somewhere i have never travelled

by unicyclehippo

Summary

Lexa Wood doesn't like being woken up at two am when her neighbour comes home from work. But, for baked goods and good company and the offer of no strings sex with possibly the most attractive person she's ever met, well. Maybe she can make an exception for Clarke Griffin.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
How It Began

It was halfway into Saturday and Clarke struggled up the staircase to her new place under the weight of, fuck, she didn't even know. There was kitchen shit written on the side but it felt like she was carrying a whole dishwasher so who knew? Four more steps and then she'd be on her landing - thank god it was only the second floor and not the sixth - and then she could dump that shit in her living room and collapse on her couch.

Hopefully.

Did she even have a couch? She thought - had it been the first thing they'd brought up? Yes? Yes. Definitely. She definitely recalled a F.R.I.E.N.D.S kind of dilemma with most of the weight of it resting on Bellamy's shoulders, poor dude, and Raven helpfully yelling from the landing a chant of pivot pivot and she shouldn't have been surprised by the chorus of shut the fuck up for a second would you Raven, you aren't even helping from everyone involved but she managed to be. Couch firmly in her mind, Clarke didn't think it would take her longer than another minute to get there.

But, well. Plans change.

She noticed her neighbour. It was a passing, fleeting thing. (If she had to describe it in any way, she might have called it a sighting. Like going for a walk and spotting a butterfly, and having it brush against you with its light wings and you might think about it afterwards when you came across the colour green or women wearing eyeliner.)

A passing, fleeting thing.

But she noticed, and that said something in and of itself because all her friends were fucking wrecks, loud and with zero regard for the well being of her possessions and she needed to give them her undivided attention all the time unless she was suddenly okay with Jasper breaking that vase she'd had forever. No matter that it was kind of incredibly ugly, no matter that there was no reason for her to have kept it as long as she had, it was a valued member of her stuff and a permanent ugly staple in each of her previous apartments. Somehow it just didn't feel like home if someone couldn't wander in and tell her "wow that is super fucking ugly, buy a new vase why don't you?"

She was fond of it. Protected it.

But she still hesitated when she got to the top of the stairs because the door next to hers, 2D, was closing behind her neighbour and the sound of it was a barely noticeable click in the hustle and bustle of everything going on - including but not limited to music, threats, insults, and crying. (That was Jasper. Octavia had probably punched him.)

Clarke heard the click. Mostly because all of her was interested in all of her, including what was going on with the door because wow. She was beautiful. And accomplished - she could hold all her things, newspaper laptop wallet and sunglasses, easily held against her body with one arm. And graceful - bent slightly to lock the door and she tossed her head neatly to dislodge a little slip of hair that had fallen onto her face and just. Yeah. She could totally handle anything that came her way, Clarke was certain of it.

A woman to admire, at the very least.

Admiration shot to lust when the woman turned, expression openly annoyed as she took in the activity in Clarke's apartment. Oh yes. Clarke was glad she had moved here. Well, mostly because
the other places she'd looked at were...not good. (That was generous.) The first came with a roommate with an unhealthy interest in fire, with clothes that smelt like oil-and-grit heavy fire and newspaper articles plastered over the walls of his bedroom that read like an arson heavy mystery novel. The second came with a roof garden, which Clarke was excited about. Until Monty had to ruin it with his 'logic' and pointed out that the garden solely consisted of weed. The third smelt heavily of urine. So Clarke hadn't bothered trying to contain her joy, which expressed itself in tears of relief, when she had found this one. 2C. A beautiful one bedroom, one bathroom apartment only a short bus ride from the hospital.

And with a very attractive neighbour.

Speaking of.

Clarke bit her lip and oh she knew it was a little creepy of her but she couldn't help but look and keep looking.

Her hair was tied back in a tight braid and her eyeliner was on point. Like, holy shit. Clarke could barely be bothered to put lip balm on in the winter - she bit her lip again at the thought bad habit or not and gnawed at the cracks of dry skin there - but she looked so good (had she winged it? Damn, she was like some eyeliner goddess right there) that she suddenly wanted to learn how to do it. Could she pull it off? Maybe she should just stick to admiration. That she could do. She dragged her eyes over the rest of the woman. Stereotyping was a bad habit that Clarke did her best not to fall into but she didn't mind letting her brain get away from her this time to chant, hopeful, lesbian lesbian lesbian when she took in the black tight jeans (damn) tucked into boots (hot damn) and the green flannel shirt with sleeves rolled up to show some frankly incredible forearms (hot hot damn).

Who knew that Clarke was attracted to forearms? Not Clarke. Not until that moment.

She could roll with it though.

Licked her lips quickly and dug her teeth into her lip again as she ogled her neighbour. Bad form that - not hers, hers was wow great - but staring was bad form. It was over all too soon when her neighbour pushed her keys into her pocket and strode past her. Clarke held her breath and pretended like she was adjusting the box in her arms. (She smelt amazing. Holy crap.)

Maybe she would take over something. Cookies or cake. That was polite, right?

Past history told her to avoid baking though. She could do the adult thing and buy her some alcohol though.

Her disappointment that the neighbour woman was gone gave way to abrupt and lurching fear when she felt the box almost give way, her aching arms barely catching it. Plus, she could sense Jasper fucking something up. (It was a skill everyone developed after spending long enough as Jasper's friend. It wasn't that he was malicious and set out to break things - not at all. He was just...clumsy. And bad luck followed him around like a lovesick puppy.)

It was too dangerous to stand upright with the box threatening to fall apart all over her so Clarke lowered it to the ground and pushed it with her foot to her doorway.

"Octavia punched me!" greeted Jasper and it went downhill from there.

"You broke the-

"Clarke! Where do you want this weird dog statue? Also it was broken before I touched it."

"-and then you broke the-

"Where can I put this box? Oh nevermind, it fell on these other boxes but none of them fell so it's all good."

"I think I have some glue, give me a minute and-

"-do you think it'll turn purple because that would be cool I could show it off to my mum-"

"What is this?"

"Raven don't touch that-"

"Don't tell me what to do."

"-that was an accident."

Clearly it had spirally from shambles to disaster zone in the space of - oh, she'd been gone for almost twenty minutes so that actually was kind of fair - well she shook the exhaustion of her arms and set about peacekeeping.

"Jasper, time out."

"What? That is so unfair," he tried to argue but when he leant against the wall and his pinkie finger nudged the painting Octavia had just hung, it crashed to the ground and he dropped into place in the corner of the room, hoping that the woman wouldn't follow him. Her hand was still wrapped around the hammer and he was frightened. "That was a fluke," he grumbled.

No one listened.

Except for Monty, who Clarke spotted trying to cheer up the sad Jasper, sneaking him food and things to assemble, which earned him his own stint in time out.

The room stopped still as they all watched with bated breath as Clarke laid down the law. "Time out, Monty. Over there." She pointed him towards the opposite wall of her apartment, separating him from Jasper. She had to close her eyes. He looked so precious and lovely and hurt with his adorable puppy dog eyes and - no. No lenience.

He knew the rules.

No one was exempt from the rules.

Monty was suddenly exempt from the rules when, first of all, Jasper threatened to riot if Monty was kept "prisoner by the ethically bankrupt institution of time out" and, second, because Clarke as magnanimous as always relented and granted him early parole on the agreement that he would set up her wifi because she was baffled.

Her friend-induced headache was fading. But then...

"Uh. Clarke. Your sink is broken."

Clarke retreated to the couch, defeated.

Raven fixed the sink - it would have had to be fixed if she hadn't broken it, but Clarke didn't bother pointing that out. Octavia glared Jasper to silence, gave Clarke a bottle of water. Monty finished with the internet and the television - "I got you cable, it's only a little bit illegal" - and Bellamy left.
"Hot date," he excused himself with a shrug.

"I thought you said you were free."

"That was before. But I was texting Amanda - you know Amanda, right?"

"You mean the girl in my gym class?" Octavia asked, arms crossed. "That Amanda?"

"That's the one. She's hot. Plus, if we do half the stuff we were texting about we are going to have a great night tonight."

He looked entirely too pleased with himself, so they all yelled at him to get out.

"Why are we friends with him?" Jasper complained. "He's so attractive and good at things." They nodded. All except Octavia, who rolled her eyes. "He makes me feel inadequate."

"You are inadequate," Monty pointed out sweetly, prompting a sneer from Jasper.

"Har har."

"Enough fighting, kiddies." Octavia clapped her hands. "Back to work."

She fell asleep on the couch later. Turns out the rest of them were slow and lazy and she was left to most of the heavy lifting. She couldn't be woken. (Rather, none of them dared to try because Bellamy had been the last brave soul to try and his nose still didn't look the same.)

"You know, you should thank us for helping you," Jasper said when she shooed them out like he hadn't been sitting on his ass for the past four hours and watching them all work. "We did all ditch our Saturday plans for you."

"Yes but you're all such terrible, terrible people," she said. Monty nodded.

"That's true." He gave her a quick hug and draped his cardigan over his arm, stepping out into the hall. "If you need any more help unpacking," a raise of his eyebrows told her that she could call him and she nodded. She probably wouldn't - she'd be diving into work headfirst in a day and a half - but she appreciated it. "Besides." He grinned at Jasper. "What plans did you quit? Oh - did you miss raid?"

"Nah, I think we can still make it if we hurry." Jasper jerked his chin in a goodbye see you later nod to Clarke before turning to his friend. He adjusted his goggles to show his stern frown. "And yes, I know that you were mocking me but I'm going to ignore it," he bowed graciously, "because I'm incredible."

She laughed at the 'save me' face Monty shot her way when Jasper began to drag him away.

Idiots.

"You're sure you'll be okay with unpacking the rest?"

Octavia was the last to leave and she gave her The Look. She knew Clarke and she knew what was in that pile, all of it, and she knew from past experience that it would take her at least three months to do it.

"I can totally handle it," Clarke said, blatantly lying to her best friend's face, and she hugged her goodbye.
One look at the giant teetering pile of boxes when she closed the door and Clarke knew she wasn't going to handle it.

She pulled a box off the top so the pile was just giant, no longer teetering, and went to bed.

She'd just take things out when she needed them. Smart.

Not at all a bad idea.

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Clarke started at the hospital bright and early on Monday morning. And by 'started', she meant of course that she gave over her soul and time completely.

"I'm a medical intern, O," she yawned into her phone, clutching desperately to the pole in an effort not to fall into Business Suit standing next to her. "Translation: I'm basically their bitch. That's how it works." She yawned again. That was what three sixteen hour shifts in a row did to a person.

"And you're okay with that?"

"I dunno. Ask me again when I'm awake."

Her week went well, considering. Considering that she had two good shifts of only twelve hours and minor disasters. Then came the dreaded twenty-four hour on call shift that was mystically extended to twenty-eight because her last patient of the night decided it would be a good idea to not only need surgery but, after that was over, had a mild reaction to the antibiotics and was very precise in where they decided to throw up.

It was on her.

Just...everywhere.

That happened.

"You alright, Clarke?" The other intern made a point of popping by - he looked disgustingly fresh-faced coming away from his day off and Clarke made an effort not to grimace too widely because it was actually really nice of him to check on her - and he rapped his hello on the locker room door.

"Oh yeah. Peachy." She'd been given new scrubs and had taken a shower but she still felt dirty. "I doused myself in a healthy dose of disinfectant and swallowed some of it too. Just letting you know so if I have a reaction, you can save my life."

"I don't know, Clarke. You're head and shoulders ahead of me at this intern thing," he joked. "You might be on your own there."

Clarke shrugged. Turned away because her smile had fallen and she couldn't force it back. She was too tired for that and couldn't stop the sadder, darker, persistent thoughts she could normally stop, all her energy going into staying upright, so she shook her head and spoke into the depths of her locker as she pulled out her jacket and bag. "I'll remember that when it counts, buddy," and she lowered a joking frown at him when she sidled out of the room and toward the exit. (The exit - it had never looked so beautiful. She was so ready to sleep.)

He covered his grin under his hand shyly and nodded. "I'll leave you to it then. Have a good day off."
"Thanks, Jackson."

She didn't have anything more planned than sleeping but it was nice of him to say.

There was the bus ride - it was a miracle, really, that she got off at the right stop and didn't carry right on down the line to Octavia's - and then there was some blind trudging up the stairs. She leant her head against her door and groaned as her bag slipped from her shoulder to drag across the ground. Finally managed to get the door unlocked.

Stepped in.

Found bed.

Slept.

Slept some more.

A full day of blissful rest was upon her, seven hours later, and she had no intention of moving from her bed except for food. She didn't realise, however, how woefully under prepared for the day of rest she was until she tried to go back to sleep after her bathroom break at nine am and she couldn't because the stench of the hospital, all cleaning agent and an underlying whiff of something not quite healthy, had drenched her bedsheets.

They had to go in the wash. Along with almost all the clothes she owned.

Then she needed coffee because they would take an hour to wash and an hour to dry so she had to stay awake until then.

"Ah." She hung limply from the cupboard knobs and scowled heavily into the dark emptiness. Well, that wasn't fair. They weren't entirely bare. There was a spiderweb in the top righthand corner of one and a dead cockroach in the bottom of the other. "Shopping," she grumbled. Joy of all joys. "Right."

Though...she did have a working kettle and some instant coffee she had smuggled from Octavia's the week before. Did she need milk? Her hands, already working on filling the kettle with water, told her no. Go with it. Fill her to the brim with glorious caffeine.

She followed its order.

She only stopped when an obstacle - sugar - stood in her way. Or, rather, the absence of sugar.

Could she survive without it?

No.

Fuck. No, she couldn't. That was just one thing she couldn't do.

Give her black, steaming coffee. Blacker than the polluted starless night sky. Blacker than the souls of someone very bad (no coffee, no thinking, no analogies). She could live without milk. But no sugar? She would rather scrub the halls of the hospital with her tongue than drink unsweetened coffee.

Which meant that Clarke had to dig through the box on her floor to find something respectable to wear (blasphemy, really, to wear clothes on her day off) and because most of her clothes were in the wash she ended up with a few outfits draped over the end of her bed: a sequinned short nightwear dress, a Hawaiian shirt and matching shorts, a bright pink hoodie, and some boxer shorts. She
grabbed the boxers and the hoodie, pulling them on as she made her way to the door.

It was just her neighbour she had to talk to. Right? She didn't have to make a big deal about it. Sugar. Smile, maybe. Retreat.

Clarke remembered when she knocked on 2D that her neighbour was an incredibly attractive woman and there she was, a mess in fluorescent pink. But go big or go home had always been Clarke's motto (it wasn't but why shouldn't it be?) and since the door was already opening she couldn't run home so go big it was. She hoped tired muscles managed to produce a smile.

"Hello?"

Clarke did her best not to swallow her tongue because damn, neighbour did sultry without even trying.

And her eyeliner was on point. Again.

And she looked impossibly cute. She shouldn't, what with her hair being in that stern braid again and her clothes very sensible and neat unlike Clarke, whose outfit she examined with a brief up and down, but she wasn't wearing any shoes and so her eyes were on the same level as Clarke's and they were wide and lovely and soft even though the rest of her was stern.

And she was wearing odd socks.

Clarke wavered on her feet a little, the slow lure of sleep feeling very much like something she should give in to. She smiled down at her neighbour's odd socks so long that the woman had to clear her throat loudly and arch her eyebrows at Clarke for her to remember what she had come over for.

"Right. Yeah. Hi. I'm Clarke." She held out her hand but the woman barely even looked at it, let alone shook it. "O-kay." Clarke's smile didn't falter, just persevered because please, she might be trying to be intimidating but Clarke had dealt with intimidating and it was not five foot something in a peter pan collared shirt. But she did take her hand back and ran it through her hair because she had wanted to make a good impression and it wasn't going well. Was going worse when Clarke realised her mistake, fingers catching in some impossibly large tangles. Probably should have showered. Or brushed her hair at least before she left her apartment. Her neighbour still looked very calm and raised eyebrow-ed and patient about Clarke standing there but the deliberate lift of her wrist to look at her watch - oh that was a nice watch - and the slow tap of her fingertips against her door she was holding open, shoulder leant against the doorframe, all made it perfectly clear that she wanted Clarke to leave.

Clarke wanted to apologise for turning up looking like she had crawled out of...something bad (no coffee, no thinking, point reinforced by that second attempt at an analogy) but decided it would be a wasted effort. The woman hadn't cared enough to even shake her hand. She just wanted her to go, probably.

Rude.

But whatever.

So Clarke forced her smile wider and did her thing.

"Look, I moved in the other day and everything's been a bit incredibly hectic at work so going shopping was kind of the last thing on my mind. Downside, now I have absolutely nothing in my kitchen and I was wondering if I could maybe grab a cup of sugar off you?"
She didn't once stutter or trip over her words and she was impressed. No coffee and not enough sleep
didn't ever combine forces to make her eloquent. (Okay, Clarke was a bit enough person to admit
that she tried really hard not to screw up because her neighbour was very attractive, even rude -
ugh, especially rude, which was so annoying for Clarke because she couldn't help that she was
attracted to those snarky types it was a curse it really was - and she wanted to make a good first
impression...a less terrible first impression, at any rate.)

"Isn't that kind of a cliche?"

The woman leaned more heavily against her door frame - Clarke had to smile again, genuinely that
time, because she tucked one of her feet behind the heel of the other and blue and green went so well
together. The odd socks were too cute. The woman didn't smile back but she didn't frown either. Just
looked at her like she was weighing her up. Clarke ignored the itch that prickled its way from
between her shoulder blades out to cover her shoulders. She wanted to know what the verdict was.
What this woman thought of her. She pushed it aside. She didn't give a shit.

"Cliche?"

"Woman home alone," she expanded, voice not changing from bored lecturer tone. "Stranger asks
for a cup of sugar. Woman invites stranger into home and is violently murdered. Probably with her
own possessions."

Clarke pursed her lips. It wasn't what she had been expecting to hear when she asked for a cup of
sugar, if she were perfectly honest. She decided to roll with it. "You're assuming that I want to kill
you."

"I assume everyone wants to kill me."

Clarke frowned carefully as she turned that statement over in her head. "Are you a very difficult
person?" she asked, because she couldn't imagine someone having the ability to make everyone want
to kill them.

"I'm a realist."

"Sounds to me like you're a pessimist, actually."

"Realist," the woman corrected her, saying the word with a slightly sharper tone. "Household
murders are very common." She didn't say it like she was frightened or worried at all, really, just said
it like Clarke should be aware and she lifted her shoulders very slightly because really, her entire
body was saying, everyone should know that.

"Right." Clarke clicked her tongue. "I'll keep that in mind. But sugar. Yes or no?"

The door in her face was her answer.

Clarke waited a little longer, in case neighbour woman opened it in a minute with her cupful of sugar
because hey, maybe she was just a pessimistic (sorry realist) and very attractive person who wanted
to give possible murderer Clarke some helpful tips regarding the originality of the lines she used to
get into peoples homes.

But the door didn't open again so Clarke moved on and upstairs.

It turned out that everyone in the apartment block (in the floor above and on her floor, at least,
because she's too tired to climb to the other floors) sucked. True, it was better than the whole
building smelling like pee but still. She would have expected someone - just one person - to have
some sugar.

She assumed it was her desperation that led her to tap on her neighbour's door again. Coffee withdrawals or something. Plus, her neighbour was the only one who had spoken to her.

Face carefully blank, her neighbour opened the door for her and raised her eyebrows.

"Yes?"

"Look," Clarke said, because she was desperate and she would do anything and this was quite frankly ruining her one day off. "This hasn't been the best week ever and I'm very tired and yesterday a man threw up on me at work and I still feel like I haven't recovered from that and I know it's part of my job," at that point she was ranting a little bit to herself because really Clarke, medicine was messy business and she had to get used to that, "but it's still really gross and all I want in life right now is a little sugar so my coffee doesn't taste like a monkeys butt and I want to get some stuff done today and I'm working for the rest of the week so this really is my only chance and I swear to you that I will pay you back but I'd just really, really," she paused, thought about it, added a third, "really would like some sugar."

"You should get a new line," her neighbour told her.

"Seriously? Doesn't it count at all that I'm not trying to kill you?" Clarke pointed out. "I just want some sugar. Literal sugar. To add to my coffee."

"Will you leave me alone if I give you some sugar?"

"Probably."

The woman's eyes narrowed and Clarke liked the small shift. Some people were far too easy to read - this was like a challenge. She would like it more, she thought, if she had had some coffee though.

"There's a half and half chance," she elaborated. "I might wake up and then come back and tell you that you're really pretty and your eyeliner is amazing and maybe we could talk and get to know each other and I promise that when I'm not feeling like I'm half dead I'm actually pretty decent company." She swore she saw the woman's lips lift in a smile and also she hadn't closed the door on her again so she continued. "Or I could drink my coffee, think a fond and brief thought about you, and go on my merry way and the only other time we interact in the future is when I give you five bucks for the sugar."

"If you leave now, I'll let you get away with giving me two dollars for all of the sugar I have."

Clarke grimaced. "I'm going to forget and you probably won't get anything until next week. Consider the extra as interest."

"Ten dollars, then."

"What?" Clarke crossed her arms, frowned. "That's not fair. You just said I could have it for two."

"If I have to wait a week for my money, and I have to suffer through more of this," she gestured between the two of them and Clarke let her see exactly how offended she was by that, which really prompted a small smile from the other woman (wow talk about rude), "then I want ten dollars."

That eyebrow lifted again and Clarke mentally cursed the parts of her that swooned because damn and shit and she could so get it were the too prominent thoughts in her brain.
"Fine. But-

Her neighbour groaned, rolled her eyes, and Clarke had to laugh.

Neighbour turned and disappeared into her apartment, left the door open that time, and as much as Clarke wanted to snoop because she was well dressed and well spoken and intriguing and Clarke wanted to see how someone like that lived (she assumed, from comparing it to herself all badly dressed and crass and boring, it would be the exact opposite of how she herself lived, mess and takeout containers common features with her) but she yawned and lost her chance. The woman was back so quickly that she didn't see anything other than the three-seater brown couch and a coffee table clear of anything except a laptop.

She held out the sugar - barely touched, Clarke could see, which she was happy about because she thought she definitely had a Tupperware container somewhere in her things and that meant she wouldn't have to go shopping for possibly weeks.

Clarke hesitated.

"What?" hot neighbour asked, not unkindly but also not kindly. Brusque. Direct. Clarke told herself that she didn't swoon.

"I don't suppose I could know my saviours name, could I?"

Her neighbour shoved the sugar into her hand and promptly shut her door.

Clarke laughed again.

She returned to her apartment and at odd times of the day she would feel her smile - when she drank her coffee and felt her lips curve on the edges of her Princess mug, when she buried her nose into her newly clean sheets and felt her smile against the fabric - and it would make her think of her. She was hot. She was also good with her tongue - ready with a reply, that was.

Clarke greatly admired those traits.

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"Lexa."

Clarke shifted her laundry basket over to her other arm and ran her hand through her hair. She'd showered after her coffee so it was soft and silky and she didn't embarrass herself having to untangle her fingers from the knots. Again.

"It's Clarke, actually," she said mildly. "And I know that you know that because I told you that yesterday. I said, 'hi! I'm Clarke!'. And," she pushed her lips out into a pout, "then you shut the door in my face."

Her neighbour - Lexa - stared at her for a moment longer.

"Okay then." She was getting the impression that Lexa wasn't one for jokes. "Oh, I have your money."

"You said it would take a week."

"Yeah well, I probably wouldn't have got around to it at all," Clarke admitted. "So I thought I'd better do it straight away rather than having to do some really exceptional gymnastics to avoid you in
the hallway." Lexa's eyebrows cut together in a quick frown. "There aren't many places to hide, you know? I'd have to try some Spiderman-esque shit out if I needed to get away."

"Right."

Clarke shook her head with a laugh. "Umm, just give me a minute, I'll get it." She bumped her door open with her hip. Lexa itched to tell her that it was a bad safety practice and she was tempting a break in with that but she didn't. It wasn't any of her business. "Alrighty, here we go. Nine dollars and seventy cents." Clarke dropped the money in Lexa's open hand and waited, trying not to grin, as the woman counted it.

"I thought we had agreed on ten dollars?"

"I'm not going to lie, I had some cravings. I'm not sure exactly what happened but I think I did some really unholy things with my mouth and a few blocks of chocolate."

"I see." Lexa lowered her head a little, lifted her hand to cover her eyes. Clarke couldn't tell whether she was hiding laughter or annoyance, but when she looked up she was perfectly calm again and she held out her hand to Clarke. "My name is Lexa," she said formally. "It is nice to meet you, Clarke."

For a second, Clarke entertained the thought of not shaking her hand and maybe even going so far as to shut the door in her face, but Clarke had spent too many little moments earlier in the week thinking about her neighbour - a spot of downtime here and there to rest her feet, shove a sandwich whole down her gullet, and dream about what her neighbour sounded like, what her name was, what her hands might feel like, and how she kissed - to turn down the opportunity. So she reached out and took the proffered hand. Her skin was smooth, soft, and her fingers were long and wrapped gently around Clarke's. Clarke wondered what moisturiser Lexa used and also what that hand might feel like gliding up her stomach and higher.

"Lexa." Clarke tried out the name. "Lexa," she said again, adding a curl of invitation to the sibilance of the x and she grinned when her neighbour's eyes darted down to her lips. "It's nice to meet you, Lexa," she said, and she dragged her thumb slowly over the back of Lexa's hand once before she drew her own away. "I have to get ready for work," she said, an apologetic tilt to her head and lips, "but we should hang out some time."

Lexa was still looking at her lips when she closed the door.

Nice.

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Lexa could tolerate Clarke.

The woman was beautiful, clearly intelligent, and nice enough. Lexa thought she had heard that she worked as a doctor of some kind - an intern, perhaps? - and that was admirable.

Clarke was also: crass, loud, worked strange hours, and when she smiled she never held anything back so it was like Lexa was constantly staring into the sun.

She didn't like it.

