The Road Back

by orphan_account

Summary

After the drop ship lands Bellamy and the others stumble upon an interesting bunker inhabited by Clarke a grounder whose family has been working to preserve information after the final war.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

If you are reading this for the first time, feel free to disregard this note.

I finally got a chance to edit this on a screen larger than my phone so I have hopefully caught all of the presumptuous autocorrect mistakes. I also updated a few chapters and added little things here and there. Chapter 28 has been updated and extended (I accidentally uploaded an unfinished version of the final chapter).

Anyways, enjoy.

Chapter 1

Bellamy

We've been walking in circles for hours and still no luck. It would help if we knew what we were looking for. There are 5 plants we know are safe to eat and we're quickly working our way through all the supplies within a day's walk of the camp. When we landed from the Ark we had hoped to be sitting on top of an apocalypse proof treasure trove of supplies and food, not that I was really looking forward to eating food that had been stored away a hundred years ago. The Chancellor assured us it would all still be edible, but he isn't high on my list of people to trust right now. Not after rounding up all of the juvenile "criminals" on the Ark and sending us to what almost everyone assumed would be our death, all to buy the Ark a few more weeks of oxygen.

From what Raven explained, when she landed in a stolen escape pod a week after we arrived, the entire oxygen filtration system was about to fail so they sent us to the ground in a last ditch effort to buy some time for the more important citizens of our fine Ark. Apparently we were expendable enough to be wasted testing what was supposed to be a radiation soaked wasteland. We were lucky to find the earth surprisingly livable, but not so lucky when it came to the location of our landing. Our ship touched down miles from it's intended location leaving a mountain range and hostile grounders between us and the only supplies we knew were safe.

For the first couple of weeks we managed to scrounge up enough food near our camp to keep us fed. We are quickly reaching the extent of our plant identification skills though. We're all either too young or too stupid to remember much from our earth studies classes. I, apparently, fall into the second category. I did well in school but the earth never interested me, a far away place I would never see, filled with irrelevant life forms that, for all we knew, could have been completely wiped out by the radioactive fall-out of the final war. If I'd been interested enough to pay attention back then, maybe we wouldn't be in such a mess now. That's not to say none of the stories from earth interested me though. I just always gravitated more to the Greek and Roman myths and histories. There was something about the raw human struggle of their stories that always captivated me. The stark juxtaposition of what, during their times, were some of the most advanced ideas in technology, philosophy, and medicine with the brutality and cruellness on their laws and customs. Although considering what the Ark has done to us, human nature hasn't changed much in a few thousand years. Maybe it was just the sheer honesty of their stories that attracted me to their lives. They were perfectly at peace with being intelligent and advanced while
at the same time cruel and twisted in their treatment of those they deemed weak. No hiding behind the pleasantries and formalities that mask the injustices of the Ark.

"Hey! Bellamy!" A shout from behind me pulls me back to reality. I turn around to see Raven, Jasper and Finn standing about a hundred meters behind me. Raven is glaring at me and Jasper and Finn look like they're about to faint.

"We didn't all go through guard training and get extra protein rations, Bellamy. Us commoners need to take a break" Raven yells without taking any steps forward.

This isn't a good place to rest. We're surrounded by tall trees and based on the way the grounders attacked a hunting party last week by dropping out of the trees, we're sitting ducks. "There's a ridge up ahead." I call as I turn away from them and continue to walk. "We can rest there until you babies are ready to head back. It'll be dark soon and there's no way in hell I'm getting caught out here in the middle of the night with this much dead weight." I hear Raven grunt in disapproval, but I also hear slow footsteps following so I continue to the ridge. The forest is thick here, like a green blanket closing in all around us. When we arrived we all thought it was so beautiful, an endless rolling forest filled with flowers, moss, trees and insects we could only have dreamed of a few weeks ago. It didn't take us long to realize that it was almost all either deadly or useless. Appreciation for beauty fades quickly when you haven't eaten in a day. For all the green there wasn't much we could actually eat, or at least that we knew we could eat. After a mishap with some hallucinogenic nuts we stopped eating things we weren't sure about. There's no point stockpiling food for winter only to find out after the ground freezes that it's either inedible or poisonous.

When I reach the ridge, I feel a twinge of awe at the view in front of me. The forest opens up and the ground quickly drops down to an open expanse of small rocky hills covered in tall grass and moss. There looks to be a small lake about a kilometre away but that will have to wait for another day. This is too far to be used as a water source but there could be fish or edible plants around the small lake. There are a few small trees and shrubs spread throughout the field that could be hiding apples or other fruit whose names I never bothered to remember, no room on a space ship for an apple tree.

The field looks more inviting than the forest behind us, even if it is surrounded on the far side with more forest and mountains. This is where I would build my home, I can't leave the group behind though and we're in no shape to abandon the ship. It is the only permanent shelter we have and it houses our precious radio link to the Ark. With the luxury of time things could have been different. Of course it's hard to be choosy about your location when your friends are being speared through the chest the first day on the ground. We threw up our walls around the ship as quick as we could and now we just hope for the best. I allow myself a pointless and indulgent moment to imagine how things could have been different. I take a long last look before turning my back to the expanse of possibilities just outside my grasp to face the forest. If there is danger, this is where it will come from. The forest my sister fell in love with the minute her feet touched the ground. The forest that has in one way or another claimed 15 of our companions. I don't have the luxury of thinking about the way things could be. I guess it's always been that way though. Being shouldered with the burden of caring for my sister at a young age has given me a bleak opinion on fantasy. It's a waste of time. All that matters is what's in front of us, and right now the task in front if me is getting 85 idiotic kids through the winter.

I take my pack off and sit down just as Raven walks out of the trees, followed slowly by Jasper and Finn. It's not really their fault, they were both injured by grounders and should be resting, but I couldn't bear to leave our best tracker and only botanist at the camp during a scouting trip. The idea was to map out areas with edible plants and send out groups over the next few days to gather as much as they could carry. Fantasy and reality aren't quite lining up today either.
Raven barely glances at the clearing behind us before sitting down next to me. Ever the mechanic, this is pretty meaningless to her. I expect Jasper, our resident botanist, to mention the trees or shrubs behind me but when I look up at him I realize he's too tired to care. At least the walk home will be short. We've been walking in a spiral away from camp to cover as much ground as possible. If we cut back to the north we should be back within an hour. Maybe two the way they're walking.

"I don't know what your problem is Bellamy," Raven complains with her usual scowl. She seems to have two moods, angry as hell or goofing off like a six year old. To be honest, I prefer angry most of the time. "I told you they aren't fully healed. If you're going to go running off like that you could at least let us know so we can wait behind while you check things out."

"What can I say? I don't always know my own strength." I joke as I pull a small bundle of dried meat from my pack. I offer Raven a piece but she waves it off in favour of some berries. After years of eating the Ark's genetically engineered and hyper nutritious rations, actual meat has been a little difficult for some people to stomach.

Jasper and Finn start chatting about the few things we've managed to gather today, a few mint, borage, and bloodroot plants we dug up with the hopes of transplanting inside our walls. It's not much but they seem to be pleased not to be going home empty handed. It won't feed us, but Jasper says they can be used to make some basic medicine. I start picking at the ground next to me absentmindedly and pull up a small rock. I turn it over in my hand a few times before tossing it over my shoulder.

Tink

My eyes shoot to Raven and I can tell by the look on her face that she heard it too. There is only one thing that could have made that sound.

"That sounds like metal." She whispers. I nod slowly and turn towards the edge of the ridge a few meters behind me.

"Stay here," I whisper. She nods back and motions for Finn and Jasper to shut up. I slowly crawl towards the opposite edge of the ridge. The hill we walked in on slopes up slowly as the trees fade to shrubs and grass but behind us there is a steep drop off. I inch towards the edge and peer down. I am looking at a mix of grass and rocks below searching for any hint of metal that could have made that sound. I am about to turn back when I notice a small grey sliver between two patches of moss. It could just be a piece of scrap but it could also be a metal door or an old car. Finn found a bunker and half buried truck our first week on the ground, and while the bunker wasn't large enough to provide us with any additional shelter for the winter, we were able to salvage the necessary parts to fix our radio and bring a few extra blankets back to camp. Even if it's just a piece of scrap it's worth checking out. I slowly scan the area looking for any sign of grounders. They seem to like to stick to the trees and we mostly see them north and west of camp, but I'm not taking any chances. Especially not when my backup looks like they're about to doze off in the grass.

After what feels like an hour but is probably closer to ten minutes I decide it looks safe enough and wave the others forward.

"I can't tell what it is but there's definitely something down there. What do you say Raven, are you in a salvaging mood? Maybe we can find some more electronics for you to play with."

Her face lights up like a damn six year old. "Lead the way boss."

We take our time finding a safe place to climb down the ridge which takes us about a hundred
meters to the east. When we make it back below where we were sitting on the ridge, Raven and I both stop short. Nestled into the rock and dirt cliff below the ridge is a plain metal door. It's surrounded by moss and covered in dents and mud, but it's open.

I hear Raven gasp behind me and I turn to hush her. I quietly creep forward and step on something metal. There is another metal door on the ground. This must be where my rock landed. This door is smaller, a square that probably leads to an underground bunker below. I ignore the door under my feet and head towards the open door in front of me. When I don't see anything inside I take a small step into the doorway and the others follow.

"Do you think it's empty like that other bunker?" Jasper asks in a whisper.

"Someone must have been here if the door is open," answers Finn as he scans the ground for tracks. The rock and moss around the doorway give nothing away.

"That could have been years ago," Raven answers slipping in the door behind me. "Hopefully it hasn't been completely looted."

As I pause in the doorway for my eyes to adjust to the light I notice that this bunker is much bigger than the small one room hideout Finn stumbled upon in the forest. The small room we entered through opens into a much larger room filled with shelves. The walls are lined from floor to ceiling with shelves all holding narrow rectangular boxes. There are low shelves in the middle of the room as well and a few doors along the exterior of the room that hint at even more possible supplies.

"What the hell do you think is in here?" Raven asks.

"You're about to find out," I answer with a smile as I step forward. I grab a blue and brown box from the shelf closest to the door and pull it down. "What the hell?!?"

"They're books," Finn chimes in as he steps forward and grabs another from the shelf to my left.

"Wow. This is one of those places," says Jasper. "You know where they used to store all their books and maps and information before they put everything on computers."

"Oh yeah," says Raven with a slightly disappointed look on her face. "I guess we won't find any electronics here."

"Hey Finn," Jasper calls back, walking farther into the room. "What did they call these places? I think it was something with an n or maybe an l...not a rectory..." Jasper's voice trails off in thought.

"It's a library," answers a firm voice from the far corner of the room. We all freeze as a small blonde girl, no older than Raven, steps out of the farthest doorway with a book in one hand and a small light in the other.
Chapter 2

Clarke

I can't quite make out their faces the way the sun is filtering in from the door behind them, but I'm sure I haven't seen them before. Leave it to Gael to send a group of complete idiots in his place. We've been planning this trip for months and this is our last chance to leave before the winter weather sets in and it will be too difficult to make the trek.

"Where's Gael?" I ask and they just stare at me. The worst part of new people is the looks they give me. It's always the same. First shock at the fact that I'm living out here alone then, more often than not, they try to take advantage of me in one way or another. Every time a new face walks in that door I'm stuck proving myself all over again. At a certain point you would think people would just realize that there's no way I would have survived this long by accident and at least grant me a little respect. No one has answered so I keep talking as I move towards them. "If he thinks he can send four idiots who can't even recognize a book and I'll let it slide he's really lost his mind. I mean you two look like you could probably hold your own on the hike," I say motioning to the olive skinned girl scowling at me and the brown haired man next to her. They look fairly strong and have what I can only assume are guns draped across their chests. I have never seen guns like these before. Every now and again someone passes through with a handgun or a small rifle but it's been a few years since the last time. Bullets are more scarce with each passing year. These two must not see me as too much of a threat since they haven't reached for their guns. The man looks older than the others, probably a couple of years older than me. He's trying to look tough with his chest puffed up and his shoulders high. His eyes tell a different story though. As I move closer I can see the confusion and worry in his eyes. He looks like someone who had to grow up way too fast. I know that look because I wear it too. Some people are born hard and tough and others are shaped that way by the life they are forced into. "But the other two," I say addressing the tall man who must be the leader of this pathetic group. "They look like they might pass out at any minute. How are they going to carry anything, let alone themselves?"

"We're not with Gael," he finally says in a slow deliberate voice.

"Well, you're definitely not with Anya...or Isaac," I say giving them a once over. "Actually you don't look like any group I've met before. Where are you from?" I ask suddenly curious about this strange group that wandered into my home.

"Far away," He answers obviously trying not to give anything away.

I stop a few feet away from him and look him over closely. The other two guys who had been walking around when I entered the room have made their way back to the door and are standing close behind him. His clothing is grey and synthetic so he has either been scavenging or has had them a long time. They're all wearing the same muted colours and synthetic fabrics. They have some recent scuffs and stains but nothing to indicate they've spent a long time in the forest or the mountains. Then it hits me. The meteor that struck weeks ago while I was in the mountains, Anya complaining of poachers and fires, their hygiene and lack of scars along with their sudden appearance and confusion about the area.

"Oh my god!" I exclaim as I rush forward to inspect the skinny shaggy haired boy standing just to the left of the leader. I run my hands over his face and inspect his teeth before grabbing his hands and turning them over in mine. "I can't believe it. My grandmother used to tell me the stories and I've read about space travel but I always assumed everyone died up there after running out of
supplies." It comes out in a rushed jumble of words as I inspect his clothing and turn to the others. I must look like an idiot, but I don't really care. Space has always fascinated me. As a child my grandmother used to tell me stories about a ship filled with survivors that would one day return to earth, she even taught me to spot it's orbit in the night.

"You're from space aren't you?" I ask the leader. His look of confusion is gone and he's just smirking at me.

"Yes," answers the handsome guy to his right. "I'm Finn," he says extending his hand.

"I'm Clarke," I say taking his hand and pulling him a into a hug. "Clarke Griffin. Come, sit." I motion to a few chairs just off to the side of the door. It's one of the only places with enough natural light to make it comfortable to read without a light. The chairs are well worn and full of patches. The springs in the seats creak and the legs are a little wobbly but they're mine and they remind me of being read to and having my hair brushed. Back in the years when I had no responsibility to shoulder and my choices were my own.

Finn and the skinny kid follow me but the other two look skeptical, especially the girl. Finn motions to the others as he sits down "This is Jasper and that's Bellamy and Raven."

I hug Jasper and lead him to the closest thing to a comfortable chair I have, he looks exhausted. I move to greet the other two but Bellamy steps back and puts a little distance between us.

"So you're with Anya then?" He asks in a cold slightly questioning voice. The way he says her name makes me think he may not have met her.

"No," I answer. "Not really. I trade with her and her people come here for information but I don't live with her clan if that's what you're asking. I don't really belong to any group in particular," I continue as I take the book he is holding from his hands and carefully place it back on the shelf. "You seem to have made an impression on Anya though. For word to travel to me so quickly she must be mad," I say turning to Raven who seems to be particularly angry at the mention of the Forest Clan.

"Yeah" she answers in a defiant voice "She's not so great at first impressions either. Her people almost killed these two!" she practically spits, motioning to Finn and Jasper.

I smile a little apologetically. "That's definitely Anya. She doesn't take well to strangers. You'd be wise to try to patch things up with her before it gets out of hand. I heard you've been poaching on her land." I settle into the chair across from Finn and offer him a flask of water. He takes it and smiles.

"Isn't that what I've been saying Bellamy?" He calls over his shoulder.

Bellamy doesn't bother to answer and I can tell already he won't be very cooperative. I peek over the shoulder of my chair at him, still standing by the door as if he's worried he'll need to make a quick exit. "So I'm guessing you're out here looking for supplies or food or both. You won't find much here," I say making sure to keep my face and voice as even as possible. "I only keep enough supplies for myself but you are welcome to look through any of the books for information that might be useful. The shelves in the middle are books about edible plants, foraging, natural medicines and basic survival skills."

I turn back to Finn and Jasper and hear Bellamy and Raven walking over the the shelf. "So, what are you going to do about Anya?" I ask. "If you've been hunting on her land she will want payment. You'll probably need to give her some of your kills to make up for what you've taken. The Forest Clan is pretty well organized, but they struggle through the winters just like everyone
else. If she doesn't have enough to feed her people she'll blame you and that could definitely get ugly."

Finn looks like he's really thinking about it, he seems like the most reasonable, or at least the most level headed of the bunch. "Bellamy's sister befriended one of Anya's people," Finn whispers. He glances quickly at Bellamy to see if he's listening but he and Raven seem to be pretty engrossed in a plant identification book. "I was thinking about having him set up a meeting with her, maybe talk about a way to make things right."

"Well that sounds like a good start," I say getting up from my chair. "For now you look like you need a decent meal before you head back to your camp, which by the way, I would love to visit sometime." I leave them to browse and rest in the main room and make my way back to my small kitchen. Most days I cook outside on a small fire but with a scavenging trip coming up I've spent the last few days moving everything back inside and packing up. I'm pulling a few things off the shelf and just filling up the kettle when I hear boots behind me.

"I thought you said you only keep enough supplies for yourself," Bellamy says in an accusatory tone. I glance up at the shelves around me. They are lined with jar after jar of carefully labeled concoctions. Each one has a story, all gathered and packed by my hands. Spring peas, apple sauce, pickles, jams and jellies, all skills I learned from my grandmother years ago. I take pride in carrying on in the way she taught me. Planting and harvesting, putting aside a little here and there so I am fully prepared by the time the leaves begin to turn.

"I do," I say flatly. "I gathered and stored all of this and I will use all of it. I said you could browse the books not invite yourself into my personal space."

"Just checking to see if you need any help," he says backing out of the room. "Obviously you've got things under control," he calls over his shoulder as he heads back to the library.

I quickly finish up making a platter of food for them. Some roasted nuts, sliced tomatoes, carrots, apples, and pears and a few strips of dried boar meat. My hand hovers over my last piece of cornbread contemplating saving it for the trip before I add it to the platter, my grandmother would approve. I make some mint and chamomile tea and head back to the library. I set the tray on the small stool between Jasper and Finn’s chairs. They have both drifted off to sleep. I gently nudge their shoulders to wake them up and Jasper nearly screams. Poor kid. He must have been through something pretty rough. I kneel down next to him and speak softly. "Good morning sunshine. I brought you some food. You need to eat if you're going to make it back to camp tonight." I smile at him and he manages a small smile in response. I walk over to where Bellamy and Raven are stacking books next to the shelf.

"Did you find anything useful?"

"Yeah." Raven replies "You don't mind if we borrow these do you?" She's stating her intent more than asking as she motions to the ten or so books they've pulled out.

"Actually I do mind," I say stepping in front of Bellamy as he picks up the stack and makes his way towards the door. "The books don't leave. That's not how it works. Like I said, you can browse but that's it. The books stay with me."

"Really? And who's going to stop me? You?" says Bellamy stoping right in front of me and sneering down at me. He's at least a foot taller than I am and I have to tilt my head back to meet his stare. He smells like blood and dirt and sweat. His face is angular and strong, his clenched jaw highlights his features and makes him look more powerful than he is. His eyes give him away. I can see a look of desperation flicker across his face as he stares me down.
"Yes" I say firmly and before he has a chance to react I sweep my foot forward and kick his feet out from under him. He drops the books in surprise as he falls to his knees and I grab his right arm as I spin around behind him. I twist it quickly until his shoulder is about to dislocate and then pull a small knife from my belt with my other hand and bring it up to his neck. His friends stand but don't move. They all look too shocked to do anything. I hear Bellamy's breathing change and his muscles tighten. I know he won't cry out in pain. He's too stubborn. I tighten my grip on his arm and twist it just a little more. I can hear him grinding his teeth in pain but he doesn't make a sound. Any farther and I know his shoulder will pop out of place. I have done this before. I lean in and whisper in the calmest voice I can manage "I'm going to let this slide just one time because you're new around here and you don't know any better, but if you come in my home and try to threaten or intimidate me again it won't end well for you, or your people. I believe in second chances but that is the extend of my forgiveness."

I release him and step back, tucking the knife back into my belt. Bellamy rubs his shoulder and stands up. When he turns back to me I smile. "I really don't want us to get off on the wrong foot," I explain. "The way I see it you need all the friends you can get right now. So let's start again. Sit and eat. You can copy anything from the books and come back to look at them as often as you like but you can't take them. You're not the only people who come here and if I let you take them I have no guarantee you'll ever bring them back."

I walk over to the chairs where the food still sits, almost untouched and Raven follows quickly behind me. "I like you," she says with a smile. "Anyone who can put Bellamy in his place is cool with me."

"Go float yourself Raven." Bellamy barks at her as he joins us to eat.
Chapter 3

Bellamy

Of course, as soon as we finish eating and pack up to leave, an acid rain storm passes over and we're stuck in the bunker. We lost one of our best guards to a storm a few days after we landed. When I found him he was covered in blisters and barely hanging on. It took everything I had to put him out of his misery. I still see him sometimes as I drift off to sleep. Pleading with me to make the pain stop. Knowing I did the right thing doesn't always make it easier. By the time the storm passes it's already dark. I should have left when that crazy girl tried to dislocate my shoulder. I should have known this place would be trouble. Anything that looks like a good thing always comes back to bite me. Now I'm stuck dragging Jasper and Finn through the forest in complete darkness.

"Alright guys," I practically growl as I stand up from an amazingly uncomfortable chair. "We need to head out if we want to make it back tonight. The storm has cleared and the camp is probably starting to worry about us."

"Aww Bellamy, we're in the middle of a game." Jasper sounds like a child about to throw a tantrum. He gives me an apologetic look when he remembers who he's talking to. Clarke spent most of the storm teaching them to play some mindless game on a wooden board she's carved with couple rows of shallow holes and a dozen or so small pebbles that they keep dropping and picking up. I brought Jasper along to help with plants and he has spent the majority of his time doing the least productive thing possible. At least Raven and Finn spent part of the storm looking through books and tracing some important leaves onto a couple scraps of paper I finally convinced Clarke to give us. 'This is not an office supply store Bellamy' she had scolded, like I even know what the hell that's supposed to mean.

"You can always stay," Clarke offers without bothering to look up from the game. "I have a couple extra beds, you can set up right through that door," she motions to a grey door behind me but still doesn't look up. "I'm sure your people will just assume you found shelter to ride out the storm. This can't be your first storm."

She's probably right but I still don't think I trust her enough to sleep here and, knowing Octavia, she's getting into trouble back at camp. After being hidden from the Ark's guards most of her life Octavia seems to be making up for her rebellious, stubborn, and defiant years all at once. It's not her fault she was locked away and to be honest she's done remarkably well considering. She should have been terminated as soon as our mother found out she was pregnant or killed at birth to comply with the Ark's strict one child policy but my mother couldn't bear the loss. I ended up delivering her on our pod floor and then spent my entire childhood sharing my rations and doing everything in my power to hide her. It wasn't really the best situation for either of us, but I love her, in-spite of all her crazy faults, so what else could I do.

"No, I think we've taken up enough of your time. Raven, Finn grab your packs and let's go."

"No way," Raven calls over her should. "If you want to head back by yourself have at it. We're staying. It's not safe out there at night and I don't know if we could even find the camp in the dark. Plus these two need to rest." Sometimes I hate these people. I don't know if Clarke's little show of strength has them all feeling a little bolder but they better fall in line when we get back to camp or we're going to have problems. The last thing I need is Raven questioning me in front of the rest of the delinquents. Those kids can smell weakness. I need to keep them under control if I want to
have any hope of getting Octavia through the winter safely.

"Fine, but as soon as the sun is up we're out of here. We still have hunting to do and now that we know what we're looking for we should be able to find some plants on the way back."

Clarke stands up and smiles at me slightly as she heads to the kitchen. I ball up my pack into a makeshift pillow and lean back against the wall a few feet from the main door. A bed would be nice but I want to be able to leave in a hurry if I have to. Plus, this way I can keep an eye on the entrance to the room in case Clarke turns out to be a complete psycho. A few minutes later she returns with an armload of well worn blankets. Like everything I've seen here, they are covered in patches and have a few small holes and stains.

"Sorry but I don't offer turn down service, you'll have to make your own beds and there won't be any chocolates on your pillows." She's smiling like she said something funny but I have no idea what she's talking about. I raise one eyebrow at her and shake my head a little.

"It's a joke Bellamy, you can smile you know." She sets the blankets down next to me and pulls a couple of cushions off of the chairs next to the door.

"Maybe I would smile if I had any idea what you were talking about."

"I swear Bellamy, it's like talking to a lion with you."

I stare at her trying to piece together how that makes any sense at all. I must look confused because when she turns back to me she laughs. "It's an old Wittgenstein quote. He said even if lions could speak we wouldn't be able to understand them. The expressions and reference points would be totally foreign. Language isn't really as universal as it seems I guess."

"Whatever," I say shaking my head. "I have a feeling I could have a more meaningful conversation with a lion than anyone else in this room." I make a show of settling down to sleep so she'll leave me alone.

I hear her laughing again as she walks away. A smile forms on my lips before I realize it's happening. It's a nice sound, her laughter, quiet but sincere.

The others join me after finishing their game and follow my lead of settling in around the door. Jasper sleeps a few feet away from me while Raven and Finn share a blanket and a few annoying giggles on the far side of the door. I stay awake until they have all drifted off to sleep. I mentally run through all of the tasks for the following day and try to picture some of the plants we looked up earlier. I'm nearly asleep when I hear a faint voice drifting through the kitchen. It sounds like Clarke but I can't be sure. There could be someone else here. If the second door we saw outside is any indication of the size of the bunker there is a lot more we haven't seen.

I slowly get up from my place by the door and thread my arm through the strap of my gun. I follow the sound slowly through the kitchen, then a smaller room lined with more shelves holding books and some tins and boxes. I make a mental note to check for anything useful later, if I get a chance. The door at the far side of the room is cracked open and there is a faint light flickering out. I can hear Clarke talking on the other side of the door. I can't hear anyone else so I lean closer to the door and try to peek into the room. There is a metal framed bed across from the door with a small table next to it. Clarke is on the bed laying on her stomach with her chin propped up on her elbows. She's reading something. I lean in closer and my gun must tap the door because it moves ever so slightly and creaks. Clarke turns quickly and locks her eyes on mine.

 Damn it.

"Bellamy?" She says it like a question even though she knows exactly who I am, like my name alone implies an actual line of questioning. I know she's really asking what the hell I'm doing
staring at her.

"I heard talking," I explain as I straighten up and step into the doorway trying to look slightly less creepy. "I just wanted to make sure everything was okay."

"No you didn't," she answers with a small smile. "You're nosey and protective and you're looking out for your people. There's no one else here if that's what you're worried about. I was reading."

"Out loud?" I used to read to Octavia from any of the stories we could manage to access on the Ark database, but I never would have thought to read aloud to myself.

"I was trying to sleep."

"While reading out loud with the light on? Who's the lion now Clarke?" I say smiling at her. She let her hair down and changed into a loose shirt before bed. She looks more relaxed and her cheeks are slightly red from where her palms were resting against them as she read.

She bursts out laughing and quickly covers her mouth, probably remembering the three people still sleeping in the library. She sits up and crosses her legs under the blankets. "That's not really the right use of the expression Bellamy. He was talking about linguistic patterns and semantics, not behaviour," she says still smiling. She leans forward and pats the end of the bed. "Come sit down."

I give her a skeptical look before taking my gun off and sitting down on the bed with my feet hanging off the side. I'm not really one to refuse a girl's invitation into her bed even though I'm sure Clarke's intentions are a little different than the girls back at camp. I lean my shoulders against the concrete wall behind me. It feels good to sit on a real bed.

"So, what's keeping you up?" I ask after a long silence. She's staring at me and the silence is making me a little uncomfortable. The way she looks at me is different than the way anyone else does, like I'm some sort of puzzle she's trying to figure out.

"I was thinking about the Ark. I've always wondered what it would have been like up there. I have a few books about space but most of that information was all on computers so I'm sure a lot of it has been lost. I don't remember finding references to anything called the Ark in any books. There were a few space stations before the war but nothing called the Ark. Was that a nickname? Which country built it?"

"Tell you what Clarke, I have a few questions for you too so how about if I answer your questions you answer mine, deal?" As soon as I see her eyes light up I know I should have asked for more. Damn it, I probably could have gotten a half dozen jars from the kitchen for the information she wants.

"Great," she says with a huge smile. "You first."

"The Ark isn't in any of your books because it wasn't launched as the Ark. It was built in space from all of the existing space stations and satellites. Most of the countries with existing space stations sent up shuttles with extra supplies and personnel since they were expecting a disruption in launches. No one expected to be up there for 100 years though."

"Wow, that has got to be the biggest construction project to ever take place in space. It's amazing they even had enough materials to link the stations together. How big is it?"

"Nope, my turn. Why do you live by yourself in an underground library?"

"Well I guess for the same reason you lived on the Ark," she says "I was born here so it's just
always been my home."

"No way," I say. She's not getting off that easy. "You have to be more specific than that."

"Alright, it's kind of a long story." I start taking off my boots so it's clear I'm not leaving. She pauses for a few seconds and then continues as I swing my feet up on the bed and turn to face her. "My great great Grandmother built this place with a few of her colleagues. She worked in the philosophy department at a university in Washington, that was the Capitol. So, anyways, from what her diary says, when things got bad she and a few other professors started thinking about the toll a war would have on some of the more important materials housed in their departments at the university. Originally they started building this place as a storage facility for books, paintings, music. Really any culturally significant works they thought might be destroyed if the Capitol was bombed. As time went on it seemed more and more that they wouldn't just be able to store the books and find a safe place to live until the war ended. They realized they would probably have to live down here as well. They expanded the bunker to house people. They installed water collection and filtration systems, air filters, batteries and other supplies. Their main focus was still to preserve information though so they also found as many books about foraging, survival, medicine, and farming. They stored seeds and planted what they could in the bunker with a few grow lights. When the bombings started my grandmother managed to make it out of the city with her daughter and one of the other professors. They brought the children of the other professors and they were all supposed to meet here but no one else showed up. It was my great great Grandmother and one other woman with 5 kids. They stayed in the bunker and raised the kids.

When my great Grandmother grew up she married one of the other boys and they had my grandmother. You get the idea, eventually here I am."

I take a minute to soak in everything she said. I thought I had it bad locked in the Ark. I can't imagine being stuck down here all those years, spending your whole life never seeing the outside world. At least Octavia got glimpses of the ark when I brought her things or we browsed the Ark's database of photos.

"Ok Bellamy, why are you here? Why did the Ark send you down here?"

"We're expendable," I say a little too angrily. "The Ark is at the end of its life so they sent all of the juvenile delinquents down to test the Earth before sending anyone important." I can tell she isn't satisfied by my answer and has million other things to ask, but she bites her tongue and waits for my question. "You never answered my whole question. Why do you live here by yourself? What happened to your family?"

"Over the years people died or tried to venture out on their own. After about 50 years, when they started to run low on supplies, they decided to open the bunker. The readings from the sensors they had installed all seemed livable so they decided to give it a shot. Apparently the amount of nuclear material dropped, at least in this area, was a lot less than they originally though. Most of the bombs were just destructive but not nuclear. After a while it was just my mom and my grandmother. They spent most of their time avoiding the Forest Clan and the Mountain Men. They weren't much of a threat and they never ventured far from the bunker so mostly everyone left them alone. My grandmother knew that my mom would have to marry eventually so she started building ties with the Forest Clan while my mother was young. She taught some of their kids and started letting them use the library. My father spent a lot of time here as a child and my Grandmother arranged for them to be married when my mother was old enough. It began a kind of truce with the Forest Clan. It helped tie us together, they trusted my grandmother and my mother married one of their own so we couldn't be that bad. My parents had three kids, I'm the youngest. We grew up with the children from the Forest and River clans. They would spend time here learning to read and gathering information that a lot of their people had forgotten. My family also traded with them and exchanged seeds and plants. We formed a basic truce in this area. My
older sister married a leader from the River Clan that lives south of here and my brother died fighting with the Forest Clan about ten years ago. A tribe from the north came down raiding villages and killing anyone they came across. My parents were slaughtered. After that, my grandmother started reaching out to the Mountain Men to build an alliance with them as well. They did nothing to stop the Northerners when they passed by their territory on their way south. She always thought that if they had been on our side we might not have lost so many people. She died about 6 years ago so now it's just me. I keep up the library and try to keep the alliance going between all the local tribes. It was always her dream to try to rebuild some semblance of humanity. She used to say 'The road back to humanity is paved with sacrifice and hard choices.' My family has always made those sacrifices so now it falls on me to keep things going."

I stare at her when she's finished talking, not quite sure what to say. I'm not sure what I expected but it wasn't that.

"So that took kind of a serious turn," she says with a half smile. "What was the best thing about the Ark?"

That's an easy one. "The view," I say without hesitation. Seeing the earth as a small blue orb never got old. I follow her lead and go for a lighter question. "What were you reading?"

"The House of the Spirits. I can read you some if you want," she offers, pulling the book from its place on the small table next to her bed.

