Those Icy Fingers Up and Down My Spine (That same old witchcraft when your eyes meet mine)

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Those Icy Fingers Up and Down My Spine (That same old witchcraft when your eyes meet mine)

by DreamsAreMyWords

Summary

“Okay, well, the way I see it, you have two options. You can turn around and face the dragon again, or you can put on your big girl panties and go tell Blondie you’re in love with her. Your choice.”

Lexa swallowed, wondering if the static crackling down her limbs and burning her fingertips was a lingering effect from riding the thestral or the feel of Clarke’s lips pressed to her own. She cleared her throat, staring back into Raven’s defiant gaze. “I think I will take the dragon,” she said firmly.

Or: The Clexa Triwizard AU, where Clarke Griffin returns to Hogwarts for her final year and finds herself in the midst of trouble: her father's been thrown into Azkaban without a fair
trial, she's having strange recurrent nightmares, someone entered her name in the Triwizard Tournament, a mysterious dark witch known as the Ice Queen is intent on starting the third wizarding world war, dark creatures are breeding and preying on wizardkind, and the champion of Durmstrang is a gorgeous girl with green eyes and a jawline to die for. Clarke probably shouldn't fall for her rival-turned-best-friend, but together they discover the strongest magic of all. Disclaimer: you don't need to know HP to read this.

Notes

This is dedicated to:
You reading this. You deserve nice things. Lexa deserved better, and so do we.
To Geyranger, my fellow HP Queen, whose enthusiasm makes writing this monster of a fic far easier :)
And to the original dedication listed when I first started this fic, thesummerofrain, for her heartbreaking Chat AU because it's full of pain and tentative friendships, and really made me want to dabble in some Ranya (update like 3 years later: I'm now fully obsessed with Ranya. No regrets)
The radio was on and for the first time in seven years, it wasn’t a Celestina Warbeck classic crackling out of the speakers.

Clarke Griffin stared out the window of a beat-up Honda Civic, shoulders tense and hands balled into a fist so tight her short nails were cutting half-moons into her palms. It was a tradition for her family to make the journey to King’s Cross in muggle transportation. It wasn’t a tradition for her mother to be the one driving, though.

Clarke winced as her mother stomped on the gas. The car roared as they launched out of the roundabout. A few cars honked loudly when they cut them off and Clarke’s heart was in her throat; she glanced at her mother, who was clutching the steering wheel so firmly her knuckles had gone stark white.

Clarke opened her mouth to say something, but closed it a second later. There was nothing she could say to make Abigail Griffin feel any better. Clarke’s father was supposed to be driving today, and he wasn’t, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Later, when Clarke was steering her trunk down the station, her snowy owl hooting softly in his cage, she joked to her mother that she was going to throw a Weasley and leave school on broom back with fireworks bursting behind her. Her mother laughed, and the awkward tension between them melted away just like that.

They chatted about various Hogwarts traditions as they walked. There was a strange twinkle in Abby’s eye during this discussion; Clarke wondered what had her mother looking more excited than
she had in months, but before she could ask, a familiar voice rang out, carrying over the hustle and bustle of the crowd.

“Clarke! Mama G!” Raven Reyes stood near the platform waving at them. Clarke and Abby crossed the station to her, muggles weaving their way around them so they didn’t run into the massive suitcase Clarke pushed.

“Good journey?” asked Raven once they reached her.

Clarke glanced at her mother warily out of the corner of her eyes; Abby had her hands clasped before her, a sign of her frayed nerves. Clarke was grateful she had decided to Apparate back home rather than take the car.

“Yeah,” said Clarke lightly, resisting the urge to stare at her mother again. “You?”

Raven shrugged. “You know, the usual.” A corner of her mouth tugged up. “Always glad to be back home.” She drew her trolley up next to Clarke’s. The three women warily glanced around before they headed toward the wall and turned their backs to it. “Kinda depressed that this is our last year, though,” admitted Raven.

Clarke nodded glumly. “I know. It’s weird to think next year we won’t be here to meet the train…”

The three casually leaned back and the station disappeared for a moment as they sank into brick and stone; then they stepped backwards into the broad expanse of the Hogwarts Express platform, steam blanketing the air above.

“Don’t be sad over your last year just yet,” said Abby, a mysterious smile appearing on her face again. It was just like the one she’d had when Clarke was discussing Hogwarts traditions with her earlier. “You have an exciting term ahead.”

“What do you know that we don’t?” Clarke asked, her eyes narrowing suspiciously. Raven followed suit, squinting at Abby.

Abby shook her head, putting a hand on Clarke and Raven’s backs to usher them toward the train. They loaded their luggage at the back as Clarke persisted in her questioning.

“What’s happening? Does it—“ She swallowed, unable to get her next words out; *does it have to do with Dad?*

Her mother seemed to realize what Clarke wanted to say, because her smile faded a little and she shook her head. “It’s all Hogwarts, honey. It’s very big. I’m actually a little jealous,” she added somewhat wistfully.

Raven planted her hands on her hips, Clarke tucking her last suitcase up for her. “Is it going to piss me—I mean, tick me off?”

Abby shook her head again, her smile broadening. “It will be fun, just wait.”

Clarke and Raven, both frowning, opened their mouths to question her further when Octavia’s voice blasted from behind them.

“We’re back, bitches! It's your senior years! You're fucking graduating!” She swung her arms around Clarke and Raven’s shoulders, cackling to herself, then closed her mouth with a snap, her eyes widening as she realized Abby was standing right there. “Oh my God, I’m sorry Mrs. G.”
Abby arched a brow, trying and failing to look stern and instead appearing merely exasperated.

“Your vocabulary has actually improved since the first time I met you, Octavia, so I consider this to be a success.”

Octavia winced while Clarke and Raven exchanged smirks. The first time Octavia and Abby met, it had been when Octavia was eleven years old and preparing to leave for Hogwarts for the first time. Octavia just so happened to have been in front of Clarke, who was a second-year, and her parents on the way to the train, and was cursing like a sailor at her older brother for pushing her headfirst through the platform.

“Ugh. I’m going to go sit down and think about what I’ve done.” she said dejectedly, but then she grinned and Abby returned it as they shared a hug.

Raven hugged Abby too before saying, “See you in a minute!” to Clarke, letting Octavia drag her up onto the train.

Abby took a deep breath, her smile fading again as she shifted her gaze onto Clarke. Clarke pressed her lips together, knowing exactly what was about to happen.

Sure enough, Abby reached over and started fussing with Clarke’s jacket, her words starting to rush out of her. She reminded Clarke to be sure to get enough sleep, to eat three full meals a day, and to study at least an extra hour for every hour of class she had. Soon enough the train was blowing its horn again and Clarke raised her brows at her mother, trying to indicate it was time to wrap it up.

“If you need any shrivelfigs or poppy heads just owl me, we always have a surplus of those so I can get you however many you need.”

“I know, thank y—“

“And did you remember your Hemlock Essence and Tormentil Tincture? You know you’re going to need some in seventh year potions, they’re bound to test you on a simple mixture like Doxycide because it’s something you should know by—“

“Mom, I know.”

“And don’t forget to owl if you need any extra crystal phials or silver scales, in the meantime just borrow some from Wells and I’ll give Thelonious, I mean Minister Jaha, the—“

“Mom.”

Clarke deadpanned her mother, quirking a brow in vague amusement as her mother paused mid-sentence. This same scenario happened every year for the past seven years, so Clarke wasn’t really sure why it came as that much of a surprise to her. Of course, her father was usually standing there laughing at Abby’s fretting, so Clarke supposed that counted as a surprise. A nasty one.

“This is my last year. If I don’t have the departure down by now, I have a lot more to worry about for my N.E.W.T.S than whether or not I can make Doxycide. Which I can, by the way.”

Abby pursed her lips to fight a smile. “Alright. I was just—“

“Trying to help, yeah.” Clarke smiled. “I know.”

Abby returned the smile, and then the horn sounded again, signaling last call. “You better go, honey.” Clarke leaned into her mother’s embrace, hugging her tightly before stepping back onto the train. She clutched the railing as she waved, her heart clenching with fear as she gazed at her
mother’s pale face. Clarke was really concerned about her mother spending the year alone. She was sure she would be keeping busy at the hospital, but still, she didn’t like the idea of her mother returning to a silent, empty house every day.

She was relieved when she spotted Thelonious Jaha walk up to her mother and place a hand on her shoulder. At least Abby had a friend close by to make sure she wasn’t too lonely, even if it was the Minister and he was busy even more than her Abby was.

Minister Jaha grinned broadly as he raised a hand. The engine was humming and it was hard to hear, but Clarke still caught the “Have fun during this once in a lifetime year, Clarke!” Jaha called out before the doors near the front of the train began automatically closing. She kept waving as the train pulled out, steam billowing. Her heart stopped as it swept across the platform and, for one brief moment, she thought she saw her father too, watching her from afar. Then the steam shifted and she swallowed. Wishful thinking, of course. But why wouldn't she want to imagine her father there, rather than rotting away in a dirty cell?

Clarke gave a final wave before turning to head down the corridor toward her usual compartment. A grin unfurled on her face when she saw her friends all piled in; Raven had the most space, lounging on an entire bench while Jasper and Monty sat beneath her, sitting criss-crossed on the floor with a massive pile of Chocolate Frog cards between them. Wells was on the floor with them, just watching Jasper and Monty swap cards with a serene smile on his face, and Harper and Monroe sat on the floor beside him. Bellamy, Octavia, Fox, and Miller were all crammed onto the other bench. Add in the random assortment of animals- Raven’s cat Mecha and Fox’s cat Tesla curled up together high up on the rack, and Jasper's toad sitting near Miller's rat on the floor- and to say it was a full compartment was an understatement.

“Clarke!” they greeted her, different octaves calling out her name. Clarke slipped the door closed behind her and sat on Raven’s bench, lifting Raven’s legs to rest in her lap. “How was your summer?” asked Bellamy.

He scowled when Octavia dug her elbow into his ribs. Clarke had only sent a few letters to Bellamy over the summer and one to Monty, and then had exchanged countless with Raven and Octavia. Only the two of them (plus Wells, since he and Clarke were neighbors) knew just how awkward and silent Clarke’s summer had been. They had offered to travel to Clarke’s home in London, but Octavia lived in a wizarding town in Middleborough, which was hours away, and Raven was over two hours away living in Cambridgeshire, trapped in a small muggle town she had grown up in, but her own mother was a handful and Clarke didn’t want Raven to get herself into trouble.

Clarke had to force the smile on her face a little, which Bellamy knew judging by the softening of his eyes. “It was fine, Bell. How was yours?”

Bellamy shared a grin with his sister. “Much better than last year,” he said. Clarke smiled for real now. Bellamy had just turned eighteen. As such, he’d bought his own place in a wizarding town and he and Octavia lived together there for the summer.

“You guys suck,” sighed Raven, her head lolling on her shoulder; Clarke was absentmindedly stroking the lengths of her legs before Mecha approached, nuzzling against her to get her to scratch behind her ear before stretching out over Raven’s stomach. “You know how many times I was this close,” she lifted a thumb and an index finger to show how close they were to touching, “to just packing up my shit, hopping on the bus, and flipping off Wisbech in the back window?”

“You should have,” said Bellamy. “You know you could have stayed with us any time. I must’ve told you that in a hundred letters,” he added somewhat irritably.
Octavia’s brows raised and a few of the others exchanged smirks. “And why didn’t I know that my brother and my best friend were exchanging ‘a hundred letters’ this summer?”

“Shut up, O.” Bellamy’s cheeks were pink and so were Raven’s, but judging by the huge grin on Octavia’s face, Clarke knew the two of them would be mercilessly teased for the next few weeks at least.

“Like I could afford taking time off to make a three and a half hour journey to Middleborough.” Raven snorted.

“You could have taken the Knight Bus,” said Wells.

“Oooh, I’ve been on that before!” said Jasper excitedly. “We took it two summers ago, remember Monty?”

Monty nodded, distracted as he shuffled through his cards.

“Why would you take the Knight Bus?” asked Fox, frowning. “I thought you lived in a muggle town, Monty?”

Monty shook his head, his black hair falling into his eyes. “We moved in my third year.”

“To the same town as Jasper?” Octavia had that wicked grin again.

“And Miller.” Monty glanced up to exchange smiles with Miller, and no one missed the sweetness on their faces.

Bellamy, Clarke, Wells, and Harper all chuckled. Raven gagged and rolled over to face the back of the bench; Mecha sprung off to return to the luggage rack, disgruntled, and Clarke’s breath hissed out of her teeth in response to the sharp pain of Raven’s brace digging into her hip. “Oops. Sorry, babe.” She lifted her leg to settle it on Clarke’s thighs.

“Hey, by the way…” Harper began slowly. “Have you guys heard about anything, er…weird that’s supposed to happen this year?”

Clarke met Wells’ eyes. Clarke had been wondering that herself. There were so many little hints and secrets hid in her mother’s eyes over summer break, and Jaha had teased on more than one occasion that it would be a big year. She had shared this strange behavior with Raven, Octavia, and Bellamy, who were all just as flummoxed as Clarke and Wells.

Bellamy narrowed his eyes, setting his jaw in thought. “Maybe there’s something big happening with Quidditch this year. Remember when they upped the stakes years ago, when we were first years? Slytherin won the Cup, and Kane awarded the entire team with brand new brooms?”

“Because Hogwarts is apparently too cool to just go with the usual pizza parties,” said Raven dryly.

Jasper and Monty had finally finished sorting through their chocolate frog cards. Jasper looked up, his face alight with enthusiasm as he said eagerly, “Maybe they’re going to cancel exams!”

Everyone else snorted, rolling their eyes, and even Monty shook his head.

“What?” Jasper playfully shoved at Monty’s shoulder and accidentally knocked a stack of cards into him. “You never know!”

“That is the lamest guess anyone could ever make,” said Monty in disgust, flicking a few of the
fallen cards back at Jasper.

Jasper seized a handful of the cards and threw them, and from then on it was chaos. Clarke kept to herself in the corner of the bench; Raven had fallen asleep and with her legs a comfortable weight on Clarke’s lap, she was tempted to drift into sleep herself.

She would have, perhaps, if thoughts of Abby and Jaha’s mysterious hints and the sorrowful absence of Jake Griffin today weren’t swirling around in Clarke’s head.

* * /잀/ * *

Clarke was unashamedly looking forward to stuffing her face. She sat at the table nearest the stool where a first year perched looking terrified beneath the frayed and patched Sorting Hat. Clarke and the rest of her friends were impatiently waiting for Professor Sinclair to wrap up his speech so the Sorting Hat could get through whatever song it chose to sing this year, the first years would be sorted, and the feast could get started.

Professor Sinclair sat the Sorting Hat on the stool and then silence stretched on in the Great Hall. Nearly every student sat on the edge of their seats, excitement bright in their eyes as they waited with bated breath. Clarke sat with her elbow on the table and her chin resting on her fist, clamping down on the urge to sigh as she used her free hand to impatiently drum her fingers on the edge of her clean dinner plate.

Finally, the brim of the hat parted, spread wide, and a haggard voice rasped into being.

\[
\text{Many years have come and gone} \\
\text{Thus Hogwarts has changed;} \\
\text{United and tolerant, we stand strong,} \\
\text{But forget those still confined to chains.} \\
\text{Be cautious, good pupils,} \\
\text{For much this age shall happen:} \\
\text{In an exceptional year with a notable treat,} \\
\text{Be wary of whom you so warmly greet.} \\
\text{The world outside these strong castle walls} \\
\text{Is not as fair as it seems;} \\
\text{Darkness beckons and shadows are stirring,}
\]
Full of deceit and splintered dreams.

I am telling you now, heed my words—

Beware the lines that begin to blur

What is right may turn wrong

So remember this when the dead are gone:

Within a game so hazardous,

The living may grow ravenous.

The resulting silence from what was quite possibly the most perplexing and ominous speech Clarke had ever known the Sorting Hat to give was resounding and prolonged, broken first by the professors, who all wore similar expressions of uncertainty and concern as they slowly began to clap. The students followed suit, and the applause that echoed through the Great Hall was sparse, interposed by the many students exchanging confused expressions and hushed words. The murmurs were cut short when the Headmaster rose from his seat and everyone fell silent as all eyes turned to him.

He gave a thin smile that did not quite meet his eyes. “Let us all give a little encouragement to our newest additions, yes?” He brought his hands together loudly, clapping alone for only a brief moment until the remainder of the Hall joined in. The large group of children standing in the threshold of the doorway broke out in nervous smiles, looking a smidgeon less terrified. Clarke would have smirked in memory of her own Sorting experience, had she not been still wrapped up in the Sorting Hat’s song.

Seriously, what was that about?

The children were sorted quickly and gravitated toward whichever table cheered the loudest for them. Finally the hat shouted out “Ravenclaw!” and the young girl, appearing so weak with relief that her knees were giving out, staggered her way to the table that clapped the loudest for her. Clarke clapped on with the rest of her House, but God, wasn’t it time to eat yet?

Professor Sinclair rolled up the parchment, food began to appear on the tables, and the Great Hall broke out in amiable chatter and a simultaneous hum of appreciation for the Hogwarts food.

“That was probably the strangest speech I’ve ever heard the Hat give,” said Wells, the only other person aside from Clarke who had not yet touched the food and who still appeared lost in thought over the Hat’s words. She nodded in agreement.

“I know, it was kind of…” She struggled to find the right word. “Creepy,” she finally decided.

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” spoke Bellamy from the other seat next to Clarke. He was digging into a tray of buttered jacket potatoes. “It’s the Sorting Hat. Every year it says something more confusing than the last. I think it’s just bored for the rest of the year and tries to top itself when the Sorting comes around.”

“But that was really creepy, wasn’t it?” persisted Clarke. She struggled to remember the exact words
now, but regardless, what it said made her stomach uneasy. Her instincts were usually reliable—having a mother that was a Healer meant Clarke kind of had to learn to trust her instincts, because her mother had to trust hers on a daily basis.

“Clarke, look. It’s a hat. It doesn’t exactly have a life to live, you know? I think it’s probably bored out of its mind sitting around, so every year it tries the scare factor to get a reaction out of all of us. It’s probably just a laugh to it. Stop worrying and eat.” He slopped a heaping spoonful of mash onto Clarke’s plate for good measure.

“Still, it’s weird,” said Clarke obstinately. As if she was going to let this go when it was only hours ago that Jaha had been waving at her from the platform with a knowing smile on his face, telling her to ‘have fun during this once in a lifetime year.’ “I wonder what it means.” She lapsed into thought, mulling over the possible implications for a second before pondering aloud, “What did it say about telling us to heed its words again?”

“I’m pretty sure it called us nerds,” said Jasper casually as he reached across the table to seize the chicken leg that Bellamy had been reaching for. “Yeah, it said, ‘heed my words, you bunch of freaky nerds,’ or something like that.” He sank his teeth into the chicken and wiggled his eyebrows in response to Bellamy glowering at him.

Clarke echoed Bellamy’s glare, adding an eye roll for good measure. “It said ‘heed my words, beware lines that blur,’ you goob.” At least she thought that was what it said. Something to that effect, anyway.

Jasper snorted, nearly choking on the swig of pumpkin juice he’d just taken. Raven, who was a few seats down sitting between Octavia and Fox, leaned forward over the table to peer at Clarke without Octavia obstructing her view. She cocked an eyebrow up and said in a snarky voice thickened around a mouthful of Shepard’s pie, “You’ve been around those kids way too much, Griffin. Their spectacular vocabularies are making you sound like a preschooler.”

While Monty, Octavia, and Bellamy snickered, Fox frowned. “What’s a preschooler?”

Raven gave an exaggerated eye roll. “Fuckin’ purebloods. I swear to God. You’re the preschoolers. Fucking muggle-borns have to come to this school and we teach you more than our own fucking professors teach us.”

“And you just mocked my vocabulary.”

“Shut up, Clarke.”

“How many fucks does a person need to use in a sentence?” queried Octavia, a half smirk on her face, clearly amused as she tore a chunk out of her bread roll and dipped it into the hot cocoa that had just instantly refilled in the mug before her.

“As many as possible, considering on most days, no fucks are given,” said Raven dryly. Bellamy chuckled, Monty and Octavia collapsed into laughter once more, Raven smirked at her own hilarity, and Clarke just exchanged a smile with Wells and shook her head, the two of them quite accustomed to not having a clue what these jokes meant in the muggle world.

“You guys give me a headache,” grumbled Fox as she returned her attention to her plateful of vegetables, clearly not as entertained by these inside jokes as Clarke and Wells were.

Monty pulled something out of his pocket and offered it to her. Just by Fox’s appalled expression, Clarke knew it had to be one of those Wheezes Monty had been trying to get her to try on the
Hogwarts train just a few hours ago.

“No way! Monty, those must be ancient! They’re probably defective!”

Monty feigned a gravely offended expression, cupping the small wrapped pastille and gingerly bringing it to his chest. “Have you no respect? These are legends!”

“Yeah, legends that are over a century old,” Fox pointed out rather crossly, though Monty’s joking reaction had caused her lips to quirk in a not-so-well-suppressed smile. “Why don’t you just get some Arker’s products instead? You know they work better.”

“Do they, though? These are the originals,” said Monty, lifting the pastille up to gaze almost dreamily at it. “The Weasley twins were the trailblazers. Arker’s wouldn’t even exist if it hadn’t been for them.”

“You don’t know that. Maybe Arker’s would have figured it out on their own.”

Monty’s affronted expression seemed a little less forced now. “What? You’re crazy! Arker’s entire company is literally just a total reboot of Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. Hugo Weasley II sold the rights to all the products over to Jimmy Arker, and Arker just renamed them, tweaked a few effects, and sold them with Arker’s stamped on them instead! The company acts like it’s all their original work, but they’re total frauds!”

“Well they can’t be frauds, because they bought the company fair and square from the Weasleys.”

At this, Monty’s eyes practically bugged out of his head, and Clarke turned away to focus her attention elsewhere before she either laughed aloud or developed a headache herself.

By the time people were finishing dinner, the sun had disappeared from beyond the stained glass windows. The ceiling was full of stars tonight, and Clarke was itching to paint them, but she couldn’t because she was still sitting in the Great Hall waiting for the excited prattle and the tinkling of silverware to fade once Kane finally got off his arse to get whatever the hell was going on started. She just wanted to be back in the common room wedged into her favorite chair with her canvas spread out across her knees. She wanted it so badly that her fingers shook as she reached for her pumpkin juice, and maybe she could have gotten away with hiding in the astronomy tower so she could sneak away when the feast started, like she usually did because after the first couple of years at Hogwarts sitting through the First Year Sorting had become incredibly dull, but she had been curious. Something big was stirring at Hogwarts this year, which everyone had suspected and the Sorting Hat had basically just confirmed.

In a special year with an ancient treat. Clarke frowned, again wondering what it all could mean. She had known all summer that some special event would be taking place this year because her mother had almost let it slip once, and Minister Jaha had hinted at it on more than one occasion, although to the frustration of she and Wells, they were both tight-lipped when it came to revealing any further information. Still, regardless of how many books she pored over, Daily Prophets she scanned through, or conversations she eavesdropped, she hadn’t a clue what was in store.

She was as intrigued as she was relieved when finally Professor Kane stood from his chair at the head of the professors’ table.

The chatter died down immediately, and all the students who had previously looked drowsy from such a large, delicious feast were at once alert.

“To all the new students: welcome! To all the returning students, welcome back!” He lifted a goblet.
“First, before I break into the opening speech, let us toast to a new productive year of learning.”

“Hear, hear,” was chorused throughout the Hall as students and professors raised their glasses in the air and then to their lips. Even the Ghosts all raised invisible glasses to the air.

When Kane lowered the goblet, the Hall was so silent that the chink of the glass lightly scraping wood as he set the cup on the table seemed to echo around the vast room.

“This year, a tradition is being brought back to Hogwarts. It’s a game that hasn’t been played in over a century, and one that has, in the past, brought glory and honor in our school’s name upon winning it. This tradition…” Kane paused, presumably for dramatic effect, as the entire school awaited his words in avid anticipation. “…is called The Triwizard Tournament.”

Cheers erupted in response, and all around her, Clarke’s friends were grinning and clapping wildly. Clarke brought her hands together a little more hesitantly, because the words of the Sorting Hat were bouncing in the confines of her skull and she didn’t understand why this prospect, one that should be making her excited, was instead making her stomach twist with anxiety.

“Now, I know concerns will be raised regarding the certain possibility of the chance of…fatalities… occurring in this game, and, yes, people have died in the past.” Hushed voices broke out at this, but Kane pressed on. “I can assure you that no such thing will be happening this year. Myself, the faculty, and the other participating schools have all gone to great lengths to ensure the most important part: your safety. Strict guidelines will be enforced, all in-game objects will be thoroughly checked for spells, jinxes, hexes and curses, no outlandishly dangerous creatures will be partakers within this tournament, and every member of staff will be present and overseeing each trial to guarantee the safety of the champions.” Kane raised an open hand, palm facing outward, to quiet the cheers. “The second most important part of this tournament is for as all to have fun. It’s a chance for us all to come together as a school to root for our champion while at the same time developing life-long interschool relations with people that hail from entirely different cultures than we do.” Kane smiled, peering out at all the beaming students. “Now, are there any questions?”

Jasper’s hand shot into the air, but the moment Kane saw it, he closed his eyes, smiling even as he lifted a hand of acknowledgement again. “Before you ask, Mr. Jordan, you must be of age to qualify for this tournament.”

The response was met with more than a few groans, and Jasper looked positively murderous, but most people seemed to expect this. Clarke knew that those rules had been in place since the last Triwizard Tournament, though they hadn’t seemed to have done much good considering a boy still died. They were taught this in fourth-year History of Magic, so it was a relief to know most people remembered that lesson, at least. Though admittedly, people tended to pay more attention in History of Magic 1976-present simply because it was otherwise known as the “Study of Potter” class.

Another hand from a girl Clarke didn’t recognize lifted. It was a very young girl. Clarke couldn’t tell from where she sat whether or not the girl was wearing a colored tie; if she was a first year, Clarke was impressed she had the guts to raise her hand and ask a question in front of the entire school.

“Yes, Miss Charlotte?”

“Yes, Miss Charlotte?”

“Um, I-I just wondered, w-when do the other schools arrive?”

Definitely first year, Clarke thought.

“Both schools will arrive at the end of this week.”
“Where will they stay?” shouted some excited second-year from Clarke’s own house; he was so excited that he nearly spilled pumpkin juice all over his robes.

"If he’s going to suggest we bunk up, he can think again,” said Murphy flatly from a table down. Clarke resisted the urge to scowl at him simply because she hated his voice.

Kane appeared not to have heard Murphy, or if he did he didn’t acknowledge him. “During their time here, they will be living in the transportation they arrived in.”

By the time Kane finished answering a host of seemingly never-ending questions, the excitement had lost the fight to food-induced exhaustion. Kane sent them all to bed, and together Clarke and Wells helped the prefects usher the first years to their respective dormitories.

She and Wells parted near the painting of fruit that concealed the opening to the Hufflepuff dormitory, and then Clarke made her way to Ravenclaw tower. She was ready for a nice, long sleep back in her four-poster bed, even if Raven would be talking her ear off to the point where Clarke was threatening her with a curse if she didn’t shut up.

_in conclusion_, she thought, yawning as she trudged up the spiral staircase, _it just felt good to be home._

* * * /\ / * *

Nightmares did as they always do and beleaguered Clarke’s slumber. She tossed and turned in her four-poster bed, as in her mind she walked down a long, empty hallway, her sneakers slapping soundlessly on the waxed white floor.

She passed by several doors with no handles; she strolled past a huge tank full of green water and brains with writhing tentacles; she wandered past a mysterious veil that fluttered in a nonexistent breeze. It wasn’t until she trooped across a thin bridge that arched over a pool of broken clocks that she arrived at the grey door with the circular window in the center of it. Her heart thudded in anticipation, her body quaked in fear, and every part of her waking conscious told her _don’t look through that door!, _but she leaned toward it anyway, squinting her eyes as she struggled to see through the mass of seemingly impenetrable swirling grey that pushed up against the window.

She tilted her head in an attempt to discern what lay behind the smoke. Her heart both leapt into her throat and dropped like a stone to the soles of her feet when she saw.

It was her father, his body a wrecked, mangled shape, limp and motionless as clawed hands rose from beneath tattered black robes, as putrid smelling breath was expelled, then inhaled slowly with a eerily suspended rattling note—

The dream shifted and Clarke saw, for a split second, the shredded human meat that she called Dad open his eyes and lock gazes with her; then it broke, and Clarke woke with a strangled cry.

“Clarke? Clarke? Wha—ouch, fuck!” A wand light flicked on and Raven came into focus; she had fallen off her bed, the curtains tangled around her good leg. Her wand rolled away across the floor, the illuminated tip causing shadows to roar into being over the walls and make Clarke squeak in fright. The fact that Mecha had let out a loud hiss and scurried beneath the bed didn’t help matters.

The curtains on the bed on the other side of Raven’s ripped back and a voice harshly whispered
“Lumos!”; Clarke focused wide, wild eyes on Fox’s floodlit face. Fox looked back and forth between Clarke, who was curled into a ball so far up the head of her bed she was sitting on her pillow, and Raven, who was still writhing on the floor trying to escape from her curtains. “What’s going on? Is everything okay? Raven, what are you doing?”

Raven grunted in her struggle. “Oh, you know, just playing a game of Twister. I do this every night.”

Fox blinked once before frowning. “Twister?”

Raven cursed so loudly that a couple more beds had their curtains drawn back, their sleepy occupants rubbing their fists into their eyes as they looked out to see what the commotion was. “Fucking purebloods, I swear! It’s—a—fucking—muggle—thing!” She spat each word out through gritted teeth between each vicious tug of her curtains, pulling them out from beneath her before finally she surrendered and glared up at Fox. “What the fuck does it look like I’m doing? I fell, you idiot. Help me up.”

Fox was blushing so hard she didn’t bother snapping back as she scrambled out of bed, bending to grip Raven by her arms and heave her upright. Raven hopped on her only foot to her bed, turning and sinking down into it while Fox returned to her own bed. “Thanks,” Raven muttered. Fox merely nodded in acknowledgement before murmuring “Nox” and pulling the curtains around her bed closed.

Raven massaged her thigh while Clarke breathed in and out slowly, struggling to regain her bearings and calm down; gradually, the other girls drew their curtains back and slipped into inertia again.

Raven’s wand had clattered to a stop near the stairwell door. Its tip cast enough light on the walls that Clarke could see Raven’s dark eyes shift up to meet Clarke’s gaze.

“Was it the same one?” Raven asked in a low voice.

Numbly, Clarke nodded. Her stomach was still twisted with nausea, her heart still pumping in her chest. The image of her father’s mangled corpse seemed to be a permanent imprint burned into the back of her eyelids; every time she blinked, she wanted to scream.

Raven clucked her tongue, shaking her head in disbelief. “Geez. How many times does this make?”

“Nineteen,” said Clarke faintly.

Raven swallowed; Clarke could see her throat move, half-obscured in the darkness. “Have you… does anyone else know about them, besides me and O?”

Clarke shook her head.

Raven’s brow knit together. “Clarke, babe…” She began tentatively. Clarke sucked in a breath; she knew what was coming. “Maybe you should speak to Mama G about this.”

“No,” Clarke cut across, her tone harsh and final. She drew her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms tightly around them. It wasn’t the first time Raven had suggested Clarke confide in her mother. When Raven wasn’t doing it, it was Octavia urging her to. Clarke’s relationship with her mother had been rather… strenuous, since her father left. Her mother seemed aloof and distant ever since, and Clarke knew that was partly her own fault since she had been the first to withdraw. Regardless, she wasn’t about to speak to her mother about dreams as vivid as this.

Raven knew enough to back off. “Alright, but I’m just sayin’. O and I are only students, same as
you. Maybe some adult experience can help you figure out what they mean, because that shit’s not normal, Clarke. Dreaming about it just once is weird enough on its own, but *nineteen times?*

Clarke wet her lips; her mouth was so dry. “I’ll figure it out, Raven. Right now I just want to sleep.”

Raven scooted back on her mattress, patting the space beside her. “Well come on, then. I know how much you Griffins need your beauty sleep.” She grinned, and Clarke almost felt normal again. She felt better the instant she slid into Raven’s bed and relaxed into the comforting warmth of Raven’s arms wrapped around her. Raven pulled the blanket up to cover the both of them. The curtains were still in a crumpled heap on the floor and Raven’s wand was still across the room.

Clarke had just opened her mouth to mention it when Raven lifted an arm and her wand zoomed into her palm. As she flicked it through the air and the curtains rose to reattach themselves and draw shut around the bed, Clarke grumbled, “You say you and Octavia aren’t any help because you’re students, yet you can do magic most adults can’t even do.”

It was dark now and Clarke was facing forward, Raven spooning her from behind, but she could sense the grin on Raven’s face as she slipped her wand beneath her pillow and pulled Clarke closer.

*・˚・／✧／・˚・*

Breakfast the next day was a bittersweet affair, if only because it was the last first day of term that Clarke would ever have.

Still, it was easy to forget with the excitement lingering in the air over the Triwizard Tournament. The vast majority of seventh years were overcome with the excitement of entering the tournament, with the exception of Clarke. Jasper would be downright horrified when he learned Clarke was not taking advantage of her age and entering, but entering the tournament was the last thing she wanted to do. For one, it was pointless considering she was probably not going to be chosen. On the off chance that she was chosen, however, Clarke decided not to enter. She and her mother had enough on their minds what with Clarke’s father being in Azkaban, the Ministry breathing down their necks, muggle-hating racists trying to promote a pro-blood-exclusion act, and Clarke preparing for her eventual N.E.W.T.S.

Regardless, the thrill of the Triwizard Tournament was impossible to ignore, considering the giant gleaming cup was on full display at the professors’ table at the head of the Great Hall.

Octavia sighed, gazing wistfully at the goblet. “You guys seriously suck. If I was just one year older, I could join you.”

Clarke dipped a knife into butter, pulling a stack of toast to her plate. “You mean Raven. I’m not entering.”

Octavia’s jaw dropped and her hand slapped onto the table as she swiveled around to face Clarke. “You what? Are you telling me that you—you who are seventeen and therefore meeting the requirements to enter the most famous Wizarding school tradition of *all time*—are *not* going to enter?”

Clarke shrugged, smiling calmly back at Octavia’s appalled face as she took a bite of buttered toast. “Nope.”
“Hello ladies.” Bellamy, Wells, and Raven all sat down around Clarke and Octavia, immediately piling food onto their plates. Raven’s nose was buried in a particularly heavy copy of an Advanced Arithmancy book, as per usual. “What are we having a freak out over today, baby sister?”

Octavia glared at Clarke before sweeping her hair back smoothly over her shoulder, haughtily dipping a spoon into her oatmeal. “Clarke thinks she’s not going to enter the tournament.”

“I know I’m not going to enter,” Clarke said firmly, ignoring the incredulous look Bellamy threw her way.

“I’m not entering either,” said Wells.

“Why?” asked Bellamy, the incredulity of his tone somewhat marred by the thickness of the word forced out of bulging cheeks full of hash brown.

“I think it’s a stupid tradition. I can’t believe they’re trying to bring it back again when every supposedly foolproof safety measure has been proven useless the last twenty times it’s been played.” Wells used a knife to slather butter over his bagel; like Clarke, he was utterly unperturbed by Bellamy and Octavia’s horrified expressions.

Clarke grinned. “Nice.”

Wells returned the smile before politely taking a bite out of his roll. Octavia and Bellamy were both shaking their heads in disgust.

“So it’s gone a little wrong in the past,” said Bellamy, and Clarke knew if anyone knew about the history of the tournament it would be Bellamy, considering his zeal for the History of Magic classes. “That doesn’t mean what it stands for is irrelevant.”

“Yeah, it’s supposed to promote school unity and strengthen cultural relationships. Plus,” Octavia added cheekily, grinning broadly as she pumped her fists in the air. “School spirit, yeah!”

Clarke rolled her eyes, biting her lip to fight her smile from broadening as she took a sip of pumpkin juice. “School spirit and stupid traditions aside…I’m not entering for the same reasons Wells isn’t. I just think my mom has enough on her plate without worrying about her daughter competing in some dangerous competition, too.” 

I have enough to worry about too, Clarke thought, but she didn’t say it.

Judging by the expressions of Bellamy, Octavia, Wells, and even Raven, who had finally set down her book, Clarke didn’t have to say it aloud for them to get it.

“Fair enough,” Bellamy finally said, breaking the silence that had started to board on awkward. “Now do you guys want to know why I am going to enter?” The rest of the group smiled, digging into the food once more. Bellamy stood up, extending and pointing an arm out while he flexed the muscles of the other arm. He put on a deep voice. “Courage, bravery, daring!”

Octavia jumped to her feet too, mimicking her brother’s pose and deepened voice. “All the things that make Gryffindor the best!”

Clarke and Wells cracked up, while Raven swiveled around in her seat to aim a wicked grin toward the Blakes. “Psssh, please, as if. If anyone’s going to win the tournament for Hogwarts, it’ll be a Ravenclaw.”

Bellamy’s head rolled on his shoulders as he cracked his knuckles and gave Raven his best lofty grin. “Yeah, right. Books and clever things aren’t exactly going to save you if you’re staring down a dragon, will they Reyes?”
Octavia sat down with an exasperated sigh and a smile, glancing at her watch before taking up her knife and fork again. When Bellamy and Raven started up, it took a while before they winded down.

Raven arched a brow, the look she gave Bellamy so patronizing it almost made onlookers flinch. “Uh, yeah, actually, it will. Ever heard the phrase ‘Brains over brawn,’ Blake? You probably haven’t. I know the only reading you do involves boring old dead guys nobody gives two farts about.”

Clarke shook her head in amusement, returning the majority of her attention to finishing her breakfast. Raven and Bellamy had a very competitive friendship, and when they got going like this, everyone else just kind of went with it and ignored it. Wells was busy feeding bits of sausage to his Screech Owl that had just delivered a morning paper to him.

Bellamy put his hands on the table, leaning toward Raven with his brows arched and his mouth curving in ambitious arrogance. “Bellamy Blake. Remember that name, because it’s going down in history. Bellamy Blake, Hogwarts’ Triwizard Champion.”

Raven put her own hands on the table, leaning forward and glaring right back at Bellamy, her plump lips twisted in a smirk. “You’re right, your name is going down in history. Emphasis on the down. Because the only thing you’re gonna read about Bellamy Blake is that when Raven Reyes won the tournament and became the Triwizard Champion, Bellamy Blake volunteered himself as her servant, handfed her grapes and fanned her with a giant leaf!”

Bellamy squinted at Raven and Raven stared right back at him. Then Bellamy stuck out a hand. “Fine. It’s on.”

Raven swung her arm forward to take Bellamy’s hand and shake it vigorously.

“Wait, wait,” said Clarke distractedly, dragging her attention off the bowl of oatmeal she had nearly finished. She reached into her bag, ripping a piece of parchment free and digging her quill and inkwell out. She dipped the quill point in and held it poised before the paper. “Okay, go.”

“Raven Reyes versus Bellamy Blake. Whosever name the Goblet spits out is the winner. Loser has to be the winner’s servant for a month.”

Bellamy narrowed his eyes. “Two months.”

Raven did the same, leaning forward again. “FOUR.”

Bellamy leaned forward too, slapping his palms down on the table again and causing Clarke’s inkwell to nearly topple over; Octavia silently reached over and steadied it. She and Wells were completely ignoring Bellamy and Raven, Octavia focusing on cramming scrambled eggs into her mouth so she wouldn’t be late to class and Wells working on his tea while he read the Daily Prophet.

“FIVE.”

Raven’s lips were curled back in a snarl. “THE ENTIRE YEAR.”

Bellamy opened his mouth but Clarke cut across him before he could say anything. He and Raven’s noses were less than an inch apart, their eyes wide and wild with the thrill of fresh challenges. “It’s done, I’m not writing anymore.” Clarke held up the paper, wiggling it so Raven and Bellamy would turn to appraise it. They both nodded their approval and glowered at one another a final time before sitting back down. Bellamy resumed his meal while Raven just grabbed a muffin to stuff in her mouth as she cracked opened her Arithmancy book again.
“An entire year of servitude,” Clarke mused as she packed the contract, quill, and ink back into her bag. “That’s ambitious and evil. I swear you should have been in Slytherin.”

“My name is Raven. If I had been in any other house than Ravenclaw, it would have been sacrilege.”

“Kind of like how Clarke Griffin isn’t in Gryffindor?” said Octavia thickly through a mouthful of sausage.

Raven grinned at Clarke over the top of her book. “Yeah, just like that.”

Clarke rolled her eyes; this was a tired argument. “The hat is like the God of Hogwarts. There’s no arguing with it.” That was a lie, though. Clarke had been a Hatstall—at almost seven minutes, she had been one of the longest in over a century. She had her reasons for choosing Ravenclaw, and they were reasons she wasn’t keen to divulge just yet.

Monty arrived lugging Jasper behind him. There was dirt and a leaf on the collar of Monty’s robes (Monty had Advanced Herbology early in the morning every other day), so Clarke leaned over to brush it off while Jasper collapsed into the seat next to her, clearly half asleep even though Clarke was certain he was supposed to have had a remedial class an hour and a half before breakfast.

“How was Potions, Jas?” Clarke asked teasingly.

His eyes drooping nearly completely shut, Jasper reached for the bacon while he used his other hand to aim a rude hand gesture to Clarke, which she promptly returned. “Fuck you, Clarke.”

“You wish,” said Clarke, blowing him a kiss and laughing when he blushed.

“Fuck off,” he whined, plopping the bacon onto his plate. “That was one time. In Fifth year!”

“What was last year,” Monty reminded him.

“Not helpful, Mon.”

* "・/✧・* "

Friday afternoon found Clarke bounding down the staircases three steps at a time, leaping almost five to avoid the Vanishing step. Her books had been hastily crammed into her bag and one of the books was digging into her spine, but she had no time to stop and fix it. Today marked the arrival of the other wizarding schools that were competing in the Triwizard Tournament, and thanks to her Alhotsy Draught taking so long to complete it had nearly made Clarke hysterical, she had already missed the arrival of Beauxbatons. Now she was rushing, her footsteps thundering down the corridors, to make it to the Grounds in time to catch the arrival of Durmstrang.

She made it just in time, pausing to double over and pant before weaving through the crowd to find Raven, Octavia, or someone else she knew.

“Hey,” she breathlessly greeted Bellamy and Octavia, glancing around at the crowd. “How much longer until—“ Her words trailed off, her jaw dropping as she took in the sight of a gargantuan ship pulled up to the shore of the Great Lake. As she observed the intricate carvings in the side of the ship, the huge door opened and fell with a resounding boom on the shore, and a boot-clad foot
stepped out.

The entire Hogwarts class of students took a collective step back. That was how intimidating the woman who first strode off the ship appeared.

She was all solid muscles and hard angles, tall and thick, with black tattoos inked into dark skin, the most prominent being the half-moon shape framing the outside of her right eye. Her hair was cut close to her head, and she wore a heavy fur coat. Her expression was blank, but something in her eyes screamed a challenge. Clarke watched her gaze flicker from student to student before finally landing on Kane, who stood smiling with his arms open welcomingly. The woman did not return the smile, nor the warmth. Clarke leaned her head toward Octavia, about to make a comment on how that woman—presumably the Headmaster of Durmstrang—didn’t seem all that pleased to be there, when she noticed the girl walking behind her.

Holy—

If the Headmaster’s gaze screamed danger, it was nothing on the girl’s who walked close behind her.

She looked around Clarke’s age, so she had to be a student and not a professor. Her hair was pulled back, plaits interwoven within the wild brown strands. Her face was tattooed as well—or maybe they weren’t tattoos, Clarke realized, glancing back at the Headmaster’s face, because on this girl it looked far more similar to paint. Like…war paint.

“So much for ‘friendly competition,’” whispered Bellamy. Almost every Hogwarts student was silent, staring transfixed at the strange new guests. “They look like they’re here to start the next Battle of Hogwarts.”

Clarke didn’t answer, too distracted by this girl, who was strangely pretty even though she looked like she could kill someone with her gaze faster than a wand and who wore her war paint on both eyes with three spikes on each dripping down toward her ridiculously impressive jawline. Clarke could see all the way from where she stood that the Durmstrang girl’s eyes were a startlingly bright contrast against the black paint; they sparkled the same green as the Great Lake that served as her backdrop as she walked down the ramp with the regality of a queen. The only people Clarke ever saw walk around like they were royalty were the racist pro-exclusion supporters. *She’s probably a Pureblood*, she thought.

Wait, she shouldn’t make snap judgments like that. There were royal wizarding families; maybe the girl actually was royal. You never know. She certainly looked regal in her fur cloak and blood-red scarf.

Clarke couldn’t help but to notice, again, that the girl was really very pretty.

Clarke forced herself to pull away her gaze from the girl to instead focus on the next person walking. It was a boy with a shaved head and white paint tearing down the side of his face in three lines.

“Hello, tall, dark, and handsome;” muttered Octavia.

The girl walking behind him was as fierce as the first, though unlike the Headmaster and the royal girl, she was not expressionless; she clutched her fur coat tightly to herself and gazed up at the castle almost reproachfully, with disdain etched into every line of her face. She wore war paint as well, her eyes appearing almost sunken in the black marks around them.

On it went, with nearly every Durmstrang student wearing some variation of war paint and thick, heavy fur coats that they were already beginning to shed. The breeze was crisp enough to keep
Hogwarts students in their robes, but the Durmstrangs looked as though they were hot in the sunlight. Clarke knew from her schoolbooks that their homeland was filled with snow and ice.

“Welcome, welcome, my friends,” said Kane joyously, clasping hands with the Durmstrang Headmaster, who still did not look very welcomed at all. “We are so honored you have agreed to be our guests for this school year! And might I just say, that is an *impressive* ship.”

Rather than thanking him, the Durmstrang Headmaster gave a terse nod.

“Beauxbatons arrived not ten minutes ago and we have already sent a professor to escort them up to the castle to await your arrival. Now that you’re here, we can feast,” he added brightly.

Some of the students looked relieved at the mention of food. Clarke wondered how long their journey was.

For some reason, she couldn’t keep her eyes off the girl who stood at her Headmaster’s side holding herself with such composed posture.

Professor Kane tapped the tip of his wand to his throat and muttered a spell before addressing the students, his voice booming above the murmurs. “If everyone could please make their way to the Great Hall.”

Students began filing toward the castle, chatting animatedly at once over the excitement of Durmstrang’s arrival. The Durmstrang Headmaster jerked her chin toward the castle and the rest of the Durmstrang students trailed after the Hogwarts ones toward the feast.

“Clarke,” said Kane, apparently spotting her out of the crowd. He gestured for her to join them. Clarke bid Bellamy and Octavia goodbye and hurried over to Kane, determinedly avoiding looking at the girl and staring fixedly at Kane instead.

“Yes Headmaster?”

“This is Headmaster Indra. Indra, this is Clarke, our Head Girl.” Headmaster Indra did not offer a hand to shake but merely nodded instead. “I was going to request the two Heads offer tours to the Durmstrang heads…you do have Heads of Durmstrang, I take it?” Kane added to Indra.

Indra tilted her head, glancing at the girl, who still stood with perfect posture. “Lexa is our prize student, if that is what you are implying.”

“Ah, well, not exactly, but whatever works. Clarke, if you could take Lexa on a tour of the castle so at least one student will know the lay of the land.”

“Yeah, sure, I can do that.” Clarke finally looked at the girl and her stomach turned. She was more than very pretty. She was exquisite.

“Excellent!” said Kane, smiling as he clasped his hands together. “Well, then. Headmaster.” He swept open an arm and inclined his head toward the Indra. The two started for the castle, leaving Clarke and the regal-looking girl—Lexa, Indra had called her—standing alone, the Durmstrang ship casting a large shadow over them.

“Erm.” Clarke swallowed, trying not to squirm under that intense green gaze. Lexa didn’t even blink, just stared at Clarke as though she was waiting for her to do something. Oh. “Um, I’m Clarke Griffin. Clarke Griffin. And you’re Lexa.” Her cheeks burning, Clarke stuck out a hand; to her surprise, Lexa ignored it and clasped her forearm instead. Clarke followed suit and the two squeezed lightly before dropping their arms. (Lexa’s arm was hard and lean and Clarke was shivering). “I
guess, um, we can start with the grounds? Since we’re already here. And then we can go up to the food. The feast, I mean.”

I sound like a complete idiot. Nice game, Griffin.

Clarke startled at her own thoughts, reprimanding herself at once. No ‘game’ would be happening here. Not only was Lexa a total stranger and not only was she a student of Durmstrang, whom Hogwarts was competing against, but Clarke had absolutely no time in her seventh and final year of Hogwarts to even think about any romantic notions.

Not to mention Clarke’s ex-boyfriend still tasted like ash in her mouth, Senior Undersecretary Dianna Sydney was still harassing Clarke and her mother about the Pro-blood-Exclusion Act, and Jake Griffin was rotting away in Azkaban.

The girl inclined her head in a positively regal nod of assent. “That will be fine,” she said, and her voice was so soft and such a stark contrast to her vicious appearance that Clarke’s stomach clenched.

“Okay,” said Clarke, balking at the husk of her voice.

Clarke Griffin was not the type of person to be so overcome with initial attraction that she was actually affected by it.

Lexa arched a brow in response, clutching her cloak more tightly around her. Unlike the other Durmstrang students, Lexa had yet to remove it or the scarf cascading down one shoulder. Sweat was beading off the exposed curve of her neck, but Lexa was clearly content to stay fully clothed as she was.

I shouldn’t be disappointed by that.

This was ridiculous. Five minutes of being in this girl’s presence and Clarke was a mess. She was never this frazzled. What was going on?

She remembered the Alihotsy Draught and she barely suppressed her cringe. Shit.

Okay, so Clarke was still slightly hysterical. Regardless, she was Head Girl (not a very good Head Girl, but that was another story). She had a duty and right now that involved showing Lexa the grounds before taking her to the castle, and hopefully not giving her the impression that all of Hogwarts was as weird as Clarke was currently behaving.

Clarke forced a polite smile and gestured toward the expanse of the grounds behind them. “Shall we?”

Chapter End Notes

This has a epic plot with plenty of conspiracies and things that tie in together at the end, so grab your hippogriffs and buckle up for the wild ride, kiddos *cracks knuckles* All aboard the gay Hogwarts express!

Yes, this has a happy ending. Everyone lives. May jatan rot in Azkaban.

Comments (the longer the better) validate my existence, so please give me some :)
I have no beta so all mistakes are my own.

Come find me on Tumblr. I'll post sneak previews and answer whatever questions about this you may have. My user name is dreamsaremywords.

All hail Clexa.
"Mudbloods. Am I right?"

Chapter Summary

Conspiracies are stirring, Raven is sick of having to be a "muggle-born justice warrior," Clarke's friends are shit-heads, and Clark makes herself look like an idiot in front of Lexa...AGAIN.

"Those fingers in my hair
That sly come-hither stare
That strips my conscience bare
It's witchcraft"

- Frank Sinatra
The colors were starting to bleed together.

The emeralds and jades of the trees were melting into the cobalt sky; the ivory clouds were dripping like rain down into the rolling olive hills. Dante Wallace frowned as he took a step back to appraise it, tilting his head and wondering whether things would start to feel right again, or if he was just losing his touch.

There was a burst of green and a roar of smoke and flame to his right. He continued painting without so much as a glance over as a woman stepped out of the fire, smoothing down her neat navy skirt and brushing ash off her shoulders before she straightened. “I’ve just spoken to Cuyler Ridley and everything is going to plan. How are things on your end?”

“Everything is going smoothly, Madam Undersecretary,” murmured Dante, distracted as he dipped a brush into the green again.

Her voice was clipped with impatience as she said, “And Vie? What of him? Is he going to cooperate?”

Dante didn’t answer for a moment; he gave a hill a higher arc with one fluid stroke of his paintbrush. He decided to leave the imperfections rather than return to touch them up. They might add character to the piece.

He carefully placed the brush upon the easel before turning, sighing as he gave a weary smile. “It is as I told you three days ago, Madam Sydney, we have done all that we can do. For now, we’ll have to wait and see where the pieces fall.”

Sydney gave him a sweet smile as cold as the straight edges of her blonde hair. “And what did I tell you, Wallace?” She took a step forward, and perhaps she would have been more intimidating if Dante was not an old man who had seen more than his share of violence (more than he’d care to admit). “If we don’t make this happen, we won’t get another chance like it. It has to be perfect. So if everything and everyone is not in the place they need to be before the tournament begins, all our efforts will have gone to waste. We can’t wait another four years because his daughter is there now. Jaha is already growing suspicious and the Order has been restless. People can feel something is stirring and we need to make sure all our preparations are in order before they do something about it.”

Dante maintained steady eye contact with her and preserved the small, pleasant smile as he said, “Don’t let your ambition cloud your judgment, Diana. Plan all you want, but at the end of the day you still need a good dose of luck and faith to ensure things go the way you want them to.”

She half rolled her eyes and shook her head in disdain, glancing down at her watch before she took a step back, pulling a pinch of floo powder out of her pocket and tossing it into the fire. Green flames leapt as high as she stood. “I don’t have time for your fortune cookies today. Just make sure everything is ready. It has to be perfect,” she added again, thin brows lifting as though to impose the emphasis.

Dante raised his hand in farewell. “Have faith that it will be, and it will.”

The expression in her blue eyes was flat and as cold as ice, but she sneered as she stepped back, the flames licking at her skin. “Faith is for the unprepared.”
She looked up, standing rigid and straight-backed. “Home,” she said sharply, whizzing away.

As the fire flickered orange once more, Dante looked at his painting and sighed; it was nothing more than a scattered mess of color blending into one another as though it couldn’t decide what it wanted to be.

*・*・/zej/・*・*

_Bang, Bang._

“Clarke! I swear to God, if you don’t get the hell up out of my bathroom right now, I’m going to choke you!”

Clarke shook her head though Raven couldn’t see it and pressed the pads of her fingers into the porcelain underside of the sink, gripping the edges hard. She sucked a deep breath in through her nose, blew it out slowly. She could still feel her heart fluttering fast in her chest, and her head still felt light and fuzzy.

Fucking Potions class.

She was seething. If she hadn’t had the bright idea to follow in her mother’s footsteps to be a Healer, she wouldn’t be in Advanced Potions. And if she hadn’t been required to take Advanced Potions in order to qualify for the N.E.W.T.S, she would never have been stuck in class this morning for over a half hour after the class ended. And if she hadn’t been stuck in class working on her stupid Alhiosty Drought, breathing in blue fumes that made her head spin and her tongue feel fuzzy, she never would have just completely embarrassed herself in front of the prize student of Durmstrang (who also happened to be really, really hot).

The entire tour had been a disaster. All that really happened was Clarke marching Lexa randomly around the Grounds. She showed her the Gamekeeper’s hut, the Herbology gardens, the Quidditch pitch, and warned her to keep out of the Forbidden Forest. Then they exchanged jokes and pleasantries and afterward meandered back up to the feast, where Lexa sat a table across and Clarke pretended to listen to the Headmasters explain the rules of the tournament and the method of choosing the Champions while really she snuck glances at Lexa.

Except, it wasn’t anywhere near that fucking simple.

First, while Clarke was speaking about Dumbledore’s Tomb, which lay sparkling in the sun on the other side of the lake, she squealed in surprise (literally fucking squealed) when the Giant Squid just conveniently decided to pop up out of the water to drift a few tentacles across the bow of the Durmstrang ship (Lexa didn’t seem surprised at all. She didn’t have any expressions at all, actually). Clarke babbled on about everything she knew about the Squid and about the tournament’s history and about the Hogwarts Grounds as she led Lexa to the nearest place: the Gamekeeper’s hut. It took over a minute of Clarke avidly chattering on about the most famous inhabitant of the hut and his role in the Second Wizarding War and Battle of Hogwarts for her to finally realize that the new Gamekeeper could be seen through the window—and he was as oblivious to that fact as they were, considering his naked ass was facing them and his arm was moving very quickly in jerking motions.

It was the first noise Lexa had uttered since she introduced herself; she made a strangled squeak that quickly turned into a _tsk_ of disgust as both she and Clarke spun on their heels to avert their eyes.
before the image was burned into their brains.

Clarke didn’t dare touch Lexa (she didn’t look like the type to be okay with strangers daring to touch her), but she nearly reached out to seize her arm as though to drag her along as they hurried away.

At the Herbology gardens, Clarke chatted on about the different sorts of plants that Hogwarts housed, which ones were most commonly used in St. Mungo’s (Clarke was relieved she knew this information thanks to her mother), and a few other sources of information she had actually heard from Monty. Lexa listened and nodded on occasion, but otherwise retained the same impassive face. In fact, she didn’t show any emotion at all—not even when Clarke was idiotic enough to step too closely to a pot of Venomous Tentacula, which promptly proceeded to wrap its thorny vines around her. It didn’t have time to constrict though, because next thing Clarke knew Lexa was waving her wand and a quick burst of azure fire sent the plant retracting. Clarke muttered a few incantations and ran the tip of her wand over her arms, where blood had started to beam holly-bright out of the several tiny cuts the thorns had given her. Blushing furiously and hating the way her head spun as the panic pounded on in her chest, she led Lexa out of the Greenhouse and across the grounds to the Quidditch pitch.

Lexa still betrayed no emotion as they stood before the pitch, but Clarke noticed the way her green eyes lit up and the corners of her lips twitched, ever so slightly, upward. Clarke wanted to ask her if she played Quidditch, but she was so worried that she would say something stupid (she wanted to punch herself in the face for fucking Potions class) that she remained quiet.

They headed up toward the castle doors. Clarke gestured toward the Forbidden Forest and explained the reason it was forbidden. Lexa’s expression was still blank, but her eyes curiously flitted along the forest’s edge. In the distance, there was a ruffling of treetops; a smattering of birds rose high into the sky. Lexa’s expression didn’t change, but the light in her eyes did. It dimmed as though with sorrow as her gaze followed the trail of the birds fluttering through the air until they dipped back down into the canopy of trees. Lexa turned around to face Clarke, and for a moment Clarke thought Lexa was going to say something, but she merely turned again to walk through the front doors. Clarke was disappointed; there were other features she was supposed to show Lexa. Then again, perhaps it was better if their time was cut short, considering the fumes still twisting Clarke’s brain.

They were clearly the last to arrive for the feast. Clarke knew she should invite Lexa to sit with her at her table out of courtesy but she was fucking terrified she would just make more of a fool out of herself. Before she could make a decision, Lexa turned to face her, bowed her head and murmured thanks for the tour. Then she turned and wandered toward a table where most of the other Durmstrang students sat.

Clarke found a seat between Raven and Jasper. It would be a lie to say she’d paid attention to Professor Kane introducing the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons headmasters. It would be a lie to say she’d cared much when Kane unveiled the Goblet of Fire, an ancient artifact that had Bellamy practically swooning from where he sat on Raven’s other side, before Kane delved into a long speech about the new safety procedures, the Age Line that would be placed around the Goblet, and the time window in which they had to submit their names. Clarke was too busy ducking her head down when she thought Lexa caught her shooting furtive glances her way; she couldn’t help it. Her mind was so frazzled by this point that she wasn’t even sure if Lexa was actually noticing or if Clarke was imagining it. Despite the fact that the other Durmstrang students had shed their cloaks and heavy furs (revealing the blood-red uniforms they wore underneath), Lexa did not remove a single article, not even the scarf tucked firmly in place at her left shoulder. She remained quite still and impassive as she kept her alert eyes, such a vivid green against the solid black warpaint on her face, focused on Kane as he spoke, clearly taking in his every word. Soon enough Kane released them and Clarke only seized a few rolls of bread that she shoved into her robe pockets before
standing to leave. Her friends all gave her puzzled looks but she swiftly shook her head, quickly assuring them she was just tired, and then hurried away.

And now here she was. She’d locked herself in the Prefect’s bathroom and was attempting to brew up a homemade Calming Draught.

“Give me one minute,” she called to Raven, who groaned before footsteps stomped a slight distance away. Clarke was guessing she went to sit in the hallway.

Clarke tucked her bottom lip between her teeth as she quickly whisked the mixture in the small wooden bowl. She brought it up to her nose to sniff, contemplated for a moment, then shook her head and added another pinch of ginger.

“Clarke! Are you taking the world’s biggest shit or what?”

Clarke let out a harsh breath through her nostrils, struggling to rein in the anger and impatience. This wasn’t the first time she felt remorseful over the fact that she told Raven and Octavia the passwords to the Prefect’s bathroom. “Raven,” she said carefully, practically biting the word out, “I said give me one minute.”

“I did!”

“That was more like ten seconds.”

Raven huffed a breath. “Well you’re taking forever and it’s kind of infringing on my bath time.”

“Go masturbate in your own bathroom.”

Raven scoffed. Clarke smiled at the lack of an answer. Raven must have sensed Clarke was smirking because a moment later she said, “Fuck you.”

“You’d be so lucky,” Clarke sang out while lifting the bowl up for another sniff. That smelled better, but it was still missing something.

Raven gave another impatient sigh. “Alright, that’s it.” Before Clarke could seize her wand or throw her shoulder up against the door, she heard “Alohomora!” and the door swung open, the edge scraping against the side of Clarke’s bare right foot and slicing into her pinky toe.

“Damn it!” snarled Clarke, hopping on one foot and just barely managing to keep the liquid from sloshing out of the bowl.

“What are you doing?” asked Raven with an arched brow, looking from Clarke hopping around to the bag of ingredients on the porcelain sink. “Are you making a potion? What are you making? Why —”

“UGH, I’ll explain in a minute, just take this so I can fix my foot that you decided to cleave off!” She shoved the bowl into Raven’s open hand (the other was clutching a caddy filled with toiletries) and hobbled over to the toilet, sitting and propping her leg up on the other. She fumbled for her wand in her cloak pocket, almost frantic at the fact that she could sense how jumbled she still was from that damn draught, and muttered a quick healing spell as she ran the tip of her wand along the scrape on her foot. Relief spread, tingling up one side of her calf, but her head still spun and pounded.

Panting slightly, she looked up to see Raven staring down at her with a half amused, half perturbed expression on her face.
“Oh-kay…” said Raven, lifting her eyebrows at Clarke. “Now do you want to tell my why you’re making a…” She wafted the fumes of the bowl toward her, closing her eyes blissfully at the sweet fragrance. “Mmm. A Calming Draught?”

“We were working on Alihotsy Draughts in Advanced Potion Making today. I guess I inhaled some fumes, because I started getting a little hysterical not long after I left.”

“Shit, Clarke. Why didn’t you say?” Raven took another sniff of the mixture before she started rummaging around in Clarke’s bag of ingredients. “Don’t need you poisoning yourself because you were too hysterical to think straight. Not that you ever think straight.”

She took the knife Clarke left on the sink and cut a few chunks of Valerian root, lifting them over the bowl and squeezing the juice from them. After mixing it in, she gave another hearty sniff before nodding and passing the bowl to Clarke. “Two gulps should do it.”

Clarke lifted the bowl to her lips, breathing in the sweet, thickly rich smell of the herbs and spices before she took a long swig. She took three gulps rather than two, but it wouldn’t hurt.

She had hardly passed the bowl back to Raven when she felt the calming affect wash over her like a warm blanket. She sighed, a sleepy smile creeping up on her face. Raven grinned.

“Better?”

“Much. Thanks.”

“Mmm-hmm. No wonder you were so weird and twitchy at the feast.”

Clarke winced. “Was I that bad?”

Raven nodded, leaning a hip against the sink as she set the bowl back down in it. “You just seemed jumpy and stressed. And like you weren’t even paying attention to Kane, plus you kept looking over at the Durmstrangs and—wait a minute, I almost forgot! Who was the girl you were with?” Clarke hesitated and a wicked grin unfurled on Raven’s face. “Don’t tell me you already shagged a Durm—”

“God no,” Clarke waved a hand through the air as though brushing Raven’s questions aside. “Are you kidding me? Kane asked me to give her a tour. I guess she’s like Durmstrang’s version of Head Girl.”

Raven almost looked disappointed. “She’s really hot. I was kind of impressed, not gonna lie—”

“She probably thinks I’m a total psycho, Raven.” With that Clarke explained what happened during the tour. While Raven did cackle throughout most of it, she had sympathy in her eyes as well. “So yeah, I seriously doubt she’ll ever even want to talk to me after that,” finished Clarke. “Hell, I don’t want to talk to her after that. I would be happy with never having to show my face around her again. It was embarrassing.”

“I’d be more embarrassed if I was the Gamekeeper,” sniggered Raven. “He’s sure making himself feel at home, isn’t he?”

“I can’t believe how stupid I made myself look,” said Clarke rather hopelessly. “It just—like, it’s unbelievable. I’m probably the first Hogwarts student she’s ever met. I made everyone look bad.”

“No you didn’t,” Raven disagreed. “If anything, the Gamekeeper did. Who does that with the window behind them?”
“Not to mention she’ll probably tell all of her Durmstrang friends how pathetic I am. Ugh, I just made SUCH an idiot out of myself!”

Raven shrugged. “Think of it this way. Nothing can be as embarrassing as Trina getting detention for stealing cucumbers out of the kitchens. At least it wasn’t that bad.”

Clarke almost smiled.

Raven took a deep breath, pushing off the sink and setting her caddy on the floor before stepping over to Clarke. She offered a hand to pull Clarke to her feet.

“It probably wasn’t anywhere near as bad as you think it was,” said Raven gently. When Clarke deadpanned her, Raven deadpanned her back before rolling her eyes. “I’m serious. You were hysterical, Clarke. Just laugh it off, alright?”

Clarke sighed, finally nodding. “Yeah, nothing I can do about it now, I guess. What’s done is done. It’s not like I have to talk to her again.” She was sure Durmstrang will be plenty occupied with rest of the school, the Beauxbatons, and the tournament. Clarke smiled for real this time, bracingly rubbing Raven’s arm. “Thanks for your help, Ray. I guess it can be a good thing sometimes that you take over the bathroom you’re technically not allowed to use.”

Raven rolled her eyes again, moving to pick up her caddy. She was already turning the faucets to the swimming pool-sized tub by the time Clarke had rinsed out the bowl, cleaned it and the knife, and put them away in her bag. “You should be glad it was me and not Octavia,” Raven called out over the crackling sound of huge lavender bubbles popping out of the tap. “At least I’m good in Potions. If it was O you might be dying from poison or something right now.”

“As if I’d let O touch any of my potions.” Clarke slung her bag over her shoulder, breathing in slowly again with her eyes closed, grateful for the various fragrances of the soap drifting in the air, grateful for the Calming Draught, grateful for her friends. Also grateful her mother was overbearing enough to insist Clarke take an “Emergency Potions Kit” with her to school.

“I’m heading back to the Common Room,” she called to Raven over the water gushing into the tub, which was already nearly full.

“Finally. Get out of here so I can get naked already.”

“Yeah, like I haven’t seen you naked a million times.”

“Out, Griffin!” Raven stood to jerk a thumb toward the door, unbuckling her brace and setting it carefully on the floor before starting to peel off her clothes.

“See you in the room.”

Raven waved a hand distractedly as she shimmied out of her underwear. Clarke heard her curse, followed by a splash as she closed the door; clearly Raven had slipped and fallen into the tub. Clarke heard a muffled “Fuck you Clarke!” through the door. She shook her head, smirking, and headed down the hallway.

Ten minutes later Clarke was walking up the spiraling staircase leading to the Common Room in the Ravenclaw tower, passing by multiple windows as she did so. It was at the topmost window that the Durmstrang ship caught her eye; she paused, leaning in so close her face was nearly pressing into the glass.

She could see someone lying on a deck chair near the bow of the ship, their arms behind their head
and their ankles crossed, face upturned to the sky. She thought it might be Lexa, but despite the brightness from the stars in the sky today, the distance was simply too great to tell. Besides, what are the chances that out of all the Durmstrang students, it was Lexa?

Why was Clarke even thinking so hard about this anyway?

She pressed her lips together, withdrawing from the window. She watched the spot where her breath had fogged it start to clear for a moment before she continued up the stairs, heading for bed and hoping fervently that she could just forget about this entire day.

* * *

There were more stars in the sky than Lexa had ever seen.

She gazed up at them, almost in awe as she watched the way they blanketed the sky in the thousands. For once there were no trees outlining her peripheral vision, no smoke fires marring the darkness of the night sky. It was just the stars and Lexa, lounging on her back on a dingy reclining chair on the deck of the Durmstrang ship. She was alone, and she liked it that way.

“Don’t tell me you’re taking up Divination,” came a flat voice from somewhere behind her. Lexa sighed. She knew it was too good to be true.

“We should appreciate this view while it lasts, Anya,” she said wearily, sitting up and swinging her legs around to flatten her boot-clad feet to the floor.

Anya stood before the ship door, hands buried in the pockets of her fur coat as she gazed impassively up at the sky. Lexa approached her, coming to stand by her side for nearly a full minute, the two of them considering the sky in silent appreciation. Then Anya brought her gaze down to focus on Lexa. The corners of her lips had curled slightly in a distinctly feline smirk. “So how was the tour today?” she asked sardonically.

Lexus remained impassive. “It was fine.”

“You do know who that girl is, right?” asked Anya, amusement layering every word.

Lexa jerked her head somewhat irritably. “Of course I know.”

Anya waited a beat. “And?”

“And what?”

“What did you think of her?” said Anya impatiently.

“She was…odd,” Lexa said hesitatingly, frowning slightly. It was the truth. Clarke Griffin was nothing like she expected. She had been practically hysterical during the tour (which was disastrous in itself, though Lexa was not going to be telling Anya about it anytime soon to avoid relentless teasing about the man in the hut). She was nothing like the stoic, somber girl with fire in her blue eyes who had been plastered across every newspaper in Europe last year.

Anya arched a brow. “Odd?”

“She seemed tense, I suppose.”
“Hm.” Anya contemplated for a moment before shrugging. “Perhaps she’s anxious to enter the tournament.”

“Perhaps.”

Anya looked up at the sky, then down to Lexa again. “We should go. We don’t have much time left before the tournament begins, and we still have so much to do.”

Lexa dipped her head in acquiescence. “Agreed, but do you really think we should call it training when you are so easy to beat?”

Anya gave a feral sneer. “Lexa, Lexa, Lexa…” she said slowly, withdrawing her hands from her pockets; her wand was held lightly between two fingers. She tilted her head, smiling in response to the slight curve of Lexa’s lips. “Let’s get this over with. You’ll need time to tend your bruises before bed.”

Lexa whipped out her wand just in time to meet the gold sparks with red ones of her own.

“OFF the ship!” burst Indra’s voice from somewhere below deck in the hull; Lexa lifted her lips in the ghost of a cool smile in response to Anya’s smirk before they made way down the ship to take cover in the outskirts of the nearby forest.

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Hogwarts was abuzz with excitement over the course of the next week. It seemed that every student and professor was intent on showing off as much as possible for the new inhabitants. Random Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students would often sit in on various lessons, evidently eager to observe Hogwarts’ lesson criteria, and all the professors seemed extra focused and strict on those days. Hogwarts students, meanwhile, could be heard loudly bragging to any who would listen about their intentions to enter the tournament. Durmstrang continued to adorn warpaint, perhaps under the impression it would intimidate their competition (which was proven accurate, really, because after first period Clarke saw Jasper turn a corner to enter the dungeons after her Potions class and Jasper ran right into the Durmstrang boy with three lines of white cutting across his face; Jasper startled at the sight and stumbled a few steps back, tripping over his own feet. The Durmstrang boy helped him up and Jasper left after a muttered thanks, his cheeks a furious shade of red. Of course, that was most likely due to the pretense of a pretty Beauxbatons girl who had been standing nearby and watched the whole thing. Her lips were pursed in an effort not to smile and embarrass him, at least.

Clarke caught a few glimpses of Lexa whenever she had to make the trek across the Grounds to visit the Care of Magical Creatures classes. She completed the classes when she was a fifth year, but Professor Nygel had started sending her (since she was Head Girl and therefore expected to be responsible) to retrieve Flobberworm Mucus and Salamander Blood from Professor Vera since the last three days of this week would be spent making Wiggenweld Potions. Clarke had been taking advantage of the time by stopping off at the kitchens to grab a pumpkin juice to go, which the house-elves were always only too happy to oblige to. Today, however, Clarke paused instead to lean against the fence outlining the carrot patches as she waited for Professor Vera to retrieve the flobberworm mucus. Clarke was waiting patiently, pumpkin juice forgotten, because across the Grounds and in perfect view she could see Lexa atop Durmstrang’s ship. She seemed to be practicing spells.
Lexa stood with her legs firmly planted in a wide stance and her arm outstretched as though she held a sword rather than a wand. Her face was every bit as impassive as it had been when Clarke first met her, but there was a look of fierce concentration that Clarke could clearly even across the distance. Her forehead shone with sweat and her cheeks were flushed, but no part of her so much as trembled as she held her stance, the only other evidence of her effort being the crease between her eyebrows just below the peculiar little circle on her forehead.

Lexa suddenly leaned far toward the left, head ducking and body shifting as though dodging an invisible spell. She twisted around to pivot, long plaited hair wrapping around her neck as she turned again, her wand-arm weaving through the air and creating a huge puff of cloudy white smoke that billowed out the tip of her wand. Lexa crouched before leaning back, wrist rising almost delicately, sending the smoke gyrating as though it were an ocean wave. A few sparks crackled out to spark and fizz down the length of the smoke extending well beyond the bow of the ship.

Clarke couldn’t find it in her to frown at this puzzling behavior, too entranced by the fluid way Lexa was moving and the beautiful streams of smoke now arcing through the air like stones skipping across the surface of water. She was watching so intently that she jumped, startled, when Professor Vera placed a hand on her shoulder. She hadn’t even heard her approach.

“Here you are, Miss Griffin.” Professor Vera wore a kindly smile as she carefully handed Clarke the box of full vials. “Tell Professor Nygel that the blood is a few weeks old, but should still be strong enough to work.”

Clarke didn’t have to force the smile; Professor Vera was one of the sweetest professors at Hogwarts. Back in Clarke’s first couple years of school, when Kane was a totally different Headmaster (a total asshole, in other words), she and the rest of the entire student body had found it both shocking and affronting that Kane was Professor Vera’s son. She was so kind.

“Thank you Professor. I’ll see you on Monday.”

As Clarke headed back toward the castle, she peeked over her shoulder to see Lexa had relaxed, taking a break from whatever the hell she’d been doing to dab a towel at her sweaty forehead. Clarke told herself that the unpleasant swoop of her stomach was just from the rancid odor of the flobberworm mucus, and not because she swore Lexa had just glanced at her.

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Dinner that evening was a tense affair, if only because everyone was so tense with excitement over the fact that the Choosing Ceremony for the Triwizard Tournament would be taking place in just one week. Students could be found all over the Castle speculating in hushed voices who the Triwizard Tournament judges would be.

“Obviously the headmasters will be judges,” said Octavia wisely just as they sat down to begin loading their plates. “And Minister Jaha.”

“I heard Jamie Potter is going to be a judge,” said Monty, an excited grin on his face.

Octavia’s eyes widened, so taken with this news that she even took a break from piling pineapple ham onto her plate. “Whoa, really? Jamie Potter is like the fucking elite.” Octavia aspired to take over Jamie’s job as the head of aurors one day. “Where’d you hear that?”
"I heard it during AH this morning. Professor Cartwig came in to see Professor Vera and they mentioned it. I mean they were just guessing too, but they sounded pretty confident."

Octavia was practically beaming for the rest of dinner.

Raven arrived late as she usually did on Friday’s due to an evening Advanced Transfiguration class. As she sat down and pulled her cutlery toward her, she announced she had just submitted her name to the Goblet.

“Yes, the Goblet received the winner’s name today,” she boasted, a smug expression on her face as she ladled huge heaps of carrots onto her plate.

“Actually, the future winner put his name in last night,” said Bellamy, grinning. Clarke hadn’t been able to watch Raven put her name in this afternoon because she’d been in a Head Girl and Head Boy meeting with the Headmaster, but Harper, Jasper, and Monty had been there to watch and had already explained in detail the way the fire had flashed colors and the little slip of parchment had disappeared in a puff of sparks and ash. Clarke had been able to see Bellamy’s, however. He was nearly as excited as Raven about it, and hadn’t wasted any time in barraging Clarke with encouragement to enter. She was still resolutely refusing.

“Don’t make me laugh, Blake.” She pretended to peer around the table, giving an exaggerated smile as though she hadn’t found what she was looking for and it was such an inconvenience for her. “Man, I can’t wait until I have my slave to fetch me grapes from the kitchens and hand-feed them to me while I bask in the spoils of my victory.”

“Keep holding your breath for that, Reyes.”

“Did anyone else enter with you?” asked Clarke, interjecting before they could start up what they usually did.

Raven nodded as she sprinkled salt over her carrots. “Yeah, there were some Beauxbatons there. Jasper’s wife put her name in too.”

Jasper blushed despite the smirk he had. “The future Mrs. Jordan was there? That’s nice. Maybe she’ll win so we can get that condo we’ve been looking at.”

“You’re a creep, Jasper,” Octavia said, though there was no real malice in her tone.

He shrugged and shoved some green beans in his mouth.

“Apparently the Durmstrangs came and all entered at the same time early this morning,” said Fox. “Guess they didn’t want to draw a lot of attention.”

“That’s surprising. They look the type to show off,” said Wells, and Clarke nodded in agreement. With the war-paint, the warrior-style braids, and the less-than-friendly expressions, Clarke would have assumed they would enter in front of everyone in hopes to intimidate.

“This asshole from Beauxbatons entered when I did,” said Miller when he arrived late for dinner, hair windswept and goalie gloves on. Apparently he’d been out flying, which most Hogwarts students had started to do after the disappointment of learning Quidditch season was cancelled. Most students were appeased by the fact that it was only cancelled due to the time-consuming nature and excitement of the Triwizard Tournament, but people like Clarke and Wells, who could honestly care less about the tournament, were not very happy about the situation.

“Who?” asked Jasper.
Miller sat down beside Monty, pulling a plate of ham toward him. He nodded toward the table directly behind theirs, which was mostly empty save for a few Beauxbatons. The girl Jasper had a crush on wasn’t there, but there was a pretty girl with dark skin and dark hair.

“Who, her?” asked Harper.

He shook his head, actually lifting a hand up to point. “No, him.”

It was a boy with pale skin and thick dark hair slicked back from his face. There was something about the flat glint in his eyes, the way he lounged in his chair, and the self-satisfied lilt of his lips (one of which looked scarred) that Clarke didn’t like. She reminded herself it wasn’t smart to judge someone you didn’t even know.

“Why is he an asshole?” she asked.

“He came strutting in just after I put my name in. He put his in and then he asked me what my blood was.”

Everyone made similar noises of affront.

Miller nodded in agreement to their outrage. “I know. I told him it was none of his business. Then he asked for my name, so I told him, and he asked if I was related to the auror David Miller. So I had to say yes, right. Totally changed toward me then. Started talking about how a ministry job is commendable and why shouldn’t we want positions of authority filled by real wizards? Dude’s a racist. I’m guessing he’s pure-blood, too.”

Raven snorted. “Of course he’s pure-blood. LOOK at him, like check out the fucked up mouth. He’s purebred. Clearly the result of inbreeding, folks.”

“Raven!” said Octavia in a shocked, appalled voice, though she was clearly attempting to suppress a grin. Fox shifted in her seat, appearing a bit uncomfortable.

“His name is Cage Wallace,” said Wells. Clarke could tell by his wrinkled nose and slightly curled upper lip that Wells didn’t like him.

“How do you know?” said Octavia in surprise.

“I had to take him on around on a tour.”

“How was he?”

“He’s an absolute wanker.” Wells glowered in Cage’s direction. “Really arrogant, with this smug smirk that makes you want to jinx him. He’s like Murphy, but ten times worse.”


“Not all pure-bloods are wankers,” said Fox sharply. She was frowning reproachfully at Raven.

Raven rolled her eyes in exaggeration, slapping a hand to her heart. “Oh, God, I’m sorry. Don’t want to offend the minority here,” she said rather nastily before turning her attention back onto her Shepard’s pie. Fox looked hurt for a moment, before Octavia, scowling, nudged Raven in the ribs. “Ow! What?” She looked to where Octavia was gesturing and a mixture of exasperation and remorse flashed across her face. Appearing uncomfortable, she rubbed the back of her neck. “Look, I know not all pure-bloods are wankers. It’s a figure of speech, you know?”
“Well, maybe you should think before you speak,” said Fox stiffly. “And I am the minority, actually. Less than ten percent of the wizarding population is pure-blood.”

Raven frowned. “Like that’s a bad thing?”

“It’s not a good thing! It’s a tradition—“

“An outdated and dangerous tradition that’s built on years of oppressing those they found ‘inferior,’ which is pretty ironic considering they—”

“Dangerous? How—“

“Guys, enough,” interjected Octavia, brows arched waringly.

Raven and Fox fell silent. Fox resumed cutting her steak while Raven remained motionless. Clarke didn’t bother broaching the subject she was keen to discuss, because she knew Raven wasn’t finished yet.

Sure enough, only a few minutes later, Raven said, “You know what I don’t get?” Fox’s lips thinned as she pushed her plate back, setting knife and fork down with a clatter on the wooden surface of the table. She turned to face Raven with the air of one staring down what may be a very long battle.

“Why you feel the need to defend yourself from something I’m not even accusing you of. I’m talking about pure-blood extremists, people like that guy,” she jerked a thumb toward Cage, who was still poking and prodding at his food with a look of disdain, “Who think that people like me aren’t real witches or wizards.”

“Because, Raven, you don’t say ‘him.’ You say ‘pure-bloods,’ and I’m a pure-blood.”

“You can’t use common sense to realize who I’m talking about?”

“It doesn’t matter what your intentions are, but the way you’re saying it. You talk about pure-bloods like they’re all these horrible, racist, murdering villains, but you know not all pure-bloods are like that! I’m a pure-blood, and I’m not like that!”

“But Fox if you know that I know that, then why are you bothered?” argued Raven. “Obviously when I say pure-bloods I mean in general, not every single individual pure-blood. You know that’s what I mean so why do you get worked up over it like it’s a personal attack against you?”

“Because it is!” burst Fox. “You can’t say pure-bloods all have it in for muggle-borns because not all pure-bloods are like that! Saying otherwise not only offends me, it hurts my feelings, Raven!”

Raven threw her hands up. “But why? Why do you make it personal like that? I’m talking about the way pure-blood society handles it in general, not you in particular!”

“Because I’m one of those people!” Fox repeated, voice rising as she lost her temper.

“Really?” said Raven, voice dry with sarcasm and brittle with anger. “You think I’m not a real witch, then?”

The look Fox gave her was full of disgust and annoyance. “Don’t be thick, Raven. You’re my friend and you know that’s not what I think.”

“Then how are you one of the people I’m talking about?” Fox was silent for a moment under the weight of Raven’s glare.
“It’s just rude,” she eventually said, lips pursing as though she’d tasted something bitter.

Raven planted her hands on the table and slowly stood up, her jaw set. Clarke and Octavia exchanged an uneasy expression; they both knew Raven was about to bomb Fox, and it wouldn’t be pretty.

“Well I’m sorry that you get offended because you take something I say about a corrupt and oppressive aspect of society with an underlying foundation of murder and racism to be all about you in particular, which if you would shut up with your petty bullshit long enough to realize your own problem of making everything about you, maybe you would see that a real friend would be more concerned about the fact that people like me have been discriminated against, tortured, and murdered for centuries, and that that’s worth talking about more than the fact that you get butthurt because you take it personally, which, oh yeah, probably stems from the fact that you don’t have to defend your freedom to use magic and the right to belong every day of your life. Unlike ‘muggle-borns,’ who are all just clumped together in general because we’re the oppressed ones, pure-bloods have the right to their own autonomy because they’re the ones in charge just like they have been since the beginning of time. Instead of worrying about whether or not I might be hurting your feelings, how about instead you worry about how there are groups of people who are told everyday they don’t deserve to live just because they weren’t bred!”

With that, Raven swung her legs over the bench and marched away, her heavy bag of books bouncing on her back with the force of her stomps. The table was left in an awkward silence, everyone determinedly avoiding looking at Fox. Clarke chanced a glance at her to see that she was glaring down at her untouched food with a stormy expression, her eyes watering. After a moment, Fox stood up and left the table too.

Clarke looked up and happened to lock eye contact with Cage. She got the distinct feeling he had heard the entire conversation. He had a smirk on his face as he rolled his eyes and said loftily, “Mudbloods. Am I right?”

It took the combined efforts of Clarke, Wells, Jasper, Monty, and Miller to stop Octavia and Bellamy from lunging at him with their wands brandished.

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It took the entire weekend for Raven and Fox to acknowledge one another again, and the constant dreary rainfall did nothing for their moods. It was more than uncomfortable for everyone else, Clarke in particular since she slept in the same room with them. Finally, by Monday evening they managed a civil “Could you pass me the potatoes?” “Thanks.” After that everything seemed to return to normal, though they were each careful not to bring up any discussions regarding blood.

It was fortunate too, considering they were both on the Quidditch team, so when Octavia begged everyone to head to the pitch so they could have a friendly game, Raven and Fox were happy to accept. Clarke, however, wasn’t so sure—not just because there was a giant signpost on the field asking students to stay off it, but because if she got in any trouble, it would mean extra trouble for her mother.

“Aw come on Clarke, I know you haven’t flown in ages, and it’s no fun with only one seeker!” pleaded Octavia.
Clarke hesitated. On one hand, Kane just might kill them if he found out, though Clarke wasn’t really concerned about that. No, what she was concerned about was that he would tell her mother—her mother, who was currently home alone, no daughter or husband to keep her company…

Yet on the other hand, Clarke had not had time all summer to go out flying in the garden even once, and considering the Triwizard tournament was taking over the school year, this could be one of her only chances…

“Jasper, on your right!”

The bludger hit him square on the side of his face. Octavia zoomed by clutching the quaffle tightly to her hip, cackling. Bellamy smirked as Jasper clutched at his broom handle to balance himself again.

Clarke shook her head, grinning broadly as she squinted, searching for a glint of gold amidst the steady downpour of rain. When they started it was only drizzling, but it was sure to become a storm later. Clarke didn’t care. She was grateful to be out in it, relieved at the feeling of weightlessness and the wind rushing through her hair.

They had been playing for around twenty minutes when it happened.

It had stopped raining, grey clouds giving way to a dazzling sunset and pretty rainbow arcing over the castle instead. Bellamy was trying to teach Jasper and Monty the proper way to swing a bat, since neither of them played Quidditch (though they both loved the game and Jasper was the school’s Quidditch Commentator). Wells was sitting in the stadium working on his Arithmancy, considering he wasn’t a fan of playing. For everyone else, however, the game had dissolved into a ridiculous game of chase.

Though Octavia hadn’t been able to score any goals against Raven, she’d lost count of her goals against Miller. Losing interest, she had instead decided to annoy Clarke by shadowing her, taunting that she would find the snitch first. The others soon joined in and now there was a rather large crowd of all Clarke’s friends flying madly in a huge mass behind her, laughing and cackling and seemingly determined to just follow Clarke around and annoy her rather than be the one to find and catch the snitch.

Clarke had spotted a glint of gold near the ground at the edge of the pitch, but aware of everyone watching her, she pulled her broom handle up and shot higher into the sky, feigning as though she had spotted the snitch. As expected, everyone followed her, a few people shouting in excitement. Grinning, Clarke abruptly shoved her handle down and went rocketing toward the ground, turning to look over her shoulder and flip her middle finger at Octavia and Raven, who had anticipated the feint and were close on her tail.

“WATCH OUT!” someone screamed, possibly Harper, but by the time Clarke looked around and noticed the green eyes she was hurtling toward, it was too late.

She fumbled to pull out of the way, but the messy jerk of the broom handle resulted in her spinning to the side, the broom flying out from beneath her and Clarke collided right into none other than Lexa.

Her jaw slapped Lexa’s shoulder and her wrist seared as they hit the ground. Her first thought? “Oh my God how many times will I humiliate myself around the Durmstrangs?” Her lashes fluttered as she blearily opened her eyes, squinting in the sharp light of the sunset reflecting off the castle tower windows.
Lexa did not make a sound as she pushed herself up onto her elbows. Clarke realized with a jolt that she was sprawled out spread-eagle beneath Lexa. Clarke’s second thought: “Why the hell are they even here on our pitch anyway?”

Lexa pursed her lips together, blinking rapidly as though to expel the stars out of her eyes. Her gaze focused and met Clarke, and Clarke felt a ripple of electricity course through the length of her entire body, warming her belly, as she became truly aware that she was lying beneath Lexa and the entirety of the fronts of their bodies were flush together.

Third thought: “Holy shit she’s attractive. Why does she have to be so attractive?”

Embarrassing yourself was so much worse when it was in front of someone ridiculously attractive. It didn’t matter that Clarke had absolutely zero intentions of doing anything about the attraction. She would rather not make herself look like a fool, regardless.

She wrenched her gaze from Lexa’s, turning her head to take in the sight of most of her friends landing lightly in the grass. It had only been Octavia and Raven who had kept up with Clarke enough that they crashed and burned with her. Raven was slumped over the haughty looking girl, moaning, and the boy Octavia had struck had somehow managed to catch her in his arms so their fall was muffled.

Lexa mercifully rolled to her feet. She offered a hand to Clarke, which she was only partly grateful to take (because she had to admit it would be a tiny teeny bit easier dealing with all this humiliation if she could somehow blame Lexa for it). Lexa pulled her to her feet and then released her hand to reach up and pick the grass out of her braids. She didn’t seem very perturbed or upset at all that Clarke had just flown straight into her.

Raven had hobbled to her feet too, followed quickly by the girl she’d crashed into. Octavia was holding the gaze of the boy she’d crashed into, a flirtatious light in her eyes in response to his easy smile.

Lexa, meanwhile, dipped her head in a polite nod at Clarke. “Hello again.”

“Hi,” Clarke managed. At least Clarke wasn’t hysterical this time. If she had been, she imagined she would have been babbling under the distraction of Lexa’s flawless cheekbones and admittedly gorgeous eyes.

“You made me wet,” said Lexa mildly, glancing down at the damp spots of her cloak.

Clarke bit her lip. Yeah, good thing she wasn’t hysterical today.

To her horror, Lexa began shrugging out of her cloak and robes, revealing a slim, lean body whose muscles were easily defined in the tight, form-fitting long-sleeved black top, and tight black trousers that Clarke was sure she should avoid seeing the back of if she wanted to maintain any semblance of sanity.

“You people fly like complete morons,” said the haughty girl in a flat voice. She was picking clumps of mud out of her fur hood. “We were watching you for a time. Have any of you ever even heard of Quidditch before? Do you even play?”

“I’m Ravenclaw’s Keeper,” said Raven testily, a note of pride in her voice. Clarke didn’t blame her. She had developed her own contraption to support her brace on her broom, and she was one of the best Keepers of the past decade.

“Yeah, I’m a Chaser for Gryffindor,” said Octavia, a shit-eating grin on her face as she rubbed the
back of her neck with a rather muddy hand.

“I’m a Seeker for Ravenclaw,” said Clarke with a sigh. Which made this whole incident even more embarrassing.

“You did not mention that you play Quidditch,” said Lexa, directing her attention onto Clarke. Her green eyes were so steady on Clarke that she almost wanted to squirm under her gaze. Clarke could have sworn there was a faint layer of amusement in her tone. “You would think someone with experience would have better handling of their broomstick.”

Clarke wanted to melt right into the ground, wanted a giant hole to open up and swallow her whole. She cleared her throat uncomfortably, hating the flush of her cheeks and the way her hair was plastered to her head and the side of her face. She wasn’t about to give them the satisfaction of knowing she was mortified, though. Her voice was strong as she said, “What can I say? I’m a little out of practice.”

To her surprise, Lexa’s lips curved up slightly.

“Yes, well, I think ‘complete amateur’ is the more accurate label here,” said the haughty girl, finally finished brushing dirt off her arms and knees so she could level a disdainful gaze on Clarke. “You fly like children.”

Clarke gave a weak smile. “Sorry. We were just messing around, and—“

“You think you can fly better?” demanded Raven.

“Better than a child?” The girl’s upper lip curled. “It’s not hard to do.”

“Maybe in fair, sunny conditions,” Raven taunted. “You’ve been wiping your hands clean since you got knocked down. I don’t think you could handle making saves in the pouring rain.”

“A little rain never hurt anyone,” challenged the girl.

Clarke internally groaned. This was like Raven and Bellamy 2.0.

“Looked like I hurt you just a second ago.”

“Not as much as I’ll hurt you in a minute.”

To Clarke’s relief and pleasure, Lexa interjected before things could escalate.

“I am Lexa,” she introduced herself to Raven, Octavia, and the rest of Clarke’s friends who had walked over. “This miserable terror is Anya, and that is Lincoln.”

“This grouch is Raven,” said Clarke, jerking a thumb toward Raven. “That’s Octavia.” She turned to point at her friends all huddled over clutching their broomsticks. She pointed one by one as she said each of their names. “Bellamy, Monty, Miller, Jasper, Fox, Harper, Atom, Roma, Monroe, that’s Wells walking over to us, and I’m Clarke,” she finished, turning back to face them.

Lexa gestured toward two Durmstrang girls and one Durmstrang boy who were lingering farther back, clearly content to have watched from a distance (and were grateful to have done so now, after Clarke, Raven, and Octavia had crashed into their friends). “That is Emori, Tris, and Artigas.”

Clarke lifted a hand in greeting. They nodded in return.

“We heard you playing from our ship and decided to spectate,” said Lexa, watching Clarke intently
as though gauging her reaction. Clarke was bewildered as to why Lexa would think she would care. Then Clarke realized Lexa probably thought Clarke would assume Lexa would try to stay away from her after yesterday.

She wished she could explain the Alihotsy Draught, but there were too many people here that didn’t know the story, and that she didn’t want to know the story.

So she said, “Well I hope we provided some level of entertainment.”

“You did.”

There was an awkward silence. Clarke hated the fact that all her friends were here hanging on to their every word; it made it so much more uncomfortable.

It didn’t help that she still remembered the comfortable pressure of Lexa’s body weight on hers.

She shivered.

Lexa raised her brows, taking the shiver for cold due to the rain rather than…other reasons. “We will head back to our ship now so you all may return to the castle. I am sure you would like to get changed out of your wet clothes. I know I would,” she added with the ghost of a smile.

Clarke had to actually make an effort not to shiver again.

As the Durmstrangs left, Clarke’s friends headed back toward the castle. Clarke, Octavia, and Raven gathered their broomsticks up from the ground. Then they stood together, staring after the Durmstrangs, who were small in the distance now.

Raven was squinting at them with an unreadable expression, her jaw set and lips pursed. “What a bitch,” she said savagely, referring to Anya. After a beat, she added in satisfaction, “I like her.”

Clarke and Octavia both snorted, smiling as they shook their heads, and together the three of them headed back up toward the castle, all quiet and lost in their thoughts.

Clarke wasn’t hysterical anymore, so she wondered why she couldn’t get those green eyes out of her head.

* * */°/°* *

Rain was peppering the cobblestone streets of Hogsmeade. The smell of hearty yeast and sweetness lingered in the air from the bread baking in the oven in the back, and the comfort and warmth of it served as a perfect foil to the cold streak of raindrops trailing across the bay window. Evie sighed, utterly content as she leaned a hip against the bar countertop, propped her chin on her hand, and gazed at the dark sky beyond the window across the pub.

It was early morning and her first regular would amble through the door in little over an hour, but this was Evie’s favorite time of the day. The stillness in the air, the silence but for the crackling of rising yeast in the oven, the smell of it and the pastries…She glanced at the bright yellow sunflowers resting in the blue glass vase perched atop the piano. She appraised the flowers, and thought of the person who brought them. Evie smiled. That was her favorite part of the day, and there was no use trying to deny it.
The bell above the door chimed as the door cracked open. A grinning head poked in. Evie’s smile spread.

“Good morning.”

She swallowed, sucking her bottom lip into her mouth to stop her smile from splitting her face ear to ear. “Good morning, Frankie.”

He pushed the door open farther and stepped inside, wiping his feet on the mat and shaking the rain off his coat. He tucked his hat more securely on his head and pressed his lips together in a determined smile before crossing the room, lifting the bouquet of vivid pink tulips once he reached her.

“You look beautiful today.” He leaned forward to press his lips to her blushing cheek.

“Thank you,” she murmured. She took the flowers and put them in the vase of water she had already prepared. She beamed at them before turning to Frankie again. He looked as he always did: a little flushed, a little shy, but with the sweetest smile that lit up those bright brown eyes. Evie stepped around the bar to him, directly into his space. His throat moved as he swallowed, and she fought not to smile too obviously. He was so sweet. “You’re right on time, as usual.”

He shrugged, grinning. “I guess I’m predictable.”

Evie grinned back as she reached up to adjust the collar of his jacket, smooth it down. “A little predictability is never a bad thing. It just means you’re reliable.”

He narrowed his eyes, bending down, stooping to move his smile nearer to hers. “Sounds pretty boring.”

The quiet sound of laughter she made in the back of her throat was muffled as she buried her face in his shoulder, breathing in the smell of firewhisky and plants and mint toothpaste.

“I won’t stay long,” he said, pulling back from the embrace to look into her eyes. “I know Jamie will be here soon, and I don’t want to intrude.”

Evie rolled her eyes, waving his words away and pulling him close to her by the scruff of his collar again. “Jamie-shmamie. It doesn’t matter anyway. Don’t you want to catch up?”

Frankie nodded. “Yeah, but you haven’t seen each other in almost a month. Don’t you want to spend some time together first?”

Evie shrugged. In all honesty, she wanted to invite Frankie back to her bed and spend the rest of the night and the entirety of the next day there as well, regardless of business that needed to be done. But Frankie liked to take things slow.

Evie stretched onto her toes to brush a kiss across Frankie’s lips. His cheeks turned red and he smiled again.

“I guess I could stay a bit longer.”

She tilted her head up, kissing him deeply until several minutes later he pulled back to smile at her, his gaze a little unfocused.

“Wow. I could do that all day, you know?”
“We could—"

“Hey, what do you say about me picking you up for a lunch date today?” he said brightly.

Evie stopped short, frustrated only for a moment, then merely bemused and exasperated. She wasn’t used to taking relationships so slowly. It was aggravating, but it was Frankie, so she didn’t mind as much.

She smiled. “That sounds great.”

He grinned and moved to kiss her again, but before he could, the lights in the pub shut off. She and Frankie stilled, a gasp caught in her throat after the door flew open with a loud bang upon rebounding on the wall. There was a faint hiss and then the hum of the oven ceased as it shut off. The room grew cold, freezing even, and Evie’s heart was pounding as she clutched Frankie, straining her eyes and her ears.

There was nothing. The silence pushed against her ears with an almost painful pressure. Her skin prickled with gooseflesh. Her heart sank. She knew what was here.

It was visible only a split second before it lunged. It was a darkness that seemed heavier than the darkness around it. Rotting, scabbing claws protruded and a guttural snarl ripped through the air and Evie screamed as she plunged her hand into her dress pocket, fingers closing around the wand that felt more like a thin stick than anything right now—

“**EXPECTO PATRONUM!**”

A huge silvery white hawk, glowing so brightly it lit up the entire pub, swooped through the air, bringing with it warmth and the ability to breathe. The foul creature made a noise that sounded like something between a hissing snarl and a garbled shriek, hurling itself toward the open door. There was a faint grunt and the sound of tattered cloak whipping in the wind, and then there was silence.

Evie stood frozen, her eyes wide in the looming cloak darkness, one hand clutching her wand and the other gripping Frankie’s arm. The hawk landed on the floor, tucking its wings to its side and tilting its head, looking up at Evie with unblinking eyes. Then it faded into a wisp, melting away into the air and plunging the pub into darkness again. Evie let out a shaky breath as Frankie flicked his wand, muttered the spell, and the lights came back on.

“Are you guys okay?” came an urgent voice as Jamie strode into the pub, unclasping a travel cloak while crossing the threshold.

Evie numbly nodded, struggling to catch her breath. Frankie rubbed his hands over his face before saying hoarsely, “Thank you, Jamie.”

Jamie exhaled slowly in relief, green eyes darting around the pub as though checking there weren’t any more before turning toward Evie, expression suddenly stern. Evie’s heart sank. *Here comes a lecture from big sister.* “You should be more careful, Evie!”

“What do you mean ‘be more careful’?” said Evie incredulously. “If a solid black creature that doesn’t make any noise when it moves skulks in when my eyes are closed, how am I supposed to know the bugger is there?!”

“You’re supposed to be vigilant!” said Jamie crossly. “Constant vigilance! If I hadn’t shown up, you two would be soulless squibs right now!”

Evie shook her head, too accustomed to her sister’s overprotectiveness to bother arguing with her.
Instead she moved forward to draw her in a hug. “It’s good to see you, Jamie.”

“You too, even if you are turning me grey.”

Evie snorted, rolling her eyes. “It’s not my fault you started turning grey at sixteen.” The amusement in her tone was broken, fear creeping into the cracks. “So, uh… why was it here, anyway? That’s the third sighting in the last—”

“Month, yes,” said Jamie dully. She sighed, reaching up to rub the back of her neck. “I don’t really know. Partly because there’s some information about it that’s so classified I don’t even know about it, but mostly because no one seems to know at all. The only person that could give us some kind of clue is Jake Griffin and he’s in Azkaban, so we’re basically still going into this blind.”

“Jesus. It’s a wonder they’re even hosting the Triwizard Tournament this year at all, considering how much you lot seem to be busy with,” said Frankie.

Jamie’s brow furrowed. “I know, I have wondered about that.”

“Maybe Jaha wants the distraction,” suggested Evie. When Jamie gave her an almost disbelieving look, Evie added, “Well people are scared, so this takes the worry off a bit instead, right?”

Jamie shrugged, clearly reluctant to believe it. “I suppose.”

“Anyways, come in and have a drink. You can tell me everything you know about the tournament.” Evie stepped forward to lock the door, glancing at her watch to see how much time she had left before she officially opened. She ushered Jamie toward the stairs, pausing at the bottom to exchange a chaste kiss goodbye with Frankie. When she entered the spare room clutching two butterbeers, she groaned at the sly grin on Jamie’s face.

“Don’t even start.”

“So when’s he moving in?”

“Ugh!” Evie glared at her sister as she set the beers down on the table and squeezed into one of the chairs. “We’re taking it slow, Jamie.”

Jamie raised her brows, lifting the bottle to her lips to take a sip. “Slow, really? That’s a surprise.”

Evie rolled her eyes. “I would have thought you’d be happy about that.”

Jamie tsked. “Rude. Just because I’m not having sex doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be.”

“You’re not having sex because you’re asexual and you don’t want to. I’m not having sex because this relationship means too much to take it too fast and screw it up. There’s a big difference.”

Jamie smiled as she took another drink. “You don’t have to tell me that.” She set the half-finished bottle on the table, sighing as she leaned back to lounge comfortably in her chair. “So, how’s it going with Frankie, then?”

Evie smiled. “He’s amazing. The sweetest person I’ve ever dated. He brings me flowers every morning.”

“It helps having the garden that he has,” mused Jamie. “How’s his dad doing?”

The two launched into discussion over the Longbottoms, eventually leading to a discussion about their brother Gideon and his Daily Prophet articles.
Eventually, their laughter faded and their butterbeer was finished. Jamie distractedly toyed with the label on the bottle as she seemed to decide to say something.

“You know, speaking of relationships…”

“We’re not speaking about relationships, actually.”

“Okay well, we were speaking about them fifteen minutes ago. Look, I know you’ve already promised Gideon you’d be his photographer. The thing is…” She hesitated, discomfort clear on her face. Evie felt a particular sense of foreboding, so strong it brought heat to her face.

“What? Spit it out already, you’re making me sweat.” Evie tried to play it off as more amusing than anything, lifting her bottle to take a swig.

Jamie took a deep breath, clasping her hands before her. “I’ll just come out with it. Luna is coming.”

“Lu—Wha—” Evie choked on the butterbeer. Jamie patted her on the back as she coughed and spluttered, her throat burning and eyes streaming. “Luna is coming? Why is Luna coming? Luna?”

“Way to set the record for most Luna’s said in one breath,” said Jamie light-heartedly, as though lightening the mood. Evie glared up at her. “Okay, okay. Luna will be here in a couple weeks’ time.” When Evie started sputtering again, she hastily continued, “She’s basically bringing the second task to Hogwarts.”

“But why her?” demanded Evie. She couldn’t help but to feel furious over this whole thing. “Why didn’t you get someone else to bring whatever the hell she’s—“

“I wasn’t in charge of the tasks,” said Jamie gently, a steady hand on Evie’s shoulder to calm her. “Jaha and Diana Sydney arranged all this, I had nothing to do with it. But it’s okay, it’s not like you have to talk to her.”

“I’m the photographer,” said Evie through gritted teeth. “I’m bound to run into her at some point!”

“It’s been years, Evie! And you’re clearly in a stable relationship with a person you’re obviously head over heels for—should it really bother you so much?”

Evie’s cheeks were bright red. “Well—I just—I don’t—“ She huffed, crossing her arms over her chest and ignoring the amusement mixed in with the pity in Jamie’s eyes. “Just make sure she stays away from me. I’m not kidding. Send her an owl and tell her to stay away and leave me alone.”

“First of all,” began Jamie, exasperated. “I’m not going to owl her. Do it yourself if you want. Secondly, why do you just assume she’s going to try to talk to you anyway? She’s probably just as reluctant to see you again as you are her.”

“Probably, considering she hates me,” said Evie, unable to prevent the bitterness from coming through in her tone.

The smile Jamie gave her was sympathetic. “I’m sorry, Evie. I’ll try to be a buffer if you guys have to be around each other a lot, alright?”

Evie jerked her head in a nod. “Alright,” she clipped.

Jamie checked her watch. “I suppose I better head out. I’m supposed to be meeting the other judges for breakfast at Hogwarts, not to mention you open in five minutes.”
The two women stood and embraced. “Come see me later. I want some insider information on the tournament. I need to know who to put my money on.”


“Jesus Christ, relax, will you? I was only joking.” Partly.

“I’ll pop by Friday night, since the Choosing Ceremony is Saturday.” She clasped the buttons of her traveling cloak. “In the meantime, I have a full week of dealing with Diana Sydney. Wish me luck.”

“Good luck,” said Evie, following her down the stairs and standing in the doorway to wave her sister goodbye as she headed down the cobblestone path. Once she rounded the corner, Evie stepped out to switch the sign to open. Her first regular, who had been waiting by lingering against the wall down the alleyway, trotted forward.

As Evie turned the oven back on and then poured the man his usual glass of Paulopabita's Fishy Green Ale, she fought against the mingled emotions rising within her at the idea being in the same general vicinity of her ex-girlfriend (ex-everything, really). The dread she was fine with (good with actually), but the excitement?

She kind of hated herself for it.
The Choosing Ceremony

Chapter Summary

The one in which Clarke is an asshole, Octavia hates Raven's music taste, Clarke's nightmare crashes the party, and the Goblet of Fire chooses the champions.

Chapter Notes

This is quite a bit longer than the other chapters, so hopefully it makes up for the wait.
The next chapter will involve MANY more Clexa scenes.
Let me know what you think, I live for your comments/reviews.
Feel free to stalk this page--> http://dreamsaremywords.tumblr.com/tagged/Clexa-
Triwizard-au if you want some more info, spoilers, that kind of thing.
Hope you all have a great weekend.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"When the light falls on your face,

Don’t let it change you

When the stars get in your eyes,

Don’t let them blind you.”

-Saving Jane

“She’s bluffing. She’s definitely bluffing.”

“She’s not bluffing, mate. Whatever you’re thinking when it comes to her, do the opposite. When it comes to lies and deceit, Rivers is the fucking queen. I’m telling you.” Tomac shook his head, a warning in his eyes as he slapped the cards down on the rickety table. He glowered, crossing his thick arms over the broad expanse of his chest. “I fold.”

Quint remained unmoving, his eyes narrowed over the deck of cards he had tucked up to his face. His gaze darted from the cards to Tomac, then to the lean girl with olive skin and wicked amber eyes that lounged in the chair across from his own. She gazed back at him impassively, and the composed intensity in her eyes reminded him of a wolf watching its squirming prey.
Tucking his tongue between his teeth and hoping for the best, Quint carefully spread his cards out on the table. “Two kings, a mage and a sparrow.” A grin slid onto his face, his arrogance completely ruining the effect of his attempted glare. “Fork over the gold, Rivers.”

She leaned forward, the flatness of her gaze melting away as a crooked smirk unfurled on her face. Without a word, she placed her deck on the table and pushed them across until they lay before Quint’s. It was silent for a moment. Quint waited with baited breath.

The cards burst into silver and white flame, the paper curdling and twisting as they rose into the air. Quint’s cards formed into two miniature kings with tiny crowns atop their heads, a figurine of a woman with a cloak over her dress and a long staff clutched in her hand, and a minute sparrow, zipping back and forth in the air around the kings and the mage. The other deck’s burning tendrils of paper composed itself into bigger figures, and Quint let out a grunt of surprise that quickly turned into a snarl as Rivers’ cards turned into two queens, all intricate crowns and long, needle-thin swords, a dragon figure nearly as large as Quint’s palm, complete with miniscule teeth and a barbed tail, and an elegant bird with a scarlet plumage that still smoldered.

Quint leaned forward, his mouth falling agape as Rivers’ two queens ran their swords through the kings and they disappeared in a puff of foul-smelling smoke. “Damn it, fuck, no!”

The dragon opened its mouth wide in a silent roar and the mage swept her staff through the air, but the flame that shot forward was engulfed by the dragon as it lunged forward and swallowed the mage whole.

The phoenix disappeared in a flash of red and orange. The swallow flitted away toward the ladder and the trapdoor that led to the deck of the ship, but it had barely crossed the length of the hull when fire exploded behind it, and the phoenix reappeared in time to swoop straight through the sparrow, leaving nothing behind but sprinklings of ash that drifted to the floor.

Tomac’s cards, a handful of small warlocks and a miniature three-headed dog, were incinerated within seconds by the dragon’s fire breath.

The two queens, the dragon, and the phoenix all turned to face Rivers. They bowed low to the surface of the table before rising into the air again, twisting as flakes of paper zoomed toward them from the piles of ash on the table and on the floor near the ladder, and a moment later perfectly formed cards lay before Rivers in a neat pile once more.

“Ahh, you mother—“

“Ah ah ah,” sang Rivers as she stood, picked up her cards, and began shuffling them into her full stack. Her expression was so infuriatingly smug that Quint wanted nothing more than to curse it off.

“That was the deck I picked up in Barbados on my stag night,” growled Tomac.

“Oh, Tomac.” She leaned forward, amber eyes crinkled in mirth as she tucked her thick stack of cards away in her pockets. “You’ll just have to pick up another on your next stag night then, won’t you?”

“Fuck you, Rivers.”

“If you didn’t have the misfortune to have been born with a cock dangling between your legs, you might have been that lucky.” The chair scraped the wooden floor as she pushed back from the table so she could get to her feet. She had a broad grin as she plucked the few galleons on the
table up and carefully placed them into her shirt pocket. Then she dumped the handfuls of sickles into her overalls, loading up her pockets. She left the single knut on the table and traipsed to the ladder, turning to face Tomac and Quint with a sigh.

Tucking her hands in her pockets, Rivers shrugged, one corner of her mouth curling into a smirk. “Better luck next time, boys.” She pulled her wand out and swished it once through the air; before they could even react, they crashed to the ground as the chairs beneath them and the table vanished. “Now that you’re up, get your arses to the deck and start swabbing, muggle style.” She flipped her long pastel braid of hair over her shoulder as she gripped the ladder and started up it as Tomac and Quint clambered to their feet, grumbling. “Don’t think I forgot our other part of the deal, either. Losers clean the bilge, so you may want to get started before we hit the portal into North Sea. We arrive at the castle in less than a fortnight, and the tournament waits for no woman!”

She pushed through the trapdoor and out of sight. Tomac and Quint stood in silence for a moment, until Tomac sighed and pulled his wand out of his back pocket. “Accio mop!” Barrels quaked and brooms clattered to the floor as a mop shook itself loose from fish netting to whiz through the air and into Tomac’s hand.

Quint’s upper lip curled in disgust. “Are you seriously going to do what she says?”

Tomac ignored the derision in Quint’s tone as he tucked his wand firmly into his pocket again. He reached down to take a bucket and put the mop inside it before moving toward the ladder. He turned to look at Quint again when he’d put a hand on the railing. “Look. You’re new here. Rivers isn’t really that bad. In fact, she isn’t bad at all. She’s just tough as nails.” Quint wrinkled his nose, clearly not comprehending the muggle phrase. “And young, which means she has all the more reason to be tough. She’ll warm up to you. Just don’t think you can beat her in Wizard cards again.” Tomac chuckled to himself, starting up the ladder, then paused as he remembered. “Or Wizard chess.” He went to move, then hesitated again. “Actually, just don’t challenge her in anything and you’ll be fine.”

Quint rolled his eyes, withdrawing his wand from his pocket. Tomac paused again, frowning as he watched Quint turn around. “Scourgify,” muttered Quint, jabbing his wand toward the extra mops and buckets in the corner. They rose in the air, drifting along to settle in the center of the hull. They started cleaning.

“Didn’t you ever watch Mickey Mouse?” asked Tomac half-jokingly, eying the way a couple of the mops carried themselves over the floor while the others poured water out of the buckets.

The look Quint threw him was full of repulsion. “No, because I’m not muggle rubbish like you.”

Tomac shook his head as Quint disappeared down the staircase. “Asshole,” he mumbled before heading up the ladder.

* * /\ /\ * *

“So, aurors. You know them. We’ve all heard of them. They’ve been in charge of protecting civilians for centuries. But what made them necessary? If you’ll open your books to page nineteen…”
This was around the point Octavia usually tuned out. Sure, this was a big deal to Bellamy, but it wasn’t like it was his first job. He wasn’t paid or anything, anyway. Yawning, Octavia flicked through her book to the correct page, then propped her chin on her fist and gazed out the window across the room, toward the Quidditch pitch she could see just distantly…

She couldn’t believe Quidditch had been canceled. Despite being unbelievably excited for the Triwizard Tournament, she just wasn’t thrilled about the prospect of no stadiums filled with roaring, adoring crowds, no justifiable reason to forget about her homework and troop down to the pitch with her broomstick on her shoulder. Not like there was ever any excuse not to soar through the air with the wind in your hair, but still. Maybe she would feel a little less resentful if she were old enough to enter the tournament. Just one fucking year late! It was a massive pain in her ass, and she was making sure to let everyone know it.

Raven was sympathetic, but she was so excited about entering herself that it kind of distracted her. Bellamy was happy Octavia couldn’t enter. Jasper was just as pissed that he couldn’t enter, so at least there was that. Monty was too besotted with Miller to even have a damn conversation with, and Fox had been awkward to be around ever since she and Raven argued. Wells didn’t care about the tournament at all, Harper was too nice to rage with Octavia, and there wasn’t anyone else she really gave a damn about. Except Clarke, of course, but Clarke, well, Clarke already had a lot on her mind so Octavia couldn’t really blame her for not jumping into her rants.

Octavia sighed, almost misty-eyed as she gazed out the window. It just sucked that this was the one chance at the Triwizard Tournament, since next year she would be graduating and then heading out to travel the world before returning to begin her training as an auror, and she was too damn young to even go for it. By one year.

“With Kingsley Shacklebolt as Minister for Magic, Harry Potter as the head of the auror department, and Hermione Granger as the head of magical law enforcement and then eventually the Minister for Magic herself, the entire Ministry was completely revolutionized. That’s why the next half century after The Second Wizarding War is known as the Golden Ages, a time of unprecedented peace with only a handful of Dark wizard incidents. If you’ll turn to the next page…”

Bellamy cleared his throat rather pointedly, sending a glare Octavia’s way; clenching her jaw and resisting the urge to sigh, Octavia forced her attention onto the book. She should be paying attention, she knew that. After all, History of Magic improved the older you got, and Fifth year learning about Giant Wars hadn’t been so bad. Seventh year was the best year because seventh-year students could choose History of Magic 1993—present as an elective, and since Octavia was the TA’s sister, it meant she was the only sixth year in the room.

Maybe it was the fact that she had heard Bellamy drone on about history too many times to count growing up, and now she was hearing it in class too.

“Such peace was literally unprecedented, but, as we all know, it didn’t last long. So forty-seven years after the fall of Lord Voldemort, the new Minister of Magic thought that training dementors was possible, and that if they were trained, they could be put back into their former positions as prison guards in Azkaban.” Bellamy’s words were met with more than a few disgusted tskts and shaking heads. Bellamy’s lips tugged up into a crooked smile at the response. “Yeah, I know, it’s unbelievable how stupid people can be.” After being met with a smattering of chuckles, Bellamy continued, “So the Department of Mysteries and the Department of Magical Law Enforcement joined together to start training the dementors, even against the advice of a now aged Harry Potter, who had just retired from the auror department. As we all know…the training didn’t go well.” The bell rang, signaling the end of class, and Bellamy’s next words were interrupted by the scraping of chairs scooting along scuffed tile floor and the sounds of books being closed and students
starting to chat.

Raising his voice to be heard over the noise, Bellamy said, “Read through the next chapter before tomorrow! See you guys then!”

Octavia weaved her way through the students, a patient smirk in place as she met Bellamy’s eyes. “Like anyone’s going to do their homework. The Choosing Ceremony is in two days, Bell.”

“Well I know at least one person who’ll be doing the reading,” he smirked, raising his eyebrows with that infuriatingly patronizing ‘Big Brother’ look.

Octavia rolled her eyes. “Yeah, right. Good luck making it up the staircase to make me.”

“I’ll send Howler after Howler, O,” he warned, though there was a teasing note to his voice. “If I have to drive you crazy to do your homework, I will.”

“You already drive me crazy,” Octavia grumbled. Since Bellamy only taught the one class, the two of them headed toward the Great Hall together, tucking their books into their sides as they descended the narrow staircase.

“Man, the fact that Murphy has more of a chance of being Hogwarts’ champion than me is ridiculous!” complained Octavia, throwing a hand up in frustration as she spotted Murphy across the hall, shuffling toward the goblet. He threw a piece of parchment in and stood there with his hands shoved in his pockets, haughtily watching the fire gobble up the paper.

“He won’t be, don’t worry,” said Bellamy, the only thing more confident than his voice being the glint in his eyes.

Octavia sighed, smiling at her brother. “Well, I guess one Blake winning is better than nothing.” Though honestly, a part of her had a sneaking suspicion it would be Raven whose name was pulled out. She would rather die than admit that to Bellamy, though.

“Hey, there’s Clarke. I thought she wasn’t entering,” said Bellamy in surprise.

“She isn’t.” Octavia followed his gaze and frowned. There was Clarke, alright. She was stalking across the hall, straight past the goblet, and she was evidently seething. Octavia watched her march right up to that Durmstrang girl, Lexa, if she remembered correctly. Lexa turned to face her with a mild expression. Octavia’s brows lifted as Clarke snarled something at the girl then shoved what appeared to be a feather into Lexa’s hands. Lexa tilted her head, said something that made Clarke argue a little more, and then at Lexa’s next words Clarke flushed. At that point, the rush of fourth years just released from a Transfiguration class came pouring into the hallway, and Octavia and Bellamy lost sight of Clarke. They squinted for a couple seconds longer before descending a few steps on the staircase. Enough fourth years dispersed so they could see Clarke again. She was rubbing the back of her neck, appearing uncomfortable. Lexa nodded once more, briefly, before turning and heading out the entrance doors. Clarke stared after her before slowly turning and starting toward the direction of her tower.

“The fuck was that about?” muttered Octavia.

Bellamy shrugged, brows knitted. “Hell if I know.”

“Clarke’s been acting really off lately,” said Octavia, worried.

Bellamy brushed it off with a shake of his head that had his hair flopping. “She’s went through a lot in the past couple years. Give her some time. Once her dad gets out of Azkaban, she’ll
Octavia bit her tongue at the urge to say ‘If.’

“O, Bell! Wait up.”

They both startled, looking round to see Raven on the staircase above them, hobbling in her hasty excitement. Her face showed anything but excitement, however. She looked upset. She was clutching something in her hand.

Once she reached them, she shoved it into their faces. It was the Daily Prophet. “Look at this,” she said gravely.

Octavia’s eyes immediately widened in alarm, and then narrowed in indignation. Plastered across the front page of the Prophet was a huge moving picture of Clarke and her mother. They were standing outside of Azkaban, glancing warily around as they stood in queue waiting to enter the prison. It must have been a picture someone took from last year, because Clarke and Abby had not been permitted to see Jake, as far as Octavia knew. It wasn’t like Clarke talked to any of them about it. She wasn’t exactly an open book.

Griffin Conspiracy

"Abigail Griffin, Chief Mediwizard at St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, has never been afraid of doing what she felt was right regardless of what the law has to say.
about it, writes Charles Pike, special correspondent. As most remember, it was only four years ago when Mrs. Griffin broke the International Statute of Secrecy by preforming healing spells on an injured muggle she came across while on holiday in America, landing her in hot water with the Salem Bureau of Magic. It was only three years ago that Mrs. Griffin was brought up before the Wizarding Gamot on trial for a befitting punishment after using an illegal dosage of Dragon’s Blood while administering healing potions to the Minister himself. Of course, since it was Minister Jaha who was healed (after a particularly vicious bout with an illegally enchanted muggle firearm left him crippled and exposed to the sharp claws and attack of a rather grumpy Yeti), Mrs. Griffin was able to walk free yet again. The irony of her inability to be persecuted for breaking the law, however, is the imprisonment of her husband Jake Griffin, an Unspeakable from the Department of Mysteries. After the mysterious incidents of last summer that the Ministry has been so careful in keeping hush, Jake Griffin has been in Azkaban ever since—without trial. Despite efforts of Mrs. Griffin, her underage daughter Clarke, and even Minister Jaha, Mr. Griffin has spent the last year incarcerated. As the majority of the wizarding community is aware of, Azkaban prisoners are not permitted visitation rights, no matter the length or nature of their imprisonment. So why are these pictures of the Griffins visiting Azkaban last Christmas surfacing now? Who allowed this to happen? Is Minister Jaha aware of this violation of law? And if so, will Abigail Griffin finally be held accountable for behaving under the misguided belief that she herself is above the law for the third time? Or has the Griffin-Jaha relationship led to a conspiracy? Read more on Ministry conspiracies, pg. 7"

Bellamy swore loudly.

“I know,” said Raven, rolling the paper up and tucking it into her bag. “I don’t know if Clarke has seen it yet. She has a subscription but she slept through breakfast this morning.”

“She could have gone to the Owlery though. We just saw her acting really weird with that Durmstrang girl she flew into the other day. She looked pissed.”

“Clarke did, or the Durmstrang girl?”

“Both. Well,” Octavia paused, scratching her chin. “I don’t know. That Durmstrang girl kind of always looks pissed.”

“Anya?” said Raven in surprise.

Bellamy frowned. “No, it was Lexa. And since when are you on first name basis with the Durmstrangs?” he asked rather accusatorily. This was around the point where Octavia wanted to slip away.

“Since I flew into her yesterday and they told us their names,” said Raven dismissively, glaring right back at Bellamy, who stubbornly held the gaze.

“Alright so what if Clarke has seen this?” interrupted Octavia before things could escalate. She wasn’t sure exactly what was up with Bellamy and Raven, except that she was fairly certain they had a crush on one another and was also fairly certain they both had their heads too far up their own asses to do anything about it other than constantly fight.

“We need to distract her,” said Raven at once.

“Shouldn’t be too hard to do with the tournament coming up,” said Bellamy.
“No, Clarke doesn’t give a damn about the tournament. She’s too pissed at the Ministry to want to be involved in anything they’re helping put on. No, we need to rely on our old, trusty methods of distraction.”

All three exchanged a glance before their faces split into wide grins.

“Hogsmeade Party.”

*・/✧・*/

Early in the morning two days before the Choosing Ceremony, Clarke Griffin woke with a gasp, her soaked clothes clinging to her sweaty body. She lay there for a minute, chest rising and falling rapidly and breath escaping her lips in shallow bursts, waiting for her heart to stop feeling as though it would pound right out of her chest. It was a Thursday and she knew Raven had an early Advanced Transfiguration class, so she couldn’t crawl into bed with her and hear soothing words that reminded her she wasn’t in the Department of Mysteries, her father wasn’t dead, and there were no strange creatures coming to attack her.

Sighing and resigning herself to the fact that she may never get another restful night’s sleep again, Clarke swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood up. Even though she didn’t have classes until after lunch on Thursdays, she went ahead and got ready for the day, deciding she could write a couple letters and head to the Owlery after lunch, at least.

She ate an early lunch with Jasper and Monty, laughing at the ridiculousness of their beards (because Jasper was an idiot and had managed to talk Monty into trying to cross the Age Line with him, and neither of them were keen to lose their “awesome beards” just yet). She caught Lexa’s eye on more than one occasion and hated the way she blushed (because seriously, how many times did she need to embarrass herself around the attractive Durmstrang girl?). Afterward, she made her way up to the Owlery.

The first she wrote to her father, explaining her uneventful summer and how Hogwarts was going to be hosting the Triwizard Tournament this year. She even wrote a few lines on how she, Octavia, and Raven had flown into Durmstrang earlier in the week.

The second she addressed to her mother, which was considerably shorter. She divulged the whole Durmstrang fiasco too, but she didn’t need to explain her summer or the tournament, so she ended it asking how her mother’s day was going and left it at that.

Up in the Owlery, it took her nearly ten minutes to seek out her owl because the fucker slept like a log. After calling his name at least a couple dozen times, Merlin fluttered down to the window sill, blinking amber eyes sleepily and holding his leg out for her. She rolled her own eyes as she attached the letter. “Are you ever not sleeping, Merl?”

He hooted softly and affectionately clicked his beak as Clarke stroked his head. He took off into the cloudless sky after a moment, and Clarke watched him fly until he was nothing more than a tiny dot she had to squint to see. As she started to leave, a Hogwarts barn owl landed on her shoulder, her rolled up subscription to the Daily Prophet attached to its leg. Clarke fished a couple knuts out of her cloak pockets, dropping them in the pouch on the owl’s other leg. As it flew away, she unfurled the newspaper, leaning against the wall and yawning.
Her stomach gave a sick flip when she saw what was on the first page.

She balled the paper up after reading it, feeling nauseous and furious. She slammed the ball on the windowsill, grabbing her wand and pointing it at it. “Confringo,” she muttered; the ball was shot off the windowsill with the force of the fire spurting out of her wand. She glared as the burning paper floated all the way down from the tower window, eventually landing in the Black lake, where a massive tentacle immediately rose out of the water to scoop the paper into its depths.

She hated Charles Pike. This wasn’t the first time he had written a nasty article about her mother. He seemed to have it out for them. The picture they had taken wasn’t even right. It had been over Christmas break last year, not this previous summer, and Clarke and her mother hadn’t even been able to go in and see her father. They had hoped to, but instead had only been able to deliver a present, which was a blanket and an apple pie (his favorite).

Clarke spent the rest of the day fuming. It wasn’t until her Transfiguration class that her day really took a spin for the worse.

They had spent the previous week reviewing Vanishing spells. Professor Sinclair had given them all feathers to practice on; considering they learned Vanishing spells at O.W.L. level, it had been simple enough. Today, however, they were practicing Conjuring spells. Each of them had to sit at their desk and attempt to Conjure the same feather they had successfully Vanished. Clarke was struggling with it. She was actually good at Transfiguration (not as good as Raven, but who was? Monty, nearly, but still), but it was difficult to concentrate with that Daily Prophet article circling round her mind.

On top of that, the school was still operating under the bright idea that inviting the foreign students into the classrooms was somehow beneficial.

It was hard enough preforming Conjuring spells without her mind being elsewhere and Lexa sitting only a few desks away from her.

Clarke’s lips were pressed into a thin line, her jaw set as she aggressively poked her wand through the air. Nothing. No one in the classroom was having any success yet. Clarke wasn’t sure if the knowledge that in Raven’s Advanced Transfiguration classes they were already practicing nonverbal Conjuring spells made her feel better, or worse.

To add onto her growing list of things to be irritated about, Lexa had moved desks. She was now sitting directly in front of Clarke, turned in her seat to watch her with that steady green gaze. It was unnerving and also…

“You need to swish more and flick less.”

Clarke blushed.

Also a pain in her ass.

She swished her wand as Lexa said, muttering the incantation as she willed her cheeks to return to normal. There was a faint shimmer in the air before her wand. Trying to swallow her frustration and be grateful for the help instead, Clarke let out a long breath through her nose, closing her eyes for a moment before opening them and trying again.

“You are too distracted,” observed Lexa, gaze as steady as ever on her. Clarke gave an impatient huff of breath.

“Well, you’re the one distracting me,” said Clarke shortly, eyes on her wand as she swished
One of Lexa’s brows quirked. Clarke blushed again. “How am I distracting?”

“Have you ever tried to work with someone watching?” said Clarke through gritted teeth.

Lexus nodded. “Often.”

*Of course.*

“I don’t like it. So stop watching me.”

Lexus blinked at her, but if she was surprised at Clarke’s blunt rudeness, she didn’t show it. She said coolly, “That explains your poor flying skills.”

“Well if you think you can do better…” muttered Clarke, brow creased in concentration as she tried another good swish and…nothing.

“I do, actually,” said Lexa, sounding amused now.

Clarke glanced up at her, a sardonic smirk playing on her lips. “Oh you do, do you?”

Lexus gave another of what Clarke was beginning to think were her signature brief nods. “I do. I play for Bulgaria International.”

The smirk slid off Clarke’s face. “Shit. Really?”

Lexus’s lips quirked in another thing Clarke was starting to suspect was her signature thing. “No.”

Clarke scowled.

Sinclair was coming around to check progress. There were quite a few people with feathers laid out before them, and Clarke had still yet to do it.

“Fuck,” she growled, jabbing her wand in the air again.

Lexus sighed, reaching into the folds of her cloak to pull out her wand. “Like this,” she said firmly. She swished and murmured the incantation, and a feather shimmered into being. Clarke automatically reached out to catch it as it started to float down.

The expression on Lexa’s face—on her admittedly very pretty face with its elegant cheekbones and steady eyes and arched brows and full lips—was not even smug, just self-assured. Clarke blushed, and another rush of loathing trembled through her. She wasn’t sure if it was more for Lexa or herself.

“You—“ she started to snarl, though she wasn’t sure what exactly Lexa was except very annoying and very attractive and—

Professor Sinclair arrived at her desk. “Clarke, good,” he said, taking note of it on his clipboard.

Lexus stood and headed back to her previous desk, a knowing little smirk on her face, and Clarke swore steam was coming out of her own ears.
Lexa was out the door the moment the bell rang. Clarke hurried to pack her things away, her vision practically red and yeah, maybe she was overreacting, maybe she was overcompensating for her growing frustration over constantly making a fool out of herself in front of Lexa by growing irrationally angry with her for no good reason, but Clarke was sick and tired of being frustrated so she was going to have a word or two with Lexa. After dumping her quills and parchment rather unceremoniously in her bag, she rushed out the door and down the hallway after Lexa.

She finally caught up with her in the entrance hall.

“Hey! Lexa!”

Lexa turned to face her with that infuriatingly calm expression on her face, utterly devoid of emotion. It just served to anger Clarke even more.

“Here’s your prize.” She shoved the feather into Lexa’s hands.

Lexa angled her head, the amusement back in her eyes. “My prize?”

“Yeah, your prize,” snapped Clarke. “For being an arrogant asshole in my classroom.”

Lexa blinked, the cool, patronizing light in her eyes chasing the amusement away. She lifted the feather, twirling it between two fingers. “While I appreciate the irony of you calling it your classroom while you’re unable to successfully preform something as simple as a Conjuring charm, I have to ask why you feel the need to behave this way, Clarke.”

Clarke blinked now, taken aback by the sound of her name leaving Lexa’s lips. She said the ‘K’ with a slight click. Heat crept up Clarke’s face, flooding over her face.

“Why I…behave what way?” said Clarke defensively, struggling to remember the point of all this. The point was most certainly was not to stare at Lexa’s lips as she spoke. Clarke ripped her gaze away, glaring into Lexa’s eyes. They were a lovely combination of green and grey, almost pale in the light leaking in through the stained glass windows. Staring at Lexa’s eyes didn’t help either. Clarke picked an ear and glared at that instead.

“Why you are treating me with so much aggression and hostility? Have I done something to offend you?” Lexa asked sincerely, brows slightly creased, as though honestly perplexed as to why Clarke was pissed.

Had she done something to offend her? Clarke almost scoffed, and then as she thought about it, realized there were no actual examples she could use. She had met Lexa, had given her a tour while under the effects of an Alihotsy Draught, and Lexa had not been rude in response. She had quite literally flown straight into Lexa because she wasn’t paying attention where she was flying, had knocked Lexa down into the mud, and Lexa still had not been rude. And now Lexa had even helped Clarke with her Transfiguration upon seeing Clarke was distracted and struggling. Yet what had Clarke done? Followed her and attacked her.

Fuck.

Ashamed and embarrassed, Clarke rubbed the back of her neck. “You’re right. I’m—I’m so sorry, Lexa. I don’t know what came over me.”

Lexa scrutinized her for a moment, before her face went devoid of emotion again. She gave a brief nod. “Your apology is adequate,” she said, before resuming her exit.
Clarke stared after her, wondering if she was ever going to be able to have a single conversation with Lexa without humiliating herself.

Aggravated, she turned round to head toward Ravenclaw tower, deciding she could at least go work on the Conjuring spell herself. Maybe she could master it and then conjure Lexa up to give her a proper apology.

* * *

Raven and the gang told Clarke about the party during dinner. Clarke had spent most of the meal shooting guilty glances at Lexa, who sat a table down with the rest of the Durmstrangs.

“Fuck yes, we’re going to see Party Girl Griffin again!”

“No you aren’t,” said Clarke sharply to Jasper. He had finally been forced to rid himself of that ridiculous beard when Kane spotted him and Monty in the hallway and ordered them to go to the Hospital Wing at once. “I’m not getting drunk tonight.”

“Aw, why?” whined Japer. “You’re so fun when you’re drunk.”

“Hey, I’m fun sober! I can be fun,” she insisted.

“He means half-naked fun, Clarke,” said Octavia.

“Oh. Well then no, Jasper, no fun for you.”

He pouted and Clarke rolled her eyes, but in her head she was formulating a plan.

This could be how she apologized to Lexa. By inviting her to the party.

Clarke waited until most people filed out of the Great Hall before she leapt up and trailed after Lexa. She caught her in the doorway, calling her back. Clarke blurted it out before she could hesitate.

“Do you—would you want to come to a party, tomorrow night?”

Lexa’s mouth hung open for a moment; clearly, whatever she expected Clarke to say, it hadn’t been that. Anticipating her question, Clarke said quickly, “It’s like a back-to-school get-together, sort of? I don’t know, my friends are throwing it for me. They thought I looked down, which, I don’t know, maybe I am—was. But I’m fine now.” Clarke punctuated the end of the sentence with a bright, wide smile. Rather than having the effect she hoped it would, it just made her look rather mad.

“Um.” It was the first time Lexa looked taken aback. Even flying into her on broom hadn’t surprised her as much. The thought made Clarke grin. Arching a brow in response to the smirk, Lexa gathered herself up, wiping the surprise off her face to put on her usual mask of indifference. “I’m not sure. Indra would not be happy. I am supposed to train, and it is the night before the Choosing Ceremony.”

Somehow, Clarke knew exactly what to say to push her buttons. She took a step forward,
lifting her brows and narrowing her eyes patronizingly as she smirked and said, “If you’re scared to get in trouble, you don’t have to risk it.”

Lexa’s brows furrowed, her lips pursing. “I am not scared, Clarke,” she said, sounding ruffled. “It is a matter of what is appropriate and what is not. It is not very appropriate to have a party before such a significant day.”

“I think that’s when it’s most appropriate. I mean, what if your name is called? You should celebrate your last day as a free woman, without the responsibilities of being a champion, representing your whole school.”

The look Lexa gave Clarke was disdainful. “I am accustomed to responsibilities already. Becoming Champion will just be one more.”

“Still. You should come. It gives me a chance to show you I’m not a total asshole.”

Lexa’s lips quirked. Clarke almost blushed, because Lexa clearly understood exactly what she was talking about. She had definitely been a dick, then.

“Please come,” said Clarke. “Please.” She wasn’t sure exactly why she was almost begging, except she was very adamant about having one damn conversation with this girl without making herself look like a total idiot or a complete jerk.

“All right,” Lexa gave in. “I will be there. What time and where?”

“Have you sat in on a Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom?” Lexa nodded. “Okay, just head to that hallway half an hour after dinner.”

Lexa’s brow furrowed. “You are having a party in a hallway?”

“No, no, there’s a secret corridor that leads to this tunnel, which you follow to—you know what, it’s kind of a long story. If you want, we can take a walk around the castle and I’ll try to explain it to you.” Clarke wasn’t sure why she was asking her this. She told herself it was to prove that she could act like a normal damn person around her.

Lexa hesitated; then to Clarke’s surprise, she nodded. “That will be fine.”

They set off down the hall, Clarke explaining the hidden passageway as they went. Lexa talked about Durmstrang a little, and Quidditch, and Clarke hated how fluttery her stomach was and how warm her face was, but she couldn’t help it. The more Lexa spoke, the more fascinating her life sounded, even despite how modest and humble she was whilst speaking. She was clearly a top student at Durmstrang, which Clarke already knew by Kane making her give her a tour. She was an excellent Quidditch player, judging by the nature of how most games went in her favor. The fact that she had this jaw line that Clarke wanted to drag her tongue along didn’t help matters.

Clarke explained her bad mood earlier (though she avoided discussing the Daily Prophet article; she didn’t think she could handle it if Lexa started asking questions about what her father had done to land him in prison), and apologized again. They discussed the tournament and Clarke told her about why she refused to enter while Lexa talked about all the glory and honor winning the tournament would bring Durmstrang.

When they went through the Entrance Hall, they stopped to observe the House Point jewels and discussed them a bit. Currently, Ravenclaw was in the lead, which was generally thanks to Raven. Lexa opened her mouth to ask another question but stopped, her gaze focused on something behind Clarke. Clarke glanced back over her shoulder to see—speak of the devil—Raven sitting at
the foot of the staircase like she usually was after dinner, to prepare to walk up the winding staircases to reach Ravenclaw Tower. She had rolled up her jeans and was adjusting her brace. Clarke understood Lexa’s curiosity. Most students who saw the brace were confused, because the overwhelming majority of witches and wizards healed their disabilities rather than wearing muggle-like contraptions.

“Raven’s paralyzed,” she told Lexa.

Lexa bit her lip, appearing a little uncomfortable with asking questions.

“It’s okay. People ask all the time.”

Lexa nodded, still not speaking. After a moment, she said, “Why does she not conjure a prosthetic?”

Clarke lifted a shoulder, let it fall. “Her dad was disabled and in a wheelchair. He always told her he was proud of who he was and he wouldn’t change anything. I think she feels like it would be a slap in his face to fix something he wouldn’t consider needed any fixing.”

Lexa nodded in understanding, her gaze lingering on the clasps of the brace that, with a twirl of Raven’s wand, started to buckle themselves. “She must be very clever, to have produced a design like that.”

Clarke nodded, smiling slightly in pride. Raven was the smartest in their class in most subjects, aside from Clarke’s instincts in Potions, Monty’s aptitude for Herbology, and Bellamy’s memory for History of Magic. She and Lexa resumed their walk, their footsteps echoing down the empty corridor. “She is. She used to train as a mechanic and an engineer too, before she came to Hogwarts.”

“Did she?” Lexa appeared almost startled. Her brow creased. “At what age do you first attend here?”

“Eleven or twelve.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. It was the most Clarke had ever seen her expressing how impressed she was. “To be training in that at such a young age is very…exceptional. Most muggles spend years of their adult lives in training, let alone children.”

Clarke raised her eyebrows. Well that was interesting. For some reason, she hadn’t expected Lexa to be even remotely interested in the muggle world, let alone have any knowledge about it. “Do they offer a Muggle Studies course at Durmstrang?”

Lexa gave a puzzled frown. “Yes, why?”

Clarke shrugged. “Most people ask what engineers and mechanics are.” Clarke wouldn’t have expected Lexa to trifle with a class like Muggle Studies; if anything, Lexa looked the type to focus diligently over NEWT-level revisions, with no time or inclination to indulge in any leisure courses. “Did you enjoy the class?”

Lexa stopped so Clarke stopped with her. Lexa looked confused for a moment, then comprehension wiped all expression from her face. Her eyes went curiously blank. “I have never taken any Muggle Studies courses,” she said carefully, a testy note in her voice that took Clarke aback—did she offend her somehow?

Oh, no, don’t tell me she’s pro-blood-exclusion.
“Um…Lexa, you aren’t—“ began Clarke, but it was at that moment that Headmaster Indra stepped around the corner.

“Lexa.” Indra sounded surprised to find Lexa there—and by the sudden narrowing of her eyes, Clarke had a feeling Lexa was expected to be somewhere else.

To her credit, Lexa did not quail beneath Indra’s glare. “Headmaster,” she acknowledged politely with a slight (albeit stiff) nod of her head.

“What are you doing inside the castle? You are supposed to be in training with Anya.” She threw an accusatory glare toward Clarke, as though it were her fault Lexa was here and not there. Though, Clarke was a little to blame. Still. Rude.

Lexa bowed her head, but any intention to appear humble and apologetic was overruled by how positively regal she looked while doing it. Clarke’s cheeks flushed as her stomach flipped. She looked away, determinedly fixing her gaze on a stone that was protruding particularly far out of the wall.

_Fuck. Stop acting like a pre-teen._

It was fucking ridiculous. _Lexa_ was fucking ridiculous, with how ridiculously attractive she was.

“I had originally planned to, but I desired a walk to clear my head. Since the Choosing Ceremony is in two days, and I wanted to meditate on my plans for when my name is called.”

Clarke’s eyes snapped back onto Lexa. She thought Lexa surely must have been joking, but her expression was as solemn and unreadable as ever, and she wasn’t adding anything else. She was serious. She was certain it was her name that would be called tomorrow. That was…pretty fucking bold, to just _assume_ she would be the Durmstrang champion.

Part of Clarke wanted to scoff at her arrogance. Part of her wanted to laugh at the incredible naiveté. Instead, she frowned as she wondered why the hell Lexa’s confidence was turning her on so much.

Indra’s full lips quirked. It was the closest Clarke had ever seen to a smile. “Well…regardless, you should not neglect your training. I am on my way to the grounds now, to meet briefly with the other judges regarding the tournament. If you aren’t at the ship by the time I reach it, you will be punished.”

Lexa nodded for a third time. “Yes, Headmaster.”

Clarke waited for Indra to cross the hallway and round the corner out of sight before she turned to Lexa. “You sure nod a lot, don’t you?”

One of Lexa’s brows arched as she gave an ironic little nod.

Clarke grinned, despite being thrown into conflict again by the fluttery tensing of her stomach and the rapid beating of her heart, trying desperately to keep her gaze far from where Lexa’s plump lips were curving upward by just a breadth. “You know, this castle has a lot of shortcuts.”

It was the second time Lexa almost-smiled.
Clarke had to fight to resist the urge to wander out onto the grounds and watch whatever training it was that Lexa had to do. She had parted ways with her around twenty minutes ago. Clarke was now slumped over in her favorite chair in Ravenclaw tower, her Astronomy book lying open and forgotten on her lap. She argued with herself for a good couple minutes before finally grumbling, “This is stupid,” closing the book and setting it on the table, and rising to her feet. She glanced guiltily over her shoulder as she moved slowly toward the window, though logically she knew there was nothing that looked even remotely guilty about this, she was at perfect liberty to look out the window.

Except really, she was perving on Lexa.

_Perving._

The mocking voice in her head belonged to Raven, of course.

Clarke stood close to the wall, carefully peering down through one of the square panels of the stained glass. Her eyes panned over the grounds, but Lexa was nowhere to be found. Maybe she had already finished training and had retired to the ship.

She was about to give up and go back to her reading (or lack thereof) when she spotted her. Lexa was standing a few feet away from Anya in the outskirts of the Forbidden Forest. What were they even doing? What did training even mean, anyway?

Clarke’s questions were answered a moment later when Anya slashed her wand through the air and red sparks went bulleting at Lexa. Clarke’s stomach lurched and her hand twitched as though to reach into her pocket for her own wand, though she didn’t know what she could have done from the top of one of the castle’s highest towers. Before she could draw it out, she watched Lexa spin away, her wand slashing through the air faster than Clarke had seen anyone move a wand before. Her stomach lurched again, but for another reason entirely this time.

Fuck, was this girl actually possible? Clarke’s fingertips pressed against the window as she leaned in, her breath fogging up the glass while she gazed down at Lexa spinning and lunging and doing all sorts of fancy maneuvers, green and gold sparks spitting from a wand that moved through the air so quickly it was merely a blur. Smart, confident, beautiful, and talented. Clarke didn’t understand how someone who seemed so perfect could actually exist. Then she remembered earlier, how Lexa had reacted at the mention of Muggle Studies, and her heart sank a little at the thought of Lexa being pro blood exclusion. With that prejudice and this insane level of dedication to cultivating her magical talents, she must be pureblood.

Clarke reminded herself that Raven was the brightest witch of the school in a century and a muggle-born and winced for being so prejudiced herself. Clarke grew up visiting muggle towns and had muggle friends all her life, yet she still had to constantly reprimand herself for times when her wizarding privilege snuck into her manner of thinking.

“Hey Clarke,” greeted Monty, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. Clarke jumped. She hadn’t even heard anyone enter the room.

“Oh. Um. Hey Monty.” She turned to fully face him, hoping she would block out the window.
It didn’t work. He rose onto his toes, frowning a little as he squinted to see Lexa and Anya.

“Are those Durmstrang girls? What are they doing? Are they dueling?”

Clarke sighed, a little impatiently. “I don’t know. I only just noticed them,” she lied.

“Oh.” He dropped back onto his heels. “That’s weird.” He shrugged. “I’m going to go to bed. ‘Night.”

Clarke cast one last curious look at Lexa and Anya, telling herself she wanted to tear herself away from the window. She sank back into her chair, lifting her book up again to thumb through the pages, wondering idly whether Monty had taken some of those *Weasley Wizard Jobi Berruts of Fun* again.

It was only minutes later that the common room opened and Raven strolled inside. She smirked the moment she spotted Clarke. “So guess what I did today?”

“What?”

“After dinner I invited a Durmstrang to the party,” said Raven casually, though her smirk was anything but as she continued on toward the spiral staircase leading to the dormitory.

Clarke scrambled to her feet, tucking her book to her side as she followed Raven up the staircase. “You what? Who did you invite?”

“That really hot one that looks at people like they’re bugs she wants to step on. Which just makes her hotter, by the way.”

Clarke’s mouth was open as they climbed the stairs. Then she laughed, causing Raven to shoot a puzzled look back at her over her shoulder as she pushed open the door to the rooms.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. It’s just—I invited a Durmstrang, too.”

“You did? Whoa. Who?”

Clarke sighed, unable to prevent the smile from spreading on her face, nor the blush that touched her cheeks. “Lexa.”

Raven, of course, noticed the blush. Her smile turned wicked. “Do you have a thing for her, Clarkey?”

“Ugh, don’t call me that! And *no*, I just invited her because I was a total dick to her this morning and I felt bad!” Clarke fell back onto her bed, covering her face with her hands. Her hair fanned out over the pillow, and she whined when Raven accidentally sat on it.

“Sorry,” she said, lifting and shifting a few inches up so she was sitting on the mattress instead. “Why were you a dick to her?”

Clarke sighed. “I read that article. I’m sure you’ve read it too and have been trying to keep it from me, but I already saw it when I went to the Owtery to send letters to Mom and Dad.” Raven didn’t say anything, which just confirmed what Clarke had said. “I was in a bad mood because of it. Lexa was in my Transfiguration class, and I couldn’t concentrate because all I was thinking about was how I want to kill Pike Weston and how I miss Dad, so I was sucking at Conjuring spells. Lexa—she didn’t do anything wrong, she came and helped me, but I was so rude to her. I caught up to
her and apologized, but it still didn’t feel like enough, so tonight after dinner, I invited her.”

Raven bracingly rubbed Clarke’s arm. “Hey, it’s understandable. That’s a lot of shit to deal with.”

“Yeah, but she doesn’t know any of that.”

“She could. Do they get the Daily Prophet in Durmstrang?”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “I doubt it.”

“And anyways, you’re too cute to resent. Did you put on the ole’ Griffin charm?”

Clarke groaned.

“You are such a pain in my ass, Reyes.”

“Yeah, but I’m cute. See what I mean? It totally negates everything else.”

“Whatever.”

Raven smiled as she moved back toward her own bed, pulling her clothes off and rummaging in her dresser for some sleepwear. “Well, just think. You have the best form of distraction coming up. The Choosing Ceremony is in two days, and then you’ll have the excitement of the Triwizard Tournament to look forward to.”

Clarke sighed. “Yeah.” She dropped her arm from her face, moving into a sitting position. “Are you nervous?”

“ ‘Course not.” But Clarke could hear the false note in her voice. She waited for Raven to look around, then arched her brow at her. Raven shrugged. “Honestly? Yeah. What if Bellamy really does get his name called?”

“You’ll be his slave for the year,” said Clarke teasingly.

“No, seriously.” Raven’s face was solemn, the anxiety shining forth in her dark eyes. “I really need this, Clarke. I want it so much,” she said simply.

Clarke understood. Raven had had a rough life growing up. With her mother, and then later Finn…Raven needed to feel like a Champion.

And Clarke wanted nothing more than for her to feel that way.

“I know, Ray. I wish this was the kind of thing where, like, everyone voted. We just wrote who we wanted to get it down and put it in the Goblet.”

Raven gave a small smile. “You wouldn’t vote for Bell?”

Clarke returned the smile, tilting her head. “You know I’d always pick you first.”

Raven grinned. Then she tackled Clarke in a hug, and Clarke laughed and felt lighter than she had in ages.

* * / ◡ / ＊ *
The next day seemed to pass extra slowly, probably because everyone was eager for the party and eager for Saturday. By the time dinner rolled around, Clarke had even started to grow excited for the party.

“Goddammit Bellamy, will you hurry up?” hissed Raven.

Currently, Clarke stood in the hallway outside of the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom near the one-eyed witch statue. They had just left dinner and were waiting for people to start arriving for the party.

Raven gave an exaggerated groan, gesturing for Bellamy to quicken his pace. He rolled his eyes but quickened his strides, finally reaching the statue that Clarke, Octavia, Jasper, and Monty all stood around.

“What is it?” he said impatiently, annoyed at being forced to rush.

“We need you to go with Mon and Jas to help them bring the food in from the kitchens,” said Octavia.

Bellamy aimed a withering gaze at them all. “Why can’t you lazy arses go?”

Raven smirked. “Clarke can’t go because it’s her party, and Octavia and I can’t go because we have guests to entertain.”

Bellamy’s eyes immediately narrowed. “What do you mean?” he said sharply, glancing at Octavia.

“Nothing,” said Octavia pointedly, glaring at Raven.

“She’s totally getting some tonight, Bell.”

“Raven,” he growled warningly. Octavia shoved Raven, who cackled.

“Shut up, Raven!”

“Seriously,” seconded Bellamy, glowering at Raven.

Raven rolled her eyes. “God, you Blakes are so touchy. Anyway, as much as I love to torture you both, we don’t have time for this. You guys get down to the kitchens. I’m going to take the first wave. O, you take the second. Clarke, you come down last so we can yell surprise when you come in.”

Clarke pursed her lips to keep from smiling.

“Don’t poop on my party, Griffin.” Raven straightened up as Bellamy, Monty, and Jasper left. People had just turned the corner and started walking toward them, including Fox, Harper, Miller, and Atom. “Alright, here comes the first wave now. See you on the other side.” Raven led the nearly dozen people into the entrance through the witch’s hump; they disappeared after sliding into the darkness.

“I’m going to kick her ass,” muttered Octavia.

Clarke pursed her lips to keep from smiling.
The second wave arrived, bringing with it the one lone Beauxbatons that was invited. She gave Clarke a shy smile, following the direction Octavia pointed and entering the hidden passageway.

“Murphy, I’m pretty sure you weren’t on the invitation list,” said Octavia flatly, spotting the boy as he shuffled toward them with a smirk on his face.

“Maybe you should check the list again then.”

Clarke watched in amusement as Octavia stood perfectly still and let Murphy go by into the entrance. When Octavia looked at her with that hard expression, Clarke lifted a brow.

“Revenge on Raven?”

“Totally. She hates him, so she’ll spend the whole night trying to kick him out.”

“She will kick him out. Most likely by transfiguring him into a football and booting him across Hogsmeade.”

Octavia shrugged. “An added bonus, then.”

The last few stragglers of the second wave made it only minutes before the third wave started arriving. As Octavia disappeared into the tunnel, Lexa, Anya, Lincoln, and a few other Durmstrangs emerged from around the corner. Anya looked as haughty as ever, while Lincoln looked mildly interested and Lexa was impassive. Apparently their moods were eternally unchanging.

“Hey,” said Clarke, grateful for her ability to adequately cover up her nerves at the moment. “Glad you guys came.”

Lexa inclined her head in that regal manner of hers, while Lincoln smiled and Anya merely stared.

Wells was the last to arrive. When everyone gathered around, Clarke addressed the group.

“We’re the last wave except for a few guys who are grabbing food. They might be awhile, so I’m going to close the passageway after us. You guys can go in first, I’ll follow.”

After everyone piled in and Clarke had closed the hump behind her, they set off down the long, winding tunnel that led to Hogsmeade.

“Are there many hidden passageways in this castle, Clarke?” inquired Lexa. Clarke wasn’t sure what she was blushing at; the fact that Lexa said her name again, or that she had lingered behind somewhat to walk alongside Clarke.

Clarke delved into a lengthy explanation of the multiple secret passageways in the school, and then Lexa disclosed a few of the mysterious corridors in Durmstrang Academy. They spent the entire walk discussing the various elements of each of their schools.

When they reached Hogsmeade, Clarke checked if the coast was clear before leading the troupe as they snuck out of the building and across the street, into Clarke and her friends’ favorite haunt: The Three Broomsticks. Though it had gone up in prices a little since being taken over by a new owner, the drink was as delicious as ever. After throwing her hands up and pretending to be pretended to be surprised when everyone shouted it, Clarke offered a drink to Lexa, who politely requested a simple butterbeer. By the time Bellamy, Jasper, and Monty arrived with huge armfuls of crackers and snack foods, Raven had turned on the wizarding radio and already engaging in
exchanging insults with Anya. Octavia was in the corner animatedly chatting with Lincoln, and Bellamy lingered nearby, glaring at them out of the corners of his eyes until a Durmstrang girl caught his eye and he turned on the charm (the girl seemed resistant to it; if anything, she looked amused, but she was talking to him, at least).

For Clarke, it was just like it had been yesterday. Conversation flowed effortlessly between she and Lexa, and she couldn’t even begin to fight the excited butterflies fluttering in her belly at every tiny curve of Lexa’s lips, every time their eyes met. It was frustrating because it was distracting and Clarke really, really couldn’t afford to get distracted again.

After a time, she excused herself to wander through the crowd, searching for one of her favorite people. She found Raven hovering over the radio, arguing with Octavia over song choice.

“Raven, I hate this song,” whined Octavia. “Please, please, play anything but Dino Warbeck. He thinks he’s a rap god and it just, I can’t, every time he opens his mouth I want to Apparate to wherever he is and cast a Sectumsepra on his face.”

“Whoa whoa, wait a minute.” Raven lifted a palm up. “First of all, you don’t even know how to Apparate. Second of all, he can rap, he’s just not as good as muggle rappers. Third…I bet that’s how The Joker got his scars.”

Octavia smiled despite herself, rolling her eyes. “Ugh, Raven. For real though. I can’t stand him. Just turn on WWN and see what they’re playing!”

Rolling her eyes, Raven did as Octavia asked and switched the radio over to the Wizarding Wireless Network. As she scanned through the stations, Anya asked, “Do you listen to The Weird Sons?”

Raven’s lips spread in a wide grin. “I love The Weird Sons.” She found the station and her face lit up at the sound of a deep, rough voice crooning out the interlude while drums pounded in the background. “Oh, yes, Blodwund Blod!”

“No way,” howled Octavia. “God, come on Raven, he’s so old!”

“He’s good, O,” said Raven earnestly. “God, you haven’t lived until you fuck to his music. It’s so great for stopping and starting!”

Octavia’s eyes narrowed. “Why would you stop and start a song—“

"You've got to play the music out,” said Raven impatiently. “Let it build, let it get to the climax—"

"And then cut it off to tease relentlessly?" interjected Anya, her expression suddenly less haughty and more wicked.

Raven grinned. "Not quite what I meant, but I like the way you think."

Anya’s expression didn’t change, nor did her gaze on Raven waver as she said, “What did you mean, then?”

Raven straightened and, no longer hunched over the radio, came to stand before Anya. “I’ll have to show you sometime,” she winked.

Clarke snorted.
“I can’t believe you’re listening to this shit,” grumbled Octavia.

“You have terrible music taste,” said Raven without missing a beat.

“You’re being such an ass tonight, Raw-ven.”

“That’s not how you say my name, O, I thought we discussed this.”

“I don’t like your music and I don’t like the way you say our name. Raw-ven is better.”

“Ray-ven. RAY. VEN.”

“I like the way you say your name,” offered Anya.

Raven winked, her voice lowering and turning sultry. “You should hear the way I can say yours.” Before Anya could reply, Raven seized her hand and pulling her out to dance.

Wow.

Clarke shook her head, watching as Raven started doing bizarre dance moves around a trying-and-failing-to-appear-disgusted Anya. “She is unbelievable.”

“I know. If my lines were that smooth, Mohawk over there would already be mine.”

“Um, O, I think he’s already a step away from fanning you with giant leaves and feeding you grapes,” said Clarke. Octavia followed her gaze to glance back behind her shoulder at Lincoln. He looked like a smitten puppy, anxiously awaiting her return.

When Octavia looked back at Clarke, neither could resist; they both started laughing.

“So what about your girl?” asked Octavia, sobering up.

“What are you talking about?” Clarke said quickly, a blush immediately rising to her cheeks. She had to work really hard to stop her eyes from wandering the room to find Lexa.

“I don’t know, I just thought since you were talking so much, you might like her.” Octavia was watching Clarke intently, as though gauging her reaction.

“I don’t like anyone,” said Clarke quickly. Too quickly. Her back going up in response to the pity in Octavia’s eyes, Clarke added, “I’m not looking for a relationship, long-term or short. Not even a one-night-stand. I don’t want one, and I don’t need one.”

“You know you deserve to be happy, Clarke,” said Octavia tentatively. “I’m not saying you need a relationship to be happy, because you don’t. I’m just saying…don’t close yourself off to the possibility. You deserve to be happy. That’s all anyone wants for you. We all love you, and just want you to be happy.” She didn’t say the word ‘again,’ but it still hung in the air between them.

Clarke thought of her father, thought of her mother, thought of Finn and how every time she thought of herself, bad things happened.

But Octavia was looking at her as though she was fragile, and Clarke Griffin was not fragile. She nodded and faked a confident smile. “Thanks, O.” She excused herself before had the chance to see whether or not Octavia bought it.

She spied Lexa standing where she left her, watching Anya and Raven with amusement in her eyes. She should avoid her. So instead she walked to the bar, busying herself with pouring a
She had only just tipped the glass to her mouth when Lexa appeared beside her.

“Hey.” Her voice was hoarse as the firewhisky burned the back of her throat. Clarke and her friends were accustomed to parties, and often (She was certain Kane had only made her Head Girl under the misguided assumption that it would deter her from breaking any more rules), but she had not drank since the end of last term. She looked at Lexa through watering eyes, lifting the empty glass. “Want a drink?”

“No thank you,” said Lexa, eyes curious as she watched Clarke pour herself another glass. Clarke accidentally spilled some onto the countertop. “Need some help?” asked Lexa in amusement, lifting her wand.

“Sure,” said Clarke jokingly, snatching Lexa’s wand. Lexa did not open her mouth to protest as Clarke swept it through the air and cleaned the liquid up. “See that? Vanishing Spell. Handled. Boom.” She lifted the glass again, frowning. “I just asked you whether you wanted a drink, right?”

Lexa’s lips quirked. Clarke wondered if she would ever see her give an actual smile again. “You did. I do not wish to drink so close to the ceremony.”

“You did not wish to drink so close to the ceremony.”

“Why not?” Clarke asked, gasping after she swallowed the drink.

“I will be chosen,” she said confidently.

“Oh. Right.” Clarke wondered where Lexa got her confidence from. Just as she opened her mouth to ask, an unfamiliar woman stumbled down the staircase, and the entire party went silent save for the music crackling out of the radio.

The woman blinked, a look of utter shock slackening her pretty face. Then her eyes flashed and she planted her hands on her hips. “What the fuck are you lot doing in my pub?”

“Who are you?” the woman demanded.

“Um.” Octavia swallowed before wetting her lips, clearly at a total loss for words.

Never Raven, though. She cleared her throat. “We’re Hogwarts students. Well, most of us,” she added, glancing at Anya.

Comprehension smoothed the angry lines in the woman’s face. “Oh…so you snuck in here through the secret passageway.”

Raven, Clarke, and Octavia exchanged a glance, the latter nearly smirking. Clearly the woman had some experience.

The woman sighed, appearing uncomfortable she dragged a hand through her short tresses. “Well…look. I get it. I had my own fair share of parties when I was your age. But there are things going on that you guys don’t know about. It’s not safe for you to be here.”

Raven frowned. “What do you mean, not safe?”

“Clarke,” whispered Lexa, tugging at Clarke’s sleeve to get her to face her.

“What?” Clarke whispered back.
“We should listen to this woman,” she said, nodding toward the woman. There was a solemnity in her eyes that put a gnawing sense of apprehension in Clarke’s stomach. “If she says it is not safe. We should leave.”

Clarke lightly laughed. She would expect this kind of fear from Wells, but not from Lexa. “Why wouldn’t it be safe? She’s probably just trying to get us to leave—”

“I would rather follow the advice and it be a lie and ignore the advice and it be the truth. I think she is right. It—something doesn’t feel right. We should go.”

“Lexa,” Clarke began, with the air of one who had been forced to talk Wells into staying far too many times, “What would there be to be scared of?”

The look Lexa gave Clarke was scornful. “I am not scared, Clarke. I am careful. There is a difference.”

Clarke started to roll her eyes, but at that precise moment there was a peculiar wail and the lights went off. Silence fell over them, every single student suddenly alert and very still.

“Get back,” came the woman’s voice suddenly. “You need to get back, get away from—”

The door burst open, and with it came a terrifying figure. It swooped in and brought with it a bone-chilling cold. Most people bolted, panicked shouts piercing as they dived for the staircase. Clarke remained rooted where she was, the alarm bells ringing in her head, feeling as though her heart had both dropped to the soles of her feet and lodged itself in her throat. She stared with wide eyes at the creature that rose high above toward the ceiling of the pub, its tattered cloak flapping eerily as though moving in slow motion. The moonlight pouring in through the paned windows weren’t enough to show anything more than red eyes through the shadows from the hood obscuring its face, but Clarke could see it had scaled, scabby grey hands that were shaped like claws, and she could hear the rattling breath it drew in. Her eyes widened, rolling back as she was reminded of her dreams and they seemed to slam into her all at once. The Department of Mysteries. Her father’s mangled body. The creature just like this one, looming over her, ready not just to take her soul but to actually kill her, to make her suffer—

“Clarke, my wand! Where is my wand?”

Lexa was looking for her wand, which Clarke still clutched in her hand. She couldn’t muster the energy to lift her arm and give it to her. Even if she did, what good would it do?”

“*Expecto Patronum,*” Clarke heard Octavia whisper from beside her. Octavia appeared frozen too, though she at least had her wand lifted and pointed at the creature. Nothing happened, not even a wisp.

“*Baubillios!*” Raven was swishing her wand through the air, though the terror in her eyes was obvious and the sweat beading on her brow and pale clamor of her skin told Clarke she may be close to passing out. “*Confundo! Avifors! Confringo! Depulso!*” Raven waved her wand through the air, utter panic on her face. “Oh my God, my spells aren’t working. I—I have no magic!”

The creature seemed to open its mouth; the rattling noise increased in volume, and it felt as though the air was being sucked out of the room. Every person in the pub simultaneously fell to their knees with weak, shallow gasps.

Clarke began to close her eyes, the image of her father’s wrecked body floating incessantly around in her mind, bouncing off the confines of her skull.
Beside her, Lexa had fallen to her knees too, though she was struggling to get up. The expression on her face was dazed, and without the war paint she seemed so much younger, like a frightened young girl, as scared as Clarke and just as helpless. Clarke’s heart ached for her, and that was what brought her back.

It took an incredible amount of lift Lexa’s wand. It felt as though everything was going in slow motion. She slowly turned her head to face the creature, which was advancing on the group, descending with its putrid breath still rattling. Clarke pointed Lexa’s wand and said in croaky, labored voices, “Expecto Patronum!”

Absolutely nothing happened.

Raven was right. Their magic was gone.

The creature was upon them. It reached out for Clarke of all people, which she was grateful for because really, if anyone was dying here, she would rather it be her than her friends or anyone else. Its hands were as cold as ice and as rough as sandpaper as it gripped her chin and tilted her face up. Clarke’s dazed eyes crossed as it felt like the air was being sucked from her lungs.

Then the door burst open, and someone snarled, “Expecto Patronum!”

Something silvery swooped through the air, so bright it burned Clarke’s eyes. The creature released her and Clarke fell flat on her face, head bouncing painfully on the hardwood floor. The creature shrieked as it barreled through the air, being chased out the door by the winged patronus.

The warmth returned as abruptly as it had left. Many of the kids had fainted; they stirred feebly as the lights flickered back on. The woman who owned the pub had fainted and was slumped over one of the tables.

Their savior turned out to be none other than Jamie Potter, who marched inside with her travel cloak whipping behind her. She revived the owner of the bar before turning to face Clarke and all her friends, who were shakily pulling one another to their feet.

“Just what the hell are you lot doing here?” demanded Jamie. No one answered. Clarke felt Octavia move behind her and felt guilt sink into her stomach. They came here for her, and would now all be in trouble because of her. Jamie was the head of the Auror office, and Octavia wanted nothing more than to be an Auror when she left school.

“We snuck out,” spoke up Clarke. “It was my idea. My fault.” No one argued. People knew better than to speak against her.

Jamie leveled her gaze onto Clarke. Her steely green eyes reminded Clarke of Lexa’s, though they were less grey and more emerald. “Do you realize what kind of danger you put yourself and everyone around you in?”

“I do now.”

Jamie shook her head in evident disgust, directing her attention to the entire group, now. “All of you need to leave,” barked Jamie. When people remained frozen, stricken as they stared at her, she clapped her hands together. “Now. Your headmasters will be hearing about this!”

A few people groaned, but everyone had snapped to at Jamie Potter’s orders. They shuffled out the door and down the cobblestone street, glancing around warily at the looming darkness before safely making it to Honeyduke’s.
“I’m sorry,” Clarke muttered to Lexa. Lexa was silent for a moment, a muscle in her jaw clenching. After a tense silence, Lexa sighed.

“It’s alright. I mean, Indra may kill me,” she added with a bitter teasing note, glancing at Clarke with a hint of a smile, “but I had…fun. It feels like it’s been a long time since I’ve had fun for no reason other than having it.”

Clarke couldn’t help the smile that trickled onto her face, even with the knowledge that tomorrow meant a day of getting lectured by Kane, by Jaha, by her mother. She was certain there would be a Howler waiting for her at breakfast.

“I’m glad you came,” she said honestly.

To her surprise, Lexa blushed. Clarke grinned and Lexa turned her head as though suddenly very interested in the rock wall. It was about time Lexa was the flustered one.

Then she remembered the creature they had just faced, and her smile melted away. She chewed on her lower lip as they made the trek through the tunnel back to Hogwarts, thinking about the creature. What was it? Because it certainly wasn’t a mere dementors, and it seemed to be the same creature out of her dreams. It seemed so familiar, but she couldn’t think of what it was…

“It was a Shadow-Eater,” said Lexa gruffly.

Clarke jumped at the sound after being so engrossed in the silence and her own head. “What?”

“What we faced back there. You were wondering what it was, right? It’s called a Shadow-Eater.”

Clarke’s brows knit together. “A Shadow-Eater? Like…”

“Like Death-Eater, yes,” said Lexa heavily. “That is what its name is derived from.”

“What was it?”

“Once, it was a dementor. They were all dementors once, until your people started treating them like animals.”

“What?”

Lexa shook her head, shooting a wary glance around. “It is not the time nor the place to discuss such matters, Clarke.”

But what Lexa didn’t understand that Clarke was burning to know. After twenty-one dreams starring that creature, that Shadow-Eater, Clarke needed to know what it was.

Still, she bit her tongue, because she understood. They were walking through a dank tunnel with thirty other people and had all just been scared out of their wits by it, whatever the hell it was. They could discuss it later.

She wanted to speak to her friends, because she felt guilty they were in trouble as well. Everyone was in trouble, all because of a stupid newspaper article had upset Clarke and made her friends feel as though they needed to cheer her up.

She and Lexa halted at the end of the hallway once out of the passageway. They didn’t
speak, just waited for everyone to leave, even though a small part of Clarke wondered why they were waiting and what exactly she was waiting for. Anya glanced between them before haughtily rolling her eyes and stalking past them; Raven and Bellamy slanted curious looks at the two of them as they rounded the hallway. Once everyone had cleared out, Clarke turned to face Lexa.

Whatever words she had been planning to say died on her lips. She thought of the creature, the *Shadow-Eater* as Lexa had called it. She thought of her father in Azkaban. She thought of her mother home alone. She thought about how good it would feel to just take a step forward and press her lips to Lexa’s and bury her hands in her wild tangles of hair and to just forget everything except the feel of her hips pinning Lexa against the wall.

The only reason she saw Lexa’s throat move as she swallowed was because her gaze was lingering on her lips.

Lexa took a step back and suddenly the hallway felt as cold as the pub had been. “Thank you for inviting my friends and I tonight,” said Lexa. She was looking at the air two feet above Clarke’s head as she spoke.

Clarke nodded, unable to pull her gaze off Lexa. “Thanks for coming. Sorry you got in trouble.”

Lexa’s lips pursed in another almost-smile. She glanced at Clarke quickly before looking away again. “Goodnight, Clarke. I will see you at the ceremony tomorrow.”

Clarke watched her walk away, letting her get near the end of the hallway before calling out, “Good luck!”

Lexa nodded even though Clarke could only see the back of her. She let her go, even though the thought of kissing her was the only thing keeping the shadows in her mind at bay.

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Saturday morning found almost every inhabitant of Hogwarts practically convulsing in excitement over the coming evening. Even Wells was looking forward to it, so distracted that he almost lost at Wizarding Chess with Monty during breakfast. Even Kane was too distracted to concentrate; he only gave Clarke and all the party-goers a week’s worth of detention, and he completely forgot to block off the passageway.

 Clarke felt like the only person in the whole castle who didn’t want to go to the ceremony. She considered skipping it, but if one of her friends were Chosen and she missed it, they would never let her forget it (Raven, of course). She was fucking exhausted, though. Her sleep had been riddled with nightmares and she hadn’t wanted to wake Raven before such an important day, so she had barely slept.

The fact that the Durmstrangs were sitting with them today for brunch and she kept making awkward eye contact with Lexa didn’t help matters, either.
Clarke spent the afternoon catching up on her Potions homework, writing nearly three feet worth of parchment over the nine uses of Troll hide by the time dinner rolled around. Exhausted from a lack of sleep, grumpy from being so engrossed in homework, and disgruntled that she had still not received a response to her letters to her parents, Clarke made her way to the Great Hall on her own, her favorite blue Ravenclaw quilt wrapped around her shoulders.

As expected, Clarke seemed to be the last to arrive. Her friends had saved her a seat so she sank down next to Octavia, yawning.

“You are literally the most boring person on the planet,” complained Jasper, shaking his head in only half-serious disgust at Clarke.

She shrugged.

She nibbled on some Treacle Tart while waiting for the shindig to get on the road. Finally, the plates turned spotless and the students began to excitedly chatter.

“Oh my God there’s Kane. There’s the cup. OhmyGod!” breathed Octavia, whacking Clarke across the back in her excitement as Kane emerged from a room to the left of the professors’ table, wand out, with the goblet hovering in the air before him. The room was utterly silent as the goblet was carefully placed on the stand directly before the podium.

“The goblet is almost ready. To all those hoping to bring such honor to their school…good luck!” Kane beamed at them all. “When your name is called, I ask that you enter this chamber to my right and await further instructions.”

The goblet’s white-blue flames suddenly turned red, spitting sparks high into the air. Each and every student and professor seemed to be holding their breath. Even Clarke found herself affected by the excitement, forgetting how tired she was and leaning forward in anticipation.

The first piece of parchment shot out of the goblet. Kane snatched it out of the air; he read the name out to utter silence.

“The Durmstrang Champion is…Lexa Woods!”

The Durmstrangs erupted in cheers, along with polite applause from everyone else. Clarke shook her head in disbelief, grinning despite herself as she watched Lexa stand and walk to the head of the hall, still impassive. When she reached the front and turned around, somehow her gaze found Clarke’s. Clarke nearly felt her jaw drop as Lexa actually winked. “I can’t believe she got it. She knew she was going to get it.”

“Even Anya said Lexa would get it,” shouted Raven over the cheers.

“Lincoln said it too,” yelled Octavia.

The noise immediately died down when the goblet turned red again.

“One out of three, this could be my name being called,” whispered Raven.

“Yeah dream on Reyes, it’s my name you’re about to hear,” responded Bellamy, his face just as alight as hers with a determined fervor.

“The Beauxbatons Champion is…Cage Wallace!”

Their entire table groaned.
“How the fuck did that loser get picked?” complained Raven.

“How?” said Wells.

“What? I don’t care if they can hear me. He is a loser,” she repeated even more loudly. The only Beauxbatons who didn’t seem thrilled at Cage being chosen was the girl Jasper had his eyes on, Maya, if Clarke remembered correctly.

Cage sauntered up through the aisles, smugness written into every line of his face. When standing next to stoic Lexa, who looked intimidating as fuck with her warpaint on, Clarke found herself heartily wishing Lexa and the Hogwarts champion (presumably Raven) would stomp Cage into the ground.

The goblet turned red again. The entire hall was silent, waiting with baited breath. The goblet spit out the parchment; Kane seized it out of the air and unfurled it. He smiled.

“And the Hogwarts Champion is…”

Drumroll, Clarke thought, twisting around to grin at Octavia.

“Raven Reyes!”

Clarke beamed, starting to clap as she turned to look at Raven. But Raven looked shocked and she wasn’t clapping, which confused Clarke. Raven wanted this, so what was the problem?

She frowned quizzically at Raven, and it was only when Raven glanced at Bellamy that Clarke realized everyone was staring at her and none of her friends were clapping.

“Guys?”

“Clarke,” hissed Octavia, digging an elbow into Clarke’s side when Clarke didn’t move.

“Get up. They called your name.”

“They what?”

“They just called your name. Everyone’s waiting. Get up there.” Octavia ushered Clarke up and pushed her with a hand at her lower back; Clarke stumbled forward, eyes wide as she took in how every single student and professor was staring at her.

Did they call her name? But how? She didn’t enter. They couldn’t have called her name.

Unless someone put her name in. Bellamy had threatened to do it as a joke—

She glanced back over her shoulder at her friends; but no, they wouldn’t have done that to her, not when they knew her reasons for not wanting to enter. They all looked flabbergasted, except for Raven, who looked….Clarke felt her heart sink. Raven was pissed. Her jaw was set, her mouth pressed into a thin, angry line, and her eyes burned into Clarke’s as Raven glared at her.

Fuck.

Clarke looked ahead again, clenching her hands into fists when they started to tremble. Her friends had not entered her, though Raven clearly thought Clarke entered herself. Someone had to have entered her, but who?

Something wasn’t right here.
This felt so familiar, and she was sure she had read about this happening in Octavia or Bellamy’s modern History of Magic book. Yes, she had. Someone had entered Harry Potter in the last Triwizard Tournament, over a century ago.

Kane was beaming as he welcomed Clarke with open arms. He offered her a hand to shake; she gripped it and leaned in, urgently whispering, “Professor, there must be a mistake—“

“What?” said Kane in surprise, barely discernable above all the sound of applause filling the Great Hall.

“I didn’t put my name in,” she said quickly. If this could be revoked—if the names could be redrawn and it could be Raven up here instead like it should be, then everything would be fine—

Kane shook his head and Clarke felt nauseous. “No, no,” he chuckled, clapping a hand on her shoulder. “There’s no need to be nervous, Clarke. We’ll discuss this after the ceremony, okay?”

He turned and held his arms up toward the rest of the school. “Everyone please give a big round of applause for the Triwizard Tournament School Champions! Cage Wallace, Lexa Woods, and Clarke Griffin!”

Clarke stared in shock at all the clapping students and professors. She felt faint, she felt sick, she felt completely paralyzed with horror—

She noticed Lexa looking at her out of the corners of her eyes; Clarke glanced over at her to observe a crease in Lexa’s brow, evident of confusion, though her eyes were narrowed in something akin to distrust. Clarke had told Lexa she wasn’t going to enter, and yet here she was, standing right beside her, school Champion.

“I didn’t—“ Clarke began, but the next moment Professor Sinclair was ushering the Champions toward the door at the far right of the faculty table and Clarke was walking in the front behind Sinclair, Cage sauntering at the rear and Lexa directly behind her, her eyes burning into the back of Clarke’s head.

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Chapter End Notes

When I first wrote this story, we didn’t know Pike’s full name was Charles Pike, so I had originally wrote Pike Weston. I changed it except for in the pic of the article itself, which I am too lazy to do all over again, so, just pretend it says Charles Pike instead, okay? :P

Also, when I wrote this we didn’t know who Luna is either, hence why she is a lesbian woman of color in this fic. Tbh I personally like my version of Luna better. Hopefully you enjoy her too! ^=^
Chocolate and Excuses

Chapter Summary

Clarke uses the allure of Occlumency lessons as an excuse to hang out with Lexa.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait; it’s been a crazy month, but a good one (I proposed to my girlfriend and am now getting married - yay! :D)

This was a monster to write; it ended up being nearly 20,000 words so I had to cut it down and put the rest in the next chapter (one of those scenes was Clarke discovering Lexa’s tattoos, so look forward to that next chapter). I haven't reviewed this, was too impatient to post it once I finished, so I apologize for any mistakes.

As always, thank you for reading and please let me know what you think.

"Dark Lady played back magic til the clock struck on the twelve

She told me more about me than I knew myself"

— Cher

“Merlin’s beard!”

Those were the first words the Sorting Hat ever uttered to her. Raven shifted in her seat, fingers splaying on her lap as she dug her nails into her kneecaps, spine rigid with tension. She relaxed, even grinned, when the Sorting Hat said, “Enormous potential you have, child, yes indeed. Incredibly bright, you are—and very brave. There are two Houses you would be suited for.”

Two houses. Raven had already read both the old and modern installments of Hogwarts, A History. Both of them used the same words to describe the four Hogwarts Houses. Ravenclaw was clever and bright. Gryffindor was daring and brave. Slytherin was resourceful and ambitious. Hufflepuff was kind and good.

Raven already knew she was brave, and resourceful, and good. She’d had to be, to survive the past eleven years of her life. People could recognize that just by the fact that she was here and she was alive—even if she was not quite whole anymore, as evident by the clunky brace bracketing her right leg.

But being clever—that was what she had to prove. That was what she wanted the most—to
prove that she was more than the scrawny grease-covered kid with bloodied knees and a split lip. That she was more than the trashy junk-filled garden and the tiny dilapidated caravan she called home. More than the cemetery and the ashtrays and the shattered bottles of vodka.

That was what she had to prove. She was bigger than her bones, and it was her own knowledge and talent that would get her through life, rather than gritting her teeth and doing what she had to do to move forward.

“Ravenclaw,” she thought, screwing her eyes shut with concentration, hoping beyond hope. “I want Ravenclaw.”

“’Ravenclaw, eh? A fine choice, and the better of the two for you, I would say. Ravenclaw will help you rise to heights never before been seen, I can see it all right here in your head, plotted out for me as though Rowena Ravenclaw herself mapped it out! Oho!’” Raven’s thin little chest swelled in pride. “Right then, brace yourself…”

“RAVENCLAW!”

The grin felt as though it was splitting her face in two, but she had never been happier as Professor Sinclair swept the hat off her head and she hopped off the stool to deafening cheers and applause. She made her way to the table clapping the loudest, though she knew they were not all in her House, because the separation of Houses had ceased not long after The Battle of Hogwarts (she had read that in her books, too).

As she sank into her seat beside the blonde first-year who had also been sorted into Ravenclaw after what was quite possibly the longest Sorting ever, Raven looked ahead at the table across and spared a sad smile with the boy with shaggy dark hair who had told her he loved her only an hour ago in the train compartment.

Raven loved Finn more than anything else, but for once in her life, she had to do something for herself. And Raven knew—had known since Finn came to her with revelations about a world she never believed in—that she was meant for Ravenclaw. She was meant to think, because she had seen what life was like when people did not think, and Raven never wanted to experience that again.

So she gave Finn a wink and he grinned, and she made a mental note that the first thing she would put her Ravenclaw brain to was figuring out where the Hufflepuff common room was located so she could tell her boyfriend that even though they were only eleven and her father once told her it took seven years to know if you’re truly in love, she loved him, too.

More than anything.

The seventeen-year-old Raven stepped forward, eyes narrowed as she watched her younger self wink and grin at Finn. The Raven then did not notice that Finn’s eyes had shifted ever so slightly onto the blonde sat next to her. The Raven now did, though. So had the fifteen-year-old Raven after she arrived for her fifth-year of Hogwarts and discovered that Finn had started dating the aforementioned blonde over the summer, even though they were still dating. Determined to catch the exact moment things had started to go wrong between them, Raven perfected the spell and chose this as the third memory she revisited. So had the sixteen-year-old Raven who hadn’t been able to resist on the very last day of term, when Finn told her he wouldn’t be returning for his final year.

For the first time, Raven wasn’t visiting this memory for Finn. This time, it was for Clarke.

Clarke, whom she had wanted nothing more than to hate since the moment they met, yet had never been able to hate. It was easy to pretend she could when they were in their first three years at
Hogwarts and Clarke was an infuriatingly snobby half-blood with all the privilege of a pureblood, with her father being a respected Ministry worker and her mother a world-renown Healer at St. Mungo’s, not to mention her best friend was the son of the Minister himself. Add in a few other factors, such as their rivalry at the tops of their class with both determined to score better than the other, that time when they were in their first year that Raven’s spell-practicing had went awry and Clarke suffered the consequences, and Clarke constantly “accidentally” stepping on Raven’s cat’s tail far too many times to count and, well, their entire relationship was a recipe for disaster. It wasn’t until they were fourteen and forced to work together as partners during an entire week in Potions for an in-class competition where the winners won a bottle of liquid luck that Raven realized Clarke wasn’t as annoying as she looked. She was actually quite hilarious, and a good person, and every bit as deserving of her top grades as Raven was. They made the best damn Wit-Sharpening Potion that had ever been made in a fourth-year Potions class, and carefully split the contents of the bottle (which Raven was fairly certain Clarke still had to this day).

That was in the last week of regular classes of their fourth year, hardly enough to start a tentative friendship, but still, when they were on the train leaving school, they managed a polite smile while passing one another in the compartment.

Raven sighed, rubbing her temples as she stood and walked forward, straight out of the current memory she was revisiting, one where she and Clarke were having a particularly vicious unspoken battle to finish their Transfiguration assignment first during their second year. Her surroundings swirled in a mass of blinding color as the memories shifted. As everything steadied around her, Raven inhaled as she opened her eyes to see the empty dormitory, silent but for the sounds of gentle breathing coming from the black cat curled up at the foot of her bed.

Most people were still at the feast. Some had left at the same time Raven did just after the names of the Champions were called, though their reasons were presumably to rush up to the Owlery to send excited letters to their loved ones informing them of the results from the Choosing Ceremony. Raven had wandered up the staircase, following where her feet led her. She hadn’t been surprised when they led her to the trunk at the end of her bed. She hadn’t hesitated to pull out the pensive and dump her memories in, nor had she hesitated to dive straight in.

She was hesitating now, though. She lay in bed staring at the ceiling, thinking somberly about what all this meant.

On one hand, she was filled with rage. It boiled hot and low in her belly, spikes of fury arcing up to cut at her throat, at her tongue, urging her to march up to Clarke and give her a piece of her mind. Why was it always Clarke? Why couldn’t it ever just once be Raven instead? It wasn’t fucking fair. She wanted this more than anything, and yet…nothing. Again.

She took a deep breath, exhaling it slowly through her nostrils.

On the other hand, this wasn’t Clarke’s fault, right? It couldn’t possibly be. Clarke hadn’t entered herself. Even if all her family shit wasn’t going on, Raven wasn’t sure whether she would have entered herself. Clarke had seemingly grown out of her spotlight phase; ever since the Ministry started accusing her father of crimes, Clarke preferred to linger in the background, keen on staying out of the limelight. Which was due to all the shady reporters, and Raven couldn’t blame her there.

But Clarke always got everything. Clarke never had to work like Raven did to prove her worth; she was raised in the wizarding world, and people did not vehemently spit her name out in the form of “Mudblood.” Clarke had the loving parents. She had the knowledge growing up that Raven never had; the knowledge of what she was, that magic existed and the little things she could do didn’t make her crazy. She even had Finn, Finn whom Raven loved more than anyone until the day
she realized this was one area in which she truly had no chance of competing with Clarke Griffin. She yanked off that necklace and dropped it into Finn’s hand and squeezed her eyes shut. She pushed him away when he tried to dry her tears, and that night she cried into her pillow when Clarke didn’t come to bed until almost midnight. They were only going on fifteen, and now, in hindsight, Raven knew it was foolish for it to still hurt, but it did.

Once, Raven was always picked first. First for Quidditch, first for Dueling Club, first in Transfiguration, first in Apparation classes, first in everything.

Except, for when it really mattered. Except when Clarke Griffin was involved. Except when it really meant something.

Winning the Triwizard Tournament was only part of the dream. What Raven had really wanted was the chance. The chance to be the Champion of her school, to bring honor and glory, the chance to prove herself.

Now, thanks to Clarke Griffin—regardless of whether or not Clarke entered herself, Clarke was there nevertheless—thanks to Clarke Griffin, Raven wouldn’t have the chance.

Raven carefully placed the pensive in the first drawer of her nightstand and closed her eyes, pressing the side of her face into the pillow and fighting the urge to scream out in frustration, or crumble in on herself with tears. Fuck being upset. Fuck the tournament. And fuck Clarke.

* "・/・/・" *

While Raven drifted off to sleep swamped in anger, Lexa was stuck inside a room with eight other people.

“Sir, there has to be a way to fix this!” insisted Clarke, panic written all over her face. “This is ridiculous, this isn’t the first time someone has been forcibly entered in this tournament, Harry Potter was the first and should have been the last!”

Kane exchanged a wary glance with Jamie Potter, looking utterly put out.

“You have to fix this! I can’t do this, I don’t want to do this, the whole point of not entering the tournament was because I have enough to worry about without deadly tasks and the whole school riding on my shoulders—“

“Clarke—“

“—and my dad and my mum, my mum is going to worry about me through the entire tournament and she has enough on her plate without—“

“Clarke.” Kane had walked forward, put a hand on Clarke’s shoulder and crouched beside her. “I’m sorry. We didn’t take extra measures to prevent a name being entered because it was a freak accident the first time.”

“It wasn’t a freak accident,” said Clarke, her voice thick as she clearly tried to fight tears. “Mad-Eye Moody put Harry Potter’s name in the Goblet as part of their plan to get him where they wanted him so they could raise Voldemort from the dead.”
“It was Barty Crouch Jr., actually,” said Jamie heavily. She walked over to slump down in the chair across from Clarke’s, running a hand through dark hair streaked with silver. “I don’t know who entered your name, but we’ll find them, Clarke.”

“You believe me?”

Jamie nodded. “Of course I do. The same thing happened to my great-grandfather. If I lived back then, I would hope I would have been one of the few people to believe him, too.”

Lexa observed the crease in Kane’s eyes, the way his gaze was full of pity, but not conviction. Jamie Potter may believe Clarke, but Kane did not.

“Look…I’m sorry, Clarke. But we can’t take you out of the tournament.”

Clarke blinked; Lexa expected tears, but to her surprise, none came. Rather, Clarke’s face suddenly hardened, her jaw setting. When she spoke, her voice was stronger. “Are you saying that you aren’t going to do anything about this?”

“I’m saying there isn’t anything we can do.” Kane looked sympathetic, at least, but Lexa was fairly certain he should probably remove his hand from Clarke’s shoulder before he lost it. Sure enough, he seemed to notice her change in demeanor and removed it. “The Goblet of Fire is an ancient magical artifact, Clarke. The choices it makes are final, and refuting them is like trying to avoid fulfilling a prophecy; it just doesn’t work. It will make sure you are fighting for your life either way. It’s the same reason Harry Potter was forced to fight in the tournament regardless of his age and the fact that Hogwarts had two Champions while Durmstrang and Beauxbatons had one.”

“You would think,” spoke Clarke through gritted teeth, the ferocity in her gaze so fierce that Kane even had to look away. “That after that happened, people would have taken the precautions to prevent it ever happening again.”

“Clarke…” Diana Sydney spoke for the first time; her face was creased in sorrow, her blue eyes soft as she approached the table. “I understand this was unexpected.” Clarke scoffed, but Sydney continued, “But think of the joy it would bring your mother if you won the entire competition. Think of the pride it would bring your father once he’s out of Azkaban.”

Clarke shot a furtive glance toward Lexa, shifting in her seat; Lexa’s brow creased. Clarke clearly hoped her business would stay her own. Acknowledging this, Lexa politely focused her attention elsewhere, clasping her hands behind her back and turning to face the fireplace. She stared into the flames, wondering why Clarke was behaving so strangely.

Obviously she entered herself in the tournament, and then what? She regretted it once her name was called? Lexa glanced at her out of the corner of her eyes; Clarke looked genuinely upset, arguing with her own headmaster. She must have gotten cold feet upon her name being called. Which was ridiculous, considering what an honor it is to have been called in the first place. Clarke was ungrateful.

Lexa told herself this, because lately she had found her thoughts wandering to the awkward blonde who had taken her on the worst tour in history and had flown into her on her broomstick and had the brightest blue eyes and such a lovely smile—

Lexa closed her eyes, taking a deep breath through her nostrils and blowing it out slowly through parted lips.

It was unusual, an almost perplexing realization, to comprehend the fact that she may actually
possibly have a slight...attraction, to this girl she had only known for a couple of weeks.

More unusual still for the fact that Lexa still felt a flutter in her belly in her proximity, even knowing she was clearly lying about putting her name in the tournament, a cowardly and dishonorable thing to do altogether.

Hoping to distract herself from the nature of her own thoughts, Lexa turned, casting her gaze about to observe each of the judges. Kane and Jamie were still speaking to Clarke. Diana Sydney was watching the argument with sympathetic eyes. The Beauxbatons headmaster, Dante Wallace (who had insisted upon being called Dante rather than Wallace), was sitting rather elegantly in one of the lounge chairs, gazing up at a large painting of an old witch posing with a bowl of fruit (who was eavesdropping on this whole conversation with undisguised curiosity) with mild interest on his withered face. Indra lingered in the far back of the room, looking as though this entire discussion was a waste of her time. Which, really, it was.

“Can we wrap this up already?” said the Beauxbatons champion, a lofty note in his voice that made Lexa mentally raise a brow.

So he was arrogant. Good. That would work against him in the tournament.

“Some of us have places to be. Sitting around whining that you regret entering the tournament isn’t going to change the fact that the Goblet of Fire has recognized you as the Hogwarts champion and you have to compete.”

Clarke quite literally bared her teeth, and Lexa was considering settling back to enjoy Clarke ripping this uncouth Beauxbatons boy to shreds when Dante spoke up.

“Cage, be quiet,” he said warningly; the Beauxbatons boy fell silent at once, sulkily sitting down in the chair beside his headmaster. The room was quiet for a moment, until Dante said in a tired voice, “Ms. Griffin, I am...truly...sorry to say this, but Cage is right. The Goblet of Fire has chosen you. You will have no choice but to take part in this tournament.”

For a moment, Lexa was sure Clarke was about to explode. Flames seemed to flicker in her eyes, her brows arching and the jut of her jaw exposing the fury within. But then something shifted in her face, almost like a shadow, and she melted. Her shoulders sagged as she sank back into her seat, utterly dejected as she shook her head mutely.

“This is wrong,” she said, and kept it at that. The judges all exchanged a look, before Kane and Jamie rose to their feet.

“Alright, well, down to business then...” began Kane, voice almost reluctant as he spared another pitying look at Clarke. “You three are the school Champions. As such, the remainder of the school term is going to be a busy one for you. We aren’t going to release any information about your first task; you are all in your final years of school and as such, should be competent enough witches—and wizard,” he added, glancing at Cage, who stared right back at him appearing faintly bored, “to develop a plan within the fifteen minutes we are granting you at the start of the task. Tomorrow we’re going to have a ceremony directly after lunch in this room, where you will be interviewed by a Daily Prophet reporter and photographed during the Weighing of the Wands.” He gave a last try at a winning smile, but Lexa thought it came off rather weak. “Good luck in the tournament to you all, and may not just one, but all of you, bring great glory to your schools.”

The inhabitants of the room filed out; Lexa lingered behind, partly because she would rather not get caught up in the line beside Cage, but mostly because Clarke had not moved from her spot on the chair. She should leave, she knew she should, because there was no logical explanation why she...
was still standing there, hesitant for some unforeseen reason because of Clarke’s presence, except maybe Clarke looked rather small sitting there in the large blue chair by the fire, and even though she had been unusual and not at all what Lexa expected, right now the girl she was staring at looked just like the one who had been in the papers last year, the same solemn, deep blue eyes gazing vacantly out beneath creased brows, as though she was lost somewhere inside herself.

Lexa shouldn’t hesitate, she knew that—because hesitation meant feeling, and feeling was something she absolutely couldn’t afford—especially at a time like this.

Despite her every better judgment, Lexa asked, “Why are you opposed to something you volunteered for?”

Clarke jolted, startled as though she hadn’t realized there was anyone left in the room with her. She looked up, brows creased even more in concern.

“You don’t believe me?” she asked, a steady defiance already in her voice. Lexa was not irritated by it, nor was she impressed; judging by how Clarke argued with her own Headmaster and the infamous Jamie Potter, defiance was to be expected from her. “Even though I was just telling you yesterday why I don’t want to be in the tournament?”

Lexa shrugged. “People change their minds.”

“Really?” said Clarke coolly, standing up. “I changed my mind in the space of a day?”

“I do not know you well enough to make an educated guess on that,” said Lexa honestly.

Clarke looked ready to argue, but then she visibly deflated. “You know what, that’s fine. It doesn’t make a difference anyway.” Without another word, she walked past Lexa and out of the room.

Lexa watched her go, a bitter taste in her mouth that she could not quite place.

When she returned to the ship, her classmates greeted her with proud smiles. Even Anya didn’t have the heart to find something to tease her about. Lexa and the rest of the Durmstrangs shared tea and biscuits, and Lexa listened to Artigas and Tris as they avidly discussed possible tournament dangers Lexa would face.

“What if she has to take down a giant?”

Anya scoffed from where she sat behind Lexa, one long leg draped over the other as she sipped at her tea. “Don’t be ridiculous, Tris. Everyone knows the last giant died over a century ago.”

“So they say,” muttered Tris.

“Could you imagine if there was only one task? Just a duel to the death?” mused Artigas.

Lexa pursed her lips, thinking it would certainly be convenient, but a little less than thrilling.

“Good,” said Sanali, her expression hardening. “That means we could watch her humiliate that idiot Beauxbatons boy.”

Most of the Durmstrangs who had unfortunately experienced being in close proximity to the racist pureblood shared scornful noises of shared sentiment.

“Not so sure how she would fare against the pretty blonde, though,” said Anya with a smirk
Lexa could see curling up behind the rim of her cup. “We all know how our Lexa behaves around attractive girls.”

Lexa arched a brow, hating the way her cheeks warmed. Anya always teased her. “Are you saying you find Clarke attractive, Anya?”

“Oooh, Clarke, it has a name,” mocked Anya, a delighted glint in her eyes. “And of course she’s reasonably attractive. I’m not blind.”

“I like the short one,” said Lincoln, an almost dreamy smile spreading his lips. Lexa exchanged a grin with Anya.

“Alright, we are not here to fraternize with the other schools,” said Indra, who had just climbed up the stairs onto the deck. Lexa, Anya, and the other students stood respectfully, sobering at once. Indra glowered stonily at them all with that typical steely austerity in her dark eyes. “We are here for one reason and one reason only. Put your festivities away and get to bed. Think on why we are here on your way to sleep.”

Sighing, Lexa descended into the hull, preparing her bed. She knew she couldn’t sleep, as she had a meeting with Indra and the rest of the inner circle once the rest of the students had went to bed, but she had time enough to lay down and remind herself of all the reasons she was here. It wasn’t to get distracted by attractive blondes. It wasn’t even just to win the tournament. It was to do her job and what her position required of her, and keep all her people safe.

* * / dryer / * *

Clarke woke with a jolt, her blanket tangled so tightly around her it was cutting the circulation off in her right leg, and so soaked with sweat that her clothes were stuck to her skin.

Another fucking nightmare.

The twenty-second.

Dread lapped over her like sickening waves. She sat still, her spine rigid, willing the fear and tremors to pass.

“Raven?” she whispered.

No answer.

Not that it mattered anyway. Considering Raven probably no longer wanted anything to do with her, and Clarke was fairly certain that included consoling her friend after nightmares.

Wincing at the needle-sharp pinpricks of pain piercing her sleeping leg, Clarke sat up to untangle the blanket from her body. She stood up, limping and resisting the urge to either whimper or hysterically giggle at the sensation of her leg coming awake, and felt around in the darkness for her wand, finally grabbing it off her nighttime. She muttered “Lumos!” and found a spare shirt, dropped the one she was wearing into a sopping heap on the floor beside her bed, and quietly hobbled out of the room.
Her wand light created eerie shadows on the wall that loomed over her as she crept down the spiral staircase. She was relieved to see that no one was awake in the common room even though the ornate golden clock above the fireplace showed it was almost ten in the morning. She supposed most people were exhausted from the excitement of the Choosing Ceremony.

Sighing, Clarke sank into her favorite armchair, letting the soothing warmth of the fire wash over her and basking for a moment in the sound of the crackling flames. It was only when she distinguished the quiet “*Tap tap tap!*” that she squinted one eye open to see Merlin fluttering outside the tower window.

She hurried over to swing the window open and let him flutter in, taking perch on the armchair she had just occupied.

“Hey boy,” she said brightly, relieved someone was being friendly toward her. He affectionately nipped her fingers, ruffling his feathers as she stroked down his back. When he shuffled closer toward her to give her more reach to stroke him, Clarke spotted the small roll of parchment attached to his leg and remembered with a skip of her heart that Merlin wasn’t just here for a visit.

“Dad wrote back!” she said excitedly, hurrying to untie the scroll. Merlin clipped his beak, affronted at the clumsy fingers fumbling around his talons. “Sorry, Merl, this is important.”

Finally having freed the parchment, she ripped through the seal and hastily unfurled it.

*Dear Clarke,*

*I’m sorry about the nightmares. I hope you are ok.*

*I hope you are having fun with the tournament too.*

*I miss you too sweetheart.*

*Love, Dad*

Clarke stared at the letter for a full minute, her mouth hanging slightly open. Then she blinked, brows creasing together as her grip on the parchment tightened enough that the edges started to tear. This…this was the most piece of shit letter she had ever received in her life.

“The fuck?” she muttered, sinking into her chair. She ran a hand through her hair in agitation, scowling down at the letter. It didn’t make any sense. This didn’t sound anything like her father.

It felt like her blood turned to ice when she thought, what if it wasn’t her father? What if his time in Azkaban had…had *changed* him?

Her eyes stung and she swallowed at the lump suddenly in her throat. No, she shouldn’t be ridiculous, her father was far tougher than that and it wasn’t giving him the credit he deserved to think anything otherwise. One year in Azkaban wasn’t going to *change* him.

He was probably just tired, she was sure of it. He was the same person, he was still her father, but he was just tired and depressed. Temporarily. He would be fine once out of prison, whenever that would be. His trial was in May, so they would find out then.
“Clarke?” came a groggy voice.

Clarke whipped around, startled at the sudden intrusion, to see Raven standing at the foot of her staircase, clad in her black boxer shorts and thin white tank top.

“Hey,” said Clarke warily.

It was the first word she’d said to her since their argument after the Choosing Ceremony last night. When she’d returned to the dormitory after the meeting with the judges, she found Raven half-asleep pointing her wand at the teacup hovering in the air, boiling the water. Clarke had lingered in the doorway, struck wary by the stormy expression on her face and the clear resentment and loathing in her dark eyes as she shot a glance at Clarke. Clarke had swallowed, clenching her hands into fists, wanting to say something but not quite knowing what to say. Raven was her best friend. Raven was supposed to be on her side. Raven hadn’t looked at her with that much hate since they were children.

“You know I didn’t do it.”

Raven had ignored her, stonily staring at the wand she twirled in the air.

“Raven. Raven. Rae.”

Eventually, before Clarke could choke her, she made herself go get in bed, jerking the curtains shut around her. She was having difficulty getting to sleep, so it wasn’t much of a surprise when the curtains were eventually yanked open.

When Raven finally acknowledged her, it was with a wounded snarl and an aggressively bitter note in her voice.

“Tell me you didn’t do it.”

Clarke sat up in bed, scowling to mask the hurt she felt that Raven even had to ask that. “Seriously? You know I didn’t do it.”

Raven glared at her, ignoring the statement. “I want to hear you say it.”

Clarke gritted her teeth. “I Didn’t. Do it.”

Raven stood there, eyes narrowed in distrust, before she lifted her chin in the air. “I believe you, but I’m still upset. Don’t talk to me for awhile.”

Clarke’s mouth fell open a little as she watched Raven pull the curtains shut again. A terrible sense of hopelessness threatened to engulf her, because Raven was her best friend and Clarke was tired of feeling alone and shouldering burdens and worries that she felt much too young for.

But those burdens and worries were what centered Clarke, so it was with her father’s impending trial in mind that she fell asleep.

And now here she was, the next morning, knees still a little weak from nightmares, heart aching from a half-hearted letter, and wishing more than anything she could just escape somewhere else.

Raven stared at her with sleepy eyes for a moment. “What are you doing?”

Clarke narrowed her eyes, letting her indignation at Raven warm her inside, give her fuel. “What do you care?” she shot at her.
Raven’s brows dropped, and the gaze she leveled on Clarke was flat. “I might be pissed at you, but you’re still family. A spoiled rotten princess, but still.”

Clarke swallowed. Raven had once used that nickname all the time, but not since….

Not since Finn.

Clarke didn’t have the forgiveness to let the conversation be easy. Though every part of her was screaming to let it go, to move on, because she was in a fucking dangerous tournament and she knew most people weren’t happy with her so one more person on her side, such a significant person to boot, would be something to rejoice, but she couldn’t do it. She was still hurting from the argument last night. “You asked me to give you space, Raven, so I am. Why are you here?”

As expected, it raised the hackles on Raven’s back. Her nostrils flared as her expression hardened. Without another word, she turned and stomped up the stairs.

“Yeah, go! I don’t need you here anyway!” Clarke spat, vengeful and aching and wishing her head would stop pounding.

She crumpled the letter before ripping it to shreds and tossing it into the fire. The firelight gleamed in her eyes as she pointed her wand at the rubbish, a steady blaze burning it all to ash.

* * /ş/ * *

“Eight inches…ash…rather brittle…veela core, cool.” Sienna smiled, looking utterly enchanted as she waved Cage’s wand through the air and shot writhing vines out of the tip. The vines withered away into nothingness as she handed the wand back to Cage. “I have only seen a handful of veela core wands. They tend to be temperamental to work with, but Beauxbatons seem to have grasped a handle on them.” She smiled at Cage, who smirked back, before gesturing to Clarke.

It was the Weighing of the Wands ceremony, and she was more than ready for it to be over with. It had been a miserable day. First with what happened with Raven in the morning, then with the majority of her friends giving her a healthy berth of space during lessons. Finally, during their Advanced Transfiguration class, when Raven had refused point-blank to pass Clarke the jar of newt eyes they were supposed to be Transfiguring into a bowl of oatmeal, Clarke had had the last straw. Being forced to show up for a ceremony she didn’t want to go to for a tournament she never wanted to participate in was not something she wanted to experience.

Not even putting forth effort in returning the polite smile the wandmaker gave her, Clarke handed Sienna her wand.

The brunette woman turned it over in her hands, peering carefully at it. “Hawthorn and dragon heartstring…Twelve and a quarter inches. Extraordinarily adept with healing spells, but it seems a little stubborn…Very nice wand, but…” She pointed it up, letting streams of blue water float gracefully into the air where they hovered before popping like bubbles. “You aren’t the first owner, are you?”

Clarke nodded, thinking she probably shouldn’t be surprised that the woman realized since she was, after all, a wandmaker, and therefore well educated in wandlore. “It was my mother’s
wand, and her mother’s before her. She wanted me to have it.”

“Well, I appreciate the sentimentality behind handing down wands through generations, but the problem is, this wand didn’t choose you. If it works for you, that’s great. But if you had your own, it would serve you better. It works well for you though?” When Clarke nodded, Sienna echoed the movement. “Good. It’s in good working order, too, so here you go,” she said, handing it to Clarke with a grin.

Clarke stepped back to let Lexa move forward. Sienna’s face lit up the moment she took the wand in her hands. “An elder wand?” Sienna gazed at the wand in rapture, looking positively terrified, and delighted. Lexa watched with a politely indifferent expression. “Wow. They only made five of these, you know. Well, six, if you believe in old nursery stories.”

Lexa nodded. Clarke resisted the urge to roll her eyes. Even though she and Lexa barely knew each other, the fact that she hadn’t believed Clarke still stung.

“Thirteen inches…dragon heartstring. Unyielding.” Sienna’s face glowed as she appraised the wands, holding it almost reverently. “This is a very powerful wand you’ve got here.” She waved it in the air; blue and gold flames sprouted from the tip, spiraling upward before fading into smoke. “It’s in excellent working condition as well. Here you go.” She handed the wand back to Lexa.

“Excellent,” smiled Kane, clapping his hands together. He gestured at the people who lingered in the back; a Daily Prophet reporter and a photographer. Clarke realized with surprise upon closer inspection as the two walked forward that the photographer was the same woman who owned the Three Broomsticks.

“Allow me to introduce our reporter Gideon Potter, here on behalf of the Daily Prophet. His sister Evie is here to fill in as photographer.” Clarke’s eyes widened; even Lexa’s back stiffened somewhat. The Potters had been Wizard-kind celebrities since the last Wizarding War. “They’re going to take a few pictures and get a quick interview before you head back to class.”

Clarke set her shoulders, resignedly steeling herself for the next probable hour. Needless to say, she’d developed a very healthy hate of reporters over the past couple years. But that Evie had seemed kind enough at the bar, and God knows Jamie Potter (she’d had weak knees when Kane had introduced the judges during breakfast the day before the choosing ceremony) was awesome. It was safe to assume the third Potter would be equally great.

She resisted the urge to cross her fingers as she walked forward with Lexa and Cage to meet them.

* * /✧/ * *

Evie smiled encouragingly at the nervous blonde who sat in front of her. She was a stark difference from the stoic brunette interviewed just before her; Lexa Woods had answered all of Gideon’s interview questions with one-word replies, and had refused to so much as crack a smile for
any of her photographs. Clarke Griffin, at least, made an effort to politely return the smile. Evie considered that a success, considering she’d seen the Daily Prophet pictures of Clarke over the past couple years, and there had most definitely been no smiles then.

Sympathy softened Evie’s heart as she gently directed Clarke to tilt her head up slightly before snapping the next picture. Evie knew very well how hard it could be when you’re stuck in the spotlight and there’s nothing you could do about it. Being a Potter, she’d endured years of pestering reporters, especially during her teenage years when she couldn’t stay out of trouble.

Once they’d finished with the Beauxbatons Champion (who seemed to be a bit of an asswipe, judging by how he smirked at the camera like he was a model who’d already won the tournament), Kane released the students and he and the rest of the judges came to appraise the photos and interview segments.

“They’re all excellent, thank you very much,” Kane beamed. He clapped his hands together, appearing very pleased indeed. “Looks like we’re all right on schedule so far. The first task setting is already ready to go, and we’re starting work on the second task tonight once Luna arrives with the main element.”

Evie’s heart skipped a beat while her stomach sank like a stone, making her nauseous and dizzy. Luna would be here tonight, then. Shit.

“Thanks for the opportunity, Headmaster.” Gideon grinned as he shook Kane’s hand. “Looks like you’ve got a good bunch of Champions.”

While Kane glowed with pride and the Beauxbatons headmaster smiled, the Durmstrang headmaster only nodded in acknowledgment.

“I did want to ask, though...did you want us to, er, do a separate interview segment with Griffin?” Gideon rubbed the back of his neck, uncomfortable. Evie stared in disbelief at him; he knew exactly how it felt to be at the receiving end, so was he really about to set up what she thought…? “She would up the ratings and sell twice as many copies just because of her name and the fact that she’s been all over the paper before anyway, plus...I’ve heard rumors that she’s claiming she never entered herself.”

Kane looked taken aback; he blinked, clearly contemplating Gideon’s words.

“Gideon,” said Evie warningly, staring at him.

Gideon looked round at her and shrugged, though he looked like he felt a little guilty. “What? You know it’s true. If we could get her mother in, even better.”

“I’ll think about,” said Kane thoughtfully.

Gideon nodded. “Thank you, sir.”

As they trudged back toward the front gates carting all of their equipment, Evie wasted no time in scolding her older brother. “That’s so rude, Gideon. How could you even think of doing that? Don’t you remember when that pathetic old codger Eli Goodale used to follow us around trying to dig up dirt on us? And everyone knows about that hag Rita Skeeter who used to stalk our great-grandparents!”

“I know, Evie,” said Gideon, sounding annoyed. “But this is my job, so it’s up to me to give the people what they want.”
Evie snorted, shaking her head. “You sound like a total douche bag.” She strode ahead of him, turning to eye him witheringly. He deadpanned her in return.

“Have fun seeing Luna again,” he called to her just as she turned on the spot and Apparated back to her pub.

“Asshole,” she grumbled as she flicked her wand so the door would swing open. She didn’t know why Gideon was being such a dick; he was normally kind and jovial. She supposed the daunting task of reporting the tournament was just taking a toll on him.

She had already crossed the length of the room to place her camera bag on the countertop when a movement out of the corner of her eye caught her attention. She spun around, bags falling to the floor as she pointed her wand; there had been two sightings of Shadow Eaters only in the past few weeks, so she was taking no chances—and her grip on her wand tightened in response to spying the woman who lounged in a chair as though it was a throne, one long leg draped over the other. Evie’s stomach flipped.

_Fuck._

“Hey,” greeted Luna, rising to her feet and walking toward Evie. Evie still hadn’t lowered her wand.

Luna looked exactly the same. It had been years but, Merlin’s beard, she looked just the same. She wore tight trousers and an even tighter shirt with the sleeves cut off it, exposing dark, toned arms covered in a multitude of vibrant tattoos. Her hair, colored varying bright shades of pastel, was pulled back in a long plait. Her tawny eyes were as intense as ever, and Evie was as affected as ever—just twenty seconds in this woman’s presence and her stomach was already warming with attraction.

_Shit, shit, shit._

“It’s nice to see you again,” said Luna, wrapping her fingers around Evie’s wrist and gently lowering her arm as she leaned forward to brush her lips across Evie’s cheek. Evie didn’t know what to say or do. She just stared. “I know the last time we saw each other, we weren’t exactly on amicable terms, but please don’t curse me,” joked Luna, though the way she eyed Evie’s wand was serious. “I remember your bat-bogey hex and I’ve never exactly wanted to be on the receiving end of it.”

“I—sorry,” muttered Evie, tucking her wand away into her back pocket. Her face burned as she forced herself to raise her gaze to meet Luna’s again. “I just—I didn’t expect to—why are you here?”

Luna’s full lips were curving in amusement, sparking irritation in Evie (not just because Luna was amused, but because looking at those lips made her mouth dry). “Well, honestly, I just wanted to see you on my terms, instead of running into you at the castle when neither of us were expecting it.”

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“I thought you weren’t arriving until tonight,” said Evie stiffly.

“We won’t. I Apparated here and I’ll go back when we’re finished.”

Evie’s annoyance was mounting. “Finished with what?” she said impatiently.

“This.” Luna gestured between them; to her credit, her eyes were solemn, not an ounce of the usual mischievous delight in them. “I don’t want this to be a problem. We dated, we broke up. Can we tolerate one another enough to not let this get in the way of the jobs we have to do?”
Evie blinked. That was…surprisingly mature. Especially coming from the woman who had thrown a vase at her the last time they were in the same room together.

The vase had missed and shattered on the wall above Evie’s head. Later, the bits of glass that landed on her cut her scalp when Luna had Evie’s hair wrapped around her fist as she fucked her from behind, and then the glass on the floor shredded Luna’s skin when Evie had her on her knees for what was supposed to have been their last bout of break-up sex (though it had been more like an ongoing week, before Evie finally tore herself away from the girl who broke her heart and Apparated back to England, leaving Luna alone in the dingy cheap apartment they’d lived in for four months in Spain).

Evie swallowed, willing the memory of Luna on her knees to go away. She was in a relationship now, she reminded herself, mentally gasping and floundering like a fish out of water to call forth the image of Frankie to the forefront of her mind. Frankie was good, he was kind and sweet. He was much better for her than Luna, Luna who would steal and break laws and drag her into all sorts of trouble, had ever been.

“I see no reason why we can’t,” drawled Evie coldly. Luna raised a brow at the change in Evie’s demeanor, as she shifted from stiff-backed and vulnerable in her surprise to hard and unaffected. “We have history, sure, but we were young and we were…”

“Idiots?” suggested Luna.

Evie swiftly nodded. “We’re grown adults with jobs and lives of our own. I’m sure we’re both in relationships, and—“

“I’m not in a relationship,” said Luna quickly.

Evie hesitated. Luna’s cheeks turned pink; she clearly hadn’t meant to blurt that out.

“Oh…well…I am. So.”

Evie didn’t miss the line that appeared between Luna’s brows a second before she wiped it clean.

“Who with?” she said nonchalantly; Evie noticed that her eyes had narrowed.

“A good man,” said Evie honestly. A man whose name she was admittedly having trouble remembering at the moment, but still. She loved him, she did.

At the word ‘man,’ Luna visibly relaxed. A corner of her lips tugged up. “Don’t you know that every problem a girl has begins with the word ‘man’?”

Evie remembered, with a slick heat that made her clench her thighs together, that time when she was seventeen and standing in a hot, over-crowded club in Amsterdam and had just shoved away a boy who’d been getting rather handsy with her while they danced; Luna, who she’d noticed earlier in the evening dancing (it was hard not to notice Luna), had sidled up to her, and Evie could easily recall even now the spikes of excitement and rush of heat she’d felt when Luna leaned in, her chest brushing up against Evie’s back, and whispered, “Have you ever noticed that every problem a girl has begins with the word ‘man’?”

That night had ended with Evie’s world getting rendered upside down and feeling as though it exploded in a euphony of screams and moans as she learned in the third stall of a graffiti-stained bathroom just what lesbian sex was.
Luna had obviously revisited the same memory, because her pupils had dilated and her lips were parted. Evie swallowed hard, forcing herself to take a step back.

“We’ll be fine,” she said firmly. Luna lifted her chin.

“Why wouldn’t we be?” said Luna coolly.

“Exactly,” said Evie, voice and expression equally as chilly.

She stiffened again, her heart thumping when Luna reached forward and around, sliding Evie’s wand out of her back pocket. She smirked at the blush on Evie’s cheeks as she handed her the wand. “You know you should never put your wand here. Don’t want to blow an arse cheek off, do you?”

Evie leveled a flat gaze onto Luna; the movement had made them much too close together, and Evie prayed Luna couldn’t hear her heart pounding. Like always, Luna had to have the last word, the last laugh. And, like always, Evie couldn’t resist rising to the challenge.

She reached behind Luna’s neck; Luna did not so much as blink. Evie gripped her braid and pulled it forward, running her hand down the length of it before letting it drop over Luna’s chest. “Your hair looks like shit, by the way.”

Luna gave a wide grin. “Looks better than yours.”

Evie ignored the comment like any dignified person would do. “It was nice seeing you again,” she lied. At least she thought it was a lie.

Luna leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek; the kiss seemed to linger even as she stepped back, turning to walk toward the door. She didn’t look back, but raised a hand and waved it. “You too. I’ll see you soon. Try not to stare at my ass as I walk.”

Evie scoffed, rolling her eyes to glare at the ceiling (mostly because, damn it, she had been looking at Luna’s ass).

Luna closed the door behind her, and Evie let out a breath she hadn’t realized she’d been holding. Then she hurried upstairs to shower and dress, telling herself that the reason she had just decided to go to Frankie’s was because it was time, and she didn’t even know why she’d been so intent on waiting in the first place, and that it most certainly had nothing at all to do with Luna’s return.

Later, if she had to bite her lip because she almost moaned out Luna’s name, she didn’t dwell on it. Just hooked a leg around Frankie to straddle him, and rode him until amber eyes were no longer burned into her vision.

“*・./σ/・*”

Clarke’s knuckles shone white as she gripped the porcelain underside of the sink, gritting her
teeth together as she squeezed her eyes shut and concentrated on her breathing. It was three days after the Weighing of the Wands, and she was fucking tired. Four days worth of her best friend cold-shouldering her. Four days of her other friends treating her just...differently. She didn’t know how to explain it; it wasn’t like they were all being rude to her, and she was mostly certain none of them actually thought she entered her own name except for Jasper, but fuck Jasper because he was an idiot anyway. Jasper she could deal with, because he was bitter and jealous and he truly thought she’d found some way to enter her own name in. Her other friends were more being awkward because, while they knew she didn’t put her name in, they found it an odd coincidence how her name was entered, the one person who really really didn’t want to do it. Even that Clarke could deal with. But Raven? Raven knew Clarke didn’t enter herself. She knew, yet she was still angry with her.

Clarke blinked and looked up, gasping quietly in her struggle not to cry. She wasn’t going to cry. She wouldn’t cry.

She felt so alone, as though the weight of the worlds was on her shoulders, and she couldn’t remember the last time she felt weightless.

“Clarke?”

She turned, startled, and felt further irritation settle into her upon seeing Lexa standing in the doorway. Oh, what the fuck was she even doing here? It was midday and Lexa was a Durmstrang, so why was she in the castle?

“Hey.” Clarke wiped her nose with her cloak sleeve, hoping the deep inhale was subtle. She didn’t want Lexa to think she’d been upset, but judging by the reluctant concern in Lexa’s green eyes, Lexa had seen. “What are you doing in here?”

Lexa tilted her head. “I was on my way to observe a Transfiguration class. Are you alright?”

“I’m fine,” Clarke answered at once.

Lexa looked at her like she didn’t believe her. Well, it wasn’t the first time she didn’t believe Clarke.

“I thought we were becoming friends,” admitted Clarke.

Lexa’s brow furrowed. She hesitated, appearing to wrestle within herself for a moment before finally saying, “I just don’t understand why you are lying.”

“I’m not lying!”

Lexa stared impassively, and pure frustration fueled Clarke to give an aggravated huff of breath.
“Fine, how about I grab some Veritaserum and we see exactly—“

“No, just—wait,” said Lexa, sighing. She stepped forward, taking Clarke by the shoulders and gently steering her around to face her. Clarke scowled because she was sick of being treated like a liar, and she didn’t appreciate Lexa in her personal bubble without warning (which made Clarke’s heart beat a little too fast for her liking).

“What are you doing?” she said suspiciously, narrowing her eyes at Lexa.

“Tell me again.”

“Tell you what again?” said Clarke, completely thrown now.

“Tell me that you didn’t enter the tournament,” said Lexa impatiently.

Clarke frowned back at Lexa, wondering what the hell she was doing. She was staring so intently into Clarke’s eyes, like she was trying to see through to her soul. Though perturbed, Clarke said firmly, “I did not enter myself in the tournament.”

Lexa gazed intently as Clarke spoke. After one long, tense moment, Lexa blinked slowly and nodded, leaning back and releasing Clarke’s shoulders. “I apologize for not believing you the first time, Clarke. I see now you have been truthful.”

“How do you know? What did you just do?”

“I am an accomplished Legilimens,” said Lexa simply.

Clarke’s stomach dropped. Lexa had just used Legilimency on her?

Anger rippled through Clarke. She knew very well what Legilimency was, and it had never been something she liked the sound of. “Did you just invade my mind without my permission?”

Lexa’s brows lifted; she appeared almost startled, as if the thought hadn’t occurred to her. “I did not delve into the layers of your mind. I simply sought out the truthfulness to what you were—“

“You should have asked me first!” said Clarke, fuming. She was angry out of embarrassment more than anything. What if Lexa had saw that Clarke had had more than a few inappropriate thoughts about her? What if she had seen personal information—things about Clarke’s parents, about Finn, about Raven, Octavia, Bellamy, and more? Things that were no one else’s business!

“Clarke,” said Lexa, her voice soft and gaze steady. “I am sorry. I apologize. I should have asked you first. I did it so that you would not be tempted to use Veritaserum, because it could make you share more than you would feel comfortable revealing. I swear to you I did not look beyond anything other than the truth of your statement. I would not invade your privacy. I am sorry I acted hastily and did not ask for your permission first.”

Clarke was tempted to tell her to fuck right off, but…well, right now, Lexa was the only person who wasn’t treating her like she was a liar or damaged, and she seemed sorry enough.

“I…okay, I get it. Just…don’t do it again, okay?”

“I won’t. I am truly sorry, Clarke.” She looked it, so Clarke nodded.

“So…you can do Legilimency. Where did you learn that?”

“I taught myself in my third year.”
Clarke’s eyes widened. “Your third year? How the hell did you learn that so young? And why?”

Lexa shrugged. “I wanted to learn it, so I did.”

Lexa was definitely some kind of prodigy. Clarke remembered with a sinking feeling that she would be competing against her in the tournament.

“I can teach you if you like,” said Lexa, clearly taking Clarke’s returning frown to mean something else. She also clearly felt as though she needed to make thinking Clarke lied up to her, because Clarke had a feeling she never would have offered otherwise.

On one hand, Clarke really wasn’t thrilled about the prospect of Lexa potentially being exposed to personal memories.

On the other, there had been times when Clarke suspected Diana Sydney of reading her mind. If she could learn to protect herself, it would make things much less stressful in the long run, regarding Ministry trials and asshole reporters.

“Oh. Um. That would be cool. But, uh, you know it’s strictly regulated by the Ministry here, right?”

Lexa nodded. “Unethical use is frowned upon where I come from as well.”

Clarke smirked. Lexa didn’t seem the type to break the rules. “But you do it anyway?”

“No. I learned the hard way that you will often learn more things about a person that you wish you didn’t, rather than learn the things you were hoping to find.” Lexa’s eyes twitched as though wincing. Clarke wondered what things she had learned.

Clarke thought of her father being sent to Azkaban under such mysterious circumstances, how Diana Sydney was full of lies and Jaha was hiding something. “I could do with learning it,” she said honestly.

Lexa nodded again. “I will teach you.”

“When?”

“When would you like to start?”

The idea of returning to class, where Raven was being so cold and everyone else looked at her like she was some attention-seeking prat, was not a pleasant notion, so Clarke didn’t hesitate to say, “Would today work?”

Lexa looked surprised for a moment, but she nodded. “We could start after dinner, if you would like.”

“That’d be great. Where do you want to do this?”

Lexa contemplated. “It will need to be somewhere quiet and isolated, where we can focus. Which may be difficult to find, considering this is a school.”

Clarke thought about it. She shrugged. “There are the secret passageways.”

“Hmm. I suppose they will have to do, if there are no other alternatives.”
“Okay. Meet me in the entrance hall and we’ll go. But first—er, do you know how to play Wizard’s Chess?” Clarke’s cheeks went pink. This was ridiculous and pathetic, she knew, but she didn’t want to go back to class and she didn’t want to be alone.

Lexa looked at her in confusion. “No.”

Clarke blinked. “You—really? Well, um, I can teach you. In return.”

Lexa considered it for a moment before nodding. “That will be fine. When?”

Clarke gave a hopeful smile. “Now?”

Lexa’s lips curved. “You are trying to skip class, Clarke.”

Clarke grinned. “Maybe.”

“I am supposed to observe a class today.”

“Technically you’ll still be learning something,” Clarke pointed out.

Lexa lifted a brow, smirking slightly. Clarke blinked, actually blinked, because the rush of warm heat to her stomach was sudden and unexpected. “You are more naïve than I thought if you think we Durmstrang are attending lessons to learn. We are observing a different method of teaching, nothing more. Your school is behind Durmstrang in methods of learning.”

Clarke raised her own brows, amused. “Oh are you?”

Lexa nodded, all confidence. “We are.”

Clarke leaned forward, her own lips twisting in satisfaction to the way Lexa blinked and took a step back. “So come observe me kicking your ass in chess.”

Twenty minutes later, the two of them sat in the empty Great Hall, Clarke smiling in amusement at the way Lexa had sat perfectly still for the past three minutes, eyes narrowed and chin propped on fist as she stared at the chessboard.

“So, what do these do again?” She reached across to place a slender finger atop a chess piece.

“That’s a bishop. It can move as far as you want, but only diagonally.”

“And this?” She pointed to another piece.

“A rook. Forwards, backwards, and to the side.”

“Right.” Lexa’s eyes gleamed with the challenge. “Let us play, Clarke. I have studied enough.”

* " •/✧/ " *
The ceiling above had shifted from blue skies interspersed with fluffy white clouds to a velvet night blanketed with stars. Students had filed in for dinner, but the plates that had appeared before Clarke and Lexa remained empty and untouched. Clarke, for the first time in what felt like months, was truly and heartily laughing.

“You—Lexa, you can’t—ha, ha, Lexa—“

“Kill it!” urged Lexa, eyes wide and focused on the piece remaining stubbornly still on the board. “Kill it, you stupid pawn, it’s right there—“

“Lexa, it’s a pawn!” Clarke half-shouted in laughter; a few Slytherins and Hufflepuffs sitting at their table glanced at her, but she didn’t care. “It can only move forward, one square at a time!”

Lexa lifted her gaze to meet Clarke’s, glaring at her. “It moved twice before.”

“That’s because it was your first move. They can only move once after that.”

“Clarke!” whined Lexa, and Clarke was in such disbelief because did Lexa actually just whine that she collapsed into howls of laughter.

Lexa blinked at her before a smile slowly spread across her lips. Clarke sobered, laughter trailing away. This was the first time she’d ever seen Lexa actually smile, like a real smile, not just a smirk or a slight curve of the lips. It was a real, genuine smile that lit up her green eyes, and it was so beautiful it made Clarke’s heart ache.

“So…” She spoke, had to speak because she didn’t want Lexa to see how she affected her. “I think it’s safe to say that some Durmstrangs could do with a little more learning and a little less ‘observing’.”

Lexa rolled her eyes with a huff. “Beginner’s misfortune, Clarke.”

“I think the phrase is actually ‘beginner’s luck,’ which you clearly did not have.”

“Best ten out of twenty,” suggested Lexa, and Clarke snorted with laughter again.

Had either of them been paying attention, they may have noticed how so many of the other students—Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and Beauxbatons alike—were watching them with unease.

After another few games played while absently eating dinner, Clarke and Lexa made their way to the Entrance Hall. The air blowing in through the cracked entrance door was cold; it gave Clarke gooseflesh. It was sure to be even colder in the passageway tunnels.

“Hey, do you mind if we stop by my room first so I can grab a jacket? It’s a little chilly.”

“You can borrow this,” Lexa offered, lifting her hand to pull at her fur-lined cloak. Clarke shook her head at once in alarm, panicked at the prospect of wearing Lexa’s cloak because God it probably smelled like her and Clarke just should not wear Lexa’s things. That was just too much.

Lexa lifted a brow. “Are you sure?”

“I am used to much colder temperatures than these,” said Lexa in amusement.

“Still,” said Clarke, turning her back to Lexa and waving her hand in a vague gesture that both shook off her comment and gestured for her to follow. “Better not to risk it. I’ll just grab my
jacket and we’ll head out.”

“Where do you sleep?”

“One of the towers,” answered Clarke easily, pointing out one of the stained glass windows they passed as they climbed the steps. She pointed at the tower on the other side of campus, where Ravenclaw Tower was situated.

“You live that high?” Lexa appeared to be more than a little alarmed at the prospect of living at the top of a tower, which amused Clarke. She stopped a few steps above Lexa, turning to look at her.

“Yeah, that’s where my House is, Ravenclaws and Gryffindors live in towers, while Hufflepuffs live on ground floor and Slytherins are underground.”

“That cannot be safe,” said Lexa dubiously, her brow creased slightly as she gazed up at where the sun was glinting off the pointed rooftop of the tower. “These Slytherins and Hufflepuffs have the right idea.”

Clarke tilted her head, watching Lexa. “Not a fan of heights?”

Lexa looked down up her, startled as though Clarke had pulled a wand on her. Clarke didn’t miss the way she shifted her weight from one leg to another, her throat bobbing as she swallowed and glanced away. “I am not afraid of something as insignificant as heights. I…was merely surprised, considering Durmstrang Institute is below surface level.”

Clarke’s eyes popped. “Whoa, your castle is underground?”

“It is less like a castle and more like a fortress, but yes.”

“Like, entirely underground?”

“Part of it, yes,” repeated Lexa.

“That’s so—is it really creepy down there?” This was exciting information. Clarke had always wondered what the other schools were like, but the most she knew about Durmstrang was that it was somewhere far north, and there was a wall with an inscription upon it created by a famous dark wizard. “Like all dark and gloomy?”

Lexa lifted her brows. “I thought we were not supposed to disclose information regarding our schools in order to protect the sanctity of their whereabouts.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Yeah, well, it’s not like I’m about to pack up my broomstick and fly over to Durmstrang now, is it?”

Lexa’s lips tugged up at one corner in a smug smirk. “You could try.”

Clarke rolled her eyes again, so heavily it almost hurt. “Let’s go.”

To Clarke’s displeasure, the dormitory was not empty when she entered it. Raven lay in her bed, the same stony expression on her face that had been stuck there for the past few days.

“Where are you off to?” she muttered, watching Clarke yank open her dresser drawer to snatch out her jacket.
“None of your business,” replied Clarke smoothly as she pulled it on.

“You’re hanging out with Lexa, aren’t you?”

Clarke turned to frown at Raven, lifting her hair up from where it was trapped between her neck and the jacket collar. “So what if I am?”

Raven sneered. “I don’t give a shit who you spend your time with. But it’s kind of stupid of you to spend it with the Champion of Durmstrang, isn’t it? Fraternizing with the enemy much?”

Clarke scoffed. “God, could you sound any more ridiculous, Raven?”

Raven shrugged, the angry, disgusted expression hardening her gaze. “I’m just saying. She’s probably spying on you.”

It was so stupid and so uncalled, and Raven was being so fucking ridiculous lately. Clarke took in a deep breath, reigning in her temper before it could sharply rise.

She left before Raven could say another word.

Lexa waited for her in the spiral staircase. As they made their way toward the fifth floor, they discussed Wizard’s Chess again. Clarke explained that she had played it regularly when she was a child, and that even now she and Wells had a long-standing battle over the ultimate winner.

Lexa discussed Exploding Snap and how in her first year she’d burnt an eyebrow off after a particularly vicious game with Anya. Then the topic moved onto Quidditch.

“You did not mention that you play Quidditch during our tour,” said Lexa seriously. Her green eyes were so steady on Clarke that she almost wanted to squirm under her gaze.

“You didn’t mention you play, either.”

“I am a Seeker for my team as well.”

“How do your teams work out? Since we have, you know, all the Houses.”

“We go by years. My year always did very well. I am Seeker. Anya is a Chaser. Lincoln and Emori are Beaters.”

“Are you a Captain? Raven is the captain of mine, and Bellamy is for Gryffindor.”

Lexa nodded. “Each Year has a Captain, and then one overruling captain is chosen out of Year 7 and 8. Anya was the overruling Captain last year. I am this year.”

“Overruling captain?” said Clarke quizzically.

“Just the top Captain, who helps choose the Captains for the other Years. It is usually a Commander. I am the current Commander, so—“

“Whoa whoa whoa, wait a second,” said Clarke in disbelief. “They call you Commander?”

When Lexa did not answer save leveling her flat gaze onto Clarke, Clarke snorted. “Oh my God, that’s hilarious. That’s probably one of the most ridiculous things I’ve ever—“

“What do your people call you?” Lexa interrupted.
“My people?” Jesus, this day was just getting better and better. Clarke snickered through her words as she said, “Um, for Quidditch it’s just captains. For the school in general, there’s Head Girl,” she pointed at the badge on her chest. "There’s also a Head Boy. The positions below it are called Prefects.”

“Prefects? That sounds ridiculous.”

Clarke chuckled to herself as they finally reached the statue of Gregory the Smarmy. She rapped her wand over the statue’s head, muttered the password, and stepped back as the trapdoor opened.

“There’s a ladder, but it’s not that far of a drop.” She stepped forward, dropping into the darkness. She had already lifted her wand and murmured the spell that shot fire into all the surrounding torch brackets when Lexa dropped to her feet beside her.

Lexa looked around, not appearing altogether satisfied. “This may be an uncomfortable place to practice, Clarke.”

Clarke looked around. It was just an empty passageway, about the size of narrow hallway. “Why, what’s wrong with it?”

Lexa tapped her boot-clad foot on the ground. “The floor is stone. Occlumency can easily tire you out, and there may be times when you fall.”

“Oh.” Clarke waved her wand, conjuring a few yoga mats out of thin air. Lexa nodded in approval as Clarke laid them out.

“That will help a little,” she said as she walked forward, turning to face Clarke with a mat between them and a mat behind Clarke. “But if we can find a more comfortable place, that would be desirable.”

“We’ll keep an eye out, then.”

Lexa raised her wand. “Now, are you ready?”

Clarke’s eyes widened. “What—now? Oh, we’re going now? Okay.” Clarke lifted her own wand, mimicking the slight way Lexa crouched. She nervously fingered the handle of her wand, wondering what she had gotten herself into. There was an intensity to Lexa’s gaze that would be slightly worrying, if it wasn’t turning Clarke on a little.


Lexa nodded, and was silent for a moment. Clarke waited, holding Lexa’s gaze. Then Lexa pointed her wand and Clarke had not even begun to think of an appropriate counter-curse before Lexa said, “Legilimens!”

The dungy passageway seemed to melt away as other images suddenly started to flash through Clarke’s mind.

The smell of eggs and sausages drifted through the air; Clarke was six and happily swinging her legs off the stool she sat on, waiting for her father to finish cooking breakfast.

Wells Jaha was sitting before her, smiling as his queen dragged Clarke’s knight off the board;
they were nine.

Clarke sat beneath the Sorting Hat gripping the stool tightly, arguing with the Hat because it thought she should go in Slytherin or Gryffindor and didn’t understand that she needed to be in Ravenclaw.

Raven was towering over Clarke, who was sprawled out on the floor in shock, soaked in a puddle of foul-smelling Girding Potion. The cauldron rolled to a stop at her knees. The class was laughing as the professor tried to calm them, but Raven, the one who had shoved Clarke down and knocked her cauldron over, was not so much as sneering. She looked guilty as she stared down at Clarke.

The spell lifted; Clarke blinked, dazed, as the passageway came back into view. She was still standing, at least.

“Are you okay?”

Clarke nodded, taking a deep breath. “I sucked at that, didn’t I?”

The curve of Lexa’s lips was apologetic. “Your memories weren’t terrible ones, so you weren’t pushed very far. If we reach difficult ones, you’ll react to it. Are you ready to try again?”

Clarke nodded again, gripping the wand that was slipping in her now-sweaty hand.

“Clear your mind. Keep it devoid of any emotion. Keep it clear…”

This time, when Lexa lifted the wand, Clarke was ready.

“Legilimens!”

The passageway swam before her again.

Clarke was eleven again. She was excited but sad as she waved goodbye to her parents as the train pulled away from the platform.

Clarke was twelve. Her heart was racing as she leaned forward to kiss the Slytherin girl who she’d been paired with for a Charms lesson. The girl’s lips were soft and warm.

Private, a voice in Clarke’s mind whispered. This is private.

Now she was sixteen. She was drunk and laughing as she watched Octavia give Atom the sloppiest lap dance ever, before Bellamy came over and ripped her off him. He punched Atom in the face and the entire party dissolved into chaos.

Clarke was fifteen. Finn Collins grinned at her as they walked through the Hogwarts’ gates. He held her hand the entire walk to Hogsmeade. Even though he’d told her that he and Raven broke up over the summer, and Raven wasn’t even here at school, she was still grateful Raven wasn’t allowed to visit Hogsmeade because her mother never signed her papers.

Private! Stop it! The voice in Clarke’s head spoke louder. Another part of her seemed to be conscious; it was the part of her that urged her to grip her wand more tightly, to lift it.

Clarke was sixteen and she was friends with Raven now. Finn Collins was a jerk who had cheated on her, but Clarke was tipsy and lonely and horny and she knew Raven wouldn’t mind because Raven had done this only last week, so Clarke squeezed her eyes shut and pretended Finn
was a better person as she unzipped his jeans and pulled her skirt up around her waist—

“STOP.”

Clarke came back to the passageway; she was on her knees but had missed the mat; the uneven stone was digging into her kneecaps and had probably bruised her. The only sound was the sound of her panting. Lexa was quiet, avoiding her gaze as she stared interestedly at the ceiling.

“God,” panted Clarke, staggering to her feet. “I’m starting to rethink this.”

Lexa didn’t answer. Clarke noted with an amusement that cheered her slightly that Lexa’s cheeks were pink.

“Did you want to stop?” murmured Lexa.

Clarke blew out a breath, willing her heart rate to slow. “I don’t know, it depends. Did I improve at all that time?”

Lexa seemed reluctant, but she nodded. “Yes. You wasted energy shouting, but you did raise your wand, and you did ward me off.”

“Did I?” said Clarke in surprise. She hadn’t even been aware she’d cast a spell. “What did I use?”

“Expelliarmus. It proved effective, since it pushed me out.” Her cheeks blotched a darker shade, no doubt due to the fact that the last memory they’d been in was one in which something was pushing into Clarke.

Clarke couldn’t stop the giggle, even though everything that happened with Finn was certainly not funny. Her nervous laughter was clearly contagious, because a moment later Lexa was smiling too.

“Okay, let’s try it one more time.” She felt weak, but third time was the charm, right? Clarke was determined to successfully ward off Lexa this time.

Lexa crouched. “One…two…Legilimens!”

“Expelliarmus!” shouted Clarke.

Lexa’s eyes seemed to grow wide as though Clarke was falling into the pupils.

Lexa looked around seven or eight. She sat straight-backed in a chintz chair, a violin tucked under her chin. A man and a woman, both dressed as in fine clothes, reclined in the sofa watching with empty expressions.

The memory changed, new images flickering across Clarke’s mind. Lexa was ten or eleven and staring in confusion at the letter the same man and woman—her parents, Clarke guessed—dropped into her lap. The Durmstrang crest was stamped and broken apart on the already-opened letter. Lexa’s parents were angry, and Lexa was scared.

Now Lexa was a teenager and curling her lip in disgust at the Durmstrang boy leaning in to kiss her. She whipped out her wand and blasted him back, eyes widening when she saw him slam into the stonewall and then crumple on the floor.

Lexa was a little older than the last memory, maybe fourteen. She was arguing with Anya
about Quidditch.

Lexa was younger again, in her early teens. Her hands trembled as she lifted them to tuck hair behind the ear of a pretty girl with dark skin and warm eyes. The girl moved forward to press their lips together; Lexa’s lips formed a smile against the girl’s mouth.

Clarke was suddenly blasted back, the passageway returning with sharp contrast a moment before she slammed against the wall much in the same manner as the boy in Lexa’s memory. She wheezed as the breath left her lungs.


Lexa’s hands were on Clarke. Lexa was fretting, gripping Clarke by the shoulders and pulling her up. Clarke would smirk at her, if she weren’t gasping for the breath that had been blasted out of her.

“Holy—shit—“ rasped Clarke, rubbing her abdomen. “What the fuck, are you trying to kill me?”

Lexa sounded concerned. “I’m sorry. I just reacted. I did not intend to hurt you.”

Clarke sat up, clamping down the urge to groan. She chuckled when she saw the worry on Lexa’s face. “I’m fine, you just took my breath away.”

Lexa pressed her lips together, pursing them in an effort not to smile. Clarke’s cheeks warmed at the wording.

She chuckled again, nervously this time.

Fuck.

Clarke had seen the memory.

Lexa was so into girls.

Clarke was a girl.

She blinked up at Lexa, taken aback by the sudden intensity in her eyes.

Fuck.

Lexa leaned forward and Clarke thought wildly, is she about to kiss me? before Lexa randomly lifted a hand and brushed her fingertips across Clarke’s temple. When she drew her hands back, there was blood on her fingers.

“Geez, you really were trying to kill me, weren’t you?” teased Clarke. Lexa did not look amused.

“I’m sorry,” she said somberly.

“Hey, it’s okay. It was an accident.” She lifted her wand to her head and murmured the spell, relief easing the headache she hadn’t realized she’d had as the wound closed.

“I’m glad you are better with healing spells than I am,” said Lexa, staring at the wound.

“Yeah, well, perks of having a Healer as a mum,” sighed Clarke as she made to get to her
feet. Lexa rose with her, putting her hand on Clarke’s shoulder again to steady her. Clarke appreciated the gesture, really, especially because she felt weak and dizzy now, but when Clarke’s stomach warmed at just an innocent touch, it was more of an inconvenience.

“So…” Clarke grinned. “I did better that time.”

“You did better,” Lexa agreed with a slight grumble.

Clarke grinned wider. “Wanna tell me what was up with the blasting the kid away? Tell me he lived.”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Obviously he lived. He spent a few days in the Hospital Wing, but he did live.”

Clarke laughed. “And why did you feel like sending him flying into the wall was an appropriate reaction to him trying to kiss you?”

Lexa’s brow furrowed in a scowl. “I did not give him permission.”

“Well, yeah, but that’s not what I meant. Why that particular spell? Why not glue his mouth shut or give him giant teeth or something to embarrass him?”

Lexa’s lips curved as she understood Clarke’s meaning now. She shrugged. “Putting him in the infirmary adequately humiliated him. He never spoke to me again, at least. And Anya made sure none of the other girls would kiss him either.”

“So you turned him into a social pariah,” said Clarke, impressed. “Nice.”

Lexa smiled. “Well, you did improve, Clarke. Did you want to continue?”

“Yeah, but not today.” She winced as she rubbed her lower back. “I didn’t expect Occlumecy to be quite so exhausting. It was like a workout. And I never work out.”

“Having your mind probed is understandably taxing. If we had some chocolate, that helps the recovery.”

Clarke perked up at the mention of that. “Hey, I know where we can get some chocolate.”

* "・/◼/・" *

“Shhh!”

Lexa and Clarke both went silent, ears straining as they listened. Then they giggled once more, as they heard nothing in response.

“Okay, go.”

They were stealthily marching forward, skulking down the passageway that leads to
Hogsmeade. It was weird, not just because Lexa couldn’t stop laughing when she rarely laughed, but because Lexa also never broke the rules, and since knowing Clarke Griffin, she had already broken multiple ones.

Indra would kill her if she knew where she was and what she was doing, but somehow, Lexa can’t bring herself to care.

Lexa told herself it was just because she was tired of being responsible and always doing what was expected of her, but a part of her wondered if it was because of the memory she experienced, where she watched the younger version of Clarke lean forward to kiss another girl.

Clarke kissed girls.

Lexa was a girl.

Lexa should not care about this.

They reached the trapdoor and went silent again as Clarke lifted it up and tentatively peered around. Clarke grinned widely at her before gesturing for her to follow as she started up the ladder.

Lexa admired Clarke’s bottom as she climbs up above her.

Clarke, who did not concede a single game of Wizard’s Chess to Lexa out of pity. Clarke, who smiled in response to Lexa’s personal memories. Clarke, who smells like some honeydew fragrance and has eyes blue as the sky.

Fuck, Lexa kind of cared about this.

Standing in the dark candy store lit only by the streetlights outside, Clarke leaned toward Lexa. Lexa felt her heart jump in her throat as Clarke’s lips brush against the shell of her ear as she whispers, “Hurry and grab whatever you like.”

Lexa moved automatically in the same direction as Clarke, taking the nearby bar of Honeyduke’s Chocolate off the shelf. This was stealing and that was so wrong. She would have to come back to place money on the counter.

But to her surprise, as they were leaving, Clarke dug into her pockets to pull out more than enough galleons to cover their chocolate. She carefully (and silently) placed it on the counter, and then led Lexa toward the trapdoor.

“Hey, look,” whispered Clarke, stopping Lexa with an elbow to hers (because both their arms were full of chocolate). She nodded her head toward the fat cat that was curled up into a ball in the chair perched behind the counter. Its black fur had splotches of ginger, and it was so, so fat. It slept soundly.

“No a very good watchguard,” whispered Lexa, moving her lips into an automatic smile when Clarke giggled in response.

They descended the ladder slowly so as not to spill their candy, and snacked on the long walk back to the school.

“I think I prefer this Honeyduke’s to the sweets we have at Durmstrang,” Lexa said after swallowing a rather large mouthful of the saccharine chocolate.

“I just fucking love chocolate,” sighed Clarke, and the two of them laughed again.
When they’d finished stuffing their faces and reached the end of the passageway, Clarke shoved all the wrappers into one corner. Then she walked Lexa out to the entrance hall doors.

“I’ve had fun,” she smiled. “We should do this again tomorrow.” Lexa hesitated, because she’d had fun too—more fun than she should have. Clarke seemed to hesitate too, because a moment later she added, “I, uh, I really need to learn Occlumency. Like, it’s important. So, uh, would you be opposed to making this a regular thing?”

She should be. Lexa had too many things to concentrate on without having illicit playdates with an attractive blonde who made her smile.

But when she opened her mouth, all that came out was, “Sure.”

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So that was how it started. Two weeks later, when Clarke stood outside the secret passageway happier than she’d been all day because this was what she looked forward to most, Clarke told herself that all this only started as friendly, innocent lessons. That was the only reason she asked Lexa if they could make it a regular thing. Not because she wanted to spend more time with Lexa because she liked her, or was fascinated with her, or couldn’t stop thinking about her.

God, Clarke couldn’t stop thinking about her.

The smile that spread across her face was immediate when Lexa appeared from around the corner. Lexa automatically returned the smile.

“Hey,” Clarke greeted a little breathlessly (she was always a little breathless when in proximity to Lexa. Even her friends had noticed, all but Raven, who was still refusing to speak to Clarke).

“Hey,” Lexa greeted in return.

Clarke tapped her wand on Gregory’s head and swung the trapdoor open. Lexa stepped into the gaping square, and Clarke hopped in after her, a little too soon perhaps, since she nearly landed on Lexa.

“Sorry,” she gasped, but she was anything but considering Lexa’s arms had went around to catch her.

Lexa released her. “Let’s get started.”

Clarke had proven to be an incredibly fast learner. After two weeks of practice, she really no longer even needed to practice. She was excellent in Occlumency and excellent in Legilimency. They’d both viewed scatterings of memories from the other, Lexa viewing more of Clarke’s than visa versa, but still, they’d learned more about each other in the past two weeks than Clarke thought she would ever learn about Lexa. Like the fact that Lexa had very strict parents whom she was now estranged from. Like the fact that when Lexa was young, she had glasses. Like the fact that when she was twelve, she had her first kiss. Like the fact that last week, Lexa accidentally walked in on two Hogwarts’ students getting it on in the bathroom (Clarke had almost died of laughter at how hard
Lexa blushed when she came out of the memory).

And then there were the things they learned because they shared them with one another. Like the fact that Lexa was the top in all her classes, though Defense Against the Dark Arts was her favorite. Like the fact that Lexa loved the color red and her favorite meal was a steak and mushroom pie.

Like the fact that Lexa’s eyes were so green but there were flecks of gold in them that shone when the sunlight hit them, or that her ears were so cute and tiny, or that her smile did the most wonderful things to the rest of her face and to Clarke’s heart.

Okay, maybe Lexa wasn’t aware that Clarke knew all of those last few things, but God, Clarke couldn’t get them out of her head. Lexa was actually making her dizzy.

After their lesson, as always, Clarke was sad to see it end. Every night Lexa seemed to leave later and later, until it grew to the point where there were no longer any excuses to make and Lexa had to leave before Indra noticed her absence and killed her. Tonight, Clarke bid Lexa goodnight and returned to the tower, and tried not to reflect on the fact that she would have to wait a whole other entire day before she could spend time with Lexa again.

Then Clarke heard a noise as the common room entrance door opened (which was weird, because it was very late and Clarke was usually the only person awake at this time), and her jaw dropped as she turned to see who it was.

Lexa was climbing through the archway.

“What? But, I…” Clarke was flabbergasted. “How did you get through the—“

“I answered a riddle,” said Lexa simply, that typical infuriatingly blank expression on her face.

“Oh.” That brought Clarke up short. Of course Lexa would answer the riddle—she was clever, after all. But it still didn’t explain why Lexa was standing right here before her when they had just bid one another farewell. “I guess…that makes sense then. Well, so…why are you here?”

Lexa hesitated, uncharacteristically nervous all of the sudden, which immediately triggered Clarke’s interest (as though it wasn’t triggered enough already) “I have something for you.”

“What?”

Lexa gestured for her to follow, so Clarke did. Because it was Lexa, this infuriating Durmstrang girl that Clarke was soon to be competing against in a deadly tournament, and whom Clarke went to sleep every night fantasizing about kissing.

Clarke followed Lexa down the spiral staircase, all the way to the statue of the one-eyed witch. Uncertain but grateful to be back in Lexa’s presence, Clarke followed her through the opening and down the long passageway to Hogsmeade.

“What are we doing here again, Lexa?” Clarke whispered as they neared the ladder.

Lexa turned to smile at her, and it took Clarke’s breath away. “We haven’t had any chocolate since last week, and I owe you, plus today’s lesson was a little rough, so I thought…” Lexa shrugged. Clarke grinned.

Lexa was right, they hadn’t visited Honeyduke’s since last week. And today’s lessons were
rough; Clarke had revisited a memory from the past summer involving her father in Azkaban. Lexa had comforted her, but it had still shaken Clarke up.

Clarke chose her favorite chocolate bars and thanked Lexa for paying for them. They patted the cat (it had woken up the third or fourth time they visited and became somewhat of a lovable mascot to their illegal antics) and headed back down the tunnel for the castle, munching on their candies as they walked.

Once they reached Hogwarts again, Clarke followed Lexa, planning to walk her to the entrance doors as usual. As they were walking down the hallway toward the desired floor, they both halted in their tracks, hearts jumping with panic, as they heard a voice they so did not want to hear at three in the morning.

“Oho-ho-ho, and looky who we have here, out of beds at the Devil’s hour, past curfew? I’s have a moral obligation to report you, you know. For your own safety.” Peeves the Poltergeist grinned wickedly at them as he floated high above their heads, inkwells clutched in both hands.

Clarke and Lexa looked at one another.

Peeves sucked in a deep breath.

“Run for it,” Clarke half-shouted.

Clarke and Lexa bolted, feet pounding on the floor and hearts pounding.

“STUDENTS OUT OF BED, STUDENTS BREAKING CURFEW! HOGWARTS AND DURMSTRANG, BREAKING THE RULES! STUDENTS OUT OF BED!”

They nearly knocked into one another as they flew down the next hallway, then again as they leapt down the stairs. Lexa felt panic spike in her as her foot sank into a trick step on one staircase; Clarke hurried back to help her and managed to pull her out just in time for them to duck into another hallway; the annoying flying poltergeist swept past them, evidently assuming they headed down the other hallway.

Clarke and Lexa doubled over, hands on their knees as they panted for breath. Then they looked at one another and split into grins.

“You could have warned me about the dodgy step,” said Lexa.

Clarke smirked. “Shut up, it warms my heart for you to need my help for once.”

They stiffened again as they heard him again; Peeves had clearly circled back when he hadn’t found them.

“Shit, run,” she cursed, and she and Clarke threw again, half-laughing like mad because how ridiculous was this?

“We need to hide,” Clarke managed between gasping for breath and laughing. They flew around the corner and to the next hallway; Lexa spied the small, unassuming door—presumably a broom closet—and made a grab for it.
Lexa skidded to a halt so suddenly Clarke slammed into her back. “Here!” Lexa went to seize the nearest broom closet doorknob, but her hand was sweaty and fumbling.

“Hurry!” Clarke urged, though she herself could barely stand as she was overcome with uncontrollable giggles.

“I’m trying!” Lexa was biting her lower lip, not quite managing to suppress a reckless grin as she tugged open the door. She and Clarke toppled into the room, Lexa managing to hook a foot around the edge of the door and kick in, pulling her leg back just in time for the door to slam shut without catching her toes in the process. It was only a split second, and then Clarke’s weight on her was too much and the two of them crashed to the floor.

“Oh my God. I…” Clarke was laughing too hard to speak coherently. Lexa was laughing too, harder than she had in a very long time. Her vision went blurry as tears gathered in her eyes, and that only made her laugh harder.

“That was…ridiculous.” They were silent as they looked at one another in the light of the hallway torch leaking in through the cracks of the door. Then they erupted into laughter again.

It wasn’t until moments later when Lexa was catching her breath that she noticed Clarke was watching her quietly with her lips curved up.

“What?” Why was she self-conscious? Lexa was never self-conscious.

Clarke tilted her head, smiling at her just a second longer before she said, “I’ve just never heard you laugh like that. You, um…you have a very nice laugh.”

Lexa wished there was a simple spell that countered blushes, because her face was heating up and she definitely did not want Clarke to notice. Judging by the grin unfurling on her face, though, she already had.

“Thank you,” she said softly, evading her gaze. She supposed she should probably check if the coast was clear and then leave before Indra noticed her absence. She was surprised at the sinking of her heart; she didn’t want to leave. She wanted to stay a while longer with Clarke. Still, better safe than sorry, so she should probably leave. Her ankle was starting to ache; Clarke was still half-lying on her leg from when they had fallen into the closet.

Lexa withdrew her leg out from beneath Clarke, put her other beneath her as she reached out for the wall behind her so she could push herself to her feet. She paused when she felt something round and solid, like metal.

“What?” Clarke had shifted below her, clearly planning to get to her feet after her (there was little space in this broom closet).

Lexa frowned, twisting around to push at the jackets and coats hanging above, trying to see the handle she was gripping, but the shadows the coats were casting were too dark. “There is a—I think there is a door here.”

“A door?” Clarke sounded far from doubtful, and Lexa wondered just how many secrets this castle held. Clarke had already showed her two secret passageways; perhaps this was one more. Excited by the idea that Lexa found a secret Clarke did not know of, Lexa turned the handle and pushed.