It wasn't fair for Clarke to be dazzling even when she was wearing pyjamas and smelling faintly like a three-day shift, hair a mess. It wasn't like Clarke was even the first attractive, blonde, blue-eyed woman that Lexa had come across (but she was the first one to leave Lexa speechless).
It also wasn't fair that she had smiled brightly and happily when Lexa was working on finding the words to tell her that she was possibly the worst neighbour that Lexa could have been given. Lexa was a light sleeper. Clarke was unfathomably loud and arrived home at unreasonable hours, leaving Lexa to wake up each night Clarke had a late shift because the blonde would stamp her way up the stairs and mumble to herself as she fumbled with her keys or, sometimes, sing along to her i-pod. Clarke might have had a lovely voice but Lexa was fond of her sleep - very fond - and Clarke closed her door like she had taken a fucking precision course on it, on being able to close it at a volume that was barely, barely acceptable. And on the wrong extreme of barely acceptable.

It was unfair. Lexa couldn't tell her not to slam the door because she wasn't. And that was unfair. If she was going to wake her up every night, she could at least have the decency to do it properly. On purpose. With no shame about the volume of her actions.

It was like she was trying to be decent and just failing miserably.

But Lexa could play nice. Introduce herself. Perhaps work into the conversation about sugar that she was completely and totally sick of being woken up. She hadn't expected Clarke's dazzling smile and the easy way about her, so any thought of slipping an "I am very displeased about the volume of your comings and goings at three am" escaped her.

But no matter.

She could do it the next day, hearing Clarke leave to collect her laundry from downstairs. She stepped into the hall.

She could do it.

She could, before Clarke appeared in front of her clean and dressed and smelling lovely and still smiling that stupidly stunning smile and before she took Lexa's hand in hers and Clarke's hands, Clarke's hands were cool and faintly calloused, which Lexa had not expected, and she couldn't help the red hot thought of what they might feel like skipping over her hips and up the sides of her ribs and Clarke was a doctor, right, so she was probably very good at being precise and Lexa really had to not think about that.

She lost the ability completely to tell Clarke to stop being so bloody loud at night because Clarke took her hand and said her name not once, not twice, but three times and she said it like it was cigarette smoke all addiction and husk.

"You know what your problem is," Anya said after Lexa told her everything that happened and everything that had gone wrong.

"Enlighten me."

"You are so fucking gay," was her helpful answer.

Lexa scowled down into her pan and scooped the stir fry into her bowl. "Thank you," she said. The remainder she laddled into a small box, which she neatly labelled WEDNESDAY, and placed in the freezer. The phone she kept pressed against her ear with her shoulder as she rummaged for a fork and made her way over to her coffee table. "You are so incredibly helpful, all the time."

"I know. But hey, I'm just saying. Woman up. Go bash down her fucking door and tell her she's being selfish. You have a job too and just because you like her knockers doesn't mean you like it when she goes knocking into everything."

"You're proud of yourself for that, aren't you?"
"For knockers and knocking?" Anya asked. "A little. Not my best, but it was okay."

"It was good."

"Thanks."

"Can I use it?"

"No. Fuck off, Wood. Come up with your own shit for your next book why don't you."

Lexa laughed. They both knew that everything they said to each other was probably going to end up in something they wrote, one way or another. That was how it went with them. They turned over everything they heard or saw or read and it came out, sometimes on purpose, sometimes on accident, but it always found its way onto paper.

That's why they were friends, really. (They sniped and fought hard. They also edited ruthlessly and were both better for it.)

"Mine," Anya repeated, more sternly, and Lexa let her have it. She didn't know how she would use it anyway. Too flippant for murder mysteries, anyway. The grit of pencil on paper came through the phone and she knew Anya was jotting it down. "Gus is home," Anya muttered, distracted by her writing.

Lexa shifted, crossed her legs underneath herself. Barreled noodles into her mouth and spoke around them, "Tell him I say hi." She smiled into the quiet of her apartment. Anya hated it when she ate and talked at the same time.

"Gross, Lexa." And then, "Gus! Lexa says hi," she bellowed, making Lexa switch her phone to her other ear. She rubbed at the ringing one, probably permanently damaged now, she thought dramatically. "Gus says hi back."

"Gee. Thanks."

"Welcome. So lunch tomorrow?"

"Got a deadline coming up." Lexa groaned as she forced herself to her feet. Padded over to her wall calendar. She slurped the end of a noodle into her mouth and hummed a thoughtful hum, trying not to be too pleased by Anya's disgusted noise. Ah, revenge. "Thursday?"

"Client." Her fingers made a neat dragging sound over the pages of her diary, flicking through it. "Friday? I have the afternoon free."

"Mm." Not ideal. She could make it work. "Done."

"Done. Alright, see you then. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go have wild sex with Gus now. Tell your neighbour bitch she should be quiet so you can work on the final draft of that shit storm you've been writing for forever - seriously, Lexa, finish that already."

Anya hung up before Lexa could tell her she never, never, ever, never needed to hear that about her best friends. Not that she wasn't pleased they still loved each other, she was, they both deserved it. But she didn't need to hear the details. Ever. She also didn't need Anya telling her for the five hundredth time that she should finish her book but that was what Anya did. (An excellent editor. Terrible friend, sometimes. She wasn't inclined towards sympathy, but then again neither was Lexa, so they made a good team.)
She settled by her coffee table again and tucked her feet underneath her.

A blank document blinked on the screen of her computer and she wilfully ignored it, thinking instead on what Anya had said about Clarke. It wasn't that she didn't want Clarke to be quiet. Lexa loved sleep. She wanted to sleep. But she couldn't agree that Clarke was a bitch, even if she were a detriment to her carefully planned sleep schedule.

She was just settling in still.

It was only the third time Clarke had woken her up.

She could let it slide.

She even let it slide the fourth time as well.

But the fifth time. The fifth time, though. She hadn't even been living next door for two weeks and she'd woken Lexa up five times. The short story she'd been commissioned to write was sitting, half finished and fully dreadful, on her screen and the time to finish it was ticking away. She had until five pm - was it too much to hope that she could be well rested when she sat down to finish it? It was important. She had a reputation to maintain, dammit, and so when she heard the shufflings of her neighbour at half eleven, she pushed up off her couch and away from her document.

She knocked hard on Clarke's door and repeated her points over and over in her head so that Clarke's stupid smile wouldn't dazzle them away.

She was in luck.

Clarke was definitely not smiling when she opened the door.

She yawned instead. Dragged a hand over her face. Slumped against the door and cracked her eyes open the tiniest bit - correction, just one eye. "What."

But.

She was wearing a tank top and boxers, her pyjamas clearly, and the shirt had ridden up. There was an inch, maybe more, of pale skin on view above the waist of her shorts. Lexa swallowed thickly.

Reminded herself that she was angry - she had work to do, dammit - and she didn't think again about skin or blue eyes blinking at her or pale pink lips that still managed to look appealing even when they were tilted down into a frown.

"You are loud," Lexa snarled. "You stomp on the stairs and you knock into everything. You close the door like it's midday when you come home at two in the morning and you wake. Me. Up," she said through gritted teeth. She ignored the slightest prickle of guilt, seeing the bags under Clarke's eyes, because she had woken her up five times and it was going to be the last. "You're distracting and annoying and I swear to god if you wake me up again I'm going to make you pay to soundproof my apartment. Got it!"

Clarke yawned again. "I'm distracting?" she asked, a lazy grin growing and she waggled her eyebrows. Lexa growled, turned on her heel. She tried to ignore the light laughter that followed her, slammed her door. But the sound repeated over and over again in her mind and she scowled down at her keyboard.

//
She had one blissful night of rest. The night after, though, Clarke was back to her terrible ways. Stumbling into her room, closing the door too loudly. Lexa planted her hands on her face and groaned up to the ceiling because it was two fucking thirty nine in the morning and she had a gym session with Anya at six.

Clarke was a sore point between them.

"You're so useless when you haven't slept," she told Lexa. Lexa gritted her teeth and punched harder at Anya's mitts, hoping today was the day she would knock her over and get to gloat. "She might be hot but she's terrible, Lexa. Talk to her again. And by talk I mean tie that bitch up and go all Saw on her because if she's going to play with you then take that shit up a notch."

Lexa stepped back and looked at her friend cautiously. "You are a very twisted person," she said lightly.

"Thanks."

Apart from the suggested torture, Lexa almost agreed with Anya. That was, she did agree that Clarke and her loudness needed to be stopped but she disliked the superior tone Anya took whenever she seemed to win so she set her chin mulishly and ignored her.

There was a basket and a woman outside her door when Lexa got home.

"Well this is a surprise."

"Note," Clarke grunted, eyes closed.

"Excuse me?"

"There's a note," she said. "In the basket. Read it."

Lexa unlocked her door and pushed it open slowly. Clarke didn't give a shit, just fell back slowly with it and laid in her doorway. Eyes still closed. So Lexa stepped over her, didn't bother to hide her grin because she was fairly sure that the blonde was fast asleep, and put her things away. Gym bag in the laundry. Water bottle by the sink. Towel in the hamper.

By the time she came out to her living room, Clarke had, with much difficulty, sat herself up against the door frame. She pulled the basket to her chest and then pushed it further into Lexa's apartment. Taking pity on the obviously exhausted woman - she might have been woken up at three but Clarke hadn't gotten in until then, on the back of a long shift, and it was only seven. She was surprised Clarke had made it out of bed. "Do you require any assistance?" she said, crouched over Clarke.

"Shut your angel face," the prone woman murmured, "and read the damn note."

There was a bag, brown paper bag, and a note inside the basket and Lexa lifted both out. Placed the bag on her knee and opened the note.

In a messy scrawl, Clarke had written:

was loud. regret. sorry. food. C

Peering into the bag, Lexa lifted her eyebrows because there was a thick slice of banana bread there, wrapped in cling wrap. It looked good. She tasted a corner of it, examining Clarke quietly, and she tried to muffle the groan - it was good. It was really, really good. (And Lexa had an uncontrollable
weakness for banana bread but she didn't know how Clarke could possibly have known that.) She hoped Clarke hadn't heard the sound. It had been heavy and deep and undeniably sexual and maybe that was the reason that Clarke's eyes were open and she was smiling at her.

"Do you need help?" Lexa asked stiffly. Awkward.

"Do you?" Clarke slurred and while it was definitely a come on, her words were slurred from fatigue so Lexa took that as a yes and, reluctantly, set her treat aside and helped Clarke to her feet. More or less carried her into her room and made her sit on the edge of her bed.

She wavered for a moment.

Lexa pushed lightly on her shoulder and Clarke flopped back onto her bed, groaning a groan that had made her banana bread delight sound positively PG in comparison. "Thank you, for the apology," Lexa said and she had almost gone when Clarke called out.

"Wait." She struggled to sit up, gave up after a moment. "Wait," she said again, and Lexa returned. "I lied," she said quietly, very sadly. "I didn't make it. My kitchen's all boxed an' I bought it last night. Didn' mean to be loud," she said and Lexa couldn't help the tug of her smile. Clarke couldn't see it still so it didn't matter if she let it show.

"Sleep well," was all she said.

Clarke was snoring before she could take two steps.

Something about the encounter must have stuck in her brain though because the next time (the following night) Clarke woke her up, Lexa almost stepped on a box with a blueberry muffin in it.

The next time, more banana bread.

The next time, Lexa tried not to be disappointed that there was nothing waiting for her when she left for her gym session. Clarke made up for it with a visit in person, yawning, breakfast bribe in hand.

"Do you always eat breakfast from the bakery?" Lexa asked her curtly.

She didn't see the way Clarke's eyes raked over her and she bit her lip hard to stop from drooling when she saw her toned arms, the sweat that beaded on her neck and made its way down her chest, the black tattoo that curled over her bicep.

"Clarke?" Lexa asked, eyebrow raised.

Okay, maybe she did see the way Clarke's eyes lingered. She didn't mention it though, just turned her keys slowly between her fingers.

"Ah. No." Lexa breathed a sigh of relief too soon. "Most of the time I just have left overs." She crinkled her nose thoughtfully. "I like Chinese a lot." Clarke blinked. Nodded. "Also, it's lunch really. Since I don't get up until eleven. Or twelve. Or two," she said, wistful smile drifting over her at the thought of staying in bed so gloriously late.

"You should be more healthy."

"Eh."

"I am serious, Clarke. You are young and fit now, but improper eating can do things to your body in addition to unhealthy weight gain. Without the right fuel, your body will get tired sooner and you
may develop illnesses without the proper nutrients."

"Gross. Nutrients." Clarke narrowed her eyes then but her sleepiness made it rather adorable (never a word Lexa would say to her face, because Lexa Wood did not use the word adorable) rather than threatening. "You eat this stuff too," she pointed out.

"Because you wake me up and then I am irritable." Lexa shrugged. "When I am irritable, I make bad decisions."

Clarke grinned. "Anything more fun than baked goods?" she asked, eyes lighting up at the prospect of good gossip.

Lexa flattened her lips, glared at her. (It wasn't her fault that her glare was heavy and dark and sultry and, well, that didn't do anything to deter Clarke.)

"What bad mistake have you chosen today?" Lexa asked instead of encouraging her.

"Banana bread. Seems like it's your favourite." There was a look in her eyes and a tilt to her lips that made Lexa's cheek burn. So. Apparently Clarke had heard her reaction that morning. "Want it?"

Lexa did. Her pride wouldn't let her say it. Not with Clarke watching her like that. Besides, the blonde was up at seven on a Sunday morning and that could only mean one thing: she was up to something. Most likely nefarious.

"What's the catch?"

"You wound me." Lexa raised her eyebrows. Clarke grinned. "But you have a point. I want you to eat breakfast with me." Clarke wiggled the bag invitingly. "Come on, Lexa. You know you want it."

"Say I did," she said, mild tone betraying nothing. (Oh she was an open book though, Clarke could see her eyes lingering on that bag, on her lips so brief. She thought she was so reserved but Clarke had her.) "Why would I eat with you? You're a terrible neighbour."

"Because I'm very, very sorry and I would like the chance to prove it." Clarke pushed off the door and sauntered back across the hall to her apartment. "I also have a new coffee machine," she said.

"You also have a hell of a mess," Lexa told her, "did you know?"

Clarke feigned surprise at the boxes stacked against the wall. "Oh my god," she said dryly. "How did those get there? Quick, call the police. I think I've been reverse robbed. How do you take your coffee?"

"Milk. No sugar."

"Gross."

//

That was how it all started.

Two, three times a week they would eat breakfast together and they settled into it. It was a thing. A thing replete with flirting but no more than they might with their other friends. It was a thing but, they both knew, it wasn't a thing.

Lexa told her every time that her place was a mess.
Clarke called her names - pedantic, neat freak.

They weren't friends, exactly. Clarke still woke her up too often for Lexa to be happy with her. But they were friendly and Clarke supplied the coffee and breakfast and Lexa would walk right into her apartment the next morning and frown at her and make them both coffee and she even helped her put up a shelf and empty the box labelled books.

"I'm a writer," she grumbled, "and it physically pains me to see you just leaving them here. Dumping them like, like you don't want them."

Clarke watched her handle the books. Lexa turned them over and dusted their covers off in slow, careful movements that Clarke tentatively attributed as lovingly and she sat cross legged on the ground for a whole hour setting them into piles according to genre. Clarke sat with her and that day, about a month and a half after she had moved in, she started on the fifth last box. Filled with movies and music, she showed each one to Lexa and set them in piles according to the face she made.

Legally Blonde - left. Lexa's expression didn't change but Clarke could tell she loved it.

Fight Club - right. That was definitely disgust.

Lion King (and Disney in general, Dreamworks too, all those animated films that left you feeling either happily heartbroken or just plain happy) - left. Adoration, Clarke thought, because Lexa pursed her lips and she only did that when she wanted to hide a particularly fond smile. What a sap.

"Okay, we have to move this crazy party to the couch," Clarke groaned. Lexa was always so smooth, graceful, standing and moving around and she just jumped to her feet even after sitting so still. Clarke groaned and clicked and reluctantly pushed to standing and gave her the stink eye.

"What?"

"Why are you so...you?"

"Genetics." Lexa shrugged. "And yoga, once a week." She raised her eyebrows - god, she had to stop doing that because in close proximity - at the disgusted pull to Clarke's mouth. "Not a fan?"

"It's not that. Everyone's got their thing," she said carefully. She liked Lexa. She didn't want to tell her that she considered yoga to be the devil's sport. "It's terrible," she admitted when Lexa refused to look away. "I tried it out once when I had a crush on this instructor and I literally twisted myself into knots and it was painful and she never once looked my way." Clarke stomped to the couch and threw herself into it. "Disaster. And also, not my thing, but I won't judge if you like it" she added. Diplomacy. Nice. She would give herself a pat on the back but she was comfortable so she did it mentally.

Lexa eased down into the armchair - Clarke probably needed to get more furniture, but since she was always working and it was almost always just her and Lexa anyway, she kept putting it off - and nodded.

"I tried rowing once," she said.

"And?"

"And what?"

"God Lexa." Clarke threw her head back and sighed. "Why am I friends with you? You can't tell a story for shit."
"You know I'm a writer, yes?"

"Well. Other than that," Clarke corrected herself, "you can't tell a story for shit."

"I see. Fine. She was a year older than me and I was," it wasn't obvious but there was a bit of a tint to Lexa's cheeks then, "rather less fit than I am now. It was high school. Everyone goes through an awkward stage."

"Not me." Clarke shrugged. "I've always been glorious."

"I have seen you rolling on my floor, mostly asleep," Lexa reminded her. "Glorious is not the word I would have used."

Clarke didn't care. She nudged Lexa with her toes and nodded for her to continue.

"I fell out of the boat," she said with a shrug. "I was not a very good swimmer."

"Oh no. Were you okay? I mean obviously now you're okay, but were you okay then?"

Lexa hesitated. "She jumped in after me and pulled me to shore. We weren't very far out." She looked beautiful when she smiled. "I got her number and we dated for most of the year."

Clarke frowned. "What?"

"Oh yes. She was lovely."

"What? No. Lexa, we were telling each other bad attempts at dating. You can't just turn almost drowning into a good thing. That's not fair."

"I am impeccable," the other woman said. "I'm sorry that I don't have any stories."

"None?"

"None."

"But you're single. So you had to break up with someone."

Lexa looked away. Interested herself with the books on the floor. Clarke pushed up a little. There was something that settled between them that told her that she had touched on something that, perhaps, should not have been touched on. She opened her mouth, ready to backtrack, because Lexa was pulling on her bottom lip with her teeth and looking undecided.

"I'm-"

"Her name was Costia," Lexa said quietly. "It didn't end well."

The least Clarke could do was not to mention it at all and she didn't, deciding that it was likely time to change the topic because it was inching towards her last relationship as well and she didn't want to talk about that. So she nodded and they spoke at length about the band that Derek, one of the tenants upstairs, had started and whether they were musically talented enough to weasel their way in. He was always carrying the best snacks when they saw him so it would be worth it. Lexa confessed she was tone-deaf, Clarke again professed that she was flawless but she was too lazy. "That is a flaw, Clarke," Lexa told her but Clarke disagreed and in the end they decided that they were adults so they could buy their own snacks were they so inclined and Derek's apartment never smelt very nice so they abandoned the idea entirely.
Something changed that day, though, and there was the underlying knowledge that Lexa had the girl who swam and saved her and she had Costia and Clarke had, at the very least, been interested in a woman before.

That changed things.

That was how their friendship started.

It started one night when Clarke came home from work. Lexa's light was still shining underneath her door and she knocked on it lightly. The "come in" was gruff but not unkind and Lexa even looked up from the computer screen when Clarke appeared in the rectangle of the door. "You look gross."

"You always know the right thing to say," Clarke grumbled. She didn't move further in.

"What's up?"

Clarke shrugged. Lexa closed the screen, standing. It was strange when Clarke wasn't smiling. It was more strange - in fact, Lexa didn't think she had ever seen it - when Clarke was upset.

"Clarke," she said slowly, quietly. "What is it?"

"Can you..." Clarke shook her head hard. "Just. Can you not be nice to me right now? Just be you."

"Are you saying I'm not nice?" Lexa asked her and to her relief, the affronted tone made Clarke's lips quirk up. "I'm perfectly capable of being nice."

"Sure you are."

"You have no idea," Lexa tacked on, lowering her voice purposefully. It wasn't a good idea, she knew from personal experience, but sometimes losing yourself in something other than pain was the best thing to do. Friends were best. But lust did in a pinch. "Too bad."


"Clarke," her name was a warning. It was are you sure and it was I don't want to make this worse - this being whatever it was that made Clarke look like she was a thunderstorm instead of the sun. This being, whatever made Clarke's eyes glassy and her arms wrap tight around her waist.

"Lexa," she returned and that was I'm fine and I need something. She needed something, to get her to stop thinking, to get her to stop remembering there was any kind of world, to make her small and secure in something that she could control and now that they had begun - it was just words but at the same time it wasn't, because it was also all the ways they had looked at each other and it was the way the air was starting to feel like too much space between them - Clarke didn't want to stop. She wanted Lexa's hands on her. She wanted to bury herself in someone else and she wanted to forget anything that wasn't a body pressed against hers and her breath lost on someone else's skin. "I just need someone."

Lexa could be someone. She could be someone, for Clarke.

She followed Clarke when she wavered, turned. Followed her into her apartment and locked their doors.

She looked small, arms wrapped around her waist, standing barefoot in the middle of her living room and Lexa sat carefully on the couch. Waited, hands loose by her side, and after a moment Clarke moved to meet her and straddled her lap. Her fingertips felt like they were sparking when they met
Lexa's cheeks.

It was a hushed affair, slow and careful. Lexa let Clarke trail her fingers down her neck, let her explore until her eyes looked more like the ones Lexa knew. Dark and hooded, yes, but no longer shadowed. Focused. Focused on her, and the thought made Lexa shiver and her shiver made Clarke grin sharp and wicked and she touched the end of Lexa's braid.

"Can I undo this?" she asked.

Lexa nodded, eyes fixed on Clarke's lips.

Somehow they agreed to hold off until Lexa's hair was free (though she did lift her hands onto Clarke's thighs, digging her fingers into the soft muscles there in a light massage) and Clarke dragged her hand through the length of it once, twice, and on the third run through she gently twisted her hand in a bunch of the curls at the back of her neck, murmuring a quiet "is that okay?" and Lexa's reward at her yes was a near blinding smile. Lexa leant up and she leant down and they kissed.

Clarke moved slowly, sinking further onto Lexa's lap, and she let her free hand explore Lexa's shoulders, the muscle of her arm. She sank further into the massage on her thighs until a groan escaped her and Lexa's too-pleased grin earned her a sharp nip on her lip.

"Don't look so pleased with yourself."

"If I do, will you bite me again?" Lexa asked, shifting her lips down to kiss softly the curve of Clarke's neck. To dip below the line of her shirt and suck marks into the pale skin.

"You like that, do you?" Clarke murmured, trying to keep her breath even. Lexa just hummed a yes into her skin and the thought was all too much. "This is great," she said, voice only slightly uneven, "and you should definitely explore this slow and steady route another day but right now I kind of need to be fucked."

Lexa paused. Her face stayed impassive but oh, Clarke felt her hands tightening. One of them had moved up to her waist and it jerked her roughly forward. "I can do that," Lexa shrugged.

"Yeah?" Clarke laughed, the sound cutting off when she felt Lexa's fingers on her waistline. "What are you comfortable with?" she asked. She didn't move any further and the static in Clarke's brain - Lexa was touching her, oh god, she was being touched and it had been way too long since anyone had touched and she was so fucking ready why wasn't she doing anything - cleared when she realised what Lexa was asking.

"Umm." Clarke tried to push down against Lexa's stomach - she knew she was ripped and please let her get some friction from it - but she was too strong and Lexa held her still. "Fingers are good."

"Can I use my mouth?"

"You might want to save that for after I've had another shower," Clarke suggested, and Lexa shrugged. Whatever Clarke was comfortable with. "But yeah. Penetration is great. However you want to touch me and now would be great." Lexa grinned, all too pleased. "Lexa, I'm seri-oh yes," Clarke hissed, feeling her fingers slipping under her scrubs and into her underwear, grazing against her. "Fuck yes."

"Shirt off," Lexa said, helping her pull it off, and she kissed the tops of Clarke's breasts because they might be going quick and Clarke might not want it slow this time but if this were the first and last and only time she got to do this then she was very interested in doing it right. Clarke made it clear - an
iron grip on her wrist and eyes flashing open in a glare - that she wasn't going to move, even to take off her pants, so Lexa kept her hand in the tight space, dragging her fingers slowly up from Clarke's entrance to swirl around her clit.

"Just do it already," Clarke growled, curling her hand around the back of Lexa's neck because as much as she wanted to kiss her again, Lexa was doing some heavenly things with her tongue and Clarke's nipples so she was happy to leave her there. But she wanted - "fuck yes" - for Lexa to push her fingers inside her already and when it happened, it happened quickly and Lexa listened to the directions of "harder" and "faster" and "right there" and she pulled her mouth away from Clarke's skin so she could look up at the open-mouthed, eyes squeezed shut, head thrown back goddess like woman on her lap. She did her best to concentrate on the movements of her hand and ignore the ache in her wrist. When Clarke pushed her hard back against the couch, fingers digging into the skin of her shoulders, she couldn't help the moan that rumbled up her throat. "You like that," Clarke huffed in a laugh, forcing herself to look down at Lexa. It was a mystery to her how Clarke managed to roll her hips down and close to her, drag herself that little bit closer, but Clarke managed so that she could look down at Lexa even as she tried to control her whimpers, so that when Lexa thrust inside of her, pushing her higher and closer and further toward that point, she could drag her thumb across her lips and feel her stuttered breaths against it and feel Lexa grazing her teeth against the skin of her finger and sucking it slow into her mouth and the way she grinned around the digit when Clarke faltered in her rhythm and made a helpless kind of sound. Lexa's grin was devoured with a kiss hot and dark and achingly slow that Clarke pressed against her, one Lexa couldn't help but think of as anything other than a reward and one she wanted to earn again and again. And when she came, she dug her nails into Lexa's shoulders and cried out into their kiss.