"That's okay." I get up to leave. This seems as good a time as any to make an exit. "I'm a little too old for bedtime stories."

"Suit yourself," she says, rolling back onto her stomach and opening the book. "There's another bed in the corner if you change your mind." She tilts her head towards the far side of the room and I see another bed just like hers tucked behind the door. I pause in the doorway as she begins to read. Her voice is low and steady. She reads with a comforting tone that cherishes each word without distracting from the story itself. I look back to her and then the bed in the corner. What the hell, I think as I shrug off my jacket and climb into the bed. This may be my last chance to sleep in a real bed for a long time.

The last thing I hear as I drift off to sleep is the steady cadence of Clarke's voice. I've never slept so well.
Clarke

When I wake up it's dark, it's always dark in here without the lamp. In the summers I build a temporary tent just outside the bunker and wake up with the sun. The nights have been getting colder though so I've moved back inside. I thought about building something more permanent in the meadow but it just seemed like a waste of energy. By this time next year I'll be living in the mountains. I think I'll miss the summer nights the most. The mountains can be beautiful, but nothing compares to the sounds of the meadow on a summer night. An entire orchestra of insects to sing me to sleep. Waking up to the birds chirping and the hazy light of the morning fog before the sun chases it away. This place is so much of who I am, a quiet refuge surrounded by harsh terrain. It's not something I can change though so I push the thoughts away.

Bellamy is still asleep across the room. I can hear his steady breathing as I get up and dress quickly. I grab a handful of blueberries as I pass through the kitchen and head for the door. I tiptoe around Finn and Raven who are still a ball of tangled limbs and make my way outside. I leave the door cracked open enough to let in some fresh air but not so much to wake them up with a cold draft.

"Good morning sunshine!"

Finally.

"Good morning Gael," I say before turning to greet him. "I was starting to worry you wouldn't show. I'm glad you found some breakfast." Gael is sitting on a rock a few meters from the door finishing an apple. He's short, only a couple inches taller than me but his broad shoulders and hard jawline still give him a tough look. His skin is dark, darker than Raven's soft olive skin. His hair is black and shiny and he keeps it short and slicked back. He wears no battle paint or adornments like the Forest clan, just a simple leather jacket and pants. His boots are relics from before the war but his clothing has been made in the past few years. It has the more rugged look of craftsmanship that has not quite been mastered yet or is lacking some of the necessary tools. There are two other men and a girl resting farther away. They're sitting next to a blackberry bush and tossing berries into each others mouths.

"Come on Clarke, you know me better than that. I wouldn't let you down. Plus your sister would kill me." He adds the last part with a joking smile but we both know it's true. For all his toughness on a hunt or in battle it's Arryn who runs the show in their home. I smile back and offer him some berries. "No thanks sunshine, I filled up on apples. I even remembered to save you the seeds this time." He looks proud of himself.

Seeds are a precious thing to me and last year when Gael visited he and his men ate through over a dozen apples and spit all of the seeds onto the ground. I save the seeds all winter and plant them in the early spring. Every time I travel I carry a few saplings with me to transplant if I can find a good spot. I think of how much the apple tree in our meadow helped when my family first ventured outside of the bunker. Finding food is the difference between life and death. Arryn used to jokingly call me Clarke Appleseed and on our last scavenging trip Gael even found a pot that fit perfectly on my head. He let me keep it but I find it's better for cooking than keeping my head dry. Arryn and Gael are so much alike. They are both so full of life and spirit. I feel a little lighter when they're around. Arryn doesn't make the trip up north very often though. Apparently she and Gael are trying to single handedly repopulate the Earth. They have 5 kids so she stays close to home.
"So how's my sister?" Gael usually brings me a letter or a diary from her to add to our collection. In addition to the existing books in the library we try to add as much about our lives as possible. A first hand account of life after the war. I even found an old Polaroid camera a few years ago that was miraculously still functional. It only has a dozen or so pictures left though so I use them sparingly. We started taking annual pictures to sum up our year. Something to add to our box of memories. Last year it was a picture of the view from the tallest peak in the Mountain Men's territory. I haven't take one yet this year. Maybe I'll take the camera on the trip and see if I can find anything interesting.

"Oh she's keeping busy," he says pulling his pack open. "You know she's always got some project going on." He keeps talking as he fishes around in his bag telling me about how she ended up turning half the family red for a week with her attempt at dyeing fabric. It sounds like Arryn. Gael pulls a small box from his pack and passes it to me. I know right away it's from her. The pressed flowers tied around it with a piece of vine are a dead give away. Gael also pulls out a few other small packs of fruit and seeds, peaches don't grow this far north and Arryn knows I love them.

As I turn to take the packages into the bunker Bellamy walks out of the door still rubbing sleep from his eyes. I'm staring down at the packages in my hands and I walk right into him.

"Well, looks like someone is getting spoiled with gifts." He's almost glaring at me as he eyes the packages in my hands.

"Oh yeah," Gael calls from behind me. "Clarke didn't tell you, she's a regular princess in these parts." Over the years word has spread about the library and I get visitors from time to time so an unfamiliar face wouldn't seem strange to Gael.

"Shut up Gael." I laugh as I say it so he won't know how much I actually mean it. "This is Bellamy," I say, quickly changing the subject. "He's from space."

It works and Gael launches into a stream of questions. I'm glad Bellamy doesn't have a chance to dwell on the princess comment. I'm not sure if he was even curious enough to ask but it's not something I want to discuss. Not with him anyways. I don't know why I kept it from him last night. I guess it's nice to have someone look at me without the cloud of my future life hanging in their eyes. When I told him about my siblings marrying into the surrounding tribes I neglected to mention my role. Before my grandmother died it was decided that I would marry Isaac, the son of the Mountain Men's king. It was agreed that in my 20th year I would leave the library behind and move to the mountains. My grandmother said that while the library was important, it's useless if there is no one around to read. Since the day I was promised to Isaac, the three tribes in the area have worked together to keep the peace and protect each other. If someone needs help we provide it as best we can, we trade goods and teach each other skills. Some of the tribe members have even begun to socialize outside of their own tribes. I know we are all stronger with this alliance so I accept my part. It could be worse, Isaac is a good man. He's a couple years older than me and came around a lot when we were younger. He was never very interested in books. He learned to read but didn't really enjoyed it. He did enjoy playing with me though. We would explore the meadow and the forest together, acting out imaginary battles and discovering buried treasures. When it was time for him to train for real battles though, he had no more time for games and I don't see him much anymore. He sends gifts and messages from time to time and has his scouts check on me any time they are in the area. I make sure to visit him every few months and spend time with his tribe. I don't want to be a complete stranger to them when I arrive there to live. Isaac's parents are kind to me, especially his father. He loves the jams I bring him each fall. His mother wanted me to move to the mountains as soon as my grandmother died but Isaac refused to force me into anything I wasn't ready for. He was only about 15 at the time but he knew I wasn't ready to leave my entire family's legacy behind. It sounds silly, but I felt less lonely by myself in
the bunker than I did in his tribe's busy settlement. I smile a little as I think about his gentle side and tell myself I will be happy with him.

When I step back into the bunker Jasper, Raven and Finn are just waking up. Raven is inspecting Finn's side, it looks like a stitched up stab wound, or maybe an arrow.

"Are you alright?" I ask. It looks like it is healing but it still must hurt.

"Some painkillers would be great." Raven's sarcasm is refreshing. It reminds me of my brother Ray. "Or maybe some antibiotics."

"I'm a little short on morphine today, but I may be able to scrounge up some antibiotics," I call back as I pass into the kitchen.

"Make that two orders," Jasper calls after me.

I pull some honey from the shelf and a dozen or so cloves of garlic. I mash the garlic and mix it with a little honey and water and divide it between two cups. I figure I should start on breakfast while I'm in here. We all have a long day of walking ahead of us. I cut the peaches and lay them out on a wooden platter along with more nuts, some blueberries and some cured strips of fish. I make lavender tea with the dried flowers and leaves Arryn sent and then call for Raven to help me carry everything outside.

"Let's get them fixed up first and then we'll eat." I hand Raven the two cups of mashed garlic and we walk back to the main room. Finn and Jasper have moved outside so I grab a few strips of bandage from a small first aid box on the shelf next to the door and head out.

"Raven, they need to drink all of that, it's going to taste pretty bad but it should help fight any infections."

"Drink this." Raven shoves the cups into Jasper and Finn's hands and watches as they drain them obediently.

"Alright," I say stepping towards Jasper. "Raven, you watch how I do this so you can do Finn's bandage yourself. I'll give you enough honey to take with you and replace the bandages until tomorrow but that's all I can spare and you'll have to make your own bandages or wash these. If you want I can show you a picture of a beehive and you can have your hunters or scouts look for more." I turn to Jasper and ask him to show me his wound. I notice Bellamy is eying me from where he is standing with Gael. He obviously still doesn't trust me completely.

I press gently around Jasper's wound to make sure there is no leakage or swelling. It seems to be healing but it's still pretty raw. I pour enough honey onto a small strip of cloth to cover the wound. I hold it in place and tie a longer piece of cloth around his body to keep it from shifting while he walks.

I look up at Raven who has been watching me intently. "Pretty simple, right?"

"Yep." She smiles a little and turns to work on Finn.

"You'll need to change the bandages twice a day. If they get any worse you can come see me."

"Thanks. We have a kid back at camp who was in training to work as a doctor on the Ark but he had barely been there for a year before he got caught sneaking medicine for his mother and was locked up. He can do the basics but without materials he's pretty lost."

"Well, he's welcome to come by and browse the books or ask for advice," I say.

As I rise to head back to the bunker for the platter of food I left in the kitchen I catch Bellamy
staring at me again. He looks away quickly when our eyes meet. I'm still not sure what to think of him. I know he wants me to think he's cold and tough but he also seems like he cares, at least about his people. And he was kind to me last night. It must be a burden to take care of so many young people, all lost and confused in their strange new home. I help the people who live around here but I'm not single handedly responsible for their survival. I can't imagine what that feels like. I've often wondered how Isaac will carry the weight of his tribe when the time comes. Our tribe, I remind myself.

I bring the food outside and we eat on the ground near the bunker. Gael and his people don't eat much but they enjoy the tea and discuss the route we'll take while the rest of us eat. Jasper is fascinated with the peaches and even Bellamy seems to enjoy the blueberries. I notice him put a handful in his pocket. He doesn't say much as the rest of us talk about the food and how to identify it. Jasper is a little disappointed to hear that the peaches only grow farther south.

When we finish eating I take the platter inside and quickly straighten up in the kitchen. I grab the pack I prepared before Gael arrived and make sure I have my keys to lock up. Bellamy is standing at the door when I walk outside.

"Where is everyone else?" I scan the meadow quickly but Raven, Gael and the others are gone.

"Gael heard a turkey or something like that so they're trying to catch it. I figured I'd stay behind incase you need any help. I'd hate for a princess like you to be stuck in the woods all alone. Plus the birds will eat all these berries you have growing by the time you get back so I thought I'd take them off your hands."

"Bellamy," I say fuming "in case you hadn't figured it out yet I spend most of my life alone in the woods. I don't need protection from you, or anyone else for that matter. I thought I made that pretty clear yesterday. And I definitely don't need you stealing my food. I'm running a library not a damn soup kitchen."

"Well then, it's a good thing I didn't take any soup." He's smirking at me and looks like he's trying to swallow a full blown laugh.

I spin around and stomp off after Gael leaving Bellamy standing in the meadow.

"Brave Princess." He laughs as he jogs to catch up.
Bellamy

Apparently Finn isn't quite the master tracker he seemed to be. Not while he's wandering through the woods with a barely healed stab wound anyways. Although mastering skills like tracking and navigation must be difficult on a grey metal space station. It takes us almost four hours to get back to camp. We stop pretty often, marking patches of edible plants on our map. Clarke and I caught up to Raven and Finn just after Gael managed to take down two of the turkeys he heard passing by. Clarke convinced him to give the smaller one to us. I guess she's not quite as stuck up as I originally thought. She reminds me of the upperclass on the Ark, the over educated council members who voted to lock up Octavia and float my mother. She would have been one of them too. If her ancestors were professors she would have been one of the privileged Ark citizens. I'm still not sure if I trust her and I have a faint tingle in my shoulder that reminds me I need to pay her back for her show of strength in the bunker. If that had happened inside the camp walls I would have had to kill her, or at the very least banish her, to keep everyone from thinking I'm weak. I may have had it coming though. I wouldn't have been quite so forgiving if someone walked into our camp and tried to walk back out with supplies.

By the time we arrive back at camp we are loaded up with the turkey, a few more medicinal herbs and enough roots, nuts, and berries to keep us fed for a few days. The good thing about everyone coming from the Ark's prison station is that they are all used to getting by on the smallest possible rations. I am the only one who received a full ration of food. The Ark likes to keep the guards strong. It helped me fight my way on to the drop ship when I learned what Jaha was planning for Octavia and the others so I am thankful for that, but my stomach still grumbles in frustration at every pathetic meal.

As we walk to the center of the camp, I send Jasper to the makeshift kitchen area with instructions to show everything we have gathered to the hunting parties before it is cooked and eaten. I'm heading towards my tent to put away my pack when I feel a body slam into me from behind and wrap tiny arms around me. Octavia.

"Hello little sister, I missed you too," I say in a slightly mocking tone.

"What the hell Bellamy? We thought you guys might have been dead." She lets me go and steps around to face me. "When we saw that fog set in we figured you found shelter somewhere for the night, but then this morning when you didn't show up...I was about to send out a rescue party."

"Relax Octavia," I say with a smile. Her eyes look wild and full of emotion. She's always been a bit erratic emotionally. She feels things more than most people. When she's happy, she's elated, but when she's mad, you had better get out of her way, especially if you had anything to do with making her mad. "We found a safe place to stay for the night and took our time heading back so we could gather as much food as possible."

"So where did you stay?" She asks and I step around her to continue towards my tent.

"It's a long story Octavia and I have a million things to check on. Who knows what's been going on since I left. I need to get everyone back to work." Octavia follows me into my tent and sits on the bed as I begin to unpack. The expectant and slightly annoyed look on her face tells me I might as well get it over with and tell her everything.
It's dusk by the time I finish filling Octavia in on Clarke and making rounds of the camp. We're divided up into groups to make sure we complete everything before the arrival of winter, or a grounder attack, whichever comes first. The wall is being patched and reinforced, additional tents are being built, food is being cleaned and stored and a smoker has been set up to cure what little meat we have managed to hunt. Looking at the meat reminds me of Clarke's comments about Anya. We'll have to do something, but I'm not even sure where to start.

I stop by the bonfire on the way to my tent to give instructions for the following day. We're sending out hunters and I want to make sure they stay southeast of the camp. We didn't pass any grounders on our way back from the bunker so maybe that's not part of their territory. Word has spread about Clarke and the library and I also want to make sure no one gets any stupid ideas. The last thing we need is to get on her bad side. I spot Octavia by the fire and remember the blueberries in my pocket. I used to bring her little surprises from around the Ark to help her pass the time while she was alone in our pod. I know it didn't make up for being locked in a room for 15 years but it was something anyways.

"Hey O," She's standing with her usual group of friends. As far as delinquents go, these ones aren't so bad, they're annoying as hell but they're not murderers. I open my hand to display the berries. "I brought you these."

"Wow Bellamy!" She says with an exaggerated smile. "You are the best brother ever. And I'm not just saying that because you're the only brother. I'm so lucky." She pops the berries in her mouth and hugs me. I don't reciprocate the hug because I know exactly what's going on here.

"What the hell did you do this time Octavia?"

"Well it isn't really what I did, it was kind of Finn's idea." I take a step towards Finn and glare down at him. Before I can ask what the hell he's done, Octavia steps between us and puts her hands up to push me back. "Did I say Finn's idea? I mean...uh...I had an idea and Finn tried to stop me. He's actually super responsible and concerned about my safety, you should really thank him."

I let out a long sigh and shake my head at Octavia. "Stop babbling O and just tell me what is going on."

"Ok so this is what happened," I can tell she's mentally adjusting the story in her head to make it the most easy to swallow version of events. "So after you told me about that girl and the library and how she works with the grounders, I started to think, why can't we do that too? I mean, we could make some kind of treaty too. So then I thought how could we talk to Anya and I remembered Lincoln. And I know you told me not to see him but I don't care because he won't hurt me and he's not even mad about you tying him up and he promised to help."

She says the last part in a quick jumble like it's all one word before I can interrupt her. I take a minute to think about what she has said. "So you snuck out of the camp, with Finn," I glare at him over Octavia's shoulder. "And agreed to some kind of negotiation without talking to me or anyone else. Is that right?"

"Well, yeah, but I think it's for the best Bellamy. I'm tired of being locked up. I know the camp is bigger than our pod, but this is ridiculous. We come all the way to earth and we can't even explore or do anything. You said one day I would get to see the real world and I feel like I'm still looking at shadows on a wall. I want to get out."

Octavia always knows just what to say to make me give in. "Fine," she throws her arms around me and nearly knocks me over with a hug before I can finish. "We'll talk to them. I don't know what we can really offer though. We don't have much food to spare."
"Actually," Finn says chiming in. "I was thinking, the Ark sent us to that bunker where you and Raven found the guns. There must be more bunkers around here. It seems like a lot of people were getting prepared for the war so if the Ark can pinpoint any more storage facilities or bunkers in the area we could share that information with the grounders."

"So you're saying we should give them guns?" I ask raising an eyebrow at Finn. Last week he was bitching about us having guns and now he wants to scatter them across the whole area.

"Not specifically guns, anything we find there. I'm sure there are tools and probably some first aid supplies. And if we do find more guns it seems like the people around here aren't really so bad after all. If Clarke trusts them I think we can too. From what she said last night there are much worse tribes out there. If we want to work with the tribes around here we need to show we can contribute and pull our weight. I think this is the best way to do it."

"And you really think you can trust her? Some girl who spends her time reading and spouting random meaningless quotes? She sits there in her safe little underground castle with people bringing her gifts and protecting her. What would she know about having to contribute and pull her weight?" I don't know why I'm getting so worked up about her. I just can't shake the feeling that she would have been one of the people pushing the button to float my mother and lock up my sister. I also can't quite shake the sound of her laugh, and I'm not sure what the hell to think about that.

Raven suddenly steps forward, as usual she sounds angry. "I don't know who you think you met in that bunker Bellamy, but Clarke is a badass. Sure she talks funny and maybe she's a little odd, but she's tough as nails. You really think you could survive out here by yourself? Plus she practically kicked your ass. Just because she looks like a council member's daughter doesn't mean she is one. I may not be as forgiving as Finn towards the grounders after what Lincoln did to him, but in my book, Clarke is an ally and with the way things are going we need every single one we can find."

"Plus this honey she gave me for my stitches is literally the most delicious thing ever." I glare at Jasper and he shuts up and turns back to his friend Monty. They're dipping their fingers into the small jar of honey Clarke gave Jasper and eating it.

"Damn it Jasper, I leave you alone for 10 minutes and you're eating your medicine," barks Raven. Jasper tilts the jar towards her and she continues to glare at him before giving in and tasting the honey. "Ok fine it's amazing. Now give it to me." She puts the lid on the jar and shoves it in her pocket.

I squeeze my eyes closed and will everyone to be gone when I reopen them, fantasy loses again. I'm suddenly exhausted. Arguing with these people will be the death of me. "We meet Anya tomorrow and discuss a deal. Finn and Octavia, you come with me. Raven, you stay behind, the last thing I need is you stabbing Lincoln." I give them all a hard stare to let them know the discussion is over and head for my tent.

There is a girl waiting for me. She's been around before. Tall with long brown hair and big eyes. She tries too hard and she's not very bright, but then again, she's not here to discuss Wittgenstein or whoever the hell Clarke was quoting. I let her stay. As I drift off to sleep though it's blonde hair I see in the lamplight and a quiet voice whispering and laughing in my ear.

The next morning when I finally get a chance to unpack the bag I brought back from the bunker I find a small green book tucked near the bottom. Lord of the Flies. I turn it over in my hands before opening the cover. Clarke has written on the first page in small neat letters.
Bellamy,

Consider this your guide to what not to do when you find yourself stranded far from home with a group of children.

Clarke

P.S.
Roar!
Chapter 6

Gael and I spend most of the day catching up on the past year. The people he brought are all a couple years older than me but this is their first trip this far north so they want to stop a lot and look at everything foreign. Gael could talk to a tree for hours so mostly I listen while he tells me about life in the village and the floods this spring. They lost a lot of crops and a few of their people, but as usual, Gael knows how to make even a sad story funny. He reenacts how he rescued his best rooster from the top of a tent only to have it nearly take his eye out with one of it's spurs. We laugh a lot and by the time we stop for the night we are both tired in the best way.

When I wake up though, something seems wrong. This time of year the woods are busy with birds, but there are no songs to wake me up. Instead, I wake to silence just as the dawn is breaking over the mountain. We made our camp on the top of a hill with a clearing covering most of the slope below us. It looked like a good spot to plant a few seedlings but I was too tired last night. I grab my small hand shovel and five seedlings and walk towards the clearing. I stop short when I see movement in the thin forest on the hill opposite ours. It doesn't look like an animal. I take out my binoculars and scan the hill the way Isaac taught me. I count 27 men and they look like Northerners. From the looks of it, they are just waking up. They have a small camp set up and from the look of their tents and fire pit, they've been there a few days. Some are still asleep and others seem to be hunting and gathering food along the side of the hill. They haven't seen us, not yet. I shove my things into my pack and wake up Gael as quietly as I can.

"Northerners. We need to move. Now."

Gael shakes the others awake as I shove everything we have into bags and do my best to hide the signs of our camp. I'm grateful we cooked the turkey at lunch and did not light a fire here. Gael send his fastest man off in the opposite direction to try to lead the Northerners away, if they do find our small campsite. I give him my map so he can loop back around and meet up with us. We head straight for the Mountain Men's settlement.

When we arrive I find Isaac. I haven't seen him in months. The last time I was here was only a few weeks ago, but he was away hunting. He looks older and taller. He towers over me and his strong broad shoulders make me feel even smaller than I am. His face is square and unmarked. Many of his people have marked their faces with tattoos or brands but his remains as it was when we met almost ten years ago. He keeps his beard and hair short but he doesn't slick it back the way Gael does. I don't know that he's handsome, but he is strong and powerful and when he smiles, which isn't very often, it's beautiful. He takes me in his arms when he sees me and holds me just a little too tight. I squirm out before he cuts off my breathing and when I see his broad smile I feel bad that I am here with such bad news.

"There are at least 27 Northerners headed south. I spotted them 4 hours east of here." His face falls and he turns, leading me by the arm to his father's home. Isaac knows exactly what this means to me. We met just a year after my parents and brother were killed. We used to play at hunting Northerners is the woods around the bunker. He always let me kill them.

After it is decided that Isaac and his father will lead a group to intercept the Northerners, Gael and I decide to head south to tell Anya. We will need to meet back in the mountains so Gael leaves his
people behind to rest. This is much more excitement than they were expecting. We head south right away so we can meet Anya before dark. We're lucky, and before we reach her village we spot a few of her archers near an old bridge. It turns out Finn decided to try to negotiate after all. We head for the bridge and find the two groups just splitting up.

When I walk up to the bridge Anya and I just stare at each other for a moment before she pulls her eyes away from mine and turns to her people. We respect one another, and I guess we get along well enough, but there has always been an uncomfortable silence that hangs between us. I think she sees my brother when she looks at me. His hair was darker, but I have his cool blue eyes. Ray and Anya learned to fight together when he joined her tribe and she watched him die next to her during the battle. We spend time around each other trading or taking part in discussions and treaties, she even came to the library with a few of her people one winter, we rarely actually speak to each other though.

"Hey Princess," Bellamy jumps off the ramp to the bridge wearing his version of a smile. I've never seen him actually smile the way anyone else would, it's always more like a smirk. It suits him though, and I can't help but smile in return.

"Bellamy," I say with a nod. Something tells me commenting on the annoying nickname will make it worse.

Gael has walked over to talk to Anya which leaves me, Bellamy, Finn, and what I can only imagine must be Bellamy's sister standing at the edge of the bridge.

I step forward to introduce myself and she hugs me tightly. "Clarke, I heard all about you. You have to take me back to your place. I want to see everything. Jasper said you have all this different food and cool old stuff. And games, I love games." She takes a step back and looks me over while she hold me in place by my shoulders. "You've got to be the prettiest, and smartest girl Bellamy's slept with since we got here. I like you."

I step back abruptly and my eyes shoot to Bellamy. "Whoa, no, no that never happened. There is NOTHING going on between me and your brother." Bellamy scowls at me a little and I turn back to Octavia. I think I hear Finn try to turn a laugh into a cough beside me, but I ignore it. "I don't know what he said but that never happened."

"What's the matter Princess?" Bellamy is practically leering at me. "You're too good for me?"

"You have no idea what you're talking about Bellamy." I turn quickly and join Gael and Anya. I can feel blood rushing to my cheeks and I force myself to calm down. Anya has agreed to come speak with the Mountain Men about what's happening so Gael and I will follow her back to her camp to spend the night and then return to the mountains in the mornings. The light is starting to fade and it's a hard walk to make in darkness.

Bellamy and Finn look like they are ready to head back to camp but Octavia is lingering near the bridge. Our eyes meet and she jogs over to me.

"I'm sorry Clarke." She looks sincere and it's not her fault if Bellamy is making up stories. "We just kind of assumed. Bellamy doesn't exactly spend his nights alone at the camp, and Jasper said when he woke up Bellamy was just coming back into the room where they slept."

"It's okay Octavia, it's not even about Bellamy, I just can't have people thinking anything happened between me and Bellamy, or anyone really. Just, tell Jasper nothing happened, okay?"

"Of course." She hugs me again. "I really do want to come visit sometime."
"I would love that Octavia. You are welcome any time. I think I even have a few books about your namesake." She smiles again before stepping past me to Lincoln.

I'm a little taken aback when he lifts her up to meet his lips and kisses her powerfully. I hear Bellamy yelling her name from the forest but Octavia doesn't move. She brings her hands up to Lincoln's neck and kisses him again before letting go.

"Octavia, let's go. Now." Bellamy screams this time. He is beyond angry now. Octavia flashes us all a mischievous grin and turns to run back to Finn and Bellamy.

I burst out laughing as she leaves and shove Lincoln's shoulder playfully. "Of course you had to fall for the girl with possibly the most over protective brother in the world. You never do things the easy way do you, Lincoln?"

Gael laughs too. "That's not the half of it Sunshine, he also stabbed Finn and then Bellamy and Raven tortured him."

I know it shouldn't be funny, but all I can do is laugh even harder. It's been that kind of a day. Lincoln throws a pine cone at me and I knock it aside following Anya back to camp.

The next day we arrive back in the mountains to find two of their men injured. Isaac meets us at the edge of the settlement and he looks worried.

"So I guess it wasn't a hunting party?" I ask. Any hope I had of this being resolved easily has drained away.

"No." Is the only answer I get.

Isaac leads us to the main fire pit in his settlement where his parents are already waiting for us. His father nods as we arrive but doesn't rise to greet us. The Mountain Men are not as prone to enthusiastic shows of affection the way Gael's River People are, I tend to be more like the River People myself. I think it surprises Isaac's people to see him hugging me when we greet, but that's how we used to greet each other as children and it just kind of stuck. He seems cold to me at times, but compared to his father and uncles he's lavish in his affection for me. I notice we're sitting closer than any of the the other couples around the fire, and we're still barely touching.

"The Northerners Clarke spotted were here as a scouting party," Isaac's dad begins once we have all sat down. Isaac's sister Marcia passes out cups of tea, she squeezes me gently on the shoulder after she gives me my cup and leaves. "They were here scouting to prepare for an attack. When we approached them, they attacked our people and we killed them. We were able to get information for one of them before he died. They were sent to scout our territory and count our numbers and weapons. The Northerners are planning an attack. We did not learn when and with their scouting party all dead they may change their plans, but we still need to prepare as if war is coming soon. We will begin sending scouts to the border and into their land to alert us as soon as they move. Anya, we request the help of some of your better riders. Gael, we ask you to go home and prepare your people for war. Gather weapons and make arrows. We will need everything we can get. Clarke, we ask that you travel to the east and ask the Water People to join us. They may listen to you. Are these terms acceptable?" We all nod. I'm sure there will be logistics to work out, but that all sounds fair. Someone is missing from the plans though. I clear my throat before standing up to speak.

"I don't think you are aware, but there are new people in the territory. A few weeks ago, when we watched a meteor fall, it was actually a ship landing from space. They are descendants of those who were working in space when the war broke out. There are just under 100 people, most under 18 years old, who landed in the eastern part of Anya's territory. They would like to join our
alliance. I believe they have made an agreement with Anya," I turn towards her and she nods slightly in agreement. "We should ask that any of them able to fight join us. It will give them a chance to prove themselves and they have guns and other weapons. They will need training and they have no armour but they are young and strong."

Isaac’s father stares at the fire before responding. "Ah, the Sky People, they have returned. We will ask them to join us. They can train here or with Anya. Clarke, you will speak with their leader before you travel east. They should also be asked to join us to trade. Is that all, Clarke?"

"I would also like to offer the bunker as a safe house for any women and children who are unable to fight. It protected me during the last invasions and there is room for at least 200 children. If things get bad, they can travel there when the fighting begins."

"Thank you Clarke." It is Isaac's mother who speaks now. "I will consider your offer as I'm sure Anya will as well."

Isaac's father stands and we all follow his lead. "If that is all, you may go. Gael, I would like to speak with you more before you return south."

Isaac looks like he wants to talk to me but he's pulled away to discuss training and scouting so I make a mental note to find him later. I spend the next hour stocking up on food and supplies for my trek east. I already have most of what I need since I was planning over a week long trip with Gael so I just replace the few things I've used in the past two days. I also gather a few things to trade with the Water People and Isaac’s mother gives a small carving of a wolf to offer their leader. Anya and Lincoln approach me as I'm closing up my bag.

"Lincoln will travel with you." Anya looks at me but she doesn't meet my eyes. "He is a good shot and he has made the trip before."

"I've made the trip before too Anya," I reply.

"If the Northerns are moving, you should not travel alone. I will not have any more of your family's blood on my hands."

"Anya, that wasn't your fault. You were just a girl."

"It has been decided Clarke," Anya says with a tone of finality.

"Ok. Thank you." I manage a weak smile before turning to Lincoln. "You betting get packing. If we leave now you can be snuggling with your girlfriend by nightfall." Lincoln glares at me but starts grabbing some food to pack.

"Take mine Sunshine," Gael calls from a few feet away before tossing Lincoln his pack. "We won't leave until morning so I've got time to pack another. You should get going."

"Thanks Gael." I hug him tightly. I'll miss him. He's become such a big part of my family. When Ray was killed he slowly took over the roll of big brother and now I can hardly remember a time when we weren't joking together. "I'll bring you some shells for Ayrrn," I say, letting my arms fall back to my sides.

"I wouldn't expect anything less" he says with a wink before turning back to the arrows he was studying.

"Lincoln, I need to find Isaac before we leave, I'll meet you at the trail in 10 minutes." Lincoln
walks off and I weave through the settlement to find Isaac. The houses are made mostly of stone with a few crude wooden buildings and tents for storage. They're not attractive like the large wigwam style tents Gael's tribe builds, but they need to be sturdy to survive the winter. I wonder idly where I will live when I marry Isaac.

"Clarke," Isaac steps out of one of the houses as I pass and places his hand on my arm. "Are you okay?"

"Of course," I say. "This time will be different Isaac. We'll be ready for them. I'm not losing my family again." He squeezes my arm a little before letting go. I think he has always felt a little guilty that his family did nothing to stop the invasion years ago. It wasn't really their responsibility, but they certainly could have done more.

"Do you need a guard for your trip? I will need to be here. I can find someone else to send with you."

"I already have Lincoln. We'll be fine. I should be back at the bunker in six days if you want to send someone to check on me." I shift up onto my toes and kiss Isaac on the cheek. "I'll be back, I promise. Maybe I'll even bring you some salt." Isaac kisses the top of my head and we turn away from each other.

I meet Lincoln at the trail and we head towards Bellamy's camp. The trek is all downhill so it will take us less time than the 8 hours we walked this morning to reach the mountains. It will still be dark by the time we reach the camp though, so we don't waste any time.
Chapter 7

Bellamy

Tonight I stay away from the bonfire. This morning we announced the treaty we negotiated with Anya. Everyone is feeling celebratory and, after the two weeks we've had, they deserve to let loose. I let Jasper and Monty pass out the moonshine we usually reserve for sterilizing wounds and it doesn't take long before almost everyone is at least a little drunk. It's nice to see them happy instead of cowering in fear or bickering like idiots. Someone has to be the responsible one though, and lately it seems like it's me. Actually when I think back, it's always been me. I settle down on a patrol post along the wall where I can keep an eye on most of the camp and still see the gate if Anya wasn't actually as serious about the truce as she said. The wall is a little over 9 feet tall and built mostly from fallen trees and a few we managed to chop down as well. Some of the unusable parts of the drop ship have been added to strengthen it, but even if we stripped the entire ship we wouldn't have enough metal for a decent wall. If things work out we can stop spending so much time on the wall and maybe have a shot at making it through winter.