A small door creaked open and dim light flooded the floor of the closet. Lexa glanced back to see Clarke staring at her in surprise and curiosity; eager, Lexa smiled and crawled through the
opening, Clarke following behind her.

Lexa climbed to her feet and held out a hand for Clarke’s, pulling her up once she gripped it. They both lost their breath as they took their first look around.

“Whoa, what is this place?” breathed Clarke.

Lexa shook her head numbly. *It’s your school,* she wanted to say, but she was too taken aback by the room they had stumbled into.

There were countless books, mostly stacked in neat rows while some were strewn rather haphazardly along the shelves. There were two beanbag chairs before the shelves; directly across was a small table with a checkered surface, two chairs on either side of it. The room was illuminated by a handful of wall sconces, the fire burning brightly.

“Wow,” said Clarke breathlessly. Lexa turned her head the same time Clarke did. The two exchanged incredulous expressions. They looked a bit like they had just stepped off their brooms, and Lexa felt her stomach squirm while her heart fluttered in her chest. Clarke had a lovely face. Her eyes were so blue, when Lexa looked into them, it reminded her of the sky, and for once it didn’t scare her.

Clarke’s gaze softened and Lexa’s stomach clenched. She feared the affection was showing on her face, so she quickly arranged her features into an indifferent countenance.

Whatever you are feeling, stop. Feeling allows room for weakness. You cannot have weakness.

Lexa looked into Clarke’s eyes again, and willed herself to feel the terror of the sky. Fear is more easily swallowed than feeling the other thing.
Chapter Summary

Bellamy sucks at Potions, Clarke discovers Lexa has a muggle tattoo, and Raven is a stubborn genius.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your kind words and awesome reviews. They inspire me to continue writing, so thank you! ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You ought to know where I'm coming from
How I was alone when I burnt my home
And all of the pieces were torn and thrown
You should know where I'm coming from”
-Banks

Snow crunched beneath heavy leather boots.

“I don’t understand what we’re doing here.”

Atohl shifted nervously, toes feeling as though they were frozen solid despite being well insulated in the fur inside his boots. It was just cold, bone-freezing cold, and a quick glance at the black shadows lurking in the distance, hovering over the frozen pond, explained the unnatural icy air.

“We’re waiting,” Atohl answered tersely, gaze continuing to flit over their surroundings.

Frigoro looked just as unsettled, and Atohl could not blame him. Atohl had been around the wretched creatures too many times to count, but Frigoro was his second, and newly trusted into the inner ring.

“When will she arrive?” Frigoro’s voice had dropped to a whisper. The creatures had inched forward, gliding silently over the untouched snow banks.

“Any moment, just hold on.”

Atohl’s heart felt as though it were caught in his throat, but his shoulders were back and his palm was not sweaty as he clutched his wand. The despair settling over them was no longer so
draining; Atohl thought of his brother, of his niece, of their smiles, and he held onto the happy memory like a lifeline. The creatures halted, but it was only because of the figure that had suddenly materialized into being.

She was tall and willowy, wrapped in a black and white fur cloak and sporting blue war paint that swirled down her temples around prominent cheekbones. Her appearance, however, was not nearly as formidable as her expression—the confident indifference, the empty challenge in her sharp cerulean eyes.

“Kwin,” Atohl and Frigoro breathed, immediately dropping to their knees.

“Hod op,” she barked at the creatures. Atohl glanced warily at them; they had been advancing on them, clearly taking the dropping to their knees as signs of permission. They halted at her order.

“So,” began the Ice Queen with the usual briskness in her voice. She worked on pulling her gloves off, her wand tucked firmly beneath her arm as she did so. “News?”

“We have not yet been able to breach the outer walls.”

“And your excuses?”

Atohl exchanged a look with Frigoro. He cleared his throat. “Ah, all spells we tried have not proved strong enough to break the enchantments.”

The Ice Queen pushed her gloves into a pocket, exposing pale hands with long, jagged nails. “In other words, you have no justifiable reasons for your inadequacy?”

Frigoro’s dark skin visibly paled. “M—my Kwin, if you would extend your m—mercy to us, give us a few m—more weeks—”

His words were cut off with a choking gag when the Queen shot a hand out and closed it over his throat.

“You’ve been working on this for almost a year,” she said, an almost lofty note of apathy in her voice. “You assured me it would take half of that. I gave you six months. It’s been nine.” Atohl remained frozen where he stood, anxiously watching. The Queen tilted her head, gaze as unfeeling as Frigoro was about to be in a moment. “Tell me, Atohl, why should I not kill him right here and now?”

His voice was hoarse as he quickly said, “You’ve already replaced the last three Unspeakables, my Kwin, you cannot afford to lose another.”

“A dead Unspeakable is less irritating than a useless living one.”

“He—he’s not useless—entirely useless,” he added hastily when the Ice Queen’s eyes flashed. “He has managed to breach the walls farther than any before him.”

The Queen gazed at him with vague repulsion curling her upper lip. Finally, she released him, throwing him down to the snow with one hand. Frigoro shook violently in the snow, coughing and gasping for breath, his hands clutching at his reddened neck that was sure to bruise.

“Tell the others of your Queen’s mercy,” she said lightly as though they were discussing this over a casual cup of tea. “And make certain you have successfully completed your mission by the end of the tournament, or else…” Her warning was not necessary, because at her beckon, the
creatures had slowly glided forward again. Frigoro’s eyes were streaming, no longer just out of pain, but out of the despair inkling over them. Atohl went through the memories again and again in his head, holding onto them like they were his own personal golden sun, providing him with warmth as the unbearable cold of the creatures settled over him.

The Ice Queen extended her bare hand, and Atohl watched as both creatures lifted their own grey, scale-rotted, clawed hands. They touched the Queen’s palms, and the air went suddenly so cold that Atohl could not draw breath. Then warmth emanated from the Queen, before fading away again along with the light that had temporarily set her skin aglow. Her eyes were closed, a hard smile on her face, almost feral with fierceness as she opened her eyes again and breathed in hard through her nose.

When she gripped her wand, blue and silver sparks struck out of the tip, spiraling through the air with the force of a muggle gun’s bullet.

“Gon we,” she said softly; the creatures rose into the air without another word, robes drifting eerily in the slight breeze. The air was instantly warmer as they shot away.

The Queen was tucking her hands back into her gloves. She nodded at Frigoro, who was unconscious in the snow. “Clean him up,” she ordered Atohl, who bowed his head. She spared Atohl one last hard gaze as she angled her body away, prepared to Apparate away.

“I mean it, Atohl. You have until the end of the year. The Third Task will take place in June, and everything must be ready and in order by then.”

“Yes, my Kwin.”

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“Dude, you’re supposed to stir counter-clockwise.”

Bellamy clenched his teeth, nostrils flaring in irritation as he followed Miller’s directions and switched rotation, both hands firmly gripping the wooden spoon. He painstakingly pushed it through the congealed grey slop of what was supposed to be a poison antidote.

Murphy snorted. Bellamy kept his head inclined down toward the cauldron, but his eyes flickered up to glare at Murphy, who deadpanned him in return for a moment before shrugging. “What? You’re shit at this.”

“Potions isn’t exactly my favorite subject,” defended Bellamy; he was actually sweating as he managed to pull the spoon another round.

“Yeah, it’s obvious why.”

“Fuck you, Murphy.” He had a point, though. Bellamy released the spoon before it could splinter and break; it stuck straight up in the ruined potion, not even quivering. Almost panting, Bellamy looked around the rest of the room. Diggs and Sterling looked like they were having as much luck, and even Fox and Roma looked like they were struggling. Bellamy jutted his jaw as he blew under his breath, mentally cursing that Raven and Clarke, the know-it-alls, couldn’t help him since they were in a separate Potions class for advanced students.
“Just leave it,” said Miller in disgust, his upper lip curling as the foul smell of the potion wafted over to him.

They waited for Professor Jackson to make his way over to their group. Jackson was just as repulsed by their potion as they were, so it was with the sobering knowledge that they utterly failed the lesson that they slung their bags over their shoulders and made their way out of the dungeons.

Fortunately for Bellamy’s mood, a delicious array of Shepard’s Pie was awaiting them in the Great Hall. He sat down next to Raven, whose nose was buried in a book. Bellamy frowned, confused to see that there was an iPod sitting in front of her, wires tangled and looping around her plate of untouched food.

“Uh, Raven? What are you doing?”

“Hm?” It took another moment before she finally peeked up over the book, which upon closer inspection, was an electronics manual.

“What are you doing?” he said again, raising a brow at the iPod again as he reached for a bowl of mushy peas.

Raven sighed, grabbing the iPod and lifting it up to peer intently at the opened back. “I’m trying to find a way to make this work. There’s so much magic in the air here that technology goes haywire, but I’m thinking if I can cast some type of protective enchantment around it…” She trailed off into thoughtful silence, her brow furrowed as she frowned at the iPod. It was small, red, and scratched up—old, so Bellamy was guessing it was her own.

“Like a safe bubble around it?” he asked.

“Yeah, some way to clear the air just around it so I can listen.” She finally looked up to meet his gaze, and Bellamy ignored the way his stomach always seemed to squirm whenever Raven’s dark eyes focused on him. A corner of her full lips tugged up in a crooked grin. “It’s fucking 2105 and how behind are wizardkind? Muggles have even managed to make hoverboards. Brooms are going to be redundant soon.”

Bellamy chuckled. “Imagine showing up to Quidditch practice with a jetback instead.”

Raven cackled, to Bellamy’s pleasure. “Even a jetpack wouldn’t help Gryffindor, Bell.”

He immediately narrowed his eyes. “Gryffindor has won the Championship for the past four years, Raven.”

“Yeah, but that’s because of Octavia!”

“Who do you think taught her?”

“Not you. You suck.”

“You’re a dick.”

“Bigger than yours.”

Bellamy fell silent, glowering. “You wish,” he eventually mumbled, busying himself with stuffing a roll into his mouth.

Raven glowed too, but with triumph. “And anyways, who’s won the House Cup the past
seven years?”

He scoffed and shook his head, but mostly because he didn’t really have an argument. Ravenclaw was generally full of people too smart for their own good, in his opinion—and it was only thanks to Raven, Clarke, and Monty that they did so well in classes and scored so many points.

“I failed Potions today,” he said to change the subject, though almost immediately regretted it because now he had to explain why to Raven, who was nearly as bad as Clarke in being a super genius in Bellamy’s least favorite class. Give him A History of Magic and Defense Against the Dark Arts all day, because they were full of action-packed adventures, but Potions? Herbology? Charms? He hated them.

With a sigh, Bellamy explained his failure, struggling to contain his exasperation with Raven’s increasingly amused expression.

“You’re supposed to follow Golpalott’s Third Law.”

Bellamy glared, stone-jawed. “I don’t even know what that is.”

“The antidote for a blended poison can’t just be created by finding antidotes to each separate poison and mixing them together. You have to find the one ingredient that transforms them near-alchemically into a combined whole, that way it can counteract the whole blended poison.”

“A language I can understand, Raven.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’m not explaining it to you like you’re twelve, Bellamy.”

Bellamy growled.

“Hey there Grumpy and Grumpier.” Octavia sidled up next to them, throwing her bag on the floor as she swung her legs over the bench. “What’s shakin’, bacon?”

“Oh don’t mention bacon,” moaned Jasper as he and Monty approached them after they stood from the table they’d been eating at. “I’m starving.”

“You literally just ate lunch, dude,” said Monty.

“Just giving Bellamy a Remedial Potions lesson,” said Raven easily, starting to pack her iPod away into her pocket so she could pull her plate over and finish her meal.

“I take Remedial Potions and you could probably teach me better than Nygel,” said Jasper.

Raven rolled her eyes. “Anyone could teach better than Nygel. Hey, Roma,” she greeted when Roma strode into the Hall, looked around, spotted where they all sat, and moved toward them.

“Hey guys. Have you seen Clarke?” When no one answered, Roma lifted the rolled parchment in her hand. “Professor Sinclair told me to deliver this to her, but I haven’t been able to find her anywhere.”

Bellamy exchanged a rather guilty expression with Octavia. It wasn’t like they were shunning Clarke—they certainly weren’t being hostile toward her like Raven was. They just felt weird celebrating her role as the school Champion when it meant so much to Raven. It had meant a lot to Bellamy too, hell, but at the end of the day, he knew Raven deserved it more, and he wanted her to be happy (though he would rather eat slugs than admit that to her). And while they all knew Clarke wouldn’t submit her own name, it was still more than a little fishy that of all names to be
picked, it was Clarke’s.

Roma sighed. “Well, can you pass this along to her?” She extended to hand the note over to Raven. The entire group was silent as they watched the exchange, tension thick in the air. “Thanks. See you later!”

Raven’s expression was as dark and stormy as the enchanted ceiling above them. She shoved the note into the pocket full of iPod.

“Actually…I haven’t seen Clarke in awhile either,” said Octavia hesitantly, brows drawn together in concern. “I didn’t see her at all yesterday, and barely saw her over the weekend.”

“I haven’t seen her either,” said Monty, and Jasper shrugged in agreement, appearing wholly unconcerned with Clarke’s disappearance. Bellamy glared at him.

“Clarke is our friend,” he said sternly. “Where is she? Has she been in the dorms, Raven? Or the common room?”

Raven mutely shook her head, stabbing at her sweet corn with the prongs of her fork.

“She hasn’t been in the library,” said Monty helpfully. “I’ve been in there every day after lunch and dinner, working on my Herbology paper.”

“I know she hasn’t been out at the Quidditch pitch because I’ve been flying after dinner,” said Octavia, and if Bellamy paid a little more attention he would have noticed the way his sister’s cheeks went pink.

“Hey Wells,” called Bellamy; Wells, who sat a couple tables down with Fox, looked up. “Have you seen Clarke lately?”

Wells shook his head. “I figured she was busy, with the first task coming up soon and all.”

Bellamy and Octavia frowned at one another, while Jasper and Monty remained silent and Raven continued to broodily take out her aggression on her food. Octavia said slowly, “If Clarke hasn’t been in Ravenclaw Tower, the library, the pitch, or hanging around with Wells…”

“Then where is she?” finished Bellamy grimly.

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“Come on Clarke, you must clear your mind!” urged Lexa.

Clarke was slumped in one of the beanbag chairs, panting. She didn’t regret asking Lexa to give her Occlumency lessons because it helped them become…well, they were basically friends now, right? But she did regret the whole memories-kicking-her-ass thing.

“I thought I was good at this,” grumbled Clarke, biting back a groan as she forced herself to sit up. Lexa was crouching down beside her, one hand hovering over Clarke’s back to help push her up. Clarke rubbed the back of her head, aching because it had hit the wall the beanbag was pushed up against particularly hard. She looked reproachfully up at Lexa. “I feel like this week I’ve taken one step forward and three huge steps back.”
“I’m not holding back as much now,” muttered Lexa, eyes on Clarke’s feet to ensure they were firmly planted before she pulled her up.

“What?” Clarke’s eyes popped. “This whole time you haven’t even been doing it properly?”

Lessa kind of deadpanned her, as though it should be obvious. “Well, no, Clarke. If I used full power, you would not have the chance to grow. You have been steadily improving with each lesson.”

Clarke sighed, taking her wand that Lexa picked up off the ground. “This time, can you please use full power on me?”

“I don’t think that is a good idea—“

“Please, Lexa?” When Lexa just considered her, Clarke added, “Look, if someone uses Legilimency on me, they’re not exactly going to be holding back, are they?”

Lessa looked as though she were trying hard not to roll her eyes. “Who would be using Legilimency on you, Clarke?”

She didn’t want to discuss her father, so Clarke just glanced away, looking out at the expanse of the Room of Requirement instead. It was perfect for them not only to practice in, but to just relax and hang out (though honestly, they had yet to do that without the excuse of Occlumency lessons). Clarke considered this room to be the most incredible thing about Hogwarts yet. She’d heard rumors about its existence, but didn’t know anyone who had ever found it. She knew her friends would be beyond excited to learn of it, but she wasn’t about to tell them. Not just because of the peculiar way some had been treating her, but because…well, she wanted to keep it to herself and Lexa, for now. It was the perfect place. The only weird thing about it was the ceiling; it was black and smoky, as though a fire had charred it. It gave the room a funny smell, like something was burning, but the room was otherwise so perfect Clarke could easily overlook that.

“Oh, Lexa relented. “As long as you are certain. If I use full power, I will be exposed to many more memories—some you may not feel comfortable sharing.”

The only personal memories Lexa had seen so far were memories of Finn, and one memory of Clarke watching her father being dragged away to Azkaban. Clarke didn’t offer to talk about them, so Lexa didn’t ask any questions. Clarke stared at the wand she turned over and over in her grasp.

“I think I’ll be able to ward you off,” she said confidently, looking up at Lexa again.

Lessa’s lips pursed and an eyebrow lifted. “Are you sure about that?”

Clarke smiled, feeling secure in the challenge. “Positive.”

Lessa looked doubtful, but she nodded. “Alright. Clear your mind.”

Clarke did so; this was why she was good at Occlumency. She could clear her mind at a moment’s notice, keep it devoid of emotion and focus on what needed to be done.

Lessa crouched slightly before her, raising her wand; Clarke mirrored the movement.

This time, Lexa gave no warning.

“Legilimens!”
The room wavered before slipping away entirely; Clarke felt herself fall, far deeper and faster than she ever had before, into her memories. They flashed before her eyes like she was watching a muggle film.

Clarke was eight, sitting backwards on the toilet while her mother fretted over her hair. Her mother explained they were going to a fancy Ministry dinner and Clarke had to be on her best behavior. Clarke nodded, excited to prove that she was a good girl and could be just like her mother.

She was a first-year, tucking her tongue between her teeth and grinning because she was out of bed and wandering the castle. Wells shuffled along behind her, looking terrified he would be caught.

She was older and panting as she kissed a new, different Slytherin girl. The girl moaned Clarke’s name into her mouth; Clarke shuddered, smirking into the kiss as she dipped a second finger in to join the first. The girl’s hips canted with every movement.

No, the voice in Clarke’s head muttered. Don’t let her see that, it’s private.

Now she was fifteen, standing transfixed with horror as she watched Raven come to the same conclusion she had only moments ago; Finn stood between them, palms out and facing up, a beseeching expression on his face. Clarke’s heart was breaking.

Stop, stop, stop.

Clarke was sixteen. Tears were pouring down her face as the decision was made. Her father had been found guilty. He was being sent to Azkaban. He approached her with tear tracks cutting the lines of his usually jovial face. He cried out apologies as he pulled Clarke into a hug. Ministry officials were already pulling him away, but her father jerked free, hurriedly unclasping his watch from his wrist and pushing it into Clarke’s hands. “I love you kid,” he said, “Be good—”

“NOOOOO.”

Clarke came back to herself, panting. She had missed the beanbag chair; she was bent over on all fours, and her face was wet with tears.

“I warned you,” said Lexa quietly, something akin to pity in her eyes as she came to stand before Clarke. She held out a bar of Honeyduke’s.

“Shit,” huffed Clarke, drained and exhausted as she rolled back and took the chocolate. She tore the wrapper open with her teeth and bit a corner off. Swallowing it provided warmth in her belly and helped to steady her. “You weren’t lying.”

“I wasn’t,” agreed Lexa.

They were quiet for a moment, Clarke finishing off the chocolate. She wondered what Lexa was thinking; she was silent, gazing at the blackened ceiling with an impassive expression. Clarke stared down at her hands, torn because she was unsure whether or not she wanted to speak about the memory they had just witnessed.

They and Lexa were sort-of friends now. They spent a fair amount of time together anyway (every single evening, actually). They knew quite a bit about each other, yet there was still so much they didn’t know. Clarke had not discussed her father, or Finn, or her relationships with any of her friends, including the fact that Raven was currently furious with her. Lexa had not discussed her parents, or her school, or pretty much anything personal about herself. And Clarke wanted to know, but she also knew that she couldn’t just expect Lexa to open up without her doing the same.
Clarke made her decision the same time she finished off the chocolate bar. She would talk to Lexa—but later. Tomorrow, perhaps. That gave her time to think about what exactly she wanted to say. For now, the memory was fresh in her mind and her heart hurt.

“Can we take a break?”

Lexa nodded. “Of course. What time would you like to resume?”

“No, I mean—” Clarke pushed herself up to lean back on her elbows. “Can we stay in here? Just, not do Occlumency for a bit? Or stuff our faces,” she added, seeing Lexa look over at the pile of candy.

Lexa looked confused. “What would you like to do, then?”

Clarke shrugged. “Just hang out. Talk. We’re friends, aren’t we?” Lexa’s face fell a little and Clarke felt something clutch at her heart. “…Lexa? We are friends…right?”

Lexa stared at her, something wrestling behind her eyes. Finally, she blinked and nodded slowly.

Clarke grinned. “Good. First mission of friendship: twenty-one questions.” First mission of friendship? What the hell. Clarke’s cheeks warmed, but she kept the smile fixed firmly in place.

Lexa lifted her brows, amused. “Twenty-one questions?”

“Yeah, I’ll go first. Most embarrassing thing you’ve ever done?”

Lexa’s lips curved at the question. She contemplated for a moment. Then she said: “When I was in my fourth year, I sought revenge against Anya by casting a lip-locking charm when she was kissing a boy from a year above us.”

Clarke snorted, delightedly surprised Lexa was capable of such low measures. “That’s great, how is that embarrassing?”

Lexa’s lips pursed in a smile. “She did the same thing to me a few months later, only a full-body one. I was not dressed appropriately.”

Clarke’s eyes widened. She collapsed into laughter.

They played the game for quite some time, until Clarke’s watch showed it was nearly midnight. She had no desire to leave, however, and judging by how Lexa was reclined back in her chair with a peaceful expression, she didn’t either.

Clarke was, however, growing a little cold.

“You okay with me making a fire?” she asked, moving toward the fireplace. Lexa shook her head, so Clarke pointed her wand at the fireplace and filled it with crackling flames. She turned back to face Lexa and started to rethink whether bathing her in a romantic firelight glow was a good idea.

Lexa, however, was looking like a dork.

She had sunk into the giant beanbag chair so deeply that her knees were up at her chest. She was trying to wriggle out of it, eying up the candy on the table, but she couldn’t stand.

Lexa shifted her gaze onto her, narrowing her eyes when she saw that there was mirth in Clarke’s. “A little help?”
Clarke smiled as she watched Lexa struggle. “I don’t know, this is pretty entertaining.”

"Clarke," Lexa huffed, sitting up as straight as she could manage considering she was buried low in a beanbag chair. "This is not funny." Her expression was reproachful and her voice was clearly meant to be stern, but her eyes were so big and shining. They reminded Clarke of a puppy. She couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled past her lips, and Lexa was not amused. "Right. I am leaving." She made to get up but her hand slipped so she slid further down in the beanbag chair. Her expression contorted into full-blown irritation. "Clarke!" Smirking, Clarke extended a hand.

“Sorry. Couldn’t resist.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, smiling despite the pink blush staining her cheeks as Clarke helped her to her feet. “No sweets for you, now.”

That was a lie, of course, because an hour later they were both sitting comfortably on the floor before the fire, laughing and telling stories as they finished off a bag of Honeyduke’s candies.

Clarke sent Lexa a grin through a mouthful of licorice wands. “We had a gnome infestation in our garden last year. There was this one that hated the sun and always skulked around in the shade, so he was like, really pale. I named him Voldy.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. “You named him—” Her words cut off in sputters of laughter. “Oh my—”

Clarke nodded, voice straining to speak before dissolving into laughter. “Yeah. So my—so my dad would call him, ‘gnome-who-must-not-be-named.’” She and Lexa collapsed into giggles then, and Clarke felt lighter than she had in ages—she had just casually mentioned her father, and it was okay. She didn’t fall apart at the seams or revert into a state of deadened sorrow. Her father used to be around all the time, now he wasn’t, and it wasn’t okay but—she could breathe again. He would be free one day, hopefully in the near future.

“Clarke,” Lexa said finally, voice breathless and eyes bright from laughter. “You are just…" She pursed her lips, shaking her head as she searched for the word. She reached forward to snatch the last licorice wand off the table. “Strange," she decided, tearing the wand and tossing one half to Clarke. “You are very strange. I am…” She hesitated, staring at Clarke. Clarke tilted her head, furrowing her brows quizzically. Lexa's eyes flickered down again, and Clarke wondered if she was avoiding her gaze—as scratch that, she was definitely avoiding her gaze—as she said quietly, “I am glad to have met you.”

Silence stretched in the room, but it wasn’t awkward. It was contemplative. Clarke considered Lexa’s words, considered the way she was staring intently at her own hands. She thought of the first time they had met, and wondered if the reason she had been so frazzled hadn’t only been due to the Alihotsy Draught. She trailed her gaze along the contours of Lexa’s face that she couldn’t help but to yearn to stroke her fingertips along—the elegant curve of her cheekbones, the arch of her brows, the straight, narrow length of her nose, and the sinfully plump lips. She forced herself to look away when she lingered too long on the intricately braided hair that she longed to bury her hands in, shame curdling and mixing with the heat simmering low in her belly. She shouldn’t be feeling this attraction, not only because she wasn’t in the right place for a relationship of any kind, but also because what Raven had warned her about weeks ago was right. Lexa was her competition in this tournament, and Clarke couldn’t afford to get distracted.

Clarke noticed with a guilty jolt that Lexa was blushing, faint pink staining her cheeks. Here Clarke was, worrying about falling for someone she shouldn’t, when Lexa was embarrassed enough just to admit she liked having her as a friend. Clarke allowed herself to briefly imagine what it would
be like for Lexa to actually be interested in her too, and then adamantly pushed the thoughts out of her head.

“I’m glad to have met you too,” she said softly.

Lexa’s eyes darted up to meet Clarke’s. Clarke smiled, fighting hard to keep any sadness out of it. After a moment, Lexa returned it. The way Clarke’s stomach flipped filled her with a heat that made her tie feel just a little too tight around her neck, and her face burn hot.

Then Clarke noticed that Lexa was actually sweating.

“Do you want me to put out the fire?” she asked, but even as she spoke Lexa shook her head, getting to her feet.

Clarke’s eyes widened as she saw Lexa start to unclasp her Durmstrang cloak and shrug off her robes.

She pretended to be very interested in the stones outlining the fireplace as in her peripheral vision she saw Lexa finish shedding the heavy clothes. Clarke couldn’t resist looking; she turned and felt her stomach drop. Lexa was wearing the equivalent of a tank top. Lexa’s arms were showing.

And holy shit.

Her arms were lean and hard with muscles, and there was a—there was a—

Clarke’s stomach tightened with a hard, low sweep and she swore her pupils dilated. She scrambled to her feet.

“You have a muggle tattoo?” she breathed. She was as surprised as she was turned on. Surprise may be too reserved a word. Actually, she was shocked—wizards and witches never had traditional muggle tattoos. Everyone always opted for using magic instead; a quicker and much less painful process compared to how muggles scarred the ink into their bodies. But this design on Lexa was definitely a muggle tattoo. For one, it wasn’t moving. Two, Clarke could see the minor flaws in it: the slight waver in a few of the lines, the raised ridge of scar tissue. Magic imprints could not be done like that, because they always came out perfect.

And yet, this tattoo was so beautiful. Clarke’s stomach fluttered as she trailed her eyes over the hard contours of Lexa’s shoulders, arm, and exposed portion of her back. Her fingers itched in anticipation of her urge to just touch it.

“Yes. I received it this past summer.”

“God, it’s so…can I…do you mind?” She lifted a hand, held eye contact with Lexa to be sure it was okay.

Lexa hesitated for a split second, and then briefly dipped her head in acquiescence, turning her body to angle her back toward Clarke.

Gently, as though afraid if she put too much pressure it would melt away, Clarke dragged a fingertip along one of the thick, coiled lines.

Oh, wow.

Lexa’s skin was so smooth and warm, and the outlines of the tattoo felt rough, almost like parchment. Clarke traced around what portion of the tattoo she could see; the rest of it extended on beneath Lexa’s shirt. Clarke pursed her lips and bit her tongue when she realized she had opened her
mouth to ask Lexa if she could see the rest of it.

It took her a second to find her voice (mostly because it was lost amidst the thundering of her heart). “…It’s, uh, it’s really…it’s beautiful, Lexa.”

You’re beautiful, she wanted to add. Her heart squeezed in her chest.

Not appropriate.

When Lexa spoke, she sounded just a tiny bit uneven. “Thank you, Clarke.”

Lexa still hadn’t turned around. Clarke was much too close to her; she could smell the smoke from the fire lingering in Lexa’s hair. Rather than just staring at her exposed portion of back and shoulders (which were becoming increasingly more tempting for Clarke to press her lips to), Clarke stepped around to face Lexa.

Shit.

This was an even worse idea, because now she was facing her, and they were only like a foot apart, and the firelight bathed Lexa in flickering light and shadow, and her lips were so full and plump and Clarke really wondered how soft they would feel against hers.

She was lost for words. Apparently so was Lexa, because after a second of staring at Clarke with her lips parted as though about to say something, she pressed her lips firmly together and turned her head to stare at the fire instead.


Lexa seemed relieved to have something to say. “It felt right. I spent the last summer traveling the world. It was befitting to mark the experience.”

By the hesitance in Lexa's voice, Clarke assumed there was something she wasn't telling her. But if Lexa didn't feel comfortable, Clarke wasn't going to push her. “Raven had a tattoo when she came to Hogwarts, and—” Lexa’s brow had furrowed so Clarke quickly answered for her, “Yeah, she was only ten when she got it. Her mom was…not the best mother, basically. She went to get a tattoo and took Raven with her, and decided to get Raven a flower on her ankle. Of course, Raven said she asked for a pinup girl instead,” Clarke added with a wry smile. “But her mother insisted on the flower.”

Lexa’s brows were lifted slightly—they always were whenever Clarke spoke about Raven. Clarke couldn’t blame her. Raven was pretty damn impressive. “She is the only other witch I know to have a muggle tattoo as well.”

Clarke waved a hand dismissively. “She doesn’t anymore. In our fifth year, me, Raven, Octavia, Bellamy, and the rest of the gang visited Hogsmeade together. We, uh…” Clarke couldn’t help the ghost of a smile; she was thinking of all the rule breaking she and her friends used to get up to that they no longer seemed to have the time for anymore. Or maybe she just didn’t have the inclination, since her father was shipped off to Azkaban. “We snuck into The Hog’s Head to see if we could get our hands on some firewhisky. Raven met this old guy who had a tattoo of a Chuddley Canons’ chaser scoring a goal, Raven asked him about it and they got to talking. Didn’t take long for her to get the tattoo Vanished and replace with a flying raven. It kind of circles around her leg, from her ankle to her knee. She says it makes her leg feel more energized,” Clarke added with huff of laughter.
“That’s very nice.”

“Yeah, she was happy. It reminded her of her dad. He always used to call her ‘Little bird’. She didn’t mention it much, but I think she hated her old tattoo. Every time she saw it, it just reminded her of her mom.”

“Her mother was…a very cruel person?” said Lexa hesitantly.

Clarke nodded, equally hesitant because this was obviously Raven’s story to tell, not her own. “Yeah, she… didn’t treat Raven the way she deserved to be treated. Raven only sees her over summer break; she, Octavia, and Bellamy usually come over to my house for Christmas.” Clarke swallowed, her throat suddenly dry. “It used to be really fun. My dad would cook Christmas dinner and make jokes because my mom is like, the worst cook ever. We’d all pile on the couches in the living room, Wells and Thelonious would come over too, and we’d all wake up and open presents together. Last year…it wasn’t the same.”

“Because your father is gone,” spoke Lexa softly. At Clarke’s look, Lexa said, “I remember reading about it in the paper.”

So she did know before.

Starting to wish she was asleep in her four-poster bed, Clarke tucked her hair behind her ear, shifting her weight to her other leg and wondering what Lexa was thinking.

“You don’t have to speak about it. If it makes you uncomfortable.”

“No, it’s okay. I know it’s good to talk about it. Helps with the healing process, anyway.” Clarke took a deep breath. “I want to talk about it… with you.” She tilted her head. “We’re friends.” She didn’t state it as a question, but she still felt relief flood through her when Lexa nodded in agreement. “Just, do you… is it okay if we talk about it tomorrow? I don’t think I have the energy tonight.”

“Oh course, Clarke,” said Lexa softly. Their eyes met, and Clarke froze while inside her stomach flipping and her heart beat faster. Lexa’s eyes were so expressive, so open and green. Clarke was quickly learning they were the only open thing about Lexa.

“Um…” She sucked in a deep breath, tearing her gaze away. Friends, she reminded herself. Friends don’t give friends butterflies. “Okay.” She started toward the door, ignoring the puzzled crease in Lexa’s brow. She had just placed her hand on the doorknob when she half-turned to give a tight smile. “Same time tomorrow?”

Lexa was looking so intently at her. Clarke could have sworn her eyes darted down to Clarke’s lips, but it happened so fast she couldn’t be certain. Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed, and her cheeks tinted pink. A pleasant feeling swooped low through Clarke, and she struggled to suppress a smile; perhaps this attraction wasn’t as one-sided as she’d assumed.

“Yes,” said Lexa, voice a little raspier than usual. Clarke stared back at her, warmth aching in her belly, heart aching as well. Would it really be so wrong if she marched back to Lexa? If she pressed their lips together, pressed their hips together, explored Lexa’s lean body with one hand while she buried the other in her hair? Would that be so bad?

There was a voice in her head urging her it would be so, so right.

But Lexa had blinked and smoothed the emotion in her eyes into a carefully guarded impassivity. She wrapped herself in her robes again and swept forward. Clarke opened the door,
gesturing for her to move through.

The Room of Requirement had not concealed its entrance in the form of a broom closet since the first time they found it. It opened into the corridor, and even as they stood outside it, they watched the door shrink until nothing but a broad expanse of stonewall.

“I'll see you tomorrow, Clarke,” murmured Lexa.

Clarke couldn’t watch her go and not—

“Hey.” Lexa halted when Clarke’s hand closed around her forearm and gently pulled her back. Lexa turned, looking almost fearful, her eyes darting to Clarke’s lips again.

Fuck.

This was Lexa. This was strange. Clarke wasn’t one to just fall for someone, not since Finn, and not before him. Falling for someone before you knew them was not only stupid, it was dangerous. And despite how Clarke felt as though she and Lexa had been spending time together for much longer than the past few weeks, in all reality, she had only known Lexa for a month. She hadn’t even known she existed before this, and visa versa. And all things considered, despite how much they’d learned about one another during their lessons, they didn’t know anything about one another.

So why the hell did Clarke feel such a pull to her? The Durmstrang girl stood before her like a trembling work of art, clad in heavy robes of red and black, her hair drawn back in intricate braids that made Clarke’s hands itch, whether to bury her hands in them or draw them she didn’t know. In the light of the lone torch lighting the hallway, shadows were cast long and spidery over Lexa’s sculpted cheekbones from her lashes. Her lips were—God, Clarke couldn’t even look at them without practically imploding with emotions. She didn’t know if she had ever wanted anything as bad as she wanted to kiss Lexa at this moment.

That need scared her. Feelings were dangerous, caring about someone in that way was dangerous, made her vulnerable—she’d learned that the hard way with Finn. And anyway, this wasn’t the time. There were too many things to worry about. Her father, her mother, the tournament, her grades. It felt like Clarke was in the middle of a war with the world, and there was no place for romance in a war.

Still, Clarke leaned forward, pulling a shocked Lexa into a hug. “Thank you,” she breathed into Lexa’s hair. It smelled of smoke from the fire, with something earthy underlining it, like trees and forestry. It made her ache, in all places.

“I. Um. For what?” Lexa sounded as stiff and surprised as she was in Clarke’s arms.

Feeling rather rejected, Clarke withdrew, her cheeks burning. “For helping me with this. Teaching me Occlumency. I just. It means a lot.”

Lexa stared at her a moment longer, clearly worried, and sinking her teeth into the full pout of her lower lip. Clarke almost groaned.

Clarke made to step back, the fact that Lexa had not responded to the hug weighing heavily in her mind. She was stunned when Lexa suddenly moved forward, wrapping Clarke in a fierce hug and brushing her lips across Clarke’s cheek. “We’re friends. You don’t have to thank me for being your friend.”

Clarke remained motionless, her face feeling as though it had caught fire. Lexa stepped back,
clasping her hands together. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Clarke.”

Clarke nodded dumbly in response, and just stood there watching as Lexa hurried away down the corridor, turning the corner and out of sight.

She let out a breath she hadn’t been aware she’d been holding, slumping back and letting her head fall back against the wall, and completely unaware Lexa was doing the same just around the corner.

"・/°・"*

_Mama just killed a man_

_Put a gun against his head_

_Pulled my trigger now he’s dead_

“Ha ha! Yes!” Raven pumped her fist in the air, breathless with triumph as she gazed down at the iPod, screen lit up bright and music drifting from the speakers. The air around the iPod was a little pink, like it was trapped in a soft pink bubble, but it wasn’t too obvious, so she was pleased. More than pleased, because she was pretty sure she’d just done what no student at Hogwarts had ever done before: she’d used muggle technology.

“Fuck yes,” she breathed, collapsing onto bed clutching the iPod to her chest. She opened her mouth to tell her best friend—and promptly closing it, sourly remembering as she glanced at Clarke’s empty bed.

It had been weeks. She missed Clarke so much sometimes it felt as though a part of her had died, or some other melodramatic comparison. Bottom line, Raven missed her. She knew it wasn’t Clarke’s fault, and yet...she couldn’t forgive her. Hurt and jealousy stung like a bitch, and she wasn’t ready to talk to Clarke again.

That didn’t stop her worrying about her friend’s whereabouts, though. Bellamy, Octavia, and the rest of their friends were right: Clarke hadn’t been around lately. Every day after classes, with the occasional sighting during lunch and dinner, Clarke disappeared. No one could find her.

Coincidentally, Raven noticed, Lexa was always gone at the same time. Raven couldn’t help but to wonder where they slipped off to…unless…

Raven climbed out of bed. She took the white earbuds off her nightstand, plugged them into the iPod. She twisted the headphones into her ears and shoved her iPod deep into her jacket pocket. Bohemian Rhapsody finished out as she made her way down the spiral staircase into the entrance hall, and Adele began crooning softly by the time Raven reached the statue of the one-eyed witch. The tunnel was empty, and Raven didn’t imagine Clarke or Lexa would be keen to return to where that weird dementor-looking thing had been, so she trudged up the stairs and crossed to the entire other side of the castle, The Weeknd pumping in her ears as she opened the passageway behind the statue of Gregory the Smarmy. Again, nothing. The only possible other place they could be was the Durmstrang ship, unless they were just randomly wandering the castle, but Raven doubted that; one of their friends would have seen her at some point.
Raven tapped the screen of the iPod to up the volume as Omi’s Cheerleader began playing. She hummed along as she tramped across the grounds toward the huge ship looking particularly eerie with the full moon high above it. As she neared the ship, she noticed the silhouette against the moon; Anya was standing on the ramp, leaning her elbows on the rope and staring at Raven.

"Hey blondie, long time no see."

Anya inclined her head, the corners of her lips lifting up faintly enough that Raven couldn’t be sure if it was a smile or a sneer. "Raven."

Raven tucked her earbuds, glancing around the ship behind Anya. No sign of Lexa or Clarke, unless they were in the ship.

"Why are you here?" said Anya.

Raven grinned. "Wouldn’t you like to know?"

Anya deadpanned her. "I would, actually. Seriously, what are you doing here?"

"I’m looking for Clarke." Raven wrapped the headphones around the iPod and stored it in her pocket. "I’m guessing she’s with Lexa? Any chance you know what they get up to? Gotta be something good."

"Deductive," said Anya coolly. "It’s none of our business what they may or may not be doing."

"They? So she is with Lexa." When Anya didn’t answer, Raven rolled her eyes. "Oh come on. You aren’t a little bit curious?"

Anya raised an eyebrow. "Are you often curious about your friends, Raven?" she said sardonically.

"It’s more of friends of friends I’m curious about."

Anya snorted. "You’re out of your depth, Raven," she said, striding past her and moving toward the ladder of the ship.

"What do you mean?"

Anya glanced back over her shoulder at Raven, appearing both arrogant and supremely indifferent. "I mean in your dreams, Raven. You couldn’t keep up."

"What the fuck? Are you talking about sex?" When Anya merely looked smug, Raven demanded, "Are you saying that because of my leg?"

"Of course not. I’m talking about how stupid you are."

"What the fuck!" fumed Raven, outraged. "I’ll have you know I’m fucking awesome in bed!"

"I’m sure you are," said Anya in a patronizing voice that further infuriated Raven.

Raven followed Anya halfway up the ladder, unsure whether or not she wanted to punch her face in or fuck her to prove a point. "That’s ironic coming from you, considering you look too uptight to be fun at anything, ever. I bet you just lay there like a wet fish. You probably fake your orgasms and can’t wait until they roll off you and go to sleep so you can stop being a pillow princess."
Anya clearly wasn’t taking the bait. The corners of her lips were curled up in a smug smirk. “Think what you want, Raven. You won’t find out either way.”

Raven glared at Anya’s back as she turned and continued her walk up the ramp. When she reached the top she paused, turning back. The mirth was gone from her eyes; instead, all that was left was indifference. “By the way, you aren’t a very good friend.”

“What do you mean?” snapped Raven, back still bristling over Anya’s earlier comments.

“You just didn’t strike me as such a small, petty person.” When Raven balked, Anya continued. “You haven’t been on amicable terms with Clarke since the Choosing Ceremony. Why? Because you’re jealous?” Anya rolled her eyes, and Raven felt as though she were shrinking into herself. “Get over yourself.” And then Anya walked up onto the deck, disappearing from view, and Raven stood there on the ramp, speechless. In the resulting silence, the music trickling out of her iPod could be heard from her pocket.

Some One Direction song was playing, and it made Raven feel like shit.

“・/؟/・” *

Clarke woke early Saturday morning. Normally she’d be annoyed she woke so early and didn’t sleep in, but for some reason she woke with a fire lit in her heart. She was going to talk to Lexa today. She needed to talk to Lexa today, to open up about her father and everything else. She would feel better after it, she knew it.

So Clarke dressed and got ready, sparing a moment to frown at the cold cup of tea sitting on her nightstand. Who made her a tea? Raven’s bed was empty, but even so, considering she was pissed with Clarke, she wouldn’t have made it. Content to call it a mystery, Clarke mentally shrugged and hurried off to breakfast.

She cornered Lexa just as she was leaving and asked her if they could go now. Lexa was surprised but agreed, so the two of them grabbed handfuls of muffins and made their way down to the Room of Requirement.

Once inside, they sat on the rug before the fire just as they had yesterday, and Clarke took a deep breath.

“I guess you’ll already know this from the papers, but, my dad worked at the Ministry of Magic. He was an Unspeakable. I guess he broke the first rule: don’t talk about the job. I don’t know the details, no one does. It doesn’t make sense either, because I’m sure my dad would have told me, or at least told my mom,” she admitted. “All we know is that he was accused of leaking official confidential Ministry information. Like I said, it’s shady because I don’t actually know who my dad would have even told, assuming he even ever said anything.” Clarke frowned at the fire, a familiar lump obscuring her throat at the unfairness of it all. “They don’t even have solid proof that my dad did anything, but they still locked him up. They didn’t even give him an actual trial.”

Lexa was puzzled. “Forgive me if I am wrong, but—is your family not close friends with the Minister? Could he not do something?”

Clarke shook her head. “His hands are tied, apparently,” she said, unable to prevent the bitter note from creeping into her voice. “Personally, I think it’s Madam Undersecretary that’s behind it.
She’s had it in for my dad for some reason. She was the one who voted against him. She was the deciding vote that sent him off to Azkaban.”

“Sydney?” said Lexa, raising her eyebrows in surprise. “The tournament judge?”

Clarke nodded. “Yeah. She’s the main reason I want to learn Occlumency. We had a few interviews with her, but they were more like interrogations.” Clarke shifted, uncomfortable. “Sometimes I’d get the feeling she was reading my mind. And she looked really intently at me, the same way you do when we practice.”

“So she thought you were hiding something?”

Clarke shrugged. “I guess so. But my dad never told me anything, or my mom. He was good at his job. He was a good person.” Clarke hated the way tears stung her eyes; hated the way nails clawed at her throat when she tried to speak through the lump obscuring it. It had been almost two years and she was sick of feeling so hopeless.

“You should tell me about him,” said Lexa seriously, as though she knew exactly how Clarke felt and she was trying to make her feel better. “Tell me positive memories.”

Clarke sniffled, blinking to prevent the tears from falling. “He’s a great dad. When I was little, he used to take me to muggle football games.”

Lexa actually smiled at this. “What games?”

Clarke gave a somewhat nervous chuckle. “You know, I’m not sure? Both of my parents are half-blood but my mom never knew her dad. My dad’s mom was muggle-born, but she died before I was born. I was raised in a Wizarding village, so I never really learned very many muggle things. Dad took us—Wells and I, because we were best friends and neighbors—to football games, and once to a muggle movie theater, which was awesome. We watched this western film that was big over in America.”

“What film was it?”

Clarke shrugged. “I can’t remember, to tell you the truth. It was a really old film, though. The theaters were just doing a special showing of it.”

“I wasn’t ever really a big fan of western films,” said Lexa thoughtfully. “I always preferred documentaries.”

Somehow the idea of Lexa vacationing as a child and presumably watching a muggle film at some point made Clarke smile. “Did you start collecting muggle memorabilia in your spare time?” she teased.

“Well, I did spend the first eleven years of my life thinking I was a muggle, so, I suppose you could say that.” said Lexa easily.

“Wait—you’re a muggleborn?” Shit. This whole time she’d just assumed Lexa was pureblood because, well, she just seemed like she’d be a pureblood. Clarke cursed herself for jumping to conclusions.

Lexa nodded. Her face was impassive, but her eyes were wary, guarded. Clarke immediately stumbled to clarify herself.

“No, I mean—I’m not saying it like that’s a bad thing, I just—I never would have guessed.
You don’t, um, seem like a muggleborn.”

Lexa arched a brow. “What is a muggleborn supposed to seem like?”

Clarke felt the brush spread all the way to the tips of her ears. “Nothing,” she said quickly, absolutely mortified at the hole she’d dug herself in. “I’m not—there’s nothing bad about being a muggleborn at all! Raven’s a muggleborn, there are tons of muggleborns—I just, you come from Durmstrang and you seem like—” Clarke gave an aggravated huff of breath, gesturing helplessly at Lexa. “I don’t know, I sound like an idiot. You just don’t look like you come from the muggle world. You look like you’ve grown up in the wizarding world. Honestly, I thought you were a pureblood when I first saw you. Wizarding royalty, actually,” she rambled on, eyes widening slightly and face on fire when she realized she’d actually said that out loud. Oh my God.

Lexa snorted. “Royalty?”

“You looked royal,” insisted Clarke, determinedly holding eye contact. She may be a fucking idiot, but she wasn’t going to make even more of a fool of herself by acting all embarrassed.

“I assure you I’m muggleborn,” said Lexa, a little coolly.

Clarke picked up on the note. “That’s not a bad thing. I promise I’m not an asshole.”

That seemed to assuage Lexa somewhat. She relaxed, the tension in her shoulders visibly releasing.

“Can I ask you something?” Lexa looked expectant, as though she already knew what Clarke was going to ask. “How does it work for Durmstrang?”

“The same as it works for Hogwarts, as far as I know,” said Lexa. “The headmaster or a professor arrives at the student’s home. They inform the parents of the magical world, show them magic, and notify them of the consequences if they break the International Statute of Secrecy.”

“Oh.” Lexa gave her a questioning look, so Clarke explained, “I sort of hoped you were going to tell me how it happened for you. What’s your story?”

Lexa looked down, her face creasing somberly, and Clarke hastily said, “You don’t have to if it makes you uncomfortable.”

“No, I’ll tell you…” But she still looked reluctant. Clarke realized why.

“Just because I opened up to you doesn’t mean you have to do the same,” she pointed out. “I didn’t do it expecting reciprocity.”

Lexa gazed at her for a long moment, considering her. To Clarke’s great surprise, she started talking. “My parents were very strict and very religious. They were well known and respected in the town we lived in. They had high expectations for me, and I strove to achieve them. Even though, judging by their reactions, it never seemed to be enough. When I was eleven…” Lexa’s brow furrowed2 as she faltered. “They received a letter in the mail with the Durmstrang crest on it, and the letter explained that the headmaster of a private school would be arriving in a week to discuss my acceptance there. My parents were pleased; they thought it was some fancy religious school, I suppose, who had caught word of my academic achievements and my parents’ reputations.” Her expression darkened with the ghost of a smirk that Clarke was almost ashamed to admit sent a tingle up her spine. “Indra arrived and explained about our world. She showed them magic, and they…” She sighed, sounding both tired and faintly amused. “It went about as well as you can expect, coming from a family like mine. Not only were they intolerant of any religion or belief other than
their own, but they were racist as well,” she added with a bitter chuckle. “Naturally, they did not take the idea of Indra taking me away to practice witchcraft very well. I was... upset,” she said in a measured tone, “Because I had noticed my powers before, and they had worried me for the same reason they worried my parents. After Indra, they evidently thought it made more sense to blame me for it.”

When Lexa did not continue speaking, Clarke prompted, “So what then?”

Lexa shifted her weight, leaning back on her elbows; she had clearly reached the part where she no longer felt comfortable sharing.

“Hey, you don’t have to say anything else,” said Clarke gently. Lexa took a breath.

“Basically, to shorten the story... Indra came again later and explained things more thoroughly to me. I realized that Durmstrang was where I needed to be. My parents told me they never wanted to see me again, and I left. I’ve lived at Durmstrang ever since.”

Wow. Clarke’s heart ached for her. “Did you ever see them again?”

“Once,” said Lexa carefully; this time her gaze slid off Clarke’s to focus on the fire instead. She fell silent. Clearly that was the last she was prepared to say on the matter.

Clarke felt like she should say something, so she did. She leaned forward and brushed her fingertips over Lexa’s shoulder, meant as a way to both get her attention and serve as a comforting gesture. All it did was make Lexa’s gaze snap onto her, startled.

“Sorry,” said Clarke quickly. “I just—I wanted to say sorry. Sorry your parents are like that. You seem pretty awesome to me,” she offered, shrugging when Lexa stared. “So... they’re missing out.”

Lexa held her gaze a beat longer, before she gave a tight smile. “Thank you.”

Clarke nodded in affirmment, but now there was a silence stretching on; Lexa clearly didn’t want to say anymore, and Clarke wasn’t exactly keen on discussing her family issues any longer, so instead she stood up and extended a hand for Lexa’s. “So do you want to start Occlumency?”

Lexa took Clarke’s hand; Clarke pulled her up to her feet, ignoring the little flip her stomach gave at her hand being clasped in Lexa’s.

An hour later, Clarke was panting and had a splitting headache. A few days ago she’d thought she’d gotten the hang of Occlumency, but now, with Lexa no longer holding back, it felt as though there was some kind of mental block in Clarke’s mind that she couldn’t get past to clear it.

Lexa had just witnessed Clarke’s personal memories—memories of her father being found guilty and sent to Azkaban, memories of Finn weakly explaining why he’d felt the need to lie to Clarke about his relationship with Raven, memories of long nights crying on Octavia’s shoulder, memories of fights with Raven, fights with Bellamy, and memories of haunting dreams that flickered past too quickly to explain.

“What are they?” Clarke panted, hands on her knees and shaking after being forced to relive the dream that had been haunting her for the past year.

Lexa’s jaw worked, muscles jumping as though she were agitated by Clarke’s questions. “I already told you. It’s a Shadow-Eater.”

“But what is that?” Clarke pushed her hair out of her sweaty face, looking up at Lexa, who
seemed intent on avoiding her gaze. “What is a Shadow-Eater? I don’t even understand—I’ve never even heard that term before. It looks like a Dementor.”

Lexa reached up to rub the back of her neck, still avoiding Clarke’s eyes. “I’m not supposed to talk about it, Clarke,” she mumbled.

What the hell. “Why?” demanded Clarke, finally standing. She marched over to Lexa, standing right before her so she was forced to look at her. “Who doesn’t want you talking about it?”

Lexa didn’t answer immediately. She stared at Clarke for a long moment, before finally saying, “Indra.”

“What does Indra know about them?”

Again, Lexa didn’t answer.

“Lexa, I have that dream all the time!” Twenty-four, to be exact. “If they have something to do with my dad, I have a right to know!”

Lexa glanced around the room as though suspicious there were people spying on them. “This is highly classified information, Clarke, I’m not supposed to—“

“I’m not going to tell anyone,” said Clarke fiercely. “I just want to know what they are! I dream about them all the time, and then we see one in Hogsmeade? And apparently it’s not the first time they showed up there? I need to know.”

She stubbornly held Lexa’s gaze, glaring into green orbs until she felt like she was falling into them. Lexa’s throat bobbed as she swallowed, blinking and taking in a deep breath. “Alright. Look, you can’t tell anyone what I am about to tell you. It’s really important, okay? Okay, Clarke?”

Clarke nodded. “I promise. I’ll do an Unbreakable Vow if you want,” she joked. Lexa stared at her as though she was seriously contemplating it, before she seemed to move past it.

“Shadow-Eaters are not natural beings,” she said slowly. “They were designed by wizardkind. You said they remind you of dementors…well, once, that’s what they were.”

Clarke’s brows drew together. “So they what, evolved?”

Lexa frowned, eyes unfocused as though recalling a distant memory. “Have you ever heard of lethifolds?” she said darkly. Clarke shook her head, though the term sounded vaguely familiar, as though she’d read about them in a school book some time ago. “They’re not common here, but exist in more tropical areas. They’re similar to dementors in appearance.” Lexa continued hesitantly, “It is…believed…that many years ago, your Ministry of Magic began experimenting with dementors. I assume you have been taught in your history classes, as have Durmstrang, that dementors once guarded Azkaban, before they betrayed the Ministry by joining the Dark Lord’s side.”

Clarke nodded. What once was history had became legend since; on top of being taught during History of Magic, the majority of witches and wizards were told the stories at bedtime by their parents, especially on the anniversary of the Battle of Hogwarts over a century ago.

“According to some…your ministry started conducting experiments on dementors, in an attempt to train them. It didn’t work, so they tried breeding them with other creatures instead, hoping it would change them enough that they could use them. They breded dementors and lethifolds, and created the creatures you see in your dream. Only, the creatures didn’t turn out how they hoped. They were even more difficult to control than dementors, and escaped from the ministry. I do not
know if there are more than the original created, or if they are breeding on their own, but…” Lexa shook her head, mouth stretched into a grim line. “Your ministry created a dangerous creature. People started calling them Shadow-Eaters, after the Death Eaters that followed the Dark Lord.”

Clarke’s heart was beating fast. If this was true—and she saw no reason why Lexa would lie about this—then that was horrible of the Ministry. At least it was long before Jaha’s time, but had it still been going on when Diana Sydney was the Minister? How long ago had this all occurred? And, even more curious—how did Lexa know about it?

“How do you know all this?” Clarke asked, watching carefully for her reaction.

Lexus was impassive, however. “Ask me no question and I will tell you no lies, Clarke.”

Clarke recoiled, almost ashamed by how much that hurt. “You don’t trust me?”

Lexa immediately shook her head, eyes open and expressive again. “It’s not like that. I’ve just been sworn to privacy. Think of it like an Unbreakable Vow,” she added, an attempt at a ghost of a smile on her face.

“But it’s not an Unbreakable Vow,” said Clarke flatly, not amused.

The almost-smile slid off Lexa’s face. “No,” she admitted. “But it is very important. I’m sorry.”

Clarke moved past it; there were other important questions she had. “Why am I dreaming about it, though? I had never seen one until Hogsmeade, but I’ve been dreaming about it for over a year. How does that happen?”

Lexa shrugged. “Lethifolds have been known to infiltrate an unsuspecting person’s dreams. Maybe you have met one before, but you were never aware of it. If that is the case, it could still be haunting you…which is all the more reason to learn to close off your mind. Occlumency,” she added at Clarke’s blank look. “You should rest tonight, and tomorrow we will continue where we left off.”

Clarke didn’t want to wait another day. She was annoyed she still hadn’t managed to fight Lexa off, and she was determined to do it. “Let’s go again.”

“Are you sure?” said Lexa dubiously.

Yes. Clarke was going to do it this time. She thought of the dreams, of the Shadow-Eaters. She had to learn to banish them from her mind.

When Clarke nodded, Lexa stood with resignation in her eyes. She waited for Clarke to stand and face her before she raised her wand.

Clarke briefly closed her eyes, inhaling deeply, willing all her emotions—the fear, the hurt, the sadness—to fade into the background. I can do this. She slowly blew out the breath between pursed lips. I’m going to do this. When she opened her eyes, there was a new, determined glint in them.

Lexa crouched, pointing her wand. “Ready? Legilimens!”

“Expelliarmus!”

The Room of Requirement melted away.
Lexa was inside a cathedral, sitting straight-backed and rigid in a pew between her mother and father. She was wide-eyed and solemn as she gazed up at the man speaking to the audience about sins. She looked hardly eight.

Lexa stood in a muggle village, nose pressed up against a window as she peered at a television inside. Her mother seized her by the ear and dragged her away. She looked around ten.

Lexa had to be eleven, because she was standing inside a huge stone fortress; her expression was impassive, but her throat moved as she swallowed and her jaw clenched. There were children all around her. Indra stood with her arms behind her back, staring sternly at them all as she discussed the rules for first year Durmstrang students.

Lexa was panting and aching, on her knees inside a strange circular room. Indra and Anya stood close together, arms crossed over their chests as they gazed down at Lexa. Try again, said Indra. Lexa squeezed her eyes shut and felt her body begin to move; she screamed as her spine cracked. She was barely a teenager.

Lexa looked around sixteen. She was staring into the ghostly eyes of a dead girl, a pretty girl with dark skin and eyes that looked as though they would be warm had they not been cold with death. Lexa was on her hands and knees in the snow, and there were blood splatters marring the white surface. Her wand lay forgotten feet away. A cloaked figure advanced on her, gloved hands lifting a wand.

“STOP IT.”

Clarke was blasted back, and this time when she slammed into the wall, there was no concerned Lexa immediately rushing to her side. Arms quivering from exhaustion, Clarke pushed herself up, peeking at Lexa through the strands of golden hair that had fallen into her eyes. Lexa was hunched over and silent.

“Lexa?”

She didn’t answer.

Cautiously, Clarke crawled forward. “Lexa?”

“Don’t,” choked Lexa, standing and stumbling back a few steps from Clarke. Her skin was ghostly white, her eyes wide and anguished. Without a word, Lexa fled, running out the door.

“Lexa, wait!”

The door closed and Clarke was left alone, shaking from the memory.

Rap rap rap.

Lexa ignored whoever was knocking on the door. She was crouched in the corner of one of the bathrooms on the ship, knees tucked to her chest and arms wrapped around them. She couldn’t
stop shaking.

*Rap rap rap!*

“Lexa, are you alright? What’s wrong?”

Lexa had to work hard on regularizing her breathing before she felt her voice would be steady enough to respond. “Leave me, Anya. I’m fine.”

“You didn’t look fine when you came running in here. Let me in.”

“No.” Lexa immediately regretted the bite to the word; Anya was silent. “I just—I just need a minute alone. I’m okay though. I promise.” She wasn’t, not quite, but she hoped she would be, one day.

“Oh okay,” said Anya, and then Lexa was left alone.

She struggled to fight the tears, looking up at the arched wooden ceiling as though that would stem them. She pressed her lips together to stop her bottom lip from quivering.

The memory was so fresh in her mind. Costia had been dead for over a year, but after being forced to go through that, it felt like it was happening all over again. Like it was only yesterday that Costia smiled at her, and said she’d be back soon. Like it was only yesterday that Lexa received that letter and felt her inside freeze. Only yesterday that she looked into the Ice Queen’s cold blue eyes, and fell to her knees, soaked in blood, her wand stained in it, and her harsh words echoed in her head. “Tell me, Lexa. Tell me where—“

“Lexa?”

Lexa started, clamping down the urge to retch. She pressed her shaking hand to her forehead and worked on her breathing again. “I want to be left alone, Lincoln.”

“I know, I’m sorry, but Clarke is here.”

Clarke. Clarke was here.

Clarke was here at the Durmstrang ship?

Lexa’s mind raced almost as fast as her heart. Shit. Lexa wanted to be left alone, but Clarke—Clarke was…

Clarke had just confided in Lexa about her father. Lexa had just told Clarke secrets that others had tried and failed to torture out of her. What was it about her that made Lexa break her own rules? What was wrong with Lexa?

She rose to her feet, staring at her reflection in the mirror. Her warpaint was smudged and running down her neck, tear tracks cutting irregular lines. She swept her wand over her face, a steady stream of enchanted water easily removing the paint. Her face clean and eyes only slightly rimmed red, Lexa pulled open the door just as Lincoln called her name again.

He was looking at her with those sympathetic eyes that made Lexa change her mind about asking him to get rid of Clarke. She would rather be with Clarke who only knew a tiny part of her story than surrounded by people who knew exactly what was wrong with her.

“Where is she?”
“On the ramp.”

Lexa nodded and moved past him; he said nothing as she climbed the ladder to the deck of the ship.

The sky was blanketed with stars, and for a strange moment, as Lexa spotted Clarke’s blonde hair, standing out easily in the darkness of the surrounding forest, Lexa felt as though she were looking at another one. She pushed the thought away as quickly as it had arrived.

“I’m sorry if I’m pushing it coming here, but I was worried about you,” spoke Clarke in a rush, her face creased in the same concern that shone in her blue eyes. “I didn’t want you to—I know you probably wanted to be alone, but I didn’t feel right letting you after what we just—“ Clarke trailed off as though she’d bit her own tongue. “I’m sorry, Lexa. You don’t have to talk about it, we don’t have to talk about it. I just—I hope everything’s okay. I mean I know it’s not, it can’t be, after what we saw, no one could be okay after what you went through, but I—“

Lexa came to a stop just before Clarke, eying her carefully. Clarke was genuinely concerned for her, which Lexa found she…liked. Guilt panged through her at the flush of affection she felt toward Clarke, because the memory of Costia lying in her own pool of blood was still so fresh in her mind and—

Lexa was a horrible person.

All she wanted to do was sleep, so she didn’t have to feel the pain anymore, the confusion, the fluttering—Costia and Clarke, war and…

“You’re rambling, Clarke.” She said the first thing that came to mind, forcing an amused lilt to her lips even though she was screaming at herself in her mind. Your thoughts are rambling, she cursed herself.

Clarke looked as though she believed the smile about as much as Lexa did. She was quiet for a moment, considering Lexa, the concern never leaving her eyes. “Are you okay?” she said gently after a moment.

“Don’t,” spoke Lexa at once, cringing after. She had spoken without thinking. That one single word expressed a thousand times more emotions than Lexa ever wanted to show. Emotions were dangerous, a voice in her head whispered.

Clarke didn’t speak again for a long time. They stood on the ramp, shivering slightly, Clarke because of the cold and her thin robes and Lexa because of every painful thud of her heart.

“Hey, I want you to know I’m here for you,” she finally said, voice so soft Lexa almost had to strain to hear it amongst the sounds of the forest, of the leaves rustling in the wind, and of the lapping of the lake waves against the ship as whatever creatures in its depths shifted in their slumber. “If you ever want to talk…” Clarke clasped her hands together nervously, eyes flickering up to meet Lexa’s. “Or…anything. I’m here for you, okay?”

Lexa swallowed against the sudden lump in her throat.

“Clarke, I—“ She didn’t know what she wanted to say. She didn’t know how to even begin knowing. She didn’t understand the way her heart could ache with pain from Costia, and ache with longing for Clarke. She didn’t know what kind of person could promise forever with one person, and then think about another—

This was why feeling anything for anyone was weakness.
“Her name was Costia,” she said, and she didn’t even know why she was saying this, but she was. “Something happened to her…and it was because of me. Because she was mine. I thought I'd never get over the pain, but I did.”

Clarke was still looking at her with so much concern in her eyes. It almost made Lexa angry. Don’t look at me like that. “How?”

Lexa straightened her shoulders, setting her jaw. She willed the pain away, ignoring the ache in her heart, the tears stinging in her eyes. “By recognizing it for what it is. Weakness.”

Clarke’s expression went blank, the concern fading somewhat in her confusion. “What is? Love?” When Lexa nodded, Clarke frowned. “So you just stopped caring? About everyone?” When Lexa nodded again, Clarke shook her head, appearing a little sick herself. “I could never do that.”

Lexa ignored the lump in her throat. “Then you put the people you care about in danger, and the pain will never go away.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed again. “Who is in danger?” When Lexa didn’t answer, Clarke stepped forward, frown deepening. “Lexa? Wh—“

They both froze when the sound of angry voices drifted to them. Lexa and Clarke both extended an arm across the other in protective gestures; they looked at one another, startled, and then the voices sounded again, distracting them.

“Luna, you’re being ridiculous!”

Lexa and Clarke both automatically crept down the ramp, moving around the outskirts of the forest toward where the voices were sounding. Two women were lingering in the shadows near the front gate of the school. One was the photographer for the Daily Prophet and the owner of the pub in Hogsmeade; the other was someone Lexa couldn’t recall ever seeing before. They were standing ten feet apart, the Daily Prophet photographer/bar owner glaring at the other woman that must be Luna.

“I am in a happy relationship,” the bar owner added hotly.

Luna’s smile was wide and smug, almost feline. It reminded Lexa of Anya. “I’m just saying I’m not too sure about that. You’re out here with me right now, aren’t you?”

“I’m not out here with you. I’m just here to tell you to leave me alone.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong, Evie,” said Luna.

“Yes you have!” exploded Evie. “I can see you looking at me, always with that stupid smirk!”

“I smirk because I’m constantly catching you staring at me. Now why is that, Evie?”

Clarke turned to look at Lexa, making a face and rolling her eyes. Lexa muffled her snort behind her hands, rolling her own eyes. They had just started to creep away after a few minutes of listening to the women argue when they heard something that made them both freeze.

“What did you even bring over for the task, anyway? What are they doing?”

“I brought a few things, actually. Some for the first task, some for the second.”

“What are they supposed to do?”
Lexa strained her ears, listening. Clarke was shifting beside her, listening. “The first task is in the Black Lake. They’ll be underwater for an hour or so, fighting this—”

“Shh. I think I heard something.”

There was silence for a moment, until Evie spoke again. “Come on, let’s go in, just in case…”

The two women started to head out the gate, and Lexa stared after them, mind reeling with the information. “Did you hear that, Clarke?” she breathed. “The first task is in the Black Lake…”

She turned to look at Clarke when she tugged on her sleeve.

“Lexa,” Clarke whispered, eyes wide and full of panic. “I can’t swim.”

Chapter End Notes

I don't think anyone's noticed so far, but...there's totally a nod toward Korrasami here. :)


There's More To Life Than (Gay Rainbow Horses)

Chapter Summary

Lexa teaches Clarke how to swim just in time for the first task.

Chapter Notes

Holy fucking hell this was a monster to write. I hope you all like it; I wrote my heart out. Please leave reviews on what you think (it seriously makes my day. Thank you all so much for your support; you have no idea how happy it makes me). This is almost twice as long as a usual chapter, so, hopefully makes up for the month it takes to update. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Are we gonna stay like this forever
Floating…I’m serious, my heart is furious
‘Cause I’m so confused when we’re together
Feels like I’m choking, these emotions
I know I’m gonna let you down
So don’t hold your breath now"

-Jaymes Young & Phoebe Ryan

Clarke stood awkwardly in the doorway of Lexa’s room on Durmstrang ship. Even despite Clarke’s familiarity with magic and extension spells, the inside of the ship was bigger than she’d imagined it would be. It was like an entire school packed into one level of the ship.

Lexa was moving around her room, pulling off her robes and folding them, setting them down on the foot of the bed.

When Lexa glanced up and noticed Clarke hovering anxiously, Clarke felt her heart jump as their gazes met. Only moments ago Clarke had been swamped in a memory that wasn’t her own, staring into the unseeing eyes of a dead girl named Costia who Lexa had clearly once loved and who had been actually murdered. Clarke felt sick to her stomach.
“Sit,” ordered Lexa, pointing at the bed.

Despite the nausea in her belly, aching pain in her heart, and anxiety in her chest, Clarke’s cheeks warmed at the idea of being on Lexa’s bed. Lexa’s toned, tattooed arms exposed in her sleeveless top didn’t help matters.

“I’d rather stand,” she said honestly, shifting her weight on her legs. Lexa stared at her for a beat too long, before shrugging and sinking down onto the bed herself, stretching out and crossing her ankles.

Clarke remained frozen in place, almost shivering, while Lexa leaned back against the pillow and closed her eyes. Silence swelled between them, so long that Clarke began to wonder (had already been wondering really) why Lexa told her to follow her onto the ship.

Finally, just when Clarke was contemplating whether she should tell Lexa she was going or merely slip out, Lexa spoke.

“When do you want to begin lessons?”

“Wh—what?” More Occlumency lessons had been the last thing on Clarke’s mind. She didn’t think they would ever continue them now, to be perfectly honest.

“Not Occlumency,” said Lexa flatly; Clarke would have wondered if she had just used Legilimency on her, if she hadn’t been staring at Lexa and knew she hadn’t opened her eyes. “It… may be awhile before… if we continue those again. I meant swimming lessons.”

Clarke’s eyes went wide, mouth falling open. “Swim lessons?” she spluttered, face immediately going red as an exaggerated image of herself and Lexa in bikinis and a swimming pool popped into her head.

“Yes,” said Lexa, opening her eyes and gazing up at the ceiling. “And you may as well stop the complaining before it begins because I’m not taking no for an answer. I refuse to let Cage get second-place during the first task.”

“Who said I was complaining?” shot Clarke, before Lexa’s second statement sunk in and she raised her brows, incredulous. “Wait—second place?”

“Yes,” answered Lexa simply.

Clarke scowled, but decided to move on. “I don’t need your pity, Lexa. I can teach myself, or get someone else—“

“Who?” demanded Lexa, suddenly sitting up and turning, swinging her legs over the bed. “Who else is there to teach you, Clarke? I know none of your friends have been speaking to you. You are facing a dangerous, trying tournament, and you are facing it alone. I’m offering what little help I can. You should be grateful and take the offer.”

Clarke’s stubborn streak reared in full effect—but as she glared right back at Lexa, she realized something. Lexa’s eyes were rimmed red; she had been crying. The pride drained away from Clarke so quickly she was almost overcome with sudden exhaustion. Her shoulders sagged as she gave a small nod. “Alright. Thanks.”

Appearing wary at how easy it was, Lexa frowned at Clarke for a long moment before echoing the nod. “Good.” She reclined back again, cautiously watching Clarke. “We can start tomorrow. The problem we now have is where we can do this.”
Clarke thought about it. They clearly couldn’t do this in the lake itself, and the mere idea of that made her shudder. Was the Room of Requirement capable of transforming itself into a giant pool? No, that broke one of the basic wizarding rules. Where else were they going to find a pool?

*Oh.*

*Duh.*

“I know a place,” she said confidently.

*・/°/・*

The lessons hadn’t even started yet and Lexa already regretted the entire idea. Seriously, what had she been thinking?

In theory, it wasn’t a bad idea at all. Clarke was her friend (even despite the small nagging voice in Lexa’s head that warned her how dangerous it was to consider Clarke to be her friend, and even more despite the other, louder voice that insisted Clarke wasn’t just a friend), and Lexa would be a terrible friend if she let her friend partake in an hour-long dangerous tournament task in front of hundreds of people without the basic skills that would enable her to survive said task (how many times can she say friend in one sentence? Enough to convince herself it sounded right?)

Besides, Lexa had been telling the truth; there was no way she was going to let Cage get second behind her even if that meant she had to help Clarke with each task.

So no, in theory, the idea wasn’t a bad one.

The fact of the matter was, now Clarke—Clarke—was standing feet away from Lexa, looking so...cute...in a fluffy white and blue bathrobe, her blonde hair tumbling over her shoulders in loose waves, her face clean and devoid of makeup, her eyes so bright and blue. Lexa’s heart skipped a beat as she looked into them.

*God.*

Clarke Griffin was going to be the death of her.

“This is the Prefect’s bathroom,” Clarke explained as she led Lexa to a statue of a rather baffled looking man who was wearing his gloves on the wrong hand. “So there’s hardly any chance of us being interrupted.”

Lexa swallowed, hating the way her face heated up at such a perfectly innocent comment.

Clarke leaned toward a door and said clearly, “Lava asinum.” When Lexa frowned, Clarke laughed softly to herself, shaking her head before she pushed open the door, gesturing for Lexa to sweep inside before her.

Lexa’s brows lifted, impressed as she surveyed the room. Everything was white marble, from the gigantic pool-sized tub right down to the toilet. There was a large chandelier, what seemed to be a rather unnecessary assortment of faucets framing the tub, an actual diving board, and a rather grandiose portrait of a mermaid.
Clarke crouched down, turning a few taps so that the sound of water hitting porcelain filled the room, seeming to echo in the space. Heavily scented bubbles followed a moment later as Clarke fiddled with one tap in particular.

“Clarke,” said Lexa rather sternly, lifting a brow. “We are here to teach you how to swim, not to take a relaxing bath.”

Clarke looked up at her, a small sheepish smile on her face. “Sorry.”

Lexa shook her head disapprovingly, amused despite herself. The amusement faded at once when Clarke stood and shrugged out of her bathrobe.

Now Lexa really wished she’d never had this idea.

She was wearing what looked like boy shorts, and a thin tank top that Lexa was certain would cling to her body in all the right—

She determinedly steered her thoughts away from the direction it was going.

The tub magically filled itself in a manner of seconds; Clarke turned off the faucet and then stood at the edge, appearing nervous. She looked up at Lexa.

“Aren’t—aren’t you going to get in?”

Lexa deadpanned her. “I already know how to swim. We’re here to teach you, remember?”

Clarke huffed, rolling her eyes before she slipped into the tub. Lexa assumed it must be pleasantly warm because Clarke sighed and relaxed immediately. She ventured into deeper water until it came to her neck and she had to stretch out onto her toes to keep her head reasonably high above the water.

“Oh God.” Clarke half-moaned, sending an unpleasant swoop of heat through Lexa’s belly. She licked her lips, forcing her gaze up to focus on the sleeping mermaid in the portrait hanging on the tile wall. She could see Clarke in her peripheral vision, dipping her head back to wet her hair. She ran her hands over it, sighing again. “It’s been so long since I’ve had a bath. Why have I been showering so much instead? Fuck showers.” Another sigh, another thrill up Lexa’s spine. “This is so much better. I should have brought a cup of tea and a book to read—”

“Clarke, we’re here for swim lessons,” reminded Lexa.

Clarke looked up a little guiltily. “Right. Sorry. Okay.” She stood straighter, eying the far section of the tub. “I’ve never been in the deep end,” she said, answering the question Lexa had just been about to ask.

“Now’s the time,” said Lexa dryly. When Clarke squinted at her, Lexa lifted her palms in silent apology at her attitude.

“You know, you seem a little stressed. Maybe you need a relaxing bath,” joked Clarke, though her smile didn’t quite meet her eyes; then her smile really did meet her eyes, as she perked up and swept an arm out, gesturing for Lexa to join her.

Lexa hoped the surprise on her face didn’t register, and that her blush wasn’t obvious.

“I’m good, thanks. Let’s just concentrate on your swimming.” She really hoped the note of desperation in her voice to get off the subject of she and Clarke in a bath wasn’t obvious. “Hold on
Lexa appreciated how Clarke didn’t try to hide her nerves as she clutched the side of the tub and pulled herself to the other side of the pool.

“Put your legs up, relax your body, and just float for a minute.”

“Do I let go?” said Clarke in alarm, eyes wide as she followed Lexa’s directions.

“No, keep holding on. We have to get you comfortable in the water first.”

Lexa let Clarke float until she didn’t seem tense enough to sink like a stone anymore.

“You know,” said Clarke, voice a little sleepy presumably due to the warmth of the water and the lathering bubbles, “Teaching me to swim would be a lot easier if you were actually in here with me and, you know, teaching me.”

“I’m teaching you now, am I not?” Lexa was standing between the tub and the door, arms crossed. She supposed she did seem less than approachable, so she went around to the diving board and sat on the end, her feet dangling just above the bubbly water. “I think you are comfortable enough. Get vertical again.” Clarke did as she said. “Now keep your legs straight and point your toes. Keep holding the edge, but I want you to practice kicking in the water.”

After several minutes of that, Lexa directed Clarke to try to stay afloat in the deep end.

Concentration settled into Clarke’s face, setting her shoulders back and jaw set as she steeled herself. She tentatively moved forward in the water.

“Don’t panic,” said Lexa in a firm voice, eying the alarm widening Clarke’s eyes as the water rose past her chin. “Just relax, breathe, and kick.”

Clarke did as Lexa told, her head dipping down only briefly as she kicked her legs and waved her arms about. She wasn’t struggling at least. She gave Lexa a smile that lit up her whole face, and Lexa thought drowning herself may be less painful than the pang in her heart Clarke’s smile gave her.

* "・//topics/・*

Clarke, on the other hand, was considering purposely drowning on the chance that Lexa would preform mouth-to-mouth. Then she reprimanded herself, because that was the most ridiculous idea ever.

* "・/topics/・*

A couple days later, Clarke and Lexa had holed themselves up in the Room of Requirement, a multitude of books scattered over the surface of the tables interspersed with various Honeyduke’s chocolate wrappers and biscuit crumbs.

Clarke frowned as she flipped through the pages of a book over the history of the Triwizard Tournaments. The task was in less than three days, and while she had finally mastered the art of not-drowning, she still had no idea what she was going to do in order to stay alive in the Black Lake for
an hour.

She sighed, looking over at Lexa. “I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Lexa glanced up at her over the top of her *Magical Fresh and Saltwater Plants* book. Clarke ignored the tingles in her belly Lexa’s green gaze gave her, busying herself with focusing on the letters on the pages as she scanned through them.

“Potter used gillyweed, while Diggory used a bubble-head charm and Krum did a half-assed Transfiguration.”

“What worked best?”

“Well…” Clarke rubbed the back of her neck, making a face and shrugging. “None of them seemed great, to be honest. Gillyweed would be okay if you knew what you were doing, but you’re obviously not going to utilize it to its fullest capacities when you’ve never done it before. Plus it only gives you an hour; at least with the other methods, you don’t have to worry about drowning within the time limit. The bubble charm seems terrible to me; it doesn’t do anything other than give you a way to breathe, but does nothing for your vision or swimming abilities. Krum’s Transfiguration seems like the best way to go.”

Lexa nodded, brows drawn together thoughtfully. “Transfiguration it is then.”

“Well, what would we turn into?” said Clarke, frowning. “A shark would move fast, but I read one interview where Krum mentioned he nearly bit Hermione Granger when trying to break her free.”

Lexa tilted her head, green eyes suddenly intense on Clarke. “We probably should try to withhold some details at least, Clarke. We can’t seem as though we have been helping each other.”

It put a sinking feeling in Clarke, but she forced a grin. “But we have been.”

Lexa lifted a brow. “I would say I’ve helped you far more than you’ve helped me,” she said dryly, pulling a chuckle out of Clarke.

“I guess so, I’m not going to argue with you on that one.” She leaned back against the wall, sighing as she looked up at the charred ceiling. She ran through a list of every magical water creature she could think of, but nothing helpful was coming into mind.

She wished she could brainstorm with Raven, or any of her friends, really. Bellamy, Wells, Octavia, Monty…anyone. When she’d voiced this aloud to Lexa, Lexa had immediately shaken her head. “We can’t let anyone know we know what the first task is,” she’d said seriously. “We can’t risk them telling anyone and getting us disqualified.”

Clarke was annoyed with herself, because there was a reason she was one of the top in her class. She was smart. She was also creative. So why was it so difficult to think of what to do?

She quickly glanced over at Lexa; face warming, she looked away, and told herself that Lexa was certainly not the reason why her head wasn’t in the right place.

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“Clarke, you have to kick your feet,” Lexa said exasperatedly.

Clarke gritted her teeth and screwed her eyes shut, kicking hard. Her thighs pushed through the water like she was trying to propel herself out of it, and Clarke laughed aloud at the realization that she was actually doing it, she was in deep water and she wasn’t drowning. She cracked open an eye and shot a grin at Lexa.

Lexa didn’t seem nearly as amused or elated as Clarke. In fact, she looked downright put out.

“You know, a smile wouldn’t kill you. I’m swimming!”

Lexa looked as though she was trying very hard not to roll her eyes and sigh. “You are in a bathtub, Clarke. In the task we will be in an enormous lake hundreds of feet deep, presumably filled with a variety of dangerous creatures that will work against us. It is not the same.”

Clarke’s smile slipped right off her face. She was afloat in the center of the tub in the Prefect’s bathroom, Lexa sitting on the toilet giving her directions. It wasn’t that impressive, and certainly nothing like the situation Clarke would soon be in at the end of the week. Lexa was right, of course. Clarke hated it when Lexa was right.

Disgruntled, Clarke kicked her feet and doggy-paddled the length of the tub, heaving herself up to sit on the side. She wrung her hair out, snorting in amusement because the painting of the mermaid was currently doing the same thing.

“We need to practice in the lake,” said Lexa, draping one leg over another and shifting on the toilet. Only Lexa could sit on a toilet like it was a throne. Clarke sighed.

“Yes, but don’t you think it’d be kind of obvious if people see us there? It’s not like people ever just go for a casual dip in the Black Lake.”

“If you would like to leave your first time in it for the tournament, be my guest. Less competition for me.”

“Ouch. I don’t like being the subject of your manipulation skills.”

Lexa glanced at Clarke, relaxing when she saw she was just teasing her. “You really need the practice, Clarke. I would not be opposed to taking a closer look at the lake, either.”

“Is that what this is all about?” Clarke couldn’t resist teasing. “Are you only helping me to learn the Hogwarts’ tricks from an inside source?”

Lexa rolled her eyes. Clarke toweled her arms dry in silence for a moment, thinking. Eventually, she had to ask. Reluctantly, she said, “I do wonder, though…why are you helping me?” When Lexa looked at her, Clarke shrugged. “I am your competition.”

Lexa considered her for a long moment. “I wanted to help you,” she said finally, as though that answered anything. If anything, Clarke had even more questions now.

“But why—” she started, and was interrupted by someone knocking on the door. She froze, she and Lexa staring at one another with wide eyes.

“O, hurry up, I have a shitload of Transfiguration tonight and I need a bath before I claw my eyes out.”

Clarke’s heart sank while annoyance bubbled up within her. It was Raven. Using the
bathroom she was only allowed to use because Clarke gave her the password.

Silently, Clarke quickly stood up, wrapping her towel around her body. Lexa looked uncertain, but rose when Clarke gestured for her to follow her. Steeling herself for the confrontation, she opened the door.

Raven’s eyes immediately widened when she saw it was Clarke; then they narrowed when she spied Lexa standing behind her.

“All yours,” said Clarke coldly, walking straight past her, Lexa at her heels. Raven did not say a word, so to Clarke’s surprise, she was able to stride out of the hall without incident.

“I take it things are still not well between you,” noted Lexa.

“No,” said Clarke curtly. When Lexa lifted a brow in response to Clarke’s tone, Clarke sighed. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. She just drives me crazy. She knows I didn’t enter, but she’s pissed at me anyway. It doesn’t even make sense. How can she be mad at me when she knows it’s not my fault?”

Lexa shrugged. “Perhaps she is simply jealous of you.”

Clarke almost snorted as she cautiously peered out into the empty Great Hall before leading Lexa across it toward the front doors. “The idea of Raven Reyes being jealous of me is ridiculous.”

“Why is that?” said Lexa as they trotted down the hillside toward the glittering Black Lake.

“Because it’s Raven,” said Clarke, as though that were the only answer Lexa needed. When Lexa merely stared at her, Clarke gave a huff of breath, rolling her eyes as she spread out her towel on the grass. “Oh come on. She’s the top of the class. She’s the captain of the Quidditch team. She was a Prefect, until she blew up half the dormitory during an after-party and Kane threatened to expel her. Everyone loves her.”

Lexa paused at the blowing up part, but clearly decided to move past it. “But do people follow her as they follow you?”

Clarke frowned as she sat down, stretching out on the towel. If she weren’t so distracted with the conversation, she would have noticed the way Lexa’s cheeks had gone pink and she had determinedly looked away at the lake. “No, but that’s just because I’m—I don’t know, I take care of people, because that’s how both of my parents were growing up. It’s just instinct.”

“An instinct Raven does not possess. She is self-sufficient, while you are a caretaker.”

Clarke waved it away. “Whatever. Regardless, Raven is awesome. There’s no reason for her to be jealous of me.”

Lexa shrugged, finally moving to sit down beside Clarke, though she was careful to leave a decent amount of space between them. “Envy is not exactly a rational emotion. A man could have almost all the gold in the world, but he is envious of the man who has the little that he does not.”

Clarke gave her a withering expression. “Are you in the middle of Transfiguring yourself into a fortune cookie, or something?”

Lexa arched her brows. “Do you even know what a fortune cookie is?”

Clarke grinned. “I do, actually. I went out for Muggle Chinese takeaway with Octavia once
Lexa stared out at the lake, squinting at the way the sunlight reflected off the water. She sighed. “I would kill for some Chinese food. Muggle-food has its perks.”

“It’s because it’s made with love, instead of magic.”

“Mmm. You’ve obviously never had McDonald’s.”

“Is that the pink slime that muggles pretend is real food? Raven’s told me some shit. Deep shit.”

Lexa was smiling that beautiful, light-up-her-green-eyes smile, the one that made Clarke’s heart flutter. “You know, you speak like her, sometimes. When you talk about her.”

Clarke smiled amusedly. “Yeah, it happens after seven years of living with her. Three spent hating her, two spent tolerating her, and two spent being affectionately annoyed by her.”

“Why did you hate each other so much?” said Lexa curiously.

“Well, ah…” She and Lexa were friends now. She may as well tell her; she’d certainly seen enough about Finn during Occlumency lessons, anyway. “At first, it was basically because of grades. Raven didn’t like me, thought I was stuck up… I was a little stuck up, honestly. And I thought she was cocky and a pain in the ass. Which she is, so,” added Clarke, smiling. Her expression sobered with her next words. “Then came Finn. We were just kids, but when he started flirting with me and I realized he and Raven were a thing, I backed off. Until…later, when he started acting weird and...not himself. When he called Raven a mudblood and me a blood traitor, that was kind of the last straw.”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. “He’s a racist?”

Clarke gave a rather bittersweet sigh. “It’s complicated, but… No. He was actually very kind, and very in support of mixed blood. He, uh... he and Raven came together.” When Lexa’s brows furrowed in confusion, Clarke expanded, “They were neighbors, before they came to Hogwarts. If you didn’t realize by now, Raven is pretty gifted. For as long as she could remember, she could do magic, just weird bursts, especially when she was angry. It got her in trouble a lot. She used to explode her mom's bottles of alcohol.”

Clarke smiled at the memory of Raven's shit-eating grin the first time she confided in Clarke all of this. Lexa's eyes, always so deep and thoughtful, shone with a mixture of pity and admiration. "The older she got, the better she was at controlling it. She was at a creek like a mile from her house skipping stones and making them come back to her when Finn stepped out. He'd been watching her for awhile. I guess. Saw her smash a window without touching it a couple weeks back. His mum was muggle-born and he lived with her, but his dad was a pure-blood wizard, so Finn knew all about our world. He once told me that he was scared he wouldn't be a wizard because he hadn't shown any signs of magic, and his dad was a dick. He slept with Finn's mother because he wanted her. Found out he had a kid a couple years later and went back, but he treated Finn's mum like shit. Looked down on muggles and everything. He wasn't the kindest to Finn either, but he at least visited once a year, tried to instill 'family values',' Clarke lifted two fingers, wagging invisible quotations. "Finn was scared he wouldn't be a wizard and freaked out his dad would totally disown him."

"Yet he still sought out a muggle-born?" questioned Lexa.

Clarke nodded. "Yeah, he did. He watched her after he saw her bust the window, and two
weeks later he saw the proof down at the creek." Clarke grinned at the memory. "Raven nearly killed him with those rocks and her bare hands when he stepped out from the bushes, but he explained pretty fast."

Lexa lifted her brows. "She believed him?"

Clarke snorted. "Raven? Yeah, right. She told him to fuck off. They were only eight. He ran away." She chuckled.

"A few days later, her mum was really drunk. Raven was upset, and the bottle in her mum's hand exploded. Glass, blood everywhere. That kind of stuff had been happening since Raven was four, so, her mum knew it was somehow Raven's fault." Anger and pain flashed across Clarke's face; Lexa's expression darkened in understanding. "She was upset and I think it was like the last straw, so...she walked a mile to the next door neighbor's. Finn. She found his window, managed to make it inside. Scared the living shit out of him, but Raven asked him to explain how magic worked to him again, and about witches and wizards and Hogwarts, so he explained again, and Finn’s mum let Raven stay over, and..." Clarke shrugged. "They were together all the time after that. Until the summer between fourth and fifth year, when we worked together at an excavation camp thing in Romania. He told me he and Raven broke up, and Raven and I, even though we were civilized to each other at school, we still weren’t exactly friends, so I didn’t know he was lying until we showed up for fifth year,” said Clarke heavily.

Lexa was frowning. “Did he not think you’d find out? You and Raven share the same dormitory, do you not?”

“Apparently Raven’s mum was pretty sick. Cancer. Raven told Finn she wouldn’t be coming back to school because she had to take care of her. But then her mum did what she always did and started treating her like shit, which reminded Raven how toxic she was in the first place, so she ended up putting her in a home right before school started. She arrived a few days late, but when she did, she...well, as far as she knew, she and Finn were still a thing.” Clarke was almost surprised, for a moment, at the lack of tears in her eyes, at the absence of a lump in her throat. Thinking about Finn was still upsetting, but not the betrayal. “Raven found out not long after that, and dumped Finn on his ass. He tried to come back to me, but I just...I couldn’t trust him, not after that. I understand that he thought he and Raven were over, and he was upset, and I know we were just kids, we were only fourteen, but...”

“You were young,” murmured Lexa. She nodded, not in sympathy or pity, but in understanding. “And feelings are weakness.”

Clarke thought of the girl, Costia, that had been in Lexa’s memory. Because she was mine. That kind of haunting emptiness that had been in her eyes when she told Clarke about it, and the horror of Lexa slumped over Costia’s body in anguish...

Clarke shook her head. “I still disagree about the whole feelings are weakness thing, but, this conversation is depressing.” When Lexa lifted her brows in amusement, Clarke grinned. “I say we continue our lessons...” she gestured to the lake spread out before them. “Up for it?”

Lexa stood up, brushing the dirt off her cloak. “I’m still not swimming, Clarke, but yes, let’s continue the lessons.”
Today was the last day before the tournament, and Clarke had become a pretty damn good swimmer, thanks to Lexa. Now If Lexa could just stop getting butterflies in her stomach every time she so much as looked at Clarke, that would be great. The task was tomorrow; Lexa really had no time for distractions now. She’d only practiced her Transfiguration charm once, and while it had been successful, she would like to practice it a few more times at least. And yet what was she doing now? She was pacing on the deck at the Black Lake at one in the morning, teaching Clarke Griffin how to swim.

Clarke was dipping down in the water, her nose and narrowed eyes only just above the surface. She moved slowly into the more shallow waters, advancing on Lexa like a skulking lily pad. It made her laugh aloud. Clarke grinned, lifting out of the water just slightly. Clarke took one more step and then the grin slipped off her place to be replaced with a grimace of pain; she clutched her leg in the water and glanced at Lexa.

“Ouch. Shit.”

“What?” said Lexa, leaning far over the deck in an attempt to peer down the water at Clarke’s leg. “What did you do?”

“I think I stepped on something. It cut my foot.”

Lexa hurried forward at once, concerned. “Are you alright?”

Clarke didn’t respond; her head was tilted down, her strands of wet hair hiding her face from view. Was she smiling? She was probably just messing with Lexa. She was probably planning on—

The thought had just occurred to Lexa and made her narrow her eyes and go to move back when Clarke shot out of the water like a fucking dolphin, flung her arms around Lexa’s legs, and reared back, dragging Lexa with her. They both crashed into the water.

“Fuck!” gasped Lexa, breaking surface and spluttering. The water was freezing, and now her robes were sticking to her and—

Clarke’s laugh was loud and musical just in her ear; Lexa turned to scowl at her, heart jumping at their proximity. Clarke’s hands had dropped to Lexa’s waist, and she seemed to be pulling her closer in her attempts to steady her.

“I think that’s the first time I’ve ever heard you say fuck,” said Clarke, grinning broadly.

Lexa found her feet finally, paddling in the water. Clarke still had not dropped her hands. “Here’s a second time,” panted Lexa, glaring at her. “Fuck you.”

Clarke threw her head back and laughed, hands shifting up to clutch at Lexa’s shoulders. It took her a good ten seconds to sober, finally looking back at Lexa with mirth in her blue eyes. “You wish,” she teased, and Lexa felt her stomach drop because she hadn’t been thinking that but now she was. God. She couldn’t stop her gaze from flicking down to Clarke’s lips, couldn’t stop herself from floating a little closer. Her heart hammered in her chest as she thought Clarke glanced down at her own lips too, but she couldn’t be sure, because then Clarke said, “I bet I could beat you in a race.”

Lexa blinked, the heat simmering in her belly as the spark of challenge hit her. “Are you joking?” she said coolly, her lips lifting up in response to Clarke’s widening grin. “I would destroy
“Sure you would,” said Clarke condescendingly, rolling her eyes for good measure.

And that was what started the next fifteen minutes of them splashing enough water out of the Black Lake to probably empty it. Clarke was hopelessly slow, so Lexa ended up switching to dog-paddling only. After about the fifth dog-paddling race, Clarke managed to ask for a break between gasps of breath, so they both floated on the surface, chests heaving.

“I didn’t realize swimming would be such a workout,” wheezed Clarke. “I’m exhausted. Fuck me, this is tiring.”

“You wish,” Lexa echoed Clarke’s earlier words, her lips twisting in a smirk.

Clarke snorted. “Don’t act like you could handle this, Woods.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, shifting upright to float so she could turn to deadpan Clarke. “You have a real knack for getting yourself out of your depth, don’t you?”

Clarke turned too, gently propelling forward in the water, closing the distance between them.

“What do you mean?”

Lexa shook her head, smirking slightly. “Nothing.” When Clarke narrowed her eyes and splashed water at her, she automatically moved back, hovering in the deeper water that she knew Clarke would be tentative to breach. After a few minutes of floating, Lexa gazing up at the stars in the sky, Clarke finally spoke up again.

"Um. Hey, Lexa…” she began, and Lexa smiled in response, waiting. "Come here."

"Why?” Lexa asked amusedly, enjoying toying with Clarke and watching the way she struggled to keep her expression devoid of the anxiety that threatened to blatantly appear on it.

"Just come here."

Lexa floated a little closer to her, enough that her toes could graze the sand. "Why don't you come to me?"

"You know why,” Clarke groaned, and shoved water at Lexa when she burst into laughter.

"Don’t make me dunk you," Lexa warned, blinking the water from her eyes. Clarke narrowed her own eyes, took a deep breath, and disappeared under the water.

Lexa looked around, still laughing, certain that she would only be somewhere in the shallower water before her, rather than behind her where she couldn’t touch. Therefore she was surprised when she felt hands on her back, heard splashing as Clarke kicked her feet and propelled both of them forward into shallower water.

“Okay Clarke,” Lexa chuckled, turning to face her; Clarke’s hands slid from her back and nearly to her chest before they jumped away, and Lexa’s laughter subsided when, upon turning, she realized how close they were. Their legs brushed against one another, slick and smooth beneath the water. Lexa felt a familiar ache as she looked at Clarke, less than a foot away from her. Her blonde hair almost looked brown when it was wet and slicked back, and the drops of water that clung to her ears looked like sparkling jewels. Clarke was so beautiful, and the way she was looking at Lexa reminded her of another pair of eyes that once had similar warmth in them when they looked at her—
Lexa’s heart plummeted.

She didn’t want to think of Costia. It had been over a year, it was time to forget. Time to bury the memories and the hurt and the pain and finally be free of it. Every moment she felt for Costia, she was vulnerable. Every moment she allowed herself the chance to feel, she was vulnerable. Clarke was her friend—no, not even that, Clarke was a student from an opposing school and Lexa was merely serving as her temporary mentor, teaching her how to swim, how to be a champion. That was it.

It didn’t matter that Clarke was so beautiful she made Lexa’s heart ache, or that being in close proximity to her set Lexa’s heart pounding, or that two nights ago when Lexa felt a familiar ache in her chest and stomach and between her legs and set to work on liberating herself of it, it had been Clarke’s name tumbling out of her lips.

Lexa swallowed, compulsively licking her lips in her nervousness, ignoring the bitter taste of the salt water. Clarke’s brows creased slightly and her head tilted as she studied Lexa, perhaps wondering what was going through her mind.

"I haven't been swimming in a long time,” Lexa professed, thinking of the first excuse that came to her. It didn't even explain why she was looking so intently at Clarke. *Stupid.*

"So?"

Lexa pressed her lips together, looking out at the ocean horizon to stall. "That’s all."

Clarke laughed at her awkwardness. "Who’s high on Alihotsy Draught now?" she taunted.

"You have that effect on me," she said flatly, and then she mentally cursed herself. *Not a good thing to say.*

But Clarke only smirked. "I have that effect on most people," she said loftily, turning onto her back and floating, putting much-needed space between them. Lexa could have sighed in relief, even though a part of her felt let down.

"You are arrogant, aren’t you?" said Lexa curiously, head tilted as she smiled at Clarke.

Clarke sighed, closing her eyes as she sank her head in the water enough that her hair was immersed. “Not as arrogant as you.”

Lexa scoffed. “Confident, not arrogant. There is a difference.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

The two lounged in the water for another hour, before everything was ruined.

Lexa stiffened in the water, automatically taking her wand out of her pocket as she noticed the figure in the distance, skulking near the tree closest to the lake shore. “Clarke,” she whispered urgently. Clarke, who had been floating peacefully nearby, stirred.

“What?”

“There’s someone there—“ She had hardly pointed toward the direction when the person stepped forward; it was Octavia, Clarke’s friend, and she didn’t look happy.

“Octavia! What are you…” Clarke’s voice trailed off when she noticed the way Octavia’s
jaw was clenched, her hands balled into fists at her side, one of which clutching a broomstick.

“Clarke,” she said shortly, as though struggling to control and even her tone. She was glaring at the two of them. “Are you seriously doing what I think you’re doing?”

“What?” said Clarke, but she sounded guilty. It was too late. Lexa wondered how long Octavia had been there, watching them.

“You cheated. You aren’t supposed to know what the first task is, yet here you are.” Octavia’s face was hard and angry. Lexa’s heart was beating fast, thinking quickly. Octavia now had information Lexa couldn’t afford to allow her to keep.

Clarke looked confused. “Since when do you care about the rules?”

“Since you entered a tournament that’s a pretty big fucking deal, and you’re representing my entire school.”

Clarke’s mouth immediately moved into a thin line. “Octavia, you know I didn’t enter myself.”

“Whatever. I just can’t believe you’d be here, with Lexa of all people, doing this.” Clarke moved forward in the water when Octavia took a step back.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to tell anyone,” she said, as bitter as she was irate. “But just know you’re fucking selfish, Clarke. Raven should be here, not you.”

“You think I don’t know that already?” Clarke shouted after her, but Octavia was walking away. Lexa lifted her wand, preparing to bring her back so she could take care of this mess, but Octavia had swung a leg over her broomstick and was already soaring through the air toward the castle, until suddenly she was nothing more than a tiny dot disappearing in the darkness of the night sky.

Lexa cursed, shaking her head as she swam forward. “We need to take care of her,” she told Clarke.

Clarke shot her a puzzled look.

“We can’t trust her,” said Lexa grimly. “I’m sorry, Clarke. But she will have to be dealt with accordingly.”

“What does that mean?” demanded Clarke, following Lexa up the shore. Lexa busied herself with gathering her things, ignoring Clarke until she seized her arm and yanked her back. Lexa clenched her jaw, turning to glare at Clarke, who blinked, appearing to regret grabbing Lexa so brusquely. She didn’t apologize, though. “What does that mean?” she repeated.

“It means we have to protect ourselves. We can’t have people finding out we knew.”

“People don’t know, it’s just Octavia—“

“And what happens when she tells someone? And they tell someone, and then they tell someone? When does it end? Anyone knowing is dangerous. So I’ll take care of it.”

She turned again, wadding up the towel and pushing it into Clarke’s hands.

“Just how are you planning to ‘take care of it,’ Lexa?” said Clarke through gritted teeth.
Lexa took a deep breath, steeling herself. She was certain Clarke would not like what she was about to say. She turned to face her, maintaining steady eye contact as she said calmly, “I will wipe her memory.”

Clarke’s eyes immediately widened. “You’ll—what? No. No, we aren’t doing that.”

“No we,” said Lexa irritably, moving around Clarke again to pick up the candy wrappers in the sand. “I’m going to do it. You’re going to go back to bed and get some sleep before the task tomorrow.”

“Lexa, no,” growled Clarke, “Memory charms are dangerous, you could damage her memory if you mess it up! And it’s not humane, she’s not a muggle threatening the secrecy—”

Lexa’s eyes flashed. “Unless you’d like to curse her, then I suggest this method.”

Clarke’s jaw dropped. “Curse—what’s wrong with you? What the fuck, Lexa?”

Lexa paused, swallowing hard, her heart beating hard. She had already said too much. Cursing and killing, making the difficult choices, that was normal in her world—it was not in Clarke’s. Clarke had never hurt anyone before. Clarke had not known war. Clarke wouldn’t understand.

Lexa’s hand twitched toward the wand wrapped in her wet robe pocket. Should she wipe Clarke’s memory too? But no, she couldn’t—not Clarke.

Lexa closed her eyes, mentally cursing herself for her fucking weakness. Feeling was weakness. Look where feeling had gotten her now. You can’t take care of business if you are weakened by feelings.

“Octavia has to be dealt with,” she said quietly, dropping her hand from her pocket. She paused, tilting her head slightly so her voice could reach Clarke over her shoulder. “I’m sorry, Clarke.”

“Listen to me,” said Clarke, her voice urgent and angry. She marched over, standing directly in front of Lexa, forcing her to look into her eyes that were so fucking blue even in the darkness. “We can trust Octavia. She’s not going to tell anyone, okay? I promise. I’ll talk to her.”

Lexa remained quiet under the knowledge that she needed to let Clarke think she believed her. When Clarke raised her brows, Lexa inclined her head slightly and started to head toward Durmstrang ship. She would get Octavia tomorrow, as soon as possible.

“Goodnight, Clarke.”

“Wait—Lexa, but—”

Lexa ignored Clarke, heading up the ramp of the ship, leaving Clarke shivering on the shore.

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Clarke woke early on the day of the tournament. She dressed, she gathered her things, and she headed down the spiral staircase before the sun had even touched the stained glass windows. She
crossed the grounds, ignoring the chill in the air, and lingered on the outskirts of the forest, watching the figure zooming around high in the sky on the Quidditch pitch. Clarke knew it was Octavia. She’d known over a week ago that Octavia had been sneaking out late at night to come out and fly with Lincoln. Bellamy would be furious if he knew, but Clarke found it endearing, almost. She had noticed them share a few chaste kisses while she walked back from Durmstrang ship over the past few days, and she thought they were sweet together. It had only been a few days ago that she realized Octavia woke early in the morning to fly on her own.

She settled back to wait, jaw clenched and gaze sharp.

It didn’t take even another fifteen minutes before she saw her.

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Lexa crept out from behind one of the stadiums of the Quidditch pitch, gaze turned skyward as she watched Octavia soaring through the air, practicing various flying maneuvers. There was dry taste in Lexa’s mouth, like dust, as she lifted her wand. She tried not to think about how this would make Clarke feel and she sucked in a deep breath, preparing to utter the incantation.

She halted, turning when she sensed a presence behind her. She had a brief moment to think this shouldn’t really surprise her before Clarke tackled her to the ground.

“I can’t believe you, Lexa,” hissed Clarke, gaze furious. She was straddling Lexa, pinning her arms above her head to wrestle her wand from her grasp. Lexa could easily knock her off, could easily reverse their positions. Could easily curse Octavia and then curse Clarke too.

The thing is, she didn’t want to.

She hated herself for that.

Clarke was white-faced with fury as she clambered to her feet, seizing Lexa’s wrists and tugging her to her feet as well. “I’m so fucking pissed. I swear, I could—“

“Curse me then,” said Lexa dryly. “Try it. I dare you.”

“Shut up,” rasped Clarke, breath hissing out between her clenched teeth as she dragged Lexa around the stadium. “I’m not going to fucking curse you because unlike you, I realize how wrong and inhumane it would be.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, allowing Clarke to lead her from the pitch, trotting behind her. “It’s not inhumane. It’s cleansing her of one tiny, needless memory. Hardly the work of evil, Clarke.”

“Shut up,” growled Clarke again. Lexa sighed, rolling her eyes once more. She continued to ignore the fact that every thud of her heart echoed with pain in her chest, and her stomach was unpleasantly churning. She hated herself. She really, really hated herself.

But she had to do what was right for Durmstrang. For her people.

“I just—I really can’t believe you. She was fifty fucking feet up in the air, you could have killed her.”
Lexa had to fight to roll her eyes again. “I obviously would have lowered her first, Clarke.”

“Would you have?” The words were said with biting sarcasm, so Lexa chose not to dignify them with a response.

Clarke was marching her toward the direction of Durmstrang ship. Lexa was overcome with an odd urge to laugh at the thought of Clarke pointing at the ramp and ordering her to go to her bedroom.

Before they could walk much farther (Clarke ranting the whole way), they were stopped at the sound of someone called their names.

They turned to see Jamie Potter waving them down, striding toward them with a steaming cup of tea in her hand.

“Hey, you guys are a little early, but that’s just what I call being well-prepared.” She gave them a bright smile, lifting her free hand to point somewhere behind them. “The Champions’ tent is on the far side of the lake, not too far from the docks. You can wait there.”

Clarke and Lexa both stared blankly at her. “Wait there for what?” said Clarke bluntly.

Jamie’s smile faltered somewhat, her brows furrowing. “Well, for the pre-task interview. Didn’t your headmasters fill you in?” She frowned now, as though just realizing the situation. “Why are you guys out here together, anyway?”

Clarke’s mouth fell open slightly; she and Lexa glanced at one another. Clarke was still clutching Lexa’s wrists, as though afraid she would run back to Octavia at first chance. Before they could respond, however, Jamie shook her head and said with a slight smile, “Forget it, I don’t want to know. Just head to the tent now, okay? There’s food in there if you didn’t get a good breakfast. My brother and sister should be here within the hour, so think about what you’d like to say. And girls—“ Lexa and Clarke had just turned away to head toward the tent; they looked back to see Jamie’s encouraging smile. “Good luck today.”

“Thank you,” they both said, and started across the grounds toward the far side of the lake.

Clarke didn’t say a word, not even when they entered the tent. There was food laid on a long table at the back, but they both ignored it. Lexa wanted to say her lack of appetite was because she was angry, or even because of nerves for the task, but it was painstakingly obvious to her that it was because of the pain aching in her chest, and the ice-cold shame flooding through her veins every time she so much as glanced at Clarke.

Clarke. Even the name running through her head seemed breathed with reverence. It was frightening, how much she had come to mean to her. It was dangerous, and foolish, but it was Clarke. And Clarke most likely hated her now. Lexa couldn’t blame her; she was a monster, wasn’t she?

They only lasted around ten minutes before Clarke couldn’t keep quiet any longer.

“I told you Octavia’s not a problem.”

Lexus clenched her jaw, the anger at herself rising like bile in her belly. She let it swamp her, let it fuel her. She would rather appear angry to Clarke than weak. “Leave me alone.”

“No, I’m not letting you out of my sight!”
Lexa snapped her gaze onto Clarke, her arms folded beneath her chest. “I’m not exactly going to leave to finish the job now, am I? In case it escaped your notice, the first task will soon be starting.”

“I don’t give a damn about the task or this stupid tournament.” Clarke’s eyes were bright, but Lexa knew they would not shed a tear. She stormed over to where Lexa stood in the center of the tent, stepping into her personal space, something no one else save maybe Anya or Indra would ever dare to do. “What the hell were you thinking? You can’t just curse everyone you don’t trust!”

Lexa glared right back at her, self-hatred pulsating through her. “Yes,” she said firmly, jaw set. “I can.” She turned away, telling herself she wasn’t going to give Clarke the satisfaction of facing her (when really, she just couldn’t bear to look into those blue eyes a moment longer. She hated herself, she really did).

“Well I won’t let you,” spat Clarke, moving around to stay in her face. “Stay away from her. And from me. I can’t do this anymore.”

Lexa turned, her expression fixed as indifferent and apathetic as she could possibly make it. “Do what, exactly, Clarke?”

“This!” Clarke gestured wildly between them. “I can’t be friends with someone who tries to curse people like a maniac, just to cover their own ass!”

“Good. Friendship is a ruse, anyway, as you’re so clearly showing now. It’s because of that friendship that you don’t understand why I tried to do what needs to be done. Octavia is a threat, Clarke. If you weren’t so close to her, you’d see that.”

Clarke stepped forward again, and Lexa had to fight the immediate instinct to step back. Clarke was in her space. Clarke. Clarke hated her.

“It’s because I’m close to her that I know she’s loyal. This school means everything to her, and to Bellamy. This is their home. They would never do anything that would disqualify me and stain the school name.”

Lexa arched a brow, mustering every ounce of apathy and disdain she could. “And you’re willing to risk everything on that?” she said sardonically. “On your feelings?”

“Yes.” Clarke looked angrier than Lexa had ever seen her; her temper was as much fire as it was stone-cold ice. “You say having feelings makes me weak, but I say you’re weak for hiding from them. I might be a hypocrite, Lexa, but you’re a liar.” Lexa’s heart jumped erratically in panic, lodging itself in her throat as Clarke stepped forward, advancing on her. She automatically moved back, too filled with the instinct to put distance between them to think about how weak it made her look. Clarke kept advancing, and Lexa kept backing up, maintaining just enough sensibility not to stumble over her own feet.

“You’re still haunted by Costia. You barely talk about your past, you refuse to explain the memories I’ve seen, and you know what, that’s fine. But don’t you dare call me weak for being vulnerable, because at least I have the courage to expose myself in the first place. You want everyone to think you’re above it all, but I see right through you.”

Lexa lost her breath when she was backed up into the table of food; she was trapped, there was nowhere else to go, nowhere to hide from Clarke’s blue, blue eyes burning holes into Lexa’s.
She summoned the last dregs of false anger, holding onto it like a lifeline. She glared at Clarke with as much self-hatred in her eyes as she could muster, hoping she would mistake it for fury on her part.

“Get out.”

Clarke ignored her. Lexa was frozen in place. It was just she and Clarke alone in this tent, and it felt like Clarke was everywhere; all she could see was blonde hair and cerulean eyes. All she could smell was Clarke. All she could feel was her heart pounding in her chest, and her fingertips tingling.

“You’re scared of letting anyone in. You shut everyone out.”

Lexa took in a shaky breath, swallowing hard at the lump in her throat that was threatening to choke her. She was tired of this. She was tired of existing, of fighting, of everything.

“Not everyone,” she said quietly. She swallowed again when Clarke just stared at her. “Not you.”

Clarke looked at her like she was realizing something, and the alarm tripping in Lexa’s head and heart did not want to consider what she may be comprehending. It was the most truth Lexa had given Clarke, had given anyone, in a long time.

Clarke blinked rapidly, wetting her lips. If Lexa hadn’t been so swamped in pain, she may have noticed Clarke’s eyes dart down to her lips. “Well—if you care about me, then trust me.”

There was nothing left. Lexa hated herself more than Clarke could ever possibly despise her. Lexa had a duty to her friends. Had a duty to do what needed to be done to win this tournament.

“I can’t.”

Clarke gazed at her for a beat longer, before her brows furrowed and she opened her mouth to speak. Before she could, Cage Wallace waltzed right into the tent.

“Well, well, well, what’s this?” His brows were lifted and there was a wide smirk on his face as he took in the sight of Clarke pressed up against Lexa, who was pinned up against the table. Clarke immediately stepped back; Lexa pushed away from the table, avoiding Clarke’s eyes.

“Talk about fraternizing with the enemy. Wow. You think I could just step out and you could continue where you left off?” He grinned. “I like to watch.”

The remaining threads of sensibility sparked and snapped in Lexa’s head. She had her wand out and was lunging toward Cage faster than she could draw breath. Clarke caught her, arms wrapping around her middle. Cage looked horrified, his gnarled mouth hanging open, eyes wide and fixed on Lexa.

“Don’t. You’ll get disqualified,” muttered Clarke.

Furious, Lexa stood straight, pulling out of Clarke’s grip just as more people walked in through the tent flaps. It was Gideon and Evie for the interview.

* * /ʃ/ *
An hour before the First Task, Luna Rivers whiled away her time by wandering her old school. It wasn’t until she finished and started to leave, heading through the entrance hall, that she really regretted her decision to leave the safety and comfort of her ship, because quite a few tournament onlookers were congested in the hallway—including Evie Potter and Frankie Longbottom.

 Fortunately, a distraction in the form of a pearly-white ghost cropped up just in time.

 “Luna Rivers,” said Nearly-Headless Nick, smiling in response to Luna’s wink. “I do believe it’s been several years too many since I last saw you. How are you, how are you?”

 “I’m doing great, Nick, how are you?”

 “Oh, you know, a new day, a new year, a new century,” he said warmly. “Are you here to watch the Triwizard Tournament?”

 “Kind of. I brought the first task here.”

 “Really?” said Nick, looking impressed. His brow furrowed in thought. “That must have been quite the trip, with a creature like that.”

 Luna laughed. “Yeah, it was. I’m used to dealing with it, though. It’s what I do for a living: haul around dangerous creatures that could bite my head off.”

 “Impressive,” said Nick, looking it again. He followed the direction of Luna’s gaze; Luna immediately regretted her staring when Nick said wryly, “I see some things never change. Still harboring eternal hatred for Miss. Potter?”

 Luna snorted, though her face was burning red now. “Why would you think that?” she mumbled.

 “Why, what other reasons could you be staring so intently at her?” Luna wasn’t sure whether he was genuine, or sarcastic to the extreme. She squinted at him for a brief moment, before shifting her eyes back onto Evie, who was chatting with her brother and the Beauxbatons headmaster.

 “It’s not like it’s a secret,” ventured Luna, stubborn pride getting the better of her as she watched Frankie skirt around Evie to speak to Gideon, his hand on her waist.

 “A secret?”

 “Yeah.” Luna folded her arms beneath her chest, crossed her legs as she leaned back against the wall. Her gaze trailed down the length of Evie’s body, from her strawberry blonde hair down the length of her slender legs. “Everyone already knows,” she muttered.

 “Knows what?”

 That she's literally stunning. By far the most beautiful woman Luna has ever laid eyes on (and Luna has laid many a beautiful woman). That she was exquisite and Luna had never been able to keep her eyes off her for as long as she'd ever known her. "That she's reasonably attractive,” she said dryly.

 Out of the shadows came quiet footsteps and a condescending 'tsk.' John Murphy stepped into the light, his heavily lidded gaze appraising Evie in a way that made Luna want to punch his
lights out. Clearly it did the same for Nearly-Headless Nick, who made a noise of derision before bidding Luna goodbye and disappearing into the wall. "That's quite a stingy answer from you, isn't it Rivers?"

"Don't you have class, Murphy?" she said irritably, ignoring his question.

"So what if I do?" He came to a stop beside Luna, his posture slouched and his hands in his pockets. He wasn't wearing his school robes.

She rolled her eyes. "You're never going to graduate."

"Big deal. This place is a shithole anyway."

"I won't lie, Slytherin common room always was a little lacking compared to Gryffindor," she said, watching as Evie threw back her head and laughed at whatever hilarious statement the Beauxbatons headmaster just made.

"I'm pretty sure it's frowned upon to be in a House that's not your own," said Murphy loftily. "Thought you said you were a model student, Rivers?"

She lifted one shoulder, let it fall. "I was. I told you. I don't break rules."

"Yeah, sure you don't. That's why the first time we met, you were drunk and high and gambling away your life savings."

Luna rolled her eyes again. "Whatever." She pushed off the wall, started walking down the hallway toward Evie, leaving Murphy.

She was just nearing her when someone came around the corner and nearly ran into her. She smiled at once when she saw who it was.

"Jam-Jam!"

Jamie Potter's pretty face split into a grin. "Loony!"

Laughing, the two women embraced. "I can't believe this is the first time I'm seeing you! We arrived a few days ago, figured you'd welcome us."

"I know, things have just been kind of mental at the Ministry lately," admitted Jamie, reaching up to tuck a strand of her salt-and-pepper hair behind her ear. Luna observed the few lines and wrinkles on her face, the way her eyes, the same bright green as Evie's, were still shining brightly.

"You look good," said Luna affectionately. "Haven't aged a day, have you?"

Jamie chuckled. "Tell that to my ass," she joked.

Luna's eyes shifted over onto Evie, who had turned her back to them in the distance as she chatted with Professor Kane. "Your sister's still looks good."

Jamie's smile shifted into a smirk. "Luna, you know she's in a stable, committed relationship."

"So am I, big deal."

"You are?"
“Sure. With Firewhisky.”


“Relax, I’m joking. I quit drinking. Bad for your sanity, or something.”

Jamie’s smile faded. “Yeah, I heard you got pretty bad, after Evie left…”

Luna shrugged. “Genetics are a bitch. I’m better now.”

“I can see that.” Jamie smiled again, and there was enough warmth in it that it made Luna’s heart ache. She had missed Jamie; when she lost Evie, she lost Jamie and Gideon, and it had felt as though she’d lost her own siblings. Losing her girlfriend was bad enough; losing her family was another kick to the gut. “Well, I need to get going, have to meet with Madam Undersecretary about the first task.” Jamie made a repulsed, exhausted face, causing Luna to laugh. It caught Evie’s attention; she turned around, curiously looking over at Luna and Jamie.

“Good luck,” said Luna, chuckling. Jamie waved and started down the hallway. Evie, meanwhile, was now walking toward Luna, which made her heart kickstart even while it sank, because her boyfriend was now walking alongside her.

Luna tried to shake off the jealousy; she was a grown woman for fuck’s sake; jealousy was for idiotic teens.

“Luna,” greeted Evie in a calm voice.

Luna inclined her head, eyes darting between Evie and Frankie.

“Hi Luna,” said Frankie cheerily, extending a hand for Luna to shake. “It’s been years, I haven’t seen you since school. How are you?”

“I’m great,” said Luna, perhaps a little too loudly. “Traveling the world and chasing my dreams. All that dumb shit. What have you been up to?”

“Just tending the pub,” he said, an easy smile on his face. “And every now and then I do a little work on the side for the Ministry.”

“Oh yeah?” Luna desperately hoped her voice was neutral, and that she wasn’t really glancing at Evie as much as she felt she was. “What kind of work?”

“Misuse of muggle artifacts. If there’s a cursed doorknob about to bite some unsuspecting lad’s hand off, I’m there to do damage control,” he said happily.

“You sound far too happy about that,” said Luna, aiming for a teasing tone that probably came off more as strained and…Merlin, she was embarrassing herself.

Before Frankie could respond, Thelonious Jaha, who was visiting with his son, called to him from across the hallway. Frankie spared Luna a warm smile before kissing Evie on the cheek and heading over, leaving Luna and Evie in air tense enough to cut with a wand.

“So that was awkward,” said Luna flatly, deadpanning Evie.

Evie’s smile almost looked sad. “It doesn’t have to be.”

Luna hated feeling off balance and overpowered, because she knew that was the situation now. Evie was in the least awkward circumstance; Evie was the one looking at her with pity in her
eyes like Luna was actually hurting (she ignored the fact that she really was hurting, over a woman she hadn’t seen in several years and whom she was possibly definitely still in love with).

So Luna did the only thing she could: she smirked and teased.

“It does when you look at me the way you were.”

To her surprise, Evie’s cheeks tinged pink. Luna grinned. That hadn’t taken long at all.

“I wasn’t looking at you at all,” said Evie, all trace of emotion gone from her face, leaving her emerald eyes hard and indifferent.

“Yeah you were,” said Luna easily.

“No I wasn’t.”

“Were too.”

“I’m not doing this with you!” snapped Evie, eyes flashing. She glanced around warily to make sure Frankie and Jaha hadn’t noticed her voice rise before she leaned toward Luna, lowering her voice to a harsh whisper. “I know what you’re trying to do.”

“What am I trying to do?” said Luna, amused.

“You’re being charming. You’re…you know what you do. But it’s not going to work. I have a boyfriend, and we’re over. We’ve been over for over nearly a decade, for fuck’s sake, so what you’re doing is pathetic.”

“Seven years,” said Luna, unable to keep the bitter note out of her voice. It was always annoying whenever Evie called her out, which had always been much too often.

Evie gave her a disgusted look. “You haven’t changed at all, have you?”

“Seven years isn’t that long,” said Luna, carefully removing any emotion whatsoever from her voice and expression.

“No, not since we last saw each other. I mean from when you were an arrogant Slytherin constantly thieving from the school, making jokes all the time so people wouldn’t notice how lonely you were.” Luna stiffened in surprise, but Evie wasn’t close to being finished. “All you did was throw parties and break the rules.

“Like you weren’t entertained chasing me around,” snapped Luna, temper flaring. “Goody-Two Shoes Potter, Prefect and later Head Girl, always determined and out to get me. Sure got me a few months after we graduated, didn’t you? On my knees and eating y—“

“Shhh, shut up!” Evie looked alarmed as she glanced back at Frankie again before seizing Luna above her elbow and hauling her around the corner of the hallway, then down it. She dragged her into the shadows of the deserted hallway that contained one of the many secret passageways Luna used to use to leave the grounds. “I fucking swear, Luna, you’re even more annoying than you were when we were kids! So fucking crude. I can remember you sneaking into my tower to fuck that revolting Kelly Campbell—“

“Kelly was the head of the gobstones club!” said Luna, torn between exasperation and bemusement.
“Like you even played gobstones, nerd.”

“Are you seriously calling me a nerd right now? Seriously? You had a pygmy puff named Einstein! A muggle scientist that’s been dead for centuries!”

“Shut up,” growled Evie, partly because Luna’s voice had been rising from its original whisper, and partly because her cheeks had gone red again.

“Why don’t you just admit the only reason you hated Kelly was because she was fucking me.”

“Why would that have bothered me?” countered Evie.

“I wonder,” said Luna sarcastically.

“I hated you. We hated each other.”

“I never hated you,” Luna lied.

“Yes you did. Like you said, you thought I was a goody-two shoes out to get you.”

A corner of Luna’s lips tugged up in another smirk. “Yeah, and like I said, you got me, didn’t you? On my knees—“

Evie growled, pushing Luna hard, pressing her against the stone wall and getting in her face. “On your knees, eating me out, yes, I know.” Luna had stiffened in surprise, not prepared to deal with Evie’s proximity, with the fact that the entirety of the fronts of their bodies were pressed together, and their noses were so close they could almost brush together as Evie glared straight into her eyes. “It wasn’t exactly something I planned to do, Luna. You were there. It could have been anyone.”

Luna scowled, glaring right back at Evie as her lip curled. “You are so full of shit. I saw the way you looked at me in that pub. You wanted me, it didn’t have anything to do with anyone else or your fucking libido. It was me.” Evie didn’t respond, and Luna’s body was burning so hard with the memories that she wasn’t sure whether Evie’s grip on her slacked or tightened. “It was the same reason you did a 160 and started partying our seventh year. You were sick of being in Jamie’s shadow and trying to live up to her. You were sick of lying to yourself and being who everyone else thought you were supposed to be.”

“So what?” snarled Evie. “It was none of your fucking business anyway.”

“It was when you were stealing my customers away.”

“Customers,” Evie echoed scathingly, snorting in derision. “It’s not my fault your parties were so fucking lame.”

“I threw the best fucking parties in the whole school!” said Luna in outrage. “You pissed your pants at the one in the Shrieking Sh—“

“Only because it was too damn small and there wasn’t a bathroom!”

“You tried to fucking kiss me there too, if you remember.”

“I did not!” When Luna smirked at her, Evie repeated hotly, “I didn’t! I thought you were someone else!”
“But you wanted to kiss me by then. Admit it.”

Evie’s brows drew together as she fell silent, as though overwhelmed by the memories. After a beat too long, she sighed. “I wanted to,” she admitted, voice quiet. Her eyes were considerably softer on Luna. “It was more my pride that got in the way.”

“Just like now.” Evie’s expression went blank, so Luna explained in a voice that somehow managed to be both hard and gentle, “You still have feelings for me, Evie, I can see it. I can tell when you look at me. But you don’t want to admit it.”

Evie abruptly pushed back from her. “That’s not true.”

“It is true,” persisted Luna. “You’re doing what you did in school, you’re doing what you think is the right thing. You’re playing it safe with your safe boyfriend and your safe job. It’s just the right amount of sensible and boring. I bet you miss traveling.” At the words, Evie dropped her gaze, confirming Luna’s suspicions. “You do.” Luna stepped forward, figuring now was a time as any to be bold. “You miss me, too.”

Evie took a step back, gaze still fixed resolutely on the floor. “I don’t. I’m happy with Frankie. I love him,” she said, and even she could hear how empty the words were.

Luna stared at her. It felt like she’d lost this argument, and for once, she wasn’t even really trying to win. All she knew was that her heart still swelled when she saw Evie, and she wished desperately that things had been different. “Not like you loved me,” she said, and that was the end of it.

Evie turned around and left.
their mission was to reach a shrine in the center of the lake to pick up their bag, which would include hints as to the next task. They had to do this while surviving the magical creatures let loose in the lake, of course. Just great.

It was enough to make Clarke want to drown beforehand. But she had to do this, not just for her, but all the people counting on her.

She stood rigid and straight-backed, staring straight ahead with her hands balled into fists at her side. Her skin prickled in the sunlight and the cool breeze. The water gently rippled before her. Hogwarts was chanting her name, excited grins on their faces as they cheered. Durmstrang looked fierce, an intense war lust in their eyes as they rhythmically stomped their feet. Beauxbatons stood tall and proud, a calm arrogance on most every face.

“Three…”

Clarke’s heart pounded in her throat.

“Two…”

She clutched her wand in her pocket; it was slippery in her sweaty palms.

“One…”

She glanced at Lexa out of the corner of her eyes. She was staring straight ahead at the water, intense focus alight and hard in every angle of her face.

**BOOM.**

The cannon blasted and Clarke jumped. She didn’t spare the time to look over at Lexa and Cage, instead fumbling to pull her wand free from her pocket.

She trudged forward into deeper water, shivering as the waves lapped at her ankles, then her shins, until finally it was up to her waist, so freezing cold it felt as though there were hundreds of tiny needles pricking her skin. She swallowed and steeled herself, wandered out several feet farther, her head bobbing above the surface as her legs made powerful kicks through the water. She was only probably a foot away from the ground, but there was still a trace of panic on her face as she twisted her neck, craning to see Lexa because for some reason she needed to see her.

Lexa was in deeper water, a strange green aura emitting from the tip of her wand. It began surrounding her body as she stood there, her eyes especially green among the black war paint and the water surrounding her. The aura reached her body and set her skin aglow as she sank into the water. There were a few bubbles, and then she didn’t surface again. The crowd cheered wildly; Clarke glanced over her shoulder and caught a glimpse of the holographic form of a massive creature sweeping through the water. The camera flashed.

“Clarke, get your ass in gear!” screamed Octavia; Clarke jumped and hurriedly brought up her wand.

She pointed the tip at herself and muttered the incantation. The strangest sensation trickled down her body, starting from the top of her head right down to her toes. She blinked and her surroundings took on a strange hue. Colors she had never seen before burst to life above the water and lingered in the low-lying clouds peppering the sky. Her neck began burning, a brief searing pain that took her breath away—and didn’t give it back. Her head spun while panic bloomed in her chest; she felt like she was drowning, but she was still kicking and her head was above surface—
Her free hand scrabbled at her neck and she realized, *of course, she had gills.*

She lurched forward, relief flooding her as the water enveloped her. Her legs pulled together, skin joining skin as her flesh flawlessly seamed together, silvery scales elongating and her feet altering into fins. She blinked once, the extra flesh over her eye shifting as she adjusted to the water. She could see with more clarity than her normal eyes could out of water. She looked down at her tail, appearing absurd beneath her Hogwarts skirt, and then drew back her sleeves to observe her grey skin. Her nails had even grown longer, clawed, while her hair had taken on a green tint similar to seaweed.

A shark suddenly went barreling past her, Beauxbatons robes fastened around it. Clarke snorted. Of course Cage would transform into a shark.

Clarke moved forward, spinning to the side as her powerful tail thrust her through the water much farther and faster than she anticipated. It was clearly going to take some getting used to. She tentatively swam on, learning how to maneuver with a tail in mind. After a time, she was finally confident enough to venture out toward the center of the lake.

The world beneath the surface was so much more beautiful than she expected. It was teeming with life, thousands of tiny colorful fish, and an abundant amount of bright plants. She spied a few grindylow, but they fled at the sight of her, and she again felt pleased with her choice of Transformation. Merpeople clearly held authority here.

Clarke swam on, and did not feel so much as queasy at the fact that the water below her was growing much darker and colder, as she plunged deeper into the heart of the lake.

* "・/✧/・* "Fucking swim, you moron!” shouted Raven, voice clearly rising even above the crowd. Anya’s sharp gaze shifted off the floating screen where Clarke was attempting to stealthily creep past a school of kelpie, onto Raven, who was leaning up against the wall, her blue and bronze scarf wrapped around her neck.

Anya shouldn’t do what she was about to do. But she was going to do it anyway.

She weaved through the crowd of students, squeezing past Lincoln to make her way over to Raven.

She was not surprised when Raven barely spared her a glance.

She was not surprised when Raven barely spared her a glance.

“*What do you want, Lachman?***”

Anya did not so much as smile as she sidled up next to Raven. “*Any time you’re going to pull your head out of your ass, Reyes?***”

Raven immediately scowled; beside her, a girl with red hair (Anya vaguely remembers her name might be Fox) turned to look, her mouth falling open in surprise, presumably at what Anya just said to Raven. Her eyes widened when Raven didn’t even give a response. Anya smirked.

When Anya looked up at the screen, Clarke was doing a rather clumsy job of swimming around with her new silvery tail.
Anya knew Raven’s answer, but she asked anyway. “Did you help Clarke plan for this at all?”

It took a minute for Raven to answer. When she did, it was with a bitter note. “No. Not that she asked.”

“I wonder why she wouldn’t? It’s not as though you’ve been acting like a spoiled, selfish child,” said Anya in mock wonder.

“Did you just come over here to insult me?” demanded Raven.

“Yes.”

Raven made a noise of derision, rolling her eyes. Anya stared at the screen form of Lexa cutting through the water as effortlessly as a broomstick soaring through the sky. Though she did not speak to Anya regarding the task, Anya knew Lexa chose that form to transfigure into because it was familiar, and she was certainly not regretting the choice right now, as she bulleted past a crowd of grindylow, sending them all tumbling through the water, waving their tiny fists in outrage. None of the Durmstrangs were nervous regarding the tournament; excited, yes, but not nervous. Lexa was their Champion, and they all knew she would bring glory to Durmstrang’s name.

“What the fuck is Lexa supposed to be, anyway?” muttered Raven, nose wrinkled and lip curled as she glared up at the screen. “A fucking rainbow horse? How gay is she?”

“It’s a hippocampus,” said Anya in amusement.

“Just another excuse for Clarke to ride her,” she muttered.

Anya raised her brows, smirk fading just slightly. “For all your talk of friendship, you sound awfully jealous.”

Raven’s scowl melted away into an expression of genuine surprise. “What?”

Anya nodded toward the screen, where the shark-form of Cage was getting into a tussle with a pack of grindylow. “Every time I see you lately, you are making bitter remarks regarding Lexa and Clarke’s relationship.”

“Every time I see you, you’re talking about them,” countered Raven, which was so ridiculous Anya snorted. “Maybe you’re the one with feelings for Lexa.”

Anya’s stomach went queasy at the thought. She didn’t bother to hide it from her expression as she shook her head, repulsed. “Lexa is beautiful, but I would sooner jump off a cliff. She’s like my sister. And the fact that you avoided my question just confirms my suspicions that you have feelings for Clarke,” added Anya.

Raven rolled her eyes, looking away from the screen in time to miss Clarke nearing a huge stone city in the heart of the lake, where other merpeople were excitedly pointing at her and whispering to one another. “I don’t have feelings for Clarke. I swear on all that is good and holy. I swear on my life. I would swear on my mom’s life, but I would want to be lying then.”

Anya almost chuckled.

“Clarke’s just a friend. Like a sister to me, too, except we made out once when we were fifteen so it would be weird calling her my sister when we’ve sucked face. What the fuck is that?” she suddenly said, eyes widening. Up on the screen, there was an enormous shark-like monster
coming into view, mouth full of teeth the size of a human, and tail covered in countless small barbs.

“That’s an isonade!” said Bellamy from a few people away. “They must have brought it all the way from Japan, that’s crazy!”

The crowd made noises of fright and excitement when the creature lunged at Cage, who missed it by inches. He went spinning away in the resulting underwater waves, eventually stopping far from where he had swum. The creature didn’t pursue him, which made Anya think the headmasters and judges had most certainly charmed the creature so it wouldn’t actually kill someone.

“How was she?” asked Anya.

“How was who what?” said Raven, distracted as up on the screen, Clarke was swimming closer and closer to where the Isonade was.

“Clarke,” said Anya, entertained. “You said you kissed her. How was she?”

“Oh. Good,” said Raven, simultaneously nodding and shrugging. Up on screen, Lexa was on the other side of the creature, having arrived from a different direction than Clarke. It looked like they were both going to collide with it at the same time. “Didn’t do anything for me, but she was still good. It was a Spin the Butterbeer Bottle game at a party. First and last, one and only time her world was rocked. What can I say, I’m just that good.” She finally tore her eyes away from the screen to glower at Anya. “I would offer you a free sample, but you’re an asshole, so, nevermind.”

Anya actually smiled. “You’re a fucking moron, Raven.”

Raven couldn’t prevent the grin tugging at her lips. “Back at you.”

They both echoed sounds of distress, wincing as up on screen the Isonade had noticed Clarke and Lexa. It went straight for Clarke. Clarke was brandishing her wand, a stream of bubbles issuing from her mouth, and her wand shot streaks of red and gold at the giant creature. It hardly stunned it. Clarke started swimming the other direction, but the creature was big enough that it was already nearly upon her—until Lexa rammed its side. Anya tensed, gripping the fence tightly enough that her knuckles shone white. Cage took advantage of the Isonade’s distraction by skirting around it, streamlining it toward the large stone shrine that was just now visible, thanks to the Isonade moving away from it. He picked up one of the three bags on the altar in his mouth; as he turned around, before he left, he hit the other two bags with his tail. They started sinking down the extra fifty or so feet to the lake floor. The audience began to boo, Raven and Anya included.

“I hate that guy,” she said savagely.

Clarke, meanwhile, had not moved. She was still shouting spells at the creature as it gave chase to Lexa, who was careening through the water in tight arches; the creature was so large it could not easily follow her. Eventually it grew tired and turned its attention to the culprit who was annoying it with spells; as it turned, Clarke hit it right in the eyes. It thrashed in the water, spinning and thrashing Clarke hard with its barbed tail; the crowd screamed as Clarke’s robes tore, blood staining the water. The crowd roared even louder when Lexa darted under the creature as it floated up, dazed from the spell; she nudged Clarke’s stomach with the long length of her muzzle, and Clarke, face screwed up in pain, wrapped her arms around Lexa’s neck, gripping her mane.
They dived down toward where their knapsacks had fallen; the crowd was stomping their feet and cheering loudly because now it was a race between Lexa and Cage, who was swiftly cutting through the water toward the surface.

“If he wins, I swear to Merlin! I hope that Isonade eats him!” exclaimed Jasper, who immediately looked down at the girl who stood beside him. “I mean, no offense—“

“None taken,” she said. “I don’t like him either.”

Anya’s heart was beating fast as she watched Lexa galloping through the water, Clarke hanging onto her for dear life, one arm locked around Lexa’s broad neck and the other clutching their two bags and her wand. They raced after Cage, whose sleek body easily matched the pace Lexa set—

The crowd all gasped as another huge creature came barreling out from the depths, not as big as the Isonade, but certainly longer.

“That’s an Abaia Eel!” shouted Bellamy in glee.

“You’re such a nerd, Bell!” Raven said loudly, too caught up in what was happening on screen to even shoot Bellamy a smile.

“Shut up, Rae,” he joked back, eyes fixated on the giant eel.

The Abaia Eel, whatever the fuck he said it was called, was, in Anya’s opinion, of perfect timing. Cage was halted in his tracks as the Eel reared; he darted away, looking more like a minnow in a pond as the Eel struck at him. Lexa and Clarke swept right past them, heading toward the surface, while the Eel pursued Cage the other direction.

Anya grinned; on one side of her Octavia and the rest were cackling, while on the other, Raven was still staring up at the screen with wide eyes, trembling from head to foot.

“Raven?” she prompted.

“I didn’t—I didn’t know,” she stammered, the blood drained from her face. She shifted her wide, dark eyes onto Anya.

Anya deadpanned her. “Are you fucking kidding me?” When Raven merely blinked at her, Anya gave an impatient huff of breath and said, “Let me guess. You just now realized how dangerous this tournament is, and how much of an asshole you’ve been to Clarke?”

Raven numbly nodded.

Anya scoffed, rolling her eyes. “You’re lucky you’re attractive. How people say you’re a genius is beyond me.”

* "·/✧/·" *

Clarke gasped out the spell the moment they broke surface. She flexed her toes as the scales on her legs melted away, and she could finally spread them apart.

“God,” she choked, spluttering up the water in her mouth that hadn’t had the chance to pass
through the gills that were now gone. Coughing, she loosened her grip on Lexa’s mane to slide down, feet miraculously sinking into sand. The instant her ears stopped ringing, she recognized the deafening sound of a roaring crowd. For one wild moment, she thought of Quidditch. She looked beside her at the brightly colored creature her arm was hooked around just as it began to shrink; Lexa had nonverbally cast the spell and was shifting back into a human form. Clarke’s head titled down with the movement, unable to tear her gaze from Lexa’s as she shrank down; her skin was a vivid rainbow color for a split second before fading back into its natural tan. She blinked long lashes, eyes looking a particularly bright shade of green in the sunlight. Her pink, plump lips were parted as she panted for breath, but she looked relieved more than anything as she held Clarke’s gaze.

“Thanks,” managed Clarke.

In lieu of catching her breath, Lexa nodded. Clarke’s stomach clenched tightly for some reason as her heart seemed to miss a beat; she realized her arm was still tightly looped over Lexa’s neck, Lexa’s wild tangled braids caught in her fist. Blushing, Clarke removed her arm.

She handed Lexa her knapsack and together they trudged up the shore toward the deck, where the tournament judges awaited them, and the majority of the audience had packed in.

The Beauxbatons burst into applause while everyone else grumbled as Cage made it to the surface and started jetting toward them, the only sign being the shark fin breaking the surface. Clarke shook her head, still huffing for breath. “Dramatic idiot,” she muttered to herself. The headmasters pretended not to hear her, but Kane smiled slightly.

They stood shivering even with the blankets Jackson wrapped around them as the judges announced the points. Cane was last place, with a points taken off for lack of sportsmanship; Clarke was second, and placed high up due to her choice of transformation and use of spells against the Isonade; Lexa was first, for the obvious reasons.

While the audience was dismissed for the feast, the Champions were ordered to head to the tent to await further instructions. Once there, they had only a minute to relax before Gideon and Evie arrived for interviews and pictures. It felt like hours later that the judges finally told them that the next task would take place at the end of January, after the Yule Ball in December, and Clarke wanted to cry in relief that she had three months until the next terrifying task. They dismissed them, and Cage barely spared them a glare before he stormed out, leaving Clarke and Lexa alone in the tent.

Clarke picked up her bag, too tired to look into it, and had walked only a few feet out of the tent before she halted. Her stomach was flipping unpleasantly, because she currently felt a maelstrom of emotions and she didn’t know what to do. On one hand, she was furious with Lexa—on the other, Lexa had saved her ass during the task, and even though it had only been a day, Clarke somehow missed her. She turned, hesitated, lingering in the doorway. Water dripped from the ends of her hair, and the quiet plunk as it hit the floor alerted Lexa to her presence. She turned to face Clarke, clutching the red blanket more tightly around her. Her war paint had been washed off in the water, leaving only faint black smudges around her temples. With the clear face and the loose curls of wet hair, she looked younger than Clarke had ever seen her. It was a stark contrast to the exhaustion in her eyes that looked as though it should belong to someone much older and with much more responsibility.

There was silence in the tent as they stood ten feet apart, gazing at each other. Then Lexa cast her gaze down, staring intently at her own feet. “I do trust you, Clarke,” she said in a soft voice.

Clarke was surprised. Of all the things she expected Lexa to say, this was not among them. She wrestled with the urge to be angry, to remember what Lexa had done and let that fury fill her belly, hot and demanding and encouraging her to curse Lexa before storming away.
But Lexa was looking down at the ground with misery etched into every inch of her face, as though she hated what she had done and who she was, and Clarke couldn’t bear that. Her heart throbbed in alarm at even the notion of Lexa in such pain. So she stepped forward, eyes sincere as she said firmly, “I know how hard that is for you.”

Lexa finally looked back up at her. Her eyes were so big, so sad, so green. “Durmstrang… it’s always been a school centered around Dark Arts and black magic. We work hard to rid ourselves of the stains put upon us centuries ago. We covet our secrets as though they are sacred, and work harder yet to ensure they are safe. We protect our own. You think our ways are harsh, but it is how we have survived.”

_Survived._ Clarke thinks of Hogwarts and the battle that had once taken place there, of the hundreds of names etched into the memorial wall in the Great Hall, and the thousands more on the memorial fountain in the Ministry of Magic. She thinks of Lexa’s memory of Costia, of Lexa’s parents and how they treated her, of Raven forced to return home to take care of her abusive mother, of Bellamy and Octavia’s treatment from their own parents. She thinks of her own father, his gaunt, unshaven face, and the emptiness in his blue eyes.

She thinks of Lexa, constantly training and so determined to be the best that she was missing out on everything else, even things as simple as relaxing and eating fucking chocolate.

Clarke sighed, shaking her head, struggling to put it into words. “It doesn’t…it shouldn’t have to be that way, Lexa. I don’t know, just, maybe life should be about _more_ than just surviving.”

Lexa was quiet, but the atmosphere in the tent seemed to thicken as Clarke noticed the way her eyes darted down—down to Clarke’s lips.

The beating of her heart increased tenfold, a low pull flipping in her stomach as she stood motionless, unable to prevent her own gaze from shifting onto Lexa’s lips, so full and plump and… oh God she was licking her lips now and Clarke had went from angry and sad to hot and bothered and fucking _yearning_, an ache in her stomach and in her heart, in the space of about two seconds.

The thought of kissing Lexa was too much; her heart trembled while her stomach turned. She shuddered, stomach warm and face heating up.

Lexa’s brows rose in concern. She walked forward, pulling the blanket off. She thought Clarke shivered out of the cold, rather than the onslaught of certain feelings that Clarke knew she _shouldn’t_ be feeling.

Lexa left plenty of distance (too much, really, Lexa had to stretch forward to reach) between them as she draped the blanket around Clarke’s shoulders. Clarke knew she should avert her gaze but she just… couldn’t. Lexa looked so solemn, miserable, even.

“Life _should_ be more about surviving,” Clarke repeated in a quiet voice, almost as an afterthought. A life rotting away in Azkaban was just surviving. A life refusing to be open to the possibility of feeling something was just surviving. Clarke held Lexa’s gaze, willing her to understand, to make the conscious decision to be happy. There was a clear note of desperation in her voice as she added, “I mean, don’t we deserve better than that?”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. Clarke thought she was about to walk out, finally fed up with listening to Clarke.

But Lexa said, “Maybe we do,” and then she was leaning in, bringing a hand up to cup the back of Clarke’s neck. She pressed her lips to Clarke’s.
Suddenly the clichés made sense. The world stopped. The lights pouring in through the openings in the tent blurred into magic as Clarke’s eyes fluttered shut. For a moment, there was nothing in the world—no previous memories, no future thoughts—nothing except for the present, in which it was just Lexa and the smell of the salt water and her soft lips against Clarke’s.

Then her mind seemed to catch up to what was happening.

Clarke had to catch her moan in her throat before it could escape her. There was a potent sweep in her stomach, a profound tug that trembled at her core. Her heart somehow managed to feel as though it had stopped beating and was about to pound right out of her chest at the same time. For some reason, this was scarier than the task had been, as though she was standing on the edge of some precipice and she could easily fall off, float down to the ground and be lost in it. Oh my God, she thought, unable to breathe. Lexa. I’m kissing Lexa.

Lexa’s lips felt every bit as soft and plump as they looked. Clarke’s stomach turned, a deep pull hitting her low as Lexa pressed into her, both of them inhaling sharply through their noses, intent on keeping their lips together for as long as possible. Lexa tilted her head to deepen the kiss, her nose lightly brushing Clarke’s.

(Wow, Lexa could kiss).

Clarke remembered watching the fierce savagery with which Lexa brandished her wand that time upon the deck of Durmstrang ship, the aggressive lunges, and the quick, fluid way she pivoted and turned, and how now her lips were so soft, so gentle, her touch tentative but firm, as though she was handling Clarke with the kindest of care in case she crumbled beneath her touch, but with a fervent fear in her grip like she didn’t want to let go.

Clarke lifted her hands to tangle her fingers through Lexa’s plaits, freezing cold with the lake water. Lexa shivered, but Clarke didn’t think it was due to the cold. They clutched one another closer, swaying where they stood. Lexa’s lips tasted bitter like the lake water, but there was a faint taste of some lemony sweetness, like Honeydukes chocolates, and Clarke’s heart ached at the thought of Lexa eating the chocolates Clarke gave her as some form of good luck before the task.

Lexa pulled back and they were hardly an inch apart, their foreheads pressed together and eyes closed as they quietly took in shaky breaths. Clarke felt as though she would never have enough oxygen again, and she was perfectly okay with that as long as it meant she could keep kissing Lexa. This was...something about all this was so familiar. Their lips fit together perfectly, like they’d done this a thousand times before, and Clarke never wanted to stop. Lexa hovered hardly an inch away and all she wanted to do was swallow the space between them and continue.

Please, she wanted to say, but she froze at the thought that she was about to beg. Clarke Griffin did not beg.

Griffin. Clarke Griffin.

Clarke’s eyes fluttered open, hazy and dazed but reality was returning sharply. This was not supposed to have happened. Clarke wasn’t supposed to get distracted in this tournament. She wasn’t supposed to get distracted in life. Her father was in prison. Her mother was depressed. There were crazy creatures called Shadow-Eaters attacking Wizarding villages. Part of the Ministry was still trying to pass a ridiculous pro-blood exclusion act. Someone had put her name into the Goblet of Fire. Clarke had to get through this stupid dangerous tournament she was forced to participate in. She didn’t have time to stand around tents kissing people. She couldn’t afford to get distracted.

She blinked hazily at Lexa, whose green eyes looked just as glossy and dazed. Fuck. Her wet
hair had been slicked back from her face by Clarke’s hands, but it was so thick and heavy that it had fallen forward again, framing her face in wild tangles. Her lips were slightly swollen from the kiss, previously a pale pink from the cold but now reddened from the friction.

She couldn’t afford to get distracted, even if the person distracting her was so…

Lexa’s eyes, trained on Clarke’s mouth, were drifting shut again as she leaned forward, inclining her head, her nose dragging across Clarke’s, lips almost brushing together again—

She was so fucking perfect, and that’s what terrified Clarke the most.

“Wait—” she said, a note of panic in her voice as she took a step back. Lexa, who had followed her at first, stopped at once, straightening with a sober expression.

Clarke blinked rapidly, once more taken aback by how beautiful Lexa looked and the fact that they just kissed, struggling to regain some semblance of coherent thought. “Um, I just—I—”

Lexa was still staring at her lips, and it made it really fucking hard to remember why they had stopped kissing. Lexa managed to bring her gaze up to meet Clarke’s and stay there, as though determined to be respectful. Her display of self-restraint gave Clarke the relief she needed to remember the reasons why they stopped.

“…I’m sorry,” she said honestly. “I just—I’m not ready. To be with anyone.”

A brief silence hung between them, dense and substantial with the words Clarke wasn’t saying. That she wanted to be ready, that she wished she wasn’t in the position she was. That she cared about Lexa more than she would have thought possible, and it wasn’t fair to Lexa, wasn’t fair to her parents, wasn’t fair to Clarke.

Still, she was looking into Lexa’s eyes and they looked wet and honest and innocent, and Clarke didn’t see what harm telling one more truth could bring.

“Not yet,” she added quietly.

Comprehension smoothed Lexa’s face, and her features softened. Clarke swore there was the ghost of a smile curving her lips. Lexa nodded, and Clarke’s shoulders nearly sagged in relief.

“I’m sorry,” said Lexa after a beat. “I shouldn’t have— I should not have done that, without your permission.”

Clarke couldn’t stop the sad smile that crept onto her face. “I think we both know you had my permission, Lexa.”

Lexa really did smile now, and the sight made Clarke’s heart ache. “Regardless, I would prefer spoken permission…” “…Next time.” The implied words hung between them and Clarke was very close to saying fuck it and stepping forward to kiss her again. But then, to her surprise, Lexa was the one taking a step back, her brow creasing in a frown. “I am in the same position as you, Clarke,” she said, her throat moving as she swallowed. That mask of indifference returned to her; for some reason, it brought a terrible sadness to Clarke as she watched it wipe Lexa’s face clean of emotions. “I am not ready for any type of—anything. I cannot afford to be distracted right now, not when so many people are counting on me.”

Clarke opened her mouth to speak, not really sure what she was planning on saying, when a deafening BOOM struck hard. She and Lexa stiffened, looking at one another. They drew their wands out, hurrying out from the tent, visions full of Hogwarts being attacked by Shadow-Eaters
filling Clarke’s mind until someone that sounded suspiciously like Bellamy could be heard cursing from all the way across the lake; evidently he had been fiddling with the canon and set it off.


Lexus cleared her throat; she was determinedly looking away from Clarke, staring at the ground instead. “Well done in the task today, Clarke. I will…see you around.”

Clarke dipped her head in a nod, ignoring the disappointment curdling in her belly. “Yeah, I’ll—see you. Um, good job to you today too.”

Lexus nodded a final time before quickly striding away. Clarke watched her go, hating the lump in her throat that formed at the realization that she and Lexus’s friendship was most likely ruined, now.

* * /♂/ * *

By the time Clarke reached the Common Room, the celebration party was already in full swing. The entire room roared when they saw her; everyone swamped her at once, congratulating her and pushing overflowing mugs of butterbeer and firewhisky at her. She refused them all, shaking her head and insisting she was tired and wanted to go to bed, but no one would hear her. It took almost forty-five minutes for her to finally escape, which was only thanks to Bellamy arriving late and diving into a story about almost accidentally shooting the recently freed Giant Squid with a cannon ball.

To her surprise, Raven was the only person in the dormitory. She was sitting on Clarke’s bed. She had been waiting for her.

Clarke stopped in her tracks and stared, a maelstrom of emotions crashing through her. Raven looked up at her, tear tracks clearly marked on her cheeks, and wordlessly opened her arms. Clarke remained where she was, all intentions to tell Raven to fuck right off or maybe to give her a good punch, but as she looked at her, she found the anger draining out of her. She thought of her time in the lake, she thought of Jaha avoiding her, she thought of Lexus and the feel of her lips on hers. Clarke’s eyes abruptly overflowed, and she did not hesitate to lunge forward and fling her arms around Raven, tackling her back on the bed with a fierce hug. As she breathed in the familiar scent of Raven’s lavender shampoo, she felt the stress and tension ease slightly off her shoulders. God, she had missed her best friend.

They cried for a good while, clinging to one another. Eventually, Raven put a hand on Clarke’s shoulder and gently pushed her back to give her a shaky apology. “I’m so sorry Clarke. I was such an asshole. I can’t even believe how much of a dick I was. I’m sorry.”

Clarke shook her head, sniffling. “You should have been Champion, Raven. I get it. If I were you, I would have been pissed at me too.”

“But it wasn’t your fault. You never wanted to compete. Some asshole forced you to. And instead of being your friend, I pushed you away just because I thought it’d be easier. But it wasn’t. It wasn’t.” Raven’s voice broke; Clarke reached up to tenderly brush one of her friend’s tears away. “You’re my best friend and I missed you so much. I’ve hated the past month.”

“So have I. I’ve missed you too.”
“I’ve been so selfish, I know you’ve been freaking out and scared and I wasn’t there for you. I’m sorry, Clarke.”

“Hey, hey, shhh…” Clarke soothingly rubbed Raven’s arm. “It’s over now. Hey, I got through the first task alive, right?”

It brought a watery smile out of Raven. “Yeah, barely. I know you’ve been in the library until the break of dawn every day. Lexa’s a shit help, I would have told you to turn into a mermaid ages ago.”

Clarke lifted a hand, ran it through her hair, uncomfortable. “Well, Lexa and I agreed not to help each other on that part. We thought it would look fishy.”


Clarke tried to hold onto her smile, but talking about Lexa made her think about what happened between them. It made her heart ache, and her throat suddenly felt scratchy. “Raven, I need to tell you something. After the task, Lexa and I…um, we kissed.”

Raven shot up. “Holy shit, you kissed? Tell me everything!”

After she finished, Raven shook her head, whistling. “Ten galleons you fuck by the end of the week.”

“Raven!” admonished Clarke.

“Okay, end of the month.”

“Not helping!”

“What!” said Raven incredulously. “You’ve already taken a bath together, what more is there to do?”

“We didn’t take a bath! She was teaching me how to swim!”

“Mmm-hmm, I bet she gave you mouth to mouth too, didn’t she?”

Clarke gave a guilty smile. “Okay, I did consider drowning once for that reason.”

Raven cackled. “I stand by my point. I give it a month. Two tops. Okay wait, I give it three.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Why three exactly?”

The grin Raven gave her was absolutely wicked. “Have you already forgotten?”

Clarke frowned at her for a moment before she realized. Her eyes widened before she groaned, collapsing onto the bed and burying her face in the pillow.

Raven laughed again, rubbing her back. “Don’t worry, Clarke. I’m sure Lexa can teach you how to dance.”

“I know how to dance, dumbass.”

“She doesn’t need to know that!”

“You’re impossible.”
“Shut up, you missed me.”

Clarke sighed. “Yeah. I did.”

Chapter End Notes

For those of you wondering, I picture Luna to look like a cross between Alicia Keys, Franky from Wentworth (her smirk), and Amanita from Sense8, and I picture Evie to look like Ali Larter. (and I imagine Jamie to look like a bit like an older Hayley Atwell).
Chapter Summary

2 months after the First Task, the Yule Ball is officially on, and no one can keep it in their pants.

Chapter Notes

I wrote the majority of this sick with the flu and on medication, so sorry for mistakes. Thank you guys so SO much for the comments, kudos, and bookmarks. They make me so happy! Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Help, help
I'm drowning
In the sea where I found you
The kerosene in your skin
The chemistry that I'm bound to"

-Andrew Belle

The floor was no longer white. Blood dripped from the ceiling and splattered across the tile like rain. Clarke walked without slipping, her sneakers making no sound, but her steps sent ripples through the red puddles, and left cracked footsteps in her wake.

“Clarke.”

A shudder went through her spine. Someone was whispering her name, and if she could just find who it belonged to—

She ignored the handle-less doors surrounding her, heading down a narrow hallway. She hurried past a huge tank of water more green than the Black Lake had been during the first task. She came to an abrupt halt in the doorway to a huge room, full of stone steps that led down to a dais where a peculiar veil wavered in an archway.

“Clarke…”
That’s where the whispering was coming from. Brows drawn together and mouth set in cautious determination, Clarke stepped forward; rather than drop down to the steps, her body seemed to drag forward, until she blinked and suddenly she was standing in front of the archway.

There was no breeze, but the veil fluttered again. Clarke stared at it, the whispering caressing her ears as though whomever it belonged to stood right behind her. She was overcome by the strangest feeling, one she could not describe. Something was inside her, pulling at her, tugging her forward, urging her to pull back the veil despite her stomach clenching in nauseous dread—

She reached forward, extending an arm. The whispering grew louder as she stretched a hand out, grasping the tattered fabric in her palm; strangely enough, it felt like wind against her skin.

“Clarke…”

There was a voice in her head filled with distress, warning her not to pull it back, but some unknown force had taken control of her limbs, and Clarke had no choice but to lift the veil.

It was her father. The grey door with the porthole stood behind him, but otherwise, it looked as though he were standing in a field of storms, swirling grey at his feet. His body was contorting and distorting, cloaked in a tattered black robe; his hands were not his own, but grey and clawed; his blue eyes were fixed on Clarke as he opened his mouth, his breath putrid and rattling—

“Clarke…” he gasped; Clarke remained frozen, unable to move, her heart pounding—

His eyes flickered, shifting just slightly to focus on something above Clarke’s shoulder. Now she turned automatically, the same force moving her body, turning her to face—

It was Lexa. She was stark-white, deathly pale, covered in dark bruises, but she did not so much as sway where she stood. She stared at Clarke and her lips parted; blood poured profusely, staining her teeth red, dribbling down her chin, as she whispered, but the words came from three different places at once; came from Lexa, lips red with blood and red with stolen kisses; came from Clarke’s father, wrecked and mangled behind her; came from Clarke, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as blackness crept toward her vision—

“Love is weakness.”

“Clarke! Fuck, Clarke!”

Clarke came to choked in terror, mouth open in a drawn-out, silent scream. She stared up at Raven with wide eyes, her body frozen in place, stuck to the bed in clammy cold sweat.

“Clarke!” Raven shook her, face pale and panic in her dark eyes. “Hey, Griffin, you’re scaring the shit out of me. Talk to me! Are you okay?”

Clarke blinked, Raven going blurry as her eyes unfocused. Her stomach cramped with nausea; she promptly rolled over and retched over the side of the bed. The people crowding around her yelped and jumped up to avoid the splatter of sick on the floor.

“What’s wrong with her?” Fox’s terrified tremor.

“We should call for Jackson—“ Mel’s voice was thick; she may have been holding her nose.
“No—“ choked out Clarke. Spending the night in the infirmary and the school following their obligatory duties by informing her mother was the last thing she needed.

“Clarke, what’s up?” breathed Raven, her knee digging into the mattress so she could lean toward Clarke and smooth her hair back from her face. “Nightmare?”

Clarke numbly nodded, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and rolling back over, panting. “Yeah. Bad one.”

“Alright, everyone clear out, get back to bed,” said Raven sharply; the other girls reluctantly backed away, worried eyes fixed on Clarke. Raven glared at them all until their curtains were yanked shut, then she urgently crouched down to press her hand to Clarke’s clammy forehead.

“Shit, you scared the life out of me.” She pushed Clarke’s sweaty hair out of her face. “Are you okay? Clarke?”

Clarke nodded, too exhausted and terrified to do much else. She hated nightmares; she was so vulnerable when sleeping, and would wake too disoriented to be sensible.

“What happened? Why was this one worse than the others?”

Clarke kept her mouth clamped shut in efforts to discourage the nausea from spilling out again. After a long moment, she braved it. “I don’t want to talk about it,” she whispered.

Raven’s brow creased. “Clarke, it could help, talking about it.”

Clarke shook her head. “No. I just want to sleep.”

Raven drew back, brow furrowed. “Okay,” she said, finally taking pity on her. “I’m here for you though, okay?”

Clarke nodded, rolling over to bury her face in the cool side of her pillow. She heard Raven muttering the spell to clean up the sick before climbing back into her four-poster bed. In the following silence, Clarke focused on her breathing, on the beating of her own heart.

Only hours ago she had been kissing Lexa in the tent at the lake. Only minutes ago, Lexa had been bloody and deathly in her dreams.

She didn’t know why, but Clarke had a feeling everything would be different now.

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Two months later

Clarke stood in the Great Hall with a large group of her particularly angry friends. The Yule Ball was in less than a week, and Kane had just informed them of the basic rules. No alcohol. No dueling. No inappropriate shenanigans. Girls must wear dresses, and boys must wear suits.
The last rule was the one Clarke and her friends had a problem with.

“It’s 2105!” said Raven incredulously. “Muggles don’t even conform to gender stereotypes anymore!”

Kane’s fake polite smile was still plastered on his face. “I know,” he said in a low voice, glancing around, “But when there are schools that still believe in convention.”

“Not my school,” said Anya, appearing offended at the mere insinuation.

“No, but some…” he glanced over at the large group of Beauxbatons clustered near the front entrance. “Some schools have more traditional values, and since this is tradition in itself…we’re going to adhere to those.”

“This is so stupid!” snapped Octavia; Bellamy immediately put a hand on her shoulder, pulling her back before she landed herself in detention.

“Agreed,” said Raven, glaring at Kane. “Teddy Lupin was non-binary, and if he was alive today, I can bet he’d think this was stupid too.”

“Nevertheless,” said Kane, brows rising as he straightened; the fake smile had slipped away. “That’s the way it’s got to be. I’ll see you appropriately dressed on Saturday.”

They all watched him walk away, similar expressions of disgust on their faces.

“Well that’s bullshit,” said Octavia, voice hard. “We’re going to do it anyway, right?”

“No.” When Clarke spoke, everyone turned to stare. Sighing at their looks of outrage, Clarke said, “Look, if you show up like that, they aren’t going to let you in the ball. And if you change during it, they’ll just kick you out.”

“But it’s not right,” said Bellamy, jaw set and frowning.

“No, it’s not,” agreed Clarke. “So we’ll do something about it.”

“Like what, Princess?” said Bellamy, scowling.

Clarke ignored the nickname. “Like getting Monty to bring some of his special Moonshine, and spike the punch.”

With that, all the faces looking back at her split into grins.

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“Where’s my shoe?”

“I dunno…where’s my tie?”

Monty sighed, watching Miller frown at the floor. That’s what he always did; he lost things, and instead of looking for them, he would just stand there squinting, like whatever he lost would just suddenly materialize into being before his very eyes. It should annoy Monty; they may have only been dating for a few months, but he knew Miller, had went to school with him for six years.
It didn’t annoy him, though. Monty smiled, shaking his head; Miller noticed and grinned, bending down to actually look around. He pulled the green and silver tie out from under the bed, holding it triumphantly in the air. “Found it!” He stood and immediately held it out to Monty.

“Nerd,” said Monty, grabbing Miller by his shoulder and turning him around, holding his cloak out for him to slip into.

Miller snorted, turning around to face Monty while he pulled his tie around his neck. “Says the Herbology dweeb.”

Monty rolled his eyes, leaning in to give Miller a quick peck on the lips before he started looking around for his shoe.

“We better hurry or we’ll miss our reservation, and then we’ll be late getting ready for the ball,” noted Miller as he strapped his watch back onto his wrist.

Truthfully, Monty wasn’t altogether opposed to missing lunch and staying longer. There was something comforting about Slytherin dungeons now; he didn’t know whether it was the relaxing cool green that seemed to cover every surface, or the peace he felt when he peered out the windows and saw nothing but the lake and, on occasion, the Giant Squid as it lazily drifted by. He glanced at Miller as he shrugged his Ravenclaw robes on; that right there was the main comfort of Slytherin common room, and there was really no use denying it. Monty was already head over heels for him. They had been dating for months, but neither had yet dropped the L bomb yet. It was starting to get to the point where the words were close to bursting forth from Monty’s lips at the most inopportune of moments, such as at breakfast, when Miller was smiling at him with sleepy eyes over the top of the morning paper, or during Arithmancy when Miller would scribble a note on a ripped piece of parchment and discreetly use a hovering charm beneath the table to slip it to him, and most especially during nights when one of them would sneak out of their common room and make the long trip across the castle just for those stolen golden moments beneath blue or green sheets.

They made their way up the staircase and across the castle, greeting a few of their friends having lunch as they passed through the Great Hall. Raven did as she always does and started gagging at their display of affection (holding hands), smirking when they both just rolled their eyes. Octavia winked, Wells shared a warm smile over the top of the Prophet, and Clarke didn’t even notice them, too absorbed in the furtive glances she was swapping with the Durmstrang Champion a table down.

As they walked, Miller inclined his head toward Clarke and Lexa, grinning. “When do you think those two are going to get their heads out of their asses?”

Monty smiled. Miller couldn’t find the things that were right under his nose, but he was perceptive in other ways. Wordlessly, Monty lifted their entwined hands and brushed his lips across the back of Miller’s hand. Miller smiled back, pleasantly surprised, and brought Monty in closer, wrapping his arm around his waist as they walked out the doors and trudged through the snow toward the distant gates leading to Hogsmeade.

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Hell must have frozen over, because Lexa Woods was actually contemplating faking illness.
It was Christmas morning, which meant it was also the morning of the Yule Ball (the unexpected task Lexa had not anticipated being so nervous about), and she knew today would be difficult. Not because of the day, though Lexa had been trying hard to banish her memories of Christmas from her mind—childhood memories spent being scolded by her parents for remaining awake in attempts to listen for Santa Claus, and memories at Durmstrang of cuddling up to a fire with Costia and exchanging gifts. Lexa wanted nothing more than to distance herself from the holiday because of this, and Lincoln and Anya, at least, seemed to understand that. This morning they'd just casually set presents in her room (a new Sneakoscope from Anya and a Quidditch book from Lincoln; Anya getting her something sensible and Lincoln getting her a thoughtful gift to relax with made perfect sense). There was also a package of tea and digestives, which Lexa knew was from Indra and Gustus (and that they had done this every year since she came to Durmstrang), but also knew would never admit it, though Gustus would probably wink and smile.

Regardless of the stress of the holidays, that still wasn't why Lexa knew it would be a difficult day. It wasn't even so much because of the party (she wasn’t a big fan of social events), but because of who would be there.

Clarke. Clarke would be there.

Clarke Griffin, whom Lexa had been working her ass off and failing miserably at keeping out of her mind. Clarke Griffin, whose lips Lexa dreamt about every night and the reason she woke aching in all places.

Clarke Griffin, whom Lexa missed almost more than she could bear.

Lexa had spent a ridiculous amount of time wondering how inappropriate it would be to get Clarke a gift. In the end, she'd decided to buy a large pack of Honeyduke’s Chocolate from Hogsmeade, and it was currently nestled in one of her dresser drawers on the Durmstrang ship until she could figure out a way to sneak it to her. It had been over a month since they’d even spoken, and it was a month before then too. After the first task, after the kiss, Lexa had been diligent about avoiding her. She’d been successful for a little over four weeks, until the day she decided to leave the Defense Against the Dark Arts class she’d been observing early, partly due to a headache but mostly because it was a joke compared to their course equivalent at Durmstrang. Consequently, she’d been the only person not in class wandering down the hallway in the eastern wing of the castle, and as fate would have it, Clarke had woken late for her Advanced Potions class and was rushing toward it. As she turned the corner, Clarke came around it; the two collided and Clarke’s bag of quills, parchment, and ink went everywhere.

“Shit! Fuck, I’m sorry—“ Clarke began, eyes wide and face splattered with ink. She went still and silent when she saw who she’d ran into. “Oh. Sorry,” she said again, more quietly, and immediately reverted her gaze as she started picking up her belongings.

Lexa silently helped, pulling out her wand and cleaning the spilled ink and shattered glass from the floor. She and Clarke clambered to their feet without any help from the other and stood, awkwardly, both avoiding the other’s eyes.

“See you,” muttered Clarke finally, quickly striding past her. Lexa forced her legs to carry her on, not allowing herself to look behind and watch Clarke go.

She hated herself for the fact that she wanted to.

That was the last time they’d spoken, or even acknowledged one another’s presence beyond the usual glances during lunch and dinner.
And now tonight, she’d be forced to acknowledge her. Didn’t know if she’d be able to resist, considering Clarke would be dressed up and Lexa…Lexa couldn’t stop thinking about her anyway, so did it matter, really?

After the feast, Lexa returned to the ship and readied herself with Anya’s help. Once Lincoln joined her and they started making their way to the castle, Lexa meditated in her head, repeating the words like a mantra: “Feeling is weakness, feeling is weakness, feeling is weakness.”

Inside the Entrance Hall, Lexa was surprised to see Indra smiling and engaged in conversation with the woman who had brought the first and second tasks here. The woman looked striking indeed, wearing a long, silky dress the color of poison-green. As Lexa and Lincoln approached Indra, the woman—Luna, remembered Lexa—excused herself and headed inside the Great Hall.

“I didn’t know you made friends so easily,” teased Lexa.

Indra gave a gruff “Hmph,” rolling her eyes, but the smile still lingered on her face. “I have known Luna since she was a child.”

“How do you know her?” asked Lexa curiously.

“She went to Durmstrang before transferring to Hogwarts in her third year. She was a troublemaker, but a good kid. She did well in my classroom.”

“Lexa,” murmured Lincoln, nudging her; she turned around and felt her heart stutter when she took in the sight of Clarke, who had just descended the stairs into the Entrance Hall. She looked stunning in a short periwinkle dress, the train of which was a darker sapphire. The two colors combined looked like the precise shade of Clarke’s eyes.

Lexa swallowed the lump in her throat as she eyed those pink lips she hadn’t been able to get out of her head.

Lexa was fucked.

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“If Kane is so concerned about tradition, all the boys should be wearing dresses. That’s what they used to wear, anyway.”

“They were called dress robes, O. And yeah, they were still wearing them only a century ago.”

“So you can say, ‘ugh, dress robes are so one hundred years ago,’ and it’s legit.”

“Yep.” Bellamy appraised himself in the mirror, adjusting his bowtie. “Thank God for suits.”

Clarke silently waited for her friends to finish their last minute adjustments to their wardrobes, perched on one of the comfy chintz chairs in Gryffindor common room. It hadn't taken her long to get ready; she'd even beat Raven for once. Honestly, though, she was distracted enough today without the Yule Ball hanging over her head.
It was Christmas. The first Christmas Clarke ever spent away from home, away from her mother—though not the first she’d spent away from her father. She and her mother had even tried to visit him at Azkaban last Christmas, even though visitors to Azkaban were never allowed and they knew there was a very slim chance they would somehow miraculously convince any of the guards (though they’d at least salvaged a sympathetic look from Roan Kwin, one of the guards). They’d been turned away, of course, disappointed that they couldn’t even give him his present. Instead, all they had gotten were secret photos taken by Pike. What a gift.

This Christmas, of course, Clarke was stuck at the castle for this damn ball. Her mother had still sent her gifts, some sweaters, a nice new jacket (blue), and some homemade food that Clarke guessed must have been cooked by one of her mother's co-workers. Clarke’s friend group was too big for them all to buy one another presents, so they tended to draw names and buy a present for whoever they got. This year Clarke had gotten Bellamy, who was only the easiest person to shop for ever. She bought him a book (had her mother Owl it to her from Diagon Alley) over the history of ghosts, since it had looked interesting, and he seemed delighted by it, if his broad grin and excited shuffle through the pages had been anything to go by. Fox had drawn Clarke's name, and bought her a large pack of sugar quills and a brand new set of dragonskin gloves for Advanced Potions.

There was also a rather huge box of Honeyduke's Chocolate that Clarke had bought for Lexa, and trying to figure out whether she should just secretly deliver it to Lexa's room on the ship, or eat it all herself.

Clarke held up her dress so she wouldn’t step on it as they traipsed down the spiral staircase, leaving Gryffindor tower and heading for the Great Hall where the Ball was being held. Bellamy wandered off the moment he saw the Durmstrang girl he’d had his eye on for months now, and Raven disappeared the moment Anya was in distance, leaving Clarke and Octavia alone and facing down the door.

“Let’s get this over with,” sighed Clarke, leading Octavia forward.

Just as they were about to go through the doorway, another couple walked into them. Clarke’s stomach dropped right down to her toes as she realized who it was.

Lexa.

Lexa in a fucking dress.

Fuck.

“H—hey,” stammered Clarke, face warming just being in such close proximity to Lexa. She cleared her throat, smoothing her expression. "Happy Christmas.”

Lexa looked absolutely gorgeous in a flowing red dress that hugged her every curve. Her hair was up in a smooth, sleek bun, and her face looked particularly pristine without any war paint but winged liner instead, that seemed to make the green of her eyes pop out even more. Clarke gave an audible swallow.

Lexa’s eyes widened fractionally upon settling on Clarke, before she quickly wiped her face clean and devoid of anything other than the usual indifference.

“Hello,” she politely greeted them. "Happy Christmas to you too."

“Happy fuckin' Christmas indeed. Jesus, you clean up nice,” complimented Octavia, gesturing toward the entire length of Lexa’s body. Clarke wanted to elbow her, but it would be too obvious.
Fuck. Her brain felt like a scrambled egg in the wake of Lexa’s presence. What was it about Lexa that reduced her to nothing more than babbling nonsense? Alihotsy Draught nothing. It was all Lexa, it had always been all Lexa.

Clarke glanced around and realized Lexa was alone. There was only Lincoln nearby, presumably here to speak to Octavia. “Did you—are you alone?” The Champions were supposed to bring dates, so Clarke was confused.

“Lincoln is my date,” said Lexa stiffly.

Clarke’s heart sank a little. She knew Lexa and Lincoln clearly weren’t a couple, but still, something about it just…hurt. It most likely had to do with the way Lexa’s gaze dropped as she spoke, staring intently at the floor instead.

“Oh. Um. Octavia is mine.” She gestured toward Octavia and didn’t miss the way Lexa’s eyes flashed up to focus shrewdly on her for a split second before latching onto Clarke’s gaze.

“Have fun,” she said carefully, before giving a small nod to Lincoln signaling him to follow her. He gave a sad little wave to Octavia before following Lexa through the door.

Clarke stared after them, hating the way she felt like she was burning on the inside.

“Well, that was awkward,” burst out Octavia, laughing. “You couldn’t have cut that tension with a severing charm.”

Clarke sighed. “She hates me. I told you.”

“I can see that. Jesus, how bad a kisser are you, Griff?”

Normally Clarke would glare at her, but Lexa’s frostiness still lingered in the air, so she just remained quiet instead. Octavia stepped forward, placing a hand on her forearm.

“Hey, I’m kidding. She definitely doesn’t hate you, Clarke, you can see that in her eyes. I think it’s the opposite that’s the problem, actually.”

Clarke pulled her bottom lip into her mouth, chewed on it for a moment, contemplating.

“You think so?”

Octavia nodded, the look of certainty on her face almost calmly arrogant. “Uh, yes. I think she likes you, and that kiss made things a whole lot worse because it put that fact right in her face. Lincoln’s told me about her, she likes to keep things in and pretend she isn’t affected by emotions and shit like us mere mortals. But she’s still only human.”

“I know,” said Clarke dully. And she did know. She had learned as much and more about Lexa in the months spent consumed in one another’s thoughts and memories in the Room of Requirement. She knew Lexa—maybe not as well as she would like, but to some extent, she did know her.

“If she’s so freaked about feelings, but you two have the hots for each other, there is an alternative solution, you know.” When Clarke finally looked up at her, Octavia said with a smirk, “You could just be fuck buddies. By that insufferable tension that nearly just killed me, I’m sure she’d be up for it too. No strings attached, just sex.”

The thought of having that sort of relationship with Lexa created a maelstrom of emotions within Clarke, because while she was absolutely pleased with the idea of being with Lexa in that
way (God, it had been all she could think about since that damn kiss), there was something missing, something that made her heart hurt with every irregular beat.

She shook her head, pushing it out of her mind, and hooked her arm around Octavia’s.

“Come on, O. We’d better go in.”

The Yule Ball had already begun in full swing, despite having only officially been started for less than ten minutes now. Lexa and Lincoln, Cage and his date were congregated near the front of the room next to the table where the judges sat, so Clarke and Octavia headed there, Clarke’s heart sinking in anticipation of what was about to happen. Dancing was one thing, she had no problem with that. Dancing around Lexa, who was dancing with another partner…that sucked.

Kane was wearing a black tux, while Dante looked striking in a traditional white suit and tie. Diana Sydney was wearing a dress made out of some very expensive silk-looking product, while Jamie Potter wore a very professional-looking black dress suit, the skirt showing off long, curvy legs. Evie and Gideon Potter, who stood nearby with the camera and Quick-Quotes Quill at the ready, were also dressed the part. Gideon wore a suit while Evie was garbed in sheer rosy dress that ended far shorter than Jamie’s skirt.

Clarke remembered Raven talking about how attractive the Potter sisters were and pressed her lips together to contain her smile over how excited Raven would be once she spotted them.

“Hello, hello,” Kane greeted them enthusiastically. “Ready to start it off?”

As always, Cage looked supremely smug as he offered a hand to his partner, a pretty girl Clarke was fairly certain was named Lorelei.

The Champions filed out onto the dance floor. Clarke walked in the middle, directly behind Lexa and Lincoln. The view of Lexa in that gorgeous red dress that was so tight her ass looked absolutely amazing (honestly she wanted her hands on it)…Clarke gripped Octavia’s hand tighter for support, as though it tethered her to the ground before her thoughts could send her floating away into the rafters. Octavia squeezed, as though in wordless support.

In the center of the dance floor, the Champions turned and arranged themselves into the proper positions, holding them as they waited for the music to start. Once it did, they swept across the floor, every eye in the Hall on them as they danced. As they twirled in time with the swell of the music, Clarke made eye contact with Lexa; it seared through her body like lightning, and for a moment she was frozen. Lexa seemed the same, until Lincoln pulled her into another turn.

Octavia, meanwhile, yanked Clarke back to earth.

“You’re going to have a heart attack by the end of the night if you keep staring at her like that,” whispered Octavia; Clarke wrenched her gaze from Lexa and, when seeing the smirk on Octavia’s face, deliberately stepped on her foot as they pivoted.

“Ouch! Shithead.” Octavia’s eyes watered with pain.

“Sorry,” said Clarke grudgingly; she may have done it a little harder than intended.

“I kinda deserved it, so whatever.” Octavia still smiled reassuringly at Clarke as they twirled and spun, and for a moment, as her friend made her laugh, Clarke forgot the heaviness in her heart.

Still, by the time other couples swept onto the dance floor and the song shifted into another, Clarke was relieved to head off the floor. She and Octavia headed straight for the table where a large
bowl of punch sat, along with platters of various snack foods such as dragonwheels, sausage rolls, and pork pies.

“Urgh, this sucks,” said Octavia, making a face at the cup of red liquid she’d just tasted. “It’s like they poured shitty Hawaiian punch in. Jasper and Monty need to spike this already.”

Clarke had never tasted Hawaiian punch, and wondered when Octavia had, as she was fairly certain Octavia had never visited America before. Before she could ask, Monty and Miller sidled up to them.

“Hey guys. Jasper should be doing his thing soon,” said Monty, fixing himself and Miller a cup of punch. “He just snuck my moonshine in, but he’s caught up talking to Maya.”

Octavia rolled her eyes, tossing her full cup into the trash. “I’ll get him.”

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Jasper stood out of the crowd and farthest from the stage, clutching two plastic cups of punch in his hands. He tried his best to appear patient and cool, but couldn’t help shifting his weight, antsy as he awaited Maya’s return from the powder room. He really liked this girl, and was fervently praying he didn’t screw it up.

He felt his heart skip when he spotted her making her way around a group of dancing Hufflepuffs toward him.

“Hey, I got you some punch.”

Maya took the cup he offered her, murmuring thanks.

“Monty’s famous moonshine,” he said, hating the nervous tremor in his voice. “Try not to down it all at once, it—it kinda stings going down.” He should know, he’d already had a few cups just working up the courage to ask her to dance.

Maya smiled at Jasper over the rim of the cup as she brought it to her lips. She coughed as the punch went burning down her throat.

“Oh Merlin, I—um, wow. You really—you really spiked it, didn’t you?” she managed to say between coughs and giggles.

Jasper gave her a lopsided grin, already tipsy. He raised his cup in mock salute.

“To your good health, m’lady.” He immediately blushed. He really didn’t have any game.

But Maya giggled again, shaking her head, and the smile she gave him spread warmth through his chest.

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“Ginevra Lillian Potter? That’s your, that’s like your actual name? Really?” Raven snorted into the bottle she’d snuck into the ball before hiccuping. “That’s almost as bad as Albus Severus.”

“Raven!” admonished Clarke, glancing at Evie, but Evie seemed, if anything, faintly amused.

“One of my ancestors was called Fleamont. Trust me, terrible names have been a thing in my family for quite some time.” She stood with a content smile, pushing the stool back from the bar. She stretched her arms above her head, yawned before she lifted her camera and said, “Well, I guess I better get back to work. Nice talking to you guys.”

“You too,” said Clarke politely, waiting for Evie to walk around the corner and out of sight before she rounded on Raven. She lightly whacked the back of her hand on Raven’s shoulders.

“Ow! What?”

“That’s like your actual name? Really?” mimicked Clarke. “That was so rude, Raven!”

Raven shrugged, her expression moody. “It’s a terrible name.”

“You don’t have to say that out loud, though!”

She shrugged again, taking another swig of the firewhisky.

“Ugh. Give me that,” said Clarke in disgust, snatching the bottle. She fixed it to her lips and drank the remainder of it before Raven could wrestle it back. Raven watched her finish it off with a withering stare.

“That was counterproductive,” she said, smirking slightly as Clarke swayed where she stood.

“Whatever. Just stay out of trouble,” warned Clarke, lurching away.

“Back at you, Princess!” called Raven; Clarke ignored her, heading for the door.

She so didn’t want to be here. It was bad enough having to attend a dance chaperoned by the professors, even if they were abysmal at keeping out the alcohol (though Clarke supposed they had Raven to thank for bribing Nygel with vials of magicae viriditas she won off Murphy in a game of Wizard Cards). Her required presence here was made absolutely unbearable by the fact that she seemed to see Lexa everywhere she went—swimming through throngs of dancing teenagers, there was Lexa, off to the side standing with her usual Durmstrang cronies, nursing a cup of punch that she seemed to never do more than sip considering it was full every time Clarke spotted her. More than the awkward eye contact, Clarke hated the way her heart beat faster when she saw her—and the way her lips seemed to tingle, as though seeking a repeat performance of what happened in that tent two months ago.

“Hey Clarke. Still sulking?”

Clarke turned to glower at Octavia, who she had the misfortune to walk past at the same time she spotted Lexa across the dance floor absorbed in conversation with Artigas and Emori.

Lincoln, who sat in the stool beside Octavia and was still taller than she was standing, laughed at Clarke’s expression. “Don’t worry, Lexa’s been sulking too.”

Clarke’s eyes flashed onto Octavia, who grimaced slightly. “You told him?”
“Um…yeah?”

Clarke was seething, but she held it under control—partly because she was already tipsy and she didn’t want to fight with Octavia, but mostly because there was another secret Octavia had kept to herself, which Clarke was grateful for.

“You suck,” she said flatly, half-playfully nudging Octavia’s shoulder with a fist as she continued on her way.

“Sorry!” Octavia chuckled.

Clarke mostly wandered around for the majority of the next two hours. The Ball was supposed to last from eight to midnight, and she wondered how early was too early to leave. She would have already left, if she wasn’t the Champion, and she knew Gideon Potter was skulking around taking photos of the Champions enjoying the party which, sucks for him, Clarke must be the most boring photo subject ever because so far she had only danced twice: once at the very start of the dance, and then once in a mad frenzy during a fast song with all of her friends (most specifically Raven, who kept lifting her bad leg and thrusting it about as though stuck in a hilariously frantic perpetual state of The Hokey Pokey). At a quarter past ten, she decided to head out for fresh air at least, and wandered out into the entrance hall, taking a seat on the steps adjacent to the Great Hall so she could see in and watch the dancers.

She mostly watched people for the next half hour. She watched Evie Potter dancing with her boyfriend Frankie Longbottom, who had the biggest, sweetest dopey smile, as though he couldn’t believe Evie was here with him. She watched Dante twirl around with Professor Cartwig, and Kane dancing with his mother Professor Vera, who wore an adorable towering purple witch’s hat adorned with glowing stars. She watched Raven and Anya, who had sat together at the bars for the past hour and a half in some kind of snarky drinking contest. And most of all, she watched out for glimpses of Lexa, occasionally walking past with that same cup of punch in her hand and the typical stoic expression on her face.

Clarke stomach twisted unpleasantly and she sighed, tearing her gaze away from the Great Hall, where she’d just watched Lexa disappear into the throng of people. She buried her face in her hands, rubbing at her temples.

This was a disaster. She couldn’t stop thinking about Lexa. It had been two months, they’d hardly spoken, and she still missed her so much. She missed their time in the Room of Requirement. She missed Lexa’s dry, sarcastic sense of humor. She missed the way the corners of her lips would tilt up before the rest followed. She missed the expressive light in her eyes, how her entire face would always be so indifferent but all her emotions were in her eyes. She missed the smell of her, like fire smoke and something earthy and flowery, and for most of the time she had known her now, like the sweet chocolate they were constantly sharing. She just missed her friend, and she hated that their entire friendship had been ruined by that one single kiss. The one single kiss that also seemed to ruin Clarke’s life, if her inability to think of literally anything else was of any indication.

At the thought of those soft, warm lips pressed to hers, Clarke shivered. Her head was already so fuzzy from the alcohol, she shouldn’t be thinking about it, but she couldn’t help it. The warmth spread through her body, tingling at her core, as she remembered the steady rhythm of Lexa’s lips moving against hers. Now that it had already happened and fucked everything up, she couldn’t help wishing she could have done it a little differently, since it had been their first, last, and only kiss. Like tongue. She would have used tongue for sure. She wished she could have felt Lexa’s tongue—and in more places than just her mouth.

See, and that was why your friendship is ruined, thought Clarke. Thinking things like that.
Those are not things a normal friend thinks.

Granted, normal friends didn’t kiss each other, but still.

She pulled her face out of her hands and looked up, startled, when she felt a weight settle down beside her on the step. Her mouth dropped open a little when she realized Lexa was sitting beside her. She hadn’t even heard anyone approach.

“Lexa?” she said, shocked.

Lexa did not look at her; she stared down at the full cup of punch she nursed in her hands. Her lips were stained red from it, and her face was a little flushed.

“Hello Clarke,” said Lexa quietly, still not looking at her as she brought the cup to her lips and sipped.

Clarke snapped her gaze up from Lexa’s lips, her face warming. This was the first time she’d been alone with Lexa since the corridor over a month ago.

“Hey,” she said finally, not sure what else to say. There were plenty of things she’d like to say.

“I miss you.”

“I’m sorry I kissed you. Actually I’m not, it was the best fucking thing I’ve ever done, and I’d like to kiss you again, but I’m sorry I ruined our friendship.”

“You look beautiful tonight—well, you always look beautiful, but you look extra beautiful right now?”

“I know I’m a disaster but can we please be friends again?”

Are you enjoying the party?” asked Lexa carefully, eyes still on the punch.

“No,” said Clarke truthfully. “Are you?”

Lexa was silent for a moment, before slowly shaking her head. “No,” she sighed. She finally lifted her head; Clarke’s heart started thumping as their eyes met. “I keep looking for you.”

“Wh—why?”

Lexa stared at her for a moment, lip moving as though she was chewing on the inside of it. “I miss you. I have ruined our friendship and I’m sorry but I miss you.”

Clarke blinked, shocked again. She realized that Lexa had not been carrying the same cup of punch around, but had in fact been refilling and refilling it. Lexa was well on her way to becoming drunk. Clarke had sobered up since she’d been sitting out in the hall for a time, but she was still not completely sober. Lexa was sitting so close to her on the steps that their hips were touching, and she looked so gorgeous, and there was a drop of punch glistening on the plump bottom lip Clarke remembered felt like a soft pillow beneath her mouth, and this was not a smart situation to be in.

“Lexa…I think you’ve been drinking a little too much,” said Clarke gently, reaching to take the cup. To her surprise, Lexa let her take it. Clarke carefully set it down a couple steps above them, where they couldn’t easily knock it over.

“I’m not drunk,” Lexa assured her, and to her credit, there was no waver or anything else to
her voice. “I’m just sad.” Her eyes were huge, expressive, and full of somberness, so, yeah. She was sad. So was Clarke.

“I miss you too. And you didn’t screw up our friendship, I did.”

Lexa shook her head. “I am the one who kissed you. I made the move. I—I was caught up in the moment.” She leaned forward a little; Clarke’s breath hitched, but all Lexa was doing was maintaining eye contact to emphasize her sincerity as she said, “I am truly sorry. I didn’t—I want to be friends with you. I miss you. I miss spending time with you. I’m sorry.”

“Stop saying sorry. You didn’t do anything I didn’t want you to do.”

Lexa considered her for a moment, gaze disconcertingly steady for someone half-drunk. “You did want to kiss me?” she eventually prompted.

Clarke gave her an incredulous look. “Are you kidding me? Yes, I wanted to kiss you.”

“Why?”

Why? Clarke stared at her in disbelief. There was nothing but sincere puzzlement in her eyes. She honestly didn’t know.

How did she not know?

“I—“

They both stiffened when someone pointedly cleared their throat. They turned to see Anya and Raven standing at the foot of the staircase, identical drunken smirks on their faces.

“Well hello lovebirds,” cooed Anya, a wicked delight lighting up her eyes.

Raven looked smug as she appraised the two of them. “I would say how are you enjoying the party, but clearly you’re enjoying some alone time instead.”

“Fuck off,” groaned Clarke, rubbing her temples again. She had such a headache, and she was now 99% sure Raven Reyes could be attributed to it, just because it was Raven.

“That’s the plan,” sniggered Raven.

“What?” frowned Clarke, who didn’t hear exactly what she said.

“Nothing,” said Anya dryly. “Go enjoy the party. This only happens once in your life and you’re both Champions, so go. Enjoy.” She planted one hand on her hip and pointed the other toward the Great Hall.

Clarke and Lexa exchanged a look before sighing. It was probably safer in there surrounded by people than out here alone, anyway, where they could just make more mistakes.

As they stood up, Clarke snatched the cup of spiked punch from the step and took a long drink before handing it to an expectant Lexa, who promptly tipped the rest of it back down her throat before they started down the staircase. She tossed the empty cup at Anya, who batted it away and let it clatter to the floor.

Clarke and Lexa headed straight for the punch bowl. After they filled their cups, they faced the dance floor, watching Miller and Monty dance, and watching Bellamy try and fail to ask a pretty Durmstrang girl (Echo, Clarke thought her name was) to dance.
“Can we still be friends?” muttered Lexa, so quietly Clarke almost did not catch it.

She turned to face her, hating the way Lexa refused to make eye contact.

“Do you want to be?” wondered Clarke, frowning.

Finally, Lexa met her gaze. She looked wounded, hurt. It made Clarke’s heart feel as though it were being squeezed in a fist. “Yes. I just don’t know if we should be.” If we can be.

“I think we can handle it,” said Clarke, shrugging. “We were just caught in the moment anyway, right? It didn’t…mean anything.” Lie, lie, lie. Somehow the alcohol was making it easier to lie; wasn’t it supposed to make it easier to be truthful?

Lexa nodded in agreement, though her eyes seemed dimmer than ever. “Of course.” She suddenly smiled brightly, which looked terribly wrong on stoic, drunk Lexa, and stuck a hand out for Clarke to shake. “Friends,” she said.

Clarke took her hand, shook it. “Friends,” she echoed.

They were still clutching hands. They should have let go now. Clarke’s cheeks were burning. Lexa moved forward, pressing her lips to Clarke’s cheek (if it was closer to the corner of Clarke’s mouth, she certainly didn’t say anything). “Friends kiss each other’s cheeks.”

Clarke smiled; she couldn’t resist, so she said, “Do you kiss Anya’s cheeks?” because she was pretty sure Anya would actually cut someone’s head off if they tried to kiss her cheek.

Lexa’s returning smile was drunk and mischievous. “She wishes.”

Clarke laughed, but decided to drop it. Instead she squeezed Lexa’s hand she was still holding, and started to tug her out to the dance floor, cup of spiked punch still held high in her other hand. “Friends dance together, too,” she said, her voice a little husky, which was ridiculous, but Lexa’s eyes were wide and her smile was too, and Clarke was just happy they were communicating again, and maybe their friendship wasn’t totally ruined after all.

* * *

Charms was Evie’s favorite class. If she could, she’d take it all day, every day.

And if she could, she’d never take a stupid Potions class again.

Today they were working on Confusion Concoctions, which was living up to its name. Evie was beyond confused—and even more so when some girl she had definitely never seen before walked right into the classroom. Professor Nygel spoke in hushed voices with her before pointing toward the table Evie and her friends were gathered around. While everyone else was in groups of four, there had been an uneven number so Evie was only with two of her friends, which was annoying since she was bad enough at Potions without missing the fourth member. So although Evie was even more confused by the presence of someone she’d definitely never seen around Hogwarts before, she was cheered slightly that there was a chance it wouldn’t just be Jackson doing all the work for this lesson.
“Hi,” Evie said cheerily as the girl neared them. To her surprise, the girl did not respond save for a scowl.

Evie’s brows moved down into a frown. “Who are you?”

The girl lifted a brow, a lofty arrogance exuding from her as she dropped her bag unceremoniously on the floor and plopped down in the empty seat beside Evie. She ran a hand through her dark hair and said, “Luna. Rivers. Luna Rivers. What’s it to you?”

Evie exchanged a glance with Jackson and Megan before settling a disdainful gaze on the new girl. With pointed politeness as though hoping to share some manners with the girl, Evie said, “…Pleasure. I’m Evie Potter. Where are you from? I’ve never seen you at Hogwarts before.”

“That’s because I haven’t been in Hogwarts,” the girl, Luna, said with boredom etched into every octave of her voice. She absently scratched her neck as she shifted tawny eyes over the room, observing the students standing over their cauldrons. “I’m a transfer from Durmstrang.”

“Durmstrang?” said Evie in surprise. She had never known of students transferring wizarding schools, and judging by Jackson and Megan’s expressions, nor had they. “Why did you come here?”

“You sure do ask a lot of questions, don’t you?” deadpanned Luna, and something about her gaze settling onto Evie made her cheeks grow warm. Luna was very pretty—all hard angles and smooth dark skin. “My mum was offered a job at the ministry, so we moved here. They wanted me closer. Satisfied?”

Evie’s frown didn’t budge. “But that’s what the trains are for, and Apparition and Floo Powder. People don’t just switch schools.”

“Well I did. Why are you freaking out about it?”

“I—I’m not!” spluttered Evie, blushing furiously. Her spine grew rigid at the sound of Jackson and Megan sniggering behind her. “I was just wondering—“

“Yeah, you’ve been up my ass since I walked in here—“

Evie’s eyes grew wide; they were only third-years, there was really no reason for that kind of language, especially in class.

“You’re being rude,” she said reproachfully, glancing at Professor Nygel.

Luna followed her gaze, noticing how uncomfortable she was. A wide grin unfurled on Luna’s face. “You scared to get in trouble?”

Evie’s expression hardened at once. “I was just asking you a question, Rivers. I was curious. You don’t have to be such an insufferable wanker.”

Luna’s eyes were as sharp as Evie’s voice now. “And you don’t have to be such a nosy twat, Potter.”

Evie’s eyes narrowed. In this moment, she decided she absolutely hated the new girl.

“Fuck you,” she hissed. She stiffened, eyes going wide, when Professor Nygel snapped out her name.
Moments later, Evie was set with detention (she’d never had detention), the new girl was smirking, and Evie was on fire with fury.

New mission in life: destroy the new girl.

“Hellooo. Earth to Evie.”

Evie snapped out of her reverie, startled. She looked at Frankie, who was looking at her in amusement.

“You okay there, love? I’ve been talking to you for a couple minutes now and you started zoning out.”

Evie’s blushed. She’d been thinking about the first time she met Luna when here was Frankie, trying to talk to her.

The longer they dated, the more she was convinced she was a terrible girlfriend.

“Yeah, sorry. Just thinking,” she muttered, quickly busying herself by turning to look in the mirror as she put in her earrings.

“About what?” asked Frankie, still smiling.

“The ball,” lied Evie. She didn’t know why she was lying. She hated liars. But she felt guilty about how often she thought about Luna. Not just for Frankie’s sake, but guilty because she knew she shouldn’t herself.

She was a terrible girlfriend.

Frankie came up behind her to help her clasp on her necklace. He paused after to lean down and brush a soft kiss over the back of her neck. Evie didn’t know if the resulting gooseflesh was because of the kiss or the guilt.

For fuck’s sake, she hadn’t even done anything with Luna, and she wasn’t going to do anything. It was just these thoughts, all the time—she was always in her fucking head. It had been like this since they were children. There was just something about Luna, whether she was pissing her off or making her laugh or fucking her until she blacked out—Luna had always consumed her in some way or another, and Evie had never been able to get enough of it.

That’s not what she needed, though. She needed someone like Frankie. Someone kind and sweet and patient, gentle and slow. Except Luna could be kind and sweet and patient, and gentle and slow too, depending on her mood. She was usually brash and impatient and rash and messy, which wasn’t good for Evie. The life they’d lived after school…it had been chaotic and pointless. They’d flitted from place to place, switched job after job, and nothing ever felt like home.

This life with Frankie—this could feel like home. She worked in the pub all day, he worked in his pub all day, and they could retire to a little cottage and drink tea by the fire. Nothing was wrong with that. It sounded perfect, Evie firmly told herself.

Like she usually did, Evie turned around and wrapped her arms around Frankie’s neck to draw him into a hard kiss. And like he usually did, Frankie eased back, nibbling softly until the kiss
was slow and gentle. It frustrated Evie. She told herself she shouldn’t be upset by it, should be pleased with it.

She told herself one day they will have been together long enough and would be comfortable enough in the relationship that she could tell him sometimes it’s okay to be rough, sometimes it’s good to be demanding and messy and claw at one another’s backs while they fucked hard enough it hurt to walk the next day.

One day, things would be great.

One day.

“Ready?” said Frankie warmly, smiling as he extended an arm.

She returned the smile and took his arm.

* "* /\_/\ * 

_Fuck._ That was Luna’s first thought, when she spied Evie across the dance floor.

She looked fucking phenomenal. She was wearing a dress that was short as hell, and with the high heels, her legs went on for days. Her hair was wound up in a shimmering updo, and her makeup was flawless. She was smiling and laughing and it made Luna’s heart swell.

_Fuck._ That was Luna’s second thought, when she blinked and seemed to finally register that the person Evie was smiling and laughing with was her boyfriend.

Frankie Fucking Longbottom, the clumsy oafish boy who had went to Hogwarts a few years above them. Evie was so out of his league, which Luna had to give him credit for because judging by the constant dopey expression as though he couldn’t believe his luck, he clearly knew that.

Luna swallowed away the bitter taste in her mouth and went to go get a cup of punch. She promptly chucked it away after the first sip when she realized these damn kids had spiked it, and there was no way in hell Luna was planning on getting inebriated around Evie (especially around an Evie in a sexy short dress because who knows what Luna could blurt out and say? I love you? Fuck that).

Luna instead wandered the party, chatting idly with a few people. She reminisced with Indra over that time she was twelve and accidentally cast a jelly-leg hex on herself during a DADA class, she playfully insulted Murphy about his wrinkled suit, she congratulated the Durmstrang Champion over her performance in the First Task. She meandered away almost an hour doing everything in her power to avoid Evie, until Frankie Fucking Longbottom excitedly waved her over to where he sat nursing two bottles of butterbeer at an empty table. Luna reluctantly made her way over to him, weaving her way through dancing students.

“Hey Luna, fancy seeing you here,” he said warmly, offering her an unopened butterbeer. She took it, hesitating before opening it. “This one’s Evie’s,” he said, guessing the cause of her hesitation and lifting the other bottle. “You can have mine. I own a pub, so I’ve had enough of butterbeer to last me a lifetime,” he joked.

Luna nodded awkwardly, bringing the bottle to her lips and taking a swig. “Ah, and where
“Bathroom,” supplied Frankie. “Had to powder her nose, or whatever it is you girls do in there.”

Memories of all the things Luna and Evie had done in a bathroom surfaced, and Luna’s cheeks grew red. She hastily took another gulp from the bottle.

“So what are your plans after the tournament?” asked Frankie, gesturing for Luna to take a seat in the chair beside him. Her guilt spurred her to do so, which was impressive because Luna rarely ever listened to her guilty conscious.

“I have a job in Africa, actually,” she admitted. “The Uagadou School of Magic is creating a new salt-water lake, and I’m supposed to transport some kelpies and grindylows for them.”

He looked impressed. “I’ve always wanted to see another Wizarding school. Even at Hogwarts, I wondered what the other schools were like. Wish we would have gotten a chance at the Triwizard Tournament,” he said wistfully, looking around at the mix of Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and Beauxbatons students all mingling.

“Would you have entered yourself?” asked Luna curiously; Frankie seemed far from the competitive type.

He shrugged. “Probably not. It would have made me a nervous wreck, to be honest. You would have,” he added, eyes twinkling.

Luna couldn’t help but to smile. “Yeah, but for the opposite reasons. I wouldn’t have thought about it at all, just dived right in without considering the consequences. I’ve gotten better over the years, but I can still be a little reckless sometimes. I’m working on it.” She took another sip of butterbeer.

“I’m trying to be more reckless,” mused Frankie. “I’m afraid I’m somewhat predictable sometimes. It’s a wonder Evie’s happy with me at all, you’d think I bore her. Especially after the life of adventure she’s had. Traveling around with her parents, and then traveling with you.”

Luna tilted her head slightly, listening. She was curious; she wouldn’t have thought Evie would tell Frankie about their relationship.

Frankie’s brow furrowed and he glanced around before leaning forward. “Tell me something, Luna.”

Luna leaned forward too. “Yes?”

“How is it that you two were such good friends—” Luna’s heart sank. “—that you used to travel the world together for a good year, and then just stop talking?”

Luna withdrew, reclining back in the chair, frowning. “We, um. Just went out separate ways. Drifted apart, I guess. It happens,” she said a little defensively.

“But you were best friends,” persisted Frankie. “I guess I’m just wondering why there’s so much tension between you. It’s almost like you hate each other. I guess I was just curious as to why that is. Maybe it could be fixed.” Frankie gave a hopeful smile. “Evie works a lot, and then when she isn’t working, she’s with me. Guess I just thought she could use another friend.”

Luna cleared her throat, horrendously uncomfortable as she avoided Frankie’s gaze. She
hated the bitter disappointed feeling in her gut, and hated even more the resentment that rose at Evie in response. Of course Evie wouldn’t tell anyone about their relationship. Of course she would play it off as though they’d just been friends. What the fuck else had she been expecting?

At the sudden and much too close sound of Evie’s laughter, Evie had clearly came back and hadn’t noticed Luna while distracted speaking to someone else, Luna immediately stood up so quickly the chair scraped the floor as it pushed back. Frankie looked alarmed, but Luna was desperate to leave before she ran into Evie. She turned and began hurrying away; as a few students moved out of her path, to her horror, another person came careening in—and it was Evie.

They collided with a sick smack; Evie gave a strangled yelp that bit off into a gasp as Luna seized her waist and twisted in an effort to avoid crushing Evie as they both crashed to the floor, Evie landing on her rather than the other way around. Luna groaned as stars exploded in her vision.

“You clumsy asshole,” wheezed Evie.

“Accident,” managed Luna, the realization slowly inkling into her that Evie was lying on top of her, pressed against her, a leg trapped between hers. Her entire body warmed as though a furnace had been turned on; her stomach clenched, tightened, and she desperately hoped her olive skin hid her furious blush.

Breathless and beyond irritated, Evie pushed herself up onto her elbows, blowing a tuft of fallen hair out of her eyes so she could glare down at Luna—and she instantly froze as their eyes met. *Fuck.* Because now Evie was as painfully aware of their positions as Luna was.

Because now they were both remembering how many times they’d been in this exact same position.

Because she needed that muggle life alert shit; she’d fallen and she couldn’t (didn’t want to) get up.

Because *holy* fucking shit, all she wanted to do was lean forward and kiss Evie. That was what she wanted more than anything she’d ever wanted before—she hadn’t kissed Evie in almost seven years, and she would give *anything* to do it again.

Evie’s pupils were blown and her lids seemed heavy. Her eyes darted down, so quickly Luna could have imagined it, but she knew when Evie slowly licked her lips, teeth scraping across her bottom lip by scarcely a breadth, enough that she probably didn’t even realize she’d done it, but it was enough that Luna knew. She knew exactly how Evie was feeling by those tells. In the past, she’d always known what followed those tells.

Heat flooded through her, pooling in her core, her stomach, her chest. They had only been on the floor for a few seconds, but Luna had already lost it—her mind felt lost, gone, floating away somewhere in the hazy clouds. She was two beats away from just going for a kiss regardless of sensibility—Evie wanted it, she wanted it, what was there to lose?

“Are you guys alright?”

Frankie’s voice jarred them both. When he took their arms and pulled both of them to their feet, it effectively pulled them back to reality as well.

Except it didn’t, not really, because though Luna was standing now (swaying really; that was a hard fall), she still couldn’t tear her eyes away from Evie, nor could Evie seem to break eye contact with her. There were students all around them, staring because of the clumsy fall, and one of the
professors was asking if they were okay, but it was all just tinny background noise in Luna’s ears.

Almost forty minutes later, when Evie had finally shaken off Frankie and found Luna near the punch bowl and silently followed her out of the Great Hall and through the Entrance Hall and down into the dungeons to an old Potions classroom where they knew they wouldn’t be interrupted, and Luna turned back to ask if Evie was sure, and Evie just leaned forward in answer, she could suddenly see everything with startling clarity.

When their lips touched, it felt like coming home.

*・°/✧/°・*

Lexa was giggling, and Clarke was probably having heart palpitations. Drunk Lexa was adorable, and drunk Clarke was star struck.

Drunk Lexa and drunk Clarke were also staring at one another far too often to be considered friendly, so when they were on the dance floor shimmying to a ridiculous Dino Warbeck song and Clarke followed her instincts and leaned forward to press her lips to Lexa’s cheeks, she wondered why she wasn’t surprised at where they were and what they were doing. They had kissed two months ago but it felt like yesterday, and Clarke wanted to do it again today, and tomorrow, and the next day—

“You can do it too you know,” she whispered to Lexa, who was staring at her with wide eyes. They were both just standing still in the middle of the dance floor, with students around them jumping and dancing wildly. Clarke kissed Lexa’s cheek again, ignoring the way Lexa licked her lips (or not ignoring it at all and just staring at her lips. “Kiss me. That’s your permission.”

Lexa licked her lips again. “As long as you’re clear about it, okay.” She leaned forward too, kissing Clarke’s cheeks and lingering.

“Hey losers, your PDA is making me sick. Get a room!” shouted Octavia over the music, grinning at Clarke and Lexa’s stricken expressions.

Clarke stumbled forward, sober enough to be annoyed as she whispered harshly to Octavia, “We were kissing cheeks!”


Lexa said something but Clarke couldn’t hear her over the music. “What?” Lexa said it again and Clarke still couldn’t hear her, so she grabbed her wrist. “I can’t hear you,” she yelled, tugging Lexa toward the considerably quieter and mostly deserted Entrance Hall. There were only two people in there, which looked like Harper and some guy from Beauxbatons. Clarke pointedly cleared her throat; Harper and the guy jumped and gave sheepish smiles before hurrying away back into the Great Hall.

“What did you say?” Clarke finally said, turning to face Lexa.
Lexa’s face was flushed and her eyes were bright and she looked so beautiful Clarke’s heart trembled just looking at her.

“I asked you what Octavia said.”

“Oh.” Clarke awkwardly ran a hand through her hair, which was a mess after dancing. “Nothing.”


“Um. She told me to get game because you were kissing my cheek when I’d rather you kiss me somewhere else.” Clarke heard how it sounded the same time Lexa did; both of them blushed. Clarke quickly added, “My mouth.”

She heard a snigger; fucking Murphy was lurking near the doorway of the Great Hall and had overheard them.

“Fuck off, Murphy,” muttered Clarke, grabbing Lexa’s hand again and pulling her around the staircase to afford them some more privacy. Standing in the shadows beneath the stairs, Clarke gazed at Lexa and felt her courage rise.

“Do you really want to know why I wanted you to, Lexa?” she asked, tilting her head.

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. “I’m probably drunk.”

“I’m not,” said Clarke, taking a step forward. “I just want to kiss you. If you didn’t catch it before, I’m very attracted to you,” she added honestly. “I think you’re beautiful.”

Lexa blushed, her hands tucking behind her back as she backed herself against the stairwell. “Um. Clarke…”

“Lexa…” Clarke mimicked, grinning widely when Lexa rolled her eyes.

“Mockery is not the product of a strong mind.”

Clarke laughed, a laugh perhaps too loud and boisterous for lingering in the quiet of the shadows as they were, but she couldn’t help it. It had been an amazing night filled with Lexa, Lexa, Lexa—Lexa was amazing, Lexa was wise and kind and strong and gorgeous, and her lips were so soft, and Clarke remembered how they melted beneath hers, how when they kissed, they seemed to sink into each other, and Clarke wanted to experience that again more than anything.

“I want to kiss you,” she repeated seriously. Lexa went quiet, just staring up at her with wide, glassy eyes, something almost akin to fear in them. Clarke’s brow furrowed in concern as she reached out, brushing a loose spiral of chestnut hair behind one of Lexa’s cute, tiny ears. “Why do you look scared?” she asked in a hushed voice. Then, feeling suffocated in air that was suddenly much too tense, much too important, she added jokingly, “I don’t bite, unless you want me to.”

Lexa didn’t crack a smile. She just looked at Clarke with that fearful gaze, her throat bobbing and jaw tensing as she swallowed. Clarke’s fingertips drifted from Lexa’s hair to her face; she smoothed them over her warm forehead, over sculpted cheekbones. She trailed her thumb across Lexa’s lips and her heart jumped in her chest up into her throat. She felt as though she could choke on it. Lexa was wise. Lexa was kind. Lexa was hard working and ambitious and talented and strong and funny and caring and beautiful and Lexa was just everything and Clarke didn’t know how to handle that, how to handle this feeling inside her.
“Are you afraid of me?” she whispered, her heart sinking as she pressed the pad of a finger into the heavy line that had appeared between Lexa’s brows when Clarke stroked her lips. Lexa’s eyes were closed as Clarke caressed, but when she spoke, Lexa opened them. They were so big and glossy and green; Clarke could see her reflection in them, frowning back at Lexa just as fearfully.

“Yes,” Lexa said breathlessly. Her lower lip almost seemed to tremble beneath Clarke’s thumb, but she couldn’t be sure—she pressed it into Lexa’s lip more firmly, and almost like an instinctual response, Lexa kissed her thumb. They both stiffened, eyes flicking up to meet. Lexa looked more scared than ever. Clarke felt like maybe she should go, so she dropped her hand, but she couldn’t resist discovering the reason why Lexa was scared of her. What had she done to make her feel that way? Regret and shame curdled within Clarke’s gut.


Clarke should notice, probably, that Lexa’s eyes glanced down at her lips as she spoke, but all she could think about was the disappointment coursing through every fiber of her being, disappointment because somewhere along the way she had messed up with Lexa, Lexa who was so special.

Lexa swallowed again. Hesitantly, she reached out—reached to take Clarke’s hand in hers, to entwine their fingers. Clarke’s heart was thrumming in her chest. Wordlessly, Lexa tugged Clarke forward, bringing her close so their bodies were flush together. Then she was inclining her head, leaning down—

But Clarke had to know. “Why are you scared of me?” she persisted, her voice less than a whisper.

Lexa paused, her eyes half-lidded and trained on Clarke’s lips, and Clarke realized it wasn’t just because she’d been talking. Her heart thumped erratically and she swallowed, her mouth suddenly dry in anticipation.

“I’m—I’m scared of how you make me feel,” Lexa admitted, soft and hushed. “You…” She reached up with her free hand, slipping her fingers into the tangles of golden hair. “I can’t…stop thinking about you. All the time. I don’t know what…” Lexa took a deep breath, chest expanding, breasts pushing against Clarke’s, and a low ache tugged deep in Clarke’s belly, causing her to grip Lexa’s hand tightly in response. “I want to kiss you,” she said, echoing Clarke’s earlier words. “Because I’m attracted to you. Because I think you’re beautiful. Because you are…incredible…Clarke,” Lexa’s voice had dropped to such a whisper Clarke could barely catch her words, but she caught the way Lexa was dipping her head, their noses brushing— “I can’t get you out of my head, and all I want is—”

Clarke didn’t let her finish, couldn’t, because Lexa’s lips were grazing against hers now and it took a will that even Clarke didn’t have to stop herself from leaning forward, pressing their mouths together. Lexa’s words were cut off by the soft noise she made as Clarke immediately parted her lips so she could close them over Lexa’s plump, bow-shaped upper lip. Lexa’s hand in Clarke’s hair dropped to cup the back of her neck and bring her even closer, drinking Clarke in with an almost avaricious desperation.

Clarke’s sigh was caught in her throat as she urged forward slightly again, deepening the kiss. Lexa’s lips parted beneath hers without warning, granting Clarke entrance, and she felt a shiver wrack her entire body as tongue met tongue. Lexa tasted sweet like the punch, intense like the dragonwheels. She kissed Clarke slowly and deeply, every sweep of her tongue, every gentle kiss as purposeful and deliberate as the way she had rubbed her thumb across the back of Clarke’s knuckles in slow circles.
Clarke felt heady, as though she was drinking in Lexa and perhaps now she was drunk, because she certainly felt like it. She tilted her head up with a tender swerve, kick-starting the pace of the kiss, and Lexa released her hand to seize at her forearm, using it to tug Clarke forward, bringing them impossibly closer.

Clarke wrapped one arm around Lexa and used the other now-free hand to trail up Lexa’s side, starting from her waist. Lexa shuddered in her arms as Clarke’s thumb brushed along the side of her breast. Lexa used her free hand to echo Clarke’s movements, but when she reached Clarke’s breast, she didn’t just graze across it. She cupped it, squeezed before massaging, her fingers drifting over Clarke’s nipple briefly enough that it could have been an accident, but when Clarke’s breath caught in a keening moan, Lexa did the same again.

*Please, more,* she wanted to beg, but there was no room for words when Lexa was sucking her bottom lip into her mouth and nibbling on it as though it was a rare delicacy she’d spent far too much time imagining tasting.

Clarke pressed forward again, pushing Lexa up against the wall, taking her own breast in her hand now. Lexa released her lip to take a sharp inhale of breath, so Clarke took advantage by lowering her lips to Lexa’s shoulder. Lexa’s hand on Clarke’s back gripped tightly, nails cutting into Clarke’s exposed skin.

Clarke’s breath was coming harshly now, desperation causing her to press the entirety of the front of her body into Lexa as she pressed lewd, burning open-mouthed kisses along her neck. She found a particular spot on the column of Lexa’s throat that had her dropping her head back against the wall with a groan, body bucking against Clarke. She straddled one of Lexa’s legs, pushing her own leg between Lexa’s and fucking *reveled* in the soft whimper that her thigh hard against the apex between Lexa’s thighs coaxed out of her. Their dresses were only thin silk, so it left little to the imagination; Clarke was practically imploding at the feel of Lexa, already hot and damp against her. Lexa’s leg lifted, a muscled thigh pushing against Clarke’s core, and sparks snapped in her mind. Panting, she lifted her head, lips seeking Lexa’s again—they found her first, mouth moving greedily, sucking at Clarke’s tongue as she pressed her leg forward again.

The pressure was already building but at the same time, it wasn’t *enough,* she needed *more.* She and Lexa seemed to have the same thought process, because they both moved at the same time, hands cupping onto thighs to push up at their dresses. Clarke’s was shorter so Lexa was able to push hers up sooner; she almost moaned in the response to the groan made in reaction to feeling nothing but a smooth expanse of skin, because Clarke wasn’t wearing anything beneath her dress, and *God,* Lexa’s fingers were *so close* to where Clarke needed them to be, and *fuck,* Lexa was wearing some lacy underwear that Clarke immediately hooked her fingers in and started to tug down—

“Lexa? Are you out here?”

Clarke and Lexa froze, holding their breath. Lexa had grown so stiff in alarm at the sound of Indra’s voice that Clarke immediately released her pseudo-grip on her underwear.

“Who are you looking for, Headmaster?”

“I’m looking for Lexa, I saw her head this way half an hour ago. Have you seen her?” The student must have shaken their head, because Indra *tsked* in impatience and irritation.

“If you see her, tell her that her presence is required on the ship. Immediately.”

“Yes, Headmaster.”
Clarke and Lexa did not breathe until the footsteps faded. Lexa withdrew her leg, finding her feet and pushing away from where she’d been slumped up against the wall. Clarke dropped her hands. Lexa looked alarmed, eyes wide in near panic as tugged the bottom of her dress back to its normal length. Clarke reached out to pull up the shoulder of her dress for her, her heart sinking when Lexa flinched away from her touch.

“I…” She didn’t know what she was going to say. I’m sorry? She wasn’t.

Lexa took a few steps forward, her back to Clarke, before halting in her tracks, shifting as though hesitating. Then she turned, jaw set in determination, and Clarke’s eyes widened as Lexa crossed the space between them and took Clarke’s face in her hands, kissing her so deeply that it made Clarke’s knees weak. Clarke was left panting and wet and aching as Lexa strode away, head held high and shoulders back and gait measured as though they didn’t nearly just dry-hump to satisfaction beneath the stairwell in the Entrance Hall.

Clarke doubled over for a moment, hands on her knees as she struggled to catch her breath. Holy fuck, how was she even supposed to return to normal life after that?

Eventually, she returned to Ravenclaw Tower. Once there she looked out the window to see whether or not she could see Lexa. Lexa must have reached the ship before Clarke made it to the tower, because she couldn’t. So Clarke headed to the empty dormitory and changed into more comfortable clothes, thinking she might as well go sit out in the common room and get some homework done. But the ache between her legs and low in her belly was still so strong it made her dizzy, and she was still so fucking wet, so she considered it for about two seconds before she collapsed onto her bed and slipped her hand down her pants.

A few minutes later she was pressing her tongue to the roof of her mouth, the pressure reminding her of Lexa’s tongue in her mouth, one hand drifting fingertips over a nipple the same way Lexa’s had done. Her back arched as she fumbled over her swollen clit, rubbing wild circles and imagining doing the same to Lexa. Her breath escaped her in harsh spurts. She came hard with Lexa’s name on her lips, came so hard that she was asleep less than a minute later, legs spread and her hand still trapped in her pants.

* * /~/^/ * *

Raven staggered as she entered the dormitory, wincing as parts of her throbbed, still recovering. She felt high as a fucking kite, and it was great, and it was definitely going to happen again, even if she was drunk and totally going to regret it in the morning.

The dorm was deserted except for Clarke, who was curled into the fetal position on her bed, passed out. As Raven neared her, she saw that Clarke’s hand was down her pants. Raven snorted, snickering, because Clarke was a horndog okay, and it wasn’t the first time Raven had caught her like this, let’s be real. It wasn’t quite as traumatizing as the time in fifth year when Raven, Clarke, Octavia, Fox, and Harper went into the Hufflepuff dormitory to see why Trina had skipped the party only to find her asleep with a cucumber sticking half out of her, so, there was that.

Raven took pity on Clarke and draped her quilt over her before crawling into bed. She fell asleep with the taste of Anya still on her smiling lips, and slept better than she had in weeks.
Jamie laughed at the expression on Kane’s face as he miserably failed at asking Indra to dance.

“But it’s tradition—“

“No. I do not dance.”

“But—“

“No.”

“B—“

“No.”

Looking thoroughly put out, Kane let Indra walk away from him. Jamie was still chuckling when she turned to see who had just put a hand on her shoulder.

“Hey, Jamie.” It was Frankie. He was frowning and looked slightly worried. “Have you seen Evie?”

“No, why?”

Frankie’s face fell. “I can’t find her. It’s like she disappeared.”

Jamie chewed on her tongue. She saw Evie and Luna collide earlier, saw the looks on their faces, so she could guess where Evie was if she had disappeared. It didn’t make it right—Frankie was a good man and he didn’t deserve being cheated on—but honestly Jamie was surprised it had taken this long for it to happen. Evie and Luna had never been able to resist one another, whether it was fighting or dating.

Jamie spotted the concern on Frankie’s face, so she said with a gentle voice, “Hey, I’m sure she’s around here somewhere. Let’s go look for her, okay?”

Frankie nodded, at least some measure of relief lightening his expression.

* * /◇/ * *

"I see you're embracing your past," husked Luna, her arms above her head, her own ripped up dress fisted in her hands.

Evie groaned, tilting her head to sweep her hair aside as she pressed hard into Luna. "You know...what they say." Evie panted, grinding into Luna. "Old habits..." She grunted as Luna gasped, rose high off the surface of the table, back arched and entire body quaking as the orgasm swept over her. "...Die hard."

Luna lay limp and still; even after nearly seven years, some things never changed. When Evie spotted her unmoving chest, she absently gave a light slap to Luna’s arm.
“Breathe.”

Luna gasped, opening her eyes to gaze unfocused on the ceiling. She started laughing a moment later, a wide, sated smile on her sleepy face. “Yeah. Sorry. Always gets me after the fifth or so orgasm.”

“You always say that, but you do it after just one,” said Evie flatly, though her tone was ruined by the curve of her lips and the way she squinted one eye at Luna, who grinned in response.

“Only if it’s a big one.”

“With me, they’re all big ones.”

“Damn right, babe.”

They lay catching their breath for a good while, limbs sweaty and tangled together. It was like the years between them melted away; just like she used to do, Evie slid her gaze down the length of Luna’s naked body, the warmth pooling at her core and her stomach tightening again. She mirrored Luna’s smirk as she swung a leg around her hips and straddled her, pulling her exhausted body up with some difficulty (it had been awhile since she’d been fucked like this…it had always been different with Luna). Luna’s hands immediately rose to her waist, fingertips digging into her skin as Evie slowly gyrated her hips.

“I missed fucking you,” breathed Evie, strawberry blonde hair falling forward to frame her face as she placed her hands on both sides of Luna’s head, taking care not to press on the pastel hair that had fallen loose from its braid.

There was silence save for Evie’s panting and Luna’s quick breaths. Then Luna muttered: “I missed you.”

Evie squeezed her eyes shut, doing her best to ignore the squeezing of her heart. There was a valid reason she and Luna had broken up.

It was hard to remember when Luna was naked and sprawled out beneath her.

Luna took the hint and shut up, but brought her arm forth, hooking it beneath one of Evie’s thighs. She curved her wrist and drifted across the length of her, scattering fingertips over the swollen bundle of nerves before dipping down into a hot liquid core. Evie’s breath hitched and she bit her lip hard enough to hurt, body shuddering as Luna curled one, then two fingers inside her, immediately pressing against that spot that she had always known how to find so damn well.

Only minutes later Evie was already at the edge again, grateful Luna was not one to ask her to quiet because she couldn’t even if she tried; Luna used her thumb to press into Evie’s clit and Evie gave a final grind on Luna’s fingers before the orgasm swept over her and she cried out Luna’s name again and again like a mantra.

She barely registered the fact that Luna had gone stiff beneath her, nor was she aware of much else other than the pounding of her own heart, so it took her a moment to respond to the sound of the door being flung open.

She felt her heart drop to her toes as she turned to see Jamie standing in the doorway, staring down at them with a blank expression on her face.

“I take it back,” said Jamie finally, lifting a brow and grimacing. “That set the record for the most Luna’s said in one breath.”
Evie blushed furiously.

* * *

She was a horrible person. A horrible, terrible excuse for a human being.

Evie wasn’t crying. She was in shock, too stunned with what she had done to summon the emotion needed to cry.

She was hurrying across the grounds with Jamie toward the distant gates leading to Hogsmeade. Her body was sore and aching and she was still covered in enough sweat that the cold December air was absolutely freezing her, and she was pretty sure it was starting to snow. Part of her felt like she deserved to linger out here and maybe get hypothermia and die or something.

Seriously, what had she been thinking? She hadn’t been thinking, clearly. Had been thinking with her genitals or something. Had been thinking, alright, but about nothing and no one but Luna. Fucking Luna, who was…Merlin, Evie was a horrible person because here she was, guilt-ridden and rushing home because her boyfriend had left to find her, and what she wanted was to be back in that room with the person she cheated on him with.

“You need to talk to him, Evie,” murmured Jamie after they Apparated onto the cobbled streets.

“I know,” whispered Evie. Frankie was a good person, and he didn’t deserve to be betrayed like this. Evie needed to confess everything, needed to tell him about her past with Luna, needed to tell him about tonight. He deserved the truth. She just hoped he could find it in him to forgive her, one day.

She paused in front of her pub, taking in a deep breath and exhaling it slowly.

“Did you leave your door open?” said Jamie sharply.

Evie shook his head. It must be Frankie. They couldn’t find him anywhere in the castle, so he must have came back to see if Evie had returned to her pub for some reason.

But as Evie placed her hand on the doorknob, she was suddenly overcome with a strange sense of foreboding. Jamie clearly felt the same because next thing Evie knew, Jamie had drawn her wand and stepped in close beside her.

“Wait,” whispered Jamie. Her face was drawn in concentration, the wrinkles between her brows particularly prominent as she stood before the cracked door, listening. “Wait, Evie,” she said again, more urgently as Evie went to push open the door. “I have a bad feeling about—“

Panic rose in Evie’s chest, threatening to choke her, and she couldn’t stop herself from pushing through the door.

She stepped into her freezing cold pub, and her gaze settled on the limp figure slumped up against the empty fireplace.

And not for the first time that night, Evie screamed.
Chapter End Notes

Regarding the whole gender conforming BS rule...don't worry, they're going to do something about it, but not until a later chapter, for reasons that will be revealed. Next chapter will probably be the second task ;)

Survival of the Witches

Chapter Summary

The Second Task, and that means survival of the fittest.

Chapter Notes

Thank you guys so so much for every comment, every kudos, and every bookmark. They make me so damn happy, you have no idea. I hope you enjoy this chapter! It was one of my very favorite to write thus far. Please let me know what you think! :) (btw, to those who have left long reviews and then mentioned their concern that said review was too long- I fucking LOVE reviews and the longer the better, so you definitely have no need to worry! Ily all)

"Lend me your ear while I call you a fool.

You were kissed by a witch one night in the wood,

And later insisted your feelings were true."

-Jethro
Lexa’s heartbeat was drumming in her ears. Things had transpired too fast to function in the past twenty minutes—the past hour, really. What had even happened? Lexa stumbled through the events in her mind as she hurried across the grounds toward the distant Black Lake where Durmstrang ship awaited. She was tripping slightly over her dress so she seized the bottom and carried it above her knees as she hurried through the snow and slush, toes frozen even through her boots.

First was the Ball. Clarke was stunning in a dress, and Lexa hated the twist of jealousy at seeing her dance with Octavia, wrapped up in someone else’s arms, smiling at someone else—

It was stupid, Lexa knew, but it drove her to downing cup after cup of the spiked punch, because the more she drank, the easier it was to look at Clarke and not feel like the burning inside her was consuming her. She thought it would make it easier to forget that kiss in the tent after the first task, but it didn’t work the way she wanted it to. The lights were blurred into stars in her vision, and when they melted together all she could see was the color of Clarke’s eyes as their faces drew near. By the time Lexa finally gave in and wandered out of the party to find her, heading toward the entrance hall where Lexa last saw Clarke heading, she was beyond self-control. Talking to her was easy, and Lexa never confided in people. Dancing with her was even easier, and Lexa never danced. Staring into Clarke’s eyes in the shadows of the stairwell and letting her pin her against the wall with her hips? That was the easiest yet.

Then was the kiss. That kiss.

More than a kiss. Lexa was still weak-legged and throbbing. The flare of irritation at Indra occurred, which was not a common phenomenon as she was rarely ever annoyed at Indra, who had always looked out for her, but in Lexa’s current drunken, shaken state, she let the irritation bubble up. What a fucking cockblocker. Or what was the phrase for a lesbian? She’d heard Raven jokingly say it before to Octavia, Lexa knew she’d heard the word—

The word floated back into Lexa’s hazy mind just as she crossed the ramp and the door to the hold opened. “Clitterference!” burst Lexa, relieved she’d remembered, and then she blanched as she took in Indra standing in the doorway.

Indra raised a brow. “I don’t want to know,” she said brusquely, before seizing Lexa by her arm and yanking her inside.

“What’s happened?” asked Lexa in a rush, completely oblivious to the way her words slurred because Indra looked even graver than usual and Lexa just had a gut feeling that something was wrong.

“In the wardroom,” said Indra curtly, nodding toward the left and standing aside so Lexa could shuffle past her. “I will wait for Anya.”

Lexa lurched her way down the narrow corridor, pitch-black save for the pinprick of light in the distance. It grew brighter as she approached, until finally she stepped into the wardroom, where four men stood near the fire.

“Long time no see, strik hedra,” came a familiar gentle rumble. Lexa’s heart leapt and she blinked in disbelief. The four figures were actually just two, Lincoln and—
“Gustus,” breathed Lexa, falling forward into his embrace.

He laughed softly, wrapping her up in his large arms and hugging her tightly. “Not so little anymore,” he teased, his eyes twinkling as he pulled back to smile at her. “You’ve grown two feet in two years.”

“I have not,” she grumbled, swatting away the hand he held out at her shoulder length to depict her sixteen-year-old height. She tried squinting at him, but then another wavering Gustus appeared beside him. When she swayed, eyes widening, Gustus chuckled.

“Here.” He pushed something in her hands and she lifted it to her nose to take a sniff. A potion of some sort. It smelled of ginger and coconut.

“Urgh.” Lexa gagged as it hit the back of her throat. It tasted bitter like coffee. The moment she swallowed it, a sharp cold seemed to tingle out from within her chest, scraping through her mind like hands clawing away fungus. The haze lifted as easily as though she’d simply erased the past couple hours of drinking.

Completely sober now, Lexa gave a heavy sigh, shoulders sagging as she moved around to sit in one of the comfortable chintz chairs before the fire. Reality had returned with an even sharper hit to the head. Only moments ago she had been wrapped up in Clarke Griffin, pressed against the wall beneath the stairs in an entirely public place. What had she been thinking?

“Better?” asked Gustus, amused.

She looked up into his face and felt at least some of the weight ease off her shoulders. It was so good to see him after two years without him. He was as much a fatherly figure as Indra was a motherly figure, but they had taken care of Lexa in ways her biological parents never had. They may not be Lexa’s actual parents, but they had certainly helped her learn and grow. Durmstrang was her home, but it was more than that—her people were her home.

That was one reason she was so desperate to protect them.

“How have you been?” Lexa asked, voice throaty from the potion and the sobriety.

“Good,” he said, though his accompanying smile didn’t quite meet his eyes.

“Is she sober?” asked Indra sharply the moment she walked into the room. When Lexa settled steady eyes on her, Indra nodded her head once, swiftly, in satisfaction, before inclining it toward a completely off-her-face Anya, who was half-crawling behind her.

After a slight struggle between Gustus trying to force-feed Anya the potion while she shouted incomprehensible greetings and wrapped her arms and legs around him, Anya finally drank it and sank into a chair as her head cleared. Lexa noticed the dark bruises peppering her neck and bare shoulders but refrained from making a comment, partly because she didn’t want to deal with grouchy recovering-from-being-trashed Anya but mostly because something important was going on if they had been called out of the Ball for this.

“What happened?” said Lexa urgently.

Indra stared into the fire for a long moment, arms crossed over her chest and jaw working as though she was chewing over the words she needed to say. “Queen is on the move,” she finally grunted. Lexa’s heart dropped to her toes while her stomach turned with a punitive twist of nausea. “We don’t know where she is or what her game is. But the Shadow-Eaters have been rising, and it’s all our people can do to stay their defenses. I don’t know how much longer they can hold off before
Lexa exchanged a look with Anya and Lincoln. It was significant, because all three sets of eyes held similar expressions of terror, and none of them were ever frightened, let alone did they show it to others. But here they were—Lincoln was clearly smitten with Octavia, something obviously existed between Anya and Raven, and Lexa was trembling at the thought of returning to war and leaving behind a girl she by all accounts had no ties to.

Anya cleared her hickey-riddled throat, swallowing before saying, “What about the rest of the coalition? The ones who disagree?”

“What of them?” said Indra, voice dull. “They still will not help us.”

There was silence, save for the crackling of the fire and faint wash of water gently splashing against the ship, and the sound of Lexa’s heartbeat, rapid and tinny in her ears like a frantic hummingbird trapped in a cage of brittle bone.

“Gustus?” said Lincoln tentatively. Lexa and Anya automatically turned to look at the man. Gustus looked reluctant to divulge, but when Indra gave him a heavy glance, he sighed.

“It was not a success,” he explained, striding to the enchanted fire and turning so he could face them all. “I rounded up as many as I could, but…they’re gone. Whatever they’re doing, it turns them into something…” His face darkened. “Something that’s not human.” He shook his head. “They can’t help us.”

Lexa couldn’t say she was surprised. Even if they were sane enough to communicate with, she still wasn’t sure whether she’d ever want Reapers fighting at her side.

“What are we going to do?” asked Lincoln.

Everyone looked at Lexa. She glanced at them all before focusing on the flickering flames. It was too soon to think. Moments ago she’d been wrapped up in a beautiful girl that made her heart ache. Now here she was again, standing on the brink of war and surrounded by people she was terrified to lose.

She lifted her head high and settled her shoulders back. Her expression did not waver as she said calmly, “We’re going to have to call the Order.”

* ° /♂/・°*

“We…might have fingered each other in Filch’s office.”

There was silence as Clarke, Octavia, Wells, and Miller stared at Raven. Then Octavia burst into cackles.

“Holy shit, Raven!” she guffawed, slapping her knee. “Didn’t take you long, did it?”

“You talked to Lincoln for like two days before fucking him!” said Raven indignantly.

“Yeah but that was normal sex where he invited me back to his room on the ship and we did
it! You got drunk off your ass and left the dance to go fuck in the Filch’s office!”

It technically belonged to the current school janitor, but the entire office had been named after a janitor who had fought in the Battle of Hogwarts named Argus Filch. Still, that wasn’t important.

“Have you talked to her since?” asked Clarke, not particularly surprised since, for one, she’d expected Raven and Anya to start sleeping together a long time ago and two, when she saw them at the Yule Ball they had been all over each other.

“No, but I will. Because there’s definitely going to be a round two,” added Raven, rather unnecessarily considering the smug expression on her face.

“How was she?” asked Octavia eagerly, so absorbed in the scandal of the whole situation that the pile of eggs on her plate were forgotten and growing cold.

“Very demanding. I dig it.”

“Well,” said Octavia, momentarily looking down at her eggs to bring a forkful to her mouth before grinning at Clarke. “Looks like Clarke’s not the only one who got some last night.”

“Raven!” Clarke said in outrage, cheeks burning as she glared at Raven. Raven had wasted no time in the morning to tease her about catching her with, as Raven put it, ‘her hand in the cookie jar.’ Apparently she’d wasted no time in telling Octavia about it, either.

“You were talking in your sleep,” said Raven, smirking at how Clarke’s eyes widened and she flushed. “And guess whose name you kept saying?”

‘Lexa, Lexa!’ teased Octavia. She and Raven both cackled when Clarke groaned and buried her face in her hands.

“You guys are seriously the worst.”

Beside her, Wells shook his head and returned his attention to the stack of French toast on his plate. “Whatever it is you’re talking about, I don’t think I want to know.”

“Me either,” said Miller, also shaking his head as he brought his mug of orange juice to his lips.

“Good,” muttered Clarke, lowering her hands. She sighed as she stared rather forlornly at her plate without really seeing. Her body still prickled with heat as the memories of last night washed over her. Lexa, that particular smell of fire smoke and earth, her lithe body pressed against Clarke’s, her lean thigh pressed between her legs, her warm, soft lips moving with Clarke’s—

She shivered before she could stop it, face burning as she ignored Raven and Octavia’s knowing smirks.

“Shut up. This isn’t funny,” insisted Clarke, when Raven and Octavia merely snickered. “She’s probably never going to speak to me again,” she added glumly, heart sinking at the realization that it was probably true. Lexa wouldn’t talk to her for months after a kiss; after what they’d done beneath the staircase, she probably wouldn’t ever talk to her again period.

Clarke frowned at the sudden widening of Raven and Octavia’s eyes; she felt her heart lodge itself in her throat when she swiveled around in her seat to see Lexa approaching their table.

Fuck.
Their eyes met as Lexa strode down the aisle between the tables, and Clarke shuddered under the weight of that intense green gaze. The last time she’d been under it, they’d been panting and wet and—

*Fuck fuck fuck.*

“Hey,” said Lexa, coming to a stop just before Clarke. She glanced around at Wells, Miller, Octavia, and Raven, giving them all a jerky nod before zeroing in on Clarke again. “Can we talk? Privately?”

Swallowing, Clarke nodded. Without sparing a second glance to any of her friends (certain as she was that Raven and Octavia would be looking smug), she stood up and followed Lexa out of the Great Hall. To her surprise, Lexa didn’t stop in the entrance hall. She didn’t miss the way Lexa glanced at the stairs—at the side they had been under last night. Her shoulders tightened and she marched onward; Clarke tried to ignore the sudden heat in her belly and followed her.

She knew the moment they started up the moving staircase where they were going, and it made her heart beat faster. Why was Lexa taking her to the Room of Requirement? They hadn’t been there together since before the First Task. Clarke remembered how Lexa came back to kiss her one last time before she left to find Indra. Was there a specific reason Lexa was now bringing her here, alone…?

Her heart was pounding a tattoo against her chest.

The door to the Room of Requirement blossomed into existence as they neared it. Once there, Lexa swung open the door and inclined her head, gesturing for Clarke to enter. Lexa closed the door behind them.

Clarke’s heart ached at the familiar sight of the room, full of bean bags and bookshelves and the chessboard and—

Her eyes widened and she gulped. There was a large bed in the center of the room. Why was there a bed in the room? It was simple and adorned with white sheets, but it was a bed nonetheless, king-sized and appearing comfortable enough.

Lexa was frowning at the bed, but tore her eyes away to meet Clarke’s. “Clarke, I would like you to please take a seat. What I’m about to tell you may be rather…difficult, to hear.”

Echoing Lexa’s frown, Clarke did as directed and eased down onto one of the small wooden chairs framing the chessboard. Lexa took the one across from her and folded her hands together in her lap. She was more solemn and serious than Clarke had ever seen her.

There was a tense silence that stretched on for a long moment, until Lexa finally said in a low voice, “I care about you, Clarke. As such, I feel obligated to warn you about the danger that you and everyone you care about are in.”

Clarke immediately sat up straighter, alarmed. “What do you mean? What danger?”

Lexa took a deep breath. “There is a war going on outside these castle walls that you and the majority of the wizarding population are not aware of. There is a woman…she calls herself the Ice Queen. We aren’t sure exactly what part she plays in the creation of Shadow-Eaters, but she has maintained some measure of control over them. And last night…” Lexa took another deeper breath. “Last night, a man was attacked in Hogsmeade. In the same pub we were all attacked in during that party months ago.”
Clarke’s eyes widened as her heart dropped into her stomach. “Who? Is he okay? How—“

“Frank Longbottom III,” answered Lexa heavily. “He is currently in St. Mungo’s. I thought perhaps you could ask your mother for updates. As far as I know, he was found by Jamie and Evie Potter in a critically injured, comatose state. I…” She hesitated, sorrow shifting across her face like a dark cloud. “I believe the Kiss was administered to him, but they cannot be sure because he will not wake.”

Clarke felt sick. She remembered seeing glimpses of the man dancing with Evie during the Ball. He had been smiling and completely unaware that in only a few hours, his very soul would be sucked from his body.

“What about…” Clarke screwed up her face, struggling to remember all the things Lexa had told her about Shadow-Eaters during their Occlumency lessons. She remembered when she’d experienced the Shadow-Eater, she’d lost the ability to cast magic. Lexa had stated once in a lesson, in an off-hand, evasive sort of way, that Shadow-Eaters could temporarily neutralize magic the same way they paralyzed humans by blocking all happy thoughts and feelings, leaving them to drown in the cold depression left behind. “What about his magic?”

Lexus lifted her shoulders in a despondent shrug. “They can’t know for sure yet because he hasn’t woken up. But, since he won’t wake…it’s not looking good. His body may be in shock after losing both his soul and his magic.”

“That’s so sad…” croaked Clarke, heart aching for him, for Evie. “How…how do you know…how did you find out about all this?”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. “There are…many things happening…that you are not aware of, Clarke,” began Lexa slowly. “And many of them are things I am not allowed to discuss. I can, however, tell you that…the reason I am talking to you about any of this in the first place is because I want you to be aware, to be safe. No more using the secret passageways. No more trips to Hogsmeade.”

Clarke was torn between being touched and being annoyed by Lexa’s concern (because who was she to stop talking to her for two months and then to kiss her and then to worry about her?). She cast her gaze down and said coolly, “I haven’t use a passageway or snuck to Hogsmeade since the last time we went together.”

Lexa blinked before looking away, appearing supremely uncomfortable and a little ashamed. “Listen…about last night…”

Clarke remained silent, waiting for the shoe to drop.

Lexa inhaled again, reaching over to tentatively place a hand on Clarke’s forearm. “I’m sorry for—“

“Don’t,” said Clarke, automatically standing and stumbling back. She righted herself, blushing slightly, Lexa gazed up at her, green orbs deep with sorrow. “Spare me the apologetic speech, Lexa. I don’t need—I don’t want to hear it.”

“Clarke,” said Lexa quietly, standing, but Clarke plunged on.

“No, I don’t—I’m sick of the whiplash, okay? One minute we’re friends, the next we’re kissing, then you aren’t speaking to me, then we’re doing stuff again, and—“

“I was going to say,” Lexa cut across her, tone gentle, “that I want to be friends.”
Clarke blinked at her, dumbfounded at the sudden change. “What?”

“I don’t want to go another two months without talking to you,” said Lexa simply.

Clarke stared at her cautiously, even suspiciously. “I’m not in the place for a relationship.”

Lexa dipped her head in acquiesce. “Nor am I. Obviously you realize…” Her eyes dropped to Clarke’s lips, lingered; she swallowed again, forcing her gaze up to lock onto Clarke’s. “I am…very…attracted to you. But more so than that, I care about you. I don’t want to lose our friendship. I have grown to care about you a great deal, and I don’t want this attraction to get in the way of that. Can we…would it be possible, for us to resume our friendship?”

Clarke stared at her, a vortex of emotions crashing through her like waves. Only last night she had been pleasuring herself to the thought of Lexa—could they really maintain a purely platonic relationship when Clarke couldn’t even look at her without butterflies bursting in her belly and her gaze always inevitably dropping to her lips?

Blushing and immensely grateful Lexa would never use Legilimency on her without her permission, Clarke stalled. “Uh.”

Lexa quickly cast her gaze down, expression crumpling. “If you don’t want to—“

“I do,” said Clarke quickly. That was at least one thing she was certain of. She wanted Lexa in her life. Stupidly, she stuck a hand out. Lexa lips quirked at the gesture, but took Clarke’s hand and shook. “Friends.”

“Friends,” agreed Lexa.

Clarke wasn’t sure what was the more potent coursing through her: the relief at having Lexa back, or the dread that she was going to fuck it all up, because Lexa’s hand was warm in hers and Clarke was looking at her lips again.

Fuck.

*’・/♀/・’*

The next month passed by fairly quickly. Clarke spent most of her time doing homework, sneaking out to the Quidditch pitch for impromptu games with her friends, and hanging out with Lexa in the Room of Requirement snacking on the outrageous amount of chocolate they had both gotten one another for Christmas. Her homework wasn’t too bad, considering she was exempt from the final exams (though not her N.E.W.TS, but she didn’t have to worry about those for a while). The Quidditch games were a blast, because now the Durmstrangs and a couple Beauxbatons would join them. Anya was a Chaser, and she was fucking vicious; she provided a perfect match to Raven, who would furiously guard her goal and raged whenever Anya scored on her. The two had maintained a tense relationship following their brief affair in Filch’s office (Raven wouldn’t admit it, but Clarke knew she’d expected Anya to pursue her, but according to Lexa Anya was not the commitment type, so). Lexa and Clarke matched well too, though Lexa was more than intimidating
to play against; the Durmstrang were always sure to wear their warpaint, so seeing Lexa flying around with her red scarf and her cloak billowing behind her, her wild tangles of braided chestnut hair streaming behind her, eyes narrowed as she raked her gaze around for the snitch, was enough to send Clarke’s heart pounding (for more reasons than one). Lincoln and Octavia were pathetic, because he refused to hit a bludger at her (which was probably a good thing, because when Bellamy wasn’t glowering at Anya and Raven, he was glaring at Lincoln).

In the Room of Requirement, life went on much as it had before they’d kissed. They played Wizard’s Chess (Lexa was getting better, and had even beat Clarke in a few games now; unable to put up with Lexa’s smugness, Clarke had been sure to casually set up a game between she and Wells the next morning at breakfast. Lexa had lost and Clarke made a mental vow never to engage in Wizard’s Monopoly with her in case she reacted even half as bad as she had to Wells’ checkmating her).

It wasn’t until a week before the second task that things started to go wrong.

First was the letter she’d received from her mother. They had only exchanged letters a few times this entire year, and considering Clarke had been forced to miss Christmas because of the Yule Ball, she was missing her mother. She’d wrote to ask how Frank Longbottom III was doing, and the reply didn’t come until over three weeks later, when her mother replied to say Frank had finally passed on. Evie and Jamie Potter, who would make occasional appearances for dinner, were nowhere to be found. Luna Rivers, however, could often be found sitting at the lakeshore near her transportation ship, looking miserable as she stared out at the water.

Second was the fact that, what with she and Lexa beneath the staircase, and then Raven’s scandalous story, and the excitement of Octavia announcing she and Lincoln were officially a thing, and then the tragedy of a Longbottom’s death, Clarke had completely forgot about the little knapsack she’d salvaged from the first task that was supposed to contain hints of what to expect for the second task. It wasn’t until late one night in the Room of Requirement when Clarke was sprawled out on her stomach on the bed working on her essay over the effects of aconite in a Wolfsbane Potion and Lexa was lounging in a beanbag chair, feet propped up on the table as she idly flicked through the pages of Hogwarts, a History, that Lexa asked Clarke if she had a plan for the second task.

“A plan?” said Clarke blankly.

“Yeah.” Lexa looked up at her. “You opened your bag, right?”

Clarke frowned at her until it dawned on her. Then she cursed and rolled off the bed. “Shit, I completely forgot!”

“You haven’t even opened it?” asked Lexa, amused.

“No. What’s in it?” she asked, anxiously winding her fingers together.

Lexa pressed her lips together in a smile, closing her book and sliding it back into its place on the shelf. “They might be different.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Come on, just tell me.”

Lexa folded her arms beneath her chest, a wide, taunting smile spreading on her face. “Now if I told you, Clarke, that’s be cheating. Don’t you know what happens to cheaters?”

Clarke arched a brow, advancing on Lexa. She crouched down close enough that their faces were only a few inches apart, reaching behind her to grab her back from behind her chair. “Let me
“guess,” she said, deliberately lowering her tone. She pretended not to notice the flush on Lexa’s cheeks, but it gave her a thrill. “They’re punished.”

Lexa arched her brow.

Oh, yeah. This had been another regular occurrence. Flirting. Constant, shameless, not-subtle-but-hy-it’s-still-innocent flirting. It was stupid, and dangerous, but it had started happening and neither could resist rising to the challenge. It was all innocent, anyway. Mostly.

Clarke poked around in Lexa’s bag for a moment, only coming across a few quills, ink, a couple rolls of parchment, and a sneakoscope.

“I don’t carry it around with me, if that’s what you’re wondering,” said Lexa dryly.

Clarke looked back up at her. They were still pretty close together (too close, but Clarke wasn’t about to back up). She playfully dropped the bag onto Lexa’s lap. “You’re just useless then, aren’t you?”

“Not entirely,” defended Lexa. She kept her eyes steady on Clarke’s as she added, “There are a few ways in which I am very useful.”

_Lately, very useful in spank bank material_, thought Clarke, immediately blushing and pushing it out of her mind. She was about to open her mouth to say “Prove it,” but then she realized that would be going to far and crossing the boundaries. So instead she refused the bait and stood up, putting some distance between them. It was getting late anyway, so she moved to the bed to pack up her things and sling her bag over her shoulder. When she looked back at Lexa, she was surprised to see an almost disappointed look in her eyes.

“I better go check it out, then. Are you going to tell me what was in your bag?”

“Nope,” said Lexa, popping the _p_ and looking amused again as Clarke sighed and rolled her eyes. As Clarke moved toward the door, Lexa frowned and leaned forward. “Wait! I thought we were going to watch another video tonight.”

Since Raven had managed to magick her muggle technology into use, she’d been experimenting with a few more things as well. She’d moved on from the small iPod and had started enchanting things called Tablets, iPads, laptops and more. She’d given Clarke an iPad complete with several hundred muggle songs and even muggle music videos. Most nights before Clarke headed back to Ravenclaw Tower and Lexa retired back to Durmstrang ship, they watched a music video together. Lexa had better understanding of the strange technology, so Clarke only ever watched them with her.

Clarke smiled, secretly pleased that Lexa was reluctant to end their night so soon. She set her bag down and kicked the beanbag chair up next to Lexa, plopping down into it close enough to nearly land on Lexa’s hip.

“Ow!” chuckled Lexa, extracting her arm from where it was trapped behind Clarke’s lower back. “Fat arse.”

“Jerk,” quipped Clarke in return, nudgingLexa in the ribs with an elbow. She withdrew her wand and flicked it; the iPad came flying over from where it lay on the far table with the chessboard from when they’d listened to a few songs while playing a couple games. Clarke pressed the on button like Raven had taught her and then swiped through to the music library like Lexa had shown her. They had been making their way down the list for the past couple weeks, so Clarke clicked on
the next one, propped it up on the table to where they could clearly see the screen, hit play, and settled back.

It was some loud, obnoxious song about black widows and Clarke didn’t even know, she just frowned at it before exchanging the frown with Lexa, who nodded in agreement. Clarke leaned forward to tap the screen for the next song to come on.

This one was much better. It was soft and crooning, gentle enough to cause Clarke to grow a little sleepy. She glanced at Lexa, who was watching the video with her lips curved up ever so slightly, and felt more at peace than ever.

“Do you mind if I use your shoulder as a pillow?” she asked, snuggling down into the beanbag.

Lexa lifted a brow. “I thought you were going back to the tower after this?”

Clarke rolled her eyes, dropping her head against Lexa’s shoulder anyway. “I’m not going to sleep, dork. I just want to relax and listen to this.”

Lexa hesitated before she smiled. “Fine. User.”

“Shut up,” grumbled Clarke, but her smile was bigger than ever Lexa’s arm dropped around her shoulders.

They watched the rest of the video play, Clarke growing progressively sleepier as Ed Sheeran’s voice crooned out of the tiny speakers. Muggle technology was a marvel, really, thought Clarke, yawning. It was becoming more of a struggle to keep her eyes open.

As the video finished and shifted into the next, Clarke lifted her head and felt her heart tremble at the sight of Lexa dozing, lips parted slightly in her sleep. It occurred to Clarke that this was the first time she’d ever seen Lexa sleep, and she looked younger than she’d ever seen her, face smooth and blank, lashes long and thick. She was so beautiful it made Clarke’s heart ache.

She rested her head on her shoulder again and nuzzled into her, content to remain here for just another minute.

Except it wasn’t just a minute.

Almost an hour later, Lexa woke to the feeling of someone warm and soft pressed against her. She looked down to see Clarke asleep on her, arm slung around her waist and face pressed against her chest, and it felt as though a jolt seared through Lexa’s heart while dread boiled in her stomach.

Fuck. This was never supposed to happen.

Clarke jolted awake when Lexa suddenly tore away from her. She blearily blinked up at her, alarmed from having been ripped from such a peaceful sleep so suddenly. Lexa looked even more alarmed, clear panic etched onto every line of her face.
“Lexa?” she said sleepily.

“I don’t—I can’t—” Lexa stammered, eyes wide and wild. “I can’t—I have to go,” she said quickly, and rushed out of the door without even grabbing her bag.

Clarke stared at the door as it swung shut, leaving her alone in the room, silence broken only by the sound of some sad song drifting out of the speakers. There was only one thought on her mind.

*Not again.*

The next day, Clarke was entirely unsurprised when Lexa proceeded to ignore her all through breakfast, lunch, and the Advanced Charms class she was sitting in on. It wasn’t until Clarke finally cornered her in the Entrance Hall after dinner that they finally spoke, and that was after Clarke called her name several times and Lexa refused to make eye contact.

“Why won’t you talk to me? Is this because we fell asleep together? It didn’t mean anything, okay? It didn’t mean anything. Why are we doing this *again*?”

“Just, look.” Lexa took a deep breath, looking up at the ceiling while she steeled herself to say whatever it was she was going to say. “I don’t think we should see each other anymore.”

Clarke’s heart throbbed painfully, sinking right down to the bottom of her toes while anger bubbled in her belly. She held on to that anger, clutching for a hold on it as she swallowed the lump in her throat and said in as clear and flat a voice as she could manage, “Are you fucking kidding me?”

Lexa didn’t so much as blink. She merely stood there stoically, as though she was the bearer of some great weight and no one could possibly understand the gravity of her choices. “I’m sorry,” she said in a quiet, steady voice. “I’m trying to be sensible about this, Clarke.”

“You’re being a coward,” Clarke cut across her. Her eyes were stinging and she hated it, but God, Lexa was standing a foot away, looking so kissable, and she was using those lips to tell her she never wanted to see her again. Lexa, who was the most incredible person Clarke had ever met, didn’t want anything to do with her. Because it was easier than addressing what was between them.

“Think what you would like,” said Lexa tersely, “But I’m making this choice with my head, and not my—” She cut off with an odd cough. Clarke gave her a strange look. Lexa ignored it, shaking her head before adding, “This is the smart thing to do and you know it.”

Clarke’s mouth was dry and she realized with horror that her lower lip was trembling, so she sank her teeth into it. She didn’t miss the way Lexa’s gaze fell on the movement, nor the way her pupils dilated and her jaw dropped slightly as she parted her lips to take in a quiet, sharp intake of breath.

“I don’t know anything except you’re running away,” said Clarke, hating the rasp of her voice; she wasn’t sure if it was because of the painful thud of her heart, or in response to Lexa suddenly looking at her like she was a steaming mug of butterbeer she wanted to consume. “I thought we were—“ Clarke’s voice cut off as she struggled to swallow so it didn’t crack or something equally horrifying. “I thought I meant more to you than that.”
Lexa’s eyes seemed to flash in something akin to panic. She looked away, cheeks tinted pink, and stared at the floor as she said in a weak voice, “Clarke, things are…too much. We can’t…I can’t.” Lexa took another breath, harshly blew it out. “This is ridiculous,” she muttered, shifting her weight and dragging her gaze up to meet Clarke’s. “I can’t have this in my life,” she said, gesturing widely between them.

Clarke’s brows drew together and she clenched her teeth together even as her heart broke. “You mean you don’t want me in your life.”

“That’s not what I mean at all, Clarke. I just can’t afford this distraction.”

“So that’s all I am to you?” said Clarke coldly. “A distraction?”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed again before deliberately looking away. “Yes. One I cannot afford.”

“Because of the tournament,” said Clarke scathingly.

Lexa seemed to hesitate before nodding.

