interested smirk full of innuendo and potentially inappropriate questions, onto Clarke’s form.

“Oh?” She asks with exaggerated innocence.
Clarke resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “I just mean that Lexa and I are… Friends, I guess you could call it.” Clarke justifies with a small nod, mainly intended for herself.

“I might be new to the whole concept of friendship, but I can guarantee you, that ‘friends,’ don’t look at each other the way you two do.” Ontari teases playfully. Her eyes dancing with mischief as Clarke’s pink blush darkens.

Clarke chokes on any words that might have come out of her mouth to deny the implication, unable to give voice to the repudiation. Unwanting to lie about something she was obviously so happy about. Clarke might want to ensure people knew that she did not hate Lexa, but she was unsure if she was ready to admit to anyone but herself and Lexa, that there was more between them. That there was kissing, and feelings and a tether that tied their hearts together so that they beat in tandem. Clarke wasn’t ready for that kind of public announcement. So instead, she stuttered out some kind of response that vaguely sounded like a goodbye to Ontari, and quickly escaped the knowing gaze of her friend. Deftly ignoring the chuckle that escaped Ontari’s lips as Clarke effectively ran away.

Clarke was excited about the new dynamic between she and Lexa. It made her heartbeat quicken and her breaths to become shallow and fast, and it sent a delicious heat to all the right places. But at the same time, Clarke would be naïve to deny that she was nervous, and scared. There was so much that could go wrong, and so much to go right, and she wasn’t sure which made her more anxious.

She was so unaccustomed to a connection like what she shared with Lexa. She didn’t know what to do with the feelings that bubbled in her chest, and refused to be overlooked. She had lived in a constant state of anger and bitterness for so long, that their sudden absence was startling. It felt good to be free of their oppressive weight, but Clarke also felt exposed and vulnerable without those harsh emotions to hide behind.

Clarke breathes in a deep lungful of fresh air and tries to dislodge the thoughts kicking up uncertain dust in the recesses of her mind. But as Clarke walks in the direction of Raven’s makeshift radio tent, her mind continues to drift back to Lexa, and the conversation they had shared after Lexa had expressed her suspicions about the traitor being Titus.

Lexa and Clarke had talked in depth about the information Greya had yielded from Clarke’s interrogation efforts. Clarke recounting every new and potentially integral piece of intelligence she now knew.

Lexa had seemed proud. Her green eyes sparkling with strength and warmth, and it was all for Clarke. Clarke had felt something hard and unbending soften and turn to a soft paste under the warmth of Lexa’s eyes alone. But she was not so caught up in the moment to allow the shadow that passed over Lexa’s face and lingered behind her eyes, to go unnoticed. Clarke was not naïve, and the darkness made its presence known when her promise to save Greya’s siblings was mentioned.

Without the topic being addressed openly, Clarke knew that Lexa was worried that Clarke was leaving herself too vulnerable. That making a promise so large and potentially unobtainable, had the power to turn Clarke’s newly emerged confidence to dust. That if, god forbid, she failed to save those children, and the hundreds of other innocents from the clutches of Nia, that the pain and guilt of that failure would break Clarke. The weight of that burden would snap her spine in half, rendering her permanently broken and inert.

Clarke also wondered why Lexa had avoided bringing up the situation with Eden. After all, she was out of line. She had treated the woman poorly, and exacted frustrations that had nothing to do with Eden, onto her person. Clarke had been cruel, devoid of empathy, and part of her wished that she could have the opportunity to go back and undo her actions. She felt guilty, and dirty in a way that someone without a conscience wouldn’t understand. Clarke had been wrong to treat the woman the
way she had, and as much as Clarke loathed to admit it, she would rather own her mistake and atone for it. Rather than be too proud to acknowledge that she was wrong and become a vile by-product of this world’s cruelty.

She wanted this reality to be better than what it was, and the only way for that goal to be an achievable standard, was if Clarke set an example for generations to come. Because although Lexa might have been right when she said our choices will help mould the future, so that innocents like Grace could have the power to decide what kind of life they lead. She was wrong when she said that Clarke would never see that change. She was wrong when she said that Clarke and others like her, would need to do horrible things in order for an evil to vanquished, and for that bright future to become a possibility.

And Clarke knew that that bright future started with her actions. She needed to find some way to make amends with Eden. Because while it may have only been a moment. Clarke lost her temper, and as a leader and someone that the people look to for hope and inspiration and strength, she was held to an impossibly high standard. Where she was not allowed to be seen as anything less than perfect. She could not be seen as human or weak, because leaders were meant to be infallible. Unbreakable, and Clarke had already failed at that once.

And then without further contemplation, it all clicked. Clarke now understood why Lexa had decided not to verbally address either of these concerns while they were together. Part of the reason she might have avoided it, was because Lexa wanted to preserve the little bubble of happiness they found themselves existing within, by not talking to Clarke about harsh realities and unwanted truths. Unwilling to take the evenings emphasis away from the fact that the two of them had shared a series of kisses that stole breath and melted hearts. But the main, primary reason Lexa remained silent, was because she somehow knew that Clarke needed to figure this out on her own. Giving Clarke the independence and freedom to come to the same conclusions Lexa had, in her own time. Clarke needed to see for herself that making a promise with an unknowable outcome was a risk. And that she gambled between being rewarded for her risk with either an immense sense of fulfillment or a burden too heavy to bear, depending on if her promise was successfully upheld, or if she failed to do so. And Lexa knew that Clarke also needed time and space to comprehend that her reaction to Eden in the dungeons was irrationally severe. She needed to identify the true cause of her anger and deal with it accordingly, instead of misdirecting it to anyone who angered her. She needed to understand that she couldn’t allow herself to be seen in an uncontrolled fit of rage. The people who followed her needed her to be more.

Clarke had needed the independence to come to these realisations in her own time, and Lexa had not only acknowledged that need, but she had designed and manifested the correct circumstances for those realisations to be made.

Clarke was baffled by the fact that even in a moment where Lexa could have just as easily pointed out Clarke’s flaws and potential failings, and scolded her like a petulant child, she had refrained in order to maintain the mutual equilibrium in their relationship. The equal footing, they shared with everything in their relationship. Everything from taking responsibility for the fall of the mountain, to kissing. One was not dominant and one was not submissive. They were equals. True partners even when there was animosity between them.

They were equals in everything but power. In this case alone, Clarke possessed more than Lexa, and the scales were unbalanced. And with every passing instance, it was becoming increasingly plain to see that all that cherished equality shared between them, would all be for nought if Lexa’s people turned away from her. Abruptly the thought of bonding with Lexa, even if for politics initially, was becoming an increasingly attractive option. It would solve the mess with Titus, at least partially, it would also redistribute power equally between them, and it would return the people’s favour to
Lexa’s leadership. But there was only one issue standing in Clarke’s way.

By offering this piece of herself to Lexa, they would both be trapped. Bound to each other until death, assuming Lexa accepted the proposal. While she and Lexa had begun a romantic relationship, there was no guarantee that it would last in the long run. Divorce was not a concept that the clans recognised, it was viewed by the majority as an archaic notion put in place by their ancestors, who selfishly only wished to have multiple mates in a lifetime. If Clarke did this, she might be giving up hers and Lexa’s opportunity to marry for love. Grace would be viewed as not just Clarke’s child, but Lexa’s too.

There were so many ways in which this union could fall apart and combust in the long-term. Clarke wasn’t quite sure how she should be feeling about Ontari’s suggestion. And just as she knew it would, the thought kept bouncing around her cranium, now that it had been unhelpfully proposed. Clarke had not even had the chance to talk to Lexa about the possible benefits of bonding yet, and already her mind was rattling as the broken pieces of one idea clunked against the protective bone of her skull.

Clarke sighed deeply, adjusted Grace’s weight on her hip, and kept walking.

Hello lovelies!!

I know it has been a little while since I posted, and for that I am sorry, but I have been struggling with some highly irritating writer's block, and my uni studies just started again last week. So I have been busy with school, and my brain has been struggling to find the right direction to take my story. But, never fear, as the writer's block has been cured, at least temporarily, and I am back!

Since uni has just started again, I don't know how regular my posts will be, but I will strive for at least one every week. Depending on how stressed out I am, it might be more or less, but I will try to keep a regular schedule.

In my last post's A/N, I mentioned a potential pairing between Ontari and Jasper. I just wanted to let anyone who hasn't read the feedback in the comments, that this momentary break in my sanity has been rectified, and is no longer something I am considering, haha! Thanks to everyone who weighed in on the suggestion, it was actually really great to have such an interactive discussion with you all regarding it! :D

Right now, I am writing chapters 46 and 47, and I am having sooo much fun! Let that be the spoiler for what is to come hehe!!

As always, I hope you guys enjoy the chapter, and please leave me some feedback - you all know how much I love hearing from you all!

Love Loz! :D
Clarke stopped dead in her tracks as the sound of a pleasured moan scraped along her ears like nails down a chalkboard. Not because the sound was grating, but because she recognised the voices, and knew to whom they belonged.

She stood outside Raven’s tent and questioned how the young mechanic and Tanga had managed to keep their relationship a secret up until this point. Or perhaps they hadn’t and everyone was simply being overtly polite about the fact that they knew and they were all trying to respect her privacy. After all, Raven did admit that she wasn’t ready to openly admit the relationship to the world.

Clarke immediately dismissed that logic as she recalled how obnoxious Raven had been that first night Clarke had returned to Arcadia, and she and the remaining delinquents - those who didn’t hate Clarke at the time - had sat around the fire playing never have I ever. Raven had been nosy and loud, and there was no way that her friends wouldn’t pounce on the opportunity to tease her for her own trip to pound town with a grounder.

Clarke had originally come to see Raven, because she was hoping that the slightly older brunette, might have some beyond-her-years wisdom to share regarding everything that had transpired concerning Lexa. Bonding. The kiss. The list went on.

Clarke just wanted someone to talk to, who was hers. Someone who didn’t have any loyalty to Lexa, who she could be completely honest with, without fear of judgement or reproach. Clarke valued Ontari, she truly did, but she knew that Ontari was Lexa’s friend first. Plus it was partly the Azgeda girls fault for Clarke’s writhing indecision. After all, it was her that had suggested bonding to solve their current crisis. And Clarke knew that Raven, despite her eccentric tendencies, was one of the smartest people she knew, and she trusted the mechanic’s insights implicitly.

Another loud moan grated on Clarke’s nerves, and she found herself grimacing and quickly removing herself from earshot, deciding to let the pair have their private moment to themselves. She loved Raven and Tanga, truly she did. But she didn’t love them enough to listen to them go at it like proverbial bunnies. So, Clarke left to go find Bellamy and Lincoln instead, deciding to seek Raven out again when she wasn’t so… preoccupied. Clarke needed to speak to the boys about their raiding party going out again tonight anyhow. Now that Clarke was mostly healed, she was eager to return to her original routine.

Well perhaps healed was an over-statement. The wound no longer bled, and didn’t hurt nearly as bad as other past injuries had. In Clarke’s opinion, it was as healed as was required at this point in time. Healed enough at least to be a helpful asset to the war effort.

Clarke found Lincoln and Bellamy sitting around a cookfire, with Octavia, Monty and Harper. The latter leaning over a pot of something that might have been food at one point, but was charred well to the point of inedible, and currently smelt like something Grace might deposit in her diaper. Clarke wrinkled her nose subtly in revulsion, but schooled her features when Harper offered her a friendly smile and greeting.

“Clarke! I was just making some dinner for everyone. Back in Arcadia, Heidi had begun teaching me some recipes but I hadn’t had any reason to use them until now. There’s plenty here if you want some.” Harper enthused sweetly, a brilliant grin spread across her face and crinkling around her eyes.
Clarke quickly cast a glance in the direction of her other friends, and observed the pained expressions they wore on their faces as Harper filled their bowls with the ghastly smelling concoction. “I actually just ate, so I am not very hungry.” Clarke tells the little white lie flawlessly, and four sets of eyes glare at her good fortune for narrowly avoiding food poisoning. Clarke suppresses the smug chuckle, that tickles the back of her throat.

“I haven’t seen you all day Clarke, where have you been?” Octavia asks in lieu of a greeting, and eager to distract her mind from the disgusting substance currently staring at her from the bowl in her hands.

“I’ve been around.” Clarke says quickly, dodging the question as she contemplates how incredibly busy she had been today. She had had a very productive day indeed. First she sparred with Lexa, and then she had her less than pleasant encounter with Eden, patched up Greya, and finally extracted the information she needed from the Azgeda girl. She had learned of Titus’s interest in Grace, and Ontari suggested bonding with Lexa to dissuade Titus’ interest. Then she had spent some time with Grace, kissed Lexa, and had a brief discussion with Ontari, before having her ears assaulted with the sounds of her close friends loudly exploring the benefits of their new relationship, before coming here. It had been a productive day to say the least. A mentally exhausting day. Clarke visibly shook her head and tried to lift the fog that had engulfed her brain as she silently reminisced. Refocusing on the unimpressed expression she was receiving from Octavia, after blatantly evading the question, she redirected the feisty girl’s attention back onto herself. “I heard you and Lincoln spent the afternoon in the mountains.” Clarke says with a small conspiratory smile.

Octavia blushed, and she quickly met Lincoln’s eyes with an expression of longing. “Yeah, we… Went for a walk.” Octavia sputters helplessly as an explanation, as Bellamy levels an affronted glare on Lincoln for the underlying admission that he had defiled his baby sister. Charcoal eyes boring into earthy brown, testosterone infusing the air. Not naïve enough to believe even for an instant, that walking was the only activity they had taken part in.

Despite the fact that Bellamy’s hacksles rose every time his sister’s sex life was hinted towards, he viewed Lincoln as his brother. And he respected the man for treating his sister so well.

“Anyway.” Clarke backtracks, feeling a little guilty for being the unintentional catalyst for the sudden tension. “I was thinking that we could head back out onto patrol tonight. My wound has closed, and it doesn’t hurt. So I figured we could get back to our schedule.” Clarke chirps happily. Truth be told, she was eager to do something physical. The entire day – except for thirty minutes of complete bliss when she sparred with Lexa early this morning – she had exhausted all of her mental and emotional energy, only her body was wired up for some activity. Her tired brain was at odds with her hyperactive muscles. And going on patrol, even if nothing exciting happened, sounded like the perfect way to expel some of that excess vigour.

Lincoln’s eyebrows raised, and he cast a dubious glance to the ribs where Clarke’s injury lay. Even though the wound was covered by clothing, it felt like his scrutinising gaze was inspecting the edges of the injury. Cataloguing the slightly reddened edges, and the angry red line where skin was slowly meshing itself together. Lincoln’s disapproving eyebrow arch, confirming that he didn’t believe Clarke’s claim for a moment. Limited medical knowledge surfacing to the forefront of his mind, telling him that there was no way that Clarke had healed already. His face screamed dissatisfaction at Clarke’s overzealous nature, but he wisely chose to remain mute. A skill no doubt honed by his years cohabitating with Octavia.

Bellamy’s eyes lit up with excitement. He had been extremely bored, and feeling useless since Clarke had been injured. To keep himself occupied, he had actually taken to helping the village blacksmith Jorja and her husband Abel, with some of the menial tasks around their forge. He found
that the profession intrigued him, and admired the skill that it took to craft something from the
mangled mess of steel that lay littered around the workshop into something deadly and beautiful like
a sword. But while he enjoyed helping the couple, and he knew that deep down his interest was
appreciated by both Abel and Jorja, he was also aware that his aid was sometimes a hindrance.
Having been told that he was oft times underfoot, like an uncertain child according to the older
woman. So he was excited by the prospect of going back out on patrol, to be doing something he
was knowledgeable in, to be useful and make a difference.

Lincoln and Bellamy shared a quick glance, silently assessing the other’s willingness to commit to
Clarke’s suggested plan for the night, and both nodded their acceptance.

After that, Clarke settled down with her friends and simply enjoyed being in their proximity.
Listening to the friendly banter, and contributing a joking jibe every now and then.

As dusk settled over the village, Octavia brought up the topic of childcare, while Clarke was on
patrol. Deciding that she wanted to try her hand at babysitting Grace for the night while Clarke was
out combing the forest for enemies. Voluntarily offering her first night of freedom since arriving, to
care for Clarke’s daughter. Octavia was nervous about the prospect, but determined, and decided that
she would simply sleep in Clarke’s bed, and wake Raven if she had any issues with the infant.
Octavia was eager for a chance to determine whether or not she truly had what it took to care for a
child independently. She knew Clarke was still awaiting an answer in response to her request to
name she and Lincoln, Grace’s god-parents. But she was still so unsure. Octavia knew that it was not
a task she could take lightly. If, god forbid, Clarke was to die tomorrow, it would be Octavia’s
responsibility to help raise Grace. And that was a responsibility she wasn’t sure she was prepared for.
She was honoured by the display of trust, but ultimately, she still had not come to a decision. So in
order to know her mind a little better, Octavia decided that spending more time with Grace would be
a good way to figure out if this was something she wanted for herself.

Everyone agreed that it was a solid plan, and Clarke observed the expression of mingled pride and
affection gleaming in Lincoln’s eyes as Octavia stepped up into a position of maternal responsibility,
even if only temporarily.

Octavia’s initiative filled him with hope and warmth for the future and children he and Octavia might
one day have together. He knew that she was not ready to have children yet, but nevertheless, it
warmed his heart to see her making an effort to overcome her insecurities.

Clarke tried not to speculate over whether or not Octavia and Lincoln had come to a conclusion
regarding being Grace’s godparents. They hadn’t said anything about the proposal since it was first
suggested days ago. But Clarke chose to take Octavia’s offering of her services tonight to care for
Grace, as a positive sign.

Shortly thereafter, Clarke, Bellamy and Lincoln retired for a few hours of sleep, before their patrol
started. Clarke took the opportunity to grab some dinner that wasn’t charred. Grateful that Harper
remained oblivious.

Clarke lay in the soft furs, her breast free from her shirt, as Grace lazily suckled. Her baby blue eyes
becoming unfocused, and eyelids heavy. Grace’s breathing slowing as she began to drift to sleep.
Clarke soon followed, and was lulled to unconsciousness by the gentle, even inhalations of her
daughter.

Clarke was awoken at midnight by Octavia’s soft knocking on her door. Raven must have snuck in
sometime after Clarke, and was asleep in her cot. The brunette groaned and shifted as the knocking
persisted. Clarke pulled herself out of the warm furs, careful to manoeuvre around Grace gently to
avoid disturbing her sleep, and quickly tiptoed to the door.
Octavia didn’t bother with pleasantries, just wearily dragged herself into Clarke’s hut, and began unlacing her boots and taking off her coat. Dumping all of her belongings, weapons included, in a haphazard pile that Raven would surely trip on in the morning. Obviously, Octavia had been woken by Lincoln as he prepared for their patrol, and she had sleepily trudged her way here so that she could continue slumbering. The girl looked completely exhausted, and Clarke hoped that Grace slept the whole night through for O’s sake.

There truly was nothing worse than being sleep deprived because of a restless baby.

Clarke began dressing for patrol, and slipped into the beautiful armour that Lexa had gifted her with. Clarke substituted the navy tunic with a plain black one, as the original undergarment had been destroyed when she had been injured. Naomi had been forced to cut the clothing from her body in order to treat her wound.

Clarke donned the ebony hood and the thick black leather chest guard, not for the first time marvelling the way Lexa was able to incorporate the beautiful cobalt blue stitching without it drawing any undue attention to Clarke’s figure when stealthily moving around at night. Clarke slipped on the reinforced black, formfitting pants, and the black combat boots. And then pulled on the tipless gloves, armguards and jacket.

Clarke’s deft fingers quickly plaited her long blonde tresses into tight braids against her skull, working the black bolts of cloth into the basic designs in her usual disguise. While her blonde hair would not be as visible tonight due to the subdued brightness of the moon. Clarke did not want to rely solely on the safety her hood would provide. Being one of the most recognisable blondes amidst the thirteen clans, sometimes had its advantages. But when stealth and invisibility was required, the rarity of her light hair was more of a curse.

Clarke tied her dagger to her thigh, and secured her sword to her back, as well as her quiver of arrows. There were only twelve arrows left, and Clarke made a mental note to craft some more when patrol was over. Clark inspected the four short daggers that Ontari had given her, and double checked that the edges were sharp and lethal. When the tip of her index finger came away with a small bubble of blood leaking from the tip she silently congratulated Ontari for doing such a thorough job.

When each blade passed Clarke’s inspection, she found the discreet pockets in her chest guard, designed for the stealthy stashing of weapons. Clarke counted a total of ten possible places to conceal a blade that she had not noticed the first time she wore the armour. Clarke wondered just how heavily armed Lexa expected her to be and chuckled silently at the brunette’s subtle overprotectiveness. Aware that even a week ago, Lexa’s desire to guard Clarke would have offended instead of charmed.

Clarke slipped the four small daggers on either side of her ribs, deciding that they might serve as a layer of protection between her body and the slightly tender flesh of her recent injury. Clarke noticed with great interest, that the torn material from where her enemy’s blade had pierced her ribs, had been repaired with charcoal stitching, and realised that whoever had mended the garment must have purposely strayed from the original cobalt theme, so not to draw attention to the weakened area of protection. The observation brought a smile to Clarke’s lips.

When Clarke turned to ensure Octavia was settled and comfortable, she was greeted with the sight of the brunette gazing longingly at the soft furs, but still stood unmoving beside the cot, not attempting to get any closer to the bed.

Clarke followed the direction of her cautious jade eyes, and noted the way Grace was peacefully sprawled onto the furs, easily taking up half the narrow stretcher. Understanding dawned as Clarke
realised that the brunette was nervous about sleeping next to Grace. Either for fear of hurting her, or waking her, Clarke was unsure. “Just lie down next to her.” Clarke whispered encouragingly.

Octavia’s head snapped up to meet Clarke’s eyes, as if asking permission. “Wont she wake up?” Octavia asks reluctantly, biting her lip with uncertainty.

Clarke couldn’t help but smile at her friends display of concern. Despite knowing that it was borne out of fear and inexperience, Clarke couldn’t help but acknowledge the warmth that flared in her chest to see the evidence of Octavia’s care for her daughter shine brightly in that moment. “No, she’ll be fine.” Clarke reassured gently.

Gingerly, Octavia lowered herself onto the furs and settled in next to Grace. Octavia eyes lit up with pride when Grace did not stir as she made herself comfortable.

In the next instant, that look of pride vanished as Grace wriggled in her sleep. Octavia’s eyes widened with apprehension and she held her breath in her lungs. Her muscles taunt as she froze herself in place. Refusing to make any kind of movement lest she wake the child fully.

However, Octavia needn’t have worried, as Grace’s little arms sought out the warmth of Octavia’s body, and the auburn headed infant snuggled closely into the younger Blake’s side. Burying her rounded face into the soft fabric of Octavia’s tunic. Effectively cuddling into Octavia while she slept.

Clarke was accustomed to the action, as Grace did it with her every night. But seeing Grace so pliant and trusting in the arms of someone that Clarke cared for, filled her with a sense of ease and contentment that was difficult to put into words.

Octavia’s eyes burned with affection for the little bundle tucked securely against her chest, and without her eyes ever leaving Grace’s sleep slackened face, she whispered, “Is she always this cute?” Octavia questions gently.

Clarke grinned. “Yeah she is.” She utters wistfully, her eyes still drinking in the scene before her eagerly. It was undoubtedly, a special moment. One she hoped to always remember.

“How do you ever get out of bed in the morning if she’s always like this?” Octavia asks incredulously, her eyes only now seeking out Clarke’s as she asks the question.

Clarke chuckled quietly. “With great difficulty.” Clarke answers wryly. Her comment earning an amused grin from Octavia. “Although the kicking to the ribs tend to help motivate me.” Clarke adds as an afterthought.

