bang shui

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Summary

Clarke Griffin is a med student at Polis University. She and Raven Reyes are roommates who just moved into an apartment closer to campus, but their neighbors have extremely loud marathon sexy times and Clarke is just not getting the rest she needs. She runs into one of the neighbors -- Lexa Woods, a grad/law student -- and tells her to please move her bed away from the wall. Which is embarrassing, yes, but anything could result from that type of conversation...

Notes

HI, all! I decided to do a Clexa AU for Clexa Week 2018 and of course, it started as a short story but ha ha those of you who read my S3 reboot "Grounded" know how I am. So it's now a novella.

AND HA HA NOW IT'S A NOVEL OMG LOLOL

Includes holiday fluff n' romance (Thanksgiving and Christmas-y stuff).
I'll be posting installments throughout Clexa Week. And this is totally fluffy, light angst, romcom-ish, with Clexa as endgame. Because I am a Clexaholic.

Hope you enjoy it. You can find me on Twitter and Tumblr. Ask me anything! And I do respond to comments here. Fanfic writers in general LUV hearing from readers, so please post away!

Also, you know the drill. I do not own these characters, but I'm playing with them in an alt-u.

Happy Clexa Week!
Clarke leaned on the counter, waiting for the coffee to finish, nursing a headache and a grudge the size of Jesus. After a couple more minutes the coffee was pretty much done and she poured it into the biggest mug she had. If there were a way she could mainline it, she would have. Maybe she’d make that a priority in her classes. Begging instructors to show her how to mainline coffee directly into her fucking veins.

“You look like hell,” Raven said from the doorway. She had her hair tied back into a ponytail and she was wearing one of her more worn T-shirts. Probably a lab day.

“Thank you, Captain Obvious.” Clarke took a swallow of coffee, willing it to work faster.

Raven joined her in the kitchen and took a container of yogurt out of the fridge and a spoon out of the drawer. “Up late studying? Or maybe doing something else that I will totally tease you for but approve of?” She opened the yogurt and dipped the spoon in.

Clarke groaned softly and took another drink. “Fucking neighbors again. Literally.”

“Damn. Again? That’s—”

“Three times this week. And worse than last week.”

“How could it be worse than that?”

“Try sleeping in my room sometime and find out. I finished the night on the couch.” Clarke wondered if she had a funnel somewhere. She’d just pour the coffee right down her throat. God, maybe she’d have to indulge in one of Murphy’s Red Bulls later.

“We should start a GoFundMe.” Raven gestured with her spoon. “Help us buy the neighbors of Horndog Central a futon, no frame. Minimize headboard noise during sexy times so Clarke, future surgeon of the world, can get her beauty rest.”

Clarke glared at her. “They’re louder than you and Anya, and you’re in the same damn apartment.”

“And clearly, mood rest.”

“This shit is not funny, Reyes. I’m fucking exhausted and our neighbors are the world’s hugest horn dogs. Hugest rude horn dogs. They go for fucking hours.”

“Hours fucking, you mean. Although you do have to admire the stamina. They might actually be putting me and Anya to shame.”

Clarke glared at her again. “I’m going to sleep with you tonight. Nobody slams headboards into your wall.”

“Not entirely true, Griffin. It’s just that my wall isn’t yours, too.”

She groaned. “Oh, my God. No. I do not want to think about you and Anya.”

“Too late. And right now you could almost be Godzilla, with lasers shooting out of your eyes.”

“Wait until I’m fully awake.”
“Okay, okay. You’re right. They’re being rude. Admirably sexy, but rude.”

Clarke nodded. “Thank you.”

“So tell them.”

“Are you high? Because if you are, I want some of what you’re smoking.”

Raven took another spoonful of yogurt. “Seriously. Just…you know. Be delicate. Mention that the walls are really thin and that you can hear everything.”

Clarke poured herself more coffee. “We just moved in three weeks ago. I don’t want to piss people off.”

“So don’t be assholey about it. Just kind of jokey. Like, ‘hey, I get it. Sexy times are fun. But loud. So loud. And the walls are thin’.” She shrugged. “Like that.”

“We haven’t even met them. I’m going to come off as assholey regardless. And then they’ll have even louder sex to spite me.”

Raven finished her yogurt. “Fine. I’ll talk to them.”

“That makes me look like a coward, since it’s my room that’s getting the noise.”

“For fuck’s sake, Griffin.” Raven rinsed the container out and put it in the plastic bin next to the fridge. “We’ll go together. We’ll stop by as we’re carrying groceries up the stairs or something so it looks like we didn’t plan it. And that way I can mitigate your asshole side.”

“Yes, I see how your perpetual snark will put them at ease.”

Raven grinned. “I can be less snarky.”

She looked at her, dubious.

“Sometimes,” Raven hedged.

Clark shook her head and took another swallow of coffee. It might actually be working. Finally.

“And as much as I love snarking at you, I have to go to class,” Raven said. “And then the lab. You good?”

“As good as I can be. Go on. I’ll see you later.”

Raven hugged her. “I’m sorry our neighbors are horrendous horndogs. But I wish the same for you.”

“Oh, my God. Get to class.”

Raven laughed and left, and Clarke heard her laughing in the other room. She reappeared in the kitchen doorway, wearing her jacket and her backpack slung over her shoulder. “I’ll make it up to you. Pizza night?”

Clarke smiled. “Definitely. I’ll be back around five.”

“And then we can throw your soccer ball against the wall a few times. Maybe they’ll get the hint and neither of us will have to talk to them.”
“Great. An arms race with noise. Okay, then.” She rolled her eyes. “Go science things, Reyes.”

“Maybe I’ll science a cool-ass polymer that expands into a huge soundproof foam—”

“Bye.”

Raven did an air-kiss. “Later.”

Clarke finished her cup of coffee then showered, thinking that she’d grab something to eat on the way to campus, which was only a half-mile away and one of the primary reasons she and Raven had moved. They had gotten lucky, because the people who moved out of their apartment were friends of Raven’s and they had an inside track to a lease. Plus, it was a cool older building from the 1940s and it had great light from the windows, which she liked when she painted.

Too bad the apartment wasn’t on the other side of the hall. Or downstairs. Clarke pulled on a pair of jeans and put on one of her comfiest V-neck tees and her favorite Polis University Med School sweatshirt. She grabbed her jean jacket and backpack, made sure she had everything she needed for the day, and stepped into the hallway. As she finished locking the door, a woman with dark hair emerged from Horndog Central—dammit, Raven, for that visual—and Clarke froze. She turned and, seeing Clarke, gave her a nod then went down the stairs.

So was that one of the neighbors? Or was this a walk of shame? She was pretty, from what Clarke could tell. Dark hair tied back in a ponytail like Raven’s had been, probably about her height. Looked about the right age for a student, but she might not have been. Clarke started toward the stairs when the door to Horndog Central—seriously, she would kill Raven for that designation—opened again and another woman stepped into the corridor, wearing sweats and a T-shirt.

This woman ignored Clarke and instead jogged down the hallway to the stairs, leaving the door to the apartment partially open.

“Octavia,” she called down the stairs. “Wallet.” And then she went down the stairs and it occurred to Clarke as she did the sex math that Horndog Central could very well be an establishment of the lady gay variety and then it penetrated her exhaustion-addled brain that Bellamy’s sister was also named Octavia, though she hadn’t met her.

She did more sex math. One woman leaves on a walk of shame, and another chases her down the stairs with a wallet, a clear indication that the first woman had spent the night. And the two of them had engaged in loud, annoying sex that banged the bed against the wall they shared with Clarke.

Ew.

Clarke went to the stairs, glancing at the door to Horndog Central, but it wasn’t open wide enough to snoop. She heard voices and laughing from the first floor as she started to descend and then the second woman appeared and started up the stairs. She looked up at Clarke and—

Holy Jesus, her eyes. And lips and cheekbones and shoulders and jawline and Clarke jerked her gaze to her own feet.

“Hey,” the woman said. “You’re the one who just moved in next door, right?” She stopped and Clarke automatically did, too, glad that the stairwell was wider than many, and afforded lots of room. It reminded her of the big wide stairwells in her old high school building.

“Yes.” And in the three weeks since, she’d gotten seven noise-free nights. Maybe ten.

“Cool. I’m—”
“Loud,” Clarke said before she thought about it. She’d show her that she didn’t give a shit about some incredibly hot woman with hair the color of chocolate falling around her shoulders who was staring up at her. She probably used her incredibly hot looks to get whatever the hell she wanted and Clarke was in no mood for that. She was fucking tired, and this woman and her girlfriend or fuckbuddy or whatever the hell had put her in this state and she was right here, right now, and Clarke was not one to keep quiet about shit on her mind.

“Sorry?” Her expression registered confusion and Clarke tried not to notice her shoulders, which looked very nice in the tee.


“Oh. Okay, I’ll make sure we keep the TV at a lower volume.” Her eyes flashed with what might have been anger, but there was amusement, as well, and it pissed Clarke off, but it might have pissed her off more that she wondered about the tattoo on her neighbor’s right arm that the sleeve of her tee didn’t entirely cover. “It’s not your TV,” she shot back. “It’s your bed.”

Her eyes widened in surprise and then she half-smiled, a maddening but entirely sexy little smirk that lifted the corner of her mouth. “Seems a little forward, talking about my bed like that. We haven’t even been properly introduced.”

Clarke glared at her. “Please move your bed away from the wall you share with us.”

Her brow furrowed in puzzlement.

“The headboard,” Clarke said. “It knocks against the wall during certain activities.”

She raised her eyebrows and comprehension dawnded and she smiled, maybe a little embarrassed. “Ah. I’ll take care of it.”

“Thank you,” Clarke said, still glaring, and then she hurried down the stairs before she had to say anything else to the goddess—um, horndog—of 201.

“You’re welcome,” the woman called after her and though Clarke heard amusement in the tone, she detected warmth, too, and it unnerved her a little, left her unsettled in ways both pleasant and irritating. She walked a little faster than usual, as if it would disperse the image of the woman on the stairs, and her enigmatic green eyes and playful smirk.

Maybe she had been an asshole, bringing it up like that, she thought as she entered her fave coffee house. And maybe she’d let her lack of sleep get the best of her. She could’ve been nicer about it. Or slipped a note under the door. Because now she was the bitch in apartment 202. God, maybe she should’ve let Raven take care of it, who could be blunt but also disarming with her snark. Clarke just tended to be blunt in situations like this, especially after she’d attempted the patience thing.

And worse, 201 was possibly hittin’ it with Bellamy’s sister. That could be awkward.

She bought a large coffee and a huge blueberry muffin, the buzz of voices, laughter and the hiss of the espresso machine helping calm her mood and by the time she got to campus and her first class, she felt more like herself. And maybe she’d finally be able to get some damn sleep at home.

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Clarke opened the pizza box Raven had brought and loaded two pieces each onto plates while Raven opened a bottle of wine.
“This here is some fancy shit,” she said as she poured Clarke’s mason jar glass half-full and did the same with hers.

Clarke laughed as they both sat down at the table in the dining nook just off the kitchen. “How was your day, dear?”

“The usual. Blew shit up in the lab. Sinclair helped, though, so it was all good. Worked on that cool-ass knee joint after I blew shit up. Then had lunch with Monty and Jasper. They say hi. And yours?”

“Drank two of Murphy’s Red Bulls. Worked on anatomy. Told the neighbor to please move her bed away from the wall.” She took a bite of pizza.

“Wait,” Raven said. “What was that last part?”

“It wasn’t my fault. I was leaving and the girlfriend was doing the walk of shame. Our neighbor followed her with her wallet—”

“Her and her? We’re dealing with a manifestation of gay?”

Clarke arched an eyebrow. “Or bi. Maybe pan. And yes, it would appear so.”

“And the wallet left behind.” Raven picked up her glass. “That’s a sure sign of a sleepover.”

“Exactly, Dr. Watson.”

Raven sipped. “I see. Tell me more, Ms. Holmes.”

“The one who stayed over is Octavia.”

“Wait. You don’t think that’s Bellamy’s sister, do you?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t met her, but it’s an uncommon name, so I’m going to assume it’s the same one.”

“I didn’t realize his sister was into the ladies.”

“Yeah, me either. But then, he doesn’t talk about her sex life.”

“Good for him. So continue.” Raven sipped her wine.

“The one who chased Octavia with the wallet—I don’t know what her name is. But I told her she’s loud and to please move the bed away from the wall.”

Raven almost spit her wine out. “You went to her apartment and told her this?”

“Oh, hell, no. She went down the stairs with the wallet. I went down the stairs because I was leaving. She came back up the stairs and that’s when we talked.”

Raven grinned. “You were an asshole, weren’t you?”

“No.”

Raven cocked her head.

“Okay, fine, maybe a little.” She finished her pizza, not sure why she felt a little pang of remorse about how she laid it out for the neighbor in Horndog Central.
“Like…how much little?”

“I just told her she was loud. She said she’d turn the TV down. I told her that wasn’t the problem, it was her bed.”

Raven laughed and almost spit out her pizza.

“I had to further explain.”

“Oh, shit. And?”

“I just said the headboard knocks against the wall because certain activities are very loud.”

Raven practically doubled over with laughter. “Certain…activities…I’m dying…”

Clarke shrugged, but she smiled, too, and then ended up laughing.

“Girl. I can’t.” Raven wiped her eyes with a napkin. “Certain activities.”

“She got my meaning.” Clarke took a swallow of wine.

“Oh, really?” Raven reached for another piece of pizza. “Do tell.”

She remembered the neighbor’s sexy little smirk and hesitated. “She didn’t laugh or anything. She just said she’d take care of it.” With a slightly embarrassed and cute—shit, why was she thinking that—smile.

“So she was nice about it?”

“Pretty much.”

“That’s cool of her. Since you threw down on the stairs that she was fucking too loud for everybody’s good. And too fucking loud. Or something.”

Clarke laughed again.

“So basically we have maximum gay next door, which may or may not include Bellamy’s sister Octavia, and you told Octavia’s girlfriend to move the furniture for quieter bang shui—“

“Oh, my God, Reyes, you did not just go there…” Clarke almost choked on her wine.

“When have I ever not gone somewhere others won’t?” She grinned. “And she said she’d deal with it. Guess this means we won’t be having movie night with the neighbors.” She poured more wine for both of them. “I mean, how do you hang out with them, now? ‘Oh, hi. Want to watch this movie and I’ll totally try not to think about how loud you fuck your girlfriend while we’re watching it’.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said again, and a flush heated her neck.

“Exactly.” Raven smirked and looked at her, a knowing expression in her eyes. “So is she hot?”

Clarke coughed. “Who?”

“The neighbor.”

“Um.”

Raven’s grin widened. “Oh, hell. She is. She totally is. And your little starved bisexual libido can’t
handle the strain of telling your hot gay neighbor to please fuck quietly, I’m studying to be a doctor, ’kay thanks.” She practically crowed the last part.

Her face heated. “Okay, fine. She might be…attractive.”

“Okay, so we won’t have movie night with them, but at least we have eye candy next door.”

Clarke rolled her eyes

“Is there a possibility that Octavia is a roommate and girlfriend? Maybe the hot neighbor you talked to and the other woman live together in domestic lesbian bliss.”

Clarke shrugged. “They could be roommates, too.”

“But that doesn’t make sense. Wouldn’t Bellamy have said something about how Octavia lives in our building?”

“You’d think that.”

“We should stake them out. I can borrow Harper’s night vision—”

“Why the hell do you need night vision inside an apartment building that has low night-time lighting?”

“Because it would be cool.”

“So you’re going to find a place in the hallway and…what? Watch their door to see who comes and goes?” Clarke shook her head.

“Okay, it might be weird, when you put it like that.”

“Because it is weird, Jane Bond.” She stood up and started putting the few pieces of pizza left into a plastic container. “Whether it’s Bellamy’s sister or not, the problem is now solved. I’ll be able to sleep, and hopefully they won’t hate me too much for bringing it up.”

“True. And they’re hot, so when you see them, it’s eye candy. Maybe you can see if they’ll do threesomes.”

Clarke whipped around from the fridge so fast she almost got whiplash and Raven laughed again. “Bellamy’s possible sister?”

“Okay, your expression is hilarious. I mean, think about it. It’d be an easy lay. They’re right next door,” she teased.

“I kind of hate you for putting that image in my head. Especially if it is Bellamy’s sister.”

“You mean it worked?” Raven chortled. “C’mon, Griffie. You need to get out more. You need to start dating. Or at least hook up.”

“Hello, there’s this thing I’m doing called medical school. I don’t have time for dating.”

“Whatever. You have time to hook up. Don’t you watch Grey’s Anatomy?”

“And maybe I don’t want to be bothered.” She started cleaning the counter, irritated.

“Maybe you should be. Maybe it’s time you stopped letting your dating past define your dating
Clarke sighed. Raven was just trying to be helpful. “It’s not that I’m adverse to dating or hooking up. I’m just not thinking about it. School keeps me busy. Life keeps me busy.”

“I know. I just—I don’t want what happened with Finn to taint anything else. That douche.”

“It hasn’t. It just made me tired. Like on a really deep level. And I don’t want to expend energy right now on even hooking up.”

Raven stood and handed Clarke her wine. “But sometimes hooking up is exactly what gives you energy. Hookups, done right, can be really healing.”

Clarke smiled. “I don’t have the energy to even determine that.”

“You think too much. Get out of your head and just feel. If you think somebody’s hot and they’re into you, why not just go with it?”

She started to respond but Raven put her hand up.

“I’m not an actual medical doctor, but I know your mom would agree that you do live in your head all the time and that sometimes, throwing that out is the best thing you can do. So come with me and Anya to the club Friday. You can study all day Saturday.”

Clarke chewed her lip. “I have an exam on Monday.”

“So? Take Friday night off and study all weekend. I’ll go to Anya’s so you can have the whole place to yourself and if Horndog Central didn’t move the furniture, you can sleep in my room and we’ll go to war with them next week. C’mon, Griffie. It’s been a while since we all went out.”

Still, she hesitated.

“Pretty please? Do it for me and my fucked-up leg.”

“Seriously? Pulling that card?”

Raven grinned. “Yes. Yes, I am.”

“For fuck’s sake.” But she laughed. “Okay.”

Raven fist-pumped. “And now I have to check in with my lab group. I’ll be in my room.” She almost skipped out of the kitchen, in an awkward kind of jump-hop. The brace on her left leg limited her mobility, but she used the limitation as inspiration, and was working on various projects to help develop new joints and new types of braces that could increase mobility.

“Raven,” Clarke said as she went into the living room.

“Yeah?” Raven leaned out of her bedroom.

“Thanks.”

She smiled and her gaze softened. “You’re my best friend. I just want to make sure you’re okay.”

Clarke hugged her. “I know. And I appreciate it.”

Raven released her. “Seriously, Griff. I don’t know where I’d be without you.”
“Probably listening to Horndog Central alone.”

“Which might be more entertaining than movie night, I guess.”

Clarke made a gagging noise. “And on that note, I need to go over anatomy.” She started to walk away. “No comments about whose anatomy, Reyes,” she shot back over her shoulder.

“Damn. You know me too well.”

Clarke laughed and retrieved her backpack from her room and hauled it to the table. She liked working here, near the windows that looked out over the park a half-block away. Their apartment building had nice views, at least.

Both outside and in.

She grimaced as an image of her neighbor again entered her thoughts. Yes, she was physically attractive. But there was something else about her that dug at her, that had stuck with her all day. Something deep and mysterious, something she wanted to know more about but Raven was right. No way would she be able to hang out with the neighbor because she’d be thinking about her and the other woman, skin to skin, sheets tangled around them, headboard slamming against her wall—

Okay, enough of that.

Clarke focused on her notes again and stared. She’d doodled a rough sketch of her neighbor. Clearly, her subconscious was being an asshat. She turned the page and spent the next couple of hours going over the nervous system and when the images blurred on the page she put her books and notes away and got ready for bed. After she finished in the bathroom, she stood in the middle of her bedroom and listened.

Silence.

It almost made her giddy. She got into bed and was asleep in seconds.
“Sleep is the best thing ever,” Clarke said as she cleared the table. Raven had cooked enchiladas for dinner, one of Clarke’s faves.

“So it seems we won’t have to wage psychological warfare with our neighbors.”

“Not at this time.”


“What time do you want to go to the club?”

“Anya’s not drinking tonight, so she’ll pick us up at ten and she’ll drop you off here when we leave.”

“I see how she is. Wants to get you drunk.”

“Not that she needs to,” Raven said with a sly smile. “But my week has been super busy and stressful and Anya thinks I should blow off some steam.”

“Before you blow her?”

“Oh, nice, Griff. Nice. Would you like me to go into detail about our strap-on play?”

“Um…no. But thanks for asking.”

“Prude.”

“Nope. I just don’t want that image of you in my head at this time. Maybe ever.”

Raven laughed. “You raise a good point.” She helped finish cleaning up. “So have you seen our neighbors since Monday?”

“No.” Clarke decided not to bring up the fact that she’d been taking the back stairs to avoid running into them, though she had seen her in the parking lot once, getting out of a black Jeep Wrangler and, not gonna lie, it was a vision to behold and Clarke had stared, transfixed. And when the neighbor’s gaze met hers and held it and she actually smiled at her—a mixture of smirk and smolder—she had raced inside before anything could be said.

Because, really, what could she say? She’d basically told the neighbor that she was having sex so loud that it was causing her to lose sleep.

One did not just start chatting amiably after that exchange.
But she couldn’t get the neighbor out of her head and just thinking about running into her again made her really nervous. Not necessarily in a bad way, but she didn’t really want to add fuel to it. Plus, if it was Bellamy’s sister living at Horndog Central—ugh, she still used that—she wasn’t sure she wanted to think about that. Besides, she was busy. Exams to study for and all that.

“Well, at least she moved the bed. From bang shui to feng shui, so there’s that”

“I can’t with you.” Clarke shoulder-bumped her. I’m going to watch some Legends of Tomorrow for a little bit. Want to join in?”

“For Sara Lance, I would crawl over broken glass.” She got two beers out of the fridge and joined Clarke on the couch.

A couple of hours later Clarke inspected herself in her full-length mirror. Raven had Pitbull playing on the speakers in the living room and Clarke moved to the beat, deciding that yeah, she did need a night out. She wore her favorite black jeans and an AC/DC T-shirt and her motorcycle boots, which always made her feel like a badass. She shut her light off and grabbed her jean jacket.

“Griff,” Raven said from the living room. “Any’a’s outside. Are you ready—holy shit.”

“What?”

“You look really good.”

“I’m wearing jeans and a T-shirt.”

“It’s not the ‘what.’ It’s the ‘how.’ You are rocking that. In fact, you could totally pull off the celebrity musician act. All sexy messy blond hair and steely blue eyes. And for real, it’s good to see you looking like that and going out with us. I’ve missed you.”

“You don’t need a wingman anymore.”

“I always need you,” Raven said, batting her eyelashes. She put her leather jacket on.

“Well, you look hot, too.” And she did. But then, Raven was always beautiful. She had her hair down tonight, and she wore tight black pants, black high-top sneakers, and a feminine-cut white shirt that showed just a hint of cleavage. “I’d do you.”

Raven stared at her then burst out laughing. “Wait. Has Clarke Griffin discovered a sex drive? Is hibernation over?”

“Hypothetically, Reyes. I’d do you hypothetically.”

“Baby steps.” She grabbed her keys off one of the hooks by the door. “Let’s go.”

Clarke waited while Raven locked up and followed her down the front stairs. She kept glancing at 201, hoping the woman she’d crossed paths with would step out but also hoping she wouldn’t. She’d have to do some processing about this later, when she had more time. Fortunately (maybe?), the door to 201 remained closed and Raven went down the stairs, Clarke keeping an eye on her though she knew Raven wouldn’t accept help unless it was absolutely necessary.

“Hey,” Anya said when they emerged from the building. She’d been standing right outside waiting for them. “Hi,” she said in a softer tone to Raven and she leaned down and kissed her. It was disgustingly sweet.
“Clarke,” she said. “Glad to see Reyes convinced you to join us. You look good.”

“Thanks. So do you.”

And she did. Anya was gorgeous, and could wear pretty much anything and look amazing. She wore her hair long, too, and tonight it was braided in intricate patterns and pulled back from the elegant planes of her face. She wore faded blue jeans and a black shirt under a black blazer, but Anya could turn heads no matter where she went.

Anya took Raven’s hand and Clarke followed them to her car. Raven got in the front passenger side and Clarke in the back.

“So Raven tells me the problem at Horndog Central has been solved,” Anya said as they pulled away from the curb.

Clarke really might kill Raven for that term. “Seems that way.”

“And she said the neighbors are hot. But she hasn’t seen them yet, so that’s hearsay. In your opinion, are they, in fact, hot?”

“I guess so. I mean, they’re not unattractive.”

Anya barked a laugh. “You need to get out more.”

“So I’ve heard.” She stared out the window as Anya drove, a little nervous because she hadn’t really been out since the last time she’d seen Finn, which was almost a year ago, now. God. Was it seriously that long ago? She mentally calculated. Since last Christmas. Fuck.

“Hey, Griffin, I’m having one of my parties next week. You’re invited. Dress up and bring a date,” Anya said.

“What day?”

“A week from tomorrow. Did Reyes give you details?”

“Not yet.” She leaned forward and poked Raven in the arm.

“Ow. Whatever. I forgot.”

“Does it have to be a date-date?” Clarke asked. Bellamy would probably go. Murphy in a pinch. Maybe Harper, though she was busy with Monty these days.

“No, though that would be great for you. But then, who knows what could happen between now and then?”

Not a lot, Clarke thought. “Okay. Thanks for the invite. Do you need us to bring anything?”

Anya glanced in the rearview mirror at her. “Nope.”

“What’s the occasion?”

“Fall. It’s one of my seasonal parties. I like having one of those with every season.”

“How well-rounded of you,” Clarke said.

“Damn right.”
Raven chuckled and squeezed Anya’s hand and Clarke’s chest tightened. Maybe some day she’d have that kind of relationship. The kind where the other person just accepted her for who she was, accepted her friends and her family and life and wanted her to grow both in and out of the relationship, and who could deal with her weirdnesses and the wounds she carried. She listened to Anya and Raven banter, and she wondered if she’d ever have something like that.

Maybe. Maybe not. Right now, she was too damn busy.

“I’ll drop you two off and go park,” Anya said as she pulled up in front of the club. Clarke got out quickly because she wanted to make sure Raven was okay. It had become habit, since the accident that fucked up her leg five years earlier, and though Raven didn’t need help most of the time, Clarke couldn’t break it and Raven had let her keep it.

They waited for Anya so they could all go inside together and once in, Clarke realized that she had missed going out and losing herself in a crowd and dancing until the sweat ran down her back. Raven pulled her toward the bar, and much to Clarke’s surprise, several of their friends from school were already there, and they’d scored a few tables.

“Hey,” Murphy said when he saw Clarke. “Stay right here. I’m going to buy you a beer. What do you want?”

“Negro Modelo with a lime.”

He gave her arm a squeeze as he passed her on his way to the bar. A few minutes later, she had a beer and had been drawn into conversations with various people. It was nice, just hanging out, no pressure, no expectations, and not thinking about classes. After her second beer she ended up on the dance floor, which was fine because Clarke loved to dance, and it was even more fun when she danced with a group of her friends and they goofed off and laughed.

The mix was hot, the company was fun, and for the first time in a while she let herself enjoy the moment and when Harper leaned in and asked her if she wanted another drink, Clarke agreed and followed her off the floor to the bar, where at least the noise was at a dull roar rather than the pounding of the dance floor.

“I have to pee,” Harper said. “Be right back.”

“What do you want?”

“Whatever you have.”

“I’m drinking beer.”

“Fine.” She pushed through the crowd and Clarke worked her way to the bar. She ordered two more beers and when the bartender brought them, a tall guy reached over Clarke with what might have been a twenty.

“On me,” he said as he looked down at her and Clarke immediately categorized him as classic frat douchebro.

“You don’t need to do that,” she said to him, loud enough for the bartender to hear.

“I don’t mind,” he said, giving her a smarmy, predatory smile.

“I do,” she shot back, and his eyes narrowed. She handed the bartender her own twenty. “I’m buying my own beers.”
He nodded, took her bill, and went to get change.

“C’mon,” Fratboy said. “I’m just trying to be nice.”

“Then you should have asked first.”

His eyes narrowed. “Oh, I get it. Women’s studies major?”

“No, actually. Med school. But for the record, there is not a damn thing wrong with women’s studies.”

Fratboy looked a little surprised. The bartender handed her some bills and she took them but left a couple bucks on the bar, picked up the two beers, and she started to walk away.

“Hey, c’mon,” Fratboy said and he actually grabbed her arm.

Clarke jerked away, trying not to spill the beers. “What is your problem? Leave me the fuck alone.”

“You don’t have to be a bitch about it,” he said and Clarke’s heart hammered in her chest because for a moment, he looked like Finn, and the shift in his demeanor both pissed her off but scared her, too.

“Problem?” said another voice nearby and though she’d only heard it once, she knew immediately who it was. The woman from apartment 201 gave Fratboy a onceover as she took one of the beers from Clarke and draped her arm over her shoulders which made her heart hammer again, but for different reasons. “Thanks, hot stuff,” she said to Clarke with a saucy little grin that made her forget the past ten minutes and then the neighbor took a swig of the beer and regarded Fratboy with the look of someone who ate people like him for breakfast and there was something both sexy and safe about it.

“Weren’t you just leaving?” she said to him.

He muttered something and moved away into the crowd.

Clarke carefully stepped away because all kinds of confusing thoughts bounced around her head about how good it felt to be this close to a woman she didn’t even know. “Thanks. But for future reference, I can take care of myself.”

She arched an eyebrow and smirked and it caused butterflies in Clarke’s stomach. “I got that feeling about you, but your hands were full.” She handed the beer back. “You okay?”

Clarke nodded, but everything about her tensed.

“Hey, look, I didn’t mean to interrupt your evening. I just saw that guy behaving badly and your hands were full. Just a neighbor helping out. And by the way, no hard feelings about the bed thing. See you around.” She turned to go.

“Wait,” Clarke said, loud enough to be heard above the noise.

She did.

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be an ass. Thank you.” She handed the beer back to her and at that moment, Harper showed up.

“Damn. Long line——” she stopped and looked at the other woman.
“Here,” Clarke said, and she handed the other beer to Harper. “I’m going to chill for a few.”

“Okay.” Harper gave 201 another look then melted into the crowd.

“I don’t want to take your last beer,” 201 said.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ve had a couple already.”

201 regarded her, and it was all Clarke could do not to lose herself in her eyes. “Wait here,” she said.

Clarke started to tell her not to worry and to go about her business but 201 interrupted her.

“Please? Just for a little bit. I’ll be right back.”

She nodded because something about her instilled trust, and she had no idea why, but everything felt better, somehow, even with the douchebro incident. So she waited, and sure enough, maybe a minute later, 201 returned, carrying an empty pint glass. She poured half the beer from the bottle into the glass and handed it to Clarke then tapped the bottle lightly against the glass.

“Cheers,” she said, and she took a swig. Clarke did, too. “So now that we’ve properly toasted the evening,” she said, leaning a little closer so Clarke could hear, I’m Lexa.”

“Clarke.”

“As in Arthur C. or Kent?”

She cocked her head, surprised. “Arthur C.”

“Very cool. So you spell it with an ‘e’.”

“Yes.” And oh, God, Lexa smelled good. Crisp, like the outdoors, but kind of spicy, too. Maybe with some sage thrown in.

Lexa was about to say something else when Monty showed up. “C’mon, Clarke. The dance floor awaits.”

Clarke gave Lexa an apologetic look and Lexa smiled and shrugged.

“It is a club. Thanks for the beer.”

“Thanks for your help.”

Monty looked from Clarke to Lexa back to Clarke, clearly puzzled.

“No problem. If you need anything else, you know where to find me.” She grinned and moved away and Clarke stared after her. Was that an invitation? Or just a neighborly thing to say?

“C’mon,” Monty said, and he pulled her to the floor.

She danced with her glass, but soon finished the bit of beer in it and set the glass on a table that ringed the floor and got pulled into a dance circle with Jasper, Miller, Harper, Raven, and Anya, though the latter were more engrossed in grinding against each other.

Dancing made her feel better and maybe a little sexy, and she lost herself in the music, laughing and whooping with Jasper and Monty, sweat gathering on her brow and back. She scanned the crowd as she moved, and saw Lexa a few feet away, dancing with her own group and Clarke watched her
because holy shit those jeans were super-hot on her and she’d taken her long-sleeve shirt off and the
tee she wore clung to her frame—

Clarke jerked her gaze away because Lexa was just too fucking hot, the way she moved, and her
clothing only served to emphasize it, only served to accentuate the lines of her thighs, shoulders, and
back and holy fuck nobody should look that good. Clarke glanced back at her—because seriously,
how could she not—and ran right into her gaze and even a few feet away, she saw the teasing half-
smile on Lexa’s lips.

She smiled back, against her better judgment, but flirting was fun and she hadn’t done it in a while
and she was good at it. Lexa’s eyes widened and she raised her eyebrows, a question directed her
way, maybe asking permission for something. Clarke shot her a cocky little grin and caught her
lower lip in her teeth and managed a shrug while she danced and Lexa feigned shock, though her
smile had widened to a grin.

The beat changed to a trendy song and the crowd yelled its appreciation and more people squeezed
onto the floor until it was harder to move but nobody cared and it seemed everybody was dancing
with whomever was nearby, something Clarke enjoyed, when everybody just got into the spirit of
the music and nobody cared about bumping into strangers because once you did, they weren’t a
stranger anymore and instead just a fellow dancer, having a good time.

Clarke put her arms up and moved her hips and Raven started yelling “go, girl, go, girl” while Jasper
and Monty jumped up and down, laughing, and Harper suddenly got shoved into a Raven-Anya
sandwich. The song changed to another trendy tune and Clarke liked this one, too, so she stayed on
the floor, though she couldn’t see her group anymore in the crush of people.

She bumped into somebody behind her and she corrected her trajectory to give the other person room
and threw a look over her shoulder to gauge distance and when she saw it was Lexa, she turned so
she faced her and moved closer, eliciting a spark of surprise in Lexa’s eyes.

Which, for some reason, was sexy, too, that Lexa might be surprised that Clarke would give her the
time of day.

Clarke flashed her another quick grin and Lexa’s eyes widened, expression both cautious but hopeful
and again, acting against her better judgment, Clarke moved even closer and casually put her arms
around Lexa’s neck, and as if it was the most natural thing in the world, Lexa’s hands were on her
hips and they moved together like they’d been here before, like they’d known each other for so much
longer than just a few minutes.

And Jesus, Lexa could move, and the heat Clarke felt building around her didn’t have much to do
with the crowd packed in close, but it sure as hell had everything to do with the glint in Lexa’s eyes,
and the way her gaze dropped every few seconds to Clarke’s mouth then moved back to her eyes.

The music built to a breakpoint then stopped, lights flashing, and the crowd roared and Clarke stared
at Lexa, fully aware that this was a very dangerous moment and Lexa rested her forehead against
Clarke’s, and they were both breathing heavily from dancing and their mouths were so close that
Clarke could feel the warmth of Lexa’s breath on her lips. Why the hell was she feeling this way
about someone she didn’t even know, so completely turned on but there was something else,
something so much deeper—

The crowd roared again as the beat dropped but neither of them moved, and dancers jostled them on
all sides and Clarke was painfully aware of Lexa’s thighs against hers, of her hands on her hips, and
the expression in her eyes. An image of Octavia leaving Lexa’s apartment earlier in the week
intruded in her mind and Clarke let go and moved away before either of them did something they’d
both regret.

Lexa didn’t resist, but the look in her eyes told a different story and Clarke knew she had the same expression in hers and that’s why she needed to leave as soon as possible, and get her bearings. She went to the tables her group had been using and got her jacket.

“You okay?” Murphy asked.

“Yeah. Just need some air. It’s hot in here.” In so many ways.

“Hey, Clarke,” came Raven’s voice. “If you’re ready to go, so are we.”

Even better, Clarke thought. “Yeah.” She followed Raven and Anya outside and stood with Raven in the cool early November air, her skin prickling at the movement from hot to cold. Several people stood nearby in groups, talking. Some smoked.

“That was fun,” Clarke said after a few moments. “Thanks.”

Raven side-eyed her. “So did you get her number?”

Clarke knew exactly who she was talking about. “No.”

“Oh, my God, Griffin. She was ultra-hot and clearly into you. Why in the name of all that is holy did you not get her number?”

Anya pulled up to the curb.

“Didn’t have to,” Clarke said as she stepped forward and opened Raven’s door for her.

Raven frowned. “What do you mean?”

“She’s the neighbor. And her name is Lexa.”

Raven’s eyes practically popped out of her head. “Oh, my God.”

Clarke shrugged and got into the back while Raven stared at her for a few more seconds then climbed in, too. Anya waited for them to buckle up before she started driving.

“Clarke was getting frisky with our neighbor,” Raven announced.

“Jesus, Reyes,” Clarke muttered.

“So that’s who that was.” Anya grinned in the rearview mirror at her. “That’s convenient.”

“And a bad idea,” Clarke shot back.

Anya glanced at her again in the mirror. “Why?”

“She’s seeing someone.”

“We don’t know that for sure.” Raven turned and looked at Clarke.

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Yes, we do.”

“How do you know?” Anya asked and Clarke gave her the rundown of what had happened earlier in the week and Anya laughed.
“So let me see if I have this right. You told your incredibly hot neighbor to move her bed away from the wall because of loud sex, possibly with the sister of a friend of yours and this sister may or may not live there with her.”

Clarke sighed. “Yes.”

“Oh, this is good. This calls for serious popcorn.”

Clarke looked out the window. “Whatever.”

“Well, even if Lexa is seeing the other chick,” Raven said, “maybe they’re not serious. Maybe it’s just for sex.”

“Oh, that makes me feel so much better,” Clarke retorted. “Because I’m already uncomfortably aware of the marathon sessions the two of them engage in.”

“What’s the problem, Griffin?” Anya asked. “Afraid you won’t measure up?”

“Ouch,” Clarke said. “Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

Raven shot Anya a look.

“And no,” Clarke continued. “It’s just weird that I’ve already heard her having sex with someone else.” Although Anya might have a point, about the measuring up part. Clarke hadn’t been involved with anyone in a while and Lexa was super hot and clearly super sexual and it was just weird, having already heard her involved in major sexy-times. But seriously, who could blame anybody who hit it with her? She was…fuck. Heat tore through her veins, a tide of fire. And something had happened between them tonight, though Clarke figured it was the music, sweat, and alcohol.

Sometimes that wasn’t a good combination. Especially when it involved a woman who was probably seeing someone else.

“Well, whatever,” Raven said, turning to look at her. “You danced with a hot woman who just happens to live next door to us so, yay?”

Clarke smiled. “Yeah. There’s that.”

“And nothing happened. No harm, no foul.” Raven faced front again but oh, how wrong she was.

Because something had happened, and it scared Clarke because it had caught her off guard and it was a hell of a lot more powerful than anything she’d felt before. She wasn’t even sure what it was, but it included want, need, desire, and so many other things and she had barely met Lexa, barely crossed her path.

But here she was, wanting more from a woman she didn’t even know, who was caught up with someone else. Who lived right next door.

She stared out the window, wishing for things she couldn’t even name. And of course she’d feel this way about someone who was already involved. Because nothing could ever be simple in her life. She leaned her head against the window, its cool surface sort of comforting.

“Oh, Griff. I’ll check in this weekend. Study hard and let me know if you need anything,” Raven said as Anya pulled into the parking lot of their apartment building.

“I think you’ll probably be busy, but thanks for thinking of me,” Clarke teased. “And thanks for the
ride, Anya.” She got out before either could say anything else and walked to the entrance to the building, which required a code. Anya waited until she was inside before she drove away and Clarke almost went back outside so she could walk around to the back and avoid any further contact with Lexa.

She sucked it up and went in the front, though she hurried up the stairs and down the corridor, trying not to look at the door to 201 but failing. At her door, she almost dropped her keys as she tried to get inside as soon as possible. Once she did, she leaned against the door and closed her eyes, remembering how Lexa’s hands felt on her hips, how the air between them nearly combusted, and how fucking aroused she’d been.

“Shit,” she muttered. On the plus side, Lexa seemed to have followed her wishes and moved the bed away from the wall. But it didn’t stop the images from flashing through her brain, of Lexa tangled up with someone else and goddammit, Griffin, get a fucking grip.

She stripped and showered, put on pajama pants and another tee, and got into bed, a little more relaxed. No sound emanated from next door and she sighed with relief because what she didn’t hear wouldn’t hurt. Seconds later, she was asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Clarke. Maybe get out of your head a little...
Clarke spent Saturday studying, and though she loved Raven dearly, it was nice to have their apartment to herself, music tuned to a classic rock station that played softly in the background. Her dad had loved classic rock, instilling in her a love for it, too, though since he had died, she often listened to it to feel closer to him.

Her phone rang with the tone reserved for her mom.

“Hi,” Clarke answered. “I thought you had to work all day.”

“I do,” Abby said. “I’m taking a break. Just checking in. What are you up to?”

“Studying. I have an exam in anatomy on Monday.”

“You’ll do fine. You know much more than you think.”

Clarke heard the sounds of the hospital in the background and she imagined her mom in her scrubs, hair pulled back, lines of exhaustion around her eyes. “I feel like I do. But it’s still stressful.”

Abby chuckled. “I know. So do you have time for dinner next weekend?”

“Maybe Sunday? Brunch? Anya is having a dinner party on Saturday.”

“That sounds like fun. I’m glad you’re getting out a bit more.”

“You sound like Raven. And Bellamy. And all my other friends.”

“It’s because we care, honey. Med school is intense, and it’s good to leave that behind for a bit and reconnect with people and make some new connections. And I know part of that is my fault because I’ve pushed you to meet the amazing potential I know you have, but I’ve come to see that maybe that’s not entirely healthy.”

Clarke laughed. “God, Mom, now you sound like a therapist. When did that happen, this other career you embarked on?”

“Let’s just say that I’ve learned a few things from and about you along the way. I’ll still screw up, but I’m trying.”

She smiled. “And I appreciate it. So are you free on Sunday for brunch?”

“Yes. Want me to pick you up or do you want to meet at the usual spot?”

“I’ll meet you. I have to run some errands after.”

“Sounds good. Take a study break, sweetie, and good luck on your exam.”

“Thanks. Talk to you later. Bye.” She hung up and checked her emails. A few of her classmates had texted with questions, too, so she texted back then heated up leftover enchiladas for dinner and watched the latest Star Wars movie then, because she was feeling restless, she got her sketchbook out and sat at her drawing table in her room, seeing where her mood might take her.
She drew a forest, and in the middle of it a city with a tower and she envisioned it as something that survived after an apocalypse. What kinds of people would inhabit such a place? She started doing character sketches, and ended up with a few men and women dressed in ragged trousers and shirts and furs, carrying swords and knives and in once case, a battle axe. The men were mostly bearded and both men and women wore their hair in braids.

Inspired, she sketched another warrior, this one a leader, maybe, with a long black coat, dressed in black trousers and shirt, her hair braided in intricate patterns, holding a sword in each hand, staring out of the paper at her. Clarke outlined her eyes with a painted-on mask that appeared to drip down her cheeks in three vertical lines on each side, like the tracks of tears. She added a small shape between the warrior’s eyebrows, a tiny gearwheel, and finished with her face then added details to her clothing.

Finally, she stopped and studied the drawing and her chest tightened because it was Lexa, staring out at her behind the green of the sketch’s eyes. Clarke flipped to another drawing in the book she’d done months before, when she’d been goofing off about putting herself in various landscapes and settings and she found the one she had been thinking about, in which she had drawn herself dressed in black boots and gray trousers, wearing a ragged dark shirt and a beat-up black jacket. Blood and grime streaked her face and behind her loomed the ruins of what she had envisioned might be a space station that had come to the ground.

She flipped back to the warrior leader and thought about Lexa, and how she had stepped in last night when Clarke was dealing with the douchebro. And finally, she allowed herself to acknowledge that she wished Lexa was single, that they could have continued with that dance they’d started the night before. She sighed and checked the time on her phone. Damn. Almost 1.30 in the morning, and she had a study group at the library tomorrow morning.

After she set her alarm, she went to bed and lay in the dark, listening. She didn’t hear anything from next door—not even the murmur of a TV—and she wondered if Lexa was at Octavia’s tonight and the thought made her sad but fortunately she fell asleep before it could keep her up.

The next morning brought low-hanging clouds and the possibility of rain, but Clarke overslept and she was in a hurry to get everything organized before she went to study group so she decided not to deal with an umbrella.

Which was clearly a mistake, she realized, as she trudged home from campus in a steady downpour that soaked through her hoodie and jacket. By the time she got to the apartment complex, her sneakers, socks, and jeans were soaked, too and she made squishy noises on the stairs, which made her think of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies because those fish-pirate guys were always making watery slurpy noises.

At the door to her apartment she took her pack off and unzipped the pocket where she kept her keys. And didn’t find them.

“What the fuck?” she muttered and she searched the pocket again. Then the rest of her backpack. No keys.

“Pinches llaves,” she said, a little more panicked, taking a cue from Raven who swore in Spanish in particular situations. “Where the fuck are my pinches llaves? Shit. Shit, shit, shit.” She stood dripping onto the tile floor in the corridor. Had she left her keys at the library? She retraced her steps in her mind, and visualized everything she had done since she’d woken up a half-hour late.

And then she groaned. No, she hadn’t left her keys at the library because she hadn’t taken them off
the hook in her apartment. They were just on the other side of this door and she’d locked the door from the inside and pulled it shut once in the corridor and hadn’t bothered with the deadbolt because she was in a hurry. Had she done so, she would have realized she didn’t have her keys when she left that morning.

“Fuck.” She went back downstairs to the main office. The sign on the door said somebody would be back at four and it was just one now. Great. Fucking great. She texted Raven and went back upstairs, as if staring at the apartment door would get it to open. While she waited to hear back from Raven, she sat down, back against the wall, and leaned her head back.

Twenty minutes passed and still no word from Raven, so she texted again. Fuck. Maybe she’d go back to campus and wait there. She glanced at the window at the end of the hallway. The rain was coming down harder. Okay, fuck that. She stretched her legs out and pulled her backpack closer. Since she wasn’t going anywhere, she might as well review her notes again.

Voices floated up the stairs from below and she heard a door open and close. A guy from the floor above—the complex only had three floors—came down the stairs carrying an empty laundry bag, which reminded Clarke that she needed to do laundry, too. Some time later she saw the same guy, his laundry bag full and slung over his shoulder, headed back up.

She went through her notes again but looked up when she heard someone on this floor. Fuck. Lexa.

“Hey,” Lexa said as she approached. She didn’t stop at the door to her apartment and instead came over to Clarke’s. She was carrying an umbrella (because she clearly had more sense than Clarke), and she wore a black and gray leather motorcycle jacket, faded jeans, and scuffed black combat boots. And oh, shit, she had a baseball cap on, brim to the back, and how could anyone make that look so fucking cute and sexy at the same time?

“So let me guess,” Lexa said, and there was concern in her eyes. “Keys.”

“Bingo,” Clarke said, looking up at her. “They’re inside. I’m not. And the bitches won’t let me in.”

“Well, at least you know where they are. So the super’s not back for a while?”

“Not ’til four.”

Lexa nodded. “And you can’t find your roommate.”

“Nope.”

“Looks like you’re stuck with me, then. Come on.” She motioned with her head toward her apartment.

Clarke looked at her, confused.

Lexa smiled and held out her free hand to help her up. “Come on. I’m not leaving a neighbor out in the hall.”

She hesitated, but took Lexa’s hand and it was warm and strong and Clarke tried not to think about that as she got up but even that momentary contact made sparks zip around her stomach like crazed bees.

“Shit. You got caught in the rain, too. For sure you’re coming over. It’s cold out here.” Lexa walked to her apartment and unlocked then opened the door while Clarke put her notebook in her pack and picked it up.
“Take your shoes off by the door,” Lexa said from inside. “And while you’re here, you can inspect the positioning of the offending bed.”

Clarke froze in the hall, mortified, and Lexa leaned out of her apartment a second later.

“Kidding.” She grinned, sheepish. “Just letting you know again that it’s not a big deal, what you said, and you don’t need to worry about it.”

Clarke actually smiled back and stepped into the apartment, which smelled warm and earthy, like sandalwood and pine, maybe. Homey. Lexa set her umbrella near the door and took Clarke’s pack and put it carefully on the floor while Clarke took her shoes and socks off and then her jacket.

“Give it here,” Lexa said, and Clarke handed her jacket over and Lexa took a hanger out of the coat closet and hung it on the door knob. “Damn. You really are soaked.” She quickly took her boots off and set them next to Clarke’s shoes. “Okay, hold on. I’ll be right back.” She walked away and Clarke glanced around. The apartment was pretty much a mirror image of hers. A few more steps would take her into the living room and probably to the left would be the kitchen and one bedroom while to the right would be a bathroom and the bedroom that shared a wall with hers—and it occurred to her that Lexa hadn’t gone in that direction. Instead, when she came back carrying a bundle of something, she had come from the left.

“Here’s a towel and some dry clothes. The bathroom’s to your right.”

Clarke took the bundle and a lump formed in her throat at the kindness from a relative stranger.

“You good with coffee? Or do you want tea? Or something stronger?” She smiled and it lit up her eyes.

“Coffee would be awesome.”

“Done. See you in a bit.”

Clarke went to the bathroom, which was in a short hallway a few feet from a bedroom. The bathroom was like the one in the apartment she shared with Raven, the floor made up of small hexagonal white tiles popular in the era in which it was built. The walls, too, were tiled halfway up, also in white, but the top row was black, like her bathroom. The shower curtain had a space scene on it, like from a science fiction movie, and Clarke appreciated that and the shelving over the toilet and pedestal sink. Stainless steel. Somebody had also hung candle holders on the walls that were actually used for candles.

It was peaceful and tasteful and not what Clarke had expected. From the kitchen, she heard the sound of a coffee bean grinder. It was comforting, somehow, and she set the bundle on the closed toilet seat and stripped down to her underwear and bra. Lexa had included a towel in the bundle and she dried off with it then rubbed her hair down and finger-combed it, since it was kind of weird to use somebody else’s brush for that. Especially when she didn’t know them.

Lexa had provided a pair of baggy gray sweats and a baggie blue hoodie, faded and comfortable, along with a pair of thick gray socks. She hesitated before putting them on because holy shit, this was weird, being in Lexa’s apartment and holy shit, wearing her clothes.

But it also felt perfectly natural. She dressed quickly, hung the towel on one of the hooks available, and took her clothing to the front door, where she left it folded on the mat next to her backpack. She put her phone in the front pocket of the hoodie.

“In the kitchen,” Lexa said and Clarke padded across the wooden floor, a match to the floors in her
apartment, to the kitchen. The smell of fresh coffee greeted her and she inhaled, enjoying it. “Perfect timing.” Lexa poured a cup from a French press. “Cream?”

“Yes, please.”

Lexa took a carton out of the fridge and Clarke poured a splash into her cup.

“There’s sugar, if you want it.”

“No, I’m good.” She lifted the cup to her lips and sipped and it was so good. Rich, strong, and smooth. The best kind of coffee. “And this is also good.”

“I like strong coffee. And yeah, you don’t seem the sugar in coffee type,” Lexa said as she poured herself a cup, “but you never know. Come on and sit down.” She went out into the living room, which had the same mellow vibe that had greeted Clarke when she first arrived. The color palette included a mixture of earth tones from the furnishings and splashes of bright, welcoming accents from throws, art, and wall decorations. Lexa headed for the sofa but Clarke’s attention went to the bookshelves.

“Do you mind?” she asked, gesturing at the shelves.

“No, go ahead.” Lexa joined her, perhaps quietly amused at Clarke’s geek side.

Most of the titles were science fiction and fantasy, and most Clarke had read. “This is a great collection,” she said. “Yours?”

“Yep.”

“You’ve got some originals.”

“A few. But they’re all a pain in the ass to move and I keep saying I’m going to sell some and give some to libraries, but I always talk myself out of it.”

“Guess you can’t move for a while, then,” Clarke said as she pulled Arthur Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* off the shelf.

“Guess not. So who decided to name you after him?” She gestured at the book.

Clarke looked up at her. “My dad.”

“Clearly, your dad is a very cool man.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said as she replaced the book. “He was.”

“Oh, hell,” Lexa said softly, a stricken expression in her eyes. “I’ll just change the subject, now.”

“You’re fine. I can talk about it. He died seven years ago, the summer I graduated from high school. Cancer.” She sipped her coffee, staring at the books. “He would have loved this. He appreciated people who liked sci fi, and who liked reading physical books and not just digital files.” And how was it that she was so comfortable talking about this with someone she barely knew?

“And I appreciate that he was like that and that you’re telling me about him.”

Clarke regarded her, warmth spreading through her chest and down her legs.

“So are you like him in that regard?” Lexa asked.
“Yeah.” She turned her attention back to the shelves. “It drove my mom crazy sometimes, that we’d be geeking out together. We’d go to conventions when I was in high school. The last one we went to was in March before he died.” She cleared her throat, battling tears, and took a sip of coffee. “So, yeah. Comics, movies, TV shows, books.”

Lexa gently squeezed her forearm. The contact was completely unexpected but also comforting. “Well, that could make for some fun movie nights. Are you into stuff like that with a geeky neighbor? I’m always looking for people to talk to about my movie obsessions.”

Clarke smiled. “Yes, actually. I’d be into that.” And then she regretted saying it because it meant she would have to be in Lexa’s space, sitting near her, wanting things that threatened to overwhelm her and when she looked into Lexa’s eyes, she felt it again, a pull between them, and her heart sped up and she took another drink of coffee, using the cup and the act of holding it as a barrier between them.

“What about you?” Clarke asked. “Where are your parents?”

“Connecticut.” She paused, as if considering her next words. “I don’t actually have much contact with them.”

“Oh. Shit.”

“Not really. They’re not nice people. It’s better for me not to be around them. My dad’s military and my mom is…a piece of work. I’m not the daughter they wanted, so I left before I graduated from high school and pretty much didn’t look back. But it’s okay, because my dad’s brother and his family took me in. Those are the people I consider my family. Not my parents.”

Clarke jerked her gaze off Lexa’s lips back to her eyes, but that didn’t alleviate the strange craving she had to be around her, to hear more about her life, and to…to what? She wasn’t completely sure, but she wanted more.

“Anyway. Are you hungry? I can order something from the Thai place around the corner. They’re pretty quick.”

“You’re being awfully nice to me,” Clarke said with a smile. “Considering I was a total ass last week.”

Lexa laughed. “Yes, you were. But there is no easy way to broach that subject with a neighbor, so kudos to you for just putting it out there.” She smirked. “You can be damn sure I’m still teasing the hell out of my roommate about it.”

Clarke lifted the cup to her lips then stopped, thoughts swirling. “Roommate?”

Lexa nodded. “Want more coffee?”

Clarke handed her cup over. Teasing her roommate? So Lexa wasn’t responsible for the noise?

She was already walking toward the kitchen, still talking, and Clarke followed.

“My roommate -- who is also my cousin -- and his girlfriend clearly hadn’t considered the ramifications of their sexploits, and your apartment was empty for about a month, so clearly, there wasn’t a problem until you moved in.”

Clarke waited while Lexa poured their cups full again and got the half-and-half out. “I don’t think I’ve seen your roommate.”
“He has weird hours. He’s a grad student, too, but works as a bouncer. This weekend, he and his girlfriend are out of town. They’ll be back any minute, though.”

Clarke poured half-and-half into her cup. Okay, so the roommate and his girlfriend were the ones responsible for Horndog Central (dammit, Raven). Which still didn’t mean that Lexa was single. After all, she had chased Octavia down the stairs with her wallet. So maybe she’d been right, after all, about Lexa and Octavia. The thought left her sad all over again.

"So you’re also a grad student?” Clarke asked, trying not to think about Lexa's possible involvement.

“In my own way. Law. Combined with political science. So do you want me to order Thai?”

Clarke was pretty sure that was both a very good and very bad idea and fortunately her phone rang, putting the decision off. “Speaking of roommates,” she said as she answered. “Hey.”

“Dammit, Clarke, what the hell?" Raven said. “¿Donde están tus pinches llaves?"*

“I left them in the apartment. I was running late this morning and just…you know. Fucked up.”

“Are you okay?”

“Fine.”

“Oh, so you got back in?”

“No. The super gets back in about forty-five minutes—”

“Then where the hell are you?”

“Lexa’s.”

Pause. “Excuse me? Can you repeat that? Because it sounded a lot like you just said you were at Lexa’s.”

“Yeah, she got home and took pity on me.”

Lexa laughed and started cleaning out the French press and Clarke went out into the living room.

“What the hell are you saying to me right now?” Raven said in a stage whisper.

“She can’t hear you. We’re on the phone.”

“I’m being dramatic.”

Clarke laughed. “True.”

“So you are seriously in Lexa’s apartment right now?”

“Yes. Drinking coffee.”

“I want a full report. We’re ten minutes away and then I will liberate you from Lexa’s clutches. Unless, of course, that’s where you want to be.”

She flushed. “Shut up, Reyes. See you in ten.” She hung up and went back into the kitchen where Lexa was setting the press in the drying rack near the sink.

“Good news, then?” Lexa said.
“My roommate will be here in ten minutes. So thank you for taking me in.”

She flashed that damn half-smile. “You’re not a stray. And anybody who likes science fiction is welcome. Although even if you didn’t, I’d make an exception for you.” The look she gave her was reminiscent of Friday night, and Clarke experienced a full-body flush, glad that Lexa hadn’t actually brought that up as a topic of discussion.

Fortunately, she heard keys in the door.

“Honey, we’re home,” said a man’s voice.

“In the kitchen,” Lexa responded, still holding Clarke’s gaze. “And we have company, so don’t be naked.”

Laughter, and a few seconds later a good-looking guy walked in. His head was shaved but it was a great look on him, and Clarke could tell, even though he wore a jacket, that he was in good physical shape.

“Hi,” he said when he saw Clarke.

“Lincoln, Clarke. Clarke, Lincoln. My roommate. Clarke’s one of the new neighbors.”

He smiled and shook her hand. “Cool. Also, sorry about the noise. Hope things are…more quiet.” His eyes sparked with mischief and embarrassment.

“They are. Thanks,” Clarke said, trying not to make it any more awkward than it might already be.

Lexa hid her smile behind the rim of her cup as a woman walked in and Clarke recognized her as Octavia.

“Hi,” she said. “I think I saw you last week.” She shrugged. “The day Lexa chased me down the stairs because I forgot my wallet.”

Lincoln laughed and his smile lit up his eyes. Clarke liked his energy, and she also liked that he took the fact that he’d been busted for loud sex in stride. She had worried things might be awkward in that regard with someone in this apartment, but things were fine so far.

“You damn boyfriend clearly couldn’t be bothered to get out of the shower,” Lexa said, but she was smiling, too. And so did Clarke, because Lexa had just revealed that Octavia was Lincoln’s girlfriend.

“So to what do we owe the honor of this auspicious visit?” Lincoln asked as he opened the fridge and took a Diet Coke out. “Anybody else?” he asked, holding the can up.

“Yeah,” Octavia said and he handed her one.

“I’m locked out of my apartment,” Clarke responded to Lincoln’s original question. “And Lexa came along and took pity on me.”

“She’s good like that.” Lincoln winked at Lexa then looked at Clarke. “So do you need to pick the lock?”

“Are you offering?”

He shrugged. “I might have a few skills.”
“I’ll keep that in mind,” she said as her phone notified her of a text message. She glanced at it. “Fortunately, my roommate’s back with her keys.”

“Next time, then,” Lincoln said. “Good to meet you. Has Lexa invited you to her geekout movie nights yet? And we’ll probably watch one tonight, if you want to hang around.”

“Yes, she has told me and movie night another time. I have an exam tomorrow morning.” Her phone dinged again. “And now I have to go or my roommate will think I’ve been kidnapped.”

Octavia frowned. “By who?”

“Don’t ask. I’ll hopefully see you all later.”

Lexa set her cup on the counter and followed Clarke to the front door. “You can give the clothes back later.”

“Are you sure?”

She smiled. “I know where you live.”

“Ah, but you don’t have my number,” Clarke said as she rolled her still-damp clothing up and stuffed it into her backpack.

“I’m working on it,” she said, a warm but hopeful undercurrent in the statement.

Clarke straightened and regarded her for moment. “Do you have your phone?”

She pulled it out of her back pocket and unlocked it then handed it to Clarke, who added her phone number to Lexa’s contacts list. She handed the phone back when she was done.

“Thank you for today,” she said as she picked up her pack and sneakers, all still damp.

“You’re welcome.” Lexa handed her jacket over then opened the door and stepped aside so Clarke could leave and Clarke fought a nearly overwhelming urge to hug her as she stepped past her into the hallway.

“And thanks for Friday night,” Clarke said.

“Which part?”

Clarke shot her an enigmatic smile and went to her apartment.

“Hey,” Lexa said from her doorway.

She waited, hand on the doorknob.

“Have a good night, Clarke.”

“You, too, Lexa.” She opened the door and went inside.

*¿Donde están tus pinches llaves?: Where are your fucking keys?

Chapter End Notes
If only we all had a neighbor like Clarke's.
“I cannot believe you spent the afternoon at Horndog Central.”

Clarke looked up at Raven from her bowl of cereal. She hadn’t felt like cooking. “Okay, first, it may still be that, but we will never know because I can’t hear it anymore and that’s what counts.”

“It also counts that it’s not Lexa doing the horndogging.”

“Not that we know of,” Clarke said. “All we know at this point is that she’s not with Octavia. Or her roommate.”

“Unless there is some seriously kinky shit going on over there. Or a perfectly legit poly relationship. Or even a legit kinky poly relationship. And all permutations thereof.” She took an ice cream sandwich out of the freezer. “And I’m supposed to believe that nothing happened except coffee and talking, even though you come back here wearing Lexa’s clothes? I dunno, Griff.” She shook her head and took a bite.

“She was really sweet,” Clarke said, noncommittal.

“And smoking hot. And fucking sexy as hell on the dance floor. Are you telling me you weren’t tempted even a little bit to get a piece of that?”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe?”

She sighed. “I’m not sure I’m ready for anything. And even if I was, she might not be single. Or she might just want fuckbuddies.”

“And what the hell is wrong with that?”

“Nothing. I just don’t think I’m in the right headspace for that.” Which was kind of a lie. She wasn’t in the right headspace for it with Lexa, and that had her messed up, because why wouldn’t she want to hit it with her and just keep things casual? Because there was something different about her, and it scared the fuck out of her. She finished her cereal.

Raven frowned around the ice cream sandwich. “Wait a sec. Elaborate. You’re not in the right headspace for fuckbuddies in general or with Lexa?”

Clarke stood and rinsed out her bowl. “I have no issue with fuckbuddies,” she said as she cleaned it. “I just don’t even know if I’m ready for that. I don’t know if I’m ready for any kind of dating.” But
Lexa was different. Lexa made her feel safe, and the way she had looked at her Friday night, wanted. Today, she had made her feel welcome, with no pressure or expectations, and it was refreshing, knowing that even in the charged moments between them, Lexa wasn’t going to demand anything from her that she wasn’t willing to give.

“So ask her out. Something casual that’s not quite a date but could lead to one.”

Clarke didn’t respond and instead stood at the sink, trying to sort through Friday night and today.

“Hey,” Raven said in the tone that meant she wasn’t teasing.

Clarke looked at her.

“I know this is a tough subject. It’s just—there’s something a little different about you these past few days. A shift of some kind, and I’m not saying it correlates with Lexa, but if she’s got you thinking about dating again, then maybe it’s a message from the universe that it’s okay to do it. Whether her or someone else.”

“I just—I don’t know. We’ll see. And now I have to go over my notes again. I have that damn exam tomorrow.”

“Oh, yeah. Okay.” She stood and gave Clarke a hug. “This is me being sappy. And also it’s a good luck on your exam hug.”

“Thanks.”

“Are we still on for my doc appointment Thursday?”

“Yes. It’s in my calendar. See you in the morning.” She went to her bedroom and sprawled on her bed with her books, notebook, and tablet. A couple hours later she was done so she watched some Netflix, though she was thinking mostly about Lexa and when she got ready for bed and finally got under the covers, she was still wearing Lexa’s sweats and socks. The hoodie she had draped over the chair at her drafting table.

She wasn’t sure why she had told Lexa about her dad. Since he had died, she never just brought it up like that, though Lexa’s questions didn’t leave room for dodging the subject. And it had felt okay doing it, and even when she got a little choked up, Lexa didn’t make a big deal out of it and instead just squeezed her arm, a gentle connection that did more to soothe her than a lot of the platitudes she often got.

What was the harm in just asking her to coffee? That way, she’d get a sense of things, and see how she felt about maybe doing a more serious date. Raven was right. She didn’t have anything to lose, with just coffee. There was a chance she’d be disappointed, but that was much easier to deal with than heartbreak.

She hoped.

###

Wednesday morning, Clarke slept in until nine. Her exam had gone well on Monday, and Lexa had sent her a good luck text that morning, which gave her a buzz every time she thought about it and of course she had immediately added Lexa’s number to her contacts.

Tuesday she’d been busy all day on campus and didn’t hear from Lexa, which was a little disappointing but whatever, they both had things to do. Though she did wonder what Lexa’s dating
situation was.

Today she had a class at two and another one at four, which gave her time to sleep in a little and get caught up on household chores like laundry.

Clarke kind of hated washing the clothes Lexa had loaned her because they smelled like her and maybe it was really fucking weird that she derived comfort from that, but she’d worn Lexa’s hoodie to her exam and it was strangely comforting and she felt like zen incarnate as she worked her way through the questions. And at least the clothes were an excuse to stop by and see her when she dropped them off.

God, what the hell? For someone who wasn’t supposed to be interested in dating, she spent an inordinate amount of time thinking about Lexa.

She put a couple loads into the apartment complex washers as soon as she got up and now she was making blueberry pancakes because it was the perfect fall morning for that. Her phone registered a text message and she checked it and grinned because it was from Lexa.

*Meet somewhere for coffee?*

*Where are you?* Clarke texted back.

*Home*

*Same. Come over & bring coffee. Plz.*

Lexa didn’t respond, so Clarke poured another pancake onto the griddle and watched it for a bit then flipped it and checked the bacon, which she was preparing in the oven. A knock sounded at her door and she had a full-body rush as she went to answer. She glanced through the peephole, smiled, and opened the door.

“Hi. I come bearing coffee,” Lexa said as she held up the French press.

“Excellent. You had the correct password on the first try. And you’re just in time for pancakes. And bacon, if that’s your thing.” She moved so Lexa could enter and damn, her ass in the jeans she was wearing—Clarke forced her gaze to the coffee press.

Lexa’s eyes lit up. “My thing on all counts.”

“Then you definitely can hang out with me.” Clarke led her to the kitchen.

“Just as I suspected,” Lexa said, looking around. “An alternate reality to my apartment layout. And oh, my God. It smells so good in here,” she said as Clarke took the first pancake off the griddle and put it on a baking sheet in the oven then poured another. She liked big pancakes, like you might get in a restaurant.

“Okay, cups here—” Clarke showed Lexa which cabinet, “and cream’s in the fridge.”

While Lexa got the coffee poured Clarke flipped the pancake then retrieved two plates from the cabinet and set them on the counter next to the stove.

Lexa handed her a cup of coffee and Clarke sipped.

“So good,” she said.

“I worked as a barista in college.” Lexa leaned back against the counter. “Important life skills were
learned. So how’d your exam go?”

“Great.” She added the pancake to the stack in the oven and poured the last of the batter onto the griddle. “Thanks for asking.”

“What year med student are you?”

Clarke looked at her, surprised, and Lexa laughed.

“You were wearing a med school sweatshirt last week.”

“It might not have been mine.”

“So I took a chance on making the assumption it was.” She sipped her coffee and Clarke jerked her gaze off Lexa’s lips back to the pancake.

“I’m in my second year. And I like that you assumed the sweatshirt was mine and not some dude’s.”

Lexa snorted. “That’s not the vibe you give off.”

“And what vibe is that?” she asked as she flipped the pancake over.

She smiled and took another drink of coffee. “Your own.” She set her cup on the counter and took butter out of the fridge, and Clarke had the strange sense that they’d been here before, that this interaction between them, though new, was somehow not new. Lexa then picked up the jar of maple syrup from the counter and carried both to the table in the dining nook.

Like they had done this before, like they just kind of knew how to negotiate each other’s physical spaces.

It left Clarke off balance but also excited, somehow, like she was finding something she hadn’t realized had been missing. She finished with the pancakes and loaded two plus three strips of bacon onto each of the two plates and carried them to the table. “Want apple juice?”

“I’d love some.”

Clarke retrieved it along with two juice glasses and set all on the table. “Dig in,” she said as she poured the juice.

“Wait,” Lexa said. “More coffee.” She took her cup back into the kitchen and when she reappeared she was carrying her cup and Clarke’s. “Now.”

Clarke buttered her pancakes and poured syrup—the pure stuff, from Vermont—all over them. “I love pancakes.”

“I, too, am a fan,” Lexa said as she prepared hers like Clarke’s, except with less syrup.

“My dad made the best pancakes,” Clarke said. “But these aren’t bad,” she said, chewing thoughtfully.

Lexa took a bite. “Oh, my God. These are amazing. Your dad would’ve been proud. Did he learn from Ra’s al Ghul?”

Clarke laughed. “Yes. Because the League of Assassins is very particular about its pancakes.”

“Because they get them from the Legion of Pancakes.” Lexa nodded, thoughtful. “Whose logo
would be crossed spatulas and a skull.” And then she grinned. “Sparring would be like some crazy
version of Iron Chef.”

“I can totally see that as a graphic novel.”

“Or maybe a show on the CW.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “That would ruin it. There’d be all these cool female characters and then
they’d find a way to totally hamstring them and make them hook up with toxic men and then they’d
kill off the gays after claiming amazing queer rep.”

“You speak true,” Lexa said with extra gravitas. “And yet I keep hoping they’ll get better.”

“Okay, there is Legends of Tomorrow.” She ate a piece of bacon and something about the morning
and the way the sun splashed across the table through the window panes and how Lexa’s eyes could
express so much—it was completely comfortable but also exciting and really confusing because
she’d never felt anything like this.

“The Flash, too. I like Barry’s relationship with Iris. One of the few het pairings I ship. And I am
super gay.”

Clarke smiled and went to get the rest of the bacon. She stood for a moment, staring out the window
over the stove, watching sunlight glance off the deep reds and bright yellows of the changing leaves
of nearby trees, fado music playing softly in the living room and shit, she could get used to this, to
having Lexa around. She took the plate of bacon back to the table.

“You have a really nice space,” Lexa said as she took a piece. “I love the light. And I like the feel,
with the distressed wooden shelves and this table. It’s nice.”

“Thanks. I actually did a lot of the shelves myself. And the end tables.” She gestured vaguely at the
living room.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. Flea markets. Stripped and sanded them then re-painted.”

“They’re beautiful. You and Lincoln should hang out. He loves doing stuff like that. He made our
coffee table.”

“He did a great job. I love the tile on it.” She took a drink of coffee. “So. Law. Why?”

Lexa sat back, a half-smile dancing at the corner of her mouth. “A way to effectively—hopefully—
make change. I’m interested in civil rights law and how it intertwines with policy. It’s a tool that can
be applied in many different ways.”

“I can see you running for office some day.” She thought about the image of Lexa she had drawn as
a warrior and then about Lexa stepping in at the club when the douchebro hassled her. Battles could
take many forms.

Lexa’s half-smile became a grin. “Maybe. I might be better with grassroots work, though. I like
getting my hands dirty, working with the little guy and organizing coalitions.”

“Sounds like you’re in the perfect fields.” Clarke raised her cup in a toast.

“And you? Why medicine?”
“I like solving problems. Medicine gives me a chance to help people solve health problems. Or at least figure out ways to work with the problems.” She caught Lexa’s gaze and held it. “Yeah, maybe my dad dying made me want to be a doctor more.” She glanced out the window then back at Lexa. “Not that I’ll be able to save everybody. Or fix things like advanced cancer. But maybe in a trauma situation—and I’m interested in trauma surgery—I can make a difference for somebody.”

Lexa didn’t say anything but her silence was both comfortable and encouraging.

“My dad was an environmental scientist. He was particularly interested in renewable energy sources and I did think about going into that, but it didn’t grab me like surgery.”

“Was he into it?”

Clarke smiled. “Yes. You know that exhibit “Body Worlds”? Where the statues are actually human bodies without skin basically shellacked by an artist into different poses? It’s exhibited all over the world.”

Lexa nodded. “Haven’t been, but it was featured in that Bond film. Casino Royale.”

“Yes. And I liked that movie. I like Daniel Craig as the damaged, darkside Bond.”

"I'd have to agree. It allows exploration of plots in different ways, and making Bond almost an antihero kind of humanizes him. And it shows the brutality of the line of work he's in."

"Definitely. Skyfall showed that, and I like that it did, because you never really see earlier Bonds dealing with the after-effects of the physical pounding his body takes as an agent." She paused and caught Lexa's gaze. "And we just totally geeked about Bond movies."

Lexa laughed. "It's important as Legion of Pancakes members that we have a wide range of knowledge of many things geek."

"Good to know. Anyway, so yeah, the idea about the exhibit is kind of creepy if you think too hard about it and I’ve heard shitty things about the motivations of the guy behind it, but my dad took me when I was in junior high because he knew I was really interested in anatomy. He was always kind of squeamish, but he knew I wanted to go, so he took me.” She stared into her coffee cup, smiling, then wiped her eyes. “Sorry.”

“For what?” Lexa reached over and squeezed her wrist. “You miss him. There’s nothing to be sorry for.”

Clarke wiped her eyes again, this time with a napkin. Her wrist tingled where Lexa had touched it. “Anyway, he was proud of me and my medical aspirations, though he teased me and my mom about having all these doctors in the family.”

“Your mom’s a doctor, too?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“Not far. Outside D.C. She’s a surgeon.”

“Did that inspire you, too?”

“I think so. And of course, it’ll be a good skill in a zombie apocalypse.” She smirked over the rim of
her cup. “Me with those skills and you with your organizational capabilities—hell, we’ll have the best survivor group around.”

Lexa laughed and oh, shit, the air between them heated and the connection Clarke had sensed since the beginning embedded in her heart like a grappling hook, and Lexa held its rope.

She wasn’t ready for this, for the current that pulsed between them. But there was such a gentle certainty in Lexa’s eyes, beneath that damn rakish sexiness—it calmed her in some ways and aroused her in others.

Shit.

“You know, Clarke,” Lexa said after a few moments, “breakfast is a gateway drug.”

“Oh? To what?” And oh, her name sounded so good in Lexa’s mouth.

Lexa raised an eyebrow and Clarke wondered if she was still breathing.

“Lunch. I’m working my way up to that with you, too. Sunday?”

“I’d love to, but I’m meeting my mom for brunch that day.”

“And that is a very good reason to refuse my gateway drug offer. Well, if you’re into it another day, just let me know.” She stood and started clearing the table.

“Hey, don’t worry about that,” Clarke said as Lexa took plates to the sink.

“I’m not. It’s just one of my rules,” she said over her shoulder. “I help clean up after someone cooks a meal.”

“Is that part of the Legion of Pancakes manual?”

Lexa gave her a stern look. “There is no written manual. The secrets must be learned, painstakingly passed from true warriors to novitiates, that the cycle may repeat.” She returned to the table and took the things that belonged in the fridge and put them away. “Knowledge is imparted through the sacred conclave, and also through levels of training. And only those with the right bloodline—maybe blood—are granted the opportunity in the conclave to ascend.”

Clarke grinned. “And the best of them—the most gifted of them—becomes Commander, who ensures the survival of the conclave and the coalitions she builds.”

“See? Pancakes are very important,” Lexa said as she finished clearing the table. She stacked the plates on the counter by the sink and put the glasses and cups next to them then turned and regarded Clarke, and they stared at each other for a few moments, as if assessing the possibilities in this slice of time.

“Thank you,” Lexa said, providing a safe segue for Clarke’s churning thoughts and emotions. “For sharing not only amazing pancakes, but your home and a bit of yourself.” She picked up her French press. “I’ll let you know when the next movie night is.”

Clarke followed her to the door and Lexa walked down the hallway and oh, God, Clarke was desperate for something. Fuck, for more Lexa. For her smile and her laugh and her tentative teasing and the way she made her feel safe and warm and accepted. This moment felt important, like a big opportunity she shouldn’t let slip away.
“Lexa,” she said, just as Lexa was about to go into her own apartment.

She waited, expression inscrutable.

“I have…this thing Saturday evening,” Clarke said. “A semi-formal party that my roommate’s girlfriend does a few times a year—anyway, would you like to go?”

“I’d love to,” she said, no hesitation.

“Great,” Clarke said, not sure how she managed not to collapse as she tried to sound nonchalant. “I’ll give you details when I have them all.”

“Excellent. Talk to you later.” She flashed her a grin and went into her apartment and Clarke barely managed to get into hers and close the door before she let herself slide down the wall, heart pounding like she’d been running a track event. She texted Raven.

_I asked Lexa to go to A’s party w/me_

She smiled and chewed her lower lip. “Fuck,” she whispered. What was she doing? Raven texted back.

_kjkdkgjhlksjdjklj_

She laughed. _she said yes_

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! was Raven's response.

And she now needed to put her laundry into the dryer and get things ready for her afternoon classes. Because if she didn’t keep herself busy, she was afraid she’d find a way to convince herself not to do this.

_Talk 2nite_, Raven texted. _Wtf can’t w/ this news I’M DEAD GRIFFIN omg bout time luv u and see u l8r_

Clarke took care of her laundry and another wave of giddiness hit her when she put Lexa’s sweats in with the rest of her clothes, indicative of a level of intimacy she didn’t have with her, but it felt like she did. Or had. Or should have. Or something.

After her laundry was done and she had gotten her materials ready for class, she texted Lexa: _You’re right_

Lexa didn’t text back until Clarke had already started walking to class. _About?_

_breakfast as a gateway drug_

Lexa’s reply came a couple minutes later. _Except we skipped lunch & went right to dinner._

_clearly my pancakes are a more powerful drug than other breakfasts_

Lexa responded with the laughing emoji. A few seconds later she added, _You have no idea, the power of your pancakes._

Clarke laughed and her phone dinged again.

_I might be hooked._
She slowed down so she could text back. *Don't worry. I can make more.* She continued walking, a damn butterfly sanctuary taking flight in her stomach and chest. Her phone dinged with a follow-up from Lexa.

_Not talking about pancakes._

Jesus *fucking* Christ. She stopped. “Who *are* you?” she whispered as she stared at the text. Who the hell was this woman who had somehow managed to slide right under her skin? Who had managed to take up residence in her thoughts as she trailed her fingertips over the surface of her heart?

Fuck.

She might be hooked, too.

Maybe.

Damn gateway drugs.

Chapter End Notes

Envisioning Legion of Pancakes logo...

Also Lexark shout-out. Heh.
The Panini Guild

Chapter Summary

Clarke invites Lexa to movie night with her and Raven after she walks home from campus with Lincoln. Who might be a little protective of Lexa. And Raven is...well, Raven. LOL

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“So have you talked to her today?” Raven pushed her protective goggles up onto her head and joined Clarke in the hallway, outside the lab.

“No.”

“Why the hell not?”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Because we both have things to do—”

“So you’ve already shared schedules?”

“Okay, I’m now going to go home. I go with you to your doctor’s appointment yesterday and do a cheer when he says your new brace is awesome and then I came all this way today just to say hi and this is what you do.”

“I’m just teasing. And you know you kind of like it.”

“Maybe. Is there anything you want for dinner?”

Raven crossed her arms. “How are you this calm when you’re going on a date with her tomorrow?”

“It’s not a date.” But it kind of was. It felt like it. She was trying not to freak herself out, though.

“Oh, my God, whatever. It’s totally a date. And it’s a safe date, so kudos to you. Bringing her to a place where all your friends are—let’s give her props for having brass ovaries, stepping into potentially hostile territory like that.”

“And on that note, I’ll see you at home. What do you want for dinner?”

“A Clarke special sandwich.”

“Oh, good idea. I’ll make panini.”

“God, I love you. But not that way. In a totally wholesome roommate way.”

Clarke grinned. “C’mon, Reyes. There was that one time over spring break a few years back. I recall we both had a really good time.”

She affected a thoughtful air. “You are a mad hot kisser. But I think we work much better together as BFFs.”
She laughed. “Same. See you at home. Are we still on for movies?”

“Duh. You should invite Lexa. I have to check her out, after all, before the party.”

“We’ll see.”

Raven made kissing noises and went back into the lab and Clarke left the building and started walking across campus, headed home. She’d been trying really hard not to freak out that she had a date—a sort of date—but she’d been nervous and excited and anxious for two days.

Fortunately, she and Lexa had both been busy and hadn’t seen each other, though they’d texted back and forth a few times on Thursday, and Clarke appreciated that Lexa couldn’t see her in a text because she felt like a bumbling ass when interacting with her.

Lexa had kept the texts fangirl-related and mostly innocuous, though maybe a little flirtatious here and there and Clarke wondered if maybe she was a player, and just really good at sucking people in. But then she’d think about her eyes, and the way she exuded calm and warmth and that thought would fade. She stared up at the sky, a solid gray today, which meant either cold rain again or maybe snow. It might be cold enough for it.

“Hey, Clarke,” someone said and she glanced around.

Lincoln, walking toward her. He wore black jeans, boots, and a Navy pea coat and Clarke totally got what Octavia saw in him. He was hot. And he had really kind eyes.

“Hi,” she said.

“Thought that was you. Headed home?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll walk with you, if that’s okay.”

“Totally.”

“Cool. So I think I met your roommate the other day,”

“Oh?”

“Raven.” He adjusted his backpack on his shoulder. “Ran into her in the laundry room. She asked if I was the dude who lived next door and made an ungodly amount of noise with my girlfriend.”

“Why, yes, I see you did meet Raven.”

He laughed. “I like her. She’s welcome at movie night any time.”

“Good to know. So when’s the next one?”

“Probably next week. Lexa’s trying to get this big project done for one of her classes. Something to do with putting together an argument for a trial.”

She had texted something to that effect to Clarke, which was why Clarke had been leaving her alone for the most part, so she could get her shit done. But she really wanted to make her pancakes again and make sure she was eating right and getting enough rest. And she wanted to cuddle with her on the couch and snuggle into her embrace and holy Jesus so much more...fuck.
“So I heard you and Lexa are going to a dinner thing tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Raven’s girlfriend puts this thing on every season. She’s all about acknowledging the change in the Earth’s patterns. Which is funny because she’s a hardcore science-type.”

“Sounds cool.”

“Well, I’m sorry I hadn’t met you earlier, because I would have invited you and Octavia to this one. So you’re officially invited to the next one.”

He grinned. “Excellent. Appreciate it.”

And it hit Clarke, that she was assuming she’d still be interacting with Lexa beyond tomorrow, and that she’d drawn Lincoln in, too. They both stopped at the corner, waiting for the light to change.

He gave Clarke a look, assessing. “Has she talked about her family?”

“A little. She said her parents weren’t the best.”

“That’s generous. My dad is her dad’s brother.”

“She told me that, too.”

“You’ve probably guessed, but her parents found out she was gay when she was a freshman in high school, though they weren’t that keen on her before because she wasn’t a typical girl, if you will, and they’re super conservative and uptight. They tolerated her for a while, but by the time she was a junior, she was pretty much living at my house. I think they probably would’ve kicked her out had she not left on her own.”

The light changed and they crossed and Clarke’s heart ached for younger Lexa.

“I was in high school with her,” Lincoln continued, “and we were tight then, too, so if people messed with her, they messed with me.” He was quiet for a few moments. “Let’s just say I got into some fights. So did she.” He shrugged. “We survived. And at least my folks are pretty awesome. So she knew she had people in her life who cared about her no matter what. But her fucking parents...If I ever have kids, I will never do to them what her parents did to her. I will never understand how you could reject your own child like that. And Lexa is beyond awesome. She is absolutely one of the strongest people I know, but she has the hugest heart. You might not know it, because she can be a shark when called for, but if she shows you her heart, she means it.”

Clarke tried to swallow around the lump in her throat but found it difficult. They stopped at another corner, waiting for the light.

“It’s been a while since Lexa’s...well, gone out with anybody,” he said.

She looked at him and she must have appeared surprised because he laughed.

“I get it. It might not be a date date, but it’s a nice way to test the waters. And I applaud you for making the attempt.”

Clarke stared straight ahead, not sure what, if anything, to say.

“She’s not what people think,” Lincoln said. “She’s much deeper, and doesn’t have time for bullshit.”

“I can appreciate that.”
“Yeah. I kind of get that feeling about you, too.”

*That* was a relief. “So you’re basically testing the waters your own self, here.”

“Possibly.” He regarded her for a few seconds. “She’s like a sister to me, and right now, I’m feeling kind of brother-ish.”

“Well, I can appreciate that, too.”

Lincoln shrugged. “I don’t think I can convey how amazing I think Lexa is, and that she deserves amazing things.” His brow furrowed. “But she doesn’t think she does. As powerful as she can be, as completely badass, she has a lot of walls, and it takes a lot to get past them. So I applaud you again, that you’ve gotten this far. It says something about you, that she’s taking this chance.”

They had arrived at their building and they both stopped.

He cocked his head. “But I’m guessing that you’ve gone through some shit, too. Whatever it is, it’s speaking to Lexa. And I like seeing it on her.”

“Thanks for the pep talk,” she said, tone wry.

He smiled. “Lexa’s picky. That says something, that she likes you. And if you let her in, I think the two of you could be really good for each other.”

Lexa liked her? Would Lincoln notice if she floated away right now? And hold on, what was this future prediction shit going? Because she was not at all sure what she wanted.

Lincoln entered his code and opened the door. “Hope I didn’t freak you out,” he said as he held the door for her.

“No. I’m glad she has people who care about her. It says something when a person has that, don’t you think?”

He nodded. “I get the feeling you have people who care about you, too.”

They went up the stairs and Lincoln stopped at the door to 201. “Thanks, Clarke. Hope to keep seeing you around.”

“Same to you.”

He unlocked his door and Clarke went to her apartment. It should have made her uncomfortable, that Lincoln basically gave her a version of the third degree. But instead, she was glad, because it said something about Lexa, that she had people who cared about her and were willing to put themselves on the line for her. It was oddly comforting, and only reinforced her feelings—wait. Scratch that. Too soon to talk about feelings, right?

Maybe?

Clarke tossed her pack onto her bed, changed into sweats and sweatshirt, though she almost—almost—put Lexa’s back on. They were folded up on her shelves, clean, waiting for her to take them back but she just hadn’t gotten around to it. She pressed her hand lightly against the sweatshirt then went into the kitchen where she started prepping for panini.

That should be the title of a podcast, maybe. And about twenty minutes later, it started to rain as the sky darkened. She texted Raven.
Are you good w/ getting home ok?

A few seconds later, she got a response. Yeah. Tom’s giving me a ride.

One of her lab partners. That was a relief. good. see u soon

A few minutes later her phone dinged again. Maybe the ride with Tom fell through and she’d have to go get Raven. Instead, it was a text from Lexa. Hey. Got your info about tomorrow. Ok if I drive?

Clarke smiled. Keeping your wits about you?

I’m entering uncharted territory. Stands to reason. [smiling emoji]

Clarke melted, though she wasn’t sure why. The message was innocuous enough. Then yes, she responded. You drive.

Thx. Are you still on campus?

No. U?

Kind of. On my way home.

Clarke pondered that, because she liked thinking that Lexa lived right next door. In the rain?

Driving.

jfc you’d better not be while texting me

lol no, sitting in parking lot

Clarke laughed and then did something she generally avoided with people she didn’t know very well. She called her.

And Lexa answered on the first ring.

“Hi,” she said and shit, her voice. Clarke closed her eyes at the sound of it.

“What parking lot?” Clarke asked.

She chuckled, a sweet, husky sound and Clarke was sure she was not going to recover from it. “The parking structure by the library.”

“That’s a good one, as parking goes.”

“I agree. Well-lit and accessible.”

The pause between them was rife with possibility.

“And those are important ingredients in a parking garage. So. What are your plans tonight? Since it’s Friday and all.”

“Honestly, I’m tired and was planning on spending the evening with my couch and Netflix or Amazon. Lincoln is supposed to be going to dinner with Octavia and he might be back tonight or he might not. I decided not to think about it either way.”

“Well, if you’d like, Raven and I are having panini and then watching movies.”
Pause. “Are you inviting me over?” And her voice held hints of that sexy little purr that meant she was flirting. In her understated Lexa way, that Clarke had picked up on since—shit, since the beginning.

“Yes. And I’ll even put bacon on your panini, if you want. Though I was planning on doing muffuletta style.”

“So this is dinner and a movie?”

“And popcorn, if the stars align right.” She leaned back against the counter.

“The clouds are blocking the stars right now.”

“Then we’ll just have to assume that they’re aligning. But you said you’re tired, so we can schedule another time.” Which would be disappointing, but Clarke understood the need to unwind after a long week.

“I’m never too tired for panini and popcorn. What time?”

“An hour?”

“Done.”

“Is panini okay? Do you have dietary issues I need to know about?”

“Nope. Do you need me to pick anything up or bring anything?”

Clarke forgot to breathe again because yes, she did need Lexa but how was that possible and once again, it felt like they had been here before, in a similar comfortable space that was quickly filling with possibilities she wasn’t sure she was ready for.

“Raven likes beer with panini, God love her. How are you on picking beer out?”

Lexa laughed. “Not my first rodeo. What kind does she like?”

“She’s on a brown ale kick.”

“Got it handled. See you soon.”

And she hung up, but Christ, Clarke ached in every conceivable way but shit, it was scary and really intense and maybe she should slow this down.

But she was almost sure she didn’t want to, and somehow, she knew she’d be safe, that Lexa would make sure of it. She went back to work on the panini.

###

“She’s coming over,” Clarke said, amazed that her voice was steady.

Raven whooped.

“Oh, my God,” Clarke grumbled. “Really? It’s just dinner and movies with my roommate on the same couch.”

“Doesn’t matter. She’s coming over knowing I’m here. Wait. You did tell her that I’ll be here, too, right?”
“Duh. Yes.”

“So she knows exactly what she’s getting into and yet she’s coming over anyway.” Raven’s eyes widened. “She’s into you.”

Clarke laughed and gestured at the ingredients she had assembled for the sandwiches. “I thought I’d go maybe muffulettta-style.”

“Fuck, yes, but back to the previous point. She’s into you.”

“Would you stop? It’s too soon.”

Raven gave her a look. “Hold that thought.” She left, probably to take her jacket off and put her backpack away. When she returned a few minutes later, she was wearing sweats and a big, baggy black sweater. Clarke had assembled one panini and was working on another.

“Okay. Now. Back to that thought. Too soon? For what? You’re just hanging out, getting to know someone a little better. And you can be into someone at any time. I mean, the first time I saw Anya, I was all, ‘oh, hell, yes, I could hit that’.”

“Thank you for that visual,” Clarke said with a groan. “Please don’t share your sexifying with me.” She finished layering the meats and olive spread on the second panini.

Raven snorted then sniffed. “Do I smell French fries?”

Clarke moved so Raven could look in the oven.

“I do,” Raven said, inhaling deeply. "And here they are. Did you make those?”

“Not today. These are frozen, from the store. That brand you like.”

“They will still do nicely.”

“I made them garlic parmesan.”

“So you’re not planning on kissing Lexa tonight.”

Clarke almost dropped her spoon and Raven gave her a wicked grin.

“Though it seems you’ve been thinking about it.”

She refused to answer.

“Totally don’t blame you.”

“I just met her,” Clarke said as she finished with the third panini.

“Like you’ve never kissed someone you just met.”

She made an exasperated noise and wiped her hands off on a paper towel then got her panini press kit out, which consisted of a skillet and a brick that she proceeded to wrap in foil as the press part.

“Okay, relax,” Raven said. “I know you’re freaking out because you’re actually attracted to someone after a shitty experience, but here’s the thing. She’s not what’s-his-name. You’re not repeating a pattern.”
“I don’t know if I can be sure about that.” She wanted to be. God, how she wanted to be. But history could be a cruel teacher.

“Clarke, get our of your damn head for once and quit overthinking things. You’ll know if there are red flags and because you had that crappy experience, you’ll know to run away.”

She sighed and looked at Raven. “Do you think so?”

Raven’s gaze softened. “Yes. I do. You deserve to be happy. If Lexa’s someone who’s going to have that effect on you, then go for it.” She hugged her. “I know it’s scary. Believe me, I know. But even if shit flies completely off the rails, you still have me and your mom and all your other friends and we will fucking catch you and make sure you’re all right.”

It almost made Clarke cry.

“Hell, even Anya will cut a bitch if she fucks with you.”

She laughed. “I just figured Anya put up with me as your roommate and BFF.”

“No way. She likes you.” Raven let go of her. “Anya’s a pretty good judge of character and she knows you’re the real deal. She’ll let you know if anything’s weird with Lexa.”

“Now I feel sorry for Lexa,” Clarke said, only half-kidding.

“I think Lexa can hold her own. So when’s she coming over?”

“Soon. I talked to her about an hour ago.” She prepared the pan with oil for the panini.

“What movie should we watch tonight?” Raven asked, watching.

“Something big and fangirl-ish.”

“The Force Awakens.”

“Love that one. Let’s see if Lexa’s good with it.”

“If she’s not, she is not the woman for you,” Raven said with mock seriousness then left the kitchen area before Clarke could reply.

She sipped her wine and watched the oil and when it was ready, she put the first panini on the pan’s surface and pressed down then put the foil-covered brick on it.

A knock sounded at the door and Clarke’s heart started pounding.

“I’ll get it,” Raven called in a sing-song voice.

Clarke heard the door open, and then voices, one of which made her grin and bite her lip.

“Look who I found,” Raven announced as she entered the kitchen, Lexa behind her.

“Hi,” Lexa said with a smile and Clarke almost couldn’t talk because why the hell did she have to look so damn good all the time? And she was just wearing old, faded guy-cut jeans that had holes in the knees, a well-loved gray sweatshirt that said Polis University Athletic Department, and classic slip-on black Vans.

“Hi,” Clarke said and then she realized that Lexa had brought flowers. “Oh, wow. Those are—wow.
Thank you. Let me get a vase.”

“No,” Raven said. “You are the keeper of the panini and must stay at your post.”

“She makes a good point.” Lexa handed the six-pack of beer she had in her other hand to Raven.

“Oh, I love this one,” Raven said. “Want one?” she asked Lexa. “Or are you the wine and panini type?”

“Wine tonight, I think,” Lexa said as Raven put the beer in the fridge then retrieved a cylindrical green glass vase from a cabinet. She set it on the counter along with a pair of kitchen shears and Lexa set to work cutting a little off the stems of the flowers, which were a mixture of reds, oranges, and whites. Very autumn-ish.

“Smells super good in here,” Lexa said as she filled the vase.

Clarke flipped the sandwich. “Hope it tastes good, too.”

“I am not even worried.” Lexa put the flowers in the vase and took the glass of wine Raven handed her. “Where would you like these?” she asked Clarke, gesturing at the vase.

“Shelves by the table.”

“Got it,” Raven said, and she took the vase out of the kitchen. Soon after, Clarke heard Raven’s phone ring, the tone for Anya.

Lexa sipped her wine. “Thanks for the invite.”

“If you’re too tired after we eat, I won’t be offended if you decide to leave.”

“And miss popcorn? Blasphemy.”

Clarke smiled and took the first sandwich out of the pan and put it in the oven to stay warm then added a little more oil to the pan and waited for it to heat.

“I’m fascinated by this technological innovation,” Lexa said as she pointed at the foil-covered brick.

“I don’t see the point of spending a ton of money on a panini press when I can just improvise,” she said. “That whole zombie apocalypse streak I have going on,” she added with a smirk.

“And I appreciate a woman who’s prepared,” Lexa said, tone innocent as she took another sip of wine but the spark in her eyes wasn’t innocent at all.

Clarke swallowed hard and put the second sandwich in the pan and put the brick on it and Lexa leaned against the counter.

“So who taught you to cook?”

“I just kind of picked it up,” she said, relieved at the change in subject. “My mom taught me some basics, and my dad had a few things he liked to cook, so I expanded on it. Raven’s a really good cook, too, and I learned a few things from her. I like to experiment, too.”

“Well, I’m glad I get to enjoy the fruits of your labor.”

“I’m glad you’re willing.”
“Although it is interesting, these alliterative meals you’re sharing with me.”

Clarke flipped the sandwich over and looked at her.

“Pancakes, panini, popcorn.” She raised an eyebrow and Clarke couldn’t breathe for a second and then she was glancing at Lexa’s lips for the millionth time then back at her eyes and Jesus fucking Christ, she needed to get a grip.

Raven popped back into the kitchen and started chatting Lexa up, much to Clarke’s relief because she could focus on dinner, though just listening to Lexa talk was enough to get her worked up.

She finished heating the sandwiches and added fresh greens to them before plating. Raven put fries on all the plates and they ate at the table and talked for a while and the conversation flowed easily, even when Raven brought up Lincoln and Octavia’s bang shui, and the expression made Lexa laugh.

“Clarke was pretty irritated that morning,” Lexa said, and it seemed like ages ago, that morning she had first seen Lexa on the stairs.

“I’ll bet.” Raven leaned into Clarke. “She’s a hellbeast when she doesn’t get much sleep.”

“Sorry, not sorry.” Clarke shrugged and took a drink of wine. “But thank you for taking care of it.”

She caught Lexa’s gaze, glad she was sitting across from her because she was able to watch her throughout dinner.

“Totally,” Raven said. “She was so much nicer the next morning. Practically as pleasant as when she’s getting laid.”

Clarke almost spit out her wine.

“TMI?” Raven added, feigning innocence.

Clarke’s cheeks heated with embarrassment. “Jesus, Raven.”

“Oops,” Raven said but with a grin, and she got up and started clearing plates. Lexa helped, much to Clarke’s relief because she was mortified.

“Dinner was absolutely delicious,” Lexa said when she came back to the table with the bottle of wine Clarke had opened earlier. Clarke pushed her glass toward her and she poured it half-full and did the same with hers. “Seriously. Thank you,”

“You’re welcome.”

Lexa looked like she wanted to say something else when Raven shouted from the kitchen.

“Movie time,” she announced. “I’ve got the popcorn on.”

Clarke heard the hum of the microwave. “Couch prep time,” she said and went to get blankets while Raven got the movie ready to stream.

“Pick a spot,” she said to Lexa, who took one end of the couch.

“Yes,” she said when she saw the first movie choice. “I love Force Awakens.”

“Then you can stay,” Raven said as she exchanged a look with Clarke. “Getting the popcorn. Clarke, you’re middleman tonight,” which meant she was going to sit between Lexa and Raven. Oh,
darn. She settled herself on the cushions and covered her legs with a blanket.

“If you need a blanket, it’s here, behind your head,” she said to Lexa.

“Thanks.”

Raven returned with a big plastic bowl full of popcorn, and a smaller bowl, and napkins.
“Everybody have drinks? All right. Let’s do this.” She dimmed the lights, sat down, put popcorn in the small bowl, and handed the large one to Clarke. “Now you kids share,” she said and pressed play on the remote.

Clarke moved a little closer to Lexa—she needed to be able to reach the popcorn, after all—but pretended it was no big deal. But oh, hell, it was. They were almost as close as they’d been at the club and she remembered how it felt to have Lexa’s hands on her hips, and her mouth so close—the image always left her breathless.

So, too, did Lexa in general. And she was right here, inches away, and oh, shit, her fingers brushed Lexa’s in the popcorn bowl. It was almost painful, being this close to her and afraid to do anything about it and she wondered if there was a correlation between increased fear and knowing that there was more at stake.

Something about Lexa was different than anything she’d experienced with anyone in the past. She just…fit. A nearly seamless integration into her life in just days and Clarke couldn’t pinpoint when it had happened—when it had even started to happen—because everything had unfolded organically, and now here they were and the proximity was both welcome and terrifying.

They finished with the first movie and took a break. Lexa went to the bathroom and Raven and Clarke cleaned up the popcorn bowls and empty glasses.

Raven poked Clarke gently in the head. “Get outta there,” she said softly. “You’re thinking too much.”

“It’s hard.”

“Only if you let it be that way.” Raven poured three glasses of water from the pitcher in the fridge and she and Clarke took them to the living room just as Lexa was settling herself on the couch again.

“You good for another one?” Raven asked her.

“Yes. Oh, thanks,” she said when Clarke handed her a glass of water.

“Time for another fave.” Raven got comfortable and located D.E.B.S.

“Oh, my God. I love this movie,” Lexa said and Raven nodded, approving.

“You have passed another test, Padawan,” Raven said as the movie started. “Now shut up, both of you, as I recite all the dialogue.”

“Only if I don’t first,” Clarke said.

“I will out-recite everyone,” Lexa grabbed the last blanket and put it on her legs.


Clarke laughed. And kept laughing throughout the movie as both Lexa and Raven tried to out-do each other. At one point, Raven knocked into her as she was attempting to also act out the movie and
Clarke fell against Lexa, who put her arm around her to steady her. Raven, in turn, fell against Clarke and they were all laughing and oh, hell, Clarke held on to Lexa’s forearm, where it rested around her stomach and Lexa might have tightened her grip. And Clarke was pressed against her until Raven finally stopped laughing and sat up and reluctantly, Clarke sat up, too, but damn it had felt good, being that close to her.

Maybe too good. Clarke tried not to touch her again, because she liked it too much and she wasn’t sure she’d be able to stop.

“Okay, that was seriously fun,” Raven said as the credits rolled. She switched the channel to a late night comedy talk show. “I must admit, the Padawan has proven a worthy opponent in dialogue wars.”

“Clearly, I have much to learn from you, Jedi Master,” Lexa said.

“And with that, I have officially entered your fan club.” Raven stood. “But I must retire. Good to hang out with you. See you tomorrow. ’Night.” She gave Clarke a look and a smile and went to her bedroom.

“You must be really tired,” Clarke said. She and Lexa were still sitting on the couch.

“No more than usual.”

And the air seemed to go still between them and Clarke remembered the night at the club, and how the flirting was so easy until it escalated so quickly, surprising and overwhelming them both.

“But I do need to get some sleep,” Lexa said, and Clarke was both relieved and disappointed. She got up and folded the blanket she’d been using and set it carefully on the couch. Clarke got up, too, her blanket still wrapped around her.

“What time should we go tomorrow?” Lexa asked.

“Six-thirty.”

“Okay. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Even though Raven’s girlfriend insists on semi-formal?”

Lexa smiled. “I think it’s nice, wanting to have a gathering like that. It’s old-school. I kind of like traditional stuff like that.”

“And I kind of like that you have this old-fashioned streak in you.”

“Points for me.” She paused at the door, before she opened it. “Thank you for tonight. This was…it was great. And that panini was off the chain. Seriously. I could eat that every day of the week.”

“Is there perhaps a Legion of Panini, too?”

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “It’s a guild, Clarke. The Panini Guild. And it’s not as on the down-low as the Legion, but you do have to be referred before you can be considered for the rites of initiation. I think you’re actually a member but you haven’t revealed that to me, yet, because you’re still trying to figure out if I’m worthy.”

Clarke smiled because how could she not, at this geeky adorable-ness? “You think I don’t have you figured out?”
That caught Lexa by surprise and her eyes widened.

“That could already have your number, Lexa.”

“Well, yes, you do, because I let you have it.” And a slow smile tugged at the corners of her mouth and Clarke knew she wasn’t just talking about her phone number. Her throat went dry.

“And I do appreciate it. Thanks for coming over. And thanks for not avoiding me because I was a total asshole the first time we met.”

“I didn’t have to. You were doing a pretty good job avoiding me.”

“Oh, Jesus,” Clarke muttered, fully aware that she was blushing. “So you…what? Let me avoid you?”

She laughed softly. “I knew you were feeling weird about it and I wanted to give you some space. So I’d make sure you were already down the back stairs before I’d leave the apartment. But then that dick at the club—I wasn’t going to just let that happen. So, bummer for you, I guess. You had to interact with me again.”

“It turned out all right.” Clarke pulled the blanket around her tighter, as if it could protect her from all the feels racing up and down her legs and exploding in her chest.

“Yeah,” Lexa said, staring into her eyes. “It did.”

Every nerve in Clarke’s body had burst into flame at the look in Lexa’s eyes.

“See you tomorrow.” Lexa smiled and opened the door and Clarke followed her into the hall and watched her until she got to her door.

“Good night, Lexa,” Clarke said.

“You, too.” And she went into her apartment and Clarke went into hers and oh, she was in trouble. So. Much. Trouble.

Chapter End Notes

Lexa and Raven cracked me up with their dialogue wars challenge.

Also, I seem to have a thing for food.
Chapter Summary

Raven gives a pep talk to Clarke about the impending dinner party and then they run into Lexa with a bunch of friends at the park.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“When are you going to Anya’s?” Clarke asked as poured Raven a cup of coffee.

“Enough about that. What happened last night?”

“Nothing.”

Raven stared at her like her head was on fire. “What? I leave you two alone to give you sexy-time space and you are telling me that nothing happened? Jesus, Griff, I even set it up for you with that clever move on the couch.”

“What—” She groaned, remembering how Raven had bumped against her and she had ended up practically in Lexa’s lap.

“You’re welcome.”

Clarke half-laughed and poured herself a cup of coffee, too. “We talked a little and then she left. She was tired.”

“Ay, Dios mío.” Raven poured creamer into her cup with a dramatic flourish. “Why didn’t you at least kiss her? The two of you have so much damn chemistry flying between you that you could probably create a new element.” She stopped, thinking. “Clexonium.”

“What?”

“Clexa. Clarke and Lexa.”

“Oh, my God, you’re shipping us.”

“Duh.” She smirked.

“Whatever. Maybe I’m not ready. And maybe she’s not, either.”

“As disgustingly sweet as that sounds, you are both ultra-hot, ultra-sexy, and so into each other that even blind people on the other side of the country can see it.”

Clarke stared at her for a moment then laughed. “You did not just say that.”

“Clexonium in its pure form glows with the heat of ten thousand suns.”

She almost spit her coffee out.
“Seriously, Griff. Normally when you’re into somebody, you make it happen. What’s the deal, here?”

“I don’t know. Part of it is me. Residue from Finn. And I always worry that people in my life will get taken away.”

“Some should. Like Finn.”

Clarke shrugged. “What if I’m really into her and something happens?”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Like she’s not into it. Or she’s just into fuckbuddies. Or we get serious and… something worse happens.”

Raven had her “stop it” expression and Clarke waited for her to voice it, too. “Do you remember when I first started seeing Anya?”

The question surprised her because she had been waiting for a lecture. “Yes.”

“I didn’t want to.”

“Wait. What—”

She put up her hand. “I figured I was too broken.” She gestured at her leg. “I mean, this is a lifelong issue, here, this damn leg situation. There are things I can’t do, and things I shouldn’t do. So I have to assess, you know, what it means and how to navigate. And on top of all my other issues—hell, you know. I am totally not the easiest person to get to know.”

“Huh.” Clarke said, feigning innocence.

“Exactly. So Anya and I did this dance for a while. We both have similar senses of humor—we’re both snarky as hell—but there was always something underneath it. I mean, I was into her the first time I saw her but what the fuck, I can’t be dealing with this. So Anya would snark the hell out of me but she’d then leave me the latest research on joints and braces and I’d somehow always end up talking with higher-ups in the industries working on new tech for people in situations like me and I’d always be observing the latest experiments and getting previews of prototypes. Anya set that all up. I’m just this lab grunt and she’s leading this research team and the whole time we’re having snark wars, she’s helping me. And showing up at times when I really needed somebody to talk to or vent about something with.”

“I knew she was a softie.”

“She is. But she told me later that there was something about me she couldn’t shake, and she wanted to figure it out, even if it took the rest of her life.”

Clarke stared at her. “That is probably the most romantic thing I’ve ever heard about Anya.”

“Totally. And if you tell her I told you about that, she knows how to dispose of our bodies without leaving any kind of trace.”

“Noted.”

“Anyway, I so did not want to get involved. I’m busy, I’m broken, I have issues—I had all these excuses.”
Clarke leaned over and kissed Raven on the cheek. “You’re no more broken than the rest of us.”

“Yeah, okay. Anyway, one day I was in the lab—do you remember last semester when I had that fucking huge project I was trying to get done and my prof didn’t like the first two drafts and I had to pull, like, three all-nighters to get the specs right?”

She nodded. “And it sucked.”

“Truly. So I’m working my ass off and finally get it done and I send it in and I’m packing up to leave and Anya comes in. It was, like, midnight. She wanted to make sure I got home all right. She knew I was working late and she came from her house to make sure of that. And I’m tired and fucked up from exhaustion and we start snarking back and forth and I’m fake bitching about how now I owe her and she says that yes, I do owe her and I’m all, okay, fine, what?”

Clarke’s coffee cup stopped halfway to her mouth as she waited to hear the rest of the story.

“And she says to me, ‘dinner.’ Which kind of caught me off guard. And I must have looked totally crazed because she laughed and she said, ‘Jesus, Reyes. This is me asking you out’.”

“Why did you not ever tell me this story?”

“I told you some of it.”

“Not all of this.”

“Fine. I’ll tell you the rest.” Raven sipped her coffee and continued. “I thought she was kidding. So I was all, ‘oh, ha ha, Anya, whatever.’ And then she kissed me.”

“What the fuck? Why did you not tell me this? We are BFFs, Reyes.” Clarke put her cup down with a huff and Raven shrugged, a little sheepish.

“Okay, so, it wasn’t a really long kiss. That came later. But it got my attention and seriously, I could not speak. I had no idea what to say or do and she laughed because I was speechless and I never am.”

“True.”

“She said I didn’t have to respond right then because she knew I was tired, but she wanted me to know. And then she carried my stuff out of the lab and held my hand all the way to the car and I still had no idea what the fuck was happening so I’m talking about my project and how tired I am and we get to her car and she says that it’s the cutest thing she’s ever seen, is me freaking out about what happened. Then she told me not to worry about anything, that she’d call me later and to get some sleep.” Raven frowned, thinking. “I don’t remember much after that. She walked me to the door and gave me a hug but I was practically asleep on my feet.”

“You slept ’til, like two the next afternoon.” Clarke remembered when Raven had come home that night. She had been completely exhausted and Clarke helped get her into pajamas and that was pretty much it. They had been living in a duplex, then, a few miles from campus.

“Yeah. She had texted me to call her when I was ready. Point being, Griffin, I was pretty much the last person I thought would get involved with anyone but I took a chance and now here I am. And yeah, it could end tomorrow. But at least I won’t regret not trying.”

Clarke got up for more coffee. “I don’t know how serious I think I should be about any potential between me and Lexa.”
“I get it. I know losing your dad fucked you up in ways you’re still trying to understand. But you can’t assume the worst will happen. Hell, maybe that’s why you stayed with Finn. Because you were afraid to pick someone who you could really care about, who would treat you with the respect you should get. And I’m saying that as a fucked-up, broken-ass woman myself.”

“Your ass is not broken.”

“Not the point.”

“I know. And I also know that though I try not to filter shit through loss, I know I still do.” She rubbed her forehead. “Maybe I’m more broken than I think.”

“Well, stop thinking about it and see what your instincts tell you. I mean, you clearly like her.”

Clarke refilled Raven’s cup, too. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, my God. I’ve known you for years, Griffin. I can tell when you’re into someone.” She shrugged. “She’s not a bullshitter.”

“And you know this from the short time you spent with her last night?”

“Fuck, how long have you known me? I can spot bullshit a galaxy away, Padawan. She’s been through some shit, and she doesn’t take things for granted.” She took a drink then rolled her eyes. “The two of you are acting like Amy and Lucy from D.E.B.S. You’re Amy, by the way. Trying to be all uptight and on the straight-ish and narrow while Lexa as Lucy is all, ‘yep. I want some of that’ and is just waiting for you to catch up.”

Clarke almost choked on her coffee. “For fuck’s sake, Reyes. And on that note, do you want eggs?”

“Yes. But let’s go out. I’m in desperate need of a breakfast burrito that I don’t have to make.”

She laughed and went to get dressed then walked with Raven past the park where a group of people was playing football, to a Mexican restaurant in the neighborhood, glad to get out and think about something other than angsty issues over Lexa. Like how easy it was to be around her. And what it might mean to go with her feelings.

“I smell something burning,” Raven said on the walk back to the apartment. “You must be thinking about all the reasons not to hook up with Lexa. Or it’s Clexonium.”

Clarke gently shoulder-bumped her. “Actually, I was thinking about another exam I have coming up in a couple of weeks and that I’m having brunch with my mom tomorrow.”

“Liar,” Raven said with a grin. “But how is your mom?”

“The usual. Busy but trying to make time for me.”

“And she does.”

Clarke shrugged. Abby did try. And Clarke knew things were hard on her, too, and that after her dad died, the two of them had to figure out who they were without him. They were still working on that.

She and Raven arrived at the park and Clarke slowed down because it really was pretty, with all the fall colors on full display. Today was sunny and mostly clear, though the grass still looked damp from the night’s rain and there was a crisp bite in the air. Not really cold, but not really warm, either.

Raven stopped and pointed at the group of people near the center of the park still playing football.
“Hey, is that—”

“Lexa,” Clarke finished and they both watched because Lexa was engaged in a pretty intense game of recreational football. The play ended and Lexa pulled her team aside. A few seconds later they broke and lined up and Lexa called another play and a big dude Clarke didn’t recognize hiked the ball to her. She faded back, looking for a receiver, and a guy and a woman on the opposing team rushed her. She dodged at the last minute, ducking under their arms, and she stepped up and drilled a beautiful pass several dozen yards to Lincoln, who raced a few yards until he passed two street cones that marked the end zone, Octavia in pursuit and she jumped on him anyway and they laughed and went down onto the grass.

Cheers erupted and Lexa ran over to the end zone and jumped on top of Lincoln and Octavia and Clarke found it really cute.

“Don’t tell Anya this, but that play was hot,” Raven said. “How can you not want to hit that?” She gave Clarke a side-eye.

“I never said I didn’t want to. I said I wasn’t sure I should.”

“Oh, shit. You owned it. You totally just owned it. Come on.” And she started walking toward the game.

“Raven, what—”

“Shut up and just do. For once, Griff, stop thinking.”

“Jesus,” Clarke muttered but she followed Raven to where the teams were taking a break, laughing and drinking water and Gatorade amidst a jumble of gym bags and coats.

“Hey,” Octavia said with a smile when she saw them approaching. “What’s up?” She was streaked with dirt and mud and the knees of her jeans were wet.

“Nothing much, “ Clarke responded. “We were on our way back from breakfast. This is Raven, my roommate.”

“Hi. I’m Octavia.”

“Good to meet you.”

“Hey, Princess.”

Clarke jerked her head to the voice. “Bellamy?!” She gave him a quick hug. He was dirty and damp, too, and he had a knit cap on over his dark hair. “How—”

“Um, hello. O’s my sister.”

“I know. I mean, I knew that. But I wasn’t sure this O was your sister.” But looking at them together, how could she have missed the resemblance? Octavia’s eyes were green where Bellamy’s were brown, but they had similar facial structures, complexions, and hair color.

Raven stared back and forth between Bellamy and Octavia and then she laughed.

“What?” Bellamy asked.

“Nothing. At the moment.” Raven shot Clarke a look and Bellamy frowned, puzzled.
“You guys are weird.”

“You have no idea,” Clarke said.

“Wait a sec,” Bellamy said to Octavia. “Was it Clarke?”

Octavia shrugged, embarrassed.

“Clarke what?” Raven asked.

“Who told Lexa to move the bed?”

“Oh, shit.” Raven’s eyes widened. “Wait,” she said to Bellamy. “You know Lexa?”

“Well, yeah. Through Octavia. But back to the other issue. Did you seriously tell Lexa Woods she was having sex too loudly?” He was smiling and Clarke wanted to shrink and disappear in the grass.

“Yes,” she said with a sigh.

“But it wasn’t Lexa,” he jabbed Octavia in the ribs.

“Ow. Dude. Stop. And I didn’t name names,” she said to Clarke. “I just said Lincoln’s new neighbor had heard a few things.”

“And I didn’t make the connection,” Bellamy said, “that the new neighbors were you and Raven.”

“I seriously need to hear how the loud sex conversation went between you, Lincoln, and Lexa,” Raven said.

“Raven,” Clarke warned, mortified.

“No, I need to hear, too,” Bellamy said.

“It was funny, actually,” Octavia said. “I came over that night and Lincoln was moving his bed. I asked why and he said because the neighbor couldn’t sleep. Lexa came in and she was kind of laughing and she said that the phrase you had used was ‘certain activities’. Thanks for the discretion.” She flashed Clarke a sly smile.

“Yeah, well, it’s better than the alternative,” Clarke said.

“So what was Lexa’s reaction?” Raven pressed and Clarke shot her a Godzilla laser glare. Bellamy frowned again.

Octavia shrugged. “She wasn’t mad.” And then she smirked. “She did want to know more about this neighbor, though, who had the balls to just come out and tell her to quit having such loud sex and offer a solution to the situation.”

Clarke managed a laugh. “Well, I’m sorry for all the…whatever.”

Octavia started to respond but Lincoln ran over and pulled her into a hug. It sent them both tumbling to the grass and they both laughed.

“Hey.”

Clarke looked up to see Lexa jogging over, smiling. “Hi,” Clarke said, and every nerve she had flared to attention. “So that was a pretty amazing play.”
Lexa laughed and wiped absently at her face, which, like everybody else’s, had flecks of dirt and mud on it. The third and fourth fingers of her left hand were taped together. “Yeah, it went pretty well there at the end.”

“What was the score?” Raven asked.

“Seven all until that last play. We were in sudden death overtime.” She had a towel draped over her shoulder and her sweatshirt was hanging on her, dirty and wet but she was the most beautiful thing Clarke had ever seen.

“And where did you pick up these particular football skills?” Raven asked.

“High school.” Lexa flashed her a smile.

“Oh, please,” Lincoln said, untangling himself from Octavia. “Stop being so modest. We played football together. Lexa was the second-string quarterback, but she almost always came in at the second half, especially if we were down or needed a clinch play.”

“Well, damn,” Raven said.

Somebody Clarke didn’t recognize said something to Lexa and she turned to answer and Clarke stared at her profile. Raven waved her hand in front of her face.

“Earth to Clarke. I’m going home. I’ll see you there.” She smirked.

“We’ll walk with you,” Lincoln said. “Raven, you into pizza?”

“Hell, yes.”

“Cool. Clarke? You in? We usually do meat on one and veggies on the other.”

“Sure. I’ll have a piece.”

“Okay. Bring Lexa with you.” He smirked, too, and picked up his gym bag. Octavia grabbed his hand and they went to catch up with Raven.

“I have to go,” Bellamy said to her. “But speaking of pizza, we should get some people together and hang out.”

“Yeah. Soon. Maybe next Friday.”

“Excellent. I’ll organize.” He gave her a hug and went to get this stuff, leaving Clarke to watch the various players pick up their gear. Lexa was busy changing out of her cleats so Clarke went over.

“What happened to your fingers?” she asked.

“Oh, they’re messed up from my high school days. I just tape them so they don’t get more messed up. They’re fine.” She put her cleats and towel in her bag and looped it over her shoulder.

“So. Football,” Clarke said. “I’m finding out all kinds of things about you. Why football?”

“I liked the physicality of it and the strategy. It’s a battle and a dance, and you have to figure out the other team’s weaknesses and exploit them while they’re doing the same thing about your team. It was a good escape for me.”

“And impressive, since not many womenfolk actually play on high school teams.”
“I tried out, like everybody else.” Lexa shot her a glance. “And I was fast.”

“And probably strong,” Clarke said and that put all kinds of thoughts in her head that maybe she shouldn’t have invited.

“Maybe a little.” She grinned.

“A perfect outlet, then, for—dare I say—the Commander of the Legion of Pancakes.” Clarke gave her one of her full-wattage smiles and Lexa’s eyes widened and so did her grin. “Perhaps the Commander will share more of her exploits on the battlefield.”

“It might be of good use,” Lexa said, affecting a thoughtful air, “since we are both Legion.”

Clarke laughed and Lexa did, too, and her eyes sparkled with humor and that damn warmth that seemed to be an intrinsic part of her. “Unfortunately, no pancakes this afternoon. Lincoln is ordering pizza,” Clarke said as they started to walk and Lexa chuckled.

“Another food that starts with p. It might be a sign.”

“Oh?” Clarke looked at her, trying to avoid staring at her lips. “Of what?”

“That we clearly need to expand our diets.”

She snorted. “We’ve had bacon. And fries.” She almost took Lexa’s hand, like it was the most natural thing in the world to do. She put her hands in her jacket pockets instead, no matter what Raven said about doing and not thinking.

“So how is it that you ended up here this morning?”

“Late breakfast with Raven. Breakfast burritos. See? Another b food.”

Lexa grinned. “Thanks again for last night,” she said. “I had a really good time.”

“So did I.”

“Next movie night at my place.”

“Deal.” Clarke fisted her hands in her coat pockets because oh, God she really wanted to hold Lexa’s hand but she also wanted to taste her mouth, wanted to find out if all the hype her body was manufacturing was warranted. Another glance at Lexa’s profile dispelled any doubt that it would blow the hype right out of the atmosphere.

Okay, so she’d work up to…the next step. She was comfortable around Lexa, liked her, and had really amazing physical reactions to her. But what, exactly, did she want that next step to be?

“You okay in there?” Lexa asked with another of her smiles. “It’s Saturday. No deep thinking allowed.”

“Guild or Legion orders?”

“Mine.”

"Oh, really?"

“As Commander, of course. Of the Legion of Pancakes. Because I’m Commander, I can make decrees separate from the Legion.”
Clarke scoffed. “And how, exactly, does that work? Given that I am the Pancake Master?”

“Ah, see, we can share power,” Lexa said as they neared the front entrance of their apartment building. “Leadership works best when you have a clear chain of command, but also mutual respect between leaders and open channels of communication.”

“Organic checks and balances?” Clarke asked as she entered the code at the door.

“Exactly. And a good Commander is also a good listener.”

“I see you’ve thought about this.” Clarke held the door open then followed Lexa up the stairs, trying not to stare at her ass but of course she completely failed. Not that she was upset about that.

“Part of my organizational thing, you know. And in a zombie apocalypse, you’d totally be part of the leadership chain. I mean, who wouldn’t want a good Pancake Master on board?” She stopped at her door, which was partly open. “I’ll text you when the pizza comes.”

“Sounds good. See you in a few.” Clarke forced herself to go to her own apartment where Raven was on the phone with Anya.

“Hey, Raven said after she hung up. “So I’m going to have a little bit of pizza and then Anya’s coming to get me around three-thirty to help with the dinner party. I’ll stay at her place tonight.”

Clarke waited for Raven to tease her about having the apartment to herself and what she might do with that possibility but instead Raven went into her room.

“I’m going to wear one of my new dresses,” she called.

“The red one?” Clarke went into the kitchen and took a can of sparkling water out of the fridge. She sipped and looked at the flowers Lexa had brought over the night before. It made her goofy.

“Yeah,” Raven called.

“Good. It’s classic but sexy.”

“What about you?”

Clarke went to Raven’s bedroom and leaned on the doorjamb. “I’m still not sure.”

“And no doubt you’ve been thinking about it since you asked Lexa to go with you.”

“Fine. Yes. I have.”

“Wear the white one you have with black accents. It’s highly complementary of your boobage.”

Clarke laughed and nodded. “I was leaning toward that one. Shoes?”

“Those black heels I like. The ones that make everybody come to the yard for your milkshake.”

“The last time I wore those I got hit on by every douchebro in the bar.”

“Well, there won’t be any doucebro at this dinner party. And yeah, doucebro may have been hitting on you, but the ladies were also checking you out. You have universal appeal, Griffin. Own it. And wear those heels.”

“Then why don’t I feel like I have this appeal of which you speak?”
Raven looked up from her dresser. “Because Lexa has you off-balance. That’s not a bad thing. It’s just that you were totally not expecting someone like her to come along and now here she is and you’re not sure what to do. See, you feel like a fuck-up because of Finn and you don’t totally trust yourself. But the thing is, you don’t have to get engaged to her. Just date her. You guys have insanely good chemistry and it’ll be fun. You need fun in your life, Griffster.” She took a pair of lacy black panties out. “Oh, and wear sexy underwear, Padawan.” She raised her eyebrows and leered. “Get some Clarke mojo back. Sexy underwear can do that.”

“And this is why I stay with you.” Her phone dinged and Raven raised her eyebrows. “Pizza’s here,” she said.

“Don’t get too distracted. You need to prepare for tonight.”

“It’s only one o’clock.”

“You need time to be spectacular. Not that you aren’t already of the incredibly hot variety. But the goal is to make it painful for Lexa to be around you.”

“Not helping, Reyes.”

“You know exactly what I mean.” She grinned and laughed maniacally.

“Come on.”

“Oh, yeah. You have to, you know, get a piece.” And then she chortled again but Clarke ignored her and went to her bedroom to retrieve the pair of sweats and sweatshirt that Lexa had loaned her. She didn’t want to give them back and she knew it was stupid, wanting something of Lexa’s near. But it also would have looked kind of suspicious if she kept them, though Lexa hadn’t asked for them back. Would she be sad if Clarke brought them back? Or was she too polite to ask for them?

Fuck. Whatever. They were just sweats. Raven didn’t comment on what she was carrying, fortunately, and when they got to Lexa’s door, it was partially open.

“Hello,” Raven said as she knocked.

“Come in,” Lincoln called and they went in. He and Octavia were sitting on the couch watching a college football game. Lexa emerged from the kitchen carrying paper plates and napkins. She had showered and she was wearing sweats and a T-shirt and her hair fell around her shoulders and holy God how could anybody look this fucking good without even trying?

“Hey. Super casual.” Lexa gestured at the coffee table by the couch and went to put the plates and napkins down. Raven grabbed a slice of the veggie. “What do you want to drink?” Lexa asked. “Diet Coke, iced tea, water?”

“Diet Coke,” Raven said.

“Same.” Clarke followed Lexa into the kitchen. “I thought you might want your clothes back,” she said, holding the sweats out to her.

Lexa looked at them and her brow momentarily creased. “Oh, yeah.”

“They’re clean.”

“Cool.” Lexa took them and set them on the counter as she got sodas out of the fridge. “But seriously, you didn’t need to do that. I have a lot of sweatshirts and sweatpants.”
“I didn’t want you to think I was holding them hostage.”

Lexa handed her a can. “Maybe they like being in the company of the Master of Pancakes. Maybe they specifically requested it.”

Clarke smiled and opened the soda. “Tell you what. They can come visit any time they want.” And she flashed her a flirtatious smile over her shoulder before she returned to the living room and got a piece of the veggie pizza.

The next two hours were a blur of laughing, talking, and sharing glances with Lexa or she’d just watch her as she and Lincoln traded opinions over a particular football play. And there it was again, that sense that she had been here before though she never had, a sense of connection and belonging. Deeper than déjà vu, but she didn’t have words for it.

“See you at the hacienda, Griff,” Raven announced.

Octavia waved from the couch. “Thanks for hanging with us. See you next time.”

Raven nodded and waved back, flashed Clarke a sly smile, and left.

“I’d better get going, too,” Clarke said and went to the door, Lexa behind her.

“Six-thirty still good?” Lexa asked.

“Yes.” So good. Better than good.

“All right.” Lexa opened the door for her but her eyes lingered on Clarke’s then on her mouth and then she stepped out of the way. “See you soon.”

Clarke brushed past her, and every part of her wanted to pin her against the door and kiss her into next week but this kind of pull was a little scary in its intensity. Maybe a lot scary. She went into her apartment and leaned against the door.

“So that was fun,” Raven said as she exited her bedroom. “I have a very good feeling about Clexa.”

Clarke snorted. “You and your ships.”

“Whatever. The two of you could power entire cities with the way you look at each other. Clexonium at work.”

“I’m still not sure what I’m ready for.”

“Please. Just go with it. You’ll see. And Anya will be here in a few minutes. I’m going to dress at her place.”

“Uh-huh. Undress first is more like it.”

“Duh.” She grinned. “See you there. Oh, and Facetime me with your progress so I can make sure you’re appropriately spectacular.”

Clarke nodded and locked up after her, both excited and anxious about the directions this night could go. She went to shower, trying to stay focused on one thing at a time.

Chapter End Notes
It's true, what they say about Clexonium. It powers entire freaking cities.

Also, football shout-out! to Clexa AU "Catch Me I'm Falling" by EffortlesslyOpulent and sam_kom_trashkru
Do what scares you

Chapter Summary

Clarke and Lexa go to Anya's dinner party and oh, shit there's a moment...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clarke smoothed the front of her dress again. Instead of a wrap, she had gone with a short-cut black jacket accented with threads that seemed to make it sparkle. She’d also decided to wear her hair up, which Raven said gave her kind of a classic movie star look. All she needed, Raven insisted, was a pair of gloves and a long cigarette holder and she could be a blonde Audrey Hepburn.

Clarke had laughed, but secretly she appreciated Raven’s help. The knock at her door came at exactly six-thirty. Clarke picked up her long black dress-up coat and put her phone in one pocket and her driver’s license and a credit card in the other. She grabbed her keys and took a deep breath and opened the door.

And almost fell over.


“Hi back,” Clarke said, relieved she sounded perfectly normal. “Thank you. So do you.” She did. She looked incredible. But that word truly didn’t capture the vision standing in the hallway wearing a sleek black form-fitting sleeveless dress and black heels. She was holding a dark gray coat trimmed in what looked like black leather and a bottle of wine and her hair was combed to one side and Clarke wondered if it was possible for her head to explode.

She locked the door and walked with Lexa down the back stairs to the parking lot and Lexa’s Jeep. Lexa opened the passenger side and held Clarke’s coat for her as she got in. Once she was settled, Lexa handed her coat back and closed the door then went around to the driver’s side. She started the vehicle and backed out of the parking space.

“Do you need the address again?”

“Nope. Got it.” She flashed Clarke a quick smile that was somehow both shy and sultry.

“So here’s your briefing.”

Lexa laughed. “I was hoping I’d get one.”

“I’m not sending you in without background. Anya is the lead engineer on a biomechanics project at the university that’s being funded by a company that’s working on creating prosthetic devices and also better braces for people with damaged limbs. Raven’s been working on a few projects along those lines and Anya liked her work and brought her onto the team. And then she decided she liked Raven, too.”

“That’s a nice story. How long have they been together?”
“Officially about seven months. They flirted for a few months before that, though.”

Lexa laughed. “That’s cute.”

“It was funny, too, because they’re both pretty snarky, which might have gotten in the way, at first, of getting together earlier, but it all worked out.”

“Humor can be armor,” Lexa said. She checked the rearview mirror as she stopped at a red light.

“True. Attractions can also be scary.” And she wasn’t entirely sure why she said that, but whatever, it was true.

Lexa glanced at her then back at the road as the light turned green. “I agree. But what are your thoughts on that?”

“They make you feel vulnerable. Maybe a little out of control because suddenly there’s this new element in your life and you have no idea what it means or if it’s going to hurt you somehow.” Again, she sounded normal. Thank God. “And all you have to go on is what’s happened in the past, which might not have been good, so you’ve got this map but all it tells you is where you’ve been and not necessarily where you should go.”