“That is seriously the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” Clarke took a step forward, and ignored the fact that Lexa took a step back. The movements were echoing what happened in the tent only an hour before their first kiss, and it sent a shiver down both of their spines. Maybe it was a good thing Lexa was ending whatever this was, because she didn’t know how much longer she could remain in Lexa’s proximity without confessing her feelings and also asking her permission to rip off her clothes. By all accounts, Clarke didn’t need this, whatever it was between them, in her life either. “You can end us if you want, but you aren’t going to do it half-assed. Tell me the truth, Lexa.”

Lexa’s eyes were so wide and brimming with emotion. She looked somehow both worn and hard, vulnerable and impenetrable. It reminded Clarke of cracked glass wavering but not quite shattering; of crumbling stone that could stay upright if it just stilled.

Then Lexa blinked, and the vulnerability was gone.

“There isn’t an us to end,” she said harshly.

Clarke watched her go, watched her storm down the staircase before slowing to a trot in the entrance hall, dropping her shoulders and lifting her head high and walking as dignified as though she and Clarke had just had a civilized conversation about politics over the paper and a cup of tea. Clarke wanted to see her as fake, wanted to see her as a coward, wanted to be disgusted by her.

All she saw was Lexa scared and hiding. Clarke was more disgusted for allowing herself to get in so deep.

She wasn’t going to cry, she told herself that. After she returned to Ravenclaw Tower to gather her toiletries and made her way to the Prefect’s Bathroom, she took a long soak in the tub, floating in the deep water. She couldn’t stop her gaze from shifting over to the diving board and the toilet where Lexa always sat during their swim lessons.

It was then, alone with only the company of the mermaid portrait, that Clarke finally allowed the tears to fall.
Two days before the second task, Clarke found herself sitting on the lakeshore (as far away from Durmstrang ship as she could manage it) and struggling to fight tears. She started when she heard footsteps, and then relaxed when she saw it was Wells, his school messenger bag slung over one shoulder and his yellow and black tie loosened around his neck.

“Hey,” said Wells, frowning as he eased down beside Clarke. “What’s the matter?”

Clarke sighed, impatiently wiping at the corners of her eyes before the tears could fall. “Lexa,” she muttered.

“Trouble in paradise?” he asked, trying for a light tone, but the way he was looking at Clarke was serious and somber. When she didn’t respond, he wrapped an arm around her shoulder. She leaned into his familiar embrace, breathing in the clean linen Wells always smelled of.

“Paradise,” Clarke snorted, shaking her head as tears stung her eyes again. This time they spilled over, rolling down her cheeks. What part of paradise was any of this? Her father in prison, her mother too busy to regularly speak to her, Diana Sydney making simpering, subtle comments about her father every time she visited the school to conference with the other judges, Shadow-Eaters apparently prowling around on the loose, people dying (four more since Frankie), this stupid task, and now Lexa ending their friendship.

On top of all this, the second task took place in two days, and Clarke was not feeling confident (not like she was feeling confident for the first task either, but still). She’d finally opened her knapsack to reveal a small wooden trunk that looked more like a treasure chest, and one skeleton key. What the fuck that meant, she didn’t know, but the note attached to the key had a riddle on it that Clarke and all her friends could agree sounded as though the second task would take place over the course of two days in the Forbidden Forest, of all places. Well, most of her friends thought this. Jasper, the idiot, was certain the task was in a forest in Albania. Clarke refrained from calling him a moron, if only because they had been on shaky speaking terms since the first time he’d actually acknowledged her presence (at the Yule Ball) since the start of the task. While Octavia was under the impression that Clarke would have to fight some monstrous creature, Raven and Clarke thought the riddle indicated Clarke would have to survive a night there and then find whatever she needed to use the key for, to retrieve some object and place in the trunk that would contain a hint for the final task.

“Everything is going to be okay, you know,” said Wells gently, reaching over to brush a thumb over Clarke’s cheek and rub away the tears.

She nodded, hugging Wells tightly.

He stayed for a little while and they talked, from everything from what had happened with Lexa (when she’d explained they’d fallen asleep together, Wells had suggested “Sounds like she panicked, does she have commitment issues?” and Clarke had to wonder when it wasn’t like they were in a relationship in the first place), to how the next task would go. They chatted their theories about what awaited Clarke in the forest, and despite her anxiety (because the forest was scary, okay, they had been warned against it every year at school and once when Raven and Bellamy had challenged one another in their fourth year to go into the forest at night and they came back white-
faced and mute, their entire class had the unanimous decision to stay out of there), Wells was making her feel better. Soon enough, though, he had to return to the castle for his next class, and Clarke was left wandering back across the grounds by herself.

She stopped to head toward the gamekeeper’s hut and vegetable garden when she spotted the gamekeeper, Raven, and Octavia all standing together outside the pumpkin patch.

“…I’m just saying, I bet I could show you a fun night,” suggested the gamekeeper, a confident smile aimed at Raven.

Clarke met Octavia’s eyes and they both shook their heads, grinning. The gamekeeper was hitting on Raven. The same gamekeeper Clarke had seen jerking himself off while she gave a tour to Lexa.

“Yeah, I already know how to make my nights fun, thanks,” said Raven, rolling her eyes.

“Oh really? I bet you do.”

“Jesus, Wick, get your mind out of the gutter,” sneered Raven, which was ironic considering the gutter was where Raven’s mind lived.

Clarke came up to stand at the fence with Octavia, content to watch Raven shut down Wick several more times before he finally gave up and left to go ‘tend to the Quidditch pitch,’ whatever that meant.

“How embarrassing for him,” Raven jeered, watching his retreating figure.

“I would say that was more embarrassing for you,” came a droll voice.

Clarke, Octavia, and Raven’s heads all snapped toward the edge of the forest adjacent to the lake. Anya stood there, her typical haughty expression marred by the evident amusement lighting up her eyes.

“Well damn,” breathed Raven, grinning broadly. “Last time I saw your face, it was between my legs. Back for a repeat, Lachman?”

“In your dreams, Reyes,” Anya shot back. “I still haven’t recovered. Keep throwing up every hour or so. It’s really unfortunate.”

Raven snorted, shaking her head, and bent down to tie her shoe (which led Clarke to believe that Raven was blushing and trying to hide it).

“You know, I’m really beginning to believe you’re a walking, talking, human dementor, Anya,” said Octavia, though her smirk gave away her teasing. “Just going around trying to suck the souls out of we happy humans, aren’t you?”

“It’s what I live for,” said Anya dryly.

Clarke couldn’t help but to think this was not a very sensitive time to discuss soul sucking and dementors, considering what happened just a few weeks ago.

Still, she tried for a light tone. “Better start working on our patronus charms, then.”

“Or just our general asskicking skills to repel her,” joked Octavia. “Although I guess if we want to repel her, we could just act like Raven.”
“Hey!”

One corner of Anya’s mouth curled up while Clarke chuckled and Octavia cackled.

“Dicks,” grumbled Raven, still crouched and ‘tying her shoes.’

“Maybe we could just use Anya as a dementor-repellent. She’s so scary, she’ll scare them away. It could work since there are like, no first aids against dementors anyway, right?”

“Chocolate is a good first aid,” said Clarke.

“You know what else is as good as chocolate?” asked Raven, popping up over the fence.

“Orgasms.”

Clarke smiled. “You know from experience?”

“Next time I get Dementor-spooked, I’ll try it and let you know.” She rolled her eyes. “They release the same chemicals in the brains, so theoretically, it could work. We could test it out,” she added, winking at Anya, who did nothing in response but arch an eyebrow.

“I’m flattered,” said Anya, obviously sarcastic considering the feigned-disgusted curl to her upper lip as she pretended to glance over Raven in repulsion; utterly unaffected by Anya’s attempt to insult, Raven leaned back against the gate with a hand at her hip, a confident smile tugging up a corner of her mouth. “Really. But perhaps you should stick with the small fries.” When Raven quirked a brow in questioning (clearly what Anya had been expecting), Anya added with a vaguely arrogant countenance, “You know, other Hogwarts students. I daresay you’ll face more difficulty than you can handle with a Durmstrang such as myself.”

Raven leaned forward, her mouth thinning out into a determined sort of smirk, gripping the fence post tightly enough that her fingers were white. “You saying I can’t handle you?”

Clarke and Octavia exchanged a glance, rolling their eyes and shaking their heads as they wordlessly started heading back up toward the castle. Raven ignored them, too affronted to care. Besides, there was something other than annoyance stirring in her belly as she stared at Anya. Every time she looked at her, images flickered through her mind like some kind of possessed porno spelled onto the forefront of her brain. Anya: sweating, panting, back arching, fingers clawing, naked.

Now Anya looked supremely superior, brows raised and eyes half-lidded in her smugness. “Yes, actually, that’s exactly what I am saying.”

Challenge sparked in Raven’s dark eyes. “Didn’t hear any complaints about me handling you last month.”

Anya rolled her eyes, sighing as though in pity. “Raven. Don’t delude yourself. Anyone can get drunk enough to enjoy sex regardless of how poor the performance of their partner—or partners—may be. Hence why I’ve been happy to go a month without so much as a notion of a round two. You even entertaining the idea that you could satisfy me is amusing enough on its own.”

Raven unclasped the gate to let it swing open, taking a step back and holding an arm out wide as though for Anya to come in. Anya merely stared at her with that infuriating smirk still on her face. “Come on then,” said Raven, holding Anya’s gaze. “Hurry up, I haven’t got all day.”

“And why would I go in there?” asked Anya in amusement.

“To fuck.” The way Raven said it was nonchalant, and she kept her expression cool and
collected even though she felt a rush of satisfaction at the slight widening of Anya’s eyes in surprise. “Or are Durmstrangs too high maintenance to get down and dirty in a vegetable garden?”

Anya had regained her composure; she drew herself up with the regality of a fucking queen (what was it about Durmstrang women?) and surveyed Raven as though Raven was a mouse that the cat wasn’t sure whether or not was worth hunting. “There’s a difference between down and dirty when it comes to fucking in the dirt like pigs.”

“Either way, I can make you squeal.” Raven winked and Anya actually gagged at how lame that was.

“Squeal as in disgust? Sure. Satisfy me? Probably as much as you satisfied me before.”

“Well clearly you hadn’t satisfied me that night either. I had to finish myself off again when you left, you know.”

Anya’s eyes flashed; Raven grinned. She had touched a nerve, clearly. “Is that a joke?” she said sharply.

Raven shrugged. “Nope. I swear it. Wanna do the Unbreakable Vow? I can—“ Her next words were interrupted when Anya seized her by the arm and proceeded to drag her around the corner and out of sight, toward the far off oversized pumpkins in the shade that bordered along the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Anya slammed her back against one of the huge pumpkins and Raven had half a mind Anya was about to punch her lights out when Anya yanked her forward by her tie and crashed their mouths together.

Raven’s stomach clenched and her mouth went dry, and she didn’t bother to hide her moan as she returned the kiss with equal ferocity, plunging her tongue into Anya’s mouth and ignoring the clanking of their teeth in their overzealous enthusiasm.

“Fuck.”

Raven wasn’t sure which of them said it, but she thought it might have been her, because Anya was biting her own lip when she pulled back, eyes dark and hooded. She stared at Raven for a moment, both of them panting.

“You sure?” she asked in a low voice.

Raven wanted to snort because, *duh*, but then she remembered a month ago. Remembered pulling back from Anya to ask those exact words. She decided to give her the same response Anya had given her.

“Of course I’m fucking sure. Now eat me out like it’s your job.”

Anya had the ghost of a smirk before she crouched down, and for once, did what Raven said without any further snarky ass comments. Raven’s cries echoed around the pumpkin patch, and as she threaded her hands through Anya’s tangles of dirty blonde, braided hair, she wondered if her heart was pounding because of the sex or because of whom it was with.

* * *
The night before the second task, Clarke sat at dinner nervously prodding her food with the prongs of her fork, nerves dancing in her belly and not allowing her so much as a semblance of an appetite. For the past few days, her friends had been helping her at all possible moments, helping her train in various empty classrooms. Clarke felt guilty that they’d helped her, though rationally she knew Anya and Lincoln were probably training with Lexa, and Tsing and Emerson (two other asshole Beauxbatons) were certainly helping Cage.

Still, when Clarke voiced these concerns to Raven, she was given the words she needed to hear.

"So what if you’ve relied on your friends? You know Harry fucking Potter would have died in his first year if it weren’t for Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. His friends saved his ass over and over again and Voldemort would have won if it weren't for ALL the people who fought against him, but Harry Potter was still a great wizard. The fact that your friends are badasses doesn’t make you any less of one, Clarke." She reached across the table to pluck an apple out of a woven basket, winked at Clarke as she took a huge bite out of it. Her voice was muffled with her mouthful as she said, "Just means you're pretty lucky to have so many people who love you."

* "・/✧・* "

“Three…”

Clarke stood there at the outskirts of the forest, her heart pounding, her hands shaking as she tightened her grip on her wand. Her friends were cheering for her from the crowd situated in stands all facing a gigantic floating screen lifted high above the forest treetops.

“Two…”

She glanced at Lexa, who stood slightly crouched with her legs bent at a wide stance. Her eyes were focused and alight with a fierce intensity as she gazed forward into the forest that she looked prepared to launch herself into. Her long lashes were distinguishable even amidst the black paint coating her eyes and temples. Clarke swallowed down the urge to laugh at herself for getting the low heat in her stomach and the flutter of her heart; how could she think of her attraction to Lexa at a time like this?

“One…”

She gritted her teeth, crouching a little, steeling herself in preparation of what was to come.

The cannon blasted and they took off. The roar of the crowd immediately muffled the moment Clarke entered the thicket of trees, though she knew logically she wasn’t far enough into the forest for it to do that. Holding her wand out at the ready, she warily cast her gaze about. Lexa had already disappeared, but she could see the back of Cage as he veered off toward the northwestern side of the forest.
The sound of a whistle pierced the air, followed by a roar that halted Clarke in her tracks. She heard distant screams from the crowd, and a voice that sounded distinctly like Raven screeched, “What the fuck is that?”

Clarke swallowed as she quickened her pace.

She had plunged well into the center of the forest before she finally slowed her gait. She had relaxed somewhat, partly because the only obstacle she’d ran into so far was a unicorn at a reasonable distance, which merely galloped off at the sound of her, but mostly it was because the forest wasn’t as scary as she thought it’d be. It was beautiful, with towering trees with trunks twice as thick as her, and a variety of greens and colorful flowers. The sounds of birds chirping and various woodland creatures skittering about was like music to her, and she actually breathed a sigh of contentment as she weaved her way around a series of boulders; if there were animals around, surely that meant there were no dangerous creatures nearby.

Clarke busied herself with finding adequate shelter. She supposed she could use one of the caves she spied out to the east, but she didn’t like the idea of having her back to the wall when whatever it was that had been released into the forest and roared like that (and caused everyone, including Raven, to scream) was around. She decided to pick out a tree and hope for the best.

She made quick work of hunting around for berries and mushrooms. As far as she knew (as far as their Herbology books and *Hogwarts, A History* went into detail, anyway), nothing she’d picked was going to poison her, at least. She cast a spell to arrange stones into a neat little ring before cracking branches and gathering foliage, lowering them into the circle. She cast a fire, poked a stick through the mushrooms and held them above it, keeping her wand raised while warily glancing around, worried that the fire and smell of cooking food would attract unwanted creatures. She would have to enchant her cloak tonight, otherwise she was going to freeze, because there was no way she was sleeping next to a fire that would be glaringly obvious at night. At least it wasn’t too bad right now, smoke fading away in the blue skies peaking out above the thick canopy of trees. Nothing came, however, so it was with a full belly, relief, and heightened concern that Clarke cast herself up onto a high, thick branch, and secured herself with a single conjured rope. She supposed she could secure herself with a gluing charm, but that left too many potential catastrophes, such as accidentally dropping her wand and getting stuck up there.

She didn’t sleep well.

* * * /✧/ * *

Lexa didn’t fare much better.

She woke from an unsatisfying sleep sweating from the heat of her enchanted cloak and rolled to her feet, stretching for a moment before she pulled out her toothbrush and toothpaste from her bag. She had slept in her braids, and despite a few strands that had escaped, they were mostly still firmly tucked away, so she left it alone. She took advantage of a frozen puddle nearby to reapply her war paint. She removed the enchantment from her cloak before packing it, the Sneakoscope, and the Peruvian Instant Darkness Powder into the small knapsack she swung over her shoulder. She tossed a handful of berries into her mouth for breakfast before heading out.

She wondered where Clarke camped for the night. She hoped Cage had already been devoured by the creature evidently roaming the forest (Lexa didn’t know what it was, but whatever it
was, it was big. She’d heard it stomping around for a good ten minutes during the middle of the night), or had at least been severely maimed. Cheered by the thought of Cage’s pain, Lexa strolled on.

She headed deeper and deeper into the forest, until the sounds of birds faded along with the sunlight. The canopy of trees above grew so thick that not a single beam of sunlight managed to escape through; Lexa made sure her footsteps were quieter as she cautiously weaved through the trees, her wand held a little lower than she’d like but there was nothing she could do about it if she needed her wand light to see where her steps were falling.

A sense of foreboding came over her as she descended a hill littered with dead leaves. The leaves were crunching beneath her feet no matter how lightly she stepped, so she pointed her wand at herself and muttered, “Ascendio! Arresto momentum!”

She drifted through the air, gliding forward. Once she hovered over a clearing, she lowered herself down.

The instant her heels touched ground, something launched at her.

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Clarke cast water at the campfire. It hissed as she put it out. She’d briefly entertained the thought of emptying her bladder over it instead, because it was certain to piss the judges off and seriously fuck them for making her compete in this damn tournament in the first place, but the thought of strangers watching her freely urinate wasn’t an altogether pleasant one, so she found a bush and squatted there instead. She stuffed her toothbrush, toothpaste, and blanket back into her bag, lifted the heating enchantment off her cloak and pulled it back on, slid her arms into the straps of her bag, and started walking, even though she had no idea where she was going.

She walked for hours and was almost unnerved at the lack of obstacles she faced. Still, Clarke couldn’t help but smile as she passed by a pair of chattering squirrels, and bright blue birds swooped through the air above her head.

Dead in the center of the forest, she found her objective: three large wooden trunks were set up on a huge slab of rock that looked out of place in the forest, so clearly it had been set up there. When Clarke climbed up onto it, she saw that two of the trunks were empty; Lexa and Cage had evidently beat her here.

The key fit perfectly. She opened it up and frowned, perplexed to find a heavy golden claw. She peered around the trunk, felt it, cast a spell to reveal hidden objects, but nothing. Baffled, she stood up and packed the claw away in her bag, turning to head back to the forest edge.

Well, this task hadn’t been so difficult after all. Nothing had attacked her so far, ‘surviving a night in the forest’ was more like camping out, and basically, it just wasn’t a problem so far.

And then she spotted a figure in the distance tussling with some massive, many-legged creature. She saw the flash of wild brown hair and her heart jumped in panic; she hurried forward, wand held aloft.
There was a flash of light and the creature landed with a thud, the figure holding the wand standing over it, chest rising and falling but otherwise not looking too breathless. She turned at the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Clarke?”

Clarke’s mouth fell open and her eyes widened slightly as she took in the sight of Lexa standing over a mass of furry tangled legs, her wand lowering as she stared back at Clarke. “Lexa?”

They stared at one another for a moment; Clarke’s mouth was dry and she didn’t quite know what to say, so eventually she tore her gaze away from Lexa to focus on the Stunned spider motionless on the ground at her feet.

“We should leave this area. More will probably come,” said Lexa, having followed Clarke’s gaze. Her warpaint had been smudged in the apparent tussle, almost completely rubbed away at the outer corner of her left eye.

Clarke shook her head. “I think that’s the last acromantula in the Forbidden Forest.”

“How do you know?”

“They were mostly killed off in the Battle of Hogwarts, but our school books say there were some left but the population was dwindling down. I heard the Gamekeeper talking about it a few months ago about how there were only three in the forest that he could find, all female and all pretty old. They were trying to introduce new males in but the females kept killing and eating them. If this is the only one that attacked you, I think this is the last one left.”

“Oh.” Lexa stared down at it, expression indifferent but brows slightly raised. “Good thing I didn’t kill it, then.”

Clarke immediately gave her a withering look. Of course. Because all Durmstrangs were inclined to curse anything they didn’t trust. “Can’t say I wouldn’t have been surprised if you did.”

Lexa lifted her eyes to meet Clarke’s and narrowed them. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Clarke went to lift a shoulder in a shrug but did an odd irritated jerk instead. “Whatever you think it means. If you do kill it, just don’t wipe my memory so I don’t tell the judges and you get disqualified or something for it, okay?”

Lexa rolled her eyes, clenching her jaw; Clarke could see her grip tighten around her wand. “Get over yourself, Clarke,” she said coolly.

*I’m trying to get over you.* Clarke ignored the pang of her heart and uneasy twist of her stomach. She held onto the anger instead. She’d been doing a lot of that lately. She’d found it worked nicely. Thinking about dueling with Lexa was safer than thinking about doing other things with her, anyway. Well, maybe. Lexa would probably kill her in a second; she was lethal. Lethal Lexa. “Whatever you say. Commander,” she added scathingly; Lexa’s back straightened as she stiffened, a scowl darkening her features.

And that was what started the two of them bickering in the middle of the Forbidden Forest.

“You are so frustrating!” Clarke finally yelled, losing her temper.

Lexa had just opened her mouth to bellow back when the ground shook beneath them. “Wait,” said Lexa urgently, lifting a hand as though Clarke was about to speak; Clarke shot her a
reproachful look. Lexa crouched down, flattening a palm to the ground.

“Something’s coming. Something big.”

Clarke had lost all temper and patience and had clearly been around Raven and Octavia too much, because the first thing that came out of her mouth was a sarcastic, “Is it your mom?”

Lexa deadpanned her before scowling. “Shut up, Clarke, this is serious.”

Clearly it was very serious, because suddenly, before either of them could process it, a giant pissed-off gorilla burst through the vegetation and roared, charging toward them.

“Holy shit!” shrieked Clarke, stumbling back, the big claw in her bag clanking against her things.

“Shit!” cursed Lexa, eyes wide on the gorilla. She whipped her wand through the air, but every spell rebounded off the gorilla and just seemed to piss it off. It snarled and lunged toward them, but then Lexa snapped out a spell and sent the acromantula spinning in the air toward the gorilla, hitting it dead in the chest with a sick crunch.

They both turned and ran, hearts in their throats.

“If that spider wasn’t dead before, it sure as hell is now!”

“Shut up, Clarke!” said Lexa angrily.

The gorilla was pounding behind them; they hung a left between two particularly thick tree trunks and darted around a cluster of stones over ten feet high.

They peered out from behind it, intently eyeing the gorilla running in the distance, roaring in fury as it tried to find them.

“It really is your mom,” whispered Clarke, unable to resist and yeah, okay, maybe she was kind of in shock at seeing a fucking gorilla trying to kill them.

“Shut up, Clarke, before we’re mauled to death because of your shit jokes!” hissed Lexa.

Sure enough, the gorilla’s head turned sharply, as though it had heard them, or perhaps caught their scent.

“Fuck,” whispered Clarke.

They fled as the gorilla charged toward them again. They ran, progressively deeper into the forest, which was completely counterproductive because they needed to be running the other way, toward the crowd, in order to finish the task. The forest around them was growing darker, but the sunlight that managed to peek through the canopy of leaves was glinting off huge, intricate spider webs. Fuck, that was worrisome. What if that hadn’t been the last acromantula?

The gorilla was still following them and they hadn’t seen a single spider, so they flew on, until they came to the edge of a cliff. It didn’t look too far down, but far enough to hurt an ankle, and they didn’t have time to cast any spells to slow their descent—the gorilla was right on their trail, so the moment they reached the edge, they jumped.

They both cried out in pain as they landed; Lexa landed on her wand arm and Clarke twisted her ankle as she hit ground. Still, they pulled themselves to their feet and clutched onto one another.
and to their wands as they dragged themselves toward the only possible salvation they could see: a cave not far off. Clarke practically shoved Lexa inside and immediately began to cast protective enchantments around the mouth of the cave so by the time the gorilla reached them, it slammed into the invisible barrier and howled in rage. It could smell them, but it couldn’t see them and it couldn’t hear them.

Panting, Clarke turns to see Lexa slumped up against the wall, breathing haggardly in pain from her arm. She was trying to shakily point her wand at it to heal, but Clarke knew Lexa was terrible with healing spells.

“Here, let me,” she said, still breathless. She bent down and pointed her wand, running the tip over the length of Lexa’s arm, from her shoulder to her hand.

Lexa sighed in relief, stretching it. “Thanks.”

* "・/\・ STAR

An hour later, they were no better off than where they’d been before, except now, they couldn’t stop bickering. The gorilla was still lurking at the cave entrance, breathing heavily and staring resolutely into the cave as though eventually Clarke and Lexa would reveal themselves to it, and neither of them had any idea what to do, considering all their spells were bouncing off the gorilla, and the gorilla could smell them so it wasn’t like they could just sneak past it.

“We’ve got to figure this out,” breathed Clarke, pacing in the small space of the cave. “Some way to do this fast because it’s not like the gorilla is going to take mercy on us or anything—“

“Nor should we take mercy on it. Mercy in the heat of battle is weakness.”

"I thought you said feeling was weakness," Clarke shot back at her.

Lexa deadpanned her. "Mockery is not the product of a strong mind, Clarke."

Clarke fucking hated how she practically shivered every time Lexa said her name. That damn K. "Look, as much as I'd love to stand here discussing what our definitions of a strong mind are, there's a giant mutant gorilla blocking our way back to the castle and we need to be brainstorming."

Clarke wrung her hands in agitation, screwing up her face as she strained her mind for some, ANY, idea.

"I've already told you a perfectly acceptable idea," said Lexa obstinately.

Clarke sucked in a deep breath. "We are not using an Unforgivable Curse."

"It's an animal. It's not going to have lifelong trauma from an Imperius curse making it move out of our way."

"Yeah, I bet it's that easy to you. Just like when you wanted to curse Octavia," muttered Clarke.

Lexa rolled her eyes so heavily it looked painful. "Are we still going over that? It's been
months. Move on.”

Clarke scoffed. “Move on—wait.” She stopped, her mouth falling open. “Move on. That’s it! We need to just move on. A portkey!”

Lexa frowned. “I thought Hogwarts was surrounded by protection spells. We will not be able to use magic to relocate to the castle—”

“We won’t go to the castle. If we use it as minimally as possible and stay within the confines of the forest, we should be okay,” she explained. “We’ll travel a distance that’s less than a hundred feet, and that shouldn’t be enough to mark it as serious relocation magic.” Now she sounded as though she were trying to reassure herself more so than Lexa.

“Are you sure you can do this?” asked Lexa; to her credit, she did not sound doubtful. If anything, she sounded urgently concerned, like she was worried for Clarke, too.

“Well I’ve never done it before, so I guess we’ll find out.” Clarke kicked both her shoes off and picked one up. She held it flat in her palm as she pointed her wand at it. “Portus,” she muttered; it glowed a vibrant blue before fading back to its normal brown. She carefully sat it down on the stone ground at their feet before she picked up the other one and did the same incantation. The moment it began fading to brown, she said quickly, “Wingardium Leviosa!” and held it hovering in the air for a moment.

“Okay. I think this is going to work,” she said nervously, glancing at Lexa’s reluctant expression. “We’re going to have to be quick and take off the moment we land. Are you ready?”

Lexa eyed the floating shoe for a moment before shaking her head in resignation. “Ready as I’ll ever be. Let’s do it.”

Clarke nodded grimly before turning and facing the entrance that the gorilla was still pounding against. Praying she didn’t end up whacking it in the face with the shoe, she waved her wand and sent the floating shoe flying out of the cave and spiraling across the forest; it landed just as the gorilla fell forward, momentarily surprised at the border suddenly disappearing.

“Quick!” hissed Clarke; she and Lexa both squatted and held a hand above the remaining shoe. “Ready?” The gorilla was scrambling to get up, snarling, eyes on Clarke and Lexa. “One—” the gorilla was back on its feet, “Two—” The gorilla was crashing toward them, roaring, “Three!” Clarke and Lexa seized the shoe just as the gorilla lunged at them.

The sensation of a hook at her navel was not unfamiliar to Clarke, as she’d used a portkey a few times in her life (usually during the Quidditch World Cup games her father and Jaha would take she and Wells to), but it was still unwelcome. She and Lexa slammed into each other, shoulders banging together, clutching the shoe as they whirled through the air—then they landed with a heavy thud on their stomachs in the snow where the shoe had landed feet away from the cave. Lexa was already on her feet and pulling Clarke up, both gasping for breath; they ran from the cave as quickly as they could, no time to even look back over their shoulders to see if the gorilla had caught on and was following them. It didn’t sound like it, at least.

They ran for a solid ten minutes before finally stopping. Clarke placed a hand on a tree and bent over, her chest searing as she drew in haggard breaths. This was enough exercise to last her a lifetime.

“I can’t believe that actually worked,” Clarke admitted, ignoring the sharp glare Lexa gave her.
“I can’t believe I consented to that when you didn’t even know what you were doing.”

“It’s not like we had any other options. You weren’t exactly contributing ideas,” she defended as she pointed her wand at her bare, freezing feet to cast a spell preventing them from getting wet and frozen solid during the imminent trek through the snow.

“I had a more than adequate idea,” snapped Lexa. She pushed away from the tree and held her wand in her palm, watching where it swiveled before lowering it and starting to stride in the northern direction. Clarke followed, massaging her sore sides as though it would heal her aching lungs.

“I’ll repeat it one more time, since you seem to have difficulty understanding this. _Cursing_ is never the answer.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, shaking her head; they no longer seemed particularly concerned with the gorilla hearing them and following, since they were basically storming through the forest in their growing anger. “You people are so soft,” she said scornfully. “If you want to be a leader, you must have the courage to make the hard choices.”

“I don’t want to be a leader. I didn’t ask for this,” growled Clarke.

“Regardless of your wishes, you were still chosen as your school’s champion, therefore you are a leader whether you like it or not. There was a reason your name was chosen out of all the names submitted, Clarke,” continued Lexa as she used her wand to blast a particularly dense cluster of bushes out of their path. “You were born for this.” Clarke didn’t miss the way her expression hardened and eyes went cold, nor the slight bitter tang to the words as Lexa said quietly, “Same as me.”

They had a long journey back, another two or three miles at the very least. Rationally, Clarke knew they should probably separate, go their own ways back to the castle. After all, like Raven said, she and Lexa had already finished the first task together, which looked odd enough without them emerging from the second task together, too. It was unprecedented in the entire history of the Triwizard Tournament for Champions to work together (except for the one when they all tried to catch a rampaging cockatrice together, but still). Clarke knew. She’d checked.

Not to mention she and Lexa already needed to put as much distance between them as they could, considering the air between them was rife with tension and they couldn’t stop arguing.

They bickered now as they walked. Clarke wasn’t sure what was pissing her off more: the fact that Lexa was a stubborn fool, or that Lexa’s angry tone and flashing eyes were kind of turning her on. The fact that they were trekking through the forest and despite the cold were sweating from exertion, Lexa’s warpaint mostly gone, and her arms looked particularly lean and muscular as she shoved aside branches and bushes, and the hard jut of her jaw line was just mouthwatering—

Yeah, none of that helped.

“You’re so hypocritical,” fumed Lexa, blasting another bush out of the way with unnecessary force; it smoldered a little when it landed. “You scorn me for using aggressive tactics while you’re content to luck our way through trouble that _you_ cause!”

“First of all, it wasn’t _my_ fault it attacked us,” said Clarke through clenched teeth, stomping along behind Lexa. “Secondly, you call cursing an ‘aggressive tactic?’ It’s called _cursing_ for a reason! It’s not a good thing, Lexa! I don’t know how you do things in Durmstrang, but here we’re a little more civilized than that!”
Lexa whirled around to face her. Clarke hated how her stomach tightened at the sight of Lexa’s jaw working, spitting through clenched teeth, “Just because we have different ways—“

“Different ways?” Clarke echoed in disbelief. “How about you just try not cursing people to get your way? It’s the same way you used wiping memory as a solution to Octavia! Manipulating and overpowering people is not the way to win!”

“Manipulating and overpowering is a necessary quality when you have to lead and protect,” snarled Lexa, teeth bared. Clarke could swear there was steam coming out of her nostrils; the bright ferocity of her green eyes, the concentrated rage—she looked like a dragon unfurling her wings and preparing to launch a devastating attack. “As leaders, we do what we must when there are lives on the line.”

“What lives?” scoffed Clarke. She didn’t notice the way Lexa blinked and moved her head back slightly, as though sharply returning to reality. “The only life on the line is yours because of this idiotic tournament that you volunteered for.” She stepped forward, noticing with a thrill that this time, Lexa didn’t back away. She stood tall and stubbornly proud, an angry, haughty expression on her face (she reminded Clarke of Anya for a brief moment). “You put your name in. You planned to be in this tournament from the start. You asked for this, Lexa, all of it.” Lexa’s gaze faltered, but Clarke plunged on. “A good leader would know how to take care of their problems peacefully. A good school would educate you on dealing with problems peacefully. You aren’t savages.”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. She said softly but firmly, “We are what we are.” And Clarke was struck.

Struck because Lexa was infuriating, and obstinately stuck in her ways, and impossible to argue with. And so, so beautiful.

She fought not to let her gaze drop to Lexa’s lips; she determinedly looked into her eyes, ignoring the increasingly rapid pattering of her heart as she said, “I think you’re lying to yourself.”

If anything broke through Lexa’s facade, that did. Her brow furrowed as she frowned, the corners of her lips tugging downward. Clarke was so focused on holding Lexa’s gaze she didn’t miss her eyes shifting down, glancing at her lips. Clarke licked them subconsciously, watched Lexa’s eyes dart down again to follow the movement.

“How is that?” she said, voice dangerous.

Clarke wasn’t sure if they were more filled with rage or the other thing. “You tell people you care about them, and then you push them away.” It had felt pretty savage when Lexa had ripped her heart out and stomped on it, when she told her they couldn’t be friends any more.

Clarke swore if Lexa rolled her eyes one more damn time, she was going to listen to her about the benefits of cursing someone. “Whatever helps you sleep at night, Clarke,” she said, tongue clicking on the K, and Clarke’s blood was boiling as hot as the heat searing in her belly. Lexa turned and resumed walking; after a brief moment in which Clarke counted to ten in her head and reminded herself that it wasn’t as much a good idea to pick a fight with Lexa as it was to sleep with her before she set off after her.

The problem was, the fighting didn’t stop. Nor did the insistent heat and longing.

They were probably only a mile and a half away from the edge of the forest when their bickering finally culminated in Clarke continuing to call Lexa a hypocrite and a liar, and Lexa continuing to snark at her, until Clarke was sick and tired of lying to herself.
“Calling me a liar is nothing but pathetic. I do what I must and I am not apologetic over that. I
will be truthful—“

“Well what is the truth then, Lexa?” The longing was too much and Clarke was so, so tired
of thinking about the tent, about the ball. “Because I think you want to kiss me.”

“I think you want me to kiss you.”

Clarke’s patience had already dwindled away, the resulting absence culminating in sparks
that exploded in her belly, ones too potent to pretend were born out of anger. “Then just fucking do
it,” she snarled, halting in her tracks to glare at Lexa. “I’m sick of seeing you stare at my lips.”

Lexa spun on her heel, a muscle twitching in that sinful jaw. “I’m sick of you staring at
mine!”

“Fuck you.”

“Fuck you.”

Fine.

Clarke surged forward, crashing her lips onto Lexa’s with a near growl ripping from her
throat. The noise Lexa made was caught somewhere between a snarl and a whine, the latter seeming
more likely as the force of Clarke’s lunge pushed Lexa back, causing them to stumble. Clarke’s
momentum kept her staggering forward, reaching out to balance herself just as Lexa’s back slammed
into a particularly thick tree trunk, one big enough for Clarke to slap her hands on. The rough bark
cut into Clarke’s palms, but she ignored the pain, had no mind for the pain because every brain cell
seemed to be going haywire at the moment, bouncing around the confines of a mind that suddenly
felt very hazy.

The moment was suspended, just for a brief moment that felt far longer than it was. They
stood there, Lexa pressed back against the tree, Clarke’s body flush against hers, her fingertips
digging into the tree. Then there wasn’t enough oxygen and they both parted their lips with echoed
gasps; the wild intake of breath that came from Lexa and the way her lips parted beneath Clarke’s
was the final straw. Every inhibition snapped as easily as the twigs beneath her feet as she shuffled
forward, dipping her head as she angled in, deepening the kiss. Lexa’s lashes fluttered against
Clarke’s cheeks. One of her hands dropped to Clarke’s waist while the other snaked up between
them to take purchase in Clarke’s hair.

Clarke’s heart was pounding nearly as fast as her head was spinning. Lexa smelled of earth
and sweat, and there was the slightest taste of blood on her lips, presumably from the earlier tussle
with the gorilla. Her body felt hard and lithe against Clarke’s, while her tongue was smooth and hot,
so fucking hot, as it curved with Clarke’s.

Lexa turned her head to change the angle of the kiss, ghosting her lips across Clarke’s
jawline before capturing Clarke’s mouth once more.

Fuck.

Clarke slipped her hands underneath Lexa’s Durmstrang uniformed shirt and her breath
catched as her hands flattened against muscles that went hard and taut against her cold fingertips. Her
shudder pushed her closer to Lexa, broke their kiss as she inclined her head against Lexa’s,
foreheads resting together. She closed her eyes in an attempt to steady her spinning head, licked her
lips, mouth dry, heart thumping, body aching and not just because she’d been thrown around like a
rag doll by a mutant gorilla.

Her fingertips drifted down to the apex of Lexa’s thighs, and then everything seemed to slow. As she blinked, eyes meeting Lexa’s, the sparks of panic (because they should still be moving fast, right? This tension had been between them for months—they should be ripping at one another’s clothes and drowning in bruising kisses. They shouldn’t be like this—moving slow like they’re savoring it, gazing into one another’s eyes, unspoken promises on their lips and curious inquiries on the tips of their tongues) in her chest were muffled by her lust and the perplexing belief that, though everything pointed to danger considering she was here, with Lexa, in the Forbidden Forest, Clarke felt safer than she had in a long time wrapped in Lexa’s arms.

Lexa’s hands were roaming down Clarke’s side, shifting her cloak aside to grip the blue-striped tie and tug Clarke in for another deep, searing kiss.

Clarke’s hips were pinning Lexa’s to the tree, but Lexa was still canting, pressing herself against the thigh Clarke had pitted forward. Her breath hitched and caught as Clarke pushed her leg forward, their stomachs flattening together while they both grinded their hips, Lexa’s lips falling to Clarke’s neck.

They shouldn’t be doing this. That much was obvious. But Clarke couldn’t think straight—didn’t want to. Pun intended.

She leaned back, causing Lexa to withdraw from her neck, and drifted a light, questioning touch across the skin beneath the waistband of Lexa’s pants. Lexa shuddered. “Can I?” she asked, voice low and husky.

Lexa’s heavy-lidded gaze was trained on Clarke’s mouth. She tilted her head, and Clarke had never been so relieved by one of Lexa’s signature swift nods. “Touch me.”

That one command was going to be the death of Clarke. The ache at her core was so strong it was almost painful.

She slipped her hand into Lexa’s pants, shifted aside her underwear. “Oh my God,” she breathed, mouth open, dimly aware she was now holding her breath as she traced her fingertips through slick folds of liquescent heat. Lexa was so wet, for her, for Clarke, and she was stunned by the intensity of the desire quaking through the entirety of her body. She’d never wanted anyone this much, and as her eyes flew open, as she met Lexa’s wide, lust-glazed gaze, she realized it wasn’t just desire she felt.

All the time she’d spent arguing with herself, spent resolutely denying any feelings, yet here she was. Lost somewhere deep in the Forbidden Forest, a monstrous creature intent on killing them lurking somewhere in the distance, the entire school and all their people waiting for them, the Ministry still on Clarke’s back, her father still in prison, Shadow-Eaters still wandering free, haunting memories and so much to worry about, and Clarke had the prize of Durmstrang pressed up against a tree, her fingers gathering the abundance of wetness near her entrance and moving up to lightly trace wide circles around her, and Lexa’s tangles of half-braided hair clenched in Clarke’s fist, pressing gentle kisses to her temple as she dropped her head back against the tree, gasping quietly. Clarke bit her lip, ignoring the sudden sting in her eyes, the lump in her throat, the swelling emotion in her heart. She didn’t have to think about this. That was the good thing about feeling, about not thinking. It didn’t have to be complicated.

Clarke was so absorbed in Lexa, fixated on her eyes, her pupils so blown the green of her irises could barely be seen, Lexa’s plump lips parted as she took in a sharp intake of breath, holding it, waiting for Clarke’s fingers to stop just ghosting and teasing, waiting for the pressure, for this to
finally start—

But the universe had other plans, clearly, because suddenly the birds in the nearby trees took off and there was a guttural roar and the sound of branches snapping and heavy footsteps shaking the ground.

“Shit,” gasped Lexa; she pushed back from the tree as Clarke yanked her hand out of her pants. Lexa hurriedly tucked her uniformed shirt back in as they both hastily stumbled back, eyes zeroed in on the distant forest where the roaring was coming from. The bushes and trees were shaking violently as the gorilla barreled through them.

“Fuck. Run!” cursed Clarke, shoving at Lexa’s back to urge her onward.

They flew. The trees they weaved through were growing wider apart, the forest lighter. They couldn’t hear the crowd yet, but Clarke knew they were getting closer to the edge of the forest. Her legs were burning and lungs searing, but they ran.

“Wait wait wait,” panted Lexa, halting Clarke with a hand on her shoulder. They skidded to a stop in a leaf-strewn clearing dappled in gold from the sunlight leaking through the canopy. “I think we lost it.”

Clarke looked around as she doubled-over, hands on her knees, wheezing for breath. Lexa was hardly sweating, which would annoy Clarke if awareness of the wetness on her fingers hadn’t suddenly returned. She brought them to her lips without a thought, licking them clean before she remembered where she was and that Lexa was standing right there, staring at her with wide eyes. Clarke blushed furiously, but Lexa was licking her lips and moving toward her—

They jerked apart, stumbling back from one another when a vivid blue light shot through the air between them.

They turned toward the direction it had came from, and Clarke had hardly pulled out her wand by the time Lexa had already brandished hers and sent a spell barreling toward the tree Cage had just ducked behind.

“What the fuck?” said Clarke in outrage, lunging to avoid the next spell Cage shot at them; she hid behind a tree, briefly peeking out from behind it, trying to spy Cage. He was behind the same tree but focused on Lexa now, who had not moved to avoid him but was still standing in the clearing, her red scarf billowing behind her, face deadly with intensity, wand slashing through the air. She was muttering spells under her breath, mixing them together to create a huge wave of magic, woven together like glowing DNA, formed from the tip of Lexa’s wand, gushing into the air like water.

“Misce Ventus, Baubillious, Aqua Eructo, Alarte Ascendare!”

It undulated for a moment, absorbing the spells Cage shot at her; then she snarled and thrust forward her wand, and the magic streamed toward Cage, hooking around the tree to hit him square in the chest, hardly deterred by the shield he’d managed to put up, and knocked him ten feet away and ten feet high, the glow of the spell receding and leaving him drenched as though in water. He landed with a hard thud and wheezed for breath, rolling to his stomach before he managed to scramble up and crawl behind another tree so Lexa’s next spell hit the ground he had occupied a second before.

That fucking asshole must have seen them ahead of him and tried to stun them so he could reach before them and get first place. Furious he’d tried to hex them, Clarke peered around her tree again. Lexa was still in the clearing, slowly advancing on Cage, wand slashing as she deflected curse
after curse he was throwing at her. One of the spells hit the tree Clarke was behind; she ducked back just in time. When she looked out again, there was a small crater in the trunk, black and charred. Lexa glanced over to make sure Clarke was okay; when they made eye contact, Clarke lifted her brows and inclined her head; Lexa nodded to confirm.

Lexa would serve as the distraction. Clarke carefully tiptoed around, darting behind tree after tree as she slowly made a wide circle around where Cage was flinging his arm out from behind the tree, blindly throwing spells at Lexa.

“Muffliato,” whispered Clarke, pointing her wand at the ground. Now her footfalls didn’t crunch in the snow, so she was free to inch her way closer to Cage.

She stopped a few feet away, pointing her wand at his back. “Expelliarmus!”

Cage’s wand flew out of his hand and landed on the ground. He turned in surprise, his face contorting in rage when he saw that Clarke had crept up on him. “Epoximise!” said Clarke before he could move; he slammed against the tree, arms oddly angled as though he’d slapped onto it like Velcro. “Accio wand,” said Clarke calmly, catching it when it flew to her. She flicked her wand once more, wordlessly silencing Cage before he could speak.

Lexa walked over to stand beside Clarke, looking down at Cage with disdain as though he were a bug unworthy of having dueled with her (which, after watching Lexa duel, Clarke could confirm 100% true).

“What are we going to do with him?” she asked; she and Lexa both folded their arms beneath their chests, arching one brow as they stared down on him. He was frozen but his eyes could still move; they bulged in fury, and Clarke was certain he’d be screaming at them right now if he could.

“You know what I would suggest,” said Lexa, tone light and even as though they were discussing a friendly game of Quidditch.

Clarke shot her a withering glance. “Cursing him right now, even if he was the one to attack us, would just lose you points, assuming it didn’t disqualify you altogether.”

Lexa rolled her eyes, but didn’t push it.

Clarke looked back at Cage again and fought to hide her smirk as she shrugged and said, “We could just leave him for the gorilla.”

Cage’s bulging eyes suddenly looked less angry and significantly more terrified.

“You won’t let me curse him, but you’ll leave him to be ripped apart and eaten alive by a mutant gorilla?” said Lexa dryly.

“I would if there weren’t cameras on us right now.” Clarke and Lexa both stiffened as the words sank in. They had forgotten they weren’t just alone here in the forest; the entire school had been watching them the whole time, and only minutes ago Clarke had had her hands down Lexa’s—

They looked at each other and then looked away, faces burning red.

Clarke felt like she would happily sink down into the ground into a puddle of humiliation. Raven was never going to let her hear the end of this.

“Let’s just incapacitate him long enough to go win this task,” suggested Lexa.
“What do you have in mind?”

“Well he’s full of enough hot air that this shouldn’t be too difficult a transition,” she said innocently, one corner of her lips curving upward.

Comprehension put a smile on Clarke’s face. She held up her wand, pointing it at Cage. “Gotcha. Shall we?”

Lexa nodded, clearly enjoying putting on this show to torture Cage as much as Clarke was. She lifted her wand. “We shall.”

They both said their spells at the same time.

“Aqua Eructo!”

“Enbublio!”

Cage promptly inflated; first his head, then the rest of his body. He grew bigger and bigger until his eyes could not even be seen over his protuberant cheeks; then there was a deafening popping sound, and he burst into a hundred tiny bubbles. The gorilla roared at the noise, but it was distant, back near the heart of the forest; it was probably chasing a unicorn or something. The bubbles hovered in the air for only a moment before they all popped one by one, leaving behind a small puddle at the foot of the tree.

Clarke grinned at Lexa, whose returning smirk put the warmth back in Clarke’s belly and brought painful awareness to where her hand had been earlier.

“Come on,” said Lexa; to Clarke’s great surprise, Lexa reached over and grabbed her hand, holding it tightly as she began to lead them toward the direction of the castle. Clarke tossed Cage’s wand at the tree he’d been pinned against, where he would soon reform.

Tired but on high from humiliating Cage, Clarke and Lexa made their way toward the light. They could now catch glimpses of the faraway Hogwarts towers looming over the forest. Clarke’s heart was beating fast, but it was less because of the trek and more due to the fact that she and Lexa were still holding hands. What did this all mean? Clarke never meant for this to happen—she was in as much a place for a relationship as Lexa was, and that included a no-strings-attached, friends-with-benefits kind of thing. But she wanted Lexa in her life, and there was no use denying that she wanted her in other ways as well, which was clearly reciprocated by Lexa…so what were they supposed to do? What were they supposed to do when this tension was always in the air between them, and they couldn’t simply be friends?

Maybe it would be better when the tournament was over and Durmstrang left Hogwarts, when Lexa wasn’t constantly everywhere she looked. They could write letters to one another and be normal friends, perhaps, and focus on their schoolwork. But for now—when Lexa was literally everywhere, when Clarke would wake in the morning and she could see Lexa on the deck of Durmstrang ship practicing spells, at lunch, in classes when Durmstrang was observing, at dinner, and then at night when they always seemed to awkwardly walk past one another in the halls when they weren’t speaking and then when they were, wrapped up in the Room of Requirement together—it was impossible for Clarke to look at Lexa and lie to herself that she only wanted her as a friend when she couldn’t stop looking at her lips.

Clarke squeezed Lexa’s hand; Lexa looked at her questioningly and politely halted when Clarke slowed and gently tugged her back.
“Can we talk? About what happened? Please?”

Lexa glanced around the forest. “Do we have to do this here, Clarke?”

“It’s just video, I doubt they can hear us. Especially over the crowd. They can just see us.”

Lexa looked down at their intertwined hands. Clarke almost expected her to pull away, but she didn’t. She looked back up at Clarke.

Clarke took a deep breath. Before she could speak, however, Lexa cut across her.

“I don’t…think that this is going to work out.”

Clarke deflated. Here we go again. Lexa was ending it before it could even begin. Clarke went to pull her hand free and turn to resume walking, heart already hurting, but when she tried to pull loose Lexa tightened her grip. Clarke looked back at her, frowning, puzzled.

“Clarke, I mean staying away from each other. Or being friends. I…I don’t think I can do it anymore.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed. “Wait, so, if you don’t want to be friends, but you don’t want to stay away from each other either, then…”

It was Lexa’s turn to take a deep breath this time. “I think—“

The universe clearly hated them today. When the spiders came barreling out of the only darkness around (lingering high above them in the trees), Clarke was almost laughing at the irony.

“Fucking spiders,” cursed Lexa as she used her wand to blast away the one nearest, that had careened down from a web on the branches above their head. “I knew there couldn’t only be one left.”

“They’re back for revenge!” Clarke laughed, and laughed harder still when the look Lexa gave her was a mixture of reproach and amusement.

There were only four spiders, but they were large enough and pissed enough (it really was a revenge ambush, clearly, since they were near the edge of the forest and Clarke doubted the spiders ever ventured this far from the dark safety of their nest) that they still posed a problem.

“Impedimenta!” The spider’s advance was slowed, but it still managed to knock Clarke aside with three of its legs. She scraped her arm on a bit of tree root sticking out of the ground and pain arced through her arm. She twisted her wrist to aim her wand up at the spider. “Immobulus!” It froze, falling forward flat on its face and landing on Clarke’s legs. More pain. Panting, she rolled her free front half over to point at one of the three spiders surrounding Lexa. “Incarcerous!” The spider was wrapped in conjured ropes and dropped to the ground with a heavy thud.

“Arania Exumai!” Lexa pointed her wand at the last two spiders and sent them flying back. Then she pointed her wand at the frozen spider pinning Clarke to the ground. “Arania Exumai!” After it went flying back to slam into a thorn bush, she heaved Clarke up and slung Clarke’s arm over her shoulder, since Clarke couldn’t put much weight on her leg. “Blast them if they come at us again,” she said, charging forward bearing most of Clarke’s weight. They half-ran from the debilitated spiders, hurrying toward the light. They could hear the crowd now, screaming and cheering.

Clarke was panting, and she wished she and Lexa could have finished their conversation but
there was no way she was going to stop again. She had seen enough of this forest to last a lifetime and was beyond ready to finish this task. She pointed her wand at her leg and muttered “Episkey!” The bruised bone healed instantly and Clarke withdrew her arm to run properly alongside Lexa so they could move faster.

They were both panting and covered in sweat when they finally burst free from the outskirts of the forest. The crowd was absolutely screaming, but it all sounded like static as Clarke and Lexa both paused to catch their breath and looked at one another. They were standing rather close because of how they ran, and Lexa’s eyes looked so clear and green, and Clarke was still tingling both with adrenaline from the gorilla, the duel with Cage, and the spiders, and with fire from the kiss with Lexa (and more), and their interrupted talk—

“She’s glad to see you well,” said Kane, practically beaming as he swept an arm out and began to usher Clarke and Lexa forward, toward the stage that the stadium full of students was all angled toward. The huge screen floating high in the air was black, but Cage was still in the forest. Clarke hoped this meant the videoing somehow malfunctioned.

“Have you seen Cage?” asked Dante; he came to walk beside them as they neared the stage.

Clarke and Lexa exchanged a look; they pursed their lips so Dante wouldn’t catch their smiles.

“We passed by him,” grunted Lexa.

“He shouldn’t be long,” added Clarke.

They stood where Kane directed them, facing the crowd. Clarke could see Raven, Bellamy, Octavia, and a few more of her friends, all leaping up and down and screaming in excitement.

Cage arrived almost fifteen minutes later with fury etched onto his red face. Clarke bit her tongue to hold back laughter; Lexa’s face was indifferent, but there was a satisfied twinkle in her eye. The judges conferred and then the crowd quieted as Kane cast *sonerus* on himself and began to announce the points.

Clarke stood there on the stage, body sore and aching and still trembling, barefoot and cold despite the blankets that Jackson had once again supplied. Kane had just announced that Clarke—Clarke—had gotten first place. She had won this task and was now tied with Lexa for the lead. Cage had of course scored last, though there was no mention of him attacking them so Clarke guessed, with relief, that the videoing had malfunctioned for some reason; Lexa scored second and was lauded for her dueling skills when facing down the gorilla and the spiders; Clarke was praised for her ingenuity in creating a portkey. She couldn’t believe it. She’d gotten *first*, when she didn’t even care about the damn tournament. Briefly she wondered if it would upset Lexa, who clearly cared a great deal about winning this tournament. Heart sinking, she glanced over at her. And promptly felt her heart kick into overdrive.

Lexa’s eyes weren’t on Kane, and she certainly didn’t look upset. She was looking at Clarke, and her eyes were dark, lips slightly parted—she looked like she had when Clarke had her pinned up against the tree, and when Clarke had her pressed against the wall beneath the stairs, and when they were in the tent months ago after the first task. Lexa was looking at her like she wanted her (Clarke shivered and it wasn’t because of the cold), and *God*, Clarke wished she knew what that meant.
After the task, Clarke was attacked with hug after hug from her friends in the entrance hall as they barraged her with their experiences watching the tournament.

“Well at first, I thought it was a dud,” said Raven as they all piled into a table for dinner. “Like it was the most boring task ever, it was exciting in the first five minutes when they released the gorilla and it took off. It almost caught up to Lexa before she lost it and it started going for a rabbit instead, but then that was it. The gorilla just sat on its ass eating the rabbit and the three of you found places to bunk for the night.”

“What did you guys do? Did you go back to the castle?”

“Some people did, but we all stayed and took turns sleeping.”

Clarke lifted her brows, amused. “You took shifts?”

Raven grinned. “Yeah. In the morning when you finally woke up—I mean Christ, Clarke, how can you sleep in even during a fucking tournament task?—we all were up and watching again. We sent Bell to grab some breakfast so he missed it when Lexa took down that giant ass spider and you ran into her. He came back just when the gorilla was chasing you guys and was like what the fuck did I miss. It was great though, really exciting, like muggle action movies.”

“I’m so glad it entertained you,” said Clarke dryly, and Raven chuckled.

“Anyway, so we watched you guys find the cave and it looked like you were arguing with each other, but we couldn’t hear anything you were saying.”

“Probably because of the enchantments,” mused Clarke.

“We were all freaking out when you made the Portkey, it was genius. And we were pissed when the cameras cut out when you caught your breath, didn’t know if the gorilla was still after you or what.”

Clarke’s face heated up. “Uh, yeah…that would be because Lexa and I kind of…had an argument.”

Raven rolled her eyes. “Did you start dueling or something? Because if you did, that’s stupid they cut the cameras. Drama makes for great television, any idiot knows that—”

“We didn’t start dueling,” interrupted Clarke, cheeks growing warmer and warmer. “We, uh…started kissing.”

Raven’s eyes widened. “That’s not a ‘just kissing’ blush. Oh my God, did you guys have sex? During the task?”

“No!” protested Clarke, a little weakly but voice firm enough to be heard over Raven’s sudden excited spluttering. “I just…kind of…felt her?”

Raven fell silent, raising her brows and smirking wickedly, and Clarke knew she was about to be relentlessly mocked. “Oh you felt her?”

“Shut up,” grumbled Clarke, scowling at Raven. “I mean I got in her pants, but didn’t have time to do anything before the stupid gorilla came back.”
“Damn cockblocking gorilla,” grinned Raven.

“Clitterference, as Octavia would say,” said Clarke dryly.

“What would I say?” said Octavia as she popped up behind them.

“Guess what Clarke and Lexa did during the task?” said Raven smugly. Clarke shot her a reproachful look, but Raven merely supplied, “It. They did it.”

When Octavia’s eyes widened, Clarke hastily filled in the blanks. “Not exactly doing it. Just…kissing, and some heavy petting…I mean maybe I got in her pants a little…”

“Oh my God!” shouted Octavia, an almost maniacal grin on her face. “You fingered Lexa in the forest during the task!”

“No I didn’t!” huffed Clarke. But her body was warm all over again and she just wanted to continue where she and Lexa left off…and that look Lexa had given her after the task, what was that about?

As though with divine intervention, just as Clarke looked up, she met a green-eyed gaze. Lexa was standing from the table, a similar untouched plate of food before her. She tilted her head, that same look on her face as she looked back at Clarke; and then she turned, wordlessly walking toward the door. And Clarke just knew.

She stood up so abruptly her friends stopped eating to look at her. Raven and Octavia, the only two to have followed her gaze and knew who she had been looking at, both exchanged a smirk.

“I’m tired,” lied Clarke. “I’m going to go to bed.”

Her friends all bid her goodnight and offered a few more congratulations as Clarke moved around the table and headed for the exit.

Raven sniggered. “Get some, Griff.”

“Shut up.”

* * /✧/ * *

Clarke hurried to the Room of Requirement. Lexa was not in sight, and there was a tiny voice in her head that suggested she may have returned to the ship, but Clarke had a feeling. Her entire body felt as though it were vibrating with white-hot electricity, the tips of her fingers tingling as much as her lips, as though craving the touch again.

She felt her heart practically jump out of her chest when she rounded the corner and spotted Lexa standing before the door of the Room of Requirement. She turned at the sound of Clarke’s footfalls, face indifferent but eyes—her eyes were burning with intensity.

Silently, Clarke walked to her, coming to a stop before the door.

They held eye contact, green and blue and so much heat, enough that Clarke felt as though the temperature in the hallway had risen about fifty degrees. Her skin tingled with anticipation, and her mouth went dry as Lexa extended a hand, stepping forward so that their bodies were pressed
flush together.

Clarke stiffened, heart racing as Lexa reached around her to twist the doorknob and push the
door open. Her hands dropped onto Clarke’s waist, holding firmly, and as Clarke stepped backwards
into the Room of Requirement she felt like those hands were the only thing holding her steady and
keeping her tethered.

Lexa’s head was lowering, eyes already half-lidded but still holding Clarke’s gaze. She
slowly moved her foot behind her, using her heel to find the door. Lexa’s arms were shifting, hands
twisting up Clarke’s back, pulling her close.

“This means something,” said Clarke suddenly, voice soft and eyes flicking to Lexa’s parted
lips. She didn’t know what possessed her to say it, except she knew she had feelings for Lexa and
they weren’t going away, and certainly wouldn’t be disappearing after tonight. She tensed in Lexa’s
arms, uncertain, hoping this wasn’t going to snap them back to reality and remind Lexa of all the
reasons why she insisted this should never happen.

But Lexa’s eyes were dropping to Clarke’s lips, and Clarke felt a thrill of anticipation as she
watched Lexa’s tongue dart out to moisten her own lips. “I know,” whispered Lexa, and Clarke
relaxed in her arms, winding her own arms around Lexa’s neck, slanting her head up as Lexa tilted
hers down.

Their lips met just as her heel nudged the door shut.
Sex and Patronuses

Chapter Summary

Clarke, Raven, and Octavia join the Durmstrang training sessions and learn how to cast a patronus charm.
And there's sex. Lots of sex.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You hover like a hummingbird

Haunt me in my sleep

You're sailing from another world

Sinking in my sea, oh

You're feeding on my energy

I'm letting go of it

She wants it."

-Of Monsters and Men

Lexa tried to control her gait as she made her way down the wide berth of the hallway. Her heart was thrumming in her chest and it felt as though she had a lump stuck in her throat. Were her hands actually shaking?

She almost felt trapped in a stupor. It brought her back to only a month ago when she had felt similarly dazed, after spending several glorious minutes with Clarke beneath the stairwell during the Yule Ball. Two months before that, she was alone and cold after winning the first task, her lips warming with friction against Clarke's in the Champions' tent. Before that, she only knew of Clarke from various newspaper clippings and theories of the Order. She knew of her name, and she knew what her admittedly pretty face looked like. But it wasn't like this. She didn't know the warm sky-blue of Clarke's eyes, didn't know the way her brows arched when emotions were spilling inside her, didn't know the way her voice took on that hard commanding tone when she was angry, didn't know the way she so often toyed with the old golden watch around her wrist when she was distracted or agitated, didn't know how her laughter at the table with her friends in the Great Hall seemed to somehow brighten the sky in the ceiling, didn't know that Clarke tasted even sweeter than the chocolate they were always sharing—

Lexa took a deep breath and let it rattle from her lungs and out of her lips, heart thrashing as
she spied the Room of Requirement starting to bloom into being before her. She wanted to glance behind her, but she wouldn’t let herself. She was afraid that if she did, she would somehow jinx it, and Clarke wouldn’t come.

She wasn’t letting herself overthink this, either. Overthinking was all Lexa ever did. Clarke was like her safe haven, the one person she could let her guard down around. The one person who made her think maybe there is more to life than war and the role Lexa had to play in it.

She hadn’t yet reached the door when Clarke arrived. Lexa felt her presence before she heard her. She turned round, heart thumping and mouth dry in anticipation, stomach tight and coiled, skin tingling. Only moments ago Clarke’s fingers had been drifting across her…

Was this wise? Did she have the right to do this? To do something for herself, to sink into this when there were people counting on her?

*Don’t overthink this.*

Fortunately, she didn’t have to repeat the words to herself, because the instant Clarke rounded the corner, all thoughts flew out of Lexa’s head.

Lexa kept her expression carefully blank, studying Clarke intently. Clarke did not say a word as she crossed the hallway, coming to stand directly in front of Lexa, so close their chests were almost touching. The tension in the air was beyond palpable—normally Lexa felt as though she were suffocating in it, but today, it energized her. Images flickered through her head; the tent, the ball, the forest. What difference did one more memory make?

Or maybe more.

Lexa held her gaze as she took a step into Clarke’s space, reached forward, her arm brushing Clarke’s waist as she opened the door. She moved her hand to rest on Clarke’s hip, clutching onto her like a lifeline as she led her backwards into the Room of Requirement.

Clarke’s lips were so soft and pink, and her eyes were dilated, black nearly overtaking sky blue. Finally inside the room, Lexa maneuvered her foot back, slow and a little clumsy considering she was distracted by the way Clarke’s eyes were dropping to her lips.

“This means something,” said Clarke in a hushed voice, eyes widening slightly as though she couldn’t believe she said it.

Lexa swallowed, noting the way Clarke had grown stiff in her arms, the anxiety written all over her face. Her heart felt lodged in her throat.

This shouldn’t mean anything. They shouldn’t even be here right now.

But Lexa couldn’t imagine being anywhere else right now. This is where she was meant to be. Wrapped up in Clarke Griffin, her heart pounding in her chest, her stomach tight with heat, her mouth dry and her very soul aching.

Lexa looked at Clarke’s pink lips again and unconsciously licked her own. “I know.”

Clarke relaxed, bringing her arms up and titling her head to meet Lexa’s lips just as she managed to push the door shut with her heel. The moment their lips met, it was like sparks turning to flames. Lexa’s head spun as Clarke pushed her tongue into her mouth, as she pressed her against the door Lexa had only just pushed them through. The moan was caught in Lexa’s throat as Clarke’s grip tightened, fingers digging into soft curls at the base of Lexa’s neck, mouth moving insistently,
licking and sucking greedily.

A sudden beeping startled them apart; they both looked down at Clarke’s watch, the stars lighting up the face. “It was—I had it set for the interview.” Clarke blinked a few times, cheeks rosy and pupils dilated. Lexa stared at her, skin prickling with heat, heart thrumming like the wings of a hummingbird. “We were supposed to meet Gideon with our Headmasters in the Entrance Hall—“

Lexa shook her head before Clarke could say more, wordlessly reaching out to dig her fingers into the knot of the blue and bronze tie Clarke was wearing.

“I didn’t say we’re going,” said Clarke, voice airy and breathy as her mouth fell open, chest rising and falling rapidly as Lexa pulled her tie loose and threw it haphazardly behind her. She paused for a moment at Clarke’s words, relaxing when she saw the slight curl to Clarke’s lips, the amusement and lust written over her features.

Affection rose sharply, blocking Lexa’s throat and sending her heart on an even faster journey seemingly right out of her chest. Dangerous territory, dangerous territory—the alarm in her head was as loud and riveting as the watch had been. She swallowed, licking her lips, the anxiety almost making her falter. Clarke’s gaze zeroed in on her tongue swiping over her lips, and the desire clouded through her again like a hurricane, torrential winds tearing at her inhibitions like hellfire, and then Clarke was lunging forward, crashing their lips together, and Lexa swore that if she died now, she would die happy.

Their mouths were fused together as they moved toward the bed. Lexa pushed Clarke back, gently guiding her down onto the mattress, falling until Lexa was straddling her hips, knees at Clarke’s waist. Lexa whispered her name like a prayer as she tilted her head to the other side, changing the angle of the kiss, deepening it before she drew back to suck hard on Clarke’s bottom lip.

Heavy breaths mixed as Clarke sank her teeth into Lexa’s lip, pulled on it. Her grip on Lexa’s hair turned lethal as she yanked, swallowing Lexa’s groan as Clarke pulled her head toward the side, shifting her so that suddenly Clarke was the one atop Lexa. The ache in her belly and between her legs intensified when Clarke’s fingers deftly moved over the buttons of Lexa’s Durmstrang uniform, pushing it open to reveal the form-fitting long-sleeved undershirt. Lexa rocked beneath Clarke, breath hitching at the gasp Clarke spilled into her mouth as her thighs pressed against her core, but Lexa was merely shifting to shrug out of the uniform. She immediately lifted her arms when Clarke gripped the bottom hem of her undershirt and pulled it over her head in one fluid motion that left her clad in only a black athletic bra.

Before she could so much as reach back to unclasp it, Lexa was pushing Clarke’s cloak down her shoulders and tugging her shirt up, pale skin flashing free. Clarke had not yet pulled her arms free, and Lexa could feel her skin hot at her fingertips, and Clarke looked as irritated as Lexa felt at the unnecessary amount of difficulty they were currently having at getting Clarke topless, so Lexa gripped Clarke’s shirt collar with both hands and yanked them opposite ways, popping the first few buttons open, and then dragged her hand down the length of the shirt, hand skirting over the ample cleavage and down the plain of Clarke’s stomach, tearing the buttons free just as her fingers reached the waistband of Clarke’s pants.

“Fuck,” Clarke managed to say, trembling in anticipation as Lexa pushed the open shirt aside, trailing her hands up Clarke’s sides, thumbing her hips, her rib cage, and finally the swells of her breasts.

Clarke’s eyes were blown, pupils nearly eclipsing the sky blue. Lexa palmed the fabric of Clarke’s bra, applying pressure over hardened nipples with the pads of her thumbs and moving in
slow circles around them, growing impossibly wetter with each passing second that she watched Clarke’s head drop back, eyes closed and lips parted as she inhaled and expelled rapid, shallow breaths. Lexa lowered her head, setting to work beneath Clarke’s jaw, along her throat, her collarbone, shivering at the way Clarke’s hum of approval vibrated against her lips.

Clarke’s hands snuck up, one disappearing in the wild mess of brown braids and the other dipping down, clawing a fiery path down the ridges of Lexa’s abdomen muscles and finally hovering over the waistband of Lexa’s pants. She felt the movement of Clarke’s wrist against her lower belly as she unbuttoned the pants, and Lexa’s eyes snapped open, breath catching as she felt Clarke slip her hand down, down, down.

Lexa bit off her moan into the curve of Clarke’s neck, body shaking as she struggled not to wriggle beneath Clarke, struggled not to show that vulnerability, that weakness, but Clarke had removed her hand. Lexa’s hips canted before she could stop them and she instinctually nipped at Clarke’s neck in response; Clarke dipped her hand down again, sliding it beneath her underwear and moving—oh God, she was so close to where Lexa needed her to be—and then she was pulling her hand out of her pants to trail up her torso again. Fuck, was she actually teasing her right now?

Because two could play at that game.

Clarke’s eyes fluttered shut as Lexa tipped her head up, Clarke’s blonde tresses tickling her nose as she settled her lips behind Clarke’s ear, kissing and dragging her tongue across the side of her neck and sucking her ear lobe between her lips, scraping her teeth along the curve. Clarke shuddered against her, the hand hovering over her waist clapping onto her hip and gripping tightly. Clarke was breathing expletives, the hitches and catches and quiet, breathy moans doing nothing short of driving Lexa into a spiral of mental instability. Lexa was gasping for breath as she wrenched Clarke’s head down with her teeth on her ear lobe. Clarke turned, nose pressing into Lexa’s cheek as she smashed their lips together in a searing kiss that opened with more gasps, rolling her tongue against Lexa’s, against the roof of her mouth, and Lexa’s hips bucked again, grinding against Clarke.

“Fuck.”

Clarke lifted her hand from Lexa’s waist to instead tangle it in her hair, fisting it hard and pulling Lexa up. Lexa was forced to reluctantly drop her hands on the bed so she could sit, giving Clarke the space she needed to reach around and unclasp Lexa’s bra. Clarke’s mouth fixed on her breast before her head had even hit the pillow again. Lexa’s back arched into the movement of Clarke’s tongue flicking her nipple, pushing her breast back against her lips, begging for more contact. Clarke’s left hand rose up. Her thumb and forefinger twisted Lexa’s right nipple, another single, quick movement, as at the same time she used her lips and tongue to pull on the other. The white-hot sear of pleasure was like a tidal wave approaching the shore, and somewhere in the back of Lexa’s mind she faintly registered that she could come just from this. But she would be damned if she came before Clarke.

She reached behind Clarke’s back, and then Clarke’s bra and shirt was thrown somewhere to join the tie. Hopefully it wasn’t in the fireplace, though as far as Lexa was concerned, Clarke never needed to wear a bra around her again. Her breasts were large and full, her nipples erect and flushed pink, and Lexa was so, so wet.

Clarke’s breath caught again in a half-whine as Lexa rose up, flipped Clarke beneath her. She grasped the waistband of her trousers and Clarke lifted her ass off the bed to help as Lexa tugged them down her hips, her thighs, her calves and finally her ankles. Her underwear was as blue as her eyes, and when Lexa stroked a finger down her core, it was soaking wet cotton.

"Clarke,” breathed Lexa before she could stop it, and Clarke reached up to frame Lexa’s
face in her hands, bringing her down for another burning kiss.

"God," Clarke murmured against her lips. Their tongues curved together, rolling to draw Lexa’s forth so Clarke could close her lips around it and suck. "I love the way you say my name."

Lexa licked at the inside of her mouth, biting Clarke’s upper, then bottom lip before skittering her kisses across Clarke’s jaw to her ear. "Clarke," she said slowly, deliberately, clicking the $K$, curling her tongue over the shell of her ear, sucking the lobe into her mouth again.

"God, Lexa," Clarke keened, and it was like a direct punch into the gut, like an iron fist pressing into her tight stomach. Lexa’s clit throbbed in response.

"You have no idea how much I’ve wanted you under me," Lexa said in a low, quiet voice, lowering her head to drag her tongue from Clarke’s neck, between her breasts, down to her navel. She twirled her tongue around, slowly sliding it along the top of Clarke’s underwear. Clarke groaned, arching into Lexa again, pushing her wetness against her, leaving Lexa’s chin damp when Clarke withdrew and fell back onto the bed again.

"You have no idea how much I want you in me," she said huskily, and Lexa’s mouth went dry as Clarke started pushing her own underwear down, kicking them off once they she pulled a leg out and they were around her ankle.

Lexa looked down at all the naked flesh beneath her, a lump rising in her throat at the realization that this was her first time seeing a naked woman since…since Costia. It was different, but…not for the first time since meeting Clarke, Costia felt less like a ghost on her heels and more like exactly what she was: a memory, and one she could make peace with. Costia was gone, and Lexa had once thought she could never get over the pain, but there was something about Clarke. Something before they even met, when Lexa had held that crumpled copy of the Daily Prophet in her hand and looked down at the faded black and white eyes staring up at her. She hadn’t known her beyond her name, then. And now…here she was, eyes in vivid blue color staring up at Lexa, and Lexa was trembling with lust and emotion and an affection so panoptic and colossal that it almost frightened Lexa to think about because it was already impossible losing Costia and God, she couldn’t lose Clarke too.

“Where are you?” Clarke murmured, brows pulling together as she lifted her hands to cup Lexa’s face.

Lexa swallowed, recognizing the uncertainty flickering in Clarke’s eyes. She was spread out naked under her and Lexa had been frozen and silent. She gently kissed Clarke before wrapping her fingers around Clarke’s wrists, pinning them together as she stretched her arms above Clarke’s head. She raked her gaze across Clarke’s bare body, breathless and dizzy with want; Clarke was heart stopping and Lexa wasn’t sure if she had ever been quite this wet before.

“You’re beautiful,” she said, voice rough with lust, and stroked her fingertips over the insides of Clarke’s thighs. They quivered beneath her touch, and as Clarke’s legs fell open, spreading for her, Lexa lost the ability to breathe. Clarke’s lashes fluttered as her lips curved up.

The room was so quiet right now save for their own heartbeats crashing in their ears and the crackling of the fire. They both seemed to be holding their breath as Lexa stroked her middle finger over Clarke’s wet slit, pushing through her lips to gather the moisture and spread it. Then it was like an explosion of sound in her ears, the sound of Clarke’s low, throaty moan, of Lexa’s heart pounding as she moved her wrist, making slow circles over Clarke’s clit. Clarke’s eyes closed, her mouth parting as she breathed heavily, and she was so beautiful that Lexa finally resigned herself to the fact that the lump in her throat probably wouldn’t be going away any time soon.
She focused instead on the noises Clarke was making, on how wet her fingertips were, and was struck by a question she wasn’t ashamed to admit she’d had a few times before: what did she taste like? Lexa lifted her hand, and Clarke’s eyes fluttered open. They a darker blue than she’d ever seen on her, almost similar to how they were when she was angry. Lexa held that cobalt gaze as she brought her fingers to her lips. Sweet and tangy, perhaps bitter from sweat from the tournament earlier, but more delicious because of it. Clarke’s breathing was drawn and panting as she stared at her. Lexa leaned forward, kissed her slowly. Lust slammed even harder into her gut when Clarke closed her lips around Lexa’s tongue, creating a sweet suction so she could taste the faint mixture of own juices. Lexa pulled away deliberately after a second, and only smiled in response to the frown Clarke gave her. Then her frown faded away, when Lexa scooted down her body and Clarke realized her intention.

“Oh God,” she said, and dropped her head down into the pillow.

Lexa lowered her own head down between Clarke’s legs. She dipped her tongue into the wetness and shuddered at the burst of flavor, at the sweet, sharp taste that was so intrinsically Clarke. She slowly spun her tongue into a figure-eight, teasing a tight circle around her clit and then around her entrance. Clarke’s thighs trembled against the sides of her face, and the part of her stomach that rested beneath Lexa’s hand juddered, and Lexa knew she wouldn’t be quite as long as she’d like, which augmented her lust as much as it amplified her desire to make Clarke feel good for as long as she possibly could.

She carved lazy spirals wider and wider around Clarke’s clit, stomach tightening with more and more need every time her tongue brushed her clit and Clarke’s thighs clenched against her head. She watched her as she moved her tongue; Clarke’s back was arched, her arms spread-eagle, the mattress sheets clenched in her white-knuckled fists. Her neck was tensed and craned, her head pushed back into the pillow, her lips parted and her chest heaving as she panted. Lexa took a break from the circles to repeatedly flick her tongue on her clit, and couldn’t stop the slight curve to one corner of her lips as Clarke writhed on the bed. Lexa had to hold her down, her hands clamped on the insides of her thighs, to keep going. The sounds of heavy breathing, of moans and whimpers, of “Fuck, Lexa,” were filling the room, bouncing off the walls and echoing in Lexa’s head, and Lexa clenched her own legs tightly together, both out of a desperate need for friction and in a desperate attempt to stop herself from quickly climbing the peak and flinging herself off it before Clarke had even touched her.

She wasn’t very good at teasing Clarke, because the moment she started to whine, Lexa gave in. She lapped at her clit and squeezed her thighs as they started violently shaking; Clarke’s moans juddered in strangulated euphonic cries that rose higher and higher in octave, finally culminating in a paralyzing silence, her back arched in an almost perfect bow, her mouth open and no breath leaving her lungs. Lexa glanced up at her through heavy-lidded eyes, feeling her own orgasm not far from bay as she watched her, something almost tragically beautiful in the sight, something overwhelming; it was the same feeling that often swamped her when she stood beneath a particularly starry night, gazing up into the sky and feeling as though the infiniteness of it all was swallowing her whole. Another second, another lick, and then the moment broke.

Clarke collapsed onto the bed with a long-drawn out moan, half-writhing as Lexa began to slowly taper off. Clarke was twitching and whispering Lexa’s name like a mantra when Lexa gave one final kiss to her clit and pulled back to smile at her.

Clarke looked back at Lexa, opening and closing her mouth several times before giving up and shaking her head. Lexa arched a brow. “Not good for you?”

“Shut up,” Clarke managed, still twitching with the remnants of her orgasm. “So, so good.”
Lexa’s smile widened and she kissed Clarke’s thigh this time. “Good.”

Clarke lay panting for a moment, the trembling of her body slowly subsiding, and it was so quiet for a good couple minutes that Lexa feared she fell asleep. The ache at her core was so strong it was bordering on downright painful, and if Clarke—

“You now,” said Clarke suddenly, rolling over so she was atop Lexa as easily as though she hadn’t just been speechless and immobilized. Lexa lost her breath, hunger and relief tumbling through her. Now Clarke was kissing her again, undoubtedly tasting herself, and the thought made Lexa moan. She moaned again a second later, when Clarke immediately stuck a hand down her pants and swiped a finger through the length of her almost embarrassingly wet sex.

“Shit. Fuck. Fuck.”

Clarke grinned before ducking down to kiss Lexa’s neck. She murmured in her ear, “Have I ever told you I really like those words coming out of you? Especially like this.”

Lexa was ready to curse some more when Clarke pulled back again. Clarke must have noticed the frustrated expression on her face, because she only smirked before she scooted down her body, and Lexa was pretty damn sure her soul was about to ascend.

Clarke hooked a finger in the front of her underwear, slowly pulled them down as her tongue followed the movement. When her tongue dipped below the panty line, teased the top of Lexa’s slit, her hips jerked without her consent and a cry escaped her lips. She clamped her mouth shut, abashed, but it fell open again with a haggard gasp when Clarke elongated her tongue to lightly tease the tip just over Lexa’s clit. Then Clarke pulled back. Again.

“Clarke,” she wheezed, but Clarke had only withdrawn to take Lexa’s underwear off her. The moment the underwear was thrown away, Clarke wasted no time in ducking down again. Lexa’s entire body seemed to jolt at the sight of Clarke’s back, her muscles moving as she bent, her golden hair swinging forward to frame her face as she parted her lips to immediately bury her tongue inside Lexa, whose own back arched. A strangled cry of pleasant surprise ripped forth from her throat.

The sensation of a thumb tripping circles around her clit joined the tongue pulsating inside her, and it was too much for Lexa to bear. She twisted and squirmed, the sheets tangling around her sweaty body, shaking as the heat spread in waves.

Clarke was tapping on her stomach. “I want—hey, look at me. I want to watch you.”

Their gazes met, green and blue, and Clarke’s eyes were channeling so much heat that Lexa snapped and tumbled right off the peak of the mountain.

She cried out as she came, as Clarke’s tongue continued pumping in and out of her, as Clarke’s thumb pressed hard into her clit. Now her soul really was ascending, her body arcing off the bed, her eyes squeezed shut tightly enough to see stars that faded away into the charred black ceiling when they flew open again. Every worry in the world, every weight on her shoulders seemed to fall away as her orgasm swept over her like a tsunami, drowning her in nothing but otherworldly bliss.

Her cries tapered off into exhausted panting as she came down from the high. Her body felt like melted wax.

Clarke began peppering kisses along her leg. When she reached the inside of Lexa’s thigh, the muscles gave a spasm beneath her lips, and a quiet gasp escaped Lexa. But Clarke only
continued up, her body slinking up Lexa’s until she lay flush beside her, and their lips were moving in a hot, measured pattern.

"Lexa," she murmured as she gently traced the outline of Lexa’s lips with the tip of her tongue.

Lexa flipped the tip of her own tongue against Clarke’s, taking the catch of her breath into her mouth. "Clarke," she replied softly, and the corners of Clarke’s lips tilted up in the smallest of smiles. Lexa smiled in response.

“You aren’t sleepy, are you?” There was a tease in Clarke’s voice, a wryness in the arch of her brow.

Lexa closed her eyes, a grin spreading on her face. “Maybe.”

Clarke languidly stroked a fingertip between Lexa’s breasts, down her stomach, down to where she was completely soaked and swollen. Lexa’s uneven breath hitched again. "Well, you better wake up." She leaned into Lexa, deepening the kiss as Lexa sighed into her mouth. “Because I’m not finished with you yet.”

Lexa groaned, heart still galloping on. Clarke dipped her finger inside her, sliding the length in once, slowly, before pulling out again, and the movement left Lexa wanting more, more, more. “Fuck, Clarke. Please.”

She could feel Clarke’s smirk against her mouth. "You know it's good when the Commander says please.”

"Don't get a big head. That's the only time you'll hear me say it." Lexa nipped Clarke’s bottom lip.

"That's what you think.” Clarke leaned forward to brush Lexa’s wild tangles of hair back from her sweaty neck, so she could purr, “But let’s see how many times you scream it by the end of the night.”

Electricity crackled through Lexa’s body. God.

"Bring it on," Lexa challenged. Realistically, she didn’t know how much more her body could take. That had been the mother of all orgasms, and she was fairly certain every juice in her body had been pumped out of her.

Clarke’s cheek brushed hers and her damp waves of hair tickled Lexa’s face as rasped, "I love the taste of you.”

Lexa shivered, breath catching when Clarke trailed her finger along her body again. When she swiftly alternated between slowly caressing Lexa’s nipple with her fingertips, then roughly palming her breast, Lexa’s breathing pattern turned haggard. She struggled to level it out, her chest rising and falling rapidly, but Clarke’s hand was traveling south and she knew her breathing would probably not even out at all for quite a while.

The pressure of her fingertips over Lexa’s slit was like a ghost. Lexa could hardly feel it, yet at the same time, it was overwhelmingly dominating. Her hips arched, craving more pressure as her legs spread apart. Panting already, she turned onto her side, reaching her own hand down to slide between Clarke’s legs as she leaned her body into hers, hard nipples rubbing against one another as Lexa immediately covered Clarke’s mouth with her own.
Clarke’s leg rose over to hook around Lexa’s as Lexa slipped one finger into Clarke and rotated it, stretching her out before she slipped another in. “Is this okay?” When Clarke shuddered and nodded, Lexa slowly moved her fingers out, then in, then out and in again. She murmured, “What do you like?”

“Two for now. Three later,” managed Clarke, eyes shut and breath jagged as Lexa moved faster.

After a moment, Clarke moved her hand as well, filling Lexa and drawing a moan out of her. “You?”

“Two is good.” She gasped as they both seemed to hook their fingers at the same time, curving them up, searching for that spot on the inner wall, fingertips floating across soft ridges and muscles fluttering around their fingers—

They moaned at the same time, both sets of hips canting at the sensation, heads falling forward to rest foreheads together, breath mixing, cries blending together with the sound of flesh slapping wet flesh—

They came simultaneously, clutching one another as the orgasms ripped through them.

It felt like hours later when they finally collapsed back, sweaty and exhausted and satisfied though not yet sated. Lexa didn’t think she would ever be sated with Clarke. She wanted her even more now than she did before they slept together.

She was just starting to drift off into a slumber when Clarke broke the silence, the heavy air around them seeming to tremble as Clarke mumbled, “What happens now?”

Lexa concentrated on steadying her breathing, pursing her lips as she breathed slowly through her nose, out her mouth. She sighed under the realization that, even though they really shouldn’t actually fall asleep together…Lexa was seconds away from doing so.

She was sleepy and more exposed than she had ever been, so she just smiled and shrugged and said in a drowsy, satisfied voice, “Maybe this could be more…than just a one-time thing?”

Clarke’s face split into a smile and Lexa’s heart soared at the kiss she gave in response before nuzzling her nose into her neck and resting an arm over her chest and a leg over her waist. The overwhelming affection rose sharply in Lexa again, that same damn lump obstructing her throat, but she only closed her eyes and gripped Clarke in response, holding her to her side as they drifted.

Even in sleep, they held one another like a lifeline, and perhaps that was what kept the nightmares at bay.

* * * /✧/ * *

The steady hum of machinery was no longer an unfamiliar sound. The Minister for Magic stood before the brightly lit technology, hands clasped behind his back as he stared unflinchingly at the many different numbers and codes scanning through on the screen. After several minutes of the odd beeping and blinking, there was a quiet ding, and then the lights faded.
“Did it work?” he asked the woman he already knew stood behind him.

“Almost.” He turned to face the serene woman whose curves were wrapped in a tight red dress. Her hands were the mirror reverse of his, clasped before her like a silent prayer, or a bid for self-control. Alie’s full lips pursed in a smile. “We are very close to our goal.”

“What more do we need? Anything I can do.”

Allie dipped her head once, swiftly, in a nod. “You are doing well, Thelonious. We need only time and the right people.”

Jaha glanced at the monitors again, the numbers making little sense to him. Still, he trusted Alie with every fiber of his being, so he nodded, lifting his wand and sweeping through the air, Transfiguring the muggle technology into an ornate wooden dresser, stained glass windows sparkling. When he turned back, he noticed Alie’s eyes following the movements of him tucking his wand back into his cloak pocket.

“You’ll have one too. Soon,” he added.

Alie lifted her chin, brows arching as she pressed her lips together in another smile. “Soon,” she echoed. “First, we recruit our people.”

* * * /✧/ * *

In the wake of Clarke and Lexa’s absence, Raven and the rest of her friends were still sitting at their table in the Great Hall, roaring with laughter as steam poured out of Monty’s ears.

“My turn, my turn—” said Jasper, reaching across the table for the small vividly colored candy Monty offered him. Jasper tossed the wrapper onto the pile of them in the center of the table and shot Maya a shifty grin before he popped the candy into his mouth.

Raven, who had recognized the gummy-bear-shaped pastille as the same kind Monty had pranked Bellamy with in the past, held her breath, grinning broadly as she waited for the effect to take place.

“Huh, this one feels funny,” said Jasper, face growing a little red. “What is this one? It’s not a fainting fancy—” His words trailed away as his eyes widened. The table began roaring with laughter once more as Jasper looked down at his crotch and the swiftly growing bulge there.

“Imagine if they just stole Viagra from muggles and started selling it as Hard-On Haribos,” mused Octavia. Raven shook her head, cackling at the half mortified, half amused expression on Maya’s face. Jasper was blushing hard enough (hard, ha) he could have taken a Blushing Benzy, too.

“Monty!” whined Jasper. “Where’s the antidote? How do I get rid of this?”

“I’m sure this isn’t a new dilemma for you,” said Anya dryly. “Use your brain. Or your hand, I suppose…”
The entire table cracked up again. Lincoln buried his laugh in Octavia’s shoulder, kissing it softly before leaning up to take her lips. Raven glanced at Anya, her smile softening, and leaned forward to press a kiss to her cheek before she could talk herself out of it. Anya looked back at her, appearing startled, but pleased. She smirked at Raven.

“Seriously!” insisted Jasper. “Hey, Clarke’s going to be a Healer, she can tell me.” He glanced around, looking for her. “Where did she go? She was just here.”

Octavia rolled her eyes. “Jasper, Clarke left with Lexa ages ago. She’s been gone for like, two hours.”

“And she won’t be back. She’ll be busy. All night,” added Raven, smirking as it dawned on Jasper. He glanced down at his cock again, more miserable and embarrassed than ever.

“Man,” he whined, plopping his elbows on the table and burying his face in his hands.

Raven’s words proved true, because later that night, when she snuck Anya into Ravenclaw Dormitory, Clarke’s bed was still empty. After drawing the curtains closed and casting Muffliato around it, Raven and Anya balanced themselves in the small twin-sized bed, and Raven was struck by the realization that the Triwizard Tournament could have happened next year, and then she never would have been able to meet Anya, and Clarke wouldn’t have met Lexa, and Octavia wouldn’t have met Lincoln.

Raven tried to convey all her gratitude with the kisses she gave Anya that steadily moved lower, lower, and lower.

Neither of them noticed the crow that was perched on the windowsill, staring into the dorm with beady unblinking eyes before taking flight, wind streaming silently beneath its graying black wings.

* ｡・/✧・* ｡

The sleet was turning Evie’s hair into hard chunks of ice. She caught a glimpse of her reflection as she walked past the windows of various shops; she looked like a ghost, skin as white as the falling snow. Her feet sunk into the snow as she came to a stop before her pub. There was a sick premonition curdling in her belly, and a morbid type of curiosity lingering in her chest. She dreaded this more than anything she’d ever feared before.

But still, she steeled herself and pushed open the door.

“Frankie?”

Evie frowned. The lights were off. The lights were off, but the door was open—if Frankie were here, wouldn’t he have turned the lights on? Lit the fire? It was cold in here. It was—

Evie’s eyes widened. It was too cold.
She whipped her wand out, skin prickling with gooseflesh. She was really starting to regret the short dress now. She cautiously moved forward, peering around the corner, and felt her heart drop down to her frozen toes when she spotted the limp figure slumped up against the empty fireplace.

“ Frankie! ” she hissed. He was just sleeping. That was all. He was just knocked unconscious or something during the fight, that was it—

Evie hurried over to him, seizing him by the shoulders and shaking him. Even his suit-clad shoulders were freezing. “ F— Frankie! ” gasped Evie, her heart hammering. Frankie’s lips were blue. Frankie was not breathing. “ Frankie? Shit. Frankie. Wake up, Frankie. Wake up, ” she growled, shaking him again. She lightly tapped her hand against his face, then again, harder, when he still didn’t respond. She pointed her wand at his chest and spoke the rejuvenation spell. His chest glowed as brightly as her wand tip, but nothing happened.

She felt sick. She wanted to retch.

“ Frankie! ” she screamed.

There was a sudden hiss and a long, drawn-out shriek. Evie glanced over her shoulder and made a strangled squeak of a noise, so overcome with terror that her legs went out and she fell from her crouched position, sprawling out on the floor, scrambling to crawl back from the advancing Shadow-Eater; her back slammed into the same empty stone wall Frankie was inclined against. She was trapped, there was nowhere to go, and her wand had fallen to the floor feet away, and her body was sore from sex, and Frankie was dead—

She was too frightened to scream as the Shadow-Eater opened its mouth and drew a rattling breath in.

Her heart stopped when she saw in her peripheral vision Frankie turning his head, blinking unseeing eyes at her. His blue lips parted and he said in a voice with more hiss to it than the Shadow-Eater, “ Liar. ”

Back in the guest bedroom of Jamie’s house, Evie woke with a scream and a sob.

“ Evie? ” Jamie burst into the room with an urgent air, wand raised as she looked around, searching for the assailer. She blew out a breath of relief when she realized it was just Evie, looking particularly small in the middle of the large bed, terrified and clutching her duvet around her. “ Hey, ” she said, considerably quieter as she moved around to ease down on the edge of the bed beside Evie. She bracingly rubbed her younger sister’s back, eyes full of sorrow.

“ I—I can’t believe—I— ” gasped Evie, hyperventilating as tears rolled down her pale cheeks.

Jamie murmured soothing words of comfort, reaching up to brush greasy strawberry-blond hair out of Evie’s sweaty face. Her stomach was queasy with concern and pain for her baby sister. It had been over a month since the Shadow-Eater attacked Evie’s pub. It had been two weeks since Frankie had died in St. Mungo’s from injuries sustained from the attack. It had been one week since his funeral.

Every night since the attack, Evie had nightmares. Tonight was the first time she had woken screaming, however.

“ You’re okay, ” she murmured, for what felt like the thousandth time. “ It wasn’t your fault. ”
“It was my fault!” burst Evie, tears pouring down her face. “I was—it was my pub, and he was—if I wasn’t with Luna, he wouldn’t have—he wouldn’t have gone looking for me and—it was my pub, he was innocent, it—it was Christmas and he was alone and hurt and it was my fault, it’s my fault—“

Jamie waved her wand and murmured, “Accio.” A moment later the small vial of Calming Drought came whizzing into the room. She pulled the stopper and handed it to Evie, who immediately tipped a gratuitous mouthful down her throat. Evie calmed at once, the threat of a panic attack fading away. Her eyes grew heavy, misery etched onto every line of her face as she shakily pushed the bottle back into Jamie’s hands.

“I’m sick of feeling,” said Evie simply, sinking her head back onto her pillow.

“I know,” murmured Jamie, brushing a hand through her sister’s hair again. “But I love you, and I need you here, okay? You are loved and needed. Please don’t hate yourself for something that was beyond your control.”

Evie didn’t hear the words. She was already asleep.

* * */◇/ * *

“This is so stupid,” gasped Clarke, hips jerking in response to Lexa’s fingers digging into the underside of her thigh. “This is so stupid,” she repeated, as Lexa shifted her kisses from Clarke’s jaw onto the slope of her neck. “This is so stupid,” she said once more, as Lexa bit down hard before sliding a soothing tongue over the stinging flesh.

“I know,” mumbled Lexa, tongue rolling over Clarke’s collarbone.

Clarke clutched her closer. “So stupid,” she said fiercely, almost growling it, before Lexa pushed her thigh forward and up against the apex between Clarke’s legs, and Clarke moaned. “Don’t stop.”

Lexa pushed Clarke’s cloak down her shoulders; Clarke pulled it off as Lexa’s fingers deftly worked her tie, swiftly pulling it loose before she gripped the bottom of Clarke’s shirt and peeled it off her. Lexa’s lips immediately explored the newly exposed skin; Clarke’s head fell back against the door, chest heaving and stomach tight with heat.

It was only minutes ago they had stumbled into the broom closet in the corridor nearest the Great Hall, ignoring the catcalls and taunts echoing behind them as Raven, Anya, Octavia, and Fox teasingly cheered them on from the Great Hall. It was only half an hour ago they had been engaged in a brutal game of Wizard’s Cards with them over lunch, and while Raven and Anya had been positively howling at the substantial level of intensity on Lexa’s face as her miniature dragon annihilated Fox’s smattering of mages and warlocks, Clarke had found it impossible to drag her gaze away from Lexa’s focused, narrow eyes, and her warming face and tightening stomach told her exactly why.
It had been almost a week since the second task. Almost a week since they dived into bed with one another. There were over three months between now and the third and final Triwizard Task, three months that Clarke fully intended to spend as she had been spending the past week: wrapped up in Lexa every possible chance she got.

She was on cloud nine. Sure, there was troubling background static—her father’s letters, sparse and few, sounded less and less like him, and Clarke’s mother was beyond busy in the hospital dealing with all the recent victims of random Shadow-Eater attacks. But it was hard to concentrate on all the negatives when her mind was being blown with orgasm after orgasm multiple times throughout the day.

When Clarke wasn’t sneaking away to random broom closets or the Room of Requirement with Lexa between classes, she could often be found still and frowning, staring out the windows with a wrinkle between her brows that spoke of her concern. She had a gut feeling, something akin to dread broiling within the depths of her belly, but it was easy to ignore when she had something to concentrate on. They weren’t to be informed of the tournament task until precisely one month beforehand, so that left schoolwork—and Lexa.

It had been only a week, and it was getting progressively harder and harder to convince herself this was just sex, just two friends with potentially romantic feelings expressing it in a physically intimate way. There was an unspoken agreement between them not to discuss this, what was happening between them. But it was growing more difficult by the day to shrug off the tender kisses, the names whispered with reverence, the gentle cradling. Lately, they seemed trying to overcompensate for that with rougher sex.

Fifteen minutes later Clarke and Lexa were both slumped against the wall, withdrawing wet fingers and adjusting skewered clothing.

“Fuck. We really need to stop doing this in broom closets,” groaned Clarke, rubbing the part of her forearm that she’d accidentally rammed against a shelf littered with nails and broom twigs.

“Yeah,” agreed Lexa, still breathing heavily as she pulled her red Durmstrang fur cloak back on. “One of these days Indra is going to catch us.”

“Well, I meant because of the limited amount of space,” said Clarke, reaching over and helping Lexa quickly clasp up the cloak. “Not because of the very slim chance of Indra randomly opening the one broom closet out of like five hundred in this school, at the exact time that we happen to be fucking in it.”

Leya rolled her eyes, helping Clarke tie the Ravenclaw tie back up and tuck it into her white-buttoned shirt. “We shouldn’t leave it up to chance, Clarke.”

“Hey, I’m agreeing with you. As hot as it is in these dusty old closets, the Room of Requirement does have a bed. And a random sex swing. Probably. If we wanted one.”

Leya rolled her eyes again, but it did bring a chuckle out of her. “We’ll talk about it.” She leaned forward to press a kiss to Clarke’s lips, before she opened the closet door and poked her head out, peering around before fully opening it and stepping out. “I’m supposed to train now, so I’ll meet you for dinner.”

Clarke nodded, though her curiosity got the better of her and she had to ask. “What do you guys train for, anyway?”

Leya turned around, mostly expressionless, but Clarke could see something else in her eyes.
She was quiet for a moment before saying quietly, “Defense against the dark arts.”

Clarke blinked, surprised; she hadn’t expected to hear that. Dueling perhaps, or just training for the tournament, but not an actual class. “Oh. Why? What kind of stuff do you do?”

Lexa was quiet again for a time, something clearly warring within her. Finally, she said, “You should come sometime.”

A blush blossomed on Clarke’s cheeks. Lexa was inviting her to come watch them train?

“Not a date,” Lexa quickly added, and Clarke snorted. There wasn’t exactly anything romantic about hanging out with Indra and the rest of the Durmstrangs having a Defense Against the Dark Arts class. “Just come watch.”

It was a Saturday, so Clarke didn’t have any classes. She shrugged. “Okay.”

She followed Lexa to the Durmstrang ship. It was a nice day out, cold but the sun was out. A few students were sitting on the benches near the Black Lake, throwing bits of toast and watching tentacles rise out of the water to scoop them down.

Clarke was, however, pretty surprised to see Raven and Octavia lingering near the ship ramps, Anya and Lincoln beside them. Judging by Lexa’s brows rising, she was taken aback too.

“Clarke!” Octavia waved.

“Hey,” greeted Clarke, perplexed by their presence. “What’re you guys doing here?”

“Lincoln invited me to watch him train, and I think Raven is just stalking Anya.”

Raven rolled her eyes. “If I was stalking her, she wouldn’t know I was here.”

“That’s even weirder than insisting you want to watch, Raven.”

“I was just curious what you they all get up to.”

“I kind of am too,” confessed Clarke.

Lexa nodded. “We will be honest with you.” She exchanged a glance with Anya and Lincoln. Anya looked back quite blankly, but Lincoln nodded. Lexa turned back around to face them. “In a way, you may look at these training sessions as self-defense lessons.”

“Self-defense against what?” asked Raven.

“Shadow-eaters,” replied Lexa gravely, and just like that, the air was ten times thicker, heavy with tension and perhaps an inkling of fear.

“Oh,” said Raven, voice steady but the slight creasing of her brow betraying her uncertainty.

“Can any of you perform the Patronus charm?” said Anya.

Clarke met their eyes and they all shrugged. “My dad talked to me about how to do it, but I’ve never actually done it.”

“Me either,” said Raven, and Octavia nodded to echo the sentiment.

“We’ll work on it. You guys should be prepared. Just to be safe,” said Lincoln seriously.
“I’m game,” said Octavia eagerly.

“Let’s do it,” agreed Raven, clapping her hands together and rubbing them, though that may have been more because the sun was behind a cloud and it was a little chilly without the sunlight.

Inside the giant hull of the ship, several Durmstrang students were already practicing, waving their wands and crying out the incantation. Wisps of white, silvery substances were extruding from their wands, but no corporeal patronuses, which Clarke’s father had told her was the most successful.

Indra was glaring at them from across the room, but Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln clearly ignored her, turning instead to face Clarke, Raven, and Octavia.

“First, you need to concentrate on a happy thought. Happy memories, happy times,” said Anya.

“And then we can fly, Peter?” said Raven. Lexa’s lips twitched in a smile and Octavia grinned, but Clarke, Anya, and Lincoln were left frowning, puzzled.

“Be serious,” snapped Anya; Raven’s lips curved in a smirk, so clearly Anya’s tone did nothing but turn her on. That was kind of hilarious, so now Clarke had to fight to suppress a smile.

“The incantation is ‘Expecto Patronum,’” supplied Lexa.

“It’ll take a few tries, but you’ll get it eventually,” said Lincoln.

It did take a few tries, but Clarke caught on fairly quickly. It was hardly a quarter of an hour later when a massive silvery lion burst forth from the tip of her wand; it bounded around the room before fading away. Excited, Clarke turned to tell Lexa—and her eyes widened when she saw an adorable pearly raccoon rolling on the ground in front of her.

“Lexa, is your patronus a raccoon?” she said in disbelief, amusement raising her voice.

Lexa gave Clarke a small smile, but there was sadness in her eyes that made Clarke’s grin fade.

After half an hour, Octavia had successfully cast the charm. A shimmering white butterfly flitted through the air above her, the reflection glowing in her blue eyes and glinting off her teeth exposed in a broad grin. Lincoln’s dog bounded below it, as though trying to play with it.

Raven, however, was having no luck. It was evident that it was beyond frustrating to her, considering Raven generally mastered any element of magic she put her mind to. But the only thing leaving her wand was wisps of smoke, and her face was screwed up in concentration.

“You’re thinking too hard about this,” ordered Anya, eyes glued to her silvery owl swooping through the air above her head. “Just focus on happy thoughts.”

“I’m trying,” said Raven through gritted teeth; there was actual sweat rolling down her temples. Clarke’s heart ached for her friend. She was sure there were plenty of horrible memories she was trying to block out.

“I struggled with patronus charms too,” said Lexa quietly, coming to stand behind Raven. “It took me time to find the happy thought that worked. Try thinking of the people you care for.”

Raven glanced at Octavia, at Clarke. At Anya.
She swished her wand and said, “Expecto Patronum!”

The spell was stronger now, a huge cloud of white rather than small wisps. Raven looked even more frustrated now. She narrowed her eyes in concentration, whipped her wand through the air again, and half-shouted the spell.

This time a silvery raven burst into the air, and Raven burst into excited shouts of laughter.

“It’s a raven,” she said, eyes streaming with hilarity, and Clarke, Octavia, Lincoln, and even Lexa and Anya all joined in on the laughter.

Later, Lexa introduced them all to Gustus, a man who had apparently once worked at Durmstrang as a Charms professor. Clarke wasn’t sure why he was here now, especially if he was no longer a professor, but his eyes were kind and Lexa was smiling radiantly while she introduced Clarke to him, so Clarke was happy he was there.

That night, there was a raven and a lion bounding through the air in the Ravenclaw dormitory, the room alive with oohs and awws from Fox and the rest of their friends.

* "·/✧·ˈ* 

One week later

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” Hot breath heated the side of Clarke’s neck. A tongue snaked out to trace wet spirals along the column of her throat. Tangles of golden hair clung to the side of her face as she pushed her weight into each thrust of her arm, anchoring herself with legs positioned in a widened stance. Her lips curved up at one corner in a smirk when she felt strong thighs quiver against her wrist, heard breath hitch and catch as lissome fingers dug into her tense shoulders. “Oh, fuck,” gasped Lexa, a moment before she unraveled.

Clarke parted her lips and met them with Lexa’s, catching Lexa’s groan in her mouth. Lexa’s back arched, her body juddering and twisting as Clarke strained to keep her still with her right arm while her left pumped furiously. For several seconds, the only noise in the deserted space was the sound of Lexa’s muffled cry, the wet sound of flesh slapping flesh, and the sound of Clarke’s heart pounding in her ears as her blood seemed to rush through her veins.

Then Lexa was undone, limp and jelly-legged as she drew in ragged breaths, her grip on Clarke’s shoulders trembling and weak. Clarke slowed her pace before pulling out of her. She pressed a kiss to Lexa’s temple before she relaxed and released her. Lexa lifted her hazy, heavy-lidded gaze to watch as Clarke brought her fingers to her lips and sucked the taste into her mouth. Then she took Lexa’s wrist, guided Lexa’s hand under her robes. They both groaned at the sensation of fingertips slipping into slick folds.

Lexa’s free hand move up to take a fistful of Clarke’s hair and drag her around by her head, reversing their positions. Her fingers were already inside Clarke before she could so much as gasp Lexa’s name, and the rhythm of her pumps was undeterred as she squatted down between Clarke’s thighs, lifting Clarke’s right leg so she could hook it around her neck and draw her in closer. Clarke
moaned as Lexa’s tongue flattened against her clit, the tip teasing her hood as she continued to drive two, then three fingers deeper inside her.

When she came, she gasped in Lexa’s name and it left her lips in a scream.

Later, when they dressed themselves and started to head out the door for dinner, Clarke put a gentle hand on Lexa’s arm to stop her.

“I was just wondering if you wanted to go to Hogsmeade this weekend. With me. Together.”

Lexa was quiet before answering, swallowing thickly before she said, “I told you I don’t do dates, Clarke.”

“It’s not a date,” insisted Clarke, ignoring the sinking of her heart. “Just…two friends grabbing some lunch together.” She leaned in to nudge Lexa, lifting her brows and smirking suggestively as she added in a lower voice, “And maybe some dessert later.”

Lexa swallowed again, eyes darkening slightly. “Well, when you put it that way.”

* * * /rouch / * *

Clarke, Lexa, and all their friends were crammed into The Three Broomsticks, all clutching butterbeers. Clarke was a little grumpy, considering she had been hoping to spend this day alone with Lexa, and hadn't anticipated getting ambushed by all her friends while they were traipsing out of Honeyduke's. The Hog's Head had been closed since its owner (Frankie Longbottom III) had died, and The Three Broomsticks was only open because Jamie Potter had taken a leave of absence from work to help out her sister, who was nowhere to be found. Jamie greeted them all warmly and delivered their butterbeers, and Clarke felt bad for her.

The last time they’d been in here, a Shadow-Eater had attacked them. Since then, someone had died from the injuries sustained from the last attack in here.

“It feels creepy in here now,” whispered Fox, saying what everyone else was thinking.

Clarke made a mental note not to tease Lexa for how she unconsciously tightened her arm around Clarke’s waist, bringing her closer to her. They were supposed to be keeping their relationship casual and private, to avoid Indra’s wrath for one (“Indra will never want me distracted during the tournament,” Lexa had explained), but all their friends knew, so Clarke didn’t see any harm in leaning forward to brush a kiss across Lexa’s cheek. Lexa blushed, avoiding Clarke’s gaze as she brought the bottle of butterbeer to her lips and took a long swig.

“Hey, I’ve been thinking,” said Clarke, hoping to distract everyone from the tense atmosphere. “Remember how at the Yule Ball, we had to follow that stupid dress code?” Her friends nodded, looking grumpy on top of glum now. “Well, it's Valentine's Day next week. What if we threw our own party? We could do a reversal thing. Guys wear dresses, girls wear suits.”

All her friends’ faces immediately lit up. “Yes,” Octavia hissed, leaning forward. “I look hot as hell in a suit. This party is so on.”

Clarke glanced at Lexa, and the thought of seeing her in a suit brought a whole new wave of heat to her face.
If Lexa didn’t touch her soon—

It was pathetic, really, because they had been fucking every possible moment they could over the past week. After breakfast, between classes, after lunch, after dinner—for dessert. They couldn’t get enough.

It had been hours since they last saw each other because Clarke had class and Lexa had been called into a meeting with Indra. Clarke had no idea what it was about, but she did know that she was in desperate need of a release because she couldn’t get Lexa out of her head and God, she needed her.

She distracted herself by heading to the library with Wells, Bellamy, and Octavia, figuring she may as well take advantage of the free time by working on homework. When they reached the corridor above the library, they all halted, stiffening at the sound of Peeves the Poltergeist’s voice booming down the hallway, followed by heavy rapid footsteps.

“John Murphy, the derpy
Full of fat turkey,
He’s only a meanie
‘Cos of his teeny weenie!”

Peeves burst before them and Murphy rounded the corner at a full sprint right behind them. He skidded to a halt and froze in place for a split second. Then he whirled around, his furious eyes bugging as he said heatedly to Clarke and the others as much as Peeves, “It is not small!”

Peeves halted too, dipping over to hang cross-legged in the air. He blew a huge raspberry at Murphy. “Is too, I saws it!”

“No you didn’t, you lying shit!”

“Did so! Saws it in the Prefects’ Bathroom last night, I did, when Murphy climbed out of the tub to take a little wee before adding more green and purple bubbles!”

Clarke would have wondered why the hell Murphy felt the need to sneak into the off-limits Prefect’s bathroom, but she was too entertained by the scene she just walked into. She wouldn’t have thought it was possible considering how wide Murphy’s eyes already were, but they bulged even more. “You did not! Stop lying!”

Clarke pressed her lips together in an effort to suppress her smile, because she was fairly certain that when she went to the Prefects’ Bathroom late last night for a leisurely bath with Lexa, there had been remnants of green and purple soap all along the bottom of the huge tub.

Murphy rounded on Clarke, Wells, Bellamy, and Octavia. “He’s fucking lying! I swear my
dick is not small! It’s six inches!” Octavia was laughing, which seemed to be the last straw for Murphy. “MY FUCKING COCK IS SIX INCHES. LOOK.”

“NO—“ began Clarke in panic at the prospect of seeing Murphy’s dick because, *ew*, it was *Murphy*, but he only plunged his hand into his robe pocket and seized his wand, which he violently brandished in their faces.

“LOOK, my wand is a little over seven inches, it’s BARELY longer than my penis! I swear, my dick is not—“

“Why am I not surprised you’ve measured your dick to your wand?” interrupted Clarke dryly. Murphy halted mid-sentence, his mouth hanging open slightly.

“Maybe he was trying to cast an *Engorgio* charm,” suggested Octavia, her brows raised in amusement. Bellamy snorted.

Murphy’s face contorted in rage, and Clarke’s hand tensed around her wand in case he was about to throw a jinx in Octavia’s face—but instead he spun around, shouted “Langlock!” and slashed his wand through the air towards Peeves, who careened away just in time to avoid the spell.

Clarke and the others laughed as Peeves took off with Murphy chasing after him, Peeves singing “Teeny weenie, teeny weenie!” while Murphy snarled “Come back here, you stupid fuck!” until the two of them rounded a corner and were out of sight.

“Shouldn’t we go after them, Clarke?” asked Wells doubtfully, but Clarke shrugged and released her wand to pull her hand out of her pocket.

“You are the worst Head Girl ever,” sniggered Octavia. Clarke just laughed as the four of them continued on toward the Library.

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On the third training session Clarke, Raven, and Octavia attended, Gustus cast the patronus charm.

Clarke watched expectantly, waiting to see a creature as large and strong as Gustus—instead, when the light flooding from his wand finally took shape, it was a...

"Is that a duck?" whispered Clarke incredulously. She stared for a beat longer before bursting into laughter.

Gustus glanced back at her, the corners of his eyes crinkling as he offered a small smile. "Don't diss the duck," he joked as he walked past her, the glowing duckling waddling behind him.

Clarke was doubled-over and gasping in hilarity when Lexa approached her. Looking up and expecting a similar expression of amusement, Clarke was surprised to see Lexa looked solemn.

"You shouldn't laugh, Clarke," she murmured.

"Why?" Clarke asked, sobering. "It's a duck, it's cute. Because he's...you know, huge. And it's a little duck," repeated Clarke, chuckling again.
Lexa's green eyes were a mixture of pity and sadness as she stood beside Clarke. "You know why a patronus assumes the shape it does?"

"Yes," said Clarke, who had a feeling she wouldn't like where this was going.

"Gustus had a daughter. To my knowledge, she was very fond of ducks, and he used to call her that as a pet name. She died very young, because of this war."

Clarke stared at the tiny duckling trailing after Gustus.

"The memory of his daughter serves as Gustus' protection," Lexa continued, though it wasn't necessary. Clarke swallowed past the sudden lump in her throat. She thought of her own father, how he called her his cub and ruffled his hand through her hair and called it a mane.

"That's so sad," she murmured.

Lexa gave one tiny nod. Clarke thought of Lexa's patronus. "Is that why yours is..." She trailed off, reluctant to weigh Lexa down with painful memory.

Lexa nodded. "She used to call me a raccoon because of my choice in warpaint."

Clarke nodded. "I'm sorry, Lexa."

"It's alright."

That night, Clarke was sure to kiss her enough to make both of them forget the pain and the sad memories.

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The Saturday exactly one week before the Valentine’s Day party found Clarke and her friends lounging on the hillside at the Black Lake. The snow had finally melted, and the sun was out, so it was the nicest day in quite some time. They were going to have a friendly Quidditch match later, so Clarke was looking forward to that. As for now, she was stuck playing 21 questions with Raven, Anya, and Lexa.

The current question was: "What are your fears?"

Clarke sighed, holding up two fingers. "I have two fears. One is drowning. The other is tight spaces. I'm claustrophobic. That's why I hate…what are they called, Raven? The muggle death traps."

Raven smirked. "Elevators?"

"Yeah, those."

Lexa quirked a brow, amused.

"I'm scared of cars," said Raven, tapping her brace as way of explanation. Judging by Anya's lack of reaction, Clarke guessed Raven had confided in her how her mother had forced Raven to get in the car with her, and the messy crash resulting in Raven becoming partially
paralyzed.

“I’m not scared of anything.” said Anya obstinately. When Lexa pointedly coughed, Anya rolled her eyes. “Alright, baboons creep me out.”

Clarke and Raven both burst out laughing. Even Lexa was grinning. “Baboons?” choked Clarke.

“Yes,” said Anya defensively. “It’s their bums. They’re gross looking.”

“Lexa?” prompted Raven, eyes watering.

Lexa’s smile immediately faded. “Falling from tall heights,” she said softly.

“Heights?” Raven frowned. “How are you afraid of heights? You fly all the time!”

“I love flying. It’s not that height that makes me uneasy. It’s the falling—the ground.”

“But that’s the same—ouch!” Anya had pinched Raven and stood. Scowling, Raven let Anya drag her up. “But I want to know—“

“See you later.” Anya dragged Raven off and Clarke frowned after them before realizing Anya had done it to give Lexa some privacy to speak to Clarke.

“It’s how we traveled,” explained Lexa. “Costia had not grasped Apparation as quickly as I had, and side-along was dangerous. We tried to escape by broom.” Lexa stood as still as a statue, her face carefully blank, but the movement of her throat as she swallowed, the slight tightening of her lips, the tremble in her eyes gave it away. “I will never forget the sight of her falling to the ground.”

Clarke licked her lips, the sick feeling in her stomach rising and making her queasy enough to retch, but she didn’t. “Is that how…?”

Lexa shook her head, voice as indifferent as her face. “The snow blanketed her fall. She was okay, but…they reached her first. By the time I landed, they were gone.”

Clarke tentatively waited, expecting Lexa to continue, but when Lexa finally looked at her, she nodded in understanding. She very much wanted to know who ‘they’ were, but this wasn’t the right time nor moment.

“Not here,” murmured Lexa, glancing around as though in fear someone would spot the way her eyes were shining unnaturally bright.

“Okay,” whispered Clarke, rising to wrap her hand around Lexa’s. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Lexa swiftly squeezed her hand. “Thank you.”

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Lexa’s fingers toyed with the hem of Clarke’s tank top. They were cold from the flying, and
felt particularly freezing against her arousal-heated skin. But the shivers it drove up Clarke’s spine were from anything but the cold.

“You know I’ve wanted you since the first time I saw you,” said Lexa, her voice low and rough as she advanced on her, pressing her other hand into the right side of Clarke’s stomach so that she was forced to stumble in return until her back was pushed against the wall. Clarke’s breath expelled, quiet and shaky. She stared at Lexa with wide eyes as she stepped into Clarke, putting her body between Clarke’s legs, and brushed her lips across hers.

The movement was so light, like feathers caressing as they floated through the sky. But it sent electric shivers down Clarke’s spine, and set off a low tug in her belly.

Lexa moved her head, trailing the feather-light kisses along the curve of Clarke’s neck. When she reached the side, near the nape of Clarke’s neck, Clarke’s hand automatically lifted in response, gripping her shoulder. She scraped her teeth along Clarke’s skin, and Clarke gasped, her hand flexing open, digging into Lexa’s shoulder.

“God, I wanted you too,” she confessed with a moan.

Clarke seized her by the hips and in one swift move, slammed her back against the wall and stepped before her, reversing their positions. Lexa’s eyes were dark green, luminous and huge as they focused on her, her full, plump lips parted as she took quick, short breaths. Her lips were so perfect, Clarke thought, marveling as she again admired them, particularly the larger bottom lip. So plump, it made her want to sink her teeth into it…which was exactly what she did. Lexa’s breaths came heavier as she slipped her hands beneath the back of Clarke’s shirt and raked her nails along her skin, from her upper to her lower back. As a result Clarke arched into her, unintentionally pressing her leg against her. Lexa gasped in response, and huffed out a ragged breath when Clarke quickly moved her leg back. Her chest was rising and falling rapidly as she looked at her beneath long lashes, her golden gaze smoldering. Clarke pressed her leg into her again, pushing against the apex between her thighs. Lexa’s head fell back and her back arched as she sucked in another wild intake of breath.

“Fuck, Lexa,” Clarke breathed, and wasted no time in peeling Lexa’s clothes off her until Lexa was naked and trembling before her like a living, breathing piece of art, so beautiful she made Clarke ache in all places, but especially the organ currently pounding in her chest.

I like you. I like you. I lo—

She closed her eyes, wetting her mouth, biting her own lip as though it could strangle the words trying to rise through her throat and fling themselves free.

This was ridiculous, this was crazy. She had only known Lexa for a few months, but she felt as though she had known her forever. They had only been sleeping together for two weeks, but she could map out every inch of her body as though she knew it better than her own.

She stepped forward, resting her hand over Lexa’s heart, and leaned forward to kiss her.

She couldn’t tell her how she felt, but she could convey it this way.

When she pulled back Lexa took a minute to open her eyes, she looked back at Clarke with a dazed smile, and Clarke’s heart tumbled again.

She kissed her again, pouring out her heart, and her very soul seemed to tremble when Lexa kissed her back just as intensely.
I slipped in another reference...Quinntana this time. Can you spot it? I felt obliged considering I took a few parts out of my old Quinntana fics. Next will involve the Valentine's Day Dance and yes, you are quite correct, you WILL be seeing Bellamy in a fluffy, glittery pink dress. (Also Clarke, Lexa, Raven, and Octavia looking hella fine in suits.....) :D
Chapter Summary

While Clarke falls through the sky, Lexa rises from the ground.
They catch each other.

Our fight is NOT over.

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone. First I would like to say thank you so much for your continued support of this fic and my writing. It means so much to me, I would never have words to explain just how much, and it has really really helped me these past couple of days getting asks at you. I can't tell you how it makes me feel that people are thinking of this fic and care about it enough to worry about losing it. I seriously love you guys and you just, you have no idea what it means to me, so thank you.

Secondly, this is a very short chapter, but I just had to post something. For reasons. Like the first point. It may be hard to read, but don't worry...for what I'm about to say in the third point.

Thirdly: FUCK THE SHOW. Seriously, fuck that bullshit. Lexa is very much alive regardless of what happened to her in that terrible AU called The 100 and jus drein jus daun motherfucker; everyone keep writing and creating art because that is how Lexa lives on. I AM continuing this fic but with one major change: NO ONE IS FUCKING DYING. Originally I had this huge epic tale planned out, following character events, so everyone that died in the show would have died in this. But you know what, FUCK CANON. NOBODY HAS TO DIE. NOT WELLS. NOT ANYA. NOT GUSTUS. NOT LEXA. NOBODY. THIS FIC IS GOING TO TURN FROM TRAGIC/EPIC TO FLUFFY/ANGSTY/EPIC. IT’S GOING TO HAVE A HAPPY ENDING. AND LEXA AND CLARKE ARE GOING TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER IN A MAGICAL WORLD.

"Deep in my bones, I can feel you
Take me back to a time only we knew
Hideaway

Say you'll never let me go"
The world may be ending.

The structures surrounding Clarke were dilapidated and groaning in the harsh wind. Ash was careening through the sky like torrential rain, tearing across the stormy horizon. Clarke stood in the center of a broken city, blinking down at the ash landing on her pale skin. It looked like black blood, dripping onto her arm and absorbing into her skin, a stain in her veins she could never wash away.

There was a towering building directly before her, with cracked windows and a single door at the base. Before she could even register making the conscious decision to move, Clarke found herself stumbling forward, tripping over rubble and stone and bones. She stared with wide eyes at the door, as grey as the world around her, the one circular window in the center of it standing out in stark contrast because it was a startling white.

Her heart thudded in anticipation, her body quaked in fear, but every part of her waking conscious told her not to be afraid. She was on the other side of the door this time. What was there to fear? She would surely be safe, this time.

The door flew open before she reached it. She passed through and the roar of the storm fell silent, leaving her shivering in a room with nothing in it except for the charcoal sketched into the floor in the center, of trees, of the stars, of the moon, of the earth. Clarke spared the art one last glance before pushing forward, walking slowly on shaky legs forward and over a thin bridge arching over countless broken clocks. She paused in the center of the bridge, tilting her head to better hear when she heard a faint ticking. Maybe they weren’t all broken.

She hopped down the small distance from the bridge, wood crunching beneath her feet. She waded through them, ignoring the stabs of pain as the broken wood pressed into her ankles and shins. She plunged her hand into a pile without thought once she neared the sound, grasping the clock on her first try and pulling it free. She frowned at it, perplexed—it looked just like her own watch around her wrist, with stars around it rather than numbers. The hands pointed at 3:07.

“Clarke?”

Clarke looked up, dropping the clock in her surprise. She heard her name echoed again, a soft female voice filled with pain—

*Lexa’s voice.*

Clarke charged forward, trampling through the broken clocks and leaving the ticking one behind with it; the ticking reminded her of a bomb, but the thought it exploding and destroying itself to leave silence in its wake was a comforting notion.

She stumbled to a halt in the doorway of a huge room full of stone steps that led down to a dais where a mysterious veil fluttered as though in a nonexistent breeze.

“Clarke…”

That’s where the whispering was coming from. That’s where Lexa was.
Heart pounding in her throat and feeling sick, Clarke hurried forward, seizing the curtain and yanking it back in her panic without any thought. A person stood in a plain white room, wearing a black coat with a mask that obscured his face. Clarke stared at him for a moment, brows knitted, before the man lifted his arm and pointed a muggle gun at Clarke’s face. She dived down just in time, the heat of the bullet hot against her head as she ducked and avoided it while her name rang out again, before dropping in a whisper.

“Clarke?”

She turned with horror to see Lexa standing in the doorway, the tattered veil wrapped around her, her eyes wide, her fingertips brushing over the wound in her stomach leaking inky blood as black as the ash had been.

“No. No no no, Lexa, no, please no—“

Clarke lunged forward just as Lexa began to fall, but she had already disappeared through the archway, and just as Clarke neared it, thirteen huge, horrifying cloaked creatures with clawed hands and rattling breaths burst forth from inside it, sending Clarke stumbling back toward the masked figure that had killed her Lexa.

The Shadow-Eaters were approaching, and Clarke was trapped. Trapped between the horrifying deluge of misery and the shaded figure intent on hurting her. Her grip on her wand loosened. She had no magic. She was not special. This was another nightmare, somewhere in the back of her mind she registered this, but she had lost count of how many she’d had and this was the final straw, this was too much. Lexa was gone, and she died with her. Lexa had been right all along: love is weakness.

But the Shadow-Eaters didn’t stop. Clarke felt the pull, felt the tug in her soul and the overwhelming despair that dropped her to her knees, but the creatures didn’t stop to coax her soul free. It remained firmly in place somewhere beneath her pounding heart as the Shadow-Eaters crept passed her, paying her no mind, scabbed rotting hands reaching out toward the masked figure behind Clarke. Numbly, she turned to watch, something akin to hope drumming up deep within her like a spark that refused to extinguish.

The figure had backpedaled, and though Clarke couldn’t see his face, she could sense the panic, the regret, the surprise. Still, he did not send them away, didn’t redeem himself—he lifted his own wand, voice firm and confident as he said, “Expecto patronum!”

Maggots burst forth from the tip of his wand. They swarmed, curling through the air as one sentient entity that swiveled back around and promptly devoured the masked figure. The screams faded before the Shadow-Eaters; they turned to face Clarke. She stared back at them, something strange on the tip of her tongue, unsure whether she should be bitterly laughing or mourning for the damn unfortunateness of it all. Her body clearly solved the problem for her, because a beat later there were hot tears rolling down her cheeks, and she gave a tremulous smile as she inclined her head, nodding just slightly at the Shadow-Eaters, acknowledging the despair they invoked, the humanness of it all, and conveying her utter gratitude at how the masked figure had been swallowed whole.

Their cloaked heads dipped as though in similar refrain, and the seconds felt like years but they faded into nothingness, leaving behind a room not quite as clean and unblemished as before, with black marks scraping down the floor like scars, but Clarke was able to push herself to her feet.

She walked forward, moving to the stone dais. She pulled back the curtain and stepped through it without another thought.
She stood on the top of the astronomy tower at Hogwarts. The stars above stretched into infinity, and Lexa was standing at the foot of the tower, her hair cascading down her back in shining chestnuts waves free from the familiar braids, and for once free from war paint her eyes were bright and green and so, so soft.

“There are more worlds than this one,” murmured Lexa, voice a whisper as clear as the wind ruffling the distant treetops. There were thestrals nestled in for the night in the forest, and unicorns grazing not far off. The stars were lovely, and Clarke was as breathless as ever in the face of Lexa’s beauty. Lexa’s eyes were fluttering shut, and Clarke’s heart caught in her throat as she watched Lexa drifting back, dandelions bursting to shake through the air as Lexa sank into the soft grass.

The air was charged, intensified as though with electricity, but for once Clarke was calm and at peace. Lexa’s face was so young in her sleep, peaceful, and Clarke knew her life would never be the same; it was always for the better after knowing someone as incredible as Lexa.

Clarke stepped off the tower, the wind rushing through her. She seemed to hang suspended in the air at the top of her jump, her golden hair streaming around her as her face upturned; the stars reflected in the blue of her eyes, and as she started to descend, she felt like a star herself, plunging to the earth.

While Clarke falls through the sky, Lexa rises from the ground.

They catch each other.

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Clarke woke with a wild gasp, breath lost from her lungs as though the wind rushing at her in her dream had been real, and the impact had sent her heart thudding.

“Clarke?” Lexa shot up with her, face drowsy and disoriented. She pushed at the wild mane of brown hair that had fallen forward to block her eyes. “Clarke? What is it?”

“Nightmare,” choked Clarke, terror constricting her. She seized Lexa’s arm, squeezing as though to make sure the dream had simply been that: a dream. And it was, because Lexa was okay, Lexa was here, alive and frowning at Clarke with concern and sleepy eyes.

“What happened?”

“I just—you, something happened, you died—you were shot by a muggle gun—“

“A gun?” Lexa scoffed, the indignation effectively waking her. She snuggled closer to Clarke, wrapping her arms around her from the side as she grumbled, “As if a bullet would defeat me, Clarke. Be realistic. I think you’ve watched one too many of those western films.” She playfully tugged at the ends of Clarke’s hair. “That, or your nightmare-writer is a complete moron.”

Clarke inhaled and exhaled slowly, willing the leftover panic to dwindle away. “It was scary,” she admitted.
“Of course it was,” said Lexa, voice still tilted up slightly with a playful inflection, obviously hoping to cheer up Clarke. “Who else would annihilate you and your friends in Quidditch otherwise? You’d have to find a new commander.”

“I don’t want a new commander. I just want you,” said Clarke seriously.

Lexa was quiet for a moment, sobering as she held Clarke’s gaze. She moved her head forward to give Clarke a slow, gentle kiss that lingered even when she withdrew.

The sincerity in her gaze, the intensity in her green eyes—Lexa was so good, so kind, so amazing. It was why Clarke lo—

Not yet.

Maybe someday.

(Definitely).

It was what made Lexa who she was. And Clarke knew she shouldn’t think this, knew she shouldn’t because they were two young girls who had fallen into this relationship in the midst of lives that seemed intent on not giving them enough time to even breathe, let alone love. Clarke’s father was in Azkaban, and Lexa had lost Costia, and there was a war that existed outside the safety of this castle, and there were a million burdens that fell on their shoulders, but in spite of it all, here they were. Lexa’s naked body was pressed to Clarke’s and she had never known so much peace as she felt in Lexa’s presence.

“I’m not going anywhere, Clarke,” said Lexa quietly, and warmth bloomed in Clarke’s chest.

“Good.”

Lexa nuzzled her nose into the side of Clarke’s neck, pressing her lips just under her ear before she pulled back and yawned. “You have a Herbology test tomorrow and the party is in a week, so we should probably get some sleep while we can.”

The shiver of fear that trembled up Clarke’s spine was not altogether surprising. “I don’t want to sleep,” she whispered. “Can’t we keep talking?”

Lexa paused. She kissed the underside of Clarke’s jaw before whispering, “We don’t have to talk at all.” Lexa’s lips tugged up in response to the relieved grin that Clarke gave her. “But—“ she said quickly when Clarke swung a leg around her hips to straddle her, and moved forward to kiss her, “If we were talking—I would just want to tell you that I’m here, Clarke.” Her throat moved as she swallowed, but she didn’t avert her gaze as she said softly, “Always.”

For once, Clarke didn’t fight to ignore the lump in her throat, the stinging of her eyes. She just leaned down to draw Lexa into a long, slow, unhurried kiss, wrapping her arms around her. That night, she traced forever into Lexa with her tongue, and fell asleep with a sated, blissful smile on her face, and slept a wonderfully dreamless sleep with Lexa’s limbs tangled with hers and her sweet smelling hair in her face and her heart beating in rhythm with Clarke’s.

Don’t cry
Hold your head up high
She would want you to
She would want you to

-Above the Clouds by Bear's Den.
Parties and Pranks

Chapter Summary

Abby is hiding something, school prank wars get personal, and Clarke and Lexa are hopeless.

Chapter Notes

First: I'm sorry this is so late. Lexa's death hit me...MUCH harder than I anticipated. I don't really want to get into that, but I will just say that the Clexakru has been a source of comfort, and especially all of you for being so understanding. Thank you.

Second: Originally, I intended for this to be an epic tale. The third wizarding war, with many many casualties involving the war, lots of conspiracies, and deaths echoing canon events. After Lexa died, the thought of deaths in my AU was making me sick. For any of them. It wasn’t fair. But the thing is, the plot of this fic...some people have to die. It’s war, it happens. So after thinking about it, I’m going to return to my previous plot. HOWEVER: there is going to be a happy ending and everything will be okay. I don’t want to give anything away, but please trust me when I say it will all turn out alright in the end and everything will have been worth it. So people (main people) are going to die, but in the end, it will be okay! Just trust me to take care of it, okay, I swear fealty to this damn fic, it'll all work out great and be a happy, Clexa ending! So once people start dying...DON'T FREAK OUT. Everything will make sense in the end :)

Third: I haven't edited this or even read through it, I wanted to upload it as soon as I finished so apologies for mistakes. I hope you guys enjoy this and thank you for sticking with it. I really, really appreciate all of you so much, I have no words, just thank you and I hope you're all doing better and not hurting too bad. Please stay safe and don't watch the finale if you were upset by 307.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Well maybe I'm just thinking that the rooms are all on fire

Every time that you walk in the room

Well there is magic all around you, if I do say so myself...

I have known this much longer than I've known you

-Stevie Nicks
Note to self: check weather before Apparating.

Jamie Potter sighed as the rain drenched her, pointing her wand at the briefcase she clutched in her free hand and muttering a quick *impervius* before doing the spell on herself.

Shaking her head at her lack of foresight, she made her way across the street, weaving her way through the crowds. She finally reached the old red-bricked department store and stepped through the window. She stepped onto the waxed tile floor of St. Mungo’s and wasted no time in waving her wand before her to dry herself. She checked with the Welcome Wizard at the front desk and discovered Abby was currently working on a patient, so after thanking the man, she took the elevator to the fourth floor to wait.

She waited nearly twenty minutes before the double-doors opened and the Healers came out, appearing exhausted as they removed their aprons, masks, and gloves, leaving them clad in their lime-green uniforms.

“No, there’s no point in trying again,” came one voice muffled over the mask that had yet to be removed. She finally pulled it down after chucking her gloves and apron into the bin. “His leg was sliced into with a Dark Curse. I can’t do anything about it. He and his brother shouldn’t have been messing around with that kind of magic.”

They started to gravitate toward the hallway to the right, so Jamie cleared her throat and stood up.

“Abby.” When the slight brunette woman glanced over, Jamie nodded toward the hall. “Got a minute?”

Judging by how Abby looked to be steeling herself for the conversation, she must have some idea what the topic would be. Jamie narrowed her eyes. That wasn’t a good sign.

Abby nodded before muttering a quick farewell to her fellow Mediwizards. They moved on down the hallway while Abby stood in place, watching Jamie as she approached her.

Jamie sighed once she stood before her, scratching the back of her neck. “Look, I don’t want to do this anymore than you do. But as I’m sure you know, things are getting bad.”

“Bad?” said Abby sharply. “I would consider that to be an understatement, Jamie. Our first floor is packed to the brim and there’s nothing we can do about it. ‘Bad’ doesn’t begin to cover it.”

“Bad?” said Abby sharply. “I would consider that to be an understatement, Jamie. Our first floor is packed to the brim and there’s nothing we can do about it. ‘Bad’ doesn’t begin to cover it.”

Jamie swallowed, hating the dry, sawdust taste in her mouth. “I know. Are they…they aren’t…”

“Are they getting better? No,” said Abby curtly, crossing her arms over her chest. “Half of the ones that have lost their magic are refusing to leave until we get it back. They won’t listen when we explain that there’s nothing we can do. Most of them have a breakdown and have to be admitted anyway. We had a Pureblood in here that tried to kill himself. Said he’d rather die than be a Squib. The rest of those poor people do nothing but take up space—they’ve lost their magic and their souls, so what are we supposed to do with them? Put them out of their misery like they’re a bunch of animals?”

“No. No, I—I think you’re making the right choice,” said Jamie, swallowing again. “I wouldn’t let them out either, in case it starts a panic. We just need to figure this out.”

“Starts a panic?” said Abby incredulously. “Look around you, Jamie. People are already panicking! My own daughter was attacked in Hogsmeade! Why she was even out of Hogwarts
anyway is beyond me—“

“They had a party. Kids being kids. Kane blocked the exit, so it won’t happen again.”

“Jamie.”

Jamie closed her eyes for a brief moment; when she opened them again, it was as though she’d aged twenty years. “I know,” she said wearily. “This is…a disaster, honestly. We’re trying our best. We only have a little over three months until the tournament ends, and we’re nearly finished getting everything in place.”

“Forgive me if I’m not entirely confident in the Ministry’s abilities,” said Abby dryly. “This tournament was supposed to go off without a hitch, yet my daughter claims someone put her name in.”

Jamie’s head dropped. “I know. I know. We’ve been looking into it and I think we’ve narrowed it down.”

Abby’s eyes were zeroed in on Jamie like a hawk. “Do you have any idea who entered her?”

Jamie’s brows knit together as she glanced around. “I don’t trust speaking about it at a public place like this. But I’m sure you can guess.”

Abby nodded, Jamie’s words confirming her suspicions. After a moment, she asked, “How is Clarke doing in the tournament, by the way? She told me in her letters that it’s going better than she expected. She won second place in the first task, first in the second. She said she was nearly killed by a mutant gorilla, but ended up enjoying the task anyway.”

Jamie’s cheeks warmed as she remembered exactly why Clarke had enjoyed the task so much. Clarke and the Durmstrang Champion. Jamie had had to sabotage the cameras before their exploits were put on the big screen. While it had been slightly traumatizing for Jamie (and Jamie had been in plenty of scarring moments thanks to growing up with Gideon and Evie), at least it had made Evie laugh when she told her, something she’d only done a grand total of once in the past couple months.

“She’s doing well. It’s a shame you can’t come watch.”

“I’m hoping I can during the Third Task. Thelonious is planning to make it down, so if I can get off work, I’ll be there.” Abby paused, studying Jamie again. “Look…I know you’ve all been working hard to make sure this tournament goes off without a hitch, and I know you have a plan. But the hospital is filling, Jamie. The people are scared. People think the silence means you’re trying to brush it under the rug. Your plan to avoid mass panic isn’t working, and it’s going to get worse if you don’t address this. “

Jamie’s stomach twisted. “I understand. If we don’t get this taken care of soon, if our plan falls through, then we will. What we’re hoping is that we’ll end it before it even begins.”

“Jamie, I told you, the hospital is full. People have died. It’s already begun.”

“Yeah.” Jamie’s mouth was dry. Abby was only a few years older than her, but somehow always managed to make Jamie feel like a child. A blink, and suddenly she was back to being a first year, looking up at the Prefect who was waiting to see what she’d do. “We’re working hard. This tournament just needs to go the way we planned, and we’ll have it taken care of.”

Jamie doesn’t add that she’s not just been worried over everything that’s been happening.
She’s worried she’s quite possibly the worst head of aurors that the country’s ever seen. She’s worried that there’s another wizarding war brewing, and she, the great-granddaughter of Harry Potter himself, the man who ended the last war, was not going to be able to stop it.

It felt like she was carrying worlds of pressure on her shoulders, and sometimes she worried if she was strong enough to hold it.

Abby seemed to understand the line her train of thought was taking. She pressed her lips together, briefly rubbing an arm down Jamie’s in consolation. “You’re doing the best you can. We just need to keep going.”

“Yeah,” said Jamie, grateful Abby was trying to help, but her heart still ached over the fact that she felt so useless. She shook her head. Now was not the time to get distracted with her own feelings. She lifted up the briefcase, watching the way the skin around Abby’s eyes seemed to tighten as her gaze fell on it. “I guess we should discuss why I’m here.”

“Probably,” breathed Abby, mouth working as though she’d just tasted something awful.

Jamie led them over to the couches, setting the briefcase down on the table before them. She swept her wand over the lock, then opened it up, not missing the hitch of Abby’s breath.

“This is all he could give me,” said Jamie, lifting the small vial filled with a silvery substance that swirled around like clouds of liquid gas.

Abby was pale and trembling as she stared at the vial filled with Jake Griffin’s memories. She slowly reached out to take it when Jamie offered it, and cradled in her hands as though it were beyond precious, whispering, “All he could…or all he would.”

“I need the rest of it, Abby. You might be the only person who can get it.”

The remaining color in Abby’s face drained away. Suddenly she returned to herself, straightening up and wiping away the stray tears that had leaked out of the corners of her eyes. “I can’t,” said Abby, pushing the vial into Jamie’s hands, her own trembling. “I can’t.”

“You tried to visit him last Christmas,” Jamie pointed out.

“That was because of Clarke…” Abby’s voice trailed away and she gave another tiny nod of her head, as though shaking herself out of the direction her thoughts were taking her. “And we didn’t make it in. You should know. Roan was the one who turned us away.”

Jamie clenched her jaw, which Abby noted with a quirk of her brow. Jamie couldn’t help it. She was not easily upset, but she had never been able to stomach anyone directing anger or upset at Roan. “Roan was doing his job.”

“Yes, I know that, but imagine me trying to reason that with my sixteen year old, grieving daughter.”

“I’m sorry, Abby,” said Jamie, and she was sorry. “Rules are rules. I can’t help that. We do what we have to do.”

Abby’s eyes widened a fraction at those words. Jamie frowned, perplexed by the reaction, but then Abby was taking the memory in her hands again, clearing her throat and saying quickly, “So what is this?”

“Do you want to watch it?” said Jamie.
Abby stared at it, and Jamie stared at her. She had expected Abby to be angry. To wonder why Jamie could visit him when she couldn’t. To demand to learn of the investigation and what it all meant.

She didn’t, though. Instead, she swiveled the vial around in her hand, the silver light reflecting in her brown eyes. Jamie watched her throat move as she swallowed; watched the slight tremble of her lips.

Jamie was the head of the aurors; she was both a member and the leader of a unit of highly trained officers specialized in the job of catching dark wizards. She had received top marks in concealment and disguise, and stealth and tracking. It was her business to know what people were up to, to know their tells, to read people. Watching Abby, Jamie was realizing something now.

Abigail Griffin was hiding something.

* * /ᐠvox/ * *

“I’ve done it,” announced Raven, plopping her bags down on the table and knocking over a goblet of pumpkin juice as she sat on the bench next to Monty and across from Clarke.

“Done what?” said Fox, frowning as she leaned forward to mop up the spilt juice before it could reach the immaculate parchment she’d been using to write her Muggle Studies essay.

“Get this: I magicked a stereo system.” Raven’s grin was broad, excited and completely undeterred by Fox’s puzzlement resulting in a complete lack of reaction. Octavia, however, immediately mirrored Raven’s grin. “Surround sound.”

“Nice!” The two exchanged high-fives.

“What’s it do?”

“Fox!” Raven groaned dramatically. “I pity the purebloods, I really do. You don’t know what you’re missing.”

Fox rolled her eyes, ignoring Raven’s comment to impatiently repeat, “What’s it do?”

“It’s music! It’s kinda like the muggle form of the encompassing amplifying charm.”

“Why not just use sonorus, then?” said Fox shrewdly.

“You’re missing the point!”

“What is the point? Why do you need a muggle stereo thing?”

Raven gave a smug grin, snatching a piece of toast off the table and tearing into it. “You’ll see.” She spotted the shadows under Clarke’s eyes and her grin melted away in concern. “Hey,” she said through her mouthful of bread, nudging Clarke’s knee with her foot under the table. “What’s up? How did your Herbology test go today?”

“Not great,” grumbled Clarke, stabbing at a bit of egg with her fork. “I overslept and missed it.”
Raven lifted her brows. “Lexa didn’t wake you?” Clarke’s cheeks went pink, and Raven exchanged a smirk with Octavia. “Oh, so you were up late, huh?” She wiggled her brows, but Clarke rolled her eyes.

“I had a nightmare last night,” said Clarke curtly, promptly wiping the smirk off Raven’s face. “A bad one, I don’t know why, but it might have had something to do with you trying to get us drunk yesterday,” she said, looking at Octavia pointedly.

Octavia lifted her hands palm up in surrender, shrugging. “Hey, I was just trying to celebrate the fact that I aced my Muggle Studies exam.” She spluttered when a piece of toast was thrown at her face.

“Which is not fair considering you were raised as a muggle,” said Fox with a withering expression, moodily buttering the remaining toast on her plate.

“Did you just throw food at me?” said Octavia in disbelief.

“Do you really think alcohol made the nightmares worse?” asked Raven, brow furrowed as she looked at Clarke. Clarke shrugged. “You would think it’d make it better. You know, pass you out.”

Fox scowled when a piece of cantaloupe hit her cheek.

“I don’t know,” sighed Clarke. “I barely remember last night. I just know that I had a really shitty dream, and Lexa woke up. I don’t remember what we talked about, but she made me feel better. Then, uh…” Raven wiggled her brows again as Clarke blushed. Fox threw another piece of toast, buttered this time, at Octavia, who squealed when it landed in her hair. “We fell asleep, and when we woke up, it was nearly nine. My test started at eight.”

Raven grimaced in sympathy, reaching across the table to put her hand on Clarke’s arm, and ducking the bit of egg that went sailing over her head to smack Fox in the forehead. “I’m sorry, babe. Did you talk to Professor Vera?”

Clarke shook her head. “Not yet. I was going to go after I finish eat—WHAT THE FUCK.”

Octavia and Fox both froze when two different breakfast items (scrambled eggs and an unnecessarily large heaping of oatmeal) splattered across Clarke’s face on both sides, since Fox and Octavia both sat on either sides of her. Raven slowly withdrew her hand.

Clarke stood up. The table had fallen silent, with everyone watching to see what she would do. Clarke gathered her things, hitched her bag over her shoulder, and stepped out of the bench. She flicked her wand and the plates full of food sitting before Octavia and Fox shot up, smashing into their faces. Clarke was already walking un hurriedly toward the doors by the time the plates slid off their faces to clatter down onto the table, leaving two gaping girls sitting there with their mouths open in shock and their faces covered in clumpy mixtures of gravy, butter, egg, oatmeal, and syrup.

Raven ducked again to avoid the sudden explosion of food at the table. Wells, Monty, Roma, Sterling, and Trina all scrambled to get out of the way as Octavia and Fox began launching food at one another.

“Clarke, you asshat!” yelled Octavia, flinging a handful of grapes at Clarke’s back. Clarke didn’t look back and continued walking forward but waved her wand so the grapes ricocheted away as though hitting an invisible barrier; they scattered and hit various students in the backs of the head. The students turned to glare at Octavia, whose eyes widened. She gave a weak grin and waved; she lunged beneath the table when a variety of food went flying toward her.
Raven crawled away, managing to make it only being hit once in the stomach with some strawberries. Her head rammed into something hard just outside the doors, and she looked up to see Anya hoping on one foot, wincing and cursing because Raven had just head-butted her shin.

“How fucking hard is your head,” groaned Anya, finally stilling to glare down at Raven.

“How me,” said Raven, pretending to wheeze and clutching at where her strawberry soaked shirt clung to her stomach. “I’ve been hit.”

Anya bent down, one brow arched as she pulled a lump of strawberry of Raven’s shirt and brought it to her lips. “By a stray fruit?”

“Hurry,” Raven continued wheezing, gripping Anya’s clothes and trying not to laugh at the curl of Anya’s lip as Raven tried to pull herself up by Anya’s robes. “You need to get me naked—uh, I mean take my clothes off…” She couldn’t hide the grin that grew on her face in response to the snort of laughter Anya couldn’t hide. “Was that—“

“Doesn’t she get you naked enough, Raven?” Octavia and Fox had just ran into the entrance hall, slamming the doors behind them. There was a loud “splat splat splat!” against the door as food hit the heavy oak.

“Merlin’s pants,” marveled Anya, taking in Octavia and Fox’s appearances. They were both covered from head to toe in food. “What kind of school is this?”

“The best,” said Raven, before remembering she was supposed to be wheezing and clearing her throat, trying again. “The best!” she gasped out, widening her eyes as she flung her arms around Anya’s legs.

“Isn’t it a little stupid to risk getting in trouble a week before you have a party?”

Octavia shrugged, sending a bit of oatmeal rolling off her shoulder to fall with another splat to the floor. “It’s a pre-party.”

Fox carved the oatmeal out of her eyes, blinking rapidly to dispel the droplets of…was that chocolate milk? that were clinging onto her eyelashes. “A wet party.”

Raven, Anya, and Octavia all went silent, staring at Fox. It took a minute, but finally it sank in, and she rolled her eyes, her blush visible even through all the bits of gravy and egg and oatmeal. “Oh, I didn’t mean it like that, you pervs.”

“She did mean it like that,” wheezed Raven, looking back up at Anya and plucking at her robes again. “It’s a requirement at Hogwarts. All party-goers must be wet.”

“Please. Any party thrown by Hogwarts students is bound to be dry,” said Anya.

“Excuse me,” said Raven in mock indignation, “but I think you know better than anyone how not dry I make things!”

Anya’s cheeks tinged pink, but she still managed to look haughty as she said, “Proof that miracles exist.”

“Ew, okay, I don’t need to hear your foreplay, Raw-ven.”

“Shut up, O.”
“Me either. I’m out of here.”

“Shut up, Fox.”

“What is this?” cried out a voice that had all four girls cringing. Kane was running toward them, wand out. His eyes widened in anger as he spotted Octavia and Fox; Raven had quickly stood up and half-shielded herself behind Anya so he wouldn’t see the stain on her shirt.

“This is what Professor Nygel pulls me out of an important meeting for?” demanded Kane, gesturing wildly at Octavia and Fox, who stood there sheepishly. “My sixth-year students, behaving like…like first years!”

“Sorry, Headmaster,” said Octavia with a wince.

Fox looked both terrified and murderous. She was rarely ever in trouble.

“Both of you in here with me,” ordered Kane, pointing toward the Great Hall. “You’re going to help me clean this mess up, and then we’re going to discuss your detentions. You two,” he shot at Anya and Raven, who had been stealthily inching away, “Get out of here. Raven, show our guest how a real Hogwarts student should behave.”

“Yes sir,” said Raven soberly.

Kane stormed after Octavia and Fox, slamming the doors behind him. Raven and Anya stood in silence, staring at the closed doors.

They both turned to face each other at the same time.

“Wanna go make some miracles?”

The snort escaped Anya before she could stop it. She clapped a hand over her mouth and nose, eyes widening. Raven’s brows raised and her smirk slowly morphing into a teasing grin.

“Did you just—“

“Shut up,” said Anya, rolling her eyes and seizing Raven’s arm. She proceeded to drag her toward the hallway before the sound of Raven’s loud peals of laughter could get Kane on their case.

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A few days before the party, Clarke found herself in the Great Hall with her friends, listening, quite possibly for the billionth time, to Bellamy and Raven bicker.

“You’re supposed to be my slave for the rest of the year!”

“Uh, I don’t think so. I don’t see you toting the Triwizard Cup around. You lost too!”

Raven opened her mouth to undoubtedly explode into a thousand arguments, so Clarke stepped in before it could escalate. “Actually, considering you both lost, I think that means you both have to own up to the bet.”

Raven sputtered while Bellamy scowled with indignation. “What, be slaves to each other?”
Octavia’s eyes crinkled with mirth. “I’m loving this.”

“Yeah. You have to do whatever the other person says.”

“That’s redundant,” said Raven, rolling her eyes. “It would just be us counteracting each other all day. Nonstop arguing.”

“So no different than usual,” said Wells under his breath. Clarke lifted her goblet of pumpkin juice to her lips to hide her snicker.

“Stay out of it, Minister of Hogwarts!” Raven tossed a few pieces of toast at him, and then cleanly swiped her wand through the air to send the grapes he lobbed back flying off to the side, where they hit Murphy in the back of the head and he swiveled around to see who did it, glowering.

“Honestly I don’t know how I stomach being around either of you,” said Octavia, shaking her head as she returned her attention to the rather impressive stack of French toast sticks she was arranging in a tower similar to Jenga, that log game she’d forced Clarke to play with her when Clarke visited the muggle world the summer before fifth year. “All you do is bicker. I wish you’d just get married already.”

Bellamy and Raven both blushed deeply, glancing off to the sides. Anya was surveying the two of them with her head slightly tilted and one brow raised.

“You’re gross,” said Raven to Octavia after a beat too long. The silence was palpable now, with most people at the table trying to avoid looking at Bellamy, Raven, or Anya.

“Disgusting,” agreed Bellamy, his cheeks still red.

Octavia smirked. “Uh huh.” The majority of the table was trying to hide their smirks, but Clarke was watching Anya, wondering what her reaction was to all this. She just looked a strange mixture of amused and curious.

Wells threw another piece of toast at Raven, seemingly in an effort to lighten up the tension at the table, but Octavia caught it before she could get hit. “Stop it. No food fights.”

“Agreed,” grumbled Fox.

“How many days of detention did you get?” asked Raven.

“Two weeks,” glowered Octavia. “Honestly, I think we should have gotten a few days and Clarke gets two weeks. She started it.”

“Excuse me, I finished it,” said Clarke. “You two are the wanna-be pranksters who got the rest of the Great Hall in on it. I left before then.”

Anya smirked at the words. “Wanna-be pranksters is probably the best way to describe Hogwarts.”

“Hey, I can do some kickass pranks!” said Raven rather heatedly. “I’m practically the next generation of Weasley twins.”

Bellamy rolled his eyes. “Okay, that’s an exaggeration.”

“Maybe a slight exaggeration, but still,” said Raven with an eye roll. “And anyways, better to be wanna-be pranksters than stuffy goody-two shoes.”
Anya looked at her skeptically. “Are you trying to imply that Durmstrangs are stuffy?”

Even Octavia was grinning now. “Definitely.”

Lincoln shook his head, sighing as he took a bite of an apple. “I’m staying out of this.”

“Durmstrang isn’t as stuffy as Beauxbatons, no offense,” Jasper quickly added to Maya, who rolled her eyes with a smile, “But they are pretty uptight.”

“Uh, excuse me,” came a voice from the table next to them. They all turned around to look at the girl who sat in front of Murphy. “Durmstrang could out-prank Hogwarts any day.”

“Emori could out prank Hogwarts any day,” corrected Lincoln.

“I thought you were staying out of this?” said Octavia, flicking Lincoln’s arm. He smiled.

“That’s it! Prank war!” announced Raven; she ignored the groans gave by Fox and Wells, instead bolstered by the cheers given by Octavia, Jasper, and Miller.

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Over the remaining week before the party, Hogwarts and Durmstrang were under siege. First it was Raven and Jasper setting off Dungbombs in the Durmstrang ships (Clarke and Lexa were more amused by that simply because Lexa hadn’t had to deal with the consequences; she’d been in the Room of Requirement with Clarke). Then it was Emori pranking Raven with a nose-biting teacup during dinner. Octavia, Miller, and Harper retaliated by cornering Emori and Artigas in the hallway while they were on their way to observe a Charms class, magicking invisible barriers up, and setting off stink pellets.

Next came Anya and Emori teaming up to put Bulbadox Powder in Jasper’s school robes, causing him to miss a full class while he was in the Hospital Wing getting treated. Monty avenged him by dropping some Whizzing Worms in Anya and Emori’s pumpkin juices the next day at lunch.

Still, the prankng wars were commencing regularly harmlessly, until the day the Hogwarts students and Durmstrangs students noticed how amused the Beauxbatons (specifically Cage) were at the antics, when they caught him howling in laughter one night when Emori pranked Monty with an Ever-Bashing Boomerang. Watching Cage cackle over poor Monty stumbling back up to the castle shielding his face from the persistent boomerang had proven to be the wild card that combined Hogwarts and Durmstrangs’ efforts into a singular mission: destroy Beauxbatons.

While hearing the angry shrieks of Cage and his cronies when Raven and Octavia blew up the plumbing to the bathrooms while they were in there was pretty entertaining, Clarke returning to Ravenclaw Tower to find three feet worth of fresh horse shit piled in front of the doorway was not one of her favorite experiences (even a week later she swore her nostrils were still burning).

One day while the Beauxbatons and Wick the gamekeeper were in the Great Hall eating lunch, Monty snuck over to the Beauxbatons carriage and poured a healthy dose of Arker’s powdered X-Lax concoction into the Pegasus’ trough. While the horses eagerly sank their muzzles into the spiked malt whiskey, Jasper and Miller both magicked roll after roll of toilet paper over the carriage in high, streaming arcs. The three off them scammed away laughing their heads off, returning to the Great Hall in time to be treated to a toast by Raven and the rest of their Hogwarts and
When a full day passed without any retaliation, while Raven was certain Beauxbatons was defeated and scared of them, Octavia wasn’t so sure. “They’re planning something,” she insisted.

Sure enough, that night (only three days before the party), Raven found a box of chocolates on Clarke’s nightstand. Assuming they had been a gift from Lexa or something, she wasted no time in stealing a couple chocolates.

And that was what led Clarke to discovering one of her best friends in a state of insanity, clinging to one of the bedposts (grinding was possibly the more accurate term, but Clarke would give her the benefit of the doubt) and singing some ridiculous muggle song about her love for Anya.

“Cage Wallace, that bastard. He’s more cunning than he looks,” said Fox.

“I don’t think it was Cage. I bet it was that smart girlfriend of his, Lorelie Tsing,” said Octavia.

“Oh my fucking Merlin, get her off me!” exclaimed Anya, when Clarke, Fox, and Octavia’s conversation distracted them from watching Raven, and she’d taken advantage of the freedom to treat Anya’s leg the same way she’d treated the bedpost. It wasn’t a pretty sight.

“I love you so much, my sugar pie honey bunch,” crooned Raven, peppering kisses all over Anya’s face while Clarke, Fox, and Octavia all struggled to pull her back.

“Ugh!” Anya looked as disgusted as she was horrified, and Clarke wasn’t sure whether to laugh or to join Anya in her contempt.

“Come on, Raven, we need to take you to the Hospital Wing. Jackson can give you an antidote…”

“No! I want my sweetie pie—“

“Ra—Oh my, Raven—haha, Raven, come on, let’s get you out—haha…” Octavia was laughing so hard she could barely hold Raven up. Finally she gave up entirely, collapsing onto Raven’s bed to howl with hysteria.

That left just Clarke and Fox, straining to drag Raven toward the door and away from Anya, who was standing there utterly aghast.

“Raven…Raven, come on…” said Fox gently, but then Raven’s flailing knocked an elbow into Fox’s nose and she let go too, stumbling over to her bed to grab her wand to stop the bleeding.

“Argh—Raven, I can’t—“ Both of Clarke’s arms were wrapped around Raven’s midsection as she bodily dragged her out of the doorway. Raven’s hands clapped onto the doorjamb, and she was literally up in the air now as Clarke miserably failed at pulling her through it. “Any, I could use some help!” barked Clarke.

Anya was blushing furiously and still looked repulsed at how absolutely love-sick Raven was, but she still came over to help. The moment she neared, Raven latched onto her. Anya hatched her up into her arms and Raven clung onto her as though they were on the cover of a cheap, trashy romance novel. It was too much for Clarke. She fell to laughter too, collapsing against the wall while Anya stormed past her, stony-faced and ignoring the way Raven was poking and prodding at her face, calling her a love muffin. Clarke shuffled into the room, joining Octavia and Fox as they all laughed so hard their bellies hurt.
The next day, when Raven pranked all three of them with transforming their turkey legs into real life turkeys just as they took a bite, they didn’t blame her, even with the beak marks all over their arms and the hilarity of the fact that Raven and Anya couldn’t look at each other without blushing. They didn’t retaliate. They kinda deserved it. Anya, however certainly received the worst of it.

The weather had been lovely considering it was only February, so they tended to spend their free periods outside, especially after lunch.

“RAVEN!” bellowed a voice that had all of them stiffening, turning around to settle wide eyes on the figure covered in mad mess of feathers and goop.

“Anya?” gasped Lexa, looking positively alarmed at the sight of her friend covered in such a mess. At the same time, her eyes were bright with barely suppressed hilarity. “Um,” she said, clearly trying to compose herself, “What…what happened?”

“Raven, what did you do?” thundered Anya again, wild, furious eyes fixed on Raven, whose lips were twitching and eyes were wide despite being frozen in place. Clarke and Octavia both started cringing, knowing what was about to happen. “RAVEN!” Anya barked again when Raven didn’t answer.

Sure enough, Raven’s lips pulled into a huge, shit-eating grin. Her mirth rang through the air as she doubled over, slapping a hand across her knee. Everyone else just stood there staring, lips sucked in in efforts not to reveal their smirks. Anya’s eyes bulged.

“Levicorpus!”

Raven was turned upside down as she was yanked into the air by her good leg, her shirt falling forward to reveal a flat brown stomach. Anya was advancing on her, stomping forward on sopping wet shoes that squelched with honey. On the contrary to the imposing figure Anya would certainly be (were she not covered in honey and feathers), Raven laughed harder than ever, clutching at her belly as she hooted with laughter.

Anya stared at her for a moment, wand clenched tightly in her hand. Everyone held their breath; they knew Anya wasn’t going to actually hurt Raven, but they wondered just how embarrassing her revenge would be.

But the revenge didn’t come. “You’re so annoying,” snarled Anya, letting Raven drop to the ground with a swift jerk of her wand. Raven was still cackling as she rolled over and pulled herself to her feet, swiping the dirt off her ass.

“I can’t believe she didn’t curse her,” said Clarke in amusement.

“Trust me, for Anya, that’s like a declaration of love,” muttered Lexa, lips still curved.

After taking care of Clarke, Octavia, and Anya, Raven didn’t waste any time in planning her revenge against Beauxbatons, but no one had expected her to do what she did.

Raven went to Peeves.

The majority of Hogwarts watched from the window that night as Peeves wrecked havoc in the Beauxbatons carriage. Clarke heard a very distant voice that sounded suspiciously like Cage scream, “Using Peeves is CHEATING!” It sounded like music to her ears.

Beauxbatons left them alone after that, and even Peeves seemed on better terms with the Hogwarts’ students. Lexa was in such a good mood after watching Cage stomp out of Beauxbatons’
carriage with covered in shit that she was more playful than she’d ever allowed herself to be with Clarke. They had a playful duel on the Hogwarts’ grounds that Octavia, Lincoln, Anya, and Raven had all watched with as much enthusiasm as though they were in an arena watching a battle to the death. Raven even wrote numbers on a bit of parchment and held them up when they did something particularly great (such as when Clarke finally managed to get Lexa by casting a silent *Levicorpus*, and then giving her a chaste kiss while she was upside down). It was a beautiful, sunny day. Cage was somewhere covered in shit, Clarke was surrounded by the people she loved (ignoring the kick of her heart when she thought of that while looking at Lexa), and it was a great day.

“Clarke, Lexa is kicking your ass!”

Clarke ducked the spell Lexa shot at her and briefly hid behind Raven, panting. Lexa laughed at how she used her as a shield, so Clarke rolled out to shoot a jelly-legs curse at Lexa that she promptly waved her wand and avoided.

“I know!” lamented Clarke, ignoring her friend’s laughter as she took off running again, barely avoiding the tickle charm Lexa cast at her.

Truthfully, she wasn’t much of a match for Lexa, but she was comforted by the fact that no one really was. It was more a game of her running away from Lexa’s spells until finally, gasping for breath, she doubled over and held a hand up for Lexa to stop.

“Okay, okay,” she panted. “I’ve had enough, I’m dead. No one is meant to have this much exercise.”

Lexa smiled and nodded, but her next spell had a gust of wind lifting Clarke’s skirt high enough that her vivid blue Dino Warbeck underwear was suddenly on display for everyone to see. She yelped and pushed her skirt back down, but the damage had already been done.

“I’m never letting you live this down,” Raven told her between loud peals of laughter.

Octavia was laughing so hard she was leaning against Lincoln for support, but she still managed to complain, “Clarke, noooo, Dino Warbeck sucks!”

“He’s not that bad,” argued Raven, still cackling.

Torn between embarrassment and amusement, Clarke caught Lexa’s eye. Lexa took a step back when Clarke took a step forward.

“Kick her ass!” cheered Anya.

“Now Clarke…” began Lexa reasonably, but when Clarke shook her head, she burst out laughing and took off full-sprint toward the castle. Clarke took off after her, the sounds of their friend’s laughter fading as, giggling, she chased Lexa into the castle and down the hallways.

She finally caught up to her just outside the Room of Requirement. Lexa turned, a hand clapping the doorknob and a reckless smile on her face. Clarke didn’t slow down enough and consequently slammed into Lexa rather hard, their bodies pressing together as they fell through the doorway and into the room.

“This was your plan all along,” accused Clarke, fingers already working on the buttons and clasps of Lexa’s uniform and she backed her up onto the bed.

Lexa nodded, fully grinning, and it was like the sunlight came from her face. Clarke’s heart trembled, but she kept moving, immediately dropping her lips to Lexa’s chest once exposed.
“As much of an evil genius as you are, we can’t stay here long,” Clarke said breathlessly, lifting Lexa’s hips to peel her pants off her. “I told Wells I’d meet him to study for our Charms test.”

“You’re charming the pants off me, doesn’t that count?”

Clarke’s mouth fell open against where she’d been pressing kisses to Lexa’s neck. She buried her laughter in the curve between her neck and shoulder.

Still, Lexa wasted no time in removing Clarke’s clothes and sending her on an impossibly fast, frenzied climb to the top. Clarke came twice, and cried out Lexa’s name loudly enough for the floor above to hear.

When it was Lexa’s turn, Clarke briefly considered whether or not it would make her a terrible friend to ditch Wells for sex. Sure, he was gray-ace, but he would still get it, right? She had needs.

“Oh my—ah, Clarke, fuck—“ Lexa’s moans skittered away into pants as she arched her hips, threading her fingers through Clarke’s hair. After her first orgasm, she continued bucking her hips and panted, “Now I know why this is called the Come and Go room.”

Clarke burst into laughter, the sound muffled in the liquid heat her face was currently buried in.

* * */\*/ * *

There was only one day left before the party, and Lexa was concerned.

She knew she and Clarke were basically already going to the party together. She knew they would spend the entire party together, and that they would leave the party together. But still. She needed to officially ask her, didn’t she?

But how was she supposed to ask her? Especially when she was the one that had been so adamant about not dating. It was getting harder and harder to remember her reasons for that, though. Clarke was amazing, Lexa couldn’t get her out of her head, and...

“What is this about, again?” came a grumble from behind her. Anya had arrived to pull Lexa out of the dangerous direction her thoughts were going. Grateful, Lexa turned to face her best friend.

“I don’t know. Clarke asked me to bring you to the Quidditch pitch.”

Anya sighed. “If it’s another prank from Raven, I’m going to have to kill her.”

It wasn’t another prank. But it was just as insane. Once they reached the Quidditch pitch and took in the sight before them, they froze.

Lexa laughed, actually laughed aloud, until there were tears streaming down her face, because she couldn’t even believe what was happening before her.

Raven had gone one step further than an enchanted radio. She had brought giant speakers, presumably from the nearest muggle town, and magicked them up onto the Quidditch goals. They were booming out sound, some muggle song Lexa had never heard before, and Raven, Octavia, and
Clarke were actually doing a *dance number* in the center of the pitch. Raven was pointing her wand at her throat, her *Sonerus* charm magnifying her voice, which admittedly wasn’t the best as she sang along with the song. Clarke and Octavia served as her swaying backup singers, going through clearly choreographed movements.

"Those fucking idiots," stated Anya, her eyes wide as she stared in disbelief. Raven was grinning broadly, using the hand not holding her wand to point at Anya as she sang. "*She walks like a model, she grants my wishes like a genie in a bottle,*" Lincoln fell beside Lexa, laughing so hard his paint was running, as Octavia and Clarke half sang, half laughed, "*Yeah, yeah!*"

"*Cause I'm the wizard of love, and I got the magic wand,*" sang Raven, waving her wand and shooting silver and gold sparks through the air, before Clarke and Octavia spun in close to her and she hooked both arms around them, Clarke and Octavia kicking a leg out as Raven belted, "*All these other girls are tempting, but I'm empty when you're gone and they say, Oh I think that I've found myself a cheerleader—*"

By the time the entire ordeal was over, Anya was as red as a tomato and speechless on top of it. Lexa, however, couldn’t stop laughing.

“This wasn’t supposed to be funny. It’s serious. I was seriously dancing,” insisted Clarke to Lexa with a twinkle in her eye, causing Lexa to laugh even harder.

“So Anya…what did you think?” asked Raven once she bounced up to them after having magicked away the speakers. She had a huge, smug grin on her face.

Anya’s mouth opened and closed a couple times before any sound made it out. Finally, she managed to utter “…*why?*”

“This is my dramatic way of asking you to the dance.”

Anya’s eyes widened even more so. Raven was still grinning, as was Octavia, Clarke, and Lexa.

There was hardly a beat of silence before Anya burst out, “*No! Are you kidding me?*”

Lexa felt a pleasant buzz of warmth in her chest at the fact that Clarke, Octavia, and Raven never stopped smiling. Clearly they knew Anya quite well now.

“Come on, admit you’re impressed.”

“No!”

“I know you want to go to the dance with me.”

“No!”

“What color tie are you wearing? So we can color coordinate.”

“Raven, no.”

“When should I pick you up?”

Anya sighed, shaking her head. The corners of her lips were twitching—a telltale sign. “Eight,” she eventually said, sounding weary as though she’d just been put through an ordeal. Lexa, Clarke, and Octavia all burst into laughter again, but as all five of them walked back across the
ground toward the castle for dinner, they didn’t miss the way Anya took Raven’s hand.

*・*・*・*

That night in the Room of Requirement, Clarke was feeling the pressure.

She’d been thinking of this all day—all month, really, ever since they planned this damn party. She and Lexa had already gotten their suits, had already discussed the party and everything about it…except actually attending it together. Now it was getting late and Clarke was just wrapping up completing her Transfiguration homework, Lexa would be returning to the ship soon since she had early training in the morning, and this was her only chance.

“So listen,” Clarke began slowly, ignoring the hammering of her heart and the way her grip on her wand was slippery with her sweaty palms. She waved it, placing all of her scrolls and the goblet she had been practicing on transfiguring into a squirrel into her backpack. “I was thinking, I’m going to the party, you’re going to the party. You know we’re going to end the night together—”

“Oh are we?” said Lexa teasingly, arching a brow.

Clarke rolled her eyes, huffing to hide the fact that she felt as though she were about to hyperventilate. “Come on, I’m trying to ask a serious question here.”

She did one of her signature nods, signaling Clarke to go on.

Clarke took in a deep breath. “Well…why don’t we just go to the party…together?”

Lexa’s expression was carefully neutral. “Together as in…a date?”

“Yes. I mean, I know you said you don’t do dates, and I don’t either, really, but I just thought, if we were already going individually and then leaving together, why not just go together as well?” She shrugged, internally cringing at the awkward jerking of her shoulders. “It makes sense to me.”

Lexa just stared at her, utterly impassive. Clarke waited with bated breath, her stomach twisting, and she couldn’t deny it: she was kind of terrified of Lexa’s answer.

She didn’t know what was more frightening: Lexa rejecting her, or Lexa saying yes.

“You go out with me this weekend.”

Clarke’s eyes widened. Of all the things she expected Lexa to say, this was not one of them.

“What? As…what?”

“I thought…maybe…” Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. “Maybe as a date. A real one.”

Clarke was lost for words. All this time Lexa had specifically said she didn’t want to date,
which made it easier for Clarke not to think about it, but now…

Fuck. Now she had the option. And Clarke honestly didn’t know if she was ready.

“I…” She wasn’t supposed to date. She had started seventh year with that thought specifically in mind. Her father was in prison, Diana Sydney and Charles Pike were out to get Clarke’s family, Finn had been a disaster, and now with the Shadow Eaters and chaos going on… She didn’t want to get wrapped up in a relationship but, she realized as panic thrummed inside her, it looked like that’s what she started to do.

Lexa swallowed again, and to say she looked nervous would be an understatement. Still, she said nothing. Just watched Clarke and patiently waited for her response.

“Lexa, I…I don’t know. I mean.” Clarke’s stomach dropped at the disappointment on Lexa’s face; no, Lexa didn’t outwardly give any signs, nor did she move in any way whatsoever, but Clarke could see it in her eyes. “I…I really like what we’ve got going. And I…maybe one day, I’d want to explore that in…in a more serious way? But I don’t know if I’m in the right place to be a serious option for anyone at this point. You know?”

It sounded like a cop out, and they both knew it.

But Clarke was terrified. She knew how this worked. If relationships go wrong, people don’t stay friends. Just look at what happened with Finn. They were only kids when they dated, really, yet the horrible things he said, what he did, and how he just left…

Clarke cared about Lexa. More than she was even willing to admit to herself. And she didn’t want to lose Lexa.

Lexa stood without warning. Clarke leaned back a little in surprise, staring at her. “I understand,” said Lexa, and she was clearly trying hard to come across as fine, as easy and unaffected, but her voice was strained and Clarke could see it in her eyes, could see that she was wounded and sad. “We can still go to the party together, but don’t worry about this weekend.” Lexa lifted her arm to look at her wrist, which was ridiculous because she wasn’t wearing a watch. “Well, I better return to the ship, training starts soon. I’ll see you around, Clarke.”

“Wait,” said Clarke, the desperation in her voice painfully evident. “I don’t—I mean, I’m not saying that one day we couldn’t—I mean, maybe someday we can—”

“Clarke,” said Lexa, and she said it like she always said Clarke’s name. Soft, quiet, with that click at the end and that gentle look in her eye. “I understand. I really do.” She leaned forward to press a warm kiss to Clarke’s lips that was far too brief. “I’ll see you later.”

Lexa left the Room of Requirement, and Clarke standing alone in it. She was tingling all over, and not in a good way that Lexa’s kisses usually left her. Clarke gave a frustrated sigh, sinking back onto the bed and burying her face in her hands. What was she doing?

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mirror, smirking at her reflection. “I should wear a suit more often.”

“Agreed,” said Lincoln, leaning forward to press a kiss to Octavia’s temple. She turned to face him, smirk shifting into a full-blown grin as she took in the bright yellow dress he wore.

“You pull that off pretty well, too. Maybe wearing dresses should be your new thing.”

“If I didn’t have to go through the hassle of casting spells to get them to fit me, then maybe. It’s the dress or the muscles, can’t have both.”

Octavia pouted. “They can compliment each other. I mean, look at your legs.”

Lincoln laughed, moving a leg forward and flexing his bulging calf muscle.

Clarke swept in at that moment, looking fantastic in a vest suit complete with a blue tie that matched her eyes. She lifted her brows at how Lincoln was posing and laughed, adding in a wolf-whistle that had Lincoln growing sheepish.

“Flirt with your own date,” joked Octavia. “Where is she, anyway?”

Clarke shrugged, but cast her gaze downward. “I guess I beat her here.”

“The party has arrived!” Raven came bounding in, Anya trailing along behind her. Clarke whistled at them next, laughing again when Raven struck a pose and winked.

“You’re ridiculous,” mumbled Anya with a roll of her eyes, but she reached over to shift Raven’s tie into place when it fell crooked.

“You love it—it. You love it.” Raven had hastily stumbled over her words, but Octavia and Clarke had both caught it. They caught each other’s eye, too, and promptly turned around before Raven or Anya, who were both looking more than a little red in the cheeks, could catch them grinning.

“Hey,” came a quiet voice. They all turned to see Lexa walk in looking absolutely stunning in a black slim-fit suit complete with a vivid scarlet tie. Her hair was loose from their braids for once, cascading over one of her shoulders in shining waves.

Octavia gave one long, low whistle. “Damn, Woods. I thought I looked best in a suit, but… you might be a close second.” She winked at Lexa when she smiled, but the smile didn’t last too long. Octavia glanced at Clarke and frowned when she saw that Clarke was avoiding looking at Lexa.

“So…” began Raven, clearly anticipating the awkward silence. “Who’s ready to party?”

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Bellamy felt more than a little ridiculous.

He was wearing a ridiculous dress, and he was only wearing it because Raven ordered him too as part of this stupid bet that they’d done months ago and now they had to be slaves to one another and it just…it was a pain in his ass. At least he’d gotten revenge by making Raven add back-up dancers when she asked Anya to the dance. That cheered him up, slightly.
The party was in full swing, and nearly every girl wore a suit while every boy wore a dress. Most of the kids that didn’t identify as one of the other just wore whatever they wanted, and one kid even wore half a dress and half a suit. The magic was admirable, but Bellamy couldn’t help wishing he asked them to do something about his dress. Make it not so bright, maybe.

And oh great, here was someone now, presumably to have a laugh at him.

It was Gina Martin, a Hufflepuff girl that had been in his Defense Against the Dark Arts class. She was pretty, which made it even more embarrassing that she had spotted him (he wasn’t exactly hard to spot, either). She made her way over to him.

She came to a stop directly before him, but she didn’t say anything. Gina’s gaze traveled down the length of his body, and she was sure as hell taking her time about it. Bellamy’s cheeks were burning.

“I like the pink,” Gina finally said, lips twisted into a smirk that lit up her pretty brown eyes. “It really brings out your blush.”

Bellamy quickly rearranged his shocked expression into the grumpiest one he could manage. Gina laughed, which tugged a reluctant smile out of him. Damn it, she was charming.

Also reminded him a little of Raven, which he resolutely shoved to the back of his mind the moment the thought occurred.

He determinedly ignored the way it made his heart beat faster, too.

“So…” began Gina, adjusting her yellow and black tie. She arched a brow at him, and this time he didn’t even try to stop the grin from spreading. “What’s it take for a girl to get a drink around here?”

Okay, maybe the dress wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

* * * * *

This was awkward.

Not for the first time tonight, Lexa considered just leaving. But it felt rude, she felt rude, so she didn’t. She just stood there, awkwardly avoiding Clarke’s eyes, and failing miserably because every time she glanced at her hoping she wasn’t looking, they made eye contact. And as miserable and embarrassed as Lexa felt, she also had a thrill shoot up her spine, because Clarke looked incredibly attractive in her suit, and Lexa would have already taken her to the Room of Requirement if there wasn’t a rift the size of Europe between them.

What had she been thinking? All she’d done is hammer into Clarke that she didn’t want to date, and then out of the blue, she asked her out on a date. Why? Why did she have to ruin it?

Especially considering Lexa wasn’t even 100% positive that she wanted a date after all. This wasn’t the plan, she wasn’t supposed to fall into bed with anyone, let alone fall into l—liking.

(Liking).

She only had one job, one mission: she had to win the Triwizard Tournament. Everyone was
counting on her to win the tournament. She had to win it. Her life was nothing but moves and
countermoves, strategic planning and acts of war. It was easy to come to this school, to participate in
this tournament, to get swept up in life here as though there really wasn’t anything to worry about
beyond prank wars and food fights and whether or not she was ready to date someone. There was a
war waging beyond the walls of the castle, and Lexa could not afford any distractions, yet that was
what happened—she’d allowed herself to get sidetracked, to forget that it’s weakness, feeling,
emotions, all of it. Weakness.

“What’s up your ass?” asked Anya. Lexa startled; she hadn’t even noticed her sidle up beside
her. Anya noticed and snickered. “You’re losing your touch, little one.”

“Don’t call me that,” said Lexa waspishly.

“Why not?” Anya gave one of her signature feral grins. “You were tiny growing up.”

“You’re hardly two inches taller than me now.”

“Because you had a growth spurt. You’ll always be a little goblin-sized pipsqueak to me.”

Lexa rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

Anya chuckled, but sobered fairly quickly. She gently nudged a shoulder into Lexa’s and
nodded toward the direction where Clarke was dancing with Wells on the dance floor. “What’s
going on between you and blondie?”

“Nothing,” said Lexa at once.

“It’s clearly not, or you wouldn’t be pining after her with sad heart-eyes.”

“I don’t have heart-eyes.”

“You really do,” said Raven unhelpfully as she came up to Anya’s side with two drinks. She
handed one to Anya before taking a sip of her own. “And if she keeps looking at you out of the
corners of her eyes, they’re going to get stuck like that, and I don’t know if I can be seen with
someone so visibly love-struck.”

Lexa’s heart jumped at the word. Could Clarke…?

But no, Lexa wouldn’t even let herself dream of it. How could she? Clarke knew, she had
seen the memories, had learned who Lexa was, and even then, Clarke did not know nearly enough
about her. Lexa had done so many horrible things in the name of war. She wasn’t worthy of Clarke,
not at all. After the fiasco at the first task when Lexa had been intent of wiping Octavia’s memory…
she was sure Clarke knew that too.

Lexa was a skilled lover, she could acknowledge that. But anything more?

No.

“Have fun tonight,” she said shortly to Raven and Anya, ignoring their sympathetic
“Lexa…”s and moving toward the door instead. She was done with tonight and ready to retire to
bed.

Then Clarke caught up with her at the doorway.

“Lexa, wait!” Lexa turned to face her, carefully shifting her face into a neutral, indifferent
expression. Clarke was slightly breathless, clearly having seen her leave and ran from the dance floor after her. Lexa tried not to let herself feel hopeful. “Where are you going?”

Lexa deflated slightly. She tiredly gestured toward the entrance hall. “Back to the ship. I’m tired,” she lied.

“Please don’t go.” Lexa blinked, frozen in place as Clarke stepped forward and rather into her personal space, taking Lexa’s hands in hers. “I’m sorry that I’m—that I—I’m an idiot, okay? And I promise, I would have immediately said yes to what you asked me if there weren’t so many things going on. With my dad, the ministry, the weird stuff going on, what happened with Finn, the idea of being in a relationship scares me.”

“Me too,” said Lexa. She wanted to say more, but she didn’t know how. They hadn’t discussed anything, not their feelings, not what they were doing, nothing…had never even said they liked each other. They knew, Lexa knew Clarke knew as she knew, but it was still terrifying. They needed to discuss it, they needed to talk, but both were paralyzed when it came to opening up.

“You shut everyone out.”

“Not everyone. Not you.”

It was true, Lexa had opened up more to Clarke than anyone in her life. She’d discussed Costia with her, she’d discussed her parents with her, but there were still so many secrets between them.

“Can we please just pick up where we left off? Can we just…take this slow, do what we’re doing, and figure this out when things calm down?”

Lexa looked into Clarke’s eyes and willed her heart to calm down. Clarke was so beautiful, the healthy round curve to her cheeks, the bright blue of her eyes, the pink of her lips. She was sincere in every sense, almost pleading with Lexa.

Lexa swallowed. “What will you do when it’s over? The tournament. This school year.”

Clarke blinked, her brows creasing. “I have no idea.”

She had discussed it with her, briefly. Her mother hoped for her to be a Healer, and that was what Clarke was studying for, but something about it felt…off. She wasn’t sure yet. Lexa wasn’t sure what she would do yet either, but the idea that this school year would end, the task would be over, the war would be won, and then they would just return to their respective lives, was ridiculous. She couldn’t imagine living life this time next year and Clarke wasn’t in it. That was perhaps the most frightening thought of them all, but still, she wanted to know if Clarke had considered that at all, either.

“Well…” Lexa paused uncertainly, swallowing, nerves fluttering in her belly. “What do you want?”

Clarke stared back into her eyes, brow still slightly furrowed. “Nothing. I want my dad back, out of Azkaban.” She shook her head slightly, looking down at their hands, but Lexa was suddenly conscious of the fact that Clarke was gripping her hand even more tightly now. “I can’t think past that right now. I want my dad back.”

Lexa flipped her hand over in Clarke’s gently squeezing it back. “You’ll get him back, Clarke.”
“But when?” said Clarke, that note of sad desperation sinking into her tone again. “He’s been there for over a year. How much longer?”

“It takes as long as it takes.” She brought their entwined hands up, twisting round to kiss the back of Clarke’s. “Just don’t give up.”

“You don’t either.”

Their eyes met again, green and blue, and Lexa nodded in understanding.

Clarke pulled her in for a searing kiss, smiling into it when Lexa gripped her hips for balance. When she pulled back, Clarke was inclining her head toward the dance floor. “Want to dance?”

Lexa nodded, returning the smile.

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They danced for a good while, Clarke only stepping on her foot once.

“You’re a better dancer than Octavia,” Clarke mused as Lexa spun her. “I don’t suppose you were a swan or something equally graceful in a past life? Maybe that’s your animagus.”

Lexa burst out in laughter, perhaps a little too exuberantly for the comment, which cause Clarke to arch a brow and smile, a little puzzled, but Lexa couldn’t help it. If Clarke only knew her actual animagus form, the idea of a swan was hilarious.

“Do you want to get a drink?” asked Lexa, gently tugging Clarke off the dance floor.

Clarke nodded, face settling back into one of amusement and contentment as they headed toward the bar (which was once the professor’s table they’d Transfigured into a more suitable bar) that Raven and Anya were both standing at.

“Hi,” said Clarke cheerily to Anya and Raven. “What do we got? Hmm…” She peered at all the drinks set up behind the bar, tilting her head as she deliberated. “Lexa, do you want a firewhisky or a… ooh, or a dragonspirit? Think you can handle it?” asked Clarke, shooting a smile at Lexa.

Any snorted, collapsing into giggles that left Clarke and Raven staring at her, mystified. “Oh, you have no idea.”

Lexa, whose face had fallen into a withering scowl, nudged Anya off the stool. “Shut up. Go bother someone else. Take your girlfriend dancing.”

“We’re not girlfriends,” Raven and Anya both said at once. Lexa exchanged a smirk with Clarke. Raven rolled her eyes, but still grabbed Anya’s arm and dragged her off to disappear into the throng of people on the dance floor.

“So,” said Clarke in amusement, now that they were finally alone. Lexa plopped down onto the stool, setting her elbows on the bar and propping her chin on her fists, causing Clarke to laugh. “Did you want any dragonspirit or not?” She lifted a brow, the light in her eyes almost challenging as she tipped the bottle of vivid blue liquid over, letting the glittering light pour into a shot glass. “If you can handle it, that is.”

Lexa wordlessly reached over to take the shot glass. She brought it to her lips and held Clarke’s gaze over the rim of the glass for a brief instant, before tipping the contents down her throat. She was actually a fan of dragonspirit; it felt more like swallowing shards of ice than anything. She
placed the glass on the counter and it scraped the oak as she pushed it toward Clarke, ignoring the
tensing in her lower stomach as Clarke’s eyes flashed down to watch Lexa licked her lips. Lexa
tapped her fingers on the bar, lips quirking as Clarke brought her eyes back up to meet hers. “Make it
a double.”

Clarke grinned. “Sure thing, Commander.”

* * /天鹅/ * *


Raven rolled her eyes, stumbling forward with Anya hooked around her. “I know, babe, just
give me a minute—“

“Don’t call me babe!”

“What, you don’t like it?” slurred Raven.

“Yeah, I like it.”

“Can I call you it then?”

“As long as it’s not love muffin,” mumbled Anya.

“Aha, loooook, a broom closet!” Raven staggered over to the door, but as soon as she gripped
the handle, she heard heavy breathing and moaning.

“Hey!” Anya banged on the door. “You aren’t allowed to have sex!”

The moaning abruptly stopped, and the door was yanked open. Raven and Anya both
blinked, taken aback, when Octavia’s head popped out. “Go away!” she hissed, before slamming the
door shut again.

“Well,” said Raven, looking at Anya. “That was just rude.”

“Come on, love muffin, let’s keep looking,” sighed Anya, patting Raven’s arm before turning
them toward the staircase leading to the floor above.

“I thought you didn’t like love muffin.”

“I don’t like it.”

“You just called me it.

“No I didn’t.”

“Yes you did.”

“Oh. Wait, what are we talking about?”

“Haven’t we already walked down this hallway?”

“What?”
“What?”

They both halted in the middle of the hallway, squinting suspiciously at one another. Then they shook their heads and moved on.

“What?!”

They had come across a big wooden door that Raven hadn’t noticed at all when they first started down this hallway. They opened it and both of their jaws dropped.

“Whoa, this broom closet is big.”

“It has a futon!” squealed Raven. “I love futons!”

“What the fuck is a futon?”

“Shhhhh, just come on, I show you.”

“Okay.”

The door shut itself behind them.

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“Clarke. Clarke, stop.” Lexa was breathing heavily, chest heaving as she pushed Clarke back by her shoulders.

“Yes, please, stop,” said Octavia as she limped past them, Lincoln accompanying her. “Get a room.”

“You get a room,” muttered Clarke, fixing her lips to Lexa’s throat again.

“We just did,” said Octavia smugly.

“Good for you.” Clarke tilted her head up, rolling her tongue against the skin just below Lexa’s jaw. “Lexa, let’s get a room.”

“Agreed,” breathed Lexa, sliding a hand down Clarke’s arm to take her hand. She was painfully aroused, the wet stickiness between her legs very uncomfortable, and Clarke looked so good in that vest. They’d both taken their jackets off and their ties were loosened around their necks. Clarke’s breasts were…

Oh, God, they needed a room, like now.

“Come on, come on,” said Lexa impatiently, now steering Clarke toward the staircase that led to the Room of Requirement.

“Wait.” Lexa gasped as much with incredulity as surprise when Clarke suddenly yanked her arm and tugged her back. Lexa opened her mouth, about to ask why they were stopping, but Clarke’s eyes were blazing and Lexa was about to implode. Clarke pulled her in for another kiss, tongue skimming the seam of her lips before she parted them and Clarke immediately spun her into a deep, world-consuming kiss.
Okay, they needed their hands on each other. *Now.*

“In here,” Lexa ordered, pointing toward the one broom closet in the entrance hall, probably far too close to the Great Hall, but she was literally going to die if Clarke didn’t touch her soon.

“But the Room of Requirement is just a floor u—”

“I can’t wait.”

Lexa quite literally pushed Clarke into the closet. There was a gasp that came out suspiciously more like a moan when Clarke fell, knocking boxes to the floor with her.

Lexa pulled out her wand, turning to slam the door shut and wave her wand over the doorjamb. “*Muffliato.*”

She turned, waving her wand again to cast the light on. Then she let it drop, heat pressing insistently at the base of her stomach, in her chest, between her legs, as she took in the sight of a thoroughly disheveled, flushed, completely turned on Clarke sprawled out on the floor, looking up at her through half-lidded, lust-glazed blue eyes.

“Fuck me,” said Lexa as she slowly pulled Clarke up by the collar of her vest, drawing her face closer to her own. Looking down into her blue eyes, it was like Lexa was falling into them, falling into the sky, and it sent a delicious thrill coursing through her. “Fuck me,” she repeated, in less than a whisper. Clarke’s lips were parted, her warm breath washing over Lexa, smelling of minty, fruity dragonspirit. She couldn’t believe it had only been hours ago that they rejected one another, that they had the option to say yes to dating, and they both had their reasons not to. “Fuck me so hard I can’t remember *any* of this in the morning.”

Clarke found her feet then, and strong hands on Lexa’s hips steered her back hard enough to slam her against the doorjamb. Still, it was her eyes locked on Lexa’s that were most effective in keeping her pinned. Lexa breathed heavily under Clarke’s hot gaze, already so wet, eyes half-lidded and teeth sinking into her bottom lip. Slowly, deliberately, Clarke leaned into her, blonde hair swinging forward to brush against Lexa’s face as Clarke placed her lips on Lexa’s cheek, pressing light kisses to the corner of Lexa’s mouth, along her jawline, and the sensitive skin behind Lexa’s ear as Clarke’s hands kneaded Lexa’s ass through the fabric of her tight jeans. Lexa’s breath hitched when Clarke turned her head, her lips grazing the shell of Lexa’s ear as she whispered, “I’m going to fuck you so hard this will be the *only* thing you remember.”

“Fuck,” Lexa moaned, arching her hips when she felt Clarke’s right hand drift downward. But it only slipped under the bottom hem of Lexa’s shirt, and her fingertips trailed up along the flat of Lexa’s belly, leaving gooseflesh in their wake.

Lexa knew they shouldn’t be doing this. Kane could crash the party and Indra could probably start looking for her right now, and there weren’t a plethora of places for her to search. They were only in a broom closet on the ground floor, half-obscured behind a stack of boxes. If Indra looked for them here, she would find them, and they then were both dead.

The pad of Clarke’s thumb brushed Lexa’s nipple, and something akin to electricity rippled through her body. She hadn’t even realized Clarke opened her top, pulled the front of her shirt down, and moved aside her undergarment. Clarke’s hips were pushed against Lexa, keeping her pressed back against the wall, and Clarke’s right thigh was sliding purposefully against the apex between Lexa’s. Lips and tongues moved in a steady rhythm. Lexa’s bra and shirt snapped back into place as Clarke withdrew her hands, lifted them to Lexa’s head instead. Lexa felt the shudder that racked through Clarke’s body when she buried her hands in Lexa’s waves of hair, tugged insistently to
bring her even closer to her. How did Lexa survive without doing this more often? It felt like she had been oxygen-starved, and Clarke was the breath she was finally inhaling.

“I like this vest on you,” Clarke murmured, her voice a rasp. Her heavy-lidded gaze was rolling hot and appreciatively over the plunging neckline, the way the corners of the collar were now sticking up. She trailed a fingertip along the hem, stroking her way down for a moment before caressing the skin of Lexa’s exposed lower belly. “Nice change to all the buckles and clasps.”

Lexa hummed noncommittally in response, too distracted by the way Clarke’s hand was dipping in and out of her shirt, fingertips moving teasingly over a hardened nipple straining against a black bra.

“I think I miss the scarf, though.” Lexa was barely registering her words. She was whimpering, lost in the sensation of Clarke’s tongue sliding hot and wet down the sensitive column of her throat, of her fingers plucking and pulling at her nipples, of her hips grinding into Clarke’s, her thigh occasionally making another slide up, pitting against Lexa’s throbbing center. “Would’ve been nice to…play with it,” whispered Clarke. “…play with you.”

“Play with me,” Lexa managed to choke out, grasping for the fabric of Clarke’s own vest so she could clutch her closer. There was a ghost of a smirk on Clarke’s face as Lexa looked at her, Lexa’s chest rising and falling with short, rapid breaths. “There are many other ways—”

“You’re not the Commander of me,” Clarke reminded softly, one of her brows arching up, as though daring Lexa to get annoyed at how Clarke was resisting her, how she was teasing Lexa. Lexa’s back arched and she groaned as Clarke squeezed and twisted her nipple. “And you’re not my captain either. You can’t order me around. You’ll have to say the magic word.”

“Clarke,” Lexa warned, spitting it out through clenched teeth. Clarke was definitely smirking now, her lips slightly parted, the tip of her tongue lingering torturously over the curve of her bottom lip.

Lexa heard her smirk more than she could feel it pressing against her neck. “What, baby?” Lexa shuddered, a delicious thrill pulsing through her body at Clarke calling her that.

“I want you.”

Clarke bent her head, rolled her tongue over the hardened nub. Lexa clamped her mouth shut to strangle off the whimpers, body arching and twisting as Clarke sucked her nipple into her mouth, the hot, wet sweep of her tongue sending dizzying spikes of arousal toward Lexa’s core.

“Clarke!” A whine escaped Lexa’s lips before she could stop it.

“You’re still going to say please,” Clarke assured her after she released her nipple with a wet pop. She ran her hands along Lexa’s side and kept her face nuzzled close to her body as she crouched down, hooking a finger in Lexa’s waistband and tugging her trousers down. Lexa gasped, legs trembling, when she felt Clarke press a kiss to the inside of her quivering thigh.

Lexa bit her tongue to stop from crying out, pleas choking in her throat as Clarke dipped a tongue in, drifting the tip lightly over Lexa’s clit. Lexa automatically spread her legs farther open, giving an aggravated grunt when Clarke pushed her hips down as she tried to roll farther into Clarke’s mouth.

The butterfly-light pressure was driving Lexa mad. She twisted, hips juddering as she strained for more contact. Clarke tugged her pants down her thighs, tapped Lexa’s knee to indicate
for her to step out of them. Lexa did so, trembling. Her legs were like jelly and she hadn’t even been adequately touched yet.

When Clarke moved her tongue in a light circle around Lexa’s clit and softly tapped a finger over Lexa’s entrance, refusing to go in, Lexa finally snapped. She lifted her head off the wall to glare down at Clarke.

“Clarke,” she said firmly, her commanding tone leaving no room for nonsense. “Sexual torture is not the product of a kind soul.”

Clarke snorted against Lexa’s lower belly. “Don’t act like it isn’t working for you.”

Lexa’s head fell back against the door with a thump, her breath caught on a gasp as Clarke pushed a finger inside her. Lexa slanted her hips in encouragement, but Clarke pulled out of her more quickly than she had entered her.

“Damn it, Clarke—“

She wasn’t sure what Clarke’s answering smirk made her want to do more, curse her or kiss her.

A moment later Clarke was two fingers deep and her tongue was swirling patterns against Lexa, and Lexa was already close, head tilted up, eyes squeezed shut, gasping, the insistent heat in her stomach coiling low—

She snarled out strangled curses when Clarke withdrew her finger and began nuzzling her again, nose trailing lightly along a soaked and swollen clit.

“This is fucking ridiculous, Clarke,” fumed Lexa, ending Clarke’s name with a clipped K. Her legs were shaking so badly she could barely stand. “If you do not do it right, I swear I’ll—“

“You’ll what, Lexa?” interrupted Clarke softly. Her smirk was slight, her eyes glazed with desire as she looked up at Lexa, watched her as she burrowed her face against Lexa’s belly, lapped into her once briefly (Lexa’s hips jerked and her lips fell open in a ragged gasp) before stopping again.

“I—“ Lexa moaned again as Clarke drew her tongue in a spiraling figure eight. The moan bit off into a growl as Clarke withdrew yet again. “I will do the—“ Another groan, as Clarke dipped a finger in for three thrusts before pulling out— “Same to you, and I will not let you finish.”

“Threats, threats, threats,” taunted Clarke, grinning as she hooked two fingers in Lexa, stroking inside her and causing Lexa to make a keening noise that was so pathetic it flushed Lexa all over again. “Good things come to those who wait, Lexa. If you weren’t so stubborn, you would have already came by now.”

Lexa’s frown was wiped from her face when Clarke flattened her tongue against her clit, flicked rapidly for a brief golden moment that almost had Lexa crying out in release. Almost. She nearly screamed in frustration, the need for release so insistent it was pounding at her head, stinging her eyes.

She seized a fistful of Clarke’s hair, tried (half-heartedly) to gently urge her forward again. Clarke resisted, nipping at Lexa’s inner thigh instead. “One word,” murmured Clarke, twisting her fingers deep inside Lexa.

But Lexa was resolute. She would not beg.
Instead she reached up, fingers making quick work of the buttons on her vest. Clarke’s expression went blank, her grip on Lexa’s hip going slack and her fingers stilling as Lexa let the vest drop to the floor. When the binding followed it, Clarke’s grip unconsciously tightened, fingers crooked inside Lexa.

Lexa kept her half-lidded gaze locked with Clarke’s as she slowly, deliberately, trailed her hand down her body, nails skimming over the curve of her own breast before following the line of her abs, finally coming to a stop over Clarke’s hand still frozen between Lexa’s legs. Lexa closed her fingers around Clarke’s wrist, watching the way Clarke followed the movement of Lexa’s tongue wetting her lips as she squeezed Clarke’s wrist, pushing at her hand. Clarke’s lashes fluttered the same time as her fingers, as though she was awakening from a trance.

“Let me come and I will let you,” said Lexa in a low, soft voice, continuing to move Clarke’s hand.

The smug relief on Lexa’s face was quickly wiped clean when awareness seemed to return to Clarke’s. Clarke tilted her head, a corner of her lips tugging up in a smirk as she pulled her hand back. Lexa’s snarl of frustration was lost in confusion as she watched Clarke fall back from her knees to lay on her back on the floor before Lexa, Lexa still standing uncertainly against the wall.

Clarke pushed her pants down her legs to sit in a heap around her ankles. She held Lexa’s gaze while she slipped her hand between her legs, and Lexa wasn’t confused anymore.

“Fuck,” she whimpered.

Clarke spread her legs, her brows rising and lips parting in pleasure as she moved her hand. She held Lexa’s gaze as she trailed her finger up and down the length of herself, so wet she was glistening in the dim light of the closet.

“That’s cheating,” whispered Lexa. Without conscious effort her own hand drifted aside to rest on her thigh, inching toward the insistent throbbing between her legs.

“It’s not cheating,” breathed Clarke, her back bowing briefly as she used two fingers to rub her clit. “Just rising to the challenge.”

Lexa bit her lip, vaguely wondering if she was drooling as she observed Clarke track her fingers down to circle her entrance. “It’s not fair, then.”

Clarke slipped two fingers inside herself and gave a low moan that hit Lexa like a sledgehammer in the gut, the tight pull in her belly, her core, so intense it hurt. Before Clarke had a chance to answer, Lexa dropped to her knees between Clarke’s legs. Without a word she bent down, leaving Clarke’s fingers where they were but settling her head over them so she could press her tongue to Clarke’s clit.

“Fuck. Lexa.” Clarke panted, squirming slightly as Lexa undulated her tongue with Clarke continuing to pump her fingers in and out of herself. “Fuck.”

Lexa pushed a finger in beside Clarke’s, matching her rhythm as she continued lapping. After a moment Clarke withdrew her fingers, clearly too taken to focus herself, so Lexa slipped in two more. Clarke’s body bowed under the combined sensations from Lexa’s swirling tongue and her fingers pounding in and out of her. Clarke’s moans bit off into pants when Lexa withdrew her fingers and sat up, all intentions to smirk and tell Clarke, “Good things come to those who wait.” But then she looked at her—bottom half naked, legs parted and her flesh pink and wet and mouthwatering, and her golden hair was fanned out on the floor behind her. Her eyes were hazy and
heavy and so, so blue—and her lips were curved in the slightest smile, like there was nothing she liked more than to see Lexa.

Lexa had wanted to torture her the same way she had tortured her. Blood must have blood, after all.

But as she looked back into Clarke’s eyes and a smile began unbidden on her own face, she couldn’t bring herself to do it.

So she bent back down, biting her lip at the heat pooling between her own legs as she knelt between Clarke’s. Lexa pushed two fingers back into Clarke, twisted and crooked them, stroking against the small spot a little ways up on Clarke’s inner walls that had Clarke’s gasps choking in her throat. Clarke reared up, digging her short nails into Lexa’s back, cutting into the skin of her shoulder blades as Lexa dipped her head down to use her tongue on her as well.

Lexa’s heart was pounding in her ear and her body prickling with heat as sweat beaded on her flushed skin. She gazed up at Clarke as she used her tongue to spin arrays on her, ignoring the voice in the back of her head that asked her what patterns she really wanted to spell out. If her tongue itched to spell out three little words, she resolutely ignored it, switching instead to lap, roll, and flick her tongue in a way that made Clarke give loud, keening moans with Lexa’s name garbled within them. Don’t think like that, Lexa threatened herself, backing some of the sudden anger she felt in the thrust of her fingers in Clarke, who panted out Lexa’s name, her fingers threading through Lexa’s wild tangles of hair. It is weakness. It is weakness. She looked up at Clarke again and it was like melting as she watched her writhe under the furious rhythm of Lexa beating her fingers deep inside her. It is weakness.

Clarke rose higher into the air with her back bowed. Lexa lifted her free hand from where it clutched the underside of one of Clarke’s thighs to instead tap Clarke on the stomach to remind her to breathe. She slipped her hand under Clarke’s shirt (annoyed it was still on, to be honest) and under her bra, rolling a nipple between two fingers. Clarke was silent but for random choked breaths, her body trembling, and thighs quaking violently. With one particularly hard sweep of the flat of Lexa’s tongue, Clarke broke.

Lexa’s heart ached and she felt a lump in her throat at the sight of it because, God, Clarke was so beautiful. She was frozen in place but shaking, legs locking around Lexa’s head. There was a shine to Clarke’s sweaty skin and a red flush staining her cheeks. She moaned and it was Lexa’s name falling from her lips, and it was Lexa’s fingers buried inside her as Clarke gyrated her hips and rode out her orgasm. Lexa pushed her fingers deeper inside, stroking again at Clarke’s inner walls, and Clarke’s cry was so loud it pierced Lexa’s eardrums (didn’t help that Clarke’s thighs were still slammed into her ears) as the next orgasm tore through her.

“No no no,” Clarke gasped, twitching uncontrollably and pushing at Lexa’s head as Lexa licked again at her swollen flesh. “No more. I can’t.”

Lexa tilted her head, lips curving as she realized she found a new way to torture Clarke as she had her. She kept her gaze on Clarke’s face as she lowered her head, blew lightly on her clit. “Are you saying you can’t handle it?”

Clarke lifted her head, an eyebrow arched. Chest heaving and glaring right back at Lexa, she seized a fistful of Lexa’s hair and arched her hips up as she yanked Lexa’s head down. Lexa smiled, pleased she could always count on Clarke’s competitive nature.

Several minutes later the breath Clarke huffed out sounded more like sobs as her body convulsed and twitched, hand surely stinging after striking her palm down on the floor several times
during the next two orgasms.

“Okay, okay, no more, I give! I can’t. I can’t,” she panted, moaning and twitching again when Lexa withdrew her fingers. Clarke, who looked as though she could barely lift her head or even squint open one eye, rolled her eyes when she saw that Lexa was smirking. “Don’t look so pleased with yourself.”

“Why not? You do.” Lexa laughed lightly when Clarke tried to kick a foot at her but merely jerked her leg instead, too exhausted to lift it.

Clarke sighed, eyes closed with a happy lilt to her lips. “Lexa.”

Lexa tilted her head, smile widening at the way Clarke whispered her name almost reverently. “Clarke,” she answered softly.

They laid in silence for a moment, Clarke spread eagle on the floor and Lexa stretched out between her legs, her head resting on her thigh. After a time, Clarke squeezed her leg to jolt Lexa’s head to get her attention. Lexa pushed herself up to her knees, blinking sleepily before focusing on Clarke.

“Your turn.”

Sleepiness was gone. The heat returned, pooling low and tight in Lexa’s belly. She frowned a little, wondering how Clarke was going to touch her when she looked as though she could barely lift an arm.

“Sit on my face and I’ll return the favor.” When Lexa narrowed her eyes, Clarke rolled her own, grinning. “No more teasing. I promise.”

Still a little suspicious, Lexa crawled over Clarke’s body to do as Clarke said.

It took an embarrassingly short time. Very soon after spreading her legs over Clarke’s face, Lexa was slapping her hands down on the floor on either side of Clarke’s torso, back arching as she formed a bridge over Clarke, gasping out her name as the orgasm roared through her body. The release was so needed that sobs caught at Lexa’s chest. White-hot heat flooded through her body, her hips juddered as Clarke stroked her hands down the length of Lexa’s thighs, tongue buried inside Lexa, and Lexa was so affected by the magnitude of this one much-needed orgasm that she was too sensitive for anything else. She twisted around and slumped down, flopping herself on the floor to lie beside Clarke, and a moment later blinked under the realization that she either couldn’t remember moving to lay beside Clarke, or she had briefly blacked out from the orgasm.

Clarke turned to burrow into Lexa’s side, slinging an arm over Lexa’s waist and a leg over Lexa’s hips. They lay in silence but for the sound of Lexa’s breathing slowing and her frantic heart rate slowly dwindling back down to normal. Clarke gave a hum of happiness, a blissful smile spreading across her face, and Lexa couldn’t help but to echo it.

“Lexa?”

“Mmm?”

Clarke was quiet, using her nails to gently scratch at Lexa’s stomach, tracing patterns along the indentions of her muscles. “I really like you,” she said softly.

Lexa swallowed in an attempt to rid herself of the lump in her throat.
Not right, this isn’t right. She wasn’t supposed to have any distractions. She wasn’t supposed to come here and become so taken with this beautiful blonde girl and dance at parties together and fuck for hours in broom closets. Her heart wasn’t supposed to flip at Clarke’s raspy voice telling her quietly that she likes her. She wasn’t supposed to feel butterflies at the sensation of Clarke stroking her skin. And she certainly wasn’t supposed to think about how she could be happy if she could only do this every day for the rest of—

It is weakness.

But she couldn’t bring herself to care.

“I like you very much too, Clarke,” she whispered.

If a few tears slipped out at the same time, Clarke didn’t mention it.

Chapter End Notes

I sin for writing this, you sin for reading this, we all sin. See you all in hell. ;)

Also a thanks to the anon that suggested the idea for the Clarke/Lexa playful duel and gust of wind!

Next chapter will be the third task, and things kinda blow up crazy. We’re at the top of the roller coaster: get ready for the drop!
Chapter Summary

This chapter is nearly 30,000 words. You're basically getting three chapters in one giant chapter. Happy Birthday!

I hope you guys enjoy this! Let me know please, since I live for the comments and there's so much going on here that I'm dying to know your thoughts.

Have a great night/day!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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*Baby, this is what you came for*

*Lightning strikes every time she moves*

*And everybody's watching her*

*But she's looking at you*

*oh, oh*

-Calvin Harris/Rihanna
“Victory stands on the back of sacrifice.”

That was the first of many times Evie would hear the harshly whispered words of war from the adults around her. She would remember it quite clearly for years to come; would remember crouching hidden in the shadows of the staircase, bath bubbles still crackling in the ropes of wet hair that clung to her bare shoulders as she clutched her Penny the Pygmy Puff towel tightly to her chest. She was frozen as much with fear as the cold as she listened, straining her ears and wishing her parents had bought her the latest sparkling pair of Extendable Ears she’d begged to have for Christmas. Her father was in the kitchen, drained face lined with worry and partially obscured by the unfamiliar man sitting across the table and blocking Evie’s view.

“I’m sorry, Sullivan,” said the stranger, voice sympathetic. “None of us could have
“Of course I couldn’t,” Evie’s father said sharply. “But you should have. You’re there, this has all happened right under your nose. There should have been warning, there should—“

“I’m in Magical Law Enforcement, not the Department of Mysteries. They aren’t allowed to speak of it.”

“Don’t act as though you aren’t gunning for the Minister position, Thelonious.” Sullivan Potter’s lip unconsciously curled upward to accompany the scathing statement. “I know you’ve been at Sydney’s side like a leech. People talk.”

The stranger, Thelonious, sighed. When he spoke again, it was with a gentle tone. “All I want to do is help people. What better way than as Minister?”

“There are plenty of ways,” Sullivan said coldly. “Anything is better than that corrupt—“

“It’s only corrupt because of who holds it,” interrupted Thelonious.

Sullivan stared, expression unfathomable. After a moment he shook his head, weary again as he changed the subject. “How much time do we have?”

“Not enough. I was told a year. Maybe two.”

Sullivan buried his face in his hands, shoulders heavy. Evie shivered where she stood, her heart beating fast, desperately wondering what they were talking about. She wished there was someone to talk to about this, but she couldn’t go get one of her siblings because Gideon was about as stealthy as a niffler in a jewelry shop, and Jamie would chastise Evie for spying on a private conversation not meant for them.

Of course, even Jamie looking down her nose at her would be better than her father catching her, because he had just lifted his head back up and spotted Evie in the reflection of the old grandfather clock against the wall across from her. Her eyes widened.

She scurried away up the stairs, heart pounding in her ears loudly enough to nearly block out the sound of Thelonious addressing her father again. She dressed in her pajamas in the dark so she didn’t wake Jamie, who was sound asleep in the larger bed closest to the door, and scrambled beneath the covers of her own bed, flicking off the light and burying her head beneath the duvet. She cringed, holding her breath when she heard the telltale creak of the stairs indicating her father’s approach.

The door creaked open and a moment later the mattress tipped down as her father sat at the foot of the bed. He rested his palm on Evie’s ankle and the warmth of his hand sank through the blanket.

“Evie?” he whispered, free hand coming up to tug the quilt down. Evie remained still, hoping if she pretended to be asleep he would buy it and she wouldn’t get in trouble.

“Don’t be scared,” he said quietly. “Things are going to be okay. It’ll be okay.” He bracingly patted Evie’s ankle as he spoke, but she thought it sounded more like he were trying to reassure himself. He leaned over to press a chaste kiss across the top of her head before leaving the room.

Evie laid motionless, the silence of the dark room swamping her as heavily as her thoughts. She didn’t understand the conversation she’d overheard, but she knew enough to know something
bad was going to happen.

“Evie?” came a soft voice.
Evie started. She thought Jamie had been asleep.

There was the quiet ruffling of sheets and then soft footfalls as socked feet padded across the room. Jamie slid into bed and looped an arm around Evie, tucking her in close. Evie nuzzled in, clutching her big sister tightly as though it would make all the scary go away. It was the last week of August and this was actually a regular occurrence; Jamie usually crawled into bed to hold her when Evie grew morose over the fact that her older sister would be soon leaving for school. It was even worse when Gideon left too and Evie was left home all alone. This year, however, Evie was eleven, and it was her turn to go to Hogwarts. It would be the only year they spent together at school, before Jamie graduated.

“Everything’s going to be okay,” whispered Jamie. Evie realized with a dawning sense of wonder that her sister had been eavesdropping too, perhaps darting up the stairs before Evie had.

“What’s going on?” Evie whispered back.

“I don’t know.”

“Evie?”
Evie startled, tearing her gaze away from the sight of the younger versions of herself and her sister and turned to see her present sister standing beside her. Evie deflated.

“How long have you been here?”

Jamie smiled a little sadly, looking longingly at the door their father had left through. “Long enough.”

They made no movement to go, so Evie stood there awhile longer, watching their younger selves fall to sleep wrapped in one another’s comforting embrace.

How did so much change, yet still remain the same?

Jamie sighed, reaching out to put a gentle hand on Evie’s shoulder. “Come on. You’re not going to find what you’re looking for, trust me.”

Their surroundings swirled around them as they rose into the air. Evie blinked, and she was back in Jamie’s guest bedroom, her silvery memories swirling around the bottom of the pensive that lay in her lap atop the sensible black and white cotton duvet.

“What do you mean?” questioned Evie even she touched her wand tip to the memories before bringing them up in a long, thick, undulating strand to return to her temple. Had Jamie been doing some searching of her own?

“I already looked,” Jamie admitted. “I heard everything you heard that night. More, actually, since you were in the bath and missed some. It’s nothing we don’t know.” She shrugged. “The ministry are morons.”

Evie pursed her lips in a half-smile. “You do realize you’re a part of the ministry too, right?” She felt a pang of guilt at Jamie’s surprised expression. Evie had probably smiled a grand total of
twice in the past three months. At the thought of why, her smile faded away, and so did Jamie’s.

“I can be a moron too,” said Jamie lightly, clearly choosing to skip over Evie’s rapidly descending mood.

Evie snorted. “Yeah, right. You’ve never been a moron. I used to hate you for it,” she said honestly, studying the way Jamie visibly flinched. If there was one positive thing to have happened the past few weeks, it was that Evie somehow seemed to gain an unnerving potential for honesty. “You always did everything right.”

“Not always,” Jamie murmured.

Evie resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “You always did the best you could.”

Jamie dipped her head in acquiesce. “Yeah. But sometimes that’s not enough.” She cleared her throat and took a deep breath when Evie opened her mouth, cutting across her with, “Look, we need to talk.”

Evie tried to ignore the sudden lump in her throat. This was it, she was sure. She’d been waiting for this moment, for Jamie to tell her it was time for her to snap back, to stop moping around, that she can’t keep ignoring her pub and spending every night here so she had an excuse not to return home. It had been nearly four months. Evie knew it was time, but she’d never been very good at facing her fears.

She always wished she could be better. A better person. Brave like her father. Sensible, like Jamie. Confident, like Gideon. Fearless, like Luna.

The lump seemed to grow, and her eyes stung, but she ignored it. She’d grown accomplished at not letting the tears fall. She busied herself with sitting up to carefully place the heavy pensive on the nightstand beside the bed. Still, when she finally spoke, her words left her throat with a croak. “About what?”

All at once Jamie seemed tense, on edge, but not at Evie’s reaction. “There’s a meeting tonight—“

“A meeting?”

“The Order. The Order is coming.”


“It’s a long story,” said Jamie quickly, and Evie could tell by the way she glanced away that Jamie was as guilty as she was preoccupied. Anger abruptly boiled up in Evie.

“What are you not telling me?”

“The Order will—“

“No, I want to hear it from you,” she demanded. “Tell me. I mean it, Jamie, tell me now—“

“Okay, fine. But you need to understand that I couldn’t tell you all of this before. We were sworn to secrecy.”

“What, they made you swear the Unbreakable Vow?” said Evie skeptically.

“No, but we had orders. It was Fleimkepa.”
Evie fell silent, her eyes widening. “It goes all the way up to him?” she said in a hushed voice.

Jamie nodded. Her grave expression coupled with the streaks of silver in her hair suddenly made her seem much older than she was, and it put an ache in Evie’s heart. When did everything take such a turn?

“This is a long story,” said Jamie, shifting her weight from where she sat perched at the edge of the mattress. “You’re going to hear it all again later. If you just wait for tonight—”

“I want to hear it from you,” Evie cut across her.

Jamie sighed, shoulders sagging slightly in defeat. “Alright.” She took a deep breath. “You remember that things began to change the year I joined the aurors. You were… I think thirteen, so it was your third year.” Evie nodded, remembering the whispers during Christmas break that year. “It was a difficult transition for the Ministry, at first, because remember the last Death Eater was caught the year Granddad was born, and a dementor hadn’t been spotted in years, and with the policies that Hermione Granger put into effect, there had been unprecedented peace for a century. Nan was even able to turn in her auror badge and retire early, remember?” When Evie nodded, Jamie continued, “Anyways, during that first year, I learned that things weren’t really as peaceful as they seemed. More and more people were experimenting with dark magic. The purebloods were still dying out and they were starting to panic; some of the more prominent members kept suggesting these ridiculous laws reminiscent of the muggle-born abuse shown during the Second Wizarding World by Voldemort and his supporters.” Jamie shook her head, brow furrowed and lip curling in disgust. “They were using past history of the witch burnings as examples.”

“But hardly any people actually died from that,” said Evie, frowning. “They probably killed one or two of us, but the muggles were killing their own kind.”

“I know,” said Jamie heavily. “They used that to their advantage, too. Kept saying muggles were dangerous savages and needed to be put down. Some really horrible stuff,” she added with a shiver. “But that wasn’t all. You already know parts of this—that the Ministry was experimenting on dementors.”

Evie swallowed while her expression darkened. If she hated dementors and the ministry for experimenting on them before, it was nothing compared to how she felt now. “Because they’re arrogant bastards—”

“I agree, Evie,” said Jamie gently, eyes kind and sympathetic. “But look, they did have good intentions.” She raised a hand when Evie began to furiously protest. “I’m not saying it was right, or smart, because it wasn’t. It was wrong and idiotic. I’m just saying, no one anticipated what would happen. They used to have a deal with the dementors, with mutual benefits so it was a win-win, up until they proved they couldn’t be trusted when they joined Voldemort. Over half a century later and they were nearly extinct, but Azkaban prison guards were having trouble containing the prisoners, they weren’t being paid enough, and too many of them were quitting because of the risk.”

“That’s why Roan quit.” Evie stated it, rather than asked, and Jamie nodded. “Why did he go back, then?” she asked, and Jamie hesitated.

Most of what Jamie told her Evie had already guessed, but she had always wondered why Roan had returned. He’d hated working at Azkaban, so it had never made sense to Evie, and Jamie had always been tight-lipped whenever she asked her about it. Not that she’d had much time, considering Evie had been in school, then left to travel after graduating, then working odd jobs in Diagon Alley before busying herself with work at her pub in Hogsmeade. This year had been the
most time Evie had spent with Jamie since they were children.

Jamie sighed for the third time. She looked more tired every time. “Honestly? Because I asked him to.”

“Why?” said Evie in surprise. Jamie and Roan had been close since their first years at Hogwarts together, and had always treated each other with the utmost care and devotion. She would never have even imagined a possible world where Jamie would put Roan into a place of unhappiness.

“The Order,” Jamie admitted. “He agreed. It’s his duty. It’s all of our duty, in the Order. We do what has to be done.”

“Wait a minute.” Evie’s eyes were wide, her heart beating faster in her chest and her stomach feeling slightly queasy. “The Ice Queen. Is that why he…?”

Jamie rubbed her face with her hands. “Yeah. We caught her. She was the problem. She kept breaking through the charms we placed on her.” Jamie dropped her hands, face utterly serious. “She’s a magical prodigy for a reason, Evie. Her willpower is amazing. She fought off every Imperius Curse, she was barely winded by the Cruciatus Curse Byrne threw on her—she’s incredible. Evil, but incredible. She’s the main reason the Ministry was so hell-bent on experimenting with the dementors. They thought the quickest, cheapest solution was to figure out a way to control them. You know they tried to create new ones by breeding them with lethifolds. It didn’t work. And you know, I don’t think that’s all they did. Something else went down in the Department of Mysteries, but…” Her expression darkened. “Who knows. All that matters is that one of them escaped when I was in my fourth year as an auror, and it took seven of us to take it down and bring it back to the Ministry. I don’t know what the hell happened after that, but now there are too many to count out there. We know how to deal with them now, know that the Patronus charm spooks them, but…the fact that they can take away our magic is just too dangerous. How are you supposed to defend yourself against a magical creature with no magic of your own?” She gazed off into the distance almost thoughtfully, chewing on the inside of her cheek. “It traps you in your worst memories, gives you depression that traps you in your worst fears for the future. It exploits what makes you vulnerable. It takes love and…it makes it your weakness.” She was quiet for a moment, but eventually jolted out of her reverie when she noticed the silent tears streaming down Evie’s face. Jamie’s own face crumpled with guilt as she immediately leaned forward to wrap an arm around Evie’s shoulders. “Shit. I’m sorry, Evie, that was insensitive of me—”

“No,” sniffled Evie, shaking her head and shrugging out from under Jamie’s arm so she could stand. The wooden floor was cold beneath her bare feet as she crossed the room to stand before the dresser and stare into the green eyes of her reflection in the large mirror on the wall above it. There were dark shadows under her reddened, puffy eyes, and her skin was pale from the lack of sunlight she’d received over the past several weeks. Her hair was oily and unkempt. She didn’t look as terrible as she felt.

She swallowed down the ache in her heart and started plucking various articles of clothes off the dresser. They were clean but covered in wrinkles; Jamie had washed her laundry for her and brought it in, but Evie had neglected to fold it.

“What are you doing?” asked Jamie. She was still sat on the bed, watching Evie with a mixture of guilt for discussing those vile creatures after what happened to Frankie, and reluctant relief, because Evie was up and moving but how long would it last?

This time it would last.
Because Jamie was right. Love is weakness. The words echoed strangely in her head, if only because they had been directly stated only months ago by the Durmstrang Institute Triwizard Champion. It had been during their first ever interview after the Weighing of the Wands ceremony. Evie had been trying (and failing) to get the champion to speak, to open up, to at least smile. She attempted, as a desperate last measure to pull a smile out of her, to call out over her camera for Lexa to think of someone she loved. Lexa had hardly moved, just sat there with perfect posture and her hands in her lap, but had lifted her chin higher, her green gaze boring into the camera as she said calmly, “Love is weakness.” And Evie hadn’t known what to do. She just snapped the picture, thinking she may look fierce and formidable in the photograph when in reality Evie just thought she looked dead inside. Afterwards the girl bowed her head and politely thanked them before gliding out of the room, and Evie shared a perturbed glance with an equally baffled Gideon.

At the time, she’d thought the Durmstrang Champion was simply…well, weird. Trying hard to be a badass, despite the fact that Evie’s instincts told her that steely glint in her eye and the hard angles of her expression were anything but theatrical. Now she knew better. Lexa had clearly known loss in her young life, and grown tired of feeling the pain of it. The pain of loving someone was simply that: pain. It did nothing but drag you down, weaken you, make you defenseless.

It was easier to think like that, wasn’t it? To live like that. Because the alternative—letting go and moving on, something the ones she had loved and lost could not do—made her sick to her stomach. Gave her guilt creeping up her spine at what a disservice it was to Frankie, who had died with the uneasy knowledge that Evie was missing, who had died unaware that Evie had betrayed his trust. Who died because he hadn’t been good enough for Evie—which was a lie. Because really, Evie had not been good enough for him.

Evie was not good enough for anybody. And that was good, because she didn’t deserve to be.

No, she didn’t deserve to live, but she didn’t deserve to take the easy way out either. Didn’t deserve to insult Frankie by removing memories of him, didn’t deserve to choose to die when he didn’t but did anyway. She deserved to suffer, and to suffer alone, where the only person hurting was herself and everyone else around her could move on with their own lives.

Everything inside of Evie, all the opposite elements of her naturally carefree personality were in full fight, gearing back in rebellion, giving her a panic that rose up to lodge in her throat. She suffocated the initial alarm, composing her face into a cold, indifferent expression, and the trembling of her hands finally stopped as she reached down to gather her clean bath towel. She still felt like she couldn’t breathe, like the air around her was thick enough to suffocate in, but at least now the pain was muted. The terrible, wailing, all-consuming anguish was pushed back, crammed into a box in the back of her mind that she hoped would strengthen into iron over time, untouchable in every sense of the word. Evie hardened herself into a shell of ice, told herself it was strong, not brittle, and moved forward.

She turned back to cross the room again with her arms full of her toiletries, towel, and clothes to change into. She dropped a chaste kiss to the top of her sister’s head, ignoring the surprise on her face at the fact that Evie was going to take a shower without any fight or fuss. It had been a while.

As Evie reached the door to the bathroom, Jamie’s voice softly called out to her.

“She’ll be here tonight.”

The hard line of Evie’s mouth faltered, threatening to tip into a frown, but she quickly flattened it back. The resounding snap of the shut door was quickly followed by the loud stream of water hitting ceramic tub, and then Evie was inside it, slicking back her hair in water hot enough to
sting her skin, letting it pour over her face, over her chest. She raked shampoo through her hair and let the water beat her back. Droplets clung onto her clavicle like diamonds. The bruises left by Luna’s lips had taken weeks to fade.

Evie sighed and breathed out evenly into the humidity of the shower, closing her eyes and melting into the spray. She felt nothing.

* "・_/∠/・* *

Luna was a bundle of nerves and trying hard not to devolve into an adrenaline-pumped mess as she Apparated onto the wet pavement of Clapham Common. She shivered immediately and zipped her leather jacket up to tuck beneath her chin, glancing up at the clock tower before ducking her head down against the misty rain and cutting down the street. She was normally quite hot-blooded, but with the unpleasant anxiety fettering her stomach…

Tonight will be the first time Luna has seen Evie since the funeral.

Evie had been stumbling drunk, and crying, and throwing herself into Luna’s bed.

Evie had been gone in the morning.

Luna wrote a letter. She tore it up before she could send it.

She had not spoken to Evie since waking to find her bed empty save for an indentation in the mattress that was still warm, and a pillow that was still soaked in tears. Luna couldn’t bring herself to wash the pillowcase. She placed it under her bed and used another pillow.

“Hey,” came a sudden voice that jostled her from bitter memories. She glanced back to see Charles Pike striding quickly to catch up with her. Luna arranged her face into a pleasant smile.

“Hey, Professor.”

Pike fell into step beside her as they turned the corner, now in sight of the distant gray-bricked house.

“Not a professor anymore,” he said with a chuckle. “How have you been? Staying out of trouble?” Pike arched his brow, one corner of his mouth tugging up, and Luna was at once struck with memories of getting thoroughly chastised by the head of Gryffindor House every time she was caught sneaking into the tower for late-night rendezvous with various students.

“Always.” The smirk on Luna’s face didn’t come nearly as natural as it used to.

Diana Sydney and Vincent Vie came looming out of the shadows of the nearby alley while Hannah Green and David Miller approached from the opposite. All six of them reached the house at the same time.

Luna’s hand trembled a bit as she reached for the doorknob. Evie was here. Evie, who hated her.

Evie, who she was in love with.

It didn’t take a genius to figure it out. She’d known for a while, really—it wasn’t that she’d
fallen back in love with her, but simply that she’d never fallen out of love in the first place. It took all of two seconds into kissing her to admit it to herself.

Evie hated her.

Luna didn’t blame her.

When Frankie was attacked, Luna’s heart had broken, not just because Frankie genuinely was a good person who didn’t deserve it, not just because it meant that if Luna and Evie’s feelings and relationship were complicated before, it was tenfold now, but because she knew this would forever haunt Evie. Haunt her with guilt and regret, for what they had been doing at the same time Frankie had probably been getting attacked. Luna understood, she knew how that felt. She hadn’t been able to save someone she loved, either. Her mother had died, and would probably still be alive if it wasn’t for Luna. If it wasn’t for the fact that Luna had come home stumbling drunk with a bottle of dragonspirit in her hand and several smaller bottles of firewhisky clinking around in her cloak pockets, waking her recovering-alcoholic mother as Luna tripped in the dining room over the chairs, keeping her mother from returning to bed because she was too busy smoothing her intoxicated daughter’s hair back from her face as she vomited up the contents of days worth of binge-drinking in the potted plant perched on the windowsill in cramped living room. When she woke the next day and the remaining bottles of firewhisky had been emptied, for one wild moment she allowed herself to believe her mother had simply drained them down the sink.

Then she found her passed out on the settee, and the horrified realization that she’d just hand-delivered alcohol to a recovering addict tasted even more bitter than the taste already souring her mouth. It took another four months, but when she came to visit one rainy Thursday afternoon and found her mother dead with her head in that same potted plant, she wasn’t even surprised. In a way, it felt like she’d been waiting for this for as long as she’d lived. Her mother had always struggled with her addiction. It was just damn ironic that it had been Luna who had been the one who killed her instead of it. Not intentionally, no—but blatant carelessness, flagrant selfishness…that was inexcusable, and Luna had killed her as much as the drink did.

In a way, she felt as though she had killed Evie too.

Frankie would not have died if Luna had not been wrapped up with Evie in that dusty old Potions classroom.

Frankie would not have died if Luna had not came to Hogwarts for this Triwizard Tournament.

Frankie would not have died if Luna had never been a part of Evie’s life.

Evie loved her back, Luna knew that, even if Evie tried to deny it to herself, Luna loved her, too. But sometimes love wasn’t enough. They learned that the hard way seven years ago, when Luna was too stubborn to change and Evie was too indecisive to stay.

The door opened before they could reach for the handle. “Come in,” greeted Jamie, voice a fair amount more cheery than her tired countenance. She pulled the door open wide and stepped back to wave them through.

They huddled forward into the dining room, which appeared to have been magically extended. The rectangular table was huge and surrounded by two dozen chairs.

Luna’s heart thudded as she looked around at all the familiar faces. So many people…except Evie. Desperate to distract herself from this overwhelming panic thrumming in her chest, Luna
quickly counted through the people, curious how many Order members had returned. There was herself, Jamie, Evie, Gideon, and Roan; Minister Jaha and his senior undersecretary Diana Sydney and a few more ministry employees; Byrne, the major under Jamie in the auror department, and some of her subordinates; the school headmasters involved in the Triwizard Tournament and a few of their people; and a smattering of other members who had been there much longer than Luna had. There were plenty of people missing, but considering this was the first Order meeting in years, Luna reckoned it made sense. She had only attended one meeting, and that was years ago, when she and Evie had just started dating, and the Ice Queen was causing trouble.

The low murmurs and chatters faded as Jaha went to stand at the head of the table and raised his hand. Once everyone’s attention was directed on him, he spoke.

“I think everyone who was able to come is here. Let’s begin.”

Luna sat down in the nearest chair, wondering if Evie was going to show at all. She had barely eased down onto the chair when she spotted the flash of strawberry-blond hair out of the corner of her eye and she jumped. She narrowed her eyes intently to look in the reflection on her glass; she could see Evie behind her descending the staircase. She did not so much as glance at Luna as she moved around the table to sit. Unfortunately, there was only one chair left open, and it was almost directly across from where Luna sat.

Luna could feel her pulse racketing wildly in the apple of her palm as she pressed it against the smooth wood of the table, gripping onto it tightly as though it were a lifeline to cling onto before her own feelings swamped her. Before she stood up and staggered around the table to fall weeping to her knees before Evie and do something really stupid.

“So.” Jaha took a moment to survey the table with that strangely calm way he always had about him. He took a deep breath, clasping his hands before him. “I suppose there’s no point in explaining why this meeting was called.” The silence that met this statement confirmed it. “The Shadow-Eaters have become more of a problem than initially foreseen.” Luna resisted the urge to snort. *No sh*t.*

“And it looks like we are on the brink of another war,” Jaha continued, oblivious to Luna’s flat gaze and Evie’s glare. “Our sources informed me over a year ago that the Ice Queen had returned and was gathering her army in preparation to make a move. The Triwizard Tournament was brought back this year in an effort to create an elaborate trap to catch her. We expected her to make a move after the Choosing Ceremony, but for whatever reason, she’s chosen to remain hidden. She’s waiting. We believe she will strike at the conclusion of the tournament, possibly during the awards ceremony.”

“How do you know that?” asked Byrne. Luna was a little taken aback by how skeptical she sounded, considering she was a ranking official in the ministry and Jaha was the minister of magic himself.

“My sources have informed me,” said Jaha simply. When Byrne waited expectantly, Jaha added, “I am not at liberty to reveal who they are.”

Byrne’s brows arched up. “Do you not trust everyone at this table, Minister?”

“Do you, Major?” Jaha shot back at her. Bryne fell silent, studying the minister.

“Even if it isn’t true, there’s no harm in preparing,” spoke up Jamie, voice light and steady. Luna felt a rush of appreciation toward the person she once considered (still considered) something of a sister. “Better safe than sorry, especially when it comes to the children.”
“Agreed,” said Abby Griffin from down the table. A few other parents nodded.

“The children are our first priority,” said Jaha, though there was a strain to his voice that told Luna that was not quite the case. She wasn’t the greatest fan of Jaha. She still remembered, years ago, when the Ice Queen first took control of some Shadow-Eaters and tested them out on muggles, that Jaha had been content to sit back and watch, to observe and see what she could and would do. He had claimed it was an unfortunate but necessary cost to observe the ministry’s creation in case they could still be used. He had claimed the needs of the many outweighed the needs of a few, that some muggles could be considered expendable if it meant saving the rest of the world. At the time, Luna had been not only outraged, but also confused, because Jaha’s wife—though she had died years ago—had been a muggleborn. But the longer she knew Jaha, the more she understood: he had a savior complex. Most ministers did. They thought the sun shone out of their ass. That had been around the time Luna began expressing her wish to Jamie that she would become Minister one day in the future, but unfortunately, it looked like Pike—former History of Magic professor, part-time Daily Prophet correspondent, and full-time Head of Magical Law Enforcement—was next in the running.

“You all know by now how this works. You know what she is capable of. The use of Unforgivable Curses is not only allowed, it is encouraged. You all have permission to kill upon sight.”

The silence that followed these words was edgy, prickly with tension, both apprehensive and aggressive. Some wanted her alive to suffer; some wanted her dead as soon as possible. Everyone wanted her punished. Too many people had lost loved ones at the hand of the Ice Queen.

“It is vital that this is taken care of before it can truly begin. If we fail to dismantle her, our world will be plunged into the third wizarding war. Over a century of peace, gone. We have to do this right,” said Jaha firmly.

“Why the tournament?” asked Luna abruptly; several other Order members glanced between she and Jaha, all curious. Only a select few were filled in on the little details; she was not one of them. She didn’t rank high enough in the order and didn’t have anyone to secretly slip her the details; she would have, perhaps, if she had remained close with the Potters. Actually, probably not. Jamie always had been a stickler for rules. “What do the schools have to do with the queen?”

Jaha pressed the tips of his fingertips together hard. “It’s not the school. It’s a specific student.”

Luna raised her brows; she could see several people expressing similar incredulity in her peripheral vision. She waited expectantly for Jaha to continue, but instead he inclined his head toward Indra. “I believe our Durmstrang Headmistress should be the one to explain this.”

“Headmaster,” corrected Indra, though the sharpness in her tone was no more than usual. Her jaw was set and she looked as fierce as she always did. “And the student is mine. Lexa.”

Luna’s brow furrowed in genuine bafflement. “Your Champion. What about her?”

Indra exchanged a heavy glance with Gustus. The muscles in her jaw seemed to clench in preparation of revealing this information. “A source revealed to us many years ago that the Ice Queen was hunting those with a particular affinity to magic, who began showing it very young. Prodigies, as many would say. Lexa is one of them.”

The whole table watched her with rapt attention. Indra took a deep breath, nostrils flaring as though this entire conversation was an inconvenience to her but one she had no choice but to partake in, which Luna supposed was an accurate assumption.
“Lexa began showing signs of magic as early as birth.” Murmurs broke out at this, but Indra ignored them and steeled on. “She also happens to be a muggleborn. In circumstances like this, the parents’ memories periodically needed wiping, and an eye is usually kept closely on the child until they turn of age to attend Durmstrang.” Indra scowled. “While Lexa did not have very…supportive parents…she was reasonably adjusted considering her situation. She came to Durmstrang and soon began advanced classes. I knew Lexa was at risk for the Ice Queen’s wrath, so I ensured she learned to take care of herself. She joined this tournament with that in mind.”

Multiple people burst into protests at this.

“You told her about the Order—”

“She is not in the Order! She’s a child! Why bring her into this?”

“She is deliberately endangering herself by competing in this tournament, she should be hidden away far from where the Ice Queen may—“

“Lexa has already met the Queen!” Indra snarled, eyes flashing in warning; everyone fell silent, mouths slightly open at this news. “And yes, I did inform her, enough she needed to know. She has a right to know. She is also more than capable, and she was the one who suggested using herself as bait and starting up the Triwizard Tournament in the first place. She knows what the risks are, and she is willing to take them for the sake of her people.”

“She met the Queen?” echoed Pike in disbelief.

Indra nodded, movements jerky with her discomfort and aggravation. “Almost two years ago. The Queen learned of Lexa’s existence and sought her out. We protected and fought for a year, until she kidnapped one of my former students in an attempt to bait Lexa out. Lexa lived. My former student did not. The Ice Queen escaped.”

No one was even whispering. The silence in the room was heavy and somber, and no one dared reach out to comfort the Durmstrang Headmaster as she swallowed thickly, her eyes unnaturally bright for one brief moment, before she blinked and steel returned to them.

“Why did we not know of this?” demanded Byrne.

Indra’s eyes flickered to Jaha, briefly enough it may have been coincidence. Luna had a feeling it wasn’t. “Someone suggested it was not wise to cause a panic when immediate results were not tangible, since the Ice Queen was in hiding.”

“So this entire tournament is a lie, to tempt the Queen?”

“We believe the Queen is planning to kidnap Lexa.” No one denied this. It was what happened; witches and wizards went missing, taken somewhere by the Ice Queen. They never returned. Now at least it made sense—if the Ice Queen was hunting magical prodigies, those were the people she was kidnapping.

“But why?” asked Luna, clearly speaking for most of the Order considering they were nodding their heads in agreement. “What’s the point? Why is she hunting these prodigies?”

Indra glanced away, throat moving as she swallowed. “We don’t know,” she said, but Luna narrowed her eyes. Luna used to lie quite often, so she was pretty good at recognizing a lie. Indra was lying. She was hiding something. Why?

Luna licked her lips, setting her jaw and leaning back in her seat. She learned many things in
the past few years, and one of them was that patience is a virtue. Indra had only been her professor for three years, but Luna respected her enough from that short amount of time to respect her reasons, whatever they were. She trusted her, and Luna did not trust many people.

The remainder of the meeting was fairly uneventful. Jaha informed them of their duties during the awards ceremony; they were all to be stationed at Hogwarts in preparation. Inside sources (Luna wondered who the hell that was; she would have assumed Roan if he hadn’t proved years ago that he had rebuked the Queen’s ways) revealed that the Ice Queen would come out of hiding then. In the meantime, Jaha was designating various missions to Order members. The Petersons were in charge of using their home as a safe place to hide away other witches and wizards, some young and some old, that had proven a special affinity—prodigies, in other words that were being pulled from school until the Ice Queen was no longer a threat. Some of the Hit Wizards were assigned to track down known affiliates of the Ice Queen. Luna sat with her fingers drumming the surface of the table, wondering what her role to play in all this was.

The simple grandfather’s clock propped up against the wall chimed midnight by the time the meeting came to an end. Most people were already leaving, some to go home and some to start on their duties. Luna hesitated, eyes drifting to Evie, who was still sat at the table murmuring with Jamie and Roan. It had been months since Frankie… Luna had desperately wanted to speak to her, but Evie had wanted space. Luna respected that and gave it too her. Evie wasn’t showing any signs of being ready yet, but everything inside Luna was gnawing at her to speak, to apologize to Evie, even though it wasn’t enough, she knew nothing would ever be enough.

Luna watched them out of the corners of her eyes, hoping she was being discreet. Roan glanced up at her, his brow furrowing slightly before she widened her eyes and shook her head. He dutifully returned his attention to the Potter sisters, and Luna let out a breath of relief before she bit her lip, her mouth dry and palms growing clammy. She cursed herself. Evie was the only person who ever got her this way, all nervous and uncertain.

“Rivers,” spoke Jaha; Luna startled, tearing her gaze away where it had been boring into the back of Evie’s head. She looked up to the head of the table where Jaha still stood, his hands clasped behind his back.

Luna approached the Minister of Magic, and had just reached him when, to her horror, he turned his head to the only others remaining and said, “Evie.”

Luna glanced at Evie, saw she was determinedly staring at Jaha, and carefully averted her gaze.

“Ladies,” said Jaha, looking between both of them. “The time has come for all of us to do our parts. I remember how much you did for us in the past.”

Almost seven years ago, her role had been to sneak around and gather information. Her habit of traveling and partying meant she’d met a wide variety of people; Luna also had an unfortunate case of the sticky fingers since she was a child. She wasn’t sure why she enjoyed nicking things so much, though thieving her mother’s alcohol in sloppy attempts to get her to quit drinking from a young age may have had something to do with it. She’d become acquainted with many other thieves and law-breakers. When she ran into Evie almost two years after graduation, and they began seeing one another, she got better, which she was grateful for when Jamie informed her that the Ministry knew what she was doing and was on her tail. They offered her an out, if she would sell out other criminals. It was her girlfriend’s older sister; of course she wasn’t going to say no. That led to the some pretty interesting missions that she and Evie deigned as “holidays” since they took full
advantage of the traveling, though they did successfully help catch a few dark wizards, and witches.

“There is a particularly special mission that requires the utmost care, from experienced members. I need you to work together again. You make a good team.”

*Oh no.* Luna looked at the floor, a lump in her throat. She could practically feel Evie bristling with anger beside her.

“I need you to find someone for me,” Jaha continued, either oblivious to their reactions or ignoring them. “I will provide you with a tracker to assist you, and if you’re successful, you’ll be helping the Order come closer than it ever has before in defeating the Ice Queen once and for all.”

“Do we have to?” asked Evie bluntly. Jaha stared at her. Luna couldn’t resist; she peeked up too. To her credit, Evie did not so much as flush under the weight of the minister’s gaze.

“Do you have to…follow the orders the Minister of Magic has asked of you?” said Jaha incredulously.

Now Evie flushed. “I don’t mean to offend, Minister, but I don’t want to go on a mission with her.”

Luna’s stomach dropped unpleasantly. She wasn’t surprised at all, but…

Evie really must hate her to openly speak out against the Minister of Magic.

The disbelief on Jaha’s face quickly morphed into ire. “I am your *Minister*. You will *do* whatever I tell you to do.”

Evie opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, Luna was speaking.

“I don’t appreciate what you’re implying, Minister,” snapped Luna. “We’re not your servants, and this has nothing to do with the Ministry of Magic. This is the Order, and you aren’t the leader.”

*Shite.* The silence left in her wake was thick with tension. The Minister swiftly arranged his countenance into one of neutrality.

“For the sake of the Order, I’m going to allow you another chance to answer my *request,*” said Jaha, placing extra emphasis on the word since it was beyond clear that it was in fact an order. “I need the two of you—because it makes the most *sense,* because everyone else has already been given a missive and you both have worked together in the past—to complete a task tracking a possible informant to the Queen. While I do urge you to put your nation above your own personal feelings, as Ms. Rivers so tactfully stated, you are not my servants, therefore you are allowed the right to refuse this mission and I can find someone to take on the extra duties.”

Everything about Jaha’s tone and the glint in his eyes told them that they absolutely were not allowed to refuse.

Still, Evie Potter could be a stubborn fool when she was angry. “I’ll think about it,” she said stiffly, and just as the meaning behind Jaha’s words was clear, so was Evie’s. She was not going.

“I’ll think about it too,” added Luna.

The Minister’s jaw clenched. He swept past them, hands still behind his back. “I expect an
answer by tomorrow,” he said curtly, pausing by the door before he headed out.

Evie moved away from Luna at once, leaving her standing by the table. She didn’t get very far, considering Jamie and Roan were walking toward them, and Jamie shot a hand out to grab Evie’s arm before she stormed past her to the staircase.

“Whoa, wait a minute,” she said firmly, steering Evie around to face her. “What was that about?”

“I’m not going on a mission with her!” said Evie heatedly, face red as she gestured wildly toward the direction Luna still stood.

“You told Jaha no?” said Jamie in alarm. Beside her, Roan looked equally incredulous at Evie’s actions.

“Yes,” hissed Evie, ripping her arm out of Jamie’s grip. “I’m not going anywhere with her.”

Jamie’s face settled into stone, that stern disappointment she had always harbored for occasions such as this, when someone did not meet her expectations. Evie had always called it the “big sister trying to be a mom” look. “Evie, you can’t just tell the Minister no. We’re on the brink of war. You can’t just make everything about you.”

“I’m not!” said Evie indignantly. “But I shouldn’t be forced to do something I don’t want just because he says so! He’s a minister, not a god, no matter what he thinks! And I don’t have to do what he says, I don’t want to spend time with her—”

“She’s right, she shouldn’t have to be around me if she doesn’t want to,” interjected Luna, internally cringing at the pleading tone in her voice.

“Stay out of it!” Evie’s eyes flashed as she flared up, rounding on Luna. “I don’t need you to defend me!”

“I’m not—”

“Hush, both of you,” said Jamie sharply. They quedled at once. “Now, you’re acting like a child. You are.,” she asserted firmly, cutting across Evie as she began to protest again. “Why do you always do this? You’re an adult, you have to grow up at some point.”

“Jamie,” began Roan in a quiet voice, leaning forward, but Jamie shook her head, clearly distressed.

“No, I’m serious,” she said impatiently. “You can’t justchildishly refuse orders for your own petty reasons when there are people’s lives at stake!”

The air seemed to suck out of the room. Luna and Roan locked eye contact, both holding their breath.

Evie seemed dumbstruck, but two seconds later managed to choke out, “Petty? I’m being childish? I have to grow up? I don’t understand that people’s lives are at stake?”

The words seemed to dawn on Jamie; her face drained of color. “Ah. Shit. Erm, Evie, I—“

“Frankie died,” said Evie quietly, tears filling her eyes. “A person died, because I was careless enough to let him go. Because I was being selfish. A person lost their life because of me. Frankie—whose great-grandfather fought in the last war and helped defeat Voldemort—died alone,
at the hands of a vile creature, because he went there looking for me. He died thinking that I loved him, because I was too much of a coward to tell him I didn’t. If I had, if we had broken up like we should have, he never would have been there that night. He would have been asleep in his own bed, or maybe he would have been seeing someone else, someone that actually deserved him. Not me. Me, someone he was ten times better than. I don’t have my shit together, I never have. I lied to him every day by staying with him when I knew his feelings were deeper than mine. I’ve been obsessed with her,” she swung an arm out to point at Luna while still not looking at her. Luna was still frozen in place, watching in shock, feeling as though her heart was breaking into a million tiny shards even though she had been so certain there were no pieces left to break. “since day one. She strolls back into my life and I’m right fucking back there. Frankie died because I was fucking her when I should have been with him, but it’s not even that, I should have told him a long time ago, I should have broke it off with him, I should have—” Evie’s voice cracked and broke off. Jamie, Roan, and Luna all watched her, hearts aching, as she sniffled and wiped her eyes and nose with her shirt sleeve before taking a breath and leveling her gaze onto Jamie again. “There are a lot of things I should have done, but there’s nothing I can do about it now.”

“I’m sorry,” Jamie finally said, after the silence had stretched on. “I didn’t—I didn’t mean—“

“I know what you meant,” said Evie wearily. “And I stand by what I said. I’m not going on the mission. I don’t care.”

Jamie swallowed, glancing at Roan, who inclined his head in an almost indiscernible nod, before she looked back at Evie and nodded too. “Okay.” She glanced at where Luna stood uncertainly and shifted her weight on another leg, a few emotions flashing across her face before settling on caution. “Alright, I’m going to walk Roan out before he Apparates home.”

Evie’s back visibly stiffened as she realized why. “I don’t want to talk to her.“

Jamie and Roan stilled again, but Luna stepped forward. “Let me talk to her,” she implored. Jamie looked between them, brows raised in uncertainty. “Evie, please. I just, I need to talk to you. Please. I—I’m begging you,” she added, the words dry in her mouth despite the wet sting in her eyes.

Evie didn’t answer or even move to turn back to look at her. “Please, let me talk to you. Please, just let me say what I need to say and then—and then if you want, you never have to see me again. I promise, if you tell me to go, I’ll go, just—please, talk to me first.”

There was silence save for Luna’s heart pounding in her ears. Finally, Evie gave a nod, almost imperceptible but it was there, and Luna had to grip the table for support because her legs went shaky with relief.

“Alright,” said Jamie reluctantly, nodding more to herself than them as she started forward, Roan trailing behind her. She stopped when a thought struck her; she turned back at once and pulled Evie into a hug. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. After a moment Evie lifted her arms and returned it.

“Thank you for taking care of me,” she whispered back.

Jamie pulled back, her eyes creased in sorrow. “Anytime. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

They withdrew and Jamie started forward again, reaching back behind her to blindly grab for Roan’s hand as they crossed the room. Roan took it and squeezed gently as they passed out of the front door, leaving Luna and Evie standing there with what felt like miles of space between them.
“I was too hard on her wasn’t I?” muttered Jamie fearfully as they stepped out into cobblestone, standing under the shelter of the small awning above the door, staring at the nearest streetlamp directly ahead a few feet away. Its weak, flickering light provided a hazy orange circle that illuminated the drizzling rain.

Roan squeezed her hand again. “Yeah, but you apologized.”

“I just—I’ve been so stressed out. I wasn’t thinking when I said it,” she admitted. “Doesn’t make it right, but—” She sighed, turning slightly toward the door. “Maybe I should go back in there. They’re going to kill each other.”

“They aren’t going to kill each other,” said Roan patiently, placing his free hand on Jamie’s shoulder to stop her from opening the door. “They need to talk.”

“I know, but—“

“Stop worrying,” he directed, giving Jamie a reassuring smile when she glanced at him. “It’s going to be okay. What do you always tell me, hm?”

Her lips curved up in memory. His smile widened in encouragement.

“That’s right. *Anything is possible if you’ve got enough nerve.*” He squeezed her hand for a third time. “If we know anything about those two, it’s that they’ve got nerve. They’ll make the right choice.”

Jamie squeezed back, comforted. “Thank you.”

Roan pulled his wand out of his back pocket and traced it over Jamie and then himself, murmuring the Impervius spell, before tucking it back into his pocket.

“That’s how you lose an ass-cheek,” grumbled Jamie, pulling him out into the street.

Roan laughed, allowing himself to be gently tugged along. They rounded a corner and were surprised to find Indra and Gustus standing beneath another dim streetlight, having a hushed conversation.

“She won’t want to know,” said Gustus gravely in his deep voice.

“I know that, but she needs to. It’s time.”

They noticed Jamie and Roan across the street and waved at them before finishing their conversation in whispered voices and then Apparating away.

“I wonder what that was about,” said Jamie, staring at the empty space they had disappeared in. She clearly decided to move past it, turning to look at Roan. Her face was full of apprehension again. “You’re going back to the prison?”

Roan sighed. “I don’t have a choice, do I?”

Jamie worried her bottom lip, looking as wretched as she felt. “None of us do. I wish we did.”

Roan nodded because what else could he do, and bent down to press a chaste kiss to Jamie’s forehead. “I’ll see you at the awards ceremony,” he said.

She nodded, and was left standing alone in the rain as he Apparated. She turned to look back
at her house, certain Evie and Luna would be busy speaking for hours. She eventually decided to
creep in through the back door and up to her room; the two girls would be none the wiser.
She did so, trying hard to block out the sounds of them speaking, and cast a *muffliato* on her
door to silence the room as she changed and burrowed beneath the covers in her bed. Sleep wasn’t
coming easy to her tonight, but eventually she drifted off to slumber.

* "・/✧・*" *

Luna and Evie stood inside the silent house, Luna staring at her and Evie staring anywhere
but at her.

“Thank you for agreeing to speak to me,” said Luna suddenly, cringing at the awkwardness.

“So speak to me,” said Evie bitterly.

Luna swallowed. Right.

She took one step forward, still lingering by the table but leaving only a few feet between she
and Evie. She took a deep breath, and Evie watched her flatly, skeptical. Luna wanted to talk to her.
If there was one thing Luna Rivers was terrible at, it was opening up and talking. Evie wondered
how long it would take her to give up and leave.

“I’m…I wanted to say…to say that I’m sorry.”

Evie worked hard to keep her expression indiscernible. She hoped if she stayed neutral, she
wouldn’t lose her temper. “Okay,” she said—her voice wasn’t hard to decipher at all; she was
annoyed, and her annoyance grew at the fact that that was obvious.

Luna’s face was reddening, but she plunged on, reaching forward to grasp the chair that
stood beside her, as though it would help ground her so she didn’t run away. “I’m…I’m sorry. I’m
sorry for everything.” Her words came at a rush now and Evie had the decency to hide her surprise.
She wished she didn’t. “I’m sorry for coming to Hogwarts and fucking up your relationship. I’m
sorry for pursuing you, for flirting with you. I’m sorry for pursuing you all those years ago, you were
my person and I ruined everything.”

Evie scoffed at that, though her heart trembled at the words. She wished more than anything
that this yearning and terrible, terrible sorrow inside her would just go away. She didn’t want to feel
anything at Luna’s words. She wanted to hate her, because Merlin, it was easier to hate her than to
hate herself, wasn’t it? She let the anger and hurt ripple over her, because above anything—talking to
the woman who had never been able to open up to her or anybody, listening to her tell her bullshit
like that, was too painful. “Right. As if you’ve ever let anyone be your person.”

"Are you joking?" Luna's entire face was creased in pain. She was gripping the back of the
chair so tightly her knuckles were white. "Evie, you were my favorite person. You were always my
favorite. We were best friends. At least you were mine," she added bitterly.

Evie nodded quickly before she swallowed hard at the lump in her throat, hating the way her
heart ached and how it seemed to alternate between screaming and whispering names with each beat.
Frankie. Luna. Frankie. Luna.

"It's just...I didn't mean for this to happen." Luna gestured almost wildly between herself and
Evie. "I was just pissed, because of what happened between us and how it—how it fucked things up. Do you really think I would just dive into that again? That I would even want to?"

Evie pressed her lips together at the flash of hurt and anger. "You didn't seem to have a problem diving into bed with me again," she said stiffly.

Luna's eyes widened. They were normally such a bright amber, yet now seemed dim and dulled in pain. "Are you—Evie, I didn't—" she began incredulously before shaking her head and biting her quivering bottom lip to still it. "I didn't plan on it. I never thought I even had a chance with you. I was flirting with you, but it was harmless, I didn't actually think—"

"What didn't you think?" Evie interrupted, her eyes flashing angrily and resentment in her voice. "That I would reciprocate? That I still wanted you that way? That it's been seven years and I still can't breathe when you look at me? But it doesn't matter now does it? Because FRANKIE IS DEAD," she bellowed, finally losing her temper. Tears stung her eyes and the lump in her throat was threatening to choke her. "He's dead, and he isn't coming back. I fucking cheated on him and he never even knew it. I slept with you! I slept with you," she repeated, her voice lowering as it cracked and the tears started rolling down her cheeks. Luna wasn't crying, but her face was pale and she still looked on the verge of it. "Frankie loved me, but I slept with you."

"I—I love you too," stammered Luna. Evie's heart thumped at the words despite the grief that was frozen solid in her gut. Luna looked utterly terrified, but she licked her lips. "I...I..." She cursed before spinning around, withdrawing her wand from her jacket. "Oh my Merlin, I need help. Jamie's gotta have some. Accio Veritaserum!"

A tiny bottle went whizzing out of the storage cupboard and into Luna's waiting outstretched hand. Before Evie could so much as open her mouth, Luna ripped the stopper out and took a gulp, blinking rapidly as the potion went down her throat.