Octavia’s eyes are still filled with amusement, even when her expression shifts to mock-horror. “Well your daughter and I will be having words if that’s how she wakes me up.” Octavia quietly replies with exaggerated seriousness.

Clarke chuckles again. “Good luck getting a response from her.” Clarke teases gently. Octavia smiles around a yawn, and her eyelids begin to droop. “Sleep well O.” Clare says softly. Moments later Clarke knows the brunette has fallen asleep, as her deep even breaths join the symphony of sleeping sounds from Raven and Grace.

Clarke quickly pulls out the small tin jar of black war paint, and spreads the thick oily kohl substance across her face. Copying the same design from the first time she went out on patrol. One thick black line that enveloped her eyes, spread across the bridge of her nose, and then stretched into the blonde wisps of her hairline. And two thinner lines of ebony on either side of the first thick line. One just above her eyebrows and constant. And one below, broken on either side of her nose, framing the
outline of black and the natural typography of her face. Then finally she dragged two fingers coated with the tar down from her lower lip, to her chin. Even without gazing into the mirror, Clarke knew that she cut an imposing figure. Her icy blue eyes, challenging and fearsome, and daring her enemies to look into them and see their own death.

Clarke reminisced the last time she went out and played this role. The last time she went out on patrol and let the world see not Clarke Griffin, but Wanheda. Even though it was only a short time ago, Clarke no longer felt the same levels of apprehension and fear that had overshadowed all other emotion, as she had last time. Clarke felt more at peace with her role here. Her purpose.

Clarke still felt the weight of responsibility that accompanied such a title, as the commander of death, and she likely always would. But she didn’t feel the same self-loathing and disgust for what she was, as she had before. She didn’t feel the need to constantly war with herself in an effort to convince herself and the world that she wasn’t a monster. Clarke knew that there was a monster that lurked in the shadows of her soul, but she also knew that there was also a monster that lurked in any man’s soul. Just because hers was big and hungry for death, did not mean that it was worse or more frightening than anyone else’s. It just meant that she struggled to hide it more. And for some reason, Clarke was okay with this development.

She accepted that Wanheda was part of who she was, a small facet of her identity. But just like her role as a leader, and a healer, and a mother, it did not define who she was a person, it simply contributed to who she was as a whole. Clarke didn’t know where this sudden, and yet strangely welcome self-awareness had come from, but she chose not to question it. Instead she clung to the revelation with iron fists and a desperation that surprised even her.

Clarke felt liberated and weightless for a moment as she allowed the new truth to sink into her bones. When she contemplated the sheer amount of death she was responsible for, she still felt shame and self-loathing, but the emotions weren’t so intense that her body would heave and visibly attempt to escape the knowledge. There was no vomit, no copious sweat, no bone rattling tremor. It was strange to be without such a reaction after living with it for a year and a half.

While she had accepted Wanheda as a part of her identity, she was not fooled by her new acceptance to disregard the fact that she was a murderer. Clarke would not be so naïve as to expect her long standing flirtation with death would simply vanish now that she had accepted that her history, and all the ugliness buried within it would simply stop aching. Or that it would disappear into a void where forgetfulness would become her ally and friend. Clarke knew that her actions would stay with her forever, possibly haunting her existence until the end of her days. But she was also coming to understand that death was a part of this life, and she wasn’t a good or evil person for having taken life in the quest for a brighter future, she was simply human.

She had proven to herself that she was capable of good. Her friends and Grace, and Lexa were proof of that.

But she was also aware that she was capable of evil as well. And it could be seen whenever she took a life, and allowed the darkness within her to come into sharp, deadly focus.

Maybe no person was entirely one thing. Maybe every person was born with a little good and evil. And there was some kind of inner balance between the two. Perhaps Clarke was always destined to be what she was. Of course, there was no evidence to prove such a thing. But much of life was open to interpretation.

And maybe, just maybe. Clarke was okay with that too.

Somewhere in Clarke’s mind, she questioned whether this development and increased self-awareness
had anything to do with a certain commander with olive eyes. But she didn’t let the thought wander any further down that path. Not out of shame or self-preservation, as she might have done in the past. But because Clarke knew, that if she allowed herself to think about Lexa right now, her mind would undoubtedly veer into a recollection of their shared kiss, and then Clarke would have to go out on patrol with an uncontrollable grin on her face.

But by trying not to think about Lexa, she had inadvertently brought attention to the fact that she was attempting not to allow her brain to actively think about her, and then accidentally thought about her anyway.

Clarke sighed, annoyed with her own inability to keep her thoughts focused and on task instead of wandering back to the tent where she and Lexa had shared a soul-searing kiss. The softness of Lexa’s lips, the sweetness of her tongue, the gentle caress of her touch…

Dammit Clarke! Get a hold of yourself, Clarke inwardly scolded herself. Wondering if it was too late to go jump into the cold river in an attempt to cool her rapidly heating body, and cleanse her swiftly devolving mind.

Instead Clarke settled for the brisk air of midnight, as she cast one last longing look towards Grace, whispered her goodbyes, gathered her bow from the foot of the bed, and then promptly left the cosy confines of the hut.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys! I hope everyone has had a great past week!

This chapter is more of a filler than anything else, but I hope you all enjoyed it anyway. The next two or three chapters will be pretty intense, so strap in ladies and gents!!

Thanks for all the great comments to anyone who took the time to leave me with some feedback, it was greatly appreciated. And there were a few suggestions that were made that I really loved, and will be including in my story at some point. So if you guys have any ideas, and feel like sharing them with me, please feel free to do so. I care about you guy's thoughts and opinions! And it's always exciting to have new concepts thrown into the mix that I might not have thought of.

As always, please comment, I love to hear from you all! Even if the comment is completely mundane, and the same as what you have commented in the past. It doesn't matter, all feedback is appreciated my lovelies!!

Anyway, I will be posting again monday next week. I might be able to have another chapter out sooner depending on how I go with my studies, but I will definitely have something on monady for you all.

Have a fantastic week!!

Love Loz x
Clarke met everyone at the gates of Alton. Recognising most of the original patrol already anticipating her arrival. Bellamy and Lincoln stood confidently at the front of the group, giving instruction and explaining a few strategies to employ if they were to come across hostiles as they did last time.

Listening attentively were Tobias, and Mercy, the two Alton natives that were intimately familiar with the layout of the forests surrounding the village. And with them, to Clarke’s surprise, stood Jonyon. The older man that Clarke had so eloquently nicknamed nose-hairs not so long ago. Having beaten him and one other warrior spectacularly, during an enthusiastic and less than friendly fight weeks ago in Arcadia. The man now stood tall and attentive as Bellamy and Lincoln spoke, his ears soaking up every utterance so he could be prepared in his new post. Clarke allowed a small smile to part her lips as she watched, it had taken some bruising, but Clarke had earned the man’s respect and loyalty. And Clarke had no doubt that Jonyon had appointed himself to this group because of Clarke, similar to Ontari.

Clarke glanced around her in an attempt to spot the brunette, and saw her in the distance, striding confidently towards them. She wore traditional Azgeda armour, equally as magnificent as Clarke and Lexa’s, only coloured differently. The leather of her chest guard was a mixture of mottled white, grey, and black. Perfect for manoeuvring within the ice fields of Azgeda, but a little more noticeable within the trees of Trikru. The girl’s dark eyes were outlined with black war paint in a design that didn’t resemble a design at all. It looked as thoughOntari had simply put the black grease into both hands, and carelessly smeared it from her eyes to her ears. It was messy, and lethal. Making the usual almond hue of her eyes seem like bottomless pits of blackness. The Azgeda princess certainly struck an intimidating image.

However, Ontari’s imposing figure was entirely at odds with the grin Clarke received as the girl neared. It was a subtle smile. One that no one would notice unless they knew Ontari, but Clarke saw it. It hid within the subtle curve of her mouth, and the twitch of her facial muscles.

Ontari stopped right next to Clarke, and gently nudged her with her elbow in greeting. “You ready Wanheda?” Ontari says seriously, her smirk the only indication of her non-malicious intent by using the title.

Clarke smiled. “Now that my bodyguard is here, of course I am ready.” Clarke responds with dry cynicism.

“Sarcasm is not the product of a strong mind Clarke.” Ontari scolds playfully. Parroting the phrase Ontari had heard Lexa use on occasion, and the exact words Clarke had heard from Lexa before the fall of the mountain.

Clarke’s jaw unhinges itself for a moment, as shock rattles up her spine. “Jesus Christ, you sound just like her.” Clarke comments incredulously. Folding her arms across her chest as blood rushed to her cheeks. It was strange to hear Lexa’s words fall from another’s mouth.

Ontari didn’t need to ask who Clarke was referring to. Instinctually she knew as soon as the blood pooled in Clarke’s face. There was only one person who had this effect on Clarke, and even after only knowing Clarke for a short time. Ontari knew there was no one she could possibly be talking
about except Lexa. Ontari snorts in response. A completely unladylike, and unrestrained sound of her amusement. The noise drawing the attention of Mallion and Angus, who had arrived sometime recently. The pair of burly Trikru warriors leering at the duo with beady little eyes that Ontari decided, bore astonishing resemblance to a couple of rats. Ontari gave them each a bone chilling glare, and the pair instantly averted their vermin eyes. “I don’t like those two.” Ontari comments after she was sure the two in question were no longer paying attention.

Clarke nods in agreement. “Yeah neither do I.” She murmurs offhandedly.

Shortly after, Clarke was perched high up in the trees. Ontari following shortly behind Clarke. Clarke had deferred leadership to Lincoln once again, not because she didn’t feel inadequate or incapable of taking the mantle herself. But because she wanted to see Lincoln step up. He had done such a good job last time, that Clarke wanted to give him the opportunity to spread his wings and flavour into the role. Plus she really enjoyed being in the trees, overlooking everyone, and keeping them safe from above. It gave her a reassuring sense of control, helping her feel less vulnerable and exposed than if she were on the ground with them.

Lincoln had spread everyone out into a very similar pattern as before. Forming a ‘V,’ and spread out, keen eyes tracking any, and all movement ahead of them, behind them, and alongside them. Lincoln headed the pack, with Bellamy and Mercy on either side of him, and Mallion and Angus on either side of them.

Jonyon, despite not being an archer, chose to scout ahead from the trees, armed with a fierce-looking spear clutched in his meaty fist. Since he was a scout in his everyday life and was the role he excelled at, everyone felt much more at ease knowing that the bear of a man, was surveying the path ahead of them. Tobias flanked the group in the trees to the left, and Clarke to the right. With Ontari bringing up the rear. However, no one but Clarke seemed to notice the way the Azgeda princess veered closer to the right-hand side of the pack with each step. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Clarke was unsure, but Ontari’s gradual deviation from her assigned area, inched her ever closer to Clarke. Allowing her to better fulfil the task of guarding Clarke’s back, as she had promised she would.

The constant knowledge that there was someone there to protect her, made Clarke feel a sense of security and safety that she hadn’t experienced since before she was imprisoned on the Ark. Having Ontari there, knowing that she would protect her, was reassuring in a way that Clarke could only compare to one of her father’s bear hugs. The way he used to pick Clarke up as though she weighed nothing, and envelop her in his strong arms and the clean smell of his aftershave. It was strange, to feel that sense of safety in a situation that was decidedly unsafe. And even though Ontari likely had no idea how her presence made Clarke feel, Clarke found herself feeling the urge to thank Ontari for giving her that small sliver of security. For offering that miniscule ounce of sentimentality, where she could remember her father, and the sanctuary she felt while he was alive, and not be bombarded with the negative feelings that typically accompanied memories of him. Negative feelings that were born the day he was killed, and her trust in her mother was broken for betraying her father. She lost both parents, her only family, and never felt safe again. Until now.

Clarke wondered why that was.

Was this sense of security only present because she trusted Ontari? Clarke decided it wasn’t. She trusted Bellamy and Lincoln, but she never felt this level of ease. And with them she had shared history, making their bond infinitesimally more versatile and strong.

Perhaps it was because of Ontari’s connection to Lexa? Clarke pondered it as she continued to move swiftly through the trees. Her feet virtually soundless with each of her confident steps. Clarke knew
that it wasn’t that either. She felt a safety with Lexa that was different to what she felt with Ontari. Not better or worse, just different. With Lexa, the ease she felt was dulled slightly by rebuilding trust, but it was almost always alive with an electric undercurrent of chemistry and sexual tension.

The only comparisons that felt adequate in explaining her feelings, were the relationships she shared with Raven and Octavia, and maybe even the connection that was blossoming between she and Greya. It was familial and comforting Clarke realised. Sisterly.

Clarke smiled, wide and warm. Uncaring if the broad expression smeared her war paint, making her look more raccoon than commander of death.

Clarke tuned into her surroundings more fully, and took note of the positions of everyone in her group. Lincoln was moving steadily past a large section of underbrush, his head on a constant swivel as he navigated his way through the forest. Determined to keep everyone under his care safe and alive. The weight of his responsibility bearing down on tense shoulders.

Lincoln was followed closely by Bellamy, a rifle clutched in knuckles slowly turning white from his iron-like grip. Nervous eyes darting from bush to bush and sweat beading his brow.

Mercy trailing a few metres behind him, her entire body relaxed and at ease with her surroundings, no doubt comforted by her familiarity with the area. A sturdy wooden staff held in her hand almost as an afterthought, and a cluster of daggers attached to her hip.

Mallion was moving more slowly than the rest of them. No doubt sacrificing speed for stealth. Being as large as he was, he had no chance of being both swift and quiet, especially with the added weight of his broadsword strapped menacingly to his broad back.

Angus on the other hand, was doing the opposite, moving faster to keep up with Lincoln and the others, but making a small amount of noise as his heavy feet broke the ground beneath him. Twigs snapping, and leaves crunching under his careless hoofs. Clarke cursed his stupidity.

Clarke couldn’t see Jonyon, but she knew they would have heard something to alert them, if something had happened to him. The stocky man had years of experience to keep him alert and alive in situations such as this. And if the way Jonyon handled that spear was any indication, he was quite deadly when the circumstance required him to be.

Tobias was lazily jumping between tree branches, staying close to Mallion’s position. His keen eyes scanning the area for danger, and his wiry frame crouched low in the canopy, attempting to emulate the same ease in which he had witnessed Clarke move on occasion.

And then there was Ontari… Still bringing up the rear, but she had fallen behind a little. The girl looked uncomfortable being so high from the ground, and her breathing was laboured from the strain it took to maintain agility and stealth in trees that seemed determined to throw her to the earth. Clarke stopped moving and unconsciously sunk into a shadow to wait for her friend. Unwittingly disappearing herself from sight.

Ontari was Azgeda, and in the heart of Ice Nation where she had grown up, there weren’t many trees. So there had been no reason to learn to climb and move between them. And even though she had been immersed within Trikru lands for the better part of eight years, there obviously hadn’t been much need for her to learn the skill. Lexa had tried to teach her on occasion, but the other brunette had grown irritated with Ontari’s lack of talent for the skill. She was silent enough, and quick enough. But she had no natural predilection for the ability. And it was obvious that she was struggling to keep up with Clarke’s punishing pace.
Ontari’s eyes flitted up to check on Clarke, as she had been doing ever since they began their trek through the forest an hour ago. Clarke had been slowly getting further away, much to Ontari’s sprouting annoyance. Ontari cursed her endurance and vowed to take Lexa’s tree climbing instruction more seriously next time.

Now when Ontari looked up to spot Clarke, she couldn’t see her, and her stomach dropped. Ontari knew she had not heard a body plummet, so the sky girl hadn’t fallen from the trees. But there was also no way that Clarke had gotten so far ahead that Ontari could no longer see her. Ontari’s unease grew the longer she could not see Clarke, her eyes frantically searching for the blonde’s form. Ontari stopped moving, and strained her eyes to see into the night, panic starting to set in when she still did not find Clarke amongst the trees.

Clarke watched as Ontari stopped, and she instantly wondered if perhaps the brunette had spotted something that had escaped Clarke’s attention. Clarke’s eyes quickly scanned the area, darting to the most likely hiding places for an enemy combatant. Only Clarke found nothing, much to her confusion. She refocused on Ontari and watched as the girl’s eyes began to dart and search the trees agitatedly. The panicked whites of her eyes visible even from this distance. Clarke stood from her crouched position, and Ontari’s eyes instantly fell onto the movement, relief relaxing her face before being abruptly replaced with cool frown, and then burgeoning annoyance.

Ontari’s eyes were instantly drawn to the movement as Clarke stood. And the tension that had been hardening all of her muscles with panic, instantly relaxed. Ontari examined the place that had concealed Clarke so well, and frowned. She was certain that her eyes had searched that particular spot only moments ago, and yet had found nothing there. It was like Clarke had literally become one with the shadow. Ontari found that the skill Clarke displayed, inspired both amazed respect, and shocked unease within Ontari’s guts. She had only seen a few people able to move like that. To not just hide in a shadow, but become one with the shadow, and all of them had been Azgeda assassins. Ontari had never seen the skill adapted for movement within the trees before however, only ever between buildings and the streets of a bustling city. Curiosity sat low and heavy in her breast, and she tried not to wonder too hard, how someone like Clarke managed to possess that skill. Ontari stalwartly attempted to ignore the part of her brain that remined her that Clarke had been missing for a year and a half, and little to nothing was known about what had transpired during that time. The only certainties were that Clarke had a child with an unknown man, and had learned the art of combat with startling proficiency.

Ontari felt some of her distrust towards her mother, threaten to bleed over and taint her friendship with Clarke, as she contemplated how Clarke could possibly have the skill of an Azgeda assassin. A year and a half was three times the required period to train a talented assassin in Azgeda. Ontari should know, when she was a goufa, she understood the danger her discovery brought to herself. She would observe as they learned the trade of the deadly arts, and it made her gladdened to have never been fated to lead that life. It was brutal and savage even by Azgeda standards, and Ontari witnessed more prospective assassins die, than those who completed the training. It made Ontari wonder, why someone would willingly choose to become an assassin in the first place.
Ontari glanced back at Clarke, and watched as the sky girl smiled teasingly at her. Ontari scoured the suspicious thoughts from her mind, and simply reasoned that Clarke’s ability to sink into a shadow, could be attributed to luck. Visibly, Ontari shook her head to dislodge her paranoia, and for an instant she knew that her expression would broadcast her frustration with herself, and with Nia. Her mother had cost her so much, she would not allow Nia’s delusional paranoia to rob her of the chance to have another real friend. Just because Clarke had secrets, didn’t mean that she was one of Nia’s pawns. It didn’t mean that Clarke was a traitor. Ontari felt disappointed in herself for even allowing the thoughts to touch her mind. For allowing her issues with trust to temporarily taint the way she viewed a friend.

She knew Clarke. Although she didn’t know her history. Ontari knew her heart. She was soft, and kind, and she cared about too much. And she knew that Clarke weaponised stoicism and the fear others felt to mask that from the world. It was her armour. And more than anything else, Ontari knew that Clarke could never betray Lexa.

Ontari blamed her suspicious ponderings, on the tension created by the war. She was willingly going to war with her own people, her clan, her last remaining flesh and blood. Essentially betraying all she was raised to hold dear. She knew it was bound to have an effect, only she hadn’t expected it to manifest itself by questioning the loyalties and the motives of a friend. Ontari’s cheeks heated with shame as she scrambled to catch up with Clarke. Her feet barely stumbling as they tapped lightly against the branches of the trees and ate the distance between she and Clarke.

Clarke silently smirked as Ontari started moving again. The brunette’s feet a little unsteady and unsure of themselves, making her resemble a foal, fresh to life and trying to find its legs. When Ontari was closer, Clarke continued on her way. Weaving between the trees with flawless certainty. Like she had lived on the ground her entire life, and had grown up amidst the forest. Footsteps silent, and silhouette constantly shifting and blending with her surroundings. Unaware of the slightly awed expression adorning Ontari’s face as the girl paid closer attention to the way Clarke moved. An unconscious side effect of her moment of unfettered paranoia.

The group carried on like this for hours, the night all but silent outside of the varied sounds of nature around them. The moon shaved down to a crescent in the sky, like a luminescent fingernail. Its reduced size, making the night seem dark and lonely. Clarke’s eyes, ever watchful, shielding the people below her like a guardian angel. Her own protective sentinel, only metres behind her, constantly scanning the area for threats. Body taunt and ever-ready to pounce and defend in an instant.

When Bellamy’s walk slowed slightly, Clarke kept in time with him. Not willing to allow him to fall behind. He bent over to untangle a bur that had lodged itself into his sock, and that’s when Clarke heard the soft thump as a body hit the ground. Not the dead weight of a corpse falling from the trees. But someone with stealth and training, who was very much alive and had fallen with a purpose.

Clarke instantly sinks into a shadow, and hides her body in the canopy above Bellamy’s head. Clarke’s blood sparks with adrenaline, and her ears become sensitised to all the sounds surrounding her, trying to pinpoint the location of the threat. For surely that’s what is was, a threat. Her eyes focused on any minute movement around Bellamy. Clarke could hear Ontari stopping as well, and silently cursed the girl for being so obvious. If their enemy was attuned to sound the way Clarke was, they would know that they had been discovered the moment the brunette’s slightly audible footsteps suddenly ceased.

Clarke knew that someone was here, someone who wasn’t meant to be. The hairs on the back of Clarkes neck stood on end, and her heart thumped in her chest steadily. The organ wanting, needing to go into a panicked frenzy, but Clarke refused to let it. Kadeon’s training reminding her that by
getting panicked, she would offer her opponent an unfair advantage ringing in her ears. So Clarke took purposefully slow and measured breaths, as she waited.

Bellamy was oblivious below her, unaware of a threat nearby. The charcoal haired young man straightening after pulling the sharp prickle from where it had been scraping painfully against his ankle, and then quickly moving to catch up to the others.

And that’s when it happened. A lone figure darted out from a shadow near Bellamy with a speed and silent ferocity that mirrored the training and finesse of an assassin. Their blade lethal and sharp in their hand, as they brought it down in a swift arc towards Bellamy’s unsuspecting head.

Clarke immediately launched herself into the air and dropped to the ground. Pulling her sword free from its sheath as she fell. Her feet jarred from the impact of falling such a distance so quickly, but she rapidly pushed the pulsing jets of pain aside. Clarke positioned her body to knock Bellamy out of the way and brought her sword up to catch the impact of her enemy’s blade as it swung downwards with a strength that sent cruel vibrations up Clarke’s shoulder. Clarke grit her teeth as hot, jagged pain reverberated through her body.

The loud clang that resounded through the forest alerting the other members of the group of the intruders presence, as Clarke grappled with the stranger. Clarke vaulted forward with as much force as she could summon to push the Azgeda warrior backwards. The unknown attacker fell backwards, and hit the ground with an audible ‘oof,’ as air forcibly left her lungs. The impact knocked her dark hood back from the shroud of her face, revealing the surprised expression and unmarked skin of an Azgeda assassin. Clarke inhaled sharply as sweat dotted her brow. Fear thrummed in her veins, as she realised she was likely outmatched.

Kadeon had taught her well, but she had only possessed her deadly skill with a blade, for a number of months, whereas the slayer before her likely had years of experience to uneven the odds in her cruel favour. Clarke swallowed thickly as she prepared to engage the warrior a second time.

The assassin quickly moved to stand once more, but by then, Ontari had dropped silently from the tree behind her, and now had the cold, unforgiving steel of a dagger pressed to the woman’s throat.

Ontari nodded once in reassurance, and Clarke never felt more relief to have brought Ontari along with them, than in this moment. The girl had kept her promise to guard Clarke’s back, just as she said she would.

