Just Give Me Mercy, 'Cause I Keep Hurting

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Just Give Me Mercy, 'Cause I Keep Hurting

by timeespaceandpixiedust

Summary

Lexa Woods is starting her junior year at Stanford, happily hiding out in her shared San Francisco apartment with her best friend Raven. She's single and more than okay with it, or at least she would be if her mother would stop trying to set her up with random boys and get her paired off for the upcoming family reunion. Enter Clarke Griffin who just so happens to be staying with them for a while and might be willing to offer Lexa some help.

Or the fake dating AU where Lexa knows it's a bad idea but can't say no.
“Lexa, wake up!” is what she hears just before the far too bright light that was her bedside lamp is switched on and hands are grabbing her shoulders.

She groans, loudly, deciding that was more than enough of a response right now.

Raven knew she was hungover. Waking her up with anything other than a glass of ginger ale and two Tylenol was just cruel.

Next, the blanket is ripped from her body, taking away her guard against that intruding, blinding light. “Nope, not happening,” Raven declares. “You’ve already used up your get out walks free card for the month. Let’s go.”

“I’m sick,” Lexa answers with a whine. She felt sick at least. That seemed like it should count.

Raven tuts. “You’re hungover. Your illness is self-inflicted.” Lexa would have to try that logic next time Raven was curled in the fetal position from a few too many rounds of beer pong. “I shouldn’t have to suffer just because you got drunk off of boxed wine after a phone conversation with your mother.”

Which makes Lexa groan more because the last thing she needs is a reminder as to why she got drunk in the first place. “Don’t remind me.” That was a train wreck of a conversation, and the worst of what was discussed had still yet to come to pass. She did not need to think about that first thing in the morning.

“Fine,” Raven relents. “Get your ass up, and I won’t mention it again this morning.”

That was probably the best she was going to get, so Lexa stands, wincing against the pounding in her head. “You’re a terrible friend.”

Raven beams. “I know, darling. Now get dressed.”

Lexa throws on the closest thing to pyjamas that could be considered appropriate for outside and ties her hair up in a knot on top of her head. She puts her glasses on, this was no day for contacts and stumbles out to the kitchen for some glorious coffee.

“One of these days we need to get a dog,” she says, hands fiddling with the ties on the bag of coffee. “The two of you can walk each other.”

Raven bats her hands out of the way and quickly opens the bag. “Until then I’m stuck with you, though,” she answers, hastily dumping in spoon fills to the filter. She never made the coffee correctly. “I guess that makes you my bitch.”

“Love you too, pal.” Lexa drops onto the bar stool laying her head in her arms on the countertop and letting out a long, endless moan of displeasure. First of all, she was awake, second she was being forced outdoors, and lastly, she had a research paper due in precisely fourteen hours that she had all of two sentences written for, not to mention that phone conversation. She was not regarding that conversation as a thing worth thinking of.

Raven places a Gatorade in front of her. “My mom is always harping on about how this stuff is what you should drink when you’ve been puking. Something about electrolytes and shit.”
“But I didn’t—”

“Twice,” Raven interrupts with a wrinkled nose. “In my trash can, thank you very much.”

Oops. “I’ll clean that out.”

“You bet your ass you will,” she holds out a cup of coffee in Lexa’s favorite to go mug because she was being forced to go somewhere. “I’ll drive.” She almost always drove. Lexa hated driving, not to mention she wasn’t very good at it. Raven drove like she was a retired Nascar motorist, but she at least did it well.

“You better take those turns slow today.”

Outside the weather is balmy, a light breeze flushing against Lexa’s face as soon as she pushes the door open. That was her favorite part of San Francisco, easily. No matter the time of year it always felt like those perfect days of spring, when the cold has thawed out, and the summer air had just begun creeping in, before the humidity or the sweltering heat that rivaled a day in Death Valley.

Raven rolls down the windows of her old Jeep Wrangler, the engine kicking to life with more of a growl than a pur. Probably the only part of this car that still maintained it’s 2001 parts was the body itself; the rest had been entirely reassembled by Raven herself.

“Drink your Gatorade,” she reminds Lexa as she eases out onto the main road. “I’ll buy you something greasy after.”

Their little walks were a near daily tradition, only abandoned on particularly lazy weekends or last semester when Lexa had morning classes starting at 7:30. Raven had heard that and promptly said “fuck that shit I’ll be sleeping,” like the elegant goddess she is.

The walking was part of Raven’s “physical therapy” which her mother insisted upon even though Raven’s leg injury was nearly a decade old and could probably be maintained just fine without daily three-mile walks. Lexa was pretty sure it was just her mom’s way of feeling like she was doing something even though Raven was several states away from home.

The trail is only a couple miles from their apartment. It’s the perfect length with a pleasant tree coverage to prevent any sunburn, and typically their only company was stay at home moms with their running strollers and the occasional elderly couple. Lexa enjoyed that part at least.

They start out, even footfalls as a squirrel darts in front of them. The cool bay breeze wasn’t as frequent here since they were a little more removed, but it still found its way through the branches of the trees, the leaves singing with the motion. It was peaceful and quiet and relaxing. “Ugh, god, why do all white people do that?” And then there was Raven.

“What?” Lexa asks. What could she have possibly done?

“That thing,” Raven answers, her lips pressing together and offering this forced, half smile. “You all do it when walking by each other. Like why? Either you’re excited to see someone, and you show it,” her face breaks out in an even, open-mouthed smile. “Or you stare straight ahead with a steely-eyed gaze and ignore the strangers who are obviously beneath you.”

Lexa laughs because that was usually the best response she had for most of Raven’s rants. “You spent the second half of your life raised by the Griffins,” Lexa points out with a shake of her head. “Even their surname is white.”

“You say this as if I don’t consistently mock my family,” Raven shoots back. “I’ve been rolling my
eyes at their whiteness before the ink even dried on those adoption papers.”

Raven often talked like this about her family, teasing and taunting and like she was totally sure of their love for her. Which was surreal for Lexa, who had been born into her family and yet she still tried not to put too many toes out of line, just in case it was decided she wasn’t worth loving anymore. If that hadn’t already come to pass, that is.

“Speaking of which,” Raven takes a long draw of her coffee before lowering it and shooting Lexa a look. “Abby and Clarke are coming out to visit in a few days.”

Lexa had heard about this in passing. She’d met Abby on a few occasions, last year on Raven’s birthday and a few odd weekend visits. Clarke hadn’t ever made it out here, though. Raven always saw her when she flew home for the holidays or summer vacations instead. “I know, you said they’re staying for a week or so, right?”

“About that,” Raven says, eyes up in the trees as if there was something to see. “There was something I needed to run by you.” She seemed nervous. Raven was hardly ever nervous about anything.

“Um, okay?” If Raven was nervous, then Lexa was panicking. “Is this a good or a bad thing?”

Raven “hms” in thought. “I suppose that would depend on perspective.” Alright, she was curious. “So, you see, Clarke graduated a couple of months ago with her degree in something art related or another,” she waves her hand as if the specifics weren’t important. Lexa knew she was more than aware of what exactly Clarke’s degree was in. “And Omaha isn’t exactly bustling with activity for her right now…”

“Uh huh,” Lexa encourages Raven to continue. “I doubt Omaha is bustling with activity for anyone.”

“Too true,” she answers quickly. “So anyway, Clarke was thinking about maybe staying out here for a little while, just to try and see what she can do in an area like San Fran.” So far this all seemed fine enough. “And I was wondering if she could maybe stay with us for a bit? Just until she saved up enough to get her own place of course.”

“Until she can save up…we live in the bay area, Raven!” she reminds her friend because clearly she’s forgotten. “It could take her a decade to save up that much. We can’t even afford where we live!”

Raven shrugs that sentiment away. “Clarke’s gotten all ‘I need something new’ on us. I think she’s just jealous,” Raven smiles, hands up in a “what can you do?” motion. “She’ll probably come to stay out here for a month or two, realize that it hasn’t solved all of her problems and go back home.”

Though she had never met Clarke, Raven spoke of and to her often. Lexa had seen snapchats and heard long rants of the loser guys Clarke was dating or the terrible job she was working. She’d never met Clarke, but Lexa had heard enough that she felt like she had.

“But she probably has more of a reason to be out here than you or I,” Raven tacks on. “Ms. running to the other side of the country from her parents and my unquelling need to be by the water and fellow beautiful people.”

“You moved here because you got a full ride to Stanford,” Lexa reminds Raven with a dry tone. “And I got into Stanford. Both very valid reasons to move to California.”

“Maybe,” she answers with a shrug. “But you also got into Harvard, Princeton, and University of Penn. You know, actual Ivy Leagues.” Raven points out. “Regardless, San Fran is the kinda artsy
place Clarke will enjoy for a bit before getting tired of it and moving on to the next thing.”

It wasn’t unusual for Raven to give Clarke a hard time. She was her sister after all.

“And she’ll just sleep on our couch while working this out of her system?” Lexa asks, only entirely opposed to this concept. Lexa was an only child. It had been enough of an adjustment getting used to living with Raven. She wasn’t used to sharing a bathroom or fighting over who’s leftovers had been in the fridge. It took three months before she was comfortable enough to walk around the apartment without her bra on or with zit cream smeared all over her face. She adjusted to sharing that intimacy with anyone. Clarke would be another someone to get used to. Her presence in their living room would sequester Lexa to her bedroom whenever she wanted to hang out in her towel after a shower or not wash her hair for three days straight because she was too busy to be bothered with it.

“If you don’t mind?” And Raven’s the closest thing to a best friend Lexa has ever had, maybe even closer than family itself at this point. She rarely asks for much, except these daily walks and occasionally a designated driver.

“Alright,” Lexa never has been very good at disappointing people she loves.

“You’re the best,” Raven says, half smiling, which was essentially the equivalent of her launching herself into Lexa’s arms and yelling ‘thank you’ from the top of her lungs. “Also, they get here in three days, and I might have already told Clarke yes, so glad you agreed.”

Of course. “What would you have done if I said no?” Lexa wonders aloud.

Raven shrugs, “Probably beg, maybe lay on my tragic backstory a little bit until you broke down in pity.”

“You’re kind of a dick; you know that?”

Raven laughs, “Oh my darling, Lexa,” she throws an arm around her shoulders. “Two and a half years of friendship and you still put ‘kind of’ in front.” She places a fat, sloppy kiss on Lexa’s cheek. “One day you’ll learn.”
“Are you sure you don’t want to come?” Raven asks for the third time, standing in front of the sliding glass door of Lexa’s closet applying mascara. “It’s been forever since you joined,” she comments, dropping the makeup as she turns to face her friend. “It’ll be fu-un,” she sings, eyebrows raising.

With a shake of her head, Lexa readjusts the book in her hands. She was making a conscious effort to put more attention into this reading than she was in Raven. “I’m just fine here, thank you,” she answers. The last time she’d gone out had been enough of a disaster to last her a few months more, at least. Going out lead to bad decisions, which equaled drinking, which lead to more bad decisions.

Lexa had enough of a lack of impulse control as it was. Get some alcohol flowing through her blood-brain barrier and next thing she knows she’s got some girl whose name she doesn’t know pressed up against the inside of some random bedroom door with her hand down said girl's pants.

“Clarke’s coming,” Raven adds as if that changes anything. “They’ve been here almost two full days, and you haven’t even bothered to get dinner with us.”

“I’ve been working,” Lexa reminds her. Besides, she’s decided she’ll be seeing plenty of Clarke in the weeks to come. A fact that she was reminded of when she came home last night, a small pile of bags already gathering in the corner of the living room. Not exactly what she needed to acknowledge when she was bone dead tired and interested in nothing more than an entire bag of spicy hot Cheetos and some Gilmore Girls reruns.

With a sigh, Raven turns to face her. She had on tight black pants and a crop top that revealed her even, toned abs. Raven had made it her personal mission to make sure people had something to look at besides the brace on her leg or the limp in her walk. “You need to meet someone, Lexa. Your last one night stand was months ago and the more you have, the easier the whole break up thing is to recover from, you know.”

“I do not-” She drops her book, hard stare fixing on Raven.

“It’s been, what, a year since Costia?” Lexa picked her book right back up. “And you’ve slept with how many people since then? I thought I was in the middle of a dry spell, and I’ve slept with three different people this month alone.”

“That’s because you’re a slut,” Lexa teases though it comes out a little more biting than she intended. She only made the comment mostly because she knew it would get Raven going on a whole rant of double standards, slut-shaming, and the patriarchy. “And I’m a happy little prude reading her books and drinking her tea in peace.”

Raven rolls her eyes, shoving a twenty into her pocket. “Just saying, babe, I can give you the website I bought my vibrator off of if you need.”

“Ew, gross,” she answers, gagging in response. “There are things you can keep to yourself, you know.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” she asks, pulling Lexa’s book down from her face so she can look her in the eyes. “The whole world won’t bite you in the ass like she did, okay?”
Lexa yanks her book out from beneath Raven’s hand, situating it right in front of her eyes like she was reading without her glasses on. “Tell Octavia I said hello.”

A ‘knock’ sounds as Raven jabs a knuckle into the back of Lexa’s book, pushing it forward just enough that it hits her face. “I will do no such thing. If you want to say hello, then you’ll just have to come out.”

“Well with a threat like that…” Raven shoots her a look before shouting a “Don’t wait up!” and letting the front door slam shut behind her.

Sighing, Lexa promptly gets up to lock the door, knowing Raven won’t have thought to do it.

As used to living with Raven as she was, there were still some parts of a life alone that she enjoyed existing within when these Fridays cropped back around. At first, she’d been a willing participant, going out with Raven…and Costia. She’d drink, and party and have a grand old time, but she’d had enough of that recently. Especially after waking up in bed next to a girl whose name she could not remember for the life of her (more than once). She re-dedicated Fridays once learning she apparently had no self-control. It wasn’t emotionally responsible.

Tonight was especially a night for relaxation, she decides. Midterms were over, and she deserved some time to do whatever she pleased after the twenty-minute conversation she’d had with her mother a few days ago. Maybe one day Raven would learn to appreciate the simpler things in life too, Lexa considers as warm, soapy water fills the bathtub, and she grabs the Mallomars out from the back of the cupboard.

If not, Lexa decides while slipping beneath the water and letting her eyes fall shut. She really was missing out.

///// Maybe if they didn’t live in one of the notoriously labeled “college apartments” Lexa wouldn’t be low-key blasting Mumford and Sons while walking around in her bathrobe and stirring her homemade macaroni and cheese that was nearly complete. But it was a Friday night, and she was probably one of the few people still inside, and definitely the only person who has even contemplated sleep. So she doesn’t feel bad when she turns it up just a little more to hear over the running water.

She’s humming along, wet hair dripping onto her bathrobe and her bare foot tapping with the beat. This night was quintessentially her favorite sort of night as she fills a bowl with delicious, steaming macaroni and turns the stove with a ‘click’ of the burner to off.

Netflix would be her best friend throughout the rest of the evening, maybe some of the Noam Chomsky she’d scored at the used bookstore last week. Simple, safe, smart. The alliteration might as well be her motto these last few months.

Her phone had long since been, intentionally, forgotten, plugged in to charge in her room and left there, just in case her mother got any bright ideas about engaging in additional conversation. Lexa could hardly feel guilty for not answering when she didn’t know anyone was calling.

Her voice harmonizes with Mumford, singing about holding on hope and letting you choke. She’s feeling those lyrics in her very soul right about now. At least, she’s singing and smiling and reveling until the front door comes crashing open and a vaguely familiar blonde comes stammering through, a singular silver key in hand. Then Lexa’s just gaping and trying to decide if she should call 911 or just run away before she could get shot.
“Shit, sorry man,” the girl says, and even though she only looks somewhat familiar, Lexa knows that voice even better.

“Clarke,” she places. Clarke whose picture sat on Raven’s bedside table and whose face Lexa had seen in the shadowy light of Skype calls and Snapchat photos. Clarke who looked entirely different, living and breathing in front of her than she had ever appeared in any two-dimensional space. Clarke who had electric blue eyes and a gentle curve to her hips and a scoop neck shirt that was scooping impressively low right about now.

Lexa knew Clarke in theory.

Clarke in reality, however...she swallows heavily.

Clarke smiles, shifting her weight only to stumble sideways. She corrects herself one foot crossing over the other to catch her balance. “Sorry, sorry,” she says again. “That party was...I was probably better off not knowing what my sister does every weekend.” Lexa wonders if she knows the half of it. “It was loud, and I was tired, and that punch was way stronger than I’m used to,” she starts rambling, her words bleeding together at the rate she was speaking and the level of drunk that she was. “And the brownies definitely were not just brownies. Which I had failed to recognize until I had already eaten a couple and...suffice to say I wasn’t about to go back to the hotel for my mother to see this, so I directed my Uber here.”

Here - where Clarke apparently already had a key to. And was already considered as being a regular enough guest that no one had felt the need to text Lexa and warn her that there was a person who was going to come breaking in and maybe Lexa shouldn’t be standing in a light pink bathrobe with a cucumber scented facemask on. Or, you know, maybe she should keep her phone on her so if someone tried to warn her she would know. Not the important part of this right now, she decides.

“Raven said you’d probably be asleep and to just be quiet, but you’re definitely awake,” Clarke says, giggling. “And I definitely was not quiet.”

Lexa nods once, before remembering she should probably speak again. This girl seemed to do enough talking for the both of them. “It’s okay,” she says and then rolls her eyes. “Also Raven was being dramatic. I would hardly be asleep at 9:30 on a Friday night.” She’d had plans to stay up until at least eleven.

“Well sorry to interrupt your…” Clarke pauses, not that Lexa can blame her.

“I was just…” the instrumental portion of the song kicks in, the music getting louder and faster. “Listening to banjos.”

Clarke bursts out into laughter. “Sorry,” she says again, hand against her stomach before pressing her lips together and apologizing for a second time. Lexa might be more inclined to believe it if little puffs of laughter didn’t keep escaping from between Clarke’s lips. “Oh god, I’m sorry. I’m way too intoxicated not to find that equal parts hilarious and endearing, though.”

And if Lexa has a brief thought of how she was more than okay with Clarke Griffin considering her endearing or the fact that the comment made her stomach do this swooping/roller coaster feeling, then she wasn’t going to dwell on it. She also doesn’t spare another thought to the way Clarke’s eyes are roaming along Lexa’s bathrobe-clad body before freezing on the bowl in her hand. “Is that mac and cheese?” she asks, her voice shooting up an octave in excitement.

“Yes, it is,” she answers evenly. Intoxicated people weren’t usually her thing. Unless you counted Raven, which, as Lexa had decided in most categories of her life, she didn’t.
“I’m starving,” Clarke declares. “Probably in part to those brownies which were either very potent or three might have been too many.” She laughs at herself. “My mother always did lecture me on being a glutton. Look where it got me.”

“I’m sure she’d be more than happy to say ‘I told you so’ right about now.”

Clarke laughs again. “You’re funny,” she decides, looking to the food in her hands. “Any chance you made extra?”

Extra for lunch tomorrow, yes, but Lexa just nods instead, handing her bowl over. “Here, I’ll go get myself some more.”

Perhaps a less drunk Clarke would have better manners, but this one just loads her fork and takes a heaping bite, chewing for all of a second before groaning. “This is amazing,” she declares. “Raven’s been holding out on me.”

“Oh?” Lexa asks, simply stuck where she was, watching. “How so?” A smile plays on her lips, she can feel it. She can also feel herself pushing the edges down, refusing to allow herself to get wrapped up in what was quickly becoming the stupidest crush. Raven had been right, apparently. It had been way too long.

“She never mentioned that you were a great cook on top of being sexy,” Clarke says, giggling. “That’s like, double sexy.”

Oh god, those were words that would quickly get her into trouble. Lexa clears her throat, opening her mouth for a response that won’t come. There was a particular reason why she hadn’t gone out tonight and, goddammit, Clarke Griffin was not about to undo months of pure introvertism and the extreme effort of good decision making. Not when Clarke was the only one intoxicated. Not when Lexa had put this much time into not doing things, or people, she shouldn’t.

Clothes, she thinks. She should really put on some clothes. “I’m just gonna go get dressed,” she announces, turning towards her room and away from Clarke, who was still standing in the entryway consuming pasta at an alarming rate.

“Wait!” she shouts, food momentarily abandoned as she takes a few steps towards Lexa. “I have a better idea.”

Which is precisely how the two of them end up sitting on the floor of the living room, coffee table pushed out of the way, playing a game of Scrabble in bathrobes.

“We should all always wear bathrobes,” Clarke had declared as soon as she came out of Raven’s room wearing a dark purple robe that Lexa didn’t even know existed. Raven was more of a walk around in your underwear type of girl.

“Mankind fucked up when they decided what should be classified as business casual.” This statement is declared while Clarke continuously tries to spell “caffeine” with only one ‘e’ and swearing she had done it right over and over again, Googling the word on her cell phone before quietly going, “Oh,” and realigning her tiles in front of her.

“You aren’t very good at this,” Lexa says, not concerned about being rude since some random girl was forcing her to remain in her bathrobe, had eaten most of her food, and temporarily redecorated her living room. Seemed fair enough to insult this chick’s Scrabble skills, or, more accurately, the lack thereof.

Clarke’s eyebrows knit together in concentration as she reads, “quince” upside down. “That’s not a
“Sure is,” Lexa argues back. “It’s a fruit from the same family as apples and pears.” She factors the points into her overall score. She has now beaten Clarke three times over. “They’re very tart.”

“Why do you know that?” Clarke questions, her tiles laying out in an attempt to spell “caffeine” again. “Why would anybody know that?”

Lexa shrugs. “I like knowing things,” she mumbles, feeling oddly attacked by a girl who’s left boob was about to bust out of her robe. Not that Lexa was looking. She wouldn’t be doing that at all.

“Aha!” Clarke shouts suddenly. This time her tiles spell “caffaine” which is almost close enough that Lexa just gives it to her.

Just as she opens her mouth to say something, Clarke’s cell phone goes off, her concentration immediately redirected. “Fuck, it’s my mom. Here.”

She answers the call and passes the phone to Lexa all in the same movement. What was she supposed to do exactly? “Abby,” she says, smiling even though Clarke is the only one here to see her.

“Lexa? Is that you?”

“Sure is,” she answers, making a face of question towards Clarke. What was their angle here?

“Did you go out with Clarke and Raven?” Abby asks, her voice almost suspicious. Clearly, it had gotten back to Raven’s mom that Lexa was in a state of eternal homebody behavior.

“Um,” she looks for the right answer in Clarke who is still just staring at her word with a cocked head. “No, actually Clarke came to...get something, and we ended up playing Scrabble.” Now her friend’s mom would be certain of just how much of a loser she was. Which was probably okay when it came to moms. Moms liked losers.

“Scrabble?” Abby snorts into the phone. Okay, never mind, even moms were making fun of Lexa now. She’d hit a new low. “Clarke can’t even spell scarf.”

So this wasn’t purely a drunk thing. “I’m figuring that out,” Lexa laughs.

“Is she coming back here tonight do you know?” Abby asks, and Lexa shoots Clarke a look, hoping that maybe she’s heard the question and can help Lexa answer it. “I’m old and tired, and she’s young and stupid and forgot her key card.”

Probably better at the hotel than in the brownie pan she’d been hanging out with for most of that party. “I think she’s...staying here tonight?” Lexa’s voice raises with the end of the sentence without meaning to. Clarke is still too invested in her word as she begins moving letters around.

“Okay, well you two try not to have too much fun,” Abby says. “I’m sure I’ll see you sometime this trip, Lexa. Take care until then, okay?”

“Will do,” she answers, exchanging good nights before hanging up the phone and tossing it back to Clarke. “Thanks for the help on that one.”

“Sure thing,” she mutters, completely unaware of Lexa’s sarcasm. “Okay, I got it.” She pulls her hands back, and Lexa reads “caffiane.”
With a heavy sigh, Lexa nods, relenting. “Those might be the hardest earned 26 points anyone has ever gotten in a game of Scrabble. She took too much pity on her to argue anymore. This was just painful.

“I’m out of tiles,” Clarke declares, falling onto her back and staring up at the ceiling. “Game over.”

“That’s not…” Lexa starts to argue but then stops. “I kicked your ass,” she says instead, following Clarke’s lead and laying back on the floor.

Clarke is silent for a long moment, causing Lexa to poke her head up and look at her, wondering if she had passed out. “I get extra points for effort,” she declares, a bobbing finger-pointed over in Lexa’s direction. “God,” she throws her arm over her face, blocking out the light. “I could stand to sober up by now.”

Lexa knew what that was like, when the alcohol was still lingering, lips numb and head fuzzy when it wasn’t what you needed any more.

That was the thing about dulling yourself to the world. You didn’t always get to decide when it came back into focus.

“The first time I got high was off of four puffs of a joint,” Lexa reminisces, that hazy slowing had lulled her body, erasing some of the anxieties, making her muscles unclench and her breathing even out. “It was great until I was convinced my mom had put a tracker in my shirt collar and started walking home, thinking the police were tailing me.”

“Oh no,” Clarke laughs. “You’re a paranoid stoner.”

“I’m a nothing stoner now,” Lexa corrects. Though it might be the casual California way, it was not for her. She was paranoid enough as is.

Clarke opens and closes her mouth, lips making little popping sounds as she brought them together and apart, again and again. “It’s kind of fucked up,” she says after a minute. “All humanity is set up to do is survive, and we have all this shit just to make it bearable, to try and create some twisted form of fun.”

It was fucked up, kind of like most other things with humanity. “Is that why you ate three brownies?” Lexa asks, voice teasing. “To make life bearable?”

“Nah,” Clarke answers, hand sloppily waving through the air before falling back to the floor with a heavy thud. “I’m just a whore for chocolate.”

Without meaning to, Lexa laughs. There’s something about the drop in Clarke’s voice, the husky tone slurring words while proclaiming a love for chocolate, that gets to her half-asleep brain.

“You have a nice laugh,” Clarke hums. “You should only hang out with people who make you laugh.”

The phrasing throws her off. “Maybe people should try harder to make me,” she challenges in response.

“What do you call an alligator wearing a vest?” Clarke asks, head turning towards Lexa, cheek pressed against the carpet and hooded eyes watching her across from a half filled out Scrabble board.

“Beats me,” she remarks, trying not to smile before the joke has even been delivered.
“An investigator.”

Lexa raises an eyebrow because that was kind of a terrible joke, but then Clarke is snorting, laughter spilling out past her lips and through her nose and Lexa can’t help but join in until her stomach is shaking and her body flooding with warmth.

“You’re pretty,” Clarke says, effectively stopping the last dregs of laughter.

Apparently, Lexa wasn’t the only one who lacked impulse control. “You’re drunk.”

An eyebrow shoots up. “It’s only polite to tell me I’m pretty too.”

But that makes Lexa’s mouth go dry and her hands to twist in the fibers of the carpet. Because Clarke was pretty. She was very pretty. Not just in an objectional, yes this fellow female is nice to look at sort of way either. Clarke was full on hot. Hey, let’s make out and maybe hang out horizontally in bed for a little bit sort of hot. The sort of attractive that flared up every immeasurably gay cell in Lexa’s body with want and desire and attraction that doesn’t dwindle.

Pretty was an insult. Pretty was belittling to the grander scheme of what Clarke might just be.

And this was without beer goggles.

“You’re pretty too,” Lexa finally says, heart, tripping over its beat and stomach twisting against the mac and cheese. Because she was stupid and naive and too easily carried away. Because she never learned a lesson or wised up. Because Clarke was a pretty girl and she was just lying on her apartment floor admitting it.

There’s no response, though. When Lexa looks over after several empty minutes, she finds Clarke with lips slightly parted and eyes gently shut.

Well then, Lexa would just be keeping this one to her self it would seem.

Chapter End Notes

May I present for your reading pleasures, chapter 2. Hopefully with a little less drama attached than with chapter 1 lol. I think I'm going to aim for a Monday and Thursday update schedule. I do go out of town next week, though, so that might not quite happen. Anyway, hope you all enjoyed meeting Clarke and have a good next few days.
The front door swinging open is enough to rouse Lexa. She opens her eyes to see an upside down Raven standing over top of her with a raised eyebrow. “Morning there, Lexa,” Raven says, eyes moving from Lexa to the Scrabble board to Clarke, who was stretched out on her stomach, snoring softly with her head cradled on her arms. “You two get hot and heavy last night?”

“Huh?” she’s too tired to do this right now.

“Clarke’s wearing my bathrobe and, I don’t know about you, but nothing gets me going like some word games.” She’s chuckling to herself as she kicks off her shoes and throws her bag down on the floor.

Lexa fights out a sputtering form of an answer. “I did-and we didn’t-I would never...with your sister.”

“Whoa there, Lexa, don’t have an aneurysm on me.” She crouches in front of her, patting Lexa’s head. “You can bone my sister. Just wait till she moves out, ‘kay?”

“Shh!” Lexa responds, loudly. “Just...go take a shower or something.” Raven always showered after nights out. Washing the evening off of herself, she would always declare. More like cleansing the one night stand off from her before it could turn into anything else, Lexa speculated.

Raven raises an eyebrow but stands, shucking her shirt on her way to the bathroom. “If only I had my bathrobe!” she calls behind her.

Lexa groans, covering her face with her hands. Because yeah, this might not look particularly great. After all, she and Clarke were both only half dressed, and they probably both looked like a mess and Raven is always going on about how much Lexa needs to blow off some steam already.

Impressively, Clarke continues to sleep, undisturbed by any of the noise or movement in the apartment.
Lexa pulls herself off the floor and slips into her room, shutting the door and leaning her body against it as she blew out a breath.

Okay, this was no big deal, she thinks. Raven was more than likely to believe they’d done nothing but play a board game on the living room floor because she would expect nothing more of Lexa anyway. And Clarke probably wouldn’t remember half of last night. Surely she wouldn’t recall labeling Lexa as “double sexy” or the fact that she practically undressed her with her eyes or the more or less seductive way she had announced that she should just take her clothes off instead of Lexa putting any on.

Lexa clears her throat. That would definitely be forgotten. So would the way Lexa’s cheeks kept flushing or how her words stammered or the manner her eyes kept gravitating to Clarke’s hips or breasts or the exposed skin of her neck and shoulder, mouth going dry. That would all be erased as well.

All at once, Lexa fully regrets the fact that she’d remained sober while Clarke was entirely inebriated. Now they were left with a power imbalance. Not last night, nothing happened for their to be any sort of power imbalance there, but this morning. Lexa was going to remember every second of that three hour Scrabble game and how Clarke’s eyebrows furrowed when she was thinking particularly hard and the deep, throaty laugh she developed when she got tired. Lexa was stuck with this dumb little crush that she’d fallen into in a matter of minutes and Clarke was barely even going to remember her name. One thing could be for certain, she was not going to remember how to spell caffeine.

Something of which Lexa could use right about now. They’d been up till almost two in the morning. Lexa didn’t remember the last time she had seen two in the morning. Even when she went out she returned prior to two in the morning. Sleep was important. Lexa liked sleep. Not enough to stop ridiculous Scrabble games with girls she doesn’t know, apparently. Who knew?

One look at her phone, which was very, very charged now, and she feels her heart drop into her stomach. While she’d been out there making heart eyes at her roommate’s drunk sister, her mother had called her four times. Great.

There are voicemails and texts that surely would spell out her mother’s disappointment in crystal clear detail, but Lexa ops to just call her back and save the pain and suffering of listening to the recorded tone of distaste.

“Well about time,” is the greeting her mother chooses.
“Sorry,” Lexa sighs automatically. There was no point to any other response here. “I was working on my paper last night and fell asleep on the couch.”

“Hm,” her mother answers. “You fill me with confidence that you’ll maintain your partial scholarship more and more every day, Alexandra.”

It was seven in the morning. How was Lexa already in this much trouble at seven in the morning? “It’s not due until the end of the week. Don’t worry.” It seemed unlikely that worry is what hid behind her mother’s comment. More like dismay.

"I'm sure," she answers, sounding anything but. "Now, I was calling about my upcoming trip. There are some important questions I need answers regarding."

"You aren't coming for a month," Lexa replies without thinking. How else was she supposed to respond? It was a literal thirty days, and Lexa had gotten four phone calls in three hours to ensure there were answers to these, apparently, very timely questions. There are a heavy few seconds of silence on the other end, and Lexa regrets her words immediately. “I just meant-”

“It hardly matters what you mean, Alexandra.” Her mother’s words are quick and snapping, the end of each one definitive and sharp, her name the tip of the blade. “If you come across as rude then that’s what you are. Understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” she answers back promptly, just like she’s been trained to do. “I’m sorry I didn’t return your call sooner.”

“Better,” she grumbles, and Lexa fights back pointing out that if you come across as rude, then you are. “Now, as you know, the reunion is on a Saturday. I’ve sent you pictures of multiple dresses for the event. I want you to pick one and send me your measurements so I can be sure to buy the right size.”

Twenty one years old and her mother was still dressing her. “I don’t think my measurements have changed.”

“Were you asked that question?” her mother retorts, accepting Lexa’s quiet “no,” in response and moving on. “Now, since I’m sure you have no one to come with you,” her mother could at least have the decency to be a little less direct with her jabs. “I have multiple friends with sons at Stanford, a couple who go to San Jose State if we get truly desperate.”
Oh, she was desperate alright. “Well, actually, mom-” Lexa tries to correct her, she really does.

“Now, we should let them know ahead of time so we can make sure we aren’t rude. I’ll send pictures of them too, so that you can select one, maybe check out their Facebook pages and Instagrams.”

Her mother, the social media literate. Even on the internet, Lexa couldn’t escape her. “Should I send them my measurements as well?” she deadpans.

The answer she receives is a heavy sigh. Her mom would have been up for exactly an hour and fortyfive minutes, and she was already exhausted by her child. “If you could not behave like a hormonal teenager for a five-minute conversation I would appreciate it.”

“I’d really rather not go with a boy. I mean, I told you-”

“I have to go,” her mother cuts her off quickly before Lexa stands a chance of getting her full thought out. “I’ll send everything over via your school email so you can be sure to get it. Please have a response to me by the end of the day.”

There’s nothing but silence on the other end as soon as the sentence is out. No goodbyes or I love yous, or any of the things Lexa assumes are normal end of the conversation etiquettes. Like oh, letting people finish their sentences.

“Ugh!” she shouts, ready to chuck her phone across the room but pausing, a broken phone would help no one. She settles for her pillow which isn’t nearly as satisfying and angrily pulls on a T-shirt and sweatpants, storming out of her room and to the kitchen that was perpetually in one state of unclean or another.

She grabs a sponge, wets it, and begins to scrub the countertops, fingers digging into the porous yellow so deeply her nails leave little, crescent indentations as she scrubs up tomato sauce and dried on coffee. She’s muttering to herself, little comments she wishes she could say to her mom, the little sayings she’s heard again and again throughout her childhood come through her mouth in a high-pitched, mocking tone.

“You okay?”
She spins, hand flying to her chest where her heart is racing, either from shock or the form of cardio that Lexa chose to participate in that just so happened to be cleaning.

Of course, it’s Clarke standing there, hair in disarray and eyes a little bloodshot. A hungover, half awake Clarke was equally as attractive as an intoxicated, late evening Clarke, apparently. Lexa was hoping that in the natural morning light streaming through their balcony door that some hideous marker of Clarke’s would become known and quell the butterflies flitting around in her stomach. The opposite is what she finds. As if this morning wasn’t sucking enough already.

“Fine,” Lexa bites, eyes opening wide when she realizes just how harsh her tone was. “Sorry,” she sighs, head dropping. “I’m just...a little...this place is a disaster.” And she turns back to her countertop, not looking behind her again even though she knows Clarke is still standing there, can feel the eyes watching her.

This is why she didn’t want another person living here. She couldn’t clean herself into exhaustion and shut up every thought in her head when someone was constantly existing, triggering new thoughts to be worked away. She couldn’t forget herself when she was so clearly being thought of by another.

And then there’s Raven reappearing. Lexa hears the bathroom door open and close and the footsteps that stop next to Clarke, and she feels like a goddamn zoo exhibit.

“Can I help either of you?” she says, throwing her sponge to the counter, about as effective as throwing her pillow, and puts her arms on her hips as she faces them.

“You alright there, buttercup?” Raven asks, clearly unbothered by Lexa’s attitude. She knew exactly why this version of Lexa came to life. She knew to give her space and let her clean the whole apartment and not ask any questions. If nothing else, Raven got a clean space out of the deal.

“I’m fine,” she growls, growing more and more irritated by Clarke’s presence. Could they just leave already? Didn’t Raven have a walk she needed to go on about now?

Raven holds her hands up in surrender. “Alright, well if you scrub right through the counter don’t come crying to me.” And then she turns and leaves, because she knows that’s what is needed right now.
Clarke doesn’t seem to possess the same common sense, however. “You sure you’re good?”

And her bathrobe is in all sorts of disarray with her hair like a wild, golden halo around her face and an even, puckered look of concern etched into her features.

Which isn’t what Lexa needs. She does not need her best friend’s unexpectedly attractive sister asking her if she’s okay while standing there looking all...hot and stuff.

“Yep,” she answers, hating the way the word is short and sharp, like how her mother talks.

That’s still not enough, apparently, because Clarke doesn’t move. “You just seem a little. Well, I can go try and scrounge you up one of those brownies if you want,” she jokes.

Lexa smiles for a second despite herself. “I think I’m good,” she says, but there’s less bite to her words, more give with each syllable. “But thank you.”

Clarke nods a few times before her lips stretch into a smile. “Anytime. We are in California after all.”

Despite how utterly furious Lexa had been minutes ago she can only hold back her own answering smile for a second. There was something about pretty girls smiling at her that she had never been very good at resisting. That was how Costia had ever become... Costia in the first place.

“Well, I’m just gonna…” Lexa fades, picking her sponge back up and holding it in example.

“Right,” Clarke answers. “You have fun now,” before turning and leaving.

Lexa turns to face the wall as soon as she walks away and does her best to take deep, calming breaths to lessen the frantic beatings of her heart. She tells herself that it’s from the anger she feels towards her mother and not the feelings of attraction settling deep into the pit of her stomach.

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pauses, casting a confused look to the front door. Raven never had visitors this early.

Before she has to worry about answering it, Raven comes out of her room, laptop balancing on her hand as she unlocks and opens the front door. “Morning, Ma,” she says, turning to walk away before Abby grabs her shoulder and drags her in for a hug.

“I only get to do this so often now,” she says as she kisses Raven cheek even as her daughter bats her off. “I miss it.”

“You miss me fending you off?” Raven laughs, but then she throws her free arm back around her mom again.

They both look to Lexa then, finding her staring. She quickly looks away, pretending like she has been entirely occupied with something else this whole time.

“Well, sweetheart,” Abby says to her next, pulling her, rubber gloves and all, into her own hug. “How have you been?” She was always soft and gentle. Lexa wondered if Raven had talked about Lexa’s less than spectacular relationship with her own mother which then resulted in this tender side of Abby or if this was just how the woman was in general.

“Good,” she answers quickly. “Busy.” Lexa thinks about the way her mother would reprimand her for the short, empty answers, but Abby just smiles again.

“Busy is a good thing at your age,” she says, walking back to the living room. “Where’s my other kid?” Her eyes glance to the still on display Scrabble board. “Man, you went easy on her.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Clarke says, a towel wrapped around her freshly washed hair on top of her head. “She still destroyed me.”

Raven scoffs. “So did our third grade cousin last year so don’t feel too special.” Well, she certainly wouldn’t now.

“You girls ready or what?” Abby asks, eyeing Clarke’s current towel hat.
She yanks it off, fluffing her still wet hair that was already curling back into its previous state. Lexa very intentionally turns away from a bent over Clarke shaking her wild mane of hair out. There were boundaries and she needed to implement them for herself right about now. Simple things, things like not checking a girl out in front of her mother.

“Can Lexa come?” is Clarke’s follow up question.

“Oh, I-”

“Of course,” Abby interrupts. “You’re always invited. I know Raven can’t cook to save her life, so I’m pretty sure I owe you for my daughter’s continued livelihood.”

“I wouldn’t want to impose,” Lexa answers because that was the polite way to say ‘hell no’ to an invitation. She’d seen her mother do it enough times.

“Please,” Abby waves the idea away.

“I’m not exactly dressed to go out,” is her last ditch effort, hopeful that Abby’s previous desire to leave would beat out her newfound hope of including Lexa.

“We can wait a minute.”

Okay, so that failed. “I’ll be right back,” Lexa says, trying her best to slap a smile on her face until she’s in her room with the door shut. There’s not exactly ample time to worry about what to wear so she settles for shorts and a flannel, baseball cap atop her unwashed hair.

Just before walking out, she grabs her phone off the nightstand. She wasn’t about to repeat last night’s mistake all over again.

They pile into Abby’s rental, going to a nearby cafe which was more cutesy than practical, plants hanging in watering cans from the ceiling and fairy lights along the brick wall. It was very San Francisco. Art hangs on the wall from local artists, little pieces of paper taped up next to them, offering pricing and artist information.
Raven elbows Clarke’s side, pointing to it. “There’s a few empty spots,” she says and Clarke, for whatever reason, shoots Lexa a glance before turning red and looking away.

They order, Lexa taking her chocolate croissant and coffee to a table in the corner, settling herself into a seat and waiting for the rest to come join her before she starts. Raven shows up, already munching on a bite of her sandwich as Clarke loudly disputes some claim or another.

“Alright, quit fighting,” Abby says with a roll of her eyes.

“We aren’t fighting, Mother,” Raven corrects. “This is how we bond.”

“A little less bonding would be appreciated,” she sighs. “Good luck living with this,” she says to Lexa, gentle smile and easy eyes. “I swear I tried to raise them better.”

Lexa pushes down all those comments that initially rise to the surface of how much she does not want to live with “this” but instead smiles politely and says, “I’ve already put up with Raven for this long. How much worse can Clarke be?”

“Objection!” Raven shouts, hand slapping the table.

“Overruled,” Clarke retorts, tongue sticking out. “I am a pleasure to live with, don’t worry.” Her eyes land right on Lexa’s, making the bite of croissant in her mouth turn to a paste as her mouth goes dry. Living with Clarke was going to be anything but a pleasure. Not that this fact was Clarke’s fault. The best she’s got to respond with is a, “heh,” as she eats, eyes suddenly fixated on her coffee.

Thankfully, Abby takes over the conversation, asking Raven all sorts of questions about school and her grades and making all the appropriate, mom-like sounds and responses in all the right places.

“Is she this much of a show off to you too?” Clarke asks, inching towards Lexa’s ear, her breath warm as it brushes past her, her thumb jutting momentarily in Raven’s direction.

Someone was not getting the “back off” signals Lexa was sending out. Probably because she wasn’t actually doing a very good job of sending them out. “Pretty sure she’d put her own report card on the
fridge if we had any magnets,” Lexa jokes in response. Joking was a stellar way to send out back off signals.

Clarke laughs. Lexa melts.

“Are you sure you don’t want something else?” Clarke asks, pointing towards the half eaten dessert on Lexa’s plate.

She blushes. Blushing at casual comments weren’t exactly promising responses. It didn’t make any sense. “I’m sure,” she answers. “I’ve always had a bit of a sweet tooth,” she admits unprompted. Again, offering information that wasn’t asked of you. One stellar way to get someone to stop talking to you. She was crushing it over here.

Clarke has this grin as she watches Lexa, a tooth coming out to bite her lip for a second. She looks like she’s about to say something when Abby says her name. The two of them snap apart, Lexa hadn’t even been aware she was inching closer until she’s pulling herself back to the middle of her seat.

“I asked if there was anything you had left to take over to Raven’s,” she says, a look being cast between Lexa and Clarke for a second. “I leave tomorrow evening, remember.” Then she gets this sad look in her eyes, a joking pouty lip sticking out before throwing an arm around each of her daughters. “I guess I’m just going to have to tell Marcus we’re moving out here,” she says, turning her head from side to side as she kisses their hairlines. “I can’t have both of my kids out in California and stay in Omaha of all places. I don’t even like Nebraska.”

“Does anybody?” Raven asks, plucking Lexa’s croissant off her plate and taking a bite.

“Your father,” Abby sighs. “Who says hello, by the way, he wanted to come out with me to see Clarke off, but something came up with work...I didn’t get specifics.”

Raven holds up her cell phone. “I know,” she says. “We didn’t get divorced,” she jokes. The couple had split a few years ago. Raven had just rolled her eyes and said, “I’m adopted and still the child of a broken home over here.” She got a kick out of being melodramatic sometimes. “How’s new daddy?”

Abby’s head tilts as she shoots Raven a look. “Marcus is good. Tomorrow afternoon is the dress fitting, don’t forget. I doubt you’ll make it home in time much before the wedding, so it’s now or
Raven groans. “I can think of no worse way to spend a Sunday than trying on dresses.”

“For your mother’s wedding,” Abby reminds her. “Suck it up. You’re welcome to come too, Lexa,” Abby says with a smile. “Not that I think you would find it very exciting. Just saying, the invite is out there.”

“Save yourself,” Raven says. “There’s nothing worse than bridal shops.”

“You make it so easy to be the good daughter,” Clarke teases.

“My report cards would say otherwise,” Raven shoots back. “Or my college tuition.” She’s smirking, proud and challenging.

Clarke’s quick to retort, “Well your relationship status leaves something to be desired last I checked.”

“Oh, c’mon! Last I checked you were still sulking over Nylah.”

Now Clarke is looking to Lexa with some slight panic in her eyes before turning back to Raven and gritting her teeth as she says, “I was not sulking, and that was months ago. The last real relationship you were in was what, two years ago?”

“How is Kyle?” Abby asks pleasantly, not even bothered by the bickering.

Raven shrugs. Poor Kyle Wick had been the first guy Raven had legitimately dated since the self-declared “relationship disaster” that was Finn Collins back home. She’d dated Kyle for a solid three months before he dropped the “L” bomb and she dropped him precisely twelve hours after telling Lexa about the incident, less than thrilled.

Since then Raven’s longest relationship included the girl who had stayed over during Labor Day weekend. And that was only because they had the extra day off. The following Tuesday she was never heard about again.
“Spectacular,” Raven answers, clearly grumpy at this point.

“It’s okay, darling,” Lexa says, breaking out Raven’s nickname for her in an attempt to cheer her up. “I know you’re just too committed to me to ever have time for another.”

Raven breaks out in a smile, stealing another bite as she says, “At least you get me, babe.”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize this is a good bit filler, story set up can be a bitch sometimes. Thanks so much for all of the positive feedback, it has been wonderful! I will be going out of town but so long as I still have signal at some point on Monday, I intend to upload again then.
Sunday morning Lexa wakes up to her blaring alarm, unhappily attempting to ignore it for a minute as she pulls the comforter over her head to filter out the noise.

It didn’t do a very good job.

Sitting up she scans, looking for the source of the noise. Her phone had ended up on the floor at some point in the night, forcing Lexa to get up and shut it off. Which was probably for the best, walk time with Raven was in twenty minutes and she’d be on the receiving end of a week’s worth of bitching if she missed it.

As per most mornings, she throws on the most accessible, meaning comfortable and at least moderately clean, thing she can find, hair gathered up in a knot on her head and glasses on. It was the best she had to offer on a weekend morning, especially for Raven.

At no point yesterday had her friend returned after she went out with her mom and Clarke later that afternoon, Lexa bowing out of any further family fun by citing her research paper (which she really did need to start on).

Figuring she had probably just slept over in the hotel, which Lexa would have been taking advantage of all weekend if she had a say, she figured she better just meet her friend at the trail instead of wait to get in any trouble.

Lexa grabs a bar, considering it breakfast enough and jogs down the steps to her car. The little Honda Civic didn’t run quite as nicely as Raven’s Jeep, but it got her from point A to point B. And, best of all, she had paid for this little winner entirely on her own. Meaning, at least in this aspect, she was in no way indebted to her mother. Besides, whenever the little guy croaked and stopped moving, she simply bought Raven a family sized bag of Doritos and said please.

If Lexa had to choose someone to be indebted to, it would be Raven.

She gets to the trail throwing the car into park and getting out her phone to check for any texts. She sends a quick ‘I’m here!’ to Raven.

When she steps out of the car, Lexa can feel the wind blowing more than usual, almost cold against her skin. She tightens her hair and glances around for her friend. Maybe it shouldn’t be a surprise, but even still she stops in shock when she sees none other than Clarke Griffin sitting on the bench at the head of the trail, eyes downcast on her phone.

If she wanted, Lexa could probably turn right around, get back in her car, and drive away without ever having acknowledged the fact that she saw Clarke, with no Raven, there. Or at least she had that window of opportunity, but by the time she finishes weighing her options, Clarke is looking up, shooting Lexa a smile.

“Hey,” she says easily, pocketing her phone in her sweatshirt as she stands. “Where’s Raven?”

“I thought she was with you,” Lexa answers, quickly confirming that this was not the case.

Clarke’s eyebrows furrow. “I thought she was with you.”
“’Fraid not.” Which, maybe if it wasn’t Raven she’d be worried, but Raven sometimes vanished for a night or two. Lexa knew better than to get concerned. Now if she missed a class or failed a test, that would be means for concern. “Well, I guess we should just…” Lexa fades off before finishing her statement. Leave, she thinks loudly, just say leave. But she doesn’t really want to.

“I wouldn’t mind a walk still,” Clarke interjects. “If you’re interested.”

If she’s interested. Oh god, if that isn’t one hell of a loaded question. Lexa doesn’t think too hard about it as she says, “Yeah.” Which of course means she’ll just overthink it later, but that was Future Lexa’s problem. Current Lexa was offering a nervous smile and shifting her weight between her feet. There were still probably ten feet of distance between them, but Lexa worries if they’re much closer she’ll make even more of a fool of herself.

The wind picks up around them, the branches shaking in response. A few leaves are shaken loose, falling slowly to the ground around them. The sky was overcast, even, Lexa wouldn’t be surprised if the fog off the bay came rolling further onto land today. That happened on days like this, when the air was chillier and the wind quicker.

They set off down the same old familiar trail that Lexa has walked almost every single day for the last two years. It looks different today, more deserted and…intimate. Why did this feel like sabotage?

“Hey, I wanted to tell you thank you,” Clarke says out of nowhere, pulling her sweatshirt sleeves over her hands and playing with the material. “For letting me stay with you guys, I mean. I know Raven can be a little…convincing when she wants to be, and I’m sure another roommate isn’t exactly what you were looking for but… thank you.”

Lexa shrugs like this wasn’t costing her a lot. Which, okay financially it was going to cost her less because Raven swore Clarke would chip in for rent, but emotionally and mentally? That was a whole other story. The wind blows again, a scent of raspberries and coconut and something distinctly feminine hitting Lexa’s nose. Physically too, this was definitely costing her something physically. “If by convincing you mean downright manipulative then I’d say you’ve pinned your sister right.”

Clarke laughs, “That’s Raven alright. Total pain in the ass.”

“Ridiculously overdramatic.”

“Too smart for her own good.”

“And far too self-aware of the fact that she’s smart,” Lexa tacks on.

Clarke’s quiet for a second. “She’s also the best, though. You know?” She smiles when Lexa agrees. “Like, I didn’t think I wanted a sister by any means, but then my mom literally just brought Raven home one day and, god, I couldn’t imagine life without her.”

Lexa has always wondered about what Raven referred to as her “origin story” but never pushed. Raven wasn’t one for sharing, neither was Lexa. They got that about each other. “I wish I had a sister,” Lexa admits quietly. It would be nice, she thinks, to have someone who just got all of the intricacies of her life and her mom and had experienced the same upbringing. It was the sort of bond she craved with someone else. “Or an anyone, I guess.” She doesn’t know why she says it, but once the words are out there, they aren’t easily taken back.

“What do you mean?” Clarke asks, her pace slowing.

“Oh, I…” she sighs, it was her own fault after all. “It’s always just been me and my mom which makes things complicated.” With a shrug, Lexa shoots a glance off to the side of the trail a
particularly strong gust of wind whooshing around them as leaves get caught in a momentary whirlwind, and Clarke’s hair goes flying around her head before settling back into place, a little more haphazard than it had been before.

“What about your dad?” Clarke asks, arms wrapping around her midsection. “Sorry. You don’t have to answer that.”

“It’s okay,” Lexa replies automatically, even though it isn’t. Even though it didn’t feel okay at all. “He left when I was little, like two or something. I don’t really remember.”

“Oh,” Clarke answers, voice half lost to the space around them, sound waves interrupted by the wind rushing through. “That’s...that kind of sucks.”

It did. Lexa wouldn’t pretend otherwise. “So...art,” Lexa says. Not her strongest start to a conversation, but she needed a topic switch sooner rather than later. “You-you make art.”

Clarke chuckles, arms back to swinging at her side as she nods. “I try to make art, at least,” she says, and with her smile wide and her eyes bright, Lexa thinks maybe she just is art. “Do you know anything about it?”

There was exactly one art course required in her major. Lexa had opted for Visual and Performing Arts that was hosted entirely online. She never even glanced at the power points, instead responding to discussion posts based on other student’s responses. For her final, she stole a ticket stub to the school play from a friend who offered rudimentary comments on “A Midsummer’s Night Dream” which Lexa wrote a four page paper off of. She had gotten a 98% in the class overall and a very important lesson on the difference between working hard and working smart.