Lexa shifted, started to extricate herself, and froze when she felt Clarke's sharp teeth at her ear. "Stop," she murmured. She shifted so she was straddling only one of Lexa's legs, pushed her knee into her sharply and laughed when she tasted the tiny whimper that tripped off Lexa's tongue. "Continue," she directed her, and the low groan she let out when Lexa pushed back inside her had Lexa trembling. Clarke licked a hot stripe up her neck, scraping her teeth against every sensitive patch, and worked at Lexa, grinding her knee slowly against her until she had come again and only then did she shove Lexa to lay down on the couch, Clarke hovering over her, fingers working their way into Lexa's jeans and pressing against her until Lexa hands fluttered uselessly against the sweat-slick curve of Clarke's back and forgot how to move, where to settle, and she came with a small gasp and with gentle hands pressing Clarke down on top of her, just for a few moments.

She shivered each time Clarke kissed her neck.

And down her chest, sucking at the curve of her breasts. Avoided her nipples all together and tilted her head - hummed happily when Lexa ran her hands through blonde hair again and again, trying to settle herself when her heart was racing and her skin felt too hot, and Clarke's mouth was an inferno blazing wicked against each rib that appeared when Lexa arched up against her, her fingers a welcome and equally charged distraction where they tickled against the sensitive skin of her hips.

"Is this okay?" she murmured, pausing before she tugged at Lexa's jeans, her answer a groan and hands that shoved at her own jeans and pulled them off, underwear and all, thighs falling open. "I'll take that as a yes," Clarke laughed.

Clarke didn't let them leave the couch until Lexa was babbling beneath her and scraping her hands through her hair again, occasionally ducking down to try and press at the stubborn head between her legs that teased and teased and teased and fucking teased even as Lexa murmured her best please's and fuck me's but Clarke held out until she was sure that Lexa would give her more than a whimper when she came, a full and grating groan her last and best effort.
"Enough," Lexa murmured. "Enough, I think you've killed me."

"Mm." Clarke nuzzled against her stomach, enjoyed the twitch it gave her when she pressed a kiss between Lexa's breasts. "Come on. My bed is more comfortable."

Lexa fell thankfully into the bed when Clarke helped her there. "I can't feel my legs," she mumbled into the pillow, and Clarke just hummed happily, curling against her bed buddy and enjoying the feeling again of soft skin under her fingers.

"Sleep well."

//

"Okay, your turn, go." Clarke tossed a fortune cookie Lexa's way and grinned when it hit her neatly on the shoulder.

"Why are you giving me this?"

"So you can tell me my fortune. Go, go, go." Lexa rolled her eyes but cracked open the cookie. Her eyes skimmed the message but she held out until Clarke dug her toes into her side. "Tell me!"

"A very attractive person has a message for you," Lexa read, voice flat. "And your lucky numbers are 6, 10, and 43."

"You know you do that in a very boring way, right?" she sighed. Lexa hid her grin - the bitch totally did it on purpose, Clarke knew - in her 'breakfast' of leftovers and Clarke frowned. "Fine. Whatever. I'll show you how it's done. With flair and good grace," she said sharply, and Lexa lounged against the arm of the couch and shrugged. Clarke broke the cookie against her knee, picking up the cracked pieces and popping them into her mouth as she read the fortune. "You already know the answers to the questions in your head," she read, voice dropping low, excited, mysterious. "Huh." She flicked her eyes over Lexa, let them drop obviously to her breasts. "What kind of questions you thinking about, hot stuff?"

"Whether I can make you come without taking any of your clothes off." Lexa shrugged. "Like you said, I already know the answer."

Clarke crunched on her cookie. Crinkled her nose at Lexa in lieu of an answer and didn't bother to hide her satisfied smile. "True."

"Why are we watching Harry Potter, by the way?"

Clarke rolled her head to the side, smiled at Luna Lovegood. "I have a massive crush on Bonnie Wright." Lexa shrugged. "Ginny," she clarified. "She's better in the books but she's totally hot so I deal with it."

"I like Luna," Lexa said, settling back. "What are we doing?" she continued in the same easy tone. "Are there rules to this?"

"I don't think so." Clarke frowned. Pushed her toes underneath Lexa's thigh. Maybe she had a good thing going with her socks, warm toes and colourful as they were. Ah well. She had Lexa but when she left she would look into getting some. "Can't we just be friends? Fuck buddies. Bumping uglies and swapping stories?"

"No strings attached," Lexa clarified.
"Yeah. I mean, we're friends, right?"

"No," Lexa forced her lips still, even when she desperately wanted to grin at the faux hurt that bled over Clarke's face.

"That is so rude, Lexa, so rude. I guess I'll never do that thing with my tongue again." She crossed her arms and huffed, but she was feeling too good, too relaxed, to hold it for long and she snuggled into her couch pulling a cushion into her stomach. "See? Easy."

And it was.

Lexa did her best not to think that maybe it would be too easy, too simple, and that she would find it too easy to lower those walls. Instead, she leant over and kissed Clarke on the side of the mouth until she growled with annoyance and pulled Lexa down to kiss her properly.

They slept together again that day.

Twice.
Raven was the one they went to when they aren't sure how to talk to Clarke.

No one is sure how to go about talking to her about her neighbour, Lexa, the one Clarke mentioned eleven times at family dinner, because they aren't sure how to tell her that they like the way her eyes are shining and her smile seems more full, more natural, than it has in a long time.

They don’t know how to say it without her shutting down.

Trying to figure out her emotions. Which is when everything typically goes to shit because Clarke isn’t a ‘figure out my emotions’ kind of person - she’s always been a go with the flow and feel my emotions kind of person, but then it happened and she started to pretend she didn't have any at all. And that wasn't good but it wasn't better than how she had been so they let it happen. Which, they now knew, could be classified as a disaster.

So Raven was the one they went to, they primarily being Octavia because she was the one with the worried tilt to her mouth while Jasper and Bellamy were quietly taking gulps from their drinks whenever Clarke mentioned Lexa. (Jasper was helped into Monty's car at the end of the night. He had to pay for the cleaning the next day.)

"She's happier," Raven told Octavia when she called the first time. "Did you see her? She looks good."

//

"I don't know, O," Raven told her the third time. "She looks fine to me."

"That doesn't mean she's actually fine, you know. Just because she's sleeping with someone," Octavia said, on the verge of pulling her hair out because this was Clarke and Clarke was someone who had changed majors and who hadn't talking to her about it, possibly to anyone about it, and who had come out smiling within a few weeks like nothing was wrong. "Just because she is sleeping with her doesn't mean that Clarke is over it."

"Not really something you can get over," Raven said as mildly as she could.

Octavia let her breath out in a rush. "No. I know. That's not what I meant."

"Well. Maybe figure out what you mean before you talk to me about it because I'm all about Clarke doing what she needs to do and you know that. Definitely figure out what you mean before you talk to her."

//

Bellamy called her next and she thought maybe Octavia had set him up to it because he sounded very much like the part of the big brother when he brought it up.

"We need to talk about Clarke."

"Yeah, she's working a lot. We should steal her away for a beach day sometime," Raven suggested, tinkering with her latest job. She was a beautiful car and technically she could and should have called the guy to pick her up yesterday but she wanted a little extra time to have a look and a play.
"What? Yeah! Totally! That would be awesome. Text me and we'll set it up." He paused. "Oh, but also," paused again and Raven could imagine him grinning, pushing his hair back, and she smiled because he had never changed in that for all the years she'd known him. He'd changed in other ways - he wasn't quite so much of an arse as he used to be, and he stopped being quite so overbearing which Octavia was very thankful for - but that had always stayed the same. Terrible at poker. "She's super in love with her neighbour. You know that, right?"

Raven hummed a little, made sure that the clank of parts was loud enough to be heard through the phone so he got the clue - she didn't care and she wanted to get back to work.

He didn't get it.

"Understandable, of course. Have you seen her?" He whistled low and appreciative. "Hot."

"Gross."

"What? It's true."

"Piss off, Bell."

"Whatever. But hey, talk to Clarke would you? I don't want," he started, and he didn't bother to finish the sentence because they both knew what he didn't want and it was bad enough that he didn't want to say it. "Beach day," he said. "Yeah? Let me know when it's on."

"Will do."

//

Jasper and Monty were next.

It was Monty's phone but they were both talking into it and over the other and she was in half a mind to just hang up and ignore any future calls.

"Raven, hey-"

"-wait is it working? Monty, give it to me, it's not even on speaker you knob-"

"It's on, Jasper. Raven?"

"Hey Tweedle Dee, Tweedle Dum. Once again, Jasper," she said cheerily, because for some reason he always asked just in case she had changed her mind, "you are Tweedle Dum."

"Wow. Rude." Monty laughed at his friends affront and she heard the distinctive sound of them swatting at each other, took a moment to roll her eyes and push against her bench to send her chair back toward the mini-fridge in her garage. She scrounged some snacks and rolled back to her workbench in time to hear the end of Jasper's question.

"-game back?"

"You want it back?" she guessed.

"Yes."

"No." Monty's muffled laughed came over the line again and she grinned, threw a chip into the air and caught it with a crunch. "Sorry Tweedle Dum, I'm still beating the final boss for, like, the fortieth time."
"You are not!" he cried. "That's a hard game and, and you've only have it for three days!"

"Which was two days and twenty one hours more than I needed."

"I'm coming over," he grumbled. A crackle of static then. Raven assumed he had gone but not far because Monty, when he spoke, was quick and quiet.

"Raven?"

"Yup, still me."

"About Clarke," he said and she sighed. "Sorry. You've got that a lot lately, haven't you?"

"Nah. This is only the seventeenth time." Raven crunched into another chip as loud as she could. It didn't make her feel any better. "She's okay," she told him and then Jasper was back and Raven couldn't tell if she had been convincing or not.

She thought probably not.

She would need to have talked with Clarke to know for sure and Clarke hadn't been the talk-about-my-feelings person for a long time.

//

Octavia called often. They discussed her promotion, Bruce eating half the couch, vacation plans, Bruce eating the other half of the couch, Raven's work, the escapades of Raven's on-again off-again boyfriend and it was all pleasant and normal. But Clarke lingered under the surface, making hello's tentative with silent "please don't bring her up"s and goodbyes made curt when they cut themselves off too quick to avoid continuing on to her.

Still.

She was bound to come up eventually.

Raven couldn't find it in herself to be surprised when Octavia's first words were:

"We need to do something about Clarke."

Raven heaved a sigh. Sunday mornings and Important Discussions didn't really mix well for her but Octavia sounded desperate so, for Octavia, she could try.

She patted her bed buddy on the chest, jerked her chin in the direction of the door, and watched him go before she pulled on some underwear and a shirt and set about making breakfast for herself.

"She's fine," Raven said.

"No. She isn't. I love her, Raven, you know I do, but-" and that but was heavy with guilt because love shouldn't come with a 'but', right? She pushed on. "I'm not okay with what's going on."

"You don't have to be. Only Clarke does."

"Shit, okay, whatever Raven. I get it - you're thrilled that she's her own woman and making her decisions. Whoop dee fucking doo, she's determined and ambitious and, and full of self-direction growth or whatever. Hooray." It was impressive just how much sarcasm Octavia could fit into a single word. "I'm so happy for her, that's great. What I'm not happy about is what is happening right now because her decision is that she's going to fuck around with this girl and you know just as well
as I do how this is going to turn out."

"Octavia." Raven's tone dropped in warning.

"Don't Octavia me," she bit back. "She's not going to let herself give a damn. She's going to be cold and heartless and when Lexa tries to take this further, Clarke is going to break her heart and, when she figures out too fucking late that she felt the same, she's going to break her own damn heart."

"What makes you think Lexa will want to take it further."

Octavia just scoffed.

Raven sipped at her coffee. She had a point. Clarke was kind of hard to resist; everyone fell in love with her. Raven was fairly sure she had seen it for herself one day when it happened to a young man they stood next to on the train. He was the literal incarnation of starry-eyed and Clarke just gave him a faint smile as they stepped past him.

"What do you want then," Raven asked, moving on. "You want her to be that old Clarke again? Full of hugs and kisses and how are you's and sunshine coming out her arse?"

"Fuck you. No. Don't give me that. I know she's changed and I don't expect her to be the old Clarke. I want her to be... I want her to be the new Clarke, a happy Clarke with who she is now, and I want you to help me with that because you know as well as I do that what she's doing isn't healthy. But fine, whatever. If you want to deflect or whatever it is you're doing then fine. I just thought you cared about Clarke more than that."

"She has it under control," Raven said. "She's okay," she said, and she remembered saying exactly that to Monty and now she knew that it wasn't convincing at all.

"You were at the same dinner as me, weren't you? She's head over heels for this girl. Which would be a good thing if Clarke was Clarke from five years ago but she's Clarke now, which means that unless something drastic has changed in the last week, this is terrible. Like, catastrophic degrees of terrible." Octavia paused. "She's not going to feel a damn thing, Raven."

Raven scraped the flat of her knife through the butter, dropped shavings of it into her pan. As it bubbled, she closed her eyes and sighed because that is what Clarke did to them now. Made them into people who sighed. Raven knew people who sighed upwards of twenty times in an hour. They were people with aching backs and old age and who were generally disappointed in life. People who told children to stop enjoying themselves because they weren't doing it like they did in the 'good old days'.

Also: people who loved Clarke. They were filled to the brim with sighs - annoyed sighs, worried sighs, exasperated sighs, fond sighs.

They loved Clarke.

They did.

But.

Octavia was right. There was a 'but' to it.

It was different now, they way they loved her, because they had to be more careful about it and, somehow, more direct.
Less 'are you okay' and more 'hey fucker, what are you up to?'

Less 'how are you feeling' and more 'listen to me tell you in detail everything I did this weekend while you were at work'.

(That was how Raven did it anyway. The others probably had their own methods.)

They were allowed to love Clarke and they were allowed to involve her in their lives but more and more it had become obvious that she would tell them what she did and where she went and who she saw but feelings - Clarke's feelings - were off limits.

She kept them at a distance and it was better than her cutting herself out of their lives forever so they let it happen.

"She feels it."

"You sure about that?" Octavia shot back. "Because she does a damn good job at pretending otherwise."

"You didn't." Raven cut herself off. She didn't want to talk about it. "Don't," she said instead. "Just leave her be."

"We. Have. Tried. That." Octavia bit out each word, trying to get Raven to see. "We have tried that, over and over again. We give her space and we let her throw herself into the beds of strangers and into work and it's not, it's not helping."

Octavia, across town, in a light and airy cafe with the hustle and bustle of Sunday morning lives, dragged a hand through her hair and blew her sigh harsh from her nose.

She wasn't angry.

God, she wished she could be angry.

At Raven for not wanting to help her, for not agreeing with her immediately even though Octavia was sure on some level she did agree. At Clarke, for being so...

But she wasn't angry, she didn't have enough energy for that anymore, so she settled into frustrated and she settled into resigned and she ran a hand through her hair again and tossed it loose and lovely over her shoulder and gestured for a refill for her coffee.

"It works for some people, you know?" she said, more quietly, more calm. She focused on the man at the table across the room, the one who smiled at the man with him like he was the sun, and her heart hurt. "They can go through life and not get attached to people and it works just fine for them. Clarke isn't one of them. She's not using this time, she's not using work to build herself up, Raven," she said and she listened to Raven's silence and knew that she agreed, however reluctantly. "She's using it to hide."

"You don't know anything about it."

Octavia bit down hard on the inside of her cheek, wanting to say I lost him too, we all lost him, but it was different for Raven and it was different again for Clarke.

"I know something about it."

It was Raven's turn to sigh again because, yeah. She did.
They all did.

But also, there just weren't the right words or words enough or time enough for her to tell Octavia what Clarke might feel because she didn't think even she could fathom it. Which meant something, it had to, because there were mornings when Raven woke up and wished that she hadn't. Mornings where she was glad she ran her own business because she didn't have to go through the effort of calling in sick and faking a cough so she didn't have to tell anyone it felt like she had swallowed a black hole and it was tearing at her insides piece by piece. Mornings when she felt over, stupidly, blindly, over to the space in her bed and there was a matching space in her heart. So. For Clarke...

She sighed again.

Octavia let the silence stretch out for a few moments longer. She was getting strange looks from the patrons around her - what, like they hadn't heard a woman sigh seven times in a single conversation before? - and the topic was dragging her mood down to the very bottom of her boots and that wasn't what she had wanted when she called Raven, it wasn't what she had wanted at all. She just wanted to help.

"She's joining me for breakfast in a few." Octavia glanced at her watch. "Brunch, technically. You should join us."

"Are you going to tell her that she's become a heartless monster and you're staging a one person intervention?"

"No."

"Are you going to accidentally on purpose imply that she's become a heartless monster and you're staging a one person intervention."

"No." Octavia rolled her eyes. "And I don't think that."

Her gaze cut across the wall of windows, searching for that happy smile and blonde hair in the crowd. She let herself hate the way longing sat heavy on her chest - she wanted that smile back, the one Clarke had had before - and she hated the way she couldn't tell anymore if she was imagining it, if she automatically assumed that the smile from before was bright, lighter, happier.

"She's changed, Raven, and I don't think it's for the better. We're her best friends - shouldn't we be trying to help her? It's been three years."

"And she might need thirty more." Raven let that linger as she served herself breakfast.

Octavia made a small sound of agreement. She knew it was true. She didn't like hearing it, but it was true.

It didn't mean they couldn't try.

"Clarke does what she wants to do anyway," Raven said. "It's not like you can really stop her or change her mind."

"Mm. That's true."

"It's kind of like," Raven started and she sounded entirely too pleased with herself, and Octavia paid attention because she was sure she wouldn't like what the woman was going to say next, "that time up the coast when you were-"
"Oh no, come on, don't bring that up again."

"It was the best holiday I've ever been on. And you face was swollen like-"

"Stop it." Octavia slouched, scowled into the phone.

"-when she-"

"Stop it or I swear to god you won't like what I do."

"-did the thing with the-"

"I'm hanging up now."

"-and you-

Octavia rolled her eyes, pressed end on the call. She wondered how long Raven would talk to herself before she realised that Octavia was gone. Hell, knowing Raven she would probably keep talking even after she realised. She liked the sound of her own voice, that woman.

With good reason, Octavia had grace enough to admit.

"Uh-oh, someone looks like they've been talking to Raven," a voice murmured, teased, hands dropping lightly onto Octavia's shoulders.

She didn't let herself jump at Clarke's voice, broke into a grin instead of a flinch - had she heard any of her conversation? was she angry? what would she do if Clarke left? - and accepted the kiss Clarke pressed onto her cheek.

"Someone has been talking to Raven," Octavia agreed, eyes crinkling into a fond smile as she looked over her friend. She looked good. Happy. Healthy. Maybe Raven was right.

"Ah. I knew I recognised the look - the one," Clarke gestured at her own face, gesturing between eyes and mouth. "Half annoyed, half delighted."

"Don't let her hear you say that."

"Please, I'll say it to her face and you know it." Clarke grinned, turned to the waiter to order her breakfast. "A cappuccino, please, and uh," she glanced over the menu quickly, "a bagel thanks."

Octavia waited until he was gone to comment. "Light breakfast."

"Light brunch," Clarke nodded. "I might have already eaten breakfast, sorry. Lexa brought over some of her homemade muesli. It's supposed to be healthy and apparently my 'eating habits appal her'," she said, lifting her chin and eyebrows just slightly, tone dropping into a smooth serious impression she did of Lexa. She'd used it twice at their dinner last week and Octavia positively itched to question her about it.

"She sounds nice," is all she said.

Apparently it was enough, though, because Clarke recognised the way Octavia was trying to hide behind her coffee cup like the words had spilled out and splattered messily all around and she was hoping to avoid clean up,
"She is." Her words were quiet. Not a warning, not yet. Just... it was simple. That was all there was to it.

"I'm glad. What is she like?"

"Come on, O. We talked enough about her at dinner."

Her name - what she did for a living - was she hot. That was what Octavia remembered discussing. Not: how does she make you feel - where do you think it's going - have you met her friends yet - when are you going to end it.

"Right."

"No, come on, I wanted to hear about you. Lincoln messaged me, or was it you from his phone?" Clarke started to reach into her bag for it before she shrugged. "Whatever. Anyway, tell me," she urged with a smile. "You got a promotion?"

"I did. Head trainer at the gym now. Thank you, thank you very much." She accepted Clarke's proud smile and applause with her normal ego. "Don't stop," she frowned and the laugh she pulled from her friend sounded like, felt like, a victory.

It was nice. It always was, spending time with Clarke. She was so good at making people forget they had asked her a question because she turned it into a story, one that made you laugh, or she answered with three words before she changed the subject, and Octavia noticed because she had heard Clarke doing it for three years now and she knew how it worked. But she had no doubt that everyone at the hospital loved Clarke, adored her, that her patients thought she was the sweetest happiest person they had ever come across, that the other interns thought she was gentle and helpful and that they knew her well.

It took a while, if anyone bothered to think about it, to understand that they hadn't even scratched the surface of her.

Octavia knew there was no way their friends would do it.

Jasper and Monty adored Clarke, they thought she was the 'coolest' and 'had been through a lot, let her be' and there was nothing they would ever do to hurt her. Bellamy cared but he was on Raven's side. Let Clarke do what she needed to do, who she needed to do.

"Hey. You alright?" Clarke tapped on the table, urged Octavia to talk to her with wide eyes. "You kinda drifted away there. Something wrong?" When Octavia bit her lip, Clarke nodded encouragingly.

"It's your neighbour," she said.

She didn't know if Clarke could feel it, the way she reacted. If she even knew that she had. But Octavia saw it all. The way her hands retreated and settled in her lap. Just shy of wrapping - protective - around her stomach. The way she licked at suddenly dry lips. The dipping of her eyebrows.

"What about her?"

The smile was the same. That always made Octavia stop short because she looked so much like the Clarke she knew but the smile wasn't right.

"Are you sure you're on the same page? It's great, really, but you know. This kind of thing." She
shrugged. "It can get messy, Clarke. I don't want you to get hurt."

"I know and I love you for it but really," Clarke laughed, a breezy easy laugh.

It didn't reassure Octavia.

Was that because of Clarke, though, or was it because of her? Because she didn't think that Clarke was moving on in the right way?

She wasn't sure she knew anymore.

"We're both adults and we're doing something that feels good. We're friends. It's all good." Clarke waved her hand a little, let the movement end around her water glass. Took a sip. Smiled lightly at Octavia over the edge of it. "Honest," she tacked on when Octavia didn't look convinced.

Octavia locked the sight of that smile in her mind.

Might be that she wouldn't see it again for a long time if this went south.

She said, "When was the last time you two talked about something other than sex? Did something other than sex?"

"We weren't really that kind of friend before," Clarke pointed out.

Clarke's lips whitened with the effort it took to not just up and leave because she knew where it was going, knew what Octavia thought of her, how Octavia would second guess her.

She knew, also, that Octavia needed to. She needed to be reassured.

Clarke was tired of it. She was tired of needing to reassure her friend, she just wanted to do and be and if Octavia couldn't deal with that...

Clarke smiled reassuringly at Octavia. She would do it again because she couldn't deny (as much as she might try to because it hurt, a lot) the fierce thump of love that pressed against her rib cage when she looked over at Octavia. "We watch TV, we talk. She lends me a book now and again." There was more to it, Octavia could see it. She wondered if Clarke knew her take away order, her favourite book, her actual favourite book and not the one that Lexa said was her favourite. She wondered how much Clarke really knew because as much as she wouldn't admit it, Octavia was sure that she loved this woman. Or she was very, very close to it. "But when you're as good as we are in bed, you don't really need to do much else," she laughed.

Octavia didn't laugh with her.

"You have to talk to her, Clarke."

The sudden toothiness of Clarke's smile was all sharp. But Octavia carried on because they both had things they needed to do - Clarke needed to reassure, Octavia needed to press because this time the reassurance wasn't enough.

"I know you've done this before but this is different and I'm worried that-"

"O," Clarke cut her off. Gently. "It's fine."

There was no room there for disagreement.

Clarke's hands were too stiff where they lay in her lap, her shoulders were too tight and turned out to
the side just slightly, eyes seeking out the exit.

Octavia knew their lunch date was over, that Clarke wasn't going to listen to another word from her, and she sighed.

Sunk back into her chair.

Considered calling Lincoln and asking if he wanted to join her for a smoothie on his lunch break.

"Sure Clarke," she said. "Whatever you say."

"Octavia."

"No, really. I get that you're putting your life together and I'm proud of you, I really am, because you're the only person I know who could get out of bed after it happened and you're the one that looked after all the rest of us even though he was your boyfriend."

"Don't."

"But you helped us and we want to help you know and that's what I'm trying to do when I say you need to move on." She refused to flinch at the hard glare Clarke threw at her, or the way Clarke snatched at her bag and pushed away from the table. She didn't stand. Not yet. "No one expects you to be okay, Clarke."

"Really? Because it seems-" Clarke puffed her breath out, shook her head quickly. "No. You know what? I am. I am okay, except for the fact that every time you think I'm making a bad decision you bring him up because you think I'm grieving or delusional or whatever. I am sorry that you don't think I'm making the right decisions. I am sorry that I'm not aiming for love or commitment and you think I'm losing out. I'm sorry that I make these choices for me," she snapped, "and not to make you feel better."

"And Lexa?" Octavia asked. She braced herself against the table because this was the last thing she had wanted, she didn't want it to end like this, but it was happening and she was going to have to go with it. (She didn't ask herself why she didn't tell Clarke, didn't say you love her don't fuck it up and leave it at that because she knew the answer and didn't like it.) "Does she know what she's getting into? because if she doesn't then you've made a decision there as well and when it goes to shit you'll have no one but yourself to blame."