The female assassin gasped as she moved and the blade bit cruelly into her neck, and ruby liquid dribbled down her throat. Clarke’s veins filled with ice, as the woman smirked and laughed as her heated blood steadily dripped. Slowly the woman raised her hands in a display of surrender, but her devilish smirk remained firmly in place. Clarke was unnerved.

Moments later the rest of their squad surrounded the woman, a volley of pointed weapons aimed in her direction. Mallion and Angus remain a few feet away, and keep a sharp eye on their surroundings in case of further attack, and Bellamy regained his feet.

“Echo?” Bellamy’s voice cracks a little as the name leaves his lips. His grey eyes appraising the woman before him. The woman who he hadn’t laid eyes on since the weeks after the fall of the mountain. After she had left their shared bed without a word of farewell.

“Hello Bellamy.” Echo drawls slowly, her menacing smirk still firmly in place.

Clarke heard the whoosh of the arrow, just as it pierced the assassin’s muscled thigh. Echo grunted in pain, and Bellamy shot a reproachful glare in Tobias’ direction.
“What the hell was that for!” Bellamy bellows with angered irritation. His arms flailing in his frustration for a moment. He was hurt by Echo’s vanishing act, but it did not mean that he wanted her broken and bloodied.

Tobias simply returns his stare nonchalantly. “She is Azgeda, and her face is unbranded. Which marks her as an assassin.” Tobias drones with an air of indifference. What he didn’t say however, was that he was frightened by the girl’s deathly smile. It was creepy and gave him chills down his spine. And placing an arrow through her leg, made him feel slightly more secure. Safe. Tobias was no fool, he was painfully aware of how brutal Azgeda assassins were. And he had heard the rumours and legends surrounding the most notorious of killers from the Ice Nation. Like Natmitta, the Black Mercy, and Olangof, the Heart Eater. He knew not to underestimate them if they were truly as dangerous as their legends suggested.

Echo laughed, an empty, hollow cackle. If Clarke didn’t know any better, she might have categorised it as bitter, defeated.

“I didn’t come here to kill you all.” Echo says plainly. Her teeth gritted as pain lances up and down her leg.

Clarke takes a threatening step forward. “If I hadn’t caught the blow you were readying to level on Bellamy’s head, he would be dead. So don’t try to act innocent when it is clear what your intentions here were, assassin.” Clarke says lowly. Her hand gripping the sword in her hand tighter.

“If you look behind you, there is a big tree.” Echo gestures with a small jut of her chin. The movement digging Ontari’s dagger deeper into the flesh of her throat.

Clarke cautiously looks in the indicated direction and instantly sees what Echo’s true intention had been, what Clarke had initially overlooked in her fear for Bellamy’s life. The tree had been only inches away from Bellamy at the time of the attack. Echo’s attack had been too wide, and would have embedded her blade into the tree if Clarke hadn’t intervened, and Bellamy would have still remained alive, if not a little startled. “You weren’t trying to kill him.” Clarke surmises slowly. Her expression subdued and guarded.

Echo directs a small mocking grin towards Clarke. “No I was not. I had only intended to frighten him, and then subdue him.” Echo says plainly.

Bellamy’s head snaps back to Echo to meet her calculating gaze, and screeches. “What, why?” His face turning an affronted, angry red.

Echo chuckles through gritted teeth. Her leg felt like it was on fire. Like lava was lancing up her nerve endings. Hot and furious. “So that I could warn you all, without you branweda’s filling me with arrows.” Echo spits out, shooting a pointed look towards Tobias’ perch in the tree above them. “I would have been successful too, if you hadn’t jumped in the way.” Echo’s fierce hazel eyes now bore into Clarke, as if she was the one who had just attacked the group instead. “I did not see you lurking in the trees. Tell me warrior, how did you do that?” Echo asks with an assessing gleam in her eyes.

Clarke feels an uncomfortable weight settle on her shoulders as Echo’s knowing eyes drill into her skull and inspect the grey matter within. Clarke curiously finds Ontari’s probing gaze also peering inside to have a quick look. But she shrugs off her discomfort and simply directs the conversation away from herself. “You said you came to warn us? Warn us of what?” Clarke asks evenly.

Echo’s eyes narrow as Clarke avoids the question, but she answers anyway. “Nia has sent an army to attack Alton. She saw the messengers leave the village early this morning, and knew that Heda
must have officially declared war. She intends to attack before your main force arrives. Hoping to win the war before it truly starts.” Echo dutifully answers.

Clarke’s belly fills with lead, and so too does everyone’s around her.

Bellamy’s face drains of all blood.

Lincoln’s jaw clenches so hard Clarke wonders if teeth will shatter.

Ontari hangs her head in silent shame for her mother’s cowardice.

Mercy’s eyes shine with tears that she stubbornly refuses to let fall.

Tobias’ breathing increases tenfold, hyperventilating his body.

Jonyon’s head lowers as he sends a silent prayer to the forces that be, to spare his people.

Even Mallion and Angus have the good sense to shift uncomfortably in the face of this news.

Clarke quickly composes herself. “How do I know that I can believe you?” Clarke asks warily. Trying valiantly to soothe the rising panic that was bubbling in her belly, despite logically knowing that there may not be any truth to what the girl says.

Echo smirks. “You’ll just have to trust me.” She says with a self-satisfied leer. Hazel eyes tracking Clarke’s every movement with keen interest. There was something about the icy-eyed girl that fascinated her. She did not recognise the young woman in front of her, but it was obvious that she was in charge. And Bellamy was obviously familiar with her.

Clarke’s mind drifted to something Kadeon had once told her, a way to discover whether an assassin’s intentions were truly honourable. “Tell me your name?” Clarke’s eyes gleamed with a mortal confidence, as Echo’s smirk fell away as though doused with acid.

“I am Echo of the Ice Nation clan. You already know this.” Echo pronounces the words with purposeful slowness, all the while knowing that this was not the name the intelligent blue eyed girl sought. But attempting nonetheless to avoid revealing the assassin’s title pinned to her identity. The name that was associated with a distinct signature with all her kills. The name she was taught from the very first day of her training, to protect with her life. The name that would identify each of her kills to the people now eying her with curiosity. People that would likely be honour bound to kill her once they connected her to all the lives she had snuffed out by the whim of her queen.

“That is not the name I want.” Clarke says with a small sinister twist of her mouth. Her eyes glowing with victory as Echo’s eyes darkened and her heartbeat sped in her chest.

“I do not know what you speak of.” Echo denies coldly, her tone dropping in temperature rapidly. The atmosphere turning arctic as confused eyes attempt to discover what Clarke and Echo were speaking about.

Clarke takes steps forward, until she is only inches away from Echo’s face. Clarke can feel the woman’s anxiety quickened breaths puffing against her face, and her eyes darting between the two frigid orbs of Clarke’s eyes. “You are an assassin, which means you are known by another title. A name that the families of your victims curse, and wish death upon. The name that Nia teaches you to believe has importance. I want to know what yours is.” Clarke says quietly. Calmly. Her voice just above a whisper, and eight pairs of intrigued ears strain to hear the words.

Blood drains from Echo’s face as though an artery had been severed. “How do you know about
that?” Echo growls lowly, threateningly. The sound enticing Ontari to press her unforgiving blade closer and harder to the exposed curve of Echo’s throat.

“What is going on Clarke?” Bellamy asks almost gently. His curiosity was burning, as was everyone’s in the group, but he somehow knew that whatever was taking place in front of him, between Echo and Clarke was not meant for his eyes and ears. It was something he was not meant to understand.

Clarke slowly dragged her piercing glare away from Echo and let it rest on Bellamy for a brief moment, before sliding back to Echo again. Her heavy gaze boring into the hazel-eyed assassin as she explained. “Every assassin has a title and a unique signature to accompany their kills. It is the only thing that ties them to their victims. By asking her what her assassin’s name is, I have asked her to share with me the link that ties her to every one of the people she has killed. It is the one thing that an assassin will protect about themselves to their deaths. If she gives me her name, I will know that she is being honest and honourable.” Clarke says unblinkingly.

Ontari stares disbelieving as Clarke imparts that small amount of information. Ontari wasn’t even aware of this practice. Even after watching from the vents within the Fortis castle as the assassins trained all day every day. She had never known about this ‘honour code.’ And she felt the tingle of suspicion raise the hairs along her nape once more as she regarded Clarke.

Echo’s stare becomes inscrutable, and cold as Clarke explains. It was unnerving that an outsider know these things. After all, Azgeda’s assassins and their subsequent training were heavily guarded secrets, and mysteries shrouded in legend and fallible myth throughout the clans. Asking for the name of an assassin as evidence for the integrity of their words, was typically a ritual that only took place between assassins, because it was something only they knew about. Echo scrutinised the girl for a moment, and wondered if perhaps she was in fact one of her Shadow Sisters. The way the girl was able to get the drop on Echo earlier was proof enough that she was no ordinary warrior. But before Echo could continue to muse on the subject, the mysterious blue eyed girl interrupted her thoughts.

“Tell me your name, or I will drive my sword through your heart.” Clarke threatened coolly. Her fingers twitching on the handle of her blade as she spoke.

“What? No, Clarke!” Bellamy hollers with helpless desperation. Bellamy moves to step between Clarke and Echo, until Clarke levels her assessing gaze on him, effectively pinning him in place. Clarke allowed the cold façade to crack for a moment, and she silently implored Bellamy to trust her. Bellamy nodded once, hesitantly.

Clarke returned her hardened stare to Echo, enticing her to answer.

Echo took a deep steadying breath, and answered. “I am Hadasa, also known as the Huntress.” Echo answers through gritted teeth.

Tobias drops from his perch in the tree and approaches Echo. “You’re Hadasa? The woman who slits the throats of her victims and hangs them by their feet like an animal?” His voice is low and unbelieving. Eyes appraising the woman before him, covered in sweat and pale from pain and blood loss, and compares her to the legend of Hadasa. The woman before him does not fit the image he held in his head, of the fierce assassin. But he supposes that once a legend becomes flesh and blood, it was easy to become disappointed by the reality.

Now that the intelligence was all but confirmed as a plausible threat, panic began to bubble heatedly under Clarke’s skin. Clarke’s mind, as though it has a will of its own, instantly fills with images of TonDC, immediately after the mountain men levelled the village with a missile. The fire, the blood,
the death. Destruction blossoming all around, like a deadly flower, watered with the blood of innocents, and the tears of those yet living. Clarke feels bile burn in her belly, as she recalls the agonised screams and crackle of flame as people were devoured by fire. And in her mind’s eye, Alton is juxtaposed over TonDC. Instead of the faces of those lost to the explosion, Clarke sees Grace, Lexa, Raven, Octavia, her mom, Tanga and Naomi among the dead. All the people still nestled away in their beds, resting peacefully under the false security that they felt, knowing that the village was safe. That they were safe. Only they weren’t. They were all in terrible danger, and Clarke was stuck in the middle of the god-damn woods, impotent and powerless to stop the coming devastation just as she had been a year and half ago.

Clarke turns her back on everyone around her, as her breathing ratchets up, and her heart thuds frantically in her chest. She needed a moment to compose herself. Clarke counted backwards from 100, and focused on taking deep, even breaths. She could not allow her own fears dictate her actions. She needed to be strong, and she needed everyone around her to see that steel in her spine, and believe in it. She needed to be their strength. Clarke takes one final deep breath when her hand finally stops trembling, and turns around to face the group once more.

Clarke interrupts the tense discussions taking place around her, and steers the conversation back to the issue at hand. “When does Nia’s force attack?” Clarke asks quickly. Hoping that the dread she feels growing in her belly like a cancer, does not make her voice shake with hysterics as it wants to. Now that she knew that Echo was being honest, and that the threat to their people was imminent, anxiety clawed at her lungs like some mythological griffin.

Echo’s expression sober, and something about the seriousness of the countenance makes unease swell in Clarke’s breast, to the point where she feels her fingers twitch with the need to scratch and tear open her chest cavity, so that the toxic emotion could escape her.

“No.” She says with a small sad exhale. Full of remorse and the breath of her failure.

Multiple voices speak up at once, into a chaotic mess of intrigue and fear, and vibrating tension.

“What do you mean now? -- ”

“Why didn’t you warn us sooner? -- ”

“Now, as in tonight? Or now, as in, this second? Or now, as in, all yours friends and family are already dead? -- ”

“Enough!” Clarke hisses, silencing everyone immediately.

Echo sighs as she begins answering their bombardment of questions. “I would have come to you with this information sooner, but it was a very sudden decision, and I needed to be given the opportunity to sneak away without my absence being noticed. There is more at stake here than just the survival of one village.”

Clarke wonders if Echo is referring to the prisoners Nia keeps, to coerce the loyalty of her subjects.

“If it’s such a big risk, then why are you warning us?” Bellamy asks hesitantly. Frown burrowing his thick eyebrows and shadowing his brown irises.

“I did it for you Bellamy.” A wisp of a smile flirts with the corner of Echo’s mouth as she peers into the chocolate depths of his eyes, before seemingly catching herself and rapidly locking the softness away. “I owed you a blood debt from the mountain. You saved my life, now I am returning the favour.” Echo’s tone hardens as she swallows down the remnants of her vulnerability.
Bellamy’s eyebrows hike up his forehead.

Echo eyes drop from Bellamy’s inquisitive gaze, and she refocuses on the task at hand. “Nia ordered they attack an hour before dawn. She is relying on the fact that your warriors will be tired, less focused from being on sentry duty for most of the night.” Echo explains.

Clarke looked to the sky and only just began to realise that the dark night sky, was beginning to lighten from black to a dark grey, with the coming of dawn. Clarke’s mind quickly veered to the image of Grace snuggled in the protective arms of Octavia, and hopes – prays – that if Clarke is too slow to get back to camp in time to save her daughter, that Octavia would be strong enough to do it for her. Clarke cursed at the unfairness of it all. She cursed her stupidity to have chosen this night to have left her daughter’s side. Grace was in danger, as was everyone else in Alton, and Clarke wasn’t there to protect them.

Clarke mind conjures the image of Lexa’s soft and beautiful face, and the anxiety that thrums in her veins pounds faster, harder. Spiking her body with copious amounts of adrenaline. Logically, Clarke knows that Lexa is more than capable of protecting herself, but Clarke knows that it only takes one stray blade covered in poison, to end the fight of a once fierce warrior. And Clarke wants to safeguard Lexa, as well as Grace.

“We have to warn them.” Clarke sates shakily, bounding into action, ripping the radio off of Bellamy’s belt and quickly, desperately handing the device to Lincoln. “Radio it in, warn Alton what is coming.” Clarke says quickly, her heart thundering in her chest so hard and loudly that she feared it would leap out of her chest. Deciding to make a different choice to what she made in TonDC. She could warn this village, she could save these people. Because Echo wasn’t Bellamy, and the circumstance was different.

“Where are you going Clarke?” Lincoln quickly asks as Clarke quickly turns on her heel.

“I have to get to them. I have to save my daughter. I have to get to Lexa.” Clarke frantically explained.

Lincoln quickly grabbed both of Clarke’s arms and halted her frenzied movements. Half convinced that she would sprint back to Alton on her own if she truly believed that it would make a difference.

“I know Clarke, I know. But you are Wanheda, and you are a leader.” Lincoln reminds her softly. He releases Clarke’s hands and gestures around them to the people who had ventured out tonight on patrol, at Clarke’s behest.

Clarke’s eyes mist over with tears, as Lincoln’s words bury into her chest, and strike home. And realisation, dark and heavy sat on her feathered ribcage. She couldn’t abandon these people, even though every instinct inside of her was screaming for her to do just that. They were here because of her, they trusted her to lead them despite Lincoln’s presence. She was responsible for these people. And right now, she couldn’t run away. She had to stay and see this through. Clarke sniffled, and took a deep breath that shuddered violently as it entered her anxiety-riddled lungs. “Okay.” Clarke laments with an anguished exhale.

Lincoln offered a small, sad smile, and squeezed Clarke’s shoulder. His hand shook even as he did so.

“Hand me that radio.” Clarke steels herself and prepares for what comes next.
Hello lovelies! I hope you have each had a pleasant week!

This chapter is a bit longer than usual, partly because I got carried away, and partly because I wanted to reward all your patience. I know that there are a few of you who really love my fic, and are probably a little annoyed that I am not updating as much at the moment. So I just wanted to give you guys something a little more substantial this week.

Things are really heating up in this update! There is so much going on in this chapter. Lot's of little clues and tidbits to think about if you pay attention, hehe! :D

As always, please leave me some feedback, I LOVE hearing back from you guys, and I will try to reply to all of you and answer any questions you may have.

Have an excellent week guys!

Love Loz :D
Lexa pushed aside the flap of the makeshift tent and stormed into the hastily assembled mechanics work space, where the radio sat prominently upon a steel table. Lexa still felt a little dazed from being abruptly woken from her slumber by one of her guards. She had barely enough time to dress before she was being sequestered towards the radio. Lexa’s braids were in disarray, and her war paint was sloppily spread across her cheekbones, and clothes were probably misbuttoned and hanging from her body awkwardly.

But Lexa forgot all of the unimportant aesthetic aspects of being heda when she realised that she would not have been summoned to the radio tent had something dire not occurred. The uncomfortable quiver in her belly told her that it was something big, and probably dangerous if her generals were not sufficient resources to assess the situation.

The last time she had been summoned was when Clarke and her squad had encountered the staged bodies left to be found by Azgeda. Lexa’s heart beat a little faster as she recalled that Clarke had decided to go back out on patrol tonight. And she hoped that she hadn’t been called here because the blonde had found herself in another perilous situation. The girl honestly had an uncanny knack for attracting danger. Lexa worried it would one day send her hair silver.

Lexa’s eyes quickly scanned the room. Looking for familiar faces and trying to get a read on the current situation. In the tent already, were some of Lexa’s generals; Olga, Thane and Indra. To Lexa’s surprise, Abby was also standing awkwardly in the corner of the room. And instinctually, Lexa hardened her facial features and infused her spine with steel. She already knew that whatever the situation was, it was bad. Abby and the generals had never been summoned during the last crisis on patrol. In an emergency, it was either one or the other, not both. Never Heda AND the generals.

Turning her attention back to the radio, she addressed the person operating the technology. Lexa was momentarily surprised to see Tanga at the helm, having expected to see Raven fiddling with dials instead. She dismissed the seemingly unimportant observation. “What is the problem?” Lexa quickly cut to the quick of the situation, eager to get a read on the issue that required Heda, Abby Griffin, and her generals to be in audience. Lexa tried not to draw conclusions from the ashen complexion of the raven haired young woman.

“Heda, Clarke and Lincoln’s team have encountered an Azgeda assassin…” Tanga forces the words out haltingly. Her tone disbelieving even as she carefully enunciates each syllable succinctly.

In the corner of the tent Abby’s eyes widen and her face pales. Involuntarily she gasps. The small sound feeling far too loud in the silent chamber.

Lexa’s eyes widen a fraction at the mention of an Azgeda assassin. She knew from numerous attempts made on her own life, that the trained killers were not to be trifled with, or underestimated in any circumstance. Lexa moved to open her mouth. To demand further explanation. But she was interrupted by a hasty explanation from the young raven haired woman. Obviously Lexa’s panic had broadcasted itself across her facial features. She silently cursed her weakness for Clarke. The familiar and yet completely unwanted phrase from her childhood making an ugly reappearance. Love is weakness.

Lexa banished the unsavoury mantra and the corresponding imagery of Titus yelling to enforce his
point, from her mind.

“The assassin was not there to harm your warriors heda, only to warn them of the coming threat.” Tanga quickly reported. Becoming a little breathless as she rapidly freed the words from her vocal chords without breath. Eager to remove the slightly green, stricken expression from the commander’s face.

Lexa perked up at that. However distrust bled into every fibre of her being. Everyone knew that Azgeda assassin’s were masters at deception and enjoyed the hunt as much as the kill. Lexa feared that this trained killer was simply toying with them. It wasn’t such an implausible suspicion.

“Okay.” Lexa says absentmindedly. Already moving towards the radio to receive the news herself direct from the source.

Tanga wordlessly vacated her seat and took a respectful step away from the commander. Giving her the space to take control of the situation.

Lexa fiddled with a knob to find the correct frequency, just as Raven had instructed her to do in the past, and then flicked a switch to relay her message. “Clarke come in.” Lexa utters the words a little awkwardly. Still feeling strange talking to a machine as though it were a living, breathing person and expecting a response. Skaikru tech truly was a strange marvel.

A few moments past by in silence. Each static filled moment of no reply sent Lexa’s blood pressure through the roof. Her life expectancy dwindling. Until eventually a breathless, wheezing voice crackled through the tensely silent tent. Everyone inside took a collective breath of relief. Abby’s frightened eyes softened with maternal relief.

“This is Clarke, over.” Came the crackling phantom of Clarke’s voice. Her laboured breaths could be heard through the radio, as though she had been running and only stopped because she was being squawked at by the box on her belt. Lexa still found it curious that the radio always managed to remove the life from Clarke’s voice. It always seemed to make her sound hollow.

“Clarke, tell me the situation.” Lexa says quickly, her voice oozing the authority of heda as her mind begins to latch onto the situation fully.

Clarke chuckles humourlessly for a second. The resounding crackle making the noise sound more like a hacking cough. “Heda we encountered an Azgeda assassin. She told us that a large force of Azgeda warriors will be attacking just before dawn. Nia hopes to wipe out your army before our reinforcements from the other clans arrives to lend us aid.” Clarke summarises. Her tone giving away none of the panic she currently felt.

“How do you know that the information is accurate Clarke?” Lexa asks hesitantly. She couldn’t afford for this intelligence to prove untrustworthy. If she gathered her army and prepared for a fight that never came, her people might assume that she is fearful of Nia, and then her already tenuous hold on power would simply evaporate. She could not allow for that to happen.

“She was repaying a blood debt to Bellamy… And she told me her name Lexa.” Clarke answers immediately. Her distorted voice still somehow broadcasting her solemn determination.

Lexa tries not to groan at Clarke’s response. ‘What good could the assassin’s name possibly do them here?’ Lexa asked herself with annoyance. “Clarke…” Lexa begins quietly. Her tone already taking on a placating timbre.

“No not that name.” Clarke interrupts quickly. Lexa can almost hear her dramatic and frustrated eye
roll. “I mean her assassin’s name. The name that can link her to every one of her kills.” Clarke elaborates seriously, her tone lilting towards the end with a small inflection of hope, or perhaps it was curious expectation. Like she expected Lexa to have some knowledge about what she was referring to.

Lexa didn’t even bother questioning how Clarke knew about that little detail right now. She somehow knew that she would not like the answer. “And what is her name?” Lexa inquires curiously.

“Hadasa.” Clarke quickly responds.

Lexa’s eyebrows hike up her forehead, and she spares a cursory glance towards her generals to gauge their reactions to that little morsel of information. Olga’s expression mimicked Lexa’s own. Her features belaying her shock over the development. Indra hid her interest well behind her dark mask of determination. And Thane, well he looked angry. It was likely that the assassin they spoke of had claimed the life of someone he knew.

When Lexa doesn’t immediately respond to Clarke, the blonde speaks again. “Look I know that a lot is riding on this Lexa. But I trust her motives. I don’t trust her, but I think her purpose here is honourable.” Clarke implores. By now her wheezing breathes have calmed and she doesn’t sound as winded.

Lexa ponders the situation for a moment longer. She knows that the stakes are high right now. That her entire coalition rests on how she chooses to proceed. But Lexa also knows that Clarke would not have deemed this a plausible threat if she didn’t truly believe that their people were in danger. Despite their rocky start, Lexa knows that Clarke would not actively seek to destroy her. And after their kiss, and subsequent relationship shift, Lexa knows that she can trust Clarke. She feels it in her bones, and more importantly, in her heart.

