So Doggone Lucky
by AspenTree0228

Summary

When Staff Sergeant Lexa Woods comes back from an oversea deployment that ended in physical and emotional trauma, she sets out on a journey to find her so-called fate with her buddy Hades, a German Shepherd. She winds up on a dog boarding farm, owned by Clarke Griffin, a divorcée and young mother, who is mourning the death of her brother. They find solace and comfort in each other, while their complicated backstories test their faith in destiny.

(If you haven't guessed already, it's 'The Lucky One' movie adaptation that nobody asked for)

Notes

I was coerced into watching The Lucky One with my straight best friend™, and of course my mind wanders -- this could be an awesome story with wlw characters.

Full disclosure:
My limited knowledge about the Marine Corps came from my dad (army 20 years ago so...) and the internet.
The overall plot follows the movie, some borrowed lines, but with lots of additional scenes, conversations, interactions, sins...
No beta, no intention to claim ownership over the story or characters, I own nothing but all mistakes.
February 4th, 10:57 p.m. 2014

“Uncle Titus,

My troop departed Camp Pendleton yesterday, and we are en route to Baghdad region to begin a nine-month deployment.

My faith in my country and my loyalty to the leaders have been tested and have endured. I have survived and proven to be courageous. Father would have been pleased to know that I honored his wishes and expectations.

I hope Aunt Nia and the kids are well.

May we meet again.

Lexa”

June 26th, 2:18 a.m. 2014

“Sergeant Woods! We’ve been ambushed! I’m pulling back!” Sergeant Ryder cries out by the end of a clumped corridor in an abandoned office building. The headlights on his helmet, bouncing off the walls, light up his grimaced face at the metallic taste of blood in the dusty air. He pulls back from the line of fire.

“Commander, they got women and children hostages!”

“Two children in the far east room!”

“Ma’am, Sergeant Forrest’s bird just touched down.” PFC Lincoln Riverson, an intimidating-looking young man built of muscles stacked on muscles, runs up from the ground floor, all sweaty and labored breaths, reports to the commanding officer.

“’bout fucking time. Anya, get your ass down on second floor!” Staff Sergeant Lexa Woods ducks behind the corner of the staircases and spares a second to confirm that backup has arrived. “We got screwed over by the fucking intel, new priority’s to evacuate the hostage.” She nods towards the room where they temporarily hid the children.
“Roger that.” Riverson grips tighter to the thermal camera and inches forward to the other side of the building where their technology shows the terrorists are holing up.

“Commander, permission to blow shit up at south east entrance?” Explosive Specialist Raven Reyes comes in on the radio.

Lexa quickly assesses the situation. She’s got hostiles with hostages on the east upper level, and commotions from the north entrance. Anya’s Marines are descending down from the balcony, the quickest evacuation route might be the one that they’ve originally planned to blow up to encircle the fleeing hostiles. “Negative, Reyes, leave it clear.”

“Yes ma’am.” Raven does not sound happy about the newest development, always eager to make a hole in the wall.

After hearing the noise of glasses breaking, then followed by the rapid onslaught of M14s, Lexa knows Anya has come through. She searches for a clip on the ammo pouch, swiftly reloading her beloved M9. Rounding the corner, she immediately recognizes the back of her best friend’s head, “Anya, I’ve got your six.”

“Prepare for impact, Woods. Gordon, Wilde, and you, Bucky blondie, we’re rolling out.” Master Sergeant Anya Forrest leads three of her subordinates to round the last corner that separated themselves from the direct line of fire.

“C’mon, Bucky blondie? Seriously?” Before the Sergeant can finish his sentence, sounds of flying shrapnels cut him off.

The smell of gun powder permeates the perpetually dusty air, the fast paced sequences of red and yellow flashes are the only visible light source. But despite of the disorienting darkness, the Staff Sergeant’s eyes catch the bullets soaring in a way that is almost slow-motion, and piercing through the Master Sergeant’s body. Upon impact, the woman’s torso bends into a strange angle that is definitely not humanly possible.

“NO!!!” She forgets to blink, forgets to breathe, forgets the heated dust burning her eyes and lungs, and forgets about the searing pain in her shoulder where she most certainly got hit but hasn’t had the time to check it.

“Man down, man down. Secure the corridor, we’re pulling out.” The blonde haired Sergeant holds his ground, and barks some orders through his intercom. “Sergeant Woods, we got a window to evacuate the kids, I’ll cover you.”

Lexa seizes the opportunity without hesitation, she quickly gestures the Marines following her to pass through the corridor. “It’s you and I now, Bucky.” She points her weapon at the shadowy figures that are shooting at them, and fires several rounds until they momentarily cease fire. “We need to get the fuck outta here. I think Anya’s still alive.” Lexa rolls her friend onto her back, and hoists her up from the ground. When she looks back to the Sergeant, she freezes mid-sentence.

There is a gaping hole in the side of his neck, blood squirting out under the pressure of his hand, he is leaning against the wall, and the darkness pooling from two other bullet wounds on his chest and stomach has thoroughly drenched his uniform.

The terrorists recover too soon, and start firing again.

“Looks like it’s just me now, ma’am.” He gives her the saddest smile, while pulling out a hand grenade.
“You put that back right now, Sergeant, and that’s an order.” Lexa screams after him as he starts a sprint towards the scurrying figures at the other end of the hallway.

“It’s now or never, ma’am.”

Hot tears streaming down her face, one minute Lexa is holding up Anya’s lifeless body in her arms, the next minute, she feels herself being thrown down the floor by a powerful blast. Her world flips upside down before it all goes black.

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**June 26th, 11:32 a.m. 2014**

Staff Sergeant Lexa Woods sits in front of the remnants of the building. The medical triage unit has cleaned out her wounds and moved on down the priority list. She is glad that they got to Anya in time to patch her up and send her on a chopper going straight back to base.

The desert sun is poisonous, though it doesn’t really bother her. She is in an entirely different frame of thoughts. She looks down at her palm, where it lays Sergeant Terrence Ryder’s dog tag, and she knows they’ve lost too many. She tears her gaze momentarily away from the object to watch the half dozen children rescued from the site, and contemplates about how the newspapers are going to glamorize this encounter as a victory. She feels everything but victorious.

Suddenly, a shiny object in the corner of her eyes catches her attention. Her curiosity, and perhaps the manipulation of a greater power above, drag her beaten body up to investigate.

It lies quietly in the rubble, and Lexa hisses as she bends over to pick it up, the sutures on her bicep fortunately withhold the motion.

Then she takes a closer look at it.

A photo. She brushes away the dust on its surface with her thumb gently. A young women’s face is slowly revealed. She has blonde hair and an easy smile, her eyes almost squeezed shut but Lexa still manages to distinguish the color—blue as the sky on a cloudless day. On the back of the photo, scribbled an endearing sentence that read “Be safe, xoxo”.

Just when she is about to carefully tuck it in her pocket, some commotions erupt by the makeshift triage clinic that pull her attention away.

“Ayis (Miss)! Ayis, bak’ya (Miss, stop)! Somebody stop her!” A nurse in navy scrub notices one of the women hostage they found under the rubble, who has been drifting in and out of consciousness, rolls down the stretcher and drags her broken body to the entrance of the building. Her face is muddy and tear-streaked, and her screams are like chalk scratching on blackboard as she digs at the concrete remnants, “Wa-ladi (my boy)! Abany (son)!"

Lexa scrambles to her feet at the sight, as another figure also starts a sprint to retrieve the woman. “Pull her out of there! EOD hasn’t cleared—”

**BOOM—**

The powerful wave of explosion sweeps her up from her feet, tossing her ten yards away. Her body rolls on the ground like an abandoned rag doll. Darkness, chaos, panic, and the texture of trickling blood on her forehead wrap around her senses like a wooly old rug. Lexa tightens her hold on the...
photo in her hand desperately as the last of her consciousness slips away.

July 2nd 2014

The first person she sees when she comes to is the Captain, a man with gentle brown eyes and salt and pepper on both sides of his temple.

“Welcome back, Woods,” Captain Marcus Kane greets her with deep yet soft voice, and put a ziplock bag, containing a picture and Sergeant Ryder’s dog tag, on the nightstand next to her bed, “the medics found this in your hand. We did our best to salvage it, but the blood wouldn’t come off, sorry.”

“It… it’s not mine, sir.” Nevertheless, Lexa picks it up and cradles it in her good hand, re-reading the words on the back, “it must be important to someone. I’d like to return it to the person who lost it.”

Kane nods in approval, “well, that might be a little difficult to achieve. You’re one of the last few left to be transferred back, we have to wait for your vitals to stabilize.”

“Captain, Anya—Master Sergeant Forrest…”

Kane puts his hand on her shoulder to ease her agitation, “Anya will be alright. She’s already back in the States. It’s Reyes that I’m more worried about.”

“Raven? Is she—”

“Alive and stable for now, but the shrapnel in her spine is giving the doctors a hard time. She might very likely lose function from waist down.”

Lexa clenches her jaw, the lump in her throat suddenly becoming suffocating. Raven was the quickest to react when the Iraqi woman approached the building entrance, Raven was the one who ran towards danger when others froze. But it should have been her, Lexa mourns, it was her order, it should have been her.

The Captain clears his throat, lifting his hand and patting her on the shoulder empathetically, “good luck with that,” he gestures at the picture now laying quietly, abandoned, in her lap, “chances are, the owner has already gone home to their loved ones.” Injured, disabled, or, dead. He leaves the last part unsaid.

July 20th 2014

“Lexa, you need to stop punishing yourself.” Anya’s words are accompanied by her labored breathing, indicating she is in the middle of her rehab, “just come home already.”

“I’m not punishing myself. They are in more critical condition than I am, they need complicated procedures just like you did.” Lexa insists. She just missed yet another flight home, having given up her spot to a fellow Marine, a father of three, who is in need of an emergency amputation
“Lexa—”

“Anya I’ll talk you later ok? I need to pack, the troops are on the move.” Lexa disconnects the call before Anya can ask more questions about where and why they are moving. Her hand hovers on the picture that sits on top of her neatly folded clothes in her luggage, before picking it up and tucking it in her pocket, for safe keeping, she tells herself.

PFC Lincoln Riverson is one of the few people that has yet to evacuate. He is silently organizing his weapons, observing her in the mean time. They’ve been working together for a few months now, but never found the necessity for pleasantries since the both of them prefer silence to chatter, and they only grew close recently because they are kind of stuck together. “Is that your guardian angel, Commander?” Since when that he also began to use the nickname her platoon came up with a while back now?

“She’s not mine, Lincoln.” Lexa smiles, shaking her head, “do you believe in guardian angels?”

“This one right here,” he fishes out a picture from the front pocket of his jacket, “her name’s Octavia. We met in college, she just graduated, and I’m visiting her hometown soon.” His grin is so big when he carefully places the picture back into his pocket, right over his heart.

“Oh, Wisconsin?” She vaguely remembers him telling her about UW-Madison and the football games the city of Madison is so renowned for.

“Yup, TonDC. Tiny town, really close to Madison actually. I can’t believe I’ve never been to her house, well, I was so nervous I’d screw it up when I meet her big brother and her mother, but… I’ve actually seen her brother, he’s a pretty cool guy. I don’t know what I was nervous about…”

“Lincoln, you’re rambling.” Lexa smirks at his flustered face. She is intrigued by the way his cheeks redden and eyes brighten at the mention of his girlfriend, it is almost like a love-sick puppy kind of devotion. Has he had a tail, Lexa muses, it would’ve been wagging too. It is such a silly thing, that a woman can bring out all the giddiness in this mountain of a man, but all the same beautiful.

Soon enough, their delightful conversation is interrupted. Private Dax pokes his head into her quarter, “Sarge, the car’s ready.”

It takes her a second to acknowledge him, because she despises the disrespectful nickname. “Alright, thank you, Marine. You’re dismissed.”

Unsuccessful in his attempt to spite her, Dax and his bruised patriarchal ego grumbles something under his breath before seeing himself out.

“Sergeant Woods, would you join me for the ride? I’d like your input on a subject matter.” Captain Kane motions Lexa over once they are outside. He has always been kind to her, and it is not just because he was close friends with her late father, Colonel Gustus Woods. Kane knows that Lexa is special, gifted, more than fit for this job. A Staff Sergeant normally takes an enlisted Marine eight to ten years of experience for appointment, it took Lexa six. It is not easy, either, being a woman, a very young woman, in the Marine Corps, watched by too many pairs of prying eyes out of curiosity, suspicion, animosity, and sometimes malice. She has been through events that the bravest of man can’t endure, and people thought she’d crumble. But Lexa Woods rose above it all, and she grew, sprung up like some sort of stubborn pine tree, the harsher the winter, the taller its crown. He’d sworn to Colonel Gustus Woods’ gravestone, to always look out for his daughter, yet, it
seems that she doesn’t need any looking out for after all.

Their vehicles form a line as they drive through the abandoned city, the only sounds heard being tires rolling over gravel. Lexa solemnly watches the backing scenery. Each corner they round, she can see the liveliness that it once contained, and she imagines what it had been, a bookstore maybe, a grocery shop, someone’s home. People don’t think about it often, not when they are busy staying alive, but the truth is, what they are doing to this country in the name of the greater good, is also what destroys it. She, herself, being a part of this destructive force, is responsible for someone else’s homelessness, someone else’s pain, someone else’s death. Then she remembers the devastated mother, the way she dragged her broken body in search of her son, her screams, her nails bloody by the digging, and at last, the explosion that completely tore her apart, arms and legs and bits and pieces. Lexa bites the inside of her cheek to force the image out of her mind. She won’t dwell on it, she can’t.

Kane casts a glance at the Staff Sergeant as she shakes herself out of the trance. He knows, sort of, what Lexa is thinking about when she gets quiet and pensive like this. They have had long, contemplative conversations about how following orders doesn’t always mean following what’s right in their heart, and about being able to resolve the cognitive dissonance doing what has to be done for the sake of international concern and feeling what she feels on a personal level. He is just about to say something, the vehicle comes to a sudden halt, causing them to tip forward slightly.

“Why are we stopping?” Lexa cranes her neck to see to the front. She sees that they have arrived at a small bridge, the river beneath them is dry, the ground crusty and barren.

The Marine driving explains, “there’s a civ truck parked in front of us.”

From the cargo truck in front of theirs, Lexa sees Dax, the Private from earlier today, jump out of the truck to investigate. “Goddamn it,” she also pops open her side of the door, “go back into your vehicle, Private!”

“I’m just checking, ma’am.”

“Stand down, Marine. You do not know the situation!” She feels for her weapon, ready for the consequences of his idiocy. Then she motions the cargo truck driver, “we should back out and take a detour.”

Dax is already inching towards the parked car. He rounds to the driver’s side, and peeps in. “Sir, I’ll need you to move this car.” He knocks on the window when he sees the figure sitting in the passenger’s seat.

Lexa is watching the exchange keenly, an unexplainable sense of trepidation tugs at the hair on the back of her neck, goosebumps rippling over her skin.

Then he sees something, and his body goes very still, like a ghost has run through it.

In the blink of an eyes, a gigantic ball of flame implodes from inside the car, accompanied with a deafening roar of metal snapping apart. It continues to expand, like a blooming flower, morbidly beautiful, all-consuming, deadly.

People talk about near-death experiences in a way that makes it seem romantic, your entire life flashes before your eyes, and you see the ones that matter the most to you.

Liars.
Nothing about this is romantic. What Lexa sees unveil before her very own eyes, is an absolute atrocity.

It is nothing but destruction, a spiral of dust and smoke envelopes the entirety of her being, tendrils of fire lick at her exposed skin, sounds of metal bending and rubbing screech in her ears, and glasses stab into her thigh. In the midst of it all, she remembers that there is something important that she is supposed to keep safe, her hand naturally comes to clutch tightly onto her chest pocket.

People are right about one thing, time does slow down when you’re suffering.

“We need medical back-up on west border line 7 miles to the dam, man down man down!”

“Get a chopper ready, we’re losing her!”

Chapter End Notes

I may have enough chapters written out to update every week, after that it will be every other week. Idk, depends on what you want.
October 30\textsuperscript{th} 2014

For the first time in over six months, Lexa feels her feet touch the soil of this strangely familiar land where she lived for over ten years in her childhood. The streets are quiet, and the morning sunlight is soft, palm trees stand with perfectly measured distances in between, guarding the houses with bright colored rooftops.

She made a mistake not taking a cab, or this Uber thing that apparently everybody uses nowadays to get around. The old wound in her leg is throbbing after walking from the bus stop to the neighborhood. It doesn’t concern her too much, she passed physical therapy after all.

As she approaches the yard of this one particular house with an obnoxious orange door, she sees two kids playing in the garden. Before she can even open her mouth to call their names, a German shepherd, giant comparing to the children, leaps out of the fence that separates the front yard and back yard, charging at full speed toward where she stands.

“Hades!” Lexa greets him with equal excitement, kneeling down to wrap her arms around his strong neck and threading her fingers in his coarse fur.

Hades barks and grunts, whimper and yelps, as if he tries to speak in a language that can convey his love and devotion to his human, and at the same time chastise her for being away for so long.

“Alexandria, my dear niece.”

She looks up from the embrace. There stands Titus, and soon Nia joins him. They have a forced smile on their faces. “I see you’ve come back to retrieve your dog.”

Sighing because she hates to do this, asking favors from people that clearly are stingy in giving such, Lexa struggles a little to stand up, “actually, I am hoping that I can stay with you for a little while… just till I get my benefits and paperwork signed off.”

November 11\textsuperscript{th} 2014

There is the sound of a huge explosion in the living room, causing Lexa to almost drop the plate in her hand. It takes her a fraction of a second to react, hands automatically searching for the M9 that is no longer strapped against her thigh.

The two children pay no attention to her, continuing with their combative video game while shoving at each other.

Titus screws up his brows observing his niece. “Alexandria, a word?” He nods toward his study, trusting his niece to trail behind him like a little duckling.
“Sorry, uncle Titus,” Lexa starts before he opens his mouth because she knows what he is about to say, “I’m just a bit sensitive to loud noises.”

He sighs, smoothing his hand over his bald head, “You aunt Nia is a very opinionated woman, Alexandria, and it’s not like she doesn’t like you, it’s just that she has her own concerns.”

“Concerns about what?”

“That your behaviors are having negative impacts on Ontari and Craig. They’re sensitive children, and they might think that they’ve done something wrong.”

It would be inappropriate to scoff at his words, Lexa bites the inside of her cheek, anger and annoyance bubbling in the pit of her stomach. *Sensitive my ass.* Just two days ago, over dinner, the kids were shoving at each other, whispering “you ask her”, “you do it”, “just ask her” amongst themselves, until Ontari inquired about when Lexa was going to move out so she can have her room back. “Uncle Titus, with all due respect, I don’t think it’s fair for her to say—”

“Are you seeing a shrink, Alexandria?”

“What?”

“The Marine Corps can provide you some help, like through VA’s hospitals.” He digs through some booklets that he has collected over the course of her stay, and then snatches down the sticky notes he posted with numbers of counselors and psychiatrists. “I think it might be best for you to seek professional help, instead of… you know… staying with us and doing nothing.”

Lexa shoots up one eyebrow in disbelief. *Doing nothing? Is he fucking serious?* She has been tidying the garage, fixing pipes and everything broken by the children, doing chores, and putting up with the little demons that reside in this house for two weeks, she kind of earned her stay, and he still has the audacity to accuse her for being a lazy ass. “I don’t need ‘professional help’, Uncle Titus, if you want to get rid of me, you can just say so.”

“Alexandria, I didn’t mean it like that.”

Maybe he didn’t, but she knows Nia and that poisonous mouth of hers meant every single word of it, Titus is just her puppet. “It’s fine, I’ll leave by the end of this week.”

**November 12th 2014**

She has been packing all morning, and arranging her stay with Anya, who moved into a small apartment near the VA rehab center for convenience as she is taking care of Raven. The two of them really have to work on their subtlety if they are really trying to keep their mutual pining on the down low. She has taken her last prescription pill for her leg pain and feels terribly drowsy, so she rests her cheek against the lumpy luggage, the fan on the ceiling blowing wind on her eyelashes, it tickles, so she closes her eyes too. Before she knows it, she is drifting off into a troubled dreamland.

*Helicopters whirl over her head, broken glasses crunch under her boots, and bullets fly by her ears. She takes cover behind a short wall.*

Ontari and Craig steal into the room. “Why is she sleeping? She’s supposed to move out of my room today!”
They have almost surrounded the terrorists, and the diversion the snipers created gives her the opportunity to slip pass the last defense of the enemies. Sometimes they are more valuable alive than dead, which is the reason that she is trained for any form of close combat should the occasion arise.

“Wake her up then.” Craig suggests, tugging at the luggage underneath Lexa’s head, then he waves his hand in and out of the woman’s face, receiving no response.

She inches closer, while raising her hand behind her to gesture her teammates to seize fire momentarily to provide a window, just a few seconds, that allow her to subdue the culprit.

Ontari pokes Lexa’s side, who jerks slightly from the assault. “You wake her.” She orders Craig.

“No you do it!”

She sees her chance, and hurdles herself over the short wall, pouncing on top of the hostile. He brings the butt of his assault rifle in the air, which she dodges easily.

“You do it!”

“Fine!” Craig relents. He climbs up from the other side of the bed, and stands with his feet on either side of Lexa. His claws in the air, and body bent, ready to jump scare the sleeping marine officer.

He is still clutching at his rifle, pushing her off his body. She lands on her back, but quickly recovers by kicking the weapon out of his grip. He doesn’t bother to pick it up again, instead, he charges forward, his shadow looming over her, his hands raised in the air. She knows what is coming, she knows he’ll try to choke her, so she balls up her fist to aim at his jaw.

Craig bounces a couple of times on top of Lexa before crashing into her with half of his body weight, his hands gripping at her shoulder tightly.

She feels it, the burning iron grip on her shoulder. She twists her trunk to escape the surprisingly light hold. Her hand finds his shoulder and her forearm digs into the vulnerable, exposed throat. She expects a deep grunt, or a wheezing moan as air leaves his lungs. What she doesn’t expect, is the shriek of a child.

“Mom——!!!!! Help!!!!”

Faces. Bloody, twisted, painful faces of those she killed, of those she saved, of terrorists, and of women, children, innocent citizens morph together in front of Lexa’s eyes. She blinks hard, to force the morbid red away, till tears stream hot on her cheeks. Then through it all, she sees Craig’s helpless little body under her headlock, and his nails sinking into her skin.

She briskly lets go of the boy, watching in horror as he rolls over holding his throat, already wearing bruises on his neck. “I’m so sorry, I am so, so sorry, Craig—”

“You CRAZY BITCH, STAY AWAY FROM MY CHILDREN!” In comes Nia in a frenzied fit, she scrambles across the room to pull Ontari and Craig into her bosom.

“Nia, I swear it is an accident! I’m so sorry. I—I was asleep, and I didn’t know what happened, I…”

“Get. Out. Of. My. House!” Nia spits at Lexa, voiced deprived of sympathy but filled with hatred “that is the last straw. I’ll call the cops if you come ten feet near my family!”
“I’ll go. I’ll go. I’m really sorry for what happened.” Lexa gingerly scoots over to the other side of the bed, picking up her duffle bag and watching the other woman out of the corner of her eyes. Once Nia follows her out making sure she didn’t steal any of their valuables, Hades emerges from the garage as well, sensing something wrong in the air, so he stands next to Lexa’s feet, protective of his human. Nia opens her mouth and is about to yell more, but with a glance to the dog, she reluctantly clenches her jaw and mutters, “yeah, take your filthy devil of a dog with you too.”

It doesn’t hurt, Nia’s atrocious words, the children’s ungrateful brattiness, Titus’ pathetic cowardice, or her predictable misfortune. She knows from the beginning, this is never going to be her home.

January 3rd, 2015

Co-existing with Anya is an easy routine thing. They were in the same battalion when Lexa was fresh out of bootcamp, and Anya on her second tour. They for more than enough times shared personal space holing up in caves and sleeping in trucks together. So spending Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and New Years Eve together, isn’t up for discussion at all.

Now after a month and half, it is a still strange thing to get used to, Anya being domestic and tender when she is out of her uniform and around Raven. Lexa has to admit, they are pretty cute together. Anya drives Raven to rehab everyday, then bartends at a local pub owned by a veteran every night. Their life is nothing of grand luxury, but comfortable, and mundane, and normal.

Lexa finds herself, at rare moments, jealous of what Anya and Raven have.

She is staring at her laptop for about an hour now, her heart fluttering wildly. The lighthouse that popped up on her search matches the lighthouse in the picture behind the blonde woman, and it is located in a small town called Arkadia in Wisconsin.

Raven strolls out of Anya’s room into the living room, glowing happily. She is walking almost like her old self now, with her left leg in the supportive brace. She then plops herself up at the counter of the kitchenette. “Yo Commander, whatchu lookin’ at?”

“Lighthouses. Listen, Raven, I was going to talk to—”

“What’s up, loser!” Anya also emerges from her room, with a shit-eating grin plastered on her face. She eases herself into the small gap between the counter and the fridge, arms sneaking around Raven’s waist, and whispers, “hey babe.”

Lexa doesn’t have to guess what they were up to, and she is not nearly as traumatized by the time she walked in on her blonde friend knuckles deep inside the other girl and face buried between her legs. A small smile finds its way to her lips as she looks at her friends. “Actually, Raven, Anya, I want to talk to you about something.”

“Oh no, are you breaking up with us?” Raven teases, “I will fight you for Hades’ custody!”

Lexa shakes her head in amusement, “I am and always will be Hades’ lawful guardian. Anyways, actually, I really want to thank you for your hospitality, putting a roof on top of my head and all.”

“Oh don’t be coy, Lexa. Mi casa su casa. Your uncle and aunt are just assholes, anyone else would’ve done that in a heartbeat.” Anya opens up the fridge for some beer, and tosses one to
where Lexa is sitting.

“Appreciate it. However, I think I should get my butt moving before I overstay my welcome.”

“Pffs, nonsense.” Raven flicks her wrist in dismissal, “you’re fam, Lexa, we went through hell and back together, I think it’s pretty much implied in our deployment statement. Plus, my birthday’s in like two weeks, how rude of you to take off before buying me a gift!”

“I’ll stay till February.” It isn’t like she has a tight schedule to follow or anything, so she budges.

“What is it really about, Lex? Got somewhere better to be? Maybe some secret lady love?” Anya makes some kissing noise.

Lexa suppresses the urge to flip her off, instead, she confesses about the photo, and that she has found a lead on the woman’s whereabouts. “Something to keep my head occupied might be good for me, at least that’s what the shrink said.”

“So what do you plan on doing, say if you actually find this woman?”

“When I find her.” Lexa corrects, “I dunno, thank her, I guess. Fate did bring her to me, and it’s constantly reminded me of things other than war and death, things that are good.”

“You never believed in ‘fate’, Lexa,” Anya holds up her hands to do an air quote, “I’m not attacking you for changing your mind, but what gives?”

Taking a sip from her beer, Lexa just gives her friend a shrug. “Well, a little brush with death may have put my views into perspective. I grew up non-religious, you know, and it’s probably a little late to go back on that, but I can see how it’d be nice to believe in something, however trivial or minute, it gets you through the day.”

“I feel ya.” Raven raises her beer, and Anya nods. They share the drink in comfortable silence, a sullen mutual understanding finds roots in unspoken words, empty beer bottles, and chilly night air.

Lexa watches silently, as Raven and Anya move around each other in the small kitchen with the most routinely fluidity, with a small smile despite the light pang in her chest and the lingering bittersweet taste on her tongue.

They have a lovely home, it just isn’t hers.

May 11th 2015

Lincoln reached out to Lexa when he heard she’d be coming up to Wisconsin. Octavia has found a job in downtown Madison, so he also found small gigs here and there to contribute. Lexa however, kindly declined his invitation to stay with them. Weeks of third wheeling for Raven and Anya is too much time sitting in silent sexual tension knowing she is the reason those two haven’t started going at it on the kitchen counter. To witness another one of her coworkers like that, no thank you. But she did agree to have a drink at the place Lincoln works as a security guard in a pool bar.

“When you told me about coming up here, I was expecting much earlier.” He gives her a toothy grin and holds out a stool for the petite brunette girl in his arm, “Octavia, Sergeant Lexa Woods, the ‘Commander’.” He introduces them, and motions the bartender to fill them up.
Lexa savor the sweet aftertaste of the Wisconsin brew for a minute before answering his silent question, “got held up on the road, this old leg acted up again so I had to make a pitstop at the clinic.”

“You know, Octavia betted there’s not a snowball of a chance that you’re gonna walk all the way here from Cali.” He chuckles at her raised eyebrow.

Lexa points at the sole of her shoe, almost bald at this point, “well, here I am.”

“You’re a piece of work, Commander.” The other brunette holds up her glass in the air, “since I lost the bet, tonight’s on me. Hey Jasper, get us the top shelf moonshine!”

“You won’t hear me complaining.”

Liquor flows, so does the conversation. They talk about everything and nothing in particular, favorite childhood memory, best places to eat out in town, Octavia’s college days, Lincoln’s recent attempt at being a stunt actor, Lexa and her experience training dogs.

Between laughs and drinks, Lexa closely observes the couple even though her senses are fuzzy from the alcohol. She can see how Octavia is good for Lincoln, she brings out a light in him that was once dim and faint, her quick wit and outgoingness make up for his reserved personality, and his steady presence grounds her.

After probably four shots, two beers, and a Bloody Mary, Octavia’s words start to slur a little, “I gotta ask though, you probably get this a lot—”

“O, com’on.” Lincoln runs interference, knowing his girlfriend can use some filtering when she gets drunk.

“You want to know what possessed me to walk here.” Lexa finishes her question instead, “it’s ok, Lincoln.”

Hollering with another shot in her hand, Octavia wedges herself between her boyfriend and the Commander, leaning in with interest, “See? She’s game! Ch-cheers to the Commander!”

“Lexa, you don’t have to answer her.”

“No no, it’s fine.” Either it is the alcohol making her want to talk more, or it is the comforting fact that none of them would remember this conversation in the morning, Lexa finds herself slamming down another shot glass before bringing her hand up to tap at her temple. “I needed time to be alone, well, with Hades of course, but you know what I mean.”

Octavia nods a little too enthusiastically, comically even, as if what Lexa just said is a big revelation to her.

“Well, I just… I wanted to figure out what people mean when they talk about fate, why we do what we do, why some people make it back and some don’t. I feel like there’s a debt that I have to pay… but I’m not sure how… Maybe it’s a form of self-punishment, I don’t know, but I think I needed to take the time before I find her, you know, before I say thank you.” Lexa rambles on, “I—I think I just need the time to figure out what the hell I’m gonna say. I’m… I’m not making much sense am I? Sorry, where was I?” Confusion grows as alcohol clogs her brain, she can vaguely make out Octavia’s half-asleep form against Lincoln, and the man is trying his best to steady the both of them.

With her eyes shut, Octavia seems to still catch on and be nosy, “no no, it makes sense. You
needed time to think of something to express your gratitude to her… wait wait back up, who is this woman?”

Lexa lets out a small laugh, her hand fumbles in the front pocket of her jacket till she retrieves a photo, white lines start to appear at where it is folded. “I don’t even know.”

“Hey!” Suddenly, the bartender, Jason…? Kasper…? whatever, he pipes up from behind the bar, “that’s Clarke. Clarke Griffin.”

“What about Clarke Griffin?” Octavia shakes herself awake momentarily at the familiar name. “Wait, hey, you have a picture of Clarke! Where’d you find it?” Then she plops her elbow on the bar, closes her eyes again.

Lexa looks among the two, then at Lincoln who shrugs, “it’s a long story. Do you know where she lives?”

“Oh yeah,” Jasper grins deviously, “but uh… it’s gonna cost ya.” He rubs his fingers together and gestures meaningfully.

At that, Octavia just shoots out a hand and punches him in the chest, not opening her eyes once. “Omph, ok, ok! She has a farm in Arkadia, small village far west to Middleton, I’ll write it down for ya.”

“She lives on the farm?”

“Her family owned dog boarding kennels are there. Her dad was a vet, and her mom’s house isn’t far from either.” He scribbles on a piece of napkin as he talks. Lexa finds his handwriting incredibly hard to read, especially when the words are floating in front of her eyes. So she tucks it in her pocket with the photo, deciding to further inspect in the morning.

May 11th 2015

“Aden, time for breakfast!” A young woman’s voice echoes down the corridor, and followed by a blonde head poking into the room. “Come on, we have a lot of work to do today!”

Her 6 and half year-old son, whose hair is a similar shade of golden, maybe a hue darker, jumps from his bed and runs to the woman’s arms for a morning hug. “Morning mom!”

“Did you enjoy the shopping mall?” An older brunette woman is already seated at the kitchen table, she asks lovingly when the pair make their way downstairs. Abigail Griffin has aged well, not a single strand of grey hair in her still luscious locks, and small wrinkles around her eyes make her look softer than the intimidating chief of surgery people say her to be.

“Yes grandma, I got a new magic poker set! And I heard a new dog is coming in today!” He does a little hand dance in the air. “Oh, oh, Mrs. Harper tells us we’re having a field trip to the university next month, I need you to sign this paper for me!” He jumps from topic to topic before breakfast is served, which brings a smile to his grandmother’s eyes.

“Clarke, honey?” Abby calls her daughter before she goes to do the dishes.
“Yes mom?”

“Find someone to help with the kennels ok?” She worriedly flips through her calendar. “You know the season is coming, people are going to bring their animals here to go on vacations, and my work is going to pick up soon.”

“I’ve been posting ads here and there, it takes time, mom. Don’t worry, I’ll be alright.” Clarke kisses her mother on the cheek and takes the plate from her hand.

Abby sighs and follows her. The sooner they are done with dishes, the sooner they can go into the kennels, and the sooner she can help her daughter with work. She always wants to help. After her husband died, Clarke and Jacob were ones to keep the little family business going, and she knows it is important to them, and now with her son gone… She closes her eyes at the thought. It’d soon be the one year anniversary of her son’s death.

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Lexa groans when Hades barks loudly at a squirrel that scurries past them. She can’t remember the last time she had a hangover quite like this—to the point of not recalling what she said and how she ended up on Lincoln and Octavia’s couch. Maybe she is getting old. However, as she feels for the note on the napkin in her pocket and actually reads the address, she can’t let this slight ill feeling deter her from finally finding the woman she’s spent months thinking about. After a brief goodbye and thank you’s to her hosts, she packs her luggage, puts on her cleanest pair of jeans, and signals Hades to join her on their journey.

Wind chimes on the small wooden house greet her happily as Lexa steps into the receptionist office. “Hello? Anyone here?”

“Yeah!” Quickly comes the response and a blonde woman pokes her head out from under the counter with a pile of documents in her hand. Her hair is piled up into a messy bun on top of her head, and a few strands frame her face.

Lexa almost falters at the sight. The woman, hair shiny like the sun, eyes bluer than the sky, a small dimple in her chin and a freckle sitting at the corner of her upper lip… she is real, she is standing right in front of her, and she is the most beautiful creature in every vivid detail that she’s ever laid her eyes upon. Lexa can’t bring herself to form a sentence, instead, she gulps nervously before opening her mouth and immediately tastes the woman’s name on the tip of her tongue. “Clarke Griffin…”

“That’s me.” Clarke lifts an index finger telling Lexa to hold her thought, while continues fumbling at the documents in her hand as well as talking on the phone with a client. “Yep, we can take her in on Monday. No, we just need you to sign paperwork for temporary custody, oh and her dietary requirements… Ok, ok absolutely… I promise you won’t need to worry about a thing!” She ends the call with a smile, then turns to eye the brunette woman with caution. “Can I help you?” And then she notices the German Shepherd sitting next to the woman. “Well hello there, who do we have here?”

“His name’s Hades.” Lexa smiles nervously as Clarke rounds the little front desk to greet the dog, who, just like his owner, is absolutely enamored by the stranger lady and whimpers at the first stroke behind his ear.

With Clarke standing so close to her, she can smell the refreshing scent of waterlily, lavender, and
just a tinge of sea salt mixed in peppermint.

“Such a good boy, yes you are, Hades. What a good boy!” Clarke adores the dog instantly as well, and it is apparent that whoever this woman is, she has trained her dog well. “Well, Hades is too well-behaved to be sent for training, so I’m guessing you want to board him? Taking a vacation maybe?”

“Uh, no, actually, I came here to find you, Ms Griffin.” Lexa manages to recover, and under the intense stare of curious azure eyes, she looks anywhere but at Clarke, her hand feeling for the pocket on her jacket, “uh, I’ve got this thing of yours… let me just find it, you probably don’t know… I think it’s for the best to just show you…”

“Oh, oh my gosh! Absolutely! You saw the ad didn’t you, of course!” Clarke nods in conviction, quickly retiring to the back of the receptionist desk.

“Um…”

Pulling out drawers and dusting off boxes, the young farm owner pulls out some crumbled paper and a pen. “Ok, I… it’s actually really surprising, Ms…?”

“Woods, Lexa Woods.”

“Well, Ms Woods, I never thought someone would respond, I mean the pay isn’t outstanding but our clients can be very generous with tips, and plus there’s the year-end bonus and health benefits. The work isn’t that difficult either, basically cleaning cages, feeding and walking the animals and so forth. So if you’re interested, we have the form and you can sign right here.”

Lexa stares at the slender hand holding out the pen in complete bewilderment. Three minutes into the room and she is offered a job, call it luck or fate, but she suddenly feels too tongue-tied to finish what she was going to say. “Thanks.” Her finger brushes against Clarke’s as she takes the pen from her hand.

Clarke cranes her neck, trying to read the neat cursive handwriting that sprawls out under the scribbling hand, she notices the boney knuckles are turning white from the tight grip. “So, do you have any other experiences working with dogs beside Hades?”

“I worked with bomb dogs before.” Lexa arrives at the blank for her previous employment. “Wow, you used to be a cop?”

“Marine, ma’am.” Lexa finishes the last few rows and holds both the pen and the form up to the woman staring wide-eyed back at her.

It seems like the Clarke’s whole body is locked up, her forearm stiff and her fingers twitching as she hesitantly retrieves the items. Then she quickly browses over the form, her dark golden brows furrowing tighter and tighter as she moves through the lines. “Ummm… okay, Sergeant Woods, you may leave your number here so I can reach you, and uh, I’ll call and let you know if you get the job.”

Confused by the sudden change of demeanor, Lexa feels like she is being brushed off, “sounds like you’ve been having trouble finding someone for the job.” She observes with an unasked question.

“Why does a person drive all the way from California to work here at a dog boarding farm?” Clarke squints at Lexa, slightly irritated.
Lexa only shrugs, “couldn’t tell ya, I walked.”

“You walked? You walked here from California?” Azure eyes grow even impossibly wide, a smudge of fascination and disbelief in the sparkling reflection of the sky.

“I like to walk.” Lexa states matter-of-factly.

Studying her for a moment, Clarke opens her mouth several times with no words coming out. At last, she holds up a hand, “would you excuse me for a minute?”, and storms out of the room from the back door. She finds her mother pulling and pushing at a giant Leonberger, trying to convince him into the shower.

“Mom, mom!” Clarke quickly joins her in the pushing.

“What is it, honey?”

Lowering her voice as she sees Lexa, too, wanders to the back door of the wooden house, leaning against the door frame, seemingly unamused. “That woman came here to apply for the job, I can’t get rid of her!”

Abby spares a glance to the woman, who immediately takes interest in the broken railing on the side of the house. The older woman purses her lips, “she looks harmless.”

“She walked here from California! Tell her you hired someone else or something.”

“Why don’t you tell her? You’re the one who doesn’t want to hire her.” Abby presses down a smirk, which earns her an incredulous look from her daughter. “Guess there’s only one way to settle this,” Abby lets go of the dog, who sprints to the opposite end of the kennel to avoid his shower. She rubs her hands on her dirty jeans, and approaches Lexa with a smile, “are you mentally unstable?”

“I beg pardon, ma’am?” Lexa lets out a gentle laugh.

Abby takes an instant liking to the young woman that stands anxiously in front of her as if her decision would completely change the course of her life. “My daughter thinks you might be insane.”

“No, ma’am, I can assure you, I am very clear at the moment and I don’t have a medical history of insanity.”

“Well, you look like a sharp capable young woman. Now why don’t you tell me, why does a sharp capable young woman like you want a job cleaning cages?”

“It seems like a peaceful enough work, my last job isn’t.” Lexa shakes her head at her own understatement.

“Oh, where were you? Wall Street?” Abby snorts at her own joke.

“No, ma’am. I was in the Marine Corps.”

A slash of hurt appears in the light brown eyes. Abby blinks several times, and looks down to the German Shepherd sitting beside Lexa’s feet, “ahh, Marine Corps.” She mutters contemplatively.

Some rustling noise comes from the kennels, and Hades growls loudly, his body tensing up and tail stops wagging, then he lets out a loud bark, startling the older brunette.
“Hey, easy, easy boy. Sit down.” The Marine Officer drops her hand in a commanding gesture, to which Hades obeys without hesitation.

“Trained him yourself?” When Abby speaks again, her voice comes out softer, but her eyes determined.

“Yes ma’am.”

Minutes later, Clarke watches as Lexa walks off of the driveway with her incredibly gorgeous dog companion, “how’d you get her to leave?” She jogs up to Abby, pleased.

“I gave her the job.”

“You what?!”

Abby just holds her palms up, “gotta hire somebody?!”

“You don’t know anything about her!”

Used to the dramatic tendencies to her daughter, the older Griffin woman just winks, “neither do you.”

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Lexa finds herself standing outside of a log house not far from the farm, worn from the weather and stripped down to the bones. The red-faced landlord smelling like smoked ham and chewing tobacco has been ogling at her butt for about ten minutes now. She takes a tour in the house, seeing that beside a spring bed and a wobbly closet, furniture is basically nonexistent, countless holes in the floor, and paint peeling off the walls, everything covered in dirt and leaves.

But at least there is hot running water, the price is true to its worth. She isn’t exactly in the position to shop for mansions either. “I’ll take it.”

“Just need a lil tender lovin’, ya know.” The landlord cackles wickedly, “I’ve got tools and timber in the shed. You’s welcome to ’em.”

It is true, though, nothing some hardware and a pair of skilled hands won’t fix. Lexa mouthes the nearly illegible words on the dusty doormat, “home sweet home.”

Chapter End Notes

I think I might have enough chapters stored to post every week, then it’ll be every other week when I run out. Idk, depends on what you want.
Embarrassed, embarrassing, embarrassments

Chapter Summary

Clarke can't decide what to make of these feelings for Lexa, meanwhile, Lexa meets Finn for the first time, and builds a stronger relationship with little Aden and Abby.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Embarrassing, embarrassed, embarrassments

May 12th 2015

Hardly able to sleep in the house where everything squeaks and wind seems to slip in from all directions, Lexa gets ready at the crack of dawn, and walks to the farm with Hades. Wandering around the vast land of property, she finds the piece of broken railing that was tittering on the edge of the house yesterday, and stands on a chair to fix it. Hades runs around, waking up all the other dogs and making new friends.

She doesn’t see the hostess of the farm, nor the kind older woman that gave her the job. She figures it is still too early.

Clarke isn’t one to sleep in. She’s had sleep problems for as long as she can remember. It is always something weighing on her mind, sometimes it’d be Aden’s grades, sometimes her late father, sometimes her brother Jacob, and this night, it was the peculiar woman with wild brown hair and intense emerald eyes. So she sneaks out from the house to go for a run around the valley.

In the glowing sunrise and chilly wind, Clarke feels content, in touch with her own body and nature. She’s come to appreciate the peace and quiet of being alone, hiding from her responsibilities, running from her sadness, and forgetting that her life can never be the same, for just half an hour or so. She is smiling to the soreness in her legs and the burning in her lungs when she gets back to the farm, well that is until she sees Lexa.

It is kind of awkward to find this stranger lurking around her home fixing things for her, and it is way too early to be seeing Lexa. She clears her throat, and makes her presence know, “you know, you don’t have to come in till 8:00.”

Slightly shaken by the voice, Lexa turns to look for the source. The sight of the young woman basked in early sunlight, a thin coat of sweat glinting on her neck and arms, her tank top clinging to her body, and dark yoga pants hugging at all the right curves, it is nothing less powerful than the first time she truly laid eyes on her. But quickly she looks away, chastising herself for being disrespectful. “I couldn’t sleep, figured I’d get an early start.”

“Well, just to make it clear that we haven’t agreed on anything about overtime pay, so either you
can go home early today, or you’re volunteering your time until we reach further agreement.” Clarke says in monotone, and turns to jog back to her house. “Hi Hades.” She stops to pet the dog who looks at her expectantly.

A sense of disappointment washes over her. Lexa exchanges a look with Hades, who strolls back with tail wagging side to side, it makes her snort, “shut up.”

Nothing can really have her disheartened. Lexa shakes herself out of the daze and brings up the hammer again to bang the nails in. Fixing things always gives her purpose, makes her feel productive and useful, but nothing really compared to the feeling of fixing this railing right now, because she knows, it isn’t just anybody’s railing.

All morning, whenever Lexa looks up to the sky, she sees blue and gold.

In the afternoon, Abby shows Lexa the farm and their house, pointing at places where she can clean the tools, where she can change, where she may take breaks and eat. “Oh, we had a hell of a snowstorm back in February, that lovely thing came down.” The older brunette woman steps over a fallen branch in their way to the barn. Lexa follows, making note of a tractor parked in the far end corner of the farm, a ragged cover draped over it.

******

Aden curiously watches the woman scrubbing the dog cage. There is something familiar about her that his young self can’t quite put a finger on. Maybe it is in the way she holds herself up straight, maybe it is the stolid expression when she does the most minute of works, or it is those gentle yet very demanding eyes. “Mom, who is that?” He asks when Clarke comes out of the house with his bags packed up. Aden is about to spend a week at his father’s place in Middleton. Her ex-husband Finn Collins is a Deputy—whose capability of being such is up to debate—and his father is the Mayor. She always winces at the thought of fighting him for Aden’s custody in court, knowing all too well the influence of the Collins family in the local law department.

“She’s just somebody grandma hired. Hurry up now baby.” She walks toward her truck, but can’t help stealing a glance in Lexa’s direction.

The Marine Officer has tied her flannel around her waist, in only a tank top and a pair of khaki pants, tan lines run along her collarbones, and her forearms are a beautiful dark mocha color, a stark contrast to the paler skin on her upper arms. There is also a tribal tattoo that sprawls around her exposed arm, its design unique and intricate, its meaning impossible to decipher.

And as if catching somebody’s staring out of the corner of her eyes, Lexa grabs the shovel and throws it over her shoulder, muscles in her bicep flexing and bulging with every movement. Turning around, she catches Clarke gawking at her, and the little blonde boy waving. A small grin finds its way to her lips, she nods in their direction.

Her heart steadily skips a beat. Clarke feels the heat rising to her face. She quickly darts her eyes away, and hops into the vehicle.

Lesa brushes it off with a small laugh. She doesn’t think she’s done something to offend the woman, but Clarke has been putting distance between them. People have the right to dislike someone, no reason needed, Lexa tells herself, but she sure hopes Clarke will warm up to her
eventually, and then, she can tell her about the story of the photo.

Clarke sits in the driver’s seat, cold palms against a hot face. That little grin back there, she doesn’t know how to describe it, but it stirred something inside of her. She has not been flustered like this for a long time, and it makes her feel silly.

“Mom, you ok?” Aden climbs up the truck and sees his mother’s face, concerned, and reaches to feel the temperature on the back of his small hand.

“Hmm? Oh yeah, I’m fine, baby. Aren’t you forgetting something?”

“Oh!” He jumps off and goes back to the porch to fetch his violin case, “dad doesn’t like it when I practice in the house.”

It isn’t the first time he makes an off-hand complaint like this. “Maybe you can practice in the yard.” Clarke suggests. This is another one of their disagreements. Finn has always wanted his son to play football, and wasting time on some artsy-fartsy music instrument is something he never approves, completely disregarding the fact that Aden would pick violin, magic tricks, chess games, and a dozen more outdoor sports over football anytime.

“Your blankey is in the bag, you can find it for the night, but don’t forget to bring it back this time.” Clarke continues to nag when Aden presses his face on the back window of the truck, watching Lexa as they drive off the farm.

May 20th 2015

Lexa has been pouring her heart and soul to the farm work, like some kind of loyal, gentle, and faithful beast in its very own natural element. She comes in early everyday, and doesn’t leave until well into the evening, she puts much more effort than the work requires, goes above and beyond, doing everything to try to prove herself and her good intentions.

She has established a routine by now. Every morning she secures the fences before letting the dogs out to clean the cages, then she feeds them, gives baths to those that need it, gives them exercises, and checks in the office for new clients or discharges. Then in the afternoon, she organizes the storage, cleans the tools, washes bowls, and feeds the dogs again. Later in the evening, she spends at least half an hour fixing things, first the squeaky doorknobs, then the leaky pipes, and fire hazards reside in the electricity panel.

During her only off day in the week, she works too, in her little cabin that she calls home now. Making furniture, painting walls, sweeping floor, fixing the roof—everything she learned over the years to improve her living environment. With little tools and timber, she makes the log house a charming little retreat.

Clarke sometimes sits in the office, looking out the window. She knows the Marine Officer is quite a smart woman, moving from project to project, slowly creating a little work station around the old tractor. The self-discipline, the hardworking, the phlegmatic temperament, all remind her of someone.

Her brother.
And it intensifies her mixed feelings about Lexa. Every time she thinks about their alikeness, the way maybe they’d get along really well, it leaves a sharp pang in the hollow of her chest, a Jacob-shaped hole that brings her an infinity of bitter tears.

But they are so different too. Jacob was the lighthearted, the talented, the center of attention in her family, and she’d known him from the moment he was born. Whereas Lexa… Lexa seems to be a more reserved person, a person with a story of a sullen past, a person carrying an invisible weight on her shoulders. Clarke can feel herself drawn to the mystery, yet scared out of her mind of the pain this woman can inflict.

Abby’s vacation is coming to an end, so she spends almost every waking moment on the farm, getting all the nature and greenness before going back behind the hospital walls that perpetually smell of chlorine. She wanders around the tractor, finding Lexa underneath. “Sweetie, you know this old thing hasn’t been more than a decoration for probably a decade now!”

“I just figured it’d save us time with heavy work, ma’am. A beard well-lathered is half shaved.” Lexa comes out from under the tractor with screws in her mouth, she has engine oil all over her white tank top and even some across her nose bridge, but she is smiling victoriously.

Abby can’t help but laughs, “what do you know about beards.”

“It’s a saying my father always used.”

“Your father is a wise man.”

“Was.” Lexa corrects with a small voice.

Hearing that, Abby sits down with her back against the tire, placing her hand on the young brunette’s knee. “I’m so sorry honey.”

“Thanks, it was a long time ago.” Lexa gives her a reassuring smile.

The two of them sit beside the tractor in silence for a few minutes, before Abby speaks again. “You know, Clarke’s father died too, a few years back, cancer. I thought we’d never get over the pain.”

Lexa looks at Abby’s gentle smile at the thought of her husband, she observes, “but you did.”

“But we did.” With a long sigh, Abby decides to share some more, “my son died almost a year ago.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” This time, Lexa is the one to put her hand on top of Abby’s.

Nodding at the kind gesture, Abby continues, “we’re still learning to cope with it, Clarke especially, they were very close.”

“I don’t know what to say, ma’am, it must be very difficult.” She wishes she has a better response, something more profound, something wise, her father was good like that. But in the comfortable silence, Lexa thinks maybe she said the right thing after all.
May 25th 2015

Aden is sitting in the living room with his reading, Clarke is busy cooking breakfast, and Abby just got home from a night shift, on the porch enjoying her tea.

A loud noise breaks the serenity, followed by the crackling sound of old machine, and branches being broken. It startles all of them, Clarke in particular, almost drops her scrambled eggs. She stomps outside angrily, “what the heck is she doing now?”

“Can you believe she got that old pile of metal going? Unbelievable!” Abby is absolutely amused.

Clarke just rolls her eyes at her mother, then she suddenly declares, “I’m taking some shifts for Julia next week.”

“Ahh…”

“It’s only for a couple days… but…”

“Honey, why don’t you go back full time. Lexa can probably handle everything at the farm, and it’s been almost a year since—” She is interrupted by her daughter at the last sentence.

“I know how long it’s been. I just— I’m not ready.”

Before Abby can pursue the topic again, Lexa drives the tractor past their front porch, dragging the broken branch behind, dogs bark and Hades chases behind. Clarke and Abby watch the chaotic scene in awe.

“Do you think she has an off-switch?” Shaking her head, Clarke retreats back into the house.

Abby chuckles approvingly, “I hope not!”

June 4th 2015

Lexa is cleaning the cages when she hears a car pull into the drive. It is just her today, as the mother and son went to a PTA meeting, and Abby pulling a double shift at the hospital.

A man with floppy hair, in a Deputy suit steps out of his car, and breaks into the reception room.

Lexa runs to the front door to stop him from wandering all over the place. “What’s up.”

“What the hell are you doing here?” The man takes off his sunglasses and sizes the woman up and down.

Lexa frowns, backing away for several inches, “is there a problem, Officer?”

“There will be one if you don’t answer my question when I ask it.” He steps forward, lifting his chin and flaring his nostrils.

“Oh, I work here.”

He flashes his badge in her face, “Finn Collins, MPD, put your hands on the counter.”
“Why?” Lexa inquires, not breaking eye contact with the dark haired man.

“Would you rather come with me to the station?” Finn threatens once more. “I gotta make sure my wife didn’t hire a criminal to work for her.”

“You mean your ex-wife.” She’s learned something about Clarke through Abby in the past few days, including this Finn who took advantage of the girl when her dad passed away and got her pregnant by the last semester of high school.

It seems to further provoke him. He grabs both of her arms and turns her around, slamming into the desk. Then his hand run roughly over her backside until he pulls out her wallet. “Staff Sergeant Alexandria Woods, so you’re a soldier barbie.”

“Marine.” Lexa swallows the bitterness of her rage, not wanting more harassment than she already received.

“Well,” Finn lets go of the hands holding her down, and throws the wallet back on the desk, “where’s everybody at, Alexandria?”

“They’re all out. Do you want me to give Abby and Clarke a message?”

“It’s Abby and Clarke now, ain’t it?” He once again invades her personal space, staring her down, his greasy hair falling into his eye. For some reason, he feels threatened by this woman, whether because of her impartial attitude towards his own assumed righteousness, or fact that Clarke used to date this girl Charlene in high school before she slept with him. No matter what, he is very displeased with this new arrangement, which Clarke failed to discuss with him.

Lexa merely meets his glare with an uninterested look.

Finn scoffs, “you tell Clarke to meet me at four.” Then he swaggers out, assuming an air of importance, spitting on the ground as he goes.

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Afternoon, Lexa takes the dogs for a routine walk. By the time she comes back, Clarke is sitting on the porch as Aden runs in and out of the house with different ties to try on. He always changes his mind last minute, but she doesn’t mind waiting at all.

She’s seen Lexa’s note for her, that Finn came over and reminded her to make an appearance at a town party his father is throwing for his re-election campaign. However, the gathering isn’t something that is remotely on her mind, rather, she’s been worried about Finn meeting Lexa. Not that Lexa is someone that means something to her, but Finn can be possessive and controlling, and he had never gotten along with her brother because Jacob scared him. It is a feeling, a strong and trusted one, that he and Lexa probably didn’t start off on a friendly ground.

“Mom, I can do it myself!” Aden squirms out of her arms when she smooths out his collar, comparing which tie goes better with his outfit. He finally decides on the cerulean one that matches the dress she is wearing. When he sees Lexa who just finishes up with locking the cages, he runs over to her, “Hey Ms Woods!”

She smiles at the little boy, holding up her fist for him to bump. “Hi Aden, and I told you, call me Lexa.”
“Are we friends yet? Coz mom says for grown-ups I can only use Mr and Ms unless we’re friends.”

“Well, I consider you my friend, don’t you young sir?”

“I guess so! Anyways, Lexa, do you like this tie?”

Amused, the woman cocks her head to the side, pretending to muse over his question, then she throws her hands in the air with a small shriek, “I think it’s a fantastic pick! It matches your eyes, and your mom’s dress.”

“And her eyes too!” He points out.

Of course, it is the first thing that came into her mind when she saw the baby blue color, streaked with various shades of azure. At his words, she naturally follows the urge to turn around in search of the blue-eyed woman.

Clarke is observing their interaction with a smile, leaning against a pillar. As green eyes capture her own, her smile falters, her heart picks up its thudding in her chest. She gulps down the lump that formed at the base of her throat, and breathes in deeply before she starts walking toward them.

Lexa can’t help her gaze that sweeps over Clarke’s body, lingering just a tad longer than necessary on her chest that is shown off by the low cut dress generously. “Excellent choice, Aden. Now go put it on so you won’t be late, ok?” She pats his back lightly to prompt him to go inside.

Clarke combs her hand through her son’s blonde hair as he runs to her. Lexa thinks she is just coming to retrieve him, but she keeps closing the distance between them after the boy disappears inside the house.

Blinking, Lexa pretends to not have just spent a second too long admiring a pair of magnificent boobs, she takes interest in the hole that starts to form on the knee of her jeans.

“Hi.”

Clarke’s voice is soft, with a tinge of nervousness in it. Lexa suppresses a grin hearing it. “Hi.”

“So… thanks for the note.”

“You’re welcome.” She senses that it isn’t the only thing Clarke came over to say, but she doesn’t press for it.

Clarke worries at her lips for a little bit, searching for the words that she hasn’t had time to practice over. “Finn… he can be an abrasive jerk.” With this, she musters some courage to look up at Lexa, “I’m sorry if he offended you today.”

“You shouldn’t have to apologize for him.” is all Lexa says in reply.

Shouldn’t have to, it is enough confirmation that the floppy haired man did say something stupid and acted like an asshole. “I’m… sorry.”

Lexa just gives her a small nod, “it’s okay.”

For a second there, Clarke can swear that she saw right through the emotions in Lexa’s eyes. Sadness, forgiveness, tenderness, loneliness, gratefulness. It all flashed through like a breeze on the viridescent water, barely leaving any ripples once it blew over. When she tries to find it again, nothing is there but her own reflection.
“Look! I did it all by myself!” Aden’s exclaim pulls their attention away from each other. He jumps off the porch, and dashes over, crashing into Clarke’s side.

Though the knot is a little crooked to one side, and the front piece is too much longer than the back, it still looks decent as a handiwork of a 6 year old. “You look amazing, Aden. I couldn’t have done it better myself.” Lexa gives him a thumbs up, to which he grins brightly.

Clarke also smiles at the marine officer’s gentle nature, she drapes her hand around the boy’s shoulder to guide him to the truck before he goes on a ten minute story telling about all the different kinds of knots he has learned from the internet. Walking past Lexa, she hears her whisper, “enjoy the party.”

******

They arrive at the town center only fifteen minutes late, and Finn walks over as soon as he spots them. He disapprovingly straightens Aden’s tie, and scorns, “what the hell is this mess?” Then he stands to press his lips on Clarke’s cheek.

“Hello Finn.” She frigidly pushes him away.

Embarrassed, the man scoffs, “so, how’s your new girlfriend huh? The desert queen?” He asks out loud purposefully, causing some side eyes thrown at her. In a small Catholic town like this, she’s always been an odd one. Rumors spread quick about her relationships with girls throughout her high school years. She still likes women, but being with one has become virtually impossible after having Aden. She has to put her son first, consider his well-being and feelings before anything else.

She glowers at the Deputy, “I wasn’t one that hired her.” Walking away, she quickly finds her group of friends, consisting Monty Green, Nathan Miller, Harper McIntyre and Zoe Monroe.

“Hey blondie!” Zoe waves her over, “how you been?”

“Not bad, thanks for asking.” Clarke sees the curios look in her friends’ eyes, she groans, “what?”

“We didn’t say anything.” Monty snickers.

Harper quickly follows, “unless… there’s something, or somebody, we should know about?”

“So what’s her name?” Nathan is more cut to the chase.

Clarke throws her hand on her forehead, “I have no idea what y’all are talking about.”

“C’mon, it’s us!” Zoe chimes in, “the military woman you recently hired. She’s like super hot or something, right?” Again, words travel fast in a small town like theirs, words that probably started by Lexa’s landlord.

“Jeez, what have you heard!”

“Well, your mom told us about her. Sounds like she’s real good with her hands, if you know what I mean.” Harper gives her a suggestive look, causing the group to burst in laughter.

“You know, we should invite her out for a drink or something!” Nathan suggests. Harper immediately rejects, “we don’t want to embarrass our Princess in front of the love interest do we?”
Clarke can only give her friend a warning look, “I don’t even like her. Would you guys stop?”

There is a look exchanged among her friends, still chuckling. “A’ight, Princess, if you insist.”

June 13th 2015

Since the day that her friends teased her about embarrassing herself in front of Lexa, she seems to manage that just fine by herself.

It is almost like the woman possesses some kind of detector for her, especially when she is alone.

Lexa has found her sitting on her ass in a puddle of mud trying to fix the fence but fell backward. She hoisted her up without a word, and the next day, the fence is sturdy as ever.

Lexa has witnessed her making silly faces for selfies to her friends in the office to kill time.

Lexa has caught her reading Twilight with unshed tears in her eyes.

Chances are, Clarke thinks to herself, one day Lexa would probably walk in on her naked with a vibrator in hand. Hell, she even had a nightmare about it, but weirdly enough, instead of her dying of embarrassment, it ended with her moaning her release and a dream full of the color green.

Ridiculous! She shakes the thought away vigorously and carries on with her morning run. That, is inappropriate.

“Woof!” A loud bark startles her back to reality. She laughs as Spartacus, a 200 pound Mastiff, finds his favorite pond in the small forest off to the country road. He drags her and the three other dogs that went on the run with them over.

“Spartacus! No no no no! Come back!”

But it is all in vain. He sniffs around the bank happily, then leaps into the deepest end without hesitation, making a giant splash that instantly drenches his caretaker who is dangling precariously on the edge, holding his leash. “Oh. My. God.” She sputters out the muddy water, glaring at Spartacus in disbelief. “You’re so going down, mister!” Abandoning all concerns, she toes off her sneakers and socks, jumping into the pond and using her hands to create waves that targeted the dog.

It is well into their water fight, all the dogs have joined in, when she hears barking from the bridge that looks over the small body of water. She whips her head around, and has to bring her hand up to shield her eyes from the sunlight trickling in between leaves and branches.

A lithe figure stands on top of the bridge, framed by golden lights shining from behind. The shadow of a German Shepherd accompanies the person. Clarke doesn’t have to guess who it is.