“Some stuff,” she lies. “I like Van Gogh?” Damn, her voice did that question thing again.

“And Picasso, right?” Clarke questions with a glimmer in her eyes, seemingly unbothered by the continuing unpleasant weather. The more Lexa was thinking about it, the more she realized just how empty the trail was right now. “Those are the two artists everybody references. You know, when they don’t know anything.”

Her shoulder bumps against Lexa’s. If it wasn’t covered, Lexa is pretty certain the whole area of skin would have just burst into brilliant red.

Lexa starts to laugh in an attempt to play it off. The sprinkle of rain hitting her glasses cuts her off, though. It was starting to come together why no one else had shown up to the trail today.

“Huh,” she muses as more drops begin to fall around them, the leaves shifting with the weight of drops hitting them. “I guess I’ve gotten so used to the weather here I kind of forgot about, you know, checking it.”

“A little drizzle never hurt,” Clarke answers. As if the sky itself is responding, the rain picks up with a gust of wind to accompany it. “Or you know, a total downpour.” The rain continues to pick up, “Damn, I was hoping that would work.”

Lexa giggles despite herself. Clarke’s gaze darts from the falling rain around her to Lexa’s face. She holds her eyes for a moment, and the world seems to slow, or maybe it begins to spin a little bit faster, and that’s why Lexa gets a rush of dizziness, her knees going weak beneath her.

The moment is lost entirely as the sky opens wide, the rain beginning to dump on them at an alarming rate. “So I think it might be time to run,” Clarke shouts over the heavy rainfall, feet moving faster in the opposite direction they had just been heading as Lexa follows.
Lexa doesn’t respond, just feels her gait shift from a fast walk to a full out run. It’s been so long since she’s run with any sort of lightness. None of the pressure of a soccer game with her mother on the sidelines or completing the track fast enough in high school, no whirring belt of a treadmill maintaining her pace. She feels like a kid, feet flying beneath her, stride wide as the balls of her feet smacked the earth with each step. It’s like recess, sprinting from the outstretched hand of another child, or playing in the backyard, convinced you could take off like a plane if you went fast enough.

She’s running, getting properly drenched in the process as the ponytail holder falls from her haphazard hair, falling into the puddles behind her. It’s only a minute later that she realizes her gasping breaths are simultaneous laughs, bubbling out of her with each hurried step.

Her eyes meet Clarke’s who mirrors her wide smile, breathing heavy and fast but eventually falling into the same broken giggle as Lexa.

They get back to the car faster than Lexa expected, her key is still buried in the inner pocket of her shorts, but Clarke unlocks the rental from her mom and shouts, “Get in!” so she does.

They slam the doors, shutting out the loud, fast rainfall, before turning to one another, bursting into laughter all over again. “A little drizzle never hurt,” Lexa mocks, barely keeping a straight face before she’s laughing.

“How was I supposed to know!” Clarke yells back, her last word coming out broken with her laugh.

“What are the odds of a freak rainstorm in San Francisco?”

“That I don’t know,” Lexa says, her body shivering.

Clarke starts the engine, switching her previous air conditioning over to full blast heat. “So that was something.”

Lexa looks woefully at her own little car across the parking lot. She wasn’t looking forward to getting back out in this to get to her car. “Guess we know why Raven bailed. I guess I should…”

“I don’t know about you,” Clarke says when Lexa fades off for a second. “But I’m freezing, and I’m pretty sure coffee is the only possible fix here.”

Without even allowing herself to, Lexa’s face breaks out into a wide, happy smile. “I know just the place.”

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The Coffee Arc was one of the many notorious locations just outside of downtown San Francisco. It was eclectic and slightly off-putting in all the right ways. The music never syncing with the tone, the decorations absurdly mismatched, the workers always a little more abrasive and impatient than usual.

“You come here, like, three times a week. How could you possibly need to look at a menu?” Or maybe the last part was just because Octavia Blake practically lived behind this counter, a tiny, ineffectual black apron around her waist.

With a gesture of her hand, Lexa waits for Clarke to come up beside her. “It’s for her,” she answers.

Recognition dawns on Octavia’s face at about the same time Clarke shouts, “You!” as she points an accusing finger to the girl behind the counter, her cry just loud enough to garner some attention from the people around them for a moment. “You’re the one who made those brownies.”

“Okay,” Octavia answers, arms crossing over her chest and her hip leaning against the counter. “First
of all, my boyfriend made them because he is the sexiest Betty Crocker alive. Second of all, you’re the dumbass eating brownies at a party without knowing there’s pot in them. C’mon, this is not anyone’s fault but your own.”

Lexa shrugs, “She might have a point.” They weren’t exactly in Nebraska. Weed was probably in most things at a party.

“I spent thirty minutes panicking to Raven that our mom was going to call the cops on us,” Clarke says.

Octavia shrugs, passing over a menu. “That’s your own damn fault, Raven’s sister.”

“Clarke,” she corrects quickly, hand sticking out in greeting.

“Right, Clarke,” Octavia shakes it for a second before pulling her hand back. “Well, in the effort of full disclosure, nothing served here has any pot in it. At least, not that I’m legally allowed to say,” she says with a wink.

“She’s joking, right?” Clarke says to Lexa. “Winking means joking.”

Lexa shoots O a look, momentarily placing a hand on Clarke’s upper back to push her towards a table. “We’re going to go sit down and figure out what we want, and you can come take our order like an actual waitress,” she instructs. Octavia seemed to have stopped listening halfway through.

At the table Clarke opens up the small paper menu, eyes scanning the pages.

They were both still soaked to the bone, ten minutes of heat on the way over had only done so much. Lexa is attempting to wrangle her hair into something resembling manageable without a ponytail holder, but her fingers just keep getting caught in knots and tangles. She gives up. Clarke seems nonplussed with her current state, her hair still wet enough that it was more tamed than usual, her wet clothes clinging to her body, a small puddle being created beneath each of them.

“So you come here often?” Clarke asks, head jutting towards the front counter.

“I guess,” Lexa answers. In this area, they were surrounded by coffee shops and bakeries. For the first year, she’d been determined to try them all, not wanting to laden herself down with routine or get lost in easiness. Six months in she’d had this place’s chocolate raspberry flavored roast and she forgot all about her promises. “When Octavia’s not being a bitch she gives me free stuff,” she says the bitch part loud enough in hopes of her friend hearing.

Clarke nods, finger flipping the paper edge of the menu back and forth along the pad of it.

Now that they were here, wet and cold with nothing but the Annie soundtrack playing in the background and a few fellow college students plopped around on pillows or armchairs, Lexa was realizing she didn’t have anything left to say. Conversation wasn’t coming naturally, and that was enough to send her in a tailspin. She was very much stuck here now.

“So what’s your major?” Clarke asks after another minute.

“I guess,” Lexa answers. In this area, they were surrounded by coffee shops and bakeries. For the first year, she’d been determined to try them all, not wanting to laden herself down with routine or get lost in easiness. Six months in she’d had this place’s chocolate raspberry flavored roast and she forgot all about her promises. “When Octavia’s not being a bitch she gives me free stuff,” she says the bitch part loud enough in hopes of her friend hearing.

Clarke’s eyebrows rise for a second before resting back into place. “Fancy,” she mumbles under her breath, settling back in her seat.
“I don’t go to Stanford for nothing,” she responds, though the linguistics program was the second reasoning behind her choice of school.

The music switches from a group of kids bellowing on about their hard knock life and into some heavy metal, the transition less than subtle as the volume jumps with the switch. There’s a vague, “Sorry!” being called as someone turns it down.

“So tell me, Lexa the linguistics major, what exactly does one do with that?”

Another unoriginal question. For the first year after declaring her major, she had done nothing but explain it. Every family member, friend, even some of her high school teachers, they all were more than impressed that she had found something she was interested in, but all anybody cared about was what she was going to do with it. Lexa was sick of always thinking about doing.

She shrugs. “I could teach if I wanted, go on to get my doctorate. Or I could delve more into the science side of it, work in therapies or research studies.” The world was her oyster, and she would appreciate it if everyone would stop acting like it was a clam, ready to slam shut and lock her in. “I haven’t decided.”

“That’s pretty cool,” Clarke says after a moment. “Why linguistics?”

Okay, why was new. Lexa had to narrow her eyes and tap a finger against the table in response to why, searching for an answer. “Really I’m all about the history of it. The development of language across cultures, the transition within English itself, the slang of centuries past and the rapidly changing scope of how we speak and write and communicate as technology plays a role in it. It’s fascinating.”

A slow smile stretches across Clarke’s face, and Lexa can’t decide if she looks like the Cheshire Cat or Alice in Wonderland herself.

“What?” Lexa asks when she doesn’t stop. The smile makes her cross her arms over her chest, suddenly hyper-aware of her own use of language.

“Sorry,” Clarke apologizes. She did that a lot, Lexa thinks, dropping sorry’s left and right even when they weren’t warranted. Lexa wondered what she said when they were. “I like people with passion.”

“I don’t know if I-”

“You do,” Clarke cuts her off. “It’s in your eyes, the same way as mine is in my hands.” She holds them up, silly little jazz hands going for a moment before she chuckles to herself and tucks them back under the table.

Passion, Lexa thinks, that was quite the word. She wondered if there were studies on the word passion alone, at how many different things it could apply to while still melting down to the same core definition, the same inclination of intensity and need and love. Or maybe desperation, maybe passion was just about being desperate enough for something that you would do anything for it. If that was the case, Lexa doesn’t think it applies to her.

“You know,” Octavia comes sidling up to their table, notebook in hand but pencil behind her ear. “There’s this new way of tipping where, for every hour you spend taking up a table without food; you owe twice as much as the tip itself.”

“It’s not our fault if the service sucks,” Lexa shoots back.

“Contrary,” Octavia says, pulling a chair over and straddling the back as she sits down, resting an
arm across the top and her head on top. “I offer such stellar service that I have already put in what I
know you want, and I ensured you two had plenty of time to finish flirting before I interrupted.”

Lexa could feel the blood rush to her face. If she was a smoother person, more relaxed and easy
going, she might play it off. Instead, she just looks away, hoping Clarke doesn’t think it’s strange that
Lexa has suddenly developed a very strong interest in the half of a Barbie doll sticking out of the
wall to her left.

“Whatcha want?” Octavia says to Clarke, pencil poised.

“Um, latte?” she answers, clearly with a question. “And, uh,” she goes back to the menu which had
become more of a prop to mess with than anything else.

Octavia shakes her head, pulling the menu from Clarke’s hands. “You allergic to anything?” Blonde
hair shakes back and forth in response. “Any deep hatreds?”

“Avocado is overrated.”

Octavia blows out a low whistle. “I said deep hatred not controversial, geez.”

And then she walks away. “Wait, but I-”

“I’m afraid you lost your chance,” Lexa tells hers. “She’ll be deciding for you now.” That was
Octavia, everyone else can be mulling and wondering, saying “Oh, I don’t care, whatever you
want,” and Octavia will tolerate it for all of ten seconds before she makes the decision, marching
forward with surety and leading them off to a restaurant or movie. She took charge, and it worked
out, usually.

One time Lexa had gotten a tuna melt and she almost barfed in response. Tuna was not meant to be
hot. Or with cheese.

Before she can say anything else, her phone rings out. Figuring it’s Raven, Lexa picks up, “Hey,
about time,” she says as Clarke rolls her eyes at her sister.

“Is that any way to answer a call, Alexandra?” her mother’s voice asks on the other end.

Shit. “Mom, sorry,” she shoots Clarke a look, biting her lip. Would it be weirder to stay here for the
conversation or get up and walk outside for a minute? “I was expecting a call from my roommate.”

Certainly not from her mom. That made two days in a row. “I see.” They never talked this
frequently.

When she doesn’t add on anything else, Lexa sighs. “How are you?” she asks, trying to hide the
annoyance and bury down the frustration. Did they have to do this every time? Couldn’t she ever just
say what she had to say and move on.

“I’m well, thank you for asking.” Her mother doesn’t return the nicety. “I’m calling because I still
haven’t heard anything from you.” Right, the email with the dresses and the measurements and the
boys. “I hardly think a timely response is asking very much.”

A part of Lexa wants to pinch her voice into a nasty little mockery and repeat her mother’s petty little
sentence back at her. The smart side of her says, “Of course not, I’m sorry,” instead. Because she
was a wuss.

“You have till the end of today, or I’m just going to have to decide for you.”
Oh god, the only thing worse than her mother presenting a list of boys for her to choose from was her mother choosing from the list herself. “I’ll respond just as soon as I get home, promise.”

“Where could you possibly be at nine in the morning on a Sunday?”

“Church,” she answers flatly, ignoring the way she can envision her mother’s manicured eyebrows raising or the irritated gleam in her eye.

“I’m sure.” If possible, her mom’s voice was even dryer than Lexa’s had been. At least she knew where she got it from. “Also I was talking to Preston’s father the other day,” as if Lexa knew who Preston was. “He’s free the weekend of the reunion and would be happy to go. I think you should highly consider him.”

“Mom-”

“He’s well bred, studying to go into pharmaceuticals, and is the goalie for the Stanford lacrosse team.”

Lexa wants to tell her mom that the men’s lacrosse team might as well be a pseudonym for jackass jock who casually date rapes. “I just really don’t-”

“I know, you’re independent. You want to make your own selection, but I just wanted to offer you an opinion to consider.” An opinion to blindly follow is more like it. “He’s a fine looking young man.”

“I don’t want a fine looking young man,” Lexa mutters between gritted teeth, her body turning away from Clarke and facing the back of the restaurant, trying to find some semblance of privacy since her idiotic self had been too dense to walk out in the first place.

“Don’t you take that tone with me.”

The food comes, Octavia throwing her a glance as she sets down Lexa’s favorite coffee and her breakfast sandwich, covered in peanut butter and banana and honey granola all warm and melted on thick slices of toasted sourdough bread. Even that doesn’t get her to relax right now, though.

“This event is important, Alexandra.” Important to show that the poor little dumped woman, the lonely single mom, was thriving and strong and better than everyone else. She would show off her daughter with the perfect figure and the spectacular grades at the great school, and there would be a generic blond haired blue eyed boy to top everything off. “I will not have you behaving like some scandalous school girl too caught up in one trend to the next to behave like a proper young lady.”

A scandalous school girl, nice. Well, at least she was trendy apparently.

“Can’t I just go alone?” she mumbles.

“You know I can’t stand when you speak like that.” Lexa can see her mother now. She can see the way her head falls forward as her fingers pinch the bridge of her nose. She can see the wine glass coming out of the cupboard, anticipating the dark red liquid that will soon fill it. She can see the frustration coating her mother’s skin, the irritation crawling beneath. The disappointment clear in her eyes.

“I’d rather prefer if I wasn’t required to be accompanied by any sort of gentleman caller.”

A tut of disappointment. “I can’t have this conversation with a child. You have till noon before I decide for you.”
The line goes dead.

Slowly, calmly, Lexa places the phone back on the table. She inhales deeply, eyes falling shut as she tries to focus on the metal chair beneath her legs, growing warmer with her body heat against it. She focuses on the smell of freshly ground coffee beans and the warm, half melted peanut butter. She listens to the thrum of country music and the loud laughter from the table across the restaurant.

When Lexa opens her eyes again, Clarke is watching her, a plate of untouched hash browns and egg white omelette in front of her.

“You okay?” she asks.

The wise, seasoned, mature part of her wants to say, “Yes, I’m fine. Just some silly little family drama,” and go back to her breakfast and conversation about passions. Instead, she holds Clarke’s eyes, wondering if Clarke will see the frustration and anger and hurt buried there.

Clarke doesn’t look away.

“Not really,” Lexa admits against her better judgment.

There’s a split second where Clarke opens her mouth, ready to ask a question. Before she does, though, she pauses, picks up her fork and knife and starts to eat. “Wanna talk about it?” she inquires, much like yesterday morning in the kitchen. Only this time she seems more interested in shaking the ketchup out of the glass bottle than listening to what Lexa might have to say.

“Well,” that makes it easier to talk. “My mom and I don’t exactly see eye to eye.”

“You don’t say?” Clarke answers, looking up for a second to shoot Lexa a mischievous glance and a smirk.

“She’s just…” there wasn’t really any just when it came to her mother. “She’s so concerned with how the world views her. And I get it, sort of. She was a single mom, left by her husband to raise a child on her own, maintain a career and a livelihood, on her own. It was a lot of pressure, especially as a woman twenty years ago.” Raven would have a whole thesis ready to whip out on this. Lexa didn’t quite grasp these nuances and historical significance and the means of oppression. “My mom had to work twice as hard to be recognized, speak twice as loud to be heard. And having the right look and the right presentation makes it easier to sell yourself as a whole.”

Clarke’s nodding, taking one small bite of potato after another, as if she’s afraid she’ll run out otherwise and Lexa will stop talking.

“But, ugh, this whole family reunion thing has been the last straw, and it’s still a month away.”

Clarke’s nose wrinkles up. “I think family reunions bring out the worst in anyone,” she says. “For instance, it brought out my uncle in his tighty whities high off the meth he shot up in the playground porta pottie. So, you know. I get that one.”

That gives her pause for a second. “Geez,” Clarke just shrugs and makes a casual gesture for Lexa to carry on. “First she was on me about a stupid dress and the next it’s for my measurements and now this unrelenting insistence on finding me some prep boy to go with.” She groans, head falling to the table. “There’s nothing more hideous to me than walking around in an uncomfortable dress and heels with my arm wrapped just so around some guy named Preston.”

“That’s a terrible name,” Clarke concedes.
“And I told her I was gay,” Lexa blurts out, her head shooting back up. Now she had started. Now she had a newfound frustration and annoyance and all those times she’s been ignored and disregarded are pissing her the hell off. “Does she know how hard that was for me? Does she even care? She’s convinced that since I haven’t been in a relationship with anyone since Costia that my burgeoning sexuality was just a ‘fling’ and a ‘trendy experiment.’”

Word vomit. That was exactly what had just happened.

She’d known Clarke for mere days and had just regurgitated more of her poorly digested feelings to her than Raven had forcefully sucked out of her in two years.

“Well let’s just date then,” Clarke responds, her voice muffled by the mouthful of eggs she has right now.

“What?” Lexa asks as her stomach drops down to her feet and her heart kicks into high gear. Forget cardio, Lexa could just spend thirty minutes with Clarke and experience the same effects.

Clarke swallows and then takes a long sip of coffee. “That’s fucking delicious,” she says, eyes wide. “What is that?” But then she looks back at Lexa’s face and shakes her head a little to reorient herself. “Right, sorry, anyway if your mom’s issue is really just that she thinks you aren’t serious or whatever, then just date me. I’ll like, be your pretend girlfriend until she has no choice but to believe you.”

“You would….you would do that?”

“What have I got to lose?” she asks, face breaking open in a smile as she laughs. “I’ll go to that stupid family reunion with you and tell your mom to shove it, if you want.”

What did she say? Considering the last three years of her life had existed around language, Lexa was finding herself impressively without a single word to offer. “So you’d…be my girlfriend?”

“Yeah, sure,” she shrugs again. “I’ll change my Facebook status, and we can post Snapchat stories and Instagrams and whatever else couples can do to prove their couple-ness. It’ll be like an extreme game of two truths and a lie.”

“What are the truths?”

Clarke pauses, the prongs of the fork tapping against her lower lip in thought. “I hadn’t gotten to that part, but you know when you make up the lie you give backstory and make sure things line up, that every bit of that lie sounds just like something you would do until it’s so real you wonder if maybe it is the truth?”

Lexa blinks. “I never win that game.”

But Clarke just grins, reaching across to rip off a piece of peanut butter covered bread from Lexa’s plate and pop it into her own mouth. What was with people and eating her food? “Good news for you, Lexa Woods,” she leans on her elbow, the peanut butter of her index finger being sucked off, her mouth making a popping sound when she pulls it out, moving on to do the same with her thumb. “I always win at that game.”

Between the words and her motions, fingers being licked clean and all, Lexa feels mildly seduced, partially aroused, and entirely confused.

“So what do you say?” Clarke asks, her smirk looking like trouble waiting to be had. “Wanna play?”
Whoops, sorry this one is a little late. I'm traveling so I'm working with whatever service I manage to find. Posting from my phone so apologies if the formatting gets weird or anything. Thanks again for all the feedback! I'm loving it!
Oh no. As soon as Lexa is no longer tucked away in a coffee shop that doesn’t make sense, only mere inches away from a girl who makes even less sense, she realizes what she’s done.

This was stupid. This was a horrible idea. It was going to end in disaster and fighting and probably some amount of bloodshed. This was a declaration of war on her mother.

Not to mention the very real stirring Lexa felt inside of her every time she caught Clarke looking at her or in the moment when their knees pressed together beneath the table. Or when she thought back on the first night, Scrabble board and bathrobes and macaroni and cheese. She was not strong enough to fake date somebody. She was weak and soft and too easily in love.

Especially when it was a beautiful girl who had an easy smile and who put conscious effort into making Lexa laugh. Especially when it was a girl whose eyebrows quirked up in a challenge and with a smirk formed on her face that left Lexa wanting to do something to wipe it off. Especially if the first thing that came to mind was kissing it away.

Kissing Clarke was a terrible idea. Almost as terrible as the one Lexa had just agreed to.

She barely even knew Clarke. She knew that this chick couldn’t spell to save her life and had a thing for art and couldn’t guess that there was weed in brownies at a party. She knew that Raven was her sister and that she was going to be living with them for the foreseeable future. Those few things she knew were enough to make this the most astronomically horrific idea.

This plan only ended two ways. Either Lexa kept burying these silly little feelings rising in her deep, deep down and refused to let them ever see the light of day. Or she said something, did something, fell apart in some way that allowed this dumb little crush to come tumbling out. All for nothing. It wasn’t as if she actually liked Clark. But crushes were sneaky little things, throwing you off when you don’t expect it only to send you rolling down into the formidable darkness.

Crushes were bad. Lexa had been forced to work her way through more than her fair share of crushes.

The first time Lexa let herself think she was gay she’d been sixteen years old. A little late, maybe,
but she’d been preoccupied. It wasn’t until Ms. Nevins’ trigonometry class, the first miserable class in the morning, that Lexa ever had the thought. Alessandra sat in front of her. Alessandra with the pink hair bows from the first grade and the Power Rangers birthday cake in the fifth. Alessandra who always said, “You know” way too much and never answered questions in class. Alessandra who had always been perfectly ordinary and kind of just...there. She sat right down in front of Lexa, turned in her seat the first day of class and asked to borrow a pencil. She then promptly peeled off her oversized tennis sweatshirt, flashed Lexa a large, toothy smile and turned back around for the rest of the year.

Lexa was gone. She watched the way this girl would twirl her hair and slouch in her seat. She watched the hurried, sloppy handwriting rushing across the page to keep up with the demonstrations. She watched the slope of a neck and the rise and fall of her shoulder with each shrug, the sharp outline of her shoulder blades and the neon yellow band of underwear poking over the top of her low rise jeans.

All it took was handing over a pencil, and she was utterly swept away.

Five years later and apparently she hadn’t gotten much better.

It was too easy to fall into a crush, into whatever half-formed version of love something like that can ever be. Maybe Lexa was just obsessed with the idea of pretty girls and soft hands and even smiles that were meant for her. Maybe she was too wrapped up in having someone see her, want her, need her. Maybe she was always trying to create that for herself, imagine what a life like that could be.

So she fell in like, and it transitioned to that far off version of love. Love for girls who had boyfriends or were her best friend’s sister. Love for girls who weren’t even real people in her mind. They were half-formed caricatures of opportunity. They were on a pedestal of desire. Lexa never knew how to get them down.

Clarke didn’t deserve that. She didn’t deserve to be another girl that Lexa “fell in love” with, harboring feelings that weren’t valid in hopes of a person who wasn’t even real.

Therefore, this was the worst idea Lexa had ever agreed to. At least, soberly.

Normally this might be the sort of thing, just troubling enough, anxiety twisting in her gut and racing through her mind, but not too serious, not too real, that she could turn to Raven.
Raven was her best friend, her trusted roommate, her confidant. But Raven wasn’t the exception, not with everything. Costia hadn’t even of been an exception. There were some things worth sharing with others, worth dredging up and hashing out so she could lay them to rest later. There were others that she had never seen the value in doing that with.

This one she could, though. Except Raven was a little bit in the middle here, and she might not appreciate the fact that Lexa had developed a silly, inconsequential crush on her sister. Or the fact that Lexa was now agreeing to essentially use Clarke in addition. Yeah, Raven might not be a fan of that one, even if it had been Clarke’s idea.

Lexa had friends. She had a whole list of friends who she could text or call. They would get coffee with her or go to the movie’s or hit up an iHop at one in the morning in their pyjamas.

Raven just so happens to be the best one. The “ride or die” as Octavia liked to say sometimes.

Murphy was the second.

The psych major had plopped down next to her in Marine Biology her second semester and asked if she was smart enough that he could cheat off of her, he had better classes to pay attention during. She said probably not; there was only one reason anyone outside of marine biologists took marine biology. It was the weak man’s science, the non-chemistry, the anti-anatomy and physiology.

He shrugged and didn’t move.

That was the first class she’d ever cheated in. Turns out he was better at it than she was.

“I’m not giving you life advice again,” he says through the phone before Lexa so much as even has the chance to speak.

The first thing she did after getting home, Clarke promptly leaving to get a goodbye meal with her mom and Raven, was hideout in her room. Door shut, body crammed into the little space between the foot of her bad and the wall sort of hideout. She was panicking. This was where she could wield in that panic the best, pretend like the world was smaller, like the only thing that existed were the three square feet of space she had folded herself into.

“How do you know I’m calling for life advice?” Lexa questions.
There’s a scoff on the other end. “Because you’re calling me. Who the hell calls people anymore?”

“I call people all the time,” is her rebuttal, casual shrug for someone who wasn’t there to see it. Maybe she didn’t even need life advice. The conversation might be distraction enough.

“You mean when you’re freaking out?”

A part of her wants to point out that it isn’t very nice to make fun of panic. “I’m not.”

“What, did you get an A minus on a test?” His tone is dry. If Murphy weren’t Murphy, Lexa would probably find him mean. Normally he was the sort of person she couldn’t stand. For whatever reason she overlooked his many flaws, finding that he could kind of be a decent person. You know, when you squint. “Did you find a split end? Pimple the size of Everest?”

“You’re an ass,” she mumbles, wondering why her two closest friends were the two rudest people she’d had the displeasure of encountering. Maybe she had a thing for the abuse.

“I’m also kinda busy, Lexa. So either spell it out, or I’m hanging up.”

Busy to Murphy was probably involving sleep, food, or his girlfriend. Lexa didn’t feel bad in the slightest. “I’m an idiot.”

“Is this news to you?” he taunts. “Because this is exceptionally not news to me.”

“Murphy.”

“Honestly, I’m feeling kinda bad. Has no one never told you before now? Did you…” he gasps, “Did you think you were smart or something?”

“You aren’t helping.” Except that he kind of is because she’s glowering and rolling her eyes and a lot less fixated on the terrible decision she had made.
The air around her is hot, little to no circulation, one arm flush against the wall and the other smushed into the mattress and boxspring, her thighs pressed against one another. A wiser person might move before the stagnant air got to them any further. Lexa just stays in place.

“Two minutes, man. I’m not kidding.”

She sighs, the back of her head hitting against the wall with a smack. She leaves it there. “So you know Raven’s sister?”

“Yeah, she was at that party you blew off on Friday.”

You can’t blow off a party you never said you were going to, she wants to remind him. She doesn’t. There were bigger issues at hand right now. “Right.”

“What about her?” When she doesn’t answer for a minute he says, “Fuck, did you sleep with her?”

“No!” she shouts, oddly defensive all things considered.

He laughs, a chuckle in the back of his throat. “But you want to, don’t you?”

“That’s not…” she wants to say that isn’t the problem, but it kind of is. “My predicament is a little more nuanced than just that.”

“Go on.”

Her two minutes are about up, but Murphy doesn’t seem terribly bothered by this fact now. Shocker. “Well, you see, my mom-”

“Oh god, should I get popcorn? There’s something about you opening with your mom that really makes me feel like popcorn would be appropriate.”

Just so busy. “Shut up.” He does. “My mom has been on my case recently, ‘cause there’s this god awful family reunion happening in San Diego next month, and she’s been going on and on about
finding me a boy to go with.”

Murphy laughs again. “Has she seen your wardrobe? There’s no point in denial when just looking at your closet.”

If Raven were here, she’d have some response about not stereotyping, but Lexa just doesn’t have the energy to care. So what if she was a walking stereotype in flannel? There were worse things.

“Oh, she’s seen it alright. That’s probably why I’m getting a dress too.”

“Will your coursage match his cumberbund?”

She groans in response. “So I was just explaining this all to Clarke and, well, she kind of suggested that I take her instead.”

“Wait a minute.” Lexa can already hear the teasing in his voice, can sense the verbal onslaught she’s about to experience. “Your problem is you got asked out on a weird date?”

“My problem is that Clarke offered to be my fake girlfriend to try and help me stick it to my mother, and I was stupid enough to agree.” Maybe they should go back to talking about how busy Murphy was. That conversation didn’t make her sweat so much.

“Oof,” he answers. “And you’ve got the hots for her on top of it all.”

“I didn’t say that.”

Murphy’s kind enough to leave that alone. “So who are we more afraid of right now? Your mom, Clarke, or Raven?”

Herself. Lexa was mostly just afraid of what stupid thing she was about to do. And how much it would wreck her in the end. “All of the above.”

“Shit, this is going to be good, isn’t it?”
“I could think of a few other words for it.”

/////n

Lexa hides out in her room for the rest of the night on Sunday. She shuts her door and turns off her light and feels like a kid hiding from the boogie man. Which was ridiculous.

Not that this realization is enough to make her leave. She hides out until Monday morning when Raven comes in, her shoulder and hip nudging into Lexa’s as she pushed her aside to fit beside her in bed.

“Mmph,” Lexa says in response when Raven’s elbow jabs into her side. “Ge’ off.”

In response Raven just turns on her side, head butting into Lexa’s chest until she moves over. Raven throws her good leg over top of Lexa’s thighs to stretch out.

“This is the opposite of get off,” Lexa complains, throwing her arm over her face to block out the morning light peeking around the edges of her curtains.

Raven’s head lifts off the pillow for a second as she says, “You aren’t allowed to be tired, darling. You were already passed out when Clarke and I got back at like, eight.”

No, she wasn’t, but that wasn’t what she wanted to talk about right now. “Speaking of Clarke, can’t you force her to go on a walk with you this morning? Isn’t there an advantage to having your sister squatting in our living room?”

“Up,” Raven insists, even though she’s got her face half buried against Lexa’s arm, her warm breath blowing against it.

“No,” Lexa growls back. Up required facing a day she wasn’t ready for and a new roommate she wasn’t ready to contend with just yet.
Raven lifts herself up on her elbow, leaning over Lexa, pressing their foreheads together. “Please?” she asks, Raven wasn’t one to beg very often. “I’ll make you a deal. You go for a walk with me and I’ll reserve us some time at the gym for after your classes.

Which is how Lexa ends up with tape wrapped around each hand, knuckles protected, and a sheen of sweat collecting on her body as she slammed each fist over and over into the punching bag. Raven barely recoiled with each hit.

Somehow, Lexa never asked questions with this sort of stuff, Raven had formed some sort of connection that allowed her access into this portion of the gym. They found the odd hours when no one else was there, securing the place to themselves while Raven blasted loud rap music through the speakers. It wasn’t a bad setup.

Whenever one of them was angry or sad or frustrated, this was where the other would suggest to go. So even though Raven has no concept of what was going on in the grand scheme, she still knew enough to identify that Lexa needed an outlet, that something was amiss. For that, Lexa was beyond grateful. That was exactly why Raven was her best friend. And also why Lexa shouldn’t be crushing on her sister.

Raven makes easy conversation, yammering to Lexa over the beat of the music and the heavy slaps of the punching bag and the rattling of the chain.

First she talks about one of her classes and the teacher she hates. Next she moves on to this boy she’s slept with a few times now and how she could see the feelings starting to gather in his eyes, (a big no-no). Then she’s onto Clarke.

Raven loves Clarke. Like, sisters who are absolute best friends sort of love. They bicker and pick on each other and she complains about her constantly, but she clearly idolizes her adopted sister. She speaks in high regard of Clarke’s art and the job hunt she’s been on. She mentions how nice it is to have her here, even if she does add in how annoying it is to have someone watching over her in the same breath.

Having Clarke around makes Raven happy. An easy sort of happy, too. One where she laughs frequently and opens herself up a little bit more. Raven is loud and abrasive and intense, but when she relaxes into the people around her, a rarity, she’s so much more than any of those other things. She’s kind and thoughtful and the sort of person who crawls into bed with you in the middle of the night or makes brownies when you get a bad grade on a test. She’s the sort of person who holds the punching bag for a half hour straight while Lexa fights out every last ounce of tension that she can.
Which is why Lexa doesn’t say anything. Not a word to be breathed about the fact that she had stupidly caught feelings. Not a single mention of what Clarke had suggested and how easily Lexa had accepted it. Instead she just keeps hitting the bag, listening to Raven talk about her sister and pretending like hearing Clarke’s name didn’t stir something inside of her every damn time.

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Monday morning Lexa had gotten up and thrown her gym clothes in her bag along with her work uniform and her school books and anything else she could think of so she wouldn’t have to go home until it was late and dark and a justifiable bedtime.

That’s how the next few days go. She deals with whatever she’d agreed to with Clarke by slinking away early in the mornings with Raven and not returning until late at night. She crashes on Murphy’s couch in between classes and work or settles herself into the library for the afternoon. Octavia hooks her up for lunch at the cafe, offering sandwiches and coffee and questions.

“You never hang out here this much,” she calls Lexa out on Wednesday afternoon, elbows leaning on the counter.

With a shrug Lexa pulls off a piece of her blueberry muffin, squishing it between her fingers before popping it in her mouth. “You’re my friend,” she replies. “And you give me food.”

But Octavia narrows her eyes and watches Lexa, blatantly ignoring the customer standing by the counter and squinting at the menu overhead. “Did you and Raven have a fight?”

“No,” she disputes immediately. “She was here with me yesterday.”

“This is a Clarke thing, then,” Octavia deduces.

Lexa bristles, back straightening, and eyes drifting over to the waiting customer. “Don’t you have a job to do?”

Octavia’s eyes travel up and down Lexa, obviously analyzing her body language and drawing a conclusion when she pushes off of the counter. “Already taken care of,” she answers, an open-faced smack of her hand against the counter before she walks over to the register and begins taking an order.
Lexa blows out a long breath between her lips and fights the urge to groan. Not because Octavia had clearly pieced together what was going on and not because she teases Lexa or might tell Raven. Nope, Lexa really wanted to groan because the mere mention of Clarke’s name sent her stomach somersaulting and that didn’t seem like a great sign.

Might as well accept the fact that she was screwed. Denial sure wasn’t her getting anywhere.

Chapter End Notes

Again, sorry about the late update. I'm lowkey in the middle of nowhere right now so chances to properly edit and update are few and far between. Also sorry this chapter is a little shorter and with slightly less content main plot wise, next one coming is going to be good, I promise. Thanks to you all again! You're the best :)}
Chapter 6

Campus after dark was never Lexa’s favorite. Not that she’d ever had a real problem, but there was something about the consistently appearing glow of the blue emergency lights that offered a luminously haunting warning sign. That combined with the myriad of horror stories that she’d read made her steps fall a little faster.

The messenger bag slung over her shoulder is heavy, loaded down with books and her laptop and the change of clothes that she still had stuffed in there from work yesterday. Not to mention the empty wrappers from vending machine food she’d been living off of for the last few days.

This was getting ridiculous.

There was no way she could spend the next several months avoiding her apartment, this solution had no form of longevity to it. If for no other reason than she could hardly explain to her mother that her measurements had changed because she’d been following a diet consistently including chips and snack cakes.

Also Raven was asking questions already, making comments about how Lexa never spent this much time out and what was she possibly doing all day. Lexa had avoided her questions which immediately made Raven jump to Costia. Lexa could really stand if everyone else put as much effort into forgetting about Costia as she did.

There was also Raven’s offhand mention this morning that Clarke had been asking about her. Which might make sense, since Lexa had agreed to this convoluted little lie and part of fake dating might include at least seeing each other more than thirty seconds a day.

Initially, Lexa was hoping some space would be good, giving her a chance to find some solid ground to stand upon and wake up from this silly little crush she’d slipped into. It wasn’t working, though, so it might just be time act like a grown up instead of a little kid running away.

“Lexa?”

Her name causes her to pause, wondering if she was going crazy or if the universe was just playing a cruel enough trick on her to confront her with this the exact second she had considered growing a
pair and confronting the situation in the slightest.

The voice sounds like Clarke, but Lexa keeps walking, not looking back. “Lexa!” It’s closer this time, a little louder as footsteps hit the ground and Clarke comes up by Lexa’s side. She stops, officially not running away if only because that was far too blatantly rude.

“Oh, Clarke,” the enthusiasm from her voice was lacking. “What are you doing here?”

Clarke points across campus, “I was getting dinner with Raven before her night class. We didn’t know you were still here or we’d have invited you.”

She looks almost guilty, eyes darting and her teeth jutting out to bite on her bottom lip. Lexa is grateful it’s at least dark, she might just lose herself in watching her if she could see Clarke in full on daylight right now. “Oh no worries,” she waves the concern away. “I was studying anyway.”

“You seem so busy,” Clarke comments, starting off towards the same direction Lexa had been going. She falls into step beside her. “I’ve barely seen you since our coffee date on Sunday.”

“One of those weeks,” she answers, but her voice is taut. She tightens a hand around the strap of her bag, eyes glancing to the side as she takes in Clarke’s profile, her easy walk and the breeze blowing her hair forward for a moment.

“Are you free now?”

It was nine at night, and Lexa was definitely out of excuses. “Just heading home.”

“Cool,” Clarke smiles before reaching down and grabbing Lexa’s hand that wasn’t wrapped around her bag. “I have an idea. Come on.”

She pulls her off in the opposite direction, down the stairs towards the science buildings. Lexa tries not to move her hand which was grasped lightly in Clarke’s, more of her fingers held than anything else.

Once they reach one of the fountains, the water bubbling and a light illuminating it, a few benches
were placed around the brick walkway; the plants were pruned and trimmed behind them. Clearly, this area received a little more care than some of the shrubs and weeds along the other sidewalks and trails.

“Go sit by the fountain,” Clarke instructs, pulling Lexa’s bag from her shoulder.

“Wha-” she gives up, releasing her bag as Clarke props it on the ground by her feet, pulling out her phone.

She waves her hand over by the fountain. “Come on; you’ll look great.”

How she looked wasn’t precisely Lexa’s primary concern. Why was Clarke insisting on photos of her at all exactly? She sits on the corner of the fountain regardless, shooting Clarke a quizzical look. “Why am I-”

“For Instagram, Lex. Now smile.”

The nickname makes her lips quirk up all on their own. She pushes further into the feeling, letting the grin slip up, her cheeks rising and her shoulders straightening. Clarke gets into it, messing with angles and backing up or coming closer. “Gorgeous, darling,” she says in some terribly, mock British accent.

Lexa can’t help herself when she giggles, hand rising to block it instinctively. “Oh, that’s perfect,” Clarke says, holding her phone out as she stares at whatever picture she’s just taken. “You look amazing. See?”

Lexa walks over to her, taking the phone in her hand as she looked, finger sliding across the screen to examine the many photos Clarke had snapped. The lights in the background appear in blurry, tiny blots; the water paused in its descent just behind Lexa’s body. She’s propped on the edge of the fountain; one leg crossed over the other, hands wrapped around the rim of the fountain, smile light, almost seductive. In the last photo she comes to, the grin has taken over her face completely, eyes crinkling and nose squished up, her index and middle finger resting just over her lips, but unable to hide the smile.

“I guess,” she answers, passing the phone back to Clarke.
“Now you take one of both of us,” Clarke swings around, throwing an arm around Lexa’s shoulder and smiling wide. “Your mom doesn’t follow me,” she explains when Lexa just keeps her head turned, staring at her.

Right, Lexa thinks as she pulls her phone out of her back pocket. This was all for her mom. Which felt a little weird, now that she thought about it. She angles the selfie, fixing the way her hair fell over her shoulder and trying out a few different smiles before snapping the picture.

“Do another,” Clarke says, switching her smile from a full on “cheese” to a half-there smirk. Oh god. She keeps taking pictures until Clarke stops making faces and pulls away. “We can pick one out at home.”

At home, right. “I guess I’ll see you there.” Clarke chuckles. “What?”

“Always guessing at the truth,” she comments, holding Lexa’s bag out to her as she turns and heads in the direction they came from.

Lexa’s stuck there for a minute, watching after her as she tried to piece together what exactly Clarke means. She throws one last glance to the fountain before following after Clarke, realizing what a portion of Clarke's statement was referring to and trying not to lose herself in it. What did looking amazing mean anyway?

///// Clarke had a way of fitting herself into places like she had just always belonged there. Her presence in the living room, which should feel foreign and off, like a guest well past over staying their welcome, settles into Lexa in a calming sort of way she wasn't accustomed to.

At first when Lexa walks in, a good bit later than Clarke attributed to the fact that she had biked to campus today, she finds her new roommate fiddling with her phone, back pressed against the couch and her stretched out on the floor in front of her. The coffee table had yet to return to its previous position since that Scrabble game.

Clarke's the picture of ease as she sits there, thumbs skimming and typing across the screen. Somehow, Lexa is the one who feels like an intruder. Like this apartment has always belonged to someone else and they’ve now come home, making her free to leave.

But then Clarke is turning her phone towards Lexa and saying, “What do you think of this?” and
Lexa kicks off her shoes and lets her bag fall to the floor as she takes up a spot of her own on the carpet. Not too close to Clarke but still close enough that, if she wanted, she could press a knee against hers.

The picture with Lexa’s full smile has been chosen of course, a filter added to lighten it just slightly. Clarke’s added a comment at the bottom that reads, Beauty in the dark is the most lovely of all the option to tag someone open and waiting for Lexa to type in her username. “Corny, I know, but I think it works.”

This is pretend, she reminds herself, swallowing against the rising tide of happiness that swells inside of her. God, she had forgotten how it felt to be regarded this way. “I think it’s good,” she says, words short and concise as she passes the phone back to Clarke who nods once. “What should I make mine?”

Scrolling through the photos, Lexa sees Clarke and her variety of expressions, smiling despite herself at the one where Clarke’s cheeks are puffed out and her eyes wide in a goofy display. Ultimately, she decides on the one with Clarke’s smirk and gaze that regarded the camera just so. It seemed fitting to Clarke’s personality.

The cursor blinks in the comment section as she tries to think of something to say. People often said language was “her thing” but too many times she couldn’t think of a single damn word worth saying. Especially when it came to Clarke.

“Howm,” Clarke says, rising on her knees and crawling just behind Lexa where she peers over her shoulder. “Don’t be too subtle; you know how people write stuff off between girls all the time.” She rolls her eyes and Lexa can feel her turning to look from the camera to Lexa herself. The blush rising to her cheeks is something Lexa tries to fight back before it gets out of hand.

Lexa’s finger taps against the side of her phone. Trying to think of words while Clarke was staring at her all of two centimeters away was even more impossible. She swallows, trying to find her way to the comment that was believable and obvious while steering clear away from anything too genuine.

Briefly, her eyes flit to the side, head turning just slightly as she glances to Clarke who holds her gaze, a small quirk of her lips as she leaned a little heavier onto her hands which brought her that much closer to Lexa.

Lexa looks back to her phone before she can do anything stupid and swallows heavily. How can I be subtle when you look at me so blatantly, she types without thinking.
“Perfect,” Clarke says, her chin resting on Lexa’s shoulder for a mere second before she pulls back, moving to lie on the floor. “Your mom does use this stuff, right? I know Instagram is a reach for parents still.”

“Oh, she uses it,” Lexa sighs. Less of her mother on social media would be preferable. And she had never posted this...blatantly before. She hadn’t even turned her picture rainbow on Facebook when the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage and every straight that wasn’t some flaming conservative did for at least a day or two. Nor did her mother, come to think of it.

Before she can overthink it any further, Lexa hits the post button, throwing her phone away from her in response.

Clarke rolls onto her stomach, using her hand to push back the chunks of blonde hair as they fall in her face. “What are you doing this weekend?”

“Oh,” another solid start. “Not much, I work on Saturday and maybe plans with my friend Murphy that night.”

Clarke nods, several small bobs of her head as she looks away as if processing the information. “Wanna go into the city on Sunday then?” she asks, doing that lip biting thing for a brief second. “I’ve been here over a week, and I haven’t done anything the least bit touristy. If nothing else I have to go to Fisherman’s Wharf to experience scenes from 2001’s most iconic film.”

There were many things Lexa expected of Clarke; weird film buff wasn’t exactly one of them. “Which movie is this, exactly?”

“The Princess Diaries,” she answers, tone dry and almost mocking. “Maybe I don’t need you showing me around after all.” But then she’s chuckling as her head ducks down and then back up again a second later, hair in disarray once more.

“I guess?” she answers, blinking back at Clarke.

The look she gets in return is a raised eyebrow sort of stare. “This one is pretty straightforward, Lexa. Yes or no would be fine to use here.”
Man, she was going to have to work on how she responded to Clarke, in general really. “Yes, I would like to show you around downtown on Sunday.”

Damn, if Lexa knew how bright Clarke’s smile in response was going to be, she never would have held back in the first place.

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“Well you sure didn’t waste any time,” Octavia says first thing Friday morning.

It was colder than usual, a little more wind than mere breeze, and Lexa was regretting ever agreeing to take that three day a week East Asian history elective, regardless of how interesting it could be or that it was taught by her favorite professor. She was tired and a little bit cranky and a lot too lost in what Sunday was going to entail.

All she could think about last night was Clarke. Clarke’s little smiles and that way she bites her lip. Clarke hovering over Lexa’s shoulder, staring at her with wide, unrelenting eyes, challenging her with teasing words. Clarke’s wild hair, tiny little waves that looked like she’d wandered off of the beach, hair full and free and constantly everywhere. Clarke Clarke Clarke.

“What?” Lexa asks when all she wants to ask for is the biggest cup possible filled with her favorite coffee and maybe one of those double chocolate muffins.

In response, Octavia holds up her phone, one hand propped on her hip. It’s the picture of Clarke and Lexa, the one Lexa had posted with that little tagline beneath about looks and subtlety.

“Oh, right,” For some reason, Lexa had failed to recognize that fake dating Clarke to her mom might also look like dating to all of her friends.

Octavia pulls her phone back, only to wordlessly shove it even closer to Lexa’s face. A comment’s been added to it.

*Abby: *Lexa looks beautiful. Call me??
Oh good, well at least one mom was catching on here.

“Beauty in the dark is the most lovely of all?” Octavia quotes back, her voice just a little too loud. “How can I be subtle when you look at me blatantly?” She puts down her phone, head shaking. “What. The. Fuck.”

And because Lexa is in way over her head, she blushes in response. “It’s not what you think,” she mumbles.

“What I think, Alexandra Woods, is that you are two steps away from fucking Raven’s sister and it is unforgivable for you not to have texted me immediately after whenever the hell this,” she waves the phone in the air in example, “took place.”

“I am the entirety of Eurasia distance away from...sleeping with Clarke, okay?” More steps than she could ever conquer in a lifetime.

Octavia raises a brow, looking down at her phone and then back up at Lexa. “This is reading very differently, nighttime beauty.”

“Listen, it’s not even-”

“Did you tell Raven at least?” Octavia interrupts. “Because there’s not much Raven isn’t willing to share, but...her sister might be one.”

Which is the exact moment that Lexa realizes, no, she had entirely failed to mention to Raven that she was using her sister as a pawn to get back at her mother. And that this process might include a lot of corny Instagram posts and Facebook relationship status changes. “I have to go,” Lexa says, turning back to where she came before Octavia can say another word, and long before she has a cup of coffee in hand.

Theoretically, she reminds herself, throwing a leg over her bike seat and pushing off back towards the apartment, Clarke would have mentioned something. After all, she’s Raven’s sister; they probably talk about everything. There’s no way Clarke would have let this slip her mind.

No, only Lexa could be that stupid.
Only haphazardly propping her bike up against the building, Lexa darts inside, running up the stairs. Raven was probably asleep still. Fridays were her class free day, and she usually took advantage of it by sleeping until noon when Lexa would come home and wake her up in increasingly horrible ways. It was only fair, since she had to get up so early and Raven looked far too happy all curled up in her bed like that.

The apartment door swings open and who else would be standing there but Clarke. She’s got her back to Lexa, standing in the kitchen with an oversized T-shirt slipping off one shoulder and only a pair of baby blue underwear clinging to the curve of her ass. There’s a pair of headphones in her ears and she’s bobbing her head to the song, spoon tapping against her lips as she chews on a bite of cereal, her hips doing this little sway in front of the fridge.

Lexa freezes, one foot in the door and the other out. This was too much. This entire imagery was too fucking much and was driving home exactly why Lexa didn’t want Clarke to move in to begin with.

Well, okay, maybe the exact reason wasn’t because Lexa had zero self-control and was going to immediately fall flat on her face at the very concept of a living, breathing Clarke Griffin. But it should have been! Lexa knows herself well enough to know she’s a dumbass who constantly falls in love with the wrong people. Starting with exhibit A of the fact being that they are all women.

Clarke spins, cereal sloshing precariously close to the edge as she does. In response to Lexa soundlessly standing in the doorway, hardcore staring at her unplanned roommate in her underwear, with the door still wide open at that, Clarke lets out a little scream.

“Jesus,” she says, cereal bowl being placed on the counter as she rips out her earbuds and holds a hand to her chest. “Sorry, I did not expect to see you standing there.”

“S-same,” Lexa answers, trying hard not to just keep looking at Clarke’s thick, glorious thighs. At least now the entire definition of her ass wasn’t available for Lexa’s gaze.

Potentially the only thing strong enough to break her gaze away is Raven’s bedroom door when it comes flying open. Lexa is relieved when she doesn’t see her cell phone clasped in her hand, at least.

“What is there possibly to yell about at eight in the morning?” she asks, hard glare directed back and forth between the two of them.
“Lexa scared me,” Clarke offers, back to eating her cereal and not caring.

Raven deepens her glare. “Do it more quietly next time, would you?” And she turns back to her room before anyone can say another word, door slamming shut.

“She’s always been so cheery in the mornings,” Clarke remarks around her Reese’s Puffs. “What are you doing home anyway? I thought you had class?”

Lexa’s still stuck standing there, mouth unhinged like a fool. “Oh, I…” rushed home to fill Raven in our plot. “Um, well-”

“Okay, you two,” Raven says, cutting Lexa off as she opens her door once more. “I’m gone one night, and you’re posting sappy quotes about each other on Instagram?”

So apparently Clarke didn’t tell Raven.

Lexa’s eyes open wide, even though nothing is happening. There’s a perfectly reasonable explanation for the corny quotes and silly pictures.

“You get weirded out when I call you a beauty in the night,” Clarke answers. “Lexa takes it better.”

“Raven, you see-”

“I don’t even want to know, okay?” she interrupts again. “Like, just, don’t do anything stupid.” She turns back to her room then, taking a few steps before adding, “And if you do just give me a heads up so I can find anywhere else to be but here.”

A better person might stop Raven and correct her. A less idiotic friend would stop her and explain the whole thing before any of this gets out of hand.

Lexa just keeps standing there, more awake than she’s been all morning and utterly unsure of what to do next.
“I didn’t mean to…” Lexa fades off, unsure what to do with her sentence now that she had the chance to finish it. “I figured you would have told her.”

Clarke shrugs, falling back onto the sofa which was still in it’s transformed version of a nightly nest of pillows and blankets. “This is more fun.” She reaches down at the bag at the foot of the couch, pulling out art supplies and dropping them on her lap. “Also I kind of forgot, but bygones be bygones.” Another unconcerned shrug.

In her entire life, Lexa didn’t think she had ever been so nonchalant. She was almost certain she came out of the womb with the muscles of her back taut and her teeth grinding in tension.

“I can explain it to her. If you want.”

Clarke picks up a paintbrush as she settles herself to sit on the floor, opening up tubes of paint and squirting them onto an old piece of cardboard. “Nah, I’ll watch her squirm for a little first,” she laughs, yawns, and holds her paintbrush over the colors, pondering. “Aren’t you supposed to be in class, though?”

Right, about that. Lexa didn’t quite know how to relay that she was a spastic idiot who was overcome with worry that Raven might not know about her and Clarke’s fake relationship. Especially when said fake girlfriend was sprawled out, half dressed on the floor and completely unconcerned by this matter.

“It was canceled,” she lies.

“Wanna paint with me?” Clarke asks. Her eyes remain downcast on her own work, paintbrush moving in small, uneven strokes of pale blue. It looks like the color of Clarke’s eyes, only a little duller than they were in real life.

“I don’t paint.”