"Luna!" Evie hurried over to her, seized the potion out of her hand. "You idiot, you aren't supposed to take that much, only a few drops—"

"Ask me questions," said Luna quickly, panic in her voice, pushing herself down to sit on the chair. "Ask me anything you want. I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"You idiot," hissed Evie again, ripping the potion out of her hand. "I won't be able to ask you anything. You took too much. You're about to spill out your whole life story."

Luna's eyes went wide, but she only swallowed in determination. "Okay," she said, nodding. "I have nothing to hi..." Her words trailed off as her eyes glazed over.

Evie eyed her cautiously; Luna blinked slowly, utterly zoned out. "Luna?" she said tentatively.

"My father attended Durmstrang Institute and my mother attended Uagadou School of Magic," stated Luna matter-of-factly. Evie went silent, slowly placing the potion bottle on the shelf beside them. She stared back into Luna's ocher eyes, which were now brighter than Evie had ever seen them. Luna had rarely ever spoke about her family. "My father was killed when I was very young from Scrofungulus. My mother struggled with alcoholism after this. She was not a bad person, just depressed, and she did try very hard to overcome it. We moved to Russia a couple years later and lived there for a time. I attended Durmstrang until I was thirteen, and we moved to England because my mother had a promotion and transfer to the British Ministry at Magic. That's when I came to Hogwarts. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you."
Evie cast her gaze down in an effort to avoid the intensity of Luna's gaze. Her heart hurt as much as her head. "Luna. We were kids the first time we met—" she began muttering, but Luna interrupted.

“It was the night I arrived at Hogwarts. I was waiting for the Headmistress to collect the Sorting Hat so I knew which House to bed in. It was midnight, but you were awake. I could see you through a tower window. You were dancing with a pink pygmy puff.”

Evie’s cheeks tinted red. She remembered that—remembered being giddy with happiness because she was finally here, finally at Hogwarts, so she scooped up Einstein, her pygmy puff, and began dancing with him to make Jamie and the other Gryffindor girls laugh.

“I was sorted into Slytherin, and disappointed I wasn’t living in the tower with the weird pretty blonde girl, but I liked my dungeon as well. The next day, I was in low spirits because it was my first day and I was nervous. It was worse when I walked into the classroom late, because I wasn’t expecting to see you. My default was to be rude, naturally, and I was angry with myself for making you hate me so quickly. It solidified our relationship into that of rivals. As the years passed, you were as aggravating as you were attractive to me. You often went out of your way to annoy me, and when you became a Prefect, you constantly made Slytherin lose house points by grassing on me whenever I snuck out of the school, threw parties, or anything else against the rules. Since you seemed to have made it your mission in life to ruin mine, it was easier to convince myself that I hated you rather than admit I may have found you likable and attractive.”

Evie swallowed hard at an attempt to rid herself of the lump in her throat. She picked at a few stray threads in her sweater, heart pounding as she listened intently to every word Luna was spilling out.

“Though I hated fighting with you when I really wanted to be on better terms, I enjoyed it as well. You were stuffy and overly concerned with following the rules, and I raised general hell in the school. When we were in our final year, you changed. You started breaking the rules too, stopped trying to be your sister. You showed up at one of my parties. The one at the Shrieking Shack. You drank too much firewhisky, and you tried to kiss me. I had spent the past year experimenting with hair colors, but that was the night I turned it from blue to pastel. You cornered me in the bathroom and wanted to kiss me. I was going to kiss you back, until you called me Gemma. You thought I was someone else. It embarrassed me, so I embarrassed you. For the rest of the year.”

Evie closed her eyes, breathing out carefully. She remembered everything Luna was saying, of course. Her seventh year had taken a complete turn to how she’d behaved the previous six years. She’d relaxed, she’d slept around, she went to parties—everything she had always wanted to do but hadn’t because she felt as though she had to live up to her name. It had taken a night of arguing with Luna, listening to her crossly point out all the ways she was just living in her sister’s shadow, for Evie to realize—grudgingly—that Luna was right. She started being herself after that.

And she remembered the first party she showed up at. How could she ever forget that?

_The party was cramped. It wasn’t the first time Evie regretted coming here._

_Students from all houses were crammed into the small space of the Shrieking Shack, the mass of dancing bodies pushing out into all four corners. There was a tiny storage room off to the right, adjacent to the rickety old table propped up against the wall and covered in every manner of alcoholic beverage. There was no bathroom, and Evie’s bladder was already twinging in response._
Jackson and Megan were mingling with a few Hufflepuffs in the corner near the door. Evie cursed, because that meant she couldn’t easily slip away.

Jackson spotted her and as if reading her mind, he smiled and rotated over to her, darting over to the table to grab a couple bottles of firewhisky. He pushed them into her hands, leaning close to say far too loudly to be heard over the pounding music, “Relax! Live a little.”

Evie tightened her grip on the neck of the bottle, swallowing thickly. He was right, of course. It was her seventh and final year of Hogwarts and this year was going to be different than all the others—she was different. She had come here to relax. Even though every part of her was screaming in protest that there were a million other places to do it besides Luna Rivers’ parties. She brought the bottle to her lips and decided the only way she was going to relax is if she got completely smashed off her head.

A couple hours later, Evie’s head was spinning and her bladder was throbbing painfully, palms growing sweaty because holy shit, she needed to use the restroom. That wasn’t the only urge in her, though. A beautiful girl with white-blond hair and gorgeous blue eyes—Gemma Coleman, a sixth-year Ravenclaw girl, had pulled her into a dance and kissed her, grinded her body into hers, and asked Evie to meet with her after the party. Evie was as nervous as she was excited; she had only ever slept with boys, though she knew she was attracted to girls too. Evie was drunk, Gemma was drunk, and fuck yes to getting drunk-laid. Was that a word? Drunk-laid?

“Evie,” came Jackson’s voice, gripping her above her arm and spinning her around. Oh. She had just been standing in the middle of the dance floor alone. Gemma had whispered in her ear that she was going to get more drinks. Jackson laughed at the way Evie swayed, and she grinned broadly in response.

“I’m gonna go find Gemma,” she half-shouted, and Jackson nodded, letting go so Evie could weave her way (bumping more than one person by accident) through the dancing crowd, toward the table that held all the drinks. Gemma was nowhere to be found. Evie looked around, but she didn’t spy the white-blond hair. Her eyes fell on the storage room. Maybe Gemma had gone in there to find more alcohol.

Evie blundered inside, walking right into a girl with light hair. But it wasn’t Gemma.

It was Luna Rivers, tawny eyes outlined in slanting, cat-eyed liner, pastel hair piled high in a messy bun atop her head, a few small braids just visible around it. She was flushed from drinking too, though she wasn’t quite as drunk as Evie, and stood solidly and even reached out automatically to steady Evie.

“Ev—Potter?” Luna did stumble over her words, at least. Evie was silent, just staring at her with dilated eyes. She had not been expecting to see Luna, which was stupid because this was her party, of course she would see her at some point. But she certainly didn’t expect to be standing so close to her within the small confines of a storage closet. “Hey.” She snapped her fingers before Evie’s face to get her attention. “Are you okay?”

“Wow. You sound so concerned,” Evie slurred.

Luna stared at her for a moment before blinking and falling into a scowl. “I’m not,” she said flatly. “Just don’t want you vomiting all over this place.”

“Noooo,” Evie quietly howled, placing her hands on Luna’s face with a little more force than she’d meant; Luna flinched, but Evie just pinched her cheeks near the corners of her lips and pulled upward.
“Ouch—I—what are you doing?” she said, brow knitting in discomfort, lifting her hands to Evie’s wrists and tugging back.

“Turn that frown upside down,” Evie cooed, pinching at her cheeks again before Luna pulled her hands away. “Ya have a pretty smile.”

Luna arched a brow, seemingly fighting to keep a smile off her face. She wasn’t very successful; it crept free when she had to push Evie’s hands down again as they went to lift to her face once more. Evie beamed.

“That’s better.”

Even drunk, she noticed the blush painting Luna’s cheeks. “Pretty, pretty,” she chanted, squirming a wrist free to reach up to poke a fingertip into the apple of Luna’s cheek.

“Oh, okay,” said Luna amusedly, shaking her head as though embarrassed, which Evie didn’t really understand because everyone was always talking about how pretty Luna was. How hot she was, to be exact. Evie appraised her, body overcome by the conflicting sensations of her painful ache of her bladder, and the warm, insistent ache in the pit of her stomach that meant something else entirely. Luna had fallen silent, eyes narrowed as she scrutinized Evie, watched the emotions chase across her face and eyes like she was an open book. Under the weight of her tawny gaze, the heat in Evie’s belly, in her chest, between her legs, was more insistent than ever, and she leaned forward before she could really think about it. Luna’s brows immediately raised in response, her mouth falling open in surprise. Even drunk Evie did not miss the way her gaze fell to her lips for just a brief glance, before they snapped back up to lock with hers.

One of Luna’s brows arched and she tilted her head, watching Evie curiously as she deliberately took a step forward, closer into Evie’s space. Evie took several stumbling steps back, narrowing her eyes. She stopped when her back hit the door shut.

A moment of clarity fought through her alcohol soaked, lust-fogged brain. This was Luna Rivers, her mortal enemy. Sure, Luna was also gorgeous—and smart, and funny, and so, so tempting—but she was also a massive pain in Evie’s ass and had spent the better part of the last nearly five years torturing her at any given moment, just as Evie had done with her. She’d lost track of the amount of times she’d gotten Slytherin to lose points because of Luna, and lost track of the times Luna had messed with her, whether by casting diffindo on every new bag she had as she walked down the corridors to class, or Transfiguring her soup into various disgusting insects right before she went to take a bite.

But now Luna was standing only a few feet away with a delicious sheen of sweat on her glowing skin, her eyes hazy with intoxication and something else. Without even thinking about it, Evie shuffled a few steps forward, ignoring the way she stumbled slightly again and the way her bladder was now searing insistently with the need to empty it. Luna’s gaze flickered down to Evie’s lips again, and the shock of that knowledge had Evie coming to an abrupt stop with only a couple feet between them in the small space of the room. Luna couldn’t fight the grin unfurling on her face, and a second later she was chuckling, and then full-out laughing.

Luna just laughed, the sound hearty and warm, and it brought a whole new wave of butterflies that exploded in Evie’s chest. She struggled to control her breathing, struggled not to sway where she stood, struggled not to stare at Luna’s lips. She failed at all of it, especially the third.

Luna noticed, Evie knew she did. Could tell by the deliberate way she licked her lips and stepped closer. This room was already tiny enough, but with Luna stepping into her space, it was unbearable.
Luna’s head was tilted and her eyes were narrowed, watching Evie curiously, warily. “Why are you here, Potter?”

“Because.” Evie had meant to sound flat and sarcastic and untouchable. Had meant to. But she didn’t. Instead she sounded breathy and affected and…

Luna’s tawny gaze was so steady on her, much too steady for someone who had been drinking. Evie felt like the world was tipping upside down around her, like the ground was shaking beneath her feet, but Luna’s eyes were the only constant, like unmove twin suns that bored into her, deep inside her where even her own thoughts couldn’t reach.

“Because why?” asked Luna finally, and if Evie were a little more sober she may have realized that Luna was trembling ever so slightly, that her pulse was racing so hard you could see it moving her neck, that a dark blush had lit up her cheeks.

Luna inched forward again; Evie noticed that. Her skin seemed to prickle and rise up a couple degrees with every inch that Luna neared.

“Because I want to be,” said Evie stupidly. She couldn’t even find it in herself to be embarrassed. She couldn’t even think.

“What else do you want, Evie?”

Fuck. If it wasn’t the low, rough voice, or the way her gaze smoldered beneath the thick lashes she gazed at Evie through, or the way she had shifted forward again, so close their breasts brushed together with their breaths, it was for the way she said her name. They were always so careful to use last names, more befitting of nemeses, than their first names. The way Luna’s lips curved around the letters. The way it sent Evie’s heart pounding, and her stomach flipping, and a strange heat burning her up all through her veins, from her heart to her stomach to her core.

They were both leaning forward now, Evie’s body practically vibrating with need. Her eyes were drifting shut and she was tilting her head up without another conscious thought.

What did she want? Fuck, she knew what she wanted now. Knew, could admit it to herself right now, drunk and breathing in Luna, that she had always wanted this, since the moment they met.

Their noses brushed together as they drew closer, breath mixing together, lips almost touching.

But why had she come in here, again? Hadn’t she been looking for someone?

She didn’t even feel a strike of guilt as she remembered. Oh. She had been looking for someone, for—

“Gemma,” she breathed without thinking, and then, to her horror, warmth spread out from between her legs. Her bladder had finally expelled, and she had just said another girl’s name—who she truly, honestly couldn’t care less about—and Luna’s eyes snapped open and widened.

Luna abruptly pulled back, and just in time too, because the door to the storage room had just flew open with enough force to bang back against the wall and nearly shut again. Luna’s mouth fell open with an almost inaudible gasp as a furious blush exploded across her face. Evie’s head was spinning too rapidly to form a single concrete thought right now.

She looked down at the large stain of wetness trailing down her thighs. She had almost
kissed Luna. And she had pissed herself.

She looked back up at Luna; both of them stood there with their mouths open and breath sucked in, eyes wide, standing frozen where they stood.

The person that had slammed the door open was Gemma, of course. She was beyond drunk, screaming the lyrics to an old Blodwyn Bludd song, attracting the attention of other party-goers who crowded in to see the commotion.

Luna was getting past the shock now. She blinked rapidly before her brows drew together and her mouth thinned in a flat frown. Evie knew why she was angry. She thought that Evie thought she was Gemma, but wasn’t it obvious that she didn’t?

“Evie’s wet her pants,” announced Luna to those crowding up near the door, and Evie spluttered in protest, heat flooding her face. The crowd started crowding in laughter. “I’m used to having that affect on girls, but not quite this extent,” added Luna, smirking a smirk that did not quite reach her eyes.

Anger flooded through Evie. She looked between Luna and the crowd, aghast, before finally running out of the room, stumbling again and again in her intoxicated state until suddenly Jackson and Megan were at her side, gripping her arms carefully and helping her start up the long tunnel to the castle, raucous laughter echoing off the walls behind them.

Evie opened her eyes, the remaining dregs of laughter echoing in her mind. It didn’t embarrass her now, miraculously; she and Luna had been able to laugh and joke about it once they started seeing one another. She had never told Luna that she didn’t actually think she was Gemma Coleman. She wished she had, now. She would right now if Luna weren’t on a roll from the Veritaserum.

"Over a year after graduation, I saw you again. It was in America. I had just left the Salem Institute where I was visiting with an old friend. I went to the Bubbling Brookside cafe to meet with some friends who suggested we go to a pub. We went to two others before finding Love Potion Motion. I was tipsy but I noticed you. You were standing at the bar waiting for the bartender. I couldn't take my eyes off you."

Evie swallowed, uncomfortable with the truth spilling so readily from Luna's lips, but curious despite herself to hear more.

"You were beautiful. You wore a teal dress and your hair was falling out of its bun. Your cheeks were flushed and your eyes were bright so I knew it wasn't your first drink of the night. I was on my way to becoming drunk, and the group of friends I were with had not gone to Hogwarts with us so they didn’t know who you were, and your friends didn’t know who I was. It was almost like a second chance, where we could live in a world where we weren’t supposed to be rivals. We didn’t speak, but we watched each other all night."

Evie couldn’t stop the sad, watery smile that formed in response. She remembered sitting at the opposite end of the bar from Luna, surrounded by her chatting friends, not taking in a word because she was too busy staring at Luna over the rim of her glass, sharing a tiny, knowing smirk with her like they were both in on some joke that no one else could understand.

“I ditched my friends to come talk to you near the end of the night. I couldn’t bear just letting
you leave without at least saying hello. It was like we were different people, sarcastic and charming rather than cruel and hostile. I bought us drinks and you bought us more after we finished them. You made funny jokes, and I loved your smile. No one at the pub knew who we were at school, so we didn’t have to act like we hated each other. When your friends came for you, I was sad to tell you goodbye. I sat and watched you dance before I headed back to my friends.”

“An hour later, I thought you’d already left. Then I saw you on the dance floor. You were watching me while you danced, looking at me like you wanted me. A man started dancing too close to you, and you didn’t want him there. I took care of him, pushed him away and danced next to you instead. I made a joke and made you laugh. We danced until you kissed me, and then we couldn’t stop kissing, and you took my hand and led me to the bathroom. My heart was beating so fast I thought I may be at risk of a heart attack.”

"Luna," Evie murmured plaintively, reaching forward to take her hand.

"You kissed me in the bathroom and assured me you were usually this forward before you pulled my pants down and dropped to your knees. I thought my world was exploding. When you made me come, I told you I loved you. You didn’t remember it, and I was grateful, because it was pathetic. But it was true. Even when I hated you, I really loved you. I loved the way your hair was gold but there were strands that were more red in the sunlight. I loved the way you argued with your friends about house-elves and goblins and their rights. I loved how frustrated you would get in Potions class. I loved the way I would find you in the library with your nose crinkled as you read book after book on Charms because it was your favorite subject. I loved how you helped your friends when they were worried about Quidditch trials, and I loved how you always bought Jackson sweets on the train because he could never afford it. I loved your smile, and I loved how hot your eyes would get when you were arguing with me. I loved how kind you were, how smart and passionate, and how relentless you were. I loved you then and I love you now.” Luna smiled at her, and to Evie’s horror, tears began spilling over her cheeks. Luna never cried.

“I love you so much, and that’s why I hate myself for hurting you.”

Soon Evie was crying too, and then they were both weeping, clutching onto one another even while the effects of the potion didn’t allow Luna to fall silent. The Veritaserum wore off after a couple hours, but Luna didn’t stop, truth still spilling from her lips. She told Evie about her mother, how she felt responsible for her death, told her how she’d struggled with alcoholism herself and overcame it though she still attended meetings every now and then, told her how she’d had a few odd jobs before settling with transporting dangerous creatures because it was exciting and she was able to travel that way, told her how she once transported a dragon with squabbs syndrome and fed it too many peppers and nearly killed it, told her how she regularly kicks ass gambling and hustling unsuspecting people in merciless games of Wizard Cards, told her how she only recently gathered the courage to visit the sea where she scattered her mother’s ashes, told her how when Evie cornered her in her boat after Frankie’s funeral, Luna had cried herself to sleep in the living room recliner.

“I’m sorry,” Evie admitted, tears rolling down her face. She swiped at them with her shirt sleeve, shame boiling in her gut. “I know I— I knew I kind of threw myself at you, after the funeral. I just, I felt like I was dying from the pain of it, from the guilt too. It wasn’t just that I wanted to be fucked, that I knew you could make me forget everything for a few hours. It was the guilt I would have after. I felt like—like I deserved to suffer.”

“I know.” Luna reached forward to brush the tears off Evie’s cheek with the pad of her thumb; Evie reached across to scrub Luna’s own tears away. “Do you remember what happened?” When Evie shrugged to indicate no, not really, Luna swallowed and glanced away. “I…I had some Polyjuice Potion saved up, from when I had to sneak into Amsterdam to steal the unicorns away
from poachers a couple years ago. I Apparated to Frankie’s pub and took some hair off his pillow.”

Evie watched her speak, rapt with attention, not sure how to feel about this so far.

“I thought it would help you, to get some closure. I told you what I was doing, you watched me transform. But you started crying harder and asked for me to come back. I couldn’t, I had to wait the hour out, but you told me, you told Frankie, that you were sorry and he deserved better. I just kind of sat there and brushed your hair. I wanted to help, but it felt like it made everything worse.”

“Because it wasn’t really him,” Evie murmured, bits of memory returning to her. “And you weren’t you either.”

Luna nodded. “When I turned back to myself, you, um…tried to get me to bed with you. I told you no, and you got so mad at me. You…said you hated me. Eventually I offered you a potion to help you sleep, and you did. I tucked you into my bed and I went into the living room to sleep on the recliner.”

“I don’t hate you,” whispered Evie, eyes focused on her own hands. She forced herself to lift her gaze, to meet Luna’s. “I’ve never hated you. Since Frankie died, I…I just hate myself. I feel responsible. I’m sorry, Luna.”

“Don’t,” said Luna at once. Her arms wrapped more tightly around Evie; Evie was still sat on her lap from when they had held each other as they cried. “Don’t apologize. You don’t need to.”

So for the first time in months, Evie didn’t. She just wound her own arms around Luna, and they held each other like a lifeline, feeling lighter and lighter as they wept out their pain.

Later, much later, when their butterbeer was room-temperature and their eyes were dry but red raw, Luna sighed and shut her eyes, screwing her face up as she rubbed her hands over it before dragging her fingers through the flyaway strands of pastel hair that had escaped her braid. “I did try, Evie. I tried. I tried to be a good guy.”

Evie sniffled, blinking bleary eyes at the firewhisky she nursed. “Maybe there are no good guys, you know?” Evie paused, jaw clenching as her eyes filled again. “Except Frankie. He was good.” She swallowed hard before saying, “I never deserved him.”

Luna was silent for a moment. She brought her bottle to her lips and took a long swill before quietly setting it back on the table. “Maybe not,” she admitted. Her eyes lifted level with Luna’s, tawny boring apologetically into emerald green. “But I never deserved you either.”

Evie stared back at her, expression unfathomable. The silence stretched on so long Luna didn’t expect an answer, and busied herself with taking another swig of butterbeer. The bottle was nearly empty when Evie eventually spoke in a soft voice with a hard edge to it, like a note of finality, “We deserved each other.”

They held eye contact, the air between them swelling with emotions, mostly sadness, but something else, too. Peace, perhaps. Acceptance.

Luna reached forward, gently resting her hand over Evie’s. Evie did not so much as flinch. She merely looked down at the movement, face blank and expressionless. “Listen,” began Luna in a low voice. “I’m not saying I expect forgiveness from you. I’m not asking for it. I’m not saying I even deserve it. But, I do want one thing. I want payback.” Evie’s eyes lifted, a glint in them that put the air back in Luna’s lungs. “I want to get back at the fucked up people that did this. That did all of this. So…I’m going to do it. I’m going to do what the Order asked.”
Evie looked back down at their hands. Luna stiffened slightly in surprise when Evie slowly turned her hand over, pressing her palm to Luna’s as she entwined their fingers. “I’m coming with you,” she said.

Luna studied her, studied the way her shoulders were back and her head was held high. “Are you sure?”

Evie didn’t nod. She didn’t need to. Her eyes were blazing in the way they always had when she was determined to do something. Still, she squeezed Luna’s hand and said, “I’ve never been more sure of anything in my life.”

* "・/✧・*" *

“Do you trust me?”

Clarke was panting, hips canting up to chase the wet fingers Lexa pulled away. “Do I—what?” she muttered, glazed eyes fluttering as she turned her head to look up at Lexa.

“Do you trust me?” Lexa repeated, leaning back to stand on the floor just beyond the edge of the bed.

Clarke eyed the way Lexa lifted her wand, curious but one hundred percent at ease. “Of course,” she said, a little puzzled.

“Obscuro,” murmured Lexa.

Lexa’s room on the Durmstrang ship abruptly turned dark as a heavy cloth blindfold magically formed over Clarke’s face. She reached up to tug it, peeking at Lexa from beneath it. “Oh we’re doing this again, are we?” she smirked.

Lexa’s returning smirk sent Clarke’s heart galloping faster, increased the heat stirring in her belly. “With a twist.” She pointed her wand at Clarke again. “Wingardium Leviosa! Incarcerous!” Clarke rose up into the air, floating as though the gravity had simply been turned off. Thick ropes started to wrap around Clarke’s body before Lexa swiveled her wand tip through the air, directing the ropes to Clarke’s hands and feet instead. They pulled her hands away, dropping the blindfold back over her eyes again so she was blind as the ropes snaked off to hook themselves on something, leaving Clarke trapped with her hands and legs spread.

“Remember the safe word?” whispered Lexa, lips suddenly at Clarke’s ear; she shivered at the next hit of heat that struck up her spine.

Still, Clarke giggled, because the word they had decided to use the first time they had sex like this was quite frankly ridiculous. “Acid pops.”

“Okay,” said Lexa, then she paused again, brow knitting. “Wait. Are you saying it now or were you just answering me?”

Clarke wished Lexa could see her rolling her eyes. “Answering you, dork.”

“Okay.” Lexa smirked. “Ready then?”
“God yes.”

It was probably the kinkiest sex Clarke had ever had, and that included the time with Pascal last year when they’d had a thing one night after a party and he’d used some very interesting spells on some very interesting parts of her. They’d hooked up a few times after that, until he started dating Trina. Trina was a freak so it was a perfect match, in Clarke’s opinion.

It was well over an hour later when Clarke and Lexa collapsed together, sweaty and exhausted. Lexa’s limbs were shaking from effort and orgasm, and she didn’t seem to mind that her wand rolled out of her grip to land on the floor, halting against the splits between the wooden planks.

“I can’t believe you just dropped your precious elder wand and don’t care,” Clarke huffed, laughter coloring the rasp of her voice.

Lexa’s abs were flexing with her panting and then her chuckles, and the heat in Clarke’s stomach was stirring again even though her body felt like a limp noodle she was trapped in right now.

“I’ll get it in a minute, when I can remember how to breathe again.”

Clarke groaned as she rolled herself over, the air hitting her sweaty back feeling like paradise. “How did you get an elder wand, anyway?”

Lexa jerked a shoulder in a lazy shrug. “The wand chooses the witch.”

“Yeah but there are only like, five elder wands left in the world, right?”

Lexa shrugged again. Clarke was pretty certain that was what her dad had told her. After the fall of Voldemort, for some reason all of the wandmakers had stopped making wands made of elder.

“I clearly didn’t do my job very well if you still have energy to talk,” teased Lexa.

Clarke grinned. “Nah, you didn’t. Maybe you should try again.”

Lexa plastered a scowl on her face while squinting one eye open. The eye was such a bright green against the red flush of her face, and her nostrils were flared and upper lip curling in her feigned annoyance, that Clarke laughed. “You look like the literal definition of ‘don’t poke a sleeping dragon’ right now.”

Lexa burst out laughing too, much harder than Clarke reckoned the joke warranted, but it made her own smile widen. She curled up against Lexa, the cool air against her heated skin making her shiver now. Lexa beckoned her fingers at the quilt that had been unceremoniously shoved down between the frame of the bed and the mattress, and her nonverbal accio draped it over them.

Clarke gave a heartfelt sigh of content, nuzzling her face into the crook of Lexa’s neck, and Lexa hummed out her own content, arms wrapping around Clarke.

They dozed for only a few minutes, before Clarke’s stomach grumbled and had them both opening their eyes.

“You’re hungry?” said Lexa incredulously. “It’s almost one in the morning.”

“I know, and I just ate,” said Clarke, causing Lexa’s eyes to widen slightly and a blush to color her cheeks before she pinched at Clarke’s sides to tickle her.
Of course, tickling and wrestling inevitably led to Lexa flipping them around and pinning Clarke’s wrists together on the pillow above her head. The heat channeling their gaze was enough to set the warmth all over her body, and as she gazed up at Lexa, she wondered how she became so lucky.

Just as Lexa dipped her head down to drag their lips together and sweep her tongue into Clarke’s mouth, footsteps suddenly sounded and the door was pushing open before they could so much as pull apart.

They both turned to see Indra standing there with an appalled expression that immediately morphed into wrath. Lexa yanked the blanket above them enough that they were bare from the thighs down, and the blanket was well over their heads, as though they were hiding. Clarke absently wondered if it were possible to die of humiliation.

“Ms. Griffin, I suggest you get the hell out of this room right this instant. Lexa, I need to speak to you. Now.”

“Okay,” said Lexa and Clarke weakly.

The door shut, indicating it was safe to come out. Clarke and Lexa poked their heads over the quilt, hair wild and sticking up from their heads.

Clarke swore. “That was awkward.” Then she gave a nervous giggle. “Also kind of funny, if you think about it.”

“It’s not funny,” insisted Lexa with a groan as the two of them got up and began getting dressed. “I wasn’t supposed to get distracted during this tournament. She’s going to be furious at me,” she added in a whisper, glancing at the door.

Fully dressed now, Clarke helped Lexa pull on her shirt and leaned forward to drop a kiss to the tip of her nose. “It’ll be okay. You’re just a kid, Lexa, she’ll understand. She’s been there before.”

“I doubt it,” Lexa said in an even softer whisper, glancing reproachfully at the direction Indra was, but she still pulled Clarke in to give her one last lingering kiss before she walked her to the door.

Clarke cringed and gave a weak smile and wave as she passed a murderous-looking Indra on her way out the door, along with a bemused Gustus. She hurried off the ship, pleased she didn’t see Anya or Lincoln, since she knew Anya, Raven, and Octavia would be a nightmare if they knew she’d done the walk of shame off the Durmstrang ship and in front of the Durmstrang headmaster no less.

By the time she made it back to the tower, she was reasonably exhausted. She changed into an overlarge t-shirt and climbed into bed; her knee had just hit the mattress when she paused after hearing a strange rattling noise.

She turned round, glancing at the windows first to make sure an owl hadn’t arrived for some bizarre late-night delivery. Then she frowned, eyes flitting across the room as the rattling sounded again, more insistently this time. She couldn’t see anything that could be the cause of the noise. It went quiet again and, figuring whatever it was stopped, started to climb into bed again.

She had just settled in when it sounded once more. She followed the sound to Raven’s dresser and rolled her eyes, wondering what the hell it could be if it was Raven’s, but when she
pulled it open (carefully quiet, considering Raven was snoring lightly right next to it), she saw nothing but an empty pensive bowl, her iPod, a few spare quills, and a sneakoscope. Nothing rattling.

A little annoyed, Clarke went to bed once more. This time no other sounds were made, and she finally fell asleep with a smile on lips that still tasted of Lexa.

She woke up what felt like only minutes later with her heart in her throat at the sounds of Raven’s screams.

The other girls in the dormitory’s panicked shouts filled the air. There was flashing of lights as various girls lit the torches or the tips of their wands. They all turned to see Raven writhing in her bed. The topmost draw of her nightstand was open, and the headphone cords of her iPod were attempting to strangle her.

“Holy fucking shit!” someone shouted.

Clarke leapt off the bed and hurried to Raven’s side, shoving her way though the other girls that had the same idea. Fox, whose bed was on the other side of Raven’s, was the first to reach her, and was wrestling with the cords, her fingers turning white digging between where the cord was tightening around Raven’s neck. Raven was still floundering, choking.

“Shit shit shit,” cursed Clarke, eyes wide and hand shaking as she pointed her wand at the Ipod. What was she supposed to do, she’d never even heard of anything like this happening! Raven’s face was turning blue and now Fox was wailing in pain at the cord cutting into her fingers.

“Anapneo!” cried Clarke, pointing the wand at Raven. Her neck seemed to extend and she took one long, strangled gasp before the cords tightened again, making her neck look twice as thin as it should. “Defodio!” The cords were pulled back again, but then snapped back even tighter. Fuck, fuck fuck. “Relashio! Impedimenta!” The cords seemed to be moving in slow motion now, but they were still tightening—

Clarke aimed her wand at the small rectangular iPod rather than the cords. “Flipulso!” The cords snapped out of the iPod as it went sailing away. To Clarke’s horror, the cords continued to strangulate Raven. Raven had fallen onto her back and her hands were scrabbling uselessly at the cords, eyes streaming and face blue.

“Expulso!” Clarke screamed, and the iPod exploded, but the cords still didn’t stop.

She didn’t want to risk a reducto and hurt Raven. She also didn’t want to risk a severing charm and cut into her, but there was no time and she had no choice.

“Diffindo!” The cord stopped its attack at once, split down the center at the same time a long cut down the front of Raven’s throat began beaming out holly-red blood. Fox did not so much as withdraw her aching, purple-bruised fingers, but immediately clapped her hand over the slice on Raven’s neck. Raven’s eyes bulged and rolled up; she went limp as she fainted.

“Fuck, open her mouth!” Clarke said, terrified as she clawed Fox’s hand back and glided her wand over the gash, hoarsely muttering “Vulnera Sanentur,” to close the wound. She touched the bloody tip of her wand to Raven’s temple next, stammered out “Rennervate!” and had her eyes seared by a brilliant flash of red light. She fell down onto the side of the bed in relief when Raven’s
eyes flew open and she drew in rattling, haggard breaths, coughing and choking but alive.

“What—the fuck?” gasped Raven in a voice so gravely it was hard to discern her words. “What—the fuck—happened—“

“Don’t ask us, it was your muggle rubbish!” said Fox angrily, clutching her wounded fingers to her chest. Her entire hand was covered in Raven’s blood.

“It wasn’t Raven’s fault. Calm down,” ordered Clarke, and Fox fell quiet, glancing at Raven once more with a strange mixture of murderous resentment and fretful concern.

Raven seemed to be in shock. Weak with relief and fractious with an irrational anger at Raven for frightening her so much, Clarke slapped aside Raven’s hands that were pressed to her neck. “Let me clean this to make sure I did it right.” She was sure she did, but she wanted something to do before she snapped at Raven, which wasn’t fair at all. “Tergeo,” she muttered, drying and cleaning the blood off Raven’s neck so she could see the angry red scar there amongst all the bruising. “Ferula,” she said, conjuring bandages to wrap around Raven’s neck. “You need to go to the Hospital Wing, Ray,” she said, standing up. “You should too, Fox.”

Jackson, who ran the Hospital Wing, did not seem particularly happy when they refused to tell him what happened. He warned them that he was obligated to report this to Kane and even that he would write to Clarke’s mother, but they held firm. They weren’t sure about the school’s stance on muggle technology, but just in case, they didn’t want to get Raven expelled or something.

Clarke remained at Raven’s bedside while some of the other girls who had came with them from the dorm said their goodbyes and headed back to Ravenclaw tower. Fox was standing beside her, fingers easily healed.

“I don’t understand,” croaked Raven, and she looked so confused and hurt over the larger healing bandages Jackson had put on her that some of Clarke’s irrational anger abated.

“Your iPod attacked you,” said Clarke, putting a comforting hand on Raven’s leg. “Maybe someone cursed it. Maybe Cage—“

“No one cursed it,” said Fox crossly; even though her hands were healed, she still clutched them together. “That’s what happens when you enchant muggle technology.”

Clarke and Raven both stared at her. “Really?” said Clarke.

“How—do you—know?” rasped Raven, frowning.

“It’s in the second revision of Hogwarts, A History! There’s a mad car that still drives around in the Forbidden Forest! Why do you think we have a Misuse of Muggle Artefacts office!” she snapped, eyes flashing. “That’s what happens when muggle technology is enchanted. It turns sentient!”

Raven’s eyes widened, and if there was any color left in her face at all, it drained.

Of course, Raven was Raven, so she had to snap an insult at Fox. And Fox was Fox, so she had to storm away in dramatic fashion. That left Clarke sitting on the bed, her pulse finally starting to return to normal, exasperated over Raven and Fox, and body still aching from sex.

She sacrificed her own sanity by telling Raven about being caught by Indra and her consequential walk of shame, all to make Raven laugh. Still, Raven fell asleep with a troubled expression on her face, and Clarke fell asleep curled up beside her, completely forgetting the reason
Indra had walked in on them in the first place.

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In the wake of Clarke’s exit, Lexa stood with a carefully impassive face as Indra walked in glaring.

“So much for no distractions during the tournament.” She stood in the center of Lexa’s room that smelled overwhelmingly of sex, with her arms crossed beneath her chest. Gustus trailed in after her, and had the decency to look a bit sorry for Lexa, at least.

Lexa said nothing in response, just stood with her hands clasped behind her back. As Indra began to scold her, Lexa tried not to let her bitterness become obvious. She was guilty and embarrassed, but it was because Indra had caught her, not because of Clarke. Never Clarke.

Eventually Gustus reached forward to place a hand on Indra’s shoulder, and Indra gave an aggravated huff of breath before falling silent. Lexa waited, wondering why they needed her anyway.

“It is time,” Indra finally said.

Lexa waited expectantly. When they said nothing, she prompted, “Time for what?”

Indra sighed. “Gustus, please bring it out.”

Lexa’s eyes widened in understanding and fear immediately seized her heart as Gustus left and returned with a pensive. Lexa automatically took a step back, her heart racing.

“What is it?” she asks at once. Indra and Gustus do not answer. “What did I forget?” she persisted, too panicked to be ashamed of the obvious apprehension in her voice.

“You did what you had to do,” said Indra gruffly. “And we are proud of you, Lexa. Even if you do allow yourself distractions.”

Clarke is not a distraction, she thought, but held her tongue. She couldn’t tear her eyes away from the pensive, especially when Gustus pulled out the vial from his cloak pocket and poured the entire silvery, glowing contents into the bowl.

Indra gestured for Lexa to approach the pensive, her own heart beating painfully fast for the poor girl. As if it weren’t bad enough for the situation they were in, now she’d allowed herself to become distracted with the one girl above all that she shouldn’t.

Lexa bent down and a bright light flashed as she entered the memories.

Beside her, Gustus sighed. “I wish things were different,” he mused.

“As do I,” said Indra heavily. They both watched as Lexa’s body twitched, as the hands framing the bowl her head was lowered in trembled and gripped it tightly enough that her knuckles shone white.

It took only ten minutes before Lexa suddenly lifted her head out and staggered back with a wild gasp. She fell to her knees and Indra and Gustus rushed forward but halted in their tracks when
Lexa lifted a hand to cease them.

They waited, unnerved, for Lexa to finally lift her chin up. Indra’s heart beat with a dull, resounding ache when they saw that tears were falling down Lexa’s face. Lexa never cried, least of all in front of others. Even when she was eleven and her parents were spitting her, she did not cry. And now she was freely weeping, breath escaping her lips in stuttering sobs. Indra and Gustus exchanged a glance, unsure what exactly to do.

Gustus was the one to move. He approached Lexa slowly and dropped down to one knee, embracing her. It lasted about two seconds before Lexa gently pushed him away.

“I need a moment. Alone.”

Indra looked at Gustus again, before they both nodded. They left the room, softly shutting the door behind them, and stood in the hallway, unsettled.

All at once, Indra is angry. Angry Lexa allowed herself the vulnerability of distraction. She wouldn’t be so hurt if she hadn’t allowed herself to grow attached.

Indra did not agree with the philosophy of the leader of the Order very often, but in this current situation, he had a point. Love could be a weakness here, and it was.

After a few minutes, an impassive Lexa with a clean face, aside from her reddened, puffy eyes, pulled the door open. Indra and Gustus stepped inside the room and turned, studying her as she closed the door and then stood before them, until she spoke.

“Where is Titus?”

“He has gone into hiding,” answered Indra.

Lexa nodded, as though she expected that. She must have, considering how he had suggested her decision to remove her memories at the start of the year. Lexa lapses into silence.

“You know you must not tell Clarke of any of this,” warned Indra, guilt plucking at her at the way Lexa’s expression falters at the name.

“I know,” Lexa said quietly. But after another moment, her expression crumples, and tears overflow again. She allows Gustus to place an arm of comfort around her. Indra just stands there; she’s never been very good at showing emotions. It was something she and Lexa had in common. “She’s going to hate me,” she whispered, face contorted in misery, and Indra yet again, for what felt like the millionth time that year, wished that things were simpler.

“It’s safer this way,” said Indra; beside Lexa, Gustus nodded in agreement.

“I know,” agreed Lexa in a small voice, though she was obviously heartbroken.

“If she was in your position, she would do the same,” said Indra, hoping her voice was gentle. Lexa just nodded distractedly, eyes unfocused and tears still falling.

“Tomorrow marks one month until the third task. Jamie Potter and Diana Sydney will be informing you of what the final task involves. Try to act normal.”

Gustus shot her a reproving glance for her lack of sensitivity, but Indra had to stay focused on the mission. Indra did feel for Lexa’s pain, she did—but this was about the entire Wizarding community. The entire world.
They had to protect their people.

“Can you do that, Lexa?” asked Indra carefully, studying Lexa intently.

Lexus took in a deep breath, closing her eyes. She exhaled and opened them. She seemed weary, and far older than she was as she lifted her chin and said in a tired but clear voice, “Yes. My people come first.”

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One month later, the morning of the third and final task found Clarke and Lexa sat in the Great Hall for breakfast, surrounded by a mixture of Hogwarts and Durmstrang (and the lone Beauxbatons Maya) students. Everyone was chattering excitedly, but Clarke and Lexa were relatively quiet, picking at their food. For Clarke, this was to be expected; she generally grew nervous even before Quidditch games, let alone huge tasks in front of the entire school and world, which was why she was also distracting herself with an early game of Wizard’s Chess with Wells, who sat across from her. But Lexa was never nervous, and she had hardly touched her food.

“Hey,” said Clarke, offering her a bite of her buttered toast. Lexa flashed her a small, grateful smile and took a bite. They both rolled their eyes when Jasper and Miller started winding them up about how disgustingly cute they were.

“So what if tonight ends in you guys like, locked in a battle to the death against each other for the cup?” asked Jasper with a huge, taunting grin. “How’s that going to go?”

“Lexa will kick my ass and take the cup,” said Clarke airily, causing Jasper, Miller, Bellamy, and Octavia to groan. She nudged her knight on the checkered board, sticking her tongue out at Wells when he arched a brow in response to the risky move.

“Clarke, you can’t just roll over and give up!” lamented Octavia. “You’re from fucking Hogwarts, man, you gotta rep our school. At least go down fighting.”

“I guess I could just take off my clothes and seduce her,” said Clarke in amusement, grinning in response to Lexa’s eye-roll and smirk.

“Please do,” came a snide voice from the table next to them.

“Shut up, Murphy,” most of the table recited without even having to look behind to see him.

He snickered, but shut up.

In all honesty, Clarke was just praying nothing of the sort would happen tonight. The judges had informed them a month in advance that the final task would involve a labyrinth filled with obstacles and spells to overcome, and that they would need to take the items they won in the second task with them. The three champions would start from different entrances and make their way toward the center where the Triwizard Cup was waiting and the first to touch it was the winner of the tournament.

Clarke and Lexa had spent the past month practicing spells of all sorts, periodically helped by their friends (except Raven, who quit and decided to merely watch instead when Lexa hit her with a jelly-legged curse so powerful it shook Raven’s brace off her leg. Lexa had apologized profusely and
they were perfectly fine, but it did put Raven off practicing for a time).

The week after the iPod attack, Raven had gathered all of the enchanted muggle technology she’d given to various friends and destroyed it. Clarke and Lexa were a little sad to see the iPad filled with music and videos go, but it was understandable. Raven had spent days in the library researching into it, and if her cold rebuke of Fox was anything to go by, it seemed Fox had been right. She admitted to Clarke when they were alone in the dormitory that Arthur Weasley had wrote a book on enchanting muggle technology, and even directly stated to “Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can’t see where it keeps its brain.” Still, Raven had healed nicely and the scar on her neck was no longer even visible. Anya had assured her of her disappointment, insisting scars were sexy.

Speak of the devil, Clarke thought wryly as Anya stolled into the Great Hall, her hair a mess and...

“Anya, is your cloak on inside out?” asked Lexa, frowning.

Anya ignored her, stating instead rather breathlessly, “I know I’m late, but I was doing stuff —“

Raven pranced in a second later, as equally disheveled as Anya, with a smug grin overtaking her face. “I’m stuff.”

The table groaned and laughed and Anya didn’t even blush, just rolled her eyes, as she and Raven squished into their place at the crowded table.

“Is there any point in time where you two aren’t banging?” said Clarke in amusement, arching a brow. Wells took her knight and she pursed her lips, narrowing her eyes.

“You’re one to talk,” said Anya bluntly. “At least we haven’t had Indra walk in on us.”

“Raven!” Clarke chastised, scowling at the way Raven cackled.

Raven lifted her palms in surrender, shrugging. “Hey, it’s not my problem if you dummies can’t find another place to bang.”

Truthfully, they had, but then Clarke offered to walk Lexa to the ship, and one thing led to another…

“There are some really good broom closets around,” said Anya, nodding sagely.

Raven’s eyes popped open wider in excitement. “Yeah, we found this crazy place once when we were drunk, it was after the last party, actually! It was a broom closet but get this, it had a futon. But we were so drunk and we’ve never been able to find it again,” she said sadly.

Clarke exchanges a glance with Lexa and they promptly turn to hide their smiles at the fact that Raven and Anya had clearly accidentally stumbled upon the Room of Requirement. Clarke was glad they hadn’t been able to find it again. It felt like the room belonged to she and Lexa, as silly as that was.

“Ha, Lexa, check this out,” said Octavia, tongue between her teeth in a grin as she took the Daily Prophet Lincoln had been reading out of his hands it leaned across the table, avoiding swinging her hair into oatmeal, to hand it to Lexa.

Lexa spread the paper out over the table, gratefully pushing back her plate of untouched eggs
and bacon. Pike had written an article over all the pieces Gideon Potter had done thus far about the tournament. He described the way Lexa had fought off the Acromantulas and mutated gorilla in pathetic lines such as “a gorgeous ballet of death.”

“What the fuck, who pays him to write shit like that?” asked Raven in disgust, having peered over Lexa’s shoulder to read along with them.

Clarke shook her head in disgust, then outright scowled when Wells check-mated her. The chess piece knocked her own into a nearby glass of milk, and the little piece struggled to swim and stay afloat. Clarke quickly reached in to scoop it out, and they watched it cough and splutter and shake tiny fists at them. Clarke and Wells both stared at one another, their hands pressed to their mouths and a challenge in their eyes for who would break first. Clarke’s shoulders shook with the effort not to collapse into laughter.

Clarke spent the day with Lexa and the rest of their friends, laughing and making jokes funny enough to even tug forth a smile from Lexa’s face. She had been rather withdrawn ever since the day the judges told them what the task would involve. Clarke chalked it up to nerves since this was the final, last chance at becoming champion, but she couldn’t help but to feel a strange sense of unease. Part of her felt it was fear that everything would soon be changing, because once the tournament was over, the school year would finish and they would be graduating and then who knew which directions their lives would take them in? Clarke wanted to go into training to become a Healer, Lexa wanted to join the aurors, and above all Clarke was just worrying over how to go about asking Lexa to become something more serious with her. She wasn’t going to ask before the end of the tournament because she was going to respect Lexa’s wishes, Lexa hadn’t wanted a distraction and while it could be argued that casual, frequent sex with a best friend could certainly be labeled as one, an actual serious relationship with a girlfriend couldn’t be denied as one. So, after. She would ask her after.

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Their friends wished them good luck as they headed toward the stadiums, and Clarke and Lexa grabbed their knapsacks they’d won from the second task and headed for the Champions’ tent that was set up not too far from the gamekeeper’s hut. Cage looked as smug and cocky as ever, lounging in one of the chairs, and Clarke and Lexa flatly ignored him and his attempts to get in their heads and rile them up. Lexa looked more and more nervous, and Clarke was growing more and more concerned for her. She was currently sitting on one of the benches, actually chewing on her nails, answering Clarke’s questions with short, distracted answers.

Diana Sydney and Jamie Potter arrived to take them down to the Quidditch Pitch to start the task, and Lexa shot to her feet. Cage gave her an arrogant, superior glance as he sauntered past them.

“We’ll be there in just one second,” Clarke told Jamie, who nodded and ducked out of the flaps, leaving Clarke and Lexa standing alone in the center of the small tent.

Clarke slanted forward to kiss Lexa, a soft press of warm lips. “Good luck,” she said, leaning back; her smile faded a little at the really disconcerting, unfamiliar display of nerves on Lexa’s face. Her green eyes seemed to swallow her pale face whole. There was the slightest tremble to her lower lip before she inclined her head to press another gentle kiss to Clarke’s again; she could feel the tremble, could even feel it down her whole body when her hand shot out to clutch at Lexa’s hip.
The distant whistle of the pitch blew outside, signaling they were needed, but it went unnoticed. “What’s the matter?” she whispered, wide eyes holding Lexa’s gaze, brow creasing in concern. She’d never seen Lexa like this before. She’d been relatively cool and collected before the other two tasks. When Lexa didn’t answer, she squeezed her hip before reaching up to brush the strands of hair that had fallen out of her braids from her face, taking care not to poke her with her wand. Lexa didn’t reply, only continued to stare at Clarke with fear shimmering in green orbs. “Baby?” prompted Clarke, ignoring the term of endearment that had just fallen from her lips without warning. She frowned, shaking Lexa slightly, enough that she swayed where she stood. “Lexa.”

Without warning, Lexa crashed their lips together. Clarke’s whimper of alarm was muffled against Lexa’s mouth; she pulled back at once, but Clarke clutched her by her uniform, tugging her close again.

The shrill whistle pierced the small bubble of comfort the tent provided, but they shrugged it off, Lexa’s hands running up and down the length of Clarke’s body and Clarke’s hands getting lost in Lexa’s wild braids.

The whistle sounded a third time, followed by the stomping of approaching feet. “Hey!” hissed a voice; Jamie Potter poked her head into the tent just as Clarke and Lexa broke apart, breathless and flushed. Jamie deadpanned them, bemused.

“Save it for another time, one of you have a tournament to win.”

Clarke bit the inside of her cheek not to smile because Jamie clearly didn’t want Cage to win, but she still gave Lexa a quick peck on the cheek before she and Lexa picked up their knapsacks and followed Jamie out of the tent to where Diana Sydney and Cage were looking particularly annoyed and impatient waiting for them.

The three champions traipsed down the hillside, flanked by Jamie and Diana. Clarke’s heart was racing and her grip on her wand was sweaty; her free hand itched to close the space between she and Lexa, to take her hand or perhaps just stroke her fingertips across the curve of her cheek, the sharp angle of her jaw. God, she wanted to. She really, really wanted to, and not just for herself. Lexa had seemed so nervous in the tent, but now that she was in the presence of others she had rearranged her face into its typical cool indifference. She was calm and composed as they crossed the grounds, walked up the hill, and finally faced the Quidditch pitch, where huge, towering hedges lined the edges of the field. Clarke frowned as she realized she could not see any openings to enter through.

The stands were full and the sounds of hundreds of people chattering excitedly and hurrying to get their seats filled the air. Clarke spotted Raven and Octavia waving frantically at her and she waved back, forcing her nervous expression to rearrange itself into a pleasant smile.

The sky was darkening, the first stars beginning to twinkle. Clarke’s insides were squirming as they came to a stop near a stage set up between the pitch and the stadium; floating far above it was the same huge cube that would display the live-action videos of the tournament. Diana Sydney headed over to the stage without another word, but Jamie paused to quickly whisper to the Champions, “We’re going to do a little speech and then you’ll walk to your places. They want to take pictures of you walking, which is why you’re rather far away,” she added apologetically before giving them a tight smile and hurrying away toward the stage.

Professors Sinclair, Vera, and Nygel were already patrolling the maze; Jamie had already informed them that if they ever needed help, to just send up red sparks. Clarke frowned; three professors for three champions didn’t seem like enough. Then she chastised herself for being so anxious and concentrated on the magically amplified voice now reverberating out from the Minister
of Magic himself from where he stood on the stage flanked by Diana Sydney, Jamie Potter, and the three headmasters.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome, welcome. Welcome to the final task of the Triwizard Tournament! As of now, we have Ms. Lexa Woods of Durmstrang Institute in first place, Ms. Clarke Griffin of Hogwarts School in second place, and Mr. Cage Wallace of Beauxbatons Academy in third!” The applause and cheers for Lexa and Clarke had been quite loud, while in comparison the applause from Cage seemed subdued, probably due to only the Beauxbatons clapping for him.

“This year has been one of the most successful tournaments in history, more papers being sold than ever due to continued interest in the tournament. Our judges are Headmaster Marcus Kane of Hogwarts, Headmistress Adina Indra of Durmstrang, Headmaster Dante Wallace of Beauxbatons, Senior Undersecretary Diana Sydney, and Head of the Auror Department Jamie Potter! We’ve also had great help from all the professors, from Luna Rivers and her shipmates in transporting the tournament creatures, from Evie and Gideon Potter for their fantastic reporting on the tournament, and from all the sponsors who made this possible. They’ve worked hard this year alongside myself in promoting and taking care of this tournament. Let’s give them a round of applause!”

The thunderous cheering sent the nearby birds skittering up out of the trees, and Clarke felt more nervous as ever, knowing they were moments away from the start of the task.

“Right now, we’re going to lead the Champions to their starting points. Despite the order of place, they will all be starting from an equal distance from the Triwizard Cup.” At the mention of the cup, explosive cheers sounded again, and Jaha smiled. “Whoever is first to reach the cup is the winner of this task. Afterwards, the judges will convene to tally points and make a decision on the winner of the tournament.”

So close.

This was so close to being finished.

As Clarke was herded off the pitch by Diana Sydney, she walked in a daze, thinking of the past year. Maybe being in this tournament wasn’t as bad as she thought it would be. She’d been able to meet Lexa this way, at least, and the tournament hadn’t been as much of a burden on her mother as she’d expected, and it had actually proven to be a relieving distraction to Clarke. What if she even had a chance of winning it?

But no, it was probably silly to imagine that. Lexa had been training for this like a maniac, and if anyone deserved to win, it was her.

She twisted back to see Cage being walked another direction, back toward the castle, by Kane, and Lexa being led the opposite direction by Jamie. Lexa had turned back to look for her at the same time. Clarke smiled and lifted a hand; Lexa’s smile seemed a little forced, but she still waved back before facing forward again.

“Heere we are,” said Diana in a suspiciously airy voice. She always sounded so fake. Clarke never liked her, even before all the trouble with her father going to Azkaban. She pointed Clarke toward a strange round stone and indicated for her to stand on it. Diana’s smile was as sickly as poisoned honey as she wiggled her fingers in a wave. “Good luck.”

The other Champions must have reached wherever they were supposed to, because there was a sudden roaring applause as the final whistle blew, and the stone Clarke stood on began to shake.

The stone began to descend and Clarke tried desperately to calm her breathing down as she
was enveloped in the darkness of a tunnel, sinking far below ground. After a few minutes, she
descended into a cavernous room filled with the flickering light of torches in sconces on the wall, and
she blew out a breath of relief, glancing back up at the small opening above her that was the tunnel
leading to the surface. Even as she looked up at it, darkness pulled over the distant light at the top as
the entrance was closed. The ground beneath her was made up of dirt rather than stone, though the
walls looked to be nothing but rock.

Still tightly gripping her wand in her sweaty hand, Clarke took a look at her surroundings.
The lack of entrances in the hedges on the pitch made sense now. Clearly this was some sort of
underground maze and dungeon, and if Clarke was correct, there would be another portal waiting at
the other end to take them up to the labyrinth on the surface.

Hitching her knapsack higher on her shoulder, she set off down the narrow tunnel lit by more
torches, holding her wand aloft and lit up with *lumos* just in case.

To her surprise, there were no obstacles in her way as she walked the long trek until finally
she reached another cavern-like room. The tunnel behind her closed off the moment she stepped into
it and she shivered, grateful she didn’t linger on the threshold.

There was not much in this room either, save for a large wooden trunk pushed up against the
wall to her right, and a small wooden trunk on her left. There was not even a door leading out of the
room. Unnerved, Clarke cautiously crossed the room, peering over the walls for a hidden door. She
cast a few spells, but there was nothing there. Finally, she turned to look at the trunks.

Was she supposed to pick one? What if she got it wrong? There were strange carved spirals
on the front of the large chest complete with five smaller circles placed at odd places around it, four
at the top and one at the bottom. Clarke waved her wand over them, tried tentatively pushing her
fingers into the holes more than slightly concerned that it was a trick going to take her fingers off.

God knows she needed those.

Her fears were for nothing, though, because absolutely nothing happened.

She went to look at the other chest that was roughly a foot in length and width. There was
nothing on it, no strange circles and not even any indentation to show it could open.

Clarke sat back on her haunches, forehead puckered. Her legs eventually ached, so she sat—
and hurt her tailbone on the knapsack hanging low on her back.

*The knapsack.*

She quickly shrugged it off and pulled it over, yanking the drawstrings to open it and dig a
hand in. She took out the only thing in it: the strange claw she’d received during the second task.

She turned it over in her hand, raking her gaze over it. She knew Lexa’s was silver rather
than gold from when they had observed them together and wondered what their use could possibly
be. They both had odd little spirals in the palm, both had four claws up top and one on the bottom
like a dewclaw—

Clarke froze. *Wait.*

She crossed back to the large chest again and fit the claw over the holes. It lined up perfectly.
She pushed in.

There was an almost melodic whirring noise before the lid to the trunk flew open. Clarke
took the claw when it popped out, clutching it in her right hand while she used her left to point her wand carefully in the trunk, suspecting a trap. The only thing inside it was a vaguely familiar velvety case with a long, thin indentation.

Clarke’s eyes widened when she realized why it looked familiar. It looked like a wand case.

*Oh fuck no.* Clarke stood up, shaking her head. *Nope. Nuh uh.*

There was no fucking way she was letting go of her wand.

She stalked around the cavern for another ten minutes or so, searching for another way, before she finally came to a conclusion. She had no choice, she had to place her wand in there, otherwise she was trapped in here.

So in spite of every gut instinct telling her not to relinquish her only weapon, Clarke placed her wand in the indention—perfect fit—and held her breath.

The melodic whirring returned as the velvety case with her wand suddenly shot into the wall and the trunk slapped close before Clarke could so much as grab for it. There was a loud rumbling as the wall directly opposite the way she came in lowered, revealing another passageway. Her heart was in her throat as another quieter, higher-pitched whirring sounded behind her. She spun around to see the smaller trunk pop open.

She approached it cautiously and frowned when she spotted another velvety case, but this time there was something else in it—something she honestly *never* expected to see.

It looked like a muggle gun. Clarke’s eyes were wide as she stared down at the little black mechanism. She had seen these in the few muggle films she watched with Wells, and had read about them in several muggle papers on holidays.

She gingerly lifted it out of the case. She closed her hand around the cold metal, her heart thumping as though in her palm as she gently squeezed the handle and traced a finger along the ridge of the trigger. This was crazy. She wondered what Wells would say if he were here. He would probably stand with his legs wide apart, eyes narrowed and fingers wiggling at his sides, saying, “*Draw!*” just like they did in the Western film they watched. He had really liked that one.

The only problem was, what was she supposed to do with this? Surely they didn’t give her muggle technology to fight magical creatures? These guns were the equivalent of the Unforgivable Killing Curse. Unless it was…

Clarke narrowed her eyes, squinting suspiciously at the thing. Unless it was enchanted.

Heart racing and hand trembling, she closed her eyes and turned her head the other way, lifting the gun and pointing it toward the ground on the other side of the cave. She pulled the trigger, and a blast of cold air blew her hair back from her sweaty face. Surprised, she turned to look. There were shards of ice stuck into the floor.

*Ohh, it was enchanted!*

A little giddy with relief and excitement, Clarke pulled the trigger again, holding the gun with both hands this time. A stream of water splattered the floor. She pulled again and it was a jolt of electricity that left a small burn mark on the wall. Another trigger and it was a jet of fire. Clarke went through it a few more times, making sure it was the same cycle every time. Ice, water, electricity, fire.

Well, now she at least had a weapon, since her wand was gone. She only hoped there wasn’t
a limited amount of ammo. She bent down to gather the claw, stuck it in her knapsack again before heading out the next tunnel, holding the enchanted gun before her.

She ran into a few doxies that attacked her on site; she managed to freeze them to the wall using the ice shot, and she moved on with them still angrily chittering at her and brandishing miniscule fists.

She walked on for a few minutes, the winding tunnel widening and the ceiling getting higher and higher, before she rounded a corner and finally came to another door. It was massive, with the same odd markings on it that the trunk had had. Clarke pulled her knapsack on, feeling more confident now. She pushed it into the door; this time the mechanical whirring was deeper and more jarring. As the door lifted up, taking the claw with it, Clarke caught a brief glimpse of an absolutely gigantic room before a mass of glittery black something overtook her vision.

Clarke gasped, collapsing against the wall as she took in the sight of a massive dragon. So that was what the claw opening the doors was; it was modeled after a dragon claw. The dragon in the chamber had black scales that looked rough to the touch and higher, sharper ridges lining its back. It didn’t seem to have noticed Clarke was there; it must have looked over at her door opening and lost interest when no one came out.

She spotted the opening near the right. Another tunnel. Clearly the exit she was supposed to reach, assuming she could get past a fucking dragon, without a wand.

She backed up for a moment, thinking hard. From her classes she knew that dragons had sensitive underbellies and sensitive eyes. If she had a wand, that would be helpful information, but all she had was enchanted shit. That’s what it felt like, anyway.

Maybe she could sneak past it. It hadn’t noticed she was there, after all. Holding her breath and wishing she could quiet her pounding heart, she began to inch her way out, keeping alongside the wall as she slowly crept around toward the other tunnel.

The dragon clearly knew she was there, perhaps smelling her, because it was rearing its long neck back and hissing, exposing fangs that must be as long as Clarke’s forearm. It had brilliant purple eyes that focused on Clarke and seemed almost angry. Clarke winced. Fuck.

She lunged to the side just in time. A blast of fire hit the wall where she’d been standing, and even from a few feet away her skin warmed with the heat of it. She sprinted toward the door, clutching the enchanted gun as though her life depended on it (which it kind of did right now). Just as she grew near the exit, the other end of the dragon came at her. It was a massive arrow-shaped spike, and she only just managed to duck under it, and that was only because in her haste to turn, she’d slipped and fell. She watched as though in slow motion as a chunk of blonde hair went drifting down to land on the ground right before her nose. Holy shit. She scrambled up and made it to the tunnel she’d come in through, turning the corner so the fire hit the wall just in time.

She gasped for breath, squeezing her eyes shut and leaning against the wall for support. Fuck. Had she really been thinking only less than twenty minutes ago that this tournament wasn’t that bad of an idea?

Furious squeals reached her ears; Clarke’s eyes flew open and her grip tightened on the enchanted gun. The doxies had clearly freed themselves from the ice, and were coming at her angrier than ever, claws extended.

“Oh, great.”
Octavia screamed loudly enough in Lincoln’s ear that he actually flinched as Clarke narrowly avoided the wrath of the dragon and now faced off with several angry doxies.

“Oh my God,” breathed Octavia, gripping Lincoln’s shirt for support, eyed glued to the screen. “That is so scary, but awesome. What the fuck kind of dragon is that anyway?”

“That’s a Hebridean Black,” spoke up Bellamy from where he sat a row down with an arm wrapped around Gina’s shoulders. “They’re native of Great Britain, too.”

“Look, it’s Lexa!” screamed Octavia now.

Lexa had entered through her tunnel. Clarke had been the first to reach the tunnel; it had taken Lexa long to get the hang of her weapon, and Cage had basically wasted time torturing doxies with his weapon.

The crowd held their breath as Lexa walked out into the cavern and looked up at the dragon. The dragon looked down at her.

And nothing happened.

“What the fuck?” Octavia repeated. “What kind of nonverbal magic was that? Don’t you need a wand anyway?” Most of the crowd was expressing similar expressions of confusion as Lexa simply walked through the cave, pausing briefly in front of the blonde hair on the ground right before the tunnel. Lexa probably assumed Clarke had made it out alright. She walked on, entering the next tunnel.

Lincoln and Anya exchanged a smile.

The crowd didn’t have enough time to ponder though, because now Cage was entering the cave. People roared in approval when the dragon attacked him, almost hitting him several times. When Cage managed to angle beneath the dragon enough to hit it with the syringe and push, draining the red liquid into it.

The dragon howled, fire streaming from its jaws up at the ceiling, and then faded abruptly as the dragon quieted, suddenly docile.

Everyone waited with bated breath as Clarke, finally having taken care of the doxies, came back into the room and spotted Cage standing beside the dragon. Cage’s scarred lip curled upward in a smirk as he lifted a hand and pointed at Clarke.

“What are you doing?” asked Clarke, backing up, alarmed as the dragon began growling and advancing on her.

“It takes its orders from me now,” he called out.

Most of the Hogwarts and even Durmstrang (everybody hated Cage Wallace) booed as Cage slipped out of the exit while the dragon lunged at Clarke. Octavia clutched at Lincoln, face practically petrified as she watched one of her best friends running and ducking a giant fire-breathing dragon’s attacks. She shot ice at its tail and managed to pin it down, but the dragon quickly ripped it
free. She shot water into the dragon’s mouth, but it merely allowed it to create a hot steam that was still certain to burn. Finally, she shot electricity into its eyes, and the dragon was in enough agony that Clarke took advantage of its distraction and managed to make it out the tunnel, and everyone gave a sigh of relief.

* * /✧/ * *

Clarke moved forward through the underground tunnels, beyond grateful to leave the dragon behind. She was still trembling, and felt slightly sick from the adrenaline still coursing through her system, and her head still felt clouded with fury over what Cage had done.

Clearly they all had different weapons, because whatever Cage had was in a hypodermic needle and it seemed to function similar to the Imperius curse, though Clarke assumed it only worked on creatures, since if it worked on humans, that would be highly unethical and illegal…

She wondered how Lexa was doing, if she had already reached the surface maze yet. Lexa had probably handled the dragon with ease, knowing her. Wonder what her weapon was.

Apart from dealing with a frustrating amount of dead ends, and winding tunnels that led every which way (she was beyond frustrated she didn’t have her wand to use a Four Points spell), Clarke didn’t have too much trouble with the obstacles she ran into. There were a few imps she dealt with easily by shocking them, a couple crocettas she tried freezing until they bit through the ice, but managed to chase off with fire instead. She gained some nasty scrapes in her calf when she stumbled upon a gulon (she only knew what the fuck that was because of Bellamy), but she made quick work of it with some fire. There was one point where she was horrified to see a clusterfuck of creatures charging toward her. Doxies, gulons, crocettas, imps, howlers, and even a karakadon. Fury cours ed through Clarke when she spotted Cage standing behind them all, gloatingly brandishing his syringe of Red and sneering. Clarke barely managed to get away, and only did so by shooting water and then electricity, effectively shocking all the creatures at once. Cage was fuming, but disappeared into another tunnel before the ice Clarke shot at him could hit him in his stupid head.

Finally, after what felt like the fiftieth tunnel of the night, Clarke could see a set of stairs in the distance. She started toward it, relieved that she was that much closer to the surface and finishing this damn tournament once and for all.

Just as she reached the first step, however, someone bodily tackles her to the ground.

It was Cage. Of course it was.

“Get the fuck off me!” she shouted, twisting underneath him in an effort to break free. His hot breath was on her neck and it was making her nauseous. She managed to get her empty hand free and balled it into a fist, slamming it into Cage’s jaw.

“Argh!” He rolled off her and she helped him on his way with a swift kick to his balls. “Fuck!” he screamed.

Clarke scrambled up, panting, and aimed the gun at the ground a fair distance away, quickly clicking through electricity and fire before she aimed the gun at Cage’s legs and pulled the trigger. The ice trapped him to the ground and he screamed louder still, but not as loudly as he did when Clarke kicked him hard in the balls again.
She left him there, hurrying up the steps, but to her disappointment they didn’t lead to the surface, but into yet room that had several different tunnels to choose from. She rushed down them, heart still hammering from Cage attacking. Fuck, was that even legal? Why the hell weren’t the professors patrolling getting onto him for that, disqualifying him? Or perhaps this was just part of the tournament; seeing who turned on one another.

Her path was eerily clear as she crept on, growing more and more desperate to reach the surface. Finally, finally—she reached a large opening with another pair of stairs, these wide and extending up past where she could see, where lights were flickering. This must be the exit.

She paused for a moment since no creatures were around, allowing herself to double over and catch her breath. She glanced at her father’s watch on her wrist; she’d already been down in the tunnels for almost an hour, and it had probably been nearly fifteen since she’d trapped Cage in ice… he was probably free from it now…

Shit. She needed to move, before he showed up aga—

She jumped as something sharp pressed painfully into her neck. Cage’s hot breath was on her cheek again, his smug chuckling in her ear.

“You don’t have to do this,” whispered Clarke; Cage’s other arm was wrapped around her, holding her firmly in place.

“I know I don’t. But I want to.” He pressed the needle harder against her neck, tightening the grip his other arm held. She felt like she could choke just from this. “Just imagine all the things I can make you do…the things I can watch you do…"

She clenched her teeth together, spitting the words out between them, “Let me go.”

“Oh I will. But first…” He released the hold his free arm had, pointing up toward the staircase. “Say goodbye to your dreams of winning the cup.”

Clarke squeezed her eyes shut, waiting for the pressure of the needle pumping the red potion into her veins. It never did. Instead, Cage’s curdled scream nearly busted her eardrum as his hold on her loosened at once; Clarke’s eyes flew open to see a small dagger stuck in the wrist of the hand he had been pointing up the staircase with.

He staggered back and Clarke turned to see him dropping the red before her vision was overtaken by a certain Durmstrang girl with black war paint nearly as fierce as the savage way she bared her teeth as she came flying at Cage. There was a sickening crunch of bone as Lexa punched him in the face before he could so much as reach for the fallen syringe.

He fell to the ground cursing, but Lexa didn’t let him. She seized him by his blood-soaked shirt collar and pulled him up, growling a few choice words before she pulled his head down and plunged her knee up. There was another crack and when Cage looked up from the blood-splattered ground he was sprawled on, his nose was broken.

He was still clutching the wrist the dagger was pierced through and howling as much in pain as fury now. “But she’s not on your side! You’re not on the same team, Woods, only one person can win!”

“Attack her and you attack me.”

Cage’s eyes were wide as Lexa approached him again, but she merely yanked the dagger out of his wrist. He seized his bleeding arm, wailing again.
Clarke couldn’t help the crooked, delighted smile that formed on her face when Lexa turned around and met her gaze. Lexa was breathing heavily, but still reached down to wipe the blood of the dagger using Cage’s leg. She smacked the toe of her boot into his shin, causing him to yelp out, before she turned and headed for where Clarke still stood at the bottom of the staircase.

“You could have hit me, you know,” said Clarke teasingly, cocking a brow.

The corners of Lexa’s lips tilted up just slightly as she neared her. “Non-verbal aiming charm,” she said simply.

“I’m so glad you’re a genius,” said Clarke before launching forward to smash their lips together. She didn’t give a fuck that this was probably on the big screen right now for the entire school to see. She didn’t give a fuck about anything right now, other than Lexa.

She was pleased to see Lexa didn’t seem to care much about anything else too, because she merely offered Clarke a warm smile before leaning back.

She extended the hand her dagger was in and pulled it as though stretching it; it elongated into one sword. Then she gripped the handle and pulled as though splitting it apart, and it really did split into two twin swords. Clarke watched in awe, not ashamed to admit there was a stirring in her belly as Lexa gave the swords a little flourish. Lexa looked good with swords.

Clarke lifted her own little gun and Lexa’s smile widened. “I saw you use it on some crocettas back there. I tried to catch up, but you were gone by the time I reached you. I doubled back because I saw Cage being a fool with some of the other creatures, and I wanted to make sure you were okay.”

Clarke shook her head, heart swelling because God, Lexa was…

She wasn’t quite ready to admit exactly what Lexa was to her, but she knew. And she kind of thought Lexa knew, too.

“Let’s go,” said Lexa, and they started up the staircase.

The stairs went on for quite some time and were quite steep. Clarke got to see Lexa with her swords in action, slicing through a fair amount of imps. The sword seemed to pass right through them but left them paralyzed; Clarke supposed the judges didn’t want the tournament to be too graphic and brutal. Finally, they seemed to reach the end. At the top of these stairs was a large door lit up with several torches; there were three small trunks placed on the right. “I think we put our weapons in,” said Lexa. Clarke was relieved. This must mean they were nearly done.

Lexa changed her swords back into a dagger before she set it carefully in one of the trunks. There was a rumbling and then the other side of the wall pushed out a velvety case with Lexa’s wand inside it. She took it and gave Clarke a reassuring smile before she stepped before the door; it opened for her and she slipped out. It shut after her.

Lexa changed her swords back into a dagger before she set it carefully in one of the trunks. There was a rumbling and then the other side of the wall pushed out a velvety case with Lexa’s wand inside it. She took it and gave Clarke a reassuring smile before she stepped before the door; it opened for her and she slipped out. It shut after her.

Clarke put her enchanted gun in the next trunk and received her wand. She stepped out of the door and into the dark surface maze of the Quidditch pitch. They’re in a small, enclosed space that feels more like the proper entrance of the maze; they could hear crazed cheering and knew the crowds must see them on the screen, and know they’re close. They rushed forward, Clarke grinning a little recklessly amidst all the cheering, Lexa as focused and serious as ever, until they plunged into the true darkness of the maze, not even the stars there to light up their path anymore.

“Wands out,” Lexa whispered.
They lit their wands and extended them before moving down the maze. They can hear the distant rumbling of the audience, but the maze was definitely muffling the sounds of the outside world. It was eerily quiet as they crept down dark paths, avoiding the vines that shot out to snake around their ankles. They fought together past an Acromantula (“Surely this is the last Acromantula. How do you feel ending an endangered species?” “Shut up, Clarke.”) and various other creatures that Clarke was sure Bellamy was probably having a field day about.

They had just turned onto their third new path when they both halted and Lexa gasped; there was a body spread-eagle in the middle of the ground, waves of blonde hair fanned out across the ground. Clarke stared, mouth open slightly in surprise and confusion—she was standing right here, but that was clearly her body over there on the floor.

There was a loud crack and then the body belonged to Anya. Another, and it was Lincoln. Then Indra. Then Gustus.

“Oh, Lexa, it’s a boggart.”

Her voice seemed to attract its attention, because suddenly there was a dead Lexa on the floor just like her dreams, black blood staining her torso. Then dead parents. Dead Raven, dead Octavia, dead Wells, dead Bellamy, dead Monty—the list went on and on, and even though Clarke knew it was just a boggart, it still unnerved her, so she lifted her wand and said calmly, “Riddikulus.”

The boggart had just transitioned into Raven; with a pop, it changed into a broomstick instead.

“Not sure what that’s about,” said Clarke, bemused as she waved her wand again and the boggart disappeared. Lexa was quiet, throat moving as she swallowed and eyes wide focused on the place on the ground that the fake dead bodies had appeared. “Hey, it’s okay. Come on, let’s keep moving,” she said, giving her a chaste kiss before leading her forward, down the next dark tunnel.

“Shit, vines again,” Clarke muttered, pointing her wand toward them and using Diffindo to slice through the thorny branches and brambles.

“My swords would cut through them easily,” said Lexa wistfully.

Clarke grinned. “You looked good with them.” Lexa blushed and Clarke found it as hilarious as it was adorable.

They moved down the path, turned left, and hit a dead end. “Point me,” Clarke muttered. They doubled back a couple paths and turned right, heading toward the center of the forest.

“We could easily use the Reductor curse to blast through the hedges, you know,” mused Lexa.

Clarke snorted. “Yeah, but that would be cheating.” When Lexa didn’t answer, she smiled in amusement. “There’s no honor in cheating, Lexa.”

“Nor is there in losing, Clarke,” said Lexa solemnly, causing Clarke to laugh.

“Relax. I don’t think Cage is going to be a problem anyway. You kinda beat the shit out of him.”

Lexa grinned.

They both halted in their tracks when a huge serpent, at least ten feet tall, blocked their next
path. Clarke’s first thought was a basilisk, but no—they were looking into its yellow eyes and they certainly weren’t dying. Still, the sight of the snake rearing up high, an inky green color that blended in disconcertingly well with the hedges, its fangs gleaming and tongue spitting out, was terrifying enough.

“Impedimenta!”
“Confringo!”
“Stupefy!”
“Confundus!”

All their spells seemed to just be bouncing off its scales. They quickly backtracked as the spider glided toward them, hissing loudly.

“Avis! Avis!” Clarke shot half a dozen fluttering birds at the snake. It snapped at them as she seized Lexa’s hand and they sprinted past it.

“Good thinking,” said Lexa appreciatively. Clarke squeezed her hand.

Clarke was the first to round the corner and not looking at all, so she didn’t see the golden mist until it was too late. Her hand was torn from Lexa’s as she was jerked forward. She gave a strangled gasp when she suddenly found the world around her turned upside down. “Lexa! What—”

Her hair was hanging below her, blonde tresses falling into a starry night sky that seemed to extend on forever. Clarke looked down to see that her feet were in the grass. What the fuck was this? How was she supposed to get out of this? She felt as though if she so much as moved, she would float away into space.

She hears a muttered spell and then Lexa appears, stepping before Clarke, seemingly standing in the sky.

“Lexa! You’re in the sky!” gasped Clarke.

“Actually you are, love,” said Lexa, softly laughing before she gently kissed Clarke. Butterflies exploded in Clarke’s belly, her heart skipping, and she wasn’t sure if it was more for the term Lexa just called her or the sweet upside-down kiss they’d just shared. “Take a step.”

“What?” yelped Clarke; the idea of even moving her foot was ludicrous.

“You can do it. Here, I’ll help.” Lexa tenderly cupped her face and kissed her again. Clarke moved her foot and found herself falling; her scream died in her throat as she fell onto Lexa, sending them both tumbling down onto soft grass.

Clarke huffed, looking up at the golden mist hanging above them. “Well that was a pain.”

Lexa groaned from beneath her; Clarke quickly removed her elbow from where it was digging into her stomach. “You’re the one always falling out of the sky onto me.”

“You’re the one always standing under me!” Clarke exclaimed.

Clarke pushed herself up onto her elbows to glare down at Lexa; the effect clearly didn’t come across as formidable as she’d hoped, because Lexa’s face softened into a smile. Then it turned sly.
“I don’t mind being under you sometimes, Clarke.”

Clarke had the decency to blush, though she rolled her eyes. A thought struck her and she smirked. “You do realize they have cameras and probably microphones on us? Everyone just heard that you’re a total bottom. If you listen really hard, you can hear Raven screaming I knew it.”

“Does she really think I’m a bottom?” said Lexa, offended.

“Nothing wrong with it, babe,” said Clarke airily, rolling to her feet and extending a hand to help Lexa to hers. “Everyone knows I’m in charge.”

“I’ll show you whose in charge,” Lexa grumbled, but she was smiling rather playfully as she dusted her hands on her knees.

“You can show me tonight,” smirked Clarke.

Lexa’s smile faded away. “Let’s just get this tournament over with,” she said seriously, and Clarke nodded.

It isn’t long before they finally see it in the distance; the Triwizard Cup. Both of their mouths fall open when Cage suddenly hurtles out from the hedge beside them, at full-sprint toward the cup.

“What the fuck,” said Clarke, watching him run. He looked like a bat, with his Beauxbatons cloak flapping behind him.

Lexa sighed, peering into the hedge beside them. “He cheated.”

“You did say there’s no honor in losing.”

Lexa rolls her eyes skyward before pointing her wand at Cage, sending ropes wrapping around him. He crashed to the ground face-first, and even from this distance they could hear the crunch. They both winced.

They strolled toward the cup. Vines were creeping toward Cage and wrapping around him; his alarmed shouts were muffled in the rope swathed around his mouth. Clarke gave him a wave as he was pulled away.

Clarke took Lexa’s hand, noting the apprehensive expression on her face. She was glancing up at the distant sky above them, as though another creature was going to come swooping out at them at any given moment.

The gleaming Triwizard Cup was only feet away from them, but Clarke still tugged Lexa’s hand to pull them to a stop. “I think you should take it, Lexa,” she said seriously. “It means so much more to you.”

Lexa’s brow knitted in a frown. “It doesn’t matter if it doesn’t mean anything to you, Clarke, but think of your friends. Raven, Octavia, Bellamy—they’d want you to win this for your school.”

“No, I won’t do it. This matters more to you.”

Lexa sighed in exasperation. “Together, then.”

“Together?”

“Why not? We’re both here. We’ve made it through this tournament together. Let’s win it together.”
Clarke considered her for a moment before nodding. In truth, Lexa had helped her far more than she’d helped her, but Lexa was also unbelievably stubborn, plus Clarke was beyond ready for this damn tournament to just be over with already. “Okay.”

Lexa smiled, once last glance at the sky above them as they walked on again. “Okay.”

They reached forward as they took the last step to the cup, but before they could so much as touch it, as their feet sank into the grass before it, there was a jerk at their navel as though a hook had closed around Clarke’s throat. For one wild second she thought Lexa had pulled her into side-along Apparation—but then the world was spinning around her in a hurricane of screaming wind and churning colors, and her feet were in the air despite the fact that they felt glued to the ground, and then—

Her knees buckled as she landed on waxed black tile floor. Lexa’s hand was sweaty in hers. She looked around, baffled.

“Where are we?” asked Lexa, wand raised, immediately on guard. Her eyes were narrowed suspiciously. “This is part of the task?”

“We’re in the Ministry of Magic,” said Clarke, almost marveling until she realized what part of the ministry they’re in. Her heart slipped several notches and she fell to her knees. Oh God. Oh God, no. “Lexa…” she whispered.

“What?” There was alarm in Lexa’s voice; her head was snapping back and forth as she looked around, trying to take everything in at once.

Clarke pointed a shaking hand at the hallway. “I’ve had dreams of this.”

“Dreams?” said Lexa sharply. She was quiet for a moment, eyes darting from side to side as comprehension sank into every line of her face. Her throat moved as she swallowed and her jaw rolled, and her voice shook as she said, “Get up. Now.”

Clarke didn’t move. She felt frozen in place, paralyzed with fear. After having so many nightmares about this place, being in it felt like she was trapped in one. “What’s going on?”

“Something bigger than we think. Get up, quick, we have to get out of here—”

Lexus seized Clarke’s arm and started to tug her up, physically dragging her a few feet across the floor. “Where’s the exit? Where’s the exit, Clarke?”

Clarke was flooded with fear at how terrified Lexa sounded; Lexa never displayed her fear. But Clarke didn’t want to walk down the hallway, because she felt like she knew what she would find. Just like in her dreams.

“Clarke, please,” begged Lexa, a plaintive moan in her voice. “Please, we’ve got to move fast, before she—”

“Clarke.”

Clarke stilled, blood turning to ice at the sound of that familiar voice filled with pain.

“Clarke.”
“Clarke,” said Lexa urgently, eyes widening at Clarke’s reaction. “Clarke, whatever you hear, just ignore it. We have to get out of here. We have to go, now—“

“Clarke, help me.”

“It’s my dad!” gasped Clarke, scrabbling at Lexa to get to her feet. “It’s my dad, he—he needs help!”

She took off sprinting, feet pounding on the tile floor. Lexa was running after her, crying out her name, but she couldn’t stop. Her father was still whispering for her and suddenly it made sense, this was why she dreamt about him all this time; he was in danger here at the place he used to work, and she was meant to save him.

She seemed to be moving through the Department of Mysteries backwards. She crossed the room of broken clocks, heard Lexa, who had been nearly gaining on her, trip over one and gasp swear words before calling for Clarke again, but Clarke couldn’t stop. Her father was still whispering her name and she knew, just knew, that the room he was kept in was close.

“Clarke, please, stop!”

But Clarke had stopped, just as Lexa reached her and seized her hand, as Clarke burst through a rotting door. Lexa stumbled in with her, straightening to urgently tell Clarke once more that they had to leave, then fall silent when she saw the expression on Clarke’s face.

Because her father was not in this room. In fact, nothing was in this room. Nothing but a black, uncompleted infinity symbol painted onto plain white wall.

Clarke frowned up at it, not understanding, while Lexa walked forward, head tilted up to look up at the painting. “What does this mean?” she said quizzically. Lexa didn’t answer. “Lexa?” prompted Clarke, stepping forward. “What is this?”

Lexa slowly turned around. Her face was white and her eyes were wide. She stared at Clarke for one long moment, the shock on her face chased away by a coldly furious, hard expression.

“This is a coup.”

Chapter End Notes

Raven and Anya’s Great Hall entrance was taken from the "Person A, noticeably disheveled as they enter the room: Sorry I’m late, I was doing stuff; Person B, also disheveled and grinning smugly: I’m stuff" prompt from Tumblr.

Another special thanks to all the people who have made me fan art, and those who take the time to write those extra long, detailed reviews. It makes me so damn happy. Thank you.

Also: my heart goes out. If anyone needs someone to talk to, my inbox is always open. Love is love is love, and love always wins.
Thank you all for your patience with me updating this story. I could tell you all about how life gets, but we all know. I hope you enjoy! Please drop me a comment (and by drop I don't mean it has to be brief, if you want to leave a longer detailed one you can, I love those the most anyway) since, because this chapter is so action-packed, I'm anxious to learn how its being received. Hope all your lives are going well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Raven shifted, her heart beating too fast, and squinted up at the giant screen floating above the maze. Less than five minutes ago, Clarke and Lexa had been walking hand in hand toward the gleaming Triwizard Cup, until they stepped into the grass only feet away from the cup, and disappeared with a flash of blue light.

At first, the crowd merely roared, thinking it was part of the competition.

But then they noticed.

Most specifically, Anya and Lincoln noticed. As the rest of them cheered, Anya and Lincoln shot to their feet, and their expressions were anything but thrilled as they stared up at the screen in horror, then shifted their gazes down and around the maze, as though searching for something, or someone. Raven frowned, following their gazes, and saw some of the professors moving urgently, some sprinting back toward the castle, some blasting holes in the hedges and heading directly into the maze.

Raven stood up too, leaning toward Anya, who was still searching, face drawn of color.
“What’s going on?” Anya didn’t answer, eyes still darting around before they finally fixated on Durmstrang Headmaster Indra. “Anya? What’s going on?” Raven repeated, shuffling closer to her.

A muscle in Anya’s jaw jumped as she clenched it, nodding in response to the curt nod Indra gave her before she turned and strode toward the other Headmasters—actually, just Kane, because Dante seemed to have stepped away somewhere, or something…Raven’s brow furrowed. He was there a second ago.

“Anya?” she said again, giving her a quizzical look.

Anya didn’t answer. Raven watched her and Lincoln both stand and, together, begin descending the stands. Raven looked at Octavia, who looked just as perplexed as she was.

Something about the unfinished infinity sign painted on the wall was utterly entrancing. Clarke couldn’t tear her eyes away from it.

“Clarke?” called Lexa, jolting her out of her reverie. She turned to look at Lexa, mouth and throat dry as sandpaper. “How do we get out of here?” When Clarke only blinked, Lexa took a step forward, her tone urgent. “Which way do you go in your dreams?”

“Right…” said Clarke slowly, distractedly. She stared at the infinity painting on the wall. She had a very strange feeling indeed, as though none of this was real and she was just standing in another one of her dreams. “I guess…I was having them for a reason…but why?”

She missed the way Lexa’s expression faltered, the way she nervously licked her lips. “Which way?”

Clarke walked out of the room, Lexa at her heels. She stood in the dark hallway. This was different than her dreams. In her dreams, everything was white, the ceilings, the walls, the floor. She often walked alone down a hallway, through a circular room with no handles, past strange things like massive tanks of brains and creepy whispering veils, over a bridge of broken clocks, and straight up to the room she currently stood outside of, with a rotting grey door with a circular window. But here everything was dark. The floor, the ceiling, and the walls were all black tile, and the only light were the torches glowing a white-blue that reflected in the floor and made Clarke think she saw a ghost of herself every time she glanced down. This room behind her had been all white save for the painted black infinity symbol, there had been no swirling smoke, and her father had not been in there. Clarke didn’t know if she should be relieved. On one hand, of course, her father was safe and sound in Azkaban, right? On the other…why did she have those dreams in the first place? Was he actually in danger? Was her subconscious trying to warn her, or was she really under the effects of a lethifold?

She was so tired of not understanding anything going on around her.

“I don’t know,” hesitated Clarke, frowning as she looked around. The hallway stretched on and now that she stood here, she couldn’t even remember which direction she’d came from. But to the right, there was no door at the end of the hallway…just a blank stretch of black wall. To the left, there was a door, and it surely must be the same door they came in through…
Which led to the entrance of the atrium, and where their exit would be.

“Come on,” muttered Lexa, who clearly had the same idea. She took Clarke’s hand and began tugging her toward it, but Clarke needed no further incentive. She squeezed Lexa’s hand back as they hurried toward the door.

Almost the moment it shut behind them, the room they stumbled into began spinning. Clarke and Lexa both placed an arm in front of the other, wide-eyed and alarmed, but the floor did not move. The walls did, and when they finally came to a stop, there were vivid blue streaks burned into Clarke’s vision from the torches on the wall.

“How which door did we come through?” whispered Clarke.

Lexa swallowed, eyes darting about to take in the dozen doors around them. “We need to mark the door we came through. We’ll have to try them all until we find the exit.”

Clarke nodded, tightening her grip on her wand.

They opened a door and cautiously inched out, absorbing their surroundings. There was a huge tank full of ghostly green water and even eerier inhabitants; brains floating through the water with long tentacles trailing behind them, illuminated by the low-lying lamps that hung on the surrounding walls. Clarke’s heart sank when she spied two other doors, located on opposite walls. There were exactly three steps that led up to each door, including the one they stood at.

“This place is huge,” said Clarke hoarsely. It had always been a futile mission, trying to speak to her father about his job, but that was one thing he’d been able to tell her. The Department of Mysteries was big. She just hadn’t realized it was this big, with at the very least over a dozen large rooms thus far.

“We know we didn’t come in this way,” said Lexa, clearing her throat as she took Clarke’s hand again and pulled her back. Once back in the circular room of doors, Lexa pointed her wand at the door they’d just came in through. “Flagrate.”

Now a burning red checkmark joined the blue streaks as the room spun again.

They chose another door, and it was the wrong one again, but this time Clarke gasped and took another step inside.

“What is it?” said Lexa worriedly.

This room was strange, but God, it was so beautiful it took Clarke’s breath away. The air was strange; Clarke almost felt as though if she jumped into the air, she wouldn’t come back down, but would perhaps float instead. In hindsight she knew she couldn’t afford to waste time standing here gawking, but years of wondering were finally being made a reality.

“This is where my dad works,” said Clarke in wonder, blindly shuffling forward, face upturned to take in the sight of the tiny glowing balls of light floating above her. There was a larger one directly overhead that must be a miniature replica of the moon. “It’s what he researches…” Her gaze followed the trail of constellations to the mechanism that sat in the center of the room. It was a large grandfather clock that looked like a miniature replica of the old Big Ben clock tower in London.

“Your father studied Time and Space?” Even Lexa looked entranced by the swirl of miniature galaxies they stood beneath. Saturn was rotating only a few feet above her head.
Clarke nodded slowly. “Yeah…I don’t know anything about it. Unspeakables aren’t allowed to talk about what they do…”

There was silence for a long moment, which Clarke spent walking around, marveling at the floating planets and pulsating stars. Even the grandfather clock had a strange sense of ethereal beauty about it, with its cracked, dusty face, chipped paint, and jagged scratches on its front. Clarke bent for closer inspection, squinting at the lines; it looked like someone had attempted to scratch out the words carved in it. The only letter she could make out looked like an A, and then there was the number 5 a ways down. Surprisingly enough, the clock seemed to work, though the hand that counted seconds seemed fast, just tick, tick, ticking away. It gave Clarke a strange sense of urgency the longer she listened to it, and the longer she listened, the faster it went.

“Let’s go,” she said, even though she was strangely reluctant to leave this place. It made her feel closer to her father. She could just imagine him pacing around scribbling notes onto a clipboard, his tongue tucked between his teeth as it usually was when he was thinking hard.

Lexa nodded in agreement. They both returned through the door they came in. Lexa marked the door and the room spun once more.

The next door they tried would not budge open no matter what enchantments they tried. They eventually gave up and tried another; this door opened into a narrow hallway. Clarke shrugged helplessly and Lexa set her jaw in determination, quietly and carefully leading Clarke down it.

A minute later they arrived at another door that opened up into wide hallway. It led into a large, empty room, nothing at all there. Frowning, Clarke headed for the one door at the opposite end. She swung it open to reveal a strange room that caused them to blink rapidly in surprise, unprepared for the dazzling show of lights that were as blinding than the stars and planets had been. Once their vision adjusted, they took in the sight of huge shelves towering to an impossibly high ceiling and covered with thousands of spheres that glittered in the blue light of the torches on the wall.

Clarke’s eyes widened as she realized this was the Hall of Prophecies. Her father had told her about it before, that there were hundreds of thousands of prophecies here lining the shelves. There was space between each shelf, narrow aisles that extended past their vision. She stared in awe, though a dreadful feeling of foreboding was flooding through her like waves breaking. Everything about this was so familiar. Vague memories were flickering through her mind, times in class with professors lecturing, times Clarke came across it in her books, times Bellamy had enthusiastically raved on about it, times Clarke’s own parents had told her in bedtime stories.

Everything about this was so horribly reminiscent of what happened to Harry Potter.

This wasn’t right, she shouldn’t be in this room. It wasn’t the way they came out. Lexa turned to head back, but Clarke didn’t. She felt rooted to the spot, her heart beating fast. Then came the whispers again.

“Clarke…”

She sucked in breath in a sharp hiss between her teeth, eyes widening in alarm. Lexa turned back at once, a hand on Clarke’s shoulder spinning her round.

“What? What is it?”

“My dad, I can hear my dad again—"
“No,” said Lexa, sounding as horrified as she looked. “Clarke, you can’t, I’m telling you, something is happening here and it isn’t safe to stay—“

“Why not?” asked Clarke, loudly as the repeated whispering of her name caused the anxiety knotted up in her gut to compress.

“Shhh!” said Lexa frantically, eyes darting around.

Clarke understood; her instincts told her it was safer to stay quiet, to not draw attention. Still, she wasted no time in hissing, “What is going on?”

Lexa shook her head and Clarke tried, she really did, not to let her expression crumple as the hurt lanced through her heart. They were in danger and Lexa knew why. Lexa knew so many things that she never trusted Clarke with.

So many people knew so many things, and Clarke was tired of not knowing anything.

She could tell by Lexa’s expression that she hadn’t been successful in schooling her expression into one of indifference, so she didn’t bother trying to look unaffected again, letting the fear and anger leak out instead. She set her jaw. “What’s going on?”

Lexa shook her head again and Clarke’s anger rose sharply. She clenched her fists. She tried again.

“My dad is trapped here, isn’t he?”

Lexa shook her head a third time and Clarke was ready to pull her own hair out. “It’s a trick. They’re using him to lure us here. That’s why we have to go right now. The longer we’re here, the more danger we’re in.”

Clarke inhaled deeply through flared nostrils, struggling to reign in her dwindling patience and skyrocketing temper. “Who are they, Lexa?”

Lexa looked almost fearful, her eyes wide and slate-colored in the blue firelight. It was one of the more disconcerting elements of the night. Lexa never looked frightened. “Let’s get out of here first.”

“I—“ Clarke stilled, her train of thought crashing as her father’s voice sounded her name yet again. He was here, Clarke’s gut was telling her he was here, and she was going to find him whether Lexa helped her or not. “I’m going to find my dad,” she said flatly. She set off down the hallway.

“No, wait!” said Lexa desperately, seizing Clarke above the arm and yanking her back. “Look, we’re in your Ministry of Magic, right? How can your father be here, Clarke? Why wouldn’t he be in Azkaban?”

“I don’t know, someone brought him here!” she said impatiently.

“Why would anyone—“

“I told you there was something going on when he was arrested,” said Clarke furiously. Her eyes narrowed as a new thought occurred to her. “I bet you anything Diana Sydney is behind this.”

“But why would he be here?” persisted Lexa; she was still trying to not-so-subtly tug Clarke back toward the room with the doors that surely held the exit, but Clarke stubbornly pulled back. “What’s the point?”
Clarke shook her head, distracted as her father whispered her name once more, this time with a plea for help. Her stomach was in knots and she could hear her own blood rushing in her ears; it felt like there was very little time left. She had to move now, every instinct in her body was urging her to move, to do something.

“There’s no reason for him to be here, Clarke!”

“You should be helping me! Why don’t you care?” she said, struggling to keep her voice calm as she leveled her gaze on Lexa. Lexa stared back at her with an open mouth, and Clarke would have thought she’d stopped breathing were it not for the rapid rise and fall of her chest.

“Clarke,” began Lexa slowly, stepping forward and into her space. Clarke shivered in response to Lexa slipping her hands through her hair to cup her neck, thumbs at her cheeks as she gazed intently into Clarke’s eyes, clearly all efforts to gain her full attention. “I do care about you, Clarke. I—probably too much, I care—“ She paused, exhaling with a huff, and Clarke had a fleeting thought that her cheeks would be red if they weren’t white with her fear. “Please trust me when I say we are in danger here. We have to leave as soon as possible. No one has addressed us yet, so they may not know we’re here. We have to leave before they do.”

“Who?” Clarke burst again in outrage. “Who are you talking about? What the fuck is going on?”

Lexa dropped her hands, shaking her head as she took a few steps back. “I can’t. I can’t say anything.”

Hurt and fear flushed through Clarke, blocking her throat. Lexa knew something, Lexa had always known something, and hadn’t told Clarke. Clearly she thought she was too fucking stupid to know, or not trustworthy, or something—

She licked her lips and stepped back, shaking her head. Lexa’s brow furrowed, but Clarke just turned, ignoring her. “He’s here. I know he is.”

Lexa’s alarmed harsh whispers of her name were left behind as she darted around an aisle and then hurried down it, footsteps pounding on the floor. She had a brief moment to wonder where the hell she was going before she heard it again—her father, whispering her name. Lexa was wrong; he is here. Clarke could feel it with every bone in her body. He was here, and he needed her help.

She hurried on, sprinting down the halls—Lexa was gaining on her, she could hear her, could sense her growing near—Clarke turned abruptly and darted around into another aisle. Her heart pounded as her father called her name once more, this time closer than ever.

“Clarke…”

She skidded to a harsh halt, turning her head toward the sound. It was not at the end of the aisle, but rather in the middle of one of the shelves. Confused, she swung her head round, but he was nowhere to be found. Lexa had finally reached her and immediately seized her by the arm but Clarke shrugged her off, eyes narrowed as she shifted her gaze around the shelf she stood before.

“Wait!” Lexa looked torn between two worlds. There was a commanding tone in her voice, but nothing but desperation on her face. “Fuck.” She sucked in a sharp breath that came out as a hiss; she briefly closed her eyes, appearing faintly sick, before opening them again. “Okay. I need to tell you something. It’s going to be difficult to hear, but I need you to understand.”

Clarke turned to face her, fear coursing through her veins. She didn’t like the look in Lexa’s
eyes; it looked like pity.

“Your father isn’t here,” she said, voice soft, face as impassive as it was the day they met but her eyes were open and shining and sorrowful, like she were trying to distance herself but she couldn’t. “He’s dead, Clarke.”

There was nothing.

No sound, save for Clarke’s pounding heart. No whispering. Not even breathing. Just nothing.

Then:

“What?”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. “Your father is dead. I’m sorry. He’s gone.”

“I—I don’t under—dead?” spluttered Clarke. There were images flickering through her mind like a muggle movie. Her father, laughing at one of Jaha’s jokes as the two of them played a game of Exploding Snap with Clarke and Wells. Her father, her earliest memory of him, of the two of them curled up on the settee reading Babbity Rabbity and the Cackling Stump. Her last memory of her father, desperately trying and failing to appear fine as he was hauled away in chains, Clarke and Abby crying in the pew at the courtroom surrounded by stony-faced Wizengamot members.

Most recent memory. Not last.

Not last, because there was no way he was gone.

“No. No. You’re wrong.” Clarke shook her head, backing up again, almost into the shelf behind her. “There’s—there’s no way. He’s not. He can’t be. He wouldn’t be—”

“He is, I promise you, Clarke,” said Lexa, lip trembling. Her unemotional façade had already fallen away. Her eyes were unnaturally bright. “That’s why I’m here. That’s why we had the tournament. I’m supposed to protect you. I just, I didn’t remember because I had to take my memories out, because it was safer that way—”

“Lexa.” Clarke’s voice was loud, even to her own ears and the sound of her wild pulse. She was frozen in place yet trembling from head to foot. She lifted her shaking hands, pressing them to the sides of her spinning head, her left pushing the handle of her wand painfully against her skull. “Why are you saying this?”

“Because we’re in danger,” said Lexa, voice infuriatingly soft and eyes even softer, but no less desperate. “They’re using your father to get to you, but you can’t let them. He’s not here. He’s gone.”

There was a stinging pressure behind her eyes, a buildup that was sharp in her throat as well as her heart. “He…can’t be…” Denial tasted bitter in her mouth. She couldn’t even think straight, struggling to form any semblance of coherent thoughts. Her father. Her father couldn’t be dead because how could he be? He was taken to Azkaban, Clarke saw him get taken away. They had been exchanging letters for over a year, how could he write letters if he was dead?

Her heart stopped, desperation striking through her like lightning, the relief almost making her knees buckle. “He can’t be dead, because we’ve been writing each other!”

The pity in Lexa’s gaze hurt Clarke as much as it annoyed her. “This is why he hasn’t been
writing back to you—"

“But he has!” said Clarke, frantic. Somehow she felt as though if she could just convince Lexa, then it would be okay. “He has been writing back to me! He even wished me good luck on the third task!”

Lexa’s brow furrowed in a confused frown. She opened her mouth, but before she could speak, the whispers sounded again, loudly this time. It was as though it was coming from the shelf itself. That was her father’s voice. Lexa was wrong; somehow, she had gotten things very wrong. Clarke’s father could not be dead, not when he was here, now, calling for Clarke to help him.

Clarke spun around, gaze immediately falling on a certain dusty orb that….

That had her father’s name on it.

“What…” she muttered, reaching for it.

“No!”

The hit to her midsection took her breath away. Clarke gasped, sprawled on the floor where Lexa had tackled her.

“You’re okay,” breathed Lexa, already untangling herself from Clarke and pushing up onto her knees. “You’re okay. We have to go. Right now, they’ve probably already realized we’re here —”

“What—” Clarke wheezed, starting to bring her knees up so she could double over, but she never had the chance because now Lexa was hauling her up by a tight grip above her elbow.

“Hurry,” said Lexa, and if anything had frightened Clarke tonight, it was the panic in Lexa’s voice. “Come on,” she said, voice breathless with the effort and fear, as she began to tug Clarke down the aisle.

“No no,” sang a voice.


Clarke’s breath caught in her throat as black shapes materialized from nowhere, at least a dozen people in black cloaks, hoods drawn over their faces. They slunk out from the very shadows, walking forth down the aisles, closing in on where Clarke and Lexa were frozen. There were so many lit wands directed at them that for one dizzying moment, Clarke thought they could have been back in the Time and Space room, stars and planets hovering around them.

Lexa’s grip constricted on Clarke’s arm, but she only took one step before—

“Oh ah ah,” sang the same voice again, coming from the nearest hooded person. They were short, rather small, but something about the voice still sent shivers down Clarke’s spine. “Hold it right there.”

“You,” snarled Lexa, grip on Clarke tightening even more so, shifting her closer and turning, angling so Lexa stood between her and the cloaked woman.

“Me,” said the figure, sounding amused. Hands reached up to bring the cloak down, revealing a young face marred with a cruel-looking smirk and jagged scars. Her dark eyes shifted from Lexa to Clarke, still paralyzed with shock behind her. “I see you’ve found a new plaything.”
Clarke’s stomach was lurching as the dots slowly came together. She could no longer hear her father whispering her name. What if Lexa was right? What if this was a trap, and they had used her father to bait her here? What if they had… killed him?

Her insides plummeted and her stomach twisted so violently for a moment she thought she would be sick, right then and there. Her knees shook, and she swayed where she stood, but Lexa’s grip grounded her. Her father could not be dead. He couldn’t just die in Azkaban custody, that would be illegal, and anyway, even despite everything that had happened, he was Minister Jaha’s closest friend and there was no way he would allow his death to go unanswered. Not to mention Clarke’s father had been exchanging letters with her all year, and her mother. He had to be alive, so either they had used his voice to bait Clarke (but for what reason?) or he really was here, and if was here, in the same place this terrifying girl was, and he was silent…

“Where—“ began Clarke, coming to herself and starting forward, but Lexa immediately hissed “No, Clarke!” and pressed her forearm harder against her chest, forcing her back. She fell into the shelf, a few prophecies crashing to the floor. Every breath in the room seemed to be held; the cloaked strangers had lurched forward, the girl’s eyes so wide they were practically bugging. She relaxed immediately when the ghostly Seers, three older women and one quite young, rose up from the shattered glass akin to the way genies unfurled from lamps in the muggle movie Clarke watched with Wells; it felt so long ago. Everyone in the room paused, watching the Seers, listening to the disjointed voices mixing together. Finally, they faded, and the girl looked at Lexa and Clarke again.

The girl laughed; it was high and cold and matched her smirk perfectly. She and the rest of the cloaked people continued to slowly advance, forming a half ring around Clarke and Lexa, blocking any possible exit. “Never have been able to keep a very tight leash on your lovers, have you Lexie? We all remember what happened to the last girlfriend you couldn’t control…”

Lexa’s upper lip curled in a silent snarl, and her arms were still stretched protectively over Clarke, who was now uncomfortably pressed up against the shelf behind her, the wood jutting painfully into her back.

The girl came to a stop a few feet away, completely at ease. She tilted her head, brows arching and lips tilting loftily. “So. This moment feels pretty heavy, doesn’t it? Been waiting for it for, oh, a couple years, now? It’s a momentous thing. I feel like we should take a moment of silence, just to soak it all in. So much preparation, so much planning…” Her dark eyes drifted from Lexa to Clarke, then back to Lexa again. “And here you are. It all worked out perfectly. Our Queen is mighty indeed.” The surrounding cloaked strangers echoed noises of agreement. Lexa and Clarke were silent, Lexa clearly listening, waiting, and Clarke in terror. Her heart was racing. They were in danger, that much she knew, and she had no idea how they were going to get out of it. They were outnumbered a dozen to one.

“Aren’t you curious, Lexa, how this came to be?” drawled the girl. Despite her cool demeanor, the girl’s eyes were bright and full of an almost manic energy. She was soaking this up, all of it feeding whatever twisted ego she possessed. “I’m sure you are. I’ll allow you to ask questions. Go on, ask. I know you’re dying to know how we pulled one over on the mighty heda.” Her last two words were mocking, sardonic. Clarke had no idea what it meant, but it was clearly an insult.

“Cowardice and corruption as usual, I’m guessing,” said Lexa dryly. Clarke felt a rush of appreciation. Lexa didn’t sound even remotely scared, completely unlike the persistent way she was shielding Clarke.

“Corruption, yes, of course,” said the girl, amused again. “All the best things are. But never
cowardice. Hiding behind your school and your teachers. Participating in a rigged tournament. Running from your destiny. The only coward here is you.”

“The only people running are yours,” retorted Lexa. “The Queen is the one that’s been hiding. You’re the one that hasn’t shown your face. And now you’re here with a flock of the Queen’s soldiers at your back because you know you can’t beat me in a fair match.”

There was silence, the girl’s smirk fading. Her features were cold and hard now.

“I would challenge you on that right now, Lexa,” she said softly, “if I weren’t under direct orders.” She straightened then, gaze slipping onto Clarke once more, this time staying. Lexa shifted again, but Clarke could still maintain the girl’s stare just over Lexa’s shoulder. Her heart was hammering. “Hello, Clarke. I’ve been rude, haven’t I?” She asked. The cruel grin was back. “Haven’t even introduced myself, where are my manners? My name is Ontari. I’m guessing Lexa hasn’t told you much about me. Actually, I’m guessing Lexa hasn’t told you much about anything. That’s kind of how she operates.”

Ontari tilted her head again, clasping her arms behind her back and holding Clarke’s defiant gaze. “I’m sure you’ve heard of the Ice Queen,” she said loftily. She lifted a shoulder, gesturing to all those that surrounded them, faces still shrouded in darkness, masked by their hood. “We are her loyal servants. The Ice Nation. Her Death Eaters.”

Death Eaters. Like Voldemort’s followers, over a century ago.

Chills erupted over Clarke’s flesh. Things just grew ten times scarier, thanks to the presence of a word dedicated to a group of horrible murderers.

Still, Clarke swallowed hard and asked the question she was dying to ask. “Where’s my dad?” she burst; she was trembling still, as much in fury as fear.

Ontari’s grin widened, but before she could answer, Lexa spoke.

“He’s not here, Clarke, I told you.”

Ontari’s smile slipped for a split second. She glanced at Lexa with a frown before looking back at Clarke, grin returning. “Oh, but he’s here. Haven’t you heard him? Clarke! Clarke!” she mimicked with a high voice; the rest of the Death Eaters laughed, a cacophony of malicious mirth echoing throughout the huge room.

Clarke’s heart seized. “Where?” she said desperately, trying to move forward but blocked again by Lexa. She shoved against her, failing miserably at throwing her off. “What have you done with him?”

“He’s safe,” relented Ontari, sobering slightly as she watched Clarke struggle. Her grin was still sharp, still dangerous. “For now. As long as you do what we say.”

“Don’t listen to her, Clarke!”

“Be quiet,” barked Ontari, raising her wand, presumably to silence Lexa. Lexa immediately raised her own, and Ontari paused, staring at Lexa, staring at the wand pointed at her. Her nostrils flared in anger, but her voice was controlled as she said quietly, “Don’t be stupid, Lexa. There are thirteen of us, and only one of you. Play your cards right and you can both walk out of here unharmed.”

Lexa hissed out a breath that was more like a scoff. “Right,” she said coldly. “As if that’s
even remotely a possibility, let alone the plan.”

“And you know our plans, do you?” goaded Ontari. When Lexa was silent, Ontari grinned triumphantly. “I bet you wish you did. I bet you’re dying to be in the inner circle, to be in the know. You always were a meddlesome bitch, always sticking your nose where it didn’t belong.”

Clarke’s grip on her wand and on Lexa’s shoulder tightened, fury coursing through her at Ontari’s words. She tried to subtly maneuver her wand arm beneath Lexa’s arms, pointing it at Ontari just through the gap between Lexa’s waist and arm. Her heart sank when Ontari noticed.

“Oh what’s this?” said Ontari in wicked delight. None of them lowered their wands. “You’ve got her trained, Lexa? Would be impressive, if she weren’t shaking so much.”

Clarke swallowed hard, struggling to control her trembling, but she really couldn’t. She and Lexa were surrounded by Death Eaters, who clearly knew and hated Lexa, her father was in danger too, and there was little hope for escape. She shifted her weight, and glass crunched underneath one of her feet; glass from the fallen prophecies. Clarke’s eyes widened slightly in recognition. Memories returned to her in a rush. She remembered hearing the stories, listening to Bellamy teaching a Potter Studies class. Harry Potter had been in this same situation. Harry Potter had escaped Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries.

Harry Potter had used the prophecies.

Clarke removed her right hand from Lexa’s shoulder, slowly dropping it down. She kept her gaze firmly fixed on Ontari as she continued through her slew of insults as she carefully slipped her hand beneath the hem of Lexa’s shirt. Lexa’s back was rigid and tense, sweating slightly, but she didn’t so much as jump as Clarke drifted her fingertips across her skin in the shape of letters.

“Oh of course, Lexa’s last girlfriend was a coward too. How she cried, when we caught her…”

*Hit*

“She begged us to let her go, you know. Begged, cried, snot everywhere…it was pathetic, but we really weren’t expecting anything less…”

*Prophecies*

“She was weak, but then again, all of you are…too weak to understand the glory of our Queen’s plans, too weak to defeat her…”

*Run*

“But still, I suppose we’ll have to make do with what we have,” sighed Ontari, lips twisted as she took a step forward. Clarke stilled, hand flattening against Lexa’s back as she pushed back into her again, still fiercely shielding her.

“It’s time,” announced Ontari, eyes bright as they flicked between Lexa and Clarke. “Who wants to do the honors?”

Clarke waited expectantly, at a loss for what the hell Ontari was referring to. Ontari noticed.

“Better be Griffin,” she smirked, moving her wand to point at Clarke; Lexa shifted again, but Clarke was now pressed back against the shelf so tightly that there was no room to breathe, and Lexa had no choice but to lean forward slightly, giving her room. “Don’t want Lexa to accidentally croak on us, not when there are still so many *uses* for her.”
“What do you want?” croaked Clarke, rasping slightly to regain her breath.

Ontari’s brows lifted. “The prophecy, of course. What else?” Her eyes narrowed and briefly shifted onto Lexa. “I thought she was supposed to be bright.”

“Don’t take it,” muttered Lexa.

Ontari rolled her eyes. “You don’t exactly have a choice.” She lifted her wand and pointed it at Clarke before she could so much as move. Lexa immediately shifted, blocking Ontari’s line of vision. It looked as though Ontari was straining not to roll her eyes again. “Move, Lexa.”

Lexa didn’t waste time with an answer. She merely remained where she was, tense and ready, wand aimed directly at Ontari.

Ontari really did roll her eyes again this time. “Look. I don’t know how many times I need to say this. You are outnumbered. The harder you make this, the more it’s going to hurt. Let her get the prophecy, simple and clean, or I’m going to torture her until she loses her mind. Which sounds better? Or,” added Ontari, leaning to the right so she could properly meet Clarke’s gaze over Lexa’s shoulder, “She could watch me torture you. Which sounds more fun?”

Clarke’s mouth was dry. The idea of Lexa being hurt to protect her made her stomach twist. There was no way she was letting that happen. She nodded, almost imperceptibly, but it was enough. Ontari saw it and smirked, lifting her wand again.

“Still, let’s have a little fun with it anyway, shall we? Imperio!”

All at once, Clarke felt like she was on cloud nine. Quite literally, she felt as though she were floating. All the weight in the world seemed to vanish off her shoulders, every bit of fear and worry promptly trickling away out of her head, leaving only a sleepy sort of contentment. She had to wonder why she had ever been worried in the first place; what had she even been so scared of?

“Take the prophecy,” came a voice. It was Ontari’s. Clarke was dimly aware that Ontari was watching her with a kind smile. She was a nice person. Why had Clarke not thought that before?

Clarke obediently faced the shelf behind her, reaching up to take the prophecy that had her father’s name on it. It was heavy and surprisingly warm in her hand.

Clarke turned and frowned down at the little glass ball, watching the way the white swirled around like smoke in the depths of it.

“Now give it to me,” cooed Ontari, beckoning Clarke forward with her crooked fingers.

Clarke blindly took a step, then another, the prophecy tight in her sweaty grip. Everything felt so wonderful, so why was her mood starting to lower?

“Give it here,” crooned Ontari, beckoning Clarke again. Her voice was disembodied, didn’t match the smile on her face.

But no, why should she? Just because Ontari said so?

“Come on,” snapped the voice, losing patience. Ontari’s smile was shifting, the world around Clarke contorting, losing its rosy tint. Ontari’s teeth looked sharper, her eyes looked wilder.

No. I don’t want to.
“Give it to me, now!”

No!

Clarke gasped as reality returned to her with startling clarity. Her knees were throbbing painfully, having smacked down into the cold concrete floor. Clarke had both stepped forward and tried to prevent herself from doing so, resulting instead in her faltering, stumbling, and falling to her knees. She looked up, saw Lexa looking down at her with pride in her eyes as she reached down to help Clarke to her feet. Ontari, however, looked livid.

“Trained her better than it looks, huh?” demanded Ontari, manic smirk still in place. She and the other Death Eaters pointed their wands, stances widening as they took position. “Looks like we’ll have to do this the hard way. Accio prophecy!”

The sphere flew to the tips of Clarke’s fingers but she just managed to keep ahold of it, her heart thrashing. This prophecy was the only thing stopping the Death Eaters from attacking. “Make a move and I’ll smash this,” said Clarke at once, clutching the prophecy tighter to her chest.

Ontari was finally no longer smiling. Despite the fact that it meant they were in more danger than ever, Clarke couldn’t help but feel relieved. Ontari kept squeezing her wand, grip clenching and unclenching, nostrils flared and jaw working as she thought of her next move.

“You know what?” she finally spat out, eyes dark and dangerous. “I’m done with this.” She slashed her wand through the air, mouth opening to shout out a spell, but Lexa moved faster.

“Protego!”

Ontari’s spell ricocheted off the invisible shield, crashing high into the shelves above her head, blasting the top of the towering structure. Some prophecies exploded at once into pearly-white bemoaning figures, while others began to drop, shattering at their feet. The Death Eaters stumbled forward as the shelf wobbled precariously and then, slowly, began to fall upon them all.

Lexa seized Clarke’s arm, blasted a nonverbal *reducto*, and began dragging her through the clouds of dust and smoke and prophecy. Shouts filled the air, spells rushing past them, barely grazing over them, white-hot and far too close for comfort. Lexa and Clarke ran, Clarke desperately clutching onto the prophecy, Lexa desperately clutching onto Clarke, and the Death Eaters right at their heels.

As they ran on down the aisle, the sounds of collapsing shelves crashing behind them, Clarke realized with a sinking feeling that they had gone the wrong way. They were plunging deeper into the Hall of Prophecies.

“Find them!” they heard Ontari bark, among other orders such as, “Hurt them if you want, but don’t fuck up, we need the prophecy and we need them—“

“Shh,” said Lexa quietly, pulling Clarke into a crouch at the end of the aisle.

“L...Lexa,” panted Clarke in panic, shaking her head and darting her gaze around, too out of breath to give voice to her concern. They were wedged in a corner, trapped. Death Eaters could appear any moment from all aisles, closing in on them.


Clarke’s eyes widened and her stomach dropped, but she tried her best to remain still and
silent as she steadily rose up through the air. She glanced around, but the shelf at her back hid her from view. The only person she could see was Lexa, slowly becoming smaller and smaller, her wand pointed up at Clarke. At the very top of the shelf, Lexa lowered her wand and Clarke found her footing just in time. She quietly sank to her feet on the uppermost shelf, cringing at the creaking. She pointed her wand at her own feet, murmured “Muffliato,” and peered back down at Lexa. Clarke was certainly not afraid at heights, but standing on this ancient wooden shelf that felt as though it could break any moment, countless glass spheres she could easily knock off surrounding her feet, and Lexa tiny and alone beneath her…

It was enough to be frozen in fear.

But Clarke didn’t have time for that.

Lexa was now lifting herself up to join her, but had only risen probably ten feet in the air when Ontari rounded the corner and into view.

“They’re in the air!” she shrieked, sprinting forward. Lexa dropped as she moved her wand to parry off the spell she threw at her; she rolled back up the moment she landed, wand slashing through the air as several more Death Eaters closed in around her.

“Clarke, run! Meet me at the door!” she bellowed as she dived and dodged, stunning two Death Eaters at once while ducking the Crucio Ontari threw at her, throwing back an Imperio that Ontari deflected.

Clarke moved automatically, not giving herself enough time to worry about balance or falling clear off the shelves as she sprinted down them holding the prophecy in her right hand and her wand in her left. Countless other glass balls were scattering beneath her feet, kicked off the shelf and dropping for a few seconds before shattering on the floor so far below.

“_incarcerous!”

Clarke barely managed to deflect the spell; it whizzed overhead, scorching the top of her head with its heat. She risked a glance back over her shoulder to glimpse the horrifying sight of Ontari rising onto the shelf behind Clarke, flying up far faster than Clarke had. She landed heavily and immediately took off after her, throwing spell after spell at Clarke’s back that she only just managed to parry off.

“expelliarmus!” screeched Ontari. Clarke lost all her breath as her wand flew out of her hand. She sprinted on, footsteps pounding under the groaning wooden shelf. She was coming up to the end of the shelf now, with no wand and Ontari bearing down on her.

“_incarc—“

Clarke did the only thing she could. She jumped.

Her scream was trapped in her throat as she plummeted down, sinking faster than a stone. The concrete and all the glistening shards of glass scattered across it came up faster than she could imagine. Clarke squeezed her eyes shut, prepared for the crash—

“levioso!”

Clarke came to a jarring halt in midair only feet from the ground, hovering for only a split second before Lexa’s arms wrapped around her as she bodily intercepted her before Clarke could even register her sprinting and leaping. They sprawled down on the ground, but Clarke scarcely had time to groan before Lexa was scrambling to her feet, heaving her up by her underarms to her feet.
Ontari landed with a heavy thud just as they took off down the aisle and missing her curse by a hair as they tore around the corner. They skidded around another corner as Death Eaters burst down a distant row and stormed toward them. Finally, Clarke could see the door they came through.

“Stop them!” screamed Ontari.

Lixa half-twisted round as they ran to cast a blasting curse so strong, it blew three shelves to bits. She threw her wand-arm up in the air, chucking up a shield that protected them as massive shards of wood and slivers of glass and prophecies and debris came storming down on them. They crashed through the door and slammed it shut behind them.

“Lock it!” gasped Clarke.

“Colloportus!”

Clarke collapsed against the wall in relief at the squelching noise of the sealing door. “Fuck. Oh, fuck.”

They were quiet for a moment, the only sound in the room their panting, and the distant, muffled noises of shelves crashing and Death Eaters shouting in the Hall of Prophecies.

Clarke was still clutching the safe, though sweaty, prophecy, this time in both hands.

“Where’s your wand?” asked Lexa sharply, eyes sliding around the floor as though Clarke had simply lost it.

“Ontari,” supplied Clarke, eyes half-lidded in her exhaustion, still breathing heavily.

Lixa briefly closed her own eyes. “Fuck,” she muttered, before opening them and pushing off the wall she’d been slumped against. “Alright, come on, we need to move.”

Clarke nodded. She and Lexa hurried from the room, locking that door behind them too.

They were half-way down the hallway when the shouts and footsteps grew suddenly louder. Clarke’s heart jumped into her throat. The Death Eaters had caught up, and quickly.

“Hurry!” Lexa urged her.

They sprinted into the room of spinning doors and had only just locked it and burned a mark into it when a body slammed into it.

“Alohomora!” rang a voice, even as the room began spinning.

The room was still spinning, but the door was cracked open, whatever Death Eater there struggling to push it open against the velocity of the spin.

“Get it open, Ivon!” cried Ontari, voice high with urgency.

Clarke seized the nearest door and dragged Lexa into it with her, shutting it a moment before the other door could open.

“Split up,” ordered Ontari. “Find them. Move it!”

Clarke and Lexa were back in the room with the tank of brains. Lexa took her hand; when Clarke looked at her, she lifted her other clutching her wand to press a finger silently to her lips. Clarke nodded. There was no way she was about to make even a sound.
They quietly descended the couple steps that constituted stairs and crossed the room, and had only just rounded the tank to duck behind it when the door opened. They crouched, trying to keep on the metal bottom half to avoid their distorted images being seen through the tank itself, even though the water was so green it may not have posed a problem. Three Death Eaters neared them and Clarke was grateful they had decided to duck down, because she could see them through the tank, their reflections oddly misshapen.

She held Lexa’s gaze. Her eyes were wide and extra green in the light reflecting off the tank, almost as ghostly as the water itself. Understanding passed between them. There were three of them, and while Lexa could possibly take them down, Clarke didn’t have a wand and they couldn’t risk it. They had to remain as silent as possible and hope the Death Eaters left, so they could make it to the other door.

“Check around the tank,” said one Death Eater. Clarke’s heart sank. Looks like they weren’t slipping away after all.

Lexa fidgeted slightly, adjusting her weight on the balls of her feet where she crouched, raising her wand, eyes alert. Clarke turned to peek up through the tank, hoping to glimpse which way they were coming from, but it was a bad move. The Death Eater that had came to check out the tank spotted her through the glass.

“They’re in here!” he howled.

“Uirgae arcum!” hurled Lexa over the corner of the tank. Arrows erupted from the tip of her wand, whistling through the air. The Death Eater gave a strangled scream as one of them pierced his knee, and another his shoulder.

Another Death Eater ran around the tank, ducking the stream of red light Lexa sent shooting at him, and flung back a “Silencio!” that Lexa blocked.

The third Death Eater edged around the other side of the tank, but Lexa was preoccupied with the other two Death Eaters and Clarke quickly realized that the Silencing charm had in fact managed to hit her, when she opened her mouth to warn Lexa and no sound came out. “Tarantallegra!” shouted the third Death Eater. Clarke didn’t have a wand or a voice, but she still had a body, so she lunged to the side, the spell meant for Lexa hitting her square in the chest instead.

Clarke gasped, barely managing to hold onto the prophecy as her own knee jerked up to hit her arm. Her legs were thrust into a hectic dance, sending her horizontal on the floor as she struggled (and failed) to control her body’s involuntary movements.

“Clarke!”

Lexa’s hands fluttered over Clarke’s torso, but before she could lift her wand to reverse the spell, the far door banged open again, rebounding against the wall. Ontari and the rest of the Death Eaters flooded into the room. Panic lodged in Clarke’s throat, choking her as she writhed on the floor, legs flying every direction. They were fucked.

She was concentrating so hard on stilling her uncontrollably jerking legs that she only vaguely registered Lexa standing before her, wand flashing through the air as she took on ten Death Eaters at once.

There were too many of them, and Ontari was ruthless. Lexa stepped back, wand flying through the air to block the dozens of curses aimed their way; Clarke’s leg flew out and tripped her, and suddenly Lexa and Clarke were both on the floor, over a dozen Death Eaters bearing down
“Orbis! Ebublio!” cried Lexa.

The floor around them shifted, several Death Eaters stumbling as it trembled beneath them. The entire room dipped, floor caving in like a bowl, while Clarke and Lexa sank in the center, and the bubble Lexa had conjured encapsulating them. Lexa was already murmuring other spells so quickly that it sounded like a continuous string of words, until finally the floor stilled and the Death Eaters were surrounding them, spells bouncing off the bubble, Clarke and Lexa motionless inside it.

“Finite,” said Lexa. Clarke’s legs finally stilled and she took a wild intake of breath, pushing herself up onto her elbows and glancing around at the Death Eaters towering over them, furiously trying to break the protective enchantment, before her gaze stilled on Lexa.

Lexa was still crouching by her side, eyes wide and luminous and looking at her like she was her entire universe. Clarke held her gaze, rooted in place, mouth parted in surprise. The force of the Death Eaters’ spells were starting to crack the bubble.

“Clarke…” began Lexa in a soft, sad voice. It immediately filled Clarke with anger.

“No,” she said, voice shaking slightly, more out of anger than fear. “Don’t.”

A tinge of exasperation layered Lexa’s expressive eyes. Cracks were creeping across the bubble like spider-webs. “Don’t be afraid. Death is not the end.”

Clarke’s jaw tightened and she sat up, still clutching the prophecy tightly in her hand. “We are not dying here.”

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed. She glanced around at the Death Eaters, eyes narrowing as she met Ontari’s furious, triumphant gaze. Lexa tightened her grip on her wand, and it was utterly steady as she lifted it, pointing it directly at Ontari’s face. The bubble was cracking, seconds away from shattering. “Then get ready to fight.”

Clarke crouched beside her, unsure how exactly she was supposed to fight in a fight of magic. If she could just wrestle a wand away somehow—

The bubble finally smashed. Spells went flying—but not at Clarke and Lexa.

The far door had slammed open again, more people flooding into the room. Only this time, Clarke let out a relieved shout of laughter as dizzying relief surged through her body.

Indra, Gustus, Major Byrne, David Miller, Hannah Green, Roan Kwin, Luna Rivers, a few people Clarke didn’t know, and the Potters. Jamie, Gideon, and Evie. If there was anyone here that made Clarke feel saved, it was the Potters. The legendary family whose ancestor had fought so much and had escaped the Ministry when he was even younger than Clarke. The Potters were here, along with several other accomplished witches and wizards who were already furiously engaging the Death Eaters in mortal combat. They were saved.

“Protego!” Lexa blocked Ontari’s curse just in time, blasting her away, but another Death Eater was reaching for Clarke, while all the others dashed to meet the newcomers in battle.

“Relashio! Stupefy!” The Death Eater’s grip loosened as he keeled over. Lexa pulled Clarke to her feet and put her arm around her shoulder, helping her limp over on aching legs to the door. “We have to get out of here, Clarke.”
“But what about—“

“Everyone else will be fine,” assured Lexa, breathing heavily out her nose as she began helping Clarke up the stairs. “Confundus!” she snapped out, sending the Death Eater that had been rushing them careening away, a perplexed expression on his gaunt face.

“Tarantallegra!”

Not again. Clarke cried out as her legs suddenly jerked and twitched so violently that she ripped free from Lexa’s arms, falling hard to the floor. Pain burst in her arm as her elbow cracked against the ground, but she still managed to keep hold of the prophecy.

The Death Eater was bearing down on her, a nasty grin on his face. “Locomotor Mortis!” A horrible pain lanced up Clarke’s spine as her jerking legs locked together, uncontrollable convulsions wracking through them in terrible waves while they were motionless. She howled in pain and was a moment away from throwing the prophecy, her only weapon, into the Death Eater’s face.

“Stupefy! Finite!”

Clarke felt yet another rush of appreciation for Lexa, but when she looked up, Lexa was engaged in a duel with two other Death Eaters. It had been Evie Potter who rushed to her aid. She didn’t stop but continued running, Luna at her heels, to meet Ontari. Clarke felt another thrill of fear spike up her spine like a jolt of electricity as she watched the viciousness with which Ontari slung spells at the two of them. Green and red lights flashed from her wand that Luna and Evie barely evaded. Ontari was aiming to kill.

Clarke couldn’t move, could hardly breathe as she rolled over, her legs throbbing with shocking pain. When Indra felled a Death Eater nearby, Clarke seized the wand that rolled out of his limp hand. She quickly cast a healing spell on her legs, but it didn’t do much good, not only because it wasn’t her wand but also because the two combined spells had done a number on her legs. She instead pointed her wand at the nearest Death Eater, who had just sent Hannah Green tumbling unconscious to the ground. “Baubillious!” The stream of white light that shot forth from her wand blasted the Death Eater and sent him barreling into a fellow, successfully setting the both of them up to fall to Indra’s stunning spell.

Clarke had barely struggled to her feet when a spell from across the room hit her. Though she didn’t hear the caster, it was clearly Deprimo because of the powerful gust of wind that knocked her a few feet forward toward one of the doors, slamming her head against the stone steps. Clarke heard a sickening crunch and blackness crept toward the center of her vision, but sudden panic caused her to stay awake. Utter panic, because Clarke had made a mistake. She had dropped the prophecy.

A pearly-white figure rose out of it, hands clasped and bald head bowed down as though the man was praying. Amidst all the screaming and crashing and chaos of the room, Clarke, who lay directly beneath the prophecy, heard disjointed snatches.

“Thirteen years from now, three will commence a battle of the blood…” began a deep voice.

“The prophecy! The prophecy!” screeched Ontari from somewhere in the throng of madness.

“…three phoenix, three heads…One of fire and brimstone, born in the seventh month…”

“QUIET! LISTEN! THE PROPHECY!” screamed Ontari, but none of her fellows were listening, too engaged in battle.

“…one of the ice, cold and invasive, born alone in the winter…”
“QUIET! QUIET! THE—SILENCIO! SILENCIO!”

“…the stars in the fall, born ivory and forged in steel…”

“SILENCIO! LANGLOCK! AVADA KE—“ A deafening blast, courtesy of Luna Rivers’ confringo, silenced Ontari more effectively than any of her spells had silenced the rest of the room. The spell and Ontari slammed back against the tank of brains with a deafening crack, leaving a jagged white crack in the glass.

“…of blood as fallen…”

The blackness was still creeping to the center of Clarke’s vision; she was losing strength. The wand rolled out of her limp hand as, arms too weak to support her, she fell flat on the floor again.

“…has faded away…”

Stay awake, stay awake, voices chanted to her in her head, but it was too much. This, everything, was too much. She just wanted to close her eyes. Just wanted to sleep, if only for a moment—

“...souls return from whence they came, together at last in the city of light.”

The screaming and shouting and blasts of noise ceased abruptly as Clarke blacked out.

“Rennervate.”

When she came to, the wand was being pushed back into her hand and hardly any time had passed: everyone was still battling those they had been battling before she was hit, but the Death Eater that had hit her was now advancing on her. Gustus, from his position beside Clarke, lifted his wand, but the Death Eater sent him tumbling back with a well-placed hex he couldn’t deflect in time.

Without moving from her position sprawled out spread-eagle on the ground, Clarke shakily lifted her arm. “Everte Statum!” she said weakly. It wasn’t her strongest spell. The Death Eater easily blocked it, but before he could get nearer, David Miller stepped before him, effectively distracting him with a powerful Body-Bind curse.

Clarke slowly pushed herself up, sitting flat on the floor. She could taste blood, cloying and metallic. She smacked her lips and tentatively broached the tip of her tongue against the roof of her mouth, blinking dazedly. Either the world around her was spinning, or her head was swimming.

“Stupefy!” shouted Jamie from nearby, her voice oddly warbled, as though underwater.

Clarke blinked rapidly, shaking her head in an effort to clear it. She reached up to feel the back of her head; when she withdrew her hand, her fingers were covered in blood. Breathing shallow, Clarke carefully pointed the wand at the back of her head. “E—episkey!” she whispered. She let out a quiet moan of relief when her head warmed and then cooled, healing.

“Evie, duck!” cried Luna; Evie lunged down just in time, the streak of green tearing overhead and blasting into the giant tank instead. It broke with an ear-splitting crack, spider webs spiking out from the point of contact, an odd groaning noise coming from the glass a moment before it shattered. Water rushed out, flooding the room, brains riding the waves with the long streams behind them making them look like ghostly jellyfish. Clarke’s eyes widened as it all came rushing straight toward her.

Then Lexa appeared, grasping Clarke by the arms and heaving her up onto the steps. One
brain floated just under her flailing foot, missing her by inches.

The rest of the room wasn’t as lucky.

Jamie, who had been least distracted as she’d finished off her Death Eater and was rushing forward to meet the next one, was able to leap up onto the opposite steps just in time, arms wind-milling as she fought to keep her balance. Luna and Evie caught each other, but not before the water rushed over, knocking them to their knees; Roan was locked in a deathly battle with two Death Eaters at once, and all three were knocked over by the wave, brains latching onto them all; Indra and the Death Eater she was grappling with (literally grappling, since after *expelliarmus* had disarmed her of her wand, she’d resorted to lunging forward, knocking her opponent’s wand away, and engaging in a furious hand-to-hand combat instead) were swept away too, brain only narrowly missing Indra and latching onto the screaming Death Eater instead. Another Death Eater took advantage of Byrne’s distraction by casting a *Petrificus Totalus* and sending her slapping down into the water flat as a board. The only person still fighting was Gustus, tall and strong enough to remain standing like a mighty oak amidst a flood. Clarke gaped, watching in awe as he cast his wand like a battle-ax, striking down the three Death Eaters that had went running when the tank broke.

“*Flipendo!*” Lexa pointed her wand at any nearby brains, casting them away before they could wrap their long tentacles around Clarke’s ankle.

Most people were already struggling back to their feet again, save for a few still wrestling with the brains. “*Glisseo!*” snarled Ontari; the stairs Clarke was lying on and Lexa was kneeling above shifted beneath them, smoothing into a ramp. They were sliding down it and sprawling out into the puddles of water before they could stop it, and Ontari was pointing her wand at them again.

“*Immobul*—“

“*Protego!*”

Indra stood between them and Ontari, shielding Clarke and Lexa.

“Lexa, take her and get out of here, now!”

Lexa immediately slinged Clarke’s arm over her shoulder and moved toward the door; Ontari’s face contorted in fury, but Indra blocked her path, brandishing her wand as fiercely as a sword and shooting streaks of silver light at Ontari, so that Ontari had no choice but to engage in combat with her.

“Come on,” whispered Lexa.

Clarke watched with wide eyes as Lexa shuffled her toward the door. Most were still fighting, but not everyone. Some people were unconscious on the ground. Two Death Eaters and Roan Kwin were wrestling with brains, struggling to loosen tentacles that wrapped around their limbs like ropes. Gustus was kneeling in the shallow water, trying to revive an unconscious Byrne. Indra and Ontari were dueling as ferociously as ever, Ontari clearly trying to get past her so she could get to Clarke and Lexa.

She was too late, though. Lexa has successfully pulled Clarke into the room with all the doors; she cast *Flagrate* and then the room was spinning. They didn’t try to exit, but Lexa instead quickly opened door after door, trying to find a familiar room.

“*That one,*” breathed Clarke. She recognized the hallway.

They set off down it, moving as quickly as they could in spite of Clarke’s hurt legs and
aching head. Lexa herself looked relatively unscathed, save for a cut across one of those sinfully chiseled cheekbones. Lexa was beautiful. Clarke’s stomach churned unpleasantly at the thought, her heart echoing it painfully. Lexa was a liar. Lexa knew things, things that apparently involved Clarke but she didn’t bother informing her about.

Lexa made a noise of relief in the back of her throat, a stifled sigh, perhaps, as the distant elevator came into view. They hurried to it, Clarke’s feet dragging slightly behind them. “Which floor?” asked Lexa.

“Atrium, eighth level,” huffed Clarke, hobbling to clutch onto the railing as Lexa punched the button. Lexa eased off her slightly, steadying her merely by a hand on her waist, gazing worriedly at her.

When they finally reached the atrium, it was eerily silent and therefore disconcerting, even if logically Clarke knew it was supposed to be like this since it was late at night on a Saturday, so no one should be working. All the times Clarke had been here, it had been alive and bustling with people. Now it was empty. The polished floors of the long hallway were glinting in the light of the torches, the golden symbols above on the blue ceiling glinting too, but the fireplaces set in the walls were empty and barren.

“That’s our ticket out of here,” said Clarke tiredly, nodding toward the fireplaces. “But…” she glanced back over her shoulder at the elevator. “Should we really leave them?”

“Yes,” said Lexa firmly, slinging Clarke’s arm around her shoulders again and starting toward the elevators. “This is what they do. They’ll be fine, Clarke.”

Clarke watched Lexa for a moment, the focus and determination on her face as she half-carried Clarke across the atrium. “What are ‘they?’”

Lexa was quiet for a moment, breathing steadily. The atrium was very large, but they had almost reached halfway across. They were nearing the huge golden fountain of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley that had been built there almost a century ago. Water poured steadily out of each their upheld wands.

“The Order of the Phoenix.”

“What?”

“That’s what they’re known as,” said Lexa quietly. “Technically, it disbanded over a century ago with the defeat of Voldemort. Unofficially, it reconvened thirteen years ago, with the rise of the Ice Queen, but that’s not the first time. It’s came and gone a few times over the last century. It began as a clandestine organization founded to oppose Voldemort, but ended up transitioning into a special taskforce that opposes any dark wizard or witch that tries rising to power.”

“Oh.” They had finally passed the fountain. “Are you in it?”

Another pause. “Not exactly,” she answered, sounding strained.

“LEXA!”

They both jumped, startled, when Ontari’s voice ripped across the atrium. She was pushing herself out of the elevator, struggling to force open the doors before it was ready. She made a strangled sound of frustration before pulling back; a moment later, the elevator doors were blasted off and landed several feet away, smoking.
Lexa set Clarke down as carefully as she could in her hasty state. “Go,” she urged her before turning, deflecting the hex Ontari cast at them.

Clarke stumbled back toward the fireplace, but she didn’t tear her gaze away from Lexa and Ontari, now circling one another like a pair of lionesses facing off.

“Expelliarmus!”

“Protego!” cried Ontari, making Lexa duck to avoid her reflected spell. Ontari slashed her wand through the air. “Sectumsepra!”

Lexa nonverbally deflected it, flicking her wand with as much consequence as someone shrugging off a fly.

“Incendio!” screamed Ontari, a jet of crimson and gold flames spurting forth from her wand.

“Aguamentil!” The massive undulating stream of water that rose up into the air from Lexa’s wand tip lassoed out toward Ontari, plunging into the fire and turning it to steam.

“Confundus!” said Clarke; Ontari deflected it and cast the same spell back, which Lexa quickly repelled.

“Clarke, leave! Get back to the castle—“

“I’m not going to leave you alone with some maniac trying to kill you!” exclaimed Clarke, lurching to the right so she could throw another spell at Ontari.

“She’s not going to kill me,” said Lexa through gritted teeth, twisting to avoid the Crucio Ontari cast. “She needs us alive.”

“Alive for now!” corrected Ontari, eyes wide and wild again. Her broad grin was feral and feverish. “One of these days—“ she panted, wand moving nonstop as she parried and sent back spell after spell with Lexa. “—you’re going to get—what you deserve—fucking bitch—“

“Expelliarmus!” roared Clarke, lunging out from behind Lexa to cast it. Ontari’s eyes went even wider as the spell hit her and her wand went arcing into the air.

“Incarcerous!” said Lexa just as Ontari lunged for her wand. Thick ropes wrapped around her just as her hand closed around it.

At that precise moment, the elevator lowered down. They hadn’t even noticed it rise. The rest of the Order, save for a few, burst out of it, wands at the ready.

Ontari glanced back at them. Her face paled. She turned back around and snarled, “Relashio!” As the bindings fell open, freeing her, she plunged her free hand into her cloak pocket and threw something on the ground just as everyone, every single person in the atrium, cried a spell, all wands pointed at her.

The torches lining the atrium went out. The entire atrium was cast into darkness, briefly illuminated by half a dozen spells clashing together, revealing an empty floor. There was a sudden burst of fire in one of the grates, a flash of brown hair and black robe, and then Ontari was gone.

The torches flickered back into life, bathing the atrium in their dim glow. Indra and the others slowly approached Lexa and Clarke, all panting and glancing around.
“She’s long gone,” said Indra in frustration.

“Fuck!” huffed Luna, doubling over to catch her breath. Evie reached over to briefly touch a hand on her mid-back, not so much to rub consolingly but to just provide the comforting knowledge that she was there.

“What’s our next move?” asked Evie.

Jamie, who was sporting a rather deep gash over her forearm, shook her head and wiped her sweaty forehead with the back of her hand. “We can discuss that later. Gid is injured; Death Eater got him with a Dark curse and nearly took his hand off. Hannah’s woken up but Byrne is still unconscious, last Gustus checked. He’s working on David right now, trying to stop the bleeding. Roan’s got the brain off him but he needs to stop by St. Mungo’s to make sure there’s no lasting effects. Evie and Luna need to set off as soon as possible; I’ll bring you to your Tracker and you can go as soon as you’re ready. And these two need to get back to the castle,” she added, gesturing at Clarke and Lexa.

“You can borrow my brooms,” said Evie.

Indra nodded in agreement, directing her attention onto Lexa. “The rest of the Order is guarding the school. Anya and Lincoln are awaiting instruction. Take this one,” she said, jerking her head toward Clarke, “to the hospital wing. She will need those legs looked at.”

“My dad,” spoke up Clarke even as Lexa ushered her back toward the fireplaces. “I need to check on my dad!”

Everyone ignored her, but she didn’t miss Jamie’s glance, emerald eyes full of pity and guilt.

“Let go of me!” she said in outrage as Lexa pushed her to the fireplace. Lexa cast fire in it before taking a handful of Floo Powder from the pot beside the grate and threw it in.

Lexa took her arm and held it tightly as she pulled Clarke into the fireplace with her and threw down the powder. “Hogsmeade!”

Clarke gave a keening cry as her already-hurt elbow slammed into the stone walls of the chimney. Lexa was gentle and concerned as she pulled Clarke free, into the warmth of The Three Broomsticks.

“Lexa, my dad—” began Clarke desperately, but Lexa shook her head, gently cupping Clarke’s cheeks.

“Clarke, I’m so sorry,” she whispered, eyes bright. She tenderly brushed a strand of Clarke’s hair back, but Clarke flinched, heart thrumming with agony. He wasn’t dead. He couldn’t be dead.

Lexa immediately dropped her hands when Clarke cringed, taking a step back to give Clarke her space. Her throat bobbed as she swallowed, gazing at Clarke with a guarded impassive expression and mournful green eyes.

She turned, lifting her wand. “Accio Evie’s brooms!”

Brooms came whizzing down from upstairs, quivering to a halt before them.

Clarke clambered onto her broom, following Lexa out the open window and into the night sky, legs aching, head aching, and heart aching the most.
The tournament audience had clearly all been moved inside, because the grounds were silence as they glided over them, heading for the lit up castle. Clarke’s head was pounding progressively worse as they flew, a strange pressure pushing at her ears and her sight weakening, but she ignored it, determinedly flying on.

By the time they landed before the castle doors, she lost energy. She couldn’t even stand.

“Clarke!” Lexa gripped her shoulders, peering fearfully into her eyes. Clarke blinked hazily up at her, slumping against her.

You’re a liar, she wanted to say, but it came out as incomprehensible mumbles.

The castle doors burst open. Clarke saw Kane’s drained face a split second before she blacked out.

* * /<>/*

When Clarke came to, she was in the hospital wing. By the pale orange light leaking in through the spaces between the curtains on the window, it was nearing dawn. Lexa was in a chair next to her bed, holding her hands, her head resting on the mattress beside Clarke’s side. Her lips were slightly parted as she slept.

A strange mixture of emotions rose within Clarke.

Concern, because Lexa had just been through the same ordeal, but her cut on her face had clearly not been healed, and she was dressed in the same clothes, and her neck must be craning.

Affection, because Lexa looked so…she looked so wonderful, peacefully sleeping, and she was holding Clarke’s hand…

Lastly and most significantly…a burning, wretched sense of betrayal.

Clarke swallowed, hating herself for the tears that stung her eyes, and telling herself that she hated Lexa for giving them to her. She pulled her hand out of Lexa’s grasp and half turned as best she could, burying her face in the pillow, and crying herself to sleep.

Her last thought was that she was damn well going to check on her father somehow, with or without Lexa’s help.

* * /<>/*

“Ow,” complained Luna, wincing as Evie lightly traced her wand tip over the cut on her neck.
“Shhh,” tskeled Evie softly, murmuring the healing spells. “You’re all healed,” she finally said, leaning back to appraise Luna. Sweaty, exhausted, brave Luna. “You’re lucky. A couple inches over and you could have had your throat sliced open.” There was silence, as Luna pulled her jumper back over the tank top that stretched over her torso like a second skin. That was how they mostly existed around one another, now. A comfortable silence. Easy companionship. Mutual need and quiet respect.

It was like breathing air for the first time in months, to Evie.

It was like breathing air for the first time in years, to Luna.

It was what they both wanted, and needed. Possibly for the rest of their lives, even if those lives may be shorter than they expected, with the Ice Queen around.

“I hate this,” admitted Evie, voice barely above a whisper. When Luna looked at her, automatically reached out to thread their fingers together, she swallowed and found the courage to go on. “I hate the fear. Never knowing if—if that’s going to be the last time I see you, the last battle we fight.”

“I hate it too,” said Luna quietly. “We all do. But I’m lucky. I have someone to be scared of losing, someone I fight harder to go back to. Someone I love that makes all this worth it, if it means the world is a little better for you to exist in.”

“We all do,” Evie echoed with a reassuring smile, “That’s why we’re going to win.”

Luna returned the smile, squeezing Evie’s hand.

They both turned at the sound of Jamie’s return. Her gray-streaked hair was matted to her sweaty forehead, still stained with blood from the cut she’d at least healed, and she looked fatigued, but she still blew out a breath and gestured tiredly behind her. “Meet your Tracker.”

Evie and Luna immediately raised their brow at the boy that traipsed inside with his hands shoved in his jean pockets. It was just a boy. He looked like he was young enough to still be in school. Evie exchanged an uncertain glance with Luna, who arched a brow in disbelief at the floppy-haired lad as he grinned and lifted a hand in greeting.

“Hey,” he said cheerily, sticking out a hand for them to shake. “I’m Finn. Finn Collins.”

Chapter End Notes

PS. I feel obliged to add that for some reason, I’m obsessed with the scene where Lexa raises Clarke up and starts to lift herself up but then is attacked and fighting off multiple Death Eaters so Clarke has to take off running VERY VERY HIGH across the shelves knocking prophecies while Ontari chases her like a bat out of hell. I think that’s my favorite scene from this chapter.
PPS. a protagonist (not Jake) did die here; can you guess who? :( RIP
Chapter Summary

Clarke is determined to confirm her father is alive, even if it's the last thing she does.

Chapter Notes

Right on time (although a little late in the day, I suppose). I had actually gotten most of this done early, but I had three job interviews this week. This isn't my favorite chapter by far, but it's done with and I hope you guys still enjoy. Thank you so much for your continued support; it seriously means the world to me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It feels like there's oceans

Between you and me once again

We hide our emotions

Under the surface and try to pretend

But it feels like there's oceans

Between you and me

-Seafret

Jamie Potter waited in line with the other students, standing calmly despite the excited butterflies fluttering around her stomach. She had been waiting for this moment for eleven years. She was ready.

When her name was called, she couldn’t resist the grin that spread on her face as she settled down onto the stool and the head of Slytherin House put the Sorting Hat on her head.

“Oh-ho! Another Potter, my how the years fly…and let me guess. I know what house you desire.”

“Put me in Gryffindor.”

“Yes, yes, I’m not surprised at all. Gryffindor, eh? Well, there’s no denying you are filled with a resilience that steadies you and a courage that fuels you. But you’ve got brains— incredible
intellectual capabilities, really, that are far better suited to a House that encourages that prowess, and you've have a kind heart and loyalty that certainly means—"

“No thank you,” Jamie thought, polite yet firm. “I would very much like to be in Gryffindor, just like my parents and my grandparents.”

She smiled when the hat rang out the words, and headed to the table that clapped the loudest.

Her hands only trembled slightly as she folded them before her, quiet settling over the Great Hall again as Professor Nygel lifted the long curling parchment that held all of their names. “Roan Kwin,” she called, and a girl that was somehow short and gangly at the same time stepped up to the stool, eyes darting around the room as nervously as the way she pushed her brown hair behind her ear. It swung free again to cover half her face as the Sorting Hat was placed on her head, sitting there a full two minutes before the mouth parted to shout, “GRYFFINDOR!”

Nygel lifted the hat off her and she stumbled over to the table clapping the loudest full of the most Gryffindors. She looked both relieved and faintly nauseous as she collapsed into the free seat beside Jamie. Jamie shot her an encouraging smile, which the girl timidly returned, before they both turned their attention to the continued sorting.

After the last child was sorted, Headmistress Gordon started off the Welcoming Feast. Jamie dug into the Treacle Tart and was pleased to find it was as delicious as her father assured her it would be.

She mostly listened to the conversations around her as dinner progressed, noting the excitement and trepidation of fellow first-years and absorbing all the wild stories about the school told by older students. Wild stories were nothing new to Jamie. Her grandfather she’d been named after, James, had been quite the troublemaker in his days at Hogwarts, and whenever he visited he wasted no time in beguiling her with tales. Still, Jamie didn’t bother hiding her small smile, and steadily worked her way through the feast as she quietly listened to the conversations around her.

The girl next to her was quiet too, and had hardly touched her food. When she first stumbled over to the table after she was Sorted, she’d looked relieved, but by now she seemed nervous again.

“Hi. I’m Jamie.” She stuck out her hand for the girl to take, smiling encouragingly when the girl’s pale blue eyes darted between Jamie’s face and hand.

The girl swallowed, extending her own hand to grip Jamie’s and shake. Her palm was sweaty. “I’m Roan,” she said, voice almost inaudible.

Jamie felt a rush of sympathy for this girl; clearly she was very shy. Jamie wanted to ask if she was muggleborn—it would certainly account for her fear, being in an entirely new strange world—but it was considered rude to do so, and she didn’t want to risk offending her. So instead she pursed her lips and gestured to the nearby Treacle Tart on her other side, too far away for the girl to reach. When the girl nodded, Jamie picked up the spoon and scooped some onto a plate, handing it over to Roan.

“Are you looking forward to classes?”

Roan paused, the spoonful of tart trembling a moment before she swiftly nodded and then brought the spoon to her mouth. She slanted a glance at Jamie as she chewed, swallowing thickly before saying breathlessly, “Are—are you?”
Jamie smiled. “Oh yeah. I can’t wait for Transfiguration. I’ve always been really interested in it.”

She was pleasantly surprised when Roan actually returned the smile. “I’ve always liked Defense Against the Dark Arts,” she admitted softly.

“That’s a good one too,” said Jamie sagely. “I’ll have to get N.E.W.T.S in both of them one day. I want to be an auror when I grow up.”

Roan looked impressed. “That would be cool. What made you decide that?”

Jamie hesitated. This was always the point where Jamie grew cautious. It was why she sometimes avoided revealing her last name too soon. Roan said she always liked DADA, so she clearly wasn’t a muggleborn. Anyone raised in the wizarding world knew the Potters, and sometimes people were weird about it. Usually Jamie was okay with it, though Gideon annoyed her by how often he bragged about being a Potter when he was trying to impress people, but she preferred to be judged by who she was as a person rather than her family name.

Then again, they did just go through the Sorting. Roan surely must have already heard Jamie’s last name, unless she’d been so nervous she hadn’t paid attention.

“I’ve always wanted to be one. I had a lot of people in my family who were aurors,” explained Jamie, and it was the truth. “What do you want to do when you grow up?”

Roan hesitated, her blue eyes growing misty. She dropped her gaze, staring at the treacle tart she suddenly seemed to have lost the appetite for; she nudged it with the prongs of her fork, smashing it into the plate. Jamie watched, sobering at the display before her.

“Happy,” whispered Roan after a moment, so soft and quiet it was almost inaudible, but Jamie caught it, watching and listening as intently as she was.

She stared at this girl for a long moment. They had only met minutes ago, but Jamie was certain in that moment that they were destined to know one another. Jamie Potter was a firm believer that there was no such thing as a coincidence; there was a reason they were both here, in their first year at Hogwarts together, in the same House, and sitting next to each other at this delicious feast.

“You know, I hear that friends are good at that,” she said lightly.

Roan’s gaze flickered up, a crease appearing between her brow. “What do you mean?”

Jamie shrugged, expression serene. “Making each other happy.”

Roan stared at her, mouth parted slightly. Then, slowly, the corners of her lips curled in a grin that mirrored Jamie’s. “Oh.”

“Jamie?”

Jamie startled, tearing herself out of her reminiscing. She blinked, looking down at Roan. He was perched on the edge of the hospital bed, brows raised in amusement at her presumably dazed, zoned out expression.
“I thought aurors were supposed to be more focused than that,” he joked.

Jamie rolled her eyes. “Shut it, you.” She leaned forward to snatch the clipboard off the nearby tray, ignoring Roan’s nudging of her ribs, and quickly scanned through the list of medical jargon.

“I’m pretty positive nothing’s changed in the last five minutes,” he said lightly; Jamie looked above the clipboard to zero her gaze in on Roan’s smile.

She sighed, setting the clipboard back down on the tray. “I know. I’m just getting antsy. I’m ready for you to be released.”

“You’re telling me,” he said.

“You’ve only been here for a couple hours,” pointed out Abby Griffin as she came sweeping into the room, her lime green robes billowing behind her. She came to a stop at the end of Roan’s bed, folding her arms and arching a brow at he and Jamie. It very much made Jamie feel as though they were back in school again and about to be scolded by the Head Girl. “It could have been worse. Much worse. You got off lucky.”

She moved forward to gently lift up Roan’s arm, waving her wand over it to unfurl the bandages, and then opened the gown to observe his chest. She studied the angry red welts on his skin.

“I guess thoughts can leave some pretty heavy scarring,” joked Roan. Jamie’s lips quirked.

So did Abby’s. “You’re right, actually. You’re probably always going to have the marks. But if you keep applying Dr. Ubbly’s Oblivious Unction, you’ll get past the worst of it.” She flourished her wand again so the bandages and gown closed up. “You’re free to go. Just take it easy,” she warned him, before turning her attention to Jamie, her smile fading. “I’m about to go visit Clarke again.”

Jamie and Roan sobered at once. “How’s she doing?”

“Still unconscious, but she’ll pull through.”

The tension in the room thickened, turned heavy with solemnity. “Thank you. For protecting her,” said Abby. “I would have…I’m so…I hate how busy…I wouldn’t have missed the call, if I hadn’t been tending to patients. I wouldn’t have so many patients in critical condition if it weren’t for the Ice Queen. I can’t imagine what could have happened…”

“Hey,” urged Jamie gently, gripping Abby’s hand. “Don’t waste energy worrying about what did and what could have gone wrong. We did it, okay? We got there in time. Clarke’s okay. Everyone made it out alive.”

Jamie’s insides plummeted as Abby’s lips twisted and she moved away. “I better leave. I have more patients to check up on before I go.”

“Wait. I know Hannah Green is okay but—Miller and Byrne, are they…?”

“We’re still running diagnostics…”

Something about Abby’s tone settled unease in Jamie’s stomach. Hannah Green had been conscious, at least, when they left the Ministry, but Miller and Byrne had both been unresponsive, according to Gustus.
Abby seemed to hesitate before she turned. Jamie’s heart sank at her pitying expression.

“How—“ Jamie croaked. “I mean. Was it the brains, or a spell…?”

Abby swallowed, lips pursed as she worked to restrain her emotions. “Drowned,” she finally said.

Jamie’s insides plummeted. “Thank you for letting me know,” she rasped. Abby gave a swift nod before leaving the room.

Alone now, Jamie’s face crumpled as Roan pulled her into a hug; she gingerly pulled back when he winced at her pressing into his injured side. Her eyes quietly traced the contours of his face, lingering at the dark bruises before stopping at his pale blue eyes. Jamie leaned forward, pressing a soft kiss to the tip of his nose, and he reached up to cup her face before sweeping her graying hair away with a kiss to her forehead.

“You make me happy,” she whispered. She squeezed her eyes shut; she’d only shed a few tears, but she still reigned in her sorrow, sighing as she focused on the Order, on the jobs they all had to do. “I don’t want you to go back to Azkaban.”

“I don’t either,” he admitted, pressing another kiss to the top of her head. “But we both know I have to.”

She sighed again. “I know.”

* * /✧/ * *

“…you can’t keep doing this to yourself. It’s not your fault. None of this is your fault, Lexa.”

Clarke’s lashes fluttered as Anya’s harsh whispers trickled into her consciousness, interrupting a sleep deeper than she’d had in what felt like years. Memories slammed into her all at once; Ontari’s scarred, livid face lit up with a frenzied fire, grinning wickedly as she slung spells. Death Eaters screaming as writhing tentacles wrapped around their limbs, water tumultuously splashing at their waists. The gaunt faces of golden statues thrown into punitive relief by the flashes of light streaking across the dark atrium beneath them. Lexa’s eyes, wide and green and so full of sorrow as her plump lips moved to form shapes of death, of lies.

The anger came to her first. Even with her eyes still closed, Clarke gripped the white linen sheets in her hands, squeezed them into fists as the sharp sear of anger struck deep in her belly, high
in her chest.

Lexa.

This was her fault. Everything was her fault.

(Clarke ignored the tiny voice in the back of her head that called her to question—)

No. This was all Lexa.

Lexa had lied to her, had kept secrets, and then lied to her again. This was betrayal, short and simple.

“It feels like it,” came another voice, strained and low. Lexa.

“Well it’s not. You did what you had to do, what any of us would have done—hell, what Clarke would have done. You did your duty and protected your people. You did good, kid.”

“It doesn’t feel good.”

Lexa sounded miserable. Clarke told herself that the overwhelming ache in her gut was one of vicious satisfaction.

“Look, if you want to beat yourself up, you’re going to have to do it later. We’re supposed to meet with Indra in five minutes.”

Silence. Clarke determinedly kept still, her eyes closed, careful to keep her breathing steady. She wasn’t sure why she was so intent not to speak to Lexa right now. If anything, she should be up in Lexa’s face demanding answers. But the idea of facing her right now…it was enough to put nausea in her belly. She just wanted her to leave, and then Clarke would be free to get up and make her way to the place she was absolutely desperate to be in right now: the Owlery. She needed to write her mother a letter, as soon as possible.

“What if she wakes up?” said Lexa softly. “I don’t want her to wake alone.”

“Jesus, Lexa, you haven’t left her side since last night. You need to meet with Indra and then get some breakfast and rest. You know how imperative it is to replenish yourself now that we’re in the middle of a fucking war.”

“I know. I will be there in a minute.”

“Lexa, we have four minutes to get to the ship, you can’t—“

“No.”

Anya’s impatient, exasperated huff of breath seemed to echo in the room longer than her receding footsteps did.

Clarke forced herself to remain as still as possible as Lexa moved toward her; she couldn’t do anything to prevent the jump of her heart as her hand was suddenly taken in Lexa’s.

“Clarke?” Damn it. She had clearly noticed the change in Clarke’s breathing.

Clarke’s nostrils flared as she let out a long breath. When she finally opened her eyes, she had to blink rapidly to clear up the blurry sight of the hospital wing. She had a bed next to an open window; the air that drifted in was warm, and the sunlight lit up the candy-laden table next to her
bed. Lexa was sat in the chair on the other side, the same one she’d slept in overnight. There were shadows beneath her eyes, so clearly she hadn’t slept well.

“Clarke,” breathed Lexa with a sleepy smile that quickly faltered beneath the weight of Clarke’s cold gaze. Lexa’s throat bobbed as she swallowed. “How do you feel?”

Clarke took a deep breath, reigning in the anger that was pulsating in her veins. She pulled her hand out from beneath Lexa’s. “How do you think I feel, Lexa?” She had hoped for a calm, constrained voice. Instead her words were clipped, short, brittle with fury.

Lexa’s eyes widened. She blinked, resuming her neutral expression before she carefully slid her arm off the bed and withdrew to sit straight-backed in the chair.

“I am sorry,” she began, but Clarke scoffed. “Too late.”

“Clarke,” she said again, voice just as infuriatingly soft. She leaned forward slightly, eyes wide and sad and fuck, Clarke couldn’t stand this, couldn’t stand her.

“Don’t,” said Clarke, loudly enough that it took Lexa by surprise. She fell silent, sitting back again. She just watched as Clarke pushed down the blankets and kicked them off, swiveling round on the mattress to stand. She swayed, dizzy for a moment as her sore legs ached, and Lexa was on her feet beside her in an instant, an arm wrapping around her waist to steady her until Clarke bodily shoved it off. Lexa stepped back at once.

“Don’t act like any of this is okay. Don’t—don’t act like I’m in the wrong here, like I don’t have a right to be fucking pissed off, okay, because none—none of this is right.” She pointed a shaky finger in Lexa’s face, relieved beyond belief that her voice wasn’t shaking too. “You lied to me. You completely betrayed my trust. You made me feel—” she thundered closer, lip trembling uncontrollably now. She advanced again when Lexa opened her mouth to speak. “Don’t! Don’t. I have a right to be angry. I have a right to know everything you’ve been keeping from me.”

“I never said you didn’t, Clarke,” said Lexa. Her lip was trembling too, looking as close to tears as Clarke had seen her without her trying to hide her face away. They held eye contact for a moment, and Clarke knew. She knew what was coming. She held her breath, willing herself not to snap, not to lose her temper. Lexa tried approaching her again. “And I’m sorry. Believe me, I’m so, so sorry. But I can’t.”

That was it. Snap.

“I swear to God,” growled Clarke, pushing her hands on Lexa’s chest to shove her away when she tried to come near. Lexa did not so much as stumble, but she quickly backtracked, lifting her arms palm-up in surrender, and didn’t argue when Clarke seized her wand from where Lexa had placed it on the mattress. Lexa didn’t so much as move as Clarke pointed it at her. “I swear to God, Lexa, you better tell me everything you know. Everything you know right now.” she said even louder when Lexa began to protest about it not being the time or the place. “Tell me, Lexa!”

“I—I can’t, Clarke,” she said, voice shaking hard as though she was inhaling sobs. Her eyes were bright. Clarke didn’t care. “I’ve been sworn. I can’t.”

“You told me you aren’t under an Unbreakable Vow—“

“I’m not! But I told you, it’s similar…”
“It’s not the same thing!” cried Clarke. “It’s not the same and I want to—I need to know, I have the right to know!” Hate rushed through her and she wished it were toward Lexa. She really wished it were because it would make things so much easier right now. But it was at herself, for the way she trembled from head to foot, for the way her voice cracked, for the way her face was flushed red with anger and her eyes were about to spill over.

“I…” Lexa visibly deflated before her, dropping her hands. Her shoulders sagged as she slowly shook her head, gaze dropping to the floor. “I’m sorry, Clarke.”

Clarke didn’t stick around to hear another excuse.

Lexa’s alarmed whispers of her name were left behind as she marched out of the hospital wing, jerking Lexa’s wand through the air to angrily cinch up her gown when she felt it fluttering open, exposing her backside to the world. She darted around the corner and then hurried down the hallway, bare feet slapping on the floor. Lexa was wrong; her father was alive. Clarke could feel it with every bone in her body. He was alive. Clarke just needed to quickly write a letter to her mother and ask her to come back, to confirm this.

She hurried on, sprinting down the halls, not really sure if she was breathing hard or hardly breathing—Lexa was gaining on her, she could hear her, could sense her growing near—

But Lexa didn’t know this castle like Clarke did.

She ran onto the moving staircase and peered over the banister to see Lexa still on the ground, looking up at her with hurt completely clouding over any frustration she may have felt. Good, thought Clarke harshly, swallowing in an attempt to rid herself of the lump in her throat. She took a step through the door that liked to pretend it was a wall and hastened down the next hall, heading for the spiral staircase that served as a shortcut to the Western side of the castle. She still had Lexa’s wand, but she was certain Lexa wouldn’t be catching up any time soon; she’d only experienced Hogwarts for the past several months, and didn’t know its ins and outs even half as well as a regular. Clarke was fairly certain Lexa had never even visited the Owlery before. After all, whom would she be exchanging letters with? The thought gave Clarke a pang in her heart, but she ignored it, focusing on her seething rage instead as she stormed up the steep staircase.

She skidded to a halt once she finally reached the top of the West Tower. She shivered; the Owlery had always been cold and drafty, and she was only wearing a thin hospital gown that felt more useless than underwear as the wind hit her from all sides thanks to all the glass-less windows. Her bare feet already felt frozen solid, the cold of the stone floor seeping through the straw and droppings. Her legs were still aching, but she ignored them. Her gaze darted around the rafters, taking in all the hooting and trilling owls, hundreds of them littered throughout the awnings, and jumped at a sudden weight of someone touching her. Lexa had finally caught up, tentatively putting a hand on her shoulder to gently turn her around, but Clarke shrugged her off, eyes narrowed as she continued to search for Merlin.

She scowled when he fluttered down to land on Lexa’s shoulder. He had taken quite a liking to her over the past few months, particularly since Lexa usually fed him bits of bacon during breakfast, but it was still a treachery.

“Merlin, come here,” she snapped out, ignoring the softness of Lexa’s gaze as the owl fluttered to Clarke’s arms.

She used Lexa’s wand to conjure parchment, ink, and a quill.

“Clarke…”
“Don’t start, Lexa,” snapped Clarke, quill scratching rapidly on the parchment as she scribbled out her message to her mother, imploring her return to confirm her father was not dead. “I’m doing this with or without your support.”

“I do support you,” said Lexa gently. “I just don’t want you to get hurt.”

“More hurt than I already am, you mean?” Clarke glared at her as she rolled up the letter. She took a vicious sort of satisfaction in the way Lexa closed her eyes for a brief moment, her version of flinching beneath her gaze.

“I never meant to hurt you. I just…I had a job to do,” she said helplessly, reaching forward to help Clarke tie the scroll to Merlin’s leg. When Clarke stilled, glaring hard, Lexa automatically moved her hand to stroke Merlin’s head instead. “I know it doesn’t make sense to you right now, and I wish I could explain it all.”

“So explain it,” said Clarke coldly as she finished with the letter. She glowered when Lexa merely licked her lips, brow creased in guilt.

“I can’t,” she whispered, eyes closing again when Clarke scoffed and moved to the open window, petting Merlin before gently nudging him out. “If you just give me some time,” she said desperately, moving to stand beside Clarke. “I can tell you everything—”

“When?” growled Clarke. Her body was practically vibrating with her anger, but she forced herself to remain still, to keep her gaze trained on Merlin’s shape growing smaller and smaller as he flew away.

“I don’t know. It depends…”

“On what?”

Clarke could hear the swallow Lexa took. “I can’t say.”

Anger rose sharply; Clarke inhaled it like air as her nostrils flared and she turned again. She hated the all-consuming ache that rose inside her whenever she looked at Lexa. Once, it had been yearning and affection, then the need to say those three words that always seemed to swell her heart when she so much as thought about Lexa, but now it was pain, it was anger and sadness and a devastating anguish. She had trusted Lexa. She had genuinely trusted her with everything she had, and look what happened. Lexa had only even been here in the first place to be in a tournament that was apparently rigged, and—

Wait.

Clarke’s heart stopped, eyes widening. Lexa frowned in concern, taking a step closer.

“What?” she said, putting her hands on Clarke’s shoulders and peering into her eyes. “Clarke?”

She shrugged her off. “Is that the only reason?” she breathed.

“What?”

“Is that the only reason? Why you got close to me? Because of this tournament? You—was it you that put my name in? Did you…did you plan this the whole time? Jumping into bed with me, gaining my trust, just to—just to keep me close, make it easier to watch me?”
“No,” said Lexa, looking aghast that Clarke would even consider that possibility.

It wasn’t a far stretch. Lexa had been lying to her this whole time. What was she supposed to think?

“I swear to you,” said Lexa desperately, moving closer again. “I swear, I never intended to have any sort of relationship with you. I didn’t know who you were. And I didn’t put your name in the goblet.”

Clarke’s brow furrowed; Lexa’s wand felt slippery in her sweaty grip. “Then how did you —”

“Ms. Griffin,” came a snarl that had both Clarke and Lexa jumping. They spun around to see Indra standing in the doorway, entire face contorted with anger. Clarke jumped even more so at Indra’s sudden movement, but she still managed to catch the wand Indra threw at her. Clarke’s eyes widened as she looked down at it. It was her own wand.

“Delivered from the Ministry this morning. Now, I suggest that instead of berating my student,” she snarled, “loudly enough for the entire school to hear, you get yourself back to the Hospital Wing at once. Kane is waiting for you there. He is as displeased with your disappearance as I am with your presence.”

Clarke wordlessly shoved Lexa’s wand back into her hands and left. It would be immature to flip the bird at Indra and Lexa’s backs, wouldn’t it? Still, she looked over her shoulder to shoot a murderous glance their way, ignoring the pang of her heart as she saw Lexa staring after her past Indra’s shoulder. Maybe once her guarded expression could have hid her true emotions, but Clarke could see past it now. Lexa was heartbroken.

*(Good, she savagely told herself. She deserved it)*.

* * /✧/ *

Once Clarke made it back to the Hospital Wing, she was fortunate enough to only be forced to endure a few minutes of Kane chastising her. He told her that her mother had been to visit and check on Clarke’s recovery last night and earlier this morning, but quickly had to return to St. Mungo’s.

Jackson brought Clarke a tray of food from the Great Hall and made her drink a revolting potion that he said was supposed to help her legs heal faster. Clarke angrily devoured the meal and then sat fuming, watching the clock ticking away on the wall.

The table that held enough candy and sweets to form half a candy shop went untouched. She could see a large helping of Honeyduke’s Chocolate and knew it came from Lexa; for one furious moment, she considered chucking it all away. She wondered when she’d managed to even find the time to get it; had she hurried down a secret passageway and cleaned out half of Honeyduke’s? She could imagine Lexa shuffling into the Hospital Wing with guilt and concern written all over her flawless face, arms full of the sweets. The rage seemed to melt out of Clarke like wax, leaving
behind a despair that was so much worse. As her head sank into her pillow, she felt tears rolling down her cheeks.

When she woke again, it was to quiet murmurs. Clarke drowsily blinked, vision clearing to take in the sight of her closest friends gathered around her bed. Both her hands were being held, one by Raven and one by Wells.

“Clarke!” came a symphony of relieved voices.

“Hey,” said Clarke sleepily; she tried to return the reassuring smiles Octavia and Bellamy were giving her, but it came out as more of a grimace.

“Are you in a lot of pain?” whispered Raven.

Clarke curled and unfurled her toes, testing her legs. They twinged a bit, but already felt far better than they had in the morning. She shook her head, and Raven swiped her thumb across the back of Clarke’s knuckles in gratitude.

“Good.”

Octavia moved to Clarke’s bedside, stealing Clarke’s hand out of Raven’s, who moved back to let Octavia take her seat while she went to snoop around the candy-laden table, clearly hoping to distract herself from the fear she felt at seeing her best friend in an infirmary bed. “How do you feel?” she asked in a hushed voice. Her eyes, such a different shade of green than Lexa’s, were bright with concern.

Clarke swallowed, pulse increasing as memories of the night before flashed through her mind again. “I’m okay,” she lied, hoping the look she gave Octavia wasn’t exposing the storm of emotions trapped inside. Octavia, on the other hand, was pale with shadows under her eyes. In fact, most of her friends looked worse for wear, like they hadn’t slept. Clarke flipped her hand around so her sweaty palm met Octavia’s and squeezed her hand. “How are you?”

Octavia closed her eyes and gave a huff of breath out her nose in lieu of a snort or a scoff. “We’re worrying about you, not the other way around. We don’t even understand what the hell happened or what’s going on now.”

Raven nodded in agreement, though she didn’t turn from where she was poking around in a box of Bernie Botts Every Flavor Beans. “Any and Lincoln haven’t even spared the time to pop by, let alone talk to us. All the professors are walking around like they’re—like—“ She shook her head, clearly at a loss for words, which was quite a feat for Raven.

“Like they’re preparing for war,” said Bellamy grimly.

“No one will tell us what’s going on,” added Fox. She was positioned the farthest away, arms folded beneath her chest as she leaned against the wall, stiff and uncomfortable. “We went to Professor Kane’s office and he turned us away. Said he wasn’t at liberty to discuss anything at the moment and that we students are all perfectly safe with the adults protecting us.”

There was a bitter taste in Clarke’s mouth. The way it sounded, all the students had seen Clarke and Lexa disappear during the Third Task, had witnessed professors probably panicking, and then heard tell of Clarke fainting upon her return. She was sure some students were treating it as a joke, but most—particularly her friends—were confused and scared.

“Could I have some of this chocolate, Clarke?”
Raven was pointing at the chocolate Lexa had left. Clarke’s expression darkened as she nodded.

“Take it all. Lexa gave it to me, I don’t want any of it.”

Raven faltered as she reached for it, exchanging a glance with Octavia. She took a chocolate bar anyway, unwrapping it and taking a bite. Her cheeks were bulging and she gave a pleased little hum before she swallowed and asked, “So…are you up for filling us in?"

Clarke took a deep breath, and then proceeded to fill her friends in on all that had happened.

They gasped and cringed at all the right moments. By the end of it, Octavia looked close to tears and Wells appeared faintly sick.

“I knew this was going to happen,” said Bellamy with a gleam of triumph in his dark eyes; when everyone looked at him, he cleared his throat. “I mean, if you read through all the history books, there are big chunks missing. We know the Ministry was experimenting on Dementors, but we don’t know what happened after—and now we know. Shadow-Eaters.”

“But what are they?” asked Fox in horror. “They can neutralize our magic? How are we even supposed to fight against them?”

“Patronus Charms right off the bat before they can do their thing,” said Raven.

Fox’s face fell. “I’m terrible at those,” she said glumly. “I’ve never been able to do a corporeal patronus. I don’t even know what shape it would take.”

“If it’s not a fox, it’s blasphemy.” Raven forced a smile, clearly trying to lighten the atmosphere of the room again. “Just like if I wasn’t in Ravenclaw, and how Clarke Griffin isn’t in Gryffindor.”

“I don’t understand who this Ice Queen is,” said Wells with a frown. “Like, what’s her goal? What’s she trying to do? And what does she want with you, Clarke?”

The breath Clarke drew into her lungs was shaky as the memories flickered through her mind again, the terror of being cornered by Death Eaters, of being chased by Ontari, of broken prophecies and Lexa breaking her heart.

“Whatever prophecy Clarke grabbed, it had to be about her. They have protective enchantments and curses placed on prophecies so only the people they’re about can pick one up. The prophecy had to have something to do with the Ice Queen’s plans, but it either wasn’t about her or she didn’t want to risk the chance that it wasn’t, so she used Clarke instead,” said Bellamy.

“And you didn’t hear any of it?” said Octavia anxiously.

Clarke shook her head. “Just snatches, and I can’t really remember it now. Something about…a battle of blood, and…a city of light or something…”

“A battle of blood? That’s not ominous at all,” said Raven darkly.

“What did Lexa say about it all?” asked Wells.

Every time she so much as thought of her, her heart fissured, torn between anguish and rage. She tried to contain the torrent of feelings with a sigh, but it still came out thick and shaky. She looked down at her lap, clearing her throat to stall before finally saying, “Um. Lexa and I…we’re
not...exactly on the best terms right now. Turns out there’s a whole lot she knew but didn’t bother telling me. Apparently...” She took another deep breath. “Apparently, the tournament was rigged, or something. Lexa was here to...protect me, I guess. Which is what she did in the Department of Mysteries, but...I don’t know, I—I think I have a right to be upset...” There was a plea in her voice and in the way she looked around at her friends.

They seemed to understand. Raven and Octavia even seemed angry on her account, and Clarke was sure that was in part due to their own aggravation with Anya and Lincoln.

“Yeah you do,” said Raven with a firm nod. “She knew and was keeping it from you. I’d be pissed too.”

“Why didn’t you guys leave right away, though?” queried Fox. Clarke’s heart faltered, sinking as she looked over at Fox frowning. “You said you went from that room with the sign painted in it all the way over to the Hall of Prophecies, which clearly wasn’t the right way and was the exact room the Death Eaters wanted you in.”

“My dad.”

“Your dad?”

Clarke stared back into all her friends’ puzzled faces and knew she had to tell them, as much as it terrified her to admit the words aloud.

“I could hear my dad’s voice, just whispering my name and asking for help.” Everyone’s eyes widened in alarm, but Clarke went on before they could say anything. “I thought he was actually trapped inside the ministry, like the Death Eaters had him and were hurting him, but he wasn’t there. Lexa said that they were using him to bait me, to get me to go where they wanted. And then she...”

Everyone waited with bated breath, fear mirrored identically in each set of eyes.

“She said...” Clarke swallowed hard; the lump in her throat was painful, but not as much as the hollow ache in her heart. “She said...Lexa said my dad is dead.”

She was met with a stunned silence. She helplessly looked at her friends, scared if she so much as blinked, tears would fall.

“What?” said Raven finally, aghast. “But...how can he be dead? Why would he be dead?”

“They would have notified you,” said Octavia shakily, frowning. “I mean, Jaha is your dad’s best friend!” She half-turned to look at Wells, who looked just as floored as the rest of them.

He shook his head at their questioning gazes. “I don’t see how...my dad never said anything...”

“Clarke, there’s no way your dad can be dead,” said Octavia firmly. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“But why would Lexa say he is?” asked Clarke fearfully. This was it. This was the pinnacle fear that had been shredding at her insides since the moment Lexa told her in the Department of Mysteries. Either Lexa was telling the truth, or she was lying, and both were alarming prospects, though the latter would be a relief for obvious reasons. “Why would she lie to me?”

“Maybe she’s just a bitch,” exclaimed Bellamy; he closed his eyes briefly when Clarke and
everyone else automatically turned to glare at him. “Sorry. I’m sorry. That was totally uncalled for. I’m sorry. You’re my friend and I’m pissed she hurt you, but it was still uncalled for. Sorry.”

“I don’t understand what Lexa could have to gain by lying about that,” said Wells, brow still furrowed.

“Me either,” said Octavia. “Unless she doesn’t believe she’s lying. Maybe she believes it, but it’s not true. I mean, it can’t be true.”

Clarke felt a dizzying rush of hope even though she could hear the unspoken words at the end. *It can’t be true…can it?*

It couldn’t be, and the only way to confirm that was to prove it, Clarke suddenly realized.

She jolted up in bed, startling everyone and causing Octavia and Wells to release her hands in surprise. They all watched as she stood up; this time, her legs didn’t so much as quake beneath her. She turned to look at everyone.

“We have to go check on my dad.”

She was met with silence again, before Bellamy’s brow knit and he said skeptically, “What, like…go to Azkaban?” His eyes widened when Clarke nodded.

Octavia looked shocked. “But we don’t even know where Azkaban is…”

“I do,” said Clarke. “I went last Christmas, remember, to visit my dad? It’s out to the North Sea. I can get us there.”

“You mean trying and failing to visit him,” said Fox pointedly. Her arms were folded over her chest and her shoulders were hunched; she was clearly uncomfortable with this whole idea, and that fact annoyed Clarke to no end. “You couldn’t even get in, Clarke. How do you expect them to let a bunch of students though?”

“We’ll figure it out,” snapped Clarke. “We’ll need our brooms. We can Apparate to Aberdeen and then fly from there.”

Clarke tried not to let her disappointment or frustration show at the lack of enthusiasm of the five faces looking back at her. Fox looked positively alarmed.

“You want us to fly across the ocean? At night?” she squeaked.

“What if we get lost at sea?” asked Bellamy with a frown. “Surely you don’t know the exact coordinates—“

“I know enough from when my mum and I went,” said Clarke stubbornly. “I can get us there.” She moved forward, sidestepping the chair Wells was still sitting on to grab her wand off the nightstand beside her hospital bed. “I’m going to go get ready,” she muttered as she tightened her gown.


“What about them?” said Clarke shortly. “You know they’ll only try to stop us.”

“Can’t you just write a letter, Clarke?” said Fox exasperatedly, voice as high as her stress level.
“I did write a letter!” said Clarke heatedly. “But I don’t have time to sit around waiting for my mum to take her precious time to reply! I need to see if my dad is okay right now, in case the Death Eaters have him and no one knows until it’s too late because everyone’s heads are too far up their asses to take the time to check!” She marched to the door before turning back. “If you want to go, meet me in Ravenclaw common room in ten minutes. Bring your broomsticks!” And then she stormed away, leaving everyone stunned in her wake.

Octavia leapt to her feet and started out the door, but was immediately pulled back by Bellamy’s grip on her arm. “No. No way, O,” he began. “You are not going to Azkaban! It’s too dangerous and you’ll get in trouble—”

“Clarke is my friend,” she said fiercely, ripping her arm free. “And she’s yours too. Come with me.”

He held his younger sister’s blazing gaze for a moment before sighing and setting his jaw, nodding. “Alright,” he said gruffly. “Someone needs to keep an eye on you two,” he added in a mutter as he followed his sister out.

Wells trailed after them, appearing vaguely dazed, but there was no question of whether or not he would follow Clarke. He always had, and he always would.

That left Raven and Fox, both still rather shell-shocked. Raven had had enough experiences dealing with her mother and muggle jails to be understandably reluctant, but she immediately rationalized the situation to herself. If she were in Clarke’s position, she’d be jumping the gun too.

“Are you actually considering this?” demanded Fox, gaping at Raven, who moved to the sweets on the table again. It sounded as though they were in for a long trip, and just on the off chance that they ran into those vile creatures…

“Look, Clarke’s head is fucked right now,” said Raven lowly. “She’s been messed up about this for over a year, she misses her dad and she’s just been told that he’s dead. Let’s just go, and if we can’t get in, we can’t get in, but at least then she can say she’s tried. Let’s just do this for Clarke, okay?”

Fox chewed at the inside of her cheek, silent for a long moment in which Raven continued shoving chocolate bars down her pockets. Fox slowly shook her head. “No. No, I’m telling you, I’ve got a feeling, Ray. This is a bad idea.”

“I know,” said Raven; to her credit, she looked serious, so at least she wasn’t just humoring Fox. “I’m actually in agreement with you. But I know Clarke, and she’s going either way. I’d rather we go with her than she go alone.”

“Or we could just tell Kane so he could stop her.”

Raven slanted a withering look at her. “Even you aren’t that much of a grass.”

“I could do it,” she threatened.

“No one is forcing you to go.”

Fox stilled, jaw working as she glared at Raven. She scoffed. “You know, for how brilliant you are, you can be really thick to what’s in front of you.”

It was probably one of the closest things to a compliment Fox had ever given her. “What’s that supposed to mean?” called out Raven, but Fox was already storming out of the wing.
Clarke paced in the empty Ravenclaw common room. Being a seventh year and the Head Girl definitely had perks; she’d barked orders at the few first and third year students that had been playing games of Exploding Snap, telling them to leave so she could have the room to herself to study. They’d given her odd looks because of the broomstick she carried and how she wore traveling robes, but scurried off, leaving her alone to pace. Raven and Fox were both upstairs changing, and Clarke had already let Bellamy and Octavia in by the time they made it down, Raven looking grim and Fox white-faced with nerves. Wells was surprisingly the last to arrive, though the reason was quite clear: Jasper was trailing behind him, wearing his signature pair of monocular goggles around his neck and his traditional dopey grin. Clarke’s heart sank. There was no way she wanted Jasper accompanying them; he was clumsy and loud and immature, and as much as she loved her friend, he would just get in the way.

“So apparently we’re off on an adventure?” he said brightly, grinning around the room. No one smiled back.

“Um, Jasper—“ began Clarke, but her saving grace had just descended down the co-ed staircase.

Clarke called Monty over and quickly explained the situation to he and Jasper both. It didn’t take nearly as much convincing as she thought to get them to stay here under the entirely fake missive of Clarke needing them to watch Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln and ensure they didn’t realize their absence and try to follow. In other words, Jasper could do what he did best and cause a chaotic distraction.

Jasper and Monty headed out of Ravenclaw Tower and Clarke turned to face everyone. They were all dressed in similar traveling cloaks, Octavia, Bellamy, and Raven’s all rather ragged and worse for wear; Clarke, Fox and Wells’ expensive-looking and sleek. They all, even Fox, had identical expressions of resolve.

“Ready?”

When she was met with nods, Wells’ and Fox’s rather shaky and Bellamy, Raven, and Octavia’s firm, Clarke dipped her head in return and raised her wand. She and the others all muttered the Disillusionment Charm and shivered at the strange cold sensation flooding down their skin. Then Clarke flourished her wand, opening the window, and upturned her face to the sky, glaring up at the low-lying clouds in fortitude. The sun would set soon, and then they would have the cover of night to aid them on top of their concealment charms. “Alright. Let’s go.”

She stepped off the windowpane, broom vibrating as though with joy at being in the air again. As Clarke soared higher and higher, her troubles and fears seemed left on the ground within the glittering Hogwarts castle, growing smaller and less relevant. Everything’s going to be okay, she assured herself, ignoring the painful thrumming of her heart. This was crazy, the small rational voice in the back of her mind was not being quiet about telling her that, but now that she was up in the air, now that she was on her way to Azkaban and actually doing something about this, she let that relief and determination fill her with hope. The wind felt incredible in her hair and the chill of it was welcomed on her anxiety-flushed skin. In no time at all, she would be confirming that her father was
alive and well, and Lexa would be stammering her apologies and explaining why she’d ever believed such a thing in the first place.

It didn’t take long to reach the borders of the Hogwarts’ grounds. They all hovered together in the sky, clutching hands as they Apparated to the outskirts of Aberdeen. The ocean waves were soothing and peaceful on the shore beneath them, though the water grew choppier the farther out they flew, until there was nothing but sea stretching out into the horizon on all sides of them. Fox looked faintly green, and Clarke was certain she heard her mumbling a spell in the hopes to alleviate her nausea, but she needed a potion, and Clarke spared a brief moment to lament her stupidity in forgetting to take her emergency potions kit with her.

Clarke kept a careful eye on the direction her wand was swiveling in her palm as she continuously referred to the Four-Point Spell. She remembered from the time visiting with her mother that it was a solid North from Aberdeen, but she wondered if the protective enchantments would prevent them from finding it this time; after all, last time her mother had warned the prison of their arrival, and this was definitely not a planned excursion. Almost an hour and a half of flying later, however, when the hands clutching broomsticks were dry and frozen and Clarke was starting to panic, Bellamy shouted out, pointing at a structure in the distance. It grew as they neared it until finally, her heart pounding, Clarke found herself peering down at the gigantic stone prison, so much more foreboding at night than a sunny Christmas morning.

Clarke lifted her free hand to gesture for her friends to follow as she headed for the strip of island ground just before the entrance doors that she and her mother had not managed to gain entry into. They piled their broomsticks in the corner outside of the doors, and everyone clutched their wands as they cautiously moved toward the window just outside the door.

Clarke ordered everyone to stay put while she took a few tentative steps forward, wand held aloft, ready to cast a stunning spell; she spared a thought wondering if her friends anticipated that Clarke was prepared to get into this prison whether she was allowed to or not, and she knew she wouldn’t be allowed to. If that meant she had to slowly and steadily stun every guard and shoulder her way in, so be it.

But to her surprise, there was no guard in the window. She surreptitiously glanced around as she leaned half her torso in to reach the lever that swung the entrance doors open. As far as she could tell, no one was here.

“Hey,” whispered Wells as she gestured for everyone to follow her as she lit her wand tip and started down the hallway. Everything was made of stone, and seemed grimy and dark, the few torches on the walls putting off enough flickering light that they could faintly see the mold on the ceiling. “Shouldn’t there be guards here?”

She shrugged, eyes focused on the far door at the end of the short hallway. There should be a large amount of guards, but perhaps they simply stepped away for a moment, or took a break, something. There wasn’t time to ponder. They were here now and needed to move as quickly as possible before the guards did show up.

“Clarke?” persisted Wells, though he was still following her slow inching down the hallway. “Why wouldn’t there be any guards?”

“I’m with Wells, something feels off,” said Fox in a carrying whisper that caused Clarke to grit her jaw.

“Look, you two can wait outside if you’re worried,” she said sharply, half turning to shoot them both a glare. “I’m finding my dad.”
She crept on, and they followed her.

The door swung open as she neared it. It led into another short hallway, this one suspiciously empty too. The hairs on the back of Clarke’s neck were rising, an odd sense of foreboding washing through her, but she must be imagining it. She had to be, because there was no way this could be some type of repeat of the Ministry. No one would guess a group of teenagers would break into Azkaban.

Finally, the next door opened to reveal a prison cell directly opposite them. Everything was dark and quiet; as they crept past a few cells, they could see various wizards and witches inside, all with equally unkempt scraggily hair, all wearing identical dirty robes that looked more like something a House Elf would have worn in their history books, back before their liberation. Warped shadows stretched out on the walls as Clarke neared each cell, holding her wand tightly in case a prisoner lunged at it as she leaned close to the bars, hoping to see familiar blonde hair and a surprised and pleased, albeit exhausted, smile.

The longer they walked down the hallway and the more cells they peered into, the harder Clarke’s heart pounded. Her nostrils flared in inexplicable rage at her name being gently called by Octavia, sympathetic and pitying. Embarrassment and shame threatened to curdle in her stomach even while panic brought a lump to her throat and a wet, stinging pressure to her eyes. She just told herself to keep going, to keep hoping. There were still cells left. There was no reason her father shouldn’t be in one. There was no reason what Lexa said was the truth. It wasn’t plausible. It couldn’t be possible.

“Clarke?”

Her heart jumped at the rumble of a deep voice. All breath left her lungs. She whirled around, thinking perhaps she’d somehow missed a cell—

But it wasn’t her father. It was Roan Kwin. He was walking toward them with a slight limp, bandages peeking out beneath his cloak on one arm and part of his chest, dark bruises on his jaw and one side of his face from spells or the brains that had attacked him.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he said, face pale either from seeing a group of Hogwarts students inside Azkaban prison, or the exertion it was taking him to move around. “How could you be stupid enough to come here?”

“I’m here for my dad,” said Clarke, voice not even so much as trembling. She half turned to point her wand at Roan as she carefully took a step backwards. She was sure she wouldn’t manage to stun him, considering he was an adult, an accomplished wizard, a guard clearly trained for this, and a member of the Order, but she hoped at the very least to distract him long enough for her to peek into the last couple cells.

It did what she hoped for; Roan halted, frown deepening as he lifted his hands palm-up to show he meant no harm.

“Clarke,” hissed Fox.

“You have no idea what you’re doing,” said Roan, eyes following Clarke’s shuffling steps backwards, the way her head craned as she quickly glanced into the cell next to her. A wispy witch of a woman was lying asleep on her cell bed.

“I’m finding my dad,” said Clarke, nearly panting; she was starting to panic now. One cell left. Nausea was broiling in her belly. She was praying her father was in there, that they hadn’t just
Roan looked perplexed. “He’s in there, Clarke.” Her heart leapt, causing her steps to falter as she looked at Roan. The relief washing over her like waves was overwhelming, but something—something suspiciously like Lexa’s earnest sorrowful eyes—urged Clarke to check anyway. To be sure. “He’s been in that cell for over a year. I would know if he left it. The Death Eaters were just baiting you.”

She finally reached the last cell. Her heart lodged itself into her throat and suddenly she was holding back choking sobs as she gripped the bars, gazing into the cell.

Her father was there. He was alive.

“Dad! Dad!” she called, voice breaking as tears streaked down her face.

Jake Griffin was roused from sleep, rolling over in the uncomfortable-looking prison bed, bare feet flattening on the stone floor as he sat up on the edge of the moth-eaten mattress. He rubbed his hands over his face, blinking and squinting in Clarke’s wand light.

“Clarke?” he questioned, voice gravely with sleep. He dropped his hands to frown at Clarke. “What are you doing here?”

“I—I—” She couldn’t speak. It was all she could do not to collapse weeping against the bars. She felt gentle hands on her back and looked around to see Raven and Bellamy both smiling at her, looking as giddy with relief as Clarke felt. “They told me you were dead,” croaked Clarke, turning to give her father a watery smile that widened when her father padded over to the bars, gripping Clarke’s arms through them in a half-hug. She made an odd noise somewhere between a laugh and a sob before shuddering. “Dad, I was so scared…”

“Shhh,” he hushed her, squeezing her arms. “It’s okay, Princess. I’m here.”

Clarke frowned, sniffling, up at her father. He had stopped calling her that after she explained how Finn used the term too.

She shook her head, more at herself than anything. She recalled the letters he’d sent her over the last year, how he hadn’t sounded like himself. He was rotting away in this dingy cell, of course he wasn’t quite himself. Though, looking at him, he actually looked fairly healthy…he wasn’t as skinny and gaunt as Clarke would have expected. He looked more like he looked before he was sent here. It should have been comforting, but instead, it was disconcerting.

“Dad?”

He looked back at her just as questioningly.

She stared up at him. Her wand light threw the contours of his face into sharp relief; his cheeks were full and had color, his eyes as blue as ever. He looked fine. He was even smiling, though his smile seemed…off. Not as warm.

“Okay, I’m glad you had this reunion, but you all need to leave,” said Roan seriously. “Azkaban doesn’t allow visitors. How did you even get in here? What did you do to the guards?”

“There weren’t any guards,” said Bellamy.

Roan scowled. “What do you mean? There are always guards.”
Bellamy shook his head, his wind-swept hair flopping over his forehead. “The place was empty.”

What little color was left in Roan’s face drained away. He stood there with his mouth parted, eyes flickering from Clarke to Jake and back to Clarke again. He spun around, staring at the direction he just walked from. “What?” The word was muttered more to himself; he hurried to the doorway, and just as he reached the threshold and stood in the light leaking in from the next room, several things happened at once.

The first was the cold. A bone-chilling cold seeped into the air, more freezing than the cold emanating from the stone.

The second was Roan lunging forward out of view; his shouts were incomprehensible over a loud bang and then he was blasted back through the doorway, slamming hard into the wall and then crumbling into a lifeless heap on the floor.

The third was the voice. Exuberant, high, cold laughter crackled into the room. A shudder went up Clarke’s spine that had nothing to do with the temperature dropping.

She watched in horror, clutching her father’s hands, as Ontari strode into the dungeon. Her dark eyes flitted around each of Clarke’s friends before settling on Clarke. She smirked.

“Do-gooders. You’re all so fucking predictable.”

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The sun was going down. The sky was an array of pink and orange, layers of purple fading into blue just over the thick canopy of trees at the Forbidden Forest. A couple thestrals were dipping in and out of the sky, scattering birds into the air as they chased them; they didn’t utter a sound, but it was obvious just by looking at them that they were taking a certain amount of joy in the activity. It constricted Lexa’s throat as she watched them from the bow of Durmstrang ship. She wished they reminded her of dolphins, weaving in and out of the water, but the only thing she could think of when she saw them was death.

It felt as though death had plagued her entire life. Even before this war, she had known loss. Her grandparents had been her favorite people in the world up until she was eight years old; her grandfather had died of lung cancer just after her eighth birthday, and her grandmother had followed within the year. Her parents had called it a natural death, passing away from old age, but Lexa knew it had been from a broken heart.

When Costia died, she understood the sentiment.

The fact that she had removed herself of her own memories of the last she had seen her was disturbing to Lexa. She knew why she did it; the pain of it, the overwhelming anguish, could be considered distracting to her overall mission, which had been to draw the Ice Queen out while protecting Clarke. She had failed at that. She wondered; if she’d had her memories all along, how would it have changed things? Would she have better anticipated the Ice Queen’s plan? Would she have been more or less focused? Would she have fought even harder against her feelings for Clarke?
It was too late now. The thought gave her peace as much as it gave her sorrow. Who would have thought? Lexa herself never in a thousand years would have imagined arriving at Hogwarts for the Triwizard Tournament and falling in bed with both an enemy, since Clarke was a rival school champion, and the girl she was supposed to protect, let alone actually falling in *love* with her. Falling completely, wholly, helplessly in love with her, and then absolutely shattering her heart.

Lexa swallowed thickly, but it didn’t absolve her of the lump stuck in her throat. Her stomach was roiling, and she almost swayed where she stood, certain she was about to retch—but she held up, fingers turning white as they pressed against the ship railing she clutched and leaned up against.

She was the worst of the worst. Nia was vindictive and cruel, Titus was self-righteous and cold, Ontari was wrath and greed, but Lexa…Lexa was a traitor, a liar. She betrayed a person who cared for her, who trusted her. She betrayed the person she loved. Lexa was the worst person alive.

She didn’t even deserve to *be* alive.

She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head, holding her breath before slowly exhaling. When she opened her eyes, the sky was darker, the sun having disappeared beneath the forest horizon.

There was no time and Lexa could not afford to be selfish enough right now to indulge such thoughts. She had her people to take care of. She had a duty.

She turned to glance up at Hogwarts’ castle. She’d promised herself she would give Clarke space and time to cool down, even though part of her was certain Clarke would never forgive her. She didn’t blame her. Even if Lexa had only been doing what was right, it didn’t change the fact that she had known about her father’s death for a month and never told Clarke. It didn’t change the fact that Lexa had acted as though this was all a game, Durmstrang here merely for the Triwizard Tournament, Lexa merely here to win it. It didn’t change the fact that Lexa knew so many things, things about Clarke’s father, about the Ice Queen, about Shadow-Eaters, about the danger Clarke was in.

Part of her was cursing herself, wondering why she didn’t just *tell* her. If she’d had her memories, would she have told her? Would Clarke still have hated her?

Lexa closed her eyes again. Inhaled. Exhaled.

She dug her fingers into her arms, hating the way her heart ached.

*It’s weakness. Love is weakness.*

She could almost imagine him here right now, his bald head bowed and eyes closed in disappointment in her, in her weakness.

*Love is weakness.*

She had lost count of the many times he’d uttered the phrase to her. He told her before Costia. He told her after Costia.

The tears stinging her eyes turned the display of colors in the sky into a whirlwind of blue and purple. Her nails cut half-moons into her skin. She bowed her head and shut her eyes again, willing herself to steady before the trembling of her body could tear apart the walls she desperately struggled to keep from crumbling.

*Love is weakness.*
She knew that. She did. She learned it when her parents told her she wasn’t good enough. She reminded herself of it every time Titus pushed echoes of it her way, so alike yet so dissimilar. The words screamed inside her head when the Ice Queen delivered Costia to the Durmstrang grounds, when Lexa’s heart made a wild leap of hope and relief upon seeing Costia stumbling toward her, when Lexa’s insides turned over and her scream shredded her throat as Costia upturned her face, her unseeing white eyes, and she realized that the girl she loved was gone and this was an Inferi left in her place, sent as the ultimate weapon to hurt Lexa, because Lexa loved her and that love was what made her weak.

Weakness.

But it was different with Clarke. All the pieces had lined up, fit together. Lexa had never imagined loving anyone after Costia, but it felt as though everything in her life had been leading up to that moment. To falling into vividly blue eyes, sinking into golden hair. She had only known Clarke for a handful of months, but it felt longer, like she had known her for so much longer, perhaps even forever. Definitely, forever.

And she had ruined it. Like she ruined everything. Like she ruined her relationship with her parents. Like she ruined Costia.

She ruined Clarke.

It was unforgivable; she knew too well the pain of losing someone you love, and she gave that pain to Clarke. Her father was dead and Clarke had to learn it a year too late, and she had to learn it from a girl she had been sleeping with, had, really, been in a relationship with even despite how hard they both tried (and failed) to keep it light and casual and safe.

Love is weakness.

She wondered how long she would have to tell herself that before she finally started believing it.

“Lexa.”

She startled, hastily scrubbing the tear tracks from her face before settling her gaze on Lincoln. He was standing on the ramp, looking up at her with a sad understanding in his dark eyes. Of course. Octavia was angry with him, too, just like Raven was irate with Anya. They all felt betrayed; they all were betrayed. Anya and Lincoln had known enough that they were lying by omission, too.

She nodded in lieu of a greeting, not quite trusting her voice yet.

Lincoln was silent for a long moment. He watched Lexa carefully for her reaction as he said, “I’m going to tell Octavia.”

Lexa tried to quietly sniffle, swallowing hard at her emotions again. When she spoke, her voice was hoarse. “It puts her in danger.”

“She’s already in danger. We all are.”

Quieter still: “Titus will be angry.”

Fear did not so much as flicker across Lincoln’s face. He shrugged. Lexa admired that about him; he always followed his heart. Envy cut a jagged hole inside her. She wished she could be afforded that opportunity.
“I’ll deal with it.”

She looked back up at the sky and sighed. The pale glow of the moon was shining brighter by the second as the sky shifted to a velvet blue. “Okay,” she finally said, because what else could she say?

What else could she do?

Titus expressively forbid them from revealing any classified information. Lincoln was about to do it, and Lexa knew it was only a matter of time before Anya told Raven. Part of Lexa grew hopeful that perhaps she could just throw caution to the wind and spill everything to Clarke. The other part of her recoiled; it was a breach of her duty, it was breaking every oath she had given Titus and the Order. Lincoln and Anya were not in the same position she was. They weren’t part of the prophecy. The fate of the world didn’t rest on their shoulders. They were, in all the ways that she wasn’t, free to do as they liked. Lexa’s shoulders drooped as she remembered herself; she had a role to fill. She was tied to her people.

“Do you want to come to the Hospital Wing with us?” asked Lincoln gently.

Lexa exhaled again, swallowed again. She could think about it as she walked. She nodded and head off the bow, joining Lincoln on the ramp. They met Anya at the entrance doors and entered the castle.

From then on, several matters of consequence took place. The first was their realization that they were being followed; the second was that, a short time later, they were all shaking with rage as they realized what happened. The hospital wing was devoid of Clarke and her friends. Monty and Jasper were both tied up in thick ropes and chucked into a broom closet after Lexa extracted the information (which surprisingly didn’t take as much persuasion as she would have expected). The three of them immediately headed for the grounds; Anya was so furious Lexa could actually hear her teeth grinding. Even Lincoln was raging.

“How could they be so stupid?” he demanded, head swinging back and forth as they hurried down the staircase.

“Clarke isn’t thinking straight,” snapped Lexa; her grip on her wand was so tightly clenched it was a wonder it didn’t break. “She’s heartbroken and angry and desperate and those are the worst combinations.”

“I’m going to kill all of them,” growled Anya.

They stormed across the Hogwarts’ grounds. The night sky above provided little light, clouds obscuring the moon and most of the stars. According to Monty and Jasper, Clarke and her friends had left almost an hour ago. They would be arriving at the prison any time, depending on their route. Lexa seemed to realize they would get there too late on broomback at the same time Anya and Lincoln did.

“Lexa. There’s only one way we’re getting there in time.”

Lexa ground to a halt, a muscle in her jaw twitching as she clenched her teeth. She balled her hand up into a fist before letting out a sharp hiss of breath.

“Fine,” she spat out. She waved her wand toward herself, muttering a spell before tossing it to Lincoln, who snatched it out of the air. Lexa unclasped her cloak, throwing it to Lincoln too. She cracked her neck and rolled her shoulders before she bent down. Her body began quaking, but her
jaw was gritted and her voice was steady. “Get on.”

*・/・゚/・゚*  

Ontari was still laughing.

She, along with the dozen Shadow-Eaters, had forced Clarke and her friends into the dungeon cell. Clarke didn’t understand. She didn’t understand why Ontari was here, how she knew Clarke would be coming. She didn’t understand why Ontari had forced them all bodily into Jake’s cell, smirked and said she’d give them some time alone. She didn’t understand.

She didn’t understand why her father was so off. He wasn’t himself. Her father would have been reacting with more emotion; would have been casting a protective arm over Clarke in the wake of those horrible Shadow-Eaters, would have been gripping Clarke’s shoulders and shaking her and demanding to know why she was here, with relief and concern warring in his blue eyes.

Jake Griffin would not be swaying where he stood, blinking slowly as though he was Confuddled, not hardly reacting at all.

They had been alone in this cell for almost five minutes, and her father wasn’t even reacting to her.

“Dad? Dad?”

She turned to look helplessly at Raven and Octavia, who looked back just as uncertain and at a loss. Bellamy was stoic and grim, Fox was trembling from head to toe, and Wells’ eyes were unnaturally bright.

“Has he been cursed?” she whispered, watching the way her father’s head jerked as though he were trying hard not to just fall asleep where he stood. Had his brain been addled by his time in this prison? She didn’t understand.

All of their eyes collectively widened when out of nowhere, almost seven minutes into Clarke’s desperate attempts to communicate with him, Jake suddenly looked around, his eyes focusing, and grinned at Clarke.

“Princess,” he said.

His grin faltered when Clarke didn’t reply. She stared at him blankly.

“Dad?”

At the utterly nonplussed way she said his name, Jake sank down into his bed, burying his face in his hands. Clarke remained motionless, her wand warm in her palm. Clarke wildly looked around again, at a complete loss as to what to do.

Focus.

Okay. She could either continue dwindling into insanity in the wake of her father’s perplexing, distressing behavior, or she could focus on a way to get him and her friends out of this
alive. They had been shepherded into an Azkaban prison cell by a deranged lunatic who was immensely powerful and dangerous. Regardless, there was only one of her, and six of them. Of course, they were also outnumbered two to one by Shadow-Eaters, which could easily sap their will and temporarily neutralize their magic…

They couldn’t Disapparate here, but if they could just get past them to their broomsticks…

“We need to get out of here,” whispered Clarke, gesturing for everyone to come near; she glanced at the Shadow-Eater that had remained behind to watch over them. It was lurking near the door they would need to exit through, far enough away that the despair wasn’t too overwhelming, or perhaps it had simply dialed it down for now. “Everyone cast a Patronus.”

Minutes later, the entire cell was lit up by silvery creatures that flooded Clarke with warmth and reassurance. Her lion joined Bellamy’s bear and bounded through the bars toward the distant Shadow-Eater, that glided away at once.

Raven worked on unenchanting the cell doors while Clarke gently looped her father’s arm around her shoulders and her own arm around his waist. He didn’t hold his own weight very well; she staggered as they shuffled out of the cell Raven had lost patience with and blasted open. Several Shadow-Eaters made to rush inside and were immediately buffeted and forced back by the bright horse and butterflies that had joined the lion and bear. Fox, who had not yet cast a successful patronus, cursed as she tried again, still only managing to produce wisps of light.

Ontari’s incredulous laughter could be heard from somewhere beyond the horde of Shadow-Eaters they were trying to force their way through, using their patronuses like battering rams.

“Leaving so soon? I was giving you time…”

Clarke panted with the effort to half-carry her father. Wells had grabbed his other arm and slung it over his shoulders, which helped.

“Time to say your goodbyes…”

Clarke’s heart skidded into her throat as her insides turned over. The lion faded from view; a moment later the bear followed, and Bellamy’s harsh bark of a voice produced another.

Ontari was still crooning. “Come on, Princess…”

A blinding rage came over Clarke. She lifted her wand, visions of her father popping into her head, of Roast dinners cooked by him and her laughing mother, of Raven and Wells and Octavia and Bellamy and the rest of their friends, of Lexa’s glowing green eyes and her soft, warm lips—

“Expecto Patronum!”

The force of the massive silvery lion blasted through the Shadow-Eaters, sending them scattering and accidentally driving Ontari to the floor, paving the way clear for Clarke and her friends to move down. They made it to the hallway, passing through the door when the torches flickered and went out. Raven locked the door behind them, but when they reached the next door, it was locked, and their spells weren’t working—

“Fuck, my magic—“ Clarke flourished her wand again, trying to conjure another Patronus. Fox and Wells seemed to have lost the ability as well, and Octavia was only producing wisps of smoke. Bellamy and Raven seemed least affected thus far; they both backed up, arms out protectively, wands pointed at the door Ontari and the Shadow-Eaters were just beyond. It sounded like Ontari was trying to blast the door apart.
Clarke and Wells shuffled to the side, gently laying Clarke’s half-conscious father down. This was a moment they would have to fight through, and then pick him up again. His head lolled on his shoulders and his eyes fluttered. Clarke whispered assurances and pressed her lips to his sweaty forehead before standing and joining the others in the misshapen circle they stood in.

The stone walls shook, specks of stone sprinkling like small pellets of rain from the ceiling and clouds of dust coughing out of the fissures they left behind.

“Get ready,” whispered Octavia in a voice that shuddered with every terrified breath she sucked in, begging to no one in particular as they all stood rooted to the spot, five pairs of wide eyes glued to the door. Clarke understood her fear; Octavia was claustrophobic, so Clarke couldn’t imagine a worse scenario for her than the heavy walls juddering around them. The two people that stood on either side of her, Raven and Bellamy, both wordlessly reached down to grasp her hand in tight, white-knuckled grips.

Clarke heard a strange yelp of a sound, like a strangled sob, and glanced over to see Fox swaying where she stood, her face white as a sheet, thin chest rising and falling rapidly with every shallow breath. She looked as though she were about to hyperventilate. Clarke understood. She felt steadier, comforted by the presence of her friends even if her heart was pounding wildly with a sick, thrumming dread, guilt festering at the pit of her stomach. What did she just lead her friends into?

Her insides plummeted when she heard a familiar voice, sing-song and taunting. “You aren’t going anywhere.” The door creaked open; their group took a collective step back, bracing themselves as a brunette girl stepped into the room, dark eyes lit up with a wicked glint. “Let’s get down to business.”

There was a hard swallow, and then Raven gave a derisive snort. Clarke’s heart jumped into her throat. Raven didn’t know Ontari. Raven didn’t understand the threat. “You didn’t tell me this asshole was part of a singing group, Clarke,” she said flatly.

For a moment, Ontari was silent, seemingly taken aback by Raven’s lack of fearful respect. Then she threw her head back and laughed. “You have guts,” she said when she sobered, lips curved in an almost lazy sneer. “I thought they were exaggerating, but you do. As gutsy as any fool who comes from Hogwarts can be, anyway.” The moonlight leaking in through the barred windows glinted off her exposed canines as she bared her teeth in a wolfish grin. “Fortunately for you all, you won’t have to waste any more time there.”

“How long are you going to waste your time trying to intimidate us? Sounds like you’ve been taking tips from too many cheap muggle horror films,” said Raven loudly. Clarke felt a rush of both appreciation and dismay at her very brave, very stupid friend.

Ontari unclasped the traveling cloak she wore and let it billow to the ground, leaving her clad in her plain black robes. Clarke wondered where she came from. She looked young enough to be in school, but she clearly wasn’t, nor did her clothing reveal anything—

“I’ve never watched a muggle film,” said Ontari loftily. “Being pureblood, I would never dream of wasting my precious time on muggle filth. I’m a prodigy, too,” she added, still sneering as she tilted her head, her dark gaze boring into Raven’s. “That means I’m special. Not that you’d know anything about being special, mudblood.”
A muscle in Raven’s jaw jumped. Ontari was striking a nerve; implying Raven’s blood or history meant she was weak was a surefire way to ignite her fury. “You don’t know anything about me. Just because I’m not a prodigy doesn’t mean I can’t kick your ass.”

Ontari smirked. “Oh, but I know all about you. Raven Reyes. Supposedly brilliant. Probably would have single-handedly invented and engineered top of the line magical products, revolutionizing the wizarding world, assuming you weren’t stupid enough to come here.” Ontari’s lower lip jutted out in a pout that came across as more of a sneer. “Dying before your time, before anyone will remember you. Tragic, isn’t it?”

Raven lifted her wand, jaw clenched; Ontari eyed it before the force of her laughter caused her to throw her head back. “What are you going to do?” she asked through her cold chuckles. “You have no magic, but even if you did, what would you do, Transfigure this place into a trashy little caravan, just like the one you grew up in?”

Clarke and the rest of their friends all sucked in a breath. She had no idea how Ontari knew so much about Raven. Clarke only knew one thing, and that was that Raven was about to bring this whole place down.

Raven’s lips curled, the determined smirk not quite rising to her furious eyes. “I can make it go boom.”

There was a beat then, just long enough for Ontari’s brows to draw together. Then Raven was shouting before anyone could make another move. “Confringo!”

There was an explosion of orange light that quickly warped into fire as the force of the spell blasted the stonewall behind Ontari and the Shadow-Eaters, who had only just managed to lunge out of the way (or glide, in the case of the Shadow-Eaters). Everyone was blasted back several feet; all the breath left Clarke’s lungs as she slammed into the wall before slumping down to the stone floor.

“O!” Bellamy yelled in response to the curdling scream that pierced the air over the rumbling and crashing, but Clarke was certain the scream had came from Fox, not Octavia. She was proven right a moment later when she saw Octavia flying forward in her peripheral vision, lunging at Ontari, who was just struggling to her feet.

“Bell!” shouted Raven from somewhere among the clouds of dust.

Wells was stumbling forward, one side of his face coated in white dust, the other side stained red from a deep gash across his cheekbone. Fox was only half conscious with an arm slung over Wells’ shoulders, her head lolling and auburn hair sticky with blood.

Clarke shook her head, blinking rapidly in a dazed attempt to get rid of the black fog creeping toward the center of her vision. The back of her head was thrumming with pain from where it had cracked against the stone. She could see her father still lying in the same place, coated white with dust but miraculously unharmed. Her heart actually ached with relief.

“Gerrof—you—fucking—” Ontari and Octavia were literally rolling around on the floor, Ontari’s arms flailing as she tried to lift up her wand to point at Octavia while Octavia rained messy punch after messy punch on Ontari’s head and chest.

Ontari blasted her back before anyone else could so much as raise their wands. Octavia hit the ceiling before falling back down, crying out as her wrist cracked beneath her weight. Ontari was already scrambling up, livid as she pointed her wand at Octavia again.
“No!” roared Bellamy, lunging, but he fell hard to the ground when Ontari conjured thick black ropes that wrapped tightly around him.

“I should kill you all where you stand,” sneered Ontari, glancing around at them all as the structure around them continued to shake violently and crumble apart. “But that would just take the fun out of it, wouldn’t it?” She jumped back when a large chunk of stone fell out of the ceiling, landing where she’d just been. It left a large hole that revealed the starry night sky above. Her lips twisted. “I could just piss off and let the prison kill you for me.”

Jaw clenched, Clarke limped forward to pull Octavia to her feet and let her lean against her for support. “She’s not going to do that,” she muttered as she felt Octavia trembling. “Lexa said they need us alive.”

Ontari snorted. “Yeah, you. As in singular. The Queen doesn’t give a fuck what happens to the rest of them.” Her gaze zeroed on in something low behind them, and Clarke felt a rush of foreboding at the wicked grin that unfurled on her face.

Clarke spun around to see her father on all fours, body shuddering as though he was going to be sick. She lurched forward, shaking her head to ignore the way the room spun as her injuries throbbed.

“Dad! Are you okay? Dad!” She gripped his shoulders, trying to help him back, but quickly recoiled when a strange sensation pressed into her palms, as though her father’s shoulders were bubbling. She stared down at him in horror, at the way his blonde hair was rapidly tinting red, at how his body seemed to be shrinking in length but growing wider, paunchier—

Her jaw dropped open as her father transformed before her very eyes into an unfamiliar man, a stranger with red hair and stubble and small, beady eyes, and a sick smile on his face as he started to breathlessly laugh, joined in by Ontari’s mirth.

Clarke stammered incomprehensibly, paralyzed in shock on the ground before the man who continued to laugh in spite of his apparent sickness that had coughs intermittent between his gurgling. She didn’t understand.

She still didn’t understand.

She didn’t understand anything.

The man and Ontari’s laughter mingled together as the Shadow-Eaters’ cold turned Clarke’s bones brittle. She blinked, and then it felt as though pain was ripping her in two as realization sank into her.

Lexa had been right. Her father was dead. Clarke hadn’t listened, and Ontari had taken advantage of it, had lured Clarke here, had trapped her.

Lexa had been right. Clarke’s love for her father had been her weakness, and it was going to get them all killed now.

Somehow she found the strength to push herself up to her feet. She pointed her shaking wand at Ontari, useless as it was with her magic temporarily neutralized by the Shadow-Eaters. Ontari laughed harder, and all Clarke’s friends were silent with shock and grief, but Clarke let it propel her, let the anger and anguish form a wall that blocked the despair from leaving her in tears. “What did you do?” she managed to say, voice hardly above a whisper.

Ontari’s laughter faded; she barely glanced at Clarke’s wand as she smirked. “Like I said. So
fucking predictable.”

Clarke took a step forward, shrugging off the hand Bellamy put on her shoulder. “What did you do?” she repeated, voice louder this time.

Ontari’s smugness was enough to make Clarke reconsider everything she’d ever thought about Unforgivable Curses. “The Ice Queen is wise, wise enough to listen to council when offered. I knew you’d come here. Lexa told you to leave at the Ministry and you didn’t. You’re stubborn and headstrong and you care too much. I knew you’d head here as soon as possible, knew an intercepted owl and a delay in a reply would encourage you even more. Say hello to Cuyler Ridley,” she added, nodding toward the man, still panting and exhausted on all fours, but still chuckling. “He volunteered, knowing the Queen would reward him handsomely for this. I gave the polyjuice potion to him at just the right time, so it would wear off when you were here. I took care of the guards, Ridley took his place, and we waited for you. Of course, we didn’t count on someone—” she added with a harsh kick of her boot to Roan’s ribs; he jumped, face contorted in pain. Clarke had not even noticed the Shadow-Eaters had dragged him in. “—to be back from the hospital so soon. The Order takes their duties a little too seriously, if you ask me.” She upturned her face once more to meet Clarke’s gaze, sneering again. “I have to say, with the girl the Ice Queen is so intent to capture, I’m more than a little disappointed in your level of intelligence. What kind of idiot thinks she can break into Azkaban?”

Ontari was right. God, what had Clarke been thinking? Grief and desperation had blinded her. She’d been so determined to prove her father was alive that she’d been careless with her own life, and her friends. Now her father was dead, and they may soon be in the same boat.

Now there was only one thing on Clarke’s mind, one question she was burning to ask, but it fell silent on her numb lips. She was terrified, absolutely terrified, of knowing the answer.

Ontari seemed to guess. A corner of her lips tugged up again, twisting as she lifted her brows.

“You want to know how long, don’t you?” She shrugged, as though this matter was of little consequence. “He’s been dead for over a year.”

The world seemed to revert back; Clarke felt as though she were standing in a tunnel, listening to Ontari’s voice echoing from out the other end.

“And I’ll tell you that it’s not exactly a secret. People knew. People you trust,” she added, and her eyes shifted to Clarke’s right side…Clarke followed her gaze and felt her stomach bottom out as she realized Ontari was looking at Wells.

She would have thought there was nothing left of her heart to shatter, but yet again, she was wrong.

“Of course, the whole point of this wasn’t just to torture you. Next, I’m going to kill all your little friends here, and then I’m going to take you to the Queen, who is very interested in meeting you.”

Clarke lifted her chin, channeling as much cold fury and defiance as she could muster through her gaze. “Why is that?”

Ontari’s lips curved. “You have secrets inside you, Clarke Griffin. Secrets we want.”

Ontari lifted her wand, but Clarke was ready for her. “Protego!” she shouted; Raven and Bellamy had shouted it too. She stared at Ontari through the force field, hate coursing through her veins and throbbing in her temple. Ontari just smirked, and Clarke hated her even more. Clarke
didn’t know how long her magic would last, didn’t know if her pure fury was what regained the ability, but she would have to make it count.

Ontari removed the force field, and then it was Clarke, Raven, and Bellamy against Ontari, wands flying, streaks of light flying overhead or ricocheting to leave craters in the walls that continued to shake and groan. The force of their dueling was throwing the prison into further chaos, and it was already in danger of collapsing.

Clarke let her fury fuel her, let the sobs she wanted nothing more than to release punch through her body, ripping through her muscles, her bones. The force of the Stunning spell she sent had Ontari actually stumbling back in an effort to block it; Raven’s next “Petrificus Totalus!” had her stumble again, Raven not daring to use another blasting spell for fear of bringing the whole place down, while Bellamy’s stunning spell pushed her back even further. Still, despite it being three against one, Ontari was holding her own. And now the Shadow-Eaters were moving forward.

It was chaos again as dust shook down from the trembling ceiling, as Clarke, Raven, Bellamy, and Ontari’s wands were a blur as they slashed through the air. Octavia was uselessly screaming spells while Wells was desperately trying to bring back his Stallion Patronus, but the Shadow-Eaters were bearing down on them. Brief warmth exploded as Fox’s incorporeal patronus flooded the room, halting the Shadow-Eaters. Her face was shining with sweat, screwed up with the effort as she unremittingly muttered the spell, keeping up a continuous slew of silvery vapor that kept the Shadow-Eaters at bay.

It wasn’t enough. None of this was enough. One of Ontari’s spells, a nonverbal red streak that flew straight into Bellamy’s chest, sent him crashing to the ground limp and unconscious, blood trickling out of his nose. It was Clarke and Raven side-by-side now, terrified for their friends and flinging spells more desperately than ever as Ontari easily kept up with them, and Clarke had only a fleeting moment to wish Lexa was here, because if Lexa was here, Ontari would have met her match. Lexa could overpower Ontari. Lexa could protect them.

Clarke’s brain seemed to short-circuit as she saw in her peripheral vision that the Shadow-Eaters had split up and were now taking on Wells, Octavia, and Fox from separate angles. Wells had fallen to his knees, head bowing up as a scabby, rotting hand gripped his chin and forced his face up —

Before Clarke could so much as move, the brightest light yet burst from Fox’s wand, so bright it ceased all other movement in the room, Clarke, Raven, and even Ontari stumbling, squinting, shielding their eyes—

As the light dimmed, it revealed an astonishing sight. A tiny creature of light—for one wild moment, Clarke thought it was a fennec fox, before she realized it was nothing more than a mouse with rather large ears—was scurrying forth, so bright it sent all the Shadow-Eaters dispersing and held them pressed back against the wall before they finally broke and scattered, swooping away out the door and up out of the hole in the ceiling.

Then all that Clarke knew was pain. Burning, consuming, world-rendering pain, as though every part of her body were being stabbed. The scream tore free from Clarke’s throat as she writhed on the ground.

“Protego!” cried Raven, voice full of panic, and then the pain miraculously ceased.

Clarke’s arms shook as she rolled herself over and pushed herself to her feet. Her body was sore as though she’d just been pummeled, but she lifted her wand and joined Raven’s attack on Ontari. Octavia had joined them; Clarke’s heart lifted with relief to see Bellamy conscious and
standing fine beside her, both of them furiously casting curses and hexes at Ontari and alternatingly
defending one another from what she returned. Fox and Wells were maintaining their Patronus
charms, keeping the Shadow-Eaters at bay.

Four against one now. Ontari had long lost the smirk; her face was contorted in a snarl of
fury, her wandwork faster than ever. There was a flurry of wand and light as she created some sort of
protective shield around herself, a bubble similar to what Lexa had produced in the Ministry, but
before she could finish, the combined force of Clarke, Raven, Bellamy, and Octavia’s different spells
hit her hard, lifting her off her feet. She flew back into the horde of Shadow-Eaters that were
congregated in the other room.

Clarke twitched her wand to slam the door shut in Ontari’s face.

They were left alone, shaky and panting, the scurrying mouse and cantering horse lighting up
the room.

“What do we do?” whispered Fox.

“Blast open the door,” said Clarke sharply, looking directly at Raven, who nodded.

They all backed away as she walked to the door. She had just lifted her wand when there
was a deafening boom, but it didn’t come from her. They all spun around to look up in horror at the
massive creature that had just broken down the wall, huge chunks of stone clattering to the ground;
they all split, lunging just in time before they could be crushed, and Clarke wondered if anything
would be anything less than chaos again.

There were screams, flashes of light as Patronuses went out and the ceiling was knocked
aside to reveal the stars and the half moon, guttural noises, snarling, roars, the screech of claws on
stone. Then there was a familiar voice that, in spite of everything, had Clarke’s lips parting and her
palm pressing to her heart in overwhelming relief. Through a vast hole in the side of the wall, she
could see her.

“Get on!” shouted Anya; she was standing on a huge tail, clinging onto a protruding spike
with one hand, the other waving madly to get their attention, red and gold sparks shooting from the
end of her wand. “Everybody get on!”

Any other time, Clarke would pause to wonder why Anya and Lincoln were both riding on a
huge fucking dragon. Right now, she could do nothing more than seize her friends and make a sprint
for it.

They scrambled out of the dilapidated wall, stumbling over one another’s heels. On the open
island rock, Clarke gaped up at a sight she never would have imagined seeing. Two dragons
silhouetted against the night sky, terrible sounds of rage screaming from locked jaws with teeth as
long as Clarke’s forearm. The one Anya and Lincoln had jumped down from and were standing
before, gesturing wildly for Clarke and her friends to hurry toward them, seemed to be on their side.
Its wings furled and unfurled, impossibly big, as it snarled and tore at the slightly smaller black
dragon with deadly sharp claws; the smaller dragon screeched and twisted out of its grip, wings
beating as it retreated a wide berth.

“Bellamy, what kind of dragon is that?” whispered Octavia.

Bellamy shook his head, brow knit in puzzlement but mouth open in shock. “I don’t know.
Never seen any pictures of ones like that…”
The dragon was smaller than the Hebridean Black from the Third Task. It was long and lithe, muscles rippling beneath shining russet scales. It had larger scales along the ridge of its neck and tail, sharp, with grooves in them that twisted round and round. There was a peculiar arrangement of darker, spikier scales around its eyes, almost like the shape of a mask—

Oh.

The dragon’s head twisted around on its long neck and Clarke stared, dumbfounded, up into large, vividly green eyes.

“Get on! Hurry up!”

She was jolted back to life as Anya’s grip seized her arm painfully tight, pulling her over to the dragon. Clarke dazedly climbed on, clutching the spikes and scales, careful not to cut herself on them.

“Is everybody on?” bellowed Lincoln to be heard over the crash of the ocean waves against the island rock, the crumbling stone fortress, the howl of wind beating beneath dragon wings over the snarling and growling.

Sitting up second-highest behind Fox, Clarke glanced behind herself to see Octavia, Bellamy, Wells, and Raven all clinging on, Lincoln and Anya behind them. Clarke met Lincoln and Anya’s eyes and nodded.

“Move, Lexa!” shouted Anya, clapping her hand on the bit of hind leg she could reach.

“Lexa?” Octavia yelped.

“Of course!” hollered Bellamy in comprehension. “She’s a fucking animagus!”

“We all are, now shut up and hold on!” ordered Anya.

The spray of the sea on the wind speckled Clarke’s face as they rose into the air. She held herself close to warm, smooth scales, fumbling to maintain her grip as she slid backwards an inch or so as they climbed higher into the sky. She ducked her head to look back down at the prison, to catch a glimpse of the crumbling structure, spotting a few figures already growing smaller—the wispy witch, Cuyler Ridley, and a few others she had seen in the cells—and then she felt her very core grow suddenly cold, breath leaving her lungs as she remembered.

“Roan!” she gasped, twisting, nearly slipping as she tried to turn back to Anya. “Roan Kwin is down there—“

Anya bellowed Lexa’s name, but Lexa had already stopped, hovering in the air, turning toward the prison. The other dragon, which must be Ontari, Clarke realized with a sick jolt, was flying off in the distance, a limp figure clutched in her hind claws, his long hair streaming in the wind.

“It’s too late,” said Anya, voice quieter with grief, but Lexa clearly heard her, because she turned again, the opposite way of Ontari’s departure.

The sea grew calmer as they flew. The reflection of the dragon appeared spectral in the water beside the white moon. Clarke, shaking, squeezed her eyes shut and held her face pressed to the scales, letting them warm her cheeks as tears turned to ice.
“It’s called The Chamber of Secrets,” said Jamie, emerald eyes crinkled in excitement. The blue ones she gazed into were wide with wonder. “Salazar Slytherin himself created it, in secret from the other founders. And I know how to get in.”

Roan’s lower lip moved out in a pout as she rolled her eyes. “You’re the worst liar ever, Jamie.”

This had been a point of argument (playful, teasing banter, but a disagreement nonetheless) for the past few weeks.

“I’m not lying!” said Jamie, amused. “Watch!”

She bent down, quickly finding the tap with the small serpent carved into it. She hissed the words the same way her granddad showed her; it took her a couple tries, but eventually it worked, and the entire bathroom began to tremble.

“Hold on,” she said urgently, panic twisting in her stomach as she huddled with Roan behind the wall near the doorway. This wasn’t the way it was supposed to happen, was it? She’d expected the small snake outline to etch itself into the porcelain, and then tap her wand on it to open a tunnel leading to the chamber. That was what her grandfather told her had happened.

“Jamie!” whispered Roan, rapidly tapping Jamie’s shoulder to get her to turn round. Jamie did so, eyes widening to take in the sight of the moved sinks revealing the tunnel.

Jamie let out a breath she hadn’t realized she was holding, smiling as she turned to raise a brow at Roan. “See? I told you I wasn’t lying.”

“Are we—are we going down there?” breathed Roan, cautiously inching forward and squinting to peer into the tunnel. It was too dark to see anything.

Jamie glanced back at where the broomsticks were safely stored just behind the first stall. This was what they came here for, and she was definitely curious to see what was waiting for them in the chamber. She slanted a smile at Roan before moving toward the tunnel.

“Really?” burst Roan, blue eyes wide as she watched Jamie clamber down at the mouth of the tunnel. “Really. We’re doing this? Okay.” She crossed the bathroom, kneeling behind Jamie.

“Ready?”

Roan nodded, face lit up with nervous excitement. “Right behind you.”

Jamie scooted down slightly, then found herself sliding down a wet, slippery tunnel, descending so rapidly the wind stung her eyes. The journey was longer than she’d expected; it felt like minutes later when she spied the faintly green light in the distance. She braced herself as she zoomed toward it, and her knees only buckled slightly when she landed hard on a dusty, grimy stone floor.

She stepped forward just in time, as Roan landed where she had been standing.

“You good?” she asked as she gripped Roan’s arms to steady her.
“Whew.” Roan twisted around to glance back up the dark tunnel. When she swiveled back around to look at Jamie, she looked awestruck that they’d actually done it. “Yeah.” Her eyes widened as she took in their surroundings. It was huge—much larger than Jamie had anticipated. Though she supposed she shouldn’t be too surprised, considering it once held a giant basilisk.

They wandered around the chamber for a time, Jamie chuckling at the way Roan startled every time a rat scurried past them. Eventually they came to the giant stone face and the still water that served as a moat around it. They decided to take a break and sat on the cleanest bit of stone they could find, where they lounged as they snacked on the bread rolls they’d taken from lunch.

A good hour had passed before they were ready to leave. Roan stood first, stretching while she looked around.

“Do you think we’re the first Gryffindors to ever be down here?”

“No. My great-grandfather was the one who found this place.” Comprehension sank into Roan’s face; she nodded, as though remembering. “He fought Voldemort, or a part of him or something.” Jamie smiled. “My dad tends to skim over the details. I think he doesn’t want to frighten me.”

“Did he fight a giant snake or something?” Roan nodded when Jamie did. “I think I remember reading something about that. A basilisk, that’s what it was.” She looked around again, pale blue eyes skittering across the tranquil green water and grimy gray stones. “I wonder if they moved its skeleton.”

“It’s been over a century. It probably decomposed.”

“True.” Roan looked down at her hands, clasping them together. She fidgeted until glancing at Jamie, then looked back down at her hands and cleared her throat. “So…if this is a Chamber of Secrets…I’ve got one.”

“Got what?”

“A secret.”

Jamie turned to look at her friend, frowning slightly in concern at how nervous Roan looked. She patiently waited for her to speak, puzzled. Roan licked her lips before swallowing hard, briefly closing her eyes, as though steeling herself to say whatever it was she was about to say.

“I had to leave Salem because they only accept girls and I don’t feel like a girl.” Jamie blinked, raising both brows. “Um…pardon? You spoke too fast, I didn’t understand what you said.” She smiled encouragingly, hoping it would abate some of Roan’s obvious nerves.

Roan took another breath, this time speaking more slowly, though it didn’t seem any less painstaking to escape her lips. “I had to leave Salem. I mean, I didn’t just move because Hogwarts is better. I had to leave, they made me, because they’re an all-girls school, and I told them I’m not a girl.”

“Oh.” Jamie tilted her head, eyes sweeping over her trembling friend. America was even more different than Jamie had thought, clearly. “That doesn’t sound very nice of them. Why are they all-girls, anyway?”

“They don’t like it. They’re an old school,” said Roan, shrugging rather helplessly.
“So is Hogwarts,” said Jamie. “So you told them you aren’t a girl? Are you…” Jamie struggled with the words, trying to recall the words her mother had used when she explained how everyone was different. “Do you identify as a boy? Or…”

“Yes,” said Roan nervously, nodding and eying Jamie as though she were about to exclaim in disgust.

Sensing Roan’s trepidation, Jamie rose to her feet, dusting her hands off on her knees before crossing the chamber to put her hands on Roan’s shoulders, looking intently into her—his—blue eyes. “Hey, you’re looking at me like I’m going to curse you or something,” said Jamie lightly, still smiling gently. “I don’t know what America is like, but we’re more evolved here. I know people used to be weird about things they shouldn’t be weird about, but it’s not like that anymore. If you don’t feel like a girl, then you aren’t one. No matter what anyone else says.” At this, the tears in Roan’s eyes spilled over, and his quivering bottom lip pushed out into a pout. Jamie promptly pulled him into a hug, bracingly rubbing the length of Roan’s back as he clutched Jamie tightly and wept.

A sudden intense wave of loathing directed at Salem Institute coursed through Jamie. She pressed her lips into a thin grim line, squeezing Roan more tightly and wishing more than anything her friend wasn’t hurting. “I’m sorry.”

“Thank you,” Roan choked out. He held Jamie a minute more, before finally withdrawing and taking a deep, shaky breath. When he swiped his fingertips beneath his eyes, Jamie was struck again by how very pretty Roan was.

“You know,” she said seriously, “You’re very handsome.”

Roan blinked at her for a moment, before a corner of his lips tugged up in a crooked smile. He laughed then, and kept laughing, so hard that it wasn’t long until Jamie found herself joining in. Their laughter echoed across the empty chamber.

Later, as they made their way back to the entrance of the chamber, Roan spoke of Salem, of how his mother was angry and disagreed when he asked to leave but suddenly had a change of heart at the last minute, of how he finally realized why he never felt comfortable in an all-girl’s school because he wasn’t a girl.

“I just felt like an imposter, and it started to hurt, keeping it bottled up inside, and it wasn’t really until my friends told me I wasn’t acting myself, like I was just angry all the time and miserable, that I realized I needed to be honest.”

“There are a lot of people here who aren’t comfortable in the body they were born with,” Jamie told him. “My older cousin Fabian found that out in her fourth year. She said she had a lot of friends that took the transformation potion too, and they were much happier after. Professor Gordon just told them to make sure they were in a dormitory they were comfortable in. So if you decide you want to do the spell, she’ll probably just ask you if you want to stay in the co-ed dorms or if you’d be more comfortable in the boys’ dorm.”

“Oh.” Roan looked taken aback, as though he’d never anticipated actually having the freedom of choice to consider. “I’ll probably stay. I’d miss you too much,” he added, grinning as he nudged an elbow into Jamie’s ribs. She smiled, blushing slightly, but pleased.

They finally reached the tunnel. Roan frowned.
“So how are we supposed to get out of here?”

Jamie turned to raise her brows at Roan. “Did you really think I’d come unprepared?” she said teasingly before lifting her wand. She swished it through the air, said “Accio brooms!” and two Nimbus 3000s came zooming down the tunnel, coming to a sharp halt right before them where they quivered in place as though anxiously awaiting their weight.

Roan looked as impressed as he did pleased as he clambered onto the broom before him. “Nice. Are these both yours?”

“No,” said Jamie, swinging a leg over her own broom. “I borrowed one from the Quidditch supply room.”

Roan twisted round to shoot Jamie an incredulous look. “Wow. You really are a rule-breaker, aren’t you?”

She grinned. “I just like to make you happy.”

He returned the smile. “That is what friends do best.”

Their laughter was lost in the wind that rushed their ears as they soared up and out of the chamber.

Jamie jumped, torn out of her reverie as a streak of silvery light flew into her open window. Her dinner, measly takeout from a muggle restaurant nearby, was still untouched on her bed. She was too preoccupied, worrying what the Ice Queen’s next move was, worrying whether Roan was feeling okay after his injuries, worrying whether he was miserable at the prison like he usually was, worrying whether she could have somehow done something to save Byrne, worrying, worrying, worrying.

Now there was more to worry about, because the light was resolving itself into the familiar elephant patronus that belonged to Gideon. It lifted its trunk, opened its mouth, and spilled out her brother’s words.

Jamie’s heart was pounding as she surged to her feet, seizing her wand from where it had rested on the nightstand. The elephant had barely faded away before she was down the stairs and out the door, turning on the spot and disappearing with a pop.

* * *

They landed on the outskirts of Hogsmeade. It was as close as Lexa felt safe doing, and it was at least a full Wizarding Village, so if someone spotted her, better a wizard than a muggle.

The ground shook and nearby birds skittered out of the trees they’d been sleeping in. She carefully dropped her tail, unsure by the weight if it were one person or two who was on it, and flattened herself as close to the ground as she could. Her nerves were twisting, fraying; she was at the end of her tethers.

Keeping herself safe from the weakness of love, from the vulnerability that caring cost, what
bullshit. All she had been lately was terrified. Terrified that she wouldn’t be enough, that eventually something would happen and the people she loved most wouldn’t make it. That she would lose Clarke, Anya, Lincoln, Indra, Gustus—everyone and more, so many people that had snuck inside her and burrowed themselves comfortable homes in her heart. Nothing was safe, and the only thing she could do was surge blindly forward in a desperate bid to protect them.

“That’s everyone,” Anya called, patting her tail to signal.

Lexa closed her eyes and concentrated. She had done this so many times before, but now, knowing Clarke knew, had seen her in her animagi form, it somehow made her nervous, like this was a new side of herself she was showing her—which, she supposed, was exactly how it was.

The familiar pain was muted; she had long learned to ignore it. Her bones crackled as they shrunk, her skin prickled as scales withdrew into her flesh and disappeared. When she was human again, she took in a deep breath and exhaled it slowly, grateful for the returned complexity of her hominid thoughts.

When she turned around, automatically holding out a hand for her wand, she stiffened upon seeing every set of eyes (besides Anya and Lincoln) wide and staring at her. Lexa’s gaze found Clarke’s, and she swallowed, unsure what to think because the only emotion revealing itself on Clarke’s countenance was pure shock.

Anya dropped her wand into her hand. “Right, I’ve got a few words for you reckless morons,” she flared up, rounding on everyone but most specifically Clarke and Raven. “What the fuck were you thinking, going there? And without even telling us? Of all the stupid, irresponsible—”

“Shut up!” said Bellamy urgently; Anya rounded on him next, mouth opening furiously, but Lexa gripped her arm when she saw the direction Bellamy was looking.

In the distance, smoke had risen high into the air above the horizon of village houses and treetops. It had been clear only moments ago, but now it was filling the night sky, firelight turning it a dull orange.

That was all it took for everyone to take off.

The minutes it took to reach Hogwarts grounds felt both like hours and seconds. Bellamy and Lincoln reached the gates first, everyone else a second or two behind, and Fox and Raven lagging quite far behind. They all stood there behind the bars, gazing in horror between the wrought-gate bars at the bedlam before them.

The grounds were full of people, a mix of students, professors, Death Eaters, and members of the Order; some were evidently fleeing the scene, but most were dueling. Jamie Potter was visible in the throng, back to back with Indra as they cast and deflected spells. The Beauxbatons’ carriage was gone, and the Durmstrang ship was a charred, blackened mess. Half of the Hogwarts castle was on fire.

“What the hell?” said Octavia, horrified.

“The Ice Queen,” said Lincoln grimly.

“What do we do? Do we get help?” said Fox, white-faced and terrified.

Lexa waved her wand, unlocking the gates with a blast that banged them open. “We are the help.”
I think a few of you already guessed what Lexa's animagus would be, which I'm pleased about since I've been dropping little hints all throughout the fic. I hope the idea is not too ridiculous to some of you (although I guess it would be kinda silly if it is considering this is a story about witches and wizards who have magic wands and go to a magical school lol). It's been planned since I first started brainstorming for this fic and there is a specific reason for it which will be explored in later chapters. It's not a central part of this fic; as Lexa will later explain, it can actually be a pain in the ass since it's not exactly inconspicuous.

Fox's patronus was a nod to a little HP tidbit I always found particularly awesome, Illyius. https://www.pottermore.com/writing-by-jk-rowling/patronus-charm

*Spoiler Alert* Roan will never die. But Cuyler Ridley is totally dead; good riddance.
Blood and Flashbacks

Chapter Summary

The Battle of Hogwarts

Chapter Notes

I wrote 20k just today. I don't even know how I did this. Either way, it's been a rough month (started a new job and then my great-grandma died a few days ago :() and as such I would absolutely LOVE a comment saying what you thought of this chapter. They absolutely make my day and it would mean a lot. An extra thanks to those of you who have been leaving comments and that; I read every one and you have no idea how crazy happy they make me. I think I refresh my mailbox like 100 times a day to see them haha.

Also, IF you leave a comment (because I don't want to get just random comments of this info since I feel like it will add comments to this fic of just that and it would feel a bit like cheating), it would be cool if at the end you say what your Hogwarts house, Ilvermorny house, your wand type, and your patronus is :) I'm a Ravenclaw, Thunderbird, Hornbeam wood with a Phoenix feather core 12 ¼" and Slightly Springy flexibility wand, and my patronus is a goshawk. My wife is a Ravenclaw, Pukwudgie, Hazel (which is funny bc it's her eye color) wood with a Phoenix feather core 12 ¼" and Unbending flexibility, and has a THESTRAL patronus, the butthead. I'm jealous because Thestrals are probably one of my very favorite HP creatures.

Anyways, I hope you enjoy this chapter: lots of action, death, and just...lots of stuff. You'll see.
Hope you have a great day!

Give me a whisper
And give me a sigh
Give me a kiss before you
tell me goodbye

-Guns n Roses

It was utter bedlam that felt as though it passed in snippets and flashes, as though Clarke were merely a spectator here. Indeed, the sense of surrealism seemed to serve as a shield of numbness that enabled her to keep moving forward, to duel the Death Eaters that stepped up to meet her, to spare only a brief glance at the ominously familiar figures limp on the ground—acquaintances and strangers she shared a castle with, all dead. Gone. There was nothing she could do but fight her way
through the throng and hope to prevent any more deaths from happening. There was an itch at the back of her head that matched the overwhelming emotion threatening to flood her chest like a tidal wave. She could name the terror, the panic, the adrenaline-fueled determination, but she couldn’t identify the itch, the sense that something was wrong. She felt unstable and unbalanced, like she was missing something important, but there was no time to dwell on it.

She vaguely registered her friends splitting away one by one, wands slashing and flashes of light banging loud, spells flying so close to her it rose the hairs on the back of her neck. Octavia’s vicious jelly-legs jinx stopped a Death Eater from finishing the _Crucio_ he’d been aiming at Wells while Wells smoothly disarmed the Death Eater who had been sending flames spurting at Fox, who sent a neat jinx across the grounds at the distant Death Eater looming over some feebly stirring figure slumped up against a tree.

“Nice aim!” enthused Raven, causing Fox to look around in astonishment, but Raven didn’t linger; she was rushing forth as best she could with her limp, sending two nearby Death Eaters flying away with strangled screams as the force of her blasting curse left a sizable crater in the ground.

Her friends were dispersing to meet their enemies; Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln had long ago hurried to back Indra and Jamie. Bellamy was just behind Clarke, his screams for Gina muffled and lost amongst the screams and shouts and booms of spells deafening the night. Clarke’s focus was on the castle, on getting there as soon as she could to salvage what was left within it. It looked as though the entire entrance was in danger of crumbling, and there was so much fire and smoke clouding the night sky that it was impossible to see exactly which towers were under attack. All she could pray was that Kane had somehow been able to send students home, that he’d had adequate warning and saved innocent lives—

“Conjunctivitis!” roared Bellamy; the Death Eater that had been hurrying down the stairs to the smoldering entrance doors fell with a scream, clutching at her eyes.

“Confundus,” muttered Clarke with a twitch of her wand as the woman began struggling to her feet again while blindly pointing her wand at her attacker. She stumbled off in the other direction, confusing mingling with her pained expression.

Bellamy had clearly been of the same mind as Clarke, that they needed to get to the castle, because they were the only two left of their friends still running, so close to the entrance doors—

So close until they weren’t. A streak of red light hit the stairs only feet away, the force of the explosion blowing Clarke and Bellamy back, sending them over ten feet into the air before they slammed down hard, no breath left in their lungs to cry out in pain with. They had no time to catch it, either; they both rolled to their feet, gasping out curses at the same time, wands pointed at the Death Eaters that had been chasing them.

“Incarcerous!”

“Petrificus Totalus!”

Both of their spells were deflected, and they had to lunge apart to avoid the streaks of red sent to them by one, and streak of green sent by the other.

“No!” shouted one Death Eater, seizing his fellow by the front of his cloak. “We have orders, you can kill as many as you like, but not Griffin—“

“Stupefy!” yelled Bellamy and Clarke, their spells hitting each Death Eater at the same time.
They had barely turned to face the castle when they were again drawn back.

“CLARKE! BELLAMY!” bellowed someone behind them; they both spun around to see Miller sprinting toward him, a Death Eater hot on his heels flinging curses that Miller zigzagged and dodged. Clarke and Bellamy both pointed their wands; Miller’s eyes widened a fraction of a second, and he lunged out of the way, tumbling to the ground, leaving the Death Eater exposed.

“Stupefy!” they screamed again; this time their spells combined to hit the cloaked figure in the chest, blasting her back.

“Fuck,” panted Miller once Bellamy seized him by the arm and pulled him to his feet. “Have you seen Monty?” he said at once, doubled over to catch his breath. “I can’t—I can’t find him anywhere. I was in the dungeons when they sounded the alarm, I ran all the way to Ravenclaw tower but no one was there.”

Clarke and Bellamy both shook their heads, impatiently pushing back the sweaty hair that fell forward into their faces. “No, I haven’t seen him since—”

But at that moment, her words were drowned out by yet another person shouting her name nearby; the three of them turned to see two Hogwarts students, Atom and some first-year that looked vaguely familiar, running toward them, four Death-Eaters streaking after them, and like Miller, Atom and the girl were barely avoiding the streaks of red and blue and green that shot over their heads.

It happened so fast, yet at the same time, the next minute seemed to pass as though in slow motion. One moment, Atom and the first-year were screaming for help, fleeing from the Death Eaters, and then Atom met Clarke’s gaze, wide, terrified green eyes meeting frozen blue, and yet Clarke could also see the Death Eaters behind him, slashing their wands and bawling spells—

And then the world was rendered into two as the force of the Death Eater’s spell blew up the earth around them. Clarke saw Atom and the first-year were blasted into the air, saw the Death Eaters flying backwards from the force, and then she, Bellamy, and Miller were flying back as well, fire and magical energy crackling in the air around them.

Her body was shaking and her eyes fluttered as she tried to open them, praying she hadn’t blacked out for long. Beside her, Bellamy was struggling up too, his arms trembling as he pushed himself to his feet. He helped Clarke up and they looked around to help Miller, but he was feet away and already up, clearly having spotted Raven in the distance, taking on a Shadow-Eater, her patronus swooping through the air, and was rushing toward her, no doubt to ask if she’d seen Monty.

“Clarke,” said Bellamy, voice so full of panic and fear that Clarke’s heart stopped again. She looked the direction he was gesturing and her heart thrummed back into life as she took in the sight before her.

The first year girl, covered in blood, was whimpering as she crawled forward, slowly making it to her feet and swaying where she stood. Bellamy seized her above the elbow tightly, making sure she didn’t fall. The girl wasn’t concerned about herself, though; the blood she was covered in was not her own. She twisted around to look at what Clarke and Bellamy couldn’t tear their gazes from.

Atom was sprawled out spread-eagled on the floor, mangled and nearly every inch of him painted scarlet with blood. His skin (most specifically his face) was covered in angry hives, but most disturbingly was the fact that his stomach seemed to be completely cut open, and—God—

“What did they do to him?” said Bellamy hoarsely.
Clarke’s stomach was churning with nausea; she tore her gaze away from his exposed abdomen. “It looks like multiple combined curses…a hive-conjuring curse, a full-body bind, something else, and—and an entrail-expelling curse…”

“Why would they do this? Why would they do something this sick, to a kid?” said Bellamy desperately, angrily, trying to make sense of it all.

Clarke shook her head. “Because they are sick. They’re the worst kind of human beings. They’re just killing us…for fun.”

Atom was still twitching in agony, his rattling shallow breaths reminding Clarke of the Shadow-Eaters. The skin that wasn’t covered in blisters or blood was stark white; he didn’t have long. He was suffering from Dark Magic, and simple healing spells wouldn’t be enough to fix this. Even if they had the months required to brew the most powerful healing potions, it still, Clarke knew, would not be enough for this…

Atom was looking at Bellamy, who had once been his close friend until they had a falling out when Atom was dating Bellamy’s sister. He seemed to be trying to speak; Clarke knew he would be writhing, screaming in torment if he could, but he was in the worst pain imaginable, paralyzed on the blood-soaked ground. “Kill…me…” he choked. “Please…kill…me…”

She looked sidelong at Bellamy; he clearly knew, because his jaw was clenched and he was staring down at Atom with resignation warring with the dread in his dark eyes. He determinedly walked over to Atom, dropped to his knees beside him, and raised his wand. But he didn’t do anything.

The seconds stretched on into a full minute, and Clarke knew they were as precious as they were cruel.

Bellamy couldn’t do this, but Clarke wasn’t about to let Atom suffer any longer. He was her friend. He dated Octavia all through Octavia’s fifth year and he’d been a sweet boyfriend to her, even though it hadn’t worked out. He had been a decent Chaser for Hufflepuff. He was their friend. He was their friend and he was dying. The least they could do was ease his suffering.

“Hey,” said Clarke softly, brushing the hair back from Atom’s sweaty, bloody forehead. His eyes locked onto her again, wide, terrified, and glossy with pain, and despite her fissuring heart, she tried to smooth her face into a soft, comforting smile. “I’m going to help you, all right?” His body bind was starting to fade; he was shaking violently now. He nodded, just barely, still rasping for breath, but there was comprehension and relief in his eyes.

She traced her wand over his body, murmuring the spell; it was complicated enough, long enough, that it almost sounded as though she were humming a song. Atom’s eyes gave a final flutter, tears leaking from them, and the wild pulse in his neck gave a final pound before it stilled. Everything about Atom went still, and Clarke was left smoothing her fingers along his hairline, her heart aching with sorrow, panic embedded along the lines of her stomach and chest.

“What did you do to him?” whispered Bellamy. “He’s…he’s not breathing.”

She swallowed, though she was now sure there would now never be a time in her life when her throat wasn’t constricted. “Bewitched Sleeping spell. They stop breathing while they’re under, until the spell is lifted. He’ll die before then. Peacefully.”

Bellamy sniffed, nodding, more to himself than anything. He reached over to take Clarke’s hand, even though it was coated in Atom’s blood, and squeezed it. Clarke met his gaze, nodded at
his wordless gratitude. She grieved in silence with him.

They couldn’t mourn for long. They both stiffened at the unnatural cold that settled over them; more Shadow-Eaters were emerging from the forest like a second wave of reinforcements. Clarke and Bellamy both stumbled to their feet. They had no choice but to leave Atom’s body behind as they hurried forward, casting their Patronuses that launched forward, scattering the hooded creatures. The little girl was still beside them, eyes wide; she had clearly been watching the whole time, because the mingled fear and awe in the way she looked at them made Clarke even more uncomfortable.

“We need to get her out of here. All the first-years…” began Bellamy, but his voice trailed away rather helplessly as he looked around the grounds, taking in all the bodies scattered around. Some were entirely too small…

“They tried to send us home,” whispered the girl. She seemed extra tiny for a first year, swallowed whole by the green dressing gown she wore, her blonde hair falling loose from the hasty tail it had been pulled back into. “They didn’t have time.”

“Did they get anyone out?”

The girl nodded. “Some. They were making Port-keys, but they didn’t have time. So they had the House-Elves come up from the kitchen and Disapparate with us, but they only managed to take half of us before she arrived…”

“Who is she?” said Bellamy sharply.

The girl took a shaky intake of breath, and spoke her next words on the exhale. “They called her the Ice Queen. She was over there.” She pointed toward the direction of the lake. “She broke into the tomb, and—and then all the scary things showed up, those things that look like dementors, and then the people in hooded black cloaks, and the Entrance Hall blew up, and the professors that were left started fighting, and some first and second years crawled out of a hole in the wall, so I followed them…” She swallowed, face contorting in pain as the reality of the situation overcame her. “Then—then Death Eaters attacked me, and they used the Crucius Curse on me…that boy, he—he showed up and s-saved me. But more came, and we ran, and…” She glanced at Atom’s body, terror-stricken again, tears dripping down the edge of her nose.

There was a shocked silence, before Bellamy cleared his throat and said in a gruff voice, “Sounds like you were pretty brave, kid.”

The girl didn’t answer, but seemed taken aback by the compliment. “What’s your name?” asked Clarke gently.

“Charlotte Vivodic.”

“Okay Charlotte,” began Bellamy, voice firm but kind, he crouched down a little to be eye-level with her; Clarke remained standing, warily keeping track of all the enemies around them and that they were kept busy in their various battles. “Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to get back in the castle, find a House-Elf, and get you out of here. Okay?”

Charlotte stared at Bellamy with wide-eyes, still trembling from head to toe. “I’m scared. Especially of…those scary things. That take all the happiness away and—and make you think of horrible…terrible things…” She shuddered. Her voice was barely above a whisper, but Bellamy heard, and his brow creased in sympathy.
“Listen to me. I’m a Gryffindor, okay, so trust me when I tell you this.” He gripped her shoulders when the girl only stared, wide-eyed, up at him. “You gotta have courage. Fears are fears, and they’re like demons. We have to face them. At some point, we all have to slay our demons. I’m scared too, but we have to get you safe.”

Finally, though she still seemed reluctant to reenter the castle, Charlotte nodded.

Bellamy stood. “Clarke?” His brow was furrowed and Clarke knew his internal struggle: did he take Charlotte into the castle to look around for Gina, or let Clarke while he went to find and protect O? Castle for Gina, or Grounds for Octavia?

Before he could decide a spell hit Clarke; she cried out in pain as she fell, her legs jumping.

“Finite,” she spat through clenched teeth, legs mercifully stilling. God, she hated that spell. She looked up at the Death Eater advancing on her. “Stupefy! Bellamy, you take her, and find Gina. I’ll find Octavia. Go!”

His terror at not going forth himself to find Octavia and protect her was palpable, but Bellamy still seized Charlotte’s hand and began dragging her toward the castle. Clarke scrambled to her feet to take on the two Death-Eaters running at her, her wand striking the air as she blasted them both back with a well-aimed blasting curse.

Bellamy and Charlotte hurried up the Entrance Hall steps and burst into the dilapidated castle, and Bellamy was certain he was every bit as terrified as Charlotte was—maybe even more so.