Lexa haltingly leans closer to the mouthpiece and finally relays her decision. “I do not trust this woman Clarke. I must admit… But I do trust you. And if you believe that Hadasa is being honest, then I will trust your information.” Lexa says firmly. Hoping her words touch Clarke’s heart in the way they were designed to.

“Thankyou Lexa.” Clarke lets out a relieved breath of air, and Lexa feels a small, barely-there smile pull at her lips. She quickly wipes her face blank of all emotion before straightening her back and addressing her generals. A plan already brewing in her mind’s eye. A plan she had been contemplating ever since arriving to Alton in the event of an attack.

Lexa was just glad that she never divulged these plans with Titus before he disappeared like smoke.

“Olga, gather a discreet group of warriors and have them begin waking our army and the villagers. But make sure they stay completely silent and no torches are lit. Move in the shadows, and ensure that any Azgeda scout that might be monitoring Alton, only sees a slumbering village.” Lexa ordered firmly.

Olga nodded so hard, Lexa was sure that her spine creaked. Her facial features stony and serious. Carved from grim marble.

“Be swift, we don’t know how soon the ice nation army strikes. The quicker you wake our army and the villagers, the higher chance we have of defeating our enemy, and the more lives we will preserve.” Lexa says quickly.

“Sha Heda.” The loyal woman quickly agrees.
“Indra, I need you to begin coordinating our army once it is woken. If this intelligence proves to be misleading, then I want to try to incorporate some countermeasures. Divide our force into four groups. Have two of them move through the mountains that shelter Alton on either side and position them to flank any force that moves against us. Since there is only one entrance into Alton, that is the direction that they will be able to attack from. Have some sentries posted to watch over the mountains and the lake, just to make sure we are not taken by surprise if they find another way in. But it should be impossible unless they have an Alton native with them. Speaking of which, you will need to find some locals to guide you through the mountains. They will be unpassable for us as well if you do not have someone direct you. The other two remaining groups should be scattered throughout the village, hidden until we are attacked. They are the main force that will engage the enemy. Make sure to keep them quiet and unseen.” Lexa demands. Her posture stiff and commanding.

Indra’s eyes gleam with fire, and her frame seems to burn with suspended energy. She was obviously ready to fight, and the dangerous grin and nod of approval confirm Lexa’s suspicion.

Lexa turns her attention to her last general. “Thane, you are in charge of gathering the civilians and taking them to safety. Children, the elderly, infirm, and anyone else who is not a fighter. Make sure you take all the healers with you as well. I have a feeling that when this fight I over, we are going to need them all, but I am not willing to risk losing them in this fight. Gather a group of thirty warriors to protect these people, and have someone familiar with the area guide you high up into the mountains.” Lexa’s eyes take on a calculating gleam, curious to see how Thane will react to being demoted to a glorified babysitter.

The man clenches his jaw, subtly grinding his teeth, but he nods his head in understanding despite the fact that his pride was undoubtedly wounded by being forced to remain clear of the battle.

Lexa nods approvingly at his subdued reaction and quickly dismisses her generals, who then take off sprinting from the tent to fulfil their orders. Lexa then turns to Abby. The woman looked tired, and stressed. The lines of aging in her face seeming to grow deeper in the relative darkness of the radio tent. Lexa opens her mouth to speak once more, but is cut off.

“May I?” Abby asks softly, gesturing to the radio with a finely boned hand and watery eyes.

Lexa nods wordlessly and takes a step back.

Abby quickly crosses to the radio and plops heavily into the metal chair. “Clarke baby?” Abby says the words like a plea. Desperation clinging to her soul like a leech. She and Clarke had not been seeing eye to eye lately. And now that danger was imminent and knocking on their door. Abby felt the undeniable urge to set right the wrongs she was responsible for. She needed Clarke to know that she was sorry, and that she loved her.

“Yeah mum?” Clarke’s voice sounded small, but out of breath once more. She had been running again.

“I just need you to know… I…” Abby’s voice cracks as she trips over the words.

“I know mum. I forgive you. We’ll start fresh when this is all over, I promise.” Clarke says softly. Her voice vulnerable and understanding even through the resounding static.

Abby’s tears fall a little harder as she nods wetly. “I love you Clarke.” She whispers. The silent ‘be careful’ was abundantly clear.

“I love you too mum.” Clarke returns the sentiment without hesitation.
Abby quickly stands from the metal seat, brushes away her weakness, and straightens her shoulders. Turning her now determined eyes towards Lexa. “Where do you need me?” She asks.

Lexa would never admit it out loud, but she admired the way Abby picked herself up and brushed herself off so resolutely. The woman was strong, and fierce in her own way. And Lexa was quietly proud of the way that Abby had allowed herself a moment to be emotional, but was now preparing for war with the rest of them.

“Go find Naomi and set about packing the essential medical equipment. I suspect that in Nia’s quest for wanton destruction, she will target places like the healing huts first so as to cripple us. Any supplies left behind will likely be destroyed in the coming fight.” Lexa explained.

Abby nods and stalks out of the tent. Bearing remarkable resemblance to the ‘woman on a mission’ stereotype.


Lexa sat back down in front of the radio. “I am here Clarke.” She reassured softly. She was alone in the tent now. Tanga had slipped out at some point. Likely to wake her own friends and family.

“Are you alone?” Clarke asks tentatively.

“Yes.” Lexa intones patiently. Her curiosity peaking.

“Good.” Somehow that one word was able to broadcast so much anxiety, and fear and uncertainty, that Lexa wondered how Clarke had managed to remain so composed only moments before. Even through the radio waves that projected Clarke’s voice, Lexa could hear the strain. The worry that clawed at Clarke’s vocal chords as she spoke, was so loud it was as though the emotions were being screamed directly into Lexa’s ear. The static crackle of Clarke’s shaking voice as it transmitted through the large radio, serving to remind Lexa of the distance that separated her from the blonde. How far away Clarke was from her protection, should she be attacked once again.

The thought allowed black unease to vine its way into the in the deep pit of her stomach. The thick, ichor covered vines only growing in size as Lexa’s anxiety increased. The claws of the dark manifestation of Lexa’s dread, slowly constricting around her organs.

Lexa felt like there was another sentience pulling her abdomen rigid, and ravenously devouring what was cocooned inside the protective sheath of her body. Logically, Lexa knew that the dark, broiling imagery her anxiety-addled mind provided was merely a projection of her fear and dread. But it felt real for a moment.

Lexa straightened her spine and stiffened her muscles so they locked into place stubbornly. Pushing the thoughts from her head, Lexa cleared her mind and refocused her energies into what was now important. Lexa still worried about Clarke, but she had a responsibility to her people to fulfil. And right now, more than ever, she could not be weak. She needed to demonstrate to these people why SHE was the commander of the thirteen clans. She needed to remind her people once more that she was a powerful adversary, and that her enemies would always fall lifeless by her feet. She could not afford to spend her time obsessing over Clarke’s safety, and yet… She could not stop the tidal wave of concern that flared in her heart, and compelled her to protect the blonde before all else.

“I need you to do something for me.” Clarke’s voice was vulnerable, wavering slightly as it was transmitted through the radio speakers.

“Anything.” Lexa replied almost instantly. Her body subconsciously drifting closer to the radio as
though the piece of technology held the key to teleporting directly to Clarke’s location.

“Protect my baby girl.” Clarke’s voice cracked under the weight of the words, and this time it had nothing to do with static.

Determination and purpose thrummed in Lexa’s veins as the words filtered through her ears. Curiously, Clarke had not phrased the words as a request, or a command, but as a statement. Like she did not question whether Lexa would do this for her, but instead, somehow already knew that Lexa would guard Grace until her last breath. Her voice while heavy with emotions so desperate and hungry, had also managed to be certain and so sure of what she knew Lexa would do for her. There was no doubt in Clarke’s tone, only resolute belief in Lexa. And Lexa knew that this was the ultimate display of Clarke’s restored trust in her. Clarke was entrusting Lexa with the task of protecting the tiny human that was the literal embodiment of Clarke’s heart. And Lexa knew there was no way that she could fail in this responsibility. She wouldn’t let herself.

Lexa had both Clarke’s trust and her heart in her hands, and she would protect them until the end. Of this, Lexa was sure.

“You know I will Clarke. Always.” Lexa says softly, allowing the smallest hint of reassurance and gentle affection to creep into her voice. Lexa absently wondered what Titus would think if he saw her now. Witnessing the commander melt into the startling visage of a young girl with her heart on her sleeve. Or perhaps more accurately, her heart in Clarke’s palm. He would be disappointed, she knew. But the thought pestered her regardless, wishing he would react differently. Perhaps in another lifetime he would have.

“Thankyou.” Clarke sniffled softly.

There was another brief pause.

“Be careful.” Lexa says tenderly. The unspoken ‘I love you’ loud between the two of them. Lexa’s heart sped up in anticipation of Clarke’s response.

“You be careful too.” Clarke whispered with just as much conviction.

Lexa smiled as the static washed out Clarke’s voice. Lexa quickly rose from her chair and temporarily pushed Clarke from her mind. Instead focusing on her new priority.

Lexa took long strides from the tent, four guards flanking her protectively as she quickly ventured off in search of Grace.

Chapter End Notes

Hi guys!

I know it has been ages since I updated - I am so sorry about that. I literally have had no time to write recently, which sucks so hard. I’ve been super busy with uni and family drama that I won’t even get started on, haha!

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy the chapter, I know that it’s probably more of a filler than anything, but it’s the best I could do right now.

I start a nursing placement on Monday, so my schedule is about to become hectic again,
and I don't know if I will be posting anything until that is over. So if you guys can be patient until the beginning of June, that would be amazing!!

I just want to say a special thankyou to the people that kept encouraging me to write in my absence, it was really amazing to hear from you guys even though I wasn't actively sharing any new content with you guys. Your support truly means the world to me!!

Any-who, please leave me some feedback, you know how much I love to hear you guys' thoughts!!

Enjoy my lovelies!!
Clarke’s lungs burnt like she had just inhaled smoke and embers from an open fire. Her chest heaved with laboured breath, and sweat dripped from her head. Salty rivulets stained black from war paint and desperation. Clarke imagined her cheeks must be tinged scarlet from the punishing pace she was setting, but no one had yet complained about the brisk sprint.

Pre-dawn was beginning to stain the grey morning an apricot tinge, signalling the start of another new day. Only the lightness of the sky, and the alluring mixture of orange and grey didn’t feel like hope and warmth as morning grew closer, as it had yesterday and the day before. Instead this time, it felt as though the colours scarring the sky, were heralds of doom. Orange fire, and grey soot from fires that burned hot enough to melt flesh from bone, and boil all happiness until it vanished in a plume of scalding steam. The brighter the sky grew, the higher Clarke’s anxiety climbed.

And casting her stony blue eyes around to the faces of her group, she could tell that she wasn’t the only one looking at the slashes of colour, and felt dread coil in her belly. Lincoln looked positively panicked, and Bellamy appeared like he was going to pass out. Both of them likely fearing for Octavia’s safety.

Ontari’s face was a grim mix of anger and fear that was difficult to gaze upon. The emotion too raw and conflicted as she contemplated her mother’s and her people’s role in the coming devastation.

And the others of their group looked similarly distressed. And exhausted. They had been sprinting at top speed for the better part of fifteen minutes now, and somehow they were not only maintaining their breakneck speed, but were getting faster as the horizon basked in tendrils of glorious light. The threat igniting their blood with purpose.

Their legs were pumping wildly, with the frightened abandon and grim determination that only existed in men and women about to lose all they loved in the world. Clarke’s calves were aflame with fatigue, but she pushed through it. Her legs soon feeling like numb sacks of meat, whose only purpose was to bring her to Grace and Lexa, and her mom, and everyone else she cared for. Adrenalin lacing her bloodstream like a drug.

Clarke recalled the prone girl they had left in the dank, dark cavern. Echo. Having found no one willingly volunteering to stay and guard the assassin, Clarke thought it unfair to command someone to stay behind, when everyone had a loved one they were anxious to see alive and well back in Alton. So she had whipped her knife across the woman’s skull with enough pressure to keep her unconscious for a few hours, and then left her bound and gagged in a cave that Mercy had found. And then they had been sprinting as they waited for Lexa to respond to their distress signal, so they could share what they knew about the coming attack. And they had been running like their lives depended on it ever since.

Their return to Alton was fast and sweaty, and panicked, but it was also loud. And Clarke knew that they were flirting with danger by being so careless in their footfalls, and their rattling gasps for breath. Because if there truly was an attack coming, then these woods would be crawling with Azgeda scum. Clarke wondered if it was she and Lincoln’s duty to slow their pace and maintain a more cautious speed. But she knew it would be a fruitless endeavour before the half-formed thought had any time to mature. Her companions were all equally motivated to get back to Alton. Lincoln and Bellamy had Octavia, Ontari had Lexa, and Jonyon had Harlen. Even Mallion and Angus had
people that they wanted desperately to see again. Tobias had a wife, and small daughter, and Mercy, well she had her parents and older sisters that she was anxious to return to. Clarke just prayed that they were lucky enough to evade the enemy long enough to lay her eyes on Grace and Lexa. To reassure herself that the people she loved and valued most on this reborn planet were alive and safe.

Clarke cast her mind back to the conversation she had had with Lexa not so long ago over the radio. And felt a flutter of warmth ignite in her chest.

Lexa had promised to look after Grace.

It was a step Clarke never thought that she would be brave enough to take. Trusting Lexa with Grace. But she had taken the leap anyway, entrusting her daughter’s safety to the woman who had betrayed Clarke and her people on the mountain, and curiously she didn’t feel anguished by it. The change likely had something to do with the process of healing that had taken place recently, and the evolution of their relationship in past twenty-four hours probably helped bolster Clarke’s confidence in her decision. But amidst all the chaos and fear surrounding them right now, Clarke felt reassured, knowing that Grace was being protected by not just Octavia, Raven, and Abby, but also Lexa.

Clarke knew that while it was a fantastic show of faith and trust, it was also a portrayal of her selfishness. By asking Lexa to protect Grace, she was also in some ways asking that Lexa never betray her again. By asking Lexa to protect Clarke’s little girl, she was asking, or perhaps demanding that Lexa choose that one child over all others in the middle of battle. To prove her loyalty and devotion to Clarke and Grace, and do as she promised, before doing all else. Purposefully putting Lexa in a position where she might be forced at some point to make a choice between her loyalty to Clarke, or her loyalty to her people. To abandon her responsibility as Heda at a time where Heda will be needed, and protect Grace instead. Using Lexa’s selflessness to satisfy Clarke’s own selfishness. It was wrong, Clarke knew it, but she could not bring herself to spare regret over it.

And in some ways, it was even more than that as well. At the end of the world, any person who can’t be with their family and loved ones, wants their loved ones to find comfort in each other. And Clarke didn’t want neither Lexa or Grace left alone in the middle of this bloody confrontation. She wanted them to have each other.

What was more was that Clarke knew that she was taking a risk. The last time she trusted Lexa in a situation where their feelings for one another was weighed against Lexa’s people, Clarke lost. And right now, there was the potential for it to happen again. There was a chance, a slim one at that, but a chance nevertheless, that Lexa might be put in a situation where she was once again forced to choose between her loyalty to Clarke and her loyalty to the coalition. And Clarke could honestly say, that while it would pain Lexa to do so, she would likely choose her people again. Even if it meant sacrificing Clarke’s trust twice. Because that was the kind of person Lexa was. And while it once would have pained Clarke to admit so, she was exactly the same as Clarke. She would sacrifice something that meant the whole world to her, if it meant that she could save the lives of thousands.

Like what she did on Mount Weather, by sacrificing her humanity and a fraction of her sanity, and the lives of the Mountain Men, Clarke was able to save her people.

And while some might look at the fact that Clarke chose to entrust Grace to Lexa’s care while knowing that if the choice needed to be made, Lexa would not choose differently, Clarke also knew now that Lexa’s choice would not be a betrayal of trust or affection. But a sacrifice of something cherished. And on some level, knowing that Lexa was predictable in this way, and would lose something she valued more than anything else on this planet if she betrayed Clarke twice. There was a strange sense of justice about it. A symmetry that Clarke understood and could admire. Because Clarke was the same.
But Clarke also knew that Lexa would do everything in her power to avoid a situation where she was forced to choose between Clarke and her people. And she felt like she could trust in that certainty. The certainty that Lexa would fight for them before she gave them up. And even if Clarke didn’t trust Lexa to choose Grace and her over her people, Clarke knew that she could trust that Lexa would live in constant pain over the choice she made. And there was a comfort in that. A dark, macabre kind of comfort, but a comfort none the less.

Besides, even if Lexa did ever choose to betray Clarke again, she knew that she could rely on herself to save her daughter and save her people. She had given up her humanity once, perhaps it would be easier to do it the second time. Clarke didn’t know if there was any truth to the statement, but she refused to give-up that simple hope. Which in and of itself was proof that even if Clarke was forced to pay a terrible price to save Grace and her people, she was still capable of healing. She had healed from mount weather. Well, partially healed at least. Her ability to manifest a simple, if not naïve hope was evidence enough of the feat.

But even now, Clarke knew that she had more skills at her disposal than she did a year and half ago. Because now she was armed with more than just a fierce determination to save her people. Now she could fight with more than just her wits and her stubborn nature. Now she could fight with sword and dagger. Bow and arrow. Spear and staff. Tooth and nail. She had more skills at her disposal now, and perhaps that would make all the difference if ever faced with those same insurmountable odds again.

Ultimately Clarke didn’t know if her newly acquired warrior prowess was enough to make any difference, but she couldn’t bring herself to abandon that hope that yet lingered in her breast. So Clarke pushed herself harder, and pumped her legs with more ferocity.

But they were still too loud, and this forest was full of enemies of the coalition. And the next thing Clarke hears is an arrow whistling through the air.

“Get down!” Clarke screeches, her voice enough to startle some of her companions into action, but merely frightening others. Clarke hears the arrow hit flesh with a low thump, and then the heavy sound of a lifeless body hitting the dirt underfoot. No pained grunt, no gurgle of a soul lingering and clinging to this life. Just the soundlessness of death. The finality of a life being extinguished. And as soon as the realisation strikes, that someone in her squad just died. That a party of nine, just became a party of eight. Clarke feels something inside her chest snap and freeze over as ice fills her veins and cold fury sweeps through her entire body. Lighting her very soul alight with icy fire.

Clarke ducks behind a thick tree trunk, and feels the press of someone squeezing in next to her to share the shelter. Clarke was relieved to discover it to be Ontari.

Clarke doesn’t want to look. She doesn’t want to see Bellamy’s lifeless eyes, or Lincoln’s death-stained face. Or even Jonyon’s still chest, frozen into stillness with his last breath trapped inside his dead lungs. She doesn’t want to see someone that she was responsible for protecting laying still and dead in the dirt, because she had failed to protect them. She didn’t want to see her failure, and yet she was helpless to stop her eyes from turning back to identify who among her flock, flew no more.

In the dirt laid Mercy. An arrow shaft protruding from her eye socket and her body twisted unnaturally from her instant death. Her young, nineteen-year-old face, frozen at this age forever. Trusting brown eyes, sightless and lifeless, and staring accusations at Clarke. Silently asking why Clarke did not protect her. Why Clarke wasn’t strong enough to shield her from danger.

Clarke felt the icy fire breath frost into her veins and extinguish all the warmth and light in her chest. The love she was capable of guttered out in her heart for a brief moment. Frozen stalactites of blood fused to Clarke’s non-beating heart, as the grief and failure washed over her. And in that cold,
desolate darkness, Clarke felt Wanheda shift and stir. A deadly excitement makes the monster within, gnash its teeth and fight against the prison of iron will, desperate for freedom. Sensing the overwhelming guilt and sadness and using those dark emotions to rise to the surface. And Clarke cant remember why Wanheda should be locked away. As she stares into lifeless brown eyes, so round and big and young, Clarke forgets. So she allows the dark fury to settle over her, and lets Wanheda have the freedom she so craves.

Ontari must sense a shift, because in the next moment the Azgeda princess is lunging to grab a hold of Clarke, to restrain her perhaps, or maybe attempt to reason with her. But Ontari has never met Wanheda, and Wanheda is an animal hiding in human skin. A dealer of death and resident of darkness. And you cannot reason with her. And before Ontari can reach the blonde, Clarke was already moving. Already so far out of reach, both physically and mentally.

Clarke pulls an arrow from her quiver and loads her bow with startling efficiency, and darts around the side of the tree. Instantly her eyes find Mercy’s killers. A small group of six or seven Azgeda warriors in the distance, all hiding behind rocks and bushels about two hundred metres ahead of her. Clarke takes aim and feels the thrill of an impending kill shiver down her spine as her fingers release the taunt string. Clarke doesn’t enjoy killing, but Wanheda does. The arrow finds a home in the Azgeda archer’s eye, and she thinks that this must be justice. Mercy’s murderer died the same way she did. And she feels the malicious smile pull at her lips before she even consciously thought to wear it.

“Clarke what are you doing?! Get to cover!” Bellamy shouts at her, his brown eyes filled with panic, even as he aims his rifle at the enemy before them. Firing bullets at heads that seem to stubbornly hide behind the cover of their little sanctuary of rock and shrub.

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Clarke ignores Bellamy and notches another arrow, and releases it in quick succession. The arrow finds a home in the soft flesh of a woman’s neck, and her blood-curdling scream echoed through the forest just before her severed carotid artery pulses its last drops of blood on the mossy ground.

Clarke heard the whistle of an enemy arrow as it flew through the air. Clarke sidestepped the vicious pointed weapon, feeling the brush of displaced air tickle her scalp. The arrow harmlessly impacting with nothing but the decaying stump of a felled tree behind her.

Clarke unleashed an otherworldly war cry and charged the Azgeda warriors. Dodging the arrows and daggers thrown at her with the practised ease of an assassin. Her body twisting and turning as she side-stepped, ducked and dodged her death. Her movements so instinctive in this state that she didn’t even have to think about them.

As Clarke neared her targets she felt, rather than saw their fear, and Wanheda’s mouth slicked with copious amounts of hungry saliva. Eager to taste their panic and their desperation and terrified gasps as she ripped their lives from their carcasses. All of the fear she felt for her loved ones and the guilt for Mercy’s needless death, only serving to further provoke Wanheda’s wild fury. Clarke embraced the blood-thirst and the gore-hunger she felt, and channelled their ugliness into making herself faster and stronger and more determined.

Clarke’s legs ate up the distance, the straining muscles not even aching in the midst of her battle-fury. Clarke felt like a Valkyrie, come to reap souls for Valhalla.

Clarke ran towards a copse of trees to her right, evenly dispersed in a jagged zigzag pattern that ended just next the hiding place of the men and women whose lives she would now take. Clarke increased her speed even more, racing like a cheetah after her prey. Reaching the first tree, Clarke jumped and used her momentum to jump to the next tree trunk and the next. Zig-zagging between the trunks of sturdy forestry, and travelling higher up the trunks with each powerful leg thrust. She
kept going until she reached the last tree, and without stopping, ripped her sword from its sheath, and lunged with all the force of her gathered momentum. Landing on the back of her next victim.

Her knees ploughed painfully into his shoulder blades so that he could not defend himself with his arms. The man grunted in pain and began to flail hopelessly, but in the next moment, he was attempting to breathe through his gaping trachea as Clarke slit his throat with her vengeful blade. Blood spraying across the faces of his friends, hot and thick.

Clarke surveyed the remaining four warriors with a wicked gleam in her eye. Eager to meet the challenge the next foolish dead man or woman posed for her. Wanheda was still thirsty.

Ontari and the other’s could be heard making their cries for war, as they sprinted to lend Clarke support. Clarke ignored her friends and focused on the four foes she now faced.