“But a map also shows you a range of possibilities,” Lexa said as she waited to turn left. “And yes, we can use past experiences as guides. Or we can use them as ways to avoid taking chances.” She made the turn and continued down a residential street, lined with historic houses. Anya lived in a nice part of town. “I’ve done the latter. And maybe it helped me figure a few things out, but it can also be pretty lonely.”

Clarke watched her profile, as if she was trying to commit it to memory. “Do you ever—” she stopped.

“What?” Lexa glanced at her again.

“Do you ever worry that people you care about will—I don’t know. Leave? Or that you’ll lose them?”

“Yes. Even though I knew not having my parents in my life was, in the long run, the best thing for me, it left scars, and maybe made me a little hard to approach in some ways. My past relationships haven’t always been the best situations. I think I probably was being self-destructive in some ways, and picking women who weren’t entirely healthy.”

“So what did you do?”

Lexa parked, about four houses down from Anya’s. “I went on a dating and relationship hiatus for a while.” She smiled and got out of the Jeep and put her coat on and grabbed the wine before she went around to the passenger side and took Clarke’s coat for her and offered her free hand.

Clarke took it and it was arousing and comforting, the feel of Lexa’s hand in hers and it was a palpable loss, when Lexa let go.

“So how long was this hiatus?” Clarke asked.

“Almost two years.”

“When did it end?”
Lexa caught her gaze and smiled then shut the Jeep’s door. “Last week.” And then she helped Clarke into her coat, sparing her having to talk about the implications of the statement.

“I know what it is to lose people,” Lexa said, “And I know how it messes up your maps.” She pressed her key fob and the Jeep locked. “But sometimes doing exactly what you’re afraid of is the best thing you can do.” She smiled again and this one was full of warmth and understanding.

“Ready?”

Clarke nodded and they started walking. “Thanks for driving,” Clarke said, thoughts still whirling over her admission about the end of her dating hiatus.

“Sure.”

They ascended the two steps to Anya’s covered wrap-around porch. Clarke rang the bell and shot Lexa a smile. “And you really do look incredible,” she said, timing it just right because Monty opened the door before Lexa could respond, and Clarke liked leaving that for her to think about.

“Griffin,” Monty almost shouted. He looked at Lexa.

“Lexa,” she said.

“Welcome. I’m Monty.” He motioned them in and Clarke gave him a hug.

“Don’t you look dapper,” she said, tweaking his black bowtie. “A suit.”

“It happens.”

“I’m sure Harper appreciates it,” Clarke said, letting him take her coat. Lexa handed her coat over, too, and Clarke willed herself not to stare at her shoulders. At least not obviously.

“Thanks,” Lexa said to Monty.

“Come on.” Clarke motioned for her to follow and she led her through the house, a tasteful renovated Craftsman-style bungalow from the 1920s. Some people stood in groups talking while others browsed the hors d’oeuvres on the long table to the right in the dining area. Other tables held a roast, vegetable skewers, and side dishes. A fire popped and crackled in the fireplace in the living room to the left and Clarke smelled fresh bread. She greeted people as they worked their way to the kitchen and introduced Lexa along the way.

Voices and laughter emanated from the kitchen as Clarke entered, Lexa right behind her.

“Holy Jesus,” Raven said. “You look fabulous. Even more fabulous than Facetime demonstrated.” She glanced past Clarke at Lexa and stared. “And so do you. That dress is perfect on you.”

“Thank you,” Lexa said. “You look fabulous, too.”

And Raven did. But she always did, Clarke thought. Red was a good color on her. It accentuated her dark hair and eyes. She’d also put her hair up, and she was wearing one of the lightweight braces she was testing for the lab. Its lines were barely visible under the dress.

“This must be Lexa,” Anya said as she approached. She was dressed in a gray slim-line suit and though she had a tie on, she’d opened her shirt at the collar. Her hair was pulled back and the overall effect was both bookish but casual.

“I am. You must be Anya.” Lexa handed her the bottle of wine.
“Oh, nice,” Anya said as she scanned the label. “And speaking of wine, there are a few bottles open on the counter. Beer in the coolers out back along with non-alcoholic drinks.”

“Great,” Clarke said. “Thanks.”

“I’ll get it,” Lexa said to Clarke. “What would you like?”

“White wine.”

“Anything in particular?”

“You pick,” Clarke said and Lexa smiled and moved away and the way her dress was cut in the back—holy shit how had she not noticed that until right now? Her upper back was exposed, and included a view of at least half of a delicate vertical tattoo along her spine, the top of which included a large circle slightly off-center, bisected vertically on the right by two short lines that looked like they might be spears. It was both futuristic but ancient and then Clarke lost sight of it as Lexa’s hair moved to cover it and a guy blocked her view.

“I have to say, Griffin, you clean up well,” Anya said. “And you have excellent taste in women.”

“We aren’t—”

“Yet,” Raven said sweetly. “And you look fine. So fine.”

“Well, so do both of you.”

Lexa reappeared with a glass of white wine that she handed to Clarke. She held a can of sparkling water.

“Thanks,” Clarke said, and she sipped. “Oh, good choice.”

Lexa smiled. “I thought it might be.”

Raven looked from her to Clarke and smirked. “So why don’t you go mingle? It is a party, after all.”

And that’s what she did, Lexa with her at first but then she was drawn into other conversations and Clarke was able to position herself to watch her. She finished her wine and went to get another glass and something to eat and when she got back from the kitchen, Lexa was talking to Harper, Jasper, and Monty and a few other people who were probably friends of Anya’s. She put her wine glass down on one of the folding tables set up with food and munched on vegetables and cheese.

Raven joined her with her own glass of wine. “Seriously, Clarke, you look fucking unbelievable. Those heels. Mmm.”

“And you’re good for the ego.”

“Whatever. Anya’s dude contingent has been checking you out since you got here. Then again, so has the lady contingent. And Lexa. Jesus. That dress on her.”

“I know, right?” Clarke glanced around looking for her and spotted her near the fireplace, still talking to Jasper and Harper.

“I mean, look at her. She’s the real deal, Griff. Fucking hot, smart, fun to be around, and she’s into you.”

“Maybe.”
“Stop. Just stop. She’s been watching you all night.”

Clarke raised her eyebrows. “Okay, that’s only a little creepy.”

“Not like that. She just checks to see where you are and then she kind of checks out who’s around you. Not in a weird jealous way. It’s like she’s just making sure you’re okay, like—” Raven stopped then grinned. “Like what couples do.”

Clarke shook her head and finished the food on her plate, but she liked thinking that, maybe a little. Though she sure as hell wouldn’t let Raven know.

Anya had somehow ended up in the group Lexa was talking to. Lexa’s back was to Clarke, and her hair again covered her tattoo, but Clarke had a great view of her shoulders. She took a swallow of wine and continued to admire Lexa’s shoulders, thinking about what she had said on the ride over.

“I’m going to check on Anya,” Raven said and Clarke nodded and went into the kitchen then the back porch, where she got another sparkling water out of one of the coolers on the back deck and wiped it off on a dish towel in the kitchen. She returned to the living room, where Lexa had been drawn into another group. She was talking to one guy, but one of the others was leaning in a little too close. Clarke deftly inserted herself between him and Lexa.

“Thought you might be thirsty,” she said as she handed her the can.

“Very,” Lexa said with one of her slowburn smiles and Clarke was only too aware of the underlying message.

“Did you get something to eat?”

“Was just on my way there.”

“If you’ll excuse us,” Clarke said to the three guys and she went with Lexa to the food.

“Excellent timing,” Lexa said as she made up a plate for herself.

“It seemed an intervention was in order.”

“And I do appreciate it.”

“Clarke,” Harper said, “come over here and tell Monty that he’s totally wrong about the function of the pituitary gland.”

Clarke flashed an apologetic look at Lexa. “You all right?”

“Yes. Go clear up this anatomical mystery.”

Clarke held her gaze for a moment and joined Harper’s group. A few minutes later, after ensuring that Monty did, in fact, understand what the pituitary gland was and where it was, she worked her way around to other groups, but by ten, people were already leaving while others had broken off into smaller groups. Clarke’s feet were tired. As good as these heels might look, they were a bitch when it came to walking and standing.

Lexa had finally ended up in her group and it was nice, having her near. Okay, it was so much better than nice. And Lexa had no problem working a room, at settling into the vibe and joining any conversation. And shit, her dress was slit up the left side to mid-thigh and the way she looked in those heels—yes, they were modern torture devices, heels, but fuck. Clarke could appreciate the
aesthetic of them, and Lexa rocked the hell out of the pair she had on.

“Hey, Lexa,” Anya said. “Raven tells me you know a thing or two about football.”

“I might.”

“Then explain to me the circumstances that a wishbone formation might or might not work.”

Lexa laughed. “Okay. Get me some paper or a tablet or something and I’ll draw it for you.”

“Yes,” Anya said. “Science-y visuals. Come on.” She motioned for her to follow and Clarke was treated to a visual of the slit in Lexa’s dress opening a bit as she walked. She sipped her wine, wondering if it would be possible for her to just sleep with her and get it out of her system, if it would be possible to have something casual with her. But it didn’t feel right, that thought.

“So isn’t that the woman from the club last week?” Harper asked.

“Yes.”

“Who is also your neighbor?”

Clarke shrugged. “Coincidentally, yes.”

“Nice.” She nodded approvingly.

“We’re not together,” Clarke said, maybe too hastily. “I mean, we are at this party together. I asked her to come with me. But we’re not together together.”

“Not yet,” Harper said as she gently shoulder-bumped Clarke. “She seems really cool. Smart, funny, and just really well put together. Not just externally.”

Clarke nodded and heat shot up her back. “She is that.”

“And so are you. Seems like a pretty good situation. Unless she’s seeing someone seriously and really is just doing the friend thing with you.”

Clarke thought about what Lexa had said when they’d arrived earlier that evening. “As far as I know, she’s single.”

“Then it’s perfect. Go for it, Griff. You deserve it.”

Fortunately she didn’t have to respond because Monty came over and then there was another bunch of people to talk to and Clarke carefully bowed out, needing a break. Lexa was still drawing diagrams for Anya (which was actually kind of cute), so she got her coat out of the guest room where Monty had put them and went out back to the deck with her wine.

The portable firepit had been set up and a couple of people were standing nearby talking. Clarke took a position near the railing that looked over Anya’s back yard, which she had landscaped into a zen garden of sorts. It was a great space for hanging out and barbecues. But tonight, it was a great space to enjoy the tang of autumn in the night air, and the sky, littered with stars and brushed by the milky way. She sipped, thinking again about what Lexa had said earlier and also about her dad. The fire popped behind her and she closed her eyes and inhaled, smelling woodsmoke, night air, and the faint lingering of cigarette smoke. And then a sandalwood and pine note that caused her eyes to snap open.

“Okay if I join you?” Lexa asked behind her and Clarke turned. She had put her coat on and was
carrying a cup.

Clarke smelled coffee. “Definitely.”

They stood together in companionable silence, leaning on the railing of the deck and staring at the sky.

“My dad and I would sometimes camp out in our back yard,” Clarke said after a while. “He loved astronomy and he had a pretty decent telescope. He was a big fan of the Perseids meteor shower and there was this open space twenty miles away and we’d go and lie on the hood of the car on a blanket and watch them. And he always brought snacks and sometimes it would be really hot, because the Perseids show up in August, but I didn’t care. It was like nature’s fireworks.”

“That’s a great memory.”

“Do you ever watch the Perseids?” Clarke watched her profile. Again.

“Yes. Lincoln and I were in Virginia for them this year and lucky for us, it wasn’t cloudy or rainy. Gustus and Indra--my aunt and uncle--live out of town, and they have this great flat-roofed out bulding. That’s where we watched. It was beautiful.”

“Well, that’s a great memory, too.” Clarke sipped her wine, and she felt the heat from the firepit on her legs and feet, while the heat that seemed particular to Lexa’s presence filled her chest and stomach.

They were silent again, watching the sky.

Lexa finally spoke. “My dad was an officer in the Air Force. But I’m not really a military brat because my mom and I didn’t move to various bases with him. He’d be stationed somewhere for six months at a time but he didn’t talk much about it. I think he was probably doing intelligence work or something like that. He worked out of DC quite a bit. Which is why I grew up in Virginia.”

Clarke watched her, enjoying how the firelight danced across her skin.

“My mom is a financial advisor. She was a different person at work than she was at home, in that her clients and colleagues really liked her. But at home, it was different. Not approachable at all, and I couldn’t do anything right. And it sure didn’t help when my parents found out about the gay thing.” She was holding the coffee cup between her hands, staring out over the back yard.

“How did they find out?”

“I think my mom already suspected, but this really shitty girl at school told her mom and her mom and my mom were church friends. Things had been stressful between my mom and me before that. They were so much worse after. And my dad is conservative, too, so it was a clusterfuck.”

Clarke moved a little closer. “When was that?”

“Start of my sophomore year in high school. On the plus side, it made me see that I could stop trying to please my parents, since they would never accept me or anything I did. So I quit trying and just focused on what was important to me and on the people who really did care about me. You can imagine how my parents reacted when they found out I was playing football.” She half-smiled, but it seemed sad.

“That had to be hard.”
“Yeah. But everybody has crap to deal with and high school isn’t necessarily friendly to anybody.”

“Especially not if you’re different,” Clarke said softly. She took another drink of wine. “I was the weird smart geek but got along okay with most people, though I didn’t come out as bi until college. I regret not telling my dad before he died, but maybe it was for the best because I know he would have worried about how people treated me. On the other hand, I hate that he didn’t know.”

“Maybe he did.”

Clarke shifted her gaze to Lexa’s.

“Maybe he did but figured if you wanted to talk about it, you would.”

“Maybe.” She looked away, a huge lump in her throat.

“How about your mom?”

“I told her in college, but she suspected. She worries about me, but is really supportive. Though it’s been hard since my dad died, trying to figure out who we are together without him. We’re doing okay, I guess. But some days are still harder than others.”

Lexa moved closer until their arms were touching and though it sent sparks to Clarke’s fingers, it was also really comforting. Clarke automatically leaned into her, and it felt so good and so safe that she closed her eyes for a second.

“I legally cut ties with my parents when I was able to,” Lexa said.

“Damn.” Clarke couldn’t imagine that, and even with the fights she and Abby sometimes had, she always knew that her mom loved her and would do anything to protect her.

“Right? That was hard, too, but I didn’t want them to have any power over me, over anything that had to do with me. I pretty much lost the inheritance, but I’m pretty sure I wasn’t going to get one, anyway.”

“Do you remember any good times with your parents?”

She was quiet for a few moments. “Not many. Those memories I try to hold onto so I don’t get bitter, but there aren’t many that are good.”

Clarke pressed against her a little harder, a silent, tentative offer of comfort. “What’s a good memory?”

She smiled. “Beaches. Before I was in junior high, we’d go to the beach a lot. Both my parents love the beach. After that—things kind of went to shit and I basically just survived. Even though Lincoln was there for me, junior high and high school were pretty hard. When I finally decided to go live with Lincoln’s family, things got even worse with my parents. I ended up having to just leave a bunch of my stuff behind. And it’s not like Gustus and Indra have tons of money, but somehow, we all made it work. So out of a really bad situation came a good one.”

The two other people who had been on the back deck went back into the house, but Clarke heard low voices in the back yard and she could just see the glow of a cigarette—or, most likely, weed—near one of the benches a dozen yards away.

“That’s a good thought,” Clarke said softly. “Because sometimes we get focused on just surviving and forget to see past that.” She half-laughed. “I should take my own advice.”
“I should take mine, too.”

Clarke turned toward her. “Oh? What would that be?”

“To do what scares me,” she said, and God, she was beautiful. The firelight caressed her face like an old friend and no one should even have eyes that expressive.

“So what scares you?” Clarke asked, heart pounding.

Lexa regarded her for a few moments, the air practically sizzling between them. “You.” And then she cupped the back of Clarke’s neck and pulled her close, and holy shit her lips were so soft against Clarke’s and her kiss was so gentle and oh, fuck every bone in Clarke’s body seemed to turn to liquid and fireworks went off in her head and millions of tiny lightning bolts shot down her thighs.

How anything could feel as good as this kiss Clarke didn’t know and she returned it, stunned as she was, keeping it just as gentle but cautious, and Lexa’s nose brushed hers as she changed the angle and oh, it felt so good—

Too good.

Too real.

Too intense.

Oh, God, too intense.

Everything was on fire and her world was shifting on its axis and waves of happiness and trepidation roared through her veins—

Clarke pulled away, thoughts and emotions racing, heart pounding. “I’m sorry,” she said.

Lexa immediately let go and stepped back, giving her space.

“I don’t—I’m not sure what’s going on. I’m—please don’t think—”

“Clarke,” she said, voice soft and calm. “It’s okay.”

It was. She heard it in Lexa’s tone. She was still safe, no matter what happened. “I need to explain, but—”

“It’s all right. You don’t need to say anything right now.”

“I—can we go?” And oh, God what the fuck why was she freaking out when everything about Lexa made her feel so damn good?

“Yes. Are you okay riding with me? I can get you an Uber if you’re not. If you need to be alone. Or I can find someone else to take you home.”

Clarke’s throat tightened and she fought tears because how the hell could someone like Lexa be real? “No, I’m okay with you.” She was more than okay with Lexa and maybe that was the problem, because she hadn’t felt like she could be with anyone and now she didn’t know what to do with it.

Lexa nodded and picked up her coffee cup and Clarke’s wine glass from the railing’s ledge. “I’ll meet you out front,” she said, tentative.

“No, I’ll come with you.”
“Are you sure?” Her expression was filled with concern and it made Clarke melt but also feel really guilty.

“Yes.” And that was the thing, wasn’t it? She knew she was safe with Lexa, that she would always be safe with her. Knew it with a certainty that usually only came after months or years of knowing someone. And that was part of what scared her, was how she knew that. The other part was the intensity of her feelings. Who had feelings like this after barely two weeks? What the hell?

She followed Lexa into the house, already feeling a little better, because Lexa radiated calm and warmth and Clarke kicked herself for freaking out, but she put on her self-assured mask and said her goodbyes with smiles and laughs. She gave Raven a quick hug and teased her about staying over at Anya’s and though Raven laughed along with her, the expression in her eyes held questions.

Clarke didn’t want to answer them. She looked for Lexa and found her standing near the front door, talking with Anya, but Lexa glanced at her, like she knew Clarke was looking for her, and she flashed her a quick smile.

It relaxed her even more as Clarke walked over to join them. “Thanks. Do you need people to help clean up tomorrow?”

Anya smiled. “Well, look at you, Griffin. Willing to work on the Lord’s Day. And no, I’ve got it handled. But I do appreciate the offer. And you—” she said to Lexa, “I expect to see more of you.” She gave Clarke a look then opened the door for them. “Be safe.”

“Thanks,” Clarke said again.

“Yes, thanks.” Lexa waited for Clarke to join her on the porch and Anya shut the door. “You’re still sure about riding with me?”

“I am absolutely sure.” And she started walking, wanting to take Lexa’s hand but resisting because she might have ruined any chance she could have had in that regard and that thought was the scariest one of all.

They didn’t speak on the way to the Jeep, but it wasn’t tense. It was Lexa giving Clarke space, like she had earlier and Clarke didn’t know how to navigate space so willingly granted. Again, Lexa opened the door for her and made sure she was settled before she closed it and went to the driver’s side.

She didn’t say anything as she buckled up and started the engine, but she smiled reassuringly at Clarke as she pulled away from the curb.

They were almost back at the apartment complex when Clarke spoke. “I’m sorry.”

“Stop,” Lexa said softly. “There’s nothing to apologize for.”

“I owe you an explanation.”

L Lexa parked before she answered. She didn’t turn the engine off when she stopped and turned to look at Clarke. “No, you don’t. But if you want to tell me something you think is important, that’s different.”

Clarke nodded. “Okay. And I do.”

L Lexa waited, body language alert but not tense or anxious.
“My last relationship ended badly,” Clarke said. “I broke it off spring last year. We’d been together about eight months but he was controlling and manipulative and I finally realized it and got out.” She paused. “He took it badly, and stalked me for a few weeks. But I had told everyone, and gotten local police and campus police involved. There’s an order of protection. But honestly, the friend and acquaintance brigade worked much better than law enforcement at keeping him away from me.”

Lexa stayed silent, but Clarke thought she saw her jaw clench.

“Turns out I wasn’t the only woman he was bothering. A few months after I broke it off with him, he was at a local bar and harassed the woman he had dated before me. Her MMA brother wasn’t happy about that and my ex ended up with a broken jaw, broken ribs, a dislocated knee, and a broken wrist. In short, he got fucked up.” And when Clarke had heard what had happened, she wanted to send a thank you card to the MMA guy. “And that sounds really fucking ridiculous, doesn’t it?”

“What?”

“That my ex just happened to mess with a woman whose brother is MMA. I mean, that is a bad movie plot.” She sighed.

“I’ve seen worse movies.”

Clarke managed a laugh.

“Where is your ex now?” Lexa asked.

“California, where he’s originally from. He transferred to a local university out there. I did hear, however, that the MMA guy has friends in that area and a couple of them tracked him down and had a talk with him. He hasn’t bothered me since. And probably no one else here, either.” She stared at her hands, remembering the sense of relief she had felt when she heard what happened.

“When did he leave town?”

“Last August. Maybe September. His knee had to heal, and it’s at least six weeks for that. Plus broken ribs take a while. He probably wouldn’t have been able to travel until his knee worked.”

“What’s his name?” Lexa’s voice was calm, but there was an undercurrent of steel.

“Finn Collins. Two ‘n’s’ on the Finn. He’s at Cal State Fullerton.”

Lexa was quiet for a moment. “Thanks for telling me.”

Clarke nodded, and she felt somehow lighter, and her whole body relaxed even more. “Thanks for listening.” And she wanted to say more, wanted to tell her that her relationship with Finn had left her wary, left her scared in some ways and that she knew losing her dad was part of her fear of loss, too, but she just couldn’t find the words.

“Are you ready to go upstairs?”

“Yes.”

Lexa shut off the engine and Clarke got out and waited for her and they walked together to the back entrance where Lexa entered the building code. They went upstairs to Clarke’s apartment and Lexa waited for her to get the door open before she spoke.

“Are you all right by yourself tonight?”
Clarke nodded and regarded her for a few moments. “Thank you. I had a really good time. Better than I’ve had in a long time. The last thing I wanted to do is freak out like I did.”

“You have your reasons.” She smiled, though it seemed wan. “I’ll see you later.” And then she walked to her own door and opened it. “Sleep well,” she said, and then she was gone and Clarke’s chest constricted and why the hell couldn’t she get it together? She went inside and locked up and put pajamas on and ended up on the couch staring blankly at late-night TV.

A text message sounded on her phone and she stared at it, sitting there on the coffee table, like it might bite. She sighed and picked it up and almost cried when she saw it was from Lexa.

*Call if you need anything tonight.*

She leaned back against the cushions, so relieved that she almost cried over that, too. Of course, Lexa was probably just being her polite self. Had something shifted irrevocably between them? Had she sabotaged herself again?

*I need you and I don’t know how to ask*, she typed out then erased. “Fuck,” she said with a groan. Why was she so stupid?

She sighed and typed out *Thank you* instead and sent it. Then she put her phone on the coffee table, wrapped herself up in a blanket, and stretched out on the couch. After she turned the TV off, she stared into the dark until she finally fell into a restless doze, stomach twisted with anxiety and regret, lips still seeming to tingle from Lexa’s kisses.

Chapter End Notes

Dammit, Clarke! She wasn't quite ready for the Clexonium! But we did get to see soft Lexa and a bit of Clarke's baggage. Which Clarke better throw off the damn train.

Also, shout-out to the #WayHaught vibe some of you might have picked up on. :)
Clarke is a ball of angst when she goes to meet Abby for brunch. While waiting, she talks to Raven on the phone. Then Abby and Clarke have a bonding moment and Clarke hopes she didn't fuck everything up with Lexa.

The restaurant Clarke and Abby generally met when they had brunch was in Polis, but a few miles from campus, so Clarke drove. She was stiff because she’d stayed on the couch all night and today she felt like she had a hangover though she’d only had a couple of glasses of wine the night before.

Emotional hangovers were way worse than what alcohol caused.

She arrived early and sat in her truck and debated texting Lexa. But maybe it was too soon after last night. Or maybe it was too late for anything. She groaned and rested her head against the steering wheel. Her phone announced a text and she checked the screen, dreading and hoping it was Lexa and then she was disappointed that it was Raven.

So have u ascended 2 rank of horndog? [devil horn emoji]

Clarke closed her eyes with frustration. She didn’t want to talk about this now, but she knew Raven would figure out that something wasn’t right. She texted back.

no

Pause, and Clarke watched the three blinking dots that indicated Raven was working up a reply.

????????

Clarke debated what to say. Finally she opted for blunt. I might have fucked up

Her phone rang seconds later and she winced because it was Raven and Clarke wasn’t sure she was ready to talk about it though she had pretty much invited it with her most recent reply. She answered.

“Clarke, what the fuck?”

“I don’t know."

“Hijo de puta.* You don’t—are you okay? Where are you?”

She exhaled in relief. “Sort of okay and I’m waiting on my mom. We’re having brunch at Niylah’s.”

“So what happened?”

“I freaked out.”

Pause. “Define ‘freaked out’.”
She ran her free hand through her hair. “She kissed me.”

“And?”

“And it was un-fucking-believable. It was everything plus so much more.”

“Uh-huh. Still waiting on the definition of freaked out.”

Clarke clenched then unclenched her teeth. “The kiss. That’s why I freaked out.”

“Um. Give me something to go on here, Griffin. She blows your mind with a kiss and that’s…bad?”

“It shouldn’t be, but oh, my God it was beyond intense. Raven, I have never felt anything like that and I—fuck, I don’t know. I got scared.”

“Scared? Of what?”

Clarke bit her lip. “Of everything. My feelings. How amazing it felt. How amazing I think she is. And how the hell can I even feel like this when I barely know her? And then I got scared because what if something this intense is bad? And what if I’ve totally misread her and this is another Finn?”

"So what happened?"

"I stopped kissing her and told her that I wasn't sure what I was doing."

“Okay, whoa. Rein that shit in and listen to me.”

“My mom will be here soon—”

“Clarke. Listen.”

She shut up, because Raven had her *tone* on, the one that meant she was about to nail down some law.

“I need you to really hear this. I need you to put it on repeat in your brain so that it pounds against the inside of your skull on non-stop rotation. Lexa is not Finn. Got that one?”

“Yes,” Clarke said, resigned.

“Say it.”

“Raven—”

“Clarke.” The *tone* was worse than Godzilla laser eyes.

“Lexa is not Finn,” she said.

“Good. Here’s another one. ‘Just because I lost my dad doesn’t mean I’ll lose Lexa’.”

“Seriously?”

“Do I sound like I’m playing right now?”

“No.” She tried to swallow past the lump in her throat.

“Say it.”
She gritted her teeth. Why was this so hard? “Just because I lost my dad doesn’t mean I’ll lose Lexa.” And a single tear tracked down her cheek. She sniffled and brushed it away. And the irony here was that in trying to keep from losing someone like Lexa she tried to drive her away and lose her anyway.

“I don’t even—she’s not even in my life, like in a position to be lost,” Clarke said.

“It’s a vaccination for when she is,” Raven retorted. “So say both of those again.”

“Goddammit, Raven.”

“Do it. This is tough love, Griff. Do it.”

Clarke made a frustrated noise. “I kind of hate you right now.”

“I don’t care. This is important, and you need to do this.”

“Fuck.” She cleared her throat. “Lexa is not Finn and just because I lost my dad doesn’t mean I’ll lose Lexa.” She wiped her eyes and sat, staring out the windshield.

“You still with me?” Raven said after a few seconds, but the tone was gone.

“Yes.”

“Okay. So how did Lexa handle your freak-out?”

Clarke bit her lip again to keep from crying anymore. “Oh, God. She was so understanding and supportive. And I told her about Finn.”

“Good for you. Does she know about your dad?”

“Yeah. I told her that early on.” Clarke picked at the grip on her steering wheel.

“Wow. That’s different for you.”

“That’s what I mean. I don’t understand why I feel what I do around her. It’s too good to be true.”

Raven chuckled.

“What is so funny right now?”

“You. God, Griffin. Lexa has melted your frozen little heart and you’re starting to live again and it hurts, because it’s like when you’re outside in dangerous cold and you come inside and start to warm up and everything hurts while that happens, but it also feels good because yay, warm.”

“I don’t even know what to say to that.”

“You say thank you, because I’m right. And for fuck’s sake, stop being the plot of D.E.B.S. As cute as I might find it later. Go talk to her. Stop freaking out. She’s into you, you’re into her, and there are no obstacles here besides the ones you’re creating in your own fucking head. Ay, Clarkita. Sacalas tu cabeza del tu culo.”

Clarke knew she was right. Felt it in her heart. But damn, getting her brain to go along with it was another matter. A familiar SUV pulled into the parking lot. “My mom just got here. I’ll see you later.”
“Say hi for me. And we’ll talk later. Bye.”

Clarke ended the call and checked her eyes in the rearview mirror to make sure it didn’t look like she’d been crying. She wiped her face again and grabbed her wallet and got out of her truck as Abby got out of her SUV.

“Hi,” Clarke said as she walked toward her, and Abby was wearing jeans and a gray sweater under a thigh-length leather jacket. Her dark hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she was wearing sunglasses that made her look seriously badass.

“Hi, honey. Good to see you.” She wrapped Clarke in a hug, which almost made her cry again. “So did you get the results of your anatomy exam back?”

“A.”

“Knew it.” Abby stepped back. “You look good.” Then her brow furrowed. “What’s going on?”

Dammit with the mom telepathy.

“Just stressed. Let’s eat.” She started walking toward the entrance to Niylah’s Café. They had gotten there early enough to beat the Sunday brunch rush, and they scored a table. Clarke left her phone in the pocket of her jean jacket. She didn’t want to agonize over whether Lexa would contact her or not. The server—a bouncy undergrad with red cateye glasses—came over with menus.

“Hey, Katie,” Clarke said.

“Hi, guys,” she said. “Good to see you. I’ll let Niylah know you’re here.”

“She’s about to be really busy,” Clarke said, “so don’t worry about it.”

“The usual on drinks?”

“Yes,” both Clarke and Abby said at the same time as Abby took her reading glasses out of their case.

“Be right back.”

Clarke glanced over the menu and thought about pancakes, which only made her think about Lexa which then made her think about her freak-out—fuck, stop it.

“What do you think?” Abby asked, looking over the top of her glasses at her.

“A big stack of waffles and a bunch of bacon. And fruit.”

Abby laughed. “I was thinking the same thing.”

“Let’s do it. Big on everything.”

She set the menu aside and put her glasses away. “How are classes going?”

“Pretty good. As much work as anatomy and lab are, I think those might be my favorites.”

Abby smiled. “You always enjoyed those.”

“But I do like pathology, too. That’s interesting. And microbiology.”
Katie returned with two large mugs of coffee and a small pitcher of cream. “Are you guys ready?”

“Yes,” Clarke said. “Going big. The waffles and double up the bacon and a side of fruit.”

“Nice. Abby?”

“The exact same.”

“All right. Back in a bit.” Katie smiled and took her order to the kitchen. Clarke liked how Niylah had turned this place into a mellow, relaxing space with lots of natural wood and light. She had a quirky artist’s sense, so whimsical sculptures out of metal and wood adorned various shelves and tables and she’d created mobiles out of found objects and hung them from the ceiling. Some had bits of glass in them, so they’d catch the light and reflect it in interesting patterns. Lexa would like it—shit. She really needed to stop thinking about Lexa right now because that only got her all fucked up.

“So how’s Raven?” Abby asked as she poured cream into her coffee.

“Still Raven. We went to the doctor on Thursday so they could see how the new brace is.”

“And?”

“They like it, and it seems to be helping with the biomechanics of her body. She feels more comfortable with this one and her gait is better. It’s corrected something, because her right hip isn’t bothering her anymore.”

“That’s great news. And how are she and Anya?”

Clarke rolled her eyes and made a gagging noise, which made Abby laugh.

“That good, huh?”

“It’s kind of disgusting. They do snark-flirting, now. Raven says hi, by the way. She’ll probably give you a full update on the brace next time she sees you. Or she might text you. But right now, she’s working on a prototype at the lab for an even lighter one.”

“I love young women in STEM fields,” Abby said. “Go recruit more.”

“Oh, sure. In between classes.” Clarke poured cream into her own coffee and it made her think of Lexa making her coffee for the first time—goddammit. “So how are things at the hospital?”

Abby sighed. “Busy.”

“Can you take a vacation any time soon?”

“I’m thinking about it. But right now I have a little too much to do.”

“Mom,” Clarke said, stern. “Do you have a life outside the hospital?” She sipped her coffee. It was good, but Lexa’s was better. And there she went again. Fuck.

Abby smiled, trying to be reassuring. “Some days. I need one more good surgeon on staff so I can step back a little. We’re opening a search in the next couple of weeks and hopefully in a few months we’ll have someone on board who I can rely on.” She set her cup down. “I sometimes think about what it would be like to work with you once you’re done with medical school.”

Clarke froze.
“It’s not an expectation, honey,” she said hastily. “It’s a hope. You’re going to be your own woman, your own surgeon, and you will be one of the best ones out there if not the best. Wherever you decide to practice is your call and I will be proud of you no matter what.” She dropped her gaze to the table. “Your dad would’ve been proud of you, too. So proud.”

Fuck. Clarke wiped at her eyes just as Katie arrived with their food.

“Going big, ladies,” she said as she set the plates down along with a carafe of coffee. “Let me know if you need anything,” she said and she bounded off to another table.

Fortunately, the conversation moved to other, more mundane matters. Clarke finished her waffles and bacon and started working on the small bowl of fruit, watching as Abby finished mopping up the rest of her syrup with the last bite of a waffle.

“Are you dating right now?” Clarke asked.

Abby coughed.

“I mean…in general. Like, anything serious?”

She held up a finger and drank some water.

“Sorry,” Clarke said. “But it’s okay because I’m studying medicine and I do know the Heimlich.” That made Abby laugh but she coughed, too. “Okay, what brought that question on?” she asked.

“I was thinking about how you seem to be always working and I’m pretty sure that’s not healthy. I guess I was hoping you had a distraction.”

Abby pushed her empty plate aside and poured more coffee into her cup. “I did meet someone.”

“What? When? Do tell.” She leaned back with a smirk.

“A couple months ago. His name is Marcus.” And she actually blushed.

“Well, now. This is interesting. So what’s his deal?”

“He’s not a doctor.”

“Thank God,” Clarke said with relief as she speared another piece of fruit with her fork. “We have enough of those in this family.”

Abby laughed again.

“So what does he do?”

“He’s a professor.”

Clarke looked up, surprised. “Shut up. Really?”

“Yes, Clarke, really.”

“Of what and where?”

“Anthropology, at Arkadia University.”

“Wow.” Clarke nodded and finished the fruit. “So how did you meet?”
“Not how you might think.”

Clarke looked up at her, puzzled.

“Not a formal setting, like at a fundraiser or something really stuffy and boring like that.”

“What? You were shopping at Whole Foods or something and bumped into his cart?” Which sounded kind of nasty, thinking about it. She stifled a laugh.

“Almost.”

Clarke groaned. “Oh, my God. No. Did you seriously meet him in a grocery store?”

“No. A bookstore. Kind of. The parking lot. He backed his car into mine.” She shrugged and looked so entirely sheepish that Clarke had absolutely nothing to say for a few seconds.

Finally, “Seriously? You met over a fender bender?”

“Yes. Don’t get me wrong. I was super-pissed. It was his fault. But he was so apologetic about it and really nice and he is good-looking—”

“Oh, my God. He played you.”

“Maybe a little,” she said, but laughed. “He got right out of his car and gave me his insurance information and business card. So I gave him one of mine.”

Clarke poured more coffee into her cup. “My mom is living in a romcom. And let me guess. He called you to make sure that the insurance company took care of everything.”

“No. He sent a card to my office.”

She shook her head, but it was really sweet, because Abby was smiling and she looked twenty years younger. “What did it say?”

“It was an apology card. With his personal cell phone.”

“For fuck’s sake. Did you call it?”

“No. I’m hard to get.”

She almost spit coffee across the table and at that moment Niylah appeared, wearing loose black chef pants and a white chef jacket that she had opened halfway so her T-shirt was visible. When she cooked, she kept her hair up in a chef’s hat, which for Niylah was a flat-top black one with a multi-colored strip around the crown.

“Hi, Clarke. Hi, Abby. How was everything?” Her smile sparked in her eyes, a soft hazel.

“So good,” Clarke said. “You’re the best.”

“And you’re good for the ego,” Niylah said.

“Cool. Glad to know I’m good for something.”

“I’m not even going to go there. Or I could, and totally embarrass you in front of your mom.”

Clarke raised an eyebrow. “With what?”
Niylah grinned. “I could tell her about certain abilities you have—”

“Okay, okay. Point taken.”

Abby laughed.

“So is there any good gossip?” Niylah asked.

“Actually, yes,” Clarke said. “My mom here is dating.”

Niylah looked at Abby, eyes wide. “This is good news. Who is he?”

Abby rolled her eyes but she was smiling, “I love how my daughter tells all my business to everyone.”

“Not everyone. Just Niylah,” Clarke said, pretending to be hurt.

Niylah squeezed her shoulder. “Your daughter has your best interests at heart.”

“I do,” Clarke said. “And he’s an anthropology professor at Arkadia University.”

Niylah nodded, approving. “And?”

Abby sighed and told her the story of their meeting.

“So you didn’t call him after the card?” Niylah asked.

“My mom is hard to get.” And then she thought again of Lexa and the kiss they’d shared and holy shit, pay attention.

“Good,” Niylah said. “So how did he finally convince you to call him?”

“He appealed to my intellectual side.” She took a drink of coffee, for effect. “He sent me a ticket to the latest exhibit at the art museum. Just one. It was up to me if I wanted to see it with him or not.”

“Cheeky bastard,” Clarke said and Niylah laughed. “What if you hated art?”

“He noticed my T-shirt the day we met. It was for that Van Gogh exhibit you and I went to a few years back.”

“Oh, he is a cheeky bastard,” Niylah said and Clarke almost spit coffee again. “But clever, the way he left it open. You could go with him or not. What’d you do?”

“I went by myself but texted him in the gallery.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said, wide-eyed. “You did not.”

“Yep. I figured he’d have a ticket for himself on the same day, so if I decided to follow up with him, I would. I like that about him, that he left things up to me.”

Clarke high-fived Niylah. “My mom is a gangster of love.”

“And on that note, I need to get back to the kitchen. Just wanted to come out and say hi. Call me, Clarke. We need to do another art session.”

“Oh, definitely. Thanks for cooking this awesome brunch.”
Niylah winked at her and left and Abby raised her eyebrows.

“Art session?”

“Niylah’s been helping me with painting.”

“Oh, really,” she teased.

“Really. She’s formally trained. I’m not. I want to learn more oils techniques.”

“So that’s what they’re calling it these days.”

Clark groaned. “I already told you. Niylah and I did have a thing for a little bit, but it was a couple years ago and it was fun while it lasted. Back to you. Is this thing with Marcus serious?”

“I’m not sure.” She toyed with her spoon.

Clarke stayed quiet, to see if Abby would follow up. She did.

“He’s…really great. I love being around him. He’s funny and smart and kind. It’s easy, and we seem to fit together.”

“Wow. This does sound kind of serious.” And again Lexa was at the forefront of her brain, with her gentle teasing and warmth and fuck, Clarke hoped so hard she hadn’t completely screwed everything up.

“I suppose I’m taking a wait-and-see approach. We’ve only known each other a couple of months, after all. But it’s so easy to be around him. He sort of fits in my life, in the places that I haven’t filled with work and research and things doctor-related. But he even fits there, too, because he’s interested in what I do. But he gives me room to engage or not. It’s refreshing.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“I’m not sure.”

And Clarke saw in Abby’s eyes some of the ghosts of their shared past. “You’re not replacing Dad, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Abby looked at her, a warning in her expression.

“Relax. I mean that nobody is Dad. Marcus is a totally different guy, so you don’t need to feel guilty about seeing him.”

Abby continued to toy with her spoon.

“After Dad died,” Clarke continued, “I did have an issue with you being with anyone else. And I know you didn’t date for a couple of years. But I want you to find someone—if that’s what you want to do—and be happy.”

She didn’t respond and her eyes filled with tears. "I wonder if sometimes I think that I'm somehow not honoring your dad's memory because I'm interested in another man."

"Mom. No." Clarke reached across the table and took her hand. "Dad would want you to be happy. You know he would."

Abby took a pack of tissues out and wiped at her eyes. “Well, this isn’t the way I envisioned brunch
going.”

“Maybe it needed to.”

She nodded. “Maybe it did.” She wiped her eyes again. “I had an issue with dating, too, after we lost your dad.” She paused. “I need you to understand that I loved your father more than I can even explain. He fit perfectly with me when we were together, and he was a wonderful man. Not only as a husband, but as a dad. He was my everything. And when you came along, you, too, became my everything.”

Tears pricked Clarke’s eyes. Jesus.

“Nothing will ever replace him, because he was his own man, and we worked together very well at a specific time.” She dabbed at her eyes again. “I’m a different woman now than I was when he was alive. So I need a different kind of partner, who can meet me where I am now.” She handed Clarke the tissues.


“I really like Marcus,” Abby continued. “A lot. He seems to be a person who fits with me now, as the woman I currently am.”

Clarke wiped her eyes with a tissue. “But?”

“There isn’t one. Not really. We’re just going slow. He divorced about three years ago and so we’re both just kind of seeing how things go. It’s still early, and that’s why I haven’t mentioned him to you. Until, of course, you went prying.” She smiled and squeezed Clarke’s hand. “Do you understand?”

“Oh, totally. How do you feel about him?”

“I like him.” She blushed again.

“Seems like a little more than that,” Clarke teased.

“Maybe a little,” Abby said and she blushed again. “But it’s different for me now than when I first met your dad. I’m older now, probably more cynical, and I see the world through a whole different lens than when I met your dad.” She interlaced her fingers with Clarke’s. “But Marcus makes me feel alive, in ways I haven’t in a long time. He makes me believe in a future with a partner again.”

Clarke gently squeezed Abby’s hand in return. “That makes me really happy.” And it did. Because despite everything, ultimately she just wanted her to be happy. And she’d have to get Raven lined up for a screening session of Marcus.

“God,” Abby sniffed. “This bonding shit is hard.”

“Right?” And she laughed and cried but it felt good, having this moment with her. They were quiet for a while, and Abby pulled her hand away so she could take another tissue out. Clarke watched her, and thought she saw in her the woman she’d been twenty years earlier. Abby had a certain strong, stubborn beauty to her both inside and out and Clarke was suddenly really glad she’d ended up with her as a mom.

“So what did it feel like when you met Dad?” she blurted and she wasn’t sure why she’d said it, but for some reason, she needed to know.

Abby didn’t respond right away, but her expression softened. “Your dad was a goofball. A
handsome, kind, warm, gentle goofball who would do anything he had to do in order to protect the people he cared about.”

A fresh round of tears filled Clarke’s eyes but she didn’t stop them. “Was it love at first sight?”

“It was more connection at first sight,” Abby said, a faraway expression in her eyes. “The moment I met your father, I felt totally safe. And it was strange, because he was this big, geeky scientist-type, but there was passion within him, and intensity, and when he looked at me, I’d never felt that with anyone. Safe but also like I couldn’t get enough. It was scary at first.” She stopped and focused on Clarke again. “And I don’t want you to think that I’m just settling for Marcus. That’s not the case at all. He makes me feel that way, too, but it’s different now than it was when I was younger. It doesn’t make what happened with your father any more or less valid. It’s just different circumstances and different times in my life.”

Clarke stared into her coffee. “What did you do, when you got scared with Dad?”

“It was only in the initial stages that I felt that way. Because it was pretty intense. I was so afraid that I’d lose him somehow, because the connection was almost overwhelming, so why should I even try?” She smiled, and though it was sad, it was also hopeful. “I—we—did end up losing him, but I am so grateful that we got the time with him that we had. I wouldn’t trade that for anything, and every day, I see him in you. In how you view the world, your sense of humor, your blend of art and science, your eyes, your laugh, the way you say certain things. I know he’s still with us both through you. So I took a chance, and there is no way I’d do anything differently.”

“Jesus, Mom.” Clarke grabbed another tissue and wiped her eyes yet again. “When you met him for the very first time, did you feel anything? Besides safe?”

“That part’s important for me. But yes, I felt all kinds of other things, too.” She waggled her eyebrows and smirked.

“Some of which I’m fine not knowing.”

Abby laughed. “He was a handsome man, but also funny. And he had nice eyes. That is, not only pretty, but kind. It’s completely non-medical to say this, but there is something to that, about eyes being windows to the soul. His eyes were full of life, and he had the best smile.” She stared into her coffee cup. “The first time I saw him, I felt this little pull. I wasn’t sure what it meant, or why I would even feel that for someone I didn’t know, but there it was. A connection. Spark. Whatever you want to call it. And he felt it, too. He knew I was reticent. So he gave me lots of room to figure it out, though he had already decided that I was the one for him.”

Clarke grinned. “How long did that take?”

“Not very, actually. But he didn’t mind waiting for me to get my head on straight.” And then she was quiet again and prisms of light from one of Niyalah’s crystals that hung in a nearby window threw colors across the table.

“So. All these interesting questions. Have you met someone?” Abby asked and Clarke was glad she wasn’t eating or drinking anything because she probably would have choked. The expression on her face must have been a giveaway because Abby laughed. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No yet. I’m not sure where it’s going.” But she knew where she wanted it to go, if she hadn’t fucked it completely up.

“Where do you want it to go?” Abby asked, with that damn mom mind meld thing.
“I just met her a couple of weeks ago.”

Abby didn’t respond and instead sipped her coffee.

“What?” Clarke asked.

“Nothing.”

“You have that look.”

Abby set her cup down. “What look?”

“It’s a mom look.”

She laughed. “Honey, I know you better than you like to think I do, and it’s clear to me that there’s something about this woman you just met that’s got you a little shook.”

Clarke raised her eyebrows. “Oh, my God. You actually said ‘shook’ to me in that context.” She groaned and lowered her head to her arms, but she was laughing, too.

“I try to keep up. And it seems to apply.”

“Yeah, okay. I met her and—I don’t know. She’s stuck in my head.” And under her skin and all over every waking moment.

“Have you asked her out?”

“Jesus, Mom.” Clarke’s cheeks flared with embarrassment.

“What? We’re adults, here. We’re having an adult conversation.” She refilled Clarke’s cup with the last of the coffee in the carafe.

“Officially, yes, I have, but we hung out a couple of times before that, informally.” She sat up and picked up her cup, more for something to keep her hands occupied than because she wanted to drink more coffee.

“And?”

“It’s been…” she sighed. “Amazing.”

“But?”

She put her head back down. “We were at Anya’s last night for that dinner party—that was the more official date—and there was a moment. And I got scared. And I feel so stupid about it because generally, I’m not such a hot mess when—um—”

“When you’re attracted to someone.”

“Yes. That.”

Abby nodded sagely and sat back in her chair.

“That’s another mom look.”

“Is it? I was just thinking that there must be something really special about this woman to affect you like this. And if she is as amazing as you say she is, she’ll be open to talking with you about why
“You got scared.”

“Maybe. Or maybe I misread her.” Had she? Had her instincts been that far off on this? She thought about what Lexa had said before she kissed her and sighed again.

“Just because you make a mistake in one relationship doesn’t mean you’re incapable of picking a good one after that. I was with some real duds before I met your dad. And I had similar feelings. Was he for real? What would someone so amazing see in me?”

“Yeah,” Clarke said. “There’s that.”

“Well, turns out that was the point. He saw *me*. And that’s really empowering but also scary, that someone could get you on those levels. People think it’s a point of weakness, to be vulnerable with someone, but it’s actually one of the strongest things you can do because you trust your own strength when you show your heart to others.”

Clarke stared at her. “Damn, Mom. That was fucking poetry. If Marcus has anything to do with this place you’re in, I clearly need to meet him.”

Abby smiled. “He’s—kind of amazing, too.” And she blushed and dropped her gaze.

“Okay, wow. I won’t ask you if it’s serious because you’ll let me know, but I hope things work out.”

“I like the trajectory thus far, and I like how it feels.”

Katie appeared at the table. “Hi, guys. Sorry to interrupt, but can I get you anything else?”

“No,” Abby said. “We need to get going.” She handed Katie her credit card because Abby always paid in situations like this and Clarke had quit fighting her on it. She thought about Lexa (again) and about how she cut ties with her parents. It pissed her off and made her sad but it also made her want to be someone in her life that she could rely on. And there she went again, with the damn future thoughts.

“Be right back,” Katie said, and she walked away.

“Thanks, Mom. Not just for brunch.”

“Same to you.” She stood and put her coat on. Clarke handed her the pack of tissues, which was pretty diminished now. Katie returned and Abby signed the receipt.

“Thanks,” Abby said to Katie. “We’ll be back.”

“Good.” Katie hurried away.

“See you later,” Niyalah called from the kitchen doorway.

“Bye,” both Clarke and Abby said and they went out into the parking lot to Abby’s SUV.

“Call me,” Abby said. “And study hard.” She put her sunglasses on.

“Yeah, yeah.” Clarke hugged her.

“And talk to her,” Abby said.

Clarke released her, nodded, and waited for her to get into her vehicle. She waved as Abby backed out of the parking space then went to her truck, finally deciding to check her phone, a little flutter in
her chest.

Texts from Raven, Bellamy, and yes Lexa. She read the one from Raven telling her to grow some ovaries while Bellamy reminded her about a study group later that afternoon, and then she took a deep breath and opened the one from Lexa, which had come in right after she sat down with her mom and put her phone away.

*Hey—checking in. Hope brunch w/ ur mom went ok.*

It didn’t feel like an angry text. But Clarke stared at it, trying to read between the lines. Was she still interested? Or was she going to back off?

“I’m such a fucking idiot,” she muttered. And then she texted back. *Hi. It did. thx.* She sent it then started typing again. & *thx for checking on me.* She sent that one then sent an addendum. *Can I see you later this evening?*

“She’s me,” she said softly. “Doing what scares me.” She started the engine and headed toward campus, thinking about what Abby had said, about vulnerability and strength. And then she thought about Lexa, and how a kiss set everything on fire, turned everything upside-down—wait. Maybe she was looking at this wrong. Maybe it had made everything right-side up, and this is what it felt like when you found someone who matched your wavelength.

Who saw you.

Who understood you on levels nobody else could.

Maybe this is what possibility felt like.

And oh, God, she hoped it was still an option.

*Hijo de puta: son of a bitch*

**Ay, Clarkita. Saca tu cabeza del tu culo: Ay, little Clarke. Pull your head out of your ass.**

(Technically, I should probably spell it “Clarquita,” but we’ll just go with the “k” spelling here.)

Chapter End Notes

I'm not crying. YOU'RE crying.

I like AU Abby so much better, especially when she's not the one responsible for Jake's death.

Also, yeah, I've decided I REALLY have a thing for food...
Master and Commander

Chapter Summary

Clarke still hasn’t heard from Lexa after brunch and a long day, but she puts her art skills to use to see if that will help. Raven offers moral support and then we get some answers to the mystery about why Lexa hadn’t responded.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Okay, here it was nearly five and Clarke still hadn’t heard from Lexa. She tried not to dwell on it, but how could she not? Her study group hadn’t been as useful as it could have been because she was distracted, wondering if she should text Lexa again, and when Bellamy asked her if she wanted to grab a beer with a few of the other students, she agreed because she wasn’t ready to go home.

God, maybe it was going to suck having Lexa for a neighbor in the wake of what happened the night before if she couldn’t make this right.

One beer and a few hot wings later she walked back across campus to her truck, resigned, now, to the fact that Lexa was probably pissed and hurt and there might not be a way to fix this. Which in a way bummered her out even more because that meant that again, Clarke had misread someone because if Lexa really was into her and cared, she would’ve been amenable to talking.

Fuck.

She drove home, stomach churning (the hot wings might not have been a good idea, either) and parked. She went in through the back and automatically checked for Lexa’s Jeep.

Which was missing. She frowned. What did that mean? She wasn’t sure. And maybe she didn’t want to know. She went up the stairs to her apartment just as a text came in, but it was from Raven, saying she was staying at Anya’s tonight. Clarke texted an acknowledgement back and went to her bedroom when Raven texted again.

Have u talked 2 her?

no

She was not really in the mood to even text about this, but Raven was replying, so Clarke waited.

why not?

Clarke typed a quick response. She hasn’t responded to my text. And Raven called her a few seconds after that.

“What’s going on?” Raven asked.

“I don’t know. She texted me this morning when I was at brunch, but I had my ringer off. She said she was checking in and she hoped brunch went okay. I texted her back and asked if I could see her later this evening. I haven’t heard anything back.”
“When did you text her?”

“Around one-thirty or two.” And it was now nearly six.

“Just go to her apartment. Maybe she didn’t get the text.”

“Her Jeep’s not here. And we sound like we’re plotting some kind of spy caper but we’re really incompetent at it.”

Raven snorted. “We are never incompetent, Griffin. Ridiculous, but never incompetent. So what’s the next plan of action?”

Clarke sat on her bed. “I don’t know. I don’t want to push her.”

“Fuck, how bad was this freak-out?”

She didn’t respond.

“That bad?”

She winced. “It could’ve been worse, I guess.”

“Why didn’t you say this earlier?”

“Because I’ve been thinking more about it since the last time we talked.”

“Hmm. Maybe she’s not mad but rather hurt.”

That was worse, Clarke decided, that she could have hurt Lexa, whose soulful, sparkling eyes always seemed to say so much more than words. “I don’t know. Maybe?” And she was the world’s biggest ass for doing it.

“So text her again.”

“No. I’ll give her some space.”

“She might just be busy,” Raven said.

“Maybe. But right now I need to finish up some stuff for class tomorrow.” But she wasn’t sure how the hell she was going to concentrate.

“Do you want me to come home?”

“Nah. I’m okay.”

“Clarke.”

“Seriously. I’m okay. If that changes, I’ll let you know.”

“All right. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Hi to Anya. Good night.” She ended the call before Raven could pull her into more conversation and went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea. Once that was done she took her laptop and class notebooks out and went to work at the table but fifteen minutes in, it was clear it was not going to happen.

She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, letting memories of the night before sweep over her
in a tide of heat and longing. And then she got up and went to get paper and her drawing pens because an idea hit.

A few minutes later she was at work at her drafting table, a comic quickly taking shape. She worked fast, wanting to keep the inspiration as long as she could, creating a multi-panel story based on what had happened that started with Clarke meeting Lexa as cute little cartoon characters on their apartment stairs. The story moved to the club, then breakfast, movie night, and finally, the dinner party. The thought bubbles above her head on Anya’s back deck were filled with “fuck what is wrong why am I so scared” and “I have never felt anything like this and it’s blowing my mind HALP.”

Clarke stopped and added a few details to the middle part of the story. She’d been spare with dialogue, but used a lot of other amusing thought bubbles above her own head filled with things like “omg she’s amazing” and “shit, so amazing and it’s scaring the hell out of me.”

She then added a few more panels, where she talked to Raven on the phone, making sure she drew Raven telling her to pull her head out of her ass. Then she drew a few of her with Abby, emphasis on Abby telling her that it was okay to be scared, but maybe not okay to run.

Finally, the last two panels included first, her toonself looking worried, with fret lines over her head. The last panel, though, she drew her toonself smiling and looking directly at the reader, holding a plate of pancakes that she seemed to be offering to whoever held the paper.

Was that too stupid? The pancakes?

She frowned and read through the whole thing again and got to the last panel and decided that it worked. Lexa knew she had a silly streak in her, after all. And it matched the mood of some of the thought bubbles. She waited for the pages to dry then carefully folded them and put them in an envelope that she taped shut. On the outside of it, she drew a skull and crossed spatulas beneath it, also cartoon-ish, took it down the hall, and taped it to Lexa’s door.

By ten she still hadn’t heard from Lexa and she actually went to scan the parking lot. The Jeep wasn’t there, which was both good and bad because of course Clarke wondered who Lexa might be with this late and then she caught herself. She didn’t have a Lexa monopoly (dammit), and they weren’t together, so she didn’t have any right to get jealous. After all, she had pretty much rejected Lexa last night.

And then she wondered if she should text Lexa anyway because she was a little concerned that she hadn’t responded and usually she was good about that.

But why the hell should she be good about it now, after the previous night?

Fuck.

Clarke got ready for bed, but she knew she probably wasn’t going to sleep much and just as she was finishing up, she heard the door open.

“Hey, Griff, I’m home.”

“What—please tell me you didn’t have a fight with Anya,” she said as she went into the living room.

“No,” Raven said. “I just didn’t want you to be alone tonight.”

Clarke half-smiled. “It’s not like this is a major breakup or anything. I mean, I barely know her. And apparently, it didn’t work out.”
“Oh, my God. Stop it.” Raven took her backpack into her bedroom then reappeared. “You don’t know any of the details. And I know even though you don’t really know each other that well that you connected. And it hurts, because you know there’s a connection but you don’t know the person well enough to gauge their reactions. And I’ll send you the bill for this therapy later.” She went back into her bedroom and Clarke went into hers and got into bed.

Raven came in a few minutes later, dressed in sweats and a sweatshirt and using her canes, which she did at home when her brace was off. She set them down and started to climb into bed next to her.

“What are you doing?”

“Do I really have to spell this out for you? Move over.”

Clarke did and Raven got in next to her.

“I told you that if shit doesn’t work out or maybe gets a little fucked up, I’d be there for you. So shut up and enjoy this moment of BFF bonding.” And she hugged Clarke then turned off the light and Clarke was glad Raven was here, though there was a Lexa-sized hole in her heart.

“Griff, I know you’re upset and this whole thing feels completely fucked, but relax and try to get some sleep,” Raven said. “We’ll figure out what’s going on in the morning.”

“What if she’s ghosting me?”

“Then we cut a bitch.”

Clarke snorted. “I love you, Reyes.”

“Ditto, you freak.” Raven hugged her again and Clarke did try to relax, but she knew it was going to be a long night. And yes, the morning would no doubt provide answers.

But she wasn’t sure she wanted them.

###

By the time Clarke finished with her shower the next morning, Raven had moved back to her own bedroom. Raven didn’t have to be on campus until later, so Clarke made sure her bedroom door was closed before she moved around the kitchen and did her morning routines.

Having Raven with her had helped, but she had still spent a shitty night of bad sleep that involved waking up several times wondering if Lexa was okay, or if she was ghosting her. Which would totally suck, because it meant Clarke hadn’t read her right.

And if that was the case, should she call Lexa and tell her she was an asshole or just ghost her right back?

Which would be difficult, given their proximity in this damn building. And given that every time Clarke thought about her, an immense wave of feels rushed through her. She gathered her things for the day and checked the weather. Cold and cloudy, snow later. Whatever. She’d go to campus now and get some studying in before class.

Today was definitely a leather jacket and baseball hat day. Along with her favorite faded guy jeans, flannel shirt, and sneakers. She drew a few hearts on a sticky note and put it on Raven’s door then grabbed her pack and keys and stepped out into the hallway.
And stared at the outside of her door, because an envelope was taped to it, the size of a greeting card. Her name was written on it, in strong but somehow elegant letters and she knew it was Lexa’s handwriting though she’d never actually seen it.

She carefully pulled the card off the door, shut it quietly, and locked it before she opened the envelope and okay, her heart might have been pounding really hard. The photo on the card made her smile and she wondered where the hell Lexa had found it, because it was a picture of a plate of pancakes, syrup running down the sides, on a 50s-style diner table. But the message inside made her smile even more.

Hi, Clarke—I am so sorry. I went to Virginia yesterday to help Indra and Gustus with something and my phone died and like a dumbass I didn’t have a charger and their phones don’t have the same cord—long stupid story about me trying to find a damn charger. Which I never did, obviously. I got back pretty late, but I know I owed you a text, so here it is, old-school. And yes, Pancake Master, I would love to talk with you. Just let me know. – Commander Lexa

P.S. I didn’t realize you were an artist, too…

It was like the clouds had parted and thousands of rainbows had arched over every part of the planet. Clarke read the card a few more times, just to be sure she wasn’t hallucinating. No, unless it was a pretty elaborate delusion. She decided not to send a text because it was still early and she didn’t want to wake Lexa up, if she was trying to sleep in. But fuck, she was practically floating down the hall and yeah, okay, she might’ve slowed down while she walked past Lexa’s door but seriously, who wouldn’t, after a card like that?

Who the fuck wouldn’t?

She put the card in her backpack before she went outside and even though a light drizzle accompanied her to campus, she didn’t notice, and instead she was on countdown for when she could text Lexa and tell her hell, yes, she would meet her any time, any place to talk about whatever the fuck she wanted to talk about. She could listen to Lexa recite a grocery list, if that’s what she wanted to do.

Somehow Clarke ended up at the med school library, though she wasn’t entirely sure how she got there, since her entire trip to campus was kind of a blur. And why the hell hadn’t she stopped for coffee? This was going to be a really good and really bad morning.

Her phone dinged with a message but she waited until she was at the entrance to the library and reasonably sheltered from the continued drizzle. She checked the message and immediately warmed right up. It was from Lexa, but it was a very short video and it showed two Starbucks paper coffee cups, one with the name “Clarke” on it and the other with the name “Lexa.” Then the camera panned to an envelope on the table with a cartoon of a skull and spatulas. The message that accompanied the video was, @ student center. Join me?

Clarke had a couple of hours before class. And really, there was no damn contest between studying and Lexa. On my way, she texted back and went right into the drizzle again (and she really sucked at umbrellas because she hadn’t brought one today, either).

By the time she got to the student center, the drizzle had slowed but the air was noticeably colder and Clarke was pretty sure there would be snow later on. She entered the building and wiped her feet on
the industrial-sized mat underfoot and wended her way through the groups of students either standing
talking to each other or taking up the various tables. On days like this, the student center was always
crowded, and here in the atrium area, voices created a low roar.

Fortunately, the Starbucks was toward the back of the building on the lower level, and there was
usually a lot more seating available, though since the weather was shitty, Clarke suspected the tables
would be full there, too. She stopped at the railing near the stairs and looked down toward the
Starbucks. As she had guessed, pretty much all of the tables set up outside the coffee place were full,
but Lexa might be at one of the tables inside.

All kinds of sparks were racing through her chest and abdomen. Her phone indicated a text, this one
from Raven.

_U ok?_

Clarke bit her lip and smiled. *yes. heard from L. mtg 4 coffee*

Her phone indicated that Raven was texting back so she didn’t go down the stairs just yet.

*details plz.* She added a GIF of a guy sitting at his desk drumming his fingers, looking like he was
waiting for something.

Clarke’s smile widened to a grin. *she went 2 VA 2 help fam. forgot phone charger. back late last
nite, left card on door.* She sent it and started down the stairs because she would much rather be
talking to Lexa than texting right now. Raven texted back and Clarke looked at it when she got to the
bottom of the steps.

*jfc what did it say*

Clarke stepped out of the way of the stairs to respond. *she apologized 4 not being able to text back.
plus other stuff. have 2 go. deets l8r [sunglasses emoji].* She put her phone in her jacket pocket and
walked toward Starbucks, heart pounding again because apparently she was way into Lexa Woods
and here was her chance to make things right. And to get over herself.

She stepped into Starbucks and glanced around and found Lexa almost immediately, seated at a
small table toward the back working on a laptop, the two large cups from the video she’d sent next to
her, along with the envelope that held the comic she had drawn the night before. Clarke stared at her,
and everything she had felt two nights ago came roaring back in a flood of heat and hope. As she
watched, Lexa reached for one of the cups and sipped and looked up and her gaze latched onto
Clarke’s like she had known she’d see her there.

“Hey,” Lexa said, and that one word conveyed everything Clarke needed to hear. All the tension
she’d been carrying around started to dissipate like so much smoke.

“Hi,” she said as she set her pack on the floor next to the empty chair to Lexa’s left and they stood,
smiling, and Clarke wanted to hug her but refrained because seriously, she might not have stopped
there. And besides, she had walked in the rain and her jacket was damp.

“It’s still warm,” Lexa said as she handed Clarke the cup that had her name on it. “Americano, shot
of cream.”
“Thank you.” She took her jacket off and sank into the chair and sipped, all kinds of emotions buzzing through her chest. Lexa sat down, too, and Clarke realized she was wearing the sweatshirt that she had loaned to her the day of the lock-out. “But it is definitely not even close to your coffee.”

Lexa smiled again. “It’s all in the bean, Pancake Master.” She closed her laptop and set it aside.

“Oh, is that what it is?”

“Yes. You have to start with good beans. No matter how good your roaster is, if you have shitty beans, you won’t have good roast potential. You can manipulate a roast and bring out flavor even in crappy beans, but if you start with a really good bean and a good roaster, boom. Good coffee.”

“I don’t think you’re doing your own roasting next door, so…?”

“I buy good coffee and prepare it correctly.” She shrugged. “But I didn’t ask you here to talk to you about the lore of a good brew. As enjoyable as we both might find that.” Her gaze drilled into Clarke’s. “I really wanted to make sure you’re okay.” Concern flashed in her eyes.

Clarke moved her chair a little closer. “Yes. Are you?”

Lexa looked away for a moment, then back and she nodded. “Yeah. But not gonna lie. I did get a little worried that maybe I misread something and that I had put you in a bad position, which I would never willingly do to you.”

“You didn’t.” Oh, God. How much more incredible could she be? Clarke held her coffee cup between both hands and sipped again, only too aware that they were both trying to ascertain where the other stood and what it might mean.

“Okay. Good.” She bit her lower lip and it was goddamn adorable. “I—if you don’t want to talk about Saturday, that’s okay, too. I wasn’t sure how much time you had before class or whatever you have going on today. Just wanted to check in.” She said it in a nervous rush and Clarke really wanted to—God, what she wanted to do. She acted before she even knew what she was doing and she took Lexa’s hand and the contact—as simple as it was—created a feedback loop down her thighs. Lexa stared down at their intertwined fingers, then looked up at her again, expression a mixture of surprise, hope, and relief.

“I’m sorry,” Clarke said. “I didn’t want you to feel that way about my freak-out.”

Lexa started to reply but Clarke shook her head.

“Wait,” she said, gentle but firm. “I need to say some things.” And she needed to do it before she thought about it, before she got stuck in her head. “Everything I said in here—” she tapped the envelope that held the comic with her free hand, “is true.” She bit her lower lip, considering her next words. “And maybe you already figured it out, but I’m not very good with feelings, especially since my dad died. But that’s a whole other conversation.” She held Lexa’s gaze and said the next thing quickly because she wanted to verbalize it and not just express it in a comic. “The thing is, I think you’re amazing.”

Lexa smiled, the one with the slowburn overtones that lifted one side of her mouth first.

“And I didn’t—don’t—know what to do with that, because I barely know you, but in some ways I feel like I do.” She smiled back and forged ahead because once she made a decision, she generally stuck with it and plowed ahead. “I swear, it’s like being struck by lightning. Metaphorically, obviously. An actual lightning strike is really dangerous and of course might be bad—” she stopped because now she was rambling and really? Lightning?
But that’s what it felt like. An emotional lightning bolt coupled with a slow roll of warmth as Lexa entered Clarke’s life, and somehow was becoming grafted onto the infrastructure of it. And then Clarke’s heart had mutinied against her head and flung the door wide fucking open and all Clarke had to do was invite Lexa in.

“You’re amazing,” Clarke repeated. “And I have not ever felt the way I do when I’m around you. And fuck, that scares me. And I can’t believe I said that out loud.” She dropped her gaze and her heart felt like it was slamming against her ribs, like it was going to break right through, but Lexa’s fingers were warm and comforting, entwined with hers.

“So I’m sorry I freaked out,” Clarke continued, “and I really didn’t want to make you feel bad about how I acted Saturday. That wasn’t on you.” She looked up again into Lexa’s eyes. “And I’m really hoping I didn’t completely fuck this—” she gestured between the two of them with her free hand, “situation up.”

And then she stopped because holy shit she’d pretty much laid it all down right there and she forgot to breathe because she was so damn exposed right now.

“You didn’t,” Lexa said after a few charged moments. “Not even close.” She glanced down at their hands again, like she couldn’t believe that Clarke had done that, then returned her gaze to Clarke’s. “I’m scared, too,” she said, voice soft.

Clarke slowly exhaled because she’d barely been breathing.

“But I’m more scared of not continuing, because I think you’re amazing, too.” She smiled, and it was shy and hopeful and Clarke fucking melted. “And I want more,” Lexa added. “As fast or as slow as you want to go to see what could happen. I mean, if you want.” And then she waited, hope and possibility in her eyes, but leaving the decision up to Clarke.

And how could Clarke not want to? How the everloving hell could she not?

“I so want to,” she said, and she leaned in and brushed her lips across Lexa’s in a quick kiss that took them both by surprise and, in Clarke’s case, made sparks race through every part of her body. She sat back before she did more and the expression on Lexa’s face was everything and Clarke knew she had the same one on hers.

“So…does this mean I might get more pancakes?” Lexa asked and Clarke laughed.

“Yes, Commander. And I can guarantee that the Legion fully supports this activity, and I, of course, am in charge of it. As Pancake Master, you know.”

Another sexy little smile hung on Lexa’s lips. “I like this whole Master and Commander thing we have going on.”

She smiled back. “Same. And now I have to go to class. But thank you for talking.” Clarke carefully disentangled her hand from Lexa’s and oh, she missed the feel of it immediately.

“I’m glad you wanted to. So when can I officially see you again?” she asked as she stood while Clarke got her coat on.

Whenever she fucking wanted to, if Clarke could have her way. “As soon as possible. What’s your schedule for the next few days?”

“Bad today and most of tomorrow. I have a huge project I’m trying to finish up for a class.”
“I think Lincoln dropped a hint about that. Is Wednesday better?” She had her coat on and she picked up her backpack.

“I’m going to say yes. Six-ish? Take-out Thai at my place?”

“Perfect.” And Clarke fell into her eyes again and it was new and exciting but somehow familiar and she wanted to kiss her again and not stop. “Thanks for the coffee,” she said instead.

“Any time. Stay warm.” Lexa put her hands in her jeans pockets and bit her lower lip, like she was trying to decide what to say next. “See you soon.”

But Clarke knew she wanted to say more because she did, too, but this was still so new even in the warmth that flowed between them and they were still learning each other’s cues. “Definitely,” Clarke said, and she left before this became a long, drawn-out romcom scene (which she totally would have loved but maybe not in the student center Starbucks), heart pounding again while millions of butterflies dive-bombed (did butterflies even do that?) each other in her stomach.

Once outside, she was greeted by the first official snow of the season, big, fluffy flakes that were already sticking to the sidewalks and grass. Somewhere people were whooping and yelling and she guessed there was a snowball fight going on or something comparable. Clarke loved snowfall, loved how it made everything seem quiet and hushed, and she loved the crisp bite of the cold air and watching how the world slowed down. She drank her coffee, now lukewarm, but she didn’t care because Lexa had gotten it for her and she heated everything else up in her world.

When she got to her classroom building, she found a table in a quiet corner of the study area and checked her phone. A few texts to go through, including one from Bellamy about possibly cancelling the study group the next day because of weather. Harper had texted, too, to find out if anybody was up for drinks on Friday. Definitely. Clarke responded to that. And hopefully Lexa could go, too.

Lexa. Jesus fucking Christ, this felt…shit, it felt like they were on their way to being a thing. Not just a hookup. Not just fuckbuddies. And her head almost exploded at even entertaining that thought because it involved lots of skin and oh, god—she took a gulp of coffee.

Being a thing. She sat with that thought for a bit, picking it apart and assessing how she felt about it. A little scared, still, but more anticipatory, like she was getting ready for a new adventure and she wasn’t sure what it would bring, but she really wanted to go.

She texted Raven. good talk

And Raven must have been monitoring because her reply was immediate. define good head exploding good. She waited for the response, idly flipping through social media.

that tells me nothing jfc details

Clarke grinned and responded. she thinks i’m amazing & we’re seeing each other on wed.

JkjkJkfdjsjkdjkdj did she actually say that

yes

Raven was clearly working up a longer reply, from the icon on the screen. A few moments later, it came. what did u say? plz tell me we r not doing DEBS here & u were legit af …as fun as DEBS is

Clarke rolled her eyes and huffed. why do u have no faith in me
whtevs, Clarke texted back. *i told her i was scared & apologized 4 frk-out. said i’d never felt the way i do when i’m @ her*

Raven didn’t respond for a bit and Clarke stood because her class started in about ten minutes. The text came through as she grabbed her backpack.

*ksjlfjskdkjkljsld omg lkfjsljflsjsjflsdjf jfc we r celebrating*

Clarke laughed and another text came through.

*srsly Griff im so happy af 4 u want more details 2nite bye [heart eyes emoji]*

She grinned again because yeah, the heart eyes might be a thing with her the more time she spent around Lexa. Shit, she probably had them right now. But she didn’t care. Plus, she had another official date with Lexa in two days, which she knew was going to be a really distracting thought during this anatomy class.

Like she minded.

She sat down and got her laptop out.

“Hey, Griff,” Bellamy said as he took the seat next to her. “Did you get my text about study group?”

“Yeah, thanks. Is it really supposed to get that bad?”

“Maybe.” He took his laptop out. “I’ll let everybody know probably tomorrow morning. How’s it going?”

“Good. Really good.” Beyond good. Maybe even orbiting good.

“Oh, did you get Harper’s text about drinks on Friday?”

“Yeah. I already responded that I’d go.”

“I invited O. Why don’t you invite Lexa? She seems all right.”

Clarke felt a flush on her neck and she was glad her shirt had a collar. “Good idea. But if you told O, she probably already invited her, since she no doubt invited Lincoln, too.”

“You can never get too many invites,” he said with a shrug and Clarke looked at him, trying to deduce if there was a hidden meaning to this conversation. But he was busy checking class notifications so she did the same and when the professor arrived and class cranked up, the most prominent thought in her head was of Lexa, her fucking slowburn smiles, and the way her eyes seemed to sparkle when she teased.

Shit.

She was definitely in trouble.

Most definitely.

But she kind of loved it.
I have so many feelz right now.

Kinda subtle shout-out to the fanfic (soon-to-be Clexa Comic!) Lightning Only Strikes Once, by fiona_249.

And omg, shout-out to The S.S. Clexa, who made a most awesome GIF with Clarke and Lexa Starbucks cups. I've been using that GIF and brought the concept into "bang shui." (Told you I luvved that GIF, SSClexa!)
The Great Chicken Caper

Chapter Summary

Clarke and Raven go to Lexa's and hang out with her and Lincoln, which means Lincoln dishes on Lexa and Raven dishes on Clarke. And there's another moment, y'all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Clarke opened the door to her apartment, the rich, spicy smell of posole greeted her, along with Raven’s favorite telenovela on the TV.

“Hey,” she called. “Something smells super delicious.”

“Come and get some,” Raven said from the doorway to the kitchen. “Snow always makes me want posole. Plus, we’re celebrating.”

“Celebrating what?”

“Jesus, Griff. Clexa. My ship, dammit.”

“Stop,” she said as she set her pack on the floor by the door since it was damp from snow. But she was laughing, too. “I’ll be right there.” She shook her jacket and baseball cap out and took both into her bedroom where she hung the former up and dressed in sweats and a sweatshirt and not for the first time she wished she still had Lexa’s.

“So I heard this shit is going to get bad tonight and it’s supposed to keep up through tomorrow,” Raven said when Clarke came into the kitchen.

“I heard a couple rumors to that effect. Maybe classes will be cancelled.”

“Let us dream.” Raven spooned posole into a bowl and handed it to her. “Tortillas are in the oven. I’ll bring them out.”

“Seriously, Reyes. I fucking love you,” Clarke said as she took the bowl to the table along with the garnishes. Raven liked cilantro, lime, onions, and sliced radishes in that role.

“How could you not?” she shot back.

Clarke laughed and went to get utensils and something to drink. “Beer? Wine?”

“Beer.”

Clarke took two bottles out and went back to the table. The snow piled up on the window ledge, a good four inches already. She opened both bottles and set one across from her just as Raven emerged from the kitchen with another bowl and a tortilla warmer.

“So good,” Clarke said as she took a bite. “Damn. Anya is missing out tonight.”

“Sadly, yes. But she’s out of town until Thursday. Some fancy meeting with a grant agency.”
“Oh, my God. I have you to myself for a while?” Clarke pretended to fan herself.

“Ha, ha. But I seem to recall you have a date Wednesday.”

Clarke blushed and Raven raised her eyebrows and picked up her beer.

“To Clexa.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Clarke muttered but she clinked her bottle against Raven’s.

“So. How did this coffee date come about?”

Clarke got up and went to get her phone so she could show Raven the text with the video.

“She did not,” Raven said as she watched it. “Oh, she did. She totally did. That is smooth. And what’s that envelope?” She handed the phone back and Clarke set it aside.

“I might’ve drawn a comic for her last night and I might have left it on her door.”

The spoon stopped halfway to Raven’s mouth. “Qué?”

Clarke took a drink from her bottle rather than respond.

“Elaborate. What is this comic of which you speak?”

“It was…just kind of, um, the things I’ve been thinking about where she’s concerned but haven’t said because I’m not very good at feelings.”

Raven sat back, clearly surprised. “So…who are the characters?”

“Me. Lexa. You’re in it telling me to pull my head out of my ass.”

She stared at her. “Oh, my God. You told her your side of this very new, very intense story. The stuff you didn’t say, until today.” She shook her head, eyes wide with amazement.

“Yeah. I did.” She concentrated on her food.

“And she left you a card?”

Clarke blushed again. How annoying, this instant response to conversations about Lexa. “Yes. Taped to the door. I found it this morning. She called it an old-fashioned text.”

Raven blinked. “Give me a minute.” She held up her hand. “I’m processing the overwhelming cuteness of this entire situation.”

She blushed again and Raven laughed.

“Damn. And I can finally tell my mom that someone has finally gotten to her Clarkita.” She crossed herself dramatically.

“I’m living my own telenovela.”

“There are worse things, Clarkita. Okay, serious, now. Did you for real tell her out loud what you said in your comic?”

“Yes.”
“And it clearly went well. What did she say?”

Clarke took another drink and took a second tortilla out of the warmer. “She said she’s scared, too, but that she’s more scared of not seeing where this goes than to continue.”

Raven cocked her head and her brow furrowed. “So…wait. That sounds like she’s interested in a little more serious than just hooking up.”

“She said she’d go as fast or as slow as I want to go to see what could happen. But she left it up to me.”

“And you of course said hell, yes, I want this ride.”

“Oh, my God.” She was blushing even more.

Raven laughed. “Well? What did you say?”

“Duh. Yes.” There was no way she could have refused. Lexa had some kind of power over her, had found a way to slip past her defenses and now she was standing at the door that her mutinous heart had opened.

“Holy shit. Okay, how long since she’s been with anybody?”

“She says two years.”

Raven clutched her chest. “A woman that hot? Left to her own devices that long? And she picked you, Clarke. Even though you told her she was sexing too loud.”

Clarke laughed. “God, I know.”

“Even though you flat-out told her to move her furniture so you could sleep, she picked you.”

Clarke took another bite. “And?”

“That’s the best. She’s selective. And she saw in you what so many others take months, sometimes years to figure out.”

She looked at her, puzzled.

“Griff, you’re fucking hot. I mean, that’s totally what people ascertain when they first meet you.”

Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Stop. And listen. You’re also super smart, flirtatious, and funny as hell. But you don’t ever let anybody see past your surface unless you let them. But then Lexa comes along and she saw past that surface pretty damn quick. That’s why you got so freaked. Because she saw in you what you don’t ever show and oh, noes you lost some control. Jesus, this is totally D.E.B.S. and you’re still Amy.”

“Maybe.” Clarke set her spoon down, thinking. “But she makes me feel safe. Like I can be myself and she won’t judge me for it.”

“Clearly. Because you told her about your dad pretty quick.”

“It felt right.” She shrugged and tore a piece of tortilla off and used it to wipe the sides of her bowl for posole goodness.
Raven nodded and smiled. “I am so happy right now.”

Clarke looked at her, waiting.

“All any woman who can make you feel like this is pretty special. And you know me. I’m a cynical bitch. But right before my eyes, I am witnessing a Clexonium reaction.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said as she stood and gestured at Raven’s bowl. “Do you want more?”

“No. Saving room for ice cream.”

Clarke glanced out the window at the snow. The wind had picked up and swirls of snowflakes danced outside the panes.

“What? Ice cream is always good,” Raven said, following Clarke’s gaze to the snow.

“No argument here.” She took the dishes into the kitchen, thinking about the day Lexa came over for breakfast and helped clean up, and how easy it was to be around her, how it felt so familiar but new, and how they kept circling each other, still assessing but willing to go a little farther.

Clarke cleaned the dishes but knew Raven would leave the posole out a little to cool before she put it in the fridge, so she wiped down the stove and counters. She heard Raven in the living room talking. Probably Anya.

Which made her miss Lexa. Was it weird to call? She didn’t know her that well, after all.

But she did, maybe.

On some deep, primal level. Somehow.

Fuck it. She’d text. She retrieved her phone from the table and went to her room. hey. did u get home ok? While she waited a bit for a response, she turned her light out and stood at the window, watching as snow filled the night and blanketed the streets and sidewalks. The trees might lose limbs in this, if the snow was too heavy, since a lot of them hadn’t lost all their leaves yet.

Her phone registered a text from Lexa.

Yes. You?

yes. have u had dinner? Oh, my God. What the fuck? Lexa might need to do things around the house and she had that big class project to work on. She hastily added another message. i know u have work 2 do, but we have extra & i can bring it over

A few moments later the reply came. tempting as that is, Lincoln cooked tonight. We’re crazy over here! [laughing emoji]

Clarke smiled, but didn’t respond because Lexa was working on another reply. Finally, it came.

& now I’m trying to think of excuses to see you b4 Wed. My list: borrow a cup of sugar (so not a thing anymore)/Check 2 see if ur heat is ok/Same, only with water/ Find out if u heard a weird noise down the hall

How was it possible that someone could be so damn hot and adorable all at the same time? keep trying [wink emoji]! She smiled and held the phone close to her chest, thinking that this was beyond dorky, since they literally lived right next door to each other, but also knowing that the space between them was cautious, still, as they tried not to breach boundaries the other wasn’t ready to let
down.

Lexa sent another text. *Hot chocolate. I have extra. plz help.*

She laughed out loud at that. *but ur project?*

*Even a Commander needs study breaks.*

And Clarke needed a hell of a lot more than that from her, but she wanted to make sure that she did this right, and that they were both ready for...well, for whatever time might offer. *Pancake Masters too. when?*

*15 mins. Bring Raven if she’s around.*

Clarke shook her head in wonderment at the subtle way Lexa offered her a buffer and also acknowledged Raven’s status in her life. And now she had another case of feels. Dammit. She took her slippers off and put a dry pair of sneakers on and tied her hair back before she went into the living room where Raven was stretched out on the couch Facetiming with Anya.

“Hey, Griff,” she said, “I was just giving Anya the Lexa update.”

Clarke rolled her eyes but leaned over and waved at Anya.

“I’m going to need lots of popcorn,” Anya said sardonically with a raised eyebrow and Clarke smiled.

“What’s up?” Raven asked her.

“Lexa has hot chocolate. She invited us over.”

“Us? As in you and me? Together?”

Anya laughed. “Go ahead. Looks like you could use it in that weather. Text me later, sweet stuff.”

“Okay.” Raven made kissing noises at the phone and ended the call.

“Sweet stuff,” Clarke teased.

“Yeah, whatever. I give it a week before you give Lexa a nickname.”

She blushed, because actually, she already kind of had but no way was she going to admit that to Raven. “So you want to go?”

“For hot chocolate? Do you know me?”

Clarke chuckled. “Good point. Okay. We’ll leave in a few minutes.”

“Awesome. I’m seriously liking your future girlfriend,” Raven said with a devilish grin, which only made Clarke blush again.

“A little early for that,” she muttered.

Raven didn’t respond, but she was still smiling when she got off the couch and went to her bedroom, leaving Clarke to silently go giddy over the thought of girlfriend status with Lexa even though the logic side of her brain was staring disapprovingly at her.
“Ready,” Raven said. She had changed into sweats, too, and had on a big hoodie that Clarke recognized as one of Anya’s faves. Again, she missed Lexa’s sweatshirt.

She grabbed her keys and Raven got hers, too.

“We only need one set,” Clarke said as they went into the hallway.

“Not if my Clexonium dreams come true.” She flashed her yet another wicked smile.

“Oh, my God, I can’t.”

“Yes, you can. And you’d better. Because women like that don’t come around all that often.”

“We can discuss this later.” Clarke shot her a look and knocked on Lexa’s door.

“Hi, neighbors,” Lincoln said as he opened it. “She’s in the kitchen doing barista things.”

And Clarke heard the unmistakable sound of an espresso machine steaming milk.

“Come on in. We’re just chillin’, watching some Netflix.” And he looked pretty mellow, dressed in old jeans, thick socks and a denim untucked button-down shirt.

“I’ll just go to the couch and hang out with Lincoln,” Raven said as she gave Clarke a pointed look.

“Right on.” He smiled. “We’ve got snacks going, too.”

Raven followed him and Clarke broke off and went to the kitchen because of course she would do that.

“Hi,” she said as she entered, trying not to fall over at the sight of Lexa in jeans and a T-shirt, her back to Clarke.

“Hey.” She flashed a quick smile over her shoulder. “Just about done with the last hot chocolate.”

“Can I do anything?” Besides stare at her and worship her lips and cheekbones?

“Just keep me company.”

“I think I can manage that.” Any time, any place and God, she wanted to run her fingers through Lexa’s hair as it hung around her shoulders.

Lexa grinned and picked up a cup. With her other hand, she poured steamed milk from the stainless steel pitcher into it and then, when the cup was almost full, she drew a rosette across the surface of the hot chocolate with the milk, finishing with a practiced flourish.

Oh, my God. Why was that so fucking sexy?

“Done.” Lexa allowed a little bit of steam to push through the nozzle then wiped it.

“Wow. A veritable artist.”

“Takes one to know one,” Lexa said. “A talent you have I’d like to know more about.”

“Says the Coffee Commander. And I know I did not see this coffee tech in here the last time I was over.”

“That’s because I keep it in a special place, guarded by several members of the Legion of Pancakes.”
She smiled as she put the four cups of hot chocolate on a tray. “Can you get the strawberries out of the fridge?”

Clarke opened it and stared for a moment at a plate piled with about two dozen strawberries, dipped in white chocolate and dusted with what looked like cocoa. “You’ve been holding out on me, Commander,” she said as she took it out.

Lexa shrugged and arched an eyebrow. “I told you. Important life skills were learned as a barista. Besides, I can’t have you learning all my secrets too soon.” And then she carried the tray of hot chocolates out to the living room, leaving Clarke following with the strawberries, dutifully trying not to stare at her ass, but totally failing.

“Wow,” Raven said as Lexa carefully handed her a cup, then Lincoln.

Clarke set the strawberries on the coffee table next to a bowl of pretzels, and took one of the last two cups on Lexa’s tray. She sipped and oh, my God who knew hot chocolate could taste like velvet? If velvet was edible. “This is so fucking good.”

“Right?” Lincoln said. “She’s a woman of many talents.” And he might have flashed Clarke a look, but Clarke couldn’t be sure.

Lexa set her empty tray out of the way on the coffee table and sat down on the couch, Lincoln to her left and Clarke to her right. Raven settled in the matching chair set at a right angle to Clarke’s right.

“Damn,” Raven said. “Wow. Okay, so, can I just make a formal announcement here that I am really glad you’re our neighbors. Cheers.” She raised her cup and Clarke laughed because she had a steamed milk mustache. And then she looked at Lexa and caught her just as she was licking milk off her own lips and holy shit—she wrenched her gaze away because it was probably obvious, that she was staring.

They raised their cups and Clarke settled into the easy camaraderie that flowed between all of them as they drank, talked, and ate strawberries. Lincoln told a few stories about Lexa as a kid that made Clarke’s heart practically explode even as she laughed.

“You should’ve seen her,” Lincoln said, finishing up another story. “She got home that afternoon totally covered in mud because we played football for hours in the rain. Your mom wasn’t home—”

“Thank God,” Lexa said and Clarke detected an underlying note of tension and sadness behind her smile.

“I think that was probably the only time I’ve ever seen your dad laugh that hard.” Lincoln picked up another strawberry. “I mean, he laughed until he cried.”

“Because both of us looked like we fucking climbed out of the primordial ooze,” Lexa said.

Raven almost spit her hot chocolate out.

“And he said it was a good thing my mom wasn’t home because all of us would’ve been sleeping in the yard.” She flashed Clarke a wide-eyed look.

Lincoln finished the strawberry. “As it was, he got the hose and totally hosed us down in the driveway and he was laughing the whole time and he got soaked too because we ended up in a water fight.” He stopped and stared into his cup for a few seconds. “God, we were always getting into shit.”
Lexa shoulder-bumped him. “And we had a lot of fun.”

“For sure.” He looked over at Clarke and Raven. “Lexa was pretty much the leader of our group in high school. She may seem quiet, but she’s got steel in her spine and the hugest heart. The younger students loved her because she never judged, and if you made it into our crew, you knew Lexa had your back. I always thought she should’ve gone into the military, because she would’ve been an excellent officer. The kind that soldiers would follow anywhere.”

Clarke could totally see that.

“And we had a lot of fun.”

“For sure.” He looked over at Clarke and Raven. “Lexa was pretty much the leader of our group in high school. She may seem quiet, but she’s got steel in her spine and the hugest heart. The younger students loved her because she never judged, and if you made it into our crew, you knew Lexa had your back. I always thought she should’ve gone into the military, because she would’ve been an excellent officer. The kind that soldiers would follow anywhere.”

Clarke could totally see that.

“Yeah…no,” Lexa said softly, maybe an undercurrent of a warning in her tone, and she reached for her cup.

Lincoln gave her shoulder a squeeze. “Hey, not dredging up ghosts or anything. That’s just an independent analysis.”

She smiled. “I know.” She looked over at Raven. “My dad was military. Let’s just say there’s some baggage there.”

“Gotcha.” Raven took another strawberry. “In other news, these are really fucking good.”

“Thanks,” Lexa said. “I don’t get to make them much.”

“Why not?” Clarke took another one, too.

“Busy. And no real reason to.” She paused and nailed Clarke with her gaze. “Until now.”

Sparks shot down Clarke’s back and she almost couldn’t swallow. “Well, I know just the people to invite over to indulge if you make them again,” she said, arching her eyebrow and she glanced at her lips because who the fuck wouldn’t.

“Hell, Lexa,” Lincoln said. “It just hit me. We don’t get into as much trouble as we used to. We should change that.” He finished his hot chocolate.


“Oh, see, we could start a gang.”

Everybody looked at Raven.

“I can design all kinds of cool tech that we can use to do it.”

Lincoln stared at her then laughed. “I like you, Reyes.”

She shrugged. “I’m just saying.”

“Yeah, the last thing we need is you going to the dark side,” Clarke said. “And right now, I’m still stuck on Lexa and Lincoln getting hosed down in the driveway.”

“It was hilarious,” he said. “What’s a fun memory you have, Clarke?”

Lexa caught her gaze, a flash of concern in her eyes, like she wanted to make sure Clarke was all right talking about the past. Clarke gave her a barely perceptible nod and Lexa relaxed and how the hell was it that they could read each other like that already?

She paused before answering. “Oh, here’s one. My dad liked to take me camping in our back yard
when I was a kid. It would usually be hot in the summer, but I didn’t mind. We’d sit out in the dark and watch the sky and he would tell me that fireflies were baby stars, and that when they finished their work on the planet, they’d head up to the milky way where they’d complete their evolution into full starhood.”

“That might be the sweetest thing I’ve ever heard,” Lexa said softly and Clarke swallowed around the lump in her throat and got caught in the shifting depths of her eyes and she was right there and all Clarke would have to do is lean in and—

“Yes,” Lincoln said. “That’s fucking beautiful.”

Clarke blinked and remembered that there were others in the room. “But Raven and I got up to shit, too,” Clarke said, scrambling to get her mind off Lexa’s lips. “There was one time we snuck into the high school and TP’ed the front office.”

“How the hell did you manage that?” Lexa asked.

“I have skills. And I know people,” Raven said with a shrug. “They never did find out it was us, though.” She leaned over and high-fived Clarke. “You may not realize this,” she said to Lincoln and Lexa, “but you are sitting in the presence of an epic practical joker.” She made an expansive gesture at Clarke.

“Get out,” Lincoln said.

“It’s true, young Padawan. Clarke is a Jedi Master of practical jokery. She has since reformed her ways, but every once in a while, she just might surprise you.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “I’d only do stuff like that every once in a while,” she said. “It wasn’t like I was annoying about it and did things all the time.”

“This is true.” Raven sipped her hot chocolate. “Clarke was always a good student in school and pretty popular because she didn’t really judge anybody. She hung out with lots of people, though she had a few regulars.”

“I think we would have liked you.” Lincoln picked up a handful of pretzels.

“You definitely would have,” Raven said. “Anyway, the thing with Clarke is, she’s pretty funny in general but like I said, serious about her classes and kind of a good girl, if you know what I mean. Which is why it’s even better that she was responsible for a few amazing pranks that are the stuff of legend even now.”

Clarke snorted. “Oh, my God, Raven. Really?”

“Do tell,” Lexa said, positioning herself closer to Clarke so she could look at Raven but whatever, Clarke would take any reason anywhere to sit close to her.

“Gladly. There was the one time when we were juniors and we took that giant-ass fake chicken from the fried chicken restaurant and posed it outside that grocery store, for example.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said, leaning back on the couch. “I haven’t thought about that in a while.”

“Okay, this sounds kind of awesome.” Lincoln munched another pretzel. “More details.”

“So we get this chicken,” Raven said. “It sat next to one of those old chicken shacks from the 70s or 80s.”
“Rob’s,” Clarke said. “And technically, it was a rooster.”

“Yeah, okay.” Raven rolled her eyes. “So there was this rooster made out of fiberglass and it stood about five feet tall. It was kind of a landmark—still is. It’s still next to that restaurant, though it’s not a chicken shack anymore.”

“It’s a burger place, now,” Clarke offered.

“Yes. But the chicken—excuse me, rooster—is an icon and probably because of Clarke. But I will always refer to it as a chicken, because it sounds funnier.”

Lexa laughed and leaned back, too, so she could shoulder-bump Clarke. “You iconized a chicken. Already, that’s epic.”

“Ah, but it gets better,” Raven said. “Clarke got the idea to unscrew it from its moorings and do something with it. And here’s something else about Clarke. When she decides to do something, that’s it. She does it. She will find a way to make it happen. So she comes over to my house one day and she’s all, ‘let’s take the chicken from Rob’s.’ And I’m like, ‘why?’ And she says, ‘because we can do something funny with it at Easter.’ See, it was only February when she told me this.”


Clarke leaned forward for another strawberry.

Raven nodded back at him. “Exactly. Turns out Clarke had been thinking about the great chicken plot for weeks and she’d actually been loosening its fasteners, which were basically glorified lugnuts.”

Lincoln stopped mid-chew on his current pretzel. “Shut up. What about security cameras?”

“Please,” Raven said with a snort. “Mike, the guy who ran the place then, was too cheap to get them fixed. Everybody in the area knew it, but it wasn’t, you know, a topic of conversation. Nobody ever said, ‘oh, my, Mike really should get those cameras fixed because you never know who’s going to want to borrow the chicken’.”

Clarke almost spit her strawberry out and fell back against the couch, laughing.

“Borrow?” Lexa said to her.

“Technically, we didn’t steal the chicken—rooster. We borrowed it for a little bit.” Clarke shrugged and oh, shit, her shoulder brushed Lexa’s again and Lexa didn’t move away and again Clarke’s heart sped up and damn, Lexa smelled good. That faint sandalwood outdoorsy scent that made her want to bury her face in her neck and just breathe.

“Semantics,” Raven said. “So Clarke brings this idea to me after she’s already gotten all of the lugnuts loose enough so it would be an easy matter to just pull the chicken up and take it for a ride. And—” Raven held her finger up for emphasis, “Clarke had already acquired a vehicle to do it.”

“Something else you borrowed?” Lexa asked, tone innocent.

“My dad’s truck. It had a camper shell and it was the perfect size for the chicken, if we slid it in on its side.”

Raven nodded sagely. “She had scienced its dimensions already.”
“Oh, this is good,” Lincoln mumbled around another pretzel.

“Right?” Raven said. “So I’m all, ‘what do you want to do with it?’ And she told me and I was so in. But we had to enlist a couple of others, and we did. The thing is, Clarke had this rep as kind of a cool good girl, but a very few of us knew about her streak, and we just thought it was so cool that she had it, this ability to go pranking, so whenever Clarke planned a prank, anybody she got to do it with was so stoked to be in on it that they would totally cover for her. That was most of the fun of doing something with Clarke fucking Griffin, was being in on this private joke, like a weird version of a war story. So years later, you’d maybe run into Clarke online or something and you’d be all, ‘remember the chicken? That was epic.’ And then you’d have a laugh about it again. Legacy pranks, man.”

“I’m gonna write that down,” Lincoln said. “Legacy pranks. And hold on—does anybody want a beer?”

“I would love one,” Raven said. “Story-telling makes me thirsty. Also, bathroom break.”

“C’mon,” Lexa said. “I need the rest of this story.”

“And you shall have it, Padawan. Give me a minute.”

Lincoln went to the kitchen and Raven to the bathroom, leaving Clarke alone with Lexa on the couch and it was both exciting and nerve-wracking.

“So,” Lexa said. “Master of Pancakes is master of much more.”

“Yeah, well, high school wasn’t necessarily the best place to be. My mom and I had a hard time getting along. My dad said it was because I was a lot like her in some ways, and so we had similar energy crashing into each other.” She leaned forward for her cup, still half-full of hot chocolate.

“How are you like her?”

She smiled. “Stubborn, mostly. But my dad said my mom was the strongest person he knew until I came along.” She stared into her cup. “He would tell me stuff like that after my mom and I would get into it. I know he was hoping that I would see that my mom and I were stronger as allies than adversaries, but it was still hard with her, sometimes.”

“And now?”

“We’re much, much better now. When my dad got sick is when things started to shift, but it took a while and after he died, it was really hard because we really didn’t know each other that well without him as a buffer. It’s been a learning process for us. But we’re getting there.”

“I’m glad,” Lexa said, and Clarke fell right into her eyes again, and everything seemed to heat between them.

“Me, too,” Clarke managed and Lexa glanced at her lips then back at her eyes and oh, God, everything was on fucking fire and Clarke leaned a little closer because this connection was stronger than gravity and—

“Lexa, you want a beer?” Lincoln called from the kitchen. “Clarke?”

Lexa cleared her throat. “Actually, yes.”

“Same,” Clarke said and Lexa gave her one of her slow, sexy smiles just as Raven returned.
“Okay, people. Let us return to the tale of the great chicken caper.” She plopped back down in the chair and Lincoln came out of the kitchen with four bottles, two in each hand. He set three on the coffee table and Clarke handed one to Raven and took one for herself while Lexa took the third.

“All right, so here we are in February and Clarke has already prepared the chicken for the caper. She’d been thinking about this since December, you see, because she plays a long game, which is why her pranks can be so epic. And two weeks before Easter, we enlisted two more minions.”

“And they kept it quiet?” Lincoln asked as he grabbed more pretzels.

“Oh, of course. This is another Griffin plot, so they were excited to be chosen.”

Clarke shook her head, embarrassed.

“So it’s the Saturday before Easter rolls around and everything seems normal. We all go to bed around midnight and then we all sneak out of our respective houses at about one in the morning. Clarke had her dad’s truck and picked us up—”

“How?” Lexa asked. “I mean, she couldn’t just go to each house. It would be too obvious.”

“Exactly. Which is why we were careful with our minion selection. We all lived in the same neighborhood, and there was a park a few blocks away and I went there with the two others and Clarke came by and we piled into the back.”

“Did you disguise the truck? I mean, people probably knew Clarke’s dad had it.” Lincoln gestured with his beer.

“Yes and no,” Raven said. “He didn’t drive it around much. And Clarke put a different plate on it that night.”

Lexa grinned. “Seriously?”

“Yeah,” Raven said. “She had a few plates that she’d randomly acquired and she put one on.”

“I think it was the Iowa one,” Clarke said and Lincoln chuckled.

“So we go to Rob’s and Clarke parks the truck behind the building, since the police sometimes patrolled out there late on Saturdays.” Raven leaned forward, conspiratorial. “The chicken was kind of heavy, but Clarke and I had figured it would be, so we put it on a skateboard and rolled it to the truck then loaded it in. It fit perfectly, with room for one of us with it and two others in the cab.”

Lexa took a pull from her beer. “I feel like this could be a really good episode of *Scooby-Doo* or something.”

Raven nodded. “Right? So we drive the chicken over to a grocery store on the other side of town. We picked this one because it closed early on Saturdays, and everybody left by ten. Also, it was easy for me to deal with the one security camera near the main entrance, but we shall not talk of this. Suffice it to say that it worked fine twenty minutes after we were gone.”

Lincoln was laughing again and another of Lexa’s slowburn smiles made Clarke hurt in really good ways.

“And now for the finale. We set this chicken up by the front door of the store. It was, like, two-thirty in the morning at this point. Clarke had gotten a sign ready and she hung it around its neck and it said ‘save the children’ and it had a picture of an Easter egg on it.”
Lincoln stared at Clarke for a beat then doubled over with laughter.

“Holy shit,” Lexa said, her smile widening to an appreciative grin. And nobody caught you?”

“No,” Raven said. “Most people in the area thought it was hilarious, since nobody got hurt and nothing was damaged. A few other high school students took the chicken back to Rob’s the Monday after and bolted it back down, since we had left all the hardware there, and everything was as it was. Clarke even offered to repaint it.”

“Oh, slick,” Lincoln said. “Did you?” he asked her.

She nodded. “Yep. It had gotten pretty weather-beaten over the years anyway, and Mike was only too happy to have it fixed up a bit for free, as cheap as he was. So the next Saturday I did that.”

“Totally covered your ass,” Raven said.

“Damn,” Lexa said. “Truly, we are in the presence of greatness.”

“Yes.” Raven sat back. “People still talk about that.”

“My mom suspected,” Clarke said. “And I’m pretty sure my dad knew, but hell, I got the streak from him. I remember when he came home with the newspaper Monday after that Easter and there’s a picture of the chicken outside the store and he thought it was funny as hell and he said that it was an epic prank and he hoped no one ever found out who did it and then he kind of gave me this look, so he probably knew. But he never asked.”

Raven pointed her beer bottle at Clarke. “And another time—”

“Really?” Clarke said. “You’re revealing all my secrets?”

“Well, yeah.”

“More please,” Lincoln said.

“Seconded,” Lexa added.

Clarke groaned. “Shit.”

“So our senior year,” Raven said, “Clarke got a bunch of people in our class to sneak into the school —and yes, I still had my ways and my connections—and switch all the furniture in six classrooms, setting them up exactly as they were in the original rooms. That one was pretty funny and once again, we got away with it. It was the only thing people talked about at the school for two weeks.”

“Damn. I wish I’d known you in high school.” Lincoln ate another pretzel.

“Everybody covered for us, then, too, because they liked the laugh.” Raven smiled. “I’m telling you, Clarke has this ability to get people to buy into whatever she’s doing. I mean, you just trust her decisions, whether it’s an epic prank that hurts nobody but makes everybody laugh for years or some kind of event she puts together to benefit a kids’ hospital or something. She’s just got that way about her. And she can play a long game, like I said. Setting things in motion a while before anything actually happens.”

“I can see it,” Lexa said, a thoughtful expression in her eyes but another of her smoldering smiles on her lips. “And I agree, that we are indeed in the presence of a Jedi Prankmaster.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Clarke said, but she was smiling because Lexa’s thigh had bumped hers.
“We had some good times,” Raven said as she took one of the last strawberries off the tray. Bad times, too, but we stuck together. I know I couldn’t have gotten through high school without her.”

“Aww,” Clarke said and she reached over and squeezed Raven’s thigh. “Thanks, Reyes. You got me through some shit, too. And you still do.”

“And don’t you forget it.”

Clarke chuckled. “How can I? You won’t let me.”

And suddenly all of their phones dinged with texts. They all looked at each other then at their respective phones and Clarke almost laughed again because it was like a well-calibrated scene in a movie.

“Yes,” Raven said with a fist pump. “Official university announcement. Snow day.”

“Is it that bad out?” Lincoln got up and moved the curtain to look out the window. “Oh. Yeah.”

“Really?” Raven got up, too, and then all of them were staring out the window, and Clarke estimated that at least six inches of snow had already accumulated and it wasn’t letting up. Cars parked on the street looked like white hillocks.

“Damn. I need to call Octavia,” Lincoln said and he went into his room.

“Yeah, I’m gonna get going, too,” Raven said, giving Clarke a pointed look. “But let me help you clean up,” she added, looking at Lexa.

“No, I’ve got it,” Clarke said. “Go finish your convo with Anya.”

“Okay, then. Lexa, thank you for the awesome hot chocolate and the snacks.”

“Thank you for the stories,” Lexa said, with a sly smile directed at Clarke.

“Any time. I’ve got a million of ’em. See you back at the ranch, Griff.”

Clarke walked her to the door and Raven gave her the biggest shit-eating grin. “Snow day, Griff,” she said in a low voice. “You know what that means.”

“No classes. And I can catch up on some stuff.” But she knew damn well what Raven meant.

“Oh, my God. No, dumbass. It means you can be up really late tonight. Have fun.” She ducked out and shut the door before Clarke could retort.

“Hey, it’s cool if you need to go,” Lexa said behind her. “There’s not that much to clean up.”

“You remember that rule you have about cleaning after somebody cooks?” Clarke regarded her a moment, marveling at the way heat built between them so quickly. “I have the same rule.”

“I see,” Lexa said. “Well, don’t let me get in your way.” She smirked as Clarke brushed past her and collected the cups and tray Lexa had used earlier for them. Lexa gathered the beer bottles and now-empty plate that held the strawberries and they went into the kitchen where Clarke washed the cups and plate while Lexa cleaned her espresso maker.

“Thanks for the study break,” Clarke said as she set the cups in the drying rack near the sink.

“Thanks for letting me tempt you.” She looked up from the machine. “I had a really good time. And
now I feel like I want to go and find this burger place and behold the legendary chicken.”

Clarke laughed. “It’d be a fun road trip. I haven’t been back to see it in a while.” And then she caught herself, because she was making assumptions, wasn’t she? That Lexa would want to do something like that with her—

“I would love to do that.”

Oh, God. Those damn dive-bombing butterflies again.

“Well, sadly, tonight’s out of the question,” Clarke said. “Rain check? Or maybe snow check?”

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “Definitely.”

And oh, Jesus, nobody should be this inviting without even fucking trying.

“So I know you have that big project you’re working on,” Clarke said, “but if you want another study break tomorrow, I make pretty good pancakes.”

“I’ve heard that about you. Does this mean I don’t need to come up with another list of reasons to convince you to see me tomorrow?”

Clarke smiled and bit her lower lip. “Not necessary. I’ll make an exception.”

And damn, there it was, that slow half-smile that was both promise and invitation. “I’ve got to check in with the other people working on that project with me, so I’m not sure when I can get that break. Okay to text you?”

“Always.”

And the smile widened, and the expression in Lexa’s eyes was like she had just won the lottery or something, like she couldn’t believe her luck, and Clarke suddenly wanted to pull her into a hug and hold on to her and tell her it was okay, she was here, and wasn’t going to run away. Except Lincoln came in and Lexa took a subtle half-step back.

“Hey, Clarke. Sorry I missed Raven leaving. Just wanted to say good night and thanks for hanging out.”

“Yeah, of course. Let’s definitely do this again.”

He gave her a quick hug then addressed Lexa. “I’m gonna try to get over to Octavia’s tomorrow.”

“Okay. But if the roads are really bad, don’t.”

“Yeah. ’Night.” He left and Clarke stood for a moment, debating options. “I’d better get going,” she said, because though she didn’t want to, she knew that it was probably for the best for both of them this night. She went to the door, Lexa following, but neither of them opened it.

“I want to talk more about this art streak you have,” Lexa said, and they were standing so close, close enough for Clarke to—fuck it. This was opportunity, goddammit. She cupped Lexa’s cheek and ran her thumb lightly across it and Lexa stared at her, and she didn’t move, eyes wide with disbelief and Clarke pulled her gently closer and kissed her and oh, God, it was like Saturday night and everything in her brain felt like it was short-circuiting and then rewiring and Jesus nothing could feel as good as Lexa’s lips against hers.

They stopped as if by mutual agreement, foreheads pressed together like at the club, breathing
heavily, Clarke’s hand still on Lexa’s cheek, Lexa’s hands somehow on Clarke’s hips, and it was like time compressed into this one point, like Clarke had been waiting for this moment for years.

And then Clarke smiled. “Just so we’re clear, you can talk to me about whatever the hell you want,” she said softly. And she kissed her again—this one a gentle, quick brush of her lips that assured much more later—then slowly pulled away and opened the door. “Good night, Lexa,” she said and she stepped into the hallway, mouth tingling and nerve endings sparking. She wasn’t sure how she was able to make it to her own door and get it unlocked.

“Clarke,” Lexa said, and Clarke looked at her, standing there in the hallway near her own door.

“Yes?” She said, teasing, a tide of warmth rushing over her.

“I can play a long game, too.” She smiled. “Good night.” And then she went back inside and Clarke entered her apartment and leaned back against the door and closed her eyes, that damn heat still roaring through her blood and Lexa’s damn smile still floating in her mind’s eye.

Fuck, she was hooked.

Completely.

And she wouldn’t change a thing.

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Chapter End Notes

I can totally see Clarke and Raven doing the great chicken caper in high school. And I'm pretty sure all these stories about the past have both Clarke and Lexa all up in the feels.

And fuck it, I'm a foodie. #sorrynotsorry. Try this recipe for Raven's posole (yes, it's also spelled pozole).
Snow Day Picnic

Chapter Summary

SNOW DAY, BITCHEZ! Clarke goes to the store in the morning and runs into Lexa. Then later, Lexa asks if she can move their date up a day. Pretty sure you all know what Clarke says to that. And there's more food up in here. GAWD. wtf with me and the food.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“They are you even here this morning?” Raven asked when Clarke came into the kitchen. “And not next door? I expected a walk of shame, dammit.”

Clarke smiled and poured herself a cup of coffee and went to the fridge for the cream.

“Hmm,” Raven said from where she leaned against the counter, wearing her big blue fuzzy robe that made her look seriously cute.

“You have a certain glow. Not quite full-blown Clexonium, but…” she waggled her eyebrows.

“There might have been another moment.” Clarke poured a splash of cream into her cup, thinking about how Lexa created the design on the hot chocolate the night before, and about her smile and her laugh and Jesus every fucking thing about her.


She sipped and leaned back against the counter next to Raven. “This could be problematic,” she said.

“How?”

Clarke sighed. “I really like her.”

“Thank God. Because she is clearly way into you.”

“Do you think I’m ready for—” she stopped, not sure what she was trying to say.

Raven regarded her over the rim of her cup then lowered it. “For more than casual?”

She didn’t respond and Raven’s brow furrowed.

“Yes. Because if that’s what it feels like—if that’s what all the signs are telling you, then you’re ready. And wow.”

“It’s like I got hit by a metaphorical truck,” Clarke said. “Totally blindsided. And no matter how hard I fight it—”

“Why are you fighting it?”

Clarke gave her a look. “Do you even know me?”
She rolled her eyes. “We’ve had this conversation. I know it’s kind of an automatic response with you, but look what you did. You got scared, you told her, and she’s still around. And so are you. So why exactly are you fighting it?”

“Automatic response. But my point is, no matter how hard I do that where she’s concerned, the harder it gets.”

Raven sipped. “Then clearly, you’re not supposed to be fighting it. And no, that’s not any kind of science there, but I am also a believer in listening to your instincts and ever since you met Lexa, there’s a part of you on autopilot headed right for her, no matter how hard you try to turn that off and steer away.”

“But doesn’t that happen with people who are bad for you, too?”

“Yes and no.” Raven poured herself more coffee. “I mean, we all have those moments where we’re attracted to someone who’s not good for us, but every time, there’s always a little tiny prickle of warning. And we ignore it. Do you have anything like that where Lexa’s concerned?”

“No. The opposite.”

“There’s your answer.” Her eyes seemed to sparkle. “And it looks good on you. So I expect a walk of shame in the near future.”

Clarke shook her head, and a blush worked its way up her neck. “Do you want breakfast?” she asked as she moved toward the dining nook and looked out the window.

“Nice deflection,” Raven teased.

“I know. But wow. Look at that.” Clarke stared out the window, at the untrammeled winter wilderness. “That’s probably almost a foot of snow.”

“Is it still snowing?” Raven asked behind her.

“Not really.” But that could change, as the sky was still a flat light gray. An SUV drove slowly down the street, helping carve tracks in the road and behind him some dedicated soul jogged in one of them, a dog romping along beside him. “Bagels,” Clarke said. “We need bagels.”

“Are you serious right now?”

“I’ll go.”

“Are they even open?”

Clarke shrugged. “I’ll call.” She set her cup down and went to get her phone so she could look up the number to the nearby store. Bellamy had texted that study group was cancelled—she figured as much. She called the store and a chipper employee answered right away, telling her that yes, they were open.

“Yes,” Clarke said when she went back to the dining nook. “They’re open. What else do you want?”

“Orange juice and bacon. Oh, and cheese.”

“Bagel sandwiches. Do we have enough eggs?”

Raven checked. “Better get more.”
“Okay. Let me get dressed.”

“I’ll just stay here and recline on the couch like the poor soul I am.”

Clarke laughed. “Pobrecita.* And Anya might need to hear from you, too.”

“She’s in meetings all morning trying to score big money for more research. I’m not going to bother her. She told me I distract her.” Raven grinned. “Not in a bad way.”

“I figured.” Clarke went back to her bedroom and put on a pair of old jeans, her winter boots, and a sweatshirt. She took her lightweight down jacket out of her closet, grabbed a scarf, gloves, and knit hat before she got her wallet and phone. The latter went into one of the interior pockets of her jacket.

“See you in a bit,” Clarke said as she pulled her gloves on. “Text or call if you think of anything else we need.”

“Yep. Maybe you should check with Lexa, see if there’s anything she needs.” And then she did one of her evil laughs that followed Clarke out into the hall. The thought had crossed her mind, but she knew Lexa was busy with her project. She hadn’t texted yet, either, so Clarke walked past her door, but looking at it reminded her of the night before and—fuck, just go down the damn stairs, she remonstrated herself.

Crisp, cold air greeted her when she exited the building, and she thought about how she and her dad would go sledding when she was a kid, and how they’d both yell and laugh all the way down the hill, sometimes tipping over and then they’d laugh harder. Even Abby would get into it with them, taking photos and joining either Clarke or Jake on the sled.

Light snow continued, but the worst of the storm had passed and Clarke started walking to the store, finding a path on the sidewalk that some intrepid soul had already shoveled. Laughter and shouting drifted in the crystalline air from the park and as she got closer, she saw several people enjoying the weather. A few kids were making snow angels and snowmen while a couple of dudes were playing with dogs and throwing sticks for them. One lone cross-country skier glided through all of them.

And nearby a bunch of people were engaged in a major snowball fight, right down to a hastily constructed bulwark that three people were crouched behind. As Clarke passed, a barrage of snowballs sailed over the bulwark and landed on the sidewalk and the people behind it scattered, chased by a few others. She stopped to watch and ducked as another snowball flew overhead and landed in the street. And then one hit her on the thigh and Clarke decided she needed to get out of the line of fire when a familiar figure raced toward her from the park, a fierce grin on her lips.

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Clarke said and she immediately crouched and created a snowball and as Lexa drew closer, Clarke aimed and let it fly and it hit Lexa’s arm.

Lexa laughed and slowed down as she approached. “Nice throw. Have you considered football?” And holy shit, she was so fucking cute, with her knit cap and red-tinged cheeks and nose. Her eyes sparked with amusement.

“No, but now that you mention it, I might know someone who plays.” And then she raised an eyebrow. “So. Study break?” she teased.

Lexa chuckled. “Actually, I stayed up pretty late and finished almost all of what I had to do. I was on my way to the store but the guys from the other side of the hall were out here goofing off, so I joined in.” And then she suddenly bent over, gathered a couple handfulls of snow, and dumped it on Clarke’s head.
“Oh, no you didn’t.” Clarke lunged for her and Lexa dodged, laughing, then started running back into the park, Clarke just behind her, also laughing. Right into the middle of the current battle they ran, and snowballs flew around them, a few hitting her on the legs and back, but she didn’t mind and instead chased Lexa right over the makeshift snow bulwark, which threw them both off-balance. Lexa went down in the snow first, Clarke right after her. Lexa tried to scramble to her feet, but Clarke grabbed her legs and brought her down again.

“Oh, shit,” Lexa said, gasping for breath and laughing. “Good tackle. And now I’m at the mercy of the Pancake Master.”

“Vengeance is mine.” And Clarke dropped a bunch of snow on her head but Lexa grabbed her arm and pulled her down and they were both laughing and wrestling until they both collapsed, Lexa half on Clarke and even through all their layers of clothing, Clarke was only too aware of their proximity and she wanted much, much more.

Unfortunately, Lexa rolled off onto her back next to Clarke, though her arm stayed in contact with hers. They lay there in companionable silence for a few moments, catching their breath.

“So is this on your list of things to try to get to see me?” Clarke asked, turning her head to look at her.

“No. But I think I’ll add it. I like the result.” And she grinned and if Clarke hadn’t actually felt the cold from the snow seeping into the backs of her thighs, she would have thought it had all melted from the expression on Lexa’s face.

“Same,” she said, smiling back, and Lexa stared at her. “What?” Clarke asked.

“I—it just kills me when you do that,” she said softly.

“Do what?”

“Your smile. It wrecks me.”

Clarke stared back at her, heart pounding. “I hope that’s good.”

“Yes. So much yes.”

And then Clarke grabbed the front of Lexa’s jacket and pulled her out of the way as a guy dove into the snow next to her, trying to avoid another snowball attack.

“Fuck,” he said, laughing, as he got to his feet and staggered away, stopping to make and fire a couple of snowballs back.

Clarke’s actions resulted in Lexa on top of her, and she stared up into her eyes, knowing that what she saw in them was in hers, too, and how was this possible, the connection that arced between them? How was it possible, all of these overwhelming emotions for a woman she’d only recently met? But goddamn, her heart was on autopilot, like Raven said, and was beelining right for Lexa.

“Thanks,” Lexa said, but she didn’t make any motion to get up, for which Clarke was only too glad.

“It’s the duty of the Master of Pancakes to aid the Commander when she can.”

A half-smile pulled at the corner of Lexa’s mouth and she gently brushed Clarke’s hair away from her face. “It seems you have some…snow in your hair.”
“Huh. Wonder how it got there.” She sounded normal and collected but inside she was nearly liquefying at Lexa’s gesture.

Lexa laughed. “So might I have the pleasure of your company to the store?”

“I think I can accommodate that.”

She carefully got up, much to Clarke’s vast disappointment, and helped her up.

“Jesus,” Clarke said as she brushed herself off. “It seems I have snow in a lot of other places, too.”

“You’re not alone,” Lexa said as she brushed off her jeans. “Ready?”

“Totally.” And it was so damn easy to be around her, Clarke thought as they walked to the store, laughing and talking. Easy and charged, and everything just felt…right. Like this was exactly where she needed to be, and this was exactly how things were supposed to unfold. The door to her heart was wide open. All she had to do was let Lexa in.

*Pobrecita: poor baby

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“Okay, I know there’s a lot of snow out there, but did you have to crawl in it to get to the store?” Raven asked from the couch when Clarke let herself in and started to divest herself of her wet clothing.

“I might’ve had a snowball fight at the park,” she said, sheepish. And then she went to her bedroom before Raven could say anything else to change into sweats. She then went back to the front door to retrieve the grocery bags but Raven had already taken them into the kitchen.

“Snowball fight?” Raven asked with a smirk as she unloaded the groceries.

“And Lexa might have been involved. And she might have been on her way to the store, too.”

Raven laughed. “That’s one of the mysterious properties of Clexonium.”

Clarke got two frying pans out. “What?”

“It inevitably attracts those who share its properties. Which are extremely rare, since only two people on the planet share them.” She handed her two eggs and raised her eyebrows.

“You and your ships.”

“And this one is sailing, bitches.”

Clarke snorted and blushed as she cracked the eggs with a flourish into one of the pans. “Maybe.”

“Spare me. You started raising the anchor the night you danced with her at the club.”

“Whatever.” But she smiled because Raven was probably right. Something happened that night, and it hadn’t stopped happening since.

“And will a certain neighbor be joining us for this most delicious repast?” Raven asked. “You’ll need to cook another egg.”
“No. She’s almost done with her project and she wants to finish it before this afternoon.”

“Uh-huh. At which point she will no doubt suggest a movie.”

“I don’t know what her plans are.” Clarke placed strips of bacon in the other pan. “She said she’d text me later, though.”

“That’s her plan.” Raven chortled. “Anya’s right. We’re going to need a lot more popcorn.” She started toasting bagel halves.

Clarke didn’t reply, but she was still smiling, thinking about what Lexa had said at the park about her smile. And who was she kidding? She thought about her practically nonstop, and that unvarnished admission in the park made her feel lighter than she had in years.

The bagels finished around the same time the eggs did and Raven placed slices of cheese on each bagel half then Clarke put an egg on top of the cheese then a couple slices of bacon. And after they had eaten and cleaned up, Clarke went to her room to study and she was mostly successful for a couple of hours and got done what she had wanted to. Then she got up and went to her sketchbook to the drawing she had done of Lexa as a black-coated warrior.

She stared at it for a while then took her pens and added more details, working steadily until Lexa—no, Commander Lexa—was practically flowing off the page, expression in her eyes focused and resolute but Clarke knew that underneath it were so many other layers and she had only just begun to tap them.

A text came in and she glanced at the screen of her phone and smiled because anything Lexa did seemed to make her do that.

*Hey, Lexa texted, wondering if I could move Wed. date up & talk you into Thai 2nite.*

God, even a text got her all worked up. And she didn’t miss how Lexa referred to Wednesday as a date. & *what could the Commander possibly offer for such a thing?*

She set the phone aside and continued working on the drawing until the next message arrived.

*The Commander has only her humble company to offer the Master of Pancakes. She hopes such is amenable.*

Clarke groaned softly because goddamn, even Lexa’s wordy and well-articulated texts were hot. *The Master of Pancakes accepts. Time?*

Her phone rang with Lexa’s tone. “Hi,” Clarke said, a little surprised but also excited to hear her voice.

“Hi. So maybe this is a little forward, but the truth is, I would love to see you now.”

Clarke might have forgotten how to breathe.

“No pressure. I just really enjoy being around you. I was hoping maybe you’d help me watch *Wonder Woman* and eat snacks. Maybe. If you want to,” she added hastily. And she sounded so shy but hopeful and fuck, Clarke would’ve said yes to anything Lexa suggested, but hell, she was also really endearing.

“I would love that,” she said. “When?”
“Um. Now? I mean, I wasn’t kidding about the now part. But if you’re in the middle of something or need to get some things done, I totally understand—”

“Give me ten minutes.”

Pause. Then, “Really?” Cautious, like she wanted to make sure that she wasn’t interrupting.

“Really. Should I bring anything?”

“I’ve got it covered. And if Raven wants to come, that’s okay too. Lincoln’s at Octavia’s tonight, so there’s plenty of room on the couch.”

And that was Lexa offering her a buffer, trying to make sure she was comfortable being around her. “I’ll check,” she said, but she hoped Raven said no. “See you in a bit.”

“Great. The door’s open. Bye.” She hung up and Clarke put her pens away and closed her laptop and organized her books and though she knew that she probably looked like the heart eyes emoji, she went out into the living room anyway. Raven was at the table in the dining room doing her own studying.

“Lexa called.”

“Of course she did,” Raven said with a wicked little smile.

“She invited us over to watch Wonder Woman.”

“Maybe next time. I need to get through some class stuff.” She gave Clarke a smirk. “But even if I didn’t, I’d still say no because this is all about the Clexonium.”

Clarke started to respond then stopped and sniffed. “Did you make biscochitos?”

“I love how you know the foods of my people. Yes. And I’m still making them. This weather gets me all homebodied up.” She stood. “Take some to Lexa’s.”

“Seriously?”

“Duh. What kind of BFF would I be if I sent you off to a snow day rendezvous empty-handed?” And she went into the kitchen and loaded up a plate with several cookies. Clarke ate one while she watched her, and powdered sugar stuck to her fingertips. She licked it off.

“I love these things.”

“Right?” Raven covered the plate loosely with plastic wrap and handed it to her.

“Thanks.”

“De nada.** Go. I’ll see you when I see you.”

“Call or text if you need anything.”

“I’d tell you the same thing, but I’m pretty sure you’re going to be just fine.” She grinned. “More than fine.”

Clarke shrugged, trying to be nonchalant. “Whatever. It’s a movie and Thai later.”

“Uh-huh. Now you kids play safe.”
“Jesus Christ, Raven.” Clarke avoided her gaze but she was smiling as she took her keys off the hook by the door—she’d become almost obsessive about it since she locked herself out—and stepped into the hall then wondered if maybe she should change. She was currently wearing sweats and a sweatshirt and a pair of beat-up slip-on sneakers she used as slippers in the house.

“Go,” Raven said from the doorway.

“Should I put jeans on?”

“It’s a snow day. I guarantee she’s dressed the same way.”

She had a point. Clarke went to Lexa’s door. Behind her, Raven had gone back inside. Clarke tried the door, and like Lexa had said, it was open. She knocked anyway, just to be polite, before she went in.

“Hey,” Clarke called. “Just me. Not some creepy ax murderer.” She heard Lexa laugh and then she appeared from around the corner and like Raven had said, she was wearing sweats and a sweatshirt, too but fuck, she was still beautiful and her smile lit up her eyes.

“But if you were a creepy ax murderer, don’t you think the first thing you’d say is that you’re not?” Lexa said as she moved past her and locked the door.

“There is a certain logic to your point.” Clarke pulled the plastic wrap away from the cookies.

“Oh, my God. Biscochitos?” Lexa looked at the cookies then at Clarke.

“Yes. Raven just made them and she insisted that I bring them.”

She took one and bit into it. “So good,” she mumbled as she wiped her lips with her other hand and Clarke wanted to lick the powdered sugar off her fingers, but this space they shared was still tentative, still careful, and she liked this dance, liked the respectful way they negotiated slowly deepening intimacy.

Still chewing, Lexa motioned toward the kitchen and Clarke followed, everything tingling again because she had that fucking effect on her.

“I smell coffee.”

“Fresh. And I’m hoping you’ll have some.”

“I think you know my opinion about your coffee,” Clarke said and she took the plate of cookies to the coffee table where Lexa had already placed some other snacks, including a bowl of popcorn and another, smaller bowl of M&Ms. Next to that were two more plastic bowls, both empty. The TV was already on, ready to stream *Wonder Woman*.

“Do you want something to drink other than water?” Lexa asked as she carried two cups over to her. “I got fancy and I do have sparkling water.”

“That would be perfect.”

Lexa set the cups carefully next to the popcorn. “Lime, lemon, or berry?”

“Lime.”

“Be right back.”
Clarke surreptitiously watched her, and reminded herself that they had only just met, but everything felt a lot deeper than that. The over-analytical part of her brain demanded to know what that meant but again, her heart overrode it and told her to trust the process. And it felt good to do that, Clarke decided as Lexa returned with two cans of sparkling water, one lime and one berry.

“Movie time,” she said as she set the cans down and gestured at the couch. “And I, too, have official movie blankets.” She grabbed one off the chair Raven had occupied the night before and handed it to her and took another off the opposite end of the couch for herself.

Clarke settled onto the couch to Lexa’s right and loaded one of the empty bowls up with popcorn and handed it to her. “Let’s do this.”

Lexa grinned and started the movie and Clarke got even more comfortable and she might have moved a little closer to Lexa (okay, she totally did) and by the time they were halfway through the movie, Clarke was leaning against her and even that was a version of heaven.

“I like how you get into movies,” Lexa said.

“Meaning what?”

“You cheer and laugh and just…get into it.”

“I’ll have you know, though, that I do not talk when in an actual theater.” Clarke had set the big bowl of popcorn between them on the couch and she grabbed a handful.

“But do you cheer and laugh in an actual theater?”

“You’ll just have to go with me to find out,” she said with a shrug. “And for the record, I really don’t think the writers needed to hook Steve up with Diana.”

“I’m in agreement.”

“I mean, what the hell? They have a nice rapport without the hookup. And seriously, you get the impression that Diana basically pined for him for years.”

“Pined,” Lexa said with a little snort. “She Chris Pined.”

Clarke laughed. “Okay, that was dorky but funny. And really? She didn’t hit it with anybody else after the war?”

“What about a movie with Diana during World War II hooking up with Agent Carter? That would be well worth the price of admission.”

“I’d watch the shit out of that. Steve Rogers—what the hell with these dudes named Steve?—would try to ask Peggy out and she’d look at her watch and say, ‘nah, gotta go. Diana and I have important work to do’.”

Lexa snickered and they fell silent again as the showdown with Ares approached.

“I love this scene,” Clarke said, riveted when it started to unfold. “I love the whole idea of it, and the power Diana tapped into and then realized that ultimately, her strength came from love. God, there’s something so fucking emotional about that for me.”

“Because we’re taught that love is weakness when in fact, it’s the opposite.” She glanced at Clarke. “I’m still working on it.”
“What do you mean?”

“Just that it’s a little hard for me to trust people, especially given my past.” She smoothed the blanket where it rested on her legs.

“You seem to be doing all right with me,” Clarke said, voice soft.

“I’m going on instinct in that regard.” She tempered the admission with a half-smile.

“Same here.” Clarke gently squeezed Lexa’s hand and leaned into her, fingers interlaced and they watched the rest of the movie in companionable but achingly charged silence, Lexa’s thumb lightly stroking Clarke’s, and she felt it all the way to her toes.

The credits ended and Lexa looked at her, expression shifting between unreadable and maybe a little scared but also hopeful. “Dinner?”

“Definitely.”

“Cool. I’ll get the menu.” She slowly pulled her hand away and got up and Clarke did, too, and picked up the snack bowls and carried them to the kitchen. She almost bumped into Lexa on her way back to the living room and they stopped and stared at each other for a moment and it was funny, this ultra-careful interaction, as if they were both assessing what it might mean to go a little further, to touch a little more, to let the connection between them guide the next steps.

And another of Lexa’s slow, sultry smiles broke the moment but infused it with so much more and Clarke smiled back because holy shit, how could she not.

“Just set that stuff on the counter. We can deal with it later.”

She liked how Lexa used “we” instead of “I,” like she expected her to be in her space for a while longer, like she belonged here. Once she did what Lexa requested, she joined her at the couch where they picked a few dishes from the restaurant. Lexa called the order in and paid with a credit card and then the two of them did, indeed, clean up snack central, bantering back and forth until they finished.

“There’s a bottle of wine in the fridge,” Lexa said as she opened one of the drawers and handed Clarke a corkscrew. “Could you take care of it?”

Clarke raised an eyebrow. “I think I can handle it.”