That makes Clarke look up, hand stilled. “Everyone paints,” she says. “Art classes as a kid? Finger painting? C’mon, you can paint.” To complete her statement, she holds out a small paintbrush, the end a perfect, undisturbed tip.
“What happened to finger painting?” Lexa asks, taking the brush from her hand and sitting down beside her, back resting against the couch.

Clarke passes her a small piece of canvas. “Oh, that is definitely an option,” she smiles but goes back to her work.

“What are you painting?” It was a wonder how artists ever got ideas. Even as a kid Lexa would sit and struggle to come up with something to do. That was why she made so many “confetti” pieces, little multi-colored smudges of paint or markers along the background. Even now she looks around, trying to see if there was anything simple she could duplicate onto paper.

Clarke smudges some blue and yellow together, creating a green. “Don’t know yet,” she answers.

Come to find out, Lexa quickly realizes, most objects in real life were three dimensional, making them immediately outside of her scope of capabilities. Glancing to Clarke’s green concoction, Lexa lands on drawing a tree. How much could she mess up a tree?

They continue quietly for some time, Lexa sticks her tongue between her lips, body hunching over her canvas as she tries to get it right. It was embarrassing how much concentration her very rudimentary painting required.

“So this is your thing?” she asks after a few more minutes of smudging branches. It looked more like trees did when she forgot her glasses. Call it a stylistic choice. “Painting?”

“Yeah,” Clarke answers, not looking up. “Painting, drawing, they kinda go hand in hand.” Which would explain why Lexa was terrible at both. “It’s what I’m good at though. What I hope I might someday be able to make a living off...It’s not realistic. I know.”

For a moment Lexa wonders how often people have asked Clarke what she was going to do. She also wondered how much harder of a question that was to answer than it was for Lexa. “Lots of things aren’t realistic,” Lexa answers. “That doesn’t mean they don’t happen.”

Clarke doesn’t answer, just keeps painting.

After some time Clarke sets her canvas aside. Meanwhile, Lexa is just making a greater mess of hers. “It’s supposed to be fun,” Clarke had reminded her about halfway through. “It doesn’t matter how it
looks.” A nice idea, not that it’d helped her relax any.

“You should respond to my comment.”

“Hm?” Lexa asks, looking up from her lost cause in question. Had she missed something?

Clarke points to Lexa’s phone. “On Instagram. It’s part of selling it home.”

Right. She picks her phone up, unable to stop herself from blushing a deep red when reading Clarke’s comment.

**Clarke:** Hard not to give you that look when you’re standing there looking all sexy

She’d added on a little kissy face emoji at the end even.

It wasn’t that Lexa hadn’t flirted before, god had she flirted. But she was private. Her first proper, out and proud relationship had been Costia. She and Costia didn’t even change their Facebook statuses until eight months in. The most they ever exchanged was a tag to a video of cute puppies or funny memes. There was something about the posting of her relationship or flirting or anything beyond the epitome of platonic that felt so...intimate. It was against her history of hiding things away to go blasting it all over the place for the world to see.

Lexa was a private person. Ergo, her relationships were private. The people she slept with were private. Hell, even her flirting was private.

Doing otherwise felt...off.

“I don’t know how to do this,” she admits, immediately concerned that she will come off in the wrong way. Even though it really shouldn’t matter, Lexa didn’t want Clarke getting the wrong idea. That she’s inexperienced or naive or skittish. She was none of those things. She just was, you know, confidential of this stuff.

“Sure you do,” Clarke answers easily in an attempt to wash away her concern.
She sighs in response. “I mean, I know how to date and flirt and such, but the whole, posting online and sharing that with the whole world...I don’t know.”

Clarke’s lips twist to the side in thought as she pulls herself up, crossing her legs underneath her. She sits directly across from Lexa, glancing down at the messed canvas in her hands and then back up at her. “Just pretend we’re having a conversation,” she suggests.

Except that doesn’t exactly make things a whole lot easier in this particular instance. If not because Clarke is witty and sarcastic and beautiful, then because she’s sitting here in her underwear and has bedhead and it is entirely too easy to imagine what a morning after Clarke would look like. “People don’t talk like that in real life,” Lexa argues.

Damn, Clarke looks like she’s ready to take on the challenge. “Oh?” she asks, regarding her with a smug smile. Clarke’s eyes pan up and down Lexa’s body for a moment. She feels more naked in her jeans and sweater than Clarke seems to feel in her underwear.

Lexa swallows, nodding. She had a feeling she wasn’t ready for whatever was about to come.

“It’s kind of hot when you argue with me, you know,” Clarke tells her, her body leaning forward just so.

Oh god, four and a half months of avoiding going out and partying and fun and she could easily throw caution to the wind and kiss Clarke senseless right about now. Even if it was the worst idea she’s had in a very long time, (not long enough, but still, it’s been a while).

“Not as hot as your ass in that underwear,” she shoots back, voice surprisingly strong when she feels like she could simply pass out any second now.

Clarke looks surprised for a second before regaining her composure. “Been looking at my ass, huh?”

“You’re the one who put it on display, Griffin.” This felt like the sort of exchange she should have in a dimly lit hallway, the music way too loud and the temperature way to warm, her hair frizzing out from the pure humidity of tightly packed humans all gyrating to the same beat. This was not the conversation she tended to have on her apartment living room floor at nine thirty in the morning.

“Maybe I did that on purpose,” she offers, and the glimmer in her eye truly leaves Lexa uncertain if
she means it or not. “Maybe my ass was on display for you.”

Shit. Every word vanishes from Lexa’s brain in that second, every ounce of moisture gone from her mouth. Because there was nothing hotter than the concept of Clarke Griffin showing herself off for Lexa. “I wasn’t supposed to be home for hours,” is the best she can counter with, her voice meeker all of a sudden.

Clarke rolls her eyes. “Work with me here.”

With a short shake of her head, Lexa says, “Right, sorry,” and clears her throat, trying to get back into that headspace.

“Damn, Lexa, some subtlety might be nice.”

Before getting wrapped up in the very real feelings that trampled over the not fake ones like a stampede, Lexa remembers to stay in this fake, pseudo-character of herself. “It’s awfully hard to be subtle when you’re giving me…” she holds Clarke’s stare, who raises an eyebrow for a second before letting it rest back into place as her lips quirked up, posture shifting. “That look.”

“Hard not to give you this look when you’re sitting here all sexy,” her voice is huskier, sexier.

“Look who’s talking,” she shoots back. “Half dressed, hair mussed, those eyes...you’re a walking billboard for sex, Clarke.”

Both of her eyebrows shoot up, “That might be just a little too forward for Instagram, Lex,” she laughs, breaking the spell before either of them can fall any further into it.

“Right,” she answers, trying to avoid the creeping embarrassment at how forward she’d been, clearing her throat. “Sorry.”

Clarke sits back against the couch, picking up her paintbrush once more and making little swirling doodles on the cardboard itself. “Don’t apologize,” she instructs before looking towards Lexa one last time. “I never said anything about it being too forward for me.”

Chapter End Notes
Man, these two are fun to write. Thanks again for the support!
“I swear,” Lexa says around a mouthful of potato chips, feet kicked up on Murphy’s coffee table as some movie with more explosions than plot played in the background. “It’s like she’s trying to make this as painful as possible for me.”

Murphy watches the movie, his attention seemingly not on Lexa in the slightest. “How so?” he asks, gaze never leaving the television as he shoves his hand back into the bag of chips.

A dismembered arm flies across the screen for the few seconds Lexa bothers to look at it. “What the hell are we watching?”

“Cinema at it’s finest,” he answers with a dry tone.

That could be debated. “Whatever you say.” He gestures with his hand, indicating that Lexa should go ahead and describe her painful existence to him in excruciating detail. “Clarke’s just-ugh,” her hands come up to cover her face. “I know I agreed to this whole fake dating nonsense, but it’s not supposed to feel like real dating.”

“What exactly does real dating feel like?” Murphy asks. Probably a fair question since he’d been with the same girl since freshman year. They were an old, domestic married couple all week who partied together on the weekends.

“You know,” Lexa mumbles, picking at her fingernails. “That swirly feeling in your stomach, the long, meaningful looks, the intentional phrasing and that tone you reserve for when you’re flirting.”

Murphy finally looks away, raising an eyebrow. “Chicks put a lot more thought into this.”

“Just humans, Murphy,” she retorts. “There’s a certain way you talk to someone you’re attracted to, especially in the beginning. You do all those little... extras to get their attention.” It was hard to explain to a normal human being, let alone someone who is the equivalent of a thirty year old preparing to celebrate their ten year anniversary.
He shrugs, “Okay, so she’s into you,” he replies in an impressively blase tone. “Is that a bad thing?”

“No, she’s not,” Lexa deflects. There were times, definite moments where she couldn’t be certain, but then Clarke broke out of the characters they were masquerading as and shook her head or looked away from the gaze that was wrapping Lexa up tight in a spell of attraction. “I think she’s just messing with me. Plus, you know, convenience factor.”

Some man with a deep voice starts narrating over the scene, a camera panning across a war-ridden replica of some generic city, smashed up cars and half torn apart skyscrapers taking up the screen. Murphy sighs as he pauses the movie and turns to look at Lexa. “Okay, so she’s entirely not into you. Is that what you want me to say?”

“I-no,” she crosses her arms over her chest and slumps into the couch, looking towards the frozen screen. “I was just saying that’s not what’s going on.”

The movie starts again. “You know,” he says as the music starts to build. “I’m just going to let you say whatever you want, Lexa.”

“I was just complaining,” she informs him, glancing towards her upside down phone on the cushion next to her. Clarke had taken to texting her every so often in the last two days. “Thought you’d be able to recognize the one thing you’re fluent in.”

It might be less annoying if he’d been paying any attention to her or actively attempting to decipher what was going on, the way Octavia or Raven do, but instead, he just shakes his head and says, “One day you’ll stop lying to yourself,” like he knows. Even though he wasn’t trying to. “Until then, at least try not to get that dreamy, far-off tone again whenever you bring up Clarke. Kind of gives you away.”

“Noted,” she growls towards the TV screen, settling for stuffing more chips into her face and watching the graphic disembowelment with unflinching eyes.

//

San Francisco is always the same weird, beautiful city everytime Lexa goes to spend the day there. Some part of her expects something to change, some normalcy to creep into this strange, multicultural land of different and unique. It’s always the same, though. There’s always at least one person talking to themselves and someone passing out flyers on the corner of Chinatown, at least one
fresh fruit stand every few blocks.

Perhaps there was nothing amazingly original about San Francisco in comparison with New York or Chicago or Philadelphia, but this was Lexa’s city alone, so it felt special. The other places she’d visited with her mother, following her into cabs and eating at the pre-selected restaurants and shopping at the brand name stores. San Fran was hers to choose what she did with. That meant if she wanted to wander into one of those weird trinket markets right in the heart of Chinatown and waster her money on a solar-powered dancing monkey, she could. If the cupcakes on Lombard Street were calling to her, she’d stop in and get one.

And if the first thing her fake girlfriend wanted to do was visit The Castro and walk along the rainbow painted crosswalks, then so be it.

The Castro District is its own little hub of unique and special. Rainbows are everywhere, so proudly gay that Lexa sometimes struggled with it. There are flags and banners and street signs, all displaying those same bright colors.

The coffee shop they go into has rainbow sleeves for the cups and an array of stickers over by the cream and sugar. Clarke smiles to herself as she picks up a blue, purple, and pink flag and slaps it right on her chest, like a name tag. She holds out a rainbow one to Lexa, before quickly pulling her hand back, offering out the bisexual flag as well. “Didn’t mean to be making assumptions,” she says, looking down.

And even though Lexa normally stays away from this sort of thing, the stickers and the face paint and the rainbow flag around her shoulders like a cape or waving in the wind outside of an apartment, she plucks the rainbow sticker right from Clarke’s hand and mirrors her placement. “No worries,” Lexa responds, taking a sip of her coffee and meandering back out onto the street. “You assumed right.”

From there they wander. Lexa had been worried that Clarke would be less than amused with walking the city, but driving around here was hell. Well, okay, in all actuality she never had driven here so she couldn’t say that. Even just the concept was hell. With concern and a quiet voice, she had asked Clarke that morning if she’d be okay with taking the train in. Clarke had shrugged and said “Why not? Save the earth, right?” and that had been the end of it.

Now Lexa worries if she regrets her decision. The Castro District was pretty damn far from Fisherman’s Wharf and Clarke has on these cute little flats that might not have been the best choice for a four-mile walk. She seems absurdly unbothered by it, keeping pace and chatting about the things surrounding them, occasionally losing focus and bopping into a propped open storefront, hands sliding across silk fabrics or picking through old vinyl records.
For a moment Lexa can’t help but wonder if maybe Clarke is nervous. It would seem she talked a lot more, was less focused and more disorganized it would seem, when she was either drunk or nervous.

Out of nowhere, Clarke grabs Lexa’s hand, dragging her towards an ice cream shop with a line out the door. She pulls her right to the end of it and stands as if she intends to wait for this.

“You’re kidding, right?” Lexa can’t help but ask. Clarke shoots her a curious look. “There are probably ten other ice cream places on the way with a quarter of the lines.”

With a shrug, Clarke pulls out her phone. “But this one has the longest line, meaning it’s the best.”

Which, okay, debatable logic at best. “Actually I think it just means it got popular on Instagram.”

Clarke grins, holding up her phone which she uses to quickly snap a picture of the sign hanging overhead before bringing it back down, looking right at Lexa, and taking one of her too. “Well, then I’ll get ice cream and a lot of likes. Seems like a win-win to me.”

They wait in the line.

Clarke orders a double scoop of chocolate chocolate and eats the whole thing. Lexa does her best to keep up, Clarke laughing at her as she hurriedly tries to lick away any melted trails before they drip down the cone and onto her hand.

“So what's your favorite thing here?” Clarke asks while Lexa is licking raspberry truffle from the back of her hand.

Did she have a favorite thing? “Um,” her brilliant answer might suggest otherwise. “I don't know. I guess maybe the people and the atmosphere, you know?”

Clarke’s watching her, clearly listening to whatever Lexa is saying with intention. “How so?” she asks. Her arms swinging freely by her side, a portion of her hair has been pulled back, and her loose, flowing tank top whips around with the breeze.
“It’s so…” she thinks of the niche food places and the specialty stores. She thinks of the blend of tourists and residents, the interactions of the business workers and the people on the street. San Francisco was a patchwork city, different districts and sections laid out and then squished together, creating a singular area that molded into an eclectic gathering of weird. “I like that there’s so many different places that all kind of come together. Like how the whole place is made up of different jigsaw pieces that don’t actually go together, but someone forced the pieces in. So now there’s this complete picture, but it’s all distorted and strange.”

Clarke’s watching her, eyes imploring as a slow smile begins to take over. “That’s a cool way to think about a place,” she says, looking around the city as if she might see something here that was missing before. “Adds a whole new layer of imagery, you know?”

“Sure?” she answers in question. Words and language to her weren’t about imagery; they were about expression and comprehension. “And the bridge. I like the bridge. Cliche, I know.”

Clarke perks up, walking with a new purpose. “Well then, Lexa, I’m going to need you to show me your favorite spot in the city.”

“That’s even further than the Wharf,” she casts Clarke a cautious look before glancing to the tip of the bridge she could see poking over the top of row houses as they walked down a particularly steep hill. “And it’s not that great or anything.”

Clarke’s eyebrows furrow together. “Well if it’s one of your favorite things about this broken jigsaw puzzle, then it must be great somehow.” She’d just said she’d like it; she wants to argue, but then Clarke is digging her elbow against Lexa’s ribs as she says, “It’s okay to stick with your opinions you know, right?”

So instead Lexa says nothing and leads Clarke towards the bridge without another word about it. Because it was cliche and the most lame and touristy thing potentially in the entire state, but it was the first thing she had seen of the city. The burnt orange tinge stuck out of the clouds that were lingering in a heavy fog as Lexa’s plane had arced down towards the runway when she’d first flew out here. It was like a beacon in the distance, poking out of the gloom and the worry of just what she had chosen by opting to go to school on the other side of the country.

The walk is long and less than easy as they go up and down hills, the breeze off the bay keeping them cool as the sun shines down. Lexa answers questions about her favorite color and what sports she liked. Clarke likes to ask questions.

Sometimes it shocked Lexa how utterly different Clarke is from Raven. Realistically she knew they
were hardly going to be the same; they weren’t even genetically related. So maybe that’s why she also didn’t expect them to be such polar opposites, like twins on different ends of a spectrum. Clarke is bright and colorful. She’s inquisitive about people in the way Raven digs into science and mechanics. Clarke is messy in a different way from Raven’s tendency to clutter every space she enters. Clarke’s chaos is contained, tucked into corners and organized in its own disaster of disarray.

Raven rarely asks questions. Lexa returned the favor. The facts they knew about one another had been gathered through observation and the voluntary admission of information. It made their friendship easy, genuine and committed in its own way.

Clarke seemed to love asking questions, delving further into the answers Lexa provided as if she was cataloging all this information away into some special filing cabinet exclusively stuffed full with useless information revolving around Lexa.

A part of her wants to question what Clarke cares, curious what difference it could possibly make to her, but Lexa can’t quite seem to resist answering the questions. They lead to easy conversation that makes the distance pass quickly. Before she knows it they’re walking along the sidewalk by the water, the small waves of the bay rolling in on the small strip of sand next to them as they meandered by.

The wind picks up a little more when closer to the water like this, and Lexa wraps her arms around herself, hands running up and down her bare upper arms a time or two to try and find a little extra warmth.

“So,” Clarke starts, her steps still matching Lexa’s evenly and her eyes out over the water. “Let me ask you something.”

Lexa can’t help but laugh. “Isn’t that all you’ve been doing?” she jokes.

Clarke shrugs. “Maybe,” she says, answering Lexa with a smile that leaves her heart stuttering in her chest for a moment. “I can’t help but wonder, though...why aren’t you with anyone?”

“I-” she starts, feeling oddly defensive in response to Clarke’s question. But she stops herself, biting her lip.

“I’m just wondering, you know, if this whole...issue is because your mom doesn’t believe you since you haven’t been with many people, what’s the holdup?”
“It’s not exactly easy to just find people,” Lexa shoots back, following the trail around and quickening her steps up the hill towards the start of the bridge. “Especially when you’re not straight.”

The cars whiz past them, the noise growing as they walk further from the water and onto the beginning portion of the bridge. “You live in the gayest city in America, Lexa,” Clarke deadpans which, okay technically that’s probably true, but it doesn’t immediately mean there are girls worth dating popping up all over the place.

“Relationships are an awful lot of effort,” Lexa shoots back, her arms tightening across her and not just from the cold now. “I’ve got a lot going on as it is.” And she did. It was her senior year as an undergrad, and priority number one is keeping her GPA looking stellar for a pretty scholarship to help her through graduate school. Plus there was work and her friends and her mother, who always required some amount of effort. Being Raven’s roommate and best friend were equally as demanding as a relationship, something many people might not understand well.

“Love isn’t effort,” Clarke counters.

Okay, not directly what Lexa had said but she could debate if that’s what Clarke was looking for. “Of course it is. Any sort of relationship requires time and commitment, romantic ones usually more so.” Lexa had experienced this first hand. The other half of the relationship sometimes demanded more than Lexa had to give. Sometimes you could give your all, and it still wasn’t enough. Then you were just left with nothing, your all now in the hands of someone who had reduced it to nothing. “I have other priorities right now. My effort needs to be fixated elsewhere.”

A piece of Lexa wonders if she imagines the disappointed way Clarke looks down at her feet and bites her lip. “Relationships take time and commitment, sure, but I think effort is a shitty way to boil down loving someone.”

“Maybe it is,” Lexa bristles. “Sometimes the reality of things just isn’t as great as they’re imagined.”

She sounds like a cynic, like she’s gonna kick Tiny Tim’s crutch out from under him and mutter a “Bah humbug!” as she carries on. It’s not like her view of love has been tainted, or her past relationship has left her all broken and jaded, in need of someone to heal her broken viewpoint. No, Lexa has always known the truth, sometimes she just let herself forget it. Now was not about to be one of those times.

“I disagree,” Clarke responds. “I think love is an easy thing to find and easy to maintain as long as
it’s something you value. I think the quality of love is rooted in the development of it and the nurture required is based on the foundation it’s built on.” Idealistic at best. “Love isn’t meant to be a chore.”

How exactly did Lexa end up in this conversation in the first place? She wanted to go back to discussing the legitimacy of indigo as a color versus purple and not breathe another word of love or relationships, or her current state of potentially self-imposed spinsterhood. “Perhaps not,” Lexa answers, her tone colder than she intends. “But how often have we learned that things are not as they should be?”

She poses the question and then shakes her head fighting off the rest of her melodramatic comments and desperately wishing this heaviness now between them could be alleviated. All the same, she holds to what she’s said. Little in life is easy. It was up to each person to decide what was worth it.

“So how about you then?” Lexa asks, hoping to deflect the attention from herself and the words Clarke so clearly disagreed with. Perhaps this could be the way she so thoroughly puts an end to this silly little crush she continues to harbor. “If love is so easy why isn’t there anyone back in Omaha?”

For the first time, Clarke seems to close herself off, her face hardening as she turns away from Lexa, leaning against the fence as she watched the water instead. “That’s not how I meant it,” she mutters. “Easy can be applied in a variety of ways. I’d expect you to know that, Ms. Linguistics.” Her tone lightens as she speaks, the tightness in her shoulders there and gone so quickly Lexa could have missed it if she wasn’t paying close enough attention. “You seem to have quite the all or nothing perspective.”

Maybe that was true. Maybe it was okay if it was. “I don’t waste my time creating gray out of black and white.”

“How very artistic of you,” Clarke answers, lightening the mood at once. Lexa cracks a smile and starts off along the bridge, feeling Clarke follow just behind her. “So this is it, huh?”

Lexa nods, suddenly too warm after her debate with Clarke. She pulls her flannel off, relishing the cold against her bare arms. She ties the shirt around her waist; sure she would want it again when got cold in her tank top. “The glorious Golden Gate.” She spins, arms wide in front of Clarke as if to say “Behold.” Clarke watches Lexa as she takes a few steps backward with her arms splayed. “Was it worth it?” she yells over the traffic and the distance now between them.

“Not in the slightest,” Clarke answers and Lexa can’t help herself as she laughs loudly, head thrown back for a moment as she revels in the jokes and the lightness now added to the previous tense atmosphere.
“Told you so,” Lexa taunts, as Clarke seems to snap some pictures on her phone again. Lexa ignores the fact that the camera appeared to be on her when she first looked up.

The bridge is long, a continuous path to the other side that always seemed closer than it actually was. “Hey, Lex,” Clarke says after a minute, a glimmer in her eyes and the sun beginning to set behind her. The little nickname stirs up those feelings again as she looks to Clarke. “Don’t you think whoever told the first knock-knock joke sure does deserve a no-bell prize?”

“Oh my god,” Lexa murmurs in exasperation before breaking down into giggles and eventually falling into the stupid laughter with Clarke, the silly joke erasing any remaining tightness in her muscles as she dissolves into the joy of the moment.

A part of her wonders when she last laughed so easily. A bigger part of her ignores just how the one thing she thinks of when it comes to spending time with Clarke is that it is so goddamn easy.

///

The lights are out, only the faint gleam of Lexa’s cellphone offers any illumination in her room. She’s got her fan on high and is bundled beneath the heavy weight of her comforter and her blankets all wrapped up close and warm, the perfect way to sleep.

As with every other civilized individual in a first world country, she crawled into her bed and scrolled on her phone until the tiredness hit her. First was Facebook, the most boring and useless as she rolled her eyes at the dumb Minion memes her aunt was still posting and liked some pictures of her cousin’s like, fifth baby in two years, Lexa swears.

Twitter is for the news updates. All the retweets and the likes of her favorite people to follow popping up along with the posts. She clicks on the occasional article to read more in detail before getting sick of the country’s political reality and closing the app before she can get any more depressed.

Instagram was usually her last stop, watching her friend’s stories from the day and scrolling through pictures of celebrities and her loved ones alike. She double clicks the post from the dog blogs she follows, enjoying the different cute puppies in all sorts of locations. She scrolls past an ad before her thumb stills, finding a picture of herself.
It’s from today, the Golden Gate tall and imposing above her as she’s got her arms wide and open, one foot stepping back and flannel tied loosely around her waist. Her smile is full, clearly caught in the middle of laughter, and her eyes are unfocused, not watching Clarke or the camera but taking in the world around her. The water is a starking blue behind her and Clarke had managed to capture this moment when just a few cars were buzzing past on the road.

The picture is perfectly nice, but then Lexa reads the comment attached to it. “So much to look at and all I see is you.” She can’t help the way the breath hitches in her chest or the fluttering of her heart as she smiles, pulling the covers up to tuck her smile away, as if hiding it could erase the emotions raging inside of her.

This is all pretend, Lexa reminds herself as she closes her eyes and blows out a breath. She pushes the button to put her phone to sleep and rolls over in bed, settling within the center of the mattress and closing her eyes.

When she wakes up in the morning, she still has a smile on her face and her heart rate immediately kicks up, thinking for the first time just what it might mean for something to be easy and if she was willing to consider what submitting to it might mean.

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you so very much to everyone who takes out the time to comment or kudos, it's a huge motivator and has really kept me going with writing. I hope you all have a wonderful weekend. Let me know what you think of the chapter and I shall see you all again Monday!
Tuesday afternoons were always oddly busy at the pet grooming store Lexa worked for. She had yet to determine just what it was about Tuesdays that screamed to people their pets needed to be washed and trimmed, but that didn’t mean she stopped trying. Often times she, like most of the employees, attempted to keep her Tuesdays per month as low as possible. The tips were nice, but it was always several hours of chaos and the manager was hyper-present those days. Sacrificing sanity for a few extra dollars wasn’t typically enticing.

Today, however, she’s more than happy for the added distraction as she goes from a shitzu to a samoyed who’s brushing would take at least an hour to manage. The thick fur was never easy to get through, requiring extra attention to detail and special tools to cut away any small mats that might have gathered on the dog’s haunches. It was a laborious task, and the dog observed her cautiously when she first goes to pick up the brush.

“I’ll be gentle, girl. I promise.” The dog, almost as if it understands her, sighs heavily and looks away, facing forward like preparing for a portrait to be drawn.

Lexa gives her a scratch between her ears and then gets to work. The lower portion of the legs and her poofy tail seem to bother the pup the most, so Lexa takes extra special time, not concerned with if she got stuck here late again. “You’re like eighty percent fur, aren’t you?” Shockingly, the dog doesn’t respond. “Man, might as well just set up camp here tonight.”

This time the dog turns to look at her, head cocked to the side. “Kidding,” she assures. “Besides, it’s not like I’m still avoiding Clarke or anything.” Maybe she needed some more friends after all. If she was resolving herself to talking to a dog, it might be a sign. “Avoiding Clarke would be stupid. She’s…” Lexa pauses, swallowing hard. “I think she might like me for real,” she whispers, as if the dog is going to go and blab this information to anyone. “And I don’t know what to do with that.”

When Lexa starts on one of the lower haunches the dog shifts away, letting out a small whine before Lexa’s even begun. “Sorry, girl. Does Debbie normally groom you? I swear I’m better than Debbie.” She gets to work, slowly chipping away at the clumps of fur that are coming out in loose tufts. “But Clarke probably doesn’t like me, not really. It’s all for fake, right Daisy?” She reads the dog’s collar sitting on the table next to them.

Daisy perks up a little at her name, turning to look at Lexa as much as the holds would allow and letting out a small bark in response. “Clarke wasn’t kidding when she said she was good at lying. I’m in on this lie, and I still don’t know what the hell is going on!”
With a groan she drops her hands away from the dog’s leg for a second, resigning to cut a portion of fur away to save Daisy from suffering through the process of working out a thick knot. This dog had so much fur. “And what the hell is with the not telling Raven thing?” she demands, hunching forward to the dog’s back leg, holding it in place with one hand while she cut away with the other. “Why can’t we tell Raven? I tell Raven most things and not telling her this feels weird and like...like we’re lying to her or something. Hold still Daisy.”

With a heavy sigh, the dog drops her leg back to the table. “Don’t give me that look. You’re the one with the triple thick coat.” The lights in the grooming room are especially bright, necessary for proper dog grooming perhaps, but they’re making Lexa’s headache right behind her eyes, and she wishes there was a way to dim them.

“It’s all in my head, though. Don’t you think?” There’s a distinct lack of response, and Lexa can’t help but wonder if even the dog has stopped listening to her at this point. “I see something there because I want to. Not because there’s anything to see.” That had to be what was happening. She was falling down a rabbit hole of her own make-believe desires. She was being foolish and self-imposing her desires onto Clarke. “But then sometimes she does these little...actions. Like taking pictures of me or telling jokes until I give in and laugh. And the looks! Don’t even get me started on the looks, Daisy.”

This time the dog simply huffs at her name, lifting her front paw to Lexa when she holds out a hand for it. “You’re smart, I can tell.” All dogs were wonderful in their own way, but geez had Lexa groomed some stupid dogs in her time. Daisy was clearly intelligent, able to interact with humans and pick up on non-verbal cues quickly. “Any chance you wanna tell me what to do?”

The dog blinks at her in response. “Right,” Lexa sighs, groaning as she let her face fall into the soft, half groomed fur of the dog. “I thought it might be worth a shot at least.

/////When Lexa gets home from work late that evening, she unlocks the door to find Clarke crossed legged on the couch, guitar on her lap as she strummed, singing quietly to herself until the door opens.

“Are you just naturally talented in anything related to art?” Lexa jokes, trying to ignore the way her mouth goes dry and the image is burned into her brain.
It was as if there was some checklist Lexa had never been aware of, and Clarke was in front of her now, checking off each and every box, slowly but surely. Lexa didn’t even know she had a thing for girls with guitars or blonde hair or lame jokes until the girl who had it all was placed in front of her, living and breathing and each of those things.

Clarke chuckles, not acknowledging Lexa initially as she strums again. “I think it was an open rebellion against my parents,” she answers, humming along softly. “They were always all about math and science and four-year-old Clarke wanted to cement that wasn’t the path she was going down.”

Lexa nods, vanishing into her room where she could throw her bags of stuff down before wandering back out to the kitchen. It was nearly nine at night and dinner had been alluding her for far too long now.

The chords to Riptide, the one Vance Joy song the world seemed to know, play out, and Clarke sings quietly along. It should hardly surprise Lexa that she finds it lovely, the music, the singing, the imagery. A part of her was beginning to wonder if she just found Clarke to be infallible. It was hard to see the downfalls of a person when you were so wrapped up in their perceived perfection. Flaws could be unintentionally overlooked when you were consumed by every aspect of a person, examining their every trait as one more additionally perfect piece of a whole.

Taking a page out of Clarke’s book and, you know, sticking with the little game they had going, Lexa sneaks back out of her room, recording Clarke as she sang out, “Lady, running down to the riptide taken away to the dark side. I wanna be your left hand man.” She stumbles over the next line and laughs to herself as she continues playing, singing about becoming unstuck with extra power to her voice, as if to balance out the mistake.

When Lexa pans around far enough that Clarke sees her she pauses shooting Lexa and the camera a shy look before throwing herself back into the bridge, a little smile in place as she looks back to her guitar and then straight back at Lexa, as if the camera isn’t even there.

“Thought it might be a good one for Instagram,” Lexa explains when she stops the recording a second later. She clears her throat, shifting from one foot to another. Maybe this wasn’t the sort of content she should be saving to her camera roll.

Clarke nods, stopping her playing and setting the guitar down. “Good idea. Have you heard from your mom at all?”

Lexa shakes her head. It had been over a week, and there’d been nothing but radio silence. Not that she was terribly surprised. Her mother’s tactic to most things she didn’t like was to simply ignore
“Maybe be more blunt,” Clarke suggests. “Something she can’t help but respond to.”

Little does Clarke know that it took Lexa four times to get out the fact that she was gay in the first place. Her mom would hang up the phone or just turn around and walk away, as if not hearing it would prevent it from being true. Hell, Lexa wouldn’t be shocked if her mother just blocked her on Instagram, so she didn’t have to see these pesky little posts that disrupted her reality.

“Right,” she says instead, looking down at the new content now on her phone. This was easily the hardest part, narrowing down about what exactly she wanted to post or say, how she wanted to phrase this to make it seem obvious without being too out there.

Clarke snatches her phone right out of her hand, though Lexa doesn’t miss the follow-up glance that is shot in her direction, as if Clarke was ensuring it was okay. She thinks for a second before typing something out and passing it back. “This seems good to me,” she shrugs.

Is there anything my girlfriend isn’t absurdly talented in?

Lexa rolls her eyes as she shoots Clarke a look. “Way to toot your own horn.”

Clarke laughs, picking her guitar back up as she fell back onto the couch. “You pretty much said it first, Lex.”

“Twisting my words, Griffin,” she teases back, leaning forward without meaning to.

“Just helping you find them, Woods,” she answers back with a wink before going back to her music and somehow managing to make Lexa feel like she’s not even there at all anymore.

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Even though the semester had barely started back a month ago, Lexa feels a little bit like she’s drowning. She’d taken on a full course load for the third semester in a row and was immersed in some of the most difficult and time-consuming courses she’d ever suffered through. Long research
papers were due every other week in her Language and Semantics with a Focus on Pragmatics course. Even the name of that class took something out of her every time she said it.

Most of her free time should be spent with her books, her laptop, and a color coded notebook with all of her notes from class scribbled down in organized thought bubbles and bullet point style.

This necessity was lost on Raven who, like always, flew through her homework like its second-grade math and is left tapping her fingernails against the table in Coffee Arc while Lexa works.

“If you’re so bored you can go hang out with someone else,” Lexa sneers when Raven sighs for the third time.

“I’m not bored,” Raven bites back, but she looks grumpy and irritated, and Lexa does not have the brain power to work through whatever the hell is bothering her friend right now.

Nor does she have the brain power to deal with Clarke Griffin, not that it stops the bell over the door from ringing out and announcing her presence, immediately making her way over to her table and falling into a seat. “This job is going to kill me,” Clarke mutters, pulling off her bright red collared shirt to reveal a form fitting black tank top underneath. How was that fair? Lexa really wanted to know if the whole damn universe was trying to mess with her right about now or if it was exclusively Clarke. “I never knew Target customers could be so damn needy.”

“I could’ve told you that,” Lexa answers, ignoring the way Clarke steals a drink of her hot chocolate without asking.

Shortly after Octavia shows up and Lexa might as well be attempting to study in a circus between the increasingly louder conversation and laughter and the music Clarke keeps humming aloud to, pulling her chair closer to Lexa in order to fit Octavia. Another one of those things that didn’t mean anything. Just like it didn’t mean anything when Clarke’s thigh pressed against Lexa’s for several minutes or her hand rested just beside hers on the table, pinkies brushing.

Regardless, Lexa buries her nose further into her books, resisting temptation to join in and trying not get bitter when Raven bumps her elbow, smearing her handwriting all over the page. She does make a mental note not to accept any more of Raven’s offerings to study together anywhere in public, however.

“Lexa!” Clarke says loudly, laughing. The way she ways it makes Lexa quickly aware of the fact
that she had missed something.

“Hm?”

“The party,” Clarke says, relaxed smile on her lips as her eyes soften when Lexa turns to look at her.

*This!* she wants to yell. She wants to snap a picture of this exact moment to offer it to Daisy the dog as an example of what she meant about the actions and the looks. You know, if she was crazy enough to think that this dog could understand her. “What party?”

“The Halloween party that Jasper is having this Saturday.”

“Saturday’s like, October second,” Lexa answers with furrowed eyebrows. There was a whole month before Halloween.

“You know Jasper and Monty,” Octavia says with a roll of her eyes, her foot propped up on the corner of Lexa’s chair. “They celebrate Halloween like it’s Christmas.”

She actually barely knew these kids, but she nods anyway. Whatever they wanna say. “The theme is costumes of Halloween past,” Clarke adds on, turning back to Lexa. “Wanna go?”

See, this is where the confusion kicks in like no other. Because Clarke is sitting very close to Lexa, head turned entirely in her direction as she watches intently in anticipation of an answer. This is the moment when Lexa doesn’t know the difference between reality and pretend. There’s a silent *with me* attached to Clarke’s words, an obvious invitation that feels more like a date, like a real one. Maybe if Raven and Octavia weren’t sitting there, watching this all play out, Lexa might feel like maybe this is real, like maybe she’s finally grasping at the fact that Clarke is legitimately flirting with her and actually interested.

Except that Raven has been very intentionally not told by Clarke about this arrangement and when they’re alone, Clarke is different. Clarke wouldn’t be asking this if they were alone right now, right? Because there’s no way this is real. It’s so silly to allow herself to think otherwise. She shouldn’t be so easily fooled.

“No.” She says the word with a blunt edge and barely even looks to Clarke before honing back in on her homework.
No was the only possible answer here. Yes would spell disaster. Yes would include getting dressed up in some silly costume and riding together to this party where they would drink and dance and there’d be dim lighting and a steady thrum of a beat, and Lexa would get lost entirely in her alcohol riddled head, frontal lobe shut down for the night as she drowned within blue eyes and golden hair and a body that would grind up and down hers, lips entirely too kissable in the dark, easy to find when Lexa couldn’t even find herself amidst the chaos and bodies.

There was no way she could even consider yes as a possibility.

“Oh,” Clarke answers, sitting back in her chair, arms crossing over her chest as she shoots Lexa a final glance before looking away, focused on her long since cold latte that sat in front of her. “Never mind then.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay, it couldn't be fluff forever. As always, thank you thank you guys for the support. It's so fun hearing your thoughts and responses and I'm glad so many people are enjoying the story. Hope this chapter was more of the same and I'll see you all again on Thursday!
For the rest of the week, Raven seems hostile. They walk together each morning like always, but Raven says little, putting in her earphones and walking in silence for the full three and a half miles.

It’s not the complete silent treatment. If it was, Lexa could maybe call her out on it. But Raven says just enough to get by without Lexa being able to comment on anything except behaving strangely.

It sucks.

Lexa can feel the tension every time they’re together. When she suggests the gym, Raven blows her off with some lame excuse about getting dinner even though it’s three in the afternoon.

This entire situation is precisely what Lexa was afraid of. It was everything she was hoping to avoid that Clarke had pretty much orchestrated to happen when she chose not to tell Raven the truth. Now Raven was clearly upset with Lexa for shutting down her sister, and Lexa was the one who had to deal with those consequences. Even though the only thing she’s doing right now is trying her best to maintain some form of self-preservation, not make an ass out of herself, and not let Clarke in on the fact that Lexa had very stupidly fallen for her.

A couple of times now, Lexa has attempted to start up some semblance of a conversation with Raven. It lasts a few seconds before Raven decides to talk over her or walk out of the room or do whatever other blatantly rude things she wants. Lexa would be a liar if she didn’t admit that this sort of behavior, this seeming dismissal, from her best friend hurts. It’s like getting a shot, the initial pinch of pain causes her reflexes to jerk back. Then there’s the sting, that radiating pain that seems to grow from inward and dwell with her. She didn’t need that. She’d never gotten that from Raven before, and she didn’t know what do with it.

The frustration sits between them, the anger radiating off of Raven and settling right inside of Lexa, weighing her down with the disappointment and the sadness of having let down her friend. A part of her, every now and then, gets riled up with the frustration of the fact that she hasn’t done a damn thing, this could hardly be her fault, but somehow it still feels like it is.

Friday night rolls around, and Lexa wants to be anywhere but home, but she’d been feeling stubborn today. So she had come back from her class and refused to leave because this was her apartment and she wasn’t about to be chased out of it by Clarke or Raven or anyone else. So instead she gets to be
largely ignored by Raven for the day, Clarke throwing her a “Hey,” and a small smile when she comes home from her shift.

Lexa can’t help herself. She watches Clarke whenever she gets the chance. She watches her rifling through her bags, digging stuff out and collecting it in her arms before vanishing off to the bathroom.

“You’re sure your good going separate?” Clarke yells, assumedly to Raven.

All in all, Lexa attempts to make an effort to pretend like she wasn’t the least bit aware of either of them. Not of the conversations they shout back and forth or the heavy footsteps through the apartment as they piece together their costumes and continue getting ready. With practiced feigned focus, Lexa highlights portions of her textbook, earphones in her ears even though nothing plays from them. She was a pro at pretending she was simply too busy to otherwise pay attention. A skill long ago learned from living with her mother.

There’s a knock on the door and, when no one else appears to answer it, Lexa takes a break from her fake business and gets up to open the door.

“Hey,” she says to the guy standing there, he’s tall with dark hair and some odd combination of cardboard and plastic configured onto his body. “Raven’s still getting ready. I’ll let her know you’re here.” Depending on Lexa’s mood, and Raven’s seeming interest in these people, sometimes she leaves them in the hall, other times she lets them come and stand awkwardly in their doorway.

“Raven? I’m not here for Raven,” he says before Lexa has a chance to shut the door in his face.

“Well then who are you-”

“Bellamy!” Clarke says from behind Lexa, standing in the living room as she used her phone screen as a makeshift mirror to draw large black dots on her face. She’s got this red tutu around her waist and black leggings beneath, a red and black polka dotted shirt and too-small wings attached to her back. She’s the cutest fucking adult ladybug Lexa has ever seen. “I’m almost ready.”

It’s with a crushing dose of reality that Lexa realizes that this Bellamy guy was not here to be Raven’s date. He was Clarke’s. This realization comes as she watches him and Clarke exchange wide smiles before Clarke blushes and looks away, like a schoolgirl with a crush. Like, Lexa identifies in horror, herself every time she and Clarke exchanged a look.
She doesn’t know what to do. Clarke darts back into the bathroom and Lexa’s just standing there, door open and boy filling the frame, his eyes watching to where Clarke had disappeared to.

The air feels stuck in her lungs, like she can’t get out this sharply sucked in breath that was filling her lungs with dozens of tiny sharp razor blades, slicing her up from the inside out.

It was all pretend, she reminds herself as her hands drops away from the door and she turns from it, letting it hang open and the boy to continue to stare into the apartment.

It was all pretend, she tries to cement in thought as she walks past her laptop and her school books and her headphones, all those careful strategies to be focused or distracted or intentionally not present in the rest of the moment.

It was all pretend; she wants to chant to herself beneath the covers of her bed, letting the darkness consume her to wipe away all of the shame and disappointment and crippling dose of reality that was smacking her in the face right now.

She shuts the door to her room, wedging herself back into the corner beside her bed and the wall and holds her breath, that same deep, infiltrating air tearing her up inside until she hears Clarke shout a goodbye and the door slam shut behind her.

Only then does she let the air all the way out. It burns as it whooshes through her lips; the sob tucked away in the rush of air.

It’s not that big of a deal, Lexa swears to herself. She knew from the beginning that this whole charade was foolish, a mistake waiting to happen. This was not a surprise.

So why does this feeling seem to have jumped out from the dark, launching an attack which she had no defenses for? Why does she feel like the silently harbored hope has been snatched away?

Because she’s stupid, Lexa thinks, her head falling against the wall. Because she was dumb enough to ever delude herself otherwise.

Maybe Preston wouldn’t be so bad after all. If nothing else, he had to be better than this.
Raven leaves without saying a word. Lexa feels ridiculous hiding out in her room over some girl she only partially knows yet, somehow, managed to impressively obsess over, delude herself into thinking something existed when it didn’t.

Pinching the bridge of her nose between two fingers, Lexa inhales, attempting to suck in the clean, Clarke-free air into her lungs and erase this entire ridiculous mess. A disaster she had created entirely on her own. A train crash collision that she was throwing the coal on the fire for. Of course this was the direction their game would take.

After all, Lexa concedes, she had turned Clarke’s invitation to be her tag along fake girlfriend tonight down. It was the right thing to do. Clearly, there were other people Clarke was interested in. There was no reason she should be obligated to Lexa, no point in holding Clarke back.

Despite the lies Lexa liked to delude herself with, she also knew this was never going anywhere but down. She knew this was pretend, pictures posted on Instagram and a relationship status changed on Facebook. These were imaginary butterfly wings, invisible blushes, self-structured romance. None of it was legitimate. Hence why it was so easy for Clarke to walk out of here with that boy on her arm. Hence why she didn’t owe Lexa any sort of explanation.

It stung, sure, but Lexa was used to the sting. She was more than accustomed to people not owing her reasonings. It was no one’s responsibility to meet her contrived expectations, to uphold her own hopes.

This wasn’t Clarke’s fault, not by a long shot. Lexa had shut her down for a reason, after all. This sadness was her own creation. A perfect storm that grew stronger as she stoked the fire, urged the winds to grow and the rain to pour. There was no one to blame but herself. Like always.

A portion of Lexa wonders if the only one to blame had been her from the very beginning. For being born, for running off her father, for ruining her mother’s reputation and potential and career. Logically she knows that it’s hardly as if she asked to be born. She’s not enough of a fool to shoulder the regret of an existence, but she also knows that her presence had destroyed lives and relationships, families and dreams taken out by Hurricane Alexandra.

Melodrama at its finest, Lexa thinks to herself as she runs a hand down her face and stands. This was no way to spend her time. These weren’t the thoughts of a healthy mind or a reasonable, mature individual. That was what she aspired to be. Mentally sound, logical, intelligent, and capable to become something, do something, not laden down with knowledge of the chaos she has no control
When she stands, she can’t help when she glances to her closet, half open with her belongings strewn outside. Raven had clearly been here.

It’s not much, but Lexa sees the red boots poking out from last year. She’d been one half of the somewhat iconic Marceline and Bubblegum Princess duo from Adventure Time. Costia had insisted, dragging Lexa around to thrift shops and doing internet searches to find each item. The red cowboy boots had been the hardest to track down within their budget.

There’s a moment where Lexa doubts this idea stirring in her mind, a second where she catches her reflection in the mirror of wild, untamed hair and disheveled tank top all twisted around her torso. She sees the girl who doesn’t go to parties and who makes good choices and works towards building herself up, avoiding the instinctive self-destructive behavior that so easily came out.

With the closet half open it’s easy to look away from it, eyes honing back in on the boots. Surely those old fangs are still buried in there somewhere.

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The party is loud when she arrives. Not that parties typically are anything but. The faint beat can be heard as soon as she turns her bike down the street towards the frat house.

Sure, biking to a party didn’t exactly scream badass vampire, but she wasn’t wearing a helmet, that was pretty badass, right? Lexa wonders if the powder she’d coated her skin in almost made her skin light enough to glow in the dark, the gray tank top cold as the air stung against her shoulders now that the sun was gone.

It didn’t worry her much, though. There was one thing she was going to this party for. It wasn’t to see Clarke and her stupid date. It wasn’t to confront Raven. It wasn’t to make any sort of statement whatsoever.

It was entirely to get her shitfaced drunk on cheap, shitty alcohol and dance until the world was hazy, lights blurring and edges numbed. The music could guide her into the dark, taking over the thoughts in her mind until all that worry and concern was replaced with light giggles that bubbled out of her from the contents of a Red Solo cup and the cheers of the comrades around her. Filling in the holes, the air that was always tinged slightly of cigarettes and mostly of weed taking up every bronchiole and alveoli, replacing the razor blade sharp breath that had settled in her before.
The door’s open, it always is at these sorts of things, and hands are on her as soon as she enters the door, people touching her shoulders, big football guys patting her head as they walk past, someone shouting that they like her costume over the music.

Jasper and Monty are nowhere in sight, but that only matters so much when this is the event that they’re hosting. It’s hardly as if she was showing up with some wine and cheese to present as a housewarming gift.

Her eyes scan the room, she can’t help herself. There’s no one she immediately recognizes in the front room. There’s a bonfire outside that she sees the edges of from the windows, surely there were at least half this many people clustered outside.

There are coolers everywhere, half empty with beer cans floating in melted ice water, water bottles and sodas outweighing the alcohol left a couple of hours into the party.

Beer took too long to touch her. Beer was slow, carbonation filling her up before the woozy feeling could slip in. The kitchen has more offerings, harder drinks that required a little prep, always enough to ward off those who were in search of quick and easy.

Tequila has always been her enemy, the quickest deliverer of downfall. Lexa finds that bottle first, filling her red cup with the liquid and topping it off with some Sprite to dull the burn. When she takes her first gulp the sting is still there, the way she wanted it.

She glances towards the outside, where there’s laughter and cheers around the fire. She heads for the living room where there’s too many bodies and not enough air circulation. She sees who she thinks is Monty, or maybe it’s Jasper, but she decides against offering any pleasantries. Instead, she dances, hips swaying, shoulders shimmying, eyes closed as bodies moved with her, against her. She felt the music and then she drank some more, feeling the sting and the rhythm and the pressure of someone pressing against her.

She feels all of this around her and forgets all about the other feelings nestled deep in her chest. She doesn’t feel the twisting of her gut in worry or the dropping of her heart in disappointment. There’s no ounce of sensation in regards to desire or passion. All traces of those flighty, delusional hopes scratched away from the surface.

Her cup is empty too soon, just as the lightness is starting to lift her up and the world is going a little more blurry. Back in the kitchen, the pouring is less certain, some missing the cup at first. There’s no
Sprite left to be seen, so Lexa settles for some Coke, which doesn’t quite mix as well, but she takes another greedy slurp after the first one. She’s still with it enough that her drinking is controlled, the swallows even and her lips hooking around the rim of the cup.

No way was she going to get sloppy drunk, not the kind where she’s dribbling down the front of her shirt and unable to withhold the contents of her stomach. She was better than that. At least, that’s what Lexa tells herself on her third refill.

At some point Octavia finds her. She’s got this absurd Little Red Riding Hood costume on, Lincoln appearing behind her looking vaguely like a wolf with her basket in hand. O’s eyes go wide with excitement as she squeals, throwing a drunken, heavy arm around Lexa and kissing her cheek. “Finally got your ass out of that fucking apartment,” she slurs, body lurching to the side as Lincoln reaches out to grab her.

Lexa laughs, teetering herself but able to correct her balance without a wall of a man to catch her. “My ass is out of that fucking apartment,” Lexa reiterates the sentiment, raising her cup and taking a long drink from it. She wipes the corners of her mouth when she’s done.

A song comes on that sounds vaguely familiar, but, Lexa realizes, they all kind of sound the same so they were probably all equal parts familiar. Octavia gets excited, promptly dancing, her body grinding lightly against Lexa until she joins in with her.

The lights are too dark to see much of anything, and there’s so many people. Even still, Lexa catches the flash of blonde hair. She can’t miss that wave to it, the antennae on top of her head. Even with the alcohol thrumming, properly coursing through her by now, Lexa doesn’t miss the sultry look on Clarke’s face as she looks to the boy. Normally by now, Lexa’s vision would be blurry, her eyes unfocused, but she has no trouble honing in, her movements stopping as she watches a hand running down a chest and another grabbing an ass. She can’t see anything but those lips, god Lexa has seen so much of those lips, and now she sees them whispering, moving just so near an ear, brushing oh so close to another pair of lips, being bit for a moment by a tooth.

The cup is empty, her route to the kitchen blocked. Octavia has banished, the song has transitioned, and now the lights seem too bright and intruding, and her head is swimming, but it’s fighting too hard to make sense of anything, like swimming against the current even though it should know it’s going to lose, it’s not strong enough to make it.

Outside the air is cooler. Someone passes Lexa a can of something. She takes it, swallowing the contents without recognizing what the hell it is. The fire is diminishing, but that doesn’t lessen anyone’s excitement.
Out here the world seems a little clearer for a second, a brief glance of clarity before Lexa pushes further into the depths of stupor. The thought of how utterly dumb it was to combine fire and alcohol-riddled college students passes through her mind, but she drinks again to shut it up.

Someone’s watching her. Lexa can feel eyes, and even though she should be beyond thinking about hopes or fantasies, she still has to swallow a heavy dose of disappointment when the eyes she finds on her are random.

A few more drinks and a couple more glances and Lexa is wondering if it matters.

The girl’s eyes look like they could be a rich, chocolate brown from here, her dark skin almost looked like the fire was dancing off of it. Her hair is thick and curly, frizzing out of control and Lexa finds herself wondering what it must be like to lose your fingers in that hair. She wonders what those eyes look like up close. She questions if those curves feel as soft and supple beneath roaming hands as they appear to the eyes.

There’s a lot of pondering that she’s suddenly doing and next thing she knows, her brain is demanding answers. All at once Lexa realizes she’s no longer dancing, but walking straight towards the girl whose eyes are probably brown and whose hair is very intentionally out of control and who Lexa can imagine the taste of before she’s even close enough to properly see her.

“Hey,” the girl says when Lexa gets close.

Words are funny, Lexa thinks, all she does is study words and language and how it has become what it is today. All she does is think of language, and she never has a single goddamn thing worth saying. Her entire life she’s never had anything worth listening to. Her voice was too quiet, too easily overpowered by others around her, nothing profound enough to shut up the voices that take over, not capable enough to be heard above the expectations and the predetermined future.

Words are a waste of time. Lexa’s done fucking around with any damn words.