Bellamy’s gun went off, and then there were three foes. The large hulking man that had stood to face her, was now missing half his skull, and his brain decorated the forest floor in a ghoulish painting of red and grey. A stray eyeball, rolling haphazardly from the grotesque mess the man made. His ridiculously large body falling to the ground to join the other three corpses Clarke had created.

Two women picked up the mantel the skull-less man dropped, and they struck at Clarke in tandem. One with Dark colouring and the other light. Clarke wondered if they perhaps assumed to overwhelm her with their doubled assault. The last Azgeda man living, was warily watching Clarke and throwing daggers at her friends as they neared.

The dark woman swung her sword in a low arc with expected swiftness, a move probably designed to split a belly and spill entrails into the dirt. But failed spectacularly, as Clarke simply leaned her weight on her back foot and stepped out of the woman’s reach. Allowing the Dark woman to overextend herself and become off balance.

The Light woman took advantage of the perceived moment of distraction to move her sword in a swift stabbing motion. Clarke was very familiar with the move itself, as it had been the one to end Kadeon’s life. Clarke quickly parried the woman’s strike and twisted her wrist in a subtle but undeniably powerful circle, that jarred the light girl’s wrist and pushed her back all at once.

The dark woman, now recovered, was preparing to strike once more, she thrust her sword out towards Clarke’s left leg to sever her hamstring. Clarke caught the blow with her blade and quickly delivered a blinding punch to the woman’s nasal bridge as she lent in close to support the weight of Clarke’s sword. The Dark woman stumbled back, and tried to rid herself of her disorientation. But to no avail. Clarke moved swiftly to attack at the girl’s head, but feinted to her right when she predictably moved to defend. Clarke dragged her sword across the girl’s hamstring just as she had intended to do to Clarke. The Dark woman screamed in her unexpected agony.

The light woman was watching her friend bleed in the dirt, and felt a flare of anger. She swung out viciously and recklessly, Clarke simply knocked the blow away, and stepped inside the woman’s guard. Clarke yanked her dagger from her thigh, and in a flash the unforgiving steel was lodged in the woman’s soft belly. Clarke looked into the woman’s hazel eyes as the light began to fade, slowly. It would be a slow death if she was left this way.

In the corner of her eye, Clarke could see the dark woman dragging herself up into a standing position, and picking up her sword once more. If she had been more coherent, Clarke might have admired her grit. But Clarke yanked the dagger out of the light woman’s belly and threw the blade at her friend, all without breaking eye contact with the light woman. Clarke heard the dark woman gurgle around the dagger in her throat, and knew her aim had struck true.
The light woman watched aghast as her friend died, and she slumped to her knees. Blood dribbling from her mouth. Without further preamble, Clarke swung her sword down in a rapid arc of deadly intent, and slit the woman’s throat. Her blade biting in so deeply, that it severed all but the woman’s spine. Which under the weight of her unmoored head, snapped with a sickening crunch, as her head rolled backwards. Blood spurted up at Clarke, from the headless corpse. Bathing her in even more crimson, even more death.

Clarke looked around for more Azgeda, despite knowing that there would be none. Ontari was moving towards the last one, a handful of daggers in her fist, and handful more riddled through the last man’s body, as he fell to the ground. His life eventually fleeing him as well. Ontari stood over the corpse, her daggers bloody and her breathing heavy. Her inscrutable eyes staring blankly into the dead orbs of her fellow clansman. Clarke wished that she felt enough equilibrium and warmth to offer Ontari some form of comfort, but Wanheda was still slathering and roaring too close to the surface. Seemingly frenzied by the heavy scent of iron, and slippery consistency of blood smattered the ground around them.

Bellamy was looking pale again as he surveyed the carnage around him. His dark freckles seeming even more prominent as his alabaster skin lost colour. But he seemed to push through his discomfort. “Is anyone hurt? Did anyone get cut by one of their blades?” He asks quickly, his eyes surveying everyone for injury, while his mind churns on the ever-present threat of Azlipa-Tozu. Everyone voicing their unharmed status, the underlying gravity that not everyone had been so lucky as to avoid the enemy’s weapons hung heavy in the air. Eventually his burgeoning gaze settles onto Clarke. His expression expectant. Clarke just shakes her head in the negative.

Lincoln looked concerned as he watched Clarke try to cage Wanheda once more, locking the ugly, dangerous side of herself deep down. Back into the darkness where she believed such a creature belonged.

Mallion and Angus appeared utterly uneasy as they looked upon Clarke in a new light. This was the first time they had seen firsthand the kind of destruction she was capable of, and it had shaken them to their very core. The two men wondered if it was too late to fall on their knees and beg forgiveness for their arrogant stupidity for ever questioning her in the past.

Ontari still stood over the corpse of the last man, but her keen eyes were observing Clarke. Her head cocked as she acquainted herself with this version of Clarke she had never seen before. Whilst also subconsciously cataloguing the unique fighting style Clarke demonstrated and comparing it to the assassin’s she liked to watch as a child.

And Tobias and Jonyon, were already moving towards Mercy’s fallen body.

Clarke sighed as she calmed herself. She closed her eyes to disappear from sight all the death she had delivered, and focused on her breathing. Her harried inhalations eventually lengthening and slowing, once again becoming calm. The anger and fiery retribution that had laced her blood when she saw Mercy fall, had now evaporated. And left behind was only sadness. Clarke had failed. She was meant to protect these people, and in their rush to get to Alton, a life had been lost. A young life. And it filled Clarke’s chest with lead, as she contemplated how she could have prevented it.

Clarke’s eyes were unfocused as she gazed towards Mercy’s fallen corpse, and watched as Tobias and Jonyon, pulled the arrow out of her head, and dragged some branches over her to protect her body from the wild animals until they could come back for her.

“Stop blaming yourself Clarke.” Ontari admonishes quietly.

Clarke turns around to meet Ontari’s serious chocolate eyes. Clarke hadn’t even heard the girl move
towards her, so caught up in her own musings had she been.

Clarke opened her mouth to protest.

“Don’t deny it. I saw the way you lost control there for a moment.” She says softly, kindly. Understanding pouring from her in rivers.

None of the disgust was present in Ontari’s expression, that Clarke had come to expect whenever Wanheda got the better of her and became too much to deny. Clarke felt ashamed that she hadn’t been able to control the darkness inside of her. She felt like she had failed twice already this day, and it was still only in the beginning orange swirls of dawn.

Clarke stymies the guilt and hardens her resolve, nods slowly, and begins pulling her dagger and arrows out of the corpses she created, and wiping the gore on the Fallen’s clothes.

“We need to keep moving.” Clarke comments with stark resolution. Her voice detached and eyes a little glassy. Guilt and the barely restrained presence of Wanheda, still making her feel like she was prey in her own skin.

Ontari follows Clarke wordlessly, choosing not to comment on the extraordinary carnage that Clarke had created in the space of a minute. Her previous suspicions regarding Clarke’s warrior origins feeling as though they had more credence now than ever. Ontari’s seeds of distrust growing into small sprouts of certainty as they are watered with blood and gore.

Clarke and the others began their sprint once more, their attention already turned back onto the task of getting to Alton as fast as humanly possible. Clarke’s legs pumped with adrenalin and determination. And her eyes warily surveying all that surrounded them. She was in no hurry to shorten eight sprinting sets of feet down to seven.

Clarke could see the smoke from the cookfires inside Alton in the near distance. She could practically taste her close proximity to her daughter and Lexa. Hope springing to life in her chest. Just before she heard the unmistakable scrape of steel on steel, an angry war cry of warriors doing battle, and gunfire thundering along the mountains. And she could smell the gunpowder and the smoke and blood. And Clarke realised that the smoke she had seen was not from the cookfires.

Alton was burning.

Azgeda was already here.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all!

Hiatus is now officially over, thanks so much for your patience! My placement was amazing, a big thankyou to everyone who wished me well!

I had so much fun writing this chapter. I got to have a play with Wanheda again, which is always exciting (and bloody), but I also got to explore the way Clarke reacts to death when she is not responsible for it. Which is something I dont think I have gotten to cover very much in my fic so far. We also got to see Clarke lose control in this chapter, which is a little confronting, as it is a very human reaction, and she sought out revenge
for her fallen comrade - out of grief and loss and fear, it doesn't really matter, but I wanted to play with Clarke's humanity a little in this chapter. If I achieved that, then YAY, but if not, I will try harder next time haha!

Anyway, I hope you guys really enjoy this new chapter, it was a blast to write, and the next update will happen in the next week sometime. I am not going to put an exact timeframe on it, but I am aiming for a week.

Until next time my lovelies! Happy reading!! :D
It started the way most fights begin.

An enraged battle cry, followed quickly by the clash of steel and wails of doomed men and women, falling dead or wounded to the ground.

Only this conflict was slightly changed to what Lexa deemed normal. Because alongside the clash of iron and the heavy tang of blood in the air, was the resounding pop of gunfire echoing through the valley. Skaikru fighting alongside Trikru. It still felt strange, even after all the time that had passed since they became the 13th clan, and yet it was also a comfort. They hadn’t fought alongside each other since the fall of Mount Weather, and although it was only a small number of Skaikru, their presence here felt like forgiveness.

Skaikru moved in first, taking out a large portion of Nia’s force with just the squeeze of their finger. The power of their weapons terrifying to behold, and yet Lexa was so grateful to have them leading the attack.

Azgeda just kept coming. They charged like mindless beasts, running out of the forest like hellhounds were nipping at their heels. Their foolish bravery contrasted so violently to Nia’s cowardice in that moment that it was dizzying to behold.

Because that was what this was all about, wasn’t it? Nia wanted power, but she was too impatient and craven to face the full force of Lexa’s army in an honest battle. Instead she sent her warriors in the early hours of dawn, to wipe out an army sent to protect the borderlands that Nia had been terrorising for weeks now.

Lexa charged into the fray with ten trusted warriors flanking her sides. Lexa cut down men and women with ruthless efficiency, and she tried not to think about the fact that perhaps not all of these people were here out of choice or loyalty to their Queen. That these people might be just the same as Greya. With a family locked away and threatened to force their compliance, in a war that they didn’t want or believe in.

She pushed that thought aside and tried only to focus on the battle raging all around her. But the sights surrounding her were even more morbid than she had prepared herself for. Because behind her, huts were burning. Tendrils of hungry flame licking at the thatching and consuming the sturdy structure beneath like it was little more than parchment.

Remnants of huts shimmered in the fierce heat of flames spread by Azgeda arrows dipped in oil and flickering orange light.

The air was so polluted that Lexa’s eyes felt gritty and burned from small foreign particles sapping away their moisture. Lexa’s nostrils felt clogged with ash and smoke and her lungs burned with each hot inhalation, as Alton caught on fire. Buildings that were once coloured light browns, and woody yellows from the trees by which they were crafted from, were now ravaged by angry amber, and twists of fiery crimson and flecks of gold. The trees that had loomed too close to the huts were losing their luscious green colours, in exchange for the blacks and browns of nature-death. Their vitality being drained away as they choked on smoke and scalding warmth.
Livelihoods were burned along with family homes.

The blacksmith’s forge.

The little grocer’s that traded their wares of fruits, vegetables, spices and herbs.

The seamstress hut, that crafted such beautiful clothing and leather armour.

Even the Baker’s hut that had once sold fresh bread made from oats and honey.

They were all ravaged by flames. They would all be reduced to smoking piles of blackened rubble by tomorrow.

Lexa didn’t know how she hadn’t noticed the heat at her back before now. It was like standing too close to a furnace. Her body slicked with sweat from both her exertions on the battle field and the radiating fierceness of the blaze behind her. The uncomfortable dampness made her pauldron feel more oppressive and constricting than normal, and Lexa momentarily wished that she could take it off and fight in only her tunic. The symbolic significance of the thought was not lost on her.

Lexa pushed that thought aside as well and focused her energies back on Nia, even as she made a vicious swipe with her sword and cut a woman’s legs out from beneath her. Ignoring the agonised scream as tempered steel tore through flesh.

Lexa wondered if it was a tactical manoeuvre, by bathing Alton in fire. If it was done to provide light for their archers, and to cut off Lexa’s army from an escape into the mountains or even into the lake. Or if perhaps they were following orders from Nia, to destroy everything in their path for no other reason than because they could. Knowing Nia’s vindictive nature, it was likely that the tactical benefits of setting Alton ablaze were simply a convenient by-product of her cruelty.

Nevertheless, Lexa’s heart felt a little heavier in her chest every time she heard an arrow embed itself into the thatching of someone’s home, or someone’s business, or someone’s chest, and heard the following whoosh of flame as they were engulfed. The organ slowly becoming encased in lead under Nia’s carefully chaotic ministrations.

A man rushed towards Lexa, with his sword raised high. Deadly intent clear in his eyes as though Lexa’s death had been written there. Lexa wondered if this man was the tenth or perhaps the twentieth in this battle to have charged her with the same foolhardy plan to kill her. However his mission ended the same as all the others. Lexa parried his thrust with the thoughtless efficiency of someone who had been trained to fight since before she could walk. And then quickly slashing her blade across the meat of his shoulder as she advanced on him. Lexa kept walking as he fell, knowing that the warriors that flanked her and guarded her back would dispatch him swiftly enough.

She heard the wet thunk and sickening crunch, as Ronan drove his spear into the man’s skull.

Lexa’s boots squelched in the ground beneath her, and she fought the urge to gag when she realised that the dirt had softened from all the blood spilt upon it. The earth saturated with death like some kind of pagan blood sacrifice. The dead littered the ground like leaves from an autumn tree. With all manner of weapon protruding from their corpses. Axes, spears, arrows, knives, swords. Some were simply dead with their necks twisted unnaturally.

Trikru, Skaikru and Azgeda alike, death accepted them all into his cold embrace. Lexa pushed her disgust and her sadness behind the mask of Heda, and pushed forwards. Knowing that no one would follow a commander that wore her weakness as though it was strength.

Lexa kept pushing forwards, using her blood-borne superior speed, strength and reflexes to her
advantage. Cutting through Azgeda like her life depended on it. And in some ways, it did. By keeping the battle contained to the village, Lexa was able to keep Grace and everyone in the mountain safe. Lexa longed to be able to have Grace’s head of auburn curls in her sights at all times and fulfil her promise to Clarke, but she knew that there was no way that her people would fight for a leader who was more concerned with saving a single child. And there was no way that Lexa would endanger that little girl by having her anywhere near combat. Or anywhere near her for that matter, for there was no doubt in Lexa’s mind that she would be the main target here tonight. That if she fell, then Nia would win. And although Lexa wanted nothing more than to be reassured with her own eyes of Grace’s safety, Lexa just needed to rest easy knowing that Grace was with Octavia, and Raven and Abby. She would be safe with them until Lexa was able to finish this fight and protect her herself.

It was as this thought trickled into Lexa mind, that she spotted the red bomber jacket and the unsteady limp of one, Raven Reyes across the battlefield. The girl was with Tanga and the pair were trying to move what Lexa now recognised as Raven’s radio, and some of her other equipment, whilst simultaneously fighting off Azgeda that deemed them an easy target.

They were wrong however, as Raven seemed to be a spectacular shot with her pistol, and every time an Ice Nation warrior stepped too close to her and the other black-haired girl, she would put a bullet in their heads, spraying their brains into the wind as red mist.

Tanga seemed to be quite the swordswoman as well. Cutting down anyone who got within attacking distance of herself or Raven. Lexa watched as the young woman buried her sword into the eye socket of some unfortunate soul, and just kept moving.

Lexa felt admiration and a trickle of fear prickle in her coronary arteries for the duo, and began moving in the girl’s direction without much conscious thought. Knowing that Clarke would be inconsolable if either of her foolish friends died because they were trying to save a radio and whatever else Raven had managed to salvage.

Lexa cut a path towards the girl with ease, ignoring the way blood sprayed against her face, and iron coated her lips. If Lexa couldn’t be right next to Grace in that moment, the least she could do is protect Clarke’s friends.

Moments later, Lexa was standing before Raven and Tanga, the former of the two staring at Lexa and her warriors with wide-eyed surprise. Her brown orbs comically large.

“What are you doing here?” Raven’s tone is filled with shock.

Lexa raised one perfectly sculpted eyebrow in response to Raven’s tone, before asking a question of her own. “I think the better question is what are you doing here?”

Raven looked at Lexa as though she had sprouted an extra head. “I had to save my radio.” Raven’s voice is almost shrill as she speaks loudly to be heard over the din of war. “I couldn’t let her burn.” Her eyes are wide and almost pleading, as though the thought of leaving the inanimate object behind was simply unthinkable.

Lexa almost laughed at the ridiculousness of the entire situation. But couldn’t bring herself to do so in the middle of a battlefield. Not while people were being slaughtered all around.

Lexa opened her mouth to respond, but was interrupted when a barrage of arrows rained down upon their heads. Lexa saw the five dots of orange rapidly growing larger as they fell towards their targets, Lexa felt her black blood surge with adrenalin, and with a burst of near inhuman speed, Lexa roughly shoved Raven and Tanga behind the protection of a mighty oak tree without much care for herself.
Lexa felt pain splinter up her arm like wildfire, and grit her teeth to avoid crying out. Looking down, Lexa saw the shaft of an arrow skewering her left forearm, and the angry tendrils of flame that were now clinging to the armour on her shoulder and rapidly eating through the protective fabric.

Tanga quickly recovered from the unexpected movement, and regained her balance quickly behind the safety of the tree, whilst also protecting Raven’s precious radio from damage.

Raven was not so lucky, and hit her head hard as her bad leg crumpled beneath her. “Ah shit!” Raven exclaimed a little groggily, as she regained her balance, reorientated herself with her surroundings, a hand rubbing the side of her head, where she had smacked into the trunk of the tree. She looked down to reprimand Lexa for her rough treatment, and only then noticed the arrow sticking out of Lexa’s flesh and the fire attacking her clothing as she tried to smother the flames. “Double shit!” The brunette swore.

Tanga was already moving into action, scooping up a handful of dirt and patting out the flame. Unthinking of the infection risks or any other concern of bacteria that her mother might have scolded her for forgetting.

“Thankyou.” Lexa croaked, sighing in relief once the fire was out. She could feel the flesh beneath her armour burning with white hot pain as though she had been branded, and instinctively knew that damage had been done. After taking a quick mental observation of her wounds and current physical state, only then did Lexa dare to survey the status of her warriors. Three of the ten laid dead. Lexa recognised Asha, Quill and Joshume lying motionless in the dirt. Their blood mingling and watering the earth with yet more crimson iron.

Crouched behind an upturned cart, was Ronan and Korbin. The other five warriors crouched in various positions of protection from the arrows.

“They are trying to kill you Heda.” Ronan growled in anger as he quickly moved to his commander’s side. Spitting dramatically in the direction of the nearest Azgeda corpse.

“So it would seem.” Lexa mumbled dryly to herself. Titus’ lecture about sarcasm being the product of a weak mind instantly replaying in an irritating loop in the back of her head. A lesson she had learned very early as a young nightblood. The memory felt bittersweet now.

Korbin quickly knelt by Lexa’s side and ripped off a piece of his shirt to tie a tourniquet above the shaft of the arrow still protruding from her arm. His fingers were quick and sure, and Lexa contemplated whether he had done this before.

“Heda, I need to get the arrow out.” Korbin informs her with an apologetic grimace.

Lexa nods her understanding slowly, even though the smallest movement made her arm feel like it was about to unhinge itself and fall into the dirt.

Korbin inspects the arrow for a moment more, before his expression turns dire and concerned. His mouth opening as though he planned to say something, before shutting again when he thought better of it.

“What is it?” Lexa snaps brusquely.

“The arrow appears to be barbed Heda.” Is all the explanation he offers, and Lexa immediately knows what that information means.

“Okay.” She nods her head with determination and reinforces her resolve with steel. She had, after all been through this once before, and knew the pain that she was about to endure.
“I don’t think you understand Heda…” Korbin’s voice trails off when Lexa levels a fierce glare upon the man.

“I know what it means.” She says with quiet resignation.

“Does someone feel like decoding ‘Doctor Cryptic’s’ diagnosis please?” Raven without any heat, her attempt at sarcasm falling flat when her voice shook with guilt and uncertainty. It was her fault Lexa was hurt. Clarke was going to kick her ass.

“It means that it is going to hurt… A lot.” Tanga whispers absentmindedly. The girl uncharacteristically serious, as she lays a protective hand on Raven’s shoulder and squeezes gently. Reassuring herself that the mechanic was safe and present.

Korbin says no more on the matter, and gets to work cutting away Lexa’s armour to gain access to the wound.

The pain of that simple action is enough to make Lexa grind her teeth, as the charred material pulls on burnt flesh and blossoming blisters. Dark scarlet and angry. Lexa’s black blood making the wound appear a strange hue of maroon red, verging on a dirty coal black.

When the material was finally cut away from her arm, Lexa assessed the damage. Her left arm was covered in burns from her collarbone to her elbow. Most of the damage looked superficial, but the blisters closer to where the arrow shaft jutted out of the flesh of her arm, looked deeper and more vicious. A small trickle of black blood ran down Lexa’s arm and dripped from her elbow.

Raven gasped as she watched the oil-like substance flow from the commander’s arm, and wondered if she was currently hallucinating. “What the hell is wrong with your blood?” She shrieked undignifiedly.

Lexa levelled a blank stare in the mechanics direction and mentally rolled her eyes.

Despite her apparent shock, the mechanic crouched closer to have a better look, even as her cheeks paled and her nose rankled, her eyes filled with fascination. “Dude you should go see Abby when this is all over. I think you have some kind of medical condition.” Raven falls back on her sarcastic nature to avoid her mounting unease as she watches even more of the Commander’s black blood ooze from the wound encasing the arrow head like a grotesque glove.

Tanga scoffed and playfully smacked Raven up the side of the head. Muttering a fond “branweda,” under her breath.

Raven turned her head on a swivel and mock-glared at her girlfriend. “That was rude.” She mutters under her breath.

Tanga rolls her midnight blue eyes, unaffected and unapologetic for her behaviour.

Ronan shakes his head reproachfully at the two bickering children. “It is the sacred blood of the commander’s.” He corrects Raven’s assessment. “She is a Natblida. The strongest Natblida of her conclave.” He says reverently, bowing his head slightly in respect to Lexa, even as his eyes scanned the surrounding area for threats. The battle had moved further ahead, with Lexa’s warrior’s on the offensive and pushing Azgeda back out of Alton. For the moment their group was relatively safe, but it was wise to be on guard nevertheless.

Lexa paid close attention to the conversation occurring around her, as Korbin quietly warned her that he was going to cut around the arrow shaft now. Lexa focused on Raven’s eyebrows as they rocketed up her forehead, as Korbin sliced a neat line to extend the wound on Lexa’s arm with an
unsullied knife. Lexa’s eyes watered, and her arm felt like it had been fed on by the piranha’s of the Floukru. But she stubbornly did not cry out.

Because the arrow was barbed, it could not be pushed through as a normal arrow might, without shredding the muscles of Lexa’s arm. So the tip needed to be cut out, to avoid further damage. And even then, dislodging the mangled edges of steel from sinews of muscle would be one of the most excruciating experiences of Lexa’s life. That’s if she survived it. Most often, warriors died from the barbs shredding their blood vessels, and then bleeding out.

Korbin poured a small amount of TonTon on his hands to clean them. And Lexa wondered why the man had it on his person. “I am going to put my fingers inside the wound now.” Korbin murmured quietly, so Lexa was the only one who heard.

Lexa grit her teeth again and tensed her body in preparation for the waves of pain she knew would be engulfing her any second now.