“I have complete faith in your abilities.” Lexa left and Clarke got the wine out—a pinot grigio, which she appreciated—and set to work with the corkscrew. She heard Lexa’s phone ring and then her voice.

“They’re downstairs,” she told Clarke as she walked past on her way to the door. Be right back.”

“Okay.” Clarke found wineglasses in one of the cabinets and plates and set them all on the counter then got utensils out of another drawer, thinking that she missed Lexa’s presence, even when it was only for a few minutes, and she smiled when she heard her come in.

“Dinner,” Lexa announced in the kitchen doorway, holding a bulging plastic bag filled with food containers. “And I had an idea.”

Clarke waited.

“Snow day picnic.”
“I generally trust that the Commander is in control of her faculties, but—”

Lexa grinned. “Grab the wine.” And she motioned with her head toward the living room.

Clarke did, bottle in one hand while she held the wineglasses by their stems in the other and went back to the living room and goddammit, Lexa had put a blue-green batik tablecloth on the coffee table and she had set three pillar candles roughly in the middle and as Clarke watched, she lit them then set the matchbook aside and changed the TV channel to a worldbeat music station.

“I stand corrected,” Clarke said. “The Commander is always in control of her faculties.” And she set the glasses down and poured each half-full while Lexa went back to the kitchen. She came back with the plates and utensils Clarke had already set out.

They sat down, backs against the couch, and Clarke stretched her legs out underneath the coffee table and helped Lexa open containers and then she served them both and she liked the rhythm they fell into, an instinctive way of interacting, each automatically taking care of things in a seamless, interlocking way that felt long-practiced. And when their plates were full, they both picked up their wine glasses.

Lexa smiled. “Thanks for coming over,” she said.

“Thanks for inviting me.” Clarke touched her glass to Lexa’s and as she sipped, she thought about what her mom had said, about taking chances even though she was scared, and something else settled into place, a certainty about Lexa and her own place in what was revealing itself between them.

Lexa picked up a spring roll. “So I’m still pondering this prankster side you have.”

“And here I thought you wanted to talk about the artist side,” she teased.

“Maybe the two aren’t mutually exclusive. I mean, it takes an artist to come up with that chicken prank.”

“Not necessarily.” Clarke took a bite of curry and savored it as she chewed. “A good strategist such as yourself could no doubt pull off something similar.” She looked at her. “Did you?”

“Not really. I mean, Lincoln and I did get into shit when we were kids, but once I hit high school, I did the total opposite of what you’re supposed to do when you’re having problems at home—I buckled down in terms of my classes and I found football. Both kept me out of the house and helped me focus on things beyond home and my parents.” She was matter-of-fact, but Clarke heard echoes of old pain in her tone.

“So you’re saying you didn’t act out and run wild through the town in your high school biker gang.”

Lexa chuckled. “No. But that would probably be a cool movie. Oh, wait. Maybe it was. That one from the early 90s with Johnny Depp.”

“Cry-Baby.” And Clarke had to stop eating for a moment to appreciate the image of Lexa in a black leather jacket and boots leaning against a motorcycle.

“I love that you speak geek.”

She shrugged. “I love movies. My dad probably caused that, too. Though my mom likes movies. Not as much as he did, though. Or as much as I do.” She took a drink of wine. “So not a biker gang.”
“No. There were days, though, that I wanted to act out.” She idly pushed some of her food around on her plate. “But I knew that I’d never get out of there if I did that, or I’d end up in a worse place.” She paused. “Things seriously might have been different if I didn’t have Lincoln and his family. They were always a place I could go.”

“Tell me about them.”

Lexa got up and went into her bedroom. She returned with a framed photo that she handed to Clarke. In it, a younger Lexa (Jesus, she had always been gorgeous) and Lincoln (another always beautiful human being) stood between a huge, bearded white guy with a broad smile and a shorter black woman who looked much more serious than the man, but her eyes seemed to twinkle with hidden humor.

“I’m not sure how the hell my dad came from the same parents as Gustus,” Lexa said as she sat down on the floor next to her again. “His name’s Augustus, but he prefers the shorter version. Anyway, he’s like what Santa Claus would be like if Santa was in a Conan movie or something.”

Clarke laughed. “I can see that. Maybe he could be in a movie.” And she suddenly envisioned him in warrior garb like the other figures she was drawing in her post-apocalyptic landscape series. She set the photo carefully down on the corner of the coffee table.

“Totally. He’ll dress up like that sometimes, too, for Halloween.” Lexa smiled, like she was remembering. “Gustus is this big, jolly, warm guy. And my dad isn’t. I mean, he’s big, but not jolly or warm.”

“But it sounds like maybe he was, once. Like when you and Lincoln had to get hosed off,” Clarke offered.

Lexa was quiet for a few moments. “I’m trying to remember how many of those times I had with him, and there weren’t many and they were usually when my mom wasn’t around.” She shook her head. “Like I said, my mom is a piece of work. I hate sometimes that she’s my mom and that we share DNA because what if I end up like that?” She stared at her plate.

“Not gonna happen.” Clarke took her hand and just that simple gesture fed something deeper. Lexa looked at her.

“That’s not who you are,” Clarke said. “And I am the Master of Pancakes. I know things.”

She laughed. “I’ll defer to your judgment. So maybe my dad was more like Gustus before my mom. I don’t know. I’ll never know. He sure as hell didn’t fight for me.” She sounded tired as she said it. “But Lincoln, Gustus, and Indra did. Always. No matter what happened, the first people I would call in an emergency or for anything weren’t my parents, but them. And they were always there. They never pushed me to talk about what was going on at home if I didn’t want to. They just kind of absorbed me into the house. They even cleared out a room they used for storage and made it mine.”

She gave Clarke’s hand a squeeze. “And they never said anything bad about my parents in front of me, even after it all went to shit with them. Lincoln and I would kind of go off on them in private, but Gustus and Indra never judged. They just wanted to make sure I was okay and if I needed them, they were there. So when I emancipated, they were there for me to help get me moved in.” She paused and Clarke didn’t say anything and instead moved a little closer.

“And like I said, I never did get a lot of my stuff. I wonder what went down with that, because I know Gustus went to my parents’ house to see if he could get the rest but when he came back, he
didn’t have it and he looked so mad and so sad that it kind of scared me because I’d never seen him mad. He never told me what happened, though he said that it was best I didn’t know because he didn’t want me to have that as a memory of my parents.” She picked up her wine. “The next thing they did was get legal guardianship of me, for emergencies and school and taxes and all of that.” She sipped. “That was stressful because I did still have to deal with my parents a bit, but not as much as I had been and Gustus and Indra were the shields. They’re my people. They always have been.”

She cleared her throat and Clarke’s heart ached.

Lexa stared into her glass. “It sucks when your parents hate you.”

“They don’t hate you. They’re just not capable of love. And that is not on you.”

She looked up at her and Clarke saw what might have been tears in her eyes. “Feels the same,” she said softly. Hate and an absence of love.”

“They’re not. Hate is active. An absence of love is passive. Both, however, hurt.”

She smiled again. “I see why people want to be part of your crew.”

“Well, I see why people want to be part of yours. So tell me a good memory about Indra and Gustus.”

“Practically every day. I mean, there were times I was an asshole and needed to get talked to, but they were consistent in that, too. I never had to worry that if I fucked up they’d stop caring about me, and that was something I did worry about with my parents but I figured out that no matter what I did, they just weren’t going to care about me.” She took another drink of wine. “Back to Indra and Gustus. They love Halloween and every year they do the most amazing decorations. Their house is one of the houses to go to for trick-or-treating. They generally have a theme planned out and then they start getting things together months in advance.”

That had been the weekend before Clarke had met Lexa. “What was the theme this year?”

“After the apocalypse. They had this, like, Fury Road thing going on and Gustus dressed up like Immortan Joe and Indra was Furiosa. They sent pictures. Here.” She used her other hand to pull her phone out of her pocket and when she found the images, she showed Clarke.

“Oh, God. That’s amazing. They look so good.” And they did and Clarke thought about drawing them as characters in her current sketch project.

“Indra worked on that fake arm for weeks.”

“It looks real.”

“Right? Lincoln and I couldn’t go down there this year, but they always share Halloween when we can’t.” She put her phone on the coffee table. “Halloween is always a good time for me. And both Indra and Gustus love football, so they’d play with me and Lincoln. Nothing serious, but it was fun.” Lexa smiled and it lit up her face. “They’re what good parents are supposed to be. They set reasonable boundaries and expectations, but gave me and Lincoln room to grow. Even when we fucked up, they wanted to make sure we learned something from it and that we took responsibility for it. And when I finally figured out I wasn’t straight, they were totally supportive of that, and treated my girlfriends like they did Lincoln’s. We both had the same rules.”

“Please. You can’t tell me you didn’t have half the school after you.”

“No, I can’t, but I didn’t date half the school, either.”

Lexa laughed. “Let the record show that I, Lexa Woods, did not in fact date half my school, though I did have a few girlfriends.”

“Of course you did,” Clarke teased.

“What about you?”

“I dated. I had a semi-serious boyfriend when I was a junior and then a semi-serious girlfriend my first year of college. That lasted a year. Then I wasn’t with anybody for a while.”

“Not even dating?”

“No,” Clarke said. “I did meet a cool guy my third year of college, but that was more fuckbuddies than anything else so I don’t think I’d categorize that as serious.”

“What happened to him?”

Clarke leaned back against the couch, so aware that she still held Lexa’s hand and so aware that she really, really liked it. “I don’t know. He was older and went off to grad school somewhere and we kept in touch for a little bit but life goes on.” She paused. “I went through another dating phase, then. One guy I dated fairly consistently for about six months after college graduation and then that ended. He wanted to join the military. Which was weird because he never mentioned it until toward the end. Then dating. And you know about Finn.” She looked down at their intertwined fingers and marveled, because it felt so right. “You?” she asked.

“Semi-serious girlfriend from halfway through junior year in high school through graduation. Then dating, then semi-serious girlfriend sophomore year in college, then more dating from halfway through junior year to halfway through senior year then serious girlfriend after that for a little over a year.”

“What’s the difference between semi-serious and serious?”

Lexa picked up her wine glass again. “High school is semi-serious. All kinds of hormones and intensity but you both know that things are going to change probably after graduation, if you’re still dating when that comes along. My semi-serious girlfriend in college started as fuckbuddies then we just started seeing each other exclusively but without any real plan about where we wanted it to go. It just faded out after a while. My serious girlfriend in college involved talk of what we wanted to do in the future and how we would work that. But it occurred to me when that ended that it hadn’t been all that healthy.”

“How so?”

Lexa shrugged. “She was pretty demanding overall, and I didn’t really have any space. She was constantly asking where I was going and who with and she always thought I was cheating on her. Looking back, I might’ve gotten a bit lost, trying to be something I wasn’t and to basically just conform to whatever it was she wanted. Which, ultimately, I couldn’t fix because it was something she had to figure out about herself. I think she was using me as a way to try to avoid dealing with herself.” She turned her head and held Clarke’s gaze. “So what’s the difference between semi-serious and serious for you?”

“Same as for you. Semi-serious is hanging out but maybe not dating anyone else but not having
much of a thought about where it might go. Serious, to me, means you’re interested in not just being exclusive with someone—if that’s your thing—but also in creating something long-term with them. That you want to be with them through good and bad, and they’re your person.” She leaned over and picked up the wine bottle with her free hand and refilled their glasses, heart beating a little harder because somehow, saying that to Lexa meant a lot more than she thought it would.

The hint of a smile pulled at the corner of Lexa’s mouth. “You know, I’m really glad you told me that day to move my bed.”

Clarke groaned and rolled her eyes. “Oh, my God. I’m still kind of embarrassed about that.”

“Don’t be. I liked that you just came right out and said it. Not everybody says what they mean.”

“Better than a note under the door, I guess.” Clarke sipped and little jolts of electricity raced up and down her arm because Lexa was again gently stroking her hand with her thumb.

“Although I’ve discovered I like notes on the door.” And she nudged Clarke’s shoulder with her own. “Thank you for that. Do you do other kinds of art?”

Clarke thought about the warrior woman she’d drawn in the image of Lexa. “Yes. Sketches. Charcoals. Pastels. I’m experimenting with painting.”

“Do you think some day you might show more of your work to me?”

And there was so much imbued in that question, but it was also so open-ended, for Clarke to engage it or not. “Definitely.”

Lexa smiled and took another sip and Clarke leaned into her, only too aware of her body heat even through their respective clothing and they were quiet for a while, Clarke enjoying the proximity (finally) her heart pounding while extremely exciting and pleasant sensations raced along her nerves.

“So I’m now a huge fan of snow day picnics,” Clarke said.

“Same. The hugest.”

She pressed closer, not necessarily wanting more in this moment than just to be close to her.

“Um,” Lexa said, hesitant.

“Yes?”

“This has been one of the best days I’ve had in so long. And I know you’ve probably got things to do, but if you wanted to stick around and watch another movie or Netflix or something—”

Could she be any cuter? “Yes.”

“Yes as in you have something to do or…?”

“Yes as in I’ll stick around.” And oh, the meanings that could have. Not just today. Not just tomorrow. Maybe a lot longer than she was ready to talk about. And though she hadn’t scientifically tested this, Clarke was pretty sure Lexa’s smile could light up a room.

“Awesome. Okay. Do you want hot chocolate?”

“I think I’m good for now. But I will help you clean up.” Because the sooner they got that done, the sooner she could snuggle up against her on the couch. And she got up, still holding Lexa’s hand, and
“If I recall correctly,” Lexa said as they cleared the dishes and containers from the coffee table and took them into the kitchen, “you don’t have class until tomorrow afternoon.”

“Aren’t you observant.” Clarke put the lid on one of the plastic containers Lexa had handed her. Lexa didn’t respond and Clarke looked up and ran into her gaze and the intensity of it swept right through her, left her aching. “Were you planning a late night?” she asked, raising an eyebrow playfully.

“Uh, just…if the movie goes late, you can still sleep in a little tomorrow.”

“How noble of you,” Clarke said with a feisty grin as she walked a few plastic containers to the fridge. When she turned back around, Lexa was watching her and eating a biscochito, and powdered sugar clung to her lips and Clarke didn’t even think about it as she closed the distance between them and took Lexa’s chin in her hand and used her thumb to brush at the powder on her upper lip and their gazes locked and it was like neither of them was breathing.

“Did you get it all?” Lexa asked, her sexy little smirk raising the corner of her mouth.

She smirked back. “Best to be sure.” And she leaned in and kissed her and oh, God, how could something as simple as a kiss feel like an earthquake, like a re-alignment of her axis? She slid her arms around Lexa’s neck like the night at the club and Lexa’s hands were on her hips and holy fuck her mouth was making Clarke feel things in places she didn’t think could feel but here she was and Jesus God.

Lexa pulled her closer and Clarke was wrapped up in her embrace, pressed against her, their kisses slow and deep and the tip of Lexa’s tongue skated along Clarke’s lower lip and it set more fires down her spine and she tasted like sugar and desire and fuck, there was no going back from this, and no way she wanted to.

Clarke didn’t know how long they stood there making out, Lexa backed against the counter, but it was fucking everything, exploring, tasting, and allowing a barrier she held to dissolve.

And then they both stopped, foreheads together, Lexa’s breath rough bursts of warmth against Clarke’s lips.

“You okay?” Lexa asked and Clarke’s heart practically flew out of her chest.

“More than okay. You?” She kissed the tip of Lexa’s nose and Lexa smiled.

“Beyond okay,” she said softly.

And Clarke didn’t want to move, didn’t want this moment to end and Lexa brushed a strand of hair out of her face like she had at the park earlier that day, a gentle, tender gesture that set a whole other round of fires and if anything, it should have scared her more than the kisses. Instead, it only made her want more.

“Thank you.” Clarke pulled back a little so she could better look at her.

“For?”

“For not running away after I freaked out.”

Lexa looked at her like the thought had never entered her mind. “You still talked to me and
responded to my texts. And you drew me a comic,” she said with a smile. “A really incredible comic. So maybe it wasn’t as bad a freak-out as you think it was. Because here we are. And it seems you’re doing all right.”

Clarke smiled back. “It seems you are, too.”

“You have no idea,” she said, and then she kissed her again and was this how it was going to be every time it happened? This mind-blowing explosion of feels and arousal and warmth and safety and so much else that only seemed to get stronger? How was that f*cking possible?

They stopped again and Clarke was pretty sure Lexa was trembling and she held her close, hoping she could impart warmth and safety to her, too.

“Damn,” Lexa finally said, voice soft near Clarke’s ear. “I don’t have words for how you make me feel.”

“Same.”

Lexa tightened the hug with a sigh and Clarke felt another tremor move through her.

“Couch?” Clarke said.

Lexa nodded and loosened her hold but Clarke took her hand and pulled her back to the living room and they settled on the couch, Lexa braced in a corner while Clarke leaned back against her. Lexa put her arms around Clarke’s waist and Clarke rested the back of her head against her shoulder and it felt so good, this new intimacy, and she just wanted to bask in it, just wanted Lexa wrapped around her every chance she could get.

“Still good?” Lexa asked.

Clarke turned her head and pressed her lips to Lexa’s jaw (because holy Christ, that jaw). “The absolute best. You?”

She chuckled, a soft sweet sound. “Same.”

Clarke cuddled against her harder, as if that was possible, and Lexa turned the TV on and they ended up watching episodes of *iZombie*, though Clarke wouldn’t have been able to recount a single one because she was leaned back against Lexa, seated between her thighs and wrapped up in her arms. Everything was a blur of soft laughs, quiet conversation, slow kisses and touches, and an easy, languid slowdive into the connection that Clarke had felt from the beginning between them.

She didn’t even realize she had fallen asleep until she woke up, and the TV was off though the candles were still burning and somehow they were stretched out on the couch, Lexa asleep too and spooning her, a blanket over them both, and she couldn’t bring herself to move or go home because this was exactly where she wanted to be—where she needed to be—and she covered Lexa’s hand with her own where it rested against her stomach and drifted back to sleep, her last cognizant thought that this was so much more than a hookup.

**De nada: it's nothing/of course/thank you (literally, "of nothing," but generally understood as "you're welcome" and semantically similar to "not at all," as in "thank you so much" and then you say "oh, not at all," meaning "it's no bother/you're welcome" [further explanation added in response to comment below]. If you're interested in finding out more about the use of "de nada" and its contexts, see [here](#).**
Chapter End Notes

I have so many feels after writing that, you guys.

And here you go. Raven’s biscochitos (sometimes bizcochitos). They don’t have to have powdered sugar, but Raven loves her some of that.
Chapter Summary

The morning after and Clarke falls back on her standard breakfast fare. Later, she and Raven and Anya talk about what kind of Thanksgiving they should have, since it's coming up right quick.

And fuck it, I'm clearly going to keep bringing food up in this fic.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Clarke woke up next, pale morning light suffused the apartment. One of the pillar candles had burned out but the other two were still going. But the best part was that Lexa was still pressed against her back, still spooning her. So she lay still for a few minutes, enjoying how it felt way too much but dammit, she had to pee, too.

Fucking biology.

She carefully extricated herself, moving slowly so as not to wake Lexa up, and went to the bathroom. When she returned, Lexa was stirring and Clarke sat down next to her on the couch. Lexa opened her eyes and gave her a sleepy smile.

“Hey,” she said.

“Hi.” Clarke leaned down and brushed a kiss across her lips, taking advantage of the new-found familiarity they had created.

“Mmm.” Lexa took her hand. “What time is it?”

“Eight-thirty.”

Lexa sighed. “It needs to be Saturday.”

Clarke smiled. Just-waking-up Lexa was super-cute. “I agree. But I have an idea—”

“I love it.”

She laughed. “You haven’t even heard it.”

She propped herself up on her elbows. “If you’re in it, it’s a good idea.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said. “You’re too much.” She kissed her again but stopped because she really wanted to take Lexa to bed rather than just to sleep and she had way too much to do today and holy shit, was she even ready for that?

“I merely speak the truth regarding the Master of Pancakes.”

“And that’s my idea. I’ll be making some in about a half-hour. I would like it if you joined me.”
“Done. I’ll bring coffee.”

“Excellent. Then I’ll see you then.” Clarke stood and put her phone in her pocket. Lexa got off the couch and regarded her, a little sheepish. She looked like she wanted to say something but Clarke beat her to it.

“Thank you for yesterday. And for last night.” She flashed a teasing smile. “We need to do that again.”

“Definitely.” Lexa walked her to the door but before she opened it, she pulled Clarke into a quick kiss. “See you soon,” she whispered against her mouth and there was no part of Clarke that wasn’t aching for a hell of a lot more and she saw the same sentiment in Lexa’s eyes, which only made all her feels stronger.

“Hold that thought,” Clarke said, and she left, knowing full well that Lexa was watching her. At her own door, she glanced down the hall and yep, there was Lexa. Once Clarke got her own door open, Lexa went back into her apartment, but not before Clarke caught a glimpse of her smile.

She went and showered then dressed in jeans, tees, and her beat-up house sneakers and went into the kitchen where she started making pancake batter. While it set, she checked her phone. Raven had texted her while she was in the shower.

*Dammit! Missed the walk of shame! [laughing emoji]*

Clarke got bacon and eggs out of the fridge and two pans before she responded.

*I did sleep w/ her. But that’s all that was involved.*

Pause, while Raven typed. *what is this madness*

She laughed at that and got a pan ready for the eggs and bacon and started heating the other up then texted back. *it was amazing. there was…some activity. watched tv, then fell asleep on couch*

Raven didn’t respond right away so Clarke turned the oven on and poured the first pancake out.

*this might be disgustingly cute and i might need to detox*

Clarke chuckled and went to get her tablet so she could stream some music off the living room speaker. A knock sounded at the door just as she clicked play. She opened it and Lexa held up her French press.

“I come bearing gifts,” she said and she was dressed in black jeans, sneakers, and a really comfortable-looking olive green sweater that only made the green of her eyes more pronounced. And God, how Clarke wanted to run her hands through her hair.

“And they are much appreciated.” Clarke stepped aside and Lexa went to the kitchen, Clarke right behind, and as Lexa poured coffee into cups, Clarke flipped the pancake over as well as the strips of bacon in the other pan.

“God, that smells good,” Lexa said as she got the cream out of the fridge.

“Breakfast is the best. How do you like your eggs?”

“Medium to hard.”

She had actually guessed that, and it made her a little giddy that she had gotten it right. The pancake
finished cooking and Clarke put it on the tray in the oven and poured another one into the pan. She turned, then, and Lexa was staring at her intently, and before Clarke could say anything, Lexa leaned in and kissed her and this one wasn’t tentative or careful. It was a deep, scorching acknowledgment of the shift in their boundaries and a promise of much more and fuck, it was hot and fuck, Clarke was so ready for this and more and she returned it just as fervently.

Lexa slowed it down then pulled away, searching Clarke’s gaze with her own, and Clarke knew she was checking in, making sure that all of this was okay.

“Damn, Commander. I need to have you over more often.” And Clarke gave her a shit-eating grin to reassure her, reached past her for a cup of coffee, and flipped the pancake over.

Lexa responded with a smile that was practically incentive for Clarke to undress her right there in the kitchen. She drank more coffee instead, but it didn’t do anything to decrease the throbbing between her thighs. She was definitely liking these new parameters in their relationship.

Relationship. Was that what this was?

Not quite. An exploration of possibility.

But Clarke kind of liked the idea of “relationship.”

“So I’m having drinks with friends on Friday,” Clarke said, and she took Lexa’s hand. “Would you like to go?” She sipped her coffee and wondered if it was shallow of her to want to continue this with Lexa for her coffee, too. Fuck, who was she kidding? Everything about Lexa was a reason to continue.

“I’m meeting some of my friends, actually, for dinner that night and then we’re going to a club. Want to meet up?” She arched an eyebrow and goddammit, that was hot, too.

“I do. I’ll see if the rest of the crew does. What club?”

“Same as last time.” She smirked then raised their intertwined hands to her lips and kissed Clarke’s fingertips and Clarke really liked that, too, the gentle touches and physical contact. An acknowledgment that things had shifted between them, but with room for either of them to increase or decrease the amount.

“Good choice.” She gently extricated her hand from Lexa’s, as much as she hated to, and put another pancake in the oven then turned the heat down on the eggs and bacon before she poured another cake into the pan.

“I thought so.” Lexa got plates out of the cabinet—why did Clarke find it so damn endearing that she knew where they were?—and took them and utensils to the dining nook. She also got the orange juice out of the fridge and a couple of small glasses and took all of that out to the table, too, as well as butter and syrup and Jesus the fucking domesticity of it all was not only adorable but spoke to her on a really deep level. She flipped the pancake over, sorting through all of these emotions, which she was enjoying more than she thought possible.

“Order up,” Clarke said as she took the tray of pancakes and bacon to the table and put two cakes on Lexa’s plate. She went back to the kitchen and brought the pan with the eggs and last of the bacon to the table, too, and put one egg on her plate and one on Lexa’s.

“Be right back,” she said, flashing Lexa a flirtatious little smile. “More coffee?”

“Please.”
Clarke retrieved the whole French press and brought it to the table and sat down. Lexa was putting butter and syrup on her pancakes and Clarke refilled Lexa’s cup then hers. “I fucking love your coffee,” she said as she set the press aside.

“Well, if nothing else, we have that.”

Clarke cocked her head, hearing a brittle note in Lexa’s voice. “And I fucking love that you’re here,” she added.

Lexa looked up and set the syrup aside but didn’t respond.

Clarke reached across the table and took her hand. “I need you to hear this.”

She held her gaze, waiting.

“Yes, I freaked out before. And I’ve provided the reasons for that. I’m not going to say that everything’s great and my past doesn’t influence me anymore, but I am going to say that the time I’ve spent with you in the short time I’ve been getting to know you has been amazing. And I want a fuck-ton more.”

A slow half-smile broke on Lexa’s lips.

“I don’t know for sure where this is going, but fuck, I’m into this ride.” She let go of her hand. “And I just wanted you to know that.” And holy shit did she just seriously say that? Yes, yes she did. And she meant every word.

“Same. Right down to issues in my past maybe making an appearance now and again. Apologies in advance.”

“Don’t apologize for that,” Clarke said. “We all have shit we deal with. Just so long as we recognize it and talk things through—and maybe it’s a little early to say stuff like that but whatever—then we’re doing what we can.” She squeezed Lexa’s hand. “Breakfast awaits.”

Lexa laughed and put the butter within Clarke’s reach then took another bite of pancake and sat back, shaking her head. “So fucking good.”

“And those are just my pancakes,” Clarke said, with a suggestive arch of her eyebrow.

Lexa laughed and took another bite. After a few moments, she spoke again. “Thank you for last night. I had a really great time.”

“So did I. Thanks for the invite.”

“You’re welcome. Thank you for breakfast.”

Clarke took another bite then got another piece of bacon. “I would like to spend more time with you, in case I didn’t make that clear earlier.”

“I am completely amenable to that.”

“Good. So can I see you this weekend too, in addition to Friday?”

“Yes.” And she looked like she had, again, won some amazing prize that she’d been hoping to win and Clarke wanted a whole bunch more make-out sessions that morphed into even more than that.

“Any chance I can see you tonight? Or tomorrow night?” Clarke asked. Because she was pretty sure
she might be addicted.

“I’m still free tonight,” Lexa said. “Since I was reserving that spot for you anyway. But I do have to check some things because since we had the extra day for our project, I just want to make sure everything’s good to go.”

Clarke nodded. “Also, just so you know, if you have things to do, please don’t feel obligated to spend time with me. Get your other stuff done and spend time with your friends and family, too.”

“Thank you. Same to you. But just so you know, I do want to spend more time with you, and I want to make sure that happens every chance we can.”

“And we sound like a couple of damn lawyers, outlining contracts.”

Lexa laughed. “Maybe.” She got another piece of bacon. “But I hope I don’t sound like that once I finish this law degree.”

“I’ll keep you in line,” Clarke said with a shrug and she actually liked that the statement was about the future, and she also liked that Lexa didn’t contradict her, because maybe she was thinking the same thing.

“Somebody might need to.” She smirked.

And that’s how the rest of breakfast went, with easy conversation and flirtatious digs and touches, and by the time they started cleaning off the table, Clarke realized that she was way past being scared of whatever this was. Hell, she was already making camp in it.

“So maybe I’ll see you later today?” Clarke said when she walked Lexa to the door.

“Yes. I’ll text you.” She held her French press in the crook of her arm and they stared at each other, only too aware of this new territory between them in terms of intimacy.

“I meant what I told you last night,” Lexa said. “I still don’t have words for how you make me feel.” And she leaned in with another of her ultra-hot kisses that made Clarke’s blood pound and her thighs ache.

“You’re dangerous, Pancake Master,” Lexa whispered when she slowly pulled away, expression in her eyes all kinds of heated and maybe a little mysterious.

“So are you, Commander. But I think you’re up to the challenge.”

Lexa smiled and kissed her again. “Pretty sure you are, too. Talk to you later.” And she left but Clarke watched her (how could she not?) and when Lexa was back in her apartment, Clarke went back into hers, closed the door, and leaned her head against it, heart racing.

She was so fucked.

And she liked it.

###

Clarke finished going over her notes for her upcoming exam and then worked on her sketches. The one of warrior Lexa had inspired another one, this time with her in a fight with another warrior, and blood streaked her face and her expression held the flat certainty of a predator but also a serenity, that she accepted whatever outcome the fight brought.
Much different than the Lexa she’d spent the evening with the night before, first at a movie then a walk to a comic store. They’d held hands in the movie and again on the walk to the store and there was a lot of laughing and flirtatious conversation and the energy between them sizzled with potential. They were still learning the parameters of the unfolding intimacy between them, but at the end of the night, when Lexa walked Clarke to her door and kissed her into the next week, Clarke was so ready for more.

But the moment wasn’t right and they both had things to do, so with an unspoken agreement, it seemed, about responsibility, Lexa had gone back to her apartment and Clarke was so, so glad that it was right there, right next door.

The door to her apartment opened and she heard voices, so she put her pen down and went into the living room where Anya and Raven were taking their coats off.

“Hey,” she said.

“Hey, Griffin,” Anya greeted her. “Raven tells me you haven’t been home that much this week.” She grinned. “Nice.”

Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Speaking of, it’s Thursday night. Do you know where your neighbor is?” Raven said, teasing.

“We both needed to get some studying done.”

“Oh, of course.” Anya nodded. “Anatomy, I’m sure.”

Raven snorted a laugh.

“Go ahead. Get it out of your systems.” Clarke made a “go on” gesture with her hand.

“So they had coffee Monday afternoon. Then hot chocolate Monday night,” Raven recounted. “And movies and Thai food Tuesday.”

“Sounds delightful,” Anya said, putting her hand to her chest with an “awww” expression.

“And then yesterday evening they went for a walk.” Raven used air quotes around “walk.”

“We went to a movie,” Clarke said. “And then the comic store. Are you done?”

Anya shook her head. “Damn. That’s actually…cute.”

“I know, right?” Raven grinned and gave Clarke a hug. “It’s fucking adorable and it gives me feels. And the best part is, they’re going to the club tomorrow.”

“For fuck’s sake, Reyes,” Clarke muttered. “So are you.”

“It’s way cuter that you’re going with Lexa.”

“I’m meeting her there. She already had plans with friends beforehand.”

“So. You’re meeting her friends.” Anya finished taking her boots off. They looked like motorcycle boots but maybe a little less clunky. She was wearing black jeans and a baggy gray sweater that managed to look both stylish but well-loved at the same time.

Raven already had her boots off. “Sounds intriguing. Wine?”
“Yes,” Anya said. “And popcorn.” She made kissing noises at Clarke.

“Jesus.” Clarke make a “what the fuck” gesture, but she was smiling and blushing.

Anya motioned her toward the living room. “C’mon, Griffin. Join us. I personally think it’s nice, that you’re clicking with someone. And I am generally a sarcastic, snarky bitch.”

“Which I love a lot,” Raven shouted from the kitchen.

And Anya blushed.

“Though I love the creampuff underneath it, too,” Raven added as she walked two glasses of wine out to them. She kissed Anya as she handed her a glass.

“Creampuff?” Clarke raised an eyebrow. “That’s going into the blackmail file.”

Anya shrugged. “Nobody’ll believe you. Come and sit down.”

Raven handed Clarke the other glass. “Unless you have to study,” she said. “In all seriousness. I know you have an exam next week.”

“What kind of asshole gives you an exam the week of Thanksgiving?” Anya asked as she sat down on the couch.

Clarke shrugged. “On the plus side, he’s the one who has to grade over Thanksgiving and I don’t have to study for an exam that weekend.”

Raven went back into the kitchen and Clarke joined Anya on the couch.

“So I’ve gotten most of this unfolding romance second-hand from Raven. Now I’m going to the source. How are things going?”

“Good.” She sipped her wine.

“Oh, my God, Griff,” Raven shouted from the kitchen. “Are you kidding me with your low-key self right now?” She stood in the doorway. “Things are going so fucking well that Clarke has heart eyes and I can personally attest to the fact that Lexa has them, too.”

“Fuck,” Clarke muttered.

“Heart eyes, huh? Let me see.” Anya leaned a little closer.

“I don’t have heart eyes.”

“Um, I may not be an actual medical doctor, but it appears that yes, you do. Don’t worry. They’re not fatal.”

Raven laughed from the kitchen.

“It actually looks good on you,” Anya said. “And don’t sweat it, Griffin. I like her.”

“Anya can read people pretty well,” Raven hollered from the kitchen.

“Oh, my God, Reyes,” Clarke hollered back. “Stop fucking eavesdropping and put the popcorn on.”

Anya chuckled. “She’s cute when she does that, though.”
Clarke nodded and grinned. “Yeah, she is.”

“What?” came Raven’s voice again from the kitchen and both Clarke and Anya dissolved in a fit of laughing.

“Oh, shit,” Anya said, wiping at her eyes. “Back to your boo.”

“I’m not sure I’d go there yet.” But fuck, was it that far-fetched?

“Yeah, your heart eyes say otherwise.”

She bit her lip. Shit. That obvious?

“Anyway,” Anya said. “She’s a class act. I got a really good vibe from her.”

Clarke heard popcorn in the microwave and the smell of it wafted into the living room. “I should’ve known you sooner. You could have screened everybody I dated before this.”

“And you totally wouldn’t have listened.” Anya winked and set her wine on the coffee table.

The microwave dinged its finish and a few moments later Raven carried a big bowl of popcorn into the living room and set it on the coffee table along with some napkins.

“You need wine,” Anya said and she started to get up.

“I’ve got it.” Clarke went into the kitchen and poured Raven a glass and how weird was it that she really missed Lexa right now? Last night’s movie and comics outing had been amazing—that word again, but where Lexa was concerned, it always worked. They’d walked and talked and goofed off and laughed, and it was almost silly and sexy and all kinds of a turn-on.

Clarke took the wine back to the living room and Raven was seated on Anya’s lap and they were laughing about something and fuck, she really missed Lexa.

“Okay, this is disgustingly cute,” she said as she handed the glass to Raven then sat down.

“You saw nothing, Griffin.” Anya gave her a glare that she couldn’t hold because Raven kissed her on the cheek.

“Your reputation is safe with me.” Clarke grabbed a handful of popcorn and Raven handed Anya her wine.

“Are you on your way to more serious?” Anya asked.

She hesitated.

“Clarke’s not big into talking too much about stuff like this.” Raven gave her a sympathetic look, which was kind of surprising, since she enjoyed teasing her, too.

She decided to respond. “I’m not sure what that would look like. I mean, I haven’t known her that long and we’re just sort of seeing where things go.” She ate some of the popcorn, thinking about how Lexa just fit, and that thinking about her not around made her feel...empty.

“Sometimes people just click,” Anya said, like she had suddenly developed telepathy. She kissed Raven’s chin. “It took this one a while to figure it out, though.”

Raven rolled her eyes.
“To be fair, I think I actually fell for the one person who can be just as snarky if not snarkier than I am. So I had to show her how I felt.” She flashed a grin at Clarke. “She probably already told you that story.”

“Yeah. She did. Adorbs.”

“I am never adorbs, Griffin.”

“Except when you are. And that goes into my blackmail file, too.” She did an evil laugh.

“So what’s Lexa doing for Thanksgiving?” Raven asked, waggling her eyebrows.

Clarke frowned. “Shit. I don’t know.”

Both Anya and Raven stared at her.

“Well, what are you doing?” Raven grabbed the bowl of popcorn and handed it to her. “You said a week ago you were probably going to your mom’s. Does that still stand?”

“She might have to work. I’ll have to check with her.”

“Is Lexa going to Virginia, then?”

Clarke looked at Raven. “Probably.”

“Well, find out. Because if she’s here and you’re here, we could all have Turkey Day together. Or is that a little too much for your overloaded heart right now?”

Anya grinned. “But there’ll be other people there, so we can help take the pressure off your first major holiday together.”

“Stop. Just stop.” Clarke got really interested in the popcorn.

“Seriously,” Raven said. “Find out. It’ll be fun to hang out. And we don’t have to do turkey. We could make big-ass pans of lasagna or enchiladas or, fuck it, both.”

Anya smiled and hugged Raven. “God, you’re so fucking cute,” she said as she nuzzled her neck.

“I’m detecting major heart eyes, Anya.” Clarke threw a piece of popcorn at her.


“So what about it?” Raven pressed Clarke. “If you don’t go to your mom’s, let’s do Thanksgiving here. Me, you, Anya, hopefully Lexa, Lincoln, Octavia, and Bellamy and whoever his flavor of the month is.”

“Well, if Lincoln’s going to Virginia, so is Lexa. They share a family, after all.”

“Oh, yeah. So find out. Hell, maybe if they’re going to be around, we can do a two-apartment T-Day.”

“I kind of like that idea,” Anya said. “A cool way to mingle and meet people.”

“Provided, of course, that Lexa and Lincoln are going to be around.” Clarke picked up her wine glass. “And maybe Bellamy and Octavia have their own plans.”
Raven shrugged. “Then we’ll find some others to hang out with us. I mean, we could even do pizza and movie Thanksgiving.”

Anyá kissed her cheek. “I like that idea, too.”

“That’s because you hate Thanksgiving and Christmas and almost all that is good in the world,” Raven teased. “But I, Raven Reyes, will thaw your icy heart and next year, you will volunteer to cook the fucking friends-giving meal because you will love it so much.”

Clarke coughed. “Damnit, don’t make me laugh when I’m drinking.”

“I’m not ever going to be a fan of the holidays,” Anyá said. “But I will be a fan of yours and if you love them, then I’ll support you in that.”


“Hell, yes.” Raven handed her a glass and Clarke wasn’t sure if it was Raven’s or Anya’s but it didn’t matter because they’d been sharing and for some reason she found that really sweet and again she thought about Lexa and what it would feel like to have almost every evening with her, in the same space, cuddling against her or a lot more—

Her phone rang.

“Ask Lexa about Thanksgiving,” Raven hollered.

“It’s my mom,” Clarke said from the doorway.

“Oh, well that’ll work, too. Ask her if you’re going to her place for T-Day.”

Clarke nodded and answered. “Hey, Mom. What’s up?” She took Raven’s wine to her and then went back into the kitchen.

“Just checking in. And I wanted to touch base about Thanksgiving.”

“You said you might have to work.” She took a drink of wine.

“I got my schedule switched around and I have Thanksgiving off.”

That might be good news, depending on what she wanted to do. “So do you want to have a traditional kind of dinner or…?”

“Well, I’m not sure. I’ll be working this weekend and the days before, so I might not be able to get everything ready.” She sounded stressed.

“Then I have just the solution for you. Come to my place.”

Abby didn’t say anything for a few moments. “Really?”

“Yeah. Raven and I were just talking about it and she suggested we have a friends-giving here at the apartment. And we’ll do something a little different. Like maybe enchiladas or lasagna or something. Raven makes killer enchiladas and calabacitas. Plus we’ll have a bunch of sides for whatever dietary requirement.”

“That sounds like fun,” she said, and Clarke heard a layer of relief in her voice.

“No worries, Mom. We’ve got this. And you can come and hang out and sit on the couch and maybe
have a glass of wine or two and listen to my friends have snark wars and say really inappropriate things." She paused. “And bring Marcus, if he doesn’t have anything else going on. And if you’re ready to, you know, take that step of actually sharing a holiday with someone you like.”

“Is this my daughter teasing me?”

“Duh.”

She laughed. “I’ll ask him what his plans are. And speaking of sharing a holiday with someone you like…?”

Clarke blushed. For fuck’s sake, would she ever be able to have a conversation about Lexa without losing her mind over it? “I’m not sure what she’s doing. She has family in Virginia, so she might be going there. I’ll find out soon. If she’s around, then yes, I’m going to invite her.”

“Is this the woman you were telling me about at brunch?”

“Yes.” And God, that hadn’t even been a week ago but it felt like months. “Lexa.”

“I take it this means things are going well.”

“Yes.” She took another drink of wine, like that would cool her down.

“And you’re actually going to introduce me to someone you’re seeing? Damn, I should have recorded this conversation because I’m not sure I heard that right. So let me make sure. You’re fine with inviting someone you’re seeing to Thanksgiving where she’ll be meeting your mom? Is that about right?”

Clarke snorted. “There’ll be lots of people here, so not much stress involved.” Ideally. She took another gulp of wine.

“Well, I look forward to meeting her. I promise not to embarrass you. Too badly, anyway.”

“Don’t worry about it. Raven and Anya will take care of that.”

She laughed. “Some things will never change.”

“Truth.”

Raven came in. “Hey, Doc,” she said, leaning in close to Clarke, who handed the phone to her.

“Friends-giving here is on,” Clarke said. “My mom’s coming, and she might be bringing her new guy.”

“Shut up,” Raven said as she put the phone to her ear. “Is that true? You might bring a dude?”

Clarke could hear Abby laughing again then talking.

“That’s really great,” Raven said. “So I’m giving you back to Clarke now, but I’m so glad you’re coming here for T-Day. Later.” She handed the phone back. “Have you met her guy?” she whispered.

Clarke shook her head as she put the phone to her ear. “Okay, are we all good?”

“What should I bring?” Abby asked.
“A pie.”

“Oh, yeah. That pecan pie she makes,” Raven said as she took a diet soda out of the fridge.

“Did you hear that?” Clarke asked Abby. “Raven wants the pecan.”

“I think I can do that.”

Clarke nodded at Raven, who fist-pumped and went back into the living room.

“But seriously, if you don’t have time or you’re saving every patient there, don’t worry about bringing anything. Have a low-stress friends-giving.”

“Thanks, sweetie. I really do appreciate it. What time?”

Clarke leaned into the living room. “What time?” she asked Raven.

“Two? That way people come, hang out, eat, and get home to pass out.”

“Two,” Clarke repeated to Abby as she retreated into the kitchen. “But if you want to come earlier before people show up, that’d be all right.”

“Okay. I’ll call closer to the time.”

“Great. Talk to you later. Love you.”

“Love you, too. Bye.” Abby ended the call and Clarke stood for a moment, thinking that if they didn’t do turkey (and she was hoping they didn’t), she and Raven could go shopping either Monday or Tuesday and start making the main dishes, whatever they were. She went back into the living room.

“Enchiladas,” she announced.

Raven was snuggled next to Anya. She nodded. “Done.”

“A pan of chicken and another pan of vegan.”

“Sides?”

“Calabacitas for sure. Maybe a few more sides, but people are going to bring stuff, too.”

“No turkey?” Anya asked.

“Fuck, no,” Raven said with a triumphant smile. “This’ll be epic.”

Clarke smiled. “Yep. We can go to the store after the weekend.”

“Sounds good. Want to watch a movie with us?” Raven pointed at the unoccupied side of the couch.

“Nah. I have to read a chapter and then I’m gonna crash.”

“And call Lexa.” Anya’s grin was almost feral.

“Which is totally legit,” Raven said. “See you tomorrow.”

“’Night, Griffin.”
“Same to you,” Clarke said and she made a stop at the bathroom then went to her room where she sat at her drafting table and pondered the new image of the mysterious warrior, Commander Lexa. She turned on some music and worked on it for a while, liking the way Lexa’s coat flowed around her legs and how her blades seemed to reflect light as she stood in her fighting stance, prepared for… well, for anything. She stared at it for a while, envisioning Lexa in this outfit, as some kind of leader in a post-apocalyptic world and it totally fucking worked. Maybe she’d do a whole comic about it.

On the same page in the lower right she started another sketch of herself, working off a selfie, keeping the post-apocalyptic theme in her worn trousers and boots, and the hard, faraway look in her eyes.

A text came in, startling her a little because she’d been so focused. She finished shading a particular area of the sketch then looked at her phone.

*Can’t stop thinking about you.*

Oh, God. She picked it up to read it again. And maybe a dozen more times. Or possibly several dozen. Her heart sped up and what the hell with all of these feelings crashing around in her chest?

She hesitated with her response. Should she play it snarky? Cute? Bland? Fuck it. Flat-out truth. *I haven’t stopped thinking about you since I told you to rearrange your furniture.* She read it a couple of times, chewing her lip, fingertip poised to send. This might be serious, a text like that.

But then again, hadn’t she just told her mom that she was going to invite Lexa to Thanksgiving? Friends-giving or not, she was going to invite someone she’d met not even a month ago to a gathering that included her mom. That was pretty serious, too. And maybe she just needed not to get caught in her head.

She pressed send.

And set her phone aside carefully, like she was afraid of what it may or may not end up telling her. It rang and again she started though she knew it was Lexa.

“Hi,” she answered, heart hammering her ribs.

“Hey.” And her voice held a smile. Clarke could hear it, and she was glad they weren’t Facetiming because she felt a little exposed at the moment, a little unguarded after admitting that.

“I miss you,” she said and Clarke relaxed, her grin so wide it was almost painful. “And I know we haven’t known each other that long, and that we just saw each other yesterday, but—” Lexa paused. “Damn. I’m seriously hooked.”

“And presumably, that’s not a bad thing,” Clarke said.

She chuckled. “Depends on the circumstances. And so far, they’ve been amazing. So, no. Exactly the opposite.”

“I’d have to agree.” In so many ways. “So where are you?”

“Next door. And I’m actually a little bummed that my bedroom isn’t the one that shares a wall with you, because I had this idea about tapping on the wall in code.”

Clarke laughed. “I think phones are probably faster.”

“But code is so much more mysterious. And maybe romantic.”
“So basically, it would be like League of Assassins and if we ever end up imprisoned in adjoining cells, we’ll have our own method of communication. That is some major geekery there, but I completely approve.”

“You speak my language, Pancake Master. And that is one of the many reasons I enjoy being around you so much.”

“The Commander flatters me.”

“I merely tell you the truth.”

“Well, it’s completely mutual.” She forced herself to calm down.

“And another truth is, I can’t wait to see you again.” And Lexa’s voice seemed to pour all over her like warm syrup.

“That, too, is mutual. And speaking of seeing you, I was wondering what you’re doing for Thanksgiving.” There. She said it. “I mean, I figured you’d be going to Virginia, but thought I’d ask.”

“A couple of weeks ago, you’d be right. But Indra’s mom isn’t in the best health, and she and Gustus decided that they’d better go to Florida instead.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Do you need to go to Florida?”

“Not until after the new year. I’ll be headed down there probably for spring break and I’ll spend a day or two with her.”

And Clarke totally started making spring break plans for Florida but caught herself. They had to get through the holidays first. “Okay, so if you don’t have plans for Thanksgiving, Raven and I are going to have a friends-giving and you’re more than welcome to come. Lincoln and Octavia, too. We’re doing enchiladas as the main course.”

Pause, then, “That sounds like the best. I would love to come.”

Clarke’s smile might be permanent.

“And if you want,” Lexa added, “we can… I don’t know. Open my apartment, too, and invite a few more people and have a crazy open house kind of thing. That way people have room to mingle and do whatever.”

Seriously. This smile was not ever going to fade. “And Raven actually brought that up, if you and Lincoln were going to be around and were into it.”

“We are and I like the idea. Just let me know how you want to work this and Lincoln and I can set up extra tables or whatever. After all, he has connections,” she said with exaggerated importance. And let me know what food you want us to prepare.”

“Cool. Raven and I aren’t into turkey, as you just discovered, so don’t even worry about the usual stuff.”

“That’s such a great idea.” She sounded relieved.

“I mean, I’ll do turkey if the people want to be all colonial traditional or whatever, but Raven and I have never really liked this holiday and what it represents, so when we do it, we do it to just basically
celebrate friends and family and the connections we share.” She stopped. “And that sounded kind of like some douchey greeting card, didn’t it?”

Lexa laughed. “Not at all. It sounded like exactly what a gathering should be. I like that you’re subverting it. Or converting it.”

“Plus, doing it this way takes a lot of stress off people. Having a party with a bunch of friends is much less anxiety-driven then having to go to a relative’s house and deal with family drama, shitty turkey, and trying to make small talk with people who have issues with the way you’re living your life.”

“Nailed it. But I will say that Gustus actually deep fries turkey and that shit is delicious. He’s a master at it.”

“I have never partaken of this mystical repast.”

“Oh, it’s the best. It seals in all the juices and it doesn’t take long at all. And—well, hell. If Gustus decides to do it next year, you’re invited to try it.”

A statement like that should have freaked her out. It should have sent her screaming into the interior parts of her brain, where she would over-analyze everything and come up with all kinds of reasons that thinking about the future was bad, but it didn’t. Not even close. Instead, it made her hope that she would get that chance.

“That sounds like a plan. No pressure on Gustus, though.”

“He loves doing it. And I think you’ll hit it off with him.”

More future talk. Where was her inner asshole voice? Nowhere. Her heart had completely overruled it and she would totally buy it a drink.

“And speaking of families, my mom is coming to friends-giving.” And she winced, waiting for Lexa’s response.

“Cool.”

Which was not the one she expected. Maybe she needed to just accept that Lexa was different, and to stop worrying.

“It’ll be fun to meet her.”

Clarke fell back on her bed and stared at the ceiling. Lexa was fucking perfect. So perfect. How was this even possible? “All right. We were thinking we’d eat around two.”

“I’m in. I’ll check with Lincoln, see what he and Octavia are up to, and let you know for sure what’s happening.”

“We’re thinking we’d invite probably twenty total. We’ll have a list of ours and you can invite some of your holiday orphan friends, too.”

“Good plan. And now I’m going to let you go because I need to do some reading and you probably do, too.”

Clarke thought about the drawing she’d been working on. “Yeah, probably a good idea.”

“Okay. Then I’ll see you tomorrow.” And she sounded so fucking cute and sexy at the same time.
How the hell did she do that?

“Yes. You will.”

“All right. Good night.”

“Lexa.”

“Yeah?”

“It’s true, what I said in my text.” She bit her lip, worried that this was too forward, too much, and maybe too intense.

“Same,” Lexa said, that hint of a smile in her voice. “Good night, Clarke.” And she hung up and Clarke rolled over and yelled into one of her pillows because holy fuck Lexa was amazing, this was amazing, everything was amazing, and she was so into it that it completely overruled her brain.

And it was a whole new way of looking at things, allowing her heart to just do what it seemed to want to do. And where Lexa was concerned, her heart had already made a decision.

All she had to do was follow.

Chapter End Notes

I am literally writing every chapter with a new set of feels.

And oh, hey, Clarke likes this pancake recipe. She’ll modify it for different flavors, and you can, too. Play around with it. See what you come up with. And duh, invite me over.
Date night at the club, y'all. And dancing is a gateway drug to...other things.

This day was the longest Friday in recorded time. Every class was at least a month long and her study group took a year, Clarke was convinced. She somehow managed to focus on the classroom materials in between thoughts of Lexa (no easy feat) but still, she kept looking at the various clocks on her devices wondering why the hell time had frozen.

Lexa had been busy, too, but she had sent a short video of herself rolling her eyes outside a classroom with the tagline, why is this day so long?

And Clarke had paused it in a particular spot because Lexa’s smile was surely one of the wonders of the known world and she needed to screenshot that shit. She sent a video back with her doing the same thing. The tagline was, right? so looking forward to later

Lexa texted back almost immediately. So much same.

After decades (or at least close to that), she was on her way home so she could drop her pack off and change her clothes and meet everybody for drinks and something to eat and then off to the club where finally—finally—she’d see Lexa. And that thought started all kinds of sparks and butterflies dancing around in her chest.

She decided on faded black jeans that Raven said made her look edible and a white V-neck tee under a well-worn denim shirt that brought out her eyes. She put her motorcycle boots on (slightly clunkier than Anya’s), checked herself in a mirror, and put on one of her fave coats, a slightly big faded maroon and white letterman jacket she’d scored at a Goodwill. She’d taken the name patch off it—Patrick—but kept the cool-looking lion head mascot patch.

Her phone indicated a text, this one from Harper, who was picking her up. She grabbed cash, credit card, and ID and hurried down to the parking lot, where Harper waited in her car with Monty and Jasper.

“Hey, Griff,” she said as Clarke got into the back seat next to Jasper. “Happy Friday.”

“Hi,” Clarke said.

“Finally Friday night,” Jasper said. “Today dragged.”

“Right?” Clarke put her seatbelt on. “Oh, what’s everybody doing for Thanksgiving?”

“I’m going to Cali to see my brother,” Harper said.

“New York,” Monty said. “Family gathering at the grandparents’ house.” He didn’t sound thrilled about it. “Unless the weather gets bad.” He sounded hopeful about that.
“I’m chillin’ here,” Jasper said with a shrug and Clarke decided he looked good with the goatee he was cultivating.

“Well, Raven and I are having a friends-giving at two on Thursday. So Jasper, if you feel like hanging out with us, we’re doing enchiladas and whatever the hell else. Bring a side and a drink. And a plus-one if you want to.”

Jasper lit up. “Oh, hell yes. Raven’s enchiladas.”

“Exactly. And Monty, if the weather gets shitty again, come and spend T-Day with us.”

“I’d rather do that,” he said with a sigh. “But barring a storm of apocalyptic proportions, I’m trapped. Thanks for the invite, though.”

Jasper shook his head slowly, feigning deep sadness. “Dude, you never know. Climate change is a thing.”

Harper snort-laughed.

“And if you get stuck,” Clarke said to her, “friends-giving for you, too.”

“Thanks. But I should be okay. I’m flying out Tuesday.”

Monty sighed again and Harper grabbed his hand and Clarke bit back a groan because she still had a few hours before she’d see Lexa and goddammit why was this day being so unfair and so fucking long?

She forced herself to get over it and enjoy the company of her friends and when they got to the pub, she was in the moment and laughing at Jasper’s description of a bunsen burner fuck-up in his chemistry class earlier. Bellamy had already scored a table where people were seated while others were standing around drinking beer. Most were fellow students in med or grad school, but some Clarke didn’t recognize. Maybe they were plus-ones.

Bellamy gave her a quick hug, which didn’t sit well with the woman he was currently dating. Laurel? Was that her name? She wasn’t sure.

“I’ll grab you a beer,” Bellamy said and he moved away.

Harper caught Clarke’s eye and gave her a “really?” expression as Maybe-Laurel continued to throw shade her way.

“So are you still meeting Lexa later?” Harper asked, loud enough for Maybe-Laurel to hear.

“Yes.”

“And how are things going?”

Clarke grinned.

“Okay, then,” Harper said with a laugh. “Pretty well, then.”

“Yeah. We’re having fun.”

Maybe-Laurel seemed interested in their conversation.

“Here, Princess,” Bellamy said and he handed her a glass of beer. “We ordered a bunch of different
food.”

“Cool.” She handed him ten dollars to cover her part of the festivities. “Let me know if you need more.”

“Thanks. You remember Lauren?”

“Yes. Hi.” Okay, so she’d been one letter off. Not bad. But she was still giving her the “he’s my man” look and Clarke hoped Bellamy was going out of town for Thanksgiving so she wouldn’t have to deal with Lauren as his plus-one at friends-giving if he was staying. Fortunately, Lauren said something to him about the bathroom and she got up and left.

“So what are you doing for Thanksgiving?” Clarke asked him.

“Nothing.”

“Raven and I are having friends-giving this year. Two o’ clock on Thursday. We’re making enchiladas, calabacitas, and other stuff. Bring a side dish and a drink.”

“Nice,” he said, and he grinned. “Raven’s enchiladas. Okay to bring a date if I have one?”

“Sure.” But inside she was rolling her eyes. “We’re limiting the guest list to twenty, so don’t run around inviting just anyone. We can only make so many enchiladas. And we, of course, want to eat all of them.”

“And we will. Thanks.”

Clarke moved away before Lauren returned because she was not in the mood for petty bullshit and fortunately, most everybody else wasn’t, either, because the conversations were funny and interesting and everybody seemed pretty relaxed. Maybe it was because this was the last Friday before Thanksgiving and a lot of them would probably be leaving a day or two early for the break.

Several appetizers were delivered to the table and Clarke snacked on zucchini sticks and managed to grab a slider and some fries. She paced herself on beer so when ten rolled around she’d actually only had two and she had been munching on snacks the whole time. She drank some of Harper’s water and checked her phone. Lexa had texted about ten minutes ago but Clarke hadn’t heard it.

_I like my friends and all, but I’m literally counting the seconds until I see you._

She smiled and bit her lower lip. _same. where r u?_

A response came back a few seconds later. _on our way to club. hoping you’ll get there soon._

Clarke glanced around, looking for Harper to assess whether she was ready to go. Monty and Jasper were talking to Bellamy about something and laughing, but no Harper. Should she text her? Oh, my God. That might be douchey, especially if Harper was in the bathroom.

And while she was thinking about it, she’d take care of that here rather than at the club if at all possible. On the way to the bathroom, she ran into Harper.

“Hey, you ready?” Harper asked.

“Yeah. Let me go to the bathroom.”

“Okay. I’ll get Jasper and Monty rounded up.”
She nodded and went into the bathroom. She was washing her hands when Lauren walked in.
Clarke resisted another eyeroll and instead smiled.

“Are you going to the club?” Lauren asked before she went into a stall.

“Yes. I guess we’ll see you and Bellamy there?” She tried to keep her tone conversational but damn,
where did Bellamy find these women? She checked her hair in the mirror, a cursory onceover.

Lauren didn’t respond and Clarke left, wishing Bellamy would stop his chain-dating and either find
someone steady who challenged him or that he’d just stop for a while and get his shit figured out.
Because if Lauren was going to be this shitty at friends-giving, both Clarke and Raven -- she would
back her up on this -- were going to have a talk with Bellamy. After they had a talk with Lauren
about attitude.

Harper had Clarke’s coat when she got back to the table and handed it to her. She said her goodbyes
and nodded at Harper.

“Are you guys ready?” Harper asked Monty and Jasper.

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

The four of them went to the parking lot and Clarke burrowed deeper into her coat in the brittle night
air.

“Fuck. It’s cold,” Jasper announced.

Monty snorted. “I believe it’s called winter.”

“The struggle is real,” Harper said as she unlocked her car and Clarke laughed as she got into the
back with Jasper.

“I’m not sure how late we’ll stay,” Harper said as she pulled onto the street. “But I will make sure
you have a ride home.”

“Raven and Anya will be there, so I should be okay.”

“What about Lexa?” Monty turned to look at her.

“She might not be driving.”

“So how’s that going, by the way?” Monty asked.

“Does everybody know my business?” But she wasn’t mad. “Fine. It’s going fine.”

“Define ‘fine’.” Jasper looked at her and stroked his chin like he was pondering something.

“Raven might have mentioned heart eyes,” Harper said as she checked her rearview mirror.

“Oh, my God.” Clarke crossed her arms, trying to warm up a bit. “Lexa and I are dating, and so far,
it’s fun. So things are fine,” she said in what she figured was a masterful downplay.

“She seems pretty cool.” Monty turned again to look at her. “I didn’t get to talk to her much at
Anya’s party, but from what I could tell, she seems chill. Is she going to friends-giving?”

“Yes.” And Clarke might have regretted saying that the second she did because Jasper chortled.
“Wow. You invited her to a major holiday event,” he teased.

“Whatever. She’s in town and she lives right next door. It would have been rude not to.” And no way in hell was she going to say that her mom was going, too.

“Well, I think it’s great,” Harper said. “I hope it works out.”

“So do I.” Monty reached back to give her a fist-bump and Jasper did, too.

“Thank you,” Clarke said. “I’ll now forgive you for all the shit you’re giving me.”

“Aww. Thanks.” Jasper stuck his tongue out at her.

“And before we get to the club, does anybody know anything about this Lauren chick Bellamy’s hauling around?” Harper asked. “Because she’s a little weird.”

Monty looked at her. “What do you mean?”

“She’s not a fan of Clarke’s, for one.” Harper slowed to a stop at a light.

“How is this even possible?” Jasper affected an indignant air. “To know Clarke is to love her. Usually. And sometimes to get frustrated with her, but generally, there is much love for her.”

“I don’t know.” The light turned green and Harper accelerated. “It’s like she thinks Clarke is gonna put her moves on Bellamy.”

“Which is bullshit.” Clarke looked out the window, thinking about the tense exchange in the bathroom. “But yeah, she definitely does not have any love for me.” She told them about Lauren’s less-than-friendly reactions to her.

“Maybe she’ll get over it once she sees you with Lexa,” Jasper said.

“Who is she, anyway?” Clarke asked. “I mean, where did Bellamy find her?”

“Probably a coffin in a basement somewhere. I only see her when they’re out at night.”

Clarke laughed and jabbed Jasper in the arm. “Seriously.”

“I think at a party,” Monty said. “But I wasn’t paying much attention when he told me because you know how he is. Next week it’ll be somebody different.”

Clarke hoped so because she didn’t want Lauren anywhere near her apartment or Lexa’s. She decided she’d risk pissing Bellamy off and tell him that Lauren couldn’t be his plus-one. Which felt kind of high school, but whatever. She didn’t want any bad energy over her friends-giving.

“How long have they been dating?” Clarke asked.

“Not even two weeks,” Monty said. “It feels more like they’re just hanging out.”

“Maybe banging here and there,” Jasper added and Harper made a gagging noise.

“What? Maybe she’s a good angry lay.”

“Yeah…no.” Clarke smacked Jasper on the arm.

“Angry sex can be good,” he said, somewhat defensively and Harper laughed.
“What are you not telling us?” she asked, glancing in the rearview mirror at him.

“Yeah, dude.” Monty reached between the seats and poked his knee. “What’s the story?”

“Just what I’ve heard,” he said, and Clarke laughed again.

“Have a few more beers, Jasper,” Harper said. “And then I’ll ask you again.”

The conversation went pretty much like that the rest of the ride to the club but Clarke was only half-listening because soon she’d see Lexa and every part of her reacted to that thought and it was maybe what a livewire might feel like, with all kinds of energy sparking through her and underneath that, a really deep, hot, magnetic pull.

Harper turned into the parking lot of the club and they ended up having to park in the far lot in the back because the front lot was already full and partially blocked from the piles of snow that had been plowed out of the way and were stubbornly clinging to life in the continued cold. Someone in a huge parka was directing traffic and he waved them toward a spot between an SUV and a sport sedan and as they walked toward the entrance, Clarke wondered how it was that she wasn’t clearing a path across the packed-down snow with the heat she imagined she was generating.

God, she was a mess over Lexa. A fucking hot mess.

The bouncers at the door checked ID and took cover charges and Clarke could hear the music thumping from the building and she remembered the first time she and Lexa had danced, and that initial intense, almost visceral moment they’d shared and it had been unsettling and scary but damn, she had wanted more even then, even though her logic side was telling her that stuff like this was impossible and dangerous and it was just hormones. But Clarke had a romantic, hopeful side, too, and as aloof and calculating as she could be in some ways, Lexa defied her logic and infiltrated her defenses.

But if Clarke was being completely honest with herself, she had totally let her in. This whole thing between them had been a continuation of that first dance. Acting on instinct, falling into each moment, backing off a little, moving in a little, syncing to each other’s rhythms like the backbeat of a song.

The bouncer handed her ID back and she gave the cashier money for the cover then went to coat check.

“Ready?” Harper asked and Clarke nodded and put her phone in her pocket and followed her into the club through the crowds of people to the bar.

“What do you want?” Harper asked, leaning in a little closer because of the din of voices and music.

“Negro Modelo with lime.” She handed her some cash just as Monty and Jasper got there.

Clarke stepped away and scanned the crowd, but it was already pretty busy, and she wasn’t sure where Lexa would be, so she texted her. i’m here

The reply came seconds later. Where?

main bar

Lexa didn’t respond and Clarke again scanned the crowd—there. Lexa was working her way through the people near the dance floor. She was easy to pick out because she was wearing a white button-down shirt and her hair flowed around her shoulders and it was like some kind of magnet
drew Clarke’s attention right to her.

Clarke moved a little closer to the few steps that led from the bar level down to the dance floor level and when Lexa arrived at the base of the steps, she looked up and her gaze found Clarke’s almost immediately and that damn slow smile lifted the corners of her mouth.

And then she was at the top of the steps and she pulled Clarke into a hug and Jesus, every part of Clarke’s body responded to her.

“Hey,” Lexa said near Clarke’s ear. “It is so good to see you.”

Clarke kissed her because how could she not? It was a moral and biological imperative at this point, and God, Lexa’s lips were everything. Fuck, Lexa was everything.

“Okay, so I missed you,” Clarke said after a few more glorious seconds of Lexa’s mouth. “I know it’s only been a couple of days, but—”

Lexa kissed her again. “Same. And you look so hot. Damn.”

Clarke smirked. “So do you. And it’s part of my evil plan.” She stepped out of Lexa’s embrace but gave her a hand a parting squeeze.

Lexa leaned in. “Am I part of this evil plan?” she asked with an arch of her eyebrow.

“Guess you’ll have to wait and find out.”

Lexa was about to respond when Harper showed up with a beer and a glass of what looked like Coke. She handed the beer to Clarke. “Hey, Lexa. Do you want a beer? I’ll get you one.”

“No, thanks. I’m driving.”

“Same.” Harper held her glass up. “Want a soda or something?”

“I’m good.” Lexa flashed her a smile.

“Okay,” Clarke said to her. “Are there tables near you?”

“Possibly.”

“Go on,” Harper told Clarke. “I’ll chill with the guys. Raven just texted. They’ll be here soon. Where’s your group?” she asked Lexa.

“Back corner.” Lexa gestured.

“Cool. We’ll see you later.”

Lexa took Clarke’s hand and guided her down the steps into the crowd near the dance floor. Clarke stayed close not only because of the crowd, but also because now that she was with Lexa, she didn’t want to let her out of her sight and not just because she looked insanely sexy in that shirt and those jeans, but because…well, just because.

They ended up at a few small bar tables pulled together in the back corner, where several people had congregated, about an equal mix of guys and women. Lexa made quick introductions but Clarke wasn’t too worried about remembering everybody’s names. This was a first impression of her, and she knew Lexa’s friends would be assessing how she treated her and later, in other circumstances, when they could actually hear each other talk, she’d then worry about names.
Two she would remember, however, because they had a similar intense energy to Anya’s. Echo and Luna. Cool names, too. They were pleasant but Clarke could practically feel their scrutiny and as much as she was glad Lexa had friends who cared about her and wanted to make sure she wasn’t dating an asshole, it was a little unnerving.

“Want to dance?” Lexa asked and Clarke grinned because any time she got to be in Lexa’s space was a winning proposition.

“Oh, hell, yes.” She grabbed her hand and led her to the dance floor where she found a spot and she pulled Lexa close and oh, how it felt to have her moving against her like this and to see the look in her eyes. And it might have been more exciting than the first time they’d danced because there was a comfort with intimacy between them now, an understanding that they were willing to see what might happen next.

The music changed and they ended up in a circle of Lexa’s friends and Clarke’s, and at one point Raven and Harper sandwiched Clarke between them and did an exaggerated sexy-dance that had them all practically crying from laughing. A few songs later Clarke had her arms around Lexa’s neck and Lexa’s hands were on her hips like the first time they’d been here, but this time they were so much closer and Lexa’s thigh was between hers and fuck, the way she moved. Clarke hadn’t ever been one for quick hookups in bathrooms, but she was seriously considering it right now because she was so goddamn turned on and from the glint in Lexa’s eyes, it was mutual, which only turned her on more.

The music shifted again and the lights on the dance floor dimmed as the beat segued to a slower, dirtier groove and Lexa pressed harder against her and her lips were on Clarke’s neck which…fuck, it sent jolts right to her core. Clarke set the rhythm of this grind, and Lexa followed, hands still on Clarke’s hips but lower, now, and her thumbs were dangerously close to her belt buckle.

Oh, the possibilities that position engendered.

Clarke ran her hands along Lexa’s shoulders (fuck, they were spectacular) and she was already so wet and so ready and Lexa grinding against her was only making it worse (better?) and that goddamn smirk of hers—Clarke kissed her then bit down on Lexa’s lower lip then ran her tongue lightly over it. She pulled back a little and even in the dim light, she caught the heated surprise in Lexa’s eyes.

Good. She liked having this effect on her, because she’d be damned if she suffered alone in this deliciously painful state of arousal.

Which Lexa suddenly made much, much worse because she moved abruptly behind Clarke and God her breasts were pressed hard against Clarke and good God her breasts were pressed hard against Clarke’s back and her groin was against her ass and fuck, her hands—still on her hips, but her fingers were now splayed just below Clarke’s belt. So not fair. But so fucking hot.

Clarke leaned back against her and slid her hands down the sides of Lexa’s thighs because she wasn’t going to let Lexa be the only tease in this situation.

“Jesus,” Lexa said near her ear, breathy and urgent but loud enough for her to hear. The song changed again to an even dirtier groove and the crowd cheered and Lexa’s mouth was again on Clarke’s neck and Clarke covered Lexa’s hands with hers then grasped them and moved them lower, but not quite low enough, and she was sure she heard Lexa groan softly against her neck.

She wanted a lot more sounds like that from her and she really, really enjoyed the effect she seemed
to be having on her.

The beat picked up and better matched the throbbing between Clarke’s thighs and she moved her hands off Lexa’s and turned to face her and Lexa put one of her arms around Clarke’s lower back, and held on to her as they continued to move against each other. Clarke again put her arms around Lexa’s neck and pressed her lips against Lexa’s throat, tasting the faint tang of salt from the light sheen of sweat that coated her skin and she smelled traces of her cologne and holy fuck if there was a picture of the definition of thirst in the dictionary, it would be her, staring at Lexa.

After another couple of songs, the floor had become almost unmanageably crowded and there wasn’t much room to move. People jostled them from all sides and Lexa’s gaze held a question and Clarke nodded and reluctantly let go so Lexa could lead her off the floor back to her friends’ tables in the corner, but she did need a break.

“Want another beer?” Lexa asked, leaning in so Clarke could hear her.

“Just water.”

“Be right back.” She smiled and brushed a light kiss over her mouth before she moved away and fuck, even a small gesture like that only made her thirst worse and there was not a damn thing water was going to do for it because it was visceral and maybe primal, how much she wanted Lexa. How much she wanted to be under, over, inside her. How much she hoped Lexa wanted the same with her.

She watched the dance floor for a few moments, but couldn’t tell where any of her friends were so she checked her phone (shit, almost one in the morning already?) and discovered a series of texts from Raven.

will b at Anya’s 2nite

Then,

jfc u & L…will u plz hit that

i’m begging u

bcuz u might self-combust if u don’t [flame emoji]

& i wld srsly miss u

‘here lies Clarke…she died of thirst’ [skull emoji]

Clarke laughed and texted back. omg wld u stop. She waited for Raven to text back, but she might be on the dance floor—no, there was the floating ellipses indicating she was writing back.

PLZ 4 THE LOVE OF GOD HIT THAT

She flushed and bit her lower lip, still waiting because Raven was texting again.

at least get SOMETHING

Clarke texted back. plz tell me u haven’t started a betting pool

no but omg good idea

She laughed out loud again. don’t even. i know where u live
[laughing emoji] do u need a ride home?

Clarke considered her options in that regard. Harper would for sure give her a ride, but Lexa was driving, too. Would she have room? Or had she brought a bunch of her friends and she’d have to drive them home? Harper for sure, Lexa maybe, she texted.

if not L, camp outside her door til she gets there [tent emoji]

why r u like this, Clarke texted back, smiling.

I luv u & want what’s best 4 u. She included the purple grinning devil emoji on that one.

She bit her lip again.

see u l8r this wknd, Raven texted. & u’d better b wlkng funny [kiss emoji]

Oh, my God. Clarke shook her head but she hoped so, too, and fuck, was it wrong to objectify Lexa like that? She looked up to see Lexa headed for her through the crowd, carrying a couple bottles of water, top few buttons of her shirt undone, which exposed her neck and the top of her cleavage. Clarke’s mouth went dry. And damn, Lexa’s jaw. And cheekbones. Like she had been sculpted from marble.

Okay, so maybe a little objectification was okay. From a purely aesthetic perspective, of course.

Fine. And a thirst perspective. People would have to be dead not to look at Lexa Woods and think these things about her. Clarke was, therefore, merely appreciating beauty.

And, okay, appreciating thoughts of getting Lexa undressed and putting her hands and mouth all over her.

Perfectly legit, given how Lexa looked and how Clarke felt at the moment.

Lexa smiled at her as she approached and handed her one of the bottles of water and Clarke immediately opened it and drank. Lexa looked like she wanted to say something but Echo got her attention and she leaned in that direction to hear.

Clarke drank half the water in the bottle. Her tee under her denim shirt clung to her from the sweat she’d worked up on the dance floor and the throbbing between her thighs had decreased to a dull ache but she knew it was only a matter of time before it started up again because Lexa had that effect on her.

Lexa finished talking to Echo and moved closer to Clarke. “Echo and Luna are leaving now with another friend, so I don’t have to take them home later. I can take you with me, if you want, so Harper doesn’t have to go out of her way.” She raised her eyebrows and smiled, hopeful.

“Well, aren’t you chivalrous.”

She arched an eyebrow. “Maybe a little.” And she had that glint in her eyes from earlier on the dance floor. The one that was a mixture of adventurous and dangerous and the ache between Clarke’s thighs increased. Again.

Clarke set her water bottle down on a nearby table and texted Harper to let her know she was getting a ride home from Lexa. Harper texted right back.

[thumbs up emoji] Raven is celebrating. Catch you later.
Clarke leaned closer to Lexa. “Does anybody else in your crew need a ride?”

“No. Luna made sure everybody’s good. Just let me know when you’re ready to go.”

“How about now?”

“You sure? I don’t mind waiting if you want to hang with your friends for a while.”

“They’ll be fine without me,” Clarke said, leaving her bottle on the table along with Lexa’s. She flashed her one of her ultra-flirty smiles and she took Lexa’s hand and guided her through the crowd to the coat check. When Clarke had hers, she turned to Lexa, who started toward the door.

“Coat?” Clarke asked.

“In the Jeep,” Lexa said as she held the door open. “I have a thing about bringing coats into clubs.”

“I’m not sure that’s a good look for the Commander out here,” Clarke teased as they hurried across the parking lot. Lexa had parked in the back, too.

“I’m counting on you not letting me freeze to death in this parking lot.”

“I suppose that is one of my duties as Pancake Master.”

Lexa chuckled and held Clarke’s hand all the way to the Jeep, where she put her coat on before she got in and started the engine. Clarke settled in the passenger seat and gave Lexa a quick onceover. Her coat turned out to be a Navy-style pea coat and fuck, was there anything in the world that didn’t look good on her?

“So I didn’t get to talk to you much today,” Lexa said as she backed out of the space. “Which I totally hated.”

“Same here.”

“On the plus side, I talked to Lincoln and told him about friends-giving and he’s totally into it. Octavia can come, too, so they can help.”

“Is he cool with the double apartment thing?”

“Yes.” Lexa pulled onto the street. “That is such a good idea. I invited Luna and Echo. They’re into it. Luna makes really good hummus with this out of this world pita bread. She’ll make a bunch of that. And Echo will bring a vegetable and cheese tray.”

“Okay, give me some backstory,” Clarke said. “How do you know them?”

“Luna from college and Echo’s in law school. She’s in one of my study groups. She might bring a guy she’s been dating, but she’s not sure she’s that into him.”

And that answered Clarke’s unasked question about whether Luna and Echo were a thing. “What about Luna? She can bring somebody if she wants,” Clarke said instead.

“She’s not seeing anyone seriously at the moment. So she probably won’t.” She stopped at a light and looked over at Clarke. “Most of my other friends are going out of town or visiting family. Lincoln has a friend or two he might invite, if that’s okay.”

“Definitely. It’s good to expand networks.”
The light changed and Lexa accelerated. “Are we still on for something this weekend?” she glanced over at Clarke, maybe a little bit of worry in her eyes.

“I have so decreed it. Saturday is probably best since I have to study for that fucking exam on Sunday and you have a paper to finish up.”

“At least we’ll have that shit done before the break.”

“There is that. But I am still of the opinion that it sucks.”

Lexa laughed and Clarke loved the sound of it, but she wondered at the tension she was picking up from her, laced with uncertainty. Lexa pulled into their home parking lot and drove to her space and turned off the engine, but she didn’t get out of the vehicle and a spike of anxiety shot down Clarke’s spine.

“What’s going on?” she asked, every insecurity she had starting to bubble up in her chest.

“Clarke,” Lexa said, looking at her, and then she hesitated, and there it was, a flash of fire in her eyes.

Clarke waited, practically holding her breath because Lexa’s tone was weighted with uncertainty and vulnerability.

And then her brow furrowed and she leaned in and gave Clarke a quick kiss then pulled away and gazed into her eyes again.

Still, Clarke remained quiet, giving Lexa room to say what she was trying to verbalize.

“Shit,” Lexa said softly, and she looked like she was struggling to find her next words. “Okay, here’s the thing. I absolutely love spending time with you and I can’t get enough. And I don’t want to seem too forward, or make you uncomfortable, but fuck, I have to say this. I don’t think you have any idea how you affect me and—” she stopped and took a breath. “I’m dying to take you home with me.”

Clarke almost didn’t breathe. Did she just say that? Holy shit, every part of her was about to burst into flames. Clarke gave her one of her slow smiles. “Then you’d fucking better, Woods.”

Lexa stared at her for a beat then smiled back and they both got out of the Jeep at the same time, and Clarke almost laughed not only with relief, but at how they were both trying to keep it together in the midst of this monumental thirst as they walked together to the back entrance, Clarke keeping her hands to herself though it was an ordeal.

They made it just past the door to Clarke’s apartment before she couldn’t stand it anymore and Clarke grabbed Lexa by the lapels of her coat and kissed her, hard, and they were there in the corridor making out like the first time and then it was a matter of stumbling the couple dozen paces to Lexa’s apartment still kissing (it was probably a good idea that it was so late because the neighbors might’ve had a hell of a show).

Lexa managed to get the door open but as soon as she had closed it behind them, Clarke pushed her against the wall of the front hallway, cupped her cheek, and gave her a hard, deep kiss that Lexa reciprocated, equally intense, her tongue in Clarke’s mouth, breath hot and fast against her mouth, her hands gripping the front of Clarke’s jacket to hold her in place, and it was probably the hottest kiss Clarke had ever experienced. She pulled away, blood pounding, breath coming in short bursts, lips swollen, and stared into Lexa’s eyes, visible in the dim light that filtered into the front hallway from a lamp in the living room.
She had the same expression now that she had earlier on the dance floor and Clarke was sure her panties were soaked. She kissed her again, and holy fuck, fireworks exploded in her skull and between her thighs and still kissing, she pushed Lexa’s coat off her shoulders and it fell to the floor, joined immediately by Clarke’s. And now Clarke had Lexa against the wall again and she was working the buttons of Lexa’s shirt open as she kissed and sucked on her neck because fuck, she’d been wanting to do this all night.

Who was she kidding? She’d been wanting to do it longer than that.

Lexa groaned and one of her hands was tangled in Clarke’s hair and the other was at the small of her back and she was sucking on Clarke’s bottom lip and finally Clarke got Lexa’s shirt unbuttoned and she put her hands on her bare stomach and fuck it was so much better than she’d imagined, feeling her skin.

She ran her fingertips over the hard expanse of Lexa’s abdomen, which earned a sharp intake of breath from Lexa, who shifted and suddenly she had switched positions with Clarke and now Clarke’s back was against the wall and Lexa pulled Clarke’s shirts out of her jeans.

“You look so good,” Lexa whispered against her mouth between kisses. “Do you have any idea how fucking hot you are?”

And Clarke really, really liked this side of Lexa, the one that said things like that as she started to undo the buttons on Clarke’s shirt. But Clarke didn’t have patience for that shit, so she pushed Lexa’s hands away and yanked her denim shirt off over her head without unbuttoning it and tossed it onto the floor, leaving her in her tight V-neck tee which, she knew, did a fabulous job of showcasing her assets.

Lexa’s gaze lingered on her chest and Clarke smirked as she slowly pulled the tee off and let it fall, leaving her in a black lace bra and Lexa stared, frozen.

“I’ll take that as a yes, that you’re enjoying the view,” Clarke said with a low, husky laugh and Lexa shifted her gaze to her eyes.

“You’re fucking beautiful,” she said softly, an intensity in her eyes that made Clarke’s heart pound even harder. “I can’t believe you’re here.”

Clarke’s breath caught and she took Lexa’s hands and put them on her stomach. Then she leaned in and kissed her. “Believe it,” she said, and Lexa moved her hands gently to Clarke’s breasts and ran her fingers slowly over them and even through the fabric of her bra, Lexa’s touch, gentle as it was, turned her on even more (which she didn’t realize was possible, but apparently arousal could be exponential where Lexa was concerned).

Lexa ghosted her thumbs over Clarke’s nipples, coaxing them to even stiffer peaks through the fabric and there was a direct line of communication from her tits to her clit, because Jesus fuck Clarke was afraid she was going to come from that alone. She clenched her teeth as Lexa continued to tease her with her hands and then she leaned down and Clarke practically shot out of her jeans as Lexa gently nipped and sucked the exposed tops of her breasts.

With one hand on the back of Lexa’s head and the other inside her shirt at the small of her back, Clarke pushed against her.

“Fuck,” she finally managed as Lexa’s lips grazed her nipples and Clarke really, really wanted her bra to be off but Jesus, this felt so goddamn good and she didn’t want to interrupt.
And then Lexa straightened and shrugged out of her shirt—and God, the way her shoulder and arm muscles flexed when she did that—and for a beat, Clarke stared at her, at how her breasts looked in the white lace bra she’d worn and fuck, she needed to get Lexa out of that, too. But right now, this would suffice, and Clarke explored her chest with her fingertips and then her tongue and lips and Lexa moaned, a soft breathy sound that shot right to Clarke’s core.

And then she pulled Clarke against her and Jesus, the points of contact between them that didn’t have clothing as a barrier were making her head explode and sending more signals to her crotch and fuck, she could kiss her forever. Clarke groaned and pushed her against the opposite wall and Lexa’s hands were roaming her back then they were on her shoulders and then her breasts again and Clarke was sure there was nothing that felt as good as being with Lexa like this.

Lexa kissed her neck and Clarke felt her tongue on her pulse point and then she was sucking there, too, and she couldn’t fucking stand it and she gripped Lexa’s hands and guided them to her belt, keeping her pinned to the wall with her body weight, which Lexa did not seem to mind at all, given that damn flirtatious smirk. Lexa kissed her while she unfastened Clarke’s belt and undid her jeans, and then she stopped and stared into Clarke’s eyes and the two of them stood in this tableau, Lexa’s fingers on Clarke’s zipper, Clarke’s resting on Lexa’s hands.

Slowly, Lexa lowered the zipper, gaze boring into Clarke’s, both of them breathing heavily. Clarke ran her hands up Lexa’s arms to her shoulders and kissed her again, long and deep and slow, and then she stopped, every nerve on fire, her skin practically buzzing, and stared into Lexa’s eyes as Lexa caressed Clarke’s skin just above the waistband of her panties, a black lace match to her bra.

“Go ahead,” Clarke said, voice soft. “Find out what you do to me.”

And Lexa gently worked the fingers of one hand past the waistband and moved them lower, caressing as she went and her touch was so soft, but coupled with the look of absolute hunger in her eyes, it was one of the most erotic things Clarke had ever experienced.

Lexa’s fingers were so, so close now and Clarke’s heart was pounding hard enough that she wondered why Lexa didn’t hear it and then Lexa gently cupped her and they both moaned and Lexa pulled her a little closer with her free arm, the palm of her hand at the small of Clarke’s back even as she slid her other fingers carefully into Clarke’s folds and drew her breath in, a sharp, quick sound of surprise, need, and want.

“That’s all you,” Clarke said.

Lexa’s expression was a mixture of awe and raw desire, and it was a little overwhelming but also arousing, seeing that directed at her.

“God, Clarke. I can’t—you’re just so amazing.” Lexa kissed her and Clarke sucked on Lexa’s lower lip for a few seconds then moved a little, allowing her better access between her thighs and oh, fuck, Lexa used it and slid a finger in—not too deep, but just enough to give her a sense of what was in store—and Clarke’s breath hissed between her teeth and goddamn, how quickly she responded to Lexa and her touch, automatically moving slowly with the motion of her hand, knowing that she was only getting wetter. And holy fuck if Lexa kept this up, Clarke was going to come. In an embarrassingly short time, and with only a fingertip. But fuck, it felt so good. So, so good. She bit her lip, trying to stave off her orgasm, already building far more quickly than she was used to.

“Take me to bed already,” she said against Lexa’s mouth and she felt Lexa’s smile and Lexa carefully withdrew her hand (Clarke missed it immediately) and then they were kissing again, working their way through the apartment to Lexa’s bedroom, where she’d left a light on, but it didn’t throw much more light than a candle.
Clarke pulled Lexa with her onto the bed and undid Lexa’s bra (finally) and tossed it aside. Lexa helped Clarke with hers and then Jesus God Lexa’s hands were on Clarke’s breasts without that damn barrier, squeezing and caressing, and her thumbs were brushing her nipples again and fuck all this clothing, for fuck’s sake. Clarke kicked her boots and socks off and Lexa helped pull her jeans off but she suddenly stopped and stared and Clarke braced herself on her elbows, a question unvoiced on her lips.

“Let me—I just want to look at you,” Lexa said, and her gaze was almost as potent as her touch and Clarke had never felt so powerful beneath the reverence of Lexa’s gaze, though she was almost completely unclothed.

How did she do that, make her feel like this? Like she could do anything, and that she was the sexiest woman alive?

And then Lexa dropped Clarke’s jeans on the floor and lowered herself against her and Oh, God their breasts pressed together and nothing should feel this good but God, it did. Lexa brushed Clarke’s hair out of her face and leaned in and kissed her, a slow, almost tender melding of their lips that heated the longer it went on and Clarke pushed Lexa’s jeans down past her hips but couldn’t get them below that from her position, so Lexa helped until all they had between them was underwear.

Lexa sat up and straddled Clarke’s legs as she worked Clarke’s underwear off and when Clarke was finally completely nude, Lexa let out a breath.

“Jesus, Clarke,” she said. “You’re fucking gorgeous.”

And Clarke stared at her, at the thirst writ large on her face, at her eyes dark with desire, and her chest was a maelstrom of emotions and the only thing she could think to do was to take Lexa’s hand and pull her back down against her and kiss her with all the pent-up need she’d been carrying around for days. Lexa’s skin was warm beneath her hands, and Clarke traced the lines of muscle on her back with her fingers and she slid her hand past the waistband of her underwear and grazed her ass (as glorious as the rest of her) and then she enlisted her other hand to start pushing Lexa’s underwear off, too.

“I need to feel you,” Clarke said against Lexa’s mouth and Lexa immediately accommodated the request and worked her underwear off in a matter of a few seconds but Clarke was so not prepared for how it felt, having Lexa totally nude against her and she moaned and buried her face in Lexa’s neck, overwhelmed and completely, utterly turned on.

And then Lexa’s lips were on Clarke’s breasts, and her teeth grazed her nipples and Clarke decided that Lexa could do whatever the hell she wanted with her tits because holy shit, she was good at this.

“Tell me what you want,” Lexa said, gaze dark, intense, but also playful.

“You all over me.”

“Glad to hear we have the same goals. But please let me know if you want or don’t want something.”

And dammit, why did that make Clarke’s heart fill up, too? “Just keep doing what you’re doing. You’ve already found out the effect you have on me.”

“Not gonna lie,” Lexa said with a smirk. “I kinda love it.”

“Yeah, well, I do, too.” Clarke smirked right back. “So show me some more.”
And Lexa continued working on Clarke’s breasts and fuck, it was transcendent, Lexa’s mouth on her nipples, her hands caressing and squeezing her tits, her hair splayed out across Clarke’s chest—this had to be heaven.

Lexa worked her way lower and Clarke knew that she was leaving marks but she actually wanted them, wanted proof that they had done this. And Clarke moaned, her fingers tangled in Lexa’s hair as she went even lower and Clarke silently willed her to please take her fabulous tongue even lower than that.

“I want to taste you,” Lexa said, like she was reading her mind, and just that statement made her even wetter.

“By all means,” Clarke shot back and Lexa chuckled and a few seconds later her mouth was exactly where Clarke wanted it to be and oh, God…Lexa’s tongue. Clarke lost most coherent thought as Lexa sucked and licked her clit then worked along her folds to her entrance where she teased until Clarke was on the razor’s edge of release and she knew damn well Lexa was drawing it out.

“Lexa,” she said. “God, so good. But I need you inside—”

And then Lexa slipped two fingers in and Clarke groaned long and low because fuck Lexa’s reach -- Jesus God -- and how she moved her fingers. She was hitting all the right spots, especially the one — fuck. Clarke’s hands tangled in Lexa’s hair and she met every thrust and within seconds she was coming, Lexa’s name on her lips, sparks flickering behind her eyelids but fuck, she wasn’t done and she came again and slammed back onto the bed, aftershocks rippling up and down her legs and torso.

“Fuck,” she managed as Lexa repositioned herself to kiss her and tasting herself in Lexa’s mouth only worked her up again with emotions she still wasn’t sure how to define. She leaned down and kissed her, gentle, then nuzzled her neck. “What do you like?”

“You. Touching me everywhere.”

Clarke grinned. “I can totally get behind that as an objective. Tell me if something’s not working for you or if you want me to do something else.” She held Lexa’s gaze for a few seconds then ran a line of kisses along her collarbone before she sucked a mark into her skin just below that and oh, the noises Lexa made.

Clarke would never get tired of them.

She spent a while with Lexa’s breasts (fuck, they were perfect and fit her hands just right) and then they were kissing again because Clarke really could not get enough of that. And then Clarke worked her hand between them and Lexa spread her legs wider and guided Clarke’s hand between her thighs and holy fuck, she was drenched. Clarke actually groaned at how hot it was.

“That’s what you do to me,” Lexa said, voice low and husky.

“So beautiful,” Clarke said, her gaze locked on Lexa’s. “You’re so fucking beautiful,” she whispered as she gently stroked, fingers instantly coated, the throbbing between her own thighs increasing. She stopped, earning a disappointed groan from Lexa that died immediately when she watched Clarke slowly lick her fingers,

“And God, you taste so good.” She again started stroking with her fingers while she gently sucked and nipped at Lexa’s breasts and Lexa strained against her.

And Clarke loved how her name sounded in Lexa’s mouth under these circumstances and she loved how Lexa seemed to curse more the more worked up she got. She slid a finger through Lexa’s folds then inside and then she inserted another and she wasn’t sure if it was her or Lexa that groaned because God, it felt good to be with her like this, skin to skin, fingers buried to the knuckles in her wet heat, and she moved so she could use her mouth, too, and good God the taste of her all over her lips and tongue was otherworldly.

It wasn’t long before Lexa pushed against her, urgent and tense, making the most gorgeous, breathy sounds, and a few seconds later her body went rigid, and Clarke pumped twice more, her tongue working her clit and Lexa came with a flood of wetness and another long, loud moan and Clarke decided if that’s the sound she had been hearing after she moved in next door rather than the headboard, she probably would’ve masturbated to it.

Lexa trembled with aftershocks and Clarke continued to gently lick and suck, keeping her fingers inside, patiently coaxing Lexa through the aftermath to another peak.

“Fuck,” Lexa blurted as she crested again, tensing then relaxing with another one of those delicious moans and this time Clarke let her settle, her fingers still inside, while she pressed soft kisses to her belly.

Lexa made a contented sound, one of her hands in Clarke’s hair, and when Clarke started to pull out, Lexa stopped her with her other hand.

“No,” she said. “Not yet. You feel too good.”

Clarke smiled and re-positioned herself so she was lying next to her, left hand still between Lexa’s thighs, fingers still embedded. She propped herself on her elbow and watched Lexa’s face in the dim light.

“Okay?” Clarke asked as she pressed a kiss to Lexa’s forehead.

“Mmm. The best. You?” She stroked Clarke’s cheek.

“Same.” And she loved these little check-ins they had as they moved to new levels of intimacy, loved how they tested them together, and allowed room to explore.

And they lay like that for a while, exchanging slow, languid kisses and soft caresses until Lexa squeezed Clarke’s wrist, signaling her to pull out and she did and Lexa gathered her into an embrace and held on to her, nuzzling her throat.

“I’m so into you,” Lexa said against her skin. “In case you hadn’t figured it out.”

“I think I might have a fairly good idea about it.” She ran her hand down Lexa’s back. “And I might low-key it, but I’m way into you, too.” And it didn’t freak her out in the least to say that.

Lexa chuckled. “I was hoping.” She kissed her shoulder then stared into her eyes. “And I’m not done with you yet tonight.”

And Clarke didn’t think it was possible to get instantly wet just from a look and a statement, but here she was and it was happening.

“Well, I was hoping for that, too.”
And it did not take long for Lexa to get her completely worked up again. And again. And a couple more agains after that (with a hydration break between). But Clarke did the same to Lexa because goddamn, everything about her was so fucking amazing and she made Clarke feel all kinds of things—things that went deeper than physical, things that fed her emotions in ways she hadn’t figured out yet. Her logic self would have told her to be scared, to hold back, but her heart was clearly on Team Lexa and was totally recruiting Team Clarke to the cause. And as they lay tangled together in the sheets, skin to skin, sweaty and sated, Clarke knew that her heart was right.

“Can you stay?” Lexa asked and Clarke pulled her even closer.

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“You live right next door. Maybe you prefer your own space after doing...this.”

Clarke grinned. “After doing you, you mean?”

Lexa huffed, but she was smiling, too. “Well, if you’re going to be blunt about it. I was thinking after doing ‘certain activities’.” And she used air quotes, which made Clarke laugh.

“Oh, okay. Well, this is a euphemism-free zone right now,” she said with exaggerated stern-ness. And then she kissed her. “Hell, yes, Lexa. I’m staying.”

“Good.” And her smile was so soft and radiant that Clarke almost drowned in her feels.

“When does Lincoln get home?”

“Sunday. Do you not want him to know you spent the night?”

Clarke furrowed her brows. “No. I just didn’t want him to trip on all the stuff we left on the floor by the door. Though that might make a good Instagram photo for a Rapture prank.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow. “Seriously?”

Clarke laughed and kissed her. “I don’t care who knows that I’m spending time with you. I really like you, I love being around you, and holy fuck, I love certain activities with you.” She used air quotes, too.

“It’s mutual.” Lexa kissed her and she still tasted like them both and God, was this how it was going to be? Clarke would just immediately be ready for Lexa to strip her down and have her way with her?

Probably. But she did have to admit that right now, she was pretty tired. So more of those “certain activities” would have to wait.

Lexa pulled her close and spooned her, and Clarke relaxed, loving the way it felt to be with her like this, in her bed, without clothing. Lexa kissed her shoulder. “Good night, Clarke.”

“Night, Lexa.” She squeezed Lexa’s hand where it rested against her stomach. “Also, I’m really glad you don’t have a headboard.”

She laughed softly, a delicious, sleepy sound. “I’m making a space for the 80s mirror, instead. You’ll totally love it.”

Clarke smiled.

Her heart was right.
Don't tell anyone that dancing could cause "certain activities." Because then some asshat will totally try to ruin it. So it's OUR secret.

And I'd make some comment here about other things that are edible besides food in keeping with my foodie theme, but that would probably be inappropriate. Instead, I'll let YOU do that.

P.S. I even have feelz writing Clexa smut, dammit.
The Book of Clarke

Chapter Summary

The morning after. And then the afternoon after, too. And the evening after. Oh, and at some point there's pizza. Also, Clarke's pretty much decided to buy a house in Lexa-ville, though she's not talking openly about it. Because Clarke.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clarke was clearly the luckiest woman ever because Lexa liked morning sex, too, and though she had started deliciously slow, things escalated quickly and now here Clarke was, Lexa feasting between her thighs, and fuck, her tongue, and then her fingers—God her fingers—reaching so deep, hooking just right…ohhhh God.

“Lexa,” she managed, drawing out the last syllable in a long moan and she felt like she was floating for a second then she was falling back to the bed, and a tide rushed through her and all she could do was let it, all she could do was fall and feel it wash over her, and then Lexa was gently kissing the insides of her thighs and caressing the curve of her belly with her free hand and Clarke couldn’t swallow around the lump in her throat. She drew a couple of ragged breaths and Lexa took her hand and intertwined their fingers and dammit, the lump in her throat seemed to expand and she smiled as Lexa made a soft, contented noise and rested her head on Clarke’s stomach.

Clarke wound her fingers through her hair, enjoying the way the sunlight that filtered through the blinds fell across her naked back and made a pattern on the sheets. The comforter and two blankets had somehow ended up on the floor but she didn’t care.

“Best morning ever,” Lexa said, voice husky, her words warm puffs on Clarke’s skin.

“Yes. It is.” She continued to stroke Lexa’s hair with her free hand, and everything felt so good and so right and she sighed, completely relaxed.

Lexa carefully pulled out and moved so she could lie next to her and Clarke was really loving the way it felt to have Lexa naked against her in every possible way. She brushed hair out of Clarke’s face and God, Clarke could easily spend days staring into her eyes.

She traced Lexa’s jaw with her fingers and Lexa smiled and turned her head and kissed Clarke’s hand.

“Okay?” Lexa asked.

“I am so okay. Beyond okay.” Clarke pulled her into a kiss and fuck, she tasted like them both and that just made her want more. “You’re amazing. And I don’t just mean that in the certain activities sense. Though that is, in fact, the case.”

Lexa laughed. “You inspire me,” she said before she kissed her again and Clarke deepened it and they both moved so that Lexa was on top and fuck, they were both wet again and Clarke smirked against Lexa’s mouth and lightly bit her bottom lip. She moved her thigh between Lexa’s and Lexa
voiced a soft “mmm” and slid her tongue into Clarke’s mouth and started slowly grinding on Clarke’s thigh. She groaned a few moments later.

“Fuck,” Lexa said, breathy, and she braced herself on her arms, hands on either side of Clarke’s head. She stared down into her eyes. “God, what you do to me.”

“And what I want to keep doing to you.” Clarke grinned and let her hands ride Lexa’s hips as she adjusted her speed to Lexa’s, moving her thigh for maximum contact and it wasn’t long before it was coated with Lexa and fuck, it was hot, feeling Lexa’s arousal increase as she continued to grind against her.

Lexa’s breathing sped up, until it was coming in short, sharp bursts, and the green of her eyes seemed to darken. “I’m close,” she whispered. “So fucking close. But I want you inside for it.”

And Clarke immediately adjusted her position so she could get her hand between them and Jesus God Lexa was soaked and she groaned at how hot that was as she gently teased her, ran her thumb over her clit and Lexa tensed and her breath hitched and she bit her lip.

“God, Clarke,” she managed. “That’s so good. Fuck, I’m so close.”

And Clarke slid two fingers in and Lexa groaned, low and dirty, and it was almost a growl the way it rumbled up from her chest and Clarke increased the speed of her thrusts, her thumb brushing Lexa’s clit. She felt her clench around her fingers and Clarke stopped moving them and Jesus God Lexa was soaked and she groaned at how hot that was as she gently teased her, ran her thumb over her clit and Lexa tensed and her breath hitched and she bit her lip.

“Clarke,” she whispered and God, the expression in her eyes. Clarke’s chest felt like it was on the verge of exploding with the enormity of the emotions that filled it.

“I’m here.” She stroked Lexa’s cheek with her thumb. “Ready?”

“God, yes.”

And Clarke pumped a few more times and Lexa tensed, and that was hot, too, the sheer physicality of her and the way her muscles bunched. And then she released with one of her long, deep moans, but she somehow kept her eyes open and stared into Clarke’s as she came and there was nothing more beautiful than seeing it expressed in her gaze, the storm of her cresting and then warmth and vulnerability as she fell back into herself and Clarke’s embrace.

Clarke held her close with her free arm, intoxicated by their sweat-slicked skin and the way their scents mingled in the room and how the sheets now smelled like them, too. And she didn’t even care that her hand and wrist were going numb because she hadn’t pulled out (besides, there was nowhere else she wanted to put her fingers), and Lexa pressed slow, lazy kisses to her neck as she came down then she moved a little so Clarke could extricate her fingers. Which Clarke appreciated in some respects because she could then run both hands up and down Lexa’s back and ass while they made out again, long, slow, languid kisses and fuck, she could kiss her forever.

She could do a lot of things with her forever.

And she waited for the little punch of fear that normally accompanied such thoughts where relationships were concerned but it didn’t come and Clarke tightened her embrace and buried her face in Lexa’s neck because she suddenly wanted to cry but she wasn’t sure why.

“Hey,” Lexa said, tone gentle. “What’s going on?”

Clarke loosened her hold so she could wipe at her eyes. “You,” she said.
Lexa moved off her but stayed close, propped on her elbow. She stroked Clarke’s cheek. “Talk to me.”

And Clarke’s heart overflowed. “God, Lexa. I just—you’re fucking amazing. I feel so much when I’m with you. I don’t even have words for most of it.”

Lexa searched her gaze for a moment. “I feel the same way about you.”

Her words went right to her heart and Clarke kissed her again because that was one of her prime directives where Lexa was concerned.

“Everything you do, everything you are—I’m here for it,” Lexa said against her mouth and Jesus fuck Clarke wanted to cry again.

She pushed her cheek against Lexa’s palm. “Same.”

Lexa brushed at a lingering tear on Clarke’s face with her thumb. “Are you still scared?” And her eyes were so full of warmth and care that again, Clarke’s heart felt like it was spilling over, and filling up every dark corner of her chest.

“No,” she said with utter certainty and she covered Lexa’s hand where it rested against her cheek. “Are you?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because…you’re you.” Lexa smiled. “And I want to be around you as much as I can. I’m not saying that to make you freak out. I just need you to know, and I also want you to know that if you need to adjust the pace here—slow it down until you’re sure about what you want—that’s okay. I get it.”

“Thank you. But I already know what I want and I’m well past needing to go slower.” She smiled back. “I’ve been naked with you since last night, after all.”

“Technically, since really, really early this morning,” Lexa said, and she leaned in for a kiss which of course Clarke granted. More than once.

“What’s. Just so long as I can get you like this again.” She ran her hand along Lexa’s shoulder and then down her arm.

“Definitely,” And her eyes seemed to gleam with that sexy adventurous expression she had. “I am really, really into you, Clarke. In case it’s not clear.”

“Same.” And Clarke pulled her into another embrace and relaxed.

“Okay?” Lexa asked.

“Yes. You?”

Lexa didn’t respond for a few moments and Clarke looked at her.

“You can talk to me, too, you know.”

“I’m trying to figure out how to say what I don’t have words for.” Lexa held her gaze. “Language isn’t always the best medium.” She brushed a kiss across her forehead. “I’m—I don’t know how to
describe how deeply you move me. But I hope maybe you can feel it. Or at least trust that it’s true.”

She did. Oh, God, she did.

“Please don’t let that scare you.”

Clarke smiled. “It doesn’t.” She kissed her, gentle but also certain, and she didn’t say anything more because sometimes words just didn’t do a moment justice. Lexa settled in closer and her touches were slow and tender and she made soft, appreciative noises at Clarke’s caresses until she completely relaxed and drifted to sleep wrapped around her, head on her shoulder.

Clarke stroked her hair for a while, listening to her breathe, sinking into the feel of her and the way she spoke to parts of her Clarke had thought were unreachable, and she knew that Lexa had taken up residence in her heart. Hell, she’d invited her in. She practically gave her the keys.

And God, she hoped she stayed.

Lexa mumbled something and smiled then burrowed against her even harder and Clarke pressed a kiss to her forehead, then closed her eyes and joined her in sleep, safe and warm in her arms.

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Somehow, Clarke realized as she woke up, Lexa had managed to spoon her (not that she was complaining) and was now decorating her back with slow kisses. Which was both really comforting but also goddamn sexy.

“Mmm. Morning,” Clarke said and she squeezed Lexa’s hand where it rested against her stomach.

Lexa chuckled. “Afternoon. It’s almost two.”

Which was fucking fine with her. She started to roll over and Lexa moved her arm so she could. “So we slept in. It’s Saturday. Plus, we were busy.” She smiled and God, Lexa’s eyes seemed so green in the muted light filtering in through the blinds.

“We were. The best kind of busy.”

Clarke kissed her because fuck, that little smirk of hers was a total invitation and damn, she still tasted like the last few hours they’d shared.

“Are you hungry?” Lexa said against her lips.

“There are so many ways I could answer that.” She gently bit Lexa’s lip, which earned her one of her soft little sounds.

“When you put it like that, so could I.” She slid her tongue into Clarke’s mouth and fuck, parts of her were already lighting up again.

And then her stomach rumbled and Lexa chuckled against her mouth and Clarke sighed and kissed her again. “Okay, fine. Given that we’ve been…busy for a while, it’s probably a good idea to get some sustenance.”

“Is that your expert medical opinion?” Lexa ran her fingers down Clarke’s arm and even something that simple threatened to get her going again.

“Yes. In terms of endurance, it’s a good idea to replenish depleted energy stores. But I have a caveat.”
“Which is?”

“I’m not interested in going out into the world right now to forage for said sustenance.”

Lexa smiled. “My thoughts, too. So—”

“Pizza.”

Lexa laughed. “Exactly. What kind?”


Lexa laughed again and pulled her into a kiss. “Maybe you’d better get two.”

“Good idea. Because we’ll probably need sustenance later, too.”

“Oh?” And she quirked an eyebrow and Jesus, could she be any hotter?

Clarke stared at her and decided that yes, she probably could. “So I’m hoping.”

“Same.” She sucked lightly on Clarke’s bottom lip.

“Just a tip,” Clarke murmured, “but when you do things like that, I start to totally forget about food.”

“Like what?” Lexa asked, and there was that teasing smirk. “This?” And she kissed her hard and deep and already Clarke was on her way to ready for another round. “Or maybe this?” And she trailed her fingers down Clarke’s neck to her breasts and Clarke clenched her teeth.

“Now you’re just being mean,” she managed.

Lexa stopped and cupped her cheek. “Apologies. But I seriously cannot get enough of you.”

“Good.”

And then Lexa’s stomach rumbled and Clarke laughed this time. “Let me order pizza,” she said. “Sounds like we both could use it.”

Lexa ran her thumb lightly over Clarke’s lips then pulled her hand away from her cheek. “So since we’re preparing to leave this bed—for now—and I know it’s later than usual and pizza isn’t necessarily the best accompaniment, but can I interest you in coffee?”

“Yes.”

“Awesome.” And she gave Clarke another quick kiss and got out of bed and as sad as that was, Clarke got an almost unobstructed view of her back and shoulders and from a purely aesthetic point of view, they were incredible to the nth power. The tattoo that ran the length of her spine served as an exclamation point on how fucking sexy her back was.

The artist who had done the tattoo had incorporated both light and heavy strokes, and some of the vertical lines weren’t actually solid lines. They were, instead, made up of several designs that looked like some kind of ancient writing. Several dark circles of different sizes sat closer to the small of her back while the top, near her neck, had one large off-center circle that hadn’t been filled in but instead had a couple of sharp vertical lines that bisected it—off-center again—like spears or blades.

The whole thing looked both very old and futuristic at the same time, while the heavy lines of the
geometrically symmetrical shapes on her right biceps incorporated strong, stylistic strokes that looked like something someone would bear on a distant planet.

“What do your tattoos mean?” Clarke asked.

Lessa turned to look at her as she pulled her hair back into a ponytail and secured it with a tie.

“Different things. We can talk about that later, when I give you a closer look,” she said, with a quick grin.

“I’ll hold you to that.” And she almost forgot about what was on Lexa’s back and arm because she was now staring at her chest and her perfect breasts that fit her hands so well, and at the few marks she had left on her abdomen and chest, which provided a record of what had happened between them. “God, you’re beautiful,” Clarke said, voice barely above a whisper. “In so many ways.” And she shifted her gaze to Lexa’s eyes and what she saw there made her hold her breath, made her heart seem to expand even more.

A second later Lexa leaned down and kissed her, slow and tender. She pulled away after a few seconds. “I know I’ve said this, but I am so fucking into you.”

Clarke caressed her cheek. “I don’t think I’ll get tired of hearing it.” And she knew the statement conveyed a lot more than just an acknowledgement, knew that it might presage something so much more than casual, but she really wanted Lexa to know, wanted her to understand that she wasn’t going to run from this, wherever it went.

“I’m now going to make coffee,” Lexa said. “Because if I don’t leave this bedroom right now, you won’t be ordering anything and we’ll probably starve to death.”

“But what a way to go,” Clarke teased, and she brushed a quick kiss over Lexa’s mouth.

“Fuck,” she whispered, “the things you do to me.” And she moved away to her closet. She pulled on a pair of sweats and a tee and she set another pair of sweats and a tee on the bed. And then she lingered at the door. “I really love that you’re here,” she said in a tone that was not only somehow sexy but also hopeful for more.

“Same.”

And Lexa flashed a quick smile and left and a few moments later Clarke heard her moving around in the kitchen and she groaned softly and flopped back onto the bed, idly admiring the décor, and thinking how it expressed different parts of Lexa and how she really wanted to know more about everything that made her tick.

Wooden bookshelves along one wall provided a boundary on either side of a wooden table that clearly served as a desk. Lexa’s laptop sat in the middle of it. The shelves held books but also some objects, including some carved figures of both stone and wood and framed photos of what Clarke presumed were friends and family.

Three metal candle trees were positioned around the room. That was the best way Clarke could describe them, because they looked like trees, and each stood about three feet high and held four pillar candles at various heights on its metal branches. Lexa had placed them in such a way that they no doubt provided really mellow light without getting in the way.

She had also hung framed images of women superheroes on the wall, including the most recent interpretation of Batwoman. Others included Wonder Woman, and Storm from the Avengers. Lexa preferred earth tones in here like in the rest of the apartment, but she brought more splashes of color
to the room’s rather staid interior of off-white walls and wood floor by hanging multi-colored fabric on the ceiling. It was whimsical, and Clarke enjoyed that Lexa had that side to her.

Fuck, who was she kidding? She enjoyed every single fucking thing about her.


She stretched and sat up, still reveling in the many hours she had just spent in this bed, the smell of fresh coffee joining her as she pulled on the sweats and tee Lexa had set out for her. She went to the bathroom, very much aware that she was stiff and a little sore and that she might actually be walking funny, then went to the kitchen. Their coats and shirts still decorated the floor nearby and she was glad, because she liked the memories. Okay, she fucking loved them.

“Hey,” Lexa said, eyes lighting up when Clarke entered the kitchen. She poured a cup of coffee and Clarke got the half-and-half out of the fridge after she pecked Lexa on the cheek and poured a bit into the coffee.

She sipped and made an appreciative noise. “God, your coffee.”

“I see. So that’s why I was able to talk you into coming home with me.”

“Well, that and your tongue. And lips. Fingers. Body. Brain. Hell, it’s all you.” And she smirked and sipped, enjoying the swell of Lexa’s breasts in her tee. Especially the very visible way her nipples pecked the fabric.

“My clothes look good on you,” Lexa said, with an answering smirk of her own. “Extremely.” And her gaze lingered on Clarke’s chest. “But they’d look better off.”

“I cannot believe you used that line.” Clarke took Lexa’s hand. “But fuck, it totally worked.” And she pulled her into yet another goddamn kiss because it was clearly written in the Book of Clarke that she had to kiss Lexa at least a thousand times a day.

The Book of Clarke had other decrees, as well, and all of them had to do with Lexa. Like, for example, getting her naked as much as possible. Barring that, spending as much time with her as she could. Oh, and making her more pancakes. And watching movies with her and going on road trips and holding her hand while either one of them drove and spending holidays together and holy shit the Book of Clarke had “future” written all over it and did it freak her out?

She waited for the little dig in her consciousness that told her she needed to shut all this down and guard her heart but Lexa’s arms were around her and she was tracking up her neck with her lips and every part of Clarke sizzled its response.

Which was a big hell no to shutting this down.

From the other room, her phone rang with Raven’s tone.

“It’s been doing that for a while,” Lexa murmured against her neck.

“Of course it has. Damn thing.” She sighed and set her coffee down. “But I should order pizzas before I get distracted again, anyway.”

Lexa caught her with another kiss.

“Not helping, Woods.”
“No? It’s not distracting you, then?”

Clarke sighed. “You’re totally distracting me.”

“Good. Thought I’d lost my touch.”

“I don’t think that’ll happen where I’m concerned.” And with a sheer act of will she left the kitchen and went to her coat where it lay on the floor by the front door, her phone ringing again from its pocket. Raven again, and she knew if she answered it she’d be interrogated, but she also knew that Raven worried.

“Hey,” Clarke said. “Let me call you right back.”

“Oh, my God, you’re alive. Are you okay? Do you have all your limbs?”

“Yes, and yes. And I’ll call you back. I have to order a pizza.”

“Okay. Bye.” She hung up and Clarke ordered the pizzas online then checked her texts. Harper had left a couple, then Raven with a series of several. A couple of study group friends. And…Lexa? She opened that one. It was a picture of their clothing strewn on the floor by the door, with the tagline, for your Rapture prank.

She texted back, ah, Padawan. i’ll make a prankster of you yet

A few seconds later she heard Lexa laugh in the kitchen and it made her heart flutter. She leaned into the kitchen.

“Forty-five minutes on the pizza and I have to call Raven. Pretty sure she thinks I’ve been abducted by aliens.”

“Okay. I’m gonna shower. You’re welcome to join me.” She arched an eyebrow and God, it made Clarke weak.

“And then we’ll not only starve, but quite possibly drown.”

“I can adjust the showerhead.”

“I’m not talking about the water,” Clarke said with a wicked little smile and Lexa stared at her for a beat, then flushed and smiled back, equally wicked.

“Well, damn.”

Clarke laughed. “Tell you what. You shower and I’ll go home for a bit then come back here. Unless you’d rather eat at my place. Raven’s not coming back until tomorrow.”

“I think I’d like that,” Lexa said.

“Excellent.” Clarke went to the bedroom and gathered her clothes there then got her shirts and jacket. Lexa followed her down the hall with coffee and waited for her to get the door to her apartment open before she handed the cup to her, caressed her cheek, and kissed her.

“Be back in a bit,” she said with a smile that had Clarke melting right there in the hallway and then she went back to her apartment. Clarke stared after her before she went inside and took her clothes to her bedroom. She opted to shower before she called Raven and twenty minutes later she had done that and dressed in Lexa’s sweats and tee again, which made her feel kind of giddy and a little goofy.
She checked the time, re-heated her coffee, then called Raven.

“Ay yai yai, Clarkita,” she answered. “I thought you’d been kidnapped.”

“Well, maybe kind of. But it was purely consensual.”

Pause. Then, “Did you stay at Lexa’s last night?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

Clarke bit her lip and didn’t respond, all kinds of thrills and chills racing through her veins at the images in her mind.

“Are you walking funny?”

“Maybe.”

“Oh, my God. Finally! Details,” she practically chortled.

“As if.”

“Okay, Q and A. Did you stay the whole night?”

“Technically no, since we got back after one in the morning.”

“Semantics,” Raven said with a huff. “The point is, you didn’t hit it then bail?”

“Hell, no.”

“So…when did you finally leave?”

Heat flared across Clarke’s cheeks. “Um. About twenty minutes ago.”

Silence. Then, “Holy shit. Holy *fucking* shit. Are you being serious with me right now?”

“Yes. And she’ll be here in about twenty more minutes for pizza.”

“Uh-huh. Is that your pet name for a bit more bang shui?”

“Oh, my God with that, Reyes.” And she blushed again.

“Don’t worry. I won’t be home until tomorrow afternoon. And then I’m going to totally shake you down for more details.”

“Raven—”

“I just want to make sure you’re having fun and that she treats you right.”

“Yes and yes. Don’t worry.”

She didn’t respond for a few seconds. “I hear something different in your voice.”

“What do you mean?”

“Happiness. And it sounds really good on you, Griff. I hope it continues.”
“Wait. Who is this? What have you done with Raven?”

She laughed. “Don’t worry. I’m going to tease the hell out of you tomorrow. But I’m going to be totally happy and approving right now. So be prepared for a full Reyes grilling.”

Clarke smiled. “We’ll see. Say hi to Anya. I need to check on the pizzas.”

“Uh-huh. I’ll bet.”

“Bye, Reyes,” she said, in a long-suffering tone.

“Later.” And she included kissing noises before she hung up.

Clarke sipped her coffee, savoring it. Even re-heated it was good. She answered the texts she had gotten and then her intercom buzzed. Had to be the pizzas. She responded and yes, it was, so she slipped her house sneakers on and went down to get them then returned to her apartment and texted Lexa.

A few minutes later a knock at her door got her heart going again. She opened it and there stood Lexa with a bottle of wine and two wine glasses.

“I figured this was probably a bit more appropriate for pizza than coffee,” she said, holding the bottle up.

“Your coffee is appropriate any time, anywhere.” Clarke stepped aside. “But I have no complaints about wine, either.” She watched her walk to the kitchen, also wearing the sweats and tee she had been in earlier, her hair still a little damp from the shower but it still fell in waves around her shoulders and Clarke easily envisioned her nude (she wasn’t sure that was in the Book of Clarke, but it should be, under Lexa 1:1 or at least close to that).

And while Lexa opened the wine Clarke got plates out for the pizza as well as napkins and silverware, though she didn’t anticipate needing the latter. She put some music on—soft ambient chill because she was feeling mellow—and waited for Lexa to join her at the table.

“Which one?” she asked, gesturing at the pizza boxes.

“One of each to start.” Lexa set the wine glasses on the table and sat down while Clarke served them both slices of pizza. And why the hell did pizza taste so good after sex? Maybe it was sex with Lexa that just made everything better, because the wine was ultra-delicious, too.

And maybe it was the way Lexa looked at her, and the way she laughed and smiled as they talked and ate. And the brief touches on Clarke’s hand and arm, and her smile and the stories she shared—everything. It was just everything, and Clarke wasn’t sure what to make of all the emotions that kept bubbling up around the edges of her past, but they didn’t scare her. Instead, she welcomed them, because they were tied to Lexa, who made her feel oh, so good.

“So I was hoping you’d maybe want to hang out with me a little more,” Clarke said as she put the leftover pizza in the fridge. “Maybe watch a movie.” She closed the fridge and turned toward Lexa, and the expression in her eyes indicated so much more than casual.

“I’d really like that.”

Clarke closed the distance between them and ran her fingers along Lexa’s cheek. “I’d like to… I don’t know. Just be close to you for a while longer.” She searched Lexa’s face with her gaze, looking for any signs of unease. There weren’t any.
“I’d like that, too.” And Lexa smiled and kissed her and of course every part of Clarke responded to it and Lexa’s hands were on her cheeks, holding her in place as she kissed her until they both stopped, breathing a little heavily, and Lexa brushed a strand of Clarke’s hair out of her face and God, Clarke’s heart threatened to burst. Again.

She sighed, relaxed and aroused. “When you do things like that, I want to keep you around even more.”

“Then my plan is totally working.” Lexa smiled and kissed her on the forehead. “What movie did you have in mind?”

“Something fun and ridiculous.”

“Um…what about Clueless?”

“Oh, my God. That’s perfect. And you’re in luck because I actually own it on DVD.”

“So do I, so we’re covered.”

“Yet another thing to like about you,” Clarke said as she took her hand. “Popcorn?”

“Definitely. More wine?”

“Hook us up, Commander.” Clarke let go of her and set to work making popcorn while Lexa poured their glasses full again.

A few minutes later, they had settled on the couch and this time Clarke occupied the corner and Lexa leaned back against her and it was absolutely perfect, because she could wrap her arms around her and kiss her neck and Lexa made the best little noises when she did and they spent the entire movie like that.

“Are we in the mood for another romcom?” Clarke asked as the credits rolled at the end of Clueless.

“I think so.”

“Imagine Me and You?”

“Oh, I love that movie.”

Clarke chuckled against her neck. “Is the Commander a softie?”

“I’ve let you know my secret, Pancake Master. Use it wisely.”

Clarke hugged her a little harder. “It only makes me like you more.”

“Points for me.” She grinned and moved so Clarke could put the next movie on and this time she ended up stretched out on the couch, her head on Lexa’s thigh and Lexa toyed with her hair or held her hand throughout the film, and Clarke felt both protected and cared about and she clung to the moment, because she wanted to carry how this felt with her for the times when she couldn’t be around her.

And that sounded a whole lot like thinking about the future.

A lot of that going on in her head.

A whole lot.
But God, she couldn’t stop doing it. And how could she, when Lexa kept looking at her like she hung the fucking moon, like she was a reason for Lexa’s very existence? How could she not think things like that when Lexa directed that one smile at her, the one that said, “holy shit I can’t believe I’m here with you and oh, my God I’m so glad this is happening”? She couldn’t. Because she felt it, too.

“Do you think it could happen?” Clarke asked as the credits on Imagine Me and You rolled. She turned the TV off and shifted onto her back so she could look up at Lexa.

“What?”

“Love at first sight like that?” And she wasn’t sure why she was asking.

“I’m not sure it was love at first sight for them. I think it was a connection.”

Clarke studied her, thinking about what her mom had said about when she met her dad.

“And,” Lexa continued, “I think you can be immediately drawn to someone. That’s what I mean by connection. What you do with that can create something. Like in the movie. I’m not sure that Luce was saying she was in love with Rachel when she first saw her, but she does acknowledge there was a connection.”

Clarke kissed Lexa’s fingertips. “An unstoppable force.”

She regarded her for a moment. “What about you? Do you think love at first sight is possible?”

“I think it is for some. But I’m leaning toward what you said, about feeling a connection and being drawn to someone. Other things happen based on what you do with it.”

Lexa ran her fingers through Clarke’s hair. “So since we’re on the subject, not gonna lie. I wanted to know more about you after you told me to move my bed.”

Clarke groaned. “I was kind of an asshole about it.”

“True. But I got the feeling there was more to you. And I kept hoping for an opportunity to find out, since you were busy avoiding me after that.”

“Oh, my God.” Clarke sighed. “I mean, I basically told you that you were having sex too loudly.”

She laughed. “There are worse things than loud sex.”

When you put it that way…” she grinned up at her.

“So I guess I should find out who that douchebag was at the bar that first night and thank him for giving me a reason to get your name.”

“It’s literally on my mailbox.” She intertwined their fingers and stroked Lexa’s palm with her thumb.

“C. Griffin is. But so is R. Reyes. That could’ve been you, too. And I felt kind of weird even looking at the names. I wanted to hear it from you.” She brushed hair off Clarke’s forehead with her other hand.

“Are you saying you might’ve felt a connection?” And she smiled to blunt what was an extremely important question and she almost held her breath because maybe it was a bad idea to ask it, especially this early on.
Lexa didn’t respond for a few moments and Clarke knew she was gathering her thoughts. Shit. Maybe she shouldn’t have asked.

“You don’t have to answer that,” Clarke said.

“Why not?”

“I don’t want you to feel like I’m putting you on the spot about something that maybe we should let play out more.”

“I appreciate that. But the truth is, yes, I did. And I have no idea why, since you were pretty pissed about the bed thing. Kinda cranky there, Pancake Master.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Yes. We’ve established this.”

“Not that I blame you. After all, you weren’t able to sleep. So there you were, this pissed off, beautiful woman telling me to move my bed. I liked your spirit, and that was part of why I thought you were beautiful. I mean, aesthetically, no one would argue that point, though.”

Clarke hoped the blush she felt on her neck wasn’t visible.

“But there was a lot more to it. I need to know what’s going on underneath someone’s surface. And you were cautious at the bar the first time, which I totally get, given the circumstances. But fuck, you were so sexy that night and it made me want to know a lot more.”

Clarke stared up at her, remembering that night, and how everything felt so incredibly hot but also right.

“And I got that, the day you were locked out of your apartment.” She smiled down at her. “That day clinched it for me.”

“Clinched what?”

“That the connection I was feeling was worth exploring. And it seemed you were amenable, since you did invite me over for pancakes a couple days later.”

“True. And I don’t do that with just anyone.”

“Oh? So I’m part of a special roster?”

“Very.” And she regarded her, wondering how much she should reveal, and whether it was a good idea to do so. Fuck it. She’d do it anyway. “It’s true, that I couldn’t stop thinking about you after our first meeting. That didn’t go very well, but whatever.” She held onto Lexa’s hand because it helped calm her. “I didn’t know why, exactly, I kept thinking about you. Besides the fact that you’re fucking gorgeous.”

Lexa blushed and God, it was so cute.

“It’s true. But like you, I need to know more. The day I was locked out was the day I got a little more scared.”

“Of what?”

“You. This. I really liked how I felt around you, and that’s scary so early on, and especially after a bad experience. I was afraid to trust my instincts.” Even though they’d been right about Finn. Maybe she was afraid to admit that she should trust them.
“What have they been telling you about me?”

Clarke smiled up at her. “To keep inviting you over for pancakes.”

“I like your instincts. Can I invite them over to my place?”

“As many times as you want.” She kissed Lexa’s palm. “But I’m kind of hoping that I can convince you to stay here tonight.”

Lexa smiled, slow and sexy. “Done.”

“Good. Because I want you in my bed, too.”

“Damn,” Lexa said softly, and the expression in her eyes—was it possible to burst into flames from just a look? Because that’s seriously how Clarke felt. She sat up and straddled Lexa’s thighs, her hands braced on the back of the couch on either side of her head. And then she leaned in and brushed her lips along Lexa’s jaw (because Jesus fucking Christ, who wouldn’t?) and Lexa sighed—it was almost a moan—and turned her head so Clarke could track a line of kisses down her neck and God, her skin was warm and soft and she smelled like hints of spice and the clean, open scent of her soap.

Clarke kept her hands on the couch as she bit down gently and Lexa’s fingers dug into her hips and Clarke smiled against her neck. She teased her like that for a while, not moving her hands, nuzzling her throat with her mouth, and exploring a little with her tongue, and she enjoyed the way Lexa’s breathing quickened and the little noises she made—Clarke would never, ever get tired of those.

“God, Clarke,” she said with another breathy sigh. “The things you make me feel.”

She stopped working on her neck and stared into her eyes, and the look in Lexa’s eyes took her breath away and left her aching and needing so much more. “I really want to take you to bed,” Clarke said.

“Good. Because I really want you to.”

“So glad we agree on this.” And Clarke got up and pulled her to her feet but it was a while before they actually got to the bedroom, because it was practically impossible not to kiss Lexa, especially when she pulled Clarke close and slid her hands under her shirt and fuck, what else was Clarke supposed to do in such circumstances, besides kiss her back?

What else was she supposed to do besides start moving them both to her bedroom and tell Lexa to undress her?

There really wasn’t any other alternative, given the situation.

And from the look in Lexa’s eyes, she was more than happy to accommodate.

Ohhhh, God. More than happy.

And when they were finally pressed skin to skin, limbs entwined, moving slowly together, there was nowhere else Clarke would rather be.

Chapter End Notes
I mean, wtf with all these feels? I am totally writing this with buckets of feels.

Dammit, Clexa. ALL THE FEELS.

Also, thanks, everybody, for joining me on this ride. Really appreciate the comments and kudos! Hope you stick around. And as you can see, there will be more chapters. Because reasons. LOL.
A Conspiracy of Coincidences

Chapter Summary

Raven and Clarke have a chat about Clarke's amazing, fantastic, over-the-top weekend and then go grocery shopping for friends-giving. But uh-oh, Clarke sees something at the store that could be problematic...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Honey, I’m home,” Raven shouted as she came in.

“Hi,” Clarke said as she looked up from the table, where she’d been studying for the past few hours. And staring off into space with a huge smile as she thought about Lexa.

Raven frowned. “What’s this? I’m not interrupting Clexonium sexy-times?”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “I’m studying for that damn exam I have this week and Lexa’s at the library working on a paper.” But fuck, it was hard to concentrate, especially after the past two earth-shattering nights with her. And the past two incredible mornings.

Raven set her pack on the floor by the door and took her coat and boots off. “Damn. Still no walk of shame for me to witness.”

Clarke ignored that. “Did you eat lunch? There’s leftover pizza in the fridge.”

“Awesome.” Raven went into the kitchen, but not before she gave Clarke a quick hug, which made her smile.

“Coffee, too, if you want it,” Clarke said. It wasn’t bad, but it would never measure up to Lexa’s. She sipped what she had in her cup, thinking about the night before. And the night before that. And how the more time she spent with Lexa, the more she wanted. And not just in the physical sense, though fuck, just thinking about that practically melted her bones. How could anything feel this fucking good? This fucking right? This fucking everything?

Raven sat down across from her with a glass of water and a plate that held two slices of pizza. She carefully moved Clarke’s tablet out of the way, which was currently displaying an image of the human nervous system.

“So,” Raven said between bites. “How hard is it going to be for me to pry information out of you regarding this weekend?”

She flushed and Raven laughed.

“Well. So things went well.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yes.” She bit her lower lip and picked up her coffee cup.

“C’mon, Griff. It’s me. Your BFF. Give me something.”
She smiled. “It was…I don’t have the words.” And she didn’t. There wasn’t a language invented that could capture the way she felt being with Lexa the past two days.

Raven fist-pumped. “Yes!” She took another bite and Clarke stared at her laptop screen but she was having a hard time focusing.

“Fuckbuddy or more?”

Clarke looked at her and hesitated. Because the truth was, Lexa was so much more than that, but it wasn’t something she had discussed with her. They just sort of intuitively seemed to know that they were going to continue seeing each other and at least from Clarke’s perspective, she didn’t want to see anyone else. So what did that mean?

“Shit. Was that a sore spot kind of question?”

“No,” Clarke said. “It’s just…she’s so much more.”

Raven didn’t respond and when Clarke looked at her, she was staring at her.

“Oh, my God,” Raven said. “I’ve never seen you like this.”

“Like what?”

“This. So into someone that you don’t even know what to do.”

She smiled, sheepish. “I…yeah.”

“And you’re not even disagreeing with me. Fucking hell.”

“I seriously don’t know what to do.”

Raven cocked her head. “You keep seeing her. Duh.”

“God, I want to.”

“But?”

“It’s so weird and scary but it’s also incredible. But shouldn’t I be more careful? I mean, we technically just met. But fuck, it feels so amazing and so right—but shit, I don’t know. I just don’t know for sure.”

Raven put her pizza down. “Okay, hold on. Let’s science this.”

Clarke gave her a wtf look.

“No, c’mon. When in doubt, science.”

“I’m gonna need more coffee.” She pushed back from the table and took her cup into the kitchen, wishing that Lexa was there, with her goddamn French press and her smile, and that she was leaning in for a kiss—fuck, she had it bad. So bad. She refilled her cup then went back to the table.

“Oh, fuck, Reyes. Really?”
“This is part of science-ing. Think back on it, and try not to let what happened later bias your recollection. When you first met him, what did you feel?”

Clarke sipped her coffee, remembering. “I thought he was cute. And funny. He had a nice smile.”

“What attracted you to him?”

“All of the above.”

“Was your attraction to him really intense?”

She shook her head. “No. I mean, I thought he was kind of sexy, and he wasn’t a bad kisser and he was fun in bed.”