“Shit.”

Of course, Lexa has caught her again, with mud streaks across her face, clothes probably now see-through clinging on her upper body, and more than just goosebumps standing to attention in the cold. Clarke hugs her arms closer in front of her chest, praying that she is subtle enough that Lexa doesn’t notice.
Lexa, on the other hand, is busy pretending that she is only passing through on her way to the farm, not having been drawn by the laughter and the heartfelt scene from her morning routine. She can feel her cheeks and the back of her ears burning at the short-lived image of Clarke’s hard nipples poking through her sports bra then the white shirt. Her fingers have a mind of their own as she unzips her light jacket.

“What… what are you doing?” Comes a breathy, nervous inquiry.

It is then Lexa has snapped from her own thoughts and remembers what it must looks like. She quickly folds the jacket, placing it on top of a stump, “here, use this if you need to cover up.”

Clarke stares wide-eyed as the Marine Officer walks away respectfully, Hades trailing beside her. The dogs are unperturbed by this short encounter, swimming around and wrestling with each other in the water, but it leaves her in a completely different mood as she climbs up to the bank and squeezes water out of her clothes. She picks the jacket up, examining it closely before putting it on with some kind of trepidation. There is still a lingering trace of warmth on the article of clothing, and it carries a smell that is best described as a mixture of soap, grass, the woods, and nature.

A sinking feeling stirs in her belly, which irritates her. Clarke can’t tell what this feeling is anymore, embarrassment, for sure, but also relief, even a little bit of anger. Lexa probably is laughing at her now, for being this clumsy, silly woman that can’t handle herself if she tried. It isn’t her fault that every time she is in some kind of compromised position, the woman would show up out of nowhere.

As the dogs grow tired, she finds herself less interested in completing her morning run. So she walks back to the farm, her hair and clothes drying in the sun rays that fall through the heavy canopy. When she reaches the house, she hasn’t seen Lexa anywhere.

The smell of scrambles eggs, bacon, and coffee permeates the air as she steps in. Her stomach growls loudly. “Ugh!!!” Clarke groans, mainly to her mother who she assumes is making breakfast in the kitchen, “that woman is so irritating. Every time I turn around—”

“Ohem…” The older woman clears her throat and makes a face, cutting her daughter off with some urgency.

Lexa carries a bottle of maple syrup from the kitchen, and gives Clarke a smile that looks more like a smirk, “good morning.”

Clarke wishes she has drowned in the pond, or maybe cracked her head open on the porch, whatever, so she never has to face this kind of embarrassment ever again. She peeks at the brunette woman who makes herself at ease, perched on the chair, chewing a piece of bacon. It is one thing to talk about someone behind their back, but another thing to intentionally hurt their feelings, and she hopes she hasn’t fucked up too bad.

“So, where are we?” Abby pours herself a coffee, and make another face, this time to Lexa.

The Marine Officer just grins at her, not in the slightest bothered by the small slip-up. “We moved around a lot when I was little, from base to base, but the majority of teenage years, I grew up in southern California, close to my father's tribal land.”

“It must’ve been hard on a child, changing schools, leaving friends.”

“It was okay. I had very close friends with a few kids from the tribe.” Lexa spares a glance at the younger Griffin woman, who now is sulking in the kitchen, pretending she isn’t eavesdropping on
their conversation.

“And did you go to college?” Abby catches the glance, but she mentions nothing.

Lexa bites her lip and gives the woman a grimace, “just for two years, ma’am. I enlisted after that.”

“What did you study?”

“Well she couldn’t have studied much, I mean, it is just two years.” Clarke carries her own bowl of cereal out, leaning against the door frame.

“Clarke Abigail Griffin.” The older brunette warns, a little taken aback by her daughter’s rudeness.

“I liked philosophy.” Lexa nonetheless answers the question.

“Oh, really?” Clarke’s question sounds more taunting than sincere. At this point, she isn’t entirely sure why she is irritated, and who she is irritated by.

“Yeah, I like to read.” Lexa takes a sip of her coffee, and turns her attention to Clarke.

There it is, the gloating smirk again in those watery lake green eyes. Clarke doesn’t back down at that, she fires again, “give us a quote of your favorite philosopher then.”

Lexa squints at the woman in silent contemplation, who snickers victoriously in the entirety of those five seconds. “Sometimes the questions are complicated, and the answers are simple.” Finally she recites.

“Don’t tell me, it’s Voltaire, right?” When the viridescent eyes narrow again, she feels even more confident, “it’s Voltaire, isn’t it.”

“It’s Doctor Seuss.” Lexa says in all seriousness, which makes Abby laugh outright at Clarke’s expense. If looks can kill, Lexa feels the young woman throwing eye daggers at her. So she decides to not tease her any further, getting up and thanking her hostess, “thank you very much for the coffee, Mrs. Griffin. I should go back to work.”

“Would you just call me Abby for goodness’ sake!”

As soon as Lexa steps out of the screen door, Clarke quickly runs over to close it. Leaning against the wooden board, she throws her hand over her mouth, eyes wide, as if she can not believe the teasing from her own mother.

“Pfft, Voltaire…” Abby just scoffs in mockery, “now that’s what I call a sense of humor.” And if Abby noticed her daughter’s wet hair and the jacket she is sure belongs to Lexa, she doesn’t question it.

June 20th 2015

Clarke goes back to Aden’s elementary school to take a shift for her friend as the school health aide. In the hallway, she sees her son being pushed around by some other kids.

“Violin? You play violin? Are you like a girl or something?” A boy grabs his violin case, his face distorted with vicious laughter.
“Maybe he’s queer, like her dyke mom.”

Clarke is flabbergasted, she doubts the child even knows what those words meant.

Aden tries to fight his way through, but he is falling slightly behind on his growth curve, like Clarke had been when she was a child. “Give it back!”

“I bet he’s no good either!”

“He can’t even play. A waste of time.”

“His mom’s here! Let’s go!” A kid spots Clarke from afar so he drags the others and runs away.

Aden picks up his violin case, swallowing back his tears. If his uncle Jacob had taught him anything, it would be that haters only hate because they are jealous, and that tears never solve problems; all he needs is to try his hardest, to please nobody but himself. However, this time the bullies pushed his button. He has been doubting his decision to take up violin. His father, for one, is never a fan of it. Maybe he is really no good. Maybe it is a waste of time.

Clarke worriedly rushes over, caressing his full head of golden hair, “are you ok, Aden?”

He just keeps his head down.

After school, Aden disappears into his tree house, one linked by a rope bridge from the riverbank to a small island in the center of the river. He thought he’d give it one last try, but he needed a place where nobody can hear him.

Lexa has been walking past the bigger bridge parallel to the rope bridge, Hades by her side. She is on her way from the farm to her cabin to call it a day when her ears perk at the faint music that reverberates in between the trees.

She loses track of how long she stood, listening to the boy practice song after song, some classics, some modern, some fluent, others not so much.

The golden haired boy is in his own element, eyes closed as his fingers glide over the strings, head tilted to the side, body swinging with the melody he creates. By the time of his last song, the forest has fallen silent, creatures of the night only starting to awake.

“Not bad.” She makes herself known, half shouts from the other side of the river.

Aden turns side to side trying to find the woman. When he does, he looks slightly flustered. “I didn’t think anyone is listening.”

“Glad I was.” Lexa offers a genuine smile and waits as the boy packs his things. She wants to ask about how he knows all those songs, but bites her tongue as she senses his weariness that she accidentally heard him playing. “Come on buddy, I’ll walk you home.”

The boy walks down from the bridge, and naturally goes to hold her hand. He peers at her reaction, and decides that it is ok when Lexa again gives him a warm smile. Soon enough, he grows impatient of their pace, and trusts Lexa with his instrument as he runs ahead with Hades.

Right before sunset, Lexa has taken the boy home. Clarke is busy doing chores in the kitchen, but
one spare glance outside the window, she finds herself distracted by the scene.

Lexa is handing back the violin case to Aden, they bump fists as they say goodbye. The boy quickly runs toward the house with a skip in his steps. Lexa watches till he goes back into the house safely, then she whistles at Hades who is lingering at the cages, signaling him to go with her.

Clarke doesn’t realize she has been staring, completely enamored by the way Lexa walks into the sunset, neither briskly, nor idly, the reddish golden light framing her stature and dancing in her braided hair. She can almost see Lexa in her uniform, dark green t-shirt hugging her admirable body snuggly, the camouflaged jacket and pants adding to her authority, the cap barely containing those unruly curls…

Abby watches her daughter slip into a day dream with a dazed look on her face, a knowing smile tugs at the corner of her lips.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I appreciate your comments and kudos, they always make my day.
Affy and Lexa have a conversation in the car. Clarke opens up about her past. Ranya also returns briefly.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

June 24th 2016

Lexa returns a dog to its family when Abby is back from her night shift and just wakes up from a nap. She wanders around the farm, not finding her daughter so she turns to the marine officer for help.

“Lexa, can you drive me somewhere? Clarke’s out with a friend and my drive to the church fell through.”

Lexa readily obliges, not knowing the simple car ride will turn out to be a thorough background check, which amuses her to no end.

At first, Abby is the one that does more of the talking, about Clarke and Aden mostly. “My bossy daughter won’t let me drive after night shift since… well, you can hardly call it exhaustion hazard, more like a blink!”

Lexa smiles, “well, ma’am, I’m happy to give you a lift whenever you need.”

Abby grows fond of the young woman’s politeness, which she finds rare in people her daughter’s age. Her gaze softens, voice loving and amiable, “how old are you, dear?”

“Twenty eight, ma’am.”

“How many tours?”

“Five.” They ranged from six to fifteen months, depending on the mission and the unit size. It was easier, for her than many others, knowing that no one back home is worried sick over a longer deployment or a missed phone call.

Nodding, Abby regards the younger brunette for a while, curiosity again propels her to ask, “are you planning on going back?”

Lexa bites the inside of her cheek, unsure of what her answer will be, but she decides to be honest, “I don’t know yet. Technically I’m on leave without pay, my last rotation was interrupted and my unit was hit hard. The prospect of being placed in a new unit… I find it rather hard to see the appeal.” People that trained in bootcamp alongside her, people that got promoted at the same time
as her, people that went through the bad and the worse with her, many of them are gone, disabled, or even worse, took their own lives. She knows, or she tries to tell herself that it is not her fault, it is nobody’s fault. But it planted doubt in her, whether she is an adequate enough leader, whether she deserves the title to be the Commander, and whether she can go on making decisions that she knows might cost lives.

Abby is quiet for a few minutes, until she speaks again, this time with the kind of sadness that can’t be concealed, “my son never finished his second. You would’ve liked him. You two, are cut out of the same clothe,” she tries to lighten the mood, “you know, I’ve been doing the things I do for long enough, Lexa, I’ve seen enough losses, I lost my husband, I lost my son, and I still lose people all the time, patients, friends, relatives.”

“Ma’am, we can talk about something else if you wish to.”

“No no, hear me out. I’ve seen enough, and I’ve learned to appreciate the memory I have, and stop blaming those who weren’t bound to make it. Clarke… she hasn’t learned that like I have. She isn’t as bad as she seems.”

Chuckling, Lexa finally sees where this conversation is heading. Admittedly, Clarke hasn’t been the most welcoming, a little bratty and a little bitchy even, but it is kind of adorable in its own right. “She doesn’t seem that bad to me at all.”

Abby’s face lights up from how hard she is grinning.

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Dropping the older brunette off at the church and returning to the farm, Lexa sees Clarke's truck has pulled into the driveway. She goes to place back the keys. “Hello? Clarke?” She pushes open the house, but finds it quiet and empty on the first floor. She goes through the hallways to drop the key at the bowl she has found it in. The door off to her right squeaks open from wind, where she discovers a room with furniture covered in white sheets, collecting dust. It is not long before she realizes the room probably belonged to Clarke’s brother. With a bit of surprise, she locates a set of triangle piano in the corner. It looks like they might have even more in common than she thought.

Lexa doesn’t view herself as some kind of music prodigy, or one of those that claim to be “naturally attuned”, but she does enjoy playing it from time to time. It is what made her father smile. She lifts the cover up, and tries out some notes, linking them into a simple melody.

Aden is in the study, his mom was clearing out the attic for space to store paperwork from old clients, leaving him to read Harry Potter on his own, when he hears the soft piano. He quietly sneaks out of the room, and slips downstairs, hiding behind the bedroom door to see who the intruder is.

He finds Lexa standing in front of uncle Jacob’s old piano, keys flowing from the brush of her fingertips. It doesn’t sound like anything he knows, and he can’t quite put his finger on the tone of the song. Sullen, morose, doleful… those are words too big for him to acquire just yet. But he knows it has a tinge of sadness, the same sadness he feels for his mother.

Not long after, Clarke climbs down the attic and calls his name, causing Lexa to snap out of her trance. She quickly covers the piano the way it was before, and steals herself out from the back door into the farm.
When it is time to flip the “open” sign over, Lexa finds the mother and son cooking dinner together in the kitchen. They have turned the radio on, blasting some pop Disney songs, enjoying this happy moment as a family.

“There you go! Yes!” She cheers when the boy lifts his knees to mimic some eighties dance moves, all the while minding the bubbling sauce in the pan. “Can you help me with the vegetables? Thank you baby. That’s it!” She instructs Aden to gather the chopped carrots and onions and throw them in the concoction.

Leda knocks on the door, and pokes her head in, announcing she has finished the work before her one day off, “night all.”

“Hey Lexa, do you like jambalaya?” Aden extends the invitation without consulting his mother. He really adores this woman, and believes that she shouldn’t be left alone after she had played such a sad song earlier.

“No, no, Aden, I’m sure Ms Woods has plans.” Clarke is quick to warp her arm around her son’s shoulders, holding him back from dragging Lexa inside. It is the weekend, it is supposed to be relaxing, she is not in the mood to entertain a guest, and god knows she’s probably going to embarrass herself again in front of this woman.

“Do you?” Aden insists.

Leda pretends to give a thought, then she teases, “I can’t remember the last time I had plans.” In the corner of her eyes, she sees Clarke tense up at her answer, and almost regrets saying so, but how can she say no to Aden’s expectant eyes?

“Yeah!” He takes her hand, leading her into the small space.

“Alright buddy, show me your moves!” Lexa does a double finger gun at the boy, issuing a challenge for a silly dance battle.

Clarke only discreetly rolls her eyes once when Aden gets a little too enthusiastic, almost jumping on the table. Lexa catches him under the armpits and lets him down to safety.

Dinner goes uneventfully for the three. Lexa keeps quiet as she ate, only praising the food once in a while to be a polite guest. Clarke is exhausted from working a full week for her friend. But Aden is the one that keeps the conversations flowing, his talkative personality probably not inherited from his mother.

“Mom ran tracks, she is super fast!” Every time he brings up something about Clarke that intrigues Lexa.

Clarke carries their plates to the sink, shaking her head, “it was cross-country, and I really wasn’t that good.”

“Is that why you got a scholarship to UW? ‘Cause you ‘weren’t any good’?”

“Ok, once upon a time, I was... I was pretty good.” Clarke smiles at his face that is full of pride, as
if it is his achievement. But her self-consciousness intensifies when she inevitably meets Lexa’s
gaze, immediately reminded of the woman’s stunning physicality. Judging from those long toned
legs that can’t be hidden by her khaki pants, and her lithe build, she bets the Marine Officer is a
thousand times better. Hell, the woman fought in wars, and if she can’t run, Clarke highly doubts
the chance of her survival. She turns to her son, red-faced, “are you happy now?”

Aden fawns innocence.

“You went to UW?” Lexa asks. She’s accomplished a bachelor’s degree from the military
academy in between her deployments, but given a do-over, or that her father didn’t die when she
was a college freshman, she’d probably want to take advantage of the four-year college experience
before enlisting.

Clarke has to admit that it is flattering, to have Lexa’s attentive eyes showering her with admiration
and attention, but she clarifies, “no, I went to Edgewood College, it’s only twenty minutes from
home when some stuff came up.”

“She got pregnant, with me!”

“Well thank you Aden! Isn’t it your night to do the dishes?” She panics at the telltale sign of him
going off a tangent that probably will reveal too much personal information, and sends the boy to
the kitchen.

Aden whines, reluctantly gathering the last few plates on the table.

“Thank you.” Clarke feels bad for being cranky, she pulls him in a tickling kiss as he walks by.
When her attention returns to the woman sitting opposite to her, she finds those gentle emerald eyes
still watching her carefully, adoringly. It makes her heart thump a little louder and do this annoying
flips in her chest. She pretends to investigate the chipped paint on the edge of her dinner table.

“Do you still do it competitively?” Lexa finally asks after a long period of silence, eager to put the
blonde woman at ease.

“Oh no, no no, now I just do it to clear my head. It’s a lot cheaper than therapy so…”

“So is walking.” Lexa grins, which earns her an incredulous look from Clarke, but it is more
amused than freaked out. “Who plays chess?” She points at the unfinished game that they moved
out of the way to eat dinner.

“Me!” Aden dives right back into the conversation at the first sound of “chess”.

“Me too.”

“Bet I can beat you.” He says with confidence, and issues his challenge.

Lexa is not one to back down from a challenge. She has not played in a while now, not finding a
compatible partner since her father passed. She is not really good at it either, but he never
pretended to let her win. It was his way of showing his love, and teaching her about humility, and
failures. “Guess we’ll find out. What’s the bet?”

“Dishes tonight.”

“Dishes tonight versus pooper scooper next Monday.” She extends her hand to shake with Aden’s
small one, bluffing, “gotta warn you though, I can be pretty ruthless.”
The boy feigns a scared look, which causes both women to laugh.

To Lexa’s delight, the boy is way more competitive than she imagined he’d be. His small hand dances around the chess pieces like he is creating a form of art, cornering her, trapping her, making her take risky moves and coaxing her to make mistakes.

“I can check you in two steps.” Aden pushes one of her piece out of the game board.

Lexa can hardly believe what just happened. She let her guard down and focused too much on offense, leaving her defense weak. It is a lost battle, but she is not going down without a fight. Tapping her chin, she quickly moves a piece in the aid of her King.

Aden enjoys watching his opponent suffer. As Lexa muses over her next move, he drags the race car toy on the table, trying to distract and mock her. Clarke finally figures out who is the culprit behind all the scratches on her table.

Lexa sighs and makes her last move. Aden takes one glance and delivers a quick kill, “checkmate. Detergent is under the sink.”

“Did I just get hustled?” Lexa admits her defeat unwillingly, looking between the mother and the son, who are sharing a hearty laugh at her expanse, but can’t help her own smile that breaks forth. Clarke finally figures out who is the culprit behind all the scratches on her table.

While rinsing the plates, Lexa teases the child supervising her, “so you got more secret talents, buddy?”

“You’re the one with the secrets.” Aden points out.

They pause.

“I saw her playing the piano.”

Lexa nervously touches her nose, leaving some detergent bubbles on the tip. “Sorry, I saw it when I put the keys back. I wasn’t trying to snoop.” However the two blonde heads share a look between them, and burst out in giggles.

Clarke relents at the woman’s adorably—adorably? she faintly registers—confused look, pointing at her own nose.

Lexa quickly wipes her face on her sleeve.

“It’s okay.” Clarke whispers, reaching for the last plate in the water, not paying attention that Lexa is doing the same. Their hands meet under the surface of detergent bubble filled water, and their arms brush together at the action. It is when she finally realizes, unbeknownst to herself, she has gravitated to the warm body beside her during the chore. In that finite moment, all she feels, all her mind can concentrate on, is the lithe hand that overlaps with hers, the warm palm that encircles her fingertip, the calloused thumb that glides over her knuckle. She’d be lying if she said she isn’t at least a little bit fascinated by the woman’s hands—long, defined, tanned and strong, she’d also be lying if this isn’t something she’d imagined, the pleasant temperature, the roughness to the touch.

Lexa is the one that pulls away first, muttering an apology, and drying the suds on the dishrag.
back of her ears starts to feel hot again.

Aden comes to their rescue again, he comments, “Lexa, you don’t have to be sorry, you’re really good!”

“Hey, you’re not too bad yourself with a violin, my friend. Why don’t you show me what you got?”

He doesn’t seem too thrilled by the request, “how about a magic trick instead?”

“Oh, okay.” Lexa doesn’t press, she flies with it instead.

Clarke clears her throat, finding her voice, “he doesn’t like to play in front of people.” She leaves out the fact that it is because of Finn’s constantly disapproving and condescending attitude.

It pains her to think about the damage he’s done to Aden, and it pains her to know that some of it is also caused by her fear and cowardice. It sits heavily and thickly on her chest, like poison that she can’t just cough and spit out, like evil that she can’t put into words. And yet somehow, in the pair of watery green eyes unblinking as they stare back into hers, she sees it as plain as moonlight — Lexa understands.

Aden skips back in time as they grow shy and awkward in the pregnant and meaningful silence. He pulls his guest down on the couch and settles across the table, shuffling his poker set, “ordinary deck”. When his little fingers nearly drop all the cards, he giggles nervously.

Lexa encourages him to laugh it off, and asks if it would be the same if she did the shuffling.

Aden laughs when she also nearly messes it up, of course hers is more intentional.

“Tell me when to stop!” He flips through the cards, instructing.

“Stop!”

“Memorize the card, I’m not looking I’m not looking.” Aden turns his head away, squeezing his big blue eyes shut.

Lexa does what he said, then watches as Aden shuffle the cards again.

“Let me put a little magic.” His finger dance on top of the deck, like he is sprinkling magic dust, then he holds it to his mother’s face, “you blow on it.” Clarke obeys. Then he draws one card from the bunch. “Is this your card?” He asks Lexa.

“Um…” Her card is definitely not a spade.

“Just say it’s not your card if it isn’t.” Aden nearly rolls his eyes with impatience.

“It’s not my card.”

With that, he turns to his mother and sticks out his tongue, “told you! You’re not magical at all!” He cackles when Clarke feigns hurt by clutching the front of her shirt. “Now you blow on it, Lexa.”

“What if I’m not magical either? What if my card is forever lost!” She lets out a dramatic cry, all the theatrics that makes him laugh louder. He just holds it closer to her, so she does what he tells
Not surprisingly, he draws another card, and it is precisely what hers has been, a queen of hearts.

“Wow! That is really my card. Aden, I didn't know you’re such a skilled magician!”

“Wait till you see this one.” He loves the attention showered on him, and proceeds to show her more tricks.

However, it is late, and the boy must go to sleep. Clarke has gone upstairs to prepare his pajamas and come back. “Aden, honey, it’s bed time.” She sits on the couch next to him, running her hand through his short hair.

“Wait, but this is the best one!” He is setting up a new game for Lexa and him, ignoring his mother, whose hand freezes in the air when he shies away.

“Hey, why don’t you show it to me another time? I’m not going anywhere.” Lexa detects the smallest change in the air, and decides to step in as referee.

Clarke is more cut to the chase. She has always been firm about bedtime, especially today, well, today has been a strange day, and she can feel the tension building inside of her exhausted body. Her hands reach for the poker cards, while Aden stubbornly holds onto them, tugging back and forth.

“Aden, let go.” She demands in a less tolerant tone.

The boy’s hands slip, and his small body nearly topples over the table, cards flying over their heads and land on the carpet. Lexa has reached out to steady him, but once he rises up, red faced and a small vein in his neck bulging, he storms off to his room in exasperation, “just wanted to show her a trick!”

Clarke sighs, and turns to look at Lexa who is a bit stunned by the turn of events. “I’m sorry. He’s not usually like this… I don’t know what’s gotten into him.”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it.” Lexa bends down to gather the cards for Clarke.

“My brother… he taught him magic. It’s like… you know, it’s like their ‘thing’.” Clarke doesn’t know what made her say that, but the presence of Lexa, right then right there, has a soothing effect on her. “He passed away last year. He was a Marine too.”

Lexa stops only momentarily. She already knows that, Abby has shared with her. But coming from Clarke, it means something else entirely.

Clarke pauses, stealing a glance at the Marine Officer. When those emerald eyes—she’s noticed how the color changes just so subtly at different time of the day and in different lights, and how they look more hazel now under the dim lamp—rest upon her, she finds strength in them to continue, “It’s been hard on Aden… It’s been hard on all of us.”

Of course, it is a feeling she is all too familiar with. Lexa feels her heart break for Clarke. Every time she had to tell a family overseas that their loved ones had been wounded or killed, an overwhelming sense of sadness, of sorrow, of guilt, would wash over her like darkness takes over the sky at night. And every time, she faced the same questions she kept asking herself: why them? Why not her? Why does the Commander get to live through it all while her people die and suffer?

It feels natural to reach out and capture Clarke’s hand in her own, to console the woman, and to
grasp onto the strand of warm light before the suffocating darkness looms over her heart. Her eyes drop to the stark contrast of her own tanned skin against the pale complexion.

This time, neither of them flinch.

When Lexa speaks again, her voice is gentle but definitive, “Aden is amazing. You have taught him well.”

She gives her a small smile, just about to mutter a ‘thank you’, Hades, who has been quietly sitting on the porch, lets out a warning growl out of the blue, his body tensing up. The Marine Officer immediately shoots up, stalking over to the door. Clarke doesn’t miss the way her right hand feels for the side of her belt, most certainly where she used to keep her issued weapon.

It is ridiculous, Clarke thinks, and amazing, and heartbreaking, that Lexa is always so alarmed and vigilant. Her brother had never been this way, but he had talked about veterans that suffered from night terrors, PTSD, panic attacks, and many other mental illnesses coming back from the frontline. Though it isn’t her place to put a label on what Lexa is experiencing, she feels selfish to have subjected the woman to her own sadness and anger, to have treated her harshly because of the baggages she carries, when Lexa probably is carrying way heavier memories and burdens. In that moment, she feels herself drawn, more so than before, to Lexa, wanting to know her story and to share her pain.

Lexa lets out a breath of relief hearing women singing choir songs in the car. The church members have driven Abby home, and clearly they had a rather unconventional night.

The older brunette steps out of the vehicle, slightly disoriented, waving to her friends. Lexa is quick to steady her by the elbow, and catching another woman who also stumbles into her body.

“Awww, you’re so helpful dear, and so chivalrous! Isn’t… isn’t she chivalrous?!”

Abby is delighted, “yes, I told you Cece, Lexa is a sweetheart.”

The woman named Cece giggles, and plants several vigorous kisses on Lexa’s face, before dancing into the house.

Clarke watches in shock, brows furrowed in disapproval. “Mom! Aunt Cece! Have you been drinking?”

“You know, I had this drink called Moscow Mule, sounds terrible, but tasted so good!”

“Cece had a little bit too much to drink, she’s staying the night with us, sweetie.” Abby and the woman climb up the stairs to the older Griffin’s room.

“I’ll make you a cup of tea.” Clarke raises her voice to inform them.

Cece shrieks back, “that will be fantastic!”

“Wow, okay…” Clarke turns back to Lexa, shaking her head in amusement. She finds Lexa darting her eyes from side to side.

“Look, there’s something I’ve been meaning to tell you.” At Clarke’s raised eyebrow, she nervously bites her bottom lip, and loses the ability to reason as the curious blue eyes come to a rest on her lips. “I… I’ve never fully explained… um…”

Clarke’s smile slowly disappears as she comes to the realization of where she has been staring at.
Confusion rises in her chest and aches behind her breastbone.

“I’m sorry I can’t find the right words.”

“It’s alright.” Finally, she says reassuringly, “maybe another time. After all, I’m not going anywhere either.”

With wordless appreciation, Lexa nods and slowly backs away from the door.

“Goodnight, Lexa.”

Her heart clenches tight at the sound of her own name. It was so soft and so sweet as it slipped out from those slightly parted lips, turned sharp at the consonants and wrapped around at the vowels. Blushing like she is a teenager again, Lexa hides her face, and pretends to be busy searching for Hades. “Come on buddy.” She misses the way his back is hunched and his ears are pointed in the direction of some far-away shadows.

Neither of them notices, among all the chaos and noise, a black car has pulled into the driveway with its lights out. Finn sits behind the wheels, his jaw taut and eyes dark, watching Lexa’s silhouette slowly merge into the darkness of the night.

More and more frustrated she grows as she paces in her cabin. Once again, the struggle between telling the truth and keeping things the way they are begins. Oh she so wanted to just tell Clarke, where she has been, how she’d find her, but she has a feeling that bringing it up would make things worse for Clarke and her family.

Her finger hovers on the trackpad of her laptop, the cruiser resting at Anya’s name on her FaceTime contact list. She loses track of time she spent on staring at her friend’s little bubble shaped icon. She admires Anya’s sharp jawline and chiseled cheekbones, and the way her usually sharp and cold eyes soften as she glances sideway to Raven, who is dropping a kiss on her shoulder.

Lexa is suddenly overwhelmed by how much she misses her friends, her friends that are in a sickeningly sweet relationship. Sometimes, she is confused by this feeling. It’s envy, it’s admiration, it’s heartache, it’s loneliness, but right now, it’s hope.

Anya and Raven, both have been through hell and worse, both came back from that ugly, broken place that is war, they found strength in each other, and healed each other. They give her hope, and that hope has burned brighter and hotter since she’s met Clarke, from her blue gaze and soft voice, from the curve of her lips when she laughs and the crease in between her brows when she frowns, from the way she cares for Aden and banter with Abby. And sometimes, from the sadness in the dim lights of her eyes, in the long shadow by her feet, in the stories she tells, and the words that remain unspoken. She sees it, she recognizes it, and she feels it. That’s how she begins to realize that Clarke, with ten thousand attitudes and a brilliantly mastered facade of sassiness, in odd ways, heals her.

Suddenly the screen of her laptop lights up and the picture of Anya’s profile expands, signifying a FaceTime request from her friend. Lexa stares in awe at this freakishly telepathic occurrence, just for a second, before accepting the call.

“Sup, commander!” Raven’s head pops into the screen first, “told ya she’d pick up!” She turns to the person outside of the camera view, and grins.
Lexa shakes her head at the younger woman’s bubbly voice. “Hello Raven, is there a reason that you’re calling me at,” she finds the time on the right upper corner of her laptop, “one in the morning?”

“You sound surprised for someone who picked up so fast.” Raven dismisses her with a flick of her wrist. Anya finally emerges and sits beside her girlfriend, shaking her head in amusement. “Hey Lexa, I did not endorse this kind of behavior, just so you know.” Her words are reprimanding, but her gaze remains soft and loving at the girl who can barely sit still.

Raven bumps her shoulder at Anya’s. “I know you’re just as excited as I am, don’t pretend. Anyways, Lexa, we have some exciting news to share with you!”

“Hmm, I bet you do.” Lexa plops her chin on her palm, her dark thoughts and contemplation temporarily fades into the back of her mind.

“First of all, most importantly, something good happened to me! Guess what!”

“The suspense is killing me.” Lexa sasses, knowing Raven doesn’t have the patience to go back and forth with the guessing game.

“I’m done with rehab! I passed the physical test today.” Raven throws up her hands in the air, “I’m amazing.”

It is the kind of news that makes her day. Lexa smiles proudly, “congratulations, I’m really happy for you, Rae.”

“Thanks Lexa. But this is not the reason I’m calling you late.”

“Oh?”

“Do you remember Echo?” This time, Anya is the one that speaks. Unlike Raven, she takes an excruciating amount of time to tell the background story as she builds up to her point.

“Echo… sounds vaguely familiar.” Lexa thinks of a blurred face, with dirty blonde hair, a slim figure, in some sort of medical personnel uniform.

“She works at the VA’s hospital, one of the trauma ICU charge nurses. Worked nights.” Anya describes the woman. “I spent quite some time talking with her when I visited you in the ICU.”

Lexa rolls her eyes, “wow, how forgetful of me, of course I remember all twenty of the nightshift nurses that took care of me when I was intubated and heavily dosed with pain meds!”

“Mockery is not—” Anya starts to chastise her friend.

“—the product of a strong mind. Yes, I’m sorry, please continue.” Lexa snickers when she finishes Anya’s sentence for her, earning a glare from her former mentor.

“Well, we kept in touch, and got close over the last few months as she’s also volunteering at Raven’s rehab center.”

“Ok, she sounds like a nice person.”

“She’s getting married!” Raven announces.

“To this guy named Bellamy. He’s an associate professor in the department of history at Stanford.”
“Smart guy. Pretty decent looking too.” Raven doesn’t miss the faux jealousy from her girlfriend. She sticks out her tongue and winks before dipping in for a sloppy kiss on Anya’s cheek.

Lexa pretends she doesn’t see the blush rising from Anya’s face, and suppresses the childish urge to gag. “And this concerns you, or me… how?”

“They’re having the ceremony in his hometown, his sister and mother still live there. And he’s from…” Raven pauses for dramatic effect, “Wisconsin!”

“We got the invitation to tag along.” Anya supplements.

“You’re coming here?” Lexa asks in surprise.

“Yeah, it looks like it. I have quite a bit of money saved up, and Raven is free from rehab, we’re really over being cooped up in this small apartment.” Anya explains, “it’ll be good for us. Plus don’t you miss us.”

“Yeah, ever since you went AWOL on us in the name of finding this mysterious woman.”

“I did not go AWOL. I sent you cards and called you all the time.” Lexa protests, “but I suppose I do miss you. So when is this happening?”

“Things are still in the planning stage, but soon, I guess, coz once it’s the new school year he can’t take off for another year or so.” The buzzer beeping in the background pulls Raven’s attention away. She lets out a small cry of “pizza”, and shoots up from her sitting position to answer the doorbell. Anya watches her girlfriend leave, with the same look of carefulness and adoration. When Raven starts to have a conversation with the pizza delivery person, who has become a friend to them by how much they order in, she turns her head back to Lexa. “So, how’s working on the farm?”

“It’s been good.” Lexa shrugs, not having much to complain about. She likes her job just fine, it’s nothing glamorous or remotely demanding, but it is peaceful.

“Is the woman still a bitch?”

“She’s not a bitch.” Lexa frowns just slightly.

“Sure sounded like one the last time you described her to me.”

“Anya,” she sighs, “Clarke is not a bad person. She’s just suspicious and protective sometimes, understandably so. But lately… she’s been opening up to me a lot more.” She recalls the conversation they had before getting interrupted by Abby and Cece. The corner of her mouth tugs into a slight up-curve.

Anya pauses, she recognizes that look. She reads Lexa’s micro expressions like black ink on white paper, and however insignificant it was, the smile was there. Soft, bashful, and hopeful, it was.

“Wait… Lexa, what’s going on?”

Lexa snaps out of her memory. “What do you mean?”

“You like her!” Anya whisper-shrieks in revelation, and when Lexa doesn’t respond, she nods to herself in conviction, “you do! You’re not denying it. Wow, Lexa, uh, I’m impressed.”

“There’s nothing to be impressed by, Anya. We’re barely friends.”
“Well, does she know the story then, about how you found her picture, and went through the entire Marine Corps trying to find the owner, but you didn’t, so you walked all the way there to find her?”

“No.” Lexa twiddles her thumbs together, suddenly uncomfortable with the direction that the conversation is heading to. She doesn’t know if she could put her thoughts into words, and she doesn’t know if those words would make any sense. “I just… I can’t find the right words to say. And she’s been through so much, Anya, losing her brother in war like that. I don’t think… I don’t want to bring it up so that it can hurt her all over again. She’s doing well, relatively, now, and I can’t be a constant reminder of her brother’s death, of how unfairly things work in the world, when some of us get to come back home, yet others who were on the same battlefield don’t.” As she rambles on, Anya listens silently. She doesn’t mention the fact that she feels selfish too, not telling Clarke about how she really ended up on the farm. But she doesn’t want to ruin this, whatever it is, when finally she has this one good thing in her life. She just wants to heal.

“I know.” Anya finally says. Of course she knows. It’s the burden they forever shoulder, it’s destroying someone else’s home, and having a home of your own to go back to; it’s seeing your friends getting killed, and walking away in one piece; it’s telling someone that their loved ones are dead, and holding your family tight as they sob into your chest, glad that you are still here; it’s the loss, it’s the hurt, it’s the guilt. “We bear it, so they don’t have to.”

Raven saunters back into the screen, with a pizza box in her hand, two pieces already missing. She glances back and forth between the other two, slightly confused and alarmed, “did I interrupt something? Looks like you were having a serious conversation.”

Lexa pleads through her eyes, to put an end to this topic.

Anya knows she doesn’t like talking about this in front of Raven. In some way or another, Lexa still feels incredibly responsible for her girlfriend’s injury. She worries at her lower lip, before feigning a smile and reaching for a slice of pizza, “no love, Lexa’s just worried that we’re gonna have no place to live when we visit her.”

“It’s true, I only have one bedroom with a twin-sized spring bed.” Lexa recovers, and teases, although her voice sounds tight and her laugh forced.

“Well, you two better get used to sleeping on the floor then.” Raven claims the bed immediately, and blows her friend a kiss before ending the call, “I’m excited though! It’ll be great! Ok cool, just thought we’d tell you as soon as we can, goodnight, Commander, can’t wait to see ya!”

“Yeah, me too, Rae. Can’t wait t——” The call ends abruptly, cutting her off. Lexa stares back at the screen, now filled with just her own reflection.

“We bear it, so they don’t have to.”

She pulls out her wallet, and digs through the folds until she finds the photo. Clarke’s smile is so bright and radiant, it makes it hard to look away. Lexa knows she’d give anything to see that smile return to the woman that once looked so happy, so content, like she is bigger than life itself. With cautious hands and a heavy heart, she tucks the photo under the bulky volume of some modern warfare on her nightstand. It won’t resolve the raging war inside her head, oh never, the war has been raging on for as long as she remembers. But at least, for tonight, she can lie in bed and replay the sound of her name rolling off Clarke’s tongue again and again, till she passes out in exhaustion, till nightmares can plague her mind.
Chapter End Notes

I know, I know, I promised to update every other Friday but I'm running late. A whirlwind of recent breakup and college junior year coming to an end has produced a fair amount of anxiety and depression, which I'm realizing as I type that you're not here for, so I'm not gonna send out the invite to my pity party.

Please leave comments, kudos, or pop by my Tumblr. I really appreciate all of it, and it keeps me going.

I do make adjustments to my story accordingly, too. I see that you want Ranya, and that's what I'm going to bring back.

I'm also sorry that I can't reply to every single comment as I don't regularly go on this site unless I'm updating the story. But I see all of them. So thank you for reading this.
Good Mourning

Chapter Summary

Clarke opens up more about her brother to Lexa. Finn is still being an a-hole to his son and ex-wife, but Lexa won't allow it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Good mourning

June 26th 2015

The Griffins are unusually quiet in the morning. Abby sits in the garden collecting flowers, while Aden munches at his cereal absentmindedly. Clarke stands in front of her drawer for a long while with no motivation to make a selection from her dark colored dresses. Instead, her hand reaches for a framed photo, tucked away neatly into the furthest corner of the cabinet.

It was taken a long time ago. A boy and a girl, each with a head of stunning blonde hair, sitting on the beach and making a sand castle.

A year ago, Sergeant Jacob Griffin Jr. had died in Iraq during an operation to rescue hostages. Before the white marble headstone for honorable Marines that have fallen, Clarke holds Abby and Aden’s hands in silence. Tears streaming down her eyes as they read the names engraved on the epitaph, as they pray for and speak eulogies about a brave man, a son, a brother, a kind soul, a person loved by many.

Clarke places the flowers in front of her brother’s grave, wipes the dust on the flawless marble stone, whispering ‘I love you’s and ‘I miss you’s.

Then she spends the entire afternoon sitting in the garden, her fingers playing with the edge of her dress.

Aden has asked Lexa to his room, they played a game of chess before he took a nap. It leaves her standing at the window at the end of second floor hallway, watching Clarke mourn.

At first, Clarke tries to clean the weeds off the short walls that wind their tentacles around the garden, finding herself calm and solemn. But peace is a concept that she has a hard time wrapping her mind around it. Every time, it floats by, slips through her fingers, and disappears in thin air. She becomes irritated, by the weeds, by the wall, by herself.

She is angry, she knows, angry at her father for refusing aggressive treatment, angry at her brother for not returning from battle, angry at herself for being angry. That anger has been brewing in the pit of her stomach, gnawing at her organs for too long, and it is rapidly bubbling to the surface.

Her hand has trembled as she lifts a flowerpot, it falls and breaks into pieces beside her feet. It is the final straw on a camel’s back, and something inside her snaps. “NO! NO! Why Jacob, why!
Fuck you! Fuck you Jesus fucking Christ!” Her teary voice is quivering in hysteria. She hefts another pot, smashing it into the ground, pulling dead plants out from their roots, snatching at the veins on bricks, dirt and mud and twigs and thorns flying in the air, and her hand bleeds. From the gnarly bite of the thorn that runs along ring finger to the center of her palm, her blood pearls up, prettily like sweet sap seeping out from the tree barks under a hot summer day. Red flowers soon blooming and dotting the ground in its wake. She is all but numb to the pain.

Lexa catches the red stains, so she practically flies down the stairs. “Clarke! Clarke don’t. Stop.” When Clarke shoulders her away, and throws another pot on the ground, she locks her arms around Clarke’s waist from behind.

Clarke starts kicking and thrashing in the strong hold, but she can’t escape the firm embrace. The moment is all chaos breaking loose.

Lexa winces at the blunt pain on her shin, but she holds onto the woman.

“Let go of me! Let go…” Clarke thrashes around in the iron confine, feeling like some kind of dying sea creature flapping in a tangled web of fishnet. She curses Lexa and she curses her brother, her nails sinking into the woman’s taut muscle, smearing her own blood across the scarred skin. It’s so hard to breathe, with strangling weeps interrupted by hiccups, her lungs burn, her eyes burn. The rampage of her heartbeat, the sharp pain shooting up in waves up her hand, and the ringing in her ears are so overwhelming to her senses, her world is warped into a weird tunnel of colorless lights and endless dark, of scalding hot and freezing cold, of muted buzzes and deafening screeches.

“Shh…” Lexa shushes gently, careful with the strength of her hold, steady and strong, but no more forceful than necessary. “Pressure across the body reduces your heart rate, metabolic rate, and muscle tone. Follow my voice, Clarke, feel yourself calm down… I’ve got you.” She assures and reassures in soft murmurs, her fists unclenching as Clarke loosens the clawing clutch on her.

“That’s right, Clarke, you’re doing great. I’ve got you.”

Clarke feels her body grow heavy, like a deflating balloon, anger and frustration blowing off with every breath. Her heaving turns into symbolic squirms, then settles down into fits of sobs.

Lexa slowly backs them away from the shattered pieces, the back of her knees comes into contact with the bench against the wall. She sits down, and lets the woman sit in her lap. Running a hand over the golden tresses, she rests her cheek against a trembling shoulder. “It’s okay… It’s alright.” Her shin still hurts like a bitch, and her forearm is marred by scratches as if she just got mauled by a wildcat, but she is thankful in the moment to feel Clarke’s skin under her palm, the fragrance of her shampoo in her nose.

The woman slowly relaxes, her back softens, and head lolls back to rest against Lexa’s. After several minutes, Clarke realizes the position they are in, and awkwardly extracts herself from the embrace to sit next to Lexa on the bench, but she doesn’t shun away from the soothing contact, finding solace in how the calloused palm moves in circles on her back as she snivels.

Lexa respectfully withdraws her hand when Clarke stops sniffling, she drapes her arm on the back of the bench, her warmth still encircling the woman.

Clarke doesn’t admit that she misses the feeling almost instantly. She breaks the silence in an exhausted, hoarse voice, “at first, they wouldn’t tell us anything… how he died, where he died… just that friendly fire is a possibility.”

Lexa shuts her eyes at those words.
“So, it’s been a year today, and the official investigation into the death of Sergeant… Jacob… Griffin Jr., is still on going.” Her lips quivering, “that’s the worst part—not knowing. I would give anything… I would give anything to know that he didn’t die for nothing.”

They sit together for a few minutes, both processing Clarke’s words, before she continues, “we were inseparable as kids, you know. We did everything together. We built that wall together.” She lets out a light chuckle, “well, Jacob… Jacob built the wall. I supervised, which consisted mostly of me drinking ice tea and reading Brontes.” Suddenly, she remembers something, a playful glimmer lights up in her eyes. “Oh! This one day, I couldn’t find my book anywhere, so I asked him about it, and he just pointed. Look…” Her finger traces the edge of the wall behind them, motioning Lexa to follow.

At first she can’t make out what Clarke is pointing at, but upon further investigation, she discovers the spine of a book sealed and packed tightly in between the mud-covered bricks.

“I was so mad! I was so mad at him. He just laughed like it was the funniest prank he ever pulled on me.” Clarke giggles, doubling over as her laughter grow inside her stomach. Lexa feels obligated to pull a tight smile. But as seconds tick away, the laughter finally turns into small whimpers, then weak weeps interrupted by a few hiccups. “It was… it was ridicu—”

Lexa once again brings her into a tight hug, allowing Clarke to bury her face in the crook of her neck, desperate fingers digging into her shoulder. She doesn’t think much before laying a tender kiss on the crown of the blonde head.

Clarke melts at the feeling of soft lips in her hair, but also quickly is made aware that she has put most of her body weight on the marine officer. With a blush, she straightens up from the embrace and wipes at her tear stained face, “I’m sorry… that was… inappropriate.”

“Okay.” Lexa lets her go, but eyes at the woman’s hand that is now covered in dry blood, “can I…?” She points.

Clarke shyly but trustingly rests her palm in hers.

At a quick glance, it isn’t a particularly deep cut, and doesn’t seem to require stitches, thankfully. Lexa still examines the cut closely, “you’ve got a great laugh, you know that?” It makes the both of them pause, blue eyes curiously staring her back in surprise. She quickly darts her eyes down again, “I wish I can… hear it more.”

“Why don’t you try tell me a joke?” Clarke can’t tell if Lexa is being serious or not.

Lexa shrugs, and makes a half-hearted attempt at a humorous response, “well, you gotta get a few beers in me before I start telling jokes.”

“Okay…”

“Okay?” Lexa quirks one eyebrow, and smiles gently.

Nodding weakly, Clarke pushes herself to stand up, her legs feel wobbly and tired.

“Good,” is all she says before she gets up to her feet and leads themselves back into the house. She makes a beeline to the bathroom and finds some iodine solution and cotton balls, along with a roll of thin gauze.

Clarke catches a glimpse of the red lines on Lexa’s arm where she’d marked with her short nails. “I… I’m really sorry, for this.” Her face feels flushed, guilty and sheepish, like a small child.
“Don’t be.” Lexa sits down next to her by the table, and gestures for her hand. 

The antiseptic stings, just a little, but she hardly notices it when the back of her hand is tingling pleasantly with every tender stroke Lexa puts there. When the gauze is wrapped neatly around her palm, and the bandaid on her finger, she wordlessly takes the bottle of solution in her hand, and starts to clean out the few scratches on Lexa’s forearm that broke the skin. 

Lexa stares at Clarke’s profile in awe. Her heart is swelling to a bursting point. 

It’s like some kind of symbolism one can only see in a rom-com movie. Oh how she’s yearned for a gentle hand that heals, and how she’s wished that it would be Clarke’s, that one day, they’d be ones to heal each other. 

Maybe they do. 

Later in the evening, Clarke is finally able to pull herself out of the dark headspace filled with death and sadness, she goes to clean up the garden, only to find it already tidy as before, minus a few pots and plants. She doesn’t have to guess to know who has done it. 

Aden has been upset too. So she spends the rest of the day watching TV with her son, and they read Harry Potter together before bed. Clarke corrects some words at times, but her thoughts constantly drifts to a certain person and those expressive green eyes, softer than summer breeze. 

July, 2015 

It seems that she has not only won over the people on the farm, but the animals absolutely adore her as well. Lexa treats the dogs much like her subordinates, firm but affectionate. However, unlike her human subordinates, dogs have less personal boundaries. It is how she finds herself on the ground, attacked by nibbles and licks, a Schnauzer and a Pappillon trampling all over her. The Kangal is easily the size of a pony, who nearly throws her in the sky when he chases his smaller counterparts that run between her legs. Hades observes with watchful eyes, and steps in when she needs rescue, but more often than not, his meddling causes bigger chaos, with louder barks and more swaging tails. 

Abby is delighted when the troublesome Leonberger became obedient under Lexa’s rein. Aden volunteers to help her give the dog a shower as he has nothing to do in the early days of his summer break. The boy enjoys every bit of it, even the part when he spilled dog shampoo all over the place, on his own shirt and Lexa’s. 

“Shake!” He shouts after rinsing the bubbles from the brown fur, to which the dog gladly obeys, making him giggle. Then he pats the dog dry with some help from the Marine Officer. As Lexa brushes the dog’s shiny fur, Aden curiously studies the dog tags on a silver chain hanging loosely around her neck. He flips each one over to read the engraved letters. “What’s the black dog tag for?” 

She holds them both in her palm, “this, is mine, it has my blood type in case of an emergency. The black one is in memorial of my good friend Ryder. He died in an operation.” 

“So… they’re like friendship bracelets?”
“Yeah, yeah you can say that.” Lexa smiles at the way he puts it so innocently.

The dog whimpers and rolls over, satisfied with the brushing.

“Oh boy! I think he’s has enough.” She straightens up and blows the fallen strands of fur off the brush. She eyes the boy devilishly, her voice dropping an octave in a threatening manner, “now your turn.”

Aden shrieks, scrambles up from the floor and runs from the thick brush. “No way!!! No!!”

“Get back here! I’m gonna make a Marine outta you!” She gets up and chases him. Dog fur flutters in the air, like trifling lights falling through the sky.

“Mommy!” Aden dashes to the other side of the farm where Clarke and Abby are gardening, but Lexa has already caught up with him.

She pretends to be just a tenth of a second too late to catch him, until he reaches for his mother’s arm, still screaming and giggling. “Your mommy can’t save you now. They don’t call me the Commander for nothing!”

Abby laughs at their antics. Clarke just rolls her eyes and plays along. “Oh really? The Commander?” she says defiantly, “well you know who I am?”

Lexa tries to ignore the way her stomach lurches funnily as she looks into the mischievous blue eyes, “why should I care? Give me the boy.”

“You should care, because I am the Sky Princess that fell down to earth in a ball of fire.” She just makes something up completely without any context.

Lexa chuckles. But she pulls her best scary face, scathing and fierce, “so you are the one that defeated three hundred of my best warriors!”

“You are the one who sent them after my son.”

And thus starts a tradition of roleplaying game they’d revisit in many years to come.

July 6th 2015

When Aden learns about her nickname in the Marine Corps, Lexa is immediately dubbed ‘the K9 Commander’ because ‘dog whisperer’ is too generic a nickname. She deserves the title, though, for successfully training a Pekinese to do the agility tricks its unreasonable owner has demanded. Now Cooper, the Pekinese, knows how to run through a tube, jump over fences, and score a soccer ball in the end.

Lexa is showing Cooper’s owner some techniques and hand gestures to further train the dog, when a black Toyota pulls up in the drive, distracting the dog. Finn has come to pick Aden up to a Football game with the local kids.

Dogs seem to have adapted a suspicious attitude toward the man. They growl and bark and claw from behind the fences. Finn does not like them either, scowling as he walks pass the kennels.
The boy stands on the porch looking uncomfortable in his football gear. The helmet is too big on his thin shoulders, and the padding makes it hard to breathe for him. But he is going to play anyway, because it made Finn smile when he agreed, and there is nothing in the world that he wouldn’t do to make him proud.

“Daddy! I’ve been practicing a tackle all week!” He runs up to him, tries to sound excited.

“That’s my boy!” Finn lets out a belly laugh, and opens the passenger’s seat for him.

Clarke strides over to the Deputy.

“How’s the old soldier barbie working out for ya?” He points in Lexa’s direction with his chin.

She ignores his obnoxious gesture, “hey, do me a favor, okay? Try to remember that this is a charity game.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Don’t push him too hard, okay?”

“Hey,” Finn snaps his fingers at her, “you know what? When Aden’s on your time, he gets to do whatever you want, you can play poker, you can pet the puppies, play fiddle, whatever. But when he’s with me, we do it my way.”

“Have a good time, sweetie.” She pushes past him and kisses the boy on the forehead.

“Bye mom!”

“You give the kid some room to breathe, to be a man.” Finn keeps glaring at her until she retreats back into the house.

The car pulls away, tires screeching against the edge of the road. Cooper jumps over the fence and abandons the obstacles Lexa has set up for him, barking and chasing after the car.

“Hey! Cooper come back!” Lexa hurdles over the fence with ease, her motion so smooth and fast that it leaves the blonde astonished. Clarke watches in awe as she jumps over yet another fence and runs across the field to catch the dog.

By the time peace is restored in the farm, Clarke has loaded the truck with flowers that she’s hoping to sell at the farmer’s market. They are selling home-grown plants to support Abby’s church. And unsurprisingly, at the farmer’s market, she runs into Monty and Miller, hand in hand, picking up vegetables and fruits.

“Com’on, Clarke! Take her out sometime!” And they haven’t stopped badgering her since they wandered over to her stand. Well, they can hardly be blamed because Clarke has hidden the Marine Officer so well that they start to suspect she’s invented this person due to her everlasting solitude.

“Yeah, we want to see her sometime, if she’s really as ‘gorgeous’ with ‘cheekbones to die for’ as rumor has it.” Monty adds, “plus, Abby makes it out like she works way to hard, you should give her some break.”

Clarke rolls her eyes at her gossipy friends, “pff, what rumor? Plus I give her plenty of breaks, Lexa just likes to do her own stuff, you two leave her alone.”
“Woooo, so it’s Lex-a already, isn’t it?” The couple tease.

“Okay, okay, I give. I’m done with you two.” Clarke raises her hands in surrender, kissing both of her friends on the cheek to tell them she’ll be leaving soon. Though with a dozen bouquets of flowers unsold, she decides to go home early to avoid further inquires. She is not in the mood anyways, it makes her nervous every time Aden spends time with Finn, and it breaks her heart to see her son defeated and disappointed, time after time when Finn can never be pleased no matter what he does.

When she finally arrives home, she can’t find Lexa anywhere. Maybe she took the liberty and wandered off to buy some supplies. So she changes into her casual clothes, waiting for Finn to take Aden back. Hours later, in the middle of her doing laundry, the car blows its horn outside. Clarke peeps through the window to find Finn carrying their son out of the backseat, a fingerless spint on his little arm.

Panicking, she jumps to her feet and hastens out of the house, “oh god! Oh my god! What happened!?"

“He just slips on his foot, nothing but a little sprain in the wrist.” Finn crosses his arms, disappointment thick in his tone.

Aden glances sadly at his father, he gives his mother a one-armed hug, and goes back into the house defeatedly.

“I’ll be right in, sweetie.” Clarke kisses him on the head softly. As he disappears inside, she glares at the man with anger that can burn holes in his stupid, clueless face.

Finn shrugs incredulously, as if he has done nothing wrong, “what? It was an accident!”

“You just can’t see it, do you?”

“See what?”

“That boy will run through a brick wall for you!”

“What does that have to do with him not being able to run a touchdown?” His face is distorted by the scorn as he looms over her, “huh?”

“Ok, don’t worry about it. Please just go home, Finn.” Clarke starts to feel cornered, she turns her back on him and walks away.

Finn, however, feels insulted and mistreated. He catches up to his ex-wife, and grabs her wrist, “hey, wait a minute! Hey! Who do you think you’re talking to?”

“Finn! Calm down.” Clarke’s words only make his grip tighter.

“No you calm down! Let me tell you something, that’s my son in there too, you know. And I can take him away any time I want. You got that?”

“Let go of my arm, Finn. Let go of me!” The dull pain in her wrist triggers a fresh wave of gut-wrenching panic inside her.

He only presses closer, his floppy hair falling into his dark eyes, “what’s the matter, huh?”
“You should do what she says.” A firm voice, composed yet demanding, comes from direction of the small receptionist room. “Let go of her.” Lexa crosses her arms in front of her chest, and eyes the man coldly without a glimmer of fear.

Finn secretly gulps when he sees the muscles in her forearms bunching. He loosens his hand and she shrugs him off quickly. She storms into the house, trusting the Marine Officer would show him out.

The man slowly backs away, not without a snort at her. It takes one creased eyebrow from Lexa to send him driving off like the devil is on his tail.

Clarke kneels before Aden in the bathroom to inspect his bruises. “I hope this heals up before your birthday party. Your friends’ parents might think I beat you.” She jokes lovingly, despite the heartbreak she feels in her chest to see her baby injured.

“I don’t have to have a party. Dad said I’m kinda getting old for that.” Aden casts a sad look at his mother.

She frowns in annoyance at the mention of Finn, “that is absolutely ridiculous! Of course you’re having a party. You only turn 7 once.”

“You only turn every age once.” The boy isn’t cheerful at the prospect. He takes off his gears and stands in the shower.

Clarke can only sigh. She helps him shower, and picks up his dirty clothes after he goes into his room. A knock on the door pulls her out of the trance she didn’t notice she has been in. Lexa has come to check on her.

“Thank you for that.” Clarke lets her in. As they stare at each other in silence, realization dawns on her, and a gentle warmth tugged at her heartstrings. She knows instinctively that she feels — she is — more comfortable and safe around Lexa than she’s ever been with Finn.

“Sorry I overheard…” she asks gingerly, “can he really take Aden away?”

“You haven’t met Finn’s father.”

“Why don’t you just leave the area?”

Clarke stuffs the final pieces of laundry into the machine, and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. “If I try to take Aden away from him, I can lose him altogether.” Her voice breaks a little from the potential of her worst nightmares coming true.

“It’s none of my business. But… um… how did the two of you end up… I mean, what…”

“What possessed me to fall into bed with him?” Clarke says sarcastically, but soon remembers it isn’t Lexa’s fault of any sort, she bites her lip to quell her frustration. “Sorry. It was senior year, my father had passed away, and I was grieving. I used sex to fill the void, or to numb my feelings, whatever. He was there, and he was the captain of the football team, charming, considerate, at the time. So we both got drunk, I thought I was in love, I thought he was the one that can take away the pain. Thing is, I didn’t quite realize he just might be the biggest asshole in this universe.” Clarke walks back to face the woman, “but I don’t want to go anywhere else. This is our home, has been forever. There’s so many memories… my father, and my brother… And, whatever else Finn might be, he’ll always be the father of my son.”
Lexa listens quietly, sympathetically, and supportively. But words have never been her strong suit, she finds herself once again unable to provide adequate consolation. “I just wanted to make sure you’re ok.”

“… Thank you.” Clarke gives her genuine smile. It has been a long time since her brother’s death that she feels truly safe after an encounter with Finn like that. Jacob would’ve kicked Finn’s ass. But Lexa with her wordless threats and the eye daggers? Lexa is a whole new level of ‘hurt her, I will fuck you up’. But it is more than that. It is Lexa’s gentle nature, her protectiveness, and her confidence that has made her feel warm from the inside.

Clarke gravitates to the comforting presence of the woman, like bird seeking shelter in the rain, like insect attracted to the blossom, like sunflower finally finding the light, like inevitable, like unstoppable.

And she searches long in those sincere eyes, greener than the forest, greener than the lake.

And for the first time she lets herself really take in every detail of the chiseled face, the impeccable cheekbones, the sharp jawline, the pink, plump, pouty lips, and she thinks back to what her friends has said, *Lexa is ungodly gorgeous.*

It is Lexa who breaks the eye contact first, a suspicious red cloud tainting her tanned cheeks. Something has changed in the woman’s demeanor, she can tell by the fluttering eyelashes, the glance that rests a second too long at her lips, and the hot breath that ghosts her skin. It makes her palms sweat, little butterflies flapping their wings in her stomach, and her throat dry like she’s been in the desert for a three-day march. “Well then, I’ll see you in the morning?” She pleads through her eyes, because if she read the signs wrong, and Clarke didn’t mean it in a way more than friendly and appreciative, it’d probably end in a disaster for her heart. Hades is a nice distraction, she whistles to get his attention, “let’s go, buddy.” The dog rolls up from where he is laying on the porch, eagerly obliges. As she goes, she can still feel the blazing gaze on her back.

Clarke bites back her words, feeling slightly dejected. Then she chastises herself, for being clingy and needy. A moment of weakness, it is. Lexa didn’t mean anything by interfering, it is what anybody would do. And she sure doesn’t need anyone to defend her honor, she can take care of herself just fine.

But from the surface of the window, she sees her reflection, there is a sparkle in her eyes, and the fast thudding in her chest is getting louder and louder with each passing second of silence. Before the brunette reaches the driveway, she is running barefoot onto the porch, shouting at the top of her lungs, “hey Lexa!”

The German Shepherd whips around, enthusiastic at the sound of his owner’s name. Lexa, however, pauses for a good second before turning.

“When are we gonna get that drink?”

Lesa visibly swallows, her voice coarse still, “I won’t forget.”
Thank you everyone for reading and leaving comments! I really genuinely enjoy reading every single one of them. I am also starting to recognize those few names that always pop up at each chapter, please know that I really appreciate you! I will try to get better at replying and stuff because I want to make friends!
The not-date

Chapter Summary

Clarke finally takes Lexa to town for that promised drink, despite trying to convince everybody it's not a date. Well, who is she kidding?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The not-date

July 8 th 2015

“It’s just a casual beer between coworkers.” Clarke pokes her head into Abby’s room, having heard her mother murmuring ‘about time’.

“Mmmhmmm.” Abby takes off her reading glasses to give her daughter ‘the look’.

Clarke rolls her eyes at the her mother. “It’s not a date.”

“What? Did I say it is?”

With a mocked sigh, she walks off to her room. Instead of getting outfit advices from Abby, she turns to her son for help.

“Mom, are you seeing someone?” The boy has never seen her searching in her wardrobe for a night out like this. There is a certain element of desperation in her rummaging.

She doesn’t know what to say to Aden, because what is this really? Lexa didn’t say anything when she agreed to this night out to town and grab some drinks together thing. Surely she doesn’t think it is a date? “No honey, I’m not seeing anybody.”

“What about Lexa?” He asks, “aren’t you going out with her? She told me that you are getting some drinks tonight so she went home to change.”

“She… told you that?” Lexa went home to change for this? It makes her tummy fuzzy at the thought of Lexa dressing up in something nicer than her usual lumberjack flannel and military training shirts.

“I asked because she can’t stay for dinner.” Aden keeps going through her closet. “So is it a date, mom? Are you seeing Lexa?”

“……” Clarke has lost her ability of speech. She doesn’t dare to think how her son would feel if they… if they got together.