"Oh the blame game, huh? Nice." Clarke huffed. "I, whatever Octavia. It's not going to end badly."

"Past experience begs to differ."

"Leave it alone." One last warning. "It's none of your business."

"You're my best friend, Clarke. It kind of is."

"Well how about," Clarke said in jerky words that matched her moments as she tossed a twenty on the table, "you work on you first. Maybe the fact that you are too much of a coward to tell your boyfriend that you want to get married? Hmm? Or maybe," she suggested, faux-thoughtful, "your issues about what happened that night? Maybe the fact that you can't get over your guilt that you stayed behind so you poke and you prod at my life to try and make yourself feel like you're helping me somehow. Maybe you think about those things first and then, best friend, then you can start on me. How's that?"

Clarke's lips twitched between a scowl and anger-pursed lips and finally, settling on flat and stern
pressed so tight the blood rushed out and left them start white, she strode out of the cafe.

Octavia watched her go.

She pressed Raven's number on speed dial, lifted her phone with a heavy hand. "Yeah, she's gone," she said. "probably coming your way."

"For what it's worth, O, I think you did the right thing."

"Yeah?"

After her speech earlier, that was the last thing Octavia had expected to hear.

"Yeah. I was wrong. You were right."

Octavia laughed quietly. She swiped at her cheeks carefully with the cuff of her sleeve but they were dry and she just blinked away any small amount of moisture. "Can I please get that in writing?"

"No, but you get the lifetime satisfaction of knowing that I said it." Raven paused. "She's in love with Lexa, isn't she?"

Octavia hummed. "I think so."

"You tell her that?"

"No."

"Right."

Octavia made out a faint drumming sound, imagined Raven's fingers moving in tandem, making that noise on her desk.

"I couldn't," Octavia said, "you know how she is."

"Yeah. How bad was it?"

"Oh you know." She shrugged weakly. "Somewhere between terrible and really terrible."

"Ouch. Sorry, O. I know that must've been hard. But hey, now I get to tell Clarke that I think you're right and she'll yell at me and we'll be in her shit house together." Octavia huffed a little laugh. "Makes you feel better, doesn't it?"

"A little, yeah."

"You're such a dickhead, Blake. Call you later."

//

Clarke appeared at Raven's apartment twenty minutes later, one hand a fist around the neck of a bottle, the other a fist knocking at her door.

"Please, do come right in," Raven drawled when Clarke strode past her and dropped onto the couch without so much as a by your leave or how are you. "Here, let me," she said when she saw Clarke struggling with the lid. She was clumsy with anger, or maybe it was hurt, or maybe it was fear, but Raven hoped it was anger because the last thing she and Octavia wanted to do was scare her back into silence.
Clarke swallowed a curse and offered up the bottle to Raven.

She had no intention of pouring Clarke a drink. Clarke knew it too and she didn't say a word when Raven put the bottle away in her pantry, top shelf, behind the fibre cereals.

The worst thing about Raven - or maybe it was the best thing, Clarke could never decide - was that she never started the conversation.

She waited.

She was a water.

She could wait a long time.

Raven sat down at her workbench, turned a little so she could quietly keep an eye on the woman who had laid herself down fully on the couch by that point, legs dangling over the arm of it. She turned a part she was working on over in her hand, grunted when she found the fault. The entire piece would have to be replaced and she jotted that down on her book, setting it aside to take into work. Wick could make something out of it, she had no doubt, but a faulty cylinder had no place in her workshop.

"Octavia told me I need to move on again," Clarke said up to the ceiling.

Raven grunted. Scrawled for a moment. Then, "What did you say?"

"I said I have." Clarke turned her head toward Raven, lifted her eyebrows and then let them drop again because she wanted to say 'of course' and 'that's obvious' but there was an annoying little feeling in her chest that said made it wasn't obvious and maybe it wasn't true at all and she didn't want to listen to it.

Raven nodded.

"I have," Clarke said again. The silence pricked accusingly at her.

"Okay, Clarke."

"You don't believe me?"

"No." Raven rubbed at her knee.

Clarke's eyes were drawn to the movement and she ripped her eyes away, back to the ceiling, back to the white wash ceiling, where there was nothing painful for her to see (except for everything, because she carried it with her always and the white ceiling was the perfect backdrop for it to play out and she let herself see it there because it was high above her and she couldn't make out the details of it like she could when she closed her eyes).

"Screw you."

"Can't move on from something like that, not like Octavia means. And she means well."

"Yeah, well." Clarke scowled. "It's shit."

"Yeah."

"Do you get this as well?"
"Nah. People tend to ask less questions when the answer is kinda obvious." She pulled her hand away from her knee and went back to work. "Yours is less obvious."

"I'm not feeling anything."

"That's kinda our point."

"Our point?" Clarke pushed up onto her elbows, frowned at Raven. "You two were talking about me this morning, weren't you?" Raven nodded. "Screw you," Clarke said again, but this time it was vehement and she was up and off the couch in another moment. "You're talking about me behind my back?"

"When else are we going to do it? You hardly ever talk to us properly anymore." Raven placed the gear down. Wiped her hands clean on her towel. She had to talk fast because Clarke's hand was on her bag and she was almost gone. "You can't keep pretending you don't feel anything, Clarke. That's bullshit. It's terrifying to let people in, I know, but you've got to try."

The door closed behind blonde and Raven sighed.

"Ask her on a date," she said lamely. Paused. "Lame," she said to herself before snorting. "Nice."

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Clarke's door slammed shut.

Loud.

Lexa tilted her head in confusion. She stared at the back of her own door, a small frown a line between her eyebrows. It was odd. Clarke never slammed her door, not really. It was one of the most incredibly annoying things about her, the way she never quite slammed her door.

But she had just done it.

Lexa eased the top of her computer down, left it where it was on her coffee table, and stood.

Clarke's door was unlocked, as per usual. Lexa made a note to talk to her about home security because she had a number of useful facts for just that purpose tucked away after she researched home intrusions and murders for her last book. But that would have to wait.

She walked right in, pushing the door open. She stopped. Because the Clarke she walked in on was standing in the middle of her living room, perfectly still, hands on head, those hands braced against her temples and she was breathing up to the roof.

That was not a Clarke that Lexa recognised.

She made to leave.

It didn't feel right, it felt like she had witnessed confession or something equally invasive, and Lexa made to leave. Tried to take a quiet step back but Clarke had left their last game of battleship on the ground and it rattled when the heel of her foot grazed against it.

Lexa froze, an apology leaping to up behind her teeth that she could fire off quickly. She was already preparing the first word, only to have it stutter and stop.

Because Clarke was turning to her with a smile and she could very easily forget the Clarke she had seen. That Clarke was smoothed away like it had never existed at all, all under the perfect of that bright smile.
"I'm sorry," Lexa said. "I have to finish my story, I just wanted to check that you were alright."
Clarke's head tilted invitingly, curious. "You slammed your door. I was checking that you weren't a
thief, you see, because you leave your door unlocked so often I thought-"

"What would you have done?"

"Pardon?" Lexa blinked at the interruption.

"If I were a thief," Clarke laughed. "You don't have a weapon."

"No." Lexa's eyes darting away from her, away from that smile and the way her neck looked when
she laughed. "But your apartment is a weapon in and of itself," she teased in that serious tone of hers
that mean she was only teasing a little. Clarke's apartment was a mess. "And I know how to
incapacitate a person."

"Really." Clarke pursed her lips. "Care to demonstrate?"

"No." Lexa crossed her arms. "I have to finish my work."

"Right, right, of course you do." Clarke took a step forward. "But I have work in two hours and I
need to shower before that so," she stepped forward so that her lips were by Lexa's ear and her hand
was light on Lexa's wrist, fingertips ever so lightly brushing over her breast, and her lips curved into
a delighted smile hearing Lexa's breath stopped in her chest. "You can go finish your story, if you
want. Or you can come join me."

She pulled back.

Lexa scowled.

A scowl was better, infinitely better, than a whimper.

"Better make up your mind," Clarke teased, absolutely definitely purposefully dragging her nails
down Lexa's chest when she pulled away, and then she was stripping off her shirt and working on
her pants before she was even in her bedroom doorway.

Lexa licked her lips.

She did have two more days to work on that story.

"Shit," she swore, because Clarke was doing terrible wonderful things to her, and she ran back to
lock her apartment door and dropped her keys into the bowl beside Clarke's keys and clicked that
lock too. She ran into Clarke's bedroom, slowed to a lazy walk but it did nothing to hide her want
when she bit at her lip instantly at the sight of Clarke waiting for her on her bed. "You knew I was
coming?"

"I had an inkling." She shrugged a shoulder, hair cascading off it in a ripple. Lexa stifled a groan.
"But now I know you'll definitely be coming."

"That was terrible."

"Thank you."

"Really," Lexa continued, closing the distance between them to drop a kiss on her shoulder.
"Really," and another on her neck, enjoying the way Clarke arched her head back, "really bad."

"Critique my work later," Clarke advised her. "Honestly. Writers," she breathed that admonishment,
rolling her eyes, and she laughed when Lexa sucked a reprimand into her collar.

//

Clarke hated the way her friends made her rethink this.

This, being her smiling up into the pillow she had smashed onto her face because Lexa was working some kind of magic with her head between Clarke's thighs. This, being the way Lexa changed tiny things about her - her, Clarke, always a thinker in fact and reason, in names of bones and the knowledge that arousal led to increased heart rate, pupil dilation, lubrication -until she faded into thinking in metaphor like she was seeing the stars and she never wanted to come down.

It wasn't like she was taking advantage of Lexa.

But, then again, it wasn't like there was anything special about what they had either.

There was...it was simple.

There was yes and there and no and other helpful words.

There were orgasms ("holy fuck, yes, right there Lexa") and there was a breakfast buddy.

There was nothing special about that. But it wasn't like she had pretended it was something that it wasn't. Lexa knew.

It was confusing, everything that she wanted to tell Octavia but couldn't because she didn't want to think about it herself. She wanted to tell Octavia she wasn't heartless - she could see it like an accusation, a worried one, were it was written all over Octavia's face - but if she said it, then she would feel it.

And maybe she wasn't ready for that just yet.

Wasn't ready to tell Octavia that Lexa's was the first face she thought of between shifts. Or that envy clawed at her when she thought about all the excess of life in Lexa because Clarke came back from work looking a wreck, feeling like a zombie, and there was Lexa always so, so, so ("oh, oh, oh") perfect and put together. Or that the envy faded away quickly because she was the one that got to unbraided that hair when Lexa pushed her down onto the bed and Clarke thought about that hair a lot, especially when her hands were in it, because it was so damn attractive and Clarke didn't want to think about it.

She didn't want to think about the way Lexa was so careful and restrained sometimes, face and body and hair, and that she was the one that got to untangle that, unbraided that, open it up and revel in it.

Or about how Lexa would come over to her apartment after her morning gym sessions and she would be finishing her braid post-shower wearing her most comfortable pair of jeans and her odd socks would be bright against Clarke's couch and Clarke would convince her to leave her hair out, or she would watch her braid it because Lexa was so careful about it and delicate and her fingers moved so quickly and it was such a Lexa thing to do and Clarke had never known someone like her before and she found almost every part of her so fresh and wonderful and lovely and she couldn't stop herself from seeing Lexa in the little girl with the broken arm and two braids, or the boy clinging to his mothers leg with eyes the same shade as Lexa's, or the old woman cradling a book so carefully in her hands just like Lexa would and Clarke saw her everywhere and that was new and something she really, really didn't want to think about.

But she couldn't stop.
Because Lexa braided her hair and ran her hands over it and over it again as she stared down at her computer screen and she would mutter to herself about the idiocy of the English language and the utter bullshit - "The utter bullshit, Clarke, absolute complete bullshit is coming out of me right now and if I weren't so angry I would be almost impressed by it", "By the bullshit?", "Yes, Clarke, by the enormous amount of bullshit, no I do not want you to kiss me I'm furious. Fine. One kiss" - and each frustrated stroke of her hand across her forehead and over her hair lifted little curls and strands out of her braid.

And it was the cutest thing Clarke had ever seen and she couldn't stand it.

Because then she would turn around and Lexa had let her hair out and it was the most gorgeous sight and she would play with it as often as she could and if Lexa thought it was weird, she never said anything - or, well, she did but Clarke had told her before that if she wanted her to stop all she had to do was say the word and Lexa would lift her lips up into a tiny smile and say nothing at all.

But Clarke couldn't think about any of those things.

They didn't mean anything.

She could appreciate someone, she could appreciate Lexa, and it didn't have to mean anything more than that.

It didn't mean that she was heartless.

It just meant that she wasn't, that she, that this didn't mean anything.

Clarke twisted her hands into those curls and pushed Lexa right to where she wanted her and Lexa, no, she didn't seem to mind at all.

Clarke was right not to feel anything.

Fuck Raven. Fuck Octavia.

This was good.

She didn't care.

That was the agreement.

Lexa didn't care either.

//

Lexa cared too much.

She had been aware of the fact for seventeen days and it was a point of contention between her and Anya. Sunday morning gym session - Gus loved it because Anya rolled out of bed and he could sleep, blissful, for an extra two hours before she returned - was both exercise and therapy.

"Drop her," Anya told her. Lexa didn't reply. "Fine. Tell her you are enamoured by her and then, when she tells you that she doesn't feel the same, then drop her."

"Thank you for the help, Anya. Very encouraging."

"Yeah, we both know I don't do encouraging so drop your sarcasm on the ground and step on it. I'm the mean bitchy friend that can tell you harsh truths to your face and you just have to suck it up. Got
"Have I got that you've been watching too much TV? Yes."

"Again, sarcasm. Floor. Step." Anya leaned over the front of Lexa's treadmill and pressed the up button, speeding it up with a pleasant smile as she covered the dial. "Look, she's nice and totally hot and I get that. But she asked you for a no strings attached, booty call, fuck buddy arrangement and that's what you've given her. Has she even done a tiny bit of that ambiguous shit? Taken you on a date? Let you sleep over?"

"I sleep over," Lexa told her. She was starting to sweat, unused to the speed Anya had put her on, but was too stubborn to say anything about it. "But no. Nothing ambiguous. It's the same as it was before."

"There you go." Anya shrugged. "She's not that into you. Rachel, on the other hand, is very into you."

"Rachel?"

"A girl I met."

"And by met, you mean?"

"Purposefully sought out for a date for you. I've already slipped her card into your gym bag, you're welcome."

Anya was being helpful, in her own brusque way, but she also had zero patience for listening to Lexa, doe-eyed and wistful about her neighbour in the most minimal way possible, telling her about how she fell for Clarke.

Or about how ashamed she was because she knew the rules before they had begun, because she had agreed to the 'this means nothing' and 'we are friends' and how feeling the way she did came almost as a betrayal.

If Clarke knew, Lexa thought, she would be appalled.

But no, that wasn't fair.

She knew Clarke.

Clarke would be gentle about it but she would tell Lexa in no uncertain terms that from the very beginning it didn't mean anything. And when it was all said and done it would be Lexa with the fingerprint bruises on her hips and every friendly smile Clarke gave her when they passed in the halls would burn too hot and Clarke? Clarke would be fine. Free. Flawless.

God, how had she let it happen?

(She knew how. Exactly. Or, rather, when.)

(The how was a mystery - that was what love was, dare she say the word.)

(She didn't.)

'When' was a Thursday. Eighteen days ago.

‘When’ was after Clarke had come back from work early that morning, dragged herself into the
shower. She had come out smelling of body wash and wringing her hair and her feet made little wet
prints from her bedroom into the kitchen and when Lexa took her coffee over to her, she almost
slipped, grumbled when Clarke had laughed and reached out to steady her.

‘When’ was Clarke sliding her hand up Lexa’s arm, putting her coffee down only half drunk, and
sliding her hand the rest of the way up to her cheek, fingers brushing over the muscle there and down
to her jaw, and examining her with a dark curious look that Lexa wanted to know about because
what was she, who was she, standing wordless in a kitchen with someone she barely knew –
occupation didn’t count, the name of one friend didn’t count, not when she didn’t know how she got
the scar on the inside of her elbow or how she felt about French fries – and looking at her like there
was something beautiful about the angle of her jaw and absolutely everything else.

‘When’ was the slow smile and the slow retreat to the bedroom and the kisses pressed lightly into
that jaw and along it and over her chin and, when Lexa asked her to pretty please hurry up because
you have been standing in just a towel and I am very much ready, dropping a kiss onto her nose
because she had Lexa underneath her and was in no rush.

‘When’ was the way Clarke unrepentantly forced the breath out of Lexa and replaced it with
murmurs of adoration and pleadings and laughter.

‘When’ was the way Clarke sat up against the headboard and told Lexa that her friends had bought a
puppy the other day at least she thought it was a puppy but it was near enough about the size of a car
so she wasn’t sure and she smiled a bright proud smile because Lexa laughed quietly at the image
and looked at her like it was one of her favourite sounds.

‘When’ was Clarke stretching and making obscenely pleased noises at the relaxing of tension
because she knew that Lexa would sigh and roll over and pull her on top of her and kiss her when
she slipped her fingers inside and made Clarke come again because obviously if she still had energy
to tease her, they weren’t quite finished.

‘When’ was Clarke resting her head on Lexa’s stomach and asking her about her favourite colour,
her favourite animal, her favourite way to travel, all those mundane questions and listening intently to
each of the answers, and the way Clarke’s eyes took on a mischievous tint and she kissed across
Lexa from hip to hip and scraped her teeth on that sensitive spot when she liked an answer – Lexa
embellished, used her story telling to the best of her ability because Clarke’s fingers were inching
higher up her thigh and she liked where that was going – and when she thought an answer was
boring – that was when Lexa started to lose track of what she was saying, mind too intent on those
fingers – she pursed her lips and blew a loud raspberry over Lexa’s belly button and laughed and
laughed as the woman squirmed beneath her.

‘When’ was Clarke snoring lightly, the covers bunched around her leaving Lexa cold on her side of
the bed and mildly annoyed, and the moonlight or maybe a street light cutting a path in through the
dark to illuminate her, dust her with gold, and Lexa had never thought of herself as particularly
poetic. A writer, yes, but she’s always leaned towards the stark cold prose. She made people shiver
and look for something to hide behind but there was nothing but kill and slice and too hard love and
humanity opened up and peeled back and exposed for what it was: dangerous, often deadly, often
devastating. Sometimes beautiful as well. But she wasn’t one to write poetry. She liked poetry. But
she didn’t think of herself as poetic, didn’t go out looking for, for fingertips laced with narcotics that
would make her crave skin against skin, for eyes that sparkle like heavens or deep green ancient
forests, for a kiss that would send her spiralling in a whirl, or anything like that. Lexa is practical and
looks for clever and capable and someone who does their washing twice a week and has a bucket list
and a to do list. She looks for someone normal and human and Lexa can’t help but think of herself as
stupid because she is the one who is normal and human and she should have known that is why she
was made into a writer because she’s supposed to be the one that tells the story of the star falling out of the sky and turning into a woman and the disaster of loving her.

It was going to be a disaster.

Lexa knew it then and she knew it even when she followed Clarke into her bedroom each time after that.

But Sunday morning gym session ended and Lexa went home and Clarke's door slammed shut behind her and she witnessed a Clarke she had never seen before and it was terrifying, utterly, because Clarke was made of shaking insides and still outsides, and Lexa knew that there were parts of Clarke she had no idea had even existed. And that happened with everyone, Lexa knew that, but there was something about it, about her, that told Lexa she didn't know the half of it. Of Clarke.

That the woman was a mystery and Lexa let a smile and the lure of a bed and a kiss and the smell of body wash lingering around her to make her forget but in the afternoon, when Clarke had gone to work and Lexa was left alone to tug her jeans on and make the short trek back to her place, she remembered and she knew that Anya was right.

Clarke was not hers.

She was very, very afraid that she might be Clarke's.

It was that thought that had her reaching for the small white card in her gym bag, the one she had discarded without a thought (with one thought, rather, and that had been Clarke), and she turned it over in her fingers, tapped it with a sharp sound against her kitchen counter.

Rachel, she remembered Anya had called her.

She picked up her phone.

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Lexa heard Clarke loudly closing the door after her. Woke up, as usual. Went back to sleep.

The next morning, she went to the gym.

Listened to Anya rant about her client.

Didn't mention Clarke.

She bashed out - quite literally - a few plot points with Anya before they parted ways, lunch booked for the next free weekend.

She saw that Clarke's door was an inch open when she came home and she paused, hand on her own doorknob. After a moment, bottom lip caught between her teeth, she pushed her door open, locked it behind her, and stepped into the shower.

She had work to do and she didn't need to be thinking about Clarke all day.

She settled into place, making herself comfortable, and placed her hands over her keyboard.

She checked the brief she had been given for the short piece.

Read an example.
It infuriated her that she couldn’t retain a single word that she read, that she couldn’t for the life of her remember a single word that she had read, because the thought that lingered all day persistently was that Clarke never knocked on her door and the feeling that sunk heavy in her chest was resignation.

And then hurt.

Because she is more into what they had than Clarke was – and she knew that from the start so she’s angry at herself, not Clarke – and it hurts.

She wondered how long she’d be able to go without thinking of Clarke. Hopefully forever, at some point, because what they had was going to end soon enough.

She might as well get a head start.

Lexa didn’t come over even though Clarke pretty much almost broke a lamp coming in the night before.

She knew that Lexa heard it. There was no way that she hadn’t. Once, Clarke had stubbed her toe against the end of her bed and Lexa had grumbled at her the next morning that if she was going to wake her up then she had to either swear properly or not at all, because Clarke hopping, clutching her foot, and murmuring repeatedly "frick, frick sticks, oh mother fridding bloomer curtain sticker fricks" was sad and annoyed her.

And that was quiet.

So there was no way that Lexa hadn’t heard the crash and the fumblings as Clarke did her best to keep the lamp from falling fully to the ground. She never came over though, so Clarke guessed she had work to do and she heated up her leftovers, ignored the excess that Lexa usually took, and she ignored the yawning space on the couch when she tucked herself into the corner of it and called her mother.

Which was, in hindsight, a mistake.

A big one.

But her apartment was empty and at the time it felt like a good idea to fill it with something, to make it feel like she was doing something. It was about the time that she and Lexa would turn on the television and then decidedly Not Talk so, with that off the list, and Octavia and Raven in the shit house, Clarke didn't know quite what to do with herself.

"Clarke, it's so nice to hear your voice," her mother had started off, and then moved immediately into discussing the last surgery she had.

Both of them were in medicine, so both of them had to be equally interested in talking about it all the time.

Clarke remembered suddenly why she never called her mother but it was too late to pretend that her apartment had been suddenly engulfed in flames so she put the phone on speaker and dropped it onto the couch next to her and contributed where she had to with grunts and the occasional yes or no.
When her mother rambled on about three inch incisions and making sure that the anaesthesiologist didn't give the patient the wrong dosage, Clarke began to drift off.

She wished that Lexa were sitting at the end of the couch. Clarke would make faces at her and she thought for a moment about the smile that Lexa would give her.

The one where her lips curled up because she'd be reading a book and Clarke would be distracting and Lexa would look up for just a second to shake her head and roll her eyes and when she returned to her book, there it would be.

Small and safe in the corner of her lips.

Clarke always wanted to capture that smile.

With pencil and paper - no, not like that.

Not anymore.

No, with her own lips. She wanted to catch it with her own lips because sometimes Lexa reminded her very much of Wendy Darling with her very own secret kiss, the one that brought Peter Pan back to life, tucked there into the corner. It was cheesy and stupid, but when she kissed Clarke oh so gently - the other kisses were excellent too, of course - but there was something about the way she did it so gently sometimes that made Clarke feel like she was fizzing and popping and like she could fly and that, she supposed, would make her Peter Pan.

Octavia would be Tinkerbell. Cute. Small. Dangerous. Fiercely protective. She didn't want to think about Octavia, it made that warmth flood her chest again like molten gold, one part painful, one part wonderful, and she choked it down because Octavia was a Grade A Jerk and she didn't want to think about her.

Monty and Jasper would be Michael and John. Obviously.

Bellamy would probably be Hook. Not that he and Clarke were nemeses, but more because his birthday was coming up and he was the vainest person Clarke knew. She remembered that she had caught him looking for grey hairs in the bathroom mirror at their family dinner (he was only twenty-seven but apparently it was never too early) and she snorted at the thought of the face he might make if she teased him for being 'old, alone, and done for'.

She passed the sound off for a cough and listened to her mother tell her to gargle and rest if she wanted to stay at the top of her game.

It never, ever, ever occurred to her to think about what Peter Pan meant to Wendy. Or what Wendy meant to Peter Pan, because Lexa? And her? Her and Lexa? They weren't anything like them. Peter Pan was fiction, fully fictional, and everyone knew that when he took her home and watched her grow up and old and without him, his heart broke though he took other children with him back to the island where no one grew up or old, where everything was always fun.

So Clarke wasn't Peter Pan.

And just because Lexa had a hidden kiss tucked away in the corner of her lips it didn't mean that she could bring her back to life - fiction - and it didn't mean that they could fly - also fiction - and it wasn't like she belonged to Lexa or like Lexa belonged to her or like her heart would break if Lexa turned away from her because that wasn't what they were and that wasn't something that happened in the real world.
Not to Clarke.

What *did* happen in the real world was cold toes and Clarke wished that Lexa were there with her, because her mother was still talking and who knew she could do on at such length about a single procedure?

She tuned in with a "that's fascinating" when her mother changed to talking about suture patterns. Thought some more about Lexa, and how she could big her toes under Lexa's leg and poke her tongue out at her when Lexa made to complain, point at the phone as reprimand to hold her tongue gosh you are so rude Lexa, trying to talk over my mother of all people, and then perhaps they would try to very quietly make out and probably one of them (Lexa, definitely) would moan and alert her mother to what was happening.

But Lexa wasn't there and Clarke's toes were cold peeking out from the too short blanket and she felt strangely alone by the time her mother made it to the courtesy questions that heralded the end of the call.