So instead she presses her lips against the girl’s, and the taste she was imaging is there, mixed with the hazy hint of Coke and salt. It’s now that Lexa realizes her lips are numb. They’re messy as she tries to press them to this girl, not curling how she expects, not fitting in the way she’s used to.

The girl is either more sober than Lexa and able to correct her attempts or equally as far gone, two negatives creating a positive.
The lips are soft, Lexa’s free hand fits into the space between this girl’s hip and ribs, fingers grasping onto the soft skin there, feeling the give of flesh before sliding down and sliding a fingertip across the ridge of a hip bone.

This girl’s got free hands, hands that disappear in Lexa’s hair and run along her neck and dig into the back of her arms. Hands that are roaming along Lexa’s body, one slipping down the center of her chest, along her sternum before fingertips are teasing right through the thin material of the tank top.

It’s not cold, not with the alcohol filling up her bloodstream and the fire still crinkling mere feet from them. Even still, Lexa shivers. She submits to the touch, to the hands and the fingers and the feeling, the only feeling she wants to experience right now, of someone touching her, of someone ravishing her with their hands and how that would feel when it turned to lips.

But she shouldn’t. She knew she shouldn’t.

Desire is a funny thing, though, she thinks. Passion can come through in so many different ways. In this moment, it comes busting through common sense and good choices and creates a hazy covering of acceptable.

When the girl whispers in Lexa’s ear if she wants to “get out of here,” Lexa pauses, thinking of saying no. Thinking of being smart and wise and mature, and not some blindly following party girl stealing releases from the fellow participants around her.

Then she thinks of blonde hair and blue eyes and feet running beside hers in the rain, peanut butter being sucked from fingers and teasing jokes on the living room floor beside Scrabble boards and half completed canvas paintings. She thinks of hands on chests and lips ghosting by another. She thinks of the invitation she had dismissed so callously, convinced it had been extended purely as part of the ploy. What Lexa knew was that it was more. She could feel the static attraction buzzing between them; there was no way Clarke was ignorant to it, no way to fake that sort of sensation.

Lexa was running scared, shutting down opportunities to protect herself because her heart was broken and it wasn’t the fixable sort, Costia had proven that.

So she nods, forgoing words once more, reveling in the beauty of nonverbal communication, and follows this girl away from the music, the dim lights, and too loud laughter. She walks away from all of the chaos and straight into the disaster she’d, once again, created all on her own.
The mattress beneath her feels soft, the sheets, rumpled and unmade against her back as lips cover her, fingers dancing across her skin. She absorbs the sensations until all she has is a rush of euphoria, toes curling and breathing quick, the rush and flurry overtaking everything at once as her eyes slip shut, her mouth gasps open and her body, which was wound so very tightly, falls apart in a singular, brief moment.

Chapter End Notes

Damn, Lexa's got a thing for making questionable choices. Even though it's not the direction we obviously want, I hope you all enjoyed the chapter. Your support is amazing. I hope all of you reading are ready for where this story has yet to go, I'm writing quite a few chapters ahead and am having a great time with it! As always have a wonderful weekend and I shall see you again on Monday :)
The morning announces itself with the sound of a car revving loudly outside, the engine growling, growing and growing, until it shot off, hopefully to hell where that sort of infuriating annoyance belonged.

Lexa rolls, hoping to find some portion of the comforter available to pull over her face, guarding the light that was streaming too brightly into the room. She really needed to get some decent curtains sometime soon.

As she reaches for more covers, her hand touches something smooth and warm and most assuredly not a blanket. When she opens her eyes she’s met with a face, a gentle smile and warm eyes looking over at her. Lexa freezes.

“Good morning,” the girl says, the white sheet is a contrast against her dark, bare skin. Lexa swallows, eyes glancing to the flesh in front of her to the eyes watching her before she rolls to her back and stares at the ceiling, holding steady to the ceiling fan which rotated above.

“Morning,” Lexa squeaks, shame flooding her as she comes to terms with the fact that she’ll be gathering her clothes in her arms, scrambling to get dressed, and walking home. Along with the fact that she didn’t know where she was, how to get home, or even where her cell phone was.

Her hands come up to cover her face for a second before she runs them down, trying to wipe away the shame and the tiredness and the reality of this moment.

“I’m sorry, I—” she stops, sits up, holding the sheet to her chest as she began scanning the floor for her clothes.

“You don’t have to run off,” the nameless girl says, pulling herself up into a sitting position. Her legs cross beneath her as the sheet falls away, leaving her chest bare. Lexa makes a point not to look. “I can make us breakfast if you’d like.”

No, she wants to say. She would not like, thank you very much. She would like to gather her belongings, cover her body with something more than a sheet and get out of here. Away from this room that she only has faint memories of. Away from the girl who didn’t have a name but who had
filled Lexa up until she was bubbling over. Away from the release she had sought and the after effects she now must contend with.

This was why she didn’t drink, Lexa remembers as she slips from beneath the sheets to pick up her panties that were on the floor.

This was why she avoided parties, Lexa recalls as she pulls the tank top on over her head.

This was why she was single; she wants to scream at Clarke as she locates a red boot.

“I have to go,” Lexa announces, pulling her jeans on and shoving her feet into her boots sans socks. “I’m sorry to bail.”

And she does mean it. She’s sorry to take off in the mornings. She’s ashamed that she lets herself reel these girls in, allows herself to get caught up in them, lost in eyes or curves or hands. It’s the reality, though. It’s a reality she must face and accept and take responsibility for.

These were people she was using. These were human beings that she was taking advantage of, even if they were the ones leading her back to the room and pressing her against a bed. They were the ones initiating, but she was sending the signals flaming into the air, begging for them to do so. And then in the mornings, they had shy, batting eyelashes and quiet smiles and so often they offered for her to stay. They suggest breakfast or coffee or exchanging numbers, and Lexa hustles off, putting on enough clothes to be decent and getting the hell out before anything more came of this.

“Can I get your phone number at least?” she asks, sounding upset as she pulls the sheet back over herself.

Phone numbers weren’t part of this, Lexa wants to tell her. “I don’t think so,” she says instead, back to this girl as she faces the closed bedroom door.

“Will you at least tell me your name?”

Lexa’s head drops as she looks to the floor beneath her. There’s a shaggy, tan carpet beneath her feet, the kind that she could dig her toes into, the kind that used to sit in the hallway when she was little, she remembered the feeling of the carpet fibers beneath her cheek, how she would rub her face against it whenever she was sad or scared.
A name was more than a fair request. Lexa should want to know this girl’s name; she should feel the butterflies and the hope, slipping a piece of paper with her number scribbled on it, offering her own shy smiles and hooded eyes. Instead, she says, “Alexandra,” the name she hates and resents and turns away from. She says it before snatching her phone from the bedroom floor, sticking it in her back pocket, and walking right out the door without looking back again.

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Raven’s home and, for someone reason, awake when Lexa comes through the front door.

The pounding in Lexa’s head feels like it could split her skull in two and her stomach was twisting the whole way home, waves of nausea rolling through her so strong she thought for sure she’d be kneeling over in a stranger’s front lawn while she puked up whatever it was that remained in her stomach. Her eyes were flinching away from the sunlight, and she didn’t know if she wanted twelve hours of sleep, a gallon of ginger ale, or to choke on her own vomit in her sleep and die.

The last thing she wanted, Lexa knows at least, was to deal with Raven. Especially when her friend’s eyebrows shoot up, followed by her arms crossing over her chest.

Please, Lexa silently begs, let today be the day that Raven fully submits to the silent treatment. Maybe this could be the final straw, enough to make Raven turn her back on her roommate as she took in what was undoubtedly the walk of shame over the threshold of their front door.

“What the fuck.”

Perhaps it was the final straw, just not in the direction of silent treatment. Lexa cringes from the voice, trying to keep herself from putting her hands over her ears to dull the noises. “Shh.”

“Oh fuck that,” Raven says, pulling herself off the couch and following behind Lexa into her room. “What the hell is wrong with you?” she demands, hand on her hip as she stood over Lexa who promptly threw herself down on her bed, kicking off her now too warm and sweaty red cowboy boots as she curled on her side. “Seriously, Lexa, what the fuck are you even doing?”

“Nothing you don’t do four times a week,” she shoots back, bitter and nauseated. She squeezes her eyes shut and breathes in once through her nose and out through her mouth. “Hypocrite much?”
Raven laughs, bitter and frustrated. This was the laugh she used when someone she was texting got too aggressive, annoying her with unwanted dick pics or demanding her attention. Lexa didn’t want to be pulling that laugh out of her. “Last I checked, I didn’t lead your sister on and then first blow her off and then...what? Sleep with some random chick? Go find your ex for the five hundredth fucking time?”

Lexa regrets it as soon as she makes the move, but she shoots up, twisting her upper body towards Raven so she can look her in the eye. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, okay? Stop accusing me of anything.” Maybe if the whole room weren’t spinning she’d have more to say, but instead she just finishes with a quiet, “And leave Costia out of this.”

“You’re right,” Raven says, her tone suggesting anything but. “I don’t have the whole story, sure, but I have goddamn eyes, Lexa, and they picked up on all the high points.”

In a huff, Lexa falls back to the bed. Otherwise, she might just dump her stomach contents onto Raven, and that was a surefire way to ensure this conversation didn’t end well. “Just don’t, okay?”

“No!” she yells, tugging the blankets back from Lexa. “You don’t get to tell me what to do. You did a shitty fucking thing, and you need to own up to it.”

“I didn’t do anything!” Lexa yells back, pulling herself back up even as she can feel her brain reverberating against the soundwaves, even as she has to close her eyes right after to breathe her way through the cleaving pain in the space between her eyes. “All I fucking did was go along with your sister’s stupid idea, okay, Raven? Why in the world are you so mad at me?.”

“Wha-What do you mean?” Raven asks, her voice blessedly dropping several decibels as her previously waving arms cross back over her chest. “What was Clarke’s idea?” Lexa doesn’t miss the lack of comment on the anger that had been radiating off of her for the last several days.

With a groan, Lexa pulls a pillow over her face. “It was all pretend, okay?” she moans out in a muffled confession. “The Instagram posts and all those dumb little looks she was giving me and painting in the living room. It was all fake.”

Even though she doesn’t look to Raven, Lexa can imagine the way her eyes are darting back and forth, processing information that doesn’t make sense. Everything makes sense to Raven, everything that didn’t was processed and reasoned through for all of ten seconds before she put it together. “What the fuck are you talking about?”
Lexa pulls the pillow tighter, wanting to hide away both from Raven and the dumb, messy feelings that were rushing back even as she tried to deny them. “Clarke overheard me talking to my mom about that god awful family reunion and how my mom was trying to make me go with some boy, and I was ranting...she offered to fake date me to get my mom off my case and solve the drama of this ridiculous reunion.”

Raven’s silent when Lexa finishes. There are no sounds of movement, no shifting of feet or door shutting behind her. “Why didn’t you guys just tell me?”

With a groan, Lexa says, “Ask your sister, she was trying to mess with you or something. I don’t know.”

The edge of the bed dips, the weight of Raven shifting the mattress and Lexa curls further in on herself. “So the last like week and a half, with all your dumb posts and days out and shit, that was just to mess with your mom?”

Theoretically. “Yes.”

“And it was Clarke’s idea? To help you out?”

“Yep,” Lexa answers, ignoring the stinging feeling she’s got in her chest. “That’s all it was, Raven.”

“All it was ,” Raven parrots.

Lexa knows where this is going already. “I didn’t mean-” she turns pulling the pillow away so she can make her point fully.

“Clarke offered to help you out, and you caught feelings for her for real,” Raven accuses before Lexa can get in another word. “And you freaked out so you shut her down for that party and then you saw her with Bellamy so you…” Raven fades off, hand gesturing to Lexa’s current state.

A grunt seems sufficient enough of a response. “Your words, not mine,” she mumbles, the echoes of the yelling leaving the pressure in her head ever growing.
“Because it’s pretend, but your gay ass went and got a crush on her.”

Of course Raven would put it together in an instant. Especially since Lexa’s been hiding it about as well as she might hide an elephant in her room. It was as blatant as the heart eyes emoji stamped right on her forehead. “I didn’t… I’m not…” she turns in on herself. Because she did and she is. “I don’t know what happened.”

There’s a moment of silence, and then Raven is nudging her way into Lexa’s bed like she’s done so many times before. She fits herself into the space, wrapping around Lexa as the big spoon, forehead pressing into her back. “She’s Clarke,” Raven sighs. “Clarke flirts with just about anything that moves and you’re… you’re Lexa. I should have seen this coming, but I just thought…” she fades off, her hand trailing circles on Lexa’s back. Lexa shuts her eyes, grateful for the gentle touch. “I wasn’t exactly going to be in shock if you guys kinda… had a thing. Hell, knowing the two of you I was kind of banking on it. Admittedly the fake relationship was not an expected curve ball.”

“I didn’t mean for any of this to happen.”

She feels Raven nod against her. “Is this why you’ve been so weird and all over the place?”

It’s no surprise she’d noticed. Lexa was impressed Raven hadn’t said something long before this incident. A little hurt even that her best friend hadn’t bother to ask what the hell was going on with her. “Yeah, she’s…” Lexa blows out a breath and Raven laughs behind her.

“I know,” she answers. “Where do you think I learned it all from?”

“Don’t hate me,” Lexa mumbles. She didn’t need her best friend hating her, not when she felt enough of that for herself right now.

There’s a kiss pressed against her temple and Raven rests her cheek on Lexa’s shoulder for a second as she says, “You’re my best friend, loser. Even what I hate you, I don’t ever hate you.” Lexa doesn’t comment on the fact that she doesn’t really feel like she’s done anything to be hated over because a part of her isn’t sure what’s true.

“Boxing later?” she asks, her eyes slipping shut as Raven begins to massage her head, fingers digging into her scalp and easing the pain there.
“You got it, darling.” Raven answers, the last thing Lexa hears before she drifts off to sleep.

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The gym was the start of what she needed. Arms swinging, legs fighting to keep stance, grunts of frustration with every punch of her fist. Raven lets her work herself to exhaustion before they switch. She plays the type of hip-hop Lexa prefers, the sort of beat that you can dance to and the lyrics more easily understood, a few less words that made her flinch. They both beat the shit out of that punching bag until they were exhausted. Then they’d laid on the mats, staring up at the warehouse-like ceilings, metal rafters, and big, fluorescent lights hanging down. Lexa was getting mildly sick off of the combination of stale sweat and the distinct plastic smell of the mat beneath her.

“So are you going to tell me?” Lexa asks, turning her head to face Raven.

“Tell you what?” she asks, but Lexa doesn’t miss the way she blinks a few more times than usual or how her back straightens a little more.

Lexa doesn’t like confrontation. She’d learned to avoid it for as long as she can remember. Don’t ask questions, don’t demand answers. Keep your head down, your words polite, don’t stir the pot so the storm doesn’t come.

“Why you were so mad at me.” The words are a whisper. Lexa bites her lip and looks back towards the ceiling, her eyes honing in on one of the lights until they start to water and she has to look away.

“Oh,” Raven says in response, her fingers tapping against the mat. “I’m sorry,” she says as if that was an explanation.

They both stay silent, Lexa doesn’t answer with, “It’s okay,” even though every ounce of her craves to offer up that flippant, ingrained response. Because it wasn’t okay. She wasn’t okay because of it. The people in her life that she trusted, they were few and far between.

“I was a shitty friend.”

“Yep.”
“Lexa…” Raven sighs, pushing up on her elbows as she looks over at her friend. Lexa keeps her eyes fixed ahead, thinking if she looked at Raven she might just cry. Because this had all been a disaster and the last thing she wanted in any of it was to hurt her relationship with her best friend. “I’m sorry.”

“Why?” Lexa demands again, even when her voice quivers against the one word. It’d be easier to accept the apology and move on, but Lexa knows it will eat her alive. She deserves an explanation, or at least she likes to think she deserves that much.

Raven blows out a breath, her lips flapping together as she flops back. “Because I’m shitty. We established this.”

“Raven.” What surprises Lexa most is when she dares another look to Raven, and she’s got wet eyes and is biting her lip. “Hey,” Lexa starts, ready to tell her never mind. It’s okay. I forgive you.

“I was pissed,” she says, which was the one thing Lexa didn’t need explained. “I was mad that something was going on with you and Clarke and you two were so totally keeping me out of it. I was frustrated that you both then started acting stupid, you with shutting Clarke down and like, you wouldn’t even look at her, you know? Or you’d be hiding from her, not coming home for days. And neither of you would talk to me.”

“Raven-”

“Shut up,” she says before Lexa can add anything else. “And then next thing I know Clarke has a date with fucking Octavia’s brother, and I didn’t even know who to be mad at! You were both being so fucking stupid, and I didn’t want to pick sides but-”

“Clarke comes first,” Lexa interrupts again. She knew that. She had always known that.

Raven makes this sound that is half growl. Lexa presses her lips together. “It’s not even that, but you wouldn’t talk to me at all and Clarke was all upset, and I get really defensive when someone makes my sister sad, okay?”

That surprised her. “I made Clarke upset?”
Raven waves her off. “It doesn’t always take much, but it felt like, you were just dragging her along and wouldn’t fucking commit, which is your thing recently, I get that. But it looked shitty, and it pissed me off. It’s one thing when you pull that sort of thing on random girls, but when all of a sudden it was my sister?” she throws Lexa a look, shrugging a shoulder. “I got mad at you.”

“I’m sorry,” Lexa finds herself saying now, even though she isn’t sure if she should have to.

“I don’t like being out of the loop,” Raven mumbles. “I never felt more like an outcast than when my sister and my best friend started hanging out and...it sucked.” All at once Lexa realizes this might not have as much to do with just Clarke or just Lexa, but maybe part of it has to do with Raven too. “Clarke’s my number one, and you’re my number two. I didn’t like all of a sudden feeling like I was coming in last for both of you.”

She sniffles. Raven never cries, not unless she was insanely drunk or the rare combination of a properly sad movie, her period, and a shitty day. “Raven, we didn’t mean to-”

“God, I’m being so stupid.” She lets out an exhale of a laugh, dragging a hand down her face. “I’m sorry I was a dick.

“It’s okay.”

“No,” Raven responds, her voice dark and her face serious as she sits up, pulling her good leg beneath her as she watches Lexa. “It’s not. Don’t say shit is okay when it’s really just shit, Lexa.”

She sits up herself, pulling her legs to cross in front of her as she nods. “You were shit, Raven.”

“You know better than to expect more from me,” Raven jokes, but Lexa sees the shift in her eyes, hears the doubt in her tone.

To get her next message across, Lexa launches, tackling Raven to the ground in a hug, unable to keep from laughing. “You were shit, Raven,” Lexa says again, leaning up so she can look in her eyes even as she half lays on top of her. Raven offers half-hearted shoves to try and get her off. “But it threw me off so much ‘cause you’re normally the best, okay?”

“Ugh, god,” Raven shoves her harder. “Physical and emotional affection? I’m gonna need to go kick
On Sunday Lexa hides out in the coffee shop. Octavia is there, like always, but she’s cranky and irritable, most likely hungover, and doesn’t even offer Lexa the chance to order before passing her a coffee cup and a muffin and waving her off.

Which was fine by Lexa’s standards. She pulls out her book, sliding her glasses onto her face and resting her chin in her hand as she attempted to read. It had been weeks of overwhelming school work, and she just wanted to enjoy something else for a little bit. Normally that something else would include her ass indentation on the couch and Netflix checking in to make sure she was actually still breathing, but the couch now belonged to Clarke, so Lexa settled for a book in a coffee shop. There was a certain aesthetic to it that she expected to enjoy more than she actually did.

Because books took focus, and Lexa only had so much of that to offer. The mistake she’d made on Friday night was occupying her headspace, coupled with the guilt of the girl she’d slipped away from Saturday morning. It was rare that after one of her...instances Lexa felt anything but regret. The first time it had happened was exactly three days after Costia had smashed her heart into a million little pieces. Lexa had only needed half the amount of alcohol to follow some girl home, breath hot and lips sloppy in the back of an Uber until they were at her front door, half undressed before it was even closed behind them.

When she crept back home, in this case, that very same night, she had crawled into bed and cried.

The following week, when the same exact events took place again, Lexa cried a little less, but she couldn’t help the tears leaking past as she acknowledged that her escapades hadn’t filled the hole in her chest or healed the gaping wound in her esteem.

It took several times around before Murphy pointed out that this was “self-destructive behavior” and that she should really “fucking stop.”

So she did, if nothing else she could identify the validity of his claims. Because maybe a part of her was trying to destroy herself. Maybe she was already too broken to bother fixing, breaking further apart was easier. But when Murphy made his comment, Lexa felt dirty, like she was using girls and tearing herself down to nothing more than an infamous lesbian slut, which Raven declared was a perfectly fine legacy to leave behind, though it wasn’t exactly the memory of herself Lexa wished to leave with Stanford.
She stopped. No more girls, no more tequila (or vodka or rum), no more parties. Raven had whined, saying that a good party was important, that falling into bed was the best way to blow off steam from their sometimes crazy workloads, that embracing her slutty ways was self-empowerment if she wanted it to be. Lexa didn’t want it to be, though.

So she spent more time baking cookies and watching dumb shows and studying. She fell to the safe activities, saving her drinking for inside the apartment when Raven could keep Lexa from texting her ex.

This was an excellent means of self-control, except, she’s realizing in hindsight, if she hadn’t actually corrected any of her problems and fell right back into her same old ways. Precisely what she has done.

So the book might not be the most enjoyable thing. However, she was definitely enjoying it more than a conversation with her mother when her phone starts to go off. Perhaps if she weren’t in public, she would let out a groan right about now. “Good morning, Mother,” Lexa answers with, forehead resting in her hand as she stared down at her uneaten muffin.

“What is this nonsense on your Facebook page?” her mother demands, skipping over pleasantries for once.

“I don’t…” she trails off. Her and Clarke had discussed moving to Facebook, somewhere more broad where Lexa’s whole family was sure to see anything they’d posted. Clarke kept suggesting they change their relationships statuses, but Lexa told her to wait. “I don’t know.”

“This Clarke person has cluttered your page with nonsense,” she answers. Lexa can hear the distress in her voice, the irritation and frustration. It was borderline panic, worry mounting that someone was going to see, that they were going to know about her queer daughter who’d rather wear a suit than a dress and who’d wanted to play softball in high school, not soccer or cheerleading with the other girls. Her daughter who was insistent that she should have a girl on her arm, not a boy leeching off of her grasp for himself.

Lexa clears her throat, straightening up in her seat. She’d be damned if all this drama and misery was for not and she never even got to have this moment with her mother. All because she was chicken. “The Clarke person you’re referencing is my girlfriend, Mom.” There’s silence on the other end. “And I know you can’t be too surprised. We haven’t exactly been quiet on Instagram.”
Lexa swallows while she waits for her mother’s response, her fingers tapping on the top of her coffee cup. “Alexandra-” she starts, before immediately dropping off. “You can’t just…” It was rare for her mother to be without words. “You need to take that vulgarity off your page at once.”

That makes her laugh; she can’t help it. Even if it is her mother’s least favorite response. “I don’t know exactly what’s up there, but I doubt Clarke’s posting naked picture to my Facebook feed.”

“Don’t be absurd.”

“Well then what’s vulgar?” she asks this questions innocently even though she knows the answer. *She is.* Lexa, her daughter, is the answer to this equation. Her preferences, her desires, her loves, they were vulgar in and of themselves. Hand holding, pecks on the cheek, gentle smiles and soft eyes, things that are found precious and darling between boys and girls starting at the age of two, seen as vulgar because she wanted this with another woman.

In person she’d never be so bold, even over the phone, Lexa can feel her hand trembling against her cheek. She can’t ignore that heady rush of adrenaline rushing through her body to prepare her for fight or flight, the beating of her heart and the flush of her cheeks in anticipation.

“I won’t have you doing this, young lady.” Won’t have you tarnishing my reputation. Won’t have you wiping away the hard work. Won’t let you overcome the importance of me. “You’re being flighty, rebellious for the sake of rebellion, like a *child.* How could you be so immature, Alexandra?” The question feels like it demands an answer but her mother continues on. “You’re in your senior year of college acting like a petulant toddler who has not gotten her way because I wish for you to attend a family event with a perfectly pleasant gentleman who is more than happy to escort you.”

Lexa scoffs, ignoring the way her mother’s words get to her, ignoring those old feelings of immaturity hitting her. “I don’t want an escort!” she says, louder than she means. Heads turn, eyebrows raise.

“Don’t you raise your voice at me.”

She flinches away from the finger being pointed in her face even though it isn’t there. She squeezes her eyes shut before the flick to the head her mother would surely deliver. She slips somewhere inside of herself before the words find her, the insecurities creeping into the spaces that are all too open to welcome them in.
“You are intentionally impossible, Alexandra. All I have done for you, everything I have sacrificed for you, and this is how you want to behave over some silly little reunion? I’ve given up everything to care for you, to make sure you could attend that school, and this is the childish behavior you thank me with?”

The shame fills her. It takes over her eyes as tears swim in her vision, it fills up her chest where the air suddenly seems stuck. It floods her mind as all she can think is how awful she must be, how selfish and silly and-

“All I want is for you to accept that-”

“I will not accept anything that is petulant behavior intended only to hurt me and your family, Alexandra.” Her mom cuts her off before a word of gay could be spoken. “I will not accept your erratic, flighty actions that are a product of the culture you’re surrounding yourself with and an adolescent like need for rebellion.”

“That’s not-” Lexa starts, not caring when people are looking at her, not minding the swiveling heads when she needed to explain the truth. All she wanted was to be honest, to lay the situation out properly. To explain of the confusion she’d dealt with, the attempts to stifle this, the hopes it would fade away. If only her mother could grasp how difficult this was for her as well.

“Don’t you try and spin this into something else,” she cuts her off promptly. “Get that nonsense off of your social media, forget about this silly girl you’ve decided you’re bringing along. Preston is awaiting your email response and a dress and pair of shoes will be arriving at your apartment within the next couple of days.” Her words are clipped, short and direct and demanding. This was not up for debate, this was not an argument between two people, simply a lecture to one. “I’m done with the antics. Get your act together or so help me god, Alexandra, I’ll take care of this for you.”

The line goes silent and all Lexa is left with is the pounding whoosh of her heartbeat in her ears.

Chapter End Notes

Well alright, fingers crossed this chapter is a little less controversial than the last one lol. I responded to the majority of the comments from the last chapter so if anyone still has any questions or comments feel free to inquire. Motivations and reasonings can be a messy thing, especially when a character isn’t even entirely acknowledging the full weight of the issues surrounding them. Everybody kind of fucked up, every character to one extent or another, no one has to be labelled a villain for making a mistake, in my opinion. There’s no quick or easy solution for Clarke and Lexa outside of some good
old, proper communication and they aren't quite there yet. So, for those of you interested, just bear with them. If you aren't into this sort of situation then that's okay! Thanks for sticking around thus far.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lexa hated feeling like a coward. Even when she was one, she didn’t want to be able to recognize it in herself. So she tried to trick herself, offer reasonings for her actions beyond the fact that she was avoiding an awkward situation like a child ducking behind her mother’s legs.

The coffee shop was the best place to hang out because there was a friendly face and good drinks and yummy pastries.

Staying in the library until 11 at night was logical because she could study without worrying about being interrupted.

The extra shifts at work were great; additional money could hardly hurt anyone.

Thoughts of rationalization in order to wipe away the reality of attempting to hide from the awkward and uncomfortable, the inevitable confrontation of the tiny, smashed up pieces of her heart.

Every now and then her head would get the idea that she was braver than that, though. She needn’t rationalize anything because she was an adult for crying out loud, and she could stay in her own apartment and face whatever was waiting there to greet her.

These moments were an overestimation of her capabilities. A blatant lie of the amount of self-control she possessed, the amount of courage pumping through her veins. She was no Gryffindor, and not even her seven-year-old self had bothered to try and convince anyone otherwise.

These reminders are never more blatant than when she allowed that heedy dose of adrenaline-driven, righteous indignation to convince her that she should just have what she wants, regardless of what uncomfortable situation it may lead to.

So maybe that’s why she goes home after classes on Tuesday, Clarke’s away at work then anyway, and settles herself into her apartment. Not just the twenty square feet that made up her bedroom either, the whole damn place. She takes over the kitchen with sticks of half melted butter and little puffs of flour sifting through the air before settling herself on the countertops or hardwood floors. The scent of half-baked cookies taking over every inch of space where the particles could get to, filling the kitchen before slipping out into the living room and bedrooms, even sneaking into the
corners of the bathroom.

The living room is hers when she turns on Ellen mid-afternoon and turns it up loud enough that she can hear it as she claims the bathroom as her own by scrubbing the tiled walls and the edges of the tub with an old rag, scratching away at the rusted marks of old shampoo bottles.

This apartment was hers first, hers and Raven’s. They had filled it up with their things, their weird, cheap art held by half attached command strips on the walls, their toothbrushes sitting in a kitchen glass in the bathroom, their textbooks, pens, and highlighters taking up every free surface in the place. How dare Clarke Griffin think she can move in and take that over. How dare her purple, battery operated toothbrush squeeze its way into their cup or her oil pastels and colored pencils fill up the precious coffee table space.

At least, these are the things Lexa tells herself as she tries to reclaim the space for herself. She cleans and bakes and exists in the expanse fully under the constant stream of vexation reeling through her mind.

It works too. There was no room for worry when annoyance took up the headspace instead. Two objects cannot occupy the same space, Lexa wonders if that’s how it works for thoughts too. If one was consuming and whole enough could it take up the extent of another, force it away to make room for the new, bigger, heavier thoughts?

At least, it works until something new takes over. Until Clarke walks through the front door when Lexa’s bending herself into a half folded shape in the living room, hands meeting the yoga mat beneath her feet, the world upside down from her curved bridge as she looks to Clarke hanging in their doorway like a bat.

“Hey,” she says, not pushing out of the stretch. She closes her eyes and walks her hands a little closer to her heels, breathing in deeply as she anchored herself to the feeling of the arch of her back, the strain of her shoulders, the muscles of her stomach pulled taut, the rush of blood to her head. She tries to occupy the space in her mind with the feelings in her body, the real, visceral ones that take up residence in muscles and tendons and deep within her bones.

Something about Clarke must be visceral too, because she feels that in the lining of her stomach and the pumping of her heart and it nudges the other thoughts out of her mind, chipping away until they are smaller and smaller and eventually nothing at all.

She shifts the weight back into her shoulders, down her arms as she uses the pulse of momentum to push herself back up, standing to her feet, back to Clarke as she shuts her eyes and takes a deep
breath before turning to face the girl who remained in the doorframe.

Clarke seems to come out of her trance when Lexa spins to face her. She shakes her head, an almost indiscernible movement, before clearing her throat and stepping over the threshold, shutting the door behind her. “I can’t remember the last time you were home before me,” Clarke says, hefting a few reusable grocery bags onto the kitchen counter.

It’s near impossible to miss the way Clarke’s eyes roam briefly over Lexa’s body, hovering over the flat, exposed expanse of her abdomen and settling for a moment on the dark green sports bra that covered her.

“Senior year,” Lexa says by way of explanation. As if that explained her absence just with those two words. As if her reasoning wasn’t rooted in the fact that when she so much as looked at Clarke all Lexa could see was swirling blonde hair, spinning in the movement of a dance or those same hands, trailing along some guy’s chest, the curve of a smile as it was flashed towards someone else, lips whispering close to an ear, slipping past a cheek. As if the reasoning has nothing to do with the feelings Clarke stirs in Lexa with no consent on her end, the jealousy that rose up when Lexa had no claim to experience any such thing. The stupidity is driven by that same green eyed monster, leading to an utter lack of inhibition as it was warped away by an unjust feeling of betrayal digging its way to the center of her chest, the fire stoked by too much tequila choked down too quickly. She lost herself in the bottom of a Red Solo cup and the mattress of some stranger’s bed because of the real reasons. “Busy.”

Clarke nods, two small bobs of her head as she pulls out groceries, stocking the shelves of the fridge and an empty shelf in the cabinet. “I’m sure.” She doesn’t sound it. “We haven’t talked in awhile,” that was the point, “I wanted to check and make sure you were okay with everything?”

Lexa is more than aware of the fact that Clarke is referencing their charade, their false relationship which was thriving on Facebook profiles and Instagram posts and in phone conversations with her mother.

Though they hadn’t spoken in person since Friday night, and that had been beyond brief, Clarke was more than maintaining her end of this game. She regularly posted to Lexa’s page, tagging her in memes and pictures of delicious food with things like, Date night?! or commenting on past pictures of Lexa’s with little heart eyed emojis and things like Why haven’t I seen these?? Clarke didn’t mess around. The post that had enraged her mother had been an upload by Clarke, another picture, this one when Lexa had her ice cream in hand in San Francisco, not paying any mind to the camera as Clarke had snapped a picture of Lexa, rainbow sticker on display on her chest and the caption Never quite understood all that pride business until I had you by my side.

Instagram was its own minefield still. She posted pictures, sometimes just a sappy quote, tagging
Lexa in the image and tacking on a heart emoji.

To hold up her end of this, after all this was entirely for her, Lexa pushed past her mother’s rage and responded as wholeheartedly as she dared. She dug down deep for her own responses, tampering down her common sense to bring out her true feelings in a rush as they interacted on social media. If anyone doubted this relationship Lexa would be shocked, because she was the one in on faking the whole thing and in those moments even she would forget, smile taking over as she tapped out her own silly, swirling feelings of a response.

“Yeah,” Lexa answers. “My mom called me losing her mind the other day.”

“And that’s…” Clarke hesitates, peanut butter in one hand as the other begins to play with the ends of her hair, momentarily stalled in her mission. “Good?”

Despite herself, Lexa thinks of that phone conversation, the blunted edges of anger and disappointment, the frustration she could feel reaching out through the phone. It was anxiety inducing and counterintuitive of all the self-preservation strategies Lexa had utilized for years. “Yeah, I-I think it’s good.”

Clarke puts the peanut butter away and folds up the bags, setting them by the front door. “Well good, just let me know if it’s ever too much.”

Of course, she knows that Clarke is referencing in regards to Lexa’s mother, not about the feeling taking over inside of her, not about the hope it stirred and the imagination it leads to.

So Lexa nods, rolling up her yoga mat, feeling exposed in her sports bra and tight black pants. “Will do.” It would be so easy to leave it at that, to hide go back into hiding and duck back into her burrow of protection in her room. The part of Lexa that doesn’t always think before speaking, though, suddenly blurs out, “What if someone uploads pictures of you at that party on Friday?” and Clarke freezes, full body stuck in its motion of reaching towards the top shelf.

Maybe Clarke is wondering how Lexa knows there would be anything worth seeing in pictures from the party on Friday, maybe she’s thinking that even if there is she isn’t giving up her entire dating life just to craft a more convincing lie to Lexa’s mom. “I turned on my notifications,” Clarke says by way of explanation, arm dropping though she continued to face the cabinets. “So I see anything I’m tagged in right away, in case I need to run intervention.”
Lexa nods to no one, feeling unfair irritation rolling in her stomach coupled with anger that didn’t have any place. Clarke was allowed to do as she pleases. Lexa couldn’t fault her for living her life. But the sadness and disappointment were too hard to swallow, especially with Clarke here in front of her. So instead Lexa reaches for the nearby annoyance and embraces it in hopes of squandering those other feelings away.

“I’m sorry if I-”

“It’s fine,” Lexa interrupts before Clarke can say anything else. She didn’t want to know what Clarke was sorry for. At the end of the day, Clarke Griffin owed her no apologies, no reason to be sorry. She was having fun, going on a date with someone who would say yes in place of Lexa who offered nothing more than a no.

She didn’t want the apology because it made her feel worse for what had happened, worse for how she felt watching it take place and her reaction to it.

The awkwardness and the roiling in her stomach overcome the self-indignation. Lexa slips into her room without another word and remains there for the rest of the night.

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Raven must make it her personal mission to patch things up. She lays in Lexa’s bed Wednesday night, chocolate chip cookies in hand as she talks.

Mostly Lexa is distracted by the crumbs gathering in her sheets, but then Raven says, “I mean, this will never get better if you two just don’t ever see each other,” and Lexa’s mind is quickly pulled from thinking about cookie pieces scratching against her skin in the middle of the night.

“There’s nothing...it’s not...” Lexa has no idea what the right thing to say is. Because there is something wrong and Raven would simply deflate if Lexa told her she didn’t think it was worth fixing. Because, as far as Lexa sees it, Raven is her friend, not Clarke. Why should she feel obligated to heal herself from the brokenness of her tenuous acquaintanceship with Clarke Griffin when Raven is the one she cares about?

In summary, the answer is because Raven is the one she cares about. And Raven’s love is offered few and far between. Her love was bestowed to Lexa, hesitantly and sparingly in the beginning, but in full force now. Her love was first and foremost given to her sister, something which Lexa
understood before, when Clarke was a mere mention of a person, but grasped even more now, watching them interact. Clarke was number one.

So for that reason, Lexa couldn’t write Clarke off entirely. She had to try, to rewire her heart and her brain, to go back to Clarke being exclusively Raven’s sister and no longer the girl setting Lexa’s heart racing like it was mid-marathon.

“You’re right,” Lexa admits which is how the three of them end up squished together on the couch, movie playing and pizza and fries in front of them.

Raven’s movie choices aren’t all that different from Murphy’s, which is how the end up watching some gruesome horror-esque film that Lexa routinely wrinkles her nose at and tries not to retch up the pizza that sat like a rock in her stomach.

The lights are off, Raven’s feet are tucked beneath Lexa’s thigh, and the TV is loud as the creepy music climbs. Clarke sits on the end to Lexa’s right, pillow in her lap and knees pulled to her chest. When the evil clown or face painted serial killer or whatever jumps out, the music hitting a crescendo, Clarke screams, whole body jumping back and sliding closer to Lexa.

“Raven, I hate you,” Clarke declares as the pillow comes up to cover the majority of her face.

“It’s not like you didn’t know what we were watching, dumbass,” Raven replies without taking her eyes off the screen, still munching on fries casually as a chainsaw revs. “It’s not even scary, Clarke. You’ve just convinced yourself it is.”

“Lexa, tell her this is horrifying,” Clarke insists, her face inching behind Lexa’s shoulder, the skin of her cheek pressed against Lexa’s bare shoulder.

With a laugh, more forced than natural, Lexa answers, “It’s gross, sure, but scary? I’m gonna have to disagree.”

“No, no,” Clarke murmurs, arm wrapping around Lexa when she goes to move away. “If you aren’t scared then you’re obligated to save me from this god awful movie and not leave until it’s over.”

Lexa straightens, as if she hasn’t imagined Clarke’s arm wrapped around her and her face pressed against her enough recently. Now she could hold onto this moment, this exact sensation, in her head
for as long as her mind fought against releasing it, forcing her to relive over and over how nice it felt having Clarke’s warm breath against her, eyelashes fluttering across Lexa’s neck as Clarke moves up to poke her face out, lips parted and just barely grazing over Lexa’s shoulder as Clarke moves.

“Go use Raven as your human shield. I have to pee,” Lexa argues even as she finds herself giving into Clarke’s urgent, tightening grasp of her arm.

“Raven is the demonic subspecies that picked this movie in the first place,” Clarke argues, and when Lexa’s arm falls against Clarke’s chest for a mere second, god was that not intentional, she can feel the beating of her heart. She really was terrified. “She’s not to be trusted.”

Raven throws a fry over at them. “So goddamn dramatic,” she answers, though Lexa doesn’t miss the apologetic look Raven at least has the decency to shoot her.

Yes, obviously Raven was right, this would cure her miserable, all consuming crush on Clarke in no time flat. Thank god for this brilliant plan.

Lightning flashes on the screen followed by the boom of thunder, the face in the window washed clean as it looked in towards his victims and even Lexa tenses. Clarke’s urgent fear was rubbing off on her. The scream of the chick who looks towards the window is fake, but Lexa flinches against the sound, hand reaching out to grab onto Clarke’s who holds it in earnest.

This was a terrible idea. This was easily the worst idea Raven had ever had.

As Clarke extracts herself from behind Lexa so she can more so curl against her side, head burying into the space between Lexa’s shoulder and neck, her blonde hair falling into her face as her grip tightened on Lexa’s hand, all Lexa can think is how much she kind of wants to thank her horrible, idiotic, manipulative best friend.

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When they turn the lights back on Clarke and Lexa shift away from each other, space for Jesus between them and all that. Neither of them move from their spots on the couch.

“It’s almost eleven,” Raven says as she shoves the leftover pizza into the fridge. “Aren’t you guys going to bed?”
“I’m in my bed,” Clarke responds, knees pulled to her chest, her eyes fixed on the now blank TV screen. “Also I now feel like if my back is exposed in any manner, I will be immediately grabbed and yanked into some horrible underworld of death.”

Raven shakes her head. “Sometimes I forget how much of a pussy you are,” she taunts before turning to Lexa. “What’s your excuse?”

Lexa isn’t scared; there were enough things to be afraid of in real life to bother being afraid by made up stories of stupid teenagers in the woods, after all. Maybe, though, she’s been sucked into Clarke’s circle of fear and can’t quite figure out how to be set free. “I just happen to like our couch.”

“You too?” Raven asks, her tone incredulous as she stands overtop the two of them. “You guys are losers. I’m going to bed.” She walks away, shaking her head. “If either of you climbs into bed with me in the middle of the night try not to wet yourselves,” she adds over her shoulder.

The door to her room shuts, and Lexa thinks about how much she is going to murder Raven later for leaving her here, glued to the couch with the ghost of Clarke’s touch still floating against her skin.

“I really hate scary movies,” Clarke says, swallowing heavily as she turns to look at Lexa, offering a brief laugh at herself. “Raven is an ass.”

“I second that one,” Lexa murmurs, shifting, her eyes glancing around the room and checking to make sure the deadbolt on the door was turned. It was silly, sure, but even she wasn’t immune to fear. Just Raven had mastered that apparently.

Clarke shoots a look over her shoulder as if looking for something that wasn’t there. “Thanks for joining us tonight,” she says, settling back against the couch, her head resting against the cushion as she looked to Lexa. “I know you’re busy but...this was fun.”

“You mean when it wasn’t awful?”

Clarke laughs, biting her lip to tuck away the smile afterward. “Yeah, except for then.”

The air around them seems to thicken, like it was harder to draw a proper breath in. Lexa’s lips part,
to draw the oxygen in as her body seems to move of its own volition. Because now she knows what it’s like to have Clarke pressed against her. She knows what that static between them consisted of, how to get it to climb, the soft, gentle press of Clarke’s cheek, the strong, continuous grip of her arm, and god, the firm relentless grasp of her hand. Palms together, fingers intertwined, tight and urgent and needing. Lexa wouldn’t be forgetting that sensation anytime soon. Nor would she forget the tensing low in her stomach or the way the oxygen catches in her throat, the very capillaries of her body coming alive in those moments.

“Lexa, I—” Clarke hesitates, words vanishing while Lexa loses herself in the way Clarke says her name, the roll of the L off of her tongue, the catch of the X, the second she draws out the A. Lexa had dropped her full name years ago, refusing to be called Alexandra from the very start of kindergarten. That was the name her mother called her, the one inserted with disappointment and anger and sadness. Lexa didn’t want to be that girl anymore, not even as a tiny five-year-old who hadn’t learned how to hold a pencil or tie her shoes or add two and two; she had already learned that the name Alexandra was no longer for her.

Never had she known she would love being called Lexa quite as much as she does when Clarke is muttering it in a heat filled moment, cheeks flushed and heart still racing, even though the movie-induced terror has ebbed and faded.

“Yes?” Lexa pushes because she doesn’t know what Clarke’s going to say. It might be nothing at all, but it feels important. It feels like the sort of statement you bite back before a confession comes tumbling forward. An imagined moment maybe, but Lexa holds her breath, waiting, anyway.

“I have something to ask you.”

Lexa freezes, the exhale of breath stalled on the way out, her heart stuttering to a stop, her brain fogged over so thickly there’s no thought to be discovered. She’s frozen in place, finding her weight pushed more against her right arm as she leans towards Clarke who’s untangled herself, shifting towards Lexa in her own small movements.

“O-okay,” Lexa murmurs when her lips remember how to move. “Go ahead.”

She waits, trying not to guess what’s to come next, in case it disappoints. When Clarke bites her lip, Lexa imagines how it must feel to pull it free, how the sensation of pressing their lips together would shift that dormant desire inside of her, how biting into Clarke’s lip herself would send shockwaves all the way down to her toes.

Clarke’s eyes are dark and focused on Lexa, no shifting to the side in nerves, no urgent, fast blinks,
no letting them slide shut. Lexa thinks how brave Clarke Griffin must be and, for some unimaginable reason, now is the moment when she suddenly wants to know which Hogwarts house Clarke belongs to as Lexa makes a bet with herself that she’s a steadfast Gryffindor.

“I have a favor to ask,” Clarke says after the world’s longest moment. It was silent between them for so long that Lexa feels jolted back to the world of hearing when Clarke breaks, startling Lexa out of her reverie. “You can say no, if you want.”

Favors were a funny thing, Lexa thinks instead of responding. Because technically, Clarke was doing Lexa a favor by pretending to date her, pretending to have feelings for her and find her attractive and beautiful. And some days this favor felt like death itself pressing against Lexa’s heart, like the weight of it was going to crush her under.

Lexa’s mouth is open, ready to tell Clarke to fire away and ask already, hoping that she wasn’t about to be crushed with disappointment even though it seemed anything short of Clarke kissing her then and there might just do so, when someone knocks on the door.

The two of them jump apart, unknowing how close they’d become in the first place. Lexa feels her heart racing, knows it has nothing to do with that ridiculous movie and shakes her head in an attempt to clear it. “Who in the world could that be?” Lexa murmurs, glancing to the clock on the stove to confirm that is indeed eleven at night.

Clarke shrugs in response, eyes shifting from Lexa to the door and back again.

Well, Lexa figures as she stands, that moment’s gone. Might as well determine who exactly was the intruder. She glances out the peephole, finding no one familiar on the other side. “It’s some girl,” Lexa says, and Clarke simply raises an eyebrow.

With a sigh, Lexa pulls open the door, prepared to let this chick know that Raven was not available right now. “Hey, listen, sorry but—”

“I’m sorry,” the girl begins immediately, posture straightening as soon as the door opens. “I know it’s crazy late, but I got stuck in traffic, and I tried to convince myself to wait until tomorrow, but I just couldn’t.”

Lexa raises an eyebrow, looking over her shoulder to cast Clarke a glance who simply shrugs. Well alright, at least this wasn’t another mystery date for Clarke.
“Who are you?” Lexa asks, hip jutting against the doorframe, so the majority of the apartment was blocked from view.

The girl rolls her eyes. “Right, sorry. I was looking for Alexandra?”

Lexa’s stomach drops. When her mother said to either end her thing with Clarke or she’d intervene, Lexa had hardly thought she was serious. And no one ever called her Alexandra outside of her mom. “I, um, that’s me. Lexa. I’m Lexa.”

The girl smiles, the hard planes of her face softer now. She’s got jutting cheekbones and a long nose, and oval shaped, green eyes. When she smiles, she looks younger, gentler. “Lexa, hi.”

“Hi?”

“I’m Anya,” she says, extending her hand. “I’m your sister.”

Chapter End Notes

I like to keep you guys on your toes, what can I say. Hope you enjoyed the chapter and I am very eager to hear your thoughts once again. As always thank you so much for the support, next chapter coming Monday. Enjoy your weekend everyone!
A sister? Lexa does not have a sister. Lexa has a mother. That’s all she’s ever had. She has a mother who glares and sets down wine glasses a little too heavily and makes her expectations very well known. Sure, she had a grandmother who visited a time or two, her Mimi who always smelled of lemons and who tapped the end of Lexa’s nose and taught her the rosary. She’s got a handful of cousins and aunts and uncles to go with them.

Sure, she has family. But Lexa Woods does not have a sister.

“I’m sorry,” Lexa starts to say, moving to shut the door. “I think you have the wrong person.”

“Wait,” the girl says, hand moving automatically to stop the door from shutting in her face. When her eyes flash back to Lexa’s, she can’t help but be astounded by how familiar they looked, like her own. “I hate to spring this on you, really. I kept meaning to like, message you on Facebook or something, but when I sat down to write something out to you...none of it was right.”

That was something Lexa could grasp at least. The lack of words was a familiar sensation. Perhaps one she was experiencing right this moment. “I don’t have a sister,” she finds somewhere amongst the jumble of thoughts.

“Well, I’m your half-sister,” Anya corrects, weight shifting from one foot to the next. “My dad—our dad always said you probably knew nothing about me.”

That makes Lexa stand up taller, suddenly feeding off of righteous anger. “I don’t have a dad,” she answers. Which is ridiculous, everyone had a dad to one extent or another. As far as she was concerned, though, hers had stopped existing the day he’d walked away from her.

Anya bites her lip. “Can I come in?”

The audacity takes Lexa by surprise. How could someone who was so clearly not welcome be brave
“This just isn’t really a conversation I feel like is appropriate for the hallway.”

Lexa crosses her arms over her chest. “I’m sorry, but I don’t think I’m interested in any conversation at all.”

Anya’s eyebrows shoot up for a second, her whole body taking a small step back in surprise. “Okay, right,” she nods, blinking heavily. “I’m sorry to bother you, I guess.”

If Anya’s trying to hold back the disappointment, she does a bad job of it. It doesn’t make Lexa’s opinion on just where this girl could go change, though. Not until she feels Clarke’s presence at her shoulder, not until she turns and looks at her and sees the wide eyes and gentle admonishment written on her face. “I’m just going to go for a walk,” Clarke says, shooting Lexa a hard look. “I’ll be back.”

If only Lexa didn’t know Clarke was scared out of her mind right about now. She was terrified from that ridiculous movie and was still going out into the pitch dark just for the sake of offering Lexa some privacy, along with the opportunity to shoot her a look. Maybe if Lexa didn’t know these things as Clarke slips past, pulling a sweatshirt over her head, perhaps she could turn this chick away and call it a night.

As soon as Clarke’s disappeared down the first few stairs, though, Lexa can’t help but open the door a little bit further to allow Anya entrance. “You can come in,” she says quietly, realizing that maybe her self-preservation had simply made her an asshole. “For a bit at least.”

Anya’s smile is smaller this time, hesitant, but she walks across the threshold, eyes scanning along the apartment.

Lexa shuts the door behind her, leaving it unlocked for Clarke. She crosses her arms over her chest, considering inviting Anya to sit down but unsure if she wanted to invest that amount into this interaction. “Sorry,” she says eventually, arms uncrossing. “This is just the first I’ve heard of you, and it’s a bit...”

“Surprising?” Anya finishes. “I should’ve sent the Facebook message,” she mutters under her breath.
“Probably,” Lexa answers, unable to help a slight smile. She blinks, this doesn’t seem real. “Do you want anything to drink?” she finally offers as she tries to take this girl in. Dirty blond hair, skin a shade or two darker than Lexa’s, green eyes too familiar. How could there be someone out in the world who was half made up of the same half of stuff that composed her? How could she never of guessed this was a possibility? Or more so that this person would care.

Anyaa nods, “Water would be good.”

In the kitchen Lexa flips on the light, ignoring the dirty pan that still sat on the stove or the dishes from tonight stacked in the sink. She wordlessly holds out a cup of ice water. Now would be a good time for Clarke to reappear.

“This is weird,” Lexa says when the quiet is filling the space too much. The air was stuffed full of silence, and Lexa was starting to think she might choke on it.

She nods again, taking a long drink of water. “I know. I was so caught up in the fact that I was finally meeting you that I forgot how weird it would be to...meet you.”

“So,” Lexa starts, piecing together her phrasing. “You knew about me then.”

“Would you like to sit? I always pictured this conversation with us sitting.”

Maybe it’s not fair, but that irritates Lexa. She’s annoyed that this girl has had the chance to imagine anything, that she’s had this knowledge of her father’s forgotten child and has been given the opportunity to process it and come to terms in her own time. Meanwhile, Lexa is being forced to face this reality in her own damn kitchen at nearly midnight on a Wednesday night.

She leads her to the couch, keeping both her feet planted firmly on the ground when she sits, her posture impeccable and her expression impenetrable.

“You’re pretty,” Anya says out of nowhere, her eyes scanning along Lexa’s face. “I always figured you would be.”

“I’m more than pretty,” Lexa counters because she didn’t want to be seen as just pretty. She hated being pretty. Pretty meant hands folded in her lap, big poofy dress on. Pretty meant the boys touching you when you didn’t say it was okay. Pretty meant assumptions.
“Oh, I’m sure,” Anya seems to correct quickly. “I didn’t mean it like...Our dad always says, well, said, that he would bet anything you were beautiful.”

The correction to past tense does not go missed by Lexa. “So he’s dead.”

Anya’s whole body seems to react, her back arching in on herself, the air stuck halfway to her lungs, the tears gathering in her eyes. “Yes,” she nods, eyes blinking fast as she looks away from Lexa. “He’s dead.”