Octavia. His sister was out there locked in a life or death battle. His baby sister.

She could take care of herself, though, he was sure of that. She was a scrappy fighter and teachers and their friends surrounded her and she would be okay. Gina, though—Gina was on the way, Hufflepuff was right beside the kitchens—

Charlotte screamed as a spell went jetting over their heads; Bellamy ducked and it hit the gigantic Hufflepuff hourglass. They staggered as they slipped on the yellow jewels that spilled out. “Stupefy!” Bellamy threw over his shoulder; it was beyond luck that it managed to hit the Death Eater who had chased them through the door.

They shouldered and ducked their way down the hallway full of dueling people, too scared to cast spells in case it hit the wrong person. Charlotte’s tiny hand was still tightly clenched in Bellamy’s sweaty palm and holding a hand that small was reminding him of when he was younger, when Octavia was younger, when they were just two kids who thought that all the stories their mother told them about Hogwarts and witchcraft and magic had been simply that, stories…

The horror of seeing his beloved castle—his second home—was like a knife burying itself in his heart. There were holes blasted through walls, there were moving staircases broken off, there were collapsed statues, students lying limp on the floor…

It was almost crazy to think, now, how he had first felt about the castle. How he had been close to not even coming here at all…
Bellamy stared down at the letter in his hands before looking up, squinting again at the small wardrobe that this strange man had already cast on fire, turned into a brick wall and back again, and changed various colors every time Bellamy had furiously claimed it was a silly magic trick and this was all a joke. Now he was unsure. This seemed real; what if there really was a magic school and he really could go?

“It is real,” said the man gently when Bellamy said as much. He had been stoic when he first arrived, introduced himself as Marcus Kane, a professor that apparently taught Transfiguration or something. He had patiently fed Bellamy this story all about a secret magical world where kids were taken away to learn how to do magic themselves. It sounded too good to be true, and Bellamy had long ago had his fill of pipe dreams.

Still, if there were two things he loved (other than his baby sister and Milky Buttons), it was stories and history, so he couldn’t resist demanding more answers from Kane, who had initially seemed surprised, then even amused, as he answered.

He spoke to Bellamy for almost an entire hour, the topics ranging from the making of the school itself to an international warlock’s convention of 1709 and a Gargoyle Strike of 1911 to some boy called The Chosen One defeating a dark wizard in 1998. He confirmed everything Bellamy’s mother had ever told him, all the stories he had once thought were simply that: stories, were apparently true.

After Kane finished speaking, Bellamy sat in silence for a minute, trying to school his expression into one of indifference rather than a mix of longing and confusion.

“It sounds…interesting,” he finally admitted, rather grudgingly. “But…I can’t go.”

“Why not?” said Kane in surprise.

“My sister. I can’t leave her.”

Kane’s brow furrowed. “This isn’t as though you are a muggleborn, Bellamy. Your mother was a witch. You and Octavia both have magic. Octavia will join you at Hogwarts next year.”

“Exactly,” said Bellamy, unable to stop the desperation from mixing with the frustration in his voice. He surged to his feet and began to pace in the space of his tiny room. “That’s a whole year. Do you know how many bad things can happen in one day, let alone one year?” He shook his head, eyes burning the floor as he walked. “I can’t leave her that long. She’s my responsibility. I have to protect her.”

“Protect her from what?” said Kane gently. “Your caretakers seem very kind. It seems like she will be very well cared for here.”

“It always seems like that at first,” growled Bellamy. But that was usually not the case. There was no need to voice that aloud; Kane could read it on his face.

“What if I promised you that she would?”

Bellamy halted, narrowed eyes shifting up onto Kane even as his mouth fell open. He closed it after a moment, clenching his jaw, trying to deduce the level of sincerity in Kane’s eyes. He didn’t bother hiding the accusation from his voice. “How could you?”
“I’m not going.”

This was probably the twentieth time Bellamy had uttered those words in the past hour. He was pacing again, this time in an alleyway behind the orphanage, his dirty boots splashing through the shallow puddles left behind from this morning’s rain.

“You are too going,” said Octavia. She was no longer exasperated; this had been happening for hours, so if anything, she was no longer taking it as serious as she should.

In the back of his mind, Bellamy knew her assurance was right. He probably was going. Kane had assured him he would see to Octavia’s safety, and this is what their mother would have wanted, and besides all that, Bellamy wanted to go, desperately. Not just to leave behind this depressing place, but because he was seized with a fantastic hunger to learn more, to become more. He wanted to do magic, he wanted a wand and he wanted to sit in class learning about the history of his people and he wanted to be a wizard.

But the familiar doubt was always nagging at the back of his mind. Octavia.

Bellamy kicked a can that was halfway beneath a dumpster, his lanky form twisting.

“Bell, I can handle a year on my own,” she said calmly. “Your teacher said that he’ll put a witch or a wizard here to watch over me, so I’ll be okay. Plus, I’m not a little kid anymore.” She puffed up a little with these words.

Bellamy scowled over at her, but his expression softened as he studied his little sister. Her jaw was set and her chin was jutting into the air. Her tiny fists were clenched, and she was the picture of determination.

She was only nine years old.

He didn’t think he could leave her for an entire year. Maybe he could just go to Hogwarts late instead.

“You aren’t going next year,” she said with a roll of her eyes, as though she’d read his mind. He opened his mouth to argue, but before he could, Octavia added, “Do you really wanna be in the same grade as me? Do you really?”

A corner of his lips tugged up. Octavia tried to hold the serious pose, her hands on her hips as she arched her brows at him, but a second later she was laughing, and he couldn’t help but to join in with a chuckle.

“Seriously, Bell,” she said, walking over to him and looping an arm around his neck. “I’ll turn ten next month. You can mail me some awesome magic stuff as a gift.”

“Actually, they use owls to send letters,” he said gruffly.

Octavia gasped, and he knew she was thinking of the stories their mother had told them, of all the times they’d spotted her in the kitchen staring off at an owl in the sky.

“Do you think all her stories were true?” wondered Octavia.

Bellamy shrugged. “Probably, yeah.”
Octavia quieted, her expression sobering as she stared down at her own feet. Bellamy heard the question before Octavia even asked it. “Why didn’t she ever show us?”

Bellamy jerked his shoulders in another shrug, a sour taste in his mouth. “She always said our dad hated magic.”

“That’s why didn’t she tell us about it?”

“Maybe she didn’t want to be alone.”

I don’t want you to be alone either.

Yet again, Bellamy knew his sister could sense his thoughts, especially when she linked her arm around his.

“I’m proud of you.”

He frowned. “For what?”

“Taking care of me. But now it’s your turn. It’s just a few months to Christmas and then you’ll be back…then a few more months to summer and you’ll be back, then I’ll be coming to school with you. Okay?”

Bellamy sighed, shoulders sagging in exhaustion and relief. “Okay. But if anyone hurts you,” he added threateningly, “I’ll come back and I’ll put a curse on them or something. I’ll hurt anyone that tries to hurt you ten times worse.”

Octavia smiled. “Unless I beat them up first.”

Bellamy’s lips twisted in a smile. “Just leave some for me. You’re my baby sister, I have to fight for you.”

My sister, my responsibility.

* "*: {♀️}" *

I am not afraid.

“Expelliarmus! Petrificus Totalus!”

The Death Eater went down face-first in the charred ground, and Octavia spun around to face the next one that stepped up.

She had somehow found herself fighting back to back with a cluster of Durmstrangs. There were the ones she knew: Lincoln, Anya, and Lexa; and then the ones she was less familiar with: Indra, Gustus, Artigas, Tris, Kristoffer, Rayan, Dylan, and Markos. Jamie Potter had long since gravitated away, giving chase to a particular Death Eater that had hit a Durmstrang Octavia didn’t know the name of with a killing curse. Jamie and the Death Eater disappeared into the darkness of the nearby Forbidden Forest, and body of the Durmstrang student was spread-eagle on the ground in the middle of the protective ring they had all unconsciously formed around it.
Though her nerves were alight with panic for her friends and her brother, Octavia couldn’t help but be grateful she was fighting alongside Durmstrang. She wouldn’t lie; she was very much impressed by their style of fighting, at how Anya could savagely throw curses while fluidly casting shields that reflected what the Death Eaters threw back at her, how Lincoln’s face was contorted with focus and fury even as he shot stunning spells back at those who tried to kill him, how Lexa could brilliantly mix her spells and send graceful arcs of magic forward that absolutely annihilated multiple Death Eaters at once, leaving them screaming in utter pain on the ground.

Gustus was a force to be reckoned with, towering over all that opposed him and sending neat jinxes so small they were hard to catch streaking through the air, and Indra was the opposite, short and compact but using a wave of her wand to bring water from the Great Lake towering over her and splashing onto the Durmstrang ship, the hiss of steam piercing the air as the flames were put out, leaving the ship black and charred in the places the fire had managed to reach.

“Octavia, duck!”

She did so smoothly and without hesitation, so Artigas’s spell hit the Death Eater full on in the face and sent him staggering back with his teeth rapidly descending past his chin. Octavia caught Artigas’s eye and they exchanged grins before turning to take on the next wave.

The words her brother used to murmur to her echoed in her head now, a chant that oddly fueled her optimism. She couldn’t be scared right now. She couldn’t be afraid. Or rather, she could, but the important thing was to keep going anyway—that was what made her a Gryffindor, after all. Lack of fear did not equal bravery. The persistence and motivation in spite of it did. She was scared, and that was why she couldn’t stop fighting. Scared was good, just meant she had something she didn’t want to lose. Something worth fighting for.

She thought of her mother, how she’d been left alone after their father left, with no job and no benefits. She’d taken to selling her body and to selling other things too—things that ultimately took her own life as well, leaving Octavia and Bellamy to the orphanage until they discovered that there really was a school of magic, and then it was like they were saved. Octavia made it through the long, lonely year on her own without her big brother for the first time, and she’d learned to focus and push on. As long as you kept going, as long as you kept fighting, things had to change sooner or later.
“Octavia, have you seen Clarke?” shouted Lexa over the screams and the cries.

Octavia started to answer, before she was blasted off her feet with the force of the stunning spell a big burly blonde Death Eater managed to hit her with. The world flickered out, and then flickered back in a moment later, Lincoln crouching over her and reviving her.

“Thanks,” she breathed; he pulled her to her feet and she hurried forward as another Death Eater stepped over the blonde Death Eater’s body.

Lexa was long gone, having clearly rushed off to find Clarke for herself. Anya was still angled at such a precise way that Raven was in her line of vision.

Octavia had hardly raised her wand when two Death Eaters shot spells at once; she managed to deflect one but the other hit her side, taking her breath and sending her slamming to the ground. She gasped for air and lay there for a split second, wheezing—and then promptly lost her breath all over again when she opened her eyes and met the unseeing gaze of Artigas only feet away. There was a trickle of blood dripping down his mouth, parted as though in surprise. Octavia’s heart and stomach lurched. He had been alive and grinning with the elation of battle only moments ago…

“Rennervate,” muttered Lincoln, and the red light of the spell flooded her chest with warmth, but she didn’t need it, she was not Stunned—not with magic, anyway.

“Come on,” he whispered, gently pulling her to her feet again even as more Death Eaters joined the ranks—where were they all coming from?—and spells flew at them. Anya’s protego protected them, but it was gone a heartbeat later, and now it was Octavia and Lincoln side by side, Indra and Gustus flanking them, taking on four new Death Eaters.

In her peripheral vision Octavia spotted Anya pelting away. Her heart skipped at the fear that put in her, at the only reason Anya could be running and who she was running to, but she didn’t have time.

There was no room for fear here.

I am not afraid.

* * /△/ * *

Across the grounds, Wells was not faring quite as well.

He felt paralyzed with horror. Even as he parried and cast spells, locked in combat with a tall, hooded Death Eater intent on murdering him, his feet were stubbornly rooted to the spot. The air was thick with smoke, especially from the castle, and it was hard to breathe. A few of his spells were weaker than they should be because he was coughing as he cast them.

Remember your studies, he firmly reminded himself, struggling to remember all the incantations and precise wandwork. He was pretty sure that Fox was doing the exact same beside him, her face screwed up in concentration.

The thing was, it was rather hard to concentrate with one of their friends’ dead bodies at their feet. Roma was huddled over and would have appeared to simply be sleeping if it weren’t for her glassy gaze reflecting every streak of light cast.
“Come on, come on!” screamed Monroe from somewhere behind them. Wells half-turned to see them physically kicking a Stunned Death Eater in the stomach, sending her toppling away, before Monroe turned to take on the next, Harper joining forces beside them. They fought their way past them and ran across the grounds, presumably to take on more and see if anyone else needed help. That left Wells and Fox guarding Roma’s body, two students against the two Death Eaters left.

Wells’ next spell passed through the Death Eater’s outstretched arm and hit him in the chest. He staggered back with a strangled yell, but before he could step forward again and retaliate, the Whomping Willow’s branches came crashing down...and there was one less Death Eater to worry about, but it did nothing to alleviate the sick fear in Wells’ belly.

His head was buzzing with concerns for the rest of their friends. Roma was dead; how many more? Was Clarke okay? What happened to Bellamy? He had yet to even see Monty or Jasper. Raven and Anya were in the distance, two silvery birds swooping through the air, the two of them struggling to keep the horde of Shadow-Eaters trying to enter the grounds at bay. They could do it. They could all do this. They would.

Wells had the utmost faith that this was it; no other friends would die, he could not even think of the possibility that they would. Together they would all fight the dark forces and take back their school. Everything would be okay.

He couldn’t accept the possibility that it wouldn’t be. Couldn’t accept the idea of his father, forced to remain the proud Minister, composed and sober, at his own son’s funeral. Instead, he imagined his father arriving at the castle as soon as he could, completely forgetting the fact that he was the Minister and simply seizing his son in his arms in a desperate, thankful hug instead. They already lost his mother.

Wells remembered when he first arrived at Hogwarts, how he was Sorted into Hufflepuff and his father had actually shown up the next day, claiming he had a meeting with Kane when really all he had come for was to hug Wells tightly, smile and say that his mother would be so proud of him if she were here for being Sorted into her House.

Everything would be okay.

It had to be.

*¨・/✧・¨*

It was two against one, and Clarke was *almost* winning.

Emphasis on *almost*, because there was a third one running up at her, and she was concentrated on avoiding the *Incarcerous* that was being shot at her. She Stunned the first Death Eater, Immobilized the second, and was spinning around to raise her wand to the third, but it was too late, he already had his wand pointed.

“*Furnunculus!*” came a high voice; Clarke turned to see Harper and Monroe, both sweaty and covered in dirt. There was a nasty-looking scrape across Harper’s forehead that was oozing blood. The Death Eater shrieked as boils popped up on his face, then fell silent and limp when Monroe stunned him.
“Thanks,” panted Clarke, crossing to them on shaky legs. Harper flinched as Clarke pointed her wand in her face, but relaxed a moment later as Clarke healed her cut.

“The Owlery is on fire,” said Harper croakily, though it wasn’t necessary. Now that Clarke was closer to the castle, she could see the tower lit on fire. “It—there was no time, one minute everything was fine, they were moving students out and we were gathering in the Great Hall and then everything just, like, blew up around us.”

“I think they went for the Owlery on purpose,” said Monroe grimly. “Tried to make it so we couldn’t send letters or anything, I dunno…”

Clarke felt that it was more likely that they’d simply shot it down for the fun of it, considering there were other protective enchantments in measure that would have alerted the Order and the Ministry, but there was no point in saying so. She stared up at the burning tower, a similar burning licking the insides of her stomach and chest, aching with sorrow. Merlin was gone. Exodus, Wells’ eagle owl, was gone. Alpha, Miller’s screech owl, was gone. It could only be assumed that the rest of her friend’s pets were gone as well—certainly Tesla, Fox’s ginger cat that always enjoyed lounging in the sunlit windows watching the owls above, and perhaps even Agro, Jasper’s toad, considering Gryffindor Tower was completely decimated. Ravenclaw Tower still stood, the top of its conical roof smoking, so there was a possibility that Raven’s old black cat Mecha and Monty’s large pot of Mimbulus Mimbletonia were still unharmed.

“And Clarke…Roma’s dead,” said Harper softly.

Another crack in her heart. Atom’s face flickered across her vision. Clarke swallowed, mentally shaking herself out of it; there was no time to grieve. Mourning was a luxury she couldn’t afford.

“Clarke!” came a voice that both had her back stiffening and sent relief coursing through her.

Heart aching, she turned to see Lexa hurrying toward her. She was covered in blood that was clearly not her own. She was also sweaty and slightly breathless, but she looked as relieved to see Clarke as Clarke felt at seeing her.

“Are you all okay?” she asked once she reached them, green eyes sweeping over Clarke, then Monroe, then Harper, then Clarke again, checking for injuries.

Clarke nodded, rather curtly, but this wasn’t the time nor the place to be petty. “Is everyone —“ She cut herself off, unsure how to phrase the question.

“There have been causalities,” said Lexa seriously, face somber. “None of your immediate friends have been harmed, as far as I know,” she added when what blood was left in Clarke’s face drained away.

Except Atom and Roma and all the other students whose names she did not yet know…

“She cut herself off, unsure how to phrase the question.

“Shit,” said Monroe, eyes falling on something behind Clarke and Lexa; they all turned to see some of the Shadow-Eaters Raven and Anya had apparently been holding back finally flooding free; several had went around the other way to avoid the patronus charms. Seven of the creatures were gliding toward them across the grounds, their tattered cloaks billowing out like shadows and smoke behind them, and suddenly Clarke couldn’t tear her gaze away from them, and the itch at the back of her head returned, this time throbbing in her temples as well.

She swayed where she stood, blinking, shaking her head much in the same way an animal
would try to shake off irksome flies. Lexa’s free left hand gripped her arm tight, steadying her.

“Clarke?”

Monroe jumped forward to grab Clarke’s other side to help steady her too, worriedly taking in Clarke’s flushed face suddenly growing paler. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” muttered Clarke, shrugging them off. “Just been feeling—I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. Worry about them.” She nodded toward the approaching Shadow-Eaters. Monroe released Clarke and pointed their wand at the creatures, but Lexa looked reluctant to back away.

“What is it?” she whispered.

“I’m fine,” snapped Clarke, shaking her arm out of Lexa’s grip; Lexa immediately dropped her hand.

Lexa’s eyes looked like green orbs, reflecting every colorful burst of light from the duels around them. They gazed at Clarke in a storm of concern and emotion she was clearly fighting to keep down, but after a moment she swallowed and turned to face the Shadow-Eaters, bringing her wand up.

“What are those things?” whispered Harper. “I thought they were dementors, but they look different…”

“Shadow-Eaters,” said Clarke grimly. She stepped forward too, so she, Lexa, Harper, and Monroe made a line. “But you use Patronus Charms for them too. They’re like Dementors, but worse. They can take away your magic.”

“They can take our magic?” said Monroe in horror.

“Temporarily, but if we can hit them with Patronus charms first—“

“Permanently, actually,” interrupted Lexa. When Clarke, Harper, and Monroe all gaped, her throat bobbed again.

“Another thing that would have been fantastic to know before,” said Clarke flatly, tightening her grip on her wand and focusing on the nearing creatures again. Lexa opened her mouth to speak, but Clarke was already casting the Patronus charm.

“Expecto Patronum!”


Stunned, Clarke tried again—and was again met with the same lack of results.

(Think happy thoughts. You have so many happy memories and it’s a fucking disgrace if you let the sadness swamp them. Think happy thoughts).

“Watch me, okay? Look, here’s how you do it.” Jake traced his wand through the air. The
paintbrush hovering over the easle followed his movement, drifting color across the canvas: two straight lines and one curved line.

Clarke stared in awe at the bright blue smiley face her father had just magically painted. She clapped her hands together, impressed, and then, giddy with excitement, said, “My turn, my turn!”

Jake grinned and picked her up, dropping her down in front of the canvas. She excitedly reached for his wand, her lower lip jutting out in a pout when he lifted it out of her reach.

“No, no—you’re too little to use magic, remember honey?” When Clarke’s eyes turned teary, Jake ran a hand through her wild tangles of white-blonde hair. “You know that, sweetheart. In seven years, you get to go to Hogwarts, and you’ll get your mother’s wand, and you can do magic at school. But you can’t do magic at home until you turn seventeen. So let’s find something you can do for fun at home, okay?”

She glanced longingly at her father’s wand, but quelled under his stern, smiling gaze. “Okay daddy.”

“You’re a good little lion cub,” he said, ruffling her hair again, and she giggled, picking up the paintbrush.

“Make it red,” she said decidedly; he waved his wand and the paint dripping from the end of the brush shifted color. She tried to paint a red tongue. It came across as more of a jarring red line cutting through the blue mouth, but still, it was a start, and dragging the brush along the paper and creating things filled her with elation.

“Good girl,” her father said proudly, pressing his smile to the top of her head.

(Think happy thoughts).

There were Happy Birthday streamers floating along the walls and unopened presents neatly placed in the corner of the living room. In the kitchen, there was a Pygmy Puff Birthday Cake—chocolate flavored—decorated with eight Everlasting Sparking Candles. It was six in the morning; soon, Jake would be up making pancakes, Abby would be shaking her head, resigned to the fact that Clarke and Wells were up playing chess at this time, and Jaha would arrive laden with presents, laughing that Clarke had forced his son to wear a matching set of Bertie Botts pajama pants under the insistence that it was her birthday so he had to. That didn’t stop him from smashing her in chess, though.

“Oh you cheated. You totally cheated!”

“I did not!” exclaimed Wells, a broad smile on his face as his Knight dragged Clarke’s captured Queen off the board.
“Fuck! Duck!”

Clarke lunged behind the settee in the Ravenclaw common room as their game of Exploding Snap turned quite literally explosive. When she popped her head back up, the table was burnt and smoking, Jasper’s face was coated in ash, and Monty’s brows were singed.

“Holy shit,” said Jasper with wide eyes.

“What’s going on?”

They all startled, turning to see the Ravenclaw prefect standing in the doorway. Clarke gulped.

“Does someone want to tell me, one, why I have a second-year and two first-years out of bed, two, why you all thought it would be a good idea to play Exploding Snap at three in the morning, and three, why he—“ she threw her arm out, pointing at Jasper. “Is in Ravenclaw Common Room?”

After that, Clarke endured a lecture from Professor Cartwig, a Howler from her mother, and detention for the next week. But she, Monty, and Jasper couldn’t stop grinning at each other.

(Think happy thoughts).

“Gryffindor Keeper vs Slytherin Keeper.”

“You’re on.”

Clarke watched Bellamy and Miller’s palms slap together before they shook, squeezing one another’s fingers, sizing each other up—and she rolled her eyes.

“What am I supposed to do?”

“You can play Chaser and try to score on us!”

“I’m a Seeker!” exclaimed Clarke. She was disappointed; she’d wanted a fun little game, when clearly the boys just wanted someone to take shots on them. This was about their ego, not a friendly match.

“So? Come on, it’ll be fun,” insisted Bellamy. “Just take a few shots. Whoever you score the most against has to treat you to a drink in Hogsmeade.”

She resisted rolling her eyes again. “Or we could do something else. Why don’t we release the snitch and then we all have to race to catch it? Losers can buy the winner a drink.”

“Yeah except you’re going to be the winner! Two Keepers against the Seeker, not hard to know who’s going to get it—“
“But exactly,” interrupted Clarke. “Keepers have instincts the rest of the team doesn’t; they have to have a keen eye to watch the game and incoming Quaffles or bludgers, they have to be nimble flying to guard the goal. Really, there’s no one better to challenge a Seeker. Or are you scared?”

Bellamy’s eyes narrowed as the faint lines indicating a scowl began to appear on his face. “All right. You’re on, Griffin.”

Pleased, Clarke looked at Miller, who shrugged. “I’m in.”

All three of them flew down to the chest on the ground; with a twitch of her wand, the chest flew open; with another twitch, the snitch was released and immediately darted up high into the sky. They watched its ascent until it disappeared.

“One…two…three…go!”

Clarke smiled slightly to herself as she watched Bellamy rocket into the sky. Might as well give him a headstart. She could already see the snitch near the goal posts and Bellamy was heading the complete opposite way.

Miller had yet to set off either. He hovered close to Clarke and was smirking slightly. “You should so have been in Slytherin, Clarke,” he muttered, chuckling before zooming off.

Shaking her head and smiling, Clarke followed.

That night, she was drunk after downing the firewhiskies and dragonspirits, but she still never forgot Bellamy’s sour insistence that Clarke only caught the snitch because her broomstick is better, or Miller’s snort into his own firewhisky when Octavia accused him of being a failure at handling balls, probably her lamest joke yet but then again, she was absolutely smashed too.

(Think happy thoughts).

Their footsteps were quietly padding on the floor, but Raven’s brace was squeaking so loudly that it was waking the portraits; Sir Cadogan startled, half-asleep as he surged to his feet, swayed, and muttered, “Scurvy braggarts, fiendish rogues…” before falling asleep again slumped up against his pony.

“Shh, Raven!” giggled Octavia.

“Muffliato!” whispered Raven, pointing at her brace. She tested it for a few steps before deeming it successful, and threw her arms around Clarke and Octavia’s shoulders before the three of them continued creeping down the hallway.

They were in their fifth year (Octavia in her fourth), Raven was newly appointed Prefect, and this excursion at 3 in the morning to sneak to the kitchens was probably not the best idea, but there was a flurry of snow drifting past the dark windows and a glass of steaming hot chocolate never sounded so good.

When the House-Elves cheerfully pushed the glasses into their hands and ushered them out the door, they walked Octavia to Gryffindor Tower and slipped into the Common Room. Raven had a whipped cream mustache as she sighed happily and said, “I love you guys. I can’t believe we ever
used to hate each other.”

“Technically, you both were in a mutual hate-fest with each other and my brother.” Octavia shrugged, smiling. “I was neutral. I was Switzerland.”

Clarke snorted. “You called me Princess and you tried to hex Raven.”

“Yeah, but…can’t we blame Bellamy for that, too?”

“Definitely, and we can blame Finn for our issues, Clarkey.” Raven threw an arm around Clarke’s shoulder, reclining back against the comfy chintz chair she always claimed when she snuck into Gryffindor Tower.

“Finn, and your sickening level of devotion to being top of the class,” said Octavia. “Which is who, by the way? Just curious.”

Clarke shrugged, taking another sip of her hot chocolate. It was rich and creamy. “To be honest, we’re kind of equal. She’s better than me in Transfiguration.”

“But Clarke probably edges me out in Charms.”

“You’re better in Arithmancy.”

“But you kick my ass in Potions.”

“God, okay, it’s a tie,” interrupted Octavia with a laugh. “Jesus. You guys really are an old married couple. Can’t believe after four years of hating each other and then a solid year as best friends—not to mention literally sleeping right across from each other—you’ve never banged.”

Both Raven and Clarke’s noses wrinkled. They looked at each other and shook their heads.

“Nah.”

“I’m good.”

Octavia lifted a brow. “Boring.”

Raven slung her other arm around Octavia’s shoulders, her glass now drained empty and the white mustache thicker than ever. “With how often you suggest it, I’m pretty sure you’re just really interested in watching, O.”

Clarke smirked. “Something you need to tell us?”

“ ‘Cause I’m sure we can arrange something if you’re into it,” grinned Raven.

Octavia rolled her eyes, though she was grinning too. “You know, I actually wish I was into girls. The two hottest girls in fifth year, willing to sin for me.”

“You know, I can’t even believe that that shit is true,” said Raven. “Like, muggles used to actually think if you didn’t procreate, you were a sinner. Or something like that. I don’t know.” She carelessly waved a hand. “I tend to zone out when your brother goes on his history rants.”

“They also used to burn witches at the stake.”

“Sounds hot.” Raven wiggled her brows. “Literally.”
Clarke and Octavia groaned.

(Think happy thoughts).

Fox’s shrieks were echoing in the Ravenclaw Dormitory. Fox was hopping from the floor to her bed like the floor was on fire, and Clarke was laughing her head off from her own bed.

“It’s not funny!” burst Fox, face flushed. She carefully gripped the frame at the foot of her bed to lean over, her auburn hair brushing across the floor. She peered upside down beneath the bed for a moment as a low growling filled the room. Clarke held her breath, waiting for it.

Fox squealed as she yanked herself upright just as the book of monsters came flying out teeth-bared.

Clarke laughed again, so hard her eyes were streaming. Fox waved her wand with as much grace as she could muster, looking disgruntled as Clarke kept laughing and let the book hover in the air before she scrambled for the directions in another book. Finally, she stroked a finger down the spine and the book fell subservient.

“You could have helped instead of laughed,” she said reproachfully as she took the now-silent and unmoving book back with her to her bed. Her bed was laden with several other books and countless rolls of parchment and a few quills. There were shadows under Fox’s eyes—and Clarke’s—that could only come from pulling an all-nighter, studying for her OWLS. Clarke had done her OWLS last year, but still needed to study for the end of year testing for sixth years.

“I can’t believe Raven isn’t in here studying,” muttered Fox, glancing mutinously at Raven’s empty, but still wrinkled and unmade, bed. “Sometimes I think she’s actually mental.”

“Sometimes I think so too,” said Clarke idly as she flicked through the pages of her Charms book. “That, or she’s some type of Superhero. Maybe she’s Wonder Woman.”

Fox’s brows knit; she glanced up from her book. “Wonder Woman?”

“I don’t really know, Raven was telling me about her. I guess she’s some hero muggle with special powers, like she can fly and stuff.”

Fox’s eyes widened, and Clarke quickly realized her mistake.

“Not real,” she assured Fox. “She’s made up. They wrote comics and made movies about her.”

“Oh.” Fox’s lips curved a little. She seemed lost in her own thoughts for a moment. Still, after a time, she shook her head and focused on shuffling through her papers again. “She’ll probably ace her Transfiguration test without trying anyway.”

“She’s annoying like that,” agreed Clarke, absently setting aside her book with a yawn. She’d been studying for almost seven solid hours straight now. She was starting to think Raven’s method of partying before tests wasn’t a bad idea.

“She’s seriously crazy, but she actually gets the best grades.” Fox sighed. "I wish I could hate her for it too. Instead I..." she cut off, looking around guilty before determinedly looking down
“It’s okay,” said Clarke. Fox looked slightly alarmed. “I get it. Raven’s pretty awesome. I love her too.”

“I’m not in love with her,” she scowled with a roll of her eyes, though it seemed exaggerated and her face was beet red and Clarke had definitely not specified it as that kind of love but, if the shoe fits, she thought with a wry chuckle. “I just admire her, is all.”

“Yeah, I get it,” she repeated, trying to spare Fox the panic. “

“It’s funny we used to hate each other,” mused Fox. “Not as much as you hated each other, though. I don’t know how we survived living together all these years.”

Clarke smiled. “I know. I wouldn’t have had it any other way, though.”

“Me either. Well, maybe a little different, but... yeah, mostly the same.”

(Think happy thoughts).

“You can’t possibly be ready to go again.”

Clarke’s laugh was rich and throaty, her skin warm and flushed in a thin layer of sweat, her body aching and wonderfully heavy. She rolled over, pinning Lexa’s narrow hips beneath her own.

“Think again.”

“Oh—fuck,” stuttered Lexa, her lashes fluttering, as Clarke slotted a leg between hers and rolled her hips. Lexa’s legs spread, the most intimate, wettest part of her pressing against Clarke’s thigh.

Clarke fixed her mouth on Lexa’s neck, dragging her tongue along the strained cords, drifting her lips across damp collarbones before plunging below into the valley of her breasts. She traced a tongue around a nipple, sucking it into her mouth, and Lexa shuddered beneath her, hips canting.

“I swear you’ll be the death of me,” she groaned, breathing ragged as Clarke’s fingertips skittered down her body, dipping over the shallow spaces between her ribs, flowing down the flare of her hips, slipping between her legs, curving deep and going up, up, up. It was hardly any time at all when Lexa’s back was arching and her body juddering, and then she was closing her long fingers around Clarke’s wrist to still her, and Clarke was nuzzling her smile into the curve of Lexa’s neck and shoulder.

She let Lexa rest, half-dozing, for several minutes, happy to simply breathe and listen to the sound of Lexa’s heart thundering, before she carefully rubbed a nipple with the tip of her tongue and shifted her body down, intent on drinking in everything this beautiful woman offered. As she fixed her mouth onto her and Lexa gasped, legs falling open even farther, bed sheet clenching in her fists, and Clarke’s murmur vibrating against her making her moan, Clarke told her,

“I’ll always bring you back to life, though.”
(Think happy thoughts).

The silvery lion exploded forth, larger and brighter than Clarke had ever seen it. It may be a miracle, she thought, watching it loping across the ground. It wouldn’t have been a surprise if she’d never been able to cast another Patronus again. Instead, she produced her most powerful yet. She supposed sheer determination counted for something after all.

* • */◇/• *

The kitchens were blocked, and Bellamy was trying not to panic.

Hogwarts was full of Death Eaters, but so far, no Shadow-Eaters. There were students and adults everywhere, some professors and many that Bellamy didn’t recognize, but he thought he saw the parents of students—Hannah Green, for instance, which he didn’t really understand. David Miller, on the other hand, was an auror, so that made sense at least, but how were the others here?

Every part of the school seemed intent on helping fight off the intruders. Portraits were screaming advice, armor was coming to life and wielding their swords, ghosts were furiously storming down the halls, and Peeves was whirling around overhead, doing whatever he could—loosening chandeliers, chucking bits of chalk and vases—and cackling that this wasn’t his first go-around.

Bellamy and Charlotte managed to avoid most of the Death Eaters, either skulking around, taking shortcuts, or outright fleeing from the fights, Charlotte clinging onto his hand with all her might. Right outside the kitchen, however, right in front of the painting of the bowl of fruit, there were a cluster of Death Eaters at war with Professor Nygel and Professor Cartwig. Bellamy Stunned one before it could team up against Nygel, and then pulled Charlotte away to safety when the other Death Eaters noticed. Nygel was hit anyway and then Cartwig was overcome too, falling as stiff and flat as a board as the Death Eaters left, chasing after Bellamy, who was numb with panic. The kitchens weren’t an option, where else was he supposed to take Charlotte?

They tore down the corridor, no destination in mind except to shake the Death Eaters. Maybe if they could just hide somewhere, it would be okay—except the Death Eaters were whooping with glee, taking delight in the hunt, and Bellamy had no idea what to do. He was only one person, one student, they were five Death Eaters chucking killing curses at them that they were only narrowing managing to duck and avoid, and Charlotte was just an innocent little girl that reminded him too much of Octavia. Terror and adrenaline had his legs pumping, Charlotte was gasping back sobs as they ran and he numbly registered that her arm just be killing her, how he was dragging her along like a rag doll, but he didn’t know what to do.

He didn’t know what to do.

And now, he realized with horror that they had ran down the wrong corridor, one that only had one exit—a staircase. They were being cornered, pushed up onto the astronomy tower.
Their patronuses were bounding around them like guardians of light as they fought the Death Eaters; Harper and Monroe had never produced them before and therefore couldn’t, but the lion and raccoon were strength enough, filling them with warmth and comfort as they deflected and cast spells at their attackers.

Lexa was saying something, but Clarke ignored her, too focused on her wandwork, on avoiding the streaks of red and deflecting the streaks of green aimed at her friends, and too distracted by the dull pounding in her head. The itch was worse than ever.

The castle was overrun and on fire. She couldn’t believe it. Her heart felt frozen in her chest, unable to beat until she knew for sure whether Bellamy had made it to the kitchens. How many more first-years were in there, trapped?

The moment she had her chance, she took it. She Stunned a Death Eater and leapt over his body, tearing away up the grounds, ignoring Lexa’s cries for her to wait.

Her panic and fear only increased as she darted up the steps and into the Entrance Hall; it was a mess. There was a huge hole in the staircase, doors were blown off hinges, debris was everywhere, the hourglasses representing the house points were cracked and the Hufflepuff one was shattered and still spilling out yellow diamonds.

When she made it to the kitchens, she found an immobilized Professor Cartwig and an unconscious Professor Nygel in a pool of blood. Nauseous with horror, Clarke unfroze Cartwig and knelt down beside Nygel.

“Rennervate,” she muttered; there was a flash of red light and then Nygel stirred, groaning. Clarke let out a shaky breath in relief and drew her wand tip along the gash in Nygel’s arm that had been bleeding profusely.

“Clarke,” whispered Professor Cartwig. She had a bleeding cut on her forehead.

“Have you seen Bellamy or Charlotte?” Clarke interrupted her urgently.

Cartwig nodded weakly. “They were just here. They were chased…” She weakly pointed the way, and Clarke leapt up without another word.

She flew down the hallway, but now she had no idea. Her only hope was to follow the footprints—there were smears of blood, presumably from Nygel’s wound.

Her heart leapt as she rounded a corner and heard distant shouts. The castle itself seemed to tremble; she only just managed to skid around the corner when the ceiling collapsed and she hastily back peddled, falling but avoiding the crash. She could hear Bellamy’s yells and Charlotte’s screaming. They were on the other side—and Clarke knew now that there was this blockage, there was only one place they could go. The astronomy tower.

There was only one other entrance to that corridor, so she frantically went back and headed down another hallway. She had just reached the next hallway when it happened.
A voice sounded in the hallway, echoing loudly similar to a *Sonorus* Charm, but it seemed to come from everywhere, as though the very castle itself was speaking them. It seemed so close that Clarke actually spun around in fear, because it was as though someone were speaking directly into her ear. But there was no one. She was alone in the hallway.

All the noises of battle ceased, whether as part of the spell or because everyone was pausing to listen.

“You are as brave as you are foolish. The Ice Nation will prevail, and in the wake of our victory, our people will be more powerful than ever. Your misguided efforts to fight ensure this. Your rebellion fuels our army. This will be our legacy and our legend.”

Clarke staggered, almost falling over as the voice of the Ice Queen sounded again, so loudly it agonizingly reverberated in her eardrums.

“You have all been spoonfed lies by your leader that I am some type of magical terrorist. This is false. My idea of what the wizarding world should be is not folly—it is glorious. Everything I do is for wizardkind. What’s good for the Ice Nation is good for you. If you fight for yourself, for your kin, you fight for me. I regret any drop of magical blood being spilled. Death is regretful—and it is unnecessary. All I want…is Clarke Griffin or Lexa Woods.”

Clarke’s breath caught in her throat.

“Bring them to me, and you shall be rewarded.”

The strange pressure lifted. Clarke stood quite still, one hand clutching her wand and the other pressed flat against the wall as she struggled to find her bearing.

The Ice Queen had just spoken. It was the first time she’d ever heard her voice. Strange, that someone so frightening had a normal human voice, albeit cold and commanding.

She was demanding Clarke and Lexa be delivered to her, hoping either to provide further incentive to her Death Eaters, or to goad the other side to betray them for the Ice Queen’s reward. Clarke’s heart skipped as she wondered where Lexa was right now—still fighting in the grounds, probably. Was she safe? It was Lexa. She must be. She’d be taking care of herself.

Bellamy and Charlotte, however, were in trouble.

Clarke swallowed her fear and hurried on.

When she finally reached the correct corridor, her heart sank as she saw the sliver of air shaking before the doorway. A barrier. It would take precious time to remove it, because she first had to figure out what it would allow through; she could guess only Death Eaters could get through it, which meant she needed to remove it entirely first…

She stood there and began the necessary wandwork, murmuring the counterspells, and only a handful of minutes passed before footsteps sounded and she was forced to turn away, raising her wand to a potential Death Eater—

But it was only Murphy.

Torn between relief and annoyance, because while it wasn’t a Death Eater, it still stopped her from completing her spell, Clarke abruptly turned to the barrier again.

“Hey Princess. Boy, have I got a proposition for you.”
“Not interested, Murphy,” she said, not bothering to keep the curtness out of her voice. She focused on the barrier, narrowing her eyes to zero her gaze in on the strangely quivering air. “Busy.”

Murphy was wearing his signature smirk. Clarke wondered if he’d been engaging in battle at all, trying at all to protect anyone. It didn’t look like that. He was a little sweaty and his greasy hair had fallen forward into his face, but other than that he looked no worse for wear. He smoothed his hair back before shoving his hands in his pockets and shifting forward. “I can see that. I’m sure you can make a little time for this, though.”

Clarke deadpanned. “Do I need to get Raven to shove you in that Vanishing Cabinet again?”

Murphy’s smirk slid off his pale face, replaced by a sour expression. “I’d rather not involve Reyes in this at all, thanks,” he said dryly. Clarke ignored him, setting to work on removing the barrier again. Of course, Murphy wouldn’t be out of suggestions. “So, the Queen said that whoever brings you or Lexa to her will get this great reward, huh?”

“Get to the point.”

“She said ‘or,’ not ‘and,’” he said snidely. “Maybe if you turn the prize of Durmstrang in, it’ll buy you a free pass.”

“If you’re hoping to swoop in and take one of us to the Queen, you’re even lower slime than I thought,” said Clarke brusquely, twirling her wand.

She didn’t see Murphy roll his eyes, but she could hear it. “I’m Slytherin, not a Death Eater.”

“Is there a difference when it comes to you?” There was, of course there was, but Clarke wanted to offend him, wanted to piss him off so he’d piss off.

“Har har, coming from the girl who would probably be the Princess of Slytherin if she hadn’t begged the Hat for the safest choice.”

Clarke stilled, her spell falling flat as she froze. She slid her gaze onto Murphy, whose lips quirked. He shrugged.

“Mummy was a Slytherin, Daddy was a Gryffindor. Not hard to guess the reason you were the longest hatstall in centuries.”

“Don’t—“ She couldn’t finish the sentence, but she hoped there was enough venom in her voice and her glare and her pointed wand to silence him, to tell him they would not be talking about her father right now.

Murphy’s smirk widened, disregarding the wand in his face. “How’s daddy dearest doing, by the way? Bet you wish you’d chose Gryffindor now.”

With a twitch of her wand in his direction, Murphy stumbled back with a gasp as the spell slapped him in the chest, staggering to keep his feet. His pants quickly tapered into chuckles as he straightened again, eying Clarke’s wand with that dead-eyed look that only Murphy could have. “Cursing instead of a lecture. The Durmstrangs seemed to’ve rubbed off on you. Metaphorically, of course, but I guess literally too, considering you and Woods look at each other like dogs in heat—“

“Shut up,” Clarke snarled, twitching her wand again; this time Murphy slammed back into the wall, wincing as the back of his head hit the stone. Clarke seized him by the front of his robes, wand still angled right between his eyes.
“Or what?” His stubborn grin infuriated Clarke, but more pressing was the realization that despite the fact that she had hit him with a spell twice, Murphy had yet to even draw his wand out. Why wasn’t he fighting back?

She narrowed her eyes as the answer came readily to her. “You’re stalling.” Murphy’s grin faltered. Clarke tightened her grip on his shirt, moving her wand closer to his face; his eyes were slightly crossed as he tried to keep the glowing red tip in his line of vision, glancing between it and Clarke’s eyes. “Why are you stalling?” she demanded.

“I’m not—”

“Don’t lie to me. What are you stalling for?” When he didn’t answer, only glanced between her and the wand again, she frowned. “Are you actually planning to capture me and turn me in?” she said in disbelief.

Not that she was particularly surprised Murphy was being a dick—he had a penchant for being a greedy, self-absorbed, troublesome bastard—but this was too much even for him. They weren’t exactly friends, but they weren’t enemies either. They’d had furious shouting matches in the classroom and half-hearted duels in the hallways and they’d also shared drinks during parties in Hogsmeade, and helped one another win a few bets during Quidditch season. She wouldn’t ever expect Murphy to protect her, but she wouldn’t have expected him to plot to give her up to a murderer, either.

As she glared at him, racking her brain for some small detail she may have overlooked that indicated him switching sides like this, she found the answer effortlessly rising to her lips again. “Emori,” she muttered, warily glancing around and back over her shoulder. When Murphy only blinked, Clarke cursed. “This whole time?”

“Nah. Only since tonight.”

Clarke stared at him in disgust. “How much is she offering you?”

“One thousand buckaroos,” he said casually.

Clarke made a noise of scorn in the back of her throat. Only Murphy could take something like this like a fucking joke.

When they were in their fourth year, Murphy had caught Raven with a really horrible hex that caused her bad leg to grow a painful five sizes larger than normal, after she’d thoroughly thrashed Slytherin Quidditch team and mouthed off to him about it. She’d spent the night in the Hospital Week and the rest of the week in pain. The moment she was back to herself, however, she managed to immobilize and move his hovering form across three floors without detection before she managed to break into the Charms classroom and shove him bodily into an ancient Vanishing Cabinet, where he was trapped for three days trapped in a sort of limbo before finally clambering out of some stuffy old witch’s home, who jinxed him so thoroughly that by the time the Ministry officials arrived, he was almost unrecognizable. Raven had detention every Saturday for the rest of the year, and Murphy had gained both a furious hatred and a grudging fearful respect for Raven ever since.

Clarke spared a wish now that the Cabinet was still around for her to throw him into, but Kane had removed it from the castle after the incident.

“Where is she?”

Murphy only shrugged.
“Where is she?” repeated Clarke, letting her anger channel to her wand; the tip heated, and Murphy winced as it started to burn his skin.

“Right here,” came a voice far too cheery for the occasion. Emori came flouncing out from the nearby stairwell, grinning as though this were one of their elaborate pranks or games rather than a life and death situation.

“You are both horrible people,” said Clarke flatly. She didn’t move her wand back, even as Murphy began to squirm.

While Murphy hadn’t raised his wand, Emori did. “I suggest you let go of him now.”

“I suggest you go jump off the nearest tower.”

“Nice,” said Emori, still smirking, still pointing her wand at Clarke, who was thinking quickly and starting to breathe just as hard. If Murphy got his wand out, this would be two against one. She thought she could take them both, but she needed time to get this damn barrier open. “I’m going to say a firm no to that, though. Thanks anyway.”

“Okay, maybe this will speak more to your language—put your fucking wand down before I change my mind about the Unforgivable Curses and Murphy here gets some first-hand education about them.”

Emori laughed. “You don’t have it in you.”

Clarke arched a brow. Before she could so much as open her mouth to form her next words, however, there was a massive explosion similar to the one earlier. The walls shook and then were blasted apart. Clarke lost hold of her grip on Murphy’s cloak as she ducked, blindly throwing out a shield charm that protected her from most of the debris. When the dust cleared away (her coughing and using her wand to blast clean air free), there was a huge hole in the wall on the other side of the corridor, exposing several figures that were shouting and dodging and running; her efforts to remove the barrier had been bypassed now that the hallway she’d needed to reach was left open and exposed.

“Bellamy! Charlotte!” she shouted, stumbling past the chunks of stone and struggled through the hole in the ceiling. “Stupefy!” The Death Eater went flying back, and Clarke managed to make it across to where Bellamy and Charlotte were crouching behind a suit of armor.

“Clarke!” croaked Bellamy, voice cracking in relief. Charlotte was silent, eyes so wide they swallowed her pale, terror-striken face whole.

“Impedimenta!” she shouted, stumbling past the chunks of stone and struggled through the hole in the ceiling. “Stupefy!” The Death Eater went flying back, and Clarke managed to make it across to where Bellamy and Charlotte were crouching behind a suit of armor.

“Clarke!” croaked Bellamy, voice cracking in relief. Charlotte was silent, eyes so wide they swallowed her pale, terror-striken face whole.

“Impedimenta!” She tossed around the armor; it missed the Death Eater and hit the distant wall instead. She deflected the Death Eater’s returning spell and flicked her wand, thinking *Levicorpus!* The Death Eater shouted as he was hoisted into the air by an ankle, and Clarke quickly hit him with an *Expelliarmus* that had his wand spinning out the nearby window and then a *Petrificus Totalus* that had him banging to the ground like a broken statue.

One Death Eater left; the other two had been taken care of by the blast in the wall and were half-buried in the rubble.

“Crucio!” shouted Bellamy.

Clarke had no time to be surprised by his choice; the Death Eater blocked it and threw back a streak of green that had the suit of armor disintegrating. She quickly hit him with a Stunning Spell and he finally fell.
“Fuck,” panted Bellamy, doubling over with his wand hand on his knee; his other was still holding Charlotte’s. “Fuck. Thank you. We’ve been trying to shake them off for ages.”

“Were they the same ones that chased you from the kitchens?”

“Yeah. We almost—“

His next words were drowned out when a spell hit the wall only inches away from his head. They all spun around to see Murphy and Emori flooding through the hole in the wall, wands aloft.

“Murphy?” yelped Bellamy, fury and confusion painted across his face.

“Stupefy!” cried Clarke; Emori blocked it and sent back a nonverbal spell that hit Clarke in the stomach with the force of a hard punch to the gut and had her tumbling to the ground. She scrambled back to her feet and wheezed, “Protego!” just in time for Murphy and Emori’s next spells to hit the shield.

Emori was still grinning broadly as she battered the shield with red streak after red streak, until finally the shield shattered and Clarke shouted, “Expelliarmus!”

at the same time that Bellamy hit Murphy with a jelly-legged jinx, all while the distant door nearest Emori and Murphy crashed open and another half dozen Death Eaters flooded into other hallway; Clarke could see them through the hole in the wall.

Emori’s wand went spinning through the air out the same window the earlier Death Eater’s had gone and Murphy hit the ground, dropping his wand with a sharp cry of pain. Emori lunged for it, but it was closer to where Clarke, Bellamy, and Charlotte were.

“Charlotte, grab it!”

Charlotte darted down to grab the wand before scrambling up again, her expression both elated and alarmed, as though she couldn’t believe she’d just done that.

“Go, up the staircase!” urged Bellamy; they flew up it and he violently sliced her wand through the air to slam the door shut.

They lunged up the steps two at a time but were hardly halfway when the door below burst open again, shouts mingling incomprehensively and Murphy screaming as people presumably trampled over him.

Clarke’s breath caught in her throat as a streak of light went flying past her head, only just missing her because of the pivot of the spiral staircase; it shattered one of the stained glass windows and burst free in the night.

“Run!” yelled Bellamy, blindly throwing spells over his shoulder. His legs were the longest, but he was bringing up the rear.

“Here, switch,” gasped Clarke, hopping down one step to allow Bellamy to seize Charlotte’s hand and begin practically dragging her up the stairs. Clarke ran on after them, ignoring the stitch in her side, intermittently turning to cast spells. She slowed two at once with an Impedimenta, blocking the counter curses they shot at her so she missed the spell another cast; it flew over her head and hit Charlotte square in the back. She promptly turned rigid and immobile, falling like a statue against the steps, twisting in midair and dangling, her frozen hand still held tight in Bellamy’s grip. Rather than take the time to unfreeze her, he seized her by the waist and carried her, much like a pillar, across his shoulder as he and Clarke raced up the spiral staircase, Death Eaters hot on their heels.
Clarke burst the door open with a jab of her wand, and she and Bellamy hurtled across the threshold. She slammed it shut and sealed it, the squelching noise inaudible over the sound of their pounding hearts in their ears. There was no time to so much as double over and catch their breath—they were now completely trapped on the top of the Astronomy Tower, and the Death Eaters would be breaching the door at any moment.

"Colloportus!" Clarke cast the moment the door was magically unlocked. Behind her, Bellamy was gently propping Charlotte down on the ground nearest the castle walls. He had just raised his wand to remove her immobility when it happened: a chilling cold, creeping into their bones, with an odd mist that seemed to slink out from beneath the locked door that finally banged open.

"Protego Duo!" cried Clarke. Half a dozen spells went streaking toward her, hitting the invisible force field and rebounding, hitting a few Death Eaters and disappearing through the towering hooded figures that were now gliding silently forward, raising their scabby hands and drawing in long, rattling breaths that made the air even colder.

"Expecto Patronum!" Clarke and Bellamy both bellowed, but nothing happened. If the cold wasn’t taking their breath away, the panic certainly was.

"We have no magic," gasped Clarke.

Bellamy was slashing his wand through the air as though there was something clinging to it that he was trying to chuck off. He let out a shout of mingled frustration and anger, and the force field faded away as the Shadow-Eaters advanced, no care at all for leaving their Stunned and Immobilized comrades lumped on the ground in the doorway.

"Clarke, what do we do? What do we do?"

Clarke had no answers. She gazed up in horror at the approaching hooded creature as the cold around them penetrated her body, deeper than her bones. What was the point? What was the point of fighting this when they were so outnumbered, and so damaged? So many people, so many innocent children, already lost. Her father, already lost.

But there’s still a reason to fight, a small voice in the back of her head whispered. Still so many she cared about alive, and all fighting. Bellamy was here beside her, still on his feet, clenching his fists as though prepared to physically fight this monstrous magical creature so intent on destroying them. Raven, Octavia, Wells, Fox, Miller, and so many of their other friends were all down below, still fighting. Lexa, Lincoln, Anya, and the rest of the Durmstrangs were still here fighting, and even a handful of Beauxbatons.

Unless some have died…anyone could have died…anyone could be dead, right now…

But no. Clarke knew she couldn’t think like that. Her friends were still alive and fighting. Lexa. Lexa was alive. Her mother was still alive. Clarke still had to find out how her father died, what he died for. There were so many reasons to live.

And yet…

The cold was swirling around more inside her body than out. It felt as though there was space in her head where the iciness was trapped, she felt congested and empty at the same time, her lungs burned, her heart was galloping on as though trying to compensate for the loss it was about to lose. The nearest Shadow-Eater seized hold of her; its hands somehow felt both slimy and crusty at the same time, slick but rough as they gripped Clarke’s chin and forced her head back; in her peripheral
vision, she could see another doing the same to Bellamy.

“Stop! Stop!” screamed a high-pitched voice; the spell had worn off Charlotte. She was pointing Murphy’s wand at the Shadow-Eaters bearing down on Clarke and Bellamy, waving wildly. “Expecto Patronus—Expecto Patronum!” Nothing happened. Even if Charlotte had her magic, she was a first year and it would be a near miracle if she suddenly mastered that spell. Still, absolutely nothing prepared Clarke for what Charlotte did next. “A—Avada Kedavra!”

If Clarke were not so far gone, her mouth may have dropped in shock.

“Avada Kedavra! Avada Kedavra!” Charlotte’s voice sounded less like a frightened child’s shriek and more inhuman with utter terror and rage as she continued to say the word, even though nothing was produced at the end of the wand. It was as though she hoped the more she said it, the more power she gave it, until it would work—or perhaps she was simply angry, and terrified, and saying the word gave her power in itself.

“Avada Kedavra!” she screamed, freely sobbing now, tears pouring down her small face; the Shadow-Eaters seemed to sense her overwhelming terror and it was like a hungry animal drawn to scraps of blood meat, it was like they couldn’t resist. The one holding Bellamy stilled, hooded face upturned to watch Charlotte; the one holding Clarke actually let go, joining its fellows. They all gravitated toward her. Charlotte was no longer trying to cast spells but was still slashing Murphy’s wand through the air as she backed away from the Shadow-Eaters, until the back of her legs hit the stone surrounding the tower and there was no where else to go. “I can’t do it, I can’t do it—I hate them—I can’t—“

Clarke knew what was going to happen a split second before it did, and so did Bellamy. The remaining dregs of air seemed to leave the night.

“Charlotte, no!” she shouted, lunging forward. It was too late.

Charlotte turned and threw herself off the tower.

It didn’t feel like slow motion. Charlotte didn’t hanging in the air, silhouetted against the smoke and the distant flashes of light from the battlements. She simply dropped like a stone out of sight, silently, without so much as a scream.

“No—no—Charlotte! Arresto Momentum! Arresto Momentum!” yelled Bellamy. “Wingardium Leviosa! Wing—fuck off!” His fist sank into the approaching Shadow-Eater’s stomach, but it may as well have just passed through an actual shadow. His punch hit the ground hard, and there was a violent cracking sound that was promptly drowned out by his furious cry of pain. He still went to lift his other hand, pointing his useless wand at the Shadow-Eater, but a rotting gray hand was reaching for him, clawed fingers extending around his neck.

“Bellamy!” cried Clarke, struggling to throw off the hand of the Shadow-Eater bearing down on her again. She fell limp against her will as the Shadow-Eater sucked in a breath she felt rattle all the way down to her bones. It sucked the last of her energy away. There was blackness creeping toward the center of her vision as the creature bent its head, kneeling, gently lifting her chin as though to kiss her…

“CLARKE!”

She blinked rapidly, gasping in a breath. A side of her face was pressed flat against the stone ground. For one wild moment, she thought she had lost her soul, or was possibly dead—but then her vision cleared and she realized the light blinding her was only the glowing raccoon scurrying around
the balcony, and the silvery owl and raven swooping through the night sky, chasing away the fleeing Shadow-Eaters.

She groggily rolled over, unsure whether it was Lexa or Raven or both who had called her name. They were at her side in an instant, two sets of green and brown eyes filled with terror looking down at her.

“Did it—is she okay?” Raven was shouting, even though she and Lexa and Clarke were all right beside one another. “Did it take her soul? Is she okay?”

“She’s okay,” breathed Lexa, smoothing her hands over Clarke’s face, her cheeks, brushing her hair back. “We made it in time. She’s okay.”

Clarke vaguely registered Raven scrambling across the balcony to Bellamy’s side, similarly checking him, but he was already sitting up. He hurtled over to the edge of the balcony where Charlotte had jumped from, roaring in unspoken anguish either at what he saw or what he couldn’t see.

Raven was following Bellamy, trying to seize him, perhaps to still him so she could make absolutely certain he was okay, but he ripped his arm free of her grip. “I’m going to kill every fucking Death Eater I see!” he roared.

“Bell—no, Bell—listen!”

“Bellamy, you need to find Gina!” shouted Clarke over Raven’s frantic voice. It was the only thing that stilled Bellamy; he paused, still breathing like a rampaging bull, and stared at the ground, clearly coming back to himself. “Go find her. Make sure she’s okay.”

Bellamy nodded once before sprinting off, shouldering past Anya, who still stood in the doorway looking shaken.

Clarke squeezed her eyes shut and bit her lip to swallow the cry of pain that tried to escape as her head throbbed again. The itch was so much worse than before.

“Clarke, are you okay? What’s wrong?”

She ignored Lexa, which was easy to do considering her head was now aching so badly she could retch.

“Clarke, you have to let us know what’s going on. What is it?” said Raven, crouching by her side again.

“I—it’s my head,” she managed to say, holding it between her hands as though it would stop it from ripping in two. Her wand handle pressed painfully into her skull, but she felt like if she moved her grip, everything would entirely fall apart.

“What about your head? Is it a spell, did someone hit you with a spell? Tell us what’s wrong so we can fix it!”

“It’s—I don’t know what it is!” she burst, gritting her teeth at the pain. “It’s been hurting off and on for a while but it’s gotten—it’s gotten worse today and it just keeps getting worse and I don’t know—“

Her words were cut off with a scream she didn’t even know she was capable of making, because at that precise moment, the Ice Queen’s voice returned, echoing around the castle grounds
and piercing Clarke’s eardrum, plunging her already aching head into so much agony that she could barely register her next words.

“You have disappointed me. For that, you will be punished.”

Raven muttered something that Clarke couldn’t take in.

“My forces will withdraw. We will wait one hour. Dispose of your dead, and make the necessary arrangements if you are foolish enough to continue fighting. None will be shown mercy. Only those who bring Clarke Griffin or Lexa Woods to me will be spared. Bring them to me, and you shall be rewarded. You will be welcomed into my clan with open arms. I can offer protection from those who are corrupting my missive, those who taint my goals with lies and deceit. Join me. Deliver to me Clarke Griffin or Lexa Woods within the hour. After the hour…war resumes.”

By the time her voice faded, Clarke was beyond reason. She was curled up into a ball on the ground, still clutching her head, now searing with pain.

“What’s happening?” screamed Raven, hands hovering over Clarke’s form. “What do we do?”

“Lexa, use legilimens!” urged Anya. “See what’s going on in her head!”

“I can’t—“

“You have to do something! If you don’t—“

Clarke’s head gave a final throb and then the blackness overtook everything, and she stilled.

* * /✧/ * *

Clarke dropped her bag on the floor beside the kitchen table, yawning as she took an apple from the counter. She wandered through the house, noting by the absence of the lime-green robes that her mother was gone to work too. She’d hoped there would be leftovers from whatever her mother had for lunch, but was unsurprised to see there were none. It was a sunny Monday afternoon and Clarke always went over to Wells’ house to hang out with him at this time during the week over the summer. She was never home this soon, but they were supposed to be receiving their OWL results today, and she’d rather do it in the privacy of her own home at first. She was nervous how she did and in case she was disappointed by her results, she didn’t really need to hear all about Wells’ Es and Os.

She sank down onto the couch as she nibbled on her apple, content to just keep watch out the windows until she saw the distant school owl approaching, looking all official and carrying her results.

Considering the fact that she was alone, she was certainly not expecting to hear a faint voice from the back of the house.
“I’m sorry, Becca.”

Clarke sat up immediately, frowning. Her first question was why her father was home and not at work. Her second was: who the hell is Becca?

Brow knitted, Clarke stood and silently moved down the hallway, heading for her parents’ bedroom, since that was where the voices seemed to be coming from. There was no way her father would be cheating on her mother, let alone in the middle of the day on Monday at their house.

“I’m sorry too, Jake.”

What. The. Hell.

Clarke paused outside the bedroom door. It was open by just a crack, so the only thing she could see was the back of her father, sitting on the edge of the bed. Whoever Becca was, she couldn’t see her.

“You have nothing to be sorry for.”

A sad, skeptical scoff. “Really?”

Her father’s chuckle was just as sad. “Well. Maybe a little.”

“More than a little. I was arrogant. I tried to fix a root problem and ended up creating an even bigger one.”

“You’re also helping fix it all.”

“You’re the one fixing everything. You’re the one saving everyone, despite what the consequences will be for you.”

“Well. It’s not the first time I’ve done something illegal,” he mused. “The Department of Mysteries needs to assume responsibility in some way.”

Clarke’s eyes widened. Her father was an Unspeakable in the Ministry. There were strict rules governing his jobs, with dire penalties if those rules were broken.

“I want to thank you, Jake. When I saw you, I never imagined you would be this…who you are. You’re the bravest person I’ve ever known. I’m just sorry for everything you have to go through. Going up against the council, defying the Ministry…I’ve put you on a difficult path. Out of all the lives lost, yours is the one I’m most sorry for.”

Clarke’s heart stopped beating.

Without another thought, she pushed the door open. Her father spun around, surprised. He was…the only person in the room. Clarke suspiciously marched over to the closet and peered in. No one was there.

“What? Where did she go?”

“What?”

“Where did that woman go?” she demanded. Then she shook her head, choosing at this moment not to concentrate on the fact that there had been a strange woman in here who had somehow silently Apparated or turned invisible or something to concentrate on the fact that her father was in danger.
“Dad, I know, I heard what you said. You can’t do this. Whatever you’re doing. You can’t defy the Ministry and you aren’t supposed to talk about the Department of Mysteries and you definitely aren’t supposed to do illegal things!”

Her father looked caught, guilty—but he still sat up straight and took a deep breath.

“Okay, you know. I’m sorry, kiddo. I have to do what’s right.”

Clarke’s eyes were nearly bugging. “What’s right? Breaking your bond as an Unspeakable? You’re going to get thrown into Azkaban!”

“I’ve been thinking about this for a long time, Clarke. I have to do what’s right.”

Clarke gaped at her father, stunned at the turn of events today. One moment she was laughing with Wells, the next in a nightmare of a sticky situation. But her father was the bravest person she knew, and the smartest along with her mother. She trusted him.

She closed her eyes for a moment, took a deep breath. Opened them and said, “What’s the plan?”

Her father looked back at her in surprise—and then he looked unsurprised. He had the ghost of a smile as he said, “You don’t need to know the plan.”

“You’re doing something in the Department of Mysteries that you aren’t supposed to be doing,” she said with a nod. “What are you doing? Are you planning to talk about it or something?” When her father didn’t answer, her mouth fell open. “You are an Unspeakable planning to speak—making you either suicidal or incredibly dumb. You can’t break your bond, they’ll arrest you!”

“Wow. You are picking a perfect time to start behaving like a typical teenager.”

Clarke swallowed. “Let me help you. I’m underage and I’m not an Unspeakable, so I can talk—“

“No,” said her father at once, rising to his feet.

“But just—“

“No, absolutely not.” He wrapped his arm around Clarke, holding her tightly. “You can’t help me right now, Clarke. I just need you to trust me.”

She swallowed again, nodding into his broad chest.

Lexa half fell, kneeling on the stone floor. Raven and Anya were watching anxiously.

“What’s going on?”

“Memories,” panted Lexa, wiping away the blood trickling down her nose with trembling fingertips. “Someone wiped Clarke’s memories.”

“That’s what’s wrong with her?” said Anya, frowning.
Lexa nodded. “I think so.”

“How could missing memories do that?” demanded Raven; she was looking between Lexa and the unconscious Clarke with desperation. “She shouldn’t even be aware of them missing, right?”

“Usually,” said Lexa, looking quizzically down at Clarke. “And these are powerful memory charms that have been placed on her. She’s had memories removed and her memory modified. But sometimes we know things unconsciously, and if there’s a big enough emotional upheaval, it can trigger something…”

“Her father died and her brain is trying to put two and two together and figure something out,” marveled Anya. Her sharp eyes slanted at Lexa. “You’re seeing the memories?”

“Yes. I’m trying to draw them out and break through the charms so she has them back. They’re…I think Clarke knew things. I don’t know yet, it depends on what else is lurking in there, but…we may find out why her father was killed. Clarke actually might have known things about what the Ministry has been doing, about why her father may have been killed and how it all ties into the Ice Queen.”

She, Anya, and Raven all gazed at one another, heads buzzing with the thoughts and possibilities, hearts aching for Clarke.

“Go back in,” ordered Raven.

Lexa did so at once.

“Listen to me carefully.”

“Dad?” said Clarke in alarm, shooting to her feet. She had been pouring over her OWL results and working on a letter to Raven about them when her father burst into her room, an urgent air about him.

“Listen to me.” He put his arms on her shoulders, intensely looking into her eyes. “You have to listen to me carefully, Clarke. You won’t have these memories for long, but one day, you’ll get them back, so you have to listen—everything will make sense one day—Your instinct is going to be to take care of everyone: follow that. At the end of everything, go to the place it started. Find mine. At the close, find me. And when there’s nothing left—seek higher things.” He unclasped his watch from around his wrist, pushed it into Clarke’s hands.

She stared down at it, shaking her head, looking from it to her father. “I don’t understand—”

“Everything will make sense!”

“Dad—“

There was a loud bang and a crash from the living room, followed by the sound of multiple running footsteps. Jake Griffin drew his wand, but not to fight. With a flourish, a shining, silvery bright eagle burst into life, and then swooped out of the open window.

“Dad, what’s going—“ Her panicked questions were cut off when the aurors burst into the
Jamie Potter stood in the front, flanked by Major Byrne and David Miller. All faces were somber and resigned. “Jake Griffin. You’re under arrest for treason.”

“Dad! No—let go of him—Dad!”

Clarke’s screams faded into distant echoes as Lexa came back to herself. She caught her breath for a moment, trembling from head to foot, before she brought her wand back up, pointed it into Clarke’s unconscious face; she could have been having a bad dream. Her eyes were flickering beneath their lids, her face was stark white, and she was breathing shallowly.

“You need to faster Lexa,” said Anya quickly.

Lexa nodded, and slipped back into memories that were not her own the same manner in which one jumps from a cliff into tumultuous, choppy waters.

“You know we don’t allow visitors, Abby.”

Clarke’s mother drew herself to her full five feet and four inches. “The Minister gave me permission, Roan. These are special circumstances.”

Roan looked as apologetic as he looked irritated. “The Minister can’t override policies that have been in place for hundreds of generations. I’m sorry.”

“Stupefy!”

Roan was blasted back, hit the wall, and crumpled.

“Mom!” said Clarke in disbelief. Her mother further confused her by leaning down and immediately reviving Roan; he stirred feebly before sitting up. Abby pointed her wand at him and whispered something Clarke didn’t quite catch. Roan got to his feet and stood there bleakly.

“I know,” said her mother, sounding more shaken than she looked. She leaned into the window, glancing around warily before pulling the lever. The moment the doors swung open, several guards rushed out, wands drawn. Abby and Clarke both raised their hands into the air, but Roan stepped forward.

“They’re with me,” he assured the guards. “Special orders from Minister Jaha.” He pulled a piece of parchment out of his robes that certainly must not have been there before and flashed it at the guards, who looked only slightly less suspicious and did not lower their wands.

“The Minister doesn’t have jurisdiction here.”

“Of course he does,” said Roan briskly, tucking the parchment back into his pocket. “Special order from Jamie Potter as well. They’re going to interrogate the prisoner.”

“Those two?” said a guard dubiously, eying Clarke.

Abby smiled. “She’s older than she looks.”
“Let us through, Tibolt,” ordered Roan as he led Abby and a shocked Clarke forward. Under normal circumstances, she would be horrified—she was certainly disgusted with her mother for Stunning and then clearly casting a Confundus (she told herself Confundus because there was no way she wanted to believe her mother was capable of casting an Imperious curse on an innocent Azkaban guard) charm on Roan, but these were not normal circumstances. It had been half a year since she last saw her father and she desperately wanted to see him, no matter what.

The guards stood aside, though they still looked suspicious, and let them pass. Roan guided them down two hallways and to a large, dank room full of cells. Clarke’s heart was pattering in her chest, aching with hope she would see her father and dread that they would be kicked out before they reached him.

“Abby!”

Clarke’s heart skipped and she let out a half-sob of relief as they hurried to the cell her father was standing at, his face lit up with concern as he clutched the bars. The three of them clutched one another’s arms, hugging as best they could. Abby looked at Roan and he nodded, turning and marching out of the room.

“Why did you have me bring Clarke?” whispered Abby.

“She needs to see this.”

“See what?” said Clarke.

At that moment, more footsteps sounded; Clarke’s insides plummeted, expecting to see aurors, but when they turned around, it was the minister himself, and Clarke started to breathe a sigh of relief. Jaha was her father’s best friend. Jaha was basically part of the family. Jaha was the one that gave them the permission to be here in the first place.

“Happy Christmas,” spoke Jaha after a tense silence. “I’m sorry it couldn’t be a more joyous occasion.” His dark eyes shifted onto Clarke. “I must say I’m surprised you brought your daughter.”

Abby and Jake were silent, watching Jaha with similar wary expressions, as though waiting for something. Clarke felt as though she was out of the loop, unaware—she looked uneasily between them all, wondering what the hell was happening.

“Why are you here, Thelonious?” said Abby softly after a moment. “It’s too soon. It’s Christmas.”

Jaha closed his eyes. After a beat he opened them, and Abby and Clarke stiffened in surprise as a stranger walked into the room, a woman wearing a red dress, her dark hair pulled back in a long, sleek tail.

“What is this?” demanded Abby. “You said—“

“I lied,” said Jaha evenly; Abby made an odd choking noise. He spoke over her. “I’m not here to spite Diana and Pike. I’m here in spite of them. I’m here for the means of my own plans—plans far bigger than any of their political conspiracies.”

“You can’t do this!” said Abby furiously, lifting her wand, but then Jake put a hand on her shoulder, and the other woman tilted her head, expression still impassive save for the brow she arched.
“Abby—” murmured Jake.

Clarke drew her own wand, though she was bewildered and had no idea what was going on. Jake spotted her and widened his eyes.

“Clarke, no,” he said firmly. “Put it down. Stay out of this.”

Abby was the first not to listen. She slashed her wand through the air—but nothing happened.

“You—” she began in outrage and horror, eyes wide and wild on the unfamiliar woman, but Jaha silenced them all when he raised a hand.

“It has to be this way. Sometimes the needs of the many outweigh the needs of a few. This is for the greater good.”

“Let it go Abby,” whispered Jake.

And slowly, reluctantly, Abby lowered her wand.

Clarke didn’t. “Mum? What—“

“Let’s get this over with.” Jaha nodded toward the woman, then looked at Jake. Jake looked back, a mixture of determination and pride and resignation in his blue eyes.

Clarke tensed, waiting for the woman to draw a wand, or to just move forward, but she didn’t. The woman merely looked at Jake, face expressionless like wax, and his eyes rolled up into his head.

“Dad!”

“Jake!”

But both Jake and the woman were unaffected by Clarke and Abby’s screams. Jake had fallen to his knees, mouth open as though gasping—and then a strange glowing white light was rising out of his throat, escaping through his parted lips. It undulated in spirals through the air like smoke before drifting to the woman, who opened her mouth and breathed it in like it was vapor.

Jake fell limp to the floor like a puppet with its strings cut.

“NO—NO—DAD!”

“I’m sorry,” said Jaha calmly, hands clasped behind his back. “I wish it didn’t have to come to this.”

“It wasn’t supposed to be like this!” choked Abby, eyes bright with unshed tears. “You weren’t supposed to do it like this—“

“Take care of her,” he said tonelessly, only barely inclining his head to indicate to Clarke, who had fallen to her own knees and reached for her father’s body. She was shaking with sobs, frozen with shock. “Before I do.”

“Gladly,” said the woman, voice smooth and unemotional and strangely familiar.

“Clarke…baby…” Abby sank to her knees, and Clarke turned her head when her mother’s gentle hands cupped her cheeks. A single tear leaked from a corner of her mother’s green eyes.
“Look at me,” whispered Abby, before she lifted her wand into Clarke’s face and said firmly, “Obliviate.”

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Clarke’s eyes flew open.

The night sky was gray with smoke.

She stared at it, wondering if she could just simply float up and lose herself in it, wondered how long it would take to pass through the smoke to meet the stars. Wondered how long it would take to pass even those, and enter a new place entirely.

“She’s awake. She’s up. Clarke. Clarke—“

“Shhh. Give her a moment.”

Clarke didn’t even have to work to ignore Raven and Lexa’s voices. They sounded distant and echoing, like they were at the other end of a large cathedral.

So she had been with her father during his death after all. She still didn’t understand anything that had happened, but she knew a few things now, at least. Like who not to trust. Jaha. Her mother.

She wasn’t burning with curiosity to have her questions answered anymore. It actually felt as though she’d never be burning with curiosity ever again period. She could acknowledge the questions: who was that mysterious woman? Why did she sound so familiar? Why did she kill Jake? How did she? Why did Jaha let her? What did Abby know? Why did she erase Clarke’s memory? How did Diana Sydney and Charles Pike and the Ice Queen connect to all of this?

But in a way, she didn’t care to have them answered. Maybe because she’d just learned first-hand how painful it could be, finding things out.

Now, the only question that mattered was where to go on from here. Her father had given her strange riddle-like instructions, but she had no idea where to even start.

She supposed, right now, all she could do was try to protect her friends. Her parents had always been right about that: her instinct was to take care of others. Right now, they were in a war with the Ice Queen.

She sat up. Her head was miraculously fine, though a little tender, and she was sure she’d have a headache for some time, but she felt—physically, at least—much better now.

Raven and Anya were standing over her, Anya’s arms crossed almost defiantly across her chest. Raven’s were crossed too, though she was hunched slightly, clearly scared still because she was watching Clarke fearfully, as though waiting for her to collapse again. Lexa was sitting on the ground beside Clarke, watching her quietly. She seemed to hear Clarke’s question before she could ask it.

“We have twenty minutes left,” said Lexa calmly.

Clarke slowly stood, gratefully taking Raven’s hand when she extended it to help her up.
Lexa stood too. She was still watching Clarke. They were all still watching her. More for something to do than anything, she walked over to the edge of the balcony, ignoring the thrum of pain as the recent memory of Charlotte dropping over it came unbidden to her mind.

She stared down over the ramparts. The Queen had been true to her word, evidently. There were no ongoing duels; the Death Eaters and Shadow-Eaters had temporarily withdrawn from the grounds. The students and faculty must have congregated into the castle, because the grounds were mostly empty, save for movement in the distance—she squinted to see. There were thestrals all over the grounds, grazing. Not grazing, she realized—they were licking blood from the grass. Everywhere.

She felt sick.

Clarke turned around and considered Lexa, Raven, and Anya for a moment. Raven still looked concerned, Lexa would have looked impassive if it weren’t for the obvious concern and emotion reflecting in her eyes, and Anya looked annoyed and expectant, clearly anticipating Clarke’s next words.

Clarke sighed. “I suppose if I tried to turn myself in, you’d all try to stop me.”

Raven looked angry at even the suggestion, Anya rolled her eyes, and Lexa simply nodded.

“You’re not turning yourself in, Clarke,” said Raven in a hard voice. She glanced pointedly at Lexa. “The liar, however—“

“Neither of them,” said Anya sharply.

“Why not? She can turn into a fucking dragon,” argued Raven. “Just wait ‘till you’re next to her and change and bite her fucking head off.”

“It’s not that easy. The Queen wants them for a reason,” said Anya. “They would be dangerous weapons in her hands. It’s in the entire wizarding world’s best interest if keep them away from Nia.”

“That’s her name?” Raven’s face was cold; she clearly was as pleased with Anya keeping secrets as Clarke was Lexa. “Nia?”

“Nia Kwin.”

“Kwin—“

“She’s Roan’s mother,” said Lexa heavily.

“What the fuck, Lexa!” said Clarke angrily. The image of the last times she had seen Roan flickered through her mind—his limp form held in dragon claws high above the ocean; the memory of him meekly walking away, under her mother’s curse.

Lexa just looked at Clarke. She looked wretched, guilt written all over her. Clarke had had enough.

“Did you already know everything?” When Lexa only looked at her, she stepped forward in a challenge. “Did you know I’d had my memories wiped? Did you know this whole time that my dad—“

“Of course she didn’t know!” said Anya abruptly, stepping between them. “She just saw the
same memories you did, she just got you your memories back! Which is a fucking complex spell, too, you ungrateful—"

“Anya,” said Lexa warningly.

“No, let her talk!” said Raven loudly. “Please, Anya, enlighten us all and tell us why the fuck you guys felt the need to lie to us about everything!”

“We’ve been saving people’s lives—“ began Anya in outrage.

“Both of you stop it!” ordered Clarke; to her surprise, Anya and Raven quieted at once, looking mutinously at one another. Clarke turned to Lexa and pointed an accusing finger at her. “You just broke into my head. You’ve known things I haven’t for ages. You’ve betrayed my trust and hurt me in ways I can’t even begin to fathom. The least you can do is tell me what the fuck is going on.”

Lesa’s shoulders sagged. “Clarke,” she began miserably. “There is so much I would like to tell you, but the leader of the Order has asked me not to and—“

Anya took in a deep breath, visibly appearing to be attempting to calm herself down. “Clarke, I get that you’re pissed, I really do, but seriously, leave Lexa the fuck alone.”

“I can speak for myself,” said Lexa stiffly, shame shining in her eyes as she glanced at Clarke.

"Lexa you useless lesbian!” hissed Anya, actually flicking Lexa in the forehead. "Get it together! Clarke is the one being unreasonable, not you!"

“How am I being the unreasonable—“ began Clarke hotly, but Anya rounded on her before she could finish.

“Lexa didn’t tell you the whole truth, boo hoo! Conjure a bridge and get over it! Do you know how many secrets Lexa has kept from me? Do you know how many secrets I’ve kept from her? It’s what we do, it’s what happens when your leader is a person with secrets himself!”

“I thought Lexa was your leader,” muttered Raven, glowering between the two of them.

Anya rolled her eyes. “Lexa is special, I think you both know that by now. That means she gets to know certain things we don’t, certain things it’s not safe for us to know. That means we do answer to her on occasion. It doesn’t make her our boss, but it does make her a leader. That doesn’t give her any more freedom than we have; in fact, it gives her less.”

“I serve my people,” said Lexa stiffly.

Anya nodded. “Exactly.”

“What the fuck does that even mean?” burst Raven angrily. “What—‘I serve my people,’ what kind of dramatic ass shit is that? Is Durmstrang just a school of drama and arts or—“

Clarke and Anya didn’t do anything save frown in response, but Lesa’s lips actually quirked tiredly.

“Lexa,” said Anya with a heavy sigh as she closed her eyes and rubbed her temples, like this whole conversation was a personal grievance to her very soul. “Just tell her.”
“Thank you!” snapped Clarke, at the same time that Lexa said, “What?”

“Just tell her!” groaned Anya. “Tell her everything! I’m so tired of this—“

“You’re tired—“ began Lexa in furious disbelief, but Anya shook her head, eyes still closed and teeth clenched.

“Yes, I am so fucking tired of this. Fuck Titus.”

Lexa’s mouth actually fell open. At her silence, Anya cracked an eye open and then promptly rolled it.

“For fuck’s sake, don’t act like you’re offended on his behalf. You’re not exactly his biggest fan either. I mean, look at this!” She swung her arm open wide in the general direction of everything behind her, gesturing at the chaos and devastation surrounding them. “Look at this gigantic clusterfuck of a mess he’s gotten us in! He doesn’t give a shit about any of it, as long as it doesn’t directly involve him, he couldn’t care less. So fuck him. Seriously. He can curse me, throw me in Azkaban all he wants, whatever. Anything is better than this shithole. I don’t care anymore.”

Lexa was quiet and quite expressionless, just gazing at Anya with an unreadable expression. Anya seemed to take her silence as some type of confirmation and promptly turned to face Clarke and Raven.

“Right. Listen. I don’t even go to Durmstrang.”

Now Clarke and Raven’s mouths fell open.

“I mean, I did,” amended Anya hastily. “And I suppose, technically, I still do, but I wouldn’t be. Usually you graduate from Durmstrang in your seventh year, but if you want, you can stay on for an eighth to further your studies. Lincoln and I are in our eighth year. It was easier to stay.”

“They stayed for me,” said Lexa dully; she was clearly resigned to the fact that Anya was determined to spill truth. “Their idea of protection.”

“We’re more than just glorified bodyguards,” said Anya with yet another roll of her eyes. “We’re helping out the Order this way, too. The only thing better than pretending to be a student undercover is to actually be one.”

“So you knew that there would be trouble with the tournament,” said Raven accusingly.

Lexa bowed her head in a nod, looking wearier by the second. “The entire tournament was only devised in the first place as a way to root out the Ice Queen. Which worked…a little too well.”

“Clarke wasn’t supposed to be in it,” explained Anya. “It was just supposed to be Lexa. Lexa had to do well and win, so she’d be in the spotlight and the Queen would make a grab for her. Everything was obviously complicated when Clarke was chosen as the Hogwarts’ champion.”

“And none of you put my name in?” challenged Clarke.

Anya’s brow furrowed. “No. We think we know who did, though. Dante,” she added before they could ask.

“Dante?” said Clarke in surprise. She could see Cage doing it, but not the good-natured Beauxbatons headmaster. “Why would he?”
“We think he’s been a conspirator, working with the queen. We’ve suspected him for a while, but our suspicions were pretty much confirmed when he disappeared at the same time you guys did during the Third Task. Cage too, and a few other Beauxbatons—I think Emerson and Tsing were all masquerading as students too…”

Clarke rubbed her temple with two fingers; her headache was back. “So what’s the plan? What’s going on now? Clearly the Order is too incompetent to actually catch the queen, so, what next?”

Anyah opened her mouth to snarl some retort, but Lexa cut across her. “Let’s go downstairs. Everyone will be in the Great Hall. We’ll find Indra and go on from there.”

It was strange to find the Great Hall so full of people and yet so devoid of chatter and energy. There were bodies everywhere, lined on the tables and covered in tablecloth, some that was stained red. Some of the bodies were so small, it stung Clarke’s eyes and struck a painful, burning sear in her heart; she forced herself to look at them, knew they deserved that at least, before she blinked her tears away and moved on, focusing on finding Indra, or Kane, or Jamie.

They found Bellamy first. He was kneeling near the table that usually belonged to Gryffindor; it was so littered with bodies that there was no room for any more. He was slumped over a body over the floor, clinging to it, his shoulders shaking with the force of his suppressed weeping. Clarke’s heart lodged itself in her throat. She and Raven lunged forward, terror-stricken. Clarke hated herself for the relief that made her weak in the knees when Bellamy heard them, upturned his tear-stained face to them, and said, “Gina. Gina’s—Gina’s dead. It’s—I was too late, by the I found her, she was already gone, I—“ He devolved into incomprehensible, clenched-teeth choking noises, trying so hard not to keen and cry that his face was red with the effort.

Clarke and Raven both dropped to their knees and draped their arms around Bellamy. He cried harder, burying his face in Raven’s neck, and they murmured soothing words as they rubbed his back and arms.

“Bellamy,” Clarke whispered after a moment, because she couldn’t stand not knowing. “Have you seen Octavia…?”

He nodded, sniffled, but didn’t seem capable of lifting his head, so his voice was muffled in Raven’s shoulder as he said, “She’s with Lincoln. Near the staff table.”

Clarke met Raven’s gaze and nodded; she stood up, gently disentangling herself from the two of them and leaving Raven to comfort him. She joined Lexa and Anya, who had been watching with somber eyes, and led them down between two other body-laden tables toward the table the professors usually sat at for meals.

Sure enough, Octavia, Lincoln, Indra, and Gustus all stood there, along with a handful of other Durmstrang students. They were all stone-faced, which Clarke knew was largely due to the bodies carefully laid out behind them. They were uncovered. Clarke felt another pang as she recognized the bodies of Artigas and Tris.

Anyah immediately broke off for Tris, trembling, eyes bright. Lexa swallowed but stood at
Clarke’s side as the both of them approached Indra.

“Clarke,” breathed Octavia, throwing her arms around Clarke.

“Is everyone okay? Wells? Fox? Mill—“

“They’re all okay except—except Roma.” When Octavia pulled back, she glanced around, eyes widening. “Raven?”

“She’s okay. She’s with your brother.”

Octavia’s face fell at the mention. “It was…Clarke, it was so bad,” she said, voice dropping low. “He…he was running around the grounds trying to find her. The Queen told everyone to withdraw and they did and Bellamy talked to Trina who said she just saw Gina in the Great Hall and she was okay, Bell was so relieved, so we rushed over, but…” She shook her head, swallowing thickly. “They must have got her right—right before. He found her body next to the doors. The killing curse, so—so it was clean, but…I just.” She blew out a breath, her eyes bright. “I didn’t even know it was that serious between them. I knew they hooked up at the Yule Ball thanks to Trina, but Bellamy never mentioned it. They would hang out but he’d just roll his eyes when I teased him. I didn’t even know they were actually dating. He said that he wanted to keep it quiet while they were just figuring each other out, but that he’d just asked her to be his girlfriend and—and she said yes. Just the other day.” Tears rolled over her dirty, blood-smeared cheeks. “I feel like the worst sister in the world. I didn’t even know. I’ve been so wrapped up in my own boyfriend—“

“Hey,” said Clarke softly, cupping Octavia’s face and wiping her tears with her thumbs. “Don’t blame yourself. Just be there for him.”

Octavia nodded, sniffing. “Right. Yeah. I was about to head over, I just…” She glanced back, gesturing toward Artigas and Tris. “I just wanted to say bye.”

Clarke nodded in understanding. “I get it, O. You did good.” She squeezed her in another hug, said “I’m glad you’re okay,” as Octavia began to walk away.

“You too,” she whispered.

Clarke approached Indra in time to catch the tail-end of what Lincoln was telling them.

“…and they said his grave is completely trashed.”

Gustus looked alarmed, Indra frustrated, and Lexa aggravated. “Was the body removed…?” said Gustus cautiously.

“No, nothing like that. The body was fine, it looked like he just died today actually, so it’s been well preserved. The tomb was just split open.”

“So she just did it in a fit of rage,” pondered Gustus, deep voice rumbling.

“Or to spite and insult,” said Indra coldly.

Lexa looked around for a moment, eyes briefly resting on Clarke before shifting around the rest of the Great Hall. “How many do they estimate have been killed?” she asked.

Indra’s shoulders jerked, as though in an involuntary reaction, perhaps a shrug. “Not sure yet. There are a lot of people unaccounted for. We think most of the missing students may have been trapped in the towers that burned.”
Another blow, but one that, Clarke supposed, should have been expected. She thinks of Merlin with a pang and hates herself a little more.

“So what next?” she said abruptly, before any other news could clobber her across the head.

They all turned to look at her.

“Next we make sure to kick the Queen’s arse out of these school grounds,” said Indra harshly, appearing irritated that Clarke was asking such an obvious question.

“Speaking of, the counterattack is going to be here any moment,” said Lincoln, glancing around. “We should get outside and start the protective enchantments.”

Gustus nodded. “Good thinking. The aurors arrived. Let’s round them and the professors up and get started.”

He and Lincoln headed off. Indra, however, paused to look Clarke dead in the eye, her expression steely. “Listen carefully to me, Griffin. If for some reason our forces are getting overrun and it looks like we may lose, you need to be prepared to make an escape.” Clarke immediately opened her mouth to argue, but Indra’s look silenced her. “Don’t argue with me. It’s imperative that the Queen does not get her hands on you.” She glanced at Lexa. “How much does she know?”

“Enough that Titus will be angry. Not enough that he’ll be angry at you.”

Indra looked unsurprised but disgruntled nevertheless as she shifted her intense gaze back onto Clarke. “Then you know that the Queen is hunting you for a reason. Your father gave his life to protect that. Don’t let his death be in vain. If we’re failing, you must Apparate to safety, and stay hidden. A member of the Order will find a way to contact you.”

“You can’t Apparate on school grounds,” said Clarke automatically.

“Actually Clarke, I lifted the enchantment,” came a grim voice. Clarke turned to see Headmaster Kane approaching them; a ways behind him, Clarke could see Wells, Fox, Monty, Miller, Jasper, and Maya standing at a table where Roma was lying swaddled in a Gryffindor banner as scarlet as her hair and the blood splattered across her face. “The Queen’s army is already here, so it’s mostly ours that are Apparating in. The aurors just arrived.”

“Yes, Gustus just went to round them up,” said Indra. “We’re going to start on the protective shields.”

“I’ll join you,” said Kane, he and Indra both hurrying off.

That left Clarke and Lexa both standing together in a silence Clarke couldn’t bear to let grow awkward. She hurried toward her friends.

Wordlessly, she flung her arms around Wells neck and hugged him tightly, breathing in his familiar scent of clean linen. After an initial moment’s surprise, he wrapped his own arms around her, hugging her back just as fiercely.

When she pulled back, he was looking at her in the way he always did, with concern and love.

“Are you okay?”

She wanted to lie and say she was, wanted to seem strong and untouched by all this. Wanted
to break down and confess for that the past few hours, she had been terrified that he had known about her father’s death and just hadn’t told her, that she was so muddled in the head lately she’d allowed herself to be convinced by Ontari of all people that he’d actually betrayed her. Wanted to tell him that it was her mother all along, and Wells’ father, and that there was something happening even bigger than anything they could possibly understand. The shame burned and the hurt curdled in the pit of her stomach.

But she didn’t.

She just shook her head, and Wells understood. He gave her another hug before moving on to console Fox, who was curled up into a ball in the corner of the room, her knees tucked to her chest, staring numbly at Roma’s body.

“Tergeo,” murmured Clarke, siphoning the blood off her body.

“Now she looks like she could be sleeping,” whispered Fox. Her gaze didn’t move as she laid the side of her head on her arm and knee, a tear slipping free.

Clarke bracingly rubbed her arm before she spotted Raven, who had joined the Durmstrang area and had one arm around Anya as she stood with her head bowed before Tris, waving at her with her free hand. Clarke gave Fox’s shoulder a squeeze before making her way back over to where Lexa still stood, her jaw clenched and throat bobbing, green eyes fixed on Artigas and Tris. Clarke’s heart ached and she couldn’t resist; she took Lexa’s free hand in hers. Lexa looked down at her in shock that was apparent even though she hastily schooled her expression into an indifferent one.

Still, as she looked at her, Lexa’s gaze softened. She turned her hand over in Clarke’s, hesitantly stroking her thumb along the back of Clarke’s knuckles. Clarke hated the ache it gave her in her heart. “How are you holding up?”

Clarke swallowed, though it didn’t unfetter her of the solid lump in her throat. She pursed her lips, though it didn’t prevent the corners of them from tilting up in a coldly sardonic smile. “Not great.” The incidents of the past few hours flickered past the forefront of her mind again and this time she let the emotions linger, the swell of fury and sorrow at her mother and Jaha and everyone that lied to her. She was heartbroken and furious, but now that she had those missing memories, she felt more like herself than she had in the past year and a half. She felt whole again, even while there was a hole in her heart from losing so many people.

And Lexa. She looked at her, at the sharp angle of her jaw, of the elegant curve of her cheekbones, of her green eyes filled with so much sadness. She was still angry with her for withholding so much of the truth from her, but the fact that Lexa had not known about her father’s death provided some level of comfort, however small, and she was grateful that Lexa helped her retrieve her memory. Odd, that they had spent a portion of this year with Lexa teaching her how to block her mind, and Lexa ended up being the one to infiltrate and liberate it.

“I’m still upset,” said Clarke quietly. “I— I don’t know if I’ll ever forgive you. I don’t know if I want to. Can you give me space?”

Of course, Lexa agreed to give it to her.

Clarke tried not to flinch at the loss of contact as she slid her hand free from Lexa’s and stepped over to Raven and Anya.

“O said they’re positioning people at the secret passageways,” said Raven in a low voice. She had a hard glint in her eyes and a harder one in a smirk that didn’t quite meet them. “Sounds like
a perfect job for us.”

Clarke slowly took in a deep breath and exhaled it just as carefully. Truth be told, she had never been more ready to duel someone in her life. She wanted to hurt people, wanted to make them feel some portion of what she felt right now. Never had she been more prepared to use Unforgivable Curses.

“Sounds good,” she said, nodding.

“Clarke,” came a voice, and she immediately stiffened. She had just asked Lexa for space, yet now here she was, with that damn tone in her voice that told Clarke she disapproved.

Clarke turned to look at her, fighting to keep her face as impassive as Lexa’s always was. Lexa’s gaze searched her, as though searching for her emotions beneath the mask. “I’m going out and fighting,” she said coolly. “I don’t care what Indra said. If I end up face to face with the Queen, so much the better for me, so much the worse for her.”

“Clarke, the Queen has powers you know nothing of—” began Lexa in a puzzled type of alarm, but Clarke shook her head, cutting her off.

“I don’t give a fuck. I’m going out there and I’m fighting, and I’m taking as many Death Eaters down as I can.”

Lexa’s brow arched with an air of skepticism. “What, you’re going to kill them?” When Clarke was stonily silent, Lexa’s eyes widened a fraction and she stepped forward. “Clarke, you can’t—listen to me, that’s not going to make you feel better. It’s going to make you feel worse—”

“That’s all anyone’s told me today!” Clarke flared up at once. “All anyone’s done is tell me to listen but I’m tired of listening. I’m tired of talking. I want in on the action everyone else has apparently been on for ages. I’m ready to fight. Let me do it. You said you’d give me space,” she reminded, causing Lexa to close her mouth with a snap, nostrils flaring in frustration. Clarke ignored it, striding past her, an equally angry Raven bustling in her wake.

“Protego horribilis. Protego maxima…”

The echoed chants of Kane, Indra, Gustus, Jamie and Gideon Potter, and a host of other professors, aurors, and fighters drifted across the blood-strewn grounds, wands lifted up high to cast the impossibly large shield charms that stretched across the castle and grounds like a type of weird bubble that would have been undetectable if it weren’t for the odd distortion in the air, as though it were a heat shimmer. Clarke and Raven marched across the grounds, heading for the Whomping Willow where she knew the secret passageway into the Shrieking Shack was enclosed. They stood near the front, deciding not to actually go inside it since the Whomping Willow could serve as a second method of defense. Judging by the many branches that were stained red, it had been doing a thorough job of that already.

Clarke and Raven stood there just out of its reach, ignoring the creak of the trunk as it stretched, long branches extending toward them in futile attempts to reach them, and they waited.

Steadily, others began to file out of the dilapidated, smoldering castle, and filled the grounds, all facing the distant forest and the school gates where they assumed the Queen’s forces would enter through. Some of their friends came silently to their sides—Bellamy first, then Octavia, then Wells, Fox, Miller, Monty, Jasper, and Maya. Some looked more unnerved than others—Fox, Jasper, and Maya in particular looked obviously scared—but every single one of them had defiance in their eyes that filled Clarke with a rush of gratitude and comfort.
Clarke couldn’t have stopped her gaze from drifting to the side to watch Lexa even if she wanted to—and she did want to. She watched Lexa and Anya stride down the hillside to stand with Indra, Gustus, and Lincoln at the front line, wands held aloft and ready like swords more than anything, shoulders set and heads held high. They struck impressive figures, the Durmstrangs. And even still, Lexa, Lincoln, and Anya all stole glances back at the line of Hogwarts’ students who stood before the Whomping Willow, ready and waiting to fight.

They stood there in their misshapen line, eyes turned to the horizon. They stood, and they waited.

Then, for the third time this night, the disembodied voice echoed around the arounds.

“You have started a war you don’t know how to end. For that, half of your number will die tonight. Those remaining will be prisoners in this place you once called home. *Jus drein jus daun.*”

There was a haunting silence that rang through the air.

“What is that? Was that a spell?” whispered Raven.

“It’s a promise,” said Wells heavily.

“She’s going to kill half of us,” repeated Fox in terror. “What do we do?”

“Kill all of them,” said Bellamy roughly. “They want death?” He clenched his jaw. “We’ll give it to them.”

“I am become death,” muttered Clarke.

“Oppenheimer,” grunted Bellamy.

Clarke nodded, pressing her lips flat in a grim attempt at a smile. “Learned that from you, Bell.”

The Queen’s second wave arrived, but it wasn’t from the horizon.

The ground rumbled, quaking beneath their feet. They all leapt up, pointing their wands at the ground when it stilled. Just when they started to think it was fully stopped, human-sized holes cracked into life, dirt exploding high into the air, followed by horrifying figures covered in matted fur, teeth bared, smelling of sweat and dirt and blood.

“It’s the werewolves!” someone screamed, before the Shadow-Eaters swept forth from the forest and the Death Eaters burst through the gates and everything dissolved into chaos again.

There were bodies flying everywhere. Clarke and her friends stuck closely together, backs to one another, protecting each other. When a werewolf flew onto Clarke, so close to biting her neck that his whiskers pressed into her cheek like tiny stiff needles, it was Wells who blasted it off. When the Shadow-Eaters, it was Fox’s tiny mouse that sent them gliding away. When the Death Eaters surrounded them, it was Raven and Bellamy’s furious curses that sent them all limp and unconscious and screaming and fleeing.

Someone cast fire that caught on the Whomping Willow. It creaked loudly as it swung around, managing to land a solid hit on a werewolf that almost squashed him flat to the ground and instead managed a solid blow to the creature’s arm, gorging a deep wound (“Almost fucking roadkill!” Raven had cackled manically as she took down two other Death Eaters at once with the force of her blasting curse, “Serves you assholes right!”) and splattered blood that somehow
managed to land in Fox’s mouth and had her screaming and choking, using *augumenti* to rinse it out and exposing herself to a stunning spell that Wells only just managed to deflect with his shield charm. The tree seemed angry rather than in pain, even as the fire took it over, as Clarke and Fox’s water spells did nothing to save it.

Raven cried out as a Death Eater managed to hit her with a *tarantellegra*; her brace broke as her legs kicked out and her scream was long and agonizing even after Bellamy lifted the spell and Clarke, shaking with rage, pointed her wand at the Death Eater and shouted, “*Crucio!*”

The Death Eater’s screams were higher than Raven’s had been. He staggered back, falling and writhing in pain—and Clarke, horrified, lifted the spell as she saw where he was falling, but it was too late…

She could do nothing but watch, horrified, as he landed in the fire and burned, the screams issuing from his mouth more inhuman than the howls of the werewolves, until they finally cut off with a final gurgle and the man’s body was still as the flames enveloped him.

She had just killed a person.

She’d just used an Unforgivable Curse, tortured someone, and then caused his death.

She’d killed a human being.

“Clarke, on your right!”

Clarke swung around to meet the next Death Eater. She was forced to numbly go on, to keep fighting even while her head was swimming. *This is war,* she told herself. *This is war.*

“More coming,” warned Bellamy, gesturing toward the cluster of Death Eaters descending the hillside toward them. Fox moaned.

They were exhausted and injured and Clarke didn’t know how much longer this could go on. Looking around, it seemed like the Queen’s forces were overtaking everyone—there were certainly more of them present, and far too many Hogwarts defenders on the ground. Clarke remembered Indra’s words and her insides clenched.

“Clarke!” cried Lexa, arriving at her side, Clarke’s relief soared and she was weak-legged with it as she watched Lexa traced her wand through the air, drawing forth the same complicated wandwork that had multiple spells mixing and undulating in the air before she lashed it out at the Death Eaters, knocking them all aback at once. “You have to go, you have to get out of here—“

“I’m not leaving!” she said heatedly. “All my friends are here—“

“The Ice Queen is here for you, not them—you will be saving more by leaving!”

There wasn’t time to answer for a moment, too wrapped up in the heat of battle.

“Why don’t I just give myself up?” said Clarke finally, and even she could hear the tired, defeated note in her voice. “I don’t want anyone else to get hurt for me.”

“I already told you,” said Lexa sharply, pivoting as she blasted one Death Eater in the air and Stunned another in the same breath, “You are too important. The Queen wants you because of this —“

“She wants you too!” exclaimed Clarke, her shield charm absorbing the spells the Death
Eaters shot at them; Lexa twirled her wands and the same spells shot back at them.

“She won’t get me, I’ll leave too if it comes to that—but you are far more important. If she gets you, we’re all doomed.”

“I don’t understand why! What does she want with me? You saw everything I know about my dad, I don’t know anything more—“

Lexa shot arrows from her wand again, a Death Eater’s scream as one punctured the fork between his legs echoing across the grounds even over the deafening sounds of battle.

“Ontari told me I had secrets the Queen wanted—what did she mean by that?”

“It’s dangerous, you knowing. You lost your memories for a reason.”

“Are you fucking serious?” Clarke exploded, her fury channeling through her wand and smacking a Death Eater ten feet into the air. “You’re still keeping things from me?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, breathless and pleading. “I promise you I’ll explain everything to you the moment I can, but for now—you have to leave. Please, Clarke, you have to leave, you have to get yourself somewhere safe. If we were winning, that would be one thing, but the Order can no longer protect you, we’re being overtaken. Now the longer you’re here, the more danger everyone is in. You have to—“

“LEXA!”

Lexa turned at Anya’s shout; she and Lincoln were surrounded by werewolves and Death Eaters alike.

“Run, Clarke!” she yelled as she pelted away, leaping over bodies, her Durmstrang uniform billowing and her red scarf and wild tangles of braided hair billowing behind her.

Clarke’s heart was pounding. She didn’t want to leave, but she had already lost so many friends and Lexa was right, logically she knew that, if the Queen wanted her and she wasn’t here, that was one less reason for the Queen to be here, either. Clarke had to leave.

And the more friends she could pull to safety with her, the better.

“Guys, come here!” she cried, casting a huge shield charm over them. “Hurry, grab my hand, we’re Apparating out of here—“

“What?” said Wells in alarm. “You can’t app—“

“Hurry, get over here!”

“Clarke, where are we Apparating to—“ began Octavia; Clarke ignored her too.

“We can’t leave everyone!” said Bellamy furiously. He wanted to fight. He was still grieving that way, Clarke got it. But there was no way he wasn’t coming with them.

She seized his hand, looked around to make sure everyone was connected—she had Wells and Bellamy, Bellamy had Octavia, Octavia had Raven, who had Miller, who had Monty, who had Jasper who had Maya who had Fox who had Wells.

The Death Eaters were blasting the shield apart and it was now or never.
“Hold on tight!” Clarke urged, turning on the spot.

She twisted into the suffocating nothingness, leaving Hogwarts far behind.
On the Run

Chapter Summary

Clarke and company are on the run after escaping Hogwarts, and everyone is fucked up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And my running feet could fly

(Each breath screaming: we are all too young to die!"

-Florence + the Machine

The darkness and sense of compression lifted, and Clarke took in deep gulps of air that had a bitter stench of rainwater and piss.

“We’re in London,” said Fox breathlessly.

Clarke nodded curtly, immediately turning to cast her gaze over her large group of friends; Raven had fallen onto her ass on the damp pavement, panting, her injured leg held out at an odd angle. Clarke started to raise her wand before she remembered they were in the middle of the street in a muggle town. Already distant muggles standing near the pub across the street were starting to leer, some having staggered back in surprise, shocked at their sudden appearance but drunk enough to treat it like a joke.

“Come on, let’s carry her into that alley.” Clarke nodded toward the narrow street opening between a couple closed stores.

Wells and Bellamy hooked their arms beneath Raven’s armpits and carried her as gently and quickly as they could. They set her down slumped against the brick wall. The alley was mostly dark, lit only by a dim, flickering streetlight on the end near a dumpster. Clarke crouched beside Raven, intending to heal her, but Raven shook her head.

“It’s my leg, not the spell,” she panted. With some difficulty, she lifted her own wand; with a twirl of her wand tip, her half-done brace laced and clasped itself back up. She gave a quiet sigh of relief as the last buckle cinched just above her knee. “Better. Just going to be sore for a while.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to—” began Clarke dubiously, but Raven shook her head. Clarke supposed it was to be expected. Raven had always been particular about avoiding magic
when it came to her leg; her brace was generally as far as she was willing to go. Raven stood up shakily and tested her weight while everyone else watched.

Clarke glanced around, making certain everyone was here...Raven, Wells, Bellamy, Octavia, Fox, Miller, Monty, Jasper, and Maya. They were all the worse for wear, covered in blood and dirt and, in the cases of some, dust from the crumbling castle and even from Azkaban. There were dark circles under all sets of eyes, and everyone looked exhausted enough to simply lay on the ground in the alley and fall asleep. Clarke understood exactly how they felt; every inch of her body ached with a deep exhaustion that sunk all the way down to her bones. Only yesterday she'd been in the labyrinth of the Triwizard Tournament's third task, and then fighting her way out of the Ministry of Magic. Only today she'd flown all the way to Azkaban and then fought for her life there. Only moments ago she'd been fighting a war at Hogwarts.

Now the night was ending. The skies above were lightening, and a glance at her father’s watch told her it was a quarter to five in the morning. She thought longingly of her four-poster bed, and there was a swoop in her stomach as she thought of the huge bed in the Room of Requirement. Of course, part of its appeal was whom she had shared it with...

Clarke shivered. “We should move.”

Her friends followed her back onto the street, where the smell of food thankfully overpowered the other stench of the city. Her stomach growled. She ignored it.

“Where are we going to go?” said Monty.

Miller’s jaw was clenched; Clarke wondered if the stress of the night’s events were getting to him, or perhaps if he was merely angry with Clarke for taking him with her, because his expression was hard and eyes cold as he looked at her. “What are we doing period? What’s the plan?”

Clarke held her breath, stuck. Truthfully, she didn’t have a plan. She’d gotten them away from Hogwarts, she’d done what Indra asked. Her father’s words had been echoing in her head — your instinct will be to take care of everyone. She wanted to get her friends away from the people trying to kill them. Now where were they supposed to go? They were surrounded by muggles, disconnected from the rest of the wizarding world. They needed a way to communicate...

“For now, we lay low,” said Clarke firmly. “And we need to find a way to get news, to figure out what’s happening.”

Raven’s dark eyes shifted around the town, lingering for a moment on the jeering men farther up the cobblestone street. “If I can get to a radio, then we can check what’s going on.”

“Where are we going to find a radio?” said Monty, looking around rather hopelessly. “All the shops are closed.”

“Let’s just keep moving,” said Octavia, shivering slightly; it wasn’t because she was cold. The temperature was quite mild, and she was still wearing her school traveling cloak. Clarke understood her discomfort. The hairs on her arms and the back of her neck were rising. She didn’t like standing here with such a large, eccentrically dressed group. It felt as though they were all exposed.

“Agreed,” said Wells, sounding relieved.

“Come on,” said Clarke, starting forward.

They ignored the comments from the drunken men, though Octavia did have to steer Bellamy
away when he turned, seething, at a particularly rude suggestion from them as to whom Octavia could be spending time with tonight instead.

The longer they walked, the more visible they felt. The sun was starting to peek over the horizon and muggles were beginning to spill out into the town to start their days; they cast baffled glances at them as they walked. Clarke’s singed, tattered traveling cloak was fluttering in the wind behind her, the charred edges scraping against her calf.

“We have to change,” said Fox finally, as a large group of people waiting for the bus all gaped at them as they strode past. “We’re attracting too much attention.”

“I agree,” said Maya, shivering; she was still only wearing her thin pajamas and Jasper’s scarf.

“Let’s find a hotel for the night,” said Bellamy. “I have the money to cover us.”

They picked the first one they saw. It wasn’t anything special, and perhaps a little on the dirty side, but they were all so exhausted that at this point it could be a hovel and they’d be fine with it. Bellamy paid for a room, ignored the receptionist’s dirty look, and they all trudged upstairs, too tired to wait for the elevator (which Clarke and Fox were both relieved about), and piled into the room after Bellamy swiped a card into a little black box on the wall. Maya, Fox, and Wells set to work on extending the beds and couch and plumping up the extra blankets to serve as makeshift floor mattresses.

Clarke, meanwhile, cornered Bellamy in the doorway and forced him to remain still while she looked at the hand he’d injured on the Astronomy Tower. He’d clearly attempted to heal it himself, but hadn’t done a very good job of it. When Clarke lifted her wand, he ripped his arm out of her grasp.

“Leave it!” he said harshly. His nostrils were flared and his mouth set in a snarl, but the pain and anguish was obvious in his wide eyes.

“Bellamy,” began Clarke gently. “Let me heal it properly…”

“No.” He sniffed once, looking down at his bruised knuckles and wrist. “It’s fine.”

She didn’t argue with him. She knew he was grieving in his own way, and perhaps didn’t feel as though he deserved to rid himself of the pain. Clarke disagreed, but she bit her tongue; she knew Bellamy, and now was not the time. She nodded and moved into the room to see if her help was needed.

It was already done, and most were already collapsing onto the mattresses. Miller looked as though he was already asleep, lying on his stomach with his head on the pillow, facing the wall, but judging by the concerned look on Monty’s face as he gently stroked his boyfriend’s back, he wasn’t yet. Bellamy, Wells, and Fox each took a couch, Jasper and Maya took the other bed, and Clarke, Octavia, and Raven each took one of the makeshift pallets on the floor. No one was talking. Bellamy twitched his wand and the lights went off.

Clarke lay on her pallet, shivering beneath the thin blanket, but she didn’t think it was from the cold. Memories from the past two days were flashing through her mind like a horror movie. She squeezed her eyes shut, but she could still hear the echoes. The choking noises of the man pretending to be her father. Death Eaters laughing beneath their hoods. Shadow-Eaters’ rattling breaths. The howls of werewolves that were as human as they were wolf because the moon was not full. A man shrieking as the flames overtook him, as he died by Clarke’s hand. A terrified eleven year old
sobbing the killing curse. The roar of battle over the entire castle grounds. And screaming. So much screaming.

Clarke rolled over, pressing her face into her pillow, wishing she could simply sink into the floor. The loudest screams were her own, her anguish and frustration manifesting itself in a terrible curdling mental scream that never seemed to end.

Her friends were not faring much better. There were slivers of light that snuck into the room through the spaces of the drawn shutters. She could see the tears on Bellamy’s face, screwed up and biting his hurt fist to stop from crying out. She could see Fox silently crying and sniffling, wiping her nose with the sleeve of her cloak. She could see Miller’s shoulders shaking, could see Monty’s eyes shining as he dusted soothing kisses over his face. She could see Jasper’s fearful petrified expression; Maya could already be sleeping if it weren’t for the worried frown on her face. She could see Wells worrying his bottom lip, staring without really seeing up at the window he faced. She could see the crease between Octavia’s brow, the way her lower lip trembled. She could see Raven glaring up at the ceiling, so angry the fury was practically rolling off her in waves. That was how it was with them, all three of them. Idiots, for getting entangled with the rival school. Clarke wondered what Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln were doing right now. Had they successfully protected the school? Or did they, too, end up having to flee? She hoped they were safe. As angry as she was with Lexa, she couldn’t lie to herself and act as though she didn’t care about her. She did, far too much for her own liking.

As Clarke lay there, as they all lay there in the darkness and the silence, Clarke found her thoughts drifting to Ontari, to the Ice Queen, and to her father. What did they all want? How were they all connected to Lexa, to the Triwizard Tournament, and what was Clarke’s role in it all?

The questions plagued her mind for hours, long after Jasper’s snores broke the silence.

* "・/✧・/ْ*  

“No—no, please—“

“Crucio.”

High screams rang through the air. Ontari writhed on the filthy floor, twisting and contorting in agony, and the Queen watched without remorse, barely restrained rage pulsing through her. She pulled her wand away and the curse lifted, leaving Ontari panting and trembling on the floor.

“We’re not finished here. I am not a merciful person, and I have no tolerance for fools who treat life like a game.”

“I don’t—“ Ontari began, but then she was screaming again.

“You did,” said the Queen after lifting the curse a minute later. “I told you to hold Griffin at the prison. It was the perfect opportunity; you had plenty of cells to hold her in. It was a mission of subtlety and instead, you used the opportunity to play with your food first. It was not in the heat of the moment, either. You plotted it out, planned ahead to use Cuyler Ridley to play with the girl’s emotions—“
“I thought it would make her weaker and easier to capture!” spat Ontari; she winced as Nia threateningly lifted her wand again.

“Don’t pretend as though that was your primary objective,” said Nia coldly. “You did this, first and foremost, because you took pleasure in her pain. You then let your emotions, your anger, get the better of you, and indulged in battle; you revealed your animagi form and you nearly brought down the entire prison, which could have killed the girl and ruined everything. You were reckless and irresponsible and, most of all, most unforgivably, unreliable. You treated this like a game, and it was a game you lost. This is your punishment. “

The curdling screams echoed off the walls.

* "・/✧/・*

None of them slept much. The sunlight crept into the room and birds were chirping by the time Clarke’s eyes finally drooped. She found herself jerking awake every five minutes, heart fluttering in panic, but the room was always silent and still. By the time late morning arrived and her friends were rising, Clarke was relieved she no longer had to attempt to sleep. By the dark shadows under puffy eyes, her friends seemed to share the same sentiments.

They took turns using the shower and Clarke somehow felt more human once she’d scrubbed the blood and grime off her skin. The room was silent and most people seemed to be avoiding her eyes when she emerged, which told her that Raven had probably filled everyone in on the full story. Clarke was grateful for it, since it meant she didn’t have to.

Fox magically cleaned and laundered their clothes and they Transfigured them as best they could to look like muggle clothing, but they were only passable at best. Octavia suggested they find a clothing store and though Clarke wasn’t keen on being in public (nor was Wells and Fox; they were all under the same unspoken agreement that they should hide as much as possible), they agreed.

They ate Subway and Clarke hated that her first thought after tasting one of their chocolate chip cookies was that Lexa would like this. Afterwards, they set out to find a radio. It was stressful and tiring walking all over the place, and Jasper’s presence was, at least for Clarke, serving as extremely irritating. While everyone else was subdued and quiet, Jasper was loud and apparently in a jubilant mood, even considering the situation they were in and the fact that they had friends die last night. Rationally, Clarke knew this was just his way of dealing, and it was probably healthier to try to remain optimistic and find reasons to laugh, but at the moment she was too tired and drained to be reasonable. Part of her actually wanted to curse him.

Fortunately, it seemed Clarke was not entirely alone in this. Octavia, Fox, Wells, Monty, and Maya were all fatigued and withdrawn, Bellamy and Miller seemed grouchy, and Raven was downright irate, glaring at all who so much as glanced her way and clenching her jaw and her fists every time Jasper cracked a joke. After a time, Clarke was also forced to ignore Fox’s breathless mutters regarding exactly what she thought about walking around everywhere like muggles. Her mutters stopped anyway when Raven, who was limping along with her leg brace and refusing to use any spells to help with the pain or inconvenience of it, shot her a glare.

By the time they found a shop, Clarke was relieved to be afforded the distraction of picking
out a few articles of clothing and then watching Raven and Monty pick out a radio. She would have rather wandered the store on her own, but there was no way they were splitting up, and she told her friends as much when Jasper excitedly spotted a stand of bacon-flavored crisps. His face fell into a pout that made her want to punch him, so she quickly focused on watching Raven pay for the radio with sickles she had magically converted to muggle money. It was dangerous to use counterfeit money, but Bellamy was the only of their number who actually owned real muggle money, and they needed it for clothes, food, and hotel.

Once outside the store, they holed up inside their hotel room for the day. It was a waiting game from there. Raven and Monty were crammed together at the small desk, faces drawn in concentration as they moved their wands over the radio and murmured spells. Jasper was flicking through the television channels; Fox was watching in something akin to awe and disapproval, but Clarke could see her tensing on the couch, fingers twitching as though to try the remote herself. Everyone else was sprawled out over couches or mattresses with the same bored, tense expressions on their faces, save for Bellamy and Miller, who seemed to be sporting perpetual scowls.

“It’s working,” announced Raven hours later, leaning back from the radio and stretching from spending so much time hunched over. “We just have to find the WWN and then we’re gold.”

It took almost another hour, but they managed to find the station. The quality wasn’t great; it was crackling so badly it was hard to make out the words sometimes, but they still managed to catch the last minute of a Dino Warbeck song (Octavia pulled a face and groaned) before the radio host came on air.

And then there was nothing.

They listened in disbelief as he spoke of the cold weather, of the Ministry’s latest broomstick regulations, and most briefly about the recent uptick in Shadow-Eater attacks, before he signed off and an upbeat song came on.

“That’s it?” said Fox incredulously. “All this—Azkaban being destroyed, Hogwarts being attacked—and they don’t—they don’t mention anything about it?”

“It’s a conspiracy,” said Jasper wisely, squinting and nodding and Clarke had the decency to feel guilty about how much her friend was irritating her simply by being himself.

Clarke rubbed the heels of her hands over her face, resisting the urge to groan loudly into her palms. She was running on little food and beyond little sleep. She didn’t know what she was doing. She wished there was someone here to tell her what to do. She thought of Lexa, of her calming stoic presence and the patient yet commanding way she gave orders, but she stubbornly pushed her out of her mind, heart aching. She thought of her father, his good-natured leadership, her dad, and immediately swallowed the lump that formed in her throat at the thought of him. She thought of her mother, fingers sifting through her hair, what a relief it would be for her mum to be here, taking care of her, and she immediately recoiled, something akin to hatred and anguish swelling up within her like a wave prepared to drown her. She couldn’t think of those three people. She couldn’t think of anyone right now other than her nine friends here that she had to take care of. She lifted her head out of her hands and took in the sight of every single one of them staring expectantly at her. Yeah, she had to take care of them. They knew it, and she knew it.

“We need to contact someone.”

“The Ministry?” said Fox dubiously.

Clarke shook her head, and then glanced hesitantly at Wells. Wells set his jaw and quietly
agreed, “My dad can’t be trusted.”

Clarke reached out, took his hand, squeezed it bracingly before continuing, “We can’t trust Jaha right now, which means we can’t trust the entire Ministry, except…” She faltered. Part of her wanted to be wary, to remember Jamie Potter arresting her father, but she knew—knew it logically and knew it in her heart—that the Potters were trustworthy. “Except for the Potters.”

“And that Luna woman,” said Jasper.

Clarke nodded. “And her. We know we can trust Kane and the Hogwarts’ professors. Maya, is there anyone else in Beauxbatons that could help us?”

Maya shook her head and shrugged at the same time. “I never would have imagined Headmaster Wallace being…” she trailed off, unsure how to phrase it, so Raven filled it in for her.

“Evil?”

She sucked her bottom lip into her mouth, brow furrowing. “Yeah, I…I would never have imagined him as a—a bad guy. If he is, then I don’t know who to trust.”

“Right,” continued Clarke, racking over their options in her head. “And I guess we already know Durmstrang is on our side, but I’m not sure how to—“

But Clarke’s words, to her great surprise, were met with protest.

“Who says Durmstrang is on our side?” demanded Bellamy.

“What do you mean by that?” said Octavia to him indignantly.

“They attacked me and Mon!” said Jasper angrily.

“Wait, what?” said Clarke.

“Fuck the Durmstrangs!” snarled Miller.

“WAIT!” repeated Clarke, louder this time so everyone finally shut up. She looked quizzically at Miller. “Okay, I understand why some people are pissed at them, but why are you?”

“Young girlfriend threw Monty into the closet like he’s some kind of animal!” A vein was throbbing in Miller’s temple and he was red-faced with anger. “When you lot fucked off to Azkaban and you left Monty and Jasper on guard duty! He could have died! The castle was under attack and he was trapped in a broom closet, gagged, with his hands and feet bound! Death Eaters could have found him or he could have been burned, anything could have happened to him! It’s a miracle he’s alive!” Monty grabbed him by the arm and tugged him. Miller pulled his arm away but stepped back, muttering about the Durmstrangs, and Clarke didn’t bother correcting him. Nor did Raven and Octavia say anything in defense of Anya and Lincoln. There wasn’t anything they could say that could make Miller feel better about Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln apparently gagging Monty and Jasper and chucking them in a broom closet.

“Look,” began Clarke firmly, struggling to keep her voice from sounding as weary as she felt. “Right now, it doesn’t matter what any of us think about the Durmstrangs. We don’t know how to contact them anyway. The only thing we can do is attempt to get word from Kane, the Potters—anyone who can help us.”

Though Miller and Jasper still looked mutinous, and no one else certainly looked happy,
everyone agreed.

It wasn’t so simple to find a solution, however.

The hours spent fiddling with the radio and keeping an eye out for any signs stretched into days, and the days stretched into a week with no word from anyone.

Clarke’s friends, who had always gotten on so well, were now lashing out at one another, cantankerous and sometimes downright unbearable. Clarke was almost ashamed to admit how often she snuck away from the random hotels they moved through every few days, nicking papers out of the bins to see if anything looked suspicious. She was compartmentalizing and distant, but she was too exhausted to worry about the consequences of withdrawing from her friends. They were all too tired. None of them were sleeping well. Sometimes Octavia, who was tactful enough to remain mostly silent, presumably lost in her own sad thoughts, joined her, and the two of them would scavenge the streets of London together but always returned empty-handed, no news at all. Wells would occasionally accompany Clarke too; they would sit in the corner of a diner and watch the muggle news on the television hanging on the wall, but there was never anything suspicious. Nothing was ever suspicious, and that was the most suspicious thing in itself. It was too quiet. It felt like something was building, like eventually, the storm would hit. Clarke just wondered how long it would take.

After two weeks of this same restless tension, Bellamy stomped out of the hotel room one night and came back with arms laden with muggle alcohol. It alarmed Clarke, Wells, and Fox—they alone refused a drink, but everyone else was happy for the distraction, relieved to have something help them relax.

“This is the worst possible time to lower our inhibitions,” whispered Fox.

Wells and Clarke both agreed, but the three of them still sat quietly in the corner and allowed their friends to have their time. Maybe it would help. Maybe it would get it out of their system.

It didn’t. There were four solid nights of this. While some of it was admittedly amusing (there was one point when Clarke found an intoxicated Monty out on the hotel balcony pointing his wand down at the hotel pool; when Clarke asked what he was doing, since he was brandishing his wand but nothing was happening, he said through clenched teeth, “I can’t change the tide if the moon won’t cooperate,” and Clarke had to steer him inside, and there had been another time when a drunken Raven told Fox she was the most beautiful broom in a broom closet full of brooms, which flustered Fox so much that Clarke had to bite back a smile as she pulled Raven away).

Four days, however, was ridiculous. Clarke finally snapped and confronted Bellamy, ignoring his stubborn claims that they could do whatever the hell they wanted and a little chaos never hurt anyone to warn them all within an inch of their lives that they needed to be smart. Still, it took Jasper nearly falling out of a third story window and Clarke pointedly refusing to heal the nasty cuts across his forearm (leaving Maya to do it, a bit roughly perhaps, but an adequate job nonetheless) did it finally stop.

Then things were even worse. Bellamy and Raven were utterly unapproachable. Miller was still angry with Clarke, as though this was all her fault. Clarke supposed she deserved it; after all, she had been foolish enough to bring her friends with her on a suicidal mission to break into Azkaban. When she’d said as much to Octavia after she snapped at Miller for being short with Clarke, Octavia grew even angrier. Clarke supposed she was right too; she hadn’t been herself because of her emotional state and the mental strain of fighting to recover her own memories. It didn’t alleviate her of any guilt, though. Maybe it was her own despair talking, but she felt as though she deserved any hostility directed toward her. She almost welcomed it.
In the room, Clarke tended to keep herself to herself. Sometimes she’d pull her wand out and stare at it, slowly rotating it in her fingers, filled with a sick dread. She hadn’t used it since the Hogwarts’ battle. She had used this wand to kill someone. On top of that, this wand had belonged to her mother.

Sometimes Clarke thought she never wanted to use it again. Perhaps she could get a new wand. Her own wand.

“Clarke. Babe, we’re going to go out for lunch,” said Raven, jolting Clarke out of her daydreams. More like nightmares. Ironically, Raven was always there to pull her out of those, even though lately they hadn’t spoken nearly as much as Clarke would have liked. Raven had been withdrawn too, and she was indefinitely more aggressive. Clarke knew her and how she was, so she gave her space. But she missed her.

They dressed, checked out of the hotel, and headed out, stopping at a McDonalds because it was cheap. It made Clarke’s stomach hurt, and judging by the slightly green pallor of Fox’s face, it hadn’t exactly hit the spot for her either. Outside the restaurant, they all paused, standing uncertainly, unsure what the next move was. They’d been moving from hotel to hotel just to play it safe. Was that their next move? Get on a bus and head across town?

Bellamy, whose aggression and aggravation had only worsened over the past fortnight, scowled at them all. “I want to be alone for a while. I’m going to go for a walk.” Without another word, Bellamy took off, hands shoved deep in his pockets.

Clarke opened her mouth, though she wasn’t quite sure what she was going to say. Bellamy didn’t need to be going anywhere on his own, but she understood his desire to be alone. Even if she wasn’t afforded the same possibility because she needed to take care of their friends (some of them damn useless), she understood his urge. But he couldn’t go alone; he needed someone to accompany him at the very least. Buddy system.

“I’ll go with him,” said Raven shortly. They watched her limp after him, catching up after a while. Neither of them so much as spared the rest of the group a glance as they headed off. Clarke stared after them, uncertain whether the uneasy feeling in her stomach was watching them leave or simply the knowledge that they had pain she didn’t know how to ease. Could be the McDonalds too. It was probably all three.

Raven and Bellamy walked on in silence, weaving their way through the city with no particular destination in mind. When Raven’s leg started aching and she eyed the muggles driving past, she mentioned it would be nice to have a car to drive around. Bellamy’s eyes gleamed and she should have known what they were in for. Not until he grabbed her arm and excitedly pulled her into the parking lot of the pub they had been walking past, found the shiniest car there, and dragged her over to it. She probably should have said no, but she didn’t. She just pulled her wand out to unlock it and start the engine. Bellamy slid into the driver’s seat and Raven clambered into the passenger, and then they were peeled out of the carpool, tires squealing on pavement.

They roared down the street, streaking past their friends, who didn’t even notice them. Raven felt as though her troubles were minimized as they drove away, perhaps like they solely existed in that group of people shrinking to the size of ants the farther they drove, until they hit a corner and they disappeared behind buildings.

The wind was rushing through their hair and it felt marvelous, so freeing and exhilarating that a smile grew on Raven’s face, followed by laughter that bubbled up her throat and out her lips before she could stop it. Bellamy glanced incredulously at her, saw the joy on her face, and a corner of his full lips tugged, curling upward, until suddenly they were both laughing heartily and watching the
town streak past their windows.

“I’m surprised you don’t hate cars,” said Bellamy after a time. They were still chuckling, and the wind was still caressing their faces, so it was hard to stiffen and put her back up at his words; he clearly anticipated that or he would never have said anything in the first place.

Raven lifted a shoulder and let it fall. “It wasn’t a car that killed my dad and fucked up my leg. It was my mum.”

Bellamy nodded. They were sobering now, faces falling back into somber lines.

Raven gave another effort at remaining in the jubilant mood; she grinned at Bellamy. “Do you remember?”

“Remember what?”

“The club we’re both in. You, me, and O.”

Bellamy snorted, an amused glint returning to his dark eyes. “The Shitty Mothers Club. I remember. You were an asshole.”

Raven snorted. “Please. I got you your first and only Outstanding in Potions.”

“I didn’t need it. I might have scraped by, gotten an A.”

“Bellamy, please. You are the worst Potions-maker I’ve ever met. You’re even worse than Jasper, and all he does is blow shit up.”

Bellamy leveled a flat glance at her out of the corners of his eyes. “You do know Jas is actually not bad in Potions, right?”

Raven rolled her eyes. “He could be good, yeah, but that’s counteracted by his idiotic decisions to try to mix and invent his own shit.”

Bellamy shrugged. “He’s better than me.”

“Anyone is better than you. Muggles could mix a better potion than you.”

“You’re obnoxious. If I were a better potions-maker, I would make a Forgetfulness Potion that actually works so you could forget about how terrible I am at it in the first place. Or maybe we could both take it to forget the fact that we’re in this club to begin with.”

Raven’s smirk widened at his words as she remembered that day seven years ago, remembered it so clearly it could have been yesterday.

“That is the worst Forgetfulness Potion I’ve ever seen,” sneered Raven.

The boy lifted his head to glare at her, a mop of dark curls falling over his sweaty brow. “Fuck off.”

Raven raised a brow. They were in their first year. She was usually the only eleven year old who dare used language so foul. It wasn’t about to make her respect someone so abysmal at simple Potions, though.
“Seriously, are you even trying to make the solution? Or are you making a half-assed last
ditch effort to create some shampoo that actually tames that mess?”

The boy’s scowl deepened. “Sort your own shit out first. Do you even own a mirror?”

Raven glanced down at her failure of a tied tie and her stained shirt. She shrugged. “So I
have a shitty mum that never taught me how to dress myself. What’s your excuse? Your mummy has
to comb your hair for you?

“I don’t have a mum,” said the boy harshly. “She died, almost four years ago. Overdose. So
no, she never combed my hair.”

Raven paused.

I wish mine would have died, she thought, and immediately hated herself for it.

The boy just glared at her as she stared at him. Finally, Raven sat down in the stool next to
him and wordlessly grabbed his cauldron. It scraped against the table as she pulled it to her. She
peered down into it and coughed when the noxious fumes scorched her nostrils. She blearily blinked
at the boy, who was trying and failing to continue glaring at her. The corners of his lips were
grudgingly curling upward.

“God, this is horrible. What’s your name, anyway? Besides world’s shittest potion-maker,”
muttered Raven as she picked up the small knife and set to work on cutting another Valerian root
into two little sprigs.

The boy just glared at her again. “Who’re you, besides obnoxious?”

Raven snorted. “Weak. I’m Raven Reyes. The girl who’ll be top of the class for the next
seven years and will probably whip your ass in Quidditch too. Now do you have a name, or did this
Forgetfulness Potion taste better than it smells?”

The boy rolled his eyes, but he assented. “Bellamy Blake. Gryffindor.”

“Yeah, I gathered that by the red and gold tie, thanks. Ravenclaw. I’m not an idiot.”

“Could have fooled me.”

“Do you want help with this pathetic excuse for a potion or not? Because I’m perfectly fine
with Gryffindor getting totally humiliated by you during the first week of lessons.”

“Whatever.”

“You’re welcome.”

Bellamy’s dark eyes narrowed. “Why are you helping me, anyway?”

Raven didn’t answer for a while, pretending to be quite focused on crushing the mistletoe
berries into a fine powder before sprinkling a couple pinches into the concoction. As she carefully
counted her stirs, she mumbled, “Consider it a welcome to the club. The shitty mothers club.”

And Bellamy understood. They still hated each other, but they at least understood.

“Is Anya in it?”
Raven jerked out of her reverie, blinking at him. “What?”

“Any. Is she a member of the club too?”

“Oh. No.” The mention of Anya put a bitter taste in Raven’s mouth. “Both her parents were great. They were pureblood, but blood traitors, I guess. They were always lobbying against the Pro-Blood-Exclusion Act. They died when she was thirteen.”

“Oh.” Bellamy’s mouth flattened into a thin, grim line. “That’s…that’s rough.”

“Yeah. Her grandmother raised her, but she died too, a couple years ago.”

Bellamy’s throat bobbed as he swallowed and they drove in silence for a few more minutes until he finally asked the question he was clearly dying to ask. “Do you…know anything about Lincoln?” When Raven just looked at him, expression a mixture of amusement and exasperation, he shrugged. “It felt awkward asking O.”

“It felt awkward asking your sister about the guy she’s madly in love with?”

“Yeah. So do you know anything about him or not?”

Raven reclined her head back against the headrest. “Are you kidding? I think I know more about him than I do myself. O never shuts up about him.” Bellamy’s lips tugged up again. “Like literally. I know that his wand is English Oak, unicorn hair, and sturdy. His amortentia potion smells like some specific type of flower that he apparently claims O smells just like. His patronus takes the shape of a Newfoundland dog. He’s a total carnivore and can eat his own weight in pineapple ham.”

Bellamy was smiling now, but he still said, “Dig a little deeper, Rae.”

Raven sighed. “Both his parents were halfblood, but his mum was raised by muggles. I guess his dad wasn’t the nicest? He used to get pissy about Lincoln doing any, like, ’muggle activities,’ ” Raven crooked her fingers for emphasis, “So they’re not on the best of terms, but he’s really close to his mum. They write letters every week. He told her about O and she really wants to meet her. O looked like she was going to die when she told me. In a good way. I mean, she’s shitting herself, but she loves it. She loves him.” Raven glanced at Bellamy, falling serious. “I think they’re going to last. I think he’s it for her, Bell.”

Bellamy nodded, a muscle in his jaw clenching and his fingers flexing to grip the steering wheel more tightly. Raven recognized it as nerves at hearing this news, rather than anything negative.

“What about Lexa?” he said, voice a bit rougher.

Raven was a bit amused at his newfound interest in Durmstrang, but she let it slide. “I don’t know much. She’s a private person. Clarke and Anya respect that, so they don’t spill too much about her. You know she’s a muggleborn, and I guess her parents were assholes. So she’s in the club, too. And…” Raven hesitated, mouth dry now, because she’d always loved Abby. Abby had been like a mother to her. To all of them. “I guess Clarke kinda is too, after what Mama G did to her.”

Bellamy frowned. “What did Abby do?”

Raven had already filled the group in on everything, but she hadn’t specified that it had been Abby that wiped Clarke’s memories. So Raven explained. When she finished, Bellamy had visibly paled. “That’s insane.”
"I know. I don’t know what the fuck’s going on, but it’s bigger than all of us. Which pisses me off even more. I don’t like feeling like a pawn piece."

"Me either." A muscle in his jaw jumped and he clenched the steering wheel tightly again.

They drove in silence for a couple more minutes, until there was a loud bang and the car shuddered. Smoke billowed out from the engine. Raven’s mood sank again, as did Bellamy’s. They both sighed. He pulled the car to the side and parked.

"Great."

Bellamy twisted around in his seat to squint at the rear window. “We’re pretty close to the hotel we stayed at last night. I’m going to try to make it there, then maybe we can work on it.”

Raven nodded, spirits lifting slightly at the thought of tinkering around with machinery again. “Sounds good.”

Bellamy started the car and went to turn round, but before he could, there was another noise. Raven frowned at him, because she was pretty sure she’d just heard Octavia’s voice coming from Bellamy’s pockets, calling his name.

Bellamy’s eyes widened a split second before panic overtook his features; he frantically patted down his pockets before pulling out a small bag that was shaking violently. It was clearly magically extended because a second later after he opened it he was pulling out a mirror that was much too large for the bag. For a moment, Raven watched him stare into his own reflection, frowning. Then there was a flash of light, and Octavia was staring back at him.

* * *

It had been over an hour, and they hadn’t returned.

Clarke and her friends were still lounging outside of the McDonalds, a few of them clutching milkshakes courtesy of the handful of notes Bellamy had given them days ago in the case of emergencies. Clarke kind of thought that every living moment of the past two weeks had been an emergency. Their current lack of direction certainly was one, anyway, and that warranted chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla shakes.

It had been too long, though. They were restless.

“What are we waiting on?” yawned Miller, scrubbing at his face in an effort to wake himself up.

“Whatever Raven and Bellamy are doing. It would be helpful if they told us,” said Fox crossly. “How are we supposed to know they’re safe? How do we get ahold of them?”

“I have a two-way mirror,” said Octavia helpfully. She pulled a small bag from her cloak pocket. For as long as Clarke had known her, Octavia had always carried that bag around, but as far as her knowledge went she’d never seen her pull more than a spare quill out of it. Now she watched as she reached into it, so deeply it went straight up to her armpit. She seemed to be feeling around inside it for a moment before she found what she was looking for and pulled out a square mirror. It was small, no bigger than the size of her head, but much larger than the bag.
Clarke frowned, because she knew she’d seen Octavia with that bag since her first year, and Octavia had been raised as a muggle.

“O, how did you get ahold of that bag?”

“Kane,” answered Octavia, smiling as she lifted the mirror and peered intently into it. “He gave the mirrors to us too. One to each of us when Bellamy left for Hogwarts since Bell was worried about me, and this way we could talk…Bellamy,” she added clearly when the mirror flashed, as though turning on. “Bell, Bellamy.”

It took a minute, but then the mirror flashed again as Bellamy’s frantic face came into view. “O? O, are you okay? Are you under attack? What’s—“

“I’m fine, I’m fine, we just needed a way to get ahold of you.”

“You know this is only for emergencies!” he said angrily. “You freaked me out, I thought something happened—“

“You and Raven disappeared,” said Octavia, expression as exasperated as her tone. “Neither of you told us where you were going, so of course we were going to worry! What are you doing?”

Bellamy gave a sigh that came across as more of a frustrated huff of breath. “We’re about two minutes away from the hotel we were at last night. Meet us there.”

The mirror flashed again, and then it was only Octavia’s reflection frowning back at her.

“They’ve been at the hotel?” said Wells as Octavia packed her mirror away.

Jasper leaned forward, an air of both scandalized excitement and trepidation around him. “Do you think they…?”

Octavia looked up just as she clasped her back and tucked it back into her pocket to say flatly, “Bellamy just lost Gina, and Raven is with Anya.”

Jasper looked uncomfortable. “Yeah, but…it’s not exactly a secret that they have chemistry, and Raven is pissed at Anya and Bellamy is grieving—“

“Exactly,” said Octavia sharply. “Doesn’t matter how pissed off Raven is, she would never do that to Anya, and Bell wouldn’t do that to Anya or tarnish Gina’s memory either, and Raven wouldn’t let things change with Bellamy when he’s vulnerable anyway, and visa versa. They would never do that.”

There was a note in her voice that told Jasper to drop it, so he did.

In the parking lot of the hotel, they were met with Bellamy lounging in the front of a black car, Raven half-obscured by the open top of it. Clarke knew next to nothing about muggle vehicles, but she was pretty sure the top of a car was not supposed to be pulled open to expose all the confusing inner mechanisms that made it run.

“Um,” she began uncertainly as they all reached them. “What’s going on?”

“Trying to get this heap of junk working,” grumbled Raven. Clarke was displeased to see her mood had clearly not improved since morning. Nor had Bellamy’s, if his expression and silence was anything to go by.
“Where did you get it?” asked Octavia. Fox and the rest of their friends seemed speechless as they stared at it, except Jasper, who looked far too enthusiastic than the occasion warranted.

“Took it from the back of a pub.”

Clarke’s eyes widened. “You stole a car?”

Raven jerked a shoulder, expression stonier than ever as she ducked under the hood again, clanking sounding as she twitched her wand. “Yeah. So?”

Clarke deflated. Fox and Wells were still gaping in her peripheral vision, but Clarke exchanged a look of resignation with Octavia. Raven was Raven, and things were crazy enough that a stolen car was the least of their worries at the moment. She decided to move on.

“Did you extend it so we could all fit?”

“Of course she did,” said Bellamy gruffly from the driver’s seat. He was the only one of them who had a muggle license. “And changed the make, the color, and the license number so we don’t get the police hounding us.”

Raven slammed the hood shut and shoved her wand into her pocket. She spared a glower at them all before stomping over to the passenger seat and getting in without a word, leaving the rest of the group awkwardly standing in silence.

“Well, today’s been cheerful,” chirped Octavia with faux brightness as she clapped her hands together and inclined her head toward the car. “Pile in, people.”

The magically extended car was lush and comfortable; Octavia said it was like a limo, apparently the most lavish of muggle cars.

With milkshakes in hand, a comfortable car, and a leisurely drive, everyone’s mood seemed to skyrocket. For the first time in days (sober, anyway), people were cracking jokes, laughing, even seemed to be relaxing. Even Raven seemed more cheerful. At one point she climbed from the front seat into the back and lounged across Clarke and Octavia’s laps, and it was the first time in those two weeks that her face was devoid of scowl lines between her brows.

“We should go do something,” said Raven, actually grinning by now.

“Like what?” asked Clarke, absently brushing her fingers through Raven’s hair.

“I dunno. Go to the movie theater.”

“We could go to the mall,” said Octavia brightly.

Raven gasped, starting to sit up but doing it too quickly, so Clarke’s hand snagged in her hair and she flinched back, wincing as Clarke untangled her fingers. “Yeah!” she enthused once finally free. She popped back up at the front, slapping her hand on Bellamy’s seat. “Oi, chauffer, I have a destination in mind.”

“Where?” said Bellamy testily.

“You know where Westfield is?”

He scoffed but turned right at the next stop.

All too soon, they were inside a shopping mall, surrounded by far too many muggle
shoppers, and Clarke was one hundred percent certain she didn’t trust Jasper’s attempt at reassuring her by saying they were just going to go in, buy new clothes, and leave. They all split up, and with the amount of people here, it made Clarke uneasy. She ended up visiting shops with Raven, Octavia, and Fox, where they bought new clothes considering they’d been wearing and washing the same bunch repeatedly for two weeks. Of course, then Octavia and Raven spotted something called a photo booth, which Clarke and Fox very astutely gathered was a booth where you took the unmoving muggle photographs, and Clarke knew it was just another distraction on their list.

“Come on, Clarke, it’s a photo booth!”

She deadpanned them. “I can see that. But do you really think this is the time?” She glanced around. “We’re supposed to grab what we need and leave. We shouldn’t linger anywhere.”

“It’ll take two seconds, Clarke,” pleaded Octavia, giving Clarke her best puppy-dog pout. “Please?”

So Clarke found herself squished between Raven and Octavia, with an unwilling Fox half-lying over all of their laps.

“You can’t look like Grumpy Cat in every picture,” exclaimed Raven, pointing at the recent picture they took in which Clarke just stared sourly at the camera with Raven and Octavia pulling funny faces with tongues lolling out, and even Fox was starting to smile. Clarke wasn’t sure what the hell a grumpy cat was, but she was certain it wasn’t a compliment. “It won’t kill you to smile. With all the shit going on, we have to find the fun in life.”

Clarke sighed, but she plastered a smile on her face for the next picture. It didn’t quite meet her eyes, but it was good enough. She ignored Raven and Octavia’s half-hearted mutinous muttering as she climbed out of the booth, leaving the other three to continue. After a moment, Octavia followed.

“Hey,” she said, coming to stand beside her. They were standing before the fountain. Shimmering coins could be seen at the bottom of the small stone pool. Octavia put a hand on Clarke’s shoulder. “Just because there’s all kinds of crazy shit going on around us doesn’t mean you can’t have fun. You can still be you.”

“I am me! And I’m still fun.” When Octavia was silent for a beat too long, Clarke insisted, “I’m fun. I can be fun.”

“I know you can. You are. I know you’re just really…you know, fucked up from all this. We all are. But that’s why we have each other, right?”

Clarke’s stiff posture began to relax, gradually, when Octavia wrapped an arm around her and rested her head on her shoulder. They stood in silence broken only by the muffled sounds of Raven and Fox giggling from the photo booth. She could only imagine Anya’s scathing comments if she were here watching Raven goof around. She felt a swoop in her stomach as she imagined being curled up with Lexa inside the small space, pressing smiles to blushing cheeks.

“I miss them too,” whispered Octavia.

Clarke didn’t answer. She didn’t think she could. If she stopped to think, to reminisce, to grieve, she wasn’t sure she’d be able to cope and she didn’t want the distraction. They were being hunted by the Ice Queen and her army of Death Eaters, werewolves, and who knew what else. Clarke had to stay focused to keep her friends safe. She’d already lost too many. Right now, grieving was a luxury they couldn’t afford.
“Do you want a sickle?” said Octavia kindly, fishing a coin out of her pocket and extending it to Clarke. Clarke stared at it for a moment before sighing. She took it and blinked down at it, wondering why she felt like the fate of her own sanity rested in this little gleaming coin, and why it was so heavy in her palm. Then she sniffed and shifted it to her right hand so she could shake her wand down the sleeve of her left arm, subtly moving her hand over the coin. Her nonverbal spell Transfigured the coin into muggle money. It was fake, but at least now it fit in with the rest. Clarke tossed it. It landed with a small splash in the water, sinking to rest at the bottom.

She and Octavia turned when they heard the sound of the curtain being pulled back and photos being printed. Fox climbed out first, slightly pink in the face with a smile so big it brought out her dimples, and Raven came a moment later, still chuckling, taking care to lift her brace high to sidestep the bench in the booth.

“Let’s see how we did.” She ripped the photos free and brought them closer to her face to critically appraise them, and immediately started guffawing. “Fox, your face is ridiculous here! And Clarke, you look like someone just spat in your pumpkin juice…”

“And I am perfect as usual,” announced Octavia, pointing proudly at the photos. Clarke barely glanced them all over; Octavia was indeed very photogenic. Raven was pulling the dorkiest of faces, Fox looked initially uncomfortable but then beyond happy, though sometimes it was at the same time, such as in a photo where Raven was squishing a kiss to her cheek and Fox was wide-eyed and blushing. Clarke was scowling in them all except for the one with the fake smile.

“Hey, I’m a muggleborn in a halfblood sandwich,” chortled Raven, pointing at the picture where she’d thrown her arms around Clarke and Octavia and brought them in close enough that all their cheeks were smashed together.

“Are you guys about done?” called a gruff voice. Clarke turned with relief to see Bellamy striding toward them, Wells in tow, both of them with hands full of various shopping bags.

“We’re ready to go,” said Clarke, grabbing her own bag of new clothes.

Raven was frowning at all the bags. “How did you afford all that?”

“Confunded the merchants to think I gave them more money than I did.”

“Oh.” Raven grinned. “For a minute I thought you were way richer than you’d let on. I was about to suggest we—”

“Can we go now?” said Clarke impatiently. Raven’s brow knitted as she shot Clarke a scowl, but she and the others picked up their own bags so they could all follow Bellamy across the mall, toward the escalators.

They walked in tense silence, but Clarke hardly felt guilty. She felt uneasy, on edge. She didn’t like being in a place this large, split up from other friends, surrounded by strangers. She knew, logically, there was no reason there would be Death Eaters here, in a crowded muggle mall, but something about it all made her anxious. She was beyond ready to leave.

“Where are the others?”

“Last time I saw Miller, he was looking at shoes,” said Bellamy. “Monty was with him.”

“Jasper and Maya were in the candy shop,” supplied Wells; Clarke rolled her eyes. Of course that’s where Jasper was.
She leaned an elbow against the handrail as the escalator took them up, twisting around to watch the first floor grow smaller, the crowd shrinking in size—and then her heart dropped, her stomach lurching, as she saw it.

“Wait—“

Her friends turned at the word that left strangled from her, following her line of vision and frowning.

“What?” said Bellamy.

“What is it, Clarke?” said Wells.

She didn’t answer, looking too intently at the place where—she had been sure—she’d seen a person garbed in a black cloak, hood up, weaving their way around people before disappearing in the crowd.

“I thought I…I thought I saw…”

“There’s not going to be any Death Eaters here, Clarke,” said Bellamy, sounding slightly annoyed as he turned to face the floor they were approaching. “We’re fine.”

Clarke thought she heard Octavia sympathetically whispering something about “seeing things” and “PTSD.” Clarke ignored her, determinedly shifting her gaze around the crowd, but she could see nothing… had it been a trick of the light? Was she so stressed and anxious that she’d seen what she wanted to see?

She reminded herself again that, logically, it made no sense for there to be Death Eaters here. Still, shaken, she surveyed the floor below until the escalator brought them up and she was forced to turn to join her friends traipsing toward nearby candy shop where they could already see Jasper, a dopey smile on his face as he and Maya fed each other blueberry bonbons from the boxes they’d just purchased.

Raven gagged loudly and Jasper immediately blushed, dropping a bonbon. It bounced and rolled under the shelf.

“Hey guys!” he said, voice a little strained with embarrassment. “Where’s Mon?”

“He and Miller are shoe-shopping,” said Octavia. She looked disapprovingly at Jasper’s empty hands. “Have you even bought any clothes yet?”

“Oh, uh, no, not yet. Maya has done, though.”

Maya smiled slightly, offering her bag of River Island clothes. Octavia leaned forward to explore Maya’s purchases, and her taking that half step forward was what afforded Clarke the miracle. There was a Death Eater across floor, standing at the top of the escalator, pointing his wand straight at them. Clarke reacted instinctively, never mind the fact that preforming magic in a place so compacted with muggles was beyond a breach of security.

“Protego!”

The Death Eater’s spell hit the shield and rebounded around the shop in an explosion of chaos. Jars of candy burst, glass shattered, and countless brightly colored sweets flew through the air. Clarke seized the people nearest her, Octavia and Maya, dragging them to the floor with fistfuls of their shirts. Everyone scattered, ducking behind the countertops and shelves. Muggles were
screaming. The candy that had hit the ceiling was now pelting them as it fell.

Raven was still on her feet in the middle of the store, exposed and directly before the 
archway entrance of the store. She had one arm up protecting her head from the glass and candy 
raining down, the other pulling her wand out of her pocket. The Death Eater was brandishing his 
own for another spell after the last one shattered one of the glass windows at the front of the store.

“Expelliarmus!” said Clarke desperately; the Death Eater deflected it and the streak of red 
shot at him by Octavia and pointed his wand at Raven again.

“Avada—“

“Stupefy!” roared Bellamy at the same time that Fox said, “Petrificus Totalus!”

The spells hit the Death Eater from both sides and blasted him back over the escalator and 
down out of sight.

“Holy shit,” choked Fox, prompting incredulous looks from everyone. Fox noticed. 
“Seriously?” she snapped. “A Death Eater just attacked us! How did he know where to find us?”

“I knew I saw him,” said Clarke, panting as she planted an arm on the counter to pull herself 
to her feet while also clutching her wand and Maya. Maya slipped on the bonbons and fell again.

“We have to leave, if they didn’t know we were here before, they do now,” said Maya as 
Clarke helped her up again.

The candy shop was in ruins and the employee who had been working at the register was 
nowhere to be found. Clarke’s heart sank when they hurried out of the shop and passed an old 
muggle man lying motionless on the floor, eyes open and unseeing. One of the Death Eater’s curses 
must have rebounded and hit him…

There wasn’t time to reflect, though, because there were two things immediate to their 
attention. The first were that not all the muggles were screaming and running away. Some were 
backing away, but with their phones out and pointed at the shop. The second was that there was a 
bone-chilling cold that was settling into the mall...Clarke watched in horror as the glass on the nearby 
stores began to freeze over, as the muggles began slowly lowering their phones, expressions of blank 
terror on their faces as the despair sank into them.

“Shadow-Eaters!” screeched Maya, pointing. Clarke spun around to see a cluster of them, 
about five or so, silently gliding toward them.

The cold air seemed to solidify Clarke’s brain. She froze in place, mind whirring—there were 
muggles everywhere. What did they do?

“Run. Run!” she urged, and they all pelted toward the opposite direction of the Shadow-
Eaters, flooding onto the escalators again.

They hopped down the steps two at a time, until there was a scuffle, a thud, and then an ear-
splitting shriek. Fox had fallen and her hair was trapped in the steps, slowly pulling her head closer. 
Horrified at these apparent muggle death traps, Clarke moved forward to help, but Maya reached her 
first. The severing charm left Fox’s hair choppy and uneven, half of it as short as her chin. She was 
still blinking and gaping in shock as those nearest to her, Maya and Jasper, hauled her up to her feet 
as the escalator reached ground floor, and they all took off.

It wasn’t enough to run. Clarke should have anticipated that. The Shadow-Eaters merely flew
down after them. Clarke’s friends scattered, even while she cried out that they needed to stay together. The Shadow-Eaters split too, giving chase. Clarke was still lifting her wand by the time one swooped down on her. She knew she had only one shot at this, one shot before they neutralized their magic.

“Expecto Patronum!”

The lion bounded forth, one massive paw swiping at the Shadow-Eater. Someone was screaming—Octavia. A Shadow-Eater was bearing down on her. Bellamy was beside her, yelling, brandishing a useless wand, but the Shadow-Eater was gripping Octavia’s face, tilting her chin up as though to kiss her, and something blindingly bright was lifting out of her mouth. In a blind panic, Clarke swung her wand around at them and, miraculously, her patronus followed, turning and streaking across the mall, slamming into the Shadow-Eater. It dropped Octavia (she crumpled to the floor) and careened away.

“O!”

Panting, Clarke pointed her wand at her throat and muttered, “Sonerus,” before saying in a loud voice that reverberated around the mall, “THE FOUNTAIN. MEET AT THE FOUNTAIN.”

She helped Bellamy drag Octavia to the fountain, and they both sighed in relief when she stirred, her lashes fluttering as she regained consciousness.

“Are you okay?” demanded Bellamy.

“I…yeah. I feel weird,” mumbled Octavia, but she pushed herself into a sitting position and looked up to see their other friends approaching them.

Clarke’s heart lodged into her throat when she saw that Wells and Maya were unconscious too, being dragged by the combined efforts of Jasper, Fox, and Raven.

“Rennervate.” The flashes of red light faded, and Maya and Wells stirred too, looking scared and confused as their eyes flew open. Clarke, trembling with relief and shock from what happened, pushed to her feet. The Shadow-Eaters were gone, but they had another problem.

There were half a dozen Death Eaters sprinting at them, wands drawn. The one at the front of the group hurled a spell at them that Clarke diverted; it exploded in the ceiling with a shower of red sparks that sent any lingering muggles retreating in a massive throng of shrieks.

Wells, Maya, and Octavia were tugged up and then Clarke and her friends were running too, mixing into the crowd of muggles, ducking under swinging arms and desperately trying to maintain grips on one another.

Monty and Miller were still missing, buying shoes somewhere. This mall was too big, there were too many people, Clarke had no idea how they were going to find them and escape before more Death Eaters arrived, before Ontari arrived, before the Ice Queen herself suddenly showed…

“GUYS! GUYS, OVER HERE!”

Miller and Monty were bellowing at them and somehow, over the screams and stampeding of feet, Clarke heard them well enough to look their direction, and there they were, waving madly at them.

“Hurry, hurry—“
There was no time. She brandished her wand as she ran and shoved her way through the crowd. Muggles ran into the shield and fell, piling together in a heap of tangled limbs, and Clarke and the others ran alongside it like a tunnel, sprinting toward Monty and Miller, adrenaline setting her veins on fire.

They all collided together and Clarke frantically looked around to make sure everyone was here; her heart lodged in her throat as she realized Raven was not. Her leg. She couldn’t run like they could.

“Raven!”

She was limping toward them, blindly firing off spells behind her that hit muggles and Death Eaters alike, but the muggles were what was saving her, because the Death Eaters were struggling to weave through them even while blasting them back as though they were insignificant, like sharks plowing through schools of fish…

Raven lunged, her fingertips curling against Clarke’s arm, and that was enough.

Bellamy turned first, pulling them all forward into nothingness, the loud popping noise lost amidst the screams.

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“That’s it,” said Fox shakily. “That’s the last time we’re out in public. We need to stay hidden.”

Clarke, who was still lying flat on soft ground, panting and in shock, nodded in agreement. She took Monty’s offered hand and he pulled her to her feet. They were in a wide, open field, trees in the distance and a road that extended far to the horizon. It was quiet and still. The sun was setting.

“Where are we?” asked Clarke.

“Just outside Leeds,” said Bellamy, helping Octavia, who looked dazed and disoriented, to her feet. “O and I came here when we were kids. They used to have the circus here. I don’t know why this is the first place that popped in my head.”

“Well, I’m glad it did,” said Clarke gratefully, brushing the dirt off her grass-stained jeans and sweater. She wasn’t sure what was soothing about their surroundings, except it was warm in the sunlight, and there was a slight breeze that rippled through the grass, and the ground and the surrounding trees were a pleasant shade of green that seemed so familiar—

“Clarke,” said Raven sharply. Clarke jolted guiltily; tearing herself away from the direction her thoughts certainly didn’t need to be going. Raven, who was kneeling beside a befuddled Maya, nodded toward Wells, who was struggling to get to his feet on his own.

Clarke quickly moved to him and hooked an arm around his waist, helping steady him. He shook his head like a dog shaking off water. “Are you okay?” said Clarke lowly.

“Yeah,” said Wells, though he was frowning.
“What’s wrong?”

“Shadow-Eater nearly got me. I just—I feel weird.”

“How so?” pressed Clarke.


“We should set up protective spells,” said Fox, glancing around, clearly uncomfortable at how exposed they were in an open field even despite all the distant trees surrounding them. She was clutching her own arms, hugging herself. Her choppy hair was plastered to her pale, sweaty face. “How did they find us?”

No one spoke. No one had any answers.

“Where are we going to sleep?” said Monty.

“There’s a nearby town,” said Bellamy. “Small, but there’s a hotel there. And a pub where we can get some food.”

“We just said we’re not going out in public! We need to stay hidden!” said Fox shrilly.

“We have to eat,” said Raven sharply.

All keeping a close eye on Octavia, Wells, and Maya, they trudged out of the grassy area and down the long stretch of road, walking the near mile to the town close by. They headed straight for the pub, less because they had an appetite and more so to keep themselves busy. Clarke’s head was buzzing: how did the Death Eaters find them? There were so many places they could be, so how did they know they were in that random mall?

They ordered their food and ate in silence, each of them worried and shaken from the encounter. The fries Clarke ordered had no taste. She wondered if Lexa would know how the Death Eaters found them. At least it had only been Death Eaters and not Ontari. Clarke suppressed a shudder at the thought.

Halfway through their meal, the barkeeper changed the channel on the television from football to the news, and that was when Clarke and all her friends went absolutely still.

There was a news reporter reporting live from the same mall they had been at only half an hour ago. Half the mall had been blown up and destroyed from the dueling, there were dead muggles, and there was footage emerging of several teenagers…blurry images taken of a blonde girl running down the escalator…unfocused pictures of all her friends, fleeing…

There was nothing indicating witchcraft. The photos were of their backs, and too blurry to see properly, so there were no glimpses of wands to be had. There were muggles reporting loud bangs, citing it as gunfire, but other muggles argued with them, claiming that if it had been a gas leak, the whole place would have blown up.

But still. Clarke gazed up the television, transfixed in horror, as sketches of them were shown. Realistic ones. Of all of them.

And now other customers were starting to glance at them. There was muttering.

“We have to go. Now.”
Clarke didn’t have to say it twice. Bellamy threw down notes and they moved out of the pub post-haste.

“I told you we should stay out of public!” said Fox the moment they met the cool night air.

“What are we going to do? We can’t stay in a hotel now,” said Octavia. She had more color in her cheeks now after eating, but she still looked weak; so did Wells and Maya.

They lapsed into silence. Clarke’s heart was still pounding with panic in her chest. Now they had to avoid the wizarding world and the muggle world? Where were they supposed to go?

“I have an idea,” said Bellamy. “A couple of you, follow me.”

Miller, Monty, and Wells went with him as he started forward across the street.

“Bellamy, wait! We shouldn’t split up!” called Clarke, but they’d already rounded the corner and disappeared from view behind the buildings.

“Clarke, I’m seriously feeling weird,” said Octavia, shaking her head the same way Wells had earlier, as though trying to dispel vexing flies.

Clarke and Raven immediately moved forward, reaching out to their friend in concern. Clarke gripped Octavia’s face in her hands, held her chin between two fingers as she tilted her head this way and that. Her pupils were responding normally, she didn’t have a fever, and she appeared to be fine, albeit shaken and weak.

“That Shadow-Eater really did a number on you,” murmured Clarke, remembering the pulsating light that had lifted out of Octavia’s mouth before the Shadow-Eater was forced back. “I don’t know, O. Maybe you’re just weak after nearly losing your soul.”

Octavia audibly gulped, her throat moving against the side of Clarke’s hand. Clarke could see the flicker of fear in her green eyes.

“Wait a minute!” said Raven suddenly. She reached into her pockets and pulled out a fistful of Honeyduke’s chocolate bars. “I forgot I had these! I took them from your table at the Hospital Wing, Clarke. They’re a bit melted, but here.”

Clarke stared at her as she ripped one open with her teeth and offered Octavia a huge chunk. “Why have you been carrying that around for two weeks?”

“Well, it was in my robes, and when I transfigured them into muggle clothing, I just left them there. I didn’t bring a bag, so I just put them back in my pockets every day.”

“Why didn’t you eat them?”

Raven shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Shaking her head at Raven, Clarke watched in amusement as Octavia happily munched away. The color was already returning to her cheeks, and she was standing up straighter.

“Here, Maya, you too,” said Raven, handing her a piece, which she took gratefully.

It was almost fifteen minutes later when Bellamy, Monty, Miller, and Wells returned. There were large sacks laden in their arms; Clarke stepped forward to relieve Wells of his because he still looked bad, directing him to Raven, who forced him to practically inhale the last chocolate bar.
“What is all this?” asked Clarke.

“You’ll see.”

They followed Bellamy, who led them a ways outside of town before turning back to face them. “So, I bought tents.”

“We’re going camping?” said Jasper brightly.

Everyone (save for Maya, who rolled her eyes and smiled slightly) glanced flatly at him, pointedly ignoring remark.

“I’m going to apparate us somewhere else,” explained Bellamy, extending a hand. Everyone else did too, one by one, except for Fox, who still stood there looking entirely unimpressed with her arms crossed beneath her chest. “I don’t want to worry about all ten of us using our magic to create disguises. It’s not safe in the muggle world for us right now, and it’s not safe for us to go back to the wizarding world just yet, so we’re going to have to rough it for a while,” said Bellamy firmly. Fox sighed, and Bellamy narrowed his eyes. “Problem?”

“I’m just so done with everything,” said Fox wearily, but she extended an arm and placed her hand on the pile.

They twisted into the darkness.

They arrived at the edge of woods and began to set up the tents, which was when they all came upon a horrible realization.

Wells, Octavia, and Maya had all lost their magic.

It hadn’t taken long to figure it out. Initially, they thought it was a fluke, when Wells was moving his wand but the tents weren’t rising into the air to reassemble themselves. Even when Maya tried, they figured maybe it was just residual nerves from the close call. But then Octavia went through a multitude of spells, and when nothing happened, Clarke realized what that pulsating light that had left her body must have been. Her magic, leaving her. No, not leaving—being stolen.

It was extra difficult that night, full of fear and, for some, tears. The next day, however, the three of them were moving on, stating they could either let it terrify them, or move on from it. Clarke secretly thought it was perhaps a good thing that it had happened to those three people, because some of them (most specifically Fox, who had regrown her hair with a dazed, horrified expression on her face) would not know how to function without magic.

It certainly made them all more alert and wary, for none of them would easily forget the fact that three of their number could no longer magically defend themselves.

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They had been “roughing it” for only three days, and Clarke was ready to tear her hair out.

The morale of their group had diminished again. With friends having lost their ability to do magic perhaps permanently, empty bellies (their supply of money was quickly dwindling, so they were living off nothing but roasted hot dogs and sandwiches courtesy of Bellamy and his one
excursion into town despite their protesting), and aching backs thanks to sleeping on magically fluffed up pallets on the hard ground, anxiety and frustration were higher than ever.

They often talked over their campfire, running over their options again and again, yet again and again they could not come to a conclusion as to what to do. Half wanted to risk it and head back into the wizarding world, and the others wanted to stay safe and hidden. After much argument, they finally came to a compromise to venture out for food again and Jasper (who was oddly good at it) cast disguises on them all, temporarily changing hair length and color and facial structure, so they could sneak into town and eat. Even with newly red hair, Clarke still felt overexposed, but the allure of food was too great. Raven cast a strong Confundus charm so they could get away with not paying. Fox silently pointed a wand beneath the table so the dishes in the back of the restaurant would quickly wash themselves, which Clarke was grateful for. There were strong laws against taking advantage of muggles and it made her uncomfortable to do this, but it was easier to convince herself it was necessary when her stomach was growling so ravenously.

It was incredible, the difference in mood between being hungry and having full bellies. On their fourth day, after voraciously eating in town in disguises, gorging themselves on steak kababs, the mood at the campsite was almost light-hearted. Raven, who had *accio*’d and stolen a bag of marshmallows from a woman’s shopping cart in a parking lot, was magically hovering them above the fire and sharing them with the group. Clarke was absentmindedly staring at her wand again, wishing she could be petty and throw it in the fire and her mother could watch. She couldn’t help but to wonder what her mother was doing, what she thought about Clarke missing for the past three weeks. What was happening in the wizarding world period? Had the Ice Queen taken over Hogwarts or not? Were their other friends safe? What was happening at the Ministry with Jaha, Pike, and Diana Sydney? What was going on?

“Are you okay?” came a gentle voice, before the log shook as someone sat down beside her.

Clarke looked at Wells, who appeared tired and sad. While Octavia was determinedly optimistic and Maya was resignedly moving forward, Wells was handling his loss of magic a bit differently. He was still optimistic himself, and he hadn’t complained or lamented at all, but she could see the sadness in his eyes. Clarke had spent many a night staying up late with him, talking it through. They discussed his father, Clarke’s mother, the Ice Queen, and the whole situation, but it was as hopeless as it was with the others, too. They didn’t know what to do or what was happening and could do nothing more than continue to hide. It was beyond frustrating.

She shrugged. “Same old thing.”

His lips pressed together in a small smile. “Stay positive,” he said, holding her hand. Clarke didn’t say anything. What could she, when he was doing it so well himself even with the terror of being defenseless in times like this? “It’s all we can do. We just have to be patient for a little while longer.”

“How long?” she said hopelessly.

He squeezed her hand. “Hopefully not much longer.”

They were empty words. Clarke knew this. They were the same words they’d been saying for weeks now. Wells knew without talking; he pulled her into an embrace and she sighed, comforted by his familiar arms and familiar scent. Lexa may be the person she’d been most herself with, Raven and Octavia may be her best friends, but Wells was her oldest, practically her brother. Her heart swelled with love for him as she clung to his shoulders, hugging him tightly.

“I just don’t understand why this is happening,” she mumbled into his chest. “I don’t know
anything else. What does she even want with me?"

“You’re too important,” he said seriously. “There’s a reason the queen is after you, so I think
the most important thing is not giving her what she wants.”

Clarke bit her tongue as she withdrew. In all honesty, she wished she could just turn herself
in, perhaps give the queen a fight. She was certain she would never win, but it would be doing
*something*, right? Wells gave her a look that told her he knew exactly what she was thinking. “You
have to stay safe. If you stay safe, we stay safe.”

She sniffed, nodded. Wells gave her a lingering smile and squeeze before he stood up to grab
some extra marshmallows off Raven. Clarke looked back down at her wand, wondering what they
had all done to deserve this. To be forced into hiding like gutter rats from a maniac that killed
children.

“So, are you starting to go through orgasm withdrawal yet?”

Clarke looked up, startled, at Octavia, and scowled at her words. Octavia laughed as she
plopped herself down on the log beside Clarke.

“As pissed as I am at Anya, I can admit I miss the orgasms,” said Raven as she sat on
Clarke’s other side, hands sticky and coated in marshmallow. She licked at them as she added
casually, “Can’t act like you don’t miss the orgasms too, Blondie.”

Clarke rolled her eyes at the statement and the fact that Raven was clearly picking up on
Anya’s names for her, ignoring the squeezing of her heart at the thought of Lexa. It wasn’t just the
sex she missed. Not even close. “I think we have other things to worry about than orgasms.”

They sat in silence for a moment, Raven licking her fingers clean, Octavia staring at the fire,
and Clarke watching her wand slowly rotating.

“You know,” said Raven, “When you think about it, it’s kind of funny. This time last year,
all of us were single. Then Durmstrang shows up and, really, none of us were supposed to ‘fraternize
with the enemy,’ yet all three of us ended up in their beds. Something is wrong about this. We suck.”

“Four, technically,” said Octavia. “Five if you count Jasper.”

“God, that’s even more depressing.”

“Who’s the fourth?” asked Clarke.

“Murphy. He’s with Emori, isn’t he?”

“Don’t mention Murphy,” growled Bellamy from across the campsite, where he was sitting
by the fire.

“Why?” said Octavia in surprise.

Clarke explained what went down in the castle and watched as Octavia clenched her jaw,
growing angrier by the moment. She was still ranting about all the things she wanted to do to
Murphy if she saw him again by the time they all got around for bed, and Clarke knew she was
having trouble sleeping because of that anger, for it took a good hour for her breathing to finally even
out. There was silence save for Jasper’s distant snoring and the crackling of the campfire. The first
night they put it out, but Fox cast it again, and none of them complained. It gave a sense of comfort
and warmth.
Clarke lay still in her makeshift pallet, bundled up beneath the thin blanket Bellamy had stolen from Tesco. The tent she shared with Octavia, Raven, and Fox was only partially zipped closed, so she could glimpse the fire and the sparks and embers spiraling up into the starry sky. She listened to the sound of her friends’ breathing, slow and steady and gradually evening out. They all still had trouble sleeping, but Clarke seemed the worst at it. There was guilt gnawing at her for many things, but especially for her behavior lately. She felt like a grumpy stick in the mud, and knew her mothering must annoy her friends, but she was just so terrified of losing them, of making one wrong mistake that would end in someone getting hurt.

“Clarke?” said Fox groggily; in the dim light Clarke could see her blinking blearily at her. “I can hear you thinking. It’s loud. I’m trying to sleep.”

Clarke breathed out through her nose in a sound that may have been amusement, but sounded more tired than anything. “Sorry. I’m trying to sleep, it just…”

“Doesn’t come easy,” Fox finished for her. She yawned before sitting up and rubbing a hand over her face. She ran it through her messy auburn sleep-mussed hair after, then swung her legs over and lumbered to her feet, hunched to avoid her head hitting the low tent ceiling. She started shuffling out of the tent, but there was a grunt and a growl when she apparently stepped on Raven. “Ah. Sorry.”

“What the fuck are you doing?” rasped Raven.

“I need a wee,” whispered Fox apologetically.

“Hang on,” said Clarke. She slipped her wand out of her pocket. “Lumos.” Raven and Octavia gave sharp hisses, squinting and burrowing beneath their blankets to avoid the bright light.

“Thanks,” said Fox gratefully, carefully stepping over them to duck out of the tent flaps.

“Nox,” murmured Clarke, casting them in darkness once more. She blinked, eyes adjusting again to only the dim campfire light leaking in through the tent opening.

She finally grew drowsy, and was nearly on her way to slumber when a telltale shuffling of footsteps outside of the tent foretold Fox’s return. Clarke rolled over in bed, pulling her wand out to prepare to light her way back in. A voice sounded, a low intone, and then she froze. That was not Fox’s voice, and it didn’t sound like any of the others’ voices either.

Then, as things usually went for them, everything burst into chaos.

Clarke’s insides turned to ice as there were cries of stunning spells and flashes of light. There was shouting and screaming and Clarke, Raven, and Octavia all collided in their haste to scramble out of the tent.

“Wait a minute, you two stay here!” Raven shoved them both bodily into the tent before they could climb out, and they barely had gasped in breath to argue with her when she added in a hiss, “O, you have no magic, and Clarke, you’re most wanted, you can’t let them know you’re here or we’ll all be fucked. Stay put!”

“Round them up,” a Death Eater ordered, an odd note of jubilation in his deep voice. The Death Eaters were gleeful with their find.

Then there were more bodies tumbling into Clarke and Octavia’s tent; Raven, Fox, Jasper, and Maya.
“What happened?” whispered Clarke. She watched through the flap as the Death Eaters—at least a dozen, it looked like—explored across the campsite, poking their heads into the other tents. One was empty, since Jasper and Maya were out, but the other…

“Lookee here!” The Death Eaters pulled out a struggling Wells and thrashing Bellamy while, several feet away, more pulled out a magically bound Monty and Miller.

“Hey, wait—don’t kill him.” Clarke’s heart lifted, but then dropped at the man’s next words. “That’s the Minister’s son, that is! Bet we could get a hefty little ransom for him. Dead or alive.”

The Death Eaters chuckled, but they only bound Wells in thick ropes that wrapped around him, one gagging him. His eyes bulged and found Clarke’s; when she moved forward, starting to push through the tent flaps that kept her obscured, he shook his head violently. She hesitated, fearful that if she exposed herself it would make everything worse, but she couldn’t just do nothing while they took Wells. She lifted her wand.

“Clarke, no,” whispered Jasper urgently. He and Maya were staring at Clarke with wide eyes. “You can’t. We can’t fight them off. Maya doesn’t even have any magic.”

She couldn’t just not do anything while they took Wells. She couldn’t.

So she didn’t.

She plowed out of the tent, raising her wand; she hit two with stunning spells before they could so much as react to her presence, and dived behind a tree just in time, their counter spells blasting a crater into the trunk. She hurled spells around, but even when she hit one, two more arrived to take the place. There were too many, she realized with a sinking heart and rising terror. There were only seven of them that could use magic, Wells was captured and Monty and Miller currently were being bound…

Jasper, Maya, and Fox charged out to join Clarke and Raven. Spells were flying everywhere, the battle happening to fast to even register what was happening, to do anything other than operate on instinct, but then it stopped when a Death Eater hit a curse that soared right through Clarke’s shield charm.

Time seemed to slow down as the flash of green faded and Maya fell. Jasper caught her before she could hit the ground.

“No—no—Maya—“ He was already choking on sobs, eyes wide with shock and grief. His face was glittering with tears as he looked up, found Clarke. A sickening jolt of dread shuddered through her as she met his glare. “I told you we had to stay hidden,” he whispered through unmoving lips, before his voice grew to a shout. “She—she had no magic, she couldn’t even defend herself! I told you we had to stay hidden! This is your fault!”

The words raked through her. Her fault. It repeated numbly in her head as she spun, bringing up her wand arm to deflect a spell. Her shield was weak; the force of the spell pushed her back even when she planted her feet. Jasper was ripped away from Maya, ropes wrapping around him and pulling him back. Fox was hit with a spell that Clarke prayed was only Petrificus Totalus, but she couldn’t be sure since it had been non-verbal and blasted Fox back into the tent. Octavia, who could only fight with her fists now, was immediately stunned, and Clarke barely managed to revive her before they had to stumble apart to avoid the streak of red that cut between them. Their next spell shot ropes around Octavia and lifted her into the air, attempting to pull her over to either where Wells was bound on his knees alone, or Jasper, Monty, and Miller were tied up and slumped together. Octavia had only hovered a few feet forward when Raven threw her arms around her and yanked
her back, throwing a blasting curse at the Death Eater that hit far too close to Bellamy, sending him rolling forward, now only grappling with one Death Eater.

Clarke was running on adrenaline and panic. She knew they had to somehow grab one another to Apparate to freedom, assuming the Death Eaters had not cast the spells that disabled apparition, in which case they were just...absolutely fucked. She and Bellamy were trying to move around the fire, trying to reach one another, but it didn’t feel like enough. There was too much space between them all; they would never make it out together. It was separately...or not at all.

Bellamy seemed to have reached the same conclusion. “Get out of here!” he yelled, panicked dark eyes meeting Clarke’s stricken gaze. “Clarke, take them and go!” He shoved past the distracted Death Eater, hit the other with a stunning spell and lunged over the fire, sparks flying everywhere as he fell forward. He gave a strangled cry as the flames enveloped his legs, but reached for where Monty, Miller, and Jasper where tied up. As his hand closed over Monty’s forearm, he twisted, and with a loud pop, they all disappeared.

“WHICH ONE OF YOU FORGOT TO CAST THE—” bellowed a Death Eater, but he was effectively cut off, devolving into a strangled cry, when Wells, who managed to shake off the rope gagging him, sank his teeth into the man’s leg.

“Run, Clarke!” he shouted, and their eyes met for half a second, brown to blue. Ice flooded her veins.

“You’re too important. There’s a reason the queen is after you, so I think the most important thing is not giving her what she wants. You have to stay safe. If you stay safe, we all stay safe.”

“Grab O!” ordered Clarke, ducking to avoid the jet of red light shot at her; she threw back one of her own as she staggered and stumbled her way into the tent where Fox was still frozen and stiff. She quickly lifted the spell and grabbed her by the wrist, dragging her to her feet and forward. As they pushed out of the tent flaps, Clarke only narrowly managed to bring her wand up in time to deflect the blasting wind spell, sending back a stunning spell that miraculously landed.

Clutching hands, Clarke and Fox leapt over the three bodies scattered between them and Raven’s tent. Maya’s eyes were open and unseeing, reflecting the stars above. Clarke swallowed the urge to retch and instead cast a shield charm that didn’t expand in time. Her spine snapped straight, arms and legs gluing together, and she fell forward, not even able to squeeze her eyes shut in anticipation of face-planting the ground. She never did, because Fox lifted the spell and caught her. They both sent stunning spells back.

“Raven!” cried Clarke, blindly reaching forward; at the same time there was another loud popping noise. For one wild moment, Clarke thought Bellamy and the others had returned, and shock and anger seared through her at their stupidity, but then utter terror reared instead when she glanced over and met dark eyes wide with triumph. Ontari. Ontari was here.

It was only a second though, perhaps not even that, because then Raven’s sweaty hand grasped Clarke’s, and Fox was clutching Clarke’s arm and Raven was grasping Octavia by her forearm, and then Raven was turning, and Ontari, whose face was contorting in fury as she realized she was too late, vanished as they were swallowed by the compressing darkness.
Clarke’s knees buckled as her feet landed on solid ground, pavement rather than the coarse grass they’d been accustomed to. She blinked dazedly, eyes adjusting to the distant twinkle of city lights, to the dim streetlamps framing the winding road. She swayed where she stood, numbly staring at the sky above, only a few stars visible, a stark contrast to the views they’d been afforded while camping. The night sky was nothing but a heavy stretch of darkness, suffocating, as though it was a black blanket stretched overhead and waiting to envelop them all.

Slowly, voices drifted to her. Octavia, Fox, and Raven were here with her. Right. They all Disapparated together.

“He’s probably dead,” said Raven flatly.

“Don’t say that!” said Fox shrilly, voice as brittle as Clarke’s bones felt right now.

Raven flared up at once. “Why not? He probably is! Just like Maya! Wells is probably—is—” the rest of her words were drowned by choking noises as Raven clearly fought against dissolving into weeping. Octavia immediately wrapped an arm around her, turning to Clarke with worrisome eyes. Clarke, who had known Wells for as long as she could remember. Wells, who Clarke had just left, bound and magic-less, to the mercy of Death Eaters.

“I’m sorry,” said Clarke, voice cracking. She didn’t know who she was talking to: her friends, Wells, everybody. “I’m sorry.” Her eyes were stinging. Her breath was a shallow rasp; she felt incapable of sucking in a deep breath. Maybe she’d never be able to breathe again. Maybe she deserved that. “I’m so sorry.”

There was a tug on her arm, a hand that clasped above her elbow and spun her around. She gasped as she was immediately enveloped in Raven’s embrace; something about human contact right now was jarring, but it was Raven, and she didn’t seem angry.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” Clarke screwed up her face, throat searing with the effort not to let the sob rip free. She burrowed deeper into hair that smelled like fire smoke. It reminded her of Lexa. “I’m so sorry.”

“Clarke,” breathed Raven, hand cradling the back of her head. “What do you have to be sorry for, huh? You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“You are enough,” Raven whispered, stroking her hair. “You are enough. I promise.”

“But Wells…”

“Wells is going to be okay,” said Raven firmly, though her fingers trembled. “You heard them, he’s the Minister’s son, right? They’ll keep him safe, they’ll probably try to ransom him to get money off Jaha. He’ll be okay, though.”

The words melted into her like warmth that she held in her chest. It overpowered the icy despair flooding through her, the murmured words and Raven’s soothing touch acting like a patronus fighting the effects of Shadow-Eaters. But she was still hurting, she could still picture him there on his knees with the ropes around him, and she could still see Maya’s limp body and Jasper’s accusing eyes. This was all her fault. None of her friends would be in this situation if it weren’t for her, because the Ice Queen wasn’t hunting them. She was hunting Clarke, and she kept finding her.
“How did they find us again?” she whispered.

She saw Raven, Octavia, and Fox exchange fearful glances. There were no answers again. There were never any answers, and Clarke wasn’t sure whether she wanted to tear her own hair out or simply sleep without waking.

“We need to find a place to go,” said Octavia softly, glancing around warily, as though Death Eaters would loom out of the darkness. It made Clarke think of the way they’d emerged from the shadows at the Department of Mysteries. “Where are we, anyway?”

“Wisbech,” said Raven, voice tainted by a mixture of sourness and bitterness. “I dunno why this shithole was the first place that popped into my mind.” Her jaw clenched as she stared out toward the town she hated. She added suddenly, “But if you think we’re getting free rent by staying with my mum, you’ve got another thing coming. Though maybe that wouldn’t be a bad idea, considering the Death Eaters keep finding us.”

It was so ridiculous Clarke almost snorted, but she didn’t, certain as she was that the sound would be closer to a keening sob.

“It’s good enough. Let’s go,” said Fox uneasily.

“That’s the hotel,” said Raven, pointing at the nearest building. “We can stay low for a few days and then…then we’ll figure out where to go from there.”

Wordlessly, the four of them linked their arms together. Perhaps they all worried their legs were too weak to walk on, perhaps they simply wanted the comfort. Either way, they walked on clutching one another for support, uncontrollably shivering, though it wasn’t from the crisp night air.

Clarke glanced at the dark sky again, wishing there was something, anything, to guide her. She missed dark eyes and a kind smile and fingers prodding chess pieces to drag others off the checkered board. She missed messy blonde hair streaked with gray and booming laughter that echoed through the warm house. She missed green eyes and soft skin and the steady beat of another heart against hers.

Wells’ voice echoed through the night.

Stay positive. It’s all we can do.

Chapter End Notes

So I'm a bit worried this chapter was as difficult to read as it was to write :/ I hope it wasn't too bad.

Good news is, next chapter things will be picking up. More action and a Clexa reunion.

2016 has been a shit show. I hope you're all staying strong and if anyone needs to talk, my inbox is always open. We have each other and, yeah...stay positive, because it's all we can do.
In Moonlight

Chapter Summary

How much longer can they keep running?
(Spoiler: not much)

Chapter Notes

I know this update is way late, and rather than explain how busy life gets working 12 hour shifts at a hospital among all other aspects of life, I'm just going to give you some Lunevie smut to make up for it. This chapter is almost 30,000 words so longer than the usual 10,000 update, hope the length makes up for the wait!
Also- a late Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year! May 2017 be a great year for us all.

*Update* For those wondering, I tend to update this fic with long chapters once a month. This next update may be a bit late since I'm working on some new one-shots for Clexa Week 2017 (look up the blog Clexaweek2017 for info on that- I hope you all participate, it's going to be so great, I'm pumped! :D)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The world is on fire
And you are here to stay and burn with me."

-Ghost

“This kid is an idiot.”

“Luna!”

“What?” said Luna defensively. She shrunk under Evie’s glare and muttered, “He is.”

Evie sighed but didn’t bother arguing as she threaded her fingers through Luna’s pastel hair, weaving it into a braid. They had been traveling for what felt like ages now, and were still no closer to finding their target than when they set out. Luna had already been suspicious to begin with, because come on, their tracker was a kid? But Jamie said Jaha chose Finn for a reason, so here they were.
“Gustus didn’t need a Tracker,” she reminded Evie. She’d made this point at least a dozen times already.

“Gustus was looking for Reapers. We’re looking for one person.”

“Exactly. One person in a world full of billions.” Luna threw her hands up, immediately wincing when the movement swayed her head and caused Evie to tug on her hair. “We’re following the direction of some child just because he’s supposedly great at finding people? What the hell does that even mean, anyway? We don’t know anything about him. How are we supposed to trust him?”

“We could ask him,” said Evie pointedly, sharply tucking another chunk of hair into the braid. “Instead of whispering about it in the bathrooms.”

“What else are you supposed to use bathrooms for besides gossiping,” grumbled Luna before the words really sank in, and then she froze, meeting Evie’s eyes in the mirror. Bathrooms were kind of their thing; definitely not for gossiping, though their mouths were usually quite occupied…

“Behave,” warned Evie, returning to Luna’s hair. She smiled slightly at the way Luna actually did so with a faint blush.

The knock on the door had them both sighing. Persistent wasn’t quite the word they’d use to describe Finn.

“Hey, you guys ready or what? You’ve been in there for like, an hour. Okay, ten minutes. Same thing.”

Luna and Evie made eye contact in the mirror again, though this time with flat, bemused gazes.

Annoying. That’s the word Luna would use. The kid was annoying.

Evie finished wrapping the hair tie around Luna’s braid and let her clamber to her feet. Luna turned and brushed a gentle kiss to the tip of Evie’s nose in thanks, smiling softly at the slight pink tinge to her cheeks.

They opened the door to see Finn standing there, hands shoved in his pockets, grin as floppy as his hair.

“About time,” he said as they walked out the doorway. “You know you could just get an actual room instead of use the bathroom, right?”

Evie made a strange strangled squeaking sound and tripped over her own feet; Luna, glowering and blushing, managed to catch her before she fell flat on her face.

“That is inappropriate,” she said stiffly, internally cringing because she sounded exactly like the kind of people that growing up she vowed to never sound like. A strict, disapproving teacher, for one.

He shrugged, still smiling. “Sorry. So you guys ready or what?”

Evie and Luna made eye contact; Evie looked murderous. Luna sighed and nodded, tugging Evie along before she could snap at Finn. They made it out of the hotel and onto the street before Finn spoke again.

“And look, I’m sorry if I interrupted anything.” Luna clenched her jaw. Finn didn’t seem
even remotely sorry. He was still grinning at them as though it was an inside joke. “How long have you guys been together anyway?”

“We went to Hogwarts together,” said Evie shortly.

Finn’s eyebrows raised. “You’ve been a couple since you were kids? Damn. That’s—“

“No,” said Luna with a roll of her eyes. “We—er, didn’t exactly get along when we were younger.”

“We hated each other,” supplied Evie. Despite their irritation with Finn, they both exchanged a faint smirk. “Or at least acted like we did.”

“Oh. A love-hate thing, huh? We’ve all been there.”

Evie shot Luna a darkly significant look, and Luna resisted the urge to sigh. *Fine.* “Ah. Have you?”

To their surprise, Finn did not delve into a long-winded story as they expected. Instead he merely shrugged and nodded, and then immediately changed the subject off himself.

“So, if you guys used to hate each other, when did the flip switch? Like, when did you hook up?”

“Inappropriate!” exclaimed Evie.

“Oh—er—sorry, I was just curious.”

“I bet you were,” muttered Luna.

The three of them lapsed into a tense silence as they walked on, traipsing down the road. Evie and Luna grasped hands and both placed a hand on Finn’s shoulders as they Disapparated. They arrived just outside Dornoch Forest.

“So are you going to answer though?”

*Lord give me patience.*

This was what he’d driven Luna to do. Use the same phrase her own mother used to use when dealing with her. *Merlin’s Beard.*

“I don’t mean hook up in that—that way. I just wondered when you started dating, is all.”

They exchanged another look, stalling. This was yet another sticky situation because they weren’t exactly dating. They hadn’t discussed what they were. All they knew was that they wanted to be together, in whatever capacity. They hadn’t slept together, they hadn’t so much as shared more than a few kisses, but there were plenty of heated glances. It had been two months since they reconciled during the Order’s meeting, fought at the Ministry, and then followed Jaha’s mission by setting out with Finn. Having a young boy third-wheel them 24/7 wasn’t exactly a mood booster, and it was impossible to slip away to get a bit of alone time.

At Finn’s words, they were both involuntarily plunged back into the memories.

When did they first hook up? Jesus…
“Can I buy you a drink?”

Luna suppressed the urge to groan at the low male voice, unwarranted and unwelcome, whispering into her ear. Sometimes she wished cursing muggles could be a thing, which was probably beyond hypocritical coming from her, but still. She was already at the bar clearly nursing a bottle of firewhisky, so why waste his time sidling up to her and asking to buy her a drink? This was like the fifth guy tonight already.

“Barking up the wrong tree, mate,” she said, turning to deadpan the man, whose face immediately fell.

He slunk away glowering, and she scowled as she brought the bottle to her lips as her friend returned to her side with a drink of his own, clearly amused at Luna shutting the stranger down.

“Ouch,” chortled Derrick. He grinned when Luna cocked a brow at him.

“It’s not funny,” she insisted, even when his grin widened. “Seriously! Do I not have the lesbian vibe anymore? Have I lost my touch? What the hell is going on?”

“Come on. You’re gorgeous. Don’t you usually have guys all over you?” He snickered again at her repulsed expression.

“Fuck, no. The winged liner is usually enough to get them to leave me alone!”

He outright laughed now. “Winged liner? Is that the lesbian look, nowadays?”

“It is for me.” She shrugged, the hint of a smile returning as she downed another large gulp. It burned all the way down her throat.

He raised a brow in amusement. “Isn’t that stereotyping?”

Luna scoffed. “Maybe a hundred years ago. Now it’s just an easier way to recognize someone that likes the same thing you do.”

“And by that you mean pussy,” said Derrick dryly.

Luna smirked. “Of course. Which is why you have no taste.”

“At least I don’t have the wrong people hitting on me.”

“Hmm, let’s guess...because of how you look?” She smirked into her glass when Derrick rolled his eyes. “Who’s stereotyping now?”

“Whatever.” He absently stroked his beard as he surveyed the dance floor; Luna snorted at the sight, managing to disguise it as she took another drink.

“I need laid,” he said after a time, voice as bored and devoid of emotions as his glance at Luna. “Wingman?”

“Nah, sort yourself out tonight. I need laid more than you.”

He groaned, but knocked back the rest of his drink before placing the glass on the bar counter and stalking away toward a man Luna supposed could qualify as halfway decent looking lingering near the edge of the dance floor.

Sighing, Luna swiveled around on her stool and signaled the bartender for a new drink. She
propped her elbow on the bar and her chin on her fist as she waited. She hadn’t been lying; she really did need laid. It had been a couple weeks since her last orgasm and she didn’t even know how she was surviving in all honesty, except she’d been busy with work and not at all keen to relive the strange empty feeling she got lately whenever she woke up in a stranger’s bed.

The bartender set a glass of dragonspirit before her, and it was as her eyes settled on the glint of gold that she saw it: another glint of gold, several feet away, sitting opposite her at the bar.

Her heart clutched in her chest and constricted her throat and all the breath left her lungs as though she’d missed a step descending a flight of stairs.

Evie Potter.

That was Evie Potter. Sitting right there across from her. Evie Potter.

Evie Potter wearing a dress.

Luna’s stomach bottomed out as she had a closer look.

Evie looked…Evie looked good. It had only been a few months since they graduated, so how did she look so much older already? Softer, heavier, and the lift of her smile, the confident light in her eyes, that all looked new. She’d grown up and was clearly thriving in her adult life. Luna wished she could say the same for herself. Still, her unfortunate dependency on firewhisky and apparent inability to land a steady job or stay out of trouble aside, Evie. Looked. GOOD. Luna unconsciously licked her lips, leaning against the bar, watching Evie over the rim of her glass. That strawberry blonde hair was pulled up in a bun that sat on the nape of her neck and was falling apart, possibly from earlier dancing. Her lips were as red as her nails. Her eyes were sparkling green as she threw her head back and laughed heartily at whatever the man standing next to her said…an unpleasant lurch fluttered through Luna’s stomach and she gripped her glass more tightly.

“I see you found your next conquest,” joked Derrick as he rejoined her. Luna jolted in surprise, but after a second, she swallowed down her initial panic and defiance at his words. Derrick didn’t go to Hogwarts with them. Derrick didn’t know Evie, or she and Luna’s strained relationship—their rivalry and hatred of one another, to be more accurate. All he saw was a pretty blonde girl Luna couldn’t stop looking at.

She brought her glass to her lips again and struggled to remain still when a thrill rocked through her body as Evie glanced over and made eye contact with her. She didn’t look surprised to see her…had she already noticed her earlier, perhaps even been watching her too?

Luna swallowed the lump in her throat, hating the nerves buzzing through her. She was slightly inebriated and off balance, more so because of Evie’s unexpected presence than the alcohol. She didn’t know what to do and that more than anything unsettled her. Only Evie fucking Potter could get her all anxious like this. Fuck’s sake…

She downed another bottle as she continued watching Evie out of the corners of her eyes. It could be hopeful thinking (it wasn’t, she knew it wasn’t, but that fact terrified her), but she was fairly certain Evie kept glancing at her, and that small, knowing smile was meant for Luna… Luna gave a smirk she hoped wasn’t as goofy as it felt. Evie’s smile widened and Luna mentally fist-pumped.

Most of the night passed in this way, in the blink of an eye and yet unbearably slow. Luna tried her best to act casual, occasionally chatting with her friends, and enthusiastically moving to the dance floor to dance with them during the opportune moments when Evie was out there too. Soon enough it was late and when Luna’s friends left the bar, Luna didn’t join them and told them to go
on without her instead. Derrick, who had been well aware of her ogling the hot blonde, chuckled and clapped a hand on her back before leaving her to her devices. Luna retreated from the dance floor to give her aching feet a break. Her vision was blurring and she could see even from a distance that Evie’s eyes were glazed and her face flushed and, oh, Evie was definitely staring at her.

The air was thick in this club, and it wasn’t just because of the amount of writhing people or the magic in the air. Luna and Evie were like planets orbiting in the same system, and sooner or later they were going to collide. All Luna could do was hold her breath and wait for it to happen. If there was one thing she had learned about Evie, it was that patience was a godsend when it came to this woman.

Evie was…well, only slightly panicking. Partly because she’d spilled firewhisky on her dress, but mostly because of the fact that there was a very beautiful, infuriating, irresistible woman that she’d been gravitating around all night but had yet to actually confront.

It was her school rival, okay, someone she should absolutely hate. A girl who mocked her, insulted her, teased and taunted her. A woman currently with a thin layer of sweat shining on her beautiful brown skin, with heavy-lidded amber eyes, with pastel hair that had long fallen free from its braids to tumble wild and untamed down her shoulders.

She wanted to talk to her, so she didn’t understand why she couldn’t pluck up the courage to do it. Leave it to Luna to make her feel like the worst Gryffindor ever. Some things never changed, clearly.

Evie could do nothing more than send the occasional smile Luna’s way, praying they came off as confident and coy rather than shy and nervous. Luna returned them, the same lofty lilt to her full lips there had been in school. Once, her smirk had filled Evie with rage. But there wasn’t animosity in Luna’s gaze this time; if anything, she looked curious and…something else, some glint Evie could not quite identify, but instinctively felt was possibly on par with the heat simmering low in her stomach. She remembered their almost-kiss in the Shrieking Shack and her belly lurched, heart fluttering.

Her nerves had her hands trembling, which she seemed to compensate for by constantly reaching for new bottles of firewhisky. The burn at the back of her throat settled her, but not for long. Soon enough she’d meet Luna’s eyes, feel that impossible warmth, and her heart would thunder on all over again.

Soon enough the club was blurry and even rapidly blinking her eyes didn’t fix it very well. She noticed the return of Luna’s friends—and then their exit again. Evie’s breath caught in her throat when she realized Luna was coming toward her…and then smoothly sliding into the barstool next to hers.

“Hey.” Luna grinned, but there was something different about it. No arrogance in it, no hidden sneer. There was even something bashful about the way she dropped her gaze to the bar before flickering back onto Evie. Evie felt a similar grin grow on her own face.

“Hey, stranger. Fancy seeing you here.”

Luna laughed and the sound sent warmth curling into Evie’s thumping heart. “I’m here with some old friends from Durmstrang.” She glanced over Evie’s shoulder at the people who were still lingering out at the dance floor. “Who’re you with?”
Evie shrugged. “Just the people I’m traveling with. We were the group who paid to go abroad.”

“I went abroad too! Where all did you go?”

“South America for a bit, mostly to the Amazon rain forest to visit Castelobruxo. Where did you go?”

“North America for about a week, just to visit a few friends at Salem Institute. That’s about it though.”

“Friends at Durmstrang, friends at Salem. You’ve just got contacts all over the place, don’t you?” Luna blinked, seeming surprised at Evie’s teasing. Then they both were laughing, drunken and besotted.

They remained at the bar for probably far too long, talking and laughing, ordering more drinks for one another. In a way, it felt impossibly freeing. At Hogwarts, they never could have done this, too wrapped up in their rivalry and reputations. No one knew that here, though. When Evie’s friends approached, she introduced them to Luna, and it was almost strange to see her friends politely greeting her…and Luna politely shaking their hand…and just…

Her head was swimming and her stomach was churning but she didn’t think it was from the alcohol. Luna’s eyes were bright and her lips were still stained red from her lipstick and Evie kept catching brief glimpses of a pink tongue poking out every time she took a drink and there was something there, something more, something that she used to be kept awake fighting in her dormitory tower late night, and Evie didn’t know if she could keep fighting it now.

She told Luna goodbye, heart faltering at the…was it disappointment, in those tawny eyes? She left with her friends and lost sight of Luna as they went through the crowd, shared one last dance before heading for the distant door. They needed to head back to the hotel; it was late and they had to be up early tomorrow to Apparate to France to visit Beauxbatons and learn all about their traditions. It was part of the contract in their missions to go abroad that Hogwarts had assigned. After six months of this, Evie would receive a sparkling recommendation from the Ministry itself. So, this trip was important. It was very important.

She wanted to stay at the club.

It felt wrong, leaving when she’d only just ran into Luna again…it felt wrong fighting her urge to turn around and continue speaking to her. Why should she, anyway? Things were different. They were different. They weren’t in school anymore. This was new…like a fresh start…what were the odds that of all the places in the world they could be, they were both here in this pub tonight?

She quickly explained to her friends that she was going to stay longer and ignored their disapproving expressions. They left and Evie wasted no time in weaving through the dance floor again, heading straight for the bar she’d left Luna at. She wasn’t there. Swallowing the bitter lump of disappointment in her throat, Evie decided to remain on the dance floor and hope Luna would return. A nearby smiling woman pulled Evie into a dance that she attempted to keep up. She could feel the presence of someone dancing close behind her, and when she turned saw a tall man leering down at her. She rolled her eyes in his face and turned back around, going to focus on the woman but the woman had already danced farther away, now pulling a distant man into a dance. Evie turned around the other way and—there she was.

Luna was standing near the edge of the dance floor clutching a bottle of glowing blue dragonspirit. Their eyes met and it was like electricity coursing through Evie’s entire body. She
licked her lips before she could think of it, noticed the way Luna’s grip tightened on her bottle and realized this night may be affecting her just as it was Evie.

Evie didn’t break eye contact as she continued moving her body to the beat of the music. The man behind her moved close again, pressing himself against the curve of Evie’s ass, clumsy hands brushing her hips. She shoved him back, clenching her jaw when he just automatically moved closer again. Her stomach turned in pleasant heat when Luna appeared, slipping into place between them.

“Back away, unless you’d rather spend the night as a heap of slugs in the corner of the pub,” sneered Luna. The man retreated with a scowl.

Evie grinned as Luna turned, tawny eyes meeting green. She didn’t say anything, instead turning and resuming her dancing. Luna did as she hoped, remaining there and starting to dance herself. A rush of heat swept through Evie when she felt Luna’s chest against her back, then lips brushing the shell of her ear as Luna whispered, “Have you ever noticed that every problem a girl has begins with the word ‘man’?”

Evie laughed, recalling the muggle joke Luna had told her earlier that she’d apparently learned in the states. “You know, I’m starting to think you’re right.” She twisted around, deciding to be bold, and put her arms around Luna’s neck. There was another poignant pull of her stomach when Luna’s teeth sank into her bottom lip at the movement. Their breasts nearly brushed together as they swayed their hips to the rhythm.

Luna tilted her head, full lips tugging up in a smirk. “I’m always right, Evie. I thought we’d established this.”

Evie wanted to laugh, but she was too distracted by two things. The first was Luna saying her actual name instead of Potter. The second was Luna’s lips. Evie couldn’t tear her gaze away from them, from that smirk that quickly faded. Luna licked her lips. Evie leaned in.

“You mind?” she murmured, not so much as glancing up to meet Luna’s eyes.

“Not at all,” breathed Luna.

Their first kiss tasted like alcohol, dark and sharp and potent. They were the only still bodies in a writhing, bumping dance floor. Evie forgot how to breathe.

Luna’s lips were soft and warm and moved against hers with a type of effortless grace that Evie thought she shouldn’t be surprised by. There was a reason Luna had pulled so many girls at school, and it wasn’t just because she was gorgeous and confident and…clearly…talented.

Evie wasted no time in sweeping a tongue inside Luna’s mouth, swallowing the surprised little whimper Luna gave in surprise. Luna’s arms tightened around Evie’s waist, strong and sure, as though to compensate for it. Evie shivered at the sensation of a hand slowly moving up the length of her back to bury itself in her hair, finally drawing her bun loose.

Time was lost to her. She didn’t know how long she stood there with Luna, lost in one another. Her body was on fire and vibrating with a need she never could have imagined so strong. All she knew was that she was addicted to the taste of Luna, and wanted to taste more of her.

Without a word, she pulled away, knees nearly trembling at the dazed haze to Luna’s eyes, more golden than she’d ever seen them. She reached for her hand, entwined their fingers, and led her off the dance floor.

She swung the bathroom door shut and locked it with nonverbal magic as she and Luna
stumbled into it. Evie pushed her against the wall, living off the strangled whine Luna made when she fixed her mouth on her neck, licking up the column of her throat, nibbling the underside of her jaw. Luna’s hands slipped lower onto her bottomside, cupping and squeezing.

“Fuck, Evie…”

Those words coming from Luna’s lips would be the death of her, Evie was sure of it. She didn’t bother hiding her moan, sucking the skin above Luna’s wild pulse, slightly salty with sweat. She lifted her head and crashed their lips together, lost herself in another kiss before she pulled back, panting slightly, and whispered, “I promise I’m usually this forward, okay?”

“What—” began Luna, immediately stopping, her eyes wide, when she saw what Evie was doing.

Evie dropped to her knees, unbuttoning Luna’s pants and tugging them down her thighs and knees, letting them pool around her ankles as she smoothed her hands up Luna’s thighs. She breathed her in for just a moment, the sharp scent of arousal dizzying and mouthwatering. Then she moved in.

She’d never done this before, but it didn’t make her nervous. If anything, she was more eager than ever as she licked and sucked and scraped her teeth in a way that made Luna’s breath catch, her body twitch and jerk, her moan rumble low from her throat. Evie wrapped her hands around the back of Luna’s thighs, looking up to watch Luna through her lashes as she worked her tongue inside her. Luna’s eyes were screwed shut, her mouth fallen open in silent pleasure, her chest heaving. After no time at all, her body was drawing tight and taut, rigid but quivering, she stopped breathing as she seemed to rise taller…and then she was shaking violently, back arching off the wall, crying out as the orgasm roared through her and wetness gushed at Evie’s mouth and chin. Luna mumbled something as she came down from the high, dropping her head back to the wall, but Evie didn’t quite catch it.

She stood up, pressing a firm kiss to Luna’s temple. “What did you say?” she said breathlessly.

Luna’s swallow was audible before she shook her head, winded. “Nothing. Just…come here.” She grabbed Evie by the arm, pulling her up, and plunged them into another kiss. Evie pushed her tongue into her mouth, humming in pleasure at the noise Luna made in response to tasting herself. Evie’s body was vibrating with need, she was so wet it was dripping down her thighs, and if she didn’t get off soon, she may actually die.

Her gasp tilted into Luna’s mouth as Luna’s hand slipped up her dress and bra, fingertips tapping over a hardened nipple. “Fuck, fuck, fuck…”

“That’s what I’m about to do to you,” whispered Luna, dropping her other hand between Evie’s legs, rubbing over the wet silk of her underwear.

“Fuck, Luna—”

Luna’s movements didn’t still even when the door rattled. Someone knocked, and then pounded on the door when they didn’t answer. Evie’s eyes flew open, annoyed but certain the person was about to magically unlock the door and ruin everything. Luna seemed to read her mind. She kept her mouth fixed to Evie’s as she placed a firm hand on the back of Evie’s neck and guided them around. They burst through a bathroom stall the same time someone else entered the bathroom, muttering mutinously before entering their own stall to relieve their bladder.
Luna pressed a finger to Evie’s lips, silently ordering her to remain quiet, before she slipped her hand into Evie’s underwear and trailed her fingers through the length of Evie’s wet folds.

Evie bit her tongue, desperately trying to stay quiet. Luna removed the hand that was lost in her hair and reached into her jacket pocket, pulling out her wand. She cast muffliato on their stall. Evie let her know her relief at that choice by letting loose a long, low moan at the sensation of Luna rubbing circles around her clit.

Luna gave her a last slow, deep kiss before she dropped to her knees and Evie lost her breath all over again. Luna’s tongue sliding over her, sliding into her, was a sensation she never knew she so desperately needed. She didn’t know how she’d survived eighteen years without it, honestly. This was like oxygen. This was the point of life. This was everything.

A final flick of her tongue and Evie was breaking, body quaking through an orgasm so strong she wasn’t sure if anything she’d ever felt before could even qualify as one. Then fingers were curving inside her, slow thrusts transitioning into relentless pounding, and she was coming all over again, screams tearing out of her throat.

Over an hour later, Evie teetered out of the bathroom on legs that felt as though they’d had a jelly-legged curse cast on them. Her head was clearer now; she absently wondered if she’d had the drunk fucked out of her. Luna followed closely behind. It wasn’t as awkward as Evie would have expected. They grinned shiftily at one another as they sat on the barstools again, flagging the bartender for another drink.

The next morning Evie woke in her hotel room with a pounding headache and an aching body. She could remember most of the night perfectly, could remember leaving the bar with Luna, but she couldn’t remember how she got to her hotel. And, she realized with a sinking feeling, she had not made plans to see Luna again, nor did she have a way to contact her…

She supposed she could send an owl, that it would find her, but it somehow felt so anticlimactic after what they had shared…

She told herself it was a good thing. She and Luna had hated one another in school, and even if they did have one night where they weren’t trying to kill one another (well…), it didn’t mean they were magically compatible. Luna had a penchant for breaking the rules, for breaking the law, and it would be dangerous for Evie to get caught up in a lifestyle like that. She couldn’t become fuck buddies with someone that was once her worst enemy. That would just be…stupid. Crazy, really.

She hated herself for how much she craved Luna over the next couple weeks. She felt as though she’d done drugs one time and was already an addict. She couldn’t get Luna, or that night, out of her head.

It was a little over a month since that night at the pub when Evie saw her again, and she was so relieved and happy to see her that she didn’t question the fate of finding her once more, when they could be anywhere in the world, in a little muggle club.

“Fancy seeing you here,” smirked Luna, handing Evie a pint of firewhisky.

Evie returned the smirk. “Likewise.”

They both took a drink, eyes never leaving one another.

“Will it give you a big head if I tell you I’m, uh…happy to see you?” asked Evie, barely suppressing her smile.
Luna didn’t try; she grinned wickedly. “I mean, my head already grew pretty big sometime after your fourth orgasm, so I’m not entirely sure it matters.”

Evie rolled her eyes, but her body grew warm all over and she stepped closer to Luna.

Luna’s eyes slowly moved over the length of Evie’s body; Evie watched her wet her lips. “You look good.”

“I know. So do you.”

“I know.”

Eye contact was too much, the club was too hot, stiflingly so. Evie already felt wet.

She tilted her head. “Want to dance?”

Slowly, Luna nodded.

Out on the dance floor, it was a little easier to avoid eye contact. It was so difficult, so ridiculously difficult, for Evie to keep her gaze on Luna’s. In her peripheral vision, she could see how her hips were grinding and rolling. It was like a gravitational pull; Evie couldn’t stop her hands from slipping down from her sides. Her eyes nearly rolled back at the sensation of Luna’s lithe body pressing into hers, of the lavender scent wafting from her hair, of Luna’s amber eyes fixated on hers, the slightest smirk on her face like she knew exactly what Evie was thinking.

Though Luna’s skin had a thin sheen of sweat too, Evie knew there was no way Luna’s heart could be beating as rapidly as hers was. She inhaled sharply when Luna abruptly leaned in, pressed her cheek against Evie’s, and whispered into her ear, “Too scared to go lower?”

Evie bit her lip, almost smiling at the challenge. Perhaps she would have if she weren’t more concerned with the insistent heat conflagrating at the base of her stomach and between her legs. Still, regardless of that distraction, Luna wasn’t about to get away with winning something. Evie knew Luna knew she would rise to it, but she didn’t care. She kept her gaze steady on Luna’s and moved her hands lower, onto her ass.

Luna tilted her head, watching Evie curiously as she moved even closer to her, close enough their breasts were pressing together. She had one arm hooked possessively around the back of Evie’s neck, and trailed her free hand up her arm, cupping the side of her neck, brushing a thumb along her jawline.

It was that game, that damn game they had played for what felt like forever. They weren’t so much dancing together as they were dancing around each other. Luna’s head was still cocked to the side, the ghost of a smirk on her face and her gaze burning into Evie as she slowly, tantalizingly slowly, trailed her hand down Evie’s neck, along her exposed collarbone, down to swirl a single finger around where her nipple was straining against the silk of her dress. Evie was so overcome and distracted by the heat flushing her body she couldn’t spare a single concern that they were both standing in the center of a packed dance floor, surrounded by people. Luna twirled her finger around once more before she sighed, “Are you nervous yet?”

Oh, fuck. Evie’s knees nearly buckled, so weak they were trembling. Her heart was pounding and the ache in her belly, the ache between her legs, was so persistent it was a miracle she managed to stay quiet. Nearly seven years later, and she was losing this game again. Except this time, she didn’t want to play.

She turned her head, nose pressing into Luna’s cheek as she kissed her without warning. She
swallowed the whimper Luna made in response, sucking her bottom lip into her mouth after Luna scraped her teeth across Evie’s. Her heart was thrashing, her eyes fluttering closed as she brought a hand up to cup Luna’s cheek, sliding her thumb along her jawline, digging her fingers into the nape of Luna’s neck where her hair was curling in sweat.

“No,” Evie murmured, releasing the tongue she had been sucking on with a wet pop to dip her head down, drag her lips along the curve of Luna’s neck in burning, open-mouthed kisses. Luna’s breath was escaping her lips in harsh spurts, her hands moving deliberately up Evie’s body to take purchase in her hair. “I’m not nervous.” Evie rolled her tongue over Luna’s hammering pulse, her hips tilting up insistently against hers. “Are you?”

Luna managed to bite the edge off her moan, and the resounding whine was lost in the deafening music. It didn’t mean they didn’t hear the whistles and snide comments around them, though. Evie looked up from Luna to see the men leering at them, smirking and waggling their tongues between two fingers. Luna opened her mouth, presumably to utter her usual string of exemplary crude insults, but all Evie wanted was her mouth back on hers, so she took her hand and tugged her a few steps back. “Come on Luna,” she murmured, tugging again as Luna twisted to keep the men in sight. The sound of her name leaving Evie’s lips seemed to do the trick. She conceded, and after raising a middle finger toward them, turned and followed Evie deeper into the throng of dancing people.

Evie turned to face her, to see how she was looking at her with concern in her eyes. Maybe Luna thought a few seconds at the surface would snap Evie back into reality and make her remember all the reasons why they probably shouldn’t be doing this. It wasn’t, though.

“Do you want to get out of here?” Evie said loudly over the music, her mouth going dry in anticipation, though she wasn’t sure exactly what she was anticipating.

The concern solidifying, Luna leaned toward her, raising her voice loud enough Evie could hear it. Evie shivered as she danced her fingers up her arm again, teasing her with soft scrapes as she said, “Are you sure you’re okay with this?”

Evie swallowed a moan when Luna squeezed her arm. Evie leaned into her, chests bumping together as she closed her mouth over Luna’s, kissing her briefly before dipping her face under Luna’s curtain of pastel hair to whisper into her ear, “Take me home.”

Luna’s smile curved against her cheek and shivered again. “Come on,” she laughed and Evie’s heart vibrated in her chest, excitement fluttering in her belly when Luna’s warm hand closed around hers, brown fingers intertwining with pale.

Evie bit her lip, a somewhat feeble attempt to suppress the wide smile spreading across her face. Luna was beaming, still laughing as she led her through the color-splatted dance floor, weaving them through the countless people who were dancing wildly around them. Near the center of the dance floor, where the variety of colored spotlights were spinning wildly, she whirled back to face her, stepping into Evie’s space without warning. She dipped her head, brought her lips close to Evie’s ear, their hair creating pale curtains framing the sides of their faces, which was convenient considering the way Evie’s mouth fell open and her eyes closed in shameless bliss as Luna whispered, “All I’ve been able to think about is how you sound when you come…”

Again without warning, Luna closed her lips over the sensitive skin on the curve of Evie’s neck, immediately creating a wet, warm suction with her teeth pressing into her flesh painfully while her tongue swept over the wounds, soothing them instantaneously. Evie shuddered under the images of her creating that suction elsewhere on her body, with her tongue sweeping over—
“Let’s go,” she moaned, not bothering to restrain her impatience as she stepped forward, pushing Luna along toward the exit. “Hurry.”

Luna didn’t need to hear it twice. She seized Evie’s hand again, and once they finally crossed the dance floor, she was able to keep pace with her long strides.

She kept spinning back to kiss her, dragging her tongue across smiling lips and creating that hot drag through Evie’s stomach, leaving it there to linger when she would turn back to continue leading them toward the exit. Thoughts were swirling madly in Evie’s head. Maybe it wasn’t too crazy. Maybe this—whatever they had between them—maybe it worked. Maybe this was the point of it all. This gorgeous woman whose hand she gripped, glancing back over her shoulder at her with a beautiful smile and a heart of gold, who made Evie feel happy in ways she never thought she could be.

When they finally reached the exit and burst through the doors, giggling because the bouncer raised an eyebrow at them when Luna swung back for a brief kiss and pulled Evie’s bottom lip with her teeth, they were both on cloud nine, giddy anticipation sending both of their nerves humming.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here, my fingers are fucking frozen and I can think of a great place to warm them,” chattered Luna. Evie burst out laughing. Luna started to tug her down the pavement.

They stopped in a couple alleys on the way, kissing hard, pressing one another against the walls. On their third stop, a muggle appeared from the shadows and brandished a knife, demanding money or something, and Luna drew her wand casually as though this type of thing happened all the time.

“Obliviate.”

The muggle’s eyes went blank; he dropped the knife and marched out of the alley. Evie shot Luna a reproachful glance; Luna rolled her eyes and Transfigured the knife into a twig before she slipped her wand back into her jacket pocket.

“Do you want to lecture me, or fuck me?”

The words packed a punch. Most specifically, a low drag through Evie’s belly, sharp and heady. She bit her bottom lip and reached for Luna, shivering at the purr she gave as she drifted her hand down the length of her back.

“Take me home,” she whispered.

So Luna did.

Evie cleared her throat, exchanging a look with Luna before meeting Finn’s gaze. “A few months after school. We started dating. It was slow and casual.”

Luna nodded in agreement.

Finn looked almost disappointed. “Oh. Well, okay.” He shrugged before traipsing on.

Evie and Luna exchanged another look before sighing and following after him.

* * * *
Memories of this town brought a bitter taste to Raven’s mouth. She hated it. She hated it so much, with every fiber of her being. Nothing made her heart sink faster than every June when school let out for summer and she was forced to return to this hellhole, to watch over her mother for three months before September finally arrived and she could go home to Hogwarts.

They entered the town and she narrowed her eyes and clenched her jaw, stomach churning as all the horrible feelings this town brought to her returned. Memories of her mother staggering into the house brandishing the bottles of vodka, of cigarettes constantly smoldering on the carpet and Raven, even as young as four years old, splashing water on them. Raven had loved her father more than anything, but she knew—the older she grew, the more she knew—he had been tantamount to her mother’s treatment of her as well. He would sit there day after day lightly dozing in his wheelchair, oblivious to everything. He was awake when it came to talking cars, when Raven would scramble up onto his lap and excitedly ask him questions about the world, but always conveniently asleep when her mother lurched into her bedroom and tore Raven from slumber to scream about her life. By the time she was five years old, the sting of a cigarette had been burned into her skin so many times that the smell of burning flesh no longer made her flinch. What made her flinch was the anger in the widening of her father’s eyes, the outrage and disbelief in his gravely voice when he confronted her mother about it. Her mother had lied, of course, and said it was an accident. At the time, Raven thought her father had simply believed her. When she was old enough, she realized the unfortunate truth: that her father was old and her mother, however shitty of a person she was, took care of him. Turning a blind eye was easier than taking a risk and leaving, right? Of course, she liked to think it was that, and not that he was simply that oblivious.

It was something Raven would always regret. When she was eight years old, her mother dragged them into the car for her father’s doctor visit. They sat there in the heat for three hours afterward while she disappeared inside a pub and came out stumbling drunk, and they drove only for a brief handful of minutes before she drove them straight into a lorry. The medics considered it a miracle that the terribly injured little girl with an irreparably damaged leg somehow survived, but Raven considered it magic. She could still remember being curled up on the pavement crying next to her father’s limp, broken body. His wheelchair was feet away in the ditch. It was wrong. He was always in his wheelchair, he should be in his wheelchair, but he wasn’t. Looking back now, Raven regretted the fact that he had died without ever demanding answers from him, like why he let her mother act the way she did. Why he let her hurt her. Why he let her hurt them both.

Of course, Raven would never get those answers because her father was dead and her mother was out of her mind.

What she did get was another year of fury, of blowing up alcohol bottles in her mother’s face just because she could even though she didn’t understand how, of Finn discovering her and terrifying her with his talk of magic and witchcraft and special schools, and then of the overwhelming joy that came with her first real friend. Finn was sweet and nervous and terrified he hadn’t shown any magic of his own, completely paralyzed with fear that he was a squib and his father would entirely disown him. When his father came to visit, Raven hid in the bushes and she made that stone float in the air, and grinned broadly as she watched Finn’s father exclaim in delight and ruffle his son’s hair. She later blushed, furiously, when she had her first kiss with Finn, ten years old and weak-kneed, hearts racing.

A year later Finn was considering running away from home, certain as he was that he wouldn’t get a letter, but the day the owl came for him, Raven had never seen him so happy. Professor Sinclair arrived at her house and attempted to explain it all to her mother, who only
screamed and chucked things at him, but good came out of it too. Sinclair, aghast at her mother’s behavior, was kind enough to take Raven to Diagon Alley to buy her supplies, and had always been kind to her in class. He was her favorite professor and she would be forever grateful to him.

School came and went and Finn broke her heart three times. The first was when he kept staring at Clarke, Clarke who was pretty and blonde and smart and had nice, normal parents who loved her, who grew up with magic and money. The second was when he cheated on her with her, and even though Clarke was unaware and dumped Finn the moment she found out, it still shattered her. The third was at the end of their sixth year when Finn said he’d had enough of school, that his father wanted him to drop out to join him traveling around the world and that’s what he was going to do.

So it wasn’t just her parents that made Raven hate this town. It was the bittersweet memories of Finn, too.

Clarke, Octavia, and even Fox, to a lesser extent, were all well aware of this. They wordlessly tightened their grips on one another, Clarke reaching down to take Raven’s hand too, as they walked. Clarke squeezed it in wordless support, heart aching for her friend. Raven generally spent as little time here as possible. She was forced to return for summer to watch over her mum, but Christmas breaks were spent at Clarke’s house. She was just grateful they wouldn’t be seeing her mother while here. Clarke had met her exactly once, when she and her dad made the long journey to pick Raven up the first break they decided she should join them for Christmas (after exchanging far too many letters with a frustrated, anguished Raven). Her mother wasn’t a pleasant person. It had been hard not to curse her. Even Jake had been clenching his fists in disapproval, and his lecture went unheard by the woman so often off her face it was a miracle she ever heard anything in the first place.

“Are we sure this is a smart idea?” said Fox as they approached the hotel. “Wisbech is Raven’s hometown. What if our hometowns are the first places they expect us to go?”

If Raven weren’t so on edge and exhausted, she may have rolled her eyes. “Even the laziest Death Eater could do the most basic research on me and realize I hate this place and would never come here. I think we’ll be fine.”

“We won’t stay long anyway,” interjected Clarke tiredly. They were nearly there now.

Octavia nodded, echoing in agreement. “Like Raven said, we’re just sleeping here. We lay low and then get the hell up out of here.”

“Yeah, believe me, I don’t want to stay any longer than we have to.” Raven shuddered.

They let her speak at the counter and book the room. Once they trudged upstairs (Clarke’s stomach clenched in apprehension the entire time; she and Fox still hated elevators but Raven didn’t want to struggle up the stairs in her brace with her sore leg and none of them wanted to separate), they collapsed into one king-sized bed. It had been the last room available. There was a small recliner, but there was an unspoken agreement that, for tonight at least, they should all stay within an arms’ grasp of one another. It was for comfort as much as safety.

Raven was the biggest spoon, Fox the smallest. They lay in stillness, arms wrapped around one another. Light filtered into the room through the shutters. It was mostly silent save for the occasional rumble of a car passing down the road. The familiar sensation of a lump caught in her throat had returned to Clarke, or perhaps had never left. No matter how much she blinked, at the wall, at the back of Octavia’s head, at the ceiling, she couldn’t get rid of the images burned into the back of her eyelids or the grief in her heart. Her father being taken away in chains. Her mother’s tear-
streaked, eerily calm expression as she pointed her wand in Clarke’s face. Jaha’s indifference; the terrifying aura emanating from the strange woman. Pike and Diana Sydney’s smug, superior expressions. Cage’s arrogant smirk. The sick apprehension of the third Triwizard task. The blinding terror of the escape from the Ministry and from Azkaban. The horror of the Battle at Hogwarts. The constant fear of being on the run knowing Death Eaters were hunting them. The dread at the knowledge that her friends were not being as discreet as they could be, no matter how much Clarke, Wells, and Fox warned them. Miller directing his wrath on her. The disappointment when Bellamy grew careless. The anguish in Jasper’s eyes. Maya, dead. Wells, bound and trapped. Lexa was gone. Clarke didn’t know where she was. She didn’t know if she was supposed to care, if she should still be furious with her for keeping secrets. If, after a month, she had forgiven her, or if she simply missed her and was confusing one for the other. She wondered if Raven had forgiven Anya, if Octavia was upset with Lincoln.

The thought had barely crossed her mind when Raven’s arms tightened around her and the cold tip of her nose nudged against the back of Clarke’s neck. Clarke gripped Octavia more tightly in response, and was sure Octavia did the same to Fox.

"I miss Anya," whispered Raven.

"I miss Lincoln."

Clarke didn’t answer. There was a deep, overwhelming sorrow in her, a yearning to see familiar green eyes and braided brunette hair. To hear that soft, calm voice, to smell firesmoke and pine, to feel soft skin. In a way, she missed Lexa so much it was beyond overwhelming, was all-encompassing and felt as though all she existed as now was as nothing but human longing and sorrow packed into flesh. God, she missed Lexa. She couldn't put it into words, didn't think she'd be able to say them without breaking anyway, so she didn't try. Silence stretched on for a minute, and Clarke was just starting to sink into mattress as her breathing evened, the drowsy edges of sleep closing in, when Fox said mournfully, "I miss food."

Then they were laughing, softly, quietly, and somehow it still felt like breaking.

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Morning came not quite as stifling as the night. Clarke lay in bed for a time, staring up at the ceiling, her mind whirring with all the frightening possibilities. Where did they go from here?

They silently readied themselves and Raven magicked some food from the vending machines for breakfast. The room was tense and quiet for hours. Clarke was idly turning her wand over in her hands, lost in her thoughts. Octavia hadn’t released the two-way mirror since she woke; she eventually went from non-stop scrutinizing it to glancing at it every five seconds as she distractedly flicked through the magazine she found in the topmost drawer of the nightstand beside the bed. Raven was slowly making her way through yet another bag of smoky bacon crisps. Fox was fiddling with the muggle television, frowning as she pressed buttons and nothing happened. After a moment, Raven took pity and crossed the room to help. "It uses electricity so you have to plug it in," she explained, showing Fox the electrical cord before bending down beneath the table to find an outlet.

Fox’s brows rose as a small red light flickered beside a button. A moment later she jumped as the screen flashed on, music blasting out.
"This is shite," muttered Raven, prodding the channel buttons to flick through; Fox watched wide-eyed until Raven eventually came to a stop, a corner of her lips curving in amusement. "Here we go." She backed away to sit on the edge of the bed.

Fox remained standing right before the TV, brow knitted again as she observed the strange yellow sponge and pink star cartoon characters.

"Oi, come sit, you're blocking the view."

Fox took the empty space beside Raven. Clarke leaned back against the pillows propped against the headboard, careful not to jostle Octavia, and only indolently kept her eyes trained on the television as thoughts ran rampant in her mind.

Her heart beat faster like some kind of sick drum as she speculated on the current lives of her friends. They were all surely okay, otherwise Bellamy would have contacted Octavia. But how were they coping? Where were they hiding? Were they still camping out, or did they find a hotel too? Was Bellamy taking charge, was he sharing responsibility with someone, was he keeping them safe or devolving into chaos again? Was Jasper being an idiot, putting them all in danger? Were they all safe, or were the Death Eaters hot on their trails? And where was Lexa? What happened to Durmstrang and Beauxbatons? Clarke was, to put it simply, utterly terrified. If anything happened to any of them, she wouldn't know. How could she? They couldn't contact them. For all she knew, they could all be dead...

But no, she told herself firmly, desperately, as a terrible anguish rose like bile in her throat. They were alive. Lexa was alive. She could feel it, could sense it as though the air would be different, wouldn't be as charged, if Lexa was gone. As though she could sense Lexa, which was probably ridiculous, but managed to provide a small amount of comfort anyway. Lexa was safe. She must be.

“This is stupid,” said Fox.

“It’s a classic,” said Raven irritably, but she turned the channel.

The day passed and they never managed to make contact with Bellamy, nor did anyone make contact with them. Raven ordered room service for dinner and Confunded the worker so they didn’t have to pay.

The past few weeks alone had been bizarre, but the past few days existed on a whole other plane of existence. In some ways, it was like walking on glass, vulnerable and dangerous. Clarke was just waiting for everything to shatter beneath them. More than anything, she felt as though she herself was made of splintered stained glass, enough light filtering in to keep her awake and alive, but one misstep and she would break.

Stay positive. It’s all we can do.

They decided to move on to the next town. Surprisingly, no one expressed the sentiment that two successful days of hiding here meant they should stay longer. They were all eager to leave, though none so much as Raven, who was relieved beyond measure when they finally finished packing up the food and bottled water they bought at Asda. They clutched hands and Disapparated straight from the hotel room. They landed in York and went for the first hotel they came across.

“It’s got free WiFi, a restaurant, and a barbecue. Oh, and look, they have pet-friendly accommodations, so we can bring Fox in.”
Fox scowled, but chose to ignore Raven’s comment so she could ask, “What’s WiFi?”

Raven hesitated and then she shook her head, looking pained. “I’m not even going to try to explain it. Let’s just say it’s muggle magic.”

Fox looked more confused than ever as they followed Raven into the hotel.

“Dibs,” said Raven as casually as the way she fell back onto a cushiony red couch pushed up against the wall adjacent to the television.

Clarke used the bathroom, washed her hands, then decided to go ahead and take another shower. There was no longer any blood staining her hands, but watching the water rush over them still gave her a strange sense of peace.

They watched television for a time, until the outside world beyond the curtains drawn over the windows turned dark. There had still been no word from Bellamy or the Order. They could do nothing but pray everyone was safe.

Clarke sank into the mattress as exhaustion heavied her bones, and fell into dreams of Lexa, of Ontari, of a queen made of ice and a dragon whose fire couldn’t melt it.

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The other children laughed at him.

It wasn’t unusual. It certainly wasn’t unexpected. It happened relatively often, all things considered. But it was the first time it had happened in front of his mother.

She was shoeing the girls who had teased him out of the shop, but he was already out the door, retreating to the narrow alley just between the buildings that he often occupied when his mother was busy enough she didn’t notice him slip away. He shoved his hands in his pockets and toed at a bit of rubbish (empty Arker’s wrappers by the looks of it) on the cobblestone.

He told himself his feelings weren’t hurt (even though they always were). He’d been hearing the insults for as long as he could remember. It wasn’t as though he could adequately hide his deformity without wearing a scarf tucked up close, and that could be unbearably hot and suffocating at times. Did kids care that he had been injured by a potion-gone-wrong as a baby and no amount of magic could Transfigure him normal? Of course not. All they cared about was that he looked funny.

All he cared about was going to Hogwarts, growing up, and becoming a professional Quidditch player for the Ballycastle Bats. His room was covered in the black and scarlet posters, he had a stuffed plush toy of Barny the Fruitbat, and he was absolutely certain he would one day join their ranks. Maybe then, once everyone saw how talented and hardworking he was, people would stop teasing him.

He lingered out there alone for several minutes, trying to work up the courage to return. The thought of facing those other kids again made his palms sweaty. He picked up a twig from the ground and flourished it, imagining this time next year when he would finally have a wand of his own.

He could hear his mother calling for him. Sighing, he dropped the stick and clambered to his
feet, clapping and wiping his hands together to rid himself of the dirt. He trotted down the street, the shop in distant sight, but then—then suddenly he found he couldn’t move his legs. He couldn’t move them at all; it was like his feet were stuck to the road with a permanent sticking charm. He struggled, sweat beading on his skin, and then nearly toppled over in shock when his name was called again, though it wasn’t his mother this time.

“Hello, Zoran.”

He craned his neck to twist round enough to see the woman skulking around him. She was short and wore a cloak as raven-black as her hair. Both glinted in the sunlight filtering into the alley. She had scars stretching across her face. She was smiling, but Zoran didn’t like it. It didn’t make her look nicer; if anything, she looked even scarier with her lips stretched out like that, wickedly sharp, as though fangs should be poking out.

The woman stopped right before Zoran and leered at him like he was a bug she wanted to squash. He stared up at her, bewildered and scared.

“We’ve got a job for you.” The girl tilted her head, clearly acting as though she was analyzing him, but it merely came off as lofty and smug. She may as well have been sneering. “If you do exactly what we say, you and your mum will come out of this unharmed. Do you understand?”

As soon as Zoran began to wonder what she meant by “we,” more people in black cloaks stepped out of the shadows of the buildings. Most of them had hoods obscuring their faces, but the ones that didn’t wore the same jeer as this girl.

The girl’s hand twitched. She was holding a wand. Zoran’s mouth fell open in a silent cry (he found that he couldn’t produce any sound at all, no matter how hard he tried) as pain wracked up his spine, causing him to tremble where he stood, though he could not fall over or move his feet. It was a terrible pain that felt like hundreds of claws were tearing at his skin. His eyes welled as the air left his lung. The girl twitched her wand again and the pain ceased, leaving Zoran to fall gasping to his knees.

“Let me ask one more time,” said the girl, dark eyes flashing dangerously. “You’re going to do exactly what we say. If you don’t give us any trouble, we won’t kill you or your mum. If you cooperate. Do you understand me?”

He could hear his mother calling his name again. Zoran ignored the tears leaking out his eyes, swallowed the lump in his throat, and nodded.

The girl’s lips tilted up at the corners ever so slightly, but the wickedness of the grin was not absent.

* * /✧/ * *

The first thing Clarke was aware of when she woke was the sweat sticking her clothes to her skin, mostly due to the fact that she was wedged between two hot bodies. She, Octavia, and Fox were on the one queen-sized bed in the room; Raven had taken the couch.

The second thing she realized, with painful clarity, was the anguish churning in her belly. It had been more muted the past few days, but after another night full of dreams of Wells, of Roma, of
Maya, of Charlotte, of her father…

Initially she’d considered the sorrow and panic to exist in the form of something fierce and aggressive, but after living with it for a time, she understood it was more than that. It wasn’t just a tsunami crashing into her. It was a tide pool, calm and still and she was stuck helpless at the bottom, staring up at the filtered light. Drowning.

*Stay positive. It’s all we can do.*

She held Wells’ words in her chest close to her heart like a talisman of sorts, lighting the darkness threatening to overtake her. Before, with the stress of moving almost a dozen people around and keeping watch over everyone and organizing their survival, it was easy to tell herself there was no time to grieve. Now, it was just four of them in a silent, still hotel room. No loud, obnoxious Jasper for them to scowl and roll their eyes at. No gruff Bellamy for them to tiptoe around. No serene Wells providing a comforting familiarity and exuding the inexplicable consolation that everything would turn out all right.

It had been a week since they lost him.

They spent a couple days at the hotel in York before unanimously deciding to move on. They had moved past the hope of finding a safe place and sticking to it; instead, they were shifting locations every other day. The fact that Death Eaters had twice found them was a factor constantly playing on each of their minds, so there were no qualms about packing up their meager supplies and Disapparating across the country to random inns and hotels. They were currently holed up in a small B&B in Oxford. After three days of this, pissing rain, and less than mediocre breakfast, it was time to move on to the next town.

They Disapparated to Wales and found a quaint inn. Being out of the country brought them a strange sense of relief and tension. On one hand, it felt safer being out of England. On the other, they were more isolated than ever.

It was their second day there when there was a strange noise coming from Octavia’s bag, and a muffled voice calling her name. She scrambled to retrieve the mirror, which was vibrating and flashing, and Clarke, Raven, and Fox all crowded around her to see as she lifted it up.

Bellamy peered back at them, face splitting into a relieved grin at seeing the four of them alive and, if not well, not in bad shape at least. They couldn’t say the same for Bellamy. His face was covered in dirt and scars from poorly healed cuts and scrapes.

“Good to see you’re all okay,” he said, voice hoarse with relief. “Everyone’s all good here. Had a run in with some Death Eaters in Prague, but we managed to get away—“

“Prague?” squeaked Fox, while Octavia demanded, “Why are you in the Czech Republic?”

Bellamy shook his head. “We’ve been all over the place. Partly chasing Jasper’s stupid ass down. He’s turned into a real dick after Maya—“ He halted, guilt chasing the irritation off his face. “Anyways. Where are you lot hiding? Maybe we can meet up.”

Octavia opened her mouth to answer, but before she could, Fox put a hand on her arm.

“What?”

“Don’t! It’s not safe.”

“What do you mean?” said Octavia incredulously, gesturing to the mirror. “It’s Bell, he’s not going to—“
“What if he’s been Imperiused? Who else is there that could be?” She shook her head. “It’s too dangerous.”

“Fox is right,” said Clarke; Octavia’s face fell slightly. “I’m sorry, O. Bell should understand.”

“I do,” said Bellamy, having heard enough of the conversation. “I get it. I’m not going to tell you guys where we are for the same reason.”

While the siblings didn’t exactly seem pleased they couldn’t know where the other was, they still delved into conversation about all that had taken place since they were separated. Clarke didn’t like what she heard. By the sounds of it, Bellamy and Jasper were not good for one another at a time like this. Jasper was acting out due to losing Maya (Clarke felt sick with guilt hearing all this, even after Raven and Fox whispered furious assurances that it wasn’t her fault Jasper’s an idiot), Bellamy was still being reckless from what happened to Gina, and Miller was still a ball of rage. Monty seemed to be the only person there with a level head, and was the one to keep them out of trouble when they’d drawn attention to themselves twice (once in Prague, when Jasper had used his wand to set off fireworks, and again in Glasgow when Jasper had deliberately drawn out Death Eaters to “get revenge,” and Bellamy had tortured a handful with the Cruciatus Curse before Monty managed to grab hold of everyone and Disapparate).

Octavia scolded Bellamy and he argued with her and Clarke didn’t have the stomach to listen to it all right now, so she ran herself a bath. When she emerged, Octavia was off the mirror but still looking disgruntled, and Fox and Raven were playing tic-tac-toe with a bit of notepad and pen on the nightstand.

“Do you guys want to move on?”

Clarke was met with fervent nods. She dressed, used her wand to dry her hair, and they Disapparated.

It was a relief to be back in England. They were in St. Albans; none of them had ever been here before, so they wandered for a time before coming across a hotel. Octavia booked their room this time, using the muggle money Raven had procured for her, and the other three waited as she spoke to the front desk clerk.

A muggle family on holiday walked past, a tiny boy wearing a t-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops being pulled along by his mother’s hand. He was staring at Clarke, Fox, and Raven. Fox looked uncomfortable, Clarke forced a polite smile, but Raven smiled.

“Hey kid, I like your shirt,” she said, nodding at the boy.

He beamed and said in an American accent, “Thanks!” He grinned and jerked a thumb at the cartoon creature. “Crash Bandicoot is the best game ever, even if it is old!”

Raven feigned offense. “What’s wrong with being old, huh? The classics are classics for a reason!”

The boy continued beaming as he was led away, and Raven chuckled to herself.

“What the hell is Crash Bandicoot?” said Clarke in amusement.

“A old video game. You know, one of the ones you use a controller for and it shows up on
“Is Crash Bandicoot really the best game?” queried Fox.

Raven shrugged. “I preferred Spyro the Dragon.”

Once in their room, they used the last of the change to clean out the vending machines. Clarke and Octavia let the armfuls of candy and chips fall to the bed, and all four girls sighed as they stared down on it.

“I miss real food,” said Raven woefully.

Fox didn’t say anything, but her jaw was clenching. Clarke felt the frustration and irrational herself, though she forced herself to tone it down. She and Fox had been privileged enough growing up to be accustomed to three full meals a day. Octavia, who had lost her mother at a young age and had meager meals at an orphanage, and Raven, whose mother neglected to feed her more often than remembered, were more adaptable and found it easier to adjust to the inconsistent, small meals.

Clarke could deal mostly because she was so focused on survival, keeping them safe, and distracted by her grief. Fox, however, was growing more irritable and irate by the minute. Some days she was downright grouchy and to the rest of them it felt like walking on eggshells just to avoid her wrath.

They discussed, on several occasions, disguising themselves once more and slipping into town for a proper meal or at least proper shopping, but they were hesitant. They had no idea why or how they were found at the mall and the campsite, so they were understandably reluctant to put it to the test again. Still, it didn’t stop them from discussing the possibilities.

“Why can’t we make a Polyjuice Potion?” said Octavia enthusiastically. “We could disguise ourselves as muggles and then we wouldn’t even need to hide!”

The look Fox gave Octavia was so withering and superior that for a moment it was easy to pretend they were back at Hogwarts talking about their classes. Clarke exchanged a sad smile with Raven.

“Because it’s an incredibly complicated potion with ingredients we’d have to go to the wizarding world to get. Boomslang skin, lacewing flies, powdered horn of bicorn, and more. You have to pick fluxweed during a full moon and stew the lacewing flies exactly twenty-one days beforehand and then you have to brew the potion itself for a month.”

Octavia’s face fell. “Oh...well. Sorry,” she said sheepishly. “Dumb idea, I guess. I don’t really know much about Polyjuice Potion, to be honest.”

“Obviously,” said Fox, causing Raven and Clarke to scowl at her.

Octavia narrowed her eyes. “I’ll kick your ass in Quidditch any day, though.”

“There are all kinds of crazy stories about Polyjuice Potion, O,” intervened Clarke before Fox could snap back.

Raven shifted down the couch to sit closer to them. “Youngest person ever to make it was Hermione Granger when she was twelve years old.”

“Which is really cool considering it’s such a difficult potion to make. Most adults struggle with it and would mess it up,” said Clarke.
“Apparently she did kind of mess it up. She put a cat hair in it instead of the girl she was trying to change into.”

Octavia’s eyes widened slightly and her mouth was curving up, fascinated. “You can’t turn into animals?”

Fox scoffed. “Did you not pay attention at all in your classes?”

“It doesn’t work for non-humans or half-breeds,” said Raven, pointedly ignoring Fox.

“She was stuck in the infirmary healing from it for ages,” said Clarke seriously. Truthfully, she wasn’t sure how accurate that information was. Rather than read about it, she recalled hearing the story from Bellamy, and it was fairly easy to zone out when he went on his historical tirades.

“There was this other woman who got revenge on her husband and the lady he was having an affair with by using Polyjuice Potion,” said Raven with a growing grin. “She literally had sex with him and scooped his spunk—”

“Ew!” said Fox in repulsion. “Why didn’t she just use his hair? Or even toenail clippings? Just…literally anything else?”

Raven shrugged. “Theatrics? She went to Gringotts and took all his gold and then showed up at his mistress’s work and dumped him in this big to-do. It was great.”

“I’m guessing she was caught, since you know about it,” said Fox, raising a brow.

“Well, yeah, she served time in Azkaban for it and the goblins were pissed and her husband and his girlfriend were humiliated and then got over it, but still. It was hilarious, I still remember reading about it in the paper.”

“When was that?” asked Octavia

“I think it was in my third year,” said Raven.

“Ah, yeah,” nodded Clarke. “I remember now. My mum was horrified and sent Pike a howler, said it was ridiculous to cover something so inappropriate in the Daily Prophet when Hogwarts students get it delivered. That’s probably part of the reason he hates us.”

“Pike hates everyone,” said Octavia with a roll of her eyes.

“And we all hate him. Which is embarrassing for you considering he was once Head of your House,” smirked Raven.

Octavia groaned. “He taints the Gryffindor name! And I’m not even joking. Dead serious. He shouldn’t have been in Gryffindor at all. What are the Gryffindor tenets?” She splayed out her fingers and listed them one by one. “Bravery, chivalry…none of the things Pike is! Dickwad should have been in Slytherin.”

“Hey, none of that!” said Clarke, though she was amused by how put out Octavia was. “Sure, he’s cunning and ambitious, but he’s not clever, definitely doesn’t care about fraternity…”

“Yeah, well, he’s sure as hell doesn’t belong in my house either,” grumbled Octavia. “Gryffindor my ass.”

“The Sorting’s the law,” said Raven with a lofty sigh, clearly taking delight in winding up
Octavia, who scowled and playfully shoved at her.

“The Sorting is a joke.”

Clarke, Raven, and Octavia all fell silent, glancing incredulously at one another before turning to stare at the direction the quiet statement had come from. Fox stared back at them, bemused.

“What? It is. We’re put into houses based on our own biases and preconceived notions of ourselves, and the houses we’re in and inter-house relationships mold us even more. Albus Dumbledore himself said in the revised version of *Hogwarts, A History* that he believed we were sorted too soon. Granted, it was a quote from his portrait self, but still…”

They all remained quiet, watching Fox with keen interest. Fox sighed and continued, “Look at all of us. I think pretty much every one of us asked, in some way, for the houses we were put in. I came here already wanting to be in Ravenclaw because that’s the house both of my parents were in, and it’s known for its academic prowess. Raven had a difficult childhood with a mother that made her feel worthless all the time, but she’s brilliant and creative so of course she hoped for the House that would foster that to make her successful both for her own self worth, and as a way to spite her mother. Bellamy is Octavia’s big brother and has always felt responsible for her, so of course he’d want to be in a House that espouses everything he feels like a great big brother should be, chivalric and brave. Octavia would want to be in that same House, and with the way she grew up, scared and having to be protected, she’d want to represent that same Gryffindor tenet, courage, to take care of herself and of others too, not to mention her loyalty—she’d want to be in the same house as her brother. Clarke didn’t want to be in her mum’s shadow but she didn’t want to hurt her either by choosing her dad, so she chose an entirely new House that was all her own. We all know you’re a total Slytherin, but if you hadn’t had to worry about hurting your mum, you would have probably asked to be in the House your dad had been in… you would have grown up in a place that encourages and celebrates those tenets and became a Gryffindor anyway.” Fox shrugged. “We become what we choose to become. Even though you still have so many qualities that could put you in Slytherin and Gryffindor, because you’ve grown up in Ravenclaw, those qualities have been made stronger too. You’re more creative and open-minded than you would have been in either of the other two houses. Even though you technically shouldn’t have been, you now are a Ravenclaw. You chose it, so you became it.”

There was a long silence.

“What the fuck, Fox,” said Raven, mildly impressed. “With the way you’ve apparently psycho-analyzed us all, maybe your calling is a fucking therapist.”

Fox just shrugged again, cheeks a bit pink.

“As always, Rae, your words are so elegant,” sighed Octavia, hooking an arm around Raven’s shoulders. She pressed a firm kiss to Raven’s cheek, causing Raven to actually giggle, which made Clarke snort and Fox smile.

“What was that for?”

Octavia shrugged. “I’m just proud of you. Fox’s right, your life basically sucked before you came to Hogwarts. You’re so fucking smart though. We all know you’re going to do big things, Reyes, big things. Just remember us when you’re famous for reinventing the wizarding world or whatever it is you’ll do.”

Raven rolled her eyes, but they could all see the dark blush spreading across her cheeks and reddening her ears. “Like I’d ever forget you guys.”
Octavia turned to Clarke, smiling. “I’m proud of you too, Clarke. You’ve always been the one to take charge and keep us safe, especially when we’re being idiots. Even before all this. I was a mouthy first year but you never dropped to my level. Bellamy was a dick to you and you never Transfigured him into a kumquat. Only a truly good person could have resisted doing that.”

They all chuckled again.

“And Fox, I’m crazy proud of you too,” added Octavia. Fox looked surprised at having been addressed. Her brow furrowed in silent questioning, so Octavia went on, “You were raised to have some not-so-nice views, but you thought for yourself. You’re a good person.”

Fox swallowed hard, pleased beyond words at Octavia’s words but too prideful to show it. She glanced at Raven and wondered if Raven agreed. Raven’s opinion was most important. It always had been.

They went to bed soon after, but Fox didn’t sleep. She lay in the double bed she shared with Octavia and stared up at the ceiling, comforted by the slow, steady breathing of her three friends.

Never in a thousand years had Fox imagined herself here. Of course she’d never imagined being flung into another wizarding war, watching friends die and running for her life…she shuddered, the fear, so familiar now, shivering up her spine. She’d just never imagined having the friends that she did.

When she’d first arrived at Hogwarts, she’d been nervous. Both her parents were in Ravenclaw and she was certain she would be too, but what if she wasn’t? And then she certainly hadn’t anticipated sharing a dormitory room for six years with quite possibly the loudest girl she’d ever met…Raven Reyes.

Doing homework and maintaining the best grades of her year was next to impossible when living with Raven. Constant explosions from whatever magical inventions she was working on, near continuous streams of inappropriate language, and a never-ending supply of pranks. It wasn’t the behavior of all muggle-borns, Fox knew that because she had other muggle-borns in her classes and they acted just fine. It seemed that Raven was just, quite frankly, a complete psychopath. She was also really, really pretty, and honest, and far braver than Fox would ever be.

Sometimes Fox wasn’t sure if she was jealous of Raven or simply wanted to kiss her. The two urges were easily confused and more than interchangeable.

Not that that was ever even remotely in the realm of possibility, which was why she never dared to admit to Raven she had…slightly more than friendly feelings for her (okay, way more than slightly, she was hopelessly in love with her, she was pretty sure her amortentia smelled exactly like her, and of course this would happen to Fox: falling for the muggle-born girl she’d done nothing but insult during her first and second years at Hogwarts). If it was impossible before, it certainly was now, because any fool could see that Raven was head over heels for that Durmstrang girl who happened to be gorgeous and powerful and every bit as bold and striking as Raven was; who could compete with that?

Certainly not Fox, who had wasted no time in her very first year at Hogwarts in telling the annoying second-year who kept waking her up in the middle of the night to the sound of quill scratching parchment because she had waited until the very last minute to do her homework, or she’d woken up possessed with an idea for a new spell to try tomorrow and wanted to remember it, that she was a blight to all wizardkind and belonged to Hogwarts as much as the next muggle. Of course it was wrong and more than a little bit melodramatic, but Fox was half-asleep and cranky and absolutely alarmed that the short, scrawny second-year with the pajama pants that showed too much
ankle and an angry pout to her lips had marched over to stand in her space and demand what her problem with her was.

Fox was smart enough to know her problem was less with Raven and more with herself. She’d grown up hearing things ranging from scathing insults to well-meaning jokes about muggles and muggle-borns. The worst comments came from her grandfather on her father’s side, claiming that muggle-borns were thieves who somehow stole magic from real wizards and witches and that they all deserved to be expunged. The best comments came from her parents and their beliefs that muggle-borns, while not as talented or clever as real witches and wizards, were still worthy of being treated with stiff politeness (which usually translated more to cold indifference).

Hogwarts had been very good for her, not just for providing her magical education, but for exposing her to a variety of people and helping her learn to celebrate the differences rather than fear them. She had never really met a muggle-born until Hogwarts, and had never had much to do with anyone aside from fellow wizards and witches throughout her childhood. She still remembered the first time she ever properly met a muggle, and how fascinated she’d been…

Fox watched her father’s retreating back as he followed the Head of the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes into the nearby building. He was here on business and she was supposed to be sticking close to his side, but the sound of something strange stopped her. It sounded like a...piano?

Fox strained her ears, listening hard. She was confused. She was alone in the middle of an unfamiliar muggle town and there was a piano playing somewhere.

She stood, torn. Should she follow the sound of the music? Her parents would be furious if she wandered off alone, especially here of all places.

And yet....

Curiosity had her taking one step forward, then another. There was a pulling inside her, urging her to go forth and find the source of the music.

Her father had taught her to listen to her gut instinct. It wouldn't lead her wrong, he'd always said. Fox prayed it wouldn't lead her wrong now.

She walked for a few minutes before coming to what seemed to be a small stone house. Warily, she slowly walked around it, attempting to peek into a window. There was a grand piano visible in the living room, one bigger than any she’d seen before, but the odd thing was that it wasn’t playing on its own. There was a person there, fingers moving deftly over the keys. A muggle. He was old, with only a few sparse gray hairs on his bald head, and there was a soft green blanket draped over his shoulders that hung to the seat he sat on.

The longer the music played, the more Fox’s stomach loosened out of the uneasy knot it had been in. She silently walked around the steps leading to the small house, listening as the music rose in pace. She timidly broached the entrance, careful to open the door slowly so it didn’t creak, and appreciated the rush of warmth as she crossed the threshold; she wondered how muggles kept their homes warm, for there was no fire crackling. She moved through the short hallway and stopped dead in the doorway of the living room, her eyes on the man who played the piano. The music had changed. The air in the entire house had changed. It was so strange, because this was a muggle,
The music was a frenzy of both catastrophic and euphonic sounds, frantic and passionate as it raised octave after octave, spiraling into a crescendo of notes that shattered Fox’s very soul. Then it calmed. She could see the man, could see how his knobby fingers stilled, quivered over the piano keys for a moment. He resumed playing, the music drifting down into a somber epiphany of melancholy lullabies. Fox’s heart slowed with it, as though every beat molded itself after each key that was pressed. Beauty was filling the room, emanating from him, from the magic he played on the piano. It engulfed Fox, wrapped around her, and left her no choice but to stand frozen in the doorway, her eyes locked on him.

She could catch glimpses of the old man’s face as he turned his gaze toward different ends of the piano. He was clearly very old, but there was something youthful in his pallid face, perhaps from the peace given to him by his elegant fingers fluttering over the keys.

An urge to see the man fully rushed over Fox, so vital and strong that without thinking she opened her mouth in a desperate bid to call for his attention, before she remembered herself, that this was a muggle and she was a witch and she shouldn’t be here in the first place. As a result only an odd strangled sound managed to escape her lips.

The music came to an abrupt stop, ending with a clang of deep and high notes when the man dropped his hands. He rotated around on the bench to face Fox. His jowls were quivering, either from the surprise of an intruder in his house or from the effort it had taken to play the music. There were deep wrinkles carved into his face, his nose was bulbous and large, and the sunken eyes staring in Fox’s direction were terrifying, a jarring bright shade of electric blue.

But the man didn’t do anything except cock his head slightly to the left, blinking slowly.

“Who’s there?” he eventually said, voice deep and gravelly. Fox’s heart missed a beat as she realized that his eyes were not an odd color, they were pale and glassy because he was blind. He couldn’t see and had no magic to fix it. It was mind-boggling.

When there was no answer, the corners of his thin lips quirked slightly and he placed his hand on the piano again, the low notes reverberating in the silent air that hung between them. “I haven’t heard any footsteps, so I know you’re still there. Are you a thief, or a music-lover?”

Fox swallowed, taking a step back, trying to decide whether she should run off or speak to the man.

The man made a noise of amusement in the back of his throat. “Well, I suppose you could be both,” he grunted as he swiveled around on the bench again, slow and rather clumsily, but nevertheless, a second later, he was placing his hands on the keys again. “If you’re here to rob me, make it quick. If you’re here to kill me, make it quicker. If you’re here to listen…”

He began to play the piano again. The music was reverberating in her chest, in tune with her heartbeat thrumming like the wings of a hummingbird. Fox burned with shame. She shouldn’t be here. She had entered a muggle home. This was a muggle here. Her parents were going to be furious. Her dry mouth opened and closed.

But she didn’t want to leave. She wanted to stay here and listen to this music. She wanted to know how this man knew she was here when he could not see her. She wanted to know how he could play the piano so well, every bit as well as a magically playing piano. She wanted to know how he lived when he could not use his eyes and he had no magic.
So, as timidly as a mouse, she scurried a few steps forward, footsteps silent on the dusty oak floor, coming to a stop at the piano. She watched in awe as the man’s fingers, so bony and mottled, tips covered in bandages, flowed over the keys as though they were twenty years younger.

He played on for several more minutes and Fox remained where she was, transfixed. By the time the music tapered off and his fingertips danced over the final high keys, Fox was no longer caught and breathless, but had a drowsy sort of warmth inside her chest. The music reminded her a bit of the time her father had produced his patronus, a vibrant silvery rabbit, to cheer her up that time when she was sick with spattergroit as a young child.

“So I take it you’re not a thief.”

Fox startled; she had been staring at the keys despite the fact that he had stopped playing. An unpleasant heat crept up her neck and ears, but she swallowed and said softly, “Um, no.”

“Are you a child?” the old man said in surprise.

Fox nodded, before she remembered he couldn’t see her. Before she could stop it, she was blurting out, “How do you play when you can’t see?”

A ghost of pride flickered across the man’s withered face as his lips tilted up. “Years of practice. I used to play at the Royal Opera House, when I was a young lad.”

Fox didn’t know what the Royal Opera House was. She was burning with questions, but she wasn’t sure they were appropriate…then again…this was only a muggle, right?

“You play beautifully,” she said politely. “How did you learn?”

The man sighed, smile turning wistful. “My mother. If you think I played beautifully, you should have heard her. It was like angels, it was. What’s your name?”

"Fox," she whispered.

“Fox?” He chuckled. “Funny name.”

She blushed and frowned.

“So what are you doing here, Fox? Where are your parents?”

"Ah, I was.” Fox glanced around. "I, uh..."

"You lost?” he guessed. He rose to his feet, a few joints cracking, and shuffled around the bench, reaching for a big stick—a cane—that was propped up against the piano. “Follow me.”

She trotted after him, marveling at the fact that he was using this stick to tap the ground before him, guiding them out of the house and down onto the street. They walked in silence for a moment, Fox buzzing with anticipation.

“Where are we going?” she asked.

“To the police station,” said the man. “We’ll have to get you some help if you want to find your parents.”

“I thought you were helping me?”

He chuckled. “More help, then.”
Of course, they had hardly walked at all before Fox’s name was called out by her father. Her insides plummeted as she and the old man both halted, turning in the direction of the voice.

She watched her father march toward them, face set stern. “What are you doing with a muggle?” he said sharply.