"And how are you?" her mother said.

Clarke took a moment to answer. Chewed at the inside of her cheek for a second before she scooped up the phone. "Actually, mum, is it okay if I call you back?"

"Oh. Yes, of course."

"Thanks mum. I just have something I need to do."

It didn't take long for her to dress and she pushed down the small flutters in her stomach, told herself sternly that this was nothing, it meant nothing, and she rapped on Lexa's door.

There was a movie showing - no. Hey Lexa, there is this movie on TV- no. A movie is showing - *no*. Eh, she'd wing it.

But the door didn't open and Clarke glanced down at her watch - weird. Lexa was usually home on Tuesday's, but maybe she was out shopping or something.

She waited a moment, rocking back on her heels, before she shrugged and returned to her couch.

At least she had socks on then.

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Things changed.

Slowly. But they changed and when Lexa turned her down for the first time since they started whatever it was they had, Clarke blinked.

Then shrugged.

"Oh, okay."

Lexa had smiled at her and asked her to pass the remote.

"I won't be able to finish this marathon," she told her when they were halfway into the episode. Lexa's eyes were fixed on the screen. "I have a date."

"Oh?" Clarke nudged her with her toes. "With who? What's their name?"
"Her name is Rachel." Lexa brought her bowl up to her lips and she didn't look at Clarke as she carefully used her chopsticks to eat her breakfast. "It's our first date," she said.

Clarke nodded, smiling. She paused for a second. "Oh, does that mean we should stop?"

"I think so." Lexa was very careful about it, putting the words between them with a little frown. "I want to figure out if I like her or not and you are very distracting." Her lips quirked up into a smile.

Clarke didn't notice that it took a second too long for them to do it.

"That's true," she said, snuggling into her pillow. "Okay cool. Text me when it's done. I want to hear all about it."

And she did.

She listened to Lexa tell her about the bookshop Rachel met her at - it had dark wooden shelves and it smelled sweet, like macaroons, and they had said their hellos and Lexa laughed a small laugh when she told Clarke that she was nervous and she mostly listened to Rachel talking and it was lovely, it really was, she was a teacher and she was nice.

It didn't start to be painful until about three weeks in, when Clarke came back from work and Lexa was out on yet another date and she had no one and no where.

"Please, come right in," Raven said, rolling her eyes because of course Clarke just carried right on into her home as per usual. She had to hide a smile. It was nice to see that Clarke. But she'd never say it. "What do you want, Griffin? The Tweedle Twins are over and I'm kicking their butts."

Two hands poked up over the back of the couch, waved a little.

"Hey!"

"Hey!" Jasper sat up a little. "Oh, Raven, we un-paused the game so we can kill you when you respawn cool have fun have a good chat take as long as you need you two!"

Raven growled in his direction. Crossed her arms. "Come on, Griffin, out with it. Quick. I need to go murder a nerd," she said, raising her voice.

The little eep she received brought a quick smile to both of the girls faces.

"Lexa," Clarke said, wiping her smile away when she remembered why she was there. "She has a date and I think," her hand hovered somewhere over her chest and Raven forgot to fucking breathe because was Clarke about to say what she hadn't said in years? Was she about to admit that she was uncomfortable or longing for something - anything that suggested she still had feelings and she wasn't bottling them up like some fine wine that would absolutely trash the brave soul who took a sip. "I need to hook up with someone. I have some serious sexual tension going on and I remembered that you have like a little black book thing going on."

"Actually I will have you know that I've been sleeping with the same guy for the last two months, thank you very much." Raven sniffed and accepted Clarke's uncertain congratulations (?) with a nod. "Whatever. Yeah, I guess I have someone." Octavia would kill her. This was about the time when Octavia would say they should have a talk about feelings - and sure she might be right but she wasn't the one with the Tweedle Twins killing her each respawn in increasingly annoying ways in her peripherals - so Raven ignored the little voice in her head that told her it wasn't a good idea and she pulled out her phone. "He's nice," she said. "Polite. Respectful. Can talk your ear off about aerodynamic shit if that's the kind of dirty talk you're into."
Clarke grinned and copied the number down. "Thanks, Raven." She hugged her friend tight before she ducked out the front door again.

"Ah crap." Raven checked her score - there was no coming back from that - and she abandoned the game to call Octavia. "Hey, O. So I kind of just facilitated a hook up between Clarke and one of my guys."

Octavia squawked. Raven dealt with that as best she could and apologised more than she wanted to.
"You know, I didn't have you pegged as a literature snob, Lex."

Lexa's hand stopped still where it was, reaching for the last brownie. Her eyes narrowed. "Excuse me? Snob?"

"That's what I said." Rachel dropped onto the couch, crossed her legs underneath her. She set her drink on the coffee table and, when she did, her eyes settled on the brownie. Just for a moment but long enough. When her eyes met Lexa's, they both knew what was about to go down.

And what the stakes were.

Rachel smiled, as pretty and innocent as a flower.

"I'm not a snob." Lexa pulled away from the plate. She turned, shuffled back so her back was against the arm of the couch. She brought her socked feet up to rest on the couch cushion between them, knees bent and raised as a barricade. She needed to be in a position to defend her stance on literature - and the besmirching of her character - and it helped her to structure her thoughts if she was able to defend herself literally. Not, she thought, that she would ever have to defend herself against Rachel.

With Clarke, there had always been that feeling of soon, like she was waiting to jump her and press her against the nearest surface, the anticipa- but no. Lexa blinked that thought away and took in instead Rachel sitting opposite her.

She was different from C- she was her own person, and a very delightful, kind, and lovely person at that.

That was all there was to it.

She was colourful and bright and her smile was always in her eyes but slow to her lips. Lexa liked that. It spread across her face like the sunrise haemorrhaged across the sky each morning. Though, perhaps that was too violent an analogy for her.

Lexa cleared her throat. "I'm not a snob. I just think that they're students and they should be reading the classics. They're important."

Rachel shrugged. "They don't apply as much anymore. Contemporary lit is the way to go."

"Don't apply? How could they not apply? They're classics." Lexa's hands jerked in a gesture of surprise, shock, confusion, dismay at the suggestion. "They're classics," she repeated. "They deal in the extremes of human morality. Good and evil. Human versus beast. The lines that should never be crossed. Deed and consequence. The question of humanity." She balled her fist and knocked it against her knee like a gavel, lending her statement a certain finality.

Or so she thought.

But Rachel just laughed quietly and shook her head. "Lex, I am so completely uninterested in the way humanity is examined by stuffy old white men. The stories kids read about now should be exciting. For them. They should be," she grimaced, trying to find the right words for her thoughts.
Her hands opened and closed, grasping for them. "Bold," she settled on. "Broad, wild, dramatic, interesting. Maybe even terrifying. But most importantly, relevant." She leaned forward, eyes shining. Lexa nodded, encouraging her to continue. "The classics try so hard to be important - well, they're books. People try to make them important. But it keeps us in the past, rehashing the same questions. The kids should read stories about hope and possibility, medical advancements, artistry, space travel -"

"There is a thing called science fiction, you know."

"Shut up," Rachel laughed. "I know that. But that's my point. Why are the classics being pushed in school when we can read sci-fi? I won't dispute that the classics are classic for a reason, there's a whole system in place there about literature, but they can be overly moralistic and misogynistic. You have to admit that." Lexa hesitated. Rachel pressed on. "Alright. Name one classic off the top of your head with a female protagonist."

"Pride and Prejudice."

"Okay, fine, that's a good one," Rachel admitted. "But it's still problematic. I mean, good book and all but I think as a society we're trying to move past the whole 'women have to look pretty and act right in order to find someone to marry and be respected in society' schtick. Right?"

"It's about more than that though. Did you know that Austen's original title was First Impressions?"

"Makes sense."

"Right?" Lexa smiled widely. "It's about...it's about a person's subjective interpretation of events and people and about, well, prejudice. About misunderstandings and moving past them to find in someone else something that you didn't expect. About opening yourself up, making yourself vulnerable and losing those prejudices - to find that they are people too. Also," Lexa shrugged, "it's about the truth universally acknowledged that a man in possession of a fortune must be in want of a wife."

"Cute."

"Thanks."

"But quotes aren't going to shift me on this. Name another."

"Another?"

"With a female protagonist. And not Jane Austen again, okay?"

"To Kill a Mockingbird. Scout."

Rachel frowned. "Okay, that's another good one."

Lexa grinned. "See? The classics are alright."

But Rachel was already shaking her head. "That's two books, Lex. Two. And none of them have good queer representation -"

"D.H. Lawrence had some pretty heavy homosexual undertones in Women in Love."

"Over sexualised, never confirmed, and that was for the sole reason of making his relationship with his friend the all consuming relationship in his life. More important than his wife. The only thing I
got out of that book was that men are always more important than women."

Lexa paused. "That's...actually pretty much what it's about."

"I know. So. Any others? Or are those the only female represented classics you can think of?"

"What about Dracula? Mary was a protagonist. Discovered her husband's letters," she ticked off on her hand, "figured out more or less what happened to him, tracked down Van Helsing, helped his team, a"

Rachel clicked her fingers, pointed at Lexa. "Exactly. Brought it, helped them, sat in the corner sorting mail, was left behind. She was barely a character at all."

"That's a bit harsh. She might not be a hero we are expecting today but she had a lot of value."

"But that's my point, Lex. She's not the hero we expect today. In contemporary literature, we can get that. We can get all kinds of women - good women, strong women, scared, clever, manipulative, terrifying, horrible women, without them being reduced to a monster like Lucy to show that what she does is bad, or caught up being the perfect angelic lady. Young girls, young women - and men as well - they need to see women being more than a plot device."

Lexa knew they were in the midst of an argument but she couldn't help but smile. She thought it was alright that she was, though, given that Rachel was smiling too.

"No, okay, you have a point." Rachel nodded, placating Lexa with her words. "Classics are good. They're good stories and sure, they have their issues, but they are good stories.

"Thank you."

"However," she continued, "they have one major failing."

"Oh? And what is that?"

"They aren't applicable."

"Not this again."

"Hear me out, you jerk!" Rachel slapped Lexa's knee lightly and laughed when Lexa retaliated, nudging Rachel's foot with her own and glaring. "They aren't! They aren't exciting and kids aren't going to be interested. Look, when you were a kid did you pick up a book and it made you go wow?" Lexa nodded. "That's what I want for the kids."

"Which is why you want your preschool children to read contemporary literature?"

"Of course. Eventually, I mean. For now, Mem Fox is good enough. But when they grow up and get their hands on bigger books, I want them to have something they can relate to, something from this century."

"The language isn't so difficult, even in the older classics. It takes a little time to get acquainted but isn't it worth it in the end?"

"That's not what I'm talking about." Rachel tilted her head to the side, narrowed her eyes. A sly smile spread over her lips. "You don't have anything left to say in defence of your classics, do you?"

She shrugged. "Good food and good company have lulled me into a stupor. If I were clear-headed..."
"Right. You would've ended this conversation with some great inarguable point. Something like that?" Rachel snorted at the idea.

"Something like that."

"You're a jerk, Lex."

The words, fondly spoken, made Lexa grin. "True."

"I'm right in this case and you're going to sit there and let me finish. Okay?" Lexa dipped her head in a nod. "Good. Now, where was I?"

"Relatable fiction."

"Yes! Thank you. So." Her eyes darted up to the ceiling as she recollected her thoughts. "I want them to pick up a book and get that feeling. Like they're absorbed in it. Fascinated. Don't get me wrong. I like the classics," she said again. "But think about how amazing it will be if they get to read about the kinds of ideas from the classics in a way that is applicable to them now. Do you know how scary it can be for some kids to have to read? At all, I mean. The idea of reading a page can fill a kid with panic. And it's twice, no, probably ten times as scary to read when you're confronted by those old fashioned words and ideas and tools and all that stuff that keeps bringing them out of the story. Each time they come across something unfamiliar, they get removed from the world of it. It's like a reminder that they don't belong. So I don't blame the kids that get frustrated and put the classics down because they don't feel they belong to that world. Kids already feel like that - why should they keep trying to read about Dorian Gray and his portrait when they could read about someone staring into their mirror and no longer recognising the person there, or switching places with them, or having their face changed by some kind of medical procedure? Or taking a selfie and feeling like they're half of themselves or, or whatever. I'm not the writer here," she laughed. "I'm sure you could come up with a better example."

"No, I understand. You're quite right."

"It makes sense, doesn't it? That the way kids tackle the big ideas should be on familiar grounds?"

Lexa sat still for a moment, considering.

Rachel waited for her verdict, fingers sifting through the soft material of her skirt, folding it into pleats and smoothing it out again.

Finally, Lexa nodded. A smile tugged at her lips. "Yes. Those are very good points."

"Yes!" Rachel patted her own back before she could stop herself. She groaned. "Preschool," she explained. "Force of habit to give myself a pat on the back for good work."

"Of course." Lexa smiled wider. Her smile dropped abruptly. "And I think you get a brownie as well."

"Why yes, yes I do."

"Take it," Lexa sighed, closing her eyes as though in pain. And there was an element of pain, loss - the brownies were so damn good. Pain and regret and loss. She heard Rachel move, the whisper of her skirt against the fabric of the couch, but when she spoke again, the other woman was considerably closer than Lexa had expected.

"What if I have a different reward in mind?"
Lexa opened her eyes. Swallowed hard when she saw that Rachel was in front of her, kneeling on the centre cushion. Her right hand moved to touch Lexa's left knee, keeping her balanced. In her left hand was the brownie.

"What kind of reward?"

Lexa licked her lips.

"Helfsies." Rachel suggested. She held the brownie out. "And then we make out."

Lexa pretended to think about it for all of half a second before nodding. "You drive a hard bargain. I accept."

//

On the other side of town, Clarke slipped out of an unfamiliar bed and looked for her clothes. Her underwear and jeans were on the floor nearby and she scooped them up, tossed them onto her side of the bed.

First, and fully for the purpose of teasing the man still in the bed, she dealt with her hair. She ran her fingers through it quickly, tilted her head back, stretched. She grinned at the sound of his shaky intake of breath.

"Damn. You're evil. You know that, right?"

Clarke shrugged. Twisted her hair up into a loose bun. "Yes. Have you seen my bra?"

"Bathroom." His eyes fixed on her hips and lower, then her ass as she stepped into her underwear. "I think. Maybe behind the couch."

She rolled her eyes. "You're no help at all."

"Who said I was trying to help?" He - what was his name? It started with P, she was pretty sure. Phillip, maybe, or Peter. Paul? He grinned, tucked his hands under his head on the pillow. "I'm enjoying the view." He was all about fairness, though, and allowed her the same opportunity. He threw his sheets down to the end of his bed and stood, uncovered, before strutting around like he owned the place.

Which, technically, he did.

It was his apartment.

But what was written into the cocky lift of his chin and the half-smile and the way he sauntered over to her was an arrogance that Clarke had found incredibly attractive when he was flirting with her. It was a little less so when he wrapped his arms loosely around her waist and tried to get her to stay when she really, really had to leave.

She smiled but pushed on his chest, getting him to take a step back. "I have to go," she said, not unkindly. "I'll check in the bathroom, you check behind the couch?"

"There's nothing I can do to persuade you to stay?"

She rewarded the question - it was, after all, nice to know that she was wanted - with a quick kiss and then a second, lingering one. She patted his chest and turned him toward the bedroom door. "Duty calls, I'm afraid. I have dinner with my friends and I'm bringing the dessert."
"I could drive you. Give us another half hour or so," he suggested from the other room. She stopped still. Closed her eyes. Did her best to ignore the sudden too-quick pounding of her heart.

"We aren't really at that stage yet," she called back, voice steady.

"We're not?"

"It's only been three hours."

"Ah, but what a glorious three hours it has been." He was behind her, leaning against the bathroom door, bra dangling from his finger. "We have a connection," he said, mostly teasing.

"And what a lovely connection it's been." She kissed him again. Indulged herself in a drift of her fingers over his abs. "But I," she said, "will be late for dinner if I don't leave now." She pulled her bra on, turned, batted her eyelashes at him over her shoulder. "Do me up?" Clarke could do it herself, of course. But he pressed hot kisses with a hint of stubble to the back of her neck and across her shoulders and that was nice. It felt nothing like soft fingers tracing words into her spine when she thought Clarke was asleep.

Clarke blinked and pulled away from him.

"You have my number," he reminded her when she pulled her shirt on and collected her bag.

"Yes I do. How do I look? And if you dare say something like ravishing..." she threatened, narrowing her eyes.

"You look great."

"Good."

"And thoroughly ravished." He ducked her annoyed slap. When he grinned, all white teeth, and laughed, a deep pleasant sound, she was glad of her choice in company. He was exactly what she looked for in a partner: attractive, reasonably intelligent, quick with the banter. Was it really foreplay if there was no banter? Clarke couldn't be sure but she didn't think so. "Get out of my house," he laughed when she tried to slap his shoulder again. "Don't hit me." He nudged her toward the door. "Get out or you'll be late."

"Yeah yeah." She threw the door open but let herself be dragged back into one final kiss. She indulged him, deepening the kiss. Brushed her thumb along the strong line of his jaw. One hand on the muscles of his back, smiling when they bunched and flexed underneath. He felt nice, good.

But there was a face, a feeling, that kept trying to insert itself there in her mind between them and Clarke sighed. She pulled away. "I-"

"Have to go," he finished for her. "I know."

"Alright. See you round, stud." She lifted her bag onto her shoulder again and ran down the stairs to the bus stop.

Her phone was full of messages and voicemails from Octavia - "you'd better be coming tonight" - "Bell is cooking" - "tell her I'm - shut up Bell I already told her- it's going to be amazing - Bell shut up I am talking here" - "anyway don't forget that you have to bring dessert and Raven says that if you don't get her some ice cream she's...what? okay, she's going to do something creative with her spoon. What could you oh my god don't act it out for me ew!"
Clarke rolled her eyes. Her friends were disasters but after three weeks of not spending any extended time with anyone who genuinely liked and knew her, she found that she was looking forward to the dinner. True, it usually ended in someone drinking too much and crashing on Octavia's couch, a lot of yelling, some uncomfortably prying questions, and too much food but it was also true that they were good people and Clarke knew she was lucky to have them.

She'd been thinking about it a lot, actually.

How much she let them know about how she felt. She snorted at the thought. How much did she let herself know about how she felt? About how much she loved them, how much she would do for them. And if she could let herself feel it for just a moment -

"Miss? Your stop, miss?"

Clarke looked up at the softly spoken words. The bus driver was looking right at her. She let out a small "oh" and hurried to grab her things, rushing to the front of the bus. "I'm really sorry, thank you so much."

He smiled, opened the doors. "Saw you weren't paying attention. You alright?"

"Yeah, yes, thank you again."

"Alright then. Hope you have a good day."

"You too. Thank you again," she called to him as she stepped off, and he lifted two fingers from his steering wheel in a small wave.

She hitched her bag higher onto her shoulder and held her elbow tight to the side of it as she jogged to her apartment. No time for thinking, only barely enough time to run up the stairs - a break after the first flight, a breathless thanks that she was only on the second floor - and unlock her door. Shower. Dress. Change her bag, grab her purse. Bother with her hair? No, leave it down. Octavia would probably want to play with it anyway. She was pulling on her shoes as she locked the door and, when she turned, she saw her.

"Lexa," she said.

Those green eyes met hers and Clarke's lips fell open - they tingled and Lexa was just looking at her. She wondered what it would feel like to kiss Lexa again. It was a bad thought, a wrong thought, because Lexa had a girlfriend now and Clarke shouldn't be thinking like that so with a small shake of her head she banished the thought and smiled at Lexa instead.

"Hi."

"Hello, Clarke." She said her name just as she always had and Clarke couldn't press down the happy smile that it elicited. It felt right. It also felt too long in coming - what two? three weeks? Just too long. "How are you today?"

"Good, good." Clarke dropped her keys into her bag. "You?"

"I'm well, thank you."

Clarke's smile shifted to amused and her laugh huffed out her nose. "Lexa, I know we haven't hung out lately but this doesn't have to be awkward. We had sex a couple of times." More than a couple. "What's the big deal?"
Lexa stared at her for a moment before she turned to unlock her apartment door.

"Lexa?"

"No, you're right. There isn't a need to be awkward," she said. Clarke didn't comment that she said it to the door and not to her face. "It wasn't a big deal. I'm sorry," she added quickly. "But I have to cut this short. I have some work to do and-" She gestured to Clarke's clothes, not casual as they usually were when Clarke had time off work. "You are going out?"

"Yeah, to my friends place." Clarke checked her phone. "Crap. I'm going to be late. Hey." She bit her lip. "We should have coffee," she suggested. "It's been ages since we hung out."

"It has."

Neither of them mentioned that was Lexa's doing, or perhaps Rachel's.

"So, let's not go that long again, yeah?"

Lexa opened her door and gave her a small nod. "Have a good night, Clarke."

//

It only occurred to Clarke some time later, when she was picking out a cake to take for dessert, that Lexa's nod might not have been a yes at all.

"Okay, okay, wait. Are you two going on a second date?" Octavia wanted to know. "What's he like?"

"First, mm, I'm not sure that I would call what happened a date. Second," Clarke turned her spoon in her hand, hesitated as she looked for the best place to take her next mouthful. "He's twenty-eight, a Capricorn, he's into soccer and chess and martial arts and foreign films, he's got a degree in forestry, and he has a fear of mushrooms." She tried to contain her teasing grin but Octavia saw the start of it and the glare she threw Clarke's way was accompanied by an angry groan. "What?"

"You made all of that up, you jerk."

"What do you want me to say, O? To be honest, we didn't really talk that much."

"Nice." Jasper held his hand up for a high five. When Clarke made a face and shook her head no, he sighed and held it out to Monty. Monty obliged him.

"Well, are you seeing him again?" Octavia asked.

"No, I don't think so. He was nice but I don't know. Once was enough." She shrugged. "He seemed a bit odd actually."

"Odd how?" Jasper leant forward. "Did he ask you to do something weird? Like, in bed?"

"Oh for Christs-"

"Come on, Jasper."

"Why do you always go there, bro?"

"Not cool."
Clarke raised her hand. "All in favour of banishing Jasper when we talk about sex and sex related topic, raise your hand."

Every hand was quick to shoot into the air, even Monty's.

"Monty?" Jasper asked, betrayed, heartbroken.

"What? You get weird, Jasper. Sorry though."

"Fine." Jasper sniffed. "But I'm taking my dessert with me. Jerks." In a huff, he picked up his bowl, scooped another serving of ice-cream, and moved to the lounge. Clarke was about to tell him it wasn't far enough and to go further, but he pulled on his headphones and scowled at them, playing his music loud and angrily. They could hear it all the way from the table, so they let it slide.

"Anyway, you were saying he was weird?" Raven prompted.

"Yeah. No, not weird. Just, I don't know." Clarke shrugged. "He had, like, twenty bottles of water - the expensive stuff - in his fridge and basically nothing else. No books, his towels looked more expensive than my rent for the month, he had more hair product than all of us combined-"

"Even Bell?"

"Even Bell."

They looked impressed.

Bellamy ran a hand through his hair. "My hair is naturally lustrous and perfectly styled," he muttered.

"So, what I'm getting out of this is that he's rich and hygienic. Was there maybe some other reason you didn't like him?" Raven was looking at her with that stupid smirk and those eyes and Clarke wasn't stupid, she knew what Raven and Octavia thought, that Lexa - she shook her head.

"We just didn't click. That, and he didn't have any art."

The table fell silent for a moment. They knew exactly what art meant to Clarke and for her to bring it up of her own volition, even so passing and so small a comment…

Raven narrowed her eyes. That was strange.

Clarke didn’t notice. She was too busy thinking about those intrusive thoughts, that other reason that she didn’t intend to go on a second ‘date’ with the man. Those intrusive thoughts, the ones that haunted her kisses, saying this kiss is not like her kiss.

When she returned to herself, Monty was talking.

"-met a very good friend like that. We went on a date but,” he shook his head. “We’re just better off as friends, so I get what you’re saying Clarke. Sometimes they’re nice and great but you just don’t click.”


He ducked his head in that shy way of his and groaned. “How do you know about him?”

“Please, I might have been working non-stop for a week but Raven made me take the time to hear every last detail of you date, which I suspect she spied.”
“Raven!”

“What?”

“I told you that in confidence!”

“And you were very confident,” she agreed. Leant over the table to clap him on the shoulder. “Good job.”

“That’s not what that means and you know it?”

“How was I supposed to know?” She winked at Clarke. She totally knew. “You probably should have specified.”

“I hate you.”

Raven gasped but, before she could express her no doubt incredible hurt, Clarke waved at Monty to grab his attention.

“Hey,” she said. “Ignore her. What do you think about him?” She nudged his leg under the table. “Boyfriend material?”

The change was instant. He shifted from annoyed to a dreamy smile and he propped his chin on his hands. “Yeah. Definitely.” Clarke smiled, and he continued. “He’s sweet. He’s a giant nerd. He plays soccer on the weekends and all his friends call him Miller and he works at a construction site just down the road from the IT building and we go get coffee and lunch sometimes and-“

Raven kept her eyes on Clarke as Monty continued to talk about the man he very much wanted to date. She watched as Clarke’s smile slowly drooped, a little from exhaustion no doubt but it oddly coincided with every lovesick sigh of Monty’s. She watched as Clarke’s eyes grew hazier, more distant, less warm. When she turned to Octavia, her friend nodded. She’d seen it too.

“Hey, it’s getting pretty late.” Octavia rapped her knuckled on the table to get their attention. “Bell?”

“Jasper already claimed the spare bedroom – Monty, are you taking the couch?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Raven, you’re with me,” Octavia said. “Clarke, did you want a lift?”

“No, no, I’m going to take the bus.”

“Clarke, it’s almost midnight.” Octavia shook her head. “Bell will make the guys share if you want to crash here,” he nodded quickly, “or I can drop you off but I’m not going to let you walk around this late.”