“It’s ok, mom. I like her, she’s really cool.” He pulls out a simple short sleeved dot patterned white blouse and a black skirt to go with it, handing it off to his mother who trusts his judgement fully.
Clarke changes into it, and finds it a wee bit shorter than she thought. But the skirt definitely does wonders to show off her legs. The blouse hugs her waist snugly, leaves a tiny little peep to her cleavage, and adds an emphasize on her collarbones. Her boosted ego makes her decide to let her hair down from the bun she always wears, golden tresses falling to each side of her face, framing the heart shape.

“I think she’s good for you.” Aden comments off-handedly.

But to Clarke, it is more like a small pebble falling into the lake and causing an avalanche. It isn’t that she doesn’t believe in relationships, because her friends, Monty and Nathan, and Harper and Zoe, they are so in love and so happy, sometimes a painful reminder to her actually, that how incredibly alone she is. It is just that the thought of dating, the thought of having someone—someone as good, as kind, as beautiful as Lexa—to hold her at night, to kiss her sadness away, to quench the thirst that sometimes engulfs her senses—she blushes at that and turns her face from her son for his benefit—well, it honestly hasn’t crossed her mind ever since she has Aden. “Aww, honey, we’re not like that. Not yet. Tonight, it’s just a friendly thing, ok? Now promise me you’ll be a good boy for grandma and go to bed on time.” She kisses him gently on the head, not wanting to disappoint him, not wanting to disappoint herself if this ends up being nothing but a silly crush and unrequited pining.

“Oh.” Aden whines, but pinky promises her.

“Now, help me pick out some shoes!”

Lexa comes out of the shower and fumbles in her closet knowing fully well she doesn’t have a lot of options. She can’t even remember the last time she’s owned a dress. It is probably senior prom, but definitely was not her choice either. Just not her cup of tea.

The majority of her attires are Marine uniforms, training t-shirts, suits, and dress pants.

“Haven’t you stolen a pair of my black jeans, which are in fact, my brand new pair of Levi’s.” Anya cranes her neck as if that would help her see better from the small FaceTime screen.

Lexa digs through her closet and sheepishly holds the pair up. “It wasn’t on purpose. They just ended up at the bottom of my pile of laundry.”

“Sure they did.” Anya rolls her eyes at her friend. “Put them to good use. They go well with your motorcycle boots, for gay aesthetics or whatever.”

Lexa decides to go along with a simple grey v-neck t-shirt, and a light jean jacket, the one she’d given to Clarke to cover up after that day at the pond. She makes sure to roll the up the edge of the sleeves of her t-shirt before checking her reflection in the mirror, then quickly picks up a few strands of hair to add some small braids.

“Not bad, huh?” She receives an affirmation from Anya first, then she looks at Hades, who gives her an uninterested glance, not invested in what all the fuss is about.

*****
Clarke picks Lexa up at the cabin. She is pleasantly surprised to see the outfit Lexa has picked out for herself. It is casual, of course, but new to the eyes, and yet everything is so well in character: the brooding gay look fits Lexa.

The usually confident and laid-back woman seems slightly nervous though, as she climbs into the car, and mumbles a small ‘hello’. Lexa is quiet during the ride too, perfectly perched on the seat, her hands resting flat on her knees. But Clarke knows, she feels it, once in a while, stolen glances are casted her way.

It is hard not to stare, Lexa has given up the pretense that she is not intensely attracted to the woman sitting beside her in that skirt. Well, it isn’t just because of the skirt, but seriously, the smooth skin on Clarke’s thighs, and the taunt muscle in her calves, and shapely ankles accentuated by the straps of her stilettos… She quickly redirects her attention away before it would be considered rude, and yet, her eyes have a mind of their own, wandering back to the left side of the car every now and then.

Clarke doesn’t mean to be a tease, she doesn’t! Okay, maybe just a little. She pulls up to a stop in line that has collected as they come close to downtown, she arches her back to see what is going on. Inadvertently, her skirt hikes up her legs for just a fraction of an inch. She knows Lexa saw it, because of the smallest hitch in her breath that breaks their otherwise silence.

Clearing her throat after almost running out of air, Lexa squeezes her eyes shut. Great, she must have been acting like a sex-deprived teenager. The hot mess in her lower belly travels its way further down, and soon enough, begins the pounding in between her legs. She shifts her position with subtlety, annoyed at the way her underwear clings to her sensitive nether region uncomfortably.

After the excruciating ride to the bar, excruciating for Lexa while rather enjoyable for Clarke who secretly likes the attention, they run into Harper and Monroe. It is the first time Lexa has ever met Clarke’s friends. Abby talked about them obviously, but it never occurred to her just how beautiful and sexy her friends actually are. A churning sensation brews in the pit of her stomach as she watches Clarke greet her friends with kisses and hugs.

But quickly, the two strangers turn to her. Harper purses her lips and gives Clarke a look as if she is impressed. Monroe is the first to break the ice and extends her hand out to shake Lexa’s.

So the Marine Officer introduces herself, and invites them to sit together for a while. She finds out, with quite the relief, that the two are dating each other, and decides that she likes them after all. What she likes even more, is when they crack jokes at Clarke’s expense, making her blush oh so prettily under the flaring lights.

“So… why’d you enlist?” Harper can’t stop asking questions. As soon as she opens her mouth, she feels a kick under the table and sees Clarke giving her a warning look. “Ouch! Sorry, is that rude to ask?”

Lexa smiles, “oh, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it. It’s uh… it runs in the family.”

“So your father’s a Marine too?”

“He’s passed away, but he was, and so was his father before him.” Lexa brings her hand up to rub at the silver chain that links her dog tags.
Harper bites her lip, not sure how to proceed. Monroe just reaches across the table and places her hand on the brunette’s forearm to offer her condolences, “I’m really sorry to hear that.”

“It’s okay. It was a long time ago.” Lexa shares a bit more about her long family history serving in the Marine Corps, and Clarke finds it absolutely fascinating.

“Wait hold up! You speak four languages?” Harper exclaims over spilling alcohol.

“Yes, apart from English, I know German, Arabic, and Trigedasleng.”

Clarke asks what her friends aren’t asking, “what is Trigedasleng?”

Lexa explains to them that it is a dialect spoken by her tribe Trikru. “People of the tree, we are. And there had been war, decades of war among the thirteen tribes. My great great great great… I don’t even know how many generations ago… great grandmother, was the uniter of the tribes, she brought peace for our people. But after the European colonization, our ancestors had to adapt to western civilization because it was the only way to survive. Some married ‘outsiders’. I’m a quarter Trikru, but I have blood relatives still living on our lands, and I take pride in knowing my ancestry and speaking its language. We pride ourselves as skilled warriors too, so it really is no surprise that many became soldiers, Marines, airmen. Actually, my buddy Anya, who was my superior back when I was fresh out of bootcamp is also Trikru.”

“Wow…” Harper and Monroe are utterly entranced by her story, they are leaning on their elbows like little kids by the time Lexa has finished. Clarke, on the other hand, is amazed by not only the things that she never knew about Lexa, but also her passion as she tells her story, the way her hands move in the air, and how her expression changes through the good memories and the bad ones. She is perfectly content with just staring at Lexa for hours on end, listening to her soft voice, smiling at the sound of her laugh. Her first drink is still half full, but whenever Lexa looks at her thoughtfully and gently, pausing for a second or two to make sure she is feeling engaged, Clarke feels her heart swoon and her stomach warm like the buzzed feeling alcohol sometimes brings. Monroe has proposed another pitcher of Wisconsin’s finest brew, but Lexa politely declines. She likes the buzz, but has sworn after a night out with Lincoln and Octavia that it is not something she’ll do again. She really wants to stay sober, to savor the moments when her arm brushes against Clarke’s, and the side of their pinkies touch when their hands rest on the bench under the table.

“So, tell us what you do in the Marine Corps.”

“I’m second in charge of a weapon platoon. We have sections of rifle squad, missiles, explosives, and choppers…” She tries to simplify how things work under her command, which is rather hard for non-military folks to grasp.

Monroe regrets that she asked, things just fly right over her head. Harper tries to follow, but confusion also grows on her face. Clarke listens on, although she isn’t necessarily an expert, her brother had explained stuff before, and she is again, happy in her quiet corner just watching Lexa articulate with her purposeful gestures and focused expressions, erudite and professional in her own element.

“They call her the Commander, because she’s in control of things.” Clarke sums it up for her friends at last.

Lexa is attentive to notice that her audience has grown quiet. “Sorry,” she leans in closer to Clarke and whispers while Harper goes to use the restroom, “am I boring you?”

Shivers shoot up her spine and spread across her body at the warm breathe grazing over her cheek.
Looking into the bashful green eyes, she adores how they sparkle under the starry sky. “No, but you, and your girlfriend, are boring the hell out of me.” She says pointedly at Monroe.

Monroe puts a hand on her chest, feigning hurt. Harper comes back soon after, “what did I miss?” And Monroe whispers something in her ear. Then they look cheekily at Clarke and their new friend, “we should probably get going then.” “Yeah, our bad that we totally forgot that blondie here, has already placed a reservation on your night, Commander. “It’s so nice to finally meet you, Lexa, and you’re as wonderful as Abby said. Hope you enjoy the rest of your date!” With winks and grins, the two stumble out of the booth and giggle all the way to the dance floor.

Thoroughly teased, Lexa is blushing profusely.

“Sorry about them.” Clarke’s cheeks are equally flushed.

Lexa shakes her head with a chuckle. “They’re nice.”

She feels strangely relieved to hear Lexa say that, not even having registered how much her opinion about her friends means to her. She studies her for a moment, finding the way those pouty lips pout even more as she takes a sip at her beer utterly enticing. All of a sudden, an urge to be alone with this woman rises in her chest like a naughty secret waiting to burst out. She grabs Lexa’s hand, and pulls themselves to stand up, “I want to show you something. Come on, we have to go now.”

The Marine Officer abandons her drink, and lets herself be led like some dumb animal. The palm of her hand tingles warmly at the soft touch.

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“This is where I come when I want to be alone.” A few miles away from the bar is a little pier where small boats and ships are parked in lines, floating in the swaying water. Clarke jumps off her car, walks onto the dock, and stops at a white boat with the name “Abigail” painted on the side. Its ivory reflection flutters on the surface of the lake. Lexa sighs dreamily, “wow, she is a beauty.”

“My dad grew up around boats. He was a vet, and he loved to fish. My mom couldn’t stand it, but she went every time anyway because she liked the fact that he named his boat after her.”

“He sounds like a great person. I wish I had the chance to meet him.”

“Thank you.” Clarke gives her a genuine smile. Lexa didn’t say she is sorry, she didn’t try to make it better, her words are sincere and respectful, and it makes her think of her father fondly. “I think he would’ve really liked you. Do you want to sit in the boat with me for a bit?”

Lexa gladly agrees. She strides over the bow railing first, and offers Clarke her hands. They share a small laugh when Clarke nearly falls over on top of her, but she easily catches the woman by her waist, and gently lets her down to the deck.

“How chivalrous.” Clarke teases, to which Lexa smirks. The tenderness, once she started to see it, it became difficult to take her mind off of how gently Lexa treats her, not in a patronizing or objectifying way, but comfortable and natural like she can’t bear the thought of treating her any differently. Their link hands never break apart as Clarke shows Lexa the cabin and the cockpit of the boat. “Dad took Jacob fishing all the time. When he taught him how to steer this thing, he couldn’t have been more than six or seven.”
“What about you?” Lexa curiously observes her movements around the place.

“Oh, I absolutely love this boat. I know she doesn’t look like much now, but she was really fine back in the days.”

“We should take her out sometime.” Lexa suggests.

Clarke chuckles, patting the steering wheel affectionately. “oh no no no, we can’t even get her starts now.”

“That’s too bad.” Lexa wonders if it can be fixed, but she says nothing more because she doesn’t want Clarke to get her hopes up.

They end up sitting on the deck and looking at the stars, still hand in hand. Lexa points out a few constellations, and Clarke asks her which one is her favorite.

“I don’t really have one, honestly.” She has said, “because I spend the longest time looking at the moon.”

“Why?” Clarke has asked, scooting closer to share the woman’s body heat. Though it is early July, a night out on a Wisconsin lake can still get quite chilly.

Lexa notices her slight shiver, and without hesitation, she shrugs off her jacket to wrap her companion in it.

Cheesy as it seemed, Clarke finds herself swooning. She wasn’t sure what this is in the beginning, fooling herself and everyone else that it is just a casual drink, as innocent as it can be. But with the hand holding, with the star gazing, the story sharing, the affectionate and considerate actions, the lines are blurring and she isn’t that certain anymore. “Thanks.”

Lexa gives her hand a small squeeze before answering her question, “because, you see different constellations during different time of the year, and it also depends on the latitude of where you are on earth, but the moon is constant, you see it no matter what season it is and where you are. I think… I find it comforting that even though I can be thousands of miles away, I will be looking at the same moon as someone back home, like Anya, or Hades…” or you. “Come on, let’s get back to the pickup.”

Clarke whines about traffic in the city, which Lexa doesn’t really mind, so she jumps behind the wheels. They are quiet once again in the small confinement of the pickup, but secretly, they both miss being in contact with each other. As they stop at a red light, Clarke peers at Lexa, then she takes the chance and touches Lexa’s hand resting on the shifting stick in between them. At that, Lexa flips her hand over and laces their fingers together.

From then on, they feel incredibly satisfied with just driving, and the way home almost feels too short for their liking. Lexa brings their hands into her lap, and when she has to shift gear, she’d run her thumb over Clarke’s, or squeeze softly, before letting her hand go for no longer than a moment or two. It makes the both of them chuckle when she mumbles, “hold on a sec”, then her hand comes up to tuck a strand of hair that is tickling the side of her face behind her ear.

It definitely feels like a date.

Sooner than both of their liking, they pulls up at Lexa’s cabin.
“Are you okay to drive?”

“I’ll be alright, the city just annoys me.”

Lexa releases her seat belt, “hold on.” She slips out of the truck and rounds to the passenger’s side to open the door for Clarke.

They make their way to the front of the car, to say goodnight. Clarke leans against the bumper of her car, her fingers walking across the hood lightly.

Lexa mimics her, so their shoulders brush together. They are both tired, but very reluctant to see the night come to an end.

“You do realize we’re gonna have to do this all again…”

The forest green eyes give her a confused look.

“You never told me that joke.” Clarke pulls her bottom lip in between her teeth, coy with her smirk. She turns slightly toward Lexa, who mirrors her movement till they are face to face. The night breeze strokes at their hair, making a few strands of brown curls fall into Lexa’s face. Clarke decides she really liked Lexa’s shampoo, it smells clean and fresh, with a hint of woodsiness, and she wonders whether it is the shampoo or Lexa herself.

The back of her ear tingles warmly when a soft hand tucks her hair back to its place. “Well, somebody dragged me away before I can even finish my first beer.”

“Don’t be a smart ass.” Clarke squints, her fingers pulls lightly on Lexa’s earlobe.

“I’m sorry,” Lexa cocks her head to the side where Clarke is tugging at her and feigns hurt, “is there anything I can do to make it up to you?” The question has come out differently than she intended, more flirty, more daring. She swallows tightly.

When green eyes flutter lower to rest on her lips, Clarke licks them in reflex.

Lexa has to suck in a sharp breath of air to stifle the whimper in her throat.

Clarke’s hand puts slightly more pressure on the back of her neck. Their faces inch closer and closer, and her voice comes out huskier than ever, “is this okay?”

“Is this a date?” Lexa’s hands come to rest on her hips, neither pulling or pushing.

“Do you want it to be a date?” Warm breathes are shared between the two of them as they look into each other’s eyes.

It is becoming painfully hard to not push into the remaining distance. “I do. Do you?”

“I do.”

“Okay.” Lexa nods.

The next second, someone moves, it really doesn’t matter who, and the short distance separating their lips disappears. Their nose brush gently together as they tentatively, slowly move against each other.

Lexa’s lips are extremely soft, even softer than she’d imagined, and she tastes like peppermint and vanilla lip balm, and she smells like lemongrass and the forests. Clarke knows, by then, that she
would like nothing more than to keep kissing this woman for as long as her imaginable future allows. She opens her mouth to run her tongue over Lexa’s upper lip, drawing her in for a fuller and richer contact.

Then Lexa pulls away with a moaned mumble, “I’m sorry… It’s just… it’s been so long.”

“It’s alright. It’s been long for me too.” Clarke goes back to playing with Lexa’s ear, giving her the space and time she needs to recuperate. She hears the tiniest sigh, and when she looks up, she drowns into the depth of those full-blown pupils that leave only a sliver of dark green on the brim. She is falling right into the center of gravity.

Her throat is dry, and her palms sweaty, but Lexa doesn’t move an inch, fearing that the cold of the night will engulf her without the warm body in her arms. “Can we… try again?” After receiving an enthusiastic nod as confirmation, she leans forward to press their lips together again. This time, Lexa doesn’t want, neither has she the strength, to hold back. She sneaks one hand around Clarke’s waist, draws circles with her thumb on the small of her back, and the other hand caresses the golden threads of her hair, the dimple of her chin, the apple of her cheek, taking tender care and chasing the goosebumps away.

“Mmmm…” Clarke’s tummy tautens, her heart hammering out of her chest, and she couldn’t care less if Lexa heard it. With a louder moan, she weaves her hands through the thick brown locks, finding the intricate small braids that decorate Lexa’s gorgeous hair. The onslaught on her lips grows eager, and somehow she has anticipated that kissing Lexa would feel like this. It is nothing like Finn’s hard lips and slobbering tongue and cold nose. It is as warm as it is dominant, as soft as it is determined, it is as strong as it is gentle. It is so much like Lexa. It is all Lexa.

Their breaths start to become labored, when hands begin wandering up and down, gliding over smooth skin and cupping luscious curves. Lexa tastes alcohol in between their breathes, and suddenly her heart drops in her stomach with heavy weariness. She doesn’t want it to be just the alcohol, that they are simply caught up in the moment, and that she is taking advantage of the woman. Liquid courage or not, she is sober and thus should be one to be held responsible.

“What’s wrong?” Clarke notices right away when the kiss loses its momentum, Lexa’s hands coming to a stop on her back.

“We’ve been drinking…” Lexa murmurs, feeling dejected and discouraged.

The green eyes are the saddest that she’d even seen, and it tugs at her heartstrings to know that Lexa did not want to stop but worries it is something she’d regret. Clarke might find those puppy dog eyes adorable if she isn’t in a hurry to reassure the woman. “We had one drink.” She tries to nuzzle further into the embrace, disliking the cool air that refills the gap between them, and smiling as protective arms tighten around her.

“And you’re sure—” She is silenced by the woman running her thumb over her kiss-swollen bottom lip.

“I swear to god, Lexa, if you don’t put that mouth to better use.” Clarke hisses out her halfhearted threat and leaves it unfinished before crashing their lips back together. Her tongue traces Lexa’s smile on the gorgeous curve of her mouth. She hears her name morph into a single throaty sigh that echoes among the plantation of evergreens and undergrowths. She runs her fingers on Lexa’s neck, then shoulders, then her back, skin hot as fire and muscle taunt as steel.

Ages could have gone by as they invest into this kiss, neither willing to forgo the chance of exploring the other more thoroughly, for they both know that this is merely a passing glimpse of
something much better, a teasing sip of something much sweeter.

“Lex…” The buzzing in her core becomes more and more pronounced, Clarke clings onto Lexa’s strong frame as her hips unabashedly grind into the woman’s tight stomach.

No one has ever spoken her name like that before, like a wholehearted plea, like a loving whisper, like worshiping, like praying, like enchantment. Lexa recognizes the need in it, her own body responding at a similar frequency. She nips and licks at Clarke’s open mouth, engaging her partner in a sultry dance of nudging and sucking and biting of wet flesh. At this exact moment, Lexa wants nothing more than to remain in Clarke’s arms and confess her desperate devotion through the kiss, until the sun comes up and the forest awakens, until her duties and responsibilities return, until the road becomes occupied by hikers and cyclists, until—

Until the sound of tires against gravel interrupts the night critter’s singing and a glaring flashlight shining upon their profiles.

Lexa all but jumps in front of Clarke to protect her from the intrusion. She squints at the light source, and can vaguely make out the outline of a police vehicle pulled up behind their pickup. A man pops the door open and rocks crunch under his boots. “Officer, is there a problem?” She asks, tone laded with irritation.

“Finn?” Clarke angrily goes around the taller woman, stomping over to the person that disturbed her very good night. It is not Finn, though, but she knows almost every cop in this town, “oh Danny! What the fuck are you doing? Put that thing down!” She brings a hand over her eyes.

“You know you were going over fifty through the city?” The police officer reaches into his pocket for a speeding ticket.

“Like hell we were!” Clarke slaps at his chubby hand and snatches away the ticket booklet. She is not afraid of him, not a single bit. Finn used to be his partner, he walked all over Danny. “Finn put you up to this, didn’t he? Didn’t he!?” She knows her floppy haired ex-husband would do anything to sabotage her date with anyone, but at least he could have done it himself instead of making Danny do it for him like a fucking coward.

“Clarke, you need to go home. Let’s just say this never happened.”

“No shit.” Clarke rubs at her temples.

Lexa looks between Clarke, fuming and embarrassed, and the officer, dumb and stubborn, at a loss of what to do. “I’m sorry…” It isn’t her intention to bring complications into Clarke’s life, so an apology seems appropriate at the time.

“No, Lexa, it’s me who should be sorry.” Clarke gives her a sad look, “I should go,” then shoves the booklet back into his chest vehemently. She climbs into the truck and snaps the door close, the front lights click on. Lexa stands to the side, her eyes casted to the ground, and her silhouette lonely and long.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Your comments are very valued and appreciated, they keep me going!
Since I'm on vacation, I will probably have a little more time to write every week, so you can look for an update next week!

Xoxo
Too hot (hot damn)

Chapter Summary

Here's some fluff after I left you hanging in last chapter
The M rated content is drawing near... no spoiler, but within the next two chapters ;)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Too hot (hot damn)

July 9 th 2015

“No, Lexa, it's me who should be sorry.” Clarke gives her a sad look, “I should go,” then shoves the booklet back into his chest vehemently. She climbs into the truck and snaps the door close, the front lights click on. Lexa stands to the side, her eyes casted to the ground, and her silhouette lonely and long.

She drives—well over 50 mph— through the narrow country road. If the screeching sounds of tires grinding pebbles disrupt the quiet of the night, she couldn’t care less. Her night has been so, so wonderful, and the palms of her hands are warm from holding Lexa’s, and her lips are tingling with the passionate kiss they shared. Clarke runs her tongue over her bottom lip, where she can still taste the lingering sweetness of that beautiful woman with wild brown hair and a crooked smirk. “Fuck you, Finn, you asshole. Fuck.” Pulling to a sharp stop in her drive way, she has to remind herself to take in deep breaths, in and out, in and out. Her son is probably already in bed, and her mom will be concerned to see her upset. So she forces the anger and bitter disappointment away, and only stomps a little as she goes back inside her house.

Fortunately, the house is quiet, Abby most likely dozed off while reading some medical journal in bed “for fun” as she calls it, and Aden sound asleep. She checks on her son, peeking her head into his room, and watching the small lump in the center of the bed, the cover moving up and down to the rhythm of his steady breathing. It effectively chases away the night chills on the back of her neck, and warmth once again rises in her chest. She fights the urge to snuggle in bed with him, to smell the top of his head so that she knows it is okay. She doesn’t, because her little boy is in his worry-free dreamland where he should be, and she would do anything in the world to avoid bringing any more sadness and trouble to his young life.

Clarke doesn’t know how long she sat on the edge of her bed, or when she fell asleep. But she shudders awake in the middle of the night with a strange tightness in her chest. She rolls out of bed, confused as of why she is half naked in only her bra and panties, and goes to put on her silk kimono robe. She pads down the stairs barefoot, and hears a soft knocking on the front door. Oh, maybe that is what woke her up, she’s always been a light sleeper comparing to her son and her mother who can ride out an apocalypse in their dreams. But who can it be, at three in the morning? She tightens the belt of her robe before answering the door, her fingers momentarily trace the length of the smooth material, thin as air. She opens a small crack on the door to see who is on the other side, leaving the screen door in place. The translucent texture of the screen reveals the profile of a
woman’s figure, tall and svelte.

“Lexa.”

The screen door flies out of the way in a split second. Clarke finds herself wrapping her arms on Lexa’s shoulders, fingers threading into the luscious brown curls, and pulling the woman in as closely as she can physically manage. A pair of hot, soft, plump lips immediately presses against her own, and the strong body in front of her doesn’t budge at once when she practically melts in the blazing fervor.

She tugs them further into the house, detaching herself from Lexa for just a moment so they won’t trip on the stairs. There are more kisses, wandering hands, secretive smiles and giggles shared between the two, and if the edge of the rails digs into her side, Clarke still feels like she is walking on cloud nine. They climb as quietly and quickly as they can, and reach Clarke’s room without waking up anyone else in the house.

Lexa is backed against the wooden door, fumbling for the door nob. “Clarke…” She mews in between her labored breaths. Clarke takes the opportunity to trace her tongue along the elegant column of Lexa’s neck, catching the faintest taste of salt on the silky skin. “I thought… I thought you’d want to talk about what happened tonight,” Lexa whispers, “that’s why I… why I came over. Ow…” she swallows down a whimper at the punitive nip Clarke gives her.

“How about we don’t talk at all.” Satisfied at the artwork she painted on the woman’s throat, Clarke twists the door nob and pushes themselves inside.

Soon, she is falling into the mattress, her entire world spinning upside down and spiraling out of her control. And for the first time in a long time, she is fine with that. Lexa makes fast work unfastening the belt of her kimono, and soon, feathery kisses are dusted over every inch of newly revealed skin. Clarke has to purse her lips to hold back her moans as she watches the mop of brown hair travel to her nether region. She totally pegged Lexa to be a boob girl, but this is equally good, more cut to the chase, so she brings her own hands up to play at her bra-clad breasts.

However, what Lexa does next is anything but cut to the chase. She takes her time brushing light kisses into the fleshy thighs, her nimble fingers stroking the edge of those lacy panties, and her nose dragging across the smooth plane of Clarke’s belly.

“Don’t tease…” Her voice sounds sickeningly sweet, on the verge of begging even. Sparkling green eyes smiles up at her reassuringly. Lexa darts out her tongue, ready to plunge in and take a long, hard, delicious, lick—

“Mom, mommy!!!” Hurried padding rushes down from the hallway, first far away and faint, but becoming louder and louder soon accompanied by the noise of small fist pounding at her door. “Mommy!”

Clarke shoots up from the bed, but she has to shield her eyes from the light that pierces through the crack between her curtains. For a second she can’t fathom what is happening. She looks down to her body, fully clothed in wrinkled shirt she wore last night, the hand that isn’t shading her eyes is firmly cupping at her breast, and… to the sinking, dreading, disappointment in her stomach, no Lexa.

“Mom, wake up! It’s 9 already! And grandma made banana pancakes!” Aden knocks three more times before running down the hallway and down the stairs.

She squeezes her eyes shut and falls back into the mattress with a heavy sigh. She rolls over to bury
her red, sweaty face into her pillow, and doesn’t miss the uncomfortable feeling of her drenched panties clinging to her center. On the one hand, she is embarrassed to have had a wet dream of the woman she’s only had one date with, and on top of it all, almost getting walked in on by her son; on the other hand, she can’t help but wonder what the dream would take her had it not been interrupted.

She wonders if Lexa is an attentive lover, she wonders if her skin tastes like sea salt truffle, she wonders what Lexa sounds like in bed…

_Ugh, Clarke, what in the hell is wrong with you, get your mind out of the gutter!_ She shakes herself out of the dirty fantasy, and hops into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. Once her ruined panties are dumped into the hamper, her hair pulled into a ponytail, and her face clear of all the flushness, she wanders downstairs to join her mother and son at breakfast.

Abby certainly does not miss the way Clarke avoids looking her in the eyes. “Had a good night?” She asks innocently.

“Mom!” Clarke hisses under her tone, tilting her head slightly towards the little boy happily chewing a piece of pancake too big for his little mouth, “you can’t just suggest these things in front of…”

Abby rolls her eyes almost back into her skull, “I’m not suggesting anything. I know nothing happened, Lexa showed up at 7 in the morning.”

“Lexa’s here?” She can’t possibly be more relieved. Despite her embarrassment, she knows that she needs to talk to the woman.

Aden is finally available after swallowing his giant bite of pancake, “no, Lexa drove to the warehouse to get dog food and some new tools. She came by to tell you but you were sleeping in.”

At that, Clarke hides her face into her coffee mug as suspicious red clouds rise up to her cheeks again. She turns to her mother and changes the topic, “are you going to the hospital today, mom?”

“Not until the PM shift. I swapped with Jackson, he’s taking his girlfriend on a date for their anniversary. Speaking of dates…” Abby makes one last attempt to hint at the previous night.

“Mom, no…” Clarke groans, pulling herself up to the kitchen sink and starting to run the dishes under water. Just as she squeezes a generous amount of detergent into the sponge, she hears the truck pulling into the driveway, and out comes no other than the woman of her dreams—literally, she is still quite shaken from her lustful subconsciousness that featured wild brown mane in between her legs. To be completely honest to herself, it wasn’t the first time Lexa starred in her dream that took a turn for the NC-17 content warning, but up till this point, they have been somewhat tame and brief, and she always made sure to repress any memories of them the next morning. Today, however, she just wants to relive and ruminate about it again and again.

Aden finishes his breakfast too, and walks up to deliver his plate, peering at his mother with a sly smirk, “grandma says it’s my turn to do the dishes, but since the work station is already occupied… I’m gonna go watch some TV!” Before Clarke can react, he is running to the living room and face planting onto the couch.

Shaking her head with an indulgent smile, Clarke calls after him, “finish your math homework first, and you’re doing dishes tonight!” Before Clarke can react, he is running to the living room and face planting onto the couch.

The plain old view of her barn from the kitchen window suddenly becomes interesting today with a welcome addition of
Lexa’s presence. Clarke brushes her hair away from her eyes, and leans against the counter as she starts to slowly and mindlessly scrub at the pots and pans.

Lexa has no idea she is being watched, mainly because her mind is all muffed by sleep deprivation. She woke up at the crack of dawn—sleep did not come easily either. She spent hours staring at the ceiling, reliving every word, every smile, every handholding, and every kiss they shared. The churning, stingy anger in her stomach gradually fainted away. She knows it isn’t her fault, nor Clarke’s, hell, not even the fat cop’s, that the night ended the way it did. It was time’s fault. Whatever happened or didn’t happen is not going to dishearten her, only makes her surer of her feelings toward Clarke Griffin. It might not be meant to happen, right there right then, but it doesn’t mean that there would never be a here and now.

Hope, like the morning sun, rises cautiously but warmly in her chest as she picks up her pace to the farm.

Lexa is early again. The dogs never minded, they are always enthusiastic to see the human who feeds them and walks them. Judging by the amount of dog food and supplies left in the storage, she most likely would have to make a trip to the dealer today. So she gets a hurry start on the daily routines of feeding and cleaning.

Bargaining with the warehouse owner for dog food and several tools isn’t the best way to spend her morning, though she is able to get a decent deal on a couple of wood pieces she needs for her own little shack. But as she drives back to the farm, fatigue starts to catch up with her, and once again she wonders if life in the civilian world has made her soft.

Though it is just 10 in the morning, the blaring sun is enough to cast a burning sensation on her skin. It is weirdly familiar and comforting. She pulls the truck as close to the barn as she can manage, but she still is reluctant to accept the fact that only manual labor will work in the small distance between the storage shelves and the cargo.

Lexa Woods isn’t one to back down from a challenge just because of a slight headache. She ties her hair into a tight ponytail and meets the hard work head-on.

Clarke would have chastised herself for starring at the marine officer’s ass for too long hadn’t she already been too consumed by the sight. It is a nice pair of cargo pants Lexa is wearing. The rolled-up sleeves also leave little to imagination, Lexa’s lean and firm muscles ripple smoothly with her movements, the tattoo that wraps around her bicep bunches and stills too. Throwing the heavy bags down in a pile on the ground, then dragging them into the storage, Lexa starts panting a little. A thin film of sweat coats her neck and rolls down her back. She bends over to rest her hands on her knees, and lifts the corner of her shirt to wipe away the drip of sweat that threatens to roll into her eyes.

A small gasp catches in the back of Clarke’s throat, her greedy eyes glued to the newly exposed skin on the woman’s stomach. It is as if Lexa is doing it all on purpose, hell, she has all the bragging rights. Every bulging of her biceps, every flick of her hair, every heave of her chest, every drop of sweat on her body… Clarke for a moment thinks her fantasy has come true. With each inhale heavier than the last one, she practically moans her appreciation. A strand of hair falls from behind her ear, so she brings up a hand to tuck it back, not even noticing the detergent suds on her wet fingers. It is nothing comparing to the wetness that boiled its way down to her core.
Abby is in the adjacent dining room, working on some of her case studies. She casually glances at her daughter, and sees that she has been lingering at the sink for an unusually long time. It piques her curiosity. She cranes her neck to look outside the window, and then back to Clarke, who is staring attentively in a conspicuous trance. Abby bites down a smirk, and puts on a straight face, “well, that’s as clean as it’d ever be…”

Pink bubbles bursting all over the place, Clarke is snapped out of her daydream. She drops the pot. It slides into the water, making a loud clanking noise and splashing water all over her clothes. “Ughhhhh…!” Clarke groans in annoyance, storming to the laundry room with a bright flush on her cheeks.

After nearly two hours of organizing the storage, Lexa finally finishes all her morning work. She didn’t bring a lunch, figured that she has some time to slip away in between morning and afternoon work to go back to her shack, grab a meal and bring Hades out to the farm for a little playtime. She miscalculated. Right now, she just wants to crash and nap in the trunk. So that is exactly what she does, climbing onto the truck and slumping against the rear windshield, unperturbed by the heat.

Clarke is watchful. She’s been wanting to talk to Lexa all morning, and after all her unabashed leering, Lexa should know how she feels. Maybe it would be better if they talked in the afternoon, she fidgets in the kitchen as she prepares lunch for Aden and Abby. There will be less demanding work and more free time in the afternoon. However, when it is about time that Lexa takes off to go wherever for an hour and half, she doesn’t seem to be going on this day. It doesn’t take her much investigation to see that the woman has dozed off in the trunk. Concern for the woman quickly overtakes her embarrassment and coyness. Clarke grabs a bottle of vitamin water from the fridge and a turkey sandwich that is the main course for lunch, and goes outside. At the first stroke of the stuffy, sticky wind, she blames herself for not checking on Lexa earlier. It is abnormally hot, even for the current season. Awkwardly, she jogs up to the side of the truck. “Lexa?”

To her relief, green eyes snap open in alertness, and soften at the sight of her face. “… hi, hello Clarke.”

“Mind if I…?” She gestures at the tailgate.

Lexa scoots over to one edge to make space for her unexpected companion. “Not at all,” she pats at the small blanket, “I smoothed out all the wrinkles for you.”

“You shouldn’t have.” Clarke chuckles, and pulls herself up into the trunk with ease. “You sure you’re okay? It’s very hot out today.”

“Just a little tired is all, figured I should take a nap on break.”

“I uh… brought you these.” She hands the bottle of water and the sandwich to Lexa.

Lexa takes the items gratefully without much of a fuss. Popping the cap open, she can’t stifle the groan as cold water pours down her throat. Some spills out the corner of her lips as she gulps down the water with zest. Without a second thought, Clarke reaches out to brush the small stream of vitamin water away from her chin. It causes the both of them to pause slightly, Lexa lowering the bottle, and Clarke retrieving her hand.

Her stomach lurches at how fast her heart is beating. Clarke bites her lower lip and pretends to take great interest in the small hole on the hem of her shirt.

If she saw the endearing shy little smile at the corner of Clarke’s mouth, Lexa doesn’t comment on it. She takes a generous bite into the sandwich, and feels content just to sit quietly with the blonde
woman by her side.

“You know, you’re welcome inside.” Clarke suddenly breaks the silence.

“Nah, I’m all sweaty, probably smell gross too.” Lexa wrinkles her nose cutely.

There is a certain earthy scent to the woman beside her on this particular day. It is a mixture of deodorant, dirt, sweat and musk, with a little bit of something uniquely Lexa. Clarke doesn’t mind it at all. But she still stumbles over her words to find an appropriate response, “I mean… um when you bring like lunch or something… you can use the fridge.”

Her lips tilt into a lopsided smirk. Lexa puts down her sandwich and peers at Clarke, “okay, I’ll take you up on that offer.”

They fall into another silence as they both contemplate about whether or not to address the elephant in the room.

Clarke, after an entire morning of thinking and overthinking, finally takes a stab at the topic. “I’m sorry… about last night.”

The statement takes her aback slightly. Lexa feels confused and conflicted. “Are you sorry about the kiss?”

“No!” She is so fast to respond her voice sounds like a little yap. Clarke flushes even more than she thought she can, but continues on, “no… I’m sorry for how I… um, left… last night. I was um… I was embarrassed, and angry, and I didn’t react well. I wasn’t considerate of your feelings, and I’m sorry if I hurt you.”

Lexa is quiet at that confession. She studies the bright blue eyes that are now staring back at her nervously. She thinks about how Clarke has changed over the past few months, from the initial harsh temperament, and protective, and full of attitude, to soft, and uncertain, and hopeful. “I appreciate it,” she finally says quietly, “and it’s okay.” Her eyes cast down to the space in between themselves, her hand moves on its own accord to lapse over the other woman’s.

At that, Clarke breathes out the air she didn’t notice she was holding, and scoots closer till their arms are touching, their skin a little sticky in the sweltering weather but neither minds. “Maybe… we can try again, if you’d like?” She plays with Lexa’s long fingers, running her thumb over the small scar on her pinky, she wonders about the story behind it. “Maybe dinner and a movie…”

“Dinner and a movie sound great.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

They share a smile, a little silly and a little dreamy. Clarke rests her cheek on Lexa’s shoulder, and Lexa drops a light kiss on her forehead. They spend the rest of Lexa’s break discussing nothing in particular, some new movies that came out, and new clients they picked up.

In the afternoon, Clarke insists that Lexa should take the truck and go home, the weather too hot to work in the open field, and the dogs are also lethargic, panting with pink tongues in the shaded areas of their shelters. They check and make sure the animals have enough water and food for the day.

When it’s time for Lexa to take off for the day, both are shy and unsure of what to say. “I’ll see you
tomorrow?”

“See you tomorrow.” Clarke nods, and at last second, follows her instinct to print her lips on the woman’s cheek.

Leta drives away, a bright smile plastered on her face, and long forgotten is her uncharacteristic fatigue. Clarke goes back inside her house with a hint of salt on her tongue and a spring in her step, she tries her best to ignore the sly looks shared between her mother and her son.

**July 12th 2015**

They never set a date for the dinner and a movie, but both are well-aware that it was metaphorical anyways. Seeing each other everyday, with unabashed grins and unspoken desires, is more than enough to get them through the nights. It’s a blooming affair, an early stage of dating, a potential relationship, whatever this is, and as how normal people usually behave in this state, they are shy and curious and excitable and eager like a pair of puppies. Eager to please—which is why Leta is happily spending her only day off working on the engine of Abigail. Hades is right by her side, too, chewing mindlessly on his favorite toy Clarke gifted to him.

After several abnormally hot days of brewing and stewing, the clouds have absorbed so much water that they can’t hold onto anymore. It starts to downpour like a billion buckets of water are tipped over. Leta at first doesn’t notice, too engrossed in the boat mechanic manual. Oh how she wishes Raven was there helping with all these intricate parts and complex gears.

The boat becomes a little rocky and the lake is overflowing. She doesn’t want her socks to get wet—nothing grosses her out more than the weird cold and squishy sensation of wet socks—so she sits and waits to ride it out. Some kind of pop songs are playing on the radio, and she feels pretty content to keep working her way through the book. Some time passes, she doesn’t think it’s been too long, the radio signals start to get interrupted, first it fades in and out, then it completely vanishes into static noise with occasional screeches. She gets up from the floor, and peers outside, the downpour hasn’t relented a bit, and it even starts to hail a little. Soon, tree branches start to give under the continuous onslaught, snapping apart and slamming into the ground. One particularly frail tree is uprooted, and leans into the neighboring utility pole. Leta watches wide-eyed as the pole goes down with the tree, tugging at all the power lines connected to it and electrical sparks zapping through the sky. Hades whimpers morosely at the unfortunate event. Sirens of firetrucks are coming from all directions. Then the lights in the city start to go out, first near the capitol, then state street, engulfing half of the campus, then the blackout spreads its tentacles to the faraway clusters of houses and establishments.

She sits in the rocking boat feeling anxious, wondering if the Griffins are doing okay. Luckily, nature seems to calm after the raging hailstorm, and the sky clears a little. She ceases the opportunity to get out of the pier and make a run for the truck, “c’mon Hades, get in get in!”

It takes twice the normal time to get back to the countryside, mainly yielding for firetrucks and ambulances, and occasionally taking detours to avoid getting stuck in the mud. Leta pulls up at the farm, first to check on the dogs. It looks like the Griffins had transported everyone to the emergency indoor shelters, the kennels are overflowing and will be a pain in the ass to clean up. She then opens the side door for Hades to jump out, and they go up the porch.
Aden is flipping through a board game book at the candlelit table when he hears a knock on the door. He brings a flashlight to see who it is. “Lexa! Hades!” He steps aside to let them in, and reassures the dog who is hesitant about breaking the ‘no dirty paw in the house’ rule.

“Hey buddy, everything okay? The storm is unbelievable.”

“Yeah, you both look like you just came back from a swim.” He watches her wring out the water in her hair, and goes to find some towels, one for her, one for Hades.

Lexa sits at the table, hands over the candles to warm herself up. “What are you reading?”

Aden shows her the book, “you know, you should read this when I’m done. It can really help you up your game.”

“Who says I needed help?” Lexa arches one eyebrow teasingly.

“My undefeated record, duh.”

“Hmmm, is that so?” Lexa sounds amused. As he turns his attention back to patting Hades dry, she listens for other sounds in the house. To her worry, she can’t hear any. “Where are your mom and grandma?”

“Grandma is on call at the hospital, mom is in the barn with the dogs, some dogs are scared of the thunderstorm.”

“Well, it is a pretty scary weather. I was scared. Are you?” She gauges his expression.

He shrugs, but answers honestly, “not the storm, the power outage though. I’m scared the ice cream is going to melt. But mom said it’s nothing to worry about, the power will come back tomorrow.”

Lexa smiles, finding his childish logic endearing. “It certainly will. I’m gonna check on the dogs, okay? You stay put with Hades and watch the ice cream.”

He nods with a rare-found solemness, “I will go check it again in five minutes.”

Clarke is going over some customer records with a flash torch, she got a little bored keeping the dogs calm. They are now quieter as the rolling thunders dimmed down a while ago. She hears the barn being pushed open, and wet footsteps trailing in. “Aden?”

When there isn’t a response, she turns to investigate, and finds Lexa’s soft smile in the dancing candle lights. Her heart quickens upon the image of this woman—her hair is wet and loose around her shoulders, the rain adding a darker shade to the brown waves. “What are you…”

“Just wanted to stop by and make sure you are okay.” Lexa stalks a little closer.

Clarke can’t help the curve creeping up the corner of her lips. “Just wanted to stop by…? How mysterious…”

Lexa gives in, and tells the other half of the truth, “I also wanted to see you… all day.” With each word, she is stepping towards Clarke, until there is merely an inch between them. It takes all her willpower to not reach out and touch the woman.

Clarke captures a strand of hair and twirls it in between her fingers, feeling seductive and sultry all
of a sudden. “You’re all wet.” She whispers, and pops open the buttons on Lexa’s jacket one by one. Thanks to the water resistant material, the soft shirt underneath feels warm and dry enough.

Lexa is completely captivated. Her head is tilted slightly to the side as she watches the lithe, pale hands work on the last button. Then they come up to her collar, to help her peel the clothe off. She clears her throat, a futile attempt at hiding her blush and remaining cool. Her fingers sneak up to rest on Clarke’s waist, the glint in her eyes and the shiver in her breathes all but daring the woman to come closer.

Clarke complies, lets herself get drawn into the enticing warmth. Her hands slide over the strong shoulders, meeting behind Lexa’s neck, and the jacket slacks into a pile on the ground with a wet thump.

Their noses touch first, nudging and tickling, sharing each other’s breath. Her glance dances in between the deep green eyes with glimmers of candlelights in the center of those darkened, enlarged pupils, and the pink lips that are poutier than ever. She surges forward, to bring their lips together with urgency.

Heat, flaming like fire but also wet like the air, slowly rises in the sensual movements of warm flesh. Lexa smiles, she is pleasantly shocked when Clarke bites her upper lip slightly, and steals her tongue discreetly into her mouth. She grants her access readily, and learns to use her own flexible muscle to tease and massage its enthusiastic counterpart. Long forgotten are the curious gazes from their canine companions.

When the slickness strokes at the roof of her mouth, Clarke moans breathily, “Lex…” She pushes Lexa backwards to the side of the table.

The back of her knees collide into the chair, almost knocking it over. Lexa steadies it messily, and sits down on it, looking up to the woman adoringly. Her desire is on the brink of exploding when Clarke straddles her without hesitation. The following strings of kisses are deeper and hotter, more aggressive and dominating. She indulges in the pleasure of running her hands over Clarke’s thighs, cupping at the full behind, and squeezing softly. The blonde squirms, her core brushes against the tight abdomen, and Lexa is certain that the spreading moist warmth isn’t completely from her imagination.

“Oh my god… oh, Lex…” Clarke is practically grinding into the strong body beneath her at this point. Through layers of clothing, the friction is far from enough to tip her over the edge, but the pressure in her lower belly builds. Branding hot lips kiss a trail down the side of her neck, and find their new home just below her collarbone, and she is too far gone to be embarrassed about her uncontrollable arousal.

“Mom!” Comes the boy’s yelling from the house.

They halt for a fraction of a second, then jump apart. Clarke almost crashes into the dog cage behind her, Lexa is in time to catch her. “What is it, Aden?” She wills her breath to calm, but her voice still comes out broken and quivering.

“The ice cream is melting! Can I just eat it?”

It makes the both of them share a small chuckle. Lexa sighs in relief, glad that the candles are dim enough for their discretion. She misses their intimacy immediately, so she proceeds to pull Clarke back into her arms, and nuzzles her nose into the hollow of her throat, making small suckling noises on the soft skin.
“Just put it into a bowl first!” Clarke hopes her breathless reply does not seem too suspicious to the child’s innocent young mind.

“Okay!” From the sound of it, Aden is running back to rummage through the cupboards.

Clarke returns her attention to the woman that is currently nosing at her pulse point. She combs her fingers through the damp brown hair affectionately. “Hey look, the storm is slowing down.”

Which means that they probably should head back to the house before the little boy grows impatient and inadvertently wanders over. Lexa straightens up reluctantly, and follows the blonde to do one final round on the dogs before leaving the barn. “What time do you think the power will come back?”

“They won’t get to fixing it until morning, it’s not like we live in the city.” Clarke says as she blows out the candles, and walks to Lexa who is standing at the door, their hands naturally linking together. “The good news is, ice cream has just been added to the menu. Wanna stay for a while?”

Lexa peers out at the dark sky. Thick layers of loaded, angry clouds are still lingering above their heads. It probably is a good idea to wait out the storm, since the country road is already a muddy mess, and in case the farm needs help overnight. “Ice cream sounds wonderful.” And as those shy blue eyes smile warmly at her, she can’t help but lean in for one last gentle peck on the soft lips that have her absolutely enraptured.

They run back to the house under the light drizzle, Lexa’s jacket draped over their heads, and find Aden slurping up the melted ice cream with a straw. Clarke teasingly chastises him, and retrieves all three of them bowls to share the whole pint of the sweet treat.

Fully satisfied with the unexpected dessert, Aden and Lexa huddle over the candlelit coffee table, and start a new game of chess. Hades watches intently on the side of the table with Clarke, as if he has some input in it too. This time, whether it is because of the late time that plays into Lexa’s advantage, or the little boy recovering from his many brain freezes, the game goes on for a lot longer than either of them expected. Lexa feels proud of herself for actually winning the upper hand by the end of it, she pumps her fist in the air and lays her palm up for Hades to tap his paw on. Aden pouts, but soon forgets his defeat after Clarke drops a kiss on the side of his head, and Lexa teaches him how to high-five the dog.

They end up on the floor petting Hades’ warm coat of fur, and Lexa tells Aden the story of her coming about to rescue him from the rubbles during an oversea mission. “You know, Hades was really brave when I found him on the street. He was just a wee bit little puppy, malnourished, and dehydrated. He had a long barbed wire sticking out of his side, and it was all infected. I didn’t know if he was going to survive or not.” She rubs the dog’s belly, and points out a long scar that is hidden by his luscious pelt.

Aden looks incredibly sad, he traces the jagged skin with great care. “Then what happened?”

“I begged the medics to take a look at him. They couldn’t spare the anesthesia, well, they also didn’t know how to dose for a puppy, but they were able to take out the wire. I was actually really scared that he’s gonna lash out, and bite us. So I said to him, ‘I know you’re in pain, but we’re trying to help’, and he didn’t flinch once. I knew, in that moment, that he was going to be alright. So he did, he got stronger and bigger everyday, and he’s been a good boy.”

“Why did you name him after the god of the underworld?” Clarke strokes the back of the dog’s ear, and earns a purring growl of approval. The gigantic beast rolls over to show her his belly in gratitude.
Lexa chuckles, “the time he spent in our camp during my mission, he would always steal into the medical tent, and guard those that are badly injured. My team thought he’s like that cat, Oscar, the one in the assistive living home, who can sense death, and bestow mercy or guide the spirits or something. Marines can be pretty superstitious sometimes. So we named him Hades.”

Hades flips around at the sound of his name.

“But turned out, a lot of the injured survived. Then we started to think that he was trying to be there for them, because he knew what they were going through.”

“Like he was their guardian angel.” Aden warps his arms around Hades’ strong neck, and giggles when the pink tongue tickles his face.

Lexa instinctively looks up to Clarke at his words. Her heart clenches at the memories of finding the woman’s picture on the battle field, of the many times that she could have died, and of the many times she carefully packed the photo in her pocket. Clarke is looking at her as well, gaze tender and affectionate. In that tenderness and affection, she drowns like a shell in the ocean and floats like a feather in the wind.

The little boy peeks at the suddenly silent women. He doesn’t miss the faint blush that taints his mother’s cheeks, and the enamored spark in Lexa’s eyes. Suddenly, he has an idea. “Lexa,” he calls, “it’s gonna be my birthday soon.”

“Oh?” Lexa tears her eyes away from Clarke.

“Yeah, mom and I always go on a picnic week before the party. You should come with us, it’s really fun.”

Clarke is slightly taken aback by his invitation, and from the surprised green eyes, so is Lexa. In a fleeting moment, Lexa searches for discomfort or objection in her expression. Feeling the urge to soothe and assure, she gives her a small grin and nods.

Honored and flustered, Lexa takes in a shallow breath to calm the flutter in her chest, lays her hand on top of his shoulder and gives him a light squeeze. “I would love to.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I'll try to post another chapter within a week, but I leave for Japan next Wednesday, so maybe I'll post early.

Your comments mean everything, even if you're just popping by, say hello!
July 15th 2015

The insistent rain had provided plenty of water to the small creek that the Griffins frequent every year for camping, while the new sun and blue sky helped dry off the river banks and grass. Clarke finds herself sprawled on top the blanket, head resting against Hades’ back, the two of them watching over the pond where Lexa is teaching the little boy how to canoe.

“Come on, Aden, let’s see what you got!” Lexa hands both of the paddles to Aden, and relaxes back into the spacious boat.

Aden scrambles for them, stretching out his arms as far as he can to keep a hold on the oars. His sprained wrist from the football game is healed, however slightly weaker from inaction, the left oar slips out of his hand when he attempts a rowing motion. It drops into the green water with a thump, splashing up a small tide. “Ahhh!!!” Both Lexa and he shriek when it showers on them.

“Watch out, champ!” Lexa rolls over in time to catch the oar before it completely slides out of the oarlock.

Aden wipes at his face and sputters out the water that he didn’t swallow. “Lexa, the boat is too wide.”

She laughs at his cheeky grin, and ruffles her hand on his full head of golden hair, “don’t sweat it, buddy, you’ll grow into it.” Handing over just one oar this time, she takes charge on the other side. “Okay Aden, now I want you to do this,” she makes a plowing motion with the wooden paddle, treading the broad blade smoothly backward through the water, then lifting it up and rotating it forward to repeat it, “can you do this with me?”

Aden mimics the first part perfectly, his blade also cuts through the waves without making a splash again, but as it lets up, it doesn’t come completely above the surface of the water, and catches the opposing current that yanks the oar out of his hands again. “Sorry!” He sighs in frustration.

“No no, it’s no big deal. Pick up the paddle, Aden, let’s try again. Remember this time, pull the blade out of the water before you make another stroke. So it doesn’t cancel out your first stroke.”

“Like this…?” He pushes down the end of the paddle, and the blade easily comes out of the water, then he rows it forward.

“Yeah, exactly like that!” Lexa cheers, “now do it again, a little faster so the motions string together nicely.”

They spin around in circles for a while longer, before the boy picks up the technique and pace. Their boat successfully pulls into the center of the small body of water.
“Mom! Look at me!” Aden yells to Clarke, who is waving back to them from the shore.

Clarke has been watching, earnestly and intently. She admires the way sleek muscles ripple underneath taunt skin on Lexa’s arms, and she studies the elegant and relaxed posture as Lexa throws back her head, laughing at something Aden said. Her heart is hammering out of her chest, in the most pleasant way possible, at the smallest things that Lexa does. And it isn’t just because Lexa is beautiful, or that she is an excellent kisser, or that she makes her feel oh so pretty, and adored, and wanted. It is all of that, undeniably so, but it is also how Lexa gets along with Aden, how her undivided attention makes him feel heard and cared about, her strong presence puts him at ease, her patient encouragements, her childish playfulness… They are bonding, she can see that plain as day, and she understands fully why Aden can never stop talking about Lexa.

Whatever she and Lexa might be, she is more so grateful that Aden will always have important memories like this of his childhood, and Lexa being a part of it.

Lexa in a good mood, by the way she hums some old tunes that Aden’s never heard of.

“If you want a lover, I’ll do anything you ask me to; and if you want another kind of love, I’ll wear a mask for you…” She whistles in between lyrics, “here I stand, I’m your man…”

He giggles at the silly face she makes at a particularly cheesy line, “who sings that?”

“Only one of the greatest songwriters that graced this world, Leonard Cohen.”

“I’ve never heard of this person.” Aden shrugs.

Lexa raises her eyebrows in disbelieve, “oh buddy, you’re about to discover a real gem! My father used to own all of his albums, but I suppose iTunes has to suffice at the moment.”

“My mom has an iPod, let’s go back to her!” Aden announces. So soon the two are rowing back to shore. The boy looks worn out from the sport, he gestures Lexa to turn around so he can climb up her back to avoid getting his pants soaked. Lexa shakes her head in amusement, she picks him up with ease, and throws him over her shoulder like a bag of flour. He giggles and shrills, limbs flailing in the air. When she lets him down, Aden rolls on the blanket and finds a warm spot against Hades, quickly punching in something on Clarke’s music device. “Mom, you should try it, Lexa rows super fast!”

“No thank you, I’d rather not get my feet wet.” Clarke wiggles her toes, warm and toasty from the sunshine.

“You don’t have to.” Lexa stands in the shallow water, pants rolled up above her knees. She extends her hand out in Clarke’s direction and winks, “come on, I don’t hear him complaining about the piggyback ride, I even promise I won’t throw you over my shoulder.”

“Come on, mom, go.” Aden pushes her on the back. He knows all too well what is going on between his mother and Lexa, and he wants to let them know that he approves.

“Alright, alright. You two are totally teaming up on me.” Clarke stands up, smoothes out her skirt, and walks cautiously toward the woman. “You better not drop me.”

Lexa laughs softly, “I won’t. Now warp your arm behind my neck.”

Clarke does as told, she drapes her arm around the muscular shoulders. Lexa’s body feels warm,
solid and strong under her palm. She yelps lightly when her world turns horizontal in an instant, getting literally swept off her feet. There are so many scents, of grass and leaves, of flowers and sweet sap, of nature and sunlight, blended together in a colorful blast that invades all her senses, and amongst it all, of Lexa. She presses her cheek against Lexa’s collarbone, and noses at her pulse point, feeling its suddenly uneven flutter, and watching the skin flushes from the hollow of her throat all the way up to the base of her ears. “You smell good…”

“… thanks…” Lexa clears her throat shyly, but still savors the few strides that she takes in the knee high water until they reach the boat. Once Clarke is comfortably settled in, she hops swiftly onto the other side, not making a single splash. Lexa catches the appreciative glimpses casted her way, and grins silently to roll up her sleeves and tie her shirt above her naval.

Clarke naturally gravitates to the inviting body next to her, kicking her feet on the side of the boat, leaning into Lexa, and resting a hand on the woman’s exposed leg, her thumb tracing mindless patterns across the scars on a knee. She feels pleased when she hears the hammering heartbeat that mirrors her own.

When they arrive at the center of the lake, Clarke dares to chance a glance at Aden, who has her headphones in, and is busy collecting fuzzy dandelions and four leaved clovers under Hades’ watchful eyes. A little giddy and a little bold, she steals a kiss on the corner of Lexa’s mouth. What she doesn’t anticipate from the usually cool and distant marine officer, is Lexa putting away the oars to let the boat float freely, and bringing a strong arm around her waist, pulling her impossibly flush, and pressing those wonderfully plump and full lips to hers with a tender fervor. In the kiss, there is the taste of grass and leaves, of flowers and sweet tree sap, of sunshine and nature, and of something uniquely Lexa.

When it ends after a few more seconds that they both indulge in, Lexa draws away slightly, but keeps her hand flat against Clarke’s back. She is amazed, by the lingering softness on her mouth and the tingling heat on her cheeks, the warm buzz in her belly and the low hum in her chest. Then she remembers where they are and who they are with, so she turns around to look into Aden’s direction. “Was that… was that okay?”

Clarke nods, “yeah… I’m pretty sure he knows.”

“He’s very observant.” Lexa says, and hesitates before she continues, “he made me an invitation card to his birthday party, too.”

“That’s really cute.”

“Would it be okay if I showed up, though?”

This makes her pull away from her position that is half on top of Lexa. Clarke blinks at her own reflections in the worried green eyes. She slowly understands where Lexa is coming from.

Finn.

And the other parents that will be at the party. But mostly Finn.

She has been so absorbed in this day-to-day life with Lexa and Aden, hidden away in the secluded farm and this little bubble of their own. She’s forgotten everything that Finn is and stands for.

There will be complications in her life, guaranteed, by divulging this relationship she has with a woman in a small place like Arkadia, but Aden loves Lexa, and she really, really likes Lexa, and Lexa deserves so much more.
She muses, her eyes not leaving Lexa’s. “Yes. Aden wants you there, it’s his party.” Then she rests her hand on Lexa’s forearm, running her thumb over the ridge of a bulging vein—she is still constantly in awe of the strength and power within this woman’s admirable physique—and scoots back into Lexa’s comforting presence, “I want you there, too. You make me feel safe.” She watches the other woman intently, and sees the many emotions that flicker underneath the silent surface of the green waters, until Lexa averts her gaze, and she worries if she’s said something wrong. Her worries are chased away momentarily when Lexa gives her a smile that is best described as cautious and reverent.

“Okay. I will be there.” Lexa says dutifully.

As they stare at each other, in a strange, but not uncomfortable silence, Aden runs out of dandelions to blow into the wind. He rolls up from the ground, and runs to the log bridge that crosses the narrowest part of the pond. Hades is quick to follow. “Mom, Lexa.”

“Yes honey?”

“I need to go home and finish my invitation cards. Grandma is sending them out tomorrow.”

Lexa lets go of Clarke momentarily, “just a minute, we’re coming back.”

“It’s okay Lexa, Hades can walk me home.” Aden pats the dog on his head, Hades lets out a pleasant snore.

“Aden.” Lexa calls his name, and gives him a look, much to Clarke’s confusion.

The boy casts his eyes to his feet, “oh… okay.” Then he runs back on the log bridge, shouting, “race you back to the truck!”

“Hey, not fair, you’re cheating!” Lexa laughs, and turns the boat around.

Clarke can’t help her curiosity, “what was that about? Is he alright?”

“Aden wanted to have a conversation with me, but it’s kind of a serious topic so he’s been stalling. I’m afraid I can’t really tell you what, because I’ve sworn secrecy, but I promise he’s okay.”

Clarke raises her eyebrow, a little concerned but just a little amused all the same, “you two are keeping secrets from me now?”

“It’s his decision, not mine.” Lexa shrugs after pulling the boat to the shallow, sandy area. She jumps off, and offers her hand to the woman still perched on the bench of the canoe, eyeing her suspiciously. Sighing, she strides back, and scoops Clarke up into her arms, “come one, trust me?”

“I do.” Clarke murmurs, and wraps her arm around the strong shoulders, without prompting this time.

Lexa spends the rest of the day holed up in Aden’s bedroom. Sharing the set of headphones playing the soulful tunes while they talk, and draw, and play chess, and rehearse poker tricks that he recently perfected and intends to showcase at his party. Aden is slightly behind in making his handmade invitation cards, so she takes up on the responsibility of writing the address and time on each one. He is amazed at the cursive letters that spill out effortlessly under her fingertips. “Wow, Lexa, your handwriting looks really pretty.”
“Thanks, it’s good to know all those college Friday nights I spent perfecting my style alone in my room paid off.” Lexa teases, but is reminded by the lack of a reaction that the boy probably didn’t get the joke. “My father used to tell me that writing is reflective of the person. It shows if someone has dedication, discipline, and perseverance.” Then she proceeds to explain what those words mean.

“I want to be all of that.” Aden scrunches up his nose, “but I can’t help it that my handwriting is ugly.”

Lexa smiles reassuringly, “you’re still young, and you’ll have plenty of time to practice. It took me twenty years to be good.”

“It takes twenty years?” He is wailing by now, his mind cannot even comprehend that amount of time.

“I’m sure it will take you much less, if you’re willing to put in the work.” Lexa passes the pen in his hand, “now is a great time.”

They have arrived at the small pile of cards that Aden had set aside.

“You want to talk about it, Aden?”

The boy nods, his shoulders drooping a little.

Lexa stops whatever she was writing to give him all her attention.

Clarke loiters around the doorway to Aden’s bedroom, and peeks in at the two that are whispering amongst themselves. She vaguely makes out the words such as “friendship”, “invitation”, “trouble” and “take care of them”, but without the context, she doesn’t know what is really being discussed. As their conversation seems to draw to its end, she informs them, “dinner’s ready, everyone.” and feels less anxious to see Aden’s big bright smile and energetic shout that he is indeed very hungry.