Korbin’s fingers were gentle, but even so Lexa’s whole body stiffened and her vision blackened around the edges. Some part of Lexa, her survival instinct she assumed, told her to not fight the unconsciousness that was eager to carry her away from the agony that was shredding her arm. But Lexa refused to give into it, and struggled to grasp onto her wits, even as the pain intensified.

Lexa grunted, and her breaths were heavy and laboured, but a moment later, the pain disappeared and so too did Korbin’s fingers. Along with that cursed arrow.

Lexa slumped against the rough bark of the tree. Luxuriating in the cool bristles that scratched at her cheek, and worked to control her breathing once more. There was a residual throbbing in her arm, but it was nothing compared to the pain that had consumed her only moments before.

Lexa turned her weary eyes upwards to Korbin and the man gave her a proud smile, as he wrapped the wound in a clean cloth. “You did well Heda.” Lexa wondered if he was referring to her ability to not lose consciousness or perhaps her stubborn resolve to not scream, as he had dug inside her delicate flesh. Maybe it was a combination.

“Jesus Christ. That was gnarly.” Raven stated breezily from her still crouched position. Attempting to appear nonplussed by the whole situation. But the gratitude and deep-seated concern shone brightly from the honeyed brown irises of her eyes, and the sight made Lexa smile. It was small and lopsided, and probably looked more like a grimace, but it was there.

Raven nodded almost imperceptibly, a sudden seriousness and maturity briefly crossing Raven’s face. And Lexa found that she saw much expressed with such a minute gesture. Gratitude for pushing both she and Tanga out of the way, even though she had risked her own life to do so. And strangely enough, Lexa saw forgiveness there too. It was buried and well-hidden, but Lexa saw it peeking out of the depths of brown. She was unsure what she was being forgiven for, or perhaps it wasn’t directed towards her. But it spiked Lexa’s curiosity, and made her realise that Clarke’s friend was much more complex than she originally appeared. She reminded Lexa of Ontari.

Lexa pulled herself up from her seated position amongst the roots of the tree, and stood on shaky legs. She picked her sword up from its place in the dirt where she had dropped it, and faced her small band of warriors. “Let’s go. There is much to be done before dawn breaks.” Determination shining brilliantly from her eyes and the promise of battle imminent. Lexa turned to Raven and Tanga. “You two should head back up into the mountain’s where it is safe.” Lexa says with a small inflection of softness.

The two women shared a look that could only be described as conspiratorial, before both seeming to
come to the same conclusion.

“We will join you Heda.” Tanga’s tone is resolute, and challenging in a way that makes it difficult for Lexa to deny their desire.

Lexa cast a subtle glance towards Raven’s leg, and watched as the olive-skinned mechanic straightened her spine as though she had something to prove. “We will BOTH be joining you Heda.” Raven emphasises with crossed arms and an unyielding glint in her eye.

Lexa simply nods silently and then turns her attention back towards the sounds of battle ahead of them. The clash of steal, the wails of fallen men and women, the roar of the fire. Lexa repositioned her mask of Heda, and lead her warriors back towards the fight at hand.

Her warriors staring at her back with hearts full of renewed strength and admiration for their commander.

Chapter End Notes

Heya guys!!

Sorry for the later than expected update, but I appreciate your patience, you guys are saints haha!

I literally rewrote this chapter 7 times, because each time the words just didn't sound right, or something happened in the plot that was a steaming pile of horsedung. Anyway, I eventually got this chapter onto paper, and although Lexa was hurt - and that is something that none of us wanted - it was honestly my best choice out of all of the other plots that I came up with.

So please dont hate me guys! I am sorry I hurt Lexa, but I promise she will be fine!!

I wanted to have Raven and Lexa find some kind of common ground/understanding/respect for each other in this chapter, but I also wanted to showcase a tiny sliver of Lexa’s special nightho blood abilities. So that and a few other elements, were what I struggled with while writing this chapter. I just wanted to find a balance between it all, and I THINK I have achieved that on some level, but I will let you guys be the judge of that haha!

Anyway, this chapter was a bitch to write, I will openly admit that, but I hope you guys enjoy it nevertheless!!

Btw, I cant believe this is my 50th chapter, that's crazy! It's feels like I have achieved something here! :D

Feel free to leave me some feedback, I love hearing from you guys!!

- Loz x
Lexa’s arm throbbed. The nerves in her shoulder feeling like they had been spit-roasted over a cookfire like a juicy boar. The burnt flesh was raw, and felt like every synapse was exposed. Even tucked protectively against Lexa’s side, the pain of her arm was breathtaking, and it was difficult to focus on anything else. Even though there was a war happening all around her.

The group of ten, including Raven, Tanga and Lexa were moving in a tight V formation, with Lexa at the helm. Korbin and Ronan flanked Lexa’s right and left, with Raven and Tanga to either side of them, and all the other remaining warrior’s falling into line behind. A burly man towards the back of the group, whose name she thought might have been Jonah, of perhaps it was John, Jeremiah? He carried Raven’s precious radio. His thickly muscled arms bearing the heavy equipment like it weighed no more than a feather.

The air smelt like smoke and copper, and Lexa could taste ash every time she breathed through her mouth to avoid the smell of blood and fire. But it was no use. The air was thick with plumes of smoke, flecks of amber embers floated through the air like hellish and weightless raindrops. And through the haze, Lexa could see the sun beginning to crest the mountain top. Thin rays of golden light shining down on the carnage this unnecessary battle had caused. The birth of a new day stood starkly against the field of corpses. It felt wrong that something, anything, be born whilst so many lives were ending.

Lexa wondered how Clarke was faring. Was she safe? Was she staying with the assassin, in the sanctuary provided by the surrounding forest? Even as the thought took root in Lexa’s mind, she immediately knew the falsity of it. There was no way that Clarke would be able to sit back and watch this happen, without doing something. The realisation provided both a strange sense of comfort and a sharp twist of dread to punch Lexa in the guts.

She’s too much like me, Lexa thought wryly to herself as she stepped forward with grim determination to cut down her next foe. The tall Azgeda woman charged at Lexa as though she were a mindless beast. Her mind fogged with battle-rage and blood-lust. Lexa blocked the woman’s sword strike with her own blade. The vibration of the clash sending a painful shock up Lexa’s body and jarring her injured arm. Lexa grunted low in her throat and pushed the woman back. In a blur of movement too fast to counteract, Lexa kicked the woman’s legs out from beneath her, and then quickly dragged the wicked edge of her sword across the inside of the woman’s thigh. Slicing the femoral artery. The woman cried out, but Lexa ignored her pain, moving onto her next foe knowing she would bleed out in seconds.

In the corner of her eye, Lexa could see Ronan whipping his spear around in a deadly arc above his head before driving it through an Ice Nation man’s belly, skewering his internal organs and severing his spine. The man looked down at the pointed weapon that had delivered his death with wide uncomprehending hazel eyes. Before he coughed up a mouthful of bright crimson blood, and fell to the ground without another sound.

Korbin was more reckless in his movements as he dispatched a man with greying hair. His twin daggers gripped tight in his palm’s, as his own salt and pepper braids swung wildly around his head. Korbin blocked the man’s sword strike with crossed daggers, before kicking the man viciously in the pelvis. The man stumbled back, and his sword swiped down rapidly, only missing Korbin’s face by a mere inch, but cutting a line of garnet along his chest. Korbin whirled on the man while he tried to
regain his balance, and crouched low to slice the man’s hamstring’s just above his ankles. The man fell into a screeching heap in the scarlet mud, clutching his lower extremities. Before Korbin slit his throat with a neat flick of his wrist.

Lexa kept advancing, as all of her warriors killed the Azgeda men and women with brutal efficiency. Leaving a wake of ruined human remains behind them. Even Raven and Tanga had managed to keep up with them. Raven firing bullets at different targets, and hitting her mark every time. Keeping the man cradling her radio in her peripheral vision, and loading a new clip into her pistol from her front pocket without taking her eyes off the enemy around her. Lexa would see her grimace occasionally, when her deadened leg slipped in the mud, but otherwise she was unshakable. Her earlier playful expression replaced with a focus that was both intimidating and impressive.

Tanga was also a whirlwind if motion. The Alton native was quick with her blades, and was constantly guarding Raven with little thought of her own safety. When the mechanic’s footing would slip, Tanga would slow herself to match Raven’s pace, and keep her safe as she regained her tentative sense of balance. It made Lexa wonder if she and Clarke would fight with the same level of protectiveness. Something inside Lexa made her feel certain that they would, and her heart fluttered with a longing anticipation.

Lexa heard the wet slap of a body hitting the ground behind her, and turned just in time to see one of her own warrior’s fall into the bloody mud with her throat slit. Kale’s finger’s grasping at her torn flesh to stem the bleeding in a fruitless and hopeless effort to save her own life. Lexa could feel the oppressive nature of her group’s grief in the atmosphere surrounding them as Kale fell. But once everyone was sure that her soul had departed, the warrior’s to either side of her filled the gap in their defence that her death had caused, and kept advancing. Pushing aside their sadness like the good soldiers she knew them to be, and doubling their efforts to dispatch their enemies.

Much to everyone’s dismay, this happened twice more. Dwindling their number from ten, down to seven in the space of a few minutes. The first man was an ill-tempered beast whose name might have been Palio. He died when an Ice Nation warrior who outmatched him in strength buried his axe in his brain, and sliced a gory path all the way down to his balls. Spilling entrails and other revolting bodily by-products into the dirt. The sight was truly horrific.

The second warrior to die was a quiet mouse of a man, whose only friend seemed to be silence. His name was Onri, and his life was stolen from him when an arrow found a home in his thigh, and then a sword found a home in his thoracic cavity. He died the way he had lived. Mute.

The group continued advancing despite their losses, but Lexa couldn’t help but notice that more and more Azgeda warriors were surrounding them as Lexa’s small force thinned out.

Lexa could see Indra fighting not far from her current position with a small group of warriors in a formation very similar to her own. And a few other groups of fighters adopting a similar pattern to battle in. But eventually, Trikru and Skaikru began succumbing to sheer force of Azgeda, as the Ice Nation just kept coming.

Lexa weaved her way around yet another burning hut and avoided stepping too close to the flames. The heat from the added proximity made Lexa’s own burns radiate a dangerous heat, that licked across her arm and down her body in throbbing waves of agony. Lexa grit her teeth for what felt like the thousandth time since that thrice-damned arrow plummeted from the heavens. Slicked first with oil, then later with her black blood, and burning with ferocious flame.

Another Ice Nation warrior intercepted Lexa’s path with the intent to take her life, a much shorter shadow stepping up behind him with similar goals. The two attacked in tandem. The man going high, while the shorter person went low for Lexa’s knees. Lexa moved quickly, running to meet the
The broad man fell to the side, whilst the shorter person fell limp to the ground with unconsciousness as their head struck a hard patch of dirt. Lexa landed in a crouch and ignored the way her sharp movements had aggravated the burning discomfort in her arm.

Spinnaing around quickly, Lexa assessed her opponents. The man was quickly recovering for a second round, whilst the shorter person, who Lexa now realised was a young Sekken, of about ten years, was still claimed by unconsciousness.

The sight of the young boy’s slumped face pulled sharply at a hazy memory, but Lexa ignored that too. And quickly dispelled the wavering image of Anya that her unhelpful mind conjured.

The man stood back onto slightly unsteady feet, his grey eyes clouded with pain and confusion, as he brandished his axe once more. He swung out blindly, his movements clumsy and even slower than before, leaving Lexa to surmise that she had hit him harder than she had realised. Lexa leant back to avoid his sloppy strike, and then brought her own sword down in a vicious slash that split open the man’s belly, near cutting him in half. Tearing a wide gash for slippery, blood and faeces-slickened bowels to spew out of him like painted eels.

The man’s dazed grey eyes peered into Lexa’s green ones for only a moment, before turning his flickering, steely focus onto the crumpled form of his young Sekken. “Please… Don’t kill my son.” The man’s lips coated with blood as he gurgled the words. Before his grey eyes lost all spark of life and his already swaying body fell heavily into the dirt.

With five little words, Lexa felt ruined, a wave of crippling guilt gnawing over the place where her tachy-cardic heart must be. Lexa felt tears sting the back of her eyes. Tears she could not allow to fall until this war was won, and her enemy defeated.

Lexa didn’t want to weep for her enemy. No. She wanted to weep and cry out at the injustice of the world for not putting an end to a conflict that would rip another parent away from their child. She wanted to curse Nia for making Lexa personally responsible for ending this man’s life and taking away this child’s nontu.

Lexa swallowed thickly around the large lump in her throat and tried to ignore the vile responsibility that sat heavily in her stomach, as though she had swallowed a boulder. She knelt next the boy, and felt his neck for a pulse. It was irregular and weak, and turning the boy onto his back, Lexa could see why. The boy’s head had not hit a patch of hard earth as she had assumed, but instead had fallen onto a broken arrow shaft protruding from the ground. The splintered wood had pierced the boy’s temple, and imbedded itself into the soft tissue of his brain. Lexa felt the boy’s pulse slow until it was only an echo and then abruptly stop. All the blood in his young body simply standing still as his soul departed him.

The guilt Lexa felt moments before had amplified tenfold, and nausea burnt the back of her oesophagus with acidic promise. The mask of Heda was groaning under the weight of her emotions, and Lexa prayed that her disguise remained intact. Now more than ever she could not show her weakness. To show her grief would be to command her own death.
But nevertheless, Lexa’s watery jade irises looked up from the young corpse she had made, and all she could see was death. Men, women, even a few children. They all lay dead. Their lungs deflated from their last breath’s leaving them, and their heart’s still and quiet in their chests in a way that they hadn’t been since they were little more than a speckle in their mother’s wombs.

Their faces frozen in varying expressions of nothingness, made Lexa wonder what they had looked like in life. Did they smile with a proud mouthful of white teeth? Or did they express themselves with the warmth of their eyes?

Were these people loved by someone? Did they have a Husband, a Wife? Were they Mother’s and Father’s? Brothers and Sisters? Sons and daughters?

Lexa stopped seeing the olive green and black furs of Trikru, and the starch blue uniforms of Skaikru, or the white, grey and black tatters of Azgeda, and simply saw the individual’s that were once innocent. Once alive. Who were now dead because of a war that never should have started in the first place. A war Nia was responsible for, because she wanted something that she had no right to possess. A war Lexa had asked some of these brave warrior’s to fight and die for.

‘It is the burden of a leader to look into her warrior’s eyes and say go die for me.’ The familiar mantra tasted like ashes and lies on her tongue, because surely leadership was not contingent upon the presence of war.

Lexa cursed the bald-headed traitor who had taught her those words. Repeated them to her every morning until she heard them when the room was empty and silent, and all that existed were her thoughts and the sounds of her breath.

She hated Titus for making her think that the life she lived was ever enough. That she could look at the world through black glass, and never see the full technicolour of life. To never experience the beauty of living, instead of merely surviving in this world. She hated him for teaching her that love was weakness, and she hated herself for ever thinking that she believed him.

She loved these people, all of them, whether they were Azgeda, Skaikru or Trikru. And while it hurt to see them suffer and die, she knew that she was a good leader because she cared for their wellbeing’s. She did not lead them out of a grudging sense of duty or honour. She was their commander because she loved these people as though they were the family she had been snatched away from at the tender age of six. And that made her strong. Just as Clarke said it would.

She loved these people, and yet Nia would have them kill each other over the simple single-minded and wholly selfish pursuit of power. Lexa would give up her right to command if she thought it would create peace. But alas, a tyrant the likes of Nia, would never be content with ruling the clans, she would want to dominate them, dictate them, enslave them. And Lexa would fight that joyless fate until her last dying breath.

Her people deserved more.

Lexa felt her soul-sapping hopelessness and grief be sucked out violently, as a fiery anger and frightening wrath consumed them and took their place. Her hands shook subtly under the weight of her rage towards Nia, and the burgeoning injustice of it all.

She was Heda, and yet she could not establish a lasting peace, as she had worked so fervently for. She had built the coalition on the bones of her lover and the black blood of her conclave brother’s and sister’s, in the hopes that the clans would unite under a banner of peace. But alas, the people born to this world seemed intent on death and destruction, and there would always be a someone on this Earth willing to profit from flawed human nature.
All these thoughts crashed into the bone of Lexa’s skull until she felt like her cranium would crack open under the weight of it all. Part of her wondered if there truly was a way to be a leader and have happiness in tandem.

And as the self-doubt crept in, Lexa’s mind conjured the simple picture of Clarke breastfeeding Grace. Something she had only ever witnessed the once, and an accident at that. But the blissful smile full of adoration and affection on Clarke’s face as she fed her daughter from her own body, seared itself to Lexa’s memory. Such a simple act, and yet so significant. So powerful. That small moment of peace, that fleeting instance of happiness. Lexa knew that even if the people she served and loved slaughtered each other into oblivion, her heart would find a way to content itself with its lot in life, so long as she had Clarke and Grace to love and hold.

Lexa could survive in the darkness, so long as she had Clarke and Grace to be her light. Her sanctuary.

And so Lexa pushed herself back up to her feet, brushed the bloody mud from her knees. She cast one last apologetic look in the direction of the Ice Nation father and son whom she had just killed, and even though her heart was heavy, and she burned for retribution. Lexa moved on.

Her black blood thrummed with renewed power and purpose, and her pain disappeared in a euphoric rush. Lexa stepped into the fray once more with one thought in mind. Clarke and Grace.

She would fight this battle for her people, but she would win it for Clarke and for Grace. She would be their champion. She would be Clarke’s champion.

Chapter End Notes

Hello my lovelies!! Hope everyone is having a blissful Monday!

So in this chapter, I really wanted to explore and expand on Lexa’s inner turmoil. In my opinion she must be feeling a bit of strife considering that these are ALL her people. Not just Trikru and Skaikru, but Azgeda as well. All of them are hers. And she sacrificed so much to have the tentative peace that formed the coalition, only to have Nia threaten to snatch it all away. I imagine she would be experiencing a plethora of conflicted emotions. Despair, sadness, anger, guilt, resentment. All rolled into one deadly, black blooded package. And I think that if this whole mess wasn't getting to her in some way, then I wouldn't be portraying her in an accurate light. She's a badass, certainly. But she's also a fluffy little duckling under all warpaint. Haha!

I also wanted this chapter to be a sort of turning point for Lexa. I wanted her to see that she deserved more than pain and death, and suffering. I think she deserves that, I also think that the only way she will achieve the happiness she so craves, is if she believes she deserves it too. And there's no place like a battlefield soaked in death, for a life-altering revelation to occur. Am I right? Hahah!

Anyway, I wanted this chapter to be raw in a certain sense, and I think I achieved that, but again, I will let my loyal readers decide whether or not I accomplished my goal, haha!

Hope everyone enjoys the chapter, next update will be Monday next week, and will be Clarke's POV. There will be heaps of plot in the next few chapters. At least that's the
goal, so it should be fun!

As always, please feed my soul with comments and feedback. Hearing everyone's thoughts honestly makes my day!!

Love Loz!! xx
Clarke’s lungs heaved, her legs felt boneless with exhaustion. Beneath the war paint, sweat and flecks of blood, her cheeks were flushed scarlet from exertion.

Clarke could only imagine that the rest of her companions were in similar states of fatigue, but alas their legs kept pumping with desperate purpose, and despite the evidence of Alton burning in the distance, they did not slow down.

To slow down would be to sit idly by, while their loved ones were slaughtered. And no one in that group, not even Mallion and Angus could bear for that fate to befall the people who claimed parts of their hearts.

They had practiced caution after Mercy’s untimely demise, stopping abruptly and finding cover whenever a branch snapped in the distance, or the insects stopped their constant hum of activity. Clarke could not bear to watch someone else she was responsible for die by Azgeda hands.

Clarke could still feel the remnants of her rage and the cold detachment of Wanheda sitting eerily close to the surface after their encounter with the Ice Nation. It left Clarke feeling empty and desolate, and the lack of emotion in a situation when emotion should be a strife, was truly frightening. It made Clarke question what kind of monster she was. Again.

She shook her head violently to dislodge the thought, she couldn’t make room for self-pity and self-loathing just yet. Her focus needed to be singular. She needed to find Grace, and she needed to find Lexa. And that was all that mattered. Clarke decided that she could fall apart later. But she also prayed that Wanheda did not make another appearance anytime soon. She didn’t know if she could push that ugly part of her soul back down into the darkness again, if it chose to make a re-emergence.

Even now, she felt her tight control slipping in the most terrifying of ways. The stress and anxiety of her current predicament making Clarke feel unpredictable even to herself. And the realisation made fear quicken her pulse, and settle heavily in her belly.

Clarke was ripped from her thoughts as the clang of iron grew louder in the distance, and the crackle of ricocheted gunfire became more pronounced. The fog of smoke was thicker here, and the scent of burnt livelihoods and bleeding corpses clung to Clarke’s nostrils.

Pained groans and the slash of steel through flesh could be heard now, and Clarke knew that they were close to Alton. Clarke’s muscles tensed with adrenalin and a reaper’s poise.

The atmosphere around her changed, became more charged with energy and anticipation as her squad prepared to join the fray up head. Their steps became more careful, and their pace slowed a little as everyone spread out into more comfortable positions for fighting, and they drew closer still.

Clarke gripped her bow tightly, and pulled an arrow from the quiver strapped to her back. Notching it into the bow, and gripping the string with sweat-slicked fingers. Clarke had fifteen arrows. She would use them wisely.

The first Azgeda warrior they saw, was faced away from them. The woman was running alongside two men, who like herself, were running towards the battle at Alton. Eager to spill Trikru and Skaikru blood in rivers if they could, while leaving their backs unguarded. Their eagerness died with
them as Clarke took a knee and fired two arrows in quick succession. The first hitting the woman directly in the back, puncturing her heart and spine. The second hitting one of the men in the exact same place not seconds after.

By the time those two bodies had dropped lifelessly to the ground, Tobias had put an arrow into the second man’s throat as he turned abruptly to face his attackers.

Clarke and Tobias yanked the brown-feathered arrows from their prey without so much as a second glance. The squad remaining silent even as they continued their deadly march into Alton. Breathless and bone-weary, but determined to defend the village at all costs.

With all of Azgeda’s attention rested firmly ahead of them, it was almost too easy to sneak up on them and begin carving death into their flesh. Clarke filled men and women of all ages with arrows and daggers, and all manner of sword-borne gash, so long as they wore the white, grey and black of Azgeda. Clarke and her companions killed without mercy, and yet they were still a large distance away from the mouth of Alton.

Clarke took a small measure of comfort from the fact that this attack, whilst it was a statement of Nia’s shameless cunning, was a spare-of-the-moment decision, and not a coordinated attack. Clarke knew that Alton could not survive the onslaught if Nia had truly hoped to wipe them out in a singular strike. This was simply her own twisted way of flexing her muscles and crippling Trikru’s defences before reinforcements could arrive. Clarke also knew that by making Lexa look weak, Nia might be able to turn the tides of war to her favour, by instilling doubt into the minds of Lexa’s warriors. After all, the clans already questioned her strength as it was.

The thought made Clarke angry despite her best efforts to remain unaffected by the information. And the wrath that simmered fed Wanheda, making her greedy for freedom. Clarke could feel her own dark self, salivating in the background of her mind. The death all around her, making the blackness inside of her swell up, and fight against the walls that kept her imprisoned.

Wanheda was eager to be the beast that took the lives, instead of a mere passenger and observer to all the carnage Clarke was creating. But Clarke pushed Wanheda’s ugliness back, even in her exhausted and drained state. She knew she could not afford to lose herself twice in a matter of hours.

Clarke and her companions were in the process of stalking a group of Azgeda, when she heard it. A rumble that echoed through trees and settled around them like a blanket. Mere seconds passed as the Azgeda around them felt the change in the air, and quickly became aware of the incoming danger around them, and moved to assess their surroundings. Quickly taking note of the predator’s that hunted them between the trees.