“Nothing,” she said sullenly.

“What did you just call me?” frowned the man.

Fox’s gasp caught in her throat as her father lifted his wand.

“Obliviate,” he said firmly, wand pointed in the man’s face. “You are on the main road. Go home.”

Fox’s heart sank as a blank expression slackened the wizened features. The man turned, tapping his cane on the pavement, heading back toward his house.

“Why did you have to do that?” Fox demanded heatedly.

“What?”

Fox fell mutinously silent, glaring down at her own knobbly knees. Under her father’s perplexed albeit harsh stare, the emotion was building until she couldn’t take it anymore.

“Why do you hate muggles so much?” she burst.

Her father paused, mouth falling open. “Hate muggles?” he said in astonishment, turning to crouch beside her so they were eye-level. “I don’t hate muggles, not at all! I have a great deal of respect for them. Look at what they manage to do, all with no magic!” he added, gesturing toward the city around them. “But the fact of the matter is, we are two different species.”

“We’re all humans,” Fox muttered.

“Yes,” her father said agreeably, nodding. “But we are as separate as we are the same, and it has to be that way. You know the history. Years ago, muggles used to hunt down people like us and tried to exterminate us—“

“That was centuries ago! And hardly any wizardkind was actually hurt anyway.”

Her father smiled, exasperated and faintly amused. “That’s only a few generations ago, which isn’t very long at all. Muggles were hurting other muggles in their efforts to find us. So we withdrew from the public, created the Statute of Secrecy, and we all live with this truce now, separate and safe. I don’t hate muggles, Fox, but I do acknowledge that they are different than us. Not better or worse. Just different.”

She bowed her head, hating the patronizing little pat he gave it, and hating herself more for disappointing him.

Fox’s lips tilted down in a frown as the memory brought tears to her eyes. To this day, she couldn’t quite explain why it was so significant to her. It was one of those moments that changed the shape of the world to her. She’d never told anyone about it, though she’d considered many times confiding it to Raven. Maybe it would change how Raven saw her.
It was pointless at the moment, though, just like these thoughts were. Fox was hungry and
tired and sick of this life, of running from invisible dangers and being trapped in small rooms with
three other people. Everything around her frightened her, but most of all- even more than the deaths
of her friends- Octavia losing her magic terrified her. If Fox lost her magic, she didn't know what
she'd do, didn't know how she would survive. She wasn't sure if she could stomach living as a
muggle, as a squib. It would be karmic retribution, which everything she'd ever said to Raven, if she
did lose her magic...which scared her even more. Where would she be without magic? Where would
any of them be? Clarke, at least, would understand her fear. Clarke was a half-blood but had been
raised as a pure-blood, mostly only ever knowing the wizarding world. Octavia was...well, she was
dealing with it, but she had been raised mostly as a muggle. Raven would be completely fine without
magic, even though she would insist that she wouldn't be here if it weren't for magic that saved her
life growing up. But Fox? Fox would be nowhere and nothing without her magic. She couldn't do it.

She missed life before all this, and she knew she was being grumpy snapping at her friends,
but she was just so tired.

She let the tiredness overtake her, and finally drifted off to sleep.

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A week stretched out into a month. A month of hiding in dark hotel rooms, constantly
looking over their shoulders. A month of shitty food; they had all visibly lost weight. By the third
week, they couldn’t take it anymore.

Octavia burst into tears, Raven remained in bed all day staring up at the ceiling like a
comatose patient, and Fox was almost pulling her own hair out. Clarke watched them all in a surreal,
bemused state.

“I miss school. I miss Tesla. I miss my parents.” Fox sniffed, jaw clenched tight. Her eyes
were bright, but no tears fell. She’d been rambling complaints now for the better part of an hour. It
finally roused Raven, who sat up in bed and waved her wand. A roll of toilet paper zoomed into the
room from the bathroom. She tore off a few pieces and handed them to Octavia, who blew her nose
and sniffled, blinking puffy red eyes. Fox, meanwhile, continued ranting. “I miss how things were.
I’m sick of this, I’m sick of all of it.”

“And you think we aren’t?” said Raven dryly. “This isn’t exactly my idea of a fucking
holiday.”

Fox shot her a glare. “If you could stop making everything about you every five seconds, that
would be great.”

“Me?” said Raven incredulously. “You’re saying that to me?”

Fox flared up at once. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’re having a fucking laugh, that’s what! All you’ve ever done is made
everything about you, so I don’t know where you get off saying—“

“Fuck you, Raven,” said Fox lowly, causing Raven to gape. Fox rarely cursed. Her eyes
were bright, her face flushed red. “You’re so up your own ass that you can’t even see how things
“You’re so full of shit,” said Raven loudly. Clarke flinched. It was so reminiscent of their behavior at Hogwarts it almost seemed bittersweet, but Fox and Raven’s fights were never good. It was mostly Raven screaming and Fox struggling to stand her ground even though she was usually the one who caused the fight in the first place. “All you do is put me down, I’m so sick of it—“

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“You’ve always treated me like shit because I’m a muggleborn. If you hate me so much, just say it!”

Fox blinked. “What?”

“You heard me,” said Raven fiercely. “If you hate me so much, just say it, don’t tiptoe around it and attack me all the time. Just come out with it, don’t be a coward!”

“I don’t hate you!” said Fox angrily.

Raven scoffed derisively. “You’ve always looked down your nose at me, you treated me like shit in my second year and—“

“And I was wrong!” Fox shouted.

Clarke and Octavia exchanged a glance. They were used to Fox and Raven fighting, but it was never Fox who resorted to shouting, nor did she ever admit to being wrong. Even Raven seemed staggered; she stared at Fox with her mouth hanging open slightly, still scowling and breathing hard, clearly wanting to yell some more, but too taken aback and curious to see what Fox will say next.

“I was wrong,” said Fox again, considerably quieter this time. “My parents are pureblood, my grandparents are pureblood—I grew up hearing them go on and on about how the pureblood line is dying out and it’s all thanks to muggleborns and blood traitors. Then I turn eleven and go to Hogwarts and I have this loud, obnoxious roommate who is in every sense of the word a muggle. I’m not saying it was right,” Fox added loudly when Raven began to furiously butt in. “It wasn’t, it was wrong. You aren’t a muggle, you’re a witch. But there’s nothing wrong with muggles. You are a muggleborn, and there’s nothing wrong with it. In fact, it’s my favorite thing about you.”

For the second time—an actual record—Raven is speechless. Fox determinedly crossed the room and took Raven’s hands in her own.

“Raven, I think you’re amazing. You had a hard life, you didn’t have the mum you deserve, and you came to a place of magic with very little prior knowledge of it, but you excelled. In every possible way. You’re top of nearly every class, you were prefect and you’re Quidditch captain, everyone loves you. You’re funny and you’re beautiful and you’re really fucking good at magic, better than any pureblood, better than anyone I know period. You have these crazy, brilliant inventions and I really think one day you’re going to change the world.”

Raven was still stunned. She gawked at Fox, eyes wide. She stiffened further still when Fox leaned forward to wrap her arms around her, pulling her into a tight hug. Fox was not often so easy with the physical affection, so it was as strange and heartwarming for Clarke and Octavia to watch as it was for Raven to receive and Fox to give.

“Thanks, I guess,” said Raven shakily when Fox withdrew. “I, uh…” She broke out into a nervous smile and rubbed the back of her neck, blushing. “That’s probably, like, six years of
compliments all at once. Wow. You didn’t have to…”

“I know I didn’t,” said Fox, sounding a little amused. She was blushing more furiously than Clarke and Octavia had ever seen. “I wanted to. I…” Clarke held her breath. She knew what was coming, could feel it building, the imminent confession emanating from Fox like radiation. She had no idea what would happen. Raven had Anya, and Fox knew that, but this was a truth she had needed to set free for far too long now. “I…I love you, Raven.” They could all hear the sound of her swallowing, hard. Clarke would have thought it impossible, but Fox’s face was growing even redder. She looked uncertain and young and for some reason it made Clarke’s heart swell in her chest. “You know that, don’t you?”

Raven smiled, bracingly rubbing Fox’s arm. “‘Course I do, Fox. I love you too.” Fox’s face fell slightly, but Raven didn’t notice, since she pulled her into another hug. Clarke and Octavia exchanged a glance again. For how brilliant Raven was, she could be so oblivious at times. “I love all you guys,” added Raven, brown eyes bright as they looked at Octavia and Clarke over Fox’s shoulder. She opened an arm, reaching for them, and they had little choice but to shuffle forward and j

“I’m sorry,” whispered Fox, the tears in her eyes finally spilling over. “I’m sorry I snapped at you. I’m just—I’m so hungry.”

“Me too,” murmured Octavia, Raven and Clarke agreeing. “We can’t keep living like this. We’re wasting away, we need real food.”

After that, they took to disguising themselves and sneaking into town.

They did as best they could, but admittedly weren’t the greatest at it. Raven changed Clarke’s hair red and altered a few of her features until she was only vaguely recognizable. She gave Octavia short blonde hair (which was bizarre to them all but made Octavia giggle) and larger eyes. She turned Fox’s skin color the same shade as her own and both lengthened and darkened her hair. She did the best on herself, giving herself wrinkles and gray hair that, along with her limp, made her look startlingly like an old woman.

They gorged themselves on pizza in a restaurant called Zizzi and after sludging their way back to the hotel, felt absolutely sick from eating so much. They lounged around the entire next day, nibbling at the leftovers cold from the fridge. It was a marvel, the difference full bellies could make. Just one day of food and they were practically high on it, so happy and relieved that they were laughing and chatting and dancing (at least Octavia was; she was preforming some odd twirling and jumping in tune to Spongebob Squarepants, which had quickly became apparent to be Raven’s favorite show, by how often she put it on. That, or it was just to annoy Fox…which may well be both, considering after she and Fox had the argument and got their resentments off their chests, the television was more often than not on the documentaries about how muggle things were made that Fox seemed to be entranced by; the one about hot dogs had really fascinated her).

One night, nearing the two-month mark since the battle at Hogwarts, they were full up on chicken curry and steadily working their way through a tub of raspberry ripple ice cream. Some movie about a boy dancing ballet was on the television. Octavia and Fox were on one bed, Fox braiding Octavia’s hair. Clarke sat at the foot of their bed, right hand clutching a notepad, left sweeping a pen across it. Raven was lounging on the other bed, making ridiculous poses for Clarke to draw.

“Draw me like one of your French girls, Clarke.”

Octavia burst into cackles that had Fox narrowing her eyes and pulling her head back to
tighten the braid. Clarke arched a brow in amusement.

“One of these days I’ll understand your inside jokes,” she muttered, smiling as Raven stuck her tongue out. She added a line and a tongue to the drawing, making it look ridiculous, but entertaining. She pulled the piece of paper free and showed it to Octavia, who collapsed in laughter all over again and even caused Fox to snort and drop the piece of hair she was working on.

“Let me see, let me see!” She snatched the paper when Clarke offered it and grinned at it. “I expected better, Griffin. My ass is way bigger than that. Did something invisible bite a butt cheek off or what?”

“I was trying to compensate for the lighting,” said Clarke. “The moonlight coming in through the curtains goes over half your body!”

“So you lose points for creativity, then. You could have made me a mermaid, bathing in the moonlight.”

Clarke rolled her eyes as she quickly sketched another picture of Raven. She ripped it free and handed it to her. Raven faked offense at the rather offensive picture. “I said bathing, not drowning in it!”

“Speaking of bathing, go take a bath,” said Octavia, wrinkling her nose. “You stink.”

“My brace stinks,” said Raven gracefully, sitting up and twirling her wand. Octavia shrieked as the brace shot toward her, and Raven snickered as she limped her way to the bathroom.

“Urgh, it really does stink!”

Another twirl of her wand and the tap was running. “Wash it then, you big baby.”

“Ugh!”

“I’ll do it,” said Fox with a roll of her eyes. “Give it here.”

Octavia flung it into the air and Fox drew her wand just in time to halt it. She murmured the spell and the brace drifted over to the sink, which turned on. Soap poured itself in and the brace began to wash itself.

Fox set her wand down on the nightstand and finished up Octavia’s hair while Clarke continued her mindless sketches. She bit her lip when she began to recognize the shapes she was tracing—the slope of cheekbones, the slant of a sharp jaw, the clouds of braided hair, and the spiky slant of a mask. She swallowed and trashed the sketch, tossing the pen back onto the nightstand beside Fox’s wand.

“Thanks Fox,” said Octavia happily, jumping up when Fox was done. She crawled into bed and snuggled up beneath the covers. It was only seven in the evening and they’d just finished eating, but they had all decided to watch a movie together tonight.

“You’re welcome,” said Fox, standing to go check on the brace and dry it before hanging it up for Raven to grab.

Clarke slipped into bed beside Octavia, yawning and absentely wrapping an arm around Octavia’s slim waist, curling up beside her. She watched the show on television until Fox walked across her view, heading to her bag to retrieve the cheap set of pajamas she’d gotten from Tesco weeks ago. Clarke returned to watching the television as Fox began to change, but a moment later
her attention was drawn back to Fox when she let out a strangled squeak.

They burst into laughter as they saw that Fox had somehow managed to tangle her arms and head up in her shirt when trying to pull it off and change into her bed clothes.

“Aargh! My wand. Where’s my wand?”

Clarke and Octavia were both laughing too hard to even search for it.

“Guys!” whined Fox, lightly stamping a foot. Brown eyes peeked under her twisted arms to stare reproachfully at them. “A little help here? It’s dangerous for me to not have my wand…”

“Relax,” snorted Octavia, as Clarke rose from bed to help her. “You’re not going to die because you’ve misplaced your wand for two seconds.”

“Well,” began Fox dryly, face barely visible over the lace material. “If I had to go, I guess this is how I’d want it to be. Drowning in moonlight. Strangled by my own bra.”

“So poetic,” quipped Clarke, unclasping the bra with a quick twitch of her fingers and tugging it off. Fox hurriedly covered her rather flat chest, blushing furiously. Clarke was grateful—for Fox—that Raven was in the bathroom.

“Here’s your wand, by the way,” said Octavia, grabbing it from the nightstand and tossing it Fox’s way once she’d hastily pulled on her pajama shirt. It was decorated with the Lester City logo. Raven picked it out; she thought it was hilarious that Fox had to wear pajamas with little foxes all over them.

“Thanks,” mumbled Fox, crawling into the next bed.

Later, once the sound of the shower shut off, Fox’s eyes widened, as though she’d just realized she and Raven were sharing a bed tonight. Clarke hid her smile in Octavia’s back. Still, she didn’t want to make her uncomfortable, so…

“Sorry Fox, I took your spot over here,” spoke up Clarke. “Did you want to switch back?”

“Ah—no, it’s okay.” Fox’s smile was rather tremulous, and her cheeks were pink, but there was a type of steely resolve in her eyes, as though determined to prove to herself she could handle this.

Clarke had to quickly hide her smile again. By the squeeze of Octavia’s hand on her arm, she found it as sweet and entertaining as Clarke did.

Raven brushed her teeth and put her brace on her knee over her pajama pants (hers decorated with black cats). She was toweling her hair dry as she walked back into the room.

“Oh, are we sharing a bed, Fox?” she said when she noticed the arrangement; Clarke and Octavia cuddled up together in one bed, Fox seeming small and wide-eyed in the other. Raven’s hair framed her face in wild, wet tangles, but she smiled as she hopped into bed beside Fox. “I’m always big spoon, so don’t even try.”

Fox rolled her eyes but seemed incapable of speech, especially when Raven snuggled down and threw a leg over her.

“So what movie are we watching?” asked Raven.
“Whatever’s on the telly, considering I’m too lazy to get up again and change it?”

They all snorted at Octavia’s words, but all seemed to be in agreement considering none of them got up.

Whatever current movie was playing finished, and they watched the credits go before the next came on. As soon as the opening sequence began, Raven’s face broke out into a wide grin.

“Shaun of the Dead. Excellent.”

“What’s this about?” said Clarke sleepily.

“Zombies.”

“What are those, again?” said Fox. “I remember reading a bit about them in History of Magic, but as they’re American folklore, there wasn’t much to read…”

“Usually they’re dead people brought back to life by something, usually a virus, and they have to feed off humans. Usually eat human brains.”

Fox’s brow furrowed. “That sounds depressing… I don’t want to watch a sad movie.”

“Nah, it’s not sad. This is a funny movie. Watch, you’ll see.”

And see they did. The movie was funny enough that it was able to keep Clarke from falling asleep for a time, but she still drifted off somewhere in the middle of the movie.

When she woke again, the movie was in its ending credits and Fox, Raven, and Octavia were all up out of bed huddled around the microwave chatting as they awaited for the bag of popcorn to come out. Fox was always fascinated with the microwave and especially for the popcorn, so Raven was currently filling her in on movie theaters and the popcorn they served there.

Clarke dragged herself out of bed, yawning, and went to relieve her bladder. Once she’d washed her hands and returned, Fox, Raven, and Octavia were all sitting on one bed sharing the bag of popcorn. Clarke extended her hand and Raven dropped a few pieces in. Clarke popped them into her mouth but had barely sat back on her own bed when Fox started choking on one.

“Anapneo,” said Raven quickly; the piece Fox had been choking on went zooming away onto the floor. “You okay? It can be a bit dry and salty, you really should have a drink while you eat it.”

Fox didn’t answer, but it was less because she was gasping and more due to the redness of her cheeks at Raven’s close proximity. Amused and hoping to hide her smile, Clarke slid off the bed again.

“Anyone want a cup of tea?”

Raven and Octavia shook their heads, but Fox nodded rather desperately.

As Clarke busied herself at the sink near the bathroom, filling the kettle, her thoughts drifted to the Durmstrangs. Fox had had a pretty obvious crush on Raven for as long as Clarke could remember, but had never once made a move. Now Raven was in some type of relationship with Anya… even though they hadn’t seen the Durmstrangs in nearly two months, and things had certainly not left on amicable terms, Raven was clearly in love with her even if she wouldn’t admit it (and Clarke was not about to try to get it out of her in fear that Raven would try to make her spill her
own feelings about Lexa, and Clarke didn’t even want to think about that). Fox’s crush was obvious to Clarke, Octavia, and Wells, at least (and Monty had even mentioned it once to Clarke), but no one else—and definitely not Raven—seemed aware. Which wasn’t that surprising, honestly, Raven could be totally oblivious when it came to things like that. Still, Clarke wondered what would happen in the future when Fox did finally dreg up the courage to admit her feelings. She only hoped Raven was tactful enough to let her down very, very gently.

Clarke sighed as she realized there was a huge crack in the center of the ancient kettle. She tapped her wand on the rim of the kettle; there was a rush of warmth as water instantly boiled, steam curling into the air. Clarke used her teeth to tear open the tea bag that came complimentary with their hotel stay and dropped it into the plastic mug. She opened the milk and poured a bit in, using the spoon to stir and scoop under the tea bag before another thought occurred to her.

She popped her head back around the wall. “Fox, do you want any sugar?”

“Yes please,” she called back.

As Clarke set about opening one of the complimentary sugar packets, there was a knock on the door.

“Room service.”

Clarke rolled her eyes; this was the second time today. Room service had already come this morning to refill their toiletries and replace their towels.

Raven sighed. “Okay, there’s a fine line between good service and being plain annoying,” she grumbled, but she rose to her feet to get the door.

Clarke reentered the room, idly stirring the cup of tea with her wand.

Raven opened the door, and was blasted back before any of them could blink. Ontari pointed her wand at Clarke and was casting a nonverbal spell before she even registered her presence.

Clarke’s limbs sprang together as she froze in place. Thick black ropes sprang out of thin air and wrapped around her before she could so much as lift her wand. The cup of tea fell to the floor, shattering and splashing everywhere. It burned Clarke’s leg but she didn’t have any breath to gasp with. She fell back against the wall before crashing to the floor, helpless to do anything other than stare up in horror as the small hotel room burst into chaos. Ontari was in the doorway with Death Eaters behind her trying to crowd in but blocked, both by Ontari taking up the space and the spells that Raven and Fox were already casting their way.

Clarke was caught and trapped on thin carpet. Octavia was magic-less but certainly not defenseless; she grabbed the closest things nearest to her and chucked them at the Death Eaters, managing to smack one hard in the face with the phone. Raven and Fox were slashing their wands through the air, deflecting and casting spells, staggering back as spell after spell was thrown at them. It was two against half a dozen, and the only reason they weren’t yet overwhelmed was because of the small hotel room. The Death Eaters were having trouble flooding in through the doorway, there was smoke and chaos everywhere, and Ontari was a monstrous presence in the room, face lit up by wicked delight as she sent streak after red streak at Raven and Fox.

“Clarke!” Octavia whispered in a blind panic as she crawled across the floor. She was clutching the hotel key, hopelessly hacking and sawing at the rope. It was working, but by the rate it took, Clarke wouldn’t be free for another hour. Octavia seized her wand out of her hand and tried it again, and again, but of course nothing happened. She was cursing and had her face screwed up,
eyes welling with panic and frustration.

“Finite! Relashio!”

Raven had ducked down to the rescue. Clarke wriggled free as the remaining ropes faded away before she scrambled to her feet, seizing her wand from Octavia. The three of them were forced to duck down behind the bed again the moment they tried to rise, the spells shot at them leaving craters in the walls where their heads had been.

Fox was still standing, slashing her wand faster and fiercer than Clarke had ever seen her. Ontari looked as though she were enjoying herself; there was a hard smirk on her face as she shifted her wand, pointing at the telephone on the floor that Octavia had thrown earlier, and making it shoot toward Fox like a heavy bullet. Fortunately, Fox’s reflexes were sharp, and she managed to deflect the two curses cast by the Death Eaters straining to reach in behind Ontari in the doorway before fluidly turning to point at the phone just in time, halting it in midair before snarling, “Vermiculus!” and stabbing her wand toward Ontari.

The phone exploded into a writhing tangle of worms and shot back toward Ontari and the other Death Eaters, who all shrieked and only just managed to blast the worms away.

Raven gave a shout of laughter and triumph, rolling out from behind the bed and raising up onto a knee to send a stunning spell that Ontari deflected; it hit the Death Eater beside her instead, and he crashed unconscious to the ground, his place immediately taken by another.

Clarke made to follow her but was buffeted by a barrage of red streaks; she cast protego just before Octavia seized her by the scruff of her shirt and yanked her back to safety. “Stupefy!” shouted Clarke, hurling the spell over the corner of the bed.

Ontari deflected it, and then was hit by a streak of red from Fox. She crumbled, falling back into the crowd of Death Eaters who were now finally able to push through. Clarke would have cried out in victory for Fox if she weren’t too busy gasping for breath and casting more spells.

There was not enough room for them all to fit. There were now almost a dozen people crammed into a tiny hotel room, a tattered sofa and two large beds missing chunks of stuffing and smoking in places between them all. Popcorn littered the floor and the spilled tea was soaking into the carpet. Clarke and Octavia were still between the bed and the wall, Raven was on the floor between both beds, and Fox was the only one still standing, now staggering back and knocking into the nightstand as she wildly attempted to deflect several spells at once.

Clarke’s stomach lurched as there was a flash of light and then Ontari was back, a furious expression on her face, a manic glint in her eyes, and Clarke knew what was going to happen but she couldn’t move fast enough to stop it—

“Avada Kedavra!”

Clarke squeezed her eyes shut as though it would stop it from happening. The green light shone through her eyelids. She opened them back up to see Fox falling limp to the floor like a marionette with severed strings.

“No—FOX—NO!”

They were all screaming. They were all screaming, but it was too late. Fox’s eyes were open and frozen, staring without really seeing, the television dimly reflected in them. Her lips were parted and brows slightly raised, as though in surprise. Like she was surprised to have died. Fox, the one
who out of all of them was most pessimistic and suspicious of her own potential death.

Fox was dead.

Fox was dead. Another of their friends was dead, and there was nothing they could do to bring her back.

Raven was sobbing her name, army crawling beneath the bed to reach her. Spells were still flying overhead. Octavia, magic-less and unable to defend herself, was cowering behind the bed, one hand clutching the mattress, the other balled into a fist against the wall. Her jaw was clenched and sputtering choking noises were escaping her gritted teeth, her face frozen in a terrible anguish. She looked like Clarke felt.

“PROTEGO!”

The shield charms Clarke threw up were not lasting long. There were too many Death Eaters jam-packed into the small hotel room. Their only saving grace was the chaos, the clouds of dust and flying furniture and bulky beds between them. Clarke knew they didn’t have long, had only seconds, perhaps, until they were caught.

“O!” she shouted, lunging forward, foot crushing the shattered glass of the tea cup again. She seized Octavia by her arm and dragged her down. The underside of the mattress and all the springs scraped against their shoulders as they wedged themselves across the floor, hearts pounding. A screamed curse and a blast of heat told them the bed was on fire.

“Rae!” Octavia’s breath was still choppy and haggard with her gasped sobs. She was the one that reached Raven, that managed to secure a hand on her waist, and Clarke wasted no time in rolling on the floor, twisting them into the darkness. The last thing she heard was Ontari’s scream of rage. The last thing she saw was Fox, pale skin tinted blue from the television screen and flickering red and green as spells flew over her body.

Then it was nothing but darkness.

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“NOOOOOO!”

“Raven, Raven—Raven, calm down!”

“No...I can’t….no...” Raven’s moans as she wept were heartbreaking.

Clarke was numb. They were all three on the ground in the middle of a deserted street, the road wet with rain. It still sprinkled now. Clarke watched as Octavia wrestled with Raven, fighting her down to the pavement. They were all in their pajamas so it looked even more ridiculous and surreal. Clarke wasn’t sure what Raven was trying to do; run away? There was nowhere left to run. They kept finding them.

“We need a calming drought!” Octavia half-shouted, half-sobbed.

“I don’t have anything,” said Clarke blankly. “I forgot my emergency potion kit at the castle.”
“I—we have to—Clarke, help me!” snarled Octavia as Raven continued to attempt to wrestle away. Clarke jumped back to life and hurried forward, putting her hands on Ravens shoulders and using her weight to force her flat on the ground.

“Let me go,” sobbed Raven. Her face was screwed up in anguish and her voice cracked with every word as though the pain was tearing her throat to shreds. “Let me go…”

“Shhh,” hushed Clarke, not daring to remove her weight from atop Raven. She pressed her nose into Raven’s neck, shivering with the cold that was felt more inside her than out. “Shhh, shhh…”

She didn’t know how long they remained out there like that. A voice in the back of her mind (that, tragically, sounded just like Fox) told her how stupid it was to be out here in the open when they’d just been found, but none of them could move. They remained there in an odd dog-pile on the road, Raven sprawled out spread-eagle, Clarke slumped on top of her and Octavia half-lying over her. The rain had stopped long before the tears did.

It could have been hours, but finally, it seemed as though they’d calmed down. Octavia stood up first, then helped Clarke, who pulled Raven to her feet.

“We—we need to get inside,” said Octavia hoarsely. “It’s not safe. And my whole body is frozen.”

“We should have grabbed Fox’s body.” Raven gave a strange, strained laugh. “It was right there, I was so close. We could have brought her body back to her parents.”

“Raven…” began Octavia sympathetically, reaching out, but Raven immediately jumped and backtracked, eyes wide.

“Don’t. Don’t touch me.”

“Okay,” said Octavia gently, lifting her palms. “All right. I’m not going to touch you.”

They walked down the road at random, crossing a bridge and entering a town; when they spotted tables outside a distant restaurant, obviously closed because of how late it was, they still pushed their way through the fence and sat at one of the tables beneath the umbrella. They sat in silence for a long time. Clarke ran her wand through her fingers again and again, wishing her hands would stop shaking.

Octavia let out a long breath, breaking the silence. “I can’t believe we just made it out of there,” she said thickly.

“Me either,” said Clarke shakily. “I can’t believe we keep getting away.”

“Because they’re the most incompetent idiots I’ve ever seen,” said Raven, the anger bringing strength back to her voice. “They’re pathetic goons blindly following their leader. They’re fucking useless.”

“Ontari’s the threat,” agreed Clarke, imagining all the nameless Death Eaters and then Ontari, with her manic eyes and wicked smirk.

Raven snorted. “Weirdly enough, I don’t think we have to worry about her unless she’s operating alone. All the useless cronies actually get in her way, which is better for us.”

“I don’t understand how they keep finding us,” said Octavia, shivering.
Clarke twirled her wand again and again in her fingers, thinking back, trying to find a connection…

And then it hit her.

“My wand,” she croaked, stilling her movements. Dread was flashing through her, white-hot and broiling. “Oh my God. It’s my wand.”

Octavia and Raven’s eyes widened and dropped to stare at Clarke’s wand.

“It—it makes sense, it must be that. When I didn’t use my wand, they never found us. When we were at the mall, I Transfigured a knut into muggle money. When we were at the campsite, I lit up the tent for Fox to see. At the hotel…” her voice trailed off, grief squeezing her heart in a vice-like grip. She thought of the cup of tea Fox didn’t get to drink. She would never drink another…

Octavia leapt to her feet. “We have to get rid of your wand,” she said, alarmed. “Are we sure it’s that, or could they have some type of Trace on you? Could they do that?”

Clarke’s mouth went dry at the thought. If they put a Trace on her and any time she used magic, she was tracked down…she was fucked. Completely fucked.

“Hand me your wand,” ordered Raven. Clarke dropped it in her extended hand at once.

Raven turned and marched out of the area, heading toward the road again, and Clarke and Octavia hastened after her. Raven went off the road before they reached the bridge, heading for the grass near the water. Raven tossed Clarke’s wand on the grass a few feet away and aimed her own wand at it. Her nonverbal blasting curse created a crater in the ground that echoed around the land in a loud boom and crack as the wand broke. Clarke gingerly picked up the splintered remains; it was smoking at the tip, a couple sparks shooting out feebly before it sputtered out. She tossed it into the lake.

Without another word, Raven reached out with both hands to grab Clarke and Octavia, and Clarke never found the air to gasp with when she was jerked into compressing darkness.

She gulped air into her lungs when they landed in a meadow surrounded by clumps of nettlebushes. Octavia was doing the same, massaging her chest with the heel of her palm.

“Fuck. A little warning next time, Rae.”

“Sorry,” said Raven, though she didn’t appear particularly sorry at all. She looked dead inside, kind of like how Clarke felt. “I didn’t want to risk Death Eaters showing up because the wand was malfunctioning and spitting magic.”

“What if it’s not the wand?” repeated Octavia.

Raven glanced at her own wand before shrugging and holding it out for Clarke. “Only one way to check. Scoot in close, that way if anyone shows we can Disapparate.”

Raven’s wand a bit slippery in her sweaty grip, Clarke pointed the wand at nothing in particular and cast sparks from it. They stood still and silent, ears straining for any sound of movement. Clarke ran through a few more spells. Nothing happened.

All three of them exhaled in relief as Clarke shakily handed Raven her wand back.

“When could she have even cursed your wand?” wondered Octavia.
Clarke sighed as the answer came readily to her lips. “At the ministry. She disarmed me. She must have found it and put the spell on it before she followed after us. Indra brought me my wand the next day.”

“You’d think they would have checked for curses,” said Raven, frowning.

“They probably did, but somehow missed it. I don’t know.”

How did she miss it? It should be so obvious, twice before the hotel she’d used her wand and each time Death Eaters had found them. How had she not realized it before? How had she not realized in time?

And now, because of her mistake, because she hadn’t caught it, another of her friends was dead.

Fox was dead because of that. Because of her. Fox had been murdered over a cup of tea. The grief of losing her friend—of losing so many of her friends, her dad, everyone—hit Clarke all at once, so hard she could almost crumble and bend over double, clutching at her stomach and heart as though it could prevent the pain from spilling out like shards of ice.

“It’s my fault,” she whispered. Tears pricked her eyes, stinging and blurring her vision. Her stomach was rolling. She may retch. “I…it’s all my fault…”

“It’s not,” said Octavia, angrily swiping at her tears. She was paler than Clarke had ever seen her. “If it’s anyone’s fault, it’s mine. I have no magic, I couldn’t protect her.”

“Don’t,” said Raven hoarsely. Clarke and Octavia exchanged concerned glances before automatically shifting closer to Raven, careful not to touch her, but getting as close as possible. Raven was shaking so hard that her brace was making quiet squeaking sounds with her movements. “It’s…I feel like it’s me. My fault.”

“How could you think that, Rae?” said Clarke gently, reaching over to thumb away the tear leaking from the corner of Raven’s eye. On the other side of her face, Octavia was using the back of her knuckles to wipe the steady track away.

Raven sniffed, the corners of her lips turning down as she thinned her mouth out in a failed attempt to stop her lower lip from trembling. “Because—because…because.”

“But why?” said Octavia softly.

Raven didn’t answer. Clarke hadn’t expected her to. When Raven was hurting, it took time and patience for her to open up about it. Besides, they knew why. She and Octavia’s gazes met briefly before they both rested their heads on Raven’s shoulders and wrapped arms around one another.

Minutes later, Clarke and Octavia pulled back, frowning, when a hoarse, hacking noise came from Raven. Tears were streaming down her face again, but. She was laughing.

“I just—I’m just thinking of that asshole’s face—“ She wheezed with mirth, clutching at her ribs. “—when Fox hit her with that—when she turned the phone into worms—“

It tugged a grin out of Octavia and a sad smile from Clarke. “Yeah. She did good.”

“Good?” gasped Raven, cackling again. “She kicked ass. I’m—I’m so prou—“ She hiccupped. “—of her. She—she would die all over again if she heard me say that…”
Clarke and Octavia’s smiles faded. Raven’s laughter had quickly subsided. She was crying again.

“She’ll never know. She’ll never know.”

“She knew, Rae…”

“But I never…I never told her…”

“She knew,” said Clarke firmly. Octavia rubbed Raven’s shoulders. “She knew.”

“She never got any sort of appreciation from anybody. Her parents were so strict, they had high expectations…they always sent her stupid school supplies for Christmas and her birthday…”

“We all got her nice gifts,” said Octavia soothingly.

“But we never told her. No one ever told her that she was—that she was good. She wasn’t like her parents. And she could—she could be rude and stuffy and a total stick in the mud, she was a spoiled prat and… She pissed me off a lot. But I liked that about her.” Raven sniffled, scrubbing at her face. “I could have been a better friend to her.”

They didn’t know what to say, so they didn’t say anything. They just held each other again for a time, until they weren’t swaying where they stood, until the grief solidified into resolve.

“We have to go get you a new wand, Clarke,” said Octavia. “The most hunted girl in the wizarding world can’t go without a wand. And the three of us can’t keep running when Raven’s the only one with magic.”

Clarke debated with herself for a moment before nodding. Octavia was right. It was too dangerous for two out of the three of them to be defenseless, and it put too much burden on Raven’s shoulders. “Okay.”

“They’ll probably be expecting this,” said Raven, and her voice would have sounded casual were it not for the poorly suppressed rage and anticipation palpable in it.

“Good.” Clarke’s defiance was reflected in the sharp glint of Raven’s eyes, in the hard set of Octavia’s jaw. “I say we go now.”

“Right now?” said Octavia. “Don’t you want to plan or something first—“

Clarke shook her head. “Normally, yeah, of course, but like Raven said, they’ll be expecting us. Right now, they’re probably still at the hotel. If we can beat them there…”

Octavia and Raven both stood up. “Let’s go.”

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Diagon Alley was dark and deserted. It was nothing like the last time Clarke had been here, the summer before her sixth year (this past year she’d ordered her new books and supplies via owl and had them delivered to the school). Then, it had been colorful and bustling. Now there were shop windows boarded up, rubbish in the streets, and barren torches.
They hurried across the path to duck under the awning, unnerved. The crack of Apparation must have been particularly loud in the quiet alley. Raven quickly cast disguises on them once more, turning Clarke’s hair red, shortening Octavia’s hair, and changing the color of her own. There wasn’t time to do much else. They pressed against one another as they huddled at the corner of the brick wall, craning their necks to peer around toward the distant shop.

“Looks like they’re closed…” whispered Octavia, gesturing toward the shop. “Oh, wait, no, there’s a light on…”

“Even if it was closed, we would break in,” said Raven firmly. “Clarke needs a wand. Come on.” She broke away toward the shop, Clarke and Octavia hurrying along in her wake.

The bell hooked above the door rang as it swung open. The shop was dark, lit by only a few candles. Stacks upon stacks of wands were on display, so many more than Clarke anticipated. Her heart sank. How long would it take to pick out a wand? Since she’d always had the wand passed down through her family on her mother’s side, she’d never set foot in a wand shop before. She had no idea how the wand-choosing process took place…

“Hello,” came a tremulous voice.

Clarke’s nerves abated slightly as she turned to see Sienna, the nice woman who preformed the Weighing of the Wands ceremony for the Triwizard Tournament.

“Hi,” said Clarke, starting forward, but she faltered as Sienna approached, stepping into the light. Her appearance today was startlingly different from when Clarke had first met her.

Sienna’s cheeks were hollow with a gauntness that was echoed in the dark shadows beneath her eyes. There was a thin layer of sweat and dirt covering her face, as though she had not bathed or slept in weeks. The hairs on the back of Clarke’s neck rose.

Sienna came to a stop a few feet away from Clarke. Her eyes slowly appraised her, a line appearing between her brows as the skin around her eyes tightened. “My name is Sienna. How may I help you today?”

“My name is…Maya,” said Clarke, using the first name that popped into her head. She swallowed and smiled, hoping her inner panic at her own idiocy for not thinking of a persona sooner wasn’t showing. She shook Sienna’s offered hand. “This is…”

Octavia’s smile was reassuring and convincing. “I’m Bethany, and this is—Sarah.” Raven’s smile was tighter, but Sienna nodded at them both before focusing her keen gaze on Clarke again.

“Forgive me, but I thought you came in today with another person?”

“Right, well, I’m sorry, but the shop’s closed today,” said Sienna shortly, dropping her hand from Clarke’s. Clarke’s mouth fell open in shock and Octavia and Raven made noises of protest, but Sienna was already turning away. “If you’ll see yourself out the door—“

“Wait, please!” Clarke gasped, stumbling forward. She had grabbed Sienna’s wrist without even thinking about it. Sienna turned back, scowling, and Clarke quickly released it “I just need a wand!”

Sienna’s eyes narrowed. “What happened to yours?”
“I—er—misplaced it.”

“We only need the one wand for her and then we’ll be out of your hair,” said Raven quickly.

Sienna was still squinting shrewdly at them. “Are you daft? How do you lose your wand in times like this?”

Clarke shrugged rather helplessly.

Sienna was staring closely at her again, a calculating glint in her eyes that Clarke didn’t like very much. It was like Sienna was looking for something…perhaps looking for her.

Clarke swallowed again, willing her expression to remain blank as her heart beat faster. Sienna looked rough and worse for wear…what if the Ice Queen had anticipated this? Had expected Clarke to catch on and ditch her wand and go get a new one?

Maybe she was overthinking this.

But no, she immediate thought, as Sienna’s eyes swept over her face and red hair. She trusted her instincts. Sienna had been warned who to look out for. Sienna came at once when the bell rang as they entered the shop, scrutinized them, and seemed let down at their appearance. She had clearly been told there would be four of them rather than three, which had thrown her off, but the fact that Clarke needed a wand had raised her suspicions again.

The only question now was whether or not Clarke could get a wand and escape before Sienna’s suspicions were confirmed.

“I was with my parents when some people in black cloaks showed up,” she lied. Octavia and Raven froze beside her. She hoped this would be good enough to get them by. “I have no idea who they were, but they weren’t very nice. They tortured my mum and dad and took away our wands. I managed to escape and ran into these two and we’ve stuck together since, but it’s really not safe for me to not have a wand.” She took a breath, keeping her voice steady and her gaze steadier on Sienna’s. Sienna was staring so carefully at her, so intensely it gave Clarke the familiar feeling of someone trying to read her mind and realized with a jolt that could very well be what Sienna was doing. She remembered what Lexa had taught her and focused hard, clearing her mind, trying with all her might to keep it clear and empty.

“Okay…” said Sienna slowly, shoulders sagging as though with disappointment, or relief. “I suppose it is important we find you a decent wand.” She glanced at the dark window. “Come on.”

Clarke exchanged meaningful looks with Octavia and Raven before following Sienna down an aisle, towering shelves full of boxes on either side.

Sienna abruptly turned in the center of an aisle next to a ladder, lifting a measuring tape Clarke had not even noticed her carrying. “Which is your wand arm?”

“Left,” said Clarke, extending her arm for Sienna to measure. After a moment Sienna stepped back, leaving the measuring tape to measure on its own, and began to climb up the ladder. Clarke watched her as the tape measure moved up to measure between her nostrils now before Sienna rapidly descended the ladder again, a stack of boxes perched precariously on one of her arms. The measuring tape zoomed back into Sienna’s free hand and she stuffed it into her pocket.

“Right, try this one,” she said, tearing open a box and handing it to Clarke.

Clarke took the wand and had hardly closed her hand around it when Sienna snatched it
away again. “No, that’s all wrong. Here, try this one.” She pushed another wand into Clarke’s hand. This time she managed to give it a wave, but not quite long enough for anything to happen because suddenly Sienna was grabbing it back again.

“This one, try this one.”

So it went. Clarke held wand after wand, never getting to try so much as a spell before Sienna took it back. Clarke noticed after the sixth wand she tried that Sienna was no longer paying attention; she had paused as she reached for the last box, frozen in place, eyes darting between Octavia and Raven. Then her gaze zeroed in on Raven’s wand she still held clutched tightly in her hand.

Sienna dropped the box with a clatter onto the countertop and scurried around the counter straight up to Raven.

“Er—” Raven frowned, appearing baffled by Sienna’s behavior as she grasped Raven’s wrist and pulled her arm up, holding Raven’s hand holding her wand right before her eyes. Clarke moved to the remaining box, slowly reaching for the lid but distracted by Sienna’s odd behavior.

“Hornbeam. Dragon heartstring. Fourteen inches. Rigid.” Sienna’s eyes, narrowed and hard, flickered up to meet Raven’s. “This is the wand I sold to Raven Reyes.”

All the air seemed to leave the room.

Sienna’s gaze slid onto Octavia. She moved slowly, almost dream-like, to stand in front of her. She peered intently into her eyes and Clarke knew this was it; Octavia and Raven were not trained in Occlumency. “Octavia Blake. Ten and a quarter inches. Fir. Unicorn hair. Quite springy.”

Clarke was still clutching the box in her hands, her mouth parted in her shock as slowly, still slowly, Sienna turned to look at her. “I’m sorry, Clarke, but they have my son.”

And then she drew her wand and blasted red sparks from her wand out the nearest window and, like everything always seemed to do around them, everything around them blew up.

Clarke flung herself behind the counter as the windows and the doors exploded, cloaked figures Apparating in.

“Mam! Mam!” screamed a child’s voice.

The sound of more crashing and cracks of Apparation.

“Give him to me!” Sienna screamed. “I did what you said, I have her here, now give me my son!”

There was a squeal and scuffling and a thud, as though a body was hit.

“Shut up. You’ll have your son when I have Griffin.”

“She’s here…” sobbed Sienna. “She’s over there…”

“Clarke Griffin,” called out Ontari. A rush of hatred flooded through Clarke. Only an hour or so ago Ontari had murdered Fox. Now she was here with a child as hostage. “Come out to play or there will be more blood on your hands.”

Clarke realized she was still clutching the box. Carefully, trying to be as silent as possible,
Clarke removed the lid to reveal the thin stick that would be her only hope.

“*Homenum revelio.*”

The stiffened as the spell swept through her.

“I see you over there. Come on, come and fight, don’t hide away. Or is that all Lexa taught you to do?” taunted Ontari. "Run and hide like a weak, spineless coward?"

The rage was pulsating through Clarke, pounding in her temples. She pulled the wand free, ignoring the rustling of paper. She gripped the wand and she knew it at once. This was it. This was the wand chose her.

This wand was different. This wand was warm and familiar in a way that Clarke’s old wand had never felt. It was vibrating slightly in her hand, as though a similar joy was rushing through it, or perhaps eagerness to cast magic for its new owner. This was it, this was *her* wand.

And she wasn’t going to wait a moment longer.

She leapt to her feet and glimpsed Ontari standing there in the center of the shop, gripping a small boy by the scruff of his neck and holding a wand to his throat. Clarke noticed Octaiva, hidden just behind a shelf to where Ontari couldn't see her, but near enough to do damage. Raven was a distance away, hiding just beneath the spiral staircase that led up to the second floor full of more shelves of boxes of wands. She met Raven’s gaze a split second before Ontari could realize someone was there.

“*Protego!*” shouted Clarke.

Octavia rolled out from behind the shelf, the shield charm the only thing standing between she and Ontari. She drove a fist into Ontari’s face and seized the boy, rolling again. There was a sickening crunch as Octavia and the boy crashed to the ground and his wrist was caught between them and then floor, but it didn’t matter because a beat later Sienna was diving to them. Her hand closed over her son and there was a crack as they Disapparated.

The force of the shield charm was far stronger than any Clarke had ever cast more. It was so large and solid it forced the nearest Death Eaters to stumble back, some ducking to avoiding their own spells that were reflected back at them.

Ontari was white-faced and furious, blood trickling from her nose. She hit Octavia with a spell that finally managed to shatter the shield and Octavia fell limp to the ground. Clarke’s heart stopped in her chest, terror-stricken, but there was no time to stop.

She and Raven were hurling spell after spell, deflecting and casting like it was all they were born to do. Clarke’s spells were so much easier to cast and so much stronger with this wand. Her blasting curse was almost as powerful as Raven’s as it exploded half the side of the shop, bits of ceiling tumbling down, crashing around them and forcing all of them, Death Eater alike, to dive for cover.

Ontari was screeching in rage, smoke coming from the tip of her wand as she sent streams of red and green streaking at Raven, who was closest to her. A final blue jet she shot out sent Raven flying backwards toward Clarke, who managed to cast a cushioning charm for her before whirling away just in time to avoid the stunning spell a nearby Death Eater sent. They were closing in around her now. Raven and Octavia were down for the count and it was Clarke, alone, facing half a dozen —more now, that they kept Apparating into the shop.
“Urigae arcum!” She tightened her grip in satisfaction when the arrows that burst free from the tip of her wand sailed through her shield and managed to hit a few Death Eaters, causing them to leap up and yelp in pain, one collapsing with a sick crunch as an arrow hit his temple. Clarke had no time to spare any sort of regrets, too busy spinning around to narrowly avoid the streak of red Ontari shot at her.

“Stupefy!”

“Expelliarmus!”

The Death Eaters backed off as Ontari moved forward; she was in their way but she certainly didn’t need their help. Clarke’s determination and anger were far overpowering her fear; it kept the adrenaline at bay and kept her focused and clear-minded as she stunned three Death Eaters back to back before deflecting the *Incarcerous* Ontari threw at her.

“Reducto! Expulso!”

She aimed her wand side to side, the spells streaking forward. The shelves exploded in shards of splintered wood and sparks as wands were ripped apart by the force of the spells. The remaining Death Eater shrieked in agony as the wands nearest him exploded and sent showers of debris in his eyes. Ontari managed to cast a shield charm; the dust and debris rebounded against it, clouding up to the ceiling, obstructing their view of one another. It was now or never.

Clarke dived down for Raven, face screwed up against the dust in the air. She used her free right hand to seize Raven by the arm and gripped her tightly enough to leave a bruise and managed to successfully pull her behind the counter.

“OCTAVIA!” she bellowed over the sound of crashing shelves and screaming Death Eaters. “OCTAVIA!”

She wasn’t answering; Clarke hadn’t really expected her to. She’d been hoping she’d woken from the Stunning Spell, but clearly hadn’t.

“Accio Octavia!”

There was loud clattering as something crashed through the boxes and rubble on the floor, then a heavy thud as a body flew into the other side of the counter. Panting and sweating, Clarke shuffled forward on her knees, her left arm bent crooked above her head in a desperate attempt to keep up the shield charm that was preventing the falling bits of ceiling and wand and shelves from smashing onto her head, her right arm awkwardly twisted behind her as she struggled to drag Raven’s body forward. Her unconscious form was heavy and her brace kept catching on the debris on the floor.

The last shelves had fallen, the last boxes of wands collapsing on the ground. The dust was clearing. She could see Octavia—but Ontari could see her too, now. Having pulled her shield charm down, Ontari was crouching, head swiveling every which way to find where Clarke had ducked down and disappeared to. Clarke was less than a foot away from Octavia. She crawled out from behind the fallen desk, and blue eyes met fury-widened brown.

They raised their wands at the same time.

“Stupefy!”

The two powerful jets of scarlet light met in the middle in a blast far bigger than Clarke’s blasting curses had been. The force of it pushed her back like a potent wind, sent her sliding across
the floor on her knees. She hung on to her wand and Raven for dear life as they began to slip away. Clarke’s hand slipped, knocking up Raven’s back and scrabbling at her jacket collar. She managed to keep hold by the tips of her fingers, inexplicably reminding her of clawing at a snitch in the air. The force of the spells slammed her back against another dilapidated desk turned over on the floor, pain arcing through her as the back of her head cracked against the wooden surface, but it didn’t matter. She didn’t have the time to gasp at how it worked in her favor as Octavia’s limp form came tumbling straight to her.

“T’LL KILL YOU!” screamed Ontari as she staggered to her feet, raising her wand, but again —miraculously—she was too late.

Clarke slapped a hand down on the closest part of Octavia to her, her palm slippery against Octavia’s arm but just managing to squeeze, the handle of her wand pressing between them.

Ontari’s strangled scream became an echo rushing in Clarke’s ears as she twisted into the compressing nothingness, no thought in mind of where to go, aware only of the sensation of the damp leather of Raven’s jacket, her sweaty grip on Octavia’s clammy arm, and the surprising warmth of her oddly trembling wand pressing into the heel of her hand.

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Mud.

That was the first thing Clarke was aware of. She was on her knees on a muddy lakeshore. She was still clutching Raven’s jacket collar with one hand, the other twisted around Octavia’s arm and grasping her new wand. It was still warm in her hold, vibrating slightly as though excited to have performed magic for its new owner. Clarke had not even had the time to release Raven and Octavia when, to her surprise, the tip of her wand glowed brightly, a few silvery sparks crackling into life.

“Clarke? Clarke!”

She spun, dropping Octavia and Raven and pointing her wand at the source of noise with both hands, lips already parting to form the spell—and then she froze, all the air leaving her lungs, all the air possibly leaving the earth, as she took in the figure running toward her.

Lexa.

“Clarke!” Lexa was gaping and breathless and Clarke had never been so happy to see someone in her life.

Lexa skidded to a halt before her, splattering her torso with mud, but Clarke didn’t care. She was staggering to her feet, taking the hand Lexa immediately offered, and once she was up, everything seemed to halt again as green eyes held blue.

Clarke’s wand was still happily warm, a few last sparks crackling from the tip. The lake was lapping the shore and birds were cawing in the distance. Clarke gaped, trapped by green, and wondered why Lexa felt so timeless. She hadn’t seen her or heard from her in almost two months, but it felt like only yesterday she was looking into these eyes. It felt like she’d never looked away in the first place.
For a moment, nothing else mattered. Lexa had lied and Clarke had not forgiven her and they had not seen one another in so long, but—for a moment, it didn’t matter.

They lurched forward at the same time, throwing their arms around one another.

Clarke sucked air into her lungs; she never realized how hard it had been to breathe the past few weeks until how easy it seemed now. Lexa’s heart was pattering against Clarke’s chest and their knees trembled beneath them.

“Clarke,” breathed Lexa when they pulled back, and Clarke shuddered because, God, she hadn’t even realized how much she missed seeing those plump lips move to form the shape of her name. She smoothed Clarke’s hair back and cupped her face and just looked at her, eyes hungrily shifting all over as though desperate to drink her in, to memorize her. They finally stopped at Clarke’s eyes. Clarke could do little more than stare back.

“How did you find me?” she finally whispered, pulling back slightly to glance around. There was no one else here, nothing save for trees and the lake. Octavia and Raven were still unconscious on the ground; Clarke jolted back into life, pulling out of Lexa’s hold to drop to her knees and point her wand at them one by one. “Enevverate.”

“I didn’t,” said Lexa, still sounding breathless and in awe. “I was just walking along the lake, and I heard the pop as you Apparated, and then I saw you…”

Raven and Octavia were stirring, lashes fluttering and groggily mumbling as they came to. Raven’s brows knitted when her eyes focused. She blinked in disbelief.

“Lexa?”

Octavia shot up, eyes wide and brows high. She slapped her hands onto her head as though to stop it from spinning. “Lexa—Lincoln? Is—is Lincoln here? Where’s Lincoln?”

“He’s here,” said Lexa, nodding toward the distant trees behind them. “So is Anya—“

Octavia was already up; she staggered a few steps, clearly dizzy, but then took off running, her feet kicking up sand. Raven was still frowning, something warring in her eyes as she pushed herself up more slowly. She ducked down, face temporarily hidden from view as she twirled her wand to tighten her brace. Clarke and Lexa exchanged a look. After a moment, Raven sniffed and stood again. Without a word, she limped toward the direction Octavia had already disappeared into the trees.

They watched her go, but only for a moment. When brown hair drifted in the wind across Clarke’s vision, she slid her gaze to her left to quietly scrutinize Lexa. Her gaze on her was as greedy as Lexa’s had been. It had been two months. Far, far too long.

Lexa’s hair was, for possibly the first time Clarke had ever seen, free of braids. It hung long and free down her back. She was wearing muggle clothing, jeans that hugged her hips and long legs, and an overlarge red sweater. Her face was free of war paint, and blood and dirt and everything else it had been coated in the last Clarke had seen it. She didn’t look ready for war, she looked ready to curl up in front of a fire with a cup of tea and a good book. She looked…adorable. That was probably the right word. Just looking at her was making Clarke’s stomach flip and squirm with butterflies.

Sensing her gaze, green eyes shifted to meet Clarke’s for a brief moment, before they slowly traveled up and down the length of her body. She grew warm all over, though not for the same
reason she usually did, because Lexa was not looking her up and down in the same way she usually did. Lexa’s face was creased in concern. Clarke was a mess, filthy, covered in sweat and blood. Her red hair was dirty and unkempt. She looked as tired and ragged as she felt.

“Come on,” said Lexa softly. She started to lift her arm, perhaps as though to offer a hand, but she quickly dropped it. She cleared her throat, burying both her hands in her sweater pockets. “We have a campsite set up. You can...you can wash up. You’ll feel better.”

Clarke arched a brow. “Are you saying I’m gross?”


Clarke’s cheeks grew warm, but she said nothing. She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t know how she was supposed to react to that. Lexa cleared her throat and looked down at her feet, her own cheeks growing pink. She glanced back up in time to see Clarke nod toward the trees. “Let’s go, then.”

They walked together, a careful distance between them.

Chapter End Notes

I hope I did this chapter justice; I’m curious to know what you think of it. I tried to sneak in a nod toward Carrie Fisher. RIP space mom.

Also, I’m sorry the reunion was a bit short-lived, but as you can imagine, next chapter will be very Clexa-centric. Well, Clexa, Ranya, and Linctavia, which is my favorite :D

Thank you all so so much for every comment, every kudos, every bookmark. Your enthusiasm is what keeps this story alive. If I'm ever swamped with life or lose inspiration, I'll always get a comment that keeps me on track and reminds me I started this story and I’m going to finish it. Thank you all, I have so much love for you x
Empty the Space Between Us

Chapter Summary

"If you betray me again-"
"I won't."

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is late, just been busy and then struggling to write this chapter for some reason. It was a heavy chapter, maybe that's why. But anyways, here's over 31,000 words to make up for it. I also want to thank you guys for being so amazing. You're all so patient and sweet and your kind words telling me it takes as long as it takes and this is worth the wait always encourage me to write and just, thank you so much. I love our Clexakru family <3

And I keep forgetting to tell you guys: thank you for telling me what your HP info was! It was so interesting to read and it gave so much personality and background to your usernames 😊 I also was cracking up because I think like 90% of you guys are Slytherin, I love it.

Also: shout out to those people on that Clexa fanfic group I joined on Facebook; I asked for fic recs and they suggested my own fic to me haha, it made my day :) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Down to my last match, fire I touch just to feel
Why is it easier to burn than it is to heal?
I’ve been looking for answers I don’t want to hear
Chest to chest with you I’m staring into a mirror
I can’t keep you from harm
But I’m set on fire to keep you warm
- The Chainsmokers

“Run, Clarke!”
Those were the last words Lexa uttered other than curses for the next hour. She should be relieved. She watched Clarke grip hands with her friends, watched them all Disapparate to safety. Wherever they went, it was far from the Ice Queen’s army. It should have loosened the tight knot of terror in her chest. It didn’t. The only fact she could grasp right now was that Clarke was not here. How could Lexa protect her if she had no idea where she was?

They should have set up a system. She should have picked a place, designated it a safe house, and made plans with everyone that in the cases of emergencies, that is where they’d meet up. Why hadn’t she done that? She was an idiot.

It was too late to fret about it. She pushed it and every other unhelpful concern out of her mind, focusing entirely on the battle at hand. By now, battle to her was robotic. Years of defending Durmstrang (though the majority of the student body there was unaware) from the Ice Queen’s wrath as she hunted for Lexa did that. She had fought alongside Anya, Lincoln, Indra, and Gustus enough now that they could all move in sync; one person Stunned, another rejuvenated them while another stepped forward to take that person’s place. They operated in a perfect pentagon, they protected one another, and most of all, their presence provided strength to one another. Lexa lost count of the amount of Death Eaters she felled, of werewolves tearing across the grounds, of bodies littering the bloody grass. She was more exhausted than she remembered ever being in her life, but most of it came from within. They were outnumbered, and far too many of their own ranks consisted of underage students who had joined the fight rather than fleeing. They would not win this battle. Lexa knew it, and the Queen, wherever she was, knew it too.

“You three need to leave,” came the rumble of Gustus’s voice from somewhere behind them. Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln had moved into a small triangle when Shadow-Eaters overcoming the Hogwarts’ professors drew Indra and Gustus’s attention.

“We aren’t leaving,” snarled Anya, face contorted in fury and effort as she slung a curse at the Death Eater rushing them; he dropped dead, a puppet with cut strings. What would Clarke do if she were here and saw that the time for killing curses had arrived?

“Yes you are,” snapped Indra, appearing at Gustus’s side. “This battle is over. We are overrun. We cannot take on the Queen’s army when they outnumber us a dozen to one. They aren’t just attacking the Order; they’re attacking students as well. They’ve killed children.” Indra’s voice broke on the last word. Lexa swallowed, clenching her jaw, letting the rage and fear swell inside her to fuel the fury behind the next spell she uttered. She felled the werewolf bounding toward a distant Beauxbatons boy with a streak of green.

“Then we’ll go down with dignity,” spat Anya through her own gritted teeth. Lexa glanced at her. She knew she was thinking of Tris. The tear tracks streaking down Anya’s cheeks could pass for
“No,” barked Indra. “We can lose a battle, we cannot concede a war. Lexa, you know your role. You all must leave now, before the Queen sends reinforcements, or decides to step in herself.”

“Ontari could be here any minute,” panted Lincoln; he staggered with the effort to maintain his shield charm as three Death Eaters at once battered it with a barrage of curses.

Anya made a strangled noise of frustration and anguish, blasting the three Death Eaters attacking Lincoln with a particularly powerful blasting curse. Her wild gaze met Lexa’s in a furious kind of agreement.

“Send us news as soon as you can,” said Lexa, seizing Anya by her sweaty wrist and pulling her over to Lincoln.

“We will,” promised Gustus, while Indra urged, “Go!”

Lexa and Anya both grabbed hold of Lincoln, and then Lexa was pulling them with her into nothingness that roared in their ears, drowning out the screams and cries of battle.

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When she opened her eyes, it was to a familiar snowy mountainside.

Anya stormed off almost as soon as their feet landed. Lexa was sure she was going to go vent her feelings with her wand and whatever objects she could destroy; she heard an ear-splitting crack and then the loud crash of a falling tree after a moment.

Lincoln, meanwhile, had already started a fire. Lexa breathed in the familiar scent of chilly pine trees and fire smoke, watching the plumes spiral up into the air for a moment before she reached into her cloak pocket to pull out the small bag she always kept there in the case of emergencies.
She tucked her red scarf up to cover the bottom half of her face; her nose was already freezing. She unzipped the bag, held her wand over it and said, “Accio hat!” Several misshapen lumps of clothing zoomed out; she tossed the first one over to Lincoln, who nodded his thanks as he slipped it over his head. Lexa pulled one over her own head and left another out for Anya before returning the extras into the bag. She Summoned the tent out next.

“Get some food out, will you Lex,” grunted Lincoln as he caught it and set to work.

At the mere suggestion, Lexa’s stomach growled. She hadn’t eaten in some time, she realized. Not since…the morning of the third task. Clarke had fed her some buttered toast. She wet her lips, mouth suddenly dry, and swallowed at the lump in her throat. Now her heart ached as well as her stomach.

She Summoned a couple cans of the nonperishables and pulled out the small frying pan and a wooden spatula, along with the two plastic bowls, a spoon, and a fork. It was all she had, but it would have to do for now.

“Wingardium Leviosa,” she murmured, pointing at the pan. She dumped the contents of both cans into it, and soon the smell of cooking beans and corn was in the air, fire crackling beneath the floating pan. Her stomach was rumbling harder than ever in anticipation.

Anya conveniently returned just when the food and tent were ready. Lexa ladled the two bowls full and passed them to Lincoln and Anya with a respective spoon and fork. She herself just ate straight out of the pan, using her wand to scoop bites out and float them into her mouth. It tasted far better than fire-roasted canned food ought to taste, and she certainly wasn’t complaining, but she couldn’t exactly enjoy it. She chewed and swallowed methodically until her bowl was empty and she still felt the same. Empty. Numb.

Numb was probably the best way to describe it.

“So now what?” huffed Anya, carelessly dropping her bowl on the ground next to the fire. “We just hide out like cowards until Indra tells us it’s safe to come out?”

“You know the plan. It’s been in motion for over a year.”

“We didn’t exactly know Hogwarts would be attacked and burnt to a crisp, did we?” snapped Anya. Her arms were folded beneath her chest and despite the way she was reclining low in her folded chair Lincoln had Summoned from the bag, her posture was rigid and tense. “Running away was
“What other options do we have?” said Lincoln. “Lexa needs to stay out of sight. We agreed to guard her.”

“I told you I don’t need guarded.”

Lincoln’s lips quirked, amusement a stark contrast to the hollow exhaustion in his brown eyes. “I beg to differ, Commander.”

Lexa rolled her eyes at the nickname.

“He’s right,” said Anya flatly. “Look at the trouble you get yourself into.”

“Like what?”

“Like getting yourself saddled with a crazy girlfriend that loses her wand when she’s being chased by a psychopath, breaks into Azkaban, and is an ungrateful prat when all you do is save her life.”

Irritation and guilt bubbled in the pit of Lexa’s stomach. “First off, she’s not my girlfriend.” I wasted my chances to ask her. Didn’t deserve to either. “Secondly, she wasn’t in the right state of mind when she went to Azkaban, and she held her own in the Department of Mysteries. She wouldn’t have made it without me, and I wouldn’t have made it without her. Leave her alone. I knew her father died and I didn’t tell her. I would hate myself too.”

“I’m sure she doesn’t hate you——” began Lincoln, but Anya snarled over him.

“You took out your own memories, Lexa, it’s not your fault you didn’t know to tell her!”

“I knew for a month and didn’t——“

“You couldn’t!” said Anya fiercely, leaning forward. “You couldn’t because you’re trapped in this
stupid game that Titus plays!”

Lexa’s brows contracted and she set her jaw. Her patience was wearing thin. They were tired and still hungry and worlds were on their shoulders and Lexa was fairly certain the weight of her stress could sink her into the ground right now; she didn’t have the energy to deal with this. “A game? Is that all this is to you?” Anya rolled her eyes and opened her mouth to explain herself—she didn’t need to. Lexa already knew how Anya meant it, but it still stung. “Costia died for a game?” she thundered, and Anya’s mouth snapped shut. “The Ice Queen trying to take over the world is not a game, it’s real and it’s happening now.”

“I know it’s not a game, Lexa. You know I didn’t mean it like that. I was talking about how unnecessarily difficult Titus makes things. Like right now…where is he? Indra said Jaha sent a tracker to find him, but we know we can’t trust Jaha now after you saw Clarke’s memories. What are they going to do when they find him? He’s the only reason we aren’t going into this completely blind. What are we going to do if they kill him?”

Lexa swallowed, mouth dry. It wasn’t the first time that possibility had occurred to her. It was so nausea inducing she didn’t like to think about it.

“We keep fighting,” said Lincoln quietly, causing both Lexa and Anya to jolt; they had forgotten he was there, silently listening. “My mum always said, if we get knocked down, we get back up, and we never give up. Because that’s the only thing we can do.”

Lexa swallowed again and nodded, and then whispered words that had first been told to her by her own father. “Victory stands on the back of sacrifice.”

There was silence as Lexa and Lincoln held grimly determined eye contact. Then it was broken by Anya’s snort.

“I can’t stand another minute with your fortune cookie asses,” she scoffed, standing up and stalking off toward the distant trees, snow crunching beneath her boots. “I’m going for a walk.”

Lincoln shook his head and Lexa sighed, scrubbing her hands over her face. She had no idea how long it would take for things to settle down and Indra to contact them. Had no idea if Indra was even alive right now (she was alive, she told herself firmly. As were Clarke and her friends. They were alive.). She just hoped they wouldn’t have to hide out for long.
None of them slept well that night.

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Days later they packed their bags and crossed the magical border that separated the countries. As they approached Durmstrang fortress, Lexa didn’t feel any sort of relief; rather her heart picked up, fingertips buzzing as she gripped her wand tightly. They had to move quickly here. The quicker they returned to the UK, the better. If Indra were to send them a patronus message, it wouldn’t work aboard, wouldn’t make it across the magical border.

There were a few Death Eaters positioned outside the doors; it wasn’t a surprise the Ice Queen anticipated someone might attempt to return to the school. Lexa wondered how the remaining students inside were doing. Whether they knew some of their classmates had been murdered at Hogwarts. Artigas and Tris among them…

Lexa crept with Lincoln and Anya along the secret tunnel that led into the kitchens. Indra had taught them about the alternate entrances and exits long ago in case an emergency required they use them. Lexa considered a rumbling stomach, angry at being fed nothing but meager bowls of canned corn for the last three days, to be pretty urgent.

They were in and out fairly quickly, only being forced into a short, quiet scuffle once when a Death Eater approaching the kitchen hallway spotted them. They subdued him and left him unconscious in a broom closet before finishing stuffing their bags full of the food and drink eagerly offered by the House Elves. Once they had enough supplies to last at least a month, they left the same way they came. When they crossed the border and Apparated back to Scotland, they found a lake to wash up in before dinner. Lincoln made roast chicken, peas, and mash, and Lexa agreed with Anya’s scathing remarks that Lexa wasn’t allowed to touch the food again and Lincoln should cook it instead.

They spent the next several days operating methodically. They Disapparated every other day to the large list of places Indra deigned safe over a month ago when they discussed places they could find one another if things ever went south and anyone had to run. Though they avoided the towns and cities, they occasionally snuck in to see if anything significant was taking place in the muggle news, though none of them were overly fond doing so. Whatever was on the muggle news couldn’t be good, and Lexa was certain when they did receive word, it would be via magical means. Their first week and a half on the run passed in relative silence, all three of them lost in their thoughts. Lincoln seemed of the same mind of Lexa in terms of how to compose himself; he was calm and patient, but there was obvious tension lurking beneath the surface, frustration at their situation and fear for Octavia and the others. Anya didn’t waste her time pretending to be something she wasn’t.

It wasn’t until the end of the second week that something changed.
They were huddled around the fire while Lincoln cooked dinner, but the possibility of getting food in her stomach hadn’t done anything to deter Anya’s bitter mood. For possibly the hundredth time in the past three weeks, she fixed her glare on Lexa and commented on her ‘miserable expression.’

Lexa sighed. “Can you just leave it alone, Anya?”

“Well, I’m just saying. It’s pretty depressing walking around here day after day being forced to look at your face that looks like a slapped arse.”

“Thanks. That makes me feel much better.”

“You could make yourself feel better if you’d just try.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Lexa, you can’t keep punishing yourself like this. I’ve told you again and again.”

“I’m not punishing myself, Anya,” said Lexa calmly, resisting the urge to grind her teeth and glare. Anya was just restless and taking her frustration out on Lexa. Rising to her bait wasn’t going to do anyone any good. “I’m just sitting here, waiting for dinner. That’s all. You’re the one trying to pick a fight.”

“At least then there’d be something to do around here!” exploded Anya, kicking dirt up as she swung her leg around to rest over her other. Lincoln shot her a withering look as he shielded the floating pot from the dust in the air. “I’m so fucking tired of not knowing what’s going on! Everyone we know could be dead right now for all we—”

“Don’t say that.” Anya fell silent at the clear warning in Lexa’s voice. They glowered at one another, fire reflecting in their eyes. “Don’t.”

“Alright,” said Anya finally, after a long, tense stretch of silence. She and Lexa both turned to stare at the pot of cooking food again, before Anya gruffly added, “Sorry. I know I’m being an ass. I shouldn’t take my own shit out on your guys.”
Lexa merely nodded once in acknowledgement, so Lincoln half turned to shoot Anya a small smile over his shoulder. “It’s okay. We still love you, even when you’re a knobhead.”

Anya snorted, rolling her eyes, but it was the first almost-smile she’d given in weeks. The three of them lapsed into silence again, though this one more peaceful, but there was only a few minutes listening to the sizzling fire before a loud crack split the air. They all leapt to their feet, withdrawing their wands, standing still and ready, heads swivelng to find the source of the noise.


“Gustus!” gasped Lexa. “Quick, take down the protective spells!”

They swiftly did so, and Gustus turned toward them the moment the sounds of their voices were revealed to him. He hurried toward them, lips stretching wide.

“Gustus,” said Lexa, voice strained with relief. Tears stung her eyes as she flung her arms around him in a tight hug. She blinked rapidly and steered her gaze to the ceiling, determined not to cry, and when she pulled back to face Gustus, her eyes were dry again. “Are you okay?”

“Of course, Strik Heda.” His gentle smile made her feel safer than she’d felt in weeks. “I’m happy to see you three.”

“What’s going on in the outside world?” demanded Anya, ignoring the look Lincoln shot her as he replaced the protective charms around their encampment. “What’s happening?”

The smile faded from Gustus’ face. He gave a heavy sigh and used his wand to draw up a chair. “Might as well sit,” he said, nodding at the other chairs. “Some of this may be difficult to hear.”

They settled in and the food in the pot went untouched; none of them had much of an appetite, and as Gustus spoke, food was the farthest thing from their mind.

“Good news or bad news first?”

“Bad,” the other three answered at once.
Gustus nodded. “The Queen is not our only problem. Charles Pike and Diana Sydney had their own mutiny, and we suspect Dante Wallace may have been in on it as well, but there have been no confirmed sightings of him since the third task of the tournament. Pike is the new Headmaster of Hogwarts.”

There was a long stretch of silence broken only by the crackling of the fire.

“I can’t imagine Kane went without a fight,” said Anya finally.

“He fought and was overwhelmed and forced to surrender. He’s being held prisoner in the school dungeons. Everyone is trapped there, including Indra and Jamie.”

Lincoln sat back in his chair, scrubbing his hands over his face. “Merlin's Beard. This is…”

“A disaster,” confirmed Gustus. “We agree. It’s…it gets worse. Diana Sydney is the new Minister for Magic. Jaha stepped down, and we have no idea why. They may have blackmailed him, or…he could be under the Imperius Curse. We’re very concerned for Luna and Evie now, because they’re out on a mission given to them directly by Jaha.”

“Yeah,” said Anya. “Yeah, we know…Indra mentioned it to us, that they were going out to find Titus. She said it was pointless.”

“I think it is too,” said Gustus. “Titus is not the kind of man that you can find, unless he wants to be found. I’m not even sure what is so special about the tracker that he can find him anyway. We think it may have just been a trap, Jaha getting another two Order members out of the way. If we had Luna at the Hogwarts battle, it may have been a different story and a better outcome for our side.”

“Two dragon animagi is better than one,” mused Lincoln in agreement.

“Have you heard anything about Clarke and the others?” asked Lexa. “Have you been able to contact them in any way?”

Gustus shook his head heavily, and Anya made a strangled noise of disappointment and frustration. “It took hours to find you three, mostly because I had the misfortune to check nearly every other
place before finding you here. We’re certainly cursing ourselves for not having the foresight to
discuss safe places to meet up with them.”

“So are we,” said Lexa bitterly.

“I think we would have heard something by now if the Queen caught them,” said Gustus seriously.
“I think they’re safe.”

“Me too,” said Lincoln, the ghost of pride on his face. “If there’s anything we’ve learned about
Octavia and the rest of them, it’s that they’re scrappy and relentless enough to never give up.
Speaking of…how did you get out of Hogwarts? When the others are still trapped there?”

Gustus launched into a regaling story of his escape that happened not long after Lexa, Anya, and
Lincoln Disapparated, how many people fled into the castle as the Ice Queen’s army closed ranks
around them, and how he’d hid in the first room he came across and was shocked when a portrait
opened to reveal a tunnel out of the school. Lexa realized with a jolt it must have been the Room of
Requirement. Gustus had spent the past three weeks contacting the remaining Order members who
hadn’t been caught, killed, or betrayed them, and was arranging a plan to bust Indra and the others
out of the school dungeons.

“You three are not to be a part of it though.” When Anya cried out in outrage, he said sharply, “You
are too important! Keep Lexa safe from the Queen.”

“I can take care of myself,” said Lexa firmly.

“You keep each other safe,” Gustus said just as resolutely. “You are a team. You know the Queen’s
ways. She will kill you and absorb your power. You can’t let that happen. You and the other
Nightbloods are the only way we are going to win this war.”

“And Clarke,” said Lexa, voice considerably softer.

Gustus nodded slowly, eyes gleaming. “And Clarke.”

Gustus remained overnight, getting some much needed rest while Lincoln took shift to keep watch.
In the morning, he set out fairly early after they discussed their next several locations, when and
where they would be. He told them he would check in once a week, and with that to look forward
to, setting off for the next place wasn’t as stressful as it had been.

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Three weeks since Lexa had last seen Clarke at Hogwarts, she finally heard news about her. And it was the last kind of news she wanted to hear.

Lexa stood, transfixed in horror, inside a muggle house near the forest in which they camped for the past two days. Anya looked positively comical, eyes wide but barely visible over huge cheeks bulging with smoky bacon crisps, one arm clutching three full bags of them and the other holding a remote toward the television. They both were frozen in place, gazing in utter disbelief at what was currently unfolding on the television screen.

It was a news report about a group of possible terrorists with guns who wreaked havoc in a London shopping mall. The police had sketches of the criminals. And they looked very familiar.

“That’s Raven,” choked Anya, crumbs spitting from her full mouth. She dropped the crisps. “That’s—that’s Raven.”


“That Beauxbatons girl…Jasper…Fox…” Anya shook her head, gaping, apparently speechless. “What…”

“Octavia?” yelped someone behind them, before there was the deafening clatter of multiple pans falling to the kitchen floor. Lincoln rushed into the den, eyes as wide as saucers, panic on his face as he moved close to the television. “What the—what the fuck? Why is she—What is that? What—“

They listened, bellies churning, as the reporter explained how the majority of the mall had exploded, with several casualties. A few blurry photographs flickered across the screen. There was one of Clarke and the others rushing down an escalator, and a bizarre photo of what looked like Maya and Jasper carrying a muggle with short red hair…no, wait, that was Fox, whose hair had been chopped off for some reason…there was a terrifying photo of Bellamy dragging an unconscious Octavia across the floor…
The reporter showed the sketches again, mentioning that though there was speculation it must have been a gas leak, they were still wanted for questioning by the police. Lexa stared at the sketch of Clarke’s scared face, gazing into black and white eyes that she knew were so blue in person…

“What the fuck were they thinking?” thundered Anya. Her face was red with rage, her fists clenched at her sides. “Are they—how fucking stupid do you have to be? How—I—fuck—“ She let out a strangled bellow of rage and turned, lifting a leg to plant a strong kick on the side door; it shattered, glass flying everywhere.

Normally Lexa and Lincoln would both be reacting quite differently to her loud display; they had broken into a muggle home that was only empty because they were gone to work, but there were still neighbors, after all. But this wasn’t any situation. Lexa was filled with a swirling, turbulent mess of emotions. Fury and disbelief at the stupidity of Clarke and the rest of the Hogwarts students for going to a populated muggle mall when they were being hunted by the most powerful witch in the world, mostly. But also, a strange, dizzying, overwhelming rush of euphoria. She’d caught a few glimpses of Clarke. She was okay. An idiot who was now being hunted by muggle authorities on top of the wizarding world, but a living idiot nonetheless.

“I can’t believe how fucking moronic they are!” The other window, smashed. “They deserve to be caught after that!”

“Don’t say that,” said Lincoln. He was shaken, still staring at the television screen though the news had now moved on to a story about rising petrol prices. “They made it out. Don’t jinx it and get them caught.”

“I won’t be the one getting them caught,” said Anya hotly, whirling around to face them and brandishing a finger in the vague direction of the television. “No, those idiots will take care of that themselves!”

Her finger was trembling. Her whole arm—her entire body was trembling, especially her bottom lip. Her eyes were glassy and close to spilling over.

“Will you finish the food?” murmured Lexa; Lincoln jolted, blinking at her for a moment before glancing at Anya and coming to his senses. He quickly nodded and headed back toward the kitchen, mind clearly lost on Octavia.

Lexa, meanwhile, took a cautious few steps toward Anya, who was shaking harder than ever, her breathing harsh and shallow.
“Don’t,” she said, teeth chattering when she attempted to grit them. She was clearly trying to glare at Lexa, but her eyes were wide, tears spilling hot and fast down her cheeks. Lexa took another step. “Don’t, Lexa. Don’t—“

Leya ignored her, scooping her into her arms, and Anya let out a strangled sob she promptly buried in Lexa’s shoulder.

They stood in the center of the living room for a time, Anya’s muffled cries loud enough to take over the sound of the reporter. Their arms were wrapped tightly around one another; they swayed where they stood, clutching one another. Lexa’s own eyes were burning, but she held it back, focusing on Anya’s pain instead. She rubbed soothing circles on Anya’s lower back, and Anya melted into her touch.

“They’re all so stupid,” Anya whispered a few minutes later, once the sobbing had subsided and she’d calmed down a bit. They still hadn’t moved to pull back, still holding one another.

“I know.”

“They’re so dumb.”

“I know.”

“I want to punch them all in the face.”

“I know.” Lexa gently squeezed her. “I know you do.”

“They better stay alive long enough for me to do that.”

“They will.”

Anya sniffled, withdrawing and scrubbing at her red, puffy eyes with the bottom of her shirt. “I’m—I—“ She dropped the shirt and looked rather helplessly at Lexa, brow creased, guilt written all over
her face. She was about to apologize for taking her stress out on Lexa these past two weeks, and Lexa suddenly found she didn’t need to hear it.

“It’s okay,” she cut across her. “I get it.”

“It’s not. It’s not,” repeated Anya, after Lexa shrugged and shook her head. “I’m sorry, Lexa. I just…I hate caring about people. Life would be easier if we didn’t have anything to be scared of losing. It’d make surviving easier.”

“Isn’t life worth more than just surviving, though?” said Lexa wryly. She sombered up when Anya narrowed her eyes and just studied her. “What?”

“Nothing. Just.” She shook her head, the ghost of her signature smirk faintly curling a corner of her lips. “Maybe Clarke wasn’t a completely terrible influence on you.”

Lexa snorted, rolling her eyes, and Anya even chuckled as she wiped her nose.

“I really am sorry, Lexa. You’re just as pissed as I am. I shouldn’t have treated you like that. You deserve better, Lexa.” Anya bit her lip for a second—and then abruptly lunged forward, drawing Lexa into a fierce hug. Lexa was stunned long enough she only just managed to hug back before Anya withdrew again. “You’re my second. My best friend. I…well…you know I love you, right?”

Lexa gave her a crooked smile, warmth flooding her chest. She squeezed Anya’s hand. “I love you too, Ahn.”

Anya grinned at her for another beat before rolling her eyes once more. “Okay, enough of this cheesy shit. Lincoln cooks like a god, and I want my omelet.”

* * /◇/ * *

“I have more bad news,” said Gustus heavily, when he arrived at the end of the week as promised. “I’m…there’s no easy way to say this, so I’m just going to come out with it.”

“Not even going to sugarcoat it for us, huh?” said Anya sarcastically as she plopped down into her
A shadow crossed Gustus’s face, chased by sorrow and quickly replaced with a stoic expression. “The Minister’s son was murdered.”

“What?”

Gustus sighed, the firelight and exhaustion in his face adding ten years. Lexa could do nothing more than stare, eyes stinging again and the lump in her throat positively painful. Though she hadn’t grown quite as close to Wells as she did Raven and Octavia, he was one of her favorites of Clarke’s friends, and had easily become one of her own. The quiet serenity about him, he’d actually reminded her a little of Costia. And now he was gone. Even now, she could hear the echo of his laughter as he checkmated her in an early game of Wizard’s Chess at breakfast. And Clarke…God, Clarke would be devastated. She had lost enough, and now…

“How do you know?” said Anya; even her voice shook.

“We watched it happen. Jaha was at the Ministry for the official meeting with Sydney, where he announced his resignation and appointed her as the new acting Minister. I went there along with a few other Order members hoping to intercept him, find out why he disappeared and why he’s giving Sydney the Ministry. Then…” He exhaled, grief written all over his face; Lexa imagined this must be extra difficult for him, given the loss of his own daughter. “The Snatchers appeared with their wands pointed at the boy’s throat. They demanded he bow to them, demanded a ransom…”

“And they killed him anyway?”

Gustus shook his head; the very air itself was heavy, though not so much as his next words. “Jaha didn’t care.”

“What?” said Lexa and Anya.

“There’s no way,” said Lincoln in disbelief. “There’s…he’s such a great kid, and his father—“

“Is he Imperiused, then?” said Anya, her brow furrowed.
Gustus nodded. “We’re almost certain he is. He was acting very unusual…talking to himself as though someone was there, no reaction to those being tortured or murdered…He simply left right after the Snatchers Disapparated. Didn’t even go to his son’s body.”

“Was Wells…?” Lexa’s voice trailed away; she swallowed thickly.

“No. They didn’t torture him. It was quick.”

Shaky relief tumbled out of her lips.

“So, Jaha is missing again, and we still haven’t managed to contact Luna and Evie, either. Roan is still missing, presumably still held captive by the Queen, or dead.”

“He could be alive,” said Lincoln softly. “He’s not a typical prisoner, he’s her son. There must be some reason she captured him. Maybe she doesn’t want him hurt.”

Anya gave a bitter, mirthless laugh. “Don’t be thick, Lincoln. The Queen doesn’t give a fuck about anyone.”

“I have to agree with Anya,” said Gustus, inclining his head toward her. “Nia is not capable of caring about anyone.”

Gustus finished filling them in and then stayed for dinner. He left early, apparently off to meet with his brother Atohl, one of the very few spies for the Order working in the ranks of the Queen.

Lexa took the night shift though it was Anya’s turn, sending her and Lincoln to bed. The night ended with tears and mourning, for Wells, for all those they lost, and for those who would be devastated once they found out.

* * * /أشخاص/ * *

The next month passed much the same as the previous one did. Constant Disapparation, thieving food when they could, and weekly updates from Gustus. Anya still had her moments of aggression, but things were much calmer now. Their new location definitely helped with that, too.
They were currently setting up camp in Grizedale forest. There was a nearby village they could get food from, since their supply was dwindling and it was time for another illegal shop, but they were also near Esthwaite Water, a small lake in Lancashire, where Lexa was certain they could probably retrieve some fish to cook. Mostly, though, she was just itching to get in the water. Their last several locations had been in empty fields and meadows; it had been weeks since they were near a lake, and it would be so nice to take a proper bath instead of sneaking into muggle homes and hotels to take a quick shower.

They were supposed to be setting up camp and starting dinner soon to finish off the last few cans of food, but the lake had looked so tempting…

“Lexa!”

Lexa jolted out of her reverie, returning to reality with a start. Anya was glaring at her.

“Sorry.” She winced as Anya seemed to swell before her eyes.

“I have been talking to you for at least five straight minutes,” she said threateningly. “I swear to Merlin, if you didn’t take in any of that—“

“Since when do you do anything straight, Ahn?” joked Lincoln. Lexa deflated in relief as Anya’s wrath was refocused on him instead.

Lexa rubbed her hands over her face, blocking out the sounds of Anya thoroughly chastising Lincoln to instead dwell on her thoughts for what may well be the five hundredth time this week. She blew out a breath, looked up at the sky, and blinked at the sight of the bird swooping overhead. She glanced at Anya and Lincoln again, saw they were adequately distracted biting one another’s heads off, and quietly slipped away into the trees.

Further relief slumped her shoulders as she walked, drawing in steady breaths of nature. It was too much, lately. Everything. The only news she had about Clarke was the news report from a month ago. Seeing that clip of Clarke, terror on her face as she ran…what were they doing? What were they thinking, publically exposing themselves? Even after all this was over, assuming they survived, now they would still be hunted, this time by a royally pissed off Ministry of Magic… assuming the Ice Queen didn’t kill them all first, of course…
She sighed when the trees thinned out and the expanse of lake was in view. The ground shifted to sand as she walked to the shore and stood there, just beyond reach of the water so it washed up right before her boots. The water was a deep, clear blue. It was beautiful, though not as vivid as Clarke’s eyes. The thought gave her a pang of the heart.

She moved to walk along the shoreline and had only taken a couple steps before jumping in alarm when her pocket suddenly vibrated. She pulled her wand out of her pocket, perplexed. It was no longer vibrating, but it was unnaturally warm. She frowned at it, rolling it in her hands. Nothing like this had ever happened with her wand. What did it mean? The hair on the back of her neck rose; perhaps her wand was trying to warn her, perhaps it somehow sensed nearby danger…

A loud crack broke the silence; nearby birds scattered from the trees. Lexa spun, already lifting her wand, but she nearly dropped it in her shock when her eyes landed on the distant figures, a girl holding onto two bodies and a wand, that had just appeared on a shoreline that was most certainly empty a moment ago. Lexa froze. All the air was sucked right out of her lungs and her heart may have lodged itself in her throat, but she didn’t care. She didn’t care about anything except the fact that Clarke—a tired Clarke with red hair but Clarke nonetheless, alive and safe and here—was less than a hundred feet away from her.

“How did you find me?” whispered Clarke, eyes darting around and widening as she remembered her friends.

“I didn’t,” said Lexa as Clarke crouched down to revive Octavia and Raven. How did Clarke show up here of all places? “I was just walking along the lake, and I heard the pop as you Apparated, and then I saw you…”

Raven frowned as her groggy gaze landed on Lexa; she mumbled her name in disbelief, which prompted Octavia to sit up at once, shock etched into every line of her face, further amplified by the way she put her hands on her head as though to prevent the dizziness from tipping her right over as she spluttered. “Lexa—Lincoln? Is—is Lincoln here? Where’s Lincoln?”
“He’s here,” said Lexa, gesturing toward their direction. “So is Anya—“ she said, but Octavia was already up and off. Raven stood, clearly warring with herself over whether her anger or desire to see Anya was greater; Lexa met Clarke’s gaze and they waited to see what would win out. The latter must have been the winner because a moment later Raven set off in the same direction, moving slowly but steadily.

Lexa knew Lincoln would be awaiting Octavia with open arms, but she wondered what Raven and Anya’s reunion would be like. She worried her lower lip, hoping there was at least no dueling or anything like that.

She turned when she felt Clarke’s gaze on her. Clarke looked every bit as conflicted as Raven had as she took in Lexa’s appearance. Lexa took advantage of her distraction by doing the same. Clarke was…well, she definitely looked as though she’d been roughing it for a good long while. Her magically dyed red hair was matted and tangled. Her skin was layered in a sheen of sweat, dirt, and some blood that may not even be her own. There were dark shadows under her red, puffy eyes that seemed so unnaturally bright even now…

“Come on,” offered Lexa, lifting a hand for Clarke’s before remembering that Clarke…Clarke may not want anything to do with her, and that included casual touches. She cleared her throat as though it would rid her of the lump there and slipped her hands into her sweater pockets for something to do with them because they suddenly felt awkward. “We have a campsite set up. You can…you can wash up. You’ll feel better.”

Clarke lifted a brow. “Are you saying I’m gross?”

The sass was more than welcome considering how haggard Clarke looked; who knew what she’d been through the past two months, so the fact that she could joke was an overwhelming relief to say the least. “Maybe. A bit. Yes.” *Fuck. Shut up, Lexa.* She met Clarke’s gaze and sank into the familiar sensation as though tripping and tumbling headfirst into the sky. “Still beautiful, though.”

Clarke’s cheeks went a bit pink, another relief considering how pale they were before. She didn’t say anything and Lexa hated the burn of guilt high in her chest. She shouldn’t have said that. It was too much too soon. She looked down to avoid Clarke’s gaze but couldn’t resist glancing back up a moment later; Clarke looked back at her before gesturing toward the direction Octavia and Raven had disappeared. “Let’s go, then.”

*"・/✧・"*

Even with the worst possible scenario in mind, Clarke still hadn’t expected this.

The first thing she noticed, when the trees cleared and they approached the campsite, was Octavia in Lincoln’s arms, half cradled in his lap. The second thing was their expressions of alarm. The third was Raven and Anya standing five feet apart, Raven pointing her wand directly into Anya’s face. Raven had clearly already caught her by surprise, because Anya was covered in mud, so Raven had either hit her with a spell or shoved her down, but Anya was certainly not backing down now.

“You lied to all of us!” shouted Raven; fiery sparks flew from her wand as she brandished it. Anya,
to her credit, didn’t even glance at the wand. She stared back at Raven disdainfully, as though she were an irksome insect buzzing around her.

“So you didn’t get to know everything you wanted the moment you wanted to know it. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: conjure a bridge and get over it.”

“I’ll blow up your fucking bridge, you—“

“Raven!” warned Clarke. Raven fell silent, gnashing her teeth together. There was still palpable electricity crackling through the air, almost as thick as the tension. The hairs on Clarke’s arms were standing. She and Lexa moved cautiously closer, withdrawing their own wands. Lincoln and Octavia were on their feet and moving too. All of them were slowly closing in around Raven. If Anya could just take care not to further antagonize her, they could deescalate the situation—

Of course Anya couldn’t just leave it at that. She was every bit as bad as Raven. “That’s right, listen to your leader,” sneered Anya. “Want her to tuck you into bed too? Give you a kiss and read you a bedtime sto—“

“Stup—“

“Raven, no!”

“—efy!”

Clarke’s nonverbal shield charm blocked it just in time; the streak of red hit it and rebounded. Raven ducked and it flew just over her head…and straight at Octavia, who had no magic to defend herself and wasn’t quick enough to lunge away. It hit her hard in the chest and sent her crumbling down; there was a sickening crunch as the back of her head smacked against the tree trunk behind her.

“Octavia!” Lincoln reached her first, followed by Lexa, then Clarke. There was another flash of red as he revived her. Her lashes fluttered and she mumbled incomprehensibly as she came to, wincing as Lincoln gently lifted her into his arms, carefully cradling her head and avoiding the split that was currently gushing with far too much blood.

“Is she okay? Is she okay?” Raven had rushed over, white-faced and trembling.
“She’s fine,” said Clarke shortly, biting her tongue so the irritation pulsing within her didn’t break free. Lincoln kneeled on the blankets beside the fire, gently setting Octavia down. “Head wounds always bleed heavy. Here, let me…” she had lifted her wand and stepped forward, but Lincoln was already running his own wand tip over the wound, murmuring the spell.

“It’s okay. Lincoln’s good with healing spells,” murmured Lexa, fingertips brushing against Clarke’s wrist. She lowered her wand.


Octavia mumbled again, but it was difficult to understand, which just made Raven look even more terrified. “What?”

Octavia opened her eyes wider, fixed a withering glare on Raven, and tried again. “I said…I’m going to kick your ass, Reyes. Muggle-style.” Raven’s mouth fell open in a sigh of relief. “You fucking idiot.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“I’m serious…I’m gonna kick your ass. Stupid.”

“I know. I’m sorry, O. I’m—”

Octavia’s eyes fluttered again as they closed. Raven looked up, eyes bright and wavering with tears. “Is she—“

“Obviously she’s going to be okay,” snapped Anya, and somehow Clarke knew what she was about to say, but she didn’t have enough time to cut across her. “It’s not like you just killed your friend, Reyes. Get ahold of yourself.”

*Fuck.*
The tears spilled over, rolling down Raven’s flushed cheeks. Anya froze, the last remnants of anger fading from her eyes and slackening her face.

“Because that’s what I do, isn’t it?” said Raven in a whisper that trembled as much as her body did. “I mess up and people die? I kill them?”

“What does she mean?” said Lincoln with a concerned frown; Lexa pressed her lips together, swallowing, and Anya was still frozen in place.

“I get my dad killed because he starts an argument with my mom about me. I drive Finn away. I couldn’t save Atom, couldn’t save Roma, couldn’t save Maya or Wells or Fox. What if it happens again?” Her voice was rising hysterically as she stumbled to her feet, upturning a pleading, devastated face toward all of them in turn. “What if I can’t save one of you, either?”

“Raven…you can’t think like that,” said Clarke, even though her own eyes were starting to sting with each memory of her friends that swam across her vision.

“You can’t torture yourself like that,” said Lincoln firmly. “You can’t blame yourself. Sometimes these things happen, and all you can do is keep going, keep fighting.”

“The dead are gone,” added Lexa. “There’s nothing more you can do for them.”

“The best way to honor their sacrifices is to keep living,” said Anya, placing a hand on Raven’s shoulder with more gentleness than Clarke would have thought she was capable of. Raven immediately flinched, jerking away from Anya’s touch, and the hurt only showed for half a second on Anya’s face before she smoothly concealed it with a hard mask of indifference. “Look, you know I’m honest and I don’t give a shit if people are hurt by the truth. I would tell you if something was your fault, and I’m telling you it’s not. Okay? It’s not your fault.”

Raven’s throat dipped as she swallowed. She briefly glanced at Anya, then the rest of them, who all nodded, echoing agreement with Anya’s words (except Octavia, who frowned and winced with pain when she tried to move her head; Lincoln gently cradled her in his lap again). Finally, Raven nodded once and lowered her gaze to the ground.

“Are you up to date?” asked Lexa. When Clarke blinked blankly at her, she added, “Do you know what’s going on right now? How in touch with the wizarding world have you been?”
“We know nothing at all,” said Clarke. “We’ve been hiding out. No one has contacted us.”

Lexa nodded, seeming unsurprised with this news. “We can fill you in. We’ll likely have more news tomorrow, too. Gustus will be here. He checks in every week and tells us any new information.”

“How does he find you?”

“We arranged safe locations ahead of time, just in case anything like this ever happened.”

“Oh.” Clarke blew out a breath, bemused. “That would have been nice to know.”

Lexa looked pained, as though the thought had already occurred to her many times over. “I know.”

“Lincoln is making dinner, if you would like some.”

Clarke glanced at Raven; the events of the night had filled her with so much panic, stress, and devastation that she wasn’t sure she would ever have an appetite again, but then her stomach growled, body betraying her. Lexa looked as though she understood exactly.

“The dead are gone.” She squeezed her shoulder, a trace of a smile lingering on her lips. “The living are hungry.”

There was a stirring in the back of Clarke’s mind; she frowned, racking her brain. She felt as though there was something missing, something she should be remembering…

Lexa let go of her shoulder quickly as though it had burned her, clearly assuming Clarke’s frown was because of that. She cleared her throat, gave a jerky nod, and stiffly walked away. Clarke watched her go, helpless to prevent the huff of amusement from escaping her. Awkward Lexa was irresistibly adorable, no matter how angry she was at her.

“Come on. We’ll have dinner and fill you in.”

Lincoln handled the cooking, magically hovering a pan full of mushrooms, potatoes, and broth over
the fire. Six bowls floated in the air while the ladle served the soup. He cast Clarke a sheepish, apologetic smile as he passed her a bowl and spoon. “It’s going to be a little bland.”

She thanked him and dug in regardless. It wasn’t as though she could really taste things anyway.

Lexa ate quietly beside her. Everyone mechanically ladled food into their mouths except for Raven, who only took one bite before pushing the bowl away, looking queasy. Lincoln shot her an apologetic glance that either went unnoticed or was ignored.

“As much as I’m sure you guys want filled in, maybe we should get some sleep and do it tomorrow,” said Anya uneasily.

Clarke immediately opened her mouth to argue, but then she noticed the way Anya glanced uneasily at Raven, and how Raven was just staring dully at the ground, a hollow sort of emptiness in her eyes. She exchanged a look with Octavia before nodding in agreement. Anya, Lexa, and Lincoln all looked relieved at how easily they relented, which gave Clarke even more cause for concern, but right now she was so tired the exhaustion was seeping its way into her bones, and if she didn’t sleep her brain was going to turn into the same tasteless mush she’d just eaten.

“Our tents are this way,” murmured Lexa. “There’s only one extra room, so I can share with Anya if you want a room of your own.”

“No, I’ll share with Raven.” She wanted to keep a close eye on her.

“I’ll be up for watch, and keeping an eye on Octavia,” said Lincoln.

They all nodded and murmured goodnight, Clarke pausing to reach down and hug Octavia; they clung to one another, all the sorrow and fear from today bleeding into their hug. Then Clarke carefully took Raven, an arm wrapped around her, and led her to the tent.

“I don’t want to go in there,” said Raven at once, panic returning to her eyes. “I don’t—I don’t want to sleep in there.”

Clarke swallowed before nodding. Lexa and Anya were already removing pillows and blankets, replacing them on the ground around the fire.
“We’ll sleep outside tonight. Under the stars, yeah?” said Clarke softly.

Raven nodded jerkily before climbing under the nearest blanket she’d laid down for hardly a second before shooting up again and scrambling out from under it, stumbling over to the next one. It took Clarke a moment to realize it must have been Anya’s blanket and pillow, and Raven couldn’t bear the smell of her. She was in Lexa’s instead.

*Great.*

Clarke took a deep breath before crawling under the blanket beside Raven, lying her head on the same pillow. She was overcome by the smell of pine and firesmoke and something she could never name that was always intrinsically Lexa.

She glanced at Lexa, at the strangled mix of longing and pain that showed briefly on Lexa’s face before she blinked and smoothed it over. She nodded in lieu of goodnight, and Clarke was left looking up at the stars, at the campfire smoke spiraling into the sky, Raven curled up against her and Lexa’s smell still surrounding her. And still, despite everything, despite the pain and panic, when Clarke let out a breath and closed her eyes, she felt more at peace than she had in two months.

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“We’re getting close.”

Luna and Evie both deadpanned one another. Finally didn’t begin to cover it. It had been endless weeks of traveling with this kid, and they had long passed the point where they began to doubt Jaha’s intelligence.

They’d been all over Europe, and now, in the middle of the night, they were skulking around a creepy abandoned muggle-parking garage. It was freezing cold and showing clear signs of Dementors or Shadow-Eaters, and they couldn’t help but feel like they were walking into a trap. And it most certainly didn’t help that Finn, it seemed, was useless.

He gave them quite possibly his fifth sheepish grimace of the night. “Can you, uh…” He gestured wordlessly.

Luna and Evie both lifted their wands and murmured the spell. A silvery fox bounded forth across the pavement with a bright hummingbird flitting through the air above it.

“Thanks,” said Finn gratefully, beginning to stow away his wand.
“Don’t put it away just yet,” warned Luna, glancing around at the empty muggle cars. Something about this parking lot was utterly creepy; it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand, and gave her an unnerving sense of foreboding.

Finn dutifully pulled it back out, lighting the tip and holding it a little too far ahead of him as they walked. Luna exchanged an exasperated glance with Evie.

“So, you look pretty young,” said Evie casually, though the bemused flatness of her gaze was anything but. She at least wasn’t staring at Finn, but rather shifting her gaze around them, keeping watch. “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

“I dropped out.” He shrugged when Evie gave him a sharp look. “There wasn’t really a reason for me to stay. I felt like I learned all I was going to learn.”

“Except how to create a patronus,” said Luna dryly.

The crooked smile was back. “Well, yeah, besides that. I’ve never been any good at that, though.”

“No happy memories to focus on?” mused Evie; when Finn grew quiet, she and Luna both stopped. Finn walked a couple steps more before turning to look back at them, wary. “I’m sorry,” said Evie honestly. Luna nodded to echo the sentiment, hesitating for only a moment before she put a hand on Finn’s shoulder.

Finn seemed to understand. He nodded after a second. The three of them crept on, following the trail of light from the patronus.

“Shh, wait. Do you hear that?”

They paused, hearts hammering, frozen in place as they strained their ears to catch the sound again. It sounded like…footsteps? A clatter? It was too late now; all was quiet again. The foreboding sense was worse than ever, and even Finn seemed on edge…

“PETRIFICUS TOTALUS!”
Luna ducked just in time, but the spell didn't hit her anyway; Evie’s gasp was caught in her throat as her limbs snapped in place, body frozen and toppling to the ground. Luna caught her just in time, managing to lift her wand and firing a return hex in the direction the voice had shouted.

“Finn, take cover—“

But Finn was pointing his wand right at her, a smirk on his face. Luna’s eyes widened. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“New plan,” he said with a shrug. Luna was in shock, still holding Evie, and more than aware there were other wizards and witches weaving their way through the cars toward them. “I am actually a little sorry, you know. You guys were cool to hang out with, and the fact that you’re hot helps. Hasn’t been a bad view the past couple months, not at all.” He grinned, and Luna’s wand grew hot in her palm as she clench it. “But duty calls, and Jaha told me he’d release my dad if I do this for him.”

“You little fuck. You’ve been wasting our time on purpose.”

He raised his hands palm up in surrender, a shit-eating grin splitting across his face, and Luna’s fury grew so sharply she was sure smoke was coming from her nostrils. “Guilty. Had to do it, though.”

“Do what, exactly?” said Luna through clenched teeth.

His lopsided grin grew. “Distract you. Pike has Hogwarts—and her sister,” he added, gesturing toward Evie, still frozen in place, “under his control. And Sydney’s the new Minister while Jaha does whatever weird shit he’s been up to. Meanwhile, I bring you to the Queen, and I get my dad back. It’s a win win situation. Not for everyone, but—well, for me.”

“And us,” boasted a Snatcher, as they all closed in on where Luna and Evie were on the ground. “Let’s go.”

Luna tilted her head, and Finn paused as the ghost of a smirk grew on her face. She rolled her shoulders, muscles flexing, and tightened her grip on her wand. “You’re going to regret this.”

“If you’re thinking about transforming into your animagi form, don’t,” said Finn shortly; Luna was the one to pause now, mouth dropping open. “Yeah, I know all about nightbloods. And sure, you
can transform now and kill us all, but if we die, she’s going with us,” he said pointedly, gesturing
toward Evie. Luna’s insides went cold. “Come quietly, and we don’t have to hurt her.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“I already told you. Jaha gave me instructions to distract you while we hunt down some guy it’s
impossible to hunt down.”

“Why go to all this trouble?” demanded Luna. “We had our back to you plenty of times. Why not
just kill us?”

She didn’t miss the way Finn’s throat bobbed as he swallowed, nor the way the remaining color
drained out of his face. “Believe it or not, I don’t believe in killing people.” He ignored Luna’s scoff.
“I was supposed to, but I had a better idea. I hear the Queen is hunting down Nightbloods, and
you’re one of the few she hasn’t discovered.” He grinned again when Luna was the one to pale this
time. “So let’s get moving.”

* "・/✧・* *

Clarke woke languidly, drifting in and out of sleep for a time before consciousness finally settled
over her. She didn’t open her eyes, partly because there was something bright shining red through
her eyelids, but mostly because she just wanted to bask in this for a moment. It had been a long time
since she’d woken up feeling so…safe. She was no longer hiding out in dingy hotel rooms, peering
out the shutters for potential Death Eaters. She was lying on a mixture of sand and grass that her
head sank into like the softest pillow, covered in a warm blanket that smelled like…Lexa. Lexa was
here, and Anya, and Lincoln. It was incredible how much safer she felt in their presence.

The thought of them was what had her finally cracking open an eye. She squinted in the patch of
sunlight that filtered through the trees. She sat up to avoid it, burying her yawn in the crook of her
arm, and looked around. Octavia and Lincoln were sleeping nearest her; they were curled up in the
same sleeping bag, arms wrapped around each other. At some point in the night, Clarke must have
grown overheated (Raven was like a furnace) and stumbled away to sleep in her own space. Raven
was across the campfire from her, faintly snoring but alone spread-eagle on the sand, blanket tangled
around her legs. Anya was sitting up a couple feet away from her, arms propped on her knees drawn
up to her chest, watching Raven with an unreadable expression. She looked up, clearly sensing
Clarke’s gaze on her, and without pause turned her head to nod toward the direction of the person
she didn’t have to ask to know Clarke was looking for.

Silently so as not to wake the others, Clarke crossed the clearing, slipping a bit in the uneven sand,
and weaved her way through the trees. They thinned out, eventually leading her back to the lakeshore. The sun was inching over the horizon, bright but muted. The sound of the lake lapping the shore was comforting. This whole morning was such a relief, and that combined with the damage steadily inkling back inside over losing Fox put an ache Clarke could not name in her chest. Her throat hurt with a lump from the urge to cry, but she ignored it as she scanned her surroundings. Lexa wasn’t hard to find. The lump grew bigger and the ache in her chest strengthened.

Lexa was sitting in the sand just before the water, arms perched on her knees much the same way Anya was sitting back at the campsite. Her back was mostly facing Clarke, gaze drawn to the lake horizon and distant mountains beyond it. She was also very, very naked. Clarke couldn’t resist her gaze from taking it all in: the tan skin littered with sand, water droplets beading on the ripples of subtle muscles, relaxed as she sat calmly. Her hair was a wild tangle of brown. She’d been bathing in the lake; her clothes were laid out drying on the sand beside her, having been magically washed. There were a few other items beyond what she’d been wearing last night, too.

Clarke hesitated for a moment. She’d already been uncertain as to whether or not she was quite ready to have a full-length one-on-one conversation with Lexa, let alone when Lexa was naked.

This was the perfect opportunity, though. She wasn’t certain what she had in mind...if she wanted to demand answers or try to remain patient. Honestly, at this point she was so tired, all she wanted to do was take a bath herself and sit beside Lexa in companionable silence. She just wanted to breathe for a moment.

“Hey,” she called out, walking toward her. Lexa jolted, twisting her head round to see Clarke. Clarke could see the blush that stained her cheeks even from here.

“Nothing I haven’t seen before,” she said, amused, but she turned around, walking slowly backwards to give Lexa time to get dressed.

“You know what they say about mockery,” said Lexa dryly, voice muffled as she presumably pulled her jumper over her head. “It’s—“

“Not the product of a strong mind,” finished Clarke, smiling wryly. The shape of her lips in a smile almost felt strange after the past two months of hell. That thought made it fade as she finally turned when Lexa tugged at her sleeve. She plopped down onto the sand beside her and stretched out. She kicked off her muddy shoes and wriggled dirty toes, sighing as the cool air hit them.

“You can wash up too, if you want,” Lexa told her. “I’ll go.”
“In a bit,” said Clarke. She squinted out at the clear sky, quickly fading from pink to a pale blue as the sun rose higher.

She could feel Lexa studying her, green eyes as quietly intense as ever. Clarke knew what she was waiting for, but she felt so calm and at peace right now. She didn’t want to ruin it. Warm gratitude rushed through her when she saw Lexa nod slightly out of the corner of her eyes and turn around to watch the horizon with her. Lexa always seemed to understand what she needed, except when she knew her father was murdered and lied to her about it, among all the other things she lied about. The bitterness was unwelcome when there was such a pleasant breeze ruffling her hair, and the sand beneath her was cool and soft, and the sweet fragrance of Lexa’s soap was wafting through the air.

They sat in silence for a long time. Sometimes they watched the lake, the sky, the birds flying past, but occasionally they swapped sneaky glances at one another. Lexa’s sweater looked soft and frayed and Clarke’s hands itched to feel the fabric. Her wet hair was draped over one shoulder, droplets of water dripping from the ends of it, leaving a damp spot on her jeans.

“Are you hungry?” said Lexa softly.

Clarke looked at her in surprise, less because they had been silent for so long, but more so because she realized she really was hungry—starving, even. As though echoing agreement, her stomach chose that moment to growl.

Lexa’s lips quirked in amusement; she briefly turned, grabbing something beneath the other clothes still neatly folded on the ground on her other side. She handed it to Clarke, who arched a brow down at it.

“It’s a granola bar. A healthy muggle snack.”

“It has chocolate chips in it.”

Lexa’s lips curved. “Still healthy.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, though she couldn’t prevent her own smile from showing. “Whatever.” She tore it open and took a bite, sighing at the taste. It was actually pretty delicious.
“So,” started Lexa again, long after Clarke had finished the bar and Vanished the wrapper. Her heart sank; this time, she knew, Lexa wasn’t offering food. “Do you…want to talk about it?”

“Oh,” she answered, voice determinedly calm.

She turned her head so she couldn’t see Lexa’s expression out of the corner of her eyes. She wasn’t sure if she would feel a vicious satisfaction at the disappointment, or guilt. She didn’t want to find out.

“It could be good for you.”

“Since when do you care what’s good for me?” Clarke bit out before she could stop it. The words stung on her tongue; she held it between her teeth. Such a peaceful morning, soured by the rage already building in the pit of her stomach.

“Always,” said Lexa so softly it was nearly inaudible. Clarke had heard enough.

“Can you go?” she said shortly. She stared at the water, refusing to look at Lexa. “I want to wash up now.”

Lexa paused before standing. “Yes. I’m sor—”

“Don’t,” she said sharply, eyes flashing back onto Lexa. She hated the ache in her heart at meeting those sad green eyes.

Lexa swallowed and dipped her head. “There’s soap and fresh clothes for you here,” she said, nudging the pile of clothing with her foot to reveal the bottles underneath. “I’ll head back to the campsite.”

Clarke spared only one glance to watch her walk away, posture stiff, before she stripped down, piling her filthy clothes in a ball and carefully laying her father’s watch out on the sand beside them. She pointed her wand at the shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. Then she marched into the water (started to, anyway, before she yelped at the freezing temperature and pointed her wand at it next, warming the area she’d occupy; then she marched into the water) with the soap floating in the air alongside her.
There was something strangely calming about magically removing the red color from her hair. Something peaceful about dipping her head into the water and seeing all the red waving about, then seeing it gold next time. She scrubbed the dirt and blood off her skin so hard her flesh went pink. She used her wand to shave and floated in the water for a time before she magically dried herself and pulled on the muggle clothing Lexa left for her.

The blue jumper was overlong, but it was a snug fit around her chest. The black leggings were warm and soft. She glanced back at the trees that hid the camp from view; she wasn’t quite ready to return and be forced to socialize with others. Perhaps Lexa had a point, she thought as she sat down in the sand, stretching her legs out before her and half burying her clean toes in the soft sand. She gazed out at the horizon and found, for the first time in weeks, she could finally breathe.

It was easier like this. Knowing they weren’t alone anymore, knowing Lexa was nearby—it felt safer. Sitting on the shore, birds chirping, sun shining, the breeze stirring her hair…something swelled within her chest. If Wells were here, he’d call it hope. If Fox were here, she’d call it being lulled into a false sense of security. Maybe it was both. If her father were here…

She pressed her lips together at the ache that rose within her at the thought of him. It was so familiar now. Her father was dead. She was finally starting to accept it.

She reached for her father’s watch, sighing as she held it close to her chest, as though the beating of her heart could fix it and get the hands moving. She’d never been able to fix it, nor had Raven, who had taken it as a personal insult that no spell or tinkering could get it working. Bellamy had once grumpily suggested Clarke throw it away, but she wouldn’t and couldn’t do that. It was the last thing he’d ever given her.

She stroked a fingertip along the cracked face before rubbing the pad of her thumb along the leather strap, flipping it over to smooth the smudges on the gold back, nail catching on the strange words scratched into it. *Ascende Superius.* It sounded like a spell, but whenever she’d taken her wand and spoke it, nothing ever happened. She’d hoped when he was out of Azkaban, she could ask him what it meant. Now she would never know.

Clarke strapped her watch back on her wrist as she stood up. She slipped her wand into her pocket. She left her dirty clothes and shoes behind and walked bare-footed back to the camp.

Raven was still snoring away, but Lincoln and Octavia were awake. They were all sweet lingering touches and soft morning kisses as they worked together over the campfire, frying eggs on a floating pan. Clarke met Octavia’s gaze and nodded in response to the small, reassuring smile Octavia sent her way as Lincoln twitched his wand to flip the egg over in the pan.
Lexa and Anya were huddled close together speaking in hushed voices. Anya was still casting wary, protective glances at Raven. Lexa’s gaze shifted onto Clarke as she sat down on the tree stump beside the area she’d slept in; she took in Clarke’s much cleaner appearance and muggle clothes and blinked and swallowed and Clarke thought of how ridiculous it was that they were both blushing over something so young and stupid when they were in the middle of a war. Then she noticed the hardness in Anya’s gaze as she looked at her. Maybe blushes were a better alternative.

“Good morning,” said Octavia as she sat on the log beside Clarke’s stump, handing her a plate of eggs and baked beans that had been cooked in the can above the fire. She was already wolfing down her own plate by the time Clarke started picking at her food with the prongs of her fork. “Kinda glad Raven’s still out. Is that bad?”

Clarke glanced at their sleeping friend as she chewed thoughtfully on a mouthful of egg and bean. Lincoln and Octavia had made a tasty meal considering there was so little to work with. “No.”

Octavia frowned at Raven, licking her fingers clean. “I’m not looking forward to when she wakes up,” she said darkly.

“Me either.”

“We might have to protect Anya.”

“Maybe.”

Octavia tossed her plate and fork to Lincoln, who had it magically wash itself clean. “We thought we’d have to protect Lexa, too,” she said, carefully scrutinizing Clarke for her reaction. Clarke ignored her searching gaze, focusing instead on finishing her meal. “But you were both gone when we woke up.”

“She showed me where to wash up.” Changing the subject from the direction Octavia was clearly going, Clarke pointedly sniffed, raising a brow at Octavia. “You might want to do the same, you know.”

Octavia gaped in faux offense, causing Clarke to snort. “Linc, do I stink?”
“You always do,” he answered without a beat, not even looking up as he moved his wand to scrub
the grease residue from the pan. “I’m used to it.”

She grabbed a bean off Clarke’s plate and chucked it at him.

“Maybe it’s a good thing,” said Octavia as she crossed to Lincoln’s side, slipping her arms around
his waist and hugging him from behind.

“What is? Stinking?”

“Yeah.” She grinned. “Maybe I smell so bad, it’ll keep all the Shadow-Eaters away. It’ll be like my
new type of magic.”

Lincoln snorted, setting the now-clean dishes down to turn and wrap Octavia up in his arms. “Not
sure Shadow-Eaters can even smell, but I appreciate your determination.” His smile faded slightly as
he stared at her, and said in a low voice a moment later in all somber seriousness, “I really missed
you, Octavia.”

Octavia understood. “God. I missed you too.”

Lincoln leaned forward and Octavia tipped her mouth up to meet his. After a few seconds they broke
apart. “I love you.”

“I love you too. I’m serious, though. I can kick some serious Shadow Eater ass.”

Lincoln’s lips twisted into a small smile. “Maybe we shouldn’t put the words ‘eater’ and ‘ass’ right
next to each other.”

Octavia looked impressed.

* * ./<unsigned>/.*

More in an attempt to stop staring at Clarke (who was now talking in quiet murmurs with Raven,
who had just returned fresh and clean from bathing at the lake and was now eating a late breakfast),
Lexa approached Anya, who was standing a considerable distance away leaning up against a tree trunk, arms crossed beneath her chest.

“How’s Raven doing?”

Anya’s response to Lexa’s question was nothing more than a grunt.

“How are you doing?”

Another grunt.

Lexa sighed. Anya rolled her eyes. “Look, why don’t you worry about your own girl?” she said, gesturing toward Clarke.

Lexa walked away, though any other occasion she may have paused to say, so Raven is your girl, then? just to watch Anya squirm.

To her surprise, Clarke glanced up and met her eye. Lexa swallowed and tried to remain calm and unaffected as Clarke stood and approached her.

“So. When are you guys going to tell us everything you know?”

It was worded a specific way, a hard warning behind each word. This wasn’t just about telling them the information Gustus had shared. This was about telling them everything, everything Lexa had known and kept hidden.

Things she was still not sure she should share, because Titus had explicitly forbid her to, and she didn’t want Clarke to get hurt.

“We can talk whenever you would like,” said Lexa carefully, though Clarke’s eyes still narrowed. Lexa was indeed concerned about whether or not she should tell Clarke every last bit…but mostly, she is dreading Clarke learning the most terrible news.
That her best friend since childhood is dead.

“I think we should wait until Gus is here tonight,” spoke up Anya; Lexa and Clarke both jumped, having not even heard her approach. “In case he has new information. Might as well do it all at once.”

Lexa met Clarke’s eyes, and then they both nodded in agreement.

*・・(/✧)/・*

It went as well as expected.

Clarke was heartbroken, Octavia was devastated, and Raven seemed to sink further into whatever black pit her soul had descended into.

Lexa, Anya, and Lincoln gave the other three their space. Since Gustus had immediately informed them of what happened to Wells, things promptly fell into chaos, and no other information was given. While they grieved, Gustus informed the Durmstrangs that nothing much had changed in the past week, other than increased reports of mysterious muggle murders that the muggles were merely attributing to a spike in violent crimes.

He left that night.

The next week was spent in a devastating silence, and when Gustus returned again, this time he did have new information.

“Your brother has been captured.”

Octavia’s gasp broke the silence; and then there were a thousand questions from her, Clarke, and even the more subdued Raven. Gustus answered them all as best he could.

“They found out about the others being held captive at Hogwarts and tried to break them out. It didn’t work. Now they’re being held in the same dungeons. I can confirm they are alive.”
Octavia took out her frustration and fear by training with Lincoln. He stole fencing swords from a nearby muggle school, and apparently having learned it himself as a child, began giving lessons to Octavia, who wore the role of a muggle warrior like a second skin.

The third time Gustus came, it was clutching a letter. One letter from one Abigail Griffin.

Clarke sent a howler back with him, pouring all of her fury into it; he wasted no time in Disapparating away.

That was how time passed, for the most part. Disapparating to new locations and waiting for Gustus’s arrival. There was very little speaking, apart from Lincoln and Octavia. In the case of Anya and Raven, Raven just flat-out ignored Anya’s presence, didn’t even look at her, but Anya was always near, not quite managing to hide the concern in her eyes with a haughty, indifferent expression. Lexa tried to keep her own equally indifferent, but it was difficult with the little glances Clarke often threw her way. Sometimes they were angry. Usually they were questioning.

Lexa didn’t know what to do.

When she asked Gustus, he simply told her to listen to her heart.

What kind of bullshit advice was that?

Her entire life, she’d been told to listen to her head, not her heart. Titus alone had drilled those words into her more times than she could count. Yet now, Titus wasn’t here. Titus had completely disappeared, and if he had been gone this long, who was to say he would ever be back? Perhaps he had fled. Perhaps he’d seen that they were doomed, that they’d already lost their chance to win this war, and he’d gone.

The thought didn’t make her as sick as it once had.

Maybe none of this ever mattered in the first place.

(it was always on the days Clarke looked at her with anger she felt that so intensely).
Anya never thought she could be so frustrated, but, as usual, Raven Reyes proves her wrong.

She’d learned long ago it was just one of her many eccentric qualities. Raven was brilliant, and creative, and hardheaded. Emphasis on hardheaded. Anya had lost count of how many times Raven had proven her wrong at something or the other, and it always started with silly, heated arguments about the most ridiculous things. Debates about whether or not Raven could eat twelve pumpkin pasties in five minutes, for example. It ended with Raven massaging her swollen belly and moaning from where she lay in Anya’s lap on the staircase outside the Great Hall because Raven couldn’t make it up the stairs, but Raven had done it. She’d been right.

It wasn’t always one-sided, of course. Anya proved Raven wrong just as much. Beating her at Wizard’s Cards, for example, her cackles filling the air because her phoenix card came back from the dead and beat Raven’s dragon, and then hastily putting out the resulting flames before the Durmstrang ship could catch fire.

Still, the majority of their relationship had always been full of humor; it was one of Anya’s favorite things about Raven. Yes, she loved the fact that she was brilliant, and creative, and even found her hardheadedness endearing, but how funny she was had always been the best thing. No matter how pissed she was or how hard she tried to seem haughty and unruffled, Raven could always pull a smile out of her. Laughter had always been the bottom line.

And now there was none, and this was something else Raven was beating her at—because Anya couldn’t make her laugh. It seemed like nothing could even make her smile.

Raven spent her days just lying in bed, mostly. Anya didn’t want to smother her, but she was concerned. Raven didn’t speak to anyone, not even Clarke or Octavia, unless they addressed her first. Clarke wasn’t faring much better, but the death of Wells seemed to have had the opposite effect on her. Clarke was angry and moving forward, restless and determined, though she wasn’t quite as aggressive and emotional toward Lexa as she had been initially; she seemed just…really tired. Lexa was still pining after her, of course. It was ridiculous. Clarke didn’t deserve her. Anya wasn’t sure what she spent more time doing: watching Raven, or shooting murderous glares at Clarke.

Octavia was focused too, receiving fencing lessons from Lincoln and embracing them wholeheartedly, though they occasionally bickered when she felt Lincoln was being too overprotective (which he clearly is, but that’s fair enough considering Octavia has no magic and is fairly defenseless in a magical war), but they usually talked it out and were fine.

Right now, Raven was grieving and hating herself. Octavia told Lincoln, and Lincoln told Anya everything that had happened in their time apart. Raven felt responsible for Fox’s death, and even though no one was at fault (the angry part of Anya wanted to argue that it was technically Clarke’s
fault, that it was her stupid mistake for not realizing her wand was cursed and they were being tracked, but even Anya was not cruel enough to say that aloud, no matter how furious she was with Clarke), Raven felt guilty because she wished she’d been a better friend to Fox. But the dead were gone, and Anya didn’t know how to make Raven understand that and keep living. Right now, what she was doing…it wasn’t living. Waking up, sleeping, eating, staring at the ground as the sun rose and fell—it wasn’t living. It was just surviving. But maybe right now that was all she could do.

“You have to eat, Raven.” Anya sighed when Raven barely glanced at her. Lincoln had set the bowl of noodle soup out twenty minutes ago; it was undoubtedly cold now, but a wave of Anya’s wand had steam rising off it again. “You’re not doing anyone any favors by starving yourself.”

Raven ignored her again; by now Anya was familiar with it. But it never failed to frustrate her.

“Please,” she said through gritted teeth, tearing the word out. It had never been a word that came easily to her.

Ignored again.

She was wasting away, and Anya told herself the overwhelming helplessness and desperation that swelled within her was nothing more than rage.

“She,” she snapped, shoving the soup away with enough force it slopped over the edges, wetting the edge of Raven’s blanket.

“Fuck off,” said Raven without feeling.

It was progress, at least. Raven had actually spoken to her. Anya sighed, and with a wave of her wand, dried the wet blanket.

Still, days passed and it was scaring Anya, and if there was anything she hated, it was being scared. She remained close to Raven’s side, hovering like an irritating baby sitter, and she didn’t know what to do. Clarke and Octavia had tried to talk to her, with no success. Anya didn’t know what to do.

Raven was barely eating, barely talking, and Anya didn’t know what to do.
It finally culminated in an argument one dusky evening, when Lincoln and Octavia were cooking dinner, Clarke was off bathing, and Lexa was curled up next to the fire with her nose buried in a book, fast asleep. Anya’s heart was beating hard in her chest and she felt sick with the way Raven’s eyes shimmered, but Raven was talking to her, even if it was just to make bitter remarks hinting that Lexa was giving Clarke her space and Anya could take a page out of her book.

“Look, I’m not like Lexa!” Anya exploded. “How she gets with Clarke, all soft, that’s not me. I’m blunt and an asshole and I don’t know how to comfort people or do anything other than tell you to just get on with it. Get on with it. Get on with it, Raven.”

And then Raven was crying again, but she let Anya slip an arm around her shoulders and draw her in. Tears wet the front of Anya’s shirt, but the cold barely bothered her when she could feel Raven’s fingers curling into the fabric, clutching her as she wept.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” whispered Anya, tentatively rubbing Raven’s back. Her own eyes were stinging, whether with sorrow for Raven or relief she was finally melting she didn’t know. “I promise. Nobody died because of you. It’s—I know it’s terrible, but it’s just what happens. We’re in the middle of a war. People die, and it’s no one’s fault but the people that killed them. The only thing you could be at fault for is giving up, and what you’re doing—you’re giving up.”

“I’m not—“ Raven started to weakly protest, but Anya shook her head.

“You are, and it’s an insult to their memory. Fox died fighting, didn’t she?” Fresh tears rolled over Raven’s cheeks, but Anya went on, “She died fighting, to protect you and Octavia and Clarke. What would she do if she were here and saw how you haven’t been taking care of yourself?” Raven just cried harder and Anya pushed past the guilt. “I’m sorry if this is tough love. I’m sorry I’m not softer and more patient. But you have got to snap out of it. Death Eaters could show up any time and you’re in no shape to fight when you’re too weak to even walk around because you won’t eat. There’s a time for mourning, and there’s a time for fighting. We’re still fighting right now. Your fight isn’t over, okay?”

Raven lifted her head, and it was the first time they’d had proper eye contact in weeks. Anya’s mouth went dry and her heart thudded on and she wondered when she was stupid enough to let this Hogwarts idiot burrow her way into her heart. “Okay,” Raven whispered, and Anya couldn’t help but let out a shaky breath in relief.

That night, Raven ate the food Lincoln gave her, and when Anya sat close to her, Raven reached out to link their fingers together.
Anya squeezed her hand. Everything wasn’t magically solved, but it was enough.

* "・/・/・" *

Almost a month since they had shown up on the lakeshore, Clarke broke the silence.

They were camping out at Loch Venacher in the Scottish Highlands. Lexa was busy counting their remaining cans of food when Clarke marched up to her.

“I want to talk to you.”

Lexa stood up at once, wiping her suddenly sweating palms on her jeans. “Okay.”

Clarke blinked, as though she hadn’t expected it to be that easy, but then she composed herself into willful anger again, and Lexa followed her out of the campsite and quite a ways away from everyone else. She’d been expecting this since the moment Clarke showed up on that shore. The only reason it had taken so long was their shock at Wells’s death. But she knew she’d have to deal with this sooner or later.

When Clarke turned around to face her, Lexa yet again had to force herself to stand still and unaffected. Even though Clarke was standing closer to her than she had in months, and she couldn’t even remember the last time they were alone together, and Clarke’s eyes looked so, so blue today.

The silence stretched on so long, no sounds save for the distant birds and the wind rushing through the grass. When Clarke finally spoke, it was in a hushed voice, and Lexa never could have anticipated what she was about to say.

“Do you regret it?”

Lexa blinked. “What?”

“Do you regret it?” repeated Clarke. Her jaw was set, her face smooth, but Lexa could see the pain
in her eyes. The dread. “Any of it?”

“I…I regret hurting you,” said Lexa, off balance in the wake of such a loaded question. “I never wanted to hurt you.”

Clarke stared at her again. “You lied to me.”

“Yes.”

“You knew my father was dead, and you never told me.”

“I…”

_I only knew for a month._

_That’s a month too long. Excuses never matter. Clarke hates you now._

Lexa licked her lips, mouth dry. “Yes.”

Clarke’s throat dipped, and her eyes burned, but—she blinked and they went clear again.

“What are you going to tell me everything now?”

Lexa licked her lips again. When she didn’t answer, Clarke’s nostrils flared, and the rage rolled off her in waves. She took a step closer and Lexa resisted the urge to step back.

“All this time. All the shit we’ve been through, and you’re _still_ not going to tell me?”

Lexa couldn’t speak, couldn’t find the words. She expected Clarke to rage now, to scream and demand answers, but she didn’t. Instead, she grew quieter, and she studied Lexa like she was a puzzle she could solve if she could only see inside.
“Why can’t you tell me?” she finally asked.

She’d asked this once before, and Lexa didn’t tell her. What harm was it to tell her now? She could at least give her this one thing.

“The leader of the Order forbid it. He said it puts everyone, but especially you, in danger.” When Clarke merely looked at her, Lexa felt the need to fill the silence. “It could have led the Queen to capturing you.”

“What does the queen want with me, Lexa?”

Lexa swallowed, her mouth dry, an automatic response to hearing her name leave Clarke’s lips; it had been so long, she was almost sure Clarke had been deliberately not saying it, that perhaps saying her name aloud was too much to bear when Clarke hated her so much. “She thinks you have information that she wants.”

“Are you aware of this information she wants?”

“No.”

One of Clarke’s brows winged up in skepticism.

“No,” repeated Lexa. “I give you my word, Clarke.”

“Yeah, well.” Clarke licked her lips, glancing away as she took a deep breath before breathing out, “Your word doesn’t mean much, does it?” Before Lexa could respond, Clarke went on. “So if you don’t know this information, and I don’t…I mean, you got me my memories back, right? And all I knew was that my dad…” Her expression darkened as her voice trailed away, but she recovered and moved on again. “That’s all we know, so what could the Queen—“

“You could have other memories locked away inside you,” interrupted Lexa. Clarke’s eyes widened. “When your mother altered your memories…it doesn’t make it right by any means, but she seemed to have your best interests in mind. The less you know, the safer you are.”
Clarke looked nauseated; Lexa could hardly blame her. Who knew what her other hidden memories were? It was a terrifying thought.

“We can finish this conversation later,” said Lexa. When Clarke’s head snapped up again, she added gently, “I mean just take a break, Clarke. Get some lunch. We can talk later, when you’re up for it.”

Clarke left without another word, and Lexa watched her go, heart aching.

_I’m sorry._

* * /✧/ * *

“We’re running low again,” Lexa told Lincoln as he rustled through the few cans left. “We need to make a run to town.”

He frowned. “I thought we agreed to just wait for Gustus to bring supplies. It’s too dangerous.”

“I know, but there’s a nearby village.” They had just Apparated to a new location, and were camping out in a forest. “It looks like it’s less than five minutes away. We could be quick.”

Lincoln was staring knowingly at her. “I know you just want to get out of here for a while, but it’s too dangerous, Lex. We should just wait for Gustus.”

Lexa sighed. “Okay, fine.”

* * /✧/ * *

“Crucio!”
The screams faded, replaced with the sound of Luna’s harsh breathing. She wiped the sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand, shoving away the hair that had fallen from her loose braids, and turned to point her wand at Evie. “Relashio.”

“Fuck,” huffed Evie, massaging her wrists, red where the ropes had cut into her. “Nice work.”

“Thanks to you.” Luna blew out a breath, turning to survey the half dozen limp bodies surrounding them. One was still twitching from the effects of the curse; she kicked him hard and he stopped moving. “I wouldn’t have been able to get them if you hadn’t hit that one with that nonverbal bat-bogey hex. You always were good at them.”

Evie smiled. “Thanks.”

“So, what are we going to do with this idiot?” She gestured at Finn, still frozen in place, his eyes wide with surprise. “I feel weird about killing a kid, but…”

“I don’t know. Jaha’s not on our side, my sister’s trapped at Hogwarts, Roan is still being held captive…”

Luna worried her bottom lip; her eyes narrowed as Finn suddenly blinked, the effects of the spell wearing off. She pointed both his wand and her own wand at him. He was panting and swearing as he sat up.

“Don’t kill me. Don’t—“

“Shut up,” snapped Luna. “We’re trying to decide what we’re going to do with you, and—“

“Shh, wait!” They fell silent, heads turning toward the distant sound of footsteps. They stilled, eyes widening to take in the sight of a tall man in a tattered, sweeping black traveling cloak walking beneath the bridge, stopping to sit on the ground, cross his legs and close his eyes as though meditating.

“Is that who I think it is?” whispered Luna in disbelief.
Evie nodded, gaping. The light glinted off the man’s baldhead. He was still for another moment, before he flung his head back, his eyes open and glazed over, and began rasping words. The train rumbling overhead made it difficult to catch, but they caught snatches of words…some that were very important.

Grizedale forest…Lexa.

He lowered his head, blinking focus back into his eyes, breathing a bit heavier but otherwise seeming unperturbed by what just happened. He clambered to his feet, and Luna realized what he was about to do half a second too late.

“Wait!” she cried, lurching out, but he had already Disapparated. She stared at the empty spot he had just occupied before spinning on her heel to face Evie. “Did you hear that?”

“Grizedale Forest. Do you think it’s in the UK?”

“I hope so.”

“It sounded like he thinks Lexa is there. And if Lexa is there…”

“Then Clarke could be too,” finished Luna.

“Clarke?” said Finn, an incredulous note to his voice. “Clarke Griffin?”

“You know her?” said Luna sharply.

He nodded. “I dated her.”

Luna exchanged another disbelieving look with Evie before she marched over and seized Finn’s other arm. She and Evie hauled him to his feet.

“Right. You’re coming with us.”
“Where are we going?” he said, panic returning to his dark eyes as they dragged him under the cover of the trees again.

“To find out where the fuck this forest is.”

“Wait—my wand—“

Evie kicked it and it rolled out of view beneath the bushes. “You don’t need it.”

“No! Get it back! Get it—”

Finn’s strangled yell lasted long after the crack that echoed after they Disapparated.

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“I’m going into town.”

Clarke blinked. “Town? But…” She glanced around, eyes lingering on Anya’s sleeping form. “What about the others? They’ll be pissed.”

Lexa shrugged. “Not if I’m back before they wake.”

Clarke stared at her for a moment, watching in bemusement as Lexa began pulling her jumper on before pausing, brow creasing and lips puckering in thought. She glanced up at the clear sky before reversing and dropping the jumper back onto her pile of things. “It’s a nice day out.”

She met Clarke’s gaze and tilted her head as though to gesture toward an invisible path. “You can come with me, if you like.”

“You really think the two most wanted people in the wizarding world, one of whom is even recognized and wanted in the muggle world, should just take a stroll into town?”
Lexa shrugged again. “We can be careful. I’ll turn your hair red again.”

Clarke rolled her eyes, but she quietly made her way to Lexa’s side, especially careful not to tread on Anya. She’d been so stir-crazy lately that she was more than willing to risk a bit of danger to just do something and go somewhere.

She and Lexa walked side by side, the usual careful amount of space between them. It was mostly quiet, a few birds chirping in the distance. The sunlight grew brighter as the trees thinned out, and soon enough they’d made their way to the edge of the forest and found themselves on the hill overlooking the sleepy village.

The town’s inhabitants were clearly just starting to rise. Men and women in suits were strolling quickly down the sidewalk, clutching briefcases and sparing far too many harried glances at their cellphones and wrist watches. Buses rumbled down the roads. A delicious aroma of pastries was wafting from the nearby shops just beginning to open their doors, and Clarke noticed Lexa’s eyes lingering on the displays in the windows. Her own mouth was watering, so the next shop they passed by, she cast a quick glance around to be sure no one was watching and slipped her wand from her pocket to point it at the open window. A couple muffins zoomed out from a woven basket on the countertop; she caught them.

“Clarke,” admonished Lexa with a frown, though she took the muffin she offered. “Someone could have seen.”

“Shut up and eat,” said Clarke, sinking her teeth into her own muffin. It tasted even better than it smelled. Weeks of canned food cooked over a campfire may have something to do with that.

They were still walking long after they’d finished the muffins and bought a few sacks of food from the grocery shop that Lexa enchanted to feel lighter to carry, and Clarke was just starting to wonder why they were still here when Lexa spotted a quaint little shop and led them into it. It was rather messy, shelves littered with all manner of objects ranging from small thimbles to stuffed animals to grandfather clocks and battered old musical instruments. Though perplexed Lexa had brought them into a muggle antique store, Clarke followed her down the aisles. As Lexa stopped to look through a few books, Clarke realized with a jolt that this was the first time they had been alone together since before the third task of the Triwizard tournament.

It was also another opportunity to ask questions. Maybe Lexa wouldn’t answer them all, but surely she could some.
“So, you can turn into a dragon,” said Clarke conversationally, casually enough it actually brought a surprised laugh bubbling out of Lexa’s lips. Clarke ignored the warmth it flooded through her.

“Yes.”

“I thought learning to become an animagus was difficult and took years? You’re only eighteen. How did you…?”

“Indra started training me in my first year,” said Lexa, absently flicking through a dusty book she picked off the shelf. “I didn’t master it until I was fourteen.”

“How did you—“

“Because it is a form of offense and defense against the Shadow-Eaters. It’s the best form of magic when you’re facing up against them. Like dementors, Shadow-Eater powers only work with humans. Animals confuse them.”

Clarke picked up the book Lexa put down as she shuffled down the shelf, peering at other trinkets. “Raven said she’d like to learn.”

Lexa nodded. “I could teach her. Or Anya.”

Clarke lifted her brows. “Anya’s an animagus too?”

“And Lincoln. Most of us in the Order are.”

“How are you guys in the Order?” said Clarke curiously. “I mean, you’re kids. Why would they let kids join?”

The amusement faded rather abruptly from Lexa’s face, leaving behind a drained weariness. She put the book back on the shelf, hesitated a moment before picking up a small trinket and carefully observing it as she said, “The Order has been hunting the Queen for years. Once, they’d succeeded in capturing her, and she spent time in Azkaban before breaking out. She’s been hunting down prodigies—children who show magic at a very young age. They call us Nightbloods. Forgive me for
not sounding as humble as I would like, but, we are considered fairly gifted in magic, and our animagus forms always prove to be rare. It’s a long story, and I’m not even positive on all the facts. There are many secrets they refuse to tell us, for our own safety.”

“I wonder how that feels,” said Clarke dryly.

Lexa grimaced. She stilled, setting down the trinket before turning to face Clarke with a somber expression. “Clarke. Can I ask you something, and can you answer me honestly?”

Clarke crossed her arms beneath her chest and said coolly, “I don’t know, do you think you deserve honesty from me?”

Lexa nodded slowly. “Okay. That’s fair. I suppose I don’t deserve anything from you.” But she still stepped nearer, and Clarke resisted the urge to backtrack. Lexa leaned forward, voice a quiet whisper in this silent antique store. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I’m sorry for lying to you. I’m sorry you’ve lost so many people you love. I’m sorry you were dragged into this entire mess. If I could have protected you and kept you away from it, I would have.”

“I don’t need your protection,” said Clarke scathingly, flaring up at once. “I can take care of myself, so fuck your patronizing bullshit.”

“I know.” The ghost of something strange, pride, perhaps, returned to Lexa’s face. “I just wish you never had to deal with any of this. I wish…” She hesitated, deep sorrow bringing a glassy film to her eyes. “I wish you never had to deal with me.”

Clarke tried to ignore the sting that brought, the pain as though all the air had been knocked out of her. She inhaled a shaky breath before breathing, “So you do regret it. Regret us.”

“No!” burst Lexa, loudly enough Clarke blinked in surprise. “No, Clarke. I—I know we never talked about it. We were…stubborn, and foolish. But I…I care about you.” She studied her, lower lip trembling before she tucked it beneath her teeth. “Much more than I ever intended to.”

The blush crept up the back of Clarke’s neck and suddenly Lexa was just far too close. She took a step away, breaking the tension and putting much needed space between them. “Sometimes I think I hate you, you know,” she murmured.
She avoided Lexa’s eyes though she could feel her gaze, sad and hurt, boring into her. "It's easier for you to hate me than hate yourself. You feel like what happened to your father was your fault, as though you somehow could have prevented it. You couldn't have."

Dread coiled in Clarke’s gut; every mention of her father still did this. “Don’t.”

“..."You push yourself to take care of everyone, to protect everyone, but you can’t. We’re in the middle of a war.”

“Yes and I don’t need reminded of that when I’m living it,” snapped Clarke.

“Okay.” Lexa nodded again, stepping back to give Clarke her space. She didn’t say what Clarke wished she would. I know. I’ve been living it much longer than the past two months. I’ve been living it for years now. The words would have cut like a knife. She knew Lexa wouldn’t say them, but she wished she had. The silence swelled between them, tension thickening the air like it always seemed to when they were around one another.

Unable to bear it any longer, Clarke looked up again, found her watching her closely, an emotion she didn’t want to name swirling in green eyes. “What was it like for you guys?” questioned Clarke. “The two months since we last saw each other.”

“Lincoln was fairly optimistic most of the time, but there were times he grew quiet for long periods. He missed Octavia. Anya was often angry. She took it out on Lincoln and I, but we knew she was angry with herself, mostly for leaving things on such a bad note with Raven.”

Clarke studied her. “And you?”

“I missed you,” said Lexa simply, tone casual despite the way her heart was beating faster and nerves churned in her belly. “I had time to reflect on myself, and my life. That’s why I said what I said earlier. I don’t regret anything with you, but I regret hurting you.”

Clarke swallowed before nodding carefully. Silence grew again, and this time the unspoken words were louder than ever, swelling and swelling until they were swollen on the tip of her tongue. I missed you too. I can’t stop thinking about you. Even when we were on the run from homicidal maniacs and people were dying, you were my first thought in the morning and my last thought at night.
I know I don’t hate you, but this would be so much easier if I did.

Maybe nearly three months was long enough. Maybe she should let it go.

But she looked at Lexa and felt the sting of betrayal all the way to her bones. She couldn’t forget those haunting green eyes surrounded by war paint, looking at her with pain, lips moving to form words that break her heart.

She shuddered. Lexa frowned, taking it for a shiver, and glanced around, clearly for something warmer for Clarke to wear, but Clarke immediately shook her head, biting her tongue because this made her remember that moment in the tent only seconds before they kissed for the first time—

“Clarke?” said Lexa softly. Clarke shivered again, closing her eyes at the sound and the sight of Lexa’s lips wrapping around her name.

“Just give me time,” she gasped out, jerking away when Lexa’s hand tentatively touched her shoulder. She ignored the pang at seeing Lexa’s face fall. She clutched her own hands to her chest, hating how beseeching her posture felt, but it was all she could do. “I—I don’t forgive you, not now, not yet, but—but maybe someday.”

Lexa stared at her for a beat too long, enough that Clarke wondered what she was thinking, what she was about to do. But then Lexa’s lips quirked, stretched, and she nodded eagerly, and Clarke realized she was relieved.

Apparently “maybe someday” was more than she ever expected to receive, and the thought made her heart ache.

“Take all the time you need,” Lexa said gently. “I can wait.” And forever was just another unspoken word that floated in the air between them, grew until it burst and left them saturated in it.

Clarke swallowed, nodded, and moved on to get lost in the shelves of dusty muggle history.

* "·/∩/·" *
Almost an entire hour elapsed by the time Clarke’s wandering through the two-story shop led her back to Lexa. By then, she’d considerably calmed down, but she felt off balance at the lingering guilt and embarrassment simmering in her belly. She wasn’t sure why she should feel bad when it was Lexa who betrayed her, but whatever. She made herself feel better by picking up a couple small gifts for Raven and Octavia.

She was meandering back toward the front of the shop where she would check out and presumably find Lexa, but as she descended the stairs, music drifted to meet her. Someone was playing a beautiful melody on a piano—Lexa, she soon realized when she headed for the sound. Lexa was perched at a rickety old piano, fingers drifting across the keys like they were meant to be there. Her eyes were closed as she played, the most serene expression on her face that Clarke had seen in months. The notes were beautiful and soft, and brought a sudden dryness to Clarke’s throat.

As though sensing her presence, Lexa’s eyes fluttered open. Clarke froze as she met her eye and cast around for something to say.

“I think your hands were made for that. You have long fingers,” said Clarke without thinking; she cringed, face warming, as soon as the words left her mouth.

Fortunately Lexa didn’t make it worse. She just smiled, continuing to play the soft melody until she reached the final notes.

“I used to play the violin as well,” she said when she finished, gracefully rising from the bench and lowering the cover over the keys. “My parents tried to get me to play the clarinet too, but I never cared for it.”

“What’s the point of playing three different instruments?”

Lexa shrugged, reaching down to pick up the grocery sacks and a couple new sacks too; she’d clearly already bought something from this antique store. Clarke looked curiously at them, but they were wrapped up in the sacks. Lexa glanced at the items in Clarke’s arms and nodded toward the front of the store where Clarke could check out. Clarke followed her down the next aisle, full of dusty boxes. “Just to say you’ve mastered them, I suppose. Because of the amount of dedication and discipline it takes, it’s impressive enough to master one instrument, let alone three. I suspect my parents would have enjoyed being able to say their daughter could play three instruments.”

Clarke fell silent, a strange sensation curdling in her belly, permeating the cold in her chest. It took her a second to realize it was pity. Pity, for Lexa. Clarke clenched her jaw, resisting the urge to ball her hands into fists at the overwhelming disgust for herself that washed over her. She didn’t know
what it was more at…the fact that she felt pity for Lexa, or the fact that she was trying not to let herself.

Desperate for a distraction, she grabbed the nearest item off the shelf whose cover caught her interest.

“What’s this?” Clarke lifted the box and shook it slightly; Lexa looked up at the rattle and immediately smiled.

Clarke ignored the fact that it felt like all the oxygen left the room when Lexa crossed the room to stand before her and take the box. Lexa smiled down at it for a moment before humming, “You know, if you thought Raven and Anya were fighting before, it’ll be nothing compared to them playing this game.”

“What do you mean?”

Lexa shook her head, smile growing. She eyed another couple boxes and the shelf and grabbed them too, stacking them in her arms. “You’ll see. Come on, let’s go.”

When they returned to the camp and brandished the game, it lit up Raven’s eyes in a way nothing much lately had. She sat up, blanket falling off her, and actually grinned.

“Oh, yes,” she said savagely, rubbing her hands together. “I hope you’re all ready to get your asses handed to you.”

“I’m pretty sure this game was invented by Voldemort himself,” whispered Lincoln.

“Shhh!” Raven’s eyes were gleaming, wickedness etched into every line of her face. “I need to concentrate.”

“Concentrate on the fact that you’re almost bankrupt, you mean?” said Octavia innocently as she casually filtered through her stack of cash. Raven scowled at her.

“I think this game is rigged,” said Anya flatly. She’d lost the game nearly thirty minutes ago. Anya
had been the first to go, then Clarke, then Lincoln. Lexa had volunteered to be the banker, mostly because she knew how competitive she could get and she didn’t want to be drawn into the challenge when her real aim was to watch the expressions on Clarke’s face as she experienced Monopoly for the first time. This game had been an entertaining one, too; Raven had expected to win, but Octavia was currently destroying everyone.

“I’m practically a millionaire, Rae,” said Octavia loftily, smirking across her mound of money at Raven. “There’s no way you’re catching up.”

“Fuck off,” growled Raven.

“And look at all the property I own.”

“Fuck off, O.”

In the end, Octavia won the game, cackling as Raven shoved the board away hard enough it spilled cards all over the ground. Clarke tutted disapprovingly, waving her wand to magically fold the board and stack the cards away neatly.

“How could you just wound my pride like that?” demanded Raven even hours later, when Lincoln was roasting a promising meal over the fire. Raven was smiling now, at least, even chuckling as she threw a stick at Octavia. “In front of my girlfriend and everything.”

Lexa’s brow lifted to her hairline; Clarke, Lincoln, and Octavia looked equally surprised, but Anya did nothing more than drop an arm around Raven’s shoulders. Lexa met Clarke’s eye and they quickly glanced away before they could exchange a smile. Lexa busied herself arranging the logs closer to the fire, pressing her lips together at the strange lurching in her belly. She wasn’t sure what it meant. She was pleased for her friends, of course—she knew they’d made up a few days ago after a last argument, but not that they were already back to this, not to mention as far as she knew they had resolutely refused to define their relationship in the past. Lexa glanced at Clarke again, found her already staring, and they quickly looked away once more.

“You know, it’s funny,” said Octavia casually as she took the plate of roasted chicken and corn on the cob and jacket potatoes. “I told you I’d kick your ass muggle-style, and I delivered.”

Raven’s laughs echoed through the forest.
Clarke sighed, utterly at peace for once. She watched the plumes of smoke spiral into the night sky.

They were still caught in the middle of a war. Her father was dead, most of her friends were either dead or held captive, her mother probably hated her after the vicious Howler Clarke had sent her (not that she cared, considering her own mother had been aware of Jake’s death and wiped her daughter’s memories), they were still stuck hiding away waiting for Gustus to bring news of a plan to break the others out of Hogwarts and take on the Queen, and Ontari was still hunting them down.

But for now, right now, things were calm. Clarke was full after the meal Lincoln cooked, bigger than usual and unequivocally more delicious. Raven and Octavia were safe and happy and in good moods, wrapped up in their partner’s arms as they looked through the books Clarke had bought them. Anya wasn’t throwing as many death glares as usual at her. She and Lexa were in a tentative truce, albeit a cautious limbo, after their talk at the antique store. Tonight, things were good. Clarke was currently lounging in the blanket she enchanted to hover in the air, arms behind her head and one leg dangling, gazing up at the stars blanketing the night sky that peeked out above through the canopy of trees. Things were peaceful, and she wished it could be like this every day.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Raven pause from her chattering, explaining whatever muggle mechanics were in that book about space planes, and leaned her head forward to give Anya a soft kiss that quickly grew more heated. Clarke turned away so she couldn’t see, giving them their privacy but also to ignore the fluttering in her belly. It had been a long time since she kissed—

She didn’t want to think about that. She didn’t want to think about that, but now it was in her head, and her lips tingled as though she could feel the pressure of soft plump lips pushing into them, and she bit the tip of her tongue as though—

“Clarke?”

She started, jolting hard enough she nearly tossed herself out of the blanket. Heart hammering, she twisted round to meet eyes that looked closer to green orbs in the firelight, and willed herself to appear unaffected as she said, “Yes?” in a voice just a bit too high.

“Hey, we’re going to go take a walk,” announced Raven, standing with Anya and clutching her hand. Clarke shot her a withering gaze that Raven only responded to with a grin as they walked away; they so weren’t just going on a walk.
“I think we’re going to go collect some more firewood,” chimed in Octavia as she tugged Lincoln to his feet. They walked away grinning too, and Clarke snorted as she saw Octavia grab Lincoln’s backend just before the darkness of the forest swallowed them.

She sighed again, shaking her head as she turned back to face Lexa, who was also looking amused. “What did you need?” prompted Clarke.

“Oh. I have something for you.” Clarke arched a brow, watching as Lexa rustled around in one of the sacks she’d brought back from the antique shop but hadn’t yet opened. When she pulled the items out of it, Clarke’s breath caught in her throat.

“Being stuck with the same people doing the same thing every day can make you stir-crazy, as you know very well by now,” said Lexa, clearly trying for a light, casual tone, but the nervous shake of her voice and the alertness in her eyes gave her away. “I thought maybe you could use these, if you wanted.”

It was a sketchbook and a small box of colored pencils.

“I’m sorry there wasn’t anything better,” said Lexa, worrying her bottom lip. “I would have rather got you canvas and painting supplies, but—“

“Lexa,” interrupted Clarke; she had been running her hand over the book but now reached over to squeeze Lexa’s shoulder. Lexa quieted at once. “I—thank you.”

The corners of Lexa’s lips curled in the tiniest, most hopeful smile. Clarke inwardly sighed, finally bowing down to the fact that this swelling in her heart every time she looks at Lexa isn’t going away. “You really like it?”

“I love it,” Clarke corrected. She lets go of Lexa’s shoulder to run her hand over the binding again; she flips open the book and drifts her fingers down the smooth pages. She doesn’t miss the way Lexa’s eyes catch on the movements and her throat bobs. The air suddenly feels thicker. Clarke snaps the book shut and Lexa’s gaze snaps back up to meet hers. “Seriously. Thank you.”

Lexa swallowed again. “You’re welcome.”

Silence. Eye contact. Tingles. Tension. It was all too much, so Clarke tucked the sketchbook
protectively to her chest and blurted, “So what else is in the sack?”

Lexa blinked; it seemed to take as much effort for her to wade out of the thickness as Clarke. She looked down at the sack. “Just the other games. I thought we could open another one tomorrow, but if you want, we can play it now?”

Clarke nodded. She needed something to do, needed a distraction. She cursed the others for leaving her here alone with Lexa.

She really did get distracted for a moment, eying the cartoonish face of the box. “What is that?”

Lexa smiled. “Operation.”

Ten minutes later, Clarke was already regretting this decision.

“You have to have a really light touch,” whispered Lexa; Clarke swallowed, blinking rapidly as though it could dispel the heat the words sent flooding through her. This was a really inconvenient time to remember she hadn’t had an orgasm in almost three months. Four really, because she and Lexa never slept together for the month leading up to the third task. Clarke had assumed it was because she was really worried and focused about the third task and had given her the space she asked for (now she knew it was because Lexa felt so guilty she knew about Clarke’s father that it didn’t feel right to her). So, really…four months.

God. Four months was a really long time.

“You just have to move really slowly and carefully.” Lexa was still intent on the game, tongue poking slightly between her teeth in concentration as she reached the tweezers into the man’s stomach to retrieve a tiny butterfly. Clarke determinedly tore her gaze away from that tongue. That definitely is not the direction she wants her mind going.

“I got it!” said Lexa triumphantly, pausing to flash Clarke a smile before passing her the tweezers. “Here, you try.”

Okay, great. Their fingers brushed as Clarke took the tweezers, and she carefully avoided Lexa’s eyes as she moved the tweezers to the first opening she saw, the broken heart in the man’s chest. Her hands trembled slightly, and the game buzzed as she touched the edge. She held her breath and tried again.
It’s just, okay. Lexa is really talented with her tongue. It may have been four months, but Clarke hasn’t forgotten that. It’s not exactly the type of thing you forget about. Lexa’s tongue was long and lithe like her fingers. Capable of incredibly fast flicks to a particularly sensitive area, or long, undulating strokes inside another sensitive area, thrusting undeterred by rival grinding—

The game buzzed again. Clarke blew out a breath in frustration. Her forehead was a bit damp with sweat. It was no longer the only wet place on her body.

Fuck.

“A light touch, remember,” said Lexa softly; her voice was far too close to Clarke’s ear, and her tone was far too intimate.

Fuck.

“I think I’m going to take a break,” she huffed, scrambling to her feet. Lexa frowned up at her.

“We haven’t been playing very long.”

“Yeah but I’m tired,” lied Clarke, looking away. She spotted the sketchbook still on the ground near where she sat. She snatched it up at once. “And I want to work on this a little.”

Lexa’s eyes brightened, smile hidden in the corners of her lips. Clarke told herself she didn’t care as she hurried away.

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It didn’t help.

Her fingers shook as she slid the tip of the pencil over the paper. The green was already wearing down. She stared down at the dozens of eyes that gazed solemnly back up at her.

“Fuck,” she muttered. Unable to help herself, she traced her fingertip along the line of lips. “Fuck.”
She snapped the sketchbook shut again and ran her hands through her hair.

*Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

She was restless. She was frustrated. She was overwhelmingly torn.

She wasn’t ready to forgive Lexa. Not yet. Not even if part of her really wanted to be.

She slid off the tree stump she’d been sitting on, waved her wand to shrink the sketchbook and pencils down to a tiny size to slip into her pocket that way she wouldn’t have to carry them. It had been well over an hour already since she’d left Lexa in the camp. She walked around the forest for another half hour before deciding to head back; it was quite late now, so hopefully Raven, Octavia, Anya, and Lincoln were all back from their shameless deeds by now.

Still, Clarke took her time meandering back to camp, thoughts a long ways away, back inside a secret room in a castle, where she and Lexa had shared a large, comfortable bed... The faint orange glow of the fire was just starting to illuminate the trees when she heard low murmurs.

“...I’m just saying, she’s an asshole. She doesn’t deserve you,” said Anya flatly; Clarke’s stomach dropped. Didn’t take a genius to know what Anya was talking about.

“Quiet, Anya,” snapped Lexa. “Go to bed.”

“You go to bed.”

“That’s what I was *trying* to do, before you idiotically pulled me out of it to give me your unwanted opinions,” snarled Lexa.

“You’re welcome,” said Anya coolly.

Clarke waited until they were safely back in bed before she emerged from the outskirts and into the clearing. Octavia and Lincoln were already snoozing in their shared sleeping bag. Raven looked like she was close, as she shot Clarke a sleepy smile before curling into Anya’s offered spoon. Clarke quietly dressed into a comfortable t-shirt and a pair of loose pants before sliding into her bed. She
didn’t fail to notice that Lexa was sleeping even closer than she usually did, her sleeping bag only a couple feet away.

Soon enough, Raven gentle snores and Anya’s steady breathing joined Lincoln and Octavia. Clarke was still wide awake, staring at the crackling embers of the fire. Gustus was supposed to arrive tomorrow. She wondered if he’d bring more bad news with him.

“Clarke.”

Lexa’s whisper carried through the night. Clarke lay still, hating how her heart picked up at the sound of Lexa’s voice, at the fact that the two of them were the only ones left awake.

“I know I don’t deserve it, but—please be truthful with me. Do you regret it?”

It was a question she had asked before.

Clarke stared up at the way the stars twinkled.

“No, Lexa.”

“Why not?”

Clarke’s hands shook, so she balled them into fists. “It—it was the opposite. Okay?” It was everything. “I don’t want to talk about this right now. Okay?”

“Okay. I’m sorry.”

Silence again, stretching so long Clarke assumed Lexa was asleep. Then:

“Clarke?”
Her eyes flew open. Her mouth was dry and she wasn’t sure if she was irritated or grateful. Possibly both. “What, Lexa?”

“Sorry. Just…do you think you will want to talk about it? At some point?”

Clarke sucked in a breath. “I don’t know.” She exhaled, feeling her bones go limp. “Maybe someday.”

“Maybe someday,” Lexa repeated. Clarke imagined a small smile on her face. “Okay.”

The thought of that small smile burned like a fire in Clarke’s chest, but not in a pleasant way. She didn’t understand. She didn’t understand why Lexa still cared so much.

She turned over, sitting up in her makeshift bed and wrapping her arms around her knees. She watched the smoldering fire for a long moment, trying to work up the courage to say something, trying to tell herself to be strong enough not to.


Lexa blinked. “Because.”

Clarke scoffed. “Because. Great answer, like that answers anything at all.”

“Because of you who are, Clarke.”

She barely resisted the urge to scoff again. “I’m no one worth being honest to. I’m nothing.”

“You’re everything.” The words spilled out in such a rush and Lexa’s cheeks went such a brilliant shade of pink that Clarke half considered she imagined it, though the likelier answer was that Lexa simply didn’t mean to say it, and certainly not with that tone of reverence. Lexa blinked again, rapidly as though to clear her head, but then her brow furrowed and her jaw set. “You are, Clarke. You have the biggest heart of anyone I know. You care so much, about everyone. You’re smart and you’re funny, you’re beautiful inside and out. You’re also talented, and stubborn, and impossibly
hardheaded, and I love that.” Clarke’s breath hitched at that word. “You can hold a grudge and argue with a brick wall, you always think you’re right, and you’re the only person besides Anya who calls me out when I’m being an idiot. You make me want to be a better person,” she said softly. “You are so good, Clarke. The world would be a much better place if there were more people in it who cared even half as much as you do. You never give up, and you remind me that—that people are worth fighting for, that life is about more than just surviving. Don’t say you’re nothing when you’re everything. You’re my everything, and that’s why I—“ Clarke’s heart stopped, but Lexa cut off, eyes meeting Clarke’s briefly before dropping to the ground. When they flickered up again, they found Clarke’s gaze, held it. Lexa’s small smile almost looked pained. “That’s why you’re you.”

Maybe someday.

That’s why you’re you.

Clarke wondered when they were ever going to be fully truthful with each other.

“I missed you,” she whispered. She held Lexa’s gaze, even when the pressure at the back of her eyes made them sting. “Lexa. I missed you every day. I still miss you now,” she confessed, bottom lip trembling.

“I’m here,” offered Lexa, palms up as though in surrender or perhaps prayer. “I’m here, Clarke.”

No you’re not. We’re so far apart and I don’t know how to reach you and I don’t know if I even should.

Lexa pushed her blanket down her legs and stood up. She never dropped Clarke’s gaze as she crossed the clearing to her, crouched down and raised her brows as if to say, is this okay?

Clarke scooted back to give her room, letting Lexa crawl into the sleeping bag with her. Lexa cautiously slipped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close. Clarke let out a breath she hadn’t even realized she’d been holding, squeezing her eyes shut as she nuzzled her face into Lexa’s neck, into warmth and soft skin that smelled of the forest around them and campfire smoke and Lexa. Oh, God, Lexa. Her sobs stuck in her chest, shaking there, all desperate aches, clawing sorrow, and overwhelming relief warring in the cavity of her chest with them. Lexa, Lexa, Lexa.

“I’m here,” Lexa whispered, lips pressing into the top of Clarke’s head, fingers smoothing her hair back from her face. “I’m here.”
Lexa was here.

Lexa had lied to her, the world may be ending and they were surrounded by people who wanted them dead, but right now, Lexa was here. And that was more than enough.

Clarke clung to her, tears soaking the front of Lexa’s shirt. She felt droplets land on her face, her head. It wasn’t raining. Clarke burrowed deeper into her side, ear pressing to Lexa’s chest, listening to the rapid thrum beneath it.

After a time, the thrum steadied and so did Clarke. She released Lexa’s shirt from her fist, instead flattening her palm over it. Tears turned to hiccups turned to soft breathing and soft skin and soft hair. Clarke shivered as Lexa’s hand drifted down the length of her back, stroking the expanse of flesh that was exposed from her shirt riding up. She toyed with the bottom hem of Lexa’s own shirt, the pad of her thumb sliding along the curve of Lexa’s hip. She felt safer and warmer than she had in months.

She wasn’t sure why she kept tilting her head up, nose following the column of Lexa’s graceful throat, along the dagger-sharp line of her dangerous jaw, over the high curves of her elegant cheekbones, across the tip of her soft nose. Lexa turned her head. Their foreheads rested together and for a moment, they simply breathed each other in. Clarke’s mouth was dry, there was a heaviness in her belly mirrored by the ache of wanting pounding away in her chest. She wanted this, wanted Lexa. She hadn’t meant for this to happen, but now she couldn’t imagine it not happening. It was happening regardless of anything anyone could think, because it was like fate spurring her on, and it took a will even they didn’t have to stop this from happening.

For one heartbeat, they held each other, looked at each other, green and blue. Then they moved forward, emptying the space between them—

The crack that split the air was particularly earsplitting in the stillness of the night. It shot Clarke’s heart straight into her throat; she lurched forward out of her sleeping bag, already reaching for her wand, but Lexa’s shoulder slammed her down, arms spreading on either side of her as though to protect her from stray spells. Lincoln and Anya were already on their feet, spells streaking forward from their wands, but whatever tall, stooping figure had materialized in the center of their encampment deflected them with a shield charm that caused the spells to rebound; Lincoln and Anya lunged away just in time, the spells bulleting over their heads to hit the trees with the force of an explosion.

In the chaos that followed, the loss of pressure told Clarke Lexa had rolled off her. She scrambled to follow, kicking the sleeping bag and blanket off her, and staggered to her feet, sprinting forward. She
immediately skidded to a halt when the smoke cleared and to see Raven on her knees, wand pointed up at a tall figure in a tattered black traveling cloak. Anya was beside her, but her wand was merely hanging limply at her side. Lincoln was half-shielding Octavia, who was struggling to peer over his shoulder. And Lexa stood between Raven and the man, her arms outstretched as though protecting him.

“I’m not a Death Eater,” said the man; he sounded breathless from exertion, probably from protecting himself from spells, but otherwise he seemed calm.

“Well if you’re not a Death Eater, then who are you?” demanded Raven. She glanced uncertainly at Anya. “Ahn?”

She didn’t answer, too busy staring at the bald man, the same expression of shock on her face as there was Lincoln’s. Lexa was the only one who seemed to have recovered, though she was still visibly shaken. She put her arms down and stepped to the side, gesturing toward the man. She cleared her throat and lifted her chin.

“The leader of the Order of the Phoenix. Titus.”

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“What?”

“Who is Titus?”

“The leader?”

Clarke, Raven, and Octavia all spoke at once, confusion layering their words. Lexa, Lincoln, and Anya all three still appeared to be in shock.

“Neil Titus,” the man said, extending a hand to Raven, who numbly shook it. Octavia next, and then Titus’s gaze landed on Clarke, still standing feet away at where she’d emerged from the outskirts. She shook his hand, and had the feeling he knew exactly who she was. “Pleasure to meet all of you.”
“You didn’t meet us,” said Raven, still frowning. “You said your name and shook our hands. You don’t know us and I still don’t understand who you are.”

“You name is Raven.”

Raven goggled at him as he passed; then she looked at Anya, who was getting to her feet. “Did you tell him my name?” When she shook her head, Raven’s brows drew together disbelievingly. “How did he know my name, then? What, is he psychic?”

Anya sighed, bemused. “Yes.”

Raven stilled. “What?”

“Yes. He’s literally psychic. He’s a Seer.”

“What are you doing here, Titus?” asked Lincoln, who was watching Titus in mingled wariness and awe. “I thought you were in hiding.”

“I was,” said Titus as he sat on the ground beside the fire; he unclasped his traveling cloak to reveal equally tattered black robes beneath. For all the intrigue surrounding him, physically Titus was an unremarkable man. The firelight glinted off his bald head. “I decided it was the right time to return.”

Silence again. Clarke was still frozen in place at the edge of the clearing; it wasn’t until she noticed Lincoln, Octavia, Anya, and Raven had all slowly sat beside the fire too that she finally moved, crossing the encampment to take the open seat beside Raven. Lexa was the only one who had not yet moved; she was still standing near the empty pot that had held part of their dinner, eyes fixed on Titus.

“You came back,” said Lexa finally. Titus looked up at her and nodded. “I…we—“

“You weren’t sure I would,” finished Titus; Clarke narrowed her eyes, “I understand. Unfortunate, but expected.” He gave a small smile to Lexa that did not meet his eyes; Lexa didn’t return it and Clarke really wasn’t sure about him now.
No one spoke for a moment. Clarke’s heart was thrumming; she could feel it pulsing in her fingertips. This was the leader of the organization, a man she knew next to nothing about except that he was high up enough to be in charge of everyone, and commanded enough respect that Lexa refused to reveal whatever he’d told her she can’t say. This was the man who knew the answers to everything Clarke wanted to know. And he was here.

There was no way she was letting this moment pass up.

“Why are you here, though?” said Lincoln quizzically.

“I told you, it felt right.”

“What about right now felt right?” asked Anya; though Lexa and Lincoln didn’t necessarily look pleased about his appearance, they did seem relieved; Anya, however, just looked her usual pissed off self. Even after just getting laid. “And how did you find—never mind. I don’t know why I would ask a Seer how he knew how to find us.”

“I thought Seers were only women,” said Octavia.

Titus looked at her, ignoring Anya’s questions to instead say, “It is rare for men to be Seers. It tends to get passed down from female to female, skipping generations. There are still many men who get the trait, though.”

“I never heard of any,” said Raven bluntly.

“Seers don’t often make their powers known. In the past, they have been kidnapped and held prisoner, forced to reveal visions of the future to their captors. It usually ends in their death.”

“Is that why you disappeared?” asked Clarke. Everyone looked at her. “The Queen wanted you, would have kidnapped you and forced you to tell her what she wants to know, so you had to take off?”

Slowly, scrutinizing Clarke every step of the way, Titus nodded.
Clarke took her wand out; Octavia’s mouth dropped and the others’ eyes widened, except for Anya, who eyed Clarke with disdain as though she’d fully expected her to do something so stupid.

“It’s exactly why I’m here, Clarke.”

“You—what?”

“That’s why I’m here,” repeated Titus. “There were things you needed to learn, but they weren’t safe for you to know yet.”

That’s too perfect, too much for a coincidence, but God, the knowledge was so tempting. She was a Ravenclaw, after all. Knowledge is power—especially in this war.

“Okay,” said Clarke, breathing heavily as though she’d just ran a race. “Okay. Tell me. What do you have to do with my father and the Queen and the Shadow—”

“I knew your father.”

Clarke was so taken aback by the statement she forgot to be annoyed he interrupted her. “What?”

Titus’s face was utterly expressionless. It briefly reminded Clarke of Lexa, but she shook that thought out of her head the moment it appeared. “I knew him. Jake Griffin. I worked with him in the Department of Mysteries, many years ago.”

Clarke knew her eyes had to be bugging, but she didn’t care. “You worked with him?”

“We were not in the same department. Your father researched Time and Space; I worked with
You studied…death?” said Clarke tentatively.

He inclined his head in the slightest bow. “I worked in the Death Chamber. I studied the Veil.”

Right. The archway with the eerie, fluttering Veil. She remembered that.

“If you worked in separate areas, how did you ever see each other?”

“There are often traces of time and space still lingering in the Death Chamber. Once, Time had its own chamber next to it, but it was destroyed and the remnants of it were moved into the Space room. The traces left behind may have remained from that room, or they could just always exist within Death; it was an ongoing process still studied. Either way, our work was closely connected. We often had to put our heads together to solve a problem or two. Your father was a good man, hardworking, ingenious. Often allowed himself distractions with such quaint things as love and family, and certainly with fields outside his own of study—I had little patience for the Love Chamber, for example—but…a good man nonetheless.”

“Why was he killed?” said Clarke in a shaky voice. “Why did Jaha kill him?”

“Jaha?” Titus’s brow furrowed. “Jaha killed your father?”

“Yes.”

“No. You must be mistaken. It was the Ice Queen.”

“No it wasn’t,” said Clarke.

“Yes it was.”

“No it wasn’t,” said Clarke more forcefully.
“You must have misunderstood somehow,” said Titus with a frown. “The Ice Queen was the one who killed—“

“I saw it happen!” she snarled, raising her voice. “I had the memories for over a year and a half and didn’t even know it because my own mother tried to wipe them from me!”

Titus fell quiet, staring at her with an indiscernible expression. “I do not know, then,” he said quietly. “I was under the impression it was the Ice Queen who had murdered him.”

“That’s what we had thought too, Clarke,” said Lexa gently. “Jaha told the Order that the Ice Queen had broken into Azkaban and killed him.”

“No,” retorted Clarke. “It was Jaha, or some woman who works for him. Why did the Ministry even arrest him in the first place? They said he broke the rules, but I don’t believe it.”

Titus shook his head. “I can only tell you certain things; some you have to remain in the dark for a little bit longer.”

The rage that seared through Clarke was intense enough it sent sparks crackling forth from the tip of her wand. “What? Are you fucking kidding me?”

The others must have sensed she was a half-second away from actually attacking the man, so Raven hastily stepped in. “Why can’t you tell her—us? You just said that’s what you were here for.”

“To tell you only what you need to go forward,” he said in his deep, slow voice. “I am not telling you things that would endanger you if the Ice Queen were to get her hands on you.”

“Who is this Ice Queen?” cried Clarke in frustration. “What does she want? What does she have to do with me or my dad or—“

“Her name is Nia Kwin, and she’s obsessed with power.”
“We already knew that,” said Anya dryly.

Titus sighed. “Let me start from the beginning. A century ago, the wizarding world was being reinvented by a magical prodigy named Becca Praimheda.”

Clarke’s heart beat faster. Becca. Her father had spoken to a woman he called Becca, but…Titus said a century ago. That couldn’t be right.

“Becca was a muggleborn, gifted since birth with astounding magical abilities, and as an adult Becca was very focused upon studying muggleborns. She supported the belief that every muggleborn has magical ancestry somewhere far back in their family line. Beyond that, Becca was fascinated by the muggle-born opposite: squibs. Particularly squibs born to pureblood parents. Becca was a visionary, and believed the easiest way to quell animosity—for at that time, the wizarding world was far more unequal than it was today. Becca believed the simplest way to stamp out the war and injustice was to try and fix humankind…she believed she needed to find a way to bring magic to everyone.”

“Magic to everyone? Like, give magic to muggles?” said Raven, goggling. When Titus nodded, she shook her head, mouth open in silent horror. “Worst idea I’ve ever heard.” For a moment, Clarke was surprised, considering Raven was muggleborn—then she realized Raven must be imagining her own mother with magical powers.

“Becca’s way of thinking was not only frowned upon, but highly illegal,” continued Titus. “Experimenting on muggles is enough to land a life sentence to Azkaban. For a time, Becca practiced on willing participants who fully understood what they were in for…”

“Squibs,” grunted Anya.

“Yes. Another thing to know about Becca is that she was always very fond of magical creatures. She studied them, and realized the potential in the powers of dark creatures such as Dementors. She convinced the Ministry to allow her to research and experiment on them. She bred them with lethifolds and boggarts and created the creatures you know today…Shadow-Eaters.”

Clarke just stared and listened, at a loss for words.

“Becca eventually found a way to take the magic stolen by Shadow-Eaters, and give them a new home. She did so, on a young squib. A child. She was born to traditional purebloods, a dark wizard and witch who had supported Voldemort in his prime, and who could not suffer the shame of a squib
daughter. They were enthused at the idea of someone experimenting on their child to make her, in their own words, *normal.*

“Who would let her experiment on a kid?” said Octavia, looking nauseated.

“You’d be surprised how many pureblood parents were willing. Most gave their children away either way, sending them away to muggle boarding schools and encouraging them to integrate themselves in the world that would accept them and leave the magical world far behind.”

“That’s shitty,” said Raven flatly.

Titus inclined his head in silent agreement.

“So what did she do?” asked Clarke. “She gave a kid powers? Did it work?”

“It did, but only for a limited amount of time. Initially, the Shadow-Eaters were only taking magic from the elderly and the dying; they were, of course, the only volunteers. The squib had powers, but temporarily…they faded, grew too weak. But like I said, the Shadow-Eaters were breeding and growing and becoming uncontrollable. They stole magic from those they weren’t supposed to; healthy wizards and witches. And Becca decided to use it anyway, and it worked…a little too well.

“The process took a year, but the squib steadily began to show signs of magic. Powerful magic. By the age of twelve, she was exceptionally gifted—would have been labeled a prodigy, had she been that way since birth. That squib grew up to become a powerful dark witch. Becca, meanwhile, was caught, tried for her crimes, and thrown into Azkaban for life.”

“And that squib is now the Ice Queen?” When Titus nodded to confirm it, Clarke shook her head. “But—how? She’s over a hundred years old? How is she still so powerful?”

“She’s not exactly human anymore though, is she?” said Raven lowly. “And I’m guessing those little experiments didn’t just stop with Becca.”

“They didn’t. There’s a reason all the squibs have gone into hiding since Nia’s return.”
“Why would the squibs be in hiding?” said Octavia. “Nia’s hunting down magic, what use would she have for other squibs?”

“She’s trying to raise an army and divide the world,” explained Lincoln. “She’s giving temporary magic to squibs, claiming that muggleborns stole their power.”

“A pureblood squib-sympathizer?” said Raven skeptically. “Okay. That sounds fake, but okay.”

“She’s not exactly a fan of purebloods,” said Anya. “Her parents did all kinds of fucked up experiments on her with dark magic, trying to turn her ‘normal.’ It wasn’t until Becca came along and did her experiments that anything actually worked.”

“But Becca was a muggleborn!” said Octavia. “Wouldn’t she be grateful for—”

Anya snorted. “Grateful, yeah, right. Nia is demented, Octavia. She’s pure evil. She was pumped full of powers by creatures that are the embodiment of darkness. She uses them to go around terrorizing people and stealing their magic. And she’s acting like she’s just giving squibs powers and trying to equalize things, but she’s full of shit. She’s taking the powers for herself, giving herself more and more magic to get stronger.”

“Why do you think she’s so powerful?” said Lincoln. “She has too much power. And giving squibs magic isn’t the only thing she toys with; she has other experiments, too.”

“The squibs lose the magic but the darkness leaves its imprint on them,” said Lexa; her arms were crossed as she leaned against a tree trunk. “They lose parts of their souls in the process and become empty; the Queen uses them like slaves. They’re called Reapers. The Order had given Gustus a mission to try to save some of them, but he failed. They’re…they’re pretty much gone.”

“That’s horrible,” said Clarke.

“And why the Queen cannot get ahold of Lexa,” said Titus gravely. “Having the powers of a Nightblood would make her powers grow exponentially.”

“What are nightbloods—“ began Raven, but Anya elbowed her in the ribs and muttered that she’d explain later.
“Now you know the history of the Ice Queen,” said Titus, meeting Clarke’s gaze again. “With this, you can—“

But Titus’s words were cut off when a sudden crack rang through the air. Everyone was on their feet in an instant, drawing their wands; they had forgotten to put up the protective enchantments again, and for a split second Clarke was sure, with the fact that they’d just done nothing but talk about her, that the Ice Queen must have somehow sensed it and found them, but when three people scuffled into view, two women with a boy bound and on his knees before them, Clarke’s jaw dropped.

Raven was the first to stumble forward. “Finn?”

The boy with a smear of blood on one cheek and his floppy hair falling forward into his dark eyes gave her a crooked smile. “Hey, guys.”

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Breakfast was a tense affair, and was every bit as bizarre as expected.

Clarke sat with her plate of cut up fruit on a log, watching the people forming a line awaiting Lincoln to scoop eggs onto their plates. Luna Rivers stood with Evie Potter, speaking in hushed whispers until Luna paused to yank on the chain that held Finn’s bound wrists to get him to move up with them in line; he fell face-forward into the dirt and huffed out a breath, shooting a glare at Luna before struggling back onto his knees. Raven stood a ways ahead, just behind Lexa in line, who was holding her plate out to get food. Raven was staring at Finn, her brow knit, expression troubled. Anya stood just behind her, and was openly glaring at Finn, upper lip curled in distaste.

“It’s an odd morning,” said Lexa when she came to sit beside Clarke.

Clarke nodded tersely in agreement.

She still couldn’t wrap her head around it. Luna and Evie had been given a mission by the order to hunt down Titus using a Tracker—a Tracker who apparently was Finn Collins, a boy who, as far as Clarke knew, had zero tracking powers. What even was a Tracker, anyway?
According to Luna, it was all bullshit, just Jaha trying to draw her away. But why?

The fact that Finn wouldn’t say a word didn’t help, and Raven point-blank refused to allow anyone to torture the answer out of him. That had put quite the sour expression on Anya.

No one had any Veritaserum either, and they weren’t sure what to do considering all manner of authority either couldn’t be trusted or couldn’t be reached. In the end, they decided they’d wait for Gustus (who was supposed to arrive today for their weekly checkup) and figure out where to go from there.

“You never spoke much about Finn,” noted Lexa.

“We never spoke much about anything,” said Clarke testily.

Lexa’s expression froze and for a moment Clarke thought it was finally enough, that she was going to walk away. Then, to Clarke’s surprise, she sighed. “I suppose not,” she said simply, sitting down on the log across from Clarke’s. She folded her hands in her lap and looked expectantly at Clarke.

“Er—what?” said Clarke, unnerved.

“We never spoke much. So now, let us talk,” said Lexa matter-of-factly.

“Oh, now you want to talk?”

“Clarke…” Lexa looked so calm and happy, Clarke frowned because why? “Don’t you see? You know everything I know, now.”

Oh. “Not exactly,” she said slowly.

“Ask me anything, Clarke,” said Lexa firmly. “Titus has told you most of what he forbid me to tell you. There’s nothing more to know.”

“Costia,” began Clarke, watching the way Lexa’s face falls, her eyes dim. “What happened there?”
Lexa glanced around at the others, some approaching now to eat their breakfast. She set her plate of food down beside Clarke’s equally untouched plate and then offered a hand.

“Can we go somewhere more private?”

Clarke eyed her hand for a beat before nodding and taking it. She ignored the jump of her heart at her hand being enveloped in Lexa’s soft skin and allowed Lexa to lead her a ways away in the forest, far enough that the others became distant murmurs of sound.

Lexa released her and turned to face her. She took a deep breath, exhaled. “Costia and I became friends in my second year, when she tried out for the Quidditch team. She didn’t make it, she was terrible, but she was always good at Herbology and she loved to read. She was sweet, and beautiful, and my first kiss.” Lexa took another breath. “It was in my fifth year that the Queen returned. At the time we thought she took Ontari, but we soon found out Ontari went with her willingly. It was me the Queen wanted the most, though. In my sixth year—last year—she managed to take Costia. She said she’d give her back if I sacrificed myself. I did, but I realized she’d sent Costia back to me as an Inferi before I could go with her. We fought her off. She sent Shadow-Eaters after us, and that was when I realized they couldn’t touch me.”

“What?”

“Shadow-Eaters, they don’t work on us, on Nightbloods. They can temporarily neutralize our magic at best, but they can’t take it from us.”

Clarke gazed at her, mind whirring. “What are you, exactly? What does ‘nightblood’ mean?”

Lexa glanced over Clarke’s shoulder and she knew she was subconsciously checking for Titus. Her heart sank as she realized Lexa probably wasn’t going to tell her this…yet another secret Clarke wasn’t allowed to know. But to her surprise, Lexa licked her lips and said, “Becca created us.”

“What?”

“I’m not sure on the details; Titus wouldn’t tell us everything. Apparently, in her final months of freedom, Becca showed remorse for the evil she made, and she tried to counteract it. She cast a spell on the other squibs, protected them. Proved that muggleborns always have ancestry, because Nightblood is dormant until it surfaces generations later. That’s why it’s always muggleborns.”
“That’s what makes you special?” asked Clarke. “Like, a prodigy?”

Lexa’s lips quirk. “No. All it does is protect us from the effects of Shadow-Eaters. We can’t lose our magic or our souls. And it gives us a more powerful animagi form.” She pursed her lips, thoughtful for a moment. “It also made our blood a darker color. I suppose she did it to distinguish it. Pureblood, half-blood, muggleblood. Black blood. Nightblood.”

Clarke swallowed, eyes trailing the form of Lexa’s body as though she could see the blood beneath her flesh. God, Lexa was beautiful. She blinked, steering herself into reality again. “Okay, so…how do you know all this, anyway? Or, how does Titus know?”

“He’s a Seer, remember?”

“So, what, he’s omnipotent?” One of Clarke’s brows winged up when Lexa rolled her eyes. “I thought Seers could only see into the future?”

“In the past. I don’t know how it works, Clarke, I’m not a Seer.”

Clarke studied her for a moment, refusing to be pulled into a tiff. “What’s the deal with you and Titus, anyway?”

That wiped the sarcasm off Lexa’s face. She hesitated. “I admit…I have a complicated history with Titus.”

“Complicated?” said Clarke incredulously. “Lexa, I can see where all your fucked up shit comes from, now! ‘Such quaint things as love and family’?” Lexa’s lips quirked again at the deep, condescending tone Clarke took on to mock Titus. “Seriously? I bet all he’s done is fed that ‘love is weakness’ bullshit in your ear. I don’t even understand his role with you, how is he at Durmstrang training you when he works at the Department of Mysteries?”

“He’s an Unspeakable and an advisor for Durmstrang,” said Lexa flatly. “It’s not uncommon for people to have two jobs.” At Clarke’s deadpan, Lexa sighed. “He’s the leader of the Order, and he made a prophecy about me before I was even born.”
“A prophecy. He’s—wait. The prophecy. The prophecy from the Ministry.” Clarke’s mouth fell open, brief glimpses of a silvery wisp of a bald man floating in the air as the prophecy Clarke broke released him. “He’s the one who made that prophecy! The one Ontari wanted! The one the Queen was trying to get her hands on!” When Lexa nodded, Clarke walked forward, driven by the burst of energy this exciting news brought her. “He can tell us what that prophecy is then, right? Right, Lexa?”

“We can ask him, he might show you.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

Lexa’s throat bobbed. “If he doesn’t, I’ll tell you it.”

Clarke set her jaw, nerves fluttering in her belly. “Promise?”

Lexa maintained eye contact, emphasizing her sincerity as she said, “I promise, Clarke.”

“Okay. I’ll hold you to that. So…Gustus is like, an uncle.” Lexa raised a brow, but Clarke rolled her eyes and went on. “Indra is like, an aunt, to you? A mother-figure? What is Titus? Was he as close to you as Indra and Gustus? How do you feel about him, Lexa? Can we really trust this guy?”

“He…” Lexa hesitated again, reluctance flickering across her face; she clearly was not comfortable talking about her personal life, but she was willing to try. “He was somewhat of a…father-figure to me, I suppose. When I arrived at Durmstrang, Titus was immediately there. He gave me extra lessons, he helped me learn more advanced lessons. Indra and Gustus were primarily my professors, but Titus was the one in charge. He visited every afternoon, taught me lore and history, taught me about Becca. He told me he had prophesized the Queen’s return and that the magical prodigies were the key to defeating her, hence why we had to train. In fifth year, Nia returned and made her attacks. Costia died a year later. Your father was arrested. Titus said the time was approaching when we would have the opportunity to lure the Queen out into the open, the opportunity to take her out once and for all; he thought she’d either go for me, or try to get to you for whatever reason she went for your father…or, we all thought she went for your father. Jaha told us Nia killed your father.” Lexa frowned. “I don’t understand why he…”

“That makes two of us,” muttered Clarke.

“Titus called a meeting with some of the other Order members who were still active. They needed a
way to get us close, to draw the Queen out. They were suggesting putting me at Hogwarts as a transfer student, but then I would be alone there, so I suggested the Triwizard Tournament. I was put there to guard you, Clarke. We weren’t sure if the Queen would go for you or for me, but we figured with her penchant for taking prodigies, she may be swayed by the winner of the tournament. You weren’t supposed to be a champion…you were supposed to be a normal student, blending into the background while I won the tournament and was in the spotlight, perfect to grab her attention…but I guess she had other conspiracies going on. Sydney, Pike, Wallace…it’s an easy bet they all had something to do with this.”

Clarke took a moment to process that information. A bizarre part of her imagined how different life would have been if Lexa had simply transferred to Hogwarts…if she’d been there, trying to blend in as a new student… then Clarke imagined her in the school uniform, a tie, those short skirts, and her brain promptly short-circuited. A sharp intake of breath was strangled in her throat as a squeak and she tried to hide it as a cough.

Lexa looked up at the sky, clearly contemplating something, before she blinked, took a deep breath, and looked at Clarke. “I need to tell you something.”

Fuck. Clarke’s back immediately went up. What had Lexa kept from her now? “What is it?”

“On our way to Hogwarts, Titus showed up on the ship. He took me aside, said it was imperative that I stay focused on the mission, protecting you while exposing myself to draw Nia out so the Order could capture her. But…he said in his vision, you could be a problem. He said…he said it could be another Costia situation. Said distractions were a weakness and…and that you could distract me.” Lexa licked her lips and swallowed, throat bobbing, and Clarke couldn’t look away from her, her heart hammering in her chest, her palms sweaty. “He also said the less I knew the better, in case Nia did succeed and captured me and I was compromised, so he suggested I remove my memories. So…I did.”

Clarke sucked in a breath. So Lexa…she hadn’t known the entire time? “When—“

“A month,” said Lexa quickly. Her gaze shifted between Clarke’s eyes, watching anxiously for her reaction. “I knew for a month, and I’m so sorry I didn’t tell you, Clarke. That day Indra caught us, um…that day Indra caught us, when you left, she brought me back my memories. I wasn’t supposed to distract myself. She figured it’d be safer to remember why. I felt terrible the minute I remembered everything, Clarke, I wanted to tell you right away, but it was safer not to. I know I should have. I was just trying to keep everyone safe, and I…I didn’t mind you being in the dark a little longer. I didn’t want to see you hurt. I’m so sorry.”

“I…I don’t know what to say,” Clarke admitted. “I mean…I was thinking you knew the entire time, so this makes that a little better, but…you still knew for a month, Lexa. You knew for a month and
you didn’t tell me. How would you feel? If I…say I knew Costia died and you didn’t and I didn’t tell you for a month?”

“I’d be hurt,” agreed Lexa; her eyes are glossy. “But I want to make this right, Clarke. Tell me how to make this right.”

“I don’t…” Clarke blew out a breath. “I don’t know, Lexa, I…”

A shaky sigh escaped from Lexa’s parted lips. “What can I do to prove my trust, Clarke?” she said, desperation in her voice, in her expression. She stepped forward, hands palm up, beseeching. “I care about you, I want—”

“Lexa! Clarke!” Lexa closed her eyes, mouth thinning in irritation when Anya’s voice rang out through the forest. “Gustus is back, get your asses over here!”

Clarke licked her lips, throat dry. “Come on,” she said, briefly taking Lexa’s hand, squeezing it. Lexa’s gaze snapped up at the movement. She stepped back, pulling Lexa with her before dropping her hand, and Lexa followed her back to the campsite.

They returned to Gustus greeting Titus; Luna and Evie were standing just behind him, clearly having just discussed Finn and Jaha’s actions with him. Finn was still against the tree stump, wrists bound, sound asleep.

“Lexa,” greeted Gustus, giving Lexa a hug before his gaze fell onto Clarke. “Hello, Clarke.” Clarke was surprised when he pulled her into a tight hug too; the shock of it put a lump in her throat, but she merely cleared it, trying to act nonchalant about it.

Gustus spent the day filling Luna and Evie in while they explained their past three months to him in turn. Then Titus and Gustus spoke for hours. Finally, the sun was inching toward the horizon and Lincoln was preparing dinner, and they were all seated around the campfire again discussing battle plans.

“How are we going to beat the Ice Queen? That’s the question. What are we doing? We’re just running and hiding when we should be figuring out how to defeat her!”

“What do you think the Order’s been trying to do all this time, Clarke?” said Lexa with an air of
maddening patience. “She keeps coming back. She has unnatural longevity, incredibly potent powers, and is consumed by dark magic. “

“Not to mention a huge horde of loyal follows, including one small package of concentrated psychopath,” chimed in Raven.

“Ontari can choke,” said Anya grumpily, poking at the fire with a stick.

“What’s her story, anyway?” asked Octavia. “She’s our age, isn’t she? Why’s she with the Queen?”

“Because Lexa already had me for a best friend,” said Anya dryly.

Lincoln snorted. “Ontari hates me,” said Lexa flatly to Octavia.

“Yeah, I kinda got that impression,” deadpanned Octavia. “What the fuck did you do to her?”

“She resents Lexa because, to her, it’s all backwards,” said Gustus. “Lexa is a muggleborn taken in and loved. Ontari is a pureblood who was abandoned and unwanted.”

“She was a grade below me,” sighed Lexa “We never got along very well. I was a bit older, a bit stronger, a bit faster…”

“She was jealous,” said Clarke, rolling her eyes. “You don’t have to be humble. She’s very clearly and obviously jealous of you, Lexa.”

Lexa waved it off. “Regardless.” As the others launched into discussion about Ontari’s flaws, Lexa leaned over to whisper to Clarke, “She was angry that Titus paid me special attention.”

“Because of the prophecy, right?”

“Yes.” Lexa looked thoughtful for a moment. “The ironic thing is, there's actually another person the prophecy could be referring to.”
"Ontari?" guessed Clarke. It made sense. Of course the Ice Queen wouldn't want to risk her best lieutenant and would want to keep her close, that would explain why she hadn’t killed her to absorb her powers.

Lexa snorted. "No. She wasn't born in the summer. Which is a good thing for her, because contrary to her beliefs, the queen would sacrifice her in a second if she thought there was a chance."

“Who, then?”

Lexa smiled a little and looked up; Clarke followed her gaze, over to where Anya sat talking with Raven.

“Anya?”

“Nope.”

Clarke’s eyes widened and she turned back to face Lexa, hissing, “Raven?”

“Shhh, Clarke!”

“Oh my God, Lexa!”

“But Lexa, you’re so—how could this prophecy not be about you when you’re so special? Not that Raven isn’t, God, she is, we’ve always known she is, but you’re connected with—“

“There’s still another prophecy about me,” said Lexa heavily. “Titus has made more than one prediction.”

Titus, clearly having heard his name, turned around. “I have made as many as thirteen predictions in my lifetime. Six have not came true. Five have. There are two left. Seven is a powerfully magic number, did you know that?”
Clarke blinked, once again taken aback by his strange, stoic way of speaking. “I—yes. I know that.”

“I believe it is safe to say the last two will come true as well then,” he said simply, though his word decided the matter. “To make it seven, but also because it has been confirmed by another Seer.”

“What, someone had predictions about your predictions becoming true?” asked Clarke skeptically before she could stop herself.

“Yes,” he said simply. Then he turned back to engage in discussion with Gustus again.

Clarke shifted her bemused, disturbed expression onto Lexa, who struggled to hide her smile behind her hand.

After dinner, they prepared to clear up camp to Disapparate to a new location. Clarke, however, took advantage of everyone being distracted by grabbing Lexa’s hand and tugging her into the privacy of the shadows in the outskirts of the forest, just in sight of the campfire. She took a moment, preparing herself, trying to find the words she wanted to say, and Lexa waited expectantly. The firelight was flickering orange in her green eyes. Surrounded by the smell of pine and fire smoke, Lexa’s other scent, the one most intrinsically her, was easier to detect. It sidetracked Clarke for a moment, until she blinked and shook herself out of her reverie.

“Are you one hundred percent sure that we can trust Titus?”

“Of course.” Lexa blinks. “Clarke, I’ve known him since I was eleven. He has his flaws, but he is trustworthy.”

“But he’s psychic. How did he not know Jaha killed my father?”

“It’s not like it is in the movies,” said Lexa, pursing her lips when Clarke pointedly raised her brows. “Okay. I mean. It’s not something simple, you don’t just know things at the snap of a finger. He doesn’t choose what he sees or when, he just has prophecies and visions that come to him.”

“But he made you remove your own memories! How is that not fucked up? He taught you, a kid, that love is a bad thing! That’s horrible, Lexa!”

Lexa flinched at the words, but her voice was steady as she said, “He was just doing what he thought was best.”

“But doesn’t it bother you?” insisted Clarke, stepping forward when Lexa dropped her gaze. “How he treats you more like a pawn, a means to an end, than an actual person? I mean, where was your childhood? You were a kid training for a war you were forced to take part in!”

“He means well.”

“That doesn’t mean shit.”

“Clarke—“ began Lexa, but Clarke stepped forward again, causing Lexa to step back.

“It’s fucked up, Lexa!”

Lexa was visibly upset, but still she defended him, “He was my teacher, Clarke. The closest thing to a father I had.”

“No.” Clarke shook her head. “I’m sorry, but I—you came to Hogwarts and you had never even had Honeyduke’s Chocolate before. What kid has never had Honeyduke’s Chocolate before?”

“I did have it, thanks to you,” said Lexa, voice suddenly so soft Clarke loses her footing. She pauses, mouth open, memories flooding through her mind of time spent sneaking to Hogsmeade with Lexa, hours lost in the Room of Requirement. Clarke snaps her mouth shut.

“Yes. Yeah. Well.” Clarke cleared her throat. “You’re welcome.” It was so weak she inwardly cringed.

Lexa didn’t seem to notice. She looked carefully at Clarke before stepping forward. Clarke didn’t move. “Clarke.”

Don’t. That damn k clicked. Clarke forced herself to stand her ground, told herself it was her pride, not the need in her for Lexa to empty the space between them.
“Listen. I’ve told you everything I know. I’ve promised you I’ll never lie to you again. All I want is for you to feel like you can trust me again. I would…I would do anything to be in your life, in…whatever capacity. I will be whatever you want me to be. I know you hate me right now, but, if you would be willing to consider it, it would mean…I would be your friend.”

Clarke stared at her. “I guess we’ve never really been friends, have we?”

Lexa looked a little hurt, but she took it in stride. “Well. I suppose I took it for granted, but…” except they were. They were so much more than that.

Silence stretched between them. Clarke stared at Lexa, Lexa stared at the ground, as though Clarke’s decision would swallow her whole. When Clarke began speaking, it was hesitantly. “If I find out you didn’t tell me something…” Her voice grew stronger, firmer. “If I find out you lied to me—if you betray me again—“ she said waringly, but Lexa cut her off with a shake of her head, stepping forward with an air of urgency.

“I won’t.”

Clarke remained still as Lexa stepped forward—then, to her surprise, Lexa pulled her wand out.

“May I have your hand, Clarke?”

Clarke stared again, but she automatically gripped the hand Lexa offered. “What are you doing?”

“Wait.” Lexa intertwined their fingers before touching the tip of her wand to where their palms met. Clarke’s lips parted in shock when Lexa began murmuring the spell.

“I vow my fealty to you, Clarke Griffin,” said Lexa, voice so much calmer than Clarke felt. A brilliant ribbon of flame shot from the tip of her wand, snaking around their linked hands. “I vow to treat your needs as my own,” a second flame streaked out, followed by a third as Lexa said, “and your people as my people. I will never lie to you or keep things from you again.” A fourth tongue of white-gold flame issued from the wand. “I promise, to the extent of my every ability, magical and otherwise, I serve you, and I am in every possible way in whatever way you need me, yours. And only yours.” A final tongue of flame joined the rest in wrapping tightly around their clasped hands, glowing brightly, throwing the features of Lexa’s gorgeous face into relief. Clarke stared in astonishment, gaping at those elegant cheekbones, that angled jawline, those sinfully plump lips and
those luminous green eyes framed by long lashes that fluttered as Lexa gazed steadily back at her.

The tongues of flame faded, but Clarke still felt their mark wrapped around her hand, still felt the magic lingering in the air, the thick tension between them, or maybe that was…well, she couldn’t stop her gaze from dipping down to focus Lexa’s lips again, and again.

And she didn’t miss the way Lexa’s eyes kept flickering to her own lips. “I’m not going to promise you anything in return,” she said finally.

“I would never ask you to.”

They were still grasping hands. Clarke squeezed it without thinking, heart jumping at the way Lexa’s thumb swept across the back of her knuckles.

“I meant it all, Clarke,” said Lexa, and Clarke knew she meant it, she had to have meant it because the Unbreakable Vow was called unbreakable for a reason, but she still listened to Lexa’s words with rapt attention, struggling to keep her gaze from dipping down again to watch plump lips wrap around the words. “I want to be friends.”

The silence stretched on again; they still didn’t let go of one another’s hands.

“What if I don’t?” said Clarke finally. The serenity on Lexa’s face faltered; her hand twitched, but Clarke squeezed it again, holding it tight.

“Clarke?”

“What if I don’t, Lexa?” repeated Clarke. Her eyes were stinging but God, this was so much easier than fighting it. This was so much better than pretending it wasn’t real. This was like breathing. This was like—like coming home.

Comprehension smoothed the lines furrowing Lexa’s brow as Clarke stepped closer, as she tipped her head up, as she inhaled the space between them before pressing her lips softly, gently, on Lexa’s.

Like coming home.
It was only a handful of seconds. One long, suspended moment where Clarke actually thought things would be okay now. That the kiss would end, but they could continue it later. Thought they’d gently pull apart in a few minutes, breathless and nerves buzzing, that they’d smile at each other and keep their hands together as they returned to camp, said goodbyes to Gustus and Titus and Luna, Evie, and Finn with promises to meet up in a week, that they’d Disapparate with Raven, Octavia, Anya and Lincoln to a new location, perhaps a beach. That they’d sneak out in the middle of the night to continue kissing in a more private, secluded place. That they’d wake up together.

Instead, the ground shudders beneath them as countless cracks strike the air, and they stumble apart, warmth sucked away from their hands as easily as though they’d been doused in ice water.

“Lexa!” Titus was bellowing. “Where is Lexa?”

They exchanged one stricken look before sprinting back to the clearing. There were death eaters and werewolves everywhere, some still Apparating and joining the battles already taking place, a handful of Shadow-Eaters swooping through the night sky, disguised in the shadows of the low-lying trees.

“Fuck,” cursed Lexa, alarm chased off her face by anger. “Clarke, come on!” she said, gesturing toward the tents that were on fire as she took off. Clarke started to follow, but stopped short at the next words she heard.

“It was Finn,” roared Luna, glancing at her shoulder at where Lexa and Clarke emerged; she was currently disarming a death eater. “That fucking idiot called the Ice Nation here!”

“Where—“ Clarke’s words died in her throat when a fist collided with the side of her face. A moment later she was wheezing for breath, lifting herself from the dirt. “What—“

“Hey princess,” came a voice far too close to her ear, and then a hand closed around her wrist with a vice-like grip. To his credit, Finn at least looked apologetic. “I’m sorry for this, I really am, but I have to deliver you to the Ice Queen.”

“Why?” she choked, head spinning as he forced her to her feet.

“My dad is part of her army, and I need her to one, let me in, and two, tell me where to find him. So I need to impress her, and bringing her the person she wants most is sure to do that.”
“You’re selling us all out?” gasped Clarke, teeth chattering, stumbling as he pulled her a couple steps over to avoid the streak of red someone shot their direction. “Even—even Raven?”

Finn grimaced. “Yeah. I mean, I hate to do this, you guys are my friends, but…family is more important. I’m sorry, Clarke.”

His hand tightened on her and she knew what he was about to do. As Finn twisted the two of them into darkness, Clarke pushed back from him, fighting with all her might. There was a terrible squelching noise, a choked breath, and the darkness flickered before suddenly she was back on her knees in the grass, the fighting still raging around them, and she could breathe again. She gulped down air, staggering to her feet. It looked as though Finn had barely Apparated them to the other side of the clearing before Clarke’s struggling had caused him to splinch. She spotted him feet away, lying in a puddle of his own blood, eyes wide, gasping and choking on the gaping, bloody gash on his throat.

Shit.

She blindly crawled over to him without another word, and as she gazed down at his convulsing form, found herself at a loss for words. This was Finn Collins, the sweet Hufflepuff boy who made her blush on her first day at Hogwarts. He’d been annoying and attention seeking, but he was nice, and funny, and she’d thought her infatuation with him was love before she grew older and realized it wasn’t. He was Raven’s first love, though. He was Raven’s first everything, and now he was dying.

“S—sorry,” he gurgled, gaze meeting hers. She opened her mouth, but no sound came out.

He died, and she was still frozen in place until another Death Eater seized her and forced her to join in the battle.

Curse, curse, hex. Shield charm, stun, shield charm. Clarke wondered when this became routine.

Her lips still tingled with Lexa’s kiss, her body still thrummed with life, and now here she was again, half a breadth away from certain death.

For a moment, it seemed as though they were winning. Titus was more vicious and alive than his age and stooping, banal posture implied; he was taking on two death eaters at once and winning. Anya was chasing down a yelping werewolf, fur flying through the air as she hit it with a stinging hex.
Raven was on the other side of the clearing, next to Evie Potter as the two of them hit death eaters with separate spells, a jelly legs and a bat-bogey hex. Glowing animals were lighting up the clearing; a silvery owl, a hummingbird, a fox and a tiny duckling.

But Lincoln was yelling as a werewolf sank its teeth into his forearm, Octavia wailing some battlecry as she leapt onto the creature’s back, pounding its head with a rock, Lexa rushing forward to help her take it down. Luna was shouting out in surprise when Finn got her when her back was turned and she fell with a hard shudder to the ground to lay unmoving. Gustus was turning from the three death eaters he’d already defeated to face two more, but they both pointed their wands at him at the same time, both opened their mouths to shout the spells, and green lit up the night sky.

Gustus fell, with a resounding crash, to lay unmoving on the ground.

For one suspended moment, no one moved. Gustus’s eyes remained open and glassy, visibly reflecting the stars even from this distance. His patronus was still moving; the little duckling waddled over to him, hopping up onto his chest. It curled up just over his heart. Gustus shuddered, then went still; as his chest lowered with his last exhale, the patronus faded away into the wind as though gently blown away with a breeze. Everything seemed darker.

Then the screams and shouts returned.

“**Gustus!**” cried Anya. “Gustus—no—“ She fell silent, gagged from the Death Eater that seized her from behind. Raven screamed her name, but was blasted back; Lexa caught her before she could fall, pushed her upright. The two of them stood side to side, a formidable pair, and they held their ground but there was little they could do to move forward when over a dozen Death Eaters were closing in on them.

Anya landed bound and gagged with a muffled grunt next to Clarke; a moment later Lincoln joined them, wild-eyed and frantic, straining to flop over and turn to see where Octavia had fallen limp to the ground, blood dribbling out the corner of her lips.

A death eater grasped Clarke by her arm, jerking her half to her feet.

“Clarke,” Lexa bellowed, eyes wide with panic; Clarke caught a glimpse of the terror-stricken green through the small space between two Death Eaters. Saw Lexa widening her stance, focus hardening every line of her face, nostrils flaring as though smoke were about to trail out of them. She was about to transform into her animagi form, but Clarke felt the death eater tighten his grip on her.

“Lex—Lexa!” she screamed, but it was too late.
Her name rang out one last time, Lexa’s voice strained in a mixture of desperation and concern. It echoed in Clarke’s ears as the hand squeezed above her elbow and she was yanked forward into nothingness, darkness pressing in on all sides.

*・・/✧・゚*

Every inch of her body ached, but it was the lights flickering on that had Clarke screwing her face up, squinting her eyes open. A gray dungeon cell. She closed her eyes.

“Get up,” came a voice before a boot slammed into Clarke’s ribs. Her eyes flew open again as she gasped, lurching to all fours. The back of Ontari’s hand slapped the side of Clarke’s face. “Now.”

Shuddering with effort and exhaustion, Clarke staggered to her feet clutching her pounding ribs. Her hands were bloody. Anya and Lincoln were nowhere to be found. She looked at Ontari, leaning against the wall with her arms crossed beneath her chest and a smirk twisting her lips. Cage Wallace was beside her, the smuggest smirk Clarke had ever seen him wear curling the scar above his mouth. He lifted his brows and inclined his head toward the right.

Clarke looked toward where he was gesturing to and realized there was another presence in the room. She turned slowly, eyes trailing up the figure standing in the doorway of her cell.

She was tall, slim, and wrapped in a fur coat. Her gray-streaked hair was pulled up into a tight bun atop her head. Her eyes were cold and blue.

Clarke stared up at the Ice Queen in horror, clenching her empty hands into fists at her side.

“Hello, Clarke,” said Nia; her icy tone lived up to her name. “Welcome to Mount Weather.”

Chapter End Notes

Here’s a link for a one-shot I wrote for Clexaweek2017. It's actually one of my favorite things I've ever written, I think, I'm pretty proud of it! I hope you like it too :D
http://archiveofourown.org/works/10074089
“Clarke. *Clarke.*”

Clarke stirred at the harsh whisper of her name; she woke to pain reverberating in what felt like every inch of her body. There was a cloying metallic taste—blood—on her sandpaper tongue. She blearily blinked for a moment, struggling to remember where the hell she was, and then jolted upright when realization struck her like lightning. Lincoln grunted in pain when her head smacked into her jaw and she rolled away with a gasp, her head now throbbing worse than ever.

“Sorry,” she whispered. It wasn’t like it mattered. In time, they would be suffering much worse pain.
than being captured from the campsite and roughed around for a bit by jeering Death Eaters before being knocked out and thrown in a small cage to be transported.

They were still in the cage, wandless and bound, and probably on their way to the Ice Queen. Lexa, Raven, Octavia, even Luna and Evie—they could all be dead right now.

Panic rose in Clarke so powerful and overwhelming she nearly choked on it.

“Clarke,” whispered Anya sharply, a third time. Clarke looked at her, gasping in a desperate attempt to get some air and break up the terror lodged in her throat. “Calm down, stay quiet. Listen to me. We have to figure out some way to get out of here.”

“No shit,” groaned Lincoln quietly; he was bound and slumped in the corner right beside Clarke. Out of the three of them, he certainly looked the worse for wear. He was covered in dirt and blood, the majority of it coming from the wound on his forearm. Clarke’s heart sank, stomach lurching sickeningly as she looked at it…that was a werewolf bite. Lincoln, he was…

“Lincoln,” she said weakly, gazing helplessly at the seeping wound. The death eaters had tried to heal it enough that he didn’t bleed out, but it was poorly done on top of the fact that it was a bite from a magical creature and small spells wouldn’t do much. He needed the first floor of St. Mungo’s for Creature-Induced Injuries.

“I know,” he huffed, licking his lips and closing his eyes. He was covered in a clammy sweat. “Don’t worry about me. Focus on yourself.”

“No,” said Clarke, anger giving strength to her voice. “You’re hurt. You need—“

“There’s nothing we can do for me right now,” he said; his chest was rising and falling rapidly. “We have to get you out of here. The Queen can’t—she can’t get ahold of you or we’re all—“ He cut off, hissing in pain and clutching his arm closer to himself.

“Or we’re all fucked,” finished Anya in an urgent whisper.

“How are we going to get out of here?” said Clarke. “We have no wands. Can you turn into your animagus form?”
Lincoln and Anya shook their heads. “Already tried. They put spells up.”

 Fuck. Clarke closed her eyes for a moment, wetting her lips and swallowing hard in a desperate attempt to alleviate the dryness of her throat. She had to stay calm. Panicking wouldn’t do anyone any good. She needed to take a step back and look at this logically.

Okay. So. The Death Eaters had finally succeeded in capturing them. They were most likely being delivered to the Ice Queen. Wherever they were going, there must be protective spells that prevented them from Apparation, since they were currently crammed in a small box-like cage that was swaying beneath them; they were probably flying, magically hooked onto broomsticks. When they arrived where they were going, they might have a split second when things were settling down to break free and make a run for it, but they’d have to somehow overpower their captors—however many there were—and steal their broomsticks, otherwise they weren’t getting anywhere. If worst came to worst and they were unsuccessful, they were most likely going to be handed over to the Ice Queen…and presumably fated to suffer a terrible death, followed by the Queen’s successful takeover of the free world. Everything hung on their ability to fight their way out of this.

No pressure.

(Clarke took one more shaky breath before she concentrated on her breathing; soon enough, it steadied).

And—and if any of the others were harmed, well. It was convenient they were going to the Ice Queen then, wasn’t it? Because Clarke didn’t know nor care how she would do it, but somehow she’d kill her.

“Enough meditating,” snapped Anya. “C’mere, try to shift closer to me. We have to figure out some way to get these chains off.”

Clarke did so, glancing empathetically at Lincoln as he muffled a quiet groan of pain in his own shoulder as Clarke brushed by his wound. She prayed it wasn’t a full moon out. She couldn’t remember in any class lessons regarding werewolves how long it took for the first transformation to occur. The panic-stricken concern for him—because oh God Lincoln was a werewolf now, his entire life is completely changed forever because most of the werewolves had joined the revolt rejecting society from nearly a century ago and disappeared underground and half of them had joined the Queen’s cause, but the fear was abruptly pushed from her mind; it wouldn’t help any of them right now.
“This is useless,” growled Anya several minutes later, after she and Clarke had both tried and failed a variety of methods to get the chains off. Nonverbal spells weren’t working; for all they knew, there were Shadow-Eaters flying alongside them. It was hard to tell when there was already a chill from the night air and sinking despair in their hearts.

“I swear, I’m going to kill that shithead,” snarled Anya suddenly. “Finn what’s-his-fucking-name—“

“He’s already dead,” said Clarke. “I watched it happen.”

“Good,” said Anya harshly. “If he—“

She was interrupted when they hit a bit of turbulence in the air and Lincoln let out a strangled cry of pain. “Shit. Linc?”

“I’m okay,” he panted, “I’m…I’m fine. I mean, I’m not.” He let out a breathless, pained chuckle. “But we have…more to worry about right now. You have…to find a way out of here, Clarke. Find…a way.”

There was no more time to discuss exactly how they were supposed to find their way out of this situation when they started their descent. Clarke’s heart thudded in her chest as the crate they were in thudded to the ground. They could hear muffled voices outside that gained clarity when the crate magically fell apart.

“…and keep those chains around the other two so they can’t change into their animagi,” spoke one Death Eater, as another seized hold of Clarke and pulled her to her feet. Clarke’s heart sank. There was no way they’d be able to hobble and flee with half a dozen Death Eaters pointing their wands at them.”I’ll take Griffin.”

“Why do you get Griffin?” demanded another Death Eater. “I was the one that Disapparated with her. I should be the one to deliver her.”

She couldn’t tell due to the hood, but Clarke was certain the Death Eater holding her had just rolled his eyes. “Whatever. We’ll all be rewarded by the queen, so it doesn’t matter.”

The other Death Eater opened his mouth to argue, but it was intervened by another snapping for the two of them to hurry it along. There was another wave of a wand, and then darkness fell as a
blindfold wrapped around Clarke’s head. She heard the “Obscuro” behind her and knew Anya and Lincoln had been blindfolded as well.

She stumbled forward, blindly dragged along. Her heart was racing. How was she supposed to somehow escape when she was bound so tightly she could barely walk, and she couldn’t see a thing?

She tried her best to gather any information she could. The ground they were walking on was uneven and crunched beneath her feet. The air was crisp and cold, but there was something sweet…trees, plants. She had no idea how long they walked, but eventually the dirt and loose rocks fell behind, and they were traipsing through high grass, soft and tickling her ankles. They came to a stop before long and there was a rumbling noise…the Death Eater jerked her forward and their footsteps echoed on a smooth, hard floor. They were in a building somewhere, cool and smelling faintly of mildew.

Then they were stopping, and Clarke’s heart dropped at the voice that broke the silence.

“About time,” said Ontari. “You’re late.”

“Had to take a detour to avoid the muggle flying contraption,” said a Death Eater. “Took us out of the way a bit, but we got here alright.”

“Mmm.” The quiet footsteps ended, and warm breath puffed into Clarke’s face. She fought to repress her shiver. She could feel Ontari’s presence, right before her. Sure enough, when her blindfold Vanished, she blinked and took in the sight of Ontari standing less than a foot away, surveying her with dark, delighted eyes.

“Clarke Griffin. It’s been a while, huh?”

“Not long enough,” said Clarke dryly, voice hoarse from not using it.

Ontari smirked. “Last time I saw you, I killed your friend. A cute little thing. Ginger. What was her name again?”

Clarke remained silent, grinding her teeth together so hard her jaw ached. Ontari didn’t deserve to know Fox’s name.
“I suppose it doesn’t matter. It’s not like you can have a funeral for her. You don’t even have the body to bury.” Her eyes were dancing with mirth. “Don’t worry, though, we were respectful. We burned the body, spread her ashes to the wind so they could join your other little friend…the Minister’s son. What was his name, again? Well, well, well…I suppose he wasn’t very important, if I forgot his name.”

Clarke saw red and lunged forward. She had no wand and her hands were bound, but she’d be damned if she wouldn’t sink her teeth into Ontari’s neck, rip her throat out—

“Ah, ah, ah.” Ontari laughed as Clarke was roughly jerked back by the Death Eater who held her. “Merlin, you’re a fiery one. I see now why Lexa likes keeping you around. You’re fucking her, right?” When Clarke didn’t answer, just glared as she caught her breath, Ontari’s upper lip curled. “Disgusting. In fact…” She pulled her wand out of her cloak pocket, twitched it, and Clarke lost her breath again as her hands suddenly seared with pain. A strangled cry escaped her lips and her knees went out from beneath her at the overwhelming burn…burn, like her hands were on fire…

Ontari put her wand away, but the pain receded slowly. Clarke was forced upright again by the Death Eater; her hands shook uncontrollably behind her, stinging almost unbearably. “There you go,” said Ontari. “Bit of fire to cleanse the muggleborn filth off you. You’re welcome.”

“F—fuck you,” Clarke managed to say, teeth chattering with the pain.

“Ungrateful,” said Ontari loftily, but there was a snap to her voice. “I suppose they don’t teach manners at Hogwarts. Whatever. Soon enough Nia can deal with you. If I’m lucky, she’ll let me be the one to kill you.” Her lip curled again. “She already promised me Lexa.”

Clarke had a retort on the tip of her tongue, but she knew she needed to be careful. There was something about Ontari right now…something about the arrogance, the wild glee and determination in her eyes. She was more dangerous than ever here, in her element…and something told Clarke she shouldn’t push her right now.

So she remained silent, and did nothing more than clench her jaw at Ontari’s responding satisfaction as she rolled her eyes and grinned broadly before snapping her fingers at the Death Eater.

“Alright, we’ve been here pissing the time away long enough. Hand her over.”
To Clarke’s surprise, the Death Eater didn’t let go of her. Ontari’s grin slid off her face, replaced with a scowl.

“What are you doing?” she demanded. “I said hand her over, give her to me.”

“No,” said the Death Eater.

“No?” said Ontari in disbelief, eyes flashing. “Have you forgotten who you’re talking to?”

“Last I checked, a kid, even if you are the Queen’s little pet,” spat the Death Eater. Ontari was practically boggling at him now.

Clarke expected her to swell up, to explode into a rage, but Ontari did no such thing. Her mouth thinned out and her eyes narrowed as she settled into a cold calmness that was indefinitely more frightening than if she’d went into a rage. “And you think my youth has some indication toward my competence? There’s a reason the Queen chose me to lead the mission to capture Griffin.”

“Funny, that,” said the Death Eater, lips twisting in a smirk. “Every time you were sent to capture her, you failed. The first time I give it a go and look…” He jerked Clarke forward by her arm, shaking her slightly to gesture. “Success. Reckon the Queen will give me a hefty for this, so you ain’t stealing my glory.”

For a second, Ontari’s expression was blank and frozen. Then she blinked, and a sneer curved her lips, and Clarke’s foreboding at the wicked glint in Ontari’s dark eyes had her pulling back from her captor immediately. Ontari had pulled her wand out and pointed it before anyone could so much as draw breath, and then green spots danced in Clarke’s vision long after the spell had the Death Eater’s grip releasing her as he slumped down, dead before he even hit the ground.

“What a dick,” sighed Ontari, slipping her wand back into her cloak. Clarke could do nothing more than stare as Ontari used the side of her boot to nudge the body aside, curling cold fingers and a dry palm around Clarke’s upper arm. Clarke stumbled when she started to lead her forward; Ontari turned round to shoot her an utterly repulsed expression. “Are you fucking stupid? Move.”

Clarke’s nostrils flared, but Ontari definitely shouldn’t be pushed now, not when there was a murderous exhilaration clearly running through her veins.
Ontari led them down the dark hallways, and Clarke finally had an opportunity to scrutinize her surroundings, searching for anything conspicuous to indicate where they were. There was nothing. Just a maze of empty hallways, dimly lit by small torches along the concrete walls. There weren’t even any windows. As they continued walking, Clarke realized why. They were moving down a slope...this building, whatever it was, went underground.

After several minutes, they turned a corner into a new hallway that had a single door at the end of it. There was light emanating from the cracked door, spilling into the hall. This was clearly the end of the line, since there were no other paths to take. Clarke’s mouth was dry and she swallowed hard, body tensing as she neared the door, certain she was about to meet the Ice Queen herself—

But when Ontari pulled open the door and shoved Clarke inside hard enough she fell to her knees, it wasn’t the Ice Queen waiting on her.

She looked up into the face of Cage Wallace, and internally she moaned. *Not you.*

On the outside, she just hardened her features and glared up at him, wishing more than anything she had the power of a Basilisk and could just kill him with her gaze.

“They’re your problem now,” said Ontari coolly, idly scratching at her palm as she stepped back to allow the rest of the Death Eaters to file in, still dragging along Anya and Lincoln, who had long been magically silenced to stop irritating the Death Eaters (Anya with her snarling and Lincoln with his constant groaning and panting in agony). “I’m heading up to call Nia.”

Cage arched a brow. “Now?”

Ontari rolled her eyes. “Yes, now. Don’t worry, we’ll still get a chance to play with them. It’ll take at least a full day’s journey for the news to reach Nia. We have time.”

Satisfied, Cage nodded as Ontari left, and then he did nothing more than stand there, legs spread and arms clasped behind his back, the picture of pureblood wealth and superiority. His oily hair glinted in the firelight. Clarke hated him.

Cage sneered. “Clarke Griffin. Missed me?”

“I’ve missed Lexa and I kicking your ass.”
Crack. Cage hit her across the face with a backhanded slap. Clarke struggled to regulate her breathing, unwilling to let him see how it took her breath away. She glared at him again, and he smirked. “Probably not the best idea to insult your captor. Besides. You’re not exactly in a position to be bragging right now, are you?”

He left Clarke to wipe the blood from the corner of her mouth as best she could with her shoulder. He walked forward to survey Lincoln, who was still hunched over, covered in sweat and clutching his wound.

“What should we do with these two?” asked a Death Eater.

“Throw her in a cell,” said Cage, hardly glancing at Anya, “The Queen can decide how to use her. And take this one to the dungeons.” A dangerous smile lingered in the corners of his smug lips. “Move him up to next in line for the Cerberus project.”

Clarke didn’t know what the hell the Cerberus Project was, but she didn’t like the sound of it one bit. Her protests were immediately muffled with a wave of Cage’s wand. She had no choice but to watch, bound and silenced and furious, as Anya and Lincoln were led away; she met Anya’s brown gaze, intense and focused, and understood. Find a way.

Wells’ words came to her again. That’s all we can do.

Find a way to survive, find a way to end this nightmare and achieve peace, where they didn’t have to worry about everyone around them dying. It was the only thing they could do. But how?

What do we do now? she asked herself as Cage and the other Death Eaters dragged her to her feet and led her out another door down another hallway, the opposite direction Anya and Lincoln were led down. They walked lower and lower, until they descended a spiral staircase and reached another dead-end. Cage waved his wand and a heavy door sprang open before them; he shoved Clarke inside and she lost her balance, crashing hard to the concrete floor.

“I would love to stay and catch up,” he sneered from where he stood in the doorway, “But I’m more interested in visiting your mate. The Cerberus Project is all mine, you know. But don’t worry, I’ll stop by in a few hours so we can…reacquaint ourselves.”

He shot her a grin before closing the door; the sound of the lock magically turning echoed until it
was the only sound left in this empty cell apart from the pounding of Clarke’s heart. *What do we do now?*

She caught distant movement out of the corner of her eye; she twisted around, struggling to push herself to a sitting position without the use of her bound arms. She stared into the opposite corner of the cell where a figure sat half-hidden in shadows, but there was just enough of him visible in the dappled firelight entering from the torch sconce in the hallway. It was a man, thin and wearing filthy robes. He was haggard and emaciated, barely recognizable, but Clarke would know that dead-eyed sardonic gaze anywhere.

*What do we do now?*

*We survive.*

*“Murphy?”*

*・*/✧*/・* *

The sky was black, and the ground was crimson.

Bodies were strewn along the campsite, trees overturned and fire still smoldering the trunks. Lexa and Luna were bent over double, panting and trembling from exertion; Evie was quickly moving through the grounds checking each body was definitely dead; Raven was pacing, twisting her wand in her hands; and Octavia was still on all fours with her eyes closed, struggling to steady her breathing after she was revived and awoke immediately into a panic attack.

Lexa’s stomach was churning, but she had already thrown up twice sometime in the last fifteen or so minutes. She’d been in a rage for the better part of twenty minutes, since Death Eaters disapparated with Clarke, Anya, and Lincoln. The people most important to her in her life. The people who meant everything.

Lexa had never wanted to kill Nia more than she did right now.

They could be dead. They could be, but they weren’t—she told herself this resolutely, matter-of-factly. Nia needed Clarke. Clarke could be being tortured at this very moment, yes, but she wasn’t dead.

Her mouth watered and stomach churned and she bent over, sucking in breaths in an attempt to stop
herself being sick again. Vomiting her guts up wouldn’t do anything to help them in this situation right now. She needed to be at full strength.

“So both of you can turn into dragons,” said Raven dully as she came to stand before them.

Lexa and Luna barely glanced at one another before nodding.

“What the fuck is up with that.” Raven just looked at them, face completely apathetic. She’d already screamed her terror and frustration out earlier. They all had. When Clarke, Anya, and Lincoln were gone, the rest of them had flown into a fury. Lexa couldn’t hold the rage back, and it took only moments for the dragon to take her place, teeth dripping red as she devoured all she could. Raven’s blasting curses were so powerful with her devastation they had left deep craters all over the ground. Octavia had been fighting tooth and nail, but there wasn’t much to do when you were in a magic fight without magic, and she had been quickly stunned. When Raven revived her, the death eaters were all dead and Lexa and Luna were shifting into their human forms. There was much screaming, much crying, with Raven and Octavia shouting at each other, shouting at Lexa, Lexa shouting back —and now here they were. They’d calmed down enough that they were no longer hysterical and besides themselves, but…not much.

“Nightbloods,” grunted Luna. “It varies. I’m one of them.”

Lexa ran her tongue over her teeth and tasted nothing but the cloying, bitter taste of blood. Her nails and fingertips were soaked in it, her body splattered in it. The heavy metallic scent seemed caught in her nostrils.

“Can you fly us to the queen?”

“We don’t know where she is,” said Luna. “Don’t you think if we did, this whole bullshit war would have been ended a long time ago?”

“I don’t know!” exploded Raven, tears brimming in her eyes again. “I don’t know anything because everyone treats us like kids and doesn’t tell us shit!

“Here,” said Evie gently, appearing from behind. Raven immediately turned away from the slab of Honeyduke’s Chocolate Evie offered her.
“I’m not in the mood for fucking sweets.”

“It’ll help,” said Evie firmly. “You’ve just been through hell, and the Shadow-Eaters have drained us all. Take some.”

Her tone left no room for argument, so Raven snatched the piece she offered and chucked it into her mouth all in one, angrily chewing and swallowing it down. Octavia and Luna had some too; Lexa stared dubiously at her own piece, but Evie’s glare had her giving a huff of breath and taking an annoyed bite herself.

“How are we going to get them back?” asked Raven.

Lexa’s stomach lurched unpleasantly again; the chocolate tasted like ash in her mouth. The unfortunate truth of their situation was…what was there to do? Luna was right. They had no idea where the Ice Queen was hiding out, otherwise this war could have been prevented in the first place. So how were they supposed to rescue them?

They had to rescue them. If they didn’t…if any of them died…

Lexa resolutely pushed the thought out of her head. If she entertained those notions, there would be no way she could push on.

Octavia’s brows drew together in thought; Lexa looked expectantly at her. “If we can’t get to the Queen…maybe we can make the Queen come to us.”

Raven’s eyes widened. “Yes, O!” she hissed.

She and Octavia both stared at one another. The hope flaring up on their faces enough to cause a spark of it to ignite in Lexa’s chest.

“What do you mean?” said Luna.

“The Queen and Ontari are going to be distracted with Clarke now, right?” said Raven, “So guess where they’re not going to be looking? Hogwarts!”
“Hogwarts?” said Evie, bewildered. “It’s being run by Pike and a band of Death Eaters! They couldn’t even fix up the castle because of all the dark magic. Half the school is locked up with the rest of the Order in the dungeons, and the rest are being forced to do who knows what by their psychopathic new headmaster!”

“Exactly,” breathed Luna, catching on. “The rest of the Order’s there. Even if we can’t manage breaking them out, if we create enough of a mess to draw attention, it can at least pull Nia away from Clarke…”

“And give us time to save them!” finished Octavia, eyes blazing.

“Let’s do it,” said Lexa. They could do this. All they needed was to buy a little time, and they could save them.

Nia had hurt someone she loved before.

Lexa wasn’t about to let her do it again.

* * /♂/ * *

“Murphy?”

John Murphy just stared at Clarke for a beat, before he quickly rearranged the shock on his face into his usual mask of apathy. He gave a disbelieving scoff that Clarke was certain hid a faint layer of relief. His next drawl, however, was as flat as ever. “Well I’ll be. Clarke fuckin’ Griffin. It’s not everyday these shitty cells are graced with a princess.”

“Murphy,” she breathed, voice cracking. “God.”

“Bet you never thought you’d be relieved to hear from me again.”

It wasn’t said smugly; there was a clear note of something bitter in his voice that sounded
suspiciously like guilt. Clarke’s jaw hardened. She remembered very well what happened the last time she saw Murphy. “You dick,” she snarled, scooting toward him as best she could wishing more than anything she had her wand right now. “You tried to sell me out. You better be glad my hands are bound right now or—“

“Oh I am,” he said dryly.

“You fucking asshole.”

“Yeah.” His eyes skittered over to the opposite wall to avoid her furious gaze. “I know."

“You—“ Her voice cut off in a gasp of pain when she attempted to clench her hands into fists and agony seared through them. Murphy looked back at her, leaning forward, his brow furrowed in concern.

“Clarke? What’s—“

“Shut up,” she snapped, breathing heavily and slumping against the wall. She wished she could at least look at her hands, see how badly burned they were, but the light was so dim and her arms were still bound together. “Fuck.” God, they still felt like they were on fire. Panting, she glanced over at Murphy and saw that he wasn’t chained up. Which meant his hands were free to help her. “You want to make yourself useful, come figure out a way to untie me.”

He hesitated only a moment before cautiously moving forward. She ignored his muttered apology at the hiss she gave in response to the pain his prodding fingertips sent lancing through her palms.

“Try grabbing a stone or something,” suggested Clarke, eyes half-lidded in pain as she watched him look around for one.

“I don’t think a rock is going to break through enchanted chains, Clarke—“ began Murphy, but he shook his head and kept looking when Clarke merely glowered at him. He eventually found a chunk of stone that had been jostled out of the wall from the magical door; Clarke held still, eyes squeezed shut in an effort to shut out the pain of the jostling as Murphy crawled over and started pounding it on the chain, pausing every few hits to listen and ensure no Death Eater had heard the noise and came to investigate.
To Clarke’s immense relief, after a few minutes the chain fell apart. Her breath caught in her throat as it fell free from her wrists.

“Fuck,” Clarke breathed heavily again, carefully twisting her wrists to stretch the aching joints. She brought her hands up close to her face, peering at them in the meager light. They looked horrible, red and blistered. Ontari’s spell must have been more than a simple stinging hex. She’d literally set Clarke’s hands on fire.

Murphy quietly huffed as he tossed the rock, moving back to sit down in his old spot. “Idiots. They always underestimate non-magical means.”

“You should know,” she said, shooting him an only mildly dirty look, “You’re not exactly one to talk. We both know what happened the last time you underestimated muggles.”

“Raven Reyes is not a muggle.”

“She’s a muggleborn, and to you that was the same thing.”

Murphy waved it away. “Well, I learned my lesson the hard way, didn’t I?”

Clarke shrugged, still not opening her eyes. “I’m not sure you Slytherins are capable of learning lessons.”

Murphy rolled his eyes, but it lacked its usual heat. “In the name of Merlin’s gayest pair of jeggings, it’s been seven years, Clarke. Can you stop pretending you’re not a Slytherin through and through yourself?”

She didn’t bother hiding the ghost of a smile from her face as she leaned back against the wall. The cold concrete felt good against her overheated skin. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yeah, sure. I know you only say it to piss me off. You have Slytherin friends. You never say shit like that to Miller.”

“Miller didn’t turn into a Death Eater and try to sell me out.”
Murphy scowled. “I’m not a Death Eater!”

“Your girlfriend, then.”

“Emori’s not a Death Eater either. Look, I made a mistake, I’m sorry, okay?”

That caught Clarke’s attention. She opened her eyes again, lifting her head off the wall to stare incredulously at Murphy. A ruddy flush crept up his neck to warm his face.

“Why are you in here?” she said curiously. “Where’s Emori?” She paused, a corner of her lips turning up in a sardonic smirk. “Did she fuck you over, too? It would serve you right.”

Murphy snorted. “No. More like Jaha fucked us both over.”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed. “Jaha?”

“Yeah. Guy’s gone weird.”

“I was told he might be under the Imperius curse.”

“Maybe.” Murphy shrugged. “There’s a woman with him all the time now. Always wears a red dress. Her name’s Alie.”

Clarke’s insides went cold. The woman in the red dress. Alie. The woman who killed her father. “Who is she?”

“Dunno. She’s got Jaha by the balls, though. If he is under the Imperius curse, she’s your best bet.”

“But who is she?” Clarke’s brow furrowed. “I get everyone else. The Queen wants to take over the world, Pike wanted Hogwarts, Sydney wanted the Ministry. What does Alie want?” When Murphy merely shook his head and shrugged, Clarke persisted, “What did they have you doing? What do
“Well, first off, the guy has a bunch of followers—so I guess, Alie has a bunch of followers, and
yeah, she probably has a bunch of them under the Imperius curse. One of their followers is Otan—
Emori’s older brother.”

Clarke raised her brows, indicating for Murphy to continue.

“He was one of the Death Eaters during the battle at the school. Emori and I were trying to get the
hell out of there when we ran into him.” He lifted his shoulder and let them fall, face unaffected, but
Clarke could see the emotion warring in his eyes; he felt guilty, even if he was fighting like hell to
hide it. “Long story short, she thought bringing you or Lexa to Nia would give her brother a free
ticket out of there. I helped. Obviously.”

“But it didn’t work,” said Clarke coldly. “You know, thanks to you a little girl died. A first year. We
got cornered at the top of the tower, and she jumped off.” She took satisfaction in the way Murphy
flinched. “You’re a spineless shithead, Murphy,” she said.

“I said I’m sorry.”

“You think that makes up for it? A weak apology? A kid died. Countless other people have died.
And all you ever care about is yourself.”

“You’re telling me no one’s died because of you?” Clarke froze at the words, mouth open absurdly;
she closed it with a snap. Murphy stared right through her. “You’re a hypocrite, Clarke. You always
have been.”

“I know I’m not perfect,” began Clarke, voice wobbling. “I’ve never claimed to be. All I’m trying to
do is take care of everyone.”

“And you’re doing a shit job at it, aren’t you? Otan told us your dad died. I’ve heard Wells was
killed. Ontari’s been bragging about killing someone else. I’m sure there’s others. You know, it
seems like everyone dies around you.”

They flashed through Clarke’s mind like a string of moving photographs. Her father ruffling her hair.
Wells’s grin as he checkmated her. Fox rolling her eyes at the noise level in the common room before
burying her nose in her book. Atom’s shy smile as he watched Octavia fly, the quaffle tucked firmly
under her arm. Roma’s laugh as Monty and Jasper set off their game of Exploding Snap. Maya’s
blush as Jasper pressed a clumsy kiss to her cheek. Charlotte’s terrified eyes, looking up at Clarke
and Bellamy. Gustus’s calm, stoic eyes as he faced down a horde of Death Eaters. Countless
nameless kids, blasted by green lights on the grounds of their beloved school and second home.

“Shut the fuck up, Murphy,” said Clarke, half turning her body to shield her swimming eyes from
Murphy.

“Have I touched a nerve?” he said dryly.

She held her aching, shaky hands out in front of her. She couldn’t even use them to wipe at her tears;
she didn’t let them fall anyway.

“Where is your girlfriend, anyway? Is she dead, too?”

“Shut up,” snarled Clarke.

“I…” Murphy made a noise of frustration, pushing a breath out through his nostrils. “Wait, look, I—I
didn’t mean to start on this, I…you just made me feel bad and it pissed me off so I started being a
dick to you. You don’t…” She saw him shift out of the corner of her eyes, uncomfortable and guilty.
“You didn’t kill anyone, Clarke.”

She thought of the Death Eater she’d pushed into the flames. She thought of all the people she’d
fought and left in the ruins.

“I have killed people,” she mumbled. The truth was, she’d do it all again, too. If it protected her
people, she’d kill over and over again, until there was nothing left. And that was all she wanted—for
nothing to be left. For everyone she loved to be safe. To survive.

Otherwise, what was the point of any of this?

What did it make her, to have killed and it to be for nothing? There was a thin line between the good
guys and the bad. The only way Clarke could keep moving is if she held on to all the reasons she
was still good. The unfortunate truth of the matter was, it wasn’t the fact that she killed the bad guys
that made her feel as though she could be bad.
It was that she couldn’t prevent the good guys from dying, either.

“God.” She sighed, tipping her head back against the cool concrete. “I feel like I’m going insane.”

Murphy gave a quiet snort. “Welcome to my life.”

They lapsed into silence for a time. Despite her racing mind, Clarke’s body was beginning to sag with the weight of exhaustion. She sat slumped against the wall, struggling to keep her eyes open. She had to figure out a plan. She had to figure out a plan. She had to somehow break out of here, find Anya and Lincoln, and break out of here as a whole. Which reminded her.

“What is this place?”

“Hmm?” He was still sitting in the same spot a few feet away, staring off into space.

“What is this place?”

Murphy glanced around the cell as though taking it in again. “Some fortress. They call it Mount Weather. It’s under a mountain. I think it used to be a muggle bunker?”

“That’s a pretty big bunker.”

“Yeah, it’s…it’s like a fortress.”

Clarke squinted one tired eye open to observe him. “How long have you been in here? Since the battle at Hogwarts? Why are you in here in the first place?”

He blew out a breath, a tuft of his greasy fringe blowing up before drifting down again. “Not too long. A week, maybe. After Hogwarts, Emori tried to follow Otan. Turned out he was working for Jaha, not the Queen.”
Clarke sat up, exhaustion draining away at the alarm that statement brought to her. “What? Jaha has Death Eaters?”

“No, not... not exactly. I told you that I think his followers—Alie’s followers—have been bewitched. Well, they must have been, because they just act weird. Anyway, Jaha said Otan’s been collecting information for him.”

“So, he’s a double-agent?”

“Yeah, I guess. Jaha said we could join, and Emori wanted an excuse to get closer to Otan so she could figure out what’s going on and get him out of there. So we started working for him. We worked our way up and were eventually recruited here. They’ve been doing weird stuff with their prisoners.” His expression darkened, appearing troubled. “Really weird. I don’t know the details, but... people are going in, then Cage and the Shadow-Eaters go in, and when they come out, the people are completely different. Mindless. I don’t know what they’re doing to them, but it’s not good. I heard Cage call it the Cerberus Project.”

Clarke’s stomach lurched. Lincoln.

“Everything was going fine for a while, Emori was bringing back info to Jaha and he was pleased and it was going okay. Then, Ontari noticed us.” In the dim light, Clarke could see the bob of Murphy’s throat as he swallowed, the way his nostrils flared as he set his jaw. “She wouldn’t leave me alone. I told her I have a girlfriend, but she still found a way to slip a love potion in my drink.”

Clarke’s eyes widened as her stomach turned again. She gazed at Murphy in horror. “Oh my God. Did—did you...?”

Murphy licked his lips and jerked a shoulder, clearly trying to appear unaffected, but it was more than obvious how distressed he was.

“I’m so sorry,” choked Clarke, shaking her head in disbelief. “That’s... that is so fucked up. That’s so wrong. That...” A rush of hatred for Ontari rolled through her so violently she shuddered. She was going to kill her. She was going to kill her.

“It is what it is,” said Murphy dully. “Emori realized what went on and was glued to my hip for the next few days. When Ontari realized I wasn’t eating or drinking anything while I was here anymore, she tried the Imperius Curse.” A bit of life returned to Murphy’s eyes as his lips twisted wryly. “That
didn’t work out so well. She’s not the first person to try that on me, anyway. Mum used to try it when she was drunk. Gave me a lot of practice fighting it off. Ontari was pissed, so she made up some bullshit excuse that I was stealing supplies and threw me in here. She tried to get Emori too, but she slipped away in time. She’s still around, though. I’ve seen her twice, still keeping up with the whole Death Eater charade. I think she’s trying to figure out a way to bust me free.”

Clarke swallowed, a lump in her throat. “I’m sorry that happened to you. That's…no one deserves that.”

He didn’t really acknowledge her; he just closed his eyes and tipped his own head back against the wall. After a few minutes of silence, he sighed.

“I meant what I said, Clarke. I am sorry. I shouldn’t have tried to turn you in. It was shitty. You’re not my favorite person in the world, but…you’re not so bad.”

Clarke breathed out a quiet chuckle. “You’re not so bad either.”

Murphy’s lips curved.

The silence stretched on until the exhaustion was overtaking Clarke once more. She jerked awake a few times, panic making her heart beat fast. She had to find a way out of here. Had to find a way…

* * *

The stone was trembling beneath Kane’s feet.

He shivered, clutching his cloak tighter around his shoulders. The concrete he sat on was cold, chilling him through his robes and freezing the undersides of his bare feet. He wished it were lighter in here, if not for warmth then at least for comfort. The single torch still lit on the wall was dim and flickering. It was creepy.

Every now and then, a scream reached through the walls. They must not be as thick as they looked. At first, they struck panic at the base of Kane’s spine. They were long, blood curdling and shrill. Worst of all, they were his. Not his personally, but his students—his kids. His family. This school and these children were his home, and they were all being destroyed.
He glanced around the packed dungeon room. Most of the kids were huddled together for warmth; the youngest in the room looked comical, wearing Kane’s shoes, which were at least five sizes too big. Jamie and Indra were both covered in a number of bruises and cuts, products of torture sessions with the Death Eaters. Kane himself was covered as well, but some of his were inflicted by Pike out of spite, rather than frustrated interrogation methods.

Three months in this cell meant the filthy, ragged clothes were hanging off most everyone’s backs. They had been given little food and water, though occasionally the House Elves would pop in for a secret delivery—that was what was keeping them going. So the hunger and thirst wasn’t the worst of it. The worst part wasn’t even how absolutely freezing they were, with no wands to make fire and Shadow-Eaters skulking nearby, draining the light and warmth and hope. The worst part was not knowing what was happening on the outside.

There were few things Kane did know. He knew his mother had died from a blasting curse while helping her first-years escape with the elves. He knew Professor Cartwig had died from a killing curse cast by Quint, a Death Eater that had been on the grounds the whole damn year masquerading as a beast handler for the tournament. He knew who most of the fallen were—knew there were many more that had not yet been found or declared dead. And he knew, after being filled in by Indra, that all their hope lay on the shoulders of Clarke Griffin.

For now, there wasn’t much they could do but wait and hope. Hope was the only thing getting them by, serving as their own glowing patronuses held near to their hearts, the only thing between them and the Shadow-Eaters.

As it was, Kane knew a few things. But he certainly didn’t know there was a secret tunnel that led into the dungeon, and he certainly didn’t know that the elusive Room of Requirement said to be part of Hogwarts was actually a real place. Be as it may, he was certainly more than a little surprised to feel the stone beneath his feet quake before a hole large enough to fit a grown man suddenly appeared; he leapt out of the way before he could fall in, and held his arms out protectively as the children gave shouts of alarm and everyone backed away.

Lexa Woods came snaking up the hole via the small ladder on the sides, followed by Octavia Blake, Luna Rivers, and Evie Potter, who quickly fell into her older sister’s embrace. There was a hoarse cry of relief as Bellamy Blake lurched forward, wrapping his arms around his younger sister. All four of the siblings were breathing ragged breaths of relief.

“We’ve come to rescue you all,” said Lexa.

Kane stared at her, astounded. “How did you—how—”

Lexa quickly launched into an explanation of how they snuck into the castle through the Hogsmeade
secret tunnel, then went to the Room of Requirement in the hopes it would find a way to help, and it had by providing a tunnel to the dungeons, and a portrait that hid a secret passageway back to Hogsmeade. She then described her plan to draw the queen out by attacking the Death Eaters head on; Indra nodded her head in fierce approval.

“We’ll get all the kiddos out of here first, and then we’re going to lay waste on this place,” said Luna seriously.

“We’ll make it go boom!” came a laugh, and Kane looked down into the tunnel and really wasn’t surprised at who he saw down there.

“Hello, Ms. Reyes!”

Raven grinned back up at him. “Hey Headmaster. Bet you’re regretting stripping me of my Prefect privileges now, huh?”

“To be honest, I’ve never been more glad I did,” said Kane, amused.

“Alright, let’s get a move on,” said Luna. “Kids, head down the tunnel, Evie’s going to show you the way. Everyone who wants to fight…stick around.”

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Clarke felt as though she’d only been sleeping for a few minutes when she was being jolted awake by a strange sound, like a deep rumbling. She and Murphy looked at each other, a silent question in each of their gazes.

The quiet rumble faded as the door swung open, revealing one lone figure silhouetted in the doorway. As the dust drifted away, Clarke took in the sight of Emori, wrapped head to toe in the heavy black Death Eater robes. She hooked the fingers of her good hand in the cloth covering her mouth and yanked it down to grin at them.

“Hey baby, you ready to get the hell out of here?”
“Fuck, I love you,” breathed Murphy, crossing the room to press his crooked smile to Emori’s lips. “I thought you weren’t coming again until tomorrow.”

“Yeah, well, plans change.” Her gaze shifted onto Clarke, a tentative mix of guilt and fervor in her eyes. “I heard Clarke was in here and I knew Cage would be distracted with the Cerberus Project tonight and Ontari would be gone to get the queen. This is pretty much our best opportunity. As long as we stay quiet and move fast, I think we’ll be home free.”

Murphy nodded and automatically moved around to shuffle out of the cell. Clarke, however, hesitated, staring at the two of them. This was too easy, wasn’t it?

“Come on, Clarke,” Emori whispered urgently, “If you want to get out of here, you have to move, now.”

“No way. I don’t trust you.”

Emori rolled her eyes. “You don’t have to trust me, you just have to move.” She twitched her wand and Clarke’s breath was caught in her throat as her body was forcibly jerked forward, out of her cell. The door was shut quietly behind her. Now she stood in the relative darkness lit upon only by Emori’s wand, illuminating her gaunt face. Then Murphy’s came looming out of the shadows; hair long and greasy, a scruffy beard half-hiding the grim set of his lips.

“I told you we’d make up for what we did, Clarke,” said Murphy quietly, nudging Clarke forward; the three of them crept down the hallway. “We’re going to get out of here.”

“Wait.” She stopped so suddenly Murphy walked into her back. “I can’t just leave yet. I have to find Anya and Lincoln.”

“Who?”

“From Durmstrang,” murmured Emori (“Oh yeah,” remembered Murphy). “Clarke, they could be anywhere.”

A pause, and then Murphy said, “We’ll grab them on the way.”
Clarke narrowed her eyes. “You know where they are?”

Murphy paused again. He gave an impatient huff of breath. “Yes, Clarke. Just trust me. Now move.”

Clarke stopped dead in her tracks again. “I don’t make the same mistake twice. I can’t leave, Murphy. I have to find them.”

“We don’t know where they are,” said Emori; to her credit, she sounded miserable. “Believe me, I would love to rescue them. I grew up with the both of them, and I was good friends with Lincoln. But I don’t know where they are and I don’t think we’re going to make it if we go off to search for them.”

“I can’t just leave them behind!”

“We have a solid plan right now,” said Murphy. “The three of us can make it out of here. I seriously doubt we’ll be able to navigate this mountain, find where they are, break them free, and make it back to our escape point. We have a chance now, we have to take it.”

Clarke wet her lips, thinking quickly. She nodded. “Alright. Fuck. Let’s get out of here.”

Murphy and Emori both appeared relieved, though Emori looked a bit pale, too. They set off down the hall again. As they made their way up two floors, they passed by several figures slumped on the floor that Emori had clearly stealthily taken down on her way to get them. They didn’t stir.

“Shit.” Emori halted, Clarke and Murphy freezing behind her. There was one person between them and the next door, and they were starting to rouse. They slowly sat up and glanced around, bewildered at the fact that they were sprawled on the ground, and comprehension slackened his features. “Shit,” whispered Emori again, eyes widening as the man lifted his hand to touch his wand to the center of his palm—then he fell stiff onto his face, as Emori shot a quick *Petrificus Totalus* at him.

“Fuck, come on, we have to go, now! I think he just alerted everyone else.”

Clarke’s stomach dropped; she ran alongside Emori and Murphy, glancing at the man as they passed. He had a strange spiral on his palm, blue on the inside of his fingers. She thought of Voldemort’s Death Eaters and their death marks. If he’d touched that to summon the queen, these must operate similarly. Jesus.
They burst through the door and into a large chamber. There were several tables set up, a few laden with items, one with various bits of food and jugs of water. There was a large cabinet in the center of the room, and it looked very familiar…

Clarke’s eyes widened. It was the Vanishing Cabinet that used to be at Hogwarts. The one Raven had shoved Murphy into years ago…

“Yeah, I know,” said Murphy, rolling his eyes. “Ironic. This is our ticket out of here.”

“But how…” she breathed, “I thought Pike confiscated them both…oh.” Of course. “He’s working with them.”

“Jaha told us. They helped his takeover at Hogwarts. You know he only quit because he and Kane had a row about how students should be disciplined. He thought Kane was too soft, so he went to the Ministry instead, but he’s never stopped wanting Hogwarts.”

“In exchange, he helped Sydney with her Ministry takeover—which wasn’t hard, considering Jaha all but stepped out of the way—and she helped him with the Ministry artifacts he needed. They use the Cabinets to get supplies, and to get in and out.”

“It’s also our ticket out of here,” said Murphy. “They wouldn’t ever guess a person would be dumb enough to put themselves through it, but thanks to Raven, I already know you can get through it and survive. So come on, let’s go.”

They started toward the door, but stopped when they realized Clarke wasn’t following.

“I’m not going.”

“But Clarke—“

“I’m not going,” she said firmly, cutting across Emori. She’d only come to learn how to reach this escape route. “I can’t leave them. I won’t.”
Emori and Murphy both stared at her and for a moment, Clarke wondered if they were going to attempt to force her to come with them. But then Murphy stuck out his hand.

“Good luck.”

Clarke blinked at him before nodding, relieved. She gripped his hand, shook it. “Thanks for showing me the way. Listen, when you get out of here, find Lexa. I don’t know where she is, but find her and fill her in and tell her I’m working on getting out.”

“We will,” nodded Emori. She and Murphy stepped into the cabinet as Clarke hurried out of the room.

She had no idea where she was going, and the fact that she had very little time to do this was weighing heavily on her mind. She bent down by one of the unconscious Death Eaters to gingerly swipe his wand from his cloak pocket with her aching hands, and gave it a go with a few silent spells. It was thicker and shorter than her own, and felt cold and unfamiliar in her hand, but it would have to do for now; she sighed in relief as she healed her hands and watched new skin regrow over the angry red blisters. As she darted down the hallway, she grabbed a couple more wands and tried them out, but neither suited her as well as the first she’d grabbed. She held onto the others anyway, figuring Anya and Lincoln could use them.

It took far longer than she was comfortable with. It felt like nearly an entire hour passed as she went down endless hallways; it really was like a maze. She hit dead end after dead end before finally finding herself in a new place, more brightly lit than the rest of the fortress had been thus far. She rounded a corner and nearly gasped when she found herself facing two approaching Death Eaters, but they were looking at one another as they walked; she quickly leapt into the shadows of a nearby hallway, wedging herself into the small space, and held her breath, praying the Death Eaters just kept walking straight rather then turning a corner…and they did. She still waited until she could no longer hear the echo of their footsteps before she hurried out and onwards.

She was descending deeper into the mountain and bit back a groan at the fact that it meant they’d have to be running uphill to escape.

She finally reached a doorway that led into a new room, wide and open and filled with countless cages of various sizes, some stacked in towers. For a moment it looked like a random storage room, but then she spotted a person in one of the cages on the ground…Anya. The room was also freezing cold, an unnatural chill and heaviness settling into the pit of Clarke’s stomach…there were Shadow-Eaters on guard here, and one had sensed her.
“Expecto Patronum!”

Whispering it hadn’t exactly done any good, because the blast of light that burst forth from her wand was still glaringly obvious. The Shadow-Eaters swooped erratically to escape it, bumping into the cages in their haste to escape the room. The cages rattled loudly enough Clarke winced, but they didn’t fall.

Still, now the path was clear. She ran over to the cage Anya was in.

“Anya?”

Anya turned her head. Her face was covered in colorful bruises and scratches, cheekbones puffy and left eye slightly swollen. Her hair was down, a ragged, tangled mess. What had she gone through?

“Clarke,” she croaked, before frowning slightly and clearing her throat. When she spoke again, her voice was strong. “Clarke. What are you doing here?”

“I’m coming to break you out, of course.” Clarke moved forward, pointing all three of the wands she clutched in her hands at the cage. “Alohamora.”

“You’re an idiot,” Anya told her, even as she hissed out in pain as Clarke helped her climb out of the cage and she could finally stand and stretch out. “You should have left the minute you could.”

“Like I was going to leave you and Lincoln behind.” She decided to delicately ignore the glare Anya shot at her. “Any idea where Lincoln is?”

Anya slowly shook her head.

“Right, great.” Clarke blew out a breath, holding out one of the extra wands for Anya to take. “I guess we’ll have to look for him.”

“Or I’ll look for him,” said Anya, snatching the wand without so much as a thank you, “And you get the hell out of here before the queen arrives.”
“No,” said Clarke fiercely as Anya began to heal most of her minor injuries. “I’m not leaving either one of you.”

Anya rolled her eyes and sneered, “If you’re worried Lexa will be pissed, I promise you she won’t. Get. The fuck. Out. While you still can.”

“I’m not—”

They both fell abruptly silent when the sound of the distant door opening interrupted them. They crouched low, peering over the cages to see half a dozen Death Eaters flooding in.

“Stay quiet and we can run around them,” said Clarke lowly.

“Are you kidding?” scoffed Anya. “The fewer the Death Eaters, the better.”

She charged forward, brandishing the wand like a sword. The Death Eaters shouted out in alarm, and she’d already hit two with stunning spells. Clarke cursed and followed, hitting another with a Confundus Charm, causing him to take down one of his fellows in his confusion. She pointed her wand at the teetering tower of cages, said “Descendo!” and watched as they crashed down atop the remaining two Death Eaters.

Anya lowered her wand, looking put out.

“Is that all of them?” asked Clarke, looking round cautiously.

“For now.” Anya turned to look at Clarke, raising her wand.

Clarke’s eyes widened as she took a step back. “Anya, what—“

“You need to leave, even if I have to make you. None of us are safe if the Ice Queen gets her hands on you.”

“You can’t do this without me,” insisted Clarke. “You’re weak—tired,” she quickly amended when
Anya’s eyes flashed, “Look, I still don’t know what the Cerberus Project is, but apparently the people in it don’t come back the same. They lose their minds. We can’t let that happen to Lincoln.”

“I can get Lincoln on my own. You need to leave. The Queen is already on her way—“

“I am not leaving,” snapped Clarke. Her next words were cut off in her shock when Anya twitched her wand; Clarke blocked the stunning spell. “What the hell, Anya? What are you going to do, stun me and hover me out of here?”

“If I have to.” Anya set her stance, clearly expecting a duel, but Clarke had no patience for this.

“Expelliarmus!” Anya gaped as Clarke caught the wand.

“Fine,” she growled after a moment, rolling up her sleeves. “You don’t want to fight fair? We won’t fight fair.”

“What are you—“ She realized what Anya was planning a split second later, after Anya drove her fist into the side of Clarke’s face hard enough she staggered back, dropping the wands and arms wind-milling to keep from falling backwards. She gasped at the burst of pain, and then Anya was driving her first up into her stomach, leaving her doubled-over and wheezing.

“What the fuck!”

“If it takes me beating the shit out of you to get it through your head, so be it,” said Anya between raining hits on Clarke’s arms, leaving sizeable bruises. “I’ve been looking for a chance to kick your ass after what you did to Lexa anyway.”

“What the fuck, Anya!” cried Clarke, furious as she shoved Anya back from her; she looked around for the wands, but Anya was moving forward too fast and she had no choice but to duck to avoid her next swing. Anya narrowly missed hitting the cages instead, spinning around to bear down on Clarke once more.

Her lip split when Anya popped her in the mouth. She didn’t need to look around for the wands this time; she slipped on one and crashed to the ground. She swung her leg out to knock Anya’s out from under her. Anya lost her breath as she landed hard on her back, quickly rolling to avoid Clarke’s kick.
“This is ridiculous,” snarled Clarke, using the back of a hand to wipe the trail of blood off her chin. “We’re fighting like muggles when Lincoln is off being tortured and the queen is on her way!”

“Exactly! I could have already found him by now if you weren’t a stubborn moron! Get out, Clarke!”

“No!”

She finally lifted a wand and blasted Anya back from her just when she managed to swing into her stomach again. She gasped for breath as she struggled up to her feet, wand still pointed at Anya, who had finally stilled.