Good riddance, Lexa thinks, more than a little peeved that this girl in front of her got to grieve the man she knew when Lexa was forced to attempt to miss the figment of a person she’d imagined. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Likewise,” Anya says, some strange form of a chuckle and a sob breaking lose. “His biggest regret was not fighting harder for you.”

The words make Lexa doubt the only story she’s ever known. Mom met a boy in college, they fell in love, or at least lust, and then came Lexa, a screaming red disappointment from the instant she’d greeted the earth. Two years later and the boy left, off to something, or someone, better than the two of them. And so Lexa’s mom grew tall and strong and capable, overcoming the loss before Lexa even knew it had been a thing. She’d forgotten he’d existed, assuming her father just didn’t subsist until she was old enough to grasp the science of it all.

“He didn’t fight at all,” Lexa bites out. He ran away, she thinks.

“He’s tried getting in contact with you for years,” Anya says, voice sad. “He always wondered...Did you get any of the phone calls? The cards?”

How could there be phone calls and cards from someone who doesn’t even exist? How could he have been reaching out when he’d disappeared before she’d ever made it out of diapers? “I-” she shakes her head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Anya’s eyes glance around the living room, resting momentarily on the pushed aside coffee table, now cluttered with Clarke’s art and supplies. “He really wanted to get back into contact with you before he died.” Her voice Chokes on the last couple of words, and she clears her throat to try and cover it up. “I’m sorry, I’m sure this is a lot all at once.”
It was, which is maybe why the room is starting to go sideways and her vision was fuzzy around the edges because everything this girl has said since knocking on the door has been entirely wrong. Lexa didn’t have a sister. She didn’t have a father. She didn’t have someone trying to get into contact with her. And she definitely didn’t have a dead parent.

Clarke reappears, cheeks slightly redder from the air outside, arms crossed over her pajama-clad chest, her bottoms dragging along the floor as she kicks off her flip-flops. “Sorry,” she whispers, attempting to make herself small as she walked by to the kitchen.

“I think maybe you should go,” Lexa says, her head nodding along as she spoke as if agreeing to her statement. Going was good. Going meant this would all stop. “I’m sorry.”

Anya stands immediately. “I understand,” but she hovers, eyes on Lexa, evaluating, watching.

Lexa shakes the feeling off, walking over to the front door which she holds open. There was no uncertainty about what she expected just now. This had been enough. This was far beyond enough.

In the doorway, Anya hovers. She hesitates, half in and half out of the apartment now. Her eyes are all over Lexa, roaming up and down, taking in her supposed sister. “If you want to talk more…” she holds a slip of paper, phone number, email, and address written in neat, concise handwriting. “I’ll be around for a few more days. I’d love a chance to talk to you again.”

Taking the slip of paper, Lexa nods, that was the best she could offer right now. “Thanks,” she says even though she feels just about anything but gratitude right now.

When Anya opens her mouth, as if she has more to say, Lexa offers an apologetic smile and slides the door shut, hearing the click of the doorknob and twisting the deadbolt into place.

Her heart’s still stuttering out in her chest, beating frantically as her palms tingled, her vision blurry at the edges.

Something seems to be rooting her to the spot just in front of the door, legs unmoving, feet unfeeling. Until, that is, there’s a hand on her shoulder, another presence snapping her back into reality. “Hey, Lex,” Clarke starts, voice soft and slow. “Are you…”
She fades off, as any mildly intelligent person would. Because no, she was not okay. This wasn’t exactly a situation someone was okay in. And because of that, because she was not okay, Lexa didn’t particularly want Clarke here just now. Clarke simply made her less okay. Clarke made her heart beat faster and her fingers tingle and her whole body freeze. Lexa didn’t need more of that.

Her eyes shift behind Clarke, to Raven’s room. Raven wouldn’t even be annoyed if Lexa came crawling into bed with her. She’d stir aside and throw a heavy, sleepy arm overtop of Lexa’s body as she settled back into sleep. If Lexa nudged her enough, whispered her name frantically enough, Raven would stir, bleary eyes and a coating of irritation until she heard just what had lead to Lexa being there beside her.

Right about now Lexa could really use someone who is steadier than her, someone to anchor her safely to the reality she lived within and the fact that her life was the same it had always been. Some girl knocking on her door didn’t make any damn difference.

Lexa wasn’t any different because of it. Nothing changed because of it. Her life was the same it had always been, her father had still walked out on her and her mother. Nothing was different.

“Lexa?” Clarke’s grabbing her shoulders, eyebrows furrowing as she plants herself directly in Lexa’s line of vision. “Hey, are you okay?”

And she’s not. Nothing was different, but everything she knew felt backward. Nothing had changed except the story she’d been told her entire life, except the abandonment she’d carried with her for as long as she can remember which might not even be true.

The one thing her mom had always been was truthful. She’d been what some may have viewed as cruel when eight-year-old Lexa had asked where her daddy was, but she’d laid out the truth. Just like she’d told the truth of Santa or what a bad grade meant or why participation trophies were nonsense. Her mom told the truth, especially to Lexa. Her mother was flawed, sure, but so was Lexa. The one thing she’d clung to was the fact that her mother was honest. That had always been fact. Merciless, sure, but honest.

“Let’s sit,” Clarke says, hands pulling Lexa towards the couch, sitting her there, arms remaining on her shoulders as Clarke leans in front of her, biting her lip. “Just take a deep breath maybe.”

She does, hoping it cleanses the concept of sisters and dead fathers straight out of her as she releases it. “I’m okay,” she insists even though her voice is tight and her world is all tilted and misshapen, like its coming through a funhouse mirror.
“Are you sure?” Clarke asks with an eyebrow raised as she takes a seat next to Lexa, still close, presence still invading. Lexa clings to it, forgetting the negative emotions Clarke roiled up within her and holding onto the good. “Because that was....a lot.”

Lexa nods, unsure if she’s agreeing or reassuring. Nodding seems good enough as she searches for an answer one way or the other. Clarke’s hand is fixed on her back, resting between Lexa’s shoulder blades, the thumb sweeping back and forth in an attempt to offer comfort. Lexa’s eyes slip shut, her whole body tuning in on this small offer of consolation as her mind attempts to lead her down a rabbit hole of questions and worries and accusations.

“It’s okay,” Clarke offers, her arm wrapping fully around Lexa’s shoulders, the thumb beginning its trail once more now along the side of Lexa’s arm.

Clarke’s arm around her shoulders is soft and warm and steadying. It leads Lexa back against the cushions, her body relaxing into the couch as Clarke helps guide her there. Even though she doesn’t necessarily want to, even though she knows it isn’t the best idea with everything that’s happened between them and the feelings Lexa never fully expected to get under control, even still she lets herself be guided beside Clarke. Even so, she lets the small sense of comfort sink in. Even so, she allows herself to remain fixed here, holding on to what she knows.

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Thursday is god awful. Lexa is exhausted, having fallen asleep with her cheek pressed into Clarke’s shoulder until three in the morning when she woke and stumbled off to bed. After that she never did fully fall back to sleep, stuck in her head as her mind reeled and her thoughts circled, shifting into some odd half-sleep where her worries transcended into some dream-like state.

The blaring alarm was somewhat of a relief, an excuse to slip out of bed and leave her circling thoughts behind. One class down and two to go and Lexa was beginning to think otherwise, however. Her eyes were heavy, her shoulders tight and aching as she shifted in her seat. The professor was rambling on about the upcoming midterm and how they needed to be prepared, same old same old.

For whatever reason she had slipped that piece of paper into her pocket, the phone number carried on her person but not bothering to enter it into her phone.

She didn’t know what she wanted to do just yet. A part of her wanted to ignore it all. Nothing had to
change if she ignored the information which had been presented. Her life could remain the same if she let this all fall away. She didn’t have to grieve an unknown father’s death; she didn’t have to contend with some unknown, older half-sister; she needn’t face the idea of her mother blatantly having lied to her.

But, Lexa can’t help but think, what exactly of her life was she craving not to change exactly? What was she desperately clinging to? The only redeeming factor her mother possessed? The righteous anger that had tainted her outlook because some bum father had walked out on her? The crippling loneliness she’d clung to ever since she was a child, no siblings to share the burden of being a Woods or to understand the struggles she grappled with?

Chairs scrape along the floor as the fellow students around her stand, class seemingly dismissed. Lexa rubs at her eyes in an attempt to be more awake, shoving her book in her bag. She had plenty of time to make her way over to her next class. Hopefully, the long walk would be enough to help clear her head, or at least help her to feel a little less like a mostly asleep body occupying a chair.

She flows into the sea of students, not even noticing the extra person joining at her side until the crowd disperses, leaving just her and Clarke walking together. “Hey, what are you-” she starts to ask until Clarke wordlessly holds out a coffee cup in response. “Oh, thanks.”

“Figured you could use the caffeine,” Clarke answers, the red shirt of her Target uniform seemingly glowing when they walk out into the sunlight.

“You work tonight?” Lexa asks, trying to mask the disappointment. She didn’t need to go back down the route of wanting Clarke, not that she’d ever veered off, but she could use a friend right now, as many of them as possible. Clarke was proving to be a good friend.

With a nod of her head, Clarke continues in step with Lexa. “I get off at eight, though,” she says, throwing Lexa a smile. “Wanna do dinner or something?”

The question makes Lexa heart flutter, despite everything. The imagery of last week was still burned into the back of her eyelids, though, so she can’t help herself when she says, “Is Bellamy coming too?” even if the bitterness in her tone is unfounded and obvious.

Clarke’s eyebrows shoot up before scrunching back down in seeming confusion. “Bellamy?” she asks, head cocking to the side as her steps falter. “Why would he come?”
“Aren’t you two like...a thing?” Lexa asks, even though she should know better. This dumb thing with Clarke should hardly be the primary drive for her anxieties right about now. In fact, it was time to let the whole affair go altogether.

But then Clarke’s laughing, a light giggle turning into a full-bodied chuckle as her shoulders shake and she loops an arm through Lexa’s. “Me and Bellamy?” she asks the question like it’s ludicrous, like Lexa hadn’t seen them, the smiles and glances and Clarke’s body moving against his on the dancefloor. “Bellamy’s cool, don’t get me wrong, but I think he’s more of a buddy than anything else.”

She wants to ask questions, demand answers for the way Clarke’s lips lingered so close to his ear and insist on a response as to why he’d been looking at her with puppy dog eyes, but that would require admitting that Lexa had noticed anything at all. Not to mention, it would force her to tell Clarke that she’d been at that party in the first place. Which might next lead her to explaining where she’d gone after the party. That wasn’t a conversation she was looking to have.

“Oh,” she says instead, eyes glancing around her as she tried to piece this together. Had she read into the whole situation? Had she created this miserable disaster entirely of her own accord because she couldn’t even handle two people smiling at each other? Jesus Christ, she needed to get ahold of herself. “I just thought you guys-”

Clarke shrugs and Lexa stops talking. “Octavia just said he needed someone to go with, and I figured why not. He’s cute and all, don’t get me wrong, and we had fun, but I don’t think he’s exactly my type.”

Then Clarke’s throwing Lexa this look that makes Lexa feel like the world has shifted beneath her feet and her stomach is dropping because while Clarke was apparently deciding Bellamy wasn’t her type, Lexa had managed to freak out enough that she was letting herself be bedded by some chick whose name she still didn’t bother to know. God, she was an idiot.

Lexa wants to ask questions about who is Clarke’s type and what that means, but they’re outside of the science building and Lexa’s run out of an excuse to carry out this conversation further so instead she nods. “Dinner would be nice. I’ll see if Raven wants to come?” it comes out as a question even though Lexa fully intended it as a statement.

Clarke’s bright, light and easy in that magical way she always seems to manage. “Sounds good, Lex,” and then she’s turning away and walking back across campus where her car must be.

If Lexa had turned away, she might have missed Clarke glancing back over her shoulder towards
her, seeming surprised to find her still watching. She waves her hand to wave goodbye, and Lexa mimics the movement, hand frozen in a wave as Clarke turns away and vanishes amongst the crowd of students.

Chapter End Notes

Hopefully that answered a few of your questions from last chapter! Clearly there's a lot to be dealt with in the realm of Lexa and Anya, and, unfortunately, the ball is in dear Lexa's court. Can't wait to hear your thoughts! Thanks again to everyone who commented last update. Again, you're all the best! You guys know the drill. I'll see you all Thursday.
Chapter 13

In ‘N Out Burger was overrated. That was the first thought Lexa had when she’d first tried their burger and fries her second day out on the west coast. It was about a full grade level lower than traditional fast food, which was actually quite impressive.

When Clarke suggests it for dinner, over a Facebook post filled with little heart emojis, of course, Lexa can’t help but agree. Even if their greasy burgers and mediocre fries left something to be desired. The line is long, like every other night at this godforsaken mascarade of a restaurant. She and Raven stand near the back, Raven typing something away on her phone and Lexa pretending to read something on hers while glancing up every few seconds to look for Clarke.

“I’m gonna need you to stop,” Raven says about the tenth time Lexa does it.

Her eyes fall back to her phone immediately, playing at nonchalance. “I don’t know what you mean,” she mumbles, hoping Twitter is interesting enough to hold her attention.

“Mhm,” Raven mumbles, and Lexa can feel her stare fixated on her. “So what’s the deal?”

When Lexa had called and invited Raven to join herself and Clarke for dinner, Raven had been momentarily thrown off but agreed quickly. It wasn’t exactly surprising that now she would have some questions.

“Well,” Lexa says quickly, not wanting to be caught mid-conversation on this particular topic when Clarke came strolling up. The look Raven shoots her lets Lexa know that such an answer wasn’t going to fly. “I don’t know. I-I don’t know.” She’d messed up, Lexa knew that, and maybe letting this thing with Clarke go any further was foolish, especially with the chaos her life had turned into recently, but there was this renowned hope, and it was stupid and blind and asking for trouble, yet Lexa embraced it regardless.

If nothing else, she reasons, they had to see through this family reunion at least, right?

“Have you guys talked?” Raven asks, and Lexa can’t help but glance around them again.
“Yep,” she answers simply. They’d talked plenty, many words exchanged.

Raven huffs, arms over her chest. “About anything real?”

“I like to think my suddenly appearing sister counts as something real.” Raven had been annoyed that she’d gone to bed early last night and missed the whole ordeal when Lexa had explained it to her. She’d processed the matter for a few seconds before fixing Lexa with a dead-on stare and asking, “Well is she hot?” and Lexa whacked her across the arm before breaking down into laughter because of course, as if Raven would respond any other way.

A look gets shot in her direction but then Clarke is sidling up next to her and Lexa would certainly hope Raven knows that means this conversation is completely over.

“Hey,” Clarke greets them, settling next to Lexa in line and staring up at the menu overhead. Her blonde hair is all pulled back, a few strands framing her face that swing when she turns her face to flash Lexa a smile. “How was the rest of your day?”

Honestly, Lexa isn’t even sure anymore if she spent more of it thinking about this girl in front of her or the one who had come knocking on their front door last night. “Could have been worse,” she answers, fingers reaching into the front pocket of her jeans to verify that the slip of paper was still there, something she found herself checking on all day. “You?”

Clarke shrugs, casting a glance to Raven before her gaze shifts back to Lexa. “Better now,” she answers, sending Lexa’s heart into a gallop before adding, “You know, with food so near in my future.”

A sharp exhale of a laugh is Lexa’s response, and she closes her eyes and draws in a breath when Clarke next looks away. Raven’s got an eyebrow raised, but Lexa waves her off.

“So,” Raven says as soon they’re seated with trays of food in front of them. She’s already half devoured her milkshake as she turns to Lexa. “Illegitimate sister, I’m gonna need some more info.”

Lexa shrugs, she only had so much information to offer. She felt as if she barely understood any of this herself. “I think I might too.” All she knew was that this girl appeared, she looked older than Lexa, more like an actual adult. She came in like a whirlwind announcing her existence, and the death of the father Lexa hardly knew existed almost in the same breath. The history Lexa had only ever held a slight grasp on in the first place had been entirely displaced, rolled into chaos and
confusion and left in upheaval.

“Do you think you’ll call her?” Clarke asks, fries reaching into Lexa’s ketchup pile instead of creating her own.

“What about your mom?” Raven demands suddenly, eyes going wide. “Do you think she knew?”

With a glare, Lexa finishes chewing her burger so she can glare at both of them. “You aren’t helping,” she mumbles around her food. “I don’t know, okay?”

Clarke nods as Raven holds her hands up in surrender. “I’m gonna need a full update whenever you do,” Raven comments. “My family drama has so been lacking recently, and I could use something juicy.”

“Your mom’s wedding is in a month and a half,” Lexa comments, fry poking towards her friend’s face. “I’m sure you’ll have plenty of material there.”

“Is Mom on your case about whether or not you’re bringing someone?” Raven asks, turning to Clarke. “She keeps saying, ‘I don’t care one way or the other, but I really need to know, sweetie,’” she comments in an impressively mocking tone. “It’s making me crazy.”

Clarke bites her lip, looking to Lexa and then back to Raven. “No,” she answers, but Lexa sees the look flashed in Raven’s direction, Nonverbal communication at its finest.

“O-kay then,” Raven shakes her head. “You two are lucky I love you so much ‘cause you’re both driving me up a wall right about now.”

When Lexa goes to shoot Raven a look Clarke has already beaten her to it, and for a brief moment they catch each other’s eyes, Raven forgotten.

The sister thing was definitely easier, Lexa thinks as she regains her breath as Clarke looks away. Lexa couldn’t imagine there was anything much more difficult than whatever was going on between them right now.
A dress was one thing, Lexa thinks as she stares down at the piece laying across her bed. A pale pink dress made of chiffon and matching, sparkly heels was another thing entirely.

As soon as Lexa had opened the package, she’d let out a groan of disapproval. When she’d next glanced to the tag and saw the size, one which she was pretty sure had never included her measurements, she groaned even more. Maybe a burger and fries for dinner last night hadn’t of been the best idea.

Her mom had already texted her and said to try the dress on and send a picture as soon as it arrived so she could approve it. Which might be worse than just having to wear it in the first place. First Lexa had to see herself in it, know exactly how uncomfortable it would be to traipse around in for the multi-hour affair.

These days she was in deep enough shit, however, so she follows instructions. The apartment is blessedly empty this evening, so there’s no one there to witness Lexa padding across the hall to steal Raven’s strapless bra or watch her twist herself into a pretzel in an attempt to get the zipper all the way up.

The angle makes the process difficult enough; the fact that it doesn’t fit only makes matters worse.

Lexa stands in front of the bathroom mirror, tugging the zipper, trying to pull the material closer together so it would budge. The damn thing is very decidedly stuck just below her shoulder blades, and there doesn’t seem to be any way to contortion herself to convince it to move otherwise.

The front door opens, and Lexa freezes, arms all wrapped behind her back as she catches her frenzied reflection looking back at her, sending a quick prayer up that Raven was uncharacteristically home on a Friday at seven as opposed to Clarke coming back from god knows where.

She steps out into the hall, figuring it best to get this over with sooner rather than later. Of course, it’s Clarke. Just, of course. “Oh, hey.”

Clarke smiles, eyebrows raising as she sets a brown bag down on the counter. “Nice tissue paper,” Clarke smirks, the corners of her mouth teasing and her eyebrows arching upward.
“Har har,” Lexa deadpans, hands twisting in front of her. “It’d be nicer if the damn tissue paper fit.”

Clarke casts an appraising look as she approaches Lexa. “I can give you a hand if you want,” she offers. In response, Lexa turns her back facing Clarke as she pulls her hair to the side. When Clarke grips the zipper a knuckle bumps against Lexa’s bare back, and she draws in a breath at the sensation. “Sorry, my hands are cold.”

Right, the temperature was the issue here.

Clarke’s other hand bunches the dress together, Lexa draws her shoulder blades closer in a way she couldn’t before to try and assist. “This dress wasn’t made for people with a skeleton,” Clarke grunts as she tugs the zipper, beginning to slide up. “What the fuck.”

But it zips into place, tight and unrelenting, the cinching keeping Lexa’s shoulders pulled back and tight. Probably some weird attempt at correcting her posture she thinks with an eye roll. “Is it god awful?”

Clarke’s eyes trail first down and then back up Lexa’s body when she turns around to face her. “It’s pretty,” Clarke answers, eyes settling for a brief second on Lexa’s chest before flitting away.

“But?” Lexa questions, it feels like there’s a but tucked in there somewhere.

Clarke’s head turns to the side, eyes blinking as she says, “But it’s not...right. It just doesn’t look like you.”

That would be because it isn’t her, not in the slightest. “Well that’s kind of the whole point, right?” she laughs though it feels wrong. Clarke doesn’t join in.

“But shouldn’t be,” she says, walking back over to Lexa, only inches away when she stops again. “It’s not like putting you in a pink dress makes you a different person.”

“At least she can pretend,” Lexa whispers, hating the pang it sends in her chest and the fact that she’s said the words at all. Lexa wasn’t one to search for sympathy, in fact she typically shuddered away from it. Now she expects a pitying look from Clarke, a sympathetic smile or fixed, sad eyes in response.
Instead, Clarke just shakes her head. “Well, that’s fucked up.” Her eyes are scanning along Lexa’s exposed arms, seemingly taking in the curve of her neck and the mole situated just below her collarbone. “Why would anyone want to make you somebody else?” Clarke asks, her voice quieter like if she spoke too loudly, Lexa would sprint off like a doe.

_Because I’m wrong_ , Lexa thinks so loud she wonders if Clarke can hear. _Because I’m vulgar and disturbed and stubborn, a product of the bad influences around me_. “It’s hardly as if it would be some great loss,” Lexa tries to joke, a desperate attempt to find levity in this heavy moment.

“Bullshit,” Clarke’s eyes cloud over, a flash of anger running across her face. “Lexa, you’re…” she trails off, her eyes roaming again and Lexa feels the air stuck deep within her lungs, the thoughts rolling through her mind blaring.

“What?” she demands, because Clarke seems stuck now and Lexa is rooted in this moment, hopeful that there’s something she is, something worth anything at all. That someone could think that of her.

But then the front door is banging open, and Raven comes rushing in. “Alright, I’m here for a brief celebration, but I’ve got someone picking me up at eight so let’s make this quick,” she’s practically shouting.

Clarke shoots away from Lexa, a jump back and then a few extra steps for good measure. “Brief works for me,” Clarke answers.

“What the fuck are you wearing?” Raven demands of Lexa, laughing. “Oh my god, I didn’t even know you had that much cleavage.”

Okay, I’m getting out of this immediately,” Lexa crosses her arms over her chest and turns towards her room.

“Hurry back!” Raven calls after her.

Thankfully the dress comes off a lot easier than it had gone on. Lexa remembers to snap a quick picture before the zipper is all the way down and considers it good enough. Her mother didn’t need to see the shoes. All heels were created equal.
In order to recover from what was probably one of the least comfortable dresses Lexa’s mother has subjected her to, she goes right for her pajamas, pulling on her slightly too big plaid pajama bottoms and an old soccer T-shirt from high school. Maybe she should just show up to that damn reunion like this.

Back in the kitchen Raven and Clarke are collaborating on utilizing the corkscrew. Lexa has seen more successful attempts to say the last.

“This is why you should always buy twist off,” Raven grunts as she maneuvers the tool into the bottle.

“I figured for eighteen dollars it would be twist off.”

“So what are we celebrating anyway?” Lexa asks, perching on one of the stools and propping her chin in her hands to watch the struggle continue.

Raven pauses in her attempts to elbow Clarke. “Miss artsy over here sold her first piece.”

“Wow,” Lexa says, eyebrows going up as she sat up a little straighter. “Congrats, that’s really great.”

Clarke waves the comments away, arms raised in celebration when Raven finally pulls the cork out with a solid pop. “No one get too excited. This bottle of wine cost more than I made off of it.”

“Irrelevant,” Raven says, pouring wine into each of the plastic cups and passing them around. “To success,” she says with her glass raised in cheers.

“To mild success,” Clarke amends.

“To credit cards in the meantime,” Lexa tacks on, drawing out a laugh from the group as the plastic clunks together.

Raven smacks her lips together for a moment after. “This is at least better than the wine I had last week.”
Clarke rolls her eyes, “Piss water is probably better than the wine you had last week.”

With a shrug, Raven drinks again. “Well look at you, Clarke. More successful than piss water.”

“Best believe I’m putting that on my fucking resume.”

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It was rare that Lexa went to the trail her Raven walked alone. She was here nearly once a day already; any more would be beyond excessive. That doesn’t stop her from biking over there Sunday afternoon, when the sun is still high in the sky and warm on her skin.

Murphy had visited her at work yesterday evening, when she was the last groomer remaining, working through drying the Saint Bernard who was more interested in playing. Murphy fed the dog occasional treats and worked towards his usual display of disinterest as he leaned against the wall and watched her.

“So you just, like, have this random ass half-sister walking around out there who you knew nothing about?” he asks after she’d laid out the story, in abbreviated detail, for him.

She shrugs, “Apparently. Demanding DNA evidence seemed overkill.”

He blows out a breath. “I wonder if I have any illegitimate siblings walking around.”

“Pretty sure that as a dude you should worry more about your illegitimate children.”

He points a finger in her direction and says, “Bite your tongue,” with a glare. “So what’s she like? Is she as uptight as you are?”

Now it’s Lexa’s turn to fix him with a look, hair dryer stalled in place for a moment as she does so. “I don’t know what she’s like,” Lexa says. She didn’t, not really. All she knew was that this girl had eyes that looked too familiar and that she talked too much and didn’t find it absurd to show up at
eleven at night, uninvited, to someone’s apartment that she doesn’t even know.

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Murphy demands. “Don’t tell me you’re just trying to ignore this whole thing.” When she doesn’t immediately answer, he seems to draw an assumption. “Oh, come on, Lexa. You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“I’m not ignoring it,” she argues, eyes fixed on the damp fur in front of her. “I’m processing.”

He picks her phone up from the table behind her and holds it out. “Process faster.”

So she made the call. Anya hadn’t picked up so Lexa sent a text instead, suggesting this trail because apparently, it was the only place in the entire bay area she could think of.

In response, Anya had apologized three separate times for missing the call and then said that would be great.

So now Lexa was here, locking her bike to the rack and pocketing the key in her sweatshirt.

A portion of her had been tempted to wear something nice, first impressions and all that, but then Lexa decided against it, settling for the same sort of apparel she wore here every single day, hair piled on top of her head and all. Besides, it wasn’t a first impression. The first impression she’d offered had been almost shutting the door in Anya’s face. Couldn’t start off stronger than that.

Anya’s already there, staring up at the bulletin board at the start of the trail, reading over the flyers advertising 5k’s and yoga classes.

“Hi,” Lexa says as she walks over to her, getting her attention.

“Oh,” Anya answers, as if in surprise Lexa had shown up. Again, almost shutting the door in her face may have set a precedent on how interested Lexa was in any of this. “Hi, hey, it’s good to see you.”

Lexus doesn’t return the sentiment, settling for a nod instead. “You wanna…” she trails off, pointing towards the path ahead.
Anya falls into step beside her. She’s slightly taller than Lexa, her posture a little better. “I’m really glad you called me,” she says shortly after they start. “I was starting to think...I’m glad you called.”

Lexa can’t necessarily say the same for herself right now, but she throws a look in Anya’s direction and nods. “I figured since you said you would only be around for a few more days...where are you from anyway?” These sort of questions were easier, less about what they were to each other and more about who they were as individual people. Which is all they were. No part of them was connected beyond the cellular level.

“Washington, just outside of Seattle,” she answers.

“Wow.”

Anya looks up through the trees, leaves swaying in the wind. “Yeah, the sun here is nice.”

Seattle was far but not very. Lexa’s mother had always insisted she had moved to the east coast for business, for a fresh start. Was she really just running away? Was it how she kept Lexa as far from her father and this supposed sister as possible? “I’ve heard Washington is pretty.”

“We’ve got that whole, gloomy mountain thing going,” Anya comments. “I’ve lived there most of my life. I was planning to move after college, but then my dad got sick and, well,” she shrugs. “Our dad, I’m sorry. I keep doing that.”

As far as Lexa was concerned, she could keep him. “It’s okay. He’s more yours than mine.” To Lexa, he was a mere concept, not one she was terribly fond of either. “How old are you?” she asks, veering the conversation away once more.

“Twenty three, I’ll be twenty four in December,” she answers, making her a full two and a half years older than Lexa. Meaning Anya was probably about four and a half when her father decided she was more worth his while than Lexa. “You’re twenty one, right?”

“Yep,” she answers, hands shoved deep in her pocket. Twenty-one years old and nineteen years without a word from her father, an entire lifetime of this supposed sister remaining irrelevant. “Why now?” Lexa finds herself asking even though this was the route of conversation she was least interested in going down. The question had been the one burning in the back of her mind for the longest now; she couldn’t hold it back any longer when the answer was next to her.
There’s a heavy moment of silence as Anya presses her lips together. “My-our dad didn’t want to push; he said,” she answers, eyes shifting to the side to take Lexa’s reaction in briefly. “I guess...he made it sound at least, that things ended very badly between your mother and him and she was...clear on how much contact she wanted him to have with you.”

Because he’d walked out on them. Because her mother was holding up the family all on her own and Lexa needn’t be subjected to someone who would come in and out of her life as they so pleased. Because he’d let them down once and wouldn’t be given a platform to do so again. “I’ve been an adult for three years.”

“I know!” Anya’s voice rises her eyes rolling. “That’s what I told him, but he sent his letters and left his messages the best he could.” She shrugs, shaking her head. “He said he didn’t want to push.”

The whole thing sounds made up. Especially when Lexa has no proof of the claims whatsoever. “I never heard a word from him. Not for as long as I can remember.”

“I told him that might be the case,” she responds. “He didn’t like to talk about it much, though.”

“So you’re here now because…” Lexa trails off, not wanting to be the one that said it.

“Because he’s dead and can’t stop me anymore.”

That was one reason alright. “Why do you care?” Lexa blurts out next, the other half of this conversation that she’d been wanting to shy away from. The thought of an answer makes her feel naked, exposed. The idea of someone wanting to reach out to her and coming away disappointed was even worse than for them to never have reached out at all.

“Why do I…” she fades off, pausing in her step for a second. Lexa stops too, suddenly regretting her question. “For most of my life, it was just me and Dad against the world. He didn’t talk about you often but when he did...you’re my half-sister. That means something.”

Does it? Lexa is tempted to ask, but she holds back. “What happened to your mom?” she asks instead, going back to the things that made them entirely separate people.
“She died,” Anya answers, shooting Lexa a sad smile. “Just little old me left now.”

“I’m sorry,” Lexa offers on reflex.

Anya shrugs, looking down at her feet as they continue walking. “It happened when I was young. Car accident.”

“Do you remember her?” she responds, unable to help herself. She wonders if Anya at least remembers both of her parents, not that it by any means leveled the playing ground.

“Bits and pieces. I was only four so, it’s pretty sporadic.”

If Anya was four when it happened then, that would mean… “That’s why he left,” she says out loud, the pieces coming together. “You were parentless.”

Anya nods, “The way he tells it is that he wanted you all to move out to Washington for a bit, so everything didn’t change at once for me, but your mom—” she stops abruptly, biting her lip. “Who knows the whole story, though. There are always two sides, right?”

Right, Lexa wants to agree, but the word gets stuck in her throat on the way out. This one seemed pretty straightforward, the reality of it was clear, edges not exactly blurred. “Maybe,” she says instead, eyes fixed on the trail ahead.

“I want to get to know you, Lexa,” Anya blurts out the words in one rush of a breath. “And I get if you aren’t interested or if you want me to just go away, but…I’d really like to be your half-sister, even if I am twenty-one years too late.”

It’d be easy to say no, to shut the notion down before it could morph into anything more. Lexa didn’t want a sister. She didn’t want a family at all. She’d happily leave behind the little bit she had. Family was messy and complicated and, as far as she was concerned, useful only in the event of organ transplant or health insurance.

But then she thinks of the fact that Anya, this girl that knows less about Lexa than some of her professors, she was entirely alone. Her parents are dead, her world torn apart. So maybe she was clinging to whatever she could, holding onto whoever she could find. Maybe to some blood meant more, family was worth more than a kidney or dental coverage.
And maybe, just maybe, Lexa had always wished it could be more than that for her as well. “I think I would like that too,” she admits, biting her lip as soon as the words are out.

In her peripherals, Lexa can see the way Anya perks up, the straightening of her back and the extra bounce to her step. “Do you hug?” she asks.

“No,” Lexa shoots back, dry and without explanation. Anya deflates, Lexa can almost feel it. “I do lunch though, if you’re still around tomorrow.”

Without meaning to, Lexa glances towards Anya who has a wide grin spreading across her face. “That sounds great.”

Well alright then, Lexa thinks to herself as she kicks a small rock out of her path. Guess this was a thing now.

Chapter End Notes

Look at Lexa go, not shutting Anya down completely. I for one am proud.

I hope you all are still enjoying. This little story has almost hit 1,000 kudos which is insane! Thank you all so much, I really appreciate it along with those of you who take the time out to comment. It’s just so rewarding. I hope you all have a wonderful weekend and I shall see you Monday!
It had been four days of ignoring phone calls when Lexa finally caves. She’s in her room, legs crossed beneath her on her bed and an array of textbooks spread out with her computer in front as she attempted to piece together her eight-page research paper. Even a conversation from her mother was a welcome enough distraction right now.

“Hello,” Lexa answers, tone short and even. Maybe if she were as cold and unfeeling as her mother, it would make things easier.

“And I’ve been ignoring you for days, Lexa thinks but holds back. “I sent a picture of the dress as you asked.”

“It looks too small. Have you been sticking with your gym plan that we made?”

No. “Yep.”

There’s another heavy sigh coming through the receiver. “Is there a reason you can’t even start a conversation without an attitude?”

There were a few reasons that Lexa could compile, but she decides against opening up that door right now. There were questions, sure, but Lexa didn’t necessarily need to ask her mother a single one. Not right now, maybe not ever. It felt better to hoard this secret as her own, a grasp on her past that her mother had clearly tried so hard to keep locked away and out of reach, righteous anger festering, adding to that attitude that shone through in her words.

“I have a lot of school work right now,” she answers, tapping the end of her pencil against the edge of her keyboard. There were still four more articles she needed to skim through and a ton of formatting bullshit she had to complete. This time on the phone was a waste at best.

“Alexandra,” in her mother’s defense she at least sounds a little bit defeated in addition to annoyed.
“I just wanted to have a conversation with my daughter. Is that so much to ask?”

Her instinct is to say no, I’m sorry. Lexa wants to backtrack and allow her mother the chance to talk to her. Because she was right, it’s not much to ask, and Lexa was simply behaving too damn stubborn to allow it.

Then she thinks of Anya in her doorway, the words that were laid out before Lexa on a trail that should be familiar enough that it could comfort her when everything else in her life was being thrown into upheaval. Then the anger flares and the frustration gathers, and instead, she says, “Yes, when you don’t ever listen to me, it is.” The silence on the other end is enough to swallow Lexa alive. “When you won’t talk about the things I care about or acknowledge anything I’m saying then yeah, I would rather spend my time working on my paper than waste it on a pointless conversation.”

The pounding of her heart against her chest is so fast and frantic that Lexa is afraid it’s going to splinter her bones right apart. No matter how much attitude she might give her mother sometimes, Lexa never spoke so freely, not like this. Not since she’d forced her mother to sit down and shut up and hear the fact that her daughter was a raging lesbian. Which, some good that chat did.

“I’m sorry that just because a conversation doesn’t entirely revolve around you, it seems to have lost all value to you,” her mother shoots back, harder and more distant than usual. Lexa’s words don’t wear away at this woman’s cold exterior but instead build upon it.

It was a lost cause in every way. “That’s not what I—”

“Well then maybe you had better consider the way in which you express yourself, Alexandra. Just as we’ve discussed dozens of times before, hm?”

Lexa keeps flicking back and forth between two tabs on her internet browser, watching the display on her screen change, so she had something to focus on besides the way her mother’s words settle inside of her. “Did you have anything else to berate me about or did you just call to tell me to eat less?”

When she looks up, she sees Raven in her doorway, hovering just outside while Lexa finished her conversation. Meaning Raven could hear everything on Lexa’s end of the conversation, but wasn’t technically intruding.

“I was calling to have a conversation,” her mom says. She sounds angry now, not just exhausted or
exasperated, but truly angry. “I guess since you aren’t capable of remaining civil for one of those then I’ll be going.”

Good, Lexa wasn’t about to complain about that.

“But you know,” her mother starts again, and Lexa can sense the moment her mother’s found some other scathing comment to throw at her, can feel the cool breeze blow over her exposed skin at the thought of what’s to come next. “Don’t say I didn’t tell you when you find no one has interest in you. Don’t blame me when you finally wake up and realize that your self-centered mindset and insistence or apathy and utter rudeness has left you alone.”

“Like my father left you alone?” Lexa shoots back without thinking. Her dad has been so heavily on her mind since Anya came around, the whole story had shifted into something else entirely, her history revealed to be composed of a whole different set of circumstances entirely.

There’s a long enough moment of silence that Lexa wonders if her mother has simply hung up on her to put this conversation to an end once and for all. “Don’t be mistaken,” she eventually shoots back, her voice tempered and even, calmer than Lexa could have dreamed. “He left you too, Alexandra.”

The line goes flat, and Lexa knows then that those were her mother’s parting words.

Usually after a conversation with her mom Lexa felt anger bubbling to the surface, fighting it’s way out of her in frantic movements, desperately cleaning or going for a run or dragging Raven straight down to the punching bag where she’d beat the hell out of that faded, red glorified pillow in hopes of working out the miserable sense of rage that consumed her.

This time, though, Lexa shoves aside the books and her laptop, uncaring about the uncapped highlighters or the paper that was due in the morning. She curls herself as small as she can atop her bed, arms covering her face.

She feels the books being moved, hears the laptop being set on her desk across the room, before her mattress dips beneath the weight of another human, Raven situates herself against her friend. Her fingers smooth back Lexa’s hair as she maneuvers her leg, so the brace wasn’t digging into Lexa’s skin. She presses her body against Lexa’s and holds herself there, reassuring Lexa that someone was there, someone was listening, someone made sure she wasn’t alone.
It isn’t until several minutes later that Lexa even notices she’s crying, her face wet and her breathing uneven. She turns towards Raven whose wiping the tears away and kissing the top of her head as she pulls Lexa onto her chest. “Do you mean to tell me your mom didn’t take that comment well?” Raven asks, her tone light and teasing and settling into Lexa just enough that she laughs. “Because I for one, am shocked.”

“She’s right,” Lexa mumbles against Raven’s chest, her breath hiccuping with the words. “I know she’s right.”

Raven’s hand stalls for a minute before resuming the trail it ran across Lexa’s head. “You know she isn’t,” Raven answers without expanding any further.

“But-”

“Shh,” she cuts her off before Lexa can get going. “I don’t know what the hell she said, but we’ve been over this one before, darling. Moms can suck.”

Lexa sniffs against Raven, moving her knee so it pressed against the brace, remembering what that comment meant coming from Raven, remembering that her friend has experiences far greater than Lexa could even imagine of just how much parents could disappoint, could fail so thoroughly at their job.

“I swear she sits around and tries to think of the most hurtful things she can say to me.” That was how it felt at least. Like her mother sat in some big, ominous chair with her fingernails tapping against the armrest and the stem of a deep red glass of wine in her other hand, compiling the most terrible words she could offer out to her daughter. “She hates me.”

“Maybe she does,” Raven responds because Raven never told Lexa she was wrong, not about this stuff. She never tried to force Lexa to see the good intentions her mom possessed or worked towards helping Lexa see her mother as more than the version that was so easily perceived. Raven entirely supported whatever viewpoint of her mother Lexa wanted to have. “But I love you, Lexa.” She cements the sentiment with a harsh squeeze of Lexa’s shoulders, plastering her further against Raven’s body. “And my love is valuable.” Lexa knows that. “You get it ’cause you’re so goddamn brilliant. Okay?”

Her head moves against Raven’s chest as she nods, the shifting of her hair loud against her ear. “Okay.”
“Oh, come on,” Clarke laughs, body draped across Lexa’s bed as she laid on her stomach, feet kicking in the air. “There’s no way in hell you’re actually going to try and wear that...ostentatious excuse for a dress to a family function.”

Lexa’s holding it up against her body with it still on the hanger, trying to see how the material would fit across her abdomen. She’d been low salt for three days now in hopes of cutting down on “water weight” and had spent the last three nights in the gym, regardless of homework. This damn dress needed to fit better than when she’d stuffed herself into it a few days ago.

“I have to,” Lexa answers, still unsure how Clarke had ended up in her room, let alone taking up the entirety of her bed. A minute ago her blonde hair had been fanned out along Lexa’s pillow, and all she could think was how it’d be the only scent left for her to suffer through tonight.

With a roll of her eyes, Clarke twists herself off the bed, coming to stand beside Lexa in the mirror. “Says who?” she demands, a hand on her hip.

She shoots Clarke’s reflection a glare. “My mother,” she answers in a plain drawl, resisting the urge to glare any harder.

“Your mother who, and correct me if I’m wrong, we’re openly going against by showing up to this shindig with moi draped across your arm?”

Something which Lexa didn’t exactly need to focus on, thank you very much, Clarke. “Theoretically.”

Clarke smiles then, a slow grin cracking her face open wide and burning itself into Lexa’s retinas forevermore. Clarke’s smile was too bright, too complete to be anything but blinding. “Then why the hell do you have to wear the dress?”

She reaches out, hand wrapping around the material as she tugs it from Lexa’s grasp. Lexa holds onto it for a moment before relenting to prevent the fabric from tearing. Clarke chucks it to the floor. “I-”

“You hate that dress,” Clarke supplies for her, before Lexa can argue.
“I hate that dress,” Lexa parrots, if for no other reason than to keep Clarke’s smile in place.

“That dress doesn’t even fucking fit you.”

Lexa flinches because it doesn’t, which isn’t exactly the insecurity she needs to be clinging to here. But her mother knew her measurements, and Lexa stood by the fact that this ugly pink monstrosity didn’t fit her because her mother intentionally bought a size smaller. “The dress doesn’t even fucking fit me.”

Clarke’s eyebrows raise. “You’d look hot as hell in a tux.”

Clarke’s smile has faded to this smirk, her eyes teasing as she leans towards Lexa, working her way into her space so she felt the challenge that was being presented, could thrive off of the words that she wanted to shirk away from but now had no chance but to confront. “I’d look h-hot as hell in a tux.” Her voice falters, and she clears her throat, but she gets it out.

With a shrug, Clarke’s eyes fix on Lexa’s in the mirror. “That solves that,” she says, holding the gaze.

“I can’t just...she’d kill me.” At just the thought Lexa’s heart picks up pace, wanting to shirk away at just imagining the look on her mother’s face if she came strolling up to that reunion with Clarke next to her and no pink dress in sight. “It’s not an option.”

Clarke’s face darkens, the glimmer of her eyes fading away as she nods. Then she scoops the dress up from the ground. “I can let out the sides a little bit probably,” she comments as she flips the dress inside out and begins eyeing up the seams. “Try and make the death contraption a little more comfortable at least?”

Now Lexa smiles, small and grateful that someone wanted to make this better. The fact that she could remember that it didn’t have to all be bad with people like this on her side. “That’d be great, Clarke. Thank you.”

In return Clarke reaches out, squeezing Lexa’s fingers for a moment before pulling her hand back, her entire body now suddenly so much closer to Lexa’s, the skin of their arms grazing together as Clarke shifts. “I’ll get you in a tux one of these days,” she murmurs, breath ghosting across the skin of Lexa’s cheek.
Lexa swallows, tampering down the emotions rising too quickly, fighting back the flush of red undoubtedly rising to her cheeks. “What would you do that for?” she asks, meaning to sound more challenging but instead it comes out as a whisper, a question begging for an answer.

And Clarke is grinning in response, her eyes darting down the length of Lexa’s body the best they can when the two of them are this close before shooting back up and meeting Lexa’s fixed stare. “Because you’d look amazing in one,” Clarke reiterates, “And you deserve to see that.”

There are a hundred responses rolling through Lexa’s head, about what she does and doesn’t deserve, about why Clarke would care, about why she seems to think Lexa would apparently look “amazing.” But she keeps each of those thoughts tucked away, forgetting, for a moment, about insecurities and questions and wonderings and instead saying, “Well I guess you’ll just have to find a reason for me to dress up for you.”

When Clarke is the one looking for a response, her breath bated and her chest rising and falling, Lexa spares a thought to the fact that they’re mere millimeters from one another in Lexa’s room, her bed looming in the background with its Clarke-filled essence ready to mock her tonight. The sudden pronouncement of intimacy in her mind causes her to blush even deeper.

“I’m sure I can manage that,” Clarke whispers back before pulling away, releasing them both from the moment and walking right out the bedroom door.

“Holy shit,” Lexa whispers to herself, hand coming up to rest against her frantically beating heart. It’s not the first time that she wonders if this is going to kill her entirely. Or maybe, she lets herself entertain the thought for just a second; maybe it had the potential to bring her back to life.

///// 

The thrum of the belt on the treadmill beneath her feet kept Lexa moving, gave her something to hone in on as she pushes herself further, increasing the incline and rate at the same time, focusing on the heavy, fast beating of her heart as she drew in each measured breath. Her feet hit the treadmill harder than they should, harder than her mother had taught her to allow, but she can’t help herself.

Lexa was running today without any music, no distractions as she stared at the closed blinds in front of her and pushed her feet to move faster. The only thing she focused on was her pace, the length of her stride, and the hovering anger that propelled her forward. It was the sort of rage that pushed her forward even when she felt like gasping for breath, even when her lungs felt dry as sandpaper and
her legs wanted to quiver from exhaustion, she pushed forward. Another minute, another mile, another increase in speed, until she’s so far exhausted that she has no choice but to smack the stop button as hard as she can, desperately dragging in breaths as the belt stilled and her legs could stop pumping.

Her hands fall on her knees as she bends over, dragging in breath after breath, hand shaking when she lifts her water bottle to take a drink.

It was better this way, Lexa tells herself as she steps off the belt, her legs quivering beneath her with each step on steady, solid ground. The world was a little blurry at the edges, a fact that she’s experienced before means she’s gone too far, pushed too much.

As each ragged breath is drawn in, Lexa leans her head against the top of the water cooler, hoping the room might stop spinning if she could just lay it down for a minute.

“Mind if I get some water?” someone says from behind her, causing Lexa to jump back off of her resting place.

“Sorry, I was just—” the words are gone the moment she sees the girl who had spoken. “Oh,” the word falls past her lips before Lexa had acknowledged it could. Now the world continues to spin, but for an entirely different reason. “Costia.”

Costia doesn’t smile, just moves around Lexa to refill her water bottle. It’s the same purple one with the stickers all wrapped around it, the same one Lexa had carried on many hikes or stolen sips from. She wonders how the item isn’t tainted for Costia, how she just carries on with the same items that had held pieces of Lexa within them. “How’ve you been?” she asks.

There’s a moment where Lexa hesitates, where she considers just walking away before this conversation could try and go anywhere else. She knew Costia didn’t give two shits how she was. Nor did she particularly feel the need to tell her. “I’ve been well,” Lexa answers. It had always set Costia on a tyrant when people answered with “well” instead of “good.” “I’m asking you how you are,” she always used to rant to Lexa with an eye roll. “Not interviewing you for a job. Stop trying to be all fancy and shit.”

Costia doesn’t even flinch at Lexa’s response. “That’s good. Raven’s good?”

Lexa nods. Raven hated Costia. From the second of the split, the very minute Lexa had called Raven
with tears in her voice and had asked for her to come to pick her up at the Panera Bread where she’d been abandoned, Raven had utterly hated Costia with every ounce of her being. “Raven’s always good,” Lexa answers, unable to stop herself from slipping into a light smile and gentle eye roll. “How are you?”

God, she hadn’t meant to ask that. That was not the way to stay strong here. Costia shrugs, “Same old, same old, you know?”

Which Lexa doesn’t, not anymore. Costia was a different person to her now. She’d switched majors, moved on to other people, another life, while Lexa was stuck buried beneath her past. “Yeah, totally.” She pretends anyway.

Costia’s eyes move up and down Lexa, in a way that makes Lexa feel exposed, makes her wish she’d worn pants that weren’t quite so tight and that her hair wasn’t all tied back, leaving her that much more visible. “And your mom?” Costia asks which is more a punch to the gut than she might necessarily know.

“My mother is the same,” Lexa answers, not wanting Costia to get any ideas. Nothing had changed, Lexa was the same scared little girl that had revolted Costia so greatly she couldn’t stomach to be around her. Lexa hadn’t managed to stand up more to her mother than the day she’d screamed that she was gay, the same day her admission had been shunned away, tucked down far enough in hopes that it would be forgotten.

Costia nods, taking a long drink from her water bottle before capping it. “I’ll see you around,” she says, walking away before Lexa connects the fact that she could’ve been the one doing that herself.

“See ya,” she whispers to herself after Costia is long gone. Lexa returns to the treadmill, sets her water bottle in the holder once again as she switches it on, legs burning before settling back in.

////

The clutter of the apartment is something Lexa has found harder to control with Clarke now taking up permanent residence in their living room. Even though, in her defense, she tries to consolidate her belongings as best possible. It’s not the easiest to keep all of your possessions buried in a box.

So that meant that there were often times clothes were scattered on the floor, art supplies all over the coffee table or kitchen counter, books and headphones and cell phone chargers stuffed into the
When Lexa throws out for Anya to come over, she decides the place needs to be somewhat organized so they’d have somewhere to sit, if nothing else. And also so her half-sister didn’t judge her on the mess alone. The whole shutting the door in her face, ignoring her for a full day and a half, and refusing to hug was probably enough to be judged off of. Cluttered disaster hardly needed to be added to the list.

She tidies the best she can, shoving Clarke’s belongings in the corner, a few others in Lexa’s room. The imagery of Clarke’s stuff all spread throughout Lexa’s room gets her imagination going, especially with the clothes along the bedroom floor, the bra in one corner, a pair of jeans in the other, art supplies dumped in a heap on the bed.

For the sake of having something to post tonight, Lexa snaps a picture. Surely she could come up with some easy tagline about how her girlfriend was a slob, and it was taking over her life.

Her pretend girlfriend who, even still, might be taking over her life.

The thought is put out of her mind when Lexa hears a knock on the door. She shuts the door to her room before answering to an anxious looking Anya.

“Hey,” Lexa offers along with some morphed version of a smile. She pulls the door open wider and doesn’t miss the way Anya’s shoulders seem to relax back, her breath released.

“Hey, how are you?”

Lexa shrugs off the question. “Good,” she offers weakly. It had been only a few days since she’d last seen her anyway. “You?” At some point, this had to get easier, right? She wouldn’t always start this out with awkwardly standing in entryways and desperately working to find what she should say next. At least, she needed to believe that because each of their interactions made Lexa so uncomfortable, she wanted to crawl beneath her bed and not come back out again.

“Traffic around here is god awful,” Anya comments as she wanders in, throwing her bag to the floor and making her way over to the couch. Clearly, the ability to function in uncomfortable social situations had been exclusively passed on to Anya in the gene pool. “Aside from that, I’m golden.”
Lexa nods like a dumb bobble-head, following Anya over to the couch, pulling her feet up beneath her as she sits. “When do you go back to Washington?”

Anya shifts, uncrossing one leg before crossing them again. “To be determined,” she says, flashing Lexa smile that doesn’t reach her eyes. “So, Stanford?” she asks before Lexa can ask her to expound on the statement.

With a deep breath in, Lexa nods. As her mother liked to remind her on a regular basis, Stanford wasn’t Ivy League, just particularly expensive as opposed to Princeton which Lexa just couldn’t manage to get into. But her admission to Stanford had still felt like an accomplishment to her, especially when people like Anya raised their eyebrows and blew out a low breath and seemed all sorts of impressed.

“So what are you studying?”

“Linguistics,” Lexa answers, watching Anya’s eyebrows now raise in surprise. “I know it’s not exactly a traditional choice, but—”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Raven curses as she shoves the front door open. It swings wide and hits the door stop before starting to bounce back. Raven’s got an armload of stuff, bags and boxes and loose items all clustered in her grip. “You would think that if someone is walking in two fucking seconds before you and sees you with a ton of shit, they could bother to hold the door. But noooo.” She unceremoniously drops everything to the kitchen counter that Lexa had just cleaned off. “The entirety of the bay area is a bunch of entitled assholes. Does it makes me an alcoholic if I pour myself something to drink at three in the...Oh, hi.”

Finally Raven notices the extra person sitting in the living room and stops her rant, seemingly stuck in time as she takes Anya’s presence in.

“Hi,” Anya smiles, standing from her seat on the couch and moving to shake Raven’s hand, more formal than Lexa could remember ever being. “I’m Anya.”

“Oh!” Raven comes back to life in a moment, posture shifting as she leaned an elbow back against the kitchen counter. “You’re the mystery sister.”

“Half-sister,” Anya corrects, smiling at Raven who finally took her extended hand. “You must be the other roommate.”
“Whoa, whoa,” Raven stands up straight, peering around Anya to shoot Lexa a look. “Is that what you’re telling people now? I am nobody’s other anything,” she corrects. “I am the roommate, thank you very much.”