“When did you think there might be a red flag?”

Clarke stared into her coffee. “If I’m honest, in the beginning.”

“What was the flag?” Raven started eating her second piece of pizza.

“He didn’t tell me the whole truth about his ex. And I don’t know...there was just a feeling I had that he wasn’t someone I could trust.”

“Did you feel safe with him? Like you could be yourself?”

“No.” And it surprised her a little, how clear her thinking was now about him. She’d spent so much time and energy after she broke it off dealing with the fallout that she hadn’t really thought too much about what drew her to him in the first place. “I think in some ways it was easy to be with him because it’s always easier to lie to yourself than others.”

“Denial ain’t a river a in Egypt, honey,” Raven said before she took another bite. She chewed and swallowed. “Now let’s totally move to another lab.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke muttered. “You and your metaphors.”

“Whatever. They work. So here we are in the Lexa lab. Red flags?”

“None. And goddamn, I’ve looked. I mean, she’s got past baggage—we all do—but she doesn’t deliberately hide it.”

“So the first time you saw her, what did you think?”

“I was really fucking tired and cranky that day.”

“Beyond that. Objectively.” Raven took another bite.

“I thought she was gorgeous. Her eyes. Oh, my God. And she has a great smile. I mean, she has a whole bunch of different smiles, but the first one…” she stared into the distance, remembering Lexa’s playful smirk that day and the depths of her eyes.

“It stayed with you,” Raven finished, matter-of-fact.

“Yeah. It did.”

Raven nodded. “Tell me about that first night at the club.”
She flushed at the memory. “There was this guy—a real dick—who was kind of hassling me at the bar.”

Raven set her pizza down. “What? What guy?”

“I don’t know. Some random douchebro frat-ass. Lexa stepped in, and not in any annoying way. That’s how I actually met her formally, was at the bar.” She sipped her coffee. “And there was something about her. I felt…safe. So safe. And I was kind of an asshole at first—”

“How so?”

“I was just—I don’t know. I told her I could’ve handled him and she said that yes, she knew I could have, but my hands were full and she was being neighborly. And she basically said she didn’t mean to interrupt my evening and she also said no hard feelings about the bed thing.”

Raven looked at her, expression quizzical. “And then?”

“I don’t know. We ended up on the dance floor together and it felt safe to flirt with her.” She flushed again. “It felt really hot, actually, to do that. I felt like I could flirt with her and she wouldn’t do anything that I didn’t want and that she’d give me the room to decide what I wanted to do. She’s been like that the whole time.” She thought back to Finn, and how there always seemed to be an unspoken expectation where he was concerned, that she was there to meet his needs both emotional and physical, and that he didn’t really respect her as a person.

“And how did that make you feel?”

“It was so refreshing. And it gave me room to explore a bit, because she didn’t put expectations on me. She still doesn’t.”

Raven smiled. “Mmm hmm. So what, exactly, is the problem?”

Clarke sat back, thinking. “I don’t know.”

“Oh, my God, Griff. I’ll tell you what the problem is. Your logic brain cannot compute Clexonium. It can’t wrap its cold little analysis around the fact that you’re approaching this purely on instinct, and that your instincts are telling you that this woman is exactly who you need to be with, that she’s a great match, and that it could go even farther, if you let it.” She shrugged. “And instinct, after all, is actually a really deep, primal evolutionary response to danger, so it’s totally science-related. And legit.”

Clarke laughed. “Well, I can’t really argue with that,”

“No, you can’t. And I’m right. I’ve known you for a long time, and what I’m seeing right now is that Lexa is doing you all kinds of good—in addition to doing you.” she waggled her eyebrows.

Clarke blushed.

“Exactly.” Raven set her pizza down. “Look, she’s not perfect. Nobody is. But she just might be perfect for you. And if you don’t keep seeing her, you might be missing out on one of the best things that’s happened to you.”

Clarke smiled. “So you’re saying I should put the logic aside and go with instinct?”

“Logic tells you what you think you’re supposed to do. Instinct tells you what you should do. Instinct is your self-preservation impulse. What’s it saying here?”
“That Lexa is legit.”

“There you go.” Raven finished her pizza. “And now back to regular Raven. How is she in bed?”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Clarke muttered.

“That good, huh?” And she cackled.

“No—never mind. Shit.” She knew she was blushing and that her ears were no doubt totally red.

“Fine. Yes. She’s—fuck, it’s mind-blowing. She’s mind-blowing.” And just thinking about it made her weak. “She’s unbelievable. And I can’t stop thinking about her and I can’t wait to see her again. There. Happy?”

“Yes. I am. Because you deserve it, Griff. You deserve someone who cares about you for you, who blows your mind and treats you fucking right.” She finished the slice of pizza. “So how long have you been studying?”

“Since about twelve.”

“It’s almost four.”

“And?”

“Let’s go to the grocery store. I planned out a menu.” She called something up on her phone and handed it to Clarke. It was a list she’d put in the notes function.

“Maybe we should make more than two pans of enchiladas,” Clarke said as she looked through it.

“I’m thinking at least three, but probably four. Because even if there’re leftovers, that is never a bad thing where enchiladas are concerned.”

“Especially yours.”

“Why, thank you.” Raven grinned and preened.

Clarke read through the rest of the list. Sautéed corn and poblanos…yum…guacamole (depending on the availability of avocados), and a couple of different rice dishes. Plus a bunch of chilaquiles and calabacitas. And jicama slaw and a bunch of Raven’s salsa, which was to die for. So they’d need a bunch of tomatoes and onions.

“What do you think?” Raven asked.

“Maybe we should do some posole, too. And just have it in a crockpot.”

“Good idea. I’ve already let people know that the main dishes are Mexican and some of the sides are, too, but to bring whatever they feel comfortable bringing and we’d just have a big ol’ international buffet. I also told people to bring their own beverages. We can supply some, but I thought we should focus on food.”

“Okay.” Clarke handed the phone back. “Let’s go shopping and start getting organized. I need a study break.”

“I’m a poor substitute for Lexa, I know,” Raven said in a long-suffering tone.

“Stop. You’re my BFF and you fill other needs in my life.”
Raven laughed. “Let’s leave it at that. Let me get organized and we’ll head out.”

Clarke nodded and packed up her laptop, tablet, and textbooks. She took all of that to her bedroom because they’d be needing the table for groceries and as a staging area for friends-giving prep. Maybe she’d check in with Lexa about extra folding tables that Lincoln had access to. She and Raven would probably need a couple for prep work.

She put her laptop on the desk in her room and couldn’t stop herself from staring at her bed, which she had left unmade and unstripped because goddamn, the memories and images from the night before and this morning and holy hell, she needed so much more Lexa in her life. She took a photo of the bed with its tangle of blankets and sheets and sent it to her with the tagline, thinking about you

And then she changed into jeans but she kept the sweatshirt on because it was Lexa’s and maybe it was cheesy, but she loved wearing something that smelled like her.

Her phone sounded with a text message.

*Please tell me I can see you soon.*

She smiled and her heart seemed to skip a beat. *going grocery shopping w/ R. After?*

The reply was almost immediate. *Just let me know when/if you have time.*

That was a big “when,” as far as Clarke was concerned. There was no “if” with regard to wanting to spend more time with Lexa. *K. Want anything from the store?* Clarke texted back. She grabbed her letterman jacket before Lexa responded.

*Nah. I need to go to the store tomorrow. [smile emoji] thx. Then, Been thinking about you all day and I can’t stop smiling.*

Clarke bit her lower lip. *same*

She took a selfie and sent it with the tagline *guess what's on my mind*

“Griff, you ready?” Raven called from the living room.

“Yeah.” She got her knit hat, scarf, and gloves and moved to the door when she got another text.

*How is it that you only get more beautiful?*

She grinned. *you didn’t answer the question*

Lexa immediately responded with the devil emoji and *same thing that's on mine.*

“C’mon, Griff. Tell Lexa you’ll see her later.”

She blushed and texted back, *gotta go* and she included the kiss emoji, put her jacket on, and joined Raven. “Let’s go shopping, dammit,” she said as she got her truck keys.

“Oh, hell, yes.”

And Clarke smiled again as she followed Raven into the corridor.

###

Fortunately, most of the snow had been cleared off the major streets because for a project this big,
three separate stores were involved, including Raven’s favorite Mexican market, located a few miles from campus. They went there first and Raven triple-checked the list because it was a pain in the ass to get out here. The Mexican market closer to campus was okay, but Raven preferred this one.

The next stop was what Raven called the “mainstream” grocery store, which was close to campus.

“Fuck, where are we going to put all this?” Raven asked as they loaded the groceries into the back of Clarke’s truck. She had a camper shell on it for the winter.

“Lexa said Lincoln can get some folding tables. I’ll ask her tonight about that.”

“If you remember,” Raven shot back. “I’m sure she’s distracting.”

“There is that,” Clarke said and then she grinned at Raven. “Very distracting.”

Raven laughed. “Nice, Griff. Glad to see you’re rolling with it, now.”

“Not like you’ll stop.”

“True.” She got into the truck and buckled up. Clarke started the engine and they headed to the local Trader Joe’s, which was also close to campus. It was fairly crowded for a Sunday night and Clarke guessed it was all about Thanksgiving, judging by the carts with frozen turkeys.

“We should get some sparkling water and soda,” Raven said as Clarke maneuvered their cart down one of the aisles.

“Yeah.”

“Chips,” Raven announced.

“We already have a couple bags.”

“So we’ll have another one.” She put a bag of blue corn chips in the cart and Clarke grabbed a twelve-pack of lime sparkling water while Raven got a liter of Diet Coke, one of regular, and a bottle of Sprite. “We should get a couple bottles of wine. For us, of course.”

“Definitely.” Clarke pushed the cart toward the wine section of the store.

“Well, that’s unfortunate,” Raven said.

“What?”

Raven motioned with her head down the aisle they were passing. “Isn’t that Lauren? Bellamy’s flavor of the week?”

“Looks like her. Why is it unfortunate?”

“Because she’s kind of an asshole,” Raven said matter-of-factly. “I mean, of all the stores she could shop at, she had to come to this one.”

Clarke snorted. “Oh, of course. This is totally an asshole-free store. She clearly didn’t get the memo. And why do you think she’s an asshole?” Clarke hadn’t had a chance to talk to Raven since Friday about her concerns with regard to Lauren.

“She was throwing shade when we were at the club Friday,” Raven said with a frown.
“Oh? So it’s not just me she had an issue with?”

“No, but Harper suggested you might be the one who gets the brunt of it since you and Bellamy are close in some ways.”

“But not the way Lauren thinks.”

Raven shrugged. “Some women are insecure about shit like that.”

They were now in the wine section and Clarke picked out an inexpensive white and a red that she and Raven both liked. “I really don’t want Bellamy to bring her to friends-giving.”

“Oh, shit,” Raven said. “That is a possibility.” She frowned again. “I’ll contact him and tell him to find another plus-one. Lauren creeps me out. She’s got bad ju-ju and I don’t want it around my food. Or you.” She grabbed another bottle of wine off a sale shelf. “And maybe she’s not even going to be in town.”

“We can hope,” Clarke said as they went to the check-out lines, which were pretty long.

“Damn. We should’ve bought screw-top wine,” Raven said. “We could’ve cracked a bottle right here.”

“And we have chips.”

“True. There’s not much that doesn’t go with wine.” Raven checked her phone and Clarke looked around, trying to guess what some of the other people in line might be making for Thanksgiving. From the number of turkeys in the carts, traditional was clearly happening at a lot of homes. She watched as a frazzled-looking hipster dude hurried away from the line while a woman who was probably his girlfriend stayed in line with their cart. She looked like she needed wine, too.

Finally, she and Raven made it to a check-out stand. They had agreed to split each of the store purchases, so Raven paid for the first round of bagged groceries and Clarke waited for the cashier to scan the second round. She idly glanced around, her gaze skimming over the people waiting in the line to get called to the cashier stands when it stopped on a particular person.

“No way,” she said, tension filling her chest.

“What?” Raven slipped her wallet into her inside coat pocket.

“Look who Lauren’s talking to,” Clarke said. “In the line over there.”

Raven checked. “Oh, shit,” she said softly.

“It looks like her, right?”

“Yeah,” she said, tentative. “But it might not be. Do you want me to go closer?”

Clarke chewed her lip then nodded. Raven squeezed her arm in support and walked away, toward the closest aisle behind the check-out line. Clark tried not to stare at Lauren and the other woman because she didn’t want to tip either of them off, but it was hard.

Raven returned a few moments later and Clarke’s tension increased at her expression.

“It’s her,” Raven said.

“What are the chances of them knowing each other?” Clarke asked as she paid. Seriously. What
were the chances that Bellamy’s flavor of the week knew Finn’s sister?

“It might just be a coincidence. College towns are like that,” Raven said. “And I didn’t see him anywhere over there.”

She appreciated that Raven didn’t call Finn by name, even though she knew it was stupid, thinking that saying his name out loud would somehow conjure him. She helped load the groceries into the cart then looked back at the line, and Lauren and Hannah were closer, now, and still chatting. Clarke wrenched her gaze away and pushed the cart toward the exit, thoughts whirling.

“Hey, wait up,” Raven said.

She slowed down, but she wanted to run across the parking lot to her truck, get in, and drive the fuck away.

“It’s too coincidental,” Clarke said as she put the groceries in the back with the others.

“I agree it’s weird, but this is a college town and you know how networks of people can be in places like this.”

“Lauren might live here, but Hannah doesn’t. She’s based in DC.” Or she was, at least a couple years ago.

“She might’ve moved here. As fucked up as that is.”

Clarke made a disgusted noise and dropped the cart off at a return area. When she was settled in her truck, she started the engine but didn’t leave. Raven didn’t say anything, but her expression was worried.

“What if he’s back?” Clarke asked, a familiar tension settling in her gut like big, cold rocks.

“His sister is a totally separate person. Maybe she’s just friends with Lauren and that’s all.”

“Hannah probably still lives in DC. Why is she at a Trader Joe’s in Polis with Lauren? Unless she’s staying with her?”

Raven didn’t respond and Clarke gripped the steering wheel harder.

“It’s Thanksgiving. Finn and Hannah are tight. Maybe he’s in town to visit her.” And for a fairly big college town, Polis could be remarkably small.

“And sadly, it’s legal for him to visit his sister,” Raven said, but it sounded like she wished it wasn’t. “What he cannot do is mess with you, at least not intentionally. It would be a violation of the protection order.”

Clarke stared out the window. “It’s a little too weird that Lauren hangs out with her.”

“Yeah. Hell of a coincidence.”

“What if it’s not?” Clarke said and then silently remonstrated herself because this was conspiracy theory territory, wasn’t it? Bellamy’s flavor of the week hanging out with Finn’s sister? “People have done weirder things to stalk their exes.”

“But seriously? Getting your sister’s friend to date a friend of your ex?”

Clarke shot her a look. “He admitted that Hannah went to places I was to check on me a few times
when he was in class.”

Raven scowled. “I should’ve cut a bitch. Okay, so we alert the network. We haven’t seen Finn yet, but there’s a possibility he’s in town. And if he is, maybe he learned his lesson from his beatdown and he’ll honor the order.”

“Maybe he will. But if Lauren and Hannah are in on some stupid plan of his…”

Raven squeezed her arm in support. “We’ll figure this out. And as of right now, Lauren is banned from friends-giving. I’ll call Bellamy and make sure he hasn’t told her where you live and to make sure he doesn’t bring her. Fuck, I’ll text him right now.” She took her phone out.

Clarke put the truck into gear. “That might piss him off a little.”

“I don’t fucking care. He can be pissed as long as he wants, if it keeps you safe. And I don’t think it will. I think it might make him feel stupid, for hooking up with just about any woman who looks at him.”

“God, maybe that’s why she targeted Bellamy.” Clarke pulled onto the street.

“Now you’re getting all creepy conspiracy on me.”

“I know, but it’s plausible.”

“And let’s not lose sight of the fact that it could be totally benign, that Lauren and Hannah just happen to know each other and Finn’s still in Cali and there’s nothing to freak out about.”

Clarke nodded, but she had a bad feeling about this. A very bad feeling. Halfway home, Raven’s phone rang.

“It’s Bellamy,” she said before she answered. “Hey,” she said when she did. “Putting you on speaker.”

“What the hell is going on?” he demanded in the tone he used when he was both irritated but concerned.

“Lauren is hanging out with Finn’s sister,” Raven said. “We just saw them at Trader Joe’s.”

“So maybe they just know each other. It’s a college town.”

Clarke rolled her eyes.

Raven did, too. “We’ve considered that possibility, but given the circumstances, we both think it’s a bad idea to bring Lauren to friends-giving. Even if it’s a totally innocent friend thing, the fact that Lauren talks to Hannah means she could let it slip where we live. Speaking of, you haven’t told Lauren that, have you?”

“No.” He still sounded irritated but also a little contrite, now.

“Are you sure you haven’t accidentally said something that would give Lauren any kind of clue about that?”

He was quiet for a few moments. “No, nothing. We don’t really talk much.”

Clarke made a face.
“Okay, good. And sorry, Bell. But this is about Clarke’s safety and even if Lauren doesn’t know the story here about Finn, Hannah was feeding him info during that whole shitfest, so she can’t be trusted and she might use whatever Lauren says.”

Clarke had a feeling that Lauren knew the story, given her reactions to her Friday night. But that could also just be that stupid competition thing some women got into with other women over men. Still, there was a lot of circumstantial evidence here for something more sinister.

“So why don’t I tell her not to say anything to Hannah?” Bellamy said.

“That just puts her in a bad position if she really doesn’t know anything about this. Just tell her there’s been a change of plans and you’re sorry.”

He sighed. “On the plus side, I haven’t definitively asked her what she’s doing for the break.”

Thank God. Clarke relaxed a little.

“Cool. So just tell her you’re going to DC or something with friends. I mean, you haven’t known her that long. She might have plans of her own.”

Like Thanksgiving with Hannah and Finn, Clarke finished silently.

“Are you serious with her?” Raven asked him.

“No more than usual.” He sounded a little defensive.

“What does that even mean?”

“I’m not interested in serious and God, we’ve only been hanging out for a couple of weeks.”

“There you go. No harm, no foul. Don’t mention Thanksgiving plans and if she asks, you’re going to DC with friends and you’ve had those plans in place for a while.”

“So I’m basically lying.”

“Oh, please. Like you’ve never hedged about anything. And for fuck’s sake, Bellamy. This is about Clarke’s safety. And mine, for that matter. Don’t be an ass.”

“You’re right. I’m sorry.” He sounded genuine. “Where’s Clarke?”

“She’s right here.”

“Hey,” Clarke said. “I’m sorry, Bell. I know this is short notice, but your latest runs in a suspicious crowd and she’s not a fan of mine.”

“Harper said the same thing Friday,” he admitted, “about her acting weird around you.”

“What the hell?” Raven glared at the phone. “And you’re giving us all this shit when you knew Lauren already had issues with Clarke? Dick move, bro.”

“Yeah, yeah. I guess I don’t want to think about Finn still trying to fuck with Clarke and I hate thinking that maybe I’m helping.”

“What do you mean?” Clarke asked.

“I don’t know. All the shit Finn pulled after you broke it off with him—maybe he’s setting us all up
again."

Clarke gave Raven a triumphant look. “See?” she mouthed at her.

“Are you going all conspiracy on me, too?” Raven asked him.

“I don’t know.”

“How did you meet her?” Clarke asked.

“Oh, my God.” Raven shook her head. “Stop with the conspiracy crap.”

“At a department mixer,” Bellamy said. “Which might be kind of weird because she’s a sociology major.”

“So what was she doing at a med school event?” Clarke slowed down for a light.

“I thought she was there with someone, but thinking back on it, I don’t think she was.”

“Stop, both of you,” Raven said. “You’re just going to freak each other out. Let’s focus on making sure Clarke’s safe during friends-giving, and that’s on you right now, Bell, because your current bedwarmer has a strange connection to assholes.”

“But if she is setting Bellamy up, we need to consider that possibility.” The light changed.

“And do what with it?” Raven said, patient. “If she is, we nip that shit in the bud right here, right now.”

“Fucking Finn,” Bellamy said. “You’d think after getting his ass kicked like he did he’d leave everybody alone.”

“Maybe that’s just it,” Clarke said, gripping the steering wheel harder. “I wasn’t involved in that, even peripherally.”

Raven’s eyes widened. “Fuck. Maybe he thinks he still has a chance with you, because you didn’t initiate that beatdown.”

“I celebrated it,” she said, tone dry.

“But you weren’t responsible for it, and like every psycho, he doesn’t associate one incident with the other. In his fucked-up brain, the problem isn’t him. It’s the guy who kicked his ass. And he doesn’t associate his own actions with driving women away.”

“But Clarke got an order of protection on him,” Bellamy said. “That should tell him that she’s not interested.”

“Guys like Finn will twist even that. He probably thinks she did it to keep herself from throwing herself at him, not to keep him away.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes, Bellamy,” Raven said. “This is how toxic masculinity and stalker shit combine. In Finn’s head, it’s never his fault. And that’s why guys like that are so dangerous and it’s why we need guys like you to help us call that shit out.” She sat back. “Social system lecture over. Can we count on you to make sure that Lauren does not show up at friends-giving? And to make sure that you don’t tell her where Clarke and I live?”
“Yeah. All good. But I swear to God, if I see Finn anywhere around here, I will continue his beatdown.”

“I appreciate that,” Clarke said, “but I don’t want you in jail and getting expelled.”

“He didn’t press any charges against the MMA guy,” Bellamy said with a grumble.

“Finn’s an asshole, but he’s not stupid. That would’ve brought all kinds of shit up, if he pressed charges against a guy like that on the circuit,” Raven said. “Plus, that fight involved a whole bunch of people, so he used that as cover, and not the fact that he was harassing the MMA guy’s sister.”

“Look, let’s just hope this is all a bunch of stupid coincidences.” Clarke turned into the parking lot of their apartment building. “But I do place a premium on my safety—I’m selfish that way—but I also want my friends to be okay, too. So thanks for helping with this, Bell.”

“Are we alerting the network?” he asked.

“Yes.” Raven gave Clarke a look, as if she was challenging her on that, but Clarke just nodded.

“Okay. Let me know if you need anything else.”

“We will. Thanks, Bell. See ya.” Raven hung up. “That went better than I thought.”

“And see? He went to the conspiracy theory, too.”

“Whatever. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter because in either circumstance—conspiracy or coincidence—Lauren is an unknown and possibly bad quantity. So we keep her neutralized and alert the network to see if Finn’s hanging out anywhere and if he is, we monitor and if he tries anything, we bring the cops in.”

“Thanks.” Clarke looked at her, still anxious but feeling like they were being proactive.

“Hey. You’re my bestie. And I will do everything in my power to keep you safe. So will the rest of our crew.”

Clarke leaned over and gave her a one-armed hug. “I love you, bestie.”

“Same. Now let’s get all this shit inside.”

They took one load of groceries up and Clarke left Raven to start organizing things and went back to the truck. As she was getting more bags, Lexa pulled up in her Jeep and everything was suddenly a thousand times better. She opened the window.

“Hey,” she said with one of her affectionate smiles. “Wait for me. I’ll help.”

“Okay.” Hell, yes, she’d wait for her.

Lexa went and parked then got out and came over to Clarke’s truck. “Hi,” she said and she gave her a quick kiss, which somehow managed to warm everything up.

“Hi, back,” Clarke said, loving how Lexa looked in her leather jacket and baseball cap.

Lexa grabbed the rest of the bags out of the back and Clarke locked the truck.

“Did you get your paper done?” she asked as she walked with Lexa to the building entrance.
“Almost. I’m having one of my study group people check it for clarity. Did you get some studying done?”

“Yeah. When I wasn’t thinking about you.”

Lexa flashed her a smile. “I seem to be having a similar issue with regard to you.” She entered the code and held the door for Clarke then followed her up the stairs.

“Look who I found,” Clarke said when she entered her apartment.

Raven looked up from the pile of groceries on the table. “Awesome. Want a beer or something?” she asked Lexa.

“I might. I need to go drop my stuff off.”

“Have you had dinner?” Clarke set her bags on the floor next to the table then did the same with Lexa’s.

“Yeah. I grabbed something before I headed home.”

“So come back for beer and snacks,” Raven said. “I’m sure Clarke will be more than happy with that.” She smiled and took a bunch of stuff into the kitchen.

Lexa cocked her head at Clarke, a question in her eyes.

“It’s true. I would be much more than happy if you did that.” She slid her arms around Lexa’s neck, mindful of her backpack. “I mean, if you’re into it.”

“God, yes.”

And Clarke kissed her and for a blissful moment, forgot about the events of the evening.

“Eww gross. PDA,” Raven teased when she emerged from the kitchen.

“What a very. Like I haven’t had to suffer through you and Anya,” Clarke said as she reluctantly stepped back from Lexa. “See you in a bit?” she asked Lexa.

“Yep.”

“Just come over.”

“Okay.”

And Clarke walked her to the door and got in another couple of kisses before finally letting her leave.

“God, you really are too fucking cute.” Raven said as she took more stuff into the kitchen.

Clarke smiled. “Do you have a system out here?” she asked.

“Yeah. Leave the dry goods there. I’m making room in the fridge for the perishables.”

Clarke organized the dry ingredients on the table better then went to help Raven in the kitchen.

“Are you going to tell her?” Raven asked as she set the case of sparkling water on the floor next to the fridge.
“Yes. I mean, she already knows about Finn.” But it made her a little nervous, thinking about telling Lexa this latest bullshit. Would it reflect badly on her, that her ex might be coming around again?

“Good. The more allies, the better.”

She handed the bag of poblano peppers to Raven.

“Stop worrying about telling her.”

Clarke frowned.

“I’ve known you a long time, Griff. I know how you get. You’re thinking that Lexa will get weird about the fact that you have a shitty ex who might be coming around again.”

Clarke handed her the avocados. “Do you think she will?”

“Do you?” Raven straightened and shut the fridge.

“No.”

“Then why are you worried?”

“We haven’t known each other that long. Maybe she won’t want this kind of crazy in her life.”

“What the hell? What crazy? You’re not the only woman in the world to have a fucked-up ex. Which says a lot about the state of the world, actually.” She folded the paper bags from Trader Joe’s and put them in a cabinet. “You already told her about him. And she took you to bed anyway.” Raven grinned and made kissing noises then laughed because Clarke knew she was blushing. “So clearly, Lexa doesn’t scare easily. And it’s pretty obvious to me that she picked you, so don’t fuck this up.”

“Oh, so now I’m the problem?”

“It wouldn’t be the first time. You close yourself off. I’m just saying, don’t do it now. Let someone care about you. Besides me, of course.” And she gave her a big, sloppy kiss on the cheek.

“Really?” Clarke said, wiping at her face, but she laughed.

“Really. Wine or beer?”

“Wine.”

Raven handed her a bottle. “I’m heating up the rest of the pizza, too.” She turned on the oven.

“Cool.”

A knock sounded at the door and Raven waggled her eyebrows. “That would be your girlfriend.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “We’re not there.”

“Yet.”

Clarke left the wine on the counter and went to the door. Girlfriend. Was she ready to think about something like that with Lexa? God, it was so fucking soon. That was something to back-burner. But like smoke, the thought lingered. She opened the door, and fuck, why did Lexa always have to look so damn good? Even in baggy jeans with ripped knees and an untucked flannel shirt, she was
beautiful.

“So I have a new beer I thought Raven might want to try.” She held up a couple of bottles and Clarke pulled her inside.

“I see how you are, trying to impress my friends.”

Lexa smiled. “That obvious, huh?”

And God, Clarke couldn’t resist kissing her. Again. “Raven has taken up residence in the kitchen,” she said as she pulled away. “Where both of us will be spending an inordinate amount of time over the next few days, so if you can’t find me anywhere else, try there.” She started toward the kitchen. “Raven, Lexa wants your beer sensibilities.”

“I generally don’t turn down beer.” She had opened the bottle of wine for Clarke and Lexa handed her one of the beers she’d brought. “Oh, excellent. Another brown ale. Is this local?” She inspected the bottle.

“Kind of. It’s from my family’s basement in Virginia.”

Raven stared at her.

Clarke took the bottle and looked at the label. “Gustus brews beer, too?”

“Indra, actually. She’s been doing it for years.”

“That is so cool.” The label had a rough drawing of a tree on it.

“And you are sharing family lore with me?” Raven pretended to clutch her heart.

“Indra loves feedback. This is a new batch. She experiments with local ingredients.” Lexa used the mini bottle opener on her keychain to pop the cap on one of the bottles and she gave it to Raven. “It’s good out of the bottle, but Indra thinks beer should always be served in a glass.”

Raven sipped from the bottle. “Holy shit, that’s amazing.” She handed it to Clarke, who tasted it.

“Damn. Is that chestnut I taste?”


“And vanilla,” Raven said. “I mean, this is super-smooth but festive.”

“It’s a seasonal.” Lexa got a glass out of the cabinet and again Clarke loved that she knew where they were. She poured a bit of beer into the glass and swirled it around a few times then handed it to Raven, who sipped it.

“Okay, Indra might be on to something with the whole glass thing,” Raven said. She handed it to Clarke.

“Oh, wow,” she said. I love the vanilla and chestnut blend. And I swear there’s some nutmeg in there.”

“Yep.” Lexa smiled. “This is her holiday batch.”

“She needs to just put this on the market,” Raven said.
“That’s what I’ve been telling her. Gustus is all for it, too.” Lexa took a swig from the bottle. “We’ll see.”

“That would be awesome.” Raven opened a bag of pita chips and a container of hummus. “Want a piece of pizza?” she asked Lexa.

“Nah. But I will have some of this.” And she dipped a pita chip into the hummus then got a wine glass out, poured it two-thirds full from the bottle Raven had opened, and handed it to Clarke.

“So here’s the tentative menu for friends-giving,” Raven said and she read items off her phone. “And you don’t have to follow that theme. Just bring something you like and we’ll do crazy buffet.”

“We’ll have a bunch of snacks set up at our place,” Lexa said. “Lincoln and I aren’t really into the whole traditional thing, but Lincoln makes a mean roast, so I think he’ll do that and we’ll have some Americana sides. I actually like mac n’ cheese.”

Raven laughed. “For some reason, I find that really endearing.”

“Indra’s mom is super Southern, so I can do squash casserole, too.”

“Oh, my God,” Raven said, practically jumping up and down. “Yes, please. And that’s plenty. Roast, mac n’ cheese, squash casserole.”

“And a few snacks.”

“And before I forget,” Clarke said, “any chance Lincoln could get a couple of folding tables to us in the next couple of days?”

“Yes. I’ll tell him right now.” Lexa texted him then put her phone in her pocket and leaned back against the counter with her beer in one hand and Clarke sipped her wine, admiring (for the jillionth time) Lexa’s jawline and her cheekbones and the way her eyes sparkled with humor and that damn warmth that made it hard for Clarke to breathe sometimes. Everything about her drew her in, made her want to know more, made her want to explore every level Lexa had.

“Pizza,” Raven announced, and she put two pieces on a plate and handed it to Clarke. “Shopping freaking makes me hungry.”

“You sure you don’t want a piece?” Clarke asked Lexa. “Or at least a bite?”

“That I’ll do.” She took a bite of one of the pieces on Clarke’s plate and how the hell was that as sexy as it was?

Because Clarke was all about Lexa, and maybe Raven’s earlier comment about “girlfriend” wasn’t so far off, though she still hesitated to explore that. Raven threw her a smirk but Clarke pretended not to notice.

Raven’s phone rang. “Anya,” she said. “I’ll be right back.” She went out into the living room with her plate.

Clarke finished one piece and gave Lexa a bite of the next. “So,” she said. “Mac n’ cheese.”

“It might be my Kryptonite,” she said with a sheepish smile. “Total comfort food. Indra uses her mom’s recipe and there is just something about it that makes everything all right.” She took a drink of beer. “Your pancakes have a similar effect.”
“Oh?”

“Yep. Something about your pancakes makes everything all right. I mean, I like pancakes anyway, but yours—you yours are special. And they are now in my pantheon of comfort foods.”

“Aww. Thank you.” She held the slice of pizza up so Lexa could take another bite. They finished the slice and Clarke washed the plate off and put it on the drying rack.

“So what’s up?” Lexa asked when Clarke turned toward her.

“What do you mean?”

Lexa offered a shrug. “A disturbance in The Force.”

Was she that easy to read? Or was Lexa just that good that she’d already started picking up on her cues? “A series of unfortunate events have led me to believe that Finn may be in town.”

Lexa’s jaw clenched momentarily. “Give me the rundown.”

She hesitated.

“Hey,” Lexa said. “I’m not going to run, and I want to help.”

She relaxed a bit. “Well this is like some conspiracy shit, but it seems to have something to do with the woman Bellamy’s currently seeing. Which might be too strong a term where he’s concerned.”

And Clarke told her about Lauren’s behavior Friday night then seeing her at the store with Finn’s sister. “Upshot, Raven told Bellamy he couldn’t bring Lauren to friends-giving and we’re alerting my networks.”

Lexa took her hand. “I’ll let mine know, too.”

“It’s probably nothing—”

“Hey.” Lexa cupped her cheek. “Go with your gut. It’s a little weird that Lauren was acting that way toward you and then you find out she’s hanging out with your stalker’s sister. Sure, it could be a coincidence, and she might just be one of those who thinks everybody’s out to get her man, but it might not be. How did Bellamy take Raven’s ban?”

“He agreed. I asked him how he had met her and he said at a department mixer, but it struck him as strange that she would be there because she’s a sociology major.”

“If she’s even a student,” Lexa said as she lowered her hand and interlaced her fingers with Clarke’s.

“Shit. I didn’t even think about that.”

“Do you know her last name?”

She shook her head.

“Whatever. Do you have a photo?”

Clarke reluctantly let go of Lexa’s hand and took her phone out. “I took a couple of pictures Friday—yeah. Here’s one. Sort of dark, but you get the idea.”

Lexa looked at it. “Send it to me. Do you have a photo of Finn’s sister?”
“No. But her Facebook profile is pretty open.” She called it up on her phone and showed her. “She uses a photo of herself as her profile pic.”

“Send me that link. What about a photo of Finn?”

Clarke sighed. “I kept one for network purposes,” she hastily explained.

“Hey,” Lexa said. “I don’t care if you have photos of all your exes—well, amend that. I might care if they’re a certain type of photo and you’re using them for…certain activities. But other than that…” She cleared her throat, then, and looked away, but a blush was spreading on her cheeks and Clarke melted. She did that a lot around her.

“That’s a legit caveat,” she said with a smile. “And nothing to worry about.” She kissed Lexa’s cheek.

“Fuck, I’m sorry. That was a totally asinine thing for me to say. Let’s get back to your situation, which is much more important.”

“Hey, no. This first, because it came up.”

Lexa rubbed her temples. “I don’t—I have no right to tell you what photos to have or how to use them.”

“Maybe not, but you do have a right to bring up any concerns you might have about my photos. And for the record, I don’t have compromising photos of any of my exes and I don’t think of my exes as spank bank potential.”

“Oh, my God,” Lexa said and she buried her face in her hands. “I’m so sorry this came up. Back to the networks.”

“Are you sure? Nothing more to discuss here?”

She lowered her hands. “No. That is, yes, I’m sure, and no, nothing more to discuss. I mean, they’re your past, after all.”

“The important word in that statement is ‘past’.”

Lexa took another drink of beer and something dawned on Clarke.

“Did someone in your past have inappropriate relations with photos of her ex?”

“Oh, my God.” Lexa groaned. “When you put it like that, it sounds really stupid.”

“It’s not. What happened?”

“What you said. But she wasn’t just using her own photos of exes—one in particular—as spank bank material, but also exchanging compromising photos with said ex.”

Clarke stared at her. “Well, that’s ultra-shitty. And completely inappropriate and dishonest. Unless you had an agreement with her in that regard.”

Lexa half-laughed. “No. And she insisted it wasn’t an affair, since they didn’t meet up and didn’t actually get physical in real-time.”

“Oh, please. That’s totally an affair on an emotional level if nothing else. Was she hiding her activity?”
“Yes.”

“Then she knew it was wrong and was deliberately deceiving you. Not cool. And I’m glad you let me know. But for the record, I don’t have those kinds of relationships with my exes and I sure as hell am not going to start.” And she kissed her and God, Lexa’s lips. Forged by the gods and so fucking perfect.

“I totally hijacked this conversation,” Lexa murmured against her mouth. “I’m so sorry.”

“Stop.” Clarke pulled away. “I led you down a side road because I prefer to focus on other people and things when something’s bothering me in my world. And now I’ll send you those photos and that link before I get distracted again.” She did it then looked up from her phone at Lexa. “It’s probably nothing, right? I’m probably reading all kinds of shit into things that are just coincidences.”

“I hope so. But given what you know about this guy, it’s always good to assume the worst. That way, if it does turn out to be nothing, at least you were prepared. And if it turns out to be something, again, you’re prepared.”

“All right,” Raven said loudly from the living room. “Get dressed. I’m coming in.”

Lexa laughed.

Raven entered, carrying her plate. “What’d I miss? Please skip descriptions of the PDA stuff.”

Clarke gestured at Lexa with her wine glass. “I told her about Lauren.”

“Good. The more people who know, the better. So is there a plan right now besides alerting the networks?”

“I think that’s all we can do,” Clarke said. “We haven’t seen Finn, and Lauren’s connection to him might just be one of those weird things. She might not know his story where I’m concerned.”

“But it’s good to assume she does,” Lexa said. “Consider as many possibilities as you can and think about what you would need to do to meet that contingency.”

Clarke leaned into her. “That sounds like a football play-by-play.”

Lexa set her beer on the counter and wrapped her in a hug and Clarke rested her head on her shoulder, warmth washing over her and fuck, if she could stay like this for days, she would.

“Football is fast-moving chess,” Lexa said. “You have to think about tons of possible outcomes for every play, for twenty-two separate players, eleven of whom want to grind your ass into dust.”

“Ouch,” Raven muttered.

“But in this case,” Lexa continued, “we have a known—Finn. And he’s predictable to a certain extent, in his fixation. We also have another known. His sister, who we can assume will serve in alliance to his plans and tends not to operate independently. She relies on him for marching orders, which makes her predictable, too. Then we have a wild card—Lauren. She’s shown you a few things, which means she broadcasts her intentions, and that gives us an advantage because we already know she has some animosity toward you. We also got a lucky break because you were able to connect her to Hannah and, by extension, Finn. So we have a few advantages, here, and hopefully, they don’t know we do.”

“Fuck,” Raven said. “If I ever get in trouble with the law, you are my lawyer.”
Lexa laughed and the sound soothed Clarke even more, especially since she was still wrapped in her arms, soaking up her body heat.

“For now, hope for the best, but be prepared for new developments. If he is in town, let’s hope it’s just to see his sister for Thanksgiving and that Lauren is incidental. If he has an ulterior motive, well, we’ll deal with that as it comes up.” And she kissed Clarke’s forehead.

“Oh, my God. Watching you two, I’m going to die from cute overload,” Raven said. “But first I’m going to re-watch some Fear the Walking Dead season 3, if anybody wants to join me.”

“Sure,” Clarke said. “We need all the ideas we can get to survive a zombie apocalypse.”

“Except I wish they’d let Alicia do more,” Lexa said. “She has serious badass potential.”

“Right?” Clarke said.

“And she needs a girlfriend,” Raven added. “Forget Broke-Ass Ranch boy or whatever the fuck it is.”

“Broke Jaw, but I like Broke-Ass better.” Lexa released Clarke so she could lead her to the couch.

And that’s where they spent the next couple of hours, Lexa leaning against her, fingers entwined, everything right with her world.

At eleven, Raven stood. “Okay. I’m out. So commence to engaging in PDA. Good night.”

“Good night,” Lexa said.

“Night,” Clarke called after her and then she sighed. “I have to be up early.” Which meant it was not a good idea to spend the night again with Lexa, no matter how much she wanted to.

“I know.”

She ran her fingers through Lexa’s hair. “This has been an absolutely amazing weekend.”

“Yes. And I would like more like it.” She kissed Clarke’s other hand.

“I can definitely arrange that. I’m the Pancake Master, after all.”

Lexa chuckled. “And I am but a lowly Commander. I await your texts and calls, Pancake Master.”

Clarke kissed her. “You’re the Commander,” she said softly.

“That makes it sound special.”

“It is. You are.” And she held Lexa’s gaze for a few moments, then kissed her again. “Thank you.”

“For…?”

“Everything. This weekend, the past few weeks, tonight. Everything.” And oh, God, she needed to shut up before she said something that got her in more trouble. She stood and pulled Lexa with her.

“You think maybe you’ll have some time after friends-giving to spend with me?”

“I guarantee it.” And she cupped Clarke’s face and kissed her like Clarke was the only thing that mattered to her and Clarke wondered if she was floating because fuck, that’s how it felt.
“I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” Lexa finally said and Clarke walked with her to the door, still kind of floating.

“Yes, please.”

“If you need anything, you know where to find me.” She flashed one of her smiles—the one that always made Clarke think of the future and all the possibilities it might hold.

She smiled back. “Good night, Lexa.”

“Good night, Clarke.” And she brushed her lips across Clarke’s then stepped into the hall and walked to her own door.

Oh, yes. Clarke needed a lot more weekends like this one.

Chapter End Notes

Clearly, I'm hungry because I'm all about getting ready for the friends-giving meal.

Also, shout out to the Clexa AU fanfic "A Pleasant Undoing," by mopeytropey (scriptmanip) for Indra's microbrewery tendencies. And shout-out to artist blindwire, who will be at ClexaCon 2018 selling stickers for Trikru brewing, as repped in that fanfic. Sweeeeeeet!

We're under two weeks away from #ClexaCon2018 so I thought I'd share two of the stickers I'll be offering at my table! The 1st is the official Trikru Brewing logo from the fic "A Pleasant Undoing" and the 2nd is witch!Clarke from my own fic "Mystic Coffee"! Hope you'll stop by!

pic.twitter.com/0ctCJe3lpD

— blindwire (@blindwire_art) March 24, 2018
The Lexa Files

Chapter Summary

Two days before friends-giving and Clarke is super-busy but still manages some Lexa time which includes a slightly deeper conversation than usual. And maybe a revelation on Clarke's part. Warning: feels ensue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There was some kind of rule that every class the week of Thanksgiving doubled in length. Or rather, every minute took two minutes. And even with the afternoon cup of coffee within easy reach, Clarke was so not feeling this lab at all. She’d already taken her exam in the class before this, so her enthusiasm for microbiology was dwindling the longer she was in here.

She was trying to take notes, but her damn brain kept wandering off into the files where she’d stored memories of the past weekend with Lexa and those, of course, completely derailed any attempt at focus. And made her think entirely inappropriate things in this, an entirely inappropriate setting.

So she instead tried to think about friends-giving and what she and Raven still had left to do in the next day and a half. Fuck, it was already Tuesday. At least she had most of the morning tomorrow to help organize some things and then she’d be done around four with classes—maybe earlier, since some profs took pity on students the day before Thanksgiving—and could help Raven throughout the evening.

As much fun as she knew this was going to be, it was also a pain in the ass and hello, her brain just opened the Lexa Files again and extremely pleasant and, okay, really hot memories occupied her consciousness and she idly doodled cartoons of her and Lexa in one of her notebooks. In one, they were walking in the snow hand-in-hand. In another, they were seated on a couch watching a movie and Clarke drew a little heart floating above them—

Whoa.

A heart?

Really?

And then her brain accessed another memory file, the one in which she stood in her kitchen Sunday night wrapped in Lexa’s embrace during the conversation about the Finn situation. And she’d felt so safe, so validated, and Lexa had kissed her on the forehead and fucking hell, no wonder she was drawing fucking hearts.

The professor said something about an upcoming assignment and Clarke immediately snapped back to class and to the big screen, which showed all the information. She recognized it as already available online, but she wrote it down anyway. Then promptly sketched an image of warrior Lexa in Commander mode, disheveled and grime-streaked, blades lowered but dripping blood near her boots. And she stared out at the viewer, her expression defiant and triumphant but also melancholic.
Commander Lexa needs a break, Clarke decided, and she quickly sketched another image of her, still in her coat and still with her face paint, but her swords were sheathed on her back and a half-smile lifted the corner of her mouth and her eyes broadcast subtle warmth.

Clarke might be a little enamored with Commander Lexa.

And then she discreetly looked at photos on her phone because she’d taken a selfie of her and Lexa the evening before outside a coffee house close to the apartment building, and Lexa had the same warmth in her eyes and a similar smile as the Commander that Clarke had hurriedly sketched.

So she might be a little enamored with Lexa Woods, too.

Okay, a lot enamored.

And fuck, when would this class end? On the plus side, the lab exercise didn’t require much thought. Good, because her brain was too busy spending time in the Lexa Files. Lextra-Files. She smirked. Lex-Files. Oh, God. Clarke stifled a laugh. The truth is out there. And the truth was, she had it bad for Lexa Woods.

She cleared her throat and looked at the reading assignment, open on her laptop and estimated she could probably get it done in a couple of hours, but it wasn’t going to happen right now or in the next couple of days.

The lecture part of the lab done, she went to complete the assignment with her lab partners and somehow managed to stay engaged and focused on it though her brain kept wanting to remind her of all the things she and Lexa had done with each other over the weekend, and of all the things Lexa had said to her, and God how was this even happening, this amazing connection with someone she had just met?

Where was the catch?

Because that’s always how things worked in her life. There was always a catch when it came to people she cared about. Or at least it seemed that way.

And then her heart stepped in and led her back to the Lexa Files and pushed her brain out of the way. Maybe some things could work out. And she hoped this was one of them, but she wasn’t sure what it would even look like. Both of them had so much shit going on, and so much to do in the future—what guarantee was there that they’d be able to make this work? That they’d be able to end up in the same place, even?

Fuck. She needed to stop trying to read so much into things. If this was something that was meant to work out, then it would. Right? And she hoped that Lexa didn’t turn out to be some kind of asshat.

Somehow, she didn’t think that was even remotely possible. She knew it right down to her bones. To her marrow, even. And she had no idea why or how she knew it, but there it was.

Jesus, finally class was over. She turned her phone notifications back on and was immediately alerted to a few text messages. Raven, Harper, Bellamy, and Lexa. She saved Lexa’s for last because she liked to savor those and responded to everybody else then packed her things up and waited until he was out of the lab before she checked Lexa’s message.

If you’re headed home after lab, want some company?

Totally benign question, but it still made her tingle all over. Depends. Who’s asking? [smirking emoji]
The ellipses bubble appeared as Lexa typed a reply and Clarke stood, waiting.

The Commander of the Legion of Pancakes [crossed swords emoji] seeks the company of the Master of Pancakes. [pancake emoji, crown emoji]

Of all the emojis to pick for the Commander…how the fuck—Clarke stared at the crossed swords. She had been hesitant to show Lexa her Commander comics, because she was worried she might be uncomfortable with that type of attention, but maybe she would show her after all.

The Master of Pancakes [pancakes, crown] accepts the overtures of the Commander [crossed swords] and awaits her response. God, she was so glad Raven wasn’t here to witness this completely goofy fangirl conversation because endless teasing would ensue.

Though Clarke found she didn’t mind anymore.

Lexa responded a few moments later. The Commander is honored and waits for the Master of Pancakes at the south entrance of the student center. She included the coffee emoji with a question mark.

Clarke smiled. The only coffee I want is yours. On my way. And it occurred to her after she sent the text the shades of meaning it could have. She put her pack on and zipped up her coat before she went outside into the lengthening shadows of late afternoon. The cold nipped at her face and she adjusted her scarf as she walked. A group of people were tossing a football around in the snow in one of the common areas and she thought about Lexa, and how super-hot she probably looked in a football uniform—she’d definitely have to see photos of that.

Fuck, everything in her life right now was about Lexa. She had clearly become a Lexophile, infected with Clexonium. But as she drew closer to the student center, she knew there was nothing else she wanted more. Her heart rate sped up the closer she got and then she saw her, standing outside, talking to Lincoln and a couple of other guys, but she only had eyes for Lexa, who was in tight jeans, combat boots, and her leather jacket. A gray scarf was wrapped around her neck and holy shit, the red knit hat she was wearing made her somehow completely cute but also sexy.

Of course, Clarke was totally biased and anything Lexa wore would be sexy, as far as she was concerned.

Lexa saw her and she smiled and her eyes lit up. “Hey,” she said, as Clarke approached. “How’d your exam go?” And she pulled her close and gave her a quick kiss and Clarke might have blushed a little.

“Fine. Hi, Lincoln,” she said as she stood as close as she could to Lexa.

“Hey,” he said. “So meet a couple of buddies of ours from back in the day,” he said, gesturing at the other guys.

“Randy and DeShawn,” Lexa said, indicating each in turn. “We played football together in high school. Guys, this is Clarke.”

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi,” DeShawn said and Clarke shook his hand, which was huge. And even if he hadn’t played football since high school, he still maintained his physique. Even in his coat and jeans, he looked fit, but also bookish, with his urban-chic glasses.

She shook Randy’s hand, too, and his hand was about as big as DeShawn’s. Clarke guessed they
might’ve been offensive or defensive linemen. And Randy, like DeShawn, seemed to have taken care of himself. He also kept a neatly trimmed goatee and moustache.

“We were just catching up,” Lexa said.

“Oh? So what are you guys up to, now?” Clarke asked. “Unless you’re still playing football somewhere.”

DeShawn laughed. “Only insofar as I coach peewee leagues. I’m also a grad student in business management.”

“Cool.” Clarke then looked at Randy.

“I’m a physical therapist,” he said with a grin. “So I still work with a lot of athletes.”

“Like the Polis University hockey team,” Lincoln said.

Clarke nodded. “That’s cool, too. I’m in med school.”

“That’s what Lexa was saying,” DeShawn said. “Excellent.”

“So are you guys going to tell me stories about Lexa and Lincoln in high school? Because if you are, I will totally buy you a round.”

“Oh, shit,” DeShawn said. “I like her, Lexa.” To Clarke, he said, “Tell you what. Next time, I will definitely tell some tales. And you don’t necessarily have to buy me a beer to do it.”

Clarke smiled. “I think I like you back.”

Lincoln scowled. “Seriously? You’ve kept our secrets this long and all it takes is Clarke coming along and you’ll tell her everything?”

DeShawn shrugged. “I like her vibe.”

“I thought you might,” Lexa said. “Just don’t tell her about that one time I totally messed up that fake punt.”

Randy winced. “Oh, ouch. Yeah, that wasn’t pretty.”

Clarke looked at Lexa expectantly. “You know I now need to know this story.”


“Lexa rarely made mistakes on the field,” Randy said. “But boy, when she did, she made sure it was memorable.”

“Okay, thanks, guys.” Lexa rolled her eyes. “And we’ll see you later.”

DeShawn smiled and pulled her into one of those guy half-hugs, which involved a hand shake combined with a shoulder bump. “We’ll be in touch.” He gave Lincoln one of those hugs, too.

“Yeah.” Randy did the same kind of hug with Lexa and Lincoln. “Good to meet you, Clarke. Hope to see you around.”

“Oh, definitely. Because I want those stories.”
“For sure.” DeShawn nodded and he and Randy went into the student center building.

“So do they want in on friends-giving?” Clarke asked.

“No. They both have family in the area.” Lexa smiled. “But I’m sure they’d appreciate you thinking of them.” She took Clarke’s hand. “So, no coffee?”

Clarke shook her head. “I need to get home. I have to help Raven.”

“Yeah, Lincoln and Octavia are going in search of the roast tonight.”

“It has to meet my criteria,” he said with a huff. “Not just any roast will do.”

“I totally get it.” Clarke smiled. “And thank you for making sure the roast is awesome for friends-giving.”

“See?” he said to Lexa. “Clarke gets it. And I’m meeting Octavia in a few for our shopping spree.”

“So that’s what the kids are calling it these days,” Lexa shot back and Lincoln laughed.

“And unfortunately, I can’t tease you anymore about your lack of that anymore.” And he gave her a pointed look and she blushed. “See you later, Clarke,” he said with a wink and then went inside, too.

“So,” Lexa said to her. “Your exam went well?”

“Yep. How was your day?” And Clarke started walking, pulling Lexa with her.

“Kind of blah. Until now.” She stopped, which forced Clarke to stop, too. “I missed you,” she said.

Clarke stared at her for a moment then pulled her close and kissed her, not even caring where they were. “I missed you, too,” she said against her lips. “And I hate that I’m going to be pretty damn busy the next couple of days because I really need some alone time with you.”

“Can I put myself in your calendar for Thursday night, after everybody’s gone and the leftovers are put away?”

“I’ve been reserving that space for you.”

Lexa smiled and the expression in her eyes made Clarke absolutely ache.

“C’mon,” she said. “It’s cold out here.” And she slid their joined hands into her coat pocket, which necessitated that they walk fairly close together, which Clarke totally appreciated. “Did you turn your paper in?”

“Yes. So I’m pretty much done with assignments, though my class tomorrow is still a thing.”

“Same here. And I’m pretty sure there won’t be anybody there but, like, five of us.”

Lexa chuckled. “If you need me to run errands for you tomorrow evening, let me know.”

Clarke bit her lip because she did need Lexa, but not for that. “Thanks. So. DeShawn and Randy?”

“Great guys. They were part of my offensive line in high school and we stayed in touch through college. They’re part of my crew. And now, they’re part of yours.”

Clarke shot her a look. “What do you mean?”
“They’re in the networks. They may not be MMA fighters, but they can hold their own.”

Clarke thought about that for a moment. Should she be worried about others knowing about her bad choice?

Lexa slowed down, and Clarke knew she was waiting for her to say something.

“I’m trying not to feel weird about others knowing about my mistake,” she finally said.

Lexa stopped and faced her. “That’s not what this is about.”

“I know that logically, but it still feels that way. And I know you have networks, too, and you said you were going to spread the word, but…” But what? What the hell was her issue?

“Is it because it’s me?”

“Maybe.”

“I mean, it must feel weird that someone you haven’t been dating long is trying to help you with a situation that your ex started.” Concern flashed in her eyes. “That would make anybody feel weird.”

“I’m not sure that’s why it feels weird.” Clarke still held her hand and her touch was comforting. “I think it feels weird because…it ends up not being weird.”

Lexa cocked her head and her brow furrowed.

“I’ve spent a long time building walls, and I’ve used them. Even with Finn. I somehow knew to protect myself from him. But you come along and—” And what? Knocked them down? No, Lexa hadn’t. She just…understood them. And she didn’t judge her for them and didn’t expect her to remove them. But Clarke took a few down anyway and still Lexa waited, and made sure it was what Clarke wanted to do, because she seemed to understand her on levels nobody else did.

“You’ve got walls, too,” Clarke said, “but you still took a chance with me. Why did you do that?”

Lexa looked at her like it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Because it felt right.” She caressed Clarke’s hand. “I tend to be pragmatic, because that’s how I’ve survived. But life, I think, should be about more than just that, so I sometimes take chances. They don’t always work out,” she said with a tentative smile, but sadness seemed to linger in it. “But sometimes they do.”

“I’m glad you took one on me.”

“Though maybe you took one on me, if I recall the first night at the club.”

Clarke smiled back and started walking again. “That felt right, too.”

“And what about me alerting my networks? I can stop, if it’s what you want.”

“No. It’s just—I realized that there’s this new person in my life who’s willing to help me and the weird thing for me is how totally right it feels.”

“Yeah. It does,” Lexa said and they walked in silence for a while, the kind of silence that was more an intimate, shared space than anything uncomfortable.

“So is it just Randy and DeShawn? Or are there other giant men from your past that I’ll be meeting?”

Lexa laughed. “There are a few others I stay in touch with, but I don’t see them very often because
they’re scattered around the country, doing various things.”

“You realize that I’m not going to make pancakes for all of these very large men from your past.”

“I don’t think I have a problem with that, because I like that your pancakes are special and you only make them for certain people.”

“Were Randy and DeShawn with you at the club last week?” Clarke hadn’t seen either of them.

“No, but they did go to dinner before that.” She cleared her throat softly. “That’s where I initially told them about you.”

Clarke squeezed Lexa’s hand. “Oh? About your awesome neighbor who makes really delicious pancakes? Like that?”

She smiled and leaned into her a little as they walked. “That definitely came up, but it was icing for the other things I said.”

“I see. I’m a cake, then?”

She laughed. “Now that you mention it—”

“Don’t even, Woods.”

“A delicious Clarke cake, with so many excellent layers.”

“Oh, my God. Really? A Clarke cake?”

“A delicious Clarke cake,” Lexa corrected, and she added “nom nom nom.”

Clarke groaned, but she was also laughing. “I can’t with this.”

Lexa shrugged, but she was laughing, too. “Okay, I didn’t compare you to a cake.”

“Thank God for small favors.”

“I did, however, tell them that I met someone.”

Clarke stopped laughing because this felt important, in Lexa’s choice of words and how she delivered them.

“And that she’s incredibly smart and funny and kind and I’m totally into her.”

“She sounds pretty awesome,” Clarke said, sparks racing up and down her spine.

“She is. And everybody wanted to meet her because they know that someone has to be special, for me to talk about her like that.”

“So you’re saying you’re picky.” Clarke squeezed her hand again.

“Maybe. Or maybe just careful.” She flashed Clarke one of her half-smiles.

Clarke didn’t respond right away and they walked in silence for a bit. “When you said you hadn’t dated anyone for a couple of years, was that literal?”

“Yes, for the most part.”
“How is that even possible?”

Lexa looked at her, eyebrows raised. “What do you mean?”

“How have you seen you?”

She smiled and blushed. “I didn’t say that nobody asked. And I do make a distinction—who’s it’s a dumb one—on hookups.”

Clarke laughed. “Oh, I see. So you were involved to a certain extent with people.”

“A couple of very short-term hookups,” Lexa admitted. “One night stands. They didn’t require emotional intimacy and after the second, which was about a year ago, I realized that I’m not really a hookup kind of person.”

“So you had two hookups but you also didn’t date.” It wasn’t a question.

“I needed to figure some things out,” Lexa said. “I wanted to make sure that when I engage with someone, it’s for the right reasons for me. I’m always worried that because of what happened with my parents—which I saw of their relationship when I was a kid—that I’d do similar things and make unhealthy choices.”

“But you ended up with Indra and Gustus, and it sounds like they’re great.”

“And they are. But a lot of damage gets done when you’re a kid. I just hope that having them in my life helped mitigate some of the other stuff.”

They stopped, waiting for a street light.

“The ex I mentioned,” Lexa said, “with the photographs…”

Clarke looked at her. “She was who you were seeing before you went on your hiatus.”

“Yeah. And I do still wonder why I stayed with her as long as I did. I think maybe I was trying to be like my dad, who seemed to keep hoping that my mom would change, so he stayed. Maybe if they had divorced early on, I’d still have a relationship with them. Or at least with one of them.”

They crossed the street.

“So you were worried that you would get involved with someone and…get stuck, maybe?”

“I did kind of get stuck,” she said with a sigh.

“But everybody does, in at least one relationship with someone who’s just not good for them. I mean, I sure as hell did.”

“But you figured it out, and you left him.”

“Not soon enough, clearly.” She shook her head. “There were red flags. I chose to ignore them.”

“That still doesn’t absolve him of responsibility for the shit he’s pulled since you left. Or during the time you were with him. And it sucks that the world we live in puts women in a position to always take responsibility for the bad actions of damaged men, but don’t. Because nothing you did warrants his bullshit and nothing you do from here on out does, either.”

Clarke stroked Lexa’s fingers with her thumb. “That might be a good lesson for both of us, about
feeling guilt for the actions of damaged people in our pasts.”

They were quiet again until Clarke broke it. “So why exactly did you decide hookups weren’t necessarily for you?”

Lexa chewed her lower lip for a moment. “I realized that I need a deeper connection. I mean, some people can do both hookups and deeper emotional connections, and that’s fine. But it’s not really me, and I think that’s because I saw the complete lack of it with my parents and I guess on some level, I need an emotional connection to assure myself that I’m not like them—that there’s hope for me.” She shrugged and she sounded so small and maybe a little lost that Clarke stopped, which made Lexa stop, too. Right there in the middle of the sidewalk, in the gathering chill of twilight as a few people walked around them. But then, Clarke wasn’t always known for her subtlety.

“Listen to me,” Clarke said, and she took Lexa’s other hand, too. “You are so capable of that kind of connection. And I don’t know anything about your biological parents beyond what you’ve shared, but given what I know, there is no way you’re even remotely like them.”

Lexa frowned and dropped her gaze.

“Lexa, look at me.”

She did, the expression in her eyes wary but hopeful, though Clarke still sensed the walls within her.

“You’re amazing. You’re a beautiful person, inside and out. Flaws and all, baggage and all. And you deserve that kind of connection. You deserve it so much.” And God, she wanted to be the one to share it with her and she had no idea where her certainty about that came from, but it made her beyond happy to even entertain the idea. But she didn’t know how to put those thoughts into words, so instead she kissed Lexa gently on the cheek and stared into her eyes, hoping somehow she’d see what she was feeling.

“So do you,” Lexa said in a soft voice and she looked like she wanted to say something else but didn’t and Clarke saw in her eyes what she knew was evident in her own, and she hugged her, arms around her neck. Lexa managed to work her arms around Clarke’s waist, just below her backpack.

“Remember when you told me that we could slow things down to make sure that I know what I want?” Clarke said.

“Yes.”

“That applies to you, too.”

Lexa tightened her hold and buried her face in Clarke’s neck.

“I’m not going anywhere.” And she meant it. Completely.

“God, Clarke,” she said as she released her, “I wish you could see yourself through my eyes.”

“Except maybe that first day.”

Lexa’s slow smile lit up her eyes. “Even that day.”

“The Commander has strange tastes,” Clarke said with an answering smile as they continued walking.

“She has discerning tastes.”
Clarke laughed and grabbed her hand again (and Jesus, even just holding her hand made everything tingle) until they got to the park and there Lexa stopped and kissed her and her mouth was warm and soft but also a little demanding in a way that had Clarke thinking about sweat, skin, and tangled sheets.

“Distracting me again, I see,” Clarke whispered against her lips.

“Gladly.”

“I’m giving you fair warning that I’ll need more than just Thursday night with you.”

“Good.” And she kissed her again and holy fuck, Clarke’s blood heated and she no longer minded the cold, brittle air.

“Damn,” she murmured. “Another fair warning. I’m totally telling Raven that it was your fault it took me longer to get home.”

Lexa grinned. “Somehow, I think she won’t mind.” And she kissed her again and how the fuck could standing outside in winter chill be so fucking sexy?

Goddamn Lexa Woods, that’s how.

“Sorry,” Lexa said after another kiss, but the look in her eyes was totally unapologetic. “I just—you inspire me and I want you to know how you make me feel.”

“It’s mutual.” And Clarke leaned in and gently nipped Lexa’s lower lip, which elicited a soft “mmm” from her and Clarke pulled away with a smirk. “C’mon, Commander. As hot as you are, making out with you for hours out here isn’t necessarily going to ward off frostbite.”

“Are you sure?”

Clarke chuckled and pulled her along toward the apartment building. “I can see the headlines now. ‘Women found frozen together in park.’

“But the lede would say we were smiling.”

“Oh, my God.” Clarke shoulder-bumped her. “And nobody would know for sure if we had taken our clothes off because hypothermia had set in or for other reasons.”

Lexa laughed. “I’m going with the latter.”

“And you’d probably be right.”

At the door to their building, Lexa hesitated before she entered her code. “Thanks,” she said.

Clarke cocked her head, confused. “For what? Hell, I should be thanking you, for helping me with the…situation—you didn’t have to do that.”

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “Clarke, this isn’t about obligation and it’s not about feeling roped into something. It’s because I care.”

And a whole new round of fireworks went off in Clarke’s heart. “Same. And until you say otherwise, you’re kind of stuck with me and my pancakes.” And then she stopped. Because holy shit. Had she really just said that? Had she really just implied that they were officially a thing?

Lexa’s eyes lit up with a whole bunch of emotions and all of them were directed at her, and it was
almost overwhelming. “I was hoping,” she said softly.

“Yeah, yeah,” Clarke said, trying to regain her footing. “But this means I’ll expect more coffee. And probably at the most inopportune times.” Oh, God. She did. She basically told Lexa she was interested in continuing a relationship—holy shit. Was this a relationship, now? And was she going to hyperventilate? Or fall over?

“Clarke.”

Oh, shit. She had never hyperventilated before. But she was really happy, too. Could you hyperventilate from that?

“Clarke,” Lexa said again.

She looked at her.

“It’s okay.” And she cupped her face, her palm cool and comforting on her skin. “I’m not going anywhere, either. We don’t have to talk about this unless and until you’re ready. So let’s just keep doing what we’re doing. Are you okay with that?”

Now Clarke wanted to cry, too. “God, yes. But how the fuck are you so perfect?”

Lexa smiled. “I’m not. I’m just me. But I happen to be really into you and I’ll make you coffee whenever the hell you want.” She entered the code and pulled the door open and as Clarke followed her inside and up the stairs, hands entwined, she was pretty sure that Lexa was perfect.

For her.

###

“Thank God,” Raven said when Clarke came in. “I was just going to send out a search party.” She looked a little harried and she was wearing an apron that Anya had gotten her that said “Fuck yes, I cook.” Her hair was tied back but a few strands had gotten loose and framed her face in a really appealing way.

“Sorry. Got distracted.” She took her shoes, scarf, and coat off and left the shoes by the front door.

She smiled. “Of course you did. And how is Lexa?”

Clarke must have had some kind of big, stupid, goofy expression on her face because Raven stared at her then shook her head.

“Wow. Pretty sure that’s how I looked the first time Anya kissed me.”

Clarke huffed. “Please. You still look this way when she kisses you.”

She laughed. “Okay, yeah. I’m busted on that account. So where is Lexa now?”

“At home. She’s organizing for friends-giving, too. Lincoln and Octavia went to buy a roast and then tomorrow he’s going to start prepping it.” She was trying not to talk about what had transpired between her and Lexa not even fifteen minutes earlier, because she needed some time to sort through it, though everything felt amazing.

“Okay, so let’s get to this. I’ve got two pans of enchiladas prepped but we need to chop vegetables
for the other pans.”

“I’ll do that. Why don’t you work on the posole?”

“Excellent. Wine?”

“Fuck, yes.” She went to her bedroom and dropped her pack off then put on her house sneakers and joined Raven in the kitchen.

“I made you a burrito.” Raven gestured at the oven.

“You’re the most awesome BFF ever.”

“I know.” Raven smirked and poured her a glass of wine and while Clarke ate the burrito—full of chicken, rice, and veggies—Raven worked on preparing the pork for her posole.

“Do we have anyone who is pork-averse coming?” she asked as she trimmed the fat.

“Um…I don’t think so.”

“I’ll leave it out and we’ll set that aside for meat-eaters to add as they want.”

“Sounds good.” Clarke sipped her wine then finished the burrito and washed her hands so she could start slicing vegetables.

“I’m glad my BFF knows her way around a kitchen,” Raven said. “Makes my life easier.”

“And I am totally here to do that for you.”

Raven snickered then left and turned the music up, some Latin pop and hip-hop playlist.

“How’d your exam go?” she asked. “Your text was understated.”

“You know how I am about that. I feel good about it.” She finished slicing a carrot. “So I met a couple of Lexa’s football friends.”

“And?”

“A couple of nice guys. Huge.”

“Should I make yet another pan of enchiladas?” She was only half-teasing.

“No. Lexa said they have family in the area and will be doing Thanksgiving with them. Anyway, she said they’re part of her network, and now they’re part of mine.”

Raven stopped working on the pork. “Meaning…Señor Douchebag?”

“Yeah.”

“And?”

“What?” Clarke peeled another carrot.

“It made you feel weird?”

“A little.”
“Why?”

“At first I thought it was because I have issues—”

“Really? How strange.”

She rolled her eyes at her. “I have issues with people knowing things about me, especially stupid shit I’ve done. Like staying with Finn as long as I did before dumping him.”

“Everybody on this fucking planet has a similar story,” Raven said as she reached for her wine glass. “What else?”

“I realized that I felt weird because it didn’t feel weird.”

“That is so meta. I don’t even know where to start with that.”

“Right? But it kind of makes sense because that’s how easily Lexa fits in my life, that I hadn’t even realized that I probably should feel strange that this person I just met is helping me deal with a situation with a shitty ex.” She started cutting the carrot. “And it feels totally natural, like that’s just how things are. It’s that comfortable.”

“Ah. I see the root of the issue, young Padawan. You’re still freaking out because you ‘just met’.” She put air quotes around “just met.”

“Yeah. Maybe I am. But I also really, really like her. We just…click, you know?”

Raven smiled. “Yes, I do know. So how about you just go with it and appreciate the fact that Lexa knows a couple of big, strong dudes who can snap El Cabrón* like a twig?”

Clarke almost snorted wine out her nose. “Jesus, Reyes. Don’t talk when I’m drinking.”

“Oh, my bad. Is that a new BFF rule?” She sipped her own wine, acting all innocent.

“Maybe.”

“Pfft. Whatever. I, personally, am glad that Lexa is calling in some troops. The more the merrier for situations like this.” She went back to work on the posole. “I also would like to add that there is serious potential all over the two of you. So don’t fuck it up.”

“Gee, thanks for the confidence.”

“Hey, since you lack that in your own judgment right now, I’m giving you more of mine. I see how she looks at you. She’s legit into you, issues and all, and that shit is rare. So relax and have fun. Stop trying to pick everything apart with a damn scalpel. You can do that when you’re officially Dr. Clarke.”

Raven was right. But it was really hard for Clarke to get out of her head.

“And envision Lexa’s football crew stomping El Cabrón into the ground.”

She smiled. “That is a nice image.”

“Right?” And she poured more wine into Clarke’s glass and they continued working as they laughed and talked and Clarke realized how fucking lucky she really was, to have Raven in her corner. And all the people who were right now keeping an eye out for Finn and associates.
And damn, she was especially lucky that Lexa took a chance. And fuck, she missed her and it had only been a couple of hours. Lexa was like a damn drug, but instead of draining her, she instilled her with hope and confidence and—fuck, now she sounded like she should be riding a unicorn throwing glitter around.

“We need a bigger fridge,” Raven announced, hands on her hips, as she studied the interior of their refrigerator. They’d finished preparing the last two pans of enchiladas and the rest of the veggies were chopped for the calabacitas. Raven had finished prepping tortilla strips for chilaquiles. She usually served them with eggs for breakfast, but she was doing a veggie version for friends-giving that included potatoes rather than eggs.

“Do we have room for these other two pans?” Clarke motioned at the enchiladas on the stovetop.

“Not sure. Maybe if we play Tetris or some shit in here and rearrange things.”

“I could put all the pans in my truck. In the back. The topper will keep people and wildlife from stealing them. And it’s not getting over freezing until Thursday, and by that time, we’ll be cooking these bitches anyway.”

“Hmm. Crude, but possibly effective. Let me wrap ’em up better.” And she set to work with extra plastic wrap then tinfoil. Raven had bought both in industrial sizes because she often went big with her cooking. Once she finished with the tinfoil, she then sealed the pans in plastic garbage bags. Clarke didn’t tease her about it because Raven was usually right about things food-related.

“We can put a blanket over them, too,” she offered.

“Let’s do it.”

Clarke went to get a blanket and to put on her outdoor sneakers. “I can take them down,” she said.

“Please. We’ll both do it. Saves you a trip.”

It was already well below freezing when they took the pans outside and put them in the back of Clarke’s truck. The tamped down snow in the parking lot squeaked beneath their shoes.

“This is some pioneer shit right here,” Raven said as Clarke covered the pans with the blanket. “Should we build a smokehouse, too?”

“I’d be down with that.”

A Jetta pulled up behind them and the window rolled down.

“Hey,” Octavia said from the driver’s seat. “Are you catering an event?”


Lincoln leaned over from the passenger side. “We probably have room in our fridge.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Raven said. “I heard you have a roast and other things going on in your fridge.”

“There is that. I can check, though.”

“What? And make us bring this shit back upstairs? Hell, no. It stays here, where it ponders the error of its ways.”
“Which is what?” Clarke asked.

“Not fitting in our fridge.”

Clarke snorted. “That’s the fridge’s fault.”

“True. But I’m not bringing the fridge down here for it to ponder,” Raven said with a shrug.

“Enchilada projection is a thing,” Octavia said and Raven, Clarke, and Lincoln laughed. “See you later,” she added with a smile then rolled her window up and went to the guest parking area and Clarke put the tailgate up and locked the topper.

“Okay, so tomorrow we set up the tables,” Raven said as they went back upstairs. “Is Lincoln around?”

“I think he already brought them. We can get them tonight.”

“Oh, darn. You’ll have to see Lexa again. What a burden.” She smirked.

“I know, right? Poor me.” She texted her from their apartment with the request then helped Raven put the rest of the stuff in their totally stuffed fridge. Lexa texted back that they had two six-foot folding tables ready to go and when did Clarke want her to bring them over?

*Right the fuck now, plz,* Clarke texted back.

*Yes, ma’am,* Lexa responded, along with a salute emoji.

And about five minutes later there was a knock at the door. Raven answered it and Clarke came out of the kitchen to see Lincoln and Lexa each carrying a table. They leaned them against the wall near the front door.

“Got here as fast as we could, ma’am,” Lexa said with extra gravitas to Clarke, though humor danced in her eyes.

“Excellent. Thanks, all. Want some wine?”

“I’m good,” Lincoln said. “Not much of a wine guy. And now I have to go finish organizing next door. See you when I see you.”

“Thanks,” Clarke said as he left before shecocked an eyebrow at Lexa. “Wine?”

“Yes.” She followed Clarke into the kitchen where Clarke poured her a glass. She kissed her before she handed it over and decided she’d have to up the “kiss Lexa” directive in the Book of Clarke to over a thousand times a day.

“Clarke, let’s put the tables—Jesus fucking Christ, would you stop with this cuteness? I’m trying to focus,” Raven said when she came into the kitchen.

“So am I,” Clarke shot back and Lexa blushed.

Raven snort-laughed. “Nice one, Griff. Now tell me what you think about my idea for table placement.” She outlined it briefly.

“Sounds good. Let’s do it.” Clarke set her wine down next to Lexa’s and followed Raven to the tables. The three of them set them up and Clarke then cleaned them off.
“Lincoln’s bringing extra chairs tomorrow,” Lexa said as Clarke finished. “Lawn chairs okay?”

“Hell, yes,” Raven said as she handed Clarke her wine. “Easy to move around and reasonably comfortable. Thank you.”

“Sure.”

“And now I’m going into the kitchen, so go ahead and put your hands on each other again.” Raven gave them a severe look before she left them standing in the living room.

“She has a point,” Lexa said, her little smirk tugging at the corners of her mouth.

“Like Raven ever stopped me from doing that.” And Clarke pulled her in with her free hand and nuzzled her neck.

Lexa sighed, a cute, happy sound and slid her arm around her waist.

“I know I said I have a lot to do tomorrow, and I know you do, too, but I’d really like to be with you tonight,” Clarke said against her throat.

“That is completely doable.”

“So can I convince you to stay over?”

“Done. Let me check in with Lincoln and Octavia and I’ll be back in a bit.”

Clarke reluctantly let go and Lexa left, but how fucking convenient was it that she lived right next door? She thanked whatever deities might be listening for that extremely awesome benefit.

“Are you having a sleepover?” Raven asked from the doorway to the kitchen. She was practically jumping up and down and Clarke blushed.

“Is it okay with you? I can cancel—”

“Shut the fuck up, Griffin. You had better have your girlfriend over every chance you get.”

Clarke was about to correct her—because technically, they weren’t girlfriends—but then remembered what had transpired between her and Lexa earlier. So maybe they were girlfriends-lite? Fuck. Just thinking of Lexa in any terms like that made her heart pound.

Raven grinned. “You have it bad.”

“Yeah. I think I do.”

The grin vanished. “Hey. What’s the deal?”

“Just the usual insecurity stuff. Baggage. I’m trying to relax and not think too much, but—”

“Your brain gets in the way.”

“Yeah.” She smiled. “That.”

“But even your brain has to acknowledge the hotness that is Lexa. And how she makes you feel when you’re around her.”

“There’s that. And on the plus side, I think it’s getting easier. Anyway, whatever. How are we on
projects for tonight?”

“Good to go. Tomorrow morning we can finish prepping the chilaquiles and calabacitas so they’re ready to cook Thursday.”

Clarke’s phone rang. “That’s my mom.”

“Cool. Tell Doc I said hi.”

“Do we need her to bring anything besides pie?”

“Remind her to bring a beverage.”

Clarke nodded and answered. “Hi, Mom. What’s up?”

“Hi, honey. How did your exam go?”

She laughed. “Really? No, ‘how are you’?”

“The two questions are related. Sort of.”

“Maybe in a really vague way. And it went fine. I feel good about it.”

“Excellent. So here’s some more good news. Marcus will be attending your fabulous friends-giving.”

“That’s great. I’m excited to meet him,” she said with a little smirk.

“Go easy on him. One Griffin woman is hard enough.”

Clarke laughed. “I think he’ll be fine. I’m cute and cuddly compared to you.”

Abby snorted. “That is so something your father would have said. And I’m bringing a couple of pies. Anything else?”

“Something to drink. Alcoholic or not. Or both. Wine and beer are the easiest.”

“Shit, we need coolers,” Raven hollered from the kitchen.

“Oh, my God, stop listening,” Clarke shouted back. To Abby, she said, “Raven says hi. And can you bring a cooler?”

“Done. I’ll even put ice and beer in it.”

“Best mom ever.”

Abby laughed. “I know how students are.”

“Can you bring another one with just ice?”

“Yes.”

Clarke held the phone against her chest. “She’s bringing two coolers, one with ice, one with ice and beer.”

“Awesome. I have one and Anya has a couple. We can get ice a couple hours before.”

“Okay.” She returned to the conversation with Abby. “Okay, looks like we’re good with the cooler
situation. So we’ll see you Thursday.” She was actually looking forward to meeting the new guy in Abby’s life. And she was also looking forward to having her meet Lexa, which was an entirely new feeling for her because in the past, she had always been nervous about Abby meeting anyone she was seeing.

“And I’m looking forward to meeting Lexa,” Abby said with that damn mom telepathy she had. “Did you tell her I’d be there?”

“God, Mom. Yes. I had to prepare her for the less cuddly one of us.”

She laughed. “I’m cuddly in my own way.”

“This is true. And she’s looking forward to meeting you, too.”

“Oh?” There was genuine surprise in her voice. “That’s…different.”

“Why?”

“Generally the people you’ve seen in the past were less than thrilled with that. Clarke’s scary mom.”

Fucking hell with the mom psychic abilities. “You’re only scary some of the time,” she said with a smile. “The rest of the time, you’re practically almost cuddly.”

She laughed again. “Well, I’ll let you get back to doing whatever Raven has you doing to prepare for this.”

“Right? You know her well. Call if you think of anything else.”

“I will. See you Thursday.”


“Love you, too.”

Clarke disconnected and stood for a moment, chewing her lip.

“So?” Raven stuck her head out of the kitchen. “Is she bringing her guy?”

“Yeah.”

“Cool. We can all scope him out.”

“Definitely.”

“She knows Lexa will be there, right?”

Clarke looked at her. “Yeah. And Lexa knows, too. Lexa’s looking forward to meeting her.”

Her eyes widened. “Seriously? Damn, Griff. That’s huge. She’s totally comfortable with the idea?”

“Seems to be.”

She shook her head. “Wow. That’s kind of a first in your life. I mean, the times you’ve actually introduced your mom to people you were seeing. Which is, like, maybe twice?”

Including Finn, Clarke thought. He had gone with her to DC to a fundraising event for her mom’s hospital and though he wasn’t hostile to the idea of meeting her, he wasn’t a fan, either. Abby hadn’t
said much about him, but Clarke knew her well, and she could tell that Abby didn’t trust or like him.

“Something like that,” Clarke said. “But whatever. I think it’ll be fine.”

“Same. Better than fine. It’s going to be epic.”

Clarke was about to ask her what she meant when a knock sounded at the door.

“Speaking of…” Raven gave her a lascivious smile. “I’ll wear earplugs tonight.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke muttered as she went to the door.

“See if she has a cooler,” Raven hollered from the kitchen.

Clarke opened the door and was amazed, again, at how Lexa could look both adorable and completely sexy in sweats, tee, and hoodie, this one a zip-up.


“Did you make these?”

“Yeah. Yesterday. I had to hide these from Lincoln and Octavia.” She rolled her eyes.

“Well, get in here.” Clarke stepped aside. “Raven, Lexa has snacks.”

Raven emerged from the kitchen. “Holy shit. Black-and-whites. Darling, how did you even know those are Clarke’s fave? And my second fave?” She took one and bit into it. “Damn. Clarke, try it.”

“Wait. What’s your first fave cookie?” Lexa asked.

“My grandmother’s bizcochitos.”

“Well, I’m extremely proud to have made your second-most fave, then.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke mumbled around her first bite of one of the cookies. They practically melted in her mouth. “So you’re basically a pastry chef, too?”

Lexa grinned. “No. But Indra taught me a few things. And I learned some things in my storied career as a barista.”

“Please, Clarke, keep her,” Raven said as she finished her cookie. “These are practically engagement-worthy.”

Clarke almost choked.

“Only engagement?” Lexa said with a huff. “Girl, please. These are full meal deal marriage-worthy.”

And then Raven almost choked and Clarke practically spit what was left of her cookie out because she was laughing so hard.

“Well-played, Woods,” Raven said. “More wine?” She brushed her hands off on her jeans. “And do you have a cooler? For an entirely unrelated segue.”

“Yes and yes. Also, Lincoln has one, too. We can set them up at our place.”

“Cool. We’ll have a few here, too. And now, wine.” She returned to the kitchen and Lexa looked at
“So you like them?”

“They’re fucking amazing.” She brushed a kiss across her cheek. “You should maybe put them in a safe, though. Because these bitches will be gone before morning at this rate.”

“I can make more.”

Clarke took another one off the plate Lexa still held. “Not if there’s an apocalypse.”

“Then baking and hoarding cookies is the least of our problems.” And she flashed her that damn smirk, the one that always made her heart rate speed up and got her thinking about things other than cookies, wine, and polite conversation.

“Griffin, you had better not be eating all those cookies,” Raven said as she approached with two glasses of wine.

“I left you a few crumbs,” Clarke shot back. “You can lick the plate.”

“Some BFF you are.” Raven handed her a glass of wine, took the plate from Lexa, and handed her the other glass. “Want to re-watch some Wynonna Earp with me?”

Clarke looked at Lexa. “Sound okay?”

“Sure. I love that whole cast.”

Clarke did, too, but she was more interested in being really close to Lexa on the couch, and a few minutes later that became a reality as Lexa took one corner and Clarke leaned back against her amidst Raven’s teasing about having to undergo treatment for the cuteness factor. And a couple of hours later, Raven went to her bedroom and Clarke closed her eyes, her head on Lexa’s shoulder, and everything was absolutely right with the world.

“I don’t want to move,” she said. “But it’s getting late and I have so much to do tomorrow.”

“Then it’s a good thing that your bedroom is right over there.” Lexa kissed the side of her head. “C’mon. I’ll walk you over.”

Clarke smiled and got up and took Lexa’s hand and pulled her up, too, and it felt like they’d done this forever, like they had years of this familiarity and as Clarke followed her to the bedroom, hands linked, she let her heart overrule her head about thoughts like that, because she loved having Lexa near, loved just being around her, no matter the circumstances. And as they got ready for bed and finally spooned under the covers, Clarke knew this was exactly how she wanted things to be, and hell, yes, she could get used to this.

“Good night, Clarke,” Lexa whispered as she covered Clarke’s hand around her waist with her own.

“Night, Lexa.” She gently moved Lexa’s hair with her free hand and kissed the back of her neck.

Yep. She could definitely get used to this.

*El Cabrón: asshole. In this case, the “El” capped makes it kind of a title. NOTE: I had originally written it as ”culo,” but because of regional variations in Spanish usage, that isn’t considered as coarse term in some regions as it is in others (see comments), so hopefully ”ano” will clear it up
because, really, I'm pretty sure no one wants to be referred to as an "anus." Regardless, I'm sure you'll let me know. LOL //NOTE 2: See the comments. I'm using "cabrón" now. Ah, linguistics!

Chapter End Notes

I can't not write Clexa feels. JFC.

And this AU is really feeding my damn foodie streak (see what I did there?).

Try this recipe for chilaquiles (add potatoes or whatever--have fun with it) and this one for calabacitas.

Find me on Tumblr and Twitter if you want to talk food, Clexa, feels, or whatever the hell else.

Thanks for reading!
Two-House Party

Chapter Summary

Friends-giving!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Just after noon on Thursday Clarke was already more than a little frazzled. She and Raven had been working nonstop since about eight that morning to make sure everything was prepped and ready to go and she hadn’t showered yet.

And she hadn’t had much time with Lexa since Tuesday when she spent the night. Though Wednesday morning was beyond memorable. Clarke still tingled thinking about it, and about how Lexa looked at her, and how her touches could make her both melt and burn, often at the same time.

She brought the last two pans of enchiladas up to their apartment from her truck and put them on the dining nook table. They were as cold if not colder than had they been in the fridge.

“How are we doing on time?” she asked as she leaned into the kitchen. Lexa and Lincoln had already checked in earlier, and all Clarke had managed to get were a couple of quick kisses from her and holy shit she couldn’t wait for this day to end so she could get more.

Was there a hotline for Lexa addiction? Or would it be Lexaddiction. God, she was a hot mess again.

“Seems good.” Raven wiped her hands on a dish towel. “I know your mom might get here early, so go prepare yourself.”

“I’ll be quick,” she said.

“Anya will be here soon, so if you need extra time, go ahead.” She flashed her a smirk. “Since I know you’ll want to look just right. Though Lexa would be into you no matter what you wore. Or didn’t wear.”

Clarke grinned.

“The power of Clexonium,” Raven said with another smile. “And it looks really good on you.”

Clarke rolled her eyes and went to shower then spent another fifteen minutes deciding what to wear. She was generally casual for friends-giving, but this one felt special, and she wanted to look good but not dinner-party formal. She decided on a pair of light gray form-fitting jeans, black ankle boots, and a white scoop tee under a flowy black blouse whose sleeves she rolled up to the elbows and buttoned halfway up. She put her hair up and let a few strands remain free to frame her face then put her rings on.

Almost one. Her mom would probably show up soon. She went back to the kitchen, where she heard Raven and Anya talking.

“Hey,” she said to Anya.
“Holy shit.”

Raven looked up from the guacamole she was working on. “Damn, Griff. You look practically edible.”

“Something I’m sure Lexa has already discovered.” Anya tried to sound innocent but failed. Epically. “But seriously. You look good.”

“And so do you,” Clarke said. Raven was dressed in black jeans, black heels, and a denim button-down shirt while Anya rocked a faded pair of jeans, brown wingtips, and a cream-colored button-down shirt.

“So what do you need me to do?” Clarke asked.

“Check the enchiladas. I’ve got the first two pans in the oven.”

“Those are by far the sexiest enchiladas I’ve ever seen,” Clarke said as she peered into the oven.

Anya snorted. “Duh.” And she leaned over and gave Raven a peck on the cheek. Clarke smiled and went to see if anything else needed to be done. They’d already put the paper plates, party cups, and plastic cutlery out on one of the tables set up in the living room near the kitchen. They had two coolers and one had ice and one had some beer that Anya had probably brought along with the bottles of wine Clarke and Raven had gotten at Trader Joe’s. And ick, thinking about that made her think about Lauren, which made her think about Finn.

Those thoughts sucked. So she immediately switched to thinking about Lexa, and about how she had seamlessly integrated her into her own network. Clarke had been so busy the past few days that she hadn’t really thought much about Finn, but she still had a sense of unease after seeing Lauren talking to Hannah.

The buzzer sounded and Clarke went to the intercom. “Speak,” she said.

“Hi, honey,” Abby said. “We’re here.”

“Cool. Be right down.” She went and leaned into the kitchen. “My mom’s here.”

Raven looked up from slicing avocados. “With her guy?”

“Yeah.”

Anya grinned. “So are we the approval committee?”

“Subtle, please,” Clarke said with a laugh.

“Girl, do you know us?” Raven flipped her hair.

“Yes. Please try not to scare him.”

“Please. He’s with a Griffin woman. Clearly, he doesn’t scare easily.”

Anya laughed. “There is truth to that. I’ve heard those Griffin women are dragon ladies.”

Raven made kissing noises at Clarke. “But they’re our dragons, so…”

“Oh, my God.” Clarke shook her head and smoothed the front of her blouse.
“You look really good,” Raven said. “And you’re awesome.” She gestured with her chin toward the door. “Go let ’em in.”

Clarke exhaled. “Okay. Be right back.” She left and stepped into the hallway, making sure the door was unlocked. She slowed down at Lexa’s door (because she always did these days), which was slightly ajar. She could just hear music emanating from within and she hesitated, really wanting to see Lexa. She forced herself to continue to the stairs since it was best that she meet Marcus alone.

“Hi,” she said as she pushed the door open. The temperature was definitely rising and the snow would probably be completely gone by the weekend, but the air still had a crisp chill to it.

“Hi, honey.” Abby leaned in and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. She was holding a grocery bag sideways and Clarke guessed she’d brought pies. Abby gestured toward the man standing just behind her, a good-looking dark-haired older guy with a neatly trimmed beard and mustache who was holding a canvas bag with wine bottles in it. “This is Marcus. Marcus, meet my daughter, Clarke.”

“Hi,” Clarke said with a smile. She extended her hand and he shook it.

“Hi. I am so glad to finally meet you.” His answering smile was warm, and the warmth extended to his dark eyes. Good. He seemed genuine.

“We’ve got two coolers in the car,” Abby said.

“Oh, yeah. Come on up first and then we’ll go get them. Was the drive okay?” she asked as she led them up the stairs.

“Fine. Not much traffic today,” Abby said as Clarke made sure the door was closed. She and Marcus followed her up the stairs.

“This is a great building,” Marcus said. “I love these historic apartments.”

“Yeah, Raven—my roommate—and I were pretty lucky to score one. Raven happened to know the people who moved out of our place, so we had an inside track.” She glanced at Lexa’s door, still partially open, as they passed, and she heard voices and laughter from inside. She almost stopped but decided it would be better to introduce Lexa a little later.

“So here’s home,” Clarke said to Marcus as she opened the door to her apartment. “I’m guessing those are pies, right?”

Abby nodded. “Two.”

“Awesome. Put them on the table by the window.” She motioned to the dining nook and Abby did as she requested. “And Marcus, does either of those bottles need to be chilled?”

“The red doesn’t, but the white probably should.”

“Great.” Clarke took the bag with the bottles from him just as Raven burst out of the kitchen.

“Hi, Doc,” she said with a grin. “Good to see you.”

Abby grinned back. “Hi, honorary daughter.” And she gave her a huge hug then let go. “So this is Marcus.”

“Hi,” Raven said. “I’m Raven. Clarke’s honorary sister and BFF.”
Marcus smiled. “Glad to meet you.” He shook her hand.

“We have to go get the coolers,” Clarke said. She handed the bag Marcus had brought to her. “And one apparently is full of beer.”

“It is,” Abby said, and she, Clarke, and Marcus went back outside to the car.

Once inside, they set the coolers up in the living room. “Let me take your coats,” Clarke said. “Raven, maybe some wine?”

“Excellent idea.”

Anya emerged from the kitchen as Clarke took the coats from Abby and Marcus.

“I’m Anya,” she said. “Raven’s devoted girlfriend. Good to meet you.” She shook hands with Marcus then gave Abby a hug. “It’s been a while,” she said to her. “Glad you could make it.”

“It has. I’d like to get caught up with your work.”

“Will do. But right now, I think Raven’s going to put me to work.”

“As she should,” Clarke said.

“Come on into the kitchen. We have wine and possibly snacks,” Raven said, with a quick glance at Clarke.

“Be right there,” Clarke said, and she took the coats into her room and put them on her bed then returned to the kitchen where Anya was opening a bottle of white wine that might have been the one Marcus brought.

“It smells so good in here,” Marcus said as he took the glass of wine Anya handed him. “I’m really looking forward to this. Thank you for the invitation.”

“Sure,” Clarke said. “I had to convince Mom to bring you, though.” She flashed him a smile and Abby raised her eyebrows.

“I think Doc was worried that subjecting you to two Griffin women might make your head explode,” Raven said as she handed glasses of wine to Abby and Clarke.

“Legit thought.” Anya said with a shrug.

“So far, so good,” he said in a sonorous tone though his eyes sparked with humor. Clarke decided she liked him.

“So here’s to new friends,” Raven said and she raised her glass. “Welcome, Marcus, to our demented little circle of weirdos.”

“Speak for yourself,” Clarke shot back.

“I am.” Raven grinned and they all toasted and then Anya helped Raven finish a few things while Clarke talked to Marcus and Abby in the living room where they stood and chatted, music playing softly in the background.

The conversation flowed easily, and that was a good sign. Marcus was clearly comfortable talking to new people, and didn’t seem nervous about meeting her, the daughter of the woman he was dating. He talked about his own daughters (roughly Clarke’s age and younger) and it was clear he was
proud of them—another good sign. He also talked a bit about his work as a professor and his expertise in Latin American cultures—that was cool.

And she liked the way he looked at Abby, with affection and maybe a bit of awe, like he couldn’t believe how lucky he was. It made Clarke think about Lexa, and a few butterflies bounced around her stomach, but they were more the excited kind than the worried kind. And that was new for her, because she usually didn’t want to introduce people she was seeing to Abby.

But Lexa was different. She knew it right down to her bones, with a certainty that still scared her logic side a little but made her heart expand with all kinds of feels. She still wasn’t sure what it meant—or maybe she was scared to acknowledge what it could mean—but she had every intention of continuing whatever it was that she and Lexa were doing and she had absolutely no interest in seeing anyone else. She wondered if Lexa would be okay with that…

And she wasn’t quite ready to have that conversation with her.

“So we’re doing something a little different this year,” Clarke said. “Our neighbors right next door are part of this friends-giving and there will be food and fun in their apartment, too.”

“That’s a great idea.” Abby nodded, approving. “It’s always good to have neighbors you get along with.”

“A two-house party,” Marcus said. “Takes me back to my college days,” he said, feigning wistfulness.

“And I’m betting there are stories there,” Clarke said. She checked the clock on her phone. It was almost two. “Speaking of neighbors, let me go see how things are.”

“Bring them over,” Abby said. “We can start the party.”

Oh, God. Clarke hadn’t told her that Lexa was her neighbor. “Yeah. About that…”

Marcus discreetly went to the kitchen and Clarke gave him props for being able to read a situation.

“What’s going on?” Abby asked.

Clarke set her wine on the closest table. “So I didn’t tell you this part, but Lexa is one of the neighbors.”

Abby stared at her for a beat then gave her one of her teasing mom smiles. “Oh, really. So is that how you met?”

“Pretty much.”

“Uh-huh. Seems there’s a bit more to it than just a chance meeting in the laundry room or something.”

“Yeah, okay, but it’s a story for another time.” Oh, God. The thought ran through her head: Yeah, Mom, I met Lexa because I told her to please move her bed away from the wall because I thought she was having extremely loud sex. Yeah…no. Not gonna go there.

“From your expression, I do want to hear this story.”

“Maybe. So anyway, I’m giving you a heads-up that Lexa is my neighbor and I’m going over there now to see how things are going and you should probably be prepared to meet her in the next few
“You should probably prepare her, too,” Abby said with a laugh. “Griffin women, after all.”

“And on that note, let me go see what’s happening—”

Somebody knocked on the door.

“It’s open,” Raven called from the dining nook and Clarke looked over just as Lexa walked in.

“Hey,” she said in greeting, her gaze going immediately to Clarke, who stared at her because holy fucking shit she looked incredible in form-fitting black jeans, black ankle boots with silver tips, and a green, flowy shirt that brought out her eyes. Her hair hung around her shoulders and oh, God how Clarke wanted to run her fingers through it. And fucking hell was there anything more magnificent than Lexa’s cheeks and jawline?

“Hi,” Raven said. “Anya and I were just thinking we should check in with you.” She flicked an amused glance at Clarke.

“Oh, I didn’t realize you had people here already,” Lexa said to Clarke. She looked at Abby and extended her hand. “Hi. I’m Lexa.”

Clarke forgot to breathe.

“Abby. Clarke’s mom.” She shook Lexa’s hand.

And without missing a beat, Lexa grinned. “Excellent. I’m so glad to meet you.” She let go of her hand. “Clarke said you’d be coming today. So let me welcome you to my apartment, too, which is just next door.”

Clarke started breathing again.

“We have wine, too, if you’d like to come over for a refill.”

“I’d love to,” Abby smiled then looked at Clarke. “Honey, did you need to come, too, to coordinate?”

“Yes, she should,” Raven said. “Things here are good to go and people should start arriving.” As if on cue, the door buzzer rang.

“I’ll get it,” Anya said. “You stay here and hostess.” She kissed Raven on the cheek and left.

“Okay,” Clarke said, glad that her voice sounded normal. “So now that the introductions are over, let’s go see the set-up.”

Lexa flashed her an affectionate smile, one that seemed to say, “it’s all good, don’t worry,” and led them out into the hallway.

“Luna is already here,” Lexa explained as they entered her apartment. “She’s been helping us. And she brought her amazing hummus.”

“Hey, Clarke,” Luna said as she rounded the corner from the living room carrying a bottle of wine.

“Hi. This is my mom, Abby.”

“I’m Luna. Good to meet you.” She held up the bottle. “It’s white. Refill?”
Abby extended her now-empty glass. “Yes, please. And what a lovely space,” she said as Luna poured her glass half-full.

Like the first time Clarke had been in Lexa’s apartment, it felt warm and welcoming, the light just bright enough for festivities without being obtrusive. Two tables were set up in here, as well, and coolers had been placed underneath them. Some food was already on them, including a big platter of pita bread with a bowl of hummus and another bowl of olives.

“The roast smells amazing,” Clarke said.

“Right? Lincoln’s good with chunks of meat.” Lexa flashed a half-smile just as he came out of the kitchen, wearing jeans and a white button-down shirt. And he had an apron on, which was somehow really cute.

“Happy Thanksgiving,” he said as he pecked Clarke on the cheek. “Oh, hi. I’m Lincoln,” he said to Abby. “Lexa’s awesome roommate and cousin.”

“This is Abby, my mom,” Clarke said.

“So cool to meet you,” Lincoln said as he shook her hand. “Clarke is a gem among women.”

Clarke laughed. “Been drinking already, I see.”

Octavia came out of the kitchen and joined them. She was wearing black slacks and heels and a red V-neck tee.

He grinned. “Maybe a little. But my statement stands. And this is Octavia, my extremely awesome girlfriend.”

“Hi,” Octavia said. “Hope you like roast. Lincoln picked a rather large one.”

“I do. Looking forward to it. I’ve also heard that your hummus is amazing.” Abby looked at Luna. “So I’m going to try it.”

“It is a sort of meet and eat,” Octavia said as she joined Abby at the table.

Lexa took Clarke’s hand and gave it a squeeze and Clarke was instantly soothed. “Do you want some wine?” Lexa asked.

“I actually have some next door. But maybe Raven stole it by now.”

“Let me remedy that. Also, you look incredible.” And she brushed a quick kiss across her cheek that Clarke felt all the way to her feet. God, everything Lexa did made her ache. She watched her as she went to the kitchen for the wine.

“This hummus is truly amazing,” Abby said behind Clarke. “Taste.” She handed her a piece of pita and Clarke dipped it in the portion Abby had put on her plate.

“Oh, wow. That is good. Luna, what do you put in this to blow every other hummus out of the water?”

She laughed. “The usual. Garlic, sesame, tahini, paprika, and of course love.”

“If this isn’t an ancient family secret, can I please get this recipe?” Clarke dipped her pita again.

“There may be rituals involved,” Luna said, humor sparking in her dark eyes.
Clarke shrugged. “Worth it.”

Lexa returned with a glass of wine. She had poured it into a blue tumbler that looked like some of the blown blue glasses Raven had gotten in Mexico. “I know the shape of a glass can determine certain flavors in wine, but these are pretty sturdy glasses and this is a party, after all. Who knows what’ll happen?”

“Thanks.” She squeezed Lexa’s hand and forgot, momentarily, that there were other people in the room as she held Lexa’s gaze and let herself fall into it, and again, that current of deep familiarity rolled through her, like they’d known each other forever, like they’d been here before and Clarke couldn’t think of a single reason that it was weird.

“Hey,” Bellamy said as he came in. “Raven said you were over here. Let’s get this party started.”

And Clarke laughed and let herself enjoy the afternoon and the food and camaraderie and the fact that this was the first holiday she was spending with Lexa and there was something really cool and special about that.

By the time five o’clock rolled around, she had spent about thirty more minutes talking to Abby and Marcus (about ten of that was with Lexa, too) and eaten a bit of everything offered. Raven’s enchiladas were off the hook, and the chilaquiles and calabacitas were long gone, as was Luna’s hummus. Lincoln’s roast was unbelievable and Lexa’s mac n’ cheese had disappeared within twenty minutes, the squash casserole not far behind and both were so freaking good.

Someone had turned on a football game but no one seemed to be watching it. Clarke was pacing herself with regard to wine and was sipping a can of sparkling water as she stood in her living room, surreptitiously watching Lexa as she talked to Marcus and Abby near the kitchen. All around her, people laughed and talked and the music provided a nice background and she basked in it, in having so many supportive and cool people in her life. She was damn lucky.

“So, fun fact,” Luna said as she joined Clarke. “I actually know Anya.”

“Oh? How?”

“I worked at the food co-op a while back and she knew the manager. I got to know her, too, and we’d see each other around. We didn’t quite run in the same circles, but we did know a few people in common.”

“So was she snarky then, too?”

Luna gave her a “you’re kidding, right?” look.

“That’s what I thought.”

“She came into the world snarking.”

Clarke imagined Anya as a tiny, snarky baby, and she almost laughed. “So how do you know Lexa?”

“College. I thought I wanted to be a lawyer for a minute, so some of our classes overlapped. And we ended up working at the same coffee house for a while. I was there for almost two years, Lexa for almost our whole undergrad career.”

She had known that, but she liked hearing other people’s perspectives on Lexa, too.
One of the cool things about Lexa is that she’s really down-to-earth, so it was great working with her because even when things got really crazy at the coffee house—and they did because we were close to campus—she was totally unshakeable. Like a rock. Some of the guys she played football with in high school were around, and they’d tell a few stories about her. They said she was like that on the field. Completely unfazed, but she’d get this really scary focus and intensity. It was like she was going into battle.” Luna laughed and Clarke thought about the Commander and the comic she was working on. “So you might not know it, but she does have a competitive streak in her. I think it’ll come out more when she’s actually practicing law.”

That made Clarke smile. “So what are you doing now?”

“I work at a nonprofit in DC. We do a lot of outreach with microloans to women and small businesses in developing nations. We mostly focus on Central America, though we’re working with some allies about expanding into parts of Africa and possibly Asia.”

“That sounds super-cool. What did you end up majoring in, then?”

“Anthropology and political science. But I also did some certification work in environmental science.” She swirled the wine in her glass, watching its movement. “Lexa stayed in touch with me. She helped me out a couple of times and I’ve tried to return the favor.” She looked up at Clarke. “Lexa is really good people, and she’s extremely loyal to people she cares about. I know she’s probably told you about her past.”

It wasn’t a question, so Clarke’s nod was an acknowledgement of both her statement and the fact that Lexa had.

“She worries a lot about turning into her biological parents.”

“I know.”

“And sometimes it gets in her way.”

Clarke didn’t say anything.

“I think it’s why she’s chosen the people she was with in the past. They weren’t right for her, and they weren’t capable of the kind of commitment Lexa is, but because she’s afraid that deep down she’s like her bio-parents, she picks women that she won’t ever connect with on the levels she wants or is capable of. It keeps her safe from hurting others, is what I think she believes.”

“She said she took some time off from dating.” The conversation should have been more uncomfortable than it was, but Clarke felt okay about it because she liked that Lexa had allies in her life who looked out for her.

Luna nodded. “And yeah, this is kind of a checking-you-out talk,” she added with a smile.

“I figured.” Clarke smiled back and sipped her water.

“I only know you through how Lexa talks about you and from that brief interaction at the club last weekend. But Lexa doesn’t talk about anybody in her life unless that person is important, so her friends pay attention when she does. I had a good vibe from you at the club and hanging out with you a little today, well, I like the energy you put out in the world.”

Okay, that was a little woo-woo, but somehow from Luna it was completely okay. “Thanks.”

“You surround yourself with good people. That says a lot. Plus, your mom is a total badass.”
She laughed. “You talked to her?”

“A little. Her energy is fierce.”

Clarke nodded, thinking about it. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

“She said you’re also an artist. But I already knew that because Lexa told me.”

“I just doodle a bit here and there.”

“Your mom said you won some prizes when you were in high school and college.”

“So some of the doodles were better than others.”

She laughed. “The point is, an artistic soul allows you to see things others don’t, so it’ll serve you well when you’re working as a doctor. And if you ever want to, I’d love to see some of your work. We’re always looking to feature work by local artists in our offices.”

“Well, thank you.” Clarke’s paintings were mostly in storage at Abby’s, but she had a few canvases in her apartment. “You can start with that one.” She pointed at a painting she had done a year ago that was now hanging on the wall near the kitchen, above a rustic end table. It depicted a woman in a long black coat—clearly, she had a thing for coats like that—standing in the rain on a rooftop looking over a grim, drenched cityscape punctuated by festive, vibrant neon signs. One building featured an advertisement three stories high that implored people to go offworld.

“I was watching a lot of dystopic shows and movies when I did that.”

Luna moved closer and Clarke followed. “This is actually really beautiful, in its melancholy. I like the bright colors of the neon juxtaposed with the overall darkness.”

“Might not be right for your office, though,” Clarke said with a wry smile. “I can do lighter.” She motioned at one hanging near the window in the dining nook, an empty table sitting near a window, sunlight splashing across it and a lone vase of flowers. Petals littered the table’s surface near the vase. She had used muted whites, yellows, and traces of blue and red on this one.

“I love it. Can we commission you to do something for us?”

Clarke stared at her.

“Seriously.”

“Okay.” Oh, my God. Really?

Luna took her phone out and took a picture of the flower and table painting and of the dystopic one.

“Can you work larger?”

“Yes. My mom has those in storage, but a couple are hanging at her house. They’re landscapes and crowd scenes. I’ll have her take photos of them and then I’ll send them to you.”

“That would be excellent. Can I give you my number?”

Clarke took her phone out and got it ready then handed it to Luna, who entered her number and handed it back.

“Okay, texting you now,” Clarke said. Moments later Luna’s phone whistled.
“Thanks.” She added Clarke’s number to her contacts list. “I’m looking forward to seeing your other work.”

Raven saw them and came over. “Griff, you need more wine.” She handed her the glass she was holding and took Clarke’s can of water, which was almost empty. “So, thanks for coming, Luna. I’m glad you did.”

“Thanks for the invite. It’s been really fun.”

“Luna seems to think my paintings are nice,” Clarke said.

“Well, duh. They are.”

“I’m going to see if my office will commission a piece from her.”

Raven stared at Luna. “Oh, my God. That is so fucking awesome. Like, what kind?”

“A big one,” Clarke said with a laugh. “I’ll have my mom take photos of the ones in storage and at her house and send them so I can pass them along to Luna.”

“Are you sure you want to go ahead with this doctor shit?” Raven asked.

“I have to pay the bills for my creative pursuits.” Clarke glanced over at Lexa, who was still talking to her mom—what the fuck? How was that even possible, that someone she was dating was doing so well with Abby? And then Abby laughed and Anya did, too, and Clarke looked around for Marcus and found him talking to Lincoln, Bellamy, and Octavia near the door and then they all left, probably to go next door. But she looked back at Lexa because holy hell she looked good in those jeans...

“So, your mom’s pecan pie was so fucking good,” Raven said. “I might’ve had two pieces.”

“Please. You had three.” Clarke sipped the wine and forced herself not to undress Lexa with her eyes while in Luna’s company.

“I’m being modest.”

Luna smiled. “It was delicious. So were the enchiladas.” She looked at Raven.

“My roomie makes the best damn enchiladas in the country,” Clarke said.

“Maybe this half. My mom is in California, and hers are the best in that half.”

“I’m fine with a Reyes monopoly on enchiladas,” Clarke said.

“Same here.” Luna raised her glass in tribute.

And then suddenly Lexa was right next to Clarke and she slid her arm around Clarke’s waist and Clarke automatically leaned into her and put her arm around Lexa’s waist, too. And she smelled Lexa’s cologne—that one with the sandalwood notes that was so goddamn sexy—and fuck, she was ready to take her to bed right now. Jesus God. Was there a medical name for this? Fuck. It was Lexaffliction.

“Hi,” Lexa said. She kissed Clarke’s temple.

“Hey.” Clarke smiled because how could she not, when Lexa was around? And she marveled at how comfortable it was, to display this kind of physical contact when her mom was in the same room.
“So, this was an awesome Thanksgiving,” Lexa said. “What do you think?” she directed the question at Luna.

“It was. I was just telling Clarke that I really appreciate the invite.”

“And we appreciated the hummus,” Clarke said.

“Well, thank you. And I’m going to see if our office will commission a painting from Clarke.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. “That’s so—wow.” She looked at Clarke and grinned. “Fucking cool.”

“We’ll see. I’m going to send some pictures to her of my other stuff, see if they’d like any of those first.”

“I like the idea of a Clarke Griffin commissioned work,” Luna said, “but I am looking forward to seeing what you send.”

“Seriously,” Lexa said as she pulled her closer, which only made the smell of her cologne tease Clarke’s nose again. “This is amazing.”

“Looking forward to hearing what you decide,” Clarke said.

“Hi, Clarke.”

Lexa let go of her so she could turn around.

“Hey,” Clarke said at the sight of Niylah. “I didn’t think you could come.”

“Me, either, but as it turned out, my other thing ended earlier than I thought it would—thank God. So I brought some friends-giving cookies.” She held up a plastic container.

“Oh, hell, yes,” Raven said. “Can I take these off your hands?”

Niylah smiled. “Yes. Hi, Raven. Good to see you.”

“You, too.” Raven took the cookies, gave her a quick hug, and went to put them on a nearby table.

“And hi, Lexa,” Niylah said and Clarke looked from Lexa back to Niylah then at Lexa again, which made Lexa laugh.

“Niylah was at the bakery that supplied pastries for the coffee house where I worked when I was doing undergrad.”

“So you must know Luna, too,” Clarke said.

“Yep. Small world,” Niylah said with a wink at Clarke. “I can’t stay long. Just wanted to drop some good will by.”

“Cool. My mom’s here.”

“Oh?”

“With her new guy.”

Niylah raised her eyebrows.

“Have her introduce you. I have a feeling she’ll be bringing him to brunch.”
She laughed. “And I’m guessing I’ll be seeing you at brunch more often, too?” She looked at Lexa.

“Definitely,” Clarke said and Lexa grinned sheepishly.

“Guess so,” she said. “I haven’t been by in a while.”

“And clearly a few things have happened.” Niylah smiled then looked at Clarke. “I’m going to say hi to your mom and then I have to go. Tomorrow’s going to be busy.”

“Okay. Thanks for coming by. Happy friends-giving.”

“You, too.”

Clarke gave her a quick hug then turned back to Lexa. Luna had stepped away to talk to Anya and Jasper, which left the two of them alone for a bit.

“You look absolutely beautiful,” Lexa said softly and she ran the back of her hand gently down the side of Clarke’s face, a gesture that was both tender and arousing.

“So do you. I’ve been staring at you since you got here.”

“What a coincidence. I’ve been staring at you that long, too. And I’m thinking your mom might’ve noticed.”

Clarke smiled and took her hand. “Oh, well. And I didn’t mean to spring her on you like that earlier.”

“Sometimes you can’t plan for all contingencies. Besides, I’m pretty good at improvising.” She gave her that sexy half-smile/almost smirk that had caught Clarke’s attention the first time she’d ever seen it, when she spoke for the first time to Lexa on the stairs.

And God, it moved her still. Even more. “Thank you.”

Lexa cocked her head, puzzled.

“For being willing to roll with the situation and for spending time talking to my mom.”

“I wanted to.” Lexa ran her thumb over the back of Clarke’s hand. “She’s important in your life and I’m interested in knowing more about both of you.”

“Oh, I see. You were basically fishing for information.”

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “Maybe. But I expect you’ll do the same with Gustus and Indra.”

“The Commander might have figured out how the Master of Pancakes operates,” Clarke teased, secretly thrilled that Lexa just assumed that she’d be meeting more of her family.

“I was a good quarterback, Clarke. I know how to read a field. And the people on it.”

She laughed, thinking about what Luna had said. She liked confident Lexa, and she really liked that Lexa could be both vulnerable and strong, that she was willing to talk about the things that scared her, but that she also knew her strengths.

“Okay, honey,” Abby said as she approached. “We’re going to head out.”

Lexa still held Clarke’s hand and Clarke was completely fine with that.
“Okay. Don’t worry about the coolers. I’ll bring them next time I see you. Do you want to take some food with you?”

“Raven took care of it. Marcus has it.” She gestured at the door, where he stood with the bag he had brought, and it bulged with whatever containers Raven had provided. He was wearing his coat and had Abby’s draped over his arm.

“Cool. You’ll have lunch tomorrow for work.”

“That’s what Raven said. Lexa, it was an absolute pleasure meeting you.”

“And I’m so glad I was able to meet you.”

Clarke released Lexa’s hand so she could shake Abby’s, but Abby hugged her instead.

“I hope to see you again.” Abby stepped back and gave Clarke a pointed look.

“Brunch,” Clarke said. “At Niylah’s. Pick a Sunday and bring Marcus.”

Abby nodded. “That is a wonderful idea. I’ll call you.”

“And you know what? I’ll walk you out. Let me grab a jacket.” She squeezed Lexa’s hand. “Be right back.” Clarke went to her room and got her letterman jacket then joined Marcus and Abby on the walk to the parking lot.

“That was probably one of the best Thanksgivings I’ve had in a long time,” Marcus said.

“I’m glad you could make it.” Clarke led the way down the stairs. “I believe my mom will be contacting you about brunch at a place we both love here in Polis.”

“That would be great. Just let me know,” he said to Abby, waggling his eyebrows, which made her smile.

The night air was definitely on its way to a bit colder, but not nearly as cold as it had been the past week. Clarke followed them to Marcus’s car, which turned out to be a Subaru Outback. Good for him, driving the car that many ladies of the queer persuasion had adopted over the years. He unlocked it and put the bag of food behind the driver’s seat.

“Everybody okay to drive?” Clarke asked.

“Yes,” Kane said. “I had the one glass of wine when I got here and nothing since. And I am extremely glad to meet you, Clarke. Thank you again for the invitation.”

“Absolutely. I hope to see you at brunch soon.” He opened the door for Abby (which was kind of cute) then went around to the driver’s side and got in and started the engine.

Abby didn’t get in, though. She closed the door but not completely, and regarded Clarke for a moment. “Thanks for this Thanksgiving. It was perfect.”

“I’m really glad you could come. And he’s cute,” Clarke said, motioning toward the car with her chin. “And nice. But I do intend to grill him at brunch more.”

She smiled. “Of course you will.” She paused. “So. Lexa.”

“Yes, Lexa,” Clarke said because she wasn’t sure what else to say to a statement like that.
Abby’s smiled widened. “I know this was a first meeting and people tend to be on their best behavior when meeting family and friends, but Clarke, she’s special.”

And relief flowed through her. She hadn’t realized she had been stressing a little about Abby’s reaction.

“She’s genuine. And I like the way she talks about you and how she looks at you.”

Okay, that was a little embarrassing. Clarke cleared her throat softly.

“She cares about you. And I hope that she’s able to join us for brunch, too.”

“I’m sure she’ll try, schedule permitting.”

Abby hugged her. “I hope so. We’ll talk later.”

“Okay. Thanks, Mom. Glad you were here.”

“Me, too. Love you.” And she opened the car and got in.

“Love you, too,” Clarke said and Abby blew her a kiss and closed the car door and buckled up. Clarke moved so Marcus could back up and he and Abby waved after he did and Clarke watched the car as it left the parking lot then turned onto the street.

And then she bit her lip and looked up at the sky, smiling so hard it hurt. No clouds tonight, and even with the lights of Polis, she could see stars and the Milky Way and she wished that her dad could’ve met Lexa, too. But it was enough that her mom had, and holy shit, it went great and it somehow helped further cement the idea that she and Lexa were a thing (or on their way to being one).

But what kind of thing, exactly? What would it look like, this situation that was evolving between them? She wasn’t sure.

But God, it felt good.

She went back inside, still smiling.

Chapter End Notes

I kinda love how Lexa adapts to any situation and how she's affectionate with Clarke in public and in front of Abby. That just gives me even more feels.

Also, Lexa cooks Southern-style baked mac n' cheese, and you guys, it is fucking off the chain and so fucking full of cheesy and buttery goodness that it will totally kill you if you eat it all the time. So use this recipe wisely. Or try a "healthier" version.

But seriously, nothing says comfort food like baked mac n' cheese. And how cute is it that Lexa makes it? omg I can't...
Chapter Summary

Everybody heads out leaving Clarke and Lexa alone. Smut results. But can you blame them? I mean, really.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So I’m taking Raven home with me,” Anya said when Clarke finished wiping down the counters.

“Are you okay to drive?”

“Yep. Had one drink around two. Nothing since.”

Clarke nodded, since it was nearly nine. Jasper and Bellamy had been the stragglers and left around seven-thirty and since then, she’d been busy helping clean up and organize. Everybody went home with food and/or alcohol, leaving Raven and Clarke with manageable quantities and leftovers for a couple of days.

“I’m headed to Anya’s,” Raven said when she came in from the living room.

“So I heard.” She smiled. “Happy Thanksgiving, Reyes. This was pretty damn fun, as much of a pain in the ass as setting up and tearing down is.”

Raven smiled back. “Happy Thanksgiving, BFF. If every Thanksgiving was like this, I could almost die happy. So we should do it again next year. Please don’t dump Lexa. We need her apartment.”

Anya snort-laughed. “Seems the whole Clexonium thing is going pretty well. And your mom liked her. Good sign, Griffin.” She put her arms around Raven’s waist and Raven leaned back against her.

“What’s your take on Marcus?” Clarke asked.

Raven nodded, as if thinking. “He’s a chill dude. But he is also legit into your mom.”

“I got a good read off him,” Anya said. “He’s got a good sense of humor and he looks at your mom like she invented every good thing in the world.”

“Yeah,” Raven said. “He has puppy dog eyes. And he’s kind of sexy, in a rugged dude way.”

Clarke laughed. “I told my mom to invite him to brunch.”

“Oh, shit. The sacred Griffin women outing? That brunch?” Raven’s eyes widened with mock surprise.

“The very one. And my mom then told me to invite Lexa.”

Both Anya and Raven stared at her.

“Right? I’m kind of freaking out.”
“Are you worried?” Raven asked. “Because Lexa is too suave to fuck this up.”

“Suave?” Anya chuckled. “What are you, an 80s pop song?”

“Oh, my God, now fucking ‘Rico Suave’ will be in my head.” Clarke groaned.

“There are worse things. So are you worried?” Raven pressed.

“No—not about my mom not liking Lexa. I guess I’m worried that I’ll like it too much.”

Anya nodded. “That was deep. And if you like it too much, it means you’re invested and more vulnerable. Am I getting close?”

Clarke sighed and leaned back against the counter. “Yeah. But I also really like that my mom invited her.”

“That is the important part,” Raven said. “Do you have a date set on this historic gathering at Niylah’s?”

“No. I told my mom to call. It won’t be this weekend. She’s working.”

“And you’re disappearing into Lexa-land.” Raven leered and Clarke threw a dish towel at her. She caught it and threw it back. “You know I’m right. And no doubt disappearing into Lexa, too…” she laughed as Clarke threw the towel at her again.

Raven left Anya’s embrace and hung the towel back on its hook above the sink. “Okay, so are you good?” she asked Clarke.

“Yes. Thanks.”

Raven hugged her. You’re my BFF and honorary sister. I’ve got your back.”

Clarke smiled. “And thanks for all your help,” she said to Anya. “And also for realizing that Raven is pretty damn awesome.”

Anya raised her eyebrows. “It was tough, but somebody had to figure it out. Call or text if you need anything this weekend, but I’m pretty sure Lexa will have you covered. In every possible way,” she said with a smirk.

So Clarke hoped. And it must’ve shown on her face because Raven gave her a lascivious grin. “Go, Griff. Get you some.”

Clarke rolled her eyes and followed them into the living room. Raven picked up her backpack and Anya got the tote bag of food.

“Catch you later. Have a good weekend,” Raven said.

“You, too.” Clarke opened the door for them and watched as they went down the back stairs. She glanced toward Lexa’s apartment then went back into her own. She finished folding up the lawn chairs Lincoln had brought and leaned them against one of the walls in the living room, thinking about Luna and her offer. Clarke hadn’t had much of a chance to talk to Echo, but from what she saw, she seemed to have a good time. She’d talk to her at a later gathering.

And there she went again, with the future thought thing going on. But it was exciting now, and she grinned as she finished wiping the folding tables down before she broke them down and leaned them, too, against the wall.
Her phone rang as she finished the second and her heartbeat sped up because it was Lexa.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi back,” Lexa said in response with that little sexy edge she used with her. “So we’re done over here. Do you need some help there?”

“No, and tell Lincoln that the chairs and tables are ready to go when he has a chance.”

“Hold on.”

Clarke heard Lexa talking to someone in the background.

“Okay, he’ll get them Saturday.”

“Sounds good.”

“And I was wondering if your calendar still shows some availability tonight.”

Clarke heard the smile in her voice. “I’ll have to check—you’re in luck. It does. What did you have in mind?”

“Hot chocolate.”

“Hmm.”

“And maybe some black-and-whites,” she said in a stage whisper.

“You have some left?”

“Shh. I hid them.”

Clarke laughed. “The Commander has a secret lockbox somewhere, then?”

“Of course. What kind of Commander would I be if I didn’t?”

“I like a prepared Commander. And for the record, even if you didn’t have my fave cookies and hot chocolate, I’d still be interested.”

“Oh?”

“Probably.”

Lexa laughed. “Just probably?”

“Okay, fine. Definitely. When should I come over?”

“Um…right now?”

Clarke smiled. “On my way. Bye.” She hung up, turned the lights off, and grabbed her keys. She didn’t even bother changing because she liked the effect her outfit had on Lexa.

The door to Lexa’s apartment was half-open and Clarke knocked before going in.

“Hey,” she called.

“Come in,” Octavia said. She and Lincoln were in the living room, Octavia in a coat and Lincoln
putting his on. “Hey, thanks for this awesome Thanksgiving. We were just talking about how much fun it was. And it was fun to meet your mom. She seems pretty cool.”

“She is.” Clarke gave Octavia a quick hug. “Thanks for coming and thanks for all your help.” She hugged Lincoln next. “You, too. Thanks.”

“Well worth it. So I’ll be by Saturday—let me give you my phone number.”

Clarke got her phone ready and handed it to him as Lexa emerged from the kitchen.

“Hey,” she said. She gave Clarke a quick kiss and she hadn’t changed out of her party outfit, either, and damn, the sight made Clarke entirely too thirsty. “Just getting the equipment ready.”

“Uh-huh,” Octavia said. “I’ll bet. Though I would’ve thought you’d have that ready to go all the time.”

Lincoln tried hard not to laugh, but failed. So did Clarke. Lexa grinned and threw a glance at Clarke.

“Conversations for another time,” Lexa said. “Don’t forget your leftovers.”

“Definitely not,” Lincoln said. Okay, everybody have a good Friday. Clarke, I’ll talk to you Saturday.”

“Yeah.” She texted him a quick “hi” so he could add her to his contacts list and then he went into the kitchen and came out with a bag.

“Ready?” he said to Octavia.

“Yep. Happy Thanksgiving,” she said to Lexa and Clarke.

Both she and Clarke said, “You, too,” together.

“We’ll lock the door.” She smirked.

Once the door was shut Lexa pulled Clarke into a long, hard, hot kiss and holy hell the taste of her mouth, the feel of her lips and tongue—had she exploded yet?

“God, you’re so fucking sexy,” Lexa murmured against her lips. “I couldn’t stop looking at you. Echo teased the shit out of me about it.”

“Is that bad?”

“Hell, no. I love looking at you.” And then she kissed her again and this time she didn’t stop and her hands were on Clarke’s hips then back then ass and then she was unbuttoning Clarke’s shirt and holy fuck it was as if even her blood was on fire.

Clarke pulled Lexa’s shirt out of her jeans then stopped so she could help with her own shirt and she let it slide off her shoulders to the floor, leaving her in her tee and the expression in Lexa’s eyes… Clarke guided Lexa’s hands to her stomach, then pulled them slowly higher, toward her breasts.

“You know you want to,” Clarke said with a teasing smirk and she let go of Lexa’s hands, an invitation in her eyes.

Which Lexa accepted. And oh, God, she gently cupped Clarke’s breasts and ran her thumbs over her nipples, which Clarke felt even through the fabric as Lexa brushed her lower lip against Clarke’s.
“Unbutton my shirt,” Lexa said softly and her words along with the sensation of her hands on her breasts made Clarke so fucking wet that she was sure she had soaked her jeans, too.

“As the Commander wishes,” she said against Lexa’s mouth and she worked her hands down the front of Lexa’s shirt until it was open, exposing Lexa’s black lace bra and Clarke took advantage of this new situation with her lips and hands and Jesus fuck she was so turned on that she might have an orgasm just by doing that.

And then Lexa was kissing her again, more demanding, and fireworks were going off in Clarke’s head and chest and between her thighs and she was sure nobody else in the world could get her this goddamn aroused and wet.

Lexa guided Clarke’s hands to her belt and Clarke undid it then unbuttoned her jeans and unzipped them as they continued kissing, and Lexa grabbed the bottom of Clarke’s T-shirt and Clarke raised her arms and Lexa practically yanked it off and then her hands were on her bare skin and fuck it felt so good…

She worked her hand down the front of Lexa’s jeans and cupped her and drew her breath in sharply at how damp her underwear was. Lexa grabbed her hand and moved it back up to her waistband.

“Touch me,” she said, low and urgent and there was no way Clarke could refuse her and she slid her fingers inside her underwear, down past her waistband and oh, fucking hell, Lexa was so goddamn wet.

Clarke groaned against Lexa’s mouth and Lexa sucked on her lower lip then bit down and it was so fucking hot, this more demanding side of her, and Clarke teased her with her fingers, slid one fingertip in just a bit, then withdrew it, barely able to breathe.

Lexa groaned. “Fuck, yes. Like that. God, Clarke—”

And Clarke kissed her and Jesus, the way her tongue felt in her mouth. Her hand was cramping a little in the close confines of Lexa’s jeans and underwear, but she didn’t care and she slid two fingers in and Lexa’s breath came in short, sharp bursts as she thrust against her.

“You feel so fucking good,” Lexa said, that damn half-smile riding her lips and Clarke was pretty sure both her own underwear and jeans were ruined.

“So do you.” She used her thumb on Lexa’s clit as she continued to work her with her fingers and at this point she had no idea what was keeping her from collapsing.

Lexa shifted her position a little, which made it easier for Clarke to go deeper and God the sounds Lexa made and God the way she moved and the expression in her eyes—Lexa leaned in and kissed her, hard and urgent.

“Make me come,” she said, voice husky, and fuck, Clarke loved it when she talked like that, loved that she trusted her enough to do it.

Clarke sped up her thrusts along with the motion of her thumb against Lexa’s clit and Lexa tensed and her fingers dug into Clarke’s shoulders and she groaned, long and low, and nothing sounded as good as Clarke’s name when Lexa said it as she came. Clarke wrapped her other arm around Lexa’s lower back, steadying her as she released then relaxed against her, arms around her neck, forehead against hers, and Clarke wondered how the hell they’d both managed to stay upright through that. They stood like that for a while, and there was nowhere else Clarke wanted to be.

“Okay?” she whispered, tracing patterns on Lexa’s back under her shirt.
Lexa smiled. “Better than okay.” She moved a little so Clarke could pull out and then she hugged her close, and kissed her bare shoulders.

“Mmm,” Clarke said as heat poured down her thighs. And they were quiet for a few moments until Lexa looked into her eyes.

“I forgot to make hot chocolate,” she said with a sheepish grin.

Clarke laughed. “I’m not complaining.” She brushed a strand of hair out of Lexa’s eyes.

“Rain check?”

“I think you just want to show me your equipment.” Clarke used air quotes around “equipment.”

She shrugged. “Maybe,” she said, a teasing and sultry edge to her voice. “I mean, you’re welcome to see it if you want.”

“And what about using it?”

“That too, if you want. I’ll show you how.”

“I might already know my way around your equipment pretty well,” Clarke said.

“I guess we’ll find out.” Lexa ran her lips lightly over Clarke’s, deepened the gesture into a super-hot kiss, then pulled back a little and her expression made the throbbing between Clarke’s thighs increase.

“I’m going to take you to bed,” she said, “where I’m going to finish undressing you.”

Oh, God. Every part of Clarke’s skin felt like it was on fire.

“And then—” she kissed her again, “I’m going to touch you.” Another kiss. “And taste you.” Another. “And make you lose your fucking mind.”

Clarke bit her lower lip suggestively. “I entirely support this initiative.”

Lexa smiled back and pulled Clarke toward the bedroom, where she decorated the floor with the rest of their clothing and by the time Clarke pulled her down against her onto the bed, she was already well on her way to losing her fucking mind.

But oh, what a way to do it.

###

The smell of coffee coaxed Clarke awake. She sighed, contented, and opened her eyes. Daylight filtered into Lexa’s bedroom through the blinds and Clarke had no idea what time it was but so what? She was naked, in Lexa’s bed, with all kinds of delicious memories from the previous night. And yes, Lexa had done everything she had said she would and Clarke stared at the ceiling, a huge smile on her face.

The hiss of Lexa’s espresso machine made her smile even wider and she sat up. At some point during the night, she had taken her hair down and she finger-combed it, yawned, and got out of bed.

Lexa had left a robe out for her and Clarke put it on and pulled it tight around herself because it smelled like Lexa and God, how much goofier was she going to get? She went to the bathroom and while she was there, she checked the mirror. Sex hair. Major. Not that she minded, but she still tamed
the worst of it with one of Lexa’s brushes then went to the kitchen.

“Hey,” Lexa said, and her smile was positively radiant and Clarke stared at her, heart overflowing. “Was I too loud?”

Clarke shook her head, still staring. Lexa had pulled her hair back and she wore long gym shorts, flip-flops, and a baggy V-neck tee that provided nice hints of her cleavage. She was absolutely adorable and Clarke closed the distance between them and kissed her and Lexa wrapped her in a hug and responded enthusiastically, her lips soft and hungry, and oh, God, she tasted like last night.

“Good Morning,” Clarke said, smiling and ready to take her right back to bed.

“Mmm. It totally is. And my clothes still look good on you. But…” she raised her eyebrows suggestively and Clarke laughed.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure at some point they’ll end up on your floor. Again.”

Lexa smiled. “I completely support that.”

“But I need coffee first.”

“You’re in luck, then,” Lexa said. “I’ve got a cappuccino with your name on it.”

“That might possibly be better than pancakes.”

“Never,” she said, teasing, “but I know how the Master of Pancakes is about her coffee.” She kissed her again and Clarke released her (reluctantly).