I'm scanning the crowd of drunk kids when I hear someone approaching. Raven and Finn are making their way over to me, giggling and holding hands like a couple a kids. I guess that's what they are though. Sometimes I have to remind myself that I am the oldest one here. Raven is 19 and I'm 21 but everyone else is under 18. The Ark would have floated them immediately if they had been unfortunate enough to commit their crimes after their 18th birthdays. Maybe if we had grown up on the ground things would have been different, but there wasn't much need for us to grow up quickly on the Ark. The last thing you want when you're drifting through space with limited resources is a bunch of kids ready to move out of their parents' pods and start their own families.

When Raven and Finn reach my post Raven climbs up beside me. "I am here to officially relieve you of your duties, oh fearless leader of ours." She's being a little more sarcastic than usual, but she doesn't seem completely drunk so I climb down. I'd trust a drunk Raven over most of the people here anyways. She may be annoying as hell, but she gets things done and she doesn't hesitate to get her hands dirty.

"You better not be planning to hang out here all night with your girlfriend," I warn Finn as he climbs up beside Raven. "We're leaving first thing tomorrow." Finn and I are supposed to take some of the grounders to the old government storage bunker the Ark was able to locate a week ago. We already took all of the guns but I'm sure there's still something there they can use.

I make my way through the camp towards my tent, as drunk as everyone is, they still know enough to get out of my way. As I pass into my tent I start to feel the weight of the past weeks hanging heavily on my shoulders. When I take off my gun and jacket I feel like I'm not just setting down a bunch of stuff, but the responsibility I've been carrying as well. I've been fighting constantly since we landed to keep this group alive, and it finally seems like it might get a little easier. If we don't have to worry about being attacked every time we leave camp, we should be able to gather enough food for the winter. I was right about the grounders not going to the southeast of our camp. Anya told us to stick to the east side of our camp from now on. Part of me wanted to tell her to float herself, the more rational part of me knew we weren't in a position to argue. I would never tell him this, but I'm glad I took Finn with me. My first reaction is always to push back and challenge people and today that wasn't what we needed. I let Finn do most of the negotiating and agreed to the final decisions. I know we are supposed to be allies now, but I still don't completely trust Anya and her people.
As I peel off my shirt and then my boots, my mind wanders to Clarke. I was surprised to see her at the bridge, from what Gael said they were planning to head north towards the old capitol. Something didn't seem right about her showing up. She annoys the hell out of me with all her ridiculous sayings and her high and mighty preservation of knowledge crap, but if I really think about it, I was happy to see her step out of the woods. It was more than a little insulting that she was so offended by the idea of being with me though. I frown a little remembering the look on her face. The girls at camp are happy to have my company, they're not like Clarke though. Maybe that's why my mind keeps wandering to her. She's a challenge and a puzzle.

I shift down onto my makeshift bed, it's probably the best one in camp, but it's still horrible compared to the bed in Clarke's bunker. I wonder what I would have to trade her for that bed. My head has barely touched the pillow when I hear my tent flap pulled open. "Not tonight, sweetheart." I don't even bother opening my eyes. I am more exhausted than I realized.

"Aw thanks, Bellamy, but if that's my other choice of nickname I'll stick with Princess." Clarke is standing in the doorway to my tent still holding the flap open. She stands there for a minute and when I don't get up she walks across the tent and sits on a small stool next to the bed.

"Princess." I say looking her over carefully. She looks tired. Her cheeks are flushed like she's been running. She left Anya's at the same time we did yesterday and she's wearing the same messy clothes so I doubt she's been back to the bunker. "If you don't want anyone to think were sleeping together you probably shouldn't be sneaking into my tent like this."

"I'm not sneaking anywhere." She's all business today. The joking tone she had at the bunker and with Gael has vanished from her voice. "I am here on behalf of the King of the Mountain Men. Yesterday the Mountain Men met and killed 30 Northerner scouts to the northeast of your camp. This morning we met to discuss the possibility of an invasion by the Northerners. Since you are now on good terms with the surrounding tribes I suggested that you be asked to join us if we have to fight."

"You've got to be kidding me Princess." I sit up and turn to face her. I didn't realize how close to the bed she is and my knees brush against hers, she doesn't pull away. "You convinced me to negotiate with Anya so that you can rope us into some war? Why should we help?"

"Bellamy, these are the people who killed my family. They killed half of Anya's tribe. They are monsters. You may think the Forest Clan is bad, but they're nothing compared to the Northerners. If they come, and you don't join the fight, the surrounding tribes won't protect you and I can promise you that even with guns, you will not survive them on your own."

When I lift my gaze from the patch I've been fiddling with on my knee, she looks scared. It's not obvious, there's just something about the way she's carrying herself. She's trying to project strength the same way I do when I talk about the things we need to do to survive. "So what do you want from me?"

"Soldiers and weapons. The Mountain Men and Forest Clan are sending scouts north to check the borders. The Northerners may not attack right away, but when they do we will need as many fighters as we can get. The scouts were here to collect information and return home, the warriors they'll send next time won't be as easy to kill. We also need people trained in first aid to help with the wounded. The kid Raven said was your doctor should train as many of your people in basic first aid as possible."

"And what's your part in all of this? You hide out with your books in the bunker while the rest of us do the dirty work?" Clarke doesn't seem like the type to run from a fight but she also doesn't look like a warrior.
"No." She seems a little insulted by my question. "Not that it is really any of your business, but I'm traveling to the coast to ask the Water People to join us. After that, I'll spend as much time as we have between now and the attack gathering medicine and supplies. I'm the closest thing this area has to a real doctor and I have more medical supplies than all the tribes put together. And, if it comes down to it, I'll fight." Her eyes are fierce and I can tell I'm right about her not backing down from a fight. I still can't resist pushing her buttons though.

"And what would a princess like you know about fighting?" I ask with a smirk.

"More than you'd think, Bellamy." She says it more seriously than I expected. She pauses for a minute and looks around the tent. There isn't much to see, a few piles of clothes, my gun, a small makeshift table and a couple packs of rations. Her eyes fall to the green book sitting on the table next to my knife and she smiles a little. "I'm leaving tomorrow for the coast. If you have space in your camp I'd like to stay the night here."

I smile and pat the bed next to me. "Make yourself at home princess."

"Not here you idiot." She shakes her head a little and gets up from her seat across from me. "I have a guard traveling with me and I think the tent would be a little crowded for the three of us. We can set up anywhere there's space. From the looks of the passed out kids all over your camp there will be plenty of empty tents tonight."

"Sure princess, whatever you need."

Clarke turns and heads for the entrance to my tent and I lay back on the bed. When she reaches the flap she turns back to me with a smile. "One more thing Bellamy. I figured since I'm heading to the coast I'd ask you if I can take Octavia with me. The ocean is something everyone should see at least once and I think, considering the way she grew up, Octavia will appreciate it more than anyone else."

"No. There is no way in hell you are taking my sister out of this camp, especially not after you just told me that some dangerous tribe is moving south. Not a chance Princess."

Her smile widens at my answer and it reminds me of the look Octavia gives me when she's about to get her way. "I thought you might see it that way so I took the liberty of telling Jasper and Raven and Finn that you already agreed to let her go. I'm sure they've told Octavia by now, but if you hurry you can probably catch her in time to break her heart before she's completely finished packing." Her eyes are almost twinkling and she looks like she's about to laugh. I glare at her and she just keeps smiling right back.

"You better have one hell of a guard because if anything happens to her, you and I are going to have problems."

Now Clarke actually does laugh. She turns to leave the tent and calls back to me over her shoulder. "Oh he's great. Actually I think you've already met him. He's one of Anya's men, his name's Lincoln."

I pick up my boot and toss it at Clarke's blond head as she ducks out of the tent door laughing to herself. I sit there for a minute thinking about going after her to argue or forbidding Octavia from going before I give up and start packing up for the trip. Just when I think I might actually get along with Clarke, she makes me want to strangle her.
Chapter 8

Clarke

When I wake up the next morning it is just before dawn and the camp is still silent. The celebration went on late into the night and even Lincoln joined in the festivities. Apparently while I was talking to Bellamy a few of his guards decided to see if they could outdrink a grounder - they couldn't. I step out of Octavia's tent, where she insisted I sleep, to see Lincoln still camped out next to the entrance. He wakes up as soon as I touch his shoulder and starts packing up his things.

I head over to the main fire and add a few logs to get the coals burning again. I was planning to heat some water for tea and make a small breakfast for myself and Lincoln and Octavia, but when I look around the camp at the aftermath of the night's celebration I decide to make breakfast for the camp. I find the biggest pot I can, it looks to be some kind of repurposed fuel tank, and fill it with water. I add a few roots and chunks of dried meat. I throw in a few handfuls of grains to thicken it and I find some herbs and garlic in my pack to add in as well. I leave the pot to cook and head back to wake Octavia. When she's finished dressing and filling her pack we head back to the fire to eat. Bellamy is standing by the fire eyeing the stew, he has a pack set out near his feet. I'm not surprised to see him joining us.

"Was this you Princess?"

I nod and pass by him to serve myself a bowl. Bellamy turns away from the fire and pulls a pack of nuts from his bag. I laugh a little at his stubbornness. He's obviously not as excited about this trip as Octavia.

It takes us a couple hours to settle into a rhythm while we walk. Lincoln takes the lead with Octavia and me following a few meters behind. Bellamy takes up the rear where he can keep an eye on Octavia, and Lincoln.

The trip takes us almost three full days and we pass a lot of it in silence. Lincoln and I know each other fairly well but he's not particularly talkative. We talk about logistics, how far we've traveled, where we should camp, and we take turns pointing out game and plants we can eat. It turns into a bit of a competition and by the last day I'm ahead with two rabbits and a small wild turkey to his one rabbit and a squirrel. I'm a good shot with my bow. Isaac brought it to me one summer and taught me how to shoot. I practice shooting apples out of the tree in the meadow most days and shoot game when I need to. I haven't used it to kill in years, but it seems like that could change. Bellamy refuses to eat any of the game we cook for the first half of the trip but on the second night he breaks down and eats the turkey leg I offer him.

Octavia spends most of the trip telling me about life on the Ark and growing up with Bellamy. He tosses a few nuts at her from time to time to shut her up when the stories get particularly embarrassing. She tells me about being caught after Bellamy took her out of their pod to finally see the Ark during a masquerade party. She was locked up and her mother was executed. Bellamy was lucky to only be demoted to the most undesirable guard duties. Octavia is so much like her brother, but where Bellamy locks away his emotions Octavia wears them on her sleeve. She's feisty and strong just like him, but she's also much more trusting and kind. Not that Bellamy is
mean, I guess kindness just doesn't serve him well right now.

Around noon on the third day of our trip the air starts to change and I can tell we are nearing the coast. The ocean has an unmistakable smell and texture that permeates the air all around it. I stop when we cross a small hill and breath in deeply, closing my eyes for a moment. I love this smell.

"What's wrong with you?" Bellamy stops beside me and looks around.

"Nothing." I smile and turn to him. "We're almost there. Can you smell the ocean?"

Bellamy just shakes his head and keeps walking. I take another deep breath and jog a little to catch up. Bellamy has either relaxed a little or is too tired to care anymore because Octavia is now walking with Lincoln. He stays protectively a few steps ahead of her but turns to talk to her from time to time.

"Don't you ever just stop and enjoy yourself Bellamy?"

"Yeah," he says with a resentful tone to his voice. "We tried that after we landed and 15 people died. Not everyone has the luxury of being a carefree Princess."

"Well there's no one here you need to take care of Bellamy so you might as well enjoy yourself for a little while. The Water People are very different from Anya's people."

"They better be," Bellamy snaps back. "If anything happens to Octavia..." He trails off as his gaze fall on Octavia and Lincoln laughing together.

"It looks like Lincoln's got that covered." Bellamy shoves my shoulder and I laugh. "Come on, Bellamy. Lincoln's not so bad. He's actually kind of a great guy and it seems like he's just as committed to taking care of Octavia as you are. You should be happy to finally be able to share the responsibility."

"So what's so different about these Water People?" Bellamy asks, obviously trying to change the subject.

"So, they're actually pretty weird."

"You think they're weird?" Bellamy asked in exaggerated shock. "They must be completely bizarre then because you are, without a doubt, the strangest person I've ever met, and I've been spending a lot of time with Jasper lately so that really means something." This time I shove his shoulder.

"They're really into the earth and the ocean and they have all of these weird rituals and prayers. They're going to ask you to join them, just go along with it. They take it as a big insult if you refuse. I promise it's not some weird hazing ritual, they're basically a bunch of hippies." Bellamy looks a little confused, but he doesn't say anything. "Last time I was there, I ended up laying on the beach for like three hours in the middle of the night trying to commune with the great spirit turtles. I was shaking sand out of my hair for weeks afterwards."

"Poor Princess." Bellamy gives me a mock sympathetic look and I toss a nut at him.

We walk for a few more hours before reaching the coast. There are tall dunes that run along the beach and they're covered in wild grass and prickly shrubs so we can hear the ocean before we see it. Lincoln finds a clear enough spot for us to cross the dunes and Octavia and I follow close behind him. I have to step to the side to stop from slamming into Octavia when she stops short as the ocean comes into view. She lets out an excited scream and the next thing I know she's sprinting across the beach towards the water. She looks so carefree. I look over to Bellamy and
decided what the hell, he already thinks I'm strange. I drop my pack and run after Octavia, shedding my bow and jacket along the way. I stop just before the wet sand and pull off my boots before following Octavia into the surf. She's not prepared for the force of the incoming waves and she's knocked down a few times but Lincoln is always there to pull her back up. The water is cold, too cold for a swim, but that's not what this is anyways. It's a birth and a baptism, redemption and an unbelievable release. Octavia and I splash around until our eyes are stinging from the sea spray and our skin is red from the cold.

Bellamy eventually made his way down the beach bringing my pack and discarded clothing with him. I look back at him and feel suddenly exposed in my wet undershirt and jeans. I didn't feel that way with Lincoln around but something about the way Bellamy is looking at me makes me feel unusually self aware. My clothes are clinging to my body and my hair is plastered to my face and chest. I must look like the lunatic he thinks I am.

"Enjoying yourself Princess?" he asks with a smile as I drag myself back on to the beach beside him.

"Always," I say pulling on my jacket and running my fingers through my tangled hair. "And you Bellamy, what's the matter? They didn't teach you to swim on the Ark?"

"Oh I'm fine here," he says with his trademark smirk. "I'm enjoying the view."

When Octavia and Lincoln pull themselves out of the water we start heading north towards the Water People's camp. I tie my boots together so I can string them over my shoulder and walk barefoot. I love the feel of the sand on my feet. I keep an eye out for shells and anything that might be useful. All sorts of relics wash up on the beaches around here. When we were girls, Arryn and I found an actual message in a bottle. All it said was:
'It is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers.' Whoever wrote it had long since given up on looking for help. My grandmother said it was from The Old Man and The Sea. She read us the book when we returned to the bunker and Arryn cried at the end.

Our visit goes well, we are welcomed by the Water People and fed oysters and crab and fish. I eat the oysters raw the way my father did. He was from the Forest Clan and he always thought the Water People were strange but he loved their food. Octavia is enjoying herself and Lincoln just seems happy to be with her. My favourite part of the night though, is watching how uncomfortable Bellamy looks. When one of the older women of the tribe hears that Bellamy hasn't ventured into the water she insists he take off his shirt so she can bless him in the name of the great turtle. He glares at me the whole time and I can't help but laugh. After that a couple of girls around my age make their way over to where Bellamy is sitting by the fire. They share their ale with him and giggle from time to time. I can't imagine what Bellamy could possibly have said to make them giggle. He has his moments, but his humour is mostly dark and sarcastic and that's not really the type of humour the Water People enjoy.

Their leaders don't like to discuss business right away as Isaac's father does, so we spend the night eating and talking around a fire on the beach. I know there will be time to talk in the morning before we venture home. As I sit at the fire drinking some kind ale they make with barley and seaweed I take time to look around the camp. Their homes are built on the far side of the dunes and raised almost 15 feet in the air to keep them safe when the beaches flood. It's a harsh place to live, the sea can be unpredictable and there are sharks off to coast but it's their home.

I'm lost in though when the guy sitting next to me pulls me back to reality. He passes me an old guitar. The Water People have been playing drums and guitar most of the night while singing old songs. Most are unfamiliar, but a few I recognize from my visits as a child and the old records my grandmother used to bring out on long winter nights.
"I remember you singing when we were younger," he says still holding the guitar out in front of me. I don't want to take it. "You always had such a beautiful voice. Play something".

"I...I don't know if I remember any of those songs," I say apologetically. "I can't."

"Come on, Princess," Bellamy calls over the head of the petite brunette next to him. "Just go along with it, isn't that what you said?" He looks like he's had more than one cup of ale. I'm glad he's enjoying himself but a small part of me still wants to smack him with the guitar. Instead I take it hesitantly in my hands and fiddle with the strings trying to remember any of the songs we used to sing. My mother, and then my grandmother, wanted us to learn as much as possible as children so they taught us to play the instruments their mothers had taught them years before. I was never the musician though, that was Arryn. Ray was a hunter and a warrior, brave and strong and I was the doctor. Arryn was too delicate for medicine and Ray wasn't delicate enough. I was always able to turn off my emotions and focus on the task at hand, breaking things down into the smallest of steps and disconnecting my heart from my brain. When Ray and my parents were killed I tried to shut my emotions off, but my grandmother said some emotions aren't meant to be locked away forever.

There is only one song I can remember. I don't particularly want to sing it, but at this point I don't have much of a choice. Arryn and I used to giggle through the song together while we took turns with the guitar. As I look up I realize most of the the eyes around the fire are focused on me. I shoot Bellamy a glare and start to play.

Don't you worry there, my honey
We might not have any money
But we've got our love to pay the bills

Maybe I think you're cute and funny
Maybe I wanna do what bunnies do with you, if you know what I mean

Oh, let's get rich and buy our parents homes in the south of France
Let's get rich and give everybody nice sweaters and teach them how to dance
Let's get rich and build a house on a mountain making everybody look like ants
From way up there, you and I, you and I

Well, you might be a bit confused
And you might be a little bit bruised
But baby how we spoon like no one else
So I will help you read those books
If you will soothe my worried looks
And we will put the lonesome on the shelf

Oh, let's get rich and buy our parents homes in the south of France
Let's get rich and give everybody nice sweaters and teach them how to dance
Let's get rich and build a house on a mountain making everybody look like ants
From way up there, you and I, you and I

When I finish I gently pass the guitar back and smile. "Thank you, that was beautiful," he says returning my smile. I look at him for a minute trying to remember anything about seeing him when I was here before but nothing comes to mind. I nod and turn to Octavia who is sitting on the other
side me. She hands me back my cup with a big smile on her face.

"Clarke, that was so cute. Are you sure don't want to reconsider about Bellamy? I could really use you as a sister." Lincoln laughs beside her and I shake my head.

"Sorry Octavia. You'll have to settle for having me as an awesome friend." I get up from the fire and walk down to the edge of the water. It's chilly now with the sun down and the wind coming off the water stings my face. My boots are still off and I roll up my pants when I reach the water so I can stand with my feet in the waves. I breath in deeply and gaze up at the sky. The stars seems so much brighter here. I hear footsteps behind me in the sand and I brace myself for whatever bizarre ritual they have planned for me this time.

"You know if you're trying to prove you're not a princess, that was a really bad song choice."

"It's the only song I remember how to play. My sister and I used to sing it together. She's the musician in the family." I turn expecting Bellamy to be smirking at me but he's just standing there staring up at the stars the same way I was. "What happened to your groupies?" I ask as he takes off his boots and steps into the water beside me.

"They were the wrong kind of weird."

We stand there for a while just listening to the waves and watching the stars. When my toes start to feel numb I turn to him and say good night. He nods and I start up the beach.

"Hey Clarke." It takes me a second to realize it's Bellamy calling me. I haven't heard him say my name since the first night we met. "Thanks for this. It means a lot to Octavia."

"Anytime Bellamy."

The next morning my negotiations go better than I had hoped. I knew the Water People wouldn't fight, but they did agree to send a few doctors and medical supplies. They showed me the medicines they use and gave me plenty of supplies to bring back. They were pleased with the wolf Isaac's mother sent and gave me a turtle to bring back, of course. I load up on salt and a few other things that are harder to find at home. When we set off to the west we're all a little more relaxed and even Bellamy joins in trying to catch us dinner.

Chapter End Notes

In case you're curious, the song is You and I by Ingrid Michaelson.
Chapter 9

Bellamy

We're two days into the trip back to camp when something goes wrong. Clarke and I are walking together in front with Octavia and Lincoln following a few steps behind us. The forest is thick here and we're looking for a place to set up camp. The sun is sending weak slivers of light through the trees and it will soon be completely gone. We've just started down a slight hill and Clarke is pointing out some bark we can use for one thing or another when I hear a twig snap to my right. Before I can register what is going on, Lincoln yanks Clarke backward in a blur and I hear the thud of something hitting a tree.

I spin towards the direction of the first sound and see a grounder jump towards me out of the trees. It all happens so fast, he's coming towards us with a sword raised in attack. I see his mask, the kind Anya's men wear, and before I can second guess or think through what just happened I shoot him twice in the chest. The sound of the gun firing rings in my ears and I can just make out Octavia scream behind me and Lincoln scrambling to his feet.

"What the hell was that?" I turn to Lincoln, furious. "I thought we had a treaty?"

Lincoln looks as shocked as I do. "I don't understand." He has his knife out and he's scanning the trees around us.

"The mask." Clarke's voice is breathless and I realize she's still crumpled in a pile where Lincoln pulled her to the ground. She looks hurt. As I scan the forest behind her, I see it was a spear that I heard hitting the tree. "Take off his mask."

I walk over to the body slumped on the forest floor and pull off his mask. Even I can tell he doesn't belong to the Forest Clan. His face is pierced in several places with what look like bone hooks. His hair hangs in mats and there are more pieces of bone and metal beads and rings tied into the longer chunks of hair around his face.

"Who is he?" I ask Lincoln who is now standing directly behind me.

"Northerner." He turns away and starts checking the woods around us. I follow his lead and start scanning the trees that all of a sudden seem to be closing in around us. I walk as quietly as I can in circles around the spot where Clarke still slumps on the ground, stopping every few steps to listen. I don't hear anything. The forest is quiet in the wake of the momentary chaos that just erupted. If there are more Northerners around I think they would have attacked by now so I consider us lucky and head back towards Clarke and Octavia. I don't want to leave them exposed anyways. The farther I walk away from them, the harder it would be to protect them if there is someone else waiting to attack. I keep my gun ready.

Octavia is helping Clarke to sit up and as she turns I see a bright red patch on the front of her shirt just below her ribs. I walk straight over to her, I can't take my eyes off of the growing patch of red.

"Octavia, take my pack off, I need my medical kit." Clarke's voice doesn't sound right, it's detached and emotionless. She slowly pulls up her shirt and I turn away. She has a four inch gash along the bottom of her rib cage. The blood is screaming red against her creamy skin.

"Lincoln, toss me the moonshine from your pack," she calls, still sounding a little out of breath.

I'm aware of what's going on as she cleans her wound and gets ready to stitch herself back together, but I can't bring myself to look. I make myself useful by meticulously scanning every
inch of forest in my field of vision. I don't know why I'm so bothered by this injury, I've seen a lot worse over the past few weeks. Clarke's not supposed to be hurt though, she's supposed to be keeping everyone else safe. Somehow in my head she seems to be this indestructible, untouchable force.

"Bellamy!" She calls my name frantically and I wonder for a second if the wound is worse than I thought. I look up and see an annoyed expression on her face. "Stop pacing all over the place, you're distracting me. I need to stitch this up and I can't concentrate with you stomping all over the place." I didn't realize I had been pacing. I sit down near her and stare at the forest around me. It seemed so peaceful a few minutes ago. Lincoln passes me the flask of moonshine and I take a long drink.

"You did good," He says after he takes a drink as well.

"You weren't so bad yourself." I say taking the bottle back from him. I don't want to think about what would have happened to Clarke if he hadn't pulled her out of the way. "You know I never apologized about that time.."

"Don't." He interrupts me and takes the flask, returning it to his pack. "We're good," he says without looking at me. We sit there in silence for a long time just scanning the woods. The sun has probably fallen below the horizon by now because everything behind us is covered in deep shadows. The few rays of light that are still reaching us slice through the trees giving everything an uninviting look. I don't think I'll ever get used to being completely surrounded by trees. I know we should start moving, but I don't want to rush Clarke. Judging by what I can hear of her conversation with Octavia, she's almost finished anyways. Eventually Lincoln stands up and walks over to where the body is still laying a few meters away from us. He takes the man's sword and pack before walking back to Clarke.

"Can you walk?"

"Yes." She says firmly. "We need to move. He may have been alone, but if not, I'd rather not find out while we're sleeping."

"I think there's a cave not to far from here," Lincoln says, helping Clarke to her feet. "If we can find it, we should be safe to rest there."

Clarke reaches down to grab her pack and I pick it up before she has a chance. "Bellamy," she says in the slightly annoyed tone I've gotten used to hearing from her. "I can carry my own pack."

"Not tonight, Princess." I swing it onto my back. I let her carry her bow since it's light, but I doubt she could draw it back enough to loose any arrows. She wobbles a little as she straightens back up and I take her hand when we start walking. She looks pale and her hand is clammy. I don't think she would ever ask for help, but the way she grips my fingers tells me she needs all the support she can get right now.

It takes Lincoln about a half hour to find the cave. It feels like a long time to walk with the threat of an attack looming all around us, but when we reach the cave and I let go of Clarke's hand it seems like the time slipped away in seconds. Clarke smiles at me and whispers a quiet thank you before sitting down at the entrance to the cave.

After Lincoln has swept the cave and deemed it safe we decide not to risk the attention a fire would attract and eat some dried meat and nuts before settling down for the night. I don't really want to leave Octavia and Lincoln alone together, but they also both look exhausted and there's no
way I'm letting Clarke guard the cave, so I volunteer for the first watch. I settle down in the narrow entrance and listen for anything that might give away movement in the forest. There is nothing. Clarke said it was probably a scout who managed to escape the Mountain Men when they killed the other Northerners. I don't really care how he got here, I'm worried about camp. If anyone attacked the camp while we were gone I doubt they would have stood much of a chance. There's nothing I can do from here though so I try not to think too much about it. Raven could probably hold her own and most of the guys I've been training would listen to her if it really came down to it. I left Finn and Raven in charge of taking care of the camp while I'm gone but I never expected there to be an attack. Maybe we shouldn't stop reinforcing the wall after all.

I sit there scanning the woods and replaying what happened today in my mind for what must be a few hours before I hear movement behind me. Lincoln is supposed to take the second watch, so I'm a little surprised when Clarke sits down next to me. Her eyes are still heavy with sleep and she looks more disheveled than usual. Wisps of blond hair fall around her face.

I don't know why I never saw it before, but she's beautiful. Even in the dim moonlight her eyes are an icy blue. Her face is delicate but strong and even the weak smile she gives me now makes it light up.

"Bellamy, you can stop looking at me like that." I freeze, was I being that obvious? "I'm not going to die, I'm fine."

I sigh a little in relief, I'm glad I didn't look like a complete idiot staring at her. The last thing I want is to look as ridiculous as Raven and Finn running around the camp making eyes at each other constantly. Being in love is one thing, what they have going on is something completely different. I've never understood people who run around wearing their emotions on their sleeves. That is where Octavia and I differ the most. She always told me how she felt and I have spent lost of my life masking my emotions.

"Are you okay?" she asks. Her eyes are searching mine.

"Why wouldn't I be okay?" I'm suddenly feeling a little defensive. Clarke catching me staring at her has me feeling self conscious. I have to remind my self she's not some self centered Ark Princess who would laugh at any interest from me. Technically everyone on the Ark was supposed to be considered equally important, but everyone knows a boy with a dead father and seamstress mother wouldn't be running in the same circles as the children of doctors, engineers, and council members.

"You just killed someone Bellamy. I'm not saying it wasn't the right thing to do, it's just, being right doesn't always make things easy. Do you want to talk about it?"

"So instead of thanking me for saving your ass, I'm getting a psych evaluation? Thanks for the vote of confidence, Princess." I smile a little and she laughs.

"Okay Bellamy. Thank you for valiantly saving this helpless princess and her friends." She's being sarcastic, but when I laugh at her she smiles a little too. She sits there quietly staring off into the forest. I'm not usually one for deep conversation, not even with Octavia, but Clarke tends to bring it out in me.

"So what makes you think I'm not okay with killing someone? It's not like it's the first time it's happened since we've been here."

She keeps staring into the forest for a minute before she answers. "It's in your eyes. You try to look tough and strong and impenetrable, your eyes tell a different story though."

I'm not really sure how to answer that. I look over at her for a minute considering what my eyes might be giving away now. "And what do my eyes tell you?" I ask as flatly as I can manage.
"That you're not a bad guy. I've seen killers, people who relishing in war and torture and killing but you're not like that. What you did was out of necessity, not out of the joy or power you get from taking a life."

"And what about you? When we first met I thought you spent most of your time just relaxing in your bunker, it seems like you must have some blood on your hands to have lasted this long though. I mean, your life can't be all sing-a-longs and walks on the beach." She has so much light in her, but there's also something a little dark about the way she carries herself. Especially out here in the forest. I don't think she got so good with her bow just to hunt rabbits.

"I've killed people over the years, the tribes around here all work together for the most part, but there are still people out on their own who pass through from time to time. Some are just looking for a place to call home but a lot of them have been pushed out by their groups or escaped before they could be executed. Life is hard and no one would go it alone by choice. Anyone who is out on their own for a long time either started off a little damaged or ends up that way."

"Says the girl who lives alone..."

She smiles a little and nudges me with her shoulder. "So you found out my secret Bellamy, I may be a little damaged."

"Well if you weren't before you are now." I say pointing to the bloodstain still marking her shirt. "This is obviously not the first time you've had to stitch yourself back together."

"No," she says shaking her head. "I'm lucky though, I still have all my fingers and toes." She holds up her fingers and wiggles them for proof.

"Who taught you how to do that?" I ask. I can't imagine there are many people around anymore with real medical training. Most of the equipment we use for medical procedures on the Ark requires power, down here everything has to be done by hand.

"My mother, and after that my grandmother. The other woman who made it to the bunker with my great great grandmother was a professor in the medical school so they were lucky in that regard. She taught all of the kids as much as she could. For a long time it was just theory and text books, but after they opened the bunker doors they started helping some of the surrounding tribes. Word started to spread and people brought their wounded and sick to the bunker when the herbal medicines and cures weren't working. When I was little I used to help my mom and after she was killed, my grandmother had me do a lot of procedures. I was young but she said it wasn't wise to have all of the knowledge in one mind."

"So I guess you're good for more than just obscure cultural references, pretentious quotes and cheesy songs."

"Thanks Bellamy" she says with a smile. "And I guess you're good for more than just stealing berries, poaching on people's land, obnoxious nicknames, and spreading annoying rumours."

"Hey, I never said anything," I say holding my hands up in mock defense. "Jasper saw me come back in the morning and he assumed, I don't lie about who I sleep with. Plus if I remember correctly, you were the one who invited me to sleep in your bedroom so I'd say it's mostly your fault." Clarke looks at me out of the corner of her eye while she fiddles with her zipper. She sits there for a while longer and I expect her to make a sarcastic remark back or comment on my sex life. After a few minutes, she just gets up and zips her jacket.

"It's Lincoln's turn to keep watch now. I'll wake him up." She turns back into the cave and a minute later Lincoln comes out to take my place. When I walk into the cave to lay down Clarke is
laying next to Octavia. I can't imagine she fell asleep already. She's facing away from me and I'm sure she heard me come in, she doesn't acknowledge me though, so I take that as I sign our conversation is over.

I lay down a few feet from Clarke where it looks like Lincoln had been sleeping and use my pack as a makeshift pillow. I'm just drifting off the sleep when I hear Clarke's quiet whisper. "Goodnight Bellamy."
Chapter 10

Clarke

The next morning we head straight to Bellamy's camp. If there was an attack there while we were gone, they'll need a doctor. As it turns out things were pretty quiet at the camp in our absence. I notice everyone shy away from Bellamy as he passes, they look like they're expecting him to yell at them. Bellamy goes off to track down Raven and Finn to find out what's been happening, he seems annoyed at the lack of activity going on around the camp.

Octavia and Lincoln say their good byes and he offers to take the salt and turtle and news from the Water People to the Mountain Men, but I expect Isaac will send someone to check on me soon so I decline. It's a long trip to make for just a driftwood turtle and a bag of salt.

"Clarke," Octavia turns to me when we find ourselves alone. "Thank you so much for letting me come with you. I know there's no way Bellamy would have let me go if you hadn't basically forced him to agree."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it, Octavia. I can't imagine spending my life without seeing the ocean and I figured if anyone would appreciate it as much as I do, it would be you."