Lexa rolls her eyes and gets up to throw an arm around Raven’s shoulders. “You are the worst roommate,” she says, waving a hand in gesture to the mess Raven had just created.

“Either way,” Raven says as she shoots a wink in Anya’s direction, “I am clearly the most important one. That’s the only part that matters here.”

Anya laughs, “I apologize for my error.”

“You’re forgiven,” Raven says, beginning to saunter towards her room. “This time,” she tacks on over her shoulder with a look that was a little too close to flirtatious for Lexa to be comfortable with.

With a roll of her eyes, she tells Anya, “Ignore her, seriously.”

“She seems...fun,” Anya’s eyes follow where Raven had vanished down the hallway for a moment before shaking her head.

Lexa breathes out a laugh. “That is definitely one way to describe Raven.” Raven is nothing but fun, Lexa wants to warn her. Because she knows that look in Anya’s eyes, just like she knows that casual lean Raven had fallen into and the subtle look back over her shoulder she had cast. Lexa was no stranger to those moves. Raven is fun for all of one night, two tops, before you no longer exist to her. “Also exhausting,” Raven couldn’t sleep with this half-sister who Lexa didn’t even know yet and then dump her, that was just spelling out disaster in every way possible.

“Anyway,” Anya says, seeming to shake the last of Raven from her thoughts. “Linguistics. Tell me more.”

**Chapter End Notes**

Happy Monday everyone. I have a paper due this week so if Thursday’s update turns into Friday’s update I’m sorry! I’m going to try and make sure that doesn’t happen. In
other news, I just finished watching The Haunting of Hill House and it was so, so good. I pretty much just keep recommending it to everyone I know, so you guys could hardly be left out that haha. Seriously, just watch it.

Other than that have a great week, as always thank you all so much again. I can't believe this little story hit 1,000 kudos. It hasn't always been the easiest, but I'm excited to know so many people are enjoying it. I really hope you all continue to. More to come soon!
Chapter 15

The reunion had been this far off, looming threat in the distance until somehow it is the Wednesday before. It’s a normal Wednesday, nothing significant or unusual. Nothing stands out to Lexa at all until she glances at her planner during her last class of the day and sees the plans already outlined for this weekend.

The realization of imminence leaves anxiety roiling her stomach on her bike ride home, not letting out even once she’s home, cross legged on her bed with her work spread out in front of her. At the very least she should get through some of this reading before she was attempting to make her weekend doubly bad with school tacked on top of everything else.

Clarke pronounces herself by throwing her body onto the end of Lexa’s bed, sending the school supplies flying. “Sorry,” she giggles, getting down to collect the highlighters and pens.

“All good,” Lexa answers, trying not to touch Clarke more than directly necessary to gather the items from her. “How was work?”

Clarke waves the question away, “It was Target,” she answers. “So,” she sits back down, folding herself at the end of Lexa’s bed. “You ready for this weekend?”

Lexa can feel the excitement radiating off of Clarke, and it irritates her. This wasn’t something to be excited about, Lexa wanted to scream. “Not really,” she answers honestly, fingers twisting in her bedspread beneath her. “You?”

Clarke smiles, “I got something to try and make the experience a little less miserable,” she answers.

“Oh?” Lexa does her best to try and appear more invested in her school work than whatever Clarke had to offer. Getting around her, around the feelings that squeezed themselves into the empty spaces in the hollow portions of Lexa’s chest, was slowly getting easier, but never easy. Around was the best way to describe it. Right now there was no getting over, that wasn’t a mountain she was prepared to climb, but maybe she could carve a new trail around. It’d be longer, more arduous, less promise of when they peak was near and the worst conquered, but it was doable.

There was this invisible line not to be crossed, and every day Lexa was tempted to cross it.
Frustratingly so, in fact. But she kept herself in check, trying to keep her fantasies to a minimum, holding back her desires and tucking away that intruding thought of how bad would it really be if she were to just plant one on Clarke here and now? Call it practice for this weekend. Because making out a family reunion was expected, right?

“Well seeing as it’s a seven hour drive to San Diego,” Clarke says as she wrinkles her nose, “I figured we might not want to get up at three in the morning on Sunday to drive there.”

Lexa knows where this is going. “You got a hotel?”

“Let’s just say you should be ready to leave Friday afternoon.” She’s got this smirk that sends Lexa back to that thought of how bad would it really be if they kissed right now? “Oh, and your dress is done. I stuck it back in your closet last night.”

It had been hanging front and center, right smack dab in the middle of all the flannels and baseball T’s that she hung up instead of shoving them in the drawers of her dresser. It looked so blatantly out of place that Lexa had taken the thing and shoved it straight to the back. “I saw it, thank you.”

With a shrug, Clarke says, “That is if you’re really against going and getting yourself something else.”

Lexa’s mouth goes dry just at the memory of Clarke, breath hot against Lexa’s ear, voice low and seductive, pointing out how attractive Lexa would be in a suit. For a moment the dress is forgotten entirely. But even Lexa didn’t have a death wish, not when it came to her mother. There were certain boundaries she couldn’t push just yet. Just like she wouldn’t pull Clarke in for a kiss right here, and now, she wasn’t going to show up in a full-on tux, heels forgotten and hair pulled back in a bun.

She’d mind the lines she’d laid out. Clarke was her friend, the one that maybe every so often she could touch the shoulder of or smile at a second too long. And she’d wear the dress, her hair in loose, flowing curls and a full face of makeup. Clarke would definitely be there with her, though, that was the line she was crossing. Also, she’d need someone to help her from toppling over in those damn shoes.

“I’ll stick with the dress, I think.”

Clarke stands, lips twisting to the side as if in contemplation of what she should say next. “Whatever you say, babe,” she answers, offering a smile as Lexa’s heart shorts out in her chest. She swears it
flatlines altogether when Clarke leans in and presses a kiss to Lexa’s cheek. “Get ready for this weekend, though. It’s gonna be fun, I swear.”

Well if that wasn’t the most ass-backward statement Lexa had ever heard she didn’t know what was.

But watching Clarke saunter off with her easy walk, the press of her lips burning in Lexa’s skin, she can’t help but wonder if maybe, somehow, Clarke might be right. Maybe with her by Lexa’s side, this really could be fun.

///// Thursday is hell. Lexa’s got a test in the morning that she needs to study for and she doesn’t have any concept of how to pack her bag, shoving in clothes and hoping for the best before pulling them all back out and reassessing.

Raven comes home as Lexa’s standing over her bed, which was now covered with the entirety of her closet splayed out. She eyes first Lexa and then the mess. “And we’re dressing for...a six month trip to India?”

That was the only reasonable explanation, but Lexa shakes her head. “More like my weekend away with your sister.”

“Ah,” Raven comments, only a moment’s hesitation before she starts digging through the colossal mess. She grabs shorts and tank tops and a bikini, starting to fold each article carefully before placing it in Lexa’s open and mostly empty suitcase.

“What are you doing?” she demands when Raven continues working silently.

Raven finishes folding one of Lexa’s favorite T-shirts before turning to face her and sighing. “I may not entirely understand your...intentions, or what the hell is going on,” she comments, before holding up a pair of shorts. “But your ass looks great in these, and that bikini top shows off your boobs the best, and well, I guess I’m helping you seduce my sister, but don’t make me reflect on that fact for too long ’cause it makes me feel weird.”

Well, what was Lexa supposed to do with that? In response, she holds up different things for Raven to comment on, “No, those are glorified granny panties, Lexa.”
“Your sister isn’t going to be seeing my underwear.”

“Thank you for the reassurance. You still can’t wear those.”

They pack and then Raven blasts music as they clean up Lexa’s room first, before making their way to the kitchen to make dinner. Every so often Raven would declare “roommate night” and lock the door, blast music, and all but force Lexa to hang out with her. Lexa didn’t need much coercion.

They fall into easy, silly giggles as the electronic beat blasts out, Lexa’s hips swaying, Raven’s socked feet gliding along the hardwood floor as she went to and from the fridge. The spatula proves as a good microphone whereas Raven keeps doing this one-legged shimmy against Lexa, making her burst out into laughs at the disjointed movements.

When the lasagna, Raven’s favorite, goes into the oven to bake, Raven grabs Lexa’s hands, dragging her through the apartment, twirling and giggling and light as the two of them, high off of nothing but music and laughter and each other, forget about all the drama that seemed to follow them right now.

Lexa could see the moments when Raven let the weight of the world slip from her shoulders; she could sense the time when Raven was releasing whatever form of her past weighed her down, as she forgot about the unfair history that just so happened to be hers. It was rare and brief, but when it occurred it was when Lexa was by her side, when they were lost in this girlish fits of giggling and fun, happy for no other reason than the fact that they could be.

Each time it reminded Lexa fully why she loved Raven as dearly as she did.

They waltzing their way out of the bathroom, Raven laughing hard as she tries to convince her left leg to cooperate, and it entirely does not, when they find Clarke standing in the doorway.

Maybe at another time Lexa would be embarrassed that she’s singing along to Selena Gomez at the top of her lungs and being lead clumsily through the apartment by her best friend, but she’s too lost in the fun and the ease that she just laughs at Clarke’s bewildered expression, singing even louder and letting Raven spin her around before dramatically dipping her.

Lexa can feel the tips of her hair sweeping the floor as she hovers in position for a moment, eyes opening to find an upside down Clarke hanging in her vision, smiling down at her.
As Lexa pops up, Clarke pulls her hair free from the ponytail it was tied back in, shimmying out of her red collared shirt into just her black cami and joining in on singing, pressing her back against her sister’s as they loudly shouted the lyrics, looking over their shoulders towards each other and laughing as the chorus died out. Clarke grabs Lexa’s hand, dragging her up on the couch cushions and performing an impressively dedicated air guitar as Lexa moves her body to the beat, her hands coming up to sweep her hair off of her neck for a moment.

She throws herself off balance during a dramatic swinging of her head and Clarke reaches out to steady her, hands fitting themself right on her hips as Lexa continues to move against her. She spins herself from the couch, taking Raven’s hands and guiding her in a broken twirl.

Lexa’s panting and breathless, feet moving fast beneath her and arms in the air as her body moves blindly, but in full dedication. For a moment all she can think is how much better this feels than that damned treadmill.

Clarke sidles up next to her, her body moving along the length of Lexa’s so if she hadn’t been breathless before she sure as hell is now. Clarke was probably a better dancer than Lexa and Raven put together, though she doesn’t appear to be showing off as much as easing into the fun that was overruling the apartment currently.

They dance and laugh and move against one another until the timer for the stove goes off, signaling the end of the impromptu dance party.

Raven turns the music down, and where before there had only been a beat, Lexa now hears heavy, panting breaths and her own heartbeat whooshing in her ears. Clarke holds her eyes for a minute, her chest heaving with each gasp of breath and a smile spreading wide across her face. “Who knew you could dance, Woods?” she asks.

“I sure as hell knew she couldn’t, ” Raven quips. “I don’t know what the hell you were witnessing, but it mostly looked like unbalanced flailing on my end.”

“Says the girl who can’t even spin in a circle without losing her footing,” Lexa shoots back, all in good fun as she grabs a potholder out of the drawer by the stove.

“Watch it!” Raven warns. “I’m disabled. You can’t be mean about my dancing skills.”
“You look like a puppet whose halfway disconnected from her strings,” Clarke says, breaking into laughter as Raven throws a towel towards her head.

“You are cruel and heartless people. I don't know why I bother with either of you.”

“Because you loooove me,” Clarke taunts, drawing out the word and embracing her sister with wide arms and squelching kisssy sounds.

Raven bats Clarke off of her, dragging her hand down her face to wipe off the remnants of Clarke’s affection. “Why did I offer for you to stay here again?” she asks, eyebrows drawing together. “The reasoning is suddenly lost on me.”

“To support my failing art career,” Clarke murmurs, hovering close to Lexa and the pan of lasagna. The scent of dinner seemed to be drawing everyone closer.

Lexa pokes the spatula in Clarke’s direction. “Your art career can’t be failing if it hasn’t started yet,” she argues. “Based on the origin and definition of the word failing, you first have to try.” And Clarke had to try. Lexa was no art buff, if you were to ask her about artists alive currently she could name Banksy, whoever the hell that was, and maybe Thomas Kinkade? But he also might be dead, that was her reference to art.

Clarke’s art was good, though. It was special in that it made Lexa feel something. Maybe not always good, but something. That alone was more than she could say about most art. Well, except for the octopus canvas hanging in her room that made her feel utter joy, but that was more in part due to the fact that octopuses were great all on their own.

“Don’t get linguistical on me,” Clarke shoots back, her closeness suddenly apparent to Lexa as she attempted to carve out a chunk of lasagna for each of them.

“That’s not a word,” she whispers back, clearing her throat.

Clarke shrugs, holding the plate close to the casserole dish as Lexa scooped a piece up. “All words weren’t words until someone started saying them,” she argues as so many people have argued before. Only Clarke argues while existing in Lexa’s space, hovering close. “Do you think the first person who said ‘yeet’ got it from the Oxford-English Dictionary? Didn’t you say the part of language you liked the most was its evolution?”
“Linguistical is not a fucking word,” Raven interjects, moving between them as she grabs the plate from Clarke’s hand. “Now stop being weirdly philosophical and flirty and pass me a fork.”

“I wasn’t-”

“Fork,” Raven interrupts, hand out. Clarke shoves one into the piece of lasagna on Raven’s plate, turning her face away to hide the blush creeping up into her cheeks. “If only you two could be as overt as you seem online. Jesus, you’re killing me here.”

She walks away, lasagna plate in hand, leaving Lexa and Clarke to stammer for a response to one another.

Damn it, Raven, Lexa wants to call after her. This was the opposite of helpful. Clarke still didn’t know that Raven knew, though, as far as Lexa was aware, so she went for laughing the comment off. “Guess at least our posts have been obvious enough for her,” Lexa jokes.

Clarke releases a harsh breath that could be interpreted as a laugh. “She’s not the only one.”

That gets Lexa’s attention, her head swiveling up from the dish in front of her to meet Clarke’s eyes. “What do you mean?” she asks, wondering who specifically Clarke is referencing. Did Lexa’s mom go as far as to message Clarke directly? Had Clarke run into her own set of issues from this arrangement?

“My mom…” Clarke starts and then fades off. “She wouldn’t have approved of our…arrangement. She’s a big believer in the truth will set you free and all that shit, so I kinda didn’t tell her,” which might also explain why she hadn’t wanted to tell Raven. “That’s actually, um, that was what I was going to ask you the other night?” No part of the statement is a question, but Clarke’s voice lilts up at the end, her eyes downcast on the fork as she gently tapped the prongs on the empty plate in front of her.

The favor that had been forgotten. “You mean the night when Anya showed up.” Lexa’s heart picks up at just the memory; she and Clarke had been so close, the ghost of Clarke’s touch from moments before still burned into Lexa’s skin. “You were going to ask me a favor.”

Clarke nods. “After we were interrupted I thought it might be better to wait until after everything this weekend.” In case things went miserably wrong?
“Well don’t leave me on the edge of my seat,” Lexa says, trying to chuckle even as the air seemed trapped in her lungs. The ominous favor had been forgotten in the wake of her world being turned upside down, but the thought hadn’t been entirely put out of her mind.

With deft hands Clarke goes to take the spatula from Lexa’s hands, busying herself with spooning portions onto each plate as she talked. “Well, my mom’s getting married in a little over a month and as far as she’s concerned we are together…”

“Oh,” the favor comes together quickly. “You need me to be your fake girlfriend?” Lexa laughs at the words leaving her mouth. It was absurd that this charade couldn’t end. That even with this reunion looming ever closer, the relationship wouldn’t come to a close. Lexa Woods was forever doomed to be fake dating Clarke, halfway to something she wanted desperately but never close enough that it was hers. Never able to fully relinquish the thought, the desire, when she was wrapped up in the story of their own creation.

Clarke clears her throat. “There’s a little more.”

Of course, there was. “Oh?” she asks. Of course, there was more. Of course, it wasn’t complicated enough already.

Clarke laughs, more bitter than humorous for a second before pinching the bridge of her nose, plate of lasagna set aside. “My last relationship was a little...messy.” Lexa could toast to that one. “See my ex just so happened to be the daughter of my mom’s boss.”

“You…” Lexa processes, eyes blinking in Clarke’s direction before her eyebrows raise, the problem falling into line. “Damn.”

“My mom was less than impressed.” Clarke smiles sheepishly before taking a moment to look mildly ashamed. “But, you know, professional courtesy and all that means she kinda has to invite her boss and his daughter who she now knows better than she ever wanted. Thanks to me.”

Great, Lexa wants to bury her face in her hands. Now she got to go to Clarke’s mother’s wedding where she’d be forced to pretend not just to Abby Griffin but also Clarke’s ex-girlfriend. All in Omaha, Nebraska. Who could think of a better way to spend a weekend?

“You don’t have to do it,” Clarke says, hands raised in surrender, eyes wide in honesty. “That’s why I eventually started thinking I should just wait until after this weekend. So you didn’t feel obligated
or anything like that."

The sentiment was a nice offer, maybe. But Lexa nods her head. “I’ll go,” she says, even bothering to throw in a small smile. “Why not?” She could think of a few reasons to answer that question.

Clarke chews her bite of lasagna contemplatively for a second before glancing to Lexa and offering an, “Are you sure?”

No, Lexa thinks about saying. She isn’t sure about anything. She isn’t sure about this coming weekend, about the sister who had appeared from nowhere, about the dad who abandoned her or the mother who stayed, and she sure as hell wasn’t sure about Clarke Griffin who was one part fake girlfriend but, hopefully, the other part real friend. “I’m sure.”

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“You agreed to what exactly?” Murphy demands when Lexa mutters to him the new arrangement she had landed herself in. He’s all spread out on his couch, some shooting game on the television as him and Emori traded in actual conversation for the occasional smack talk.

“To prolong my torture,” Lexa sighs, pulling a pillow from the couch to hold in her lap as she pressed her back against the couch, legs tucked up against her.

Murphy tsks at her before throwing a grenade on screen and letting out a “Booyah!” in response to Emori’s character going down and respawning at the very beginning of the level. “Is it offensive to suggest therapy? Because the more we talk these days, the more I’m convinced you need it.”

“I don’t have the energy in me to be offended.” It was Friday morning, post-paper completion and pre-Clarke getting off of work and them beginning a seven-hour venture just the two of them. What did two people possibly discuss for seven straight hours? “I have to go meet Anya soon anyway.”

Something explodes on the TV and Lexa winces against the loud noises and fake screams from the characters. “That’s the sister, right?” Emori asks. She was nice enough, though they were mostly familiar with each other through the stories Murphy told. Lexa had a feeling Emori knew more than most of her friends thanks to Murphy’s inability to keep a damn thing to himself.

“Can you please just show up at that family reunion bullshit with her?” Murphy asks, almost
laughing at the thought. “Holy shit, that would be fucking amazing.”

“No,” Lexa cuts his line of thinking off before it can derail further. “That would be a disaster.” On all accounts, probably ending in as much bloodshed as was on the screen in front of her.

There’s a moment where the only response is a round of intense button mashing before Emori adds in, “It would probably be Emmy worthy drama.”

“Panic-inducing drama,” Lexa amends. Even the thought was making her stomach twist in anxiety. Then again, maybe that was just the reminder that this weekend was coming to pass pretty shortly one way or the other right about now.

“I’d do it,” Murphy says.

Emori snorts. “Yeah, okay, you can’t even tell your mom no about Christmas pictures, but sure, you’d do it.”

“Mom lives for those stupid Christmas pictures!”

Okay, Lexa had better things to do than this.

“You could at least argue about those ridiculous sweaters she makes us wear every year.”

“It’s tradition.” He even hits pause to turn and face her, genuine irritation on his face.

Lexa shakes her head as she stands, throwing the pillow back on the couch. “I think you two manage to create plenty of drama all on your own.” She pats Murphy’s head as she walks past. “Fight nice, kids.” Their bickering can still be heard after she shuts the apartment door behind her.

Bringing Anya would at least eliminate the awkward car ride portion…

No, Lexa shakes the thought away before it could cement. It would exacerbate the awkward car ride portion. And make the family reunion portion even more insufferable than already anticipated.
There had been enough colossally bad ideas in her life recently enough. No need to tack on anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so sorry I'm posting a day late here. I was so dead after my overnight shift I could not keep my eyes open to edit despite my efforts. So apologies it's a day late but bright side now the next chapter is that much sooner? Thanks again you guys, you're the best!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The coffee shop always bounced between utter chaos and still moments with only a few spattered patrons. Octavia treated each situation with the same amount of urgency, which was none.

When Lexa walks in with Anya and sees the line almost to the door, she sighs, knowing this would take longer than lunch itself.

“So your friend works here?” Anya asks, eyes scanning the overhead menu.

Most of their get-togethers seemed to include questions like this. Anya was interested in everything. Friends, classes, relationships, where she liked to shop or eat or read books. Lexa couldn’t remember the last time anyone had wanted to know so much about her.

“*My entire life you’ve been the concept of a person,*” Anya had explained one day when Lexa had questioned the fact that Anya was inquiring about whether or not she drank tea. “*I’ve been waiting for the day when you got to be someone real.*”

What worried Lexa, that she didn’t dare say, was that Anya might prefer her more as a concept than a realized individual. “Octavia practically lives here,” Lexa comments. “Just don’t judge her on her customer service.”

Anya nods as they shift forward a few more feet. “And how about your roommate?” Somehow Lexa had a feeling she wasn’t inquiring about Clarke.

“Which one?” she asks anyway, somehow explaining her complicated relationship, or the lack thereof, with Anya seemed potentially preferable to laying out any portion of Raven.

“Raven.” Shocker. “Have you two known each other long?”

Yes and no. “She’s my best friend,” Lexa settles on. Wasn’t that like an unspoken sibling code? Don’t date your best friend? She wonders while remembering she’s actively halfway dating Clarke, partially attempting at a complete situation. “I’ve known her since freshman year.”
“What’s she studying?”

Okay, now she was fishing for information. Lexa did not know her well enough to say quit while you’re ahead. “Mechanical engineering. With a specialty in like, aircraft and such.” To be honest, Lexa grasped the concept of what Raven was studying about as well as she grasped her mandatory high school calculus class. “Her major is whatever the technical term is for rocket science; I’m pretty sure.” Lexa laughs, but she can see Anya’s eyebrows raise, clearly impressed.

“You guys sure don’t do boring around here,” she jokes. “Half of my friends were teaching majors. The other half psych.”

“And you?” Lexa asks, a sudden realization that she wasn’t really playing a very active role in this whole getting to know each other thing.

“Computer sciences,” she shrugs. “Not the most original either, I know.”

Damn, Lexa might as well give up now. Half of Raven’s conquests were computer science majors. ‘They’re smart in a different way. It’s sexy as hell.’ So Lexa might as well already consider this a lost cause.

“That’s really cool,” Lexa comments, hoping to keep the conversation steered in this direction. “And...lucrative.”

Anya laughs. “Can’t say you’re wrong.”

At the front counter, Octavia narrows her eyes at Anya for a second. “You must be the sister,” she says by means of greeting.

Anya nods, not bothering to tack on the half this time. “And you’re Octavia.”

“Your eyes are the same,” she says, looking between the two of them. “It’s freaking me out.”
“You and Bellamy look similar,” Lexa comments, continuing her practice of thinking about Bellamy without immediately associating it with Clarke and him dancing, flirting, smiling. Well shit, she started strong.

Octavia shrugs. “Never said it wasn’t creepy.” She’s ringing them up before either of them say what they want. “Hey, where’s your girlfriend anyway?”

Anya’s head swivels, eyes going wide at Octavia’s comment as she looks to Lexa.

Great, Lexa thinks while trying to hold back a sigh of annoyance. “She’s working,” Lexa grumbles.

“You want a muffin to take home to her?”

Clarke would probably appreciate that. “She likes the french toast ones best.”

Lexa walks away before any more comments can be made as if a two-second head start will cause Anya to forget about this “girlfriend” that has been mentioned.

Anya sits across from Lexa, one leg crossing over the other as she leaned back in her chair. Anya’s demeanor read to Lexa as effortlessly cool. The kind of cool most people aspired to their whole lives but never grasped the key to achieving it. You weren’t supposed to try. “So, girlfriend?”

Lexa groans. She can’t help herself. Octavia had unknowingly outed Lexa and dragged up this fake relationship with Clarke all in one go. She better not charge Lexa for that muffin. “It’s complicated?”

With a nod, Anya plays with the assortment of jelly packets sitting next to her. “I can understand that,” she says, sorting strawberry with strawberry, grape to grape. “I’m pan so, sorry you were just outed. But, you know, you definitely don’t have to like, worry about it or anything.”

Lexa twists the end of her sweater between her fingers, swallowing the lump that was in her throat out of nowhere. This shouldn’t mean anything to her. Anya was, at the end of the day, nothing to her. “Thanks,” she says quietly. Even though she figured as much, even though with all the interest Anya seemed to have in Lexa she hadn’t exactly been banking on the gay portion of her to scare off this half-sister who seemed to wait with bated breath on the regular to see if Lexa would accept or reject her.
Anya’s smiling at her, wide and easy as she stops fiddling with jellies and holds Lexa’s eyes in place so she couldn’t look away. “I know it’s less of a thing these days, but still, I’m happy for you.”

Coming out was never easy. Especially when you weren’t expecting it, especially when every time you did it there was the fear of rejection sitting somewhere in the pit of your stomach. The acceptance blew over Lexa like a blast of fresh, cool air, and her shoulders relaxed even as she bit her lip and blinked furiously, trying to bury back the relief that wanted to be set free in a sob.

Anya might only be her half-sister, and a brand new one at that, but Lexa kind of can’t help but think about how family has never made much sense to her anyway, and whatever form of it she’d had was chosen for her until now. Until this girl showed up in her doorway and offered up herself and Lexa got to choose whether she wanted this or not. The hesitancy had been apparent in every interaction, the indecision always at the forefront of her mind. Until now. Until she decides, wholeheartedly, that this is the sort of family she could be in. That this moment, as simple and small and inconsequential as it might be, is all she needs.

This, Lexa thinks as Anya cracks a joke and her shoulders shake and the ease of the moment causes her to drop her twisting sweater and launch into a story, hands moving wildly in description. This is what family could be. This is what she could make it. This is what she chose.

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“I have to ask you something.”

Lexa announces her presence back home by wandering right into Raven’s room and folding herself cross-legged at the end of her bed. Raven doesn’t even stir from the shifting of the bed, so Lexa pokes her foot, only realizing after a moment of nothing that she’s poking the one that didn’t have an ounce of sensation left in it.

Raven’s eyes are still clouded as she lifts her head off of the pillow to glare at Lexa. “I’m sleeping.”

“It’s almost one.”

Raven grunts, pulling her pillow over her head.
With a brace for impact, Lexa reaches over and plucks the pillow off of Raven’s head, holding it in her lap. “Come on. Clarke will be home soon, and I need to talk to you.”

Raven pushes herself up, eyes glaring. “There are multiple erogenous zones, Lexa. In order to best please a woman—”

To silence her Lexa swings the pillow towards the general direction of Raven’s body. “Shut up.” Raven is at least laughing. “I wanted to talk to you about Anya.”

“You’re kidding me, right?” Raven asks, dragging a hand down her face. “What could you possibly—”

“Don’t sleep with her.” Cutting Raven off was never the right choice. “Sorry, I just needed to get that off my chest.”

There’s a moment of processing, as there often is whenever Raven didn’t understand something, before she shifts, eyes narrowing. “What exactly made you feel the need to say this?”

“You gave her the look.”

“What look?”

There was no way Raven didn’t know what look Lexa was talking about. “The I’m going to have my way with you, and you’re going to love it look.”

“I don’t have a look,” she argues, arms over her chest.

“Straight up bedroom eyes.” There was no subtlety to Raven Reyes. Lexa had always kind of assumed that’s how she managed to find so many people. It wasn’t hard to make your intentions clear when you held nothing back. “You damn near swaggered out of the room after talking to her for god’s sake.”

Raven’s eyes shift to the side for a moment, as if recalling the memory on demand. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she mumbles before flopping herself back onto her bed and pulling the
Lexa crawls up next to her, laying her head on the pillow as she pulled back the covers clutched tightly in Raven’s grasp. She holds her stare for several seconds before sighing. “I’m not saying you were planning on having sex with my sister,” she explains. “Just saying...if the opportunity presents itself, maybe don’t?”

“I don’t just sleep with everyone I meet, you know,” Raven answers. There’s a flash of something in her eyes before she’s just glaring at Lexa. “I am capable of just being friendly.”

With an emphatic nod, Lexa says, “I know.”

“And I get this shit is confusing enough for you,” she tacks on, tucking the comforter beneath her chin as she glared harder still. “I can control myself.”

Lexa nods, now feeling like a shitty friend more so than she thought this would lead to. “I know, trust me,” she sighs. “This is coming out wrong.”

“You think?” Raven’s eyebrows lift for a second before everything softens, her eyes and her hunched shoulders, her features softening as she reaches over and gives Lexa’s arm a reassuring squeeze. “I won’t sleep with your sister, okay?”

“It’s just all such a mess already...a one night stand with my best friend probably wouldn’t help much.”

Raven smirks, “Bold of you to assume that wouldn’t help.”

With a roll of her eyes, Lexa pushes herself back up. She needed to finish getting her things together, not fall asleep curled up next to Raven. “Thank you.”

“Just let it be known,” Raven answers, sitting up so she could meet Lexa’s eyes. “That I am the selfless friend who gave you permission to do my sister without any drama whatsoever.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Lexa shakes her head. “All of the credit is bestowed to Raven Reyes.”
“As it should be.”

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Raven, being the mechanically responsible friend that she is, stops Lexa and Clarke before they can go anywhere, declaring an immediate need for an oil change and full engine check. She’s got grease smudged on her cheek and keeps whispering cuss words to herself as she examined dip sticks and poured in fluids.

Lexa wonders if she just wants to feel apart of this excursion to some extent before the two of them take off on a fourteen hour round trip. If only it were an acceptable option, Lexa would gladly send Raven in her stead. She’d probably actually be able to put Lexa’s mom in her place, as opposed to Lexa who simply attempted to give her mother a taste of her own medicine and ends up twice as broken as usual.

“Eventually she’ll let us leave,” Clarke says loud enough for Raven to hear as she sits on the curb, chin resting in her hands.

“Your confidence astounds me,” Lexa answers, throwing a smile in Clarke’s direction and trying to remind herself to be cool, for the love of god. This was going to be the most extended weekend of her life. It had potential to be a collection of highs, lows, and somewhere in between. Lexa would be more than okay sticking on neutral ground if it would save her from the stomach plummeting, breath-stealing moment of going down.

The conversation Lexa had tried to have with her mother about the fact that there would be no point in having any boy come along, had been fruitless. She refused to hear a word about Clarke’s presence potentially being there. It was almost a challenge, the amount her mother dismissed her. Lexa couldn’t help but be that much happier she’d ever agreed to this arrangement at the thought of the look on her mom’s face when she showed up doing the very thing her mom was convinced she wouldn’t dare defy her to do.

Well here she was, all but defying gravity as she sat outside of her Honda, head too focused on how she would fill a full weekend with Clarke that didn’t include a series of bad choices to be worried about how this reunion nonsense was going to go. It wasn’t even like she really cared about her stupid family anyway.

It was hard to care much about people you barely knew. Cousins who sloppily signed their names in
Christmas cards, a grandmother who visited once or twice and sent a twenty every appropriate holiday. Aunts and uncles who had names rarely spoken, a profile picture on Facebook or a part of her mom’s rants of annoyance.

The only person Lexa cared about at this thing was her mom, and even that was pretty sticky territory these days.

“Alright,” Raven says as she dropped the hood of Lexa’s car with a heavy ‘bang’ and wiped her hands along her jeans. “You’ll probably make it there and back.”

“Reassuring.”

“I do my best.” Raven tosses the keys in an arch to Clarke who catches them easily. “Don’t let her drive anywhere too populous. She’ll kill you”

“Hey!” Lexa shouts in defense of herself. “I can drive just fine.”

“Sure,” Raven agrees, barely bothering to glance in her location. “You can drive just fine, but when you’re someplace with more than four cars and two lanes, you go into panic mode and almost hit stationary objects.”

Lexa flushes, both with embarrassment and annoyance as she crosses her arms over her chest and turns to face Clarke. “I do no such thing.”

Clarke’s answering smile is frustratingly teasing as she says, “Tell that to your bike.”

“Well excuse me for saving the environment,” Lexa throws her hands in the air in concession. “Don’t blame me when the hole in the ozone layer burns your pretty, pale skin.”

“So you think my skin is pretty, huh?” Clarke cocks her head to the side, eyebrows waiting as she evaluated Lexa whilst awaiting her response.

Snapping fingers jerk their attention over towards Raven. “Are you two capable of having a conversation without getting all flirty and weird?” Lexa could really stand for Raven to stop with
these comments. “Now you guys have fun on what quite honestly sounds like a miserable trip.”

So miserable, Lexa wants to groan, but Clarke is waving Raven off. “Try not to get jealous,” she says as she throws her arms around Raven. “And don’t sleep with anyone on the couch. I live there now.”

“Killing all my fun,” she sighs, surprising Lexa by wrapping her in a hug. “Tell your mom ‘fuck you’ from me. Maybe give her a good kick to the shins for good measure.”

Her arms don’t relent, a tight circle around Lexa’s body for several seconds. “I’m sure she’ll appreciate being thought of.”

“Love you, darling,” Raven whispers in her ear before she can pull back. It’s the simplest sentiment from her best friend, hardly something that hasn’t been said dozens of times before, but Lexa feels tears prick her eyes at the reminder. It was the simple promise that no matter what, Lexa had a piece of family to come home to.

“Love you too.”

“Good,” she finally releases Lexa. “You’re still a shit driver.”

“You’re just a frustratingly good driver,” she counters. “Don’t have too much fun without me this weekend.” Lexa knew well enough that Raven would probably do the same thing she did every other weekend, just without Lexa to bother in between parties and sleeping buddies.

“Ditto,” Raven shoots Lexa a look that makes her too scared to look in Clarke’s direction, in case she reads it the same way Lexa does.

Lexa clears her throat, shooting Raven an annoyed look before rearranging her expression and looking to Clarke. “Well we should get going, I guess.”

The dread must be apparent in her tone as Clarke nudges her with her elbow and shoots a smile in her direction. “It’s not miserable until Sunday, remember?”
Oh no, Lexa thinks, losing herself in Clarke’s blue eyes for a moment. It wasn’t miserable in the sense of the word Clarke might think, but it was painful, excruciating, holding herself back. It was hard enough refraining herself from what was so very nearly hers. God this was going to be one hell of a weekend. “Of course not.”

Clarke jingles the keys in Lexa’s face who waves them off, if Clarke wanted to drive she wasn’t going to argue, and settles herself into the passenger seat.

The car vibrates beneath them, more of rumbling than a gentle purr, but it just made the car feel sturdier, in Lexa’s opinion. They wave in Raven’s direction as Clarke pulls out, turning towards the main road.

Well, Lexa thinks to herself as Clarke rolls her window halfway down, a pair of oversized sunglasses on her face and a wide smile cast in Lexa’s direction. Time to let the games begin.

Chapter End Notes

Let the games begin indeed. Hope you all are ready for some fun. Hope you all enjoyed, as always I love to leave your thoughts. Have a great week :)
Clarke drives with ease. She’s got a loose, one-hand grip on the steering wheel, her left leg pulled up next to her, a hand hanging out the window or waving along with whatever story she was telling. As with most other things, driving seems to be almost effortless for Clarke.

This is a fact that Lexa is envious of. She couldn’t even pull off sitting as being effortless in her world. Even still, she goes along with the conversation, feeling a little extra proud of herself anytime she cracks a joke and Clarke laughs in response.

They talk about Clarke’s job and Lexa’s classes before moving on to anything more significant. Lexa asks Clarke about her art somewhere around mile 300. Clarke asks Lexa about her family just about four hours in. It’s a give and take, no one relenting too much information but both offering something in response.

At first, Clarke seems to be almost slammed shut when it comes to her art, but with more pushing, more questions, she eventually opens wide. She talks about winning ribbons and medals, having her art on display as early as the first grade. She mentions different styles she’s gone through, how her preferences have morphed but her overall vision has stayed the same. Over and over, she says, people have told her she has potential, that she could be something, do something, but now college is over, and real life has started. Clarke wishes someone could be a little more specific about what something is.

In turn, Lexa starts slowly when talking about her family. She explains that she has a list of aunts, uncles, cousins, and a grandmother all of who she only half knows. Most of them stopped taking the time to call her on her birthday before she was five, maybe a handful had bothered to extend a Facebook invite towards her. None of them were special to her, none of them meant anything. Her grandmother maybe, who always called and sent cards, but who also was a god fearing Catholic and probably the least likely to care for this whole, Lexa bringing a girlfriend business. So she tried not to care about anyone, Lexa finds herself admitting. She tries not to want their acceptance.

But then she bites her lip because Clarke had told her about her path to success, her hopes and her dreams. All Lexa has to offer is a sad childhood and the small list of things she doesn’t want. It seems backward.

Clarke pushes forward. “Well, what about your mom?”
Lexa’s hands tighten momentarily on the steering wheel, they’d swapped drivers an hour ago, and she’d been sitting with tight shoulders and a fixed stare ever since. “I guess she’s the only real family I have,” Lexa admits, as much as she’d really rather not face reality.

“But you two don’t get along?” Clarke says it like a question, but then Lexa sees Clarke shake her head out of the corner of an eye, blonde hair swishing around. “Duh, clearly there’s some animosity going on, but were you two ever close?”

That was a loaded question; not one Lexa was exactly dying to reveal the answer to either. That was beyond a history of creating art or the surface level of Aunt Neva always sending a card but nothing more. That was a question that required a real answer; not one Lexa was particularly desperate to offer up either. “I mean…” she fades off trying to find her own answer. Were they ever close? What did close even mean? “It’s always just been the two of us.”

For as long as Lexa could remember it was just her and her mom. They were never the best friends mother and daughter type, no Gilmore Girls relationship here, but Lexa remembers her mom tucking her into bed at night, stories being read and kisses to her nose. Her mother was always straightforward, always telling the truth and making her expectations known. Which, when you’re a child is just something that is accepted as reality, no concept of another life yet grasped.

As she got older, Lexa couldn’t help but grow to resent her mother, year after year as she saw the other moms at school, as she felt the lack of affection more than before when the other girls talked about their moms in different ways. Lexa was six when her mom told her she was too old to sit on her lap anymore, when the hugs and kisses were less frequent, the bedtime stories abandoned because Lexa could read on her own now. It was the truth, but it felt like she lost her mom all at once. The void of affection left her craving - something, someone. She was too young to know what was appropriate and what wasn’t, to know not to get too attached to the teachers or hug all your fellow classmates.

And now, knowing that there could have been someone else, that it didn’t have to be just her and her mom and nobody else, it left her furious. There could have been someone else to share the burden of raising her, to offer her love in another form, to be another someone in her life. Maybe then her mother wouldn’t have tired of her so quickly, perhaps then she would still have welcomed her home with open arms.

“No,” Lexa eventually says, foot pressing on the brake as the cars merged in front of her. “We were never very close.”

She feels Clarke’s eyes on her and braces herself for whatever response was to come next, whatever questions followed.
“My mom and I didn’t use to be very close either,” Clarke admits instead, no longer forcing Lexa to give and offering a piece of herself instead. “I don’t think I was ever who she expected, the artsy kid with oil pastels under her fingernails and a solid D in math from the third grade on.” Maybe no one had parents who didn’t screw up, even Clarke who seemingly had the perfect mom all along. “But she tried, over time, she adjusted to the fact that I wasn’t changing, that I was never going to be the science kid or make it through calculus.”

“Calculus sucks ass,” Lexa offers as her contribution to the conversation.

In return, Clarke laughs for a second. “Seriously,” she agrees. “When Raven showed up things were strained between my mother and me for a while. Even though I was probably too old for it, I felt like she’d gone out and found the science and math kid she always wanted, like she sought out a better daughter.”

This was the first Lexa had ever heard of anything besides utter affection between Clarke and her sister. “Really?”

“It was stupid,” Clarke says, and Lexa can almost see her eye roll even as her eyes remain fixated on the highway. “About 36 hours of Raven living in my room I started figuring it out, though. She was impossible not to love.”

Raven, despite all of her rough edges and easy anger, had remained much the same in that respect. “So you and your mom are closer now?”

“I think first getting this random new sister threw me off, kinda broke us apart, but then we were forced to repair things and actually talk shit out.” Lexa envies that she was awarded such a luxury. Conversation as so easily eluded in her household. “So, in the beginning, it drove us apart, but in the end, we were so much closer.”

“Are you suggesting my mom and I just need to talk?” The condescending tone is not even remotely hidden. That suggestion was worn and tired and entirely useless. You can’t have a conversation with someone that can’t hear you.

“No,” Clarke says quickly, and Lexa feels a hand on her shoulder, a gentle pressure that was warm and reassuring and physically, undeniably there. “I’m just saying that things have to break all the way apart for them to come back together sometimes.”
Poetic, but not the sort of advice Lexa was looking for. “And the rest of the time?” she challenges, daring for half a second to take her eyes off of the road and look Clarke dead on, demanding an answer.

“The rest of the time shit just stays broken.”

Finally, someone who got it.

///// The sun sets around seven, they’d stopped for gas again, and there’s an old, partially abandoned looking diner across the street that they both decide is good enough for dinner.

“Well, it’s either this or Subway or...Subway,” Clarke says, scrolling through on her phone. “Oh! Or in another twenty-six miles, there’s a Subway coming up.”

The diner it is.

Inside looks only slightly more put together than outside, the green vinyl of the booths is beginning to crack, old stains in various spots on the carpet and big, oversized menus with more pictures than necessary are presented to them.

With three hours still left ahead of them, they both order coffee and sip the watered down, lukewarm drink while perusing the menus. “How dangerous do you think a burger is here?”

In response, Lexa raises an eyebrow and makes a show of looking around. “You’re the one taking your life into your hands,” she shrugs, a small smile forming in the corner of her mouth as she settles on pancakes of the chocolate chip variety and calls it a night. Even her mother couldn’t argue that it was worth getting a salad at a place like this.

They order, and Clarke’s got her elbow on the table, her chin resting in her hand as she watches Lexa with cautious eyes.
It leaves Lexa feeling exposed, examined, so she clears her throat, crossing one leg over the other as she says, “So what’s the plan for tomorrow?”

Clarke smiles, her face coy and her eyes teasing. “That’s for you to find out tomorrow.”

“Oh come on!” Lexa argues, trying to let herself lean into the moment, the conversation. “What the hell is there even to do in San Diego?”

Lena receives another eye roll in response. “Literally all you have to do is Google, ‘things to do in San Diego,’ Lex.” That damn nickname makes her heart shift into a slightly higher gear as Clarke goes on. “Nothing special, though, just a day for fun.”

The idea is appealing, especially considering what the following day will consist of. Lexa’s nerves get the better of her then, and she starts to ramble, beginning with the salmonella outbreak in flour recently when her pancakes are set in front of her and not stopping until she’s started on about random octopus facts. Clarke watches her intently the whole time, chewing with contemplation even as Lexa finds herself debating about the legitimacy of language within the Paleolithic era and no one is there to stop her, so she just keeps going.

When the check arrives, and their receipt comes back with two dinner mints Clarke blows out a breath as she pops her mint in her mouth and shakes her head. “You really can just keep talking, can’t you?”

“When I’m nervous, yeah,” she admits, not intending to breathe to life the fact that she’s actively terrified.

Clarke leads them outside, taking the keys from Lexa and stretching her arms above her head, her shirt rising to show off an expanse of her stomach, Lexa’s mouth goes dry for a moment. “Sunday is a day and a half away, okay?” she smiles then, leaning closer in to Lexa, filling up the space and the air and the headspace entirely with the blue of her eyes and the soft glow of her hair and the scent of several hour old perfume and the peppermint of her breath. “Until we’re in the parking lot of that damn event just have fun.”

It’s not that easy, Lexa wants to argue, none of this was easy. She couldn’t just shut off her mind to forget her anxieties, there was no existing exclusively in the now, even if there was, she thinks, Clarke would still be here. Those were the nerves that were bright and alive, hypersensitive even with the mildest of touches, ready to jump from beneath her skin.
“Okay,” she whispers instead, eyes faltering for a second to Clarke’s lips as they spread in a smile. She’s close enough that Lexa can see the lines on her lips, could press hers against them without moving more than a mere centimeter forward. She doesn’t, though. That wasn’t what they needed right now.

“Good,” Clarke says, almost questioning Lexa with her eyes, giving her another second to make a damn move, before pulling away and getting back into the car.

For the brief minute she has, Lexa sucks in deep breaths of Clarke-less, fresh air, dragging it deep within her lungs as if to purify herself. It’s a lost cause, she knows, but she tries regardless, hoping it will be enough.

Three hours to go.


The dark car is soothing, deceptively peaceful as music plays quietly and the car hums beneath them. It’s a clear night, and in the area between the Bay area and LA, the land is desolate enough that the stars are bright, vibrant and numerous when Lexa lays her head on her arm and looks up at them.

She sings along with the music, mumbling lyrics mostly to herself as Clarke tapped her hand against the steering wheel.

On long rides such as these time seemed to pass differently, dragged out or whizzing by like the miles beneath them. It was an uneven, unorthodox passing that seemed to shift even when nothing else did.

They don’t talk much on this stretch, eyes fixed on the road in front of them, different tunes from Clarke’s phone playing out, the occasional snack being passed back and forth between the two of them. The silence is unnerving for a moment, but then Lexa settles into it, remembering that silence didn’t have to mean punishment. Words weren’t required to keep the peace. In fact, they sometimes disrupted it.

Signs start popping up more frequently the closer they get to Los Angeles, pointing towards the city, Disneyland, the Hollywood sign, every tourist attraction highlighted to direct you to it.
“When I was a kid,” Clarke starts out of nowhere, following the directions towards San Diego and ignoring all else. “We went to Disney, stayed in the resort and ate breakfast with characters, the whole shebang.”

Disney had never been of interest to Lexa. Even on the east coast where she would have been, at most, a three-hour flight from the self-proclaimed “Happiest place on Earth” she just didn’t have the desire to beg her mother for a visit. Somehow Lexa had always seen through it, figured it’d be just as happy as every other place they went. “Was it all they crack it up to be?” she asks in response, knees pulled to her chest as she watches Clarke.

“I was nine,” she says by way of response, laughing for a second. “So I was a little shit who was too cool for the whole thing.” She shakes her head at her past self, flexing her wrist before placing her hand back on the steering wheel. “Pretty sure my parents spent a couple thousand dollars for me to act miserable and say eight million times that ‘this is for babies.’”

“Yikes.”

“Seriously,” she agrees. “And the worst part is that I’m pretty sure I would have loved it. Probably still would, honestly.”

Lexa wrinkles her nose. Large crowds, overpriced merchandise, and children weren’t exactly huge drawing points for her. “Really?” she doesn’t intend for her voice to be quite so incredulous but she rolls with it anyway.

“Yeah,” Clarke says, voice wistful and light and Lexa is reminded of walking along the Golden Gate Bridge, discussing how love is easy, and the optimism of Clarke Griffin is not lost on her. Lexa wasn’t an optimist. She fully believed in realism, which might occasionally be more negative than positive, but that was the world they lived in after all. Shit happened, sometimes it just kept happening.

“It’s stupid, I know,” Clarke admits, and the headlights passing by illuminate her face, eyes wide and a faint smile on the edges of her lips. “But it’s got that whole magic vibe going on, like anything is possible, and there’s that fake castle and fireworks at the end of the night and music playing.”

“All things that nine-year-old Clarke couldn’t stomach,” Lexa jokes, her lack of Disney experience leaves her little to comment on, but she feels as though this magic Clarke speaks of may be lost on Lexa.
“Nine-year-old Clarke was an ass. We already established this,” she laughs, following the GPS
guidance off the exit and turning left towards signs for McDonalds and gas station prices illuminated
in red lights off in the distance.

Lexa scans the outline of the hotel they pull into, trying to determine what to think of it. “So in
summary,” she says as Clarke hunts for parking. “You want to return to Disneyland so you can be
less of a dick about it?”

“Precisely,” Clarke answers, pulling the car into a spot and throwing it into park. “Glad you’re
finally catching on here.”

“Please tell me you aren’t dragging me to Disney,” Lexa jokes as Clarke pulls the key out of the
ignition and the interior lights come on, startlingly bright after nothing but the dark for hours.

Clarke winks in Lexa’s direction, undoing her seatbelt and climbing out without another word. “I
already said I wasn’t going to tell you. You just don’t know how to let up.”

Lexa grumbles in response. She had never been very good at surprises; they also weren’t something
she dealt with terribly often.

They wheel their suitcases behind them inside, and Lexa can’t help but gape a little bit at the fancy
lobby, chandelier hanging down and a waterfall behind the front desk. Where the hell were they?

“My mom knows the guy who runs the place,” Clarke whispers in response to Lexa’s wide-eyed
gaze, moving to the front desk without a moment’s hesitation.

She offers up information to get them checked in; meanwhile, Lexa is trying to settle her hair, so it
didn’t look as much like she’d been resting against a seat back for the better part of seven hours.

The man behinds the desk hums and says, “It says here a room with two queen sized beds was
reserved?”

“Yep,” Clarke answers and Lexa’s attention has been recaptured.
The man makes a hissing sounds as he says, “I’m really sorry, but we’ve accidentally overbooked.” Of course they did, Lexa wants to sigh. Of course, that would be the start of this whole experience. “I have a king room left, and we can compensate you free breakfast for the inconvenience.”

Clarke smiles when she looks to Lexa and shrugs. “Sure,” she agrees. “We aren’t about to turn down free food, right?”

“Right,” Lexa responds, her voice tight as she does her best to conceal her panic. Surely free food was a fair exchange for her sanity.

“Excellent.” He slides the key card across the desk to them, and Clarke turns towards the elevators, seemingly unbothered.

Lexa follows behind her, knowing there was no other option.

So much for miserable holding off until Sunday. This alone was sure to kill her.

Chapter End Notes

I am a failure who is uploading late again. I'm sorry! Monday's chapter should be out as regular at least. ALSO I know the only having one bed trope is over done beyond belief but this exact situation happened to me when I was traveling in October, and I couldn't resist including it. It was begging to be included, let's be real. Have a great weekend everyone and thank you all again!
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The hotel hallways are off-white, plush carpeting squishing beneath Lexa’s shoes with each step and gentle lighting guiding her forward. There are pictures of different scenic locations in Hollywood along the walls, black and white shots of the famous sign and Marilyn Monroe and whatever other claim to LA the hotel could manage. Even being an hour outside of Los Angeles itself, the desperate attempt to pretend otherwise was almost laughable.

Clarke slides the keycard in and out of the slot swiftly, a small light blinking green as the mechanical sounding lock unhitched. She pushed open the door, holding it in place with her foot as she made a sweeping motion with her arms for Lexa to walk through.

Inside there’s a small coffee pot on the front desk; a mini fridge tucked beneath the countertop and a large flat screen TV hanging from the wall. There’s a small table in the corner of the room with an ice bucket on top and two chairs pushed beneath it. The bathroom is small; door propped half open enough that Lexa can see the stack of towels and little bottles of shampoo and conditioner.

Lastly, she looks to the bed. The singular, albeit giant, bed in the middle of the room. There are small tables on either side of it, and the stark white comforter pulled up with a stack of pillows spread across the top.

Okay, Lexa thinks to herself. This did not have to be a big deal. They were two relatively small girls. Odds were they could both spread out and still not make much contact.

Clarke shuts the door, following Lexa back into the room with her suitcase wheeling behind her. She makes her way around the bed, leaving her suitcase handle in the air as she abandons it and throws herself onto the bed, her whole body flying back off of it for a second before she settles against it once more, laughing.

“Not a bad exchange, I don’t think,” Clarke mutters as she buries her face in a pillow.

Be cool, Lexa thinks to herself. Clarke is viewing this as a complete non-issue and the only thing that could create an issue right now - is Lexa. “Definitely not,” she agrees, perching herself on the corner of the mattress, legs crossed out on the floor in front of her.
“Oh come on,” Clarke grabs her shoulder and pulls her down to lie against the mattress. “This is how you relax.”

Right, Lexa shuts her eyes, breathing in deeply, the ghost of the grip of Clarke’s fingers wrapping around her shoulder was still there. Don’t be weird. Don’t be weird. Don’t be- “Yeah, I mean, who cares about sharing a bed? I don’t mind sharing a bed with you. You seem like a good bedmate.”

And that was weird.

“Thanks?” Clarke seems to take it in stride, turning on her side to watch Lexa. She’s got these gentle, hooded eyes and her hair’s falling across her arm, down onto her chest. “Hotels, in general, are just exciting, you know?”

“I guess?” Lexa answers, remaining on her back, attempting to look more at the ceiling than her self-proclaimed bedmate. “I’ve never traveled a ton.”