Lexa turned back to the espresso maker and prepared steamed milk, which she then carefully poured into a big, wide cup like Clarke had seen used in coffee houses. She finished with a flourish and set the pitcher aside then handed Clarke the cup before she turned back to the machine to do whatever secret things baristas did.

Clarke glanced at the design Lexa had floated onto the beverage’s surface and caught her breath. A heart. A big, white, creamy heart.

It made her own heart flutter and her chest fill with all kinds of sparks though she wasn’t sure it was supposed to mean anything.

“Croissants?” Lexa picked up a white paper bag from the counter that Clarke hadn’t noticed and shook it a little, a question in her eyes.

She wrenched her gaze from the cup. “When did you—wait. How long have you been up?”

“Long enough to get croissants around the corner. You were sleeping and I figured you needed the rest after friends-giving. And last night.” She arched an eyebrow and her eyes sparked with mischief and images from the night before filled Clarke’s mind again and how was it possible to be so damn thirsty for her all the damn time?

“I love croissants,” she said, and she followed Lexa to the table—in a dining nook similar to her own—where she had already set out two small plates across from each other and another cappuccino. She put a croissant on each plate and Clarke sat down. She lifted her coffee cup to her lips and carefully sipped because she wanted to preserve the heart as long as she could.

“There’s more where that came from,” Lexa said, watching her with an entirely sweet and indulgent
smile, as if she could tell Clarke was being extra-careful with the cup.

“Coffee? There’d better be.”

“Definitely. But in this specific case, designs.”

Clarke regarded her over the rim of the cup. “I really like this one,” she said, and the air seemed to still between them, charged with both acknowledgement and possibility.

“So do I.”

And Clarke held her gaze, caught in the way things unspoken were often louder than words. She set her cup down and ran her fingers over Lexa’s. “I’m really glad my bad mood that day on the stairs didn’t scare you away.”

“It was justified. And I don’t scare easily.” She intertwined her fingers with Clarke’s. “And I had a feeling about you.”

“Just one?” Clarke smiled and squeezed her hand.

“Stick around and find out.” And her smile was slow, sexy, and a whole hell of a lot more.

“I plan to.” And it didn’t freak her out to say that because she knew Lexa would give her room to explore what it meant. She held Lexa’s gaze for a few more moments, loving how the space between them was full of warmth and a sense of shared adventure.

Clarke then picked up the croissant with her other hand and took a bite. “I meant to ask you if you had heard from Indra or Gustus.”

Her smile softened. “I called them yesterday before I came over. And thanks for thinking of them.”

“They’re part of your life and important to you. And I hope to meet them.” She took another bite, trying to seem nonchalant but inside she was a mess. A melting, hot, goofy mess.

“You will.” Lexa squeezed her hand again and picked up her coffee with her other. “I told them about you.”

Clarke set the croissant down. “Your awesome neighbor?” She picked up her cup, careful because it was big and she was using one hand. “Did you mention the pancakes?”

“Maybe.” Lexa smiled and Clarke really liked holding her hand across the table like this, even if it was a little awkward when big cappuccino cups were involved.

“How’s Indra’s mom?”

“Not great. But not bad, either. She has a number of health issues. She can still get around, but her heart isn’t in the best shape. I think she might end up back in Virginia. It’s being discussed, anyway.”

“That’s hard.” Clarke stroked Lexa’s fingers with her thumb, and thought about her own mom. She couldn’t imagine her in that state, but she knew that it was inevitable, and she both dreaded it but welcomed it, because it would mean that Abby had lived a long time.

“Yeah. But it would be easier to take care of her and make sure she’s eating right and that somebody is there to take her for her check-ups.” Lexa stared into her coffee. “She’s basically my grandmother, though we’re not blood-related.”
“You don’t always need that to be a family.”

Lexa was quiet for a while. When she spoke again, there was pain in her eyes. “My dad’s parents are dicks, too.”

Clarke didn’t respond and instead just squeezed her hand, offering encouragement.

“They’re not fans of Indra. So after they found out Gustus was going to marry her no matter what, they cut way back on talking to him. They didn’t even go to the wedding.”

“That’s horrible.”

“Yeah. And when they found out I’m not of the straight variety, they were shitty, then, too. So I didn’t have much contact with them.”

“Fuck. What about your mom’s parents?”

“They died before she met my dad. My mom has a sister in Canada, I think, but my mom never talked to her. That I know of. And I don’t have any idea where she is. At any rate, Indra’s mom became my grandmother.”

“So basically your dad’s parents are racist and homophobic and your dad married a woman kind of like that, too.”

“Seems that way. But even after my dad found out about me, he wasn’t nearly as shitty as my mom. I kept thinking he didn’t buy what my mom was doing and I hoped for a while that he’d snap out of it, but he didn’t. Gustus and Indra, though—no question. They were there for me from the beginning.” She stared into her coffee again.

“And ultimately, that’s what matters.” She squeezed her hand again.

“I’m lucky in that regard. A lot of people aren’t. And fuck, that was depressing.” She looked up at Clarke.

“I’m still glad you told me.” Everything Lexa revealed about herself Clarke appreciated.

“Anyway, I told them about you.”

“Did they tease you endlessly?”

“They might’ve teased me a little.” She flashed a cute little smile. “But they also told me that you’re welcome any time.”

“I’m honored.” And she was, because she knew that as hospitable as Lexa generally was, this was about much more than that.

Lexa picked up her croissant with her free hand. “I really enjoyed meeting your mom, by the way,” she said before she took a bite.

“I’m glad. She would also like to invite you to brunch.” Clarke again tried to sound nonchalant, but everything about this morning was giving her all kinds of feels.

“I’d love to. Just let me know when and I’ll arrange my schedule.”

Clarke smiled and shook her head in wonderment.
“What?”

“You.”

She frowned, puzzled.

“You’re just…amazing.”

“Because I’m going to have brunch with you and your mom?”

“Exactly.” Clarke took another sip of coffee.

“So…there’ve been issues in the past with your mom and people you were seeing?”

“You could say that.” And maybe it had more to do with her choices in previous partners than with her mom.

“Clearly, the Pancake Master just needed a Commander in her life,” Lexa said with a completely cute little shrug before she took another bite of her croissant.

“Clearly,” Clarke said with a laugh. She pulled her hand free of Lexa’s so she could better hold her coffee cup (and, let’s be real, stare at her over the rim of it).

Lexa smiled again and her gaze dropped to Clarke’s chest, which the robe only just covered, and the glint in her eyes made Clarke think about the night before, and she was only too ready for another round.

“See something you like?” she asked, moving a little so the robe revealed a little more.

“Definitely. And God, you look so hot in that.”

“Think you can talk me out of it?” she asked, injecting the question with a sultry little smirk.

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “I know I can.”

“That’s some big talk, Commander.” Clarke sipped her coffee, egging her on with her expression. And then Lexa pushed herself back from the table and came around to Clarke’s side, where she stood, looking down into Clarke’s eyes and oh, God, her expression. Clarke was surprised that her robe didn’t just remove itself, that it didn’t just fly right off her body, which was only too ready for Lexa’s touch. She set her coffee cup down and turned in her chair and Lexa ran her finger along the collar of the robe down to her breasts, her fingertip barely grazing her skin but fucking hell, it left flames in its wake.

Lexa leaned down and kissed her and of course Clarke responded and things heated quickly and then the robe was somehow untied and open and holy fuck Lexa’s hands and mouth were on her breasts and then Lexa was on her knees in front of the chair, and she spread Clarke’s thighs and leaned in and oh, fuck, her tongue—

She didn’t even care that the back of the chair dug into her shoulder blades or that her calves were cramping a little as she braced herself with her feet, hands on Lexa’s shoulders as she worked her with her tongue and mouth.

“Fuck,” Clarke whispered and she adjusted her position a little, feeling deliciously wanton on the chair, exposed like this, but loving how she was getting worked up. “God, Lexa,” she said and Lexa hummed a response against her clit and squeezed her thighs in acknowledgement and fucking hell
her orgasm uncoiled low and slow then picked up speed and Clarke’s hands were on Lexa’s head and she was thrusting against her mouth and sparks erupted behind her eyelids and oh, fuuuuuuck…

She came hard, Lexa’s name on her lips and Lexa slowed her ministrations to gentle strokes with her tongue and delicate kisses and another release stirred at Clarke’s core and her breath came in short gasps as it built, slower than the last, but deliciously inevitable.


And Lexa slid two in and Clarke groaned at how incredible it felt and Lexa was standing, now, bent over so Clarke could hang on to her, face buried in her neck, the taste of sweat on her skin adding to how fucking hot this all was and then she was—ohhhhh God…

She relaxed, still holding on to Lexa, and shuddered with a few aftershocks and Lexa hugged her closer with her free arm. They stayed like that for a while, Clarke gently kissing her neck until she shifted a little so Lexa could pull out and stand up straight. Clarke slid her arms around her waist and rested her head against her stomach and Lexa held her close.

“This might be my new favorite chair,” Clarke said.

Lexa laughed, low and soft. “Mine, too.”

Clarke lifted Lexa’s shirt and kissed her abdomen then sucked a mark onto it, a match to the others from the night before, and she smiled when Lexa tensed and groaned, her fingers winding in Clarke’s hair.

“So, Commander,” Clarke said against her skin. “Technically, I’m still wearing this robe.” She looked up at her, a devilish little grin on her lips. “So I’ll give you another chance to talk me out of it.” And then she stood, wrapped herself up in the robe, took Lexa’s hand, and walked to the bedroom but stopped next to the bed.

“Clarke,” Lexa said softly in that tone she only used with her—the one that promised a whole lot more than just kissing. She ran her fingers along Clarke’s cheek and stared into her eyes. “Take off the robe.” And then she leaned in and pressed a kiss to her jaw and all of Clarke’s insides flipped at how goddamn sexy Lexa was.

She closed her eyes and leaned into her kiss. “That’s pretty convincing,” she said, heart pounding.

Lexa moved her lips along Clarke’s jaw until she was nearly to her ear. “Please,” she said, in that same low tone and oh, God…

Damn right she took the robe off.

Chapter End Notes

This might be utterly gratuitous smut, but I don’t care. #sorrynotsorry

And they’re so cute/sexy together that I just can’t.
Chapter Summary

Clarke and Lexa are running some errands and Clarke sees something shitty (you can guess) but Lexa makes sure her Clarkita is safe and shows her a few things about her own past while Clarke reveals a bit more about hers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clarke waited outside the post office, watching the people hurrying by on whatever Black Friday shopping pathology they were engaged in. As far as Clarke was concerned, spending most of the day with Lexa (a lot of that in bed, of course) was the absolute perfect day-after-Thanksgiving celebration. Actually, it was the absolute perfect any day.

They had finally ventured out around three (after getting delayed in the shower for completely obvious reasons) and now here they were, Clarke waiting for Lexa to drop a few cards off (how fucking cute was this ol’ skool streak she had?) and buy some more stamps.

She checked her phone and answered a text from Abby, who had also sent a selfie of herself eating leftovers in the hospital break room. She was smiling, and Clarke laughed and sent a selfie back, holding up the cup of chai she’d gotten at the coffee house a few doors down from the post office.

Raven had texted, too. Her usual check-in, but with more high-fives about Lexa and what a great friends-giving it had been. A lot of the people who had been there had texted, and Jasper had sent a video of himself singing some kind of fucked-up thank you song while he danced around his living room with a beer. She texted him back then sighed happily and watched the foot traffic across the street.

This part of Polis was sort of a charming historic district, and it was already decorated for Christmas, with lights wrapped around the faux-Victorian street lamps and strung across the street above traffic. The many shops and restaurants had gotten into the spirit, too, and though it was Black Friday and some of the people who hurried past seemed stressed, there was a festive undertone in the air, and it hung over the remnants of snow that clung stubbornly to the shady areas along the sides of buildings that didn’t warm up much. And it danced around with the canned holiday music that streamed from the speakers on the craft store on the other side of the post office (and Clarke wasn’t even bothered by it). A couple of kids ran by laughing and screaming and Clarke kept smiling.

What the hell? Normally she was already stressing this time of year, with finals on their way and trying to figure out what she was doing for the holidays and trying to jockey her schedule. But right now, everything was perfect. She leaned back against the building and idly continued watching pedestrians across the street. A group of people stood outside the movie house that showed art flicks and one looked familiar.

Clarke watched her for a few moments, and then the woman turned to greet a guy walking toward her and Clarke got a good view of both her and the guy.

Oh, fuck.
She stared as Hannah gave Finn a quick hug then appeared to introduce him to the others in the group and goddammit, one was Lauren, who acted like she already knew him.

She couldn’t breathe. Her ribs seemed to clamp around her lungs and she watched them for a few more seconds, like it was a scene in a horror movie and you wanted to look away but somehow couldn’t.

“Okay, ready to go—Clarke?” Lexa’s voice pierced her frozen state. “What’s wrong?”

“Finn,” she said and she willed herself to look at Lexa instead.

“Where?” Lexa asked, gaze crystalline, something cold and hard in her tone but Clarke knew it wasn’t directed at her.

“Across the street. In front of the theater.”

Lexa positioned herself between Clarke and the theater then surveyed the direction she had indicated. “Did he see you?” she asked after a few moments and it occurred to Clarke that Lexa had blocked Finn’s view.

“I don’t think so. He’s there with his sister and Lauren. I don’t recognize the other people.”

The group eventually started walking away, but Clarke waited until they went into a pub down the block.

“What do you want to do?” Lexa asked.

“Kick his junk off.”

She nodded. “Understandable. But maybe not as strategic as we’d like.”

Clarke chewed her lip. “Maybe he’s just here to visit Hannah and other friends. He hasn’t tried to contact me that I know of, and the only way he could do that is through Lauren somehow because I changed my phone number after we broke up and then Raven and I moved.”

Lexa stayed silent then took her hand. “I hate to ask this, since it’s not something you’ve brought up, but was he ever violent toward you?”

“No. He did, however, throw shit around. The first and only time I saw him do it was the day I broke up with him and he had a tantrum and threw a couple of my chairs and a glass. I told him to get the fuck out, that we were done, and he kicked the wall then slammed his head a few times against the door.” She clenched her teeth, remembering. “I didn’t stop him from doing that and I didn’t say anything. Then he started crying and said he thought I loved him.” She swallowed, trying to get rid of the bitter, toxic taste from that day. “I told him it was over and to leave. Again. And he stopped crying immediately. Like he flipped a switch. He didn’t say anything after that and he left, but the look in his eyes...”

Lexa hugged her and Clarke was safe in her arms, and somehow she knew everything was okay, that she wasn’t facing this alone. “I hate that you went through that,” Lexa said.

She sighed. “I hate that I didn’t break it off sooner.”

“Hey.” Lexa pulled back a little. “What’s important is that you did, and you’re still strong and you’re here and kicking all kinds of ass with who you are and what you’re doing. And I have mad respect for you.”
“Is this your quarterback huddle pep talk? Because it’s really cute but strangely effective.”

She smiled. “This is me, Lexa, telling you, Clarke, how goddamn fucking amazing you are and how strong and together you are.”

She didn’t respond immediately, caught in her eyes. “Not to detract from the moment, but I really like it when you swear like that. Especially when you’re wearing this hot-ass leather jacket.” Although Lexa would look hot in anything. But damn, when she wore her leather jacket and combat boots, it made Clarke weak.

Lexa laughed and Clarke kissed her, which garnered a dirty look from an older white woman who was about to go into the post office. Clarke smiled sweetly at her. “Isn’t she the hottest thing you’ve ever seen?” she asked. “I can’t keep my lips off her.”

Lexa looked like she was trying not to laugh as the woman’s eyes widened and she hurried inside, nearly plowing into a guy exiting.

At that point, Lexa laughed. “Oh, my God,” she managed. “No you didn’t. Her wig practically flew off.”

Clarke shrugged and sipped her chai. “It’s the truth. You are the hottest thing ever and I have a very hard time keeping my lips off you.”

“Lucky me.” She kissed Clarke’s forehead. “Are you hungry? We can alert the networks over dinner.”

“Can we go somewhere away from here?”

“Definitely.”

“You pick.”

Lexa flashed her a sly smile. “I know just the place.” And she took her hand and walked her to her Jeep, parked down a side street, and she was already feeling better when Lexa pulled away from the curb. Clarke held her chai in one hand and with her other she idly stroked the back of Lexa’s neck.

A few minutes later, she realized Lexa was headed out of town, and they were driving through the rougher, more industrial section of the outskirts.

“If I didn’t know you, I might be worried right now.” She put her empty cup in one of the strategically placed cupholders.

She scoffed. “This from someone who stole a giant fiberglass chicken from outside a diner then posed it in front of a grocery store.”

“I borrowed it.” Clarke feigned indignation but she smiled.

“Oh, of course. Anyway, I take this route to get to Indra and Gustus’s,” Lexa said. “And there are a few hidden gems along the way. They may not look like gems, but that’s the point. Only certain people know the secret.”

“And you’re letting me in on it?”

“Mmm. You must be special.” Lexa glanced at her then just as quickly returned her attention to driving but Clarke loved the statement, and loved how it made her feel. She watched Lexa for a few
seconds (because fuck, Lexa) then used the time to send a group text out about Finn and where she had seen him and who with. A few seconds later her phone started blowing up with texts and she tensed, trying not to think about him but knowing she had to. Lexa gently squeezed her thigh, a supportive gesture, as Clarke responded and explained she was okay and with Lexa going to dinner and she’d be home later that evening.

Raven sent her a private text a few moments later.

so glad L lives nxt door

same, Clarke texted back.

tell her i mght luv her 4 taking care of u

She laughed and Lexa threw another glance at her, this one questioning.

“Raven says she might love you for taking care of me.”

“I’m flattered,” she said with a smile. “And I’m more than happy to do just that.”

Clarke leaned over—awkwardly because of her seatbelt—and pressed a quick kiss against Lexa’s cheek (and God, who wouldn’t) then settled back in her seat. “Is it okay if I give Raven your phone number?”

“Definitely.”

Clarke texted Raven again and asked if she could give Lexa her phone number.

fuck yes why did it take u so long, came the reply.

whtevs! txt her. She supplied the number. “Raven’s going to text you in a bit.”

“Excellent. And I trust your judgment. If you think any of your other friends or your mom should have my number, pass it along.”

Her mom.

Oh, God.

“Okay,” she said, warm fuzzies exploding in her chest. “Same goes for my number with your friends and family.” She paused. “Are you sure you trust my judgment, given this whole situation with my ex?”

“Completely,” she said with no hesitation. “Everybody makes mistakes. That’s the nature of being human. What’s important is what you do about them.”

Clarke kissed her on the cheek again and a few more texts sounded so she dealt with those and sat in companionable silence with Lexa, liking that even silence was comfortable with her.

A few miles later, the city gave way to a more rural setting interspersed with forested areas and the late autumn twilight emphasized that. She slowed and turned right into a dirt parking lot that fronted a sketchy-looking low-slung structure with a tin roof. But several vehicles were in the lot, and blinking red Christmas lights had been hung along the eaves. A neon sign in the window advertised beer while another broadcast that the place was open. It seemed to have been carved out of the surrounding forest. Classic road house, Clarke categorized.
Lexa parked next to a pickup truck that looked like it should be hauling freight. “So this is the Skyview Inn. The guy who owns it is a friend of Gustus’s from back in the day when they both worked construction. I’ve been coming here since high school.”

“I love it already.”

Lexa regarded her, and a slow smile pulled the corner of her mouth. She leaned in and kissed her, a slow, tender meeting of lips and it settled in Clarke’s heart like hope after a long, hard day.

“How are you doing?” Lexa asked when she pulled away.

“So much better.”

“Good. Let’s eat.” She got out and Clarke followed, mindful of displaying too much affection, especially in places like this, no matter that Gustus knew the guy who ran it. That didn’t stop others from being assholes.

Lexa held the door open for her and Clarke smelled beer and burgers. Classic rock played on the speakers, but not loud enough to be annoying. The interior looked like a dive bar should, with rustic, well-worn furniture, a few pool tables toward the back, one of which had a few guys and a couple of women gathered around it, and dim but not unpleasant lighting. And in a weird but nice touch, the booths along the wall had candles burning in glass cylinders, which made everything more welcoming. Two guys sat at the far end of the bar and three of the other tables were occupied, but other than that, the Skyview was empty.

“Hey,” the bartender said, a woman about Clarke’s age who wore a tight T-shirt that showed the muscles of her arms and Clarke wondered if she was a bouncer, too. Her hair was dark and military-short on the sides, but sort of emo on top, and it fell over half her face. “Haven’t seen you in a while.”


“Yeah, all that law shit,” the bartender said and then she gave Clarke a once-over that felt clinical, like she was sizing her up before a cage match or something.

“There are days it feels like that. This is Clarke.” Lexa motioned at her. “Clarke, meet Madison. But we call her Mad Dog. MD for short.”

“Hi,” Clarke said, deciding that the nickname fit perfectly.

“Hi yourself.” Mad Dog cocked her head and glanced at Lexa then back at Clarke. “What can I get you?”

“I’m driving,” Lexa said. “The usual for that.”

“Gotcha,” MD said. “And you?” she asked Clarke.

“Tondisi stout.” She gestured at the tap handles.

MD almost smiled and Clarke saw a flicker of appreciation in her eyes. “Grab a table and I’ll bring them over. Menus?”

Lexa gave her a look like she couldn’t believe she’d even deigned to ask such a question and MD actually half-laughed and set to work on pouring a pint of dark beer. Clarke followed Lexa to a booth where Clarke took their coats off and sat down.
“Backstory?” Clarke asked.

“MD was another stray from high school who Indra and Gustus helped out. She’s part of my crew, and Gustus got her a job working here with his buddy. When she’s not doing this, she’s working on cars and racing them.”

“I like her even more.”

MD arrived with their drinks and menus and she set everything down. “I let Roan know you’re here,” she said to Lexa. “Give me a shout when you’re ready, but he’ll probably take your order first.” She gave Clarke another once-over before she returned to the bar, but Clarke didn’t mind. She did the same thing when people she cared about were seeing new people. She tasted the beer and was glad she picked it as its rich, smoky flavor filled her mouth.

“Roan is the guy who runs this place,” Lexa explained. She handed Clarke a menu. “And everything on this is super good. I’m a fan of the burgers.” She set her menu aside and picked up her pint glass, filled with a dark liquid that looked like it might be beer.

“So what’s your non-driving usual here at the Skyview?”

Lexa handed the glass to her and Clarke sniffed, smiled, and took a sip.

“That is some seriously good root beer.” She handed it back.

“Right? It’s a local. But not as good as Indra’s. Roan keeps telling her to brew more of that and beer and he’ll carry them both.”

“I like all these cool things your family does,” Clarke said as she picked up the menu and scanned the burger section.

“Well, I like all the cool things yours does. Maybe we should hang out.” She raised an eyebrow and smirked behind the rim of her glass.

“I’d be okay with that.” Clarke shrugged, teasing. She was beyond okay with that. In fact, she was already making reservations to monopolize Lexa’s time for the next few months. Maybe longer.

Please. Who was she kidding?

Lots longer.

“Hey, youngster,” said a broad-shouldered guy with a goatee and a tousled mass of brown hair that made him look kind of rakish. He wore a red and blue flannel shirt with the sleeves rolled up and jeans and work boots and his voice had an intriguing timbre that made it carry though he actually spoke sort of softly.

“Hey,” Lexa said in return with a huge grin and she stood up and gave him a hug. He practically lifted her off the ground. “Happy late Thanksgiving,” she added.

“Long time no see,” he said as he let go and looked at Clarke. “Hi. I’m Roan.”

“Clarke.” She shook his proffered hand, and it was a strong, friendly grip. Working hands, she classified, from the calluses on his palm.

“Welcome to Skyview. Any friend of Lexa’s is a friend of mine.”
“Thanks.” Clarke liked his manner, and how he exuded quiet competence. She’d totally trust him as a contractor.

“So what’ll it be? Though with Lexa, I pretty much know.”

“I want a big, fat cheeseburger,” Lexa said.

He shook his head and pretended to be stricken. “There’s a huge burger section on the menu and this is still what you want.”

“Swiss this time.”

“Oh, well, that’ll shake things up. And you?” he cocked his head at Clarke.

“The mushroom burger. With the extra touch.”

“Excellent choice. How do you like it cooked?”

“Medium well.”

“Done. Let me take care of this and then we can catch up a bit.” He picked up the menus and went to the kitchen.

“Skyview’s burgers are total comfort food,” Lexa said. “They’re perfectly cooked and Roan likes to source local beef when he can.”

“So how long has he been running this place?”

“Since I was in junior high, but Gustus has known him way longer than that.” She sat back and toyed with her glass. “I seriously cannot believe sometimes that Gustus and my dad came from the same parents.”

“Maybe Gustus was switched at birth.”

Lexa chuckled. “It makes sense. I mean, my dad is this totally uptight military asshole and Gustus is this down-to-earth mellow open-minded funny guy who never meets a stranger.”

“Sounds kind of like my mom’s brother. My mom’s kind of uptight, but her brother is way more relaxed than she is.”

“You don’t talk much about your family outside your mom.”

Clarke held Lexa’s gaze for a moment. “Because I have a hard time opening up.”

“I might have noticed that about you,” she said, but with a layer of acceptance and Clarke knew she wouldn’t push her on any topic she wasn’t ready to discuss.

Clarke smiled. “It’s not you. It’s me.”

She laughed and picked up her glass.

“My mom’s brother—Sam—is a couple years younger than she is. He’s an airline pilot based in California. He and my mom actually talk a couple times a month and they text a lot. He texts me, too, but coordinates more with my mom. He’s got a son and daughter my age, Rudy and Rebecca. Rudy is in dental school in Seattle and Rebecca works in film doing sound. She’s based in LA for obvious reasons. We all text fairly regularly, but we don’t see each other that often.”
Lexa raised an eyebrow. “I appreciate that you’re telling me these things.”

“You’d better.” Clarke smiled and sipped her beer. “My dad was an only child, too, but his parents are still alive and I talk to them a few times a month. My grandfather—Tom—is a retired biology professor and my grandmother—Helen—runs a real estate company. They put some money aside for me when I was born to help with college expenses, and it has totally come in handy.”

“That’s really cool.”

“Yeah. I got lucky in that regard. My mom’s parents, on the other hand, are divorced, and I don’t have much contact with her dad, but I do with her mom—Margaret. She goes by Margie. She’s in Arizona. She likes the desert.”

“It does have appeal,” Lexa said. “I love the starkness of desert landscapes.”

“Noted. Though can we not visit in the summer?”

Lexa laughed. “But then you’re missing out on the full experience.”

“Margie will like you. She calls herself an old desert dog, and Sam sees her more than my mom, since he’s in Cali. He flies her there once every couple of months and my mom brings her here about twice a year. So that’s pretty much the extent of my extended family. There are others—cousins of my parents—but I don’t know much about them.”

Lexa shrugged. “Not everybody has awesome extended family networks. Indra does, but Gustus doesn’t. And I clearly don’t.”

Clarke ran her fingers over the back of Lexa’s hand. “Genetic ties don’t always make a family.”

“True.” She turned her hand over and Clarke traced shapes onto her palm.

“Today has been incredible,” Lexa said softly. “So was yesterday.”

“I agree.” More than incredible, but she couldn’t think of a word that would adequately capture how she felt. She pulled her hand away as MD approached with their food.

“Lexa burger with Swiss,” she said as she set a plate in front of her, “and a Clarke burger with the extra touch.” She put the other plate down along with two sets of silverware rolled into large paper napkins and Clarke stared. The patty had to be almost a half-inch thick and sautéed mushrooms spilled out of the bun onto the plate while on top of them were two big thick onion rings, the “extra touch” on the menu.

“Damn.” Clarke shook her head in awe at this display of burgerlicious-ness and again, MD almost smiled.

“Bon appétit. Holler if you need anything.” MD glanced at their drinks, which were still half-full, and went back to the bar.

Lexa put tomato and lettuce on her burger and Clarke did the same, wondering how the hell she was going to be able to pick it up and take a bite. Fuck it. She did, and mushrooms spilled out over her hands (so what) and oh, my God it was probably the best burger she’d ever had.

Lexa watched her, grinning. “And? Your verdict?”

“Guilty of fucking deliciousness.”
“I kind of wish you were going into law, because I would pay a bunch of money to hear you say that in a courtroom.”

She offered one of her smirks. “Well, Counselor, I’ll gladly say things like that for free. Just ask.” She put a sultry note on that last part and was rewarded by a particular glint in Lexa’s eyes, visible even in the low lighting.

The moment was interrupted by Roan’s approach. He carried a glass of what might have been sparkling water. A lime was trapped halfway down among ice cubes.

“This is phenomenal,” Clarke said to him. “Seriously.”

“Glad you like it. Lexa generally sticks with the cheeseburger, so thanks for ordering something else that I can practice on.”

“I will gladly try every burger on the menu.” Clarke picked up a fry and took a bite and that, too, was excellent. Perfectly cooked.

“Pace yourself,” Lexa said, and she was smiling again and Clarke would never get tired of it.

“Can you join us for a bit?” Clarke asked and Lexa’s expression turned to appreciative.

“Thanks.” Roan sat down next to Lexa and put his glass on the table. “So what brings you this way? I thought Indra and Gustus were in Florida.”

Lexa nodded. “They are. I just wanted to bring Clarke here.”

Roan’s expression shifted, like something suddenly dawned on him and he looked at Clarke then back at Lexa and a slow smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

“Clearly, she needed an awesome burger,” Lexa said, matter-of-fact.

“Yes, I did.” Clarke took another bite.

He nodded. “Well, please indulge here whenever you can.”

“I hope to do that,” Clarke said and she caught Lexa’s gaze and it held affection but also promises and heat raced down Clarke’s thighs.

Lexa turned the conversation to other things with Roan and Clarke listened as she ate, enjoying the vibe of this place and how another layer of Lexa revealed itself—one that let Clarke see some of her past and she knew that this was something special, bringing her here, that it was much more than just a beer and a burger for Lexa.

And it was more than that for Clarke, too. She liked how they slowly revealed things to each other, how trust between them solidified more each day.

“All right,” Roan said after a while longer of chatting. “I have to get back to it.” He stood. “Really good to see you. And Clarke, good to meet you. Hope to see you again.”

“Same.”

Lexa gave him another hug and he went to the bar to talk to MD. Lexa sat down and finished the last couple of bites of her burger. Clarke had already finished hers and was working on her fries.

“Do you want another beer?” Lexa asked.
Clarke glanced at her nearly empty glass. “Will there be pool involved?”

Lexa raised her eyebrows. “Did you want there to be?”

“I’m assuming you play.” And there were two open tables.

“You assume correctly.”

“Then yes, I’ll have another beer.”

Lexa picked up her glass. “Same kind?”

She regarded her for a moment, enjoying the way she looked, in her sporty long-sleeved tee and well-worn jeans. Lexa could rock any look. “You pick.”

“All right. Get a table.”

Clarke grabbed their coats and set them on chairs near the pool table she chose. She had some change in her pocket so she put a dollar's worth of quarters on the table’s edge and waited for Lexa, who came over soon after, carrying two drinks. Hers was clearly root beer but the glass she handed to Clarke was filled with beer that had a reddish-caramel color to it. She sipped it.

“You chose wisely,” she said, at the rich undertones of toffee and vanilla.

Lexa smiled. “It’s another local. Kind of a nut brown ale.” She set two dollars’ worth of quarters on the table next to Clarke’s. “Let’s get this party started.”

Clarke inserted the quarters and released the balls. “Rack ’em up, Woods.”

She chuckled and while she did that, Clarke selected a cue and set up for the break while Lexa picked her own cue and twenty minutes later, amidst friendly and flirtatious banter, Clarke won handily.

“Okay, hold up,” MD said. “Did you seriously just get your ass kicked?” she asked Lexa.

“It would appear so.”

“And you didn’t let her win?”

“Excuse me?” Clarke said, indignant. “I beat Woods fair and square.”

“She did,” Lexa admitted. “I didn’t realize Clarke was actually a pool shark.”

MD grinned. “Well, this calls for something a little stronger than beer.” She went behind the bar and returned with a tumbler of what looked like whiskey, and she handed it to Clarke. “Congratulations. On me.”

Clarke took the glass and sipped. Smooth and strong. Probably top shelf. “Thanks.”

“Anybody who beats Lexa at anything gets props from me.”

Clarke looked over at Lexa, who was racking up for another game, then back at MD. “So you’re saying she doesn’t like to lose?”

Lexa looked up, and arched an eyebrow. “I might be a little competitive, yes.”
“You’re taking losing to me all right.”

Lexa shrugged and smiled.

“What the hell,” MD said in a dramatic whisper.

“Lexa doesn’t lose often?” Clarke asked, throwing another glance at the pool table, amused at MD’s reaction.

“Not really. And she’s usually not so mellow if it happens.”

“People do change,” Lexa said with a smile. “And Clarke, your break.”

Clarke took another sip of whiskey and set the glass on a nearby table. “So, MD, you’re saying that Lexa might be a bad sport?”

“No. Just really intense.”

“Maybe it depends on the stakes.” Clarke flashed Lexa a sassy little grin.

MD laughed. “Yeah, that’s probably it. You want another root beer?” she asked Lexa.

“Club soda this time.”

“On it.” MD went back to the bar and Clarke set up to break, which she did in smooth, practiced motions, and the balls spread out across the table from the force of her stroke.

Lexa moved closer and said in a low voice, “Watching you do that is really turning me on.”

“Good.” And she took another sip of whiskey.

“Also, I think I finally understand why women drinking whiskey can be hot. Because, damn.”

“Are you saying that I might be distracting you?”

She shrugged. “Maybe.”

“So basically, I won because you can’t focus? Not because of my mad pool skills?” Clarke teased.

“No, you won because you’re a damn good player.” Lexa moved even closer. “And I don’t mind losing to people with better skills. Besides, win or lose, I know who you’re going home with tonight.” And oh, fucking hell, her smirk eased into that damn half-smile that was both invitation and challenge, that practically begged Clarke to kiss her right there.

“You’re dangerous, Commander,” Clarke said softly with a smirk of her own. And then she set up and promptly took care of two more balls. She missed the third, but left it in a good position for a follow-up depending on what Lexa did.

MD brought Lexa’s club soda over, graced with a lime, and retreated, though she gave Clarke an appreciative nod.

A little more of Lexa’s competitive streak emerged during this game (which of course was also sexy) and it was close, but Clarke sank three amazing shots in a row, bringing the game to a close.

Lexa moved closer and Clarke wanted to kiss her but didn’t. You never knew what assholes might be around.
“As MD already pointed out, I’m not a fan of losing,” Lexa said as she leaned against the table, “but I have enjoyed watching you play.”

She was about to respond when MD approached. “Did you grow up in a pool hall?” she asked Clarke.

“No. But my dad loved the game and we did have a table.” Clarke returned her cue and Lexa’s to the holder on the wall. “And I played a lot growing up.”

“It shows.” Lexa finished her club soda and Clarke finished her whiskey. Lexa caught Clarke’s gaze, a question in her eyes, and Clarke nodded, realizing a moment later that they had just had an entire exchange about leaving without saying a word.

“We’re going to head out,” Lexa said to MD. “Good to see you.”

“Yeah. Don’t be a stranger. And Clarke, it was good to meet you. Please come back and beat Lexa at pool again,” she added with a sly smile.

She laughed. “I’ll try. But Lexa might start sneaking more practice sessions in.”

“That is something she’d do.”

Lexa pretended to huff, but she was smiling.

Roan emerged from one of the back rooms.

“Hey, we’re taking off,” Lexa said and he changed his path and came right over.

“It was really good to see you. And good to meet you,” he said to Clarke. “There’s a burger with your name on it any time.”

“Thanks. And Lexa was right, the burgers here are awesome.”

Roan hugged Lexa then gave Clarke’s shoulder a quick squeeze, a gesture that Clarke guessed was a little more intimate than usual with someone he’d just met, but it was also recognition, maybe, that she was more than a friend to Lexa. She collected their jackets while Lexa spoke a little more with MD and Roan.

A few minutes later, they left the warmth of the building for the chill of the parking lot. The gravel crunched underfoot and Clarke breathed deeply, smelling forest, woodsmoke, and a touch of winter. They stopped at the Jeep and Clarke looked up at the sky, filled with stars and a few clouds.

“It’s a beautiful night,” she said.

“Yeah. It is.” Lexa looked up, too, and they stared at the sky for a few moments.

“Can I give you some money for dinner?”

Lessa shook her head. “It’s taken care of.”

“And it was amazing.” She took Lexa’s hand. “Thank you. I needed this.”

“I know.” Lexa kissed Clarke’s fingertips. “Ready?”

“In a minute.” And Clarke pushed her against the side of the Jeep and kissed her—finally—and she was glad for the cold night air because it might have been the only thing keeping her from
combusting. She stopped a few seconds later, but damn, she was ready for more. This parking lot, however, was probably not a good idea to be doing that.

“Take me home, Woods.”

Lexa stared at her for a moment, heat in her eyes. “It kinda turns me on when you call me that.”

“A surname kink. I like it.” Clarke pulled her into another kiss and good God kissing Lexa Woods was a gateway drug to Clarke doing whatever the hell Lexa wanted, and as many times as she wanted.

Not that she minded.

Lexa unlocked the Jeep and opened the door for her then went around to the driver’s side and got settled. She turned on the engine and looked at Clarke. “All good?”

God, how Clarke loved her check-ins. “Yes. You?”

“I’m with you, so that’s always a big yes.” She grinned and pulled out of the parking lot, and Clarke’s heart was left with piles of feels to sort through.

On the drive back into Polis, she checked her texts, all from friends assuring her they had her back and would keep an eye out for certain douchebags. Bellamy expressed particular remorse about Lauren. Not much to be done, now. He really needed to be a bit more selective in his hookups, though.

Raven had texted thirty minutes earlier and Clarke let her know she and Lexa were headed home and it struck her that home for both of them was practically the same place and saying that could have so many meanings where Lexa was concerned.

Home was most often a place, and a word you said in terms of location, and where your stuff and your bed was, most of the time. But it was also something a lot deeper, and could mean a very specific place that held meaning for you, whether you were living there or not.

She looked at Lexa, whose gaze was focused on the road, the lights from her dashboard casting a glow in the Jeep’s interior and across her skin. Lexa glanced over at her and smiled. She squeezed Clarke’s hand, as if she knew she had been watching her, and she wished she could do it right back, but right now she had to watch the road.

And Clarke smiled, still holding Lexa’s hand, because home could also be a connection, and when she looked at Lexa and thought about her and spent time with her, well, that felt like home, too.

So maybe home could be a person.

She lifted Lexa’s hand to her lips and kissed it.

“Okay?” Lexa asked, voice soft, like she had known to adjust it to the quiet intent of this moment.

Clarke smiled yet again. “Better than okay. Happy.” In spite of seeing the douchebag earlier, and all the baggage that it brought up, she was really fucking happy right now.

Lexa squeezed her hand again. “Same.”

They sat in silence for a while, the space between them warm and comforting as they hit the outskirts of Polis.
“Do you think you might want to stay over tonight?” Clarke asked as they approached their apartment building.

“Hmm. Maybe invite me using my surname kink.”

“Stay with me tonight, Woods,” she said, tone low and sexy.

“Damn. You had me at stay. Maybe I just have a Clarke kink.” She turned into the parking lot.

She laughed. “I’m totally okay with that. Matches my Lexa kink.”

“That’s always helpful, to have mutually enforcing kinks,” she said as she parked and turned the engine off.

Clarke leaned over and kissed her. “I’d like to keep you around for a while, Woods,” she said as she pulled away.

The corner of her mouth lifted in a smile. “That’s totally doable.”

“Good. Now come upstairs with me. There are a few things I need to talk you out of.” She raised her eyebrows and gently bit down on Lexa’s lower lip.

“God, Clarke,” she murmured. And then she got out of the Jeep and followed Clarke home.

Chapter End Notes

This is just a goddamn tour of road house burgers. With feels on the side.

And hey, thank you so much for all the kudos and comments! You can find me on Tumblr and Twitter, if you want to chat (and share recipes or whatever because clearly, I have a food thing going on).
Clarke finished organizing the homefront after friends-giving while Lexa helps Echo move. Then they all meet up for drinks and snacks later and Drunk Lexa makes an appearance.

Clarke spent late Saturday morning cleaning and organizing the apartment more after friends-giving. Lexa had left around ten to help Echo move and Clarke would be meeting them later for drinks, but damn, she had wanted another long morning in bed with her, laughing and talking and engaging in certain activities.

And just thinking about that with her made heat gather between Clarke’s thighs.

She channeled her sexual energy—and seriously, she couldn’t remember a time she’d been like this over someone (because there wasn’t anyone like Lexa, duh)—into finishing vacuuming the floor rugs and then she mopped the kitchen floor and then cleaned the bathroom.

It was nearly two when Lincoln texted and asked if he could pick up the tables and chairs in the next thirty minutes. She texted an affirmative back then went into her bedroom, ostensibly to change her sheets but she stopped and stared at the bed and the tangle of blankets and sheets on it, which of course brought a flood of memories from the previous night.

She had unleashed on Lexa, and made sure she knew how much she wanted her, and how much she enjoyed their time together, no matter what form it took.

And right now, she really missed her even though it had only been a few hours. She missed knowing that Lexa was close, and she missed her presence when they shared the same space. Which was a hell of a lot lately.

And she was greedy for so much more.

Her phone signaled a text and she smiled when she saw it was from Lexa.

So is it weird that I miss you even though I just saw you a few hours ago?

“Fuck, no,” Clarke said to her phone as she texted a response. we can b weird 2gether cuz i miss u back

She sent it and within seconds Lexa was responding, the ellipses floating on her screen.

I know this is short notice, but can I monopolize your calendar tonight, too?

“Fuck, yes.” All of it. Lexa could have her whole fucking calendar any time she wanted. And her time. And shit, while she was at it, Lexa could have her, too, any time she wanted.
Should that be scary, that she thought that? With anybody else, probably. But with Lexa, not even a little bit. And maybe that should be scary.

But it wasn’t.

Yes plz [kiss emoji]

Lexa’s reply came a few seconds later. Good. Because I owe you hot chocolate and cookies.

Oh, my God. So ur going to show me ur secret lockbox?

Lol is that what all the kids call it now?

She laughed out loud. Lol not sure i want to pursue this line of convo

And a few seconds after that, her phone rang. “Hi,” she answered, smiling so wide it almost hurt.

“Texting just isn’t enough sometimes,” Lexa said and Clarke loved her voice and its effect on her.

“Where are you?”

“Just finishing up at Echo’s new place. It’s not that far from us. It’s on the other side of Old Polis.”

“Cool. Niylah lives over there, too.” And it occurred to her that Lexa had said “us,” and though she probably meant the building that they both lived in, she liked the entendre of it, that it could imply couple status. Or maybe she was just reading too much into it.

“So we’ll be finished up in probably another hour and Echo keeps talking about how she wants margaritas.”

“Tío Mike’s.”

“Great minds. I suggested it to her and she’s in. Maybe see if Raven and Anya want to come?”

“I’ll find out. Raven loves Tío Mike’s. She digs the Spanglish-ness of it all. What about Luna?”

“Already texted her. And Octavia said she’d stop by, too, after she drops dinner off with Lincoln.”

Clarke smiled again. “That is too fucking cute.”

“Right? And I owe them, you know.”

“Why?”

“I might not have met you if they weren’t obnoxious with certain activities.” She emphasized the last two words.

“Good point. I’ll buy Octavia a margarita in recognition of her role in making me act like a total asshole on the stairs.”

“In your defense, you were pretty tired.”

Clarke laughed. “I was a raging bitch.”

“But you had a reason.”

“And I love how you’re practicing your lawyer skills right now. It’s kind of hot.”
“Only kind of?” She had that little tease in her voice and Clarke knew she was smirking, and just thinking about it made her blood heat.

“Don’t get cocky, Woods.”

“That is really hot,” she said, and Clarke heard the smile in her voice and fuck, she missed her. She heard voices in the background.

“Oh okay,” Lexa said. “I have to go. We have another couple of trips to make. I’ll text you when we’re done.”

“All right. See you soon.”

“Can’t wait. Bye.”

Clarke ended the call and bit her lip, still grinning, then fired off a text to Raven. A few seconds later she responded.

hell yes luv me some Mike’s

i’ll txt when i head over

Raven responded with the kiss emoji and Clarke put her phone in her pocket. She was about to strip the bed when a knock sounded at her door. Had to be Lincoln. She checked the peephole anyway and sure enough, he stood in the hall. The dude really should be a model.

“Hi,” she said when she opened the door.

He gave her a quick hug. “Hey. How’s it going?”

“Just doing some cleaning.” She gestured at the tables and chairs.

“So,” Lincoln said as he walked over to them. “Finn.” He picked up both folding tables, one in each hand. “Lexa said you saw him yesterday.”

She shrugged, not entirely surprised he brought it up. “He might just be in town visiting his sister.” She opened the door for him and stepped into the hallway to give him room to maneuver with the tables then followed him to his apartment to open that door. He set the tables against the wall in the entrance hallway.

Which reminded Clarke of the first time she and Lexa had—

She focused on Lincoln.

“I don’t know the full story,” Lincoln said. “But Lexa told me that this guy is your ex and he can’t take no for an answer. She also told me that he seems to have a history of shitty behavior with women and that he got his ass handed to him by another woman’s brother.”

“He did. Then he went to Cali after that. It’s been about a year since I last saw him.” She reflexively crossed her arms, as if protecting herself. “But the protection order is still in effect for another year.”

She was surprised, actually, that she got one in the first place. The system wasn’t stacked in favor of women being stalked and Finn could talk a good game. Fortunately, Abby had lawyer friends.

“Good,” Lincoln said. He regarded her, concern in his dark eyes. “If this asshole shows up anywhere near you while he’s here and you’re not among friends, text me a 911 or call.”
“Can I give Raven your number?”

He looked relieved. “Yes. I was going to ask if that was okay. Have her text me hers. Okay to give it to Octavia?”

“Yes. Thank you.” She relaxed and uncrossed her arms.

“You’re part of our crew, now,” Lincoln said with a smile. “We’ve got your back.”

“Same goes for you.”

He regarded her for a moment and then they went to get the folding chairs.

“Are you sure you don’t want to load these up now?” Clarke asked when they finished leaning the last of them against the tables. She followed him into the kitchen where he handed her a Diet Coke from the fridge.

“Nah. I have to get work tonight and I won’t have time to drop them off. A buddy of mine will pick them up tomorrow and do it for me.”

“Well, I really appreciate you helping out with friends-giving.”

“It was a blast. Octavia’s still talking about it.”

“We should hang out more,” Clarke said and he smiled again.

“For sure. Double date.”

“Excellent. I’ll ask Lexa what she’s got going on in the next couple of weeks and then we can coordinate.”

“Sounds good.” He paused, and looked like he might be debating what to say next. “I take it things are going well where she’s concerned?”

She arched an eyebrow. “I can only speak for myself in that regard, but from my perspective, yes.”

He nodded, thoughtful. “Lexa has a lot of walls,” he said after a few more moments. “Which I get because of what happened to her growing up. Point being, she doesn’t let just anybody into her life past a surface level.”

“Is this another assessment talk from her protective cousin?” Clarke’s tone was warm, because she knew how much he cared about Lexa.

He chuckled. “Yeah. It is. But I’m not necessarily putting you on the spot. I actually wanted to thank you.”

“For what?”

“Being someone she trusts enough to let past some of her walls. That says a lot to me.”

Clarke’s heart was once again engulfed in feels. “She’s pretty special.” She sipped her Coke because it helped distract her from acting too goofy in front of him.

“Yeah. But so are you.” He shrugged and took a drink of his own Diet Coke. “Lexa grew up with a lot of loss. After it became clear that she wasn’t like other girls—whatever the fuck that even means—her parents didn’t know what to do with that, though I think had her mom not been around, her
dad would’ve been okay with it. But he let her mom define the situation.” He paused. “So Lexa has this thing about love. She has an absolutely huge heart—I’ve told you that before—and sometimes she’s not careful with it, because in some ways, I think she’s desperate to prove to herself that she’s capable of loving and being loved. She’s always worried she’s going to be like her mom, especially.”

“So she’s said.” And it made her hurt for Lexa, trying to prove that she wasn’t like her mom, worried that genetic ties would somehow override the good that Clarke saw in her, the warmth and solidity, and gentle strength. And shit, Lincoln had used the L-word.

Lincoln looked at her, surprised. “She’s talked about that with you?”

“Yeah. I told her there was no way she was like her parents and that she deserves a connection.”

He stared at her. “You said that to her?”

“Yes.” And then a wave of boldness rushed through her. “She’s stuck with me, until she says otherwise. I told her that, too.”

His eyes widened and he grinned. “You seriously said that to her?”

“Yes.” And she remembered how she’d felt, how it had totally blown her mind when she voiced it, and scared her a bit, too, but it felt so, so right. “And I meant it. And this is kind of weird, telling you these things.”

“Maybe a little. But I do appreciate your honesty because there is nothing I wouldn’t do for her and I want her to be happy, and I want her to know that she’s more than worthy of being loved.”

Whoa. Clarke’s chest tightened. There it was again. She hadn’t said anything about love.

“No matter what form it takes,” he said, as if he had read Clarke’s tumultuous thoughts. “She deserves it.”

“Yes. She does.” But was she herself capable of providing it? After all, she had her own history with loss and pain. Maybe she wasn’t capable of that kind of connection. Maybe she was broken, after her dad’s death. And then she thought about the warmth in Lexa’s eyes and the trip to the Skyview the day before, and how Lexa had held her close in Clarke’s bed after Clarke had unleashed on her—was that love? It for sure felt like connection, but was it love?

And did it matter, to put a word on it? All she knew was that Lexa was grafted onto the infrastructure of her life, and it was the most natural thing in the world, because it felt like she’d always belonged there.

“I have to get ready for work,” he said. “I’m doing some bar backing tonight as well as bouncing. On the plus side, it’ll be quieter than usual because most people are out of town.” He flashed a smile. “Thanks for talking.”

“You, too. See you later.” She left and went back to her place and decided not to study. Instead, she worked some more on her Commander comic, which she hadn’t shown to Lexa yet. She wanted to be a little farther along. She drew another image of the Commander, this time seated in a chair—no, maybe it was a throne—its back a lattice of smooth, stripped branches, some twisted more than others. The Commander sat in it like she owned everything in its vicinity and beyond, and she held a knife in one hand, the tip of her other index finger against the point. She appeared to be staring out at the viewer like she was waiting for a response, her head cocked, imperious but also wary.

What or who would make her react that way? Clarke tapped her pencil on the paper, then added
more detail to the Commander’s face and braids. It hit her. She drew another panel, the Commander still in her throne, but she casually had the knife’s tip braced on the arm of her chair, her hand resting on its pommel, regarding another woman—Clarke finished the rough sketch of herself in her post-apocalyptic clothing standing and staring right back at her.

A text notification sounded on her phone and she picked it up. Lexa.

*On the way to Mike’s.*

Clarke stood up. *same. see u soon. R and A will be there, too*

*Cool. We’ll get some tables.*

She sat on her bed and pulled her motorcycle boots on then grabbed the sweatshirt that was slung across the back of the chair near the small computer desk on the other side of the room. It was her favorite one of Lexa’s—the first one Lexa had given her to wear the day she got locked out of her apartment. So now it also had sentimental meaning.

After checking her hair in the mirror, she put her jacket on, got her keys, and headed out. Mike’s was only a few blocks away, so she walked, glad to be out in the late afternoon air, especially since it wasn't that cold.

And in just a few minutes, she’d see Lexa again.

###

“Mike’s nachos could feed a fucking army,” Raven said when the plates arrived. “Seriously. Maybe two orders was too much.”

“Never.” Anya passed the small plates around and Clarke waited for hers. Mike’s was a kitschy mixture of mis-matched tile-top tables and chairs, Mexican tourist art, and festive colors. The people who owned it were originally from San Diego and Mike’s seemed to be their ode to the melding of cultures along the border. Not quite Mexican, not quite American, but a cheery hybrid explosion of both. Which, come to think of it, was quintessentially American, especially in that region. Mexican hip-hop played just loud enough over the speakers, but earlier the playlist had been largely ranchera.

Lexa currently sat across the table from Clarke and a couple spots over, talking to Octavia and Luna and God, she was beautiful. Not because she was trying to be. She didn’t have to do that. She just was.

Clarke watched her surreptitiously for a few moments. The way she smiled. Fuck, even the way she picked up her glass. How was that so damn sexy?

Because Lexa. That’s the only reason Clarke had.

“Nachos?”

Clarke turned at Echo’s voice. She was sitting directly to her right. “Yeah. Thanks.”

Echo set the plate down next to her and Clarke used her fork to extricate a bit of the deliciously gooey pile onto the small plate Anya had handed her.

“So are you all moved?” Clarke asked, thinking that she was pretty, with strong features and dark eyes that sparkled with mischief but also intensity. She had piled her dark hair on top of her head and some of her mannerisms reminded her of Anya, sort of a take-no-shit kind of demeanor tempered
with quick smiles.

“Almost.” Echo put some nachos on her own plate. “Just that shitty little stuff you have to gather up and throw in a box. Then I have to clean.”

“I hate the last of the loose stuff that you have to track down. It’s always random shit and you don’t feel like thinking about it long enough to decide if you should even keep it, so you end up putting it in a damn box and hauling that with you.”

“Exactly. Lexa said you just moved, too.”

“A couple of months ago.”

“Seems like it was a good move all around.” She raised her eyebrows, chuckled, and threw a glance at Lexa.

“So far, it’s been a fantastic move.” She ate a nacho. “So how long have you known Lexa?”

“A couple of years. We started law school about the same time. Study groups are a thing, and we formed one our first year and stuck with it.”

“Same with me and my study group.”

“Med school, right?”

“Yes. Second year. I’m leaning toward trauma surgeon, but that could change. What kind of law do you want to do?”

“I like the idea of environmental. Seems there might be a lot of work in that field, regardless of who’s in office.” She poured more margarita from the pitcher into her glass. “More?” She asked Clarke.

“No, thanks.” She’d been nursing a small glass that Raven had poured for her earlier and now it was seriously diluted after all the ice had melted. She hadn’t had anything more than that because she had a feeling she might be driving Lexa home at the end of the evening.

Echo pushed the plate of nachos toward her and Clarke took a few more. Raven might be right, about how one plate could feed a small army because everybody had taken from the plate and it didn’t even look like they’d made a dent.

Clarke went to the bar and ordered a Coke and as she waited, Octavia joined her and ordered another pitcher of margaritas and Clarke figured she’d probably be driving her back to Lexa’s, as well.

“So, I’ve decided you’re all right,” Octavia said as she leaned against the bar next to her. And she grinned, clearly teasing.

“Cool. Do I get a certificate? With fancy gold lettering?”

The bartender set a Coke in front of her.

“There’s talk of that and induction into the crew,” Octavia said, “which involves a secret handshake and beer.”

“I can support that. Also, I am sorry about the whole bed thing.”

She laughed. “And it’s still hilarious. Didn’t tell you this part, but Lexa texted Lincoln and told him to move his bed because the bang parties were disturbing the neighbor.” She put extra emphasis on
“bang parties.”

“Oh, my God. Bang parties?” Clarke was so glad Raven hadn’t heard that one yet.

“Right? She comes up with some good ones. And actually, I’m sorry we kept you awake. But it seems to have worked out pretty well.” She smiled, sly, and Clarke automatically looked back at the table, where Lexa was now talking to Raven and Luna.

“And it’s true, what I said a while back. She was interested in who you were, and she hoped that you would get past the bang parties and talk to her.”

Clarke jerked her gaze back to her. “She knew I was avoiding her. Which was really stupid on my part.”

Octavia shrugged. “It was kind of awkward, so nobody blames you for that.” The bartender put a pitcher of margaritas in front of Octavia and she handed him a couple of bills. “And clearly, you got over the embarrassed part,” Octavia said as she waited for change.

“Yeah, well, there’s more to the story.”

“What do you mean? It’s already good.”

“I thought Lexa was the loud one and that you were her girlfriend.”

Octavia stared at her then laughed again. “Oh, shit. Seriously?”

“I saw you leave that morning when Lexa followed you with your wallet.”

“Oh, yeah. I see how that might’ve looked to the uninitiated.”

The bartender set her change next to the pitcher and Octavia picked most of it up but left a couple of ones.

“I didn’t realize you were with Lincoln until that Sunday I locked myself out of my apartment.”

“Wait. That whole week you thought she and I were—”

“Yes.” Clarke half-laughed. “Which made it even more embarrassing to talk to her.”

She laughed, too. “Jesus, that’s even better than the original story.”

“And I also didn’t want to talk to her because—” she hesitated.

“Because you were attracted to her,” Octavia finished. “And nobody in the world would blame you for that. I mean, fuck. Look at her.”

“It kind of took me by surprise.” And she wasn’t sure why exactly she was saying this, but maybe she needed to.

“What did?”

“Being attracted to her. Was not expecting that at all.”

“Not like we go around expecting shit like that.” She shrugged. “I sure as hell wasn’t looking for anything when I met Lincoln.”
“And how did that happen?”

“And how did that happen?”

Clarke raised her eyebrows.

“I know. How dumb is that? And I hardly ever go there, and neither does he, but for whatever reasons, this one day, I needed something quick before I had to go to class and Shady’s is close to campus and fairly fast, so I went. He got in line behind me. I of course checked him out.”

“A completely legit thing to do.”

“Right? I mean, he’s fucking hot. So I finally got up to the counter to order a slice of pizza, and I was short a dollar. Which was so weird, because I had just made sure I had enough. Anyway, he covered the extra dollar. He didn’t even know me. And he was really nice about it and yeah, he was hotter for that. So, no, you don’t go looking for attractions. But they do find you.” She pulled the pitcher of margaritas closer. “He sat with me at Shady’s and we talked and by the time I went to class, I had his phone number. And later that night, I found that other dollar at the bottom of my pack and I still have no idea how it got there, because I had my pizza money in my pocket.” She picked up the pitcher. “Point being, you never know.” And she went back to the table.

Clarke took her Coke back to her chair and just as she sat down, her phone vibrated in her pocket with a text.

You’re beyond hot.

She smiled and glanced down the table at Lexa, who caught her gaze and smiled back and it was like nobody else was in the room.

r u drunk txting me? [thinking emoji] She sent it and looked over at Lexa and arched an eyebrow.

Maybe.

Clarke chuckled. careful. u might reveal all ur secrets

I’ll tell you one now.

Clarke looked over at her, but she was typing something into her phone, which showed up a few seconds later, followed by a few more.

The day you moved in was actually the first day I saw you.

I was in the parking lot, about to leave.

You were by the moving truck laughing @ something Raven said.

And God, your smile.

Clarke looked over at her again, sparks flying around inside her chest, and this time she caught her gaze for a moment before Lexa started typing another message. A few seconds later, Clarke’s phone buzzed and chimed again.

I wanted to talk to you.

Clarke texted back, why didn’t you?
Lexa looked at her and goddammit, her smile. Her message arrived soon after. You scared me.

Clarke looked at her, puzzled, and watched as Lexa started typing another message. It arrived soon after.

I knew if I did, I'd probably want more.

She read the message and her breath caught in her chest. She fired off a response. and?

I was right.

Jesus fucking Christ. Clarke looked down the table at her, and Lexa’s gaze practically smoldered. She fired off another text. lucky 4 me u like cranky women @ 1st official mtg, then

Lexa looked at her phone and laughed when she read it and fuck Clarke wanted to get her alone. Luna said something, and Lexa responded then Raven leaned in and said something else but Lexa shot another lingering glace at her before turning to Raven. Clarke set her phone down and talked more with Echo and Octavia, who had similar energy. Kind of guarded and intense, but with an undercurrent of playfulness. Octavia was a nice counterpoint to Lincoln. They seemed to balance each other well, and when she talked about him, it was with gentle affection but also heart eyes.

Clarke guessed that’s pretty much how she looked when she talked about Lexa.

Another text came in, also from Lexa.

Lucky for me you talked to me first. [wink emoji]

Everything, goddammit. Everything about Lexa was everything Clarke could ever want. She got up and went to the interior quick order window—one of the many reasons she loved Mike’s, that they had this, too—and ordered chicken tacos for Lexa, who, by her observations, had not been eating enough while drinking margaritas. She ordered a chicken and rice burrito for herself and checked her phone while she waited.

Abby had texted her, wanting to know if she had made plans for Christmas yet, since she had to put in for days off.

Shit. Christmas. Normally Clarke spent Christmas Day with Abby and sometimes Margie. Raven had mentioned going to California to visit her family, but with Anya in the mix, she might not. Maybe they should have a Christmas gathering, too, like friends-giving.

But she didn’t really want to do the work for it. Maybe Anya would have something at her house. She liked to have things catered, which would help, but there was still cleanup.

What’s Margie doing this year? And, come to think of it, what was Marcus doing? Christmas was a much bigger holiday than Thanksgiving, though, so maybe Abby wasn’t ready to go that far, yet. Plus, Marcus had daughters he’d probably be seeing.

She’ll be with Sam, Abby texted back. I’ll see them in April. Tom & Helen are doing their Europe thing.

So Christmas wasn’t a big deal this year, and she was relieved because it was always a stressful time of year even though she did enjoy seeing Margie. Maybe she’d go out in April with Abby. Her dad’s parents usually preferred to visit during the summer, and Clarke had seen them in July for a few days, so that was okay. They had never been big into the Christmas thing even before her dad died, though Jake had enjoyed Christmas though he didn’t go all-out with decorations. He liked family and
friends getting together.

Which was probably why Clarke liked doing that, too.

*What’s Lexa doing for Christmas?* Abby texted and Clarke stared at it, that she had asked, that she seemed to have already made them a couple.

*Not sure. Probably going to Virginia.*

She texted back, *Let me know in the next couple of days so I know what to plan for.*

*ok,* she texted back, and then her order was up and she put her phone away and carried the two plastic baskets back to the table. Raven had moved, so Clarke took the empty seat next to Lexa and set the tacos in front of her. She looked up, puzzled.

“What—”

“To absorb all those margaritas in your stomach,” Clarke said, and she kissed her on the cheek.

“Expert medical advice.”

Lexa stared at her, and the expression in her eyes—it went right to her heart, and fuck, this was so much more than just hanging out, so much more than just dating, and was she ready?

“You got me tacos,” Lexa said.

“And you’d better eat one now, because you are well on your way to Margaritaville.”

Lexa grinned. “I love tacos.”

“I know. And you’re really fucking cute when you’re buzzed, but please eat.”

“Oh, my God,” Anya said, seated on Lexa’s other side. “I have just been assaulted by the horrendous cuteness of this display.” She clutched at her chest dramatically.

“It’s true, Griff,” Raven said. “That might possibly violate the terms of cuteness of this establishment.”

She rolled her eyes but laughed.

“I stopped drinking a while ago,” Lexa announced, a little indignant, after she finished the first taco. Clarke looked at Anya for confirmation.

“It’s true. She stopped with the margaritas about an hour ago and hasn’t had any other alcohol that I know of. But she does have a good buzz on.”

“Better than a bad one,” Lexa said between bites of the second taco.

“Fuck, she really is super cute when she’s been drinking,” Raven said.

“She loosens up a bit, too.”

Clarke glanced at Luna.

“And just wait. She’ll get really earnest,” Luna added.

They all stared at Lexa, who was finishing the second taco. She suddenly stopped, as if realizing
their sudden silence. “What?” she asked and fuck, how cute could she be?

“Nothing,” Raven said, and Clarke bit back a laugh.

“You all should get tacos. They’re really good.”

Anya and Raven dissolved into a fit of laughing.

“Told you,” Luna said.

“God, you guys,” Lexa said. “I’m not that drunk.”

“No, of course not,” Raven said, deadpan, and Clarke bit her lip to keep from laughing and instead focused on her burrito.

“But seriously, these tacos are the best. Super tasty,” she said, unironically deadpan.

Clarke lost it then, because fucking hell, Drunk Lexa was comedy gold. And the way she focused on finishing the third and last taco—like she was a little kid taking care of a task she’d been charged to do.

So goddamn cute.

“Do you want some of my burrito?” Clarke asked. She wanted to make sure that she got enough to eat.

Lexa studied Clarke’s face then looked at the burrito, as if she was contemplating a major decision. “Okay.”

Clarke cut a quarter of it off and gave it to Lexa, who took a bite.

“Wow. The burritos are good, too,” she said, no trace of sarcasm or irony.

“Oh, my God,” Raven said as Anya snickered. “Drunk Lexa might be my new fave entertainment channel.”

“What else can we expect?” Clarke asked Luna.

“Well, it’s good she stopped when she did. She’ll just be really tired in about another hour.”

“I don’t like to get too drunk,” Lexa said matter-of-factly, “because then I get depressed.”

“Alcohol is already a depressant.” Clarke pecked her on the cheek. “Just be safe when you take the edge off.”

“You’re among friends, here,” Raven said. “We’ll take care of you.”

“I know.” Lexa finished the burrito then drank a bunch of water.

“Lexa’s careful,” Luna said. “She doesn’t drink much, anyway, but when she does, it’s usually in a happy space.”

“I don’t drink if I’m already depressed.” Lexa set her water glass down and Clarke heard something brittle in her tone. She took her hand under the table and Lexa leaned into her.

“I’m here,” Clarke said softly, just loud enough for Lexa to hear, and Lexa squeezed her hand in
response and seemed to relax.

“‘I’m serious, you guys. Those tacos were off the chain,’” she said. Oh, God. So damn earnest.

Anya almost spit out her Coke and Raven almost fell out of her chair from laughing.

Conversations about other matters continued, and it was fun, the banter that flew liberally across the table, and then the subject of Christmas came up after a while.

“Are you going to visit your family?” Clarke asked Raven. “Normally you’ve got all that planned before Thanksgiving.”

“I had thought I was, but my mom told me she’d fly me out there for spring break instead. She just told me that last Wednesday.”

“That’s different. Are you okay with that?”

“Totally. Anya is having a Christmas Day thing at her house.” She looked at her pointedly.

“And all you bitches are invited,” Anya said.

“What are you doing, Griff?” Raven asked.

“Not sure, yet. My mom texted me earlier to find out what I was doing so she could arrange her schedule.”

Raven nodded and nibbled on the sad remainder of a nacho. “Is Marcus in on it this year?”

“I don’t know. Most likely, I’ll spend Christmas Eve at her house and then leave sometime Christmas Day. What are you doing?” she asked Lexa.

“I think I’ll be going to Virginia, unless Indra and Gustus are doing something with Indra’s mom.” She still held Clarke’s hand and she had started stroking the back of it with her thumb.

“Well, for any of you,” Clarke said, “if the weather gets shitty here or your flights get cancelled or travel plans fucked up, you’re all welcome to hang out with me.”

“What about New Year’s?” Anya asked.

“I’m having a thing at my new place,” Echo said. “You’re all invited.”


“Maybe we’ll all end up party-hopping, like last year,” Clarke said.

“Whatever works,” Octavia said.

The conversation moved to other matters and Clarke assessed Lexa again, who seemed to be fading a bit. “Ready to go?” she asked.

Lexa nodded and yawned and fuck how adorable was she right now? She shifted in her chair so she could use her free hand to dig into her pocket and extract her keys, which she handed to Clarke.

“Octavia? Want a ride back to Lexa’s?” Clarke asked.

“I’m good. Anya and Luna are taking me. And I have a key, so Lexa can crash at your place.”
Which meant they’d be bringing Octavia’s car, too. “Okay. Thanks, everybody. Good seeing you.”

“Good seeing you, too,” Echo said as Clarke got up and reluctantly released Lexa’s hand. She went to get her jacket from the other chair she’d been sitting in while Lexa put her own on.

“Everything good?” Clarke asked Raven as she leaned over and gave her a big, sloppy kiss on the cheek.

“Totally. I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon.”

Clarke turned to Anya.

“Don’t you dare kiss me, Griffin,” she said, giving her a death stare.

“Why not? Afraid you’ll like it too much?” Clarke shot back.

“Oh, snap,” Raven said. “Sorry, querida*, but that was kind of epic.”

“And it’s true,” Lexa said before Clarke could tease Raven about how she addressed Anya.

Everybody instead looked at Lexa.


“Oh, my God.” Raven shook her head, chortling. “TMI, Woods.”

“Alcohol is kind of a truth serum,” Octavia said. “My advice? Ask her whatever the hell you want now, before she passes out.”

“Yeah,” Clarke said. “And on that note, c’mon, Captain Taco.”

Everybody at the table burst into laughter and Lexa smiled and shrugged. “Tacos are awesome.”

“Oh, God. Can we please keep Drunk Lexa?” Raven managed to finally say.

“I second that.” Anya handed her a napkin and she wiped her eyes with it.

Clarke took Lexa’s hand. “I’m guessing Drunk Lexa is part of this package. So, yes, I plan on keeping her around.”

“Yeah, Griffin,” Raven hollered. “That’s what I’m talkin’ about.”

Lexa’s smile widened to a grin, which only made Raven cheer louder.

“Good night, all,” Clarke said, but she smiled, too, as she pulled Lexa toward the entrance, laughter from the table trailing after them.

“It’s true, though,” Lexa said when they arrived at her Jeep. She had gotten a great spot on the street, which was good because Mike’s parking lot was down an alley to the back, and it was dark out and the alley could get creepy.

“What is?”

“Kissing you moves worlds.”

“As much as I enjoy hearing these things from you, you’re drunk.” Clarke gave her a quick kiss anyway before she opened the passenger door.
“Fuck,” Lexa said. “Even *that* does it.” And she slid her hand around the back of Clarke’s neck and pulled her into a much deeper, much hotter kiss and despite being out here on a public street, Clarke was ready to do a whole hell of a lot more.

“I may be drunk,” Lexa said quietly when she ended the kiss, “but I am one hundred percent completely into you and kissing you is one of the wonders of the world.”

“Pretty sure it’s not listed as one,” Clarke said, smiling.

“Not officially.”

“Oh, so the Commander has her own list of world wonders?”

“Well, *yeah*. It’s pretty much just a list of Clarke, though,” she said with a cute little shrug and goddamn, Clarke was melting again.

“That I can live with.” She opened the door and waited for Lexa to get in and buckle up then she went around to the driver’s side. As she got situated and buckled up, she glanced at the entrance to Mike’s.

And froze when she saw who stepped outside, talking on the phone.

Fucking Hannah. Did this constitute alerting the networks? After all, Finn might not be inside. But if he was, Mike’s was a big establishment and he could be on the second floor. And if Finn was inside, he might not know Clarke had come in. And Clarke couldn’t prove one way or the other that he was in violation of the order since he wasn’t near her and he might not have known she was there.

She glanced over at Lexa, who had closed her eyes and leaned back on the seat. She’d tell her about Hannah tomorrow.

“Okay?” Lexa asked, voice sleepy.

“Yeah. I forgot to tell Raven something. Texting her now.”

“Mmm.” Lexa closed her eyes again. “By the way, when Raven calls me Woods, nothing happens.”

Clarke stopped texting and looked at her. “So your surname kink is just for me?”

“Yes. All for you.”

“I prefer it that way.”

“Same.”

Clarke smiled and sent Raven the message just as Hannah finished her phone call and went back inside. Clarke put her phone away and started the engine. Why the hell was Hannah even in Polis? She lived in DC. Not that DC was far away. But the twenty miles could take a while, especially when traffic was bad. Unless she had moved back to Polis. That was a possibility, too.

And why the *f*uck did Clarke keep seeing her around? That alone was weird enough. She pulled away from the curb, deciding not to let Hannah fuck up her day. She checked the rearview more than a few times even though she was only going a few blocks, but that was a habit she’d acquired through the whole Finn bullshit, which had included showing up wherever she was and trying to talk to her. Including parking a few times outside the duplex she shared with Raven.

That shittiness had stopped after she called Bellamy, Jasper, Monty, and Harper and they all showed
up and parked right next to him and got out of their cars and stood and stared at him. He left within seconds of them doing that and after the second time they did it, he stopped showing up at her duplex.

But until she got the order of protection, he would be waiting for her after class, or outside the library or student center, trying to talk to her, trying to push her buttons almost every day. That was mitigated when her friends started meeting her and it stopped completely after she got a sympathetic campus cop on her side. And it seemed Finn had actually been honoring the order.

Still, fucking asshole Finn. And Hannah. She enabled his behavior, Clarke figured. Her skin crawled, thinking that she had actually been with him.

She parked the Jeep at the apartment complex and checked the mirror again, glad that Lexa’s spot was blocked from a street view.

“Are we here?” Lexa asked in a sleepy voice and everything was suddenly better.

“Yeah.” Clarke got out and went around to make sure Lexa was okay getting out, too, then she locked the Jeep and took her hand and they walked to the back entrance.

“I want to go home with you,” Lexa said as they walked up the stairs. “Please.”

“You’re in luck. That’s where I’m taking you.”

And she smiled and sighed happily and beelined for Clarke’s bedroom when Clarke opened the apartment door. She locked it behind them and followed Lexa, who was near the bed and already in the process of stripping down to her underwear.

“Okay, then,” Clarke said, amused, and she handed her one of her baggy T-shirts. Lexa put it on then picked the hem up and sniffed the fabric.

“It smells like you. I love it.”

Goddamn, all these feels.

“Be right back.” Lexa went to the bathroom and Clarke fixed the sheets, blanket, and comforter. She returned and Clarke pulled the sheets back a little and Lexa got into bed and looked up at her, a question in her eyes.

“Don’t worry. I’ll join you in a bit.”

“Kay.” She smiled, a sweet, tired, kind of goofy smile and Clarke’s chest filled with all kinds of emotions, the most prominent being protectiveness. She would make sure that Lexa was safe, that she was taken care of, no matter the circumstances. She leaned down and kissed her on the forehead then pulled the sheets up around her and arranged the blanket and comforter better, too.

“Mmm,” Lexa said, and Clarke watched her for a few moments, glad that she was here. She kissed her gently on the cheek then went into the living room to check her messages.

Raven had texted to say they had reconned—her word—the restaurant and saw Hannah on the second floor with a few people, including Lauren, but Finn wasn’t there. Anya had checked the men’s bathrooms (because of course she did) on both floors, and didn’t find him there, either.

That was good news. Still, it made her uneasy. Or maybe she was just being hypervigilant. Better than the alternative, though. She made a cup of tea and took that and a glass of water to the bedroom.
Lexa was sound asleep so Clarke quietly undressed and put on a pair of lounge pants and a baggy tee and sweatshirt. She got into bed and sat up for a while reading on her iPad. After a couple of chapters, Lexa stirred.

“Hi,” she said, in her cute, sleepy tone as she snuggled against Clarke.

“Hi. Okay?”

“Yep.”

Clarke chuckled at how adorable that was. “Good. So can you do something for me?”

“Anything.”

“I need you to drink some water,” Clarke said, and she picked up the glass from her nightstand.

Lexa braced herself on her elbow, took the glass, and promptly drank half the contents then handed it back. She set it down and Lexa snuggled back against her and Clarke smiled and absently stroked her hair, listening to her breathing deepen as she fell asleep again and God, this was a perfect moment and God, she wanted so many more like this.

Finally, she went to brush her teeth and wash up. When she returned to the bedroom, she took her sweatshirt and lounge pants off and got back into bed and carefully gathered Lexa close, spooning her, which got her a sleepy and adorable sigh.

Clarke kissed the back of her head, wanting to take care of her every chance she got, wanting nothing but Lexa for as long as possible, and the admission had her heart overflowing, had her moving closer, her bare legs against Lexa’s and God, this was everything and it was exactly where she needed to be.

*querida: term of endearment. Can translate to “sweetheart.”

Chapter End Notes

Captain Taco.

You guys, I can't...even *that* gives me feels.

Plus, a little shout-out there to Waverly Earp, who now kind of owns "Tacos are tasty."
Team Valkyrie

Chapter Summary

Lexa’s a little hungover, but Clarke knows a thing or two about dealing with those. Then they both have to go to campus and oh, shit, there’s an incident...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Did you tell Lexa you saw Hannah last night at Mike’s?” Raven asked.

“No.” Clarke adjusted her phone as she talked and put the bag of donuts and croissants into her shoulder bag next to the other bag of sausage and melted cheese biscuits, which were good for hangovers, in her experience. She then picked up the cardboard drink holder, where she’d put two cups of coffee and two small bottles of Gatorade.

“Why the hell not?”

“Um, do you not remember the exploits of Captain Taco?” Clarke used her back to open the store’s door, listening to Raven laugh.

“Oh, God. Drunk Lexa is a whole other level of funny.”

“Exactly. And she fell asleep in the car on the way home. So there wasn’t much point to telling her then.”

“But are you going to tell her?”

“Yes. Once she’s functional.” She headed back to her apartment, just a block away.

“Good. So how is she?”

“She was pretty much asleep about five minutes after we got home. I got her to drink more water, though, and she made it through the night fine. She was still asleep when I left.”

“And are you okay?”

“Yes. Just a little freaked out. I mean, what the fuck with this? I thought she lived in DC.”

“I don’t know. It’s weird how we suddenly start seeing her.”

“Right? And why the fuck would Finn be in Polis if he was visiting Hannah? Wouldn’t he be hanging out in DC with her?”

“Unless she did actually move back.”

“That’s the only thing that makes sense. Anything else I don’t want to think about—hold on a sec.” She punched in her apartment building entry code with her phone hand and went inside. “And if he’s in town for the holiday, then he’ll be going back to Cali either today or tomorrow and that’ll be the end of it,” she said as she walked up the stairs.
“That’s logical. So do you need anything? Anya’s taking me to the store on the way home this afternoon.”

“Eggs, bagels, creamer. Cheese.”

“Ah. The staples. Okay. See you later. All my love to Captain Taco. Bye.”

And Clarke laughed as she got her keys out. God, Lexa would never live that one down. She entered the apartment and put the bags of food on the table and took the cups of coffee out of the holder. Each got a couple splashes of cream and then she took one to the bedroom.

Lexa was still in bed, but she opened her eyes when Clarke came in.

“Hey,” she said, voice a little rough.

“Hi.” Clarke sat on the bed next to her and put the coffee on the nightstand next to Lexa. “How are you feeling?”

“Not great, but not terrible. Thanks for the Advil.” She gestured at the nightstand, where Clarke had left a bottle of it along with a glass of water.

“When did you wake up?”

“Maybe ten minutes ago.” She held the note up Clarke had left, letting her know she was going for coffee.

“You’re going to need to eat again. And you’ll need to rehydrate.”

Lexa groaned and sat up. “Coffee first.”

Clarke handed her the cup and she cradled it like it was a precious object. “It’s not yours,” Clarke said, “but it’s not bad.”

“Did you go around the corner?”

“Yeah.”


Clarke leaned in and kissed her on the cheek then got up and pulled a pair of clean sweats out of her dresser. “You have a decision to make, Commander.”

“Not sure I’m in the right headspace to do any heavy thinking,” she said, tentative.

“I promise it’s not difficult.” She put the sweats on the bed. “Breakfast in bed or at the table?”

A slow grin pulled the corners of her mouth up. “Table. I’ll be right there.”

“Okay.” Clarke gave her a quick kiss—and it was hard not making it longer—and went back to the table where she put the donuts and croissants on a plate and the sausage biscuits in the oven. She also poured Lexa a glass of Gatorade cut with water then streamed some mellow folk music and sipped her coffee as she looked out the window toward the park. Another sunny but cool day, so lots of people were out, some with dogs, some with kids. Or both. A good day to go to the library for study group, which was on her schedule.

She heard Lexa leave the bathroom and she loved the certainty of her presence, loved hearing her in
her space.

Oh, God, she could get used to this.

But in a way that never got old.

Lexa set her coffee on the table then moved behind her and slid her arms around her waist. She stood like that with her, watching out the window, too. Clarke leaned back against her and Lexa kissed her cheek.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

“Any time. How much do you remember?”

Lexa groaned. “Everything. But for the record, those _were_ seriously good tacos.”

Clarke laughed. “So you made clear.”

“Tacos are important. But the best part was that you got them for me.” She hugged her a little tighter and God, it felt good, being in her arms. “I think that might be why they were the best.”

“Well, it seems the Commander needs a wingman when she’s taking the edge off.”

“As long as it’s you.” She nuzzled Clarke’s neck and Jesus _God_ chills raced up and down her back. Then she kissed the space behind Clarke’s ear, and oh, _that_…was…so good…

“And I love when you wear your hair up,” Lexa continued, “because I can get to this spot right…here…” and she gently kissed her again and Clarke shivered at the sensation.

“Mmm. I love it that you do that when my hair is up.”

They were quiet for a while, Clarke reveling in how it felt to spend another morning with her.

“I hope I wasn’t too embarrassing,” Lexa said.

Clarke smiled. “No. But you need to realize that Drunk Lexa is now a thing with my friends, too.”

“There are worse things.”

“Like, maybe, Captain Taco?”

She groaned again. “Oh, God. I forgot you called me that.” And then she sighed. “But for you, I’ll gladly be Captain Taco. Or Commander Taco. Or hell, Princess Pancake.”

Clarke laughed. “How are you so fucking cute all the time?”

“Don’t know. Maybe you’re the only one who notices.”

She snorted and turned around to face her. “I’m not. But fuck, I’m glad you’re here.” And she kissed her, slow and gentle, and even though she was trying not to escalate it, fireworks exploded down her spine and between her thighs. She ended it before she got totally carried away, which tended to happen where Lexa was concerned.

“No tacos this morning,” she managed to say. “But donuts can help alleviate hangovers.” She stepped away, burning in all kinds of ways, and went into the kitchen to get the biscuits out of the oven.
When she brought them to the table, Lexa had finished the glass of Gatorade. Clarke put a biscuit on her plate and got her a refill on the drink before she sat down across from her and took a croissant.

“Sausage and cheese biscuits are also really good hangover relief,” Clarke said.

“Is that expert medical advice?”

“More a discovery through experience kind of thing.”

“Well, this donut is really good,” Lexa said. “But I think I like Captain Taco as a name better than Captain Donut.”

Clarke nodded, affecting a serious demeanor. “I agree. Tacos are cooler than donuts, though I do enjoy the latter.”

“Might be the consonant. The T in taco has a nice click to it.”

“That could be it.”

Lexa picked up her glass and drank half of it. “Rehydrating,” she said, smiling sheepishly.

“Good.”

She ate one of the sausage and cheese biscuits next and finished her Gatorade so Clarke poured the rest from one bottle into her glass and Lexa continued to sip it, alternating with her coffee, and it was so fucking domestic, this whole damn morning—Clarke loved it. Loved every fucking minute of it.

“The first time I saw you really was the day you moved in,” Lexa said a few moments later.

Clarke met her gaze. “So you said in your texts.”

“Just demonstrating that I do remember yesterday.”

“I’m glad. Because I love those texts.”

“Same. And I needed you to know.”

Clarke squeezed her hand and got caught in her gaze for a few moments. “Now do me a favor and finish that,” she said, pointing at the last few bites of the second biscuit sandwich on Lexa’s plate.

She did, and drank the rest of her Gatorade, too.

“Feeling any better?”

“Yes. But that definitely has a lot to do with you. Thank you.”

“I can be a pretty good wingman.”

Lexa took her hand. “You’re so much more than that to me.” She kissed Clarke’s fingertips. “So much more.”

Oh, God. The way Lexa looked at her—fuck, there was nothing Clarke wouldn’t do for her.

“Same.”

Neither said anything further and Clarke knew Lexa didn’t expect her to, knew that she had room to figure out what her emotions might be, but her heart was so full of feels right now that it felt like it
might fling right out of her chest and declare undying love to Lexa—

_Fuck._

_Fuck fuck fuck._

The L-word. The actual L-word had entered her mind of its own volition in direct relation to Lexa. Damn her heart, that cheeky little bastard. What the hell did it think it was doing, making her think that? It was too damn soon.

Wasn’t it?

She pulled Lexa’s hand toward her and pressed her palm against her cheek, and it helped calm her thoughts.

“What’s up?” Lexa asked and Clarke imagined her heart running over to Lexa and staring up at her with huge Bambi eyes. Since heart eyes would be redundant, of course, on a heart.

And what the hell with this ridiculously stupid imagery? _Fuck._

“Just…thinking.”

Lexa nodded, understanding in her eyes.

She relaxed, covered Lexa’s hand, and leaned into it. “Hannah was at Mike’s.”

Lexa stopped moving her thumb and her gaze hardened. “What happened?”

“We were in the Jeep and I was getting ready to start it when she came outside. She was on her phone. So I texted Raven and they checked things out. Hannah’s group was on the second floor. Lauren was there, too.”

“Finn?”

“He wasn’t. Anya even checked the bathrooms.”

Lexa’s features relaxed and she half-smiled. “Good. I would’ve done the same.”

“Yeah, I think you would have.” She imagined Lexa dragging Finn out of the bathroom at Mike’s and tossing him down the stairs. It was strangely hot. “Anyway, I’m starting to think that she moved back to Polis from DC. And if Finn was here just for Thanksgiving, he might already have gone back to Cali.”

She didn’t respond, but she continued stroking Clarke’s cheek. “Why didn’t you tell me last night?”

“You were practically asleep the minute you got into the Jeep. Plus, I had some network in the restaurant.” She moved her hand off Lexa’s. “And I needed you to be safe. I needed to get you home and make sure I was here for you. Because honestly, Drunk Lexa really is a little too earnest.”

Concern registered in Lexa’s eyes, but so did the warmth she often directed at her. “You’re right.” She smiled. “I might’ve gone up to her table and tried to explain why her actions suck and that she’s enabling your ex. It would’ve been an epic presentation of drunken logic that sounded really good in my head but not so much out of it.”

“It’s not necessarily wrong to say those things to her.” Clarke turned her head and kissed Lexa’s palm. “But there’s a time and place and ways to deliver that kind of message. Captain Taco may not
have been the right messenger,” she said, deadpan, and Lexa laughed.

“I kind of love how you’re defending me. And I really love that you kept me out of trouble.” She lowered her hand and it occurred to Clarke that Lexa was using the L-word quite a bit. Out loud, even.

She caught Lexa’s gaze and oh, Jesus, her poor heart. It was inundated with Lexaffliction. Overwhelmed with Lexaddiction. But she still filed the L-word way in the back of her mind because she wasn’t quite ready to examine that.

“Trouble is a relative term,” Clarke said.

“How so?”

“Certain trouble is exactly the right kind of thing to get into.”

And Lexa gave her that damn slow, sultry smile. “Here’s hoping you show me sometime.”

“Count on it.”

Lexa ran her fingers over the back of Clarke’s hand and it sent sparks all the way up her arm. “I think I recall something about you and a study group today.”

“Yes. At two.” Which sucked because she would much rather be wherever Lexa was.

“And I have to meet up with mine for a little bit before that and then I’m going to the rec center. I need to work out.”

“You feel up to it?” And Clarke’s imagination of course went right to Lexa dressed in tight workout clothes, sweating and breathing heavily, her muscles all pumped up—fuck.

Lexa nodded. “Helps get rid of toxins. Which I clearly need to do.”

“Do you want to have dinner? I can make sandwiches from leftover roast. I mean, unless you have stuff to do.”

“God, yes, I want to have dinner. And not just because I know the sandwiches will be amazing, but also because I will definitely need another Clarke fix.”

She smiled. “What time?”

“Um, five-thirty? And I know we both need to do some studying later, so I’m declaring my table officially Study Central tonight and I will finally make that hot chocolate I owe you.”

“Do you honestly think we can just study in the same room together?”

She smirked. “Guess we’ll find out.”

“Guess we will.” And it wasn’t like she lived on the other side of town. If she had to study elsewhere, she could go right down the damn hall.

“Okay.” Lexa took her phone out of the pocket of the sweat pants Clarke had loaned her to wear and checked it. “It’s noon. I have to meet the group at one.” She sounded apologetic.

“Then you’d better get ready.” She stood and Lexa went back to the bedroom but reappeared carrying her clothes from the night before.
“Okay if I wear these?” She gestured at the tee and sweats she had on.

“You’d better.” And Clarke went over to her and pulled her into a kiss. “I like knowing that my clothes are on you when I can’t be.”

Lexa smiled against her lips. “Same.” And then she pulled away and went to the door. “See you soon.”

Clarke nodded, and watched her walk to her own apartment. She waited until Lexa got the door open and waved at her before she went back inside and she hated that the weekend was ending, but at least she would see Lexa later on.

And right now, she had to deal with other aspects of her life. Which might be a good thing because she also needed to sort through a few things. She texted Raven that she was going to the med school library and she’d see her later, then went to shower.

###

Clarke packed up her books and tablet and checked her phone. Lexa had texted twenty minutes earlier to tell her she was at the rec center and if she wanted to meet somewhere to walk home, she’d be done in an hour.

Hell, yes. outside student ctr? she texted back.

“You good on getting home?” Bellamy asked as he got his stuff together. “I mean, if you wanted me to drop you off, I can.”

“Thanks, but I’ll just walk with Lexa.”

He smiled. “How’s that going?”

“Good.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What?” She put her jacket on.

“From your face right now, it’s going way better than just ‘good’.”

She didn’t respond and instead pretended to be rearranging something in her pack.

“I think it’s great. I talked to her for a while at friends-giving and she’s legit. Plus, she seems to really be into you.”

Clarke snapped her gaze back to him.

“I know I’m not really the settling down kind right now, but even I can tell there’s something special between you.”

“I like her,” Clarke said and he laughed.

“I think you like like her.”

“Oh, my God. What is this? High school?”

He shrugged and adjusted his bag on his shoulder. “I still think it’s great and I hope it continues.”
“Since when are you my advice columnist?”

“Since you met Lexa and you seem really happy.”

Clarke put her backpack on, and she knew she was blushing.

“Where are you meeting her?”

“Student center, I think.”

“Want me to walk you there?”

Clarke regarded him and it occurred to her that he was worried about her, given the Finn sighting Friday and the Hannah sighting last night.

“It’s just the student center.”

“Which is kind of across campus from here.”

“I think it’ll be fine,” she said, and she did feel that way. Finn was an asshole, but he wasn’t stupid. And with any luck, he was on a plane back to California right now.

“Okay, but I’ll have my phone ready if anything weird happens.”

“Thanks.” She gave him a brief hug and he walked with her out of the study room down to the lobby. A few people had returned from break and were seated at the big tables in the common areas. Some were browsing the stacks while others worked on laptops and tablets.

"If anything weird happens, just call. Or text," Bellamy said.

“I will. Thanks.”

He gave her another hug. “I know sometimes I’m an asshole and maybe you don’t think I’m paying attention, but I am.”

Clarke nodded. “I know. And I appreciate it. I’ll talk to you later.”

He gave her a jaunty little salute and left. Clarke stayed inside a bit longer, waiting for Lexa’s text. It came a few minutes later.

Excellent. North patio?

yes [kiss emoji] She put her phone in her jacket pocket and left the building, out into the late afternoon shadows. Most of the snow had melted (until the next storm), but there was still a chill in the air and it would be dark soon, given the time change earlier that month. Lots of people were around, and Clarke guessed they were students back from break, though the campus was still quiet compared to its usual crowds.

When she got to the student center she sat down at one of the permanent tables on the patio and checked her email on her phone then texted Raven to tell her to pick up a couple loaves of French bread if she hadn’t gone to the store yet.

An answering text came in within seconds.

at store now. r u making something sexy 4 lexy
Clarke laughed. *sandwiches w/ leftovers. i’ll make one 4 u 2*

don’t worry-Any & i r getting takeout. see u soon

She started to text back.

“Hi,” said a voice she remembered only too well and everything in her body went ice cold.

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. Double fuck. Triple fuck. She was too shocked to do anything except look up at Finn, who stood a few feet from the other side of her table. She might not have recognized him from a distance, as his hair was much shorter now.

And here he was, in total violation of the protection order. He was also blocking her way off the patio to the rest of campus, so she gauged the distance to the student center entrance. If she went quickly, she might make it before he caught up with her. But then what? A lot of the center was closed on Sundays. She started surreptitiously recording the exchange, something that she had done during his attempts to talk to her after she broke up with him.

“What, no hello?” he said.

“Stay away from me.” She gave him a hard stare, and her voice sounded calm and cold. Good.

“C’mon, Clarke. It’s been over a year.”

“You’re violating an order of protection.”

“Oh, please. Like this is the first time.”

Oh, God. She forced herself not to react. He was just saying that to get a rise out of her. She hoped.

“I’m only kidding,” he said, but he had planted a seed of doubt with the remark, like the manipulator he was. He moved to the table and sat down across from her. Clarke took the opportunity and grabbed her backpack and walked quickly toward the entrance to the student center. She didn’t look back, but her skin crawled because she knew he was following her. Where the hell were people when you needed them? She jerked the door open and started walking faster, to the other side of the building and another entrance.

Campus police. She needed to get to their main office, which was out the entrance she was headed toward, and past a parking structure. She could do this. She sped up.

“Clarke,” Finn said behind her. “Would you stop? I just want to talk.”

Jesus fucking Christ. Nothing had changed. Rage was replacing shock. She really wanted to tell him exactly where he needed to go, but engaging was what he wanted and it wouldn’t do her any favors in court. So she didn’t respond and walked even faster.

“Why are you being this way?” He was using his cute cajoling voice and he was right fucking behind her. She was almost to the entrance and she could see freedom beyond the glass doors, and a few people were approaching. Could she use them as cover? She pushed the door open and walked toward a couple of women.

“Clarke—” Finn said, and she heard the current of anger in his tone, the one that always presaged his attempts to gaslight her.

One of the women Clarke walked toward looked at her, puzzled.
“Come on,” Finn said, imploring.

“Get the hell away from me,” she said, and the woman looked at her then at Finn then back at her.

“Are you okay?” she said.

“No. He’s—”

“She’s fine,” Finn said. “Just an argument.”

“Can one of you call campus police?” Clarke asked, keeping her voice steady.

The first woman took out her phone.

“Really, it’s okay,” Finn said in his friendly, charming voice. “She overreacts.”

Clarke held the woman’s gaze. “Please,” she said and she gave her the number. She had it memorized after last year.

The woman started to enter the numbers onto her phone’s keypad and Finn’s expression darkened. At least he hadn’t come any closer.

“Don’t listen to her,” he said. “She does this all the time.”

That was probably the wrong thing to say, because both women gave Clarke sympathetic looks.

“Hey, Clarke,” said another voice and she jerked her gaze away from the woman with the phone to DeShawn, who was approaching her. Thank God.

“Can you walk with me to campus police?” she asked him.

“No problem.”

She nodded then looked at the woman who was about to call police. “Thank you.”

“Do you want us to come with you, too?” she asked and Clarke was touched, that they would offer that to someone they didn’t know.

“It’s okay. I have backup, now.”

She looked at Finn, then Clarke. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. Thank you again.”

She nodded and she and her friend went into the student center, but they kept looking back at her. She gave them a reassuring wave.

“Seriously?” Finn said, keeping his friendly, charming tone. He, Clarke, and DeShawn made a weird tableau. “Who’s this guy?” Finn asked.

She ignored him and addressed DeShawn again. “This is my ex, Finn Collins,” she said, for the video. “The guy who stalked me last year and who I have a protection order on.”

“I figured.”

“Oh, come on,” Finn said with a laugh. “Stalked? You totally misread that. You always overreact.” He took a couple of steps closer and why he thought that was a good idea Clarke didn’t know
because DeShawn had a foot on him and was clearly built like an athlete.

“Back off,” DeShawn said, his voice quiet, but with a dangerous edge.

Finn put his hands up and smiled, but he did take a few steps back. “We were just talking.”

“He was talking. I was trying to get away,” Clarke said. She was holding her phone in such a way that Finn would be in the video, too. And if she didn’t have the order on him, she would’ve torn him a new asshole, but she needed to keep her cool and demonstrate that she was not the one who attempted to initiate contact and that in fact she was attempting to avoid it.

“Yeah, I saw that, too. Call campus police,” DeShawn said. “We’ll wait here for them, so we can keep an eye on him.”

“Really?” Finn’s friendly tone had acquired its undercurrent of impatience that usually came before he tried to manipulate her into believing that he was the victim here.

Clarke pulled the campus police number up on her phone, her initial freakout replaced by anger. The thought then occurred to her that he might actually be armed in some way. His jacket was bulky enough. It wasn’t his usual habit, but it had been a while and he might have developed a new way of doing things. On the other hand, this was a public area, and he hated being seen as anything but charming. Unless he was desperate. Fuck.

DeShawn moved closer to her.

The sound of running footsteps interrupted her and she looked up and almost collapsed from relief as Lexa and Randy arrived, both dressed in workout clothes and holy shit, Lexa was like an avenging angel, the look in her eyes battle-ready. The Commander incarnate. Clarke stared at her and as freaked out as she was, her heart practically exploded at the sight of her.

“I called backup,” DeShawn said with a faint smile.

“Thank you,” Clarke said. She wanted to hug him.

“You okay?” Lexa asked. She gave her a quick onceover and touched her hand and Clarke wanted to bury herself in her arms.

“Yes. I was just calling campus police—”

Bellamy burst out of the student center and everybody looked at him. “Got a douche alert,” he said as his gaze fell on Finn. “I see it was right.”

“Always overreacting,” Finn said to Clarke, but the friendly tone was gone, replaced by the calculating one she remembered just before she broke it off with him. “And letting other people poison your mind.”

“Make the call,” Lexa said to Clarke. “We’ve got this.” She flashed her a smile, but the look in her eyes was laser-focused and she turned her gaze to Finn and it was unnerving, the way she stared at him, gaze unwavering, expression hard and flat. Like a predator assessing him.

It had the intended effect. He moved closer to the entrance of the student center.

Clarke pressed “dial.”

“Come on,” Finn said. “Clarke.”
“Keep her name out of your mouth,” DeShawn snapped and Clarke threw him an appreciative look.

A man answered at campus police and fortunately, he was in a helpful mood and Clarke rattled off Finn’s name and case number (which she of course also had memorized as a result of his assholery), and explained he was harassing her again.

“Where are you?” the officer asked.

“South entrance of the student center.”

“And where is Collins?”

“He’s standing about twenty feet away from me, near the doors into the center. He’s a white guy wearing blue jeans, light brown Timberland Boots, and a black down jacket. Short dark brown hair.”

As Finn listened to her describe him, his expression was reminiscent of the day he threw chairs around.

“And where are your friends?” the officer asked.

“Right here with me.”

“Okay, since you filed the original order with city police, you’ll need to make a report with them, too. I’m sending an officer to you right now. She’ll be there in a few minutes. Is this the number I can reach you at?” He read off her cell phone number.

“Yes. Thank you.” Clarke hung up and gave Lexa a nod.

“Fuck this,” Finn said and he jerked the door open to the center. “Bitch,” he shot over his shoulder at Clarke as he walked inside.

“DeShawn, you stay with Clarke,” Lexa directed. “Randy, Bellamy, you’re with me. Let’s make sure this dick leaves campus.”

They followed her inside and Clarke exhaled in relief, though she was worried about what Finn might do.

“You okay?” DeShawn asked.

“Yeah. A little freaked out. But I really wanted to say a few things to him.”

“Good thing you didn’t. Everything’s on him, now.”

“So how did Lexa and Randy know?”

“I saw you on the north side of the center and when you went inside, he followed you, and I figured it was either your ex or some other asshole. So I called Lexa then came around to this side to meet you.” He shrugged. “I ran into her and Randy at the rec center earlier.”

“Thank you so much.” She gave him a quick hug.

“You’re part of our crew, now.” He smiled.

She went to a nearby bench and sat down and DeShawn joined her.

“How did he know where you’d be today?” he asked.
“Not sure. I don’t think he knows where I live now and he doesn’t have my phone number. And I haven’t seen him before this break. He can’t follow me on social media—”

“Are you sure? Maybe he’s got sock puppet accounts.”

“I have all my accounts private. Only people I let in can see what I post.”

“Good move.”

They were quiet for a bit and Clarke chewed her lip, worrying about her friends. Her phone rang. Raven.

“I’m all right,” she said when she answered.

“Jesus fucking Christ. Where are you now?” Raven sounded panicked.

“South side of the student center waiting for campus police. DeShawn is here with me, and Lexa, Randy, and Bellamy are following Finn. He took off through the building to the north entrance, I’m guessing.”

“Why in the ever-loving fuck are they following that shitstain?”

“To make sure he leaves campus. And Lexa probably wants to see what he’s driving.”

DeShawn nodded. “That’s totally something she would do.”

“Fuck, she can’t go off like that,” Raven said. “Finn might have gone full psycho or something.”

“She’ll be okay,” Clarke said, trying to convince herself, too.

“Fuck, I can’t even. Oh, my God.” She let loose a long string of Spanish curse words, only about half of which Clarke picked up.

“Did Bellamy call you?”

“No, Lexa did. I called Bellamy because I knew you had study group with him. He had just left campus but he turned around so fucking fast that I thought he might’ve ripped his steering wheel off.”

“Where’s Anya?”

“Right here. We’re parking now and we’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“Oh, my God, you didn’t need to come over—”

“Stop it. Just fucking stop it, Griffin. We are your crew. This is what we do for crew. And holy shit, that’s a great slogan, but oh, my God, I am so pissed right now and I was so scared and what the fuck with this asshole—”

Clarke heard Anya in the background trying to calm Raven down. A few seconds later, Anya spoke on the phone.

“Hey, Griffin. How are you doing?”

“Good. Don’t let this douchebag get in your head. That’s what he wants and that’s how he wins.”

“I know. And he tried.”

Raven swore in Spanish again in the background. Anya must’ve had her on speaker.

“I just parked and we’ll be over in a few minutes,” Anya said.

“Okay. Thanks.”

“We’ve got your back. See you in a bit.” She ended the call and Clarke leaned back on the bench. DeShawn squeezed her shoulder in support.

“Should I call Lexa?” Clarke asked him.

“No. Trust me on this. She knows what she’s doing.”

“But Finn might have a gun.”

“He doesn’t.”

“How do you know? He’s a crazed white man. He’s basically a textbook example of a white guy thinking women and the world owe him shit.”

DeShawn stared at her for a moment, nonplussed. “As much as I appreciate that fairly accurate analysis, he doesn’t have a gun. I teach self-defense, and I know what to look for. Lexa does, too.”

She started to ask him what the fuck that meant when her phone rang. Lincoln. “Hey,” she said.

“Jesus, Clarke. Lexa called. I just got her message. What’s going on?”

She got him up to speed and he said a few choice words.

“Okay, I’m at Octavia’s. We’re on our way.”

“You don’t need—”

“Of course we don’t. But you do. See you in a bit.”

Clarke sighed and hung up.

DeShawn smiled. “Hell of a cavalry you have.”

“My network has expanded since I met Lexa. Thank you so much for helping.”

“Damn right. I can’t stand dudes like that. Fucking everything up. Causing so much grief for women. It’s bullshit.”

“If you have a girlfriend at the moment, she’s seriously lucky.”

He smiled again. “I’m dating a guy right now, but yeah, he is pretty lucky, isn’t he?”

Clarke stared at him and laughed. “Anybody’s lucky to be dating you.”

He laughed, too. “I’m pan, for the record.”

“Thanks for telling me. I’m bi, also for the record.”
“Thanks back.”

“Clarke,” came Raven’s voice and she stood and waited for the hug she knew was coming and sure enough, Raven practically flung herself into Clarke’s arms and almost knocked the wind out of her. “Goddammit,” Raven said, and then she added a colorful phrase in Spanish about removing Finn’s dick. Anya shook her head.

“I’m okay,” Clarke said. “This is DeShawn.”

“Hi,” he said as he stood.

“I’m Raven and I will totally cut a bitch if they mess with my Clarkita.”

“Good to know.”

“Hi. I’m Anya.” She shook his hand. “Thanks for helping Griffin.”

“Definitely. Glad I was around.”

“Company,” Anya said and she motioned toward a campus police car approached them, driving slowly on the sidewalk, which was wide enough to accommodate it. They all watched as it stopped and an officer got out and Clarke relaxed even more when she saw who it was.

“Hi, Officer Flores.” Thank God she was still with campus police.

“Clarke. Sorry to have to see you again under these circumstances. So tell me what happened.”

Clarke walked with her back to the patrol car and told her the story, going back to how she suspected Lauren might have been feeding Finn information up to what had just happened. She showed her the recording she’d done, too, and had to put her ringer on silent because it was blowing up with phone calls and texts.

“This is good. Make sure you provide that to city police, too. And your attorney. Can you send it to me at my email address?”

“Like old times,” Clarke said, the words bitter in her mouth.

“On the plus side, I haven’t gotten any recordings from you for months, so he has, for the most part, been leaving you alone.” She raised her eyebrows in a question and Clarke nodded.

“As far as I know. He tried to make it sound today like he had already been in violation of it, but he’s pretty manipulative.”

“He might have been trying to scare you. But you caught that in the recording, so it’s not going to look good for him. If you decide to go through with trying to get him charged with violating the order, you’ve documented his behavior consistently. I still have all the materials you sent, too.”

Clarke nodded, glad that she had sent copies to her.

While she was talking to Officer Flores, Lincoln and Octavia arrived. They waved at her but stayed with the rest of the group. A few minutes after that, Lexa, Bellamy, and Randy emerged from the student center and came over to the car.

“Hi, Officer. I’m Lexa Woods. I’m a law student here. We followed Collins across campus to the D parking lot behind the med school where he got into this vehicle—” she handed her phone to her, “and the next photo is the license plate.”
Bellamy put his arm around Clarke’s shoulders and gave her an affectionate squeeze. She hugged him back, but right now, she really wanted to be in Lexa’s arms and shit, was it bad in this moment that she was really appreciating how Lexa looked in running tights?

Flores swiped to the next photo and enlarged it. “Got it.” She showed the photo to Clarke. “Recognize it?”

“That’s Hannah Collins’ car.”

“Was anybody else in the car?” Flores asked Lexa.

“No.”

“Did Collins do or say anything else that you witnessed before he got in the car?”

“No. He did run a couple of times, though,” she said, matter-of-fact. “Away from us.”

Flores looked like she might laugh but didn’t. “Okay. I’ll need more detailed statements from the three of you—” she motioned at Lexa, Randy, and Bellamy, “and anyone else who witnessed this.

“That would be me,” DeShawn said. Clarke hadn’t seen him approach.

“Okay. Great. If I could talk to you one at a time, we can get this done as quickly as possible.”

“Thanks, Officer,” Clarke said. “Really appreciate your time.”

Flores nodded. “Could you stick around when I’m done with statements?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Let’s start with you.” Flores motioned at DeShawn and the rest of them moved away from the car.

“Are you all okay?” Clarke asked.

“Yeah,” Bellamy said. “But it was kind of funny when Collins tried to run away.”

Randy laughed. “Yeah. He was in a full-on sprint, but couldn’t shake Lexa. She was pretty fast back in the day. Guess that still stands.” He shoulder-bumped her. “And I know you weren’t trying to catch him. Just to keep him in sight.”

“I wasn’t planning on doing cardio today, but whatever works,” Lexa said, deadpan. And then she took Clarke’s hand and pulled her in for a hug—goddamn fucking finally—and Clarke clung to her like she was the last solid thing in a storm, and she was warm and strong and tender all at the same time and fuck, Clarke wanted to cry.

“You okay?” Lexa whispered near her ear.

“Yeah. But so much better now.” She pressed a kiss to her neck and didn’t care who saw. “You?”

“Same. Just glad you’re all right.”

“Are you cold?” Clarke asked because the only layer Lexa had on up top was a sweat shirt.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about that right now.”
“God, even in emergencies, your cuteness factor is way too high,” Raven said and Clarke smiled and Lexa hugged her a little harder.

“It is totally spiking the cute meter.” Anya smiled, too.

“Now that we've established that, thanks, Woods,” Raven said, “for the rapid response.”

“Thanks for the alert. Looks like the system works.”

“Speaking of…” Clarke reluctantly let go of Lexa and looked at her phone. “I think the network has gone national.”

“Group text everybody that you’re okay and that Lexa is awesome,” Raven said with a shrug.

“Hey—” Bellamy said.

“Oh, and so is Bellamy and…Randy? I’m Raven. You’re awesome, too.”

He grinned. “Thanks.

“And don’t forget DeShawn being awesome,” Raven added.

Clarke started a group text and Lexa stood behind her, arms around her waist and yes, please, could she do that all the time?

“Seriously, Clarke,” Octavia said. “Are you okay?”

“I am. Just weirded out. But also really fucking pissed.”

“Good,” Lexa said, and she tightened her embrace and Clarke wanted to never leave the circle of her arms.

“I agree,” Lincoln said. “Don’t let this asshole get in your head. Be safe, but don’t let him set the terms of how you live your days. And of course, we’re here to help. Beat-downs included.”

“Thanks.” Clarke leaned back against Lexa and even in the midst of all this bullshit, her presence made everything better, made her feel safe and validated.

“So do we know how he managed to figure out where Griffin was today?” Anya asked.

Clarke shook her head. “I don’t think he knows where I live. Hannah doesn’t. And Bellamy didn’t tell Lauren.”

“That shit is over, by the way,” he said, and he looked like he had just taken a bite of something sour. “I ended it after I talked to you before friends-giving.”

“What did you tell her?” Raven asked.

“That I wasn’t into it.” He shrugged. “Not entirely a lie. I wasn’t.”

“And you didn’t tell her Clarke’s address?” Anya asked.

“No. Or phone number.”

“Is there any way she could have overheard something that gave her that information?” Octavia, sounding kind of like Flores. Which made sense, since she was studying criminal justice.
Bellamy was quiet for a while, thinking. “I don’t think so. I mean, I don’t make it a habit to talk about Clarke’s address or phone number around women I’m dating.”

“You mean boning,” Raven said. “There’s a difference.”

Anya bit her lip to keep from laughing but wasn’t successful. Octavia laughed, too.

“And what would that be?” he retorted.

“Dating implies you’re trying to get to know someone a little better. Boning may or may not be included.”

“Good tips,” Randy said and Lexa laughed and the sound was music to Clarke’s soul, helped dispel the residue of this craptastic afternoon. Lexa hugged her tighter and kissed the side of her head.

“Okay. Back to the topic,” Anya said. “How did he know where Clarke would be?”

Raven made a disgusted noise. “God, has Lauren or Hannah been stalking you?” she asked Clarke.

Anxiety swirled in her stomach at that thought. “It might seem like it, given the sightings over the past few days. But I don’t think so.”

“But we don’t know for sure,” Anya pressed.

“No,” Clarke admitted. “We don’t.”

“Okay, looks like DeShawn’s done,” Randy said. “I’ll go, now.” He went over to the patrol car and DeShawn took his place in the conversation.

Lexa continued to hold on to Clarke, and though she wasn’t talking much, it was like care flowed out of her body and enveloped Clarke in some kind of mystical security bubble. And Jesus, where did she get these thoughts? But it was the only way she could describe what she was feeling.

“We’re still trying to figure out how the douchebag knew where Clarke was today,” Raven said. “In case you were unaware, Lauren and Bellamy had a brief thing recently. But Bellamy didn’t tell her Clarke’s address or phone number or much of anything since they weren’t really a serious thing.”

Bellamy rolled his eyes.

“Did she target you?” DeShawn asked him.

“Not sure,” he said. “But it does seem weird, how we hooked up. I met her at a med school mixer, but she’s not a med student. She knows Collins and has been hanging out with his sister, so I guess this could be some kind of conspiracy shit.”

“If Collins wanted to find out Clarke’s new address, he might try to get info from her friends. And since Bellamy is in med school, too, that seems a logical place to go,” Randy said.

“Or Lauren could’ve tried to get close to Clarke,” Lexa said. “Why not go to the source?”

“Maybe she’s not that good an actress,” Anya said, tone dry. “And maybe she’s straight.”

“Clarke could make the straightest of women gay for a night, at least.” Raven shrugged, like it was the most obvious thing in the world and Lexa laughed again.

“I’m already gay,” Lexa said, “but seriously, if I wasn’t, I’d be so gay for Clarke.”
“Oh, my God,” Clarke muttered and Lexa hugged her closer again and kissed her cheek and fuck, everything was unicorns and rainbows. She leaned back and rested her head on Lexa’s shoulder.

“Yeah, I think I could probably be gay for a night for her, too,” Octavia said and everybody laughed at that.

“But Lauren wouldn’t have to try to date Griff,” Raven said. “She could’ve just tried to be her friend.”

“How?” DeShawn asked. “She’s not in med school, so how could she get close to Clarke except in a chance meeting? I think going through Bellamy might’ve been a good idea on her part, for gathering intel.”

Intel. Clarke looked at Bellamy. “Did you ever talk about your schedule with her?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the Sunday study group is a regular meeting. Same time, same place.”

His eyes widened. “Fuck. I did meet her a couple of times after Sunday study group for drinks.”

“Did you tell her that’s where you were?”

He hesitated, thinking. “Fuck, I think I did mention it, that I had a thing every Sunday this semester.”

“Did she know it was a study group?” Lexa asked.

“Yeah, I think she did.” He groaned. “And I might’ve mentioned a couple of names of people involved. Including Clarke’s.”

“Dude, you got played.” Raven shook her head.

“And Finn was in town for Thanksgiving and Lauren might have taken a shot in the dark,” Lexa said to Clarke. “She may have seen you at Trader Joe’s with Raven that night you went shopping for friends-giving and guessed you were in town for the weekend. And she probably guessed there would be a study group and she told Finn and he then hung out.”

Clarke make a disgusted noise.


“Yep.” Raven gave Bellamy a baleful stare. “And what is the lesson here, grasshopper?”

“I’m sure you’ll tell me.”

“Watch where you dip your stick, son.”

Everybody was silent for a beat, then laughter rippled around the group.

“Another good tip,” DeShawn said after he stopped laughing.

“Bellamy, you’re up,” Randy said as he returned to the group. He looked at DeShawn. “What’d I miss?”

“We think we know how Collins knew where Clarke would be today,” he said, and he gave him the rundown. Clarke fielded a few more texts from the security of Lexa’s arms while he talked and then
Bellamy came back and it was Lexa’s turn to talk in more detail with Officer Flores. She gathered Clarke in close.

“Be right back,” she said softly near her ear and Clarke squeezed her hand before she went over to the police car and shit, she missed her immediately but Raven grabbed her into another hug.

“I’m not Lexa, but I’ll be your snuggle monster ’til she gets back.”

“Oh, my God,” Clarke said, but she laughed and held on to her.

“Jesus, Reyes,” Anya said. “Your cute factor just blew the meter apart.”

“And don’t you forget it.”

“Never.”

Clarke laughed again. “I love all of you. Thank you so much for helping me.”

“We love you back,” Raven said. “And those of you who don’t know Clarke well yet, you will soon agree with me.”

“No doubt,” DeShawn said.

“Anybody with the Lexa seal of approval I automatically love,” Randy added, affecting a serious demeanor and Clarke smiled.

“I so appreciate what you all did. DeShawn, you have no idea how glad I am that you were around.”

“Me, too. Glad you’re okay.”

Clarke's phone rang with Abby's tone.

"Oh, shit," Raven said. "Mama Bear. I totally forgot to call her."

"I texted her," Clarke said. "Hi, Mom." And she walked a few feet away, though she heard Anya say something about Abby being a badass.

"Honey, what the hell is going on?" Abby demanded, and Clarke heard worry in her voice.

" Fucking Finn."

"What happened?"

Clarke gave her the quick story. "Officer Flores is here--remember her? She helped the last time. And Lexa and Raven and Anya, and two of Lexa's friends, and Bellamy, and Lincoln and Octavia."

"Jesus Christ. That shitty little prick."

Clarke tried not to laugh, but she couldn't help it. "And that about sums it up."

"For fuck’s sake, honey. I'll rearrange my schedule and be right up."

"Mom."

"Let me go and take care of that--"

"Mom."
"What?"

"It's okay. You don't need to do that. I'm all right. Everybody here is helping. We can Facetime later and you can see for yourself."

"Are you sure? I can make a couple of calls--"

"Positive. I've got my crew." She looked over at Lexa, who was still talking to Flores, and God, she did it again and totally appreciated how she looked in her running tights.

"Jesus Christ. All right. But if you change your mind, call."

"You know I will."

"So where is that little asshole now?"

"Don't know. Hopefully on his way back to California."

Abby was quiet for a moment. "What do you want to do about this?"

"I'm going to report it. He violated the order of protection. And I'd like to give him some hell for that."

"Good. Call Brady as soon as you can--you know what? I'll call him tonight and give him a heads-up."

"I'm kind of glad you have lawyer friends," Clarke said. "I'll probably call him tomorrow morning after class. I have to call the city police this evening and see what I have to do to file a report."

"Brady may be able to get the DA to push for a harsher punishment, but with that little shithead in California, I'm not sure how that will work."

"Me, either, but if there's a warrant out for his arrest here, it'll make it harder for him to come back."

"There's that."

Lexa walked over to her. "Officer Flores would like a word," she said to her.

"Did you hear that?" Clarke said to Abby.

"Yes. Is that Lexa?"

"Yeah."

"Let me talk to her."

What the fuck? Clarke held her phone against her chest. "My mom would like to speak with you."

"Excellent." Lexa motioned for her to hand her phone over and Clarke did, not sure whether she was more rattled by Abby's request or Lexa's willingness to fulfill it. "It's all good," Lexa said, and she gave her a quick kiss before she held the phone to her ear. "Hi," she said to Abby and Clarke stared for a moment, little puffs of warmth filling her chest as she walked over to the patrol car.

"Okay, let's go through it again," Flores said. "Sorry about this, but I just want to be sure."

She nodded and recounted the events again, starting with when study group met and about when she
left the library. She included her suspicions about Lauren and Hannah again and also that Lauren may have known about the study group and passed it along to Finn. A few minutes later, she finished and Flores wrote a few more notes.

“Do you still have my email address?” she asked.

“Yes.” Clarke had memorized that, too, though it was in her contacts.

“Good. Send me the video you took. The other gentleman—DeShawn—took one, too. It’s good corroborating evidence. Might want to get a copy from him for your records, too.”

“Okay.”

“And also—” She leaned into her car and brought out a business card and wrote something on the back. “That’s my cell number. If Collins shows up again on campus or you need my help with the DA or whatever it is in this matter, let me know.”

Clarke took the card. “Thank you for all your help.”

Flores regarded her for a moment. “Guys like this don’t get taken seriously enough, either in law enforcement or the culture at large. There are cops who try to do something about it, and who try to help, but the system sometimes doesn’t work like it should for victims or people being targeted by guys like Collins. Just keep building that evidence record, and stay safe.”

She had a feeling that Flores also meant keep her crew active, but stay within the boundaries of the law so it would be a clear case against Finn. She nodded. “Definitely. Thanks again.”

“All right. Take care.” She got into her car and it looked like she might be entering something onto an iPad. Clarke walked back to the group and Lexa immediately put her arm around her shoulders and handed her phone back.

“What’s the plan?” Raven asked.

“I have to go back to the rec center because I left my bag there,” Lexa said.

“We’ll meet you and give you a ride home.” Anya’s tone left no room for argument. “We’ll be in the parking lot behind it.”

Lexa nodded. “What about you, Bellamy?”

“I’m headed home. Clarke’s in good hands.” He smiled and Clarke moved away from Lexa and gave him a hug.

“Thank you,” she said.

“We’ve got your back. Text me tomorrow.”

“Will do.” He waved at everybody and went back into the center to cut through it to the north side.

“Can you send me the video you took?” Clarke asked DeShawn.

“Yeah. Have Lexa give you my number and text me after you get home.”

“Okay.” She hugged him, too. “And we need to have beers. I want some Lexa stories.”

He laughed. “Definitely.”
Lexa also gave him a hug and said something to him that Clarke couldn’t hear but he nodded.  
“Later, bro,” Randy said and DeShawn waved and walked away.  
“So should we get some food?” Lincoln asked.  
“I say we eat leftovers and drink beer.” Octavia looked around at the rest of the group.
Lexa nodded. “Let’s do it. See you and Lincoln at home.”  
“Cool.” Octavia hugged Clarke, then Lincoln did, and they left.
“See you in a few minutes at the rec center,” Anya said. “Do not argue with me on this, Griffin.”  
“Nope.”
Flores started her car and drove it slowly past, tossing them a wave as she did.
Anya nodded, satisfied, and took Raven’s hand and they walked toward the parking structure.
Clarke grabbed her pack from the nearby bench and walked with Randy and Lexa to the rec center, 
Lexa’s hand warm in hers, and she was suddenly really tired even though it was barely starting to get dark.
Adrenaline crash, she knew, and it was comforting, listening to Lexa and Randy chat as they 
walked, knowing that she was safe, that Lexa was with her, and that all her friends would cut a bitch if necessary.
“Later,” Randy said after he’d gotten his bag, too, and they were outside the rec center.
“Thanks for helping,” Lexa said. “Appreciate it.”  
“Yes, thanks.” Clarke gave him a quick hug.
“Any time. Anything you need, just give me a shout.”
Lexa hugged him, too. “I’ll call you later.”
“Cool.” He waved and walked away, and Lexa turned her full focus on Clarke. She brushed a strand of hair out of Clarke’s face, cupped her cheek, and kissed her on the forehead.
Clarke sighed and leaned into her.
“Shit day,” Lexa said.
“Only a little bit of it. The rest was great.”
“That’s the spirit.” Lexa gave her a quick kiss on the lips and took her hand again and started walking toward the rec center parking lot.
“How are you feeling?” Clarke asked.
Lexa looked at her, a half-smile on her lips. “Physically, emotionally, or existentially?”
“Um, all of the above?”
“I have a slight headache, and I was fucking worried about you and fucking angry about what happened. But now I’m so glad you’re okay and here with me.”
“Does that include existentially?”

She chuckled. “The last part could totally cover existentially.” She squeezed her hand. “Your turn.”

They reached the parking lot and stood on the curb near a street light, waiting for Anya and Raven.

“I have a slight headache, too, and an adrenaline crash. I was freaked out and really fucking angry but oh, my God when you all showed up, it was like Team Valkyrie or something. Even though there were guys, it still felt like Valkyries swooped out of the sky and were ready to kick some ass.” She remembered the expression in Lexa’s eyes when she showed up, how she looked like she was going to dismember Finn and then grind him into dirt--she had tapped the Commander that Clarke somehow knew resided within her. And it was sort of awe-inspiring and sexy.

Lexa smiled. “For you, no question. And I’m pretty sure the cool men in your life would not mind being honorary Valkyries.”

Clarke leaned against her. “Existentially, I feel like the luckiest person in the world because I have the friends I do and I’m also beyond lucky with you in my life.”

“Good thing Lincoln and Octavia were so loud. I might never have actually talked to you.”

Clarke half-laughed. “You’re not going to let that go, are you?”

“Never. It’s part of the story of us.”

Oh, God. Clarke wasn’t even sure the L-word could cover how she felt about Lexa. What was a word that was a level up from that? And was that even possible? Fuck. “I was kind of worried when you took off after Finn,” she said, a deflection from all the emotions and thoughts racing around inside, but she wasn’t in a position yet to sort through them. “Okay, really worried.”

Lexa pulled her closer. “It all worked out.”

“He might’ve had a gun.”

“He didn’t.”

“DeShawn said the same thing. I know why he knew, but how did you know?”

“Same reason. Self-defense classes. And one of my high school exes is a cop. We stayed friends and she made sure I knew what to look for, though I was already pretty good at sizing people up.” She kissed Clarke’s forehead again. “I would’ve made a different decision if I had any doubt about whether he was carrying.” She stared into Clarke’s eyes. “I care about you. Anybody who messes with you not only has to deal with your formidable self, but me as well. And I am not pleasant when someone I care about is being messed with.”

“You care about me?”

She smiled, this one full of so many things, mostly unspoken between them but somehow understood. “So fucking much.”

And Clarke’s heart—oh, God. She couldn’t even categorize the immensity of the feels cascading through it. “I love it when you swear.”

“I know.” She kissed her, a quick acknowledgment of the moment. “So how about this? We go and eat a bunch of leftovers, drink some beer, and when that’s done, I’ll stay over.”
“But I have to be up early.”

“And?” Lexa arched an eyebrow and it made Clarke weak in the knees. “Like I’ve never gotten up early. I don’t want to leave you alone tonight, and God, Clarke. It’s not like I live across town.”

She laughed, but also enjoyed the little thrill she always got when Lexa said her name. “Then yes, please. To all of that.”

“Done.” And Lexa smiled and fuck, Clarke was so ready to take her home right now.

“So what did my mom say?” she asked, as much to distract herself as to find out what the hell was happening with this development on the mom front.

Lexa laughed. “Aren’t you nosy.”

“Jesus, you talked to my mom after an emergency. Of course I’m nosy about that.”

“She wanted to make sure you’re all right. Apparently, you have a habit of downplaying how you really feel in situations like this.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Okay, maybe a little bit.”

“Uh-huh,” Lexa said, with an eyebrow raise and fucking hell that was hot. “I told her you were shaken up but also really pissed and that you managed not to kill Collins, which was good for your case against him.”

“My mom doesn’t normally do that.”

“What?”

“Talk to anyone I’m seeing. But she likes you.”

“Good. I like her. But I really like her daughter. A lot.” And the look in her eyes was surely capable of convincing Clarke’s clothes to remove themselves. “Also, hope you don’t mind, but your mom asked for my phone number, so I provided it.”

Clarke stared at her. “She wanted your phone number?” She wasn’t sure if she should be elated or freaked out.

“For the network.”

“I—wow.”

Lexa regarded her for a few moments. “Are you okay with that? I can check with you before I contact her. Unless it’s an emergency.”

“No, that’s okay. I just…it’s just not a normal thing for her.”

Lexa shrugged and smiled, reassuring. “It doesn’t mean anything you don’t want it to. And after what happened today, she’s just worried and wants to make sure she has as many people to contact as possible to make sure you’re okay.”

And Clarke stared back at her, a huge lump in her throat because she knew it was much, much more than that, knew that her mom had already accepted Lexa as part of the family, and it was so fucking easy, how she had become a part of Clarke’s life. Like there had always been a Lexa space to fill, and now that she was here, it was the most exciting thing ever but also the most comfortable, because
she fit perfectly.

“Okay,” Clarke said, “but then you need to do something for me.”

She waited.

“Make sure Indra and Gustus have my number, too.”

The look in Lexa’s eyes—it was everything Clarke was feeling but couldn’t put into words and she pulled her into a much longer kiss and the shit parts of the day faded because Lexa was here, and Team Valkyrie had shown up, and…yeah…Lexa. So much Lexa.

Anya and Raven pulled up and Raven leaned out the window. “Jesus, your cuteness factor is going to knock the planet off its axis. Be aware that Clexonium might be dangerous to mere mortals.”

Clarke laughed again and Lexa cocked her head.

“Clexonium?” she said, puzzled.

“I’ll tell you later.” And Clarke kissed her again, which earned a whoop from both Raven and Anya.

On the ride back to their apartment building, Lexa held Clarke’s hand and they were as close as the seat belts would allow. Banter and laughter flowed freely and the shitty parts of the day faded even more and when they pulled into the parking lot, Clarke felt even better.

“Okay?” Lexa asked before they got out of the car, voice soft.

“Yes. You?”

“Definitely.” She brushed a kiss across Clarke’s cheek and as they all went upstairs, Clarke knew, even through the storm of emotions this day had brought, that no matter the location in the world or the circumstances, no matter what was happening, wherever Lexa was, that was home.

And it felt so fucking good.

Chapter End Notes

Fucking Finn, man. Jesus, what a DICK.

But YAY Team Valkyrie!

I kinda love all the feels I have on this project. Fluff gives me hope, y'all.
A bit of an aftermath to the d-bag situation. Clarke talks to Abby about it, then has a heart-to-heart with Raven and then gets some time with Lexa who's got something on her mind that's bugging her.

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clarke got home Wednesday evening, kicked off her boots, and went into her room where she changed into sweats. After that was done, she collapsed onto the couch. Fucking Finn. She’d been dealing with another police report with the city, coordinating with Brady, her mom’s attorney friend, and getting a copy of the recent report from campus police.

What a fucking douche.

On the plus side, nobody had seen him around town or on campus, so hopefully he had gone back to California and even if he never got arrested out there, at least knowing that he ran that risk here might keep him away. Asshole.

Her phone rang with Abby’s tone and she answered.

“Hey, Mom. What’s up?”

“Just checking in. How are things going?”

She sighed and rolled onto her back. “On which front?”

“All.”

“Brady thinks the DA will want to charge him with at least a misdemeanor, but since he’s no longer here, it probably won’t mean anything in California.”

“But at least it’ll be on record and if he comes back, he runs a big risk of getting picked up for missing court dates, if nothing else.”

“Let’s hope.”

“So how are you doing?”

Clarke stared at the ceiling, deciding how to respond to that. She was annoyed because of all the bureaucratic bullshit she had to deal with, thanks to Finn the Fucker. And she was tired and stressed because of all the things she had to finish up before the end of the semester.

But she was also deliriously happy. Like, off-the-charts happy. Even dealing with all the crap after Sunday, she was goddamn fucking happy.

“Clarke?”
“Yeah. Good. I’m good. Kind of stressed, with the end of the semester. And that reminds me—can you get Christmas Day off? I’ll come down Christmas Eve and spend the night.”

“That was what I was just going to ask you. And Lexa is for sure going to Virginia?”

“As of Monday, that’s the plan.”

“Well, if her plans change, she’s welcome to join us. Have you told her that?”

Clarke smiled. “Yes. She knows.”

“Good.” Pause. “I really like her.”

She grinned. “She has that effect.”

“And I’m hard to please.”


“Oh, ha ha. Especially where you’re concerned. But in this case, she’s good for you, and I hope it continues.”

“So do I.”

Another pause. “Is that the possibility of something serious I hear in your voice?”

Oh, shit. “Maybe,” she said, flustered. “But it’s barely been a month.”

“So?”

“That doesn’t seem like enough time to get to know somebody.”

“By whose standards?”

“Um.” That was actually a very good question.

“I know this is entirely unscientific, but sometimes you can’t predict when or how these things happen. And sometimes you just click with someone and the timeline unfolds the way it wants to.”

“I’m just trying to be careful. Especially after the last time.” She didn’t say his name.

Abby snorted. “You were never serious about him.”

Okay, that caught her off guard.

“I think you thought you were supposed to be, because you were with him over a few months, but you just weren’t that into him and then you got stuck for a little bit.”

“What the hell, Mom.”

“It’s okay, honey. I’ve been there. Everybody has at least one bad or stupid relationship in their past, and if they’re self-reflective at all, the one that comes after that is the one that gives them pause, because they’re afraid they’re going to just be repeating the mistake. And yes, some do. But you’re not one of those. You’ve picked what happened with him apart so many times that it’s beyond a dead horse. It’s now just a collapsed, bleached skeleton.”

“Okay, that’s a f***ed-up image.”
“But it’s true. And yes, he ended up being worse than some people’s mistakes, but you handled it, and you have a great support network.”

“Don’t you worry about what he might do?”

“Yes, but so far, your support network has been effective. And honestly, with Lexa in the picture, I feel even better about your safety.”

So did Clarke. “I guess we might need to find out whether someone in his circle tipped him off about where I was on Sunday.”

“That’s not really useful. There’s plausible deniability there,” Abby said. “And we have no idea what he’s told anybody. His sister has probably been gaslighted, too, and believes anything he tells her. He could be lying to her and her friends about the protection order. But unless these women start harassing you, too, there’s no point to playing detective. If they do, however, or we find out they’re helping that bastard, I will come down on them with so much pain they’ll wish all they had to deal with was the little prick in their lives.”