“You good?” Lexa puts her hand on the boy’s shoulder to still him before he runs off. Her voice is gentle, but carries a great deal of authority.

Aden looks her in the eye with conviction, and puts out his fist for her to bump. “I promise.” Then he is off bounding down the staircases like he had springs on his feet, rushing to dinner table where Abby is already seated.

Clarke watches her son go with an indulgent smile, shaking her head at his loudness and shenanigans. She feels Lexa’s body brush against hers as she exits the door. Their hands naturally, maybe too naturally, come together in a tangle. These small habits, stole kisses and moments of physical closeness, developed surprisingly fast in the several days they have started seeing more of each other. For she doesn’t have a lot of off times in between working and helping Abby and taking care of Aden, Clarke has yet to fulfill the date promise. A lot of opportunities for them to be together, Aden tagged along too. Lexa seems perfectly content, though, understandingly and simply cherishes the short seconds of intimate exchange. She leaves after dinner, recalling that Anya is scheduled to call about arranging their traveling plans to Wisconsin in time for Bellamy and Echo’s wedding.

Aden works on finishing up all his cards by putting on a toy stamp on each. Abby supervises
closely, ever vigilant since the incident when he ate an entire stick of glue and had tummy ache for three days. He laughs when she teases him about it, “grandma, no! I was four years old. I’m a big boy now,” and proceeds to pester her until she promises that she will never tell the story to Lexa.

Abby flips through the deck of invitation cards on the table, she muses over several particular names. “Aden honey,” she tries her best to not frown, but her concern is evident on the wrinkles in between her raised eyebrows, “didn’t you tell me that they were not very nice to you? Are you sure you want to invite them to your party?”

“No, I wasn’t.” He admits.

“Would you still want me to sent them out?”

Aden shrugs, “yeah, I should give them another chance. Lexa said that kids bully other kids because they feel unsecure about themselves.”

“Insecure.” Abby corrects softly.

“In-secure.” He continues, “because I’m really smart and funny, and I can play the violin, and do magic tricks. They’re just jealous, it’s not like they’re evil or something.”

“Lexa told you that?”

“Yeah, when she was helping me with the cards. Look it, isn’t her handwriting pretty?” He gets excited to show his grandmother the amazing craft work they’ve accomplished together.

Abby follows where his little finger is pointing at, and nods in agreement that Lexa’s penmanship is indeed very aesthetically pleasing. But she is curious as of what the conversation was about, so she subtly asks, “what else did Lexa say?”

“She said that if I invite them, it means that I can forgive them for being mean, and take the first step to work on being friends again. She also said it’s okay to not forgive them, too, because forgiveness takes a lot of time and a lot of courage. I shouldn’t feel like I have to,” he says, “but I should never be cruel to other people, not even the bullies, it’s not right to hurt other people’s feelings.”

“Lexa is right.” Abby comments, incredibly proud of him.

“I think I’m ready to forgive them.” He puffs out his chest and smiles triumphantly, “don’t worry, grandma, I’ll only be friends with them if they’re nice to me. If they try to bully me again, Lexa will chase them out like Hades chases out raccoons from our yard.”

She is chuckling now, remembering with vivid details of the incident when a family of four greedy little beasts invaded the barn and broke into the dog foods. Lexa somehow took a liking to the creatures, fed them a meal of stale popcorns, and swept them out carefully with a soft broom. But Hades bristled almost instantly when he saw them, growling and barking and spitting at the spotted animals. So the raccoons started to scurry in all directions, so the dogs forgot about whatever they were doing to chase the raccoons, until the entire kennel rose into chaos and a whirlwind of mud and fur and water and dog food and some pigeon feather out of nowhere took over the farm. By the end of it, Lexa had to resort to raccoon repellants, which she was quite sad about. “Okay, I believe you. I’m sure they’ll have to be nice after you tell that story.”

“I bet!” He stands up and gives her a kiss on the cheek, “thanks grandma! Also… please don’t tell mom…? I can stand up for myself, but she always worries too much.”
“I won’t, promise.” *But I hope she can learn a thing or two about standing up for herself.* Abby muses, watching him go back up to his bedroom. She pushes herself up from the dinner table, and wanders to the porch to catch some night breeze. Turning on the porch light, she startles at the shadowy figure sitting in the dark corner, “oh my gosh, Clarke! You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“Sorry, mom.” The young Griffin apologizes, her voice sounding coarse and muffled.

There is a moment of silence, interrupted by small sniffles. Abby sits down on her chair and observes the profile of her daughter under the starry night sky. “So you heard us?”

Clarke only nods. Her heart is trembling with tenderness all over. How clueless has she been, and helpless, when her poor baby is trying to be so brave for her, so considerate and so protective of her. And Lexa, that intelligent, humble, thoughtful woman who is too wise for her age, who doesn’t even know how much she does, how good she is. *Oh god,* she thinks to herself, *what have I gotten myself into?*

“What is it, honey?”

Her mother’s voice is as warm as her hand that’s placed on the top of her shoulder. “You’re right.”

“About?”

“Lexa.”

“Oh.” The curve of Abby’s mouth looks more of a smirk than a smile. It makes Clarke roll her eyes.

“You’re right. Only thing is it’s not gonna work. Nobody is *this* good. They never are.” Clarke tries to talk herself out of this slippery slope that she is sliding down, a slippery slope that will unavoidably end in a sticky pit of pink bubbles and sweetness and a little four-lettered word. “Eventually… eventually it will end, things will get awkward, Lexa will have to quit the job, Aden will be heartbroken, and it’ll be all my fault—”

“He’ll grow up hating you, he’ll move far away and never call, I’ll be dead and you’ll be all alone, *forever!*” Abby cuts her off, taunting her in a dramatic and sarcastic high pitched voice.

Clarke glares at her mother for the theatrics and Abby glares right back. She finally couldn’t contain the amusement from spreading across her face.

Maybe…

Maybe it’s not so bad to have someone like Lexa in her life after all.

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*July 20th 2015*

The farm is absolutely *packed* with people celebrating Aden’s 7th birthday, family friends, neighbors, classmates, Clarke’s squad, Abby’s colleagues, and a Finn in his solitude have turned up for the little boy that they all adore and care about. It’s an excuse for kids to eat as much junk food as they want for a day, and the adults to gossip sitting on folding chairs with a glass of wine in hand.
Right now, the birthday boy has invited some children to his table. In the group of kids, there is a boy who was one of the culprits that teased Aden at school. The rest of the bullies didn’t show up, most likely because the invitation cards were intercepted by parents with some nasty opinions about Clarke.

Aden was just the slightest disappointed at the other two kids’ absence. To which, Lexa patted him on the back, “it’s their loss, Aden, you’ve done everything you could. Now why don’t you go ahead and do the poker trick for those that did show up?”

“Yeah, I will do that!” He was receptive, and ran back to gather the children to his makeshift magic show stage.

“Tell me when to stop!” He flips through the cards with deft fingers, while the other children stare in awe.

A little girl participates with enthusiasm, “stop!” and the children gasp when he stops at the exact card that the girl had picked out earlier.

After the brief interaction with Aden, Lexa has blended into the crowds. She doesn’t really know many people, besides Clarke’s friends Zoe and Harper. The couple is now talking to two men who are standing hand in hand, so she simply leans against the porch column and observes the partygoers. It is kind of hilarious, that adults are divided into clear social circles, and everyone sticks to their own, as if they will spontaneously combust with one step out of their comfort zone. Clarke and Abby seem to be the only ones that circulate among the groups, but she’s lost sight of the hostesses momentarily.

“Hey.”

A soft voice behind her catches her off-guard. Lexa whips her head back, and sees Clarke’s bashful smile. “Hey, how are you?”

“The kids are little monsters, they completely trashed my yard.” She ducks behind Lexa’s back when she sees some of the children’s parents walk close to the house, “ugh, a bunch of hypocrites, everyone of them. I can’t wait till this is over.” To demonstrate her impatience, she runs a hand down the length of Lexa’s back and rests just slightly above the swell of her gorgeous rear, “till it’s just us.”

Lexa catches the bold hand before it can travel further. She turns them around, so Clarke is backed against the column, two can play the game, “your guests will be so scandalized if they knew what we do when it’s just us,” she whispers into the blonde’s ear, her lips hovering just half an inch away from the fleshy lobe. Before Clarke could respond in kind, she has taken a step back so there is an innocent amount of space between themselves. She peeks at the kids from behind the pillar, “they finished the lollipops, looks like it’s time to cut the cake.”

Clarke sighs in relief, “good, then I can wrap this up. Hold down the fort for me.” She pushes away from the column, not without tracing her fingers along the woman’s strong arm, and teasingly pulls on Lexa’s hand before letting go. “See you at the kid’s table.”

Lexa chuckles, and braces herself for the incessant shouting and shrieking as she walks toward the children with newly unoccupied mouths.

Finn has been watching them closely, and his eyes squint in disgust, nostrils flaring and jaw squaring. The empty beer can crinkles under the force of his fist when he sees how closely Clarke has allowed Lexa to get, it then soon meets the ground with a clank when the two women share a
smile before parting. He makes a beeline for the kitchen as Clarke retrieves into the house.

The windpipes make a series of unpleasant notes when the door slams close. Clarke jumps at the sound.

Finn has come in, with him, an air of rage mixed with sweat and alcohol. “What the hell is she doing here?”

“Aden invited her.” Clarke says, forcing her voice to not quiver in front of him, “it’s his party.”

He struck his fist on the counter, and presses from behind her. “You think I don’t know what’s going on here? Huh? You take me a fool!?"

“Finn—” She tries to nudge him away with her shoulder, but he is unperturbed by her exertion. The bad smell on his breath is now hot in her face, and she feels the back of her neck tingle in fear.

He cuts her off, “I don’t think I like you seeing her, Clarke, and I don’t think I like you being a fucking dyke.”

“Well, you don’t have a say in it.” Clarke flinches when he suddenly cocks his head, shaggy hair falling in his dark, manic eyes. She instinctively feels for the knife she’s prepared for cutting the cake.

“I certainly have a say in who my son sees, eh? And if I were to say that his mom’s unhealthy relationship with some crazy dyke drifter has created an unstable environment for my boy,” he picks up the knife, and tosses it across the kitchen counter, “I don’t think there’s a judge that disagrees with me, certainly not in this town.”

“Get. Out.” Her whole body trembles, and tears start to stream down her cheeks. The thought of losing her son to Finn is absolutely unbearable. She wants to strike him across the face, no, she wants to pick up the knife and jab it through his stupid face. Yet, her body in that moment, decides to lock up completely.

Smug at the impact of his words, Finn sniffs roughly at the smell of shampoo in her hair, and finally swaggers away in slowly paced steps, vanishing from the party.

Lexa thinks she saw Finn coming out from the house a few moments ago. His presence elicited a sinking feeling in her stomach. After a while, Clarke brings out the cake, and avoids her eyes when everyone sings Happy Birthday to Aden.

People finally start to file out of the Griffin estate, children satisfied with a day of sweets and treats, and adults full with new scandalous information on their friends and neighbors. Lexa finds her alone in the garden, trying to fix a few plants of crane flowers that suffered the torment of curious kids.

“What’s going on?” She asks, albeit already guessed exactly what kind of venomous words Finn had fed his ex-wife.

Clarke swallows with difficulty. She tells her the truth, because there is no point in lying. She is scared, horrified, flabbergasted, she is trembling from head to toe. “He wants you out of my life.” Her hands come up to cover her face, “I can’t risk losing Aden.”

“So that’s your decision.” A decision you made without me, for us. She thinks, her fists clenched
tight at her side, but her voice devoid of any fringe of anger or mournfulness, of any emotions. The effect is immediate. Clarke’s pale cheeks lose their last trace of their usual healthy glow.

Lexa sighs, and pushes herself up from the edge of the garden wall. She dusts her pants, getting ready to leave Clarke, both literally and figuratively, “I didn’t come here to make things harder.” As she goes, a hand, cold and clammy, grabs onto her wrist with an obvious sense of urgency and desperation. She turns back briefly.

Watery blue eyes are wide with unshed tears, until one rolls down silently, leaving no streak or smear on the make-up free face. “You don’t know what I’m dealing with,” she says, “please Lexa”. But of what she is pleading, she can’t quite comprehend herself. She is the one who let go, yet she can’t help but holds on. The outside world through her wide, watery, blue eyes, becomes a blur of color that melts to shades of grey. The weight locks in her chest and throat. Clarke’s chapped lips tremble.

Lexa thinks Clarke is breathtakingly beautiful, even like this. Nails digging into her palms, she presses down the burning need to wrap her arms around the woman’s body. Difficult as it is, she can’t do this to herself, and she doesn’t want to do this to Clarke. “I do know that you deserve better than this.” So with that, she flees the Griffin’s property.

As if sensing the clingy distress in the smoldering summer air, all creatures big or small have deserted the trees and bushes lining the country road. The partygoers steadily dissipate into the sparsely constructed neighborhood just as fast as they devoured the food and drinks. The two boys at the party, Monty and Nathan, Lexa thinks they are called, collectively give her a empathetic smile at last, and it is just her. Her, her own breathing, and the leaves crunching under her boots.

It goes on for a long while before she notices how her jaw is hurting, by the sheer force of how hard she is clenching her teeth, and her hands are turning sore, knuckles white in tight fists. But Lexa refuses to wallow in anger and self-pity.

She traveled here looking for Clarke to say thank you, to come up with some kind of grand speech about how fate had brought her back from many possible deaths and had brought her to Clarke. However, along the way, that kind of gratitude and awe at a mysterious higher power have evolved into something else, something deeper, something that cuts and hurts like bullets that had pierced through her skin and flesh. Only this time, a surgery and some bandages can’t fix the hole in her heart.

Sound of tires against gravel snaps her out of the dull ache she has indulged to take over her thoughts. An all too familiar silver Toyota catches up with her, and behind the wheels, sits a smug Finn. “Hey, you,” he whistles, “want a ride?”

“What do you want?”

“What do I want?” Finn taps his chin, “what do I want? Hmm, Sarge, I want to give you a job, alright? You gotta be tired cleaning up dog shit by now, aren’t you?” He doesn’t let her answer the question, but chuckles vilely and continues, “I know many people in this town, I can make a couple of calls, and get you something worthy of a veteran, what do you say?”

Lexa just stares at him with a perfectly measured blank expression. She is tired of him, bored, even. When he grins at her maliciously, she doesn’t reciprocate with anything but walks around his car to take a narrower path.
“Hey!” Finn is insistent, bordering compulsive, “you better listen to me, Woods, you don’t know who you’re dealing with!”

“Oh I know exactly what I’m dealing with.” Lexa deadpans, “I’ve known people like you all my life, thinking a badge and a family name make you something when you’re nothing.”

“You better watch your mouth.” He waves his fists in the air and spits. A rash-like redness ascends from the bounding veins on his neck to his temples.

“I’m done talking to you.”

June 25th 2015

It has been days. Days of silence, days of detachment, days of awkward interactions and cold shoulders. Lexa doesn’t speak unless she’s spoken to, and when she does, the content is robotically work-related.

Lexa is avoiding her. Clarke thinks she deserves it. Loneliness, self-pity, and guilt, is what she deserves, what she always has. Yet longing, desire, and unrequited feelings, is what she cannot control. It aches, behind the hollow of her chest, in the deepest corner of her heart, like heated knife that carves through flesh and bone, when the emotionless green eyes rest upon her face, devoid of the subtle smile and adoration that Lexa has reserved for only her. And it burns, on her flustered, embarrassed face, when Aden stares curiously between the two of them, questioning the different energy but not quite able to pinpoint what has gone wrong.

Abby picks up on the trail as soon as she gets back from work and finds her daughter sulking in the living room, ironing clothes. The steam almost burns through the fabric, and her red, fumbling fingers create more wrinkles than the ones she smoothed out. Clarke’s neck is stiff, with all the stubborn in her body, she focuses her eyes solely on the chore under her nose, when just outside the window, Lexa says goodbye to Aden after her day of work. Abby catches Lexa steal a short-lived glance before forcing herself to leave, jaw clenched and brows knitted, the profile of her face so harsh it cuts.

“So are you planning to let him bully you all your life?” Abby breaks the rhythmic noise of iron raking the clothes. She supposes that her tone could have been softer, but she is equally unhappy at this conclusion Clarke has reached with Lexa.

“Excuse me?” Clarke sounds annoyed.

Abby is just as head-strong, if not more so, as her daughter. She puts down her case study, and sets her face stern, “you heard me.” When Clarke remains wordless, shoulders heaving slightly with the amount of force she is using to ignore her mother, Abby continues, “you now, sacrificing everything in life for a child is not selfless. It’s, well, it’s ridiculous.”

“I am. Doing. The. Best. That I can!” Clarke snaps, accentuating every word. The iron pounds on the board in a loud metallic clank. Blue eyes are red with angry tears.

Abby’s hazel colored eyes are clam, but unyielding, “really?”

Aden sits on the swing outside the porch and watches as Lexa walks into the sunset. She always leaves in a haste now, making various excuses to not stay for dinner or at least a cup of tea. “Where
are you going?” He had asked.

“The pier on the west side of the lake.” She answered, “I want to finish a project I’ve started there.”

She didn’t disclose what kind of project, but in the weak smile that doesn’t quite reach her hopelessly sad eyes, he thinks it has something to do with his mother. He would have been right. Lexa spends her nights on Abigail, slowly putting together a new engine for the withered boat. She’s contemplated leaving the farm as soon as she finishes fixing the engine, for the pain it inflicts that runs deeper than sore muscles and a bad knee. But she can’t find it in herself to completely abandon the relationship she’s built with the young boy, the serenity and peacefulness of country life, and even if she just searches in her heart for a second, the light of hope that shimmers like the moon, luminous and luring, crystal and constant, weaves through dark clouds and cold nights, beautifully so.

Beautiful is the crescent that hangs like a lopsided smile on the black canvass, Clarke is transfixed by the view, her pinky finger inches outward on the bench, craving for the strong hand that usually brushes and traps it. Aden’s padding appears behind her. He joins her despite it’s half an hour past his bedtime. He rubs his eyes groggily. “Mom, can I ask you something?”

She doesn’t speak, only scoots closer and holds him.

“Are you mad at Lexa?” He asks.

Letting out a long sigh, she shakes her head, “no, baby, I’m not mad at Lexa.”

“Is she mad at you?”

Yeah, probably, she thinks. Her hand comes up to caress his rich blonde hair. “It’s something between adults, honey, you wouldn’t understand.”

“Is it because of me?” He presses, his voice now filled with anxiety and regret. He knows his mother has a complicated relationship with his father, but he never wanted that to be the reason that his mother couldn’t be happy.

Clarke widens her eyes at the inquiry. “No! Of course it’s not because of you, Aden. It’s just very difficult, for Lexa and I to be… very close friends—”

“You mean a couple, right?”

She almost laughs, “okay, you’re right, for us to be together. At times, you have to choose, whether you want to be with someone, or you want your life to go on as it is. I love how my life is, right now, with you.”

“Can’t you choose us both, though? There’s got to be another way.” He says with a seriousness that surpasses his young age. “Mom, please, promise you’ll fix it?” He pulls at her arm, big doe eyes watching her expectantly, “if it’s something you did wrong, just apologize, Lexa will forgive you, I’m sure she will.”

Clarke isn’t so certain of that. But at her son’s pleading, she doesn’t have the heart to dismiss his request entirely. For Aden, she justifies to herself, she would have to at least try. “I promise.”

Chapter End Notes
Japan was amazing, I had such a good time.
I know I'm an evil person, first I post late, now I leave the story on such a note. But not to worry, my friends, I promised the M-rated content in the next chapter and I'm sticking to my schedule.

Leave me a comment or kudos, I really appreciate them! I will see you very soon :(
Chapter Summary

The prophesied M-rated chapter. Fluff and feels.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 9  Held you for a little while (my oh my oh my)

July 27th 2015

Aden presses his little face on the window of his mother’s truck, leaving a cheek-shaped print on the spotless glass. It is Finn’s weekend. He watches the backing scenery in a contemplative mind, as contemplative as a 7 year old can be, that is.

Clarke gingerly steals some glances at him, and sees that he has her headphones in, which has become a common occurrence since Lexa stops hanging around that much. She tries to strike up a conversation, so she taps him on the shoulder, “Aden, what are you listening to?”

He shrugs, “just some old songs, Lexa…” he stops, and gauges her reaction for a second, then finishes his sentence in a whisper, “showed me on the internet.”

“Play it out for me? I want to know what’s got the two of you so hooked.” She tries to sound amused, as normal as she can at the sound of Lexa’s name.

“Really!?” His eyes brighten, beautiful baby blues sparkling with hope.

It’s an expression she recognizes. Something she used to see in the mirror, staring back at her.

He claps his hands a little, promptly plugging the device into the truck’s radio system. He skips the one that is playing in the middle, and the album jumps to what seems to be the sixth song of the track.

A flick of bass guitar that first dips then rises at the first sound of drum, followed by the soft splash of bluesy piano, starts Leonard Cohen’s whispery baritone, frayed by growly, grainy edges and bluesman gravitas:

“Wasn’t hard to love you, didn’t have to try; wasn’t hard to love you, didn’t have to try. Held you for a little while, my oh my oh my; held you for a little while, my oh my oh my…”

The playful, fruity push of trumpets, and the sweet harmonic female backing vocals give the song a sultry undertone.

Clarke clenches her fists tighter on the steering wheel. Her palms quiver as they gradually remember how Lexa’s body feels.
The lyrics tell a simple, heart-wrenching love story. Weary, but optimistic, suffering, but gratified, his hymn-like husk has a remarkable way of making sadness sound triumphant, and triumph sad.

Thrilling chill climbs swiftly up her hands, her wrists, elbows, and hits straight and square at the tender spot behind her breastbone. She craves the warmth of another’s body wrapped around hers, not just any other’s.

She hears tearing of her heart reverberate in the back of her skull. The throbbing intensifies as the melody fades away, and morphs into another masterpiece. Only then she starts to recognize the streets as she pulls close to Finn’s house, and only then she finds her vision blurred by a thin coat of fog that taints her eyelashes wet.

Aden has gone quiet, as if he realizes he is witnessing a very vulnerable moment that belongs to his mother. He presses his face on the window, and watches the backing scenery.

Finn is washing his father’s BMW in the front yard of a luxuriously ornamented town house, where he lives with his parents. It pleases him very much to know that the car will soon be his when the old man gets his hands on a brand new Lincoln MKS. He admires the polished bumpers, shiny enough to present a distorted reflection of his face. The sound of an old truck steals his attention away, he watches as Clarke pulls into the driveway behind him. Dirty tires kick up the mud that is stuck in their grooves as the truck comes to a sharp halt. A speck of dirt smudges his proud handiwork. His brows immediately knit together into a tight knot. “Hey!”

Aden is in the mid of jumping down. He lands a little wobbly on his feet. “Hi dad.” He greets his father timidly.

“Aden, come over here.” Finn gestures the boy to his side, and points at the imperfection on the soon-to-be-his car. “Clean this up, I’m washing the other side.”

“Okay.” Aden obeys his order without protesting, knowing it will not have any effect.

Finn grins in satisfaction. He looks over to the truck, where his ex-wife is sitting behind wheels. In the light, he can’t really see Clarke’s face, but the shadow figure seems to be extremely still, with no intention of getting out. So he walks over, snapping the towel on his shoulder, “hey hey hey, we’re gonna order pizza later, wanna stay for dinner?”

It is then Clarke takes a deep breath. Her hands release the steering wheel, and feel for the buckle of her safety belt. And the moment her feet touch the ground, and hot, dusty summer air grazes the side of her face, her heart’s loud thudding drowns away, a cold sense of composure washes over her.

Finn stops fast in his track. The blue gaze that rests upon him has lost its usual muted apprehension, instead it freezes over.

“Aden, go back inside and finish the math problems first. I’ll see you Sunday, baby.” She relieves the boy of the chore, and watches him disappear into the house before acknowledging the man. “You know what, Finn, it’s not gonna work anymore.” Clarke slams shut the door, and shoves Aden’s bag of clothes into his chest. There is a fierceness burning high in the base of her throat. She’s almost certain that she is breathing fire. “I figured it out, you don’t want full custody any
more than I want you to have it. You can try to take Aden, Finn, but I will fight you—"

“Okay, okay, calm down, Clarke.” Finn is sweating beads now. He lives in a fairly populated town, and many of the neighbors are peering through windows or fences to watch the scene unfurl. He reaches out to her arms.

“I will fight you, and your family’s lawyer.” She slaps away his hands. “I am a damn good mother!”

He looks around the streets. “Okay, just…”

She takes a glance at the onlookers, “I am a good mother, you know that. Everybody knows that. You wanna go back to court, you just tell me when. Otherwise, stay the hell out of my life!” She points her finger at his face, and feels incredibly liberated to see he gulp down his own spit.

She leaves without so much of a bored glance at him. As she backs the truck away, Clarke spares a look of her reflection in the rear-view mirror. Bright, hopeful blue eyes stare back at her.

Lexa wraps up her first half of the day. She stands under the shower head in the tool shed, scrubbing her hands. The water is icy to the bones, effectively ridding her skin of dirt. Her fingers are red and cold, her forearms numb, but she has long lost sense of time and space, scrutinizing her hands in a trance as if they are not attached to her joints anymore. She is stalling, Lexa faintly registers, she is stalling because she doesn’t want to leave yet, she is stalling because she just wants to sneak one glimpse at a certain blonde as she returns home.

Clarke frantically dashes through the kennel. She almost believes that Lexa had already taken off, until she hears running water coming from behind the barn.

Thick, long brown hair in small braids fall over one shoulder, creating a curtain, Lexa doesn’t see the woman step into the small cube and lean against the door frame.

Blue eyes travel, from the clear muscle definition on a slender arm, following a singular vein that diverges into branches at the inner crease of the elbow, to a long hand, then calloused fingers. Clarke pretty much feels them on her body, as warm as they are demanding, as soft as they are strong, as tender as they are rough. She doesn’t want to startle the woman, so she clears her throat to make her presence known, “ahem…”

Still, it snaps Lexa out of her daze. She withdraws her hands in reflex, and backs away from the cold splash for a few steps. Water is dripping down her fingertips as she stands, looking like she just barely came back to earth.

The confusion and perplexity on her face is endearing. Clarke tucks her lower lip in between her teeth to bite down a grin. “Sorry.” She smooths out a strand of hair behind her ear to look less disheveled.

“Clarke.” Lexa schools her expression to be painfully neutral. “What is it?” She sweeps her hair behind her shoulder, and pretends to be busy cleaning imaginary stains from a water bowl, trying to quell the embarrassment from being caught off guard.

The indifference has become constant, familiar, but it doesn’t mean it can’t sting, its hidden edge still sharp as ever. “You’ve been avoiding me.” Clarke can’t help if her voice is teary.

“Well, what do you expect…?”
A simple question, but it leaves her speechless. This is so much harder than she thought, Clarke sighs, “Aden has been asking if you’d like to join us for dinner again, sometime.”

“That’s very sweet of him.” Lexa throws back a glance, but immediately regrets doing so. Cerulean waters are full to the brim, and everything inside her twists up with a compulsive urge to defend, to hold, to protect, to love. But that compulsion has gotten her hurt enough, she needs to defend and protect herself for a change. “You and I both know it’s probably not a good idea.”

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“…” Lexa is slightly irritated by the cryptic conversation, “what do you mean?”

“Finn…” Clarke sees her scowl at the mention of his name, “I told him to fuck off. He has no right to take away my son.” A long silence descends, as if Lexa doesn’t hear her. The scrubbing continues for a minute too long, her heart sinks with every second.

The water is cold, and she feels every bit of it. “Well, good for you.” Lexa dismisses the sudden giddiness that bubbles dangerously in the space between her chest and her tummy. It shouldn’t be this easy, to disarm her, to make her bare the softest part, to surrender her heart.

“Are you mad at me?”

“No.” What kind of question. Lexa frowns, her patience wearing thin.

Clarke speculates, “I think you are. It’s obvious you’re mad, don’t lie about it.”

“Again, what do you expect?” The bowl slips out of her fumbling hands, making a loud clank on the rim of the sink. She whips around, anger rising. She hopes Clarke would cut the crap, get to the point and leave her alone, before she outbursts and makes things awkward.

Clarke flinches, but quickly recovers because she understands where that anger came from. Everything she’s done, has been unfair to the marine officer, and anyone, even as kind and gentle as Lexa, has their bottom line. She is about to apologize, when Lexa beats her to it.

Hands raised in the air, Lexa shakes her head, “I’m sorry. I’m not… it’s not my place to judge. You’re a mother, of course you make hard decisions. It’s okay, I’m over it.” She mulls and revises the last part, turning her back to the blonde again so she doesn’t have to look her in the eye. “I’m trying, to get over it. So please, Clarke, leave me alone, coz it takes time.”

“You are trying to get over me?”

“Yes,” and it’s so fucking hard I don’t know if it’s possible, “I’ll get there. You should too, forget about this, whatever it was.”

“But I don’t want to.” Comes a breathy reply.

Rapid padding rushes toward her. Lexa turns around, only to have a soft body slam into hers. Slender arms circle her into a warm embrace, and steady fingers thread into her hair. A pair of keen lips seals her voice. Without the strength to protest in a single fiber of her being, she accepts the kiss, greedily, passionately, wholeheartedly and mercilessly sucking on the fervid flesh, deepening their frantic connection. Her hands, still freezing cold, lock around Clarke’s waist.

“I don’t want you to get over me.” Clarke whispers in between nips and licks.

Lena moans loudly, and stumbles back into the water. Cold shower cascades down, instantly
drenching the two. Clarke shrieks, and pushes themselves out, but she tumbles over and drags the 
brunette down on top of her.

“Are you okay?” Lexa braces herself on her elbow.

Nodding, Clarke strokes the woman’s face, “yeah I’m okay.” Her muddy hand paints several dirty 
streaks on the beautiful cheek. She bursts out in laughter, “oops.”

Lexa catches the hand that continues to smear mud on her face. She is laughing too.

All of the tension, guilt, and anger dissolve into fits of giggles. They laugh together, laugh at each 
other, laugh at themselves. It doesn’t die down for quite a bit, until both of them have aches in their 
stomach and burning in their lungs. Then they are heaving to recover, then they just look at each 
other, with smiles in their eyes and fire in their chests.

“I’m sorry for grabbing you like that, I wasn’t thinking.” Clarke speaks first.

It is Lexa who dips her head and reconnects their lips this time. Albeit losing the touch of 
desperation, the kiss still builds in momentum. It gains a flaming desire, a soaking heat, and a 
powerful need. She shifts on top of the blonde, soon finds herself comfortable with pelvis nestled in 
between Clarke’s thighs. A soft hand sneaks up from under her t-shirt, finger pads gliding over her 
abs and ribs. She tears her mouth away, to latch onto the supple skin of Clarke’s neck, nosing at the 
fluttering pulse point.

Clarke mewls in pleasure. Under her palm, she feels bones shift and muscles ripple, and indulges in 
the touch of smooth skin. Her hips roll up of their own accord, to meet the solid body above.

Lexa grinds down into the moist heat that seeps through layers of clothes. The legs on either side 
of her squeeze tighter in response. She can almost hear her arousal that starts to pull taunt at the 
base of her spine.

“Lex…” Clarke lets out a guttural groan, at the brief brush of her sensitive core against convulsing 
muscles. When a hand finally slips in from the top of her shorts, she thinks she might lose it right 
there.

Lexa takes her time exploring. Her fingers skirt the edge of Clarke’s underwear, then caress the 
exposed skin of those creamy thighs. Finally, painstakingly, her index finger arrives in the middle 
to trace down the slit in the middle, the heel of her palm presses down to the apex. The texture and 
temperature of the liquid spreading on her fingertip is unmistakable. “Oh my god…” she whispers, 
“you’re so wet…” By the shivering, just a little longer, Lexa thinks to herself, she will 
send her right over the fringe of ecstasy—

“Ow ow…” Clarke suddenly cries out. A particularly violent shudder had her knock her shin right 
onto the edge of a shovel hanging from the wall. The sharp pain jerks her out of the pleasurable 
act.

Lexa stills, then rolls off without delay. She helps the blonde up to her feet, and drops a soothing 
kiss on the golden hair.

A quick scan around the shed, Clarke realizes it is not really an ideal place for people to be fooling 
around. “You’ve got some dangerous tools here, Ms Woods.”

“I live on the edge.” Lexa shrugs. She takes the sprinkler off and rinses down the mud on herself—
she’s already soaked anyways.
Clarke wipes her hands clean on Lexa’s clothes, giggling with mischief. When Lexa turns to her with an evil smirk, she warns, “Lexa, no.”

“Lexa yes…” She stalks over and captures the blonde in one arm, the other holds up the shower head above themselves.

Clarke is ready to scream when the water hits her back, but to her surprise, it is lukewarm instead of chilling. She just jabs weakly at Lexa’s midriff as punishment. As a gentle hand squeezes water out the end of her ponytail, she is nibbling at the woman’s fleshy earlobe. “Let’s get out of here.”

Lexa doesn’t say anything, just quickly turns off the water. A pretty blush stretches across her cheeks.

They go out hand in hand, trading kisses and touches all the way to their truck. Lexa tries to be a law-abiding driver and focuses on the road, face scrunched up in concentration. So adorable, Clarke thinks, that she can’t help but teases her a little, short nails scratching along the toned arm. It draws a low grunt from the perfectly shaped lips. How wonderful, how torturous.

Lexa stops in front of her cabin. Her hand finds Clarke’s, locking their fingers. “I’m sorry I lied.” She says in a whisper, “there’s no getting over you,” and brings their linked hands to her lips, dusts feathery kisses on each knuckle.

It is the simplest gestures Lexa does that always make her heart swoon. Clarke leans over to the driver’s side and awards the woman a long, heartfelt kiss. They share it slowly, unhurriedly. With all the tenderness in the world.

The moment is interrupted, when a cold, wet nose nudges at her lower back. Clarke yelps, whipping around only to find Hades’ smily face poking in from the window and panting up at her. “Oh my goodness, Hades! Where’d you come from?”

“Saw him hop on the back when we left the farm.” Lexa pops her side of the door, and rounds to the car to open the door for Clarke. “Hades, please stay out?” She gestures at the makeshift porch where some of his toys are strewn haphazardly across the surface.

He runs happily to the squeaky ball that fits perfectly in his mouth, expectantly looking at the women, tail thumping loudly. Clearly misinterpreted Lexa’s request as an invitation to play.

“Oh buddy… umm…” Scratching the back of her head, Lexa blushes and glances between his pleading puppy eyes, and Clarke’s intent and earnest blue gaze, “sorry Hades, I was gonna say give us some privacy. We’ll play later… tomorrow. I promise.” With that, she tugs at the blonde’s hand toward her house.

Hades whines through his snout and crooks his head to the side, silently protesting this unfair treatment from his human.

Clarke places her palm on her chest, “aww, let me borrow her for one night. Thank you.” Then she is guided into the threshold, for the first time, stepping into where Lexa lives and sleeps. This makes her giddy for many reasons.

They don’t kiss and fumble in passion. They take their time.

One foot in front of the other, Clarke moves a few paces leisurely into the small rooms. There’s a small, personal touch of Lexa’s charisma in everything that occupies the space. The narrow
countertop is stainless, boxes of cereal and jars of jam are arranged by brands. The cabinets are missing a few doors, revealing bowls and plates stacked neatly. A fridge is squeezed in the corner, a floor lamp by the old armchair, no tv, but a laptop is placed in the center of the wooden table. There is a nightstand, same wood as the table, that has a lamp and a pile of books on it.

Neat doesn’t suffice in describing the room. *Precise*, Clarke decides on the word.

Then her eyes land on the bed.

It’s somewhat off-size, the frame is too big for a twin but not big enough for a double. The mattress sits awkwardly across the structure and an extension supported by two stumps, like an oversized baby in a small stroller.

“I made it… after, after the spring bed broke…” Lexa fidgets at the mosquito net, smoothing out invisible wrinkles on the material that is hung on four poles over the bed. She didn’t get a chance to clean up for a guest visit, but at least she has the habit of making her bed every morning. But even though with all her possessions flawlessly placed in their designated spots, she feels nervousness pulse through her veins.

Clarke forgets about the furniture and comforter and pillows, she focuses her attention solely on the brunette. That usually confident, courageous, composed woman who can lead a platoon of marines to war zone, is now a shy lover. Strangely, she understands that shyness.

How long has it been for Lexa?

How long has it been for herself?

A swell of protectiveness rises in her heart. It grows bigger, and stretches further, to envelope that raw vulnerability in timid green eyes.

“How long has it been forLexa? How long has it been for herself?”

Lexa goes willingly. The distance diminishes between their bodies as her desire returns, burning higher and hotter. She touches her hands on the blonde’s cheeks, thumb tracing careful lines across the glistening bottom lip. “Clarke…” the name comes out as something akin to a prayer, bigger than the word itself, bigger than any emotion or expression in the scarcity of the English vocabulary. She joins their lips together, and is immediately rewarded by a soft tongue stealing into her mouth. The validity of their connection is instantly solidified.

They back into the split of the mosquito net, knees and elbows bumping into the mattress, toeing off shoes on the way. Their clothes are still uncomfortably wet.

“Take my shirt off.” Clarke rasps, and moans into Lexa’s mouth when strong hands push up her top. They only part from their kiss to get rid of her clothes, which meet the ground in a wet thump.

Lexa cautiously moves to her jean shorts, tapping at the front button in a silent question. As soon as Clarke nods her permission, nimble fingers pop open the catch and tug down the zipper. She moves aside to help the blonde struggle out of her shorts, then kneels back in between her thighs, raveling in the sight of the woman in her undergarments. She is absolutely fascinated, at the flash of crimson that climbs up from the pale skin over breastbone to the base of fleshy earlobes. Under the ardent gaze, Clarke squirms, keenly aware that her body isn’t what it used to look like. She peeks down at her bra-clad breasts. They are still full and soft, but have lost their pertness of the early twenties glory. There are permanent blemishes and stretch marks on her stomach, muscles slackened due to childbirth. (Aden was a pretty big baby who stubbornly stayed inside her body for
an entire week over his due date). Her hands draw up in a halfhearted attempt to cover herself.

Green eyes shine with fondness. Lexa doesn’t mention her slight disappointment to lose sight of naked skin. She wordlessly sheds her own shirt and trousers to fix the imbalance of nudity.

It takes her mind off her coyness. Blue eyes are wide as they scan up the magnificent figure newly revealed. Her fingers itch for a touch.

Lexa happily accepts the soft hand that brushes across her abdomen.

Clarke is struck by the sensation of muscles bunching up under her palm. But what is even more powerful, is when her fingertip catches an uneven patch of skin that wraps around the bottom few ribs just below her bra. It’s unmistakably a burn mark. Clarke knows at that moment, that she will continue to find scars in places she’s never seen before. She will, because Lexa is letting her. Lexa is opening up to her. A rush of emotion makes her slur her words, “sweetheart… you’re so… you’re so beautiful.” Forgotten is the worry about showing her body. Clarke runs her hands on Lexa’s forearms, and intertwines their fingers.

Affectionate green eyes smile down at her. “So are you, Clarke.” Lexa bends down to kiss her again, every stroke of hot tongue and wet flesh and warm breaths. Each praising moan is swallowed with zeal as if she is just discovering the flavor of sweetness. But Lexa knows the virtue of enjoying things in moderation. She strays away from Clarke’s lips, kissing a trail from her jaw to the side of her neck. Then sternum. Then she loiters around at the top of her bra.

“Go ahead…” Clarke lets up her tight grip on the brunette’s hands. She bucks up to let the slender hand find the clasp of her bra.

Lexa follows her command reverently.

Clarke finds it adorable, how the brunette doesn’t let herself fully take in the naked view before drawing the straps down her each arm and placing the article of clothing away. But her chuckle dies in the back of her throat, when dark, hungry pupils land on her again.

Lexa palms the shapely breasts in her hands, and thumbs at the pink peaks.

A stream of lust trickles down to her lower belly warmly, and seeps through her underpants. Clarke heaves, feeling her nipples hardening. Her hand shoots up to get a hold of the thick brown locks. She invites Lexa for a taste.

And to say Lexa is ravenous would be an understatement. She puckers up her lips and suckles on without protest. She licks and nips and pinches and squeezes. The flat of her tongue flicks over the sensitive tip, the edge of her teeth outlines the rosy circles. Her hands are not idle either. They travel the length of a pliable body, and massage at the supple skin in various places.

“Uh… mmm… Lex, please…” Clarke tucks her bottom lip in between her teeth at the pleasurable pressure that arrives on the inside of her thighs.

Lexa releases the breast with a delightful pop. “Please what?” A finger dips into the hem of Clarke’s panties. Hips immediately buck up to coax her to go deeper. So she obliges, hand sliding in the front of lacy material. Past a soft triangular patch of hair, she finds the silky liquid heat that instantaneously drenches her fingertips.

Clarke hisses through clenched jaw. She lifts herself off from the mattress and pushes down the last piece of garment that separates them. “Lexa, please get this off.”
“Easy, here, let me.” The brunette hushes her. A mischievous sense to tease takes form in her head. She slips down the sensuous body in an excruciatingly leisure pace, kissing and licking every inch of skin on the way. Her nose digs into soft places and generous curves, as she tries to commit the scent to her memory. Her tongue dips in a cute belly button, then makes a detour to one hipbone like a snail. The point of her chin toys with the short golden bush. Her hands snake around to fondle the full ass cheeks.

Clarke is trashing around. She is on the verge of explosion, she can barely contain the need to gyrate her hips and grind her cunt on Lexa’s face. “Lexa… please, Lex… I need you.” She whines, her nails raking through luscious brown hair. Small braids come undone.

This is all she’s ever wanted. To worship. They have all the time in the world. Lexa loops her arms around Clarke’s legs, and holds her gently. Her breath is taken away by the sight that greets her. The pink, glistening slit is slightly parted open, and an engorged, excited clit is peeping out from under the hood. Unable to hold herself back, she places a lingering kiss on the bundle of nerves.

“Oh shit…!” Clarke cries out. Tingles travel up to her spine and reach all her limbs. She has to grasp on the headboard to pin herself down on the bed.

Lexa plants a chain of strategic nips on Clarke’s left thigh, and then right. “Ready?” She murmurs soothingly.

“Yessss…”

Firm tongue zones in on the swollen clt, and plump lips wrap it into a hot mouth. Green eyes roll back in bliss as the tangy, musky, salty, silky nectar hits her tastebuds.

“Fuck! Lexa… Lexa…” Moans fall into rhythm with every swipe and every flick. Clarke doesn’t even care at this point how she must be dripping. She feels wet, wet, wet. Wet in between her legs, wet on her cheeks, wet in her bones. It isn’t just the carnal pleasure that gives her this wet feeling. It’s knowing that her lover is equally enjoying the act. She knows, by the vibration set low in Lexa’s throat, grunting sweet nothing into her body, and by the slurping sounds that will make the most sexually experienced person blush. So when she notices a finger that probes around her entrance, she lets herself enjoy it fully, too. “Please, inside me.”

Dutifully, the brunette gathers enough slick to coat her digits. Then she slides in her middle finger. The reaction is positive and sensual. Clarke’s calves clench around her, and her thighs seem to open up wider. “It’s okay, Clarke… I’ve got you.” She promises.

A second finger is added, and gracefully pushes against her front wall. Clarke yelps in delight. “Oh god! Yes Lexa… Right here…”

“Yes?” The motion is repeated.

“Yeah! Yeah! Harder. Fas-faster…” Lifting her hips in the air, Clarke claws at the brown mop of curls until the skillful tongue is pressed against her clit once again. All of a sudden, her senses become hypersensitive. She hears the squeaking in the bedposts. It joins the squishy, watery thrusts in and out of herself in a symphony of love making. She sees stars bursting behind her eyelids. She smells sweat, and deodorant, and Lexa’s shampoo, and the dirty scent of sex mixing in the hot summer air. “Oh shit, I’m coming…” she first whispers, as if still shy, but her voice grows in volume, “I’m coming, Lexa! Fuck, I’m gonna…”

She increases her speed with her hand, and the force of her tongue. The body under her is coiled tight. Any moment, she thinks, it would snap apart from orgasm like a rubber band. She steadies
her hold. It is when the string of pretty profanities merges in a long cry, she feels Clarke still.

Then it is a wild, fierce, primitive, uncontrollable fit of twitches and shivers and spasms. And it was everywhere. Her fingers are nearly pushed out by the tight warmness that squeezes down so powerfully. Lexa has to massage Clarke’s thigh and lower belly to help her ride out the peak without straining her muscles. And the flood of pure ecstasy seems to never end. Not that she’s complaining. Lexa savors the very last drop.

It still stops though, at some point after her hyperventilation stops. “Oh my goodness… Lex, that was…”

Lexa smiles to herself, pleased and proud, until she looks up. She startles. Immediately, she climbs up the blonde’s naked body. “Hey, what’s wrong?” Her thumb wipes at the shiny stream that escapes down the side of flushed cheeks, leading to her ears. “Did I hurt you? Did I… did I do something?”

Only then does she realize that she had been tearing up. “No, oh no no no, Lexa.” Clarke’s voice is scratchy, but her eyes are glossy. “You are amazing… it was amazing. I guess, I guess I was just overwhelmed. In a good way.” Her limbs are heavy, and feeble, like lead injected in jelly. She still reaches out to pull the woman in for a kiss.

“Good,” the brunette relaxes, and eases herself back into the embrace.

A moan catches in her chest, she tastes herself on Lexa’s tongue. It’s such a thrilling experience. New, sexy, and so, so intimate. Chest to chest, hips against hips, legs in a tangle. She drags her hands down the woman’s back, counting each rib and dip of her spine, finding two little dimples just above the swell of her butt, then cupping the firm cheeks.

Lexa grinds down on instinct. The throbbing has become unbearably prominent, as her attention is no longer fully occupied by pleasing the blonde. She is now keenly aware of how drenched she is. The bottom of her boxers clings to her core. She doesn’t have to look to know there must be a dark stain on the grey material. And she is beyond shy.

The powerful body above her is moving in such a delicious fashion. Clarke feels her nipples stiffen again with the friction. Her clit too. She unabashedly rolls her pelvis, to rub against Lexa’s thigh. Oh it’s such a wonderful thigh too, muscular, taunt, flexing at all the right moments. The fact that they are kissing sloppily, and dry humping like a couple of horny teenagers, brings out another kind of lust. More desperate it builds. More arousing it becomes.

“Uh…” A tiny gasp.

So Clarke learns that Lexa is quiet when she comes. All small squirms and breathy sighs. Face burying into the crook of her neck. Chestnut curls tickling her nose. She finds it endearing, also pretty goddamn hot. Her own second orgasm follows, and snatches the tail of her first high. It crashes over her like the strong body that slackens on top of hers. She holds Lexa tight.

They pant in sync. Not moving or kissing, only trying to catch their breaths. Their bodies are coated with a thin film of sweat, basked in a glorious stickiness and exhaustion.

Grrrrrrrrrrrrrr

There is a little ruffling from outside that catches their drifting attention. Two big ears and a pair of small black eyes peep inside. Then a snout sniffs up and down. Then clawing at the wood door frame.
“Hades, noooo…” Lexa whines. What an inopportune time for him to throw a tantrum. “Well, this is embarrassing. Should’ve left him at the farm, had no idea he’s gonna cock-block me like this.”

Clarke lets our a giggle. She pushes gently at the brunette’s arm, “it’s okay, let him in. He sounds very concerned.”

“Yeah, from all that screaming.” Lexa winks, and receives a swat on her shoulder, “heyyy…”

“You’re the one who made me scream, silly.” She admires the blush on the tanned cheeks.

“Right… are you thirsty? I’ll… um, Hades, come in boy.” Lexa whistles at the door. Soon paws clatter on the floor.

Hades scouts around, sniffing at the smell of spent passion, which baffles him.

Lexa rolls up reluctantly, and ties the mosquito net apart. “See? She’s fine, we’re all fine. There wasn’t any murdering happening. Now would you please get us a bottle of water?” She points at the fridge, and repeats, “water.”

He runs to retrieve the item, but brings a beer instead. Reassured that his human is doing okay despite her suspicious activities earlier, he loses interest in their complex human language conversation.

Clarke is now laughing, thrashing on the comforter.

“Hey, he’s very well trained, I probably just don’t have bottles of water stocked.” Lexa scratches behind his ears, “beer is good too, right?”

“Beer is good too.”

They share, taking turns sipping at the cool beverage. But soon, indirect kisses stolen off the lip of the bottle are not enough. They crave to be near each other again. Lexa sets down the drink, and Clarke cradles her. Their kiss is lazy and languid, tasting alcohol off of each other.

When the kiss breaks, Lexa is so comfortably warm and relaxed. Heaviness that had held her head under water for the past week has let up. Her each breath is now free, invigorated, happy.

They are not drunk, but they might as well be.

Lexa smiles to see the blonde stifle a yawn. Fluffiness fills her heart. And her heart soars even higher when Clarke musters up all her strength to roll themselves over and says, “I want to make you feel as good as you made me.”

“You already do.”

Clarke points out, “you’re still in your bra and boxers.”

“I know.”

“You’re a dork.”

“It can wait, what I really want right now, is a nap.” Lexa stretches, then curls on herself like a cat.

“I suppose we do have all day.” Clarke shrugs when the brunette gives her a questioning look, “what? I own the farm, I give you permission to take an afternoon off. Now turn over.”
Lexa quirks one brow, “I’m the little spoon?”

“You’re the one who wanted a nap.”

Grinning, Lexa doesn’t mention it was Clarke who’s just yawned. She just complies.

Clarke doesn’t let it show, but giddiness is bursting in pink, heart-shaped cartoonish bubbles. She watches the rises and falls of Lexa’s body, caresses the flat stomach under her palm, and inhales the intoxicating scent of a mixture of shampoo, grass, earth, and Lexa.

*I could love her.*. The thought pops up in her head, when blue eyes are falling shut. She struggles to reopen them and look at Lexa one more time. To feel the heartache at the sight of scars that decorate her back. To appreciate the delicate ink work that merges so perfectly with the scars. To just make sure. To tell herself. *Well, maybe it’s still too early to pop the four-lettered words. But yeah, it wouldn’t be hard to love her.*

She slips into a simple dream of brown and green. The radio keeps replaying one song, in Leonard Cohen’s grainy, growly tone: *“Wasn’t hard to love you, didn’t have to try; wasn’t hard to love you, I didn’t have to try. Held you for a little while, my oh my oh my; held you for a little while —”*

*My oh my oh my...*

Chapter End Notes

Like... Leonard Cohen is such a gem???
Well, tell me what you think of it. And trust me I'm not done. Even though Lexa is clearly selfless and generous in bed, Clarke isn't a pillow princess either. The other half of mushy smut will come.
Chapter Summary

Lexa shares some tender moments with Clarke, and makes an unlikely new friend at the farmer's market.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 10  Secrets

Through the thin layer of mosquito net, everything of the outside world looks pleasantly hazy. Books, tables, chairs, lamps, the floor, edges fuse and lines blur. They all bask in the soft glow of sinking sun that casts long beams and longer shadows. The sun itself is unstoppable by a sheer translucent sheet. Not even the fleeting clusters of clouds can block its generous heat.

She doesn’t fall asleep. She is not exhausted to the extent that her eyes can fall shut in broad daylight. So awake she stays, awake and happy.

The body behind hers, soft and warm and slightly sweaty, gives a little squirm. The arm that rests heavily on her waist slides off. And a small sigh that sounds like a half-hearted complaint grazes the fine hairs on the back of her neck.

Lexa discovers that Clarke is not the most peaceful sleeper. She gets hot, and thrashes around, and lets out little whimpers when her position is not comfortable. Lexa turns, watches in adoration, and runs her thumb on the smooth skin underneath the blonde’s right breast. Right now, Clarke has kicked off the comforter, and is lying on her back, an arm thrown over her eyes. Minutes later, sweat dries off her skin and she gets cold again. Small goosebumps ripple across her body, she curls into herself.

Stretching out her arm till it pops, Lexa sighs contentedly, and coos, “come here.” She draws the slumbering woman into her arm, and cradles the blonde head to her chest.

Clarke immediately flops onto her belly and snuggles close to the generous heat source. The vibration of the brunette’s chuckle eventually, but not intrusively, pulls her from the hazy dream. She rubs her eyes with the back of her hand childishly, and smacks her mouth a few times to chase away the dryness caused by the fulfilling nap. When a calloused hand strokes down her naked back, sending shivers down her spine and limbs, she lifts her head and crashes into a pair of affectionate green eyes. They sparkle with smile, small creases around the edges and slow flutters of long lashes chase away the last trace of doubts she had about what being with this woman would entail. They are glassy, teary even, tenderness full to the brim. They are warm, so, so warm, that the last vengeful flare of hot wave from a descending sun pales in comparison. She flattens her palms on Lexa’s chest, and rests her chin on top the back of her hand.

Amused by the new position Clarke just assumed, Lexa licks her bottom lip and raises her eyebrow inquisitively. The flick of blue eyes down to her mouth doesn’t go unnoticed.
“Hey.” Voice coarse and groggy, Clarke breaks the silence first by leaning up to taste Lexa’s kiss-swollen lips.

Eyes falling shut instantly at the gentle pressure, Lexa murmurs her greeting into the kiss. “Hi.” A content moan breaks free from the back of her throat as the angle of the kiss deepens. Their lips mold together, and tongues brush each other, every word of desire reside in the stirs and probes and tugs and pushes. A wet, sultry, music-less tango.

Suddenly, the hot connection is interrupted, when a cold snout pokes into the nonexistent gap between the women. Hades whines inquisitively, and investigates by sniffing at his human’s mouth, firmly attached to the other human’s a second ago. He’s never seen her do that with another human as she does with Clarke. But it’s two times in a row today. What happened to the Lexa that always shared treats with him first?

Clarke scrambles up when the pink, rough tongue almost licks into her mouth. “Blagh, Hades!!”

“Pppp,” Lexa spits out the slime that perpetually covers the dog’s nose, and pushes him off, “nasty! Hades, down.”

No treats? Head tilted to one side, large ears perked, and beady eyes innocent, Hades retreats out of the mosquito net in guilt.

“I swear, he’s dumb like a bag of rocks sometimes.” Lexa sighs, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand, “something tells me there was a husky in the mix. I mean look at him…” She goes on to explain that his back doesn’t quite slope like a purebred, and a tuft of white fur on his chest that makes him look like his mama ran out of ink at that particular spot. But her voice wavers and diminishes into rambling word salad when a soft hand starts tracing circles on the bare skin above her bra.

“Huskies can be pretty goofy.” Clarke comments off-handedly. But her voice wavers just the tiniest amount, amusement replaced by intention that is not entirely innocent. Her hand follows the silver ball chain and dips into Lexa’s bra, nimble fingers fishing for the dog tag that always ends up tucked between the cleavage.

It was a calculated move to seduce her, Lexa is sure, but it doesn’t stop the hitch of her breath. “What… what are you thinking?” She asks, not recognizing the little cracks in her vocal cords.

Clarke draws her bottom lip between her teeth, and gazes up at the brunette under her lashes. She toys at the dog tag, kisses Lexa’s name engraved in the plaque, and tastes salt from her skin. “You,” she husks, “naked, under me, wet and warm and ready.”

If the casual strokes on the top of her breast didn’t send intense tingling sparks to the last of her tailbone, Clarke whispering these sinfully teasing words certainly does the trick. Heart hammering to the speed that doubles that of its usual calmness, Lexa swallows her lengthy story about all the mayhems Hades had previous inflicted.

Eyes twinkle with mischief, Clarke tucks the dog tag back into the dip of Lexa’s bra, but she doesn’t withdraw her fingers. Instead, she let the side of her hand brush against a tightly roused nipple. “I want to see you, Lex… all of you.”

“Y—yes…” She takes small sips of air in quick breathes when Clarke finally pushes her sports bra higher, letting it bunch underneath her armpits. Warmth pools low in her belly the instant a pair of hot lips wrap around the aching point of her left nipple. “I want to see you, Lex… all of you.”
head to rid her bra, and soon finds her hands buried in a mop of blonde hair, holding Clarke close.

Clarke moves from one side to the other and pampers the right breast with nibbles that barely leave a ring of teeth mark on the dusty rose colored areola. Her incessant lips kiss and suckle along the rises and dips of each rib, each sprinkle of freckles, and each scatter of scars. She is keenly aware that the body beneath her is wound too tightly for its own good. But Lexa is not a demanding lover.

“Lex, tell me what you want.” She whispers, hoping her voice is gentle enough that Lexa will know, it is okay to ask for things.

Plump lips open and close a few times as Lexa regains some use of her vocal cord. “I want… I want you, Clarke.”

It is so incredibly sweet, Clarke thinks. “You have me, darling.” She blazes a trial of hot kisses down the stack of neatly defined abs. A grin creeps up the corners of her mouth when she sees—and smells—the evidence of Lexa’s desire in a dark patch on the bottom of her heather gray boy shorts. Fingers sliding under the waistband, Clarke nudges her nose at the sharp hipbone.

Lexa lifts her hips to allow her boxer to be slid down, her hipbones jutting out even more starkly.

“Tell me, baby,” Clarke cups her palm at the joint of Lexa’s thighs, and lets her thumb idly trace patterns at the small patch of coarse brown hair, “do you want my fingers? Or do you want my tongue?” She finds the stiff little nub with the pad of her thumb, and peels the soft hood back to reveal an erotic pink.

Lexa gasps. Her legs part further, and her hips roll involuntarily upward in need for more friction. “Both…” She murmurs, “I want both.”

“Good answer.” Clarke readily lowers her head. She inhales deeply, gravitating to the musty, earthy fragrance that nestles in between her lover’s legs.

“Just—” Lexa yelps quietly, “just go slow, please.” She jolts, just as lightly as the tongue that flickers over her excited, throbbing clit. And she whimpers, as softly as the finger that enters her tight, pulsing slickness. One hand shoots up to grasp at a bedpost, the other scratches helplessly at Clarke’s scalp.

At that, Clarke adds a bit more force and velocity with each stroke. She lets herself guided by Lexa’s body language, reading the fine scripts that silently communicate her preferences, taking notes on wordless confirmations, and reciprocating with vigor, passion, and gratitude.

The pressure builds, and climbs, and rises, pushing toward a tipping point. Her clenched calves are burning, and start to shake. Lexa arches into the relentless onslaught, and her worlds narrow to a pinhole of blinding pleasure as Clarke reaches up to roll her sensitive nipple in a free hand. Then it crashes down, a spinning force that travels from the top of her head, to her closed eyelids, to the hollow of her chest, and each muscle fiber in her stomach, all the way down to the bent of her knees, and curled toes. A strangled sigh escapes her windpipe, but Lexa screams internally as she is rendered completely and utterly powerless.

Holding the trembling body together with tender touches here and there, Clarke leans back on her heels, and swears to commit this perfect picture to memory.

Finally, the prolonged and intense climax ebbs. Green eyes flutter open, orange glimmers dancing on glistening lashes. The dusk light cascades from behind the Clarke’s naked form, and she looks
entirely angelic.

It gives Lexa the urge to confess, everything she’s seen, everything she’s done, from the moment that she remembered, to this glorious second that she didn’t think would ever come true.

“Hi,” Clarke whispers, pleased with her effort to hear that erotic little noise Lexa makes.

“Hi.” Lexa’s voice breaks a little. Suddenly embarrassed and overwhelmed by how strongly she feels. She muses, if this is the time that she comes clean, to this divine creature, about how she found her, how she still came home despite every force in the universe working against her, how she was so laden with guilt. She opens and closes her mouth a few times, searching her vocabularies for words that can encapsulate the truth. But she fails. What word does one use to break someone’s heart all over again, right after making love to them? At last, she decides against it, and asks, “you hungry?”

Clarke is taken slightly aback by the change of tone. She thinks she saw an uncertainty flash in the green irises, but her stomach promptly rumbles at the prospect of food.

And it breaks the unease. Lexa chuckles, and leans up to give Clarke a peck on the lips. She feels the warm hands on her abdomen stroke up and down a few times, and grins at the blonde’s fascination of her physique. One little kiss multiplies, even when their lips are red and puffy. They come apart begrudgingly only when someone’s stomach growls again.

“Sustenance, now.”

With a few taps at the back of her thighs, Clarke finally detaches herself from their embrace which is getting heated by the second, and rolls off the mattress. She trots naked a few strides and arrives at the closet. Lexa watches in amusement while she selects a pair of workout shorts and a button-up.

It’s such a cliche, to feel the swell in your chest at the sight of a lover wearing your clothes, but boy does Lexa subscribe to it wholeheartedly. She throws on her USMC shirt and boxers, joins Clarke who is peering inside her fridge.

They cook a simple meal together, pasta with leftover chicken, and a can of cheese and broccoli soup. More kisses are traded between conversations. Hades gets spoiled by the blonde who smuggles bites of chicken under the table.

While Lexa puts away the dishes they washed and dried, Clarke idly wanders around the cozy space that is sparsely decorated. She picks up a framed photo of Lexa, in her full gear and a pair of aviator sunglasses, one arm thrown over a woman in similar gear who is missing her helmet and has a head of long dirty blonde hair. “Is this Anya?”

“Yes. You’ll actually meet her soon. She’s coming with her girlfriend, Raven, to visit.”

“Oh really? You must be excited. When will they be here?”

“Next month. They’re here for a wedding. Their friend Echo and some guy named Bellamy.”

Clarke’s eyes widen a bit. “Bellamy Blake? Mom and I got invited to his wedding too.”

Lexus pauses, and turns to peer at the other woman. “You know him?”

“My mom and his mom go to the same church, it’s the most progressive one in the area so it’s a fairly small crowd. And Arkadia doesn’t have its own high school, so I went to DC High with his
sister, she was on my soccer team… and cross country! I haven’t seen Octavia in a while now, city life must have kept her busy.” Clarke smiles fondly at her childhood friend’s name.

“Octavia… Lincoln’s Octavia?”

“Well, I never met Lincoln. Octavia and I hung out with different crowds ever since she moved to the city for college, and he got deployed pretty soon after they were together, but I heard he’s a hunk of a guy though.” Clarke gently put down the frame, her fingers finding a resting spot on the small stack of books beside it.

“Yeah, he is.” Lexa tenses. A sudden terror rises in her chest. The picture, she thinks to herself, Clarke’s picture is tucked inside her copy of ‘Modern Strategy’.

“So, did you know him from overseas?”