"It is pretty amazing," she says smiling in that bubbly way she does. "Plus it was nice to get away for a little while, things are a little tense around here." She glances around the camp and I notice a few people giving her less than friendly looks. "People don't really like Lincoln and when Bellamy isn't around, they try to take it out on me. I'm sure that will all change soon though," she adds in a cheerier tone. "Maybe we can make it an annual trip. I bet it's so much fun in the summer."

I smile back at her optimism, sometimes I have to remind myself she shares any DNA with Bellamy who always seems to expect the worst. "I know this sounds silly, but my favourite part of the ocean isn't even swimming. I like to just stand there and stare out at the waves going on as far as I can see. It's just such an unending, unchanging expanse. It makes me feel so small and insignificant, I love that."

"Why the hell would you want to feel insignificant?" Bellamy has walked up behind us.

"I don't expect you to understand, Bellamy. You seem to relish in controlling everything and everyone around you. I just find it comforting to think about it when I feel overwhelmed or like the weight of the world is falling on my shoulders. The waves will keep coming no matter what I do. Whether I fail or succeed, even after I am dead and everyone has forgotten about me, the tides will keep rolling in and out."

He just stands there looking at me and I think for a moment he might understand me, but then he just snorts and turns to Octavia. "Alright O, I need you in charge of smoking all the game they brought in while you and Clarke were off splashing around. Keep those kids in line," he calls as she walks off waving goodbye.

I turn to leave and Bellamy grabs my arm. It feels rough at first, but then his fingers relax around my forearm and he smiles gently. "Take care of yourself Princess. The tides may keep going after your gone, but if I need stitches and you're not around anymore, we're going to have a problem."
I don't know what to say to that so I just smile as I pull my pack back onto my shoulders. I can never quite figure out what's going on in his head. One minute he seems cold and resentful and challenging, and the next he's almost complimenting me. I walk towards the gate of his camp where some of his people are patrolling the entrance, and as I look back at the activity around me, I see Bellamy still standing in the middle of the camp watching me.

The next morning I wake to one of Isaac's men at the bunker door. He must have traveled through the night to be here this early. I offer him food and a place to rest before her returns home, but he only takes the food. He doesn't seem surprised when I tell him about the attacker in the woods, he doesn't offer any information though so I don't ask, he's the typical stoic silent type that his tribe is known for. I neglect to tell him about the stitches, I'm not sure if it would make Isaac worry or not, but I'd rather be on the safe side. The last thing I need is Isaac wasting his time trekking back and forth to the bunker to check on me, the wound is looking better already. I'll need to leave the stitches in for a while, but it doesn't look infected and poison would have shown up by now.

Over the next few days I pass my time making an inventory of all the medical supplies I will need to take care of typical battle wounds. I have no idea if or when there could be an attack, but I want to be prepared. Most of the major medical supplies are stored down in the lower level of the bunker. I keep the basic supplies I need for day to day emergencies in a small room just off the main door to the bunker so I can treat people as soon as they walk in. When it was originally built, the entire bunker was underground and almost completely intended for storage. The upstairs portion was added later, a few old railroad containers with reinforced walls that were connected above part of the bunker and then buried in the side of a hill. They needed a layer of earth as extra protection but they also wanted to be able to get out without having to dig their way up if the door ended up buried in rocks and dust and debris. The dust was the biggest killer after the bombs were dropped. In the early days of the bombing, when the radio still picked up a few news feeds, it seems like the sun had been almost completely blocked out in many places. Things were still dark in a lot of major cities when the radio feeds finally died out.

The lower level of the bunkers used to be lit with solar panels but they stopped working before I was born. Now it's pitch black, the only way to see is with a lantern or one of the few solar and hand crank lights I still have. I wonder if Raven would be able to fix it and make a plan to visit the camp soon to find out. I gather what I can and come across a few things I forgot were down here as well. It's funny to see the things my ancestors saved. They brought a lot of useful and culturally significant things, but also just a lot of things they loved, I guess the idea was if they loved it, someone else would too. We used to pull out the instruments and record player when we were younger and my grandmother learned to knit when she was a child, the yarn is all long gone though. There is an old loom down here somewhere but I don't have anything to weave on it. I've never come across any sheep and I'm too far north for cotton to grow. There must be something in the library about making thread and yarn from other materials but that's a problem for another time when I start to run low on clothing.

One afternoon, a few day later, while I'm climbing in the apple tree to harvest the last of the late fall apples, I spot Bellamy and a few other people walking up to the bunker door. I wave them over and keep working. Bellamy walks up to the basket I have filled and left next to the tree and helps himself to an apple.

"Whatcha doing up there, Princess? Building a tree house?" I know he's being sarcastic but I can't help myself.

"Unfortunately this tree doesn't have the branch structure to support a treehouse big enough for a princess so my dream of living in the clouds will have to wait." I toss a rotten apple at him for
good measure and I hear Raven laughing behind him. I grab a few more apples from the branch
above me before climbing down. My stitches are healing well, but I still have to be careful not to
stretch too much. I lower myself down slowly from the last branch instead of jumping like I
usually do.

"So what brings you here? Other than the food?" I ask as Bellamy starts on his second apple.

"We were wondering if you have anything to use for stitching up wounds," Octavia says. "A few
of us have started training to fight with Lincoln and we used the last of the wire we had
yesterday."

"Sure," I say picking up the basket of apples and heading towards the bunker. "I was actually
thinking about coming to find you, Raven. I have a solar panel that hasn't worked since before I
was born and I have no idea how to fix it."

"So there's actually something you can't do?" Bellamy teases. "I'm shocked."

When we get to the bunker I pull off a book with information about making sutures from animal
intestines for Octavia and Jasper and lead Raven down to the lower level to look at the controls for
the solar panels. We're passing through my room when I realize Bellamy is following us too.

"So where are the panels?" Raven asks as we climb down a ladder into the lower level. I toss
Raven and Bellamy flashlights.

"They're along the ridge at the edge of the forest, if you guys are coming from camp you wouldn't
see them, they're to the east of the bunker. To be honest I'm not sure if it's the panels or the wiring
or the controls, but you may as well have a look down here first and we can check out the panels
later."

Raven and Bellamy are both shining their flashlights around them inspecting the shelves. Most of
the underground bunker is made up of rows and rows of sturdy shelves bolted to the floor. Almost
everything is still labeled and on the shelves, there are a few empty spaces through where things
have been lost or broken or traded over the years. I've added a few things I scavenged with Gael, I
usually only bother to carry home things I need, but if it's a slow trip I'll pick up anything that
looks interesting or potentially useful. Raven stops at a section full of old electronics and stares at
the shelf with her mouth open.

"Clarke, do you have any idea what I could build with this stuff?" She picks up a few things to
inspect them more closely, she looks like a child, full of excitement and wonder. "I mean these are
really outdated compared to some of the stuff on the Ark, but still..." She trails off in thought.

Bellamy has walked ahead of us and he's browsing a shelf full of paintings. "So how exactly are
these supposed to be useful?" he asks.

"They're not," I say stepping up beside him to look at the picture he's holding. It's a painting of a
house sitting in a meadow with a forest of autumn trees fading into the hills behind it, it's one of
my favourites. "That one's called Old House, Parry Sound, it may not help me eat, but someone
took the time to paint it and who gets to say everything has to have a purpose anyways. Some of
these things are just here to be preserved. Think about how many people have looked at this
picture before you and all of the emotions they felt, don't you think it would be a shame to let that
be destroyed?"

"Not really." Bellamy puts the picture down and turns back to me. "Think about how much easier
your life would have been if you had more supplies or weapons instead of useless paintings."
"Well I think it's important to know where we come from," I say pulling another painting from the shelf. "This painting was almost destroyed once before. During the Second World War the Nazis stole art from every country they passed through. When they lost the war they almost destroyed all of it, but a bunch of people, most of them weren't even soldiers, hunted down the art and saved as much as they could. A lot of people died to preserve this. Maybe a few extra tools would have been nice, I can always make more tools though, this can't be recreated. I think that's a story worth preserving."

Bellamy looks at the painting for a minute before giving me a skeptical look. "I don't know, it just looks like a guy staring at a globe." "It's called The Astronomer." I slide the painting back onto the shelf. "Maybe it is just a guy staring at a globe to you, but it meant something to a lot of people and that's the kind of thing my family was trying to preserve. It's not just about survival guided and tools, we need to remember where we came from and who we are so we can carry that with us as we start again. People have made a lot of mistakes in the past and if we can learn from the choices we made, good and bad, maybe we can build a different world this time."

Bellamy just smirks at me. "You're spending too much time with the Water People."

"So if you two are finished with your art history lesson over there," Raven interrupts before I can reply, "I'd like to look at that wiring we came down here to find."

Raven spends about a half an hour fiddling with wires before she finds the problem. She said she can probably fix it with some of the parts I have here but it will take a while. The others head back to camp after lunch but Jasper and Raven stay to help with the wiring. I told Raven she can choose something from the electronics shelf in exchange for the work and she jumps at the offer. Apparently she's been wanting to build some hand held radios and I have the parts she needs.

Jasper and I spend most of the next day in the library talking and looking through the books while Raven finishes fixing my wiring problem. He's so eager to learn as much as he can, and he's a much more pleasant guest than Bellamy, although I do find myself missing his sarcasm from time to time.

After a few weeks we fall into a routine. Bellamy visits every five or six days. Sometimes he comes alone and sometimes others come along. He always has a question or request for me, but sometimes it seems like he's looking more for an escape from the camp than an answer. On his third visit we end up playing cards in the bunker until the sun has set and he spends the night. He sleeps in the bed in the corner of my room. I don't read that night, the sound of his steady breathing across the room is comforting enough to lull me to sleep.
Bellamy

I know I shouldn't be spending so much time visiting Clarke but I don't really care. All I've done since we landed is look out for other people and now that things are going more smoothly I just want to be a little selfish. Everyone else in the camp seems to be enjoying themselves. Raven is happy with the radios she's managed to build from Clarke's scraps and she's talking about building some bombs from the leftover rocket fuel in the drop ship and a little gunpowder. It's a bit scary how excited she gets about the prospect of blowing things up, but if the Northerners do attack we'll need all the weapons we can get. Jasper and Monty have all kinds of bizarre projects going on and Finn is spending a lot of his time with the Forest Clan. Octavia goes off to meet Lincoln every chance she gets and I pretend not to notice so I don't have to admit that I actually think he's a good guy, I know he'll keep her safe so at least I'm not worried all the time.

Even with the more relaxed attitudes, it's not all fun and games, we're training with Lincoln and a few other fighters. A group of his people were attacked by another Northerner last week so we're back to scanning the woods for enemies every time we leave camp. On top of that we're still pretty busy stocking up on food. The ground is covered in frost every morning now so I know we don't have much time left. The Ark says we've been here for 62 days which makes it the second week of December. If we make it to the 75 day mark without growing second heads they're going to send down more people, this time with supplies. Hopefully that will help us make it through the toughest months of winter. I can't say I'm excited about their arrival though, it will change everything. They may not want to go along with the treaty we've established, and even though they've promised to forgive all of our crimes, I'm a little skeptical it will actually happen. Even if we're not locked up, I can't imagine any of us will have positions of influence or importance in whatever system they decide to set up. Sometimes when I visit Clarke I take a little extra time to look up information that might be helpful if Octavia and I have to leave, maps of the area, navigation skills, building temporary shelters. I can't go back to being pushed around by a bunch of out of touch leaders who killed my mother and sent Octavia to die down here. If we do decide to leave I'm sure Lincoln would help, if not for my sake, for Octavia. We could probably join one of the surrounding tribes if it came down to it, Gael seemed nice enough. Octavia and I are both young and strong and we'd be able to contribute. I have a feeling the tribes around here are a little more interested in ability than social status.

If I had my choice of where to live though, it would be the meadow. I love it there, and not just because Clarke is starting to grow on me. It makes me feel at home, from the first moment I stepped out onto the ridge above the bunker, I felt at ease in a way I never feel in the forest. I think back to the painting Clarke has of an old house in the middle of a meadow. If it were my meadow, I would build a house there.

I'm planning to make the trip to the bunker this afternoon so I've been rushing through my rounds of the camp to make sure I get out of here as soon as I can. Lately I've been getting to the bunker in the late afternoon and coming back to our camp the next day. I tell Raven it's so that I'm here to supervise during the day and maybe it started that way, but it's not anymore. I like being alone with Clarke and getting to relax without anyone else from the camp around. She seems more relaxed when it's just us too, she jokes around the way she did with Gael. We spend a lot more time now just talking, my first few visits after our trip were all about supplies and food and resources. Lately though, I've been making the trip whether I have questions for her or not.
As I reach the section of the drop ship where we have the radio set up I can tell I won't be getting out of here anytime soon. A few people are pushing and there's a lot of yelling. I yank the two kids at the front of the line away from each other and bark at everyone else to get back to work.

"What the hell is going on here?"

"He broke the radio," says a short kid with dark skin and shinny black hair. I should know his name because I just sent him out to hunt yesterday but I can't remember it.

"I didn't do anything. I was talking and right in the middle of my conversation it cut out, then this jerk starts yelling at me that I broke it." I step between the two boys before they start fighting again. Sometimes I forget these kids were not all locked up for minor offenses like Jasper and Monty, who were stealing some of the more interesting plants from the Ark's agro station. These kids might be the kind to kill each other over a misunderstanding.

I send the dark haired boy to get Raven to check out the radio and when he's out of eye sight I send the other kid to go help clean some of today's game. We've set up a schedule for the radio so everyone gets a chance to talk to their families. I don't usually pay much attention to it though, for once in my life, I'm lucky enough to have my family here.

When Raven gets here she gives the radio a once over and looks confused. "I don't understand," she says as she reexamines everything. "It should be working."

"Yeah, only it obviously isn't, so what's going on?"

"My guess is, it's something on the other end. Maybe the Ark turned it off. I wouldn't put it past my mom to hang up on me," she adds sarcastically.

"Just get it fixed Raven. We're supposed to give them a list of the high priority supplies we need."

"Sure thing boss," she mutters as she continues to tinker with wires and switches. Even though she's mostly a complete pain, Raven's one of the most useful people we have down here. I'm glad she was stupid enough to follow her boyfriend down in that pod, we would literally be out in the dark without her wiring everything back together. I've been thinking about what Clarke said about not getting to a point where one person has all of the important knowledge locked away in their head. I need to find someone Raven can teach, she's not the most patient person though so finding someone she gets along with will be a challenge. I'll worry about that when I get back tomorrow.

When I finally make it around to our makeshift medical area in the drop ship to say goodbye to Octavia, she gives me a funny look. "Off to see Clarke again?" she asks when she sees my pack.

"Yeah," I mutter. "Jasper needs..."

She stops me before I can finished, it's probably for the best though because Jasper didn't actually need anything. "Cut the crap Bellamy, if Jasper needed something that badly he would go with you. We both know you go off to the bunker because you're in love with Clarke so stop pretending this is something it isn't. And by the way, I totally approve," she adds with a smile.

"I'm not in love with Clarke, Octavia, we're working together and she has a lot of information we need. Sure we get a long and she's not as bad as I thought, but I'm not in love with her."

"Ok big brother, you keep on telling yourself that." She hugs me and walks out leaving me wondering about how I actually do feel about Clarke. As I walk to the bunker I can't stop thinking about it. Maybe I do love her. I've never been in love before so I don't even know how it feels. I spend so much time ignoring my emotions that I probably never would have stopped to notice if Octavia hadn't brought it up. The more I think about it though, the more I know she's right. I
spend all my time at the camp looking forward to seeing Clarke, I tell myself it's the food or the comfortable bed or the warm bunker, but it's not. Every time something interesting happens I make a mental note to tell her about it, things I know will make her laugh, or cringe, or so curious that she gets that little wrinkle in her forehead and flutters around the library pulling down books until she finds an answer.

I should probably feel happy, most people would, all I feel is dread. In my life, loving someone is a responsibility. I love Octavia and I've spend most of my life worrying about her and trying to keep her safe. Loving Clarke just means one more person to worry about, and most of the time she's over a two hour walk away from me. There's no way I can keep her safe while I'm at our camp. This will only hurt me, I know I shouldn't love her. I spend the rest of the walk deciding to hate her again. I think about all the annoying things she does and everything we disagree about. When I walk over the ridge and see her sitting on a rock with a cup of tea, my resolve starts to fade, and when she turns around and smiles at me I know I'm doomed - I do love her.

When I reach the spot where she's sitting she stands up and grabs my hand. "Come on, I want to show you something." She looks so excited and I can't help but smile too. As we walk towards the bunker I wonder for a minute if she feels the same way. I never gave my feelings much though and I definitely never considered how Clarke might feel about me. She seems happy to see me, but she usually seems just as happy to see Raven or Jasper. Maybe I'm a friend to her, someone to keep her from going stir crazy all alone in the bunker.

Inside the bunker I see a large orange gourde sitting on the floor of the library. There's a bowl next to it and it looks like Clarke has scooped out all of the seeds.

"What is it?" I ask, I'm not nearly as excited as she is.

"It's a pumpkin, the last one of the year. I though you might want some of the seeds. You can cook them and eat them but you should also save some to plant next year."

"I'll keep that in mind, if we make it until next year."

"Of course you'll make it to next year, Bellamy." She sits down next to the pumpkin and pulls out the small knife she keeps tucked in her belt. "Plus even if you don't make it, I'm sure someone will, and they'll appreciate the pumpkins." She smiles but she doesn't look up from what she's doing.

I walk over and sit down next to her. She's cutting some kind of shape into the side of the pumpkin. "What are you doing?"

"I'm cutting the pumpkin," she says in a matter of fact tone, still not looking up from her work.

"That's a strange way to cut a pumpkin." I guess I'm not really sure how to cut a pumpkin, the shapes she's cut out at the top look strangely like eyes though.

"Not if your trying to turn it into a vampire," she says finally looking up at me and flashing a big smile. All I can do is laugh. Sometimes I'm not sure if she's just purposely making things up to mess with me. "Come on Bellamy, you've really never heard of a jack-o-lantern or Halloween? How is it you know so much about ancient roman culture and nothing about traditions from 100 years ago?" She tosses a scrap of the pumpkin in my direction and I swat it back at her. It lands in her hair and she doesn't bother pulling it out. She just turns back to the pumpkin and keeps cutting.

"I don't know, maybe because it would be cruel to remind a space station full of people of all of the things they're missing out on. We didn't grow food just to cut it up and play with it. Any celebrations that required materials were phased out pretty quickly from what I understand." There
were modest birthday celebrations on the Ark but it was more of recognition of the day than an actual celebration. "So what are you going to do with this blood sucking gourde?" I ask as I pick the piece of pumpkin out of Clarke's hair. It strikes me all of a sudden how comfortable she is with me being this close and touching her, I wouldn't act this way with anyone else, except maybe Octavia. I think Raven would probably slap me if I tried to fix her hair.

"Wow Bellamy, I'm impressed you know what a vampire is." She laughs a little and nudges me with her elbow. "Now I'm going to put a candle inside so the face lights up." I stare at her for a moment expecting her to continue but she doesn't.

"That's it? What is the point of that Princess?"

"Yet another wonderful thing with no purpose Bellamy, a complete waste of resources, but a fun waste of a resource, plus the pumpkin smells really nice when it's burning." Clarke holds the pumpkin up and examines her work, it looks like a vampire. She stands up and grabs a small candle off the shelf and sets it inside the pumpkin before lighting it. "My grandfather used to do this when my mom was little. It was a Halloween tradition before the war. Kids dressed up in costumes and went door to door collecting candy from their neighbours. People would carve pumpkins and put them outside their houses. I know it's silly, but my mom and dad used to let us do it with the last pumpkin of the year." While she was talking Clarke walked around the room and turned off the small lanterns that usually light the room. She sits back down beside me and leans against the chair behind her so she can look up and admire her creation where it now sits on the low centre shelf. The light from the pumpkin casts a flickering orange glow around the room. When I look over at Clarke she's staring back at me with an unfamiliar look on her face. She looks away quickly and starts telling me about her sister's attempts to use berries as face paint. She's very proud to inform me that she never once dressed up as a princess. We sit in the library and talk until the candle in the pumpkin burns out and we're left in the dark. As I sleepily follow Clarke to her room I decide I'm not sure if Clarke loves me, but I know I want her to.
There's something comforting about waking up with Bellamy in the bunker. I've been alone for so long that I thought I didn't need anyone anymore and maybe I don't need him, but it's nice to have him around. When I wake up he's still asleep so I head to the kitchen to make us something to eat. I have a plate half full of food when I realize that instead of making an actual breakfast, I've just pulled all of Bellamy's favourite things off of the shelf. I put some things back and start again, making sure I have enough protein and vegetables to tide me over until lunch. I stare at the plate for a few minutes while I wait for the tea to steep and decide to go back to Bellamy's favourite things. When I'm finished with my third attempt at breakfast, I set the plate on the table between two cups of mint tea and head back to the bedroom to wake up Bellamy. I stand there for a minute in the doorway and consider letting him sleep, he looks so peaceful. He probably has a lot to take care of at the camp though, so I sit gently on the edge of the bed and touch his shoulder.

"Bellamy, time to get up."

His eyes open quickly and he looks scared for a moment before his gaze finds mine. His curly hair is even messier than usual, like he's been tossing and turning all night.

"Don't tell me," I say with a smile "You were having a nightmare about vampires right? Is that the real reason you don't have Halloween on the Ark, you guys are all a bunch of scaredy cats?"

"Yeah, something like that," he says sleepily as he props himself up on his elbows. He's looking right at me and his face is only a few inches from mine. I get up from the bed, feeling suddenly too intimate sitting here with him.

"Breakfast is ready," I call as I walk towards the kitchen. We eat quietly and when we're finished Bellamy fills me in on what's being going on at the camp. I'm excited to hear the Ark will be sending more people soon. Hopefully they won't crash into Anya's territory again.

"So you must be looking forward to the Ark coming to the ground so you can finally have someone to talk to." Bellamy's voice sounds a little resentful.

"Yeah, I guess it would be nice not to be constantly explaining myself, for what it's worth though Bellamy, I like talking to you. It turns out lions aren't so difficult to talk to after all." I finish my tea and start clearing off the table.

Bellamy stays for a couple hours, looking through a few books in the library and making fun of my now droopy looking vampire pumpkin. When he leaves I give him the pumpkin seeds I set aside and a couple of apples. I already dried a few of the pumpkin seeds and wrapped them separately with a little note about when to plant them.

Bellamy comes back with Jasper and Raven a few days later, he doesn't look happy to have them tagging along though. Since communication hasn't restarted with the Ark, I teach Jasper to spot it at night with an old telescope. It's just a tiny spec of light drifting across the night sky that holds his entire past. Neither Raven nor Bellamy have anyone left that they care about on the Ark and Bellamy in particular doesn't seem to care much at all about it's fate. He doesn't talk about it, but I can tell he feels abandoned, I would too. I can't imagine being cast out like a bunch of lab rats. Octavia told me once that I remind Bellamy of the privileged upperclass on the Ark who had her locked up and their mother killed. I doubt I would have much in common with them though, I
hope he can see that.

That night Bellamy sleeps in one of the other bedrooms, off the side of the library, with Jasper and Raven and it seems particularly quiet in my room. I find myself reading aloud again and I half expect Bellamy to wander in and make fun of me, but he doesn't. When I wake up, I find my book is neatly put away on the table next to my bed, even though I'm pretty sure I fell asleep face down on one of the pages.

One night, about a week later, while we're sitting by the lake, Bellamy and I see a flash of light much brighter than the Ark shooting across the sky. I've seen shooting stars before, but this seems different, maybe a meteor. It's lower than anything I've seen since the drop ship landed. When I tell Raven about it later she thinks it may have been the exodus ship the Ark had been preparing to launch before the radio stopped working, or maybe the Ark itself.

Whatever it was, it landed too far for us to find out. It disappeared over the horizon to the west. I made a note in my diary and a silent wish for their survival. We don't talk about it again. I know Bellamy doesn't wish their death, but he also has no family left on the Ark and little concern for their leaders. I think he figures they would be more trouble than they're worth if they actually did manage to land here. After that night we don't see the Ark anymore.

I'm not sure when things start to change between us, it happens gradually. One afternoon, a few hours before dusk I take my tea outside. Winter is here now and the ground is covered in at least a foot of snow, if the calendar I've been keeping is anywhere near accurate, it's early January. I stand at the door and look around the meadow, it's beautiful in the winter. I'm out there standing around for almost half an hour before I realize what I'm doing, I'm waiting for Bellamy. It's been five days since his last visit so he should be here today. I stand there for another few minutes kicking the snow off a rock with my boot before I head back inside, I know this is not good.

Bellamy arrives a couple hours later with a list of questions from Raven and Jasper. I feel strangely self conscious around him today. When he arrives, his hair is full of snowflakes and I want to reach up to tousle his thick brown curls, but I stop myself and offer him a chair next to the kitchen stove instead. I never noticed before how often we touch each other, now that I'm thinking about it though, I notice it constantly. I have to stop myself a few more times when I realize I'm probably crossing some kind of line, not that Bellamy seems to mind.

I've never really thought about anyone romantically, it's just never been an option, everyone around here knows I'm promised to Isaac. Maybe that's why I've been spending so much time with the Sky People, they don't walk on eggshells around me worried they may offend Isaac or do something too forward. I'm not sure exactly how I feel about Bellamy, it feels like more than friendship though and I'm starting to feel like he may see me as more than a friend too. I know this can never be anything else, so I try my best to push the feelings away when I realize I'm watching him read or smiling a little too widely at something he says. Maybe I'm just over analyzing things now, but it seems like Bellamy is acting a little strange too. He pulls away quickly when our hands touch as I pass him a mug, and I think I can feel him staring at me a few times, but when I turn to look he's turning away too.

"Hey Princess," Bellamy calls the next morning as he's getting ready to head back to his camp. "Do you really think we stand a chance against these Northerners? All this stuff about rebuilding society and humanity, do you think it's possible?"

I stand there for a few moments thinking about how to answer. Bellamy and I spend so much time alternating between sharing information and teasing each other that a question like this catches me off guard. "I don't really know Bellamy, but I know I have to try. I don't have all the answers and I don't know how exactly we get there so I just keep moving in what seems like the right direction. We have to move forward, but that doesn't mean we can't look back. Who knows, maybe we'll all
be totally wiped out by the Northerners and no one will ever remember we existed, but that
doesn't mean we didn't. We just have to do what we think is best while we're here and try to leave
something behind that people can build upon."

Bellamy cocks his eyebrows at me and I know what he's going to say before he opens his mouth
so I don't give him a chance.

"Don't ask serious questions if you don't want serious answers, Bellamy."

"You sure know how to get people fired up for a fight Princess, just a heads up, you probably
want to leave out the part about dying and being forgotten if you ever have to talk to anyone who
will actually be fighting."

I can't resist sticking my tongue out at him. "That's why I'm the Princess and you're the rebel
leader Bellamy. You get people fired up for battle and I try to help them live in the aftermath of it
all."

When Bellamy leaves, the library seems cavernous. I know I shouldn't think it, but I wish he could
stay. I can't feel this way about him. Things have been settled with Isaac and his people for years
and I don't think they would be very happy about me backing out now, especially with the threat
of an attack looming over all of our heads. My life is not just about me, I have a lot of people to
think about, and even though it hurts a little to picture leaving Bellamy behind, I know I will have
to go to the mountains and he won't be welcome there. Eventually when the silence is too much, I
pull out the old record player and sing along to some sad old Bob Dylan records while I make
sutures and bandages.
Chapter 13

Bellamy

Just when I think things are getting better around here, someone screws up again. This morning, when Octavia went to the meat shed the door was partially open and some animal had eaten through almost an entire smoked boar. Eventually we figure out that two boys snuck in and stole food, apparently they forgot to close the door when they left. It wasn't hard to figure it out, they have a stash of dried meat tucked under their blankets.

When the camp finds out what happened, they want to banish the kids, or take away their food for a week, or kill them. I decide to send them out hunting to replace the meat. I know they probably won't find anything, but wandering the woods in the snow is as good a punishment as any, so I go with it. Jasper and I have been sorting through the food since they left and salvaging everything we can. I probably could have had someone else do it but I'm a little worried about letting people in here. The last thing I need is a panic over how little food we have. Jasper has just finished cutting away a chunk of damaged meat when we hear screams from the gate. I grab my gun and head in the direction of the noise.

"Jasper, stay here and don't let anyone in." As I duck out of the shed I see a complete mess in front of me. People are yelling and moving away from the gate. It sounds like someone is in a hell of a lot of pain. When I push through the crowd, what I find makes me wish it had stayed with Jasper. The two boys I sent out hunting are back. The older one is dragging the other back into the camp and his legs are completely shredded. His flesh has been turned into bright red ribbons and there is a trail of blood staining the snow where they entered the gate.

"What the hell happened?" I ask the older boy.

"I don't know," He pants. "some kind of animal, maybe a panther." His eyes are blank and he looks like he's in shock.

"Get into the medical tent," I order him. He doesn't look injured but I doubt he wants to stand here watching his friend die. The pool of blood is steadily growing and I know this kid is already dead. I sent him out into the woods totally unprepared and now he's laying here bleeding to death.

"Alright," I bark to the crowd that has gathered around me. "The show's over, give him some air and get back to work."

I kneel down next to the boy and listen as his breathing slows and stops. I don't even know his name and I killed this stupid kid. I tell one of the guards to deal with the body and head for the medical tent. It turns out his friend got a couple shots off and he injured the animal so I take a few people out to track it. If doesn't take long to follow the trail of blood back to the site of the attack. From there, we follow a smaller trail of blood to where the cat is hiding under a fallen tree. We finish it off and haul the body back to camp. It's not enough to replace the food that was lost, but it's enough to keep people distracted with a decent meal. I make sure we set aside the skin to tan and the intestines for sutures.

I look around the camp at everyone enjoying the meat and I suddenly feel like I can't breath. I have to get out of here. I say a quick goodbye to Octavia and head for the bunker. It's been a couple weeks since my last visit, the snow makes the trip much more difficult. Today I don't care though, I have to get out of here, and as much as I hate to admit it, I want to see Clarke.
When I arrive at the bunker, Clarke is sitting in the floor reading and she has a few books scattered around her feet. I collapse next to her without saying a word.

"Rough day Bellamy?" She stares at me waiting for an answer, but I don't know where to start. I just sit there and stare back at her for a long time.

"I read that book you gave me Clarke. The problem is we don't have the luxury of someone stepping in at the last minute to save us. I just stopped the camp from enforcing a ridiculous punishment on some kids for stealing food and one of them was killed by a panther anyways. I was trying to let them off easy and I still killed one of them."

Clarke sets down her book and turns to face me before she speaks. "Do you want someone to step in and save you Bellamy? It looks like you've done a pretty good job of saving yourself, and your people."

"Right Clarke, because I'm such a great leader, these past few months have just been a huge success." I say it sarcastically, but she answers me seriously anyways.

"Don't be so hard on yourself Bellamy. You've made it through most of the winter with almost all of your people still alive. Plus you've managed to keep a bunch of kids from going completely crazy. You're a good leader Bellamy, your people listen to you and respect you, and not just because you can be a little scary sometimes." She smiles and I know she isn't the least bit scared of me. Maybe she should be, I'm not very nice and the people around me tend to get hurt.

"They should be scared of me. I've done horrible things, Princess. And not just after we got to earth. I stabbed two other guards to get on the ship with Octavia. The first week here I locked a guy outside the gates for flirting with Octavia and he got caught in a fog storm - I had to kill him to put him out of his misery. I hung one of our guards for attacking a little girl and I let a bunch of kids die trying to rescue Octavia. I tortured Lincoln because I was too stubborn to listen him or to trust him. Sometimes I think those things have scarred me so badly that I can't be redeemed." It feels good to list my crimes out loud, to admit what I've done and that I know it's wrong. I expect Clarke to pull away or look horrified, she just looks thoughtful though. Maybe she always knew I was a monster and she's not surprised at all.

"You should let your scars remind you, to live better in their memory, to make a different choice the next time around, to try harder, but you can't let them define you. The things we do don't always have to define us. We've all done things we're not proud of or made bad decisions, it's when you let the worst things about you overtake you that you turn into a monster. We don't have the luxury of letting someone else do the dirty work. There is blood on all of our hands, Bellamy. We have to be police, soldiers, judges, and executioners, but we're also the builders and the teachers and the doctors and someday we'll be the mothers and fathers too. All we can do is keep moving forward and trying to do better, for ourselves and for our people. You can't let yourself get sucked down a rabbit hole of grief and doubt."

"Rabbit hole?" I say raising an eyebrow at her. She always has to add some random expression that was obviously lost on the Ark. She smiles and shakes her head at me.

"I'm saying you're not a monster Bellamy and your people need you."

"And what about you? Do you need me?" I regret asking as soon as it's out of my mouth. I'm a little surprised when instead of pulling away or laughing she leans towards me a little and looks right at me. I can't read her expression. She looks a little sad but I can't imagine why. She doesn't say anything for a long time and just when I don't think I can't bear the silence any longer she finally speaks.
"Yes." Her voice is quiet, barely a whisper. If she hadn't already leaned closer to me I wouldn't have heard her. My eyes move down to her lips and I lean in to close the space between us, but she turns away. She quickly starts picking up the books she has managed to scatter across the floor and begins putting them back on the shelves. "You should probably get going. It will be getting dark soon." Her voice sounds strange, like it's getting tangled in her throat on the way out.