“This is the dumbest situation I’ve ever been in,” wheezed Clarke, “And that’s saying something, because I once watched Raven cut eye holes into a sheet and dress up as a ghost for Halloween. She offended half the school ghosts, but the House Elves loved it when she knocked on the kitchen door asking for sweets.”

Anya’s lips twitched, but there was still fury clouding her eyes. “Leave while you can, Clarke.”

“What is your problem with me?” demanded Clarke. “You’ve been beyond hostile since we found you guys at the lake. Now you’re physically attacking me. I could have just gone, and left you in that cage! But I wasn’t about to leave you guys here! The least you could do is be a bit grateful—“


“I broke her heart?” said Clarke in disbelief. “She didn’t even tell me that my own dad had been murdered!”

“She had removed her own memories. She didn’t even know—“

“She knew for a month!” exclaimed Clarke; Anya fell silent, narrowing her eyes, clearly unaware Clarke knew that bit of information. “An entire month! How would you feel if Lexa knew your dad died and didn’t tell you for—“
“My parents are dead. My grandmother raised me,” said Anya coldly.

Clarke paled. She knew that. Lexa had told her before, and Raven had mentioned it too.

“I’m sorry. I forgot.”

“Lucky you,” said Anya coolly. Her expression hardened as she took a step forward. “Let’s get one thing straight. I think you’re a spoiled little brat and Lexa deserves better than you.”

Clarke stared at her, feeling a bit as though she’d been slapped.

“You’ve spent the entire year stringing her along, content to be her fuck buddy but shutting her down every time she asks for more.”

Clarke frowned. Lexa had shut her down just as much. Lexa had been determined this was nothing more than casual. Clarke was the one struggling with her feelings; Lexa had been fine.

“You’re so fucking close-minded that you can’t even entertain the idea that all Lexa was doing was what she thought was best. You don’t forgive her, because you’re spiteful and petty. Lexa might be ruthless, but she's soft underneath. She has a soft heart, and she deserves to be loved. You don’t love her, that’s fine. But leave her the fuck alone then.”

Clarke stared. And stared.

She felt as though the walls were closing in around her.

Because part of Anya was saying was right. Clarke was pretty much worthless. She couldn’t protect her father, couldn’t protect her friends, and she hurt Lexa. Lexa, whom she was completely head over heels for. Lexa, who she absolutely cared for with every fiber of her being no matter how hard she tried to fight it because it terrified her.

“You’re wrong.”
Anya paused in her ranting, narrowing her eyes.

“You are,” said Clarke, voice stronger now. She met Anya’s gaze, held it, angry blue and angry brown. “Maybe a lot of what you’re saying is true. Maybe I’m not good enough. But I have always, always cared about Lexa, since the moment I saw her step out of that ship. Since she blushed during the world’s worst tour I gave her around the grounds. Since I flew into her on the pitch. Since she Vanished that damn feather during class. Since she found me in the bathroom and told me she’d give me Occlumency lessons. Since I watched her face the first time she tried Honeyduke’s Chocolate.” Anya blinked. “Nothing made sense until that day after the first task when we kissed in the Champions’ tent, and then everything made even less sense because I didn’t understand how I suddenly couldn’t live without someone I lived for nearly eighteen years without. I’ve been fighting it kicking and screaming and that has nothing to do with Lexa and everything to do with the fact that she terrifies me.” Clarke’s voice broke on the word. Anya was, finally, at a loss for words.

“Of course I act like it’s because I don’t have time for a relationship, that I’m not there yet, but truthfully, it’s because I’m fucking terrified. I’ve seen what happens when you lose the person you love, I watched my mum for the past year, moving around like she’s dead inside because my dad was taken away from her. I watched Raven’s heart break when Finn betrayed us both. I saw the pain in Lexa’s eyes when she told me about Costia, I felt it when she lost her in her memories. I care about her so much it feels like it could swallow me and that absolutely scares me. Maybe that means I’m a coward. I don’t know. Maybe I’m an asshole for not being able to forgive her so quickly, but I’m human, and the fact that she knew that one of the people I loved most in the world had been taken away and she hadn’t told me because of her political duties broke my fucking heart. I thought I could trust her. I thought—I thought she felt the same way, but no one would do that to someone they love. If—if something happened to you or Lincoln or anyone, I would have told Lexa. I mean, imagine if she didn’t know Costia was murdered, and you knew and you didn’t tell her because Titus told you not to. How do you think she’d feel?”

Anya swallowed, features softening with guilt. “She…probably wouldn’t talk to me for a while. She’d…probably hate me, too.”

Clarke took a breath to steady herself, willing the tears not to escape her eyes. “Exactly. I’m not arguing with you on whether or not I deserve her, Anya, because I definitely don’t. She’s amazing. And she warned me from the beginning that it couldn’t be anything more, so I’m the idiot that fell for her. I’m a hypocrite, remember?”

“And she’s a liar,” said Anya softly. “Of course she fell for you, Clarke, can’t you see that?”

Clarke shrugged rather helplessly, and Anya rolled her eyes, though she looked considerably less violent this time. “If you’d pull your head out of your ass and stop hating yourself, maybe you’d see
why. You’re not…all…that terrible,” said Anya haltingly. For the first time, Clarke held back the ghost of a smile. Anya noticed and rolled her eyes again.

“Shut up. And…I guess Lexa could do worse.” That was it. Clarke knew it was the closest she would get to an compliment or an apology from Anya, but she didn’t need one anyway. Truth be told, she wouldn’t have Anya any other way, not only for herself, but because God knows only someone like Anya could keep up with Raven Reyes. They were both complete pains in the asses, but they were also as bold as a person could be. “I still think you should leave, though.”

“I’m not leaving,” said Clarke firmly, dipping down to scoop up the other wands, handing it to Anya. “The sooner we find Lincoln, the sooner we can get out of here, so c’mon.”

Anya sighed, but she followed Clarke without qualm.

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There weren’t any Shadow-Eaters around this part of the fortress, but Clarke’s heart still sank as though they were lingering there, draining away any hope.

They couldn’t find Lincoln.

They couldn’t find Lincoln, nor could they find their way back to the Cabinet. They were, in other words, completely lost.

“You should have left when you had the chance.”

“Shut up already.”

“What did you say you heard about this Cerberus project, again?”

Clarke sighed. “Not much. He just said that people go in and they lose their minds.”

“That’s helpful.”
“I did tell you I didn’t have much information on it.”

They crept around the next corner, cautiosly sticking their heads out first to check if the coast was clear. They faced yet another hallway that split off into two separate paths.

“Why don’t we split up?” suggested Anya. At Clarke’s immediately disapproving expression, she rolled her eyes. “Not for long. Let’s just go down each of these hallways, find out where they lead and then meet back here. Okay?” When Clarke hesitated, she gave a huff of breath, impatient and annoyed. “Look, we are running out of time. They’ve probably already realized we’re missing, and the queen could be here by now. We need to move faster, there’s no time to avoid taking any chances.”

Clarke bit her lip, stamping down the defiance rising within her. Anya was right. They didn’t have time to play it safe.

“Okay,” she relented, and Anya nodded and set off down the hallway on the right at once.

Clarke shook her head, exasperated, but headed down the other.

“Hurry back once you reach the end.”

“Okay.”

As she crept down the next hallway and time stretched on, the hairs on the back of her neck rose. She felt as though someone was watching her, but every time she twisted around to catch a glimpse behind her, there was nothing but darkness and silence.

She reached the end of the line when she reached a door that seemed to lead into the same room Anya had been locked up in. Sighing, Clarke turned around—and was face to face with none other than Ontari.

She barely had time to even draw breath before Ontari said, “Stupefy!” Her gasp caught in her throat as she hit the ground hard, unconscious.
Ontari allowed herself a moment to chuckle as she stood over Griffin’s body. She’d thought about playing with her a little first, but Nia had given strict instructions. She pointed her wand at her again. “Mobilicorpus.” She watched her body rise into the air, and glanced over her shoulder to make sure no one was near before she looked back at Griffin again, moved her wand and watched as her body followed the movements, slamming into the wall, then the ceiling, then the other wall, and finally the floor before Ontari let her rise up again, head lolling and blonde hair an utter mess. She chuckled again; she’d be feeling the pain tomorrow, that was for sure.

Griffin’s body floated along behind her as she made her back down the long stretch of hallway. When she neared the fork and found Nia already there waiting for her, she grinned, spotting Anya’s feebly stirring form at the Queen’s feet.

“How did it go?”

“She put up a fight,” said Nia simply. “I made her suffer for it.”

“Ohm.” Ontari let Griffin float alongside her for a moment, watching as Nia stunned Anya before preforming the same spell so Anya floated up alongside Clarke. “Did you get any useful information out of her?”

“Briefly. She pushed me out of here. Indra and Titus have trained them well.” Her eyes fell on Griffin, and a slight sneer curled her upper lip. “This is Clarke Griffin?”

“Yup,” said Ontari, popping the p.

“Who is this one?” asked Nia, gesturing toward the limp girl.

“That’s Anya Lachman. Lexa’s best friend.”

Nia’s lips twisted. “Is that so…” She considered Anya’s form for a moment, eyes calculating. “It would hurt Lexa if something were to happen to her, then.”

It wasn’t stated as a question, but Ontari answered it anyway. “It would break her heart. They’re like sisters.” She grinned. “Do you want me to kill her?”
Nia’s smile was as cold as her gaze. “Let me handle that.”

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Every inch of Clarke’s body ached, but it was the lights flickering on that had Clarke screwing her face up, squinting her eyes open. Another gray dungeon cell. She closed her eyes.

“Get up,” came a voice before a boot slammed into Clarke’s ribs. Her eyes flew open again as she gasped, lurching to all fours. The back of Ontari’s hand slapped the side of Clarke’s face. “Now.”

Shuddering with effort and exhaustion, Clarke staggered to her feet clutching her pounding ribs. She looked at Ontari, leaning against the wall with her arms crossed beneath her chest and a smirk twisting her lips. Cage was beside her, the smuggest smirk Clarke had ever seen him wear curling the scar above his mouth. He lifted his brows and inclined his head toward the right.

Clarke looked toward where he was gesturing to and realized there was another presence in the room. She turned slowly, eyes trailing up the figure standing in the doorway of her cell.

She was tall, slim, and wrapped in a fur coat. Her gray-streaked hair was pulled up into a tight bun atop her head. Her eyes were cold and blue.

Clarke stared up at the Ice Queen in horror, clenching her empty hands into fists at her side.

“Hello, Clarke,” said Nia; her icy tone lived up to her name. “Welcome to Mount Weather.”

Clarke said nothing. Nia walked forward, power exuding in her every step. At the back of her mind, Clarke registered the fact that this was real life, this was happening right now. She was probably about to die. She would never see Lexa again, or the rest of her friends, or her mother.

Nia came to a step directly before her, towering over her. She surveyed Clarke in silence for a moment, pale eyes narrowed in calculation. Her hand holding her wand twitched, and thick black chains formed out of mid-air, coiling tightly around Clarke’s body and lifting her higher into the air, so her toes were barely brushing the floor. Even then, Nia still towered over her.
“Where’s Anya?” said Clarke.

“I let her go,” said Nia smoothly. When Clarke looked doubtful, she added, “I needed her to send a message to the Order for me. She is alive.”

Clarke swallowed. That was good, at least.

“I assume you know why you are here?” said Nia coolly. Clarke didn’t answer. The ropes tightened.

“Answer me.”

“Yes,” Clarke gasped. “Yes.”

“Why are you here?”

“Because you—you want something from me. Information. I don’t have it.”

Cage scoffed. “Sure you don’t.”

Ontari merely watched, eyes glittering with excitement.

“I don’t,” gritted out Clarke when Nia merely watched her. “I swear.”

Nia tilted her head, and lifted her wand.

“Crucio.”

It was the worst pain imaginable, like every inch of her skin was on fire, boiling over, while thousands of knives slipped into her flesh. It felt as though it lasted far longer than the handful of seconds it did. If she weren’t being magically propped up, she would have fallen to her knees and curled up into a ball, body twitching with the pain. If there was an opposite of an orgasm, this was it.
“I don’t respond well to being lied to,” Nia clipped out, eyes ablaze with impatience. “Now, tell me the truth. Where is it?”

“Where’s—what?” said Clarke, bewildered and aching all over with pain.

Nia’s mouth thinned. “I suppose we’re going to have to do this the hard way. Crucio.”

Clarke’s screams echoed off the walls. When the spell finally lifted, her breath was haggard, nausea roiling in her belly.

“Where is it?” repeated Nia.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” squealed Clarke, eyes widening as Nia lifted her wand again.

“The Flame, idiot girl, where is the Flame? Where did your father hide it?”

The flame?

“I don’t know what that is, I swear, I—“

“Crucio!”

“Does Lexa know?” demanded Nia once Clarke’s screams subsided; her pale eyes were wild with the fury, with the high of rage brimming over inside her. “Lexa has it, doesn’t she? She’s guarding it, she’s hiding it. Where is it?”

“I don’t—“

“Crucio!”
When Clarke came back to, there was still blackness creeping toward the center of her vision. Her own vomit had plastered the front of her shirt to her skin, and some was dried where it had dribbled out the corner of her mouth down her chin. Never in her life had she felt such pain. It made the time she was six and fell off her toy broomstick when she thought it’d be a brilliant idea to climb to the very top of a tree and leap off it and broken both of her arms seem like a piece of cake. She thought she could probably be ran over by a dozen muggle cars and it still wouldn’t compare.

If she wasn’t already sobbing, she would have started doing so out of pure relief when Nia lowered her wand.

“Let’s try a new tactic, shall we?” said Nia coldly, and as their gazes met, Clarke felt as though she was both frozen in place and also tipping forward, falling into pinprick pupils that were growing bigger and bigger, ready to swallow her whole. It was a familiar sensation, but she couldn’t think —oh. Green eyes. Falling into those. Lexa’s. During their Occlumency lessons. Nia was about to preform Legilimency to learn everything she knew.

Maybe that was a good thing. She’d learn that Clarke really didn’t know anything.

Or did she?

Lexa had said there might be other memories hidden inside her. What if the location of this supposed flame, whatever that was, was one of them? If Nia got what she wanted, everything would be over. She’d kill Clarke, kill Anya and Lincoln, kill Lexa and Raven and Octavia and Bellamy and her mom and the rest of the wizarding and muggle world. There was a reason Titus had wanted Clarke to remain ignorant.

She couldn’t let Nia get to her.

She couldn’t screw shut her eyes, they felt as though they were glued open. Her entire body, in fact, was immobile as Nia held her stare, as memories were already starting to filter to the forefront of Clarke’s mind and…
She remembered her lessons. She relaxed her aching body. She took a shaky breath, and the breath she exhaled was steady. She cleared her mind, focusing on one thing and one thing only…

Nothing.

It was blissful. The pain radiating from every inch of her body somehow helped, helped her embrace the numbness. She focused on that; focused on the numbness, the emptiness…

A muscle in Nia’s jaw jumped as she clenched it.

Nothing…nothing but the black space of Nia’s pupils, searching hers, finding nothing…

The veins in Nia’s temple were purple and throbbing; she bared her teeth in a snarl as she sought, and sought, and found her way barred as though hitting an invisible force field around Clarke’s mind, an impenetrable wall of pure will. Nothing.

“Crucio!” cried Nia, rage flying from her lips like spittle, and the pain was somehow delayed for a moment.

Clarke spent one more blissful moment consumed with focus and nothing, before the pain took over.

*  *  *  *  *  *  *  *  *  *

“…the second time anyone has ever been able to keep me completely out. Lachman put up a fight, but I was able to gleam some information, at least.”

Nia’s voice was brittle with barely contained fury, but she sounded considerably calmer than she had however long ago she was torturing Clarke.
“Who was the first?” asked a second voice.

“Who do you think?” shot Nia.

Silence, for a moment, before Ontari said bitterly, “Lexa.”

Clarke’s lashes fluttered and blinked away the stars in her eyes. Awareness returned gradually. Her cheek, soaked with sweat and tears, was pressed against the cold concrete. The dull pang of the right side of her skull told her she’d landed there hard, and there may be a puddle of sticky blood beneath her head. She wasn’t certain if she could move any part of her body without feeling as though all her bones were shattering.

Nia and Ontari were standing feet away, frustration and anger rolling off them in waves, and jealousy pinching Ontari’s expression. God, she hated Lexa.

Clarke loved Lexa.

She wasn’t supposed to let herself think that, let alone listen to the way her heart beat faster at just the thought of her, but, well. Clarke was nearly delirious with pain, and she was probably going to die soon, so what was the harm in it?

Lexa was the most incredible, wonderful person she ever met. Lexa had eyes like silver moonlight filtering through the solemn forest. She smelled like a forest, in the best possible way. She smelled like—oh. Clarke realized what that smell she never recognized in her sixth year when they made amormentia in Advanced Potions was. Paint, oil pastels, charcoal—various art supplies, really. Honeyduke’s and butterbeer. Woodsmoke. Pine trees. General forestry. And then—that something. That something that always smelled like Lexa’s hair, especially right at the top of her head. Lexa.

God, Clarke loved her. If only she’d been able to tell her. If she was meant to die today, she would do so with the memory of Lexa’s lips pressed over her heart…

But no, that was what was dangerous about thinking like that. Soon enough, she’d be making peace with all her ghosts. And everyone knew ghosts existed only when they had business left to attend to.

Clarke certainly had some business left to attend to, and she wasn’t planning on going anywhere until she did so.
“…stirring up trouble, Cage just brought me the news. They’re attacking Hogwarts.”

“Of course they are,” sighed Nia. “They’re insufferable. I suppose they’re trying to draw attention to themselves to forestall us from killing the girl.”

“Probably. What do you want to do about it?”

“Let them,” said Nia. “I have no use for the school or for Pike any longer.”

“You know…” Ontari hesitated, arms clasped behind her back, self-doubt creeping up furrow her brows as she watched the way Nia paced in the small space. She seemed to gather up her courage, however, because she dropped her shoulders and straightened her spine before she said, “This may work to our advantage. We have enough of the Order scattered that it’s safe enough to fully expose ourselves, right? So after we finish with Griffin, we can go take Lexa down.”

“No,” said Nia curtly; she ignored the way Ontari’s face fell. “We still don’t have the information we seek, and it’s too dangerous to expose ourselves without it. We need the Flame, or everything we’ve done will have been for nothing.”

“But—” Ontari shot Clarke a filthy look, nostrils flaring when she realized Clarke was half-conscious now. “You’ve tried torturing her. You’ve tried Legilimency. Nothing’s working, so she’s useless. Why not just kill her and focus on—“

“The plan is useless without her!” hissed Nia; Ontari fell silent at once, quailing beneath Nia’s piercing icy stare. “Do not let your thirst for defeating Lexa cloud your mind. What you want is the least of my concerns. The only remaining link to Jake Griffin’s experiments lies in his daughter. I will get what I want one way or another. She’s only suffered a few hours of this; perhaps her tune will change after days of this, months…years…”

Clarke made a strangled gargled choking noise as the panic kickstarted her heart. Years as Nia’s prisoner, being tortured every day like this? She would go mad.

Ontari glowered her way, clearly resentful. “I still think her mum could be hiding something…’
“I already tortured all the information out of her mother that I could,” snapped Nia, and Clarke’s head was spinning, her heart pounding on, *oh no, oh no, oh no,* “There’s no longer any…use…” Nia’s words trailed off as her pale blue eyes narrowed and she shifted, her calculating gaze lingering on Clarke. Nothing had put fear into Clarke’s soul like the tiny cruel smile that turned the corners of Nia’s lips up. “Bring Abigail Griffin to me. Perhaps there’s use for her yet.”

Ontari smirked, and Clarke gasped.

*No, no, no.*

It was as terrible as she anticipated.

Her mother walked in looking an absolute mess, and even if Clarke was full of conflicted feelings for her mother—a rush of hatred for what happened with her father, for the fact that she took away her memories, for all the secrets between them, for the fact that her mother sent her a letter not even remotely related to all the fucked up things that happened between them, but instead vague and pleading to know whether or not Clarke was alright, and Clarke had no choice but to send a hateful Howler back filled with rage—seeing her mother looking so terrible, having visibly lost weight, covered in scratches and bruises...it was like a punch to the gut that in many ways hurt even worse than every Crucius curse that had been cast on her. Her mother had clearly been a prisoner here too, for some time at least, and now she was walking toward Clarke with unfocused eyes, looking so entirely unlike herself…

“Stop,” said Nia loftily, and Abby came to a stop before her. She twirled her wands, conjuring a dagger in midair. It floated over to Abby, and Clarke’s heart sank. “Take these.” Abby automatically reached out to grab them.

Nia looked at Clarke, and gave a smile sharper than the dagger. “Let’s begin.”

*・・・/°/・・*

“Stop.”

Clarke choked out a gasp, relief hitting her so hard her knees went out and she fell to the ground.
The two cuts across her chest were smarting, but nothing had hurt worse than her mother threatening to kill herself if Clarke didn’t reveal the information.

“I actually don’t think she knows anything,” frowned Ontari. “Why wouldn’t she?”

“Titus,” said Nia, the single word filled with disgust. “He may have taken her memories.”

“Or Lexa did.”

“Perhaps.”

Clarke was barely conscious, barely able to lift her own head, but she could see Ontari, blurry as she was, glance over at her, a wicked smile growing on her face. Clarke’s heart sank.

“You know, my queen, I do have some news that may be of use to you,” began Ontari in a snide voice.

“What is it?”

“Griffin,” said Ontari, nodding toward Clarke. “She’s in a relationship with Lexa. A romantic one.”

Nia’s sharp gaze darted to Clarke, who could do nothing more than draw a rattling breath, fear curling in the depths of her stomach as Nia crossed the cell to her. She didn’t have the energy to do much more than give a muffled moan of pain as Nia waved her wand, causing Clarke’s body to lift up off the floor and float in the air again.

“Is that true?”

“Just give her some Veritaserum.”

“She could employ Occlumency to void it,” said Nia lightly. “But it’s all right. I don’t need it, in this case. I can see it in her eyes.”
Clarke averted her terrified gaze, but it didn’t matter. She knew it didn’t matter.

Nia turned to face Abby, who was still standing in the same place she’d left her, face blank and eyes glazed. “Go to Hogwarts. Find Lexa. Tell her I’m challenging her to a wizard’s duel. She can fight my son, Roan. If she refuses, I will kill him, and Griffin, and then start working my way through all the prisoners one by one.”

Why Roan?

As Ontari laughed, Clarke understood. Lexa would be forced into a battle with an innocent, compelled person. She would never kill an innocent person. She would end up dying herself, or forced to give Nia what she wanted.

“We will arrive at Hogwarts at sunrise. Go, now.”

Clarke watched as her mother walked away, covered in her own blood and her daughter’s. At least she was going to Lexa. At least she was alive.

“Can I kill her now, then?” asked Ontari, looking at Clarke with a greedy hunger in her eyes that had Clarke shuddering again.

“Not yet. I’m going to take her with us to Hogwarts in the morning,” said Nia, sounding amused. “She can watch as Lexa dies, or Lexa can watch as she dies. We’ll see.” She pointed her wand at Clarke, who winced. “For now, here’s one more reminder of who you’re dealing with. Crucio.”

Her screams followed her mother the whole way out.

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Lexa swallowed hard, hands splaying out at her sides before she clenched them into fists. “Is she okay?”

“She’s okay,” said Abby, face crumpling as her voice broke. Tear tracks carved through cheeks covered in blood and grime. “She’s okay, but—but not for long, not unless you do as Nia says.”
Lexa drummed her fingers on the arm of the chair. “I suppose I will have to, then.”

“What? Have to do the duel?” said Raven in disbelief. When Lexa was silent, she leaned forward, face creasing in incredulity. “Are you kidding me? No way!”

“I have no other choice.”

“You can’t, Lexa!” cried Octavia. “Think of what Clarke would say if she were here! She’d be so pissed that you’re even considering this, let alone—”

“This is clearly a trap,” said Raven impatiently, alarm widening her eyes. “Don’t be stupid enough to fall for it, there’s gotta be another way.”

“Wait a minute, I don’t understand why this is a hard choice,” Murphy spoke up. “You’re like, a fucking magical prodigy, right? I saw you take down like half a dozen Death Eaters at once during the battle at Hogwarts. This is one guy. Shouldn’t this be a breeze for you?”

Lexa shook her head. “This isn’t going to be the same. Most of the Death Eaters, not all but most, are mediocre wizards and witches, weaklings flocking after the biggest bully on the playground. Roan is an exceptional wizard and was raised as the son of the most powerful witch in the world, who ensured he was able to take care of himself. On top of that, Nia’s sure to have used either spells or potions to enhance his powers, on top of the fact that she’ll be controlling him through the Imperius curse.” She looked seriously at Raven and Octavia. “This will be a very difficult duel, and I may not survive it. You have to accept that.”

“Like hell we do!” said Raven furiously. “We’re not going to let you do this, Lexa!”

“Clarke will underst—“

“This isn’t about Clarke!” said Octavia, jaw set fiercely. “You’re our friend too.”

“Even if you are a self-sacrificing pain in the ass,” added Raven with a snarl, arms crossed beneath her chest.
Lexa blinked and stared at two of the most stubborn people she’s ever known. Of course Clarke’s best friends would be nearly as stubborn as she was, but—to know they are not just doing this for Clarke’s benefit, but out of their own concern for her…

She swallowed down the warmth in her heart.

“I have to do this,” she said, voice considerably quieter, softer. “I have no choice.”

“There’s always a choice,” argued Octavia.

“We can wait this out and figure out another plan. Maybe we could trick Nia, grab Clarke and—”

“What would you do?” asked Lexa. Raven and Octavia fell into a mutinous silence. “If Nia offered this deal and challenged you like this, are you telling me you’d just, what, run away? Hang back to develop a new plan? There’s no time. Sometimes you have no other choice than to walk into the clutches of your enemy and fight your way back out of them. If I don’t do this, she’ll hurt Clarke for it, and I can’t have that happen.”

A beat of silence from Raven and Octavia, before they both finally nodded. “What about Roan?” asked Octavia. “She said a duel to the death. You gonna kill an innocent person? A friend?”

Lexa sighed. “Of course not. I’ll figure something else out.”

They looked dubious, but they nodded again.

* * /isode / * *

Clarke wasn’t sure how long she slept, but she felt marginally better when she woke up, even though her body felt as though it had been ran over by a train. Having slept on the stone floor didn’t help much either.

She yawned and stretched, wincing as pain lanced through her body, before she took a good look around. She was in a new dungeon, though it looked much like her old one. Anya and her mother were both back at Hogwarts, safe, at least, and Murphy and Emori should be there too. She had no idea where Lincoln was. She was stuck in a cell, no wand, and Lexa was being offered a deal that would end up killing her. Great.
She began to pace around the cell, searching half blind in the room for something, anything, that could help her escape. There was nothing. No windows, no door, only one torch that looked like it would be falling dry soon. She was fucked.

She slid down the wall she’d been leaning against, halting, startled, when her ass pressed against a catch. She reached back to feel a small indentation in the wall, as though the rock was old and falling apart.

Just how old was this place?

She tentatively pressed the heel of her hand into the groove, pushed…and felt it give way. Heart beating faster, she widened her stance, placed both of her hands on the wall, and used all her body weight to shove forward as hard as she could.

It took a few tries, but it eventually completely gave way, bits of stone crumbling to the floor. She coughed in the residual clouds of dust that enveloped her when she fell in through the hole, half her body in two different cells.

“Hello?” comes a quiet voice.

Clarke frowns and she blinks away the dust, pulling the rest of her body through the hole into the new cell. Why did that voice sound so familiar?

“Ms. Griffin?” the man said softly. “Clarke?”

And it clicked at the same time as the dust began to clear. A white-haired old man was stretched out over a small bed, leaning back against the pillows, his hands folded in his lap and his legs crossed at the ankles. He wore sweeping periwinkle robes that looked a little worse for wear, wrinkled and dirty in places.

Clarke’s eyes widened. “Headmaster Wallace? You’re a prisoner?”

Dante gave a thoughtful hum. “Can you be considered a prisoner if it was your own actions that got you into trouble?” When he received nothing more than a shocked silence, he blinked and seemed to
come to himself. He slid his feet to the floor and crossed the room to Clarke, extending a hand for hers. She was still ogling at him even as he helped her to her feet.

“You… I don’t understand.” She stood in place, staring at him as he returned to sit on the edge of the bed. “Cage is your son. Why would he lock you up?”

Dante didn’t answer. He just looked at her, deep sorrow in eyes as gray as the cell walls surrounding them. Clarke just gazed back into them, at a loss for words.

Then Dante sighed. “Well, I don’t suppose there’s harm in telling you.” He gave a sad smile. “Seems like we’re both in trouble now, after all. Have a seat, Ms. Griffin.” He gestured, so Clarke perched down at the foot of the bed. Dante took a deep breath, and then he began his tale.

“When I was about your age, I spent a year traveling after graduating Beauxbatons. I met a muggle girl in Ireland, and fell in love. It didn't work out. I was born into one of the few Pureblood families remaining in France, and needless to say, they didn’t approve. I never saw Robyn again. Years later, I married another pureblood, and we had a son. She died not long after he was born. The reason I’m telling you all of this is because it was ironic. I was forced to marry a pureblood, and my son turned out to be a squib.”

Clarke’s eyes widened. Cage. How could Cage possibly be a squib? Then she remembered what Titus said about Becca and Nia and squibs and… oh, God.

“Cage was a squib,” said Dante with a sigh. “I’ve worked with Nia for years, hoping to find a cure, but they were always temporary. His magic is weak and barely lasts a year before it fades entirely. I have plenty of gold, so Nia agreed to work with me. With my funds and resources joining hers, we created this place.” He lifted a hand, eyes scanning the cell. “Mount Weather. Years of missing wizards and witches… this is where they end up, used by Nia to fuel her experiments, used by my son and many others to provide him with magic. Purebloods, especially, will pay to keep their children what, in their eyes, is whole. Sometimes I wonder…” His eyes seem to dim as he lapsed into a thoughtful silence that stretched on so long Clarke thought he wasn’t going to say anything more, until he said, “…if perhaps that’s what’s wrong with him. If his… greed, and ambition, is nothing more than a side effect of those wretched creatures pumping him full of magic that is not his own.”

Clarke stared at him as he really did lapse into silence this time. “Why are you telling me this?”

Dante’s gaze flickered over to her. “This is the end of the line for us, I suppose, Ms. Griffin. When they attacked the school and killed all those children, I tried to stop it. I told Cage this was too much,
that we’d gone too far. This was not the legacy I wanted to leave behind. We’ve besmirched the Wallace name.”

“That’s what you’re worried about?” said Clarke in disbelief. “That—the whole reason you finally took a stand and said enough was enough was because you thought it tainted your pureblood family legacy?”

“That’s not what I meant,” said Dante calmly. “It’s much more than that. I could trick myself into believing that draining magic and stealing the lives out of nomads and criminals, wasted witches and wizards who threw their lives away, was forgivable. That it was necessary for the greater good. I tried to turn a blind eye on the fact that Cage was growing reckless and uncontrollable, contacting Nia on his own, arranging his own transfers, making deals with her. I could convince myself that working with Pike and working with Dianna would be beneficial in the long-run, because they promised to provide Cage and Nia with resources and free-reign to Azkaban for as many magical meals they could dream of. But I couldn’t pretend any longer when they struck children down for no reason. I told Cage enough, I threatened him, and he turned against me.” He gave a bitter chuckle. “My people were never mine in the first place, it appears. They followed his instructions, and locked me in here. I’ve been here for weeks.” He glanced at the wall next to the bed, at all the little scratches carved there marking the days. “Almost three months.”

Clarke licked her lips. “It’s kind of hard to feel sorry for you when this is your fault.”

“I know. I’m not asking for your forgiveness. I made a choice to protect my son and other pureblood families. Some were kept in the dark, parents who knew what we were doing was illegal, who suspected dark magic but didn’t want to know. I bear it so they don’t have to.”

“You’re sick.”

“I see that now. For the record, I am sorry it’s come to this.”

“You can do more than an apology,” said Clarke, inspiration striking her. “You can change things, makeup for it. Leave a better legacy than the one you’ve created.”

Dante was quiet, studying her intently. “…You want me to help you escape.”

“Yes,” said Clarke, “If I can get out of here, warn Lexa, and find a way to get this…this Flame or whatever it is before Nia can, I can save us all.” She hesitated then, narrowing her eyes. “I don’t
suppose you can tell me what the Flame is?”

Dante shook his head. “I can’t help you with that, unfortunately. All I know is that it’s a product your father created in the Department of Mysteries, and in the Queen’s hands, it would be a terrible weapon.”

“Can you help me escape?” When Dante looked reluctant, Clarke pushed. “Please. You can fix things. Just help me get out of here.”

Dante closed his eyes and Clarke held her breath, praying. When he opened them to reveal steely resolve, Clarke’s heart leapt.

“Fine. I’ll help you.”

Over the next twenty minutes, they discussed the plan. He wasn’t certain as to where Lincoln was being held, but if it was with the Cerberus Project, he had an idea. Apparently the Cerberus Project was a hobby of Cage’s; if werewolves were drained of their magic, they were stuck, the werewolf trapped within the human body. If a werewolf bit a muggle, they would simply die, because only one with magic could contract lycanthropy. If a werewolf was turned into a muggle, however… they became mindless, human cannibals with the wolves inside them hungry for blood. Cage called them Reapers, using blood to compel them. Clarke was horrorstruck and terrified for Lincoln. If she could get to him in time…

After ensuring Clarke they would be able to find her wand first, they waited for the guard to bring his lunch, and this was it. This was their chance.

As the door was magically opened to reveal the Death Eater entering with a tray laden with food, Clarke hid in the corner, and Dante held the Death Eater’s attention.

“I was wondering if you could get me an audience with my son.”

The Death Eater broached farther into the room, brows raised in both a condescending and curious manner. Clarke inched behind him. “So you’re finally willing to pull your head out of your ass, huh old man?”

Dante gave a cold smile that didn’t reach his eyes. Behind him, Clarke reached down, silently closed
her hand around a particularly sharp shard of rock that had fallen free from the hole she’d created in
the wall. Dante briefly met her gaze over the Death Eater’s shoulder and gave an imperceptible nod.

“You should really learn some manners,” he said.

Before the Death Eater could step forward, Clarke smashed the rock into the back of his head. She
stumbled forward when the man fell, aghast at the fact that the rock had stuck there in the back of his
head. A pool of crimson blood began to form beneath him.

“No,” she gasped. “I didn’t mean to hit him that hard. I…”

“It’s quite all right,” said Dante, barely sparing the Death Eater a glance. “Trust me, the world will
not miss him.”

“I just. I just stabbed a man in the head, I just killed…”

“Clarke.” Dante turned to face her, placed his wrinkled hands on her shoulders to look her steady in
the eye as he said firmly, “This is war. You’re a leader, you have to make tough choices sometimes.
Better you than someone else, right? We bear it so others don’t have to.”

Clarke blinked. It wasn’t as if this was the first Death Eater she’d killed, but it just felt more…
personal, up close like this. Her own hands doing the work, not her magic. Still, she made an effort
to shake herself out of this. They had to move.

She quickly bent down to snatch the wand out of the Death Eater’s hand. “Yeah. Let’s go.”

They hurried out of the cell and down the torch-lit hallway. Clarke followed Dante down several
more, clutching the wand tightly and always scanning her gaze around, on alert for any possible
betrayals on Dante’s part. But true to his word, they eventually arrived at new room. Clarke spotted
her wand, along with Anya’s and Lincoln’s, set on the corner of a table covered in a multitude of
other items, such as empty firewhisky bottles, dirty plates, and a random assortment of presumably
stolen goods from their victims. There was a large lit fireplace and various decorations lining the
walls; mostly mounted animal heads (deer, elk, moose, even a unicorn), and a huge twisted horn that
Clarke prayed was just a replica and not an actual erumpent horn.

She grabbed her wand along with Anya and Lincoln’s before throwing the spare in the fire. Dante
glanced at her, but she ignored him. Just because he helped her in here didn’t mean he wouldn’t turn loyalty again if Cage offered him a deal. She wasn’t about to fully trust him. She darted around the table searching for any other items that could be helpful. There wasn’t much, save for bits of food. She hadn’t eaten in some time, but the thought of food after the amount of magical torture her body had gone through was enough to make her feel sick again.

“I’m afraid there’s bad news,” said Dante suddenly.

Clarke whirled around to see him peering into the windows of one of the windows. She hurried to his side and looked in and saw…nothing. She pulled open the door and she hastened in, Dante walking behind. There was nothing but puddles of blood on the floor, and empty shackles.

Dante glanced behind his shoulder. “We shouldn’t linger. There are Shadow-Eaters nearby. If the room is empty, all the prisoners have already been changed over and are running loose underground with the wolves. If your friend Lincoln was in here, he’s already gone. He’s already a Reaper.”

Clarke swayed where she stood, struggling to keep the nausea down. Stay positive. Stay positive. There could be a cure. Somehow, they could find a way to—

“Dad?”

_Shit._

Cage’s face contorted in an ugly anger when he saw Clarke standing at his father’s side. Cage pointed his wand at them both.

“Back off.”

“Dad, please tell me you didn’t help her escape.”

“I’m sorry, son. But we can’t go on like this. I already made my opinions known.”

“Yes, uninformed opinions,” snapped Cage. “You’ve been moping around feeling guilty about a bunch of muggle blood on your hands, but you’ll get over that in time. This is only the first step.
Once Nia proceeds with her plans, we’ll move on to the next phase. Exposure. This is our world, we shouldn’t be hiding like cockroaches because the muggles are too weak to coexist with us. This is our world. We deserve our freedom. Don’t you want that? Don’t you want that for your son?”

“I…” Dante looked conflicted, and an ominous feeling began creeping up Clarke’s spine, raising the hairs on the back of her neck.

“And you’re going to turn on me? On your only son? To side with her? Do you know how many times of our people she’s killed, even just today alone?” Cage moved his wand so it was directed only at Clarke instead, rather than the both of them. The look he gave Dante was beseeching, a child pleading with their parent, and Clarke knew this was not going to have the outcome she wanted. He tossed Dante a wand, and Dante caught it in midair. “Please, Dad. I need you. I love you. Please, come join me.”

Dante began to turn toward Clarke, lifting his wand, resolve in his eyes, and it was over. Clarke swung her wand around to point at him.

“*Imperio.***

Cage’s face drained of any remaining color as Dante walked forward toward him with glazed eyes, lifting his wand and pointing it at his son.

“Let me out,” said Clarke, breathing heavily.

Cage planted himself more firmly in front of the door. The room was small; he, Dante, and Clarke were all only feet away from each other. There was a door behind her, but she had no idea where it went, and she wasn’t about to turn her back to Cage.

“No.”

“I’ll ask nicely one more time. Let me out.”

“Fuck you.”
Her nostrils flared. “Have it your way then.”

“Dad. Dad, stop. Stop. Dad!” he yelled as Clarke made Dante shoot a streak of red toward him. “Dad, stop it, please! Fight her off!”

But he wouldn’t, and they both knew that. Dante was old and weakened by his time as prisoner, and Clarke had an iron will. She pushed harder when Cage began dueling back, clearly intent on stunning his father; she wouldn’t let it get to that. If Cage was the only thing standing between her and her way out of here, she would make sure she wasn’t the one left in here.

“Please fight her off, Dad,” begged Cage, face creased in anguish as he blocked the hex Dante shot at him. “I don’t want to hurt you. Please—“

“Confringo!”

Cage shouted out in pain as fire burst into being on the front of his robes; he managed to quickly put it out and block his father’s next stunning spell.

“Going to make me kill my own father, Griffin?” shouted Cage, ducking to avoid the next spell cast at him.

“Not if you get out of the way!“

Cage didn’t move, and Clarke tried her best to freeze the panic swelling within her before it could take hold. She didn’t want to have to hurt Dante, but if Cage didn’t move, the Shadow-Eaters were going to run them all over. She twitched her wand to have Dante pull up his own wand, planning to distract Cage long enough she herself could stun him, but then Cage threw his own wand up again, and—

“Avada Kedavra!”

Clarke’s mouth fell open; she blinked rapidly in her shock, green spots dancing in her vision. Dante fell like a limp puppet, leaving Cage standing over him, expression a stormy mix of shock, rage, and devastation. As he lifted his gaze to meet Clarke’s, the devastation and shock melted away, leaving behind only the fury. She produced a shield charm just in time.
“I don’t give a fuck what the Queen wants,” he spat, seething as he flung hexes at the shield, ducking them as they rebound, “I’m going to torture you until you lose your mind. Sectumsepra!”

“Protego!”

She ducked the spell as it rebounded from her shield charm all over the small room.

“Tarantellegra!”

Cage bellowed in pain as he fell to the ground, legs dancing uncontrollably. He stopped it and rolled around, narrowly avoiding the next streak of red Clarke shot at him. “Crucio!”

“Langlock!”

“Avada—“

“Expelliarmus!”

He narrowly avoided it, just hanging onto his wand by his fingertips, pulling back to shoot a countercurse at her. She backtracked, spinning to avoid it, and her back slapped into the other door. This room was way too small. “Confringo!”

He did what she’d hoped; his augamenti hit the fire and steam exploded in the room, giving Clarke enough cover to unlock the door and barrel through it, slamming it shut behind her as Cage lunged after her.

“Colloportus!”

Cage slapped into the locked door and roared in pain. He brought his wand up. “Aloho—“

He was cut off when the far door swung open, and the Shadow-Eaters flooded in. “Finally. Get her, she’s getting away!” he said, but Clarke realized what was about to happen a split second before Cage did.
The Shadow-Eaters sensed weakness. In this moment, they didn’t care who they were supposed to serve…they just wanted the fear they could taste in the air, and Cage was putting off an awful lot of it.

And Clarke was absolutely certain someone so weak and insecure would not be able to produce a Patronus.

So she watched, half entranced, half horrified, as Cage fruitlessly argued with the Shadow-Eaters.

“What are you doing, you stupid creatures—you work for me! You work for me! Get away from me.”

He lifted his wand, and Clarke knew what was going to happen next. She knew, because this was something she actually remembered Bellamy enthusiastically talking about—a bit of old history that had fascinated him, involving the dark wizard Raczidian. Dark wizards couldn’t summon a patronus because only someone pure of heart could call a spirit guardian. And when an unworthy wizard attempted such…even if they were competent…

“Expecto Patronum!” shouted Cage.

The creatures that burst out of Cage’s wand were certainly white and glowing, but most definitely not a Patronus. Clarke turned away, shudders wracking her spine at the horrible sound of Cage’s screaming as the maggots bore down upon him, devouring him alive. The Shadow-Eaters fluttered excitedly in place, clearly feasting on the buffet of terror and despair.

Clarke jumped when a person suddenly pressed against her; she pulled up her wand, but stilled when she saw it was only Anya.

“Holy shit!” enthused Anya, mouth open—she was probably the most impressed Clarke had ever seen her. “That was—yes!” she growled, lit up with exhilaration. “Merlin, yes. Fucker got exactly what he deserved. Great job, Clarke.”

Clarke couldn’t stop the crooked smirk; Anya was definitely starting to sound like Raven. “Great job?”
Anya froze for a beat before she immediately deflated, the grin on her face slipping away as suddenly as it had appeared. She narrowed her eyes and shot Clarke a withering glance before standing straighter and taking her wand back that Clarke offered her.

“How the hell are you back in here?” said Clarke warmly, beyond pleased to see Anya alive and well, even if she did look even worse than she had when Clarke pulled her out of the cage. She’d been worried the queen had actually killed her rather than let her out as she’d said.

“I came back to rescue you, duh. There’s just one little problem.” At that, a loud slew of shouts and footsteps sounded from the opposite door; Clarke met Anya’s sheepish gaze, bemused. “I tried to shake them off. Didn’t work so well.”

“I can see that,” said Clarke dryly. She glanced at the door Anya came through; it was only a matter of time before the Death Eaters tried it and then tried them. Ontari was probably at the forefront, too. Then on their other side, there were half a dozen Shadow-Eaters, probably full to bursting after that meal. Great.

“I’d rather take on the Shadow-Eaters.” She brandished her wand, murmured the spell, and a silvery owl burst into the air. Clarke nodded and did the same, the glowing lion bounding out to join it. When they magically unlocked the door and pulled it open, the Shadow-Eaters were already flying into one another in their haste to escape the approaching light.

“You should have just left me behind you know,” said Clarke, a hint of teasing in her voice.

“You’re not the only hypocrite around, Griffin,” huffed Anya, “Now shut up and help me figure out another way to escape.”

“How’d you get back in?”

“Walked right back in through the door. Getting in isn’t the problem here, getting out is. Hence why we got caught last time.”

“We’re going to get caught again if we don’t figure out a new plan, because I still don’t know where that damn room with the Vanishing Cabinet is.”

“Great.”
The Death Eaters had poured into the next room now, and it was only Clarke and Anya taking turns blasting them through the door they tried to enter through that held them at bay. The gusts of wind sent the items on the tables clattering to the floor in a mess of swirling debris, but it did reveal one thing; a cloud of vibrant green dust that looked suspiciously like—

“Floo powder!” said Clarke suddenly. “Hold them back!” Anya gritted her teeth, brandishing her wand to reflect the spells shot at them as Clarke lunged for the powder, scooping a handful out of the air.

“It’s a long shot!” shouted Anya over the chaos of the battle. “They might not have it set up in the floo network!”

“Right now it’s looking like our only option!”

“They’re just going to follow us out! Not to mention these spells keep—putting—the damn—fire out —“ she said through clenched teeth, kicking the Death Eater she’d just stunned back when he fell forward toward her.

“Come on, hurry, get in the grate,” panted Clarke.

Anya glanced up above the fireplace; Clarke followed her gaze. The Erumpent horn.

“Exploding that is going to wipe out this entire mountain!”

“A mountain full of Death Eaters,” pointed out Anya.

“And innocent prisoners!”

“Fuck,” growled Anya, as a Death Eater nearly hit her with a stunning spell and only avoided by Clarke’s shield charm. She leapt over an unconscious body, seizing Clarke and practically tackling her into the grate at the same time she pointed her wand at the horn and sent a streak of red toward it.
Clarke threw the powder down just in time. The moment sparks hit as the explosion blasted through, they whirled away in a mess of green flame, elbows smacking and scraping against the brick wall, and Clarke shouted the first words that popped in her head.

“Hogwarts!”

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Time seemed to stop every time she met green eyes. Those particularly green eyes, specifically.

Like earlier, when she and Anya stumbled out of a cloud of black smoke and soot, coughing up a lung, and Clarke realized they were in the Headmaster’s room. The portraits on the walls were uttering cries of surprise. Charles Pike was slumped over the desk, a knife sticking out his neck. She wondered who did that, but she didn’t give herself much time to think about it because she was snatching Anya’s hand and dragging her with her down the spiral staircase, down the hallways, and down the staircase, black footprints following their every step. Finally, they burst into the Great Hall —and there she was.

Blue eyes meet green, and time stopped.

It stopped even as they ran forward, Anya falling into Raven’s arms and Clarke falling into Lexa’s. Her mother was nearby, crying, but Clarke paid her little mind. She was getting soot all over Lexa, but she didn’t care—didn’t think Lexa cared either, judging by the way she clung to her.

Later, it still held true, as all information was exchanged, and their gazes kept meeting. Even when they were anguished, from news about Lincoln (Octavia cried into Bellamy’s shoulder, and Clarke and Raven held her hands). Even when they were heated and distraught, as Clarke argued with her about the duel. That was where they still were now, an hour later. It wasn’t long until sunrise, and Clarke was tired and starving and still utterly captivated by green eyes, even if the owners of them were really upsetting her right now.

“Lexa, you can’t do this. Please, please, don’t do this.”

“I have to, Clarke. I’m sorry.”

“There’s got to be another way!”
“That’s what I said,” said Octavia bitterly.

Lexa shot her a dark glance before settling her somber gaze back on Clarke’s. “Everything has been moving toward this moment, Clarke. If I don’t fight him, Nia will kill him.”

“But that’s what she wants! Either she’s going to kill him, or you are, and if you do, you’re next!”

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“I…” At Lexa’s maddeningly superior gaze, Clarke’s nostrils flared. “We’ll figure something out, we just need some time!”

“We’re out of time. This is the only thing left.”

“I’m not going.” When Lexa just looked at her, Clarke shook her head. “I can’t watch you—I can’t watch. I won’t go, Lexa.”

Hurt flashed across Lexa’s face, but she swallowed and nodded. “That is fine.”

Damn it, Lexa. “Fuck, Lex, please. Please. Let me figure out something else.”

Lexa’s gaze, if it were possible, grew even softer. “You can’t fix everything, Clarke.”

Just…” Clarke cast a glance around, hating the fact that there were so many people, that her eyes were brimming over. Lexa’s eyes were bright too in response. Some people, such as Bellamy and Murphy, were averting their gazes to be polite, but it wasn’t enough. “C’mere,” she said, taking Lexa by the wrist and quickly leading her out into the hallway and a little farther down, out of hearing range.

“What, Clarke?” sighed Lexa as she turned to face her, and then they both stilled as their gazes met. It occurred to her that this was the first time they’d been alone since they kissed in the forest. Her heart ached.
“Please don’t do this,” she whispered. “This is a trap and you’re walking right into it. No, listen,” she said when Lexa opened her mouth to protest, “I can’t lose you. Okay? I can’t. I…” She was at a loss for words, because she knew what she wanted to say. Her lips were itching to form them, three little words that her heart was bursting for her to say, but it wasn’t fair to say them, not now. Not when the possible end of the world was upon them, not when it felt like a challenge to the universe to ruin it.

She had to make Lexa understand. She reached up to cup her face in her hands, held her as she said, “Let me fight instead. I’ll do anything. Just please, don’t do this. It’s what she wants; don’t give that to her.”

Lexa gazed back for a moment before her features softened. She leaned forward to gently rest their foreheads together. Clarke closed her eyes and tipped into the contact despite herself; both of their sighs mixed together. “I wish we had more time.”

Clarke swallowed the lump in her throat, shoving the devastation aside to call upon the anger instead. “Don’t say that! Just—just don’t.”

“Sorry,” whispered Lexa. Her lashes fluttered against Clarke’s cheeks.

“Don’t say that either,” mumbled Clarke. Their noses brushed together. “I feel like it’s all we ever say to each other. I’m sick of it.”

“What about saying something else?” She heard Lexa swallow; felt the movement push her face even nearer. When she spoke, it was the quietest whisper yet. “What about I l—“

A warm palm pressed into soft, full lips. Clarke met Lexa’s gaze over her hand; she swallowed before shaking her head. “We can say that after. Okay? Otherwise it—otherwise it feels like saying goodbye.”

Lexa’s lips pursed in a kiss against her palm. “Okay.”

Clarke withdrew her hand and nodded shakily again. “Okay.”

“Can I kiss you, though?”
Her lips were moving softly with Lexa’s hardly after she’d even gotten the question out. Clarke lost herself in it for a moment; after the time spent bound and screaming in that dungeon cell with Nia and Ontari, she’d almost felt like there could be no other sensation than ice in her veins. But standing here wrapped up in Lexa, mouths pressed together, the warmth flooded to her fingertips and toes.

And all she could think was I love you, I love you, I love you.

She almost wished Lexa would use Legilimency now.

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Anya knew it would come to this.

Somehow, someway, she knew the battle for the free world would end in theatrics. Some things were always meant to be predictable.

People were gathering, crowding around the clearing formed in what was left of the Great Hall. The sun was setting, the dusky orange light trickling in through the holes blown in the ceiling, through the rubble left from the battle. Death Eaters were near the front, standing like black-cloaked statues around Nia, who sat in the headmaster’s chair as though it were a throne. Ontari lounged in the smaller chair next to her, wearing her typical sneer. Nia looked vengeful. Purposeful. Alive.

Roan looked already dead. His eyes were unfocused, glazed over with the curse. Nia’s influence of will had always been particularly powerful, and had always held more sway with those who couldn’t help but to have a lingering attachment to her, such as her son. Anya’s gaze lingered on him, at the way he stood eerily still and detached, waiting for his opponent’s arrival. She prayed Lexa found a way to end this without harming him. Jamie Potter had already had to be restrained and silenced, trying her hardest to make her way over to him, to save him. It was a nightmare.

“I don’t know if I can watch this,” said Raven; she looked pale. “I feel like I’m going to be sick.”

Anya wordlessly reached down to take her hand. Raven squeezed back gratefully.

“It’s going to be okay. Lexa can do this.”
From her other side, Indra nodded, face as stoic as ever, and though there was clear concern and fear in her eyes, she said stoutly, “No one is better suited to this. Lexa is ruthless, and she’s smart, and those are some of the many things that make her great. She’ll figure out a way.”

“I just wish there was some way we could help her,” muttered Raven. “And Clarke too…where is she?”

At that moment, Lexa entered through the dilapidated doorway and strode toward the clearing; there was no familiar blonde trailing after her.

“I heard her say she wasn’t coming,” said Raven, frowning, “But I didn’t believe it…”

“She’ll be here,” said Anya, squeezing Raven’s hand. “There’s no way she’d miss this.”

Lexa reached the clearing and removed her traveling cloak, pulling her wand out, and Nia stood up and delved into her usual spiel about how muggles forced wizardkind into the closet.

“Centuries ago, wizards were the dominant species on this planet, before the cruelty of muggles forced them into hiding. Wizardkind was so persecuted that even their very magic itself began turning on them, manifesting in Obscuri that killed even more of our brethren.

Today, I fight for our right to take back our freedom. We are powerful, superior beings. We should not be cowering in hiding from a weaker species. We should be ruling them.”

Full of shit, of course. Nia didn’t care about purebloods, not really. Just a means to an end. Even here, with students and Order members who knew how twisted she was, she still treated her audience as if they could be controlled.

Nia stepped forward, head cocked as she slanted a look of pure ice-cold hatred at Lexa; behind her, Ontari shot Lexa a loathing glance. “Some people are against this. But today will prove with whom true strength lies.”

Nia stepped back, lifting an arm and spreading it wide to gesture. “My son Roan was once a non-believer before coming back to join my cause. Today, he will fight for that cause against Lexa
Woods in a traditional wizard’s duel.” She sneered at Lexa. “May the best \textit{wizard} win.” She sat back down.

Clarke came barreling out of the doorway. She was white as a ghost as she hurried through the crowd, finally reaching the clearing. Lexa turned and stilled when she saw her; she nodded, seemed to thank her, and Clarke nodded back, something unspoken channeling through their gaze.

Nia didn’t even pay any attention; she was too busy giving her wand a subtle twirl, spurring Roan to start forward, lifting and pointing his wand at Lexa. The crowd—including Anya—sucked in a gasp to warn Lexa, but Clarke’s expression must have already done so; Lexa spun around, a nonverbal shield charm already up and absorbing the stunning spell Roan shot at her.

See. Predictable. Of course Nia wasn’t having Roan immediately going for the kill. She was going to put on a show, first. This was the fucking irony of Nia. It was the same situation (well, not exactly, but still) as last year, when she attacked them at Durmstrang.

The first time Nia attacked, she did capture Lexa, because Lexa hadn’t been expecting it. She’d tortured her, had tried (and failed) Legilimency and the Imperius curse. And the fact that Lexa stood her ground had infuriated her. Before, it had been impersonal. Nia discovered Lexa was a nightblood thanks to her spies, discovered Titus had made prophecies involving her thanks to her spies at the Ministry, and it was a matter of time before she made a grab for her, but it hadn’t been personal. When Lexa defied her in every way possible, that made it personal.

Nia had attacked again later in the year, and she could have gotten away with it. She could have just killed Lexa. Instead, she couldn’t resist the chance to hurt her. To get under her skin. To torture her. Part of the appeal of capturing Costia had been to see if she could learn any of Lexa and Titus’s secrets, of course, but the main reason—the main reason had been to hurt Lexa. And she had, but she’d also lost her chance to kill Lexa then too, after the Order fought her off.

And now here she was again. She could have just killed Clarke at Mount Weather, but she wanted to hurt her and wanted to hurt Lexa. She could have just strolled into Hogwarts with her army and destroyed all of them right then and there, but instead, she came to put on a show, one that left her exposed.

Any could only hope they’d just a chance to use it. Right now there was no way she could even remotely attempt to creep up on her and get a decent shot at her, not when Ontari was right by her side and countless Death Eaters surrounding her. But maybe later…

Lexa and Roan tossed spell after spell back and forth at one another, dodging and ducking, weaving
their way around their small makeshift arena. Lexa was clearly avoiding using her powerful blended spells, unwilling to harm Roan. The Queen just watched with her perpetual smirk, Ontari practically in heat beside her as she watched.

“Expelliarmus!”

Roan disarmed it easily, ducking before he rolled up again, pointing his wand. “Sectumsepra!”

Lexa whirled out of the way, but it still managed to hit her. She took a sharp intake of breath, face contorting in pain as a deep slice hit her palm and she began to drip dark blood.

“Locomotor Mortis!” When Roan’s legs locked together, Lexa quickly said, “Duro!”

Roan cried out in pain as his feet were turned to stone and the grey rock began to creep up his legs, but with another wave of his wand it was remedied. He still limped a little, lurching to the side to avoid the next spell Lexa shot at him. “Immobulus!” he shot back; Lexa deflected it. “Furnunculus!” She deflected that too, sending a stunning spell streaking toward him.

Roan rolled out of the way and was on his feet again in a heartbeat, pointing his wand and roaring, “Incendio!”

Fire burst out of his wand and shot toward Lexa. “Aguamenti,” she cried, and the jet of water turned the fire to steam.

Nia had clearly had enough. “Stop playing games and finish her!” screamed Nia from the side, lifting her wand. “Imperio!”

Whatever life had crept back into Roan’s eyes faded away. He dived back into battle as ferocious as ever, panting hard, and the fight went on, until Lexa finally managed to send an immobilizing spell streaking under his outstretched arm and he went stiff as a board, limbs snapping together as he fell backward, landing hard on his back like a statue.

Nia immediately lifted her wand to lift the spell, but Lexa was busy too.

She was waving her wand overhead, brandishing it as though it were a rope, blending spells
together. Roan was just clambering to his feet, lifting his wand, and everyone shouted out in alarm because Lexa wasn’t blocking it, she was still forming her spell—

She released it with a bang, the entire arena disappearing as the explosion set off a colossal cloud of smoke. Anya’s ears were ringing, her blood racing in her veins.

The smoke cleared, but Lexa was no longer in the clearing. Anya’s heart was stuck in her throat as she swiveled her head around to find her, panic-stricken—and then it stopped. Everything seemed to stop, including time, as she spotted Lexa, standing only feet away from Nia, whose blue eyes had only half a second to widen before Lexa was lifting her wand.

“Avada Kedavra.”

There was utter silence after the flash of green faded. Everyone, students and members of the Order and Death Eaters alike, all gaped as the Ice Queen’s body slumped to the ground at Lexa’s feet. Then the world exploded into chaos.

Lexa lunged off to the side as Ontari howled in rage and lifted her wand, chucking a streak of green that barely missed Lexa. The Death Eaters were Disapparating, the werewolves were burrowing their way underground, the Shadow-Eaters were swooping away—it was over.

“COWARDS, TRAITORS!” screamed Ontari, but no Death Eater paid her any mind.

Meanwhile, Lexa, Indra, Jamie, Kane, Evie, Luna…countless people were closing in around Ontari, who backed away like a cornered animal. Her wild eyes wheeled around, searching—she glanced at the Queen’s body. Then she snatched something from the ground, twisted in midair, and the crack of her Disapparation faded into the others.

“Damn it!” cursed Indra.

Her words were lost in the uprising of cheers and screams and stomping feet, as the crowd flooded into the arena toward Lexa. Through the chaos, Anya could see Lexa turn, could see her find Clarke in the crowd. Could see them look at each other.

“Oh my God, she did it,” said Raven weakly. “She did it. Oh my God. It’s finally over.”
So it was. Nia was finally dead.

“I don’t even know what to do now,” she said, feeling numb with shock. She turned to stare at Raven, who looked back at her with the corners of her lips slowly creeping upward. “What do we do now?”

“Well,” said Raven, grinning, “Right now, a drink sounds pretty damn good to me. How about it?”

Anya kissed her.

* * *

Celebrations came amidst the sorrow. Nia’s body was wrapped in cloaks and resting near the dilapidated castle doors, far from the other bodies. Kane and Indra set to work on filtering through the bodies, putting the Hogwarts’ students and Order members in the Great Hall, and the Durmstrangs on the charred and blackened ship. The Death Eater and werewolf corpses were grouped near the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

In the meantime, the remaining students were finally being sent home. The train left a half hour ago (over an hour since the demise of the queen), but it wasn’t as full as expected. Many people remained behind to celebrate. Evie had brought back heaps of chocolate, butterbeer, and even some firewhisky and dragonspirit from Hogsmeade. While she’d been busy feeding chocolate to all the shaken students, Raven procured the firewhisky and dragonspirit and wasted no time in passing it all out. Clarke declined, still too shaken up from the past day’s events, as did Lexa. Bellamy and Jasper took some, though not to celebrate, but to drown their sorrows. Octavia was off speaking in hushed voices with Monty, Miller, Harper, and Monroe, appearing irritated when Jasper stumbled over and interrupted. Raven and Anya were already well on their way to getting drunk.

Clarke, who had been scrubbing up as best she could in the nearby bathroom, desperate to erase the blood and grime from her skin, reentered the Great Hall to find Lexa standing near the front, engaged in a quiet, intense conversation with Titus. Clarke didn’t hesitate; she went straight for them.

“What’s going on?” she asked, noticing the exhaustion in Lexa’s eyes and the frustration in Titus’s.

“Titus is concerned,” said Lexa with a sigh, channeling her exasperation into her gaze with Clarke’s; Clarke’s eyes slid over to Titus. “He is not pleased with the way I disposed of the Queen.”
“You wanted her gone, didn’t you?” said Clarke coolly. God, if anyone gave Lexa shit for killing Nia the way she did, she was going to strangle them. She did not have the energy or patience for that.

“The Queen is dead, but not as the prophecy foretold,” said Titus with a frown.

“So? Dead is dead, right?” When Titus didn’t answer, just looked lost in his thoughts, Clarke said impatiently, “Look, she was a threat. She was the threat. The world is better off without her. Right?”

“I suppose…” he said distractedly. His brow was still knit as he drifted off, walking toward the entrance hall; Clarke wondered if he was going to go ensure that was really the Queen’s body (the Order had already checked a dozen times over). She resisted the urge to roll her eyes as she turned to face Lexa again; by the ghost of a smirk lingering on Lexa’s face, she clearly knew how close Clarke was to doing it.

“Don’t give me that look,” she said, sparing a small smile. “You know he drives me crazy.”

Lexa dipped her head in a nod. “I know.”

The eye contact was too intense; they broke away, blushing slightly and turning to scan their gazes over the crowded Great Hall instead.

Lexa cleared her throat. “Clarke, I wanted to thank you for supporting me today.”

Clarke pressed her lips together to suppress her bemused smile. “You don’t have to thank me for that, Lexa.”

“I…well. I…” Her throat dipped as she swallowed. “I just wanted to let you know that it…it means a great deal to me.”

“You mean a great deal to me,” said Clarke quietly.
Lexa’s head jerked as she turned to look at her, eyes wide in her statement. Clarke slowly turned to face her, too. Lexa’s mouth opened and closed, and Clarke knew exactly what she was thinking.

“God, Lexa. I don’t understand how you can do so many incredible things, how you can be so incredible, and still think you’re unworthy.” Clarke took a deep breath and reached out to take Lexa’s hand. “Listen. I—“

“Lexa!”

They both jolted out of the little private bubble they’d somehow lost themselves in as Anya stumbled herself over to them, a broad smile on her face, so rare to see it immediately brought a grin to Clarke’s face even with what Anya had just interrupted.

“I’m proud of you, kid,” beamed Anya, throwing an arm around Lexa’s shoulders. She pressed a smacking kiss to Lexa’s cheek.

“How much have you had to drink exactly?” said Lexa, amused.

Anya shrugged, her smile sharpening into a smirk. “Enough. We still have work to do, but that can wait until tomorrow. Might as well celebrate tonight.”

“Work?” said Clarke.

“First we try to find Lincoln. Then we deal with Ontari,” said Lexa. “She’s still likely to be a thorn in our side. We’ll have to track her down.”

“Oh.” Clarke blew out a breath. She’d forgotten about Ontari, to be honest. “Right.”

“Not something to worry about right now, though,” said Lexa softly, brushing her thumb across the back of Clarke’s knuckles; it was comforting.

Anya noticed and snorted. “You guys are so gay.”
“You’re one to talk,” said Clarke, pointedly glancing at Raven, who was sitting at the other end of the Great Hall, perched at the end of the table she shared with Bellamy, Professor Sinclair, and a few other students. Raven looked up to see the three of them staring at her, grinned and raised her half-empty bottle of firewhisky in acknowledgement. Clarke and Lexa both noticed the softening, dazed expression on Anya’s face, and laughed.

“And you make fun of me for heart eyes,” teased Lexa.

“Shut up,” grumbled Anya, and though it was playful, she did look a little disturbed. “I’m not as bad as you. You guys are so cheesy it makes me sick. No, seriously, I feel sick.”

Clarke and Lexa laughed again, Lexa pressing a fond kiss to Anya’s cheek the same way she had earlier, and grasped her above the arm to steady her as she began tottering down the stairs toward Raven.

“Lexa,” came an urgent voice suddenly that wiped the lightheartedness right out of the room. They looked up to see Indra rushing toward them.

“Don’t tell me. We have a problem,” said Clarke wryly.

She straightened up after that, because this problem must be serious, because Indra didn’t even scowl or glower at her. She just hurried to their side and said urgently, “Ontari has gone rogue. There are muggle reports pouring in over the country, reports of a dragon.”

“What?” said Clarke and Lexa at the same time.

“It’s Ontari. She’s already destroyed Tower Bridge. Now she’s on the London Bridge. Too many causalities to count. She’s—she’s blown the International Statute of Secrecy apart.”

Lexa and Clarke both gaped at Indra, aghast, at a loss for words. Horrifyingly enough, Indra looked equally at a loss, no idea what to do.

“What—what do we even do in a situation like that?” said Clarke, floored. “I can’t believe she’d—why would she risk herself like that? I don’t…”
Lexa shook her head, shock still written all over her face. “She’s mad. She’s…”

“Lexa,” said Anya, who had paused in her drunken journey across the Great Hall to Raven to listen to the conversation. “Lexa, it’s Ontari. She’s the…she’s the…she’s…”

Clarke, Lexa, and Indra all moved forward, concerned, as Anya blinked, eyes going in and out of focus. She must be more intoxicated than they’d realized.

At that moment, however, Titus came rushing back into the castle, bellowing, “Shadow-Eaters! Shadow-Eaters are storming the gates! More than—more than I’ve ever seen, I—”

The castle promptly burst into chaos.

The remaining Order members and professors and some students went sprinting out to the grounds to meet the enemies, the Hall suddenly full of a blur of bodies, people bumping into one another in their haste, and then there was a strange light, like a blast of some silvery something, and all eyes turned to the source to see Anya, faintly glowing as though she’d been hit by a spell.

They lunged forward, no other thoughts than to just reach her, as though it would somehow stop whatever this was from happening, but it didn’t matter anyway. It didn’t matter, because Anya was keeling over backward, the feral tilt of her lips relaxing, forming an ‘o’ of surprise. She looked younger than she had ever looked before as she fell back as though in slow motion, arms spread wide, eyes rolling skyward.

“WHO DID THAT? WHO—WHO JUST DID THAT—“ Raven was bellowing like a raging bull as she half-sprinted, half-hopped, hobbling with her injured leg, to reach where Lexa, Clarke, and Indra all crouched beside an unresponsive Anya. “What’s—what’s happened to her? What spell was she hit with? What’s wrong with her?”

Clarke didn’t answer. She couldn’t answer. She had no thoughts, nothing except numb shock. She didn’t understand. One minute, Anya was fine, and the next, she was—

“She’s dead,” said Indra in a shaky voice, fingers pressed to Anya’s pulse. “Her heart has stopped. She isn’t breathing. She’s…she’s dead.”

“She can’t be dead,” said Raven. “She can’t. That’s. She’s just drunk. Anya.” She gently slapped her
fingers against Anya’s cheeks, doing it again when there was no response save for Anya’s head lolling on her shoulders. “Anya. Anya.”

Lexa sucked in a ragged breath and Clarke automatically reached out, to steady her as much as herself as the overwhelming, choking grief rose inside her. There were tears already streaming down Lexa’s stunned face.

“No. No, no, no, Anya. Anya!”

“Anya!”

But Anya didn’t respond, and Clarke had never prayed for one of Anya’s sneers or rude comments more than she did now. Just wake up. Just wake up and mock everyone for looking so serious. Just wake up, please—

She didn’t. The sun was inching below the horizon, and the light filtering in through the broken bits of walls reflected in Anya’s glassy, dead eyes.

The wails and sobs of those around her echoed through the castle.

*・./♀./・*

“I’m going to kill Ontari.”

Clarke looked up. Lexa was standing at the top of the Astronomy Tower, turning her wand in her hands. Her eyes were red-rimmed and puffy. So were Clarke’s.

“I’m going to kill Ontari, and I’m going to do it slowly. Painfully.”

That was all Clarke wanted to do right now, too. It had been hours since Anya had—she couldn’t even think the word. Thinking the word made it real. It couldn’t be real. Anya couldn’t be dead.

“I don’t understand any of this,” muttered Clarke. Lexa didn’t respond, and Clarke didn’t blame her.
She’d been trying to make sense of it all for what felt like a lifetime, now. The others were all downstairs in the hall. They’d fought back the Shadow-Eaters, but that was only the beginning. The remaining Death Eaters were emerging left and right, mass-murdering muggles all over the country. It was the end of times as they knew it. Even if they did defeat Ontari, they couldn’t obliviate billions of people at once. By now news was spreading through the muggle technology. The muggle world was now fully aware that the magical world existed. Clarke had no idea what this meant moving forward. “I’m so sorry, Lexa.”

Lexa turned around, brows knitting.

“I feel like this is my fault,” confessed Clarke.

Lexa slowly shook her head. “You have nothing to be sorry for, Clarke.”

“I was in Mount Weather with her. I tried to break her out, the Queen caught us. She must have put that slow curse on Anya and removed her memory of it. It—it never would have happened if it weren’t for me.”

Lexa turned again. “If it weren’t for you, she just would have died sooner rather than later. Nia would have killed her outright if she wasn’t of any use to her, or Cage would have used her as a vessel for his magic and fed the rest of her to the Shadow-Eaters. Nia did this because of me, to hurt me, because she knew Anya meant something to me.”

“I’m sorry, Lexa,” whispered Clarke. She stood up, crossed over to Lexa and drew her into a tight embrace. “I’m so sorry. Anya was—she was amazing. I’m so sorry you’ve lost her.”

Lexa exhaled a shaky breath before burying her face in Clarke’s neck and clutching her like a lifeline. “I am sorry for Raven.”

Clarke’s heart sank further at the thought of her. She’d held Raven in her arms, shared her with Octavia as she wept and raged and finally took the sleeping potion Evie offered her. She was asleep in what was left of Hufflepuff common room, one of the few remaining dormitories still standing and the only place with adequate beds.

“And Clarke, I…I’m sorry. To you. I’m…I am sorry.”
“For what?” asked Clarke, mystified as she soothingly rubbed the small of Lexa’s back.

“Everything. I wish I never lied to you. All that wasted time. Titus forbid me from telling you everything, and for what? It didn’t make a difference. The war was supposed to stop when Nia was dead, and instead, everything’s even worse. Now that she’s not here to control her forces, everything’s turned to chaos, Ontari went on a rampage before disappearing again, and—”

Clarke’s eyes widened. “Oh my God. That wasn’t the Queen.” Lexa fell silent, going still in her arms. “Lexa. That wasn’t the queen,” said Clarke, pulling back to look at Lexa in horror. “Nia wasn’t the queen. She wasn’t the person the prophecy referred to. It was—”


“Yes,” came a stoic voice. They both turned to see Titus approaching, Jamie Potter lingering behind him with a plain black briefcase in hand.

“If you knew that, why didn’t you tell us in the first place?” said Clarke angrily. “We could have focused on her, instead of—“

“Because I did not know either,” Titus interrupted. “My visions are ambiguous, at best. They are often more like riddles. Sometimes, you cannot understand them until they have already come to pass.”

Clarke remembered what Lexa said in the forest. She glanced uncertainly at her, receiving a subtle nod of approval. She aimed a steely gaze at Titus. “Show me the prophecy.”

“As you wish.”

Titus’s face was as solemn as ever as he pulled the strands of undulating light from his temple, and swirled them above into the sky. The image of himself, though a fair bit younger, swam into being, bald head bowed and hands clasped together as though in prayer. The voice that spoke was somehow both guttural and ethereal.

“Thirteen years from now, three will commence a battle of the blood...Three phoenix, three heads..."
One of fire and brimstone, born in the seventh month, raised on war and duty, an abandoned orphan surrounded by those loyal to her...

One of the ice, cold and invasive, born alone in the winter, fighting for that which was never freely given to her...

One the daughter of time and space, born beneath the stars in the fall, born ivory and forged in steel...

The world will struggle for control and look to them, wary of blood of the fallen, to she who commands it, and to she who commands stolen magic, and to she who commands death itself before and after she has faded away...

After the souls return from whence they came, together at last in the city of light...

This world will be lost, a rendered ghost, set into motion by the pull of the stars meeting the earth, and will only end once proclaimed weakness is embraced...

Magic will spit from their bones, and blood will have blood.”

As the apparition faded, Clarke looked at Lexa, who just shrugged rather helplessly back.

“I don’t…I don’t really understand any of that.”

“We can guess the phoenix are people. Lexa is the first. She was born in July to parents who did not appreciate her, destined to fulfill her duty within a war, with loyal followers who support the cause. Fire and brimstone refer to her animagus form and her protected status as a nightblood. The second is the Queen—so we thought. It could mean Ontari, who was born in December, to parents who abandoned her. The third is—”

“Me,” said Clarke faintly. “That’s why I could grab the prophecy at the Ministry. But what does the rest mean?”

“Sorry to interrupt,” said Jamie, stepping forward, “But this might shed some light.” She came to stand right before Clarke, waving her wand and conjuring a small table before them. She lifted up the black briefcase, laying it flat on the surface of the table before unclasping it and opening it up. It revealed a bottle of something glimmering and shining…

“Memories,” supplied Jamie, rather unnecessarily since Clarke had recognized what it was at once. But she didn’t understand whose or why… “Your father’s,” added Jamie. Clarke’s eyes widened. “When we arrested him, I was the one that questioned him before the court. When we were alone, he gave me these, told me they wouldn’t make much sense to me, but that I was supposed to give them
to you. He also said you would need this.” She pulled a strange fabric, silvery and silky with gleaming folds…

“An invisibility cloak?” said Clarke in surprise as Jamie dropped it in her hands.

“It’s a family heirloom, so please take good care of it.”

“But why do I need—“

“He told me to give them to you at the end of things; he said I’d know when. Well, this is definitely when. Take ‘em. Hurry, maybe they can help us.”

Clarke took the memories with shaking hands, watching as Jamie swept the briefcase off the table and placed a pensive bowl on there instead. Clarke glanced uncertainly at Lexa, who quickly pressed a kiss to her temple, putting a hand on her forearm and squeezing encouragingly.

Clarke tipped the silvery contents of the vial into the bowl, watched it swirl around. Then she took a deep breath, and lowered her head into a memory.

*The memories were strange and disjointed, almost like a dream. She watched through a haze of colors and surroundings like swirled like silver water around her. Her heart jolted as she saw her father, as she could make out his surroundings.*

*He stood in front of the mirror in his bedroom. Clarke remembered it well. There were photographs stuck in the corner, one of the three of them smiling and cheering at a Quidditch World Cup game, one of Abby pressing a kiss to Jake’s cheek, one of a young Clarke giggling with orange and red paint speared on her cheeks. She remembered that, even though she was hardly old enough to fly a toy broomstick. She’d been trying to paint fire. There was one that was stationary, a postcard picture of Big Ben in London. Clarke couldn’t remember that being there.*

*The surroundings kept going out of focus, raging as though trying to shake her out of them; she seemed to meet her father’s eyes in the mirror. He had red paint on his index finger, orange on his middle. He was writing something on the mirror.*
Seek Higher Things

*Blue eyes shifted up, and it was again like he was staring straight into Clarke’s eyes. They held contact. He smiled.*

Clarke came tumbling out of the memory much the same way one gasps in air upon breaking the surface of the water. Lexa, Titus, and Jamie were all looking at her, waiting with bated breath.

“It was- it was my dad,” said Clarke, stunned and full of wonder as she held green eyes. ”I think...I think he’s just told me where the Flame is.”

Chapter End Notes

*holds hands up* Don't freak out on me. I don't want to necessarily give any spoilers away, but remember what I said: everyone gets a happy ending. Things are not always as they seem, so trust me and don't fret, my loves. Everything will be okay ^_^ if you are still terrified, feel free to message me on Tumblr.

Also, oh my God writing this reminded me how much I ship Clarke x Anya. Ughhh. Sometimes writing these fics are hard because like I ship everyone with everyone, geez. I might just end this in one giant orgy (kidding. But one can dream)
Chapter Summary

*sings* It's the end of the world, as we know it, it's the end!

Or: shit hits the fan. Can Clexa get to the Flame before Ontari? Does the whole "slow and steady wins the race" count when that's about a tortoise and a hare and this is about an agitated blonde and two girls who can turn into dragons? Let's find out.

Chapter Notes

1. Ya girl is back with an on-time update, 30,000 words in a month, whoo! Thank you all so much your lovely words because they are what light a fire in me to get this huge thing done! ^_^

2. There's going to be a Clexaweek2017 Holiday Special, so go to the clexaweek blog here for details! https://clexaweek2018.tumblr.com/

3. There’s a part in this chapter when many of you guys are going to be “gross what noooo ew yuck” at, but I felt it was necessary. It's supposed to be painful and uncomfortable to read, it’s people being human, grieving and making mistakes…and I’m actually kinda proud of the writing for once. Hopefully you don’t suffer too much reading it :P

4. I kept meaning for ages to post this here, but some amazing person made an awesome fanvid for this fic around the beginning (so quite a while ago lol, I didn't even know it existed for ages)! I love it so fucking much, the fact that someone made a VIDEO for something I wrote blew my mind, as did reading the comments on it, I just, fjdklafjdiksah WOW. At the person that made it, if you are still reading this gigantic thing over two years later, THANK YOU SO MUCH. :D https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8bQIQBaoxA

5. Remember…happy ending for all. © I hope you enjoy this chapter, where so many things are finally revealed. And also, just a reminder that Clexa will forever own my ass.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

You taught me the courage of stars before you left

How light carries on endlessly, even after death

With shortness of breath, you explained the infinite
Moonlight flickered in through the open windows, bringing a cool breeze with it. Jamie Potter shivered from where she sat curled up on the edge of one of the few beds left in the dilapidated hospital wing.

“Are you okay?”

Jamie had already asked Roan this probably a dozen times since she along with several other Order members had rushed to his side where he’d fallen after his duel with Lexa. They had helped him to his feet and rushed him over to what remained of the Hospital Wing, where Jackson and Abby Griffin had carefully evaluated him to ensure the Imperious curse had definitely been lifted, and Nia hadn’t cast any other lingering curses.

“It had been hours since Nia’s death. Jamie had helped clear the grounds of bodies, had helped fight off the Shadow-Eaters, had been there for Anya’s death and the discovery that Ontari had revealed herself to the muggle world. She’d reconvened with the remaining Order members to quickly establish a plan. And now, she had another job to do.

“I don’t want to leave you,” she admitted, exhaling a shaky breath.

There were dark circles under Roan’s pale eyes as he looked up at her, squeezed her hand. “I’ll be fine, Jamie. Do whatever you’ve got to do. I’ll be fine.”

“That’s what you said last time, and look,” she said ruefully, gesturing vaguely at him, at the hospital wing. “I knew something like that would happen.”

He arched a brow, amused. “Oh, you knew my mother would kidnap me, hold me hostage, and bewitch me to challenge Lexa to a wizard’s duel that would end in her unceremonious death?”
Jamie rolled her eyes. “Maybe not specifically…but I was scared you’d be hurt, and you were.”

“And I’m still here.” He raised his brows, locking eye contact with her as he squeezed her hand again, as if to prove it. “I’m alive and I’m here, and you still have a job to do.”

She blew out a breath. “Alright, fine. I’m going.”

Roan wrapped her up in a tight hug. Warmth bloomed in her chest as his lips brushed the shell of her ear. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she said softly. She pressed one last kiss to his forehead before rising to her feet and heading for the Headmaster’s office.

Once there, she glanced over at the bloodstains surrounding the headmaster’s desk as she headed for the grate. Pike’s body had been removed and laid to rest with the others downstairs; they still weren’t sure who had been the one to plunge the knife into him. None of the portraits decorating the walls had seemed keen on revealing it either; they innocently maintained they’d all been fast asleep for the whole thing.

She took a pinch of Floo Powder from the urn above the fireplace and stepped inside it. “Home!”

She moved through her dark house quickly, not even sparing the time to change out of her sweaty blood-stained robes as she hunted down the briefcase she kept locked up in the trunk beneath her bed. The lid creaked as she pushed the heavy thing open and peered down at its content.

All of her most precious possessions were here. She trailed her fingertips over the smooth fabric of the Invisibility Cloak, placed neatly atop a folded parchment that was yellowed and faded. Most of the items in here were essentially useless. There was an old snitch that had lost its shine and its magic long ago; the wings didn’t so much as flutter as her touch traced over them. There was the handle of a broken knife; a dusty shard of glass; ripped letters so old the writing on them was barely distinguishable; an old locket; hand-knitted socks and sweaters She didn’t keep them for sentimental value so much as the fact that it was now tradition. Her father Sullivan had inherited them from his father Harry, and so on. Jamie smiled, something akin to hope spreading through her as she spied the stack of photographs in the corner of the trunk. She filtered through them until she found her favorite. A skinny boy with a shock of messy black hair, bright green eyes behind round glasses, and a lightning scar stood between a taller boy with red hair, freckles, and a long nose, and a girl with bushy brown hair. All three teenagers—adults, really, they must be in their early twenties, though there wasn’t a date listed anywhere—sat crowded together at
a table clutching steaming mugs of butterbeer, possibly in the old The Three Broomsticks; the pub was crowded, flashes of people appearing in the background, such as a pretty girl with long red hair, a boy with a round, friendly face, a girl with straggly dirty-blonde hair and protuberant eyes. They were only ever glimpses; it was the three who were the focal of the photograph. They grinned and waved up at Jamie, who smiled back at them.

Her great-grandfather, her great-uncle and great-aunt had been through so much. If they could get through it, so could she.

And she had a job to do, she remembered with a jolt, and very little time.

She restacked the photographs and shoved the Maurader’s Map in her pocket before pulling out the Invisibility cloak and the black briefcase. She unlocked the briefcase with a twitch of her wand and put the cloak there after checking and double-checking the vial of memories was still there. With another wand twitch it was locked, the trunk was shut and shoved back under the bed, and Jamie was hurrying back to the fireplace.

Once back at the castle, she quickly made her way down the respective floors, heading for the last place she’d seen Clarke and Lexa: the Great Hall. Only a floor above it, however, she ran into the Blake siblings, apparently in the midst of an argument.

“No way, O. No way. You’re not going,” said Bellamy.

Though his sister was shorter than him, she seemed to swell with rage, and drew herself up to a considerable height, glaring into her older brother’s face. “You’re a fucking coward, then. I’ll go on my own.”

“No—“

His protest bit off into a yell, as Octavia drove a fist into his jaw before she shoved him back so hard he lost his balance. He hit the wall and fell hard onto his ass.

“Hey!” cried Jamie, rushing forward; Octavia’s cloak whipped out of view as she rounded the corner and took off. Jamie crouched beside the boy, one hand on his shoulder, looking over him in concern. He blinked in shock, goggling down the hallway.
“She just—she just attacked me!” he said in disbelief, a hand jumping up to press to the red mark already blooming on his cheek where her hand made contact.

“Er…yeah,” said Jamie, awkward and apologetic. “What was that about?”

“She said she wanted to go find Lincoln. I told her to wait, that the Order was arranging something, but she didn’t want to. She said she already had a rescue crew ready to go, but she wanted me to join them, I told her to wait again, and she just—she snapped!”

Great. Now other underage kids were going rogue again, and these ones fancied themselves werewolf hunters. Jamie blew out a breath as she helped Bellamy to his feet.

“She won’t get far,” she told Bellamy. “Half a dozen aurors tuned in with intel that the werewolves were retreating back underground when Nia was killed. They’re not easy to track. They won’t even know where to start looking.” That seemed to put Bellamy somewhat at ease. Jamie’s nose crinkled as she smelled the overwhelming alcohol on the boy; firewhisky, though he seemed to have sobered up. No wonder he was in a bad mood, if he was out of drink. That’s probably for the best though, thought Jamie bracingly. He needed to be somewhere calmer, with a job to distract him. “Why don’t you go check on your other friend?” she suggested. “Raven Reyes. She’s in the Hufflepuff dormitory. That way someone’s there when she wakes up.”

Bellamy cast his eyes down, clearly uncomfortable. “Clarke will be there—“

“No,” said Jamie, shaking her head. “I’m about to see Clarke now. Do you know where she is?”

He shrugged. “I haven’t see her for a few hours. She was with Lexa.”

“Okay. Well, I’ll find her. You go watch over Raven and keep an eye out for your sister when she returns.”

He looked nervous about the prospect of being around Raven, obviously not wanting to face her grief—and, knowing Raven, possibly wrath. She’d been going ballistic earlier; it had taken Jamie, Kane, and a few others to subdue her, and if Clarke hadn’t been there for Lexa, Jamie was sure Lexa and Raven would have together done a hell of a lot more damage than a few blasting curses at the tables and walls. Still, Bellamy nodded and dutifully trooped off, leaving Jamie to continue on down the corridor, hoping Clarke and Lexa were perhaps still in the Great Hall.
Bellamy tentatively shuffled into the Hufflepuff dormitory, quietly clinking as he did so. He’d made a stop by the kitchens, which were miraculously untouched in all the chaos of the earlier battles. There was mostly butterbeer, but he’d somehow managed to find a dusty bottle of firewhisky. He’d already popped the cork and brought the bottle to his lips before he’d even entered the Hufflepuff common room. He passed by Professor Sinclair on the way, the Transfiguration professor who’d apparently been checking in on Raven himself, though he was bustling off to check on other students now. That left Bellamy in the eerie silence of the dorms, staring at Raven as she sat up in bed, rubbing her eyes with her fists.

His heart ached for her.

“Hey,” she said, voice hoarse. From sleep, from crying and screaming earlier.

“Hey,” he replied, voice dull.

“How are you?”

She ignored him. “What’s going on out there?”

He shrugged. “Nothing much.”

Raven sighed, dragging a hand through her sleep-mussed hair. She stilled when she eyed the firewhisky in his hand, and then she automatically extended a hand. He obliged.

“So,” she sighed again once she’d brought it to her lips, “Do you know what the plan is?”

“The plan?”

“Yes, the plan,” she said impatiently. “Ontari’s out lighting muggles cities on fire and they’re chucking bullets and launching missiles at her that she’s bewitching to go right back at them. She needs to be stopped.”
“Do you think she can be?” he said absently. Raven shot him a glare and he shrugged again, unaffected. “I’m just saying. We’re losing this war, if we haven’t already lost it.”

Raven studied him. “You’re giving up.”

It was a statement, not a question, but he nodded anyway.

“Where’s Octavia?”

His calm façade finally wavered; he took a drink from the bottle before passing it back to Raven. “She left. With Jasper, Monty, Miller, Harper, and Monroe. She thinks she’s going to hunt down Lincoln and fix him, apparently.”

Raven was quiet for a moment, thumbing the label on the bottle. “Maybe she will,” she said finally.

“You think so?”

“No. Maybe. I don’t know.” She cleared her throat. “God. I’d kill for another Sleeping potion.”

“Jackson didn’t have anymore?”

“No. They were—I guess they were giving them to the kids, when they were all trapped here. To help them sleep at night.”

“Oh.” The lump in his throat hurt.

“I just—I want something, anything, to help it stop hurting. I feel so numb, I just—I want to—I just want to forget everything. You know?”

He nodded, taking a deep breath. “Yeah, Rae. I know.”
They lapsed into a silence that turned into the two of them finishing off all the butterbeers before returning to the firewhisky, and then Bellamy was pouring his soul out and clumsily wiping the tears off his face with the bottom of his cloak.

“Sometimes I just feel stupid, you know? I barely knew Gina when you think about it. A few months and that’s it. But I knew her enough. I loved how she always said whatever was on her mind, she didn’t have any filters. I loved how we could sit and talk about Greek mythology for hours. I loved how sweet she was, but how she could tear into me if I acted like an idiot. She was so good, way too good for me.”

“Sounds like you loved her, Bell,” said Raven quietly. “And that’s not stupid,” she said calmly when his head snapped up, cheeks flushed. “The fact that you weren’t together long doesn’t mean anything. I didn’t know Anya long. Now I wish I’d told her. Even when I asked her what our relationship meant, when I asked her if we were going to suck it up and admit what we are to each other, we didn’t say it. I didn’t say what I really wanted to say because I was scared she wasn’t there yet. And now I’ll never get the chance to.” She sniffed, clearing her throat as she sat up straighter, reaching out for another swig of the firewhisky. “Of course, that’s to say she even felt the same way,” she said lightly. “Maybe she didn’t.”

“I’m sure she loved you, Raven,” said Bellamy in a low voice. He immediately took the bottle when Raven offered it back to him. There wasn’t much left now; she’d drank nearly as much as him.

“How do you know?” snapped Raven, voice breaking. “She was amazing, and I…I couldn’t even protect her. She was dying the whole time and I didn’t even realize.”

“No one did. No one could have done. But I’m sure she loved you.”

“How do you know?” she repeated, bottom lip trembling, tears brimming in her eyes.

He sighed, the firewhisky burning his belly and giving him courage to say more than he ever had. “Because, Raven. Who wouldn’t love you?”

Raven was quiet, tears silently spilling. She took the bottle again. There was silence, save for the swish of liquid in glass and the gulp as Raven took another swig. Bellamy decided to blame his red cheeks on the drink. “You know people always thought you and I would get together?” said Raven abruptly. Bellamy suddenly lost the ability to swallow. “I kind of thought it too.”
He blinked. “You did?”

She looked at him. “You didn’t?”

“I…yeah, maybe,” he mumbled. He immediately took the bottle she offered back to him. He took another drink. “I guess so,” he muttered.

“I wonder why we didn’t,” said Raven. He stared at her. “Or why we didn’t at least fuck.”

Bellamy felt his face warm, heat flooding his body at the words. Guilt tremoring there with it in the pit of his gut.

Raven stood up, lifting her trembling hands and dragging her messy hair back from her face. Her voice was thick as she said, “Do you think fucking can make you feel better?”

“I don’t—I don’t know, Raven.”

“Do you want to?”

His mouth was slightly open, his eyes wide as he just looked at her. The lump in his throat was painful; his eyes stung. Gina, Gina, Gina. Was he betraying her? Did the fact that he wanted Raven right now mean he was betraying her? “What?”

“Do you want to—“ She cut off, as though she couldn’t say the words. “Bellamy. I just—I need—“

He understood. He needed, too. Were they terrible people, for that? Anya and Gina hadn’t been gone long at all, and all they wanted was to feel alive again rather than six feet under with them. To lose themselves through drink and sex, anything to numb the pain or forget for a little while.

“Can we just—“ Tears were rolling down her flushed cheeks and her hands were shaking, so she balled them into fists against her thighs. “Can we just do this, please?
Bellamy swallowed as he stood, crossed the room to stand before her and looked down at her, face hard and stoic but eyes—his eyes were different. Softer. Scared. Heated. Sad. “Raven. If you’re looking for someone to tell you no, that we…that we shouldn’t do this because it’s stupid and wrong and it won’t help anything…I’m not that guy. But you have to tell me one thing. Are you sure?”

Raven looked up at him, chin high. Her stomach lurched, her heart lurched, at how Bellamy’s eyes followed the movement of her tongue wetting her lips. “I’m counting on it,” she said, voice low, so low it couldn’t possibly break even as the lump in her throat seared. “And no, I’m not sure. Are you?”

“No.”

“I want this anyway.”

“What about Anya?”

“What about her?” choked Raven, fresh tears spilling out. “She’s dead. And so is Gina. And they aren’t coming back. We’re—we’re alone.”

“Again,” Bellamy managed to say.

“Yeah, again. Like fucking always. And I just—“ She hiccuped, biting back her sobs. “I just want to lose myself in something else. Just—just fuck me, and we can—we can close our eyes and pretend—and pretend—“

“Raven. Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay.”

He didn’t hesitate. He bent his head down, and she leaned up, and they kissed.
It was strange. That was Raven’s first thought. There was something perhaps not quite right about this, but she pushed that out of her head. Bellamy’s lips were too big, too full. There wasn’t supposed to be stubble scratching her face. The hands wrapping around her hips were too big. He didn’t smell right, didn’t taste right. The grunt he made when Raven pushed him back against the door and attacked his neck was too deep, too low. This wasn’t right.

But she couldn’t stop. And she didn’t want to stop.

Nor could Bellamy. Everything about this was off. This was Raven that had her tongue in his mouth. This was Raven pressed against him, hips canting. Raven.

She didn’t feel right. Gina kept floating to the forefront of his mind, no matter how he tried to shove any thoughts of her into a box to be discarded in the back of his brain. Raven was not Gina. Gina was dead.

By the desperation with which Raven was leaving burning, open-mouthed kisses against his neck, panting as she grinded on him, Bellamy knew that Raven wasn’t going to find what she was looking for, either. He wasn’t her. Anya was dead too.

Both of their people were dead now. At what point did they decide to try to make each other their new people? Maybe once, it could have worked like that. He’d always been half in love with Raven, he could admit that to himself now, now that she was slipping her hand down his pants and his head was falling back against the wall with a sharp thud. But he’d never imagined it being like this.

He never imagined their first kiss tasting like salt and sorrow. He never imagined Raven’s skin to burn like this, to see her strip herself naked and her arms jump as though to cover the angry red bruises mottling her skin, kisses bruised into her by a girl that no longer existed. He never imagined the words he whispered to her to sound like flinches and swallowed apologies bubbling at the lips. He never imagined her gasping sobs between words like “harder” and “don’t stop.” He never imagined them holding their breath as they went still, held their breath like they refused to let it out again, like they didn’t want to breathe again, but it choked free of them regardless. He never imagined them slumping against the cold wall and sliding slowly to the floor, soaked in sweat and regret.

They remained tangled up together as they caught their breath, dark eyes staring into dark eyes, silent pleading, begging, as though the reprieve they’d sought would somehow find them instead. It didn’t.

The moment broke and they couldn’t even look at each other.
“Did that make you feel better?” rasped Bellamy.

“No.” Raven paused, then whispered, “Did it you?”

He closed his eyes. “No.”

* * /✧/ * *

Clarke and Lexa weren’t in the Great Hall. Clutching the briefcase and blowing part of her fringe out of her eyes, Jamie cast her gaze around a moment before spying Titus at the far end, heading out into the entrance hall. He might know where Lexa is, and wherever Lexa could be found, so could Clarke. Jamie hurried after him.

“Titus!”

She caught up with him at the foot of the marble staircase. He turned to face her, expression as impassive as always. “Yes?”

“Do you know where Lexa is?”

His gaze drifted down to take in the black briefcase. “What is in that?”

“It’s for Clarke.” At Titus’s silence and arched brow, Jamie added, “Jake Griffin gave me special orders to deliver this to her.”

Both of Titus’s brows shot up now, surprise flashing across his dark eyes. “And when did he do that?”

“When we arrested him. He told me I’d know when to give them to her. When the International
Statute of Secrecy was violated.”

Titus pursed his lips. “So that’s why the Ministry was so adamant on those policies this year.”

It stung. The irony stung. They’d worked so hard on preventing any breaches, and instead of successfully preventing it, they were rewarded with a dragon bursting its way through the most populous muggle city in England. Of course.

“Do you know where Clarke is, so I can give this to her?” she asked, a touch of impatience creeping into her tone.

“I don’t think that’s a wise decision,” said Titus slowly, looking again at the briefcase, a strange expression in his eyes. Like mingled dread, and longing. Whatever it was, it was ominous, and had Jamie readjusting her grip on it, holding the handle tightly in her sweaty palm. She didn’t understand why the rush of foreboding swept over her. Titus had been the leader of the Order of the Phoenix for thirteen years. He was an odd guy, yeah, a bit weird…a little creepy even, but that wasn’t really surprising considering he was an Unspeakable studying Death in the Department of Mysteries. But he’d never given them a reason not to trust him.

“Titus, I have to give this to Clarke,” said Jamie firmly, “I made a promise to Jake Griffin to deliver this to her when the time was right. I don’t know what it means, but if it helps us take Ontari down, we need to get it to her. Right now.”

She could see the curiosity warring with the disapproval in his eyes. Finally, his gaze flickered up to lock with hers, and he relented. “They’re at the top of the Astronomy Tower. Lexa said she needed some air, so the Griffin girl led her up there.”

“Okay,” breathed Jamie. She started up the stairs, unsurprised when Titus began walking alongside her.

They weaved their way down dilapidated corridors and partly destroyed rooms and made the long journey up the tower stairs in silence. The door was ajar when they neared it, and they caught Clarke’s voice as they finally reached the top.

“…Nia wasn’t the queen. She wasn’t the person the prophecy referred to. It was—“
“Ontari,” said Lexa grimly.

“Yes,” said Titus as he and Jamie walked toward them.

Clarke turned, brow immediately furrowing in indignation. “If you knew that, why didn’t you tell us in the first place? We could have focused on her, instead of—“

“Because I did not know either. My visions are ambiguous, at best. They are often more like riddles. Sometimes, you cannot understand them until they have already come to pass.”

Clarke remembered what Lexa said in the forest. She glanced uncertainly at her, receiving a subtle nod of approval. She aimed a steely gaze at Titus. “Show me the prophecy.”

Titus nodded as they came to a stop before them and lifted his wand to his head. “As you wish.” He drew forth an apparition of himself, and with another twitch of his wand, played back the prophecy. Jamie watched Clarke and Lexa’s expressions; both girls were listening intently, small creases between their brows. Both had red, puffy eyes. Sorrow churned in Jamie’s belly. They’d lost another kid, this one right under their noses. Indra had been inconsolable at first, but she had already snapped back into business with an almost manic focus. Raven Reyes had been…well, it was a nightmare, to put it lightly, but after a while she’d at least finally consented to taking a Sleeping Potion. A couple students were still stumbling around drunk, an attempt to drown their pain. And now Ontari was off blowing up bridges…

“Sorry to interrupt,” said Jamie, stepping forward, “But this might shed some light.” She conjured a small table with a wave of her wand and placed the briefcase on it.

“Memories,” she told Clarke, steeling herself for what was next. “Your father’s. When we arrested him, I was the one that questioned him before the court. When we were alone, he gave me these, told me they wouldn’t make much sense to me, and that I was supposed to give them to you. He also said you would need this.” She worked hard to make sure her hands didn’t tremble as she pulled the Invisibility Cloak out and gently handed it over to Clarke.

“An invisibility cloak?” said Clarke, eyebrows raising.

Jamie nodded, swallowing. It was one of her most precious possessions. “It’s a family heirloom, so please take good care of it.”
Clarke’s brow knit again. “But why do I need—“

“He told me to give them to you at the end of things; he said I’d know when. Well, this is definitely when.” Jamie gestured toward the vial of memories. It was almost a relief, to finally give them to Clarke. “Take ‘em. Hurry, maybe they can help us.”

Jamie Vanished the briefcase and conjured a pensive to replace it on the table.

Clarke and Lexa exchanged a glance before Lexa leaned forward to press a chaste, encouraging kiss to Clarke’s temple; the skin around Titus’s eyes tightened, but he otherwise made no reaction. Clarke poured the memories into the bowl and dived in.

Clarke’s body twitched, fingers gripping hard onto the edges of the table. Lexa shuffled closer in concern, a cautious hand hovering over the small of Clarke’s back. Titus was expressionless. Jamie could do nothing more than watch. She knew what Clarke was seeing; she’d been in those memories herself, again and again, ever since the day she arrested Jake Griffin and he pushed them into her hands and insisted she give them to Clarke the day the International Statute of Secrecy was broken. Jamie had refused at first, demanded answers, but Jake wouldn’t give them. He wouldn’t consent to Veritaserum, and even when the Wizengamot voted to overrule his rights in the face of the risk, the Occlumency he employed was enough to keep the full truth from spilling out of his lips. Jamie had tried again, several more times in fact. After Christmas—when he’d been killed, apparently—Jaha had denied all requests to visit him. She’d sought answers from Abby, but Abby was clueless as well. Of course, now Jamie knew why, knew that Jaha had wiped Abby’s memory of that day and his broken promises…

Clarke took a strangled gasp as she pulled out of the pensive, face pale and blue eyes wide with shock. Lexa leaned in closer still, her free hand coming up to Clarke’s stomach, steadying her.

“It’s—it was my Dad,” said Clarke, “I think he’s just told me where the Flame is.”

Except Jamie had assumed the same thing. She and a handful of other aurors had thoroughly checked the London clock tower multiple times, and had never found traces of powerful magic. Still, she locked gazes with Clarke, hoping she could finally learn something new. “Where is it?”

Clarke licked her lips, shaken. “Well, in the memory he was facing the mirror in his bedroom, but it looked different than usual because it had pictures on it. One of me as a kid, one of just my parents, one of us as a family. There was this—this muggle postcard. He pointed at it. It was Big Ben, in London. I think he wants me to go there. I think—I think he was trying to tell me that’s where he hid the Flame.”
Jamie fought the urge to sigh, disappointment bitter on her tongue. “We’ve already checked it out,” she said. “We didn’t find anything.”

There was a beat of tense silence, until Titus said slowly, “Perhaps Clarke’s presence is required.” All three heads shot toward him. “He may have cast powerful enchantments that only reveal things in Clarke’s presence.”

Hope coursed through Jamie, so powerful it was almost dizzying.

“Okay! So, we go to the clock tower.”

“We need to go now,” said Lexa, “Right away.”

“Let’s go!” urged Clarke.

“Hang on,” said Jamie, returning the memories into the vial and locking up the briefcase before Vanishing the table and pensive, “We can’t just go running off like that. I need to tell Kane, Indra, and the others, and I’ll find a couple more people to come with us. This needs to be a small mission, in and out quickly and quietly. We’ll meet in ten minutes at the castle gates.”

“Alright,” said Clarke, “I’ll go tell Raven, too.”

“I don’t know if she’s ready for something this—“

“Trust me,” interrupted Clarke. “She won’t want to miss this.”

* * * /✧/ * * *

“I can’t do this, Bellamy. I can’t—I don’t want to drink my life away and become someone like—like my mum.”

“Neither do I,” said Bellamy, shame curdling in his belly. “This is stupid. We aren’t quitters.”
Raven shook her head and pushed to her feet. “No, we’re not. We never were and we never have been. Our childhoods sucked but we took care of ourselves and we got through it. We’ll get through this, too.”

“I love you, Rae,” said Bellamy gruffly. He rolled his eyes when Raven grinned, taking the hand she offered to pull him to his feet. “As a friend.”

“I know, I just like giving you shit. You sop.”

“Whatever. Let’s just figure out a way to end this war.”

She nudged an elbow into Bellamy’s side, leaning in to press her forehead to his shoulder, briefly. “And I love you too. You’re one of my best friends. I wouldn’t pick anyone else to fight at my side.”

“You too. I’d always pick you first.”

“Raven!”

They both started and turned when Clarke burst into the room, Lexa at her heels. Relief washed over her face when she spotted her and Bellamy.

“Good, you’re both here. Listen—Bellamy, I need you to round up everyone. Jamie told me Octavia left, but if—“ Clarke paused, swallowing thickly; Bellamy pressed his lips together as his heart beat faster at the reminder that he had no idea where Octavia was and if she was even safe, “When she comes back, get her in on this too. I need you guys to take guard in the castle grounds. If Ontari shows up…do your best to protect everyone.”

Bellamy nodded and returned the brief hug Clarke gave him. She watched him hug Raven too, tightly, before he turned and dutifully trooped out of the dormitory. Clarke turned to Raven.

“Rae, we’re going to London, we think the Flame might be in Big Ben. Do you want to—“
“I’m coming with you,” said Raven shortly. She was already drawing her messy hair up on her head, using the tie on her wrist to put it up.

For a moment, Clarke considered questioning, making sure she was up to the task, but when she met Raven’s hard gaze, she nodded instead. “Okay. Let’s go, then.”

* "・/♫/・* *

“We should prepare for danger,” said Lexa as they walked across the grounds, heading for the distant castle gates. “Ontari is still out there.”

“Yeah, but there’s no way she could she know we’re going to the clock tower,” said Raven dismissively.

“Everywhere we go and everything we do tends to result in all hell breaking loose,” said Clarke wearily. “I’m not keeping my hopes up.”

They waited around for a couple minutes before four people approached them. Clarke exhaled sharply through her nostrils when she spotted them. Jamie, Evie, Luna…and her mother.

“Clarke,” began Abby as they grew near, but Clarke was already shaking her head.

“No. No way. Mum, you’re staying here.”

“I’m coming with you,” said Abby, flaring up at once. “I’m not about to let my daughter go off on a mission to save the world without me.”

“You’re just going to slow us down!”

“I am not! You’re my daughter, Clarke, I am your mother, I’m not letting you go without me. Besides,” added Abby, crossing her arms beneath her chest, “It never hurts to have a Healer around.”
“That’s why I said she can come along,” said Jamie, her smile so weak it was more like a grimace.

Clarke opened her mouth to argue further, but Luna stepped forward with an air of impatience. “We don’t have time for family drama right now. I don’t know if we’re going to the top of the tower or the bottom, but I brought broomsticks.” She tossed them one each and they climbed on, Clarke ignoring her mother’s gaze. “Let’s go.”

They flew into the air and grasped hands, Disapparating together. The crack as they appeared in London was lost amidst the sound of the bell ringing; they all let out cries and swerved in midair, not having expected the deafening gongs. After a few more rings, it went silent, though Clarke suspected she might be temporarily deaf from it.

“So what are we looking for?” called Luna.

“We have no idea,” Jamie said, ignoring Luna’s appalled expression, “Just keep an eye out for anything…suspiciously magical.”

“Because that makes perfect sense,” grumbled Luna, but she followed the rest as they began descending toward the lights of the Palace of Westminster, heading straight for the clock tower on the corner.

“It’ll be easier if we split up actually,” said Jamie. “Normally I’d say it’s safer to stick together, but this is important, and we need to get to it before Ontari. You three start from the top,” she told Raven, Evie, and Luna, “And you three start from the bottom,” she told Clarke, Lexa, and Abby. “I’ll keep watch.”

“Okay. Send a patronus if anything happens,” said Evie.

Jamie nodded, and then Evie, Luna, and Raven soared up toward the top of the tower while Clarke, Lexa, and Abby began lowering down, leaving Jamie to circle around the tower, head swiveling around to scrutinize their surroundings.

Lexa glanced at Clarke as they flew downward. The stained glass clock dial reflected like a white orb in her blue eyes. She gave Lexa a brief reassuring smile that she quickly returned.

They landed lightly at the front doors, propping their broomsticks up against the wall. They entered
the clock tower, narrowed gazes shifting over every inch of space, but there was nothing remotely noticeable. Clarke’s spirits sank slightly. Luna was right; this didn’t make sense. How were they supposed to find the Flame when they didn’t even know what they were looking for?

To top it all off, Abby was walking closely to Clarke and had already tried to get her attention a few times. Clarke was tired of it. She’d already dealt with that at Hogwarts, already had to shoot Abby glares when she felt her curious staring at how closely she and Lexa stood together, already had to find excuses to leave a group when Abby approached it. Now it was just the three of them in this small space, making their way up over three hundred stairs, and Clarke’s patience was thinning.

“Clarke, please. I just want to talk,” said Abby.

“Leave me alone,” retorted Clarke, struggling to keep her anger in check.

“If you’d just listen to me, let me explain—“

“Explain what? That you got Dad killed?” hissed Clarke as spun on her heel to face her mother, ripping her arm from her grasp. “I watched the memories. I heard you talking with Jaha, I saw the look on your face when you pointed your wand at me and wiped my memories.”

Abby pursed her lips, her bright eyes so wide they seemed to swallow her white face whole. “I…I’m not making excuses for myself, baby. I’m so, so sorry. Everything you’ve went through…” She reached a hand up as though to caress Clarke’s face and flinched when Clarke shoved her arm back, disgusted. Abby dropped her arm and tucked her trembling fingers into her palm.

“How could you do it?” demanded Clarke. “How could you arrange Dad’s death like that? You deserve to rot in Azkaban.”

“I had my memories wiped too,” said Abby, so quietly it could barely be heard, but Clarke went still anyway, her heart thumping.

“I—what—“ She didn’t know what to say. Even if her mother’s memories had been wiped, what difference did that make? Clarke had seen her reactions to Jaha and that woman appearing in the Ministry, had heard what they said. Clearly something had been going on.

“I thought he was going to save him,” breathed Abby. “When I went to Jaha and told him about
what your father had been working on, I thought he would save him. He told me he would, he swore to me that he’d do what was necessary to appeal to the Wizengamot while keeping his best friend safe. He’d been—Thelonious had been acting different lately, he seemed so far away, but I thought it was just stress, with the Shadow-Eaters growing in numbers and reported sightings of werewolves, I didn’t—I never imagined he was being controlled.”

One of Clarke’s brows winged up; she crossed her arms beneath her chest, and said bitterly, “And you know why he’s being controlled? Who’s controlling him?”

Abby shook her head. “That—that woman…that was only the second time I’d ever seen her. I had once before, when I went to Thelonious’s office and he promised me he’d helped. He introduced her to me, said her name was Alie and she’d help us smuggle Jake out of prison. He said a year from his arrest, Jake would have a trial, but with all the evidence against him…that he’d lose and be sentenced to life in Azkaban. He said they would make it appear like Jake had died, temporarily slow his heart so much the guards would assume him dead, and then help me smuggle him out.”

When Clarke was silent, Abby hastily continued, “I was desperate. I admit, I didn’t…I didn’t think things through as well as I should have. I just trusted him. It was a mistake.” She took a deep breath. “I was exchanging letters with your father, thanks to Jaha. Jake told me I absolutely had to visit him on Christmas, and to bring you. He said it was important. So we went there, and…you know the rest. At first, I thought it was just the original plan happening sooner. I didn’t realize—I didn’t realize he was actually dead,” she choked out. “I wiped your memories because that way if we were caught, you were innocent. And then, that woman turned on me and they wiped my memories.”

Clarke narrowed her eyes. “Why can you remember all of this, then?”

“The Ice Queen,” said Abby miserably. “She intercepted me when I left St. Mungo’s to head home after a shift. She tortured me and broke the memory charms, trying to find any information I knew. I wasn’t much good to her aside from that, I was certain she was going to kill me, but she kept me in case she could use me against you.”

And she had, thought Clarke, sinking her teeth into her bottom lip to stop it from quivering.

“I’m so sorry,” whispered Abby, staring at Clarke with tears in her eyes, “I can’t imagine how horrible it must be, to have those memories. To watch your father die, and then your mother turn her wand on you. I’m so sorry, Clarke. I love you.”

Clarke clenched her jaw and bit the inside of her cheek, willing the tears brimming in her eyes to go away. “I’m…I need time. Let’s just look for the Flame. Let’s start from the bottom again.”
They headed back down the stairs.

*¨・/✧・¨*

“Octavia…”

“Shh.”

“But…Octavia…”

“Shh!”

“We—“

“Shut the fuck up!”

Octavia halted in her tracks, chest rising and falling heavily, and closed her eyes for a brief moment before turning to face Monty. She worked to keep the guilt off her face, maintaining a neutral, calm expression instead as she asked in a voice that was considerably quieter, “What, Monty?”

“Bellamy sent a Patronus message,” he said, “They’re preparing for a final stand at the castle. We should be there, to fight, to help protect everyone.”

“And who’s here for Lincoln?” she snapped.

“We’ve been looking for hours,” said Monroe quietly. “We have no idea where he is…if he’s even alive.”

Octavia rounded on them, clutching her shotgun more tightly. “And? Does that mean we’re supposed to just give up on him?”

“The same way you gave up on Jasper?” retorted Monty, an unfamiliar spark of anger and resentment in his eyes.

Octavia resolutely shoved down the panic and the overwhelming devastation that tried to claw its way out of her chest. It wasn’t her fault Jasper had decided to kill himself after he ran out of firewhisky.

(She wondered how many times she could tell herself that before she believed it).

It wasn’t her fault he had recklessly lunged forward to fight a werewolf when he had no magic and no muggle weapon. He’d been torn to shreds before Octavia could even swing her gun around at it, and even then, she wouldn’t shoot it. Because what if it was Lincoln?

(It wasn’t. Miller and Monroe had riddled it with bullet-holes and when it returned to its human form, it was some other man. Octavia hated that the tears she shed were as much for Lincoln as they were for Jasper).

“We need to keep moving,” she said coolly. She turned around and marched on, ignoring the protests and mutters of Monty, Miller, Harper, and Monroe behind her.
Harper was the only one left with magic. None of the rest of them had any magic left, but they did have guns. They’d broken into a muggle police station and flew off on broomsticks with them. They’d went to this forest, where they’d heard rumors long ago held a tunnel that led underground, where bloodthirsty werewolves could be found, the witches and wizards who had long given up on the civilized society that shunned them.

She just wanted to find Lincoln. That was all she wanted to do, but so far, all they’d managed to find was a handful of werewolves, none of which were him, and one woman who was…out of her mind to say the least, torn somewhere between a wolf and a human. A reaper.

“We don’t know if we can save Lincoln, but we can save others,” said Harper in a low voice.

“With what?” cried Octavia, spinning around to face them. “Only one of us has any magic, the rest of us don’t! Guns are fine against werewolves, but you can’t shoot a Shadow-Eater! We can’t duel anyone!”

“It’s better than wandering around a forest looking for a miracle!” exploded Miller. “We’re risking our necks like this and we don’t even know if Lincoln is alive!” At the stricken silence that followed, Miller calmed down, closing his eyes and taking deep breaths. “Look, I don’t mean to knock you down about this, but you know if Lincoln were here he’d be pissed. He wouldn’t want you out here in a dangerous place trying to find him. He’d want you back at Hogwarts, standing with your family.”

Octavia swallowed. “Lincoln is my family.” Get knocked down, get back up.

She did what she had to to survive. She always had. Whether that meant lying to her big brother about her day that way he wouldn’t come home from Hogwarts, too scared to leave her alone, and making sure the rest of her days at the orphanage went better by shoving the teenager who tried to touch her down the stairs (resulting in a broken arm and a broken leg and a trip to the hospital and a promise to never come near her again), or stabbing Charles Pike when he tried to grab her to stop her from saving her brother and her friends, Octavia did what she had to do. She was a fighter. She always had been.

And she would never stop fighting to save Lincoln.

But Miller was right, too. He would be furious at her if he knew she’d deserted their people, even if Octavia was stubborn to insist that he was her people. Monty, Miller, Harper, and Zoe were her people. Raven, Clarke, Lexa, and Indra were her people. Bellamy, even if he did pick a fine time to actually think with his head for once, the asshole.

“Okay,” she began, sucking in a breath, exhaling it in a short huff. “We’ll head back. But the minute things are sorted, we come back here and keep looking. Deal?”

The others nodded, appearing relieved. “Deal.”

They all put a hand on Miller’s arm and were lost to the compressing darkness. When they appeared at the castle gates, the first thing Octavia saw was Bellamy loping toward them, his long stride picking up speed when he recognized her.

“O!”

She expected chiding, scolding, harsh words. Instead Bellamy seized her shoulders and yanked her into a tight hug. She stiffened in surprise for a minute before relaxing into the embrace, clutching at his robes.
“I was so worried about you.” He pulled back with a glare and ah, there was her brother. “Don’t you ever do that to me again,” he said fiercely. His expression softened. “Did you find Lincoln?”

“No,” she said in a clipped tone.

Bellamy nodded slowly. “There’s still a chance, then.”

“A chance for what?”

“To find him, and help him.”

Octavia paused, blinking.

“Come on,” he said, putting an arm around her shoulders and steering her toward the people congregating at the front of the castle, “I’ll explain what you missed.”

* * * /\ / *

This was useless.

Clarke lowered the wand she’d currently been waving over the staircase, using her free hand to rub her brow as though to ward off a headache. They’d scoured every inch of the lower levels of the clock tower, using every spell imaginable in an attempt to reveal anything magical, but so far, nothing.

“This is a waste of time,” she groaned. Why would her father send her here for no reason? Why would he send her on a wild goose chase?

She wrung her hands as she paced, brow drawn together. Lexa glanced at her before returning her attention to tapping her wand on various parts of the wall, and Abby turned to gaze sympathetically at her.

Clarke shook her head, holding her breath for a moment as she ran her mind through all the possibilities. She could feel Abby’s eyes on her the whole time, which caused her to turn her back to her, posture rigid and jaw clenched. But, wait a moment…

“Mum,” she began slowly, turning to face her. “Do you remember anything about the Flame? Do you know what it is?”

Abby’s brows shot to her hairline. “You don’t?”
Clarke shook her head, frowning. “All I know is it’s something Dad was working on, some kind of weapon.”

Abby blew out a breath. “It’s…well, my theories were never actually confirmed, since your father refused to talk about it even when I confronted him, but considering the fact that Jaha and the aurors seemed certain, I would wager my guess is spot on.”

“What is it?”

“Look at where we’re standing, Clarke,” said Abby, gesturing at the tower around them. “Think of the chamber he worked in, the areas he researched.”

Oh. Oh.

Clarke stared at her mother as though she’d been thunder-struck. She wondered why she didn’t realize it before.

“It’s a Time-Turner,” she breathed, the realization crashing into her like waves. Lexa took a sharp intake of breath beside her. “He was making a Time-Turner, wasn’t he?”

When Abby nodded, Lexa took an eager step forward, face lit up and more determined than ever, green fire in her eyes. “Do you realize what this means?” she said urgently, looking at Clarke. “Anya died less than twenty-four hours ago. We can save her!”

Save Anya…and more. Clarke couldn’t draw her eyes away from her mother’s, understanding channeling through their gazes. All the Time-Turners had been destroyed, so many years ago, and her father wouldn’t have been sentenced to Azkaban for simply researching them. He had to have been attempting to create one, and it must have gone successfully. The Ice Queen had wanted it because it ensured she’d never make a mistake in her takeover, plus she wouldn’t want it in the hands of those who could use it to take her down. If he had made a Time-Turner…it must have been a special one.

Her chest burned with pain and the triumph of finally knowing something as she imagined her father in the Department of Mysteries, hunched over his desk, prodding gears and hourglasses with the tip of his wand, the solar system floating above his head, and—
And—

Her eyes widened. She couldn’t believe she’d forgotten.

The memory Jamie had given to her, how her father had placed those particular pictures there. The one of them as a family—growth. Representative of the years that had gone by. The one of Clarke as a child, covered in red and orange and yellow paint from her attempt to paint fire. Flame. How he covered his fingers in those same colors before tapping them on the still photograph of the clock tower. The Flame was here.

Not here, but there. Right under their noses. A place Clarke had already visited once and had been so close, but clueless—

“Fuck,” she stammered, whipping around to face Lexa, who was waving her wand in front of a window in the hopes it would reveal some magic; Lexa turned to face her at once. Abby was already down the stairs, but stopped and twisted her head round to look at them. “Lexa, I think…I think I have to go to the Ministry. Do you remember that old grandfather clock in the room? I think—I think that’s where the Flame could be.”

Comprehension settled into Lexa’s gaze. “It was a replica of this clock tower.”

Clarke nodded, dizzy with the knowledge of what this meant. “Yeah, I completely forgot about it.” She swallowed. “I’m not stupid. I could try to do this on my own, but I think we both know how it’s going to go. I wouldn’t want anyone else by my side. Will you come with me?”

Lexa stared at her for a moment, arms crossed. Her lips quirked. “We escaped it once, stands to reason we’ll be successful breaking into it as well.”

Clarke gave her a small smile, pulling her into a hug. “We better hurry, then.”

“Get the others,” instructed Abby, looking up at Lexa. “We’ll leave right away.”

Lexa nodded before turning and dashing up the stairs, leaving Clarke and Abby in silence.
“You did it,” whispered Abby. “You figured it out. I’m so—I’m so proud of you.”

“How did anyone else not figure it out?”

“They searched your father’s office from top to bottom after they arrested him. But it might take your presence to reveal anything.”

“So, wait. Who all knows the Flame is a Time- Turner? The three of us…the Ice Queen and Ontari, Jaha, Jamie, Titus…”

“As far as I know, that’s it,” said Abby. “I—“

Her words were cut off as another deafening gong rang through the air, followed by the entire building violently quaking. Clarke and Abby both staggered, clutching onto the railing to remain on their feet. They scarcely had the time to look around before something silvery flew through the wall; it was a glowing white hawk. It opened its beak, and Jamie Potter’s panic-stricken voice filled the room.

“She’s here. Run.”

Clarke met her mother’s wide eyes; the patronus swept upward, but before they could so much as move, the far wall burst apart in an explosion that had Clarke falling to the ground, fire and rubble flying toward them.

“Protego!” she and Abby shouted at the same time.

The debris rebounded off their combined shields, dust clouding their air and just beginning to clear when someone spoke.

“I’ve been waiting for this reunion,” announced a positively gleeful voice as a short figure strode into the building, black cloak sweeping around her. She stopped short when she saw the way Clarke and Abby were both kneeling on the ground, free hands grasping at one another while their others held their wands aloft. Ontari laughed. “Oh, and it couldn’t be any better. Cowering with Mummy, Griffin?”
Clarke didn’t answer. Something was different about Ontari; a strange darkness seemed to be emanating from her, a terrible power and magic that had Clarke’s hair on end. She glanced upwards where Lexa had disappeared, where smoke and debris floated through the air, and then at the door where their broomsticks were still propped up. Ontari followed her gaze and smirked before flicking her wand that way.

She didn’t even have to say the spell; the broomsticks and the door and that entire wall exploded with the force of a small bomb, sending Clarke and Abby spinning across the floor to slam hard into the bottom of the stairs.

There was another gong, but this one sounded off, and the distant shouts that followed confirmed that. Apparently there were others here, Death Eaters or Shadow Eaters most likely, attacking from the top.

The only threat down here so far was Ontari, but Clarke could see now that it was a nightmare. Ontari was more powerful, and that could only have happened if…

Oh, shit, oh, fuck—

“I decided to take up the mantle after dear Nia’s timely death,” said Ontari lightly, though the smug look she shot Clarke was anything but. “If you thought a squib was powerful after absorbing magic, it’s nothing compared to a pureblood taking on more magic.” She shrugged. “Just further proof that purebloods are superior.”

Clarke and Abby struggled to their feet, watched on by an amused Ontari. Clarke glanced up again, wondering where the others were—if they were okay.

“What’s your angle?” she shot at Ontari, hoping desperately if she could just distract her, keep her talking before she tried to kill them, maybe it would give the others time to catch up.

“Right now? Killing you, and then going to the Ministry to find the Flame with the information you so kindly gave earlier.” Clarke’s heart sank, terror spiking through her. Oh no, oh no.

“I meant as a whole,” bit Clarke, acting unaffected by Ontari’s words. “Are you planning of purging the world of muggles, or what?”
“Of course not,” said Ontari, raising her brows as though she was nothing but earnest; it was ruined by the cruel twist of her lips. “I’m not going to waste lives like that. Even if they’re useless pieces of rubbish, they’ll make perfectly capable slaves when wizardkind is in their rightful place, out in the open.”

“Of course the pureblood wants to enslave muggles,” snapped Clarke, “You’re so fucking predictable, you know that?”

Ontari tilted her head, the mirth fading from her dark eyes just enough to show the cold hatred. “Yeah? How’s this, then?” Before either of them could react, she pointed her wand at Abby and said, “Imperio!”

Clarke stumbled back from her. Abby went stiff-backed and straight as a board, eyes glazing over slightly. Ontari twirled her wand, smirking, and Abby turned to face Clarke, who looked on in horror. “How does it feel, Griffin?” called Ontari, as she made Abby take a step forward, drawing her wand; Clarke took a step back. “How does it feel, knowing your own mother is about to kill you?”

Clarke didn’t answer, couldn’t. Her mouth was dry. There were images flashing through her head of when she used Dante in an attempt to stave off Cage, and Cage had little choice but to kill his own father. And now here Clarke was, facing down her mother the same way. She couldn’t kill her. She couldn’t do it.

“Kill her, go on.”

But Abby wasn’t lifting her wand; her body was oddly jerking, twitching, her expression contorting into pained concentration. Clarke’s heart leapt. Her mother was fighting it off.

Behind her, Ontari was scowling. “I said do it!”

“N—n—no—“ Abby’s lips were trembling, and there was fire in her hazel eyes. Ontari’s eyes narrowed as she pointed her wand at Abby, clearly concentrating hard, pushing the spell…

Ontari gave a huff of breath. “Fine. Kill yourself, and then I’ll just kill her myself,” she said, but then Abby broke out of the trance entirely, and gasped in a breath before turning on her heel, planting herself between Clarke and Ontari, and pointing her wand at the latter.
“Not my daughter, you bitch.”

Clarke’s breathing quickened and Ontari’s eyes actually went wide—but before anyone could react, there was a deafening noise, and they looked up to see huge mechanisms, gears and debris raining down from above. Clarke, Abby, and Ontari all lunged out of the way as wreckage crashed to the floor between them, shaking the entire place and throwing them all to the floor.

Clarke found Abby’s arm and gripped it hard, helping her to her feet; they were both coughing in the thick dust the wreckage had clouded the air with. Another hand seized Clarke by the forearm and she spun around, lifting her wand to aim it at Ontari—but it was Lexa.

“Come on,” she said, pulling them through one of the holes in the wall into an entryway and then out another door. They took off down the street.

“How did you do that?” said Abby incredulously.

“It was Raven,” said Lexa, tugging them around another corner that led into a narrow alleyway.

“Of course it was,” breathed Clarke with a slight smile; Lexa glanced over at her with her own small smile.

They sprinted down the alley.

“Where are we going?”

“Hey!” They looked up as they ran to see Raven flying above with Luna and Evie, who had a half-conscious Jamie slumped against her on the back of her broom. Clarke, Abby, and Lexa skidded to a halt as the others pulled up alongside them.

“Abby,” said Evie breathlessly, face pale and sweaty, “My sister—can you—“

“What happened to her?” demanded Abby.
“Not sure,” grunted Luna as she helped Evie turn Jamie’s body around so Abby could check her over. “We found her like this.”

“She needs treated,” murmured Abby, touching her wand tip to Jamie’s temple before sliding it over her forehead.

“Take her to back to the castle, Mum,” said Clarke.

Abby turned to face her, eyes flashing. “I’m not leaving you again!”

“You have to—“

“Clarke—“

“I don’t have time to argue with you!” Clarke cut across her; Abby raised her brows, mouth falling open slightly. “You are not in charge here. You have to listen to me. Go back to the castle.”

For a moment, she thought her mother was going to refuse again; she was every bit as stubborn as Clarke was, after all. But then she shut her mouth with a snap, and nodded, blinking back tears as she pulled Clarke into a tight hug. Clarke returned it, momentarily closing her eyes and clinging onto her mother’s embrace. They pulled back and Abby took in a breath.

“Alright. Help me pull her onto a broom,” Abby told Luna and Evie as she grabbed the extra broom from Raven and clambered onto it. After they secured Jamie onto the front of it, where Abby could hold onto her, Abby pushed off the ground. “Be safe.” Abby’s gaze flickered to Lexa. “Don’t let anything happen to my daughter.”

“I won’t,” promised Lexa.

As Abby soared off and the crack of her Disapparation echoed through the night even over the distant sounds of the destruction of the crumbling clock tower, Evie quickly hopped off her own broom to climb behind Luna on hers, pushing her broom toward Clarke and Lexa, who swung their legs over the offered broom, and then the five of them soared high into the sky.
“We’re not heading back to the castle then?” shouted Raven to be heard above the wind rushing their ears as they flew up into the sky.

“No, we don’t have time! We need to get to the Ministry!” Clarke squeezed Lexa’s waist and she seemed to know; she drifted them close to Raven, Luna, and Evie, who all looked at Lexa’s outstretched hand and understood the intention. They reached out, grasping one another, and then squeezed into darkness.

When the darkness lifted, Clarke opened her eyes to see a spider web of glittery lights hurtling toward them as they sailed down into yet another area of London. They ignored the shouts of various muggles as they spotted them, rocketing forward toward the telephone booth Clarke knew held the Visitor’s Entrance to the Ministry…

They hopped off their broomsticks the moment they touched down. Clarke had been to the Ministry itself countless times, often tagging along with Wells when they visited Jaha at work, usually meeting her father for lunch when he came up from the Department of Mysteries, but she had used the visitor’s entrance only twice before: one when she was a child, and her father brought her here to visit the Ministry lobby for fun, calling it a “bring your kid to work day,” and again when she was in her sixth year, and she and her mother arrived for the official sentencing of her father to Azkaban.

She led them to the heavily vandalized telephone box. Raven at least knew of this since Clarke had told her, and she assumed Luna and Evie had obviously been through this way before. Lexa was the only person who hadn’t, but if she found it bizarre, she didn’t show it. They all crowded into the box as best they could, Raven’s elbow digging into Clarke’s back and Clarke squashed between Lexa and Luna, but she managed to reach across to the dial and punch in the numbers.

“Welcome to the Ministry of Magic. Please state your name and business.”

“Clarke Griffin, Lexa Woods, Raven Reyes, Luna Rivers, and Evie Potter,” said Clarke, voice slightly muffled against Lexa’s shoulder she was pressed up against.

“Please state your business.”

“We’re here to stop the world from turning into a giant shitfest,” said Raven loudly, “Hurry up and let us in!”
Five badges clunked down the metal chute; Clarke spied the badge on the top of the pile.

CLARKE GRIFFIN
THE FESTIVAL OF SHIT

Clarke rolled her eyes.

“Visitor to the Ministry, you are required to submit to a search and present your wand for registration at the security desk, which is located at the far end of the Atrium.”

“HURRY UP,” five voices shouted back.

The floor beneath them quaked as the box began lowering them into the ground. As darkness enveloped them, Clarke felt a hand brush against hers before a warm palm closed around her fingers. She squeezed Lexa’s hand back, pressing her lips to her shoulder, the curve of her neck, and felt warmth explode in her belly at the sound of Lexa’s sharp intake of breath.

“Whatever the fuck you two are doing, I think it’s safe to say now is not the time,” whispered Raven.

Clarke swallowed, grateful for the darkness hiding her blush. She cleared her throat and began filling the others in on what she’d discovered about the Flame thus far, her hope invigorated by their cries of enthusiasm; when Raven seized her arm and squeezed and said, “We can fix everything, we can save Anya!” Clarke nodded, her resolve further solidified. They could do this. They could do this.

The telephone box came to a stop, revealing the silent, still Atrium, all polished floors and golden symbols drifting across the high ceiling. It looked as though all the damage from the battle after the third task had been repaired.

“The Ministry of Magic wishes you a pleasant evening,” came the smooth voice of the lift as the door slid open.
Clarke and the others sprang out of it, immediately setting off in a sprint across the floors toward the distant lift. The only sounds were the slaps of their footsteps on the floor and the quiet rush of water from the golden trio fountain.

The golden grilles of the lift were in sight when there was a sound like a bang; they all turned around to see the flash of green flame in one of the many fireplaces, and then bodies began to tumble out of it.

“Bell!” said Raven, “What are you doing here?”

“Abby just filled us in!” he said, reaching a hand out to help Harper clamber out of the fireplace, Monroe right behind. “Sydney split when Ontari attacked London, so the Floo network restrictions were lifted. We headed here straight away!”

“Why are you here?” began Clarke, panic fluttering in her chest; she looked down when Lexa’s hand slipped into hers.

“They’re what’s standing between Ontari and us,” she said quietly, inclining her head toward them.

Countless people stumbled out of the fireplace and into the atrium, filling it with chatter and a buzz of determination. Several of them were holding muggle guns, realized Clarke, her eyes widening. Murphy made eye contact with Clarke and nodded. They knew the risks and they were here anyway. Clarke pressed her lips together, holding herself just a little bit higher. They could do this. When Ontari arrived with her forces—and Clarke was certain she would, any time now—they would fight like hell, and possibly give them enough time to find the Flame.

“Okay. Ontari knows we’re here, she’s on her way. Keep her distracted!”

A figure broke away from the growing throng and ran toward them. “Where are you going?” asked Octavia; Clarke and Raven’s gasps were lost as they buffeted her with hugs, but there was no time to ask what happened and who missed what.

“The Flame is here somewhere,” said Clarke quickly, pulling back. Octavia was holding a gun as well. “Did you find Lincoln?”

“No,” she said, and despite the way she lifted her chin, her bottom lip trembled.
“The Flame is a Time-Turner,” said Lexa; Octavia’s head shot up. “It may be a special one. There’s a possibility…”

“We might be able to save him!” she crowed, face lit up. “Well, what are we waiting for?”

The hum of chatter halted when there was a distant bang. Everyone looked across to the far wall, where Gideon Potter and David Miller and a few of the others were strengthening the anti-Apparation charms. It didn’t matter, though; Ontari hadn’t even given them a moment to breathe before she was at their doorstep.

There were a hundred cracks striking the air, a deafening crash as walls and fireplaces were smashed apart, and cries of fear as smoke filled the air, blinding them.

As the smoke cleared, it revealed countless hulking silhouettes…and one slight one at the forefront. Ontari stepped forward, backed by what was clearly the full force of the remainder of Nia’s army. Death Eaters, Shadow-Eaters, werewolves, and people that looked absolutely mad, covered in sweat and blood, teeth sharp and reddened eyes…Reapers.

“Run!” Bellamy bellowed at them, a split second before chaos erupted.

They ducked the spells and whizzing overhead and sprinted onto the lift, mashing the number nine button. As the grilles began to close, Octavia gasped and lunged forward out of them; Clarke and Raven cried her name, but the golden grilles shut, and then they saw—Octavia was running toward one of the attackers, a tall, muscular boy with a shaved head and wild, manic eyes. Lincoln was alive after all…and a reaper.

They screamed her name, but they had only one last glimpse of the madness of the atrium before the darkness swallowed them as the lift set off.

“Fuck,” gasped Raven. “She—she has no magic, and she’s not going to shoot him! What…”

“We have to find the Flame,” said Lexa firmly. “If we find the Flame, we can go back in time and fix all of this.”
Raven and Clarke responded with jerky nods.

“Time and Space chamber,” said Clarke, shivering slightly. Lexa rubbed her arm bracingly. “That’s—that’s where we need to go.”

They heard a distant roar. Ontari had clearly decided to use her animagus form to decimate.

“She’s not pulling any stops out tonight,” said Evie nervously.

“She knows this is the last battle,” said Luna grimly. “This is her last chance to get the Flame before we do.”

“And if she’s going down, she plans to take as many of us with her as she can,” said Lexa.

They lapsed into a grim silence.

The lift shuddered to a stop and they hurried off down the waxed floors of the Department of Mysteries.

Lexa stuck close to Clarke as they ran, willing her wild heart to slow down. She was fully aware of how close to the end they were. This was it, this was the final battle, and as she’d said before, Ontari would do her best to kill as many people as she could. If they could get to the Flame, they could turn all of this around. Lexa’s spirits lifted at the idea of seeing Anya again, of saving her and Lincoln and anyone and everyone else. They could do this. She had faith. They would do this or die trying.

Death was not the end. Lexa always knew that. But this—this was more than that. This was a new chance. A new beginning.

Of course, she also knew that their journey to the chamber would not go as smoothly as they hoped. They had almost made it down the length of the hallway when the wall behind them went crashing down, the lift utterly destroyed as a huge, scaly creature surged through the stone. Ontari wasn’t just bursting through that wall. She was deliberately destroying it, heaving a huge shoulder into the wall, wings folded at her back as she bounded forward like a rampaging bull in a china shop. Lexa, Clarke, Raven, Luna, and Evie all scrambled back, fleeing the wreckage as the dragon lunged forward, turning into her human form in the split second it took for Lexa to shove Clarke forward into the circular doors and turn around to face Ontari with Raven, Luna, and Evie at her sides.
Others were dropping down from the hole Ontari had created; Death Eaters, werewolves, and reapers alike.

“Run all you want,” said Ontari, breathless with the thrill of the hunt. Her grin broadened as she lifted her wand, taking her stance as the others did the same. “Running just makes it more fun.”

*・/⊹.substr.・*

Despite the fact that they were being overrun by an army and Ontari was hot on their heels with intent to murder them and take over the free world, Clarke couldn’t help but feel a peculiar sense of tranquility as she stood beneath the galaxies floating overhead. The room was quiet, muffling the racket of the outside commotions. Clarke’s footsteps echoed as she crossed the room, coming to stand before the large grandfather clock.

Just as there was last time, staring upon the clock made her feel a strange swelling in her heart. There was something oddly beautiful and otherworldly about the clock tower replica, even though it was old and worn-down. The minute hand was ticking away; it was just after three in the morning. Clarke reached out, trailing her fingertips along the length of the dusty face, nails catching on the flaked paint. What now? How did she find the Flame?

Or was this the Flame itself? She stared doubtfully at it, rapping her knuckles and listening to the reverberations of its hollow insides. Was she supposed to climb into it or something? She hadn’t expected to use it so soon, and she certainly wanted to make sure Lexa was with her when she did.

Her nails sank into the grooves and her heart leapt; it did open up, there were small hinges there. But when she tugged at it, it didn’t budge. She tried every method, even cast spells to unlock it, but it remained stubbornly closed. She frowned at it, wand still. She didn’t want to blast the thing apart lest she accidentally destroy it…

She wrapped her arms around herself, wetting her lips as she stared at the thing. She didn’t have the time to stand here wondering, every rapid beat of her heart reminded her of that. A super-powered Ontari was out there, along with a horde of other enemies, and the others could only hold them off for so long. She had to figure out a way to do this. She trailed her hands along the tower again, searching for a button perhaps, some kind of lever, and then chastised herself; of course there wasn’t going to be a simple lever to pull to solve this, her father wasn’t lazy or unintelligent.

She stiffened when her fingers caught the edges of sharper scratches, an outline—she stepped around the corner of the mechanism and bent down to observe the lines, remembering them from last time.
What did it mean, though?

She stood there for a long moment, trying to put two and two together, thinking of all the clues he had given her…she thought of when he had been arrested, how he’d ran into her room and spoke so quickly to her…

“At the end of everything, go to the place it started. Find mine. At the close, find me. And when there’s nothing left—seek higher things.”

Her heart stopped.

Last time, she’d thought she could make out an A and the number 5. But it wasn’t the number 5—it was an S. And she’d seen that handwriting before.

She scrambled to unclasp her father’s watch from around her wrist, turning it over to look at the words scratched into the bottom of it. *Ascende Superius.*

*Ascende Superius. Seek Higher Things.* It was a spell! A spell to reveal—

Heart wildly thumping in her chest, Clarke hastily put her watch back on before pointing her wand at the clock tower and saying firmly, “*Ascende Superius!*”

The clock dial facing Clarke glowed so brightly she had to squint and shield her eyes. When a voice spoke, it was so familiar it pulled a gasp from Clarke’s throat.

“*State your business.*”

She swallowed thickly at the lump in her throat formed from unexpectedly hearing her father’s voice. State your business.

“Uhhh. I come to…seek higher things?”

The dial glowed brightly yet before fading, muted as a strange ticking and whirring noise filled the
air. Then there was a click, and the hatch sprung as the front of the clock propped open. Hands trembling, Clarke reached out to pull it open, half expecting a seat, some type of machinery like the types in the old muggle space movies her father had enjoyed watching, but instead there was a small shelf and a pensive perched in the center of it, a silver substance swirling around in the center of it...

Clarke didn’t hesitate. She bent over the memories, and lowered her face into them.

Her feet touched ground, and she was in the same place she had been in the last memory. Her father was sitting in a stool before his bedroom mirror, this time devoid of any pictures. Clarke trembled as she looked up and met eyes the exact same shade as her own in the mirror, and it took her a second to realize her father couldn’t actually see her—but that he had set this up as though he could.

“He said in a soft voice, causing her to startle. Her eyes were already stinging. “Sweetheart.”

His smile was the last straw; Clarke shakily lowered herself onto edge of the bed behind her father, at the perfect angle for him to address her in the mirror. “If you’re here, that means you’ve made it. You made it through the tournament, through losing loved ones, through being hunted. I am so proud of you.”

She wished, more than anything, that this was real. That she could reach out, touch him, hold him. That he was alive right now.

“There’s still things left for you to do, but first, I want to explain everything.” He took in a deep breath. “Well, let’s see. Right now, in my time…I’m about two hours away from being arrested.” He smiled sadly, as though he could see the tears rolling down Clarke’s cheeks. ‘I’m sure you’re angry. I don’t blame you. But just know that this is out of my hands. The Flame isn’t easy to work. There are certain things I can’t know until it’s too late, and there are certain things I can’t change without risking ruining it all. My fate is one of them. It has to be this way.” He paused again, swallowed and then inhaled deeply, closing his eyes for a brief moment. When he opened them, his expression was easy again. “I talked to you an hour ago, but with all the traveling I’ve done, it feels like forever. You were on your way out, heading next door to meet Wells to go over your supply list for the school year. I gave you a hug and a kiss. Told you I loved you. I did the same with your mother before she left for work. I finished my preparations, hid the Flame. I’m making this for you now, and in two hours, the aurors will arrive at our house…and you know how that story goes.”

Jake Griffin leaned forward, staring into his reflection in the mirror. Clarke stared back just as intently, hot tears still flooding her cold face. “Clarke, if you’re seeing this, that means everything’s gone right.” He paused, and his sober, serious demeanor momentarily slipped away as he spared a soft chuckle. “Well, maybe not right. I’m sure there’s been quite a mess, and like usual, you’re the one cleaning it up. I’m sorry for all the pain you’ve suffered, kiddo. I’m sorry we have to go through any of this at all, actually, but, well. Sometimes trouble is necessary.”
Clarke watched, transfixed, as her father shifted on the stool, sat up straighter, and took a deep
breath. “I guess I should start from the top.”

“You know that I was always into space since my childhood. My father studied it, and even when I
discovered I was a wizard, the fascination never really left me. I didn’t know I wanted to study Time
too until I was about to graduate, though. There was only about two months left before the
N.E.W.T.S and I was shitting myself.” Clarke couldn’t help but to smile sadly at her father’s choice
of word. He grinned too, as though anticipating Clarke’s reaction. “Your mother was sending me
owls every other day asking how my studying was getting on, but truth be told, I wasn’t doing much
studying to begin with. I found myself taking long walks across the grounds, and when I felt like I’d
crossed every inch, I wanted somewhere else to go. It was stupid, pretty reckless, but...” He chuckled
again. “You know me.”

He lifted his wand, and Clarke realized with a jolt he had a pensive in front of him. With a flourish of
his wand, the memories in it flew toward the mirror, where Clarke’s reflection sat frozen. She
flinched as they hit her face, and though they merely seemed to pass through her, suddenly she was
standing in the Hogwarts grounds beneath a starry sky, uncertain and unsteady. This was too strange.
She was in a memory inside a memory.

She spotted the younger version of her father, face wrinkle free and clean-shaven, his blonde hair
thicker and messier, his shoulders not quite as broad. As she watched him loping toward the forest,
his father’s voice still sounded, narrating the events.

“I started exploring the Forbidden Forest. At first, I never went far. Got really spooked once when an
Acromantula ventured out to see what I was. I learned the trails and which ones to stick to. I avoided
the creatures that didn’t want me around, and the creatures that didn’t mind me kept themselves to
themselves.” As he spoke, Clarke followed his younger version into the forest, tense and on edge in
spite of the fact that this was a memory and she couldn’t be harmed in it. “After a couple weeks, I
was going deeper into the forest, but still sticking to the paths. Then, one random Wednesday night, I
made a, uh...pretty interesting discovery.”

Jake’s younger self was wandering fairly deep in the forest. There was a rustling off to the rights
omewhere behind Clarke; she spun around, heart thumping, and stilled as she spotted a thestral. It
was inching near, eyes curious on Jake, who didn’t seem to be able to spot it. Her father’s
disembodied voice relayed the events to her even as she watched it happen, as she watched her father
bump straight into the creature’s rump and it sent him tumbling off the path.

A moment later, Jake, covered in dirt and leaves, was sitting up wincing with a pebble stuck in his
palm. Only—Clarke stepped forward, narrowing her eyes, as the younger Jake came to the same
realization. He dug the rock out of the heel of his hand and frowned at it; it was a diamond-shaped
black stone.
“I knew it was special, but it took a while for me to realize what it was, and even longer to realize that all the stories—you remember the Tale of the Three Brothers that I used to read to you when you were a kid? They were true. Or, a part of it at least. This was it. The resurrection stone.”

Just as he lifted the stone up closer to his face to see it better, Clarke’s surroundings swirled until she was standing in the Department of Mysteries and there were planets and stars blinking above in the enchanted space. Jake was older here, the laugh lines in his face more deeply set and his hair a lighter shade. Clarke watched as he turned the same stone (Clarke knew because it had the same crack running down the center of it) in his palm three times, and her eyes widened as a figure appeared. At first Clarke thought it was a ghost, but upon closer inspection, it seemed too solid to be one. An old man…her grandfather, whom she’d only ever known through stationary muggle photographs.

“I never would have guessed it’d be a real thing, but here it was. Once I figured out how to work it through some trial and error, the first thing I did was visit my dad. Just wanted to say goodbye, but it ended up getting a little…well, unhealthy. I missed him. After a while, I could tell it was becoming too much—he told me every time I brought him back, it hurt just a little more. I realized I needed to stop, so…I did. I locked it up in the Department of Mysteries, and that had been the last of it. Wasn’t until a few years later, when I met Titus, that I decided to use it again.” The memories swirled, and now they were back in the bedroom, Jake addressing her through the mirror again.

“We worked in different compartments—I worked with Time and Space, he studied Death. We worked together for years before we’d even had more than a passing conversation. Then he made another prophecy, this one involving me, and you…and a person who’d been dead for decades.

“Titus should have told you all about Becca Praimheda by now. You know she was a muggleborn prodigy who wanted to further equality by giving magic to everyone. Here’s what you may not know about Becca…she didn’t attend Hogwarts until she was fifteen. She was born before the second wizarding war, and Voldemort wiped out records of muggleborns. There are ways of finding them when they’re born, but once they’re older it just depends on where they are and if they show enough magic to register. Becca showed plenty of magic, but she lived in London…full of wizards and witches and enough magic in the air to mask hers. She grew up as a muggle. A brilliant one—she was a prodigy no matter where she was. She loved math, loved inventions and engineering—she had always been a visionary with big dreams to reinvent the world and make it a better place. She also had a secret—that she could make strange things happen just with her mind, almost like magic.” Jake smiled. “Things she knew she could never tell anyone or they’d lock her away forever.

“Eventually she was discovered, when she traveled for a muggle school convention and her magic was tracked down. It was confusing at first, people didn’t understand, but once they sorted it out, Becca came to Hogwarts. She caught up fast, finishing all the material and learning everything there was to learn from what would have been her first through fifth years, and then some. She was more accomplished than most of the seventh-years by the end of her first year there. Just naturally gifted, another Dumbledore. After she graduated, she joined the Ministry of Magic. She flitted around from
department to department, improving everything she touched, with all these grand ideas but indecision about what she truly wanted to do. She never wanted what happened to her—missing out on years because no one had known she existed—to happen to anyone else. She saw how the community reacted to blood status. She wanted to make things better. So she joined the Department of Mysteries and started experimenting.

“It wasn’t until years later that she perfected it enough to actually work. She brought magic to a squib girl, creating Shadow-Eaters in the process. Nia was…” Jake hesitated, expression darkening, “She was never good. Her parents were horrible people, racist extremists that thought muggles should be subservient to wizardkind. They supported Voldemort in his time, they were Death Eaters. When they realized their child was a squib…they did experiments of their own, dark magic, trying to find a way to fix her. They kept her hidden, they abused her. It’s…I feel terrible, because really, it’s no wonder Nia is the way she is. It wasn’t just the Shadow-Eaters that made her what she is. Her parents had more of an effect on her than they did. Of course, at the end of the day, it’s our choices that make us who we are, so I’m not saying she’s not to blame. She made her choices.”

Jake sighed. “So, Nia turned, and the Shadow-Eaters were out of control. Becca tried to figure out ways to reverse what she did, tried to figure out how to fix her mistakes, and after a few botched plans, she started making new Time-Turners. It was illegal, but she managed to, but Time-Turners were only ever able to go a day or so back, and she was trying to make one that went years back. It was too late, anyway. She was caught and taken to Azkaban and spent the rest of her life there. But here’s another another thing you didn’t know about her…Becca was a Seer.”

Clarke’s brows raised.

“Seers…Divination and all that stuff, it exists on a whole other plane of magic, and despite how much it’s been studied, most things about it aren’t understood. Centuries and centuries ago, it was worshipped, until people decided to blame the bad events happening on the people who knew about them. Then it was feared and people were killed over it, and Seers started keeping their abilities to themselves. It wasn’t studied as much as it was until later years, and even then it wasn’t a very popular subject; people either didn’t understand it or didn’t want to because it made them uneasy. Still, eventually people grew comfortable enough to start experimenting with their abilities. Becca paved the way for other Seers by discovering ways to invoke prophecies at will, though it still wasn’t a hundred percent effective. She could sense the Seers of the future and attempted to make contact with them…Titus was the one who told me about her. He caught me using the stone one day, and Becca was the first thing out of his mouth. I was intrigued. I used the stone to talk to her and she said she’d been waiting on me, said she’d Seen all those years ago…knew I would find her. And she said I had to help her save the world.”

Jake’s smile was tinged with sadness. “I worked with Becca and Titus, following Becca’s instructions to finish the project she’d been working on to try to fix her mistakes. She showed me so many things…showed me her own visions she’d had, showed Nia coming out of hiding and rising to power again, showed me how the world would end if I didn’t do this. She felt bad that I was giving up my life for this, but what was I supposed to do? Just let everyone die?” Jake shook his head. “I
chose to give people a chance. I chose to give you a chance. I know you’re probably upset with me,” he said, and Clarke stared at him, tears rolling down her cheeks, “But I have to do what’s right. I’ll happily sacrifice myself if it means you and your mum and everyone else has a fighting chance. And you will. I already saw that you will.” His smile widened.

“So here’s the deal. You know the Flame is a Time-Turner, and by now I’m sure you’ve guessed how it works. A century ago, there used to be working Time-Turners, though they couldn’t go back farther than a day. Most of them, and the research on them, were destroyed in a battle at the Ministry. Becca helped me create a new one. The dust in the hourglass is made of phoenix ashes—that’s why we called it the Flame. And it’s the Resurrection Stone that gives it the power to go back so far—and forward.” Jake leaned forward. “I’m not going to tell you outright where it is, Clarke. Even though I was meticulous about things following this set path, the slightest flaw can ruin everything, and I can’t risk someone else seeing these memories and knowing how to find the Flame. I’m giving you clues only you can figure out. I’ve hidden the Flame somewhere else. Nobody knows where it is, not even Titus. Even if he did, he especially out of all people would not be able to touch it. Clarke. You’re the one who can. You’re the one who will. Remember the stories I used to read you before bed? The one that was your favorite, about the boy who kissed the snitch? Remember that.”

His eyes were also unnaturally bright as he smiled again, softly, sadly. “I’m afraid this is the end, kiddo. Go save the world. I love you.” He put his hand over his heart, their gaze meeting in the mirror. “May we meet again.”

“No—” gasped Clarke, but the stream of memories was ending and she was being drawn out of them.

“Clarke! Clarke!”

She blinked rapidly, trying to dispel the swirl of her surroundings. As everything steadied, Raven came into focus. Her ponytail was falling out, strands of hair clinging to her sweaty face. There was a nasty cut on her cheek.

“Rae?”

“Ontari’s here, she’s—“

“I still have to find the Flame!”
“I thought you just did?” yelped Raven, glancing at the tower replica. “What was—“

“No time, come on!”

She seized Raven by the wrist and the two of them hurried for the far door as the other one burst open, half a dozen Death Eaters piling through. They locked that door behind them and slid out the next, skidding to a halt, Raven standing before the door, furtively peeking out to ensure they weren’t followed.

“Where’s Lexa?”

“She was taking on Ontari last I saw her,” panted Raven, mopping her brow with her arm. “Everyone upstairs must be—must be overrun. More bad guys keep flooding in. I don’t—Clarke, I don’t think we can hold out much longer. Where the hell is this Flame?”

“I don’t…” Clarke shook her head, screwing her face up as she racked her brain, searching for any possible clues. Her father worked in the Time and Space department. The clues led to the clock tower. The seek higher things. Then…

Then he had given her his watch.

Before he was arrested, when he ran into her room and gave her those clues, he pushed his watch into Clarke’s hands. His watch that had the spell carved into the back. The watch that never worked.

Clarke stilled, sucking in a breath.

She scrambled to get her watch off, turning it over in her hands and uttering the spell to it again, trying a few variations, but nothing happened. Her father had told her in the memories to remember one of her favorite childhood bedtime stories, of the boy that kissed the snitch.

“Oh my God,” she hissed, turning the watch over again.

_I open at the close._
“I’m about to die,” she whispered. Nothing happened. She pressed her lips to the smooth, cold back of the watch, tried speaking the words once more, but again, nothing happened. She drew back with a frown, brows furrowed. Fuck. Her father had said that it was hidden somewhere Titus couldn’t reach. She had been certain the stone was hidden in the watch…

“I don’t know why the fuck you’re kissing your watch and saying weird shit, but, uh, we’ve got a problem,” said Raven, eyes wide as she snapped the door shut again. “A shitload of pissed off Death Eaters are heading right for us.”

There wasn’t any more time to discuss it, because Clarke was seizing Raven by the arm and pulling her through another door. Raven could hardly sprint with her brace, and Clarke knew it was only moments until they caught up…so she shoved Raven headfirst into the first door close to them once the circular room started spinning, slamming it shut behind her, and waited a half second for the other to open, a Death Eater barreling through, and hit him with a stunning spell. His fellow tripped over him, causing his spell to go wide and Clarke to easily duck it as she burst through the next door, immediately tripping and falling down steep steps, landing before a stone dais, several Death Eaters flooding in after her and her wand several feet away—

“Sectumsepra!”

She looked up in time to see a flurry of vicious wand movements; Titus was there, dueling more ferociously than she ever would have thought possible of the quiet, stooping man. She watched, a little horrified, as blood spurted from the wounds and The Death Eaters fell with their hands squabbling at their throats, choked garbled noises escaping them before they fell at Titus’s feet, dead. Clarke hauled herself up, bruised and breathless but shaking herself back to business.

“Thanks for that. Have you seen Lexa?”

He inclined his head. “She’s with Ms Rivers, taking down the werewolves.”

“Oh,” said Clarke, turning her head to look up at far door she’d came in through, back with the circular room with all the other doors; she hurried toward Titus, extending her hand for him to return her wand. “I need to find her and get the Flame…”

“I’m afraid I can’t let you do that, Clarke.”
She stiffened, a feeling of foreboding washing over her. “What?”

Titus didn’t seem to care; he walked up onto the stone dais almost idly, as though merely taking a stroll. “It’s too dangerous.”

Working to maintain a neutral expression on her face, Clarke followed after him, crossing the pit and climbing the steps onto the dais, walking past the archway with the gently swaying veil.

“What’s dangerous is waiting around here like sitting ducks,” she said through gritted teeth; honestly, what was the guy going to do? Grab Lexa and the others and force them all to stay here like kids he could babysit? This was war, she had to find the Flame. He should know that! He…

Clarke’s mouth went slack as realization struck her. Titus did know that. He wasn’t preventing her from leaving for her own safety, because he was on her side. He was not on her side.

She turned to face him, mouth still open. “You knew the Flame was here the whole time.”

He walked forward, pointing his wand at Clarke; the Veil eerily fluttered. “No. No, I did not. I knew it wasn’t at the clock tower. I didn't know where he hid it. I certainly hadn’t anticipated it to be here, right under our noses.”

Clarke stared at him. “If you had, you would have taken it for yourself.”

He nodded.

“How could you? This is our one chance to fix everything!”

“This is how the world is destroyed, Clarke. The prophecy foretold it. The Flame should never be used.”

Her mind was reeling over the fact that this entire time she’d thought he had been somewhat of a friend to her father...that he was on his side. But if he’d been against the Flame being created, then…
“It was you,” she realized. “You were the one who turned my dad in. You got him arrested and killed.”

“Arrested, not killed. I appealed to your mother. When I explained the prophecy and how using the Flame ensures the end of times, she agreed with me. Perhaps less because of the prophecy, and more in an effort to protect your father. She knew he would be doomed to a life in prison, perhaps execution, if the Flame were brought to life. She made a deal with the Minister. Jake would spend time in Azkaban, but eventually freed. Jaha broke the deal.” He was shaking his head before Clarke could open her mouth. “I do not know why. All I know is that Jake was killed, and my only hope of finding the Flame and keeping it out of the hands of the wrong people lay in you. His daughter. Part of the prophecy.”

“Keep it out of the hands of—you’re the wrong people!” yelled Clarke, and though Titus clutched her wand, sparks still shot out of it in her rage; Titus tossed it aside and it clattered to the ground somewhere near the bodies of the Death Eaters. “You can’t do this! My dad was trying to save everyone, not—”

“You father created the worst weapon anyone could create,” Titus cut across her, “He created two of the worst weapons. The Flame, and you.” He inhaled and exhaled, deeply, through his nostrils. Sweat shone on his head. “I am sorry. I hoped it would never come to this. Your father…your father, for all his flaws, was a good man. I regret having to betray him like this, by killing his only child.”

Clarke swallowed, mouth dry. Her heart was hammering against her ribcage. “You don’t have to. Why do you have to betray him?”

“Because love is weakness.”

This shit again. Clarke glared at him, trying to subtly inch her way toward the doorway. Titus noticed, expression hardening, and raised his wand. Clarke lifted her hands palm up.

“The prophecy clearly draws a line and indicates love is the downfall. It’s already been proven in the past; look what happened. I warned Lexa, long before she ever grew close with Costia, that love is weakness. She has a big heart, and she didn’t listen to me. Look what happened.”

“Lexa has a right to live.”

“I’ve known since Lexa’s arrival at Durmstrang that she’s part of the prophecy, a muggleborn born
in the seventh month, to ignorance and hate. I encouraged her to avoid emotional ties, but she found attachments anyway. Costia. Gustus. Anya. Lincoln. Look what happened to them all. And now you.”

“Exactly, now me! What do you think Lexa’s going to do to you when she finds out you killed me?” exclaimed Clarke, her pulse pounding in her throat.

Titus set his jaw, a muscle ticking; for one bizarre moment, he reminded her of Lexa. “She won’t find out.” His gaze flickered toward the veil, and with a sickening swoop of her belly, Clarke understood. She didn’t know what was beyond that veil, but whatever it was, it couldn’t be good. Titus had spent his life studying it, and if he thought it to be an adequate method of removing her from the picture, she was certain it was. He was going to force her through it. They’d never even recover her body.

“Titus. Please. Think about this. I have to save us all—“

“You don’t save anyone,” said Titus coldly. “You will ruin everything you touch.” He lifted his wand, and Clarke took a sharp intake of breath.

Footsteps sounded, a door closed in the distance, but Clarke had no time to turn. Titus slashed his wand, and a body threw itself between them, running right into the spell. The flash of light faded to reveal Lexa standing there. All three of them stilled in shock; Lexa lips were parted in surprise, and her wide eyes shifted from Titus to Clarke before dropping to where the spell hit her in the stomach. Her eyes rolled up into her head and she went limp, expression slackening as she fell backwards as if in slow motion, the veil fluttering as she began to fall through it.

“Lexa!”

Clarke managed to catch hold of her wrist just in time; she yanked hard, and pulled Lexa out of the archway. They crashed to the ground, bouncing down the stone steps of the dais before sprawling out onto the floor near the Death Eaters and her fallen wand. There was a ringing in Clarke’s ears, and she shook her head like a dog trying to shake off flies as she sat up. She blinked her blurry vision into focus just in time to see Titus bounding down the steps toward them, ashen-faced. Clarke seized her wand and scrambled to her feet.

“I’m—I’m so sorry,” gasped Titus, face contorted in shock and horror as he stumbled forward. “I didn’t—I didn’t mean to—“
“Get away from her!” screamed Clarke, brandishing her wand; Titus was blasted back with the force of a small bomb. It sent him hurtling back through the archway, his black cloak curling around him a moment before he was gone. The veil rippled slightly in his wake.

“Lexa. Lexa.” Clarke fell hard to her knees, shaking hands seizing Lexa by the shoulders and pulling her around. There was a spot on her stomach where the spell had hit her, smoldering and dark. “D—diffindo!”

Clarke pushed the freshly cut shirt away to reveal the wound. It was small hole, hardly bigger than the size of a sickle, but there was a strange blackness emanating from it, spidery tendrils crawling across taut skin. Clarke’s wild gaze snapped up to Lexa’s face, eyes closed, unmoving…and panic clawed at Clarke’s throat like never before. “Lexa! Ennervate!”

The red flash of light faded, and Lexa did not stir.

Oh God, oh God.

She pointed her wand directly over Lexa’s heart.

“Ennervate!” Nothing. Clarke’s grip on Lexa flexed open, fingertips digging into her skin as though her hold could keep her grounded.

God, please. Please.

Inhale. Exhale. Charms were always strongest the third time.

“Ennervate!”

Clarke didn’t realize her tears were falling thick and fast until she watched them speckle and shine on Lexa’s face. Lexa looked so peaceful. She lay in Clarke’s lap as though she were sleeping.

Clarke couldn’t breathe, but her lips parted of their own accord and her intake of breath was stuck in
her throat. She made a noise between a choke and a sob and then—

Then Lexa’s lashes fluttered for a split second before her eyes flew open and she took a wild gasp, shooting up in Clarke’s arms.

“Lex—Lexa!”

“Clarke?”

Lexa trembled in her embrace as Clarke flung her arms around her and held her tightly, tears rolling over her cheeks and relief so strong it was dizzying.

“Oh, thank God,” she choked, “I thought—I thought I lost you.”

Lexa seemed to be recovering from shock. Green eyes glanced at the archway before shifting back onto Clarke’s tearful gaze. “I’m alive,” she said softly. She glanced down at her exposed stomach; the black was covering nearly half of her right side now. Lexa’s throat dipped as she swallowed. “For…for now.”

Clarke’s blood ran cold, but she wasn’t surprised. “It’s a curse, isn’t it?”

Lexa’s jaw clenched and Clarke knew what she was thinking. It was ironic, that she would die the same way Anya had, with a slow-moving curse.

Except this time would be different. This time they knew ahead. This time they could prevent it.

Clarke immediately began to get to her feet. “We have to go, I need to make you a potion right away that can stop this curse from spreading, and then my mum can—“

“Clarke.”

Clarke looked down at her, knew from the look in Lexa’s eyes. Clarke shook her head at once. “No. Don’t try to argue with me. We can try to find the Flame later. This is more important.”
“There’s no time.”

Furious at how calm Lexa was in the face of her imminent death, Clarke slapped her hand on the floor and cried, “Damn it, Lexa, you’ll **die!**”

“I’ll die either way. You can only give me more time, but the curse would catch up eventually. There’s no **time,**” repeated Lexa when Clarke opened her mouth to argue. “Let’s just get the Flame. If we get the Flame, none of this ever happened. None—oh.” She blinked, realization slackening her face before focus returned with the determined clench of her jaw. She lifted her wand, conjured a vial and caught it midair. Then she put the tip to her forehead, closed her eyes. She pulled away thick strands of silvery magic…memories.

“Make sure I get these,” she said breathlessly, stopping up the vial and handing it to Clarke. “It’s everything, all my memories from this past year. You. I don’t want to lose them.”

Clarke wordlessly took the vial, speechless as she watched Lexa struggle to her feet. The muscles of her stomach contracted, the black marring her skin, but she blew out a breath as she relaxed and dropped her ripped shirt back down. “Come on, we need to move. Let’s get you to where you need to be.”

*With you. That’s where I need to be, always.* Clarke blinked rapidly, unable to clear the stinging film over her eyes. “Lexa, wait, what if this doesn’t work? I don’t want to risk losing you. What if this is it? What if—what if this is all we get?” She gestured helplessly at Lexa’s cursed wound, at the Ministry crumbling around them, screams and shouts and booms of magic in the distance.

Lexa’s gaze zeroed in on Clarke as she extended a hand for her. “There’s always more,” she said fiercely. “Don’t give up now. You were chosen for a reason. You’re worthy, Clarke. You’re going to do this. You’re going to save everyone.”

“Will I save you?” whispered Clarke.

“You already have.” Lexa kissed her, hard and firm, before pulling back to drag the tip of her nose so softly across Clarke’s. “You can do this. I promise. You’re going to do this, and I’m going to find you, and fall for you all over again.” She swept her thumbs across Clarke’s cheeks, lips just brushing hers again, and Clarke felt as though she were tumbling forward into green eyes. “May we meet again.”
Familiar. She had no idea why, but the words sent a rush of warm familiarity through her. She swallowed, closing her eyes as she inclined her forehead to rest against Lexa’s.

They were interrupted by the crash of the walls as Ontari burst through, black-scaled skin rippling with powerful sinew and muscle. The roar she gave was earsplitting. Lexa stepped in front of Clarke at once, stance set.

“Run, Clarke! I’ve got this.”

“N—no!” she stammered; she couldn’t leave. She couldn’t leave, because what if this was the last time she—she couldn’t bear to think if—and she couldn’t do this, she couldn’t go on without her—“Lexa, I—”

“I’ll always be with you.” Clarke didn’t even see the plump lips move to form the words; her gaze was locked with Lexa’s, resolute green eyes set in black warpaint locking with terror-filled blue. “Go, now!” snarled Lexa as she turned around to face Ontari, who had fit herself through and was moments from lunging toward them, the words turning guttural and inhuman as Lexa began to transform before Clarke’s very eyes. Clarke stepped back, unable to tear her gaze away as Lexa grew impossibly larger, skin shifting to scale. Ontari lunged and Lexa blocked her path to Clarke and Clarke set off, wand in one hand and the vial of memories in the other.

As she opened the door and flew into the circular room, another door opened at the same time and Raven, Luna, and Evie came tumbling in.

“Close it, fuck!” yelled Raven as Luna hastily did so; the thwack of bodies slamming into the door could be heard loudly enough they all winced. “Hey,” panted Raven when she noticed Clarke. “Where’s Lexa?”

“Give me your memories,” said Clarke suddenly; Lexa was a genius. If only she’d been able to do this sooner, get memories off everyone... When the other three looked blankly at her and as the doors around them began to spin, she quickly filled them in. “Hurry!” she said impatiently as the room stilled again; they scrambled to conjure vials.

Clarke touched her wand to her own temple, closed her eyes and did quick spellwork to withdraw copies of her memories. She used her wandtip to burn quick scrawls of her name into her vial before doing the same to Lexa’s, while Raven, Luna, and Evie did the same before handing the vials to Clarke, who blinked at the handful of tiny vials she could barely fit in one hand.
“Here, keep them in this,” said Luna, pulling a metal container out of her pocket; she opened it and dumped a thick stack of Wizard’s Cards onto the floor. Clarke fit the vials inside the container and cast a few protective spells on them to stop it from being crushed or summoned or anything else to prevent harm from coming to them before shoving it into her pocket.

“Now what’s the plan?” said Evie.

“I need to find the stone,” said Clarke at once. “You have to have it to work the Flame.”

“Any ideas where it could be?”

“I…” Clarke hesitated. “I don’t know. Maybe the Forbidden Forest? That’s where my dad found it originally.”

“We have to find some rock in the Forbidden Forest?” said Raven weakly. “Clarke, that could be impossible.”

“No, no, that was a stupid suggestion,” said Clarke, shaking her head at herself. Her mind was still frazzled, frantic with worry for Lexa. Focus. “He must have hidden it somewhere here, he had to’ve —”

“Clues, Clarke,” said Evie sharply, “Do you have any clues we can work with? Any hints he could have given you?”

“No, I…” she said helplessly, racking her brain, but there was nothing…”

Another roar sounded, loudly enough to shake the entire building.

They were running out of time, and it was ironic, because what they needed right now more than anything was time.

“Come on, Clarke, anything helps!” urged Evie.
“He said I could find it, and—and it was somewhere Titus never could.”

“Somewhere in the Ministry?” asked Raven.

“Maybe?”

Luna and Evie exchanged worried frowns. “Where could Titus not go in the Ministry?”

“Why couldn’t he find it? Like, are charms in place that prohibit him specifically from entering? Or is it somewhere he wouldn’t think to look? In which case it’s probably right under his nose! Or is it something to do with some spell he just can’t do? What do we even know about the guy?” rambled Raven.

“He’s dead,” said Clarke, ignoring the surprise on the other three’s faces, “I know that. He betrayed us all.”

“The leader of this whole fucking Order betrayed us?” said Raven indignantly.

Clarke nodded. “Yeah. He said the prophecy clearly foretells the end of times if the Flame is used, and he said he didn’t want to kill me but if this was what it took to save the world, so be it.”

"I always knew something was off about him," said Luna darkly. "Always thought he was creepy."

He tried to kill you?” said Evie, aghast. “But—isn’t Lexa like a daughter to him? How did he think she would react to that? I can’t—I mean, I do believe you Clarke, I’m just shocked that he would actually do that!”

“Yeah, well,” Clarke glanced around as the building shook around them once more. They really didn’t have time for this. “He’s a dick who thinks love is weakness anyway, so I’m sure he expected Lexa to get over it eventually. Look, this place is about to collapse around us. We don’t have time to discuss—“
There was another terrible roar.

“Let’s go to your dad’s department again and start from there,” said Raven quickly. Clarke nodded in agreement.

They tried a few doors, skipping over the one always locked, before they reached the Time and Space chamber. They hurried in and Clarke ran to the cabinet where she’d found her father’s memories.

“Hurry,” barked Luna. She, Evie, and Raven took guard at each door, wands at the ready.

“I am,” said Clarke breathlessly, ducking down to lean into the cabinet, sweeping a hand beneath the pensive. There was nothing. She pulled back to squint up at the solar system floating in the space covering the ceiling. Where could it be?

Evie gave a strangled cry as the door she stood at burst open, sending her flying back. Clarke turned, expecting a raging Ontari, but her insides turned over at what she saw instead.

A horde of dead bodies were piling in—some of them terrifyingly familiar. Ontari had sent the Inferi after them.

“Confringo! Confringo! Incendio! Clarke, did you find it?” shouted Raven.

“No!” she said helplessly, interrupted from further scrutinization of the solar system by the pallid, rotting man moving toward her. She blasted him back, but there were half a dozen more to take his place. “Somewhere Titus can’t go. Somewhere I can…I have no idea!”

“Wait a minute—Clarke! Clarke, I know where you have to go!” cried Luna.

Clarke looked up, desperation etched into every line of her face.

“It’s the Love department! That’s where Titus couldn’t get in, because he didn’t believe in it, because he thought love is weakness!”
Clarke’s eyes widened.

“It’s that locked door,” called Evie, as more Inferi came crowding in, too many to back away from the ring of fire Luna was still wielding like a lasso, “The locked door! Hurry!”

“Go, Clarke!” bellowed Raven.

Clarke didn’t need to be told twice. Raven’s blasting curses created a narrow path for her to hurtle down, cold dead hands reaching for her flashing past her peripheral vision as she flew toward the door. She slammed it behind her and the room began spinning.

The various screams and roars of battle seemed to echo from behind several doors. Clarke frantically tried a few before she finally reached the one that was locked, and it was only then as she uselessly tugged at the handle that she realized: she had no idea how to get in.

The sheer horror of her situation made her knees buckle. Here she was, so close, nothing but a single locked door between her and where she needed to be. She cast spell after spell, even tried blasting the thing out of her way, but nothing worked.

“How do I get in, how do I get in!”

She tugged on the handle again, planting her feet on the walls as though she could pull it apart.

“Help me! How do I get in! Dad!” she hollered his name as though it was the password. “Dad— how do I—“

There was screaming now, horrible screaming that had the hairs on her arms and the back of her neck rising on end, followed by raucous roaring. This was it. Ontari had made her way through everyone and was right at Clarke’s heels. Well, perhaps if she waited a moment, Ontari could simply bulldoze the walls down, and Clarke could get in that way…

There was nothing else to do. She scrambled to get the cloak out of her pocket, and threw it over herself. She turned, pressing her back to the locked door, and stood there waiting, trembling and swaying slightly in her fear and exhaustion. More screams, followed by the faint sound of Ontari’s
distinct voice, shrieking curses...there was no more roaring...Luna and Lexa must be gone....

Clarke’s knees went out from under her. She slid down to the floor, tears rolling down her cheeks. This was the end. Nearly everyone she loved was gone. The wizarding world was exposed. She would probably die here, because even if Ontari came out and transformed into a dragon again and knocked the walls down, Clarke would still have to avoid being squashed or sighted or killed on top of finding where the hell the Flame was in a new, unfamiliar room, and then figure out how to use it before Ontari could take it from her. It was hopeless. At least now she could finally die. She could die, and join all the others. Everything was all over....

Except no, it wasn’t. She gritted her teeth, squeezing her eyes shut and tipping her head back against the door. So long as she was alive, none of this was over. If she could just find the Flame, she could go back in time and fix everything. She could save Lexa, and Raven, and Anya and Wells and Lincoln and Gustus and her father and everyone else—she could fix everything. Her father had orchestrated this entire thing, he knew she could do this, he had faith in her. Lexa had faith in her. Clarke just needed to have faith in herself.

Her heart swelled with emotion, as all the faces of those she loved flashed through her mind. She could save all of them. The love and hope had warmth flooding back into her body, tingles all the way down to her fingers and toes—

Her breath caught in a gasp as the door supporting her back suddenly vanished, and she fell right through.

She had only moments to blink up at the ceiling when the door adjacent to her burst open; she jolted up, heart in her throat as she pulled up her wand, but it was only Raven, covered in blood and sweating profusely.

“Clarke? Why can I only see your ankles? What are you doing?”

“I got in!” she said, twisting back to see the door shut and locked again, but she could reach through now—she reached out and her hand passed through easily as though she were some kind of ghost. “I have to go—“

“Yes, go, now!” said Raven, arm slashing through the air as she did quick wandwork, locking the door she’d came out with. When Raven snatched the case holding the vials out of Clarke’s hand to add a few more silvery strands of memory into her vial, Clarke didn’t argue. “Take those, I don’t want to forget—“ The sacrifices they all made. Clarke understood. She hastily shoved the case into her cloak pocket as Raven returned her attention to the door. “Evie’s dead, Luna’s in her animagus form taking on Ontari but she won’t last long, she’s coming after you.”
Clarke yanked the Invisibility Cloak off and balled it into her cloak pocket as she scrambled to her feet. Raven pressed her palms to the door, the stance of her body showing she was prepared to physically hold it if needed. She twisted round to meet Clarke’s gaze. There were tears falling thick and fast from both of them.

“You have to fix all of this, Clarke,” she whispered, as screams sounded beyond the door again. “You have to make it all go away. I want to—I wanna live. We deserve to live.”

Before Clarke could respond, the door Raven held shuddered, and then spells were clearly being cast at it because it sounded like a train was approaching, wind roaring in their ears.

“Come with me! Raven, come with me!” cried Clarke, as her hair whipped around her face.

Raven shook her head, her loose, messy ponytail flying out, the buckles of her brace flapping. “I’ll hold this—go, Clarke!”

“Raven—“

“NO, you can save everyone, you can save Anya and Wells and Fox and—GO!”

Clarke backed toward the door, one leg already phasing through it. “Raven, please—”

“GO, NOW!”

Clarke walked through the door, and all the outside sounds immediately ceased. She gaped.

It was quiet and calm and it had been so long since she felt so safe and warm. She was standing in the doorway of her home. Not Hogwarts—her other home, the one that filled her early childhood. There was a fire crackling and food on the stove. Abby and Jake Griffin were both sitting at the kitchen table; as Clarke took a step forward, her father looked up and met her gaze. He smiled and called her over, gesturing for her to join them. Clarke paused, mouth open, stunned, but then a small voice sounded in the back of her head, warning her…

*Keep walking. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live…*
As difficult as it was, Clarke walked on. She opened the back door and found herself in the Great Hall at Hogwarts. The chatter of happy voices and cutlery on plates filled the air. Her heart ached as she spotted her friends, all piled onto their usual table. Everyone was there. Atom and Roma, the first-year girl Charlotte. Jasper and Monty were creating a house of Chocolate Frog cards, Maya and Miller were directing them and Fox was grinning as she watched them and ignoring her open book, not studying for once. Raven had an arm slung around Anya’s shoulders, and even Finn was there on her other side, cracking jokes and laughing. Bellamy was teasing Octavia, his arm around Gina, and Octavia was leaning against Lincoln, who looked down at her with that soft look in his eyes….Wells had Wizard’s chess before him, and his face lit up when he spotted Clarke. Everyone looked up and called over over, smiling.

Clarke numbly walked on, both dreading and utterly excited for what was next because she knew…it had to be…

She was standing on the Hogwarts grounds. The sky was an explosion of color with the sunset, reflected perfectly in the Black Lake. Lexa stood there, face clean of warpaint, the Durmstrang Ship silhouetted behind her. Lexa stood there and Clarke couldn’t move in time, and she didn’t want to anyway, as Lexa walked toward her.

Her heart trembled in her chest as Lexa immediately wrapped her up in a hug. They clung onto one another, hearts beating in time, before Lexa pulled back. Clarke’s breath caught as soft, full lips pressed to her forehead, thumbs sweeping over her cheeks before gentle palms cupped the back of her neck. She was helpless to resist, tipping her chin up to meet Lexa. They kissed softly, slowly, savoring it, before they ran out of breath and Lexa pulled back to rest their foreheads together.

“Stay,” breathed Lexa.

Clarke swallowed. She knew what she had to do, but…God, she didn’t want to. “I…I can’t. I have to go back.”

She expected Lexa to argue. She didn’t expect her to close her eyes again, long lashes fluttering, and nod, her nose brushing Clarke’s as she whispered, “I know. That’s why I…” Their breath hitched, “That’s why you’re you.”

Clarke swallowed again, tears clinging to her lashes. “If I can fix this…maybe someday we’ll owe nothing to anybody else and we’ll just…we’ll just be.”
Lexa shuddered slightly; Clarke felt it as she smoothed her fingers over the base of Lexa’s spine. "I'm tired of 'not yet's and 'maybe somedays.'” admitted Lexa. “Why not now? Why not here?"

“Because…” Clarke bit back her tears as she pulled out of Lexa’s embrace, even though it felt like ripping her own heart out because there was nothing, nothing she wanted more than to just stay here forever with Lexa, “Because we deserve better than this.”

And even though it was possibly the hardest thing she’d ever had to do, she turned her back on Lexa, and walked away. The sky seemed to darken at once, turning into night, and the stars and full moon lit her way.

She followed her feet, certain they would lead her where she needed to go. No phantom creatures disturbed her as she walked deeper and deeper until she reached the heart of the forest, and in the clearing, she found something waiting for her.

It was a large, ornate mirror, framed with words she didn’t understand, the trees and darkness of the forest reflecting in it until Clarke came to stand directly before it, and then…her breath caught again.

So many people were in the reflection. She glanced back over her shoulder, but she saw nothing but the clearing and trees behind her. She looked back in and her gaze roved hungrily over each face…

Her mother and father were there, looking at her proudly. Wells, Raven, Octavia…all her friends. Professors. In the far, far distance, an intact, whole Hogwarts castle. Lexa stood directly beside her, wearing her Durmstrang uniform and black warpaint. As Clarke looked into her warm green eyes, Lexa’s reflection smiled and reached up, hand disappearing for a moment under her red scarf before tugging something free. She reached down to take the hand of Clarke’s reflection, brought it to her lips where she pressed a fleeting kiss before pressing something hard into her palm. She smiled reassuringly.

Clarke jolted as a weight really did drop into her palm. She looked down, turning up her hand, and blinked in shock at the small black stone.

This was it. The Resurrection Stone. She looked back up at the mirror again, in awe, and Lexa smiled reassuringly at her.

Her hand trembled as she turned the stone three times over, just as she’d seen her father do in the memories. Figures appeared all around her, illuminating the forest clearing. What was left of her fear
melted away as she looked at them—they, she knew, were real.

“Dad,” she choked, spotting him first; warmth flooded through her as her eyes sought the girl standing next to him, a soft, small smile on her face. “Lexa.”

“You’ve done so well, Clarke,” murmured Lexa, the k as pronounced as ever.

“We’re all so proud of you,” said her father, putting a hand on Lexa’s shoulder. The sight had Clarke choking back tears again.

“I know it hurts,” said Wells quietly, watching her carefully, somberness in his dark eyes, “But it was meant to be like this.”

“I’m sorry,” gasped Clarke, her voice cracking on the last word. Tears rolled down her cheeks and it was a struggle just to draw breath into her lungs, for it seemed to tear at her ragged throat. “I never—I never wanted any of you to die—“

“Well if you had, you’d be a maniac,” shrugged Anya. The lilt to her lips was distinctly feline and her eyes glinted in the silvery light of the moon. “We didn’t want to die either, Clarke. Obviously.”

“But—Lexa, you—and Wells, you died for me, I’m—“

Wells smiled. “What are friends for?”

Clarke’s heart was fissuring. She couldn’t believe—still couldn’t believe—that Wells was gone. She was staring at his spectral projection. How was any of this even real? She shook her head, reaching up to impatiently scrub tears off her face. “How can you forgive me?

Wells took a step forward, eyes kind as he traced his fingers over her cheek as though brushing the tears away. She couldn’t feel his hand, but she felt the warmth. “There’s nothing to forgive, Clarke. You need to forgive yourself.”

Clarke sniffled, looking around at them all again. “I just—I wish I could have saved you all.”

“You still can,” said Fox. “Just keep your head up, Clarke.”
“Be strong,” said Gustus from beside her in his deep, rumbling voice. Clarke nodded in response. She would try.

“Clarke,” began Anya, uncharacteristically hesitant. “When you go back…I don’t know what will happen, but…make sure Raven finds me. Don’t let her forget me.”

Clarke nodded numbly again, a painful lump obscuring her throat.

“Thank you,” she said. She crossed her arms over her chest, clearly uncomfortable at the show of emotion. A second later she added gruffly, “Not like she could ever forget me anyway. Especially that thing I do with my tongue.”

A breath Clarke had not realized she’d been holding in bubbled out of her lips, torn somewhere between a laugh and a sob. “Even in death you’re filth.”

Anya shrugged, her easy smile almost smug. “It’s a gift.”

“You should go now Clarke,” said Fox. “Ontari will break through soon.”

“You can do this,” said Wells.

Clarke swallowed. What if I can’t? What if I end up just like all of you?

At least then I could be with you again.

Jake seemed to know what she was thinking. He pressed his lips together in determination, walking forward and bracingly gripping her shoulders, even though she couldn’t feel the pressure. The warmth tingled down her arms, though.

“We’re all behind you, kid.”
She took a deep breath. “I would rather you were all beside me,” she admitted.

They all gave her sad smiles, all except for Lexa, who closed her eyes for a long moment before opening them again. “Our fight is over.” She walked forward, placing her hand over Clarke’s, moving as though to pull her fingers open. Clarke opened her hand, the resurrection stone slowly rolling down the length of her hand. “Yours is not,” murmured Lexa, and then the stone was dropping; as it landed in the soil and mangled grass, they all disappeared, leaving Clarke standing alone in the dark.

“Right,” she whispered, curling her fingers closed again.

She clenched her hands into fists, lifting her head high and steeling herself for what was to come, and looked into the distance, into the looming darkness cast by towering trees. She picked up the stone again.

“I have to save my people.”

The whole illusion broke. She looked back up and she found herself standing in an empty chamber, similar to the Death Chamber that held the veil except its opposite in every way; it was warm and bright in here, empty save for the mirror in the center, and several doors placed on the adjacent walls. The whole place was shuddering again, dust raining from the ceiling. There were distant, muted screams, pounding on the lone door behind Clarke. Ontari was right on her heels, and Clarke finally had the stone, but no idea what to do now. The Flame needed the stone to work, yes, but where was the Time-Turner?

She looked around as though half-expecting it to be lying on the floor somewhere.

“GRIFFIN!” screamed a voice.

She turned, horror-struck, and watched the wall strain and shudder a half second before bursting.

Ontari marched in amidst the fire and smoke, murder in her eyes. She was covered in blood and something much more sinister, darker. Clarke swallowed hard, clenching her fist around the stone.

“Did you really think you could beat me?” demanded Ontari, grin wide and manic. “I’ve absorbed more magic in the past day than Nia did in her entire pathetic life!” She marched forward as Clarke
hastily backpedaled. “I guess you did do one thing right; showed me how stupid I was to be following under Nia’s command this entire time when she should have been following me!”

Clarke pushed out the nearest door, her senses immediately overwhelmed with the glorious smell of chocolates and butterbeer. She was standing on the Quidditch pitch at Hogwarts, and there were easels everywhere, canvases covered in beautiful art. She had barely locked the door behind her when it was exploding open; she ducked behind a nearby canvas, narrowly evading the debris flying toward her head.

She ran, lurching behind the easels to avoid the streaks of spells cast at her as Ontari followed her at a more leisurely pace, clearly content to taunt her, certain as she was that she would eventually catch up and end Clarke, a possibility that was becoming glaringly more likely as she realized she was halfway down the pitch and there was nowhere else to go.

“I won’t lie to you and tell you Lexa begged for her life, that she fell to her knees for me. She didn’t. She stood tall and strong and looked me in the eye as I cast the spell that ended her life. And it felt so, so good, so much better than I imagined it would.” The heat of the spell she shot burned Clarke’s flesh as it narrowly skimmed over her shoulder. “And it felt even better when I tore into her—when I took your sacred love and ripped her into a thousand different pieces—”

Rage had Clarke twisting around to send a blasting curse Ontari’s way; even when she deflected it, it still hit the ground with enough force to send her stumbling sideways into another easel and left a smoking crater in the ground.

“You see how much power I have now, Griffin?” She swept her arms out; as she did so, the easels nearest her went spinning away, one of them crashing into Clarke. She rolled forward to avoid another, her tired body aching with protest, and her heart stuttered, insides turning cold, when she dropped her wand. She careened back to grab it, but Ontari’s blasting curse hit the ground with such force that her wand was probably destroyed, and it sent Clarke flying back, crashing to the ground hard. She hauled herself to her feet at once and went stumbling toward the forest; she had no idea how big the Love chamber was, but she had to find a way out of here.

As she staggered into the shadow of the trees, her surroundings changed abruptly. Now she was in the Great Hall of the castle, sunlight streaming from the enchanted ceiling and filtering in through the stained glass windows. Well, fuck. Great. She was wandless and now she stood at the front of the
room, near the Professors’ table, and Ontari was standing in the doorway on the other side of the large room, the house tables the only thing between them. The jig was up, there was nowhere to go and nothing left to do but face Ontari, who was grinning wickedly like a cat that was seconds away from sinking her teeth in the cornered mouse.

For a moment, the two of them just looked at one another, Clarke panting, slumped up against the table, and Ontari smirking, eyes lit up with triumph, that strange darkness still pulsating around her body like a black aura.

“How does it feel?” asked Ontari softly. “Knowing everyone you love is dead? Knowing I killed them all?”

“What’s wrong with you?” whispered Clarke. Her body was trembling, not with fear, but with exertion. Her lungs burned. “Why are you—who are you so evil?”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” Still, Ontari lapsed into a thoughtful silence, tilting her head as she considered Clarke. “Lexa and I were a lot alike, you know. Even with all our differences.” She took a step forward. “She was a mudblood and I’m pure from a prestigious family, yes. But we both had parents who hated us. We were never good enough for them, and we were both abandoned. But we were both loved again,” she continued, taking a leisurely pace around one of the tables, prolonging the moment she’d reach Clarke in favor of continuing her speech, “Not for who we are, but for what we could be. Titus was immediately up Lexa’s ass, because she was in the prophecy,” it was said scathingly, still bitter with resentment, “And Nia wanted me because she saw everything I could be, recognized the generations of power that flowed in my bloodline. She was ashamed of her heritage, a filthy squib. It was natural she wanted to ally herself with someone of my noble blood,” she said, a note of pride entering her voice, and Clarke wanted to shout at her that no, Nia wasn’t perhaps as inclined to purebloods as Ontari believed and rather used Ontari as a soldier, a puppet to do her bidding, but Clarke knew she needed to preserve her energy, “I told Nia she was playing it too safe. I told her she should absorb more magic, grow stronger, but she was cautious. She remembered the pain of the experiments when she was young, and she was reluctant to experience it again. But I wasn’t afraid of pain. The moment she died, I went back to Mount Weather—what remained of it anyway, after you blew it up—and took the magic of everyone there, all the prisoners and the Death Eaters too. I’d never felt such power flowing through my body. It felt like a fucking orgasm.” She paused, breath quickening, perhaps at the memory of how it felt. “So I took more, and more, and went out to blow up some muggles and then took more from every witch and wizard that tried to stop me. The Shadow-Eaters have been multiplying, the wolves and the Death Eaters that fled when Nia was killed returned to serve me. Me.”

Clarke forced herself to stand up straighter as Ontari came to a stop only feet away from her, sneering up at her.

“I always thought killing Lexa would be the greatest feeling in the world, but you know, I think I
was wrong for once. There’s just something about you.” Her dark gaze slowly traversed the length of Clarke’s body. “In the prophecy. All your little friends who died for you. Lexa pathetically in love with you. What makes you so special?” she asked, lip curling in disgust. “I think killing you is going to be my favorite rush.” She lifted her wand, pointing it directly at Clarke’s heart, the smirk twisting as she arched a brow. “Any last words?”

Clarke was breathing heavily, and her hands trembled, but she still tightened her hold on the small stone clenched in her first. “Fuck you.”

Ontari grinned, and then she slashed her wand through the air, and Clarke’s life flashed before her eyes. Her father’s blue eyes crinkling in his smile, the sound of her mother’s laughter, the feeling of stroking a brush across canvas, the horn sounding off the Hogwarts express, her friends’ chatter during a feast, the wind in her hair as she soared into the sky, the comfort of sinking into her four-poster bed, the light in Wells’s eyes when he was amused, Raven’s smirk and Octavia’s giggle, Bellamy’s grumpy face and Fox’s exasperated sigh, Monty and Miller’s sickeningly sweet smiles and Jasper’s lame jokes, Lincoln’s kind smile and Anya’s feral grin, Lexa’s soft full lips curved in a smile, the warm press of them against Clarke’s own, Lexa’s vivid green eyes, the smell of her hair like pine and wood smoke—

“Avada Kedavra!”

For one suspended moment, as the flash of green scorched into the backs of Clarke’s eyelids, there was nothing. Was she dead?

She first became aware of the fact that she was lying down, the hardwood surface of the Great Hall’s floor flat and uncomfortable. Then she realized the light burning her eyelids red was no longer green, but white—and far too bright.

Her lashes fluttered as she squinted her eyes open. Pain spiked in her temples and she immediately turned her head. She blinked as her vision cleared. She was on the floor of the Great Hall, and most of the walls and the entire ceiling had been blown apart; the tables were gone too. Sunlight landed on the shattered glass littering the floor, and as a result the entire dilapidated hall seemed to shine.
Carefully, still not entirely certain she was not dead, Clarke sat up. Her head turned sharply in the direction of the quiet scuffling that broke the silence. She saw a figure lying sprawled out in the center of the hall, surrounded by the broken, lit-up glass. Ontari.

Clarke hauled herself to her feet, body heavy and sluggish. She slowly made her way over to where Ontari lay and knelt down beside her. Revulsion and pity twisted itself into a tight ball in the pit of her stomach as she gazed down at her.

Ontari’s skin was charred and leathery and covered in dark blood. The darkness that had been emanating from her like an obscure aura had grown thicker, nearly enveloping her body, tendrils undulating from it; it was slowly suffocating her. She trembled from head to foot, wheezing quiet, rattling breaths. Whimpers. Her wide, terror-stricken eyes found Clarke, who froze in place. They just looked at each other, and Clarke watched as whatever light remained left in Ontari’s eyes dimmed and they glazed over instead. She gave one last weak exhale before stilling entirely.

Though Ontari was dead, the dark magic still pulsed around her. Just as Clarke was wondering what she ought to do, it sucked in as though in some kind of black hole, Ontari’s body disappearing with it, leaving only a tattered black cloak, rumpled clothes, and her wand. The darkness compacted onto a small ball, and then shot upward. Clarke followed its trajectory into the sky, shielding her eyes from the sun’s glare. It went out of sight for hardly a breadth, and then exploded into a thousand tiny bits of shrapnel that shone far brighter than the shards of glass.

It rained down slowly, like falling snow, if snow contained flakes that were glowing balls of light as big as a galleon. Clarke numbly held out a hand from where she still sat, her knees folded beneath her, and let one of the balls of light fall onto her, cradling it in her palm. Not so much snow as they were falling stars, but they still faded away as though they were melting. Clarke realized with a jolt that this must be the stolen magic and souls, set free by Ontari’s death but with nowhere to go, so they just faded away…

Ontari was dead. Ontari was dead, and so was everyone else, but somehow Clarke was still alive. She was alive, and Ontari was dead, despite the fact that she’d used the killing curse on her. Clarke didn’t understand. She was starting to give up on understanding anything ever.

She missed Lexa then, so abruptly and overwhelmingly that she shuddered.

But she could fix this. She could use the Flame, if she could only figure out how.

She reached over the pile of fabric, grabbing Ontari’s wand and slipping it into her cloak pocket as she stood up. She still wasn’t positive on how to use the Flame, but she thought of the words her
father had said to her, the words Lexa had said to her, all at the end, and she had an idea.

She undid her watch and turned it over in her hand.

“May we meet again,” she whispered.

She knew even without hearing the quiet ticking and whirring of the internal mechanisms that it had worked. The back of the watch opened and she tucked the Resurrection Stone inside it, nestling it in the hollowed-out spot amongst the tiny gears, and closed the back. The miniscule stars circling the watch face began to glow as Clarke clasped the watch around her wrist. Her surroundings faded, wind whipping at her hair, and Clarke closed her eyes, trusting her father, trusting herself, and trusting the Flame to take her to where she needed to go—or rather, when she needed to be.

* * /◡/ * *

When she opened her eyes, she was still kneeling, alone, in the Great Hall, except this time it was whole and unblemished. Hardly daring to hold her breath, praying that this had worked, Clarke weaved her way through the house tables and hurried over to the eastern windows that faced the front grounds…and promptly lost her breath at what she saw.

Everything was whole. The grounds were a vibrant green, no blood stains anywhere in sight. The Forbidden Forest was intact, no longer burnt and smoldering. There were carriages approaching, led by thestrals and filled with students. In the far distance, she could see narrow boats crossing the Black Lake.

Holy shit. She was somewhere on one of those carriages. So were all her friends—everyone was still alive. Lexa and Anya and Lincoln were still alive, presumably currently at Durmstrang. The muggles were still blissfully unaware of the magical world.

The Flame had worked; Clarke had gone back; she was in the past.

“Oh my God,” she whispered to herself. “We actually did it.”

“Yes, we did.”
She started and turned around, already reaching for her wand—

It was a man. A man with messy blonde hair, and bright blue eyes.

“Clarke,” he said, beaming, already opening his arms as he walked toward her. “My brave, brave girl. You did it.”

She took one step forward, tentative, in shock—this was real? It wasn’t a memory. Her father was here, right here, and he was looking right at her. This was real, or Clarke was dead, and she didn’t care either way at the moment.

She ran to him.

“Dad!” She flung her arms around his neck, clinging tightly as he laughed and swung her off her feet. He was warm and solid beneath her. They held each other tightly for a long moment, before Jake gently set her on her feet. “Am I—am I dead?”

He laughed again, ruffling a hand through her hair much the same way he had when she was a child. “Of course not. You used the Flame, you went back in time.”

“I don’t understand,” she gasped, shaking her head in denial. “Why—Ontari used the killing curse, but she died. Why didn’t I die?”

“Come on. You know why, Clarke. You remember the stories. What’s the most powerful magic of all?”

“Love,” mumbled Clarke dazedly.

“Exactly. So many people died fighting to keep you safe so you could save the world, and that magic protected you. Lexa died fighting Ontari to keep her from you, because she loves you. She sacrificed herself for you, and that in turn protected you. On top of that, look at that wand you’re holding.” Clarke blinked down at it, absently sweeping a thumb over the knot in the wood. “Do you recognize it?” Clarke numbly shook her head. “It’s the elder wand, Clarke. Nia took it from Dumbledore’s grave, and it’s been so many years, she took its alliance, too. Now you have it.”
“But…” Clarke’s brow furrowed. “But Lexa killed Nia. So she should have had the alliance. And then Ontari killed Lexa, so…or did Titus? I don’t…”

“No, Clarke. When Lexa killed Nia, her alliance already lay with someone else. She swore her alliance to you when she made the Unbreakable Vow. So the minute she killed Nia and gained allegiance, the allegiance went straight to you. Ontari tried to kill you with a wand that wouldn’t kill its master, while you also had ancient magic protecting you on top of it. And on top of that…” He nodded toward her bulging cloak pocket, where the Invisibility Cloak was still stuffed, and the watch on her wrist that was still glowing. “You have the wand, the stone, and the cloak. You’re the commander of death, kid. Not to mention you have a stubborn streak even worse than your mother’s; you even made it through the City of Light. Ontari didn’t have a chance,” he said happily.

“So…everything had to happen like this,” mused Clarke, still trembling from head to foot. “And…and Lexa and I had to fall in love. We were supposed to?”

Jake grinned broadly. "Kiddo, I've lived a thousand different lives and I watched you fall in love with her in every one of them. A few were funnier than others; once you took off so they had Roan track you down and bring you back, and you hit Lexa with a pretty vicious \textit{augimenti} right in the face," he said, laughing heartily at the memory. "Some things stayed the same. You fall in love. You and Anya fight and come out of it with more respect for each other. Titus tries to stop you from getting the Flame. People die. This time is different, though. I spent forever finding a way to make this work, and this one's it. This is the way. It has to be like this, and if it is...then this is the end." He gave a sad smile. “I want you to know that I’m so proud of you, Clarke. If I learned anything, it was that at the end of the day, people want to do the right thing. And most people will. In every version, you fight to protect your people. You make tough decisions, and sometimes you can barely live with yourself afterwards, but…you keep fighting, and that’s what matters.”

Clarke’s eyes were stinging. “I…I don’t know what to say.” She might be in shock. She probably was. After all the loss she’d suffered, losing everyone she held dear to her heart, hearing that she had a chance to do it over, a chance to save everyone, and that it had all been orchestrated by her father…it was overwhelming, to say the least.

“C’mere,” he said, pulling her into a warm embrace. She clung onto him, breathing in his familiar comforting scent as she buried her face in the broad warmth of his chest. When they pulled back, he used a thumb to brush through the tear tracks on her face and she gave him a watery smile that faded the longer she looked at him.

“Why can’t you stay?” she whispered.

Her father’s smile dimmed. “I wish I could.”
“Why not? You’re here now, aren’t you?” she said desperately.

“It’s just the way it’s got to be,” he said gently. “I told you, I’ve traveled…well, a really long time. I went through hundreds of variations of time, and this path is the one with the least amount of casualties.”

“I miss you.” The words were out before she’d even consciously thought them. “I miss you so much, all the time. And Mum misses you. We just—we just want you back.”

He grimaced. “I know. I know. I’m sorry, kiddo. And the truth is, you’ll never stop missing me, but one day you’ll be better. You’ll live life. Your mother will find love again. And I’ll always be here,” he said, touching his fingertip to Clarke’s heart. “I love you both more than anything, and if you asked me to do all this over again to make sure you get the chance to live, well, I’ve already done it over and over again, and I would do it a thousand times more.”

She smiled again, sniffing before she wiped her tears. The Flame on her wrist was still glowing. “So—what now?”

He let out a breath, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Well, in about ten minutes, everyone’s going to come in for the feast. You’ll have to wait around for a while, let your past self go up and unpack, and then you need to figure out a way to slip the memories in there. You can’t let yourself be seen, or you’re likely—“ He grimaced, “More than likely, actually, I’ve watched you do it, it wasn’t pretty—to think you’re dark magic and curse the hell out of yourself.”

“How do you know all this?” said Clarke, a little amazed. “How did you arrange this entire thing, Dad? Without like, I don’t know, messing up the fabric of the universe!”

He chuckled. “I did, a couple times. It’s hard to explain.”

Clarke lifted her chin. “Try.”

Jake grinned. “Okay. Well, there’s really three theories of time travel. You have the multiverse, where there are an infinite number of parallel universes, and a fixed timeline, where the future is always set, and a dynamic timeline, where things end up in an endless loop. Obviously, we’ve studied the magic of Time for centuries, but this is the first time it’s been able to be experienced first-hand, so needless to say, my research has been greatly influenced.”
Clarke snorted. "And what did you learn?"

"That's Time is a funny thing, all three of the theories are somehow both right and wrong at the same time, and magic is every bit as endlessly fascinating as it was when I was eleven years old and told I was a wizard." They both laughed.

“So, it was you that put my name in the Goblet of Fire, wasn’t it?”

“Yep.” He smiled. “I know you didn’t want to compete, but the quickest way to draw Nia out was to catch word about you and Lexa out in the open like that. It was a lot of traveling and a lot of work. I was there, you know, when they called your name. I used the cloak. And I slipped up when I saw you off at King’s Cross—for a moment there, I thought maybe you saw me.”

Her eyes widened. “I did see you! I thought maybe I was just seeing what I wanted to see, though.”

“Nope, it was really me. I saw you off every year, I didn’t want to miss you on your last one.” Jake glanced out the windows; the carriages had drawn up to the castle and the students were unloading. “We’re almost out of time,” he said heavily, looking at Clarke again. “You’d better put your Invisibility Cloak on.”

She didn’t. They both stared at one another longingly; Clarke’s heart ached, fully aware this was the last time she’d ever see her father.

“I love you,” she croaked.

He smiled, his eyes brimming with tears. “I love you too, Clarke. Always remember how much I love you, and how proud I am of you. It’s an honor to be your father, and watch you grow into the amazing young woman you are today. You’ll always be my little lion cub though,” he added, ruffling a hand through her hair and laughing when Clarke did.

They hugged too long, reluctant to part, but soon the chatter and footsteps of hundreds of students were nearing, and they unwillingly drew back.

“You can do this,” whispered Jake, helping her to tuck the Invisibility Cloak around herself before
withdrawing his own. Crinkled blue eyes were the last thing Clarke saw before her father disappeared, leaving behind nothing more than a lingering whisper. “I love you, kid.”

There was a strangle ripple in the air, as though a heat wave, and Clarke knew he had gone.

She carefully made her way to the double doors, slipping out into the entrance hall just in time for the first of the students to walk through the doorway into the Great Hall. The lump in her throat made it hard to breathe and harder to swallow. There were so many things she still didn’t know, so many things she’d never be able to ask him. Her father was gone, and she’d never be able to save him. But she could still save everyone else.

She made sure the invisibility cloak was wrapped tightly around herself, but she lingered in the shadows of the stairway just in case, watching as students filed into the castle. Her heart thundered as she students and professors passed by, alive, happy, safe. There was Professor Cartwig, helping Professor Vera usher some energetic second-years through the doors. There was Wells, laughing as Monty turned green from the jelly bean he popped into his mouth as they strolled inside, and there was Fox, lips pursed in concern, reaching out to tug him around. There were Raven and Octavia and —this was weird—there was herself, trailing behind them, a subdued smile on her face.

There was another bit of a wait, and then the nervous first-years were led inside by Professor Sinclair. The last student shuffled in and then the doors swung shut, leaving Clarke in the deserted hall listening to the muffled conversation. The Sorting Hat’s speech, Kane informing them about the Triwizard tournament…the feast would be over eventually. She wandered up to Ravenclaw, answered the riddle and slipped inside. She supposed she could hide out in the little alcove on the spiral staircase until it was time. She made sure she made a copy of her memories, everything up to date, to add to her vial, before carefully clasping it shut again, and adding a few more protective spells over the case for good measure.

Her nerves returned as she waited and waited. What if she messed up? What if she was spotted by her past self, and attacked herself? God, this entire thing was migraine-inducing.

But no, as her father has said, he’d worked hard to find the right path. Whatever happened was meant to happen. Right?

When everyone finally returned from the feast and trudged up the stairs, Clarke gave it another ten minutes before she silently crept up after them, her wand held tightly in one hand and the metal tin of memories clutched in the other. The door was thankfully ajar; she slipped inside, flattening herself to the wall to avoid some of the girls who couldn’t be bothered to unpack and had instead thrown their things on their bed and then traipsed back downstairs to visit. Her past self, Raven, and Fox were still up here. Clarke’s heart beat faster, and she was starting to sweat from where she was wedged between the wall and one of the other girls’ beds. She felt as though time was ticking away. She had
no idea how the Flame worked, how long she would remain here before returning. The sooner she placed the memories, the better.

She decided to place them under her pillow, certain her past self would notice them soon, once she went to bed. Fox left the room, heading downstairs to join the others in the common room, leaving Raven and Clarke up there. Raven called her past self over to her side to chat about something irritating thing she’d dealt with regarding her mother over the summer, and Clarke took advantage by moving closer to her bed. She couldn’t use a Hover charm or the like, so instead she waited until Raven and her past self’s backs were turned before lurching across the bed and placing the tin under the pillow before scurrying back; she knocked into the nightstand, sending a book to the ground and narrowly avoiding sending the bag of toiletries with it, and fell hard to the floor in her desperate attempt to catch it.

She lay there, stricken, as Raven and her past self looked up, taking a few steps closer to investigate.

“The hell was that?” said Raven.

“My book,” said Clarke, wearily flicking her wand; the book soared up and she caught it, placing it on the foot of her bed.

“Jesus, how heavy is it? What class is that for?”

“Astronomy.”

“Fuck that.”

“Raven, your Advanced Arithmancy book is like, twice that size.”

“Yeah, but Advanced Arithmancy is interesting.”

“You liked Astronomy!”

“Yeah, until I fell asleep and Professor Cartwig made me write that essay over when Mercury causing storms on Venus or whatever the hell it was. Now, if she’d asked me to write about Uranus,
I could have waxed sonnets.”

As Raven and her past self engaged in a snarking contest, Clarke stealthily crawled beneath Fox’s bed, careful not to let any part of her flash free under the cloak. She lay there, struggling to normalize her breathing, sparing a grateful prayer to her lucky stars that she hadn’t just been caught.

Now she supposed it wouldn’t be long before she’d be returning to her proper time, where everyone would be waiting for her.

But as time wore on, her certainty faltered before outright panic was twisting the insides of her stomach.

Something was wrong. Clarke should have returned back by now. Something should have happened. Instead she was still here crouching beneath Fox’s bed, head swimming with how bizarre it was to be watching herself moving about the dormitory, playfully warning Raven to leave her alone so she could finish unpacking and get to bed. She remembered the lame joke about the warlock and the goblin that Raven made—and then she listened to her make it now.

Panic seared through Clarke’s chest, scorching her throat, at the sudden question that popped in her head, one she should have considered earlier. What if she can’t leave? What if she was supposed to take the Flame back—what if she’s trapped here? Or would she just disappear? What was going to happen to her?

The memories were still half-hidden underneath her pillow. She could see the lamplight glinting off the edge of the tin container from this direction, but knew her former self and Raven could not spot it from where they stood talking and laughing. Somehow she needed to move it, but she’d put that damn charm on it and none of her magic could budge it.

Shit, shit, shit.

What was she going to do?

There might be a chance. She might be able to make a break for it in a minute, because she remembered she’d fallen asleep alone in the dorms on that first night because the rest of the girls weren’t tired yet and went to play a round of Wizard’s Cards in the common room. She might be able to sneak out when it was only herself alone in the room and linger in the shadows of the stairwell before Raven and the others headed back upstairs for bed. God, this was strange.
Clarke remained still, watching with wide eyes, and her heart beat ten times faster when Monty’s voice drifted up the staircase, calling for Clarke and Raven to join in on the games.

“You go,” her former self said, shaking her head as she folded up a pair of robes to put into her dresser. “I’m exhausted.”

“You sure?”

“I’m sure. I don’t know how any of you even have energy after that meal.”

“We’re not all wimps like you,” grinned Raven, ducking the pair of socks Clarke threw at her head and strolling out the door.

Present Clarke’s body was beyond tense, prepared to sneak out from the bed and make a break for it. She grasped the invisibility cloak more compactly around herself, holding her breath as she started to inch out. Any minute now her past self would notice the tin and open it up, then perhaps that would send Clarke back.

Clarke watched her past self yawn as she stowed her things in the trunk at the foot of the bed before moving around again, this time to linger by the window, Clarke remembered with a jolt. She had looked out at the stars and the grounds and had felt that familiar sense of home wash over her that she had been longing to feel and hadn’t felt since school last ended and before that, since her father had been home. This was her chance. Her past self would look out the window, and then Clarke could creep away down the stairs and figure out what to do if she were trapped. Perhaps she’d appeal to her mother, or Jamie Potter. She’d definitely write to Lexa. Although…in this world, she and Lexa had yet to even meet…

Her heart stopped in her chest as Clarke turned (yes, she turned to put her pillow cases on and make her bed before she looked out the window, that was it!) and reached for a pillow. This was it. She would lift the pillow and it would reveal the tin beneath it.

Except it didn’t. Because when past-Clarke pulled the pillow up, the other side hit where her wand and toiletries were resting too close near the edge of the nightstand thanks to Present-Clarke nudging them. The pillow knocked it all over, and Clarke hadn’t realized that the metal tin was not only half-obscured beneath the pillow but also on the edge of the mattress and consequently being held up by the pillow. There was a loud clatter as everything fell to the ground, and something shattered. Past Clarke sighed and swore. She moved around the mattress to pick up the things. The Clarke currently
frozen beneath the invisibility cloak with her heart lodged in her throat and her breath not coming out of her lungs stared with wide eyes, absolutely terrified.

Because something was very, very wrong.

She felt peculiar. Lighter, almost. It wasn’t quite the same sensation as flying, or even as falling, but it felt like the wind and the sensation of watching the ground hurtle up toward you. She looked down and saw that her very self was disappearing, fading—one moment she was lying on the ground and the next, she could see the floor through her own arms.

Clarke looked up, terror constricting her heart, thinking of Lexa, of her father, of everyone else she loved.

Oh God.

Light crept toward the center of her vision, and her senses seemed to amplify and melt together, like she was doing the very opposite of fainting. The floor felt hard against her hips, and the invisibility cloak was soft on her skin, and she swore she could smell fire-smoke and something earthy, and it felt as though achingly-familiar lips were pressed against her own—she lost the strength to support her own head and felt the jolt of the harsh thump as she dropped to the floor. Clarke’s eyes fluttered shut as she faded away into nothingness. Ironically, Clarke Griffin was out of time.

She never had the chance to ask her father where he’d learned this phrase, or how Lexa knew it as well, but right now, at the end of all things, they came to her mind effortlessly, like they had always been there.

She hoped things worked out.

May we meet again.

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Clarke startled at the sound of a sharp thud. She swiveled around, but no one was in the dorms except for her. She ducked down to peer in the direction the sound came from, thinking perhaps something had fallen from Fox or Raven’s beds, but couldn’t see anything at all. She sighed, wondering yet again for the umpteenth time lately if she was going crazy. It was bad enough to be
plagued with outlandish nightmares (eighteen, to be exact) without hearing things too too.

She returned her attention to the toiletries, gathering up her shampoo, conditioner, and body wash before carefully picking her toothbrush up so the bristles didn’t touch the floor. The new perfume her mother had bought her had shattered. She waved her wand over the mess, the shards reassembling into the diamond-shaped glass full of the purple liquid. As she stood and dropped the rest of the toiletries into her trunk in their haphazard jumble, she tossed the perfume in the trash, since the dust from the ground would have clung onto the liquid. She crouched one last time before her nightstand, blindly patting a hand around beneath her bed to make sure nothing had rolled out of her reach, and felt nothing. Too tired to bother with finishing unpacking, she rolled onto her unmade bed still fully clothed, and fell asleep soon after.

*・・・/✧/・・*

The only thing better than Advanced Transfiguration was when Sinclair decided to let class out early.

Raven had learned long ago that Professor Sinclair was partial to her, and on her particularly charming days, it wasn’t too hard to put him in high enough spirits that she could get him talking long enough to forget assigning them homework. Today, that charm had manifested itself in convincing him today was a special enough day to warrant letting them out of class early, because today was the day Beauxbatons and Durmstrang arrived for the tournament (even if they weren’t arriving until later in the day).

Raven breezed her way up to Ravenclaw Tower and snatched a pepperami from her pile of sweets and snacks atop her nightstand before she collapsed into her four-poster bed. She tore open the packet with her teeth and took a hearty bite before glancing over at Clarke’s empty bed. Raven smirked when she thought of bragging to her and O and Bell later about how she convinced Sinclair to give her a free period.

She grew a bit drowsy and considered taking a nap, but her stomach was still rumbling and it wouldn’t be dinner for a while—and even then, she was sure Kane would put them through some kind of speech before letting them dig in for the feast. She eyed the box of unopened chocolate frogs sitting on Clakre’s windowsill beside the stack of birthday cards that had taken residence there the past few days. But no, she could at least wait until Clarke opened it to steal some frogs out of it. Sighing, she grabbed another pepperami, but as she pulled it free of the basket, it dropped it onto the floor.

“Ugh.” Raven gave an exaggerated groan, screwing up her face at the type of disappointment only the avidly lazy could truly experience. She didn’t want to get up, but she also really wanted that pepperami. She rolled over and seized her wand off her dresser, aggressively jabbing it toward the
direction the pepperami had rolled beneath Clarke’s bed.

“Accio!” she muttered.

It came zooming out, but it hit something on the way, sending it rolling across the floor beneath Raven’s bed. “Seriously?” she lamented, dropping her head and faceplanting her pillow. The pepperami she’d summoned smacked her behind the ear. Scowling, she lifted her head and turned round, grabbed it in her free hand while jabbing her wand in the air again, mumbling, “Accio!” Nothing happened, so she scoffed and said, “Accio bottle…thingy!”

Her scowl deepened when nothing came soaring toward her. She swished her wand, repeated the incantation a third time, but again, nothing. Confused and annoyed, she heaved herself up and dropped down onto the knee of her good leg, craning to peek beneath her bed. There were a few socks, an old Sneakoscope, a forgotten half-eaten Crunchy bar (she gasped), a pair of underwear, and quite a healthy layer of dust on the floor beneath her bed considering they’d only been back in school for a week. In the far distance near the wall the head of the bed was pushed up against there was what seemed to be a small bottle full of some shimmering liquid.

Raven tried the summoning charm one last time, eyeing the bottle she was perplexed to see didn’t so much as twitch or roll her direction. Whatever it was, it clearly belonged to Clarke, and it seemed as though she’d put a charm on it that repelled spells. Which made Raven very curious.

With a huff, she flattened down onto her belly and army-crawled beneath the bed, shoving aside the random socks so she could scoot as far forward as she could to scoop up the bottle. Then she shimmied back, holding her braced leg out at an odd angle to keep her leg safe from smacking against the wood. She inhaled and sighed once finally back to the dust-free air, one hand clutching the bottle and the other still holding her wand and pepperami.

She eased down onto the bed, bringing the bottle up to observe. At first she’d assumed it must be the felix felices they won during Potions’ class three years, but the liquid wasn’t glittering gold, it was a smooth, iridescent silver—it looked suspiciously like the strands of memory Raven would often pull free from her head whenever she used her pensive. Raven’s brow drew together and she tucked her tongue between her teeth, bringing the bottle nearly to her nose as she peered inside. These were memories, she was sure of it. Why did Clarke keep a bottle of memories beneath her bed, complete with an anti-summoning ward on them?

Oh no. Curiosity was flooding through Raven, and she knew very well how not good a sign that was. She carefully placed the bottle on the nightstand beside Clarke’s bed and then leaned back in her own, folding her arms over her chest. Not her memories, not her business. She couldn’t just look through her friend’s private thoughts, that was beyond intrusive and personally she would be beyond pissed if anyone ever did that to her.
And yet…

Raven leaned forward, contemplative as she stared at the bottle full of the shimmery liquid.

Clarke had been going through a rough time lately with her dad in Azkaban. She was already a private person, but she was incredibly tight-lipped when she was going through shit. Raven, Octavia, and Wells probably knew more about the situation than any of their other friends did, but Clarke still told them very, very little. She suppressed her feelings and wasn’t keen on sharing her feelings.

This summer had been mostly radio silence from her. She’d been quiet and withdrawn throughout the second half of sixth year after her father had been taken away. Raven knew she and Abby had attempted to visit Jake the past Christmas, but the guards had turned them away. Even last week on the train and at the welcoming feast, Clarke had been unnaturally quiet and frowning more often then not, and lately she'd been just as subdued and distracted in her classes as she had been last year.

Maybe Raven should take a peek. She was just looking out for her best friend, after all, it wasn’t like it was out of morbid curiosity. Okay, not just out of morbid curiosity.

Raven snatched up the bottle, heading to the topmost drawer of her dresser that she kept her pensive in. As she pulled it out, set it on the table, and wrenched the stopper out of the bottle, she hesitated. Was this a major breach of trust and confidentiality?

It sounded like bullshit even in her own head, but she had a feeling. There was a strange sense of foreboding ticking inside her, a tiny voice urging her to do it. This was important and vital to Clarke’s wellbeing. Maybe it was a memory of her father that she couldn’t bear anymore so she removed it, but it consequently contributed to her losing her sense of self. Maybe it was a memory of Finn, because of what he’d done months ago. Who knew what it was, but either way, Raven had an overwhelming instinct that she should check it out.

She turned the bottle over, stilling when she saw the scrawl—her name had been etched into the bottom of the vial. The fuck?

Okay, now she was definitely going to take a look.

Before she could overthink it again, she tipped the bottle over. Rather than simply dumping the liquid in, it slowly floated out, spilling into the bowl in a swirling silvery mass. Raven glanced once over
her shoulder to make sure no one was approaching; Clarke had another class starting soon (so did Raven, but Arithmancy would have to wait), so she shouldn’t be returning anytime soon.

Raven looked back at the pensive, sucked in a deep breath, and bent down, the cool wash of the substance enveloping first her nose, then the rest of her face, before the memories reached out and gripped her, sucking her in. The world around her spun as she flew down, down, down into a memory, and… oh.

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Raven gasped as she reared up out of the pensive, floundering as though she’d been underwater and desperate for air, a cold sweat breaking out on her body, arms wind-milling as she fell hard on her ass. She wheezed for breath, eyes wide in utter shock, her teeth chattering.

“Holy fucking shit!”

Chapter End Notes

Dun dun dun, Raven is the savior after all! Poor kid had been so upset about not being tournament champion and now she's gotta step up as champion of the world. Expect some shenanigans next chapter as she freaks the fuck out.

A couple of you guys predicted it would be a Time-Turner (I tried dropping little hints that way people wouldn't totally freak out once deaths started happening a few chapters ago, so I'm glad no one's been too devastated by them); hope it was still a fun twist to read! :) I'd love to know your thoughts on this chapter and what you imagine will happen in the next! ^_^

I totally based the "falling stars" on that scene at the end of Kingdom Hearts, btw. I love the visual. It's not the last time we'll see that either, but *spoiler alert* next time may be a little more romantic ;). Here's a link to a gif http://dreamsaremywords.tumblr.com/image/165347936955
One Glance and the Avalanche Drops

Chapter Summary

I could give you a better summary for this chapter, but hell you guys already know Clexa are soulmates, so instead I'll just say Clarke is thirsty, Lexa has detention for the first time in her life, and Ranya are shitheads

Chapter Notes

( *UPDATE 03/27* Hey guys remember sometimes it takes me a while to update, so don't worry, this WILL be finished! I'm just a little slow on the next chapter so far, and kinda waiting on my wife to read this chapter but with work and her last semester of grad school it's been kinda crazy! But don't worry, I'm working on it :) Thank you for reading! )

1. One word... "um." (this is bc I literally just finished some of the stuff that takes place at the end of this chapter...lol you'll know what I mean)

2. I didn't really expect this chapter to be as in-depth as it was. It's basically a whole new fic in one chapter. have fun

3. Thank you so much for every comment, kudos, bookmark and subscription. You have no idea how happy they make me. I will eventually respond to every single one too. Hope you all had a good New Year. May 20gayteen treat you well.

4. Also, I meant to put this note in the last chapter- I planned out Those Icy Fingers before The Cursed Child and Fantastic Beasts came out. Imagine my surprise that 1. in the Cursed Child, despite all the Time-Turners having been destroyed in the Ministry, there is still a secret one that can go back much farther in time (just like in my fuckin fic), and 2. there's a thing called an Obscurus, which is similar to the phenomenon that happens in my fic (the Shadow-Eaters; how I imagined too much dark magic would manifest in creating a dangerous, unstable mass of darkness that would destroy you; I mean not exactly the same but I had been inspired by the darkness taking ppl over in Kingdom Hearts and turns out it's kinda similar regarding how it looks when the darkness breaks free). Some of you who follow me on tumblr might remember I made a post when both of those came out saying I couldn't believe it. I'm not saying I’m annoyed JKR used her witchcraft (squib my ass) to steal my ideas, but that’s exactly what I’m saying

5. I am both excited and a little nervous to know what you think about this chapter bc I know it was a lot so feel free to throw words at me :3 there might be some mistakes since I haven't been able to really comb through a few parts of this yet, but I'll go through it!

Lastly, here's the link to the aesthetic post I made for this chapter:
Past lives couldn’t ever hold me down
Lost love is sweeter when it’s finally found
I’ve got the strangest feeling
This isn’t our first time around
-Borns

For a suspended moment, the only sound in the room was the wheezing gasps of breath Raven was sucking in, interspersed with the crashing of her own heart in her ears. She stared up at the ceiling from where she lay sprawled on the star-spotted blue carpet she fell on, the sapphire canopy of her four-poster bed in her peripheral vision, gazing up at the rafters without really seeing. Her head spun with the revelations, a year’s worth of memories packed into her skull. If she had a moment of peace where she could think properly, she may have thought it felt as though she’d died and come back to life—like the Raven who existed before she got her memories back was nothing more than an empty shell, waiting, and now here she was. She remembered everything, things that had not yet happened in this world—things that she would make sure never happened in this world.

But how? Her memories didn’t show the end result of their excursion into the Ministry. What happened after that? Clarke had clearly succeeded in coming back in time to deliver memories…but why Raven’s? Where was everyone else’s?

Raven rolled over onto her front, peering beneath her bed again. Nothing there. She swiveled round to look under Clarke’s. Nothing there either, save for a few shards of glass…her heart sank. Were there more memories, but something went wrong? Surely Clarke would have been more careful than to accidentally drop and shatter her precious memories…Raven waved her wand several time, uttering all variations of spells that could possibly reveal any hidden memories, but there was nothing.

A distant thud shook the castle walls, and there was barely time for her eyes to widen as dust sprinkled down from the ceilings before she jolted up and scrambled to the window, visions bursting in her mind of the Queen’s army laying siege on the castle, of a leathery black dragon charging at them—

It was nothing like that. The hulking silhouette of the Beauxbatons carriage was framed against the
golden sky. The sun was inching below the horizon. She must have been in those memories for hours; she’d missed her classes.

Beauxbatons was here. Which meant Durmstrang would be too before long. Anya would be here soon. Raven made a noise somewhere between a strangled squeak and a gasp as she seized her wand from where it had fallen on the floor and hobbled out of the dormitory as quickly as her legs could take her.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. She had no idea what was going on. Why had it been her memories? Did Clarke know? Surely she would have been acting differently if she had. Why didn’t she, then? Why were Raven’s memories there, but no one else’s? What had happened in the past—or the future—or just, the alternate timeline, anyway? Raven had given her memories to Clarke twice, first when she, Luna, and Evie were with Clarke in the circular room with all the doors, hastily withdrawing their memories to give to Clarke while Ontari was breathing down their necks, and then again in the same room when it was just her and Clarke and she didn’t want to forget the way Evie had lurched in front of her to take the killing curse that had been cast at Raven, or the way Luna went on a devastating rampage afterward, her red scales shimmering with blood. Raven had no idea what happened after that; clearly Clarke had managed to find the Flame and use it, but why had nothing happened then? Nia and Ontari were still out there. Cage was now literally on the Hogwarts grounds.

She had to find Clarke; perhaps Clarke did have her memories, but was merely waiting for Raven to catch up…even though that would be beyond stupid, thought Raven angrily, for Clarke to do…Something must have went wrong for it to end up this way…

“Clarke!”

She burst into the Potions classroom to find it empty of Professor Nygel and the majority of the small class. There were only two students: Clarke, looking somewhat frazzled, her hair bushy and wild from the fumes emanating from her cauldron, and a burly Hufflepuff boy—seven years of class with him and she could never remember his damn name—with sweat dripping down his flushed face. They both paused over the blue liquid bubbling in their cauldrons. Clarke looked up at Raven and lifted a hand from the ladle she’d been stirring, reaching up to mop her forehead with the back of her arm.

“Hey, where’ve you been?”

“Get out,” Raven told the Hufflepuff.

He scowled at her. “Professor Nygel told us we can’t leave until we finish this Alihotsy Draught—“
“Get out,” she snapped, brandishing her wand; the boy eyed it warily before releasing his ladle and grabbing his bag from under his desk; he’d seen Raven blow up enough potions during class. He stormed away muttering under his breath.

“What are you doing?” asked Clarke, frowning at Raven. She spared the retreating boy a glance before looking back at her potion. Raven remembered with a jolt that Clarke had been slightly hysterical from spending too long inhaling the fumes from the Alhotsy leaves before; she wasted no time in hurrying forward to seize her by the arm and steer her around, flicking her wand to Vanish the potion. “Raven!” cried Clarke, torn between disbelief and annoyance. “What the hell? I’m going to get zero marks for that!”

“That’s not important right now! Listen. Are you—did you—do you have your memories?”

Clarke’s brow drew together. “What?”

“Do you have all your memories back?” said Raven impatiently. She glanced over her shoulder uneasily, but they were alone in the classroom. “I have mine.”

Clarke stared at her, clearly wondering if this was some kind of prank. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Raven scrutinized her carefully, heart thudding against her ribcage. Clarke just looked back at her, annoyed and confused. She really didn’t have her memories. Shit. Fuck. What does she do now?

She opened her mouth to speak—she didn’t even have a plan, she was just going to tell Clarke everything and show her the memories—when she realized something else, something that had her heart freezing in her throat. This Clarke was not the same Clarke she’d stood beside in the Department of Mysteries. This Clarke was younger, softer…this Clarke had not yet fallen in love with Lexa, had not yet been heartbroken by all the death and responsibility. This Clarke was aloof and sad, struggling to focus on her schoolwork because she was too busy worrying about her father alone in his Azkaban prison cell. This Clarke had no idea her father was actually dead and her mother had altered her memories.

Raven swore, spinning around on her heels. Clarke watched, bewildered, as Raven began pacing between the desks, twisting her wand round in her hands.
“Uh, Rae, you’re kinda freaking me out. What’s going on?”

Raven ran a spare hand through her hair, mumbling under her breath. This wasn’t supposed to be her, she was sure of that. She wasn’t meant to be the only one with her memories, the person upon whom the sole responsibility of saving the entire world rest on. This should be Clarke, not her. For all her confidence, Raven was terrified. Things had a tendency of blowing up in her face; what if she ruined everything? This wasn’t right, she was sure of it.

*What went wrong?*

“Raven?” Clarke sounded really unnerved now. “Are you okay? Do you need to go to the Hospital Wing?”

She could tell her later. Raven stilled, swallowing thickly. Yeah, she could tell Clarke later, tell her everything. She’d only regained her memories moments ago…she hadn’t even had time to properly think, let alone figure out a tactful method of breaking news to Clarke that would turn her entire world upside down.

For now, she had to play it cool.

She turned to face Clarke, who still looked at her with that crease between her brows. “I’m okay,” she said, and the further dubious furrowing of Clarke’s brow told her she’d said it too automatically. “Really. I’m A-Okay.” She tacked a smile onto it for emphasis.

Clarke, of course, still looked suspicious. “And what was that about…memories?”

Raven opened her mouth and…nothing. Of course. Any other time she has trouble shutting up, but now, no reasonable excuse comes to mind whatsoever.

Her saving grace came in the form of a distant rumble of voices that effectively distracted them both. Mingled desperation and joy struck her chest like lightning, filling her with relief so sharp it hurt. Durmstrang. *Anya.*

“Who’s Anya?” said Clarke; Raven winced. She hadn’t realized she’d spoken aloud.
“Uh, come on, we’d better hurry. You’ve already missed Beauxbatons’ arrival…”

Clarke looked alarmed for a moment, before sighing resignedly and gathering her things. “Kane’s going to kill me for being late, I was supposed to give a tour to the head student of Beauxbatons.”

“Don’t worry, I’m sure he had Wells do it instead,” Raven assured her as the two of them hurried out of the dungeons.

They were certainly later than Raven had anticipated; Durmstrang ship was at shore and the mix of their students and Hogwarts students were already trouping up the grounds heading straight toward where Clarke and Raven stood in the entrance hall doorway.

“Ah, shit,” said Clarke, blowing out a breath as she glumly studied the approaching horde, “Kane’s definitely going to be pissed now. Look, he had to get Octavia to give a tour,” she added, gesturing with a nod of her head.

Shit shit shit. 

She fucked up. It hadn’t even been an hour and Raven had already fucked up so bad that the entire space-time continuum was in danger. Probably. Most likely. Fuck. She remembered very well what happened in the old version—or future? Or something else entirely? Time travel was confusing. She’d always been more fascinated by space than time, personally. But, anyway, it definitely hadn’t happened like this.

She remembered, she’d relaxed in her bed for her free period, eating snacks and idly experimenting on her old iPod before lunch and then heading to Advanced Potions with Clarke. She’d finished her Alihotsy Draught and only mildly teased Clarke for struggling with hers (because not too long ago Clarke would have kicked her ass in Potions, but ever since her dad was arrested, she had trouble concentrating) and headed down to watch Beauxbatons and Durmstrang’s arrival. She’d stood in the crowd, rolling her eyes along with Fox and Monty at Jasper geeking out over how cute the Beauxbatons and Durmstrang girls were, but she knew from later after the feast when she’d decided to take herself a leisurely bath in the Prefect’s room that Clarke, half-hysterical after breathing in the fumes from the Alihotsy Draught, had given a tour to Lexa—an amusing tale to Raven, a mortifying experience for Clarke. That had been Clarke and Lexa’s first meeting.

And now it had never happened. Because Raven interrupted Clarke, stopped the Alihotsy from affecting her, and made her late enough that she missed Durmstrang’s initial arrival entirely and now Octavia was the one standing in the distance with Lexa and clearly giving an enthusiastic description of the Giant Squid, if her wild gesticulations toward the lake were anything to go by. They were too
far away to see their faces, but Raven was sure Lexa looked only mildly bemused.

“Well, I guess we can go ahead and start the feast,” said Clarke, turning around and walking a couple steps back into the entrance hall before noticing Raven wasn’t following. She looked expectantly at her. “Come on, let’s get some tea. Raven? Hey…are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll meet you in there,” said Raven, mind working quickly. She had to see Anya, had to talk to her. She knew it wasn’t a very good plan—wasn’t a plan at all, in fact—but she had to speak to Anya somehow, no matter what. “I…need to use the loo first.”

Clarke stared at her for a moment before shaking her head. “You are acting so weird today. Alright, though. I’ll save you a seat.”

“Thanks,” said Raven, though Clarke was already walking away.

The students were near now, a few of them having reached the steps; Raven’s heart leapt as she spotted Anya among them, eyes surrounded by smudged black paint, expression as haughty as ever. A rush of emotion swept over Raven and her eyes pricked with tears. She couldn’t believe it. Yes, in this world, Anya was alive and well, but in her memories it was less than twenty-four hours ago she’d watched Anya die, and it wasn’t much longer before then that Raven had been so angry with her, furious…and even before then, they spent so much time determined to lie to themselves, that they were just casual fuckbuddies, that it was all they wanted or needed… So much wasted time.

Not anymore. Life was precious. What they had—what they could have again. That’s precious. Raven had always considered herself to be a strong person, a courageous person. But perhaps this—willing to face the insufferable pain again just for a chance at happiness—perhaps that’s what true bravery is.

She situated herself near a broom closet and hid behind the entrance doors, lurking just out of sight and carefully eying each student that walked in. Her heart jumped when she spotted Anya, walking between Artigas and an unfamiliar Durmstrang with a mane of curls. When Anya neared her, Raven didn’t hesitate. She shot an arm out and seized Anya above the elbow, yanking her out of the crowd of students and, since the unexpected movement had knocked Anya off balance and caused her to stumble, managed to pull her with her into the nearby broom closet in one clumsy motion.

“What the fuck,” snarled Anya, shoving Raven hard enough she tripped backwards over the boxes on the floor, clawing wildly at the air, scrambling to find something to grab but falling hard on her ass anyway, pulling several boxes off the shelves with her. They rained down on her and she winced in pain as the corner of a particularly heavy box caught her on the forehead. She was left lying half-
buried in boxes on the floor, blinking dazedly up at the wand pointed at her face. She wasn’t so much bothered by the fact that Anya had her wand pointed at her; she did, however, get a dull, sinking sensation in her stomach at the lack of recognition in Anya’s eyes. She looked at her like a stranger…which, to her, Raven was.

“Wait,” said Raven, shaking her head to dispel the dizziness. She started to pull herself up but froze immediately when Anya raised her wand. Raven lifted her empty palms, ignoring the swelling of her heart as she looked into slanted eyes she’d been so terrified she’d never look into again. Bad move, really, because if anything put Anya on edge, it was the tremulous smile threatening to curve Raven’s lips.

“Who are you?” demanded Anya, not offering a hand as Raven pulled herself to her feet. She glanced briefly at the brace bracketing Raven’s brace, but said nothing about it.

“Hi,” said Raven breathlessly, unable to stop the greedy, hungry way her gaze roved Anya’s face, for once too absorbed to spare the time to be annoyed at the glassy film developing in her eyes. She couldn’t believe this was real. Anya was here, alive, right before her. They had a second chance.

She couldn’t stand it. She lurched forward, and Anya, always used to being able to intimidate anyone with a single look, was clearly in enough shock that Raven was so unaffected by her rage never mind the fact that she paid no mind to the wand that had been pointed right at her and was now pressing into her chest, that she didn’t move in time. Raven cupped the back of her neck and pulled her close and promptly crashed their mouths together.

There was a split second before she realized what a terrible idea it was. A split second where Anya did not react and they just stood there, lips pressed together, and Raven inhaled sharply through her nose and smelled everything Anya, the pine trees Anya told her surrounded Durmstrang, the sticky-sweet toffee Anya loved to snack on, and most of all, the scent Raven had never been able to name other than just Anya herself. For that split second, it almost—almost—felt as though Anya could feel everything Raven could, and was about to kiss her back.

Wishful thinking, of course. For Raven, she was kissing the love of her life, a girl brought back to life, a girl she wanted to spend forever convincing how much she loved her, a girl she wanted to travel with after they graduated and see the world together, even show her the shitty town she grew up with, visit their loved ones’ graves together. For Anya, well, some random stranger had yanked her into a broom closet and started snogging her. At this point, Raven probably deserved what was about to happen.

She was blasted back with a nonverbal jelly-legs jinx that had her falling on her ass all over again. Boxes rained down around her again, but the dull throb of pain faded into static background as she blinked up at Anya, who was gaping at her, her free hand halfway up, hovering near her lips. She
blinked and her shock dissipated, leaving behind the outrage she was far more comfortable feeling than anything else.

“WHAT THE FUCK,” thundered Anya as she advanced on a feebly stirring Raven, and perhaps even Raven would have found her murderous expression alarming, if it weren’t for the cute blush blossoming on Anya’s face. “Who the fuck do you think you are? You just—who just does that? What—who are you?”

Raven’s weak smile was more like a grimace above her quivering chin. “Raven. Raven Reyes. I, uh, I’m a student here. Um…welcome to Hogwarts?”

Anya seemed to swell with rage and, yep, she was probably about to kill Raven.

“Anya?” The door cracked open to reveal Lincoln. He looked between Raven and Anya, confused. “What’s going on? Do you…know each other?”

“No, we don’t!” hissed Anya. “I’ve never met this maniac in my life, but she just kissed me!”

Lincoln’s eyebrows shot up. “She kissed you?”

“Apparently this is the kind of greeting Hogwarts students give their guests,” growled Anya, her cheeks still flaming red.

Lincoln shifted his gaze onto Raven, though that may be less because he wanted to look at her and more because he seemed to be under threat of showing amusement, and then his body would be buried next to Raven’s. “Are you supposed to be Harry Potter or something?”

Raven’s hand jumped to the cut on her forehead; her fingers came away bloody. Anya continued looking as though she was deciding on the best way to curse her, and Lincoln continued carefully maintaining a composed expression. In lieu of an answer, Raven pointed her wand at her legs, ignoring Anya’s eyes narrowing further, and murmured a counter spell before shakily struggling to her feet.

If things were simpler, Raven could just tell them both everything right now. Make claims they would never believe, but prove them by casting her memories up like a projection. Spend several hours in this closet letting them get caught up, risking anyone else strolling in and seeing something
they shouldn’t. She couldn’t risk that, because she couldn’t risk the wrong people finding out she knew things she couldn’t—such as Titus. Even if they were uninterrupted, she couldn’t trust Lincoln; he would tell Lexa and Indra. Lexa, Indra, Jamie—everyone else was far too loyal to the head of the Order of the Phoenix, they wouldn’t believe he’d betrayed them, they would tell him in an instant. But Anya—Anya had always disliked him. Out of everyone, she was Raven’s best bet, and that wasn’t just because Raven wanted more than anything to have Anya back. Anya was naturally suspicious and distrustful and guarded and one of the most infuriating, difficult people Raven had ever met. They were some of the things she loved most about her.

“Look, can we talk?” Raven asked Anya, before pointedly tilting her head toward Lincoln, “Privately?”

Anya was already protesting when Lincoln nodded and backed toward the door, apparently under the impression that Anya had miraculously found herself a booty call within two seconds of being at a new school; he wasn’t doing a very good job of hiding his amused and mildly impressed expression. Anya noticed, and if anything hastened Lincoln’s retreat, it was the indignant snarl that chased him out.

“Would you prefer being Transfigured into a flobberworm before or after I remove your limbs?” sneered Anya, tilting her head slightly.

God. She was threatening her again. It was so Anya. Raven’s eyes brimmed again and all she wanted to do was hug her. Visions of lunging forward and flinging her arms around Anya’s neck died as quickly as they came, however, replaced by the immediate outcome that was certain to bring: Anya whipping her wand out and cursing Raven until she resembled nothing more than a flesh-eating slug belly-up on the ground. Even as Raven deflated, a corner of her lips still twitched upward; the idea of Anya cursing her had never exactly been a turnoff before, so it was almost reassuring to know it still wasn’t now.

But still. She needed to find a way to be clever about this.

“Your name is Anya Lachman, and you’re a pureblood who was raised by your grandmother.” Anya paused, though she looked less outraged and far more suspicious now, which was much more dangerous, so Raven quickly continued, “I’m not an enemy, I swear. I’m—I know Indra and Lexa, I know Lex is a prodigy and you guys aren’t really just here for the tournament. I know Titus is the leader of the Order you’re in and that there’s a lot at stake and some dangerous people out there. I know a lot of things,” she added, chest rising and falling rapidly as Anya stared at her, “Things that aren’t safe to talk about here. Can I take you somewhere there’s less chance of being overheard?” She knew immediately by the way Anya’s eyes narrowed and her grip on her wand tightened that it had been the wrong thing to say; an enemy would definitely want to isolate someone, and that was exactly what Raven had just proposed. “I promise I’m on your side, okay?”
“You are a stranger. Your promises mean nothing.”

“Okay,” said Raven, thinking quickly, “Then can I show you something? I have memories—memories that involve you. Use Legilimency. You’ll see.”

They’d only practiced a few times in the other timeline, but Raven had been dreadful at Occlumency. Though Anya had never been as accomplished as Lexa at Legilimency, she was still good at it. This would work, if Anya agreed to it. She wasn’t sure how else to convince Anya she was on her side.

To her relief, Anya took a step closer, still suspicious, but peering into Raven’s eyes with a new intensity as she lifted her wand. Raven looked back, unblinking, willing her to understand.

“Legilimens!”

Her surroundings shifted in an instant. Suddenly Raven was nine years old and sitting with her legs folded beneath her at a small pond, hope shining in her eyes as she listened to a little boy with floppy hair avidly describing various aspects of magic.

Now she was a teenager, playing a vicious game of Wizard’s Cards with Bellamy, cackling as her dragon devoured his knight.

She was four and sitting on her father’s lap, giggling as he wheeled them down a small pathway outside ASDA, raising her arms in the air as though it were a rollercoaster.

She was in her final year at Hogwarts, yelling as she lost control of her broomstick and flew straight at a haughty Durmstrang student, crashing into her and sending them both tumbling into mud.

She was standing in the crowd during the second task of the Triwizard Tournament, cheering alongside Anya as Clarke and Lexa used a portkey to escape a magical gorilla.

She was sitting around a campfire, laughing and joining in with Octavia and Lexa as they teased Lincoln about the rabbit he’d burned for supper.
She had Anya pressed up against the desk in Filch’s office with her red dress bunched around her waist, two fingers buried inside her, swallowing Anya’s gasps and grunts before claiming the girl’s neck with her teeth. Her lips curled into a smirk at the sound of her name ripping out of Anya’s throat as—

Raven sucked in a sharp intake of breath and blinked as the broom closet and a stunned Anya came back into view.

“See?” she breathed, shaking her head to dispel the lingering blurry vision.

“That’s—you—we—“

Raven’s lips quirked. If she didn’t know any better, she’d say Anya was spluttering. If she weren’t essentially a stranger to Anya at this point, she’d tease her for it.

“There’s more I can show you, like, a hell of a lot more. But we need to get out of here. It’s dangerous if anyone else overhears. We have to go before—“

Speak of the devil. The door cracked open at that moment, and another head popped in—this one belonging to a person Raven knew would be much harder to convince than Lincoln.

“What is this?” asked Lexa cautiously, green eyes shifting from Raven to Anya and back onto Raven again.

No one answered for a moment. Anya, still flushed and wide-eyed, looked at Raven, who was probably a little too obvious in the way she widened her eyes and shook her head a fraction of an inch to each side. Lexa’s eyes narrowed and her jaw set.

“Speak to Lincoln,” said Anya swiftly, inhaling and exhaling steadily, looking at Raven with a kind of shrewdness that told her she was making a decision and if it wasn’t the right one, Raven would suffer for it. “Give me a moment.”

“Lincoln?” Lexa’s head tipped to the side. “What does Lincoln have to do with the fact that you are in a broom closet with a stranger from Hogwarts?”
“Talk to Lincoln and he’ll clear it up,” said Anya through clenched teeth. “Trust me.”

Lexa raised an eyebrow, but Anya gazed back resolutely. Finally, rearranging her puzzled expression into one of indifference, Lexa nodded. “Fine. Where is he?”

“At the feast, I would assume.” Anya’s gaze on Raven turned cold. “I shouldn’t be long, then I’ll join you.”

“Okay.”

They remained quite still in the moments after Lexa left, waiting until she was out of earshot. Anya crossed what little space was between them in the small closet and bared her teeth. “If you are playing tricks—”

“I’m not,” said Raven, relieved beyond measure and more than happy to see Anya so up close and personal. Anya’s brow knit for a second—still disconcerted to see a stranger so unafraid of her—before her face hardened with distrust again. “Follow me.”

Any kept her wand out the entire walk up to the seventh floor.

“Wait here,” Raven told her once they reached the left corridor.

Any cast a bemused glance at the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy teaching trolls ballet before watching Raven pace, growing more wary each time Raven strolled past her.

“What are you doing, exactly?” she huffed.

Raven ignored the question; it was answered for her a second later, when a large door bloomed into being on the wall opposite the tapestry. Anya’s grip on her wand tightened.

“We won’t be interrupted here. Come on.” She grasped Anya’s free hand without thinking and began tugging her into the room; Anya snatched it away with something that sounded suspiciously like a snarl, and Raven cringed. “Sorry.”
“Just what the hell is going on?” demanded Anya, rounding on her the moment the door shut behind them. They were in a fairly empty room, comfortable recliners set up next to a stand with a Pensieve bowl perched atop it. There were velvety blankets draped over the chairs. The few torches on the wall cast the room in a cool white-blue, if not a bit dim, glow. “Did those—are those memories real, or fabricated? Why do I not have them? What—“

“Hang on, listen and I'll explain everything,” said Raven, standing before the Pensieve and beginning to remove copies of her memories, hovering the thick gossamer strands into the bowl. “Take a seat. Trust me, this is going to take a while.”

After a moment, Anya did so, albeit stiffly. “You said…you have a year’s worth of memories? That means I am missing a year’s worth of my own?”

“Yes and no. You are missing them, but technically they haven’t happened yet, either.”

“I...” Anya frowned, watching as Raven added more memories.

“Don’t worry, this is going to explain everything.”

“If you tell me not to worry one more time—“ snarled Anya, half-rising from her chair, more incensed than ever at the way Raven rolled her eyes at her, but then Raven stepped back. She took a seat in the other recliner and gestured toward the pensieve.

“Go on.”

Scowling, Anya pulled the stand over to her, spreading her knees apart to fit it between them, and peered down at the silvery liquid swirling in the shallow bowl. Raven watched nervously, quickly smoothing her expression into one of assurance when Anya cast one last glare at her before cautiously lowering her head into the bowl.

Now there was nothing to do but wait.

* * /○/ * *
“Oh my God,” groaned Octavia. “Do you see him? He is the hottest thing I’ve ever seen in my whole life.”

Clarke tried her best to hide her amusement as she tore bits of bread roll and dipped them in brown gravy. Bellamy scowled at Octavia over his Yorkshire pudding.

“I mean, fuck, he’s so hot he’s going to set the castle on fire. Why couldn’t I have given him the tour?”

“A tour of the inside of your pants, you mean?” snickered Jasper.

The look Bellamy gave him, all flared nostrils and jutted jaw, shut him up at once. Bellamy directed a sour glance at Octavia next. “Can you cut it out? I’ve been looking forward to this feast all summer and you’re killing my appetite.”

“Really, ‘cos it’s increasing mine,” said Octavia absently, still intently watching the Durmstrang boy a few tables over who was currently wolfing down what seemed to be an entire pineapple ham. He was indeed very attractive, Clarke idly acknowledged, even with the three white streaks of paint stretching across his chiseled face. All the Durmstrangs were wearing some variation of war paint. Clarke supposed it was an attempt to impress—or intimidate—their rival schools.

At his sister’s words, Bellamy dropped his fork with a clatter and pushed his plate away unfinished, appearing faintly sick.

“How’d the tour go anyway, O?” asked Clarke before Bellamy could snap at her.

“Oh, it went alright. Kane was pissed you weren’t there, by the way.”

“Figures. What’d he say?”

“Nothing, really, I could just tell by his face. He told me to give the tour instead, to Durmstrang’s prize pupil,” she said, looking at Clarke with an unimpressed expression and wagging her fingers in quotations. “Don’t get me wrong, she was pretty fuckin’ hot, but that guy looks like an actual Greek god.”
“No he doesn’t,” said Bellamy.

“Who? Where is she? I want to see hot girl,” said Jasper at once, craning his neck to look around.

“That one there,” said Octavia, pointing at a girl sitting opposite the Durmstrang boy she liked.

Nearly everyone at the table twisted round to catch a glimpse. Clarke looked too, curious despite herself about who was considered to be the prize pupil of Durmstrang. The girl had her back turned to them, but she had rich brown hair interspersed with intricate braids, and unlike most of the other Durmstrangs had not yet shrugged off her heavy cloak and red scarf.

Jasper sat so upright in his seat, craning his neck to see, he almost resembled a meercat. “Someone get her to turn around!”

“Yes, that’s the hottest back I’ve ever seen,” said Bellamy sarcastically, lifting his goblet of pumpkin juice and bringing it to his lips, evidently going for an exaggerated regal sip, but then he spotted Clarke studying the back of the Durmstrang girl. He smirked. “Look, even Clarke’s interested.”

She immediately looked away, sighing as she rolled her eyes at Bellamy. “I am not, I was just looking the same place everyone else was.”

“I wasn’t looking,” offered Miller, grinning when Clarke shot him a withering glance.

“You better not have been,” said Monty, playfully nudging him and making him laugh.

“Grumpy,” said Bellamy, looking at Clarke with amusement. Apparently he’d gotten his appetite back, because he pulled his plate over again and started digging in. “Maybe you need to get laid.”

“Hilarious,” said Clarke.

“Oh, speaking of hilarious,” chimed Octavia, a wide, shit-eating grin unfurling on her face. “We went past the Gamekeeper’s hut and guess what we saw.”
“Pumpkins?” said Bellamy dryly.

“Nope. That new Gamekeeper, Wick, was totally jerking off.”

Bellamy choked and spluttered on the swig of drink he’d just taken, and the sight of an outraged, agast Bellamy with juice dripping down his face amplified the raucous laughter at what Octavia told them. “You saw him—he was what?”

“Jacking off,” said Octavia. “Dude was masturbating.”

“Rubbing the wizard’s hat,” said Jasper airily, oblivious to Bellamy’s livid expression as he scooped peas onto his plate. “Whackin’ the Kraken. Pumping the python. Choking the chicken.”

“Hand to gland combat,” grinned Miller. “Making the bald man cry.”

“Pounding your flounder,” said Monty.

“Beating the bishop,” said Wells casually, causing Clarke to snort and half choke on her own pumpkin juice.

“Cranking the shank,” smirked Murphy.

“Painting the pickle,” said Trina.

“He was on erotic quest of self-discovery,” piped in Fox.

“I get the point,” barked Bellamy, glowering at them all. “I don’t like that my sister’s just been corrupted.”

Everyone immediately averted their gazes, and Clarke met Octavia’s eyes briefly before they looked away, hiding their grins. Some things are better left unsaid—particularly for Bellamy’s sake.
“Well, Clarke, if you need laid, there you go,” said Bellamy dryly, plainly trying to find some traction in the situation, “Clearly the gamekeeper’s raring to go.”

Clarke didn’t so much as scoff, instead rolling her eyes and returning her attention to her food. Bellamy was just being sore about people taking the piss, and she wasn’t going to rise to his bait.

“Yeah, Clarke, maybe you just need some dick,” said Jasper, wiggling his brow.

Clarke pointedly stabbed the tines of her fork into a pork sausage, smirking slightly at Jasper’s wince. He mumbled an apology and busied himself with finishing off his mushy peas. Clarke, meanwhile, dragged the bangers in a generous portion of gravy and mash before popping it into her mouth. Delicious, and she were thankful to finally be eating, but it felt like something was missing. It took her a second, distracted with food as she was, but then she realized what it was that was missing: Raven’s snark.

She scanned her gaze around the crowded Great Hall as she finished off her plate. Raven was nowhere to be seen. She frowned.

“Has anyone seen Raven?” she said, swallowing the last of her potatoes down.

She was met with various negative gestures. Her stomach lurched with an anxiouslyness that seemed disproportionate to the situation; perhaps it was result of being stressed out by the Sorting Hat’s ominous song, though it was more likely it was just Clarke’s own overactive anxiety. “I saw her in the hallway before the feast started, I said I’d save her a seat.”

Fox looked up with a frown. “That was like twenty minutes ago. She’s not one to miss out on food.”

“I know,” said Clarke, biting her bottom lip and looking round again. Her stomach twisted uncomfortably.

“Do you want to go look for her?” asked Wells.

Before she could decide on what to do, Kane stepped forward to the podium, and the chatter in the room died away.
She spent the entirety of the speech trying to convince herself everything was fine and she had absolutely no reason to be reacting with such fretfulness. It was Raven, after all; missing the opening feast was not the most eccentric thing she’d ever done, even if it was out of character. It didn’t help that Clarke’s anxiety had been steadily sky-rocketing over the past year; it was no wonder, with her father in prison for something no one seemed to be able to give a straight answer to, with the Senior Madam Undersecretary constantly showing up on their doorstep with simpering empathy as her guise when all she really wanted to do was poke at Clarke and her mother to see what they knew, and with it being the first year without Finn, since he decided to skip out on his final year, off doing who knows what. Raven had been heartbroken, and Clarke had been half worried she’d skip off to find him and drag him back. Even if they hadn’t been close since the fiasco of him cheating on her a couple years ago and acting out, he was still important to her. But surely Raven wouldn’t wait to do that now…

*It’s just your anxiety,* she told herself as her stomach lurched and her heart pounded, cold chills creeping up her back. There were *ooohs* and *ahhs* as Kane revealed the Goblet of Fire; Bellamy’s face was glowing with near reverence as he looked upon it. She just needed to get through this feast and get to bed, and then she’d feel better…of course, she needed to find Raven first…

Suddenly desperate for the feast to be over, Clarke impatiently waited as Kane concluded his speech and the food vanished off the tables to be replaced with desserts. Jasper was already making a mess with the Eton Mess and Octavia was digging a spoon into a berry trifle when Clarke stood so abruptly those nearest to her paused to look up at her.

“See you later,” she said before bee lining it out of there.

People were so busy animatedly chatting away about the tournament as they ate that no one noticed her slip out of the doors. The muted quiet of the Entrance Hall felt like a reprieve, and she sighed, relieved.

Okay. Now to find Raven.

She checked the nearest restrooms before she headed to the west side of the castle, darting up the spiral staircase and quickly spouting off the answer to the riddle the bronze knocker shaped like an eagle posed (*Who makes it has no need of it, who buys it has no use for it, who uses it can neither see nor feel it, what is it?* A coffin, and that certainly didn’t help Clarke’s anxiety) before the door swung open to let her through. The dormitory was empty, save for a pepperami wrapper and an empty glass vial on Raven’s unmade bed. Undeterred, Clarke popped by the library, though why Raven, quite possibly the biggest procrastinator in all of Ravenclaw, would be in the library during the first week of school was beyond her, unless she’d gotten some mad idea in her head about her next inventions. Hoping that was the case, Clarke deflated in disappointment when she discovered
the library was empty too, save for the ghostly Madam Pince, who glared at her when she poked her head into the Restricted Section to ensure it was empty too.

Well, great. Now what?

She wandered around the first couple floors of the castle, eventually caught up in the mass of students, sleepy with bellies fit to bursting, trudging to their respective dormitories. She passed by Wells and Harper on their way to Hufflepuff and declined their offer to help her search, thinking perhaps Raven was now in the dorms. Her second visit proved just as futile, however. Everyone was already snoring in their beds, save for Fox, who had only just returned from her Prefect duties and was unsurprisingly getting a head start on her sixth year of school by reading ahead.

“Hey,” whispered Clarke, leaning close to Fox’s bed to be heard. “Has Raven been back at all?”

Fox shook her head, blinking sleepy eyes as she shut her book. “No, I thought she was with you.” When Clarke’s face fell back into lines of concern, Fox frowned and sat up. “You still can’t find her?”