Lexa swallows dryly, “…I worked with him, yes, he was in my battalion.” Her eyes dart nervously between the book and Clarke’s gaze.

Clarke scrunches up her nose at the title of the book, the author’s name alone gives it a boring energy. It amazes her how Lexa finds military theories and strategic frameworks to be relaxing bedtime read. “Small world, huh.” She abandons the nightstand and returns to her lover’s side, wrapping her arms behind Lexa’s back. “Is that how you found me?”

Heart still beating wildly in the base of her throat, Lexa secretly sighs in relief. “Something like that…” She dips her head to graze her lips over Clarke’s cheek, hoping that her momentary panic goes unnoticed. Clarke responds in earnestness, quickly joining their lips together in a hot, wet kiss. Long fingers thread into the golden tresses that are tainted orange by the sunset. Lexa swallows the moans that escape Clarke’s mouth, inhaling her lover’s desire and holding it in her chest. In this moment, she feels more vulnerable and conflicted than ever.

Clarke senses that vulnerability, and she doesn’t comment or inquire. When their lips pull apart, both flushed and panting, she just rests her chin on Lexa’s shoulder and holds her tightly. For a long time, they stand and hold each other in the kitchen. The only sound heard is Hades’ tail thumping languidly on the floor.

“So, I must be going.” Clarke suddenly declares, and gives a peck at the pout that begins to take form on Lexa’s mouth, “farmer’s market tomorrow, mom and I need to load up the truck with flower pots early in the morning.”

“I can drive you home tomorrow? I can help load the truck too.” She offers.

“You’re sweet, Lex, but I still gotta feed the dogs tonight.” Before Lexa insists that she comes along to finish the chores, Clarke puts her hand on the woman’s chest, “it’s your day off tomorrow, take some time for yourself, Lex. Besides, mom is going to be all smug and ‘I told you so’ when she finds out. I want to keep this between the two of us for just one more day.” She runs her hand down Lexa’s bare arm, and steals the hair tie she keeps around her wrist, pulling her hair into a ponytail.

Lexa watches as the blonde retrieve the car key and give Hades some love.

“I’ll miss you,” Clarke kisses the dog on his snout, and wags a finger at Lexa, “you be good.” She throws her head back in laughter when she sees Lexa squint and rush to the door before she can slip out.

“Pretty sure you got that backward.” Lexa catches her by her midriff, and feigns a punitive nip on
her jaw.

Clarke giggles uncontrollably, instantly melting back into the strong embrace like sizzling butter. She yields as soon as the kisses continue to descend down the column of her neck with hot tickling air, “ok, ok! I’ll miss you more, Lex-ah, I’ll miss you more!”

Finally letting up her onslaught, Lexa shakes her head at their childish banter. She does not remember ever being so giddy, as if she traveled back twenty years when her father took her riding the helicopter for the very first time. Suddenly the bittersweet taste of nostalgia surges in her throat, and she almost doesn’t let go of the woman currently staring at her with an adoring, quizzical gaze.

*It’s like I’ve known you for a very long time. Thank you for saving me. I can’t believe you are here. I think I’m falling in love with you.* “I’ll see you soon, Clarke. Drive safe.”

“See you soon, Lex.” With that, she climbs into the truck and disappears, leaving behind two red tail lights that grow smaller and smaller into the woods.

Left to her own device, Lexa sits on her bed and glares at the book in which she hid the photo. The panic feeling rises again, and this time, she has nothing to distract her with. The mention of Lincoln and Octavia reminds her that she cannot risk the chance of somebody blindsiding her at the upcoming wedding. Her instinct tells her that what she is doing is like herding cats, but she needs a temporary fix, a simple one, before she can fall to the ground in front of Clarke and confess. Confess how by a freakish chance in the universe she found the picture Jacob had lost, how in her heart she believes that it was the reason she survived all the unimaginable, how she still has no idea what happened to Jacob despite being on the same battlefield, and how she feels sick to her stomach thinking that she’d taken away his chance to come home. So Lexa reaches to her phone.

It rings for a while, just as Lexa is about to disconnect, the line picks up. “Hello?” Lincoln’s voice sounds raw and hoarse against the loud background noise, club music pulsing through the microphone.

“Hey Lincoln, it’s me. Are you working right now?”

“Commander! Good to hear from you. Yeah, the night is just starting downtown, let me step to somewhere quiet.” Sounds of loud singing and screaming fades and soon it is just Lincoln’s heavy footstep against cobblestone in an alley nearby. “How are you doing, Lexa? Adjusting well to the farm life?”

“I—yeah, yeah you can say that. Listen, Lincoln, I wanted to call—it’s gonna sound weird, but I just had to—” It is so rare and highly unusual for her to lose nerves, “do you remember the picture I found, back in Baghdad?”

Puzzled by the question, he makes some incomprehensible sounds before answering, “uh… yes, the Grayson woman, right?”

“Griffin.” Lexa corrects, “Clarke Griffin. Octavia’s childhood friend.”

“Oh right, right. Were you able to find her?”

“I was. The thing is, um, we’re kind of… we’re together now.”

Lincoln chuckles, his voice warm and genuine, “congratulations! That’s great, Commander. She is one lucky lady, it must have been quite a nice surprise to her that it was you who ended up with the photo!”
Lexa clears her throat uncomfortably, “about that… she doesn’t know about the photo. I never told her.”

He hums in acknowledgement, but says nothing, waiting for Lexa to disclose as much as she wants. It’s what she likes about him. He has such a solid presence, loyal, dependable, and nonjudgmental.

“The photo that I found belonged to her brother. Jacob Griffin Jr, he died on the battlefield, and the situation surrounding his death is still under investigation. I just… I just don’t have the heart to bring it up, not before I find out what happened to him.”

“Jacob Griffin…” Lincoln muses, “can’t say I know that name. Would you want me to call around and ask?”

“No, that’s ok. I can ask Anya, two squads from her platoon were there that night.” She weighs her words carefully before continuing, “I called, because I need more time for figure this out. Do you think… do you think Octavia remembers that I asked?”

He seems to understand her intention. “Octavia got so drunk that night she barely remembered her own name, and yours for that matter. I can explain to her if it ever comes up.”

“Thank you, Lincoln, really. I feel silly to have called you for this, but I don’t want to break her heart. I think… I feel like I’m falling for her.”

“I’m happy for you, Lexa.” His tone gets even softer before he hears someone call his name, “I gotta go back to work now. Don’t worry, your secret is safe with us. We’ll catch up when you get a day off.”

She finally exhales, and jokes lightheartedly, “great, but no double dates yet please.”

“Haha, can’t promise that. But hey Lexa, regardless what you find out, I’m sure Clarke will understand, you should tell her before someone else does.”

Lexa nods, despite he cannot see. “I’ll work on it.” She whispers into the phone, more for herself to hear than him.

They say goodbye to each other one last time, and the call ends. Lexa sees that she got a text message from Clarke.

Clarke 20:47 - Home safe. Dogs are not happy about dinner being late. Miss you already xoxo

Lexa quickly emails Anya to give her a call “at her earliest convenience”. She is being overly formal, she notes self-consciously, but it is her way to tell her best friend that she needs some actual advice and assistance. Then she smiles stupidly at her phone for half a minute, before carefully selecting each letter on the screen, typing out a message in return to Clarke’s.

Lexa 20:55 - I miss you too. Good night and sweet dreams.

Her phone almost immediately vibrates.

Clarke 20:56 - As long as you’re in it ;)

It almost makes her feel guilty, for her startled heart no longer quickens from panic and conflict, it speeds up twofold as her belly and her face heat up pleasantly. There is an incessant tug in the base of her spine, excitement sparkles like she is getting ready for a fitness test. She knows what her
plan is for her day off and it cannot come soon enough.

July 28th

Besides the lavish gathering of colorful produce stands, the city’s farmer’s market has a big personality. It is a funky joint for trinket and t-shirt sellers and a casual hangout for summer term college students. Street musicians occupy every corner, constantly trying to one-up each other. Artists and magicians occasionally speak into their megaphones to collect on-lookers’ coins. Skater boys and girls race down the block that bars motor vehicles. People with different color hair and different style clothes mingle and greet each other. It is an entirely different scene from a small conservative town in the countryside.

Lexa loves the anonymity, although Hades has different ideas.

“Can I pet your dog?” He is acting extra charming in the crowd, all wagging tail and tilted head at the pedestrians’ request. The bread stand owner even offered her half a loaf of gooey cheese bread for free when they see Hades make eyes at the cart.

“Tsk, happy now?” She tugs on his leash when he gulps down a big chunk of the treat. It doesn’t take her long to find the Griffin’s flower truck on the opposite side of the street, which is swamped by lovers selecting gifts for each other. Abby is rolling wrapping papers around a bouquet. Clarke is engaged in a conversation with an elderly couple with matching grey hair and canes. Her smile is so radiant, Lexa feels her entire body turn warm and light. She decides to admire from afar, till the woman is not swamped by customers, so she sits under a shade and leans against the tree. In the corner of her eyes, she notices a short, gangly silhouette approach.

“May I pet your dog?” A tiny voice asks, pulling her attention to its owner. A girl, maybe 6 or 7 years old, Aden’s age. She is missing a front tooth, but it doesn’t prevent her from smiling timidly at her.

Lexa quickly nods, “of course, he is very friendly.” She guides the little girl’s hand to Hades’ head, behind his pointy ears. He whines pleasantly at the scratches. “My name is Lexa. This is Hades. What’s your name?”

“Ainsley.”

“Nice to meet you, Ainsley.” She relaxes back and studies the girl. Ainsley is wearing a baseball hat backwards, a pair of athletic shorts reveal two knobby legs covered in scabs, a skateboard decorated with cool designs of wolves is tipped against the tree.

The girl meets her gaze, and is suddenly shy. “I like your tattoo.” She gestures the ink peeking out from Lexa’s short sleeve.

“Thank you.”

“So what brings you to the farmer’s market?” Ainsley quickly changes the topic.

Lexa almost chuckles to herself. Ainsley reminds her so much of her 7-year-old self. She too was a skinny little tomboy at that age, and constantly attempting to strike up random conversations with women she thought were the embodiment of gay (there were a couple of closeted gays working with her father), even before she learned the word for it. So she answers with honesty. “I’m here to
see a girl I like.”

“Really!?” Ainsley’s big brown eyes suddenly light up with awe.

“Mmhmm, her name is Clarke, and she owns a flower truck. There she is.” She points toward the woman climbing down the pickup with a pot of begonias.

“So are you girlfriends?” The girl asks intently.

This makes Lexa smile. “Umm, we’re seeing each other. We haven’t exactly defined what we are, but I hope so.”

The girl suddenly sets her face serious. “I know what you mean. I really like Christine.” She looks over to a crowd of children, and points at a blonde girl fully covered in bright pink roller skate gears. “She let me kiss her after school last year.”

Lexa admits that she is impressed by this brazen little girl. She had no idea just how mature kids are these days. “Tell you what, why don’t you go buy two roses from Clarke? One for you to give Christine and one for me to give Clarke.” She fishes out two five dollar bills from her pocket, a little embarrassed that she doesn’t actually know how much a rose costs.

“You’re buying a flower from her and giving it to her? That’s silly,” Ainsley comments, but shrugs, “I guess it’s pretty romantic.”

“I’ve got quite the game, kid.” Lexa pushes up from the lawn and walks the girl across the street.

She watches as Ainsley gets in line and tries to get one of the Griffins’ attention. Abby has two college-age students fawning over the perfectly arranged succulents. The younger Griffin is quick to notice the girl, and takes her money. Soon they engage in a conversation and the little girl points again at her friends staking and mucking around at a clearing down the street, her face proud and tender - an expression that is far more mature than her age. Clarke smiles adoringly, the finest wrinkles ripple at the corner of her eyes. She taps her mother on the shoulder, and whispers something to her. Soon Abby rummages through her box of decorative supplies, and picks out two ribbons with cartoon puppies on them. Clarke ties them around the stems of the roses into beautiful butterfly bows, strands of blonde hair falling at the side of her face as she concentrates on the task.

Lexa finds herself completely enamored by the woman’s profile, certain that she is wearing a stupid grin right now. Ainsley seems beyond happy as she accepts the flower, her five dollar bill and two singles of change. Lexa ducks behind a rack of shirts as the Griffin women watch the little girl run away with a spring in her steps.

“Keep the money,” Lexa shakes her head when the girl offers her the seven bucks, “go buy some ice cream cones for your friends. But I have one more favor to ask.”

With the winding down of the market, Abby gets ready to tidy up the flower truck. Today has seen good sales, so she reprices the remaining pots and bouquets hoping the loitering shoppers will take them home as an afterthought. She is pleasantly surprised when the little girl from earlier today, run hand in hand with another girl donned up in pink roller skate gears toward her truck, four other children in their wake.

“Mrs Griffin, my friends would like to see if you have any succulents left!” Ainsley thrusts a popsicle into Abby’s hand.
“Excellent choice! Succulents are very easy to care for.” Abby pulls out her last tray of succulents, in various shapes and colors.

“Oooh, this one looks fuzzy!” An older girl points at one in the corner.

Quickly a young boy voices his concern, “it’s growing crooked. It looks sad!”

“I know! But it’s cute. Maybe we should give her a home.” She replies, and looks up at the older Griffin, “how much for her?”

“Dollar fifty with its own little pot.” It used to be two dollars with an extra two quarters for the pot, but Abby loves the children’s enthusiasm. She scoops the fuzzy little creature from the tray and puts it in a pot with small holes on the bottom, and sticks a small toothpick beside it. “There, this will help her stand.”

The girl touches the small plant with gentle fingers and laughs at the texture. “How often should I water her?”

“Set her up on your windowsill, where she can see some sunlight. With a small succulent like her, you only need to water her once a week, and each time, give her a good soak. See the holes on the bottom?” Abby gives the girl careful instructions, and writes them down on a sticky note.

While the group of children chatter nonstop with Abby and distract her, Clarke steals a moment to pull out her phone when she feels it buzz in her pocket.

*Lexa 14:36 - How is the farmer’s market?*

*Clarke 14:38 - Busy for a while, wrapping up soon.* She sends the message, and bites the inside of her cheek, feeling somewhat coy, but types another text. *I miss you today.*


*Clarke 14:39 - Do I get to know what it is?*

*Lexa 14:40 - Sure.*

*Lexa 14:40 - Clarke, look up.*

Brows knitted at the last text, Clarke notices a pair of old tennis shoes walk toward the flower stand, beside them, four dirty paws. Her eyes snap up, finding a blinding smile on the face that she has been thinking about ever since she left Lexa’s residence last night. Hades sticks out his pink tongue from one side of his mouth in a lopsided smile too.

Lexa’s heart does a tap dance in her chest. She watches in fascination as Clarke’s expression goes from confusion to surprise, then to delight and warm. She extends her hand, holding out the rose, and feeling a little silly. “For you.”

Clarke instantly recognizes her own handiwork and lets out a soft giggle. Her hand finds Lexa’s outstretched one, and tugs on her wrist until they are only separated by the vendor table. She brings the rose with her free hand to her nose and smells it. “Thank you, Lexa, I love it.”

“You’re welcome.” Lexa throws a glance behind the blonde, assured that Abby is still preoccupied by her little helpers on the other side of the truck.
Clarke notices, and connects the dots. “How long have you been here?”

She shrugs, “not long, just wanted to wait till you’re not busy.”

“And you hired a bunch of kids to distract my mom? That’s very sneaky.”

“More like bribed.” Lexa says proudly, which earns her another giggle. “I didn’t know if we’re keeping it from your mom or not. And it made me feel kinda naughty.” Her voice is low. She smooths her thumb over Clarke’s knuckles with subtlety, like she is smuggling around a secret in broad daylight.

Clarke leans over the table, she tucks a strand of brown curls behind Lexa’s ear, and brings the woman even closer. “That’s very thoughtful, Lex. But there’s nothing more I want than to kiss you right now.” With that, her lips meet Lexa’s.

Green eyes flutter close at the contact. A small sigh slips out between kisses, and she chases after the sound of it. If her hand was keeping a secret across the top of Clarke’s, then her lips are spilling every word of her worship. She faintly hears a small gasp from one of the children and then snickering and mocked gagging noises, and knows her cover has been blown. But she forgets the curious onlookers and sinks a little deeper in the kiss. She tastes the little sip of honey that Clarke accepted from the neighboring vendor, she tastes her velvety lip balm, she tastes the freshness of flowers and plants and the comfortable familiarity of the farm. She is sure she can taste the sun.

“Ahem.” They only break apart reluctantly when Abby clears her throat. The children quickly scatter with their pots of succulents.

Clarke looks over her shoulder and sees her mom with amusement on her face, one hand on her hip and the other on the table. She whispers conspicuously toward Lexa, “busted.”

Face red as a tomato, Lexa isn’t quite sure whether it is from the embarrassment or the heavy affect Clarke has on her. She is keen on doing some damage control, “I was… ah, I wanted to see if you guys needed some help closing down the stand.”

Abby just shakes her head and squints at the young women. “Clarke, honey, you really didn’t think I’d know what was going on?” She then turns to Lexa, gestures her to come behind the table enclosing their little tent, and passes some large pots for her to load up the truck, “I knew something was up with the two of you when she snuck home with this dopey little look on her face and clothes that don’t belong to her!”

“I don’t have a dopey look.” Clarke protests firmly, and receives a creased brow from both her mom and Lexa.

“Now, Lexa,” Abby starts.

“Moooom—” Clarke whines. She knows the tone, and thinks it is far too early for her to give Lexa ‘the speech’.

Abby ignores her daughter and continues, “you’re a wonderful young woman, and I trust you to treat my baby girl right. So I want you to know that you’re welcome in my house, anytime. And you two don’t need to keep it a secret for my or Aden’s sake, okay? We’ve talked about it. You can trust us, too.” Her voice goes very soft when she sees tears swirl in Lexa’s eyes, like she’s not used to being treated so tenderly by a maternal figure. She doesn’t think so, from Lexa’s brief mention of Aunt Nia. “Now,” she pats her on her shoulder, “help me take down the stand, and why don’t you two enjoy some time of your own, I’ll leave the truck here and hitch a ride with your friend?”
Clarke closely observes the exchange between the two, and feels a small lump form in the base of her throat. It makes her exhale in ease to know that her mother is supportive of them being together, and is so kind to the woman she likes very, very much. She wraps Abby in a hug and kisses her on the cheek appreciatively, and quickly texts Monty to arrange a ride for her mother.

After cleaning up their spot and storing everything away in the cargo bed, Abby gets picked up by Monty, who is hooting in the driver’s seat when he spots Clarke and Lexa standing closely to each other. They share a laugh at the turn of events.

“Cat’s out of the bag, I guess,” Clarke twirls around and faces Lexa.

“I guess.” Resting her hands on the woman’s hips, she finally is at liberty to seek as much physical closeness as she wants. So she starts by burying her face in the blonde’s neck, inhaling the lingering floral scent. “I’m so glad I found you, Clarke.”

“I am too.” Clarke turns her head and presses a kiss to the brown curls. Though slightly perturbed by Lexa’s sudden confession, she is relieved to be back in her lover’s embrace again. No amount of nosy glances could make her deny Lexa’s need for a moment of tenderness. “Hey,” she coos when she feels Lexa withdraw, “wanna go check out this smoothie place? My treat.”

Lexa nods quietly, and interlaces their fingers.

Ainsley, from the street corner, spies the two women walk away hand in hand, the generous sunlight dances in Clarke’s golden hair, and on the petals of the rose tucked in her back pocket. She looks in the other direction, and sees Christine cradling her matching rose like the most precious treasure. She gets a funny feeling in her belly, knowing the secret she shares with Lexa. So Ainsley wishes really hard that Lexa gets to call Clarke her girlfriend.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Holidays.

I am so sorry for disappearing and leaving the story for almost two years. Truthfully, I have been sad for a long time. But I have work now, and grad school to look forward to, so the hope is that I can slowly finish this story, bit by bit, scene by scene. Thank you for your patience.
One night in the sun

Chapter Summary

Get your one night in the sun. Be sure to take your imagination. Get your pinch just when the moment's right. Get your one night in the sun. -- LP "One night in the sun"

Chapter Notes

Many feels in a long chapter.
CW: Mentions of violence and death in Lexa's reflection and search for her truth. Some depression and anxiety-related feelings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 11  One night in the sun

August 3rd

Abby flies into the front door after work, hands behind her head as she paces back and forth in her kitchen.

“Mom, what’s wrong?” Clarke is startled by the frantic look on her mother’s face, she tosses aside the dirty rags used for cleaning. Lexa also looks up from the math problems she is trying to help Aden solve.

“Damn that thickheaded Patricia, just had to have so much to drink yesterday, fell and broke her goddamn wrist, ended up in my ER!”

Aden’s mouth falls open, he is just about to remind her to put a quarter in the swear jar when Lexa puts her hand on his shoulder and shakes her head.

“Poor Pat.” Clarke comments, which inadvertently fuels her mother’s fury.

“Poor Pat?” Abby scoffs and throws her hands in the air, exasperated, “poor Pat? We told her we were all going to Cece’s party and we’ll go rehearse some songs in the evening, did we not?”

“Yes. Yes you did.”

“And she ditched us. Never showed up at rehearsal, decided to get drunk with her new boy toy and now we don’t have a pianist! Gosh she is so irresponsible!” Abby is the acting choir director for her church group. Aurora is busy with other arrangements for Bellamy and Echo’s wedding. With no extensive families on either side, the couple have decided to only invite the church and a select few. Out of obligation, Finn’s father, big-fish-in-a-small-pond Mayor Collins, is also invited, and by extension, Finn. The bride and groom asked to not have a luxurious wedding, intending to save up for travel. That was when Aurora and Abby came up with the idea to hire their choir friend to
perform a simple Pachelbel for Echo to walk down the aisle to. Now the clock is really ticking down, Patricia throws them a curve ball.

Clarke blinks several times, and drapes her arm around Abby’s shoulder, “mom, there’s still time, it won’t be hard to find somebody.”

“Patricia was actually good at it.” Abby says mournfully. “I just—I know it’s really mean for me to only worry about whether she can play at the wedding, and Bellamy probably won’t even care, but it’s so important to Aurora, so it’s important to me, too.”

Aden chips up from eavesdropping on their conversation. “Hey grandma, Lexa can play the song for you, she’s reeeeeally good.”

“I can?” Green eyes grow big at his suggestion.

“You can!?” Abby rushes toward the young woman. “Oh! Lexa, I know it’s a lot to ask, but would you? It’s just Canon in D, nothing fancy.”

She would be lying if it isn’t one of the obligatory classical pieces that everybody learned when she picked up the instrument. For a simple wedding, she can’t imagine they want it to be too ostentatious. “Of course, Abby. With some practice, I’m sure I can manage that.”

“Oh god bless your heart, Lexa!” Abby rushes over and kisses the younger brunette on her cheek.

“Although… Canon would sound so much nicer as a duet, maybe with violin?” Lexa turns to Aden after musing for a few seconds.

Abby lights up as well, nodding along. “It’ll be such a nice surprise for Uncle Bellamy!”

His face, one minute proud, turns sour. “No, I can’t.”

“C’mon, buddy, I’m gonna need some help here. Do it with me?”

“I said I don’t want to!” He scoots off the chair in a fit of anger, stomping out of the front door and almost running into his mother.

“Aden—” Both Abby and Clarke call after him. The blonde sighs with a small frown, perturbed by her son’s outburst.

Lexa bites the inside of her cheek, feeling a little defeated. “I’m sorry, I pushed too hard.” She stalks over to the window and watches the boy run in the direction of his tree house.

Clarke comes beside her girlfriend and leans in for a half embrace as consolation. “It’s not your fault, Lex. He… gets a little testy with the subject. Let’s give him some space.” She shares a look of concern with Abby, but both agree on leaving it alone for the time being.

It nags at Lexa for the next hour or so. She finishes feeding the dogs, tidying up the kennels and tool shed. The sun is barely hanging onto the tree branch by now. Still no sight of Aden.

“I’ll go get him for dinner.” Clarke comes out and finds her.

“Is it okay that I give it another try?” Lexa pleads. “I won’t pressure him, but I just want to talk. Trust me?”

Putting her hands on Lexa’s cheeks, she tilts her head up and kisses the pouty lips. “Of course. Aden adores you and admires you, Lexa. Thank you for trying.” Then she lets her go. “Stay for
dinner.”

It has been rainy. The river swallows the small island up to its high ground, where the tree house is perched up on the sturdy looking white oak. The bridge quivers some under her footstep. Lexa makes a mental note to reinforce it with wire ropes the next time she gets supplies. But overall, she is impressed with the quality of the tree house. If Finn is nothing else, he is a pretty good handyman.

As she knocks on the entrance, she hears a small murmured “come in” from the boy. She climbs in through the floor board, but too tall to stand up in the small space.

He is toying with his bow. The violin case lies open in the corner.

After a few minutes of silence, Lexa starts gently, “I’m sorry to have pushed you.”

Aden shrugs, but doesn’t say anything.

“I can tell that it means a lot to you, playing the violin?”

His mouth flattens into a thin line. In the moment, he looks so much like Clarke when she is displeased. He nods once.

“Remember the time I heard you practice? You are so good, Aden, truly.”

“I make mistakes.” He replies, disheartened.

“That’s the best part about playing in a church, forgiving audience!” Lexa jokes, but sees no intended reaction from the boy. She scoots closer to him. “You know, I said yes because I know it will make your mother and grandma happy, but I can’t make them as happy as you can, because they love you so much, and they’re so proud of you. So I thought I’d ask you for help.”

“What if I screw up and embarrass them?”

“I can’t lie, it’ll be embarrassing if we really sucked.” It earns her a reluctant giggle. “But I doubt that will be the case. I know it can be scary, and you’re going to feel nervous, and that’s ok. I get frightened all the time.”

“What if I screw up and embarrass them?”

“All the time.” She feels the suffocating fear resurface in her chest for a brief moment, fragments of her life overseas flash in the blink of her eyes. It seems a lifetime ago. “But you know what I do?”

Aden shakes his head, watching her intently.

“I take a deep breath, and I let myself feel nervous.” She demonstrates, “just for ten seconds. Then I focus on why I do it, who I do it for.”

“Grandma, and Grandma Aurora, and Uncle Bellamy.”

She smiles at the realization in his expression. “Then, I trust my teammate to have my back. In the Marine Corps, we swear to do our best and take care of each other, even when things get super bad, even when we’re super scared. I’m not going to bring up this wedding thing again if you tell me no today. But if by chance you want to do this with me, I promise to have your back, Aden. Marine’s
honor.”

He goes very quiet again, but he suddenly attacks her into a hug. “You don’t have to be frightened, Lexa. I’ll have your back too.”

Lexa breathes out a sigh of relief, and hugs him tightly.

Even though he is still incredibly nervous about this commitment, Aden wants to show everyone that he is in fact a good musician. He rests his chin on her shoulder, and feels brave.

Daylight is simmering down into the waters by now, and a mysterious deep blue shrouds the forest. Darkness has officially declared its reign across the landscape. But as they climb down the tree house together, walk across the bridge, he puts his hand in her calloused one. Lexa’s strength radiates through the warmth of her voice and the brightness of her smile.

It feels like a night in the sun.

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Under the porch light, Clarke can see their figures, one tall and one small, appear at the edge of the woods. She is wary to bring up the conversation from earlier. Abby also cautiously awaits at the dinner table.

“Grandma,” Aden hugs the older Griffin, and announces, “I’ll play for Uncle Bellamy’s wedding.”

“Oh! Are you sure, sweetheart? We don’t want to pressure you into anything you don’t want to do.” Abby rubs her hand on his small back. The creases on her forehead showing her concern, but her hazel eyes are hopeful.

He climbs down from her chair and sits in his. “Of course! Lexa and I are going to practice a ton. We need to borrow Uncle Jacob’s piano.” He helps himself to a large bite of his mashed potatoes.

It seems to be the end of discussion. Clarke and Abby exchange a look, then both direct their attention at the marine officer who is spooning food in her mouth at a speed that matches the little boy’s. From the cheerful little glint in Lexa’s eyes, they can hazard a guess that their conversation went very well.

When the marine officer leaves for the night, Clarke finds her mother leaning by the door to Jacob’s old room. It has been vacant for over a year now. Furniture covered in white sheets, the room has not been rearranged. She can still feel her brother’s energy lingering within the four walls. His nerdy posters, his trinkets, and his instrument sit and collect dust.

“I think it’s time we put Jacob’s things to better use, honey. Don’t you?”

August 4th

As the busy week concludes, Lexa is invited by Aden to rehearse their musical performance. But first, she is informed, they need to clean out Jacob Griffin Jr’s room. She brings them bandanas to use as face masks.

Prepared for it to be an emotionally overwhelming day, Clarke is glad that her son and her
girlfriend are there to make the process so much more bearable. Aden has long abandoned the face mask, and repurposes the bandana as an eye patch. “Hoist the colors! Bear a hand!” He climbs on top of the desk and wields the dusting feather like a sword.

“Aye aye Cap’n!” Lexa tosses him the rag and raises a bucket of soapy water for him. They make a play out of cleaning.

He wipes down the bookcase shelves in big strokes. When he arrives at the top, he jumps to reach up, and knocks down a stack of books. They fall around him and almost hit him in the face. The bucket of water gets tipped to the floor in a loud clank. “Uh-oh!” He shouts in surprise, momentarily unsure what to do.

“Abandon ship! Abandon ship!” Lexa extends her arms and gestures him to come down. It makes both Aden and Clarke giggle.

He grabs her hand and jumps. “I’ll get a mop and more water. Captain the helm, matey!” His voice already disappearing down the hall as he runs away.

Lexus shakes her head and whispers to Clarke, “I should probably do the climbing from now on. That boy has no fear.” She picks up some dry rags to soak up the water on the floor.

An intense surge of fondness stirs in her belly. Clarke can’t describe it. Instead of saying anything, she just brings a finger on the tanned line of Lexa’s arm exposed by her tank top. She smirks to herself as a small trial of goosebumps surfaces under her finger tip. Soon the simple touch isn’t enough. Clarke rakes her hand over the taunt bicep, tracing the bouncy texture of a prominent vein.

Lexus is quite smug, knowing the impact of her physique on the blonde. She wraps her arms around Clarke’s waist and pulls her in, like in the oldie movies.

Clarke shrieks at the sudden movement, and laughs. Her laughter is quickly muffled by a kiss. Their pent-up fascination and attraction finally erupt. She threads her hand in the waviness of Lexa’s hair, tugging her closer.

Lexus is in a rush to take in as much skin as possible. She nips on Clarke’s lips, then her chin, the spot below her earlobe, and the pulse point in her neck. Clarke tilts her head sideway to grant more access, fingers digging in the muscles on Lexa’s back.

When they eventually break away for air, they are left even hungrier than before. Clarke nuzzles her nose in the crook of Lexa’s neck, and inhales the familiar scent of soap and shampoo. Her hands travel in discretion and arrive at the brunette’s bottoms to squeeze the cute butcheeks with greed. Lexa jumps in surprise, but indulges the sneaky move.

Aden’s stomping from down the hall is what breaks them apart. He catches his mother jump away from Lexa, and rolls his eyes. “I know what you were doing, and eww.”

Lexus clears her throat, a suspicious red cloud rises on her cheeks. She spots a few framed pictures in his hands, and no bucket of water. “What do you have here?”

He puts them face-down on a desk, and hooks his index finger at Lexa, motioning her to come close. He flips one over to show her. It is a family photo. Clarke looked no more than ten years old in the photo, and behind her, a burly man with a head of golden hair, and a young Abby. In front of her is a little boy with spiked blonde hair, whose facial features bear an uncanny resemblance of Aden’s. Young Jacob Griffin Jr is smiling up at the camera with a gap in his front teeth. “Mom put away Uncle Jacob’s pictures when he died. They make her too sad.” He whispers to Lexa, “but
Grandma likes to keep all of them in her bedroom.”

It dawns on Lexa, why she has not seen a single photo of Clarke’s brother. The walls are sparsely decorated in the first place. Aden’s awards, drawings, pictures of him as a baby, and the three current occupants of the house take up most the space. Even Jake Griffin’s appearances are rare. A photo of his younger self at the opening of his vet practice, and of him and Abby on their wedding day are the only ones that come to mind. So it turns out, when it concerns the photos of deceased loved ones, Clarke is an avoider, and Abby is a hoarder.

“Where did you find those, Aden?” Clarke comes up behind them.

“Grandma’s room…” He peers at her sheepishly. “I thought… since we’re cleaning out Uncle Jacob’s room. Maybe…”

“Maybe it’s time to put them up.” She finishes his sentence, and kneels down beside him. There is a lump in her throat as she tries to speak. Blue eyes well up with unshed tears. “Oh, baby, I’m so sorry we hadn’t done this earlier. I never wanted to hide him away.”

“I know that, mom, you just get so sad. Like you’re sad now.” He wraps his arms around Clarke’s neck, and kisses her on the crown of her head.

The gesture breaks her weakly fabricated front. She holds onto his shirt and weeps. “I am sad, Aden, because I miss him so much.”

The boy pats her on her back. “It’s okay, mom. He was your brother, it’s okay to be sad. Here, look all these pictures I took from Grandma.” He shows his mother and Lexa more. In one where Clarke is a teenager around high school age, her father looking thinner and Abby older, the fair-headed boy suddenly sports dyed black hair. He hides his pimply face behind the blow-dry, swept-front hair and a snapback. He looks extremely mopey—gangly body in baggy clothes.

The blonde bursts out in a fit of giggles through her tears. She traces her finger across the picture, across the teenage boy’s sour face. “Uncle Jacob went through a hardcore emo phase. He had such a hard time with Grandpa’s illness.” Then she added, “we all did.” She inspects the next picture. It was taken from behind Jacob’s shoulder. His hair is back to being spikey and blonde, and he clearly put on some muscles. The background looks like some sort of hospital suite, white tiles arranged in orderly fashion, and blurry figures in scrubs hurrying pass the cracked door. He looks down to a wrinkly newborn baby who is struggling to open his eyes.

“That’s me!” Aden pipes up.

“That is you. Uncle Jacob loved you so much, since the moment you were born.”

They look through the rest few. Most taken in Jacob’s childhood, one with Clarke on the farmland, one of him steering the boat “Abigail”, and one of his form clad in shoulder pads and headgear running a touchdown in a football game.

Lexa notices that she still can’t quite picture in her mind what the adult Jacob looked like. She doesn’t comment, though, only observes Clarke reminisce the good years spent with her brother.

Aden starts to put the pictures up on various surfaces. “Mom, is it okay that I picked these? I didn’t take his Marine Corps photos, you hate those.”

“Oh, Aden, I don’t hate them. How could I? He worked so hard to be in the Marine Corps. I just —” Clarke sniffles, “I just can’t help but wonder what could’ve been, had he not enlisted.” At that, she breaks down a little more, hugging one photo tightly to her chest. After a few seconds of silent
sobbing, she wipes her face on her sleeve. “I’m sorry, baby. I’m still trying to get over the things that we don’t have any control over. It’s taking a while.”

He nods, and replies assuringly, “maybe just these photos for now. Baby steps, right?”

“Right.” Clarke finds strength in his voice. She pushes herself up from the floor and finds a place for the photo in her hands. In the corner of her eyes, she sees Lexa. Lexa, as the wonderfully understanding woman she is, has remained quiet and busied herself with dusting off and straightening the last few pieces of furniture. Clarke exhales slowly, and whispers in a scratchy voice. “I’m such a mess today. Sorry you had to see this, Lex.”

Lexa says nothing, only takes her into a warm embrace. She lays small kisses on Clarke’s cheek, whatever fervent and lustful desire from before now tapers down to protectiveness and tenderness.

“It’s so hard to believe how much Aden is growing up to resemble Jacob. Not just in his looks, but the small things, things he says, things he does, how he just kissed me on my head.” Clarke murmurs morosely in the crook of Lexa’s neck. “He is my savior.”

The boy doesn’t interrupt the quiet affection that her mother is enjoying with Lexa. He thinks Lexa might be the best thing that could have happened to his family since Uncle Jacob’s passing. Bizarre was the way how she turned up, like a lucky strike of lightning, as if the dead man had a hand in the making of this entire affair. But in his young mind, it makes the most perfect sense. So he quietly rummages through the shelves, until he finds something interesting. “Mom, Lexa, look what I found!”

It was a collection of sheet music, sorted into classical and modern categories and by composers.

“Canon… Canon… Canon in D!” Aden raises the binder victoriously when he finds the one song that they need to look for. “Can you play this?”

Lexa straddles the piano bench, and studies the page he holds up to her face. Her right hand glides through a few notes. “Yeah, that sounds about right, doesn’t it? But we’ll need to find the duet sheet.”

He nods eagerly, “I’ll look it up on the computer!” Then he is gone, dashing upstairs to print off the music.

Thumbing through a few pages of the binder, each bears the mark of heavy use, she casually plays the opening bars of some known pieces. While Beethoven has great poise and balance in his symphony, Brahms employs rich emotions, Chopin thoughtful and reflective in each and every note… Debussy always gives her a sense of calm. She sets the binder aside, and sits properly before the instrument.

It begins with simple notes, the texture light and fleeting, elegant without dignified seriousness or grandeur. The pentatonic scale ascends with steps of subtle conjuncts. The melody wraps itself above the few harmonies. Then the dynamic changes, it climbs and climbs and crescendos into a climax. As soon as the bar ends, the tune mellows out again, only to repeat itself in a lower octave.

How strange, yet how familiar. Clarke knows of the composition, she’s heard her brother play it many times. When Jacob played, he did it lightheartedly, like a doe trotting through Scottish meadows. Lexa plays differently. Her fingers only caress the keys and dust small touches. She plays it like it is a dream, or a wish fragile as the mist on the grassy lands. Too careless, it might just blow away. Like she is in love, like she is rendered powerless by this love.
Aden at one point returns, carrying some printed pages and his violin in his arms. His mouth hangs agape. Then he becomes excited, bouncing on the ball of his feet until Lexa finishes the short song. “That was awesome!” He rushes to her side, and peers at the open page, “the girl with flaxen hair, by Debussy. Lexa, what does flaxen mean?”

“It means… pale yellow, I think.” She looks up at Clarke with an adoring expression.

A breath hitches in her throat. Was she thinking of me? Clarke doesn’t have to ask, she already has her answer.

“Girl with pale yellow hair…” He muses, and turns to his mother in elation, “you’re a girl with flaxen hair, mom!”

Clarke tears her eyes away from the brunette momentarily, and chuckles at the clever twinkle in his eyes. “And that makes you a boy with flaxen hair.” When she looks at Lexa again, the brazen passion burning in the green eyes has been replaced by a flirtatious bashfulness, as if she had said too much with the song, as if a secret had slipped out under her fingers.

“Can we play it together sometime?” He asks.

“One thing at a time, Aden. Come on, pick up your violin. We should at least start on the open notes tonight.” Lexa takes the printed pages off his hands, and secures them on the music rack.

He quickly fixes the instrument under his chin and poses the bow over the strings. Lexa sets a slow and steady tempo for the first four bars. She over exaggerates the note where he is supposed to join in and winces a little as he scrambles to screech out. “Remember, enter softly.”

They play through a few lines, and decides to go from the beginning again. This time, Aden is much better prepared. “Very good! We won’t be doing the trills, so just play it through like any other note.”

“Why not?”

“It’s too much embellishment. Your grandma said the simple version, remember?”

“Can I at least try?” He begs, “I won’t do it in the wedding, just for fun!”

She snorts, but grants him the little distraction. “Ok fine. Here, start on the second line.”

He picks up after a small pause of hesitation, managing to jump in. And when they arrive at the notation for a trill, he scrunches up his face in concentration and gives it his best shot.

Of course, under his yet masterful maneuver, it ends in cacophony. As his finger try to bounce quickly up and down the string, he loses his precision on the bow, hitting other strings and producing a sound that closely resembles the scratching of a dozen dried up chalks on blackboard, or tires coming to a rattly halt on poorly paved road, uneven and awful in every way imaginable. It even startles the artist himself. Aden lifts his bow with wide eyes and sticks out his tongue.

Lexa pauses her playing also, and squints her eyes at him. Then she says with the straightest face that she can manage, “huh, definitely sticking with the vibrato.”

They stare at each other for a few comedic seconds, and both burst in a gale of giggles.

Clarke has yet to pick up the chores they have left strewn haphazardly across the floor. She just leans against the heavy bookshelf, and watches the light banter between the two people that she
loves - love, Clarke taps her fingertips across her bottom lip, and smiles to herself, yes, I love Lexa. I am in love with Lexa. And she is not surprised that she is perfectly okay with this revelation.

So, she looks on, as the blood orange sun drunkenly and unhurriedly plunges into the soft expanse of grasslands and forests, lakes and rivers, houses and barns, setting a loving, gentle vermilion fire on the window pane, on the black and white piano keys, on Jacob’s photos, on Aden’s profile, on Lexa’s chestnut hair and eyelashes.

Clarke thinks she’s found her one night in the sun.

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August 7th

Anya finally calls. Between the emails and text exchanges with her best friend, she coaxes out the one thing that has been eating at Lexa — what exactly happened to Clarke’s brother on that battlefield?

She did her best to dig out more information from her old colleagues, but she is a civilian now, no longer privy to certain details about operations and shunned from the grapevines in her former battalion. But she calls either way, with little new development and much concern for her friend.

Anya says that she didn’t know the young sergeant well, as he was newly promoted to lead one of the technical squads in her company. Her description of the man is vague and abysmal at best.

“So is there any chance that he and I crossed paths?”

“I wouldn’t have known, Lexa. How much do you remember of that night?”

“Not much. I had a bad concussion and went in and out the next couple days. There are fragments and pieces that come and go.” Lexa sits alone in her kitchen, the photo that belonged to Jacob Griffin Jr lays face-down on the table in front of her. She smoothes her finger across the endearingly messy handwriting that no doubt came from Clarke. “I remember picking you up from the floor and getting blown away. I remember sitting in the dirt feeling like shit. And I remember Raven running toward the woman digging through rubbles.”

“More than I can say for myself.” Anya sighs into the phone. “I don’t even remember interacting with you. I was sliding down the rope and breaking the glass in, then I was too busy getting shot at.” What she recalls are more like feelings than actual events. She felt angry, that the operation went south; she felt scared, because her teammates were separated almost immediately; she felt pain.

Lexa reads all those things left unsaid in the silent gaps filled by staticky sounds and even breathing on both ends. “I’m sorry.” Her voice turns cautious, “I didn’t intend to stress you out, it was a traumatic night for you.”

“For you as well, Lexa. You were hurt, far worse than you made it out to be, at least I know that much, and none of it was your fault, believe it or not. So why are you still obsessed with this? I thought you weren’t going to mention it to Clarke.”

“Because she needs closure, Anya. You know that she hasn’t even put up her brother’s pictures in the house? I just feel… I feel obligated, since I was the one who found her photo that day.”
“You have to accept that you probably can’t give her closure, Lexa. She might never know what happened, and you need to stop punishing yourself for making it back alive.”

“I’m not—” Lexa starts to argue, but is immediately cut off.

Anya’s voice is slightly raised now, “Don’t say you don’t have survivor’s guilt. I get it. We all do. But Lexa, we signed up to serve arguably the most controversial institution, we didn’t sign our lives away. We were misinformed and fucking up to have believed that we did. You deserve to live, just as much as the next person you see on the street.”

Lexa lets her finish off her rant, knowing she won’t be able to get a word in until Anya stops her rapid fire. She chuckles when her friend ends with “I swear Lexa, don’t make me whoop your ass till you’re deprogrammed from all that honor doctrine you’ve been fed.” “Since when did you become so enlightened?” A lighthearted jab is delivered to alleviate some of the tension building in their conversation.

“Since I’ve been hanging out with these liberal nerds.” Anya snickers too, and they laugh quietly, reminiscent of how things have changed since bootcamp. “Although,” Anya confesses, “the Griffins were told that there is a possibility it was friendly fire.”

“Yes, Clarke said the investigation is still on-going.”

“Well, one of my old buddies told me that his COD was conclusive, he died from an explosive device. But there is an FBI investigation into the intel for a handful of operations that turned out badly. My buddy is under the impression that there had been a mole…”

“Griffin was not a mole.” Lexa cuts her off before she can continue with that train of thought. There is no way, she tells herself, that Jacob fit the profile. If anything that Clarke has told her about him is true, then the young man would have had nothing to do with compromising his own team.

“I’m not suggesting he is! Yeesh, Lexa, how many times do I have to remind you that patience—”

“Patience is the key to victory, yes, yes Captain America.”

Anya ignores her mocking tone, surely with a discreet roll of her eyes and a vengeance to get her back on that comment. “Look, all I am saying is that if Griffin was in anyway implicated, all of his contacts would’ve been micro-examined. It doesn’t sound like Abby or Clarke had been on the FBI’s list of interviewees. So I can come up with two theories.”

“Right, so either it was actually a case of friendly fire…”

“Or he knew something about the mole and it got him killed.” Anya’s voice is veering off to resemble a narrator for a conspiracy theory, low and slow, but she quickly catches herself and snorts, “but, it’s all speculations. I wouldn’t trust the gossips from those old salts.”

Lexa hums in agreement, yet taking careful notes of everything Anya has related. There are so many crucial moments missing from their combined accounts. She isn’t sure if it can be blamed entirely on her concussion, or if deep down a part of her has been scared to death to revisit the gruesome night.

“Lexa,” Anya calls her name after another beat of silence, “promise me you’ll try to let this go. It’s messed up as it is, there’s no point in guilt tripping yourself when none of it was your fault.”

“I know. I know…” She bunches up her shoulders and inhales deeply before letting them drop. The
simple move she learned from her veteran counselor allows some lax in her voice as she picks up a lighter topic. “Anyways, how is packing going for you? Please don’t bring clothes for two months, I have no closet space for that bullshit.”

“Pff, you know Raven, she wants to be prepared for every scenario possible, but I’ll try to contain her. Are you sure we can stay with you? We can always get a motel room in town.”

“Nonsense. You housed me when I needed a roof over my head. I’ll even let you have my bed.”

Some ruffling sounds came through the phone and then Raven’s voice, sounding like she just plopped down beside her girlfriend, “hey I heard that! No take-backs!”

“No take-backs.” Lexa chuckles, endlessly thankful for Raven’s ability to lift up her spirit. “I’ll pick you two up from the airport next week, okay? Email me the flight information and I’ll keep an eye out for the status.”

“Okie dokie! Thanks Lexa, love you lots! Toodaloo!” Raven always comes and goes in such a hurry. Lexa can hear Anya’s giggle and she makes a face to herself before saying her goodbyes.

As the day winds down, Lexa sits in front of her laptop and combs through her copies of medical records about the various injuries she had sustained during her deployments. Those are the only documents that she has full access to and that can possibly jog her memory of some operations throughout the years.

“GSW to the left bicep, through and through, simple sutures. Bilateral fractured ribs. Concussion, observational status for 48 hours.” She mouths the less-than-detailed descriptions of her treatment, and feels for the raised skin on her arm. It is rounded and rough, like a big nob of gooseflesh that will never quiet down. Her eyes close at the fleeting images that ripple through her mind in a chilling visceral reaction. She presses her finger harder on the scar, and forces herself to follow the trial of visions.

The hallway was pitch black, the only light source being the flashes of weapons discharged on both sides. Dust flecks and gun powder float in the air like a dirty snow storm. Her breath was labored, as she strained to listen to her intercom. She heard helicopters whirling pass the building, more gunshots, screaming and yelling coming from various directions.

Ryder’s face briefly comes to her mind. But no matter how hard she tries to picture him, his features have become blurry. Was his dimple on the right side or the left side of his face?

Lincoln was there, she knows. What did he say? Something about Anya, she thinks.

Oh that’s right — Anya’s chopper landed. Anya was about to get hurt.

Lexa bites hard on the inside of her cheek. Her scar burns under the pressure of her finger now. She pictures Anya’s form, rushing toward the other side of the corridor. She followed, swearing to watch her back.

“Tsss!” Her wound throbs, as if it is fresh and bleeding. She was hit, almost the same time as Anya. She can hear her own growl as her friend’s body dropped down into a bottomless pit. She was kneeling over her, tears hot and fast.

There was someone there. Shielding her.
Lexa lets go of her arm and holds her head with both hands. She was so scared. She is so scared. Her body was shaking like she is shaking now. Lexa tastes blood in her mouth, and her head is spinning under her own clutch. She wants to see more, to look up at the man who stood between her and the rapid onslaught of bullets. She can almost see him. She clung onto Anya’s listless body. She tries to look up again, and this time she can see the blood seeping through his gear, blooming black flowers and tearing him apart. Anya had a pulse, she hauled her over her shoulder. *Leave no man behind.* Then a loud explosion that shook the ground brought perpetual darkness.

Lexa had left someone behind.

By the time she loosens up her fingers pressed keenly against her temples, there are ringings in her ears and blindspots in her eyes. She scrambles to tuck her medical documents back into the folder and pushing it to the far corner of the table, almost sliding off the surface all together.

“Shit.” Lexa mutters. Weeks have gone by without dreams quite as vivid and violent, and months have gone by since she last thought about those she had lost on the battlefield. Her stomach churns sourly. Lexa dashes toward the bathroom and burrows her head into the toilet, dry heaving uncontrollably.

When she tastes nothing but bile in her throat, Lexa slumps against the bathtub. She remembers the few sessions with the psychotherapist the VA center appointed to her. “*Reframe your thoughts about the trauma,*” she remembers Dr. Schroeder’s monotonous but comforting voice, “*now, it sounds like you still experience the event as a consequence of your actions. But think about what prompted those actions? Was it the circumstance? Your training? Protocols? Or the combination of many. You did everything in your power to protect your team, Lexa, and you cannot take responsibility to the things that are beyond your control.*”

She strokes the back of her neck in a soothing pattern. The cool tile feels nice against her feverish skin.

After a particularly difficult session, Dr Schroeder would give her praises and homework. “*You’ve done hard work today, Lexa. Now for some cooling down exercises, I want you to picture a place that gives you joy, makes you feel relaxed, and safe, and loved.*”

Dr Schroeder had told her, the dreams and images will surely resurface, they always do, even when she’s felt safe and comfortable for a long time, and especially when she tries the hardest to push them down. Until the next time she needs to confront them, though, she has to recharge her mental power. So Lexa shuts her eyes tightly and only thinks about the farm secluded by dense forestry, where flowers grow and dogs bark, a golden haired boy plays violin, an older woman sits and reads, and a pair of blue eyes smiles up at her.

**August 10th**

Lexa calls in sick for a second day in a row, which is highly suspect. Clarke thinks she acted strange the last time she worked, a little too distant and a little too aloof. Aden is slightly disappointed that she wouldn’t be here to practice the duet with him again, but he is a self-sufficient boy, he can handle a few practices without handholding.

Truth be told, Clarke is probably more disappointed than her son. It is Finn’s weekend with the boy, and she will drop him off in the afternoon. Abby is on call at the hospital. Had everything gone as she planned, she might just seduce Lexa to spend a night with her in the house. They haven’t explicitly talked about sleepovers, but they both crave more intimacy.
“Please pack your bag, Aden. We really should be leaving soon.” Clarke hears the click of his violin case, indicating he is done for the day.

Aden shuffles into the living room with his duffle. “Already done last night.”

“Did Lexa… sound sick the day before when she left?”

“Mmm… she wasn’t laughing as much. But she wasn’t coughing or sniffling either. And I haven’t hung out with sick kids.” Aden crosses his arms in front of his chest and reminds her sternly, “you should go check on Lexa. What if she’s really sick and needs taken care of? You take good care of me when I’m sick.”

“I don’t know, Aden. Sometimes people just want to hide away when they’re not feeling well. Maybe I shouldn’t intrude.”

“But mommmmm!” He whines, “pleeeeeease?”

“Aden,” Clarke says a bit more firmly, “Grandpa and Grandma are taking you to the movie. We don’t have time to swing by Lexa’s on the way over to Dad’s.”

He puts his pointer finger on his chin and contemplates. “How about you go by hers and put me on the phone! I just want to make sure Lexa’s doing okay.” Blue eyes sparkle pitifully. Aden is quite masterful in the art of making puppy eyes.

How can she deny her son’s act of thoughtfulness? Clarke can only agree without much of a fight.

When she knocks on Lexa’s door, Clarke feels the nerves flutter in her belly. She isn’t certain if she is excited to see the woman or anxious about her intrusion. And that flutter only blooms quicker when no sounds but Hades’ clattering paws appear behind the door for half a minute.

“Lexa?” She whispers into the keyhole, and jiggles the door knob a few times. Only then the soft patter of bare feet nears the porch.

Lrexa cautiously tugs the door open, just a crack, and peeks at the woman. Clarke wrings her hands together as if she feels self-conscious. “Clarke… what are you doing here?”

“I uh… I came to check on you. Aden and I wanted to make sure that you’re doing alright.” Clarke notices the dark circles under Lexa’s eyes, accompanying the dullness in her green eyes.

She doesn’t appear feverish, but definitely exhausted.

Clarke tries to apologize through a look, but her phone rings and it is Aden on the line. The brunette just smiles weakly and allows her to step through the threshold.

Dressed only in a flimsy shirt and boxers, Lexa awkwardly crosses her arms in front of her chest, and takes the call.

“Lexa! How long have you been sick? Do you have a tummy ache? Do you have a sore throat?” Aden goes down a list of questions he mentally prepared.

“Aden, I’m okay… It’s just a migraine, nothing too serious. I promise.”

“Did you eat chicken noodle soup?” Which, of course, is the ultimate remedy for every ailment.
“No… I uh, don’t feel like eating.”

“Can you pass the phone to Mom?” Aden asks, and before the women can even switch hands, he loudly proclaims, “you need to make Lexa some chicken noodle soup. She’ll feel better!”

It makes the brunette chuckle. The dim expression lifts slightly into a soft smile. “Still me, bud. I don’t think we’ll be making any chicken noodle soup. I don’t exactly have the ingredients.” She has not gone grocery shopping in a while since she spends pretty much every meal at the Griffins lately, and checking that off her to-do list doesn’t feel as pressing when she has not been able to sleep in the past three days.

“Then you should go home with Mom, we have all sorts of soup in our cupboard!” He suggests decisively. “Please… Lexa, I promise you. Mom makes everything better.”

There is truth to the little boy’s statement, Lexa has no doubt. “But Aden…”

“No buts! Mom won’t mind.”

Clarke can practically hear the wheels turning in his head, trying to fix her a date night with Lexa. Warmth spreads around her cheeks, she hopes that her eagerness to have the house alone tonight was not that obvious to her mother and son. But all naughty thoughts evaporate as she looks at Lexa’s hunched profile. Protective and worry churn in her stomach. The cabin is unendearingly hot and humid without good circulation. Lexa can’t possibly get good rest in this condition. She truly wants to take the woman home, not for her own benefits but Lexa’s. It doesn’t feel right to barge in, drag her out of bed, then leave her the state she found her in. Lexa gives her a look, a little lost and a little scared, so she finally nudges. “C’mon, you heard the boss man.” She helps pick out some clothes and a pair of socks, and herds the woman and her dog into the truck.

On the muddy, bumpy ride to her house, Clarke keeps casting glances at the silent woman. The loll of the drive and the breeze through the cracked window almost put Lexa to sleep a few times, her eyelids drooping and her head tilting forward. It makes her want to drive like this forever.

The truck rolls to a slow stop in front of the house, Hades obediently jumps off the back and occupies himself in the kennels. “Sweetie, we’re here.” Clarke reaches over to gently squeeze Lexa’s hand. They only part momentarily when they slide out each side door, then their hands come together in a tangle again when they walk up the porch.

“Sorry I’m not much of company today.” Lexa whispers guiltily as she is seated on the dinner table, Clarke rummaging through her cupboards for some easy to fix dinner.

Clarke drops the pot, hurrying around the table. “Don’t be silly.” She cups Lexa’s jaw, and dips down to kiss her lips chastely. “You don’t feel well, it’s not your fault.”

“Actually… I wasn’t sick.” Her whisper becomes even lower, “I’m sorry, it’s just that, I haven’t been getting much sleep.” She looks up through dense lashes at the blonde for a reaction, but all she sees is patience and kindness. Clarke doesn’t press for her to confess anything, but it makes her want to pour her heart out even more. So she swallows the lump in her throat and tries to explain anyway. “Anya called, and we started to talk about some things… stuff that I haven’t given a lot of thoughts to in a while now. I know I’ve tried not to dwell on the past, but,” she chuckles weakly, “it’s proven to be a little harder than just shutting it all out.”

Only then Clarke inquires, “is it stuff from combat?”

“More or less. It’s not the things that I remember…” she shakes her head, “they are violent and
scary, but I’ve learned to work through them. It’s the things that I’ve forgotten, or I don’t want to confront, if that makes sense.”

“Of course, Lex, you’ve been through a lot of trauma, so of course it makes sense that you’d want to block out those memories.”

“I just can’t help this feeling, it’s something important I’m forgetting. What if… what if I’ve done something terrible, or that I should’ve been responsible? I try and I try to figure what it is but I hit a wall with every turn.” She feels dread and frustration once again bubble beneath her breastbone, and her stomach sours. “I’m sorry, I don’t know how to explain it better, and I don’t think I’m ready to talk about it…yet.” Lexa feels inadequate, her vocabulary not sophisticated enough to convey even a tenth of what she means.

“You don’t have to apologize, Lex. Jacob…” Clarke tries to not wince at the name, and continues with a hint of shiver in her voice, “Jacob struggled, after his first tour. He wasn’t ready to talk for a long time, and it felt like he had more in common with his buddies than with us. But, life went on, and he eventually did come to me. Even though I couldn’t possibly imagine the things he told me, it helped him to share.” She reaches out and runs her thumb over Lexa’s knuckles and the half moon shaped scar adorning her pinky. “Take as much time as you need, Lexa. I’m here when you’re ready.”

Lexa nods sincerely.

Clarke mirrors her, and stands to continue her rummaging through the cupboard. “Now, please let me feed you.”

That coaxes out a weak laugh from the brunette. They quickly decide on chicken noodle soup and crackers, just like the boy suggested.

Warm soup in her belly and sweat dried off her skin, Lexa feels her eyes grow heavy and unfocused like she did on the car ride. She puts up a fight, citing all the chores left unattended during her two days of absence. To appease her, Clarke runs off to feed the dogs their last meal of the day, and comes to usher her upstairs to the bedroom.

There is a slight nervousness that stirs in her chest, for this is the first time Lexa spends a night in her room. They haven’t found a chance to even just hang out in this room before, Aden’s always been around. Clarke feels somewhat assured by her decision to change the bedsheets and put away laundry earlier. Her room is spacious and tastefully decorated, with a large window overseeing the property and an abundance of natural light. The furniture could be updated a tad more modern in her opinion, but Abby stubbornly holds onto her worldly inheritance from the English Oak dressers and bed frames to various china sets. She sprayed air freshener this morning, and with the ceiling fan humming away on low setting, the room is surely to be comfortably cool. Pushing the door open, she finds it satisfying everything is exactly how it should be.

Except when their hands break apart, and she turns to assess Lexa’s reaction, she sees uncertainty settling in the wide green eyes after an almost deer-in-headlight kind of panic fleets away.

Lexa takes a deep breath. She schools her expression to something akin to neutral, and gingerly sits on the edge of the bed. The hair on the back of her neck stands under the swishing of the fan. Her bones suddenly feel icy, and she lets out a shiver. “Maybe… maybe I should take the guest room tonight.”

“Lexa, what’s wrong?” Is it too much too soon? Does Lexa not feel safe after sharing? Clarke says in a soft voice after a long pause with no reply. “You know you’re safe here with me, right?
Nobody can hurt you.”

“Yes.”

She notices when Lexa puts her hand on the back of her neck and rubs up and down anxiously, so she gently threads her hands in the thick curls, overlapping with Lexa’s. “You can trust me, Lexa.”

“I do trust you.” The small confession slips out, and Clarke feels like she can breathe again.

“Can you tell me what’s bothering you?”

“Gosh, I feel so stupid.” Lexa puts her head in her palm. “It’s the ceiling fan. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I’m not scared of you, or your emotions, Lexa.”

Lexa’s lips pull in a downward motion in a bitter remark, “maybe you should be.” As soon as she says it, she feels incredibly juvenile and dramatic. “I’m sorry, I’m being a cunt.”

Slightly taken aback by the harsh word coming out of such a gentle person, Clarke doesn’t let herself react. She can feel the resistance wearing off, and the last layer of the tough facade cracking. “It’s okay, Lex, tell me what happened with the fan.”

Lexa sits a little straighter, and stops fidgeting, folding her hands together on her thighs. “I was staying at my Uncle Titus and Aunt Nia’s home when I came back…” She tells the story in a small voice, “we are not close, and their children are kind of bratty…”

Clarke listens silently. Lexa didn’t deserve the mistreatment from her relatives. She is glad that they live so far away, otherwise she can’t promise not to run her truck over these awful people.

“I guess I fell asleep under the ceiling fan. And it felt so much like a chopper flying over my head. The stupid little boy sneaked in and startled me out of a violent dream. I really could’ve hurt him, you know.” She peers at the blonde, half hoping that Clarke wouldn’t see her any differently, half expecting her to call her selfish, to accuse her of endangering Aden, to reconsider having her so closely involved in his life. She’d understand, really, and respect a mother’s instinct to protect her child.

But Clarke stands up, walks up to the wall and flicks off a switch on the wall. “So, we use the AC.” The ceiling fan swooshes around for a few more minutes, and slows down to a sluggish back and forth motion before stilling altogether.

Lexa is so surprised she doesn’t even notice hot tears rolling down her cheeks, leaving cold trails behind.

Clarke’s heart breaks loudly, but her voice is firm. “Lexa, I trust you.”

Green eyes flicker down.

“I trust you that you won’t hurt us.” She continues with conviction. “You care so much about me, and about Aden, don’t you?”

A small nod.

“When I see you with Aden, I know he’s never been safer. You’re so protective, and patient. He loves you.” Clarke sits down on the bed, against the headboard this time, and pats the space beside
her. When Lexa carefully climbs up next to her, she pulls her into an embrace, stroking her hair reassuringly. “The places you’ve been, things you’ve gone through, those are all your stories, and a part of who you are. So what, if they’re not all perfect and shiny and happy? You’re still this amazing, incredible, beautiful woman. I’m not gonna push you away, ok?”

Lexa feels her heart drop back into her chest cavity with a thud. “Ok.” Her bottom lip trembles as she looks into the soft blue eyes, but she doesn’t break away this time.