“It was my favorite thing as a kid,” Clarke declares, picking at a hangnail for a second before resting a hand beneath her cheek, eyes still on Lexa. “The swimming pool, your parents putting the news on in the morning while you get ready, the shitty breakfast that has nothing but junk food to eat so no one can stop you.” Lexa can’t help herself, she glances over, and Clarke’s eyes have this far off look about them as if recalling hotels of past. “It’s like an adventure even if you’re just staying thirty minutes outside your hometown.”

Lexa doesn’t want to tell her that in her experience she would lay in her bed quietly, feigning sleep as early as possible and went to breakfast alone in the mornings, nobody there one way or the other to comment on what she ate. “I didn’t usually go swimming.”


“Hotel pools?”

“Yes!” She pushes herself up, crossing her legs beneath her as she looked down at Lexa, leaving no choice but to look back at Clarke instead of stare at the ceiling fan. “All of my vacations combined I think I have more memories of swimming in the hotel pool than anything else.”
“Are you sure that’s not just saying something about your vacations?” Lexa questions, eyebrow raised and a smirk beginning to grow. It was nice to forget her nerves for a second and fall into teasing instead.

Clarke shakes her head, getting up from the bed and unzipping her suitcase immediately. “Lucky for you I only book hotels with pools,” she comments, articles of clothing being dumped from the suitcase onto the comforter. “Get your swimsuit, Lex.”

“It’s almost midnight,” Lexa sighs. She was not doing this right now. The last thing she needed as they climbed into bed tonight was the imagery of Clarke Griffin in a bikini burned into her eyes, Clarke tuts. “It’s barely after eleven. We have an hour till the pool closes.” That seems to be the end of the argument as Clarke disappears into the bathroom, bright blue strings of bathing suit hanging from her hand. “Hurry up!”

Maybe Lexa should’ve focused on breakfast.

/////  

Lexa throws her swimsuit on, suddenly beyond grateful that it was at least nightfall and she wouldn’t be forever forced to remember the sensation of Clarke rubbing sunscreen all over her back. At least this one thing was on her side.

Clarke reappears in a bright blue bikini, bottoms tied at the hips and a top just big enough that she wasn’t literally busting out of it, but just barely.

For a second the air is lost from Lexa’s lungs, like hitting the ground back first, the wind rushing out of you before you can try and hold onto it. She’s gaping like a fish on land, probably, eyes falling to Clarke’s breasts before glancing to her ass. She shakes her head, trying to cement herself back in reality.

No one wants to share a bed with the creepy gay chick who can’t help but be turned on by another woman in a bathing suit. Don’t be that person, she reminds herself. “Your suit is cute.”

“Thanks,” Clarke answers, her hands twisting all of that wild blonde hair into a bun at the top of her head, leaving Lexa to stare at the even slope of her neck and the bicep poking out along her arm. The
more time she spends with her, the more Lexa has learned it’s simply impossible not to admire Clarke.

If Lexa had been paying closer attention when Raven packed her suitcase, she might have noticed that the bathing suit she’d chucked in there just so happened to be a size smaller than it really needed to be. Which, in retrospect, might be exactly why Raven had pronounced it made Lexa’s boobs look good.

At the very least, there was also an old cover up that she’d been able to throw on top of herself, so she wasn’t forced to stand here in glorified underwear. All the while gaping at Clarke’s glorified underwear. “Alright, let’s do this?”

Clarke flashes her a wide smile, grabbing a pair of workout shorts to throw over top of her bottoms, her top remaining exposed. “This is one of those things that’s fun, Lexa,” Clarke tells her, hips swaying a little more than usual as she walks up to Lexa, stopping when there was just barely an inch of space between them.

Now Lexa really can’t breathe, because Clarke is right in front of her and she’s all skin and thin blue strings that would fall apart with a simple tug. Clarke is more naked than not, and all Lexa can think about for a second is how easy it’d be to remove the not part all-together.

She’s waiting for Clarke to say more, to joke or tease or bring Lexa back to reality, but instead, they both seem to just end up stuck. Words caught in the back of their throats, breath stalled halfway in, bodies frozen in space, stuck.

After a moment Clarke lifts a hand, her fingertips trailing a blazing hot path from Lexa’s elbow down to her hand where their fingers wrap around one another almost instinctively. “Shall we?”

And then she’s grabbing the key card and pulling Lexa behind her towards the door. She’s smiling and damn near tiptoeing to the hallway as if they were breaking the rules. Clarke doesn’t drop Lexa’s hand, and Lexa doesn’t move to pull it away, allowing Clarke’s grasp to keep her anchored behind, being pulled urgently in the direction of the pool by a sign that points to the right.

She follows diligently, trying to keep up, so their hands didn’t pull too much, so Clarke wouldn’t think to let go. It was one of those things that Lexa knew was stupid and pointless and a bold-faced lie to herself, but with her hand wrapped up tight and warm in Clarke’s grasp she can pretend for a moment that they are really together, that this is something they both are wanting and seeking and was so much more than imaginary.
The few memories Lexa has of hotel pools include cinder block walls in a too humid room and a dirty table with scattered, plastic chairs more stained than white propped around it.

Of course, because Clarke is Clarke and this whole weekend can’t be anything but beyond expectations, she’s pushing Lexa outside where the blue water glows from the lights within it, a hot tub to the side that waterfalls over into the pool.

The air was cooler tonight, cold enough that it wasn’t really appropriate swimming temperature even in southern California, but Lexa can see the steam coming off the water, and she has hopes that it will be warm despite the chilly air.

Eventually, Clarke does drop Lexa’s hand, but only to shuck off her shorts. Then she’s crossing her arms tight across her chest and shivering, teeth chattering together for a second. “Hurry up!”

So Lexa thanks the darkness as she swipes off her cover-up, dropping it over top of a chair before joining Clarke in her stance, arms wrapped across her chest. Lexa aims more for concealing herself than warming, but it works as an excuse.

Clarke’s eyes pan up and down her body for a second before she’s dropping her arms and grabbing Lexa’s hand again, pulling her towards the far end of the pool. “On three?”

“On three what?” Lexa counters, eyeing the water nervously as a breeze blows through the air and causes goosebumps to rise on her skin.

“One.”

“What are we doing on three, Clarke?”

“Two,” she turns to Lexa with a broad smile that can just be made out, squeezing her hand tightly.

“If you think I’m jumping in this water on three then you are-”
“Three!” she shrieks and tugs Lexa’s hand towards the water, her feet jumping in the air.

Despite her claims otherwise, Lexa can’t help but join in. She can’t quite hold back her squeal as she gives a small hop off the ground herself and, keeping her hand tightly wrapped in Clarke’s jumps towards the water with hopes that she’ll be met with something more akin to a bathtub than a polar bear plunge experience.

Her feet hit the water first, but Lexa has no concept of temperature until her body is enveloped, hair floating around her head under the water as she opens her eyes for a moment, catching Clarke’s puffed out cheeks.

They drop hands, using their arms and legs to push themselves towards the surface. The water is blessedly warm, though. Lexa could stand to stay down here for a while.

She follows after Clarke towards the top, bursting from the surface with a gasp of air. “Oh thank god,” she finds herself breathing out, causing Clarke to giggle beside her.

“Scaredy cat,” she taunts, sending a splash of water towards Lexa’s face.

Lexa stares back at Clarke with a wide-mouthed gape as she wipes the water from her eyes. “Well excuse me for not wanting hypothermia!” she punctuates the last word with a large wave of water in Clarke’s direction.

In retaliation, Clarke brings her hands back, ready to swipe more water in Lexa’s direction, before she has a chance to, Lexa dives under the water. Her feet accept the splash as she swims down head first.

The world is quiet beneath the water, blurry and dim. The source of light is at the far end, a bright spotlight which equally blinded Lexa as much as it illuminated the water around her. She swims down, arms slicing through the water as her legs swing out beside her, guiding her further down.

When Lexa turns her head, Clarke is swimming down beside her, flashing a wide smile as air bubbles appear from her nose. She breezes right past Lexa, hand touching the bottom of the nine-foot pool and looking to her with a triumphant grin before turning and pushing herself towards the surface.
Well, Lexa decides as she spins herself in the opposite direction just before reaching the bottom, might as well win in one way.

She surfaces a second before Clarke, gasping for air in desperate gulps.

Clarke pops up beside her, taking her own lungful of air before shouting, “Cheater!” in Lexa’s direction. She takes a few more gasping breaths before swimming in Lexa’s direction. In response Lexa merely sticks her tongue out, unable to keep from laughing at the utter silliness of the whole ordeal.

“No need to be bitter just because you’ve lost,” Lexa shrugs, pretending to look at her cuticles in the darkness and trying to suppress her smile.

“I did not-” Clarke starts before shaking her head. “That’s it, Woods. You’re going down.”

“Wha-” she starts but the next thing she knows Clarke is tackling her, hands on her shoulders, pushing her down. Lexa sputters her way out of the water, limbs flailing in an attempt to keep her head above water, so she doesn’t choke on water while being unable to control her laughter.

Clarke is laughing in between her loud cries of, “Cheater, cheater, pool water eater!” and her hands are everywhere. On Lexa’s arms and shoulders, grazing along her neck, pressing on her head, until the next thing Lexa knows, Clarke’s entire body is wrapped around her back, her ankles hooking together as she clung to Lexa, arms grabbing her shoulders and hands dangling dangerously close to Lexa’s breasts.

For a moment Lexa is frozen, forgetting all about silly games and retaliation and caught up in this much of Clarke wrapped around her and the fact that the both of them are barely wearing a thing.

“You alright there, Lex?” Clarke asks after a second head craning around to Lexa’s peripherals. Her chin grazes along Lexa’s neck, her hands adjusting and pressing momentarily against Lexa’s chest.

“Just trying not to drown,” she attempts to sound some fake form of annoyed, but it mostly comes out choked and bleating. The water is just shallow enough that she can stand on her toes, keeping the two of them afloat without having to desperately tread water. Right now she wishes she had the excuse of drowning, but a part of her is also grateful to hold this moment close. “You fight dirty.”
Then Clarke is chuckling against her, the vibrations traveling right through Clarke’s body and into Lexa’s as Clarke’s nose tucks into the space just between Lexa’s neck and collarbone, breathing in the warmth of her skin as she hides against the slight bite to the night air. “You’re the cheater here; I believe we determined.”

Lexa’s heart is racing, quick, uneven beats that are almost enough to make her chest ache. The portion of her brain not entirely occupied with the sensation of Clarke Griffin wrapped tight around her, spares a thought of if she can notice just how fast Lexa’s heart is beating.

If only Clarke knew just how unfair she was playing right about now. In order to even the playing grounds, Lexa decides enough is enough and pushes off with the very tips of her toes and throws them both backward. She falls onto her back, leaving Clarke no choice but to disentangle herself and fight towards the surface.

The water breaks, droplets splashing onto Lexa’s face as she lays on her back, looking up at the sky above her. “I’m hardly about to half-ass my cheater ways,” Lexa says by way of explanation as Clarke stands over her, hands on her hips beneath the water and glare fixated.

Clarke sprinkles water on her face before laying beside her, arms outstretched as the both laid beneath the star-filled sky above them. It’s the sort of romantic that makes Lexa ache with longing, too perfect to ever be real.

“So it’s all or nothing with you. Is that the secret?” Clarke whispers just loud enough that Lexa can hear her with her ears out of the water, bodies mere inches apart.

Lexa thinks of the implications. Of being anything besides completely one way or the other, fully committed or nothing at all. She thinks of this in relation to her pretend relationship with Clarke and the desperation that she fights through her classes with. She thinks of how she has never been very good at ever accepting something as half complete and considering it good.

“Yes,” she says by way of response. It felt like enough. It felt like Clarke was asking a different question and Lexa was giving a different answer.

No one rephrases. No one adds on.

They lay beneath the stars with a half-finished conversation sitting between them and the universe itself.
In the hotel room, Lexa quickly trades her swimsuit in favor of dry pajamas. She shoots Raven a brief text saying, “your sister is going to kill me.” Along with an emoji whose eyes have been X’ed out.

There’s no response, of course. It’s a Friday night, and Raven is surely halfway past intoxicated with her body twisting on the dance floor and someone’s hands running along her curves. Lexa’s impending death would not take precedence until at least tomorrow morning.

The sheets and comforter are crisp and soft as Lexa folds them back, climbing into the bed with bare feet and her hair falling in tangles of wet hair. Her bare legs slide against the sheets as she settles under them, fluffing the pillow beneath her head before laying it down and shutting her eyes.

From the other room, Lexa can hear the shower water running, and she shuts her eyes with more determination. Falling asleep before Clarke climbed into this bed next to her was the only hope she had of making it through the night as a complete human not so entirely lost in sexual tension until she was so tightly wound any simple act could set her off.

But when she closes her eyes all she can feel is Clarke wrapped around her body, fleshy thighs digging into her sides and soft, strong arms pressing their bodies flush together. The only thing she can see is a map of stars and clear blue eyes and a wide, uneven smile that seemed to fill Lexa up with joy just from having the fortune to glance the smile for herself. And all she can hear, god the only thing in her head is Clarke asking if Lexa was all or nothing, if this halfway there relationship wasn’t enough, if she needed more. All she can hear is her yes in response.

So sleep evades her, unsurprisingly. Because whenever she shifts position she smells the chlorine in her hair and tastes the crisp fall air and her senses are entirely enveloped in the moment that has passed but that her body and brain and heart can’t let go of.

She thinks of what it means to be all or nothing. She thinks of if Clarke felt the same weight of her words, read the truth hidden in Lexa’s response, experienced the reality existing between them.

With a sigh Lexa flips to her back, the covers rustling around her. All or nothing, she wants to demand of Clarke. What were they? What was this? Did Clarke feel the electricity between them for what it was? Was the air caught in her lungs like she was choking on the water below? Was her skin burning from touches and holds and ghosting fingers? Was her heart racing a million miles a minute,
either running away from what was definite, impending heartbreak or running towards the warmest smile and gentlest hands it has ever known?

All or nothing, Lexa so desperately wants an answer. Because if she knows, then she can change. If she knows she can work with whatever answer she’s given. One way or the other, Lexa could adjust. But as of now, she exists in this plane of partway in each direction, arms being tugged so clearly to opposite sides that she feels her shoulders could be ripped from their sockets. There was no clear answer, no black or white, no all or nothing.

The question consumes her until the bathroom door is opening, the light shining along the wall for a moment before Clarke flips it off, finding her way to the bed via the flashlight of her phone.

She’s rustling in her bags and rifling through her stuff, a phone charger being plugged in, a towel rubbing along her hair, a zipper being pulled shut, all the sounds of another human living and breathing beside Lexa are pronounced. Clarke was no longer just a figment, Lexa could no longer pretend she was this artificial creation who had been placed on a pedestal. Clarke was real, a distinct individual who Lexa knew and was beginning to understand, her fears and flaws and the reality of her humanity shining through in the words she breathed to life and the clutter she lived amongst.

The added weight to the mattress causes it to shift as Clarke settles into bed beside Lexa. She was firmly on her side, Lexa all but hugging the other edge of the mattress, her knees just barely hanging over the edge.

Neither of them moves.

The silence is deafening, the darkness blinding. Lexa feigns sleep by offering slow, even breaths, and Clarke seems to settle, flipping to and from before settling on her side, the covers shifting before lifting up for a second.

There’s several minutes of stillness and then - “Lex?”

It’s a whisper, quiet enough that if Lexa so desired she could keep up her charade of being asleep. But Lexa is weak; she’s always known this, there’s no point in pretending. “Yes?” she responds instead, her own voice small and still and a part of her wonders if the darkness itself could swallow it before Clarke even hears the word.

The bed shifts again, Lexa can feel Clarke scooting herself closer, falling into the middle of the bed
instead of hanging on the edge. “I think I’m an all or nothing sort of person too.”

Lexa breath stalls halfway out, a line of goosebumps rising along her arms as she grips the comforter tighter still. She doesn’t know what do with the confession, if it even is a confession, if it stands for a positive or a negative in this whole messy debacle they’ve managed to create.

She wants to ask what that means, which side Clarke was on. Maybe Lexa knows, and that’s the part she can’t accept. Maybe the reality is what she’s hiding from, the pretend easier to accept, less frightening to acknowledge.

All or nothing was big and real and undoubtedly far from easy.

All or nothing wasn’t a world Lexa was ready to live in.

All or nothing is all she’s ever known, all she could ever be.

“That doesn’t make this easy,” Lexa whispers, breathing to life truth where before there was only ever imagination. She speaks her truth without revealing her reality.

“Maybe it doesn’t have to be,” Clarke retaliates, the acceptance of struggle and difficult and a fight that may or may not be worth it in the end, a battle that may not lead to a war being won.

There’s no easy answer left, only confessions.

Lexa breathes deep and steady, hoping that was the only answer needed.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, gonna be totally honest here, it's American Thanksgiving and Thursdays update probably is just not going to happen due to my work schedule. So if I have some slow nights I will do my best, I swear. Otherwise, everyone have a lovely holiday and leave me your thoughts on these two!
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When taking into consideration the fact that hotels exist solely as a location dedicated to sleep, Lexa will never fathom why they all insist on having the worst curtains known to man.

The light is streaming through, bright and intruding. In an attempt to stifle it, Lexa turns her head, burying her face against the closest thing she can find. She lets out a soft hum of appreciation as she settles against the warmth, taking a deep breath and allowing the scent to overcome her.

It was sweet and a little coconut-y, maybe just a touch of vanilla. Her breathing settles, her eyes growing heavy once more as she relaxes into the softness and revels in the scent.

The warm, supple pillow groans quietly beneath Lexa and all at once her eyes are no longer heavy. They fly open in surprise as she forces the rest of her body to hold very still, lest she woke Clarke up completely to the act of Lexa literally jumping away from her.

They weren’t merely close to one another, that would be too easy, too innocent, but instead Lexa’s got her head on Clarke’s chest, her face goddamn near buried in her neck, and Clarke has an arm wrapped beneath Lexa, the other thrown over top, as if holding Lexa to her. When Clarke moans again, she shifts slightly, pulling Lexa closer still as she turned in her sleep.

Of course, they are not simply lying together, sharing a bed and a blanket. No, instead they are all but occupying the same damn space. The two of them are a mess of heavy, sleep-filled limbs and humid, sticky skin. It would be too easy to only be close. Clarke and Lexa utterly could not do easy; it would seem. They were destined for complex, ordained to difficult.

Lexa shifts, some attempt to shimmy away centimeter by centimeter as if any amount of space could resolve the shift that had undoubtedly taken place. Even if Clarke was never the least bit aware of this exact moment, this subconscious, gravitational connection seemingly holding them together, Lexa was a firsthand witness. There would be no forgetting, not for her.

As she attempts to slip away, move to some other corner of the bed, as if there wasn’t plenty of space, Clarke stirs, first moving with Lexa and then freezing entirely. There was no doubt that she too had registered exactly the positions they were in - one of her legs thrown over Lexa’s arms wrapped around her, skin practically fused.
Lexa isn’t sure if she’s actually on fire at this point or if the heat between them was crawling deep within her, setting flame to her very nerves. Clarke withdraws an arm, the one on top of her first, and pulls her leg back to her side, so she was no longer bear hugging Lexa.

“Morning,” she says quietly, and if nothing else, this is what makes Lexa aware of the fact that something is different. Because Clarke is always the cool cucumber, the one nothing effects. She walks around like she is perpetually untouched, eternally above the mere inconveniences of crushes and emotions and those silly little heart flutters.

But now, now is different. Now Clarke is frozen and awkward, and her exoskeleton of chill has melted away with the sticky warmth of clung-to skin and a kind of right that fell into place effortlessly.

“Good morning,” Lexa responds, polite and concise because she doesn’t quite know what else to be right now. The manners were a fallback, carefully laid out lines to constrain herself within, like a proverbial straitjacket.

Now Lexa is the one who attempts to hold it together, clearing her throat as she slipped away from Clarke in the same move of a stretch, making the disentanglement as natural as possible. Though, she realizes, that is only so possible when their calves are all locked together, and Clarke can barely get her arm out from beneath Lexa even as she arches up and slides away.

“I should shower,” she says next because the release of hot, clean water and the freedom of solitude is calling desperately. “Pool hair.”

Clarke nods in response, rubbing the back of her hand along her bleary eyes. “Right, yeah.” Half asleep Clarke forgot how to be cool. In fact, half asleep Clarke was maybe just as flustered and falling apart as Lexa was at all times.

Which forces Lexa to be more functional, less disaster and more of a proper person. She now had to pick up the slack of maintaining normalcy when she could no longer rely on Clarke to take care of it.

She slides from the bed, the balls of her feet hitting the soft carpet first, and then she slips into the bathroom, shutting the door behind her and allowing a moment to lean against it, catching her breath. It might not make any sense, but being around Clarke felt like someone was literally sucking the air from her lungs.
But, Lexa thinks as she turns the hot water on and watches it fall in a daze, it didn’t feel that way when she’d first woken up this morning, breathing in greedy, heavy lungfuls of sweet and musk and Clarke. Maybe, she considers as she steps into the tub, the hot water running down her back and rinsing through her chlorinated hair, maybe the air was only missing when she worked against it. Maybe fighting against Clarke was like a fight against instincts themselves. Breathing fell in priority when her focus was on restraint. The air was stuck because she was hoping it would hold the attraction stagnant, would disrupt the tension that was bursting between them.

As the water slips down her body and she scrubs and scrubs and scrubs away at her skin, Lexa wonders if her air will ever be free again. She wonders if it was all held by Clarke Griffin. And if that meant that Lexa could possibly be left with nothing.

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The sun streams through tree branches in blinding chunks, warming Lexa’s skin wherever it touches. A little boy bumps into her hip, and she steps to the right, just slightly closer to Clarke whose got her hand hovering over her eyes to block some of the sun as she searched through the branches.

Clarke had driven the two of them to the San Diego zoo that morning with a shrug of her shoulders and said, “Seemed like the thing to do,” as she paid for parking and headed onward. It wasn’t necessarily a remarkable outing or an unbelievable experience, but Lexa found herself a little enamored with the simplicity of it all.

It was hot today, the slight chill in the air from last night gone entirely and replaced with direct summer heat and the sort of sun rays that would most likely leave someone as pale as Clarke burnt to a crisp within the hour.

All zoos were roughly the same, but that didn’t mean each experience was created equal.

For instance, Lexa thinks as she crowds closer to Clarke and skims the trees for lemurs, her experience at the DC zoo when she was twelve years old did not include her breath caught in her throat every time her arm brushed up against another. She also didn’t have anxiety rolling around in her stomach to the point where she might puke so perhaps not all differences were positive.

Clarke insists on the penguin exhibit which was blessedly cooler even if it did smell exceptionally like fish. When one of the strange blubber birds dives under the water and swims right by them, Clarke squeals in excitement and grabs Lexa’s hand again. Lexa could certainly get used to this new
tendency of hand grabbing that had been developed.

They stay there longer than any of the other exhibits, enjoying the air conditioning and the absurd birds as they swam and flapped about.

“Do you think they know how much bigger their world would be if they weren’t stuck here?” Clarke asks, cross-legged on the ground as she sat in front of the tank.

“Honestly, I’m not sure how much capacity penguins have to think at all,” Lexa answers, staring back at one of the animals as it pauses, blinking at them before taking off again.

“I think all animals have the capacity of complex thought,” Clarke muses. “Maybe not any sort of philosophical, who am I and what am I doing here sort of crap, but definitely something.”

Clarke had a tendency to say what she thought out loud, sometimes seemingly unfiltered. Lexa found herself processing streams of consciousness that her own mind would dismiss before the thought had completely formed. “Octopuses are damn near geniuses. I know that.”

“If octopuses can be geniuses then I believe penguins can think.” She finishes her conclusion with a singular, definite nod before sitting up straighter and looking to Lexa. “What do you think?”

“I think…” she fades off, looking around her before her eyes settle on a sign. “I think that you should be aware that African penguins are sometimes called jackass penguins because they can sound like a braying donkey.”

“You’re right,” Clarke agrees solemnly. “I did need to know that.”

The safari animals catch Lexa’s attention the most, spending long chunks of time in the unforgiving sun and elbowing her way around crowds to get the best look at the giraffes and jaguars and elephants. She stands on tiptoes to get the best look, and Clarke remains at her side, even when they’re twenty minutes in on elephant observation.

As the hours wear on, their feet ache, and subpar zoo food combined with overpriced ice cream are the only sustenance either of them has had all day. Old sticky sweat clung to Lexa’s skin as they made their way along the path, back towards the parking lot the car had been left in. As the seasons transition, the sun was beginning to set sooner, the bottom of it dipping beneath trees and buildings at
Clarke helps herself to the driver’s seat, and Lexa falls back into the passenger seat, not paying much attention as she searched for music to listen to and texted Raven and Murphy back. When she looks up the next thing she knows they’re on a bridge, the water a bright blue as the car flew past the opposing cars which sat in long lines of traffic.

“Where are we going?” Lexa asks, eyebrows furrowing as Clarke makes turns and shoots her a momentary flash of a toothy grin.

They pass a sign reading “Coronado Beach” and Clarke throws the car into another parking spot before turning the car off and pocketing the keys, not giving Lexa a chance to ask any further questions.

“It’s barely after six,” Clarke says by way of explanation as she stretches her arms above her head, the hem of her shirt rising and showing off the jutting of a hip bone and the lower expanse of Clarke’s stomach.

Lexa shakes her head, hoping she hasn’t been caught stealing as she shoves her cell phone into her back pocket and takes a few jogging steps after Clarke to catch up with her.

Clarke kicks her shoes off, stuffing the socks inside and leaving them abandoned on the sand as she made a beeline for the water.

Neither of them had swimsuits or flip-flops or towels, or any other appropriate beach materials, but in an effort to not be the biggest wet blanket, Lexa follows suit, ditching her shoes and letting the soft, cooling sand wrap around her feet as she took hurried steps after Clarke, stopping just before the bubbling water rushing forward made contact.

“It looks cold,” she comments, even as Clarke stands knee deep in the water, seemingly unconcerned.

Maybe it had been her plan all along to be dragged into the water with Clarke, a hand grasping her and tugging her into the shallow water just as the remnants of a wave washes up towards them and covers them both in chilled, foamy water up to their knees.
Lexa winces in anticipation before turning to Clarke and shaking her head, resisting the urge to push her further in with the memory of the fact that there was a distinct lack of towels.

“No beaches in Omaha,” Clarke says with a shrug, fingertips dipping into the water as it rises up towards them again. Lexa takes a preventative step back, fully intending to keep her shorts from soaking.

She kicks at the water, giving a little hop over the wave as it comes for her again, chuckling to herself as her feet hit the water once more. Clarke turns towards her, returning her grin and taking a few splashing steps until they were next to one another, jumping alongside Lexa in the waves, the both of them laughing as the water splashes up around them, leaving wide wet spots on their shorts and tank tops.

Lexa runs ahead, feet splashing in the water around her as she hops and twirls over waves and laughs, feeling silly and childish and absurd, but looking to Clarke who has bright blue eyes and this deep, easy laugh and submitting herself to those foolish tendencies anyway.

The water is cold and rushing, and the two of them are getting wet well past their knees now as the sun dips below the houses and trees behind them.

They walk in the water, Lexa giving up shortly later and stepping lightly on the sand instead as her toenails turn purple. The sand shifts beneath her, throwing her momentarily off balance and slipping towards the water. Clarke’s laughing and her hands are shoving against Lexa, pressing and kneading and stuck on flesh desperately waiting to be touched.

Somehow Clarke’s hand ends up entwined in Lexa’s, and neither of them comments on the matter one way or the other. They walk silently like that, hands clutched together and stepping in sync as they watch the few remaining beachgoers finally surrender to the end of the day. A group of teenagers with towels flying out behind them like capes, a couple of exhausted parents with a screaming toddler waddling his way out of the sand. A middle-aged woman and her illegal dog.

A place which can be filled with so many people one could barely even move at times was now cleared out, leaving it to seem as if Clarke and Lexa were the only two remaining as the sun all but gives up its struggles and sinks below, the rim of the moon becoming further pronounced by the minute.

“If you had endless money,” Clarke says after several minutes of silent walking. “Would you rather expense space or ocean exploration?”
“If I had endless money I would explore both,” Lexa answers ignoring the way Clarke rolls her eyes.

“You have to pick,” she declares her voice the vocal equivalent of a pout and hands on hips.

With a sigh Lexa looks forward, watching the gentle curve of the beach and the water rushing forward and back, creeping further up the sand as the tide came further in. “Ocean,” she says after a minute. “Might as well grasp what the hell is here on Earth before moving on elsewhere.”

“And mermaids.”

“What?” Lexa turns to face Clarke, somewhere between laughing and incredulous.

“That seems to me like a fair enough rationalization for motivation,” Clarke says, unable to help herself as she giggles. “It can’t be impossible when we only have seen like 0.2% of the ocean!” she shouts over Lexa’s laughing, waving her free hand in dismissal.

Lexa squeezes Clarke’s hand, just barely so, as she says, “You’re right,” and tries to fight any additional laughter. “Mermaids need further investigation.”

“That’s all I’m suggesting here.” It’s just ridiculous enough that Lexa laughs again, the air light and easy and warm as her shoulders shake, and her stomach almost hurts. “Hey, Lex?” Clarke says after another minute.

It’s getting to be properly dark now, hardly anyone else remaining as the moon makes its full appearance, the stars twinkling into place above them. “Yes?” she asks, suddenly finding the atmosphere itself to have grown heavier.

The waves crash next to them, the roaring rush of water filling Lexa’s headspace for a minute as she finds herself stuck in place, body turned towards Clarke; hand still held tight. “Are you having fun now?”

And she can’t think of anything besides the hand that’s clinging to her and warm, tangled limbs in the morning, and bare flesh pressed together beneath the water. She thinks of a long car ride with music just loud enough and easy conversation combined with miles that passed too quickly. She
thinks of heated outdoor pools with the stars hanging above them. She thinks of zoo animals and the beach and what is ordinary but somehow seemed so beyond. She thinks of the fact that Clarke Griffin’s single self-professed mission was to help Lexa have fun.

“Yes,” she answers, ignoring the water is creeping up her calves before pulling back away. “I’m having a great time with you, Clarke.”

And Clarke’s breath seems to stutter, her hand twitching within Lexa’s as her feet shift towards Lexa, the moon illuminating the smile stretching on her face. A swell grows within Lexa’s chest at the expression, and she can’t think of anything besides just what Clarke’s body feels wrapped around hers.

“I knew you would,” she whispers back in response, the words all but getting lost with the waves of water shifting beside them. “I know you’ve been dreading this weekend since the day I met you and I just wanted...I wanted to make it better.”

“Why?” Lexa breathes out, unable to hold the question back as she shoulders rise and fall with an inhale and her eyebrows furrow in question.

Her mind is entirely caught up in Clarke, and whatever answer is to come that she doesn’t even feel the cold of the water anymore or pay the man fishing up ahead any mind. This moment is entirely her and Clarke and whatever words are to be breathed to life. “Because I-you’re-.” Clarke struggles, head shaking and eyes hard and focused as settles back on Lexa. “You don’t deserve the way your mom treats you.”

The words settle in Lexa’s very bones. It wasn’t that her mother beat her or held her captive or even had bad intentions, but her words hurt, the denials of her daughter were in so many different regards and it stung, sharp and constant. “Maybe not,” she whispers back because she doesn’t necessarily know one way or the other if she’s done anything to deserve it.

Clarke sighs, her eyes falling away from Lexa’s for a moment. “You deserve so much more,” she says, her entire body shifting closer, her head turning to the side and Lexa bites her lip because otherwise, she would be pulling Clarke in right about now.

“I don’t know if…” she starts but fades off because Clarke’s eyes are watching her and her hand is warm and gentle in Lexa’s grasp, and it would be so incredibly easy to kiss her right now. Because being wrapped around Clarke was the easiest thing in the world. The struggle came when forcing themselves apart.
Clarke’s other hand finds Lexa’s hip, and Lexa loses her ability to process around the same moment that she feels the light pressure there. Her body leans forward, unable to hold herself back when Clarke was so close.

This is it, she thinks, the moment that propels them forward while never allowing her an opportunity to go back. This is a moment that is grounded in truth and reality with no motivation towards any of that messy pretend they had created.

Clarke’s lips are parted as she leans imperceptibly closer, the move so slow and gentle that Lexa doesn’t realize it’s happening until Clarke is right in front of her, near enough to kiss without barely needing to move another muscle.

The moment Lexa realizes this, accepts it, is the moment the water comes rushing forward, the rising tide racing in with a gush of water that washes up to their waists, causing them both to jump back, stalled for a second before the cold water drenching their shorts brings them back. Lexa squeals first, Clarke muttering a, “Jesus Christ,” as Lexa darts from the water with hurried steps. “It was not that cold, like, twenty minutes ago!” she declares, desperate for the moment to return but knowing it’s now gone, knowing that they were still existing in a before with the knowledge that they were both blindly jumping towards an after.

“The sun was out,” Clarke replies, not bothering to step away until the water’s been drawn back in, taking her steps on dry land. “And we weren’t soaked to our stomachs.” Her eyes hover on Lexa for a moment, not with quite the same weight as before, but still watching, analyzing.

Lexa shivers, unable to stop herself either from the water or the distinct knowledge that Clarke is studying her. “Should we head back to the hotel?” she whispers, hair blowing towards her face as a breeze whips past them.

Clarke continues to hold her stare before nodding her head and walking back towards the direction they had come. She walks past Lexa without a word or a glance, eyes fixed straight ahead towards the access point that was far off and steps steady and consistent in the direction.

Lexa watches after her, letting the air exhale from her lungs and her mind to catch up with the moment that was so close but still not close enough. As fast as a rushing wave, their true reality comes back once more. Just like that, Lexa forces herself to forget about parted lips and leaning bodies and almosts.
Instead, she focuses on each step in the sand, just behind Clarke the whole way.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry this is so incredibly late. I may have bit off more than I could chew between work and school and family stuff and, unfortunately, fanfic has to take the back burner. I'm hoping to get back on my schedule next week. I sincerely doubt I'll be able to make a chapter tomorrow happen, but potentially Friday depending on how things go. Again, I'm very sorry. Hope you all are well! I'm off to work but I'll respond to some comments and such tomorrow!
“So are you ready now?”

It had been twenty minutes of sitting in the parking lot, engine shut off, radio silent, eyes fixed forward.

It had been twenty minutes of wringing hands, darting eyes, and quick, uneven breaths.

“No.”

It had been twenty minutes of preparation that was never realized.

The whole reunion nonsense was, in all actuality, a relatively tame event. It was held in an outdoor pavilion, lack of fluff or lace or unnecessary fanciness. In all regards, it was an average event. There would be food and a collection of people who were vaguely familiar with one another while lacking a genuine interest in whatever growth had taken place over the last several years. There would probably be completely average music and cake with too sweet frosting.

In all reality, this shouldn’t be scary in the slightest.

In Lexa’s reality, it was terrifying.

When they had gotten back to the hotel last night, Lexa didn’t know what to do with herself. On the drive home, Clarke kept her eyes fixed resolutely on the road, the radio blasting, neither of them moving to turn it down.

In the room, Lexa made a show of hunting through her bag, hanging up the dress that should have been up for hours to prevent wrinkling. She keeps her eyes focused on whatever menial task she manages to hone in on, doing her best impression of a person entirely alone.
Clarke doesn’t push for the rest of the night. When she goes to say, “L.exa, I-” Lexa cuts her off, walking straight into the bathroom and shutting the door. Clarke might just have been trying to say she wanted dinner, but Lexa wasn’t about to chance it. Tomorrow was bound to be disaster enough, that moment with Clarke on the beach had been a fluke, a momentary lapse in judgment. They’d been lost in the dark with heads full of rushing water. Easy had found the both of them before the difficulties could catch up.

Lexa knows better.

Neither of them mention another word about parted lips or bodies leaning in or messy almosts and never realized hopes.

They climb into bed, Lexa curled on her side, facing the wall as she scanned Twitter and held her breath as Clarke laid down beside her. There’s a canyon-sized gap of space between them, and Lexa still feels the shared space closing around her. “I’ll set an alarm,” she says, short and sweet and not at all in reference to how she couldn’t stop imagining her lips pressed against Clarke’s, her hands tangled in those blonde, unruly waves.

“Sounds good,” Clarke answers, no suggestion to the fact that earlier tonight she was watching Lexa with blown pupils and her breath caught deep in her lungs. “Good night.”

“Night.”

Morning had been a redo, a reset to the night before. By the time Lexa had woken up Clarke was already in the shower, allowing her not to be forced to deal with another morning of subconsciouc cuddling. She did wake up on the opposite side of the bed, her face smushed into Clarke’s pillow, but with no one there to witness this fact she feels no need to address it.

She curls the end of her hair and pulls on the pink chiffon dress, the material fitting with ease now, and stands in front of the mirror in the bedroom as she tries to even out her breathing and calm the frantic beats of her heart.

Clarke walks out of the bathroom, her body wrapped in a towel and water droplets dotting her skin. Their eyes meet in the mirror, and Lexa offers the slightest of smiles, trying not to be thrown by a half-naked Clarke, wet and warm and eyes fixed on Lexa. “Does it fit?” Clarke asks, biting her lip as she takes a few small steps towards Lexa, holding her stare in the mirror.
“Just need help with the zipper,” she answers back, her voice halfway gone. She clears her throat in an attempt at normalcy, hoping to keep her breathing even and her expression fixed as Clarke comes even closer, her eyes dropping to Lexa’s exposed back.

The edge of the towel is tucked beneath Clarke’s underarm, her eyes darting up over Lexa’s shoulder for a second before ducking her head back down, fingers ghosting the lower expanse of Lexa’s back for a fraction of second. That’s all the time it takes for Lexa’s skin to break out in goosebumps, a flush rising to her cheeks, the very sinew of her muscles frozen from that touch. Her breathing stops altogether, caught in her throat before she sets it loose in a shaky, broken exhale.

The zipper slides up, the sound deafening in a room where otherwise the loudest noise is uneven heartbeats and Lexa swallowing heavy, her physical attempt to hold back the swelling emotions.

Clarke slides the zipper up with ease before stepping away and smiling softly. “Fits,” she whispers, eyes all over Lexa, not quick or momentary, but long, lingering stares.

Lexa returns the favor by watching the water drop from Clarke’s jawbone, onto her neck and down her shoulder, the soft, supple skin begging to be kissed, the water formation almost asking Lexa to drink it up, the moisture combined with the heady scent of Clarke Griffin. It was a dizzying thought, the world swaying around her, reality drifting in and out of focus until Lexa pulls her eyes away from water droplets and bare skin and fixes it on Clarke’s face. Her cheeks are still flushed from the heat of the shower; her stare soft and lips parted before she bites down, eyes meeting Lexa.

“Does it look okay?”

Clarke’s eyes are panning her up and down in the mirror and Lexa remembers the first time she put on this damn collection of tissue paper, of whispered confessions of her mom hoping she would be someone else. Clarke’s response about Lexa being something, a promise of enough never breathed to life.

“Still doesn’t look right,” Clarke answers, eyes fixed on the body of the dress. “You look pretty, but not like you.”

A single glance at herself in the mirror and Lexa knows how right Clarke is. She doesn’t do soft material falling around her knees, or light pink contrasting against her skin. The muscles of her arms ripple with the slightest movement, not blending with the slim straps and the feminine cut of the dress.
“Too late now,” Lexa murmurs, reaching up to bring one of the curls over her shoulder. “I think your outfit is exceptionally fitting, though.” She smirks back at Clarke, unable to help but tease her standing behind her in that towel. It was tease her or fuck her, and only one of those options was probably appropriate right about now.

“Thought you might like,” Clarke shoots back, her lips too close to Lexa, the rush of words brushing past Lexa’s bare shoulder, making her hair stand on edge, her body suddenly rethinking her original opinion on what was or was not appropriate.

Now they were sitting in the car with Lexa’s fingers twisting together. Lexa can’t help but wish she could just be back in that hotel room, holding herself back but sensing how easy it would be to slip into another form of communication, one that was frenzied and urgent and very, very clear.

“It seems like there’s a lot of people here,” Clarke comments, eyes scanning the parking lot full of cars.

There were plenty of people here, Lexa thinks, but only one she was looking for, only one she was hoping not to see at all.

Just as the illogical hope that her mother might not have come at all has taken light in her mind is when she sees her mom. Elegant in a simple dress, black heels and perfectly tucked away bun, walking her way outside of the pavilion, eyes scanning for baby pink and slouched posture. Lexa was officially late, which was not the way to start any event with her mother.

When the woman turns back, fading into the mix of people, Lexa knows she has no choice. The worst thing to happen would be if her mother found them first. She would force Clarke back to the car, hell maybe Lexa too. If she saw her daughter about to walk into the event with her hand clutched tight in another girl’s she might just be excused from the event altogether. Her mother could pretend like Lexa had come down with the stomach bug, unable to come and see the light of day itself.

The shame of no appearance at all would be deemed better than the shame of an appearance with a woman as her date.

“Okay,” Lexa breathes out, pulling down the visor and flipping open the tiny mirror to appraise her hair and makeup one last time. “Let’s get this over with.”
She gets out of the car, keeping her head down, hands fidgeting over the folds of her dress.

Clarke comes around to Lexa’s side, glancing at her phone before tucking it away in her clutch. “Just remember, as awful as this may be we’ll be driving home tonight, and we can get you any Subway footlong you want.”

She can’t help herself as she snorts, knowing Clarke isn’t kidding, their options would begin and end with Subway. “Well thank god I have that to hold onto.”

“A beacon in the dark.” And then she’s holding out her hand and wrapping Lexa’s in a firm grasp, fingers intertwining and a final, bright smile cast in her direction before giving Lexa a gentle pull forward.

Lexa can’t help but wonder if maybe she had a completely different beacon entirely, another light to hold onto even when the dark was closing in. Somewhere along the way, Clarke had become her life preserver, and she was damn near sure she was about to go under.

“Alexandra.”

She hears her name before she gets far, her heels clicking on the paved path towards the pavilion below, music playing and groups of people beneath.

Unable to help herself, she freezes. Instinctually she goes to pull her hand away from Clarke’s, but Clarke holds steadfast, grip tight as she offers a squeeze of reassurance.

“What is this?” Not who, what. “I told you this was not to be tolerated.” Her mother speaks in hurried words, her teeth clenched and brow furrowed. “I am not playing games with you, young lady.”

It’d be easy to wither, easy to collapse in on herself and relent, run back to the car with her tail between her legs and forget all about this absurd concept of standing up to her mother. “I’m not playing games either,” she says instead, forcing her shoulders back as she looks up from the ground and into her mother’s eyes. “This is Clarke. She’s my-”

“I don’t care what she is,” her mother whispers in response, a furtive glance in Clarke’s direction before she looks away. “I made it more than obvious that under no uncertain terms was this to be
something I was forced to deal with today and yet here we are. How utterly dense do you have to be to-"

"Hey," Clarke interrupts, her back straight as she takes half a step in front of Lexa. "I'm sorry but where exactly do you get off on-"

"Alexandra!" The moment is interrupted by the tall, bearded man coming up the hill with hurried steps. "Look at you! I haven't seen you in ages."

"Uncle Gus," she smiles, happy to see a somewhat familiar face. Her uncle had always been the silly guy who would hideout with her in the backyard, playing games and making her laugh with goofy jokes.

It'd been fifteen years since she'd last seen him, but he still had the same overgrown beard and wide grin. "You're a grown up."

He pulls her in for a hug, not minding the way Clarke held her hand and releasing immediately when she doesn't hug him back. "You're old," she teases in return, flashes of their banter returning to her.

Lexa's mother is reprimanding her as her uncle guffaws. "Alright, you haven't changed that much I see."

"This is-" she goes to introduce Clarke who's still holding her hand, looking between her uncle and Lexa.

"Gus, if you would excuse us for a minute," her mother interrupts before she has the chance. "Alexandra and I were just discussing something."

He looks to her and then his eyes fall to Clarke for a moment, his gaze dropping to their clutched hands. "Sure, sure, Pam," he rests a hand on Lexa's mom's shoulder before throwing Clarke a smile. "I'll meet you in a minute then."

With one last look in Lexa's direction, he heads back towards the party.

"We aren't doing this right now," her mother says, shooting Lexa a look before directing herself
towards Clarke. “I apologize for the mix-up, but—”

“We aren’t doing anything,” Lexa corrects, finding a sense of confidence that had been long since squandered away. “We,” she gestures between herself and Clarke, “are going to join the family reunion exactly as is.”

Her mother steps in front of her as Lexa goes to move forward. “After everything I have done for you—” she starts in a hurried whisper.

“I’m wearing the damn dress. I have on your godforsaken heels. I am enough of you already. Clarke is coming with me.” She’s shaking, even as she tries to remind herself to hold it together, keep her body steady and her voice even. Still, she can feel the trembling in her bones, the unease as her stomach rolls. They didn’t do this. “Excuse me.”

“Pamela, what are you—” next voice comes from Lexa’s grandmother walking up the hill, her short hair undisturbed by the breeze blowing by as she glances between mother and daughter. She smiles when her eyes fall on Lexa. “Finally,” she says, making the rest of the way to Lexa and being the next to fold her into a hug. This time Lexa drops Clarke’s hand, her arms wrapping politely around her grandmother. “I see your mother is up here hogging you all to yourself. Come and join.”

Her mom has no choice but to watch Lexa go, Clarke trailing behind them.

Within the party itself there are more people Lexa doesn’t recognize than those she does. Her grandmother announces her arrival and heads swivel in her direction as the music continues in a steady beat, the palms of her hands gathering moisture at the shift of attention.

It’s now that her grandmother turns to Clarke, smiling in her direction. “Hello, dear,” she says before turning back to Lexa. “I thought your mother said you’d be bringing your boyfriend?”

Oh god, she thinks, regretting all at once that she’s decided to do this, to make this statement. Sure, she had been convinced she was ready to claim who she was as a person, pronounce it once and for all and stop hiding behind what her mother wanted, but now that she was faced with the moment itself, Lexa is finding she’s less certain than expected. “Actually, Mimi—”

“Hey, Lexa!” her cousin calls out next. Echo had been her closest family member when she was a kid. The one who found her on Facebook and messaged her every so often in preteen-hood, checking in. The only one to bother to learn that Lexa hadn’t gone by Alexandra for as long as she’d
been able to get away from the name.

Echo was a couple of years older, just as pretty as she was when they’d been kids. She doesn’t bother hugging or handshaking, just passes Lexa a cup of lemonade and comes to stand beside her. “Thank god you’re here,” she whispers. “My mom is making me crazy. She’s halfway to wasted, and this shindig has another three and a half hours to go.”

“My mom should really take a page out of Aunt Neva’s book,” Lexa sighs. “She’s far too sober.”

Echo notices Clarke next, extending a hand. “Hey, I’m Echo. I’m the sane one in the family with the crazy name.”

Clarke laughs, taking Echo’s hand. “Clarke.”

“Clarke this is my cousin Echo,” Lexa says, somewhere between finding her manners and her balls. “Echo this is Clarke my... girlfriend.”

There’s a momentary pause before Echo’s eyes widen, and a grin spreads across her face. “Oh, this is going to be good.”

Echo’s non-reaction might almost be better than a positive one. “Don’t remind me.”

Echo glances around the room for a moment, Lexa knows that she’s looking for her mother to see just how she was handling it. “Your mom knows?”

“Technically.”

A hand wraps around her shoulder. “I wish you luck.”

She was going to need it.

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People come and go, some introducing themselves to Clarke, shooting glances in her direction and questioning looks at one another. The few other relatives she breaks out the g-word for seem unbothered. Lexa realizes quickly that this is because they’re assuming a completely different meaning for the term girlfriend.

She might as well be walking around this party introducing Clarke as her “gal pal” for anyone over the age of 35.

It’s not long before her mom makes her way back over to her regardless. “Alright, Alexandra. You’ve had your fun.”

“Do you think this is fun for me?” she whispers back, hoping not to get the attention of her great-aunt Helen who’s standing relatively close to them, hanging onto her walker. “I’m just attempting to be a little bit of myself. And my name is Lexa.”

“I think it’s time for you two to leave,” her mom suggests, arms crossing over her chest. “This was beyond inappropriate.”

“How?” Lexa demands, setting her plate of appetizers down to turn and face her mother, trying to keep her temper in check with every distant blood relative all within spitting distance. “Because I held hands with another girl? Is there a reason you insist on living in the dark ages?”

Her mom’s eyes flash in response before her lips form a hard line and she glares down at her daughter. “You’re attempting to create a scene at an otherwise lovely event. I suggest you rein yourself in and leave.”

“I’m not doing anything,” she argues back, ignoring Clarke’s gentle hand on her back or the way her second cousin glances up from the dessert table with wide eyes. “You’re the only one with a problem.”

“Alexandra-”

“My name is Lexa!” She’s shouting without meaning to, her hands formed into tight, little fists as her teeth grind down and her body leans forward, angry and desperate to find some sort of release. She was geared up for a fight right about now.
The crowd freezes for a moment; conversations halted momentarily before starting back up again as glances are sent their way.

Lexa can see her grandmother making her way over to them, stopped in her tracks as one of the young kids runs past, another chasing just behind them.

“Hey,” Clarke whispers, but Lexa shakes her off. She wasn’t backing down. It has been years of ignorance and disrespect. How hard was it to remember someone’s name?

“That’s enough,” her mother shouts in a breath, attempting to make her barely concealed anger more discreet. “Just accept that you need to go, and we’ll talk later.”

“Talk about what?” Lexa demands, hands on her hips. “Talk about the fact that you can’t remember my fucking name? Or maybe just that you don’t care?” Those directly around them are turning now, no longer pretending to ignore the family drama unfolding in front of them. “Talk about how I told you months ago that I’m gay and you still can’t get over yourself?”

“Shh!” her mother shouts, grabbing Lexa’s arm tight in her grasp like she’s a child about to be dragged off to the car for a talking-to.

Lexa yanks her arm free, making a point not to look to her grandmother who was now right beside them. “I told you, and you just ignored me. And you insist it’s this fling, this creation of my own because I’m not in a committed relationship. And then I tell you about Clarke. I bring her to this stupid reunion because that’s what you do when you’re serious with someone! And it’s still not good enough for you!”

There are more people, some approaching them and others backing away while continuing to watch. “This is not the place to have this conversation.”

“Well you won’t have it with me any other time I try!” she shouts, hands flying in the air and a lump gathering in her throat even as she tries to ignore the feelings swelling within her. “I try, and I try, and you won’t ever shut up and listen to me. You’re too busy trying to create something - someone - that doesn’t exist. Like someone who would wear this fucking dress and these goddamn heels.” She reaches down, struggling for a second as she pulls the shoes from her feet, throwing them down at the foot of where her mother stands.
If it were any other time, her grandmother would surely admonish her language with a gasp and maybe a smack across the arm. Currently, Mimi remains like the rest of the crowd, silent and watching.

Clarke’s got her hand on Lexa’ back, and she keeps trying to encourage Lexa to calm down, suggesting they step away. Lexa ignores her. Right now had nothing to do with Clarke. Hell, it didn’t even have anything to do with the rest of her family. This was between Lexa and her mother. It was a conversation several years overdue, and Lexa would be damned if she missed out on having it out fully.

“If you can’t have a conversation like an adult then I’m done talking to you.”

Her mother goes to turn away, her back facing Lexa. “No!” she shouts after her, making her mom pause before she can get far. “You can’t walk away from me and act like I’m the immature child. You’re the one who won’t talk to me. Hell, you won’t talk to anyone!”

“And what,” she says, turning to face her daughter once more. “Is that supposed to mean, exactly?”

If she thinks too long she won’t say it, so Lexa ignores every warning sign in her head and blocks out each gaping family member around her as she shouts, “I didn’t even have the chance to know my father before he died because of you. I didn’t-”

“That’s enough.”

Lexa keeps going, continuing to speak right over her mother. “I had a half-sister I didn’t even know existed because you couldn’t bear to talk to anybody!” Her voice is shrill, half-crazed as she’s sure the rest of her appears.

Someone gasps, another person says, “Hol-y shit,” most likely louder than intended.

“I think I’ve stood around and listened to your disrespect quite long enough,” she says, eyes fixed on Lexa before she turns to go again.

“Go ahead and run away again. Pretend like none of this is real. Pretend like I’m not an actual, living person in front of you who is something different than what you hoped and now you just can’t bear to face it. You can’t stand the fact that I’m not what you wanted, and you’re refusing to see it. You
kept me from so much already, and now you’re just trying to-”

The slap across her face is finally what gets her to stop.

The sting is sharp, the sound loud and punctuating. Lexa feels her body relax, the come-down of the amped up version of herself she’d been a minute ago. Her cheek stings sharply, and she raises a numb hand to it.

“That’s quite enough,” her mother growls. “Now that you’re done making an utter fool out of the both of us, I’ll be going.”

This time when her mom turns to walk away, Lexa doesn’t say another word. She’d said her piece. She’d said her piece and then some extra. Once she’d started, it was impossible to stop.

Clarke’s ducking into her vision, hands grabbing at Lexa’s arms and by her face and words that are muffled and heavy being asked again and again.