“Damn, Mom.” Clarke got up and went to the kitchen to pour a glass of wine and turn on the oven. “It’s both scary and cool to hear you talk like that.” She knew, too, that Lexa would help with that takedown, and it ignited all kinds of sparks in her chest.

“You’re my daughter. There is nothing I won’t do to make sure you’re okay.”

“You’re pretty awesome for a mom,” she said, to deflect from the major bonding feels that were threatening to make her cry.

“So I’ve heard. Anyway, I’ll get Christmas Day off and see what I can do about leaving early on Christmas Eve.”

“That would be fun. Oh, if Marcus is around, invite him over for pizza or something. I don’t feel like having a giant thing for Christmas. Unless you wanted to go out.” She leaned against the counter, wine in one hand, phone in the other.

“No, actually, I don’t. I was hoping for a mellow day with you. And he’s actually spending Christmas with his daughters.”

“I thought he might, but figured I’d ask. So how are things going with him?”

Pause. “Good,” she said, with little hints of giddiness in her tone.

“You’re as bad as I am. Queen of understatement. And I now know where I get it. So can you spend New Year’s with him?”

“He’s having a get-together at his house and yes, he invited me. And you and Lexa, if you don’t have plans.”

She envisioned his faculty colleagues, which probably wouldn’t be terrible, but she much preferred party-hopping with her crew. And making out with Lexa when midnight hit. “That’s nice of him. I think Anya’s having something and Echo—remember her from friends-giving?—is, too.”

“That’s Lexa’s friend from law school?”

“Yeah.”
“Sounds fun. Don’t worry about coming to DC. We can do brunch after the new year.”

“That would be awesome. Lexa will fit it around her schedule.”

“Good. Okay, I have to go. Looks like I may actually get out of here at a reasonable hour.”

And she wanted to duck out before she got called for something else, Clarke knew. “Oh, my God, Mom,” she said in an exaggerated whisper. "Run. Before they see you.”


“Bye.” She hung up and took a sip of wine. She and Abby didn’t really get into the whole exchanging of gifts things, especially since her dad died. Instead, they tried to do things together, like go to art openings or take a weekend trip to New England. She’d also given her paintings or drawings in the past. This year, though, she decided to get her a gift certificate to a nice restaurant so she and Marcus could go out.

She and the rest of the crew often exchanged little things, with an agreement to not spend more than ten dollars on each other and they usually donated time, items, or money to a charity they all agreed on. This year they had decided on a local shelter that helped victims of domestic violence.

But she did want to do something for Lexa. She hadn’t quite decided yet, but she had some ideas. One of them would require collaboration with Lincoln, but she had a feeling he would be more than enthusiastic about it.

Her phone rang and she smiled. “Hi,” she answered. “I was just thinking about you.”

“Something good, I hope,” Lexa said.

Clarke heard the smile in her tone but she also sounded tired. “Always. Where are you?”

“Law library. I needed to check a couple of things for this project.”

“Have you had dinner?”

“No. I’ll get something on the way home.”

“Or you could just come here and eat with me and Raven.”

Pause. “Are you sure?”

“Did you seriously just ask me that?”

She laughed. “Point taken. When Clarke Griffin suggests a course of action, that’s pretty much how it is.”

“Exactly. So when you’re finished, text me and there’ll be wine and lasagna waiting with your name on both.”

“You’re the best.”

“I know,” she said, and Lexa laughed. “Now go get things done. We’ll see you soon.”

“Definitely.” And then she hesitated, like she wanted to say something more, but instead she just said “bye” and ended the call.
Clarke set her phone on the counter and took the pan of uncooked lasagna out of the fridge and put it in the oven. When she closed the door and set the timer on the microwave, her phone dinged with a message. She checked it and opened it immediately.

_I wish I had better words to tell you how much you mean to me_, Lexa had texted, and the floating ellipses indicated she was working on another so Clarke waited, more sparks zipping around her chest and stomach.

_But I’m not even sure the words exist._

_All I know is that every day I’m so glad you told me to move my bed_ [kiss emoji]

Clarke laughed and texted back, _jfc w/that, Woods_ [heart eyes emoji] [smiling devil emoji]

“I can’t with you,” she said, still laughing, _plz do ur work & come home_ [kiss emoji] she texted, fully aware of the many meanings “home” could engender in this context and she sent it both with a sense of trepidation, maybe, but also a sense of something much deeper, something she had been avoiding thinking about too hard but that had been hovering in her heart.

The front door opened. “Hi, honey,” Raven called from the living room. “How was school today?”

Clarke poured her a glass of wine and met her at the kitchen door with it. “Fucking exhausting. You?”

“Same, but so much better now.” She took a drink and then went back to the couch where she flopped down and set her glass on the coffee table then loosened her brace over her jeans. “As lightweight as this is, it kind of digs into my thigh weird. I’ve been experimenting with different padding, but I think I need to check in with the doc.”

“Just let me know. I’ll go with you.”

“And that’s why I love you, BFF.”

Clarke flopped down next to her with her refilled glass. “Lexa’s coming over for dinner.”

“In a literal or euphemistic sense? Or both?”

Clarke flicked wine at her. “Literal. She’s at the law library now.”

“Oh. And she’s probably as tired as we are.”

“She sounded like it.”

“Well, I’m glad you asked her. She’s too damn polite to impose.” She leaned back against the couch cushions and sighed with relief.

“Yeah. She is.”

“And she really needs to impose more. I mean, she’s part of our crew, now. We are all impositions all the time. It’s only fair for her to join in with all the imposing.”

“Agreed.”

“Not to mention she’s also hella fun to have around.”
Clarke sipped her wine. “There’s that.”

“And she gives you the best heart eyes.”

She almost choked.

“Like you haven’t noticed,” Raven said with a snort. “Have you gotten your tickets for the love train yet?”

Clarke almost choked again. “Jesus God, Reyes,” she said, coughing a few times. “You are not to speak when I’m taking a drink.”

She grinned. “So? Have you?”

“What?”

“Gotten your tix for the love train?”

“I cannot believe you’re using this metaphor.”

She shrugged. “And it might require Seventies cosplay. Anyway. Stop dodging the question.”

“I’m dodging it because maybe I don’t feel like talking about it.” Clarke shrugged, too.

“Which means my question hit a nerve.” She looked at her. “Is everything okay in Lexa-land? Please tell me everything’s okay.”

Clarke smiled. “Yes. Everything’s fine. I just—” she stopped and chewed her lip for a few moments. “I don’t understand why I’m feeling for her what I do after such a short time.”

Raven let her breath out in a long exhale and Clarke looked at her and frowned.

“Oh, thank God,” Raven said. “I thought you were going to tell me that you only like her and though it’s nice, you’re just not feeling it and I was totally going to lose my shit because that is not what your heart eyes are saying.”

“What? Why would I say that? I’m totally into her. I don’t understand why, is the problem.”

Raven stared at her for a beat then laughed. “Oh, my God. Clarke, I fucking love you, but Jesus Christ, you have got to stop looking for problems where there aren’t any.”

“That’s not exactly what I meant—”

“It’s pretty much what you said. Look, here’s the thing.” Raven adjusted her position so she could face her. “There’s no timeline for things like this. I mean, I was attracted to Anya from day one, but I didn’t think I’d ever have a chance with her. And by the time she kissed me, I’d already created this huge wall in my head to avoid even entertaining that possibility. That’s why it shocked me so much when she did it. But damn, I figured out pretty quickly that she’s exactly what I want and need. So stop thinking there’s a set time for everything. Because that’s just not how life works.”

Clarke stared into her glass. Abby had said something similar earlier, about timelines unfolding the way they wanted to. “I don’t know what to do.”

“How about?”

“About what?”

“This. Lexa. Anything.” She sighed, frustrated. What the hell? What was she worried about?
“Um. Kinda lost here, Griff. What do you mean, you don’t know what to do about Lexa? Keep seeing her. Duh.”

“But then there’s Finn.”

“Do not speak that name in this apartment,” Raven said imperiously. “We will refer to him as asshole, douchebag, cabrón, fuckface, shitstick, or any appropriate combination thereof. The more colorful and creative, the better.”

She huffed. “Fine. The point is, Lexa isn’t just getting me. She’s getting my stalker, too.”

“No, she’s not. Fuckface is not part of your life. He showed up after a year for a minute, but we handled it and now he might get nailed with more penalties. I mean, you told her going in that your ex is a complete assface, and she’s still here—wait.” Raven gave her a look. “Are you getting weird because you don’t think you deserve this?”

“I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Or is it about your dad? And you’re afraid if you get too close, you’ll lose her?”

“Could be. What if that happens?”

Raven sat back and shook her head. “That’s the chance you take. And hello. I’ve been in your life for practically most of it. And oh, look. I’m still here. Fucked-up leg and all. And your mom’s still in your life. And you get along with her better these days than you did even a couple years ago.”

Clarke was quiet, listening to her but also thinking about Lexa, and how she made Clarke feel like she could do anything.

“Look, we’ve had this talk, after your initial freakout. And here you are, and things with Lexa are awesome. Why would you not want to continue with that?”

“I might be a little bit scared.”

“We’ve established that. But you’re here, and you have major heart eyes for her, so what’s the issue?”

Clarke sighed. “I have feelings for her.”

Pause. “Yeah, okay, Captain Obvious. And?”

“Raven, I’m serious. Major feelings. And I don’t understand why I have them when I haven’t known her that long.”

“Ah, Padawan. You’ve attempted to attach a chronological measurement to something you have no control over. The fact is, you two are a perfect match. And sometimes, certain people come into your life and you didn’t even know you needed them until they just click with you and suddenly they’re part of your every day and what the hell, how did that happen? But it feels really good and really safe and it’s exciting as fuck. And I’m speaking now from experience.”

Clarke smiled. “Do you love Anya?” Holy shit she said the L-word aloud to Raven and even though it wasn’t about Lexa, it was sort of by default because of the context.

“Fuck, yes. And I’m totally in love with her. I knew that, like, a month after she kissed me. But like you, I denied it and oh, my God, there hasn’t been enough time, but I realized time is irrelevant when
it comes to stuff like this. Sometimes, falling in love takes a while. Other times, it’s a fast trip. But ultimately, it doesn’t matter. What does matter is if it’s healthy and makes you feel good.”

“Damn, Reyes. You might be a Jedi Master.”

“I prefer love doctor.”

“Oh, my God.” Clarke snort-laughed.

“So…?” She moved her eyebrows up and down. “Are you pretty much riding the love train?”

“I am not responding to that metaphor.” She got up and started toward the kitchen.

“Busted,” Raven crowed. “You are. You totally are.”

“I’m not listening,” Clarke yelled back in a sing-song tone as she opened the oven, accompanied by the sound of Raven’s laughter.

“Okay,” Raven said from the doorway. “Will you listen now?”

Clarke shut the oven and looked at her. “Are you done laughing?”

“Yes. Here’s the thing. You’re an amazing woman. And Lexa sees that. And she is really, really into you. So if you’re into her, too, well, I fully support this. And I know you’re scared. We’re all scared when it comes to love.”

Oh, fuck. Raven said the L-word and again, the context included Lexa.

“Because that shit is scary,” Raven continued. “It makes you vulnerable. But it can also make you so much stronger. So yes, I tease you about it, but I really, really want this for you because I think Lexa is perfect for you.”

Clarke smiled. “I think you said that to me a couple weeks ago.”

“Yeah. I did. And I still mean it.”

She was quiet for a bit because she wasn’t sure she was ready to admit what she was about to say, but she did it anyway. “The thing is, I’ve never felt this way about anybody. And I honestly don’t know what to do.”

“Ay, Clarkita.” Raven gave her a hug. “You do what you’ve been doing. Keep seeing Lexa.”

“The more I do, the more I want to.” She put her head on Raven’s shoulder.

“You make it sound like a bad thing. How is spending more time with someone you really, really like a bad thing?”

“Because it’s different.” She sighed and pulled away.

“Than what?”

“Than anything. And okay, fine. I might be more into her than just like.”

Raven regarded her for a moment then smiled. “That’s the best news ever.”

“It’s freaking me out and I’m a little overwhelmed. But then there are times when it doesn’t freak me
out and I kind of embrace it.”

“Well, first, stop over-thinking things. Let them just happen. I know your little control freak self has a hard time accepting that there are quite a few things that you can’t actually control, but the reality is, you can’t. And the cool thing here is that you’ve been letting yourself see where things go with Lexa over the past few weeks and holy shit, they’ve gone to Awesome-ville.”

That’s about how it felt. Clarke leaned back against the counter, but a little knot of anxiety tightened in her gut. “Maybe I’m also worried that I’ll let her down somehow, that I’ll panic and run away.”

“I get that.”

“I mean, I’ve not ever really done long-term.”

“Doesn’t mean you can’t now. And what does that even mean? Define ‘long-term.’”

Clarke thought about it. “Over a year?”

“Oh, my God. Arbitrary. And you’ve done longer than that with a couple of your exes.”

She had a good point. Clarke chewed her lower lip.

“If someone’s a good fit, it’s not even an issue to go long-term because you always want to be around them. And not in some creepy, clingy way. You want to be around them because they make you feel good about yourself and they care about you and respect you and your boundaries.”

Which pretty much summed up how Lexa made her feel. And why the hell was she getting so worked up about this? The past was the past and just because she had lost her dad didn’t mean she would keep losing people. But she knew that in the wake of his death, she had shut some things down emotionally because the kind of pain his loss brought had left her raw and despairing for a long time, and its residue was something she knew she would carry the rest of her life.

That kind of loss you never got over. You just learned to live with the wound.

“Hey,” Raven said, tone gentle but firm. “I know where you went just now. So say this with me. Losing my dad does not mean I’ll lose Lexa.”

“I hate that you know me so well,” Clarke said, the lump in her throat making it hard to swallow.

“Say it.”

She cleared her throat. “Losing my dad does not mean I’ll lose Lexa.”

“Okay. Good. And maybe you’re thinking it would be really easy to not get close to someone to prevent losing them, no matter what that looks like, but it prevents you from experiencing the kind of connection I know you’re capable of.” And she gave her another hug.

“I’m not even sure what it is I’m feeling, but it’s bigger than like.” Way bigger. Like, cruise ship huge. Maybe even bigger. Fuck.

Raven shrugged. “So just relax and let things unfold on their own time. I know that’s hard for your little control-freak self, but trust the process. And stop trying to hammer this into a timeline. Damn, Griff. Fucking enjoy yourself. It’s about time you let yourself.”

“I’m kinda scared,” she whispered.
“That’s all right. And ultimately, in situations like this, it’s okay to fall.”

Oh, God. “Fuck,” she muttered. “I’m not sure I’m ready to even ponder that concept.” Falling? For Lexa? For a few moments she couldn’t breathe because the enormity of that possibility crashed through her mind and she knew that it had been lurking in her thoughts, waiting for her to fully consider it, but fuck. Was she even ready to **think** about it?

“I get it. But seriously. It’s okay. Because you know what?” Raven hugged her harder. “If you decide to let yourself do it, I’m pretty damn sure Lexa will catch you.”

And fuck, Clarke wanted to cry and fuck, she wasn’t even sure why.

“I also know you’re strong enough to do this, and you’re strong enough to catch her, too.”

“Goddammit, Reyes. Why are you saying things like this that get me all emotional?” She swallowed around the lump in her throat.

“I don’t bullshit about the important things.”

Clarke’s phone chimed from the living room. “Speaking of, that’s probably Lexa,” she said as she released Raven. “I told her to text before she left campus.”

“And that is super cute. How much longer on the lasagna?”

“Fifteen minutes. We can get the garlic bread ready, though.” And it helped, having tasks to get her mind off and the fact that Raven had pretty much nailed everything she was thinking about.

“On it.”

Clarke moved toward the doorway but stopped. “Raven.”

She looked at her.

“Thank you.”

She smiled. “I’ve got you. So just let this unfold and see where it goes. Enjoy it, because Lexa’s special. And so are you.”

Clarke nodded, wiping at her eyes, and went to check her phone and yes, Lexa had texted that she was leaving the library and would be there in about twenty minutes since she wanted to change, too. **perfect timing**, Clarke texted back. **see u soon**

“Are we eating like civilized people or Americans?” Raven asked from the kitchen doorway.

“Civilized. Let me clear the table.” She took her laptop and books into her bedroom and when she went back to the table, Raven had already wiped it off and put a festive Mexican tablecloth on it and plates and silverware.

Clarke brought their wine glasses from the coffee table and set them down then went into the kitchen to see what else needed to be done. The rich smell of lasagna and garlic bread greeted her and she realized she was really hungry.

Raven was busy putting olives, strips of roasted red bell peppers, artichoke hearts, and small chunks of cheese onto a plate. When she was done, Clarke took it to the table along with an empty wine glass for Lexa.
The timer went off and Raven took the lasagna out of the oven and set it on top of the stove. “Holy shit, it’s beautiful,” she said. “We outdid ourselves.”

Clarke nodded. “That is some sexy lasagna.”

“Right? I mean, we could take pictures of it for food porn sites. Then again, maybe not. People probably do actually use stuff like that for actual porn and I really don’t want to think about that. Not to kink-shame or anything,” she added. “It’s just that kinky lasagna is not my thing.”

“Maybe not, but that is totally our college band name.”

She laughed. “I see a whole line of merchandise…”

“Because of course you do.”

A knock sounded and Raven gave her a sly grin. “Hmm. Who could that be?”

She rolled her eyes and went to the door, heart speeding up, but she checked the peephole anyway then forced herself not to yank the door open like a crazed fangirl. Though she might actually be a Lexa fangirl. Which was kind of weird but also amusing.

“Hi,” Clarke said when she opened the door.

Lexa smiled. She was holding a bouquet of flowers and she looked so fucking cute with those, but she was also wearing a pair of faded, really comfortable-looking jeans and an equally faded blue flannel shirt over a black tee and her Vans slip-ons and Clarke grinned back and kissed her, long, slow, and deep and it didn’t matter how many times she did this with her because it always stirred things deep, and sent bolts of electricity down her thighs and up her spine.

“Damn,” Lexa said when Clarke pulled away. “How about I pretend I’m just getting here again so I can get another one of those?”

Clarke raised an eyebrow flirtatiously and pulled her inside. “No pretending needed. There’s plenty more of that available.”

“Can I reserve a spot at the top of your list?” she asked.

Clarke ran her thumb over Lexa’s cheek. “You’re the only one on my list.” The statement stilled the air between them, and Lexa stared at her, gaze full of what might have been hope, relief, and so much more and Clarke led her to the kitchen before she said anything else. They were both tired, after all, and she wanted the evening to be relaxing and not weighted with whatever baggage she was still sifting through.

“Hi,” Raven said when they entered the kitchen.

“It smells really good in here.” Lexa gave Raven a quick hug then went to the cabinet that held a couple of glass vases, like she’d been here all along. She took one out and set it on the counter.

“Wine?” Clarke asked as Lexa unwrapped the flowers, a pretty arrangement of orange and red chrysanthemums, white asters, and black-eyed susans.

“Yes, please.”

Clarke poured her a glass, listening to her chat with Raven and God, she loved having Lexa in her space, loved how easily she had entered the circles of her life, and fucking hell, she was using the L-
word a lot. But watching Lexa and listening to her and catching her eye and smile as she took the flowers to the table—this was definitely more than like.

But she needed to settle into the immensity of that idea, needed to get used to it and carry it around for a while.

Raven handed her a plate with lasagna on it. “I’m putting the bread in a basket so we can actually pretend we have class.”

Lexa laughed and took her plate and wine to the table. Clarke joined her with her own plate, but also with the bottle of wine, which she set next to the flowers.

“Thank you,” she said, gesturing at the vase before she sat down next to Lexa, on her left. “It’s nice having fresh flowers around.”

Lexa smiled. “I think so, too. Gustus likes flowers, so he grows them all year. I guess I got to like them, especially when things were hard. They made me feel a little better. Not sure why.” She took a bite of lasagna. “Oh, my God. This is so good.”

Clarke passed her the basket of garlic bread.

“Thanks for inviting me over.”

“Duh,” Raven said as she sat down across from Clarke. “You’re part of our crew, now.” She picked up her wine. “And lasagna is an important bonding ritual.”

“I’m feeling lucky the ritual doesn’t involve something like a Navy SEAL obstacle course.”

“That’s next week,” Raven said.

“Yeah. We figured we’d give you a few days to prepare.” Clarke said, tone innocent, but she lightly shoulder-bumped Lexa.

“I see. What sorts of obstacles are involved?” Lexa picked up her wine.

Raven pretended to think. “Orcs. You’ll need swords.”

An image of Lexa as Commander filled Clarke’s mind, coat swirling around her boots, swords flashing as she moved them in intricate patterns, cutting a swath of destruction through mauroading attackers—it was both exciting and really fucking hot.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Lexa said with a smirk. “Or I could just make you chocolate-covered strawberries.”

“Oh, shit,” Clarke said. “She broke out one of your weaknesses.”

Raven frowned, as if she was thinking it over. “Woods is not playing fair, here.”

“Black-and-whites, then,” Lexa said, and she took another bite of lasagna and pressed her thigh against Clarke’s and it was arousing and comforting and God, was there anything about her that Clarke didn’t like? Pretty sure the answer was no.

“Dammit,” Raven said. “Defeated by cookies and strawberries.”

Lexa grinned. “Thank God. Because those are infinitely better than dealing with Orcs.”
“Hmm. You sound as if this is an experience you’ve had.” Raven took a piece of bread from the basket.

“Of a sort. Both internal and external.”

“Mysterious.” Raven nodded. “I like that.”

Lexa smiled again and continued eating her lasagna and the conversation moved to school-related commiserating and then, though it made her tense, Clarke moved the discussion to the Finn situation.

“So what does the lawyer say?” Raven asked.

“That things can move slowly, especially since Fi—the douchebag—didn’t get violent, in the legal definitions of the word.”

Lexa put her hand on Clarke’s thigh and squeezed gently and Clarke covered her hand with her own.

“I mean, I’ve done everything I was supposed to. I filed the report with the city police and talked to the lawyer. You both know that. And Officer Flores got back to me today. She said she knows some people with the city department, and she’ll do a courtesy call to them again and provide her reports, too. Like last time.” She sighed and Lexa pulled her hand out from under Clarke’s and put her arm around her shoulders and the tension that had built up talking about this crap decreased.

“Most likely this will end up as a warrant for his arrest, but only here. And if he doesn’t do anything on visits here that involves police, then he’ll stay out of the system.”

They were quiet for a few moments until Raven spoke.

“Do you think Hannah and Lauren even realize the extent of his asshole-ness?”

“My mom brought that up today, too,” Clarke said. “He might be telling them all kinds of bullshit and they may not even realize that I took out an order on him. For all we know, he’s been telling them that I’m stalking him.”

“Fuck,” Raven responded. “I hadn’t thought about that. But in a really sick way, it almost makes sense. Because if you knew your brother had an order of protection on him, why would you willingly give him information that you knew would make things worse for him?”

Lexa picked up her wine glass with her free hand. “If he’s got Hannah gaslighted, she’s going to give him the information, even if she knows about the order. And if he’s abusive toward her, she’ll give him the info anyway, to avoid more abuse. But yeah, it’s possible that she doesn’t know and he sold her some other story.”

Clarke leaned into her. This conversation left a bad taste in her mouth, though it was necessary to have it.

“So basically, we wait and see whether the system ups the ante and puts a warrant on the order,” Raven said.

Clarke nodded. “Pretty much.” She wondered, too, if he had gone back to California. “And this has been a pleasant subject. Not.”

Raven gave her a sympathetic look. “Should we alert the networks about these developments?”
“I will. Tomorrow. I would prefer more lasagna right now.”

Lexa chuckled and pressed a soft kiss against her cheek.

Raven made an “aww” sound. “And before you both gross me out with more of this display of blatant Clexonium, I’ll have another piece, too.” She pushed back from the table. “Anybody want anything else?”

“No, they both said.

“Okay. Be right back.” She went into the kitchen and Lexa smiled.

“I like the whole idea of Clexonium,” she said.

Clarke shook her head. “Oh, my God, I didn’t tell you about it to encourage her.”

Lexa grinned and lifted her arm from around Clarke’s shoulders and God, Clarke missed her touch immediately. “I have a confession,” she said quietly, but a sly smile hovered on her lips.

“Oh? And that would be…?”

Lexa started to say something when Raven emerged from the kitchen carrying the lasagna pan.

“I’m bringing the food to us, bitches,” she said triumphantly as she set the pan in the middle of the table on a hot pad. “Dig in.”

Clarke stood and cut a piece for Lexa and served it to her and she kissed the top of her head. Lexa pulled her into a hug, her head against Clarke’s stomach for a second before she released her and it was such a pure, sweet moment that Clarke practically melted as she sat down again. She waited for Raven to snark about it, but when she looked at her, Raven was simply smiling. She caught Clarke’s gaze and her smile widened and she mouthed “so cute” at her.

Lexa put a piece of lasagna onto Clarke’s plate.

“So are you going to be around for New Year’s?” Raven asked Lexa.

“I should be back. I generally don’t stay at Indra and Gustus’s more than a couple of days past Christmas.”

Clarke looked at her, hearing something off in her tone, but she wasn’t sure what.

Raven ate another bite. “When are you heading out?”

“The twenty-third.”

“If the weather gets bad, you can spend Christmas with me and my mom,” Clarke said. “And if the weather’s bad there, too, then we can do a pizza and movie night right here on Christmas Eve.” And that would be legit amazing, she added silently.

“I actually would love to do that some time anyway,” Lexa said. “I’m not really a fan of Christmas, though Indra and Gustus make it bearable.” There was something different in her tone again, and it sounded a bit sad.

Clarke squeezed her hand where it rested on the table and Lexa intertwined their fingers and God, even that gave her feels.
Raven reached for the bottle of wine and split the last of it between the three of them. “Well, I would love to spend Christmas with all my crew. Maybe we should plan that for next year. We’ll just have a big movie and pizza night.”

“I say we decree it.” Clarke picked up her glass with her free hand. “To a crew Christmas next year.”

“Hell, yeah.” Raven raised her glass.

“Make it so,” Lexa intoned, her glass up, too.

They finished the lasagna then cleaned up. Raven divvied up the leftovers, and handed Lexa a plastic container with a big piece of lasagna while Clarke put the other containers in the fridge.

“Are you sure?” Lexa asked.

“Oh, my God, Woods. You’re part of our crew, now. Which comes with all kinds of perks. Leftovers included.”

“Awesome. Thanks. And thanks for the invite.”

“Perks,” Raven repeated. “Plus, I’m pretty sure there is no way in hell Clarke is going to let you go hungry.” She grinned at Clarke. “And on that note, I really need to work on a fucking lab project.”

“Do you want the table?” Clarke asked and Raven looked at her with obvious relief.

“Is that okay? I need to spread some things out.”

“Yeah. Go for it. I’ll just—”

“You want to come to my place?” Lexa asked, and there was an undercurrent in her voice that sounded a little tentative and maybe…insecure? Again, Clarke got the sense that something was on Lexa’s mind.

“Definitely.” She smiled, reassuring.

“All right,” Raven said. “Thanks, Clarke. And glad you came over, Lexa. I need to call Anya and then I’ll probably see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Clarke gave her a quick hug and Raven left the kitchen and Clarke turned her attention to Lexa. “Do you need to study some more?”

“I could do some reading.”

“So are we going to actually try the study experiment?” Clarke asked, teasing. “I’m down for it if you are.”

Lexa chuckled. “I totally want to try it. And if we get distracted—” she used air quotes, “well, I’m not going to be upset about it.”

Clarke kissed her and it was warm and gentle, which was a whole other kind of sexy. “We could also talk about what’s bothering you,” she said when she pulled away.

Lexa smiled, but she looked tired. “Why do you think there is?”

“A disturbance in The Force.” And the fact that she was so tuned in to Lexa’s moods. When exactly had that happened? She wasn’t sure. It just seemed that she and Lexa had been in sync since the
beginning in some ways, another layer of the seamless integration between them.

“It’s old stuff. Comes up this time of year. Nothing to worry about.”

“Doesn’t matter if I need to worry or not. It’s part of your life and I want to hear about it.” She took Lexa’s hand. “Unless you don’t want to talk about it and we can just study and then watch stupid TV and eat popcorn and I will cuddle the shit out of you.”

Lexa smiled again and kissed her fingertips. “I might take you up on that, but even if we’re just studying, I just really need you close, and I hope you don’t think that’s weird or clingy.”

“No.” She ran her fingertips down Lexa’s jaw (God, she would never get enough of it). “I want to be close, too. Every chance I get.” She brushed another kiss across her lips. “Give me a few minutes. I’ll be right over.”

“The door will be open.” Lexa smiled and held her gaze for a few seconds then left and Clarke went to get her backpack. She left a couple of books and her laptop in her room, but a couple of others and her tablet she put in her backpack. As she was leaving, her gaze fell on the folder that held the panels of the Commander comic she was working on. She was almost done with the first installment of the story. Maybe she'd show it to Lexa soon.

Raven already had her books and laptop out on the table when Clarke came into the living room.

“I’ll be at Lexa’s,” she said, and Raven laughed.

“Duh.”

“Thanks for…the earlier talk.”

“Always. Now go spend time with your hot-ass woman.”

Clarke rolled her eyes but smiled. “Call or text if you need anything.”

“Same to you. Later.”

Clarke grabbed her keys and left, so freaking glad that Lexa lived right down the hall. The door was partially open and Clarke went in.

“Hey, it’s me.” She went in and closed and locked it behind her.

“In the kitchen,” Lexa called and Clarke went to the table in the dining nook and set her pack down. Lexa had already set her books and laptop out.

“Want something to drink?” Lexa asked from the kitchen doorway. “I tend toward tea when I’m studying.”

Clarke smiled. “Great minds. So do I.”

“I’ve got herbal, decaf, and caf.”

“Something herbal and mellow.”

Lexa smirked. “In a different context, that could be a whole other conversation and activity.”

Lexa gave her a sultry look and retreated into the kitchen and Clarke took her books and tablet out then went to the kitchen.

“Can I help?” she asked.

“No. But how strong do you like your tea?” She had set out two cups.

“Just leave the bag in there,” Clarke said with a shrug.

Lexa arched an eyebrow. “I do not do bags, Pancake Master.” She made a sweeping gesture at the canister of loose tea on the counter.

Clarke stared for a moment then shook her head and gave her a smirk of her own. “Of course you don’t. You are indeed the barista of my dreams, Commander.” And she gripped the front of Lexa’s shirt and pulled her into a kiss. A hot, deep, wet meeting of mouths that went on until the hot water kettle signaled it was done with a click and beep and Lexa stopped, breathing heavily.

“Fuck,” she said softly. “I see what you mean by distractions.”

“Told you.” Clarke kissed her again, this one softer and slower, but just as sexy, and it left her aching just as much as the previous one.

“And wait a minute,” Lexa whispered against her lips. “Barista of your dreams?”

“Mmm-hmm.” Clarke grazed her lips over Lexa’s, barely touching them, then did the same to her jaw and neck, and she was rewarded by a soft moan.

“So what kind of dreams are these, exactly?” Lexa asked as she turned her head so Clarke could better access her neck.

“Well…” She gently nibbled on her earlobe and Lexa’s breath hissed between her teeth.

“Basically…” Clarke kissed the underside of her jaw. “That would be…” Another kiss, this time on her cheek. “All of them.” And she stared into her eyes as she caressed her cheek, and as light-hearted as the exchange may have been on the surface, it meant so much more than that, and from Lexa’s expression, she knew it, too, and her half-smile was a promise all wrapped up in an invitation and how was it possible to feel this open, this vulnerable, but so damn strong, too?

“I hope that doesn’t change,” Lexa said softly.

“Highly doubtful.” She kissed her again, and felt Lexa’s smile against her mouth and she felt for a second like she might be floating. “You’re truly the Commander of distractions,” she said as she pulled away.

“For good reason. I mean—” she gestured at her with a “can you fucking blame me?” expression.

“Sorry not sorry,” Clarke said with another smirk. “See you out there.” She went back to the table, because if she didn’t, she was going to initiate certain activities against the kitchen counter and as much as she wanted to and as much as she knew Lexa would reciprocate, she also knew that Lexa might need her in other ways tonight and she wanted to be present for her in that regard. She sat down and opened her tablet to her notes on the recent chapters in one of her books.

Lexa joined her a few minutes later, carrying a tray with two mugs, each with an infuser hooked on the rim. The tray also held two spoons, a plastic bear-shaped container of honey and holy shit, a small plate with a few black-and-whites.
“You really do have a lockbox,” Clarke said as Lexa set all the things on the tray on the table.

“I just might.”

“And for the record, you are a fucking sexy barista. I would’ve spent tons of money at the place where you worked, if I had known.”

Lexa chuckled and set the tray aside and sat down across from her. “I still owe you hot chocolate, though.”

“And I might just keep using that as an excuse to come over.” Clarke squeezed honey into her cup.

“You don’t need one. Please come over any time.”

“That offer applies to you and my place, too.”

Lexa didn’t respond, but her expression said everything Clarke was feeling, and sometimes words just couldn’t capture a moment, anyway. Lexa finished putting honey into her tea and Clarke nibbled on a cookie as she started reviewing her notes in preparation for upcoming finals, which began in a couple of weeks.

And, much to her surprise, she actually could be in the same space with Lexa and study. In fact, she kinda loved it, loved being able to look up and see her engaged with her own work across from her, loved watching her until she looked up, too, and smiled. Lexa would then gently nudge her calf with her foot and continue working and so would Clarke, and for some reason, sharing study time with her like this opened new channels of feels, though she wasn’t sure why.

Maybe because it was Lexa’s recognition of the importance of studying and classwork in her life and an appreciation of her chosen path and her support of it, that wrapped around her heart in a warm, soft validation blanket. God, she was totally winning the relationship lottery.

And…

there was the R-word.

Clarke sat with it for a while, testing its parameters, letting herself poke at it and she decided that the word did not adequately capture the connection she felt for Lexa. Neither did “girlfriend,” which just didn’t do Lexa justice. After all, she was an amazing woman, not a girl, and though she was a friend, she was so much more. She didn’t like the word “partner,” either, which felt kind of corporate or clinical.

Fuck. English needed better words to describe connections.

Clarke stared at the page of her microbiology textbook but she didn’t really see it because she was sorting through how it felt to think about Lexa in relationship terms.

Not scared.

Not anymore.

After all, they pretty much were in a relationship.

Weren’t they?

Or they at least were engaged in an understanding that involved way more than casual dating.
Fuck, Clarke had never thought of Lexa in casual terms. Something about the pull between them was much, much deeper than that.

She looked up at Lexa again, and though her physical beauty could take Clarke’s breath away, so, too, did everything beneath it.

“Tired of studying?” Lexa asked without looking up from her book, but she was smiling.

“I am studying,” Clarke said. “It just happens to involve memorizing you at the moment.”

Lexa looked at her. “You always manage to make me feel better,” she said, voice soft. “Even on the not-so-good days.”

She meant today. Clarke put her hand over Lexa’s. “Do you want to talk about it?”

She shook her head. “Not really. Like I said, it’s old stuff. And I don’t feel like feeding it tonight.”

Clarke squeezed her hand. “Well, if you decide you want to vent, you know where to find me.”

“I’ll talk about it eventually. I just don’t want to do it tonight. I had a great dinner with great company, and you’re here with me now—I’d rather focus on that.” She caressed Clarke’s hand.

“So…since we studied for a couple of hours, how about we put on some stupid TV and I cuddle the shit out of you, as offered earlier?”

A slow smile lit up her face. “I’d love that.”

“Good. Meet me on the couch, Woods, for some serious cuddling.”

Her smile widened to a grin.

“And fair warning, I am an expert cuddler. You probably won’t want me to stop.”

“I’m counting on it.” She turned off the light near the table as Clarke turned the TV on and situated herself in one corner of the couch. Lexa lit several candles around the room and then joined her, positioning herself so her back was against Clarke’s chest and she was settled between her legs. Clarke pulled her close and kissed the side of her head.

“Find something to watch,” she said, and she pressed the remote into Lexa’s hand and Lexa went to Netflix and called up Agents of Shield and settled back against her.

“Thank you,” she said quietly.

“I’m here for you,” Clarke said, wishing she could somehow imprint that certainty into Lexa. “Don’t ever doubt that.”

“God, Clarke.” She tightened her grip on Clarke’s forearms. “You’re so amazing.”

“Huh. I was just thinking that about you. Now relax and enjoy my mad cuddling skills.”

"Oh, I am. Also, about the confession I wanted to make earlier regarding Clexonium..."

"Hmm?"

"I totally ship us, too."
Clarke froze for a second, then laughed. "What about Master and Commander, while we're at it? That's a pretty good ship."

Lexa chuckled. "I'll ship the hell out of that, too," and she sounded tired, but also content and though Clarke hadn’t quite found the right words yet, she knew Raven had been right.

She was totally in line to buy tickets for the love train.

Chapter End Notes

All these freaking feels. I CAN'T EVEN.

Whatever. I love them. And how cute is Clarke, realizing that she's probably falling for Lexa?

feeeeeeelz
Clarke has a plan for a present for Lexa for Christmas, but she has to coordinate with Lincoln. Also, Officer Flores had some new info and then Lexa and Clarke go out for dinner and Clarke finds out why Lexa is not a fan of Christmas.

“So what are you getting Lexa for Christmas?”

Clarke looked up from her laptop at Monty. “I have a few ideas. But she’s not a fan of Christmas, so I’m deciding what the best thing to do would be.”

“Why doesn’t she like Christmas—wait. Is she Jewish?”

Harper smacked him playfully on the arm. “Just because people are Jewish doesn’t mean they don’t like Christmas. They just don’t celebrate it. Although I’m sure there are Jewish people who do, with their non-Jewish friends and family.”

“True, but no, she’s not,” Clarke said with a smile. “I think it has to do with her past. She’s estranged from her parents.”

“Oh, shit. Sorry.” Monty grimaced, contrite.

“Don’t be. You didn’t know.” Clarke took a sip of her coffee. They were seated at one of the tables outside the Starbucks in the student center. This was the last week before finals started and Clarke was trying to get study time in every chance she could. Plus she had to get a lab project done before Friday, which was three days away.

“So what are you two doing for break?” Clarke asked.

“We’re going to my sister’s, in Ohio.” Harper grinned and took Monty’s hand.

“Cool. So did you get enough family time over Thanksgiving?” She directed the question at him.

“God, yes. Too much in some ways. I mean, my mom’s okay, and so are my cousins and aunt and uncle, but her husband is still a douche.”

“I don’t think I’ve met a CEO of an investment firm who wasn’t,” Harper said. “Not that I’ve met that many. But being a douche in that line of work does seem to go with the territory.”

“Yeah, well, that needs to change.” He shrugged. “Proximity to money clearly makes people weird. And assholey. But regardless, I’ll probably go see her for a weekend in the spring, when he’s out of town.”

Clarke sipped her coffee. “Is your mom upset that you’re not coming for Christmas?”
“She’s going with him to France, so there’s that.” He shook his head. “I think she might have married him for his money. And that’s just…nah.”

“Well, I know that you sure as hell didn’t hook up with me for my money,” Harper teased and she kissed him on the cheek. “Unless I have some relative I’ve never heard of who left me a big, fat trust fund that I don’t know about but you do.”

“Please. If I knew that, we’d be buying our own island right now.”

Clarke laughed. “I support that initiative one hundred percent. Can I open a bar on your island?”

“Damn right. Jasper will probably want to put in a bowling alley.”

“Which could be fun,” Clarke said.

“And then he’ll want to have a weed shack.” Monty rolled his eyes.

Clarke nodded. “Entrepreneurial spirit. I like it. But we need a snack shack, too, in that event.” She got a text message and she checked it. Lincoln, and he’d meet her by the south entrance in ten minutes.

“Lexa?” Harper asked, teasing.

If only. “No. Lincoln. I’m meeting him in a few minutes.” She started packing up her books and laptop. “When are you guys leaving town? I’m going to DC Christmas Eve.”

“I’m done the twenty-first and she’s done the morning of the twenty-third. We’re flying out early the twenty-fourth,” Monty said. “Really early.”

“You want to get together for drinks this weekend? Maybe Saturday?”


“The usual crew. I’ll just send out a group message with a time and place and whoever’s in, show up.”

“Even better,” she said.

Clarke stood and put her coat on then her backpack. She picked up her coffee. “I’ll see you later. Start looking for that trust fund.”

Harper laughed. “And I’ll totally let you know when I find it. Later.”

Clarke went to the stairs and took them to the first floor, thinking about the short video Lexa had sent her a few weeks back as an invitation to Starbucks (she’d kept it, of course) after her freakout at Anya’s dinner party.

They’d both been seriously busy the past week trying to get projects and papers done and Clarke had been a hormonal asshat for some of it because of her period (ugh with those damn things). As a result, quality time with Lexa had been limited to a couple of hours in the evenings here and there and a couple of nights together, which were divine, but not enough.

Everybody was so busy that Raven hadn’t even teased her (much) about the love train. Probably because she’d been at the lab for what seemed like days.

God, this time of year.
What a pain in the ass.

She went outside and stood near the few steps that led to one of the sidewalks that criss-crossed campus. The bite of the cold on her face wasn’t as bad as she thought it would be, and she still had warm coffee, so waiting a few minutes out here wouldn’t be a chore.

Another text came in, this one from Lexa and Clarke smiled and bit her lower lip.

*Hey. This is short notice, but...dinner?*

Clarke laughed. *It's not even 2 yet. how is this short notice? lol.* She followed it up with, *also, yes [kiss emoji]*

Her phone rang and she laughed again. “Hi, sexiest woman alive,” she answered.

Lexa laughed, too. “I was just going to say that to you.”

“Takes one to know one, am I right?”

She laughed again. “I have a meeting in, like, two minutes but I really wanted to hear your voice. Anyway. I was wondering if you’d like to go on an impromptu date with me tonight.”

Fucking hell, how goddamn cute and romantic was this? “I would love to.”

“Excellent.” Pause. “Um, so...can I pick you up at six?”

She was going to swoon. Was that still a thing? Because nothing else really described the feelings swirling around in her chest. “God, yes. What’s the dress code?”

“Totally casual. But wear warm things.”

“Done. Go to your meeting. I’ll see you at six.”

“God, I love your voice.”

“Lexa,” Clarke said, smiling so wide it almost hurt. “You have a meeting.”

“And God, I love it when you say my name.”

“This conversation is on the verge of going into much more inappropriate territory at this rate.”

“Promises, promises.”

“Oh, my God. Get your ass to that meeting.”


“Seriously? I can’t with you. I’m hanging up so you can go to your meeting. I’ll see you at six. Bye, sexiest woman alive.” She ended the call, but she heard Lexa laughing as she did. God, this woman.

And another text came in.

*I can’t wait to see you.*

Jesus. How could she even function? *omg would you plz do ur mtg thing*

*I am. Just sat down.*
Oh, my God. She was incorrigible. And so fucking cute. *ifc*

[laughing emoji] see you later. [kiss emoji]

Winter? What was that? No part of Clarke was cold. She sighed, blissful, and took another sip of coffee.

“Hey,” Lincoln said as he walked up the steps. And even when he was dressed in simple jeans, boots, and a worn leather coat he looked like a model, like he should be on a billboard over Times Square. A group of women walked by and all of them looked at him appreciatively as they passed. Probably thinking that same thing.

“Hi,” Clarke said. “Thanks for meeting me.”

“Sure. What’s up?”

Clarke paused as she organized her thoughts. “I wanted your input on this idea I have for a Christmas present for Lexa.”

He jammed his hands into his coat pockets, and amusement sparked in his eyes. “Okay. Lay it on me.”

“All right. Here’s the thing. I know she has issues with Christmas—she hasn’t told me what they are, and I’m not going to ask you to tell me because that’s not your place to say—but how is she with surprises?”

His brow furrowed. “What do you mean? Like surprise parties? She’s not a fan.”

“Yeah, I figured, but what about…smaller surprises?”

“Depends, I guess. What did you have in mind?”

“Okay, she said she was going to Virginia the twenty-third and she’d probably come back to Polis the twenty-seventh. I’m going to DC the twenty-fourth and then my mom has to go back to the hospital the afternoon of the twenty-fifth. I was thinking I’d drive to Virginia that day as kind of a surprise.”

He smiled. “That’s the best idea ever.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

“I mean, I just want to see her for Christmas, and maybe it’ll help shift things a little for her, where that holiday is concerned.”

He was still smiling. “Seriously, this is a great idea. But are you sure you’re up to meeting Indra and Gustus?”

“Hell, yes. And I need your help and theirs to pull this off.”

His smile widened to a grin. “Fuck, this is awesome. So do you have a timeline?”

“My mom has to be at the hospital at three on the twenty-fifth. I figured I’d see her off, which will be about two-thirty, and then I’d hit the road. But I’ll need directions.”
He was quiet for a few moments. “Okay, that’s almost two hours for you on the road. Let’s extend it thirty minutes, depending on traffic, which shouldn’t be bad since it’s Christmas Day.” He paused. “Let’s say you leave your mom’s at three. That should put you at Indra and Gustus’ around five, ideally, but we’ll give you a window and make it five-thirty. And then we have to get you into the house without her knowing you’re there.”

“And without her seeing my truck.”

Lincoln nodded, thinking. “That part’s easy enough. They have a shed you can park behind. But let me call Indra and see what she thinks. We’ll probably plan on getting Lexa out of the house that afternoon. You can let us know where you are at various times and we can coordinate.” He laughed. “This will be some serious Mission Impossible shit. But damn, this is such a good idea.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to freak her out—”

“Are you kidding me? It will blow her mind in the best possible way. I’m so glad you even thought of this.”

“Which brings me to the next awkward question. Should I get a hotel room? I don’t want to impose, especially if there’s no room at the house.”

Lincoln blinked. “Are you serious right now? There is no fucking way in hell any of us are going to make you stay in a hotel. Plus, there’s an apartment over the garage, now. Which probably will be going to my grandmother after the new year, but right now, it’s empty. Don’t worry. We’ve got you covered.” He grinned. “I love this idea. I’ll call Indra tonight and we’ll go from there.”

Clarke smiled, giddy. Hopefully the weather would cooperate. “So what can I bring?”

He looked at her, puzzled.

“It’s Christmas. I’m not going to show up without a gift of some kind.”

“Hell, just bring a bottle of wine. We all like that.”

She nodded, but the suggestion had her mulling other possibilities, too. “Is Octavia going to be there?”

“No. She’s going to that big family gathering with Bellamy. I’ll see her on the twenty-seventh, though.”

“Well, that’s a drag. Have Indra and Gustus met her?”

He grinned. “Yeah. This past summer.”

“I’m going to guess it went well.”

“Totally.”

“I’m bummed, though, that you don’t get to see her for Christmas.”

He shrugged. “It’s okay. We’ll talk and New Year’s is coming up. Plus we spent Thanksgiving together—thanks to you. So it’s all good.”

Clarke finished her coffee but held on to her cup. “Okay, so we’ve got sort of a plan for this.”

“Seriously, this is so awesome that you’re doing this.”
“But we need to keep it quiet. I think it’ll be more fun to be a surprise.”

“Totally.”

“And you’re sure she isn’t going to get pissed about a surprise like this?”

He shook his head. “If it was anybody but you, me, Indra, or Gustus, she might get a little bent. She doesn’t like a lot of attention. You know she tends to be—” he stopped, as if searching for a word.


He laughed. “Yeah, okay, all of the above. But things have been different since she met you.”

“What do you mean?”

He shrugged. “Can’t put my finger on it. She just seems more relaxed and—fuck, she’s happy. I mean, she can enjoy things and she presents that image, and if you didn’t know her, you wouldn’t pick up on the melancholy behind it. Since you came along, though, there’s been a shift. Not to suggest she isn’t still wrestling with parts of her past, but…she’s happy. She’s just happy. And I’m putting most of that on the effect you’ve had on her.”

Clarke started to say something then closed her mouth because what could she say to that? Should she be worried about that kind of responsibility? After all, nobody should hinge their happiness on someone else. They should be happy with themselves, too.

No, she didn’t need to worry. Lexa was Lexa, and she was a complete person. She didn’t need anyone to make her happy. Rather, Clarke could complement her, and that’s exactly how things needed to be.

“She trusts you enough to let down some of her walls, and to show more of who she is. And doing it makes her happy, because you don’t judge her and she gets to be a little less wound up and controlled. Not many people know she has that in her.”

Clarke thought about Lexa’s goofy one-liners and her silly fangirl side and how she loved to cuddle and make cappuccinos decorated with steamed milk hearts and oh, my God, she had to have the hugest heart eyes right now.

“Well, she has that effect on me, too,” she said.

“I think I see that. Even though I don’t know you that well, yet, I really like your energy. And I like how you are with her. So let’s do this Christmas surprise.” He paused. “We should call this plan something.”

She laughed. “Oh, of course, because she’ll never suspect anything if you start talking about Operation Christmas or something like that.”

“Point taken. How the hell does that shit work in the movies?”

“Real life is a more difficult script.” Her phone rang and she frowned. Officer Flores, calling from her office line. “I have to take this.”

“Okay. I’ll touch base with you later.”

“Thanks, Lincoln.”

“Thank you.”
He walked away and Clarke answered her phone. “Hi. It’s Clarke.”

“Hi, Clarke. This is Valerie Flores, with Campus Police.”

“Yes. What’s going on?”

“Are you on campus right now?”


“Great. I have some information for you, but I’d prefer not to discuss it over the phone. Do you have some time before your next class?”

“I have about an hour. I’m at the student center, south entrance.”

“Perfect. I’ll be there in about fifteen minutes.”

“Okay. I’ll be outside. Bye.” She ended the call and chewed her lip. If it had been an emergency situation—like, Finn was roaming around on campus—Flores would have said so and told her to come to her office. She was good about that. She took shit seriously.

Clarke relaxed a little, but she was still uptight so she paced. First to a nearby trashcan to throw her coffee cup away then back toward the door then away from it, staying out of the way of foot traffic.

Finally, after what seemed like an hour but was probably only about ten minutes, she saw Flores approaching, but she was out of uniform, and dressed in jeans, sweatshirt, and fleece jacket. She also carried a gym bag.

“Hi, Clarke,” she said. “I’m off the clock. Where’s your next class?”

“Med Main.”

“I’ll walk you.”

“Okay…” Puzzled, she fell into step with her for the trip across campus.

“So I contacted a colleague of mine who’s based in Los Angeles,” Flores said, without preamble, which Clarke appreciated in situations like this. “And he did a courtesy check and Collins is currently in Fullerton.”

She sighed in relief. “For sure?”

“Definitely. It’s been verified.”

She didn’t push for details.

“I also had a little talk with Hannah Collins, since it was her car Finn was using when he came to campus, and he violated an order of protection in what is basically my jurisdiction. Woods supplied photo metadata, so there’s no denying the car’s time and place. This is all part of the investigation, by the way, so have your attorney contact me.”

She nodded. And of course Lexa would have that. She smiled as she walked. “Can I ask where she’s living?”

“Sure, but I’m not going to tell you because this continues to be an open kind of situation and the less you know about her, the less that she can try to pin on you if the situation develops further. I can tell
you, however, that it’s not Polis.”

That was a relief. “Did she know where I would be that day he showed up?”

Flores slowed. “She claims Collins told her he was meeting you for dinner.”

Clarke stared at her. “Do you believe her?”

“If she’s not telling the truth, she’s a very good actress. After all, I had to explain that I was contacting her because her car had been used in violating an order of protection.”

“So you’re saying she didn’t know there was one on him?” What the actual fuck?

“It’s not that uncommon for stalkers to hide things like that from family and friends. If they have either. The other tactic they might use is to claim that it’s not their fault, and the system did them wrong. In this case, she claimed that Collins said that the order was a mistake and you had gotten it removed. She also claimed that he seemed fine when he dropped her car off that day.”

Fucking hell. “How did she react when you told her he had violated the order?”

“Confused. She said he told her that he had texted you and you asked him to meet.”

A hard, cold anger welled up in her chest. Fucking liar.

“Which I know is not true because you changed your number a few days after you broke it off with him,” Flores said. She gave her a tight smile. “And I’ve seen the paperwork that proves it.”

Clarke was so glad she had detailed everything and provided copies to Flores. “What did he tell her when he dropped her car off?”

“She claims that he said you had texted him to cancel.”

“Well, that’s easy enough to prove never happened. Because there is no fucking—excuse me—freaking record of this alleged text anywhere except in his mind.”

Flores smiled. “True. I’m not worried about that.”

“I guess my next question, then, is whether she’s culpable in any of this.”

“That’s a convoluted situation. She can claim she didn’t know the order was in effect, and that he lied to her. There’s no proof that she knew it was, and no proof that if she did that she told him where you were, but if that’s the case, your best bet would probably be to sue her. Check with your attorney on that.”

Which would be such a pain, especially since there was no evidence that indicated Hannah knew what was going on. Clarke didn’t respond until they were almost to the building where her class was.

“So basically when this order expires next year, he can come back here and mess with me again and I won’t have recourse.” And all of this fucking shit would start up again.

“Not necessarily,” Flores said, and she sounded sympathetic. “Because it becomes part of his record and given that he violated the first order you took out on him, a judge may issue a new one between now and when the original expires. And if the original order expires and Collins comes back here and tries to make contact with you, he’s got a record, which will play into what happens with a new order and might affect other charges. These are more questions for your lawyer, about what your options are once the order expires if a judge doesn’t extend it either at expiration date or now, given
what happened.” She paused. “I suspect your lawyer is going to push for an extension on the current order in addition to whatever charges the court decides to issue for the violation.”

Clarke stopped near the entrance to the building, trying not to let her frustration fuck up the rest of the day. “Did you manage to find Lauren?”

“Yes. And I spoke with her, too. She claims she didn’t know about the order, either.”

“Of course she did. Do you believe her?”

“In my professional opinion, she seemed confused and told a similar story to Collins’ sister.”

Clarke chewed her lip. They could have talked before Flores contacted them. “I think she knows more than she’s letting on. And, by extension, so does Hannah.” The whole Bellamy thing still didn’t sit right with her.

“Its possible. But at this point, it’s a she said-she said-he said situation. They’re involved, but maybe not intentionally. That’s the part that’s really hard to prove. And ultimately, Collins is the one responsible for violating the order, unless you can prove that his sister and Lauren drove him to do it.”

Which didn’t seem likely. Finn had a problem with women and she doubted he’d let one plan for him like that. Instead, he’d manipulate a woman to help him get information he wanted.

“I really, really appreciate all your help on this.” She sighed.

“Hey, you’ve done everything right and you’ve got a great support system. Don’t discount that.”

Clarke nodded and managed a wan smile. “So I guess I’ll talk with the attorney again and have him contact you about these new details.”

“Sure.”

“Thanks.”

“If it’s any consolation, I can empathize with what you’re going through. And if you need anything or you want to check in, drop me a line.”

“I will. Take care.”

Flores gave her a nod and walked back the way they had come and Clarke wondered if she was going to the gym. Which made her think about Lexa and the day she had chased him across campus.

Fuck Finn. She wasn’t going to let him dictate her life. He was back in California and hopefully the courts would charge him with something soon—she’d be happy with even a misdemeanor. Something. As long as it kept piling onto his record. Asshole.

She checked her phone and responded to a text from Raven and another one from Bellamy. And yes another one from Lexa.

See you at six. Can’t wait.

And her previous tension seemed to drain out of her. same [heart eyes emoji], she texted back. And then she went into the building to class, heart much, much lighter.

###
Clarke checked herself in the mirror. Her fave faded comfie jeans, motorcycle boots, and blue flannel shirt over a tee. Casual and comfortable and layered for the December chill. They’d gotten a little bit of snow over the weekend, but nothing since then though the sky had been overcast for the past two days.

She finger-combed her hair and checked the clock on her phone. Almost six and she was already sparking like a livewire. God. When finals were done and she and Lexa had some time to hang out without school issues, she had some things to discuss with her. And they might involve tickets for a certain train.

Promptly at six a knock sounded at the door and Clarke smiled because Lexa was always on time. Part of her little control streak.

“Hi,” she said when she opened the door. And beheld a vision of holy hell fucking sexy. Lexa really shouldn’t wear tight black jeans like that. And dammit, she had on her combat boots and a faded loose red sweater over a white tee. She was holding her black and gray leather jacket.

“Hey. You look so good.”

Clarke laughed. “Says the Commander dressed like that. Let me get my coat.”

Lexus stood in the doorway and waited while Clarke put her letterman jacket on then grabbed her keys.

“Ready?” Clarke asked as she pulled the door closed and locked the deadbolt. She looked at Lexa and Lexa half-smiled then kissed her. Slow. It was somehow incredibly sweet and burning hot.

“I missed you,” Lexa said when she pulled away. “I feel like I haven’t had enough time with you the past week.”

“Same.” Clarke took Lexa’s free hand and they walked to the back stairs. “And sorry I’ve been a bitch and a stressbeast for a few days.”

“Everybody’s entitled to a bitchweek.”

“I might have more than one.”

“Okay. A bitchmonth, then.” She grinned.

They exited the building and walked to Lexa’s Jeep, where she put her coat on and opened the door for Clarke.

“Do I get to know where we’re going?” Clarke asked as she got in.

“Soon.” Lexa’s eyes sparkled with humor and that damn smirk of hers made Clarke think of all the things she wanted to do with her later. Lexa went around to the driver’s side and got in. “So how was class?” she asked as she backed up.

“Class was fine. Officer Flores wanted to talk to me before that, though.”

Lexa stopped the Jeep and looked at her. “Oh?”

“It’s okay. Just drive.” Clarke squeezed her forearm and recapped her conversation with Flores.

“That’s not…terrible,” Lexa said when she finished.
“No. And it’s nothing I didn’t expect.”

“She’s right, though. It’s damn near impossible to prove that either Lauren or Hannah drove the douchebag to violate the order. It’s also impossible to prove any kind of culpability on their part and no sane judge is going to issue a warrant to check text messages or phone records without solid evidence of wrongdoing.”

“It really turns me on when you speak lawyer,” Clarke said, teasing.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” She glanced at her. “So are you okay?”

“Yeah. It pissed me off. Again. But I’m not going to let him govern my life.”

“Good. Having said that, we do still have to be careful. So though he’s not going to dictate what you do with your life, being prudent is probably the best way to go.”

Clarke liked how Lexa used “we” in her statement, that she wasn’t alone in this and that it hadn’t turned her off or made her nervous. “How are you so okay with this?”

She flicked her a glance. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, a lot of people would probably think there was something wrong with me, that I have a stalker in my life and, worse, that I was actually with him prior to the stalking.”

“Everybody has an asshole in their past. Some of those turn out worse than we anticipated.” She paused. “Stalking is never the victim’s fault,” she said pointedly. “And he’s already suffered consequences for his behavior, not just with you.”

“Yeah, but he still showed up here to mess with me again.”

“He doesn’t associate that incident with you. In his mind, he’s always the victim, and doesn’t see that there’s a pattern of behavior where he’s concerned.”

“Maybe I should have an MMA fighter beat the shit out of him again.” Clarke stared out the window. “Only make it obvious that it’s me behind it.”

“It won’t help your case, unfortunately. Not to suggest I’m opposed to this scenario. It’s just that, unfortunately, we have to play within a system of rules that are, in a lot of ways, antiquated and put the onus of responsibility on the actual victim. It’s fucking bullshit, and it might be part of the reason that I’m going into law. Because it pisses me off.”

“Same. And I really like the idea of the Commander in a courtroom.”

She laughed. “Point being, the asshole is not your fault. You figured out he was toxic and did what sane people did. You broke up with him. But because he’s toxic, he didn’t react the way most normal people would—be hurt and pissed for a while, but move on. Instead, he got even more toxic or maybe just exhibited serious toxicity that he hid while he was with you. Regardless, his reactions aren’t on you. They’re all his responsibility. Which he refuses to accept. And unfortunately, that leaves us having to deal with his bullshit through a system that doesn’t work as well as it should.”

Clarke studied her profile for a few moments. “Sometimes I wish communities could deal with shit like this, and my friends and family could just give him a warning and then, if he violated the warning, kick the shit out of him and banish him.”

Lexa glanced at her again. “There are benefits to this approach, and some cultures still use it. But
now we’re just a tangle of systems that are set up to benefit certain people. And it’s not that people like me can completely change it. But maybe I can help those who aren’t benefited. And open a can of whup-ass, as Indra’s mom says, on assholes who abuse it.”

Clarke laughed. “Best image ever.”

Lexa turned into a mostly full parking lot and Clarke realized she’d been so focused on telling Lexa what happened that she hadn’t paid much attention to where they were going. “Oh, my God. I haven’t been to the food trucks in months. I didn’t think they kept going through December.”

“Some do and some don’t,” Lexa said with a smile as she parked. “My fave truck is here until the twenty-third.” She pointed at one of them, which actually looked like a 1950s-era travel trailer. A big white sign on the side with the order counter said “Lupe’s” in bright red.

“And it finally dawned on Clarke. “Captain Taco has brought me to Taco Tuesday. This is epic.”

Lexa laughed and Clarke kissed her.

“That’s for Taco Tuesday,” Clarke said against her lips. “I’ve got something else for Captain Taco later.”

“Damn,” Lexa said, her expression heated. “I seriously don’t mind hanging out right here for a while.”

Clarke kissed her again. “As interesting as it might be to do certain activities in your Jeep, I’m not sure it would be entirely comfortable.” She grinned and stood outside, waiting for Lexa as she watched the people standing in groups near each of the food trucks. She enjoyed the smells emanating from the several trucks gathered, and caught the odor of barbecue and French fries, the rich tang of Thai, and what was probably pizza. And…there it was. The down-to-Earth comfortable smell of really good tacos.

“I mean, you don’t have to do tacos,” Lexa said as they walked. “Lupe makes a stellar burrito, too. She’ll even put one in a bowl for you without the tortilla.”

“Thank God I don’t have to worry about that.” She checked the menu, which was hanging under the trailer’s main sign. A few other people were checking it, too, but Clarke decided quickly what she wanted. “Oh, hell, yes. I want the mix and match street tacos. Chicken, fajita beef, and pork.”

“Nice. That’s one of my fave orders, too. Want to share a quesadilla? They’re the size of a plate.”

“Yes, and how are you able to read my mind?”

Lexa laughed and shoulder-bumped her. “The Commander might just understand the Master of Pancakes better than she thinks.”

“She just might. And the Master of Pancakes appreciates it.”

There were four people in front of them in the line, and Clarke slid her arms around Lexa’s waist as they waited and God, this was the best, standing here with her, talking about everything and nothing until they stepped up to the counter.

“Hey, Lexa. What’s up?” a teenaged guy with dark eyes said to her with a grin. “Good to see you.” He looked to be maybe seventeen and he was wearing a black hoodie and a green ski cap with dark
hair that peeked out from under it. He had kind of a lop-sided smile that was cute.

“Lexa? Lexa’s here?” A woman who looked to be in her mid-late thirties appeared next to him. She wore her dark hair short, in a cute pixie cut that suited her, and a dark red sweatshirt. “Where have you been?” But before Lexa could answer, the woman practically burst out the trailer door and gave Lexa a huge hug. “I know, I know,” she scolded, but she was smiling, “Busy with classes.” And then she saw Clarke.

She let go of Lexa and gave Clarke a quick onceover, but she wore a sly smile the whole time. “And with other things, too. Uh-huh.” She raised her eyebrows suggestively and Clarke fought a laugh.

“Oh, God,” Lexa muttered, but she was smiling, too. “Maybe a little.”

The woman gave her a playful smack on her arm. “I’m not mad, now that I see the reason for you not coming by.”

“Jesus,” Lexa said. “Lupe, this is Clarke.”

“Hi,” she said before Lupe continued grilling Lexa about her. “Lexa told me the best tacos ever are right here.”

“She’s right,” said the guy while Lupe nodded.

“And that’s Hector.” Lexa gestured at him.

He gave Clarke one of those cool guy waves that somehow didn’t seem dickish coming from him before he handed a food order to another customer.

“How are you?” Lexa asked Lupe.

“Fabulous. So tell me. Have you been cheating on me with other tacos?”

Clarke stifled a laugh about that and because she could totally see Raven turning into Lupe in ten years.

“Only once. And it’s because I was drinking margaritas and Clarke knew I needed to eat something. So she got me tacos.”

“That is acceptable adultery,” Lupe said and she gave Clarke an approving nod then looked at Lexa. “She clearly looks out for you. I feel much better knowing she—in addition to school—are the reason I haven’t seen you in a while. And now it’s dinner time.” And she practically bounced back into the trailer. “What has Lexa said about my tacos?” she asked Clarke, looking at her over the counter.

Lexa gave Clarke a comical “help me” look.

“That they’re her favorite tacos ever. And it’s clear to me that they have to be excellent and special or she wouldn’t have brought me here. Lexa’s pretty picky about what she shares and who with.”

“That—” Lupe pointed a spatula at her, “is the voice of wisdom. And it thus deserves tacos. Tell me which ones.”

Clarke did, and Lupe nodded sagely. “More wisdom. That’s also one of Lexa’s favorite orders.”

“Nailed it. Same, please,” Lexa said. “And a quesadilla and two Diet Cokes.” She paid, after giving Clarke a look that broadcast there was no point to arguing about it with her.
“On it,” Hector said with a grin and he turned to what was probably a grill. Clarke couldn’t tell from her angle, since the trailer sat high, but she heard meat sizzling and the smell of spices wafted from the interior and damn, this was like being around Raven’s mom when she cooked.

“So how are Indra and Gustus?” Lupe asked as she handed Lexa the cans of soda.

“They’re doing well. Indra’s mom isn’t, though. She may be living with them in the next couple of months. Maybe sooner.”

Lupe shook her head. “That sucks. It’s always hard when that happens to family. Are you going to see them for Christmas?”

“Yes. I’ll tell them to get their asses down here for tacos.”

“It’ll have to be in the spring. I’ll be back in March. People need my tacos in Phoenix until then.”

“People will always need your tacos everywhere,” Lexa said.

“And now for the Clarke interrogation.” Lupe grinned. “How do you know Lexa?”

“We’re neighbors, actually.”

“Convenient.” She raised her eyebrows and gave Lexa a teasing glance then shifted it back to Clarke. “What do you do for a living?”

“Student. Med school.”

“Nice. I’ll have a lawyer and a doctor in my court. Excellent work, Lexa.”

Clarke laughed. “And I’m glad to get a taco queen in mine.”

“That needs to be on a T-shirt,” Lupe said. “But right now, I’m going to work on your quesadilla.” She turned away from the counter and Lexa addressed Clarke.

“Hector helps Lupe when she’s here. He’s her nephew,” she explained. “I found this place about three years ago when Indra and Gustus were in town visiting. Roan’s actually been, too, when he and Gustus came through on a lumber run for one of Gustus’ projects at home. So Lupe knows him, too.”

“I kinda love all these networks you have.”

“I kinda love bringing you into them,” she said softly and that plus the expression in her eyes left Clarke all melty inside.

“Tacos up, Lexa,” Hector said and he placed two paper plates on the counter.

“Awesome.” Lexa took both plates and immediately started adding sauces from the squeeze bottles provided next to the napkin dispenser on the counter to hers.

Clarke did the same, deciding to try the medium and hot red sauces but also the tomatillo.

Hector handed Lexa a plate of chips and an empty paper bowl.

“Excellent. You have to try Lupe’s salsa,” she said to Clarke and she squeezed some into the empty bowl then handed it to her. “Grab the table.” She motioned with her chin at a picnic table set up nearby. Two people on the other end were just finishing up.
“And I see why you told me to dress warm.”

“You have to get the full experience,” Lexa said. “No matter what season.”

“Totally loving it.” She sat down and Lexa put her plate of tacos and the plate of chips down.

Lexa went back to the counter and got a few napkins then returned to the table. “Let’s eat.”

Clarke picked up her chicken taco—stuffed with meat, guacamole, and cilantro—and added a few of the onions that Hector had put on the side then squeezed one of the lime wedges over it. Satisfied, she took a bite and a warm flavor explosion occurred in her mouth. “Oh, my God,” she said when she had swallowed. “These are…so good. I mean, Mike’s are good, too, but these…damn.”

“Told you.”

Clarke continued eating, and though it was cold out everything about this meal was perfect, from the excellent food to the banter she heard between Hector and Lupe to Lexa’s thigh against hers (which might’ve been one of the best parts).

“Quesadilla, Lexa,” Hector said from the counter window and Lexa got up to get it, and Clarke’s thigh missed her immediately. Fortunately, she returned in seconds.

“Lupe puts an amazing sauce on these,” Lexa said as she handed Clarke one of the quarter wedges. Clarke took a bite. “Wow. What’s in it?”

“Secret sauce,” Lupe said from the counter. “My sister’s recipe.”

“I have to bring Raven here,” Clarke said after another bite.

Lexa nodded. “Definitely.”

Clarke pressed her shoulder against Lexa’s. “I love this. The food, the company, the whole idea of this. Excellent date, Commander.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

“So can we finalize some plans?” Clarke asked as she finished the second taco.

“For…?”

“Break and New Year’s.”

Lexa dipped a chip into the salsa. “I’m leaving around noon on the twenty-third and then I’ll be with Indra, Gustus, and Lincoln until around noon on the twenty-seventh. And I’m really hoping that you’ll want to hang out with me when I get back.” She flashed her a smile.

“Duh. So you should be home around one or one-thirty on the twenty-seventh?”

“Weather permitting. If it gets bad, I might have to delay things.”

“So let’s hope it doesn’t. So how about New Year’s? Do you want to go party-hopping?”

“I want to be wherever you are,” she said as she took another wedge of quesadilla.

“Which of course goes without saying in my case, too. But do you think you’d want to go to a
couple of parties? We could start at Echo’s and end at Anya’s. Or reverse that order. And I think Harper and Monty are doing something, too, but they planned to eventually end up at Anya’s.”

“So it sounds like we should start at Echo’s and end at Anya’s. We can Uber or Lyft it, so we can always go somewhere else, too.”

Clarke started on her last taco. “So that’s okay with you? Party-hopping?”

“Definitely. Looking forward to it.”

“And in a related matter—kind of—did you want to do something for Christmas?”

“Like what?”

“Whatever you want to do. I mean, I know Christmas is shitty for you, so maybe it would be fun to do something totally unrelated with me. Like, UnChristmas or something.”

Lexa smiled. “‘UnChristmas’? Is that a thing?”

She shrugged. “It could be. If you want. I’d also like to get you something, if that’s okay.”

Lexa stopped eating and looked at her. “Like what?”

And something in her tone gave Clarke pause. “Okay, let me preface this by saying that in my crew, we have a rule that we don’t buy anything over ten dollars for anyone. Though I have broken that rule a couple of times for Raven. Anyway, a lot of times we’ll do secret Santa, but more recently we’ve actually just gone out for drinks or we’ve had a house party with goofy party favors.”

“That sounds fun,” she said, tone cautious.

“And also, every year we agree to donate time or money to a particular charity or two. So Christmas isn’t some big thing in my life. And it wasn’t before my dad died, either. I mean, he had fun and all and he liked to put a tree and lights up, but most of the time, we’d all go do something together rather than exchange gifts, though my parents got me things when I was a kid. In high school, they’d ask me what I really wanted or needed and get that. I did the same with them.” Shit. Was she rambling?

Lexa didn’t respond and instead nibbled on another chip, everything about her broadcasting stress.

“Point being, it can be whatever you’d like. I mean, UnChristmas could be cool because we could just do whatever instead of anything that’s so-called ‘traditional’.”

“You don’t have to get me anything,” she said, tone clipped.

Clarke started to respond then stopped and thought about what she could say, since it was clear that this was a difficult topic for Lexa. “What if I want to?”

Lexa finished her last taco and a tense silence filled the air between them. Finally, she broke it.

“I just….” she sighed and got up. She gathered the empty plates and took them to the trash can while Clarke tossed their empty soda cans into the recycling bin.

“You outta here?” Hector asked, looking at her from the order window. Three people stood in line, still deciding.

“Yeah,” Lexa said, but there was strain in her voice now.
“You take care,” Lupe said, appearing suddenly next to him. “If I don’t see you before spring, don’t do anything I would.” And she looked at Clarke and grinned.

“Same to you,” Lexa said. “See you in the spring for sure.”

“It was good to meet you,” Clarke said. “And those were the best tacos ever.”

“Tell everybody you know,” Lupe said. “I like being a cool secret, but not the best-kept one.”


She stopped.

“Let’s take a walk.”

She nodded and Clarke took her hand, relieved that she was amenable, and they walked toward the park that shared the parking lot with the food trucks. “Talk to me,” she said after a few minutes of walking along the path. The city had set up streetlights every hundred feet or so, which offered pools of light in the winter dark.

“I feel like this is really stupid.”

“Why?”

“Because lots of people don’t like Christmas.”

“And?”

Lexa rubbed her eyes with her other hand. “Fuck. Fine. Here it is. Christmas isn’t my best holiday.”

“So you’ve said.”

“And this time of year isn’t the best for me, either, because of all the reminders everywhere about it. Most of the time I’m okay about that. But sometimes I’m not, and it throws me off a little.”

Clarke interlaced her fingers with Lexa’s, not talking, giving her room to continue but also making sure to maintain physical contact.

“This time of year is hard for me,” she said after a while. She didn’t look at Clarke as she spoke. “My biological parents pretty much banned Christmas as things got bad between us.” She paused. “Actually, they banned it from me, since they still did Christmas things with everybody but me. Just not at the house.”

Jesus fucking Christ. Clarke stared at her, picking out her features in the dark, and her heart ached —ached—for younger Lexa. She gently squeezed her hand, signaling that she was listening.

“And all of my friends at school would be really excited about Christmas break and I fucking hated it because it meant I was alone in that house, with parents who didn’t talk to me much but didn’t have the balls to just kick me out. I think they didn’t do that because they—my mom, especially—didn’t want to have to tell people that they’d kicked their only child out of the house. So they just made things really fucking hard so that I’d leave on my own and they could blame it on me. I really believe that’s what my mom did.”

“Shit.” How in the everloving fuck could anybody do that to their only child? Clarke wanted to wrap her up in her arms and never let go.
“Right?” Lexa sighed again. “Lincoln knew. I think he probably told Indra and Gustus because I somehow ended up with them for Christmases before I emancipated. I don’t know what they ever said to my parents about it, but I didn’t care because they made me feel included.” She stopped walking. “And wanted.” She was quiet for a while, but she still gripped Clarke’s hand and Clarke focused hard on their intertwined fingers, trying to will everything she felt for her through that connection right into her heart, right into the dark, cold corners that still haunted her.

“But I still have this thing about Christmas,” Lexa said, voice soft. “I still get this sense of rejection, even though Indra and Gustus and Lincoln are my family and they love me and I have fun with them this time of year. I just—I can’t completely shake what happened, and it always makes me feel really small and lonely. Especially because there are times that I remember clearly how I felt before I told Lincoln what was going on, though he already suspected. And I didn’t talk much then about what was really going on. I mean, who the hell would believe me? My mom was well-known in her work and church circles and my dad was military. And here I was, just a punk-ass teenager.”

Her voice tightened and she cleared her throat. “Nobody listens to kids,” she added and in the glow from one of the streetlights along the path, Clarke saw a single tear slide down her cheek.

“Lexa,” Clarke said softly. “Come here.”

She looked at her, eyes full of the past, but she leaned in and Clarke gathered her close and Lexa held on to her so tightly it was almost painful but Clarke didn’t care.

“Lincoln believed me,” she said against Clarke’s neck. “And Indra and Gustus did, too. But I can’t shake this sense that if I had just been a better daughter, maybe things would’ve been different.”

Clarke tightened her hold.

“And I know that’s not logical. But sometimes, it’s how I feel. Especially this time of year.” Her voice cracked and she stopped talking and Clarke continued to hold on, but she stroked Lexa’s head with one of her hands, wishing she could make her feel better, that she could maybe kick her parents in their heads.

“So that’s why I’m not a fan of Christmas,” Lexa said after a while.

“It’s completely legit. But I need you to think about something.”

“What?”

“I’m not your past,” she said softly.

“I know,” Lexa said against her neck. “But it’s still hard to deal with the baggage.”

“That’s fair. And I will support you with that in any way I can.”

Lexus kissed her neck. “Damn, Clarke. I feel sometimes that meeting you is a dream.”

She kissed Lexa’s forehead. “I’m really, really glad it’s not. And I have an idea.”

“Okay,” she said cautiously.

“How about we change the narrative?”

Lexa pulled away and wiped her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I said. We make our own traditions.”
“Like what?”

“Like—hell, I don’t know. Pizza on Christmas Eve and movies all Christmas Day. With tons of popcorn. And M&Ms. Or black-and-whites, maybe, if I’m lucky and you make some.”

Lexa smiled and Clarke gently wiped tears away from her face with her thumb. “It can be whatever you want it to be. We could eat tacos and play football in the park. Or we could go to Dan’s and bowl in the dark with the light-up shoes.”


“Why not? There’s no rule that says we have to do Christmas like everybody else or that we have to have decorations or trees or lights if we don’t want to.”

“I do kind of like lights.”

Clarke smiled. “Then we’ll have lights. All year ’round if that’s your mood. The point is, it can be whatever you want it to be. As low-key or as nuts as you want. I’m here for whatever you want to do with Christmas, whenever.”

Lexa stared into her eyes, a half-smile teasing the corner of her mouth and fuck, Clarke was powerless to do anything but just stare back at her, caught in her gaze, stuck on her smile, and pretty much a total goner.

“This sounds suspiciously like you’re talking about more than one Christmas,” Lexa said, a teasing but hopeful note in her voice.

“Well, we have to try a bunch of different things to see which tradition we like best,” she said, deflecting a bit but only because she wasn’t quite ready to say what she’d been mulling with regard to her feelings. “The object here is to override the shitty things that happened in the past with much better things. And that, of course, could take more than one.” And hell yes, she was talking about lots of Christmases. Tons. So many fucking Christmases or UnChristmases or whatever the hell Lexa wanted.

“That could apply to almost anything.”

“Exactly.”

Lexa kissed her and Clarke of course lost her train of thought, which was standard operating procedure when Lexa did things like that.

“So does this mean I can get you a present?” Clarke asked, lips against Lexa’s.

“Is this part of Christmas or UnChristmas?”

“Whichever. We can totally call it UnChristmas, if that helps.”

Lexa cupped Clarke’s cheek. “I would do pretty much anything for you, Pancake Master.”

“I’m not getting anything for you if you’re not on board. But I also need you to know that you’re pretty fucking special to me and I would really like to get you something for UnChristmas.”

Lexa smiled and pressed her lips against Clarke’s forehead. “Fine.”

“So how about I give this to you after the official dates? Maybe that’ll help establish the new traditions.”
“After I get back from Indra and Gustus’s?”

“Or I could give you a package to unwrap there. Totally up to you.”

“I think I’d like to have a private moment with you to do that. So can I raincheck until the twenty-seventh?”

“Yes.” And she was aching to tell her that she’d see her on the twenty-fifth, but she kept her mouth shut somehow about that.

“Then okay. I’ll do UnChristmas with you.”

Clarke gave her a saucy little grin. “It’ll be fun. I guarantee it.”

“I believe you.”

“Good. So how about we go home now and I talk you into bed?”

Lexa pulled her close, eyes sparking with that seriously hot predatory flirtatiousness she tended to get. “You think you can?”

“Please. I know I can.” And Clarke bit down on Lexa’s lower lip.

“And I want to watch you do it,” Lexa said in a way that had Clarke hot all over.

“Then come on, Commander. Take me home.”

And Lexa kissed her, long and slow. “Gladly,” she said after a few oh, so amazing moments. “And thank you.”

“For…?”

“Understanding.”

Clarke took her hand again and gently tugged her back toward the parking lot. “I told you. You’re special to me. And you’re also kind of stuck with me, so there’s that.” And she didn’t freak out saying it. Not even a little bit.

“Good. Because you’re stuck with me, too.”

“Yeah, well, I was kind of hoping for that.”

Lexa grinned. “Only kind of?”

Clarke gave her a look. “How about you take me home and find out?”

And Lexa rewarded her with one of her hot-ass smirks and increased her pace to the Jeep and when Clarke got herself situated in the passenger seat, she had the weirdest sensation that she’d been here before, that Lexa had been in her life for so much longer than she had, and that the connection between them was the most natural thing in the world.

She decided she’d tell Lexa all those things, after the stress of Christmas was past and finals were over and they really did have a few days to themselves.

Because right now, she had a lot of other things on her mind where Lexa was concerned.
Lots of other things.

All good.

Chapter End Notes

Street tacos, y'all. If you haven't had them, WHY THE HELL NOT?

Also, I did MOAR RESEARCH and talked to some attorney friends and changed "restraining order" to "order of protection" throughout, which is more accurate to describe what Clarke took out on the douchebag. I changed it accordingly throughout the text. :) 

Oh, and MOAR GD FEELZ. Looking foward to Christmas/UnChristmas...
Clarke looked up from her laptop when her phone dinged with a text message. She had a slight headache, but she needed to finish this section of her lab project so she could keep to her finals schedule. She always did a finals schedule, and mapped out due dates and set aside specific study time for each class. It kept her focused. And holy hell, finals were next week.

The text was from Lincoln.

*Got a minute?*

Clarke called him. Fortunately, she had picked one of the more quiet corners of the student union.

“Hey,” he said when he answered and it reminded her of the way Lexa often answered. “So I talked to Indra.”

“And?”

“Operation Christmas is a go,” he said, and she practically heard his grin through the phone.

“Great. So what’s the plan?” She tried to sound nonchalant even though she was really stoked about arranging this.

“Indra said we’ll figure out a way to get Lexa out of the house until around six-thirty, which should give you enough time to get there. Obviously, if the weather’s bad, we’ll adjust accordingly or just cancel. Which I really hope doesn’t happen.”

“Same here.” That would suck so hard if she couldn’t get to Virginia the twenty-fifth.

“So I’ll text you the address and a few instructions. It’s a little out of town and sometimes hard to find on a map. And you can text or call me.”

Clarke stared at her coffee cup for a moment. “Does Indra want to talk to me?”

“For what? We’ve got this.”

“Uh, to maybe get a sense of me before I show up and…um…PDA all over her niece.” Which might or might not be awkward.

Lincoln laughed. “No worries. I vouched for you. And Indra prefers to judge in person.”

“Oh. Well, that makes me feel *so* much better.”
“Seriously, chill. It’s going to be fine. Both Indra and Gustus are looking forward to meeting you.”

“Oh, okay. No pressure there or anything.”

He laughed again. “Damn. Stop stressing. It’s going to be fine. Promise. So did you have any kind of specific plan for after you get there?”

“Yeah, actually. Lexa told me that Gustus makes epic deep fried turkey, so I thought maybe he also likes to grill out.”

“Totally. And are you suggesting a Christmas cookout?”

“Yes. I haven’t had this opportunity to enjoy a cookout with Lexa yet, but she has commented that she likes ribs.”

“Oh, hell, yes. She loves ribs. And Gustus loves to grill them. Let me call and find out if they’d be down with that, though I’m pretty sure they will because Gustus seriously grills all year ’round. What a great idea.”

“Awesome. Can I give you some money for the ribs?”

“Don’t worry about it right now. Plan on bringing a couple of things, though. Lexa loves those sweet and sour pickle chips with her ribs, so if you can get her some of those, that would be great. She’s not particular about brand. Unlike how she is with coffee.”

Clarke laughed. “She is pretty particular about that. And about tea.”

“Oh, my God, right? I swear, being a barista snobbed her up in some ways.”

But Clarke found Lexa’s little quirks really fucking endearing.

“Speaking of palates, Indra will totally make mac n’ cheese and mashed potatoes.” He paused. “Which means I’m going to have to get Lexa out of the house for chunk of that afternoon, to give Indra time to do that. She’ll need about two hours.”

“What about Gustus? How much time does he need to prep ribs?”

“He’s a grill pro, so he’ll need about two hours. One to prep, one plus a little extra to grill. And I’m not kidding when I say he’s a pro. He’s one of the only people I know who can literally cook ribs right on the grill and they come out as tender as they do when he smokes them. And that’s something you’ll have to experience, is when he smokes them. But that takes a good six to seven hours, so that’s not happening this trip.”

Clarke calculated. “Okay, so basically you need to get Lexa out of the house for at least three hours the twenty-fifth.”

“Maybe two. Because even if the ribs aren’t completely cooked, they’ll be almost cooked—same with the potatoes and mac. And it’ll be fun for her to come back to the house and know that it’s all in progress. Especially when she sees you there. She’s not going to care that dinner isn’t completely cooked when we get back. She’s not uptight about stuff like that. And you will be a totally amazing distraction.”

She heard a smile in his voice.

“And,” he continued, “if it’s not snowing or doing that freezing rain thing, we can have a fire in the
firepit, too. She likes that.”

“So do I. Okay, so is that legit, then? Ribs, mac n’ cheese, and mashed potatoes. My mom and I can make a couple of pecan pies.” Abby would totally get into that, Clarke knew, because it was something they could do together and it was something for Lexa and Abby had a mom crush on her. And Jesus Christ, she was now completely overcome by heart eyes.

“Oh, fuck, for sure. Perfect. I’ll take care of beverages.” He paused. “This is going to be really, really cool. And I have to get to class right now. We’ll touch base about it in a few more days.”

“Oh. Thanks.”

“No, thank you.”

“For what?”

“Doing this. And for giving her a chance. Bye.” He hung up and Clarke stared at her coffee cup again, all kinds of butterflies loose in her chest and stomach. What the hell? Lexa had given her a chance.

She thought about it for a few moments.

No, it was mutual, this dance they’d been doing since they had first met. Everything since then, too—the gentle, careful way they had negotiated each other’s boundaries and the unspoken acceptance of where the other was emotionally—all of it had been mutual, but so easy, because they often communicated without actually talking, seemingly able to sense when the other needed to be pushed or not.

And here Clarke bit her lip and smiled because the little headache she’d been nursing was probably caused by being up way too late the night before engaged in all kinds of activities with Lexa after their street taco date and holy hell, even thinking about it—okay, time to stop. She had work to do. So did Lexa. And getting all revved up at the student center before class and then lab was really not advisable. But how much fun would it be, finding a quiet spot in the law library or somewhere comparable on campus and unbuttoning Lexa’s shirt—

Fuck. Stop it. Work to do.

But damn. That was a hot image.

She unlocked her phone and looked at photos of Lexa, of the two of them together, of Lexa laughing with Raven and Anya, of—fuck. Now she was thinking about stuff that gave her feels and that was probably not effective for class or lab, either.

Dammit.

She texted Lexa. thinking @ u

She sent it, figuring she wouldn’t hear back for a while because this was normally Lexa’s workout time and oh, fuck, that was an image. All sweaty and pumped up and—

Jesus.

She needed to get it together. And then her phone dinged with a message from Lexa.

Oh? What specifically?
Clarke could visualize her, that little smirk at the corner of her mouth. Maybe a raised eyebrow…

*entirely impure thoughts*, she texted back.

A few moments later she got another message and she opened it and bit her lip hard to keep from groaning aloud. Lexa had sent a selfie, in which she was sitting on a weight bench, hair pulled back, towel around her neck. Tank top. Sweaty. Pumped up. Grinning. Shoulders exposed. The caption was, *does this help with that?*

“Oh, my God,” Clarke whispered. *jsdafhsdksldflghjfdjkl kind of hate u for this*

*lol [kiss emoji]*, Lexa texted back.

Clarke waited before responding, as Lexa was composing another message.

*Do you have any idea*

*how much I want you?*

Good God. Clarke read the texts again. And again. And okay, several more times. She was about to reply when Lexa sent another series of texts.

*In so many ways.*

*And I want to show you*

*each*

*and*

*every*

*one*

Fucking hell. There was something so much sexier about texts like this than just dirty talking. Though it was incredibly hot when Lexa engaged in that, too. But somehow, Clarke preferred the dirty talk live or on the phone rather than in a text, because she loved Lexa’s voice, and how it sounded when she said what she wanted Clarke to do to her. But writing things that hinted of that in a text…it turned her on in other ways. She liked the hints and the mystery and the anticipation. *God* how she loved the anticipation.

*this can be arranged*, she texted back. And fuck, class and lab were going to suck today. They would feel like the longest class and lab in the history of Polis University. Hands down.

*I really like how we’re on the same page about so many things.*

*same. when do u get home?* Because Jesus fucking Christ, Clarke would be waiting for her.

*Six-ish. Have to meet w/ my study group at 5. I’ll order That. Because we’ll need sustenance.*

Clarke read that text a few times, too. She so loved Lexa’s little quirks, like her proper grammar and spelling in her texts that sometimes included a slip into more informal text language. So much like her in some ways. Presenting a formal façade to the world, a wall—maybe armor?—but underneath it, so much depth and warmth. And so much goddamn sexy. She texted back.

*& now u expect me 2 go 2 class thinking @ this? srsly?* She sighed, frustrated, but also really happy. And so turned on. Dammit. She’d get more coffee. That would help get her mind off this for at least
thirty seconds.

But Lexa texted another series of texts. *And I’m here at the gym thinking all kinds of things I’d much rather be doing.*

*To you.*

*With you.*

*Shit.*

*I am so turned on right now.*

Clarke bit her lip and groaned softly. *feel my pain [pouting emoji] she texted back.*

*I’d like to feel more than that later on,* Lexa responded.

Clarke sighed, frustrated. *hold that thought.*

*I plan on holding much more than that.*

Goddammit. Lexa was clearly in a mood. Not that Clarke minded, because she loved it when Lexa flirted like this, loved it when she hinted in texts what she wanted. And what the hell? How was it possible that she herself was ready for even more rounds? They’d spent the night before engaging in a whole hell of a lot of amazing activities, after all. Which of course continued this morning, since Clarke didn’t have to be on campus until that afternoon.

And now here they were, barely hours later, on hormone overdrive. She looked at the photo Lexa had sent from the gym again and Jesus Christ there was no fucking reason on this earth that anybody should be that goddamn sexy. And it was practically criminal, not doing something about it.

She checked the time and looked at the photo again. Chewed her lip. Drumped her fingers on the tabletop. And then she started packing up her laptop and books in a hurry. She practically threw her coat on, then her backpack, and walked her empty coffee cup to the trash. Up the stairs she went, throwing her study schedule out the window for a bit because she had forty minutes before class.

And a lot could happen in forty minutes.

For example, the rec center was only five minutes away from the student center.

Clarke covered it in three. She had her student ID out and ready for scanning and barely acknowledged the greetings from the desk staff. She beelined to the weight room and stood in the doorway, scanning the spacious interior, filled with a variety of machines, and toward the back, free weights, where an all-too-familiar form was seated on a bench doing arm curls—fuck, that was hot, too.

But then, Lexa could just be sitting in a chair and be fucking hot.

Clarke went right to the locker room and once inside, went to the last changing stall on the end, closest to the showers. Nobody paid any attention to her. That was one of the nice things about locker rooms. People were in their own zones.

She closed the curtain behind her, glad that it almost touched the tiled floor. The curtain demarcated the border between exterior tile outside the stalls and carpet inside. The wooden walls were reminiscent of a public bathroom stall, in that they didn’t go to the ceiling nor did they touch the
floor, though the gap was only about six inches and if someone was in the stall next door, they might be able to figure out what Clarke had in mind once Lexa got there. But she didn’t care and she texted her.

*i rly need 2 c u. last chging stall in locker room. i have @ 30 mins*

She took her pack and coat off and set them both on the slatted wooden bench bolted to the back wall. She then pulled her sweater off and hung it on one of the hooks on the back wall.

And at that moment the curtain moved a little and Lexa entered without having to push it aside, though she made sure it closed behind her. She carried her gym bag and she turned and stared at Clarke, pretty much undressing her with her gaze. Which was a whole other level of sexy, to see the thirst in Lexa’s eyes directed at her.

Clarke smiled and Lexa set her bag down next to the curtain, providing another barrier, maybe, to intrusion but at this point, Clarke didn’t care because here was Lexa, in her fucking hot-ass running tights and tank top, hair a little disheveled, a sheen of sweat on her skin and good God there was no way Clarke could resist that and fuck, there were only inches between them, since they pretty much were in a slightly glorified bathroom-sized stall.

So Clarke did the only logical thing called for in such circumstances, which was to cup the back of Lexa’s neck and pull her into a hard, raw, kiss and it sent shockwaves down her thighs, and Lexa returned it, equally hard and raw, like she was so damn hungry for this, like she hadn’t seen Clarke in weeks when they’d only just been together.

She practically jerked Lexa’s tank off, then cupped one of her breasts through her sports bra and pressed her lips to her chest, above her breasts, and she tasted salt, sweat, and that indefinable something she knew only too well as Lexa and fuck, her shoulders tasted the same and God, they were gorgeous. Clarke could compose songs about them.

And fuck, it was so hot how Lexa’s nipples hardened through her bra and oh, shit, Lexa yanked Clarke’s shirt out of her pants and then over her head and she went to work on Clarke’s breasts through her bra with her mouth and hands, hot and hard, and Clarke was already so wet and ready that she probably could have come just from rubbing against the inside seam of her jeans.

Lexa pushed her against the interior wall, kissing her again as she undid Clarke’s belt and then the button and zipper of her jeans and Clarke clenched her teeth together to keep from making any kind of sound that would reveal what was actually happening in this changing stall. Which only added to the forbidden-ness of it and made it that much hotter.

And then Lexa worked her fingers into Clarke’s underwear and slid them gently but deliberately—oh, fuck. She slid two right in up to her knuckles, no preamble, but the circumstances called for urgent and Clarke saw stars as Lexa moved them in a way that worked in the confines of Clarke’s clothing. And Lexa kissed her, and sucked Clarke’s tongue into her mouth and oh, God, she was so entirely worked up and wanting and somehow Lexa was able to pump her fingers in and out, in a rhythm that had Clarke practically losing coherent thought.

She groaned softly against Lexa’s lips and hoped it wouldn’t be heard outside the stall, even though the sounds of the showers and the slamming of locker doors and the myriad conversations beyond the curtain might be a buffer. Still, she worked to keep it from getting too loud, one of the more difficult things she had to do right now.

And then Lexa’s thumb was against her clit and that combined with the movements of her fingers sent Clarke barreling for orgasm central.
“So close,” Clarke whispered, heart pounding, core aching, and Lexa smiled.

“I know.”

And why the fuck was that so hot, Lexa saying that at this moment? Lexa kissed her again, and captured Clarke’s long, low grown with her mouth as she came hard, a tide racing through her bones and up and down her thighs, and Jesus God, Lexa kept thrusting and fuck, she was still turned on, but there wasn’t much time and she moved and helped Lexa extricate her hand and fuck, no, Lexa was not going to keep that shit-eating grin for long, if Clarke had anything to do about it.

She pulled Lexa into another hard kiss then moved so that Lexa’s back was now against the interior wall of the stall and Clarke pushed her thigh between Lexa’s and she responded immediately, grinding against it, breath emanating between her teeth in short bursts.

“God, yes,” she said softly against Clarke’s mouth. “Fuck, I need you—” she moaned, a barely audible sound and fuck this shit, Clarke wanted to feel her, wanted her fingers inside her, and she slipped her hand into Lexa’s running tights.

“Yes. Jesus, Clarke. Like that,” she whispered.

And oh, God, Clarke loved it when Lexa said things like that, when she gave herself over to the moment, and trusted that she would take care of her.

“I’ve got you,” Clarke whispered back and she bit back a groan at how fucking wet Lexa was, at how hot and slick and ready, and Lexa buried her hands in Clarke’s hair and then ran them down her back as Clarke entered her and then Lexa was thrusting against her hand and their kisses were heated and hard and so fucking deep and dirty and was it possible to come from kissing?

Probably, where Lexa was concerned. But who cared about that, when she felt Lexa clamp around her fingers, when Lexa’s hands were all over her back and ass, holding on hard, and she was sucking Clarke’s tongue into her mouth as she came?

Making Lexa feel this good was Clarke’s number one priority on her list of things to do in life.

And as Lexa shuddered and jerked then relaxed against her, as she kissed her more slowly, then stopped and leaned her forehead against hers, breathing returning to normal with Clarke’s, it was all Clarke could do to keep her heart from exploding from the feels engulfing it right now.

“Did we seriously just do that here?” Lexa whispered after a few more moments.

“Mmm hmm.” She stroked Lexa’s cheek. “Hope you don’t mind me dropping by like this,” she said, keeping her voice low.

Lexa chuckled softly. “Do I look like I mind?” She kissed Clarke’s forehead. “By all means. Please drop by any time.” And then she gathered Clarke in for a hug and Jesus God, how could anybody be so fucking perfect? So incredibly sexy and strong and vulnerable and soft all at the same time? So goddamn tender, even after a smoking hot fuckfest in a semi-public venue?

Clarke tightened the hug and held on for a few more moments. “I have to go to class,” she said softly.

“I know.” Lexa kissed her again.

“And for the record, I’ve never done this before.”
“Um, you’ve done me several times before.” And she gave her one of her sexy little half-smiles.

Clarke bit back a laugh. “Not in a changing stall at the gym.”

“I haven’t either. But it pretty much worked. Please do decide to interrupt me in the future should you…um…need to.”

Clarke smirked and pulled away. “Same goes for you,” she said as she got her pants fastened and her belt buckled.

Lexa took her hands when she was done with that and pulled her close. “This may not be the most romantic venue,” she said, still keeping her voice down, “But you, Clarke Griffin, are fucking amazing and I cannot believe how lucky I am that you’re in my life.”

“And that I just nailed you in a place like this?”

“That, too.” And she arched an eyebrow and blessed her with her smile-smirk.

Clarke kissed her, but this time gentle and slow. “And you, Lexa Woods, inspire me to do such things. Which is totally a compliment. I don’t meet just anybody in a gym to do this, after all.”

“Neither do I.”

She kissed her again. “And dammit, I have to go.”

Lexa let go of her, but her expression said that she was not feeling that at all and Clarke had to kiss her again, for both reassurance and a promise for later. She put her shirt back on then her sweater before she grabbed her coat and slung her backpack over her shoulder.

“You might want to wait a few minutes before you leave,” Clarke said with another smirk.

Lexa just nodded, and she looked so cute, like she couldn’t believe what had just happened, and Clarke pulled her in for another kiss. Because Lexa fucking Woods.

“God, the things I feel for you,” Clarke said softly.

“Same.” Lexa ran her fingers along her cheek.

“I’ll see you later. I’d like to keep the evening plan.”

“Good. Did you want to study a bit?”

Clarke let her gaze wander from Lexa’s shoulders over her sports bra down her stomach to her thighs. “We can try,” she said. “But I’m not betting it’ll happen.” And then she flashed her a quick smile and moved Lexa’s bag aside before she ducked out of the stall to the bathrooms to wash up a bit and she knew she now wore a shit-eating grin but she didn’t care. Not in the fucking least.

She made it to class with about two minutes to spare, which meant she ended up at a table toward the back, but she didn’t care about that, either, because her head was filled with Lexa and, okay, with the fact that they had just had sex in a changing stall at the gym, and holy shit she had never done anything like that but goddamn, she would totally do it again. Right now, if she could, but fuck, she needed to stop thinking about it because her underwear was already damp enough.

And trying to do that was damn near impossible.

Her phone dinged with a text message and a few people glanced at her and she jerked it out of her
coat pocket to turn off the sounds, something she normally did before class started, but her mind had been on other things. Other much more pleasant things.

She surreptitiously glanced at the notification on her screen. From Lexa. She opened it immediately.

*I know you’re in class, and you probably won’t get this til later, but I really needed to tell you that I hope I’m stuck with you for a long-ass time, Clarke Griffin.*

Oh, God. Feels eruption.

Clarke read the message several times (okay, several dozen), then set her phone down for a bit because feels were still cascading through her heart. She then texted her back.

*you are SO stuck w/me, Woods. & not just cuz i have a list of places 2 meet u. She put her phone in her back pocket and it vibrated a few minutes later.*

*Good to know. [devil horns emoji]*

*maybe we could make mtg like this prt of UnXmas [kiss emoji]*

A couple more minutes went by before Lexa texted her back. *Does it have to be only at UnXmas?*

Clarke could almost hear the teasing little pout in her voice. *my list is pretty long. not sure there r enough UnXmases 2 handle it, so we’ll obv have 2 expand*

Lexa’s reply was immediate. *[heart eyes emoji]*

She smiled and looked up at the professor, who was going over the forthcoming lab assignment for the day and reminding everybody that the final project was due the following Wednesday (fucking finals week already) before five PM. She knew all that, so she texted Lexa back.

*same. see u 2nite. can’t wait.* She put her phone away because she really needed to get into the class zone now, but feels were still fluttering around in her chest (was that even something they did?) and how the hell was it that super hot sex with Lexa tapped other, deeper things? That no matter how hard and heavy they went, no matter how turned on they were, she still wanted to keep Lexa safe, make her happy, and take care of her to the best of her abilities?

Lexa fucking Woods was *definitely* stuck with her.

Chapter End Notes

*We interrupt this slow march to UnChristmas with this smuttish Clexa interlude because reasons. #sorrynotsorry*

*We hope you stay tuned for the continuation of Operation UnChristmas.*

*And please enjoy this fanart, which makes me laugh every time. Credit on the image.*
Also, emclaimable seems to have moved to cassiniregio at Tumblr, according to the message on emclaimable.

(also, find me on Tumblr and Twitter if you're so inclined to yell at me or whatever)
Chapter Summary

The crew gets together to celebrate the end of finals and then a conversation between Clarke and Lexa turns serious.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“So how’s your new workout routine at the gym coming along since last week?” Raven asked as they walked to a bar near campus and Clarke wondered how she managed to sound like she wasn’t totally teasing her.

“Oh, my God. Why did I even tell you?” Clarke shook her head.

“Because I am your BFF. Duh. And because I pried it out of you,” she added with a cheeky grin. “How could I not, given your afterglow? The power of Clexonium, clearly.”

“Jesus,” Clarke muttered and Raven laughed. “The workout routine is fine,” Clarke added, with air quotes around workout routine. “It just hasn’t happened at the gym again.” But it had elsewhere. Like her bedroom, Lexa’s bedroom, Lexa’s kitchen, against the wall in Clarke’s living room…she cleared her throat. Certain activities seemed to help with finals stress. Okay, with everything.

And it was Lexa, for fuck’s sake. Who wouldn’t want to hook up with her every chance they got? “Just ‘fine’?”

She blushed. “Oh, my God, Reyes. Really?”

“I am your BFF, Griffin. It clearly states in the BFF manual that talking about sexy-times with your BFF is required. Therefore, in order to ensure that we are not in violation of the international BFF guidelines, you have to inform me with regard to the progress of the good ship Clexa. So are your workouts merely ‘fine’ or…?” She put air quotes around fine.

Clarke grinned at her. “What do you think?” And she practically purred the statement, making Raven whoop.

“That good?”


“Yes,” Raven practically whooped. “The good ship Clexa has gone completely fucking nautical.”

“It’s—what? What does that even mean?”

“That it’s seaworthy and sailing, baby.” And Raven grabbed her arm and leaned into her. “This is so awesome. And today is the one-week anniversary of your first sex in a semi-public place. It might require commemorative sex in yet another semi-public place. I can suggest a few.”
Clarke laughed and pulled her arm free to give her a quick half-hug. “Probably not gonna happen for a few days. Lexa’s going to Virginia tomorrow.”

“Shit. That’s right. But mad props to you for your secret Santa plan. And because I am the best BFF ever, I can report to you that the weather is supposed to be fine. A possibility of snow showers late the night of the twenty-fifth, but you’ll already be there and most likely working out.” She put special emphasis on the last words.

“I never thought I’d say this, but I think I prefer bang shui as a euphemism over working out.”

Raven laughed. “I still like ‘certain activities’.”

They stopped at a particularly busy street and waited for the light to change.

“When are you going to Anya’s for Christmas?” Clarke asked when it did and they crossed.

“Probably tomorrow afternoon, after Lexa leaves for Virginia. Anya has a bunch of stuff to do before that.”

“Like get you a bunch of Christmas cheer?” Clarke asked, tone innocent.

Raven shrugged and grinned, wicked. “She brings that all year ’round.”

“Okay, stop. I don’t need to hear the details.”

“Whatever. I’m pretty sure Lexa’s going to bring a bunch of holiday cheer down on you, too. Way down. Like, southbound as much as possible.”

Clarke snorted a laugh. “Oh, my God.” But the image was super hot.

“You’re welcome for the visual. That’s what BFFs do for each other.”

“Well, actually, part of what I’m trying to do is recalibrate Christmas for her. I haven’t had a chance to tell you about that, because it’s not really my story to tell, but I’ll give you the big picture.”

Raven slowed down and looked at her, puzzled. “Explain.”

“This time of year has a lot of bad memories because her bioparents were complete assholes and basically didn’t really acknowledge her this time of year.”

Raven stopped, which caused Clarke to stop, too. “Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

“Puta madre.”*

“Exactly.”

“So is she going to be okay Christmas Eve?”

Clarke started walking again. “Yes. She’ll have Indra, Gustus, and Lincoln there and as far as she’s concerned, they’re her family. And I already told her we’ll make new traditions for UnChristmas, and replace the shitty memories with excellent new ones.”

Raven shoulder-bumped her. “UnChristmas. This might be the fucking sweetest thing I’ve ever heard you say about anyone.”
“Plus, I’ll be there Christmas Day, and that’ll hopefully help.” She smiled, and millions of butterflies fluttered around her stomach. “But you have to remember not to say anything tonight. You have to keep this secret.”

“I am a Jedi of secrets, Padawan.”

“And this is why I love you.”

“Among many other reasons. Anyway. What you’re doing Christmas Day is going to be the best present ever.” Raven grinned. “She’s really into you, Griff. Way into you, and not just in a physical sense when you’re doing all kinds of bang shui.”

“Seriously? Why are you like this?” But she laughed.

“Because I am your BFF and charged with speaking truth to you.”

“Is that in the manual?”

“Yes, Padawan. Chapter Three.”

Clarke laughed.

“So did you get her anything else?” Raven asked as they stopped to wait for another light. “Not that I didn’t notice the packages you got in the mail this week or anything.”

“Oh, my God, BFF. How old are you? Ten?”

“Whatever. Nine.”

“Fine. Yes. I did get her something else.”

The light changed and Clarke automatically took Raven’s arm to help her because this part of the street was in perpetual shade and it was icy.

“What? Oh, my God, I have to know.”

“You’re nine. Truly.”

“Not like I didn’t admit it.”

“Okay, fine. I got her a sweatshirt with some art on it that I designed.”

“Shut. Up.” Raven stopped and stared at her. “What’s the art?”

“You’ll see it when she opens it. And we’re not exchanging gifts until the twenty-seventh.”

“Fucking hell, Griffin. You’re going to make me wait that long?”

“For your gift, too.”

She pretended to scream and Clarke laughed. She was still laughing as they went into the bar and found their group in the back at a couple of tables pulled together where Bellamy, Jasper, Monty, Harper, and Murphy had already gathered. They had decided to postpone their originally proposed Saturday gathering until tonight, when everybody was pretty much done with finals.

“Hey,” Harper said. “We’ve got the happy hour special beer in the pitchers if you’re into a brown
“Hook me up,” Raven said, and Harper poured beer into an empty pint glass as Clarke went to the bar and ordered a dark, smoky stout with vanilla undertones that she took back to the table. She sank into an empty chair next to Raven and sipped, relaxing a little, though she was still wound up from the past couple of weeks of trying to get everything done for finals.

She did, however, like this divey sports bar, which was a favorite with students because of its happy hours and game days. The place was decorated with various sports memorabilia, but most people who came here primarily watched hockey, soccer, and American football, in that order.

“Everybody have something to drink?” Bellamy asked. “Good. So here’s to another semester done.” He raised his beer and the others at the table held their drinks up, too.

“Only several dozen more to go,” Jasper quipped and everybody laughed.

The shitty part of this week, though, was that Lexa was leaving for Virginia the next day and even though Clarke would see her two days after that, it felt like she was leaving for much longer. Even a night without her—like the night before—felt like a week. She might have to implement more quickies like last Wednesday’s, because holy hell.

She glanced toward the door, looking for Lexa, then Lincoln caught her eye over the table and gave her a conspiratorial smile and Clarke was so glad, again, that everybody was on board for the rib-stravaganza. She smiled back and listened as Harper teased Monty about one of his finals preparation rituals, which involved drinking a Red Bull at a particular time before a specific class.

“There is no wrong time for Red Bull,” Murphy said.

“But there could be times that are more right than others,” Monty shot back.

Murphy shook his head, but he was teasing, too. “I had no idea you were so superstitious.”

“It’s not superstition. It’s practicality. I’m covering all my bases for finals.”

“Clearly. Even the metaphysical ones.” Murphy laughed. “The truth is out there, bro,” he said in a semi-sonorous mysterious tone, which garnered another round of laughter.

“I think Monty has a point.”

Everybody looked at Octavia.

“And I have zero interest in religion or whatever paranormal things people want to buy into,” she said. “But there are things out there we don’t understand, so if Monty wants to try to appease whatever energy flows or whatever and it makes him feel better about the bullshit this time of year, well, I’m all for it.”

Murphy stared at her. “I think that might be the longest speech I’ve ever heard you make.”

She tossed a fry at him amidst laughter and Clarke glanced toward the entrance again, because she hadn’t seen Lexa since last night and fuck, was that weird, that she missed her so much? Texts and Facetime just weren’t the same.

“So are you done, Griff?” Monty asked from his end of the table.

“Yeah. Had my last exam and turned my final project in.”
“Nice. So everybody really is done?”

Everybody answered in the affirmative and yet again Clarke glanced toward the door, like she was willing Lexa to appear.

“Okay, so who’s staying and who’s going for Christmas?” Harper asked. “And by staying I mean you’ll be in Polis.”

“Anya and I are here,” Raven said. “The weather’s supposed to be good, so I don’t think any of you are going to have trouble getting out. But if you do, you have a place to hang out.”

“Cool. Monty and I are headed out tomorrow for my sister’s.”

“O and I are leaving tomorrow, too,” Bellamy said.

“Jasper?” Harper asked. “Are you still covered?”

“Yeah. I’m for sure meeting my brother and my dad in Cabo. Taking a redeye tonight.”

“That’s off the chain,” Raven said. “Send pics.”

“Totes.” He grinned. “We’re gonna go deep sea fishing. But most likely, it’ll just be beer pong on the boat.”


Monty shook his head. “It’s eerie how all the dudes in your family are basically the same.”

Jasper raised his glass at him. “Just lucky. Next year, join us.”

“You covered for a ride to the airport?” Bellamy asked.

He nodded. “All good. Uber is everybody’s friend.”

“Murphy? You good?” Harper asked.

“Yeah. We’re doing the usual family gather in Chicago. I’m flying out tomorrow.”

“Clarke?”

She looked at Harper. “Driving to DC to my mom’s.”

“Cool. Then let’s all party-hop for New Year’s. I say we all end up at Anya’s for the countdown.”

Clarke smiled at Harper’s organizing, and she loved how this group of friends was so much like family.

“Let’s all touch base next week,” Harper added, and everybody raised their glasses again in an affirmative. “And if you have gifts you want to exchange, do it now or wait until after.”

“God, Harper, you’re like a camp counselor,” Jasper said and he threw a fry at her.

Monty laughed and threw it back and the banter only escalated between them.

“So while they’re all distracted,” Murphy said to Clarke, “how are things with you and Lexa?” He was seated to Clarke’s left.
“Completely amazing.”

He sighed in exaggerated fashion. “Ah, young love. Sickening.” But he was teasing and Clarke lightheartedly smacked him on the shoulder.

“Your time will come, sir. And then I will tease the living shit out of you.”

“Impossible. I am John Murphy, he of the stone cold heart and ultra-snarky disposition.”

“It will take a special kind of snark to put up with Murphy,” Raven said from Clarke’s other side. “I’ll see if Anya has any straight female relatives.” And she made kissing noises at Murphy.

Clarke laughed and glanced for the thousandth time, it seemed, at the entrance and it was at that moment that Lexa actually entered and Clarke stared. Because Lexa. And fuck, she was wearing her leather jacket and combat boots and tight black jeans and Jesus freaking Christ she took her baseball cap off and shook her hair out and—

“Careful, Griff. Something might fly into your mouth,” Raven said with extra glee. “Although I totally get it. Your girlfriend is ultra hot.”

Clarke didn’t correct her because fuck, what was the point? She spent almost every waking (and okay, sleeping) hour with her. She and Lexa hadn’t had the girlfriend talk, but that’s how it felt and the realization no longer made her freak out. Instead, it spread, warm, through her heart and chest and then down her thighs and along her arms and fuck, she was so into her.

“Hey,” Lexa greeted the table and then she went right to Clarke, leaned over the back of her chair, and gave her an affectionate, though awkward hug to myriad exclamations of “awww” from the others.

“Hi,” Lexa said near Clarke’s ear. “Missed you.” Then she straightened, keeping her hands on Clarke’s shoulders and shit, even a touch as innocuous as that sent sparks all the way to Clarke’s feet. “Are we good on drinks?”

“We could use another pitcher,” Bellamy said, pointing at the nearly empty one in the middle of the table.

“What kind of beer?”

“They’re doing a happy hour special on Polis Brewery’s brown ale,” Harper said.

“Cool. On it.” Lexa squeezed Clarke’s shoulders. “Be right back,” she said, and Clarke leaned her head back so Lexa could give her a quick kiss (and fuck she had missed her lips) before she grabbed the pitcher and went to the bar, another round of “awww” trailing her.

“That was fucking cute, and I hate cute,” Murphy said.

“Damn right it was cute,” Raven said. “These two could melt even your stony heart.”

Murphy made a face and Raven made one back, which quickly devolved into a face-making competition.

“I’m so glad I’m here to witness this display of maturity,” Monty said, managing to keep all traces of irony out of his voice, which made everybody laugh again.

“And before they do another round, maybe we’d better just bring another table over so everybody
can appreciate it.” Bellamy got up and with Jasper’s help carried a two-top over to add to the others.

“Anya’s here,” Clarke said to Raven. “She’s at the bar.”

“Getting something with club soda, no doubt,” Raven said with a smile and she had the hugest heart eyes. So cute.

“Also, are you done yet?” Clarke asked.

“Turning in my final project tomorrow. We got an extra day and like a dumbass, I decided to go back through and check my data again. Then I might sleep for a week.”

“But you’ll miss Christmas with your GF if you do that,” Clarke said.

“So I’ll sleep at her house.”

“Like you’ll be sleeping then,” Octavia said with a snort from across the table and Lincoln laughed.

“She has a point.” Clarke picked up her beer and before Raven could say anything else, both Anya and Lexa appeared, Lexa carrying two pitchers of beer and Anya carrying a couple of pint glasses stacked in each other and a clear drink in her other hand. Raven got up so Lexa could sit next to Clarke and she went to the other side of the table Bellamy and Jasper had just brought over and sat near Anya.

Lexa set one pitcher in the middle of the table then poured herself a beer and refilled Raven’s glass from the other and sat down next to Clarke.

“Happy end of finals, Lexa,” Harper said and raised her glass.

“Thanks. Same to everybody.” She sipped.

“Hi,” Clarke said and she brushed a kiss against her cheek. “How was your day?”

“Meh. But it got so much more awesome, like, five minutes ago.” She smiled and took Clarke’s hand. “So your exam went well?”

“Yep. I feel good about it.”

“And you got your project in.” Lexa sipped her beer.

“Yeah. Are you all good in the project realm?”

She nodded. “Everything’s turned in. Also, Echo already left town for Christmas, otherwise she would’ve come tonight.”

“Too bad. But we’ll see her next week. And Luna. And whoever else in your crew wants to hang out with us for New Year’s.”

Lexa smiled and squeezed her hand.

“Want some fries?” Clarke asked.

“I’m good for now.”

“Do you want me to order you some real food instead?”
“I have a better idea.” Lexa leaned in close. “Lincoln’s staying at Octavia’s tonight and he’s taking her and Bellamy to the airport tomorrow, so I was kind of hoping you’d maybe come over and we could make epic sub sandwiches.”

Clarke stared at her. “You have sub stuff?”

Lexa shrugged and flashed her a quick smile. “And I made the dressing you like.”

“When the hell did you have time to get this all together?”

She smiled again and pecked her on the cheek. “I’m the Commander,” she said softly. “I have powers you don’t even know about.” And she raised an eyebrow and good God, Clarke was ready to do a major exploration to find all those powers.

“And I might be needing some of your mad cuddling skills,” Lexa whispered.

“You have an open invitation in that regard,” Clarke said as she pulled her in for a soft kiss.

“Excuse me,” Anya said, “but there is a no feels policy in this bar right now. I have a reputation of snark to uphold and I can’t do that when I’m about to thaw from my ice queen status watching you two.”

“Clexonium,” Raven mouthed at Clarke, who almost spit out her beer.

“It is one of my missions,” Clarke said to Anya after she managed to swallow, “to prove that you’re a giant bucket of feels beneath that super-snarky exterior.”

Raven grinned. “Already proved it.”

“And I really don’t want to know what that entailed,” Clarke said with a laugh.

“Probably for the best,” Lexa added, deadpan, and she reached for a fry off the platter in the middle of the table and she had to move in front of Clarke to do it and God, she smelled good. Like hints of the outdoors, maybe, earthy and approachable, with that note of sandalwood and maybe cedar. Never overwhelming, but always memorable.

Clarke would know that scent anywhere, and she would know, especially, if it was Lexa wearing it because it smelled a particular way on her. She put her hand on Lexa’s thigh under the table (and not just because damn her incredible thighs), and it was both comforting and maybe a little proprietary, how she did it, but sometimes something really deep within her—something almost primal—made her territorial when it came to Lexa, and protective.

Lexa covered her hand and squeezed in acknowledgment, and she kept her own hand over Clarke’s, and the contact was reassuring and arousing, on a lot of different levels.

She kept her hand there throughout the varied conversations flying around the table, and only moved it when Clarke finished her beer.

“Want another?” Lexa asked.

“No. Let’s go make epic subs. Unless you want another beer or something else.”

Lexa leaned in close. “I don’t think Captain Taco would be good at sub construction,” she said with a sheepish smile. “So I’ll stop now.”

“As amusing and endearing as it would be to watch the captain attempt to make sub sandwiches,
you’re probably right. So are you ready to go?”

“If you are.”

“Yes.” And she pushed back from the table and went around giving everybody hugs. Then she and Lexa put their coats on and said their goodbyes again, in the midst of much teasing about what they could possibly be going to do with each other that night, but Clarke took it in stride because damn right, she’d do things with Lexa every chance she got.

They went out into early nightfall, the crisp December air reminiscent of a day after a snowfall, when the clouds cleared and left it colder than it seemed the storm was.

Clarke looped her arm through Lexa’s as they walked to their apartment building. “Are you packed for Virginia?” she asked, though she hated thinking about it.

“Pretty much.” She sounded a little stressed.

“Hey, it’s UnChristmas. Jeans, sweats, T-shirts. And some winter-ish clothes for snowball fights, if there’s snow. Just think of it as some days off to relax.”

Lexa smiled. “Honestly, I wish you were going to be there. I mean, they try to keep it low-key for me and they try to distract me a bit from thinking about it too much, but the symbols of the holiday still kind of stress me out.”

“I get it. So that’s why we’re going to have our own UnChristmas and do whatever the hell we want. Is there anything in particular you want to do?”

“That’s a loaded question, Pancake Master.”

“Anything. Not anyone.” She shoulder-bumped her. “Though I totally approve of the anyone, as long as it’s me.”

“Definitely.”

“Good. And we can Facetime while you’re there. Please.”

“Yes. It’s kind of an imperative,” she said, voice soft.

“Hey.” Clarke stopped and Lexa looked at her. “I know undoing years of horribleness isn’t going to happen overnight, so call or text or whatever any time you feel like you need to. And I’ll give you more ideas for UnChristmas, so you can focus on those instead.”

She nodded, but Clarke saw ghosts in her eyes and she cupped her cheek. “This time of year sucks for a lot of people. It’s not my best, either, so I am totally looking forward to UnChristmas with you. Maybe I need this as much as you do, for different reasons.”

Lexa stared at her for a beat then kissed her, right there on the sidewalk outside a pizza place and a cell service store, the latter decorated with holiday window spray frost and signs encouraging people to buy phones and plans for the holidays.

“I kinda want mac n’ cheese to be part of UnChristmas,” Lexa said against her mouth, and she was smiling.

“I can totally support that.” And it was all Clarke could do not to tell her that this was, indeed, going to be part of the holiday. “Hell, we can do the twelve days of UnChristmas if you want. But one of
those days has to involve tacos.”

Her smile widened. “I can definitely support that. A movie night has to be in there, too.”

“For sure. And maybe margaritas in the park. Or, better yet, smuggling margaritas into the movies.”

“Put that one on the definite list.” Lexa kissed her on the tip of her nose and started walking again, and Clarke again looped her arm through Lexa’s.

They walked in silence for a few moments and Clarke knew that Lexa was working up to saying something. She liked how she could read her silences, too.

“Not to stress you out, but I’d really like you to meet Indra and Gustus,” she finally said, and Clarke felt her tense a little.

“I would, too. Did you want to maybe plan a weekend next semester to do that?” And she wasn’t sure how she managed to sound so blasé about it, since it was going to happen much sooner, weather and circumstances permitting.

Lexa relaxed and looked at her as they walked. “Wow. Um…yes. I’d really like that.”

“Done. Let’s talk about it when you get back and make a plan. Speaking of, did you give them my number?”

She smiled, a flash of surprise and relief in her eyes. “Not yet. I’ll do it tomorrow when I see them.”

“You know, you could just call them and tell them what my number is. Or text it to them,” Clarke teased.

“I—” She hesitated. “This is going to sound dumb.”

“What?”

“I kind of want to tell them in person what it is.”

“Okay.”

Lexa looked at her again. “You don’t think that’s dumb?”

“No. I mean, if that’s how you want to do it, that’s fine. Just make sure they have my number.” She held Lexa’s gaze for a moment. “It feels weird that they don’t.”

“Yeah. It kind of does.”

“So is there a particular reason you’d like to announce my phone number to them in person rather than via the entirely impersonal technological route?”

“It’s—” she paused. “This is probably not going to make any sense, but it means more to me to tell them in person what your number is. You’re not just a friend to me, and I kind of want to make sure they see that. I mean, if you were just a friend, I’d call or text them your number if I thought they needed it. But…I don’t know. This feels so much more important…and Jesus, this probably sounds really strange.”

“No, it doesn’t. I get it.” She squeezed Lexa’s arm. “And good to know that I’m more than a friend, because if you do with all your friends what you do with me, then we’re going to need to clarify a couple of things.” She smiled.
“Oh? Like what, specifically?” Her tone was teasing.

“One, that your definition of boundaries and mine are way different and two—” she stopped, thoughts churning at the possible directions this conversation could take and suddenly, shit got real in her head.

Way real. Fuck.

“Hey,” Lexa said, like she sensed it, too. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. We can talk about something else.”

Clarke shook her head. “It’s okay. I’m just trying to figure out how to say that I’m kind of territorial without sounding like some kind of possessive asshole. I mean, I don’t have anything against open or poly relationships.” That wasn’t entirely true, where Lexa was concerned, but she didn’t want to sound like she was issuing ultimatums. “And I guess if that’s what you’re into, we should probably have that conversation and set some ground rules.” Though they should have done that at the outset. Fuck.

Lexa stopped walking and faced her. “Okay, whoa. That’s definitely not where I thought this conversation would go.” She took Clarke’s hand. “Let me clear the air before you get totally stuck in your head.” She smiled, and it was so affectionate and so sweet that tons of warm fuzzies settled in Clarke’s chest, replacing the weird awkwardness that had been percolating for a few minutes.

“I’m going to back up a little,” Lexa continued, “to your phone number.” She looked at Clarke expectantly, and Clarke nodded for her to continue.

“I want to give your phone number to Indra and Gustus in person because when I do that, I’m going to impress upon them how important you are to me, and that you are much more than just a friend. It feels right to me to do it that way. In other news, I don’t have anything against open or poly relationships, either, but for the record, they’re not really me and that’s not what I’m looking for, especially where you’re concerned.” She paused. “And we don’t have to talk about this anymore tonight if it’s making you uncomfortable.”

“It might be doing that, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t talk about it.”

Lexa cocked her head and waited, and she still held on to Clarke’s hand, which helped steady her thoughts.

“Okay, so, we’re both clear on not wanting an open or poly situation here.” She looked at Lexa, a question in her eyes and she was actually surprised at how calm she felt.

“Yes. And it doesn’t make you a territorial or possessive asshole not to want that.”

She smiled, more a nervous reaction than anything else. “So…is it fair to say that this—” she gestured with her free hand at the space between them, “is a thing?”

Lexa raised an eyebrow, and her expression was both hopeful and bemused. “You mean are we a thing?” she asked, tone cautious.

Clarke sagged a little with relief that she’d said it. “Um, yeah. Are we?”

“Do you want to be?”

“Yes,” she said, no hesitation, and it felt like every single cell in her body stopped what it was doing and waited, holding a collective breath. “Do you?”
Lexa stared at her. “God, yes.” And she pulled her hand free and cupped Clarke’s face and holy shit was this actually happening? Clarke’s heart was doing somersaults of joy. Maybe of ecstasy and then even that thought flew out of her head because Lexa kissed her, soft but hungry, and it was everything Clarke was feeling.

“Yes,” Lexa repeated as she slowly pulled away. “I want us to be a thing. So much.”

Clarke kissed her again then hugged her close and God, she could do this all night, could stand out here in the cold, Lexa’s arms around her, and it would be the best night ever. But it already was the best night ever because holy shit, they were a thing. A goddamn fucking thing. Lexa wanted to be a thing. With her. Nobody else included. Oh, my God. How was she still standing? Everything was amazing right now, even in the midst of the very real shit that had just been said.

“Okay?” Lexa asked after a while.

“Completely. You?”

“Mmm hmm.” And she hugged her even closer for another few minutes. Or hours. Clarke didn’t know and didn’t care because she was wrapped in bliss.

“So are you ready for an entirely romantic dinner of epic sub sandwiches?” Lexa asked.

“I heard somewhere that it’s the preferred choice of people who are things.” She paused. “And that sounded really wrong.”

Lexa laughed softly. “Yes, people are many things. But are they a thing is the question.” She kissed Clarke’s forehead. “Also, it’s okay if you want to take some time to process this conversation. I’m not going anywhere.”

Clarke smiled and cupped Lexa’s cheek, their foreheads pressed together. “Neither am I.” She caressed her cheek with her thumb. “You’re still stuck with me, Woods.”

“And that’s the best part of my first UnChristmas,” she said. “Actually, of my year. And beyond.”

Clarke’s chest filled with all those damn butterflies again. “Same.” They started walking again and Clarke leaned into her, practically floating. “So when I meet Indra and Gustus, what should I bring?”

She chuckled. “Nothing. Just you.”

“That is so not cool, Commander. A Master of Pancakes never shows up to a gathering without some kind of offering to share. So. Wine? Beer? Awesome whiskey? Fruit basket?”

Lexa laughed. “Indra’s very particular about beer.”

“So…wine?”

“That’s always good, because it’s apples and oranges, basically, where beer’s concerned. That is, it’s not competing with Indra’s beer. She and Gustus both like sweet white. Like, almost dessert-like wines. But don’t worry about it right now.”

If she only knew. Clarke smiled and leaned into her again and they finished the walk to their apartment building and Lexa guided the conversation to the end of the semester and how they felt things went in that regard.

Clarke loved the check-in on mundane things like this, too, loved knowing what Lexa did and
thought during the day, because it made her feel even more grounded in their connection, and it revealed more layers about her. She also loved that even after the intensity of their earlier conversation and all the things it meant and symbolized, Lexa kept things low-key, making sure that Clarke had room to breathe, room to take some time if she needed to.

“Okay, let me go change into something far sexier, like sweats, and I’ll be right over,” Clarke said when they got to Lexa’s door.

“I kinda love your sweats. Easy access.”

“So that’s what being a thing means,” Clarke said with an exaggerated sigh.

Lexa raised an eyebrow. “That and much, much more.”

And how the hell was Clarke supposed to resist that? She gave Lexa her lazy sultry smile, which had the desired effect, because Lexa pulled her close.

“Do we want wine with our epic subs?” Clarke murmured against her lips.

“Yeah, I think we do. See you in a bit.” She smiled and kissed her, gentle, cupping her face with both hands, and Clarke knew she was in a permanent state of heart eyes. Lexa released her, the green of her eyes deep and inviting, and then she opened her door, but waited to go inside until Clarke got to hers and had her own door open.

And as Clarke hung her coat up then changed into old, comfortable sweats and tee, she knew that this was about way more than heart eyes and the physical heat between them. It was about connection and hope and how lives could come together in ways she never expected, in ways she never even thought existed. And she knew that Lexa would give her all the time she wanted or needed to figure out what exactly it meant, to “be a thing.”

But deep down, Clarke already knew. She just needed to find the right words to tell her.

*puta madre: mother fucker (versatile usage and context)*

Chapter End Notes

Excuse me while I recover from this onslaught of feels. alsdjfksdhjkgjhlk

And let us all take a moment to formally welcome Clexa into thing-dom.

I'm really getting stoked for UnChristmas, you guys...
Lexa leaves for Virginia then Clarke tells Raven about the new development with regard to Clexa. Then Clarke spends some time with Abby the day before she heads up to Virginia and UnChristmas.

“Got everything?” Clarke asked as Lexa situated her duffle bag and backpack in the back of her Jeep then closed the hatch.

“No, actually, I don’t.” She turned and looked at Clarke pointedly. “You’re not in here.” She gestured at the Jeep and made a cute pouty face.

Clarke smiled and slid her arms around Lexa’s neck. “I’ll be with you again soon.” Much sooner than Lexa knew, and it was all she could do not to tell her. “And when I am, we can continue with UnChristmas celebrations. Until New Year’s and beyond, if you want. ’Til then, I’m going to Facetime the hell out of you.”

Lexa pulled her into a hug. “Drive carefully to DC,” she said softly.

“Me? You. Be careful on the way to Indra and Gustus’s. When’s Lincoln going to be there?”

“He might already be there. He said he would head up after he dropped Octavia and Bellamy off this morning.” Lexa pulled away a little so she could look at her and God, her eyes were so green, so filled with all the things Clarke wanted to learn about her.

She caressed Lexa’s cheek. “Will you let me know when you get there, please?”

A half-smile lifted one side of her mouth. “Yes. Please keep me posted on your travel status, too.”

“Totally.” Clarke smiled back, glad that the weather was cooperating. No clouds, and she didn’t need anything more than a sweatshirt out here in the late morning sun.

They stared at each other, the space between them filled with the expectation that there was more they wanted to say but neither was quite sure how.

“So…” Lexa finally said. “I hope you have a good time with your mom,” she finished in a rush, and Clarke knew that the statement, though genuine, was also a cover for something else.

“And I hope you have a good time in Virginia.” She held her gaze for a moment longer then kissed her and it morphed into a mini make-out session, right out there in the damn parking lot.

“Damn,” Lexa managed after a few minutes, breathing heavily.

“That’s a reminder that we’re a thing,” Clarke said, and she flashed her a little grin, the new and deepening parameters of their relationship both exciting and a little scary, but not in an uncomfortable
way. More in a shared adventure way, and God, it felt so fucking good and God, there were so many sparks and butterflies racing around her veins right now.

“There is no way I’m going to forget that,” Lexa said softly as she cupped Clarke’s face. “I’m a thing with you, Clarke Griffin, and everything that’s involved—everything you want it to be—I’m here for it. All of it.”

And Clarke stared at her, completely speechless and wait a second, was she floating, too? Had she left Earth?