Clarke leans in and kisses away the tremble. It is meant to be a short peck, but with each nudge and pull of warm flesh, their limbs become entwined, their bodies flush against each other. They end up lying on their sides, noses pressed together, trading gentle kisses and gentler whispers.

The last trace of agony fades away Lexa finds her head growing light but her body heavy.

Clarke notices the green eyes drooping with her fingers scratching softly at the baby curls at Lexa’s nape. “Let me hold you tonight?”

“Clarke, I—” Lexa starts, but she doesn’t object. This is her life now, she basks in Clarke’s scent, with a woman she trusts. A new nervousness rises in her stomach, and it simmers and bubbles, growing hot and fast. At last, she can no longer press it down. “I’m in love with you.”

A surprised whimper catches in her throat. Clarke blinks a few times to the moisture gathering in her eyes. Without a second thought, she replies, “I’m in love with you too.” Her heart soars and cheers. Finally, she thinks, that she no longer need to harbor her little secret in fear of rejection.

Lips tilt into a smile. Lexa scoots closer and buries her face in the crook of Clarke’s neck. Golden strands of hair tickle her nose, but she can’t find the strength to move. Before her eyes fall shut and she finally succumbs to a deep slumber, everything is warm, and soft, and safe.

It’s her one night in the sun.

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**Chapter End Notes**

If you haven't heard of the artist LP, please check her out! She is a queer singer-songwriter, and so so talented. I listened to this song for about 20 thousand times writing this chapter.

Also, sorry it took so long for me to update again. I’ve decided to attend UBC for a Master's degree in Public Health in Vancouver, and been busy preparing. So if anyone out there is in the area, hit me up!
As their relationship grows, Clarke and Lexa discover a few adventures in their sex life. Ranya also makes a comeback.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 12 Who would’ve known

August 11th

She comes to the same way she drifted off, wrapped inside a blanket of warmth and pleasant smells. It feels late, maybe eight or nine in the morning, she knows by the sunshine invading her closed eyes and beating on her skin. She sighs in content, and twirls a piece of hair that is tickling her face around her finger.

Clarke has been awake for about an hour now, but she is happy just to hold Lexa in the ever changing lights and shadows. “Morning.” She combs her fingers through the thick braids and working out some little tangles in them. When Lexa doesn’t respond, she chuckles and tugs just a bit harder, “I know you’re awake.”

Mewing like a satiated kitten, Lexa burrows closer into her neck. “Mmmm—morning. What time is it?”

“That tickles.” Clarke giggles when hot breath blows over her hair, “it’s nine forty-five.”

Green eyes shoot wide open in surprise. Has she really been asleep for twelve hours? “What day is today?” As soon as she asks, she hears the laugh rumbling in Clarke’s chest. She rubs her eyes and peers up at the woman lying beside her. Clarke has the sweetest smile and bluest eyes. Lexa marvels as she sees her own reflection in them, and she realizes that nobody has ever looked at her like that, like she is desired, cherished, and loved.

Uh-oh. The warm swirling in her tummy intensifies again. “Thank you.” I love you, I love you, I love you.

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Uh-oh. The warm swirling in her tummy intensifies again. “Thank you.” I love you, I love you, I love you.

“Of course.” As much as she enjoys the morning snuggles, Clarke knows that the dogs are probably clawing at the cages by now. She gives Lexa a kiss on her cheek and slips out of bed to get a start on her day.

They don’t really talk about the night before, but there is a quiet understanding between them.

And like the quiet understanding, there is a quiet buzz of energy in Lexa’s body. She feels like herself, maybe even from years ago, fresh faced and not burdened by aches in her beaten joints and heavy soul. She works up a sweat sorting away all the chores that she fell behind on. Clarke, who
is pampered by Lexa doing the hard labor on the farm and not inclined to spend hours in the heat, sits on a stump outside the barn and does some accounting work. She spends at most half the time doing actual work, though, the other half enjoying the view before her.

“I thought,” Lexa says between labored breaths, “the reason you came out here, is to help me stow the garden supplies.”

“How, I had the intention to do that… but you look hot doing that all by yourself, babe.” Clarke teases with a cheeky smile.

Lexa is about to retort when a phone call interrupts them.

“It’s Mom.” Clarke picks up and says a few “okay’s” before hanging up. A grin creeps on her face as she tucks the phone back into her pocket.

“What is it?”

“Mom’s getting picked up by Aurora after her shift, and I guess they’re going in town to shop for some last minute stuff for the wedding.” She ditches her folder and pencil on the tree stump and saunters over, leaning against the door of the barn, “which means, it’ll be just the two of us today.”

“Oh?” Lexa pretends to be unaffected by the news, but her voice betrays her, turning dry and coarse all of a sudden. “So what are we going to do, with just the two of us?”

Clarke saunters inside, squeezing her body between Lexa’s and the low shelves where potting soil and fertilizer bags are sorted in respective cubicles. She steals the organic mix from Lexa and squeezes it in with the rest of its kind. “Well, I could help you with this.”

“It would’ve been very helpful. But that was the last bag.” Lexa smooths her hands down her pants, wiping away the sweat.

“Hmmmm… I wonder what else we could be doing. A two-person activity…” She walks two fingers on Lexa’s shoulder, and hikes up her neck, to toy with her earlobe distractedly. “What are you thinking?”

Her feigned nonchalance quickly breaks. Lexa gets hold of Clarke and draws her in, until their foreheads touch and their lips are a whisper apart. “I’ve been wanting to do this…”

There isn’t time for a small gasp, as it is drowned out by the sighs when wet flesh press together in a heated kiss. Clarke wraps her arms around Lexa’s neck when she feels strong hands roam underneath her butt and behind her thighs. In a light swoop, she is hitched up on top of the short shelf. Her legs hook behind Lexa’s waist, almost squeezing her in. Each breath gets hotter and heavier under the trail of kisses. Her hips rock up as she tries desperately to grind her center against Lexa’s stomach. Realizing soon that the material of her panties can only provide limited pleasure, she quickly reaches down to undo the zipper on her shorts.

“Wait wait…” Lexa mumbles with her lips pressed against supple skin, “I want to… take you to bed… and make love to you.”

It is an incredibly sweet sentiment. Clarke feels her heart melt and swoon. But that doesn’t deter her from tugging her shorts down in a swift motion. “We have all day for that. I need you to take me right now.”

Lexa doesn’t need to be told twice, sinking to her knees and planting open-mouthed kisses dangerously close to her target. She explores the little cotton piece protecting Clarke’s modesty,
finding it rapidly becoming soaked under her finger pads. So she naughtily rakes her middle finger roughly against the clothed slit, eliciting a loud groan and a tremble from her blonde goddess.

“Lex— such a tease.” Clarke catches her hand for a moment, but then releases it, as if she can’t decide if it was working too fast or too slow. Eventually, she decided to find purchase with one hand gripping the edge of the shelf, the other threading in Lexa’s chestnut curls. She puts the slightest pressure on the back of Lexa’s head, angling her closer and closer to where she needs her most.

Lexa takes the hint and pushes aside the piece of cotton. She almost gets a head rush from the heady scent from the glistening lips. It reels her in like the center of a flower to a worker bee. She takes a long, hard lick up, sending Clarke into another shiver.

It is so, so different from their first time together. This is so much dirtier, and vulgar, and salacious… Lexa feels lewd, but also intoxicated. Who would’ve known… she thinks to herself, not being a perfectly gentle and proper lover can be so damn exhilarating.

Her tongue quickly finds the bundle of nerves that carries an obscene amount of pleasure. Clarke’s thighs are tensing up against her ears and under her palms. And she zones in even harder, as if in a trance.

Clarke isn’t even making sounds anymore—they rise up high in her chest but are caught in her rapid, labored breaths. The white hot pressure builds and builds with each lick, and tingles shoot up to the top of her head, down to the tips of her toes. She can only helplessly rock against Lexa’s mouth, greedy for her imminent release.

Lexa can tell the amount of tension that her action has caused, in need to be let out. She finally relents and switches from harsh licks to sucking.

Her mouth slacks into a silent scream, and colors burst behind her eyelids. Her calves are clenching so hard she fears that they will cramp. But there is no time for silly concerns as such, her orgasm takes hold, setting the nerve fibers in her body alight. The tightly wound band finally snaps loose, and the flood rushes through the gate. Her limbs are flailing, she is surely to slide off the surface if it wasn’t for Lexa’s strong hold.

Lexa laps at the gush of salty nectar eagerly, but her hands are gentle as she strokes across the sore muscles in Clarke’s legs. She attentively guides her over the aftershocks, and eases up when Clarke becomes too sensitive. Then her kisses are mostly dedicated to the marks she left on the pale inner thighs.

“Come here.” Clarke coos in a broken voice. She smiles at Lexa’s dazed look when she rises up to her eye level. “That, was the most intense orgasm I’ve ever had.” She kisses the grin blossoming on Lexa’s face, “and I think you deserve more of the same.”

“Mmmm…” Lexa is quite intrigued by the prospect of being pleasured. She doesn’t protest when their cuddle is cut short by Clarke jumping off the shelf. She laughs quietly at the blonde when she kicks off her shorts altogether, but somewhat fixes her panties.

Clarke enjoys a newfound confidence in her half nakedness as she grabs Lexa’s hand, and trudges across the field, leading them into the house.

As soon as they reach the privacy of her room, Clarke pushes Lexa against her closet, and latches her mouth on the pulse point of the elegant column of her throat, tasting the salt rolling down in drops from her jaw. Hands scratching over the taut stomach, Clarke revels in the high of feeling of
rippling, sweaty skin. She sneaks one hand under the band of Lexa’s sports bra, and grazes the hardening tip of her nipple.

“Jesus…” Lexa exhales shallowly, taking long sips of air. She finds Clarke’s shoulders for leverage as the blonde ravishes her with sweet torture. The hair on the back of her neck stand when Clarke pushes her top up completely to expose her chest to the cool air, and a flash of teeth greets her breast.

In a disorienting push and pull of shirt and pants, they stumble to the bed and fall together. Clarke quickly establishes her dominance again, pushing Lexa gently into the comforter. She hovers on top, peppering kisses on her cheek and jaw. Her hair spills forward to form a curtain beside her face, she pushes it behind her ears. “I want to feel you.” She murmurs, almost pleading in her voice. It draws a small whimper from her lover.

“Yes, please…” Lexa knows how utterly vulnerable she is right now, under the restraint of the blonde’s weight. She takes a second to recognize it, how safe and assured she feels, surrounded by Clarke’s softness, Clarke’s scent, Clarke’s tenderness.

As if reading the emotions passing through the green eyes in a split second, Clarke slows. “I’ve got you, sweetheart. It’s okay.” She helps her girlfriend out of the last of her clothing. The sight of Lexa’s nakedness makes her pause, even though she’s already seen it once before. Her perfectly pert breasts bejeweled with dark rosy colored nipples, her flat stomach and the lines of her abs made apparent with each deep breath, her prominent hipbones jutting out starkly… and the marks, discolored and raised unevenly around her ribs, white scars of different sizes and shapes, some more fainted than others. Clarke wants to know the stories behind each and every one of them, if Lexa ever would be ready to share. For now, she can only settle on worshiping the expanse of her skin, and taste the trails left behind by drops of sweat

Under the intense stare, Lexa becomes slightly shy. Her arms draw in together to cover herself. But when Clarke pulls her hands away and holds them next to her head, she doesn’t resist.

Clarke flattens her palm against Lexa’s chest, and smoothes down, until she wraps an arm around Lexa’s thigh, prompting her to open up.

Lexa complies. She holds her breath awaiting the first contact, feeling the pulsing ache between her legs in the most intimate way. When Clarke bends down, landing a nip on the inside of her thigh, following the swirl of a hot tongue, she gasps, gripping the lithe hand tightly in hers.

Clarke wriggles her wrist, needing both her hands free to make love to her girlfriend. She is set free quite easily. Stroking the strong muscles under one hand, she uses the other to part the woman’s lower lips. She doesn’t rush in, still loitering at the soft skin, and massaging the swollen flesh and pulling lightly on the hood. Her thumb nearly brushes over the little reddened pearl yet not indulging it.

It leaves the brunette a squirming mess. Her hips buck, riding into the mattress for any kind of friction, then lifting off the bed seeking attention. Lexa is blushing a bright shade of pink, feeling herself drip with eagerness. “Clarke… please…”

A satisfied smirk creeps up the corner of her mouth. Clarke gathers an air of confidence, and lets her thumb glide over Lexa’s overexcited clit. After an anticipated jerk, she pushes further down, and wets her finger around the tender opening.

“Fuck… oh my fucking god…” Lexa muffles her swearing into her arm.
Encouraged by how vocal Lexa is being, Clarke plants a small kiss on top of the soft brown curls. She rolls her tongue over the small bud. The scent and taste are so much Lexa, musky, but mellow, salty at first, but with the sweetest aftertaste. An unquenched thirst rumbles in her chest. Her tongue darts out to lick up and down, gathering the slick seeping out of her lover, and eventually zoning in on the small bud of nerve endings.

When Clarke’s finger enters her, Lexa is all but dissolving into a puddle of want. Gravity loses its usual pull, and she flies to a height that nothing in the world can confine her, her only tether being Clarke. She is a willing puppet, her bodying performing whatever her master intends. “Clarke… Clarke!” She speaks her name as if it is a prayer, for mercy from her goddess.

“Shhh… I’ve got you, baby.”

“I’m gonna come.” Lexa blurts out, surprising herself. But the wariness of being too audacious is quickly forgotten when Clarke rewards her with more heavy petting, “shit, I’m gonna come!” And with the slightest encouragement, gentle scratches on the soft spongy spot, she does.

Clarke moans at the feeling of soft inner walls rippling, and clenching down her finger, nearing pushing her out. She licks and sucks and kisses, determined to take care of Lexa the way she was taken care of. “It’s alright, sweetie.” Lexa’s release is fresh on her tongue, and her trembling goes on for a long time underneath her hands. When the last of her orgasm rolls off and her muscles relax, Clarke eases her finger out and climbs up, pampering Lexa’s body with nips here and there.

Lexa’s lips quiver despite the smile. She brings a hand over her eyes. On a physical level, it is as explosive as it can be, neurons releasing a surge of dopamine, synapses lightening like fireworks, the high is intensely beautiful. However good it feels, though, it doesn’t compare to the effect on her emotions. Even with all of her flaws, her insecurities and troubled past, she is treated like she is good, deserving, worshiped. Something wet hits her palm.

Clarke takes her hand and guides it away, catching a sliding tear with her lips. “It’s okay, sweetheart.” She scoots closer, and kisses her eyelids and nose bridge, “it’s alright.”

Each beat of her heart is drumming out the three-word sentence. I love you, I love you, I love you. She doesn’t hesitate to say the words this time.

“I love you too.” Clarke smiles contently. She peels off the remaining pieces of clothes and drags the cover over them to snuggle.

“Mmm wait,” Lexa kicks off the corner of the comforter and rolls on top of her girlfriend, “I’m not done with you yet.” Her hands proceed to rake over ticklish spots on Clarke’s sides, inflicting squirms and giggles from her lover.

Their shared laugh bubbles and boils over, filling the bedroom like the overpowering sunlight on this particularly hot summer day. The sounds of lovemaking and hushed murmurs of love and devotion last well into the afternoon, only to be interrupted by Abby and her posse’s boisterous entrance to the house. They make a mad scramble for their clothes and Lexa all but tries to sneak out from the second floor window like a teenager caught redhanded. After an amused look on Abby’s face and some awkward exchange of pleasantry in the hallway, Lexa and Clarke steal out of the house. They look at each other in comical relief, and burst into giggles once out of their guests’ earshot.

There is a soreness in her belly from their tireless lovemaking and tears in her eyes from laughing so hard. Lexa thinks she’s never felt so light.
August 15th

With a sign in hand, chicken scratched over it were Anya and Raven’s names, Lexa welcomes her friends from the tiny regional airport. She can imagine by the green look on Raven’s face that the small plane ride was a bumpy one.

Still, Raven is Raven. “I made it, motherfuckers!” She throws herself in Lexa’s arms, and exclaims loudly, in spite of the disapproving looks from the few fellow passengers with meek Midwestern features and sporting holy cross jewelries.

Anya follows shortly behind with their checked luggages. She wraps her friend in an one-armed hug, then proceeds to shove bags big and small in Lexa’s general direction.

“Good to see you guys.” Lexa has to shake her head at the amount of things they packed, even being told specifically not to. But her spirit cannot be dampened, not when her friends are so excited to meet her girlfriend.

“So… when are we going to meet Clarke?”

“Is she gonna come with us on our bar crawl?”

“Are we going to her house first?”

They bombard Lexa with questions as soon as they arrive at the cabin. Having recovered from the flight, Raven is already dumping the content of her luggage on Lexa’s bed, and digging through her various outfits to change into.

“Yes, she very kindly agreed to come with, and yes, we will have to pick her up, since I’m chaperoning you two in her car.” Lexa can hardly contain the grin creeping on her face. She doesn’t know how to put it in words, but the dynamic of her relationship with Clarke has changed after their night together at the blonde’s house, for the better, of course. They are bolder and more adventurous in their intimate moments, getting to know what each other likes, and dislikes, breaking barriers and setting boundaries. Her body buzzes with energy at the anticipation of spending a girls’ night out where she can see a new side of Clarke after maybe a few shots.

When Clarke steps off her porch in a low-cut, form-fitting dress with blue sequins and spaghetti straps, Lexa lets her own ego inflate in front of her friends. Anya digs her elbow in her ribs and murmurs a “well done”, while Raven hoots and hollers.

Their introduction is as informal as it gets. Clarke is immediately taken to Raven when the girl almost headlocks her in a hug. Anya looks slightly intimidating, in her fierce smoky-eye makeup and all black outfit, but the easy way she rests an arm on Lexa’s shoulder and the tender look she gives Raven, Clarke thinks that they will get along just fine.

“Hello gorgeous.” Lexa leans over and greets her with a kiss as soon as they are seated in the truck. She admires the warm flush to Clarke’s cheeks.

“You clean up nice.” Clarke teases, “and I like this darker look on you, very mysterious.” Her hand finds Lexa’s taut bicep exposed by her sleeveless top, and scratches softly down the length of her arm.

It pleases Lexa knowing her choice in the loose tank top and jean shorts piques her girlfriend’s interest. Just as she is to chase after for a deeper kiss, Anya clears her throat and comments, “thanks to me, Lexa can’t do makeup for shit, she’d ended up a raccoon without my help.”
Rolling her prettily made-up eyes, Lexa warns Clarke about her friends’ penchant for revealing all her shortcomings, but she does it with a smile.

After a 30 minute ride to the city filled with chitchat and laughter, they finally find a parking spot and walk the short distance to their first bar. Upon their entrance, they can feel curious looks thrown their way. They may have attracted the attention of several bachelors congregated in various corners. Luckily, a little display of affection often is enough to ward off unwanted drinks from men. The pairs settle into an easy conversation over a jug of beer.

However, the second bar sees more brazen drunks than the first, sending drink after drink toward their direction. They decide to ditch it fast and head toward the night club where Lincoln works and promises a good time.

At the bar where Jasper is currently stationed, perched a man chatting with the bartender. Clarke immediately recognizes him as Cage, Finn’s detective friend and long-time confidant. She turns on her heels and grabs Lexa’s wrist, trying to lead her away.

“What’s wrong baby?”

Before she can answer, she hears her name in his crude voice. “Hey Clarke Griffin!”

Lexa whips around to find the man in silver suit approach. His hair is slightly out of place, and his tie loose around his neck, indicating that he’s had a few drinks in and some sordid encounters for the night. She bodychecks him from standing in front of Clarke.

Nevertheless he scoots even closer, looming over the women. “Clarke, long time no see!”

“Cage.” She acknowledges him reluctantly.

“So, who’s your friend here?” He clinks his glass of dark liquid to Lexa’s water glass, “you look familiar… aren’t you that dog trainer?”

“Lexa Woods.” Not giving him the satisfaction of being offended, she calmly pushes his glass away.

Sensing trouble, Anya and Raven set down their drinks and get up from their stools.

“Yeah, yeah, I remember you! You were the one sniffin’ round town and stealing my boy’s girl. Job well done though!” Cage scratches his stubble and clicks his tongue, “never thought you’d end up with a dyke, Clarke.”

“Cage, leave us alone.” Clarke glares at him.

Raven is less polite about it. She pushes past her friends and steps into his personal space, pressing her index finger to his chest, “you need to piss off, before Sergeant Woods and Sergeant Forrest beat your ass into a pulp that your mama won’t recognize.”

He takes a step back and gives Lexa a once-over, seeing the wiry muscles on her tattooed arms, then he takes a glance at Anya, sporting a even more severe look. Realizing that his words don’t intimidate them, and he is no physical match to either of the women, Cage throws his hands in the air. “Hey, hey, I’m just playing.” He then gives Clarke a concerned look, “you seem to be having a good night. But I’ve got to let you know, your ex-husband is having a lousy time. Finn’s been drinking, you should know. He’s got a fire to his ass these days.”
“He’s always drinking.” Clarke doesn’t take his bait, “now play somewhere else.”

He smiles greasily at Lexa. “You know, Sergeant Woods, I’ve heard all about your little adventure from the good bartender here.” He cocks his head in Jasper’s direction, who is watching the scene unfold keenly and nervously but quickly looks away when Lexa catches his eye. “I’ll dig up some dirt on you.” With a wink, he saunters off and disappears into the crowd.

“Ugh, pig.” Raven slams down a shot once peace is restored, “we should’ve gotten Lincoln to bounce him out of here.”

“Pay him no mind, Raven, we paid outrageous money for the drinks, at least we gotta dance.” Clarke is determined to be a good host and show her new friends a good time. She gives Lexa a peck on the lips and holds out her arm for Raven, leading her to the dance floor like she’s seen Anya do.

Anya lingers behind, eyes following her girlfriend and making sure she’s navigated the crowds safely. Then she turns to Lexa. “She’s a keeper.”

“Yes, she is.” She nods with a dopey smile.

“What did he mean by dirt on you?”

Her smile falters momentarily. Lexa does not know. The only thing she can think of is the picture that she’s shown Jasper, the bartender, who happened to know Clarke socially and gave her the address all those months ago. She’s a law-abiding, decorated veteran, surely he was just saying that to save face. “They’re just homophobes, but what’s new.”

“Lexa, if you want me to fuck them up, both Finn and that douche, I can make it look like an accident.”

Her seriousness makes Lexa snort, “no, Anya, they're cops.”

“Whatever, just let me know.” Anya shrugs in her true fashion as if threatening to beat someone up is no big deal, and throws back her drink. ‘I’m off!’ Exclaims loudly as she slips into the pool of dancing bodies, surely to reconnect with Raven.

Lexa doesn’t consider herself much of a dancer, so she sits at the bar quite contently, watching the girls have a good time. Clarke is laughing when the small brunette makes seductive faces and silly moves. As Anya joins them, Raven twirls toward her arms and shamelessly grinds on her girlfriend, and she pulls Clarke in from behind, making herself the meat of a blonde sandwich. Under the influence of too many shots and deafening music, Clarke sways her hips to the beat in a mesmerizing way that leaves Lexa a tad dizzy just from watching.

The girl on girl on girl action quickly attracts the attention of several club goers, and the bodies around them seem to gravitate closer and closer. When the pulsing electronic tune transitions into somewhat of a slower, pop song, Clarke loosens her hands on Raven’s waist. She smiles to see Anya planting soft kisses along the curve of Raven’s neck and shoulder. Her first instinct is to search for her girlfriend. But she turns around and a tall woman with chopped, spiky mullet greets her with what can be interpreted as a charming grin, extending an invite to dance together. Though a bit forward and wears way too much cologne, spiky mullet seems decent enough. Clarke feels flattered that for the first time since having Aden, she lets her wilder side comes out, and it has garnered interest from total strangers. So she faces spiky mullet, continues moving to the tempo. Spiky mullet takes it as a sign to acquaint herself, and makes an attempt to put her hands on Clarke’s hips, which Clarke gently brushes off. The woman, however, enjoys what she deems a
tease and chase, so she presses a bit closer.

Clarke is just about to ask her to keep more distance, she feels the steady, strong, familiar hands wrap around her midriff. Lexa declares her presence with a open-mouth kiss on her jaw, quashing the admirer’s hopeful grin.

Not bothering to find out spiky mullet’s reaction, Clarke melts into the embrace. She giggles when Lexa’s hot breath tickles her ear and she whispers a “hello beautiful.” She turns and burrows her nose in Lexa’s shoulder, returning a kiss on the sharp collarbone there. “Jealous?”

Lexa purses her lips in a mocked offense. “Jealous? I wasn’t jealous, just seemed like the right song to jump in.”

“Hmm, the right song huh.” Clarke peppers a trail of kisses along the brunette’s neck, then nips lightly on her earlobe. “Do you even know who sings it?”

“No.” Lexa easily gives in and confesses, “I can’t even dance. Of course I was jealous when my girlfriend is looking so damn sexy.” She lets her hands travel south and cups at the blonde’s dress-clad ass, kneading the flesh with clear intention. A hiss escapes her lips when Clarke digs short nails in the skin on her exposed arms.

“Keep talking like that, you make me want to do stuff to you.” Clarke purrs, her entire body humming pleasantly, warm wetness seeping through her panties.

“Mmm, what kind of stuff?” Lexa wedges her thigh in between Clarke’s legs and starts a purposeful slow grind, making the woman shudder at the pleasure brought by this sinfully audacious move.

“Why don’t you find out yourself?” Suddenly, the blonde wiggles free, tugging on Lexa’s hand.

Lexa found herself hunting down the glimpse of golden hair through a jungle of flailing bodies. Wading through shadows and spotlights, they evade suspicious looks from their friends and arrive at the heavy door that leads in a deserted alley with a dead end. There is cigarette smoke in the air, and the muffled music sends faint buzz through the wall.

Clarke surveys the alley, and tugs Lexa into the small shadow casted by building’s fire escape, obscuring view from the street. Pushing her until they hit the wall, she kisses her hard and fast.

“Fuck, I can’t believe we’re doing this.”

“We need to be quick.” She shushes Lexa, biting on the plump, kiss-swollen lip. Her hand confidently finds the fly on Lexa’s shorts and slips it all the way down. It gives her more than enough room to sneak three fingers in. What greets her fingertips is a hot, slippery mess. It puts a wicked smile on her face. “You’re so wet.”

“That’s what you do to me…” Lexa moans, trying to keep herself quiet, but she can hardly stifle a small shriek when Clarke nudges her underwear out of the way and pinches her overexcited clit with precision.

“I just want to fuck you.”

“Yes, yes please…” Dripping with want, Lexa doesn’t question her own arousal elicited by the dirty talk. The profanity and danger of such an act in a semi public place add to that arousal like gasoline on fire.
It is easy, way too easy to push in two fingers at this point. Clarke enjoys how the soft, slick opening avariciously sucks up her fingers up to the hilt. Her thumb beats relentlessly on the small nub that has peaked to its hardest point. She kisses the red flush that rises from the base of Lexa’s small, perfect ear, to her high cheekbone.

“Shit... mmm... c’mere, baby.” Lexa adds pressure to her hands that are cupping the blonde’s ass, and lifts her left thigh slightly to meet the subtle grind of her hips.

Clarke rolls her hips harder, just as greedy for release as her lover is.

“Oh... oh Clarke... harder, I-I’m close...” The sounds of palm meeting wet flesh can be heard over the club music, the way it reverberates in the alley way is near pornographic. Lexa is all but a twitching puddle melting off the wall. And when Clarke finally obliges her demand, thrusting her fingers with a bruising force, Lexa tips over the precipice.

The sight of her lover in such a gorgeous, provocative state undoes her. Clarke feels her thighs clamp around Lexa’s leg as she indulges in her own climax. It doesn’t pass for almost another fifteen seconds, sending shockwaves after shockwaves through her body.

“Oh my fucking god.” Lexa lets out a choked gasp as Clarke withdraws her hand from her still fluttering, wet center.

Chuckling, she lifts up the brunette’s tank top and wipes her fingers across the firm abs, with a flicker of mischief in her eyes, “well, well, well, who would’ve known... guess a little jealousy goes a long way.”

Green eyes squint in mock exasperation. Lexa shakes her head and warns in her broken voice, “you’re in so much trouble tonight, young lady.”

When they reunite with Anya and Raven, who were probably getting their freaks on somewhere equally scandalous, the four decide to call it a night. Clarke insists on taking Lexa home, making up excuses about the rehearsal the next day. Raven teases them with kissing noises, and Anya threatens to “break in” Lexa’s bed, which the brunette suspects will happen one way or another. Anya and Raven don’t keep to their threat though, when Lexa drops them off at the cabin and leaves for Clarke’s house, being utterly exhausted by the terrible journey earlier and the wonderful night out. Even spending the night at an unfamiliar place, they still go through their nightly rituals like an old married couple. Both make a sloppy effort in washing up, then promptly change into comfy pajamas. Raven finds a mindless show on her tablet so Anya can fall asleep to some background noise, and Anya faithfully massages her leg once her brace comes off.

They crawl under the covers together, and trade slow, tender good-night kisses before finding their usual position. Raven drapes her sore leg across her girlfriend and rests her cheek next to Anya’s shoulder, hugging her like a koala bear on eucalyptus tree.

“Ahn?” Raven muses after the lights are off.

“Hmm?”

“Lexa seems really happy now, doesn’t she?”

Anya prints a small kiss on her forehead before murmuring an agreement. “Yes, she does.”

Raven, despite her tiredness and worsening leg pain, is still excited about her new friendship with
Clarke and fascinated by the woman. She rolls up halfway to dangle over Anya’s face. “I mean, I thought Clarke was a bitch to Lexa, but now they’re all lovey-dovey. She seems to be really good for her, too. A single mom on a dog farm, turns out to be the one for Lexa. Who would’ve known!” Then she pecks Anya on the lips again, and drops her chin on Anya’s chest, causing the woman to jerk slightly from the sharp pressure.

Anya chuckles, before letting out a silent sigh. She doesn’t tell Raven about the back-and-forth conversations she’s had with Lexa, or the unease she’s felt with Cage’s appearance, putting a small hiccup to their night. So she wishes really hard that it all stays as simple as Raven puts it. “Yeah, who would’ve known.”

Chapter End Notes

Well well well, who would've known - I am still writing and updating this story!

I know it doesn't seem like it by the pace I'm producing words, but I am still with it and very much intend to see it to the end. This was more or less a filler chapter, before the big conflict, which I am dreading and struggling to write. There will be more drama, and of course resolution and happiness. Just bear with me.
August 17th

The wedding had to be pushed back a few hours, due to the constant downpour from a thick rolling blanket of angry clouds that seemed to have manifested out of nowhere. The forecast doesn’t show sign of a single sunny day in the next two weeks.

Clarke is endlessly thankful that she doesn’t have a finished basement that could be flooded. So instead of getting ready for the wedding, they put the dog kennels inside the barn to keep the animals dry and warm.

A later start time means a longer wait, and Aden is a bundle of nerves. “Hurry up, mom, Lexa! We can’t be late!” He tugs at the purple bowtie neatly arranged on his neck and looks himself over in the mirror one more time. He has been ready for quite a while now, and he is anxious to rehearse the piece that he will be performing with Lexa one more time before setting out, just to be sure.

“It’s okay, bud, we still got plenty of time.”

“I’ll wait for you in the living room!” He runs off, not bothering to scrutinize Clarke’s choice in fashion today.

Clarke worries at her bottom lip for a second, knowing that this performance is nerve-wrecking for him, but at the same time, she is glad that he is willing to take a step and confront his fears of playing in front of a crowd. She has Lexa to thank that for. Looking over at her girlfriend, the frown relaxes on her face, she can’t help but chuckles.

“What?” Lexa fidgets with her collar. The shirt she wears today is a shade of purple, lilac, she thinks. Both she and Aden are technically in the wedding, so they are required to wear clothing that matches the theme, while Clarke has the liberty to wear a stunning blue dress that brings out stunning blue of her eyes.

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“Nothing.” Clarke wraps her arms on Lexa’s waist from behind, looking into the mirror with her, “purple looks good on you.”

“Purple looks weird on me.” Lexa rolls her eyes, feeling ridiculous. “You’re sure this is not strange?” It is her turn to be worried.

“What is?”

“Me, being in the wedding. I don’t actually know either of the two people getting married today.”
Clarke drops a kiss behind Lexa’s ear, careful to not leave a lipstick stain there, even though people probably won’t even notice. “No, sweetie. I think it’s an incredible thing that you’re helping Mom and aunt Aurora with this. And, you know Echo through Anya and Raven. You know Bellamy through us. You know his sister, too. And half of the guests today you’ve seen come to rehearsal the other day. Plus, Aden would never have agreed without you by his side,” she rubs loving circles on Lexa’s hand, “thank you.”

Lexa turns her head to ask for a kiss, which Clarke obliges easily. “Mmm, you’re welcome.”

“Lexa!” Aden calls from downstairs again.

“Coming!” She fixes her collar one last time before making a beeline for the living room.

They all pile in Clarke’s truck, with Anya, Raven, and Lexa in the back row, and Aden on Abby’s lap in the passenger’s seat. The short ride takes more than double its usual time, the country road predictably flooded, muddy waters stretching across fields and bridges. Aden breaks out in a sweat on the drive.

He breathes out a big sigh of relief when they reach their destination on time, and he is in a even better mood when he sees the people filling up the front pews. The two of them are situated in a corner in the back of the church, and it would take some neck twisting for the audience to find them.

Still, some guests are intrigued by this unlikely dual. They whisper amongst themselves, and steal glances at Lexa.

“The ceremony shall begin.” Announced the priest once everyone is situated. The last few late arrivals, Finn and his father included, sneak by the podium, receiving some shushes from other guests.

Lexa knows it is their cue. She arranges her posture, and gives Aden a small nod. Then, when she sees in the corner of her eyes that the boy has also positioned his violin under his chin, she dusts her fingertips across the keys, giving him an eased start.

The piano makes an exquisite hum as if it enjoys the sunlight, rare and sparse these days, filtering through the stained glass, spilling on its lid and rippling across its pins. Lexa’s chestnut curls, too, are lit with different colored fires. Music reverberates hauntingly in the hollowed structure of the church, and the church goers are momentarily bewitched.

When the piano makes its decrescendo, Aden pitches in. His hands are a little shaky, still, so the violin also shudders out a small shrill. In a state of panic, his face grows hot and he feels eyes on him. He drops his hand holding the bow, at loss of what to do.

“It’s alright.” Lexa whispers to him, “we’ll try again.” She plays through the first few bars, then she starts again from the beginning without stopping. It might have sounded odd, but no one seems to doubt her when she does so with undoubted confidence. “This time, play it through with me.” She whispers again at the cue for him. Conveniently, the bride steps out and into the aisle, garnering all the attention from the wedding-goers. People smile and praise how beautiful Echo looks in her hand-stitched white dress and impressive long train.

Echo might have been the most beautiful goddess in the world right now, but Clarke hardly spares her a few distracted glances. She presses her palms together in front of her chest, nervous for her
son. Tears well in her eyes when she sees the subtle exchange between Lexa and Aden, and she just knows that he will do okay.

When the violin tunes in again, it is clear and soft and sweet. It even draws Finn’s attention. His mouth hangs agape when he finds the boy playing by Lexa’s side. Quickly forgotten is the bride’s walk, he twists around to send futile glares to the brunette. He feels almost humiliated, betrayed, his face heating up as a rash appears on his neck. He searches in the crowd for his ex wife, and when he sees her profile, illuminated in the soft church light, he chokes on a suffocating jealousy in his chest. They should have been his, his pride, his joy, his family. When did he become so clueless and foolish to ever let another—a woman—take his rightful place?

When Aden pushes the bow into a final note, his face is warm again, but with excitement this time. He puts down the violin and looks at Lexa, and smiles so bright his eyes twinkle.

Lexa carefully pushes herself away from the instrument and gives him a hug. Over his shoulder, she locks eyes with Clarke.

“Thank you.” Clarke mouths.

She gives her a wink.

It only takes one person discussing the musical performance for them to become the talk of the wedding at the reception.

“That’s Clarke’s girlfriend.” Octavia answers the inquiry from a guest for the twentieth time. “You know, I had no idea you two can play like that. I’m gonna have these two play for our wedding, Linc!” She praises until Aden is blushing.

Lexa jokes that they will start charging a fee.

Spying that the marine officer is occupied with friends old and new, Finn tosses back his liquor. He kicks the mud stuck on the sole of his shoes, pushes pass through a few small crowds and finds Clarke and Abby, who are chattering away with the groom’s mother. He silently grabs the blonde’s forearm and leads her away, Abby’s questioning protest falling on deaf ears.

“What the hell was that?” He demands.

“What the hell was what?”

He vaguely gestures toward Lexa and his son, “why wasn’t I informed about this ‘little performance’? Are you trying to embarrass me on purpose?”

She snatches her arm back from his clutch. “Why would we? You never respected his wishes, never wanted to hear him out, or support what he loves. Are you embarrassed now because you’ve been a lousy father?”

His rash is spreading to his hairline, coloring his cheeks a menacing purple. A vein pops on the side of his temple. “Give me a break, Clarke, you’re too wrapped up in your little homosexual romance to know what is good for my son. One day, you’ll see, I can’t be replaced by her.” He puts an emphasis on the word “homosexual”, hoping the eavesdroppers will be scandalized by this information. However, it doesn’t seem to work, as people just blankly stares at him throwing a tantrum.
“Finn,” Clarke rubs her brows in exhaustion, “no one is going to replace you. You’re Aden’s father. But you need to step up.” Lexa’s done more in a month for Aden than you in a year. She thinks, but doesn’t say it out loud. “Please, you’re drunk, just go home.”

“Is there a problem, Officer?” Lincoln’s shadow looms over him like a boulder. He places a large hand on Clarke’s shoulder, and passes her his glass of champagne, freeing his other hand, knuckles cracking as he fans out his fingers, the veins on the back of his hand thick as ropes. “Should I get you a glass of water?” He asks, his words are gentle, but the rumble of his low voice is formidable.

Finn huffs, but no matter how much he puffs out his chest, he still looks insignificant comparing to this giant of a man. He surveys the room quickly, and finds Lexa and Anya watching the scene from their group, both look about ready to intervene. Other attendees are impassive, or appear mildly inconvenienced. Knowing well that he doesn’t have his usual authority here, Finn gives Clarke one last warning glare before slinking away to the open bar.

“Fucking faggots.” Finn spits and curses under his breath, slumping against the counter and orders another drink. Jasper, who begged Lincoln for the bartend gig, quickly slips in front of him and fills his glass up. So he tips him generously with a five dollar bill. But before he put the money down, he sneers, “you’re not a faggot, are you, Jasper?”

Eyeing the five dollars, Jasper shakes his head dramatically, “no sir! Of course not!” Then he pockets the money when Finn is satisfied by his answer.

“I just, I don’t get it. You don’t take a son from his father! It’s just not right!” Finn exclaims drunkenly after another shot.

“No sir. It certainly isn’t.”

“You agree, right?” Finn throws another five on the counter for Jasper to collect. “I mean, what the fuck does Lexa have that I don’t? She ain’t even got a dick!” He laughs vilely.

Jasper feigns a laugh with him too. “Ya know, she didn’t just stumble on Clarke’s farm by accident.”

“Wait, what?”

Leaning in secretively, Jasper tells him, “yeah, apparently she had a picture of Clarke.”

Finn fishes out a bill, larger this time, a crisp Jackson head. “Tell me more.”

Eyes hooked on the twenty dollar bill, Jasper continues, “so I was bartending downtown, Lexa was there, she had this picture and she was asking everyone about it. Like some serious stalker behavior.” He happily accepts the money and twiddles his fingers, “so, of course I was suspicious, the good citizen that I am, and I told Detective Cage all about it the other day when he stopped by.”

“Oh?” Finn is pleased.

“Should I… should I give him a call and have him pick you up? I mean, it’s worth investigating, what do you say?”

“You know what, you’re a good man, Jasper. Never liked you in high school, but at least you’re not a faggot.” He pats him hard on the shoulder, sending him tumbling to a side. “Do it.”

Jasper beamed a toothless smile at him, pausing a beat to see if he is reaching in his wallet again.
When Finn doesn’t, he turns away and rolls his eyes before dialing Cage’s number for him.

Anya and Raven are thoroughly enjoying the new friends they made. They eagerly agree to have a few drinks after the reception with the other couples, consisting of Monty and Nathan, Harper and Zoe, and Octavia and Lincoln.

“Don’t be a party pooper, Lexa, come out with us.” Raven whines when the brunette gets ready to head back, “bring Clarke too, if you can’t live without lover girl for like ten minutes.”

Lexa shakes her head in amusement, “unlike you lot, we actually have business to attend back at the house.”

“Sorry guys, we really got to catch up with some chores for our clients.” Clarke wraps her arm around her girlfriend, other hand on her son’s shoulder. “The dogs will throw a tantrum without a walk today.”

“Fine, fine, but you better come party with us again, blondie, before we head back home.” Raven wags her finger.

“I won’t disappoint.” Clarke beams. “You sure you’ll be able to catch a ride? Or just give us a call, we can get you later.”

Anya waves her off, “nah, we’ll be fine. There’s no guarantee we’ll even want to be back tonight.” Then they hop in Lincoln’s car and set off for the city.

Bidding a goodbye to the newlyweds, the four of them head back home. It has started to drizzle again, clouds forming a thick blanket to block out the sun, and faint lightening bolts shimmering briefly behind them. They make hurried work to let the dogs out and scrub their poop-filled kennels. They work like a unit, while Abby and Aden busy themselves with making supper. When the work is done, and they rush in Clarke’s bathroom to get cleaned up, Lexa watches their reflections together in the mirror, both soaking wet from the muddy rain water, makeup smearing around their eyes, but laughing at each other. She feels at home.

Later that night, they climb in bed together. It being the second night Lexa’s stayed over, she borrows an old University shirt and a pair of booty shorts from her girlfriend.

Clarke burrows her nose in the brunette’s chest and inhales deeply, then furrows her eyebrows, “you don’t smell like you.”

“But I smell like you.” Lexa replies triumphantly.

Promptly rolling up and straddling the woman, Clarke has an idea to rectify the situation. She palms Lexa’s breasts through the soft cotton material, and thumbs at the peaks, feeling them stand to attention under her caress.

Lexa sneaks her hands under the elastics of Clarke’s pajama bottom, kneading the fleshy cheeks and guiding the curvy hips to gyrate downward, and a warm core to grind against her belly.

The rain has let up finally, and the moon sails through clusters of black clouds, occasionally peeping in from the window. Lexa’s green eyes are a muddy grey under the dim, cool light. They are solemn, and earnest, a multitude of love and devotion in the ripple-less water. No one else had
ever looked at her in such a way that Clarke sometimes thinks that she might drown in this solemn, earnest love. She runs her thumb over Lexa’s plump bottom lip, receiving a kiss on the pad of her thumb. She dips down and kisses her fully. “Thank you.”

Lexa gives her a confused smile, “for what?”

“For helping Mom,” kiss, “for supporting Aden with the performance,” kiss, “for being so unbelievably amazing…” With each kiss, she travels a bit lower, first on the chin, then on her jaw, then on her pulse point. “I’m so lucky to have you.”

Lexa mews and melts, “I’m the lucky one, Clarke.” She shivers when the shirt is pushed up, exposing her bare skin. She reaches the hem and tries to shed it, but her hands are stopped.

“Don’t. Leave it.”

So she lets it bunch up under her armpits, and throws her head back in the pillow when a wet, hot mouth suckles at a nipple. She bucks up her hips when Clarke pulls down her shorts. Goosebumps rise on her skin as the warm tongue swirl and tease, from her naked breast to her sternum, then descends to her navel. Her legs fall open under the blonde’s guidance.

Clarke smooths her hands down the brunette’s thighs, humming pleasantly when she breathes in her unique aroma, practically tasting the salt and honey in the humid air. She shushes her, nose nudging the glistening lower lips, when Lexa gasps and growls.

Lexa has to bite down the back of her hand when a hot tongue parts her swollen lips and zones in on her pulsing clit. The muscles in her legs twitching uncontrollably as she lifts her hips to meet the stroking motion. Her inner walls contract around nothing, leaving her a leaky mess. “This is unfair…” she croaks, getting shushed again by a punitive flash of teeth on her tender flesh.

Gently teasing her lover to receive more of the rewarding sweetness, Clarke feels herself incredibly turned on by the small noises and desperate movements. She grinds her hips against the mattress, taking the edge off for her own aching core.

“Wait… wait wait, Clarke. I want to feel you.” Lexa threads her hand in the blonde hair and tugs her up slightly. “I want to taste you. Please.”

“Mmm… this is me thanking you, baby.” She takes another nice, long lick, keeping her hands on the brunette’s hipbones to pin her down.

Lexa pants heavily, her eyes clouded with desire, a flicker of suggestive smirk shining in them. “You can thank me by giving me what I want.”

Clarke arches an eyebrow, “well, what do you suggest?”

She just gestures for her to turn around on top.

It makes the blonde snort, “well aren’t you a dirty girl?” But she doesn’t protest when Lexa helps her discard her pajamas and underpants.

“Am I now?” Lexa guides her up, spreading her knees and making them rest on each side of her head, almost touching her shoulders. It is quite a sight, Lexa thinks to herself, to have this beautiful woman suspended on top of her, exposed and vulnerable. She grabs a handful of the pale asscheek, and brings her down for a hard kiss on the wet center.

Clarke gives a violent shudder, and instinctively grinds down. Lexa’s tongue feels heavenly,
putting pressure on the spot where she needs her most. She almost loses her balance when two fingers slip inside her and curl against her front wall. In return, she dives back into the honey jar with fervor, adding her a digit to press past the soft opening as well.

They quickly fall into a rhythm, the bed groaning lowly with each thrust and squeaking sharply with each pull. Concerns about waking the other occupants are long forgotten as they indulge in this erotic dance of giving and receiving.

Clarke smiles against her lover as she feels the soft inner walls clench down, sucking in her finger and reluctant of letting go. Lexa is never very loud about her needs, but her little whimpers and shaking body let her know that she is very close to a delicious explosion. So she works fiercely, pumping her hand in and out with a bruising force and lashing her tongue rapidly over the small bundle of nerves. She almost worries that she is being too rough, when Lexa reaches her climax, convulsing, twisting, short nails digging into the supple skin of her thigh.

Somehow Lexa remains faithfully dedicated to bringing Clarke just as much pleasure. Her tongue doesn’t stop tracing tight circles around the red, fat clit, and her fingers pounding deeper and faster, until the room is filled with the obscene noise of her hand slapping against Clarke’s ass.

“Fuck…” Clarke falls forward, her elbows buckling at the intense pressure building behind her pubic bone. She buries her face in Lexa’s lower stomach, and rides Lexa’s face without shame. “I’m gonna cum… Lexa.” She whisper-shouts, bucking her hips wildly and grinding herself harder into the strong hand.

Lexa is more than glad to meet the request, she responds in a raspy voice, “yes, please… let go for me, baby.” She flattens her tongue in anticipation of the sweet eruption. With another great tremble, Clarke orgasms, and with it a stream of salty juice that covers her lips and drips down her chin.

No longer has she the strength to brace herself up, she collapses on top of her lover. She lifts a lazy finger to brush away a sweat drop that threatens to invade her eye. She giggles tiredly when Lexa peppers gentle kisses on the inside of her thigh.

“Don’t fall asleep now, I won’t be able to explain to Aden if he finds us like this in the morning.” Lexa teases, and rolls them over. She laughs quietly when Clarke sags like a doll, barely helping when she straightens themselves out.

She lets out a big yawn, and noses at the rumpled shirt, now saturated with Lexa’s sweat. A smile creeps up her lips as she falls asleep to the smell of rain and mud, woods and grass, and the warm musk that is all Lexa.

August 18th

After catching up with work, she really needs to go back to her little shack. Lexa doesn’t have any clean clothes at Clarke’s house, doesn’t have any of her hair products or toiletries—she does have a toothbrush sitting in the same holder as the blonde’s now. And frankly, she wants to make sure that Raven and Anya have not completely trashed her place. Hades is bounding happily beside her, he knows the way home, and home means reuniting with all of his toys.

They pick the long way. Their usual path is flooded, short bushes all submerged under muddy water, the bridge can only peep out from its waist up, standing in solitude in the middle of an overflowing pond.
Finn watches her trail off the main path from afar, his car parked off the dirt road and behind a lush cluster of greeneries. He slips out of the vehicle once the woman is out of sight, cursing under his breath as he takes a step on the mucky street, his socks instantly wet. He trudges up the driveway and knocks at Clarke’s door. His mouth waters at the smell of whatever roast that is cooking in the oven. He hopes that maybe his ex wife will offer him supper after hearing about what he has to say. Popping a mint in his mouth, Finn wipes the smirk off his face and schools his expressions into a serious frown.

Lexa groans loudly when she sees muddy tire tracks in front of her porch, two sets of dirty footsteps leading inside from them. “I swear to god if I need to mop up after you slobs…”

She yelps lightly when Hades dashes toward the house, nosing up and down the door frame. The coarse fur on his back bristles and his back arches defensively. Once the door is open, he growls viciously and barks lowly, foam and spit forming around his mouth.

She is instantly vigilant. Lexa knows her dog, she knows he would never give such grave warnings if everything is fine. She pokes her head inside. “Raven? Anya?”

No answer.

She calls Anya’s phone first, and is directed to voicemail right away. To her relief, Raven’s phone is still working. The person who picks it up, though, is not who she expected.

“Hello?”

“Uh… where’s Raven?”

“Lexa?” The voice asks, “hey, it’s Zoe Monroe. Raven is on the lake. She left her phone with me.”

Lexa is confused, “what? Is she okay? Is Anya there?”

Zoe laughs into the phone, “yeah, why wouldn’t they be? She and Anya went canoeing with Harper.”

“Did they… do you know if they came home last night?”

“They sure did not. They slept over at Lincoln’s, and we had brunch today, went to the farmer’s market, now they want to try some water sport.” She answers, “I honestly don’t know where Raven gets all her energy. Anya’s having a hard time keeping up with her.”

Lexa can feel chills running down her spine, the hairs on the back of her neck standing at this information. She quickly says thanks to the woman on the phone. Running to the back, she picks out a pair of shears from the pile of tools. With the tools held high in her hand, she gingerly steps inside the threshold, it is lit enough for her to see that there is no one immediately visible.

“Hello?” She calls again. Hades is pressed tightly against her thigh, ears folding backwards and teeth bare.

Still silence.

She goes further inside the house, following the muddy footprints. Aside from a pile of Raven’s
clothes, there isn’t too much clutter inside. It seems that Anya has stowed their luggages into her closet, and they have barely touched anything else beside the bed.

No one is inside.

But she can tell her things are meddled with, especially from the disorganization in the stacks of books that she’d put in alphabetical order against the windowsill, and the crooked way her notebooks stack on top of her laptop. A horrifying realization dawns on her. She runs over to her nightstand, where her bulky Modern Strategies lies.

She picks it up by the spine and shakes it, half praying that the picture will fall out. When it doesn’t, she sifts through the pages anxiously. Her mind is spinning a thousand miles, trying to register what is actually happening. “Fuck.” She runs her hands through her hair, suddenly can hardly breathe as panic squeezes around her heart.

“Hades, stay.” She puts down her fist in a commanding gesture. Hades obediently sits down, despite still worked up and nervous. “It’ll be okay.” Lexa scratches the fur between his big ears, telling herself that more than him. “It’ll be okay, Hades. I got to go, now.” Without catching her breath, she rushes out into the descending darkness, throwing close the door.

Clarke opens her door, eyeing her ex husband suspiciously. “What do you want now, Finn?”

“I need to talk to you.” He reaches into his pocket.

“It’s late, can’t this wait till tomorrow?” She wants to close the screen door. She doesn’t want him here. She wants Lexa here.

But he snifflies stubbornly, “no, Clarke, this is strictly police business.” He brandishes his badge, and pushes her backwards, forcing his way inside. The mud on his boots leaves a trail of black prints on her spotless floor.

“Finn!” Clarke exclaims in exasperation. She puts her hands on her waist, and blocks him from going further in.

He dismisses her with a scowl. “This is for your own good.”

“What is?”

He fishes around in his jacket pocket again, then holds out a picture, close to her face.

At first, Clarke doesn’t recognize herself. It is old, crumbled, dirty, with a peculiar red stain on nearly half of it. She pulls back slightly, so her eyes can focus, and when they do, memories rush back like a hurricane. Her breath catches in her throat.

“Where… where did you get that?” Her hands are shaky when she lifts them, tracing the edge of the old picture. The image of her brother’s youthful, hopeful face flashing through her mind as she remembers the day she gave him the photo.

Finn lifts his chin smugly. “Your girlfriend had it. I’m guessing you weren’t the one to give it to her.”

“This was Jacob’s.” Her voice cracks. She cradles the photo in her hand, finger running over her own handwriting on the back.
Clarke is confused to say the least. She is startled, unsure, upset, and suddenly angry. “Investigation? Why were you investigating Lexa?”

“Cage…” He clears his throat when he sees her annoyance at the mention of his friend’s name. “Cage was looking out for you, Clarke. He wanted to make sure you hired someone reliable for business, so he asked around. I just heard, too. I swear.” Seeing she is still unconvinced, he continues, “so we pulled some strings and made some phone calls. Did Lexa ever tell you, that she was on the same battlefield where Jacob died? She was there.”

Clarke is shaking uncontrollably. She can’t think, can’t process what he is implying, can’t imagine what the possibilities are.

“Does it ever strike you as strange? Think about it. Why is she here? Why does she have his picture? You know what the marine corps investigators say about friendly fire…” His voice comes to a whisper beside her ear, with a sickening sweetness and concern.

She shakes her head vehemently, vision blurry with tears. “No… no, it couldn’t have been. It… it couldn’t be.”

“Clarke, please, this is serious. You know, it’s often that people with a guilty conscious who will do ridiculous things. Didn’t she come all the way here from California? Leaving all her friends and family like that… just to find you. That, that just doesn’t seem right to me.” He wraps his hand around her wrist in a comforting gesture. “It seems to me, that she’s been hiding something, and perhaps she’s even guilty of something. You need to be careful, Clarke, and you need to think about Aden. What will he think when he finds out that he’s been friends with a person who might have murdered his uncle?”

“You don’t know that!” Clarke spits but her voice quivers. She snatches her hand back from him. “You should leave, Finn. I need… I need to be alone.”

Seeing her resolve waver and doubts planted in her mind, Finn decides to go while he has the moral high ground. He peeps inside the living room. Aden is shoving food in his mouth, not having heard anything, but he slows down when he sees Finn. Abby, on the other hand, is shooting glares in his direction. Finn gives them a curt nod and turns on his heels.

It seems like she’s run the fastest five miles in her life. Lexa almost takes a tumble in a puddle. There is mud everywhere, soaked in her pants, splashed on her face, caked her hair. Her lungs burn sharply, each inhale pains more than the last one. Her eyes are stinging too with unshed tears. She nearly jumps out of her skin when a car speeds toward her, blaring its horn. It passes by her, she sees Finn in the driver’s seat, holding up his middle finger, a malicious sneer adorning his features. She bends over, hands on her knees, muddy water dripping down her chin.

“Clarke… oh honey.” Abby sends Aden to his room. Then she sits where Finn sat, clutching her daughter’s sobbing form. She looks at the picture Clarke holds in her hand. Even though she didn’t overhear the conversation, she knows what it might mean. Her heart breaks, for Jacob, for Clarke,
for Aden, and to her own agony, for Lexa.

They huddle together in silence for a while. When a haste of knuckles rapping on their front door, they already know who it is.

Lexa, standing pitifully, drenched head to toe. She looks a mess.

Clarke feels as though she’s the one dumped in muddy water. Her body is shivering violently, as if it can no longer contain all the fury and grief and misery and pain.

“Clarke—” Lexa croaks out, but she doesn’t know what to say. She is taken aback by the hurt and distrust in Clarke’s eyes. They are bluer than ever, under the stark contrast of her puffy, red eyelids.

“Where did you get this?” Clarke yanks the screen door open, holding up her photo.

Lexa swallows thickly. So it was Finn. “I found it.”

“This was Jacob’s. He took it everywhere with him—he told me!” Clarke raises her raspy voice, but then she lowers it again, soft, even, as she asks, as if holding out hope, “you didn’t… you didn’t come here by chance, did you? You came to find me.” *Please say no, please let this be a misunderstanding, please not let Finn be right.* Her watery gaze is desperate, pleading.

“I know I should’ve told you.”

Blue eyes close shut, her last shred of faith fizzles into disappointment and anger.

“Clarke, I tried, I tried to explain. But I didn’t know how!”

“Try telling me now.” She can hardly hear her own words—her lips are numb and cold.

Her lungs are burning, her eyes are stinging, so much so she thinks she’s traveled through time and space, back to the dreadful place where gun power permeates the air and blood splatters everywhere. She is close to a panic attack, her breathing rapid and pulse thready. But this isn’t time to have a panic attack, Lexa grates her teeth and holds onto the door frame. “It was a morning… after a night raid. And I just found it… in the middle of nowhere.”

“You just… you just found it?”

She nods, “I tried. I tried to find out who lost it. I never stopped—but… but nobody claimed it.”

Clarke wipes away her tears harshly on the back of her arm. She presses, “but you were *with him,* you saw him? What happened to him? What happened to Jacob?”

“I don’t know…” then she corrects herself, “I—I can’t remember.”

“So you’re saying… you don’t know if you shot my brother or not?”

Lexa is shocked by her question. “No… no, no, no. I know I didn’t—I never could’ve hurt him.” She hurries closer, but she is stopped in her track when Clarke nudges the screen door close.

“How am I supposed to believe that?” She can’t look at her, “how am I supposed to believe you? You lied to us.”

“Clarke, please, let me explain…” Lexa leans her head against the screen, “I didn’t know what to say when I first met you. Finding something like that… in war… was like finding an angel in hell.
So I kept it with me, I kept you with me. Then… then I survived a lot of things—things I had no right to.” The scar on her arm throbs, Lexa clutches it forcefully, punishingly. “I promised myself if I ever made it out, I would find the girl in that photo… and thank her. For saving my life, when others weren’t so lucky.” The dog tag around her neck weighs heavily against her sternum, the chain like hot iron against her skin. “But I couldn’t find the words. How do you explain something… when you can’t even understand it yourself?”

Clarke bites her bottom lip until she draws blood. “Understand this…” She starts, the fragments of her shattered heart stabbing through her chest and throat, “that photo belonged to Jacob. It was meant to keep him alive.” The devastated look on Lexa as her words tears her apart, makes Clarke want to throw up.

“I wish it had.” Lexa hangs her head low in defeat. She says weakly, “If it would bring him back, I’d die…” If it could spare you the pain of losing him, even if you wouldn’t have loved me, I’d die for him. “I would.”

Clarke is weeping into Abby’s shoulder. Lexa begs through her eyes.

“You should go.” Abby casts her eyes away, regret and pity etched in the lines around her eyes and lips. In the cold light pouring from the sky, she looks like she’s suddenly aged ten years.

“Can I… could you tell Aden I’m sorry.”


Tears finally break forth, free and fast, forming a river down her cheeks. The clear drops mingle with the mud specks on her face, painting dirty streaks in their wake. Her heart shrivels under the tight squeeze in her chest, tired of its own beat. Lexa casts her eyes longingly at the house one last time, knowing she needs to leave. Because Clarke doesn’t want her there anymore.

A small figure tiptoes from the back door. Aden whispers, “Lexa, wait!” He climbs up over the fence to catch up with her. He’s heard their argument. He doesn’t understand why his mother was so mean to Lexa, and why his grandma didn’t reprimand her for being mean. Lexa must have done something wrong. But, that doesn’t mean he can’t be nice to her.

Lexa smiles sadly at the boy. She hopes that her tears have dried enough to hide the fact that they need to say goodbye. How does she say goodbye to him, though, without breaking another delicate heart?

But he seems stronger, braver than everyone. He presses a book into her hands.

“Chess Endings - Essential Knowledge.” she reads the cover, “are you sure?”

“You need it more than I do.”

She studies his expression for a moment, envious for his innocence that he doesn’t fully comprehend the meaning of this parting. “Take care of your mom, alright?”

And with that, Aden’s lips quiver finally. Fat drops of tears well up in his big blue eyes.

Lexa almost regrets what she said. Reaching out to wrap him in a firm hug, she holds him tight.

“I thought you’d always have my back.” He murmurs into her hair.

“I’m sorry, buddy. I’m sorry about everything. But you have my number, okay? You’re my best
pal, I’ll always be there for you.” Her voice cracks again.

“Tell Hades I said bye.” Their hug ends. He wipes at his face with the back of his hand much like Clarke, making her chest ache harder. Then, he runs away, disappearing into the door where he snuck out from.

August 19th

When Anya and Raven find her the next morning, Lexa has spent the night on the steps of her cabin. They fuss over her and try to drag her inside. When they don’t succeed, they sit by her side. Anya doesn’t flinch when Lexa rests her dirt-caked head on her shoulder. Raven puts away the book on her lap, then holds her hand, rubbing away dried up mud with her thumb.

She doesn’t cry anymore, having used up a lifetime of tears. She just rests listlessly against her friends, and stares into the puddle of rain under her feet. The green eyes staring back at her are as muddy as the water.

Chapter End Notes

This hurt to write. But, the story is nearing its end, and they deserve better, their luck will turn around!

If you couldn't tell, I really disliked that lil bitch ass Jasper in the show (from the limited few seasons I invested time to watch), don't know if he got over himself, don't care - lol.

Please let me know what you think, I love getting comments, and I see y'all who have been following the story from the very start. Thank you, I won't be able to come this far without you.
Who'll stop the rain

Chapter Summary

While Lexa nurses a broken heart, Clarke is overcome with her own realization, then, disaster strikes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 14  Who’ll stop the rain

August 23rd

Anya snaps her head around so fast she nearly gives herself whiplash, all from Lexa’s small, muted, quiet, “Anya?” She can swear she hasn’t heard the brunette make a sound in two days. When she found her on the porch covered in mud and filth, she’d demanded answers. Lexa had only offered a simple, “Clarke broke up with me.” Then, she’s lived like a ghost, floating in and out of rooms with no purpose, barely eating, always sleeping.

Now, Anya sits down across from where Lexa is on the dining table. They finally talk under the soft lull of rain drizzling outside. It seems once Lexa starts talking, like the drizzle, she can’t stop. In her hoarse, water-clogged voice, she tells her everything, sparing no detail, from the moment she met Clarke, to the last time they spoke. From every sincere promises and sweet nothing they whispered under the covers, to the very last cruel word they hurt each other with.