Clarke saw sets of eyes widen in comprehension of the dire situation they found themselves in, and the sliver of fear that pierced their irises. But by then it was too late. The rumble that surrounded them dissolved into wordless war cries, as a small army of Trikru fell upon them.

Clarke recognised Indra’s new sekken Tatum at the head of the pack, and felt tension release from her shoulder’s and relax her rigid spine, as she realised the new-comers were not a threat to herself and her friends.

The Trikru army were upon the Azgeda in mere seconds. Wicked blades raised, and deadly arrows pointed at their foe. Murder in their eyes.

The twenty Azgeda that had stood proudly one moment, laid in crumpled heaps of dead flesh the next. The army slaughtering them within the blink of an eye. Staining the dirt and leaves with icy blood.
It was almost startling how quickly those lives were extinguished, and Clarke found herself being reminded of the mountain men, and how rapidly she herself had managed to kill hundreds of people in the same period of time. A cold shiver raced down Clarke’s spine as the thought floated to the surface of her mind, only to be violently shoved back down not a moment later.

Clarke took an unconscious step towards Ontari, and placed her body between her and the army of Trikru. After all, the Ice nation girl still wore her clan colours despite her loyalty to Lexa, and Clarke didn’t trust the warriors spread before her to recognise Heda’s personal guard in the midst of their battle rage. Knowing that while their blood was up, they would likely only see the white, grey and black furs that marked her as Azgeda, and recognise an enemy.

Ontari’s eyebrows shot upwards as Clarke stood protectively in front of her, and stared at the back of Clarke’s braided blonde head with poorly disguised surprise. Ontari might have been confused by so much of what she had seen in the past few hours, but witnessing Clarke step in to protect her, was the most startling.

The protective gesture felt at odds with every other scrap of evidence that had fed her paranoia and portrayed Clarke as an enemy. Like seeing her melt into darkness as though she was one with the shadows, and the way she moved soundlessly through the trees like she had spent a lifetime within the high branches, and most of all, the entire interaction with Echo, or Hadasa, or whoever that assassin had been. Her knowledge of the mysterious guild of assassins trained within the heart of Azgeda. It had all served to make Ontari question everything she thought she knew about her friend.

But it wasn’t until this moment, that Ontari decided that she had been a fool to have ever doubted Clarke. She might not have known Clarke’s history, and the lessons she had learnt in order to become who she was now, but that was not what mattered. What mattered, was what Ontari’s heart was telling her. And that was that Clarke would step between an army and a friend in order to protect someone she cared about. And somehow, Ontari knew that she would never question Clarke’s loyalty again, even if she was never told what had happened in Clarke’s time away. Of course that did not mean that Ontari wasn’t painfully curious just like most others in Clarke’s life.

Clarke remained oblivious to Ontari’s revelation, and focused on the young woman approaching them. Her face streaked with dark, menacing war paint and arterial blood.

“You are Trikru?” She asked gruffly. Assessing green eyes raking over the group of eight, and stopping briefly on Ontari, before focusing again on Clarke.

“And Skaikru.” Clarke confirmed with a nod.

“Good.” The sekken named Tatum abruptly turned her back on the group and began leading her own army forwards towards Alton, preparing to put into action her orders to flank Azgeda. The mass of warriors moved swiftly to follow their young leader without another glance backwards.

“Good talk.” Bellamy wheezed sarcastically, as he doubled over to catch his breath. Hs charcoal eyes belaying his irritation with the brusqueness of the encounter.

Lincoln snorted once the troupe was out of direct earshot. “If that girl wasn’t her replacement as Indra’s sekken, I think Octavia might have liked her.”

Bellamy coughs as his laughter stole what little amount of breath he had managed to catch. “You’re right.” He wheezed.

Clarke grinned, and then they were off once more, their pace more subdued as exhaustion began to weaken them, but they continued. They passed many Azgeda bodies left in the wake of Indra’s
sekken and the army she led. A few Trikru dead laid amongst them, but the majority belonged to Nia’s force.

Clarke found herself being grateful for the inadvertent reprieve Tatum had provided for them by clearing the path ahead. She didn’t know how much longer her group could continue travelling at this rate, let alone be alert enough to dispatch any Ice nation they came across as they inched forward.

In the end it didn’t matter, because when Clarke and the other’s reached Alton, it was chaos. And the chaos sparked to life energy reserves none of them believed existed.

Tatum’s Trikru army that had been at least one hundred and fifty strong were scattered throughout the village facing off against Azgeda. The landscape that was once the home to a proud village, was now black from fire, and painted red from human brutality. Where huts once stood, all that now remained were blackened shells billowing noxious smoke. Slumped bodies wrapped in white, grey and black furs, laid next to greens and black of Trikru and the starched navy blues of the Sky people.

It was hard to tell who was winning, but Clarke knew that it only took one event to turn the tides of war.

Clarke was helpless not to search the battlefield for any sign of Lexa. Hoping to find some proof that the green-eyed girl was still alive and well amongst all the death going on. But Clarke couldn’t spot her in the pandemonium.

Without further hesitation, Clarke gripped her sword tightly in her right hand, and unsheathed a dagger in her left, and leapt into the fray.

Clarke focused on the first Azgeda warrior to come across her path, and drowned out the sounds of battle all around her. The clash of steel, the screams of dying men, and the rage of the inferno. Listening only to the sound of her steady breath and the powerful tempo of her heart, and she advanced on her unsuspecting victim.

The Ice Nation woman noticed Clarke too late, and was not quick enough to bring her sword up to deflect the brutal downwards thrust that tore open the woman’s throat and slashed a grisly path down to her collarbone. The woman fell effortlessly.

A burly bald man tracked Clarke amidst the skirmish and ran boldly to meet her on the field. Clarke stepped aside as he swung his broadsword in a wide, heavy arc. Clarke stepped under his guard as he hefted the excessive steel weight over his head to strike a second time, but before he had the chance to bring the sword down upon Clarke’s head, she slashed her dagger across his soft underbelly. Splitting open his protective armour and the skin and muscle beneath like tissue paper. The man dropped his sword, and it fell with a clang as it collided with abandoned steel by his feet from other fallen warriors. He collapsed to his knees and uselessly pressed his hands against his abdomen to keep his organs inside. Clarke twisted around behind him and stabbed him in the side of the neck with the same dagger to sever his carotid artery. The metallic tang of blood assaulted Clarke’s tongue as the arterial spray painted her lips and face in garnet, and the man fell lifeless next to his sword.

And so the battle went. Clarke would pick a target, or occasionally her victim would pick her, and Clarke would dispatch them with ruthless efficiency. A blade to the throat here, a sword to the belly there. Men and women fell one after the other, as Clarke carved a hole into Azgeda’s attacking force.

Wanheda was slavering in the confines of her inner prison. The dark presence sitting ominously between Clarke’s ribs, and deep within her mind. The ugliest parts of herself demanding to be
released amidst all the carnage around her. Clarke could feel her resolve beginning to wane under the strain of the past few hours. And felt fear and disgust unfurl in her belly in response to her own weakness.

Clarke cast her eyes around her to keep track of her friends. And witnessed them all in various stages of battle. Ontari was in the process of stabbing a woman in rapid succession with a small blade, whilst simultaneously flinging one of her daggers through the air to impale itself inside another warrior’s eye socket.

Bellamy and Lincoln stood back to back. With the older Blake firing off shots and guarding he and Lincoln’s back. Whilst Lincoln blocked various blows to his torso, and then cleanly beheading any warrior who foolishly sought to fight him.

Tobias had found a nearby to tree to perch himself in, and was firing arrows in such quick succession and with laser-like focus. His flinty eyes narrowing on any Ice nation loyalist who posed an immediate threat to the group. Hitting his marks every time like a homicidal cupid.

Jonyon was spinning in graceful arcs with his spear in hand, skewering anyone foolish enough to step within his arms reach. His face serene even though he was taking life with such a brutal efficiency it made Clarke wish she were better with a spear herself. Jonyon was fast, but careful with his footwork so as not to slip in the pool of blood that he had made by his feet.

Angus was hacking away at men and women alike with his broadsword. His movements quick despite the arduous weight of the iron he brandished.

Mallion was slower, but he was more precise with his movements, able to predict his opponents moves before they made them, despite his sluggish reactions.

All was going well. Until it wasn’t.

Clarke’s eyes scanned for another target to bloody her sword upon, when she saw him. A man amidst the chaos and destruction who wore the white’s, greys and blacks of the Ice Nation, but he wore no ritual scarring upon his face. His cheeks were lathered in white war paint, but soaked further still with the crimson of his kills.

He moved around the hedges of the battle with a lethal grace that seemed unlikely for a man of his stature. And yet it was somehow possible. His eyes were cold and black like soulless pits, and his smile was menacing. Promising pain to any who dared get too close. He carried two swords in his powerful fists, and the glinting metal dripped red. He was an eerie reminder of Tristan. The general who had sought to wipe Clarke and the hundred off the face of the earth when they had first landed on the ground.

The man’s eyes met Clarke’s, and she could not suppress the shiver that rattled down her spine, and the cold sweat that chilled her back and soaked her undershirt. Suddenly she felt like the hunter turned hunted, and knew without a doubt in her mind that this man was an assassin.

Clarke could hear Ontari’s voice calling out to her somewhere in her periphery, but it felt like her voice was smothered under the din of battle. The man pointed one gnarled fingernail in Clarke’s direction, and smiled with all his teeth. A smile that curdled blood, and turned veins into crunchy hollows.

And then he was sprinting for Clarke, his sword slicing out and decapitating men and women of any clan who stood in the way of him and his prey. Clarke watched on, and tried her best to prepare for a fight she doubted she could win. Clarke prayed to any deity that would listen that she would survive
this encounter and live to see her daughter one last time, despite doubting any kind of divine intervention on her behalf. Clarke gripped her sword and her dagger with sweaty palms and knew that the only way she could hope to beat this creature, was if she allowed a monster of her own making to fight on her behalf.

Clarke searched within herself for the darkness she so desperately needed, and grasped onto Wanheda with both hands. Letting the blackest part of herself free to do what it will.

Wanheda rose to the fore, and grinned sinisterly. The palms that sweat anxiously moments before, now felt frozen with the salty icicles, as Clarke became cold as the Commander of Death must be. All trace of warmth left her eyes, and she became the legend that she herself and so many others feared.

The man was still sprinting towards Clarke when she opened her eyes, and revealed to him the beast within. The assassin’s own sadistic sneer widened as he recognised a monster similar to his own.

Clarke twisted rapidly and flung her dagger at the assassin as quickly as she could manage, and pulled another knife from her hidden compartments, before sprinting to meet the man. The first dagger missed its mark as the man simply dodged the projectile, and kept sprinting. Clarke threw the second dagger in an attempt to find a home in the assassin’s well-guarded flesh.

The assassin pulled the closest person he could find and used their body as a human shield. The knife sunk deep into the Skaikru man’s chest, and Clarke felt familiar rage explode inside her as his large, confused eyes gaped at the hilt that protruded from his ribcage.

The assassin threw the Skaikru man carelessly to the side and kept running. Clarke pulled the third knife from its hiding place, and prepared for impact. The assassin twirled his swords once more and then lunged as the last metre between them was closed.

Clarke caught one of the man’s swords with her own, whilst ducking low under the other and dragging her dagger across his flank. The dagger bit into his flesh, and she saw the bloody evidence on the edge of her blade to prove she had done damage. But the cut wasn’t deep enough, and Clarke saw the assassin close his fist and position his second blade downwards a moment too late. The assassin’s fist connected painfully with Clarke’s cheek, the force of the blow splitting open the skin like overripe fruit and snapping her neck back to hard she saw stars and her brain rattled in her skull like a steel ball.

Clarke caught herself as she impacted with the bloody mud, and she tried to stand again on unsteady feet and concentrate on her foe even with her blurred vision.

The assassin stumbled a little as he recovered from the wound to his side, but twisted around far quicker than Clarke would have liked.

He prodded the wound gingerly, but smiled broadly as he appraised Clarke with new eyes. “I was told that you were little more than a child. A fool that was credited close to one thousand kills and yet knew nothing of how to fight. It’s refreshing to be given a challenge every once in a while Wanheda.” The man sneered.

“It would appear so.” Clarke retorts icily. Her vision beginning to clear.

“You should be proud goufa. No one has managed to cut me in many years.” The man says with a cruel glint in his eye. “However it will be the only time you cut me, because after I kill you, I am going to carve your heart from your chest and I will eat it to gain your power.” The grin that the man wore now could only be described as manic as he watched for any sign of Clarke’s discomfort.
“You see most people believe that by simply killing a person you gain their power, but the secret is eating a part of their flesh so that they can never be reborn to claim what was stolen from them in the next life. Of course by doing so you curse a soul for eternity so it can never live again in this mortal world, but who can blame me!” The man exclaimed with an emotion that might be likened to joy. “The heart really is the tastiest part of the body. I mean I would know, I have tried all the other parts, and none quite compare to a human heart.” The assassin licked his thin bottom lip and stared at Clarke’s chest as though he could see the organ pumping within the confines of her sternum.

Clarke’s anger from before faded as she listened to the man’s self-serving monologue, and instead it was replaced with icy cunning. Clarke watched with eager eyes at the way the assassin moved, the way he positioned his body, and searched for weakness. “You are Olangof the Heart Eater?” Clarke clarified to keep him distracted.

The man’s black eyes lightened for a moment with pleasure. “So you have heard of me then. That is good. It would be a shame to have my prey think me no more than a humble killer.”

The man’s eyebrows scrunched together in sudden fury and he flung a concealed dagger at the space an inch from Clarke’s head. Clarke became eerily still as she watched the projectile spin past her left eye, and then heard it imbed itself wetly into something living. Clarke craned her neck to quickly inspect the dead body, and was surprised to find a dead Azgeda woman by her feet. Clarke rested glacier blue eyes on the assassin and arched an eyebrow at the man’s peculiar behaviour.

Olangof simply sneered at his dead clansman and possessively growled “mine!”

Clarke pushed down the trickle of fear that even managed to chill the bones of Wanheda, and continued talking as though they had never been interrupted. “What are you then if not a killer?” Clarke watched the way Olangof’s eyes darted to either side of Clarke, looking for more danger. Clarke wondered if she could use his claim on her heart to her advantage.

“I am the greatest assassin to ever walk this earth.” He snarled, baring his yellow, cracked teeth.

Clarke’s brow twitched. “I thought that honour belonged to Natmitta.” Clarke asked with feigned innocence. To her surprise Olangof burst into uproarious laughter.

“Some assassin he was! He cried like a woman every time he killed, and then when the Queen recognised his weakness she left him to die pitifully in the mud, just like…” Olangof never got to finish his sentence, because Clarke used that brief moment of distraction and the burning rage she felt over Kadeon’s death to attack.

Clarke’s footfalls were swift and near silent, and her sword sliced through the air with the precision of a scalpel. Olangof came to his senses just as the blade was about to connect with his thick neck, but the assassin darted to the side, and narrowly avoided the death blow.

The man scoffed at Clarke’s efforts to kill him for a moment, before his face became blank and he moved onto the offensive. The man twisted his twin blades over his head and began a ruthless attack on Clarke.

The blonde ducked under the first sword, and deflected the second with the flat of her blade. The man twisted as Clarke used her sword’s forward momentum to attempt a slash across his chest, causing the blade to miss by mere millimetres.

Olangof swung his blades around with his body, and ducked low at the last moment, hoping to take her by surprise and cut Clarke’s legs out from beneath her. Clarke lunged at Olangof, and kicked off with all the power her fatigued thighs could muster. Clarke’s foot connected savagely with Olangof’s
nose, and she heard the satisfying crunch of bones breaking beneath her heel, before she used the momentum she had created, to flip herself back over and out of the reach of his blades.

The assassin fell flat on his back with a heavy thump and hoarse cry of pain, as blood gushed from his ravaged nasal cavity. Clarke pushed her advantage and quickly stood over Olangof with her sword levelled with the unprotected flesh of his throat.

The man’s hand darted out to thrust his sword up at Clarke in a last attempt to save himself, but the blonde was quicker as she threw her dagger with violent speed, and skewered Olangof’s palm, impaling it into the dirt below. His sword clattered to the ground, as he roared with pain. His hand shaking violently as his nerves twitched in agony.

“I will kill you.” Olangof gargles around the blood from his shattered nose.

“Maybe. But not today.” Clarke promises nonchalantly, preparing to thrust her sword into the man’s neck.

“No, not today.” Olangof says around a ghastly, bloody smile before ripping the dagger through the flesh of his ruined hand and freeing his limb. Followed by swinging his body around, and kicking Clarke’s legs out from beneath her. The sword at Olangof’s neck bit into his throat, but not deeply enough to kill as Clarke’s legs were swept from beneath her, and her head impacted with the ground with a loud crack.

Clarke was dazed. Her ears rung, and her eyesight began to blacken around the edges. Clarke was vaguely aware of Olangof standing over her prone body and his lips moving as he whispered something over and over again, but then there was the burning pain of a blade biting slowly and deeply into her sternum and then everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys!!

I know that it has been a while since I updated, and for that I am sorry. It's been crazy busy in my life recently and I haven't been able to find time to write.

But alas, I am back with a brand new chapter that I hope you will all love! I actually really enjoyed writing Olangof's character. I know he's a sick puppy, but it's a type of character that I have never been able to try my hand at portraying before. No idea if you guys liked it - let me know what your thoughts were.

In case anyone is wondering, Olangof is 'crazy' (not the clinical term I know but oh well!) as a result of his ritualistic cannibalism and other contributing factor's that deeply disturb and disgust the sane mind.

I also wanted to use his character as a way to draw some parallels between the the type of monster Clarke believes Wanheda to be, versus someone who is actually a monster, i.e. Olangof. It's not explicitly stated or explored, but it is an underlying theme of this chapter that I hope someone picks up on haha!

I just want to say a massive thankyou to everyone who has remained patiently loyal to this fic while I have tried to get my life in order (it always seems to be out of order more
often than not - oops!), but your continued support truly does mean the world to me. You guys keep me enthusiastic about my writing and inspired to keep finding new directions to take Second Chances. So again, thankyou!

Anyway, please leave me a comment! Tell me what you liked, what you loved and what needs work, and I will try to answer everyone's comments!!

Happy reading lovelies!!

Love Loz xx
Consciousness was a fickle mistress.

Clarke would feel it caress her cheek softly as a lover might, only to withhold affection when she sought it out herself. Reaching out with gasping hands, but always being denied. It teased her.

She would see glimpses of the world that went on without her, and vague impressions of blurry shapes that might have been people. And the reminder that she was being left behind by a world she had spent most of her lifetime dreaming about, spurred her determination, and fuelled her will with frustration.

The next time consciousness flirted with the edges of Clarke’s bruised mind, she grasped onto it tightly, and wrestled to have her sense returned to her. Fighting to re-enter the waking world where all that she loved awaited her, only to be repudiated, over, and over again.

Clarke lost count of how many times she felt her awareness return like wisps of smoke, only to have them be brushed away in the breeze when her head throbbed once… Twice… A third time.

Clarke was unsure of how much time passed, not that she was aware of the passage of time in her current state. But she felt like she slept for an eternity and a mere second, all at once. It made her feel ageless and immortal, and yet young and inexperienced in the same vein.

Distantly, Clarke was aware that her mind’s foray with blackness, was likely her brain’s way of protecting itself from trauma, and an indicator of a concussion at the very least. The thought caused a shot of adrenalin to course through her body and zap her heart like a cattle prod, but that reaction too, was soon swallowed by the darkness, and the thought vanished as quickly as it had come.

Eventually, Clarke felt consciousness engulf her in a warm embrace, somehow more substantial and tangible than it had been in every other encounter so far. Clarke felt the warmth seep into her bones, and soothe the parts of her that ached to wake and see Grace and Lexa, and all the people she loved again. Reassuring her, in a strange, inexplicable way.

The first sense Clarke regained was her hearing. She could detect the groans of injured warriors surrounding her, enough in number that they soon fell into the background like white noise. But what stood out the most, was the sounds of battle, or more precisely, the lack thereof. There was no gunfire, no clang of clashing swords, no heavy thump as bodies hit the dirt. Just the groaning accompanied by injuries. Soft, reassuring voices. The rustling of leaves as a slight breeze disturbed the peaceful canopy, and the occasional caw of a bird that had bravely stayed on during the fight.

The other senses quickly followed on the heels of the first, bringing the world back to life piece by careful piece.

Clarke could smell the stench of blood, the fresh stuff and the foul, crusted remnants from the battle. The stench of ash and smoke, clinging to clothing and hair. And beneath it all the reassuring odour of antiseptic wafted on the air.

Her tongue felt dry and thick in her mouth, and she could taste something bitter that was likely the accompanying aftertaste of herbal medicine.
Clarke could feel hard-packed dirt beneath her body, and a numb spot in her side where a rock had been jabbing into her, for what had probably been hours. And something soft and cushioned propped up her battered head. Clarke could feel her muscles aching without even trying to move, and the side of her face throbbed in time with her heartbeat from where Olangof had hit her.

And just like that, the memories rushed back like an unstoppable, icy avalanche.

Her fight with the infamous Heart Eater.

His desire to eat her heart, and the fear that had chilled Clarke to her core.

The anger she felt when he insulted Kadeon’s memory.

The way his fixated eyes grew excited when Wanheda met his blades and succeeded in cutting him.

And the blinding pain as her brain was scrambled after one too many hits.

And then the knife. Poised over the heart in her chest that had been jumping frantically, almost like it too, was trying to escape the deranged man who had loomed over her.

And then blackness.

Clarke’s eyes burst open as panic seized her, only to slam them shut a moment later, the brightness of the light searing her retina’s like they had been dipped in acid. Clarke’s muscles tensed as her alarm continued to surge, and she immediately regretted her movement, as jarring pain swept through her body, emanating from her chest. It felt like she had torn all her muscles, and they were simply floating, shredded inside a sack made from her skin.

Clarke must have made some kind of noise, because not a moment later there were calloused hands squeezing her own, trying to ground her. “Shh Clarke, it’s okay. You’re okay.” Clarke immediately relaxed when she recognised Naomi’s voice.

“What happened? Where am I?” Clarke’s aching head protested the octave of her voice, and sent a crippling wave of pain crashing through her skull like an enraged pauna. “Oh god,” Clarke groaned at a much lower volume.

“All is well Clarke. We won the battle, but we lost Alton.” Naomi’s voice was calm as she stated the facts, even as it grew in thickness as she mentioned the destruction of her home. “The Azgeda who attacked us are all dead,” Naomi’s lips quirked up with what could only be described as vengeful satisfaction, “and to ensure that our injured were not vulnerable to further attacks we moved all who could be transported up into the safety of the mountain.” Naomi stroked Clarke’s hair with soothing, repetitive motions and Clarke relaxed further.

The relaxation lasted not even a second as Clarke bolted upright, and sought out Naomi’s gaze with desperate, stinging eyes. “Where’s Grace?” The panic was back and blossoming into something close to desperation with every nanosecond that passed without an answer. Clarke’s entire body screamed at her, and she was vaguely aware of warm liquid seeping into the front of the bandage wrapped across her chest. Clarke ignored it all.

“Grace is fine. Heda and Ontari are keeping her with them.” Naomi was quick to reassure. A scowl furrowed her brow as blood soaked the bandages across her chest. “Now lay back branweda, you have torn through your mother’s little stitches.” Naomi scolded with an unimpressed glint in her dark blue eyes.

Clarke felt some of the tension bleed away instantly. “My squad, what happened to my friends?” She
Naomi sighs. “I am told that after you fell, your friends tried to engage the assassin. I know that he was killed, but one of your own died in the attempt.” Understanding rested in the deep blue of the aged woman’s eyes, and a morose sadness rested alongside it.