Lexa smiled, a mixture of sweet and rakish, and kissed her, fortunately, because that was about the only thing Clarke could have done with her mouth in that instance. “I’ll talk to you later,” she said as she pulled away, her fingertips trailing along Clarke’s jaw.

“You’d better, Woods.” And she got one more kiss in then waited as Lexa got into her Jeep and started the engine. Lexa slid her sunglasses on—holy fuck how hot was she now?—and smiled at her through the driver’s side window. Clarke smiled back then kissed her fingertips and pointed them at her and Lexa smiled and backed up, then gave her a cute little wave before she drove out of the parking lot.

Which felt so much emptier without Lexa in it.

Clarke watched until she couldn’t see the Jeep anymore and then she sighed and went back inside, still kind of floating. Upstairs, she prepared the coffee maker for another pot of coffee. Once it started percolating, she watched it, thinking about Lexa and what she had said, which made wave after wave of feels cascade through her chest.

“Oh, my God, Reyes,” but she was laughing.

“What? You kind of have that glow today, too.”
“Are you saying I have different glows?”

Raven rolled her eyes. “Duh. And I pretty much know them all.” She went to the counter and got a cup out and Clarke poured coffee for her, too.

“I’m so not sure how I feel about you knowing my glows.”

“After all these years, I speak fluent Clarke,” Raven said with a hair flip, and Clarke was so glad she hadn’t been trying to drink at that moment. Raven looked at her expectantly over the rim of her cup and Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Fine. I might have asked Lexa last night if we were a thing.”

Raven stared at her for a moment then grinned. “You mean you finally confirmed the obvious?”

“Come on, Reyes. This is huge for me.”

She set her coffee down. “You’re right. Being serious, now. Commencing Clarke therapy program in three…two…”

“God, you’re impossible,” but she laughed.

“So. Spill. Though you’re the last person in Polis to know, apparently, that you’ve pretty much been a thing with Lexa Woods since you met her.” She leaned back against the counter, still smiling, and Clarke chewed her lip for a moment, processing that.

“Do you think so?”

“Oh, my God. Yes, Clarke. You’ve been into her since day one. It just took your head a bit to catch up to your heart. And hormones, if we’re being thorough. And there is nothing wrong with any of that. There is nothing wrong with realizing you’re into her for more than a short-term situation, and it’s so cool that you put it on the table.” She picked up her cup. “I’m going to go way out on a limb here and say that she’s into being a thing with you, too. Because, Captain lives-in-her-head, she’s also been into you since day one. The difference is, she knew right away, worked it through, and then waited for you to catch up.”

Clarke had no reply to that, but she nodded because Raven was right.

“I give Woods total props for figuring you out in that regard, and for giving you room to go through the data your overworked processors collected.” She sipped her coffee. “And fucking hell, you could strip paint with this.” She reached for the carton of creamer that Clarke had left on the counter. “So am I right? How did she take it?”

Clarke grinned and the heat of her blush raced up her neck.

“Uh-huh.” Raven smiled back, smug. “So did you use the G-word?”

“No.” She frowned. “I’m not a fan of either ‘girlfriend’ or ‘boyfriend’. Seems kind of juvenile. And sort of surface.” And it definitely didn’t capture the depth of her feelings for Lexa.

Raven nodded. “And ‘partner’ sounds kind of corporate.”

“Exactly.”

“And holy fuck, you’re standing here talking to me all calm about terms to use for Lexa Woods, who clearly has attained girlfriend status in your life whether you like the term or not.” She practically
chortled. And then her eyes widened. “And you’re not even giving me shit back, which indicates that you are really comfortable with this. Holy shit. Clarke, this is huge.”

She smiled and thought about the night before, about how Lexa made her laugh while they were constructing sandwiches, how there was no pressure to talk further about the shift in their relationship—or rather, about the shift in their perceptions of their relationship—and how things felt a lot deeper, somehow. And then she thought about what Lexa had said this morning and…seriously, was she floating again?

“Maybe compromise terminology is in order,” Raven said, and Clarke looked up from her coffee.

“No, Reyes. I am not calling her my D.E.B.”

She laughed. “Oh, my God, but that’s so perfect. You could even make new terms for the acronym. Devastatingly Excellent Boo.”

Clarke was really glad she hadn’t been trying to drink her coffee at that, because it made her laugh so hard her stomach hurt. “Seriously?” she finally managed as Raven stopped laughing, too.

“I might actually use that with Anya.” She wiped her eyes with the hem of her tee.

“Somehow, I totally see it.”

They were quiet for a few moments.

“Okay, fine,” Raven said. “But you can’t keep referring to her as your ‘thing’. That’s just…wrong. And leads people to places in their brains they really shouldn’t go. We could maybe use bang shui—but it doesn’t work as well in that context and the acronym is for shit. Literally.”

Clarke chuckled and poured herself more coffee. “GF.”

Raven frowned. “But you don’t like ‘girlfriend’.”

She shrugged. “I like the acronym much better. Maybe because I’m not saying ‘girl’, which bugs me since neither of us are girls. We’re fucking women.”

“And women fucking,” Raven shot back with a sage nod.

Clarke started to respond then shook her head and laughed. “That, too.”

“I can get behind GF as a substitute for ‘thing’. ” She nodded slowly, as if pondering. “Yeah, I can totally do that. GF it is. Hell, I think you should launch this trend.”

“Whatsoever. I haven’t even talked to Lexa about terminology. ‘Thing’ was hard enough.”

“She’ll love it. She’ll probably put it on a T-shirt. ‘Clarke’s GF’.” Raven raised her hands like she was framing an image and Clarke imagined Lexa referring to her as her GF and shit, she couldn’t talk again.

“Earth to Griffin.”

Clarke snapped back to the present.

“Wow. Looks like your little bi self is having a Clexonium melt-down.”

“That is totally our college band name,” Clarke shot back. “Or at least the name of our debut album.”
“Oh, my God. I almost snorted coffee.”

“Feel my pain, Reyes.” She did an evil villain laugh.

“And this is also why I love you.” Raven poured herself a little more coffee. “What time tomorrow are you leaving for DC?”

“As soon as I’m up, functional, and organized.”

“Ah. So dinnertime.” She caught the dish towel Clarke tossed at her and set it on the counter.

“Probably around noon,” Clarke said.

“And you’ll be back in town the twenty-seventh?”

“That’s the plan, weather permitting.”

Raven took a drink of coffee. “God, I wish I could see Lexa’s expression when she sees you. This is the best plan, Griff. I applaud how you applied your prankster brain to this surprise holiday awesome.”

Clarke shrugged and smiled.

“I also wish I could see the sweatshirt art. Can you please give me a hint at what the design is?”

“Nope.”

“This is so not in the BFF manual. You’re supposed to tell me what you get your GF for birthdays and Christmas.” She rolled her eyes dramatically.

“You’ll see. It’s only a few days. And you’ll get your present, too.”

“This is what happens when your BFF has such an evolved prankster brain. She can keep secrets like nobody’s bitch.”

Clarke laughed. “Maybe nobody’s bitch should be our college band name.”

“It does have a nice ring to it. Simple. Snarky. And it describes us pretty well. Though I am still kind of feeling kinky lasagna.”

“We could have two college bands.”

Raven nodded, pretending to seriously consider it. “We could have as many as we wanted. We don’t even have to actually have a band. As long as we have a cool name, nobody cares whether it existed or not. And that, young Padawan, is why a good name is key for a college band.”

Clarke chuckled and poured herself more coffee then topped Raven’s cup off.

“Speaking of keys…”

She put the pot back and looked at her.

“So, I don’t want to freak you out by bringing this up, because I know how your data processors get all overwhelmed, but I’m totally okay with you giving Lexa a key to the apartment.”

Clarke might have stopped breathing.
“I mean, Anya has one. And I totally trust Lexa.” She shrugged, nonchalant. “Not just for booty calls. Just…you know. Someone else having access in case of…whatever, like if I’m not around to superhero for you.”

Clarke set her coffee down, took Raven’s and set that down, too, and gave her a huge hug. “I love you, BFF.”

“I love you back, and that’s why I think your GF should have a key. Which is why I’m bringing it up because I know how you are.”

Clarke released her, thoughts racing through her head.

“Lexa cares about you. It’s beyond fucking obvious, and I’d actually feel better knowing that she has a key.”

She nodded. “I feel the same about Anya having a key.”

“There you go. BFFs look out for each other, even through GFs and BF.”

“Okay, we’re practically text-speaking with all these damn acronyms.”

“But yet it works.”

Clarke picked up her coffee, and holy shit, she was so nervous/excited that her heart was pounding like she’d just run across campus.

“Chill,” Raven said and she squeezed her forearm. “Don’t let your head explode over this. It’s for practical reasons, too, especially since she lives right next door.”

“It’s not my head that’s exploding.” She touched her chest.

“Wow. You’re having a major case of feels. It’s okay. I felt the same way when you said Anya should have a key.”

“I feel like I should be more freaked out about this, but I’m not. I’m totally into it.” She was so fucking into it.

Raven shrugged. “Clexonium.”

“Holy shit, I’m going to give someone a key to the apartment.”

“Not just someone. The woman you’re thinging with. Your GF.”

Clarke stared at her then laughed. “Thinging? That sounds so incredibly wrong, Please stick with GF for now. Or even bang shui.”

“Making a list. Workout, no. Bang shui, yes. Thinging, no. GF, yes.” Raven’s phone dinged with a text. She took it out of her pocket. “Anya. She’s on her way over to pick me up.”

Clarke nodded. “Okay. So I’ll see you in a few days, then.”

Raven pursed her lips, then texted Anya back. The response came a few seconds later and Raven held her phone up. “No, because you’re having dinner with us. It’ll be our own Christmas whatever-the-fuck. Takeout Indian.”

“That sounds awesome. What time?”
“Six.”

“I will so be there.”

“Good. Now go get yourself all packed up for your boo.” She smirked. “Your Devastatingly Excellent Boo.”

“Oh, my God.” Clarke threatened to throw the dish towel at her again but she just laughed and left the kitchen.

“You love it, Griff,” she shouted on her way to her bedroom.

She kind of did.

Dammit.

And she couldn’t stop smiling.

Because she now had another errand to run after she finished getting things packed for her trip and before she went to Anya’s house for dinner—one that involved a hardware store.

With a key cutting machine.

###

The twenty-fifth dawned cold but sunny. Clarke checked the weather on her phone. Clouds were due to come in that afternoon, but with no precipitation. “Yes,” she muttered with a smile. Operation UnChristmas (as opposed to Operation Christmas) was a go. She flopped back onto the guest bed in Abby’s condo and stared at the ceiling, a bland, soft, off-white. Unlike the comfortable, lived-in feel of Clarke’s apartment, Abby’s place had the vibe of a vacation home that had humans in it once a year on a timeshare.

It looked nice, and had tasteful accents and color schemes, but it might as well have been furnished by a staging company from HGTV. Clarke really, really hoped that Marcus would help Abby learn to live outside of work, because right now, her condo felt like a corporate hotel.

She got up and put on her old comfie jeans from the day before and grabbed her sweatshirt before she went to the bathroom, keeping quiet since Abby was still asleep. Done with that, she went downstairs to the kitchen and set the card with the gift certificate she’d gotten for her mom on the counter then got the coffee maker started, thinking about Lexa (because that was pretty much her normal). And she kept thinking about her as she started prepping for waffles, eggs, and bacon, glad that she had stopped at the grocery store in Abby’s neighborhood before she arrived. She had seen better-stocked fridges in frat houses.

After she got the first waffle cooking and the eggs and bacon doing the same in separate frying pans, she turned the radio Abby kept in the kitchen on to a local station that was playing nothing but Christmas music. Abby had always kept a radio in the kitchen. Clarke couldn’t remember a time in her life when that wasn’t the case. And on Christmas Day, Abby would turn it on to a station playing Christmas music and she and Clarke’s dad would make breakfast.

It was something Clarke had tried to do since he died, if she was in a place where making breakfast was an option. And she was planning on doing it the next morning for Lexa and her crew in Virginia. She texted Lincoln to check with Indra about a list of ingredients for pancakes. She added another text regarding what breakfast meat they preferred and to find out whether they had eggs, cheese, and onions. She was thinking omelettes would be fun.
She took the first waffle out of the iron and put it in the oven to stay warm and started on the second one, humming along to the music.

“Hi,” Abby said as she came in, wearing a thick blue robe over her pajamas. She had major bed head but Clarke appreciated that, because it meant she had slept and was relaxed enough not to care.

“Merry Christmas.” Clarke poured coffee into a cup and handed it to her.

“Mmm. Merry Christmas.” Abby kissed her on the cheek. “I didn’t realize I had all this food.”

Clarke chuckled. “You didn’t. I stopped at the store yesterday.”

Abby sighed. “I’m sorry. And I’m sorry for getting in so late yesterday.”

“It’s okay. Not like you can plan when someone’s going to be in an accident and need surgery. Plus, I got my artwork photographed and sent to Luna. So that’s taken care of.” She removed bacon from the pan and added it to the baking sheet in the oven then put a few more strips into the pan to cook.

“I love you, you know,” Abby said.

“It’s because I’m making waffles, isn’t it?”

Abby laughed and pulled her into a hug, though Clarke had to hold the spatula away. “That and so many other things. Though your waffles are as good as your dad’s. Maybe better.” She released her and Clarke checked the eggs.

“Well, he trained me in the ways of the waffle, after all.”

“I love that he did.” She was quiet for a few moments. “You remind me of him in so many ways. I love seeing it, love how you’re your own person but have elements of him, too.”

A little lump formed in Clarke’s throat. “Pretty sure I have a bunch of yours, too.”


“Semantics, Mom. Focused, driven, dedicated.” She grinned and checked on the waffle.

Abby smiled back. “Context is everything.”

“Exactly. Could you set dishes out?” She gestured at the kitchen island, which also doubled as a breakfast bar.

“Yes.” She pecked Clarke on the cheek and got plates and silverware and set them out on the granite surface of the island’s countertop then got syrup, butter, and orange juice out of the fridge. “Thanks for going to the store,” she said.

“I know you’re busy. And I’m actually not, right now. So there you go.”

Abby didn’t respond and Clarke looked over at her.

“I’ve been thinking about moving.”

“Yeah? Where?” Clarke picked up one of the plates Abby had taken out and put the waffle from the iron on it. She put bacon and an egg next to it.

“One of the older neighborhoods. I’ve been looking at bungalow kinds of houses.”
Clarke nodded, hoping that she meant it. This suburban bullshit was so not her.

“I think after your dad died, I couldn’t be in the house we all shared because it was too painful. So I picked this place.” She sat on one of the stools and Clarke refilled her coffee. “Something soulless.”

Clarke stared at her then cleared her throat, trying not to laugh, which only made Abby laugh.

“I wasn’t going to say anything, but…” Clarke loaded up the other plate with food.

“You didn’t have to. And it worked for a while. But being with you over Thanksgiving and seeing your friends and your space—it felt like a home. This doesn’t. It feels like I’m still running and that it’s temporary, somehow. I want something better, something that feels like it’s a home for me, and for you when you visit.”

“Wow, Mom. Deep thoughts for Christmas Day.” She sat down and put butter and syrup on her waffle. “But in a way, maybe it’s appropriate, to set a goal for the next year.” She gestured with her fork. “Not a resolution. Those only set you up for disappointment. Set a goal within realistic parameters and check in with it throughout the year. That way, you work within your capabilities. Jasper actually told me that.”

“Jasper? Who knew?”

“Right?” Clarke took a bite of waffle. “Oh, yeah. This is good.”

Abby did, too. “Mmm. These are better than Niylah’s, but don’t tell her.”

Clarke smiled. “So are you serious about moving?”

She took another couple of bites of her food. “Yes. And it wasn’t just your friends at Thanksgiving that made me finally decide to do it.”

“Marcus?”

“Well, he might be part of it. But it was more seeing you with Lexa, I think.”

Clarke barely managed to swallow. “Um.”

Abby smiled. “There’s a lot of warmth and care between you, and it just lights you up.”

Clarke’s blush started at her feet and raced right up to her face. She continued to eat.

“I don’t know her that well yet, but watching her there, seeing how she interacts with you—it made me think about how your father and I were when we moved into that first house where we were living when you were born. It made me think about how it’s not necessarily a place that makes a home, but the people around you. But if you don’t like the place you’re in—either physically or emotionally—you don’t want to bring people into it. So I guess I’m looking to find a sense of home.”

She tried to swallow around the even bigger lump in her throat. “You never were the suburban soccer mom type.”

“No. But living here did serve its purpose, though I realize that it’s time to start reclaiming a more authentic self.”

“Damn, Mom. Are you going to end up on top of a mountain somewhere dispensing wisdom to followers?”
“That isn’t entirely unappealing.” She smiled and continued eating.

“Well, wherever you decide to move, I’ll help.”

“I’ll let you know. I have a realtor who’s going to work with me after the new year.”

Clarke grinned. “That’s great. Now about that workaholic side of you…”

“We’ll for sure be hiring two more surgeons in March. I’ve already told the board that I need to have a life outside work, and they’re enlightened enough to realize that when your employees have a healthy work-life balance, patients benefit and so does the institution.”

“Oh, my God. You’re blowing my mind right now.”

“These are all things I’ve been thinking about for a while but now I have stronger motivating factors.”

Clarke’s phone dinged with a text message and Abby grinned.

“Tell Lexa hi.”

She blushed again. “It’s Lincoln, actually. I was clarifying whether they have ingredients for breakfast or if I should stop to get some.” She read it. “Yep. I’ll need to get a few thing on the way.” She texted him an affirmative back.

“Speaking of…tell me more about this surprise you have planned.”

“Well, Lexa didn’t have the best childhood. I don’t know how much she’s said to you about it, but knowing her, probably not much. Anyway, before she left her biological family to live with her aunt and uncle, her parents were pretty awful and let’s just say they denied her a lot of things, including Christmas.”

Abby stared at her, wide-eyed. “What the actual fuck.”

Clarke blinked. “Okay, I’m not sure I’m more shocked that you said that or that I approve so much that you did. Whatever. Both. So, yeah.”

“What the hell kind of parents would do that to their child?”

“It’s a question I’ve asked myself many times and Lexa has told me a bit about the dynamics between her biological mom and dad, and it sounds pretty fucked up and emotionally abusive all around, but basically it comes down to her mom probably being the instigator and her dad following along.”

Abby was quiet for a moment. “Is it because Lexa’s gay?” She paused. “I’m sorry, is that how she identifies?”

“Yes and yes. And thanks for being so inclusive. Go, Mom.” She smiled and finished her bacon.

“So her parents didn’t support their daughter, who happens to be gay, and they made her life a living hell.”

“Basically. Her mom is really conservative and is involved with her church and it doesn’t sound like an affirming place, either. So Lexa didn’t fit her mom’s expectations about gender and sexual orientation and so her mom was—probably still is, I’m guessing—an asshole.”
“So was her dad, letting that happen to his daughter. What kind of man allows his own daughter to be treated that way? And enables it? Jesus Christ.”

“A fucked-up one.” She thought about her own dad, and how supportive and caring he had been, and it just hurt to think about Lexa as a kid going through what she had.

“My heart breaks for what Lexa went through,” Abby said, clearly engaging her mom telepathy. “But how wonderful her aunt and uncle are, for giving her the love and support she deserves, because she’s such a lovely person.”

“Did you just call my GF lovely?” Clarke teased.

Abby raised her eyebrows in surprise. “And did you just call Lexa your girlfriend?”


Abby laughed. “Well. Do tell.”

“Oh, my God.” She groaned, knowing there was no way out of this. “GF. I prefer GF.”

“I like that, too. ‘Girl’ seems kind of juvenile. Never liked ‘boyfriend,’ either.” She sipped her coffee, but she was smirking.

“Thank you. Same.”

“So…?”

“Okay, fine. It’s really recent. And I haven’t actually talked with her about using GF, but we’ve established that neither of us wants to see other people.”

“That sounds a little more serious than casual.” Abby’s tone was cautious.

“Yeah.” And she couldn’t stop her huge grin.

Abby stared at her for a moment. “Really? You’re getting serious with her?”

“I—yes. I am.” There. She said it. Holy shit, she had actually voiced it, without euphemisms.

“Well.” Abby nodded slowly then smiled. “And you feel good about it?”

“Completely.”

“Good. I like her.” And she sipped her coffee again, nonchalant.

“Oh, my God. Just fucking say it, Mom.”

“What?”

“You’re in your down-play mode. How do you really feel?”

Abby laughed, stood, and started clearing dishes.

“Seriously?” Clarke crossed her arms and gave her a look.

“Honey, I think it’s great,” Abby said as she prepped dishes for the dishwasher.

Clarke frowned and went to the stove to start cleaning the frying pans but Abby grabbed her from
behind into a hug, laughing.

“I’m so glad,” she said. “I really like her and I really like how happy she makes you. And this is me not down-playing.”

Clarke laughed, too.

She let go. “As long as you’re happy and this is what you want.”

“Yes and yes.” She paused. “She’s amazing.”

Abby just smiled and went back to loading the dishwasher. Clarke cleaned the waffle iron, thinking about Lexa, of course, and about the fact that she had just told her mom that she was totally getting serious about someone. Abby worked on the frying pans and they were just finishing when Clarke got a text message. She dried her hands off and checked her phone.

Merry UnChristmas morning [kiss emoji], Lexa texted. There was a photo attached—a selfie of her, Lincoln, Indra, and Gustus hamming it up for the camera, all wearing Santa hats.

“Bet I know who that is.” Abby smiled. “So how about this? I’m going to shower and then when I’m done, we can make the pies for your surprise dinner tonight.”

“Okay.”

Abby raised her eyebrows and pointed at the phone. “Don’t keep your GF waiting too long.”

“Oh, my God. You’re as bad as Raven.”

Abby laughed and left her alone in the kitchen and she immediately Facetimed Lexa. She answered before the first ring had finished.

“Hey,” Lexa said, warmth in her tone. She was smiling and Clarke’s heart overflowed.

“Hi. Merry UnChristmas morning to you, too. And I freaking love the photo.”

“It was Lincoln’s idea. I’m not a huge fan of Santa hats, but for you, I’ll totally make an exception.”

“And I totally appreciate it.” What was not to appreciate about Lexa fucking Woods in a Santa hat, flashing that little smirk of hers? “So how are things there?”

“Just finished breakfast.”

Clarke heard voices and laughter in the background. “Same here.”

“And in a few minutes begins the ritual opening of the presents. Indra wants me to make more coffee, though.” She rolled her eyes, but Clarke could tell she was teasing about it, from her expression.

She smiled. “And I’ll bet you brought your own coffee so you could do just that.”

Lexa laughed. “Yeah, okay, I did. But I did not bring my own equipment. Indra has a French press here.”

“Huh. I thought your equipment was only for use with me,” Clarke teased.

“Mmm. Entirely different equipment. And a conversation for another time.” And there it was, the
sexy little smirk and Clarke bit her lip.

“Noted.”

“Jesus, Clarke,” Lexa said. “I can’t when you you do the lip thing. She sighed, sounding frustrated. “God, I miss you. Is that weird? I know it’s only been a couple of days.”

“No. Because I miss you that much, too.”

She smiled. “And, for the record, Indra and Gustus now have your phone number, as of this morning.”

“And?”

“I told them that we’re a thing. And they’d really like to meet you.”

“Cool. Let’s plan a weekend when we see each other.” And she had to wage an internal battle not to say anything more about that.

Somebody yelled something in the background and there was more laughter.

“They’re teasing the hell out of me,” Lexa said, smiling again. She glanced back over her shoulder. “Yeah, okay, whatever,” she shouted at them and Clarke heard more laughter.

“Yeah, my mom did the same with me this morning.”

“Oh?”

“I told her that neither of us wants to see other people and she approves. She likes you.”

Lexa exhaled, like she had been holding her breath. “Wow. I’m—” she stopped, expression a mixture of things moving too fast for Clarke to read.

“Is that not okay? I thought—”

“No, it’s absolutely okay. It’s just…um…”

Clarke smiled. “It’s just that it’s kind of new for someone to validate a relationship with you by telling her mom?”

“Yes,” she said with obvious relief. “Um, it’s a pretty amazing feeling…yeah.” And was she actually blushing? *God* how cute.

“It totally is.” And she thought she heard Lincoln shouting in the background.

“Shit. I have to go. They want their damn coffee so we can open presents. But…can we talk tonight? Lincoln is dragging me out of the house for the afternoon and then I guess we’re going to have dinner. I’ll text you when I can talk.”

Clarke nodded and it was seriously all she could do not to tell her that she would actually see her later. “Definitely.”

“Great. Oh, say hi to your mom. Looking forward to brunch. Talk to you later.”

“Yep. Hi to everybody. Bye.” And she ended the call, smiling so wide it hurt. She fist-pumped then did a little dance in the kitchen that had nothing to do with the Christmas song on the radio. God, she
was so into Lexa fucking Woods. So into everything about her, so into this ride. Fuck, she couldn’t wait to see her—a text message came in. She checked her phone. Lincoln.

All good to go. I’ll keep L out of house til 6-6.30. Txt if u need more time.

She smiled again. k. thx. let me know if u need anything b4 then

Will do. See u soon.

Clarke fist-pumped again then began prepping for the great pie-making extravaganza. A few minutes later, Abby reappeared, wearing jeans and a baggy sweater, her hair pulled back into a pony tail.

“So? How are things in Virginia?” she asked.

“Good. They’re opening presents. Which is a really good segue to give you this.” Clarke handed her the envelope she had brought down earlier.

“Honey, you didn’t need to do that.”

She smiled. “Whatever. Open it.”

Abby did. The card was kind of goofy, with bad cartoon elves on the front acting out. Inside, though, was the gift certificate to the restaurant Clarke had picked.

“Oh,” Abby said. “Oh, my. This is wonderful.”

“I thought you and Marcus could have a date night.”

“I love it. He’ll love it, too. This is so thoughtful. Thank you.” She pulled Clarke into a hug. “And now it’s my turn. Be right back.” She went into the other room and came back with her own envelope, which she handed to Clarke.

She opened it, and it was also kind of a goofy card with a cartoon Santa stuck in a chimney while the reindeer looked on. Inside was a folded piece of paper and Clarke took it out and set the card on the counter.

“Oh, wow,” she said when she unfolded it. “Seriously?”

“Absolutely.”

“Three nights at a B and B near Rehoboth Beach? This is so great. And holy shit, it’s queer women friendly.”

“A lesbian couple owns it,” Abby said with a smile.

Clarke looked at her. “You totally were playing matchmaker with this.”

She shrugged.

“You got this right after Thanksgiving, didn’t you?”

“I…might have.”

Clarke laughed. “Right after you met Lexa?”

“Maybe not right after. I started thinking about it then, but I might have gotten it after I spoke with
her on the phone that day the prick showed up on campus.”

She appreciated that not even Abby would refer to Finn by name.

“Look, sweetie, I don’t want to be *that* mom, who pushes you to be with certain people or not. So I thought even if it didn’t work out with Lexa and you didn’t want to use the B and B certificate with her, you could always take Raven or somebody else.”

“But you were hoping I’d take Lexa,” Clarke said, teasing.

“Hell, yes.”

She laughed. “I cannot believe my mom actually likes someone I’m seeing.”

“What does that mean?” she huffed and crossed her arms.

“Please, Mom. You’ve never really liked anybody I’ve dated.”

“That’s not entirely fair, since I haven’t really met many of them. Although I did like that woman you were seeing early on in college. A little naïve, but she seemed sweet. Nadia? Was that her name?”

“Yeah,” she said, surprised.

“And that guy you were dating later on in college—the one who went off to grad school. He was all right. He was kind, but clearly didn’t move your world the way it needed to be moved.”

Clarke gave her a look.

“I paid attention, honey. I know you don’t think so during those years, but I did.”

“I kind of wish I had known.”

She sighed. “We had a lot to work through, both individually and together. We’re still a work in progress. But there hasn’t been a time that I wasn’t paying attention. I just wasn’t very good at communicating with you. Sometimes I’m still not.”

“I’m not, either. So we’re even. And as long as we both try, we’ll figure it out, right?”

“Right.” Abby held her hand up and Clarke briefly hooked her own pinky with hers. “So tell me exactly what we’re doing here with these pies.”

“We’re going to make your awesome pecan pies for the UnChristmas surprise I have planned for Lexa tonight.”

“UnChristmas?”

“I’m trying to help her have better associations with this time of year. She still has some baggage, and I told her we could just ignore Christmas and do UnChristmas instead.”

“Who knew my daughter was such a romantic? Wait. Never mind. Of course you are. You’re your father’s daughter and he was *such* a romantic.” She surveyed the ingredients Clarke had set out. “So do we need to make the pastry dough or do we have pre-made shells?”

“I made the dough at home a couple days ago. Your recipe. It’s been in the fridge since.”
“Excellent.” She washed her hands and set to work preparing to melt the butter. “Good choice. If you’re going to bring something to a dinner, make it pie.”

“Because pie makes everything awesome.”

Abby laughed.

“So tell me something romantic that Dad did.”

“He wasn’t a huge showman when it came to that. He wasn’t the white tuxedo and stretch limousine kind of man, which was fine with me because I’m not into that, either.” She put the butter in the pot then went to the fridge and took out the two dough lumps Clarke had brought while Clarke watched the butter.

“He’d do things like draw me silly little cartoons sometimes and leave them where I’d find them. And he’d bring me a single rose other times, usually when I’d had a hard day.” She rolled the dough out, working it carefully. “He liked to do surprises, like one time, he told me to get dressed up because he had made reservations at an exclusive venue. So I put on a dress and he had on a suit and tie—something he rarely did—and off we went.”

Clarke added brown sugar to the melted butter and whisked it. “Where did you go?”

Abby smiled. “To a picnic table overlooking a river. He had made pasta and he literally heated it up on a camp stove and served it with really delicious bread, fresh parmesan, and a really good wine.”

“Right on, Dad,” Clarke said, smiling despite the lump in her throat as she took the pot off the heat and started whisking corn syrup into the mixture along with vanilla and a bit of orange zest.

“It wasn’t too hot or too cold that night, but he had brought blankets anyway. And the sky was so clear. You could see the stars and the Milky Way. It was…God, it was beautiful.” She stopped working the dough into the pie tins and stared off into space then wiped at her eyes with the back of one of her hands. Clarke went into the living room and came back with a box of Kleenex. She set it on the counter and handed one to Abby, and squeezed her arm in support before she went back to the pot of ingredients and added a bit of salt and continued whisking.

“I’m glad he was like that,” she said. “I saw a bit of it, but you know. Eww, gross, what adults did.” Abby laughed.

“And now I’m kind of into that stuff.”

That only made Abby laugh more. “Clearly. You’re doing this dinner for your GF, after all,” she said, with emphasis. “I have a feeling Lexa is the type to appreciate it.”

“She is. She did an impromptu picnic with me,” Clarke said.

Abby looked over at her. “And?”

“It was the snow day we had before Thanksgiving. We had already said we’d have dinner at her place that evening and that it would be takeout. The food came and she turned the coffee table in the living room into a picnic table and said we’d have a snow day picnic.” She smiled at the memory, and she knew she had heart eyes. “She lit a bunch of candles and we ate and talked and…I don’t know. It was just…special.” And what happened after the picnic was pretty damn special, too. And holy hell, she was discussing her personal life with her mom.
“And you wonder why I’m encouraging you to take her to the B and B,” Abby said as she finished trimming the dough and worked on crimping the edges of one tin while Clarke did the other. “It sounds like she has a romantic streak, too, and that’s very important in a relationship.” She was quiet for a moment. “Your dad would have liked Lexa.”

“I think so, too.”

“He liked anybody who supported you and your ideas. Like he was with you. He loved engaging your ideas and supporting you in everything you did.”

“Damn, Mom,” Clarke grabbed a tissue. “You did, too, though.”

“I have a different parenting style,” she said, tone dry. “Your dad was kind of the comrade-in-arms and I was—”

“The Valkyrie.”

Abby looked at her, surprised.

“You were—and still are—the hardcore protector. I mean, Dad was like that, too. I know he would’ve thrown down for us, but he had a very different style. You weren’t—and still aren’t—afraid to confront anything or anyone when your principles are at stake or when I or Dad needed you to. You made the tough calls, even when it pissed people off, including me.”

Abby was still looking at her. “I seemed to do that a lot when you were growing up.”

“It’s because I have so much of you in me. I know Dad told you that, too. He told me we butted heads a lot because you and I were the two strongest people he knew, which would of course create some friction, but he said that when we figured out how to work together, we’d be unstoppable. And he always said we would figure it out, even after you and I had our worst fights.”

Fuck. She wiped at a tear.

Abby grabbed another tissue, too. “He did tell me that. There were days, though, that I wondered if we could. I felt like I must be the worst mother ever, because you were so angry with me so many times.”

“Damn teenagers,” Clarke said and Abby laughed, which made Clarke laugh, too.

“And now here we are.”

Clarke nodded and smiled. “Yeah.” She hugged her. “Guess we’re figuring out how to use our powers for good.”

“Your dad would be so proud of you.”

“He’d be proud of us.” Clarke pulled away. “Selfie time.”

Abby laughed again. “For Lexa?”

“And for Marcus.” She took her camera out of her pocket and took a picture of them making goofy faces, then sent the photo to Abby. She sent it separately to Lexa with the tagline, “we’re legit mature.”

“Speaking of Marcus,” Clarke said, “did he call you for Christmas?” She raised an eyebrow.
Abby laughed again. “Yes, he did. While I was in the shower. I called him back. And he sent me a photo.” She went into the living room and came back with her phone and handed it to Clarke. Marcus had sent a photo of himself with two young women who Clarke assumed were his daughters. One had dark hair like him, but blue eyes and the other had reddish hair and dark eyes, but there was a resemblance between the three of them.

“That’s Lyssa, with the dark hair, and Maggie.”

“So when do I get to meet them?” She handed the phone back.

“I don’t know. Hopefully soon. Maggie lives in New York and Lyssa is based in Dallas. They’re all here in DC for Christmas, though.” Abby put bunches of pecans in the pie tins, on top of the crust that lined the bottoms.

“Has he told them he’s seeing you?”

“Now who’s the Valkyrie?”

Clarke smiled, sheepish.

“Yes, he has.” She gestured at the pie tins. “Pour the goodness in here.”

Clarke did, and Abby put the pies in the oven and set the timer for an hour.

“So does Marcus have a fun little romantic streak, too?”

Abby smiled. “Yes. He likes to do things like go out to interesting restaurants with great views. He also took me on a night cruise of the Potomac. He likes being outside and exploring, which I enjoy about him.”

“That’s really nice.” Clarke started to clean up. “So you’re having fun?”

“Yes,” Abby said as she helped. “And I feel a lot lighter and younger when I’m around him.” She looked at Clarke. “Is that one of those ‘eww’ moments for you?”

She laughed. “No. I mean, there are some things I totally don’t want to think about that you’re doing, clearly, but otherwise, I’m really glad you’re seeing someone who makes you feel like that.”

“Well, I’m glad that you are, too. And what time do you need to leave?”

“About the same time you do--actually, maybe a little earlier because I have to stop at a grocery store.”

She dried her hands on a dish towel. “Will you let me know when you get there?”

“Yep”

“Good. And after the new year, would you be up to having brunch with me and Lexa? And then maybe you could join me and Marcus after that here for dinner or something comparable. And then we could do a double-date kind of situation.”

“Well, look at you, planning the gatherings. And yes, I’m down for that. Just let me know in advance so I can coordinate with Lexa on the brunch and the double-date thing.”

Abby started to say something, then stopped.
“What?”

“I—it’s just nice, spending time with you like this.”

“Yeah. It is. Thanks, Mom. And thanks for the pies.”

Abby laughed. “That was all you, sweetie. So how about you go shower and get your stuff ready to go? I’ll keep an eye on the pies and then we can hang out a little more before I have to get ready for work.”

“Okay.” Clarke gave her a hug. “Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Clarke went back upstairs, where she checked her phone. It was nearly eleven, which was plenty of time to get ready. Raven, Harper, Jasper, and Bellamy had all texted her and so had Lexa, in response to her selfie with Abby. Three hearts. And somehow even that gave her a touch of the feels. She responded to everybody else then took another selfie and sent it to Lexa.

Because reasons.

And holy shit, she was going to see Lexa in a few hours. She smiled as she got ready to shower.

Operation UnChristmas was going to be awesome.

Chapter End Notes

I kinda love Clarke n’ Abby time.

Also, guys, seriously, try this recipe for pecan pie. You don't have to make your own dough (I suck at that, so I don't even), and you can just get the ready-made crusts.

And you guys, UnChristmas. It's coming. Be ready. :D
Clarke heads up to Virginia to surprise Lexa for UnChristmas. Mounds of feels ensue.

A correlation existed between the distance to Indra and Gustus’s house and Clarke’s level of nervousness. The closer she got, the more nervous, until she was practically sweating as she turned onto the road outside Tondisi that in a few minutes would bring her to her destination, somewhere in this forested and hilly subdivision, where houses seemed to be a few hundred yards apart, which made it feel rural.

She was navigating with the help of her phone, and she had turned her music off when she hit the outskirts of Tondisi so she could hear the directions. And if she wasn’t so nervous, she might actually appreciate how pretty it was here, even with the hardwood trees mostly unleafed and skeletal in the fading daylight. She caught glimpses of the sunset through the trees to her left, but her focus was on the road and deer that might decide this was the best time ever to run across it.

Her phone told her that in a hundred yards she’d be at her destination, on the right. And sure enough, she crested a rise and there was the driveway Lincoln had told her to look for. He’d even sent a photo of it. A carved wooden bear standing on its hind legs served as the mailbox holder, and the mailbox itself was propped on its front paws, held above its head.

Jesus fucking Christ she was nervous. And excited, and everything was colliding in her heart and… fuck. She turned down the driveway. The house was on her left, a low-slung ranch style with dark siding and if no lights had been on inside, it might have blended into the increasing darkness. A detached garage with a second story stood to the left of the house, and an SUV and what looked like a Toyota or Honda sedan were parked in front of it. Lexa's Jeep was parked next to the sedan.

Her hands were sweating on the steering wheel. Shit. Lincoln’s text had instructed her not to take the paved driveway to the garage in the front, but to go on the gravel one past the house to the flat-roofed out building behind it on the right and she could park on the side that didn’t face the house, obviously, so Lexa couldn’t see her truck.

Lexa. Oh, my God. She was going to see her in maybe an hour. She smiled (because Lexa fucking Woods and UnChristmas was quite possibly the best manifestation of Clexonium ever) and pulled next to the building, noting that it clearly served as a parking area for other vehicles because it was graveled and railroad ties had been set out as tire blocks. She turned the engine off and silence engulfed her cab, both expectant and indicative of the lack of urban soundscapes out here.

And now here she was. Operation UnChristmas just got real. Holy shit.

Clarke wiped her hands on her jeans and got out of her truck, greeted by the crisp tang of a December forest, and the sound of running water. There must be a creek nearby. A stubborn patch of snow remained along the base of the out building and Clarke figured it was because it hadn’t warmed up enough in the shade there to melt it. She had a zip hoodie on and it seemed okay for
now, so she left her lightweight down jacket behind her seat.

She texted her mom and Raven then inhaled deeply and decided she loved it already but shit, should she just go to the house, now? Should she take the groceries or pies with her?

The decision was made when she heard what sounded like a door opening then closing on the main house and then voices. She slid her phone into her back pocket, took a deep breath, and stepped away from her truck, putting herself in view.

A bearded mountain of a man dressed in jeans, work boots, and a quilted flannel jacket was walking toward her. He was basically Paul Bunyan come to life.

Gustus, Clarke automatically registered. Holy shit, she was meeting Lexa’s family.

“Hey there,” he said, in a voice that was softer than Clarke had imagined it should be, coming from a man his size. “I’m Gustus. Welcome to Chez Woods,” he added with a grin and Clarke liked him immediately, and the way life and warmth seemed to buzz around him, like he was a human sparkler.

“Hi. I’m Clarke, obviously.”

“It’s so good to finally meet you. And we’re so glad you’re here.” He looked like he wanted to hug her, but he held back and stuck out his hand instead.

“I am, too. Thanks for agreeing to my little plan.” She shook his hand, which was huge. He probably could have covered both of hers in one of his, and his grip was firm, but surprisingly gentle.

“When Lincoln told us what you suggested, there was no way we didn’t want in on it.” His moustache moved with the motion of his upper lip when he smiled.

“Did he tell you the UnChristmas part?”

“Yes, and we love it. Lexa mentioned it, too, when she got here. We all pretended we didn’t already know.” His eyes seemed to twinkle. “This is the most relaxed I’ve seen her this time of year. Though she is disappointed that she doesn’t get to see you until the twenty-seventh…” He raised his eyebrows and did a cartoon villain laugh and Clarke liked him even more.

“So what’ve you got to take in?” He glanced at her truck then back at her.

“My personal stuff, but that can wait until later. Some groceries, a couple bottles of wine, and two pecan pies.”

“Oh, you are definitely welcome at Chez Woods. Load me up,” he said and he reminded her of Lincoln for a moment.

She went around to the passenger side of her truck, closest to the wall of the out building, and got the groceries out so she could transfer the bottles of wine to them. When she did, she handed the bags to Gustus before she took the box with the pies out then bumped the door shut with her hip.

“Excellent,” he said, sounding like a kid getting ready to go to Disney World. “I’ve got the ribs on, Indra’s got the mac n’ cheese in the oven, and Lincoln has Lexa out and about for a bit, as planned. He’ll text before they start back, and that’ll give us about fifteen minutes after he does.” He was walking as he talked, and for every one of his strides Clarke took two.

They approached the patio off the back of the house and Clarke slowed as they passed the grill, which was basically a barrel cut in half lengthwise and mounted on a frame, standing near a table
and four chairs. She knew grills like that could be bought, but she had a feeling Gustus had made this one himself. He struck her as that kind of guy.

“Oh, my God, that smells so good.” She inhaled deeply. “That’s a serious grillmaster smell.”

He was about to reply when the back door opened and a woman Clarke recognized from photographs as Indra stood for a moment framed in the doorway. She wore jeans and a sweatshirt and an unwavering and intense gaze, and Clarke could totally see her dressed in full battle regalia as a warrior for the Commander. Indra pushed the screen door open and stood, assessing, and Jesus hell Clarke wasn’t sure how to react.

“Don’t move,” Gustus said. “Motion is how she hunts. Like in *Jurassic Park*.”

Oh, my God. Did he really just go there? Clarke struggled not to laugh even through her terror (though how cool was it that Gustus assumed she knew the reference?) and Indra’s stern expression relaxed into a smile.

Thank God.

“Look, honey,” Gustus said. “Clarke is real. I found her down by the out building.”

“And I have pie.” She held up the box. “And Lexa’s pickles.” She nodded toward Gustus, who held up one of the grocery bags. “And delicious breakfast ingredients.” And oh, God, did that sound dumb?

Indra chuckled, which should have seemed incongruous coming from a woman with such intense energy, but it wasn’t somehow and Clark relaxed a little.

“Hi, Clarke.” Indra said, still smiling. “I’m Indra. It’s good to meet you. Please come in.” She moved aside and motioned her in and Clarke stepped into the kitchen, wondering if she should maybe have.texted everybody she knew that she loved them and she was glad she had known them in case she disappeared from the Indra interrogation room. Was it off the kitchen? Or maybe there was a basement? Oh, God. She hoped she looked unfazed as she lowered the box she was carrying a little so Indra could take the pies out and set them on the counter.

“These look so delicious,” she said. “Thank you.”

Okay, that sounded…reasonable. Time to up the Clarke fucking Griffin charm.

“No, thank you for agreeing to this scheme.” She took the two bottles of wine out of the grocery bags that Gustus set on the counter. “And these are way better chilled.” She handed them to Indra, and was that what she thought it was? Yes—genuine warmth in her eyes. Thank God. She felt like she was under a microscope. She envisioned herself, pinned to a petri dish, Indra carefully poking at her—

“I love ice wine,” Indra said, and her smile lit up her eyes and Clarke thanked whatever deities might care that she had chosen to buy that instead of the sweet Riesling.

“Is that what that is?” Gustus took one of the bottles and looked at it. “Oh, yes. Yes, indeedie.” He put one bottle into the fridge and one into the freezer.

“Don’t forget that’s in there,” Indra scolded about the freezer, but there was affection in her tone, and she rested her hand on his back as he laughed.

“It smells phenomenal in here,” Clarke said as she helped Indra unload the rest of the groceries.
Despite the terror Indra could engender, she liked the vibe here, and she knew it permeated the rest of the house. A lot of love and laughter, she could tell, and she was so glad Lexa had this. Even scary Indra, who Clarke knew would defend Lexa to the end of the world. And beyond. Again, an image of her in warrior garb in a post-apocalyptic landscape came to mind.

“That would be Indra’s famous mac n’ cheese,” Gustus said. “It’s a family favorite.”

“And I was fortunate to have some over Thanksgiving,” Clarke said.

He stopped and looked at her. “Did Lexa make it? Or Lincoln?”

“Lexa.”

Gustus shared a look and a smile with Indra, like Clarke had passed some kind of test and she relaxed even more as they put things away and nobody seemed weirded out that she was engaged in that with them, like she’d been here before.

The kitchen had been updated in the past few years, she could tell. Recent appliances and cabinetry that looked sleek but somehow fit in with the homey, sort of rustic feel. Like farmhouse chic, maybe. Someone had done a great backsplash above the sink that looked like subway tile and track lighting added to the updated feel.

“This is a great space,” Clarke said and Indra smiled again.

“Gustus and a friend of the family did some work on it.”

“Roan?” Clarke took a stab and Gustus raised his eyebrows.

“Yes.” and he and Indra both looked puzzled.

“I met him,” Clarke said. “Lexa took me to the Skyview.”

Indra and Gustus exchanged another look and smile and again, Clarke had the feeling that she had just passed another test.

“So…” Clarke gathered the grocery bags up. “Where should I put these?”

“I’ll take them.” Gustus took them and went into the utility room.

“Would you like a tour?” Indra asked her.

“Yes, thank you.”

“Checking the ribs,” Gustus said from the utility room and Indra rolled her eyes, but with a lot of affection.

“He takes grilling very seriously,” she said with a smile.

“Lincoln mentioned that,” Clarke said as she followed Indra into a dining room that included a big, distressed wood table that had been restored but in such a way to retain a weathered look. “Oh, my God, I love this,” Clarke said. It looked like something that would have been in a farmhouse decades ago.

“That was a project Lincoln and I did a few years ago. He found it at a flea market.”

“It’s…I love it.”
“Lexa mentioned that you have similar furniture that you worked on yourself.”

Good. Another in with her, and Clarke took it. “Yes, I do. My dad liked to do projects like that and I guess I got it from him. We did a few together when I was younger.”

Indra nodded. “She also told us that you lost your father a few years ago. I’m truly sorry.”

Normally, things like that came across as platitudes, just something to say because people felt awkward when dealing with death. But from Indra, it felt genuine, like a commiseration.

“Thank you.” And she meant it.

Indra didn’t respond right away, and she got that same intense expression in her eyes, like she was dissecting Clarke in a bio class. Then she gave a half-nod and continued the tour, which included a living room toward the front of the house that didn’t seem to get much use, a family room with a big-screen TV and shelves full of books and DVDs.

The furniture here looked worn and well-loved and Indra continued talking about some of the work they had done over the years and it was clear that she loved the house, but more importantly, what it symbolized. A haven. A place for love, laughter, and support even in the face of shitty situations over the years, whether with regard to Lexa’s bioparents, family bullshit over Gustus marrying a black woman, or whatever racist crap Indra faced and, by extension, the family faced.

Indra basically had every fucking right to question Clarke and her motives with regard to Lexa. Because Lexa’s relationship did have larger repercussions.

And fuck, this was a depressing thought train. Goddess, shit could be complicated. Hopefully, Indra would come to see how much she cared about Lexa, and that everything Lexa was, she was here for it.

Those thoughts put her at ease as they continued the tour. The bedrooms were down a hallway off the family room and Indra directed Clarke to the bathroom—also down that hall—and Clarke went to take care of that then rejoined her in the kitchen.

“Let me show you the apartment above the garage,” Indra said. “I assume Lincoln said that’s where you and Lexa would be staying.”

“Yes. He did. Let me get my stuff out of my truck,” Clarke said, trying to sound nonchalant as Indra pretty much acknowledged her relationship with Lexa. “Be right back.” She went back onto the patio, where she saw Gustus standing by the grill checking his watch. It was completely dark, now, but light spilled from the kitchen windows, creating an oasis on the patio.

“So did you get the tour?” he asked.

“Yes. This is such a great place.”

“I’m inclined to agree.” He was drinking a beer and Clarke wondered if it was one Indra had brewed. He set the bottle on the table.

“Going to get the rest of my stuff,” she said as she walked toward the out building.

“Need any help?”

“No. Thanks, though.” She checked her phone at her truck. Both her mom and Raven had texted, the latter sending nothing but heart eyes emojis. Lexa had texted, too.
So Lincoln is going crazy at Best Buy. [eyeroll emoji]

She smiled. what’s he doing?

Lexa responded almost immediately. Drooling over tech.

why do i get the feeling u are, 2? [thinking emoji]

While she waited for Lexa’s answer, she got her two backpacks out of her truck and slung one over each shoulder then retrieved a poster tube from behind her seat.

OK, I might have picked up a copy of the latest Assassin’s Creed, Lexa texted.

lol [kiss emoji]

And when I’m back in town, you should come over and play it.

Clarke bit her lip. Back in Polis, she knew she meant. She grinned. i just might, she texted before she started walking back to the house. Indra met her halfway.

“Let me help.”

Clarke surrendered one of her backpacks to her. “Lexa texted about ten minutes ago. They’re at Best Buy.”

Indra chuckled. “Good. The two of them can spend hours there.” She led Clarke back to the patio and behind Gustus and the grill to the back of the garage. A metal staircase with grated steps had been added to the backside, and it led up to a door, revealed by a light mounted over it. Indra went first, and turned on an interior light.

“Oh, wow. This is great,” Clarke said as she looked around, appreciative. The door opened into a kitchenette and beyond that was a living room/dining area combined, giving off the same farmhouse chic vibe that the main house did. Someone must have turned the heat up earlier, because it was comfortable.

“The bedroom and bathroom are there,” Indra said, and she gestured down a short hallway to her right. “Let me turn a light on for later.” She set Clarke’s pack on the couch and went to do that in the bedroom and also the living room while Clarke put her school pack down, too.

“Generally, this is our guest house, and Lincoln and Lexa stay in the main house. But given these circumstances—” Her eyes sparked with teasing amusement, “there’s a bit more privacy here.”

Clarke really hoped her blush didn’t show. “So is Lexa staying here now?”

“No. She doesn’t know she’ll be moving out of the main house tonight for the next couple of nights.” Indra smiled, a hint of teasing remaining. “I’m sure neither of you will mind.”

Oh, God. She cleared her throat.

“Everything is pretty easy to find,” she said, saving Clarke further embarrassment. “Towels in the linen closet near the bathroom, extra blankets in the bedroom closet.”

“Thank you. And I really, really appreciate you and Gustus and Lincoln helping with this.”

“We’re extremely glad to do it.” She inclined her head, and paused, but she had that mom look—the one that presaged more probing questions or statements. Clarke prepared herself.
“Lexa is generally circumspect about things going on in her personal life,” Indra continued, “but when she discusses something along those lines, it’s because she feels it’s important.”

Clarke waited, stomach a little clenched, though it didn’t feel like this was anything bad. Still, Indra made her majorly nervous.

“And she’s been talking about you quite a bit.” She accompanied the statement with a smile and Clarke hoped her exhalation of relief wasn’t audible. “Which tells me there’s something special about you.”

Clarke thought she detected a challenge beneath her tone, and though she understood and respected it, she wanted to make sure Indra understood her position with regard to this situation. “Well, Lexa’s pretty special,” she said. “And I want to make sure she knows it.” She held Indra’s gaze and it felt a little like a standoff, like a matriarch protecting her charge versus the upstart outsider. But this upstart outsider had dealt with a strong matriarch all her life, and she knew a thing or two about how that worked.

And then Indra smiled again and the moment passed, maybe with a little bit of appreciation on Indra’s part. Another test passed, maybe. “And that’s why I’m so glad you’re doing this for her,” Indra said. “So what else did you have in mind before they get back?”

“I made an UnChristmas banner.” Clarke held up the poster tube. “Hopefully to hang in the kitchen.”

“Good plan. That way she won’t see it until she comes all the way through the house.”

“And we’ll all be in the kitchen, too.”

Indra nodded. “Good. So let’s go hang this up.” She started toward the door then paused. “Do you have everything for right now?”

“Yes, but I do have a question.”

Indra waited, the hint of a frown on her lips.

“Where’s the lab?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Where you create all your awesome costumes. Lexa showed me pictures of your Furiosa and clearly, I’m in the presence of a Jedi master cosplayer.” Never a bad idea to throw legit respect to a matriarch.

She stared at her for a beat, as if she wasn’t sure it was a serious question, and then she actually laughed. “It’s underneath this apartment, actually, and how about we do the tour of that tomorrow?”

“Definitely.”

Clarke dimmed the light in the living room and followed Indra down the stairs back to the patio, where Gustus was still hanging out, sipping his beer.

“Clarke would like to see the costume cave,” Indra announced. “Given the current state of affairs, I suggested tomorrow.”

“Excellent. Shall we invoke the ritual?”

Indra laughed again. “Clarke gets a pass. She did bring pies and ice wine, after all.”
“You speak true,” Gustus said, and Clarke suddenly envisioned him in her Commander Lexa comic, too, decked out in furs and weapons, a tattoo on one side of his face. Hell, she could probably find a role in it for everybody in her and Lexa’s crews.

“Do you want another beer?” Indra asked and he grinned and placed an affectionate kiss on her cheek.

“No. I’m saving myself for ice wine.”

“Clarke?” Indra asked as she went to the door into the kitchen.

“Is it yours?”

Indra stopped, her hand on the screen door handle, and raised her eyebrows, surprised.

“Lexa brought some of yours over. Raven—my roommate and good friend—likes beer. And what Lexa brought was so freaking good. Seriously. It was amazing.”

“Was it the seasonal one she did this year?” Gustus asked.

“Yeah. If you have more of that, I’d love it.”

“You’re in luck,” Indra said. “Still have some left.” She stood with the door open. “And how are things with the ribs?” she said to Gustus.

“Magnifico.” He kissed his fingertips. “They’ll be almost ready when Lincoln and Lexa get back. So what’s the plan in that regard?”

“I have an UnChristmas banner I’m going to put up in the kitchen.” Clarke held the poster tube up.

He nodded. “I like it. So the rest of the plan is this. Lincoln will park in front, next to the other cars. That way, they have to come through the front and Lincoln knows to herd Lexa to the kitchen, where all the goodness is to occur.”

“Will he do it?” Indra asked. “I know Lexa really wants to Facetime Clarke as soon as possible.” She shot her a sly, almost playful look.

He chuckled. “I told him before they left not to let her wander off to do that when they get home. He’ll manage.”

“And when he brings her into the kitchen, what then?” she asked.

“How about we all say ‘Merry UnChristmas’ when they come in?” Clarke said. “Unless that seems cheesy.”

Gustus grinned. “Nope. I approve.” He looked over at Indra.

“I like this plan. Now let me get Clarke a beer.” She went inside and Gustus moved to the door.

“I’ll help you put the banner up.”

“Great.” She followed him inside and opened the tube and pulled the rolled-up banner out that she had created on butcher block paper. With Gustus’s help, she unrolled it. Six feet long and two feet wide, it said “Merry UnChristmas!” in big letters. Clarke had also added cartoon portraits of herself and Lexa doing various things, including bowling, hiking, sailing, ziplining, watching football, eating tacos at Lupe’s food truck, eating pizza and watching movies on a couch, having brunch with
Abby, and playing board games with Lincoln, Octavia, Indra, and Gustus.

When it was fully unrolled on the counter, Gustus stared at it. “This is really neat. And you got us in there, too.” He pointed at the board game scene.

“And here.” She pointed at him standing next to a grill with Indra. Octavia and Lincoln were there, too, drinking beer. “Octavia’s here in spirit,” she added.

“And you drew these?” He looked at her.

“Yes.”

He smiled. “This is so great. She’s going to love it. Hell, I love it right now.” He nodded. “Everybody will love it.”

Indra appeared from whatever secret grotto she stashed her beer in, carrying two bottles.

“Look at this,” Gustus said, and she came over and studied Clarke’s handiwork. “We’re famous,” Gustus said. “We’ve been immortalized in the first annual UnChristmas celebration at Chez Woods.”

Indra laughed. “Is this your mother?” She pointed at the brunch scene.

“Yes.”

“Lexa told us a bit about her. She seems like a remarkable woman.”

“She is. Thank you.”

Indra set the bottles on the counter away from the banner and opened one. She handed it to Clarke and put the other in the fridge.

“So where should we put it?” Clarke asked.

“We don’t want it to be visible unless you’re in the kitchen,” Gustus said. “So what about hanging it over there, near the windows? It’s not blocking essential cabinets that way.”

Indra nodded and went into the utility room right off the kitchen and returned with packing tape. “This tends to stick better than masking,” she said as she used scissors to cut a few strips off and stick them to the counter’s edge. Gustus took one side of the banner and with Clarke holding it on the other, he taped one side and then the other. When he finished, they stood back and assessed. Clarke had used bright paints and markers along with glitter, so the letters showed up very well, and then the viewer’s gaze was drawn to the little scenes she’d included.

“I love it,” Gustus announced.

“I do, too.” Indra nodded and Clarke sighed softly with relief. Indra was definitely the more hardcore of the two. She wondered if Lexa had felt like this when she met Abby. She took a sip of the beer and holy shit, it was good.

“This is amazing,” she said and she held the bottle up. “I would buy the hell out of this if I found it in a store.”

“Good thing you know the source,” Indra said with a quick smile.

And then Clarke’s phone dinged, along with Gustus’s. She exchanged a glance with him and he laughed.
“Looks like Lincoln wanted to cover his bases.” He took his phone out as Clarke took hers out. “Yep. They’re leaving Best Buy. Fifteen minutes.” He looked over at Indra. “How’s the mac n’ cheese coming?”

“Ready in about ten minutes. Mashed potatoes are done. I don’t want to set the table because that’ll tip Lexa.”

“Good point. Ribs are done in about twenty. And we’ve got alcohol, pie, and Clarke. I’d say we are ready for UnChristmas.” He texted Lincoln back. “Ready?” he asked her when he was done.

“Yes. Kind of excited.” Which was the hugest understatement in the history of understatements. She was so damn excited that she wasn’t sure she’d make it through the next few minutes without an adrenaline crash.

“Me, too.” He put his phone back in his pocket. “So how about we get dishes out and stack them on the counter?” he asked Indra. “Just so we’re ready.”

She nodded and Gustus went across the kitchen and took plates out of another cabinet.

“So does Lexa know what’s going on for dinner?” Clarke asked.

“No.” Indra put some glasses out. “We generally do a big lunch Christmas Eve and then have leftovers Christmas Day. She’s probably assuming we’re going to have ham sandwiches or something comparable for dinner.”

“Not that there’s anything wrong with ham sandwiches,” Gustus said as he took silverware out of a drawer. “It’s just that this is much more fun because Lexa loves ribs. Lincoln does, too, so it all works out.”

“This is, in fact, a rib-friendly family,” Indra said.

“And it’s a great night. I say we have a fire after dinner.” Gustus raised his eyebrows up and down in exaggerated enthusiasm.

She nodded. “I agree.”

“Great. I’ll roll the ol’ firepit out.”

“I’ll come. Or do you need some help in here?” she asked Indra.

“No, all good. I’ll keep watch.”

Gustus laughed. “We’re not going to win any awards for stealth, but we’ll have fun regardless.”

Clarke set her beer bottle on the counter and he held the door for her and then the two of them spent the next few minutes setting the portable firepit up. It really did roll because Gustus had it on a small wheeled pushcart. Once he positioned it on the patio where he wanted it, he and Clarke lifted the firepit off and set it on the flagstones.

“Fun fact,” he said as he pulled the cover off. “It’s gas. So basically all we have to do is turn it on and light it up.” He straightened and looked at her. “I’m really glad you suggested this. And I know Lexa’s going to love it.”

Clarke’s phone indicated a text message and she checked it.

*Almost back at I and G’s. Can I Facetime you?*
She grinned and looked at Gustus. “Lexa says they’re almost here and she would like to Facetime with me.”

“Sure, I don’t see why not,” he deadpanned. “Easy to do that across the kitchen from you.”

She bit her lip, heart pounding with excitement, and texted back, *u can FT me whenever the hell u want 😍 [kiss emoji].* And oh, my God, she was so full of giddiness and feels right now and sparks were zipping around inside her chest like fireflies on Murphy’s Red Bull and holy shit everything was about to get even more real.

“Okay,” Gustus announced as he stashed the cover to the firepit by the side of the house. “That’s ready to go—”

The back door opened.

“They’re here,” Indra announced through the screen door and Clarke’s excitement jumped another level.

“Let’s do this,” Gustus said and he and Clarke went back inside.

“Stand over here,” Indra instructed, motioning toward the banner. “That’s out of the line of sight as they come in.”

“Honey, you know I love it when you use terminology like that,” Gustus said, waggling his eyebrows. Indra laughed and smacked him playfully on the stomach then moved so she could monitor.

He took his phone out. “Gonna document the hell out of this.”

“Send the video to me,” Clarke said.

“Definitely.”

Clarke heard the front door open and Lincoln and Lexa talking. Her heartbeat seemed to pick up even more speed and Indra gave her a look and a nod that Clarke returned, like they were running some kind of military-style campaign and about to launch an action of some sort.

“Why did you buy so much wine?” Clarke heard Lexa ask. “I mean, it’s not like there’s an impending wine shortage.”

“Whatever,” Lincoln shot back. “Help me take it to the kitchen and then you can Facetime Clarke.” He made kissing noises and Clarke bit her lip and estimated that they were in the dining room now. So fucking close.

Gustus grinned at her and Indra nodded at them and hurried over and stood on the other side of Clarke.

Oh, God. She could barely breathe.

Lincoln was first into the kitchen. He came in carrying grocery bags and when he saw them, he quickly stepped out of the way of the entrance.

“Seriously, dude,” Lexa said as she came in. “They’ve never bought this much—”

“Merry UnChristmas,” Clarke, Gustus and Indra shouted, joined at the tail end by Lincoln, who started laughing while Gustus fist-pumped his free hand and gave Indra a high-five then side-hugged
Clarke, even as he kept filming.

Lexa stared, stunned. “What…the…hell…” she said and Lincoln set his bags on the floor and took hers. She didn’t seem to notice that he had, since she was staring at Clarke and everything good and beautiful in the world was in her eyes.

“We thought it would be easier to talk to Clarke if she was here,” Gustus said. “Screw this Facetime crap.”

Clarke grinned and held Lexa’s gaze, and the expression in her eyes morphed from shock to joy then something far more intense and she walked across the kitchen toward her and everything around Clarke faded into the background except Lexa, the intense green of her eyes, her damn smile, and okay, her adorable baggy jeans, combat boots, and leather jacket. She had her hair loosely tied back, and Clarke ached to let it down.

“What the actual hell,” Lexa repeated, still smiling, and she cupped Clarke’s face with both hands then let go a second later and hugged her, embrace warm and solid and oh, God, it felt so good to have her close again and somewhere in the distance Clarke heard voices and laughter and maybe some cheers but all her senses were focused on Lexa.

“Merry UnChristmas,” Clarke whispered, cheek against Lexa’s.

“I can’t fucking believe this,” she whispered back. “How are you so fucking incredible?” She pulled back a little. “Seriously. How?”

Clarke rested her forehead against Lexa’s. “I’ve asked that same question about you.” And then she kissed her because Jesus fucking Christ, her mouth was right there and her heart was somehow melting and exploding at the same time (how the fuck?) and damn, her lips and oh, God, this was her first UnChristmas with her GF and holy sh#t she was kissing her in front of her family and didn’t that make it extra important on the validation scale?

“PDA,” Lincoln shouted, laughing.

“I love it,” Gustus shouted back. “Recording for posterity.”

“And blackmail,” Lincoln shot back.

Lexa smiled against Clarke’s lips then pulled away, but she didn’t let go of her. “Is it blackmail if I wholeheartedly endorse it and post it to my own social media?”

Clarke laughed, and Gustus fist-pumped again.

“And…cut,” he said. “That’s a wrap. First UnChristmas is officially documented.” He focused on his phone and a few seconds later Clarke’s phone dinged with a message, as did Lincoln’s and Lexa’s.

“Can I share the video?” she asked Lexa.

“You’d better.” She ran her fingers along Clarke’s cheek and shook her head and smiled again, like she couldn’t believe this was happening.

“So…about that weekend we were going to plan so I could meet Gustus and Indra,” Clarke said.

Lexa laughed. “You totally get a pass.” She brushed a few strands of hair away from Clarke’s forehead and kissed it. “I want the whole story of this plot.”
“It’s so good,” Lincoln said. “And Lexa, do you want something to drink? We have plenty of wine.”

Both Indra and Lexa laughed. “There’s ice wine in the freezer,” Indra said. “Do you want a glass?”

“Yes, please.”

“On it,” Gustus said and Clarke snuggled against Lexa and rested her head on her shoulder because this was one of the best places to be.

“We’re having ribs for dinner,” Clarke said to her. “And mac n’ cheese.”

“Oh, my God. See, just when I thought you’ve hit the pinnacle of incredible, you go and do that.”

“Wasn’t just me. Everybody helped.”

“And you know how I love cooking ribs,” Gustus said as he handed Lexa a glass of wine.

“And I know how much you love mac n’ cheese,” Indra said as she took a dish out of the oven.

“This is so amazing.” Lexa adjusted her position so she could hold the wine in one hand and kiss Clarke’s forehead again.

“Clarke, did you want your beer?” Gustus asked and Clarke smiled.

“Yes. And I’ll let go of Lexa, now.”

He smiled. “It’ll be easier for you both to indulge in my delicious and perfectly cooked ribs if you do.” He handed her bottle over.

“Fine,” Lexa said, pretending to pout as she let go of Clarke. “What can I do to help?”

“Nothing,” Indra said. “Except enjoy the company and the wine.”

“If you insist.” Lexa put her arm around Clarke’s shoulders. “And this banner. Oh, my God.” She stared up at it.

“It’s the best,” Gustus said. “Lincoln, I need a rib assistant.”

“Oh it,” He took a couple of platters out of the cabinet and followed Gustus outside while Indra started taking the dishes to the table.

“When did you even have time to do this?” Lexa asked, gesturing at the banner.

“I started it last week. Unbeknownst to certain parties.” She gave her a sly look.

“And what subterfuge is this, Pancake Master?”

“The best kind, of course.”

Lexa kissed her temple. “It is. And I love it. I love all of this. And I need the story.”

“We’ll tell you over dinner,” Indra said as she came back into the kitchen and picked up glasses.

Clarke exchanged a glance with Lexa and on the same accord they released each other and started helping Indra set the table. She smiled at them both and brought the mac n’ cheese to the table just as Gustus and Lincoln came in. Gustus expertly cut the racks into individual portions and carried the platters to the table. Clarke brought the mashed potatoes and Lincoln opened another bottle of wine.
“Let’s eat,” Gustus said and he started putting ribs on each plate. “Clarke, sit there, next to Lexa.” He winked at her and Clarke sat down to Lexa’s left. The table could easily have fit four on each of the long sides, so they had plenty of room on either side.

Lincoln, Gustus, and Indra sat opposite them and Clarke served everybody mac n’ cheese and mashed potatoes, smiling amidst the talking and laughing. Indra poured everybody a glass of water from the pitcher she’d put out and Lexa picked up the bowl of pickles and put several on her plate.

“This is beyond amazing,” she said.


“And to Clarke,” Indra added as they all toasted.

“Definitely.” Lincoln smiled at her.

“To all of you for helping.” Clarke clinked her beer bottle against all their glasses then took her first bite of the ribs and holy shit, they were fall-off-the-bone good, exploding with hickory, smoke, and whatever rub Gustus used. “Wow,” she said. “These don’t even need sauce.”

“But you should totally have some anyway.” Lexa pushed the bowl toward her. “Gustus makes it.”

She put a bit on her plate and dipped a forkful of rib meat in it. And it was perfect. Tangy and sweet. “That is legit,” she said, and Lincoln laughed.

“Seriously. All of you should open a brewpub.”

“It’s crossed my mind,” Indra said, noncommittal. “But there are a lot of logistics involved.”

“And we loved it,” Indra said. “And all of you managed to keep this secret,” Lexa said. “Who else knew?”
“Octavia,” Lincoln said. “And she’s sorry she couldn’t be involved.”

“Raven, Anya, and my mom knew.”

Lexa chuckled and squeezed Clarke’s hand where it rested on the table. “I see what Raven meant, when she told that story about the pranks you pulled off. You choose your minions wisely.”

Gustus laughed. “Lincoln told us about those pranks. The chicken thing.” He nodded. “That was hilarious.” He poured more wine into Lexa’s glass and she sipped then handed it to Clarke and even something as innocuous as sharing a glass with her gave her feels.

“So basically,” Lexa said, “you all knew about this.”

“And we totally pulled it off.” Lincoln sat back and crossed his arms. “You didn’t see it coming. I’m thinking you’ve met your match.” He grinned and motioned with his chin at Clarke then fist-bumped Gustus.

Lexa laughed. “Yeah, actually. I have.” And she kissed Clarke’s fingers.

And Clarke’s heart overflowed with feels and she was pretty sure that they surrounded her like cartoon butterflies and hearts in an old Disney movie.

Lincoln made a gagging noise. “That was beyond sweet.”

Gustus and Indra laughed.

“Oh, please,” Lexa said. “I’ve seen you and Octavia together.”

“And it is pretty saccharine.” Indra squeezed his shoulder and stood. “Pie at the firepit?”

“Hell, yes.” Lincoln got up and took his plate and Indra’s into the kitchen. With everybody helping, they had everything cleaned up and put away within about twenty minutes and then Gustus went to get the fire started while Clarke cut the pies and placed slices from one onto the paper plates Lexa provided.

And God, it was like all her nerves were specifically tuned to Lexa, and exactly where she was at all times, whether she saw or heard her or not. She sensed Lexa before she was right behind her, and her hands were on Clarke’s hips and she nuzzled her neck and every part of her was on fire.

“Are you hoping for a bigger piece of pie?” Clarke teased as she cut another slice, reveling in the feel of Lexa against her back.

“Mmm. A bigger piece of something,” she said in a low, sultry voice and a jolt traveled down Clarke’s thighs and then right back up.

“God, seriously?” Lincoln said from the back door as he came in from outside. “All I’m saying is, it’s a good thing you’ll be in the apartment tonight.”

“Or we could stay in the house,” Clarke said. “Payback’s a bitch.”

Lincoln stared at her then laughed.

“Oh, you did not just go there,” Lexa said to her as she laughed, too.

“But on the other hand,” Lincoln said when he had stopped laughing, “it’s because of my ‘certain activities’ that the two of you are even here.”
Clarke laughed again. “Damn. There is that.”

“But the best part is that it worked.” Lincoln bear-hugged them both and they were all laughing and Clarke was pretty sure this day was perfect.

And it only got more perfect, as she sat outside next to Lexa by the firepit sharing a piece of pie (and then another one because, let’s be real, Abby’s recipe), talking with her and everybody else, and laughing at stories about Lexa and Lincoln in high school and about Gustus and Indra and their legendary Halloween celebrations.

A while later, she yawned and leaned against Lexa as best she could, given the arms of the lawn chairs. She interlaced their fingers and made a contented noise.

“Tired?” Lexa asked, voice soft.

“Maybe a little.”

“So how about we head up to bed?”

“Mmm.” Getting Lexa into bed was the best thought ever.

“Is that a yes?” she asked with a chuckle.

“Where you’re concerned, always.”

She squeezed Clarke’s hand. “Let me get my stuff and I’ll go up with you.”

“Okay.”

Lexa stood and gave her a quick kiss before she went into the house.

“Going upstairs?” Lincoln asked.

“Yeah,” Clarke said. “All this UnChristmas wore me out.”

Gustus laughed. “But it’s been a lot of fun.”

Indra nodded. “It has. It’s been delightful getting to know you a little bit.”

“Same. And as an aside, Lexa wanted me to meet you, and had I not already had Operation UnChristmas going, we were going to plan a weekend so it could happen.” She paused and looked over the firepit at Indra. “I’d been wanting to meet you and Gustus, too. And not just because of the awesome *Fury Road* cosplay.”

“Lexa told us that you’re a fangirl,” Gustus said with a chuckle. “So you were already all right in my book. Getting past Furiosa, however, is another matter.”

Indra laughed.

“Damn,” Lincoln said. “Don’t scare her.”

“I don’t think Clarke scares easily,” he retorted with a smile.

“No, she doesn’t,” Indra said, expression enigmatic. She didn’t say anything more and Clarke got up and gathered paper plates and took them into the kitchen to the trash, then hit the bathroom before she went back outside.
“Thanks again,” she said as she stood next to the firepit’s heat.

“You’re welcome,” Indra said. “But thanks to you, too. This was quite a lot of fun.”

“Yeah, it was really cool.” Lincoln gave her a thumbs-up. “Also, let’s turn breakfast into brunch tomorrow. I’m tired.”

“I agree,” Gustus said.

“How about we play it by ear?” Indra moved her chair closer to the firepit. “Clarke, if you’re up early and want to make breakfast, just go into the kitchen and do what you want to do.”

“Okay, but if that happens, you might have to wait a bit for Lexa to get up and make coffee. I’m much more basic about my coffee.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Indra said as Lexa emerged from the house with her duffle bag and backpack.

“Figure what out?” she asked.

Clarke took the backpack off Lexa’s shoulder. “Coffee tomorrow.”

Lexa frowned, puzzled. “When we get up, I’ll make coffee before we get breakfast.”

Clarke smiled. “I’m making breakfast. It’s part of UnChristmas.”

And Lexa’s expression was like Gustus’s had been earlier, like she was a kid about to go to Disney World.

“But breakfast might turn into brunch,” Indra explained. “Depending on when we’re all up.”

“You’re making breakfast?” Lexa said to Clarke, eyes wide.

She chuckled. “Yes. And the thing is, if we all get up at different times, the coffee thing might be a little difficult to coordinate.”

“No,” Lexa said, and her smile lit up her face. “I’ll get up with Clarke and make all the coffee anybody in this family could possibly need for a day. If that means that I make coffee all day, then that’s how it is.”

“Well, glad that’s settled.” Gustus stood. “The drama was stressing me out.”

“Right?” Lincoln said as he got up, too. “I don’t know how we’ve managed.”

“I do.” Gustus gestured at Indra and took her hands. She stood and he pulled her into a hug and kissed the top of her head.

Lincoln groaned as he got up, too. “I’m surrounded by all these displays of PDA.”

“Sounds like it’s time to call Octavia,” Indra said as Gustus released her.

“Fine. If you insist.” He laughed and hugged Lexa then Clarke.

“Thank you,” Clarke said.

“Any time. ’Night, everybody.”

“Good night,” they all responded as he went into the house.
“Okay. So we’ll see you at some point tomorrow for breakfast. There’s a key to the main house on the kitchen counter of the apartment,” Indra said. “So if you’re up before the rest of us, just come on over.”

“Will do,” Lexa said, and she went and gave both Gustus and Indra hugs. “Thanks for everything. Love you guys.”

Gustus came around the firepit. “And Clarke, I’m sorry, but you don’t get out of here without a hug.”

“Awesome.” She laughed as he gave her a quick hug and to her surprise, Indra gave her one, too.

“You good with the firepit?” Lexa asked.

“Fine.” He smiled. “See you tomorrow.”

“Good night,” she and Clarke said together and then Lexa took her hand and they walked to the garage, the sound of soft conversation behind them. Lexa went up the stairs first and as soon as they were both inside in the muted glow from the living room lamp, she dropped her duffle to the floor, took her backpack from Clarke and put that on the floor, too, and pulled her into a long, hot kiss.

And how the hell did she manage to make something this fucking hot so damn tender?

“God, Clarke,” she said after a few more moments of head-exploding kisses. “I don’t have words for what I’m feeling right now.”

“All good, I hope,” Clarke said, arms around Lexa’s neck as she stared into her eyes.

“Beyond good. I just—fuck.” She cupped Clarke’s cheek with one of her hands. “I cannot believe you’re here.” She smiled. “You truly are a Jedi prankmaster.” She moved her hand back to Clarke’s hip.

“Except this isn’t a prank. It’s a surprise. I checked with Lincoln to make sure you were okay with stuff like this. I know some people aren’t and I couldn’t ask you because it would’ve tipped you off.”

“More subterfuge from the Pancake Master,” she teased, and her grip on Clarke’s hips tightened, which was oh, so arousing.

“Pretty sure you love it.”

Her smile widened. “Pretty sure you’re right.”

“And don’t forget it, Commander.”

“I doubt you’ll let me.”

Clarke chuckled and gave her a quick kiss and when she pulled away, Lexa regarded her, expression heated but somehow vulnerable.

“What’s up?” Clarke asked, stroking her cheek.

“When you said this morning that you told your mom that we’re a thing, it—” she stopped, as if she was trying to find the words.

Clarke put her fingers gently over Lexa’s lips. “Before you say anything else, there’s more.”
Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“She asked if I was getting serious about you.”

“Um.” Uncertainty flashed in her eyes. “And?”

Clarke bit her lip and took a chance. “I said yes and referred to you as my girlfriend.”

Her eyes widened.

“But I don’t like that term,” Clarke stumbled on, “because you’re not a girl, you’re a woman—duh—but I do like ‘GF’. So that’s how I referred to you, as my GF. I mean, we’re not seeing other people, and you’re so much more to me then just someone I’m dating—and shit, GF probably sounds dumb, but—fuck, that’s where I am and that’s what I told her.” She said it in a rush, and then wondered if maybe she should’ve waited and given them both time to adjust to being a thing first.

But wasn’t that what being a thing meant? They had established they didn’t want to see other people and—

Lexa kissed her.

And it was long and slow and deep and delicious and Clarke felt it from her head all the way to her feet, with particular glorious impact between her thighs and also in her heart and fuck, there was no part of her that didn’t respond, no part of her that didn’t want Lexa fucking Woods in every possible way.

When Lexa finally stopped, they were both breathing heavily and, Clarke thought, wearing far too much clothing.

“So is that a yes to GF status?” Clarke asked, heart pounding like she’d just run a marathon. Or two.

Her smile was both sweet and sexy. “So much yes.” She studied her for a moment, stroking her cheek with her thumb. “Are you sure? I don’t want you to feel pressured about any of this, and if you’re more comfortable not using that kind of terminology, it’s okay and—”

Clarke kissed her.

And it was just as new and exciting as the first time, but imbued with so much more between them now, though maybe there always had been this much between them, and she was finally realizing it and that sent emotions crashing through her head and chest and fuck, everywhere. She finished the kiss and snuggled against her, face against her neck, overwhelmed but in the best possible way, and Lexa held on to her and they stood like that for a while.

She brushed her lips against Lexa’s neck. “So is GF okay? Or do you prefer girlfriend?” She hoped not, but for her she’d use it.

“GF is absolutely fucking perfect.”

She looked at her, and goddamn, the expression in her eyes and her smile—this right here was everything Clarke could ever want. “Merry UnChristmas, Woods,” she said and Lexa’s smile shifted to a teasing smirk, but it was tinged with so much warmth that Clarke melted against her.

“Who knew we’d end up here?” Lexa said as she brushed a kiss across Clarke’s mouth. “And I’m so glad we did. You have no idea how glad I am.”
“Pretty sure I do,” she said as she gently bit down on Lexa’s lower lip. “And not to detract from the moment, but you’re wearing way too many clothes.”

“Mmm. I concur. So are you.”

“We should do something about that.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow. “We should.” And she shrugged out of her jacket and let it slip to the floor before she untucked the faded denim shirt she was wearing and started unbuttoning it, her gaze locked onto Clarke’s. That, too, slipped to the floor, leaving her in a tee and fuck, it was hot watching her undress.

Clarke took her own jacket off and it joined Lexa’s on the floor. She slowly unzipped her hoodie and it joined the array near her feet, leaving her in a V-neck tee, jeans, and motorcycle boots.

“You are so beautiful,” Lexa said softly and Clarke kissed her then took her hands and pulled her toward the bedroom. “And seriously hot in those boots,” she added.

Clarke gave her a sexy grin. “Is the Commander revealing another kink?”

“Maybe.”

“I like it. And I have the same one about you and your boots.”

“Matching kinks. I approve.” She pulled her close and Clarke loved it when she did that, loved it when fire flashed in her eyes and in her smile. “But you’re still wearing too many clothes,” Lexa said.

“So do something about it.”

Lexa smirked and took off her tee in one smooth motion and dropped it on the floor by the bed then tugged at the hem of Clarke’s tee and Clarke didn’t need any further urging, and they finished undressing amidst kisses, caresses, and soft laughs and somehow they ended up in bed, the glow from the lamp in the corner Indra had turned on earlier casting shadows across their skin.

Clarke took the tie out of Lexa’s hair and God, it was beautiful the way it fell around her shoulders, and she pulled Lexa down against her and they moved together in ways achingly familiar and there was something so fucking hot, so fucking beautiful, about the trust, vulnerability, and heat in Lexa’s eyes that Clarke’s breath caught as she stared up at her.

And what the hell, so many emotions filled her chest that she wanted to cry, as if that was the only way she could fully express the enormity of them.

“Okay?” Lexa asked as she brushed Clarke’s hair out of her face and Clarke took her hand and kissed her fingers.

“I remember the first time you did that with my hair,” she said. “At the park. You said I had snow in it.”

“You did. It wasn’t just a ploy.” She smiled. “Though looking back on it, that was a pretty smooth move.”

“It was.” Clarke kissed her fingers again and her chest tightened with all the things she was feeling.

“Hey,” Lexa said. “Talk to me.” She moved off her so they could lie facing each other, but she still
held Clarke’s hand.

“I just…” she bit her lip, searching for the right words. “I have so many feelings for you.”

Lexa stroked the back of Clarke’s hand with her thumb. “It’s mutual.” And the look in her eyes made Clarke’s heartbeat speed up even more.

“Does it scare you?” Clarke asked.

She shook her head, a sweet, warm smile lifting the corner of her mouth. “No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. It just doesn’t. Maybe because you speak to me in really deep ways, and it feels real.” She was quiet for a few moments. “That’s not scary. It’s exciting, but with you, it’s also…safe. You make me feel safe. And that’s something that’s really important to me.”

“Damn, are you trying to make me cry?” Clarke whispered and she moved closer and kissed her, a soft, affectionate brush of her lips across Lexa’s.

“I would never want to make you cry unless I did or said something that made you so happy you couldn’t even stand it.”

Clarke smiled. “Like right now?”

Lexa pulled her hand from Clarke’s and gently wiped the tear on her face. “What specifically did I do or say?”

“This is because you’re you and I have a hard time with feelings.”

She stroked Clarke’s cheek, waiting for her to continue.

“I tend toward the analytical side of things—don’t give me that look,” she said with a soft laugh as Lexa kissed the palm of her hand. “And yes, I know you figured that out about me.”

“Because I’ve been paying attention.” She smiled.

Clarke regarded her for a few moments. “After my dad died, I found out how painful feelings can be. So I compartmentalized. It made it easier for me to cope, if I could take a bit out at a time and work through it, and not have to deal with everything at once. And then you came along.”

The expression in Lexa’s eyes clouded. “And?” she said, cautious.

Clarke kissed her again, trying to convey that there was nothing to worry about. “And you—this—” she gestured at Lexa then herself, “made me feel a bunch of things. All at once. And I’m not used to that, and I’m not very good at expressing my feelings.”

Lexa took her hand again. “You seem to be doing all right.”

“Because I feel safe with you.”

“So you’re not scared?”

“No.” Nothing even remotely like that entered her mind. “Even when I freaked out a few weeks back, I wasn’t scared of you. I was scared of how I felt around you. After the past couple of years, I wasn’t sure, at first, I could trust myself.”
“Did you want to?”

She smiled. “Yes. And I had some inner battles about it. But my logic side was basically already on board with my intuition and was just paying lip service to my usual process.”

Lexa kissed her fingers and even a gesture that simple fueled another round of butterflies in her chest. “And now?” Lexa asked.

She held her gaze. “I’m epically serious about you. Which gives me even more feelings.”

“Yeah?” She smiled, hopeful, but Clarke sensed uncertainty beneath it.

“Yes. Big ones,” she said with an answering smile.

“Like, epically big? Or just big?”

“Epically, for sure.”

“It’s so fucking mutual.”

Damn Lexa fucking Woods and that sexy-sweet smirk of hers.

“I’m glad we’re on the same page with this.”

“Yeah.” She studied her for a moment. “So are you okay?” she asked softly.

God, her check-ins. As if she wasn’t already sailing a sea of feels right now. “I’m totally okay. You?”

She nodded and Clarke pulled her in for a kiss, done with talking and needing the reassurance of her physicality, and Jesus hell, Lexa responded enthusiastically, like she needed this, too, and within a few moments, Clarke needed a hell of a lot more.

“Touch me,” she whispered, urgent, and Lexa did, starting with her breasts, and she loved Lexa’s hands on her tits, and oh, God, her mouth—Clarke groaned, her hand on the back of Lexa’s head, holding her in place and she was already seeing a few stars and she was throbbing and aching and Jesus the things Lexa made her feel.

And then Lexa worked her way down Clarke’s chest to her stomach, nipping and sucking, as she caressed her breasts and hips, and she went even lower and Clarke felt the warmth of her breath on her clit.

“Taste me.”

“God, I love it when you say things like that to me,” Lexa said softly and then her tongue was on her clit and then she was sucking and licking and Clarke moaned because fuck Lexa knew exactly how to work her, and oh, God, her tongue—Lexa sucked her right to the edge then stopped and pushed to her knees between Clarke’s thighs and Clarke stared up at her, breathing hard, nerves sparking.

“Tease,” she managed to say.

“Sometimes.” And she smiled and slid two fingers in and Clarke’s breath hissed between her teeth and she groaned and pulled Lexa close again and moved against her, meeting her thrusts, loving the slide of their sweat-slicked skin and the way Lexa’s muscles tensed. She ran her hands down her back and sucked her tongue into her mouth and Lexa groaned and fuck, Clarke loved it when they got a little raw and demanding, when physical intertwined so deeply with emotional.
“Lexa,” she whispered against her lips.

“I’ve got you.”

“I’m so close.” So fucking close…and then she groaned as she went over the edge and she clung to Lexa as another wave hit then receded, leaving her trembling and gasping, heart pounding. She kissed Lexa for a while, deep and slow, then shifted a little so she could pull out and Lexa hugged her.

Clarke nuzzled her neck. “You make me feel so fucking good.”

“Mmm. Which is excellent, because that’s what I want to do.”

She chuckled. “Same.” And she bit Lexa’s lower lip. “My turn, Woods.”

Lexa raised her eyebrows. “That is so hot.”

“I know.” Clarke smirked up at her then rolled them over and pinned Lexa’s wrists to the mattress over her head and Lexa looked at her, expression surprised but heated.

“So what’ll it be, Commander?” She brushed her lips over Lexa’s mouth. “Tell me what you want.”

Lexa groaned softly. “Jesus. You could make me come just by talking like that.”

“And we’ll definitely try that. Right now, though, how about my mouth…here…” and she sucked on one of her nipples.

“Oh, fuck. Yes.”

Clarke worked on the other one, still keeping Lexa’s wrists pinned, and she loved the sounds Lexa made, her breath hissing between her teeth and her little moans.

“What else, Commander?” Clarke ran her tongue over her nipple.

“Your mouth. My clit. Stat.”

She grinned. “It’s really sexy that you used a doctor term just then.” And she let go of her wrists.

“I’m practicing for later.”

Clarke laughed against her belly. “I’ll start working on my law terms.”

“Can’t wait—oh, fuck,” she said with a gasp as Clarke ran her tongue over her clit. And then Lexa’s hands were in her hair and she spread her legs wider and Clarke didn’t need another invitation to go deeper and work every part of her for a while, tasting and exploring and God, Lexa was so wet and so hot and if the last thing she ever did was go down on her, she’d be happy.

“That’s so good,” Lexa managed. “Fuck, that thing you do with your tongue—oh, God. That.”

“And this?” Clarke slid two fingers in and Lexa groaned long and low, but Clarke did, too, because she was so wet and hot and this intimacy between them aroused her in ways she’d never experienced and all she wanted to do was make sure Lexa felt as fucking good as she did.

“Definitely that, too—fuck.” And Lexa moved with her thrusts, pushed against her, and she had one hand in Clarke’s hair and she was tensing and Clarke backed off a little, brought her down a bit, then worked her right back up and Lexa went rigid, arched, and came with a long, deep groan and
Clarke’s name on her lips and fuck, she was beautiful, and knowing she put her trust in Clarke like that—shit, it made her want to cry again.


Clarke laughed softly. “So if I start doing this—” she slid her fingers out and stroked her drenched folds, moving her fingers in different patterns, “will that help?”

“Fucking hell, that is totally helping—” and then she bit her lip and held on to Clarke as she came again and this time, aftershocks rippled through her until she finally relaxed and snuggled against her and God, Clarke’s heart swelled with everything in this moment. She kissed Lexa’s forehead.

“Merry UnChristmas.”

Lexa smiled. “This is the best UnChristmas ever.”

She laughed. “It’s the only one we’ve had.”

“Every UnChristmas I get with you will be the best,” Lexa said, and she kissed her and Clarke melted against her.

“So are you saying that UnChristmas might be a thing with us?”

Lexa regarded her. “Yes. I’m hoping that it becomes a thing. And stays a thing.”

“Same.” Clarke kissed her again and they eventually ended up positioned with Clarke on her back and Lexa against her, head on her shoulder, arm across her stomach. Clarke stroked her shoulder, and didn’t bother trying to deconstruct her feelings. She didn’t have to. She was on board the damn love train.

“Clarke?”

“Hmm?”

“Today was amazing. Thank you.”

“It was amazing. And you’re so welcome.”

Lexa made a contented noise and Clarke continued to stroke her shoulder.

“Clarke?” she said again, this time in a sleepy voice.

“Yeah?”

“Good night.”

She smiled, heart so fucking full of feels she could barely stand it. “Good night, Lexa.” And Clarke held her while her breathing deepened and she relaxed and there was nowhere else she wanted to be more. She sighed, so damn happy, and closed her eyes to join Lexa in sleep.

###

Clarke snapped awake and lay still, gathering her thoughts. Something was off. She rolled over and reached for Lexa but ended up with a handful of bedding.
She sat up, and it occurred to her that the light was turned off and the room was bathed in soft, cool moonlight.

“Hey,” Lexa said softly, from near the window. She was wrapped in a blanket.

“What’s going on?”

Lexa returned to the bed, smiling. “It’s okay.” She caressed her cheek. “Listen.”

Clarke did, and after a few moments, she was about to ask what she was supposed to be listening for when she heard it.

A distant series of yips and half-howls.

“Oh, my God,” she said softly. “Coyotes. Did you see any?”

“No yet.”

Clarke got out of bed. “Be right back.” She went to the bathroom then joined Lexa at the window, who brought her in close under the blanket and Clarke was really glad that she was still naked, too, because this was in the Book of Clarke, to be naked with Lexa every chance she got.

The yipping sounded again, but it seemed closer.

“Were there coyotes where you grew up?” Lexa asked.

“Yeah. We were more in town, though, but they did still come through the neighborhoods.”

“I really dig coyotes.”

Clarke snuggled closer. “Tell me more.”

“I love the trickster folklore around them, and I love how scrappy they are. They’re survivors.” She was quiet for a moment. “When I was a kid and living with my parents—we still lived in this area—I’d hear coyotes at night sometimes. I wanted to know more, so I read a bunch of folklore about them and then a bunch of wildlife biology information and I really related to them. They can operate in packs like wolves, but they can also operate individually.” She paused. “A coyote pack is basically an alpha male, alpha female, their offspring, and maybe older offspring and coyotes they agree to accept.”

“So, basically, like our crews.”

“Yeah. I also like to think that two alpha females could run a pack.”

Clarke smiled. “I like that thought, too.”

“I also love that they can survive as individuals, and I guess they inspired me, especially when things were really shitty.”

Clarke hugged her tighter.

“I remember one night—junior high—I was at home and I heard a coyote barking. They sound different than dogs, and I knew that’s what it was. It was really late. After midnight. But it sounded so close, so I got up and looked out the window and there it was. Standing out in the snow right in our back yard near my window and I swear to God, it looked right at me and we just stared at each other for a while and then I kind of waved at it and it just stood there for a few more seconds then ran
off.” She was quiet for a while. “I was really depressed that year, and things were really bad at home, but seeing that coyote—it made me feel better. It was like it was checking on me, somehow, and letting me know that I could survive, just like she did.” She smiled. “I like to think that particular coyote was female.”

Clarke stared out the window, at the surrounding forest bathed in moonlight. “I really hate what you went through,” she said after a while.

Lexa kissed the tip of her nose. “Same here. But on the flip side, maybe I would have turned out to be an asshole if I didn’t go through it. It shaped me, and now I don’t take anything for granted.”

There was no way in hell Lexa could’ve turned out an asshole and Clarke was about to say that when a series of sharp barks and yips interrupted her and they both stared out the window.

“There,” Lexa whispered, and she pointed.

Clarke looked where she was indicating and watched as two coyotes greeted each other under a nearby tree. They nuzzled each other then bounced around, excited, and darted into the shadows.

“Coyotes form monogamous pair bonds that can last for years.” She was still staring out the window but Clarke was utterly fascinated by her profile. “It’s breeding season. December through March. There’ll be pups in early spring.” She turned her gaze to Clarke’s.

“I’m kind of turned on by this wildlife biology side of you.”

She was about to respond when a long howl sounded in the distance and they both stared out the window as another series of yips and barks answered it and Clarke was sure she saw fleeting shapes racing between nearby trees.

Lexa smiled and arched an eyebrow. “Coyotes tend to hunt alone or in pairs unless it’s a large animal they’d like to bring down. And those yips? That means they’re reuniting with the pack. The long howl is to report a location.”

“Seriously. I’m turned on.”

Lexa laughed and hugged her closer. “What did you think about when you were growing up and heard coyotes?”

“I thought they were interesting. My dad once got me out of bed because a couple were in our driveway after moonrise. They were playing. Literally. It was cute. They were like dogs.”

“I love that. Did your dad like coyotes?”

“He liked anything related to the natural world. His environmental scientist background, obviously. We’d go on hikes, and he’d point out tracks and stuff like that. It made me appreciate how ecosystems interconnect.”

“Oh, okay, that’s really turning me on, this talk of ecosystems.”

Clarke laughed and kissed her because that was part of her moral imperative, after all. A howl sounded, and this one seemed closer than the others, and both she and Lexa looked out the window, but she didn’t see anything that looked like a coyote.

“When I was growing up,” Clarke said, “I’d sometimes hear a howl like that but it never scared me. It was kind of…I don’t know. Friendly, maybe. It made me feel that we’re never really alone.”
“That’s part of why I really like coyotes. I never felt completely alone when I heard one.”

Clarke shifted her attention from the window and caressed Lexa’s cheek. “I’m really glad that they looked out for you.”

“Oh that I at least thought they did.” She shrugged. “It helped. Every little thing did.”

And Clarke stared into her eyes, arms around her neck, and the air between them was weighted with possibility and expectation.

“So I have a confession,” Clarke said softly, and she wasn’t sure why the hell she was doing this, but it felt so completely right that she didn’t see the point of not doing it.

Lexa regarded her, waiting, because that’s how Lexa was, giving Clarke room to talk about things and to work through her feelings. So patient. Never pressuring.

But was she ready to say what was on her mind?

“You don’t have to talk about it now,” Lexa said, breaking the silence. “Whatever it is, if you’re not comfortable, we can talk about it later. I’m not going anywhere.”

So like Lexa to say that.

“I love that about you,” Clarke said. “The way you give me space.” She cupped Lexa’s cheek. “It’s one of many things I love about you.” She paused, searching for the right words. “The thing is, I got hung up on timelines for a while.”

Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“I bought into the idea that time should be a measure of how people should feel about a relationship, that it should maybe be the only thing to consider in that situation.” She stroked Lexa’s cheek with her thumb. “But what I didn’t consider is that timelines aren’t always rigid, and that they can be really long or really short or somewhere in between, and that what ultimately matters is how you feel when you’re around someone.”

“That’s not necessarily a bad thing, to think about time in that way. Or to use it as a gauge.”

“But it’s not the only thing to consider in some situations. I mean, I sure as hell didn’t need a whole lot of time to figure out I like tacos.”

Lexa smiled.

“I mean, that took, like, one bite. And it took one taste to know I love your coffee. And in terms of people, it took about fifteen minutes to figure out that Raven was going to be a friend. It took a little longer with Bellamy, but he can be difficult.” Clarke rolled her eyes and Lexa chuckled.

“So basically,” she said, “there’s no accounting for tastes and time isn’t always relevant in that regard.”

“And this is exactly why you’re going to be an awesome lawyer.” Clarke kissed her. “None of this legalese shit. Just distill it right to the essence.”

“Paraphrasing is a thing.”

“And it’s clearly one of the many things you do well.”
Another howl sounded in the distance and they both stared out the window, though all that was visible were trees and shadows. A few moments later, a series of faint yips and barks echoed.

“They found each other,” Lexa said softly and she turned her gaze back to Clarke’s, a half-smile on her lips.

“I know how they feel,” Clarke said.

“So do I.” Lexa gently squeezed her hips and there was so much distilled into this moment that Clarke could think of no good reason not to say what she’d been thinking, and everything seemed to still between them, like the entire world was holding its breath.

“Yeah, so…about that,” Clarke said, heart richocheting through her chest like she’d just mainlined Red Bull. “Maybe we haven’t known each other long in the great scheme of things, but I’ve learned that sometimes there isn’t a particular timeline for feelings.”

Jesus Christ she might pass out at the expression in Lexa’s eyes, a storm of hope, caution, affection, concern—everything she knew was mirrored in hers. And somehow it calmed her, seeing that she was in a similar state, because it meant they were navigating this connection together, and giving each other room to test it.

Lexa cupped her cheek. “Okay?” she asked, voice quiet, almost reverent with the check-in, and how was it possible for one simple word to encompass so goddamn much?

“So much more than okay.” Clarke pressed a kiss softly against her cheek then pulled back and regarded her for a moment. And spoke before she convinced herself otherwise. “Because I’m totally falling for you, Lexa.”

Holy shit. She admitted it. Out loud.

And she hadn’t passed out.

“You don’t need to say anything,” she continued. “I just wanted you to know.” She bit her lip and smiled. “No pressure. If you’re still okay with the GF thing, we can just continue—”

Lexa pulled her close and pressed her forehead against Clarke’s, hand still on her cheek. “Clarke,” she said with a smile, “I am absolutely okay with the GF thing. And I’m totally falling for you, too.”

Oh, my God.

Had she heard right?

Lexa caressed her cheek, still smiling.

She had. And Clarke’s heart might have ridden off with Lexa’s on a unicorn surrounded by rainbows and cute litte fairies throwing glitter and confetti and there weren’t words, really, to describe this feeling.

“Okay, so…I feel pretty amazing right now,” Clarke said. Which was the understatement of the century, but nothing could adequately capture the sense of awe and belonging that was spreading through her heart.

Lexa regarded her, expression filled with warmth and wonder. “So do I.”

And Clarke pulled her close, and Lexa’s skin was warm against hers even as the blanket fell away
from them both, and Clarke closed her eyes, head on her shoulder, loving the way she felt so familiar and safe.

“Do we need to talk about this?” Lexa asked. “I know how your logic side gets.” And God, her voice was so full of affection and sweetness—how the hell could Clarke have avoided falling for her? And why the hell had she even tried?

She laughed softly against her neck. “No.” She kissed her and pulled her back to the bed. “We don’t need to talk at all,” she said as she slid under the covers and Lexa kissed her like she hadn’t seen her in a while, like this was everything she’d ever wanted and as Clarke sank into the connection between them, she thought maybe she heard a long, hopeful howl faintly in the distance and then the joyful yipping of a coyote found.

Chapter End Notes

Me writing this chapter like

So this is one chapter, but it’s practically twice as long as usual, so there you go. And omg I srsly still have Clexa feels after finishing it.

Dammit. Clexonium everywhere.

We’re winding down, friends (maybe one chapter left to go), but I think I might continue this in a second story, like a series or something. So though we’re almost done here with this installment, there’ll probably be more.

And you can find me on Tumblr and Twitter if you want to yell at me or whatever. And yes, I like coyotes.

Thanks SO much for hanging out with me during this process, and thanks for all the kudos and comments! Y’all are THE BEST!
The Good Ship Clexa

Chapter Summary

Breakfast with the Virginia posse, then Clarke gets to see where the cosplay happens and then Lexa takes her sightseeing through Tondisi (and some of her past), which results in a serious case of feels.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“These pancakes are the best,” Lincoln said and he sighed and leaned back in his chair. “Lexa, if you’re dumb enough not to keep Clarke around, at least get that recipe.”

Gustus laughed, a soft rumble.

“Have a little faith, dude,” Lexa retorted, good-natured. “Why would I want to give up not only awesome pancakes, but the woman who makes them?”

Clark raised her eyebrows at her. “I see. So it’s just my pancakes keeping you around.”

“Is that what people call it these days,” Indra said and everybody stared at her for a beat then laughed.

“Good one, Mom.” Lincoln took another bite of his omelette. “Also, these are super-good, too. Thanks, Clarke. I have to say, I think UnChristmas is better than Christmas. I say we do it again next year.”

“I agree.” Lexa leaned over and kissed Clarke on the cheek, and Clarke smiled and it didn’t freak her out even a little that they were talking about something a year away.

“That can be arranged,” she said. “And we don’t even have to sneak around.”

“Damn. That was the fun part.” Lincoln pretended to pout.

“UnChristmas is versatile.” Clarke picked up her coffee cup. “You can plan a get-together and also spring something on somebody that’s fun or goofy or whatever.” She shrugged. “It’s what you make it.”

“And it’s a lot less stressful than the actual Christmas.” Indra shot an enigmatic look at Lexa.

“Yeah,” Gustus said. “It is.”

“And it doesn’t have to happen on Christmas.” Lincoln finished his orange juice. “That’s the cool part. It can happen around Christmas and people who normally aren’t fans of Christmas get to do something cool for UnChristmas and it takes the pressure off regarding the whole Christmas thing. There’s probably huge sociological value in this, Clarke.”

She laughed. “And here, I was just doing it for the ribs and mac n’ cheese.”
Lexa gave her a mock horrified look and Gustus laughed again. Clarke grinned and took Lexa’s hand.

“And for one other huge reason,” she added before she kissed Lexa’s temple and stood. “I have enough batter for a couple more pancakes. Who’s in?”

“Just make them and we’ll fight over them like wolves,” Gustus said.

“Along those lines, did you hear the coyotes last night?” Lincoln moved his plate aside. “It was like they were having their own UnChristmas party.”

Clarke exchanged a look with Lexa. “Yeah,” they both said.

“So cool,” Clarke said, still looking at Lexa, and then she picked up the empty pancake platter from the middle of the table because if she didn’t, she was going to be awash in a flood of memories and feels right there in front of Lexa’s family and that seemed a little awkward.

“Do we need more coffee?” Lexa asked, glancing around the table.

Gustus nodded. “Definitely.”

“I could drink another cup,” Indra said in agreement.

“Yeah.” Lincoln pushed back from the table and picked up some of the dishes they were done with and went with Clarke and Lexa into the kitchen, where Clarke went to work with the skillet and batter and Lexa cleaned out the French press and put more water into the electric kettle.

“This has been great,” Lincoln said as he loaded dishes into the dishwasher.

“Yeah. I hope Octavia can join us next year,” Clarke said as she poured batter and it hit her that she had just assumed that they were going to do this again, that she and Lexa would still be together, and that Lincoln and Octavia would be, too.

Wow.

Lexa caught her eye and smiled, the one that made her ache in certain places. She gave her one of her sultry smiles in return and checked the pancake, but fuck, she was now totally thinking about the night before, and how they had gone so slow after the coyote incident, and it had been so tender, like they wanted to say everything without words, and it had been so erotic and so hot, taking their time, exploring, engaging new levels of trust. They had built a slow, deep burn into a damn inferno and by the time they collapsed into sleep, tangled together, Clarke knew she was a total goner for Lexa fucking Woods.

And it was the best thing ever.

She flipped the pancake over, then watched Lexa as she put coffee into the French press and it was so…fuck, so domestic. But so much more. It was the easy way they fit, navigating each other’s spaces like they’d been doing it for so much longer, and the way they shared looks and smiles and quick touches when they were engaged in tasks like this. And here Clarke was, spending fucking Christmas—UnChristmas—with Lexa’s family and it felt like it was a regular thing.

Lexa poured hot water into the press and prepared the plunger while Clarke put the finished pancake into the oven on the baking sheet still in it and poured the last of the batter onto the skillet. She scraped as much of it out of the bowl as she could onto the skillet and the resulting pancake was going to be huge.
“That could feed a small family,” Lexa said.

Clarke smiled. “That’s the point.”

She grinned back and left the press to brew and hugged Clarke from behind and her arms aroundClarke’s waist was everything. “So how about we check out the costume cave after this?”

“Yes, please.” Clarke kept some of her attention focused on the pancake, but most of it was on Lexa.

“Did you want to do anything else today, besides driving around with me for a bit?”

“The Commander asks an extremely loaded question,” she said softly as she ran her free hand over
Lexa’s fingers, which were dangerously close to the button of her jeans.

“Do tell,” Lexa said next to her ear, breasts against her back and fuck, how the hell was she
supposed to effectively monitor this pancake with all of that going on?

“I’d rather show you. Hope your evening is free.”

“It definitely is now.”

Clarke smiled and flipped the pancake over then leaned back against her and she was pretty sure this
was heaven, right here.

“I’m so glad you’re here,” Lexa said, and she hugged her tighter.

“Same. And do you want part of this pancake?”

“Yes. Before Lincoln snags it.”

“I heard that,” he said as he entered from the dining room. “And God, you two.”

Clarke glanced over at him just as he set the orange juice on the counter and snapped a photo of
them.

“This is just too damn cute. Sending it to both of you and to Octavia.”

Lexa laughed, gave Clarke another quick squeeze, then released her (much to Clarke’s
disappointment) and went to check the coffee while Lincoln put the orange juice in the fridge.

“Pancakes are done,” Clarke announced, and she put the last one on the platter and added the other
one—almost as big—from the oven.

“Coffee is, too.” Lexa pushed the plunger down and followed Lincoln into the dining room, Clarke
behind her (and okay, she totally checked out her ass because that was the kind of mood she was in).

Indra divided up the pancakes while Lexa poured coffee all around and Clarke settled into her chair
again and put butter and syrup on her piece of pancake. She smiled at the banter between Gustus and
Lincoln and sipped her coffee. Which was, of course, so damn good.

“I think we need to do this again in the spring,” Gustus said. “Clear your calendar, Clarke.”

“And perhaps you can find out if your mother can come, too.”

Clarke snapped her gaze to Indra, surprised.
“I understand she’s extremely busy with her work, but if we plan now for sometime in April, perhaps she can at least clear a weekend.”

Holy shit. Under the table, Lexa’s grip on her thigh tightened.

“Yes. That—yeah. Maybe around the third weekend?”

“Check with her,” Gustus said, and it occurred to Clarke that this might have been something that he and Indra had actually discussed already, from the glance they exchanged.

“I will definitely do that. Thank you.”

Lexa’s grip on her thigh loosened.

“I was thinking steaks and chicken, and I can also do veggie kabobs and veggie burgers.”

“The kabobs are fine. My mom does eat meat, but she also really loves vegetables.”

“Excellent.” He grinned. “Easiest menu planning ever.”

Indra rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. “We’ll talk more about it closer to the time.”

“Dad’s steaks are off the hook,” Lincoln said as he finished his pancake.

“Clearly, if the ribs are any indication.” Clarke sipped her coffee.

Gustus shrugged. “I have ways of getting good cuts of meat.”

She guessed he might be able to do that through Roan. Lexa glanced at her and smiled.

“This could be super fun,” Lexa said.

“Could be?” Lincoln stared at her. “It’s us. The level of fun will exceed any other level imaginable.”

Indra chuckled and Clarke laughed, because Lincoln sounded like Raven. She finished her pancake and started to get up to finish clearing the table.

“We’ve got this,” Lincoln said, and he and Gustus set to work.

“So can we take Clarke to the costume cave?” Lexa asked Indra and it was so cute, how excited she sounded.

“Let’s go now. Then you can take her into town and show her around.”

“I would love that,” Clarke said. A chance to see some of the places that Lexa grew up? Hell, yes.

“Are you done with your coffee?” Lexa leaned over to peer into her cup.

“Almost. I’m trying to savor it.”

“Hey, you know where I live, so you can always join me for more.”

“Is that a standing offer?” She teased.

“Absolutely.” Lexa pecked her on the cheek then got up. “Be right back. And then we can check out where the magic happens.”
Clarke watched her walk into the living room then shifted her gaze back to Indra, who was smiling enigmatically.

“So how long have you been into cosplay?” Clarke asked.

“Years. I was fortunate that Gustus enjoys it, too.”

“She married me for my Halloween skills,” Gustus said as he came in from the kitchen.

“Which Lexa says are amazing.”

“You need to come then, too, to see how insane we can get,” Gustus said.

“I’d really like that. So do you ever go to fan cons?” Clarke finished her coffee.

“Sometimes. It’s tough getting time off,” Gustus said. “And they can be expensive. DC and Baltimore are the places we tend to go if we can get the time, because we can drive and if we’re going to cosplay, we need to bring a lot of stuff. Depending on what we’re doing. Though Indra prefers to go to the panels and, you know, learn stuff.” He leaned down and gave her a quick kiss. “So are we going to show Clarke the lab of doom?”

“After those pancakes, it’s the least we can do.” Indra stood just as Lexa reappeared. “We’re going to the garage,” Indra said.

“Cool.” Lexa took Clarke’s hand, and Indra and Gustus exchanged a smile and Clarke thought, again, about how glad she was that Lexa had ended up here, because no way would they have been able to do this around her birth parents. Though Clarke would have, anyway, because fuck Lexa’s bioparents for how they treated her.

She squeezed Lexa’s hand and they followed Indra and Gustus through the kitchen and out the back door. Lincoln was already on the patio, and though the air carried a winter chill, the sun was warm on her skin.

“Oh, shit. Do you need a jacket?” Lexa asked. “We haven’t turned the heat on in the garage part.”

“I’m good.” Clarke smiled and shoulder-bumped her. She was wearing one of Lexa’s baggie hoodies over her tee and flannel shirt. It wasn’t the one that Lexa had offered to her that day Clarke had been locked out of her apartment—that one was her fave—but it was Lexa’s and she loved wearing it, loved that it sort of represented that they were together. Lexa was wearing an old flannel-lined barn jacket that Clarke hadn’t seen before, and she suspected it was one that stayed here in Virginia.

“Let me know if that changes,” Lexa said.

“How about I just get really close to you?”

She arched an eyebrow and grinned. “I fully support that endeavor.”

“I thought you might.”

They waited while Gustus unlocked the side door and turned the light on. “Behold,” he said, “Our lair.”

Clarke released Lexa’s hand and went in. “Oh, wow.” Her dad would totally have loved this.

“Right?” Lincoln said. “They’re hardcore.”
They totally were. Two long work tables stood in the middle of the garage while against the back wall was a workbench that ran the length of it. Tools hung on pegboards above it, but another rolling tool chest stood near one of the work tables. Adjustable lights with swivel arms had been screwed into each end of the tables and the bench, but there was lighting overhead, too. And along the other walls hung various permutations of costumes, including weaponry like futuristic armaments, high fantasy battle axes and swords, and a variety of armor that Clarke knew had to be made out of lightweight foam because otherwise it would be way too cumbersome to move around in.

“Holy shit,” she said as she stared up at two crossed ninja-like swords.

“Those are my faves,” Lexa said, and she took her jacket off and handed it to Clarke then took the swords down. “I might be a little rusty, but…” and then she took a combat stance and did a quick series of movements, finishing with a flourish, the blades crossed in front of her.

Holy shit.

The Commander.

Right here in front of her.


“Here,” Lexa said to Clarke. She handed one of the swords to her and took her jacket back and put it on the closest table. “They’re replicas.”

Clarke gripped the handle with both hands and moved it slowly around. “It feels real.”

“Right? It’s steel, but obviously not sharpened. Gustus and Indra also have replicas made out of foam, which they take to cons or cosplay events.” She went to a set of shelves and returned with another sword that she handed to Clarke. Much lighter, but it looked so realistic.

“So you took ninja lessons?” Clarke asked.

Gustus laughed and Lexa shrugged with an embarrassed smile.

“Something like that. Lincoln did some karate back in the day and I went along for a while.”

“There you go, downplaying again,” Lincoln said. He gestured at the replica sword Lexa still held. “The instructor knew a few things about swordplay and one day he saw Lexa staring at the replica practice swords he had and he worked with her for a few months—actually, over a year. He didn’t even charge for those lessons. He thought Lexa had a lot of natural ability.”

“And he knew that I was having a hard time at home,” she said softly. “It was his way of giving me an outlet.” She sounded a little wistful.

“How is it that I don’t know these cool things about you?” Clarke asked.

“It didn’t come up in conversation before this,” Lexa said, sheepish. “I mean…hey, let’s have tacos and by the way, I know a bit about martial arts with swords.”

“Which I think is a completely legitimate discussion.” Clarke raised an eyebrow at her and Gustus laughed.

“Lexa was in junior high then,” he said. “She did martial arts until about junior year in high school. By then, football had taken over her brain.”
“Not entirely true,” she said as she hefted the replica sword she still held. “I always liked football. But yeah, it was keeping me busy. I still did a lot of sword work on my own, though. And I adjusted some of the movements to fit my own weird style.”

“It’s no longer karate,” Lincoln said. “It’s Lexate.” He pronounced it lex-ah-tay and Clarke laughed.

“So when did you stop?” she asked.

“Officially, junior year in high school, like Lincoln said. Unofficially, it sort of tapered off the first couple years of college. But I do still do workouts that incorporate what I learned. It’s kind of meditative.”

And undeniably hot. Clarke had an image of Lexa in her running tights and sports bra going through some fucking sexy sword moves and good God she needed to see that in real life. Clarke handed the metal replica back to her so she could put both back on the wall while Lincoln put the foam replica back on the shelf.

“You could do live Dungeons and Dragons role-playing,” Clarke said as she moved slowly around the room, looking at the variety of weaponry and armor.

“That’s probably true. And the clothing is in the house,” Lincoln said.

Clarke looked at him. “Like…wizard robes?”

“Yeah. And pants and shirts and cloaks. Stuff like that.”

“Were you going to tell me about this awesome?” She looked at Lexa.

“Um…yes?”

“Good answer.”

“We can check it out this evening,” Lincoln said.

“Perfect.” Clarke tapped on a chest plate that hung on the wall. It looked like distressed metal, but it was actually foam. “And this looks so realistic. How long does something like this take to make?”

“Depends,” Gustus said. “You have to cut the foam—which is a special kind—and then you shape and fit it. Then there’s the painting, which is time-consuming because it requires different colors and types and layers to make it look like that. So something like that might take one person who knows what they’re doing ten to twenty hours. Probably more. It really depends on a variety of factors.”

Clarke went to the workbench along the back wall. “Oh, here it is,” she said. “The Furiosa arm.”

“It’s cool, isn’t it?” Lexa said as she put her coat back on.

“It’s totally cool. Would you show me how it works?” She asked Indra.

“Certainly.” Indra picked it up and fitted it over her left arm. “During filming, Charlize Theron wore a green sleeve over her hand and forearm.” She made a few adjustments. “Prior to green, the color used to help erase body parts and people in movie production was blue, but green is furthest from human skin colors, which makes it easier to see in CGI software. Theron wore the sleeve, and the special effects animators could then just erase the green sleeve part of her arm and match it with the background, to make it look like she didn’t have an arm.”

Indra opened and closed the graspers of the mechanical arm. “Theron’s mechanical arm was fitted
over her hand and arm like this. But in the movie, there were people who could manipulate how it looked in production. Since I can’t do that, I modified it a little with the leather here—” she moved her arm around and pointed out the strips with her free hand, “and here. These strips hide my hand and forearm while still evoking the original.”

Lincoln picked up an image of Furiosa holding her hands up. “Furiosa’s arm was removed about four or five inches below her elbow, and the mechanical arm in the movie has a long hydraulic tube where her forearm is supposed to be.”

“It’s all foam,” Indra said. “There’s a handle inside that allows me to open and close the graspers. It’s basically wooden dowels and industrial rubber bands.”

“Wow.”

“Try it.” Indra took the arm off and carefully fitted it over Clarke’s. “You twist the handle to close the graspers.”

“This is freaking amazing,” Clarke said. She gripped the handle within and carefully twisted it and the graspers closed. When she released the pressure on the handle, the graspers opened. “Oh, my God. This is totally badass.”

“Taking a photo.” Lexa held her phone up. “I’ll send it to Raven. She’ll probably be into it.”

“Totally.” Clarke moved her arm around. “I can’t get over how realistic this looks. You are truly a Jedi master of cosplay. Both of you.” She gestured at the garage’s interior. “So what are you going to do for Halloween?”

“I like how you assume we’ve already started planning for it,” Gustus said with a grin. “Because we have and can you believe we haven’t done a Walking Dead theme yet?”

“Seriously? So is that what you’re doing?” Clarke looked at him, then at Indra.

“We’re pretty sure. Don’t tell anyone. We like the themes to be a surprise.”

“Oh, my God.”

“And you just made Clarke’s year,” Lexa said with a laugh. “She’s a big fan of the zombie apocalypse.”

“I mean, not that I want it to happen. But I do have a fascination with it.”

Gustus beamed. “Excellent. Then perhaps we might recruit you into at least joining us for the weekend haunted house event. If Halloween doesn’t fall on a weekend, we do the Friday and Saturday before.”

“I’m so in.”

“Maybe you should dress up,” Lexa said.

“Would you want to?” Indra asked her.

“Sure.” Hell, yes. Wasn’t that what Halloween was all about?

“I see you as a walker fighter.” Gustus pulled on his beard. “And maybe we can get Lincoln and Lexa in on it, too.”
Lincoln nodded. “Definitely.”

“I’m in,” Lexa said.

“Oh, this is going to be good.” Gustus rubbed his hands together.

“This is going to be seriously good,” Clarke agreed as she carefully removed the Furiosa arm and handed it just as carefully to Indra. “Thank you so much for showing me all of this. And for the Halloween invite, which I am totally going to start planning for.”

“Awesome,” Lincoln said. “We’ll keep you in the loop about themes and outfits.” He gave Lexa a teasing grin.

Indra set the Furiosa arm back on the workbench. “Okay. So I’m guessing you two want to go do some driving around. Should we plan something for dinner?”

“Since it’s still UnChristmas, what about grilling again?” Gustus looked at Clarke. “I could do some brats.”

“Oh, hell, yes.” Lincoln nodded enthusiastically.

“Great. If you could pick up a couple bags of appropriate buns, that would be a good thing.”

“Will do,” Lexa said as they went outside. “Anything else?”

“We’ll call if we think of it.” Indra was the last one out and she locked the door. “What time do you all want to eat?”

“Six?” Gustus said. “I’ll start the grilling process around five.”

“Okay. We’ll be back around then.” Lexa looked at Clarke. “Is that okay?”

“Perfect. Let me go get my coat.”

“Meet me out front,” Lexa said as Clarke headed upstairs into the apartment, where she went to the bathroom and checked herself in the mirror. Her phone dinged when she went back out to the living room to get her coat and she checked it and smiled.

i’ve watched that vid 37k times, Raven texted. She had included several heart eyes emojis.

i know…so many feels, she texted back.

did u send 2 ur mom

Clarke smiled again. yes. she loved it

if ur not riding the luv train, ur at least on the deck of the good ship Clexa

She laughed. i have some news. will tell u when i see u

Raven responded almost immediately. OMG WHAT

don’t worry! everything is AMAZING. r u @ 2morrow? shld b home @ noon. She sent it then put her coat on. Raven responded right after.

yes—A’s out of town @ conference [crying emoji]. back the 29th
awwww. don’t worry, that’s only a few days—will see u 2morrow. [kiss emoji] She was already on her way down the stairs when Raven texted again.

THE GOOD SHIP CLEXA, BITCHEZ [several heart emojis]

Clarke laughed and put her phone in her coat pocket and walked around the side of the house to the front where Lexa stood next to the passenger side of her Jeep.

“Ready?”

Clarke smiled and kissed her. “I am now.”

“Mmm. I could do that all day.”

“Same. But I also really want to see some of the places where you grew up. So I’m saving…certain activities for later.”

Lexa’s slow grin lit up her face. “I kinda love how that euphemism is a thing with us.” She opened the door for her.

“I’m embracing our storied past,” Clarke said and she kissed her again before she got into the Jeep and buckled up while Lexa went around to the driver’s side.

“And I kinda love that we already have a storied past,” she said as she settled into the driver’s seat and put her seatbelt on.

Clarke smiled because everything about this moment and the past day was beyond amazing and was there a way to have UnChristmas year ’round? She squeezed Lexa’s shoulder as they backed up because she needed physical contact with her every chance she got.

“So…I wanted to check in with you about something,” Lexa said as they headed down the road Clarke had come in on.

Clarke regarded her profile (which was amazing, as usual). “Okay.”

“I just wanted to make sure that all the talk of doing things in the future is okay and isn’t freaking you out.” She glanced at her, then focussed on the road again. “I mean, I don’t want to presume anything or make you uncomfortable, and I can tell them all to back off in that regard.” She said the words in a rush then cleared her throat a little and Clarke just wanted to cover her in all kinds of kisses.

“I love the future talk,” she said, emphatic.

Lexa glanced at her again, with her cute “really?” expression, and then she focused on the road again. “I mean, I know we’re still kind of new as a couple—”

“Oh, my God, Lexa,” Clarke said with an affectionate laugh. “Pull over.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Pull over. Right here.”

Lexa did, near somebody’s long driveway, then looked at Clarke, wary but expectant.

Clarke took her hand then leaned over and kissed her then pulled away so she could look into her eyes. “So what part of ‘I’m falling for you’ is unclear?” she asked, stroking the back of Lexa’s hand
with her thumb.

“I just want to make sure you don’t feel pressured. I know you’re dealing with some things in your past that might push some buttons about expectations and making future plans and—”

“Lexa. Stop for a minute.”

She did, and Clarke held her gaze for a few moments, because God her eyes were so expressive and Clarke could stare at them for hours. Days, even. She kissed Lexa’s fingers. “I love what’s happening here.”

Her eyes lit up and a smile pulled at the corner of her mouth.

“Yes, it took me by surprise and yes, I was afraid of my own feelings because the truth is, I’ve never felt for anyone what I feel for you. And I can’t say I won’t ever be afraid again of my own feelings where you’re concerned, or that some of my baggage isn’t going to get me worked up later on, but that doesn’t change that I’m way fucking into you, that I am totally falling for you, and I am absolutely all in as your GF and therefore, completely want plan-making for future things.”

Lexa stared at her like she had single-handedly saved the world, like SuperClarke was a thing, and Clarke kissed her again, and no matter that it wasn’t the most comfortable position, in the front of Lexa’s Jeep having to lean over like she was, it still sent delicious waves of heat and fluttery goodness down her legs and made her heart fill with all kinds of amazing feels, all for Lexa.

“Jesus, Clarke.” she said after a few more moments. “I don’t have words for how happy I am right now.” She cupped her cheek. “I’m one hundred percent all in with you, too.” She kissed her, which evolved into a slowburn makeout session that had the potential to morph into other things, but they somehow managed to stop and Lexa put the Jeep in gear again and pulled back onto the road and Clarke was glad there wasn’t much traffic up here.

“So since future talk is on the table, I’m guessing you’re good with being a walker fighter for Halloween,” Lexa said, teasing.

Clarke rested her hand on Lexa’s thigh. “Hell yes. Like that’s even a question.”

“We could practice our survival strategies.”

She laughed. “Definitely. But right now I just want to be with you and see some of the places from your past.”

“Done.”

“Also, you need to talk more about this secret ninja stuff you do.”

“But is it secret if others know?” Lexa flashed her a grin and Clarke laughed.

“Good point. Still, since I am the Master of Pancakes, it behooves the Commander to share this aspect of her past with me.”

“Does it mean the Master of Pancakes will reveal more of her past, as well?”

“Yes.” She squeezed Lexa’s thigh. “You’re stuck with me, Woods.”

“Best news ever.” She covered Clarke’s hand with her own. “And you’re stuck with me, too.”

Clarke leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on her cheek, then settled back in her seat, heart
completely full, everything fucking perfect, and she thought about the first time Lexa had smiled at her that day on the stairs, and how she couldn’t get her out of her mind.

“What are you thinking about?” Lexa asked as they hit the outskirts of Tondisi.

“About the first time we met.”

Lexa smiled. “I suppose there are worse kinds of meetings.”

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you.”

She shot her a glance but stayed quiet.

“And I was thinking you were with Octavia and I was really bummed about that.”

“I figured that’s what you thought.” She slowed down now that they were within city limits.

“It’s probably a good thing I thought that because that first night at the club, I’m pretty sure I would have kissed you if I knew you were single. And then things might’ve gotten weird fast.”

“I don’t think you would have done that, though.”

“Why not?”

“Because you felt something deeper, too. And it scared you.” Lexa shot her a glance and Clarke stared at her because dammit, she was right.

“So why didn’t you kiss me that first night at the club?” Clarke asked.

“Because I felt something that was beyond just a hookup, and I am not the hookup type.”

“Not even for a makeout session on a dance floor?”

She laughed. “As tempting as that was to think about then, there was something about you that spoke to me on a lot of different levels and I wanted to know more. Plus, I was scared, too.”

Clarke interlaced their fingers.

“I’ve never felt anything like this,” she said, voice quiet. “And I’ve got a lot of baggage, too, but getting to know you more since we officially met—it’s blown my mind in so many ways. And I am so here for it. So here for you and us and all the possibilities we might have.”

Oh, my God. Clarke wanted to cry. Again. “You’re amazing.”

“I feel the same way about you.” She stopped the Jeep and Clarke looked around. They were in the parking lot of a football field.

“Is this—” Clarke looked at her.

“Yes. My high school. And that’s the home field.”

“Oh, my God.” She took her seatbelt off because holy hell, this was awesome, and imagining Lexa in her football uniform was causing a whole lot of sparks that raced up and down her thighs.

Lexa got out and Clarke joined her and they stood, silently staring at the backside of the bleachers for a few moments.
“Is there a way to get in?” Clarke asked.

“Yep. Some of the locals know it, but others don’t.” She took Clarke’s hand and started walking. “It’ll require some adventure on your part.”

“Okay.”

“But I’ll help you.”

“Good. Because I kinda want to make out with you in the bleachers.”

Lexa grinned. “I had the same thought.” She raised an eyebrow and Clarke leaned into her as they walked, laughing and talking, until they reached the dark green wooden fence behind the home team bleachers. Lexa walked along it for a few dozen more yards then stopped at the backside of what Clarke guessed was the snack bar. A couple of cinderblocks lay near the metal door and Lexa picked them up and stacked them on top of each other under a metal pipe that ran vertically on the back of the structure. It started about three feet off the ground.

She stepped onto the blocks, grabbed the pipe, and used it as a handrail of sorts as she walked up the wall, her feet on either side of the pipe, then swung onto the structure’s flat roof.

“Ready?” Lexa asked and Clarke took a deep breath and did what Lexa had, but where Lexa made it look easy, it took Clarke a little longer and she decided she really needed to start working out again.

Lexa pulled her onto the roof. “This next part’s easy,” she said, and it was because metal ladder rungs had been fastened to the wall of the structure on this side of the wooden fence.

“I think they use the ladder to access the air conditioner,” Lexa said as she easily went down it and waited at the base, her stance clearly indicative that she was ready to catch Clarke if anything happened, but it didn’t and she soon joined her on the concrete, the home team bleachers looming to their left as they looked toward the field, and a chainlink fence to their right that separated this walkway from the actual field.

The fence’s gate didn’t have a lock and Lexa opened it and stepped out onto the field, Clarke right behind her.

“This is so fucking cool,” Clarke said.

“This part’s where the team hangs out during play. I spent a lot of time here, going over plays.” She walked out onto the actual playing field past the long permanent benches and again, Clarke had an image of her in uniform, striding to the huddle—Jesus.

“That takes you to the locker rooms,” Lexa said, pointing toward the goalposts to their right. “See those metal doors? Before the game, there’s all the hype, and we’d come running out of there like Viking invaders or something.” She smiled. “It was actually pretty exciting.”

“I like your school colors.”

Lexa looked at her and quirked an eyebrow.

“Red and black is kind of a badass warrior combo palette.”

She laughed. “Did you actually look up my high school football team?”

Clarke shrugged, sheepish. “I might have, when I found out you had played football.” And it had
thrown her for a loop, because she had already been drawing the Commander comic when she found out what the high school mascot was.

“Warriors are better as a mascot than something like Trojans, I think,” Lexa said, like she had just jumped into Clarke’s stream of consciousness. She smirked. “So much innuendo with that.” She walked farther out onto the field, Clarke following, until they were standing on the fifty yard line, roughly equidistant between the home team bleachers and the opposing side, which were low-slung aluminum with fewer levels.

Clarke raised her face to the afternoon sun, then looked toward the top of the home team bleachers, at the scoreboard, and she imagined the cheers, the excitement of the announcers, and Lexa’s teammates shouting on the sidelines.

“How good was your team?” she asked.

“Not bad. We made it to state a couple of times. Once when I was playing,”

“Seriously? Did you play in the championship game?”

“I was a junior then, and I did actually get to play for about five minutes in the second half. Mostly I was a placeholder for the kicker, who liked me doing it more than the first-string quarterback. He was a buddy of mine, so that was cool.” She stared at one set of the goalposts for a few moments. “I think he actually just wanted me to be out on the field more. And a few times, I ran a trick play and scored the two-point conversion after a touchdown instead of the one-point kick. And I threw a couple of touchdowns in fake field goals.”

“Can I just say how fucking cool I think it is that you played football? And why is it that you don’t have photos out of you in uniform?”

She smiled. “I’ll show you some. I don’t have them out because even though I did have fun with my teammates, it wasn’t a good time in my life and there’s some baggage there.”

Clarke cupped her face. “I get it. But I’m not your past, and it’s going to hold a different meaning for me. So maybe me seeing those photos and totally losing my shit over you in uniform will help you associate them with something other than the bad things that were going on then.” She stroked Lexa’s cheek for a moment before pulling her hand away.

“Losing your shit?” Lexa asked, a spark in her eyes.

“Well, duh. I’ve been lusting after images of you in uniform since I found out you played football.”

She laughed. “Well, hell. Then I will totally show you photos because I am all about Clarke Griffin lusting after me.”

“Speaking of…” Clarke shot a few selfies of them. “Mmm,” she said as she looked at one and smirked. “Bet I’m not the only one. Bet there were bunches who did that back in the day.”

Lexa dropped her gaze and blushed.

She chortled. “Nailed it. So how many fangirls did you have, Woods? Or were there too many to count?”

“There might have been a few.” She cleared her throat.

“Bet you got a lot asking you out.”
She rolled her eyes. “Sometimes.”

“And did they try to get you to make out with them in the bleachers?” Clarke teased.