“Lexa…” Anya awkwardly covers Lexa’s hand with hers, she has never been the best at physical intimacy, but Raven has gone out to find a place with wifi signals and order pizza, “you had nothing to do with Jacob’s death.”

“How would you know? You can hardly recall the operation.”

“Because I trained you, seken, I know you.” Anya squeezes her hand, “stop feeling guilty that you lived, Lexa. It’s got nothing to do with a goddamn picture. You might have been lucky, yes, but you also deserved to survive.”

Lessa sighs. Logically, she knows, war isn’t more lenient to one than another, and it certainly doesn’t pick sides. So many people, behind her troop or the opposite end, have lost their lives fighting each other, and so many more are broken because of it. “It’s just unfair.”

“Nothing in this world is fair.”

“I know, I know… still, how does it make any sense, that Raven was hurt so badly that she’s going to be in pain for the rest of her life, when I walked away… basically unscathed.”

“Oh you’ve gotta be kidding me, Commander.” Raven bursts inside the door, a wet pizza box balanced on her arm, and a wetter umbrella dumped on the floor, “don’t be fucking daft. Lexa, I never—never—blamed you for what happened. It was an order, I knew the risks, and I went for it. I couldn’t help the woman that got blown away, but I’m just so fucking glad that I lived.”
She breaks her eyes away from her friend, suddenly embarrassed by her penchant for self-punishment. “I’m sorry, Raven.”

“Stop being fucking sorry, Lexa. I can walk, and my leg brace only makes me hotter.” She pushes her weight on one hip and poses with her bad leg sticking out, successfully pulling a smile from a frowning Anya. “See? You don’t have to be sorry for me. So woman up and get over whatever this is.” She gestures roughly in their direction.

Anya winces a little at Raven’s tough love. She loves that the girl speaks her mind so openly and honestly, but occasionally, she can be a little too rough around the edges, her good intentions often misconstrued as insensitive. In hushed tones, she whispers in Raven’s ear, giving her the gist of what had transpired.

Big brown eyes become wide and angry, small sparks of rage firing in the dark irises. Raven waves her fists in the air, “that’s some bullshit, commander. I don’t give a shit what you did or didn’t tell her, she had no right to make accusations like that, certainly no right to dictate who gets to live and who doesn’t!”

“Raven, it wasn’t… it wasn’t Clarke’s fault. It was Finn… it was all Finn.” Lexa murmurs, her throat tightening sorely at Clarke’s name. “I understand why she’s angry.”

“Lexa,” the petite brunette doesn’t hesitate to crush her friend into a squeezing hug, “you can be angry too, you know?”

Anya hovers close, flattening one palm on Lexa’s shoulder, wrapping the other on Raven’s forearm, “you don’t have to be the one who always takes care of everyone, Lexa. They don’t deserve you.”

“We’ll take care of you now.”

Soundlessly, Lexa weeps in Raven’s embrace, her hands entwining with both of her friends’. For a while, she just hicups in shallow sips of air. When her jerky breathing finally subsides and evens out, she whispers, soft as rain, “Sorry you missed your flight.”

Clarke runs away today. She runs away from the tedious, monotonous chores, the overly enthusiastic clients who are more sympathetic to their spoiled pets than to another human being. She runs away from her mother’s concerned nagging, her dismayed sighs, her pitying gaze. She runs away from Aden, from his timid, silent questioning, from that sorrowful, longing look in his eyes every time the front door swings open.

Finn has been more persistent than ever, charming as he marches in her house before work and reports news in the station that she could care less about. She snapped at him this morning, and he stormed off, muttering “ungrateful bitch” under his breath.

As if she should be grateful to him.

She runs away from that too, the abhorrent thought of her ex husband inserting himself in her life again.

The waterline of the lake has risen quite significantly from the long, rainy days. Green water expands and swallows the sandy beaches, lapping at the narrow biker’s trail where it drifts too close to bank. Abigail floats serenely, tethered but unbothered, cozily bobbing up and down with the ripples.
It is where she goes when she wants to be alone. She’s told Lexa that.

She stands on the wooden deck, trying to remember where she’d last hidden a bottle of whiskey on the boat. The last time she was here, she thinks, was with her. She forces the memory of the starry night to the back of her mind, set on finding her Jack Daniel’s.

Rustling around the compact cupboards, Clarke yanks her hand back when she knocks into a cold, hard box. Brows knitting, she pulls it out and sets it on the counter. She studies it, opens it, and finds tools, bolts, screws of varying size inside. Surely she wasn’t one to purchase them, as she can’t even name half of the items.

Clarke surveys the interior of her cabin more closely, skin prickling, a lump forming at the base of her throat. In the small trash can, she peeps an empty water bottle and an energy bar wrapper. On top of the abandoned cooler, the user manual for her boat and a fishing boat engineering guide are stacked together.

*Could it be…?*

She holds her breath, until her lungs are on fire, then she takes long and shuddering gasps. *It was Lexa… Lexa was here.*

The anchorage to the engine compartment is not as heavy as she remembers. She pries it loose and peers inside. It doesn’t look much different, from the few times she’s opened it and had no idea what she was looking at. But the dust on its hood is wiped clean, and a few drops of engine oil stain the edge of the cap. The battery is reattached, though some extra red and blue wires hang loose from their usual tangled confinement. She rushes to control panel, pulls the lever in neutral, and cranks the ignition. Abigail groans loudly and gives a violent shiver. The engine whirs, almost coming to life, then it sputters and rattles. Some loose noise starts from the bottom of the boat and shakes the body. Panicking, she kills the engine quickly.

*It hasn’t worked after all. She thinks to herself grimly. It wasn’t meant to work, and it never will again.*

Her legs buckle, and she slumps against the chair. Her heart is about to leap out of her chest in a bounding, bloody mess when she feels something under her. It is a dark green jacket that lies folded there.

She picks it up, holds it in her hands, and lifts it to her face till her nose can burry in its light, water-resistant material. A million little shards of glass cut at her with the million little moments that flash through her mind as she inhales deeply. In the familiar scent of rain, mud, green things, Lexa’s shampoo, her deodorant, her musk and sweat, Clarke remembers.

She remembers the first time she wore Lexa’s jacket, the day at the pond after a water fight. She was embarrassed.

She remembers the second time the jacket wrapped on her body. It was their not-date date, here, under star lights and the moon. She was enamored.

She remembers the third time it happened. They both huddle under the jacket as they skip from the barn back to the house in pouring rain. She was in love.

She still is, in love with Lexa. Clarke knows. It doesn’t fade one bit, no matter how much she wishes it would. And it will not fade for a long, excruciating, exhausting while. Clarke knows that too. But what does it matter now? The trust has been broken, along with their hearts.
She’s broken her heart, Clarke thinks. Her mother’s face, clouded with defeat and disappointment, burns behind her eyelids.

Abby cleared her throat uncomfortably at Aden’s question, “can I text Lexa?” Clarke’s stern “no” prompted her to finally voice her disdain once the boy was sent out of earshot. “You know, you’re not the only one whose life got better when Lexa was here.” She was aware how much her words hurt her daughter, but she kept on despite the paleness in Clarke’s cheeks. “You might not believe it, but I know she was telling the truth. She had nothing to do with Jacob’s death. Lexa wouldn’t lie about something like that.”

Clarke glared down at her hands, but didn’t argue.

“I think she was meant to find your photo.”

Knife makes a loud clatter against the cutting board, louder than the thunder that nearly breaks apart the sky. Clarke threw her hands in the air, indignant that her own mother, in her time of distress, would pour salt on her wound. “Right! Right, of course!” She turned around, hands in her hair, messing up the already loose ponytail. “It’s all part of a plan. None of us is in control of anything that happens. It’s all down to fate!” She regretted immediately when her son ran downstairs, appearing smaller than he was as he asked if anything was wrong, as if he’d done something to make her angry again.

“It’s all Lexa’s fault, she thought to herself, all this pain she’s inflicted on everyone, it has to be her fault.

“Well you call it what you like, but I think it happened for a reason.” Abby stared back, unflinching and unperturbed by her daughter’s outburst.

“So...” her voice broke as tears swelled her already blood-filled eyes, “you’re saying... Jacob had to die, so Lexa could live?”

“No, no... Honey...” Abby closes the distance between them, wrapping her daughter in her arms. “It wasn’t Lexa’s fault that she survived... you know that.”

The clouds have started to weep again. Clarke weeps, too, even her cheeks are stinging from the salt lines left by her tears. She weeps into the jacket, a jacket that has seen so much of their love. But it doesn’t absorb her tears, rejecting them as the droplets roll off.

*It wasn’t Lexa’s fault.*

How could it have been? How could she have said something like that? How could she have broken Lexa’s heart like it was a cheap mug, like it was worth less than a fair conversation, a proper fight, a chance, like it just deserved a badly constructed conspiracy, a spiteful ex husband’s jealousy, a few cruel words.

She’s broken her heart.

And she still loves her, oh God, she does.

August 25th
Lexa wakes at the edge of her bed, a bony body pressed hotly against her back. In a short, confusing second, she almost believes it is the day she’d first made love with Clarke. But she nudges back at the lump, and Raven’s pointy elbow digs sharply into her side.

They agreed to take turns sleeping on the small twin bed, Raven having been spared from the rotation due to her condition. Peeling Raven’s sweaty arm off herself, she rolls out of bed and kicks Anya in her sleeping bag lightly. The blonde grumbles some, but she gets up and stumbles in bed, taking her rightful spot next to her girlfriend. Raven quickly adjusts her hold, and drapes her bad leg on Anya’s thighs. If she grinds against Anya in her sleepy horniness for a moment too long, Lexa pretends she doesn’t see.

She proposes to go in town and get some groceries in the afternoon, before it is supposed to rain again. Her hope is that her friends would take that time to work out the thick sexual tension that has been brewing in the past few days, like the sticky air pregnant with the potential for a whale of a storm. However, they perk up at her suggestion, itching to get out of the little isolated cabin.

So Lexa finds herself sandwiched between her two friends like some weird threesome, walking through the rows of farmer’s stands. Raven has no qualms linking their arms together, while Anya walks slightly off to her side, holding Hades’ leash. She feels like they babysit her, after her breakdown the other day. Now they’re afraid to leave her alone, as if she’d wallow and rot in the rain.

They browse the colorful produce stand, and as a game, each decides on a color that they must stick to. Raven gets red, gathering apples, bell peppers, tomatoes, and onions (her definition of red is rather loose). Anya picks yellow, and only finds bananas, potatoes, and some corn cobs, currently losing the game. Lexa is assigned green, which technically makes her an automatic winner, but her friends don’t seem to mind.

It’s an effortless victory, with her overwhelming number of green things from the vendor. Lexa laughs—truly laughs—at Raven’s argument that watermelons are red on the inside so it should be a half point for both of them. She looks at her friends, now walking hand in hand, and she feels incredibly lucky. Without Anya and Raven, she thinks, she will probably (definitely) wallow and rot in the rain.

Hades enjoys the market more than he likes to admit. Once in a while he’s fed a piece of fruit, simple gifts from the young human minding the produces. So even with a thousand unpleasantly contradicting smells of vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, rotting away at different rates, he generally has something to gain every time he visits.

He strolls leisurely in front of his humans, his leash loose and comfortable in Lexa’s hand, his paws kicking the small puddles like a small child with his first pair of rain boots. They pass a bar, he can tell by the strong alcohol wafting out of its entrance, and follow the cobblestone to the street corner where a small hole-in-a-wall diner cooks delicious smelling burgers. His mouth waters at the prospect of smoked burger meat and fluffy buns.

“Hades,” Lexa tuts, tugging at his collar, “please contain yourself.” She chuckles at his enthusiasm.

He begrudgingly slows down and trails by her side. When it is time for them to cross the road, one paw almost stepping away from the sidewalk, a sheriff’s car comes to a screeching halt. It could’ve clipped his leg, Hades whimpers angrily at the idiot who pulled up.

When the man stumbles out of the vehicle, he fumes even harder. It is Finn, his stench mingled
with the spice of alcohol and cigarette.

His humans all stop in their tracks and back away from Finn, who slams close the passenger side’s
door, and hobbles in front of them.

“I tried to warn her,” Finn hacks his throat and spits, eyes bloodshot and unfocused, “I tried to warn
Clarke about you, she just won’t listen.”

“Finn, what are you talking about.”

“She’s gonna take me back, you just wait and see. She will. She has to.” Finn looms closer, his hot,
drunken breath grazing Lexa’s face.

“Finn, it ain’t worth it!” A fat cop, Lexa knows him as “Danny”, shouts from the driver’s side.

“Come on, Lexa.” Anya escorts Raven away, in the opposite direction of where they were going,
and pulls on her friend’s arm lightly. “Fucking loser.” Raven murmurs under her breath.

Lexa turns to go, but not one step away, she is immediately hauled back by her shoulder. The
bruising force makes her stagger, some of the vegetables in her recyclable bag escaping and
scurrying on the ground.

“Don’t fucking walk away when I talk to you!” Finn’s tongue sounds fat and clumsy in his mouth.
He snatches Lexa’s bag, and fishes a cucumber out, stuffing it into his face and chewing it into
pieces, the green juice running away at the corner of his lips. Then, he spits again, landing a few
specks of the vegetable on Lexa’s face.

Hades nervously looks down at where the cucumbers land, then looks back at her. He can sense
the tautness in Lexa’s back, muscles bunching tightly in fury. He mirrors her too, his back arches
in defense.

“Finn, c’mon!” Danny runs out of the vehicle finally, approaching in timid steps toward his friend.

Finn sneers, “you got nothin’ to say for yourself? Hmm?”

Lexa is almost ready to square up. She takes a step closer to him, nostrils flaring, face stern and
severe. Anya quickly circles back and cuts in. “Hey, hey, he’s drunk, Lexa. Let’s go.”

Danny nods in agreement, shooing Raven farther away, “stay back, we’re leaving.”

Finn feels smug. He can’t see very clearly but Lexa and her friends are retreating. It gives him
confidence that, on his own turf, he in his uniform has the utmost authority. “Yeah, that’s right!”
He lunges forward, tripping on Danny’s foot, and pushes violently at Anya’s back, and Anya, in
turn, tumbles into Lexa.

Hades can make allowance for many things, but physical harm to those he loves, he will not
tolerate. He barks bravely, foam and snot fluttering in the air. He yanks loose from the leash, with
little warning, surges forward and aims for the man’s chest.

Finn, in a moment of great terror, pulls out his gun and racks its slide to load the chamber, pointing
at the dog that is inches away from tearing off his arm.

“Hades, no!” Lexa shouts.

“Jesus! Are you crazy?” Danny scrambles away from the line of fire, arms flailing in the air. “Stay
back! Stay back!” A few of the curious pedestrians scatter away in screams.

“Hades, down!” Lexa locks her hands across Hades’ neck, restraining him with all her force. They fall backwards together on the ground. She squeezes his head against her heaving chest, her face coming in contact with his cold nose, shielding him from the black muzzle of his gun. “Easy, easy boy.”

Anya has got up to her feet, and in a world of disorientation, she finds Finn waving his Glock between herself and Lexa’s kneeling form on the ground. “Man take it easy!” She puts up her hands, commanding.

“Are you crazy? Finn, put the gun down!” Danny yells behind him.

“Shut up you fat fuck!” Finn momentarily turns his head to curse at his friend. Anya sees the opportunity and strikes without hesitation. She uses one hand to push the gun away from herself, bending his wrist in a bone-cracking angle mercilessly until he loses control and drops it. With the heel of her other palm, she knocks it as hard as she can into the underside of his jaw, sending him reeling. He howls in pain, falling sideways, and when he picks his head up to glare at her, the gun is already pointing at the spot between his eyebrows.

“Hey, lady! Relax! Hang on!” Danny begs in a crying tone.

Anya coldly watches the two clamber. Then, she ejects the magazine, and strips the slide off the frame, popping out the single bullet in the chamber. “Get some fucking help, Finn.” She hands the parts back to Danny, and grabs Lexa’s hand to hoist her up.

Finn pants on his side, his shirt drenched, from the wet ground and his cold sweat. Danny drags him by his armpits into their car before speeding away from the scene.

Finn slumps against the marble counter in Cage’s kitchen, head in his hands, on the verge of tears. “I could’ve… I could’ve killed someone, Cage.”

“They didn’t press any charges, not yet. I can give your father a call, with his reputation, the station will look the other way. Now come on, Finn, hey, pull yourself together alright?” He drinks out of his tumbler and puts one next to Finn with a thud. “Lighten up, man, it’ll be fine. No one will hear a beep about this, and she’ll be gone, and Clarke will run back to you in no time.”

Nursing the drink, Finn shakes his head, then winces when a splitting headache strikes. “No, it won’t be that easy. It…it’s never that easy. I got to talk to her.” He struggles to push himself up, leaning to a side before straightening himself up.

“Finn…” Cage calls in annoyance, but doesn’t really move from his spot, merely watching as he slides out of the door and into the abrupt downpour.

Raven snuggles against Anya once they’ve had supper, and steals kisses from her all night long, upset and sullen from their earlier encounter. “You’re an idiot.” She berates her, “what would I do if something happened to you?”

“Nothing’s happened, babe.” Anya drops a kiss on the crown of her dark head. “I had to do what I had to do. Lexa was this close to bite the dust.” She holds up her hand, pinching her thumb and forefinger together to demonstrate just how close.
“Lexa could’ve handled herself.” Raven’s pout grows.

“Lexa really couldn’t have.” Lexa pipes up from her chair, eyes soft as she watches her friends, “Hades and I owe you one, Anya.” Hearing his name, Hades peels one eye open, having dozed off from the patter of fat rain drops on the roof.

“Tsk.” she makes a dismissive gesture with her wrist, “you saved my ass once, now we’re even.”

Lexa nods. She still has a hard time discussing that particular deployment. It harbors too much pain, both physical and emotional. So wordlessly, she starts picking up her books and stuffing them inside her bag. They haven’t bought tickets to go back west, but the plan is unanimous—fulfilling this month’s lease for the cabin, then leaving for good. Her hand hovers on top of the book Aden gifted her, a compilation of chess strategies. She smiles despite herself. In the short few months, she’s not only fallen in love with Clarke Griffin, but she’s come to love Aden very much, and Abby. They gave her hope, in a sense, that perhaps she isn’t so damaged to the point that she can’t have anything good.

Aden’s friendship is good. Abby’s sage advices are good. Clarke’s love, even in its most bitter moments, was good.

She flips through its pages, not really concerned about the content. Aden and his intelligence never fails to amaze her. The flitting of the pages under her thumb gives her another saddening surge of nostalgia. How she wishes to have one more intense game with the little boy.

Suddenly, the pages stumble to a halt, and something flutters out, slipping down to the floor. She bends and picks it up. Her breath hitches in her throat.

It is Aden, laughing in the arms of a man at what seems to be a graduation. The man is dressed in marine uniform, his graduation cap perched on Aden’s head instead. Printed in bold uppercase letters on a football stadium display board, says “congratulations to our ROTC graduates, go badgers!” Behind them, unfocused, are a group of people taking picture with the giant mascot for the university, “Bucky Badger”.

*Spiky blonde hair, piercing blue eyes, a cleft chin much like Clarke’s…*

Lexa squeezes her eyes shut, her body going ice cold as she falls through the dark wormhole and crashes back to earth on the battlefield, the very night before she found Clarke’s photo.

“Gordon, Wilde, and you, Bucky blondie, we’re rolling out.” Anya lead three of her subordinates to the last corner that separated themselves from the enemy’s fire.

“C’mon, Bucky blondie?” He said incredulously, with a hidden laugh that was cut off by sounds of flying shrapnels.

……

*Upon impact, Anya’s torso bent in a strange, inhuman angle backwards.*

“NO!!!” Lexa forgot to blind, forgot the breathe, forgot the heated dust burning her eyes and lungs.

“Man down, man down!” The blonde haired man held his ground, and barked into his intercom. “Sergeant Woods,” he knew her name despite her not knowing his, “we got a window to evacuate, I’ll cover you.”
“I think Anya’s still alive.” Lexa rolled her friend to her back, and hoisted her up on her back. When she looked up to the young marine standing in front of her, shielding her while she checked on Anya, she froze mid-sentence.

There is a gaping hole in the side of his neck, blood squirting out under the pressure of his hand. He leaned against the wall, darkness pooling from two other bullet wounds on his chest and stomach.

“It’s just me now, ma’am.” He raised his hand up to his face, in it, a hand grenade.

“You put that back right now, and that’s an order!” Lexa screamed.

He started a sprint toward the terrorists, bullets rained on him.

Bucky… blonde… piercing blue eyes…

Her eyes snap open, the light in the room sending her head swimming. Lexa remembers, and she does so with such vivid details that her shirt is drenched with sweat in a matter of seconds. She finally sees his face, the face in this picture, and she finally fills in the blank of the night where their lives crossed paths in the most pivotal, meaningful way.

“Anya…” Her voice must be quavering, from the worried look her friends send her way.

“Lexa, are you okay?”

In a few strides, she arrives at the bed and dumps the picture in Raven’s lap, Anya peering over her shoulder. “Is this… is this who you called Bucky blondie?”

“Um… yeah, yes I guess. Griffin’s nickname was Bucky because of the—”

“Because of the school mascot.”

“…Right. And he was newly promoted, and blonde haired, an unfortunate coincidence for us to add ‘blondie’ to his tittle.” Anya explains. “That is Clarke’s brother, right?”

“Anya, I remembered something.” Lexa stands and reaches for her coat, her tone is grave enough that Raven closes her mouth and swallows a rejoinder about Lexa acquiring photos that don’t belong to her. She rummages her closet for her umbrella, then steps outside in to the pouring rain before they can stop her. “I need to go now.” Hades promptly follows, unwilling to let her leave his sight after today’s scare.

Aden traces the pattern of faraway claps of lightening bolts across the pitch black canvas, Bullet-like rain drums mercilessly on leaves until the branches bow low under the incessant pressure. The chorus of a million drops tapping the earth at the same time blend with the nervous barks of dogs corralled into crammed kennels, creating a cacophony that keeps him distracted. His math notebook stares at him blankly, accusingly.

Two blinding beams of headlights cut through the thick curtain of rain as a car pulls onto their acreage. Aden hears the front door creak open.
“Finn?” Clarke hears it too, she comes out of the kitchen, a towel thrown over her shoulder. “What are you doing here?” She gives him a once-over anxiously. It is not a shock for him to show up unannounced these recent days, but his disheveled appearance, red-rimmed eyes, floppy hair plastered on his forehead, drenched clothes dripping onto the carpet, shoes squishing out mud and water, make her very very concerned. “Are you drunk?” She asks, but doesn’t need his answer.

“I’ve… I’ve always loved how you set up the table before supper.” Water drips from his fingertips onto the table as he picks up a plate. The fork and spoon protest loudly for being casted aside. “These ol’ plates… do you remember? These are gifts… gifts from my grandmother when we got married.”

Sensing the tension in the air, Abby kills the stove and hides the knives, coming out of the kitchen too. “What do you want, Finn?”

Aden sneaks downstairs, and peers around the wall that separates their kitchen and the dinning room. Abby spots his golden head, so she closes the door behind her.

“What do I want?” He looks back and forth between the mother and daughter, “what do I want… I want, I want uh…” Finn takes a few steps close to Clarke, and brings her hands to his chest, his breath hot on her face, “I want us to be a family again. Please… can we be a family again?”

“Finn…”

“Really, I can change, I’ve changed! I can prove it to you. I can make you happy, Clarke, I can make you… I can make you happier than she could…” He pleads, his voice thick with desperation.

Clarke shakes her head softly, pitying her ex husband in this moment. He has issues, she knows, but they are not the reason why they can’t be together. She simply doesn’t love him. Her heart, achingly so, simply belongs to another. “I know, Finn, I know you care about Aden. But, it’s not gonna happen for us anymore. It can’t… I care about you, but I don’t love you the same…” I don’t love you the same as I love her. “You have to let it go… Please, let me go.”

He reads what she isn’t saying, and white-hot rage starts to flicker and grow in his dark eyes. “Let it go?” He clenches his jaw, shuts his eyes, and curls his upper lip into a crooked smile, “why should I let it go?”

Clarke gingerly wrangles her hands away and takes a few steps backward. She looks to her mother who is guarding the kitchen door.

Finn follows her, and as if sensing that Abby’s hiding something, he inches closer to where she is standing. “Alright, maybe I should just take Aden now. Hm? Take him away for good, can’t say I didn’t warn you.” He waves his finger at them, “in fact, we’re leaving tonight. Where’s my son? Aden!” He yells, pushing past the blonde.

“Aden?” Clarke calls upstairs, praying that he has stayed in his room.

“Aden…?” Abby looks behind her through the window on the kitchen door. But she can’t find him. “Aden!?” In horror, she yanks it open.

Both Finn and Clarke are running like headless chickens in the house, up and down, room to room. “I’m sorry, Aden!” Finn staggers upstairs behind Clarke, “I didn’t mean to scare you!”

“Aden, no one is going anywhere tonight, honey.” Clarke rushes inside his empty room, then turns on her heels to check the balcony.

Finn takes a glance at the harrowing thunderstorm outside, and catches the small shadow slipping
away from the house. “Aden!” He all but flies down the second floor, dashing out of the front door. “Hey, come back! Aden!”

“He’s heading to the tree house!” Abby bangs at the handles of their staircase, “Clarke! He’s outside!”

Pushing through the lush undergrowth, Aden can care less about how the branches poke holes in his pants and leaves stick to his hair. He runs, to the safety of his tree house, where adults are not allowed unless permitted by him. Finn is hot on his tail, he sounds afraid as he calls, but he is too big and the tendrils of weepy plants keep his pace slow. Aden, in some way that he doesn’t quite understand, wants him to be afraid, wants him to experience the same fear that Finn imposes on his mother, the fear of losing him.

“Aden, come back! Please come back!” Finn begs, watching in terror as his little boy climbs onto the rope bridge. The usually docile and friendly stream under them has grown into a beast of a river, rushing over pointy rocks and knocking down a whole army of trees in its wake. “It’s too dangerous up there!”

Barreling in the same direction, Clarke catches another figure in the corner of her eyes. Lexa huddles under a large umbrella but it is barely doing anything to keep her dry. Hades trails behind her with his tails between his legs, his thick fur drenched through and through, making him appear thinner. “Clarke?” Lexa realizes something has gone horribly wrong when the blonde heedlessly rushes into the woods in her flip-flops.

“Lexa!” Abby shouts her name like she is grasping at straws, “go with her!”

Without needing to be told twice, she discards her umbrella and starts a sprint toward the direction where Clarke disappeared to.

Holding onto one end of the rope bridge with all his might, Finn digs his heels in the softened mud. “Aden, just walk back here! Just walk back to me!” He almost slips down the bank when the stream tugs on the bridge viciously, knocking it sideways.

Aden clings to the swaying bridge, looking at the rapids under his feet. His palms are starting to sting and burn. “Dad! I can’t! It’s too shaky!” He is quickly realizing the predicament he’s in, too petrified to cry.

“Just wait right there, I’m coming to you!” Finn crawls onto the bridge, but it causes the bridge to budge even more.

“Dad I’m scared!”

Aden’s piercing scream is muffled by thunders, as one side of the rope breaks, turning completely over and he almost loses his grip. He barely catches the one good rope that is suspended over the roaring river. “Help! Help me dad!”

“Hang on!” Finn abandons the bridge and jumps in, the mud on the bottom sucking him down right away. He finds his footing against a fallen trunk, the water only a finger’s width under his nose. He inches close to the center of the river.

Lexa can hardly see, she feels Hades rush past her toward the flood. Clarke shrieks, in front of her, as she falls and slides down the hill. Lexa reaches to help but gets pushed away.

“Go! Quickly! It’s Aden!”
She has to come to a sharp halt at the edge where the road ceases to exist. In the whitewater rapid, she finds two figures clinging on by a thread. Finn spots her at the same time. Just as he is about to wave for help, a swoosh of wind tears down a thick branch. It crashes into the tree house, ripping the roof and crushing the floor. The end of the bridge to the tree house completely detaches from the small island. Aden sinks underwater.

“Aden!” Finn doesn’t hesitate to let go of the trunk and float downstream. He fishes him out by a foot, and quickly arranges him on his shoulder. “I got you! I’ve got you, son!” They are stopped a few yards away when his foot is caught on a root. He feels his ankle snap, but the adrenaline pumping through his veins masks the pain.

Aden coughs violently, but hangs onto his father.

Lexa jumps in, bringing the broken rope with her as a lifeline. Hades slowly descends with her by dog-paddling upstream, against the current. They reach the father and son as Clarke reaches the riverside. Hades sinks his teeth in the man’s jacket, dragging his head above water.

“Oh my god! Aden!!! Please!” Clarke cries, hands reaching but too far away to help.

“I need your help, Lexa.” Finn sputters, and finds Lexa through the splash. He passes Aden to her. “Here comes Lexa! Go Aden, go to her!”

Lexa catches the boy under his armpits, and helps him climb on her back, “I’ve got you.” His skinny arms choke her a little when he holds on tightly, but she can still breathe. She extends her arm out for Finn to grab, but he pushes her hand away.

“Take him, my leg’s caught!”

“I’ll come back for you.” Lexa pulls herself upstream, struggling to keep her footing. She winces in pain when a particularly sharp rock slashes open her shin. Under his exhaustion, Aden’s grasp is loosening, she quickly realizes. “Hang on, Aden, we’re almost there.” She adjusts quickly and puts him against her chest.

Now facing back, Aden sees that his father is no way near catching up with them. He screams and kicks, “Dad! Dad!!!”

“Almost there!” Lexa pushes on a little faster. The muscles in her arms are sore and shaky. But this is hardly time to turn into jelly.

Finn is gasping for air. If not for Hades’ stubborn grip on his jacket, he’d gone under a long time ago. Fate is such an ironic thing, he almost laughs to himself—merely hours ago he’d pointed a gun at the dog, and now, it might just save his life. His thought is cut short, though, when a fallen piece of that used to make up the wall of the tree house hits him squarely in the face. Finn’s world goes dark.

“I’m gonna go back for Finn!” Lexa pushes Aden up into Clarke’s waiting arms. She needs a moment to breathe, just a second, for her arms to get their feelings back. Before she can tie the rope around herself for her second dive though, a loud crack alarms them.

The tree house groans, tipping to the edge, then it collapses, making a giant wave as it hits the water.

“No!!! Dad!!!” Aden watches the broken house rush toward his father, but Clarke presses his head into her chest.
Hades whimpers in warning but it is too late. The wooden structure falls against them, shoving Finn loose and down the stream.

“Finn! Hades!” Lexa climbs up the river bank, and runs alongside the stream. She can hear Hades’ yelp, moving further and further ahead of her. She follows, and doesn’t stop for what seems to be miles. With each twist and turn of the water, the house breaks apart further, revealing the man and the dog.

Finn remains unconscious, but Hades miraculously keeps themselves afloat.

Lexa has lost sight of them several bends back, and she almost loses hope, when the river suddenly meets its demise in a large pond, flattening out, slowing, quieting down. “Hades!” She shouts despite the quiver in her voice. Hades is tough, she wants to believe, he can survive this too.

Their endless rushing stops somehow, and they start to float toward a slow-moving area. Hades takes the opportunity and finds purchase for his teeth on the man’s collarbone. If he drew blood, well, it is to save his life, definitely not some personal vendetta. He drags him through the shallows and wet mud, until they are on top of solid ground and grass. He pants for a while, listening for a sign of someone coming to their rescue.

Five minutes pass, Hades starts whimpering, and he notices the throbbing pain in his front leg. Ten minutes have come and gone, he is certain he’s broken that leg. Fifteen minutes, Hades nods off from the sheer exhaustion and disappointment that his human still hasn’t found him.

“Finn… Hades…” His big ears stand straight upon the faint calls of his name. He would leap up if it weren’t for his leg. But he barks, and howls, and wails, happily with every breath he’s got left. Not far away from the open end of the downstream, Lexa runs toward them. She is so fast that she slides on her knees and crashes into his strong neck with a small squeal. “Oh… Hades! You did it!” She kisses him on his broad head, then she checks on Finn. His breathing is shallow but steady. When she looks Hades over, she discovers the deformity in his front leg. “You’re hurt,” she whispers mournfully, picks him up and hugs him close, burying her face in his warm chest, finally letting tears break forth.

A few miles down the main road, the shrilling siren of an ambulance draws near. Its flicker of red and blue lights gradually become dazzling clear. It is when she notices, the rain has stopped at last.

Chapter End Notes

I know I’ve broken your hearts! But a small evil part of me was smiling when I see your reactions. I really appreciate your comments from the last chapter and I’ll try to go back and reply to y’all.
I don’t know if you’d notice, but I started with each little section of this chapter with a main character (main-ish, I really didn’t give Ranya a lot of stage time in the beginning). Nothing major, just a fun little exercise for writing. I wonder if it reads differently, or if it affects the flow of the story at all.
You know the end is close, but they still have to work out their misunderstandings and all the grievances. I am contemplating about extending the story for one or two more chapters and let them stew and suffer for a little bit longer. Tell me what you think!
Recovery

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of the flood, they all try to mend what was hurt and recover what they've lost. Clarke finds herself on the verge of losing Lexa. Anya is protective and unamused throughout. Lexa battles the demons from her past, and seeks strength to hope again.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 15  Recovery

“Did she find dad?” Aden turns his head toward his mother as he lies in the back of an ambulance. The EMT has stuck an iv in his arm, but he is too tired to be afraid. Warm saline dripping fast and blankets piled on top of him, Aden still shudders at the thought that he might have lost his father.

Clarke nods, pressing her nose to his wet hair to hide her own tears. “Yes, yes she did. They’re heading to the hospital behind us. They’ll be okay.”

“I’m sorry.” His bottom lip trembles.

“Oh no, honey.” She covers his face in kisses, “it’s not your fault. It’s never your fault, okay?”

Abby has already called ahead to her colleagues in her emergency department. They eagerly await the ambulances. She’s informed Anya and Raven too, unsurprised to hear the exasperation as they inquire how it all happened.

Finn has a bad concussion, aside from a broken ankle, the doctors determine, and from the blood alcohol content they find in his lab works, he needs to detox in the hospital for a few days. There are already police officers circling outside his room—despite his father’s influence and reputation, the department is set on delivering a verdict about his gross child endangerment.

Clarke only takes Aden to his bedside for a few minutes to reassure him that Finn is okay, but he needs to get better. When they get discharged, Aden is given a superhero bandaid for the tiny hole left by the needle in his arm, a lollipop, and a prescription to get a lot of sleep in the next few days. Clarke worries. This is such a traumatizing event for him, and he is already a sensitive child.

“Kids are resilient,” his doctor tells her, “they bounce back fast. The best thing for him right now is to have a stable environment, and people who make him feel safe.” Then she looks her up and down, taking in the mud streaks on her body and clothes, the scrapes on her elbows and knees, adding pointedly, “people who make you both feel safe.”

Clarke thanks her, and lets themselves get escorted to the lobby. Aden runs into Abby’s waiting arms, getting picked up by her. Normally he’d protest about being too big to be carried around like
a little monkey, but today he is just glad to burry his face in the familiar smell of his grandma’s shirt.

Abby watches her daughter linger in the lobby, scanning the waiting area and searching the crowd of unfortunate people stranded this late to be seen by a doctor. She sighs, but asks her friend, Dr Jackson, to show Clarke the way.

“She’s just over here.” Jackson kindly guides her through the ER doors, past the nurses station, and in front of a room. “Looks like they’re in a middle of a small procedure. Can you wait here for a few minutes?” His pager goes off again, buzzing in his coat pocket at the same time an overhead page informs about a code blue. “Excuse me, I’m needed for this.”

“Of course,” before she can finish, he’s running off to another room, where a whirlwind of people pushing crash cart and imagining machines inside. She is left alone to fidget outside the room. There is a window on the door, normally with a curtain over it, but the curtain is half drawn today, giving her the opportunity to peer inside. Anya is leaning against the wall, brooding. She follows her line of sight, and in the middle of the room, she finds Lexa. Clarke has to put her hand over her mouth to stifle her gasp. Pain blossoms unrestrained in her chest. Her heartache feels like a red hot coal, it glows and scalds her at the same time, upon the sight of Lexa lying in the hospital bed while the doctor works on stitching up her leg.

A basin, a few forceps and scissors, some gauze and syringes line up on the tray. The doctor irrigates the wound thoroughly. The mixture of blood and saline gets soaked up by the pads underneath. He then takes a few small needles, pushing lidocaine in the surrounding flesh for numbing. Lexa attempts to appear nonchalant, the muscles in her jaw only twitching once in a while.

“Ok, we’re going to close this up now.” Clarke hears him say, “the tear is shallow, so we only need one layer of stitches. Afterward, you may walk, but limit the time you’re on your feet, and no strenuous exercises for a week.”

Lexa nods, looking away from her wound. Her face immediately twists into a grimace at his first stitch.

Clarke wants so much to burst through the door and hold her, comfort her, plant kisses on her face and in her hair. But Raven is quick to grasp Lexa’s hand that is forming a fist on the bed sheet. Anya pushes off the wall and hovers close, sharp eyes cautiously watching the doctor work with quick flicks of his wrist, threading the thin sutures and pulling the skin back in place. “Isn’t this your bad leg?” Raven says, referring to Lexa’s old knee injury, “well, better have one good than two bad. Hey, we can be a whole pair!” She gestures to herself. To her ridiculous claim, Lexa cracks a laugh through her clenched teeth.

The doctor finishes stitching and wraps a thick layer of gauze around her leg, then bids his goodbye, rushing away to see other patients. Anya gently pats Lexa’s head as consolation, “I’ll go find the nurse.”

Clarke isn’t quick enough to hide. She almost crashes into the doctor.

It is Anya who grabs her arm and steadies her. She drags her both away from the door, out of earshot. Her tone is cool and unaffected as she asks, “what are you doing here?”

Under the icy stare, Clarke swallows, “I… I just wanted to make sure—”

“To make sure she’s alright?” Anya cuts her off, snorting with derision, “well she isn’t. Don’t you
have eyes? Can’t you see what harm you’ve done to her? She wouldn’t have gotten hurt if she wasn’t at yours tonight.”

“I know I’ve hurt her, Anya, but I could’ve lost Aden if it weren’t for Lexa.” Clarke is trembling from head to toe.

That statement temporarily dampens the flaming rage in Anya’s eyes. Rethinking the event from earlier, she is also glad that Lexa was there to save little Aden. Lexa, that dumb, loyal, brave, selfless girl, will be the death of her. Anya rolls her eyes. Yes, nothing is more important than Aden’s safety, for that she is grateful. But she isn’t very forgiving when it comes to her other grievances against Clarke.

“Look, I just want to say ‘thank you’, to Lexa, for everything. I… I wouldn’t have known what to do.”

“Abby’s already been here to say all that. And Lexa doesn’t want your thanks. Lexa didn’t do everything she’s done for your thanks, Clarke. Your thanks are useless.” Anya fumes, her finger pointed on Clarke’s chest, tipping her slightly backwards.

Wringing her hands together, Clarke pleads, “can I at least ask her…? She wanted to see me earlier. I just—can you at least tell me what it was about?” If there is a slimmer of chance, Clarke has told herself, if Lexa still has any feelings for her, she wants to fight for them.

Anya regards her blankly, and says, “wait here.” Then she disappears back into the room. A few seconds later, she comes out with Lexa’s drenched denim jacket. From its pocket, she rummages out something, soaking wet and limp in her palm. She passes it to Clarke. “It was in a book Aden gave her.”

Clarke looks down at her brother’s smiling face in the photo, heart squeezed tightly, then up at Anya’s impassive face, confused.

“She found it, so this time, she wanted to return it, right away.” Anya feels a petty satisfaction at Clarke’s pained expression, but chastises herself for it. She is often practical, rational, impersonal, but never intentionally cruel. “It’s not your place to worry about her, not anymore. So please leave. She’s very tired.” She turns her back to the woman, and strides away.

Clarke follows, but she can’t bring herself to step inside, because Anya is returned to Lexa’s side now, holding her shoulder like a protective big sister. She doesn’t go in, because Raven is speaking animatedly about building Lexa an assistive device, extracting bigger and bigger smiles from the brunette. She doesn’t go in, because Anya is right. It is not her place anymore.

**August 26th**

Her trip to the emergency room lasts the better part of the night, interluded by doctors rushing to codes and nurses bringing paperwork after paperwork. She gets five stitches, a tetanus shot, and a dose of antibiotics.

“Don’t fret. Hades will be alright, the po-po took him to the vet those K9s go see. He’s a hero now for saving Finn’s ass.” Anya helps her dress in dry clothes. Lincoln has readily agreed to come pick them up despite the early hour.

Once the three of them cram in the backseat, Lexa holds her bag of wet clothes, and laments the ill fate for her pants, shredded by the rock then by the EMT. When she inspects her jacket, Lexa
frowns, patting every pocket and unzipping every zipper. “Shit, where is it?”

“Where’s what?” Raven asks.

“The picture, I found in Aden’s book.”

Anya heaves out a sigh, “I gave it back to Clarke. She wanted to thank you for saving Aden and Finn. I told her you didn’t do it for her thanks.”

“Clarke… you talked to her? Is Aden okay? Is she okay?” Lexa blubbers, meeting her friends’ disapproving looks.

“Lexa,” Anya starts, gentle but firm, “they’re both ok. But listen, she isn’t your concern anymore, okay? You don’t owe her anything, any explanation. She isn’t your guardian angel and you don’t need her forgiveness. So you gotta let it go, there are some things you just can’t give her closure for.”

Lexa blinks slowly, allowing Anya’s every word to seep in. She has never felt so much appreciation to anyone that she feels for Anya, for her fierce protectiveness and stubbornness, self-conviction, and loyalty. But Anya doesn’t know what she knows, which is not her fault. She calmly says, “what if I could?”

“What do you mean?” Sharp, thin brows immediately come together in a knot.

“Anya, I told you about where I draw blank on the operations, big chunks missing from my memory, you know how it goes. But with that picture, I saw him.”

“Jacob Griffin.”

“Yes, and he helped me remember. And it was the most important part that I was missing. He saved us, Ahn, Jacob saved us.”

Anya considers her words solemnly. Raven looks back and forth between them, on the verge of a series of questions.

“I’ll tell you everything later, but now, I really need to go and see her. Lincoln, could you drop me off at Clarke’s house?”

He has been silent the entire trip, and only nods to her request. Although he doesn’t know the full story, Lincoln understands how important this is to Lexa. If what she felt for Clarke was anything close to what he feels for Octavia, Lincoln muses to himself, then she will know where her heart wants her to be. So he dutifully drives toward the countryside.

Once outside the house, Anya catches her before she exits the car, “hey, we’ll be here, okay? I don’t—I don’t want to see you hurt again.”

She squeezes her hand, “thanks. I just need to tell her the truth. Then I’ll be right back.” She walks up the stairs, favoring one leg. The house is pitch black and silent, the hour is still early. Lexa’s heart thuds, a violent booming in her chest. When a pair of footsteps draws close, it becomes even louder, hammering against her eardrums.

“Oh, Lexa!” Abby appears behind the door. She wraps her in a warm hug. “Did they take care of you? Does anything hurt? Quick, sit.” She ushers her inside and then down in a chair.

“Yes ma’am. I’m alright. It was nothing, really.” Lexa watches the older Griffin run around the
house and starts a pot of coffee. “I’m sorry, Abby.” She says softly, making the busying woman pause, “I didn’t mean to bring all this pain to your family. I should have told you everything from the beginning.”

“Oh, honey. You’ve done so much for us, for Clarke. Ah, let me get her for you. She’s with Aden right now.”

“No no, let them rest. I can wait…” She is suddenly nervous, stalling to clear her head and sort her thoughts.

Abby hugs her one more time, and disappears up the stairs.

Clarke startles awake to her mother’s knocking. She instinctively tightens her arms around Aden’s sleeping body. His breath is relaxed and rhythmic in a heavy slumber. There is no distress in his expression. She exhales in relief, and rubs her eyes to look at the clock. The hand is barely reaching five, she’s gotten less than two hours of sleep since coming home.

“Lexa’s here.” Abby pokes her head in and informs her in a hushed tone.

Blue eyes snap open, fatigue dissipating. Clarke quickly extracts herself from her son, and rolls out of bed. She paces down, skipping two stairs at once, and comes to a hasty stop upon the sight of Lexa sitting at the table. She suddenly becomes aware of how she looks, in her flimsy night gown, barefoot, bed hair sticking up in every direction. A curious shyness colors her cheeks a shade of crimson. She swears at herself for being useless.

Lexa isn’t here to patch things up, she tells herself, so stop being hopeful like a love-sick schoolgirl.

Lexa catches a glimpse of her barreling down the stairs, and she forgets to breathe. Even in her disheveled state, Clarke looks beautiful. She quickly averts her eyes, feeling intrusive and rude as if she’s not entitled to such intimate sight anymore.

“I—”

“Thank you.”

They speak at the same time, both surprised and alarmed. But then Clarke rushes to say, “thank you, Lexa. I can’t… I can’t imagine what could’ve happened without you there.”

Lexa nods curtly. “I came back because I found a picture in the book Aden gave me.” She doesn’t see how Clarke’s face falls as they switch subjects.

“Yes. Anya has returned it.”

“That was your brother, Jacob, right?” She states more than asks.

“Yes…”

“I… I know what happened to him.” Lexa sputters out.

Taken aback, Clarke opens her mouth, then closes it, speechless and confused.

“I was there—you already know that,” Lexa curses herself at her own clumsiness, “it was an operation that’s gone south. Your brother was in Anya’s platoon. They were closest to us. So when they picked up our distress signal, they came to our rescue. And Anya was down. I wasn’t sure if she was dead or not, but I had to check… I couldn’t just give her up.” Her face contorts at the bone-chilling fear. It grips her body every time she thinks about it.
Clarke doesn’t notice her vision is blurred by tears brimming her eyes. Her lips quiver. Her hands are twitching in need to reach for Lexa.

“There was someone there, I was on the ground, but someone was in front of me. He was hit too, but somehow, he held on. He blocked the fire and bought us time to retreat.”

And Clarke knows. She buries her face into her palms, and cries silently. Her brother, ever the altruistic, ever the optimistic, ever the heroic.

“Jacob didn’t think about himself, he just… he just stood his ground and took care of his people.”

The truth has finally come out. But even though it is what she has been searching for all this time, it still doesn’t bring her solace that she thought it would. Instead, the loss is made palpable, given solid ground, flesh and blood and real. Maybe when she didn’t know, there was still a small part of her that prayed to a false god, and deceived herself into thinking Jacob was MIA, the pieces of body that was brought back, burnt to a crisp and unrecognizable, belonged to someone else, and to this day he was still roaming the scorching earth in the Middle East.

Lexa stands, her hand hovering above Clarke’s shoulder, unsure if she is permitted to touch her. At last, she drops it and occupies it with gripping the back of her chair. “The next morning, I found your picture in the rubble outside. He must have lost it on the way in. I know… I know I’ve made it hard to believe the truth, and I’m sorry… for a lot of things, but nothing more than that.”

“Please…” Clarke curls up, pulling her knees to her chin, her insides churning so much they threaten to spill out. “Please, Lexa…”

She nods in understanding. “it’s a lot to take in. I just wanted you to know… he didn’t die for nothing.” He still died. That is the cruel part of this she cannot change, no matter how hard she wishes she can. Could it have been Lexa to sacrifice for her men? Absolutely. Should it have been her? Maybe. But Lexa is sick and tired of dwelling on what could have been and what should have been. Anya is right, these guilty thoughts are detrimental to her own mental health. So Lexa makes her escape before she succumbs to the intense, dangerous tenderness she feels for Clarke. She’s got to start looking after her own heart.

The old floorboards creak under the light footsteps. Clarke wipes her eyes and nose on the bottom of her shirt sloppily. When she looks up, Lexa has already slipped out, the screen door swinging longingly after her departure. In a state of panic, she realizes, never having more clarity and certainty than she does now, that if she doesn’t go after her, she is going to lose her forever.

Anya has been watching the front door with laser focus, clicking her tongue as her impatience grows. Raven shushes her gently, murmuring, “it’s not that simple, there are a lot of feelings involved. Let Lexa handle this herself.”

“Lexa can’t handle herself around Clarke.” Anya comments spitefully. She breathes out a sigh of relief to see the brunette walk out of the house alone. But her moment of ease is short-lived, the three of them stare wide-eyed through the windshield as Clarke chases out, barefoot and barely clothed. Lincoln lets out a soft “mmm” as if he has predicted the whole situation, earning himself a salty glare from Anya. Raven presses her face closely to the window and tries to listen in.

“Lexa! Wait.”

The raspy voice calling her name sounds suspiciously like a figment of her own imagination. Lexa
almost doesn’t stop—she can’t get her hopes up again. Losing Clarke’s trust, Clarke’s love wounded her so badly, worse than any physical trauma she’s sustained. She can’t get her hopes up. But, she feels a soft hand wrap cautiously around her wrist. Warmth radiates from the palm, a bit clammy, and reaches across the back of her hand, all the way to her fingertips. Surely that can’t be phantom. Lexa turns, ignoring the sharp tearing ache in her stitches, and rests her weight on one leg. Clarke, a beautiful mess, holds onto her as if she might blow away in the wind at any second.

“Wait…” She pleads, “you’re going to leave…” there’s a great terror in her question.

“You said,” Lexa closes her eyes and tears readily spill, her throat bobbing as she forces words out of her windpipe, “you didn’t want me here. You said…”

Clarke adjusts her hand, tangling with Lexa’s and squeezing tightly, “I’m sorry, Lexa. I’m sorry that I didn’t believe you, I’m sorry I let Finn poison me with his lies, and I’m so, so sorry for what I said to you. I wasn’t in my right mind when I…” she doesn’t have the heart to repeat the words—thoughtless, merciless, hateful words bred from stupidity and spite—and things she never believed to be true. But she needs Lexa to know, that she didn’t mean it, that she doesn’t believe it. “I wasn’t in my right mind. I want you here.”

Lexa blinks, then looks away quickly. There is a flash of hopefulness in the muddy green of her eyes, but it soon dims under the shadow of her lashes.

“I want you. I need you, Lexa.” Clarke cups the brunette’s chin, and searches frantically for that spark. “You’re the first person, after my brother died, to make me feel safe, to make me want something more in life. I can’t lose you too.”

“I’m—I’m just really, really tired.” Lexa says, no louder than a whisper. Fear, gripping and unrelenting, rises from the pit of her stomach. She feels as if she’s teetering on a tightrope, dreading to let herself free-fall.

Of course, she wants to slap herself across the face for not holding Lexa when she told her story, how much it must cost her to relive that moment, and how much it takes her to come back despite her own pain. “I know… I know, baby. You’ve fought so hard and so long to be here. You’ve been hurt so much.” Clarke lets her thumb smooth across the high cheekbone, catching a salted droplet.

“Let me fight for you now, Lex. Please, let me fight for you, and fight for us. I’ll prove it to you—give me a chance and I’ll prove it.” Resting her forehead against Lexa’s, she breathes with her, gentle and careful and reassuring. “I love you. I’m in love with you. I don’t want to give you up.” Her words are like a kiss, grazing Lexa’s face.

She was teetering on a tightrope, and now with the softest breeze, she does fall. She crashes and spirals, but she doesn’t collide painfully into solid ground, instead, she is embraced by a sea blue of sincerity, and tenderness, and hope. “I don’t want to give you up, either.” She confesses, like speaking a prayer, also like her prayer has been answered by the divine.

“Can we please try?” Clarke exhales shakily when she feels Lexa’s subtle, but clear nod. She sees in her periphery Lincoln’s car parked in front of her house and three pairs of eyes gawking at them, one pair angry, one pair suspicious, and one pair cheerful. This is their love, she decides, and she won’t let people bully her into giving that up, not even when it comes from Anya’s good intentions. “Come home with me?”

“I… I don’t know. I can’t, not yet.” Lexa draws back slightly, suddenly aware of their audience. She quickly corrects herself when Clarke’s lips tremble and a thin mist clouds over her expectant eyes. “I mean, I need to go check on Hades, he’s at the vet. And Lincoln has to go to work. I won’t be able to walk far today.” She thinks about the gash on her shin.
Clarke nods, suddenly weak from the emotional rollercoaster. She threads her hands under Lexa’s arms, wrapping around her waist. Her heart soars when Lexa accepts the hug, but she aches too, for Lexa who is always so ready to forgive. She brushes a kiss, disguising it as a question against Lexa’s earlobe. “Can I call you?”

That somehow induces a light chuckle from the brunette. “I lost my phone last night.” An minuscule loss comparing to yesterday’s frightful turn of events.

Clarke offers eagerly, “I can drive you to town tomorrow, we can look at phones?”

“Ohay.” Lexa pulls back slightly, and gives her a small smile.

“Ohay?” Not ready to let her go yet, Clarke tightens her arms.

Lexa reads her anxiety and uncertainty about this parting in the stiff embrace. She tries her best to assure, feeling brave and courageous again after so long. “It’s a date.” She gently pries herself free and runs her hands down Clarke’s bare shoulders, soothing the goosebumps that ripple across the smooth skin in the morning chill, “now go inside before you catch a cold, okay?”

“I love you, Lexa.” She tilts her head up, and gingerly, timidly, chastely, kisses Lexa’s lips. At first, Lexa merely lets her, so she almost regrets this rash decision, silently panicking that she’s overstepped the mark. As she is about to draw back and apologize for seeking intimacy too soon, Lexa parts her lips just oh so slightly, kissing her back with a new form of tenderness. It contains light, and warmth, and kindness, like the rising sun that parts clouds and graces the earth, sweeps away the sweet dew clinging to blades of grass, and dries the damp mud with a long overdue caress.

It ends a few seconds later. Clarke thinks she’s lived a whole life in these few seconds. When they part at last, Lexa squeezes her hand and turns away. She doesn’t say “I love you” back, but Clarke understands. It will take time, for them to lick their wounds and find their way back to each other, but this is a good enough start.

Lexa climbs inside Lincoln’s car, opting for the passenger’s seat this time, and unsurprised to find her best friends giving her a look. Lincoln is the only one smiling pleasantly.

“What was that?” Anya asks, jerking her thumb toward Clarke who stands at the bottom of her porch. She is unimpressed and unamused.

“Hmm.” Lexa hums noncommittally. Her lips are still tingling from the short peck. She turns her gaze to the horizon, where a small wheel of golden fire slowly makes its ascend to the pale sky. “Clarke wants another chance for us. I do too.”

“You’re too forgiving, Lexa.” Anya shakes her head, settling on an empty threat because she is too shocked to come up with anything more severe and on-brand, “don’t come crying to me when you get your heart broken over her again.”

Raven looks conflicted, uncomfortable with the tension when Lexa and Anya argue (Anya doing most of the arguing). She suggests, “well, blondie might have gotten past your soft lil gay heart, but I for one can’t let her off the hook yet. You’re going to play hard to get, until she actually proves herself.”

Lexa shrugs but doesn’t reply, indicating that she’s done discussing this with them. This is between she and Clarke, this recovering love of theirs. So she lets Anya stew in the stretching quietness of
their car ride.

Half way to the vet, as if feeling embarrassed and immature, Anya clears her throat and breaks the silence. “What did you tell Clarke? About Jacob Griffin.”

This only reminds her that she still owes them a story that she promised. Lexa considers keeping her regained memories to herself, still slightly indignant about their mistrust. But she scolds her own pettiness—Anya and Raven care about her, if there is anything that she is sure of, and they deserve the truth. So she tells them, in painstaking details, sparing no amount of gore. At the point she speaks about that harrowing scene where Anya was shot, even thought she’s already gone over it all with Clarke, she still chokes up.

Lincoln takes his right hand off the steering wheel and gives her a sympathetic squeeze on the shoulder.

Anya and Raven have their hands tightly clasped, gazing at each other in a private language between lovers.

“I’m sorry you had to go through that kind of pain.” Raven says with her tearful eyes. She strokes her girlfriend’s left collarbone, because underneath the shirt, there is a ghastly scar, souvenir from the bullet that pierced through her body, hairs away from a major artery.

Anya answers her with a kiss on the forehead, “I’m sorry I wasn’t there to protect you from what happened next.”

Raven sighs deeply, relieved as if they are just reunited with each other after a long deployment, “I’m here, and you’re here, that’s all that matters.”

“I love you.”

Lexa twists around in her seat and touches Raven’s knee. She admires their love. Their love was forged in war, enduring unimaginable suffering and torment. Because there is compassion in their love, it is solid and indestructible.

She thinks about her love for Clarke. It is, too, a love that has been tested by misunderstandings, by grief, and mistakes. Perhaps they have not lived through the same kind of war, but after all these misunderstandings, grief, and mistakes, a deep compassion has gained roots between them. It’s a compassion that set the flames ablaze in Clarke’s sky blue eyes as she declared her own personal campaign to win Lexa back, the kind that allowed her to brave the risk of rejection and profess her love without any reservation, the kind that granted generous intimacy, and equally generous space when Lexa asked it; it is also the kind that causes a tightness in Lexa’s chest with three words she was too chicken to say, the kind that sends chills down her arms because they are empty and longing, the kind that needles at the base of her skull so she looks back every once in a while, searching for the little house on a little farm where she wants to go home to.

Home. Lexa tastes the word on the tip of her tongue. After a journey so long and so hard, she finally finds the people she wants to call home.

Raven and Anya reserve any further comments for the rest of the ride.

Hades is groggy when he scents his humans around his cot. The sharp throb in his front leg is subdued to a dull ache now. His tail thumps weakly against the plush padding when Lexa rubs his ears affectionately.
“Oh buddy…” She brushes the coarse fur on his head, and kisses his snout, worried and sorrowful. “You’re gonna need a small surgery. What’d you say, get this bum leg fixed today? I’ll wait right here.”

He doesn’t quite understand what she tells him, no short command, no familiar gesture. But he is sure that she will look out for him. So he closes his eyes and sticks out his tongue, panting lazily under her caress.

She speaks to the veterinarian, Dr Abernathy, to approve Hades’ procedure and sign documents. She doesn’t ask the price of his care, because he needs it, so she will break her back to pay for it if it comes to that. But the friendly, soft-spoken middle-aged man reads her mind. He assures her that she needs not worry, the Collins will foot the bill, per gratitude from Finn’s father. Even if they hadn’t offered, he will still perform the surgery pro-bono, because he and Abby Griffin are old friends. Lexa wonders if he knew Clarke’s father from veterinarian school, if they were friends as well. She thanks him profusely, to which he even blushes a little, and bids them good morning before wheeling his patient away.

With Hades rolled into the procedure room, she paces back and forth for a long while. When she finally tires herself out and puts her feet up on a row of chairs in the waiting area, Raven lets out a squeal, spotting the blood seeping through her dressing. Anya immediately chides her for not being careful. A vet tech appears from behind her perch at the front desk and offers them some gauze and tape.

Raven helps her unwrap the blood stained layers. Anya swaps in a fresh roll.

Raven wanders off to find a trash can, but is soon distracted by the displays of prosthetics for various animal species. She browses the posters where the most successful cases are exhibited. Lexa suspects that she is giving them space to work out their earlier squabble.

Anya lingers, kneeling in front of Lexa and picking at the edge of the bandage. “Clarke came to see you, you know.” She says, breaking herself out of a trance.

“When?”

“When you were getting stitches. I sent her away.” Anya doesn’t meet Lexa’s eyes, but she imagines her friend gazping her with muted displeasure. “She was worried for you, I could see. But I guess, I didn’t want her to string you along and get your hopes up, I didn’t want you to get hurt again. You were just starting to get better. It wasn’t my call, I realized that, and I’m sorry for not telling you right away.”

“Thank you, for telling me now.” Lexa’s voice, however, is soft with understanding.

Anya shifts and sits in the chair next to her. “So, you’ve made your decision. To forgive her.”

“It’s not about forgiveness, Anya. Like you said, I don’t need her forgiveness for surviving war. She doesn’t need my forgiveness for grieving her brother, either. We’ve both said and done things that are regrettable, things that hurt us, in our moments of weakness, or selfishness, or pain. But we’re just two fools trying to learn to love each other through all these mistakes.”

“I agree with the last part,” Anya turns her nose up in the air snidely, “very self-aware. And it’s true, you didn’t tell her the truth from the get-go, and she said some hurtful shit, so I guess that qualify you both as fools. I just wanted to protect you from getting into more scraps, I suppose, because you’re like a stupid little sister to me.”
Lexa snorts, “gee, thanks.” She then bumps her shoulder with Anya’s, “I appreciate you looking out for me, Ahn. But I’m not afraid of a few ‘scraps’, as you put it, because I know there’s something that’s worth holding onto.”

“…and Clarke is.” Anya says, watching Lexa closely for a confirmation.

“And Clarke is.” There is a ghost of a smile on her lips.

Anya has come to recognize Lexa’s smiles, reticent and rare as they are. This, she knows, is reserved for Clarke. She tuts and nudges back at Lexa’s shoulder, “you’re useless.”

“Quite possibly.”

Their conversation is cut short when Dr Abernathy and his vet tech materialize from behind the opaque slide doors. They both look confident and relaxed.

Lexa leaps out of her chair, ignoring Anya’s protest about her neat handiwork. “Is it all fixed? Is he okay?”

“Yes, Ms Woods, Hades pulled through just fine. You can see him now. We’re going to keep him till tomorrow though, for observational purposes.” He gestures behind him, a room sterile and well-kept.

Raven conveniently returns, and the three of them file in the operation area. Hades is sleeping soundly under the effect of anesthesia. His front leg is wrapped from his shoulder all the way down to his ankle, a shaved paw peeking out from the blue cast, only a few rows of fur left on his toes.

“Let’s take him to the recovery room. He will wake up nice and easy.” Dr Abernathy pats Hades softly on the head, and instructs his tech to wheel him out. He humbly accepts a firm handshake and many thanks from Lexa, and retreats back into his office where a teenager anxiously awaits with his lethargic-looking chameleon. “Ah, indigestions again, Mr Houdini?” Then the door clicks shut behind him.

They follow the vet tech to another room, empty save for a few cots and machines. Lexa glues herself to Hades’ side once he is hooked onto some monitoring devices. “Oh, old boy… what did I do to deserve you?” She combs through the fur on his head, his back, his tail, over and over, reassuring him of her presence. The heartbeat that is suspended in her throat finally drops back down in her chest when Hades’ ear twitches, a sure sign of him waking.