Clarke rubbed her eyes. “I have work early in the morning – you’re sure you don’t mind driving me?” She was frowning heavily. Octavia stood.

“Of course not. You live basically between Raven’s place and mine anyway.”

Bellamy jerked his chin, prompting the others to stand and help him clear the table. They worked and pretended they couldn't hear the rest of the conversation.

"You haven't drunk at all tonight, have you?"
"Not a drop." Octavia's voice was firm and certain.

"And you're not tired?:"

"No." Clarke didn't look convinced. "I'll drink some coffee now. Bell doesn't mind." She gestured to her brother and he handed the plate he was carrying to Raven. Moved into the kitchen to start on making a cup.

"Octavia, no, it's okay. Tell him to stop. It's fine. You'll want to go to sleep when you get home and-

"Clarke." Octavia moved seats, to the one right next to Clarke. Her hand fell on the wood next to Clarke's hand, not touching because she knew that sometimes her friend couldn't stand the contact and she got the impression that this was one of those times. She dipped her head, catching Clarke's gaze with her own. "Hey. I don't care that I'll be wide awake for another hour or two if it means that I know you get home safe. I'm not going to make you feel unsafe. Okay?"

"Yeah." Clarke ran a hand through her hair. "Yeah, okay. Thanks, O." She hesitated then, surprising Octavia, she reached over and pulled her into a tight hug. "Thank you," she said again. Octavia rubbed her back.

"Come on. I'll grab my coffee and we can sit near Jasper and pretend to be talking about interesting stuff while he's got those stupid headphones on."

//

"You sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine, O," Clarke said quietly, stepping out of the car. "Thanks for driving me."

Octavia smiled, gave her a little wave. "No problem, babe."

"You're not leaving?"

"Not until you get inside safe."

"It's like three steps away."

"Lots of stuff can happen in three steps, Clarke." Octavia took her hands off the wheel and her keys out of the ignition. "Get walking."

"Yes ma'am." Clarke closed the door and walked away, smiling. Her phone buzzed a second later.

_text me when you get to your apartment._

_Don't drive and look at your phone_, Clarke sent back quickly.

_I won't. Promise._

The next message was a photo of the still dark dash of Octavia's car and Clarke felt her heart rate begin to drop back to normal levels. She gripped hard onto the rail as she climbed the stairs, knees still a little wobbly, knuckled aching from holding tight to the passenger seat's holy shit bar - it had a proper name but that one suited it too well for her to bother to find out what it was called.

Not that Octavia had been driving fast or dangerous.
No.

She just didn't like cars.

She didn't like cars and all she wanted was to walk into her apartment, into her room, take off her clothes, and curl up under her sheets. She would have to wake up all too soon in the morning and then her busy week would begin again.

Clarke stepped up onto the second floor and sent the message she knew her friend was waiting for - home now, drive safe, love you - and was only a few short blissful steps away from her door when Lexa's door opened and an unfamiliar woman stepped out.

"Oh!" The woman blinked. Then smiled. "Hey."

Having the woman speak to her was very low on her list of wants as well. Even if she was very beautiful and was wearing a lovely long skirt that made Clarke want to ask where it was from.

Clarke ignored the shaking in her hands and smiled at the woman. "Hi?"

"Sorry, right, that was random of me. I'm Rachel," she said, hand on her chest. "You're Clarke, right?"

"That's me." She smiled wider. "Rachel - Lexa's Rachel?"

The other woman seemed to blush - her skin was too dark to tell for sure, but her smile was bashful and sweet and she tilted her head a little to the side and down and Clarke couldn't help but laugh, just a little, because yeah. She was sweet.

There was an unpleasant feeling that bubbled in her stomach but Clarke didn't think it had anything to do with Rachel.

"Hopefully," Rachel smiled. "I mean, yes. I think so anyway."

"You two are dating?"

"Yes."

"Then I think it's safe to say that, yeah, you're Lexa's Rachel." Clarke held out her hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Likewise!" Rachel's hand was soft and she held Clarke's for a moment, offered her another sweet smile before withdrawing. "I was just leaving. Sorry for stopping you, I know it's late and you probably want to go to sleep, I'm really sorry."

"No, please, it's fine."

Rachel hesitated, sucked in her breath in preparation to speak. "You...might not think so when I ask you something. Is it okay? If I ask you something?" Clarke nodded. "Okay. Great." Rachel bit her lip. Nodded a few times, listening to the pep talk in her head. "I know this is probably wildly inappropriate but I really like Lexa. A lot. I can see myself dating her and it going somewhere. Eventually."

Clarke's eyebrows rose a fraction. "Wow. That's great."

"Is it?" Rachel fixed suddenly serious eyes on Clarke. "Because the way she talks about you, I know that you two had something. Were something. I don't know. But I don't want to be the girl who has
to keep checking up, who wastes her time worrying about you. I don't want to worry that you're going to knock on her door one day asking for a cup of sugar and a second chance." Rachel frowned. "Why are you laughing?"

"That's actually kinda how we met. I asked her for some sugar for my coffee - nevermind, I'm sorry, that was really rude of me. I get it." Clarke nodded quickly. "I do. You like Lexa and you want to make sure I'm not still wanting to go after her."

"More or less."

Clarke schooled her expression to seriousness. It was easy, probably because she was already doing it. Her stomach was in turmoil, knees weak, hands trembling. But she'd almost forgotten herself, so easy was it to pretend that everything was fine. Easier than thinking about it, certainly. Even the way her heart was unexpectedly wrenching in her chest when she looked at the woman opposite her. "Rachel," she said, "there is nothing between Lexa and me. We had a good time but it wasn't emotional, it wasn't serious, it wasn't anything. We're just friends."

Rachel searched her face for a time before a relieved smile spread over her face and this one was so natural, so delighted, that Clarke knew she was convinced. "Okay. Good." She reached out, lightly touched Clarke's forearm. "I'm sorry to have jumped you like that. It was good of you to answer, I know you could have just walked away but I really appreciate it."

"Don't apologise. I know what it's like to not want to worry about that." It was easy to smile for a woman like Rachel. She was sweet and kind and Clarke hesitated for just a moment before she spoke again. "Is it okay if I ask you a question as well?"

"Of course."

Clarke gestured down to Rachel's skirt. "I love this - where did you get it?"

The next dreadfully long, busy, draining week had Clarke crashing into her bed - only to be woken up what felt like minutes after her eyes closed by a heavy pounding on her front door. Before she could bother to roll out of bed and answer, the knocking stopped and the door opened.

Lexa strode right into her apartment and further, into Clarke's bedroom.

"You didn't lock your door again," she said, "and what on earth did you say to her?"

"Huh?" Clarke rubbed her eyes. Pulled her sheet up around her chest, knowing that Lexa's morals would demand that she look away once she realised that Clarke was naked. And, well, Clarke quite liked it when Lexa looked at her.

Her eyes were heated, demanding.

Clarke liked that too.

"Rachel," Lexa said in lieu of an explanation. "What did you say to her?" She began to pace. "Because she likes you - she likes you, Clarke, and I don't want to say anything stupid about you so please tell me what you told her so I don't mess this up."

"Nothing!" Clarke paused. Shrugged her concession. "Not much."

"Not much? Clarke," Lexa snapped, stepping forward, close up toward the bed, toward Clarke. "What the hell is that supposed to mean? What does she think we were?"
"Fuck buddies, I assume. Now," she said, voice firm, "step back."

Lexa was all a frenzied mix of something near to anger and confusion and Clarke didn't like it. She wasn't interested in any of those messy emotions in her space.

She didn't want that.

She didn't like the way it made her feel - like she wanted to comfort Lexa. Be there for her. Talk to her about it. She especially didn't like that the magnitude of what she felt was unsettlingly overwhelming.

Clarke had people she felt for, people she cared about. And she could barely stand that.

This was something more.

She let the lines of her face fall hard, stern. "Step back," she said again, cold.

Her hands were shaking again. They'd been doing that more often. She had a feeling it was Lexa’s fault.

She ignored it, dug clawed fingers into the giving fabric of her sheets, her mattress.

Lexa took those few quick steps back. Bowed her head. "I'm sorry," she said after a few breaths. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have barged in like that."

"No. Maybe not."

"I just..." Lexa ran her hands down the end of her braid. "I like her, Clarke."

"Great."

"And I don't want her thinking that we're together or that we were or-"

"Lexa." Clarke stopped her before she could work herself into a state again. "I told her the truth." She didn't notice the way Lexa's eyes widened, too busy wrapping the sheet around her body. "I met her the other night, told her I liked her skirt, and told her there wasn't anything between us." Clarke stood. Then came the averting of eyes she expected and Lexa took another few steps back. "She seems really nice, actually. Polite, sweet, smart. Takes no shit. I get why you like her."

She hadn't slept well.

That was why her chest felt hollow.

"She is." Lexa's eyes softened. "I'm sorry for waking you."

"I'll forgive you if you bring me a coffee." Clarke brushed a hand through her hair roughly, combing it back. Her other hand she kept on the sheet. "You might want to go if you don't want to see my fine ass," she told Lexa with a teasing grin. "I'm about to turn around."

"Oh! Oh, right, yes. I'll be right back with your coffee," Lexa said.

Clarke hesitated. Then, reminding herself what they were, she shook her head. "I was joking, Lexa. I'm just going to go back to sleep. No coffee required."

"No, you're getting your coffee Clarke." Lexa rapped on her bedroom door. "Because Rachel would like for you to join us for dinner in," she checked her watch, "two hours and you desperately need a
shower."
"Rude."
"Maybe. But I'm also right." Lexa turned her head just far enough that Clarke could see the hint of her smile. "Two hours."

"No, wait, hang on - what did you say?"
"You need a shower."

"Before that," Clarke sighed. "About dinner?"

"Oh. Yes, well, apparently you made such a great impression that she wants to have dinner. With both of us. It's been almost two months so she wants to meet my friends."

"That's a big step. You two are getting serious."

"I like her." Lexa crossed her arms. "I told you that."

Clarke dropped the sheet - couldn't help but grin when Lexa's shoulders tensed. She stepped into the pyjamas she hadn't had the energy to pull on the night before and sat on the end of her bed.

"You said something about that," she teased.

//
"Clarke, hi! It's so nice to see you again. You know," Rachel grinned, "when I'm not accosting you in the hallway."

"Rachel. I was just thinking the same thing," Clarke teased. She was stiff, surprised, when Rachel pulled her into a hug but after a moment she returned it. When she pulled away, a touch too quickly perhaps, she disguised the harsh movement by sniffing at the air. "Dinner smells great."

"Lasagne. Old family recipe."

Clarke groaned. "That sounds amazing."

"I can't take the credit," Rachel told her in a stage whisper. "I can't cook for shit. My roommate made this - it's his old family recipe. I just wanted to look good for Lexa." That pulled a tiny smile from the otherwise incredibly awkward woman, who was looking between Clarke and Rachel like there was something wrong there but she couldn't quite figure out what it was.

Clarke cleared her throat, seeing the strange look Rachel was giving her girlfriend, and she pulled the attention back to her. "Well I've barely eaten all day so I'm really looking forward to it. I'm starving."

"You haven't eaten?" Rachel moved into Lexa's kitchen, opened her fridge. "I'm sure Lex has something you can snack on while we wait - there's probably still another twenty-five minutes until it'll be ready to eat."

"Oh no, it's fine."

Rachel ignored her. "Lex, do you have any muesli bars or biscuits or something Clarke can eat?"

The brunette was stunned by the way Clarke and Rachel were getting along - famously, at the moment. She just hoped that didn't change to something more akin to getting along like a house on
"In the cupboard," she said after a moment.

Clarke left Rachel in the kitchen, wandered over to Lexa's side.

"She's nice," she said quietly. "I like her."

"That's sweet. But sorry, you can't have me. I'm kind of fond of Lexa." Rachel returned with a packet of biscuits. She caught Lexa's eye, shook the packet. "Is it cool for me to open these?" She beamed when her girlfriend nodded. "Great. Because I'm starving too. Long day at work. Nothing like you, of course," she said to Clarke, "not like running around a hospital and saving lives."

"Oh please." Clarke waved the comment away. "I'm basically an intern still. I don't really do anything exciting."

She didn't think about those nights she had to drop her scrubs at the hospital laundry because blood was splattered across them and her skin was crawling and she never wanted to see another drop of blood, never wanted to hear another cry, another scream, but she knew the second she changed into her new scrubs she would be walking right back into the ER and burying her hands in another broken body.

And it was exhausting.

Trying and trying again to save them.

Losing, sometimes.

Saving others. And each of them were exhausting in their own ways.

"Aren't you a teacher?" she asked Rachel.

"Preschool, yeah."

"That's seriously impressive. I mean, sure we can go on and on about me running around and cleaning bed pans," she grinned when Rachel groaned at the thought, "but I know I'd rather forget all about that. Block it from my memory when I'm not at work." That, and those empty faces in the halls waiting to hear if their family were dead or alive. That, and the smells that clung to every surface. That, and the crush of doctors around a body, working on them. Working until there was no one left to work on. "I can't imagine teaching kids every day. Having to look after them, the responsibility of teaching them? I really don't think I'm built for something like that - I was so relieved when you invited me for dinner, I almost cried."

"Well, teaching them how to cook for themselves and go shopping doesn't start under grade one," Rachel joked. "We're working on taxes at the moment."

"You know, I do think I heard somewhere that school was getting more difficult."

Rachel shrugged. "We drive them hard but we churn them out as identical little figurines with their student ID stamped on their foreheads, so I know I've done my job."

"Wow. Vicious." Clarke raised her eyebrows over at Lexa. "I like her."

"We've been over this." Rachel pulled on the oven mitts, smiled winningly. "I'm too fond of Lexa."

Clarke shrugged. "I guess I'm out of luck, then."
They fell into a comfortable silence as Rachel put the final touches to the lasagne. Well, for Clarke and Rachel it was comfortable. For Lexa, it was less so. She still had a small frown on her forehead and she laid the cutlery on the napkins with a serious concentration and when she was done she sat, accepted the plate Clarke handed her, but her finger twisted around the end of her braid again and again and again.

"All jokes aside," Clarke said when they were all seated, "you like your job?"

"I love it. The kids are great. I’ve got sixteen of them, I’m sure you don’t want to know all their names,” she laughed. “But they’re all great kids. Make it easy to go to work."

“Isn’t that the dream?” Clarke cut into her lasagne. “Finding a job you love? Oh my god,” she groaned. “This is amazing.”

“I’ll let him know you think so.”

They ate quietly for a few minutes before Rachel frowned. “I’m sorry if this if prying…” she trailed off and Clarke shook her head.

“Please, go ahead.”

“IT’s just, when you’re a doctor, you have to really love that. Don’t you? I mean, it’s a hard job. But, the way you said it,” she shrugged, “you don’t sound quite like you love your job.”

“Rachel,” Lexa murmured. “Maybe not appropriate.”

“No, it’s fine. It’s fine, isn’t it Clarke?” She smiled sweetly. Just enough to make Clarke aware that Rachel was interested in something else entirely. Not quite meet the friends. Something more than that. Something more to do with digging and searching. And figuring her out.

“Yeah, absolutely.”

Rachel seemed pleased and a touch surprised by Clarke’s willingness to talk.

“My mum is a doctor, Dad was an engineer--“

“Was?”

“He died.”


“Lexa, it’s fine.” Clarke nodded. “Really. It happened a long time ago.”

“I shouldn’t have asked though,” Rachel interjected softly. “It’s none of my business.”

“Maybe not, but it’s okay. Anyway, I played around with a couple of ideas about what I wanted to do before I settled on medicine.”

“Like what?”

“Nothing too interesting. Loafing around, living the good life. Free from ambition. But responsibility hit me eventually and luckily my grades were good enough to get me into med school so,” she waved her hands. “Here I am.”

“Here you are,” Rachel murmured.
"No, really, no dessert for me, thank you."

Rachel shook her head. "I insist. Old family recipe."

"Your roommates again?"

"This time it's mine actually. Won't you have some?"

"I'm too full, really."

Lexa declined dessert as well, with a small shake of her head. She hadn't spoken much at all, except to compliment the dinner and to make a few comments. When Rachel sighed, took her dessert back to the kitchen and searched for takeaway boxes to foist the dessert on Clarke and Lexa, Clarke reached over. Tapped Lexa lightly on the back of her hand.

"You alright?"

"Yes. Very."

"You didn't talk a whole lot over dinner."

"I have a lot on my mind." Lexa pulled her hand away, folded them in her lap.

Clarke nodded, pushed her chair back. "Okay."

"Clarke - going so soon?"

Rachel came out of the kitchen, tupperware container full. She handed it to Clarke.

"This wasn't necessary," the blonde tried to argue, but Rachel wasn't having any of it and she waved it away. "Well, thank you," Clarke said.

Rachel smiled at her, genuinely, openly. "It was really nice to see you again, Clarke. We should do this again sometime." Lexa's eyes widened slightly. Clarke saw it, over Rachel's shoulder, and she did her best not to laugh, knowing that it wouldn't sound amused at all.

More likely wretched. Or hurt.

Lexa didn't want her anywhere near her.

So Clarke gave Rachel a brush off, the nicest one she could manage, an excuse - "that sounds great, but I don't really know when I'll be free. One of the other interns is sick and another has a vacation planned so I think I'll be taking on a few more shifts in the next few weeks" - a light touch to her shoulder and a sweet smile, and then she was gone.

Back in her own apartment.

She dumped the cake into the bin first thing. The thought of it sitting heavy in her stomach was all too much, so she scraped the container clean, rinsed it quickly, and left it in the sink for the morning.

Then she stripped, climbed into bed, and spent the night wondering how it was she had gotten so good at pretending everything was fine that she could fool a woman who was searching for any sign that it wasn't?
Her eyes were gritty come morning and the weight in her stomach hadn't left. She skipped breakfast.

"Congratulations," Anya said when Lexa told her that she and Rachel were officially dating. "What's it been, two months since your first date?"

"We were taking it slow."

"Mhm."

Anya examined the woman she had affectionately dubbed 'the little shit' - her little sister, more or less. Less biologically, more in every other aspect.

"You don't sound as pleased as you maybe should sound, Lexa." She sipped at her drink. "Rachel is a good person."

"I know."

"If you don't feel the same about her," Anya started.

"I do." Lexa cocked her head to the side. Then, more quietly, "I could."

"You could." Anya played with her necklace. She let the charm on it spin slowly between her fingers before she twisted it the other way and let it spin again. Lexa had bought it for her with her first pay check. A thank-you for all the help she'd given her. A few minor corrections and a good word on her behalf. More than anyone else had ever given Lexa before. "But you're not over Clarke," Anya told her.

Lexa didn't say anything. She plucked at her toast, crumbling the pieces between forefinger and thumb. What could she say to that?

"Lexa." She looked up. Anya had her fixed with a sharp look - not the editor look. No, she knew that one. She could withstand that one. This was her sister look and it was unrelenting and unavoidable. "I say this with all the love in my heart - and you know that I love you."

"I do." She had never had cause to doubt it.

"You need to get over her." Anya decided to avoid the more lurid suggestions of how she could do that. "I don't know what her problem is, I don't know what's happened to her in her life and honestly? Neither do you. You told me yourself, she's not exactly a chatty Cathy is she? She's not going to open up anytime soon, reveal those deep dark secrets and let you swoop in and save the day. And even if she did," Anya shook her head. "That's not your role."

"I know."

"I just want you to be happy." Lexa nodded. "Can you see yourself happy with Rachel?"

It took a few moments but Lexa nodded again. "Yes."

"And Clarke? What do you see with her?"

That question Lexa couldn't answer. She plucked some more at her toast.

"Well, you do what you have to do to figure this out, Lexa, but...Rachel is a good person," she said
for the second time. "Just, if you can avoid it,"

"I won't hurt her," Lexa said. Her voice was firm, eyes resolute. The remainder of her toast crackled dryly in her closed fist. "I don't want to hurt her."

Anya dabbed at the corner of her mouth, then folded her napkin. She laid it neatly next to her plate. Then, she gestured for the waiter and the bill and signed the check.

They stood, collected their bags and coats.

Anya pulled her coat tight around her waist when they walked out into the colder air. She hailed a taxi.

"Those are two different things," she said mildly, watching the taxi pull up at the curb. "You know that, right?" Lexa nodded. Anya checked her phone. "I have to get back to work." She opened the door to the cab. Her fingers tapped against the door handle.

"Anya? If...if I do end up hurting her..."

She knew what Lexa was trying to ask. "No matter what happens, you're my sister. I'm not going to pick her over you. Even if you're a giant asshole. That's not why I'm telling you to be careful. I'm telling you that because I know you, Lexa." Anya wrapped one arm around her shoulders and tugged her in for a brusque hug. "You're a good person too," she murmured into her hair. "I don't want you getting hurt. Even if you're the one doing the hurting."

If she carried on with Clarke, that was a possibility.

It was the same with Rachel.

Lexa just nodded again and she stepped back when Anya released her.

"Call me," Anya said. "If you need me."

"I will."

"And this weekend. We should set up another lunch meeting."

"Okay."

"Hey! Lady!" The taxi driver pushed his head out the window so he could glare at Anya. "You getting in or not?"

"How about," she glared at him, "you not be fucking rude?"

"Fuck you too, lady, I'm workin' here." He made a gesture - an obscene one - and Lexa winced. "Get in or fuck off."

"You should go." Anya's voice was mild. She cracked her knuckles, gave Lexa a final quick nod. "I don't want your virgin ears to blush when you hear what I'm going to say to this guy."

Lexa didn't bother telling Anya that a) she wasn't a virgin, and b) that she was the most confrontation person she knew and she had definitely heard her yelling obscenities before. Sometimes, she'd taken the brunt of them.

She just nodded, waved, and walked on down the street to her apartment. She had work to finish before her date with Rachel.
“Clark? Are you listening to me?”

“What? Oh, yes, I am.”

Clarke’s date sighed, shook her head. “Look, if you want to be somewhere else you can go.”

“No.” Clarke reached out, took the woman’s hand. “No, I want to be here.”

“Doesn’t seem like it.”

Sometimes, honesty was the way to go. “Grace, I’m distracted. And rude. And I’m sorry about that. But I want to be here. With you.” Her date didn’t look convinced and Clarke leaned forward a little. Showing off her cleavage – not exactly above board, but she knew what she wanted and either it would work or it wouldn’t. “I work six long days a week. I just got out of a, well, complicated relationship. Friends with benefits, basically.”

“I see.” Grace still had one hand on her bag, ready to get up and go.

“I haven’t made a good impression. Sorry about that.”

“You’re a doctor.” The woman sighed. “I guess it’s to be expected.”

“Doctors don’t make good impressions?”

“No. They’re just usually distracted and very, very busy. You doctors don’t really make good dates.” Clarke hesitated.

“You didn’t meet me for a date, did you?” The woman pursed her lips. “You want to sleep with me.”

Clarke couldn’t tell if she was intrigued or offended. She hadn’t yanked her hand away yet so Clarke hoped for intrigued. “Yes. If you don’t want to, that’s okay. But if you do…” Her smile spread slowly. Clarke knew the power of a good smile. She knew very well that a quick flick of her tongue to wet her lips, a slow smile, winning, sweet, that would do the trick. And it did. Her date’s eyes flicked down to her lips. Her mouth fell open and her breath came quicker as Clarke dragged her thumb slowly across her date’s hand. She lowered her voice. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

Three.

Two.

One.

Grace pulled her hand away. Grabbed the shot glass on the table and drank it as tequila was meant to be drunk – all at once, ending with a small gasp as the alcohol hit her throat.

“Your place or mine?”

When Lexa exited her apartment, she looked at Clarke’s door and thought for a moment about knocking. Saying hello.
She ignored the thought. That door was closed. Literally and figuratively. She had moved on – she had Rachel to think about and it was readily apparent to her that if she dwelt on Clarke, she would never be able to move on. And Rachel didn’t deserve that. Hell, she didn’t deserve that.

She shook her head, tore her eyes away from the familiar silver numbers screwed onto the door, turned back to her own apartment.

Thought for a moment – she had everything, didn’t she? Wallet, yes, she tapped her pocket. Watch on her wrist. She’d brushed her teeth, braided her hair, perfume, makeup, everything. She was certain of it. She was ready. Time to go. Her date with Rachel. Their first, after their slightly awkward, bashful, excited agreement that yes, they were officially dating and officially girlfriends. Lexa swallowed. Her mouth was suddenly dry and there was a dull ache in her chest. Like a phantom pain, she thought. Something was missing. But she didn’t know quite what.

“You look nice.”

The voice came from the end of the hall. It made Lexa pause before she pulled her door closed, locked it. She turned and watched as Clarke came down the hall towards her. Or her apartment.

“Thank you.” Lexa took in the tight black jeans. Leather boots clinging to her calves. The low cut shirt. The way Clarke’s hair hung in perfect curls. The necklace, the earrings. “As do you. Were you on a date?”

“Yep.” Clarke stopped, leant against the wall. “How do I look?”

Lexa blinked. “Lovely. How did it go?”

“She was…” Clarke’s lips quirked upwards. “Lovely.”

“She?”

“You’re not the first girl I’ve kissed, Lexa.” Clarke’s smile turned sharp. “And now, you’re not the last.”

“You kissed her.”

“We did a lot more than that.” Clarke licked her lips. Shrugged. Lexa’s hand tightened on her keys. “I see.” She nodded. “Are you meeting again?”

“Maybe.” She shrugged. “I don’t think so. Neither of us are really interested in it being more than a one time thing.”

“Well. I’m…glad you had a good time.” Lexa pulled out her wallet, slid her key into the zipped pocket inside. “If you’ll excuse me, I have to go.”

“Rachel?”

“Yes. We have another date.”

“Oh wow, another one. You two are spending a lot of time together.”

“She’s my girlfriend. Of course we do.” Lexa took a small step forward, eyes on the stairwell behind Clarke. “She’ll be here soon.”

“Going to wait for her downstairs?”
“Yes.”

“Right. Well, go on then. I’m not standing in your way.”

