The Solitude of Grief

by Walking in Wonderland

Summary

The past haunts Clarke. She spends her nights plagued by images of blood and death, but in her waking hours she is forced to hold her pain inside. Lexa isn't ready to face the ghosts of her pasts, but Clarke is tired of waiting. She's no longer wants to hide from the past and is ready to move on.

Lexa will either have to learn to face her nightmares or lose Clarke forever.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Hot rivulets of blood dripped down Clarke's arm from her clenched fists. Something sharp pressed into her palm from where blood oozed out between her fingers. She unfurled them to reveal a crude blade pierced through her palm. Horrified, she yanked it out, sending pain shooting up her arm. She dropped it, and the blade clattered to the floor.

"Princess," a familiar voice whispered. She searched for the source of the voice, hoping it would explain the ache of grief in her chest, but instead she found looming shapes pressing in around her.

Shadowy hands reached toward her.

"I'm scared," the voice whimpered. Knots formed in her stomach. The words echoed in her head. I'm scared.
She remembered. The blood. The knife. His limp body.

Panic festered in her stomach as tendrils of blood snaked up her arm coating her hands and forearms. It burned her skin as if trying to set her on fire. She could still hear Finn's voice just out of reach: I'm scared. She would never be able to reach him.

Her eyes stung from tears she tried to hold back as the blood consumed her body. It reached her face, spilled into her mouth, and filled her ears and nose. She lost all sense of the world around her as she gagged on its metallic taste and listened to its steady pulse drown out everything but Finn's pleas.

When the blood reached her eyes, the world turned red.

Clarke lurched up in bed her strangled cry echoing through the dark. Shaking, she pressed a hand to her chest gulping down air to fill her aching lungs. Through the open balcony doors, the moon peeked in at her from a sky of blue velvet. Just behind her she heard the steady breaths of Lexa still asleep with her arm draped around Clarke. She was safe. She was in her room. Nothing could harm her.

She looked down to find her hands still coated in blood and devastation ripped at her insides; she shoved Lexa's arm away and raced to the basin in the corner. Her tears spilled into the water as she plunged her hands in it and scrubbed at the blood. His blood.

"Clarke?" She heard Lexa shift on the bed.

"Go back to sleep," Clarke’s voice shook as much as her hands.

"Another nightmare?"

"I'm fine." It was a lie, but Lexa accepted it, rolling over to let sleep claim her once more.

Clarke turned back to find shadows on her hands where she had just seen blood. Gripping the sides of the table, she took steadying breaths and tried to remind herself it had only been a dream. Once she slowed her racing heart she padded to the couch in the corner, curled up under a spare blanket, and fell back into a troubled sleep.

Sunlight poured in through the open doors and Clarke woke to find Lexa standing before a dingy mirror combing her hair. "Morning," she greeted.

"Morning." Clarke rolled off the couch and stumbled to the basin. She splashed water onto her face and scrubbed away the streaks her tears had left behind. By the time she was done, Lexa had started braiding an intricate pattern into her hair.

"A meeting of the thirteen clans," Lexa explained in response to Clarke's curious gaze. "You should get ready."

"Right." She pulled on a fresh set of clothes and joined Lexa at the mirror, brushing the tangles out of her own hair. Despite visible circles under her eyes, she felt better. When she was finished she picked up the jar of black war paint and helped Lexa smudge it across her eyes.

As she fastened Lexa’s red commander’s sash, Lexa extended her hand. “Ready?”

“Always.”

Clarke laced their fingers together, and they descended into the city. Together, they strode through the streets, the crowds parting for them, and entered a tent where the other ambassadors waited. Each
bowed to Lexa as she and Clarke took their seats on the dias above them.

Before they could begin, a round faced warrior burst into the tent, cheeks flushed and eyes wild.

“Heda!”

One of Lexa’s guards stepped forward, drawing his sword. "Get out! You aren’t allowed here."