"I though I'd stay." I start passing her books to put away. I don't quite understand her system for organizing them. "Octavia knows I usually stay here when I visit. She won't be worried."

Clarke stops putting away the books and turns to face me. Her eyes are glossy and bright. "Please go." She sets the books on the floor next to her and walks into the kitchen closing the door behind her.

I sit there for a minute not sure what just happened before picking up the rest of the books and doing my best to put them away. I leave the ones I can't figure out on top of the shelf in the middle of the room and stand there for another minute feeling a little lost. Finally I grab my pack and pull out a few things I brought for Clarke but forgot to give her earlier. I hesitate at the door to the bunker for a few more minutes. I'm not sure if should just leave or wait for her to come back out. She's upset and I want to comfort her, she asked me leave though, so I turn and step out into the meadow.
Chapter 14

Clarke

I sit on my bed until I'm sure Bellamy is gone. I walk into the kitchen and put a couple small pieces of wood into the stove and place the kettle on top. My grandmother used to say nothing chases the blues away like a strong cup of earl grey. I'll have to settle for the last of the lavender Arryn sent. I stand at the kitchen door and listen to make sure Bellamy is gone before entering the library. It's quiet so push the door open.

"...if you hurt her, I swear."

I hear Isaac's voice growling outside the bunker and run through the library towards the sound as he hurls threats. There's only one thing that could have happened. I burst out of the bunker and throw myself between them. Isaac is using his arm to pin Bellamy by the throat against the rock escarpment the surrounds the bunker door. His other hand is reaching for his knife. Bellamy's gun is trapped behind him and he's frantically trying to grab it.

"Isaac," I say putting my hands on his cheeks gently and looking into his frantic eyes. "Isaac stop. I'm here, I'm fine. It's okay." Isaac releases Bellamy and sets him down without taking his eyes off of mine.

"Did he hurt you?"

"No. This is Bellamy, from the Sky People, he was here looking through some of the books. He's my...he's a friend."

Isaac gives me a once over to make sure I'm okay and then turns to Bellamy and nods. "I'm sorry. It's not a safe time for her to be alone." Bellamy nods back. I'm not sure if he is choosing not to speak or he can't. He is rubbing his neck and it looks like he'll have a bruise. I meet his eyes for a second before turning away quickly.

Isaac turns back to me and places his hand gently on the side of my face. He can be so brutal, but he is always gentle with me. "I saw him leaving the bunker and the kitchen door was closed so I just assumed something happened. You never close that door."

"Isaac, I'm okay, I promise. I was just lighting the stove and the wind kept blowing it back out again. It was nothing. Let's go inside." I'm talking directly to Isaac, but Bellamy turns and walks back into the bunker as well. Isaac has some supplies he brought me and when he goes to put them away I am left standing in the library with Bellamy.

"What the hell was that?" Bellamy's voice is just above a whisper. I want to go to him and make sure he is okay, but I don't move.

"That's Isaac. His father is the leader of the Mountain Men. We're getting married in the fall." I say the words without emotion as if I'm reading facts from a book, because that's what they are, the facts of my life. I should have told Bellamy a thousand times before, but I'm selfish. I didn't want things to change between us, I didn't want him to see me as only Isaac's woman. Whatever Bellamy may have felt for me before today, it doesn't matter now. The look he is giving me makes my insides churn, I feel nauseous and anxious and empty.

He doesn't say anything, but his eyes go cold and his jaw is clenched. For a moment, I think he
He doesn't say anything, but his eyes go cold and his jaw is clenched. For a moment, I think he might scream at me. I don't look away, the least I can do is face the anger and hurt I have caused. After what feels like forever, he turns abruptly and storms out of the bunker. The door slams behind him but I still don't budge. I am stuck here unable to move. The weight of his anger crushes me, the deafening silence of his absence rings in my ears.

"Clarke?" I jump as Isaac calls my name and walks back into the room. "Are you okay? I heard the door slam." He steps in front of me and breaks my line of sight with the empty space where Bellamy stood. I have to blink for a second to bring him into focus. "Clarke?" He calls my name again, this time more quietly. I look up at him and try to force a smile.

"I'm fine," I lie.

"No. You're not." He steps forward and wraps his strong arms around my body. I feel so weak and feeble as he pulls me into an embrace. He doesn't say anything. He just holds me while I close my eyes and breath slowly, willing myself not to cry. I pull away after a minute and look up at him.

"Thank you." My voice is quiet and hoarse. He just nods and gently kisses my forehead.

A couple hours later, just after the sun has set four of Isaac's men arrive at the bunker. They stopped to meet with Anya along the way here, but Isaac wanted to come straight to the bunker, he worries there still may be a few scouts in the area, stuck here until the snow thaws. While we eat dinner later, the men are quiet as Isaac tells me about what has been going on in the mountains. The Northerners aren't expected to attack during the winter, the trip south from their territory is hard enough in good weather. Isaac thinks that if they do attack, it will be in the spring. We decide our best option is to prepare for a possible attack as soon as the snows start to thaw in the mountains. Anya and I can reach the mountains in a day, but the Water People and the River Clan will need more time to arrive. I offer to go south but Isaac's men have already arranged for Anya to have some of her riders make the trip when the time comes. They can cover the distance much faster. Years ago, some of her people were lucky enough to come across horses. They have been breeding them, but there are still very few. If I was planning to stay in the meadow I would trade almost anything for a horse. The mountains are no place to keep a horse though, they need space to run.

After dinner, Isaac's men set up in the small room Jasper and Raven slept in when they were here last month. They are all kind and respectful, but they don't talk to me much, the quiet is overwhelming. I wish they would say something to distract me from my thoughts of Bellamy. I wonder if he made it back to his camp safely, I wonder if his neck is okay, mostly I wonder if he hates me. A part of me thinks maybe it's better if he does, but a much bigger part hopes he doesn't. I sit by quietly while they drink and discuss the winter and how best to kill the Northerners. I notice Isaac eyeing me cautiously from where he sits next to me. He didn't make me tell him what happened or ask me why I was so upset, he could tell it wasn't something I wanted to talk about and he didn't push. I appreciate that about him, along with so many other things, but I know I don't feel for him what I feel for Bellamy. I wish I had someone to talk to. Arryn would listen, but she's so far away. I am alone here, the only person I have opened up to in years probably hates me.

After a while I get up and wish everyone a goodnight. I know that despite their long walk home, they will be up talking long into the night. One of the perks of coming to the bunker is getting to drink some of the cider I make with the apples. Isaac brought some up to the mountains once and now his men are always eager to join him when he makes the trip to visit me. Some nights I pull out the record player for them or even the guitar, but today I can hardly move. Bellamy's departure has left me feeling empty and guilty and a little broken. When I turn to leave, Isaac gets up and follows me to my bedroom. He always sleeps here in the second bed, his pack is already set
out there on the floor. When we have crossed into the kitchen he speaks.

"I can sleep with them if you want to be alone Clarke." He stops at the door to my bedroom and waits for my response.

"No, you don't need to do that, really Isaac, I'm fine. You've always slept in here..." My voice trails off, I feel completely drained.

"Clarke," Isaac says as he takes my arm to get my attention. "If there's something you want to tell me, you know you can do that right? You said he didn't hurt you, and I believe you, but something is wrong. I don't need you to tell me what it is, I just need you to know that if you need anything at all, I am always here."

I let my head fall against his chest and he wraps his arms around me again. "I know," I say quietly. "Goodnight Isaac."

He watches me as I climb into bed and turn off the lamp I carried into the room. As I stare into the darkness of my room listening to the steady conversation drifting in from the library, I wonder if he would understand, what he would say if I told him I don't want to join him in the mountains. Maybe the truce we have established is already strong enough, maybe he doesn't need me.

When I finally drift off the sleep, I have strange dreams and I wake early. It is silent in the bunker when I crawl out of bed, I give up on willing myself back to sleep and head to the kitchen. I know it will be cold, but I decided to take my tea outside anyways. I grab Isaac's warm fur coat from the floor next to the bed and pass into the kitchen. As I stand there staring at the kettle, waiting for it to boil, I am at a complete loss. For once in my life, I have no idea what to do. Bellamy laughed when I said I couldn't fix the solar panels, but that I could learn. I could live a thousand years more and still never know how to deal with love.

When my tea is ready, I shrug on Isaac's coat and make my way through the library. I notice a small stack of things on the shelf that I hadn't seen last night. I assume Isaac left them there, but when I get closer I realize it was Bellamy. He returned the camera I sent with him to take a picture of the drop ship for my album. The arrival of the Sky People seems like the most significant event of the year. The picture shows Octavia standing next to the large door to the ship. She looks so different than when I first met her. She carries a sword Lincoln has been teaching her to use and she is much stronger.

As I pick up the picture to look more closely, something falls onto the floor. It's a thin piece of leather with something attached to the middle. When I pick it up, I realize it's a necklace. There is a pearl attached in the center of the leather string by a delicate piece of wire. It doesn't look like the kind of pearls I have seen in paintings and books, it's a little lumpy and the colour is uneven but that just makes it more beautiful. This isn't the type of pearl farmed by men before the war by forcing something into an oyster's shell. This is the kind of wild pearl an oyster makes to protect itself from some small thing that creeps into its shell and threatens to tear it apart. The oyster covers the invading particle with layer upon layer of its hard shell material until it is left with a smooth round orb that can't hurt it anymore.

The light from my small lamp bounces off the curves of the pearl and it shines with yellow and orange, making a creamy colour that reminds me of a fall sunset. I stand there for a few minutes just turning it over and over in my hand before I tie the sting around my neck and take my tea outside. As I watch the sunrise I try to wrap my heart in a hard shell, it doesn't work. When I walk back into the bunker my heart is still weak and broken.
Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Bellamy

I should have known it was too good to be true. I was so sure Clarke felt the same way about me. She said she needed me. I don't know what to think about that, but I know I'm furious, at her and at Isaac and mostly at myself. I shouldn't have opened up to her, I shouldn't have wasted so much time with her, I shouldn't have let myself love her.

"Whoa, Bellamy, what the hell did that deer do to you?" Raven has walked up beside me and I stare down at the bloody mess in front of me. I've been breaking down a deer and apparently my anger got the best of me.

"What do you want Raven?" I'm not in the mood for this. It's been almost two weeks since I left the bunker, and Clarke, and I'm still as angry as the evening I walked back into the camp. I'm sure everyone has noticed a difference, but I don't really care. They can chalk it up to winter stress.

"Nothing, I just saw you destroying a perfectly good meal over here and though I'd take over for you. Go get some rest Bellamy, you hardly sleep anymore."

"I sleep fine," I go back to my butchering, a little more calmly this time. She's right though, I haven't slept through the night since I stormed out of the bunker. I still dream of Clarke but now she's wearing a mask and war paint and chasing me with a spear. I tell her I love her and she just stabs me anyways. I've been sharing my bed with a couple different girls from camp but it doesn't help. "Since when do you care anyways?"

"Since our leader is walking around here like some kind of pissed off zombie, that's when." She steps closer to me. She's not yelling but she's angry. "These kids all look to you and if you keep acting like you don't care about anything, they won't either. I don't care what happened with you, just fix it. Why don't you go see Clarke, you're always in a better mood after coming back from the bunker."

I freeze at the mention of Clarke's name. "Thanks for the advice Raven, I'll keep it in mind," I say sarcastically, trying to sound as casual as possible, it doesn't work.

"Oh, so the problem is with Clarke." I hear Raven's voice change and she's suddenly that curious six year old I hate so much. "So what happened? She finally kicked you out of the bunker? I don't know what she saw in you anyways Bellamy, you're lucky it lasted as long as it did, Clarke could probably have anyone she wants. I am gonna miss watching her throw stuff at you though."

"I'm not talking about this with you Raven." I've done as much as I can to salvage the venison so I wipe off my knife and tuck it away.

"Ok Bellamy, but seriously, for the sake of my dinner, you've got to get yourself under control." Raven walks off into the camp and I start hauling the meat to the smoker. I toss the pieces I hacked to shreds into a stew one of the kids is making for dinner.

I hate to admit it, but I know Raven's right. I can't got on like this. Over the next couple weeks I try harder to push Clarke out of my mind. Luckily, there is a lot to do to keep me busy. Now that the worst part of winter is over we are preparing to fight the Northerners. Raven has been making bombs and I figure it's as good a skill as any to learn so I watch her as she works. We'll be able to
make almost 100 small bombs with gunpowder we salvaged from a military bunker and some tin cans. Finn's small bunker had shelves and shelves of canned food, the contents were all long expired, but Raven was able to use the cans to hold the bombs. Finn was upset when he heard what the cans were being used for, he wasn't too happy about the idea of making bombs. I don't mind at all though. I'm just finishing up putting the top on one of the bombs when Octavia walks into the weapons tent.

"Hey big brother, are you up for some hunting? The guards on the west side of the wall said they saw a bunch of turkeys in the woods. I figure if we hurry we might be able to get a couple of them." I stare at her for a second trying to reconcile this strong girl in front of me with the small child that hid under my floor. Octavia has thrived on the ground. She is strong and brave and she pulls more than her weight around the camp. People gave her a hard time for being my sister when we first arrived, saying she would get special treatment and not have to work. She fought back by always volunteering for the most difficult jobs and working twice as hard as the person next to her.

"Sure O, let me grab my gun. Raven are you good here?"

"Go," she answers without looking up from her work. I'm almost out of the tent when she adds "I hear the turkeys tend to hang out in Clarke's meadow, you may want to head that way."

"Go float yourself Raven," I call over my shoulder. I hear her laugh as I pull on my gun and follow Octavia to the gate.

It doesn't take us long to find the turkey tracks in the wet snow. I let Octavia take the lead so I can keep an eye on the woods around us. Most of the trees are bare so I can see farther than when everything was covered in leaves, I still feel closed in though, I was not made to live in the woods.

We walk for about a half hour before Octavia spots the turkeys. She takes one down with the bow Lincoln has been teaching her to shoot and I take down another with my gun. Eventually we will run out of bullets and I'll have to learn to use a bow, but for now I still prefer my gun. We each grab a turkey and turn to head back to camp.

"Are you okay?" Octavia asks as we start to walk.

"Yep." I keep my eyes forward and continue moving.

"Are you sure? You've been acting strange. I mean you're not angry anymore, but something just seems wrong. Did something happen with Clarke? You haven't been to the bunker in like a month."

"Everything's fine, let's just get back to camp." Octavia steps in front of me and the look she's wearing says she's not buying it.

"Don't lie to me Bellamy, you can put on a strong face and lie to everyone else, but not me. You came down here to protect me and now that we're both here, I want to help protect you too. It's not fair for you to always shoulder the burden, but I can't help you if you won't talk to me."

I know she's right, Octavia is always right, so as we walk back to camp, I tell her everything. I tell her about realizing how I felt about Clarke and thinking Clarke felt the same way. I tell her about Clarke saying she needed me and then Isaac trying to kill me. I tell her that Clarke is going to marry him.

"So that's it, you're just going to give up? For someone who fights for everything else is his life, you're giving up on Clarke pretty easily."
"I'm not giving up O, she doesn't want me. She wants to be with him."

"Maybe, or maybe she wants to be with you and she doesn't know you love her. If you haven't told her how you feel how is she supposed to know. Clarke may be book smart, but the two of you are probably the most clueless pair of people I know. Everyone else can see the way you two look at each other, like there's no one else in the room, like you're having some private conversation even when there are three other people standing next to you."

"Maybe."

"Not maybe Bellamy, she loves you, even when we went to the beach, it was obvious. Maybe the two of you didn't know it yet, but I think you've loved her since the first day you met her."

We're almost inside the walls of the camp and this isn't a conversation I want to have with an audience so I take the turkeys from Octavia and send her to go check on the medical bay.

"Just talk to her Bellamy," Octavia calls back to me as she leaves.

Later as I lay alone on my bunk, I think about all the memories of Clarke that I tried to push out of my mind. All of the happy and the hurt and the one thing that sticks out in my mind because I just can't figure it out. That look on her face when I stormed out was so sad and broken. She must feel something for me. Octavia's right, I can't just walk away from Clarke. I've had to fight for everything else in my life, so why not her. I decide to go back to the bunker tomorrow.
Clarke

Isaac leaves with his men the morning after he arrived. I send them with as many medical supplies as they can carry - and a few bottles of cider as well. The bunker feels so empty with them gone. There is nowhere to hide from my sadness and guilt. I run through all the times I should have told Bellamy, and all the things I would have missed out on if I had. I know it's selfish, but I'm glad I had that time with him. I don't expect him to forgive me right away, but I'm also hurt when weeks pass without a visit. I sit outside in the afternoons and drink my tea, but Bellamy never comes. I get a few visits from the Forest Clan when they need medical help or just a hot meal after being caught out in the snow too far from camp. The company is nice and six months ago I would have been happy to see them. Now my heart just sinks every time I hear someone approach only to find out it's not Bellamy.

I think about going to his camp. I pack a bag and leave it by the door for another week. Each day I think of an excuse not to go. When I can't bear it anymore I lock up the bunker and make the trip north to Isaac's settlement. I don't have a particular reason for visiting, but I just can't sit in the bunker any longer. I bring food and more medical supplies just in case, spring is coming soon and war will follow shortly after. I'm halfway to Isaac's camp when I have the idea to set up a medical tent there in case there is an attack, I'm still trying to be as optimistic as I can, even though war seems inevitable. When the Northerners come south they will meet the Mountain Men first so we will fight them from there.

When I reach the Mountain Men's settlement Isaac is not there. His mother shows me a place where I can set up and I get to work building a long rectangular tent. The ground here is still frozen so I have to lash the thick branches together instead of driving them into the ground. Children from the tribe come to watch me work on my second day there and I quickly recruit them to help me with the tent. When I am satisfied with the tent I move on to getting the interior set up.

The tribe manages to spare one real bed for me and I am able to make a few makeshift cots and shelves as well. I gather all of the materials I sent with Isaac and arrange them on the shelves. I make note of a few things that are still missing so I can bring them from the bunker.

On my 5th night at the camp Isaac returns. He finds me in the the tent showing a few of the kids how to use some of my tools.

"Clarke." When he walks in, the kids all say a quick thank you to me and scurry off. "I was surprised to hear that you are here. And more surprised that you came alone. What were you thinking? It is not safe for you to be out there alone."

"I'm fine. I was really careful and I brought my bow, nothing happened."

"That's not the point Clarke, something could have happened. The Northerners could be moving south any day now." I know he's right. No one should be traveling alone right now.

"Ok, I didn't mean to worry you, I'm sorry."

Isaac steps a little closer to me and I can see a tense look in his eyes. "I will always worry about you Clarke, even when you're safe in the bunker, I know you can usually take care of yourself though. Right now it's not about that, you are too important to all of us to be playing with your life
"Ok," I say stepping forward and hugging him. He hands stay at his sides for a moment before he returns the gesture. "Should we eat?" I ask taking a step back.

"Sure. I'll meet you at the fire. I have some things to discuss with my father first. We're calling a meeting with Anya tomorrow to make final plans. The Northerners seem to be getting ready to move and we need to be ready first."

"Is anyone coming to represent the Sky People?"

"I sent someone to invite their leader." Isaac walks out of the tent and I head towards the fire in a fresh jumble of emotions. I know Bellamy should be here since his people will fight, but I'm worried about seeing him. Especially here with Isaac. I know he would never do anything stupid or make a scene, but I think seeing me here with Isaac will hurt him.

I reach the fire and take a seat to wait for Isaac. After a few moments his mother sits down beside me. She's usually with Isaac's father for important discussions so I'm surprised she is not with him now.

"Hello Clarke," she says in her usual cold tone. I've never thought of her as mean, but, right now, she has a coldness about her that makes me uneasy. She is tall and thin and beautiful but her face is not warm or particularly friendly.

"Hello," I say in return, bowing my head slightly.

"I know you are a busy girl Clarke so I'm not going to waste your time or mine. I hear that you have been spending a lot of your time with one of the Sky People, their leader I believe. I am sure this is in a purely friendly manner because, as you remember, this is the year you will join us here as Isaac's wife," I'm too shocked to say anything, all I can manage is to keep my expression as neutral as possible. I stare at the fire as she continues. "It would be a shame for you to get too attached to this boy, he is, after all, a fragile creature. The Sky People are not made to survive as we are. I have no reason to believe you will back out of the treaty, but I still thought a reminder of the terms may be in order. If you do not marry Isaac, we will not protect you or your precious Sky People from the Northerners, or anyone else. This boy you seem to be so fond of would, of course, be the first to go. I hope we understand each other, daughter."

With that, she stands up and walks away from the fire. My head is suddenly burning and I stand up to get away from the flames that seem to be boiling my thoughts. I can feel by heart pounding in my head and my ears. I don't even bother to wonder how she found out, it doesn't matter. She sees Bellamy as a threat to her son and she will do anything to protect him. She has always loved Isaac fiercely. I take a few deep breaths and head back to the fire. At least now I have an answer, any fleeting thoughts I had of going to Bellamy are now gone. I know what I have to do, the only way I can keep Bellamy safe is by marrying Isaac. I feel oddly calm with the decision taken out of my hands so completely. I never realistically considering breaking the treaty, but the though has slipped into my mind as I drift off to sleep alone in the bunker.

By the time Isaac arrives at the fire I have regained my composure. He passes me a piece of meat that has been cooked on a stick and a cup of some kind of moonshine.

"It's not cider, but it'll warm you up a bit," he says with a small smile. We sit there for a few hours making conversation about how we have each passed the winter. I have to leave out a lot of my story since it mostly involves Bellamy. I didn't realize until now what a large part of my life he had become.
The next day we meet at the fire for lunch to discuss the plans for the coming weeks. I'm surprised to see Finn here instead of Bellamy. He came north with Lincoln. He hugs me warmly when we meet just outside the fire pit.

"What are you doing here, Finn? Why didn't Bellamy come?"

"He was out hunting with Octavia when Lincoln got to the camp so Raven and I decided I would come in his place. I'm not sure how much help I'll be though."

"That's okay, their leader usually does all of the talking when he calls the meetings. If you have any questions you can ask at the end, I wouldn't really recommend it unless it's important. He's pretty formal."

"Thanks," he says with a wide smile. "Just kick me if I say anything stupid, okay."

I laugh and we find our seats at the fire. Anya, Isaac, and both his parents are already sitting around the fire when we take our seats. Isaac's sister passes out drinks again and I shake my head at her slightly when I see her eyeing Finn.

Isaac's father stands up to speak and we all listen quietly. "The Northerners are preparing to move south. Our scouts have seen them gathering materials and weapons. We believe they will be here within two weeks. We ask that everyone who is planning to fight join us here. We will defend our territories from the mountain ridge just north of here. Anya, your riders should move south and east now to gather the River Clan and bring any supplies or weapons the Water People can send. We ask that some of our people, mostly the elderly and children, be allowed to stay with the Forest Clan until the war is over. We will use the bunker as a last resort. Clarke has set up a hospital here and brought food, medical supplies and weapons. Sky People," he says looking to Finn. "What will you contribute to this battle?"

I nudge Finn and he stands up to speak. He looks calm to be in a situation with everyone's eyes on him. He's handsome though, so he is probably used to having people's eyes on him by now.

"We have guns, bombs and fighters. There are only 83 of us left and some of our people are too young or weak to fight. We can send 50 people to fight."

"Good." Isaac's father turns away from Finn, ready to move on, but Finn keeps talking.

"I also wanted to ask you if there is any other way to resolve this? Have you tried to negotiate with the Northerners? Do we know what they want?"

"They want to kill us and take our land." Anya blurts out from the far end of the fire. I kick Finn's leg a little but he doesn't sit down.

"They can't be all evil," Finn says turning to Anya. "I know we are new here, but I just want to make sure we're not joining a fight that could be prevented. If you can all make peace together why can't we make peace with them?"

"Perhaps someday we will." Isaac's father is address all of us as he speaks. "We are not so different from them. Opposite sides of the same tree, one cracked and dry, one covered in moss. The north can make you strong and brave, but it can also make you cold and empty. The same things that have made us strong and determined have left them angry and desperate. Struggling through the winter can leave you stronger, but it can also scar you so badly that you can't even recognize the summer anymore. There will be no peace this time."

Finn sits down, and I give him a look. I'm glad he said it though. As much as I hate what the Northerners did to my parents and my brother, I know it wasn't all of them and I know that people
can change. It's nice to be reminded of that. This just isn't the time to lay down our swords.

We all stay and talk around the fire for a few more minutes before spreading out through the camp. The days are getting longer but the sun is still setting early so none of us will make the trip home tonight. I give Finn a tour of the settlement and he seems genuinely interested in the history of their people. I can see why Raven loves him so much.

We spend the night at the fire talking and drinking. Finn tells everyone stories about the Ark and even Isaac's dad seems interested. When we head back to our tents Isaac leaves to take watch at the far end of the camp. He'll probably still be asleep when I leave tomorrow, after keeping watch over his people through the night. I promise to walk home with Lincoln and his people and Isaac seems satisfied with that.

The next morning, Lincoln and I walk in silence for most of the trip while the three men he brought with him walk behind us. We are almost at the meadow when he finally speaks.

"Do you love him?"

"It's not about love, Lincoln. Isaac and I work well together and the tribes need the Mountain Men."

"I'm not asking about Isaac." Lincoln doesn't have to say Bellamy's name for me to know exactly who he's talking about.

"That doesn't matter. I will marry Isaac, regardless of how I may feel about anyone else."

"You could go away you know, go south and live with Gael and Arryn or east to the Water People. The tribes would survive without you."

"I'm sure they would, but I think we should do more than just survive." The tribes would probably make things work without me, but I cannot risk anything happening to Bellamy, or his people. The Sky People have the least to contribute to the other tribes right now and with the Ark out of the picture they can't promise more supplies or information.

"You should do more than just survive too, Clarke, you should be happy."

"Lincoln, you know me well enough to know that I'm not going to run away, I can't leave the bunker and I can't break the treaty. I would rather give up a little of my happiness than abandon everyone to fend for themselves. What do you think would happen to Octavia if I ran away with her brother? Do you really think those kids can defend themselves against the Northerners without any help?"

Lincoln is quiet for a minute and the conversation seems to be over. He sighs a little and stops walking, we've reached the ridge by the bunker.

"Do you want to come in and eat?" I ask.

Lincoln just shakes his head. "Isaac would understand, Clarke. He would want you to be happy."

"I will be happy," I say with a smile and I know it's true. Maybe not the happiest I could be, but that's not the world we live in anymore. We don't always get to make our choices with only our hearts. "I will be happy to watch you and Octavia start a life together and to watch the Sky People thrive and grow. I will be happy to help Isaac lead his people and watch over the tribes. We can make our own happiness, Lincoln."

I can tell he's not convinced because he just frowns a little and hugs me before heading home. As I
walk towards to bunker I know I'm not totally convinced either, but I want to be. I think about the Water People and the way they take joy in the simple things in life, I used to be able to do that, feel happy about all the little wonders that surround me and by helping the people I care about. Meeting Bellamy changed things though, the things that used to make me happy on my own made me so much happier when I could share them with him.

As I walk into the bunker I'm so lost in my thoughts that it takes me a moment to realize the lights in the library are already on and there is a faint warmth coming from the kitchen. I set my bag down quietly and draw my bow as I scan the room. I don't notice the figure sitting in one of the old chairs next to the door until he speaks.

"Afternoon, Princess."
Chapter 17

Bellamy

"Bellamy." Clarke looks surprised as she lowers her bow and returns an arrow to its quiver. "How did you get in here?"

I smirk a little and enjoy the confused look on her face. "Come on Princess, even a lion knows there's always a spare key somewhere." When I got to the bunker and found the door locked it took me a few minutes to guess where Clarke might hide a key. She's too sensible not to leave one hidden away somewhere, she would never risk everything being lost. I found it tied to a tall branch of the apple tree she loves so much.

Clarke laughs, and, just like that, it feels as if the past month of silence and anger has been erased. We talk and joke for a while as Clarke makes a simple soup for us to eat. I stand next to her, leaning against the table as she names and chops different vegetables. She tosses me a few to try raw, the carrots are my favourite.

Neither of us mention what happened, I think we're both too scared to disrupt whatever tentative peace we have established by ignoring what happened. It's easier than I thought to erase the anger I felt, when I look at her I don't feel any anger or pain, I just feel at home.

"So," Clarke starts as she pulls two bowls from the shelf. "I was thinking we could plan a garden for the spring. It takes a lot of food to feed your people and if you keep hunting in the forest there won't be much meat left. I have plenty of seeds and you could send a few people to stay here with me and help with the work. I'm sure Jasper would enjoy it. They can stay here for the season in one of the empty rooms. When this war is behind us, you'll need to start thinking about the future and building a long term settlement." She has a wistful look about her when she talks about the future. I know she feels responsible for helping people survive and grow.

"Sure, I bet you'll have more than a few people interested though, Jasper has been telling everyone about the bunker and your food, and the honey." She smiles and puts a bowl on the table in front of me. She looks like she wants to say something else but she's not sure how to start.

"I also think, maybe, your people would like to move here eventually, the drop ship is so close to Anya's hunting territory. If you moved further south you could hunt on the far side of the meadow and fish in the lake. There is plenty of room to build tents or small houses in the meadow."

"And what about you?" I ask. I can think of nothing I'd rather do than make my home here with Clarke, but I don't think that's what she means. "Will you be here?"

"No," she answers quietly without looking up from her bowl. "I won't be here after the summer. I was thinking maybe Octavia would like to live here eventually. I don't want it to sit here empty when I'm gone." I can't imagine the bunker without Clarke running around pulling out books and bottles and random things I can't even identify. I know Octavia would love it here though.

"You should ask her, I'm sure she'll be thrilled. She really likes you Clarke. I know she loves me, but I think she always kind of wanted a sister. I was never very good at tea parties and that's kind of your specialty." I'm happy to see Clarke smile a little and the tension that was building in her shoulders seems to fade.
"Well, you and Octavia are welcome to stay here, or Raven and Finn. I just want to see the place taken care of. I'd like for my children to be able to move back here some day, if they choose too."

"Are you sure you have to leave?"

Clarke takes a deep breath and pauses for minute. "Yes."

I don't say anything for a while. I don't want to push Clarke and I'm not willing to start an argument with her. She's obviously happy to have me here today and for now, that's enough. When we finish eating, Clarke clears off our bowls and as she leans across the table to pick up mine I notice a leather string peaking out from the collar of her shirt.

"You found the necklace."

"Oh," she says putting her hand to her neck. "I did. I love it Bellamy, it's beautiful, isn't it amazing that an oyster can turn a random invading parasite into something so beautiful."

"Hmm and I just picked it up because the colour reminded me of your hair in the firelight when you were singing. What am I going to do when you're not here to explain the wonders of the world to me," I say just a little sarcastically. I stand up and walk around the table so I'm in front of her just a few inches away. Clarke is frozen and it sounds like she's holding her breath. I reach up to pull the necklace out from under Clarke's shirt and as I do my hand brushes against the side of her neck. Her skin is so soft and warm. I want to put my hand on her shoulders and her neck and her face, but I don't, I just smile and walk back into the library. I hear Clarke take a deep breath behind me as I make my way over to the chairs next to the bunker door. We sit here a lot talking and looking through books. The chairs are horribly old and uncomfortable so we usually end up sitting on the floor with books spread out around us. After a few minutes Clarke comes out of the kitchen with two cups of tea. When I take a sip of mine it tastes sweeter than usual, like honey. Clarke pulls out a few books about farming and shows me some of the tools she might need for a bigger garden. She draws a few sketches for me to take back to camp and try to make from our scrap metal. She's sitting on the floor in front of one of the chairs leaned over a book sketching a simple plough we can use to clear the land when a lock of her blond hair falls in front of her face and I can't stop myself. I reach over and brush her hair out of her eyes. Clarke stops and looks up at me but she doesn't pull away.

"Bellamy..." She looks like she's trying to get her thoughts together and I don't give her the chance to think of a reason to stop. If I let her convince herself, or me, that this is a bad idea, I may never get the chance again. I lean forward and press my hand to the side of her neck and slide it up, her head tilts slowly towards me until her cheek rests against my palm. I press my lips against hers, gently at first then, when she doesn't pull away, I kiss her harder. After a moment she pulls back just enough to rest her forehead against my nose. "Bellamy...I can't..." she whispers against my lips. I'm about to let go when I feel her hand slide up my neck and her fingers tangle in my hair. She holds her hand there for a moment and keeps her face against mine. I don't move, I don't want to pull away and I don't want to push her forward. When I feel her fingers tighten ever so slightly in my hair and her lips twitch against mine I kiss her again and again and again. My free hand moves down to the small of her back pulling her against me until she is sitting almost on top of me. She is so soft and warm and her body feels right tangled with mine, I feel whole. I pull away ever so slightly so I can see Clarke's face. I move both of my hands up her neck until I'm cupping her face in front of mine. Her breath is frantic and warm against my face, she smells like honey.