“They tried.”

“And did they succeed?”

Lexa blushed again. “There were…um…a couple of instances.”

“So you’ve already made out with someone in the bleachers.” Clarke gave her another of her sultry smirks.

“Yeah, but that’s all that happened.”

And how fucking cute was she, with her shy, embarrassed reactions? “What about on the field?” Clarke asked.

Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“Did you make out with any of your fangirls or girlfriends on the field?”

Her eyes widened. “God, no.”

Clarke smiled. “Good. I’m the first, then.” And she cupped the back of Lexa’s neck and pulled her into a kiss and fucking hell, how was it that every time she did this she felt it not only physically, but deeper than that? And then Lexa made it even worse—okay, better—because her hands were inside Clarke’s coat, against her lower back, and then she moved them lower still, possessively over Clarke’s ass then back to her hips. Which started all kinds of heat between Clarke’s thighs, and something about standing out in the middle of a football field making out with Lexa fucking Woods added to the heat factor and their kisses got deeper, more hungry, and Clarke was seriously contemplating dragging Lexa back to the Jeep, no matter how confined the space. A few moments later, they stopped, foreheads together, breathing heavily.

“Damn,” Lexa said softly. “That was so much hotter than the bleachers.”

“I agree.”

“Pretty sure it’s the company,” she said.

“It’s definitely the company.”

Lexa laughed and kissed her again. “So do you want to see more of my high school?”

“Hell, yes. Especially if there’s more climbing involved.”

Lexa laughed. But they didn’t move and she stared into Clarke’s eyes for a few moments, then brushed a strand of hair out of her face.

“It means a lot to me that you’re here,” Lexa said.

“It means a lot to me, too.” And not just because she had just made out with her GF in the middle of her high school football field.

And holy fuck, she really liked thinking of Lexa that way.
Okay, she fucking loved it.

So much.

Lexa smiled and the look in her eyes—there was no way Clarke was going to miss this opportunity to kiss her. More than once. And God, she barely managed to stop again, and from Lexa’s expression it was just as difficult for her, too.

“Damn, you’re distracting,” Lexa said. “It’s probably a good thing I didn’t know you in high school.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I can’t concentrate on anything when you’re around. Going out with you would’ve made my high school career even more difficult to deal with. But in a really good way.”

“And what makes you think I would’ve gone out with you?” she teased.

Lexa arched an eyebrow.

“Competing with all your fangirls? Please. I’m not an entourage kind of woman.” She moved back a little and adjusted the lapels of Lexa’s coat.

“Neither am I.” And then she grinned, devilish. “I think I could have convinced you to go out with me.”

Clarke laughed. “Oh, really?” She grabbed Lexa’s hands and started pulling her back toward the way they had come in. “Explain how you would have managed that, Woods.”

“I have my ways.” She let go of one of Clarke’s hands so they could walk side by side and she leaned into her.

“Okay, yes, you do. But I’m a little hard to get.”

“Oh, please,” Lexa said with a scoff. “You can’t resist me.”

“Excuse me?” Clarke stopped, but she was laughing, because Lexa was totally right. “So you’re really hot, sexy, smart, beautiful, kind, sweet, and goofy. Whatever,” she finished with exaggerated Valley Girl emphasis.

Lexa laughed, too, and pulled her close.

“You think all of that and your damn smile would’ve made me want to go out wth you?” Clarke said softly, her mouth dangerously close to Lexa’s again (how the hell did they always end up like this? Thank God…).”

“Yes.”

And damn Lexa fucking Woods with her rakish little grin and the amused little sparkle in her eyes.

“Okay, fine. Probably.” And Clarke kissed her yet again.

“When you do that, I can’t even think,” Lexa whispered. “And I can’t resist you, either.”

“Uh huh. That’s the real issue, isn’t it? You can’t resist me.”
Lexa stared at her for a few moments, and gave her an adorable half-smile. “I can’t rebut that because it’s completely true.”

And Clarke thought about the first time she’d gotten a good look at her, on the stairs in their apartment building, and how something had sparked between them even then, and how she’d fought that and her own feelings. Until she didn’t want to anymore, and now here they were.

“You’re right,” she said. “I can’t resist you. I kind of tried to, but realized the error of my ways.”

Lexa laughed. “You have no idea how glad I am about that.”

“I might.” Clarke pulled her in for another kiss then stepped back. “So let’s continue this tour through your sordid past, Woods. Because I’m pretty sure there are a few more fangirls in it.”

She blushed. “A few makeout sessions is all,” she said. “And I only did that when I wasn’t seeing someone.”

“So you’re saying you didn’t sleep around.”

“If I was seriously seeing someone, I didn’t hook up with anyone else.”

Clarke laughed and took her hand and they started walking. “So when’s the first time you had sex?”

“Junior year.”

“With your first semi-serious girlfriend?”

“Yes. She’s the cop I mentioned last month. She’s now in Las Vegas, married to a woman.”

“Awesome. Another resident of Queerland. Also, that must be intense, to be a cop there.”

“So she says.” Lexa let go of Clarke’s hand and slid her arm around her waist. “What about you? First time?”

“With a dude, sophomore year in high school. With a woman, senior year.”

“Was the guy the one you were semi-serious with?”

She shot her a look for remembering that. “No. The first time was a guy on the soccer team. He was nice enough, and we were at a party. But the sex was nothing to write home about. A lot of fumbling around, but he at least knew how to put a condom on. The first time with a woman, though, was much better. She clearly knew what she was doing.”

Lexa laughed.

“Have you ever had sex with a guy?” Clarke asked.

“I fooled around with one. We were sophomores.”

“Did you play football with him?”

“No, thankfully. That would’ve been super awkward. He was on the baseball team. And by the end of our senior year, he identified as bi.”

“I love that he later ID’ed as bi. Because more people for Queerland. Did you stay friends?”
“Yes. He was a cool dude. I mean, I like guys. Just not interested in sex or romance with them. They just don’t move me like women do.” She stared into Clarke’s eyes. “And nothing comes close to how you move me.”

“I’m in the same boat.”

Lexa smiled. “So you’re saying this is a legit ship?”

“Oh, my God, you’re as bad as Raven—”

Lexa’s lips interrupted her. “And?” she said after a few delicious moments.

“Fuck, yes. This is a legit ship. And I’m so on board for it.”

The look in Lexa’s eyes caused heat to gather immediately between Clarke’s thighs.

“Same.” Lexa pressed a kiss against her forehead. “Ready for more stories from my sordid high school past?”

“Definitely.”

And they climbed back to the other side of the fence and walked toward the main high school grounds, laughing and talking, and fuck, yes, Clarke was completely on board the good ship Clexa.

And she planned to sail it as long as she possibly could.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, my GOD this trip into some of Lexa’s past has me all warm fuzzied up n’ shit.

SIGH!!!!

Sorry I’m a day/couple of days late. On the road and I try to get as close to every other weekend as I can, but sometimes, I just can’t.

BUT! I'm going to take this story to New Year's Eve, which will thus end things with Chapter 30. I thought that was a good stopping point for this, which I'm considering Book 1. Book 2, hopefully, to come. Later on. I've got some other stuff to do.

Thanks for hanging out with me!

SLIGHTLY EDITED: 12/21/2018 in accordance with comment below regarding Clarke and Lexa convo on the football field.

SLIGHTLY EDITED AGAIN: 1/10/2018 in another attempt to address comment below regarding Clexa convo on football field.
A Key to Her Heart

Chapter Summary

Clarke goes back to Polis before Lexa does and has a chat with Raven in which she realizes something. Then she has some time with Lexa...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Clarke left Virginia earlier than Lexa, to give her more time with Indra and Gustus. Lincoln had left even earlier, but he was going to pick Octavia and Bellamy up at the airport, and then would stay at Octavia’s.

She was a little worried about the weather—a snowstorm was moving in later that afternoon, but Lexa had said she’d leave around two, so she should be fine, and if anything looked bad, she’d leave earlier. And then she had kissed her into next week after she helped Clarke put her stuff in her truck and the sparks from that lingered all the way back to Polis.

Who was she kidding? They were a perpetual state of her existence these days. Not that she minded, of course. She parked, texted her mom, then Lexa, then slung her backpacks over her shoulders and went up to her apartment.

Raven got up from the couch when Clarke entered. She was wearing sweats, her brace, and a baggy dark sweater.

“Honey, you’re home. It feels like it’s been ages.” She gave her a quick, awkward hug, since Clarke still had both backpacks on.

“At least that long,” Clarke said with a laugh.

“And I’ve watched the UnChristmas video another thousand times because holy shit, all the fucking feels it gives me and I need more stories, please, with regard to the past couple of days.”

“And on that note, let me get a little organized.”

“I hate that you’re making me wait.” Raven stuck her lower lip out in a pout.

“Hey, I’m worth it,” Clarke said over her shoulder as she went to her bedroom, Raven’s laughter trailing after her.

“Oh, do you want coffee?” Raven asked from the bedroom doorway.

“Yes, please.”

“I mean, I know it’s not your GF’s, but—”

Clarke blushed. “Shut up and make coffee.”

Raven grinned. “Awesome.” She left and Clarke took her boots off and put her house sneakers on
then unpacked. Lexa had texted her back, telling her she was glad she was safe and she’d text later. Clarke smiled and took Raven’s wrapped present out of her closet and carried it to the kitchen.

“It’s almost done,” Raven said as she got two cups out of the cabinet and then she saw what Clarke was carrying.

“Cool. More UnChristmas. Yours is on the table. Let’s get coffee’d up and then we can do the ceremonial exchanging of the gifts.”

Clarke laughed and gave her a one-armed hug and waited for Raven to pour coffee and then add creamer to it. They carried their cups to the table and Clarke set Raven’s present next to the card-sized envelope that had her name on it. “Oh, hold on.” She went back to her bedroom and grabbed the bomber-sized bottle of beer Indra had sent home with her, then went back to the table.

“What is this amazing-ness?” Raven asked as Clarke sat down across from her.

“More of Indra’s seasonal ale.”

“Praise. There clearly is a god, and she is operating through Indra.”

Clarke smiled and sat down across from her.

“So where is Lexa?” Raven asked.

“I left a little early to give her some time for lunch with Indra and Gustus. She’s leaving there around two.”

“Which is——” Raven picked up her phone, “in T minus two hours.” She frowned. “It’s supposed to snow later.”

“We know. She said she’s monitoring.”

“And you and I will jack a snowplow and go get her if we have to,” Raven said matter-of-factly. “Although there is a very real possibility that the Clexonium will melt all of the snow before it even gets to the ground.” She paused. “But we’ll jack a plow just in case.”

Clarke laughed.

“So tell me everything,” Raven said, eyes sparkling. “Wait. Maybe not everything. Unless you feel it’s necessary to reveal certain activities, as well. Or as we like to call it, bang shui, uh huh,” and she snapped her fingers while moving her hand in a circle.

She laughed. “Yeah…no to that.” She sipped her coffee, and drew it out as long as possible because Raven was giving her a look and drumming her fingers on the table.

Clarke set her cup down. “It was amazing. I mean, you saw the video. She was totally surprised and it was so worth it to plan all that.”

“Yes, I get that part. What about the whole meeting the family thing?”

“It went well. Gustus is like this huge teddy bear and I see where Lincoln gets a lot of his mannerisms. Indra is a little more scary.”

“Define ‘scary’.”

“Super intense.”
“Did she Mama Bear you?” Raven asked over the rim of her cup.

“Oh, my God, yes. But I don’t blame her. I mean, she’s really protective of Lexa, and I’m glad, because Lexa deserves people in her life who will do that.”

“So basically, there was an epic battle of wills between you and Indra that I unfortunately missed.” She sighed.

“I wouldn’t call it epic. I mean, my mom has similar intense energy, so I know how to handle it.”

“True.”

“But I did get the feeling that she was testing me in some ways.”

“But your Griffin charm derailed that.”

She smirked and shrugged. “Not sure it was that, but she did kind of warm up a bit. She did hug me good night the first night and she hugged me goodbye today.”

“You’re in. And maybe she figured you have to have some serious brass ovaries to be willing to do this without even having met her. Which, hello, also demonstrates that you care about Lexa.”

“She also agreed to show me the cosplay workshop, so there’s that.”

“Describe. Because that photo of the Furiosa arm was off the fucking chain.”

Clarke did, then talked about Lexa and the swords.

“Okay, whoa, wait.” Raven raised her hand. “Cue record scratch and back that shit up. Swords?”

“Well, replicas.”

“Whatever. She took two ninja swords and did some kind of display? Are you freaking kidding me?”

“Nope. And yes, it was ultra hot.”

“Holy shit.”

“That was exactly my reaction.” And it was still her reaction, just thinking about it.

“Are you sure she’s actually a student? And not some kind of secret agent? With geeky law student as a cover? Not that there’s anything wrong with that. It’s just really fucking hot.”

“Oh, my God. Listen to yourself. She took karate when she was in junior high and her teacher saw that she had a talent with swords.”

“Good cover story.” Raven shrugged, but from her expression she was teasing.

“I might ask the same question about Anya.”

Raven laughed. “Actually, I could totally believe that about Anya. But damn. Swords. You hooked up with a woman who can do that. Think of the sexy-times cosplay.”

“Okay, thank you, and we will now stop that branch of the conversation.”

“What? You know you went there, watching her do it.”
Clarke flushed and cleared her throat while Raven laughed. “Moving along, now,” Clarke said. She then told Raven about going to Lexa’s high school and driving around Tondisi afterward. She did leave some details out, like all the times she and Lexa had made out.

“Fuck. This story would melt the most frozen of hearts,” Raven said when she had finished. “And clearly, after describing how you got into the stadium, you totally could jack a plow with me. Also, please tell me you made out with her in the bleachers.” She grinned lasciviously.

“Oh, my God, Reyes.”

She frowned. “Wait. Are you telling me you scaled a concession stand to get onto Lexa’s high school football field and you didn’t make out in the bleachers? Ay dios mio.” She rolled her eyes dramatically.

“We did not make out in the bleachers.”

“I can’t believe this.” Raven shook her head sadly and sighed.

“We made out in the middle of the field instead.”

Raven jerked her gaze to Clarke’s, eyes wide. “Seriously?”

She smirked. “On the fifty yard line.”

“Holy shit, that is epic. That’s even better than the bleachers.”

“That’s what I thought. There was lots of making out yesterday,” she said, nonchalant.

Raven hooted. “I love how you marked your GF’s territory with makeout sessions.”

Clarke started to retort then flushed. “Whatever. She’s hot. And amazing. Why wouldn’t I want to make out with her all the time?” And it hadn’t occurred to her that she might be doing what Raven said, but come to think of it, maybe she was. Maybe she wanted Lexa to associate things from her past with things like hot makeout sessions with her.

“Oh, God,” Raven said while she laughed. “Yes, she is. And nobody’s blaming you for that.” She paused. “So…everything went well.” She put a touch of a question on the statement.

Clarke stared into her cup then checked Raven’s. “More?”

“Yes.”

She took the cups into the kitchen and refilled them, added creamer, and went back to the table. “Everything went…God, it was amazing.” She sat down again. “And I told Lexa I think of her as my GF.”

Raven stared at her. “Is that what you wanted to tell me when you texted yesterday?”

“Yeah.”

“And from what you did yesterday, she’s clearly fine with it.” She raised her eyebrows up and down.


“So why do I get the feeling there’s something else?”
“Because I might have told her that I’m falling for her.”

Raven’s cup froze halfway to her mouth. “I’m sorry, could you repeat that? Because it sounded an awful lot like love train talk.”

“I told her I’m falling for her.”

Raven slowly set her cup down on the table. “And?”

“She said she’s falling for me, too.”

“I see.” And Raven got up like she was on her way to the kitchen. Instead, she took Clarke’s cup and set it carefully on the table then grabbed her in a huge bear hug that was kind of awkward since Clarke was still sitting.

“Oh my fucking God, Griffin. I cannot even and now I feel like I should scream or something—are you freaking kidding me?” And she was laughing and half-shouting and Clarke was, too, and it was probably one of the goofiest displays in the history of BFF-dom.

“This is the best UnChristmas present ever,” Raven said as she went back to her chair. “My BFF is in love and girl, it looks so good on you.”

“Jesus.” Clarke flushed again and brushed her hair away from her face.

“Don’t even try to deny it.”

She rolled her eyes. “Fine. I totally am.” Oh, my God. She was. She was totally in love.

“And Lexa is, too.” Raven grinned. “She’s so totally in love with you that even Murphy can see it.”

“Murphy?” Clarke picked up her cup.

“After the two of you left the bar the day before Christmas Eve, he said it was really nice to see someone as cool as Lexa in love with you.”

“What? He hates love.”

“Oh, please. He only says that when it has to do with him. But the point of this conversation is that Lexa is totally into you, too. And everything is awesome.”

Clarke smiled. “I told my mom.”

Raven almost spit her coffee out. “What the actual fuck? That you’re in love with Lexa?”

“Not quite. I told her that Lexa’s my GF and that I’m serious about her.”

“Fucking hell. Did you tell Lexa about that convo with your mom?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, my God, I’m losing my shit again. I can’t.” She got up and bounced up and down and did a funny little geek dance, which made Clarke laugh again.

“This is the fucking best news.” She stopped dancing. “Seriously, Clarke. I am so happy for you.” She sat down again. “Can I tell Anya?”
Clarke laughed. “I thought you told her stuff anyway.”

“This is BFF stuff,” Raven said with a huff. “I have very good boundaries, contrary to popular belief.”

She smiled. “You do. Thank you. And yes, you can tell her. What did she say about the UnChristmas video?”

Raven grinned. ‘I’ll show you. Here’s her reaction video.’ She reached for her phone on the other end of the table and opened it.

“You seriously took a reaction video of her?”

“Duh. I did it for you. Nobody else knows.” She handed her phone to Clarke.

The video showed Anya holding a phone watching the UnChristmas video Gustus had taken.

“Goddammit,” Anya muttered. “This is the fucking cutest thing I’ve ever fucking seen. Shit.”

Clarke heard Raven laughing in the background of the video. “It gets even better—”

“Oh, my God. Woods has it bad for Griffin,” Anya interrupted and Clarke’s chest filled with sparks. Again.

“Anya has heart eyes,” Raven chanted softly in the background.

“Whatever. There are so many fucking heart eyes in this. Look at that. Griffin has it bad for Woods, too. Goddamn this is so fucking sweet. Ugh. Well-played, Griff,” Anya muttered.

“Aww,” Raven said in the background. “I love how my badass girlfriend is such a softie.”

“I am no such thing,” Anya retorted. She smiled at Raven. “Now let me watch this again.”

Clarke laughed. “I knew it. She’s a giant warm cinnamon roll beneath that hard snarky exterior.”

“Duh.” Raven set her phone aside. “She’s really happy for you. She thinks Lexa is badass.”

“Why?”

“She says that Lexa has a really strong spirit, and that she’s the kind of person people would follow into battle.”

Clarke stared at her, thinking about the Commander comic she was working on.

“Anya says Lexa is a leader—the kind that inspires people to follow her because she gives respect where it’s due, and she’s not afraid to throw down when people she cares about are threatened.”

She raised her eyebrows. “She said all that?”

“I know, right? Anya doesn’t just snark.”

“Well, I’m glad the two of you found each other.”

“Same.” And Raven’s expression made Clarke smile.

“Oh, my God. And you tease me about my heart eyes.”
“It’s out of love. Now let’s do UnChristmas, dammit.” Raven pushed the envelope between them toward her.

Clarke opened it and took the card out. It had a cartoon of reindeer lounging on a beach. Raven had written “UnChristmas rules!” across the top in marker. She opened the card and found a gift certificate inside to her favorite local art supply store.

“Oh, my God.” She looked up at Raven. “This is so great.” And then she got up and went around to give Raven a hug. “Wow.”

“You mentioned you wanted some new pens and paints.”

“God, that was months ago.” Clarke planted a kiss on her cheek.

“I’m your BFF. I pay attention.”

“And I love you for it.” She reached over Raven’s shoulder and put her present in front of her before she went back to her chair. “Your turn.”

Raven grinned like the kid Clarke remembered when they were growing up. She opened one side of the paper and looked inside, then tore the rest of it off and stared at the folded-up gray hoodie inside, and the logo on its front that Clarke had designed in red, black and white.

“Oh, my God. Are you fucking kidding me?” She scooted back in her chair so she could hold it up. “Our college band,” she said, grinning like an idiot.

“So many names to choose from,” Clarke said with a grin. “I went with Kinky Lasagna.”

“Holy shit, I fucking love this. Did you design this logo?”

“Yeah.” It featured a plate with a piece of lasagna in red and white superimposed over a black riding crop. She had positioned the fake band name underneath the image in bold black, in a font reminiscent of a bordello framed by a red stiletto on either side.

“This is fucking brilliant.”

“Check the back.”

Raven turned the sweatshirt around. “You fucking didn’t.”

“But I did.” She laughed. The back featured several fake tour dates and locations, including “Raven and Clarke’s Kitchen,” “Tío Mike’s Patio,” “Anya’s Undisclosed Location,” “Chip Aisle at Trader Joe’s” and “The Park Next Door.”

“This is the best, Griff. Seriously. I fucking love this so fucking hard.”

“And you desperately needed a new sweatshirt,” Clarke said as Raven stood and came around the table to give her yet another hug. “Anya will thank me.”

“Are you kidding? She’ll be mad jealous and for once, she’s going to try to steal mine. And why the fuck aren’t you working as a graphic designer?”

Clarke smiled and shrugged. “I like doctor stuff.”

“You can do both. Nobody said you only get to have one thing in life to do. Though in your case, pretty sure you’d pick Lexa as your one.” She chortled.
“Oh, my God. Seriously? How is that a career?”

“Whatever. It’s a goal. And a damn fine one.”

She was about to respond when her phone interrupted with a text message notification. Clarke checked it and smiled.

*Hey—on my way home. Hope you don’t think it’s weird that I’m really excited to see you again even though it’s only been a few hours. [kiss emoji]*

She responded, *hell, no. get ur ass home, Woods. miss u. [kiss emoji].* She looked at Raven, who had taken her sweater off and put the sweatshirt on.

“Speaking of, Lexa’s on her way home,” Clarke said.

Raven grinned. “Yay.”

“And that looks super cute on you.”

“I fucking love it. And I love that you got it extra baggy. Selfie.” She grabbed Clarke and snapped a photo of them.

Clarke smiled. “I know how you are about that. So how are we on groceries?”

“We should probably go shopping in a couple of days. But we’re okay for right now. I got some stuff for fake-ass Philly cheesesteak sammies tonight.”

“I totally support this.”

“And you will, of course, invite Lexa,” Raven said imperiously. “I have to tease her, too.”

Clarke shot her a look.

“Don’t worry, BFF. I will say nothing that you have not already revealed to her. Also, there are leftover burritos that I made a couple days ago if you want something right now.”

“That would be awesome.” She got up to go put the oven on and gave Raven another big hug. “Do you want one, too?”

“Hell, yes.” Her phone then dinged with a text. Raven checked it and had instant heart eyes.

“Tell Anya hi,” Clarke said with a laugh as she went into the kitchen. She stood by the stove and read the text message from Lexa again because reasons. Because even something like a simple text message from her GF—holy shit, her GF—sent her into the land of feels.

She sighed happily and slid her phone into the back pocket of her jeans.

God, she was a goner.

A total fucking goner for Lexa fucking Woods.

And they had a whole bunch of days to spend together before the semester cranked up again.

Best UnChristmas ever.

###
Clarke got her laundry together and thought about how Lexa had given her sweats and socks to wear when she’d been locked out of her apartment. She really missed that faded blue sweatshirt and wondered if it was too weird to ask Lexa if she could wear it more. Was that taking too much advantage of brand new GF status?

Maybe she could just end up borrowing it again for a little bit.

God, she was a mess.

But a really happy mess.

Her phone rang and she practically launched herself onto her bed to get it because it was Lexa’s tone.

“Hi,” Clarke answered.

“Hey. I just parked.”

She heard the smile in Lexa’s voice. “I’ll be right down.”

“You don’t need to—”

“Don’t even argue with me, Woods,” Clarke said as she grabbed a jacket.

Lexa laughed. “Well, all rightie, then.”

“That’s what I like to hear. Hanging up now.” And she did and practically ran to the door.

“So Lexa’s back?” Raven asked from the couch, tone innocent.

“Yes.”

“Then I’ll see you when I see you.”

“We’re having dinner later with you, Reyes,” Clarke said as she grabbed her keys. She made kissing noises and left, making sure the door locked behind her before she hurried down the back stairs to the parking lot.

Lexa was standing by her Jeep rummaging in the back seat when Clarke approached and how crazy was it that she had just seen her that morning, that they had been in each other’s company nonstop for almost forty-eight hours and she was still this thirsty for her?

She must’ve heard Clarke approach because she stopped rummaging, turned, grinned, and started to say something but Clarke practically threw herself into her arms and kissed her.

After a few seconds of that delicious situation, Clarke pulled away. “Hi,” she said with one of her sultry smiles. “So, yeah, I kinda missed you these past few hours. Don’t care if that’s weird.”

Lexa smiled back. “Same. And I don’t care, either.”

Clarke reluctantly stepped back so that Lexa could get her bags. “Hand me one,” she said, and Lexa gave her the pack she used for school while she carried her duffle bag. “Ready?” Clarke asked.

“Yes.” Lexa locked up then took Clarke’s hand on the walk across the parking lot.

“So Raven and I were wondering if you’d be into having dinner with us tonight,” Clarke said as she
opened the door with her code.

“As if this is a question that needs to asked.” Lexa pulled the door open, warmth in her eyes and fuck, Clarke was so totally into her.

“Well, you might have things to do. Friends to see. An apartment to clean. Movies to watch. Maybe you’d like some space.” Whatever Lexa wanted, Clarke would make sure she got it. They stopped at the door to Lexa’s apartment.

“Okay, I do need to get organized, but I really want to be with you after that. So do you think you’d like to hang out with me for a bit before dinner? Which is when, by the way?”

“Probably around six. We’re having our famous fake-ass Philly cheesesteak sandwiches. Or sammies, as Raven says.”

Lexa looked at her for a beat, then grinned. “I’m so excited right now to have a fake-ass cheesesteak. You have no idea. And I’m sure you’ll explain the name.”

“Well, they’re not real Phillies, since we don’t make them there, but we still have to make sure that people understand the difference.”

“I see. Otherwise, the real ones will have serious competition from Polis.”

“Exactly. And we can’t ruin Philly’s reputation like that. It’s historic, after all. An entire tourism industry is built on Philly cheesesteak sandwiches. So, out of the goodness of our hearts, we call ours ‘fake-ass’."

Lexa grinned. “God, I’m so glad you’re my GF.” And then she leaned in and kissed her and Clarke tried to keep herself from taking it deeper, from sucking on Lexa’s lower lip, from grabbing the front of Lexa’s jeans and pulling her closer, but she couldn’t not do those things. And Lexa groaned softly against her mouth, which only made her want to do more.

Finally, she managed to stop but the look in Lexa’s eyes was the one that always presaged even more heated and intense activities, and Clarke loved the spark of promise, and the territorial glint because that look was directed at her.

“Same. So much same,” Clarke said softly. She forced herself to step back and Lexa unlocked the door and went inside. Clarke followed, and put Lexa’s backpack on the couch and with a supreme act of will, she gave her a quick kiss on the cheek but nothing else.

“Okay, get organized and text me when you want company—wait. Why don’t you just come over when you’re ready? We’re just hanging out watching TV and I’m about to do a couple loads of laundry. Pretty chill.”

“That sounds amazingly domestic and exactly what I want. We could get even more domestic, since I have to do some laundry, too.”

“Cool. Then I’ll see you in the laundry room, Commander.”

“I hope so.”

Clarke left before she started something that had nothing to do with organizing or laundry (though it did involve clothing and its removal), and went back to her apartment, heart still pounding, butterflies still fluttering around in her chest.
“What’s up?” Raven asked from the couch when she came in.

“She’s getting organized. She’ll be over to hang out before dinner.”

“Cool.”

“Do you have any laundry you want done? Like, say, that new sweatshirt?”

“But that means I have to take it off.”

“Yes, Captain Obvious, that’s usually how it works. Or I could just hose you down in the shower while you wear it.”

“As much fun as that might be—no.” Raven took the sweatshirt off. “Please treat her well.”

Clarke laughed and took it from her. “Did you name her?” She held the sweatshirt up.

“Not yet. But when I do, you’ll be the first to know.”

“Before Anya? Wow.”

“Guard it with your life, Griffin,” Raven said, using her deep, mysterious tone.

Clarke laughed again and added the shirt to her laundry bag, grabbed her bag of quarters and her bottle of detergent and dryer sheets, and went downstairs to the laundry room.

No one else was using it, and she figured it was because a lot of people in the building were on Christmas break elsewhere. She loaded two machines, which was all she needed, and checked her messages and then social media. Lexa arrived about twenty minutes later and loaded one machine then sat down in one of the chairs next to Clarke. She was wearing a pair of her baggy jeans and a loose faded rugby shirt and God, Clarke loved casually dressed Lexa as much as she loved naked Lexa and workout Lexa and dressed-up Lexa and—shit. There was a lot of love in those thoughts.

“So. This is new, hanging out here,” Lexa said.

She took her hand. “Right? Is it in the GF manual, do you think?”

“If not, it should be,” Lexa said with a sultry little edge to her voice as she leaned in and there was no way Clarke was going to miss another opportunity to make out with her, and that’s exactly what they did, until even Lexa’s machine finished and at that point, Clarke managed to tear herself away and transfer her clothes to dryers while Lexa did the same. Once the machines were going, Clarke slid her arms around Lexa’s neck.

“I can’t seem to get enough of you,” she said.

Lexa quirked an eyebrow and smiled. “Good. It’s part of my plan.”

“Mine, too.”

She squeezed Clarke’s hips and pressed her forehead to Clarke’s. “I’m still blown away by what you did.”

“You said you were willing to make new memories for this time of year,” Clarke said, and God, Lexa smelled good. Crisp, outdoorsy, and that hint of sandalwood.

“I did. I just didn’t realize you were going to start immediately.”
“Would you have preferred I waited?” Clarke teased.

“God, no. And it’s so amazing that you met Indra and Gustus.”

She furrowed her brow. “Is it okay that it happened that way? I know you wanted to introduce us.”

Lexa smiled. “I actually think this was a really good way to meet them, because they didn’t have me as a buffer and they got to see a bit of you.”

“And, thinking about it, I didn’t actually introduce you to my mom, either.”

Lexa frowned, thinking. “That’s right. I introduced myself, and then invited her next door.”

“She appreciated how comfortable you were around her, and how even though we were dating, it wasn’t something that defined the meeting.”

“It did feel pretty adult overall.” She grinned. “And along those lines, Indra and Gustus said the same thing, that you were pretty comfortable around them, and they really enjoyed having you around.”

“Did Indra really say that or is Gustus covering for her?”

Lexa laughed. “She really did. And if she didn’t mean it, she wouldn’t say it. In fact, she talked about you after you left.”

Clarke raised her eyebrows, affecting a skeptical air.

“No, she did. She liked your sense of humor, and she liked that you were so… um… openly affectionate with me.” She blushed and fuck, it was so cute.

“I did tell Lincoln that I hoped Indra didn’t mind that I would be engaging in PDA all over her niece. He said it would be okay.”

“Well, she appreciated it. And so did I.”

“I thought you might.”

Lexa kissed her. “Always. And please don’t stop with that.”

“Never.”

She smiled and hugged her closer. “I haven’t talked much about this, but I didn’t get a lot of physical affection from my parents, even when I was a kid. They just weren’t that way with me or with each other, that I could tell. But I knew I was missing out, because I saw my friends at school being physically affectionate with each other and their families, and Indra and Gustus and Lincoln were always that way with me, so I knew that what was happening at my house wasn’t the norm.”

“I am so glad you have Indra, Gustus, and Lincoln in your life.” Clarke pressed a kiss to her neck.

“So am I. My point to this story is that physical affection is important and I love that you’re that way with me.”

Clarke regarded her. “I love that you’re that way with me. So keep it up,” she said, a little tease in her tone.

“Definitely.”
And God, her eyes and the expression in them.

Clarke cleared her throat. “So I’m kind of full of feels right now. Who knew laundry rooms could inspire that?”

“We do now.”

Clarke was about to respond when she heard voices echoing down the hall. She kissed Lexa and stepped away as two women she recognized from the first floor entered, each carrying a full laundry basket. They offered greetings and set to work loading washers, chatting with each other.

Lexa exchanged a heated look with Clarke, then they both checked their dryers. Clarke took Raven’s new sweatshirt out though it was still damp and inserted another quarter for the rest of the clothes.

“Raven’s UnChristmas present,” Clarke said, and she held it up, front side first, then back side. “We have a running joke about stuff we say that could be good college band names, and this year, I decided to immortalize one.”

Lexa stared, grinning. “That’s fucking epic. Not only because you put it on an article of clothing but also because the phrase ‘kinky lasagna’ actually came up in conversation.”

“Right?” She laid the sweatshirt out on a nearby table. The two other women who had come in finished loading their washers and started them then left and as soon as they did, Lexa kissed her again.

“Seriously can’t get enough of you, either,” she said softly. “And hold up, did you design the logo on that sweatshirt?” She looked over at it.

“Yeah.”

“Damn. The Master of Pancakes is super talented.” She went over to look at the sweatshirt again. “This is seriously cool. I mean, not to dissuade you from your medical career, but you could totally do graphic design.”

“Or both.”

She smiled. “Which is actually even hotter than just the doctor part or just the graphic design part. Both of those together—” she bit her lower lip and shook her head. “Mmm.”

Clarke flushed. “Well, lucky for me I do both.”

Lexa took Clarke’s hands and positioned them on her hips. “I’d really like to be included as one of the things you do.”

Fuck, she loved it when Lexa flirted like this, and loved how desire filled the space between them.

“Are we going to add this laundry room to our list of places to engage in certain activities?”

She laughed. “Now that you mention it…”

Voices sounded again in the corridor and Lexa smirked and stepped away as a woman and a guy came in. After quick greetings all around, the newcomers started putting their laundry in the available machines. Lexa’s dryer stopped and she started folding clothes, using the table next to the one that held Raven’s sweatshirt.

Clarke emptied her dryers, too, and set to work folding next to Lexa, and she teased her about the
precise angles she employed on her clothes while Lexa pretended to inspect Clarke’s more casual technique on her shirts.

“Hmm. The Master of Pancakes has some things she still needs to master,” Lexa said, raising an eyebrow at the pile of shirts Clarke had finished folding.

“Excuse me? Perhaps the Commander is too uptight.” And Clarke reached over and grabbed one of Lexa’s shirts and shook it out then quickly refolded it and put it back on her stack.

Lexa looked at it, and chewed her lip.

“Oh, you do have a control streak about that,” Clarke teased as she put her clothes in her laundry bag. She draped Raven’s sweatshirt over her shoulder.

“I don’t have to refold it.”

“Pretty sure you do.”

“Do not.” She pretended to pout and Clarke laughed and kissed her cheek.

“Go ahead and fix it. I’ll wait.”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Dammit. The Pancake Master knows me too well.” And she refolded the shirt, quick practiced motions. She placed her clothes neatly in her laundry basket. “Got it from my dad, I guess. Mr. Military.”

“Hey,” Clarke said, hearing a brittle undercurrent in her tone. “I’m sorry I teased you about it.”

“It’s okay.” She flashed her a quick smile. “But it’s kind of a bummer that I still retain some of my bioparents in my habits.”

“No, it’s not, unless you hate it and you want to change it. Otherwise, there’s nothing wrong with having perfectly folded clothes.” She looped the strap of her laundry bag over her shoulder and headed for the door. “Except you might have to loosen your restrictions when I do your laundry,” she shot back over her shoulder before she moved into the corridor to the stairs.

“When you do—what, now?” Lexa asked from right behind her.

Clarke started up the stairs before she responded. “There will most likely be times that your laundry will be mixed up with mine and times that you can’t get to your laundry for whatever reasons.” She stopped and looked at her, from her position a couple steps above. “But I’m definitely not in the perfect clothes-folding category of GFs.” She smiled and shrugged.

Lexa stared up at her, the laundry basket braced on her thighs. “I’m not sure why, but I suddenly have a massive case of feels.”

And Clarke did, too, as she held Lexa’s gaze and she thought about the key to her apartment she was going to give her and another tidal wave of feels washed through her.

“Who knew laundry had that kind of power?” Clarke said.

“Until today, I was totally unaware.” And Lexa grinned and started walking up the stairs again. “But now, I’m enlightened. And let the record show that I will have a complete feels meltdown when Clarke Griffin—my GF—does my laundry and folds it in her cute, casual way.”

Clarke stared at her then laughed, her heart feeling like it was skipping around her chest. “I—fuck, I
love it when you refer to me that way.”

Lexa glanced back over her shoulder with smile both smoldering and sweet. “Same.”

They stopped at Lexa’s door and Lexa put her basket down.

“So come over when you’re ready,” Clarke said. “We’re just going to be hanging out and then we’ll make dinner.” She tugged on Lexa’s sweater. “Also, later on, I would like to give you your UnChristmas present.”

She smiled. “I have something for you, too. Do you think you’d mind coming over for that? And maybe staying the night?”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” She leaned in and gave her a quick kiss. “See you in a bit.”

“Definitely.”

And Clarke returned to her apartment, so fucking grateful again that Lexa lived right next door and wondering how this day could get any better, but it sure as hell did after Lexa got there and they watched the latest *Thor* movie with Raven then made the sammies and drank some of the beer Indra had sent home with Clarke.

And then they finished cleaning up, Lexa helping and exchanging one-liners with Raven, and Clarke’s heart overflowed because Lexa fit so perfectly in her life, like there had always been a placeholder for her somehow and when she showed up, she just clicked right into place.

Raven’s phone rang and Clarke recognized the tone.

“Say hi to Anya from both of us, Captain Heart Eyes,” she said.

“You’re one to talk,” Raven shot back with a grin and she went out into the living room, leaving Clarke alone in the kitchen with Lexa. Not that there was anything remotely wrong with that.

Raven must’ve gone into her bedroom to talk because the music was still playing at volume and a slower song came on and Lexa took the dish towel out of Clarke’s hand and tossed it onto the counter then pulled her close.

“Dance with me,” Lexa said softly and holy hell, there was no way Clarke was going to refuse that and she started to move with Lexa, arms around her neck and God, it was hot.

“We don’t do this enough, Woods,” Clarke said, staring into her eyes, thinking about the first time they’d danced together. And then the second. And oh, God, the things that resulted from *that*.

“I agree.”

“But it seems when we do, things happen.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow playfully and that fucking super hot half-smile lifted the corner of her mouth. “That’s the point.” Her mouth was dangerously close to Clarke’s, but Clarke didn’t kiss her because she loved the promise of it, and the way sexual tension built as they moved together.

“Why did you dance with me that first night at the club?” Lexa asked, voice soft, gaze locked onto Clarke’s.

“I saw an opportunity and I took it.”
“There were lots of opportunities with other people there.”

“None of them were you.” She brushed her lips over Lexa’s, barely touching, but fuck, she felt it all the way down her thighs. “And you intrigued me.” She moved her hips in a sexy little sway.

“Mmm. Lucky me.”

“Since the first time I talked to you, you intrigued me. I just didn’t want to admit it.”

She smiled. “You are pretty stubborn.”

She snorted. “Part of the package.”

“And I’m here for it.”

The song changed, but it was still a slower beat and Clarke let Lexa set the pace, because it felt so good to move with her like this, so good to know that she would be going home with her, and that they had a few days to spend together.

“It’s snowing, bitches,” Raven announced as she appeared in the kitchen doorway. “And I see Clexonium is already at work.”

Clarke laughed and gave Lexa a quick kiss before pulling her to the dining nook window. Raven dimmed the light and they stared outside.


“Won’t be as bad as the snow day we had, but we can pretend,” Raven said.

Clarke looked at her. “Wait. You didn’t talk to Anya very long.”

“She’s finishing up a conference dinner and then we’re going to Facetime later. Right now, though, I feel the urge to play some *Mass Effect*. You’re welcome to join me. Or you could just go over to Lexa’s and have some happy sexy-times.” She grinned and Clarke flushed. “Clexonium,” Raven repeated, and Lexa laughed. “Okay, then I’ll see you tomorrow at some point. Good to see you, Lexa. Merry UnChristmas.”

“Same to you.” Lexa hugged her. “By the way, those sandwiches were totally delicious. I see why you hide their identity from actual Philly cheesesteaks.”

“Right? We’re protecting Philadelphia from losing all their business.”

Lexa smiled then looked at Clarke. “See you over there?”

“Yeah. Give me a few minutes.”

She nodded. “Door’ll be open.” She gave her a quick kiss, and left.

“Everything good?” Clarke asked Raven.

“Totally. I’ll see you at some point tomorrow. I think I’m going to hang out with Monty and Harper, if the weather’s not too bad. They might end up here for afternoon movies.”

“Sounds cool. If we need snacks, I can get them.”

“Perfect. Now go exchange UnChristmas gifts with your GF.” She raised her eyebrows up and
down.

“Okay. Call if you need anything.”

Raven gave her a quick hug. “Aww. I think you need to go next door right now. And you two are so fucking good together.”

Clarke nodded, then chewed her lip for a moment.

Raven frowned. “What?”

“So…I’m giving her a key to the apartment tonight.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes. As part of UnChristmas.”

“Oh, my God. I want a full report on how that goes. Because it’s going to be like Operation UnChristmas, and I’ll have to do another Anya reaction vid.”

She laughed. “I’m not going to film the exchanging of the gifts.”

“Fine. I’ll tell Anya and film her reaction. Bit by bit, we will wear down that stony exterior.”

“But it’s part of who she is.”

“So’s the cinnamon roll frosting. She just needs to show that part more. And you look like you’re about to pass out. What’s going on?”

“I don’t know. I mean, the key thing. It feels kind of big.” Like it was somehow a key to her heart or something.

“So was telling her you think of her as your GF.”

Clarke nodded and thought about earlier, in the laundry room, and how that had felt like it had weird symbolism, too. “Fuck, I am seriously in love with her.”

Raven’s eyes widened and she stared at her. “Um. Did you just hear yourself?”

“What? Shit. Did I say that out loud?”

“Um, yeah. But I think you need to tell her, and not me, as awesome a BFF as I am.”

“Fuck.”

“Relax, Griff. You’ve admitted it already. You’re just calling it what it is, now.”

“What if she freaks out about the key?”

“Oh, my God. Stop. Just stop. I’ve seen the video from Virginia a million times. She feels the same way about you. There is no way in hell she is going to freak out. Except in a really happy way. And if you’re not quite ready to say you love her—honestly, it’s not like saying that will change what you feel—then don’t. Because it’s pretty clear to the rest of the world that the two of you are fucking perfect for each other and what the fuck with a bunch of words, anyway? Just relax.” She hugged her again. “Lexa is not going away, Griff. You’re fine. She’s fine. Everything’s fine. Now go over there and give her the key.”
“Thanks, BFF,” Clarke said as she released her.

“I’ve got you. And so does Lexa. Nothing to freak about.”

“Okay.” Clarke gave her another quick hug then went to her bedroom where she got Lexa’s gift-wrapped package.

“All good?” Raven said from the couch as Clarke took her keys off the hook by the door.

“Yeah. Call if you need anything.”

“Will do. Have a good night—wait. You’re definitely going to have a good night.” She made kissing noises and Clarke rolled her eyes but laughed as she left and locked up. She paused at Lexa’s door, doing an internal check-in, heart pounding. Everything felt amazing, and she smiled and tried the doorknob. It was unlocked.

“Hey,” Clarke called as she entered.

“In the kitchen,” Lexa responded.

Clarke locked up and went to the living room first, where she set the present on the coffee table then went to the kitchen, where Lexa was doing something with her espresso machine.

“So I’m making UnChristmas hot chocolate,” she said, with a glance over her shoulder.

“Well, you did owe me.” She leaned against the counter and watched and fuck, she would never get tired of looking at her.

“Exactly.” Lexa flashed her a grin as the machine hissed and delivered steamed milk into the stainless steel pitcher she held. Once it was through, she poured it into the two cups she had already prepared, and decorated each with a heart.

“So who got that decoration when you were working at the coffee house?” Clarke asked, teasing.

“Friends. And on Valentine’s Day, everybody.”

“So you didn’t do it for anyone in particular?”

Lexa set the pitcher aside and handed a cup to Clarke. “No.” She smiled. “Until now.”

Clarke was pretty sure she had perpetual heart eyes.

Lexa opened a tin that was sitting on the far end of the counter and showed its contents to her.

“Oh, my God. Seriously? When did you have time to make these?” She took one of the black-and-white cookies out.

Lexa smiled. “After you left, Indra and I made a batch.”

“Subterfuge in our midst.” Clarke took a bite of the cookie. “Oh, my God. I will totally be your GF for these.”

“So that’s all it took, huh?” She smirked and picked up the other cup.

“That and your sexy, smart, funny, kind self.” Clarke brushed a kiss over her lips. “Oh, and your coffee.”
She laughed.

Clarke regarded her for a few moments. “And everything else about you.”

“For me, it was your pancakes.”

She gave her a look and Lexa laughed.

“Okay, those were just the icing on an amazing Clarke cake.”

“Oh, my God, with the cake thing again?”

“Nom nom,” Lexa teased and she kissed her. “So how about some UnChristmas presents?”

“I really like how you’re enjoying this.”

Lexa cupped her cheek with her free hand. “This has been the best Christmas season ever for me. Thank you.”

Oh, God. When she looked at her like that, there was nothing in the world Clarke wouldn’t do for her.

“And it doesn’t mean I won’t have a hard time with it in the future, but you were right, about changing traditions and making new memories. So yes, I’m really enjoying the UnChristmas makeover. And I want so many more with you.”

Seriously. There was nothing Clarke wouldn’t do for her. “I’m so glad. And it’s been amazing for me, too, and I’m considering options for next year.”

“Glow in the dark bowling? That seems kind of awesome.”

“Possibly.” Clarke leaned into her palm then turned her head and kissed it. “But I’m not going to reveal my plans. Yet.” She raised her eyebrows and did a cartoon villain laugh as she pulled Lexa out to the living room.

“Hold on.” Lexa set her cup down on the coffee table then went to her bedroom and returned a few seconds later with a wrapped package that she set next to the one Clarke had brought. She sat down on the couch to Clarke’s left. “Okay. Who goes first? Or we can open them at the same time.”

“I kind of want you to go first.” And oh, God, was she shaking a little bit? Maybe?

“Okay.”

Clarke handed her the package and fuck, she seriously felt like she was going to pass out.

Lexa held it for a few moments, then looked at her, expression in her eyes full of excitement and wonder and fuck, it was cute. “I don’t care what’s in here. Because I’ll love it no matter what it is.”

Clarke laughed, her tension dissipating. “How goofy are you right now?”

“Very.” She grinned and carefully undid the wrapping paper and Clarke chewed on her bottom lip.

What if she freaked?

“Oh, hell, yes,” Lexa said when she saw the front of the folded dark gray hoodie. And then she laughed and touched the logo, a large cartoon taco right in the center of the chest, with yellow
“Did you design this, too?” Lexa asked.

“Yes.”

“A Clarke Griffin original. This is amazing. An homage to not only my love of tacos, but my superhero alter-ego. Wow.” She was smiling like a little kid, running her hands over the logo. “I might end up wearing this every day.”

“I’d be okay with that, as long as you let me take it off every once in a while.”

She smiled and quirked an eyebrow. “I think we can work something out.”

“Excellent.”

Lexa removed more of the wrapping paper then stopped when she noticed the lanyard that Clarke had put around the hood and tucked into the sweatshirt, like a necklace. She looked at it, puzzled, then pulled on it until she got to the key attached to the clip.

“What—” she stared at it for a few moments, then looked at Clarke, eyes wide. “Is this—”

“Yes.”

“Seriously?”

“Completely.”

“Oh, my God.” And then she cupped Clarke’s face and kissed her, the lanyard wrapped around one of her hands, and the key bumped against Clarke’s shoulder but nothing else mattered except that Lexa was kissing her, and that she was clearly happy about this and holy shit, she had just given her a key to her apartment.

“So I’m guessing you’re okay with this?” Clarke asked, smiling against Lexa’s lips.

“I am off the scale of okay with this.”

“I didn’t want you to freak out. In a bad way.”

“Well, the Funko Rey from Star Wars lanyard helped put me at ease…” She grinned.

And Clarke kissed her this time, and she felt like she wanted to cry, as happy as she was right now.

“Your turn.” Lexa set the sweatshirt and key onto the coffee table and handed the unwrapped package to her.

She figured it was a sweatshirt, too, because of its shape, size, and how it felt, but when she had the wrapping paper off, she stared, because it was the sweatshirt. The older faded blue one that Lexa had let her wear when Clarke had gotten locked out of her apartment.

But it had a modification.

A cartoon skull with crossed spatulas under it, screenprinted on the chest in black, and the blue was light enough that the image showed pretty well.

“Oh, my God.” Clarke stared at it. “How did you do this?”
“Niylah did the design, based on the one you drew on that comic you did for me. And I happen to know a screen printer here in Polis.”

“I—fuck, I love it. And I love this sweatshirt.” Clarke took the rest of the wrapping paper off and held it up.

“I know.”

“It’s quite possibly my favorite sweatshirt ever.”

Lexa chuckled. “That day you were locked out of your apartment—”

Clarke looked at her, the sweatshirt on her lap now.

She cleared her throat. “Um, this is one of my favorite sweatshirts, too, and I don’t know why, but I wanted you to wear it. I didn’t even think about it. I just grabbed it and when you had it on, it…fuck, it just felt really good, like you should be wearing it.”

Clarke took her hand. “I had my exam the next day and I wore it to that.”

“Really?”

She smiled. “Yep. It was really calming. I have no idea why. And I didn’t wash it for a couple of days because it smelled like you.” She bit her lip and shrugged, sheepish.

“And you brought it back. But somehow kept ending up with it. Except for one night the week after Thanksgiving. I ended up with it then, and that’s when I enacted my plan.”

Clarke ran her hands over it. “I was just thinking about how much I missed it.”

“So that’s why you wanted to do my laundry.” Lexa took her hand and kissed it.

“Hmm. I hadn’t actually thought of that, but now that you mention it…”

Lexa rolled her eyes and Clarke kissed her forehead.

“Thank you,” Clarke said. “I really fucking love this sweatshirt. And I love that you fangirled it up this way.”

“It’s important that the Master of Pancakes have a uniform,” she said, humor sparking in her eyes and then her expression turned serious. “Now check the pocket.”

Clarke furrowed her brow, but she did what Lexa said and her fingers brushed something metal. She pulled it out. A key. On a metal keychain shaped like a stack of pancakes.

“I was a little nervous about giving this to you, but clearly, I don’t need to be, but still, I decided to do it when you said you wanted to be a thing, and I figured—”

Clarke grabbed her into a hug. “Oh, my God. I can’t believe this is happening.” And she swallowed, trying to keep from crying, the key gripped in her hand so tightly it dug into her skin.

Lexa hugged her back. “So I’m guessing you’re cool with the key exchange thing?” she asked softly.

Clarke pulled away, cupped her cheeks (awkwardly, since she still held the key in one hand), and kissed her, a long soft meeting of lips. “So cool. And did we seriously do this at pretty much the
same time?” She opened her hand and stared at the key.

She shrugged. “I mean, I was hoping that we might eventually get there. And then when you said you wanted to be a thing, well, I went with it. And I had this big speech prepared to try to keep you from freaking out. I was going to say that you don’t have to actually use it and that I’m not expecting anything. I just…I don’t know. I just wanted you to have it, so if I asked you to come over, I wouldn’t have to leave the door unlocked.” She sighed. “And in retrospect, that actually sounds so dumb. Especially since you had the same idea.”

Clarke smiled. “It’s not dumb. It’s amazing.” She stroked Lexa’s cheek with her free hand. “I love that we came to this conclusion at about the same time. And I love that you totally took a chance.” She held the key up.

“So did you.” Lexa intertwined her fingers with Clarke’s free hand and kissed her fingertips.

“And you know what? I’m past freaking out.” She squeezed Lexa’s hand. “I’m totally on board with you. I can’t say I know where things will go, but I’d really like them to keep going.”

Lexa’s smile lit up her eyes and Clarke could stare at her forever. “I don’t really have words,” Lexa said, “for how I’m feeling right now, because completely fucking incredible doesn’t really cover it.”

“I know that feeling.” She held her gaze for a while, because Lexa’s eyes were clearly one of the unsung wonders of the world, and the way she looked at her only added to her inability to adequately express how she felt. Words just didn’t do her level of feels justice.

“I am so glad we met,” Lexa said after a few more moments. “And as relatively new as this might be in the great scheme of things, it feels…familiar, somehow. I can’t explain it, but it’s part of why I love having you in my life.”

Clarke’s breath caught in her throat and Lexa’s hand was warm in hers and the look in her eyes—oh, fuck. Full speed ahead on the love train. “I’m totally crazy about you,” she said. And then she kept going, because this was the damn love train, after all, and once it started, you couldn’t just bring it to an immediate stop. “Fuck, it’s so much more than that. And I know words might not do this justice, but I am seriously falling in love with you.”

Oh, God.

What the fuck just happened…

Did she really just say that?

Aloud?

Oh, shit.

And not once did her gaze waver from Lexa’s during that admission.

And goddamn Lexa fucking Woods with her soulful eyes and smile, who cupped the back of Clarke’s neck and pulled her in for a kiss that went on and on and goddamn Lexa fucking Woods with her goddess lips (was that even a thing) and the way she could make Clarke’s heartbeat speed up with just a look or a touch and practically implode with kisses like this one, that left her mouth hot and tingling even after she stopped.

“I’m here for it,” Lexa said. “Because I’m pretty much already in love with you.”
Clarke stared at her. “Really?”

“Really. Just been waiting for you to catch up.” She arched an eyebrow, smiled, and kissed her again and how was it that it actually did feel like she was on a speeding train, with her heart and stomach doing some kind of crazed dance routine up and down the aisles?

“How long have you been feeling this way?” Clarke asked after a few more kisses, heart still pounding.

“I can’t put an exact date on it, but I was pretty sure that’s where I was headed after Thanksgiving. Might’ve been how hot you were playing pool at Skyview.”

Clarke gave her a look and she laughed.

“Okay, that was only part of it. But what you said to me after I took you to Lupe’s, about making new memories—that’s probably when it solidified. But if I really think about it, and if I’m being totally honest with myself, the first time you made me pancakes was when I knew I was in serious trouble.”

Clarke smiled. “Pretty ballsy, to tell me you were hooked soon after that breakfast.”

She shrugged, a half-smile on her lips. “Just because you hook something doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll reel it in.”

Clarke laughed. “So you were giving me the option to do that?”

“Yeah. But I really, really hoped you would.”

She set the key on the coffee table. “Pretty sure I did,” she said with a sultry little smile as she pushed Lexa back onto the couch.

“No disagreement here,” Lexa said as she ran her hands down Clarke’s back to her ass. “Although I made it pretty easy for you.”

Clarke grinned. “True. And here I thought you were hard to get, Woods.” And Lexa’s hands were still on her ass and it was making it really hard for her to think about anything but that.

She grinned back. “I can’t fucking resist you.”

“Or resist fucking me?” She raised her eyebrows and sucked on Lexa’s lower lip.

She groaned softly. “Uh…no. Can’t do that, either.”

“Good. Because I really want to take my GF to bed.”

“Same.”

“Right now.”

“No argument.”

And Clarke got up and pulled her to her feet and when she caught Lexa’s gaze, something caught in her chest, something overwhelming and powerful, and Lexa must have seen it in her eyes, because she pulled Clarke close and they stood like that, holding on to each other.

And God, it felt good, like something had fallen into place, exactly where it needed to be, and if
Clarke was being honest with herself, she had been on this road probably since the first time she looked into Lexa’s eyes and saw the hint of a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

Fuck. If she really thought about it, she didn’t have a chance in hell of resisting her.

Maybe there was something to this whole Clexonium thing. She smiled against Lexa’s neck, heart practically bursting.

“Thank you for not giving up,” Clarke said after a while. She kissed her cheek, and nearly melted at Lexa’s expression.

“You’re welcome. But I could say the same thing to you. Thank you for giving me—giving this a chance.”

“Well, you were right. I can’t resist you, either.” Clarke brushed her lips lightly over her mouth and the expression in Lexa’s eyes shifted to something almost primal, and Clarke’s breath hitched because she knew that look, knew that Lexa only directed it at her, and it heated every single part of her.

“Clarke,” she said softly. “Let me take you to bed.”

“God, yes.”

Because seriously.

She really couldn’t resist Lexa fucking Woods.

And as for the love train?

Clarke was all in.

Chapter End Notes

jfc it’s a feels explosion up in here.

Feels. I mean, wtf else is there to say? God, I'm a mess up in here.

Also, I'm on the road, so I'm posting a day late/couple days late. I usually try to hit weekends, but sometimes my schedule is stupid.

BUT! As I said in the previous chapter notes, I'm going to take this story to New Year's Eve, which will thus end things in "bang shui" with Chapter 30. I thought that was a good stopping point for this, which I'm considering Book 1. Book 2, hopefully, to come later on. I've got some other stuff to do before that.

Thanks for hanging out with me! You can find me on Tumblr or Twitter if you want to say hi, chat, or yell at me or whatever.
Making New Memories

Chapter Summary

New Year's Eve day and New Year's Eve! Clarke and Lexa spend the morning together (because of course they do) and then they go to Echo's and end up at Anya's. Feels ensue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

_God_, Clarke loved morning sex with Lexa. Okay, she loved _all_ sex with Lexa, but morning sex was such a great way to greet the day and her other partners hadn’t been much into it (what the fuck) and now here she was, legs spread, Lexa going to town on her with her mouth... _Jesus_ how did she do that with her tongue... Clarke groaned and worked her own nipples with one hand while she slid her other hand down to her clit—

“Fuck, that’s hot,” Lexa said and sparks shot up Clarke’s spine. “I love it when you do that,” and she flicked Clarke’s fingers with her tongue before she went back to work at her entrance and Clarke was so fucking turned on that she was sure her bed was soaked but Lexa clearly didn’t care and devoured her like she was the best-tasting dish ever.

And _Jesus fucking Christ_ (did she say that out loud?), she was coming and she groaned and arched, Lexa’s tongue deep inside, and fuck, would her bed survive? The sheets clearly wouldn’t… fuuuuuuck. She relaxed a little as the tide subsided but holy shit, there it was again and she built right back up again.

“Oh, my God,” Clarke managed and then her breath caught as Lexa slid her fingers in and began thrusting and fucking hell—

“Oh, Lexa,” she said with a gasp as she gripped her shoulders.

“I’m right here. I’ve got you.”

Oh, _God_. She kind of wanted to cry but then another orgasm slammed through her and she clung to Lexa for a moment then collapsed, panting, everything tingling, Lexa gently kissing the insides of her thighs.

“You’re so fucking amazing,” Clarke said after a few more delicious minutes.

“Mmm.” She kissed her belly. “It’s mutual.”

Clarke pulled her close and kissed her and it always turned her on, tasting herself on Lexa’s lips.

“Have I told you how much I love morning sex with you?”

She chuckled against her mouth. “Not since yesterday.”

“What?” She feigned shock. “Well, here I am telling you again.”

“And here I am, telling you the same thing. I fucking love morning sex with you, too. And afternoon
sex and evening sex and night-time sex.” She paused. “And weekend sex and weekday sex. Oh, and weeknight sex.” She nipped Clarke’s lower lip. “I pretty much love sex with you anywhere, anytime.”

She grinned, her arms around Lexa’s neck and she kissed her again and shifted her position, signaling to Lexa that she could pull out and she did and wrapped Clarke up in an embrace.

And this was heaven, skin to skin, Lexa warm against her, the swell of her breasts and the lines of her muscles pressed close as they kissed, gentle and languid.

“So…happy first New Year’s Eve, Pancake Master,” Lexa said after a good long while of that.

“Same to you, Commander.”

“What time did you want to start the evening’s round of parties?” Lexa nuzzled her neck and fuck, Clarke loved that.

“Six? Seven? Sometime between then and midnight? I can’t fucking think when you do that.”

“You mean this?” Lexa sucked on her neck and bit down and a jolt shot right to Clarke’s crotch.

“Yes. That.”

“Or maybe this?” And then Lexa tracked a line up to the space behind Clarke’s ear with her lips.

“Okay, that too.” She turned her head so Lexa could do more, every nerve on fire.

“How about this?” Lexa lightly nipped another line back down her neck.

“Jesus fuck.”

Which made Lexa laugh.

“Seriously. I can’t fucking think.”

“There are worse things.” She sucked on Clarke’s earlobe.

“Dammit, that is not worse. Fuck.”

“Can’t help it. I’m a lost cause for you.”

Clarke hugged her close. “You’re not lost.”

She adjusted her position to look into her eyes. “No?”

“No. Because I found you.”

And they stared at each other for a moment until Lexa kissed Clarke’s forehead. “Yeah. You did. And maybe I found you, too.”

“You definitely did.”

“Thanks for letting me.” Lexa kissed her.

“I think maybe you let me find you.”

“I might’ve dropped some hints,” she said with warmth in her eyes and that damn smirk.
“Maybe a few.” And goddammit, Clarke had to kiss her again. “I seriously cannot get enough of you,” she said after another few minutes of that.

“Lucky me.”

Clarke’s phone dinged with a text message, as did Lexa’s. “Bet that’s about tonight.”

Lexa nodded. “Should we look?”

Clarke sighed. “Probably.”

And Lexa rolled off her (dammit) so Clarke could reach her phone on the nightstand. Once she retrieved it, she settled against Lexa again and opened the message so they could both see and yes, it was a group message from Harper, finalizing plans for that night’s festivities.

“God, she’s such a camp counselor,” Clarke said and Lexa laughed. “So do we want to start at Echo’s?”

“Wait—I thought Harper and Monty were having a thing.”

“They are, but they’re going to end up at Anya’s at ten, where they’ll do the countdown. Everybody is gravitating there.” Clarke kissed her cheek. “Is that cool with you? Or we could start at Anya’s and end at Echo’s.”

“Let’s end at Anya’s. If we start at Echo’s at seven, that’s about three or four hours there. Unless we get over it and decide to swing by Monty and Harper’s or… something.”

“Like… have more sex?” Clarke teased.

“That would be completely fine by me, but then we wouldn’t make it to Anya’s.”

“Not if we find some place at Echo’s.” Clarke gave her one of her sexy smiles. “We don’t necessarily need to lie down.”

“Scandalous, Pancake Master.”

“You love it.”

She laughed. “I totally do.”

Clarke lost herself in her eyes for a moment, then gave her a quick kiss. “Okay, so I’m telling them that we’re starting at Echo’s and then we’ll be at Anya’s around ten?” She asked as she started to respond.

“Yes. Find out if Anya needs us to bring anything else besides a snack and beverage. I’ll check in with Echo.” And she moved away to get her phone off the other nightstand. While she texted Echo, Clarke snuggled up to her and God, they smelled like sex and sweat and the sheets were damp and fuck, there was nowhere else in the world she wanted to be.

Clarke’s phone rang, the theme to the Wonder Woman movie.

“Say hi to Raven,” Lexa said with a smile as Clarke answered.

“Hey.”

“Okay, so you’ll be at Anya’s around ten?” Raven said.
“Ish. What else do you need there?”

“Snacks and beer. Anya has plenty of champagne.”


“Oh, my God, you’re totally on the same wavelength as Anya. She’s already got the sliders covered, but would like a couple big bags of chips.”

“Potato chips and a big bag of cool ranch Doritos for her?” She almost lost her train of thought because Lexa was gently stroking her shoulder and even that turned her on.

"Yep."

“Will do. And is Anya doing a dress code this year? She hasn’t said.”

“No. Casual, unless you feel like dressing up. I’m thinking Lexa would look smoking hot in a tie.”

Lexa grinned and Clarke gave her a look and held the phone to her chest. “Did you hear that?”

“Oh, yes.”

“Well, stop. I don’t want you getting any ideas.” Because Clarke would not be able to withstand something as hot as Lexa in a tie. It was bad enough when she wore a dress.

She shrugged, an innocent expression in her eyes an Clarke put the phone back to her ear.

“Is Lexa there?” Raven asked.

“Yes.”

“Good. Tell her hi.”

“Hi, Raven,” Lexa said. “And hi to Anya.”

“Oh, my God, Woods,” Clarke said. “Stop eavesdropping.”

Raven laughed and Lexa nuzzled Clarke’s other ear. “Kind of hard not to hear,” she whispered. “Seeing as I’m this close to you.”

Clarke bit her lip as chills shot down her back. “All right, everything good, then? We’ll see you around ten?”

“Yes. And this is gonna be fun. Your first New Year’s Eve with your GF. Epic, Griff. Now get out of bed and get dressed,” she said and Clarke could hear the wicked smile in her tone. “Bye.” She hung up and Clarke rolled her eyes but Raven called right back.

“What’s up?” Clarke said.

“Sorry, Griff, but I need to swing by in a bit.”

“Oh. Everything all right?”

“Yeah, fine. Just need to get more clothes.”

“For what? Is Anya not keeping you naked?”
Lexa laughed and Clarke gave her a look and mouthed “eavesdropper” at her, which only resulted in that sexy half-smile Clarke couldn’t resist.

“Well-played,” Raven said, also laughing. “Just need to switch some clothes out. And maybe I miss you. I haven’t seen you in a couple of days. Have you come up for air?”

“A couple of times,” Clarke said as Lexa started nuzzling her neck again. “But not for long.”

“Yes,” Raven said, practically chortling. “Anyway, if you hear us, don’t worry about it. Just stay naked in your room and we’ll see you tonight. Hopefully not naked. It’s cold out, after all. Later.” She hung up before Clarke could retort.

“I’d like you to be naked all the time,” Lexa said softly and she ran her hand down Clarke’s abdomen.

“God, you’re like a little kid listening in on conversations,” she said, but she was laughing.

“Not like it was that difficult to hear.” She kissed her neck and Clarke set her phone aside on the bed and hugged her.

“It’s our first New Year’s Eve,” she said softly. “That’s seriously awesome.”

Lexa ran her hands up Clarke’s back. “It’s beyond that. I don’t have words to tell you how it makes me feel, that I got UnChristmas with you and now I’m getting New Year’s Eve.”

“And Day. Because I do plan on going home with you tonight.”

“Excellent. And maybe you’ll get lucky.”

She laughed. “Oh, I plan to, Woods. I plan to.”

“Damn, you are so hot.”

Clarke’s phone rang again.

“That’s my mom.”

“Okay.” Lexa kissed her. “Going to the bathroom.” She got out of bed as Clarke answered and pulled on the sweats she’d been wearing the night before and put on her Captain Taco sweatshirt, which she’d been wearing almost non-stop since Clarke gave it to her.

“Hey, Mom,” Clarke said. “How’s work?”

Lexa air-kissed her and slipped out of the bedroom and Clarke missed her immediately.

“Hi, sweetie. I have a bit of a break and I just wanted to check in.”

“Has it been crazy?”

“No, actually. I guess people are out having emergencies elsewhere.”

“So you still don’t have to work tonight, right?” Clarke pulled the sheet up over her chest, since the room was a little cool.

“Barring anything happening, no.”
“So you’re still going to Marcus’s?”

“Yes.”

Clarke smiled. “Good. And hopefully you’ll be able to stay, since I’m sure there will be some alcoholic beverages involved,” she teased.

Abby cleared her throat. “That’s the plan, yes.”

“Way to go, Mom. Do you have tomorrow off?”

“I do.”

“Oh, yeah. So you’ll get a little more time with Marcus. Nice.”

“And how is Lexa?” she shot back, but Clarke heard the smile in her tone.

“Fucking amazing.”

Abby laughed. “Good. I’m not sure what my schedule is for the next couple of weeks, but once I do, I’ll call and we’ll try to set up brunch or dinner or something, hopefully before the semester starts up for you two.”

“That’ll be great. Just let me know.”

“I will. Oh, gotta go.”

“Duty calls,” Clarke said with a sigh.

“It does. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay.”

“Oh—love sounds good on you, Clarke. Bye.” She signed off with a cute little sing-song tone before Clarke could respond and she stared at her phone then texted Abby.

*omg did you basically just say I’m in love?* She sent it, a huge smile on her face.

“So how’s your mom?” Lexa said as she came back into the bedroom. She had tied her hair back, exposing the fabulous lines of her cheeks and jaw.

“Pretty sure she’s shipping us.”

Lessa cocked her head, expression uncertain.

“Which is both weird but cool.”

She relaxed and smiled. “I think it’s pretty awesome.”

Clarke’s phone got a text and she looked at it and Abby’s response made her laugh: *duh*

“Yes. She’s shipping us,” Clarke said with a grin, and she handed her phone to Lexa.

“What did she say that prompted this?” She handed the phone back and Clarke pulled her down onto the bed next to her.

“She said that love sounds good on me.” Clarke then texted Abby back, three of the lol emojis and
the phrase “nailed it.” She looked at Lexa, who was sitting on the bed staring at her, and she looked like she wasn’t sure how to respond, like she was afraid she’d scare Clarke off or something.

“I know that it sure as fuck feels good on me,” Clarke said as she scooched over to Lexa, cupped her cheek, and kissed her. She tasted like toothpaste but still smelled like the both of them, a reminder that Lexa had spent the night, and that she had just used the toothbrush Clarke had put out for her just before she left for Virginia and somehow, that felt so right and so good, that their lives were intertwining in small ways like that, too.

“God, Clarke,” Lexa said. “I—fuck, you’re—shit, I don’t have the words.”

“It’s okay. Because you have me.” And she kissed her again. “Sometimes words are overrated,” she added softly.

“Yeah. They are.” She brushed Clarke’s hair out of her face. “But you have me, too.”

Oh, the feels. Clarke sighed, happy and contented, and leaned into Lexa’s touch. “I’m so glad you’re in my life.”

“Same.” Lexa hugged her. “So are you hungry? Want to get breakfast?”

“Okay. Where?”

“My place.”

Clarke laughed. “Will it involve your coffee?”

She raised an eyebrow. “You have to ask?”

“I knew there was a reason I wanted you for my GF.”

“That’s it? That’s all it took?”

“Clearly, your barista training is effective, Woods.”

“And here I thought it was the fabulous morning sex.”

Clarke smirked. “Your coffee was the gateway drug for me.”

She laughed.

“And your smile.”

She furrowed her brow.

“The first time I saw it was the day I first talked to you on the stairs.”

“And?”

“And it made me nervous.”

Lexa cocked her head and Clarke took her hand.

“Because your smile can be sexy one minute, and sweet the next. And both at the same time. And that combined with your eyes—I really didn’t have a chance.”

“Why am I just finding out now that you’re an eye woman?”
“Your eyes specifically. Although I do pay attention to eyes. But yours—yours in particular say a lot.”

“So do yours.” Lexa stroked the back of Clarke’s hand with her thumb. “You have the most amazing eyes. That day on the stairs was the first time I got a good look at them. And when I saw you smile the first time, well, I didn’t have a chance, either.”

“So it wasn’t my pancakes after all.”

She smiled. “It’s everything, Clarke. And now I’m going to make you coffee and serve you breakfast croissant sandwiches.”

“Are you trying to kill me with feels right now?” She pulled her in for another kiss.

“I’m just hoping you’ll stick around,” Lexa said against her mouth.

“Yeah, well, you don’t even have to worry about that.” She released Lexa’s hand. “I’ll see you over there.”

Lexa stood and retrieved Clarke’s sweatshirt from her drafting table, where it had somehow ended up (not that it would have anything to do with Lexa pulling it over Clarke’s head and tossing it in that direction the night before). The shirt caught on one of the folders and it slid to the floor, spilling its contents. Lexa handed the sweatshirt to her then bent to pick up the papers. And stopped, staring.

She looked over at Clarke. “What is this?” she asked as she held up one of the pieces of paper that had panels of the comic Clarke was working on.

“A hobby. Another comic.” She put her sweatshirt on and got out of bed and grabbed a pair of sweats out of her hamper.

Lexa sat down, cross-legged, on the floor. “Can I see?”

“Sure. The pages are numbered.” She joined her on the floor and helped arrange them into the proper order, a little anxious because this was the warrior comic, after all.

And then Lexa found the drawings Clarke had done of the warrior leader and herself. She stared at them for a while.

“Is this—” she looked up at Clarke.

“Yeah, okay. Maybe it’s dumb,” she said in a rush. “It’s kind of how I see the Commander. As you.”

Lexa smiled. “Really?”

She nodded. “That’s—I guess that’s your superhero side.”

"And is this you?" She pointed at another of the drawings.

"Yeah."

“When did you start doing this?” She held one of the pages of the comic up.

“Before Thanksgiving. But the Commander—” she paused. “Um, the first time I drew her was the Saturday after you helped me with the asshole at the club.” She laughed, a little nervous. “I guess
you were channeling your inner Commander and I might’ve picked up on it. Maybe.” She shrugged. “Okay, definitely. I mean, she looks like you.”

“And you drew her initially with swords?” Lexa was still staring at the image Clarke had created, of the warrior woman with the long dark braided hair and the painted mask around her eyes. She was in a fighting stance, swords at the ready.

“Yeah. Weird, huh? I didn’t know you had anything to do with swords until a few days ago. Speaking of, Raven is convinced you’re a secret agent.”

She laughed. “If only. I’d have a more glamorous life than law student.”

“Uh-huh. Isn’t that what someone in deep cover would say?” Clarke teased.

“Okay, you’re right. I’m a secret agent, working with a division of the government that’s basically part of the same division as the X-Files and maybe Men In Black. I have to make sure alien life and weird-ass conspiracies aren’t causing problems.”

“I believe it.”

“The truth is, in fact, out there, Clarke. I have to find it.”

She grinned. “God, I love that you’re a fangirl.” She gave her a quick kiss. “So I had no idea you had any idea how to use swords, but I’m kind of a sucker for a hot warrior woman with swords, so that’s how I drew you.”

“I’m flattered. And this is amazing,” she said, looking through the different drawings Clarke had done of the warrior. She stopped at the one where she was seated on her throne—which wasn’t actually a throne. It was a chair made out of tree branches that had been shaped into something impressive but not overwhelming.

“What is she looking at?” Lexa asked.

Clarke smiled. “I think me. I put that in the comic. See, the premise of the story is there was an apocalypse almost a hundred years earlier. I’ve envisioned it as nuclear. And there were survivors from all over the world who ended up on a cobbled-together space station above the earth, but the systems are finally failing, after that long, and they’re running out of air. So they decide to send a bunch of people to the ground in a dropship. The people are all basically juvenile delinquents, but not for major crimes or anything.” She joined Lexa on the floor. “See, things were so bad on this space station that it became like this terrible authoritarian place to control access to every little resource, so even stealing a piece of food could get you shot out the airlock. I think I’ll call it ‘floated’.”

She stopped and picked up one of the panel pages of the comic. “So there are all these young people who committed whatever infractions—no great loss if they get to the planet’s surface and it’s not habitable, right? But they get there and it is habitable but they don’t realize that other people survived the apocalypse. They just never left earth.”

“So they’re people of the ground,” Lexa said. “Grounders.”

Clarke stared at her. “That’s fucking perfect.”

“And the people from space—the Grounders would think they came from the sky, so they’re sky people. Or maybe crew. Sky crew or something like that.”
“Oh, my God. And I was thinking that there would be different clan groups among the Grounders—I love that—and they’d have names after their territories, which are specific geographic areas. Like a plains clan and a valley clan. The Commander is from a forest clan, I decided. But I don’t like ‘forest people’. Or forest crew.”

Lexa looked at the drawing of the warrior on the tree-branch throne. “Trees,” she said. “Forests are full of trees. She’s tree crew.”

Clarke stood and grabbed one of her pencils and made notes on a stray piece of paper on her drafting table.

“But it could be a different language that they’ve developed and spelled differently,” Lexa said. “Like t-r-i or something. And it’d be one word, tree crew. Maybe you should spell crew differently, too, so it doesn’t look like ‘try crew’.”

“She’s tree crew.”

Lexa looked at the drawing of the warrior on the tree-branch throne. “Trees,” she said. “Forests are full of trees. She’s tree crew.”

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“Shit, this is amazing.” Clarke sat back down on the floor.

“So what happens when the sky people get to the ground?” Lexa asked, eyes shining with excitement.

“That’s the first part of the story. They don’t know the Grounders exist, and they’ve never been on the ground, so they’re all crazy celebrating except for a few, who know they have to get things organized and get over to an old shelter called Mt. Weather—not sure why I called it that. It just came to me. Anyway, they have to get there to see if there are any food supplies. Anything to help them establish a more permanent residence, because the plan is to bring the rest of the people down from the space station.”

“But of course the Grounders know they’ve arrived. They saw the ship, after all.” Lexa looked at another page of panels. “And you, of course, are the one trying to organize everybody.” She looked up at her, affection in her eyes. “This is basically a fanfic AU of your life.”

She laughed. “Fuck, you’re so right.”

“And you, the organized sky people person, are not only having to figure out how to get the rest of your delinquent crew under control, but figure out how to get to Mt. Weather and then, how to deal with a variable nobody ever thought would exist. A whole culture on the ground.” She held her gaze. “This is fucking amazing.”

“And there’s of course tension between tree crew—I fucking love that—and sky crew. And the Commander is in charge of not only tree crew, but she’s also the Commander of all the clans, which war with each other, but also against another group of survivors. I haven’t quite worked out the details yet, but those survivors are going to be assholes in the mountain complex, and they’re a common enemy of all the clans.”

“So they’ll have access to technology. Have you gotten to that, yet?”

“No. I’m still dealing with war between Grounders and sky crew, since the Commander has to ensure the safety of her crew and, by extension, all the clans.” Clarke picked up one of the drawings of her. “But she’s different, this Commander. She wants to unify the clans to bring down the assholes in the mountain.”

“Because the assholes in the mountain have been preying on Grounders for decades,” Lexa said.

“I like it. But why?”
Lexa’s brow furrowed (which was so entirely cute). “What do Grounders have that the assholes don’t?” She looked at the comic again. “Do they trade with each other? Or have contact?”

“I don’t think so, because if they did, then the Commander could just take the assholes prisoner and be in charge.”

“Maybe. If the assholes are in a mountain complex, they might have guns and missiles and Grounders probably don’t.”

Clarke nodded, thinking. “But the assholes don’t wipe the Grounders out. Why?”

“Back to where we started. Because the Grounders have something the assholes want. And it’s not necessarily material because if it was, the assholes would just kill all the Grounders and take it.”

She gestured at the comic. “Okay, so let’s think about the surrounding world. It’s barely a hundred years after a nuclear apocalypse. There’s some recovery—I read something recently about what’s happening in terms of ecological recovery of the Chernobyl site, so recovery in this story is better, since it’s been longer, but I’m guessing radiation levels are still problematic.”

“But sky people would be okay, since they’re exposed to radiation levels in space and on the station. And maybe there was some engineering going on over the decades, to ensure that successive generations born in space would have the ability to withstand levels of radiation that others can’t. Grounders, of course, can, since their ancestors survived the initial apocalypse.”

Clarke chewed her lip. “Oh, my God. That’s it. The assholes can’t. They’re stuck in their mountain. They locked themselves up in there and so have no ability to withstand the radiation levels outside their complex.”

Lexa nodded, excited. “Perfect. And shit, that’s what Grounders have that they want. Their blood.”

“What? They’re not vampires.”

“But they are, in a way. They’re awful, like Nazi doctors and they capture Grounders and extract their blood because they’re trying to develop a way to withstand radiation so they can leave the mountain without hazmat suits. Which they of course have in the complex.”

“Holy shit, that’s brilliant. But they’ll need to capture Grounders to do this, and they can’t just suit up and go marching into a village. It’s too risky, because hazmat suits tear and there aren’t enough of those available.”

“No. They’ll have to use other Grounders for that.”

Clarke picked up a rough sketch she had done of Mt. Weather, as seen from a distance. “But Grounders would never willingly do that for them.” She tapped the pencil against her chin. “Never willingly.” She locked gazes with Lexa.

“They create Grounder slaves,” Lexa said. “Maybe a shock collar? If they don’t bring back other Grounders, they get shocked.”

“I don’t think that’s incentive enough. They’d figure out a way to disable the collars, and the farther away from the mountain they get, the weaker the radio signal. No, the assholes have to have something that the Grounder slaves absolutely have to have in order to get them to come back.”

“Food? Medicine?” Lexa chewed her lip again. “What do the assholes have that Grounder slaves absolutely have to have? That they would willingly turn their people in for horrible medical
experiments in order to get?”

“Addiction,” Clarke said softly.

Lexa looked at her.

“Addicts will do horrible things for their next fix, whether it’s to themselves or others.”

“So the assholes get some Grounders addicted to something—they have technology. No doubt they have some fucked-up drug they can inject or whatever. And then they send them out to bring in other Grounders so they can get their next fix.” She paused. “We might be kind of twisted that we thought this up.”

Clarke laughed. “As long as we’re twisted together.”

“Aww. That’s so sweet.” Lexa leaned over and kissed her.

“I just thought of something else,” Clarke said. “What if the battles between sky crew and tree crew open a situation up between the assholes and sky crew? What if, in the aftermath of one of those battles, the assholes are able to capture some of sky crew and they find out that sky crew blood is even better than Grounder blood? Since they’ve been conditioned and engineered, basically, to withstand even higher levels of radiation?”

“Oh, that’s excellent. And your character will of course find out all this creepy shit and will escape and she’ll go to tree crew to try to forge an alliance to get not only sky crew out of the mountain, but the Grounders she saw in there, too. Which of course puts them in close proximity to each other and maybe they’ll forge something else, too.”

“Fuck, that’s so good. You’re fucking hired.”

Lexa laughed. “I’d much rather just be your GF.”

“Done. But I would love it if you’d be a beta on this.”

“I would love to. Maybe you can turn it into a graphic novel. And that is really hot, a doctor who is also a graphic novelist.”

Clarke grinned and pulled her into a kiss. “So you don’t think it’s weird that I drew you as a post-apocalyptic warrior leader?”

“Fuck, no. I’m really flattered. But I’m curious about why you see me that way.”

Clarke sat back and started putting the drawings and comic panels back into the folder. “After our first interaction on the stairs, I was a little off-balance.” She took Lexa’s hand. “I can’t really explain it. It wasn’t the best meeting, but there was something about you and I couldn’t stop thinking about you. But I thought you were with Octavia, so I tried not to think too much about it.”

“But…”?

Clarke smiled. “There’s always a but. I drew the Commander, like I said, after that Friday when you helped me at the club. And though I didn’t know you, I felt…safe. Totally safe with you. Even when we were dancing and things got a little…um…”

“Hot?”

She laughed. “Yeah. Hot. But even during that and after, I just felt safe. It was like you were a
warrior of some sort, and so I started drawing and the Commander popped into my head. I don’t
know why. But I envision her as someone who is a total badass but doesn’t make a big deal out of it.
She protects her crew and people she cares about to the best of her abilities, and she’s a hardcore
leader because she’s trying to bring peace to a warrior society. And she’s got hidden depths, and has
experienced loss so she knows how important love and life are, though it’s hard for her to express
that.”

Clarke paused, trying to figure out her next words. “I think I picked all that up from the very short
time I’d been around you before I drew the first picture of the Commander. And I know it sounds
weird and maybe you’ll think I’m being totally one of those woo-woo people, but even when we
were first getting to know each other, you felt somehow familiar to me, and so safe. Like we’d been
around each other before.” She sighed, frustrated. “I can’t explain it totally, but maybe that helps
explain why I envision you as the Commander in my little AU thing. Because you’re like her.
You’re a warrior, but you understand your strengths and weaknesses and you’re not afraid of either.”

And holy shit, that was quite a speech. Did that sound crazy?

Lexa stroked Clarke’s cheek with her free hand. “That night at the club—as hot as it was, I felt like I
knew you, somehow. And then the Sunday after that, when you were locked out of your apartment,
I felt it again. I’ve been feeling it since we met.” She smiled. “You’re a warrior, too. In different
ways. And a leader. And you make me feel safe, to be myself. To talk about things that scare me,
like my past.” She kissed her and Clarke sank into it, because every kiss from Lexa was a gift.

“So you’re saying we’re a pretty good match?” she said against her lips.

“I am. And a great team.”

And then they didn’t talk for a while, and instead spent a while seated on Clarke’s bedroom floor,
kisses slow and deep, infused with warmth and sweetness but also that spark of arousal that always
underlay the connection between them.

“So,” Lexa said after a few more minutes, “I like being your Commander.”

“Mmm. As long as I’m your Master.”

She laughed. “We’ll have to come up with titles for people in your graphic novel.”

“Good idea. Although I think ‘Commander’ will work, but maybe in Grounder language it’ll be
something else. Not sure I like ‘Master,’ though, in that world.”

“It’ll be our thing, then.” And Lexa kissed her. Again. And fuck, it was just as hot as all the other
times.

“So if you keep this up, we’re not going to have coffee, breakfast, or make it to any parties tonight.”

“There are worse things,” and Lexa’s breath was warm on her lips.

“Dammit, I can’t resist you,” Clarke muttered.

“I know.” Her eyes sparkled with amusement and she smirked before she kissed her yet again. “But I
can’t resist you, either, so it’s okay. And I do actually want to make sure you have coffee and
breakfast.” She got up and pulled Clarke to her feet. “Thanks for showing me your work. I love it.”

Clarke set the folder on her drawing table. “I love that you love it. And I love your ideas. This is
going to be seriously fun.”
Lexa hugged her, then kissed her on the forehead. “See you in a bit. There’ll be coffee when you get there.”

Clarke walked her to the front door and kissed her again before she left, then watched her until she had gone into her own apartment before she locked up and went to shower, thinking about sharing her comic and her thoughts with Lexa, about how she had felt a familiarity between them since the beginning. And it didn’t seem strange, and Lexa had accepted it and said something similar and that made all kinds of feels bounce around her chest.

She finished showering and threw on an old pair of jeans and tee and the sweatshirt Lexa had given her for UnChristmas—she would forever think of Christmas as UnChristmas, now—and slipped into her house sneakers before she put clean sheets on the bed. Once she had made it up again, she grabbed her phone and keys and went to Lexa’s.

And let herself in because she now had a key to her apartment.

Which was still making her a little giddy.

“Hey, it’s me,” she said as she closed the door and locked it. She smelled coffee and heard music emanating from the living room.

“Hi.” Lexa emerged from the kitchen. She had showered, because her hair still looked a little damp. “So I opted for cappuccinos this morning. I can make regular coffee, too, if this giant cup I’ve got for you isn’t enough.”

Clarke pecked her on the cheek, feeling so fucking domestic and so, so good about it. “I will never get enough of your coffee, no matter the form it takes.”

“Mmm. So you’ll keep coming around?”

“Hell, yes.” She pulled her into a longer kiss.

“Good. My plan continues to work.” She nipped Clarke’s lower lip, and fuck, that caused heat to shoot down her thighs.

“We are seriously not going to get out of here for parties if you keep doing things like that.”

“Again, not sure there’s anything wrong with that.” She grinned and kissed Clarke again.

“Dammit, Woods. You’re too fucking sexy for your own good.”

“Or yours, presumably.” She gave her a quick smile and Clarke followed her back into the kitchen where she was working on finishing, as she had said, a giant cup of cappuccino that she completed with a steamed milk heart. Clarke would never get tired of that. Lexa handed her the cup and she carefully sipped so she could maintain the heart as long as possible.

Lexa started work on another cappuccino and Clarke leaned against the counter and watched her, because she loved her focus and the fluid, precise movements she employed.

“You sure know your way around your equipment,” Clarke teased. Because let’s face it, thinking about Lexa and equipment in a euphemistic sexy-times sense was fucking hot. And all the certain activities they’d been engaged in earlier that morning might’ve put her in that state of mind.

She flashed her a smile. “I’ve had some practice.”
“So it seems. Though you have yet to demonstrate with me how well you can handle your equipment.”

Lexa turned and gave her a look, a smile-smirk on her lips, and ran a hand down her espresso maker. “I’m doing it right now.”

“I’m not talking about the kitchen.” Clarke sipped, tone innocent.

“So I gathered. And I’m getting the feeling that you know your way around equipment, too,” Lexa said and raised an eyebrow, which made Clarke’s knees weak.

She gave her one of her smouldering smiles. “I do.”

Lexa smiled back, and how that, combined with the glint in her eyes didn’t set Clarke’s clothing on fire, she had no idea. “Hold that thought,” Lexa said and she poured cold milk into her stainless steel pitcher and steamed it, then poured it into the other large cup on the counter, finishing with another heart.

“So.” Lexa picked up the cup and leaned against the counter, too, looking at Clarke. “About this… equipment.”

“Yes, about that.” She raised her eyebrows and sipped, enjoying the expression in Lexa’s eyes, something territorial but maybe a little vulnerable, tempered with a whole lot of sexy.

“Are we moving past hints?”

“I’d like to.”

Lexa smiled. “So would I.”

Clarke went closer and set her cup down and put her hands on Lexa’s hips. “Then let’s.”

She set her cup down, too, and rested her arms on Clarke’s shoulders. “Okay. Logistics.”

“I kinda love it when you bring out the strategy.”

“It’s good to be prepared. And along those lines, I have a pretty comfortable harness.”

“Same.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow and grinned again. “That turns me on.”

“Good.” Clarke smirked and squeezed her hips.

“I also have a toy that fits it.”

“Same.” And the thought of Lexa in a strap-on…shit.

“That’s turning me on even more,” Lexa said and Clarke loved how she was thirsty for her in a strap-on, too. “But I think I would like to get a new toy, too.”

“Okay…” Clarke furrowed her brow.

“So it’s ours.” She stared into Clarke’s eyes. “Is that weird?”

“Are you being kind of possessive right now?” she teased, tone full of affection.
“Maybe a little. I mean, I want this to be a really great experience for both of us, and I guess I don’t want to use toys that have...um...a past.”

Clarke gave her a quick kiss. “I agree. So how about we go shopping? We can compare the toys we have and go from there.”

Lexa grinned. “So you’re saying we’re basically going to compare dick sizes.”

“Oh, honey,” Clarke said in an exaggerated Southern drawl. “Do you really want to go there?”

Her grin widened. “And this is why you’re perfect for me.” She pulled her in for a kiss that became yet another makeout session and Clarke melted against her, thoughts of certain activities in her mind and what the hell, they had just hit it not even a couple of hours earlier and here she was, ready for another round. Or two. Or hell, more.

The sound of the front door opening made them stop and stare at each other.

“Hey,” Lincoln called. “Don’t be naked.”

Lexa laughed and Clarke did, too because that might actually have happened, given how she was feeling right now. “In the kitchen,” Lexa called and Clarke reluctantly pulled away from her and picked up her coffee.

“Hi,” Lincoln said as he came in and set a box of donuts on the counter. “Dig in. And Octavia will be here soon.” He was wearing jeans, work boots, and his pea coat.

“So basically, we shouldn’t have loud sex,” Lexa said.

He laughed. “Didn’t Clarke say something about payback being a bitch in that regard?”

“I believe I did.” Clarke pretended to think.

“Anyway,” Lexa said as she opened the box of donuts, “Octavia will be here soon. Are you going party-hopping tonight?”

“Yeah. We’ll end up at Anya’s with everybody else and then come back here.”

“Cool. Lexa can crash with me,” Clarke said. “I mean, if she wants to.”

Lincoln rolled his eyes. “I don’t know. You’d probably better check with her. She might prefer to hang out here.”

Lexa shrugged. “Sure. I’ll crash with Clarke,” making it sound like she didn’t have anything better to do. And then she gave Clarke one of her ultra-sexy smiles and a quick kiss. “Hell, yes, I’ll crash with Clarke.” She took a bite of the donut and handed it to Clarke.

“God, even your donut-sharing is cute,” Lincoln said with another eye roll.

“Want a breakfast croissant sandwich?” Lexa asked him.

“Sure.”

She took another bite of the donut Clarke held for her then put a tray of sandwiches that Clarke only just noticed had been sitting on the stove into the oven. “Fifteen minutes or so.”

“When is Octavia getting here?” Lexa asked.

“Soon. She’ll probably pick something up on the way.” He unbuttoned his coat.

“Well, there’ll probably be a sandwich or two left over. And of course you brought those—” she gestured at the donuts, “so she should be good.”

“I’ll let her know. And now I’m going to shower and change.”

“Oh, is this a walk of shame?” Clarke asked.

He grinned, shrugged, and left the kitchen.

Clarke slid her arms around Lexa’s waist and nuzzled the underside of her jaw. “As much as I want to continue our previous conversation, we should probably run errands for New Year’s.”

Lexa hugged her back. “Yeah. Seems that way. “So how about in the next few days we compare sizes?” She looked at Clarke and smirked. “And then we can order something online.”

“Perfect.” She grinned. “Our first purchase together.”

Lexa laughed. “I expect us to look back on this moment fondly.”

“I’m looking at this moment fondly right now,” Clarke said with another smile as she kissed Lexa’s neck.

“Mmm. Same.” And she ran her hands down Clarke’s back.

“And God, as much as I want to take you back to bed, I’d probably better not. But when we get back tonight, be prepared.”

Lexa grinned. “Can’t wait.”

And Clarke stepped away and picked up her cappuccino. “Okay. Let’s have some sandwiches.”

Because even that could be amazing if Lexa was involved. And as they moved around the kitchen getting plates out and chatting and teasing, Clarke wanted many more days like this, where they were in each other’s space, safe, comfortable, charged, and able to talk about anything.

Many, many more.

###

Clarke ate another chicken kabob and glanced around the room. Echo’s apartment was in an older building that at one time might have been a hotel, in the earlier part of the twentieth century. It had been re-done and modernized with decent track lighting and new windows, but the floors looked like the original wood, which helped give it a warm feeling. Echo seemed to like a sort of Euro-minimalist style with regard to furniture, but it worked.

Her gaze went to Lexa, who was talking to a guy and a woman she didn’t recognize on the other side of the room, but this was Echo’s party and it was mostly friends of hers. She watched Lexa for a few more moments because dammit, she had worn a tie and Clarke wasn’t sure how she had managed to remain standing when Lexa had come over so they could catch the Uber ride together.

She wasn’t sure how she managed to remain standing now, because God, that look was hot on her. A black skinny tie with a white button-down shirt that she’d rolled up to the elbows and tucked into
gray herringbone trousers. And oh, fuck, her matching gray herringbone vest and her black wingtips just made Clarke want to both stare at her for days but also rip the whole outfit off and have her way. Either of which Lexa would no doubt encourage, with one of her damn smiles.

And then Lexa did that thing, where she brushed her hair out of her eyes and made it fall to one side…fucking hell. A guy walked over and blocked Clarke’s view, unfortunately. But he shifted his position and she caught another glimpse of Lexa. God, she was fucking gorgeous.

For her part, Clarke had opted to wear black feminine-cut slacks over a pair of black heels that Raven called “just fuck me now shoes” and an off-white blouse cut in such a way that it showed off her assets and her cleavage just right. The black bra helped, too, and Clarke knew she looked good, knew she was getting lots of looks, but damn, so was her GF, and she loved it, loved that Lexa got looks because Clarke knew damn well who she was going home with, and that was all kinds of hot.

“Hi, Clarke.”

She jerked her gaze to Luna, who was carrying a glass of wine. She was wearing a simple black dress but it looked good on her. “Oh, hi. How was your holiday? Also, that dress looks great on you.”

“Thank you. And you look amazing.”

“Thanks.”

“And my holiday was good. I also wanted to apologize for not getting back to you sooner about your paintings.”

“You did. You said you’d look at the photos I sent and let me know.”

“I mean with regard to making a decision,” she said with a smile,

“Oh, well, this is a busy time of year. Why don’t you just catch up with me about that in a week or so? No rush.”

“No, I wanted to tell you that we love your work and we’d like to commission an original.”

Clarke stared at her for a beat. “Wow. I’m flattered.”

“So I was hoping to set a meeting up with you, me, and the director of my nonprofit in the next few weeks. We can do Zoom or Skype or Google Hangouts or something comparable if we can’t make it work in person.” She sipped her wine and looked at Clarke, hopeful.

“Sure. But if we can do this in the next two weeks, I can actually drive down so we can meet in person. I prefer to do that with potential clients, so they get a better sense of me and how I work.” Not that she had ever had official clients. But she figured she’d make it sound that way.

“That would be great. Our director will be back in town next week. I’ll check with her and see what we can work out.


Luna nodded and they were quiet for a few moments before she spoke again. “I’m pretty excited about this.”

“Same. Do you have an idea what subject matter you’d like me to paint?”
“Not yet. But we love your landscapes.”

“I figured the dystopic urban hellscape wasn’t quite what you were looking for,” she said with a grin.

Luna grinned back. “Personally, I love those. But pretty sure the boss wouldn’t want one in the lobby.”

“Right. You want people to feel mellow and encouraged rather than worried about surviving roving packs of dangerous assholes.”

“Something like that.” Luna smiled and Clarke envisioned her as part of her comic, too. Another badass warrior, maybe head of her own clan.

“At any rate, thanks for sending the company website link. I’ve had a look at it and done a bit of research, but I’ll appreciate any other inside information you can offer about its vision and mission so I can think about how to capture that in whatever subject you all decide on. If you can help out with that before any meeting we set up with the director, that would be great.”

Luna regarded her for a moment. “I most certainly will, and I really appreciate your professionalism, but Clarke, this is a party and how about we just hang out, now?”

She laughed. “You started the whole professional diversion.”

“Okay, I’ll own that. But let’s talk about other things. And you look like you need another drink. Unless you’re driving…?”

“I’m not.”

“So what can I get you?”

“I think what you’re drinking is fine.”

“Great. I’ll be right back.” Luna moved away and Clarke stifled an urge to fist pump. Because how fucking awesome was this? She caught Lexa’s gaze from across the room and flashed her a little sultry smirk, which earned her one of her sexy half-smiles in return and fuck, Clarke wanted to fist-pump the fact that Lexa fucking Woods was her GF.

Luna returned with another glass of wine that she handed to her.

“Thanks,” Clarke said. “So what’ve you been doing?”

“Well, I saw a video on Lexa’s Instagram the other day.”

Clarke sipped and waited.

“And it was the cutest thing I’ve seen in a long time. Well done with UnChristmas.” She clinked her glass lightly against Clarke’s. “So am I to assume that the two of you are serious?” Her eyes seemed to twinkle with amusement.

Clarke smiled and sipped again. “Yes. We are.”

Luna’s grin lit up her face. “That’s very good news. May it continue.”

“I’m hoping it does.”

Luna glanced at Lexa then back at Clarke. “You’re well-matched, so I don’t see any problem in that
regard.”

“Well-matched?” Not that Clarke disagreed.

“Definitely. Two strong women who complement and care about each other. That came through loud and clear in the video.”

“Thank you.” Clarke smiled. “She’s amazing.”

Luna nodded and smiled back. “I’m glad to hear you say that. She is. But I have a feeling you are, too, and that the two of you are going to be a hell of a team.”

Okay, this was starting to feel a little weird, even with Luna’s usual intense energy. Clarke redirected the conversation. “So do you have some more time off before you have to go back to work?”

“I get a couple more days off, fortunately. Because this is my third glass of wine and I expect to have champagne later.”

“So…your director’s not here or anything, right?” Clarke joked.

She laughed. “No. No worries there. She’s pretty chill, though. As long as people are responsible in their off-time and don’t do anything that would make the company look bad, she’s fine.”

Clarke nodded politely, wondering how Luna and a lot of wine mixed. Did she get even more intense? Or maybe it would relax her and she’d end up being groovy mellow Luna singing reggae or something. And thank all the deities, but Lexa had detached from the group she was talking to and was on her way over. Every part of her heated at the sight.

“Hey,” Lexa said and she put her free arm around Clarke’s shoulders and kissed her lightly on the cheek and everything was right with the world. Clarke leaned into her.

“Hi,” Luna said. “You both look fabulous, by the way.”

“So do you,” Lexa said, and she shifted slightly and God, she smelled good.

“So, good news. Luna’s people want to commission me for a painting.”

Lexa stared at Luna, then looked at Clarke again. “Seriously?”

“Yes.” Luna smiled.

“This is fucking great news.” Lexa tightened her hold on Clarke and held her beer bottle up with her other hand. “Cheers.”

Clarke and Luna clinked their glasses against her bottle.

“Details,” Lexa said after she sipped.

“Clarke sent me photos of works she’d already done and I sent them to my director, who loved her style and wants to commission an original piece.”

“And?” Lexa looked at them both expectantly.

“We’re going to set up a meeting.” Clarke said. “Me, Luna, the director of the nonprofit, and I guess whoever else wants to talk art.”
“This is excellent. I’m so glad this is happening.” Lexa adjusted her grip so her arm was around Clarke’s waist, hand resting on her hip.

“We’re going to try to meet before the semester starts, so hopefully in the next week or week-and-a-half.” Luna sipped her wine and a woman Clarke didn’t recognize greeted her and gave her an awkward half-hug, but Luna seemed fine with it.

“I’ll be in touch,” she said to Clarke as she let the newcomer pull her toward another group of people.

Lexa took her hand. “This is amazing. A commission.”

“Yeah. Hopefully they won’t want it too soon.”

“Just let them know what your schedule’s like, so they don’t have unrealistic expectations.”

She smiled. “Maybe I’ll take you with me, as counsel.”

Lexa laughed. “You’re a Commander in your own right. And you can be very convincing.”

“Sounds like you’re speaking from experience,” she teased.

“Something like that.” She leaned closer and lowered her voice. “And I know I’ve said this already, but you look so fucking hot. That shirt is fucking killing me.”

“Hmm. So you’re saying you see something you like?” Clarke lowered her voice, too.

“Definitely.” And her eyes had that glint in them, the one that was a mixture of dangerous and adventurous and Clarke loved it, loved that Lexa had that side to her, too, and that she showed it to her.

“You’re one to talk.” She ran her fingertips down Lexa’s tie—loosened just right—to the vest, and leaned closer. “I love watching how others look at you.” She brushed her lips along Lexa’s jaw. “Because you’re leaving with me.”

“Jesus,” Lexa whispered. “I’m so turned on right now.”

“I know. Hold that thought.” She pulled away and took another sip of wine, and smirked at how Lexa was staring at her.

“Everybody good here?” Echo interrupted.

“Yes.” Lexa moved smoothly into her sociable persona. “You?”

“Actually, yes. I was a little worried that people wouldn’t come over because they had other things to do—other parties, you know—but this is nice. Turned out all right.”

“It did. And you have a great space,” Clarke said. And she looked good in it. Echo was like a slightly less snarky version of Anya. Tonight she wore black jeans, black boots, and a flowy black shirt with a floral pattern on it. She had her hair pulled back into a pony tail and some rangy white dude Clarke had noticed earlier with a goatee was kind of following her around. Was that the guy Echo was seeing? Because he didn’t seem quite right for her.

“I was thinking we could have a game night or something before classes start. Fewer people.” She was drinking red wine and Clarke decided she might be a cool-ass warrior in her comic, too. Which was basically a showcase right now for badass women. Not that she minded.
“Just let us know,” Lexa said, and Echo smiled.

“Well, I’m glad you were able to pull it off and I know you have other places to be tonight. Thanks for coming by.”

“Definitely. Good to see you.”

Echo nodded and went to mingle more, the rangy dude following her. And he moved like he was already drunk.

“Who is that guy?” Clarke asked.

“One of Echo’s crushboys.”

“Is she seeing him?”

“No. She has no interest in him.”

“Good. But I thought she was seeing someone.”

“She kind of is. He’s in Oregon, I think, for the break. He’s one of those sportster guys. Kind of Cali surfer vibe, but he snowboards and skis, too.”

Clarke watched the rangy guy for a little bit. She didn’t get a creepy violent vibe off him, but you never could tell. Even a pathetic vibe off a dude could morph into something creepy.

“I’ve been watching him,” Lexa said, and Clarke looked at her, because she hadn’t voiced her thought aloud.

“Did he come alone?”

“No. He’s kind of a clinger to a couple of her other friends, is what she said. There are other people here watching him, too.”

Clarke frowned. If he continued, he was going to at the very least be a damper on Echo’s new year. “Why the hell did they bring him?”

“Felt sorry for him.”

“What the fuck ever. He’s a problem. Look.”

The rangy dude had stumbled into a woman and as a result, her drink spilled. Several people gave him “what the fuck” looks and somebody else yelled, “party foul.”

“Fuck this guy. Let’s get him out of here,” Clarke said. He made her nervous, and if he wasn’t removed, he might turn into another Finn and for some reason, it was really important that she be proactive about this.

“I agree,” Lexa said, “but I need you to not jump into doing that. Let’s see where things are and make a plan.”
She was right. Clarke looked back over at the woman whose drink had been upended. She was helping clean up and a couple of other guys were talking to the rangy dude. Intently. Okay, so that was good. One of them said something to Echo and it looked like he was apologizing. Yeah, he’d better, especially if he had brought this asshole.

The drunk guy seemed to get belligerent with the guy talking to Echo and Clarke gritted her teeth. Finn had done that a few times at parties. Alcohol really was a truth serum, because the mask slipped when he drank, which is probably why he didn’t do it much. Had to keep his fucking secrets. And this guy was pushing all her Finn buttons.

Another guy was now talking to the asshole. And then a third guy, who looked like he could’ve been a younger brother of The Rock. The Rangy guy now had a dude on one side of him and one on the other and then each grabbed him and literally picked him up and walked him to the front door. The guy who had been apologizing to Echo followed them out.

Lexa looked at Clarke. “What do you think?”

She chewed her lip for a moment, thinking about all the times Finn had been a douche at parties but he hid it well and how she hadn’t wanted to admit that he was a problem until things got even worse. And she decided silence perpetuated the problem.

“I think you should go and run backup with the dudes who just took him outside. Guys don’t catch some of the the things that women notice in situations like this, and that could prove useful to Echo.”

She studied Clarke for a moment. “I am not going anywhere if you need me here. I know this brings up some shit for you.”

“And I love that you acknowledge that. But I need you to go find out as much as you can outside. I’ll talk to Echo.”

Lexa regarded her for another moment, as if ensuring that this was, indeed, what Clarke wanted. Then she handed her beer over. “Okay. I’ll be right back. Don’t worry.” And she went after them.

She watched her leave then went over to where Echo was talking to the woman whose drink had spilled.

“Everything okay?” Clarke asked.

Echo rolled her eyes. “Yeah. Drunk asshole. They’re taking him home.”

“Can I talk to you?” Clarke asked, in her pleasant but uncompromising tone. Echo gave the other woman’s arm a friendly squeeze and motioned Clarke to follow her into the kitchen, and Clarke steeled herself for the conversation she was about to have.

“What’s up?” Echo said when they got there.

“That guy—do you have a history with him?”

“No. He’s just a douche who started hanging around a few of my friends. We met formally at a bar.”

“When?”

“About a month ago.”

“You’re sure? You didn’t notice him before that?” Clarke pressed. Her experience with Finn had
made her hypervigilant about so many things and she wasn’t sure if it was good or bad, but it was now ingrained in her, to never take anything at face value.

Echo was quiet for a bit. “Good question. But I do tend to be careful about that,” and Clarke saw in her eyes a shared experience.

“Ask the friends he started hanging out with,” she said.

“Yeah, I will.”

“And if you need it, I have a contact with campus police. She’s been great helping me with my situation.”

Echo’s expression hardened. “Your situation?”

Lexa clearly hadn’t mentioned it and Clarke appreciated that it was still her story to tell. “Yeah. I have a stalker.”

“Who is he?” she asked, and it was telling, how Echo assumed her stalker was male. What the hell with this fucked-up culture that there would be stalkers, and that most of them were male?

“He’s currently in California. I have a protective order out on him. Which he violated the Sunday after Thanksgiving. I hadn’t seen him in over a year and then there he was, following me to the student center. Fortunately, one of Lexa’s friends from her football days was in the area and she was with another guy working out and came to help.”

“I’m so glad.”

One of my other friends, Bellamy—not sure you’ve met him—also came running. And so did a whole bunch of other people. I got lucky, because I had prepped a network and DeShawn was in the immediate vicinity.”

“I’ve met him. Good guy.”

Clarke nodded. “Point being, you never fucking know.”

She sighed. “You’re right.”

“Did he ever ask you out?”

“No. I’ve barely said more than a few sentences to him and I’ve only actually talked to him since that first meeting maybe...three times?”

“Has he acted out before this?”

“No. Which is why I figured it was okay for him to come. I personally didn’t extend the invitation. He was just kind of party-hopping and ended up with some of my crew.”

“Please be careful. He knows where you live, now.”

She grimaced. “That occurred to me. But I think Daniel—the guy who looks like Dwayne Johnson, in case you didn’t formally meet him—is going to have a talk with the douche. And I can’t even remember his name. Funny how I blocked that out.” And funny, too, Clarke thought, how she thought Daniel looked like The Rock.

“Define ‘talk.’”
She shrugged. “It may or may not involve words. I’m hoping it involves a few but a lot of other things, too.”

Clarke thought about the MMA guy who took care of Finn and she decided that as bad as extralegal methods could be, they could work better than legal. And fuck, where was Lexa?

“Thanks,” Echo said. “I appreciate your interest here. I’ll definitely check into some things.”

“Yeah. And seriously, if you think he’s messing with you—is he a student?”

“I think so.”

“If he is, I have that contact at campus police I can put you in touch with. She’s been seriously great with me.”

“Cool. Thanks. I really do appreciate it. And I’m really sorry you’ve been going through shit.”

“I’ve had a great support network. Make sure you have one, too.”

Echo gave her a look. “Seems I’m already getting one.”

“Definitely.”

“There you are,” came Lexa’s voice and Clarke relaxed. “You okay?”

She nodded and handed her beer back.

“How about you?” Lexa asked Echo.

“Fine. Clarke asked some good questions about the douche—Adam. That’s his name. Just remembered it. Anyway, I’m going to find out if maybe he has been expressing a longer-term interest in me. She also said she has a contact at campus police who might be able to help if he keeps it up.”

“Good. Daniel and Kurt are driving him home and it’s my understanding that Daniel might continue a conversation with him. I didn’t ask what that might entail.”

Echo pursed her lips and shrugged. “Good. I didn’t, either. And thanks for looking out for me, both of you.”

Somebody called Echo’s name from the other room and she gave them both an apologetic look.

“This is a party,” Clarke said, and Echo smiled and left. She then turned her attention to Lexa. “What happened?”

“The douche—Adam—was drunk, as we ascertained. Daniel—the dude who I personally think looks like Dwayne Johnson—practically carried him to his car. The other guy is Kurt, and he went along. Daniel said they were taking Adam back to his own place but he also said that he hoped there would be an understanding after they dropped him off.” She put air quotes around “understanding.”

“Can I conjecture?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think it’s like what happened with the MMA fighter?”
Lexa regarded her for a moment. “If I were a betting woman—yes. But the less we know about that, the better.”

“Did Adam say anything about Echo that might indicate when he got obsessed?”

“He mentioned that when he met her at the bar, he wanted to ask her out.”

“Echo says he never asked her out and that she’s only talked to him maybe four times, including the first meeting and that it was rarely more than a few sentences.”

Lexa frowned. "Beyond saying that about the bar and wanting to ask her out, he didn't say anything else that would indicate a previous obsession. That is, before the bar."

Clarke nodded, thinking. "Okay, that could be good. It might mean that he didn’t know about her until that first meeting. Echo said that was the first time she met him, was at a bar. I asked her if she was sure he might not have known about her earlier and she’s going to check with her friends.”

Lexa set her beer bottle down on a nearby counter and pulled Clarke into a hug. “Are you really okay?”

She rested her head on her shoulder, reveling in her warmth and solidity. “Yes.”

“Do you need to talk?”

“Not about either douchebag. Mine or Echo’s.”

"Are you sure? I know this brought up some shit,” Lexa said softly.

"Yes. And maybe it was good, that it came up, because yes, it pushed some buttons, but I feel okay about how I handled it."

“You should feel more than okay about it. Here you were, talking to Echo and giving her advice and offering to help.”

She chuckled and kissed Lexa’s cheek. “Me? How about you, being the Commander?”

Lexa grinned. “We make a good team, I think.”

“Mmm.” Clarke nuzzled her neck. “Luna said the same thing earlier.”

“Oh?”

“She said we’re well-matched, too.”

Lexa kissed her forehead. “I tend to agree.”

And God, even after a stressful incident that brought up shit from the very recent past, Lexa had let her take the lead, and had assumed that she could handle it. She pulled away and kissed her then glanced at the microwave clock.

“It’s ten-thirty,” Clarke said. “And I’m done thinking about douchebags. So if you want to stay here to bring in the new year, that’s cool with me. I’ll let Raven—“

“No.”

She cocked her head and waited for her to continue.
“I want to bring in the new year at Anya’s.”

“Lexa, I totally get it if you want to stay here. Echo’s part of your crew.”

She took Clarke’s chin in her hand. “I’ve only brought in one other new year with Echo, and that was because we were at a bar. I really would like to ring in the new year with you at Anya’s.”

“You’re sure?”

“Completely.” And her expression didn’t leave any room for argument. Which was kind of hot in this instance.

“Okay. Want me to call an Uber?”

“Yes.”

And Clarke kissed her because fuck, it was Lexa and she looked so good and she was so amazing and holy shit she was her GF, for fuck’s sake.

“Okay, on it,” Clarke said after a few glorious moments of kissing her. She took her phone out and Lexa picked up her beer bottle, inspected what was left, grimaced, and poured it into the sink then rinsed the bottle and set it to the side.

“Not really a fan of that beer, anyway,” she said. “I might be spoiled, given Indra’s talents.”

“Which totally explains why you stick to wine for the most part,” Clarke said with a grin. “The driver’ll be here in fifteen minutes, out front.” And she was really glad that she had dropped the bags of chips off that afternoon, because it was one less thing to deal with while Uber-hopping.

“I’ll get our coats and start making the rounds.” She smiled, gave her a heated look, and left, though Clarke made sure to watch her walk out because, damn. She left the kitchen to go say her goodbyes and Luna told her she’d be in touch and Echo actually gave her a hug, which was a little unexpected.

Lexa appeared with their coats and they left and within a minute of exiting the building, their Uber arrived and Clarke gave him the address. He pulled up in front of Anya’s ten minutes later and they got out and Lexa took Clarke’s hand as they walked to the door but before they went in, Lexa pulled her in for a kiss.

“I know I’ve said this already, but you look fucking gorgeous tonight,” Lexa said when she pulled away. “And not gonna lie, but I kind of like the thirsty looks you get from everybody else because I know you’re coming home with me.”

“I’ve been thinking the same thing about you. And just so you know, a lot of those thirsty looks are actually from me.”

“Oh?”

Clarke grinned and kissed her, soft but hungry and when they finished, they were both breathing a little harder. She smirked at Lexa and opened the door before they ended up doing a hell of a lot more than just making out on Anya’s porch, no matter how cold it was.

“Hey, look who’s here,” Harper called when they came in and she came over and took their coats.

“These’ll be in the guest room.”

“Thanks,” Clarke gave her a hug. “You look nice. That dress is hot on you.”

She laughed. “I don’t like to be constrained by expectations regarding my outfits.”

“I just love that you can rock a dress or a suit.” Harper smiled. “Go mingle. Alcohol’s in the kitchen and in coolers on the deck and Anya’s got food in the dining room.” She left with their coats and Clarke interlaced her fingers with Lexa’s and they went to the kitchen, exchanging greetings with people as they did.

“And Clea has arrived,” Raven announced when they walked into the kitchen. Several other people looked up and shouted greetings.

“Oh, my God, Reyes.” Clarke pecked her on the cheek then waved at everyone else.

“And they are rocking the fashion world tonight.” Anya nodded with approval. “Nice look on you, Woods. And Griffin, pretty sure you’ve got several fanboys and girls since you walked in.”

“Whatever,” Clarke said with a laugh. “You both look good, too.” And they did. Anya was wearing jeans and boots, but with a black button-down shirt and a white bowtie while Raven had opted for tight black jeans and a flowy dark purple blouse.

“Drinks?” Anya asked.

“White wine,” Clarke said.

Lexa nodded. “Same.”

Anya moved away to fill the order and Lexa leaned in close so only Clarke could hear.

“For the record, Anya calling me by my last name does nothing for me.”

“Good to know that your surname kink still only applies to me,” she said back, keeping her voice down, too.

Lexa smiled and quirked an eyebrow and then Anya handed them both glasses of wine and once she did, Clarke got drawn into several different conversations, but so, too, did Lexa, and Clarke loved how comfortable she was in any kind of company, and how she shared glances with her, and smiles.

Anya had music going, but she also had the big-screen TV mounted on the wall on, too, turned to one of the channels that was getting ready to count down in Times Square. Clarke ended up in a group with Jasper, Harper, and Octavia talking about various TV programs they were watching. Lexa was chatting nearby with Bellamy Murphy, Lincoln, and a couple of guys Clarke recognized as friends of Anya’s from the lab. One was checking Lexa out, but trying not to be obvious. As Clarke watched, a woman joined them, also from Anya’s lab, and she checked Lexa out, too.

She totally didn’t blame them. She smiled against the rim of her glass, especially because Lexa looked over at her and flashed her one of her smirk-smiles.

“Is Bellamy here with anybody?” Clarke asked.

“No, thank God.” Harper rolled her eyes.

“He’s usually pretty good about not bringing his flavors of the month to friend parties, though,” Monty said. “If he’s only been seeing them for a couple of weeks.”
Jasper shrugged. “It’s new year’s. Everybody’s a friend. Especially the more you drink.”

Harper laughed. “There’s that. But no, he actually Ubered over with Murphy.”

“He might be Ubering out of here with someone else,” Monty said, and Clarke looked over at their group in time to see a woman she vaguely recognized from the lab lean into Bellamy in a super-flirty way.

“He’s way too easy,” Jasper said.

Clarke laughed. “Do tell.”

“I am a man of particular tastes,” he said with a huff. “And I’m hard to get. Bellamy should try it.”

“It might not be his thing.” Monty took Harper’s hand in a totally cute gesture. “Some people just aren’t into settling down. Speaking of…” he gave Clarke a look. “Looks like Virginia went well.”

She smiled. “Very.”

“So…” he pressed, and they all looked at her expectantly.

“Really?” Clarke shook her head.

“Damn right. So what’s the deal?” Harper asked. “Raven hinted that you might be getting serious.”

“Any flat-out said you’re girlfriends,” Monty said. “No way you couldn’t be, after that.” He smiled.

“For fuck’s sake,” Clarke laughed. “Fine. Yes. We’re getting serious.” Getting? Who was she kidding? She was already serious about Lexa and had been for a while.

Jasper grinned. “Awesome. This calls for a toast.” He raised his bottle and they all followed suit with their drinks.

“To Clarke and Lexa,” Jasper said. “May they keep it going.”

“Hear, hear,” Monty added.

“God, you guys. But thank you.” Clarke glanced over at Lexa again. She was saying something to Murphy and Lincoln was nodding.

“I need a refill.” Clarke held up her near-empty glass. “Everybody else good?” She looked at Lexa again, who caught her gaze. Clarke motioned at her wine glass and raised her eyebrows, a question in her expression and Lexa smiled and detached herself from her group and joined her.

“It’s almost time for champagne,” she said, with one of her rakish grins. “Any would like to know if we can help with that.”

“Of course. Is she in the kitchen?”

“I think so.”

“Then come on, Commander. Let’s make ourselves useful.” She took Lexa’s hand and walked her to the kitchen, where Raven and Anya were setting plastic champagne flutes out on the island countertop.

“Oh, good,” Raven said. “Can you help me with this, Griff? And can Lexa coordinate the
champagne with Anya?”

“Yep.” Lexa followed Anya to the fridge while Clarke helped Raven finish setting the flutes out and then they set out party hats and noisemakers.

“What time is it?” Raven asked.

“Ten minutes to go,” Lexa said.

“Good. Pour.” Anya popped the first bottle and handed it to Lexa, who alternated between half-full and two-thirds full with the first flutes. She also poured a few barely a third full, since not everybody was a champagne fan.

Others started coming in and taking flutes and party favors, laughing and talking, Clarke helping distribute while Lexa continued her pouring duties until they’d emptied four bottles.

“Four minutes, people,” Harper said from the doorway.

“Does everyone who wants champagne have it?” Clarke asked. “Send them in if not.”

Harper nodded and a few moments later four more people came in and Clarke gave them each a flute.

“That should do it,” Harper said.

“I’ll go turn the music off,” Raven said and she left the kitchen.

“Did you get champagne?” Anya asked Clarke.

“Yes,” Lexa said and she handed her a flute two-thirds full and picked one up for herself, also two-thirds full.

“Good. Let’s ring this bitch in.” Anya grabbed two more and they returned to the family room, where the TV had been turned up. Anya had surround sound, so the Times Square announcers sounded like they might have been right in the room. She took Lexa’s free hand and watched the screen.

“Have you done New Year’s in Times Square?” Lexa asked.

“No. And I’m glad. Crowds like that make me nervous.”

“Plus a lack of bathroom facilities,” Raven said. “No thank you. In a place like this with all of you—that’s where I want to spend my New Year’s Eve.”

“Awww,” Murphy teased her. “That almost got me choked up.”

“You love it, too,” Raven retorted.

“Actually, I do. Thanks for the invite, Anya.”

And everybody in his vicinity stared at him for a beat.

“You do have a soul,” Raven said, eyes wide, and everyone laughed.

“A minute left,” someone shouted.
Clarke brushed a kiss onto Lexa’s cheek. “Back to your question. If you wanted to do New Year’s in Times Square, I totally would.”

“Actually, I’m relieved it’s not your thing. I’d prefer glow-in-the-dark bowling or parties with our friends.”

She laughed. “I’m so glad. That is totally doable.” She leaned in close. “And fucking hell, so are you. I’m seriously thirsty for you.”

“Good. And you’ll find out later how you make me feel. And God, I’m really glad I’m here with you.”

“Same. But before we properly ring this in, do you have any New Year’s rituals I need to be aware of, that you’d like to replicate with me?”

“No. Only that it includes you.”

“And I’d like mine to include you, so this works out quite well.”

“Ten seconds,” somebody shouted and then everybody was counting down in unison with the TV and Lexa took Clarke’s hand and at three, she turned toward her and then it was down to one and Lexa leaned in and kissed her, and kept kissing her even as “Auld Lang Syne” started playing and the dull roar of the crowd in Times Square mingled with the whoops and shouts and noisemakers in Anya’s house but Clarke barely heard any of it.

Barely even registered it, because Lexa’s lips were perfect and the way she moved them was so fucking good and this was their first New Year’s Eve together and that was perfect, too. Lexa pulled away and grinned.

“Happy New Year, Lexa,” she said with a grin of her own.

“Happy New Year, Clarke,” she said with that smirk of hers. And she tapped her flute against Clarke’s and they both took swallows and then they got pulled separately into other hugs and celebrations and eventually Clarke’s flute was empty and she realized she was tired and really wanted to find Lexa and go home and snuggle with her beneath her covers.

People were already starting to leave, so she scanned the room but didn’t see her, so she went into the kitchen, where a few people were chatting and cleaning up a bit.

“Clarke.”

She turned at Lexa’s voice. “There you are.” And again, they were on the same page because Lexa already had her coat on and she was carrying Clarke’s, which she handed to her. “Did you get an Uber?” Clarke asked.

Lexa shook her head. “Not yet.” And she motioned toward the back deck with her head.

“What—”

“Come outside with me.”

And of course Clarke couldn’t refuse her, couldn’t refuse the heat or intensity in her eyes and a few moments later they stood near the railing, the portable firepit nearly embers behind them and light from the windows casting patterned shadows near it. From down the block, Clarke heard the snap of firecrackers.
“What’s up?” she asked.

Lexa cupped her cheek. “I want to make a new memory out here,” she said softly, “for the start of the new year and the start of us.”

And Clarke’s heart felt like it skipped several beats. “So how do you propose we do that?” she asked, mouth dangerously close to Lexa’s.

“Mmm. What do you think?” Lexa asked, and she grazed Clarke’s lips with her own and even a touch that light made her ache.

“I think I totally agree,” she said. “So here’s me, doing what once scared me.” And she kissed Lexa like the first time, only this time she didn’t pull away, and she deepened the kiss and Lexa tasted like champagne and God, she would never get enough of this, never get enough of her and she tried to tell her that through her kisses.

The back door opened and they pulled away from each other, smiling.

“Oh, sorry,” Jasper said. “Don’t mind us. Just going over here. Carry on.” And he and Monty and Harper went to the other side of the deck, though Harper gave them a thumbs-up and a grin as she walked past. A few seconds later Clarke saw the flame of a lighter and she knew that soon she’d smell smoke, and it wouldn’t be cigarettes.

“You want some?” Jasper asked them and Lexa smiled.

“I’m good,” she said.

“So we see,” he shot back. “Clarke?”

“I’m also good.”

“Yeah, we can see that, too,” Harper said. “Happy New Year, guys.”

“Happy New Year,” Clarke said, at the same time as Lexa and then she pulled her in for a hug.

“How’s that for a new memory?” Clarke asked.

“Perfect. Have I mentioned how much I love kissing you?”

“You might have this morning,”

“Well, it’s true. I fucking love kissing you. I managed not to really think too hard about it until that first night at the club. After that, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. So when it happened the first time, I practically lost my mind.”

Clarke sighed. “Same. And then I had to go and freak out about it. Right here in this spot.”

“Which is why we’re out here now. Do-overs can be a thing. Besides, you made up for it later. And I’m pretty good at reading people. I got the feeling you wanted to kiss me back.”

Clarke heard the smirk in her voice and she pulled back. “Maybe a little.” And then she cupped the back of her neck and pulled her in for yet another kiss.

“Oh, please, Griffin,” Lexa said softly after a few delicious moments. “You wanted to kiss me as much as I wanted to kiss you.”
Clarke stared at her, and sparks raced down her thighs. “Okay, the Commander being full of herself aside, I get it, now, this surname kink.”

Lexa laughed. “Here’s hoping it only applies to me.”

“Definitely.”

“Also, full of myself?” She grinned. “I merely speak the truth.”

She rolled her eyes and grinned back. “Fine. I did. So much. And speaking of kissing and…other things, are you ready to go?” Because God she wanted to get them both out of their clothes—except maybe she’d just unbutton Lexa’s shirt and leave that and her tie on because there was something super hot about it.

“Yes.”

“Good. Let me check in with Anya and we’ll get an Uber.”

“Okay.” Lexa kissed her again, which only served to distract her, even from the fact that her feet were pretty cold, and then the smell of pot smoke wafted over, reminding her where they were, and she stopped.

“The sooner we leave…” she said suggestively as she moved to the door. “Bye, guys, she said to the group at the other end of the deck. “Text me if there’s anything going on tomorrow or this week.”


And she went into the kitchen, Lexa right behind her, and went to find Anya while Lexa chatted goodbyes to the people still left. Clarke found Raven and Anya in the living room talking to Bellamy and Murphy.

“You out of here?” Murphy asked.

“Maybe. How are you on clean-up?” Clarke asked Anya, though from the looks of the kitchen, people had already been taking care of that.

“We’re good,” Raven said. “For reals.”

“Call or text me tomorrow if that’s not the case and I’ll come and help get things back in order.”

“Oh, you’re planning to get out of bed?” Anya said, with a wicked little grin.

“I could actually say the same thing about you,” she shot back and Murphy snorted a laugh.

“Oh, snap,” Raven said.

“True, Griffin. True.” Anya gave her a quick hug. “Thanks for coming. We should be fine, but we’ll let you know if that’s not the case. I do appreciate it. And I’m really happy for you and Lexa.”

“Wait,” Clarke said. “Who are you and where’s Anya?”

Bellamy almost spit out his beer and Raven chortled.

“I’m trying to set the right tone for the new year. Snark resumes tomorrow.”

Clarke laughed. “Good to know. Thanks for everything, and we’ll see you later.” She gave Murphy
a hug, then Bellamy, then Raven. “Happy New Year, everybody. Let’s get together again soon.”

“Duh,” Raven said. “We’re a crew. That’s what we do. And seriously, somebody should make that a slogan.”

“I think you just did,” Clarke said with a smile. “Bye, guys.”

“Bye,” they echoed and she went to do a round of goodbyes to the people left then found Lexa in the kitchen.

“Ready,” she said, and Lexa nodded and took her phone out.

“And…Uber ordered,” she said. “Looks like…oh, cool. Ten minutes.”

They were almost out of the kitchen when Anya appeared in the entrance. “Good. You’re not gone yet. Wait there for a minute.” And she went to the fridge and took out a bottle of champagne and brought it over. “Keep celebrating,” she said as she handed the bottle to Lexa with a grin. “Do not say no, Woods. Or you, Griffin.”

“Oh, darn. Whatever shall we do with this unopened delicious bottle of champagne?” Clarke said. “Guess we’ll have to think of something.”

“I’m sure you will.” And Anya accompanied them to the front door. “Let’s have dinner this week, you two and me and Raven.”

“Yes,” Lexa said. “Just let us know.”

“Definitely,” Clarke said.

“Good. Later.”

Clarke opened the door and they went out onto the porch, where a couple of people were chatting, probably waiting for rides, too, and sure enough, a few seconds later a car pulled up to the curb and the two others said goodbye to them as they went to the street.

Clarke slipped her arm through Lexa’s and leaned into her, thinking that even though it was cold, here they were and everything was amazing. “So that surname kink does only work with you,” she said, and Lexa laughed.

“I’m really glad to hear that.”

They were quiet for a few moments until Clarke broke it. “So did we do okay in the new traditions department of your holiday season this year?”

“I don’t have words for how completely incredible it’s been. And I’m not just talking about the holiday season.” She angled herself so she could look at her. “I am so glad you were cranky enough that day to tell me to move the furniture.”

“Okay, you’re right. That is kind of a funny first meeting story.”

“Right?”

“Though we would’ve met eventually. I mean, we’re neighbors.”

“Maybe. But something about telling me I was having sex too loud—though I wasn’t—stayed with me.”
“Same,” Clarke said with a laugh. “And God, I then thought how awkward it would be to talk to you again after that.”

“But it really wasn’t.” And there was so much warmth in her eyes.

“No, it really wasn’t.” Instead, it had been completely easy. And sexy and exciting and fun and deep and so much more.

And then their car pulled up and Lexa smiled. “Ready?” she asked, holding up the bottle of champagne.

“So ready.”

“Then let’s go home, Griffin.” And she took Clarke’s hand and interlaced their fingers and in the smile she flashed and the look in her eyes, Clarke knew she was already home.

And there was nowhere else she wanted to be.

fin

for now...

Chapter End Notes

AAAAAAND

DONE!

With this part, anyway.

I'm most likely going to do a second fic as a follow-up to bang shui, because REASONS and FEELS and I HAD SO MUCH FUN WRITING THIS. But it'll be a while because I have some other things I need to do.

Speaking of--how does anyone feel about a one-shot that deals with the results of Clarke and Lexa's shopping for toys? It would have no redeeming value beyond just a smut/feels/humor interlude, but it might be fun. If you dig that, let me know. Or don't and I might do it anyway because I think it would be fun.

Anyway, THANK YOU for reading and joining me on this fluff excursion -- I have greatly appreciated all the comments and luv and questions and I hope you'll join me again in the future.

And you can always find me on Twitter and Tumblr. Ask me anything. Hang out. Chat. Whatever!

P.S. let me know what you think about a one-shot regarding the Clexa toy-shopping and aftermath. :D
THANKS AGAIN, everyone, and may you find your own Clexonium.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!