What Makes a Sailor

by more_than_words

Summary

AU where Clarke is a street painter and happens to be painting outside the store where Bellamy works as a tour guide.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

She considered it her addiction. It was especially noticeable when she had been away from the practice for awhile. She could feel her fingers itch, her body fidget, her eyes wander. Even though her mind might be focused on doing something else, her soul was always searching. Always waiting impatiently.

Always longing to paint.

Clarke's addiction was healthier than most, but just as strong. What would seem dull and regular to someone else would speak to her. The beauty in everything would call out to her, beg for her to paint it. The way the rain trailed down her window in a taxi, the way the colors danced on the windows of the skyscrapers at sunset, the way a little boy's eyes lit up as he received an ice cream cone... anything and everything. So, she guessed it was more like fulfilling her purpose. Like she was just moving the beauty from one place to another, helping other people see it too.

That's why it was hard for her to sell them. Her paintings. But, when times got tougher and her budget got smaller, she decided it was time. So, you would find her out on the sidewalk on a sunny day, somewhere in the city, selling her kaleidoscope versions of everyone else's life. Sometimes she would be adding to her collection. And that day wasn't any different.

She was sitting on a quaint little street corner in an area of town she hadn't been to before. She sat with her back to a rock wall surrounding a park, painting the pansies in the faded, yellow window boxes on the boutique across from her. It was nice. Sure, the day was a bit muggy. Business was
slow. But, she had set up an umbrella to keep the heat off and, eh, at least if she couldn't sell her paintings, she could use the time to create new ones. It was breath of fresh air compared to the cramped, exhaust-filled streets that she was used to. So, yes, it was pleasant.

"And that concludes our tour! Thank you so much for tagging along and I hope that you learned something new today!" She paused in her painting as a group of people began to clap in front of the shop sitting catty-corner from her. It was place offering tours of the city, and voted the most historically accurate, according to a sign in the window. A young man in a black shirt and dark skinny jeans at the front of the group bowed to the applause, his back to her. He's gotta be so hot, Clark thought to herself.

"Thank you, thank you!" he said graciously. "If you enjoyed the tour, or just really love my charming personality and winning looks-" his audience laughed- "tips would be greatly appreciated!" The man went and sat down on a black stool, a jar labeled Tips sitting beside him on a little table. People walked by, dropping money in his jar, shaking his hand. She could see his face now as he smiled and thanked everyone, and she liked how genuine he seemed. He turned and caught her staring. He held her gaze for a moment, as if equally intrigued by her, and then offered a smile in salutation. Clarke turned back to her painting.

She got a little bit of traffic from the tour group. A couple of people bought some of her paintings, but most just admired them and then walked on.

"Boats!" a little boy exclaimed, as his family walked by her little set-up. He was pointing to her painting of the harbor in the morning, when the mist still clung to the water in an attempt to hold on to the night. She smiled softly at the little boy. He looked like he was about four or five.

"Yep," she replied, getting up and squatting down next to him. "Do you like boats?" He nodded, his eyes excited, and she laughed lightly.

"Me too."

"Can we get it, Mommy?" he begged, looking at his mother pleadingly. She had shining, chestnut hair and she was toting a little, sleeping girl on her back. There didn't seem to be a husband around anywhere.

"Sorry, honey," his mother answered gently, giving the artist an apologetic look. "Not today." Clarke wasn't offended. Times were tough, especially if you are a single mom with two kids. The boy stuck his bottom lip out, tears welling up in his eyes. It didn't take a genius to tell that this kid was about to have a meltdown. Clarke wished she could give the painting to the family, but it was one of her larger ones, and she didn't want the mom to have to tote it around with them all day. Still, she had to do something.

"Hey," she said, placing a hand on the boy's arm. She nodded at the painting.

"I may not be able to give you that," she continued, "but I can give you something else." Clarke rose and patted her stool. "Would you like to take a seat?" The boy's eyes lit up with eager curiosity and he nodded. Clarke looked to his mother for permission, but she simply smiled and nodded silently. So, she lifted up the little boy and placed him on her stool sideways.

"Can I have your hand?" she asked, holding out her own. The boy complied instantly. Clarke reached around him and dipped her brush in the well of blue paint. In gentle, sweeping movements, she painted a pool of blue on the back of the boy's hand. Her brush swirled in her cup of water, tainting it blue, and then dipped into the brown paint well.

"Let's see," Clarke mused, tapping her chin with the handle of her brush. "Should I paint a
sailboat... or a pirate ship?"

"A pirate ship!" the boy exclaimed. Clarke laughed and so did the boy's mother.

"Okay!" Clarke said enthusiastically. It didn't take too long to create the pirate ship. First came the body of it, then the mast, then the sails, then the pirate flag at the top of the crow's nest. "There," Clarke said as she finished the very last detail. "Now you can carry your ship with you for the rest of the day."