"Clarke," I whisper as she stares back into my eyes. "I.."
"Stop!" She jerks back and pulls herself to her knees a few feet away from me. "Bellamy don't, please don't." Her eyes look scared and frantic. I'm not sure what made her pull away, I search her eyes for some clue, my body feels suddenly cold and empty without her skin on mine.
Chapter 18

Clarke

I can't breathe. My heart is pounding and the room is spinning around me. I shouldn't have let things go this far. I can't let him say the words I know he was about to say and at the same time I want to tell him exactly the same thing. This is so careless. If Isaac's mother knows Bellamy has been visiting, she might know he's here now. I cannot believe I was so irresponsible. I was just so happy to see Bellamy and get back a little of what I had lost over the past few weeks that I let myself get too caught up in my emotions. I take a deep breath and try to turn them off, at least for now. When I open my eyes and see the way Bellamy is looking at me, I know it didn't work.

"Bellamy," I say when I have calmed my breath enough to speak without panting. "We can't do this. I'm marrying Isaac."

Bellamy just looks at me for a while before he says anything. He doesn't look hurt, just sad and there's something else in his eyes I can't quite place - longing?

"Why? There's obviously something going on here Clarke. If you want to marry him so badly, what are you doing here with me?"

"I live here, Bellamy. What are you doing here?" I back away from him a little and try to sound casual and joking. He moves towards me as I move away though and keeps his eyes on mine. He's not going to let me laugh this off and move on.

"I think you know exactly why I'm here."

I stand up and he stands up too, stepping towards me so he's looking down at me. His brown eyes are burning into mine. I can't think straight with Bellamy this close to me, all I want to do is reach out and bury my hands in his hair and kiss him. I know I can't, I won't risk anything happening to him. Isaac's mother's words are ringing in my ears 'he's such a fragile creature.' I close my eyes and take a deep breath before speaking.

"Bellamy, I like having you here and I want us to be friends, but I need you to understand, that's all this is. I shouldn't have kissed you."

"This is way past friendship, Clarke". Bellamy tucks a stray strand of hair behind my ear and leans ever so slightly towards me. I don't want to move away, but I do. I have to look away from him to stop myself from moving to meet his lips. The way he's staring at me is breaking my resolve, I don't know if I can keep pushing him away while he's moving towards me like this, and I can't bear to think about what could happen if I don't push him away. I hear that cold voice in head again 'their leader would be the first to go.' I take a deep breath and speak.

"No, it's not. Bellamy," I say as coldly as I can manage. I pour all of my anger at the situation into my words. "This will never be anything more than friendship, and maybe a fleeting attraction. I could never be with you. Life on the ground is hard and if you couldn't even protect Octavia and your mother on the Ark how the hell are you going to protect me here? I can't build a life with someone as weak and pathetic as you."

I hate myself for saying it before the words have even come out of my mouth. Bellamy's face drops and he takes a step back. He looks wounded and I see anger welling up in his eyes, I know
he will let me go now. I have to be the cold, unloving, superior princess he thought I was when we met.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Princess," he replies, spitting the words through his clenched jaw. "You have no idea the things I've done to keep my people safe."

I stare back at him, unwilling to back down now that I've started. If he hates me, this will be so much easier. He knows I will help his people, so he would never turn on me completely, but he will never look at me the same way again.

"I know exactly what you've done because each time you come crying to me for redemption and forgiveness. You are weak and afraid and I could never love you Bellamy." I can feel my eyes burning and my voice is coming out tangled and foreign.

Bellamy doesn't say anything else. He just turns around and picks up the pack he left by the door and walks out of my life. This time I know he won't be back, but he'll be alive and that will have to be enough for me.

As the door closes behind him I collapse into the floor. I can't move and despite the burning in my eyes, I can't cry either. I sit there frozen for I don't know how long. My insides are twisted and my head is spinning. I close my eyes and try to will myself to calm down. I take deep breaths and think about Bellamy having a happy life, he will marry someone and build a home and father children. He will be a wonderful father. I try to find comfort in the fact that his hatred for me secures him a chance at a happy life, but I still just feel empty. Eventually I must fall asleep on the floor because the next time I open my eyes, it's morning. I finally pull myself off the floor when I hear someone at the door.

"Clarke, are you in there?" It sounds like Octavia.

Lincoln steps in the door before I can manage to pull myself together. He doesn't say anything but he gives me a knowing look of sympathy. Octavia steps out from behind him and she looks like she's seen a ghost.

"Oh my god Clarke," she says rushing over to me. "What happened? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," I reply, pushing my hair out of face and attempting to straighten my clothes. I notice the pearl Bellamy gave me is still hanging outside of my shirt so I tuck it away again. "What are you guys doing here so early?"

This time it's Lincoln who speaks. "Two of the Sky people were attacked in the woods early this morning. They are hurt pretty badly. One of them is Raven."

I nod and walk to the room closest to the entrance of the bunker. All of the important medical supplies are kept here and I leave an emergency bag by the door for visits like this. I grab the pack and we walk out of the bunker. I feel suddenly more calm, this is what my life has always been and it feels familiar and strangely comforting. I know where I stand and what I need to do. There are no emotions involved and I don't have to worry about hurting anyone.
Chapter 19

Bellamy

Our medical tent is pathetic compared to the hospital on the Ark. I remind myself it's the only thing we have so it will have to make due.

"Bellamy, I told you, I'm fine. Just let me pull out this damn arrow already." Finn has Raven's hands in his to keep her from pulling out the arrow that runs through her abdomen. She has a huge bump on her head and there's blood running down her neck. The other kid, Max I think, is out cold. He got the worst of it. His hand is smashed and mangled and he has a deep cut on his shoulder. He lost a lot of blood on the way back to camp, Raven had to practically drag him. She lost her radio in the fight and some of the guards heard her screaming when she got near the wall. They were able to carry both of them the rest of the way. We're doing what we can for them, but it's not much. I didn't realize how much our doctor depended on guidance for the Ark to carry out medical procedures. With the radio link down, he can hardly manage stitches. I guess that's one of the downfalls of growing up somewhere with so much technology, he's completely dependent on computer assistance to carry out medical procedures. Octavia recognized his shortcoming and took off as soon as we brought in Raven and Max - she went to get Clarke. She's the last person in the world I want to see, but I won't watch this kid die out of spite.

"Raven, I told you already, if you try to pull that thing out yourself I will tie your hands." I give her a look that says I'm not playing around.

I walk over to her side and notice a worried look on Finn's face. It almost seems like he's being supported by Raven rather than the other way around. Somehow I imagine she's far too stubborn to ever die.

"So what the hell are we waiting for then? This arrow isn't coming out on it's own." Raven asks impatiently.

"Octavia went to get Clarke," Finn answers. "She'll be here soon."

Raven seems to relax a little and just sits there fidgeting, I think this is the longest I've ever seen her sit still. It's not much longer before the tent flap covering the drop ship door swings open and Clarke runs in with Octavia and Lincoln. She looks like she must have run most of the way here, her cheeks are flushed and the strands of hair around her face are sticking to her neck and forehead. Damn it, she still looks beautiful.

Clarke's eyes widen as they meet mine and she freezes for a split second before she sees Raven and Max.

"Raven you're good right?" Clarke asks giving her a once over and stepping towards the other table.

"Just peachy Clarke, take your time."

Clarke quickly disinfects her hands and passes a bottle of moonshine to Octavia and Lincoln.

"I need your hands clean in case I need help. If he wakes up, I may need someone to hold him down." She takes a quick look at his shoulder and decides to deal with his hand first. "Octavia, can you stitch his shoulder? I don't want him loosing any more blood."
"Sure." Octavia walks over and takes a needle and sutures from Clarke.

"Nice and straight, just like I showed you okay?" Octavia nods and gets to work.

"Bellamy," I freeze when Clarke calls my name. Instead of the warm feeling I used to get when she spoke to me I just feel cold. "Come hold his shoulder steady for Octavia."

She passes me the moonshine to disinfect and I can't help but notice the string of her necklace peeking out of her shirt. I don't know what to think about that, it's not important now though so I just move to help Octavia.

Clarke spends a few minutes looking at Max's hand, probing each bone and joint. I glare at her the whole time, I don't care if she notices or not, it just feels good to be angry at her right now. I opened up to her more than anyone else, ever, and the whole time she was judging me. I can't believe I was so wrong about her - twice.

"Lincoln, we're going to have to take it off. I need the big curved knife from my bag, clean it for me."

"Take what off?" asks Finn, suddenly stepping over towards us.

"His hand," Clarke answers like it's a completely normal thing to say. "The blood hasn't been getting to his fingers and the flesh is already compromised. The best thing to do is take it off at the wrist. If I can cut through the joint it should heal more cleanly."

Everyone has stopped to look at Clarke. Only Lincoln is still focused on his work, finding Clarke's knife. She's pulled out another bag and is rummaging through some small jars.

"Octavia," Clarke says when she's found whatever she was looking for. "How are the stitches coming? I can't start until you have him closed up there."

"Oh yeah," Octavia looks back down at what she was doing, "I'm almost finished."

"Are you sure about this Clarke? There's got to be another option." Finn looks nervous about what Clarke is planning to do.

"Maybe a few hours ago, but not now. It's too late to save his hand and if I don't take it off now he could lose his whole arm. I don't have the right materials for reconstructive surgery anyways, so even if I had been here when it happened, I still probably would have had to take it off. His bones are all shattered."

When Octavia finishes with the stitches Clarke asks me to keep holding Max down while she and Lincoln work on cutting off his hand. Clarke gives him some kind of injection and ties off his arm just above his wrist. I've never seen so much blood before, I don't look away though. I think back to that day Clarke was cut with the spear and the way it hurt to see her bleeding. This is different, I know it's bad and the kid might not make it but I don't feel the same dread and worry. I think I must have loved her even then - stupid me.

Clarke and Lincoln work together to cut and sew until Max has a neat row of stitches where his hand used to be. Clarke looks exhausted as she gets up and starts cleaning her hands. She turns to me with a slight smile on her face and I'm surprised when she speaks to me.

"Thanks Bellamy, you did a great job." Her voice is quiet and almost apologetic.

"I don't need your approval," I practically growl at her. "Just get Raven fixed up so you can get
She just nods in response and moves towards Raven. I can feel everyone's eyes on me as I walk to the edge of the room and lean against the wall. Raven's injury must not be very bad because Clarke starts working on her quickly and even jokes around a bit. As I watch her work I can feel Octavia's eyes still on me. I'm sure she's wondering why I'm staring daggers at Clarke but I don't really care. She could tell I was angry as soon as I got back to camp. I snapped at her and I never do that.

As soon as Clarke declares Raven healthy I turn and walk out of the drop ship. I don't want to be in the same room with her any longer than I have to. Just looking at her reminds me of all of my shortcomings and insecurities. I'm scared everything she said was true, what if I am too weak to protect my people?

I stalk around the camp checking on things and making sure people are at their posts. The gate has been kept closed at all times for over a month now. It feels like the panicked atmosphere we got used to during our first weeks on the ground. I circle the wall a half dozen times looking for any weak spots or dozing guards. Raven managed to shoot her attacker before he could finish her off, who knows how many others are still out there though. It's night by the time I realize I never ate. I'm not sure if there's anything left of whatever was cooked for dinner but I head towards the fire anyways. I stop by the drop ship on my way and grab the bottle of moonshine Clarke was a using to disinfect. Raven has already moved back to her tent with Finn playing nurse and Clarke must have found people to watch over Max because I see a couple figures sleeping on makeshift cots next to the table where he still lies unconscious.

I'm almost at the fire when the flames shift and illuminate a head of blond hair next to Octavia. She's shaking slightly and reaches up to wipe her nose with her sleeve. She's crying. Good. I stop just behind a tree and listen.

"You don't understand Octavia. I don't want him to forgive me. I said all those things to push him away. I need him to hate me. It's the only way I can do this," Clarke says in a weak voice. Her breathing seems irregular like she's still trying to calm herself down. "He just kept looking at me with those eyes, like I was the only thing in the world and I panicked. I said everything I could to make him hate me."

"Well, you're doing a pretty good job then Clarke. I haven't seen him this upset in, well, ever really. He yelled at me. And Miller had to stop him from beating up a few kids. I still don't get why you're trying to piss him off though. Most people I know spend their time trying to stay in his good books. Especially the girls in camp, they're literally lining up to get his attention."

"Good," Clarke manages to croak out. It sounds like she's swallowing a sob. I'm not sure what to think anymore. I fight the urge to step out from the tree that separates me from the two girls. I want to tell her I could never really hate her, but her words still hurt.

"Octavia, I can't be with Bellamy and every time he looks at me it just makes it so much harder to bear. I can't have him around, and if he thinks I don't care about him or that I think he's weak, he'll stay away. When I was 11 my grandmother promised me to Isaac as part of a treaty. When summer ends I'll move to the mountains and start my life there with him. I never though much about it before you guys landed, Isaac's always been a friend and I think he might even love me in his own way. But now, everything is different. I feel like I'm being torn apart."

Octavia places her hand on Clarke's shoulder and leans in a little closer.
"So, you'd rather be with Bellamy?" Octavia asks quietly as she gently rubs Clarke's shoulder.

Clarke takes a deep breath and turns to Octavia. "Yes," she says just barely above a whisper. She shakes her head and straightens up like she's trying to regain her composure. "It's not my choice though. The treaty has already been settled. If I don't marry Isaac the Mountain Men will back out, at best they'll stop protecting the borders of the area and at worst they'll kill Bellamy and probably the rest of you too. Look at what happened today, and that's with Isaac's tribe patrolling the border. Imagine the bloodbath if they just went home and let the Northerners past. The best way to keep Bellamy safe is to stay away from him, but I don't think I'm strong enough to do that. When he looks at me, all I can think about is being with him."

I turn away from the fire and lean my back against the tree to stop myself from going to her. Brave, selfless Clarke. Of course she's doing what she thinks is best for everyone else. All I want to do is go to her, carry her to my tent and pretend the rest of the world doesn't exist. I have to do what's best for my people too, and if that means letting Clarke go, then that's what I have to do. I've already sacrificed so much to keep Octavia safe over the years, and now this is what needs to be done. We won't survive here alone, I need to give up Clarke and let her do what she thinks is best for all of us. I trust her decisions enough to know that if this is what she believes will keep us all safe, it must be the right choice. As I am getting ready to slip unnoticed back into the tangle of tents that make up our camp, I hear the conversation continue.

"So you figured you'd just piss Bellamy off until he stopped talking to you?" Octavia asks. "You should tell him the truth Clarke, it's not fair to him to have him think you don't respect him or care about him."

"I don't know Octavia, I guess you're right, I doubt he'll even listen to me though."

Shit. They must have gotten up from the fire while I was lost in my thoughts. Their conversation is getting louder. I scan the area around me for somewhere to hide.

"Bellamy?" I look to my right to see Clarke staring at me.

"Well," says Octavia smiling. "I guess that solves it. I'm off to bed, I'm sure you two have a lot to catch up on. Goodnight Bells, night Clarke." She waves over her shoulder as she heads off to her tent, or more likely to meet Lincoln, now that she knows I won't be checking on her.

I look back to Clarke and manage a sheepish smile. I move towards the fire and she follows.

"So, how long were you standing there?" She asks hesitantly as she sits down a few feet away from me.

"Long enough not to hate you." I smirk at her and inch a little closer on the log that serves as a bench. "If this is what you need to do Clarke, I'll respect your decision. If you want me to stay away from you, I will."

Clarke is quiet for a minute, just staring at the fire. "It's not about what I want." She takes a deep breath and pauses for another minute before she continues.

"I'm sorry for what I said Bellamy. I was scared, overwhelmed. I'm sorry I didn't trust you enough to tell you the truth, I just panicked. I don't think you're weak at all, you're one of the strongest people I know. The thing is, I always kind of knew where my life was going, and then you landed and things started to change. I can't be with you though, I can't walk away from the treaty. It's too important to everyone that this works."

"I get it." I hate it, but I understand. I have Octavia and the rest of my people to protect but, the
way Clarke sees it, she has three, now four, entire groups of people to look out for.

"I don't want to lose you Bellamy, I was serious about us being friends. I don't know if I can do it now, but someday. I want you to be a part of my life, but, right now, I don't think I can be around you. I know that sounds horrible and mean, it's just too much though."

I give her a smirk and put my arm around her shoulder as I erase the space between us. "I know, I'm pretty irresistible. Let's just sit here and enjoy the fire for tonight, ok Princess."

She leans into me and I think I hear a slight giggle.

"I'm not ready to lose you yet either," I say as I rest my chin gently on her head. She smells like lavender and mint and old books. "We need you, I need you. But, it seems like the other tribes need you just as much. Let's stay here for now and we can worry about hating each other tomorrow."

She sighs a little and nods. We sit there together in silence passing the bottle of moonshine back and forth until the fire loses its battle with the night. I let my mind wander over the possibilities of what our life could have been, tucking each dream into a box I can put away in some dark corner of my mind. If the Ark taught me anything about life, it was to lock away my dreams where they can't hurt me. Our lives will run parallel but they will never intertwine.

When Clarke starts to shiver I take her by the hand and walk her back to Octavia's tent. I savour the feeling of her delicate but strong fingers wrapped around mine. She smiles at me and kisses me gently on the cheek before retreating into the tent for the night.

I cross the camp towards my own tent. It's bigger and sturdier than the makeshift tents we built out of the drop ship's parachute in the days after we landed. It still feels temporary though. I remind myself that if we make it through the battle we need to build real homes. Maybe I'll take Clarke up on her offer to move to the meadow, I don't know if it would be easier or harder to live there in her shadow, but I really do hate the forest.

When I walk into my tent I see that I'm not alone. There is a half naked girl asleep on my bed. I remember flirting with her earlier in my anger. She's not Clarke, but she's warm, and I don't want to be alone so I remove my boots and climb into bed next to her.
Chapter 20

The next morning I decide to do a quick check on Raven and Max before getting ready to head back to the bunker. Gael should be arriving today or tomorrow and I want to be there to meet him. When I stop at the fire for breakfast before checking on Raven, I see Bellamy giving instructions to some of his guards. I have to force myself to look away before he sees me staring at him. By the time I finish with Raven and make it to the drop ship Max still hasn't woken up and he may not. Other than wait, there isn't much for me to do. I gave him some of Finn's blood last night so that should help with the blood loss. I give instructions to the two kids who have been watching over him and leave what few medications I can spare. As I leave the drop ship I pass Bellamy walking in with another group of kids. He's talking while he walks but when he sees me he falls silent for a second and looks away until I pass by.

Lincoln is already packed to head back to the bunker when I find him. Octavia makes him promise to stay with me until Gael arrives so we can all make the trip to the mountains together.

"It's not safe Lincoln, and if anything happened to you..." Her voice trails off and he lifts her up by the waist to kiss her. I turn away and walk slowly towards the gate so Lincoln has time to catch up.

"Clarke!" An unfamiliar voice calls my name and I see one of the guards Bellamy was talking to earlier jog towards me.

"Here," he says holding out a large handgun. I've used one like it before. There are a few stashed on top of the shelves in the library in case of an emergency. There are very few bullets left though so I prefer to use my knife. I make no move to accept it. "Bellamy said to give this to you."

"Well he must be confused because that's not mine," I say with a smile as I turn away. I know my bow will kill someone just as quickly as that gun but it still makes me a little uneasy. Maybe it's the cold metal I've grown up so unaccustomed to feeling in my hands, or the deafening sound of a shot being fired.

"It's for your trip home, for protection." He's still holding the gun out towards me and I still keep my hands tucked inside my jacket pockets.

"Look...I'm sorry, what was your name?"

"Miller."

"Ok look Miller I really appreciate it, but I'm more comfortable with my bow and I don't want to take any of your weapons. I'm sure someone here could use it more than me." He's starting to look a little frustrated and he shifts uncomfortably on his feet. He steps a little closer to me and his voice drops a bit.

"Bellamy said to give you this gun and if you don't take it I have to escort you back to your bunker. I saw what happened to Max and I really don't want be out there alone on the trip back here so please, just take the damn gun."

I scan the camp and see Bellamy watching us from about fifty meters away. I nod to Miller and take the gun, making a point to check the clip and tuck it very obviously in the back of my jeans
so Bellamy is sure I have it.

"Thank you," Miller says quietly. "And thanks for Max too, he's a good kid."

I give Miller a quick hug and head towards the gate where Lincoln is now waiting for me. We walk home quietly, there is a feeling of uneasiness that I haven't felt in the woods in years. Lincoln walks just in front of me scanning the trees and I keep my bow in my hands just in case. The trip is uneventful and when we arrive at the bunker it is still early in the day. I convince Lincoln to help me plant a few early spring crops and we spend most of the day outside tilling and planting. I catch Lincoln looking at me a few times like he wants to say something, but I think he knows that after our last conversation there is nothing left to say. By the time we finish for the day we are both covered in sweat so we walk to the lake to rinse off. The water is cold when I step in, but it feels good. I stand in the shallows scrubbing dirt from my hands while Lincoln pulls out an old wet stone and begins sharpening his sword.

"What will happen to all of this when you leave?" He asks without looking up from his sword. His hands are steady and dexterous. He has done this many times before.

"I don't really know," I say standing up and scanning the area. "I invited the Sky People to live here. A few of them are going to come help with planting and harvesting over the summer so they can learn how to grow their own food. Hopefully they can build homes here and keep things going."

"You're giving the bunker to Bellamy?" Lincoln stops for a moment and looks up at me.

"Not just to him," I reply still gazing out at the places that hold most of the memories of my life. The apple tree I climbed as a child and harvest from every year, the lake where I learned to swim and fish, the patches of garden, still mostly bare, that fed me all these years. "It's for all of them. They need a place to live and grow and the meadow needs someone to watch over it. I can't let all of my family's work have been for nothing. Don't you think Octavia would like it here?"

Lincoln smiles a little. "Actually I think she has her eye on one particular little cave in the woods."

I splash him as I walk back to the shore and laugh to myself. "If you had told me 5 months ago that Octavia wanted to move into a cave with you I would have thought you were completely crazy. She's changed so much."

"No she hasn't, no one ever really changes Clarke, they just learn a little more about who they truly are. Octavia had always been strong and brave, she just had no reason to show it until now."

I nod and Lincoln starts putting his sword away. The cool night air is coming in quickly and we should be heading back to the bunker.

"She looks up to you, you know, the way you take care of people and always know the right thing to do." This time I laugh out loud.

"Well then don't tell her that lately I have no idea what I'm doing." I say shaking my head.

Lincoln sleeps by the door to the bunker incase Gael arrives in the night and I toss and turn in my room. When I finally drift off to sleep I dream of Bellamy. We meet in the woods and he doesn't remember who I am. We fight and I wake up as he stabs me in the stomach.

Lincoln is already awake when I make my way into the library and we head outside to eat our breakfast. The mornings are still chilly this time of year but the fresh air always feels nice. A few hours pass before the River Clan arrives. Lincoln and I are outside planting when we spot them coming out of the woods on the far side of the meadow. As they approach I can hear Arryn's
voice long before I can make out her figure in the crowd of what must be at least 100 fighters. I thrust the bag of seeds I'm holding at Lincoln and take off towards her.

"Arryn," I call as I approach and wrap her in a strong hug. She hugs me back and neither of us let go. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh come on, Clarke, I can't let you and Gael have all the fun," she says finally letting go and taking a small step back so she can look at me. Her hands are still on my shoulders and I haven't let go of her either. "Oh my god, you're like a full grown person now. I can't believe how big you are."

"Arryn, I'm actually pretty short."

"Ok fine, you look pretty much the same, it seemed like the right thing to say though." Arryn makes a funny face and reaches her hand up to my neck. "What's this?" she asks pulling the pearl from under my shirt. "Wow, you finally found a pearl, I can see what all the fuss was about, it's beautiful."

"Thanks, I didn't find it thought, it was a gift. I visited the Water People in the fall."

"Was it that kid who used to give you dreamy looks every time you sang? He was always a little weird."

"They're all weird Arryn. And no it wasn't one of them. Some guy made me sing though so I guess that must have been the same kid, is it horrible that I didn't remember him?" I try to lead the subject away from the necklace as I tuck it back in my shirt.

"Yes it is Clarke," Arryn says sarcastically. "You should beg the forgiveness of the great turtle mother." We both laugh and Arryn takes my hand as we walk towards the bunker with the rest of her people. It's strange that no matter how long she's gone we always fall into the same relationship when she returns.

It is still fairly early in the day, but we decide to make the trip to the mountains tomorrow. The River Clan has come a long way already and the trip to Isaac's settlement will take another full day. Arryn and I spend the day together, talking and joking. I give her the shells I collected on the beach and she pulls out a few books she found for me. Most of them are reference books and a few classic novels. The last one she pulls out catches my eyes.

"Is that Slaughterhouse Five?" I ask taking the book from her hands and leafing through it. "Great grandma wrote about this in the old journals. 'So it goes' right? Isn't that what she used to always say?"

"Yeah, it's pretty great," Arryn answers filling the bag she just emptied with weapons I brought up from the basement of the bunker. "Clarke, what are you going to do when you're not in the library anymore, I can't picture you without a book nearby."

"It's not that far away, and Isaac knows I love it here. I don't think he'll mind if I come back from time to time, even he has good memories here. I don't think he would let it all go to ruin."

"I guess, it won't be the same around here though."

"I actually wanted to talk to you about something," I say passing Arryn a few more knives before she closes her bag. "I invited the Sky People to live here. Some of them are going to come this summer and learn to farm and how to run the bunker. I'm going to leave the bunker keys with their leader when I go north."
"Wow, you do realize they will probably completely ruin the whole Dewey Decimal thing you've got going on here right?" She smiles and we both get up to put Arryn's bag by the door.

"Between you and me Arryn," I say looking back into the room that has shaped most of my life, "I think Dewey could stand to lighten up a bit." We both laugh a little and head outside to join Gael in building a fire.

That night I pull out all of the cider I have left, we should enjoy ourselves while we can, and we all sit around a fire in the meadow. Gael and his people tell stories of past battles and foreign tribes. I'm not surprised to see quite a few women around the fire. Most of the warriors around here are men but there are always a few women who fight or learn to shoot a bow. The River People value the strength of their women at home and on the battlefield. Arryn is not a warrior, she's good with a bow but she is not one of their best fighters. I know why she is here through. She is the only one of Gael's people who has lost someone to the Northerners. She wants to see them pay as much as I do.

As I sit around the bunker I can't help but think about everything that has changed since the last time Gael was here. I feel like a different person than I was last fall. Maybe what Lincoln said was right though and I haven't really changed at all, I'm just finding different parts of myself. Maybe I always had the capacity to love the way I love Bellamy and I just never realized it before. I allow myself a moment to think about him and his beautiful eyes and the touch of his strong rough hands on my face and in my hair. I think about that smirk and the way he looks at me when I say something he doesn't understand, like I'm the crazy one. I think about the sacrifices he has made to keep Octavia and their people safe, and the way he inspires his people to do better. I know I will probably always love him and that is something I will have to carry with me, forever.

The next morning we all wake early and begin packing. I lock up the bunker and as I stand on the ridge with Lincoln and Arryn looking down at everything that has shaped who I am, I know my grandmother would be proud.

"Come on Clarke," Lincoln says putting his hand on my shoulder, "this isn't goodbye, you'll be back soon."

"Yeah and if not," Arryn chimes in as we start to walk "so it goes."
Chapter 21

Bellamy

When the time finally comes to head north, we're as ready as we'll ever be. Raven and I have made over 100 bombs and repurposed as many bullets as we can. It probably won't be enough though so we also have spears and knives made from scrap metal.

There are about 50 of us making the trip north. I asked Octavia to stay behind, even as I asked I knew she wouldn't. These are her people too and she has grown to be as much of a leader as I am. At first it was Raven and Finn who stepped in when I needed them but recently it's been Octavia that the camp has looked to for an example.

As I stand at the gate and wait for the group to be ready to move I know we will make it through this. We won't all come back, but we have started building something here and this is our home now. The people who return will build a life here, or in the meadow. I walk to the center of the group and look around at their nervous faces.

"Alright, it's time to move out. We need to make it to the mountains by nightfall, it's a long walk and the woods between here and there could be full of Northerners. The Ark isn't coming, there's no one to rescue us, but that doesn't mean we can't survive. It means this time, we get to save ourselves. The other tribes expect us to be scared. They expect us to back down and run away, but that's not what we're going to do."

Octavia steps up beside me and smiles. She looks so strong standing next to me with Lincoln's sword strapped over her shoulder.

"We're going to show them, we are grounders too. We're not some fragile creatures that fell out of the sky. We belong here just as much as they do. This is our home now and it's our job to defend it." I hear Jasper yell in agreement behind me and before I know it the whole camp is cheering. They'll need this enthusiasm when we meet the Northerners.

While everyone is still feeling brave and strong we make our way towards the mountains. Finn takes the lead since he has been there before and I walk behind him with Raven. Finn wanted Raven to stay home, but just like Octavia, she refused. She said there's no way she was going to let everyone else enjoy all the bombs she worked so hard to make. I hear her grunt a little as she walks but I don't say anything, she wouldn't want to be reminded of her weakness.

As we cross a small creek at the base of the mountains I hear movement in the bushes and motion for everyone to stop. I step forward slowly along the rocky shore and see a familiar figure stepping through the bushes at the edge of the woods.

"Gael?"

"Oh hey kid, fancy meeting you here," he responds with a casual smile. I don't think I've ever seen him without a smile. I guess if you're marching to your death it's as good a way as any to go. It's not for me though. "Where are you headed?"

"The same place as you," I wave off the guards behind me and they all seem to breathe a collective sigh of relief. "We're going to meet the Mountain Men."

"Well then, we might as well walk together. Come on out Sunshine!" He calls over his shoulder.
Clarke steps out of the bushes beside him with her bow still in her hand. "It's just your friends the space people."

"Sky people," she corrects.

"Actually we didn't really agree to that name," Raven chimes in.

"Whatever," I say shaking my head. "Let's just get moving."

Lincoln and a women who must be Clarke's sister step out of the bushes behind her and the woman takes Gael's hand. She looks a lot like Clarke but she's taller with darker hair and eyes not as blue. As we start walking Octavia rushes past me and joins Lincoln and Clarke. I can hear them talking as they walk just ahead of me but I don't pay attention. I catch Clarke glancing at me over her shoulder a few times and I resist the urge to smile at her. She was right, it's hard to be this close to her. I want to walk with her and hold her hand, when she stumbles a little on a slick patch of moss I want to reach out for her, but instead I let her steady herself. I know she doesn't need my help, maybe it's me that needs to help her, the way Finn gets his strength and confidence from helping Raven. After an hour or so Clarke's sister drops back to walk with our group and I'm a little surprised when she starts talking to me.

"So Bellamy, that's your name right?" I nod in reply. "How is the forest treating you?"

"It's not killing us as quickly anymore so, good, I guess." She smiles at me with Clarke's smile.

"And how long have you been in love with my sister?"

"I'm not...I..." I have no idea what to say, I glance around and I'm relieved to see no one is listening to us. I could try to deny it but the look she's giving me says she already knows anyway so I just answer the best way I can. "A while."

She smiles at me and we walk a little longer without saying anything. I'm not sure if she's waiting for me to say something or if she's thinking of what to say next.

"How did you know?" I finally ask.

She raises her eyebrows and gives me the look I get from Clarke when she thinks I've asked a silly question. "The way you look at her and the way you carry yourself around her, you're always aware of where she is around you. You gave her that pearl didn't you?" I nod and she keeps talking. "She told me about letting you live in the bunker. She's never talked about letting anyone live there before. She was planning to close it up and just visit a few times a year. She loves that place, and everything it stands for. I'm sure you'll take good care of it though, you wouldn't let anything happen to the things she loves."

She flashes me another smile and jogs ahead to walk with Gael and Clarke who, from the looks of it, are telling some kind of ridiculous story. They're both waving their hands and laughing. It's funny how cheerful they can be when in all probability at least some of us are walking towards our death. I remind myself that at least this time we have a choice. We don't have to fight, we could have run away or joined the water people, or just closed up and hide behind our walls. This is different than being sent to our death by the Ark. This time we are choosing to risk our own lives. There's something a little comforting in having that small amount of control over our mortality. We may still end up just as dead as the 17 bodies we have buried outside our walls but this will be a death we chose, fighting for our own futures.

When we arrive at the Mountain Men's camp it is Isaac who greets us. He walks straight to Clarke and I have to look away when he wraps his arms around her. After a moment Isaac walks over to
greet Gael and Arryn, then he turns to me.

"Bellamy," he puts his hand out to shake mine and I take it. "Your people should set up on the north side of the hill, we will leave in the morning. The Northerners are close."

I nod in response. I'm gripping my gun to keep from hitting him. It's not his fault, none of this is, but I can't help hating him. He gets to share his life with her and that's too much right now.

"Isaac," Arryn says stepping up beside him. "Bellmay is the leader of the Sky People so he should join us at the fire tonight." I raise my eyebrow at her questioningly but it's Isaac who continues.