The warrior threw her shoulder’s back. "Indra sent me with a message for Heda."

"I don't-"

Lexa held up a hand to quiet him. "What message do you bring?"

"The Ice Queen is preparing her warriors for battle. She plans to attack on the new moon."

Lexa narrowed her eyes.

"One of your spies sent word. Dria is her target."

In one fluid motion Lexa rose, grabbed her knife and flung it at the messenger. It whizzed past the warrior's head, grazed her cheek, and embedded itself in the pole behind her.

"Everyone out!"

The messenger fled and the ambassadors shuffled out, their urgent whispers fading as they went.

Clarke looked at Lexa, searching for evidence of the rage she’d seen flash across Lexa’s face before she’d thrown the dagger. Lexa betrayed nothing, staring straight ahead, her expression made of stone and ice. She reached out to take Lexa’s hand, but Lexa yanked it away.

“I know this must be hard-”

Lexa shot her a single sharp glare and Clarke’s words faltered. Clarke looked away, pretending to be interested in a rip in the side of the tent. She should have known better than to pry. Tension filled the silence until Lexa’s generals arrived.

Clarke maintained her silence as the warriors discussed strategies for the impending battle. Clarke snuck glances to check for cracks in Lexa’s mask. She found none.

By the time she returned to their room, exhaustion seeped into every inch of her body. She kicked off her boots and dropped onto the bed, savoring the rare chance to rest. Lexa appeared soon after, but when she saw Clarke she looked away.

She removed her sash and picked up the worn rag from the basin. The air in the room crackled with the strain of unspoken words. It made Clarke’s chest tighten as she watched Lexa dip the rag into the water. She crossed to Lexa’s side and took the rag.

"Let me." She wiped the rag over the war paint, rubbing it away. Lexa closed her eyes, leaned into Clarke's touch, and let out a satisfied hum.

"How soon do you think your army will be ready?"

Lexa reached up and laid her hand over Clarke’s. "Let's not talk about that now." She took the rag, dropped it back into the water, and grasped Clarke's hand. Leaning forward she pressed her lips to Clarke's.
Ignoring their exhaustion and the impending battle, they clung to each other. Lexa traced patterns into Clarke's skin leaving behind trails of heat in their wake. Reaching up, Clarke tangled her hands in Lexa's hair to pull her closer. Their kiss deepened, and they fell into the warmth of each other. Soon they were only hot breaths, tender kisses, and lips against skin. Everything between them was soft, loving, and gentle.

In the light of day Lexa was made of strength and icy masks, but here away from prying eyes she was soft, full of hesitant smiles and loving glances. Clarke loved this side of Lexa. This secret side that surfaced only for her.

When their hearts were bursting with warmth and happiness they settled in each other's arms. Clarke lay with her head resting on Lexa's shoulder, while Lexa toyed with the ends of her hair.

"Lexa?" Clarke began to run her fingers over Lexa's collar bone.

"Hmmm?"

"Were you hoping for this war?"

Lexa's hand stilled, and Clarke looked up to find Lexa's familiar stony mask. "I hope only to save my people from further suffering at her hand."

"It's because of her, isn't it?"

Lexa's muscles tensed into tight coils. "It is because of my people. The Ice Queen needs to suffer retribution for each one who has died at the hands of her warriors" Her voice was tight. A warning.

"And her. You need to make the person who killed her suffer like she did."

Lexa untangled herself from Clarke's arms. She pulled on a loose robe and crossed to the balcony, leaving a frigid hostility in her wake.

Clarke followed. "You can't run from her ghost forever."

"You're one to talk of ghosts," Lexa laughed with sharp disdain. "You spend your nights screaming for Finn, the boy who shed my people's blood for you."

Clarke stopped in her tracks, barely able to stay upright. Pain burst in her chest, radiating out as hot tears clouded her vision. It had been so long since she'd heard his name aloud.

She gritted her teeth and marched out onto the balcony.