"Awesome!" the little boy exclaimed, hopping off of the stool in his excitement.

"What do you say, James?" his mother said.

"Thank you!" he responded hastily. He then ran ahead, making wave and canon-fire noises as he went.

"Thank you," his mother echoed more sincerely. She rooted around in her purse for a moment, looking for the small amount of money she had left after taking that tour.

"You don't need to pay me," Clarke said quickly. "It's a gift." The mother looked up at her, a bit of shame in her eyes. Clarke just smiled encouragingly. "I insist."

"Thank you," the woman said again with a weak smile. Clarke watched the small family walk away, glad to have made their day the smallest bit brighter.

"Well done there, sailor!" a deep voice said from behind. Clarke jumped. She turned to find the young tour guide standing there with a smirk on his face. His voice was deeper than she had expected, now that he wasn't projecting it to a large group of people.

"Just because I can paint boats," she replied, placing her brushes back into their glass holders, "doesn't mean I know how to sail."

"Oh c'mon! I saw you weather that storm back there!" He indicated the little boy with a nod of his head. Clarke rolled her eyes and sat back down in front of her easel. "Navigate those rough seas..." the tour guide continued, leaning sideways to try and regain her attention, "pull a Jesus and calm the waters...." An ornery grin crept on to the guy's face and Clarke fought to hold back a smile.

"Well, I'm certainly no Jesus."

"Of course not!" he readily agreed. "But you're up there with Sir Francis Drake, Odysseus, Thomas Truxton, Captain Jack Sparrow-"

"Who's Thomas Truxton?" Clarke asked, thoughtfully, pausing in her painting. "I've heard of all the others."

"Thomas Truxton- captain during the Revolutionary War," the young man replied instantly, as if reading from a cue card. "The guy never lost a battle." Clarke raised her eyebrows, impressed.

"Is my geek showing yet?" the tour guy said, suddenly bashful. Clarke couldn't resist a small smile.

"A little bit." He grinned.

"I'm what some people might call a history buff," he admitted.
The guy took a stroll through Clarke's paintings. Clarke continued to paint, although the strange feeling like someone was reading her diary pages constantly nagged at her. Why in the world should this random guy looking at her paintings bug her? She didn't want to think about it and she would never let on that his presence bothered her, so she just focused on her painting more intensely than she had before.

"You're quite the artist," he said after awhile. Despite her best efforts to feel indifferent at the comment, something inside her relaxed. He came up beside her and leaned on the wall at her back. She visibly stiffened.

"Do I make you uncomfortable?" he asked. It came across as playful but with a subtle undertone of sincerity. Clarke glanced at him sideways, putting her brush down and tightening her ponytail.

"No," she lied. "Although you do reek of confidence, and it's a bit overwhelming." He laughed.

"Spending several, lonesome hours in a stuffy tour guide shop will do that to ya," he said casually.

"You give tours in front of groups of people all day," she quipped, not ready to throw the guy a pity party. "I can think of lonelier professions."

"You sit out here and people walk by you constantly," he replied thoughtfully, "and you're telling me you don't get lonely?" The question hung in the air for a minute. Clarke swallowed, unsure of how to answer. She hadn't really taken the time to think about the fact that she lived alone. Not just lived as in dwelling alone, but as in her life rendered her alone on most days and nights; no family, no friends. Not even a pet. Maybe... her apartment was getting a little too quiet for her every night. Maybe she convinced herself that money was getting tight just so that she could go out on the streets and just sit for awhile on the weekends, immersed in the flow of life but never moving. Maybe part of why she hated selling her paintings was because it was like giving away part of herself and getting nothing in return except payment for the paint.

"Just because I'm alone doesn't mean I'm lonely," she muttered, more for her own sake than his. He was quiet for awhile. People walked by, Clarke continued painting, the window flowers swayed in a slight breeze.

"Would you miss the ocean?" he asked suddenly. She turned to look at him, confusion riddling her brow. "I mean if you moved away from the coast," he clarified. "Would you miss it?" Clarke nodded instantly.

"I live right along the harbor. I love it."

"It's one thing to love it, another to miss it." Clarke thought about it. Buying that apartment had been the best decision of her life. She loved waking up to the sunrise on the water, seeing and feeling the rhythm of the waves and the boats coming in and going out, hearing the sounds of the sea hush her through her open window when she slept at night.

"I don't think I could ever be away from it again," she said quietly.

"Just because you can paint boats doesn't mean you're a sailor," he continued, walking backwards toward his shop. "But missing the ocean... is that the artist in you talking?" The corner of his mouth twitched into a brief, knowing smile. "Or the sailor?"

He turned on his heel and walked away, Clarke watching every step in silence.
My first Bellarke fic! I'm actually pretty proud of this one because it has a little bit of depth to it, although be gracious because there might be a couple of grammatical errors riddled throughout. This is part one (hopefully there will be a part two eventually). :)

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