“Aren’t you?”

Clarke shrugged again, gestured to the width of the empty hallway. “Doesn’t look like it.”

Not to the naked eye, maybe, but something about Clarke – the way she looked at her, the sharp cut to her shoulders, the way her fingers turned her key over and over and over and over and over again – meant that Lexa was held in place.

“I have to meet Rachel. She’ll be waiting for me,” Lexa said again.

“Here’s something I don’t get. How come you never gave me a chance?” Clarke frowned. The words came out hesitantly, like she didn’t know why she was saying them at all. They were quiet. And cloying. Sticky, sickly sweet thought attached to that – how come you never gave me a chance? A sweet dream that, too sweet. And just a dream.

“What would you have done?” Lexa looked at her. Clarke, in turn, was looking over Lexa’s shoulder. She kept her voice calm, as though this question wasn’t the hardest she’d ever asked. “If I told you I was in love with you. What would you have done?”

Clarke didn’t answer. Her eyes didn’t waver, locked in place on a point just an inch or two to the left of Lexa’s eyes.

Lexa nodded.

“That’s what I thought.”

Lexa turned. It was down two more halls but there was another way down to the ground floor and she didn’t think that she could stand to walk by Clarke. Not when Clarke was looking at her like that, not when it felt like there was so little air between them.

“Lexa, please. Just-“

“Don’t you understand, Clarke? I can’t look at you without wanting to be with you. I can’t look at you and not want to kiss you.”

Clarke shouldn’t say it, she shouldn’t because she couldn’t say back to Lexa ‘I love you’ and be sure that she meant it and above anything else, Lexa deserved that. She deserved someone who knew with all of themselves that they loved Lexa. That they could make her happy, give her what she needed and wanted.

She shouldn’t say anything, but she did. And Lexa’s name came out quietly and she could say she didn’t know what Lexa would do. But she did.

At the sound of her name from Clarke’s lips? At that, Lexa would turn around. And everything would change.

She knew she shouldn’t say it.

But she did.

At the sound of her name, Lexa turned.
Their eyes met.

And Lexa wanted her again. Or still. Or always.

Clarke didn’t move when Lexa stepped forward. She stared where she was until Lexa cupped her face with tender fingers that didn’t match her sombre expression. She slid her fingers into Clarke’s hair and for a moment, all she did was touch her. Mess up those perfect curls. They didn’t suit her, Lexa thought. And when she looked like Clarke again, the Clarke Lexa knew, Lexa sighed.

And then she kissed Clarke.

It didn’t start out soft.

It started out like they had never stopped, like they had never left off, and everything they were burst into life again between them.

Clarke reacted, grabbed Lexa’s coat and spun them so it was Lexa against the wall. Kissed her hard and then slow, stepping in close so their bodies were flush and she moaned when Lexa sucked on her lip. She’d missed this. Lexa. She wondered hazily why they had ever stopped. Wondered again and couldn’t think of a single reason because Lexa’s hand dropped to her waist in a vain attempt to bring her closer and, when she figured out it wasn’t possible to close a distance that didn’t exist, was only perceived by the clothes between them that stopped skin from touching skin. But a hand – that was easy to slip underneath Clarke’s shirt.

The contact sent shivers through both of them.

Lexa wrapped her arm fully around Clarke’s waist, hand splayed wide across the small of her back, deliciously warm.

Clarke sighed against her neck, enjoying the way it made Lexa’s jaw clench. Flex under her lips. She kissed it, nipped at the tight tendons in her neck when Lexa threw her head back. She didn’t feel the pain when her head thumped against the wall, just the reward for her action that came when Clarke pressed hot kisses up the column of her neck, pushed her leg between Lexa’s and grabbed at her hips, pushing her against the muscle of her thigh. When Lexa’s fingers curled on her hip, Clarke kissed her with fierce intent, the kind of kiss that was meant to spark a fire. Clarke let it happen, because it wasn’t her burning to ashes. She could feel the heat – skin against her skin hot and smooth, the heat in her belly as she was reminded of how wonderfully talented Lexa was with her lips and tongue and teeth – she could feel the heat but it wasn’t her burning.

She stopped kissing Lexa when she moved to push her hands into Lexa’s hair.

A part of her wanted, so badly, to mess it up. To pull it out of its braid, feel the curls around her fingers as she pressed closer and, hopefully, into Lexa. It was only fair. Lexa had messed up her hair, after all. But it wasn’t fair. Lexa had someone who was expecting her. Clarke didn’t. She was just going home, messy hair no problem, but Lexa was going out on a date. With her girlfriend of a month and a half. Messing up Lexa’s hair would be a problem.

She stopped kissing Lexa.

Lexa though. She kissed Clarke again, hard, nipped at her lip and felt the groan that Clarke let out for her. For her. She also felt how Clarke wasn’t responding like she had been before. She was stiff, her kisses a second behind, like she was catching up. Or slowing down. Lexa might have been dazed by the nearness of Clarke but she still noticed.

She pulled back.
Clarke pulled her hands away first, shifted so she could step away.

Lexa closed her eyes when the cold seeped in under her shirt, tried not to feel too keenly the loss of Clarke’s leg between hers. She caught her breath. Then, “Clarke.”

“I know.”

“This isn’t right.”

“I know.”

It felt right. For both of them. But…

“Oh god, oh god, we can’t do this. I have…” Lexa rubbed her forehead. “I have a girlfriend.” Her hand dropped to her lips. Swollen. “I have a girlfriend,” she said. She laughed. A harsh sound, disbelief and a horrible sinking feeling in her gut startling the sound out of her. “I have a girlfriend and I kissed you. I cheated on her,” she said. No, gasped the words. Acid pooled in her stomach, rose up her throat. She swallowed. “I cheated on her,” she said quietly, “with you and you…you don’t even love me.”

Quietly, she said that. But not sadly. She didn’t let it sound said because she knew. She’d always known. Since the beginning, she had known it as a fact that Clarke didn’t love her and it shredded at her to swallow that too, that sad and wistful hope, that pleading that wanted so badly to make itself heard.

Love me, her heart wanted to demand of Clarke. Say that you love me, anything to make this hurt a little less. Anything to make the way I feel about you not be doubled by my own stupidity.

Anything to make cheating on Rachel not such a completely empty and despicable act.

She waited for a moment, but she knew. Clarke wouldn’t say it.

So Lexa nodded and yanked her hand away from her lips. She walked away and she didn’t look back.

//

If she had, she might have seen that Clarke had begun to cry.

//

It was good that she walked away. Clarke didn’t have any I love you’s for Lexa. All she had was a please don’t fall in love with her and she wasn’t ready for what came after that. The questions. Whatever she had to face after. Past, present, future.

She wouldn’t put Lexa through something like that.

So instead of calling after her, she turned her key over in her hand again and ignored her apartment door. She spun and jogged down the stairs.

There was a bottle shop open 24 hours just down the road and she could just hear a bottle of vodka calling her name.

Her phone rang shrilly on her bedside table. Octavia paused mid-kiss, making Lincoln groan.
Octavia glanced over at her phone.

“No, babe, ignore it.” He smoothed his hands up her arms, over her shoulders and down her back. “Babe.”

She leant down again, connecting their lips and she smiled as she brushed her lips over his cheek and made to move down his neck.

Her phone rang again.

She winced and pulled away. Lincoln nodded.

“Answer it,” he laughed. “You’ll be distracted if you don’t.”

“You know me so well.” She grabbed her phone. “I’ll be right back.” Her phone rang a third time and, this time, she answered it. She checked the Caller ID. “Raven?”

“Octavia. Hey, Clarke just called.”

Octavia must have made some small sound of concern because Lincoln raised his eyebrows. She shook her head, held up a hand and he held his questions.

“Is she okay?”

“She’s been drinking.”

“Shit.” Octavia moved to the wardrobe, pulled out a heavy jacket. Lincoln’s. She did so love to wear his clothes. “Raven, I’ll pick you up in ten.”

“I’ll be outside.”

Octavia bit her lip when she hung up. “Babe-“

Lincoln shook his head. “It’s okay. It’s okay. We’ve got the rest of our lives. Go look after your friend.”

“Have I mentioned lately that I love you?”

“Yes.”

“Well I do.” She kissed him quickly. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Do you want me to go with you?”

“No. No, I think Clarke just needs…”

“I understand,” he said when she couldn’t finish. “Now get out of here. Sooner you go, sooner you’ll be back.”

“Makes sense. I’ll call you when I get there.”

//

“Clarke?” Raven tapped on the door. “Babe, you there?”

“Raven?”
Octavia and Raven exchanged worried glances – Clarke’s voice was small and vulnerable.

“Yeah babe, it’s me. Octavia too.”

“O?”

Octavia leant closer to the door, hoped that her voice was loud and clear through the wood. “Hey Clarke. You want to open the door for us?”

There was a long pause. Raven raised her eyebrows – Octavia shook her head. She knew that look.

“What?” Raven hissed. “She’s not gonna open the door. I can open it.”

“No.”

“Come on.”

“No.”

“I can get us in there in three seconds flat,” Raven informed her. “Clarke isn’t going to open the door, she can probably barely stand by now.” When Octavia wavered, Raven grinned, dipped into her pocket.

“You carry lockpicks on your person?”

“What – did you want to have to drive all the way back to my place and then come back here?” Raven lifted her eyebrows in a challenge.

“Don’t look at me like that.”

“Bitch.”

“Ass.”

“Turd burger.”

“Ew. Just…ew, Raven.” Octavia held out her hand, let Raven lean on her as she struggled to kneel. Waited patiently for her to pick the lock and then helped her onto her feet again. “You okay?”

“Just stiff. It’s getting colder.”

“Need anything?”

“Nah. I still go to PT now and again. Get a massage, sometimes. Other than that, it’s fine.” She shrugged. “Now shut up and let’s go look after our terrible, terrible friend.” Raven pushed the door open.

Clarke, only a few steps away, barefoot and pouting.

“I’m not,” her eyes were hazy. “I’m not terrible.”

Raven moved to her side. “Sorry to break it to you, babe, but you kind of are. How you holding up?”

“I’m fine.”

Octavia closed the door behind her, nodded to the couch. When Raven helped Clarke over, Octavia
couldn’t help but notice a red mark on the floor where Clarke had been standing. A mark which looked strangely like a footprint.

“Clarke, sweetie, have you been painting?”

Raven head shot up, her searching eyes finding the same mark Octavia had. Clarke fell back onto the couch and curled up – Raven was going to sit but stopped herself, going instead to Clarke’s feet.

“O, she’s bleeding. And I can see a bit of glass in one foot.”

“She dropped it.” Octavia spotted shards of glass in the kitchen. “How bad?”

Raven shook her head. “It’s not. One larger piece, a couple of little splinters. She’ll feel it when she’s sober but I think she’s drunk herself numb.” She shrugged. “Small mercies.”

“I don’t suppose you have-“ Octavia rolled her eyes. “Of course you do.”

Raven grinned. “What? You don’t carry a small toolbox with a pair of tweezers with you either?”

“No, Raven. Because I’m not a weirdo.”

“I’m hurt.” She caught her tongue between her teeth, pulled Clarke’s foot onto her lap. “Oh Clarke, babe, you are one very, very lucky girl.”

“Raven?” Clarke peeked through half-closed eyelids. “When did you get here?”

“A couple of minutes ago.”

“What are you doing?”

“Giving you a foot massage.”


“No I’m not.”

“Yes you are.” Her words slurred into one another, but Raven had plenty of experience dealing with drunks and she understood.

“No. I’m not.”

“You are.” Clarke tried to tug her foot away but Raven held it easily in place. “Give it back.”

“No.”

“Give it back.”

“No.”

“Raven.” Octavia sighed. “Please stop being a dick. Clarke is drunk and you know how she gets when she’s drunk.”

“Y’mean fun?” Clarke peered over at Octavia. “I’m fun.”

“Actually, you’re very, very drunk and you hurt your foot.” She shook the dust pan. The glass in it clinked together lightly.
Clarke looked down at the foot in Raven’s hands. The blood, the pain maybe, finally registered and her pout returned. “Ouch.” She started to struggle. Raven pinched her calf.

“Hold still. I’m almost done.” Clarke was whining though, and Raven relented. “Clarke, babe, it’s okay. You’re okay.”

“It hurts.”

“No it doesn’t. You’re fine, I promise.” She tapped the top of Clarke’s foot. “Can you feel that?”

“…Yes.”

“Did it hurt?”

“No.”

“Well there you go. You’re fine.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, Clarke.” She patted her calf again, squeezed it gently. “We’re looking after you, okay?”

“Okay.”

It took a little longer – quicker, once Clarke fell asleep, drooling on the couch pillow – to make sure all the glass was out. Octavia brought the first aid kit out of the bathroom, cleaned and wrapped her foot.

“This can’t happen again,” Octavia said, settling on the other chair. “She might not call next time.”

“What? You want to kidnap her, tie her up? Monitor her drinks?”

“I want her to be okay.” Octavia leant forward, stroked Clarke’s hair softly. Her thumb brushed over Clarke’s temple, smoothed her hair again.

“Me too, babe. Me too.” Raven stood, walked into the kitchen. “Drink?”

“I think we earned one, yeah. But I have to call Lincoln first.”

“I’ll make you something with a bit of a kick to it, shall I?”

“Please.”

Raven poured their drinks – she listened for a moment to the muffled words from Clarke’s bedroom, gagged at the near continuous “I love you”, “no I love you more” comments Octavia was spewing into her phone. She left Octavia’s drink on the coffee table. Dragging one of the kitchen stools behind her, she sat next to Clarke. Stared down at her.

“You’re screwed up, Griffin. Technically we both are.” She kicked her foot lightly against the foot bar. “Still. At least I’m dealing with it.”

“You can’t fix her by talking to her subconscious, Raven.”

“No. But at least she’s listening like this. Well.” She grinned. “A little.” When Octavia nodded, Raven handed her the drink she’d made.
They watched and waited for some time, but Clarke didn’t stir at all and finally Octavia jerked her head to the side. Raven stood and joined her.

“Let’s get some sleep. Clarke will wake us up.”

“Propositioning me? Whatever will your husband think?”

Octavia froze. “What?”

“Your hubby.” Raven smirked. Took the untouched drink from her friend along with her own – also untouched – and dumped them in the sink. “Question – you two working on a little project or did seeing Clarke like this put you off your drink?” Octavia’s struck look gave Raven her answer. “Shotgun being godmother.”

“I was thinking about asking Clarke actually.”


“Nah.” The casual work, brushing off Raven’s request, made the other woman glare at her. Octavia just laughed. “Nothing in the rules that says the kid can’t have two godmothers.”

“Huh.” Raven pulled down the sheets, plumped a pillow for her friend. “A bit unconventional.” She flopped headfirst into the bed. Turned her head. “I’ll allow it though.”

“Oh thank god you approve, I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t.”

Raven narrowed her eyes. “You know, I don’t appreciate your sarcasm.”

“Please, it’s your favourite thing about me.”

“That’s true. Other than your good looks.”

“Nice to know.”

“Octavia?”

“Yeah Raven?”

“Go to sleep.”

//

Hurried whispers caught Lexa by Clarke’s door.

_Avoid_, her brain told her. Avoid Clarke at all costs.

But low, quick whispers and a light on so early in the morning caught Lexa’s attention and she couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong.

And when she tested the door, it swung open.

She gripped her keys tight in her fist and stepped inside – only to stop short when two women turned to face her. Women who looked very comfortable and at ease in what Lexa recognised as Clarke’s clothes, and who were helping themselves to coffee.

It was the only thing Clarke really had in her house. The only kind of breakfast they could get for
themselves after what Lexa assumed was a wild night.

Two at once.

Clarke certainly was talented. And she moved on quickly.

Not nearly as torn up about the kiss they had shared as Lexa was, evidently.

Lexa tucked her keys away as subtly as she could. “Sorry,” she murmured. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“Sure you did.” The lighter one – scary eyes, makeup a little smudged– swivelled around on the kitchen stool. “Lexa, right?”

She blinked. “Yes.”

“Mhm.” The woman sipped at her coffee. “Well, you just missed Clarke. She’s gone to work.”

“No, I,” Lexa shook her head. “I just wanted to make sure she wasn’t being robbed. She, uh,” she gestured to the door, “tends to leave her door unlocked. I’ve warned her before. I thought perhaps-“

“You’re not totally wrong. We absolutely broke in.”

Lexa frowned. Sarcasm? It sounded like it was but the woman – not the first one, not the one with scary eyes but the one standing behind her by the sink, leaning more heavily on one leg and twirling between her fingers a butter knife. Which was, in itself, rather threatening in spite of its bluntness. That, in addition to the calculating look in her eyes, made Lexa take a step back.

“I find myself at a loss,” she confessed. “You know me but…”

“Right. I’m Octavia.” The scary-eyed one waved. “And this is Raven.”

“Clarke’s friends.”

“Guilty as charged.” Octavia – scary one, though Lexa tried to scrub that moniker from her brain in case it ever accidentally came out – smiled. “Did you want to join us?”

“Oh.” Lexa checked her watch. “No. No, that’s very kind of you but it’s very late.”

“Bedtime.”

“Yes.”

“We understand. So, it’s very late – early, I guess,” Raven corrected them all, “and it’s your bedtime and you’re very tired. But you were…concerned? About Clarke.”

“Robberies aren’t infrequent in this neighbourhood.”

“Isn’t she lucky to have such concerned neighbours, Octavia?”

“Raven.”

“I wish I had such nice neighbours. But I can’t say I’ve ever met them face to face.”

“Raven.” Octavia shook her head. “Leave it.”

“Fine. But I’m telling-“
“No you’re not.”

Lexa began to walk slowly backward, toward the front door.

“O, come on. She-“

“No.”

“Octavia.”

“No.” Octavia looked over her shoulder. “And now she’s run away. Great.”

“Good thing too. What did she think she was doing, breaking into Clarke’s apartment? Talk about creepy stalker ex, much? What – she thinks she gets to look after Clarke when she just up and left her for some random girl?”

“She was concerned.” Octavia placed her coffee mug on the counter. “Keep out of it.”

“Keep ou– this coming from you? Miss Meddler 2015?”

“I might be hypocritical but listen to me this time. Don’t meddle.” Raven sighed and Octavia rubbed her forehead. “I know what happened last night. Clarke freaked out.”

“Yes. Which is bad. And I’m a hundred and twelve per cent certain it had something to do with Hot Girl Next Door.”

“Bad. Maybe.” Octavia pressed her lips together thoughtfully. “Definitely, Clarke getting drunk isn’t good. But Clarke has been feeling shit all for years and then, now bear with me here, she meets this girl. Gets involved. Her unattached unaffected game backfires though because, all of a sudden, she’s gone. And Clarke is confused because something went wrong somewhere along the line and she’s emotional. So she does what she does best and tries to forget about it.”

“But she can’t so she does the next best thing and gives herself a shot to make herself forget. And then a few more. Hence, drunk Clarke,” Raven finishes for Octavia. “You’re very good at deciphering Clarke.”

“Got fifteen years of practise.” Octavia drained the last of her coffee. “I’ve got work soon.”

“You should work on getting your own business.”

“Sure. Let me do that. I’ll just check my calendar and make room for it between keeping my wild friends in line and working fifty plus hours a week.”

“You don’t have to be so rude, Octavia.”

“It’s the only thing you listen to.” She stood. Handed Raven her cup to put in the sink. “Don’t wait up for me, dear.”

“Fuck off.”

“You say the sweetest things.”

Raven watched the door close behind Octavia, hearing her lock it – sure, of course Clarke gave Octavia the spare keys - and she scowled. “She always gets the last word.” She grumbled, making her way back to the bedroom.
She grinned at the last thought before she drifted off to sleep.

Octavia had the spare key all along.

She had watched as Raven went to all the effort of picking the lock.

What a bitch.

Raven was woken by careful fingers sifting through her hair. There was a slightly shifting presence on the bed next to her, smelling heavily of shampoo and a sharper smell underneath.

It had been a long time since someone was so gentle with her so Raven pretended she was still asleep, pressing her forehead into Clarke's hip and sighed sleepily.

"I know you're awake," Clarke said.

"I'm not," she grumbled.

"Oh, you're not?" the blonde teased. "I must be mistaken."

"Must be."

Clarke scratched lightly at her scalp, laughed when a groan rumbled up and out of Raven and the woman pressed harder into her, back arching as she tried to get Clarke to continue.

"Not that I don't love a beautiful woman in my bed but, why exactly are you in my bed?"

"Didn't want to leave. And," she shrugged, "thought maybe you'd want some company."

"I'm fine."

"Right." Clarke's hand pulled away and Raven sighed, sitting up. "How's your foot?"

"Also fine."

Clarke wouldn't meet her eyes and her voice was cool, disinterested. Raven shrugged.

"Right. I guess that's my cue to leave then, huh?" She couldn't help the way she snapped the words - she was scared for Clarke but if she didn't give them anything to work with, what could she do? Nothing. A big fucking load of nothing. But she couldn't just leave Clarke with all her nothing. "Look, Clarke," she started, but when she looked over at her friend, she fell into silence.

Clarke was crying.

Actually crying.

She shook her head when Raven touched her shoulder but she couldn't get any words out - they were stuck or she didn't know what to say or, and Raven thought the last more likely, she couldn't get enough breath to form them. Clarke's breaths were uneven, eyes wild.

"Babe, you're having a panic attack." She knew the signs. She'd had plenty. "I need you to breathe for me, okay? That's all you need to do."

"Can't," Clarke gasped out.

"Yes you can. It's okay. You know where you are?"
"Home."

"Yeah, that's right babe. You're safe at home. And I'm not going to leave." Raven's stomach twisted unpleasantly, thinking maybe she was the reason this happened. She was going to leave and Clarke needed her help. She shoved the thought aside - it wasn't the right time to think about that. And blaming herself wouldn't do either of them a lick of good. "Don't think about anything else. Just breathe." Raven sat next to her on the bed, laid a hand tentatively on Clarke's back and, when her friend just shuddered and tried to suck in another breath, she rubbed wide circles there and continued to talk. "You're alright," she said, over and over. "Everything is fine. It's okay."

"No, it's not," Clarke spat. She drew her knees up and rested her forehead against one. Her breath was still irregular but she'd stopped crying at least.

"Okay." Raven leant her forehead on Clarke's shoulder. "It's okay. I promise."

"Raven?"

"Yeah, babe."

"Please don't leave?"

"I won't."

//

She was one of the most beautiful people Raven had ever known. Even after she'd been crying and her tear tracks ran down blotchy cheeks. Still, she managed to look beautiful.

Sad, though.

She'd been sad for a long time. Too long. And Raven knew it wasn't something that could be fixed but she wished, she wished desperately and fervently for both of them that it was. Sometimes. There was a sweetness to it though. A familiar weight. Not quite a comfort but it was something and Raven wouldn't know who she was without it some days. She wondered if Clarke felt the same.

"Want to talk about it?" she asked quietly.

Clarke groaned. Her knee bumped against Raven's and her forehead pressed harder into the sharp of a shoulder. "No."

"Too fucking bad. Spill."

She gave Clarke three whole seconds to gather her thoughts before jerking her shoulder, jostling Clarke.

"You're an ass." Clarke pinched Raven's side before she sighed. Raven hugged her more tightly. "I don't know. Everything is fucked up."

"What's the number one most fucked up?" She tensed, ready to jostle Clarke again, but didn't have to.

"Lexa. She has a girlfriend."

"And you hate her." Raven felt Clarke frown and she wriggled back a little, craned her neck to see her friend's face. "The girlfriend. You hate her, right? Or did you sleep with her?"
"Neither." Clarke groaned. Hid her face against Raven's side, until Raven pushed her away because 'that tickles, stop it'. "I like her."

"You like her girlfriend?"

"She's nice. Really nice. She's really fucking nice," Clarke sighed and her fingers bunched in Raven's shirt. She glanced lightning quick up at her friend and bit her lip. When she spoke, her voice was low and wavered, just slightly. "I kissed her."

"The girlfriend?"

"Lexa."

"Oh."

"I kissed her and her girlfriend is so nice - she has a girlfriend!" Clarke backtracked. "She kissed me and I let it happen and," her breath caught. Fingers closed a little more. Raven didn't dare to mention that she liked this shirt, that she would rather Clarke not stretch it, because Clarke looked vulnerable and scared and it wasn't what Raven wanted for her friend but she knew it was a long time in coming. "I'm scared, Raven."

"Of what?" she prompted, very quietly.

"I like her. A lot."

Raven nodded. Her hand came down again to rub circles into Clarke's back. "I know you do, babe."

"Raven?" she whispered.

"Yeah, babe?"

"I...I think I might love her." Raven held her breath. She hadn't heard Clarke say those words, with that meaning, in over five years. "I'm scared."

"Of what?" Clarke shook her head, clamped her lips shut, and Raven nodded. "Okay. Can I guess?"

When the blonde didn't reply, not at all, her only movement shifting her head against Raven's shoulder and letting out a long, shaky breath, Raven took that as a yes. "I think there are a couple of things. First of all, you're feeling bad because you and Lexa kissed even though she's dating someone and that's not something you like doing." Clarke didn't move. Raven continued. "Second, you love her-" she couldn't help the way the words came out with that glimmer of joy because how amazing was that? Clarke came out and told her that. Clarke felt that. Raven swallowed thickly and kept talking, even though the lump in her throat and the prickle of tears. "And you're maybe afraid that she's going to go to her girlfriend and forget about you."

The pressure of nails on her skin hurt, but not much. Her shirt was in the way. Plus, Clarke kept her nails clipped short so there wasn't much to dig in. So Raven pressed on.

"But more than anything? I think you're scared that something like what happened to Finn will happen again."

"No, no, okay I can't do this."

Clarke wrenched herself away from Raven. Clambered over her and took quick, unsteady steps out into the main room.
Raven took a little longer to stand. Massaged her calf. When she made it out, Clarke was on the couch and her elbows were braced against her knees.

She was having trouble breathing again.