When she focuses again she sees Clarke, hears the “Lex, are you okay? Lexa?” feels the warm, secure grasp of hands.

As she focuses on Clarke, the rest of the world begins to move around them. There’s chattering and glances and relatives reaching for her, other turning away. Her grandmother is standing there gaping, hand to her chest.

Her cousin’s coming towards her on one end, her favorite uncle the other, her mother entirely vanished.

It had been a rush of adrenaline, built back anger rushing forward as the dam that had been holding it all back for years collapsed. She couldn’t take it on anymore, couldn’t sacrifice herself to hold everything back for the sake of her mother. It was a desperate attempt to maintain a relationship that was already broken.

She thinks of what Clarke had said on Friday as Lexa turns and walks back towards the parking lot.
Whatever had existed before was definitely broken; now it was completely severed. Lexa thinks about what healing requires, how much of a fight it is to grow back together.

All she can think when she reaches the passenger side door of her car is that some things are just meant to be broken. Maybe that something includes her relationship with her mother. Maybe, to some extent, that simply included her.

Chapter End Notes

10 points to Ravenclaw for putting up your regularly scheduled Monday chapter! I'm taking some days to myself so I am hoping to follow this trend on Thursday as well. Hope you all enjoyed the craziness that was the reunion. I'm so excited to hear your thoughts on how things went down and to keep writing from here. Thank you all again!
Chapter 21

Clarke is behind her. Lexa knew Clarke would follow without ever checking behind her to make sure. When they reach the car Clarke doesn’t go around to the driver’s side, though, instead staying at Lexa’s side.

When Lexa moves to pull the car door handle, it doesn’t give, still locked from inside. “Clarke, unlock the doors,” she says, direct and instructive. She didn’t want to stand here; she didn’t want to be anywhere near this stupid event with these people. She wanted to go.

“Lexa, hey, let’s-”

“Unlock the car, Clarke,” she commands.

Clarke opens her mouth as if she’s going to say something else but must think better of it. The mechanical whir of the locks being undone is heard as Clarke pulls the key out of her pocket.

Lexa doesn’t wait. She opens the door and sits, pulling the door shut behind her before anyone else can appear. Lexa stares resolutely ahead, the group of people in the pavilion hidden beneath the hill. She does not acknowledge their existence now, all there was includes her and Clarke and this car that was going to drive her away from this whole mess.

The door across from her opens, Lexa doesn’t bother to look over as Clarke lowers herself into the car, placing the key in the ignition but not moving any further. “Are you sure you-”

“Drive the car, Clarke,” she instructs again, not worried about being rude or demanding or anything of the like. There was no room for any of that worry when she was consumed by an unavoidable need to get away.

But then there’s a tapping on her window, and she jumps despite herself, eyes shutting briefly as she draws a breath in before turning her head towards in the window to see who is waiting for her.

She expects to see Echo, drink in hand and joking grimace on her face. Or maybe Uncle Gus, big
and burly and looking so sad for her. What she does not expect to see, is her grandmother looking
down at her, back hunched over to meet Lexa’s eyes as she beckons her out of the car with a hand
motion.

At no point did Lexa consent to getting out, yet she finds her body moving of its own accord,
opening the door and stepping out all without her telling it too. Once out she doesn’t know what to
do next, facing her grandmother like the damn fool she is, the child who lost her temper at a family
gathering, ruined the whole reunion single-handedly. She’s like a beached fish, opening and closing
her mouth in search of something to say, an apology, maybe.

But then Mimi is reaching forward and wrapping her thin, sagging arms tight around Lexa and
running a wrinkled hand over that meticulously curled hair. Before Lexa can apologize or attempt to
offer her side of the story, before she can even drown within the shame she already feels building
around her, she’s falling apart. She’s letting loose the heavy weight of disappointment and the
unrelenting pressure of the fear that had been sitting deep within her chest, and she falls apart in the
arms of a woman who she only half knows but who still smells like rosemary and peppermint and
who has dried her tears before.

“Mimi, I-” she starts as soon as she’s stopped hiccuping and feels like she can get any words out at
all.

“Shh,” her grandmother whispers against her ear. “Right now let’s just get you cleaned up and
maybe a little ice for your cheek, hm?”

Right now she doesn’t even begin to know what she needs, but the thought of this warm, soft
woman taking care of her is appealing. She nods against her grandmother’s shoulder, grateful that
she’s not letting go.

When her arms relax, her grandmother pulls back, placing a gentle arm around Lexa’s shoulders as
she turns to face Clarke. “Clarke, right?” her grandmother asks, eyeing Clarke warily.

There’s a flash of blonde hair as Clarke nods her head, the keys twisting nervously between her
hands. “Yes, ma’am.”

“You run down and get Lexa some ice from the cooler and then come meet us back in the bathroom,
okay?” As with everything else about Mimi right now, she instructs this with gentleness, her tone
calm and even.
Clarke’s eyes dart to Lexa, meeting her gaze and receiving an affirming nod from Lexa before she turns and goes, glancing back over her shoulder as she treks down the hill.

The bathroom is dimly lit, a mild odor hanging in the air. Mimi wets one of the thin, brown paper towels with cool water before passing it to Lexa. It’s soggy and could probably begin disintegrating if handled too roughly, but she brings it to her face, dabbing at her wet cheeks and under her snotty nose.

“Mimi, I swear I didn’t mean-”

“Hush,” she interrupts again, taking the used paper towels from Lexa and passing her another. “I haven’t seen my granddaughter in years. I have no interest in anything but washing you up and attending to that cheek right now.”

Lexa doesn’t bother saying anything else until Clarke is back with a bag of ice. It all seemed a bit superfluous for a simple slap to the face, but Lexa accepts the offering regardless, hissing at the cold sting of the ice against her cheek before letting it settle there, numbing the embarrassing burn that had nestled into the flesh.

Then they are both there watching Lexa, assessing. No one moves to do anything; no one comments one way or another. It’s just the three women clustered around the single sink in the bathroom as the reality of moments earlier settles around them.

“And I thought my family reunion was rough,” Clarke attempts to joke after another minute of silence.

Lexa flashes her a smile, appreciative of the fact that Clarke was here at all, that she had been a part of this whole messy disaster from the beginning.

Mimi turns to look as if she’d forgotten she was there. “Right, yes, Clarke,” and she extends her hand. “It’s a pleasure meeting you. Feel free to call me Mimi.”

Clarke reaches forward without hesitation, shaking her hand with vigor as she smiles, eyes wide and hopeful as she shoots Lexa a momentary look. “It’s wonderful to meet you as well.”

“My granddaughter seems rather taken with you.”
Lexa fights the urge to groan, a new sense of embarrassment finding its way into the core of her being. She was taken alright, taken with someone who was never looking to claim her as their own.

“The feeling’s mutual,” Clarke says, smiling graciously at Lexa’s grandmother before shooting Lexa a look, a blush filling out her cheeks.

Mimi nods, looking between the two of them. “Alright then, now that we’ve had plenty of dramatics to last at least the next few family gatherings, I hope you two are willing to stay?” She doesn’t comment anymore on Clarke one way or the other. Lexa isn’t entirely sure what to do with the lack of acknowledgment but figures she’ll take it for the time being.

No part of Lexa wants to stay, if she were calling the shots right now, they would already be halfway out of San Diego, that much closer to Raven and the apartment and her bed. But maybe after everything, after the drama that it took just to get here in the first place, maybe it’s worthwhile to let someone else have a say.

“Sure,” she finds herself saying with a shrug of her shoulders. It’s not like this could get any worse.

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It’s with a hardly met attempt that Lexa and Clarke rejoin the party, hoping to slip in amongst the rest of the family members. Aunt Neva’s distraction enough for everyone for a moment with her drunken sloshing at the dessert table, but as soon as Lexa’s seen again another hush falls throughout as if anyone speaking too loudly will spook her off.

Gus finds her first, appearing at her side and hooking his arm through hers, even though the height difference makes it awkward. “That was quite a show you put on back there, Lexa,” he comments, and she doesn’t miss how he says her name, no more Alexandra. “No one told me you were majoring in drama.”

“I wasn’t planning to,” she mumbles in response, letting him lead her into the crowd of people where there was off-beat dancing and children screaming. “That was awful.” Oh god, that was literally the worst display she could have put on, and that was exactly what happened. Nothing like coming out to your family than literally screaming ‘I’m gay!’ at the top of your lungs.

“ Took the heat off me at least,” he says, hand waving forward at a woman, she has her arms over her
chest and a glare in place. “I went and eloped, so thanks for still managing to win biggest fuck up of the day.”

The woman softens at Lexa. “Hi, Lexa. I’m Indra,” she nods in her direction, not bothering with offering a hand.

“Hey,” she answers back, eyes shifting around in search of Clarke who had been left behind. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“This family sure does love the pleasantries, don’t they?” Indra mumbles in return more to herself than Lexa. “Your mom is something else, though. Good on you for giving her a piece of her own.”

“Thanks,” she allows herself the briefest of smiles. Even if it had been awful, the moment as a whole had been the sort of catharsis Lexa had been seeking for years now. It was much better than a punching bag. “I hardly think anyone else will see it that way.”

“I sure did,” Gus adds in, knocking a fist against her shoulder. “Pam will always be my older sister, don’t get me wrong, but sometimes older siblings need someone to put them in their place. Good on you for doing that.”

This all seemed a lot bigger than merely knocking someone down a few pegs. That fleeting decision was catastrophic. Lexa making that split second choice to stand up for herself in that context, that spelled the end for a relationship with her mother. Not that she was looking for one, not that she felt like she truly had one to begin with, but just like the pretend she lived in with Clarke, a part of her still existed in an imaginary reality where she and her mom still stood a chance, where the broken could be forged together once more. Now it would be like bridging a chasm that was far too wide, a canyon too gaping to reach between, a trench so deep the end couldn’t be found.

And Lexa had been the one with the shovel.

Clarke reappears with a drink, a real one this time. She hands Lexa’s hers and taps the rims together in cheers before taking a draw.

The event was fine from there; some members shot her looks, be it questioning or judgmental, Lexa tried not to think too hard about it. Echo reappeared, firmly on Lexa’s side and grateful to have had a welcome distraction to her mother’s otherwise absurd behavior.
It was all just completely...fine.

Sure, first it had started with smoke and flames and utter destruction, but by the end of the day, Lexa is left wondering how something she had been dreading for so long ending up being, ultimately, okay.

They eat subpar food, Clarke dances a little and attempts to entice Lexa to join. It was nothing like spinning around the apartment, though, laughing and light, but she’s a good sport regardless.

When things begin to wind down Mimi is at her side, grabbing her shoulders and holding her stare. “Now, I don’t know any specifics of what went down today, Alexan-Lexa, but you’re my granddaughter first and foremost.”

“Okay?” she says back quietly, unsure what exactly to do with that statement.

“Whatever is going on between you and your mother, well that I’ll address with her, but I’m very proud of you no matter what, do you understand me?”

Lexa nods, trying to ignore the way moisture begins to gather in the back of her eyes and the way the words make her heart feel so much fuller and yet lighter all at once. “Yes, Mimi.”

“I want you to call me more. An old woman shouldn’t have to try so hard to hear from her grandchildren.” Next, she pulls Clarke into a hug, thanking her for coming. She looks between the two of them one final time before nodding her head once and turning away.

“What did that mean?” Clarke whispers in Lexa’s ear as soon as the woman’s a few feet away.

“Hell if I know,” Lexa answers back as she glances around the room for any final goodbyes she should make. “I guess it means she at least likes me more than my mom does.” The comment is meant to be flippant with a shrug of her shoulders and roll of her eyes, but Lexa feels the statement like none other, and it’s like someone’s taking a bobby pin to the helium-filled heart she’d just been leaning into.

Clarke’s shooting her these sad eyes as if she knows exactly how the comment really does feel to Lexa, but Lexa pushes past the look, back towards the car. Today, by the end of it, had been a success in the grand scheme. Now wasn’t the time to be brought down by it all. Not yet at least.
Lexa starts out driving in a desperate attempt to find something to do with herself. She liked having the task to focus on, even when traffic did get heavy getting out of the city and even as the sun sets behind the clouds. She was glad to have something to think about, anything other than that horrid moment she’d created, suffered through, and lived to tell the tale of earlier today.

Two hours into the drive and Clarke is announcing her hunger, directing Lexa off the highway at the first sign they pass that has more than subs and McDonalds.

The two of them end up in a Chipotle with a line winding around the back. Lexa stands, trying to keep up with Raven’s text messages.

Raven: What do you mean there was drama? I need DETAILS

Lexa: I’ll explain it all when we get home. I don’t feel like rehashing the whole thing through text.

Raven: It was a whole thing? Was there a fist fight? Please tell me there was a fist fight.

Lexa: I’ll see you in the morning.

It had been decided when she and Clarke hadn’t even started the drive home until seven that they wouldn’t try and conquer the nearly eight-hour drive home in one go. Lexa was already exhausted and any reason to skip her only class tomorrow was good enough for her.

They decided to get a few hours behind them and then stop somewhere for the night. Somewhere with two beds, Lexa mentally specifies.

After they get their food Lexa is waiting for the third degree. She’s anticipating Clarke asking her on repeat if she’s okay and shooting her those same sad eyes Lexa had seen earlier tonight. Instead, Clarke launches into a story from work, full on ranting about a particularly difficult customer she had been working with and the unfairness of the extent millennials are blamed for things. Clearly, the baby boomers were the issue here.
She talks all through dinner and when they get back in the car later. She lists off hotels they could stay in and talks about her childhood cat. Clarke talks and talks so much that Lexa can’t even think.

When they pull up to the hotel hours later it’s nearly midnight, and they park near the back of the parking lot. Finally, Clarke stops talking, clearing her throat and getting a drink of her soda.

Lexa holds her gaze for a minute before quietly saying, “Thank you.”

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This place is a completely different story from the last one. It’s a run of the mill Comfort Inn. There’s a bright green accent wall behind the check-in desk and circular lights hanging from the ceiling. The young woman behind the desk passes them their keys with little fanfare, and no one offers to help with their bags, which was how Lexa liked it anyway.

Their room is perfectly ordinary, two queen-size beds with crisp white sheets and a TV at the end in between them both. Lexa throws on her pajamas while Clarke’s in the bathroom and crawls into her bed, letting herself properly exhale for the first time all day.

When she closes her eyes all she sees is her mother’s face looking back at her, stunned and furious and hurt because that had been Lexa’s exact intention. Go for the shock value, piss her off, and above all else, hit her where it hurts the most. It was some sad attempt at letting her mother feel all the same hurt Lexa has been carrying around with her for years now, let her know just how those scathing comments crawled beneath her skin and took up residence, how her refusal to accept her daughter had destroyed Lexa’s ability to accept herself.

She was desperately aiming at any unprotected space, sharp little jabs wherever it would hurt the most.

She had been successful. Now she was given no choice but to live with the consequences of this.

The other end of the bed dips and Lexa shoots up, her body twisting around in the sheets to find Clarke sitting there, halfway to the middle of the bed.
“What are you-” Lexa starts but then Clarke is moving to get beneath the sheets, her body sliding beneath them as she fluffs her pillow and guides herself over to Lexa until she’s just a few inches away. Her breath is minty from toothpaste, and she watches Lexa with steady eyes before reaching out, running a hand down Lexa’s exposed arm, causing a chill to run all through Lexa’s body.

She shivers in response.

Clarke’s hand settles next to Lexa, not quite holding it but close to it.

“What are you okay?” Clarke finally asks, body shifting ever slightly closer.

No, Lexa wants to say, nothing is okay. Nothing is okay in the slightest because she single-handedly mortified herself and her mother, she destroyed whatever semblance of a relationship she had, she was more orphan than not it felt like. And nothing was okay because Clarke was right here and there was nothing Lexa could do about it. This was a moment between friends, one comforting the other, the empathy leaking through. This was like the nights Raven crawled into bed with her, head snuggling into Lexa’s back, her bum leg pressed against Lexa’s.

This moment with Clarke wasn’t meant to be anything different. It shouldn’t feel any different.

It shouldn’t. But it does.

“I’m fine,” she answers in a whisper, letting the words sink into the air around them, hopeful that they would permeate the moment itself and cause the sinking feeling in her core to dissipate.

“What are you really?” Clarke asks, fingers sliding up and down Lexa’s arm, grazing her with a touch that Lexa wants to cling to, wants to claim as a touch just for her. She doesn’t want it to be just out of comfort. She wants this touch to be hers when things are good and happy, when her heart is light. She wants it when it’s been a long day, and she needs the support. She wants it when there’s nothing special at all, just ordinary and plain, but this touch still belonging to her, this touch still just for her.

Lexa doesn’t know what she is. Is she sad? Angry? Embarrassed? Is she simply in love right now? In whatever mixed-up, tangled version of it she has created between her and Clarke.

“I’m…” she starts but fades off. There’s not an easy answer to this question, not currently. “I don’t
know,” she says instead. Clarke’s hand wraps around Lexa’s, fingers intertwining like they have many times before. Without meaning to, Lexa draws in a sharp breath. “I’m happy you came with me, Clarke.”

That’s the best she can do right now, the best answer she has to offer. Because amidst all of this, there was one thing that Lexa got to know. She was going to hold on to that basic knowledge for the moment.

“I’m happy I came too.”

Maybe that was more than enough to hold onto.

Chapter End Notes

And somehow it is Thursday again already. Hope you guys enjoyed the chapter. Again, thank you all so much. I really appreciate your support. We're probably roughly halfway through the story, maybe a little further, and this is always where it gets harder to write. So again, thank you! All of your lovely comments keeps me going. Hope you all have a lovely weekend and I'll see you Monday :)
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The simple change to intentional choice makes waking up in the morning entirely different.

Nothing’s been altered, not in the grand scheme, but so much has evolved. Now Lexa buries her face further against Clarke’s chest, tucking her head into the curve of Clarke’s shoulder. She takes a singular, grounding breath, the air coming and going from her lungs with no fight, no struggle to take and give back. Clarke’s arms tighten just so around Lexa’s body, and whether or not she’s awake, Lexa revels in the sensation, in feeling tucked away and cared for, even if just for the moment.

Sure, she wishes this was more. It would be so much better if she could lift her head from Clarke’s chest and press a gentle kiss to her lips, her cheek, her neck, lips offering their worship to a body she’s so grateful to have next to her which is not an option, not in the slightest. So she takes what she can get, every last drop she drinks greedily, letting the drips coat her tongue, hoping these moments will be enough to hold her through what otherwise feels like the greatest drought of her life.

“Hey,” Clarke whispers, body shifting, arms twisting but settling back against Lexa.

Unlike the other morning, Lexa doesn’t attempt to spring apart. She keeps herself settled; she holds onto this before she’s forced to contend with what else is waiting for her out in the world just now.

“Morning,” she tries not to speak too loudly, afraid even sound waves themselves could punctuate this bubble they’re within.

“Did you sleep okay?”

Lexa can’t help herself before she’s damn near humming against Clarke, a nonverbal yes she hadn’t been planning to consent to. “Yes,” she squeaks in response. “Thank you.”

Clarke’s hand runs up and down along Lexa’s back, the sheer material of a T-shirt the only thing separating skin from skin. “Comfort Inn isn’t fucking around with these mattresses,” Clarke says in response, hand remaining consistent. “Or maybe I’ve just adjusted to sleeping on a couch a little too much.”
The responding chuckle bubbles out of her much like the hum did moments ago. “I’m glad you came to stay with us,” she finds herself saying. It’s only now that Lexa’s officially wondering when she had lost the ability to censor the things coming out of her mouth.

Now Clarke’s hand stalls for a moment, her body impossibly still beneath Lexa, as if she’d managed to stop even her heart. “I am too,” she answers after a minute, fingers returning to their trail, breaths coming back in rhythmic motion.

Before she can say anything else regrettable, Lexa forces herself away, sitting up and stretching her arms over her head, rolling her neck and trying to loosen her muscles before they could seize up with tension from the start of the day itself. “We should get back on the road.” It was barely after six, but better to get home sooner than later. If they stayed on task, Lexa might even just make her class.

Clarke shoots her a brief look but eventually nods, swinging her feet from the bed and reaching for her bag. “You sure you’re okay?” Clarke asks the question without looking up, almost as if she didn’t care for the answer one way or the other.

“When Clarke…” she didn’t feel like having this conversation, for the idea of revisiting the awfulness of yesterday. No part of her felt so inclined as to hash out her feelings just now. She knew how she felt; she knew there was no ignoring the sadness growing like a weed inside her, the anger partially stifled but never snuffed out, the disappointment that those words, that her truth, hadn’t been enough for any more of a reaction out of her mother than a disappearing act.

Maybe to be ignored is the best she could ask for. Life would be easier if her mother simply behaved as if Lexa didn’t exist. Lexa would no longer have to deal with her inane phone calls or constant criticisms. The bite of words could no longer get to her if no one was speaking at all.

“I’m only asking. You don’t have to answer.”

That was an offer Lexa was pleased to receive, one she didn’t get often enough. “I’m fine for now,” she offers. There’s no disputing the ache in her chest or the tears always gathered just behind her eyes; she wouldn’t soon be forgetting the sting pressed deep within her cheek.

Almost out of instinct Lexa raises her hand there, curious if any sort of mark remained or if she would just have the metaphysical reminder of the moment itself.

Clarke appears before her, gentle and soft and this near constant embodiment of light itself. She
reaches out, pulling Lexa’s hand from her cheek, letting their fingers twist together before she leans forward, lips pressed gently to her cheek, lingering there for a moment as Lexa’s eyes slip shut, her lungs breathing in deeply with Clarke here, filling up the moment with every ounce of her.

After a brief pause, she begins to pull away, lingering just so near Lexa’s cheek before pulling back. “You don’t deserve the last person to have touched you there to have done so in anger,” she whispers as explanation, her cheeks turning pink as she looks to the carpeting, feet shifting beneath her.

“You always think you know what I deserve.” It’s meant to be a joke, but Lexa’s voice is too quiet and quivering to pass as such. Instead, the statement came out as broken and hollowed as it makes Lexa feel.

Clarke’s always ready to smile; she has a whole arsenal of smile that are ready to be set free. Some of her smiles are even sad ones, sympathetic ones. Lexa had even seen once, when Clarke and Raven had gotten into it that, she had angry smiles as well. She was always smiling, even when there wasn’t happiness to offer.

Right now, Clarke does not smile. She watches Lexa with blinking eyes and eyebrows that furrow further as she processes the words. It isn’t until Clarke’s hand tightens that Lexa recognizes the fact that their palms are still pressed together.

“Well,” Clarke starts, voice even and considering. “You often act like you don’t.”

“I feel like I do,” her answer is immediate, if not intentional. Lexa doesn’t know when talking to Clarke became involuntary, when her mouth and her heart started determining what to say before her brain got a chance to chip in.

Clarke nods, small bobs of her head as she looks down at their feet again. When she looks back up at Lexa, she now has a smile in place, not happy or sad or anything easily recognizable. “Then you’re wrong,” Clarke says as Lexa comes to identify that smile.

Their hands fall apart as Clarke goes back to her bag, back to Lexa, eyes focused on the task in front of her.

Pleading, Lexa thinks as she turns to the bathroom and sets the shower water almost as hot as it will go.
Clarke’s smile was pleading with Lexa. Lexa doesn’t know if she knows what for. She doesn’t even know if she wants to.

They arrive home quickly, the miles passing without fanfare.

The familiar streets and storefronts, hell even the traffic, is comforting to Lexa. The looming reality was behind her now. The dread had been turned to memory, the consequences not yet realized. What counted was that it was over. What mattered was that she couldn’t change it. She’d made her bed. It was about time to lie in it.

The apartment feels like home as Lexa swings her bag onto the floor, ready to throw her body over top of Raven’s in relief of seeing her friend sitting there in the living room. When she takes another step forward, Lexa sees who is sitting there with her.

“Anya.” She doesn’t mean for the word to come out bitter and is hopeful that the underlying confusion covers it.

“Hey Lexa,” she smiles from her spot on the floor, bare feet tucked under her, mug of coffee in hand. She looked relaxed like she had been here for hours. Almost as if she had stayed the night… “How was your reunion?”

Lexa’s mouth opens, looking for words that weren’t coming to her.

“Eventful,” Clarke supplies, her own bag being chucked to the ground. “Didn’t you want to try and make your class, Lex?”

The question breaks Lexa’s fixed gaze between Raven and her sister, half-sister, whatever. The question is enough to interrupt those other negative feelings rising up in her, the betrayal she can’t hide away from.

“Yeah,” Lexa answers, blinking as she tears her eyes away to look towards her room. “I said that.” She shoots Raven a final look as she adds on, “Guess I should stick to it,” before disappearing into
her room.

Well, Lexa thinks to herself as she runs a hand through her hair, she might not know what she deserves, but she can at least be pretty certain it isn’t this.

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Without being aware she’s even doing it, Lexa spends most of the rest of the day Monday checking her phone.

Every few minutes in class, when she’s walking across campus, while she’s hidden away in the library. Even at work, she’ll be halfway through brushing a the pomeranian devil when she just has to stop and check.

She doesn’t know who she’s waiting to hear from. An encouraging message from Clarke? An explanation from Raven? An anything from her mother?

The one time her phone does go off with the sound of an incoming text her heart trips over itself in nerves. It turns out that the only person with interest in talking to her included the local frozen yogurt spot that was having a BOGO sale today. So at least she knows that.

The silence is killing her, and she’s so wrapped up in the loop of thoughts her mind is currently on she can’t manage to focus on a single other thing. Class is a blur, the conversation Murphy had been making in the library is entirely forgotten, even this poor dog is only half noticed by Lexa. She’s consumed with imaginary conversations, trying to conjure just exactly she would like to say to Raven, what desperate response she might offer her mother, or even the brief but exhilarating daydream of a certain conversation with Clarke Griffin.

When she eventually gets home late in the evening, the apartment is mostly dark, seemingly empty. She lets the door slam shut behind her, not bothering to try and catch it before it closed. She tilts the phone in her hand to see the screen light up, just in case she’s missed anything. She hasn’t.

The door to Raven’s room is wide open, empty.

Of course, Lexa thinks, hands running down her face as she lets loose an aggravated huff of an exhale. Of course Raven wouldn’t be home. Of course, after an entire day of being agonizingly
alone, there’s not even her best friend here to yell at.

Because Lexa is angry, she’s beyond pissed that after asking Raven one thing, just one singular thing, Raven couldn’t even manage to keep to it. It wasn’t even a big request. Raven could sleep with the whole damn student body, she probably already had, there was exactly one person Lexa had requested remain off limits. That didn’t seem like too much to ask.

Because there’s so much she doesn’t know about Anya, so many things that are uncertain and unclear and Lexa can’t even begin to sift through the remnants remaining as the fog starts to lift, as the truth is revealed. She doesn’t know what to think about this dad who single-handedly abandoned her while also trying to reconnect. She doesn’t know what to think of her mother, protecting Lexa maybe, or just deceiving to her, manipulating her. None of it makes any damn sense, and Anya is the first person in so long who has sought Lexa out exclusively to discover who Lexa is. She’s been waiting to meet this ominous half-sister. And sure, Lexa could be nothing but a big ball of disappointment, but first, she wants to find out. She wants to discover what it means to have any form of a sister, what it means to have someone in her corner.

And Raven could so easily fuck that all up. Raven is beyond capable of meddling where she didn’t belong, doing things she shouldn’t be doing, and then leaving Lexa to pick up the pieces. How dare she do this? How dare she promise Lexa one thing and then do the opposite? Who the hell did she think she was?

Who was Lexa to judge her? When she’s got a head full of Clarke and a list of memories connected to gentle touches and morning cuddles. When the only thing she could think of some days was Clarke, her smiles and her blue eyes and her kind words. She also thinks about the curve of Clarke’s neck and her gentle figure, those soft, fleshy thighs wrapped around Lexa’s back, her breasts pressing into her. Maybe Lexa was no better.

It didn’t make Raven right.

Lexa paces. Up and down the hallway, seven steps forward, turn, seven steps back. She thinks of everything there is to say to Raven, exactly how she feels, just what she thinks of Raven’s complete disregard for Lexa’s one request. She envisions angry, biting words and snide comments. And then the door opens.

The overhead light flips on as Raven steps through, bag on her shoulder. “Hey,” she says as she walks in, shutting the door behind her. “I wanted to hear about your reunion and-”

“Why?” Lexa asks, arms crossing over her chest. “You don’t listen to me when I talk anyway.”
Raven’s eyebrows shoot up, bag dropping to the ground. “So you’re mad at me I assume.”

“I’m...Of course...how could I not be?” Lexa’s flustered already, caught somewhere between rage and just being sad. She was sick of being sad, of people making her sad.

With extended palms and an expression that is utterly unimpressed, Raven says, “Well go on then, get it off your chest.”

Lexa scoffs. “Not even going to bother with a defense?”

“Say what you need to say.”

Raven being unwilling to fight back is considerably worse than going toe to toe. “I don’t ask you for a lot, you know,” it’s not a question, just a statement. “And the things I do ask of you I feel like are pretty basic. Don’t leave your dirty underwear on our bathroom floor, wash your dishes every so often, don’t sleep with my estranged sister. You know, the basics.”

“Mhm,” Raven nods in agreement, adding nothing else.

The lack of response fuels Lexa on. “And you can’t even do that! You can’t even stop being so goddamn self-involved for a single fucking weekend to not fuck my sister and dump her like you do to every other person in your life. There’s a reason I’m your only friend, Raven. You scare the rest of them off!”

“Are you done?”

“No!” she shouts back, hands in her hair as she lets out a grunt of frustration. “You are so wrapped up in Raven-land that after everything you can’t not do one singular person.” Her head is spinning, surely her face is bright red and if she doesn’t calm down soon, Lexa’s pretty sure she’s going to start spitting. “You’re supposed to be my best friend, Raven. I’m supposed to be able to trust you. Do you know how many people I trust? And you’re going to take that and twist it against me. You’re going to betray me even if it completely destroys what we have?”

Now Lexa’s crying. She can’t help herself. She’s been angry and hurt and let down all weekend, and
she’s so tired. All she can feel is the sadness welling up in her; the angry fire drowned out by the sad and desperate tears. “Sometimes you’re all I have, and you couldn’t even…” a sob interrupts her, and she buries her face in her hands, partially to hide her face and partially, so she doesn’t have to look at Raven anymore.

“My turn?” Raven asks which makes Lexa’s anger flare just momentarily. She sounds so blase, so matter of fact. She could at least pretend to be regretful. Raven must take Lexa’s lack of comment one way or the other to mean yes. “Stop crying,” she sighs.

“No,” Lexa shoots back, pitiful and sloppy as she shoots Raven the best glare she can manage right now.

Raven rolls her eyes but takes a step towards Lexa. “You dumbass, I didn’t sleep with your sister.”

Lexa’s head shoots up, eyes widening in surprise as she looks to Raven. “You...what?”

“I did not fuck your sister,” Raven puts her hands on Lexa’s shoulders, staring her down.

“Why didn’t you open with that!” she shouts, hand reaching up to smack at Raven’s arm. “Why the hell would you not send a precursory text. ‘Oh hey, know what this looks like, but I didn’t betray your one request. Talk later.’ Something!”

“Because,” Raven answers with an even tone and a raised eyebrow. “I was kind of hoping my best friend wouldn’t automatically think the worst of me. That maybe she’d trust for a second that I hadn’t just thrown caution to the wind for the only thing she cares about.”

Lexa sniffs, embarrassed and still a little bit mad. “What the hell was she doing here then?” she asks, still a little bit indignant.

“There’s this new-fangled thing people do these days called hanging out.” Raven hastily wipes away Lexa’s tears, not gentle or soft, but whisking them away regardless.

Hanging out wasn’t typically Raven’s fashion. “That’s it?”
Raven nods, lips pressed together and eyebrows raised. “I am capable of not fucking someone the second they breathe, you know.”

“I know you’re capable,” Lexa sniffs. “You just choose not to.”

After a minute Raven cracks a smile, eyes rolling as she releases Lexa’s shoulders. “Alright, I’m going to make your emotional ass some cocoa, and you can tell me all about your trip, okay?”

“Why?” Lexa asks as Raven turns towards the kitchen.

“Well normally cocoa is your go to when you’re upset, and I want to-”

“No,” she cuts her off. “Why were you guys hanging out?”

At that Raven flushes, head dipping down as she bites her lip. “Just ’cause.” She looks to Lexa before releasing a harsh sigh. “Anya is….I like her, okay? I think she seems chill. But I didn’t sleep with her.”

“Do you want to?”

“Do I-I don’t know, Lexa. I like Anya, but not just in the fucking sort of way.”

Oh. “But you like her in...that way?” Raven didn’t typically like anyone in that way. She liked people for an evening, a weekend, momentary and flashing, but at the start of Monday, it was just Lexa and Raven again.

“I promised you I wouldn’t sleep with her, right?” Lexa nods dumbly. “Okay, so that’s that. She just doesn’t know anyone else in the area and there weren’t any good parties this weekend anyway. Nothing more to it.”

“Okay,” Lexa responds quietly.

“A little bit of confidence would be appreciated, by the way.”
“Sorry,” she tacts on, unsure if it was good enough, still feeling like she was drowning in a whole rush of emotions that she’d be spinning through for the last several days. “Just usually when there’s someone here in the morning it means-”

“Well, it didn’t.”

“I’m sorry,” Lexa finds some sincerity in her voice this time, meaning the apology as she looks to Raven with remorseful eyes. “I shouldn’t have jumped to conclusions. I should’ve known-”

“You should have,” she cuts her off again, eyes fixed on the running water filling up the tea kettle. “But I get why you didn’t. Now for the love of god, can you take off your stinking wet dog clothes and go put on something else? I had a terrible day and just got chewed out for no damn reason. I could stand to hear some family drama right about now.”

As a finally form of apology Lexa wraps around Raven’s back, clapping in front of her stomach. Lexa smushes her whole body against Raven for a second as she says, “I’m sorry I was a jerk,” one final time.

Raven lets her hang there for a minute before batting her off, as Lexa anticipated. “You can make it up to me through detailed and honest storytelling, got it?”

“Got it,” Lexa parrots back, heading for her room.

“And, Lexa?” Raven stops her before she makes it all the way back and she pauses, spinning to face her friend. “You know I wouldn’t do that to you, right?”

“Raven-”

“You know?”

Now Lexa just feels like an asshole. She nods her head, biting her lip so she doesn’t start crying again. “I know.”
Raven nods and turns back around, taking the answer as good enough.

As if Lexa didn’t feel awful as it was. She flips the light on in her room with a note of guilt settling in her stomach. She really needed to stop saying the first thing that came to mind. She was in enough trouble as it was.

Chapter End Notes

Alright, another chapter posted on time. I'm calling this a success. Thursdays is completed as well due to some downtime I had last week. I have a lot of Christmas related things I need to be working on so updates might slow a little bit, but I'm going to try and pull through without letting them dwindle too much. Also, Clexmas is a thing, right? I swear I keep seeing it floating around on Tumblr. I have a lot of interest in writing a fic or two for that, probs won't manage every day, but who knows! Anyway, keep your eyes peeled for that if you are interested.

As always, thank you all so much. Your comments are so substantial and kind and just wonderful to read. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!!
If the following week was even remotely eventful, it might be easier to deal with. But nothing happens. Classes go on as ordinary, Raven and Murphy listen to the stories from the reunion with all the appropriate responses, work sees the same cycle of animals as usual. Clarke is the same. Invasive, inviting, intruding, in all her usual ways. She sits on Lexa’s bedroom floor and paints while Lexa is studying, playing music from her phone and singing along.

When Lexa come home late from work Wednesday night, she finds a plate of food in the fridge with her name scribbled on a sticky note next to it, from Clarke of course.

Lexa tries to let herself lean into whatever the two of them have. She tries to make herself remember all or nothing, what she wanted, what she chose, but she couldn’t forget Clarke’s request. There was the constant reminder that the fake dating charade was continuing onward, that she still was not free of the lies.

So they take more pictures together, make more posts. Clarke even drags Lexa out on a starry night stroll under the pretense of good photos. If it weren’t for that damn wedding, Lexa would forget all about make-believe and submit herself entirely to the reality in front of her. If only it were that easy.

Nothing happens for an entire week, and her head is still spinning. Some thoughts she can’t even finish before her brain is onto the next one. Her mind is relentless, teasing her with awful possibilities, taunting her with conversations that were never to be had. All the while, the resounding voice she hears in her head is her mother no less, promising Lexa that she is simply not good enough.

She spends more time at night awake, staring at her ceiling, than being able to drift off. She’s exhausted, dragging for every class, trying to find the energy to keep up with Raven whenever she’s talking.

Maybe none of it means anything. Maybe she’s just a stressed-out student with a lot going on. All Lexa knows is that she feels a little bit like she’s drowning and her life preservers are just out of reach- like her mind is teasing her with the possibility that she can get to them, but she never quite reaches.

Which might be how she ends up outside the guidance counselor’s office, bag over her shoulder, after class on Monday morning, unlike many other decisions recently in her life, this one had been
truly conscientious, premeditated. It was a desperate attempt at seeking some help, someone to make the voices in her brain shut up for just a little while so she could study or sleep or just breathe.

There are hours posted on the door, hours for making appointments, times when the counselor wasn’t available, but nothing about walk-ins. This wasn’t some mass marketed hair salon.

After standing in front of the door doing nothing for a few minutes, Lexa turns to leave. She didn’t need this anyway. Maybe Clarke would be home. Lexa could lay on the floor next to her while she painted, that would be enough to quiet her mind, that would take care of the voices that wouldn’t stop. Or Raven, she’d let Lexa crawl into bed with her, rub her back until she’d chilled out. Raven never turned her away, could always sense when Lexa needed something from her.

“Amy?” someone calls after her.

Lexa considers just continuing on her way and ignoring the voice, but the polite part of her can’t just ignore someone calling out to her.

“I think you have the wrong person,” Lexa answers, turning around and coming face to face with a woman probably not much older than her.

“Oh,” she says, nodding. She’s wearing heels that make her look older all on their own, along with a pencil skirt and a button-up blouse, the picture of professionalism. “Well looks like my eleven AM skipped out on me. Were you looking for an appointment?” She raises a brow at Lexa, as if she already knew the answer. There were probably only so many reasons to be standing in front of her office door anyway.

“No,” Lexa answers on instinct. “Well, maybe,” she switches to the truth. “I was just looking to see if you’d be available.”

The woman smiles, it’s not like Clarke’s smiles where Lexa can pick out the underlying emotion, just a smile. “Well good news for you is, I do. Why don’t you come in, and I can make us something to drink?”

Most parts of Lexa would really rather to just turn around right now and forget about this whole stupid idea, but a bigger part of her has never been very good at saying no. She follows behind the woman without a word, setting her bag down by the foot of an armchair and sitting down, keeping her back straight, her feet firmly planted on the ground, ready to bolt.
“You can call me Monroe,” she says as the Keurig machine spits out brown, steaming liquid. “I just started here this semester.”

Lexa retracts her previous thought; this girl was probably only a couple years older than her. This was seeming more pointless by the second. “Lexa,” she says anyway, accepting the paper cup of coffee and the creams and sugars set on the desk in front of her.

“So, Lexa,” Monroe says, flashing another smile as she sits across the desk, leaning back in her chair. “What brings you in?”

Stupidity? Poor judgment? “Desperation.”

That makes Monroe still, leaning back up in her chair, giving Lexa a watchful eye. “What sort of desperation?” she asks with caution.

“I’m not gonna kill myself,” Lexa sighs before they can go down that path. “A different sort of desperate. I just-”

“Don’t say just,” Monroe interrupts. “Lesson number one is that you are never just. What you feel is what you feel, what you think is what you think. You, Lexa, are not just.”

Lexa wishes to correct her, that lesson number one is not to interrupt the patient, but she nods instead. “Right, anyway, things have been a lot recently.”

“How recent?” she inquires, instead of asking what ‘a lot’ might define.

Lexa shrugs, the definition of recent is suddenly difficult to acquire. “This last week maybe?” she offers, the start of all her issues. “Or well, really, I guess it’s been since about September when…I mean, I really it’s been about a year or so since I told my mom I was gay.”

The doctor nods, unfazed as she relaxes back again. “Okay, and how did that go?”
“Poorly.” More nodding across the desk from her. “I mean, most things in regard to my mother have never gone well.”

“So a lifelong struggle in your relationship?” Lexa nods. “And your father?”

“How much time do you have?”

Monroe looks to the clock before shaking her head. “Don’t worry about time. Just talk.”

“You mean talk, no just, right?”

Monroe smiles bright and wide. “You’re catching on already.”

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When Lexa gets home later, Clarke is there. She’s present in all her glory. Canvases, thick, loose-leaf paper, spiral bound notebooks, not to mention the pastels and paintbrushes and cups of murky brown water all over the place. One thing Lexa had learned about Clarke is that art was rarely something small for her, Clarke did all her work spread out as far as possible.

“Hey,” she says without looking Lexa’s way. “You’re home late.”

“Yeah, I was just-” she stops herself short. Maybe she did say just a little too often. “I went and talked to someone,” Lexa admits, trying out the words on Clarke, waiting for a reaction.

She keeps painting, wide embellished strokes across the white canvas. “Like a shrink?”

“Technically, I guess,” Lexa folds herself into a corner of the couch, licking the lid of her yogurt container as she stares down at Clarke’s creation in the works. “She was probably like, a year older than us, though, so whatever the fetus version of a shrink would be.”

Clarke ponders, eyes going squinty as she taps her chin with her forefinger. “A shrunk?”
“That’s past tense.”

“A shrinking,” she suggests next, turning to Lexa for the first time a flashing her teasing smile towards her. “A shrinking shrink who has not yet shrunk.”

“You have such a way with words,” she deadpans back, attempting to find a spoonful of vanilla yogurt fascinating, so she doesn’t have to meet Clarke’s eyes.

“Do you feel smaller?” Clarke asks, lolling her head back on the couch and smiling up at Lexa. Everything about Clarke was somehow always so impossibly easy. Lexa didn’t even find breathing easy, but Clarke altered things a little bit, switched gears to slow Lexa down.

It’s a dumb question, not a real one, not one that’s going to make Lexa reflect on what it was like trying to dredge up the truth, how it felt to have someone listen to her past, the confusing shifts that kept occurring in the present. “No,” she says instead. “I feel a little bit bigger.”

Now Clarke’s smile fades for a second before settling into something gentler, softer. “Good.”

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Anya swings by over the weekend and Lexa is tempted to ask how she possibly hasn’t needed to return to Washington yet, but she goes with it. They go out for breakfast and Lexa gives Anya the watered down version of all the reunion glory, omitting the part where she used Anya’s general existence as ammo against her mother.

“Wow,” Anya says with wide eyes and a shake of her head as she pulls apart her muffin into bite-sized pieces. “And have you heard anything since?”

Lexa shakes her head, pressing her lips together. “Radio silence.”

“Yikes,” Anya sympathizes.
“I have a question,” Lexa finds herself blurt ing out. It’s a question that has been chipping away at her for weeks now, since shortly after Anya originally appeared. “It’s about our dad.”

Anya seems surprised, adjusting her posture and dropping her muffin. “Shoot.”

The asking of the question seemed like something to be handled delicately. It was clear from the first interaction that Anya loved her dad, who just so happened to technically be Lexa’s dad as well. Lexa attempted to see the points Anya made, tried to reconcile the fact that this man she’d been told her entire life had up and abandoned her had only sort of done that. “Well, if he wanted to be involved, to know me I mean, why didn’t he try harder?” Why didn’t he care more? Why didn’t he disregard her mom’s refusals and fight for Lexa in any manner? Why did no one ever consider her worth fighting for?

Anya chews on her lip, hands pressed beneath her thighs as she considers the question. “I think in the beginning he was a little overwhelmed. I wasn’t exactly public knowledge to him, so when my mom called him up and said she was dying, oh by the way you have another daughter, he was a little shaken up.” Which Lexa can understand, she can sympathize, but that’s an excuse for a month or two, not sixteen years. “And, again I only have one side of the story here, but the way he tells it your mom straight up refused to have anything to do with me and then she moved across the country…”

“Yeah, but…just because my mom didn’t want anything to do with you didn’t mean my dad didn’t have to have anything to do with me.”

“He tried,” Anya argues, but it’s half-hearted.

“Parents have rights, on both ends. I’m not saying he should’ve been fighting to get full custody of me or anything, but visitation, weekends, Thanksgiving or Christmas? I don’t feel like that’s unreasonable.”

“It’s not,” Anya agrees, her shoulders sunken, voice deflated. “I think he felt like he betrayed your mother, so he was trying to give her something in return, to not fight her.”

The words hit Lexa harder than Anya intended them to, surely, but it makes a lump lodge in the back of her throat and moisture gather behind her eyes. “So he just - he abandoned me? I was the sacrificial lamb to atone for his sins?”

“You’re right,” Anya says immediately. “I wish I understood more, Lexa. I really do, but it was
never something he wanted to talk about. He didn’t even tell me you existed until I was sixteen years old. I found him crying. It was the day of your fourteenth birthday.”

People cried for a lot of reasons. Sadness, disappointment, guilt, crying did not equate to sorrow necessarily. “He should have tried harder,” Lexa says with as much finality to her tone as she can muster, reaching across and stealing a bite of muffin to occupy herself.

“I agree,” Anya responds solemnly. “I’m sorry he didn’t.”

It’s not the same as coming from him, but Lexa will take what she can get.

When they get back to the apartment, Raven is there. She’s there when they walk through the door, and she’s hovering in the kitchen, half joining their conversation in the living room throughout the afternoon. She’s still there when Lexa leaves that evening to get pizza with Murphy, seated in the armchair with a blanket and a textbook as if she had intentions of studying on a Saturday night.

“Aren’t you going out?” Lexa asks once the sun has set and it’s past Raven’s usual disappearance time for the weekend.

Raven’s staring down at her textbook, like she’s actually reading it, as she says, “No, not tonight I don’t think.”

“But you didn’t go out last night either,” Lexa counters. The last time Lexa saw Raven stay in a whole weekend was when she’d caught the flu and had spent several days curled beneath a pile of blankets and groaning to alert Lexa she was in need of some form of care. And even then she’d mustered up the strength to go out briefly Sunday night.

“So?” is all she counters with, as though this wasn’t extremely unusual behavior, as if Lexa didn’t know what was going on.

She shoves her wallet into her back pocket, and glances to Anya, who’s feet are propped on the coffee table, phone in hand, as she looks up at Raven every few seconds before focusing back on the phone in her hands. “O-kay,” Lexa says hesitantly, sensing what was happening between them. Sensing it and trying not to worry, trying to remember she should trust Raven. “Well, I’m gonna go now. I’m already late.”
Raven offers nothing more than a dismissive wave as a goodbye. Anya at least looks towards Lexa. “Have fun,” she says before going back to her phone.

Alright then, Lexa gave it another week before they were in bed together.

Lexa’s like a schoolgirl with a crush, checking her phone every few minutes for the next several days to see if her mother has sent anything. Text, email, facebook message, she’d take a smoke signal right about now. She didn’t even need her mom to say anything nice to her. In fact, she’d be downright delusional if she was expecting that. She just wanted to hear something even if it was a disownment memo. Lexa would take being disowned right about now.

Her school work is exhausting, somehow shifting from the utmost important thing in her life to the annoying nuisance she must accomplish. The shift causes her to do things she normally avoids when studying, like having a warm blanket or music in the background. Eventually, she curls herself up on the couch; textbook propped open in front of her. Her eyes grow heavy, vision bleary and fleeting.

At some point she must doze off for when she next opens her eyes Clarke is there, spread out in the armchair, feet hanging over the side, as she doodled in her sketchbook. That was Clarke, always drawing or painting or talking about one of the two. Lexa might not know much about art (okay anything really), but she knows passion. Clarke is bursting at the seams with passion.

For as long as she can get away with it, Lexa simply watches her. Clarke’s in her element, eyes on the page in front of her, charcoal moving in tiny, distinct strokes, a look of focus right between her eyes. She’s beautiful, Lexa finds herself thinking. No part of her has ever been able to deny that Clarke is hot, aesthetically attractive, pleasing to the eye, downright smoking. Clarke has wavy blonde hair that was always a mess, but fell in just the perfect way, and she has curves that looked just so, her body hugged all the right ways, now Lexa knew how they felt too. Her breasts are...god Lexa spent a lot of time not looking at Clarke’s breasts.

Plus she has pretty white smiles and hands that danced when she talked. Clarke has a tendency to lick her lips when she’s thinking, and her head will tilt to the side when she’s examining a piece, exposing the pulse point, the soft, open flesh, the junction of shoulder and neck.

There was never any denying that Clarke Griffin is hot. It was only after really getting to know her that Lexa truly understood just how beautiful she is too. The kind of beautiful that makes Lexa want to stare forever, lost in just what perfection could mean, perfection created with tiny, barely perceptible flaws. It was the flaws that tied it all together, made the beauty undeniable.
Lexa could watch eternally. Turns out people will eventually feel your eyes on them, however, a truth she learns when Clarke looks up from her sketch and directly to Lexa.

As quickly as possible, Lexa looks away. Like a kid with their hand in the cookie jar, she attempts to feign that Clarke hadn’t caught her at all.

“You stole my bed,” is all Clarke says, eyes teasing.

“Sorry,” she says instinctually, even when she’d meant just to tease her back.

Clarke hums in response, shutting her sketchbook as she stands from the armchair. “I guess I can forgive you,” she jokes, winking in Lexa’s direction as she comes to sit in front of the couch, head falling back in the empty space as she looks up to Lexa. “You must be tired.”

With a groan, Lexa covers her face with her arm. She was tired. Tired of waiting, tired of holding back, tired of not being enough, trying enough, pushing enough. Lexa was damn near exhausted. “Long week.”

Clarke nods, head moving up and down against the cushion. “Have you heard from your mom at all?” she asks, teeth darting out to bite her lip.

“I’m not expecting to,” Lexa lies. She didn’t know what to expect. Should she expect to not hear from her mother ever again? Should she anticipate an angry phone call with proper yelling and screaming, a well-earned lecture? She was waiting without really knowing what she was waiting for. Hopeful without knowing which direction she desired things to go.

Clarke doesn’t respond after that, staring straight ahead at the black TV. She’s quiet for so long that Lexa wonders if she’s fallen asleep right there on the floor.

Eventually, she whispers a, “Hey, Lex.”

It’s nothing special, nothing new or unique, but even still Lexa feels her whole body in tune with Clarke’s, perfectly prepared to hear whatever it is she has to say next. “Yes?”
“I…” Clarke fades off before saying any more. All Lexa can see from her position on the couch is the top of Clarke’s head and part of one side of her face. She sees Clarke’s jaw tense for a second before releasing, a brief glance of her eyes to the side. “I just wanted to make sure you knew you had an out if you needed it. The wedding is in a couple of weeks, and if you wanted to skip out, I totally understand.”

The offer isn’t one Lexa knows what to do with right away. Did Clarke no longer want Lexa to come to the wedding? Was she exclusively looking out for Lexa’s best interest? Had the fake dating shenanigans finally worn out Clarke as well? “I don’t mind.”

“Are you sure? ‘Cause it’s going to be a whole weekend thing and I’m in the ceremony so I won’t be able to sit with you and-”

To hell with it, Lexa decides. It’s been months of tiptoeing, of almost answers, near possibilities, and then reverting back to carefully laid out territory. “Do you want me to come?” Lexa asks, plain and simple, point blank. A simple question only demanding a simple answer.

“Of course,” Clarke says immediately. “Lexa, I didn’t mean-”

“I’ll come then,” Lexa interrupts, pulling herself up to sit on the couch, her eyes now able to focus on the other side of Clarke’s face. When Clarke looks up at her, Lexa feels her breath catch in the throat, momentarily overwhelmed by having the opportunity of seeing all of her. “As long as you want me there. I’ll come.” If only the motivation were so simple, if only her intentions were quite that pure.

“Oh, Clarke says, and none of her is offering any sort of smile. Just a plain, open expression turned towards Lexa as if analyzing, deciphering. “Good. That’s...good.”

“Yes,” Lexa agrees, wrapping the blanket around her shoulders as she gets up, offering Clarke her bed back. “Good.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness I'm sorry for disappearing! I got pretty sick and was essentially useless for days while also still going to work. And then after being out of commission for so long I was like, oh shit it's almost Christmas, and had a lot of catching up on shopping and wrapping and basic household chores to do. So, unfortunately like always, fic
writing had to be moved to the back burner. I did write a Clexmas fic in a fever dream on Friday if anyone has interest in that, though.

In all honesty updates might stay a little behind for bit until after the holidays. I work and then leave Saturday for my girlfriend's family Christmas things, no writing will be getting done there. Then I come home, work three twelve hour shifts in a row, and we'll immediately leave for New Years again. I'm tired just thinking about it. Also, I still have classes that I have to be doing stuff for this whole time. So on that note, I can promise no regular updates. Maybe I'll shoot for another chapter somewhere in that chunk of time? Sorry! I will aim to get back on schedule just after the first of the year.

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