"When the leaders of the tribes come together it is customary for us to sit together at the fire of the host."

"Come on space man," Gael says clapping his hand in my shoulder. "I'll show you where to set up camp."

As I walk off with my people I can't resist the urge to look back at Clarke. She's standing with Arryn and Isaac, they look happy. I'm about to turn away when Clarke looks up and meets my eyes. She stares at me for a long time without taking her eyes off of mine. She looks tired and the smile she just wore has faded away.

"Earth to Clarke," Arryn calls waving her hands in front of Clarke's face and snapping her fingers. I look away and I hear Clarke laugh. I shake my head to push the sound away and follow Gael across the settlement. Maybe Clarke was right the first time. Maybe things were easier when I hated her. Although, if I'm really honest with myself I never did hate her, I may have hated myself, but I could never hate her.
Chapter 22

Clarke

When Arryn and I arrive at the fire, after dropping a few supplies at the medical tent, Anya and Bellamy are already there with Isaac and his parents. Bellamy is taking turns glaring at Anya and Isaac and Anya doesn't look too happy to be there either. When she sees us arrive she looks even less pleased.

"Oh hello Anya," Arryn calls in an overly enthusiastic show of joy. She has always loved making Anya feel uncomfortable. It's like a game to her to see how much she can make her squirm. When Arryn wraps her arms around Anya and she just stands there unmoving until Arryn lets her go, Bellamy laughs a little and I laugh too. I know I shouldn't, especially with Isaac's mother here but I can't help it. Anya looks so miserable.

A few minutes later Gael joins us at the fire and Isaac's father passes around cups of moonshine. Everyone is a little quiet at first, not sure what to say. Arryn is the one to break the silence.

"So," she says calling across the fire to Bellamy. "Tell me about space."

"It's big, and cold," Bellamy answers flatly. "There isn't much to tell."

"Oh come on, there's got to be something interesting to tell us, I can't imagine nothing funny ever happened there."

Bellamy smirks a little and it's Anya who answers. "Not everyone spends their lives running around acting like a careless lunatic the way you do."

Bellamy laughs and just like that the tension eases between him and Anya. They start talking a little and as the night goes on I even see him smile a little at her. Arryn has a way of bringing people together, even when they don't realize that's what she's doing.

Arryn and I spend most of the night joking together and talking about our past, Gael chimes in from time to time but he knows we're in our own world when we're together. The talk around the fire has just gone quiet when Arryn launches into a story about us stumbling upon some eggs on our way home from trading with the Water People one year. She always had these crazy plans, and of course, since she was my older sister, I always followed her.

"Yeah, and then you carried them home stuffed in your shirt to keep them warm. You were so excited to have a pet turtle." I laugh, Arryn has a proud look in her eye like she still thinks it was a good plan.

"Didn't they turn out to be alligators?" Isaac chimes in. This happened before my parents died and he began visiting the bunker, but he's heard most of these stories over the years.

"Yeah," Arryn laughs. "Mom walked into the kitchen one morning to find 4 baby alligators crawling around the floor. I've never heard her scream so loud." Arryn and I both giggle at the memory of my mother running around the bunker screaming about alligators. Everyone thought she had lost her mind.

"And then dad made us walk back to coast and release them. 'Clarke, these animals did not survive the war just to die on the floor of some bunker miles from their home.' If I remember
correctly you blamed the whole thing on me."

"Oh yeah, sorry about that Clarke" Arryn says with a wicked smile. We both laugh and Arryn
starts singing some sily old song we used to sing along to on the record player.

"Sometimes I wonder how you two managed to come from the same womb as Ray," Anya says
without a hint of joking in her voice. There is a split second of silence while everyone around the
fire looks to Arryn and me. I think I see a flash of regret in Anya's eyes but it disappears as soon
as Arryn and I both laugh. We used to wonder the same thing. Ray was so different from my sister
and me. He got all of my father and none of my mother's charm and humour. Arryn is mostly my
mother and I like to think I got the best of both of them.

"Grandma anyways used to say he looked like the milkman," I say through a fit of giggles. Arryn
is laughing so hard she has to put her hand on Gael's knee to steady herself.

"Get your woman under control, Isaac." Anya growls across the fire.

"Ooh sounds like someone hasn't had her coffee yet." Arryn manages to get out between more
giggles. She's the only person I know who can get away with making fun of Anya.

Isaac shakes his head and smiles. "You really don't know her if you think I can control her,
Anya." Isaac leans a little closer to me and smiles, I smile back. He's never really been affectionate
with me. I wonder what it will be like when we're married, what it will be like to kiss him and
sleep beside him with his strong arms around me. I'm not sure how I feel about learning the
answers to those questions. Out of the corner of my eye I see Bellamy set down his cup and walk
away from the fire.

I haven't spoken to Bellamy since that night at his camp. I try to will myself to forget him, but it's a
loosing battle. He kept his word and he hasn't talked to me since he joined us in the mountains. I'm
not sure if it's actually making things any better, but I'd rather not be seen with him while Isaac's
mother is around anyways. It may be my imagination but I feel like she's watching me.

The conversation at the fire starts to turn to old battle stories and Arryn and I quickly lose interest.
She kisses Gael goodnight and we get up to leave. Isaac just nods at me and smiles. I wonder for a
moment if he wants to kiss me the way Gael kisses Arryn, full of passion and longing. He kisses
me on the cheek in greeting or on the top of my head from time to time and I have kissed him back
in the same way but we've never had a real kiss. In a few month's time I will marry this man and
carry his children, but I have never even kissed him. I remind myself that isn't what our marriage is
about. We are partners. Maybe one day it will grow into what Arryn and Gael have. I can't
imagine I'll ever feel for him what I felt when I kissed Bellamy, desperate longing and desire. I
don't feel anything bubbling up inside of me when I look at Isaac, it's Bellamy who makes me
forget everything around me and lose myself in his smile and his eyes.

I walk Arryn to her tent and hug her goodnight before heading to the makeshift medical tent we
have set up at the edge of the settlement. I want to make sure we have absolutely everything we
could possibly need. I run through the most common injuries I will see and mentally check off the
supplies I will need to treat each one. I know I will probably spend most of my time cleaning and
stitching wounds. I'm considering making up some medical packs to send down with Isaac and the
other men and I want to be sure I can spare the supplies here. Tying a tourniquet or covering an
open wound can be the difference between life and death when it's an uphill hike back to camp. I
am lost in my thoughts when I open the tent flap and I walk right into Bellmay.

His knuckles are raw and he's holding a bandage trying to wrap them with his other hand. I gently
take the bandage from his hand.
"Sit up on the table and let me do this for you Bellamy, you're just making a mess." Bellamy hops up on the table behind him and when I look more closely at his hand it's obvious he punched a tree. There are small bits of bark still stuck in the scratches. I don't say anything as I clean his wounds, I know he's watching me but he doesn't speak either.

"So what did the tree do to you?" I ask after a few minutes, trying to lighten the mood.

"It was smiling at the girl I love."

I feel like I've had the wind knocked out of me and I can't breath. I'm still looking down at his hand, but I can feel his gaze burning into my forehead. I'm afraid to look up and actually face him. I take a deep breath and begin wrapping his hand. I don't know what to say. Bellamy pulls his hand away and tilts my chin up, forcing me to look at him.

"I'm sorry Clarke, maybe this is selfish and irresponsible but I can't go away tomorrow knowing that I never said it. I love you."

I take a small step forward so I am wedged between his legs as he sits on the table. I lift my hand up to touch his cheek before I have realized I'm doing it. Bellamy places his hand gently on my lower back and pulls me close. I rise up onto my toes until my cheek is against his and whisper in his ear, "I love you too, Bellamy Blake." I stand there for a minute unable to move, unwilling to let this moment slip away. It's Bellamy who finally pulls away and slides off the table.

"Well Princess," he says with a smirk. "I think we both have a big day planned for tomorrow. You should probably get some rest."

He slips out of the medical tent and leaves me standing there dizzy with emotion. I put my hand on the table to steady myself and take long breaths. I force myself to think about something else, anything else, so I won't follow him. I picture myself meticulously stitching up a deep wound the way my grandmother taught me. I mentally run through each step in the most clinical way possible. I turn my emotions off and just let the rational side of my brain take over.

When I feel sufficiently calm I head back to the tent I share with Arryn, Gael, and few others and climb into my bed. I keep my mind busy running through lists and task in my head. I practice the NATO alphabet and all the prime numbers I can remember, any meaningless fact that will keep my emotions at bay. I can't let myself break down, I felt my resolve beginning to crack with Bellamy and I know if I don't stop it the fissures will spread so deeply into my heart that it will never be whole again. As I drift off to sleep I can't stop my mind from wandering any longer and my dreams are filled with smirks and dark curls and deep brown eyes. When I wake a little before dawn I am exhausted.
Chapter 23

Bellamy

Everything is eerily quiet when we wake up early the next morning. I walk around waking up stragglers and sending everyone over to Gael and Isaac. They're sending groups out in different directions to meet the Northerners. Raven and I are supposed to head out in the front group with most of the bombs. They are small and the blasts won't be huge but they're a hell of a lot better than walking down there with just a spear in my hand.

When everyone is up and moving I find Octavia getting ready to head out with Lincoln's group. I know he'll try to keep her safe, but it still hurts to send her off to fight like this.

"Octavia," I call jogging over to her. "You watch yourself down there. I didn't come all the way to earth just to lose you again, okay?" She hugs me tightly and whispers in my ear.

"I love you big brother. May we meet again." It's an old travellers prayer they recite on the Ark, I never gave much thought to it back then but here, on the ground, it seems fitting.

"I love you too, O. May we meet again," I whisper back. "Take care of her Lincoln."

He nods and they start off to the west with Anya and more of the Forest Clan. I scan the quickly thinning crowd for Raven and head over to meet her. She actually looks excited about the idea of using her bombs. Finn on the other hand looks worried next to her. Out of the corner of my eye I catch a glimpse of blond and turn to see Clarke and Isaac heading down the mountain. Isaac has a sword, a bow and what look to be a bunch of throwing knives strapped to his belt. Clarke has her bow and a quiver packed with arrows. She can't be planning to fight with us like that. Arrows are fine at a distance but in close combat, they're useless.

"I'm serious Clarke, don't come past the tree line. Use your bow and take out as many as you can from the trees. We're going to need you to piece everyone back together when this is over. When you hear Arryn's signal, get back to the medical tent." Isaac's voice is full of concern, he must know her strength though because he doesn't try to stop her.

"All right Humpty Dumpty," she says with a smile before kissing his cheek and disappearing into the trees. Isaac shakes his head a little and rejoins his group. I can't help but smile, I know I have that same slightly confused look on my face when I'm around her.

"Raven, Miller," I call over my shoulder. "It's time to go."

When we finally spot the Northerners approaching on the opposite side of the mountain I know this will not end well for anyone. There must be at least 300 of them and that's just the fighters I can see. They are huge and covered in masks and armour. I can't see any of their faces, they just look like huge dark shapes moving through the woods. Raven has rigged up a slingshot for the bombs and we start launching them into groups of Northerners as they make their way towards us. After the first bomb lands and the fire and smoke cover a patch of woods I see some of them falter, we have an advantage here. They are surprised and confused. We don't give them a chance to figure out what happened or where it came from. We launch as many as we can over and over again into the dark mass of bodies scrambling through the trees. When the last bomb has been launched Raven radios Isaac and the woods erupt with the sound of feet and banging swords. I pull my gun back over my shoulder and head down to meet any survivors.
At first the Northerners seem cautious and I'm just using my spear to kill any injured men still moving on the ground. When they realize there are no more bombs coming though, the woods explode with the clash of sword and spears. I hear gunshots to the east and I know it must be my people. I find a small rock outcrop just inside the tree line that separates the slope we have set up to defend from the open area we are working to drive them into. The Forest Clan has taken the western side of the ridge and the River Clan has spread out to the east. I am fighting with the Mountain Men directly between the oncoming army and the settlement behind. There is hardly anyone left there now. Anyone unable to fight or preform medical duties has fallen back to Anya's settlement.

Raven is still next to me and we alternate popping up above the rocks to shoot. I take my time and make each bullet count. I hear rapid fire coming from somewhere behind me and I know whoever it is won't last long. The worst thing we can do is panic. Raven and I have taken out about 20 warriors when we both run out of bullets. I decide to discard my gun here and move forward with my spear. There are fewer people fighting now but I can still hear the sound of metal connecting with metal and wood and sometimes flesh. There are screams echoing through the forest and I try to block them out and move with a purpose through the trees and to the edge of the clearing.

Raven, Miller, and I spread out in the trees and work on taking out anyone who tries to cross in from the clearing. There are archers in all of the trees and if we can keep their men in the open we have a better chance of killing them. I have just pulled my spear out of a slumping body when I hear a familiar scream behind me. I don't have to turn to see who is. I remember that scream from the night we thought we were rescuing Octavia from Lincoln's cave. I look to Raven instead and see panic in her eyes.

"Go," I scream over the sounds of death all around us. "We've got this."

Miller and I push forward together without looking back. When the Northerners start coming more slowly we push into the clearing and sprint for the opposite tree line. I'm almost there when a short man with a headdress made of bones and a long metal spear jumps from behind a rock and thrusts his spear at my neck. I pull my spear up to block it and try to stop but my momentum is carrying me forward and the spear is coming straight for me. At the last moment an arrow connects with his neck and he falls to the ground pulling the spear with him. I recognize the turkey feather fletchings Clarke uses on her arrows and I turn slightly to the woods behind me. I can't see her in the trees and I know it's better that way but I'm comforted knowing she is watching me. I nod in thanks and disappear into the trees.

At some point during the chaos Isaac and I end up fighting side by side. I guess it's fitting, we're both here for the same reason. We're fighting for Clarke, to keep her safe and build a world where she can live. A world in which she could raise children, I know they would never be mine but I still want it for her, happiness.

There are fewer people fighting than this morning when it was just complete chaos. Blood and bodies and screaming everywhere. I think I saw a few of my people retreat but I can't really blame them. We were never prepared for this, if we want to live in this world though, we need to prove ourselves to our allies. Retreat or surrender is not an option for me.

I push forward to meet a tall man whose legs are almost completely covered in blood. I hope for a second that it is his own before I thrust my spear at him only to have it knocked aside. I side step to regain my footing and block his axe as he tries to bring it down on my shoulder. I thrust again while he is still off balance and connect with his leg. He lets out a small cry but doesn't waiver. He comes at me again and again with his axe. I dodge and block his movements waiting for another opportunity to strike. As he swings widely for my left arm I jab my spear into the area of abdomen left exposed. I push until I am sure my spear has exited his back and then twist before pulling it back out. He falls to his knees and I feel almost nothing as the light drains from his eyes. There is
no room for regret or compassion on a battle field. Those emotions belong in the quiet of the night when they creep into the edges of your thoughts.

I turn to Isaac just in time to see him cut down the boy in front of him. I quickly scan the sparse forest in front of us and see no one. Isaac motions to his left where we hear the distinctive sounds of battle and I step quickly to follow him. Just as he turns a Northerner jumps out from the tree where the fallen boy still slumps and raises a sword to strike. Before I can think, I am moving. I know why I am doing it before my mind has even told my body to move - Clarke. She can't be left alone. This man is her protection and her future. I can't let him die. I feel each fraction of a second slide by as I throw my body between Isaac and the descending sword. I have no time to pull out my spear or knife, all I can do is move. I feel the sword connect with my right side. It is unlike anything I have ever felt before. Like a scream and white light coursing down my side. I vaguely feel my knees fall to the the ground as the pain spreads like a biting wave coursing over my body. The last thing I hear before the wave swallows me completely is the unmistakable crunching of bone.
Clarke

Isaac's father used to say 'a bow is a weapon for a gentle soul, it takes a hardened heart to take a life with your own hands'. I don't think I believe that, I've killed people with my knife and my bow and either way they end up dead. There's something almost morbidly poetic about watching my arrow find its mark. When I release it, I know the person I am aiming at will die. I can appreciate the last moments of their life while they just stumble to the ground in surprise. In the time it takes my arrow to reach its mark they are standing there unaware that they are already dead; only I know what is coming.

I spend most of the morning shooting into the clearing. I aim for Northerners who are about the attack our people, my arrows are limited so I save them for people who need it. My last arrow finds the throat of a man attacking Bellamy and I'm thankful I used them so wisely.

Arryn still has not signalled me to return to the medical tent by the time my arrows are gone so I climb down from the large oak I was shooting from and scan the area. There are bodies all over the forest floor. I look for any signs of life, someone injured that I can help. I find one of Bellamy's men with what looks like a broken arm and a man I have seen with Isaac who has lost an ear and has an arrow through his shoulder. I take them back to camp and lead them to the tent. I start with Isaac's man first, I know he will be eager to get back to the battle. Arryn has kept the fire hot and has a few flat blades we can use to cauterize wounds. Stitches are better for some things but they take much longer. When I have removed the arrow and stopped the bleeding from his ear the man gets up and thanks me before turning to leave. He is clutching his large axe and his eyes are dark and wide with anger and pain. He doesn't say anything else as he walks away. No one says much at all as they slowly filter into the tent. Arryn and I are the only ones talking, giving simple commands and passing tools back and forth. For all of Arryn's joking and silliness, even Anya would have to admit, she knows when it's time to work.

It doesn't take long before most of my clothes are soaked in blood. I keep my hands as clean as I can but there is no way to keep all of the blood off of my body. It's a good day and we don't lose anyone all morning. I know there are dead in the forest, some I saw and some I killed, but for today the people who make it back to us are all still alive.

It must be past noon when I hear Octavia's voice outside the tent.

"I'm fine, I can barely feel it." I step outside to see one of Lincoln's friends supporting her as she hobbles over to the tent. There is a thin spear sticking out of her thigh. The fact that she's still upright and talking is a good sign.

"Alright," I say waving him off. He lets her go but stays by the tent door. "I've got her."

"Thanks Clarke," Octavia says grabbing my arm. "I told Lincoln I was fine but he made this guy drag me back up here."

"I would have too Octavia, if you can't run, you can't fight. I'm going to get you fixed up and then I need you here anyways." Octavia doesn't look excited about the prospect of spending the rest of the battle stitching people up and setting bones but she doesn't argue.
"Let Lincoln do what he needs to do. If he thinks you're out there hopping around on one leg he'll be distracted trying to protect you and he won't be able to protect himself. There's not much for him to fight for if he doesn't have you to come back to." Octavia nods and sits down on the table so I can get to work on her leg.

I turn back to the man still standing at the door. I'm sure Lincoln has asked him to make sure Octavia doesn't come back to fight.

"You can go. If you see Lincoln, tell him Octavia's with me. I won't let her out of my sight." He seems satisfied with that and nods before heading back down the slope. The sounds of battle are getting closer but they are also much less frequent. A few hours ago we heard almost constant screams. Now they are few and far between.

It only takes a few minutes to get Octavia patched up. She was lucky the spear was narrow and didn't hit any major arteries. She'll have a scar but she'll be fine. After today I think we'll all have scars.

As I finish Octavia's stitches I can't resist the curiosity to ask about who's left.

"I don't really know." she says. "Lincoln and I were with his people, I saw a lot of them die, but definitely more Northerners. I think Anya is still alive. I haven't seen Bellamy, or Isaac," she adds.

"They're strong, and fast," I say in a hopeful tone. "They'll come back."

"Clarke, I don't want to get ahead of things, but I think we're winning." She says it quietly as if she's afraid saying it out loud will somehow change things.

"Everyone I've seen seems pretty hopeful," I say in return. This already feels so different than when I was a child. When they swept in from the north years ago there was no warning and no one was prepared. We were unorganized and spread across miles of territory. It was a complete slaughter.

When I'm finished with Octavia she joins us treating as many patients as we can. We have just finished setting a broken leg when I hear a commotion in the camp. There is yelling and running, I'm not paying attention though, I have a line of people waiting for my help. I've just dowsed my hands in moonshine when I hear Isaac.

"Clarke! Someone get Clarke!" I turn and run out of tent. Octavia and Arryn will have to do without me for a while. Isaac's voice is as strong as ever, but there's something about the way he's calling my name that makes my stomach sink.

I make it about 50 meters away from the medical tent before I see him. He's carrying someone, I can't make out who it is. I know Isaac wouldn't waste his energy to bring me a body so he must think there's hope, but all I can see is blood. The body he's carrying is covered in blood and most of Isaac clothes are red as well. I have almost reached him when I realize who it is - Bellamy.

I feel like someone just pulled the plug on all of my senses. I'm sure there's still noise around me but I can't hear anything. The forest is a blur, all I can see is blood pouring out of Bellamy's side. I should move, but I can't. Arryn finally shakes me back to reality.

"Clarke," she calls sharply. "You have to turn it off. I can't fix him by myself."

She's right. Standing here drowning in my own pain won't save Bellamy. I close my eyes and take one long breath. When I open them again he's not Bellamy. He's just a 22 year old male with a large wound to his right side and at least two broken ribs.
"Isaac, bring him to the medical tent. Arryn, tell Octavia we're coming. Tell her I'm going to fix him. I need her sterilized and ready to assist. Get anyone who can be moved out of the tent and take them somewhere else. Start stitching up anyone you can and deal with as many of the injuries as possible."

Arryn nods and runs ahead to the tent. Octavia may not be trained as well, but she's the right kind of strong for this patient. I'll need someone to hold him down if he wakes up and Arryn hesitates when things get bad, or at least she used to. I don't know how long I would have stood there if she hadn't come along to bring me back to reality.

"Was it a sword?" I ask as we rush towards the tent.

Isaac nods.

"Poisoned?" The Northerners don't usually poison their blades but who knows what they've picked up over the years.

"I don't think so. No one else seems to be poisoned and there are plenty of people down there with sword marks." We reach the tent and Isaac sets Bellamy on the bed closest to the door. It's the same place I stood with him last night. The same place I told him I love him. I push that thought away before it has time to spread. I won't break down, I can't.

"Then why did you bring him?" I can't stop myself from asking. I don't understand why Isaac would leave in the middle of this to bring me someone who probably won't make it.

"Just worry about fixing him Clarke. I'll worry about the rest of it." Isaac turns to leave the tent and I realize, no matter how petty it may be, I have to know.

"And the person who did this?" My voice is as flat as I can manage and the words still come out a little shaky.

"Dead," is all Isaac says before he walks out of the tent. I try to push him out of my mind. I can't be distracted by worry now. Octavia has just finished sterilizing her hands and pulling out a few tools Arryn must have told her we'll need. Her face is white and she looks like she might fall apart at any moment. She looks to me expectantly and I remember what Lincoln said about her looking up to me.

"I'm going to fix him, Octavia, I just need your help okay, stay with me and he's going to be fine."

She nods and we get to work. I cut off Bellamy's shirt and pull off the makeshift compress Isaac managed to put on before carrying him back to me.

We work on him for over an hour before I'm ready to start stitching him back together. His ribs were very badly cracked but not completely broken. Most of the bleeding was coming from his liver and I take my time to repair it. If I close him up and he continues to bleed I know he will die. The body can only handle being ripped apart and pieced back together so many times before it breaks. It could have been worse though, the sword was dull, a sharp sword would have cut straight through him.

Octavia was more helpful than I could have imagined. She talked to Bellamy the whole time, it bothered me at first, I usually stay as disconnected as I can, picturing the injury and never the person. It was nice to hear her voice though, telling Bellamy how angry she would be if he died, how he has to stick around to keep her away from Lincoln, how she needs him, loves him.

Someone brought lights into the tent while I was busy working so I'm surprised when I finally look up and realize it is past dusk. The camp is much quieter now and the frantic atmosphere of
the afternoon has died down.

Octavia was right that we were winning. People are starting to return from the battle with stories of the Northeners retreating. Anya sent some of her riders to chase down as many of them as they can as they try to leave the mountains. I think if they want to run, we should let them leave, but I don't say anything. I feel numb and I'm only partially comprehending what's going on around me. Between all of the patients I have treated and the exhaustion of seeing Bellamy so broken, I can hardly move.

When I return to the medical tent after cleaning myself properly, Arryn has set a chair next to Bellamy's bed. I sit down and immediately fall asleep. I wake an hour later when Isaac comes into the tent.

"Clarke," he says gently shaking my shoulder. "The leaders are all meeting, you should be there."

I take his hand as I stand up because I don't think I can support myself and he leads me towards to fire where we all laughed last night. When I look around the fire I notice Isaac's father is missing and the look on his mother's face tells me he won't be joining us. It's Isaac who speaks this time.

"The battle has ended and the Northeners have retreated. We will not follow them into their land and attack. Anyone who surrenders or retreats as we sweep the area for survivors will be stripped of their weapons and given safe passage home."

Everyone around the fire nods. I don't think anyone wants to keep fighting.

"Over the next few days we will need people to sweep the woods recovering weapons and bodies. We must honour those who fought and when every body has been buried you may take your people home. Anyone too weak to travel may stay as long as they need. Clarke will provide care here until they are strong enough to be moved. We all owe Clarke a debt, not just for treating our wounded but for warning us of the attack. If Clarke had not brought word of the Northener scouts last fall, today would have been a very different battle."

I nod as he says my name but I'm not really listening. If I wasn't still holding Isaac's hand I'm sure I would have collapsed by now. When Isaac is finished talking and the leaders have all gone to speak to their people he walks me back to the medical tent.

"Do you want me to stay with you?" he asks as I settle back into the chair.

I know he has more important things to do than sit with me and watch Bellamy die but I don't want to be alone.

"Please," I manage to whisper. Isaac sits down on the floor next to my chair leaning his head on my knee. I rest my hand on his head and fall asleep again.
Chapter 25

Bellamy

I'm on the Ark standing outside the cupola. I can see the entire earth below me through the large windows that cover the walls. I feel fuzzy like I just woke up, or I just fell asleep.

"Bellamy."

I hear Octavia calling my name, she's standing behind me. Why is she walking around the Ark?

"Bellamy, it's time to come home."

I turn around to follow her but she disappears. I move back towards the cupola and the window is blocked by someone standing in front of me. The light shining in around her obscures her face and I have to step forward even more to see her. It's Clarke. She's smiling at me and holding out her hand. I reach for her but as I am about to touch her hand, she disappears.

"Bellamy."

I hear Clarke calling my name but it sounds like a whisper, like she's far away. I turn around and walk through the Ark following her voice. I walk past my old home but no one is there. I walk through the common area and no one is there either. I'm all alone.

"Bellamy...Bellamy...Bellamy."

I hear her again and again calling for me but she's not here. I close my eyes and when I open them, I'm on the ground. I'm standing in the forest near the camp and I see her standing a few meters away from me with her hand stretched out towards me.

"Bellamy, I'm waiting for you."

I rush forward to take her hand and she disappears again. I scan the forest around me and see a blonde head duck behind a tree.

"Clarke wait!" I managed to call out. My voice sounds weak and strained. I try to follow her but she disappears again and all I hear is her voice whispering my name over and over again as I search the forest.

"Bellamy...Bellamy...Bellamy."

I start to run, desperately trying to find her. The forest is still and quiet and the light is an eerie shade of green. Low hanging branches sting and cut my face as I frantically make my way through the brush. I stumble a few times on roots and rocks but I don't stop. My chest feel like it will explode but I keep moving, I have to find her. Suddenly the forest opens up around me and I'm standing on the beach. I stop and breath in the salty air the way Clarke does. It does smell nice. I scan the waves but she's not here either. I can still hear her whispering my name, or maybe it's the pounding of the waves on the shore.

"Bellamy...Bellamy...Bellamy."

I turn around and Clarke is right behind me. I start to reach out and quickly stop myself, afraid
she'll just disappear again. She takes a step closer to me and smiles. It's not the wide laughing
smile she gives Arryn and Gael, this is different. It's the small almost crooked smile she gives me,
the smile that makes her nose wrinkle just a little and her eyes an even brighter shade of blue.

"Bellamy," she says stepping even closer and resting her hand on the side of my face. Her touch is
so warm and comforting, she stares into my eyes and doesn't stop smiling at me. "It's time to come home."

"I don't know where home is anymore, Clarke."

She steps even closer and lifts herself up on her toes so her forehead is resting against mine.

"Yes you do," she whispers quietly. I can feel her breath against me face and I can't stop myself
from reaching out to her this time. I reach my hands up to pull her body against mine and move to
kiss her but she disappears.

This time when she moves away from me I feel a sudden pain. There is a burning fire shooting
down the right side of my body. I fall to my knees and I can't move. I kneel there for what feels
like forever, I feel myself slipping into the pain. I try to look up for Clarke but I can't see anything
around me. Everything is a fog of pain and light. Suddenly I hear heavy footsteps on the sand and
I look up to see Isaac staring down at me. Clarke is behind him but she's not smiling anymore. Her
eyes are red and bloodshot. She has deep purple hollows under each eye and her face looks
sunken and empty. I can't move to her. I can't move at all. Isaac reaches down and grabs my arm.

"Get up Bellamy, it's time to move."

"I can't" I manage to choke out. The pain is squeezing my throat and the words that felt so strong
in my head come out like a desperate whisper.

"You have to," Isaac says pulling me to my feet. Clarke smiles a little as I stand up and we start to
walk.
We bury our dead on a small hill near where the actual battle took place. I take time to plant a small apple seedling over each grave so the fallen can continue to protect us in the years to come. Raven helps me plant Finn's tree and we draw a small map so we can come back and carve his name into the tree when it grows larger. She seems comforted by this; the idea that Finn will go on feeding generations to come, the same way he kept her alive on the Ark by sharing his rations when Raven's mother traded hers for moonshine. I didn't know him very well but Finn was charming and kind. He always had a smile or kind word to give, he was sincere and honest to a fault. He spoke his mind, even when it was difficult and he had a peaceful kind of strength about him. I think we would have been good friends.

Monty insists on planting a peach tree over Jasper's body. I tell him it won't produce fruit this far north but he doesn't seem to care. He has three small seedlings Jasper had been growing at camp since the day Gael brought them to us so we choose the strongest looking one and plant it together. Jasper always seemed to march to his own beat so I guess it's fitting for his tree to be different. I stand with Monty while he cries over the tree we have just planted and when his sobs slow I take his hand and lead him back to camp. There is nothing else we can do here.

We wait three days to move the Northerner's bodies in case their tribe wants to collect them, but no one comes. We bury them on the other side of the hill, I plant seedlings here as well because I believe in second chances, even if they come after death. I make a small note about each body before it is dropped into the grave, physical appearance, clothing, approximate age, anything to help identify them later. I remove any small trinkets or sentimental looking objects. The Mountain Men and Forest Clan have long since stripped the bodies of anything useful. I think about Bellamy or Isaac laying dead on a battle field, I would want to know what happened to them. I think about the pearl still hanging around my neck and hope it never ends up under a pile of dirt. I save the trinkets, mostly small beads, bits of carved bone or the occasional necklace, in a small box with the descriptions.

By now most of the injured are either dead or healing. Only Bellamy still lingers between life and death. I spend my days making rounds to check on the injured and comfort the grieving. Sometimes I just sit and listen to them cry. Other times we tell stories and laugh. Everyone deals with loss differently. Me, I shut down. I refuse to let myself feel anything for Bellamy as I change his bandages and put cool rags on his feverish forehead. Since the battle, I have slept in the small tent I set up for the injured. Isaac checks on me every day but he doesn't ask me to leave. He sits with me quietly while we eat together each morning. I can tell he wants to say something but he doesn't, so I don't ask. I just let him be here with me. I'm not sure which one of us is doing the comforting. Isaac lost his father and his uncle along with so many of his friends.

On the fourth night the only person left in the sick tent is Bellamy. After I have done all I can for him, I settle into the cot at the back of the tent and try to will myself to sleep. When I close my eyes I see him bleeding in Isaac's arms. I see Finn and Jasper's lifeless bodies. I am trying to push the images away when I hear the tent flap open and someone enters. My face is to the door but there is a thin blanket hung between me and Bellamy that served as a partition when there were more people here. Whoever came in is probably looking for someone who has been moved back home. As he steps farther into the tent I realize it's Isaac. He must have finally decided to bring me back to his home. I make a point to keep my breathing steady and close my eyes, maybe he will
leave me if he thinks I am asleep. He doesn't come to me though. He kneels next to Bellamy and checks his wound. He touches Bellamy's forehead and replaces the rag with a fresh one. He stays there for a minute and I think I hear him whisper something to Bellamy but I can't make out any words. Just as he is rising to leave, another figure steps into the tent. It is Isaac's mother.

"I though I would find you here," she says disapprovingly. "Your sister says you have been in here checking on this corpse every day. It's time to let him die, Isaac. He will not wake up. And if he does, he will only bring trouble for you."

"No." Isaac doesn't yell, or even turn to look at her, his voice is firm and final. "He will wake up, and when he does - I will release Clarke from the treaty."

"What?" His mother gasps and steps forward. I have to stop myself for gasping as well. I don't want them to know I am awake. "You can't do that. The treaty has been set. Clarke was promised to you. He cannot have her."

"Clarke is not anyone's to have. Her grandmother promised her to me if I choose to marry her and I will not. If he lives, I will release her so she can go with him back to her home. It's what she wants. I cannot hold her here against her will. I am not a monster."