"Shit. Clarke."

"I'm...fine," Clarke gasped out. Hands shifted, arms wrapped around her waist. She screwed her eyes shut and tried so hard to breath, to not puke, to ignore the waves and waves of fear that crashed into her.

"You are. You are, babe. You're fine. Everything is going to be okay." Raven situated herself on the couch, one leg on the floor, the other pressed against the backrest of the couch, and she pulled Clarke sideways into the cradle of her legs. Hugged her tight. Whispered the soothing words that spilled out of her against Clarke's temple and just held her until her shaking eased.

Clarke didn't speak. So Raven said it for her.

"Terrible things happen and we can't do anything about it." She felt the way her friend tensed and she loosened her grip in case Clarke wanted to run again - she wouldn't stop her, but she would go after her. Raven played with the end of Clarke's hair, and pretended that all those stroking movements were purposeful. Clarke's hands were shaking too. Her free hand dropped over Clarke's and she squeezed. "What happened with Finn was a tragedy. I know it hurts."

"Raven,"

"I know what it's like to be so afraid of moving on, for whatever reason, but we have to at least try, Clarke. We can try to control everything and we can make all the plans we want or we can lock ourselves up in our rooms because we are too afraid to step out the front door but bad things are going to happen anyway."

Clarke's hands were shaking fierce then and Raven pressed a kiss to the tightness of her jaw. She swore she could feel her grinding her teeth.


"I'm scared," Clarke told her again.

"I know." Raven pressed her forehead to Clarke's. Lifted her hands to brush the blonde mass of hair back, scraped her fingers lightly through it. "I know."

There was a still moment. They closed their eyes and Clarke relaxed fully. She reached up, looped her fingers loosely around Raven's wrist when she cupped Clarke's cheek. The blonde leant forward, kissed the side of Raven's mouth. "I love you, you know."

"Love you too. Even if you are a disaster," she said with a grin.

Clarke narrowed her eyes. Moment over. "Well you're an asshole."

"You're fucked up."

"You're morally twisted."

"Thank you."

"Fuck you."
"Sorry babe." Raven shrugged, shook her head. "You're not my type."

Clarke gasped, withdrew quickly. "Excuse you - I am everyone's type."

//

They didn't part all that night. Raven walked with her to get dinner, linked arms, and Clarke didn't question how Raven knew that she needed someone with her. Just appreciated it. It kept the strange, terrifying feelings at bay and she needed that. Raven was with her even when she found (unused) bowls in her kitchen and she rifled through Clarke's room and spoke to her through the door when she went to the bathroom.

Later, Raven used Clarke's lap as a pillow when she sprawled across the couch. She looked up at the blonde and waited until Clarke felt the pressure of her gaze and looked down, lifting her eyebrows in a silent question.

"I kind of wish we did love each other like that," Raven said in answer. "We'd be good together."

"No we wouldn't." Clarke rested her hand lightly on Raven's cheek, played with her hair. "We're both assholes. We'd break up by the end of the week."

"I'm not an asshole - you're an asshole. You'd leave packets of scalpels everywhere."

"You'd track grease and engine stuff into the bathroom."

"You'd smell like hand sanitizer."

"You'd record over all my shows."

"Your shows are terrible, I'm basically doing you a favour."

"Please. You're the one who watches Dance Moms when you think people can't see."

"That was once."

"Really?" Clarke pursed her lips, trying not to smile. "What did you think about Mackenzie's dance last night?"

Raven scowled. Then, quick and angry, she muttered, "She was cheated of second place. Fourth? It was a total bullshit call."

"Yeah. That's what I thought."

Raven huffed and turned her face away, eyes settling on the television where their movie played on. Clarke joined her but neither of them were really watching.

Finally, Clarke spoke again. "You would flinch every time I said I was going to the h- to work."

"And you would shut down if I ever mentioned Finn. Or if you had to look at my leg."

Clarke's eyes closed and her breathing hitched. Raven reached up, cupped her hand around Clarke's neck. "Hey. It's okay."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know you knew."
"That my best friend can't stand to look at me? Clarke, babe, you have a nice smile but it can't fix everything. Or hide everything, for that matter."

"Raven," Clarke said, voice splintering.

"Hey. Hey, hey, hey." Raven struggled to sit up and pull Clarke close to her at the same time. She wasn't really a cuddler but they both needed this. It was past due. "It's okay. It's okay."

"It's not."

"It is. Clarke, it's different for you and me. You aren't some random on the street who looks at me and thinks, 'look at that freak, she's only got one leg'. You aren't that person. It's different for us." She smoothed her thumbs under Clarke's eyes, heart lurching when tears came away with them. "We went through that together, babe. I know that it, that I, remind you of what happened. Why do you think I always wear long pants when you're around?"

"You do that for me?"

"Sure. I worked on this leg myself, princess," she said, the name slipping out. They halted for a moment, until Clarke realised that her only reaction was a dull ache in her chest instead of the pain that used to rip right through her. Raven's smiled, just a little. "I'm hot shit. The leg doesn't change anything. Plus, I made this cover myself and it's so freaking cool. But," she shrugged. "I know that it bothers you."

"It doesn't."

Raven sighed. She didn't know how to explain it so that Clarke would know that she understood, that she was okay with it. "You can't look at my leg. Not because you think I'm weak or anything but because it hurts you. You never look down on me or think I can't do something."

"Please. You're the strongest person I know."

"Maybe. But you're the strongest person that I know because you plaster that smile on every day no matter what and you go and save lives." She pushed on through those words, even when they tried to stutter to a stop. Clarke squeezed her hand. She knew that Raven didn't like hospitals, even the thought of them. "Me?" Raven looked away. "Two weeks ago, you called me. And when you said goodbye..." Her jaw worked to keep her voice steady, shifting side to side slightly as she pushed the words out. She wouldn't cry, dammit. "When you said goodbye, I saw the whole damn thing over again and I couldn't leave me room. I couldn't. I couldn't get out of bed, I couldn't do a thing. My leg felt like it was on fire," she breathed. "I knew I was safe and it was all over but it didn't feel like that."

"That's happened before?" Clarke asked after a minute of silence.

"A few times. Not so much lately."

"You never told me that."

"And you never told me anything about what you felt. We've both got our ways to deal with it, princess." That time, they both smiled. And it didn't feel wrong. "What I'm saying is that we're always gonna remind each other of that night. And of Finn."

Clarke nodded. Laughed a little as she wiped her cheeks. "How did we even get on this topic?"

Raven shrugged. "We were talking about how we'd be good together but totally crap together."
"Right. Right." Clarke tangled their fingers. "Want to watch Dance Moms?"

"Yeah. Carol is making her daughters costume and I want to see how disastrous that turns out."

//

It was later still, wrapped up in one another, that Clarke said it.

"I miss Lexa."

Raven didn't say anything, just pulled her head away from where it was resting happily under Clarke's chin. She brushed her thumb over Clarke's fingers and waited.

"We were friends first, you know?" Clarke wasn't looking at her. She focused on their hands, linked, and the feeling of someone being right there. Being there for her. "I got scared, I think." Huffed a laugh. "Seems to be a recurring theme with me. I love you and O and Bell, all of you guys. I love you so much and I-"

"Avoid us most of the time."

"Sorry."

"Eh, it's fine. There's only so much of your beautiful face we can take before we'd combust."

"Shut up." Clarke shoved at her lightly but the comment pulled a laugh from her and Raven grinned, triumphant. It didn't last nearly long enough, her smile. All too soon it was gone. "I'm scared it will happen again."

"Me too."

"I...I think I thought if Lexa was..."

"Not your friend? Something else?"

Clarke nodded. "If I could just get some distance, maybe. I needed someone, but I didn't need a friend. And I didn't want a girlfriend. I needed a release. I just didn't want to be scared."

"TMI, Clarke."

"You've told me worse, you turdburger."

"Ah, I knew I got that from somewhere. You told me that one."

"Turdburger? Yeah."

"I used it on O."

"Oh, she would hate that." They giggled together for a time, as thought Clarke hadn't just revealed more of her heat - bloody and raw and wounded - than she had in a long, long time.

"So." Raven waggled her eyebrows. "What are you going to do about your hot neighbour?"

"I don't know." Clarke sighed. Covered her eyes with her free hand. "I don't know."

Lexa had never known the power of words more strongly than she did at that moment.
One moment, her living room had been soft and warm and welcoming. Comfortable. And the next, it felt like a wide yawning chasm. Rocks cracking and shifting beneath her feet. Unsteady and unsettling.

Rachel was on the couch. She had been standing, Lexa remembered. But then she said it and Rachel had no doubt felt the same shift and crack and she had sunk down onto the seat and lowered her head.

She hadn't moved since.

Lexa had stayed where she was, by the front door. She wanted so badly to go to Rachel but...that wasn't an option anymore.

"I don't even know why I'm surprised," Rachel said quietly. She shook her head quickly when Lexa tried to step forward. "No. Please don't."

"Okay."

What else could she say?

She was in the wrong.

She wouldn't hurt Rachel. No more than she already had, for whatever that counted for.

She stayed where she was.

"I'm so stupid," Rachel laughed sadly. She pulled a pillow onto her lap and hugged it into her stomach. Her fingers played with the corner of it. "I'm so, so stupid." The sleeves of her sweater were long enough that Rachel pulled one down over her hand and dabbed at her tears with it. But it didn't stop her, couldn't stop her from crying.

Lexa closed her eyes. Seeing Rachel crying was a kick to the stomach and she wanted more than anything to walk forward and comfort her but she knew that her hands, her arms, her lips murmuring comfort wouldn't give her any. And that, oh god, that hurt even more.

"You're not stupid," she tried to say.

"Lexa,"

"You aren't. You're wonderful and intelligent and beautiful and incredible and such a good person. And I am, I," Lexa lowered her eyes to the ground. "I am so sorry, Rachel. You deserved so much better from me."

"Yeah. I did." She wiped at her eyes again. "But that doesn't mean that I'm not stupid. I should have known. You talk about her like she was, like," Rachel shook her head. "Like she's the one you're in love with."

"I'm sorry," Lexa said, because that was all she could say.

"When?" Rachel asked her. "When did it happen?"

Lexa lifted her chin. She could answer her questions. Rachel deserved at least that. "Four nights ago."

"The day after we agreed we were dating. Seriously dating," Rachel laughed again. Lexa flinched. "That's incredible."
"I'm-"

"Don't. Don't you dare say it again." She stood. Moved into the bathroom, taking the long way around the back of the couch to avoid Lexa. She washed her face, dried it, and took a moment to lean against the sink, hands tight on the edge. Then, with a fortifying breath, she stepped out again. "I'm going to go, Lex. Lexa." Her hand came up, settled under her chin, under her jaw for a moment. She rubbed the skin there before sighing and letting her hand drop. "You know, even though I had a feeling something like this was coming, it really fucking hurts."

Lexa swallowed her apology.

Rachel laughed again, still sad. "Go on, say it."

"I'm so sorry."

She couldn't help the way her voice softened. "Yeah. I know, Lex." She couldn't help it - she was looking at Lexa and she could see how sorry she was, but it did nothing to ease the fact that Lexa had told her she wanted to try to make them something and the very next night she had kissed Clarke. And all Rachel could do was look at those lips and imagine them pressed against Clarke's lips. Clarke's skin. Whispering words to Clarke that she had promised to Rachel. It wouldn't stop hurting. "Was that all you did?" she asked, not sure that she wanted the answer. "You just kissed her?"

"Yes."

"You weren't sleeping together?"

"No. No." She started to say 'never' but she had said that about kissing someone else, about loving someone else, when she was dating another and she'd done that. "It was just a kiss."

"Right. Just a kiss."


"I know." She collected her bag. "I thought, if it were anyone, it was going to be her. Her kissing you, knocking on my door and telling me that. Asking me to forgive her, or you. But I actually believed you when you said that was over. And I believed her when she told me there was nothing between you."

"There isn't."

"Sure. Which is why you kissed her. Well, I hope the two of you are very happy together," she said. The way she was looking at her, Lexa knew that Rachel understood what Lexa had done. Every bit of it. That she had kissed Clarke but that it meant nothing, to Clarke at least. That Clarke didn't love her and Lexa's world, her heart, was coming apart because she couldn't cut the ties and let her go.

"I am sorry," Lexa said again.

"So am I."

The whole thing felt flat. Unreal. Lexa wanted to pinch herself. She didn't know what she had been expecting but Rachel to just up and leave, walk out - it had been a scenario but stiff words hadn't been part of it when Lexa thought it up. There had been accusations and yelling and screaming and fire. There had been anger roaring through Rachel - but Lexa knew that was just her brain telling her exactly what she deserved.
Rachel wasn't that kind of person.

Lexa felt a fresh burst of admiration for the woman - too late, of course, and she felt it tainted already by regret because this woman was incredible. She settled for nothing less than what she deserved. She didn't deserve Lexa kissing another woman. She didn't deserve for Lexa to wait four days to tell her. She didn't deserve to be tugged around and betrayed.

And she knew it.

"Okay. This is going to make everything a whole lot more painful," Rachel said, "but I want to know something."

Lexa nodded. "Anything."

It took her a little while to form the question, and Lexa saw each time she opened her mouth and closed it again that she rethought the wisdom in asking it. Three times, Rachel talked herself out of asking. Finally, she spoke. "If you had met me first. If she hadn't been a part of this." She closed her eyes. "Do you think you would have loved me?"

Lexa felt that kick again, right in the centre of her chest. It took her a moment to reply, the pain so strong she couldn't speak, couldn't find any words, and her voice was rough when she nodded and told Rachel, "It would have been easy."

They stood like that for a moment longer.

Rachel cleared her throat.

"I don't know if that made it easier or harder to go." She cleared her throat again. Wiped at her cheeks. She looked up at the ceiling instead of at Lexa. "When she breaks your heart," she said, "please don't come and find me."

"Okay."

"I'm not a consolation prize."

"I know," Lexa murmured. She turned her head away when Rachel nodded and moved to leave. Lifted her shoulder to wipe her cheek on the fabric of her shirt. It came away darker. "Rachel?" The woman stopped at the top of the stairs and looked back. "I am sorry for what I did. And I know it's not much, I know it won't mean much, but I really do hope that you find someone who makes you happy. I'm sorry it couldn't be me."

Rachel sighed. "You know what? I'm sorry too. I wanted it to be you."

It was hard to hear but Lexa deserved it. Deserved to hear how gloriously she had fucked up.

She tried not to cry that night but the tears came, unrelenting, when she thought that Rachel could be doing the same across town.

//

She cried the following night as well.

//

The night after, she went to Anya's and in a numb way, she explained everything that had happened.
The next night, Lexa found a bottle of wine in her wine fridge. Red. Sharp. It made her stomach warm and full and she didn't like it - maybe she didn't deserve it - but she wanted it. She drank it and was halfway through a second bottle when Clarke came home and found her sitting outside her door.

"Lexa?"

"Normally," the brunette slurred, "I drink out of a glass but tonight." She shook her head and her words and movements were loose and sloppy and Clarke knew that she had been drinking for quite some time. "It's a bottle night tonight, Clarke," she laughed.

It was wrong, it was very wrong, but Clarke melted the way she always did when Lexa said her name.

"Lexa," she said, "do you want help getting back inside?"

Lexa happily ignored her. "You're messing with my head," she told her. "I had a girlfriend. A very nice girlfriend. She's beautiful in different ways than you and she doesn't, she doesn't." Lexa frowned. Thought about what she wanted to say. "She doesn't save lives but she teaches little kids and I dunno maybe she has saved a life before, I dunno." She shrugged clumsily and her hand tilted and the wine slopped from the bottle onto the hallway carpet, where it was soaked up fast.

Clarke hated the way it looked like blood.

"She's a teacher," Lexa continued, oblivious. "She's nice and kind and smart and she's not you," she said, and it sounded a little proud and a little confused but mostly sad. "This," she slopped again, hand moving. Clarke listened carefully. "It...there wasn't s'pposed to be strings involved in, in us, Clarke. Stringless. That, it was s'pposed to be stringless. The opposite of stringed," she said, in case the very sober Clarke hadn't understood the first time.

"Lexa?"

"Yes, Clarke." Her name sounded carefully correct. Drunk Lexa didn't care about the rest of the words, but Clarke's name? That was special. She had to say it right. "Clarke."

"You're drunk, Lexa."

She just nodded at that. She was. She was very drunk.

Clarke bit her lip. She considered opening Lexa's door and putting her to bed. But the doctor in her - and another rampant, furious selfish part of her - told her not to. That all kinds of things could happen drunk and alone in the dark of even your own home. So she reached forward and laid her hand very carefully on Lexa's shoulder.

"Lexa? Do you want me to call someone for you? Or you can stay with me, if you want?"

Lexa's eyes were glazed and her mouth tilted down mulishly. "I just want Clarke," she said. "But Clarke doesn't want me." She sighed, not recognising Clarke's face above her.

"Okay. Come on." Clarke took her hand and helped her to her feet. She held it as she walked Lexa into the apartment and listened as drunk Lexa babbled on, sometimes understandable, other times not. She held Lexa's hand as she walked her to the kitchen and even as she pulled a plastic cup from the cupboard and filled it, handing it to her.
"Drink, please," she asked of Lexa. She refilled it when Lexa was through. And then a third time. She was still holding her hand when she took Lexa to the bedroom and she hesitated before taking her jeans off, moving Lexa's hand to her shoulder to keep her balanced. Clarke tried not to laugh when Lexa, face serious, asked her if they were going to have sex.

"No, Lexa."

"Oh. Why not?"

Before Clarke could reply, Lexa's eyes widened and her hand shot up to her mouth. Clarke hurried her into the bathroom and braided her hair as Lexa retched. She wiped her mouth, rinsed it out carefully. It was strange for Clarke to see - not only because it felt so strange to have Lexa in her home again, but because it was some dark version of it.

Lexa was drunk. Terribly drunk. She didn't know where she was or who Clarke was. If Clarke had dreamt about having Lexa back with her, in her home (and she had), this wasn't how she had dreamt it would come about.

It left an acrid taste in the back of her mouth and, when Lexa slept, Clarke didn't.

//

They don't say anything to each other when Lexa wakes up.

Clarke was surprised when Lexa didn't just leave. She came out to the living room, where Clarke had slept, and she sat very slowly in the other chair.

The toaster popped. The sound sent a shockwave through her. The crunch of the toast as Clarke spread butter over it. The glug of orange juice. The sound of the cup on the wood of the table, the plate too, as Clarke set it in front of her.

Lexa ate slowly. She looked up after every few bites, waited for them to settle in her stomach.

Clarke just sat and watched her.

They didn't speak, even if both of them knew that they should.

Lexa went back to sleep after breakfast.

//

There was a note for her when she woke.

*Went to work. Will be back in the morning. You are welcome to stay, if you want to.*

Lexa dragged her finger slowly over the edge of the paper, staring down at Clarke's words. She didn't stay. But she kept the note. It sat in her pocket for the day and each time her work faltered, her hand inevitably slipped into the pocket and traced the edge again.

"Hey, Clarke?"

"Yeah?"

"You don't have anything edible in your kitchen so it's actually super hard for me to make you guys
breakfast. I thought you'd want to know, though, you do have a whole pack of scalpels in one of the cupboards?"

Raven cleared her throat. Gave Clarke her patented 'I-fucking-told-you-so' look. Clarke pulled her hand out of her pocket and looked down at her first, feigned surprise when her middle finger popped up.

Raven laughed.

"Hello? Still curious about breakfast foods."

"Here, handsome." Raven patted his chest and handed him a wad of cash. "Breakfast food, go."

"I'm not a dog, Raven."

"Hunt and gather. Bring home the bacon," she continued. He rolled his eyes.

"I'm only going because I'm worried about Clarke's eating habits. I'm picking you up some fruit and vegetables as well. You know that scurvy is a real thing, yeah? It doesn't just happen to pirates. Fruit and vegetables!" he said again, as Octavia closed the door behind him.

"He's so good to us," Raven commented.

"He's alright." Octavia returned to the kitchen stool. "But I'm more interested in what Clarke wants to say."

"Who says I have anything to say?"

"Umm, well, you called us here at eight in the morning on a Saturday," Raven pointed out. "If you don't, then I'm going home."

"Seconded."

Clarke frowned. "Fine. Lexa was here."

"Here here?" Octavia asked. "Like, in your apartment here?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"What happened? Did you sleep with her? What about her girlfriend?"

Clarke shook her head. "Nothing happened. She was drunk. Really drunk. I made her drink some water and put her to bed, that's it." Her friends nodded. "And...I don't know. She was here, talking about how her girlfriend is different than me and," she stopped. Swallowed. "It doesn't mean anything."

"Tell us."

"She was drunk."

"Tell us."
Clarke bit her lip. "She said she just wanted Clarke. Me. She just wanted me."

Octavia and Raven shared a glance. "What did you say?"

"She was drunk. What was I supposed to say?" She shook her head, moved to sit on the second stool next to Octavia. She smiled when her friend patted her on the back soothingly. "I gave her breakfast, she went back to sleep, and when I came back from work she was gone."

"Well." Raven pursed her lips. "I don't want to shock you or anything, but you do know that she lives right across the hall from you, right?"

Clarke rolled her eyes.

"Go talk to her."

"I can't. What would I say? Hey Lexa, I think I'm in love with you but I'm a bit of a wreck because the last person I loved like I love you died and I don't know if I can take that again?"

Her friends shrugged. "It's a start."

They tried not to show how pleased they were. Clarke had said it. She loved Lexa. She loved her and she spoke about Finn without flinching or closing off and Octavia was doing her best not to cry. She wasn't doing well.

"O, are you crying?"

"Baby hormones," Raven excused her. "Come on, we want to hear about Lexa some more."

"Baby hormones?" Clarke squealed. "Oh my god. Oh my god! I knew you were married but this? Oh my god."

"Wait - you knew I was married?" Octavia blinked. "We haven't told anyone yet. First Raven knows and now you know?"

"It was kind of obvious, babe," Raven pointed out.

"Yeah. You went away for the weekend and came back grinning like an idiot and wearing a necklace. You don't really wear necklaces, O." Clarke shrugged. "I didn't say anything, I just thought you'd tell me when you were ready."

Octavia put a hand over her necklace. The ring on it, underneath her shirt, was warm against her skin and she couldn't help the small, pleased smile. She shrugged. They already knew - what harm could it do? "Lincoln and I are married," she confirmed quietly, and she winced at the loud squeals and the almost violent hugs Clarke and Raven gave her. "And yes, we're trying for a baby."

"I'm godmother, right?" Clarke asked.

"Fuck off, I am."

"Raven! We have been other this!" Octavia scowled at her. "No swearing around the baby. And also, Clarke, you're co-godparenting with Raven."

"Gross. I don't want to be your wife."

"You're stuck with me, babe." Raven kissed her quickly on the cheek and just laughed when Clarke gagged and wiped the imprint of her lips away with her sleeve.
"Gross."

//

Raven, Octavia, and Bellamy left after breakfast. Raven with a wink for her and a nod at Lexa's door. Clarke flipped her off again but long after they were gone, Clarke stayed at her doorway and stared across at Lexa's.

Finally, she walked over.

Knocked.

Sweat prickled on her hands. She swallowed quickly, once and then twice.

The door swung open and Lexa tilted her head to the side in a silent question - why are you here? what do you want?

"Hey. Lexa. I came to check. That you were okay."

"Rachel broke up with me and my head hurts. I'm not okay." Lexa looked away. She sighed. "What do you want, Clarke?"

Clarke froze. Thought of telling Lexa you and I'm scared but you, always you. She didn't. Because as persistent as those thoughts were, the loudest of all was the reminder that she wasn't right for Lexa. That she was sad and scared and even if she did love Lexa, she would hurt her.

So she shook her head.

"Nothing. I'm sorry about what happened with Rachel," she choked out and this time she didn't smile. She didn't even try. And if Lexa had looked, she would have seen lie written on every inch of Clarke's face. She wasn't sorry. She was only sorry that Lexa was hurt. But Rachel had left and Clarke was relieved.

But Lexa didn't look. She just nodded and closed the door and Clarke turned away.

//

Nothing. Clarke didn't want anything to do with her. Lexa made to return to her desk.

There was another knock on the door, this time quick and harsh.

Lexa opened the door.

"Ask me again," Clarke demanded. "Please, Lexa, ask me again."

She didn't have to explain. Lexa knew what she was saying and Clarke knew, she knew, that she didn't imagine the spark the words lit in Lexa's eyes. Or the way her breath shuddered out. Or the way her voice was so carefully blank (there had to be something miraculous hidden behind that blankness, Clarke was sure of it) when she spoke.

"What do you want, Clarke?"

She licked her lips.
Knew this was her only chance. Her last chance.

Knew it was impossibly selfish of her.

But Lexa, she was in her blood and in her beating heart and to see her close the door again, to see her turn away, would be the same as having it ripped from her body so she had to at least try.

The first time she opened her mouth, she couldn't say it. The words croaked and died in her throat. Lexa's hand tightened on the wood of the door - Clarke didn't know if she was hoping desperately along with Clarke, or if she was preparing to close the door.

She just knew that she had to do better, had to use her words, had to convince Lexa that she wasn't scared - no, Lexa knew that she was scared. Might not know the exact reason why but she knew that she was petrified, Clarke had no way of hiding that. But she had to convince Lexa that she might be scared but she could be more than that.

She could try.

That she looked at Lexa and she was terrified but behind that was a fierce want and something warmer, softer, that Clarke had long forgotten how to pay attention to.

She licked her lips.

*What do you want, Clarke?*

"Everything."

There was a terribly long pause then. Clarke tried not to look away. Tried not to hide away again behind a smile, even as her heart started to pound uncomfortably fast. Then Lexa opened her door a little wider.

"I've just been through a breakup," she said seriously. "But we could start with breakfast sometime."

**Chapter End Notes**

*im unicyclehippo on tumblr as well, come hang out with me if you want. reviews are very appreciated :)*

**End Notes**

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