"You're right. Every day I see him in my dreams, begging me to save him."

"In your nightmares."

"I love him, but he's gone, and I'm the reason why," Clarke's throat tightened, "I'll never be able to forget, and I'm tired of pretending losing him doesn't kill me every single day."

"This pain you let yourself feel is weakness."

"You can't tell me you don't relive Costia's death every day," Clarke snapped. "I hear you cry out for her at night."

"She's dead, Clarke. What do you propose I do about that?"
"Stop pretending she wasn't important to you."

"This conversation is over." She spoke to Clarke as though Clarke were merely another warrior receiving her orders.

"That is not how this works! You don't get to dismiss me when you don't like what I have to say."

"We are done."

Clarke studied Lexa’s face. As always it was empty, her eyes icy and lips pulled into a fierce grimace. Tears burned Clarke’s eyes and anger made her cheeks burn. Her heart ached with the weight of the blood on her hands, yet Lexa didn’t care about any of it. Clarke couldn’t take it anymore. She was tired of grieving alone.

"Fine. If you want to continue to pretend nothing affects you, I won’t stop you. ” She turned and left.

Lexa didn’t follow.

Clarke navigated through empty halls until she came to a familiar door. Pushing it open, she stepped inside, blinking back tears. She swallowed sobbing eager to escape and crossed to her bed. She took comfort in the familiar art scattered round the room. Nothing moved but a little moth fluttering around her open window. Climbing into bed, she curled in on herself and listened to the frantic wingbeats of the moth as it searched for an escape.

Clarke didn’t return to Lexa’s room. Not that day, nor the next. She remained tucked away, lost in her own thoughts. At night she lay awake plagued by the faces of the dead.

She was tired of hurting and pretending she didn't. Memories of Finn, of Wells, of Maya, of all the nameless faces she’d killed - they picked away at her heart and refused to let her forget what she had done. What she had taken from them.

On her fourth night alone Clarke couldn't face the piercing stares of the ghosts in her memories any longer. She crawled out of bed and crept around the room lighting candles. Shrouded in their soft light, she surrounded herself with paper and pencils. Art had always been her escape. She needed that now more than ever.

As soon as the tip of her pencil touched the paper, Clarke lost herself to the sound of lead scratching across its surface. When the face of Finn looked up at her from the page, she hesitated. It hurt to see him, but she felt the need to continue. To finish.

Soon there were more. Charlotte, Wells, and Maya all stared up at her as she brought them to life. The moon rose and fell. When daylight came, Clarke crawled into bed, finally able to sleep. When night returned, she returned to her work.

She felt weightless as she drew. For the first time in a long time, her heart felt light. With each drawing she let herself remember, let tears slip down her cheeks. It was melancholy work, but she didn't have to pretend to forget anymore.

She was so engrossed in her work, she didn't hear the sound of approaching footsteps. A knock at the door yanked her from her trance.

Lexa stood in the doorway, eyes uncertain. The smile disappeared from Clarke's face and her features hardened.
"What are you doing here?" Her words sounded harsher than she'd intended.

"You've been avoiding me."

"You didn't seem to mind." Clarke returned to her work.

"Clarke, I-" Lexa faltered and Clarke's hand paused. "I'm sorry."

Clarke leaned down to scratch out a shadow across Anya's brow as the fearsome warrior glared up at her.

"It's just--it's hard to--think about her."

Clarke felt her anger start to drain away. She couldn't have held onto it even if she wanted to. "I know."

"They took her because they wanted to break me." She stared at her hands, gaze hard even as her voice trembled.

Clarke set down her pencil. In Lexa's broken voice, Clarke could see cracks forming in the walls Lexa had so carefully constructed. Her shoulders slumped and her bloodshot eyes betrayed more than one sleepless night. She'd apologized, and Clarke could only hope Lexa was tired of this game of pretend. She stood and closed the distance between them, pulling Lexa into a tight embrace. Lexa didn't move, but as Clarke pulled her close, Lexa's resolve weakened and broke. She tightened her grip and buried her head in Clarke's shoulder.