A different vet tech comes in and changes the bag of fluids when Hades starts whimpering and Lexa starts freaking out. She pushes another syringe in his line. “Pain medicine,” she explains, “we’ll take him to the kennels in a bit. He’ll probably be in and out for the rest of the day, it’s for his own good. You may visit but you can’t stay too long, there are many sick animals that need their rest. If everything goes well overnight, you could pick him up tomorrow at your earliest convenience.”

They readily agree, glad to see his suffering ease rather quickly. Hades falls back asleep with his tongue hanging out, high as a kite.

Raven snickers, and helps him rearrange his tongue back into his mouth. “Wow, must be some top shelf stuff they gave him. He’s out cold.”

“So, what’s next?” Anya drums her fingernails, swallowing a yawn, ready to reunite with a flat surface and shut her eyes.
“I think, some time to recover. We all need it.” Lexa kisses Hades one more time on his head, bidding a temporary goodbye. As if on cue, someone’s stomach gurgles. After a long stressful night and an emotional morning, none of them has seen a crumb. They look amongst themselves, the knowing glint of humor and amusement finding its way back in their eyes. Lexa clicks her tongue and concedes to Raven’s expectant look, “by the sound of that, we might as well start with breakfast.”

Chapter End Notes

Phew, by the first half of this chapter I realized that there are still many feelings they should work out, and a happily-ever-after is just too far-fetched at this point. So I am extending the story and adding another chapter for their second chance at love, and of course the opportunity for some fluff and maybe smut.

Took me a long time to write this chapter because everybody is coming from a different place, and I want them to be believable. I’m also embarrassed to admit - being a nurse who’s only ever worked inpatient - I had to lurk in the ER and ask around about flesh injuries that require stitches. I sadistically wanted Clarke to suffer for Lexa’s pain, but didn't want to compromise Lexa’s mobility.

Thank you for reading and please tell me what you think. I appreciate all of y'all who were here from the beginning, who came after the hiatus, and who are just discovering this story.
Chapter 16  Forever and counting

First times are often always meaningful, memorable, special. First time having a crush, first time kissing, first time making love… those are moments when your heart flutters and your breath quickens, your skin tingles, your face heats up, and your thoughts get consumed by even the smallest detail of that person.

Clarke knows it to be true. She remembers all her firsts with Lexa. The first time their hands touched, they stood shoulder to shoulder before a kitchen sink, it was an accident under the detergent bubbles. The first time Lexa held her, was on Jacob’s anniversary, she thinks she kicked her in their struggle, but she never let go. Their first kiss had the sweet aftertaste of pale ale, under the witness of a thousand stars, rudely interrupted and regrettably short. The first time they made love, she lay naked in a hazy world guarded by mosquito net, and felt safe, cherished, cared for, she felt alive.

But she was a fool back then. They both were, blind to the hidden agony in each other’s eyes, indulgent in the oblivious joy that knew no ache of losing. She had taken them granted.

Fate is kind to her, if not before, and she is given a second chance. A second chance to hold Lexa, to kiss her, to love her. So Clarke finds herself searching, counting, collecting these new firsts, resolute to commit them to her memory. It’s a numerical journey to meeting Lexa’s heart with her own.

The first ‘first’ comes sooner than she expected, nevertheless, it leaves her more breathless than she ever imagined.

Abby keeps in touch with Dr Abernathy, her husband’s old classmate and confidant. She regrets that they’ve grown apart after Jake’s death, but he is still the kind and friendly person she remembers, generously offering his service at a moment’s notice. She gets off the phone with him at night, informed about Hades’ condition. Funny as it is, she doesn’t entertain a single thought about calling her own hospital and ask about Finn. Abby tells Clarke, “they might need a crate for him tomorrow. I doubt Lincoln’s ride is big enough for that. Why don’t you go pick them up tomorrow?”

“ Really? Okay! Does… does Lexa know?” She of course can’t give up any opportunity to spend time with Lexa.

“I’m sure she won’t mind.” Abby gives her a look half amused half serious on top of her reading
Clarke ducks her head, embarrassed that she is acting so eager and love-sick like a school girl in front of her own mother. Aden demands to come along, unconvinced that everybody is well. So she agrees, maybe then she won’t appear too desperate and clingy.

She spends her tv time getting Hades’ crate ready anyway, cleaning out the biggest, roomiest one and dragging a plush, soft blanket to pad the bottom and the corners.

**August 27th**

In the morning, she wakes early and scrutinizes her reflection in the mirror. It’s not like they’re visiting anywhere fancy, but Lexa had called it a “date”, and she cannot turn up a slob. Clarke thinks, if she’s trying to impress her, she might as well start with looking nice. A pair of tight, hips-hugging jean shorts, a t-shirt that reveals a hint of her cleavage and makes her look cute and sexy but not lewd, and her trusty leather booties to go with the casual outfit, she feels motivated, and optimistic, and confident.

That confidence is crushed into dirt when she finally pulls up outside of Lexa’s home. Anya is leaning against the door frame, arms crossed in front of her chest. Aden, unperturbed by her blank expression, is excited that he can see Lexa again. He jumps out of the truck, shouts a quick hello to Anya, and abandons her mother to face the severe-looking lady’s silent wrath.

She hops out too, landing a little wobbly on her trusty booties, and wrings her hands together. “Hi, Anya.” Lame opening line, but she can’t bear the prolonged torment. “Where is Lexa?”

Anya regards her up and down, and rolls her pretty eyes, finally relenting to put her out of her misery. “Look, I’m not going to say cliches like ‘if you hurt her I’ll hurt you worse’. But I wish by now you realize what a special person Lexa is. She’s good, she’s kind, and of all the people in the world, she cares most about you. So consider yourself the luckiest woman alive, and never, ever, pull that stupid stunt and break her heart again.” She is satisfied to see the glimmer of fear she’s instilled in Clarke’s eyes, and adds, “Raven is changing out her gauze.”

Blinking fast, Clarke nods at Anya’s words. A secret urge to hug Anya swells in her chest, but she knows it will probably earn her a bloody nose if she acted on it. So instead, she says, “you… may not believe this, but I’m glad Lexa has you as her friend.”

Predictably, Anya’s sharp brows come together in a knot, her nose turning up in the air, “don’t suck up to me, that’s not gonna work.”

Clarke sees through the little tilt of her chin, knowing it pleases Anya that her friendship is noticeably valuable to Lexa. “I hope we could be friends again, one day.” She whispers demurely. “Anya, c’mon.” it is Lexa’s soft but unyielding voice that pulls both of their attention away. She steps outside and wedges herself in between the two of them, and slips her hand in Clarke’s. Their palms fit snugly and fingers slot together in a lock.

It’s such a simple act, barely given any thought, astonishingly natural. Yet it is unbelievably generous, and kind, and gentle. Just like that, at her second chance, Lexa holds her hand for the first time. Just like that, it drives away the last trace of the gnawing self doubt and the unfathomable fear that Lexa might not love her anymore. And just like that, Anya saunters off without another word of complaint. Clarke stares at their linked hands, the prick of tears rising.
behind her eyelids.

Aden trails behind Lexa, and gets a pat on the shoulder when he grins toothily at them.

“Ready, bud?” Lexa smiles back, and tugs slightly on Clarke’s hand to lead them to the car.

“Have fun kids.” Raven cheerily bids them goodbye. It’s a good sign, really, that she is coming around to the idea of Lexa seeing her again, but all Clarke can think about is how she should’ve parked the car a little farther, so their hands won’t have to break apart. Unfortunately traffic laws dictate that she needs both her hands to operate the vehicle. So she runs her thumb across the callouses on Lexa’s fingers, and carefully tucks away this little victory in her memory box labeled ‘Lexa’.

The sales representative at the Verizon store is overtly excited, complementing the way her hair is styled and pushing their products displayed colorfully on the little brochure. Lexa has never been keen on upgrading phones every year, so she lets the mother and son be her consultants. Given the responsibility, they immediately turn to the row with the sleekest, nicest smartphones.

Aden tests out the camera, taking silly selfies with Lexa, having a blast sending them all to his mother’s phone. Clarke’s standards for phones are more practical. She inquires the perks and compares prices for different bundles.

Lexa stares. She stares at the way Clarke combs back a strand of hair fallen in her face with careless fingers, she stares at the tiny wrinkles between her brows as she reads the fine prints on a contract, she stares at her pink lips pulling into a polite smile at a lame joke the sales representative tells.

“Pst, Lexa,” Aden nudges her, “you’re supposed to look at phones.” He tells her conspicuously.

She knows he’s teasing, and he’s fully in support of them being together. Still, her face flushes hotly, so she pretends to open up the game “fruit ninja” on a touchscreen.

“Hey Lex, what do you think? It’s a brand new phone, a small down payment then it can be added to our family plan.” Clarke apparently has bargained a good deal with their helper. She holds up an expensive-looking device in her hand, generations away from her last cell.

“Oh, I really don’t need much. I can just get the smallest bundle.”

“Don’t be silly, it’s actually the smartest deal here to be added on our bill. I’ll just take a few bucks from your tip jar every month if that’s what you’re—” Clarke cuts herself off, startled to realize the implication of her words, “I’m sorry, you haven’t said anything about being back at the kennels, I shouldn’t have assumed.”

Lexa hears a pang behind her sternum. It’s not a sound that leaves her anguished, but breathless. She feels it etched in her bones, her need to make this woman happy, to protect her from sadness and harm. “Hey,” she starts softly, “it’s okay. Of course I’d come back. There are a lot of projects I haven’t finished there.”

“Really?”

“Really.” To see the lights shine brightly in the blue eyes like the sun in a cloudless sky, Lexa tips forward, drawn close like a sunflower.
“Can we get it?” Aden’s excited question breaks their locked gaze.

Lexa takes the phone from Clarke’s hand, appraising its reassuring weight and polished appearance. “Are you sure this isn’t too much? How much is the down payment?” She waves the sales person over.

The enthusiastic woman approaches, but Clarke intercepts her. “Nah-uh, don’t ask. It’s your birthday present.”

“But my birthday is months away.”

Aden begs with his big blue eyes, “please get it… pretty please…”

It is when it hits her, that perhaps the word “family” in the advertisement is far more important to them than the budgetary appeal. So she agrees to their decision, adding her line to the family plan.

“Yay!!!” Aden borrows it the second it is released to them. He adds his mother’s number, Abby’s number, and their landline in it by memory, and grabs his mother’s phone too, sending picture after picture to decorate Lexa’s empty gallery. When he hands it back to her, Lexa finds that he’s taken the liberty and changed her wallpaper. The standard abstract image is replaced by two laughing faces. Aden and Clarke are looking up at the camera, basked in the warm glow of a balmy sunset. It is the day when they visited the creek for a picnic. She chuckles at the childishly innocent little hints he leaves, and gives him a wink.

Their next destination is the vet, to pick up Hades. Clarke exchanges pleasantries with Dr Abernathy on behalf of her mother, and helps load the poor thing into his personalized crate. Hades is thrilled to see her and the little human, rolling his head into their laps and licking at their hands. The toys and treats Clarke prepared for him are hanging from his mouth, noisily chewed and stickily slobbered on. But that doesn’t prevent her from giving him kisses and hugs.

It is ridiculous how Lexa feels a little jealous of her old buddy in this particular moment. She spies in the corner of her eyes when the blonde pulls out her phone and texts her mother. She sees that at some point during the day, Clarke has changed her own screen saver, of the same place, same day. Just instead of two golden heads, it’s herself and Aden rowing boat. That ridiculous jealousy disappears as quickly as it appeared.

When they get dropped off at home, Raven and Anya are waiting, ready to haul Hades inside. Lexa stands by the driver’s door, resting her elbow on the rolled off window. From the longing in the blue ripple of her eyes, Lexa knows Clarke wants to give her a goodbye kiss. She also knows she would accept it. But Clarke is relinquishing control and giving it to her, that much is clear in the careful way she picks her words and the yearning gazes she sends her way all day.

Clarke is gazing at her like that now, like she is something strong and fragile at the same time, something precious, something irreplaceable, like she is something fated, yet a wonderful, lucky fluke.

Lexa finds herself counting too, the times she feels those three little words bubble in her stomach, then rise to her chest, and tickle the back of her throat.

So she leans closer.

“Oi, give us a hand here, will ya.” Anya is lugging the crate from the truck bed impatiently.

Lexa is a little peevish now, because of course Anya would have an impeccable timing. Sighing, she pulls back. The disappointment doesn’t go unnoticed as Clarke bites her bottom lip. “Thank
you for today,” she says instead. Those three little words sink like pebbles, but they don’t get swallowed up by mud and weeds, they lay in the shallows, waiting to be picked up at any moment.

August 28th

Lexa <3 07:11 - Are you up?

Clarke 07:15 - Yep, been up a while now. Don’t worry about work, you need at least a week off to let your stitches heal.

Lexa <3 07:16 - Thank you. I was just about to ask for a few days before coming back :)

Lexa <3 07:19 - But I would like to see you too.

Clarke is blushing at her screen. The little slanted heart after Lexa’s name was Aden’s mischief. But the smiley face in the text, it’s all Lexa’s doing. She finds it absolutely adorable that Lexa used an emoticon.

Clarke types out a response: Finn is getting surgery today. I’ll need to take Aden to visit. We should be home by supper time. She has to, because it is a kind thing to do, and truthfully she pitys him a lot, a poor bastard abandoned by his so-called friend and despised by his coworkers. Still, seeing her ex husband always brings her a sense of unease. The dread has been pooling in her stomach since last night, even the pleasant thoughts of her day with Lexa couldn’t stave it off.

As if reading her mind, Lexa asks if she would like company. Clarke says yes without hesitation.

When they step in the bustling hospital hallway, lit by the aloof fluorescent lights and drenched in the smell of chlorhexidine, their hands come together in a tangle. Clarke falls in love a little more if that is even possible. Aden hangs onto a corner of her shirt and keeps close.

Finn’s parents are already outside of the room waiting for them. They look at the brunette meekly. The old man comes forward, taking Lexa’s hand in both of his, thanking her for saving his family from a disastrous accident. Finn’s mother kisses Aden for a whole minute, before leading them inside his hospital room.

A pitiful figure on the bed, Finn lies with his leg propped up on a pile of pillows, casted in bulky dressings. His dark eyes widen at the sight of his son, but he avoids looking up at the women guiltily.

Aden is first to approach. He climbs up the side of the bed gingerly, not to disturb the lines and monitors attached to him. He smells the musty, day-old hospital gown as Finn stretches out his arm and wraps him in a tight hug. “I’m sorry, dad.”

“No, son. I’m sorry. I’m sorry for a lot of things.” He squeezes his eyes shut, lashes damp from tears that he is trying to hold back.

“I’m glad you’re doing better, Finn.” Clarke clears her throat around the lump there. The first night after the accident, he was pale and limp like a ghost. Now there is some color returned to his cheeks, and less shiver in his voice.

Finn lets go of Aden, taking a deep breath. He meets Clarke’s gaze, “thank you,” and his eyes flit to Lexa, “Lexa, I—I don’t know what to say. You saved my son, and you didn’t give up on me, after... after everything. I know that I didn’t—I don’t deserve your forgiveness, but I am sorry.”
Even though he says that doesn’t expect her forgiveness, Lexa can still tell that he cares, so does Aden, watching her expectantly alongside his father. She gives him a small nod, “I appreciate your apology. I suppose we can talk, after you recover.”

Like a drowning man grasping for a life ring, he agrees eagerly, “I’d like that very much.”

“Let us take Aden, get some snacks downstairs. We’ll leave you to talk.” Sensing the tension in the air, Finn’s father suggests, and beacons the little boy, “come, Aden, we’ll be back in a bit.” He reassures the little boy that he can visit longer, after Clarke and Finn have a conversation. The three of them slip out and head to the cafeteria.

“I’ll be right outside.” Lexa squeezes her hand, and closes the door behind her. She leans against the wall and rests her head next to the door. She doesn’t mean to listen in, but through the thin, not-remotely-soundproof wall, she can hear the clear pitch of their voices, one higher than the other.

Finn is looking at Clarke with something akin to pleading in his expression. His normally arrogant form is hunched in shame and his usual smirk is wiped completely off his face. “Clarke, listen—”

“Wait,” Clarke holds up her hand, taking back her initiative. She’s heard too much from him in the last seven years, she needs to say her piece now. “You listen. The only reason I’m standing here talking to you is because you did something when Aden needed you. You did something to save his life, for that, I am grateful. But I am done playing your games, Finn, and I am not going to let you continue manipulating me, or Aden. Do you understand that?”

“Yes… yes, please. I’m so sorry for what happened.” His hands come together in a praying gesture. “Sorry isn’t going to cut it.” She wants so much to punish him, to hurt him, to intimidate with what he used to instill fear in her. But, “unlike what you’ve always threatened me with, I’m not going to take Aden away from you, you’re still his father. It’s wrong, and it’s cruel, and it’s beneath me.”

He winces, accepting her accusation because she is right. He has been a neglectful father, a poor role model for his son, a bully and a thug to Clarke.

“I’m not pressing charges, nor is Lexa, she doesn’t want to be involved in your bullshit. But it doesn’t mean we’ve forgiven you. And I want you fully sober, otherwise I won’t let you see Aden, he’s gone through enough he doesn’t need an alcoholic father.”

“I will… I’ll check into a rehab facility as soon as I’m out.” Finn puts his hand on his chest, swearing. “Lexa… is a good person, very… kind.”

It doesn’t mean anything coming from his mouth, Clarke thinks to herself, but she still quivers with anger and regret that she’s ever let herself fall into his trap. “You have no idea, Finn. And let me make this clear, you’ve got no say, none, in my life, if you try to sabotage my relationship with Lexa again, I will give you hell. So you’d better accept that Lexa will be in my life and Aden’s for a very, very long time.”

His head hangs lower with another heavy nod, “Lexa is good for Aden, I—I can see that now. She’s good for you, too.”

“She’s a better person than you and I both. And I hate myself, even more than I hate you, that I’ve let her down, and hurt her, just because of some stupid nonsense you came up with. I almost lost her, Finn, did you know? I could’ve lost her, and I could’ve lost Aden.” To her frustration, her vision becomes blurry and her face is wet with quick tears. She wipes them on back of her hand roughly, stubborn and unwilling to show her weak side in front of him.
Finn somehow understands that stubbornness. After all, he’s the one who’s pushed her so far, who’s made sure that she has to keep her guard up around him at all times. He averts his eyes and folds his hands together.

She sniffs, composing her emotions in a few shallow breaths. Finally she says, “we’re both given a second chance, Finn. I’m going to do anything and everything to make it up to Lexa. I suggest you do the same for Aden.” Then, she’s rushing out of his room. Seeing Finn has her rattled, despite her having the upper hand this time. She feels pressed for time, ever than before, in a hurry to find Lexa, to keep good to her promise, to make sure that she’s really still here. She frantically searches the nurse’s station, scanning the impassive faces behind computers. Her heartbeat is thudding loudly in her ears, her chest constricts, and her head spins upon the sea with waves of navy colored uniforms.

“Hey, hey…” Lexa catches her by the elbow. She’s heard most, if not all, of their conversation. Lexa has met many bullies in her military career, and she knows what tremendous courage it takes to confront one. Clarke did it for her. She gets this vigorous flutter in her stomach, and the urge to protect and defend rises again.

“Lexa.” Clarke seems almost astonished to find her. The tear marks on her cheeks are still glistening in the anemic, grayish blue light.

Lexa pulls her close, and lets her tremble in her arms. “It’s okay… Clarke,” her lips are gentle against the soft blonde tresses, “you’re okay.”

It takes Clarke by surprise. How many days has she been missing this, missing Lexa’s warmth, Lexa’s smell, Lexa’s strength. Lexa is holding her now, again, for the first time, for the countless time. Like it’s the first time, Clarke has never felt safer than she is now, shielded in Lexa’s firm embrace, and each stroke Lexa puts on her back soothes a different nerve. And like it’s the countless time, their bodies mold around each other comfortably, her chin rests on Lexa’s collarbone, and her nose presses by the steady pulse in her neck. She inhales deeply, and keeps the breath that contains Lexa’s scent securely in her chest. She wordlessly stashes away in her mind this blissful feeling, both familiar and new.

“I’m here,” Lexa shushes her quietly, “I’m right here…” “I love you,” is what she tries to say. But in the corner of her eyes, she notices Aden bounding toward them with two ice cream cones in hands. It’s the second time, she counts, her little confession slithers into its secretive hiding place at the base of her throat.

**September**

Ever since visiting Finn, they feel lighter, like the air after a deluge of rain.

Aden starts a new school year, and enjoys second grade just as much as the next seven-year-old. He picks more after school activities, which means her mother gets a busier schedule. Their calendar is filled with sticky notes and red pen, marking days and times for his practices or events, weekdays and weekends alike.

Clarke finds every excuse to text Lexa, inviting her to mundane errands like buying Aden new school supplies, or picking a care package for Hades at the luxurious pet store, or on days she finishes work early, she makes an extra tray of casserole and brings it to the little cabin at supper. Lexa responds in kind, seizing every opportunity to spend time with her. Raven and Anya at first pulled sour faces, Anya claiming, “she’s trying too hard. It’s pathetic,” and Raven accusing, “you
never hang out with us, and we’re leaving soon.” But they warm to the gesture eventually. Raven stakes out at the window everyday around 6pm to see if they need to survive on pizza for another day, and Anya admits, “she cooks a mean hot dish.”

“So… are we getting fed tonight or what?” Raven pipes up on the dot like clockwork. They haven’t seen Clarke for two whole days, work at the pet motel picking up and Aden having late practices after school.

Lexa clicks her tongue disapprovingly, “Clarke isn’t obligated to make us food, Reyes. Plus, you were the one who complained that I’m neglecting you.”

“But you’re her girlfriend, that should come with perks.” Raven begs, “please, text her, I can’t stomach another crusty ole pie.” She bats her eyes at Lexa, “don’t you want to see her too? You act coy but I know you’re needy as fuck.”

“Raven.” Lexa warns, but she can’t seem to find a valid gibe, she groans, “ugh. Fine.”

*Lexa 18:12 — Raven wants to know if she can mooch off your cooking tonight. I told her it’s not your job to feed us. She then pulls up the emoji table, and selects the yellow face with eyes rolling up, hoping it means what she thinks it means.*

Clarke texts back after a few minutes. *Making pot roast right now. Why don’t I pick you all up? You guys are always welcome to join for dinner.*

*Lexa 18:16 — Are you sure? I don’t want to impose.*

*Clarke 18:16 — Lexa. Even without any emojis, Lexa can imagine her tone when she typed her name.*

*Clarke 18:17 — Be there in 20. Get ready.*

*Lexa 18:17 — Okay, thank you. You’ve rescued Raven from the ill fate of pizza.*

As soon as she hears about the plan, Anya argues that it will be inappropriate to join their family dinner at their house.

“You ate whatever Clarke brought every time, Anya.” Lexa wags her finger, displeased by her demeanor, “either you come, or you starve.” She hears Anya grumble something crude in Trigedasleng. “Be on your best behavior, you two.”

To her relief, Anya and Raven are perfectly pleasant once they are dragged out of isolation and civilized under the roof of their hosts. They make small talk with Abby and complement the food presented in front of them, and engage in Aden’s chatter about his first week at school. And if they are a bit aloof toward the young hostess, they are polite enough that Clarke smiles at them from her plate now and again.

“So, how long do we have you here?” Abby asks out of curiosity, the answer to which interests both Lexa and Clarke. Lexa loves her friends, and Clarke finds them to be good people despite the cold shoulders she’s received. It’s definitely not that they don’t like Raven and Anya. But it seems as though they’ve arrived at a standstill, where they long for intimacy, yet they can hardly find a space without an audience, or time without interruptions.

Raven shrugs, chewing a piece of meat happily. Anya replies, “by the end of next week, I think. We’ve both overstayed to make sure… uh, to keep Lexa company.” She spares a glance at Clarke, who looks away with a flash of hurt on her face. She offers an olive branch, “but I think Lexa is
doing a lot better. We should be leaving soon. Raven’s due for an orientation at this auto shop she wants to join, and I have interviews for a couple of security companies.”

Lexa reaches under the table, and gives Clarke’s knee a friendly squeeze. Raven catches sight of this small movement, and wiggles her eyebrows at her knowingly.

When everyone’s belly is ballooning out, full of tender roast and garlic bread, Aden ushers his new guests to his room. He parades his second-grade science project to Raven, who in turn teaches him how to impress his classmate with a mentos-coke volcano. Anya is instantly hooked on his vast collection of rare hot wheels—almost too rare to be in the possession of a seven-year-old. He explains that his uncle used to obsess over them. “You can take one, if you like.” He tells her, not fully realizing the value of these tiny car models.

“Oh no, kid, I can’t. These belonged to your uncle, I’m sure he would want you to hold onto them and take good care of them. Anyone but you should only be allowed to look, okay?”

He nods but gives her a weird look. “Well, you can always come back and see them. You guys will visit again, right? When Mom and Lexa get married in church, like Uncle Bellamy.”

Raven chokes on her own spit, eyes bulging out of her head, “married?”

“Yup, don’t you think they should? Mom loves Lexa a lot, and Lexa loves Mom a lot.”

Anya tucks her lips in to stifle a laugh. She schools her face back to seriousness, “well, I think that’s for them to decide. You don’t necessarily need to get married when you love someone—of course that’s an option. But partnership exists in many forms. Like Raven and I, we love each other very much and we aren’t married.” She steals a glance at Raven, gauging her reaction, trying to figure out if she had given any thought to marriage.

He looks between them and considers her words, but soon after he insists on his conviction, “maybe you should be.”

Raven’s cheeks are a purplish red. She ducks her head and pretends to investigate his other trinkets. Anya stares at him with her mouth agape, her mind flying to the bottom drawer of her nightstand at home, where a velvety ring box is disguised in an unassuming roll of socks. He grins innocently at her. Anya decides that he’s now her best friend, replacing Lexa, who is severely violating the “bros before hoes” code on a regular basis nowadays.

Abby takes the last few dirty dishes to the sink, where Lexa and Clarke are already standing shoulder to shoulder. She sneaks her load in, and tiptoes away slyly.

Finally left alone, they find themselves enveloped in the pink fire of sunset, ambient music flowing out of a classical station on the radio, and lukewarm bubbly water soaking her hands. They suddenly grow shy.

Lexa tells her about the shenanigans Raven has been up to. “She fashioned a window unit from an old fridge and some car parts. Gotta give it to her, she’s a pretty decent problem solver. Maybe I should keep her around longer to make me a heater for colder weathers.”

“Your cabin is an overpopulated fire hazard.” Clarke jokes, nudging her shoulder against Lexa, “you know, you can always stay with me while they’re still here.” The second her suggestion leaves her mouth, her eyes widen in realization of how forward it sounds. “I didn’t mean… I was just… we have a guest room and it’s really easy to get ready.”

“Clarke, it’s okay—”
“Of course it’s your decision ultimately, if you’d want to move in, eventually. I just think it could save you some rent, and the winter is pretty harsh here, you’d need way better insulation,” she rambles on nervously, unable to stop herself from jumping far ahead of what she truly wants to say. She curses herself for being so pushy, and hopes with her fingers crossed under water that Lexa isn’t spooked.

Lexa lets her finish, and watches her heave out a shuddery breath. There is a reddish glow across the blonde’s pale cheeks and nose bridge. If she looks closer, she can see minuscule red dots peppering the top of her chest that’s revealed by the v-neck. It’s certain that the sunset, though rich and ardent, can never paint such a glorious blush. Her heart burns too. “Clarke, it’s alright,” she leans closer until she can smell the floral shampoo in the blonde hair, “thank you for the offer. I’ll think about it, okay?”

Clarke nods.

Lexa adds good-naturedly, “I think Hades will benefit from having a bigger yard once he can run around again. He’s probably gained two or three pounds by now, eating and lying down all day.”

They share a chuckle at his expense, but descends into a short silence otherwise.

Clarke puts down the sudsy sponge and lets a plate submerge in the soapy water, she grips the edge of the countertop with white knuckles. Lexa’s watchful eyes are on her, patient and tender, and her body heat hovers merely inches away. She feels feverish, the same kind of warmth that sweltered in her lower belly is now rushing up to muddle her brain. She wants Lexa, she wants all of her. She wants to cast her dignity to the wind and throw herself on top of her, regardless of having four other people in the house. At the same time, she wants Lexa to feel comfortable, to feel in control, to feel ready. And Lexa is always the perfect gentlewoman, Clarke loves her intensely for that. But the gnawing voice in the back of her skull, needling her to do something about her desire for Lexa, triumphs against her self-restraint. She blubbers out, “I just… I miss you so much, Lexa.”

“Oh, Clarke…” Lexa drops the bowl in her hands and dries her hands on the rag slung over her shoulder. She turns toward the blonde, facing her fully. “Soon,” she promises, “I’ll be back at work, Anya and Raven will go home, and we’ll have all the time we want for us.”

Clarke rubs her eyes on her sleeve messily, “I know, I’m sorry, it’s silly. I’m being inconsiderate, of course you should be with your friends. They’re important to you.”

Reaching around Clarke’s waist, she reels her in until they’re chest to chest. “You’re important to me.” It’s an admission, lightyears away from what she really wants to say, but it puts a spark back in those sky blue eyes, reflections of stars in the swirling waters. “It’s not silly to miss me, I miss you too. Tell me what you want me to do, Clarke.”

She splays her hands on her pants, ridding them of suds and water, then she brings them up to rest on Lexa’s sides, her thumbs digging lightly into the taut muscles covered by a flimsy tank top. Clarke lets her line of sight drop for a fragment of a second at Lexa’s plump, full lips. _Lexa is in control._ She feels selfish, “I want… I want you to be comfortable with how fast we’re going. I don’t want you to feel pushed or pressured into anything for my benefit. I want to do this right by you. You get to set the pace, Lex, I want you to se—” Her rushed words are cut off when her chin is tilted up by a calloused finger. A pair of soft lips crashing down to hers, engulfing the last of her sentence in a blazing kiss.

Lexa tightens her hold on the woman’s hips, bringing their bodies flush together. She feels Clarke’s hands climb their way up and find purchase at her nape, combing through the tangles of curls there. She is less careful, less meticulous with her kiss, nipping until Clarke is moaning into
her mouth, and sliding her tongue against its counterpart greedily.

It’s happening fast, so fast that she barely registers that Lexa initiated the kiss, Lexa is kissing her, for the first time after so many long days and longer nights of waiting and wishing and pining. Clarke can’t help but compare it to their first kiss ever—one that was incredibly sweet in its newness, bashful, reserved and timid. This kiss is nothing like it, it’s urgent, it’s fervent, and all-consuming. She is backed up against the counter, panting hard when they part for rapid sips of air.

Lexa doesn’t know what took her so long. Maybe she wasn’t ready to give herself completely over, maybe she was holding out for a semblance of control, maybe she was afraid that if she fell too hard and too fast like she did last time, something calamitous would happen again. And maybe, even though she doesn’t like to admit it, she was keeping a score for the days of heartache she’s been put through. But none of it matters now, not her control, not her fear, no petty score, when Clarke is so soft and warm and open.

One kiss becomes two, three, several, many. Lexa sprinkles them liberally across her cheeks, her jawline, along her neck and on her shoulder. Her labored breathing tickles. Clarke giggles, surprising herself, and pulls Lexa upward to rest their foreheads together. “Lexa, wha—”

“This is me, setting the pace.” She answers, the corners of her lips tugging into a smile. She cups the blonde’s face, and watches with fondness when Clarke turns her head slightly and smuggles a kiss to the center of her palm. “I want you, Clarke.” She says, “we’re together. You don’t have to be afraid.”

“I’m not afraid when you’re kissing me like that.” Clarke tips her head up to taste those kiss-swollen lips again. This time, they are less frantic, both tilting their head to one side, adjusting their angles to deepen the connection. Rather than desperate lips and tongues, the kiss is a slow dance, a languid exploration, a reintroduction. They smile against each other’s mouth, feeling the same curve mirroring their own.

Someone is trudging down the stairs, but they don’t break apart. From the uneven footsteps, Lexa can tell it is Raven.

“Oh wow!” Raven exclaims exasperatedly, making her presence known.

Clarke whines and Lexa sighs as they pull back from each other.

“Uh, your kid is getting himself ready for bed.” Raven informs her.

“Is it 8:30 already?” Clarke confirms the time on the grandfather clock, “oh shoot, I’m sorry, give me a sec.” She stands on her tippy toes and pecks Lexa one last time for good measure, before rushing upstairs to supervise her son perform his bedtime routines. She passes Anya in the hallway, who is quietly talking with her mother. She hears her say, “I’m very sorry for your loss. He was a good man,” and her mother hugs Anya tightly. It gives her comfort, knowing that Jacob had made an impact in other people’s lives beyond her family.

Sauntering over, Raven props herself on the counter. She snickers to see the little to no progress they have made in tackling the dishes, and pokes Lexa with her elbow, “steamyp.”

“No word, Reyes.” Lexa busies herself with the chore again. Her heart is still fluttering wildly in her chest, singing a much happier beat. She listens absentmindedly as Raven tells her about plans to build Aden a miniature rocket launcher out of his broken nerf gun for his many stray bullets.

“Hey,” an idea takes form in her head, “you’re good with engines and motors.”
“Duh, who put together the transmission for your broke ass bike? I’m gonna make loads being a mechanic.”

Lexa rolls her eyes with a laugh, “you took it apart first.”

“True, true.” Raven takes over rinsing, “what, need my expertise on a new ride?”

She shakes her head, “how about a boat?”

September 9th

True to her word, Lexa is back at work as soon as she gets the clear from her doctor, and Clarke loves it. It’s not just because with Lexa around, the stay quality for animals under her care increases twofold, and the dogs get regular walks, and the charmed suburban housewives tip heavy-handedly when they come board their precious Pomeranian or Maltese—they’ve got nothing to do with her exceptionally good mood.

Clarke loves it because she can watch Lexa putter about, starting new projects without finishing old ones, and Hades bound around three-legged, happy-go-lucky and unbothered by his temporary impediment. She loves it, because at lunch time, they sit side by side on the porch, idly touching and trading childhood stories. What she loves most about it, is the fact that she can come up to Lexa with a glass of ice tea, or an apple for snack, and unabashedly steal a kiss.

And Lexa’s kisses, God Clarke wants to bottle each of them up, have regained their varieties. Some are flitting little things, small gifts in passing. Some are passionate and patient all at once, stirring up emotions that spill many types of tastes on the tip of her tongue. And some, are deep and sizzling and downright dirty, leaving her a little too warm, embarrassingly sticky, and a lot aching. Had they given it a few more seconds, she fantasizes, it might escalate quite easily into something even dirtier.

“Penny for your thought.”

Clarke startles out of her daydream. She blushes furiously as the subject of her lust plops down casually on the same stair as she is sitting on, bringing a world of amazing smells, a mixture of musty sweat and freshly cut grass.

As if she knows exactly where her mind was, Lexa smirks. Clarke butts her head against her chest, and hides her face in her neck, so she curls an arm around her shoulder. “Can you come hang out with us tonight, after supper?” She asks.

“Hang out?” Clarke repeats. It doesn’t sound like a phrase Lexa would use—she’d say something like “spend time”, or “company me somewhere”, or something equally adorable and courteous. She senses something Raven about it.

“All of ours. Anya and Raven are going home day after tomorrow. They want to be on good terms with my girlfriend before they leave.” Lexa drops a kiss on her head and coaxes, “please, we have a little surprise for you if you come.”
Clarke is admittedly intrigued by the surprise. And even though her friendship with them are rocky at the time being, she can see the ice starting to crack and melt away. “Alright.” She agrees, and smiles to see the hopeful twinkle in Lexa’s eyes.

They part ways to finish up chores. After Clarke gets Aden from school, Lexa borrows her truck.

“Are they coming to dinner? We’re doing spaghetti and meatballs tonight.” Clarke has a jar of tomato sauce in her arm.

“Oh, no, they’re set on eating out at this brats place. I’d ask you all to join, but it’s a school night, so…” Lexa steps forward, and gives her a chaste peck on the mouth, “I’ll pick you up later, okay?”

Clarke pouts to watch her leave. She’s grown used to having Lexa stay, often hours after supper. But the thought of seeing her tonight balances out her short-lived melancholy.

She’s suspicious when Lexa shows up alone, beeping lightly to get her attention from inside the house. “Where is everybody?”

“They’re there already.” Lexa starts the car and pulls out of the driveway smoothly. She is happy, Clarke observes, as she hums along to some vaguely familiar oldie on the radio.

“So, do I get to know this surprise?” She starts to recognize the way to the pier, where rows of rarely used private boats are bobbing leisurely in their slips, rain or shine.

Lexa considers her question, and decides to disclose everything. “I don’t want you to be mad, and I don’t mean to snoop… I went and tried to fix your boat engine a while ago. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want to get your hopes up if it hadn’t worked.”

“I knew.” Clarke brushes the back of her fingers against Lexa’s cheek, “I went there recently, to clear my head. You left a few things in the cabin.”

“Did you happen to find a jacket?” Lexa perks up.

Clarke snickers, “yes, silly. But finders keepers.”

Shaking her head indulgently, Lexa drops her inquiry. She’ll revisit this case of theft later on. “Ok, fine, fine. But back to what I was saying. I couldn’t fix your boat, there’s something wrong with the hydraulic system, or so Raven says. She’s been fiddling with the gear for a few days, and she’s fairly confident it’s working again.”

“For real!??” Clarke is at the edge of her seat as they pull up around the pier, “oh, Lex, you don’t know what it means to me…”

“Raven is a genius and nine times out of ten she’s right. I just, I guess… please don’t be upset with her if this doesn’t turn out the way we intended.” Lexa brings her hand to her lips and kisses it. “She feels terrible, Anya too, for being harsh and mean to you. They’re just trying to be nice.”

“Of course, I think that’s really sweet. Thank you, Lexa.”

“You’re welcome.” She leans over the central console and kisses her softly.

They stroll hand in hand on the wooden platform supported by metal girders, springing slightly with the ripples like they’re walking on cotton. Clarke can’t help but smile at the scene on her little fisherman’s boat. Raven and Anya are snuggling on the deck with blankets. They’ve already broken into the case of beer, sipping and stargazing.
“Hey Lexa, hey Clarke.” They lazily greets them, having no intention of getting up.

Lexa picks up two beers and hands one to the blonde. She wanders into the cabin, “progress report, Reyes?”

“Oh!” Raven worms out of her girlfriend’s arm and waddles behind Lexa, “come here, I need you to get in there and help me reattach the transmission to the propellers. Anya’s no help.”

That is surprising to Clarke, and it must’ve shown on her raised eyebrows.

Raven leans closer and tells her in a loud whisper, “be glad your woman is somewhat handy, Anya will burn the shit out of herself trying to change a lightbulb.”

“That was one time!” Anya protests.

“Sorry babe, I don’t trust anyone who can’t tell an Allen from a socket wrench around complex machineries.” Raven tosses a screwdriver in Lexa’s direction, “come on, commander, I’m leaving the last part so you can take the credit, show your girlfriend what those hands can do.”

It piques her interest. Clarke lingers outside and peers in, looking at the pieces and parts of her boat’s transmission laid across the floorboards.

“See? This was cracked, so the clutches couldn’t hug when you cranked the ignition, the gear kept slipping.” Raven holds up a rusted piece and shows Lexa, who studies it with curiosity. She moves onto a couple of teethed wheels, “the ratio reduction gear on the counterclockwise set is also broken, you’re lucky it didn’t bust the propeller blades spinning that fast. I changed it out, but if you need to fine-tune the propeller configuration later on, you know where it is now.”

Lexa takes note of all the changes Raven’s made, and potential problems she’s pointed out that might need fixing down the line.

Somewhere between “purge valve” and “crusader hose”, Clarke is completely lost in the jargons. She resigns to sit with her chin resting in her palm, and talk with Anya.

Anya is softer with her. She inquires about Aden’s school life, and her work at the kennel. She even brings up her deployment with Jacob, the few weeks that she’s known him. “He’d gotten on well with Lexa and Raven. We’d never see them coz they’d be holed up in the garage flipping old cars and bikes and other junk.”

Clarke smiles at her impression of her brother. Anya’s not wrong, he did have an aptitude for fixing everything old and broken. Lexa is the same. She turns her gaze back to the brunette, who is tinkering the couplings and clicking parts into place within the gear compartment. There is a certain grace about Lexa, in the small wrinkles between her brows when she concentrates on the task at hand, and her forearm muscles flexing with each careful movement, or even as she twists her body in impossible angles to fixate something inside the cramped gear compartment.

Yet, to Raven, Lexa is merely a step more evolved than a monkey. More than once she chides her for grabbing the wrong things. “What are you doing? That is the gasket for the oil cooler. Do you think you can force it on the filter by blunt force?”

Anya finds it amusing, joining in their squabble and teasing her friend despite her own cluelessness. Without looking, Lexa chucks a dirty rag squarely in her face, causing both Raven and Clarke to burst in a gale of giggles.

Lexa takes their quips lightheartedly, because when does Raven not have a colorful vocabulary.
But she nearly knocks her head against the latch door by looking up too fast when Raven calls her a “branwoda”.

Clarke doesn’t know what it means, but by the context in which the word was uttered, she knows it must be an insult. Anya supplements that it means “fool”, but now the kids use it more along the lines of “dumbass” in Trigedasleng.

“You taught her curse words?” Lexa narrows her eyes at her friend.

“Hey, don’t underestimate my intellect! I pick up on things when she calls her nomon.” Raven puffs out her chest proudly.

Lexa calls on her bullshit, “I know you lie for a fact, Anya will never use distasteful words with her mother.”

“Okay I’m busted, Anya did teach me some, only after she let it slip when she was com—” She doesn’t get to finish her sentence because Anya is muffling her mouth like she might very well suffocate her. But she still gets a wink out at Lexa and Clarke.

“Alright alright, I don’t need details of your nasty business.” Lexa covers her ears childishly, then she sends a playful glare at Anya, “well fuck me, now she’s gonna know when we’re talking shit about her on the phone.”

Anya snorts and snickers, “you remember that one time with Ms Benson in fifth grade?” Lexa groans in annoyance, but Anya spirals into a long tale about Lexa’s boarding school crush on the teacher. “So Lexa was calling me one night, and telling me all about this super hot science teacher, blonde, big tits, touchy-feely—Lexa definitely has a type by the way—and Ms Benson was on duty that night! Lexa thought she could be sneaky and talk to me in Trigedasleng, but unbeknownst to her stupid little self, Ms Benson’s husband was from our hometown and she’s fluent in our tongue.” She is clutching her stomach and tipping over, laughing so hard, “god Lexa got in so much trouble! I thought she’d had to switch schools.”

Lexa turns purple with embarrassment, but she is also struggling to hold in her own laughter.

“Oh, we all crush on our teachers, Lex.” Clarke kisses Lexa’s shoulder in consolation, but then she adds mischievously, “but honestly it doesn’t surprise me. I’ve always pegged you to be a boobs girl.”

“You’re quite right about that, blondie. Oh wait, here’s a good one,” Anya finally finds a new ear she can share all of Lexa’s mortifying childhood escapades. She tells Clarke the story of Lexa’s father taking them for a visit at his base, Lexa had stumbled into a locker room full of sweaty female pilots and come out with a nosebleed, and the next two times she “took a wrong turn” were definitely deliberate. She then recalls, in middle school, a boy had expressed romantic feelings toward Lexa, who broke the poor boy’s lips in a panic when he leaned in for a kiss.

Clarke has never seen her talk this much, but she is fascinated by her depictions of Lexa’s childhood. Lexa, having finished restoring the gears, wipes her hands clean and joins them on the deck. She only scolds Anya when her tales become a bit too risqué and graphic.

Raven madly thumbs away at her phone, and she announces that she and Anya need to depart. “Alright kids, we’ve graced you with our presence. Now we shall be on our way.”

“Where are you guys going? Aren’t I your ride?” Clarke stands too.

“Nah,” Anya waves her off, much like her answer after the wedding, “Harper and Zoe are picking
us up. We’re going home to change then going out. You wanna come?”

“Out? But it’s Thursday, we’ve got work early tomorrow.”

“Fuck work! It’s our last chance to go crazy in Mad-town!” Raven is already striding over the bow rail. “Harper and Zoe know fun, unlike you two senior citizens.”

“She’s joking. You don’t have to come. I know you probably want to have some alone time together.” Anya follows her girlfriend, stepping off the boat.

“Hey guys,” Clarke speaks up before they completely turn away. She sways a little on her heels, suddenly shy and nervous, “thank you, for tonight. I had a wonderful time hanging out with you.”

They beam at her, a genuine smile, with a high blush on both of their cheeks, perhaps from the alcohol. Clarke waves them goodbye and watches them get whisked away by Harper’s car as soon as they reach dry land. With their departure, she finds her surrounded by a serene stillness. Lexa stands behind her and wraps her in a warm embrace. She leans back, turning her head to receive a kiss.

Lexa’s chest rumbles with a hum. Then she steps back, steering them in the direction of the control panel, “why don’t you give it a try?” She flicks open the rope that is tying the boat to the pier by a cleat.

Clarke approaches wistfully, her hand hovers above the lever for a while. She feels slightly nervous, but not so as she thought she’d be. Her heart is already so full with the real gift from Raven and Anya, in the form of their friendship. So even if this doesn’t work, she thinks, it won’t disappoint her. She makes sure the lever is in neutral, then twists the ignition.

The sparking nicker lags on for a few seconds, and she almost gives up, when the boat grumbles to life, like the old lady she is, grousing about her interrupted slumber. But then, the new gears and fresh filter oil soothes her. She settles into a smooth neutral. Clarke pulls the lever to reverse, the boat obediently glides out of her slip. It stops a few yards away from the dock with the anchor pulling taut—she hasn’t reeled it back, in case the engine decides to give in after all and they need to hand-crank it to shore.

Lexa is standing in the sunken cockpit, peering over the edge, and delighting in the foamy waves the propellers made from the bottom of the boat.

Clarke runs away from the bridge and onto the deck as well. She can hardly believe her eyes. After so many years of loafing by the pier, Abigail is once again whirring merrily in the water. “Oh Lexa…” she coos her name, eyes welling up. “Lexa…” she calls again, and steps close, “thank you. Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome.” Lexa palms her cheeks, and smoothes her thumbs across the wet trails of tears. She dips her head for a kiss. Clarke murmurs gratefully against her mouth, as if relieved to be back in her embrace again. Lexa slides her tongue over Clarke’s bottom lip and gathers salt there.

Clarke wraps her arms behind Lexa’s neck, and parts her lips to greet Lexa’s probing tongue. Without further prompting, she feels the warm, wet, slick flesh flick inside her mouth and catch her own, swirling and suckling in a sultry play. She clutches a fistful of Lexa’s hair, desperate for a fuller connection.

Lexa hears her moan again, this time the gratefulness has a different tune, a bit whiny, and pleading. Pleased with the reaction she inflicted, she lets her hands travel south, abandoning the
pretense for discretion, rubbing the full hips, then cupping handfuls of the voluptuous cheeks. The press of Clarke’s soft chest against her makes her spine tingle.

“Lex…” she tears away from their kiss to pant. Those sinfully long and strong fingers kneading her behind should be a crime. They bring a gush of humid heat to her center, where her underwear clings uncomfortably. She bucks her hips, uncertain which way she wants to move.

Her lips latch on the creamy skin on the blonde’s neck. She breathes her in, and a rare urge to possess brews in her chest. “I want you, Clarke,” she licks and nips along the column of her neck, then her shoulder and collarbone, and the top of her breast, “I want all of you.”

“Yes… I’m yours, Lexa… all yours.” Clarke lowers herself down on top of the mess of blankets, and beacons Lexa to join her.

She goes without hesitation, climbing over the blonde’s softness. They kiss again, short and passionate this time. Lexa hikes the hem of Clarke’s shirt up, revealing the expanse of her buttery skin. And when Clarke tugs it off, she claws at her lace bra, and she sucks in a deep breath when one of the perfect mounds springs free from the flimsy confinement.

Clarke throws her head back at the feeling of a hot mouth enclosing around her nipple. Lexa’s tongue lashes around the sensitive tip, and she readily dissolves into a quivering mess. She rakes her fingers in Lexa’s curls, trying to direct her downward. “Lexa, I need you. Don’t make me wait… I need you now.”

And like magic, Lexa’s rough and demanding demeanor evaporates. Her mouth becomes gentle. “I’m here, honey. I’ve got you.” She pops open each button on the front of her shorts, and pushes the outer layer first, then the panties down mid-thigh, just enough room for her hand to reach in.

At the first touch of Lexa’s cool fingers on her hot sex, Clarke cries out. Her legs spread open on their own accord, giving permission for the loving pets and strokes Lexa puts there.

“You’re so wet, baby…” Lexa mumbles, still sucking lightly at the supple flesh on her chest. She finds Clarke’s clit in an ocean of her arousal, and rolls it under the pad of her thumb. Two of her fingers loiter at the entrance to her secretive garden, collecting the overflowing liquids to lube them up. When she pushes in, Clarke is so ready that she is almost sucked inside.

“Oh god—Lex! Mmm—har-der… Harder… please.” Her hips are lifting off the blankets, and her shoulder blades are digging into the hard floorboards of the boat. But she hardly give her discomfort any thought, because Lexa is working up a delicious rhythm pumping in and out of her.

Lexa obeys her request, picking up her pace with her hand. The slapping sound of her palm slamming against Clarke’s sex and the squishing noise of her fingers bringing out splashes of her sweet juice permeate the air, piercing the tranquility of the otherwise silent lake.

The pressure builds in her lower abdomen, right behind her pelvic bones. She croaks with scratchy voice and begs for her release, “Lex—ah! Please… I’m close. I’m so clo…close!” And as Lexa dutifully traces rapid and precise circles on the head of her clit, the tightness in her muscles snaps. Her whole body shakes as the strong tides of her climax wash over. She clings onto Lexa’s shoulder, floating like a helpless leaf in churning river.

“You’re okay… I’ve got you, Clarke. I’ve got you.” Her forearm strains from the repetitive movements, but Lexa ignores her own fatigue and continues to stroke and rub, carrying Clarke through the aftershocks of her orgasm. She rests her head against Clarke’s heaving chest, listening to her thudding heart and fondling her soft breast with a free hand.
“Lex…” Clarke giggles loosely, her hand covering Lexa’s that is kneading her chest, “told you, boobs girl.”

“Hmm?” Lexa hums. She smirks after absorbing what Clarke said to her, “they’ve been calling my name all day, and they’re very distracting.”

“Oh?” Clarke flips them over in one fluid motion, “all day huh?” She feels a little smug when Lexa’s eyes immediately hook onto her naked breasts bouncing slightly with the change of position.

“Mmm, maybe even a little longer,” Lexa admits, green eyes hooded with lust, “I’ve missed how you feel.”

Her heart sings in elation. Clarke bends down and noses at the junction of her neck and shoulder. “I’ve missed how you feel, too. Can I… can I make love to you, Lex?”

Nodding, she tilts her head to allow Clarke better access. “Yes please…” she grabs the bottom of her own shirt and yanks it over her head. Her bra comes flying away next. Her hips raise off the blankets when Clarke struggles to pull her pants down. They laugh at the messy work and fumbling hands.

Comparing to Clarke’s candid expression of her desire, Lexa is much more reserved, and shy, after her clothes are shed. She mewls as Clarke’s kisses descend. First they pepper across her sternum, and each hardened nipple, then they cover the points and grooves of her ribcages, and follow the stretches of her scars all the way to her hipbone. She presses her thighs together and notices the stickiness there. Being the reason of Clarke’s loud and sensual orgasm has roused her. She is uncomfortably swollen and dripping, clenching around nothing. But she doesn’t feel rushed, not when Clarke is taking such tender care to love her body.

There are not a lot of places on Lexa’s body that aren’t cords of muscles or jutting bones. But Clarke finds delicate flesh on the inside of Lexa’s thighs, and she nibbles. Lexa’s hips jump. She can smell, and almost taste the dampness that seeps through her boy shorts. She lands an open-mouthed kiss over the drenched material on top of the mound, and Lexa squirms under her with a neediness that matches her own. Clarke gets rid of the shorts, and kisses the newly healed scar on Lexa’s shin, then hitches that leg over her shoulder.

“Ah…!” Lexa shivers to feel nimble fingers brush through the small patch of dark curls protecting her modesty. Then they part her lower lips. Her hands search blindly for something to hold on and settle in the blonde ponytail. She rocks up when Clarke gives broad licks along the length of her slit, prodding and probing around her tight opening but avoiding her clit deviously.

Clarke drinks her in like she is tasting sips of flavored honey. It’s a thin trickle, but never ending. “You taste so good, sweetie.” She teases and smacks her lips appreciatively, then swirls her tongue deeper inside and relishes in the way Lexa’s velvet walls ripple around it. The fingers in her hair grip tighter and Lexa’s heel dig in her back, pulling her impossibly close. Clarke grins, knowing she shouldn’t ignore the engorged, pulsing little button too long.

Lexa lets out a gratified sigh when Clarke pushes two fingers inside, swapping place with her tongue. They reach so much deeper, and the short blunt nails scrape her front wall, hitting the spot behind her clit. She can’t help but adds more force on her hand that is holding Clarke’s head. Her pelvis jerks up, in search of any friction or pressure to soothe her ache.

Finally relenting, Clarke buries her nose in the coarse stripe of hairs and seals her lips around the pink little bud. She has to pin down Lexa’s hips, nearly getting thrown off by her violent twitch.
It is everything she needs and more. “Klark... jok... oh—” her exclaims slur into a string of mumbled expletives that sound foreign to Clarke’s ears. The muscles in her thighs and abdomen tense up, her entire body stills, in anticipation of the final drop. Then it happens, the tingles that were pulsating at the base of her spine form an electrifying current. It shoots up to the top of her head and down to the tip of her toes, but it mostly zaps at her sex, threatening to split her in two. A great tremor breaks her stillness and she falls into waves of spasms.

Clarke feels the hand in her hair tug again, this time to the opposite direction until her lips make a popping noise and release her oversensitive clit.

Lexa is still coming. Her walls are fluttering wildly around Clarke’s fingers to keep them inside. But she is too raw to withstand such direct stimulation.

“No, just like that, Lex.” Clarke kisses the inside of her thigh and slowly milks out the last bit of her orgasm. She speaks reassuringly, just like Lexa had done for her, “let go for me, love… I’m right here.”

As the tension dissipates, Clarke climbs up the wiry body and collapses in a heap next to Lexa. She smiles sweetly when Lexa turns her head to press their lips together. She laughs again when Lexa’s hand naturally comes up and cups at her breast.

Lexa nuzzles her shoulder for a moment, then she hauls one of the blankets over themselves. They huddle underneath the plush material and hide from the stars peering down.

“Jok,” Clarke suddenly pipes up, “was that a curse word in your tongue?”

Humming in confirmation, Lexa tells her that it means “fuck”.

“That’s very naughty.” She teases, walking her fingers on Lexa’s collarbone. “We were very naughty.”

Lexa agrees. She stretches out her arm until it pops in three different joints, groaning to release the pressure. “Mmm… next time we do this, I’m gonna need a bed. My old bones are not going to like it in the morning.”

Hopefully she doesn’t let it show too much, but Clarke is breathless thinking about their “next time”. She’s hardly let this time sink in. A surge of emotions stirs in her stomach, the exhilaration from their lovemaking, the elation for their future together, and the relief of having Lexa back in her arms, fully and complete and vulnerable. She cuddles close and hides her face in Lexa’s neck, unwilling to spoil the light mood. She clears her throat in an attempt to chase away the tiny trembles in her voice, “I want to learn more Trigedasleng, why don’t you teach me something else?”

Lexa is quiet for a long while. She gently extracts her arm from Clarke’s hold, and turns so they’re face to face. Her green eyes are wide and clear, soft but solemn, resolute. The inevitable feeling of free-fall is nerve-wrecking, but as she stares into the blue waters and see her own reflections, she decides to take this leap, and this decision brings her peace. She caresses Clarke’s face, “ai hod yu in.”

Clarke blinks, a trail of tears escaping sideways. She doesn’t need Lexa to translate. She knows.

“I love you.” Lexa presses their lips together, not to kiss passionately, but to eliminate any distance between them, to be close.

“I love you too.” It is much unlike the last time she’s said it, unrequited, panicked and terrified
because it might have been her last chance to tell her so. This time, she says it with unhurried affection, with confidence, and with determination that it is the first of many, many more ‘I love you’s she will exchange with Lexa, she will show Lexa.

For now, they show each other through wandering hands and tender lips and hushed cries and bright laughs. And in the morning, if their bodies are sore and bruised and slow from rolling around on hard floorboards, they just give each other knowing smirks at work.

Fall

Lexa does move in by the end of October, discontinuing her lease with the cabin’s owner. No doubt he will inflate the price for the next renter after all the remodeling Lexa’s done for him.

After a few weeks of pretending to utilize the guest bedroom, and ending up in the same bed every morning, they start sleeping in Clarke’s room altogether.

Raven and Anya check in on a regular basis. One day, they announce their engagement. Aden takes the news with a nonchalant shrug and a “I told them so”.

The family now takes trips to the lake when temperature permits, and Aden learns fast on the boat. He graduates from a little crew boy to first mate in no time under Clarke’s guidance. When he begs to take the helm, they are more than happy to sit back and watch him have fun.

Catching the last few days of decent fall weather, Lexa and Lincoln get busy building Aden a new tree house. They make sure it stays far away from the river and any flooding points. Sometimes Finn comes too in crutches, giving sound advice and contributing in what small ways he can.

Winter

November brings first snow on its tail. It isn’t a particularly exciting event for the Griffins. Their work dwindles. Only a few pets are booked to spend a few weeks here and there in their care while their owners go on vacations abroad. But Lexa, who hasn’t seen snow in ten years, can’t be bothered by a smaller paycheck. She marches outside in her new boots like a child. She spins, welcoming the snowflakes that land on her face, and stay in her hair and on her eyelashes. Hades rolls in the cold white substance and howls gleefully for he also has never seen such wonders. Her joy is so contagious that Aden also puts on his winter coat and runs outside, leaving snow angels all over their front yard.

The four of them go on a skiing trip as Christmas present to Lexa. As athletic as she is, Lexa falls way too many times. Abby patiently teaches her while the two blondes laugh their hats off at her misfortunes. Clarke complains about her cold nose and hands when they come back into their hotel room. But she doesn’t shy away when Lexa leans in for a freezing kiss. She gets her revenge that night, after they make love, she tickles Lexa senseless under their heavy duvets.

Winter for Clarke is no longer as desolate as the news makes it out to be. It is a never-ending wonderland filled with new adventures and happiness.

Spring
The promise of sunny days and milder breeze always seems unobtainable as winter drags on. But eventually, rivers melt and frozen grounds soften. Although interluded with gushes of cold winds, the weather is nice enough for pet owners to start preparing their dogs for agility competitions.

Hades welcomes the newcomers wholeheartedly. He stumbles across a beautiful black German Shepard, and quickly learns her name, “Ember”. Every time he hears Lexa call that name, he struts out to watch her train in the agility course. Ember is a little stuck up, being a decorated champion and all. She sees him, and snorts prettily, swishing her tail in his face if he gets too close. But his gentleman-like nature and his persistence spirit melt her ice. By the end of her stay, Ember is fully smitten and eats every meal out of Hades’ bowl. Lexa has to watch them like a hawk. She’s broken up his countless attempts to mount his pretty little girlfriend.

His pitiful looks force Lexa to have an awkward conversation with the nice old professor who brought Ember in. The professor agrees to arrange a “playdate” after competition season is done, and see where it takes them. With a little bit of luck, she thinks, Hades stands a chance of losing his virginity and making some award-winning puppies.

**Summer**

Their first anniversary comes amongst the busiest time for work. They are a little hazy on the date though, unable to determine which one to pick. There are simply so many memorable days from last year: the day they met, the day they went on their first date, the day they made love for the first time, the day they returned to each other, and every other in between.

It’s their excuse to celebrate a lot.

Clarke pants on her stomach, sweaty and satiated. She feels thoroughly ravaged for the night. Her eyes are half-open, but her mind is sharp, replaying all the sweet moments that she’s collected of their relationship. She can’t believe it’s been a year.

A year feels like a long time. Long enough that Clarke forgets all about her early twenties that she spent being a celibate single mother. She’s somehow transformed into a sex fiend. And it’s long enough that Lexa is much more assertive, bold, and dominant, hence, the ravaging.

It is an extremely short time, too, in the grand scheme of things. Lexa’s hair is a little longer, and the scars on her body become a little fainter. Aden is much taller, but he is still the cutest kid in her eyes. Her mother seems to have stopped aging after hitting forty-five. She herself has hardly changed. It’s such a short time that they are still learning, every day, about each other. They still find new stories to laugh about, new sadness to comfort, and new dreams to share.

Clarke peers at Lexa’s gloriously naked body, and reaches out to tug her back in bed. “You know, I think I’ve loved you since the first time we met,” she admits.

“Well,” Lexa lands with a soft ‘umph’, smiling smugly with her own confession, “I think I’ve loved you before we met.”

They grin at each other, basked in pale moonlight and summer heat, falling in love all over again.

**Epilogue**

Clarke stops counting “firsts”, she realizes one day. Not because they’ve exhausted their firsts—
not by a long shot, they still have yet to experience so many new things together.

She stops counting, when Lexa takes her and Aden to California for the first time. They attend Anya and Raven’s wedding.

She stops counting, when they go on their first vacation out of the country, a resort in Mexico. By the ocean, under the stars, Lexa gets down on one knee and pops the question, “will you marry me?”

She stops counting, when they say “I do” in front of a whole church of well-wishers, even her ex-husband congratulates her at their reception.

She doesn’t count firsts anymore, because she doesn’t need to look for new testament of their devotion and affection—it is there, each time they hug, kiss, laugh, cry, fight, make up, make love, wake up together, share chores, and fall asleep too early in front of the tv. She doesn’t count firsts anymore, because she simply collects the memory and the feeling to her box labeled “Lexa”, and cherishes every moment equally. She doesn’t count firsts anymore, because Lexa makes all the little things in life meaningful and special.

She doesn’t count firsts, because she is counting on a forever.

Chapter End Notes

Dear readers, I present you the final chapter to this story. It's pretty long, twice as long as any other chapter, with many sweet moments and feelings. I really wanted to make their love recover organically and naturally. Perhaps I can revisit this AU later on and write a few drabbles if inspiration strikes. But right now, I'm pretty happy with the way it ends. As always, I appreciate your comments, especially these days. I know the Clexa fandom is not as robust and active as it used to be, fewer and fewer people seem to be reading or creating content, given that some weird things happened with the show and the actors. But I am a stubborn person and I find it really hard to move on from anything that I invest emotions in. I still read The L Word content if that tells you anything - ha!

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