Clarke’s heart seizes in her chest, suspended in time as she waits for the floor to fall out from beneath her. *Oh god, Ontari, Bellamy, Lincoln... Please no.*

“Who?” Her voice comes out as little more than a croak, and her tongue feels like a dead eel lodged in her throat rather than a powerful muscle capable of speech.

Naomi’s face contorts into one of concentration as she tries to recall the name she was told. “Anguy? Or Angus? I am told he was a lesser liked member of your squad.”

Clarke feels the loss in spite of this. “He was, but he didn’t deserve to die.” She says with a small voice.

Naomi meets her gaze again. “Death is the only sure thing in life, it had to happen at some point.” She says with small ounce of *something* in her tone. It almost sounded bitter, hateful.

Clarke’s eyes narrowed. “Surely you don’t believe that.” She sounds scolding even to her own ears and inwardly cringes.

Her expression turns unimpressed, but Naomi says nothing more.

“What about the others?” Clarke implores.

Naomi remains stubbornly silent for a long moment, her gaze boring into Clarke’s own. “Lincoln has a broken leg. He nearly bled out as the bone ruptured the skin and tore through his main blood vessels.”

Her tone is unaffected, probably to lessen the blow the news settles upon her, but Clarke flinches none the less.

“Your mother stitched him up, and was able to save the limb. Ontari has many cuts and bruises, and she nearly lost a finger from fighting the assassin, but those are the worst injuries.” Naomi finishes with next to no inflection in her voice.

Clarke nods, her mind churning over the new information and trying to accept it. She felt nauseas. The guilt for not being there to protect her friends was making acid burn in her oesophagus. She could practically smell the bile already as it threatened to make an outward appearance.

“And Lexa is okay?” Clarke clarifies with a guarded expression that did little to disguise the concern in her voice.

Naomi huffs with impatience as her nimble fingers unbound the bandages to fuss with the wound at Clarke’s chest. “Do you think that Heda would be caring for your youngon, if she was not okay?” Naomi’s calm facade cracked and annoyance tinged her tone for a brief moment.

Clarke didn’t raise an eyebrow at Naomi’s outburst, instead watched her curiously.

Naomi’s shoulders slumped as soon as the harsher than necessary words passed her lips. She took a deep breath to calm herself, before facing Clarke once more. “Heda was injured, but it was nothing serious.” She amended, her midnight blue eyes holding the apology she was too proud to give voice
Clarke nodded minutely in regards to the confirmation that Lexa had survived the battle relatively unscathed, and felt a large remainder of her stress melt from her muscles. Clarke kept her face blank however, as the sheer, giddy relief Naomi’s words brought her, bubbled up within her chest like a babbling brook. Instead she turned her attention back to the weathered woman and studied her face for a moment.

Naomi had bags of a deep, bruising purple beneath eyes that were sunken and dull. The lines of her weathered face seemed almost cavernous, and the waning youth she had once held in her golden skin, was now completely absent, as though she had aged twenty years in only a few short hours.

“Are you okay?” Clarke asks tentatively, bracing for a swift and brutal insistence of being ‘fine.’

Naomi narrows her eyes, and her scowl deepens as she meets Clarke’s cerulean blue eyes for a moment. Searching those irises for something to reassure her perhaps, Clarke was unsure.

Clarke allowed the silence to stretch on, as Naomi stared the younger woman down, and seemed to be making a conscious effort to have Clarke flinch under her piercing gaze. But the blonde did not budge, after all, she had stared down many more intimidating people in her relatively short twenty years of existence.

Eventually, Naomi’s gaze softened slightly, and her glare melted away entirely. And then she spoke. “Tanga was down in Alton when Azgeda attacked.” Those words alone were enough to make Naomi’s eyes water, and Clarke’s stomach to drop out from beneath her like the platform of so many gallows.

“She stayed behind when your mother and I went into the mountains with all the others. She said that she needed to make sure Raven got out safe.” Naomi’s chuckle was wet as she recalled the way Tanga had been so adamant about protecting the young mechanic.

Clarke felt the noose tighten around her neck, as so many questions whipped around her head. Was Tanga dead? Was Raven dead? Were they both killed by Azgeda? Oh god, I am going to be sick…

“She said that she would be right behind me, but she wasn’t. The branweda chose to be a hero, and help fight the savages. She and Raven fought alongside Heda, and apparently they managed to impress even her.” A tear slid past Naomi’s defences and splattered against a high cheekbone.

“But while my little girl was off saving our people, I was still on this nomonjokking mountain. Believing that my daughter was only a few minutes behind me. Expecting her to come around the bend with her woman in tow.” Her tone grew angry and uncompromising now. “But she never did, not until the battle was won, and the smoke was beginning to clear. And until that moment, I was convinced that my oldest child, my firstborn daughter had been killed.” Furious tears streaked down the Trikru woman’s reddening face.

Clarke felt herself release the breath she hadn’t realised she had been holding all this time. My friends are alive, Clarke silently reassured her stuttering heart.

“I was… terrified.” Naomi meets Clarke’s eyes cautiously as she openly admitted her fear. Determining her reaction to such a revelation. When Clarke’s expression remains the same, and her irises continue to project the same genuine care that had compelled the conversation in the first place, Naomi continues. “I was terrified because it was exactly the way I lost my houmon.”

Clarke’s eyes widen with surprise, and lighten with curiosity. Silently beckoning Naomi to explain
“When Tanga was only six, and our second daughter Milly was only a young babe, Hayward was called away from our village to investigate reports of unauthorised hunting on our lands. This was twenty years ago, and well before Lexa’s time when the coalition was formed, and territory skirmishes were very common. We were very strict about who could be within our boarders, and who could not.” Naomi explains mechanically. “And Azgeda were not welcome.” She emphasises the statement by hardening her facial features.

“So a large number of our young warriors set out to investigate and push these interlopers back into the frozen tundra from whence they came. Hayward went out with them, and I made him promise me, that I would see him again in four days. He did, and we parted ways.” Naomi’s features relaxed as the nostalgia trickled in, only to be replaced by an aged melancholy. “Only Hayward and the other warriors walked straight into a trap, and were butchered. I lost my houmon, and my daughters lost their nontu.” Naomi goes quiet once again, seeming lost in her own memories.

Clarke interrupted Naomi’s silent contemplation a moment later. “And you were worried that by Tanga not returning when she promised she would, that history was repeating itself.” Clarke finished with an understanding lilt to her voice.

Naomi nodded wordlessly.

“Have you told Tanga how you felt?” Clarke asks hesitantly.

Naomi shakes her head vehemently. “No, of course not. We are Trikru. It is not done.” She says the words like they’re law, and goes back to cleaning the blood from Clarke’s chest. Pulling a smile knife from somewhere to cut away the ruined stitches with a steady hand.

The blonde’s gaze turns contemplative. “You know Trikru has many great customs. But reluctance to admit feeling and emotion is not one amongst them.” Clarke reaches out for Naomi’s hand, squeezing reassurance through her grip.

Naomi’s eyes slam back to Clarke’s, quick as a lightning strike. There was no mistaking the scepticism in her expression. “Is this a Skaikru custom? To willingly expose weakness?”

The older woman’s wise eyes hold a glint of something almost mischievous, and Clarke feels an edge of caution creep inside her chest. Clarke nods despite herself.

Naomi’s lips quirk up into a tired smirk, “then you should explain this custom to your own mother. All those years living in that floating village up in the sky, and she still seems to have missed this lesson.” She snorts in dry amusement.

Clarke hums.

“She wanted to be here when you woke you know.” Naomi says offhandedly as she presses clean cloth to Clarke’s chest wound to stop the sluggish bleeding. Clarke’s back bows as pain assaults her, but otherwise she stays completely silent. “But she was needed to attend to the more severely injured and she was worried that you would not want her here since the two of you have been fighting recently.” Naomi’s stare is almost disappointed.

“I take it that you two have been talking then.” Clarke grits out between her cement-hardened jaws.

Naomi’s lips quirk once more in a knowing fashion. “She is a very insecure woman right now. She is struggling with all of… This.” Naomi gestures vaguely to the situation around her. She waits a moment before continuing. “You should talk to her, remind her that you… Care for her.” Naomi
nods to herself at the last part, like that advise alone would help mend all the broken between Clarke and Abby.

Clarke blinks back the black spots in her vision and feels the sickly cold sweat coating her body from the onslaught of pain. “We’ve made some progress,” Clarke tries to explain around the pained groan clawing at her throat. “But there were lots of hurtful things said between us.” Clarke’s nostrils flare as Naomi presses almost unperceptively harder against her wound. “It will take time to repair those damages.” She finally grits out.

“Be sure not to avoid this thing Clarke. You know how short life can be sometimes.” Naomi says the words with a strange, knowing weight. Heavy laden with a personal experience with the pain of waiting too long.

Clarke nods quickly, and lets out a low keening noise when the motion makes her head swim.

Naomi’s assessing gaze quickly takes stock of Clarke’s reaction to her ministrations and the still-seeping wound. “I need to cauterise this. It should have stopped bleeding by now, and I doubt your mother’s pretty stitches would be capable of holding the flesh together.” Naomi explains quickly as she stands to retrieve a knife from the fire, already white-hot in preparation for such use.

Clarke watches with wide, and dare she say, fearful eyes as the hellish blade is skilfully handled above her open wound. She could already feel the heat, and dreaded the unimaginable pain she knew was coming.

Naomi’s eyes held a solemn apology, but then a moment later the cursed metal was sizzling and blistering into her skin. Clarke felt fire lance down her every nerve ending, and begin to overwhelm her already bruised mind. She bit the inside of her cheek to muffle the agonised scream that ripped open her lungs.

This time, when consciousness grasped her tightly, and pulled her under with a passionate embrace, Clarke leaned into the blackened abyss, glad for the reprieve from pain.

Chapter End Notes

Hi guys! I know that it has been forever since I have updated, and I just want to say a very heartfelt sorry to all those amazing people who have been sitting on the edge of their seats since August, I didn't mean to test your patience so much. I've had a lot going on recently, I got a new job and a beautiful little nephew, so I have been a bit pre-occupied.

I really want to thank all those fantastic people who checked up on me, and kept encouraging me to continue writing, it really helped, and I honestly can't believe that I have somehow managed to inspire this degree of loyalty and support through this story. It's truly overwhelming and I am so grateful to you all.

I hope this new chapter puts some minds at ease, and reassure you all that the character's that you all know and love are still around and kicking even if Alton isn't anymore. So in case you missed it, Clarke is safe, Lexa is safe, Grace is safe, and so to is Ontari, Raven, Tanga, Octavia, Lincoln (a little broken though), Naomi, Abby, Bellamy etc.

I'm not sure when I will be updating next, but I am hoping that now that I have started
writing again I can maintain this momentum, and keep myself inspired.

Thankyou for reading, I hope you enjoy the new chapter. As always, tell me what you loved, and what you didn't. I always enjoy hearing from you guys, it really makes my day whenever I get a comment!! :D

- Love Loz xx
Lexa was used to people staring at her. It was a part of being Heda that was simply unavoidable. People would look on in respect, anger, envy, admiration, the list goes on. However it was not often that her people looked at her with expressions of dumbfounded confusion.

Apparently Ontari had noticed too, because the next person who did it was uncharacteristically hissed at. Lexa would have laughed if it was any other situation. Ontari always was more in touch with her primal, animalistic self, but this was a little excessive even for her.

Grace was strapped soundly against her chest with bindings that Ontari had found and insisted she wear with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. Whilst in her uninjured arm she hefted the not-insubstantial weight of a felled log, Ontari dutifully lifting the other end. Together they were carrying the log down the mountainside towards the ruined village of Alton for the many pyres already in the process of being built.

One step after the other, they worked in relative silence. Carrying one log, then another. A small cog in a much larger wheel. Other warriors and villagers alike carrying loads similar to Lexa and Ontari’s own, and others with far more precious cargo, limp, bloodied bodies cradled in shaking arms.

The pattern was almost mindless now, pick up the log, avoid splinters from the roughly hacked ends, walk until their calves burned from the strenuous labor. Listen to Ontari curse under her breath as she knocked her broken finger on the pyre every time they piled another log onto the makeshift structure, and then walk back up the mountain to do it all again.

All the while, people would stare intently at Lexa as she walked past. Shameless and unabashedly tracing the outline of Grace slumped asleep on her chest, and then directing their searching gazes to Lexa’s own profile.

Lexa had heard of the way people treated Clarke due to her title of Wanheda, and by extension how they looked at Grace. But she had never had much opportunity to observe it with her own two eyes. But now that she could see the way people reverently regarded the child of Wanheda, Lexa could finally understand why Titus had been so worried about the threat the Commander of Death posed.

She of course still believed his solution to the problem just as ludicrous now as the day he had suggested it. But she understood his fear, even if she didn’t believe that killing Clarke or kidnapping her child would solve the perceived power imbalance.

Lexa posed that perhaps the old man thought that history would repeat itself.

When a Natblida Novitiate wins their conclave, the first few months are spent establishing their rule, and learning about the history of the Heda’s that came before them. Lexa is still of the opinion that learning the tales of previous commanders was the Fleimkepa’s way of not-so-subtly influencing the way Heda ruled.

By telling her of Becka the First Commander, she would learn to be courageous.

By hearing of Godfrey the First Nightblood, she would see the value of curiosity.

Dermon the Dead Man, would teach her that someone would always be trying to kill her.
Ravena the Cunning, would teach her that unnecessary cruelty breeds more cruelty, and that there is no Heda without the support of the people.

Aldice the Sword of Justice, taught her to always seek out justice and vengeance for the wronged.

The list goes on, and more lessons are imparted with each Commander. Selene, Enesh, Luka, Mina, Kallipso. They all have stories to be heard, and lessons to teach.

Amidst these stories that she knows so well, are heroes and villains remembered throughout history. People who have risen up in a time of great unrest or insurmountable suffering for the better or worse. And before Clarke, there was another called Wan hed a. A great warrior who some would call hero, and others a demon in human flesh. He assassinated Heda Dermon only two years after his ascension, and heralded the beginning of one of the bloodiest and most ruthless reigns in the Fleimkepa’s recorded history. The reign of Heda Ravena.

In some twisted part of Titus’s mind, Lexa wonders if perhaps he thought that history was repeating itself, and she would be Heda Dermon reborn. That Clarke’s mere existence would spell her certain death.

Lexa forcibly shook her head to dislodge the thought. She knew that it helped no one to try and understand Titus’s reasons for betraying her. It wouldn’t change the fact that he was a traitor and would pay for his crimes with his life. It didn’t matter that for the longest time he was the closest she had to a father.

“What is on your mind Lexa?”

Lexa’s head jerked up as she mindlessly deposited the log onto one of the pyres, to meet Ontari’s inquisitive gaze. “What?”

Ontari smirked, “I asked what is on your mind?” She repeats patiently.

Lexa’s gaze turns pensive once more. “I was musing on Titus’s motives for betraying me.” She admits honestly.

Ontari nods thoughtfully for a moment. “And what have you come up with so far?”

Lexa releases a tired breath slowly and subtly straightens her spine. “Nothing that changes the fact that if he has done as we suspect, and joined Nia’s cause, then he will die painfully.”

“Lexa.” Ontari’s almond eyes hold an ounce of warning and empathy. “Do not hide behind that mask you wear so well.” She almost sounds pleading when she says, “not from me.”

“I am almost certain that Titus had betrayed me, and yet the thought of him doing so is still unthinkable somehow.” Lexa meets Ontari’s eyes for a moment, imploring. For what though, she is not sure.

Ontari meets her gaze steadily and waits for the green eyed girl to continue.

Lexa swallows roughly. “He raised me since I was six, and in many ways is as close to a father figure as I have ever truly known.”

“You had a father Lexa. Titus was not it. He was the reason you were taken from him and the rest of your family.” Ontari’s expression is melancholic and sombre.

“I know, it’s just…” Lexa takes a deep, calming breath to continue her thought aloud. “I barely
remember my father. I can’t remember what he looked like or what his voice sounded like. He’s a ghost to me.” The admission tastes like bitter ashes on her tongue. After all her father had been killed for attempting to hide Lexa from the Fleimkepa’s when they came for her.

Ontari nods along. Despite having already known this about Lexa, she finds her heart still aches to hear it said. “It is part of the reason Nightbloods are taken at such a young age. They hope that they forget their families, and only ever remember the lessons the Fleimkepa’s teach them.”

“I know this also. But logic doesn’t always combat irrational feeling. And despite the harsh lessons Titus inflicted upon us, and all he has done since. There’s still a part of me that doesn’t want to lose him.” It feels like a betrayal to the family who lost her to admit, but it’s true to some degree.

“I understand. A part of me doesn’t want to see my mother die either, despite the fact that people I love are dead because of her.” Ontari’s eyes are sad, and Lexa knows that her friend truly does understand. She isn’t trying to placate her with false niceties and empty empathy.

“But with saying that it is easy to forget that she is my mother when I look around and see corpses littering the ground because she loves power more than she could ever love anything else. Including me.” Ontari casts her eyes around them, a heavy weight resting on her shoulders as yet another warrior walks past holding a limp form to be added to the funeral pyre.

“At some point you have to realise that the people we care for might need to be sacrificed in order to protect the greater good.” Lexa sighs with weary resignation. This was a lesson she had learned hard, but learned well.

Ontari nods solemnly in agreement.

“In my life I have already had to sacrifice too many people I love. My father, my mother, my sister, my natblida brothers and sisters. Costia, Anya, and Gustus… Clarke…” Lexa can’t help but relive a small sliver of the desolation she felt during each loss. Pausing to mull over the year and a half that Clarke was missing as she says her name and feels that same need to find her and fix what she broke.

There is a strange numbness that settles dangerously in Lexa’s chest as she says, “I sacrificed and sacrificed, until I had almost nothing left.” She recognises it as cold fury a second too late. “Imagine my profound disappointment when I realised that the only thing I really accomplished was isolating myself. I ended up alone.”

Ontari puts a hand on Lexa’s shoulder and squeezes gently to bring her back to reality. “You are not alone Lexa. I will not leave your side.”

Lexa pushes back her anger and focuses on the present, on the only true friend she has left, and allows a small smile to pull at the corners of her mouth at that. They both know that it isn’t really a promise Ontari can keep in the long run, especially in the middle of war. But in the moment it is a small, welcome comfort.

Ontari’s expression changes in an instant, from serious and empathetic to downright cunning and teasing in the next. “So you admit that you love Clarke.”

Lexa’s cheeks flush a bright scarlet that she hopes those watching on from a distance attribute to the heat or exercise.

Ontari’s grin becomes so smug she thinks it might haunt her dreams that night. “You should bond with her.”

The comment is said in such a plain way, and with such certainty that Lexa stills for a brief moment.
Her strides coming to a complete stop whilst Ontari continues walking ahead, an irritating bounce in her step.

“Don’t be ridiculous Ontari. That is not going to solve anything.”

Ontari’s eyebrow hitches suggestively, and a mischievous gleam in her eye becomes all too prominent for Lexa’s liking. “Isn’t it though?” Ontari’s voice has turned smug and knowing, and Lexa feels a blush spreading down to her toes.

She opens her mouth to say something, anything really. But her head is empty and her tongue swims soundlessly like a fish in a tank. Knowing nothing intelligent could possibly leave her lips, Lexa wisely chooses to say nothing.

Ontari’s smirk only widens as she gleefully explains her logic. “The clans believe that when two people are bonded and become one, that they are equal in all things. This includes power. It is why Heda’s in the past have been discouraged from bonding as there has never truly been one who stood as their equal in power before the bonding ceremony, and ultimately they gained nothing from the arrangement.” Ontari recites the history with far more zeal than is necessary.

Lexa listens intently despite the strange squirming eel sitting low in her belly.

“But by bonding with Clarke you would be eliminating the threat Clarke’s power as Wanheda posed to your rule, because it would be your power as much as hers. Not to mention Grace would be considered your child as much as Clarke’s, therefore eliminating her threat to your power as Heda as well.” Ontari looks positively delighted as she finishes her argument, which is a strange look especially on Ontari, who typically takes a special kind of pleasure in remaining unaffected in all things.

Lexa feels like she has been zapped with one of Abby’s electric prods, and she isn’t quite sure how she is expected to react to this information. Lexa had never considered bonding as a solution to her problem, as she had always subconsciously assumed that Clarke would be violently resistant. And a month ago she would have been. But so much had transpired since then, and top of all that there was the kiss…

Ontari studies Lexa for a moment, and Lexa can practically feel Ontari’s almond eyes boring into her skin, but she remains stoic despite the riot of feelings and thoughts running amok inside her skull.

“Wait, you already spoke to Clarke about this?” Lexa’s voice is little more than a panicked squeak. Completely undignified for a commander, and yet she couldn’t restrain it.

“But of course I did.” Ontari shrugs in a way that might have been trying to be nonchalant but failed miserably when paired with Ontari’s deeply satisfied expression. “I believe Skaikru call it making a match?” Ontari’s nose scrunches up in concentration as she attempts to remember the precise phrasing.

Lexa swallows around the lump in her throat with difficulty. “Why would you do that?” There’s no emotion in her voice, her panic at a level where the mask of Heda is a basic requirement to bare even a remote resemblance to a fully functioning human being.

Ontari soberes instantly, reaching out and grasping Lexa’s hand. “Because the issue of people looking to Wanheda before they look to Heda for guidance is an issue that does need to be addressed, and because I want, more than anything, for you to be happy. And this solution ensures that both come to pass.” The bronze eyed girl holds Lexa’s gaze reassuringly, and gives her a small comforting smile as Lexa’s fingers slowly unclasp and relax their death grip of Ontari’s hand.
The girls reach the growing pile of logs and each bend to take one end each. Lexa supports Grace’s head as she picks up the wood and lifts the weight without much issue. Smirking when Ontari inevitably forgets about her broken finger once more and knocks it against the log.

The Ice Nation Princess swears colourfully and jumps on the spot until the pain finally recedes. Lexa tries really hard to stifle the amused snigger that climbs up her throat.

Ontari shoots Lexa an unimpressed glare, “this is not funny.”

Lexa tries, she really does, but the combination of the weird jig and the indignant look on Ontari’s face was too much. The little grin, and tiny snort of laughter that leave Lexa’s lips are unavoidable. Honestly, this was the sixth time Ontari had knocked the same finger, it was getting beyond ridiculous that she kept forgetting about it.

Ontari’s glare softens around the edges and her lips quirk into a small smile, “shof op,” she mumbles fondly under her breath, and proceeds to pick up the log with her uninjured hand.

“I think this is nature’s way of telling you to stop making matches Ontari,” Lexa comments with a wry grin.

Ontari shakes her head and mumbles something about hopeless branweda’s under her breath, as they begin the trek back down the mountain.

Chapter End Notes

Enjoy peoples!

Truly sorry that it has taken me so long to get this out to you guys, I’ve struggled to find inspiration for this fic for some time, and I know that that is annoying. But I’d like to thank all the awesome people who still send me comments and give me encouragement to continue this fic, it doesn't go unnoticed or unappreciated, you guys rock!!

I also want to take the time to thank Wheelie91 for beta-ing this beast of a fic for me. If any of you have taken the time to re-read Second Chances, you might have noticed that about half of my fic sounds much more polished, and it is thanks to this guy. So show him some love :D

https://archiveofourown.org/users/Wheelie91/pseuds/Wheelie91

Thanks again for reading, and commenting!

End Notes

Thanks for reading everyone! This is my first Fanfic so please be gentle.
I am open to any feedback and constructive criticism you guys might have. I hope you enjoy the story as it progresses :D
Thanks!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!