"And if he dies?" His mother asks ominously.

"If he dies I will ask Clarke to stay, but she still may choose to go home. Clarke thinks he will live and even I can see he is healing. If anyone interferes with that, they will answer to me." He stresses the word anyone to let her know even she is not exempt from his threat. Isaac stands up and turns to face his mother. "He saved me. The sword that hit him was meant for me. He jumped in front of it to spare my life, not for me, but for Clarke. He loves her and he will give his life to protect her and the people she loves."

I stop breathing for moment and bite my cheek to keep from making any sound. I feel tears streaming down my face as Isaac's words sink in. Bellamy did this for me. He is lying here struggling to live because of me. I feel gratitude and guilt and an overwhelming sadness coursing through my body, for Bellamy, and for Isaac.

Isaac turns and steps past his mother to exit the tent. I expect her to follow but instead she steps towards Bellamy. She leans forward and I almost jump across the room to stop her from smothering him before I realize that is not her intention. She places a gentle kiss on his cheek and whispers 'Thank you' before turning to quickly leave the tent.

Sleep comes a little easier tonight but I still wake every few hours. In the morning I am just pulling myself out of bed when Isaac enters with a bowl of stew. I take it from him gratefully and follow him outside to eat. I try to mask the emotions swirling through my head when I gaze up at him. He gives me a searching look before speaking.

"You heard." He says it more like a statement than a question.

"Yes," I say as I sit down on a rock next to him. I can't think of anything else to say. There is nothing to covey how I feel about what he said so I try to start with something simple. "I love you Isaac, I have since we were children. I will always care about you and your people. I will help you in any way you need and if that means marrying you and living here, I will. We can be happy together."

"Happy, but not the way you are with him," Isaac says. He looks down at me with his strong grey eyes. He says so much with those eyes. "I have seen the way you two look at each other, you're so much more with him. You don't belong here Clarke. Just as I belong in the mountains, you
belong in the meadow. That is where you are most alive." I lean into Isaac's strong shoulder and he hesitantly puts his arm around me. I feel tears burning behind my eyes, begging to be released, and this time, I don't stop them. I have been strong for everyone else and it's my turn to let go. Isaac is so much to me, but Bellamy is everything.

"You know I love you, right?" I say when the tears have slowed. "I will always be here for you Isaac. You are part of my family. Even if I go to the meadow. I will always be here." I place my hand gently on his heart and he pulls me into an embrace.

"I know," he whispers in my ear. "but we will find more buried treasure if we split up."

I laugh a little as I pull away from him and pick up my stew. I'm just starting to eat when I hear a quiet cough coming from the tent. I thrust my bowl into Isaac's open hands and rush into the tent. Bellamy is awake.
Chapter 27

Bellmay

Clarke is getting away from me. We're in the woods again and I can barely see her as she runs ahead between the trees. I step into a small clearing and Clarke is standing there smiling at me. Her eyes are full of tears and she looks tired.

"Bellamy, you have to hurry," she pleads.

I reach out to take her hand and run with her, but she melts away into the trees. I keep moving in the direction of her voice until the trees open up and I find myself on the ridge above the meadow. This is the same place I stood when I first looked over the meadow with Raven and Jasper and Finn. This time I am alone. I see Clarke out in the field under the apple tree and I finally know where I am. I'm home. Everything looks so much more clear now and the haze that has clouded my eyes is lifting. I can see the patches of rock and grass and dirt that make up the meadow. I can see the lake, still and shimmering in the morning light. The forest behind it is just turning green with the promise of spring, a new year, a new chance, a new life. I close my eyes and breath in the scent of the grass and the water and the flowers Clarke grows along the ridge. I hear her quiet whisper drifting towards me on the air.

"Bellamy...Bellamy."

When I open my eyes Clarke is there again. I'm laying on a table and her face is next to mine. She has an unfamiliar frantic look in her eyes but they are still red and framed by purple shadows. I feel a knot in my chest at how broken her face has become.

"Bellamy," she whispers quietly. I don't move to touch her, afraid she'll disappear again. "You came back to me."

She leans forward and kisses me gently. Her lips are as soft and gentle as I remember them. I keep my hands by my sides as long as I can bear before reaching up and tangling my fingers in her hair. She doesn't move, she doesn't disappear or fade away. She leans closer to me and places her hand on my cheek. I pull away a little, suddenly I'm confused.

I glance around and see I'm laying on the table where I told Clarke I love her. My side is still burning but this feels different, it's not as hazy as the fog of pain that followed me from the beach into the woods. This is a sharp crisp pain burning down my side and waking all of my nerves.

"Clarke," I say slowly. "What's going on?"

"You were hurt, you were hit by a sword and Isaac brought you back here."

As soon as she says the words it all comes flooding back, the Northerner, the sword, throwing my body in front of Isaac, the pain. I can feel the pain pulsing through my body with each heart beat. I fight my body's urge to close my eyes and slip away again. I look into Clarke's eyes, and I know I can't drift away.

"Octavia?" I ask, suddenly remembering what I have woken up from. The last time I saw her she was marching off to battle with Lincoln.
"She's fine," Clarke answers with a smile. "She and Lincoln took the rest of your people home. You've been asleep for five days Bellamy. It's over, the Northerners are gone."

I stare at her for a while as she kneels there next to me, keeping her eyes level with mine. She looks tired and battered, but she's still beautiful. Her eyes start to well up and she speaks again, this time her voice is weak and stained.

"I didn't know if you were going to come back," she says fighting back tears. "I love you Bellamy. I was so scarred I would lose you."

She leans in again and rests her forehead against mine. I feel a few of her tears fall onto my face and I shift to look at her. I can't sit up without straining and my ribs are throbbing. I have to pull away from her a little to see her face.

"I love you too, Princess. I'm not going anywhere." I give her a little smirk and she kisses me again.

Clarke stays with me all that day and everyday until I am strong enough to be moved. She reads to me and tells me stories, but mostly she just sits quietly in the chair next to me with her face nestled against my shoulder. Isaac offers us a small house near the medical tent so we can have an actual bed to sleep on, whoever lived there has no use for it anymore. I haven't spoken to Isaac since I woke up and he hasn't made any attempt to speak to me either. I'm not sure what there is to say, I want to thank him but I wouldn't know where to start. I think we both owe each other more than we are comfortable admitting.

The house we move into is small and crude. It is built against a rock outcropping so the back wall is all stone. There is a wide bed though, and that's all I need right now. Clarke won't let me get up unless it's necessary and she insists on doing everything for me. I know it's because she's worried about me, but I feel a little useless.

"Hey Princess," I call out one morning as she's heating water over a small fire in the hearth. "I was thinking today we could take a walk over to the fire pit. I feel fine." I don't, but I'm tired of laying here.

"Not a chance," she calls back without even looking up from what she's doing. "You need to stay in bed for at least another week."

"Really," I reply playfully as she makes her way back over to me. "And who's going to stop me?"

I think back to that first day we met in the bunker and how I feel asleep next to her listening to her voice as she read, the slight emptiness I felt when I woke up and she was gone. Maybe I have loved her since then and I just wouldn't let myself see it. I guess it doesn't matter when it began, I love her now and I know that I always will.

She laughs a little as I smirk at her and she tosses a pillow across the bed at me. "It wouldn't be the first time I've stopped you Bellamy."

"And what are you going to do, break my arm? Then you'll just be stuck putting me back together again. That seems like a lot of work." I take the pillow she tossed at me and put it behind my head so I'm propped up on the bed.

"Hmm," she mutters sitting down on the edge of the bed next to me. She stares at me for a while and reaches out to tuck a lock of my hair back in place. Her eyes travel down to my lips and my chest. She places her hand gently on my chest and slowly moves it up my shoulder and neck until her hand is in my hair again. I raise my eyebrows at her a little in question and she smiles.
"I was just thinking, there are other ways I can keep you here." Her grin widens and she pulls herself farther onto the bed throwing one leg over me so she's straddling my waist. I reach up and pull her down to meet my lips. Her body presses gently against mine as she lets some of her weight fall onto my chest.

"So do you always get your way?" I groan as she kisses down my neck and nibbles gently on my skin.

"What kind of princess would I be if I didn't?" She laughs a little and brings her lips back to meet mine. I don't ask to leave the bed again.

The next week Clarke lets me up from the bed to walk around a little. On the third day we decide to walk down to the orchard where our people are buried. The 100 people who fell from the sky with me aren't the only ones I consider mine anymore. I understand what Clarke meant all this time about building alliances and working together. I can see why she was willing to marry Isaac to make it work, not that he's the villain I thought he was. We need the people around us, we never would have survived this on our own, I wouldn't have survived this on my own. Isaac could have easily left me in the woods to die. I would have bled to death on the forest floor within hours. It strikes me that we were both saved by our love for Clarke. I saved him so he could protect her and he saved me so I could love her.

When I look around at all the small trees marking the people who gave their lives to save us, I feel a pang of guilt. I stand there for a while staring down at the tiny trees that mark my friends, and people I have never met. I think back to what Clarke said about letting our scars remind us to make better choices and live a better life and I promise myself I will. Clarke walks up beside me and takes my hand in hers and when I look over at her smiling face I realize I already am.

It's another full week before Clarke deems me healthy enough to return home and this time, when Clarke asks if I'm ready, I know exactly where my home is.

"I want to come to the bunker with you, Clarke." I say as we pack up a few things for the trip. Clarke looks up at me over the bag of medical supplies she's packing. From the looks of it, she's planning to set up a small hospital along the route home.

"And your people? They still need a leader Bellamy, most of them are just kids."

"I know, Octavia and Raven have been working together so far and Octavia says they have things under control." Octavia came back to check on me a week after I woke up. I will never stop being proud of how strong and brave and smart she has grown to be.

"Plus, it gives Raven something to keep her mind off of Finn and Octavia was running things with me before all of this."

"Ok," Clarke says closing her bag and standing to put it over her shoulder. "I still think we should bring some of your people to the bunker though, what I said, about you guys building homes in the meadow, I think it's a good idea."

"Whatever you want, Princess," I say with a smile.

Isaac finds us as we get ready to leave and I step back for a moment so he can speak to Clarke. They discuss a few plans for the spring and a future meeting. Isaac still has scouts checking the border every few days just to be sure this is really over. I step forward as they finish their conversation, it's still strange to see them together. Their relationship doesn't seem to have changed much at all and yet at the same time everything about it is different.
"Thank you for everything, Isaac," she says as she hugs him tightly. "I owe you so much."

"You owe me nothing Clarke. We made it through this because of you, and you too, Bellamy," he says turning towards me. "Thank you."

"May me meet again." It's the best thing I can think of to say. He looks at me for a moment and answers in kind.

"May we meet again Bellamy."

I nod and he turns away. Clarke steps over and I take her hand. It reminds me of our walk back from the ocean, but this time, instead of just holding her fingers I lift her hand and kiss it. She's mine and we're going home and nothing could make me happier.
Clarke

Bellamy barely lets go of my hand the whole way back to the bunker and I don't pull away either. I'm not sure which one of us is more afraid to let the other go. The forest is loud and quiet all at once as we make the day long trek from the mountains to our meadow. Birds and squirrels are flitting through the trees above us and there are insects buzzing all around our heads. I can almost hear the trees breathing in the spring sunlight as they stretch their leaves higher and wider. The air is tinted a soft pale green by the light filtering through the tender leaves unfolding all around us. There is activity everywhere as new life erupts in every direction, but it still feels quiet and empty. We are both cautious and I walk with my bow in my hand, but for all the tiny movements and sounds, we are alone here. As we finally near the meadow and step towards the ridge, I realize we are not alone anymore. The faint smell of a burning fire and cooking meat is drifting through the trees and I can hear quiet voices and movement. I let go of Bellamy's hand and raise my bow and making my footsteps light and quiet.

"Wait here," I whisper to Bellamy. He look so much stronger now, but I still don't think he's strong enough to fight. The look he gives me says he thinks otherwise though.

"Not a chance, Princess," he says with that smirk that makes me want to throw something at him and kiss him at the same time. He pulls a knife from his belt and steps up beside me as I make my way to the edge of the trees. When the meadow finally comes into view I drop my bow and laugh. There are tents spread out around the meadow and the fire pit we used while the River clan was here is burning again. Lincoln is standing by the fire talking to a few boys I recognize as Bellamy's main guards and there are more people working in the gardens we planted a few weeks ago. There is activity all over the meadow and the gently hum of a collection of voices all carrying out separate conversations. There are people building and strengthening tents, tilling and weeding in the gardens, fishing in the lake, and chopping fire wood, new life is erupting here as well.

"Your people really don't take their time do they Bellamy?"

"Hey, this was your idea." Bellamy says with a smile. "You're not having second thoughts are you? I hear there's a big broken ship available in the woods if you don't want to stay here."

"Never," I say wrapping my arms around Bellamy's waist and tucking my head against his left shoulder. It feels so good to be standing here with him, our lives so full of possibility and hope. I
spent so much time worried about losing him and now I can finally allow myself to think about our future and the life we can build together.

"Good." Bellamy drapes his arm over my shoulder and pulls me even closer resting his chin in my hair. "Have I ever told you how much I hate the forest?"

I can hear the smirk in his voice and I smack him lightly with my bow as I turn to join our people.

"Right," I laugh "because that's the only reason you're here."

"Don't forget the food," he calls after me with a huge smile on his face.

When I make it down to the meadow Octavia comes running over towards us and she's all smiles. She nearly knocks me over with a hug and I have to remind her to be gently with Bellamy.

"It's good to see you too, little sister," he laughs as Octavia hugs him as gently as she can manage. Her leg has healed completely and she looks strong and healthy.

"So, Clarke," she says turning back to me. "What do you think?"

"It looks like you've been busy."

"Well, when we got back to the camp, it just didn't feel right. There were so many of us gone and we were all tired of being trapped behind that wall. Lincoln reminded me we could always come here and we figured, why wait? He's been showing some of the kids how to take care of the crops you two planted and we tilled more of the land."

"I'm glad you're here Octavia," I say hugging her again.

That night, Bellamy and I leave the fire early and head into the bunker. Everyone has been celebrating his return and they have a lighter air about them that I've never seen before. It's nice to see them without the cloud of death and devastation hanging over their heads. I'm happy to see Max has pulled through and is getting around fairly well with his one remaining hand. Raven and Monty still look sad, they are happy and smiling when I greet them, but it is a hollow kind of happiness that doesn't brighten their faces the way it used to. I have seen that look before, on my grandmother's face, and Arryn's face, and my own, I know time is the only thing that will allow them to feel joy again. It will take time for their wounds to heal and these kinds of wounds are not as easily mended as Bellamy's. I know I am lucky to have him here with me, I could have so easily lost him.

As I lead Bellamy into my room I see he has already pushed the extra bed from the corner against mine to make one bed large enough for both of us to sleep in, we don't need the space though. We spend the night in a tangle of intertwined limbs, both refusing to let go of each other. His skin is so warm against mine and his strong gentle touch melts away all of the aches and worries of the past month. His body is strong and hard where mine is soft and tender and we fit against each other perfectly.

When I wake up the next morning my legs are still wrapped around Bellamy and my head is resting on the good side of his chest. He is already awake and gently drawing circles on my back with his finger tips. I lay there for a few moments refusing to move as I take in his scent and the sounds of his steady breathing and heartbeat. I turn and kiss him gently as I move to get out of bed, but he grabs my arm and pulls me back into bed and I land on top of him.

"I think they can manage without us for a while, Princess."

I lean down and kiss the smirk off his face as he wraps his strong arms around my waist and
presses my body against his. I don't think I will ever tire of the feeling of our bodies pressed together like this.

After Bellamy and I move back to the bunker and start our new life with his people, I worry that things will be strange with Isaac or that I will loose him completely from my life, that's never what I wanted. As the months go on though, we fall into a comfortable friendship and I find myself surprised by how easy it is to love him as a brother, maybe that's the way we were always meant to love each other. Bellamy and Isaac slowly develop a friendship as well, it's hard at first, neither of them want to talk about what happened, but in time they grow to respect each other and work together. Anya joins us at the bunker from time to time as well and I slowly realize it wasn't just guilt over Ray's death that kept her at a distance all these years. She marries Isaac that fall and we hold a celebration in the meadow - with lots of pumpkins.

Arryn and Gael make the trip north for the wedding and it's nice to see them in a more cheerful situation. Arryn and I play guitar and sing songs around the fire, Bellamy sits with Lincoln and Isaac as they drink and talk on the opposite side of the fire, I catch him smiling at me from time to time and I smile back across the flames. His dark eyes are burning in the orange glow and it reminds me of the way he looked at me last year at the beach. So much has changed since then, but the way he looks at me is the same. I didn't see it then, I didn't allow myself, but his eyes have always claimed me. He's not showy in his affection for me and he rarely kisses me in front of other people, but the intensity of the way he fixes his eyes on me tells me he loves me every time he looks at me. When Arryn and I finish singing You and I, I feel a hand on my shoulder and Bellamy kisses my neck.

"I love that stupid song," he whispers in my ear, still kissing my neck. He smells like moonshine and sweat and I know he's a little drunk.

"It's growing on me too," I say and this time I wear the smirk as I lead Bellamy away from the fire and into the bunker.

It feels like more than just a wedding, it's the final coming together of all the tribes. We are stronger than ever and I can't help but feel hopeful about our future. I can tell Anya is uncomfortable with the laughter and song, she was raised for war and battle so peace is unfamiliar. It reminds me of a quote from an old book I read years ago that said peace is hard to remember because it leaves no scars. I don't know if that's true though. The scars of peace and happiness are just harder to see. Where the scars of battle are jagged and dark, the scars a peace are faint pink whispers on our skin. When I look at Bellamy, I know they are real.

Eight months after the battle, a young girl from the northern tribe, no more than 14, makes the trek south with a few guards to inquire after her dead and apologize for their sins. Isaac gives her safe passage through the mountains and we meet in an old barn we use for trading. Anya and Bellamy come to the meeting as well. The wounds are still so raw for many of us and Raven has to be kept away. The girl offers some furs as a token of peace and we agree on a boundary between her people and ours. We invite her to trade with us each full moon at the barn and I send her back with all the seeds I think will survive in her harsher climate. There are people from every tribe who curse the agreement but Isaac and I both know we can't hold her accountable for the actions of her parents. They were both killed in the battle. In my box she finds her mother's necklace and a bone her father wore to commemorate his first kill as a warrior. She ties them to a tree in the center of the orchard before she leaves. I think she is happy to leave behind the anger and bloodshed they brought to her life. It is another year before anyone from her tribe comes back to trade, but slowly we see them more and more.

When we start building a real house in the meadow the next spring, it's Isaac who comes to help us and when our son is born late that summer, Bellamy and I name him Zeke for the man who
brought our roads back together. I think a lot about what my grandmother said about the road back to humanity, I'm not sure if we're on it or even going in the right direction, but it feels right. When I look around at the life I have created for myself and my people, the choices I have made, and the traces I will leave behind, I see a world I am happy to live in and proud to help build.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who stuck with this and took the time to read what started as a random imagined conversation in my head and turned into a ridiculously long project.

Thanks so much. The comments were always very motivating.

Also incase you're curious, the quote Clarke is referring to is from Diary by Chuck Palahniuk.

It's so hard to forget pain, but it's even harder to remember sweetness. We have no scar to show for happiness. We learn so little from peace.
Epilogue

For Maiqu20, who always left me such encouraging comments!

Thanks and enjoy!

Epilogue

Bellamy

I knew I would miss her, but nothing prepared me for this. Life without Clarke is almost impossible. She was a part of everything and everyone around her. At first I was angry at everyone else for crying and mourning, she didn't belong to them, she belonged to me, what right did they have to grieve for her? I wanted to lash out and punch anyone who put flowers on her grave or passed by the house with a kind word. She was mine, they didn't know her or love her the way I did, this pain belongs to me and only me. It wasn't true though and I think even then part of me knew that. Clarke belonged to everyone and we all belonged to her. She was part of everything she touched and built and healed. Of course, the one thing I can't live without is the one thing she was unable to heal.

When she first got sick she tried to cover it up, she didn't want anyone to worry about her, she was always looking out for everyone else. Even after she spent years teaching new doctors to care for our people, everyone still came to Clarke, and she still helped them, even when her fingers had grown stiff and brittle. People trusted her more than anyone else, she spent years earning that trust and fighting for what she thought was best for all of us. I know I should be happy for the long years we shared together and the children we raised, but right now, I just feel alone and broken and angry. Everywhere I look there are reminders of Clarke. She is in the sensible stone and log houses we built in the meadow, the birch bark canoes we fish from on the lake, the crops we harvest every year - especially the apple trees. She's in the songs we sing around the fire in celebration, songs I can't listen to anymore. I hear Clarke's voice and her breath on the spring breeze that rustles the gentle new leaves she loved so much. I hear her in the call of the birds she knew by name and I smell her in the herbs that grow all around our home. She is everywhere and at the same time, she is gone.

Zeke, Abby, Theo, and Emma had all married and moved into their own homes by the time Clarke fell ill and they came home to be with her, but now they are all gone again. Zeke moved north to the mountains when he got married and he has been leading the Mountain Men with Isaac's son James for years. Beyond our children, Isaac was the only one whose grief didn't bother me. He knew Clarke almost as well as I did, he was like a brother to her, and to me. He was here for almost all of the important moments in our lives. Maybe it was the quiet way he grieved, just sitting over her grave for hours without saying a word, or maybe that he didn't try to apologize to me or tell me things would get better. When I think back to the way we met so many years ago with his arm pinned against my neck I know why his sadness didn't bother me, he may have loved her differently than I did, but he loved her just as fiercely.

Abby and Theo both moved south to join the River Clan when they were younger. Clarke and I
Abby and Theo both moved south to join the River Clan when they were younger. Clarke and I missed them, but they were happy there and they have both built lives for themselves. They visited often and we talked from time to time on the radio Raven built to help link our tribes together. They are both grown now with their own children. Abby looks the most like Clarke, she has her mother’s blue eyes and blond hair. Right now, I'm happy not to have that constant reminder around me. Clarke used to say that Theo looked like her brother Ray but with all of her mother's laughter and ease, I think that's why he went south. He always loved being with Arryn and Gael. Emma, our youngest, looks like Octavia, she’s a lot like her too. Strong and kind and always curious. She asked me to move into her home on the far side of the meadow but I refused to leave the home I shared with Clarke. This was our life, we built the first real home in the meadow and Clarke filled it with love and memories. Almost a year passes before I find myself able to smile at little things again and laugh when I think about Clarke. I know she would want me to be happy, but it's hard.

One fall night, more than a year after her death, I find myself in the bunker looking through the shelves of books. I'm not really sure what I'm looking for, but I like it here. It reminds me of her and the early days we spent together before I knew I loved her, laughing and teasing each other. As I skim the books I stop short at the sight of Clarke's neat writing on the side of a thin green book. My heart stops and I can't move for a moment. I reach up and gently pull the book from its place on the shelf. I'm almost afraid it will vanish when I try to touch it, but it doesn't. As I pull it down I remember what it is, Clarke's old journal. She used to take a picture every year and tuck it away in this book with a description of the things that happened that year. I carry the book over to the bunker entrance and sit on the floor leaning my back against one of Clarke's old uncomfortable chairs. The floor is cold and hard, but I don't care. This is where we used to sit and laugh together. I open the book to the first page and read.

**Year 96:**

This year I worked with the Mountain Men to build a small school with some of the materials from the bunker. I stayed for three weeks and worked with some of the teenage girls to show them how to teach the younger children to read. Isaac joined me in the afternoons and listened as I read Peter Pan to some of the children. I will move to the mountains next fall.

There is a picture of the view from the top of the mountain that overlooks Isaac's settlement and a few descriptions of their homes and a population count. When I turn the page I'm surprised to see a young Octavia staring back at me. I can't help but smile.

**Year 97:**

This year the Sky People returned to earth. A ship containing 101 teenagers from the Ark space station landed in the Forest Clan's territory (one additional survivor landed in a separate ship shortly afterwards). After a short period of tension with Anya's people they were able to join our treaty and become members of the alliance with the surrounding tribes. Their leader's name is Bellamy Blake.

I touch my hand to the paper where she wrote my name and try to remember the sound of her voice calling to me, but it just sounds like a hollow imitation in my head.

**Year 98:**

After a short, but devastating, war with the Northerners our populations have been significantly reduced. The Northerners attacked in the early spring and together the four tribes of the area fought and defeated them. The Water People did not fight.
Clark lists the names of the dead and numbers for the Northerners along with a few other details about the war. I skim this, still not willing to relive it. The picture on this page shows a happier scene, Anya's wedding. I still remember sneaking off into the bunker with Clarke at the end of the night. This was before we built our home, in the time when we returned from mountains and spent every free moment together in her small room in the bunker. Back then it seemed like we would never tire of each others' touch, and we didn't, but our love changed and grew as the years went on and it became so much more.

Anya (FC) and Isaac (MM) married in the meadow this fall. We held a celebration for all of the tribes, Arryn and Gael brought their children and two leaders of the Water People joined the celebration with some of their younger members. Two boys from their tribe stayed behind and Monty left to join them after the wedding. The Sky People have moved into the meadow and Bellamy and I are leading them together. I will not move to the mountains as was agreed in the treaty. Bellamy and I did not have a wedding, but I love him and we will live here together in the meadow.

I feel my eyes burning and I quickly turn the page before any tears can force their way out. When I see the next picture I realize I can't stop them and I wipe my eyes to keep my tears from falling onto the image below. The page shows Clarke standing in front of our stone and log home with Zeke wrapped in her arms. It's early fall in the picture and Zeke must be only a few weeks only. I can barely see his dark hair peeking out from the blanket Clarke has wrapped around his tiny body. She looks so young and so happy. Her smile takes over her entire face and I can almost hear her laughing as she teased me while I tried to figure out the camera. The pumpkin patch Clarke planted every year is just visible behind the house.

Year 99:

Bellamy and I built a home in the meadow, with help from Isaac(MM). Other members of the Sky People are planning to build similar homes as well and they have been watching and helping with the work. We plan for everyone to have homes built within 4 years. In the fall our son Zeke was born. He looks just like Bellamy, he has his father's beautiful dark eyes.

I stare at the picture for a few minutes remembering how happy we were together. Clarke never looked more beautiful than when she was holding one of our children.

As I turn to the next page I can't help but laugh a little at the sight of Raven. She looks so proud of herself standing in front of an antenna she built in the mountains. She spent years salvaging parts and building antennas and radios so we could communicate with the tribes around us without walking for hours.

Year 100:

Raven (SP) built a communications antenna in the mountains with the help of some of the Mountain Men and Sky People. We are now able to communicate with the Mountain Men and Forest Clan via radio. Raven plans to build more antennas in the years to come and possibly extend the range to reach the Water People and the River Clan. Early this winter a group of unknown men entered the meadow in the night and attacked some of the members of our tribe. The attackers were all killed, along with four Sky People. We don't know what they wanted or where they came from.

Clark lists the names of the dead Sky People but I don't remember who they were. It was so many years ago and we have lost so many people since then. We never had another war like what happened with the Northerners but, from time to time, we have been attacked by small groups of people. It doesn't happen much anymore though. I'm not sure how many people are still out there on their own, but we don't see very many these days. I used to wonder if there was an entire
civilization out there some where just beyond our reach. If I hadn't met Clarke I might have gone out searching for them, but once I met her I knew I could never leave.

Year 101:

This year Gael (RC) brought us 3 hens and a rooster to celebrate the birth of our daughter Abigail. Bellamy and Lincoln built a pen for the chickens in the middle of the meadow and I have been teaching people to care for them. Later in the year, when one of the hens went broody, we hatched 7 more chicks. It has been a peaceful year.

The picture below shows a group of small children watching Lincoln as he holds out a small chick for them to see. Zeke is there, standing next the Isaac's son James. They were born just a few months apart and are still as close now as they were back then. Octavia's daughter Lily is sitting in the grass in front of them, she's younger and she probably couldn't walk yet. There are a few other children from the tribe standing in the group but I don't recognize them. On the far side of the chicken pen I am standing next to Clarke holding Abby in my arms. Abby is looking over at Lincoln and the chickens and laughing. She was always such a happy child. Clarke is looking at me and smiling. She looks so peaceful and content. She used to love catching me playing with the children. She would joke that I was only nice when no one else was around to see it.

Year 102:

This spring we built birch bark canoes to fish on the lake. Gael(RC) sent four of his people north to work with us. We build 8 canoes and sent 2 back with the River Clan. Bellamy and Lincoln traded the canoe they built to Anya(MM) for a filly that Octavia and I will share. Anya promised we can breed her with one of their stallions when she grows big enough. We named her Misty.

I smile when I look at the picture of Octavia and Clarke beaming next to the horse they loved so much. Clarke's stomach is just starting to grown round with our next child, Theo. He was born early the next spring before the snow had completely melted from the meadow. The next picture makes me smile as well. It shows Clarke in the mountains standing with Raven and Monty in the middle of the orchard she planted after the war. When the trees were big enough to begin producing apples Clarke decided to teach the Mountain Men to make the cider they love so much. I see people from all of the tribes standing around her as she holds Theo on her hip and talks.

Year 103:

This fall we all met in the orchard to make cider and celebrate the harvest. All of the surrounding tribes attended the celebration and brought food to share. Monty(WP) came to join us and over a dozen people came south from the Northerner's tribe. They were all young, they lost many of their people in the war. Isaac and his people welcomed the visitors to set up tents in the clearing below the orchard and we cooked and ate around a large fire. Our second son, Theo, was born in the early spring.

The next picture shows a group of us with packs and gear set out for a trip. It takes me a moment to realize where we were going. This was not a trip to visit family or friends. This was the year we decided to finally visit Mount Weather.

Year 104:

This year we traveled to Mount Weather on a scavenging and exploring trip. What we found was beyond what we ever imagined. The facility was still sealed and when we finally found an entrance Raven had to blast the door open. Everyone inside was dead. The walls and shelves were filled with priceless art and artifacts, mostly gold and jewels. There were obvious signs of struggle and some of the skeletons were still impaled with knives or clutching guns. After looking
around at the destruction and ruin we decided to take what we could and reseal the door. We did not move the bodies, instead we left them as a reminder to future generations of the weakness of human nature and the dangers of greed and superiority. Our second daughter Emma was born late in the winter, Bellamy says she looks just like Octavia as a child.

Clarke lists everything we took from Mount Weather, mostly electronics and tools. I remember the shock I felt walking through those halls. They had enough supplies and materials to survive for decades to come but instead, they all killed each other. I guess that's the downside of trying to build a civilization out of only those people rich enough to buy their way in. I remember the look of horror on Clark's face as she stepped over the bones on the ground. Where her family valued knowledge and survival and the resurgence of decency and humanity, these people valued only money and status.

The next picture is the last one in the album. Clarke ran out of film for her old polaroid and never found more. Raven was able to restore a few old cameras we found but we never managed to find a working printer, or the right parts to build one so the rest of our pictures are locked away on memory cards. One of the things Clarke was most excited to find in Mount Weather was a medium sized box with a camera lens at one end and connections for cables at the other end. She refused to tell me what it was, 'It's a surprise, Bellamy.' I remember her saying as she kissed me gently and shoved it into her pack. A few weeks later she hung up a sheet from the clothes line behind our house and showed an old movie using the box she found. It was a projector and over the years she used it to show pictures and movies to everyone in the meadow. I'm not sure what they had used it for in Mount Weather but watching a movie under that stars with our four children crawling around us seems like the best use I can imagine.

Year 105:

This summer, during an expedition to the west, we discovered the remains of the Ark space station. Raven, Bellamy, Lincoln, Octavia and I found a large metal space station 15 days west of the Meadow. Raven was able to access some of their systems and discovered that the entire Ark attempted to land near the site of the drop ship. Bellamy recognized this as the main agricultural station of the Ark. There was no one on the ship and we are unable to determine where they went. Raven plans to return to the ship to gather more materials.

The picture underneath shows me leaning against the side of the space station gazing off into the distance. I hadn't realized Clarke had taken a picture of me there. I am about to close the book when I notice Clarke has written something else under the picture of me there.

Bellamy and I never got married, but I still love him as much as the day we returned to the meadow.

I don't know why we never actually got married, not that there was any legal authority to answer to, but most people held a small ceremony or party or at the very least exchanged rings. I guess we never felt the need to. From the moment we walked back into the meadow, everyone knew that Clarke and I belonged to each other and there was no reason to announce it. Clarke stopped tucking her pearl under her shirt and she wore it everyday until she died. She didn't want to be buried with it so I wear it now, tucked against my skin.

As I stand up and return the book to the shelf I'm glad Clarke took the time to write it all down. I remember teasing her when she insisted I take a picture of the drop ship all those years ago and when I strain I can almost hear her voice.

"Even if every trace of us is washed off the earth, it doesn't mean we weren't here or that our lives didn't matter."
It's almost comforting to think that the same is true of our love. Even with Clarke ripped away from me, our lives together, and our love for each other still matters. And someday, someone else will find this small book that holds her memories and they will know what happened here. They will know that we loved each other.

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