"I loved her," Lexa admitted, her voice just loud enough for Clarke to hear.

Clarke pressed her cheek into Lexa's shoulder. "Those were the words I said to Finn as I killed him."

"You saved him from a great deal of suffering."

Clarke broke their embrace, but caught Lexa's hands before they fell to her sides. "I still killed him." Clarke stared down at their joined hands. "I've killed so many. I am soaked in blood."

Hesitant, Lexa reached out to brush a lock of Clarke's hair out of her face. "You've done what you had to for your people. Not many could bear the weight you carry."

Clarke remembered her dreams and the image of her hands stained with blood.

"I don't want to carry it anymore." She'd taken so many lives. "How can you act like it doesn't bother you?"

Lexa cupped Clarke's cheek, brushing away the tears. Clarke leaned into Lexa's touch, focusing on the way Lexa's hand trembled, her only betrayal of emotion.

"I do what I do for my people." She spoke as if choosing each word with the utmost care. "They need a leader whose strength can withstand the worst pain. I must not be weak or I risk everything."

"You're only human."

"For them I must be more."

"You aren't alone in this anymore, Lexa." Clarke pressed her hand over Lexa's. "I can help you carry this."
Lexa let her forehead rest against Clarke's. They stood that way until Clarke’s feet began to ache, tears streaking their faces as they let the pain of their losses seep out into the cool night air.

"Will you draw her for me?" Lexa asked, her voice breaking.

"It would be an honor." Clarke pulled Lexa down to sit in the ring of candlelight. "What did she look like?"

"Her laughter was made of sunlight, and she had skin that was the warmest brown I've ever seen." Lexa picked up one of Clarke's pencils. “You would have liked her. She always tried to make me smile the way you do.

“Her eyes were gray,” Lexa spun the pencil in her palm, “not like storm clouds, but the color of a dove’s feathers. She had freckles too, and hated them.” A ghost of a smile graced her features. “I loved them. Her mother called them kisses from the sun.”

Little by little a face came to life. Words flowed from Lexa so freely Clarke almost couldn’t keep up. At last a girl, barely more than a child, with braids piled atop her head and eyes shining with life stared up at Clarke. She was beautiful. Setting down her pencil, she turned the drawing for Lexa to see.

"Costia."

Lexa crumpled in on herself. The mask she'd worked so hard to build cracked in half. Behind her careful walls lay the sharp ache of death Clarke had come to know all too well since landing on the ground. Tears spilled from Lexa and soft, grief-stricken sobs shook her body.

Clarke's heart ached to watch as Lexa came undone before her. She set aside the drawing and gathered Lexa in her arms. Lexa leaned heavily against her. Clarke led them to the bed, and Lexa cried until she had no tears left. Neither of them spoke - they had done this so many times before, curled in each other’s arms, as natural as breathing, only now a new openness lay between them.

Dull gray light seeped into the room through the ragged curtains. Clarke jolted awake, her whole body shaking as painful sobs poured out of her. She buried her head in her hands and tried to breathe, images of blood and lifeless bodies imprinted in her mind. A tender hand pulled her back down until she lay enveloped in Lexa’s arms.

"You're okay. It was just a dream," Lexa murmured, rubbing soothing circles into Clarke's arm.

More sobs burst from Clarke, but not from her nightmare. She buried her face in Lexa hair and wrapped her arms around Lexa. It was her turn to sob uncontrollably as Lexa held her.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Lexa pressed a soft kiss to her forehead. “You don’t have to face this alone.”

Their game of pretend was over, and though neither would say so, they were both relieved.

End Notes

This is one of the single best pieces of writing I have ever written, and I am so so so proud of
it. I hope you all enjoyed reading it!

As always thank you for reading my little scribbles lovelies. If you want more follow me on tumblr: alifeoflesbionage

<3

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