“No.”

Fox appeared stricken for a moment, before her sense of reason overruled and she relaxed again. “It’s Raven. I’m sure she’s off just…being Raven.” She smiled. “She’s probably in the Restricted Section of the library again, researching ways to make a broomstick more sentient.”

“I checked, she’s not there.”

“Well, perhaps she fancied a fly-about. Was she out at the pitch?”

Clarke glanced out the dark window. If anyone would be flying around this late, it would be Octavia, not Raven. “I doubt it.”

Fox fell contemplative, gnawing her lip, before shaking herself out of it again. “I’m sure she’s fine, Clarke. She’ll probably turn up soon. Just try to get some sleep, and she’ll probably be waking half of us up in the morning with her snoring.”
Fox hopped out of bed and headed to the restroom at that, clearly thinking the matter settled. Clarke sank into her four-poster bed, still torn between worry and logic; it wasn’t the first time Raven had disappeared like this, and she always turned up sooner or later. Granted, this time it definitely wasn’t because she snuck out to hook up with Finn, but still. She could have other hookups waiting, and even then it might not be a hook-up at all, she could simply just be out causing trouble. Fox was right, she’d eventually turn up here to go to bed. Best to just wait it out.

When Fox returned, she sent a reassuring smile to Clarke that she attempted to return. Fox burrowed under her blankets and soon enough her breathing evened out. Clarke lay in bed, staring up at the stars twinkling on the enchanted blue ceiling, and tried to sleep. But sleep never came, nor did Raven.

A glance at the clock told her it was half past two. Right, no, something must be wrong, surely. Biting her lip and struggling not to let panic settle in, Clarke rose out of bed and crept back down the spiral staircase.

Last Clarke had seen her, Raven had been just before the entrance hall doors, Perhaps she went outside? Though why she’d be wandering the grounds so late, Clarke didn’t know…maybe she did go for a ride on her broomstick, as Fox said, but something happened…she could be injured…

She’d have to sneak outside and check. Getting out of the castle shouldn’t be too much of a problem; she knew the prefects were off patrol at midnight since she was the one who scheduled them, and the professors would all be in bed. She knew of the minor enchantments placed on the doors to forewarn the headmaster of anyone trying to sneak in and out, and she knew how to disable them. As long as she didn’t run into Peeves, she should be okay.

She paused in the Entrance Hall, letting Nearly Headless Nick glide through before she snuck on.

She pulled her wand out of her cloak and waved it over the double doors, murmuring the disenchantments, and stowed it away in her pocket again before carefully pushing the door open; she glanced behind her shoulder as she slipped out to make sure no one was entering the entrance hall to see her leave, and quietly shut the door behind her, turning to head down the stairs.

Her breath caught in her throat as she collided with another person. Her gasp was echoed by another as the body bounced off her and went toppling backwards; Clarke blindly reached out to stop the person from falling down the stairs, gripping a forearm and tugging forward, but the person was too heavy and Clarke was off-balance, resulting in the both of them crashing down the steps, limbs knocking against one another, before finally landing in the grass with a thud.

Clarke blinked dazedly, winded. Her quiet moan was muffled against the shoulder of the person under her, the lower part of her face pressed against soft red fabric that smelled faintly of smoke; not
the unpleasant kind, but like a campfire, and something like a forest—pine trees. It was a pleasant combination.

The body beneath her stirred, and Clarke screwed up her face as she became guiltily aware of the fact that she was totally squishing someone.

She pushed herself up onto all fours and barely registered narrow hips pressing sharply into the insides of her thighs before she lifted her head and met the greenest eyes she’d ever seen. She froze.

*Holy—*

Clarke was not at all prepared for this. She was not at all prepared to see such perfection up close, nope, not at all. One look at this girl’s face and Clarke’s heart was thrumming against her ribcage, her stomach flipping. In the space of a heartbeat, her gaze shifted all over this stranger’s face, drinking her in. The world was drained of all color but her. Green eyes framed in heavy black war paint that dripped down carved cheekbones, extending toward a jaw sharp enough to cut glass. There was a long, thin nose, and full, plump lips that were…well, entrancing was perhaps not a strong enough word.

She wasn’t *just* beautiful; the intimidating war paint and intensity of her gaze screamed danger, and Clarke could not explain the hunger she felt in her soul as she looked into those eyes, experiencing an overwhelming sense of breathless awe as though she were standing at shore in the face of an approaching hurricane.

The spell was broken when the girl, who had been studying Clarke just as intently, shifted slightly beneath her; Clarke watched her throat bob as she swallowed before she noticed the crease of discomfort that had appeared between the girl’s brows. Oh, right, Clarke was still squashing her. She shifted herself, preparing to get up and opened her mouth to apologize when she realized whom the girl beneath her actually was. The wild brown hair with braids, the fur cloak and red scarf extending down her left shoulder. *Oh.*

“You’re the Durmstrang girl,” she said in surprise. The same Durmstrang girl she’d seen the back of during the feast, the prized pupil who sat across the boy Octavia had her eyes on. Octavia’s description of the boy suddenly came back to Clarke, and she realized how aptly the label suited this girl as well: a goddess, for sure.

The girl tilted her head, curiously looking at Clarke, before she winced again; Clarke was pinning down her legs and they were probably going numb by now. “You’re, um, on top of me.”
“Oh. Right.” Clarke scrambled off her, a flush creeping up the back of her neck to flood her face. She extended a hand for the girl’s and pulled her to her feet, trying not to think about how perfectly her warm hand fit in her own. They released one another at once, and Clarke, still blushing, busied herself patting the dirt off her robes. The Durmstrang girl just stood there, posture straight-backed and proud, expression smooth and serene. “Sorry, about that.”

The girl cleared her throat, glancing down before meeting Clarke’s gaze again. God, her eyes were so green. Clarke only noticed the girl’s extended hand when the girl arched a brow, waiting. Clarke hastily grabbed her hand, shaking it.

“My name is Lexa.”

“Clarke.”

“Nice to meet you,” said Lexa politely, dropping Clarke’s hand. She glanced around at the darkness looming around them, held at bay only by the flickering torch scones on either side of the entrance doors. “It’s late.”

“Yes it is,” said Clarke, hiding her unease. Was this girl going to rat her out? But she was out at this time as well; surely her headmaster would expect her students to be snug in bed on the Durmstrang ship at this time. “Er—was there something you needed? I’m Head Girl here.”

“No, thank you.”

Clarke waited, expecting Lexa to add something that explained why she had been about to enter the castle at past two in the morning, but Lexa supplied nothing else, just continued to look at Clarke with a cool, aloof expression. With any other person, Clarke would be annoyed; for some reason, she found herself further captivated by this stranger.

“It looked like you were about to go into the castle,” began Clarke. Lexa said nothing. “I…did you need a glass of water or something?” She winced as soon as the words left her lips. They did nothing to conceal her curiosity, and in fact just sounded…stupid. Her cheeks warmed.

“No, I’m fine, thank you,” said the girl again.
“So…then why were you trying to get into the castle? I mean.” Clarke plastered a polite smile on her face, inwardly cringing at how obvious she was being. “I’m—as Head Girl, I just wanted to make sure there’s not something I can do to—make your stay more comfortable.” *Fuck. Just shut up.*

“Head Girl,” said Lexa, tilting her head as she surveyed Clarke. “Is there…a particular reason you are out of bed at this time?”

Well, Lexa certainly didn’t seem to mind asking outright. Clarke sighed, thinking there was no loss in telling the truth.

“I’m looking for someone, actually. My friend Raven. She’s about my height,” she said, lifting her hand up level with the top of her own head, “Mexican descent, brown skin, hair, eyes. She’s pretty.” She smiled slightly, for real this time. “She also has a loud mouth. She’s a bit outrageous, to be honest.”

Lexa’s brow contracted, recognition flickering across her eyes, and Clarke’s interest was piqued.

“I’m looking for someone too,” said Lexa, glancing around again, this time with a tiny frown. “I think the girl you’re looking for may be with her.”

“Like, a Durmstrang? You’re looking for one of your classmates?” When Lexa nodded, Clarke echoed her frown. “Why would…you think they’re together?”

“I know they were, at least at one point. I saw them myself. Inside a broom closet near the entrance of your castle.”

Clarke stared, suspicion inkling into her. Raven and a Durmstrang, in a broom closet. She supposed it wasn’t that far-fetched when it came to Raven, but still. Was Lexa just having her on? “Uh, okay…why, exactly?”

Lexa exhaled, clenching her jaw slightly as she looked back up at the castle doors; her expression was quite impassive, but Clarke had a feeling she was frustrated. It was almost like she could read it in her eyes. “I’m not sure,” admitted Lexa. “My friend told me he saw your friend—if it’s the right person—grab my friend and pull her into the closet. He said the girl kissed her.”

Clarke’s mouth fell open. “You’re *joking.*”
Lexa looked at her coolly. “I have friends on the other side of the grounds searching, and he is one of them. But if you would like to get the account from him first-hand, I can gladly take you to him.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.” Clarke rubbed her hands over her face, sighing. Her exhaustion set in, every bone in her body weighed down with it, but she stood up straighter because of it. “Sorry. I’m just—I’ve been looking for her since the feast, I looked all over the castle and couldn’t find her anywhere.” She couldn’t help but to recall the ominous warning given by the Sorting Hat at the opening feast last week…that coupled with her disconcerting nightmares and the fact that her father was locked up without so much as an explanation… Maybe she was overanalyzing this and letting her anxiety get the best of her. Or maybe her fear was in the right place.

“We looked over your grounds and haven’t been able to find our friend either.” For a moment, the concern and frustration showed on Lexa’s face; then she smoothed it over again, looking carefully at Clarke. “Are there any other places they could be? What about that forest?” she asked, tilting her chin toward it.

Clarke shook her head. Raven hated the forest since her fourth year, when she and Bellamy had challenged one another to walk in as deep as they could go. They came out of it hours later with various scratches on their arms, leaves and twigs caught in their messy hair, and pale, sweaty faces. They hadn’t said a word about what went on, but judging by the words Raven mumbled in her nightmares the next couple weeks, Clarke guessed it had something to do with giant spiders. “They wouldn’t be in there.”

“Perhaps you missed them in the castle,” suggested Lexa.

Clarke stifled a groan as she rubbed her hands over her face again. Raven Reyes was a perpetual pain in her ass.

Now think. If she were Raven…and for some godforsaken reason decided to hook up with a Durmstrang on the night of their arrival…and if she were trying to impress someone…where would she take them?

There was only one place she could think of, and it was a slim chance, but the only option they had left.

“I only have one idea left.” She sighed, dropping her hands. “There’s a wizarding village about a mile away. Some of Raven’s favorite shops are there.”
Lexa looked blankly at her. “Everything will be closed at this time.”

Clarke resisted the urge to snort. As if that would stop Raven. “There are ways to get inside them.”

Lexa nodded. “Okay. Could you take us there?”

Clarke hummed thoughtfully. A stroll to Hogsmeade with the prize pupil of Durmstrang at almost three in the morning hadn’t exactly been how she imagined spending the night (she thought longingly of her four-poster bed), but at least she had someone in the same boat as her, concerned about her friend’s whereabouts and running out of places to look for her.

“Normally there’s a path students take to get there, but we won’t be able to use that; the gates are shut and magically locked, and anyone without the Headmaster’s permission trying to disenchant it would set off a Caterwauling Charm. We’ll have to take the secret passageway. It’s a longer journey, but we’re less likely to get caught.”

Lexa nodded again, resolve smoothing her face again, though her eyes were as intense as ever. “Let’s go, then.”

As Clarke led her back up the steps into the castle, she glanced over her shoulder at the moonlit grounds. “What about your other friends still out looking? Should we tell them first? Otherwise they may end up looking for you, too.”

Lexa gave one swift nod in response and pulled out her wand, murmuring a spell and a message before a burst of silvery light left her wand and streaked across the ground, splitting into two and disappearing into the distance. Well. That was odd, but Clarke decided to move past it.

“So, uh, one of your friends…” Clarke began, wondering if one of them was the boy Octavia was infatuated with, “Is one of them…tall? Shaved head? Wore white, er, paint on his face? Pretty, uh, attractive?”

“Yes…” said Lexa slowly, glancing uncertainly at Clarke. A crease appeared between her brow, nose wrinkling slightly. “And I suppose he is…aesthetically pleasing.”
Clarke swallowed, cheeks warming again. That was certainly an odd way of answering…

But no, no need to wander the direction of those thoughts. Lexa was very attractive, yes, and it had been quite some time since Clarke had seen someone who instantly drew her eye like this (her fingers itched for charcoal and parchment), but nope. Nope, nope, nope. There would be none of that. There was literally no reason to wonder.

Then she realized why Lexa probably thought she was asking that.

“Not for me,” she said quickly, blushing further still at her poor wording. “I mean. It’s my friend Octavia. She’s kind of obsessed. Crush at first sight.” She blushed harder at that phrase and carefully looked away from Lexa, who was, in all honesty, unfairly attractive.

“Yes, that’s Lincoln,” said Lexa, and though she didn’t smile, Clarke thought the muted shining of her eyes might indicate her amusement.

“Oh, okay.” And because she had no idea what to say now, and didn’t want to lapse into awkward silence, and maybe it was polite to ask, she said, “And who are the others?”

“Just one other,” said Lexa, slipping into the castle behind Clarke. “Her name is Costia.”

* "・/✧・* *

Raven’s stomach was a tight knot of tension as she watched Anya’s shouters grow taut, watched her tremble and shake. She pulled the soft blanket, heavier than it looked, off the back of her chair and draped it over Anya as best she could. The sense of impatience and urgency only grew as the hours passed; her bladder was full and she was starving having only eaten pepperami all day, but she didn’t dare leave the room. She watched the hands turn on the clock high up on the wall, just beneath the charred ceiling.

Finally, Anya pulled back from the memories much the same way Raven had; with a strangled gasp and panic written all over her features.

“I—I—I—“ Anya stuttered as she gasped, eyes wheeling wildly; Raven could not blame her. She had, after all, just watched herself die, among all the other horrors. Her wild gaze found Raven and the breath she exhaled was weak and shaky. “Raven. Raven.”
“Hi,” said Raven again, smile as watery as her eyes.

“You…” Anya reached out with a violently trembling hand; Raven understood and took it, squeezing it gently. “I…”

“You’re okay,” said Raven lowly, voice comforting. “We’re okay now.”

“I died,” said Anya in disbelief. “I died and—Lincoln, and Gustus, and Tris, and—"

“Pretty much everyone, yeah. But that was last time. This time is going to be different,” said Raven firmly. “Everyone’s alive again, and we’re going to make sure they stay that way.”

“Alive. Alive,” said Anya hoarsely. “We’re all…everyone’s alive again. It’s like…"

“Like a second chance,” agreed Raven quietly.

“I’m…” Anya’s lip was quivering, and she seemed unaware of the escaped tears rolling over sharp cheekbones toward freedom. Raven reached over without thinking, using her thumb to rub them away. Anya stared at her, something akin to mingled trepidation and longing, fear and awe in her eyes. “This…it’s…strange,” breathed Anya, every inch of her trembling. Raven tucked the blanket more tightly around her. “I…you’re a stranger. But…”

Raven blinked, swallowing at the bitter taste in her mouth. Of course it was like that. What had she expected, for Anya to feel the same way she had, as though she’d died and come to life? For Anya to fling her arms around her and proclaim her love? For things to just go back to how they were before Anya had died and Raven woke up a year in the past?

It wasn’t the same for Anya. Raven had her own memories back, memories that sunk into her, a missing puzzle piece. Anya basically just watched the movie.

“It’s…do you know that feeling when you read a book, and you sort of…become the character you read about?” Anya’s brow furrowed as she frowned down at the memories swirling in the Pensieve.

Raven blew out a breath, her disappointment dissipating with it. She was a little let down, sure. But
Anya was here. Alive. All Raven had to do was get her to fall in love with her all over again. Compared to the rest of the shit she had to do, such as saving the free world, it would be a piece of cake.

She grinned as she reached over and put a hand on Anya’s shoulder. To her credit, Anya didn’t jump or flinch. “Hey, no pressure or anything. You had a year to fall for my charm in the other time. You’ve had less than a day here.”

Anya arched a brow. “I’m surprised you’re not claiming it’s all you need.”

Raven’s grin widened at the statement and the casual delivery of it. Perhaps it was like more than watching a movie after all. It wasn’t the same, but it could be—would be, one day.

“So, that is as far as your memories go, I’m presuming? It seemed like you were…about to die,” said Anya, the apologetic tone as unfamiliar to her as it was to Raven hearing it.

“I dunno.” She shrugged. “I can’t have done, right? Otherwise how would I have my memories?”

“Clarke brought them back?” suggested Anya. “Or Lexa? Somebody did.”

“Yeah, but why me?”

Anya stared at her bemusedly. “Hmm, I wonder.”

Raven stared back at her quizzically. “What?”

“You’re brilliant, Raven,” said Anya shortly. “You know this. Don’t make me stroke your ego.”

It was probably ridiculous that a compliment from Anya could still bring warmth to her face. “But it doesn’t make any sense. I don’t even know what happened, how to get the Flame, how to use it. What can I do?”

“We need to make a plan,” decided Anya, and no sooner had the words left her mouth did they
notice a long table on the other side of the room, laden with parchment, ink, and quills. They stood, Anya dropping the blanket back onto her chair, and crossed the room over to it.

“Let’s start with what we know,” said Anya, picking a quill and dipping it in black ink. She pressed the tip to the parchment and began to write. “Sometime in the past couple years, Clarke’s father was arrested and thrown into Azkaban.”

“July of 2104,” supplied Raven.

“Right. And then he was killed on Christmas. You all arrived at Hogwarts for this school year just last week, right? On the first?” When Raven nodded, Anya wrote it down. “All right, so, in the other timeline, the first task took place on All Hallow’s Eve. We had the Yule Ball on Christmas. The second task took place a little over a month later. The third task on May…” She screwed up her face trying to remember.

“The twenty-ninth,” said Raven. She remembered it was a Saturday, because it was exactly two weeks before they were supposed to take their end of year exams.

“And that was when Nia made her move.” Anya paused, eyes narrowed as she stared down at the timeline and tapped the end of the quill against her chin. “So whatever plans were in motion for a coup had started nearly two years beforehand. One year and ten months, anyway.”

“Yeah, assuming Nia was in cahoots with Jaha, Pike, and Sydney since the very beginning. It could have been just the three of them at the beginning, and Nia working with the Wallaces somewhere else.”

“Either way, we can assume an alliance was formed sometime within that time-frame.”

“Can we?” said Raven dubiously, gazing at the black letters and numbers on the parchment. “For all we know, this could have been in the making for years…”

“I doubt it,” said Anya dismissively. “Jake Griffin would have been captured long before that.”

“We don’t even know why Jaha killed him. We don’t know anything about what his point in all of this is—“
“We don’t need to worry about him right now. We need to focus on Nia and Ontari because they’re our biggest threats. Especially Ontari. Whatever happened to her was...well, we can’t let it happen again,” said Anya darkly.

Raven agreed. No way in hell could they let a dragon go rampaging in a muggle city again.

“But how do we do that? We can’t tell anyone without risking them telling Titus, and we can’t tell Titus because—“

“He’s a self-righteous, arrogant idiot who thinks his way is the best way, enough to kill for it,” growled Anya. “I know, believe me. I’ve never been a fan of him or his methods with Lexa. He spent most of our childhood trying to brainwash her into believing she’s doomed to be some kind of martyr.”

“We don’t really need to worry too much about him right now though, right?” asked Raven tentatively. “I mean, he’s gone AWOL, right? He disappeared,” she added at Anya’s blank look at the muggle saying. “He went into hiding. No one has any way to get ahold of him?”

“Right, but I don’t particularly want to put that to the test,” said Anya doubtfully.

“Let’s break down this timeline some more,” decided Raven, moving closer to the paper and picking up her own quill. “We know Jake was killed on Christmas and that Clarke and Abby’s memories were fucked with on that same day. It took all that time for Clarke to get them back during the Battle of Hogwarts two days after she and Lexa escaped the Ministry, and one day after we all escaped Azkaban. But Clarke still had a bunch of shit going on because it took her doing something at the Ministry again a few months later to figure out what to do about the Flame. When I found her in the Time and Space Department, she had her head in a Pensieve, so I’m guessing her dad had left memories for her.”

Anya’s eyes gleamed. “If we can find those memories, maybe we can figure out how to find the Flame and how to work it.”

Raven shook her head. “I don’t think so. Clarke still didn’t seem to know where to go or how to use it. I’m guessing she figured it out, obviously, but I didn’t get to see that part.” A horrifying thought struck her then. “Wait, what if Clarke didn’t do this? What if Ontari did?” Anya looked up at her, startled at the thought, and Raven stared back at her, aghast. “What if this is Ontari just—just fucking with our heads?”
“It’s not,” said Anya flatly.

“How can you be sure—“

“I can’t, but I’m telling you, it’s not. Nia, yes, but she died so we know it wasn’t her. But Ontari is not as cold, as—strategic, I suppose you could say. She’s dramatic and attention-seeking. There’s a reason she turned into her animagus form in front of all those muggles. She wants to be seen. This, sneaking back through time to place your memories—out of everyone’s—beneath your bed and leaving us to stumble around in the dark? That isn’t her style. Trust me,” she said stoutly when Raven opened her mouth, “I grew up with her up until she joined Nia last year. This wasn’t her.”

Raven relented. “All right. But that reminds me—Nia didn’t wait until the third task to make her move if she’d already been out in the open attacking you over a year ago! She tried to capture Lexa and she killed that girl Costia!”

Anya’s head shot up, a frown carved in her face as she looked at Raven as though she’d just sprouted an extra head. “What? Costia?”

“Yeah, Costia! Lexa’s Costia!”

Anya looked at her blankly. “Lexa and Costia are no longer together.”

“Uh, yeah, that’s one way to put it,” said Raven, staring at her as though she’d gone mad.

Anya’s brow furrowed as she tried to place Raven’s odd behavior, and after a second it came to her in the form of vague memories that were not her own… Raven curled up in her four-poster bed late at night, speaking in hushed voices so not to wake the others, telling each other stories about Anya and Lexa like they were pre-teens… Clarke had told her that Lexa’s first love had died…

Oh.

“Ah.” Anya took only a brief pause to wonder how to say this, before determining she didn’t particularly care how it was said as long as it was said period. “Costia is alive.”
Raven’s brows rose to her hairline. “Alive? How?”

“I don’t know. Someone must have went back and saved her.”

“But I—” Raven cut off, guilt flickering across her face, but Anya understood. Raven would not have even thought of her, so she wouldn’t have gone back to save her. Did Clarke? Anya supposed it would not have been too much of a stretch… or did Lexa? Did they take the Flame together? If so…what happened afterward?

What went wrong?

“Okay, so…that changes things.”

“You don’t say,” said Anya dryly.

She watched Raven begin to pace back and forth, brow furrowed and hands clasped behind her back. This made as little sense to her as it did Raven, but Anya was relieved too. Costia was her friend; imagining her dead sent a dull pounding into her heart. But why wasn’t she dead? Did Clarke or Lexa or the both of them go that far back into the past, to save Costia? If so, why hadn’t they destroyed Nia or Ontari too while they had the chance? They could have stopped Ontari from joining Nia at the very least. They could have saved Jake Griffin, too. It didn’t make any sense.

“We need to start from the top,” decided Raven, stopping abruptly and turning her back to Anya; it took Anya a second to realize Raven was just scanning her gaze over the bookcases that had appeared lining the walls. Anya glanced up at the charred ceiling. “All the way from the beginning.” Raven limped over to the shelves. Anya just watched her quietly for several minutes, until Raven breathed “Aha!” and plucked a single book from the shelf. As she brought it over to the table and laid it out, Anya realized it wasn’t a book at all, but a binder full of newspaper clippings.

“Becca Praimheda,” said Raven triumphantly, laying out a clipping of the titled woman, wearing sweeping white robes decorated with glittering silver stars, smiling and waving at the camera. “Okay, so, now we just need to figure out the dates.” She scowled, bending low over the table. “This shit would be so much easier if there was a wizard internet. Give me a bit, this might take a while.”

It did indeed. It was nearly half an hour later, after Raven pored over article after article, scribbling various things down, that she finally beckoned Anya over.
“Okay, so, we know Voldemort took over the Ministry of Magic during the Second Wizarding War on in August of 1997, a little over a hundred and eight years ago, and we know that lasted until May of 1998. This,” she pointed at a particular article about Becca’s achievements, “says that Becca was born in 1998. Which means that her records were destroyed, because Voldemort wiped out all the records of muggleborns, but they tracked Becca down when she was fifteen and she went to Hogwarts and graduated like a year and a half later because she’s a fucking genius, and then she traveled for a bit and joined the Department of Mysteries. It doesn’t say anything about when she started doing illegal experiments, but she was arrested in 2035—the same year Sullivan Potter was born, actually, Jamie and Evie’s dad,” she added, glancing down at the newspaper announcing the arrest and the birth of James Potter II’s son before shuffling the papers around to pull out a slightly smaller picture of a dementor swooping in and out of the shot. “This says that the dementors were being brought into the Ministry to run tests on them to see if they can be controlled so they can guard Azkaban again, since I guess Azkaban was corrupt and they didn’t like wizards and witches guarding it. That’s in 2025, so we can guess Becca started experimenting and making Shadow-Eaters around that time. And then ten years later, she’s arrested.”

“And Nia is on the loose for the next…what, eighty years?” frowned Anya.

“Yep. Dark magic, unnatural long life, all that jazz.” Raven pulled out another paper. “So Nia’s off doing who knows what, researching dark shit, I dunno, but she’s arrested in 2089—Jamie was one of the aurors who helped capture her, look,” she gestured toward the faded photograph of a young Jamie Potter, stoic save for the triumphant gleam in her eyes, holding one of Nia’s arms. ‘Capture of the dark witch Nia Kwin,’ read the title. ‘The chill in the air is finally stopped: Ice Queen’s captured after multiple muggleborn murders,’ read another.

“I’d always wondered why they call her the Ice Queen,” said Raven absently. “I guess that makes sense.”

“Yes, it’s because of the cold chill that accompanies her presence, like the cold that comes with Shadow-Eaters,” said Anya. “It was unnerving even at Durmstrang last year when we knew the queen was about to make a move. Any time the temperature dropped outside, we were on our guard. But for the most part, we were waiting for months. I’m assuming because she was busy gathering her army and kidnapping muggleborns.”

“Right,” agreed Raven, nodding. “She must have been. The public obviously knew nothing about the relation between Becca and Nia, but we know that Nia’s parents brought her to Becca as a kid, that Nia was already a rotten egg and her horrible parents helped make her that way, and that Becca was the one who gave her magic and accidentally corrupted her. Becca’s arrested and Nia has no way to get her magic fix so she has to start taking it for herself, even going as far as to adopt a kid just to have an excuse to be exposed to schools and start kidnapping muggleborns. Salem, Hogwarts. But I guess she changed her plan and started creating an army instead. Look at this.” Anya leaned in to scan over the article Raven slid toward her; it was a small section, a couple columns stretched out
beneath a photograph of the outside of the Ministry. “It says top-secret Ministry operations stolen out of the Ministry itself, suspects not caught. I’m thinking it was Nia and some goons she found, and they broke the Shadow-Eaters out and started breeding more.”

“Of course they make that a small section. They wouldn’t want to give it much attention. This is all making sense, though.”

“Of course it is, I’ve given a lot of thought to this.”

“Raven, you just figured all this out after half an hour.”

“Exactly.”

Anya snorted and rolled her eyes, but focused her attention on the scribbles Raven was adding to the parchment. “This still doesn’t tell us anything about how this connects to everything else. What about the Flame? Griffin made a Time-Turner. How did he do it, when all the rest had been destroyed? How did he know how to make one?”

“I think that’s where Becca comes in.”

“Becca’s been dead for…” Anya glanced at an article, “Nearly sixty years.”

“Hang on, lemme do the math.” Raven’s quill scratched against the parchment, her tongue between her teeth. “I know Abby’s forty-three and I think Jake was a year younger than her, so he was born in…2062. He started working at the Ministry a couple years after he graduated, so let’s assume he joined the Department of Mysteries in 2081. That gives him nearly twenty-five years working there…”

“Alongside Titus,” said Anya slowly, realization dawning. “Who is a Seer.”

“Exactly!” chirped Raven. “So I figure, maybe they get to talking one day and Titus mentions Becca, Jake looks her up…maybe, since he works in same area she did, he finds more info about her than the public released. Maybe she felt remorse for what she did, felt like she had to find a way to fix it, to stop Nia, so she started working on a Time-Turner, but she was thrown in prison before she could finish.”
Anya stared at Raven, slightly awe-struck. The way Raven’s mind worked never failed to amaze her. “That’s…I think you’re right, Raven. I think you must be.”

“Of course I am,” grinned Raven cheekily. “So then Titus makes those prophecies, figures out that Jake and his daughter play a part in them—and Lexa, and Nia…”

“Ontari,” corrected Anya. “Nia started it, but Ontari was the catalyst, she was the one who tried to destroy the world.”

“Yep, agreed,” said Raven, idly adding a few more notes to the parchment. “Nia’s neutral evil, Ontari’s chaotic evil, for sure.”

Anya frowned at the strange wording, but shook her head and moved past it. All the newly discovered information—including a year’s worth of memories—were pounding in her head, but she was invigorated with the action, with the fact that they were discovering the point this all started at and going to use it to figure out how to end this war once and for all. She paced, pressing her fist into her palm, thoughts racing.

“So how does this tie in to Jaha, Pike, and Sydney?” she asked. “I get Wallace, Nia’s giving his son magic in exchange for their money and resources, but why the others?”

“No clue about Jaha,” said Raven with another half-shrug, “As for the others, I might have an idea. Now, in the last decade or so, a few pureblood families start throwing fits claiming they’re oppressed and shit and demanding these ridiculous new policies about like, checking blood status and running tests and shit on muggleborns, saying they’re just trying to ‘rule out,’ that there’s no ‘foul play,’ ” said Raven, hooking her fingers to quote with a roll of her eyes, “The whole movement’s being led by people like Diana Sydney. I’m guessing they didn’t have much of a problem with the fact that Nia’s taking away from what they deem mudbloods and giving to the purebloods. The squibs she’s giving magic to are always pureblood, aren’t they? So, to them, she’s on their side. Just doing the really dirty work for them. And not only is she doing that, but she’s successfully controlling the werewolves, controlling the Shadow-Eaters…it’s a win-win situation for them. I’m sure they didn’t mind turning a blind eye in exchange for her helping them take over the Ministry and the school. Sydney wanted to be Minister, Pike wanted to be Headmaster, and what do thousands of muggleborns and muggles matter in the face of that?” she added bitterly, dotting an i on the parchment rather ferociously.

Raven lapsed into silence and began rearranging the parchments until a horizontal timeline was revealed, various dates and notes scribbled around the uneven line.
“We really needed Clarke and Lex for this,” muttered Raven, critically eying her work. “Lexa’s probably neat and meticulous as fuck, and Clarke could draw something cool.”

“It looks fine.”

Raven heaved a heavy sigh before lifting her chin and looking up at Anya with fire burning in her eyes. “So now we have to figure out a gameplan.” Anya nodded, a similar fire burning in her own.

It took hardly any time at all before their heads were pounding worse than ever, and they were so exhausted they could hardly think let alone figure out an entire strategy to take down several enemies at once.

“We need to sleep.”

“No time,” said Raven, shadows under her eyes but still looking quite awake, fortified with determination. She scratched out the line she’d just written, tongue tucked between her teeth and brow pursed as she wrote out a new one.

“Raven, we do have time now,” said Anya sharply, and at her words Raven finally stilled. “We already know from the other timeline that Nia doesn’t outright make a move until the third task. We can afford to take a day or two to think. We have time.”

Raven looked carefully at Anya. If there were shadows under her eyes, her smudged warpaint hid them well. Her stomach gave a pleasant lurch as she held Anya’s gaze; they’d came to stand closer during their work and theorizing, and Anya was only a foot away. Raven could reach out and touch her, if she wanted. If Anya wanted.

And maybe Anya would want, one day. Because now they had another chance. Because Anya was alive. And Raven had to make sure she remained so.

“You’re right,” sighed Raven, glancing longingly at the comfortable-looking bed that had appeared on the far side of the room. This room was fucking magical. Except—“Ah, you can take the bed,” she said, shuffling across the room. “I’ll…sleep in a chair. Here.” She dropped unceremoniously into one, grimacing and arching her back to pull the balled up blanket out from beneath her and draping it in the chair beside her.
Anya frowned, glancing at Raven and the bed and back at Raven again. “Why wouldn’t we share the bed?”

Raven dropped her gaze, guilty especially with the heat creeping up her face. There was a fluttering in her heart and a low ache in her stomach and she needed to be patient, something she’d never been very good at, but she’d be damned if she made Anya feel uncomfortable.

“I don’t want to make you uncomfortable,” she said honestly, rubbing the back of her neck. “We’re…I know in the other timeline it’s…but…you don’t know me in this one.”

“You’re not a stranger,” said Anya, still watching Raven with that strange look in her eyes as she slowly moved toward her. “You were…but now…you’re not.”

Raven let go of her hand and looked down, suddenly unable to meet her eyes, and stared at the way her knuckles shone white as she gripped the arms of her chair. “I know, I get it. They were my memories, not yours, so it's like I know you but you don’t know me—”

“Raven, I just spent a year in your head,” interrupted Anya, a hint of amusement in her voice. She glanced at the clock; it was past four in the morning. “I lived an entire year in the space of nine hours. I know you.” She licked her lips, a shadow of uncertainty flashing across her face a moment before she reached out and took Raven’s hand. “I don’t know me as well as I’d like, but I know you. Does that make sense?”

Raven couldn’t help the grin that immediately curved her lips. It felt as though a weight had been lifted off her shoulders; she wanted to leap up and shout, she wanted to grab her broomstick and soar, she wanted to—

“Can I kiss you?” she asked desperately.

Anya surveyed her through slightly hooded eyes. After a pregnant pause, she seized Raven by the collar of her cloak and yanked her forward and out of the chair.

Raven’s laugh, full of joy and relief, was muffled a moment later by soft lips and a sharp tongue.

There was so much to do. They had to figure out a way to capture Nia and Ontari, to stop Cage and Pike and Sydney. But they had time, and that was the most important thing—they had time now.
“Wait,” mumbled Raven against Anya’s lips, breath hitching as Anya pushed her back into the chair and straddled her before attacking her neck with renewed vigor. “Ah, Anya, wait. Is this too fast for you? I don’t want to…”

“I missed you,” whispered Anya, the cold tip of her nose nudging the shell of Raven’s ear. Raven stilled. “I…fuck.” Anya sighed. “I miss you.”

“That’s…but…that’s not possible,” said Raven uncertainly, “I mean…they weren’t your memories, they were mine. You…”

“Did Raven Reyes really just say something’s impossible?”

Raven’s mouth fell open with a huff.

Magic worked in mysterious ways, thought Raven, sucking in a breath as her eyes stung again. She spared a grateful prayer for it, just as she had when she was eleven years old and left her shitty town far behind to find a new home in Hogwarts. Magic was one of the best things that ever happened to her.

Aware of Anya’s shiver, she grabbed the blanket from the chair beside them and swathed it around the both of them. Their foreheads rested together as they just sat there for a long moment, limbs wrapped around one another. She couldn’t hold back anymore, not after a year and time-travel and all the things they’d been through and above all, the overwhelming realization that they had a second chance to do it right.

“I love you.”

Anya’s lips dusted across her nose. “I love you too. I don’t remember it, but I know it. You’re an annoying shit, and you’re going to drive me up the wall for the rest of our lives, and I love you.”

“I think that’s the most I’ve ever heard you say at once, without threatening me.”

They laughed into their next kiss, fingers threading into hair to tug one another closer, and hearts pounding, pounding, pounding.
Lexa was so gay.

Clarke Griffin was even prettier in person than in the black and white glimpses of her in the photographs of the Daily Prophet. Lexa wouldn’t lie to herself; she’d briefly acknowledged that the girl was attractive a few months ago when she was skimming through the paper; it had caught her attention and led her to read through the article written by Charles Pike about the outrage of Clarke’s mother attempting to bypass the rules and visit a prisoner in Azkaban. Costia had noticed her looking and teased her, but fortunately relented when Anya came over to see what the commotion was, otherwise Lexa never would have heard the end of it.

She slanted a peek at Clarke right now. She was bundled up in a black cloak with the Hogwarts emblem on the left side of her chest; it seemed to be the typical uniform for students here, just a plain black robe, though she’d seen some wearing pointed black hats as well. The knot of a tie striped blue and bronze—or perhaps blue and silver, it was difficult to tell in this low light—was just visible above the collar. There was a silver badge pinned onto her chest that said *Head Girl*. Her golden hair was wavy and tousled, shadows under her blue eyes; Lexa wondered if she’d slept at all today, if she’d just risen out of bed when she noticed her friend’s absence. Lexa was exhausted herself. She’d laid in bed for hours, unable to fall asleep due to the empty bed across from her, before she’d finally had enough and woken Costia and Lincoln to help her search.

Lexa certainly hadn’t foreseen spending her first night at the hosting school sneaking off with not only a Hogwarts student but also Clarke Griffin herself, the mysterious girl Titus had directed her to maintain space from but also keep a close eye on. That was the problem, right now. Lexa was so tired, drained from the journey. That was what she told herself, anyway—that was the reason why she couldn’t stop sneaking glances out of the corner of her eyes. Something about the girl next to her was captivating. Maybe it was the blonde strands catching the reflection of the firelight of every torch they walked past. Maybe it was the eyes that were such a vivid blue even in the relative darkness of the dimly lit corridors. Maybe it was the way her shoulders sagged with exhaustion, but her pink lips were pursed slightly, curved downward in a troubled frown, lost in concentration on finding her friend. Maybe it was the husky quality of her voice as she looked back at Lexa, curiosity making her eyes more alert, and said something Lexa didn’t hear because she was too busy pretending she wasn’t looking at her, staring determinedly down at the floor, wetting her lips and swallowing hard.

Lexa was so, so gay.

“Lexa?”
She startled, blinking over at Clarke. Oh, right, Clarke had actually been speaking to her. “Sorry?”

“I asked if you’d expected your night going like this,” said Clarke, looking at her with mingled curiosity and amusement.

“Oh.” Lexa cleared her throat, hoping her awkward flustering wasn’t obvious to Clarke as she looked back at her with a carefully constructed impassive expression. “No, no I did not.”

Clarke looked at her expectantly, but when Lexa supplied nothing else, she nodded and face forward again.

“So, this friend of yours that Raven’s supposedly with. Who is she? What’s she like?”

“Hm? Oh.” Lexa blinked, clenching her jaw in frustration with herself. Get it together, Lexa. “Anya. She’s…” She pursed her lips to hide the smile attempting to curve her lips. How to explain Anya to a stranger… “She’s…Anya.” Though she kept her expression smooth and blank, she inwardly cringed.

To her surprise, Clarke didn’t laugh or seem annoyed. She just smiled slightly and nodded. “I know exactly what you mean.”

“You do?” asked Lexa despite herself.

“I find myself at the same dilemma when I have to explain Raven to people. It ends up coming out the same way. Raven is…Raven. Hilarious, brilliant, and a gigantic pain in the ass.”

Air escaped Lexa’s nostrils in lieu of a snort. “Sounds like Anya. Brings more clarity to the fact that they are both together, then.”

“Yeah…I’m still finding that a little weird,” said Clarke absently as they rounded a corner and set off down another long, empty hallway.

“I as well.”
“So this isn’t…typical behavior for Anya?”

“No, it is not. Is it for Raven?”

Clarke hummed thoughtfully. “Well. Like I said, Raven is…Raven. Nothing is too far outside the realm of possibilities when it comes to her. But…I don’t know, I wouldn’t really have expected this from her. She skipped the feast, and she’s not one to miss out on food, anyway.”

That didn’t bode well. What was going on? Whatever Lincoln claimed, Anya would not warm up to a stranger so soon. In Lexa’s opinion, there was less of a chance of Anya disappearing for some tryst with a stranger, and far more of a chance of Anya murdering a stranger who kissed her without permission and then spending the rest of the night searching for a suitable place to hide the body. Not that she’d tell Clarke that, of course. Instead she just let the anxiety keep her muscles tense as she walked silently alongside Clarke down a deserted hallway in the Hogwarts castle.

The silence was broken hardly a minute later, when they rounded a corner and a something swooped down before them. It was a tiny man with orange eyes bright with mischief and a shock of black hair exploding out from beneath a bell-covered hat. He wore an outlandish ensemble of clothes that reminded Lexa of a jester’s outfit, from the orange bow tie tucked beneath his round face right down to the curled toes of his purple shoes.

“Oh, great,” muttered Clarke under her breath; Lexa came to a halt with her when Clarke froze in place, eyeing the spirit like he was a ticking bomb.

“Oho-ho-ho,” snickered the poltergeist from where he floated overhead, short legs crossed beneath his body, “Looky who we have here, out of beds past curfew and all!” He adopted a somber expression, nodding slowly. “I’s have a moral obligation to report you, you know. Tis for your own safety.” He grinned wickedly.

Clarke looked at Lexa, an apology twisted somewhere with the panic on her face. “Run,” she said simply, and then the poltergeist sucked in a deep breath.

“STUDENTS OUT OF BED!” he bellowed, swooping behind Lexa and Clarke as they sprinted down the hallway, hearts hammering against their rib cages the same as the seemingly endless supply of empty inkwells he was chucking at them. “HOGWARTS AND DURMSTRANG STUDENTS BREAKING CURFEW! STUDENTS BREAKING THE RULES! STUDENTS OUT OF BED!”
“Fuck off, Peeves!” said Clarke angrily; a moment later she ducked the handful of brown guck he threw at her; it splattered the wall instead, and they tore past it, rounding the corner.

Peeves followed them up two hallways and a flight of stairs. Lexa narrowly managed to avoid a trick step on one of the staircases, catching sight of Clarke leaping over it just in time to jump herself. When they still hadn’t shaken the spirit, Lexa gritted her teeth and pulled her wand out of her cloak pocket; Clarke was clearly of the same mind, because her nostrils flared and she pulled her own wand out. They spun around, pointing their wands, and both shouted a spell.

“Furnunculus!”

“Tentaclifors!”

The combined spells seemed to have an interesting effect; small, wriggling tentacles burst into being all over Peeves’s body. He bounced in place in mid-air, howling with rage and pain.

“Oppugno Admorsus,” said Lexa calmly, pointing at the empty inkwell Peeves was still clutching. He yelped and uttered a stream of profane curses as the jar cracked and split along the bottom, developing a mouth with sharp teeth of glass that snapped at him; even when he dropped it, it floated in the air after him, chomping, and followed him cursing all the way down the hall and out of sight.

“Fuck,” panted Clarke as the two of them caught their breath, bent over double.

“Please tell me what he threw at you back there was mud,” said Lexa darkly.

Clarke glanced at her, a ghost of amusement chasing the tired lines off her face. “Uh, honestly? Probably not. I’m guessing he visited the winged horses down at the Beauxbatons’ carriage.”

Lexa’s repulsed face had Clarke laughing, sending an unpleasant flutter through Lexa’s belly. *No, no, no.* She cleared her throat and wiped her face of any expression, clinging on to the mission at hand: finding out where Anya disappeared to.

“So, which way now?” she asked politely.
Clarke seemed to recognize the compartmentalizing and did the same, somber-faced as she straightened and looked around, recognizing the hallway they were in.

“Not far, actually. Come on.”

She led Lexa up another flight of stairs and then hallway after hallway, heading toward the eastern side of the castle.

“This is the Turris Magnus,” whispered Clarke as climbed a staircase and passed portraits with snoring inhabitants, “It’s one of the largest towers. Defense Against the Dark Arts is taught here, in the Serpentine Corridor on the third floor.” Lexa waited, wondering why Clarke was telling her this, until Clarke added, “Same place we’re heading, really.”

When they reached the hallway, Clarke led her to a statue of a hump-backed witch with one eye.

“Gunhilda of Gorsemoor,” said Lexa, recognizing her from her studies.

Clarke nodded. “Yep. She went here, you know, in the 1500s.”

Lexa nodded too. “Yes, we studied her work on dragon pox.”

“She’s like the one Chocolate Frog card I’m missing,” said Clarke as she placed the tip of her wand on the statue.

Lexa hummed. “I’ve never had a chocolate frog.”


Lexa shrugged, a little amused by Clarke’s reaction. “Not really. We don’t eat many sweets in Durmstrang, beyond Treacle Toffee Tarts. You can order sweets to be imported, but I’ve never bothered.”
Clarke stared at her. “Please tell me you’ve had other sweets, though. Like—you’ve had Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans?’

Lixa wrinkled her nose. “Unfortunately.” Anya’s grandmother had sent her some for Christmas and she’d shared with Lixa. The first one, blueberry, hadn’t been bad—but the second one had been enough to put her off them for life. Vomit flavored. She could still taste it, urgh. Anya had nearly soiled herself laughing so hard at eleven-year old Lixa retching in the hallway outside the Charms classroom.

“Honeyduke’s Chocolates?”

“No.”

Clarke looked positively appalled, but Lixa just shrugged again. Durmstrang ate relatively healthy, nothing like the rich, decadent puddings served at the Hogwarts feast earlier tonight. Truthfully, Lixa didn’t feel as though she was missing out on anything. Clarke apparently thought differently. “You don’t know what you’re missing.” Shaking her head in disapproval, Clarke refocused on the task at hand and placed the tip of her wand on the statue. “Dissendium!”

The hump on the statue opened to reveal a dark tunnel. Lixa peered into the darkness of it before meeting Clarke’s eyes. “This leads to the village?”

Clarke nodded, tucking her wand back into her cloak pocket before climbing in. “Yep, then we have about an hour’s walk. Are you ready?”

At Lixa’s confirmation, Clarke pushed onward and was immediately swallowed by the darkness. Lixa clambered after her and upon tentatively broaching forward realized the tunnel was like a slide, smooth and slippery. She zoomed down it, the wind rushing through her hair. She had perhaps gone down a little too soon after Clarke—she realized this the moment she reached the end of the slide and tumbled into another warm body.

“Oof!”

“I’m sorry,” said Lixa, rolling off her and to her feet, skin humming a bit at the electric sensation of Clarke’s curvy body briefly pressed against her.
“Nope, my fault,” groaned Clarke, taking the hand Lexa offered to help her up. “I didn’t move out of
the way quick enough.”

They lit their wands at the same time. The tunnel was fairly small, but wide enough there was plenty
of space between them as they headed down it. Clarke couldn’t help but feel surprised (and relieved,
because she loathed awkward silences) that it was only mildly uncomfortable as they walked,
considering they were both strangers. The situation with Peeves was still playing on her mind. Lexa
could have ditched her, really, could have left Clarke to get in trouble and take the blame. She didn’t.
She’d turned back to fight at the same time Clarke had.

Still, as they walked on for the next fifteen minutes or so, the silence thickened and turned stifled.
The urge to speak, to say something that unstuck the uncertainty lodged in her throat, was
overwhelming; they both opened their mouths and started to speak at the same time. They caught one
another’s eyes in the wandlight and Clarke gave Lexa a sheepish smile. When Clarke nodded toward
Lexa to speak, Lexa nodded back.

“Um, do you…have any poltergeists at your school?” She winced the moment the words left her
lips.

“No,” said Lexa.

No, she supposed they wouldn’t, Clarke mused. From what she’d read, Durmstrang was not quite
as…lenient, as Hogwarts tended to be. They’d once been well known for their interest in the Dark
Arts and their discrimination against muggleborns, though that was over a century ago and times had
changed. People were more political with their discrimination now, as proven by the pro-blood
exclusion law Diana Sydney was working so hard to pass.

But Durmstrang was a mystery. She knew from her books that it grew quite cold where they were
located, and there were days of little sunlight, and she knew the famous dark wizard Gellert
Grindewald had attended the school in the late 1800s, and carved his sigil into the wall.

“What’s Durmstrang like, anyway?” said Clarke curiously.

A corner of Lexa’s lips twitched, as though threatening to quirk into a smile. It was interesting, since
Clarke had thus far only seen a frown or an indifferent expression on her face. “I’m fairly certain we
are not supposed to disclose information regarding our schools in order to protect the sanctity of their
whereabouts, Clarke.”

Clarke stumbled slightly, cheeks warming when Lexa’s hand shot out to her shoulder to steady her.
It was just—that was the first time she’d heard Lexa say her name, and something was…different
about it. In a good way. Just seeing those plump lips wrap around it, the strange way she almost
seemed to click the $k$…

And *whoa*, she should *not* be so affected by that. So affected by something as simple as a girl saying her *name*. Raven and Octavia’s muggle slang came to mind; *thirsty*. Not good. Clarke had far too much going on this year to get caught up in any type of feelings, be it sexual attraction or—and especially or—the fluttering in her belly. No way.

So she licked her lips and looked away, adopting a deliberately dry tone to say, “Right. Don’t worry, it’s not as if I’m about to pack up my broomstick and fly over to Durmstrang.”

One of Lexa’s brows raised, her lips doing that thing again, where it was almost like they wanted to smile. “You could certainly try.”

Clarke snorted; when she looked at Lexa, she was horrified to see she was actually smirking, and it was…very attractive on her, to say the least. Clarke wet her lips again, nerves buzzing beneath her skin, and cleared her throat. “Come on, we’re nearly there.”

They trekked on for another forty minutes, occasionally partaking in idle chitchat. Apparently Lexa was very certain she was going to be the Triwizard champion for Durmstrang. Clarke supposed she ought to admire her confidence. To her credit, Lexa did not look incredulous when Clarke mentioned she had no desire to submit her own name for the tournament, and didn’t question her as to why when Clarke merely mentioned she had enough to be getting on with this year. Which, really, led Clarke to wonder if Lexa had heard of her…do they read the Daily Prophet in Durmstrang?

The thought was brushed aside when they began to discuss Quidditch. It was interesting learning about the way Quidditch was handled at Durmstrang, and Clarke found herself aching to fly, fiercely missing the freedom of it. They should have brought their broomsticks for this journey; it would have gone much faster that way. Although Lexa was not bad company at all…and certainly not bad to look at for an hour…though Clarke tried not to linger on that thought.

“So yeah, Raven’s pretty good and Bellamy’s great, but Octavia’s definitely the best in the school. Professor Lemkin says she’s the best he’s seen in years, possibly the best in a century.”

“Is she going to try to take her career farther?” asked Lexa.

“Well, she’s wanted to be an auror since her third year,” said Clarke with a shrug, “But honestly, I think she’s good enough to go pro. She’s obsessed with the Falmouth Falcons because she loves their team motto. Something about breaking a few heads, I think.”

Lexa pressed her lips together, appearing faintly impressed. “I should like to play against her sometime, if only so I can annoy Anya with it. I’ll tell her it will be nice to have a challenge for once. It will infuriate her.”
Clarke chuckled. “Well, you’ve already met her, so I’m sure you can find her again to ask.” When Lexa glanced at her questioningly, Clarke arched a brow. “Octavia is who gave you that…interesting tour.” To her delight, Lexa’s cheeks tinged pink at the memory, and a muscle jumped in her clenched jaw.

“Ah. Yes,” she said stiffly, clearly not keen to relieve the experience of seeing the Hogwarts gamekeeper masturbating in plain view of the window.

“Bell, her older brother, was just as horrified as you, if that makes you feel any better,” said Clarke in amusement. “He’s very protective of her.”

Lexa was saved from having to respond when they reached the ladder and trapdoor. Clarke led her up it and into Honeyduke’s cellar, mouth watering a little at the delicious aroma of chocolate and sweets that assaulted them the moment they climbed up. Clarke carefully closed the door behind them and led Lexa around the barrels of supplies and out of the back. The store was dark, lit only by the streetlamps outside, but the whites of Lexa’s eyes gleamed as she looked around uncertainly at the place, clearly reluctant to be breaking the rules like this. Clarke smirked.

“This is the perfect opportunity for you to try some chocolate,” she decided, only smiling at the way Lexa’s startled gaze snapped onto her. “I’m going to pay for it, don’t worry. Just take whatever you like.” Lexa followed her as she walked forward toward the nearest shelf, grabbing a large bar of Honeyduke’s Chocolate. “It’s late and I’m still stuffed from the feast, so do you want to just share one?”

Lexa nodded, so Clarke opened the bar and hummed in pleasure at the smell wafting toward them. She broke two pieces off and handed one to Lexa.

“Moment of truth,” said Clarke cheerily, lifting the chocolate as though in toast; Lexa pursed her lips, undoubtedly fighting off a smile, and lightly tapped her piece of chocolate to Clarke’s before popping it into her mouth.

A grin spread across Clarke’s face at the look of bliss that overcame Lexa’s. And then Lexa made a quiet noise, like a muffled moan, and the smile froze on Clarke’s face as the sound sent a low ache swooping in her belly, and good God, she should jump headfirst into the Black Lake once she’s back at the castle because this was ridiculous.

“It’s good,” whispered Lexa, mouth curving up; Clarke tried not to watch the tongue poke out to lick those plump lips. “Really good. I think I much prefer Honeyduke’s to our sweets,” she said before reaching forward, slender fingers wrapping around Clarke’s hand to hold her in place so she could break off another piece of chocolate. Clarke focused very carefully on swallowing her chocolate so she didn’t choke on it.
“I told you,” she managed to say.

They ate a few more pieces before surrendering to their full stomachs, still fit to bursting from the feast. Clarke tucked the rest of the bar into her cloak pocket after insisting Lexa took a new one for herself for later. She fished within her other pocket for a few spare galleons and quietly set them on the countertop adjacent to a large, fluffy cat sleeping in a chair behind the counter. Clarke reached out to scratch behind its ear, smiling when Lexa did the same, and then Clarke led her out the front door after unlocking it, pointing her wand at the bell to keep it silent as they slipped out into the night, locking the door behind them again.

“This way,” said Clarke, leading them down the cobblestone path toward the distant pub. It was a longshot, she knew, but she had no other ideas. She deflated in disappointment when she saw there weren’t any lights on within The Three Broomsticks. “Damn it.”

“They could still be in there,” offered Lexa, though she looked doubtful as she appraised the pub.

True, Clarke supposed. They could be in there right now, drunk off their asses and drinking by wandlight. Sighing in resignation, Clarke unlocked the door so she and Lexa could slip inside.

“Rae?” whispered Clarke, lighting her wand and holding it aloft. The floorboards creaked beneath her feet. A cold chill crept up her spine, causing her to shiver. “Raven?”

“I don’t think they’re in here,” said Lexa, tone mingled disappointment and exasperation. “Is there anywhere else they could be?”

Clarke’s cheeks puffed out as she exhaled. No, not really… She couldn’t see Raven going into the Hog’s Head…it used to be a cheap old pub, but since it came under new management, it’d been considerably pricey and more high-end. Nor could she see her finding much joy in Arker’s joke shop at this time of night…so many of their products were flashy and loud.

“I don’t know,” sighed Clarke. “At this point, I’m about ready to kill her—“

“Wait.”

She stopped short at Lexa’s sudden urgent tone, and the way she’d stilled, head turned as though listening for something. Clarke frowned, pausing to listen too, but she couldn’t hear anything. Well, wait a minute, there was something…it sounded strangely like breathing, someone wheezing in shallow, rattling breaths… What was that?

“Lexa—“

“Behind you!”

Clarke whirled around just in time to see a dark figure resembling nothing more than a hulking shadow fly past the window before the door they’d only just walked through burst open, bring with it an icy wind that extinguished her wandlight, and a horror that had Clarke’s breath freezing in her lungs. She couldn’t think, couldn’t draw air—she just stood there, paralyzed with terror, as some creature she could not even see advanced on her. Her heart was pounding so hard it was the only sound she could hear apart from her blood rushing in her veins, and the horrible rattling breaths coming from the creature. She barely registered the fact that Lexa had stepped forward, barely noticed her pointing her wand and shouting a spell that had a blindingly bright light blasting from her wand, briefly illuminating a long, thin figure, almost humanoid, in a ragged cloak, before the light chased the creature out the door it had just come through. With another twitch of Lexa’s wand, the door slammed shut and locked. The room immediately felt ten degrees warmer.
“What was that?” cried Clarke once she found her tongue.

Lexa was hardly even breathing heavily. She ignored Clarke, peering out the windows instead. The streetlamps were all out.

“What was that? Lexa? What the hell was—“

“Hang on, Clarke, there are more.”

Clarke hastened to her side, peering over Lexa’s shoulder to gaze down the dark street. She couldn’t see anything. “How do you know?”

“The lights, the air. They make things dark and cold, and they travel in packs. There will be more.”

“We need to get the hell out of here, then!”

“Not yet.” Lexa took a steady breath, sparing one last glance out the window before shifting to cast a fire into the empty grate. “It’s more dangerous out there than in here, trust me. We need to wait it out and hope they leave.” Her last words sounded dubious, as though she doubted they would leave, and Clarke’s mouth went dry at the thought. Her legs were trembling. That was possibly one of the most terrifying moments of her life.

She wrapped her arms around herself, still cold despite the fire, and glanced around the empty pub. “Aren’t we sitting ducks if we wait here?”

“Trust me,” said Lexa firmly. “You would rather face one at a time in here then go out there and get swarmed. We’ll wait it out, and then make a break for the passageway and get back to the school.” She gestured toward one of the settees beside the fire. “Try to warm up.”

“What was that?” asked Clarke again, teeth chattering. “It was—it made me think of—of dementors. But I thought they were extinct…”

“They are called Shadow-Eaters,” said Lexa calmly. “They are similar to dementors, except they can remove your magic as well as your soul.”
“My—they can take away magic?” said Clarke, aghast. She staggered over to the settee and collapsed into it. The fire was comforting, but nothing seemed to be able to penetrate the ice the creature had put inside her.

Lexa didn’t expand, and Clarke was too busy trying to process everything before asking more questions. Several minutes passed, though it felt far longer than that. Clarke shot out of her chair when she heard another noise. Lexa, who still stood at the window, shook her head a beat later.

“Just a stray cat.”

“Do they attack cats?” wondered Clarke.

“No. Nor did dementors. They effect humans—animals not so much.” Lexa turned to her, and Clarke could see clearly on Lexa’s face that she was hoping to distract Clarke for a time. “Years ago after the Second Wizarding War, the Ministry was charged with hunting down the remaining dementors to prevent them from preying on muggles and breeding. There were record numbers of wizards and witches registering as animagi, because becoming an animal can stave off the effects of the dementors.”

Clarke frowned. Lexa knew an awful lot on the subject. “Um. Are you an Animagi?”

Lexa hesitated only a beat before saying, “Yes.”

“What’s your—” She was interrupted when yet another noise sounded; gazing out the window, all she saw was the same stray cat poking hopefully at a ripped trash bag propped up against a rubbish bin. She swallowed as she cast her gaze over the dark alley, searching for any sign of movement.

“There was once a man named Ishmael who studied for years and finally successfully transformed… into a whale.”

Lexa’s attempts at distraction were…surprisingly efficient. At the very least, feeling amusement and a slight sense of appreciation at Lexa for her efforts helped diminish the fear. “A whale.”

“Yes,” hummed Lexa in agreement. “A blue whale, to be exact. It was tragic. He squashed over a
dozen Ministry officials during his licensing.”

“Jesus.” Clarke tilted her head. It was interesting, but had also been a blatant change of subject. “So…what form does your animagus take?”

Lexa’s lips curved in the subtle way that Clarke was learning was her signature smile. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you.”

“Try me.”

Lexa considered her for another beat before looking away, chuckling under her breath as she shook her head. “Another time. Come on, we should be safe to take another look out, I would think.”

Clarke came to her side, the two of them examining the dark street. She couldn’t see a thing.

“We could try Homenum Revelio.”

“That won’t work,” whispered Lexa. “It won’t detect an unliving presence. They are not living beings like you and I.”

Clarke licked her lips, throat dry. What the hell were they dealing with here? “What is it? Can it find us?”

“Yes. They sense fear. If you are unafraid, we can hide more effectively from it. If you cannot control your fear, it will find us sooner.”

Clarke clenched her jaw, irritation fluttering within to join the panic. How the fuck was she supposed to be unafraid when some strange creature was out there that could take her magic and her soul? What the hell was it?

“It operates similarly to a dementor,” said Lexa quietly, the calmness she exuded immediately demanding Clarke’s attention; she held her gaze steadily, green eyes wide and serious. “Are you able to produce a Patronus?”
Bitter disappointment and embarrassment brought a pink dusting to Clarke’s pale cheeks. No, she couldn’t. They went over it in Defense Against the Dark Arts, but it was briefly, and only in theory, they never actually practiced the spell or anything. In the years following the second wizarding war, students had been required to learn it, since rogue dementors were still out roaming the world and no longer in a contract with the ministry. But now, since the dementors had died out long ago, it was no longer taught in curriculum. Which, Clarke was now realizing, was fucking stupid.

“No. Can you?”

“Yes.” She didn’t boast, nor did she scoff or roll or eyes or do anything to make Clarke feel inadequate. She just narrowed her eyes and pursed her lips as she considered their options. “You should try it. Here.”

Clarke’s heart lodged itself in her throat as Lexa unlocked the door and pulled it open. She pointed her wand.

“Expecto Patronum!”

This time, Clarke was able to see the shape the burst of silvery light took on, as it scurried down the cobblestone path, streaking into the distance like a shooting star before it faded and the darkness swallowed it whole.

“Just think of a happy memory, focus on it, and say the spell,” continued Lexa, but Clarke was no longer listening, peering intently at where the glowing creature had disappeared.

“Is that…was that a raccoon?” said Clarke in disbelief.

Lexa flushed. “…Yes.”

The laughter bubbled out of her before she could contain it. Lexa narrowed her eyes and shot her a rueful glance, lips pressed together in exasperation, only halfheartedly trying to hide her ghost of a smile. Clarke’s hand leapt up to press over her mouth and she bit her bottom lip in an effort to quell her giggles; she was exhausted from lack of sleep and shaken from the encounter with that thing, the Shadow-Eater. She couldn’t really blame herself for being like this. “Sorry. It’s just. You’re so…I mean. I wouldn’t have expected a raccoon, that’s all.”
“A patronus is a spirit guardian,” said Lexa, eying Clarke with amusement, fully aware how hard Clarke was working not to laugh. “You cannot control the shape they take on. You know why they take on the shapes they do, right?”

“Um.” Clarke tried her best to sober up and think. She could recall, vaguely, going over a book during Defense Against the Dark Arts regarding the use of powerful defensive charms…

“The best way I have seen it put is by Catullus Spangle in his masterwork *Charms of Defence and Deterrence*. He states principles on the Patronus Charm that are regarded as accurate. He said ‘a human confronted with inhuman evil, such as the Dementor, must draw upon resources they may never have needed, and the Patronus is the awakened secret self that lies dormant until needed, but which must now be brought to light.’”

Clarke stared at her, taken aback and, frankly, a bit impressed. She hadn’t expected Lexa to spout off part of a book she’d memorized.

Lexa seemed to realize and cleared her throat. “He considered the Patronus to be a hidden, but inherent, part of one’s personality. It doesn’t always have a form, and it doesn’t always have to be a reflection of what someone else makes you feel; Anya’s patronus, for example, is an owl, and she doesn’t know anyone with the same patronus, nor do owls remind her anything of her loved ones. It owl represents part of herself—hidden but inherent. Costia’s is a horse—a dapple gray mare, and it’s a reflection of herself the same way Anya’s is. Lincoln, meanwhile, has a patronus that takes on the same as his mother’s. The Patronus is generated by happy thoughts—sometimes those happy thoughts are initiated by someone else, or another person is the foundation that started all happy thoughts in the first place. The idea of his mother makes him feel safe and loved, thus his patronus is a reflection of that.”

Clarke considered that. She loved both her parents, but she’d always been closer to her father. If she could cast a corporeal patronus, it would probably take on some shape that reminded her of him… she remembered a conversation she’d had with him when she was young, when he told her about animagi and she asked what animal he’d like to turn into, if he could. He’d said an eagle, because he would love to fly around freely in the sky all over the world and feel the wind in his feathers instead of his hair—that had made a six-year-old Clarke giggle. Her response (“I would turn into a cornetto, Daddy”) had made him laugh, too.

“Does the raccoon remind you of your parents?”

It wasn’t until after the words left her mouth and the amusement slid off Lexa’s face that Clarke realized how highly personal a question it was. She stilled, heart kicking just a bit faster and face
growing warm as her brain whirled around trying to figure out a way to take it back, but to her surprise, Lexa answered, in a measured voice. “No. I am estranged from my parents.” When Clarke was silent, unsure how to proceed, Lexa added, “They are muggles, and did not approve of me leaving to Durmstrang.”

Oh, wow. Okay. Clarke certainly wouldn’t have expected that. Everything about Lexa screamed pureblood…though that was definitely Clarke’s blood privilege speaking. She’d have to chastise herself more thoroughly for that later though, because now silence had fallen and she didn’t want it to turn awkward.

“I’m sorry,” she offered, reaching out without thinking, fingertips brushing Lexa’s shoulder, unsure what she was even going for—to get Lexa’s attention, to comfort, perhaps both. Lexa’s startled gaze snapped onto her and Clarke immediately drew back her hand. “Sorry,” she said quickly. “I just—I wanted to say sorry your parents are like that. You seem pretty awesome to me.”

Lexa made a strange twitching gesture, as though wanting to roll her eyes but trying not to. “You hardly know me.”

She knew enough. She knew Lexa cared about her friends, was loyal and compassionate—enough that she snuck out of school grounds on her first day there for the tournament in the middle of the night to go searching for someone. She knew Lexa was able to keep her head in tense situations, that she was calm and steady—she hadn’t been annoyed with Clarke or made her feel small for being clueless. She knew her tiny smile was adorable, and the way her green eyes lit up was entrancing—but that wasn’t exactly relevant right now.

“I know enough.” She shrugged when Lexa just looked at her curiously. “At the very least, I know you can produce a corporeal patronus, and that’s pretty rare even for adults.” Lexa’s smile widened, still close-mouthed, but Clarke’s heart swelled in triumph. After a few minutes of comfortable silence, Clarke said, “So, who’s the raccoon for, then, if you don’t mind me asking? It can’t be just yours. I just…” Her nose crinkled in amusement. “I don’t see a raccoon representing your personality.”

“Costia.”

“Oh.” Clarke’s eyes widened as the implications of the statement sunk in. “Oh.”

The strangest mix of hope and disappointment swirled within her. On one hand, Lexa was interested in girls. On the other….
But this was good, she told herself. Lexa had a girlfriend. Why should Clarke care at all about that? She certainly shouldn’t be feeling any sort of disappointment. Jesus, she’d known this girl for a matter of hours. Sure, she was the most beautiful person Clarke had ever seen…and had already proven to be clever, talented, and had a dry sense of humor that had already made Clarke smile more times than she could count…but regardless. She had too much to focus on this year to get distracted…she wasn’t in the right place for a relationship, whether sexual or something more.

“No, she’s the reason your Patronus…” Clarke’s brow furrowed.

“She makes me happy, and the thought of her is comforting, yes.” Lexa nodded. “So do my other friends. Costia was just the pivotal moment. I was…even young, I was very dedicated to my studies. Costia was the first person who…made me feel like I existed outside of them. That reminded me of my happy thoughts. She’s the one who helped me master the charm. It’s a sentimental thing.”

“Is hers a raccoon too?”

“No.” Lexa smiled slightly. “At Durmstrang, it is tradition for the Quidditch teams to don warpaint for the games. We are not allowed to try out until our second year. Costia and I were in the same year and tried out for the same form. She was not very good, she didn’t make it, but we became friends after that. During my first game, I wore my paint like a mask, but the rain made the kohl run. Costia said I looked like a raccoon.” Lexa’s smile, and the story, was infectious. Clarke found herself smiling as she listened. “In our third year, we learned the Patronus charm. I had difficulty with it. Costia took to it the easiest. She mastered it almost on the first try. It took me much longer. She told me to think of a happy memory, something that would make me smile. That memory was the first I thought of. A scrawny second-year who caught the Snitch to win her first game, standing in the rain with war paint running down her cheeks, moments away from receiving her first kiss.”

“I think that’s possibly the cutest thing I’ve ever heard.”

To her delight, Lexa’s cheeks went pink. “Yes, well.”

“She sounds lovely,” said Clarke after a moment. “Why…did you two not work out? If you don’t mind me asking.” The reluctance that flickered across Lexa’s face had Clarke immediately hastening
to retract the statement. “Sorry, you don’t have to—it’s none of my business—“

“It’s complicated,” said Lexa quietly. “We had different viewpoints, different ideas on how our lives should go. Eventually, all we did was fight. Our friendship was worth more than that. We mutually decided we were better off that way, and it’s been much better since.”

“Good,” said Clarke softly. She wished it had been that simple with Finn. “It’s really good you guys could work it out that way. My last relationship…well, I wish it could have gone that way too.”

Lexa looked away, carefully casting her gaze over the dark street. “A messy split?”

“Yep.” Clarke leaned back, dropping her head back against the settee in lieu of slumping against it. She normally hated speaking about Finn; she’d never been particularly adept at discussing her feelings. But something about this…maybe it was the fact that she seemed to have some kind of instant connection with Lexa, something that made her feel safe, or maybe it was the fact that Lexa had already saved her life tonight, or maybe it was the darkly-lit comfort of this small pub, or maybe even the fact that it was beyond late and she was so tired her head was spinning, but right now, Clarke didn’t seem to mind talking. “My friend, Raven…there was this boy she grew up with. Finn. She’d been in love with him since they were kids. During our first few years at Hogwarts, Raven and I hated each other. We were in the same House, we competed in every class, she played pranks on me. And Finn. We liked each other. Nothing ever happened, and we were just kids. Then in our fifth year, Raven was late coming back to school, and Finn told me she wasn’t coming back at all and asked me out. We dated for about a month, until Raven came back…then Finn couldn’t make up his mind and thought he was smart enough to date us both in secret.”

“He tried to date the both of you? Even though you lived together?” said Lexa incredulously.

“Yeah. I never said he was the smartest. Fire’s lit, but the cauldron’s empty, and all that.” Clarke sighed. “We were just kids, so it was stupid, really, but I thought I loved him, so it broke my heart. And it really did break Raven’s. Some good came out of it, though. Raven and I became friends—best friends. At the end of our sixth year, Finn said he was dropping out of school to go traveling with his dad. His dad’s an asshole, I warned him not to and Raven begged him not to go, but…” Clarke shrugged. “He didn’t listen. And even though he’s an idiot, he was a friend. He was one of Raven’s most important people. It hurt.”

“I’m sorry,” murmured Lexa. She sighed then, and it sounded so young and was at such odds for the weariness in her eyes that made her seem much older that it brought another smile unbidden to Clarke’s lips. Lexa noticed, and tilted her head. “What?”
“Nothing,” she said quickly, composing her expression.

Lexa’s eyes narrowed and she opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, the fire in the grate suddenly extinguished. Clarke leapt to her feet as Lexa spun around to peer out the window. The streetlights outside were gone, too.

“It’s back?”

“Shh. Move away from the windows.” Lexa urged her back, gaze warily dipping around as she led them behind the pub counter. Clarke’s heart beat a tattoo against her ribcage. She clutched her wand tightly, eyes straining in the dark to catch a glimpse of something, anything.

“What else—“

“Shh!”

But Lexa didn’t need to shush her, because Clarke was very much aware that something unnatural had just crept into the room. A freezing chill swept over them, gooseflesh rippling up Clarke’s arms, the hair on the back of her neck rising. As a strange rattling noise sounded, hollow pain reverberated in the pit of her stomach, a suffocating hopelessness and despair…

“Lexa…” she whispered, voice faint. “What is…”

This was the worst feeling she’d ever experienced. What was the point of anything? Her father was in prison…Raven was missing…what if this creature had consumed her? Clarke couldn’t save her… couldn’t save her dad…couldn’t save Lexa and herself right now…

“Think of something happy, Clarke.” Lexa’s voice sounded as though she stood at the other end of a long tunnel. “A happy memory. Think of it and cast the spell before you can’t use your magic—”
A happy memory? She didn’t have any happy memories. There was no joy left…

Except, there was. Wasn’t there?

Her father…he would be okay. She had to believe that, had to. They’d get him a fair trial and take him out of Azkaban. He’d be okay. She’d see his smile again, she’d get another chance to beat him in chess. She’d taste his pancakes again. She’d be wrapped up in his hug. Her mother would smile again, and the three of them would be a family again.

And her friends. Raven was Raven, she was okay, of course she was. This creature would be more frightened of Raven Reyes than Raven of it. And her other friends snug in their beds back at the castle…Wells, Octavia, Bellamy, Monty, Fox, Miller, Jasper, Monroe, Harper—so many friends…

And now this girl standing at her side, the silvery light extending from her wand lighting up the pub, revealing the terrifying creatures looming over them high up in the air, frightening shadows from their tattered cloaks cast up along the walls and ceiling in shattered silhouettes…but it wasn’t as scary as it should be, because the look in Lexa’s green eyes was pure focus, eerily calm determination. Lexa was not frightened. Lexa looked like a goddess, and she was standing alongside Clarke.

Clarke looked at those green eyes shining amidst all the war paint, looked at the cut of her jaw and the cute tiny ears and the intricate braids. She looked, and then she looked up at the creature already withdrawing from the patronus starting to burst to life from Lexa’s wand, and Clarke raised her own wand.

“*Expecto Patronum!*”

It wasn’t a shape, not really. More like a fine mist, but it was almost solid, and that was something. That combined with Lexa’s pearly raccoon had the creatures flying back, nearly colliding together in their haste to swoop out of the doorway. It was a miracle, too, because when Clarke tried to cast it again, nothing happened—she’d lost her magic again.

“Fuck,” she gasped, sucking down air that no longer felt like ice in her lungs. Her legs wobbled and threatened to give out beneath her, and Lexa seized her, hooking an arm around her waist just in time. “Fuck. That was—“

“Merlin’s pants!”
Lexa whipped around, wand pointed in the direction of the voice in the blink of an eye. A woman had came barreling down the staircase and they hadn’t even noticed.

“Oh my—oh my—are you okay? I saw everything, I saw them—are you okay, are you hurt?”

Clarke stared up into the stranger’s face, feeling quite stupefied.

“We’re fine,” said Lexa firmly, hitching Clarke up a bit higher before slowly helping her to the nearest table.

“What happened? Why—what are you doing in my pub?” asked the woman, and oh, shit. Clarke swallowed, realizing they were about to be in a hell of a lot of trouble. The woman’s shock was quickly dissipating, replaced with outrage that was perfectly warranted, really. “Who are you?”

“Students,” managed Clarke. “From Hogwarts.”

“And Durmstrang,” said Lexa, as she lowered Clarke into a chair and took the one next to her.

Clarke expected the woman to just look back blankly at that, clueless as to how two students were standing here in her pub in the middle of the night, but comprehension settled into the woman’s bright green eyes, and her mouth flattened in further resigned anger. “You snuck in through the secret passageway.”

Shit. “Uh…yeah.”

The woman made a noise somewhere between a tsk and a growl before abruptly standing. Clarke and Lexa watched in bleak silence as the woman busied herself around the bar before returning with two bottles of butterbeer and a slab of chocolate.

“Drink this and eat that,” she said irritably, slapping them down on the table. “And don’t move an inch. I’ll be right back.”

They didn’t move an inch, but nor did they touch the drink or food; they watched as the woman hurried to the doorway and cracked it open, apprehensively peering down the street before she lifted her wand and murmured too quickly for them to catch; a moment later a silvery something burst out of her wand, and Clarke watched a glowing hummingbird flit past the window and then streak off into the sky.

“Who did you send that to?” asked Lexa.

“My sister,” said the woman shortly, bustling back over to them. She pointed at the items she’d brought over to them. “Eat. Drink. Now. Then we’re waiting on my sister. She’ll accompany you
back to the school, where your headmaster will be waiting for you.”

This woman had definitely been a Prefect in her time, thought Clarke sulkily as she took the butterbeer Lexa silently handed her.

As the woman went to stand near the window, undoubtedly to expectantly gaze out it waiting for her sister, Lexa nudged the chocolate to Clarke. “Here. This helps with the effects, eat some.”

It wasn’t Honeyduke’s, but it still seemed to bring back some warmth into her as she nibbled on a corner after splitting it with Lexa.

“What else were you talking about?” whispered Clarke. “What are those—where did those things come from?”

Lexa glanced at the woman before giving Clarke a meaningful look and shaking her head. Clarke held her tongue. She’d ask again later.

It took hardly ten minutes for the pub owner’s sister to arrive. The crack of Apparition broke the silence, followed by the blonde yanking open the door so another woman could stride in.

It was a woman with dark hair streaked with gray wound into a bun that was mostly neat save for the little flyaway hairs she impatiently pushed back from her face as she approached them. Clarke’s heart sank. She knew exactly who this woman was. Jamie Potter—the head of the Aurors. She had been one of the Ministry officials who arrested her father.

Jamie came to stand before them, propping her hands on her hips and looking at them in much the same way Clarke felt her mother would be looking at her if she were here right now.

“Clarke Griffin,” she noted, looking at Clarke before glancing at Lexa. “And Lexa Woods.” How the hell did she know who Lexa was? Jamie Potter—the head of the Aurors. She had been one of the Ministry officials who arrested her father.

“How the hell did she know who Lexa was? Jamie looked between the two of them. “What were you thinking?” she demanded.

“It was my fault,” said Clarke. Lexa’s head snapped to the side to stare at her.

“I agreed to it,” said Lexa swiftly, head turning again to gaze steadily at Jamie, chin lifted as though in challenge.

“It was my idea,” said Clarke tiredly. There was really no reason to fuss out the details; they were in big trouble either way. “Our friends have been missing since the dinner. We looked everywhere for them in the castle and across the grounds. I thought maybe they’d be here.”

“Did you notify your head of House?” When Clarke didn’t answer, Jamie arched a brow. “Did you notify the headmaster?” When Clarke still remained silent, Jamie sighed. “Right, of course not. Come on, then. We’ll go have a talk with them, and figure out where your friends went. Do you have any other reason to suspect they’d be here?”

“No.”

“How long have you been here?”

Clarke glanced at her watch before closing her eyes, nostrils flaring. After her father was arrested, she’d taken to wearing his watch, and it was broken. She always forgot. Lexa, however, looked up at the clock hanging above the fireplace. It was past five in the morning.

“Half an hour.”
“Half an hour?” repeated Jamie, brows rising, shooting a glower toward her sister. “Why—“

“The Shadow-Eater was here earlier,” said Lexa, ignoring the surprised looks thrown at her by Jamie and the other woman. “We spooked it, but I knew there were more. We waited it out hoping they’d leave. They did not.”

“Merlin’s beard.” Jamie scrubbed her hands over her face, appearing haggard and exhausted; Clarke wondered if they’d woken her. They must have. “Do you realize the danger you put yourself in?”

“I do now,” said Clarke bluntly.

Jamie shook her head, sighing, and ushered them out the door. Mellow blues crept above the hazy pinks of low-lying clouds on the eastern horizon; dawn was fast approaching. “Come on, then. We’ll see what your headmaster has to say about this. And you,” she added sharply to the other woman, who had just locked the door behind them. “Where were you the past half hour? How did you not notice these two in your pub?”

“I was at Frankie’s,” the woman muttered, lowering her voice. Clarke didn’t bother leaning forward to eavesdrop; she didn’t care. She looked at Lexa walking beside her, stony-faced, and faltered at the guilt fizzing in her belly.

“I’m sorry,” she said quietly.

Lexa didn’t answer, staring straight ahead as they walked, a muscle in her jaw clenching. After a tense silence, she sighed. “It’s all right. I mean, my headmaster may kill me, but we were looking for our missing friends. She will understand.”

“I’m not sure my headmaster will,” said Clarke glumly, imagining Kane’s reaction. Kane was far from the dictator he’d been in his first years as Headmaster, but Clarke was certain the patient, benevolent nature could only go so far. Not only had Clarke snuck out of school grounds in the middle of the night, but she’d taken the prized pupil of Durmstrang with her. She’d be lucky if she were ever allowed back in Hogsmeade again, let alone escaping detention for the rest of the semester. She’d probably have at least five howlers from her mother arrive before breakfast.

Well, at least she’d gone out with a bang. She’d spent the past couple hours with the hottest girl she’d ever seen. That was something.

“In a weird way, I had fun,” said Clarke casually, voice low so Jamie and the pub owner didn’t catch it. In her peripheral vision, she saw Lexa look at her, but she carefully kept her gaze forward, ignoring the blush dusting her cheeks. “Thanks.”

She couldn’t resist peeking a glance at Lexa; to her surprise, she saw that Lexa was blushing, and looking forward just as carefully as Clarke had been, avoiding her gaze. Her throat dipped as she swallowed. Clarke smiled to herself and looked away.

As Jamie and the blonde woman led them down the streets of Hogsmeade and toward the distant castle gates, Clarke’s smile faded as she recalled the terrifying creatures she’d just met. She chewed on her lower lip, thoughts racing. The most alarming thing about it all was that it reminded her of the creatures from her nightmares…it certainly looked just like it, though in her dream, the creatures had scaly claws that had tore at her father’s body.

“Clarke,” said Lexa lowly, warningly, glancing at Jamie and the woman’s backs, who were still having a quiet conversation between themselves. “This isn’t the time or the place.”

“But—“

“Trust me.”

Oddly, she did. Even though they’d essentially just met.

“Oh.” But as she lapsed back into silence, her stress level raised in conjunction to the erratic pattern of her thoughts. Why had she dreamt of those creatures? Was it a sign? Were they going to attack her father? Had they already? What did—

“You did well,” said Lexa, jolting her out of her thoughts. Clarke glanced at her curiously, saw Lexa already watching her with soft, understanding eyes. Like she somehow knew Clarke needed a distraction. “Your patronus.”

“I didn’t do it properly,” she said, let down. “It didn’t take a shape.”

Lika shook her head, smiling slightly. “You nearly got it, and on your first try.”

The compliment warmed her chest, as well as her face. “Thanks. I wouldn’t have been able to if it weren’t for you.”

It was Lexa’s turn to blush. “I didn’t do anything—“

“You did,” interrupted Clarke.

Lexa seemed unsure of what to say, so she merely gave Clarke that small smile instead. Beyond anything she’d eaten or drank, that smile is what warmed Clarke up the most.
They walked the rest of the way in relative silence, until they reached the Hogwarts gates. There, Jamie turned to thank the blonde woman, who merely nodded and cast one last look at Clarke and Lexa that seemed to be mingled amusement and disapproval, before taking a step back, clearly intent to wait until Jamie dropped them off.

Jamie tapped her wand on the gate lock three times, and when the black iron wrought glowed purple, said clearly, “This is Jamie Potter. Notify Kane I have two students to return to him.” The glow faded and then they waited only a moment before it flashed again. There was a loud click as though it unlocked, which it must have, since Jamie then pushed it open and marshaled Clarke and Lexa through.

Jamie marched them across the grounds; the sky was turning a bright pink now, shifting into gold near the horizon. They climbed the steps up to the castle doors and Jamie rapped her wand on it to unlock it before steering them inside and up the marble staircase. The castle was still and silent with sleeping inhabitants as they traversed the castle toward the Headmaster’s study. Clarke’s legs were aching; it was difficult to keep her eyes open. She thought with desperate longing of her four-poster bed.

Jamie tapped the gargoyle outside the study and pursed her lips, thinking for a long moment before murmuring a password that had the gargoyle leaping aside to let them through to the circular moving staircase.

“I’ll go retrieve the headmaster. Take a seat and wait,” said Jamie, nodding toward the chairs sat before the headmaster’s desk. Clarke been in the headmaster’s office a few times before, usually due to some incident related to Raven blowing something up; the chairs in here were not particularly comfortable, but right now she didn’t care, she’d fall asleep standing up if she had to. She stumbled toward one, mind spinning with the possibility of how much sleep she could fit into the five minutes it would take to find Kane. And then Jamie cast a stern glance at Clarke and added, “And don’t even think about falling asleep.”

Clarke collapsed, spent and bone-limp, onto one of the leather chairs, and bit back a moan. *Fuck.*

* "./ Griff./ "*

“Fuck,” moaned Raven, collapsing spent and bone-limp onto the bed.

“I told you I missed you,” breathed Anya, rolling over onto her back and sighing at the sweet relief
of cool air hitting her overheated skin. She blinked up at the ceiling, which was now just the normal charred black, unlike earlier when she swore she saw stars in it.

“And I missed you. Jesus. You fucking killed me.”

“No one is dying in this lifetime,” said Anya dryly. She expected a chuckle, a snort, anything; instead she turned when she was met with nothing but silence. Her heart dropped when she met a tearful brown gaze, Raven’s lower lip quivering. She inhaled steadily as she automatically moved in close to Raven, hooking an arm around her to tuck her in snugly against her chest. She’d been expecting this. Frankly, she was surprised it took this long.

“It’s okay,” she said, sweeping back the hair that clung to Raven’s sweaty forehead so she could press her lips there. “I’m alive now, you sop.”

“You were dead,” whispered Raven, face screwed up as though it could stop her from dissolving into sobs. “You died yesterday.”

“I’m alive today. You saved me.”

“I didn’t,” she choked, gripping Anya’s ribs with a shaky hand. “I couldn’t stop it. You just—you just died, and there was nothing I could do about it. You died. And—and it’s not just you. I couldn’t save anyone.” Anya waited, timing her inhales and exhales to the steady motion of her hand rubbing circles between Raven’s shoulder blades. She could almost marvel at how Raven was the only person she could be patient for. She had known this was coming, it was only a matter of time. There was another tense minute of silent, the tension so high it could burst, and then Raven finally did. “I can’t. I can’t ever save anyone. I couldn’t save my dad. I had magic, I knew it by then, I could make bottles explode but I couldn’t stop my dad from bleeding out? Why? Why couldn’t I? It’s easy, isn’t it? Just a push. Just push the blood back in and hold it there until help came. I could have done it if I’d been focused, if I hadn’t been screaming my head off like an idiot, if I hadn’t been freaking out about about not being able to feel my own legs—“

“You were just a child,” said Anya quietly. “And you were traumatized and injured. You couldn’t have done anything.”

“—And then I couldn’t fix my mom. She’s going to drink herself to death. I wasn’t good enough. If I could make the bottles explode then why didn’t I do it all the time? Why didn’t I work to never let her even get the chance to drink? Maybe she could have snapped out of it—“
“You were a child,” said Anya again, just as calmly. “Your mother is a grown adult. She makes her own decisions. You are more than good enough, Raven.”

“—I couldn’t fix my dad, or my mom. I couldn’t fix Finn and make him see how things are, that his dad is an asshole and he doesn’t need him. In the other timeline, he died because of it. And then—and then Fox. Fox died, I couldn’t save her. Or you. I couldn’t save you, Anya. I should have noticed something wasn’t right, I should have known Nia cast a curse on you—“

“It was a paradoxical curse, you know how they are, you’ve learned about them in school. They are slow moving but instantaneous, silent and deadly. No one could have known unless they were looking for it, and we were all distracted in the middle of a war. Clarke’s mother is a Healer and even she didn’t notice.”

“But—“

“No buts,” said Anya sharply, tilting Raven’s chin to look at her. Her throat went tight at the thought of what she was about to say, but she had to. It needed to be said. “Look. I get what it feels like. Sometimes I feel like I could have done more to stop my parents from dying. My grandmother had a natural death, peaceful and in her sleep, and even if she went too soon for my taste, there was nothing I could do. But I sometimes fear I could have done more for my parents. Maybe I could have found better Healers, maybe I should have stayed home from school to take care of them. But we don’t choose when death comes for us. I miss them every day, but there’s no point in staying upset about it, right? They are dead and staying dead and I can either let it weaken me or let it give me strength. I choose strength.”

“They’d be proud of you,” said Raven softly, and though she was still teary-eyed and trembling, she brought her hand up to press her palm over Anya’s heart. “You know that? They’d be so fucking proud of you.”

“They would like you,” grunted Anya, a bit grudgingly, even. “They’d probably say you’re good for me. Keep me on my toes. Drive me up the wall.”

Raven’s stroking faltered as shame and devastation flickered over her face again. “But would they think I deserve you?”

“What do you mean?”
“I—I was selfish,“ whispered Raven, lip quivering again, and suddenly seemed so small, as though she were shrinking into herself. It was blasphemous, frankly; Raven Reyes was the type of person who could never seem small. “I just wanted to stop hurting, to stop thinking, to stop feeling for one minute, I—I’m in love with you, but I—I—with Bellamy, my friend—“

“You sought comfort in a friend, and I don’t blame you for that,” said Anya, holding Raven’s gaze when she looked up, tears rolling down her cheeks but shock in her eyes at Anya’s reaction. “You both did. Besides.” She quirked her lips, knowing what she were about to say would make Raven laugh. “You didn’t even come.”

It did as she expected; Raven snorted and dipped her head, muffling her laughter in Anya’s shoulder. After a moment it subsided, along with the tears, but Raven was as somber as ever as she said quietly, “Anya…I’m sorry I couldn’t save you.”

“Okay, shut up,” she said, lightly enough Raven knew she was not actually angry, but firmly enough to know her disagreement was real. “You couldn’t have done everything. You’re not some kind of wonder woman.”

“Because my name’s Raven, not Diana,” she mumbled.

Anya frowned. “What?”

Raven sighed, planting her elbow on the mattress and propping herself up with a hand cupping her cheek. A tired smile grew on her face as she looked at Anya with so much affection in her eyes it had Anya growing warm all over again. She loved her eyes. They were so “Purebloods. You’re all useless.”

Anya arched a brow. “This useless pureblood just gave you three orgasms.”

“Only three?”

Her laughter was lost slightly amidst the sound of Anya’s growl and the whisper of the bed sheets as Anya hooked a leg around her and straddled her. Her dirty-blonde hair hung down, framing their faces like a curtain as she dipped down to press a long, lingering kiss to Raven’s plush mouth. “You are infuriating.”
“You love me.”

“That doesn’t make it any less true.”

Raven hummed, smiling as Anya gripped her wrists and held her arms above her head. “Yeah, but the fact that you’re going to marry me someday means I’m not as inclined to believe your griping.”

“Oh, we’re getting married, are we?” said Anya, brow arching higher, utterly unimpressed.

“Yep. And getting a cat.”

“No kids?”

Raven shrugged as best she could with her arms above her head. “I don’t know if I want any, honestly. Is that a problem?”

“More like a relief. I already have one annoying, whiny, drooling twat to take care of, I don’t need to add any more to it.”

“Anya, you shouldn’t talk about my mother that way.”

Anya rolled her eyes. “Oh come on. That was weak.”

Raven grinned. “I’m weak for you.”

Anya’s answering groan as she collapsed atop her had Raven laughing again, turning to tip her over and reverse their positions. Rather than take it any further, she just lay over the front of Anya, pressing her lips to her sternum before they wrapped their arms around one another and for a moment merely held each other, content to listen to their synchronized heartbeats.

“You know…we’ve been here for hours. As much as I don’t want to get up right now, we really should probably head out.”
“I know. It’s late.”

“And I really need to pee,” groaned Raven suddenly, nose scrunched in discomfort.

“Lexa is probably very concerned,” sighed Anya decidedly unconcernedly, stretching out and yawning before idly running a hand through her hair.

“Shit. Clarke’s probably freaked too.” Raven winced. She’d told her to save her a seat for the feast. Great. She could expect an earful tomorrow.

“I’m not particularly inclined to spend the night away from you, but we should probably at least check in with them.”

“Yeah…about that.” Raven scooted up in bed, propping her chin up on her hands folded atop Anya’s chest. “What are we going to tell them?”

Anya’s shrug jostled her slightly. “Are you not going to show Clarke the memories? I can understand that Lexa is dangerous to tell, but Clarke won’t be telling Titus anything.”

Raven’s expression fell. “I don’t know how to do it,” she admitted.

Anya squinted one sleepy eye open to level her gaze on her. “Do what?”

“I mean. How am I supposed to tell Clarke that her father was killed by his best friend while her mum watched and then wiped her memories after?”

Anya paused at that. “You’ve got a point. That’s harsh even for my standards.”

“Exactly.” She took a long, deep inhale, and then groaned, dropping her head to smack her forehead into the backs of her hands. “Ugh, why was I the only one to get my memories back? I have no idea what I’m doing. We need help. There’s got to be someone we can tell. Surely the head of the Aurors can help us, if we tell her not to tell Titus?”
“I just don’t know if we should risk it,” said Anya. “Jamie Potter seemed very by the books. Whose word is she going to take, a couple of students or the leader of the Order?”

“What about Gustus? He seemed cool.”

“He’s gone on a mission. In the other timeline he wasn’t back until the Yule Ball, and we can’t afford to wait nearly four months.”

“Roan, then,” suggested Raven.

“He’s with Jamie, he’d tell her everything. Not to mention being Nia’s adopted, estranged son.”

“You don’t think he’d rat us out?”

“No, no. But he’s at a bit more risk of being captured by her and used against us, just like in the last time.”

“Fair point,” said Raven grudgingly. She sighed again, running a hand through her wild hair. They needed somebody who wouldn’t play by the rules. Titus, Lexa, Indra, Jamie…they were all steel. They needed fire. They needed someone crazy enough to believe them.

And the answer came to her in one glorious stroke.

“Wait a minute. _Luna!”_ She abruptly sat up and slipped off the bed, excitement surging her to her feet. Anya raised her brows. “That’s it!”

“Luna Rivers?”

“Yeah!” Raven darted around the room plucking up her discarded clothing. “Luna’s a Nightblood, and she’s not a fan of Titus either!”
“That could work,” said Anya thoughtfully, dark eyes following Raven as she moved around the room, clumsily pulling on her clothes. “But wasn’t she in charge of bringing the creatures for the tournament? She could be halfway across the world right now.”

“We can owl her!” Raven was lit up with energy, fire within her at finally having a clear goal. “We’ll tell her to meet with us!”

Anya rolled her eyes, sitting up and swiveling around to step off the bed. “Her just strolling up to the school is going to look suspicious—“

“Hogsmeade, then. We have a scheduled trip this weekend. We can meet her in one of the pubs.” Raven tossed her one of her shirts and laced up her shoes as Anya pulled it over her head.

As Anya finished dressing herself, Raven hunched over the table to scribble a letter to Luna, imploring her to meet with them.

“Not sure how well this is going to work,” she confessed, finishing up the letter and dropping the quill back into its inkbottle.

“What did you put?” asked Anya as she tugged her Durmstrang traveling cloak back on.

“Not much,” Raven handed the letter to Anya when she reached out for it and began pulling on her own cloak. “I tried to put stuff that would get her interested enough to come quick, but not piss her off.”

“Why the Three Broomsticks?” asked Anya as she skimming over the letter.

“Well, one, it’s always busy and chaotic, so I figure there’s less chance of being overheard because of how loud it gets. Two, that’s where Evie works, remember? And I know from the battle at the Ministry that they’re together.” Just the thought of the desperation in their movements and spells, trying to defend one another from Death Eaters and werewolves and reapers and Shadow-Eaters and then Ontari herself…and then the utter devastation on Luna’s face, the way she screamed with it and rage when Evie was struck down… Raven shuddered. “They’re a couple, so I’m sure Luna already hangs out around there, right?”

Anya shrugged and gave her back the letter. “I guess.”
“It’ll work out,” said Raven confidently, rolling the parchment up into a scroll and sealing it with a wave of her wand before slipping it into her pocket; with another wave, the other parchments she’d written on, including the makeshift timeline she’d thrown together, all rose into the air, rolled themselves up, shrunk, and zoomed into her pocket as well. She winced as her bladder ached, so painful now it was starting to make her palms sweat. “Okay, now, I’m seriously about to pee all over myself.”

Anya’s arm shot out to deliver a hard poke to Raven’s lower belly that had her gasping and stumbling back.

“Asshole!”

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” smirked Anya.

Raven gave her a glower and a pout, gingerly rubbing the spot Anya had poked her. “Yeah, if Lexa doesn’t kill you first.”

“She can try.” Anya pressed a lingering kiss to Raven before pulling the door open. It melted away behind them as they set off down the hall, leaving behind nothing but an empty expanse of stone. They paused at the end of the hall where they’d have to part, Raven to go up another few flights of stairs and Anya to descend to ground level.

“All right, so first I’m going to the bathroom, then the Owlery, then hit the sack. Are you going straight to the ship?” Anya nodded. “Okay. I’ll meet you for lunch tomorrow? Or, I guess later today.”

“Sounds good.”

“And hey—“ Raven caught her hand and squeezed it. Her heart swelled as she leaned forward and brushed a soft kiss to Anya’s lips. “I love you.”

Anya smiled, and it was exhilarating to see this type on her face, rare, even. A full-fledged grin that wasn’t a smirk or a sneer. It made Raven’s own smile grow automatically.
“I love you too. Sleep well.”

“Would sleep better with you.”

“Tomorrow,” promised Anya. “We can sleep in that room. Or you can come onto the ship or I can sneak into your tower—whatever works best.”

Raven arched a brow, grin turning crooked. “Oh you want to sneak into my tower, huh?”

Anya rolled her eyes. “Good night.”

“ ‘Night. See you soon.”

Raven went for the nearest bathroom and swore she peed for a solid five fucking minutes. She was dragging her feet as she made the climb to the Owelry, her loud yawn causing the owls to flutter; most were returning from their nightly hunts. A few cats—Mecha included, she noticed, rubbing her fingers through her sleek black fur—were curled up on the windowsills. Raven attached the letter on one of the school’s barn owls and sent it off for Luna, and then she paused for a moment, leaning against the window and idly stroking Mecha, face turned to the cool breeze of the crisp early morning air. The sun was just breeching the horizon, illuminating the treetops of the Forbidden Forest gold as though set on fire. She remembered when it really was on fire, during the two horrifying battles at Hogwarts she’d experienced in the other timeline. Now it was whole and unblemished, a few birds and a couple thestrals soaring briefly through the sky before dipping back into the cover of the trees. After a moment she saw Anya’s small figure striding across the lawn and waved. She smiled to herself as she watched Anya troop up the ship’s ramp and disappear inside it.

Well, she’d better get to bed too. She had a feeling she was about to experience one of the deepest sleeps she’d ever have. She cast one last lingering glance at the truly magnificent sunrise beginning to take place before she turned and headed down the stairs. If she’d waited just one more moment, she would have noticed the tiny figures emerging from the castle gates, three of them marching across the grounds towards the castle doors…

Her leg began to ache as she climbed the spiral staircase to Ravenclaw tower. She mumbled the answer to the riddle and then climbed the next set of stairs, finally breathing with relief when she slipped into the dorm. And then she promptly lost her breath again.

What the fuck. Clarke wasn’t in her bed.
She limped over to it and stood there staring at the rumpled sheets as though they would come to life and tell her where Clarke went. She certainly hadn’t seen her in the common room, nor had there been any lights on in the restrooms when she passed them. So why Clarke in her bed?

*Urgh. All she wanted to do was sleep, damn it.*

“Psst. *Psst.* Hey. Wake up.” It took her smacking her pillow into Fox’s face to get her to jolt up in her four-poster bed, eyes flying open in alarm. Her expression settled into one of reproach when she saw Raven standing over her still holding the pillow.

“What?”

“Have you seen Clarke?”

Fox paused, eyes snapping from Raven to Clarke’s empty rumpled bed. Fox rolled her eyes so hard it was a wonder they didn’t sag back into her head. “Oh, you have got to be kidding me.”

“What?” said Raven.

“She went out looking for you,” said Fox pointedly, as though this were all Raven’s fault.

Raven frowned, glancing at her watch. It was nearing six in the morning. “When?”

“I don’t know, like, midnight? I have no idea. She looked for you after the feast and then came back to bed. She was still there when I fell asleep so she must have gotten up to look for you again.” Fox eyed her shrewdly. “Where’ve you *been*, anyway?”

“Nonya.”

“Nonya?”
“None ya business. Go back to bed.”

Fox’s face fell into a grumpy glower before she gave a huff and rolled over in bed, tucking her blanket below her chin and slamming her eyes shut. Raven gazed at her in a mix of fondness and amusement, heart swelling at the fact that Fox got her second chance too. She was alive and safe in her bed and that was all Raven could ever ask for.

Clarke, on the other hand, was not in her bed. Fuck’s sake.

Raven turned to frown at her bed, the hairs on the back of her neck prickling. There was too much shit going on outside the castle walls to consider it a coincidence for Clarke to disappear like this. Where the hell was she?

And then a quiet rapping on the door along with a sudden shining light had Raven spinning around to face the window. Three figures were hovering on broomsticks outside it. Raven hurried over to it and opened it as quietly as she could. Anya was nearest her, wand lit and held aloft.

“Lexa is missing,” she said simply, without any preamble. “She went looking for me and disappeared.”

“So did Clarke,” said Raven. “She’s gone too.”

She could see Lincoln, hovering a few feet away looking absolutely flummoxed that two of his friends had disappeared with girls on their first night at a new school, and an unfamiliar girl with smooth brown skin and a wind-wild mane of curls, face and posture tired but eyes focused and alert.

“You know Lincoln. This is Costia,” said Anya, gesturing her head. Raven nodded politely and Costia gave her a half-hearted sleepy wave. “Grab your broomstick and let’s go.”

Raven seized it from where it stood propped up between her bed and her nightstand. She climbed up onto the windowsill and leapt off it, pushing with her good leg, plummeting several feet in the air before she swung her other leg onto her broomstick and leveled out. That stomach-dropping thrill and the wind on her face effectively woke her up, narrowing her focus as she flew with the others across the grounds.

“Where should we look first?” called Lincoln over the wind.
Before Raven could respond, a shocked voice sounded from somewhere below; they turned in midair to see Octavia and Bellamy sitting on the grassy lawn, hair wild and faces pink from wind, a quaffle resting between them; they’d clearly woken up ridiculously early for a fly-about, which wasn’t surprising at all when it came to Octavia.

“Raven?” said Octavia again, voice practically a squeak with how stunned she looked to see Raven randomly flying around at six in the morning with three Durmstrang students. Her wide eyes darted to each of them, lingering a little on Lincoln. “What—what are you—“

“Have you seen Clarke?” asked Raven.

“I—yeah!”

“Wait, you have?”

“Yeah! Bell and I just saw her.”

“She was with a Durmstrang too,” said Bellamy, frowning faintly at the Durmstrangs, “And the head of the aurors.”

“What?” said Raven and Anya.

“Jamie Potter,” said Octavia, voice breathless with enthusiasm. She’d always wanted to be an auror, so any mere mention of them always got her giddy (much to Bellamy’s disappointment; he didn’t want his sister in such a dangerous career).

“What Durmstrang student was she with?” asked Anya.

“The one I gave a tour to. Lexa Woods.”

Any and Raven gaped at one another, flabbergasted. Clarke and Lexa had disappeared…together. Fuck. This couldn’t be a coincidence…
“And they were with the head of the aurors?” said Raven uncertainly. She couldn’t imagine any reason why, unless somehow they’d ran into trouble…had Nia somehow inexplicably made a move? “Um. What did they look like? Like, scared?”

“Pissed,” said Bellamy. “Jamie Potter did, anyway, the Durmstrang girl didn’t have much of an expression and Clarke looked exhausted.”

Anyya cursed. “Sounds like they were caught.”

“By the head of the aurors?” wondered Costia. “Not sure how they’re going to get out of that one.”

“Caught doing what?” asked Bellamy, frown deepening. Jeez. Raven forgot how distrustful he was at the Durmstrangs at the beginning, both because of Lincoln and Anya. Great.

“Looking for us,” she said quickly. “It’s a long story, I’ll fill you in later. Thanks!” She lifted her broom handle to rocket up higher in the sky, tugging to the left to turn round and begin soaring back to the castle. She heard the others join her a second later. Once they neared the castle, she slowed and descended so their feet could touch the ground and then turned to face the others.

“Now that we know they’re okay, does this mean I can go back to bed?” yawned Lincoln. “We didn’t get much sleep the day before and then we were up half the night searching so I’m beat.”

“I second that,” said Costia. She was practically sagging on her broom with fatigue. “They’re okay and that’s all I needed to know, so I’m heading back to the ship.”

“Yeah, you two can deal with it since you’re the reason they were up anyway,” said Lincoln, smiling faintly at Anya before turning in midair.

“Wait, take my broom back with you.” Anya smoothly hopped off and handed it to Lincoln, who held it aloft as he glided after Costia toward the distant ship.

“Come on, we’ll drop mine off in my room before going after them.”
Anya clambered on behind her, sliding her arms around Raven’s waist. “Do you know where they’re going?”

“The Headmaster’s office, I’m sure,” said Raven as they soared up toward one of the tallest towers. The window was still open, so they flew straight in and Raven set her broomstick in its place between her bed and nightstand.

“Raven?” said Fox sleepily, hair like a red nest atop her head, roused by Raven walking past the foot of her bed. “Did you find Cl…” Her voice trailed off, eyes widening as she spotted Anya behind Raven. “Um.”

Raven only winked at Fox, and Fox did nothing more than gape after them as they crept out of the room and down the staircase, heading for the Headmaster’s office. She could only hope Kane didn’t kill Clarke and Lexa before they got the chance to kill Raven and Anya, as Raven was sure they were hoping to do.

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Kane was, to say the least, not happy.

“I have never been so disappointed,” he fumed, pacing back and forth. Clarke watched him over the heavy ebony desk between them, her annoyance slowly rousing her out of the slump of exhaustion. This was ridiculous. Raven was missing, there were terrifying creatures out there, and Kane was chastising her over being out of bed like she was some impish first-year; at this rate she was half expecting him to punish her with cleaning all the awards in the Trophy Room, or something far more tedious. To this day Raven swore down that her arm had never been the same after Kane punished her for setting all the four-poster beds on fire during an experiment-gone-wrong during their fourth year and made her scrub the gigantic plaque on the wall adjacent to the House points hourglasses made in honor for the Fallen Fifty, muggle-style, with a toothbrush.

“You are Head Girl, and I think I’m beginning to realize that was as much a mistake as making Ms. Reyes a prefect two years ago. I’d hoped this would bring some rationality and responsibility to you and your group of friends, yet here you are—the second week of school and you’ve already broken one of my biggest rules, and not only did you break it, but you dragged a Durmstrang into it with you. How do you think Headmaster Indra is going to react when she finds out you made sure her
prize pupil was not only out of bed after hours, but in a pub, completely off the school grounds? You’ve embarrassed yourself, your headmaster, your school—and you can bet your mother will be hearing of this.”

“Sir, I don’t think we should be focusing on this,” said Clarke through clenched teeth; when Kane spun around in outrage, she exhaled sharply through her nostrils and conceded, “I know I broke the rules, I’ll accept punishment for that. But the important thing is that Raven and Anya are missing.”

“Who is Anya?”

“A Durmstrang student.” Clarke glanced at the empty chair Lexa had sat in. She was grateful Kane had asked her to step out of the office while he spoke privately to Clarke. At least she didn’t have to hear Clarke being scolded like a child. “Lexa’s friend. If you’d just listen to me for a moment,” she said forcefully, irritation growing again at the fact that Kane had stormed in to rage at her rather than listening for just a minute, “You would know that because I already told you. We didn’t plan this. Raven told me to save her a seat at the feast, and I did, but she never showed up. I looked for her afterwards and couldn’t find her anywhere. I went to bed but she still never showed so I got up and went looking for her again. When I went out onto the grounds, I ran into Lexa, and she said her friend was missing too, and that her other friend Lincoln said he’d seen Raven and Anya together.”

Kane’s brow drew together. “Together?”

Clarke shrugged. She knew what he was getting at, though. Durmstrang didn’t seem the type to make friends easily, and considering the fact that they were so disciplined and stoic, they certainly did not seem the type to make friends with the likes of Raven, who for all her brilliance and things to love about her, was also decidedly not disciplined and stoic. She was chaotic and lively and a total mess.

Kane didn’t linger long on that. His face settled into another scowl. “That still doesn’t explain why you felt the need to take a secret passageway out of the school and into a pub, Clarke.”

Clarke resisted the urge to growl or groan, settling instead for rubbing her hands over her face before dragging them through her hair and looking up at Kane, tired and cranky and struggling to maintain a polite expression. “I told you. We looked everywhere for Raven and Hogsmeade was my last idea. She wasn’t there, but there was some weird—thing.”

Kane turned, looking as though he were half a beat away from rolling his eyes. “Yes, the monster you claim attacked you.”
“There was a monster!” said Clarke indignantly. “It was—it looked like a dementor, Lexa called it a __.”

At that moment a throat cleared and Clarke and Kane both started, turning to see Lexa standing in the doorway.

“I’m sorry sir, I don’t mean to interrupt,” she said evenly, “I just wanted to provide my support to Clarke’s story. We were attacked by Shadow-Eaters. The owner of the pub also witnessed this and can testify, I am sure, if you ask.”

“Evie saw it too?”

“If that’s the woman who owns the pub, yes,” said Clarke, unable to keep the bitter note from her tone.

“Shadow-Eaters,” muttered Kane to himself, rubbing his beard and appearing both disturbed and thoughtful. Clarke watched him curiously; he didn’t seem surprised. Had he heard of them? How? And why had she never heard anything of them herself?

After a moment, Kane sighed and gestured. “Well, take a seat, Ms. Woods. The two of you may be waiting for a while. I need to go retrieve your Headmaster, and search for the missing students. They’re probably asleep in their beds.”

“They better be so I can kill them,” muttered Clarke to herself as Kane strode out of the office and closed it behind him.

Lexa smiled sardonically at the words. “Not if I do first.”

Clarke looked at her in amusement, annoyance and exhaustion seeming to ebb away as she looked into those vivid eyes. In this grand office with strange, silvery objects everywhere that reflected light, Lexa’s eyes appeared somewhat gray. They really were beautiful, thought Clarke, like a forest at dusk. She inwardly winced at herself. God, she needed sleep.

She looked around the room as she attempted to relax in her chair. It looked the same it always had. There were portraits everywhere lining the walls, and every inhabitant was sleeping. One of the largest, a couple frames up behind the Headmaster’s chair, was of a man wearing sweeping purple robes, a pointed hat glittering with stars, and half-moon spectacles perched on a long, crooked nose. He had a long beard as silver as his hair, and he always looked so peaceful and serene sleeping.
Clarke was a bit envious of the portraits right now, honestly.

“So, how much trouble d’you reckon we’re in?” she asked, scooting down in her chair in a futile attempt to get comfortable. She tried to lay her head back against the edge of the chair, but despite the comfortable leather, it just strained her neck.

“You, perhaps quite a bit. As for myself…” Lexa shrugged.

“How do they handle punishment at Durmstrang? Detention? Locking you in a cupboard? Stringing you up by the ankles from the ramparts? Flaying you?”

Lexa’s lips curved. “Detention, usually. I will not have it, though.”

Clarke raised a brow. “Why not? The prized pupil of Durmstrang is above such things, huh?”

Lexa lifted a shoulder, let it fall.

Clarke’s smile stretched wide. “You’re cocky, aren’t you?”

“Confident,” said Lexa smoothly. “There is a difference.”

Warmth simmered low in Clarke’s belly, and she was tired enough—nearly delirious with it, actually—it almost impressed her.

“Mmm. Not sure I believe you.”

Lexa looked just as tired, eyes half-lidded and heavy. She hummed. “Believe what you want, Clarke.”

Clarke shivered, and it certainly wasn’t because she was cold. She cleared her throat and sat up a bit straighter, face contorting in pain as she rotated her neck and stretched out. “Is your headmaster very strict?” She’d caught a glimpse of her during the feast. She hadn’t fit in very well with the rest of the professors at the staff table; she looked more warrior than witch. Sinclair, who sat beside her, looked
as though he couldn’t quite decide whether he was taken with her or frightened by her. The war paint was intense, though not quite as formidable since Lexa told her story about it.

“Yes and no,” replied Lexa, wincing as she stretched her own neck out. “She is stern, but fair.”

“That’s it,” huffed Clarke, fed up with it. Lexa watched bemusedly as Clarke threw herself out of the chair and flopped onto the floor. Clarke sighed in relief as she slumped back against the Headmaster’s desk. “That’s so much better,” she groaned, legs throbbing with relief as she stretched them out along the thick fur rug.

“You’re lying on the floor.”

“You are too. It’s way more comfortable. Come on.” Clarke patted the bit of carpet beside her.

Still looking bemused, Lexa relented and lowered herself down. The steady exhale she gave told Clarke she was just as relieved with the change of position.

“Better, right?”

Lexa nodded.

It was past six in the morning. They had been attacked by strange creatures, Raven was missing, and Clarke was facing down who knows how much detention, but with the fire crackling and the sun inching up through the stained glass windows and casting the room in a warm golden glow, with the silvery instruments quietly gleaming and a few odd trinkets smoking and puffing, with the surrounding portraits all snoozing and a beautiful girl close beside her, Clarke decided there were worse ways to spend a morning.

They lounged in a comfortable silence for a while, but when Clarke felt her eyelids drooping as she grew drowsy, she knew she’d better distract herself or she’d fall asleep right here on the floor and then Kane really wouldn’t be happy.

“How do you know what Shadow-Eaters are?” she asked curiously.
Lexa didn’t answer, forehead puckering as she considered how best to answer.

“There are some things I am not allowed to speak of,” she finally said, voice hesitant. “And that is one of them. I’m sorry.”

Clarke wasn’t sure why she felt as disappointed as she did. She really didn’t have much of a right to be bitter; Lexa’s business was her own, after all.

“It’s okay.” She sighed and glumly picked at the thread poking out of the hem of her cloak sleeve. “Just wish my Headmaster would have believed me.”

“He seemed rather…aggressive.”

“Yeah…he’s not usually like that. I mean, he used to be, years ago, but apparently he stopped being such a hardass after a few years and softened up some. Nowadays he’s usually pretty easy-going, but by how he just reacted, maybe not.”

“I think it just embarrassed him.”

Clarke shrugged. “Either way, he knows me and he knows my parents—I’ve, um, been in trouble a few times before,” she said sheepishly. “Mostly because of Raven. She’s kind of a human tornado and she can draw others into her chaos pretty easily. Raven’s always been top of the class, so she made Prefect in Fifth year but lost it pretty quickly when she threw a celebration party after we beat Gryffindor in a big Quidditch match and was magically mixing drinks and blew up half our dormitory.”

The curve to Lexa’s lips was more distinguishable than ever, and Clarke couldn’t help the pride that flared within her. She’d only just met this girl but something was already addictive about the rush she felt at successfully making her smile. That couldn’t be good.

“Did your team win the entire tournament?”

Clarke snorted. “No. The only reason we won that game was because their star player had a hangover from hell. Which looking back now, I’m a hundred percent certain Raven got Octavia drunk the night before the game for that sole purpose. She refused to pre-game with us after that. They kicked our ass in the final and Octavia scored on Raven so many times she sulked for two
weeks afterwards.” Clarke chuckled. “Not a good time for Raven. Lost her Prefect status and her
tournament. Kane made me Prefect instead, and then Head Girl later. I think he hoped it would
encourage me to keep Raven out of trouble, but that’s next to impossible, so.” Her smile faded as the
irritation returned. “You’d think, being aware of how Raven is and how I am, he’d know I’m telling
the truth.”

“You could use Veritaserum,” suggested Lexa.

Clarke shook her head at once, thinking of all the embarrassing truths she could blurt out—how
pretty she thought Lexa’s eyes were, for one. It was pathetic, she’d just met the girl but already felt as
though she could wax sonnets on them.

“If he was an accomplished Legilimens, he could just see for himself,” mused Lexa.

Clarke balked at the thought. “No. No way. I don’t want anyone in my head without permission. I
think it’s weird that people even learn to do that.” When Lexa was silent, Clarke turned her head
sharply towards her. “Wait—can you?”

“Can I what?” asked Lexa, but Clarke sensed she was hedging.

“Lexa. Can you do legilimency?”

“Yes.”

Clarke’s mouth went dry. “You—Have you—you haven’t used it on me, have you?” She winced
immediately; why would Lexa have any reason to do that? What a ridiculous question to ask.

“Of course not,” said Lexa. Clarke exhaled; Lexa didn’t seem offended.

“Yeah, I—sorry. I didn’t mean to…I mean, I didn’t think you would.” She shook her head,
frowning. “I’m sorry. I’m just kind of…touchy about that kind of stuff. I had someone do it to me
once, without my permission.”

The skin around Lexa’s eyes tightened, and it was her turn to look sharply at Clarke. “What? Who?
Did you report them?

“A ministry official. The senior undersecretary to the Minister, actually, so no, I never reported it.” She gave a hollow laugh. “Not much good it would have done, even though my family is pretty close to the minister. His son is one of my best friends, and we’re neighbors on top of it. But I had no proof. I just…had a gut feeling.”

“Our gut instincts are usually correct,” murmured Lexa. She wound her hands together in her lap. “What happened?”

“Well…” She took a deep breath. “My dad was arrested and sent to Azkaban over a year ago. I don’t even know what he was arrested for. They just showed up one day and said he was violating the rules of an Unspeakable and dragged him away.” She took another, shakier breath. She was numbly aware of the fact that she was actually talking about this willingly, let alone with someone who was essentially a stranger. Except Lexa didn’t really feel like a stranger anymore. “There were a bunch of reporters following us around for a while, and it felt like we were interrogated by the Ministry a thousand times before they finally left us alone, trying to get info about what my dad was up to. Diana Sydney, the senior undersecretary…she’s trying to pass this horrible law.” Clarke’s expression involuntarily convulsed, contorting with rage and disgust. “She’s in favor of Pro-Blood Exclusion. She wants to establish more rights for purebloods and take them away from muggleborns, it’s repulsive. And when she questioned me, it just…she kept looking at me, almost like she was trying to see through me, and she wasn’t blinking or anything. I think she was trying to get into my head to see what I know. Maybe she thought it would help her case, if she could get him in more trouble, because my dad wasn’t a pureblood.” She shrugged. “I don’t know, it freaked me out, the thought that she could just get into my head and see what’s there, and there was nothing I could do about it.”

“There is something you can do about it, though,” began Lexa, and Clarke, who expected yet another lecture on how she should report her and take her on, was not prepared to hear Lexa say, “You could learn Occlumency.”

“Oh.” Clarke blinked. She’d looked into it, read about it, but didn’t have anyone who could teach her. “I did read into it, but practice is different than in theory…” But maybe she could have a teacher… “Legimemcyl…do you…use it often?” she asked, highly disconcerted at the idea. There were strict rules about the use of Legilimency here, even when it came to the use of it on criminals and muggles alike.

Lexa shook her head. “No. I…” She gave a heavy sigh. “I told you earlier that I did not have a positive relationship with my parents. This past summer, I returned to my childhood home; they were still there. I hadn’t seen them since I was eleven, since they told me they never wanted to see me again when I chose to attend Durmstrang, and Indra allowed me to remain at the castle for holidays and breaks. I…even though I knew how they were, I still allowed myself to hope for more. It was a
Clarke nodded, hesitating only briefly before reaching out to gently rest her hand over Lexa’s. She understood. Lexa glanced at her hand, swallowing, but made no move to shake her off, which Clarke considered improvement. “So…how did it go?” When Lexa didn’t answer, just flitted her gaze up from their hands to Clarke’s eyes, Clarke prompted, “With your parents, when you saw them again.”

Lexa’s lips twisted wryly. “Not well. Which didn’t surprise me, truthfully. But it…it still angered me. Anya lost her parents when she was thirteen, then her grandmother not too long ago. It frustrated me, that they couldn’t see what a gift life was. I’m their daughter, they’re my parents, yet…” She shook her head, masking the pain on her face with apathy. Her next words were matter-of-fact. “I employed Legilimency. I wanted to see if they were being truthful, when they said they would have preferred if I died. They were.”

Clarke swallowed hard, unconsciously squeezing Lexa’s hands. “That is…that’s terrible, Lexa. I’m so sorry.”

Lexa did shift her hand now, pulling it out from beneath Clarke’s and getting to her feet; Clarke followed suit, slowed down with the sadness. Lexa took a breath, and seemed back to her composed, collected self again. “It’s all right. I lost them a long time ago, and this summer gave me the closure I needed.”

Closure. Clarke took in a slow, shaky breath. Her father had been thrown in Azkaban so suddenly… if she could just speak to him…

But now wasn’t the time to hurt over that, she told herself firmly, successfully steadying her breath now. Lexa was hurting, even if she wasn’t showing it. At least both of Clarke’s parents were alive; she should be grateful right now, instead of drowning in self-pity.

“You father would be proud of you, Clarke.”

She startled, blinking in astonishment at Lexa, who just watched her steadily as though she knew exactly where her thoughts had been. She nodded solemnly when Clarke only gaped. “He would. You almost produced a corporeal patronus today, and you’d never even attempted the charm before. Most importantly, you held your ground against a creature that is the very embodiment of fear itself, and you fought back. You showed great strength today.”
She swallowed thickly and, at a loss for words, just acted on instinct and reached out, taking Lexa’s hand. Lexa glanced at it, gave an equally thick swallow, and then a gentle squeeze. They looked at one another and Clarke’s heart thudded in her chest as the air turned heavy. Lexa’s eyes were very green, and her lips were very plump, and her cheeks were very pink. Clarke skimmed the pad of her thumb across the back of Lexa’s knuckles, and somewhere in the back of her dazed mind noted Lexa had not withdrawn her hand, and, if anything, seemed to be leaning in, eyes flickering from Clarke’s eyes to her…oh…

The door burst open with a deafening bang, and they were yanking their hands back as though they’d been burned, already reaching for their wands before they’d even turned to look—

Raven stared at them, eyes wide and mouth hanging open. The relief that flooded through Clarke at seeing her best friend safe and decidedly not missing was immediately swallowed by Raven’s next words. “Were you just holding hands?” Clarke blushed furiously and determinedly avoided looking at Lexa. She opened her mouth to protest, but before she could, another girl came tumbling into the room behind Raven. Raven turned to look incredulously at the girl, a grin unfurling on her face. “Anya, they were holding hands, I shit you not.”

The girl—a beautiful girl. What was it with Durmstrang and beautiful, lethal-looking girls?—seemed apathetic as she glanced at Clarke and Lexa, but when she looked back at Raven, a corner of her lips was curling into a smirk. “Why am I not surprised?”

Raven laughed, far harder than was warranted, in Clarke’s opinion; her blush and her scowl deepened. Casting around for something to say to change this humiliating subject, Clarke noticed then that both Raven and Anya had rosy red cheeks, swollen lips, wild hair, and—were those actually fucking hicckeys and bite marks decorating their necks?

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Raven and Anya both fell silent, another indifferent mask wiping Anya’s face clean, and Raven’s falling into a mixture of guilt and hesitation. “We’ve looked all over the place for you, we ran into a terrifying creature that tried to kill us, and the whole time you’ve been fucking?” growled Clarke.

She was satisfied to see that Lexa looked just as annoyed.

Raven frowned. “Wait, what tried to kill you?”

“In the seven years I’ve known you, you have never once mentioned you know a girl from Hogwarts,” said Lexa, staring accusingly at Anya.
The skin around Anya’s eyes tightened, revealing her discomfort, but she stared Lexa down. Clarke thought it was rather intimidating, but Lexa certainly didn’t seem affected by it; she just glared right back, a muscle twitching in her clenched jaw.

“Listen, Lex, it’s not what you think—“ began Raven, but she stopped short at the, frankly, somewhat murderous look Lexa just gave her.

“Lex?” she repeated, disbelief so strong her fury could not quite hide it all. “You don’t know me. I have never met you. Why would you—“

“Shh!”

Lexa looked, if it were possible, even more affronted when Raven suddenly hissed and wildly waved her hand to shush her, head turned toward the doorway concealing the spiral staircase. Raven looked at Anya, eyes wide.

“They’re coming back. We need to split before Kane flays me alive.”

Anya gave one curt nod, then another in the vague direction of Clarke and Lexa. “See you on the ship.”

Lexa opened her mouth, but Anya and Raven had darted into the opening just in time; it began to rotate, taking them down as on the other side it brought the other occupants up. Lexa turned to look incredulously at Clarke.

“How—“

“What’s going on here?” interrupted Jamie Potter as she reentered the room immediately frowning at Clarke and Lexa half-lying on the floor; they hurried to their feet, blushing slightly. Kane was right behind her and Indra trailing farther back, shoulders tense and face tight. Her eyes narrowed the moment she spotted Lexa. The room fell silent as Indra came to a stop directly before her, and crossed her arms beneath her chest.

“Explain.”
Clarke’s brows rose slightly as she looked at Lexa, whose expression was already schooled into one of stoicism. It was impressive, really, how quickly she could rearrange her features into a poker face, though that was nothing compared to the calm, measured way she began to explain to her headmaster exactly what happened tonight. Even Kane looked sobered by her polite explanation, which made Clarke deadpan because seriously? He’d been ranting and raving when she filled him in.

Indra certainly didn’t react the way Kane had. She simply nodded at times, intently listening until Lexa concluded the story, omitting the part where Anya and Raven just turned up and left. Then Indra turned to speak with Kane and Jamie, and all Clarke could do was glance uncertainly at Lexa, who met her eyes and gave a tiny, imperceptible nod as though in reassurance.

Finally, Jamie left the room after a few last murmurs, and Clarke managed to catch a few snatches—she was evidently off to notify some people about the movement of the Shadow-Eaters. Indra turned toward the door, gesturing for Lexa to join her. Clarke could do nothing more than watch, words on the tip of her tongue. It felt wrong, somehow, to just let her go without a word after all they’d been through together.

“Lexa.” It escaped before she could give much conscious thought to it. Lexa paused, turning to look back at her, a shadow of indecisiveness similar to Clarke’s flickering across her face. Clarke’s mouth went dry as she met that green gaze. She lifted a hand automatically, fighting the flush creeping up the back of her neck. “Um. It was—it was nice to meet you.”

Lexa blinked, then visibly relaxed, the corners of her lips curving so slightly Clarke knew the fact that she noticed meant she was probably watching her too intently to begin with. Lexa crossed back across the room, but rather than grip Clarke’s hand, she gripped her forearm, squeezed. “Likewise, Clarke.”

She suppressed a shiver, fully aware Kane and Indra were observing the two of them in bemusement. She dropped Lexa’s hand and watched her step onto the platform with Indra. She didn’t quite understand why her heart was beating so hard at the fact that Lexa was leaving, nor the tight knot in her belly at watching her go. Lexa held herself with that same regal posture she’d held all night, head high and shoulders back, but her jaw was clenched, and Clarke saw the dip of her throat before she looked up. Their gaze met and held as the spiral staircase began to move, until they rotated out of sight after one last glimpse of green, leaving Clarke standing there holding her breath, a stern Kane approaching her.

“I’ll send you a message tomorrow to let you know the details of your first detention.”
She exhaled slowly, shaking herself out of the strange stupor she seemed to have fallen in. Jesus. She needed sleep. “How long do I have detention for?”

“Well, earlier I was thinking the rest of the semester,” said Kane, eyes slightly narrowed, studying her critically as though fully expecting her to argue. She resisted the urge to sigh. She was already exhausted, but somehow watching Lexa leave had drained her of whatever remaining energy she had left. Right now, she couldn’t care less what Kane had to say—she just wanted to go to bed. “But after conferring with Headmaster Indra and Ms. Potter, with the…extenuating circumstances…I’ve decided to take it easy on you. You’ll have detention every day for the next week, and then the following weekends for the rest of the month. And you’re banned from any Hogsmeade trips for the foreseeable future.”

Clarke closed her eyes, nostrils flaring as she inhaled slowly. Okay. Fine. Whatever. She was going to absolutely kill Raven, but whatever.

She opened her eyes. Wait a minute.

“So, out of curiosity,” she said flatly, “Did you find Raven?”

“I ran into Fox Bueschman in your common room,” said Kane. “She told me Raven was in bed. Said her snoring was so loud she had to sleep in the common room.”

Clarke bit back a scoff. Of course Fox would cover for her. Raven was such a shithead. “And you believed her?”

Kane raised his brows coolly. “Of course I do. Ms. Bueschman is top of her class, a Prefect, and a model student. Why would she lie?”

_Fuck, okay, fine, whatever._ She just wanted to get back to her dorm and her four-poster bed. “Okay, sir, can I be excused now?”

She frowned, suspicious, when Kane’s lips quirked up as he walked around his desk to sink down into his chair.

“Actually, it’s Tuesday, and I believe your first class starts in under an hour.”
Her jaw dropped, a gasp escaping her. “You’re—you’re making me go to class? But I haven’t slept! I—“

“Sounds like a personal problem to me,” said Kane airily. When Clarke merely spluttered, he softened. “This is your last year before you graduate, Clarke. Don’t let your grades slip. You can sleep during your free period.”

Kane dismissed her and she stood calmly in the descending spiral staircase, and waited until she was out of view from the gargoyle, rounding the corner and into the stretch of corridor, before she grit her teeth and stormed off toward the dormitory so she could shower, grab her things, and strangle Raven before Advanced Charms started.

* * /◇/ * *

Lexa and Indra, meanwhile, were crossing the entrance hall, and Indra had just given Lexa the news.

Lexa stared at her waspishly. “You’re giving me detention? Really?”

“Stop your complaining,” said Indra indifferently. “You are supposed to stick close to the Griffin girl. This is a good opportunity.”

“Yes, except this is only for the next week,” Lexa pointed out. “And Titus warned me not to get too close. He said to watch her from a distance.”

“Better than nothing. And you know what I think of Titus’s plans.”

“You think him overly cautious,” said Lexa blithely. It was nothing new. Indra and Titus had always respected one another, always worked well together, but Indra found him too careful, and Titus found her too aggressive. It never interfered with their work, and it didn’t cause much tension, but it made decisions regarding Lexa take perhaps a bit longer than they should.
“You know I do. And he is not here right now, I am, so listen to my advice.” Indra stopped short of the door, turning to face Lexa, as serious as ever. “Everything is riding on this tournament. Once you are chosen and the Queen’s attention is directed at you, then keep your space. In the meantime, use this week to your advantage. Gain her trust and it will make it easier to watch over her in the future. Learn about her.” She raised a brow. “You already seemed comfortable enough within one another’s presence.”

Lexa’s cheeks warmed; she clenched her jaw as though that could stop it. “I—“

“No need to explain,” said Indra shortly, raising a hand. “I suppose the adventure of sneaking out of a school and getting cornered in a pub by a Shadow-Eater is enough to bring anyone together. Just don’t make it a habit.”

“I won’t. I’m—“

“Save your apologies, I don’t care.” Indra waved her hand as though wafting the almost-attempt away, turning to turn the handle and swing the door open. “Just watch yourself. Remember what Titus said about distractions. I have seen the way you looked at her; that girl is already distracting you. Keep focused on the mission.”

Lexa’s face burned, but she didn’t get the chance to respond because when they walked down the steps, Anya was waiting for them, shoulders square and a scowl on her face that equaled Indra’s.

“You and I are going to have a discussion,” Indra growled, and Anya’s scowl only deepened. “Lexa, go back to the ship, wash up and get some rest. We will resume your training after dinner.”

Lexa nodded and continued down the stairs, still too cross with Anya for the nature of her disappearance to spare much sympathy for her as she left her to Indra’s wrath.

Exhaustion had settled so deeply within her bones she wanted nothing more than to slump over and trudge her way there, but she forced herself to keep her shoulders back and head held high, though she passed only a handful of people since it was hardly six in the morning; she nodded in greeting to a windswept Octavia, the girl who had given her a tour, who Lexa assumed by the broomstick on her shoulder was heading for the Quidditch pitch, along with a tall boy with a mop of dark curls and a disgruntled expression on his freckled, bleary-eyed face, as though Octavia had forced him out of bed to fly with her. They must be returning for breakfast. Lexa narrowed her eyes and averted her gaze when she passed by another man—Wick, she thought Octavia had called him—she had already seen far more of than she’d ever wanted to, working around a garden beside his hut, clearly starting early on his game keeping duties. She sighed once she neared the ship and relative silence of the lake. The sky was a clear blue now, not a cloud in the sky. So blue it reminded her of—
No.

She paused on the ramp of the ship, bowing her head and squeezing her eyes shut.

No, no, no, definitely not. Of all the people to develop any sort of feelings for, she was the last person…No. Just no, she wouldn’t even let herself dare think it. No.

Lexa swallowed thickly, holding her head high, and strode into the ship. She was suddenly even more desperate for sleep, if only to shut her brain off for a time.

The ship was not still and silent; students were already waking and readying themselves for the day. Lexa wandered down the aisles until she found the room she shared with Anya and Costia and pushed her way inside. She was entirely unsurprised to see Costia was still in bed. She was sure Lincoln was too.

She shoved her wand under her pillow and began undressing, wincing when her belt clasp clattered on the floor. Costia jolted up.

“Lex?” She pushed her wild mass of curls out of her face to peer at Lexa. “Where’ve you been? Linc and I were worried sick…”

Lexa shrugged off her cloak before sitting at the edge of her own bed so she could start on her shoes. “You seem it. Snoozing away without a care in the world.”

“Well, apparently you were off with some Hogwarts girl…” said Costia, and Lexa froze for just a beat in her process of tugging off her boots. She quickly looked down and continued, but Costia had noticed, and her eyes brightened as she smirked. “I guess Anya wasn’t the only one who found herself a foreign gal pal.”

“Shut it,” grumbled Lexa, giving up on removing her socks and flopping into bed with one still half on. Her voice was as muffled as her face in her pillow as she said, “Let it be known if anyone tries to wake me up—especially one of my annoying friends—I will curse them.”

“Grumpy,” said Costia, sounding far too amused for this early in the morning. “And you have the
best friends in the world, ungrateful sod.”

“Shhh,” whispered Lexa, already half-asleep.

“All right, all right, but you’re telling me all about her in the morning.”

“Mmph.”

Costia snorted but fell silent, and shortly after her breathing evened out as she slipped back into slumber.

Despite how tired she was, it took Lexa a few more minutes. She stared sleepily up at the port windows, enchanted to look as though they were underwater. It was a tranquil cerulean with sunlight filtering through, rays of light bouncing through the glass so the room was dappled in dazzling sunspots, surrounding her in shades of blue and gold.

Blue…and gold…

Trouble.

Nothing but trouble.

\|

“I haven’t forgiven you.”

“Clarke, come on!” lamented Raven, but she didn’t seem too bothered, considering the way she was casually lathering an inordinate amount of butter onto her toast.

Clarke refused to avert her glare and took a dignified sip out of her goblet of orange juice.
“Okay, one, Raven, did you honestly not expect Clarke to hold a grudge about this? And two, I can’t believe you’re eating breakfast food right now. It’s lunch!” she said unnecessarily, wildly gesticulating all around them. The Great Hall was packed. Due to the presence of Durmstrang and Beauxbatons, no one had wanted to miss out on meals, where the influx of other school uniforms seem to fill the tables far more than usual.

“Yeah but I had to miss it to make up the Advanced Potions I missed with Nygel,” said Raven, disgruntled.

“At least you could make it up.” said Clarke sharply, eyes flashing. “I couldn’t do anything about the zero marks I received because someone thought it’d be a good idea to Vanish my potion!”

Octavia’s brows shot to her hairline as she turned toward Raven again. “Why’d you Vanish her potion?”

Raven’s shoulders slouched. “Jeez. Can’t you guys cut me some slack? I haven’t slept and I feel like I have a major hangover even though I didn’t even drink anything.”

Yeah, Clarke had a headache too—and it had strengthened after breakfast, when her mother sent her a Howler because Kane wrote to her. She had very little pity for Raven at this point. “Serves you right,” said Clarke, and even Octavia nodded in agreement. Raven huffed and fell silent, crunching into her toast and getting a large glob of butter on the tip of her nose that both Clarke and Octavia neglected to point out.

One by one over the course of the next few minutes, their table quickly filled with various friends returning from their morning classes. Wells offered a cheery greeting as he took the seat next to Clarke and started making a sandwich, and a bleary-eyed Jasper mumbled hello as Monty steered him into a seat, followed closely by Miller, somewhat disgruntled from an early Potions class. Fox arrived next, perpetual frown on her face, already distracted with thoughts of all the homework they’d been given, and Harper and Monroe arrived chatting, and then the deep crimson of the Durmstrang’s school robes lingering in the doorway caught Clarke’s eye and she turned, heart kicking, to see Lexa standing there—already looking at her.

A green gaze skittered away the moment she met it, but there was a half second where it held, and that was enough to have Clarke biting her lip and becoming very aware of the rigid way she sat, suddenly finding it quite difficult to keep all her limbs in place without them oddly jerking around. Lexa stood beside Anya, the boy Octavia was infatuated with, and a girl Clarke didn’t know who was looking curiously around as the four of them walked inside with another crowd of Durmstrang students following close behind. They headed for a nearby table, the emptiest one, and Clarke was so
busy trying not to watch Lexa that she entirely missed the Durmstrang student who broke away from the group and approached their table.

Without warning, Anya dropped into the empty seat beside Raven. The entire table fell silent so abruptly Raven looked up, frowning, but Anya was indifferent as she snatched a piece of toast off Raven’s plate and said, “Hey.”

“Oh! Hey,” said Raven, and the table stared at the way the smile immediately split across Raven’s face, wide and beaming, and her eyes softened upon landing on Anya.

What the hell? Clarke had seen Raven look at only one other person like that, and it was Finn. How was she looking the same way at a girl she hadn’t even known for a full twenty four hours?

“What’s up?”

“You have butter on your nose,” observed Anya as bit off the corner of the toast.

Raven rubbed it off with a serviette and shot a glare at Clarke and Octavia, who only busied themselves with their own meals. “You jerks, you could have told me.”

“Why didn’t they?”

“Because Clarke’s petty and Octavia’s loyal to a fault,” grumbled Raven as she cleaned her hands on a serviette. “And they also kind of hate me right now. They think I’m acting weird.”

“You’re always weird,” said Anya.

Clarke stared. “I don’t know that knowing someone for a day constitutes as ‘always’.”

Anya gave a smile in response that was as sharp as her words. “Who asked you, blondie?”

Clarke’s brows contracted, jaw setting, and it did not go unnoticed by her that all those around her, save for Anya and Raven, hurriedly averted their gazes. She opened her mouth to retort, but before
she could, another student arrived at her side. A small Hogwarts girl she did not recognize extended a hand, offering a scrolled up bit of parchment to Clarke.

“Um, hi, you’re Clarke Griffin, right? My name’s Charlotte. Headmaster Kane told me to deliver this to you. He—he said it’s the details for your first detention…”

“Great,” said Clarke heavily, taking the scroll. “Thanks, Charlotte.”

She unraveled the scroll and bit her tongue at the curse that wanted to escape. “It’s from Kane. My first detention is tonight.” Which meant she’d be missing the fun game of Quidditch with her friends that Octavia had already been enthusing about. Wonderful.

“What does he have you doing? Do you have to clean the Fallen Fifty wall?” asked Raven, leaning in and craning her neck to peer at Clarke’s parchment.

“No,” she scowled, rolling it back up just so Raven couldn’t read it. Raven’s face fell. “I have to clean the damn Trophy Room. Muggle-style.”

“Oh Merlin,” said Fox, looking horrified.

Anya rolled her eyes. “Jesus, Griffin, you’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, you should build up those noodle arms anyway, blondie,” grinned Raven, playfully pinching her arms.

Clarke just stared at them, along with the rest of the table. Honestly, what the fuck? Anya was talking to her as though she knew her, and Raven was starting to somehow sound like her, which made no sense considering they’d only just met yesterday.

“Since when do you call me blondie?” she demanded.

Raven’s brow knit. “I call all blondes blondie.”
“That’s true, she calls me that,” piped up Harper.

“See?”

“Okay, no. You’re being even weirder than usual, Raven.” Clarke narrowed her eyes, glancing between Raven and Anya. Anya looked right back at her, brows raised as though in challenge; Raven looked guilty.

“What’s going on?”

“Nothing!” answered Raven, voice a bit high pitched. “Nothing.” She cast a meaningful glance at Anya, who rolled her eyes and added flatly, “Yeah, nothing.” She stood up. “Anyways, I’d better go talk to Lexa about training tonight since she’ll be occupied with cleaning,” she sneered pointedly at Clarke, who choked on air.

“She—what?”

“She’s doing detentions with you,” said Anya, clearly amused by Clarke’s fluster. “Indra had to punish her somehow, didn’t she?”

As Clarke sat there trying to reign in her wild heartbeat at the prospect of spending time alone with Lexa again, Anya squeezed Raven’s shoulder and weaved her way through the tables again, making her way to the table where most of the Durmstrang sat clustered together.

“Okay, I’m off to class,” said Octavia, glancing between Raven, who was practically pouting, and Clarke, who still looked as though she’d been clubbed over the head.

“Me too,” said Monty quickly, urging Miller and Jasper up with him. Harper and Monroe went next, followed by an apologetically grimacing Wells and a wide-eyed Fox. Then it was just Clarke and Raven.

“Hey, Clarke…” began Raven in a low voice, wincing a little at how Clarke shook out of her daze to scowl at her. “Look. I have this meeting in the Three Broomsticks on Saturday, it’s important. Do you think you can come?”
“Kane banned me from Hogsmeade, remember?”

“Can’t you sneak out, take a secret passageway?” When Clarke’s expression darkened, Raven hastened to continue, leaning forward to plead, “Listen, please, this is really important.”

“I can’t believe you!” fumed Clarke. “You already landed me in detention for a week straight, and took away my weekends for the next month, and got me banned from Hogsmeade trips! And now you want me to sneak out and get in even more trouble!”

“If you’re caught,” said Raven sheepishly, quailing under Clarke’s glower. “I mean…we’ll be careful?”

“I don’t think that word’s in your vocabulary,” snapped Clarke, snatching her things up and stalking off before Raven could annoy her any further.

Raven sighed, watching her go, and slumped down in her seat. She didn’t stir even when Anya flopped down into the seat next to her.

“Why do you look so miserable?”

“Clarke,” said Raven glumly. “She’s still pissed at me.”

Anya eyed Clarke’s retreating figure and snorted. “I suppose she can hold a grudge in any timeline, then.”

“Yep. Did you have any luck with Lexa? Is she coming to the meeting?” She could tell before the words even left her lips that Lexa was a lost cause too. Anya rolled her eyes.

“Of course not. She’s as stubborn as Clarke. Fools, the both of them.”

“Guess that’s why they’re perfect for each other,” said Raven gloomily.

“They’re already disgustingly in love with each other, have you noticed?”
“Not really, since Clarke’s not really talking to me, but I’m not surprised.” Raven’s lips quirked up. “I saw how they looked at each other when they were holding hands in Kane’s office.”

“And how they look at each other now,” said Anya.

“Gross.” Raven sighed, leaning over to rest her head on Anya’s shoulder. She smiled slightly when Anya’s arm slipped around her, and they simply held one another, breathing each other in, until the bell rang and Raven sighed again. “I have Ancient Runes and it’s all the way on the other end of the castle, so I’d better go. I’ll see you at dinner?”

Anya’s answer was to brush her lips across the top of Raven’s head, and Raven carried her smile and the warmth in her chest with her all the way to the sixth floor for class.

*・/✧・* *

At half past seven, Clarke left the Great Hall and headed to the third floor of the castle. She was buzzing with nerves, mouth dry despite the countless lemon drops she’d been popping into her mouth since dinner just to keep busy. There was a bulge in her robe pockets, filled bursting to the brim with packages of Honeyduke’s Chocolate Buttons. She came prepared today, not to mention thirty minutes early. She had no other choice than to wait, arms crossed beneath her chest, leaning against the wall beside a portrait of Brutus Scrimgeour.

To her disappointment, even when she heard the distant gong of the clocks striking eight, Lexa had still not shown up. Instead, a few House-Elves, dressed in their snug, gleaming Hogwarts’ uniforms, appeared with such a loud crack it had Clarke nearly jumping out of her skin. They offered profuse apologies for startling her before ushering cleaning products into her hands and into the Trophy Room itself, producing several buckets nearly overflowing with bubbly water and half a dozen scrub brushes.

When they left (after enthusiastically assuring her they would notify Kane of her being present and early), Clarke heaved a sigh and surveyed her task for the night. She hadn’t been here since her first year, when curious new students were given a tour by their prefects, but it hadn’t changed much. The shelves were tall, extending up to the ceiling, and were littered with countless cups and trophies. There were so many medals, shields, and plates that there was little of the walls left to see. And worst of all, everything was covered in a thick layer of dust and thicker splatters of black ink.
Clarke pinched the bridge of her nose, a low growl caught in the back of her throat. *Peeves.* No wonder Kane chose this for her first detention. Hell, it was so much work, especially if Lexa never showed, that Clarke might have to do this for her detention tomorrow night too.

She set to work, grumpily aware of her wand in her pocket as she began carting the heavy trophy cups and a few shields and plaques into a pile on the floor. She settled down onto the floor, legs crossed beneath her, dipped a brush into the soapy water, and began, trying her best to ignore the sinking feeling in her stomach, the ache in her chest.

“Hello.”

She nearly dropped the scrub brush, managing to fumble for it and catch it before it could clatter to the ground. Lexa stood in the doorway, wrapped up in her heavy Durmstrang cloak, red scarf trailing down to the floor. Clarke hated how her heart immediately began to pound, breath quickening at the mere sight of her. God, she was attractive. “Oh! Hi.”

“I apologize for being late. I think I took a wrong turn. I, ah, ran into our friend from yesterday. The poltergeist,” she added at Clarke’s blank look.

“Oh. Uh oh.” Clarke arched a brow, praying her smile wasn’t as tremulous as it felt. “Did he give you trouble?”

The air that escaped her nostrils sounded like a huff of amusement, and that had Clarke’s smile growing. “No. He actually left the moment he recognized me.” Lexa approached Clarke and she did her best to remain still, certain as she was that her limbs might jerk around in her nervousness. This was ridiculous, really. She shouldn’t be so nervous in the presence of a pretty girl.

“Well, that’s a good thing,” she said, grateful her voice at least sounded even and natural. “For you, at least. I’m sure he’ll still be causing trouble for everyone else.”

“He can’t cause as much as you,” said Lexa in a measured voice; her eyes were twinkling when Clarke glanced at her. “I think you’ve convinced me you’re the biggest troublemaker here, Clarke.”

She swallowed thickly at the sound of her name leaving her lips, warmth simmering in her belly as Lexa began unclasping her cloak. Clarke cleared her throat and looked down at the half-cleaned trophy in her hands. “Yeah, yeah. I think we both can agree Raven and Anya are the real
troublemakers here, anyway.”

“I won’t argue with that,” said Lexa, shrugging off her cloak. Clarke chose this moment to glance up, and immediately regretted it, tongue caught in her throat because Lexa was wearing a tight, long-sleeved shirt, form-fitting enough that Clarke could easily admire the lean, lithe body beneath it. When she turned to drape the cloak across the lone desk and chair in the room, Clarke caught a glimpse of black trousers that were just as tight and oh *God,* that *ass.*

Fuck, *fuck,* Clarke was so fucked, and not the way her body was currently burning to be.

Ridiculous. This was *ridiculous.*

Lexa sat beside Clarke and wordlessly reached across her for her own scrub brush, the refreshing scent of her—woody and crisp—drifting by; Clarke blushed at how she deeply inhaled and hoped Lexa didn’t notice.

“How long have you been here?” asked Lexa as she set to work. She gestured at the pile of gleaming cups on Clarke’s left side. “You’ve gotten through quite a bit.”

“Well, I was here a little early, but I had to wait around for the House-Elves Kane sent to me anyway. Just fifteen minutes or so. I’ve been working fast since the sooner I get in bed, the better.”

“Did you get much sleep today?”

“Nope. Kane made me go to class. I slept a little in my free period after lunch, but that’s only two hours, so I’m still pretty beat.” Clarke let out a breath as she scrubbed at a particularly stubborn spot on her current trophy, a golden shield etched with the words: *award for special services to the school,* underneath of which was the name: *Colin Creevey.* “Did you sleep much?”

Lexa nodded. “I slept until lunch.”

“Lucky you,” said Clarke wistfully.

They worked in relative silence for a time, occasionally chatting about their day. It heartened Clarke
to know Lexa sounded nearly as irritated with Anya as Clarke was with Raven. They discussed how
they’d both been acting strange and why that could be (“Nargles,” Lexa said seriously, causing
Clarke to erupt into a fit of giggles, because she never could have guessed how hilarious this stoic,
beautiful Durmstrang was). When they finished the piles of trophies on the floor, they replaced them
on the cleaned shelves and began removing the trophies from the walls, Lexa holding down the chair
so Clarke could reach up for the ones too high to grasp. She didn’t miss the blush on Lexa’s face and
the way she quickly looked away when she reached, flashing skin of her midriff. That warmth
fluttered in her belly again and she decided they needed a distraction.

They took a short rest in which they ate the chocolate Clarke had brought, and then it was back to
work. They cleaned until Clarke’s arm was aching and idly discussed their friends, Quidditch, and
what seemed like a thousand other things.

All too soon, the House Elves appeared to send them to bed, informing them to return tomorrow to
finish up, and despite how tired she was, Clarke was actually not at all eager to leave. Still, she and
Lexa shuffled outside the room, handing off the buckets and brushes to the bowing elves, and were
left alone in the hallway.

“So, uh, we were nearly done, so I guess we’ll finish up tomorrow night. It’s been fun.” Clarke
smiled, shrugging. “Well, as fun as detention can be, anyway.”

“It didn’t really feel like detention to me.” Lexa’s lips quirked, twitching into a smirk. “But maybe
that’s because no one’s been flayed alive or strung from the ramparts.”

Clarke laughed, warmth blooming into her chest at the grin that split across Lexa’s face in response
—a full, toothy grin, the first proper, unrestrained smile she’d seen on Lexa. It lit up her entire face
and oh, God, Lexa was wrong—Clarke wasn’t trouble, Lexa was, and Clarke was in trouble,
because her heart was pounding a tattoo against her rib cage and her eyes were drifting from Lexa’s
gaze to linger on full lips that looked so soft and plump. The smile had faded from Lexa’s mouth;
Clarke watched as white teeth sank into the bottom lip, heat spiking in the pit of her stomach.

They both took a step back at the same time, clearing their throats again.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” murmured Lexa, taking another step back. She met Clarke’s eyes.

“Goodnight, Lexa.”
“Goodnight, Clarke.”

In bed that night, Clarke didn’t fall asleep quite as soon as she imagined. She lay there listening to the steady breathing of her friends, staring up at the enchanted ceiling, head spinning with thoughts of long legs and strong thighs, an elegant stretch of neck, soft brown curls, that swell of ass—

The heat in her belly, at the base of her spine—between her legs—was distracting and insistent, but she refused to acknowledge it. She didn’t have time for this.

She punched her pillow into place and rolled over, stubbornly determined to fall asleep.

It took forever, but eventually, she fell into dreams of green eyes and pouty lips.

* ° /¬/ °* *

Kane was a *dick.*

Thursday evening found Clarke standing in the shade of the gamekeeper’s hut, aghast. She’d received her message from Kane this morning, instructing her that the gamekeeper, Wick, was in need of a little extra help dealing with some pests in the vegetable gardens. Wick had assured her he’d already taken care of the ones in the patches near the greenhouses for Herbology, but the one directly behind the hut—the one that housed the pumpkin patch, in other words—was the worst.

That was an understatement.

Her heart sank as she looked at it. The vegetable patch was not very big, but it was littered with half-eaten vegetable roots and there were countless mounds of earth scattered within it, indicating the infestation was big enough to pose a problem. She could see one out in the open now, reclining against the fence post and gnawing on some plant root.

“Damn it,” muttered Clarke, dropping her potato sack with a huff. “This is going to take forever.”
“Your headmaster did say we could finish this tonight though,” Lexa reminded her, dropping her own sack. She seemed much more determined and ambitious about this than Clarke did as she surveyed the garden, green eyes narrowed in calculation.

“Have you ever done this before?” asked Clarke.

Lexa shook her head.

“Well, I have a few times. They used to pop up in the gardens at my house and my neighbor’s.”

“Used to? How did you get rid of them?”

“Well, my dad thought they were a bit funny. My mum wasn’t as soft on them. She—er—hired an exterminator service.” Clarke’s face contorted into a painful grimace. “It was, uh, not a good idea. They brought jarveys and they basically destroyed the whole colony…like, it was a bloodbath. Dad was horrified and Mum swore she’d never do that again, but it didn’t matter. What was left of them never came back. I don’t blame them.”

Lexa didn’t respond, but Clarke could tell by the arch of her brows what she was thinking. *Yeesh, yikes*—something along those lines.

She cleared her throat, determined not to let it grow awkward. “Yeah. So, anyway. We’re obviously not doing that.”

“And we can’t use magic,” said Lexa dubiously, gaze lingering on the gnome idly scratching its bulbous head as it licked its fingers, having finished the root. “So how do we get rid off them?”

“Oh, you can’t use magic on them anyway. They’re pretty much immune to most magic. You can stun them for a while, but it doesn’t last and it takes longer that way. They’re not very intelligent creatures, so it’s easier to just spin them around, get them dizzy, and throw them somewhere else. They have trouble finding their way back.”

“Okay,” said Lexa, still sounding uncertain.
“They scream when you throw them,” Clarke told her, leading her over to the gnome leaning against the fence, the two of them walking carefully to avoid the holes in the earth. “And the sound draws the others out to see what the commotion is. Grab them quick, spin and throw. They bite, so be careful, and the little buggers are heavier than they look. It’s actually a bit of a workout; we might have to take breaks. Damn, I should’ve brought more chocolate, for energy.” They’d eaten the last of it last night, when they finished up in the Trophy Room.

“Could do a Girding Potion,” suggested Lexa.

Clarke pursed her lips. “Well, there are some flying seahorses at the Black Lake we could use. But hell, that’d just be more work.”

Lexa pursed her own lips, though it was more to hide a smile. “Let’s get started, then.”

The creature yelped when Clarke seized it, holding its small leathery body high and flipping it round to grip it by the ankles. It squealed as she swung it overhead and flung it as far as she could over the small white fence. She looked at Lexa, whose face was unreadable, eyes narrowed as she stared calculatedly at the slumped over gnome, its knobby bald head swaying dizzily. Another few gnomes had popped up from their holes, but Clarke hesitated grabbing another, wondering if Lexa found it too violent somehow, even though this didn’t hurt the gnomes, and was certainly a better alternative to unleashing a jarvey on them.

Then, to her surprise, Lexa said quietly, “I bet I can throw farther than that.”

Clarke stared a beat longer, then grinned. “Prove it.”

Soon the air was full of flying gnomes, enough that several lines had formed in the shade of the forbidden forest, in which the little creatures shuffled off, shoulders hunched, darkly muttering disjointed curse words under their breath.

Clarke took a break after a good while, hands on her knees and bent over double to catch her breath. She hadn’t done this since she was a kid. It really was quite exhausting. She wiped the sweat off her dirty face with the sleeve of her robes before shucking them off and draping them over the fence, adjusting the jumper and trousers she wore beneath it and glancing at Lexa, who was covered in a thin sheen of sweat that looked criminally good on her; she was practically glowing. Jesus, why did she have to be so hot? Clarke shook her head, partly to clear it and partly to chastise herself, and reached for one of the bottles of water Wick had left for them before he returned to the Herbology
Lexa, meanwhile, shrugged off her own robes, and Clarke, having expected her to be wearing similar clothing beneath it as yesterday, was not at all prepared to see her wearing something sleeveless. Her stomach dropped and she choked on her water. As if that wasn’t enough, Lexa turned in concern, patting her on the back as she coughed. Clarke stepped back, red-faced and gasping, avoiding Lexa’s eye. It wasn’t until a minute later when she’d finally regained some semblance of control over herself that she allowed herself to meet Lexa’s gaze, and then all the breath she’d just recovered promptly left her lungs again.

The lean muscles of Lexa’s arms were just as sweaty as the rest of her, and covered in tattoos. Stationary tattoos.

“You—you have muggle tattoos?”

It had to be. Not only was it motionless, but there were minor flaws in it that simply wouldn’t exist with a magical tattoo; there were the raised edges of scar tissue, imperfect lines. But there was something about it (besides the fact of who it belonged to) that made the flaws make it all the more beautiful. It twisted and curved, tribal and intriguing, over her arm and shoulders, disappearing just behind the black fabric covering her shoulder blades.

“Yes,” answered Lexa, glancing at it, “I had it done this summer, actually. After my…failed attempt at reconnecting with my parents.”

“I’m sorry,” said Clarke quietly. She didn’t need to ask why Lexa had wanted to get a muggle tattoo right after discovering her muggle parents did not truly love her. The rush of anger was not altogether unexpected; Clarke pressed her lips together and exhaled slowly out her nose; how could anyone not care about Lexa? Lexa was…Lexa. She gazed at the tattoo again, resisting the overwhelming urge to reach out and touch it. Just looking at Lexa was enough to fill her with heat, she couldn’t imagine if she actually felt her skin. “It’s…God. It’s beautiful.”

Lexa’s cheeks, already flushed from exertion, turned a deeper shade of red. She swallowed and looked out at the straggled line of gnomes retreating deeper into the forest. “Thank you,” she said, voice a bit uneven.

Clarke licked her lips, even as she told herself she didn’t notice. Lexa being as affected as she was by her—she wouldn’t even entertain the notion.
“What made you choose it?” asked Clarke as she took another drag of water, tossing Lexa the other one. She watched her out of the corner of her eye as Lexa unscrewed the cap and brought it to her lips. A trickle escaped and rolled down her chin, down her neck, heading toward her cleavage…

Clarke hastily took another big gulp, absolutely parched.

Lexa shrugged. “I just liked the design, and it fits in with my other ones.”

“Can I see them?” she asked curiously.

Lexa chuckled, focusing rather intently on her water bottle as she screwed the cap back on. “They aren’t exactly on places appropriate to show—“

“I don’t mind.” She’d blurted the words out before she could even register saying them. She froze, lips parted and eyes wide, bottled water absurdly hovering just before her. Lexa stared back at her with mirrored features, blush painted on her cheeks. Oh God, say something, anything. “Um. I mean—not if you have to be naked. Not that—I meant, not that there’s anything wrong with you being naked. I mean, no—I meant, not that I want to see you naked—not that I don’t not to see you either, but—I mean—“

Fucking shut up, oh my GOD.

One of the gnomes that had popped up to see where all its fellows disappeared to snickered. Clarke had no idea whether it was snickering because of her making a fool of herself, because surely it wasn’t intelligent enough to understand her, but it still made the humiliation curdling in her stomach ten times worse. She scowled down at it, kicking at the dirt, and the gnome spluttered and withdrew into its hole, shaking its tiny fists at her.

Lexa’s eyes were wide and her cheeks pink, but she made a valiant effort to rein some dignity into the situation. “I know what you meant, Clarke. I wouldn’t mind showing you it sometime.” Now Clarke paused, tilting her head, body warm all over again, and something like hope clawing forth in her belly even when she determinedly tried to stamp it out, because did Lexa mean…? Lexa seemed to realize what she said by Clarke’s expression, and her eyes went wider still as she twisted her hands over her water bottle in agitation, “I…I apologize, I didn’t mean…” She nearly dropped the bottle and made a wild fumble for it that resulted in her stepping forward to catch it at the same time Clarke did, except when Clarke’s foot landed, it was a foot lower than she expected; she’d stepped in a gnome hole. She sucked in a breath as she careened forward, forehead smacking into Lexa’s collarbone, and Lexa twisted in an effort to prevent her from tackling her, which was lucky since it pulled Clarke’s leg free before her ankle could twist and crack, but it threw them off balance even
more and they both crashed to the ground in a cloud of dirt.

“Ouch.” The word was muffled against something soft. A breast, Clarke realized a moment later, absolutely mortified as she lifted her head from Lexa’s chest. *Fuck.*

“Are you okay?” asked Lexa, voice faint and dazed. Clarke pushed herself up onto her elbows and looked down to take in their situation.

She was both lying atop and straddling Lexa again, legs bracketing Lexa’s thighs, exactly how she’d ran into her three days ago outside the castle doors. This time, she realized with a rush of heat, Lexa’s hands were on her hips, and, God, they were closer, so much closer…she could see the flecks of gold and gray in Lexa’s eyes, could probably count each one of her eyelashes if she wanted…

The remaining air in her lungs left her body as one corner of Lexa’s lips curved up. A fucking *smirk.* God. “I think you have a thing for running into people, Clarke. You would make a fine rugby player if you were a muggle.”

Clarke shook her head slightly to clear it, not bothering to wonder what the hell rugby was. “I’m sorry. In my defense, you totally started it.”

“I did not!”

“You so did! You’re the one who dropped your water bottle!”

“You’re the one who made me,” insisted Lexa, pressing her lips together in a futile attempt to hide her smile as Clarke laughed.

“No way, I didn’t make you drop it!”

Lexa’s smile faded as she lifted her chin. “You are distracting,” she said seriously, so abruptly that Clarke had to actually hold her breath, and she didn't know whether to be offended or flattered; distracting in what way? Was that a bad thing? The way Lexa said it was chastising, almost rueful. Or was she distracting in the same way Lexa was to Clarke? “It is frustrating.”
“Um. So are you.” Clarke cleared her throat. “Distracting, I mean.”

They looked at one another warily. Clarke’s heart was swinging wildly. So, she was pretty certain by now the attraction was mutual…and she knew, somewhere in the back of her mind was that little voice reminding her all the reasons why she shouldn’t pursue this right now, not with everything going on in her life right now, she didn’t need the distraction of a relationship of any kind…but it was hard to listen to that voice when the entirety of the front of her body was pressed against Lexa’s, and they were both sweaty and breathing heavily, and Lexa’s lips looked so impossibly full and soft…and green eyes kept flitting between her eyes and her mouth…the attraction was definitely mutual. She could be…God, they could be kissing right now. She could be biting into the full pout of that lower lip, tasting her tongue…she could be pressing kisses down that elegant neck, across those exposed collarbones…could have the warm weight of those breasts in her hands, the soft flesh in her mouth…could be skittering fingertips across the planes of what felt like a hard, flat stomach, over sharp hipbones, down into wet and warmth—

Her hips jerked without conscious effort, just a small buck, but enough that she could visibly see black pupils eating away a ring of green, and oh my God, the ache of want that rippled through her was one of the most intense feelings she’d ever had.

“Are you okay?”

They startled and jumped, scrambling up at the unwelcome intrusion of a deep voice, turning to see the gamekeeper looking at them in concern.

“Yeah, we’re fine,” inhaled Clarke, voice airy and high with the desperate intake of breath she’d taken. “I stepped in a gnome hole and fell, Lexa broke my fall—er, with herself. We’re okay.”

Wick just continued to look at them with that frown, glancing at Lexa, who croaked, “I dropped my water bottle. We are fine.”

“Okay,” he said, sounding uncertain, but then his smile returned. “Well, it looks like you’ve made some progress!” He ran a hand through his hair and leaned against the fence, casting a crooked grin at the two of them before gesturing at the garden. “I saw them going into the forest, looks like you’re nearly there. Keep up the good work!”

Clarke and Lexa could only numbly nod. To their agitation, he didn’t leave, but began ambling around the garden poking at the fence, cleaning up the weeds around it, leaving them with no other choice than to exchange tense, uncertain glances and get back to work. Clarke’s body was shaking so hard it felt as though it were vibrating, and she realized with a kind of absent horror that her
panties were not quite as dry as they’d been before the fall, but she had no choice but to keep working, biting her lip so hard she had to stop once she tasted a copper tang of blood.

Once the vegetable patch had been cleansed of the gnomes and the mess of half-eaten tubers and roots shoved into the potato sacks handed off to the gamekeeper, Clarke and Lexa pulled their cloaks on and meandered back up the grounds, pausing where they’d have to part near the Durmstrang ship.

They looked at each other, and Clarke realized she had absolutely no idea what to say. She wet her lips, racking her brain, and then promptly short-circuited when she noticed Lexa’s gaze had darted down. She had to test it, of course, so she wet them one more time, more slowly, and watched as Lexa’s gaze lingered, as those plump lips parted, just slightly. An ache burned low in her stomach and her breath quickened. How was it possible to be so attracted to someone you’ve only known for three days?

She opened her mouth to speak, but Lexa beat her to it.

“Goodnight,” she said, voice higher than usual. Her throat dipped as she swallowed, green gaze skittering everywhere but Clarke. “I will see you tomorrow.”

Clarke snapped her mouth shut and nodded, at a loss for words. The disappointment burned in her gut, not quite as intensely as the other heat currently swirling in there, but enough that she curled her fingers into her palms and watched Lexa walk away, moonlight guiding her path up the ramp and into the depths of the ship.

Clarke turned and made her way up to the castle, thinking she might have to do something about this tonight or she really wouldn’t get any sleep anytime soon.

* * /✧/ * *

Lexa shuffled over to her bed, flopped into it, and buried her face in her pillow to muffle her long, drawn-out groan.
“Girl trouble, huh?” said Costia knowingly, hopping onto the end of Lexa’s bed. “Come on. Spill.”

“Go away,” grumbled Lexa.

“Do you want some tea? I’m going to make you some tea. Then you’re telling me everything.”

“Costia,” groaned Lexa, rolling over and rubbing her hands over her face as Costia ambled around their small room, withdrawing a kettle and two teacups, leaving them to hover in the air as the water boiled. “Costia.” Costia still didn’t answer, rummaging around in the box on the nightstand for the teabags. Lexa chucked a spare pillow at her head. Costia just ignored that too, sending it back at Lexa with a twitch of her wand as she hovered the teabags into the cups and poured the water.

“You’re talking to me whether you like it or not,” sang Costia as she poured a trickle of milk into each cup. Another twirl of her wand and the milk and kettle returned to their place. The tea stirred itself as she floated it over to the nightstand beside Lexa’s cot. “Seriously, come on. It’s been a while since you’ve been excited about a girl.”

“You’re my ex,” mumbled Lexa, and she knew she was speaking bullshit, but she continued anyway. “Aren’t you supposed to not want to discuss things such as this?”

“Don’t give me that rubbish,” snorted Costia, curling up on the end of Lexa’s bed and taking her cup. “We’re friends first. We were always friends first. But nice try.”

Lexa sighed. It was a nice try. “I don’t want to talk about it, Cos.”

“At least tell me what she’s like.”

“She’s…” She paused, blowing out a breath, and scrubbed her hands over her face again. “She’s Clarke. She’s…” Gorgeous. Hilarious. Thoughtful.

“Oh, jeez, you’re really hung up on this one, aren’t you? Here, sit up, take your tea.”

Lexa did so, taking the cup Costia offered her once she’d hovered the tea bags out and into the bin. “I shouldn’t be.” She frowned. “I can’t be. She’s…it’s a distraction. A weakness.”
Costia’s face hardened; she’d always been sensitive about the topic, especially since it had been a point of contention back when they dated and Titus was constantly badgering Lexa about it, warning her again and again not to get distracted from her purpose.

“You know what I think about that,” she said darkly. “Come on, I thought you’d gotten better about that. Why do you have to listen to Titus like that? Why can’t you listen to me? To Anya?”

“Because I have a mission to do,” said Lexa firmly as she tapped her wand to the brim of her cup to lower the temperature. She watched the steam curl and fade away. “People are depending on me.”

“Why do you always do that?” she demanded, and Lexa adopted a hard mask of indifference to hide her wince. “You make yourself out like you’re the savior of the world or something, you put everything on your shoulders.”

“You don’t believe I have a purpose?” challenged Lexa, lifting her chin.

“I didn’t say that, Lexa.” Costia sighed. “I know you’re special, okay? You can turn into damn dragon, for heaven’s sake. I know. But you’re a person, too. You can have a life, you can live.”

Lexa remained quiet, sipping her tea, guilt and defiance boiling inside her. Costia had never quite understood the pressure on her. Titus had explained it to Lexa, again and again, since she arrived at Durmstrang at eleven years old. She was born to the prophecy. She didn’t have a choice in these matters. People were counting on her. She knew what she had to do, and that was stay focused.

Clarke was a distraction, one Lexa couldn’t afford. It had only been two days and her head was already constantly spinning, her world turned on its axis, all because of a pretty blonde with blue eyes and a mischievous smile and chocolates in her pockets.

“Look…” began Costia in a low, measured tone, holding her tea and shifting closer to Lexa so she could nudge her with a shoulder. “Just…hypothetically. If you did happen to like this girl…what’s the worst that could happen?”

Lexa looked up at the ceiling. She took a sip of tea before saying calmly, “I like her, and she doesn’t feel the same way. Or she does, and I’m distracted by her and I make a mistake that costs me the tournament, or prevents me from protecting someone, or worse. Nia discovers I care for her and uses it against me the same way she once tried to with you; she captures Clarke, tortures her—or worse.”
I’m crippled with the heartache and Nia takes over, all the muggleborns are killed off and muggles are enslaved, the world is destroyed, Titus tells me ‘I told you so,’ and I die alone knowing I failed everyone. ”

Silence followed, stretching long enough Lexa blinked and looked down, face flushing as she realizes the extent of what she just revealed, even if she was trying to be sardonic.

Costia burst into laughter. “Jesus Lexa, did you just hear yourself? I’m saying what’s the worst that could happen if you just sleep with the girl, not marry her! Jesus. You are so extra it’s unbelievable.” Lexa did her best to ignore her, taking another sip of tea in a failed attempt to salvage her dignity. Costia just continued to laugh until it finally tapered into chuckles, and nudged Lexa again. “You can have something nice for yourself. If you’re into her, and she’s into you, why not just have some fun?”

Because she wasn’t sure if she’d ever been fun before. Her friends all tended to be pretty quiet, serious individuals themselves—Costia, Anya, Lincoln, and even to an extent the others she surrounded herself with, Titus, Indra, and Gustus—there had been plenty of occasions in which they had fun, of course, but it was always second in priority to her training and learning. Honestly, Lexa couldn’t even remember the last time she’d had as much fun as she’d had in the past two days. The truth was, she’d smiled and laughed more in detentions with Clarke than she had in the past few months period.

And God knows she’d had this insistent heat fluttering in her belly during every second spent in her presence. God. The notion of Clarke returning the interest was almost too much to dare to believe, let alone actually doing something about it.

With everything that could go wrong…what was riding on this tournament, Titus’s strict warnings, and her burgeoning friendship with Clarke…she wasn’t willing to risk any of that.

“I don’t know,” she murmured, jostling her cup and watching the remaining dregs of tea slosh around inside it.

“Well…I’m not saying you should or shouldn’t. I’m just saying not to rule it out. If it becomes a possibility…maybe give it a chance.”

Not sure what else to do, Lexa nodded.
“Anyways, I think I’m going to get to bed, and you need to go shower, you’re sweaty and covered in dirt, what the hell were you doing anyway?”

“Degnoming a garden.”

“Oh. Weird, but okay. Any idea when that one’s coming back?” she added, nodding toward Anya’s empty bed as she rose to put away the empty cups.

“No.”

Costia scoffed, shaking her head in incredulous disbelief. “She could at least hang around to let us tease her. It’d make a welcome change.”

Lexa was about to agree, before she remembered Anya’s knowing smirk every time each time Lexa saw her, whenever Clarke was nearby.

“They just met and they’re already inseparable,” continued Costia. “For Anya…it’s weird. What are they doing?”

Lexa wrinkled her nose. “Probably nothing we want to imagine.”

Costia chuckled, and her next words had Lexa chucking another pillow at her. “Well, at least someone’s getting laid.”

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Raven trembled from where she was on the floor on her hands and knees, panting hard, sweat sliding down her temples.

“Don’t stop, Raven.”
“Anya…” she moaned.

“I don’t care how tired you are, I’m not going easy on you,” said Anya softly. “Get ready.”

Raven bit back a groan and looked up to meet narrowed tawny eyes.

“Stup—“

“Expelliarmus!”

Raven’s wand flew out of her hand and clattered to the floor. She cursed and hung her head. “Damn it.”

“Up, get up!” urged Anya. “You have to keep moving. A stationary target is a sitting duck, you make it easier on your enemies to focus on you, you have to keep moving.”

“It’s a little hard when you have a fucked up leg,” said Raven through gritted teeth, seizing her wand and heaving herself up off the floor. “I don’t do these neat little spells, okay? I never went wrong with a few blasting curses in the other timeline.”

“Yes, Raven, but this time’s different, we’re the ones who are two steps ahead, we’re the ones who can get the drop of them. We know where Mount Weather is, we know where we have a chance of capturing Nia. This might be a mission that requires subtlety—sneaking in, taking them by surprise.”

Raven stood up and took the bottled water Anya offered, slanting a withering, skeptical look at her. “You really think Jamie will let a couple of students join the aurors to take down one of the most dangerous dark witches of all time? Yeah, right.”

Anya rolled her eyes. “When the time comes, we’re doing whatever the fuck we feel like doing, regardless of what they try to tell us.”

“Assuming we convince them to believe us anyway,” said Raven dryly.
“We’ll have to convince them. Somehow.”

“I’m taking a break,” said Raven grumpily, limping over to collapse in one of the chairs. Anya huffed and rolled her eyes but allowed it, taking the other chair. They drank their water for a while.

“What do we do?” asked Raven. “What do we do if Luna doesn’t help us? We can’t tell Jamie because she might tell Titus. We can’t tell Abby because her memories are fucked up and she might tell Jaha or the Order. We can’t tell Indra or Gustus or Lexa because they’ll tell Titus. How do we get people to believe us?”

“The same way you got me to believe,” said Anya, “We’ll have to show them your memories.”

Raven balked and spluttered. “My—I—uh, they’re kind of private! I don’t mind you seeing them, but…”

“Grow up,” snapped Anya. “The fate of the world rests on this. If they’re squeamish about sex, they’ll get over it.”

Raven brooded for a moment, cheeks still warm at the thought of Kane and a bunch of strangers seeing her most intimate moments. Maybe she could just withdraw only certain ones…though that might take a while…

“Just give me some time to sort them out,” she finally said. “I’ll leave the private ones alone, they can have what they need without that.”

“Fine.”

“I have another day since we’re meeting Luna tomorrow, remember?”

“Obviously. Have you convinced Clarke to come yet?”

Raven shook her head. “No, but she’s talking to me again at least, I mean she’s still pissed but she’s not being as petty about it now. She seems a little distracted, actually.”
Anya smirked. “So has Lexa. I give it a week.”

Raven smiled slightly, growing a bit sleepy as she kicked her aching leg up and let it rest on Anya’s knee. “No way. It took them ages to finally get their shit together in the other time. They didn’t even kiss until the first task and that was in October!”

“Yeah, but they aren’t the same people they were then.” Anya shook her head. “In the other time, Lexa was more guarded because she lost Costia. Clarke was more guarded and…distraught, I suppose, because she was chosen for the tournament and her friends weren’t there for her at first,” she pointedly looked at Raven, who winced. “Honestly, it’s karma that Clarke’s giving you a hard time now after you did that to her.”

“I guess so,” she muttered, chuckling a bit as she fidgeted with her nearly empty water bottle. “But still. Clarke’s oblivious and it took Lexa forever to grow some ovaries and make a move.”

Anya shrugged. “They’re…lighter here. There’s not as much keeping them apart, not as many heavy things between them. And they’re kind of meant for each other.”

Raven actually gagged. “That’s the gayest shit I’ve ever heard you say.”

Anya rolled her eyes. “Shut up. If I felt it through your memories, you’re the one who’s aware of it. You know they are.”

“I mean, yeah, but—“

“Raven.”

“All right, all right.” Raven chucked the empty bottle of water into the bin and rose to her feet, extending a hand for Anya. “Okay, how about one more round and then we hit the sack?” She wiggled her brows and Anya shook her head, smirking despite herself.

“You asked for it.”
Saturday evening came faster than Lexa had expected, but maybe that was because she’d been a jittery mess since yesterday’s detention. She’d spent the day being endlessly teased by Costia and Lincoln, followed by Anya’s late arrival at lunch and eventual joining in…which meant she was completely ganged up on by her three supposed best friends. Honestly, Lexa didn’t have the patience for this. She had quite enough to focus on without her friends making it ten times worse.

Things to focus on like the fact that the Choosing Ceremony was fast approaching and she’d soon be chosen and training for a deadly tournament, preparing for the eventual emergence of the Ice Queen. Like the fact that Indra noticed her focus was slipping during training sessions. Like the fact that every time she so much as looked Clarke’s way, her heart beat faster and there were aggravating fluttery butterflies unleashed in her stomach. Like the fact that she had to take a very cold shower yesterday. Like the fact that her eyes couldn’t stop meeting Clarke’s even though they sat three tables away and the Great Hall was crowded with students; Anya, Costia, and Lincoln certainly didn’t fail to notice that. Lexa was almost grateful for the arrival of the student Indra and Kane sent to inform her of her detention.

That evening, she met with Clarke in the Great Hall and followed her to their destination across the grounds to meet with the woman in charge of their punishment tonight.

Professor Vera was a plump woman with a kind, open face and the ability to immediately make you feel comfortable. Despite the tension that had been coiling tight in the pit of her stomach (as it had been for days now), Lexa found herself relaxing as the Herbology professor led her and Clarke into the sheds, stating she was going to have them help her transport the remaining mandrakes into new pots that she hadn’t had enough second-years for in their lessons earlier. She also admitted there really wasn’t much to do, but when she heard Kane had given one of her favorite former students detention simply for searching for another friend, well, Professor Vera was head of Hufflepuff house, and Hufflepuff were apparently big fans of finders, according to Clarke—whatever that meant. All Lexa could do was nod and try not to stare at Clarke’s lips as she spoke.

So now here Lexa was, slipping a pair of blue earmuffs over her head. She caught Clarke’s eye and couldn’t help but to smile; Clarke was grinning, clearly amused at Lexa in her earmuffs, and she also looked very cute herself in a pair of fluffy green ones.

Professor Vera mimed to them to get started and be careful not to lose the earmuffs; these were infant mandrakes, at least, so there wasn’t a chance of death, but Lexa would still rather not take the risk of passing out, so she focused intently as she gripped the plant and tugged it loose. The muddy root, so disconcerting considering it looked and behaved just like a human infant (“I don’t see how Monty loved it when we covered this section in Advanced Herbology; I know they’re plants, but there was
just something really weird about cutting it up to use it in potions,” Clarke told her before they’d started, when Professor Vera was rummaging around for her extra set of earmuffs), was already screaming. Lexa spared it a grimace as she and Clarke carefully carried it over together, plunging it into the fresh dark compost of a new plot.

Professor Vera gave them a thumbs up, took the new pot, and carried it off toward the back of the shed, nodding them to continue. They did so, and Lexa was grateful for the chance to work in silence. It gave her time to think; whenever she was talking with Clarke, she seemed to lose the ability to do so.

Twenty minutes and several completed mandrake transfers later, Lexa was starting to change her mind. She needed to stop thinking so much and to focus. Thinking was what was getting her into this mess, with the constant fluttering in her stomach every time she and Clarke’s fingers brushed together, every time Clarke glanced up at her with those eyes and that smile. God, Lexa was losing it.

No, she was actually losing her earmuffs. Oh, no.

Her earmuffs were slipping off. She barely had the time to suck in a breath and stiffen, hands clutching the mandrake tightly, but before she could move another inch, the earmuffs snapped off. “Clarke,” she gasped, slamming her eyes shut, knees immediately buckling as the high, painful shriek of the plant hit her like a needle directly into her ears; her head swam, she was about to faint—but then it stopped. Soft hands cupped the back of Lexa’s neck and head, fingers curling around the backs of her ears, thumbs pushing against her tragus, pressing in to block out the sound. She opened her eyes to meet vivid blue only inches away.

The cries of the mandrake were distant and muffled, tinny in her ears, and Lexa could do nothing more than stare, wide-eyed, heart thumping and blood buzzing in her veins. Clarke was so close, chest pushed up against hers, blue eyes wide with shock and concern. And then it visibly faded, and all Lexa could do was gulp and stand there helplessly, at a loss.

Clarke’s thumbs remained firmly in place over her ears, but her fingers dug into the back of her neck, gliding over the tiny curls of hair, and Lexa’s breath caught. Clarke’s lashes fluttered as her gaze lowered. Her lips were pale pink, her eyes pupil-blown and so blue. The mandrake was still hanging limply in Lexa’s hands, wailing its head off. She clutched the tufty leaves like they were a lifeline as Clarke gravitated closer, eyes dropping to Lexa’s mouth, and all of Lexa’s inner faculties seem to have short-circuited, a buzzing filling her head; she was capable of nothing but gazing at pink lips, her stomach fluttering and her heart hammering, breath shaky and shallow. The tip of Clarke’s nose brushed against her own and her mouth dropped open, lips parting in anticipation, mouth dry, absolutely aching—

She jumped about a foot in the air, only just managing to keep hold of the mandrake, when her
earmuffs were suddenly snapped back onto her; they hadn’t even noticed Professor Vera return to their sides. Clarke withdrew her hands, carefully putting Lexa’s earmuffs in place, lips pressed into a thin line, and her hands seemed as shaky as Lexa’s. Professor Vera didn’t act any different; if anything, she seemed more jovial than ever as she lifted the new pot for Lexa to bury the mandrake in and spooled some dirt over it. She nodded and beamed at them before pointing at the last few pots, clearly indicating for them to get on with it. Heart in her throat, Lexa nodded, turned, and did so, Clarke at her side. Every time their fingers brushed, she had to work to suppress a shiver. She wasn’t sure how much more of this she could take; it felt as though the tension was mounting and eventually, something was going to break.

They ended the night as early as the professor had promised, and Lexa didn’t know whether she was more relieved or let down when Professor Vera dismissed her but called Clarke back to speak. Lexa thanked her and waved goodbye to them both, but her gaze lingered on Clarke as she backed out of the shed, blue eyes following her the entire way.

She ran trembling hands through her hair as she walked back to the ship. The others were still at dinner, it seemed, which was a good thing because Lexa was certain she wouldn’t be able to hide this from them and would receive the most merciless teasing session yet. She took a long, long shower that did absolutely nothing to alleviate the heavy heat bottoming her stomach out, and went to bed.

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“Clarke, please, please, can you try to come? This is so important, like life or death important, I swear.”

Clarke frowned up over the top of the Daily Prophet at Raven, fork full of roast chicken pausing on its way to her mouth. She had lost track of the amount of times Raven had begged her to meet her at Hogsmeade for this ‘big important secret’ she apparently had. Octavia had overheard once and half-jokingly insisted she was engaged to Anya (Raven had blushed hard enough Clarke actually paused to seriously consider that). Raven wouldn’t mention anything else about it, but it didn’t matter anyway, because—

“I told you, I can’t,” she said with the air of one who’s repeated it a dozen times, which she had. “I have detention. Because of you. I am banned from Hogsmeade. Also because of you. I have detention, and I am banned from Hogsmeade, because of you.” It stung, too. The rest of the school was excitedly making plans for the first trip to Hogsmeade of the year; they’d be leaving after dinner and wouldn’t be back until late that night, off drinking butterbeer and buying sweets.
“Yeah, yeah, because of me, whatever, you sound like a broken record, get over it,” muttered Raven. She lifted a palm toward Fox when she opened her mouth, presumably to ask what a record was, and Fox snapped her mouth shut. “Just, please, Clarke, I’ll do anything, anything at all to get you to come. It’s super important.”

“For the last time, no.” They were interrupted by the arrival of a first-year, Charlotte again this time, with the scroll from Kane. “See?” said Clarke, waving it in the air. “Detention. Tonight.” She skimmed over it. “Cleaning muggle-style, yet again. Wonderful.”

“At least it’s not the Owlery,” noted Octavia as she glanced over Clarke’s shoulder to skim it herself. She leaned back to her side, shoveling another spoonful of gravy-soaked turkey into her mouth. “That would have sucked.”

“What have you got this time?” asked Wells; he sat beside Clarke reading his own paper.

“The Astronomy tower,” said Clarke absently as she returned to the Prophet.

“Cleaning the equipment, I’m guessing,” said Wells, nodding to himself as he turned a page, took a bite of chicken, and waited until after he’d chewed and swallowed to add, “I bet Professor Cartwig asked for you when she heard, same as Professor Vera. It’ll probably be another easy one, assuming the Bloody Baron doesn’t freak you out. He’s always up there groaning and clanking around, that’s his favorite haunt.”

“They’re all pretty easy anyway,” said Clarke, belly fluttering as she thought of Lexa. They were certainly easier to deal with in her company, though the butterflies in her stomach were definitely harder to face. She looked up, and it was always like this, so easy to pick her out in a crowd; she met Lexa’s gaze from where she sat a few tables down, next to Anya who was presumably sucking the souls out of the meal she was devouring. They looked away the moment their gazes met, and Clarke buried herself in her paper again, hoping no one noticed.

She had no idea how she was going to make it through another detention with her, especially after yesterday’s. She’d nearly kissed her, would have if Professor Vera didn’t interrupt them. Of course, Professor Cartwig would probably keep them company all night tonight, too; she was a family friend who had grown up with Clarke’s mother, so she’d probably want to chat with Clarke. Clarke ignored the sinking sensation and told herself it was better, safer, that way.

Night fell and she made her way to the Astronomy Tower already feeling antsy; just the mere
thought of Lexa was enough to get her blood pumping these days. Jesus, she didn’t know how she was going to make it through tonight—especially when she rounded the corner and immediately met a green gaze.

“Hey,” said Clarke breathlessly.

Lexa’s throat dipped. “Hey.”

They hadn’t spoken since in the green houses yesterday. They’d almost kissed, perhaps would have if Professor Vera hadn’t called Clarke back to give her what Clarke was sure was meant to be well-meaning advice, telling her to power through the detentions, that Kane still respected her, and to keep up the good work. Clarke had barely heard any of it; her mind was elsewhere, somewhere in another universe where mandrakes weren’t involved and they weren’t interrupted and she had kissed Lexa, and kept kissing her, picking her up and setting her on the green house table and—

God, she shouldn’t be thinking of that right now, when Lexa’s looking right at her. They held their gazes, tension growing thicker, Clarke’s heart pounding until she couldn’t bear it anymore, until she took a step forward, until—

“Hello!” greeted Professor Cartwig, causing them both to startle. They hadn’t even noticed her rounding the corner and approaching them. She extended a hand for Lexa. “I’m Professor Cartwig, I teach Astronomy here. Pleased to meet you, though the circumstances could have been better,” she said with a wry smile.

“I’m Lexa Woods,” said Lexa politely, shaking her hand. “Pleased to meet you as well.”

Professor Cartwig turned her attention onto Clarke. “And how are you, Clarke? I miss having you in my class.”

“I miss it too,” said Clarke sincerely.

She was grateful Callie didn’t ask her how her mother was doing. Instead she clasped her hands together, practically beaming at them. “Okay, let’s head on up and get started!”

They walked along the dimly lit corridor, following the curve and bypassing the reading room to head up the spiral staircase. Professor Cartwig chatted merrily as she led them outside, where the sky
stretched above with thousands of stars lighting their path, so many it was breathtaking. The professor led them over to the ramparts where the telescopes and various astronomical models were propped up. She conjured some towels and cleaning products, handing them over before announcing she’d be in the Astronomy room downstairs grading papers, leaving Clarke and Lexa to it.

Clarke moved to a telescope and picked up a towel automatically, a bit in shock that Professor Cartwig left them up here alone. She started to clean, Lexa doing the same not too far away.

Lexa glanced at Clarke as she worked on wiping down the model she’d grabbed, blatantly ignoring the gooseflesh that had broken out on her arms. She certainly wasn’t cold; if anything it was merely from the proximity of Clarke. Clarke, Clarke, Clarke, Clarke, who she was alone with. She couldn’t believe the professor had left them alone. Lexa was currently a maelstrom of emotions that could be boiled down to two coherent thoughts: *uh oh*, and *thank God.*

They worked in silence for a while, air thick with tension.

“Can you imagine how simple this would be with magic?” It was a bit of a weak conversation point, enough so that telltale warmth crept up the back of Lexa’s neck to flush her face. She ducked her head lower as though focusing on scrubbing the dirt off the lens.

Clarke hummed as she worked the rag around her fingers and plunged them into the crevices of the telescope. Lexa blushed harder still. “Yeah. Just a simple *Reducio* and *Scourgify* and we’d be in the clear. We’d probably be done by now.”

Lexa could think of no response, so she just nodded instead.

“I can’t believe the others are off having fun at Hogsmeade, and we’re stuck here cleaning.” Clarke shook her head, scrubbing the lens. “I’d kill for some firewhisky right now.”

Lexa licked her lips, imagining the influence firewhisky might have on them if they had some right now. She fought to keep her face even and calm, in spite of the steady burning of her body.

“You’ve tried firewhisky, right?” asked Clarke, pausing in her cleaning to glance at Lexa.

Lexa met her gaze and quickly looked away, sparks dancing down her spine. “Yes. I like it, but it’s not my favorite. I prefer dragonspirit.”
Clarke chuckled. “You like the burn, huh?”

Lexa’s gaze darted up to find Clarke already watching her, biting her bottom lip. The ache in the pit of Lexa’s stomach, between her legs, in her chest, was so strong her hand trembled and she had to carefully set down the telescope and just drop to her knees, wiping it down that way, hyper-aware of Clarke’s eyes on her.

“Yes,” she said simply, praying her voice wasn’t as rough as it felt coming out of her.

“So,” said Clarke a few minutes later; the telescopes they were working on already seemed done, but neither had made a move to walk over to the ramparts to swap it out for a new one. “Was Anya going to Hogsmeade with Raven, do you know?”

Lexa almost snorted. Anya had been driving her up the wall with demands for her to accompany them to some pub. “Yes. She’s going to a pub with Raven, apparently having some type of—”

“Big meeting?” finished Clarke. When Lexa glanced questioningly at her, she half-shrugged. “Raven’s been bugging me about it all week. I don’t know what the hell is going on. She’s been acting weird anyway.”

“So has Anya. Costia was half-convinced she and Anya are planning to elope.” It didn’t seem as much as a joke now as it did a couple days ago. It was crazy, how much things could change in the matter of a week.

“So was Octavia.” Clarke chuckled. “They’ve only known each other less than a week. Hopefully they’re not that insane.”

Less than a week. Right. Lexa swallowed, wetting her lips as she looked down at her telescope without really seeing it. How had it only been six days? She snuck a peek at Clarke, who was just wiping down the already-gleaming telescope with the washcloth.

They worked on for a bit, Lexa lost in her thoughts, until she finally admitted to herself she’d more than thoroughly washed this model and she needed to get a new one. She gripped it firmly and carefully began to walk it to the ramparts, and her footsteps faltered as she realized Clarke had just had the same idea. They approached them together and carefully set them down before they reached for a new one; their fingers brushed and they both paused. Lexa’s heart was working double-time.
She straightened up the same time Clarke did, and they looked at each other.

Clarke’s eyes were wide and luminous, dark blue and starlit. Lexa swallowed thickly. There was a voice echoing far in the back of her head, disapproving and stern and vaguely resembling Titus, but it was easy to pay it no mind when she was standing close enough to smell her, something light and refreshing and essentially her. It made her head spin.

Anya, Costia, and Lincoln would already be making fun of her by now.

Or encouraging her. At least Costia and Lincoln definitely would be, Anya would probably be gagging.

Kiss her, kiss her, kiss her.

She hesitated, eyes roving over Clarke’s face, tracing her beautiful features. She was without a doubt the most gorgeous girl Lexa had ever seen, and Lexa was weak, she was so weak for girls and gorgeous girls and especially this gorgeous girl. She was so weak but somehow, under the stars with Clarke’s blue eyes drinking her in, she didn’t care about being weak. All she cared about was Clarke.

“Do you want to get out of here?” whispered Clarke.

Lexa’s eyes widened. “I’m—what do you mean?”

Clarke licked her lips, never blinking. “Do…you…want to…go to Hogsmeade?” She blinked a couple times, and Lexa got the feeling she hadn’t set out with the intention to suggest that at all. But then Clarke stepped forward, into her space, and her breath hitched. “Do you? We could grab a broom out of my room, take the secret passageway to make it in time. Raven and Anya wanted us to go.”

I don’t want to think of them right now. Lexa stared at her, trying to control her breathing, heart still thrumming in her chest. “Clarke, you were banned. And we have detention, we have to finish cleaning these.”

Clarke shrugged. “So?”
Lexa’s lips curved in a slow smile. “See. I told you. You’re trouble.”

Clarke smirked. “Wanna find out?”

Lexa nearly swallowed her tongue.

* * \(/_/\*. *

They snuck past Professor Cartwig, who was buried behind a mound of papers to grade, and hurried to Ravenclaw Tower. Clarke answered a riddle and led Lexa in quietly through the common room and up a spiral staircase, where Lexa tried very hard not to look at the ass swaying above her, and into the empty dormitory room, where Lexa stopped short.

This was all Lexa knew:

There was something magical about this room, and it was almost ironic, because compared to the rest of the castle, it was technically nothing special. It was just a tower, with a plush star-dotted navy-blue carpet that nearly mirrored the twinkling ceiling above, enchanted to reflect the night sky just like the one in the hall where they ate. There were half a dozen four-poster beds draped in cobalt curtains that subtly glittered, as though adorned with countless tiny stars. The windows were wide and tall, so the stars were clearly visible all around them. Everything about this room spoke of stillness and awe, of quiet introspection and connection with the outside world. Of the world above and all its wonders.

And Clarke stood in the middle of it all, golden hair starlit beneath the enchanted ceiling just as it had been atop the Astronomy Tower. Her eyes were wide and dark, scattered stars reflecting in blown pupils peeking through her lashes. She looked beautiful, otherworldly even, and Lexa was not at all prepared for this.

Wasn’t prepared for the beauty of this room or of Clarke, wasn’t prepared for Clarke to slowly approach her with those quiet, curious eyes, wasn’t prepared for the sharp intake of breath that caught in her throat or the way she trembled where she stood, torn between wanting to step back and step forward. She was helpless to do anything but stand there, lips parted and eyes zeroed in on Clarke’s, darting between her intense gaze and those pink lips…
“Lexa…” Clarke began, and Lexa couldn’t take it anymore.

She emptied the space between them, reached out, and slipped shaky hands into soft golden tresses. She kissed Clarke, and it felt like coming home.

* * /♡/ * *

It was funny, almost—Clarke knew, rationally, that she’d never been in love. She'd thought it, three or four years ago, when she'd been fifteen and young and thought the pounding of her heart and a charming smile meant love, but Finn was the farthest thing from her mind right now. It was, as she'd said, almost funny, because it took eighteen years, a turn of chaos, and a pretty Durmstrang girl with green eyes and the softest lips for her to realize that she'd never been in love. Every kiss before this had been wrong. The second thing she realized was that there was another question burning on the tip of her tongue— was it possible to fall in love with a single kiss?

She stood frozen in place, stunned, as though the whole sky had just broken wide above her, and maybe they were still standing on the Astronomy tower, or maybe they had flown right through the rooftops. There was no sound left in the world save for her blood rushing in her ears and her heart bursting in her fingertips. There was no breath left, until Lexa's mouth parted her lips and she inhaled sharply, echoed by Lexa's quiet gasp, and Clarke pushed in closer, tongue sliding against a plump bottom lip before she could even give any conscious thought to it. Hands threaded through golden hair and she was lost to this and entirely uncaring, because if this were what being lost meant, she would gladly stay this way.

Lexa kissed her slowly, softly, as though this was something holy, and Clarke breathed deeply through her nose and flexed her hand open on Lexa's cloak, fingers splaying wide before digging in, grounding herself to something before her head spun her away untethered.

Clarke was reeling. That was probably the simplest way of putting it. Her surroundings blurred into streaks of gold and blue and brown and green as her eyes fluttered shut, brows raised, as the softest, plushest lips she'd ever felt pressed against her own, and oh my God. She had wasted six days of her life not doing this sooner.

She inhaled through her nose, pressing in more firmly to stay connected with Lexa, who was holding her in place with the loveliest mix of delicate control. Clarke’s head spun, and then she kissed her
back, and suddenly time continued on, bringing with it a rush of heat that coursed through her veins and flooded to the fingertips; it was like the fabric of the entire universe rushed back to be stitched into place around them, and she didn’t know what this meant, but she knew she was supposed to be here. She was meant to be right here, right now, kissing Lexa and letting the rest of the earth drop away.

Clarke parted her lips, lifting her chin to softly encase that plump bottom lip between hers, and it was her turn to take a breath, because Lexa’s tongue swept out to meet hers, bringing with it another potent swoop to Clarke’s stomach, and God, Clarke wasn’t sure she’d survive this. Her hand slipped up, thumb brushing the strong cut of Lexa’s jaw, over the ridge of a delicate little ear, back to feather through the small, soft curls of hair and cup around the back of Lexa’s neck. Lexa’s tongue rolled against hers and she tightened her grip, tugged, swallowing the tiny sound Lexa made in the back of her throat and feeling it quake down the entirety of her body before making its home between her legs. She dropped her mouth open to suck in shaky breaths and Lexa took advantage and sank her teeth into Clarke’s bottom lip and pulled, suckling it gently, then harder when Clarke tightened her grip on her hair again until she fisted it and turned, leading Lexa backwards until she stepped on the curtains and they fell around them, and the backs of her knees knocked into Clarke’s four-poster bed and they fell back on the mattress, Lexa landing with a quiet huff that was quickly inhaled again as a sharp gasp when Clarke fell between her legs.

The kiss deepened, turned harder, more desperate. Lexa’s legs fell wide open and Clarke couldn’t help grinding into her, greedily swallowing Lexa’s gasps, one hand braced above her on the bed and the other tugging on the clasp of Lexa’s Durmstrang cloak, undoing it and slipping under the hem of her top. Lexa’s hands jumped up from where they’d been grasping Clarke’s hips to encourage her grinding, sliding up over her soft belly and higher, catching Clarke’s gag in her mouth when she kneaded over her breasts, straining against the fabric of her bra. Clarke knew Lexa had to have used a nonverbal spell because her hands were currently trailing south but her bra unclasped; Clarke broke the kiss for a second to yank her cloak off and then lift her arms so Lexa could tug her shirt up and off, quickly followed by her bra. Pouty lips were attached to her nipple before Clarke had even lowered herself down yet.

Lexa’s top went next, followed by her own bra, and Clarke laved her tongue over one nipple while she stroked the other with her right hand, using her left to tug on the button of Lexa’s trousers, and maybe she wasn’t as great at multitasking as Lexa because she couldn’t even think of a spell as she struggled to undo the button. Lexa eventually helped her, hands slipping free from where they’d been squeezing the firm flesh of Clarke’s ass beneath her pants. She tugged the pants off those long legs and lost whatever remaining breath she had left when Lexa’s legs fell open for her. She was slick and wet and ready and Clarke was—

Clarke was being flipped over. She was dazed enough that it took her a second to realize Lexa was pulling her jeans off her, and then she was crying out and arching her back, because Lexa had bent down to press a open-mouthed kiss to the damp fabric of Clarke’s panties before she withdrew again to tug them off. Then she placing gentle hands on Clarke’s thighs to urge them apart, and Clarke had only a moment to watch the way thick brown curls scattered over pale skin as Lexa lowered her head between her legs before she was otherwise occupied.
She arched into the wet seal of Lexa’s mouth, the flat of her tongue as she licked through her. Long fingers curled over her thighs as Lexa pressed her palms there, softly pushing them open wider. A skillful tongue lapped at her swollen clit before trailing down, teasing around the edges of her entrance for a moment, and Clarke let out a choked, strangled sound as her breath caught in her throat at the sensation of Lexa pushing her tongue inside her.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

Hands shifted from her thighs to her ass, curving beneath to take a handful and push her up, lifting her higher so Lexa could plunge her tongue as deeply as it could go. The tip of a nose brushed across Clarke’s clit and she couldn’t prevent the low groan from leaving her, couldn’t prevent the rocking of her hips that had her pushing down harder onto Lexa’s face. One of Lexa’s hands released its hold on her to snake up her side and then there were fingertips rubbing a nipple until it became a stiff peak to pluck at, and Clarke was losing it. Never mind the fact that she hadn’t had sex in over a year; Lexa knew what she was doing, hand never too rough or too gentle, lithe tongue undulating at just the right pace, and the heat building at the base of Clarke’s spine and the pit of her stomach was enough to have her breath catch all over again.

One of Clarke’s hands reached up to slam a white-knuckled grip on the frame of her four-poster bed, the other growing lost in the silky strands of Lexa’s hair, tugging at them insistently, nearly delirious with the pleasure radiating through her body at the way Lexa was setting it on fire. Lexa moved her other hand around to press a thumb to her clit, drawing another gasp from Clarke and arching her spine again, and Lexa responded with a low groan that echoed up Clarke’s spine. Her hips juddered as Lexa withdrew her tongue to lick through her again, thumb rubbing slow, tight circles around her, and Clarke’s hips rolled into her face, chasing the wet glide until suddenly her tongue was back inside her and her clit was pulsating beneath the pad of Lexa’s thumb and she was coming, she was coming, every muscle in her body clenching and growing taut, eyes slamming shut to the white haze dancing behind her eyelids, and then flying open again, unfocused and pupils blown wide, mouth hanging open in a silent cry, back arched, feeling certain for at least half a second that she could physically fly up through that enchanted ceiling right now.

She melted back down, body twitching as Lexa pressed one last soft kiss to her before she lifted her head. Her face was wet and gleaming and gave Clarke a fresh wave of want just to look at. Clarke held her heavy-lidded gaze, sucking in air, and licked her lips because now it was her turn, and God, trust her when she claims she’s been waiting for this moment her entire life.

She flipped them over, swaying dangerously off the bed before Lexa yanked her back over; it was only one small bed after all. Lexa’s ass landed in the puddle Clarke had left behind, and she didn’t seem to mind, if the wild, pupil-blown gaze was any indication.
“Wanna be inside you,” mumbled Clarke, lips drifting between Lexa’s cleavage, a tongue dipping out to glide over the soft curve of the underside of her breast. Blunt nails raked down the quivering muscles of Lexa’s abdomen. “Is that okay?”

Lexa seemed incapable of speech, nodding frantically, and Clarke sucked a kiss into the column of her throat as she trailed her finger along Lexa’s slit, biting back a moan because God, Lexa was so wet. She rubbed soft, lazy circles over her swollen clit and swallowed each of the low moans Lexa gave her before slipping two fingers inside her and swallowing her gasp. Warmth and wet enveloped her fingers, sucking them in as she began to move slowly, pumping in and out, gradually increasing her pace as she pressed kisses to a sharp jawline, defined collarbones, stiff nipples and clenched abdomen muscles, her belly button and her hip bone and then, finally, wrapped her lips around her pulsing clit. Lexa’s answering cry sent another flood of arousal through her and she kept going, eagerly lapping at her, trailing her tongue though wet folds before sucking her clit into her mouth and curving her fingers and pounding into her. She watched it build, watched her hips jerk and her stomach clench and unclench. Her chest stillled as she stopped breathing and her muscles fluttered around Clarke’s fingers, and then—she broke.

She eased her through it, slowing her pace as Lexa came down, though she did muffle a moan against her as she cleaned her up, which had Lexa’s hips twitching again.

She crawled up her body, pressing soft kisses to the corners of Lexa’s lips as her panting gradually subsided.

“Fuck,” breathed Lexa, and that’s how she sounded. Completely and utterly fucked.

Clarke nuzzled her nose into the warmth of where Lexa’s neck met her shoulder to hide her smile. Lexa’s breath hitched again when Clarke slotted a leg between Lexa’s and pitted her thigh forward. She leaned back a bit to look at her, basking in the pleasant fluttering of her heart, of her stomach, at how absolutely gorgeous Lexa looked, hair tousled and wild, lips red and kiss-bruised, cheeks flushed and eyes dark and wide.

“Think you can handle it again?”

Clarke’s mouth fell open, strangled gasp caught in her throat when a finger suddenly slipped inside her.

Lexa was watching her steadily with hooded eyes. “This okay?”
Clarke nodded, teeth biting hard into her bottom lip, and rolled her hips to take it in deeper. “Add another.”

Lexa did so, a slow smirk growing on her face even as she slipped another finger in and rotated, stretching her, and flicked against her clit with the top of her thumb, drawing another gasp from Clarke that bit off into a moan. Lexa’s other hand landed on the small of Clarke’s back to urge her forward to spread her legs and straddle to ride her fingers.

The second time was over twice as fast. Two fingers hooked and stroked deep inside her as a thumb pressed to her throbbing clit, and she only had time to suck in one smothered gasp before the tension coiling inside her shattered. Her back arched and her head was thrown back as she came, white-hot waves rolling and crashing their way through her body with enough force and intensity for her to feel as though she’d been flung straight through the star-strewn ceiling.

When she recovered, she wasn’t at all surprised to find that the ache in her belly was still there, more insistent than ever. She should have known after a solid week of sexual tension, two orgasms wouldn’t be enough to stave off this sudden addiction she’d developed. She had a feeling nothing would ever be enough to stave off an addiction to Lexa period, but she’d think about that later; right now, she reached down to let her fingers trip and slide into her new favorite place. Lexa bit back her moan.

“I told you you’re trouble,” said Lexa breathlessly, before hooking a leg around her and pulling her in close.

* * / ⊕ / * *

“Um, Clarke? Clarke.”

Clarke stirred, curling into the warm weight of the person next to her. Then someone poked her arm.

“Clarke?” whispered Fox.

Clarke’s eyes snapped open to see Fox standing there awkwardly, hand cupping her eyes. Lexa was still asleep beside her, an arm tucked snugly beneath Clarke’s breasts and one leg flung carelessly
over her waist, pressing uncomfortably on her full bladder.

“Um, just letting you know most of us are back from Hogsmeade and…er, well, you might want to put some clothes on. “I’ll let the other girls know to…er…give you a minute.”

“Um.” Clarke licked her lips and swallowed, painfully aware of the delicious tang on her lips that belonged to the girl sleeping beside her. “Okay. Thanks.”

Fox nodded and quickly walked out, nearly walking into her bed before she freed her eyes. She left the room and Clarke looked at Lexa again.

She was struck again by just how gorgeous Lexa was. She had a profile that could have been carved straight from magic, it was so flawless. Trembling, slightly, Clarke drifted her fingertips across Lexa’s face, tucking a brown curl behind her ear. She didn’t want to get up—if anything, she’d rather continue what they’d been doing not too long ago and have another round, or even just go back to sleep, since that meant she wouldn’t have to really wake up and face the reality of the situation. But there were other Ravenclaws waiting to get to their beds, and Clarke really, really needed to pee.

“Lexa?” she whispered, softly brushing her face again. “Hey. Lexa.”

Lexa didn’t wake up quite as peacefully as Clarke had. Her eyes snapped open and she nearly yelped, yanking her limbs back from Clarke—which shoved Clarke straight off the bed. She fell hard onto her stomach, air leaving her with a heavy huff.


“Mmm. It’s okay.” Clarke rubbed her elbow that had taken most of the fall. “A little warning next time.”

They both stilled at those words. Next time. Would there be? They shouldn’t, but—

Clarke’s next thoughts were interrupted as a glint of light caught her eye. Frowning, she lowered her head and examined under her bed for a moment before scooting over and reaching in, craning her arm to grab whatever it was, and started slightly at the strange tingle that coursed up her arm when she grabbed it. She pulled out a small tin she had never seen in her life, and a little glass vial with a name scrawled onto it…wait—
“Uh, Lexa? Did you drop this?”

Lexa took the vial full of some silvery liquid and frowned down at it. “No…” she began slowly.

Clarke, meanwhile, had opened the tin, which appeared to already be half-open, and pulled out three more glass vials. *Luna…Evie…Clarke.*

What the hell?

“Clarke, I don’t know where this came from,” said Lexa, looking alarmed and possibly even a bit frightened, holding the bottle as though it was going to blow up on her.

“This one has my name on it, and I’ve never seen it before either! What’s in them?” she said curiously, bringing it close to her face to gaze inside it.

“Memories,” said Lexa, voice so quiet it was nearly a whisper. “They…they look like memories.”

“Why was this under my bed? How did it have our names on it?” She glanced at the other two bottles remaining in the tins. “Who are Luna and Evie? I don’t know a Luna or an Evie.” Her face creased as she remembered. “Well, wait, there’s that Evie that owns the pub. The…” She blinked. “The Three Broomsticks.”

Lexa stared at her. “That big secret Anya and Raven were talking about…” she began slowly. “You don’t think…?”

Clarke looked down at the memories. Without another word, she stood up and walked over to Raven’s nightstand and opened the drawer. She brought the pensive over to her bed Lexa still stretched out naked upon and dropped it down, opening the stopper of her vial and dumping the contents into the bowl. Lexa just stared at her, lips parted.

“There’s one way to find out.”

Chapter End Notes
wow that was a ride (a nearly 50,000 chapter ride to be exact, I think the word count was like 49,700ish).

We have one more chapter to wrap this shin dig up and it should be pretty quick. The real final showdown was in chapter 20; since they're a step ahead they should be okay with taking care of everyone; there's just one big bad left to deal with really...Alie.

Originally I had planned on ending this fic after chapter 20 and then starting a sequel where it basically restarts but I'm happy I went with this instead, it's better this way. There will be one more chapter and then I'm going to write an epilogue too. I might one day add another part to this series where I just post random scenes, such as possible alternate timelines, stuff that happens in the future, etc. We'll see! :)

Please drop a comment to let me know what you think. I'm dying to know how this chapter is received. I love you guys, thank you for reading!
Endless Constellations

Chapter Summary

Love is strength. Always.

Chapter Notes

1. The dedication of this chapter is split in seven ways: to my wife, to Clexa, to HP, to the tacos at Los Potros, to fuzzy socks on cold days, to Lexa who deserved better, and to you, if you have stuck with these useless gay dorks until the very end.

2. I'm sorry, I should have worded it better in the previous chapter (I went back and did so); I meant that the final showdown was in chapter 20, and in this chapter things are wrapped up fairly quickly. But *cough* this is nearly 60k so not really as quickly as I planned, lol

3. 60K GOOD LORD. And literally 85% of this is pure FLUFF. I haven't even had a chance to read over this and I'm posting it anyway (lbr that's nothing new) since I work tomorrow. Also I made a big gifset for this fic and it's kind of like a movie, it's so cool :D Link at the top of this chapter! Check it out plz I worked so hard on it ahaahah

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I took the stars from my eyes, and then I made a map
And knew that somehow I could find my way back
Then I heard your heart beating, you were in the darkness too
So I stayed in the darkness with you

-Florence + the Machine

Those Icy Fingers Gifset
“There’s one way to find out.”

Silence swelled between them, crackling with intensity. There was excitement on Clarke’s part—curiosity with certainty behind it, the urge to solve the puzzle with the comforting knowledge that whatever this was had to do with Raven, and therefore it was safe.

Lexa did not share such delusions.

“Wait,” she said quickly, leaning over to put a hand on Clarke’s forearm. “Hang on. We can’t—Clarke, half your dormitory is standing outside the door waiting for us.”

Clarke glanced over her shoulder, then back at Lexa, a quizzical crease between her brows. “So? This should only take half a second, right? Raven looks through her memories all the time, it takes her no time at all.”

“This—it could be different. If…” Lexa trailed off, dark reluctance and foreboding creeping over her
Lexa had grown up with a man who spent an inordinate amount of time trying to convince her, sometimes bluntly and sometimes in quiet, offhanded comments, that she would be a stronger person without her emotional baggage. When she was eleven, she considered it, angrily thought she’d be better off without the memories of the parents who possibly never loved her anyway, and had been about to consent to their removal when Indra and Gustus burst into the room. They were more livid than Lexa had ever seen them. Titus grew angry too, when they confronted him. He was only trying to help.

That night, Gustus lingered with Lexa after her late training. He explained to her that while Titus was an important leader and they must follow his instruction, he could also often lose sight of what truly mattered in life by focusing so intently on the bigger picture. Gustus told her memories are what made them who they are, that their past experiences are what stitch them together and without them, how would they ever learn from life? Titus never outright asked Lexa to allow him to remove them again, but he still made a few comments here and there. When she and Costia dated, the comments grew more frequent as he strongly hinted that her attachment to Costia gave her a weakness the queen could exploit. Lexa always paid them little heed. It would have to be a truly cold world before she would ever consider giving her memories up.

The impatient rap at the door had them jumping.

“Clarke, are you guys, um, decent?”

“One sec,” Clarke called back. Her eyes were such a vivid blue in contrast to the flush that still lingered on her cheeks that they almost glowed in the dimness of the room. “Okay look, let’s just… let’s get dressed and go somewhere we can figure this out, okay?”

Lexa nodded, carefully placing the bottle down on the bed as she climbed off it and darted around the room plucking up the various articles of clothing scattered around it. Clarke returned her memories back into the bottle she’d spilled them from and set it and the tin beside Lexa’s bottle before she began pulling her own clothes back on. Lexa averted her gaze, mouth going dry as bare skin flashed at her before being covered up. Her stomach and her heart both fluttered, and she
internally chastised herself for her ability to be so gay she could barely function even with the dread still flooding through her directed at that tiny, seemingly-harmless bottle.

Lexa clutched it tightly again when Clarke handed it to her before the dormitory door swung open and girls poured inside, all looking exhausted. A few shot them scowls for being made to wait, but most peered curiously at them as they began readying themselves for bed.

“Fox, has Raven came back yet?” asked Clarke.

“Oh, not this again,” muttered the red-haired girl who’d just pulled back the curtains of her bed two away from Clarke’s. She sighed. “No. Last I saw her she was in the Three Broomsticks with that… Durmstrang girl.”

Lexa’s brows rose slightly at the bitterness in the girl’s voice as she said those last two words, and the way she slanted a waspish glare at Lexa as she said them, as though Lexa were partly to blame.

“I heard she got everyone kicked out of the pub,” said another student casually.

Clarke frowned. “What?”

The girl nodded. “Yeah, I ran into Trina and Pascal at Arker’s and they said it was crazy. Apparently John Murphy got into a brawl with the barkeep and then she kicked everyone out except for him, Raven, and that Durmstrang girl she’s been snogging all over the castle.”

While the other students launched into gossip, Lexa exchanged an alarmed look with Clarke, who shook her head once before springing into action. Clarke grabbed her broomstick and the one behind Raven’s bed before she inclined her head to gesture for Lexa to follow her. They hurried out of the dorm and down the spiral staircase, shuffling past a few more tired students. Clarke led her over to one of the windows in the common room and set the broomsticks against the desk set against the wall.

“Whatever these are must have something to do with Raven,” said Clarke as she carefully tucked the tin and bottles into her cloak pocket and ran her wand over the seam to seal them inside, “It makes sense. Something weird is going on with her and Anya, I mean the moment you guys arrived, they disappeared together and now they’re inseparable. Then we meet Evie Potter, who happens to own the pub where Raven and Anya are having some important meeting they’re begging us to come to… and all three of us have bottled memories with our names on them? Under my bed?” Clarke shook
her head as she distractedly fastened her cloak; Lexa swallowed thickly as Clarke reached over and began doing up Lexa’s own cloak for her, apparently without much conscious thought. “I don’t know who that Luna is or what’s going on, but it’s too much of a coincidence to think it doesn’t have anything to do with Raven and Anya.” She glanced at the clock hanging above the fireplace before meeting Lexa’s gaze. “Do you think we can make it?”

“If we fly fast,” said Lexa, looking dubiously at the brooms Clarke had propped up against the writing desk behind her. One Firebolt Bullet and a Nimbus 3000. Not the best of brooms. Certainly not as good as the Supernova Seven she had tucked away beneath her bed on the ship; it was top of the line and the best birthday gift she’d ever received in her life. It was from Anya, whose parents and grandmother had left her enough gold to probably buy the entire student body of Hogwarts a solid-gold cauldron each. But sneaking back onto the ship at this time of night would only get them caught by Indra, who would most definitely not approve of them flying off to Hogsmeade again and would sniff out any lie they gave her in a heartbeat.

Inferior brooms it is.

“Let’s go then,” said Clarke, handing her the Nimbus. Lexa turned to the window but stopped short when Clarke crossed the room instead, heading toward the door. She glanced back when Lexa just stood there. “We can’t fly off the school grounds, Kane has enchantments in place, remember? We’ll have to take the secret passageway again. We’ll just fly down it to make it quicker.”

Right, of course. Lexa blamed the orgasms and pretty blue eyes on her inability to remember that, and hastened after Clarke.

They reached the hallway and entered the tunnel without running into anyone (Lexa was especially thankful they didn’t come across that poltergeist again). When they landed in the tunnel, Lexa had hardly dusted herself off and stepped forward before Clarke’s hand landed on her arm.

“Hey, wait.”

Lexa turned, breath catching in her throat when she realized how closely Clarke was standing next to her; she hadn’t even heard her approach. Wide blue eyes looked up at her, dark in the dimness, and Lexa couldn’t stop her gaze from trailing down to linger over the purple and red splotches dotting her neck. Her heart swelled with warmth.

“I just—is it okay if I kiss you?”
The quiet expulsion of air leaving Lexa’s nostrils in amusement had the nervousness fading from those blue eyes, replaced by something fond and soft and—Lexa probably shouldn’t think too hard about it, right now. “Of course it’s okay. You don’t—you don’t have to ask, for…” Future references. Would there be future…? After what they’d shared…this entire week, really. Lexa never knew she could connect with someone this way. She couldn’t even believe that over a week ago, she’d never even met Clarke before. In a way, it felt as though her entire life had built up to this, and didn’t even truly start until the moment they quite literally collided on the grounds, beneath the stars stretched out above them.

But how do you word that? How can you even say something like that? It was too soon. It had to be too soon. Right?

Lexa gave a shaky exhale as Clarke reached up, gently traced her fingertips over the curve of Lexa’s cheek, the angle of her jaw. When the pad of Clarke’s thumb brushed across her lips, she kissed it. “Later, we’ll have to talk about this,” said Clarke, voice hardly a whisper even though the tunnel was quiet and empty, “For now…” She leaned forward and fit their mouths together, and oh. It felt just like the first, that strange little feeling of oh…there you are.

Lexa dropped her broomstick and slipped her hand into Clarke’s hair, the back of which was still damp with sweat from earlier. She shuddered as Clarke licked into her mouth, tugging her insistently closer, teeth grazing her bottom lip, swallowing the little noise Clarke made in response. “Um.” Clarke caught her breath, forehead pressed to Lexa’s and hand splayed open on her shoulder, gripping the deep red of her scarf. “I…God. We better go, or I’m never going to be able to stop.”

“Not sure why that’s a bad thing,” murmured Lexa, bumping her nose against Clarke’s as she tilted her head to press another soft, lingering kiss to her swollen lips.

“Because of this,” Clarke closed her hand over Lexa’s other hand—the one still fisted around the glass vial. Lexa’s heart seized at the reminder. “I could tell it upset you. I don’t want you to worry.” Lexa swallowed thickly. “So let’s go. Maybe after we figure this out…” Clarke trailed off suggestively, nudging Lexa’s nose and dropping another kiss on her that was brief save for the slick flick of her tongue against her upper lip that had Lexa’s stomach lurching pleasantly. “We could spend some more time together.”

Lexa squeezed Clarke’s hip to steady herself, licking her lips and tasting Clarke all over again. “I’m not opposed to that.”
“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Clarke’s hum bit off into a frustrated half-groan as she stepped back; her pupils were blown and her cheeks were flushed. “Come on, let’s get out of here before I take your clothes off.”

Lexa’s lips quirked as she picked up her broom and swung a leg over it as Clarke did the same. “Wouldn’t be opposed to that either.”

“Shush it.”

They rose into the air and exchanged a last smile before gliding forward.

They had barely flown a half a dozen feet when alarms suddenly pierced the air, a shrill wailing so loud it was deafening, and caused both of them to jerk on their broom handles and careen into the walls. Clarke crashed to the ground, twisting so she didn’t land on the tin in her pocket, and Lexa just barely managed to remain on her own broom.

“It’s a caterwauling charm,” shouted Lexa, meeting Clarke’s wild, panicked eyes. “Your headmaster—"

“Is right here!”

They turned, and even Lexa was somewhat horrified to see Headmaster Kane approaching them, hands on his hips, looking absolutely livid.

Clarke didn’t even bother getting to her feet. She just rolled over and put her hands over her face. It still didn’t quite muffle her long “Fuuuuuck.”
“I’ll be back tonight at the latest.”

“I don’t understand. What’s so important you have to leave ship?”

Rivers clicked her tongue in exasperation as she clasped the buttons of her traveling cloak. “None of your business, Tomac, stop being a nosy git and get to work.”

Tomac gave a frustrated huff of breath, frowning down at his feet when the wood beneath them shuddered. Who the hell thought using wooden ships to transport a fire-breathing dragon was a good thing? Even if they were magically reinforced, something about it still had the hair on the back of his neck standing up. And now knowing miss dragon-whisperer herself Luna Rivers, their supervisor and the head of this expedition, was mysteriously Disapparating off for an untold amount of time, leaving him here in charge?

His magic had never exactly been the greatest; he’d been a solid E and P student in school. Truth be told, the animals breaking free weren’t his concern. It was the racist new guy, Quint, who was currently leaning against the mizzenmast with his arms folded beneath his chest, watching them out of the corner of narrowed eyes.

“If you have time to huff and puff like a child, you have time to work.” Rivers smirked at him and he shook his head; she was a stubborn pain in the ass at times, but she was a good boss. His first job with her, he watched her single-handedly fight off half a dozen Quintapeds when they accidentally ended up on the Isle of Drear during their quest delivering mooncalves and nogtails to a magizoologist residing in Dunnet Head. He admired someone so bold. “Keep the new recruits in shape. I should be back soon.”

The pop of magic as she Disapparated was quiet amongst the rhythmic sloshing of waves against the ship. Tomac shook his head again and turned back to face Quint.

“Right, come on. We’ll feed Rudy while the others deal with the dragon and that godforsaken gorilla.”

He led them a couple trapdoors, descending deeper into the bowels of the ship until they reached the wide cell with a singular cage nestled in the corner. They weaved their way through countless large, wooden crates over to it, and set to work opening the two crates nearest.
“Isn’t Rivers supposed to be the one doing this?” asked Quint in irritation minutes later, biceps flexing as he hauled a crate over. “Where’d she go, anyway?”

“No idea,” answered Tomac as he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped his sweaty forehead. “Bit odd, really. An owl arrived for her a couple days ago and whatever was in that letter had her spooked, lass looked as if she’d seen a ghost.”

“That the day she spent hours pacing in her room?” grunted Quint, cracking open the case and peering inside. His lip curled in repulsion as the eye-watering stench of raw fish filled his nostrils. He wasn’t about to touch that. He rapped his wand against the wood and hovered the fish over.

Tomac stiffened. “Ah, Rudy’s not the biggest fan of magic, we usually do it by hand.”

“Do I look like I give a fuck?”

Tomac bit his tongue and watched as what appeared to be a single boulder sitting in the center of the cage quivered before springing up to reveal the “boulder” was actually an oversized gray head sitting atop a small, hairy body. Razor-sharp little teeth flashed at the creature leapt into the air, clawing at the fish floating above it. Rage was easily visible in its beady eyes. Tomac took a wide step back, already perfectly aware of what the Russian demon was about to do.

Quint barely managed to lift his wand in time as raw fish was flung at his head. It exploded into a hundred tinier pieces against the shield he produced, splattering all over the floor and the ceiling. Quint lowered his wand, glaring.

“I told you,” said Tomac, barely able to suppress the laughter in his voice as the pogrebin bared its teeth and hissed at Quint, “Ru’s not a fan, he was raised in captivity so he’s a spoiled arse. You have to put it on a plate and slip it in—“

“And I’m supposed to do it your way, am I?” snarled Quint.

Tomac frowned. “Rivers left me in charge—“

“Sorry to break it to you mate, but I’m not about to follow orders from a waste of space like you.”
Quint sneered, not sticking around to relish the offended scowl on Tomac’s face as he spun on his heel and headed back up the ladder.

An empty deck and an open sea greeted him. Glancing around warily, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small two-way mirror. He tapped his wand on the glassy surface and murmured, “Hey, it happened.”

Only a few seconds passed before his reflection shimmered and then disappeared, replaced by another.

“Report?”

“Rivers is gone, just like you said. Randomly Disapparated not too long ago.”

“Did she mention where to?”

“No. Apparently she received an owl. She was shifty about it, wouldn’t say what it was or where she’s heading, but said she’d be back tonight.”

“Right. You’ve done an excellent job, Quint. You will be richly rewarded for this.”

Quint rubbed the back of his neck, the stench of fish still burning his nostrils. “Thanks, boss. Do I have to stick around or am I good to go?”

“Keep playing your part for just a little while longer. If I can’t locate Ms. Rivers in time tonight, your presence at the ship will be useful. I may need more from you. Understood?”

“Yes, boss.”

The image of Thelonious Jaha froze on the mirror before vanishing, leaving only Quint’s own reflection staring back at him. Sighing, he tucked it back into his pocket and looked out to sea.
The bottle was still clenched in Lexa’s sweaty palm as she walked across the grounds toward the ship. Kane hadn’t actually raged at Clarke as long as she’d expected, but the fact that he was so furious and baffled he could hardly speak may have had something to do with that. He clearly still had more trust in Lexa, because he ordered her to return immediately to the ship on her own. Then again, that was probably because he trusted Clarke less—he announced he’d be personally walking her back to the tower to ensure she actually gets in bed, and locking the door behind her, evidently hoping it would also annoy her dormmates, who would shame Clarke to further punish her. As if taking away her broom (and Raven’s, evidently thinking it to be Lexa’s) and threatening them that if they so much as touch another broom he’d know about it, and declaring he would be banning flying at Hogwarts for the next two weeks, wasn’t bad enough. If the whole of the school didn’t kill Clarke for taking away their flying privileges, Octavia certainly would (according to an increasingly outraged Clarke).

Lexa couldn’t exactly blame him for being furious at them, but she was also certain he would be speaking to Indra as soon as the opportunity presented itself, and that would be a thorn in her side. She didn’t have time for lectures. She needed to find out what these memories were, and she needed to do that now, and Anya and Raven were her best bet so far. So…apologies to Headmaster Kane, but Lexa wasn’t going to bed. And neither was Clarke.

When she noticed the winged creature swooping over the forest treetops, she knew: there was still a way. She walked around to the western side of the castle, coming to a halt just before the biggest tower. She took a deep breath as she looked up at it, neck craning. Flying was one thing. Being so high up without a means was another.

She twirled her wand around herself and murmured a disillusionment charm, ignoring the odd sensation of cold trickling over her body, and then added, “Alarte Ascendare. Arresto Momentum.”

The stars twinkled above as she slowly rose into the sky, shivering slightly in the cool night air. Once she finally reached the top of the tower, she hooked a foot on the windowsill and pulled, floating to each window until she found the one just before Clarke’s bed. It was fortunate she thought to disguise herself because Kane was still there. All the Ravenclaws were awake, watching with mounting alarm as Kane and Clarke argued. Kane left closing the door behind him (holding half a dozen brooms in his arms), and then it was Clarke arguing with several very grumpy girls, and Lexa wasn’t willing to listen to any more of it. She twirled her wand to remove the Disillusionment charm; as she suddenly appeared, a few girls facing the window squealed and squawked; the one called Fox even fell off her bed as she flailed. Lexa still rapped on the window to hurry the process as Clarke turned to see the source of the commotion. Her eyes nearly bugged out of her head when she saw Lexa floating there, a crease immediately forming in her brow as she ran to the window and flung it open.
“Lexa!” she exclaimed, half-leaning out the window to look down, appearing flabbergasted and not particularly happy with the fact that Lexa was freely floating so high up. “What the fuck! Get in here before you—“

“Take my hand,” said Lexa urgently, reaching out for her.

“I—what?”

“We’re still going,” she said impatiently, lifting the bottle out of her pocket and shaking it slightly before sticking it back inside. “Come on, hurry up.”

“How? We don't have any brooms! And we can’t just stroll off the grounds with the enchantments only he—”

“I have an idea, just come on, before your headmaster makes his way to mine!”

Still appearing stunned (though not so much as the other girls, all gaping at them), Clarke slipped her hand into Lexa’s.

“Clarke, no!” hissed Fox, scrambling to her feet and bounding to the window. “You can’t, you’re already in so much trouble! You could be killed—or worse, expelled!”

They ignored her. Lexa tapped her wand on Clarke’s forearm and murmured the spell, gently pulling her out to join her in the sky, holding her close. All the shocked girls behind her echoed Clarke’s gasp. Lexa rapped her wand on the both of them now, and this time said, “Descendio. Arresto momentum.”

As they slowly began to descend, Clarke shook her head, shock fading. Laughter bubbled out of her lips. “I can’t believe you.”

“Well, believe it, because we probably just landed ourselves with detention for the rest of the year.” Clarke laughed again, and harder still when Lexa arranged her face into stoicism and said seriously, “How am I supposed to win the Triwizard Tournament if I’m stuck scrubbing toilets with you, Clarke?”
Laughter fading into quiet giggles, Clarke leaned forward to brush a soft kiss across Lexa’s cheek. “I’d scrub toilets with you any day, Woods. Besides, who says it’ll be toilets? It’s a big castle. I can think of a dozen empty classrooms that could do with a cleaning…”

“Now you’re just lining us up for more work,” grumbled Lexa, turning her head prevent Clarke from seeing her smile; it didn’t work.

“It can be the sort of work you enjoy.”

“Is there such a thing?”

Clarke’s answering smirk sent a low pull through Lexa’s stomach, and Clarke didn’t miss the way Lexa pulled her even closer, breasts pressing together. Clarke took advantage, kissing the warm curve where neck met shoulder, smirk growing at Lexa’s barely suppressed shiver as she sucked and sank her teeth down.

“Behave,” said Lexa breathlessly as they landed and Clarke withdrew. She patted over her pocket again, making sure the vial was okay. “This way.”

She swung by the gamekeeper’s hut, noting the open window. She lifted her wand, used a nonverbal summon, and prayed something would fly out—to her relief, a large, dripping T-bone steak flew toward her; with another flick of her wand, it hovered in the air alongside her as she kept marching forward, ignoring the muttering of the nonplussed gamekeeper wondering why his fridge had just randomly burst open and meat went flying out the window.

“Uh…what’s going on?” said Clarke tentatively when Lexa led her straight to the forest. “Are we going into the forest? Because let me tell you, bad idea. Acromantulas, Red Caps, Blood-Sucking Bugbears, trolls, wolves, and about a hundred other things that wouldn’t mind killing us live in there.”

“Trust me, come on.”

It took another few minutes, along with plenty of ridiculous gentle tongue-clicking, but eventually a few shadowy figures loomed out of the darkness.
“Oh,” breathed Clarke as the five or so creatures approached them and halted around the floating meat, eating it from where it hung mid-air. “You can see them?”

Lexa nodded, moving forward to pat the smooth neck of the nearest thestral. “You can too?”

“Yeah. Since my third year. We hadn’t covered them in Care of Magical Creatures yet so it was a shock when I realized the carriages that took us up to the castle from the train weren’t horseless like I’d always thought.” Her lips twisted a little ruefully as she ran her fingers through the mane of the thestral before her. “My granddad. Old age, mostly. Heart attack. I was the only one in the room, my parents were at work, so…yeah.”

“I’m sorry,” murmured Lexa.

Clarke looked carefully over at her, eyes soft. “What about you?”

Lexa stilled for only a second before resuming her petting. The honest answer? More people than she could count, especially during Nia’s ambush last year during Christmas break, when the grounds of Durmstrang were filled with Order members dying during the duels, falling to the hands of Nia and Death Eaters alike. But she couldn’t mention that, and they weren’t the first deaths she’d seen anyway.

“Grandparents too,” she said quietly. She swallowed when Clarke’s hand landed on hers, squeezed gently.

“Wait,” Clarke caught on a second later, “You want to ride these to Hogsmeade?”

“Yes. I’m assuming Kane’s enchantments don’t extend to magical creatures such as this, otherwise they’d be constantly setting them off. Correct?”

Clarke’s shrug was more of a strange little twitch as she frowned uncertainly at the creatures. “Uh, potentially weird question, but. Have you done this before?”

“Can’t say I have. Perhaps we should take our own,” suggested Lexa as she critically studied the thestrals. “One might move slower with both our weight.”
“Great.” Clarke blew out a breath. She stared blankly at the nearest thestral before shaking her head and shrugging. “Okay, well. Let’s get this over with.”

Lexa helped her clamber up on its back before moving to her own and doing the same, scooting forward over a skeletal rump and tucking her knees behind wing joints, carefully winding the silken mane around her hands. She had no idea what to expect, but Titus was an avid fan of thestrals and spoke about them often, and according to him, thestrals are excellent at carrying riders to their destination. She leaned in close, encouragingly patting its sleek neck, and murmured, “The Three Broomsticks.”

The thestral hunkered low before springing straight up, climbing into the sky so quickly Lexa had to cling onto it so as not to slip right off. Clarke let out a shout of surprise behind her, but when she twisted round to check on her, she was fine, albeit white-faced and practically hugging the creature beneath her. Lexa turned to face forward again, wind rushing through her hair and stinging her eyes, her red scarf billowing behind her as they scaled higher into the night sky, the stars lighting their way.

*・゜・*°*°・゜・*

Anya drummed her fingers on the surface of the heavy oak table, watching the chaos around her with a bored expression. They’d been here for nearly forty minutes already and so far the only interesting thing that had happened was when the bartender—Evie Potter—threw a Hogwarts student bodily out of the pub for attempting to steal some dragonspirit. The pub was packed with students, along with an assortment of Durmstrangs and Beauxbatons. The chatter and laughter and scrape of chairs on the floor were enough to give anyone a headache. The fact that Raven had been jiggling her good leg and rapping the table did not help matters.

“Will you cut it out?” said Anya irritably as Raven’s jostling had the entire table wobbling again, nearly sending butterbeer slopping over the rims of the mugs. “You’re doing my head in.”

“Where is she?” hissed Raven in return, quite possibly for the tenth time. “It’s been half an hour! What if she doesn’t show? What do we do then?”

“I did warn you she could be halfway across the world right now. Who’s to say the owl has even reached her yet? And even if it had, that’s no promise she’ll decide to come. Not to say I told you so,” said Anya dryly, “But I told you so.
“Fuck.” Raven dropped her elbows onto the table and buried her face in her hands. “Fuck. What do we do? This was my only idea.”

“We’ll have to tell Clarke.” Anya shrugged, tipping back her mug of butterbeer. “It will hurt, but she had to find out eventually anyway. We can’t be cowards just because you don’t want to be the one to tell her.”

“Neither do you!”

“She’s your best friend.” Raven groaned, and Anya sighed. “Do you want me to get you a firewhisky?”

“Yes. Jesus.”

Shaking her head, Anya rose to her feet and squeezed past the tables before finally standing at the bar and waiting her turn. She drummed her fingers on the bar as she stood there waiting for Evie to finish tending the other customers, and then she began to contemplate… They couldn’t tell Evie anything, but perhaps they could at least ask her the whereabouts of her girlfriend.

“Hi there,” greeted Evie, swinging the washcloth she’d been wiping down the counter with over one shoulder and turning to face Anya with a bright smile. “What can I get you?”

“One bottle of firewhisky.”

Evie gave her a quick onceover as though to verify she was of age; Anya stared right back at her, apathetic. Evie smiled and nodded. “Ogden’s or Blishen?”

“Ogden’s. Your oldest.”

As Evie bent down under the counter to find a particularly dusty bottle, Anya leaned forward and said casually, “By the way, is Luna around?”

“Luna? Luna who?” asked Evie, voice echoing slightly in the cabinet below.
“Rivers.”

There was a bang so loud it caused some of those sitting at the bar to jolt, drinks slopping out of mugs, and look around to see what caused it. Evie withdrew holding her head, but there was no sign of pain on her face in favor of the blank shock washing over it.

“I—wait—what? I…what?”

“Luna Rivers,” repeated Anya, frowning now as she observed all the remaining color drain from Evie’s face. “Is she around?”

“How do you—I mean. How would I know…? Why would you think I…”

Anya stared at her, remembering the memories; Evie and Luna had loved each other, had known one another for years. “Aren’t you together? Dating?”

“Dating?” squeaked Evie, dropping her arm. She was still clutching the other bottle like it was a lifeline, and her mouth was hanging open.

*Shit.* “Nevermind. Here,” Anya tossed a galleon up on the countertop and left it clattering there as she slipped away, even though she didn’t grab the firewhisky. What kind of faulty intel had Raven given her? What the *fuck.*

“Wait,” Evie called after her, and this time there was another emotion infecting the astonishment; anger.

Fucking fantastic. Anya ignored her, making a beeline for she and Raven’s table.

Raven was still glum when Anya returned to her, face falling further when she spotted her empty hands. “I thought you were bringing back some firewhisky.”

“We have a problem—”
“What now?”

“I think your information was a little off,” said Anya quickly, but it was useless now because Evie had caught up, and she did not look happy. Anya sighed.

“Wait just a damn minute. How do you know Luna and I used to—” Evie scanned the room, appearing nervous someone might overhear, “—to date?”

“Used to?” said Raven, eyes widening.

Anya frowned at Evie, gears turning in her head, trying to make sense of this bizarre reaction. Surely not…but some people were still in the stone ages. “Are you in the closet?”

“No I’m not in the closet,” snapped Evie, “I don’t care who knows about my sexuality, but I do care who knows I once dated Luna Rivers! I’d like to know how you know that, as a matter of fact!”

Anya eyed Raven, who just gawked at Evie, mouth open but no sound coming out.

“I mean…uhm. Everyone knows that,” blustered Raven after a moment. Anya resisted the urge to drop her head on the table.

Evie flared up at once. “What do you mean everyone knows that?”

“Everyone knows Luna Rivers is a useless lesbian,” muttered someone at the table behind them. Any hopes it would be someone helpful were immediately squashed when Anya turned to see the student—Murphy, Anya recalled from vague memories that were not her own—that Evie had kicked out for stealing earlier; he’d clearly snuck back in, and by his expression, hadn’t realized Raven and Anya were in a discussion with the barkeep.

He flushed when Evie stiffened much the way a bloodhound does when it catches the scent of its prey. “You!”

“Er,” was all Murphy managed to say before he made a run for it, lunging forward and crashing down with a table before scrambling up, knocking another table over and barreling down the
Hogwarts students sitting there as he clambered to get away. Evie lunged forward too, seizing him by his shirt collar.

“So not just a thief, but a liar, too!” she snarled, pinning him against the wall; he had a split lip from where he fell into the table. “How do you know who Luna is? How do you know we were together and why are you running your mouth about it?”

“I didn’t fucking say anything! I don’t even know you—“

“You said you know Luna!”

“Yeah, Luna, not you!”

“How do you know Luna?”

“I met her at a party!” he yelled, finally shoving Evie off him. He glared at her, panting, pulling his cloak up. “My deadbeat dad threw a party a few years ago and I crashed it, okay? She was there. She was high and drunk as fuck but she still kicked my ass at Wizard’s Cards.”

“But…then…” Evie rounded on Raven and Anya again, who were both standing there stricken. “How do you know—“

The jingling of bells sounded as the door to the pub opened. They all turned to take in the sight of Luna Rivers. She hadn’t seen them yet; she was shaking the rain off her boots and tucking her wand back into her cloak pocket. When she looked up, she froze.

Evie froze.

And Raven and Anya were practically statues by this point.

They all stared at one another, until finally Murphy muttered, “Gay,” and slipped out from under Evie’s arm, stumbling away. Evie let him, unable to tear her gaze off Luna even if she wanted to.
“What the hell?” said Luna finally, brow knitting as she took in the odd scene; an eerily silent bar, everyone staring; the upturned tables; the blood on Murphy’s face; the disheveled Evie hardly a foot away.

Evie was so pale she was half a step from turning full ghost, but she still found her voice, enough to shout, “Everyone out. Right now. Except you three,” she added, sternly looking between Raven, Anya, and Murphy.

The other customers hastened to file out, some Hogwarts students who knew Raven shooting her questioning glances, some appearing positively gleeful at the scandalizing situation. Luna stepped in so they could all shoulder past her, still looking at Evie in astonishment.

“Luna,” said Evie, though her voice was so faint Anya was certain no one but she and Raven could hear her since they stood right next to her.

“Evie…?” Luna shook her head, having trouble processing this situation. “Did you write that letter?”

“Letter?” Evie numbly shook her head. “I…no. I didn’t…I had no idea you…I…” She cleared her throat, trying to salvage what was left of her dignity.

“Murphy?” frowned Luna, finally noticing the boy.

“Hey,” he said, lifting a hand in a meek, half-hearted wave.

“Why—“

“I was the one who wrote you the letter,” said Raven, glancing at Murphy. “He doesn’t have anything to do with this.”

“Yeah, I was just sitting here minding my own business before I was attacked. Crazy bitch,” he grouses, wiping his bloody chin; he flinched and scrambled away when Evie turned toward him.

“In fact, he needs to leave,” said Raven pointedly.
Now Murphy hesitated, a frown on his lips and his eyes narrowed, clearly suspicious and keen to know just what the hell all of this was about. When Raven, Anya, Luna, and Evie all glared at him, he rolled his eyes and slouched out of the pub, muttering darkly under his breath the whole way.

The door swung shut, leaving them standing feet apart facing one another in a tense silence.

Luna narrowed her eyes and tilted her head, studying them. “What’s going on?”

Yes, Anya couldn’t help but to wonder the same. This entire plan was based on Luna…they hadn’t been certain they could trust Evie yet, weren’t sure whether she’d side with her girlfriend or Jamie when it came to spilling secrets. Well, that plan was out the damn window now—they weren’t even together and, judging by the reactions she’d seen tonight, Anya would guess that Evie and Luna were decidedly not on good terms. Why the hell it had been so different in the other timeline Anya didn’t know. But it was a big ass problem now.

Raven exchanged a glance with Anya before taking a deep breath, squaring her shoulders. Apparently they were just rolling with it. “My name is Raven Reyes and I’m a student at Hogwarts; this is Anya Lachman, she’s a student at Durmstrang. Take a seat. It’s a long story.”

Evie didn’t move, nor did Luna. They both stared at each other and tension in the room abruptly heightened.

“What is this?” demanded Evie. “Did you arrange this?”

Luna scowled, the hackles of her back rising at Evie’s tone. “I didn’t have any part in this. I was sent a letter that instructed me to come here.”

“I sent the letter, we already covered that!” said Raven impatiently. “Come on, sit down so we can get this over with! Please.”

They did so, and then watched, baffled, as Raven touched the tip of her wand to her temple and then drew away memories, thick and undulating. With another twirl of her wand, they hovered before them in the center of the table.
“Okay, so these are my memories and they should explain everything, if you’ll just watch them real fast—”

“I’m not going in there,” said Evie incredulously. “I have no idea who you are!”

Raven’s nostrils flared as she twitched her wand so her memories zoomed back into her temple, clenched her teeth, and bit out, “Jesus, fine. I can explain it first. Wait one sec.” She stood up and the rest watched in silence as she limped around to the doors and windows, casting various spells that ensured they wouldn’t be interrupted or overheard. When she sat down again, she took another deep breath. “This is going to sound crazy, but you have to promise to stay and hear me out, and then maybe you can watch the memories.”

Luna stared, apathetic. “I’m not promising you anything; I don’t know anything about you.”

“Fair enough,” said Anya smoothly when Raven opened her mouth to argue, “But at least stick around for the entire story. It’s going to sound ridiculous, but wait until the end.”

“Just spit it out already,” said Evie. “How do you know who we are? How do you know we used to—to date?”

Luna slanted a look at her, questioning and unreadable, but Raven pushed on before she could say anything.

“Okay, so, basically, we already met but like, in another timeline. Lifetime? Whatever you’d call it.” It was lame. Luna and Evie tensed as though they were both moments away from flying out of here. Anya wanted to wince. Raven seemed to realize and tried to fix it. Anya watched the emotions flit across Luna and Evie’s faces as Raven spoke again, watched it change from irritation to disbelief to shock. “There was a ton of stuff that happened. We had the Triwizard Tournament—you met Lexa and Clarke last week, right?” Evie’s eyes narrowed. “Clarke was the champion for Hogwarts, Lexa was the champion for Durmstrang. Beauxbatons’ champion was this smug asswipe named Cage, but that doesn’t matter yet. Anyway, so Clarke didn’t actually submit her own name for the tournament, someone else did; I think it was her dad because apparently he pretty much arranged everything to happen in this precise way…anyway, the Order of the Phoenix was involved, obviously, and you guys were there. We fought Nia and then Lexa killed her and Ontari turned into a giant dragon and attacked London and Hogwarts was destroyed and you guys along with me, Clarke, and Lexa all broke into the Department of Mysteries to find the Flame—which is a Time-Turner—to go back and fix everything and now here we are.”

Anya pinched the bridge of her nose, closing her eyes and sighing. When she looked up again, Luna
and Evie were gaping at Raven, all the color drained from their faces. Raven shook her head, frowning at herself.

“Hang on, I’m leaving out a bunch of important stuff. Okay, let me redo this. Okay. Wait, but first…” She explained how Titus couldn’t be trusted because he puts his own morals above the fate of others.

“No way,” said Evie at once, eyes wide and mouth hanging open in horror. “No. I mean, just—no, Titus is—we have to trust him, he—“

“I’ve never been a fan,” said Luna flatly, arms folded beneath her chest. Despite the fact that she was slouching slightly in her seat and her expression was mostly impassive, she didn’t look remotely relaxed. There was alarm evident in her amber eyes.

Evie rolled her eyes. “That’s because he wouldn’t let you join at first and called you a drunk and a thief.”

“And changed his tune when I stopped Nia from kidnapping him,” snapped Luna.

Evie scoffed. “Which was pure luck because you just so happened to let the Hippogriff you were taming loose on her.”

“Wait. You fought off the Ice Queen by attacking her with a hippogriff?” Raven guffawed. “That’s the best thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Can we stay on task here?” said Anya.

“Oh, yeah, sorry.” Raven launched into the entire tale from start to finish. She told them about Becca, about Jake Griffin’s role and his death—as much as she could, anyway, since there were gaps Clarke wasn’t able to fill in for her before shit happened. She explained how Nia and the Wallaces were helping each other, how Pike and Sydney played a role in the takeover too, how Jaha couldn’t be trusted though they don’t exactly know why, and how Ontari had revealed herself to the muggle world via slaughtering thousands at a time.

This time, when she finished, Evie and Luna were silent. They stared at Raven and then at one another, stunned. Luna opened her mouth but nothing came out; Evie just helplessly shook her head.
“Are you okay?” asked Raven tentatively. Anya put a hand on her arm, shooting her a meaningful look. Of course they weren’t okay; they needed a minute.

“I need a drink,” said Evie faintly after a moment, rising to her feet. She stared blankly at the rest of them. “Does anyone else need one?”

Raven and Anya nodded, but Luna groaned, planting her elbows on the table and burying her face in her hands. “I would love a drink,” she confessed, voice flat and muffled in her palms, “But no.”

Evie blinked. “No?”

“I quit. Sober for a few years now.”

Raven’s brow knit. “But… I thought Murphy said you met at a party?”

“We did,” said Luna wearily, lowering her hands, appearing keen on discussing something else for a moment rather than the horror of the situation they were in. “Kid was thirteen and crashed his dad’s party. His dad was furious and started harassing him; I was drunk and blasted him off the roof. Broke his tailbone and both his arms and had to take him to St. Mungo’s once I sobered up. I still see him every now and then; sometimes I pop by during summer break to make sure Murphy’s being treated right. He’s a sweet kid, even if he is a little arse at times.”

Raven clamped her lips together, looking very much as though she wanted to burst into incredulous laughter at anyone calling Murphy sweet.

Evie returned to the table and slid two dusty bottles of firewhisky across to Raven and Anya, clutching a half-empty bottle of dragonspirit for herself.

She took a long swig before licking her lips and looking between Raven and Anya. “So. How did it happen?”

“What?”
“Our deaths,” she said tightly, gesturing between herself and Luna. “We died, right?”

Raven took a breath before saying heavily, “Yeah, you did. I didn’t actually see Luna die, but…I’m pretty positive she did, considering she was the only thing that stood between Ontari and the door, and Ontari was the one who made it out of there…” She cleared her throat, looking uncertainly between them now. “We were in the Space department of the Ministry trying to find the Flame when Ontari sent a bunch of Inferi after us. We fought them off while Clarke went on ahead. I watched Ontari hit Evie with a curse and then…well.” She swallowed. “Luna, you went a little crazy and turned into your animagus form. Ontari turned into hers and you guys started just, tearing at each other…I slipped away and caught up with Clarke, and that’s where my memories end.”

Evie and Luna avoided one another’s eyes. Evie took another drink before asking, “So we still don’t even know where the Flame is?”

“Mr. Griffin apparently hid it somewhere Titus could never get it, since he didn’t trust him. You guys said it’s in the Love department, so that’s where Clarke was headed…”

Evie paled. “The most mysterious room in the entire Department of Mysteries? The department no one even knows how to get into? Great.”

“Well, I don’t know. When I caught up to her, Clarke was halfway in it…like she was somehow phasing through the door? So somehow she figured it out, but I don’t know what she did.”

“She must have pulled it all off somehow,” said Luna, platinum hair pulling loose from its braid as she distractedly ran a hand through her hair again. “Otherwise you two wouldn’t be sitting here and we’d still be dead.”

“I actually died too, so I’d be dead with you,” said Anya casually.

“I think we all died,” said Raven consolingly.

“Jesus, this isn’t helping!” said Evie, setting down her empty bottle. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were bright. “What the fuck are we going to do about this? We have to figure out what happened, we have to retrace our steps to make sure we find the Flame again, this time sooner so Ontari doesn’t expose us and most of us are killed off. And I don’t know how we’re supposed to do that when the one person who might have any answers is apparently clueless. Are you sure Clarke
“She didn’t have any idea what I was on about when I asked her about memories,” Raven shook her head. “She doesn’t know.”

“Have you tried Veritaserum? Or Legilimency?” suggested Luna.

“Trust me. Clarke doesn’t know. She’s been my best friend for years, I know her, and she’d be acting way differently. Right now she’s in ignorant bliss, she doesn’t even know her dad’s dead.”

“So what the hell went on, then?” asked Evie. “Who gave you your memories?”

“I don’t know what could have happened. If Clarke didn’t deliver the memories, did she…die? Did I end up having to take the Flame back? If so I messed up, because my memory was underneath a bed.”

“Did you look for more?” asked Luna sharply. “Were there any—“

“Nope,” Raven shook her head. “I poked around under everyone’s bed, cast spells, everything. Nothing but a bunch of dust bunnies.”

“Great.” Luna gave a short, frustrated huff of breath, dragging her hand through her hair again and finally just giving up and tugging it out of its long braid. She appeared more frazzled than Raven had ever seen her. “And you’re sure we all gave Clarke memories?”

“I remember, Lexa had given Clarke her memories, I gave Clarke mine, and you two gave their memories to her too.”

“Show us.”

Raven looked up at Evie, hopeful now. “You want to see them now?”

“Yes, we want to see,” said Luna impatiently. “Show us everything.”
“Well, it’s not everything,” mumbled Raven as she put her wand to her temple and began withdrawing thick strands of memories that undulated in the air. “I took out the private stuff…”

“Raven. Just.” Anya sighed and took a drink.

“It’s going to take a while,” Raven warned them as she hovered the glob of memories forward; it flattened into a silvery, glowing oval, like a floating mirror. “Not as long as it took us since I cut out a bunch to give you what you need to know, but you’ll still be in here for a good few hours. Are you ready?”

Luna and Evie exchanged a wary glance, stone-faced and cautious, but they both nodded.

“Hit us with it,” said Luna, so Raven did. She hovered the oval forward until it met their faces; they both gripped the table tightly as their heads were enveloped with the disc that swiftly turned into an orb to encase them.

“And now we wait,” murmured Anya. She squeezed Raven’s hand and Raven was emotionally exhausted enough from all of this that she could think of nothing to say or do other than squeeze Anya’s hand back.

*・/Φ/・*

The thestrals landed outside the Three Broomsticks as lightly and smoothly as they’d taken off. Lexa murmured for them to stay put before Clarke led them to the pub, casting a wary glance down the deserted streets and hoping they wouldn’t run into the same creatures as they did the last time they were here. She grabbed the door handle and turned, eager to get inside, but it didn’t budge.

“For fuck’s sake,” she muttered, pulling her wand out. “Alohomora.” It still wouldn’t open.

“Let’s try a window,” proposed Lexa, leading them over to one. It wouldn’t work either—the entire pub had been magically reinforced.
“Great!” Clarke planted her hands on her hips and glared at the pub; the windows were dark and everything was still and silent and by all accounts, she should assume no one was in.

But this was Raven, and they had memories with their names on them, and this entire thing was too big of a coincidence and every bit of Clarke’s gut told her Raven was in there.

So she lost all patience and smacked the heel of her palm against the door, ignoring Lexa’s scandalized whisper of her name. “Raven! Raven Reyes! I know you’re in there. Open up!”

After a second, Lexa joined Clarke and rapped her own knuckles on the door. “Anya. Anya! Open the door!”

It took a minute, but sure enough, whatever charms were cast were revoked and lights flickered on beyond the window curtains. The door pulled open, and Clarke was not prepared for the strange sight that awaited them.

It was Raven and Anya all right, but they weren’t alone. There were two people at the table nearest the bar, a few empty bottles scattered before them. They were sitting rigidly in their chairs, heads completely obscured by a silvery substance.

“Clarke! I thought you had detention. What are you doing here?”

“Trying to find you idiots!” fumed Clarke, scowling. “Trying to see what you’re up to at this shifty meeting you’re having!”

“Uh.” Raven stalled, glancing back at the bizarre scene of women with a silvery orb wrapped around their heads. “It’s, um…”

“Rae, what’s going on?” Clarke deflated as concern filtered through the irritation. “You’ve been acting so weird lately.”

“Uh, it’s, um, kind of a long story, and, uh…if you want to know, you’ll have to wait your turn…” She glanced at the clock on the wall, “They’ve been in there for a couple hours now so they should be done after a couple more…so if you want to just, sit down for a bit and wait…”
“Is that Evie Potter?” asked Clarke, lingering on strawberry blonde hair.

“Um, yeah…why?”

“Any idea what this is about?” She reached into her pocket, opened the tin, and pulled out the vial with Evie’s name etched into it. Raven froze.

“What’s that?” asked Anya, coming closer for a look.

“We found memories,” said Lexa stiffly. “There are three more, two of which are labeled with our names.”

Clarke studied them closely with narrowed eyes, taking in the way Raven’s eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. “We wondered if you two had anything to do with—”

“Take them!” shouted Raven, lunging toward them. Clarke and Lexa both startled, gaping as Raven seized Lexa by the shoulders and shook her. “Guys, oh my God, do you know what this means? Take your memories back, take them now!”

“Raven what the fuck!” Clarke grabbed Raven’s wrist to pull her off Lexa, who was still goggling at her.

Raven spun around to face her, face lit up, alive and fevered. “Clarke, seriously, you have no idea what—“

“Listen to her,” said Anya sharply, eyes intensely flitting between Lexa and Clarke. “This is important.”

“I’m not taking anything,” said Lexa, clenching her jaw.

“Oh my God and you have theirs too!” crowed Raven, utterly elated. She turned back and with a twitch of her wand, the silver sphere withdrew from the two women and shot back into Raven’s temple.
The women—Evie Potter and a stranger with magically dyed hair, dark skin, and honey-colored eyes—both blinked and shook their heads, disconcerted at being pulled out so abruptly. They frowned as they took in the four girls looking at them. Raven excitedly hurried toward them, unstopping the vials by pulling the corks out with her teeth.

“Guys, look! Clarke and Lexa found the other memories! Here, here!”

The women still appeared a little unsure, but then the stranger sighed and shrugged and said, “Fuck it,” before tapping her wand to the vial and bringing it to her temple. Evie took a breath and then did the same. The rest of them watched as the vials emptied and the women sat there for a moment, eyes closed and bodies trembling as they absorbed memories…and then their eyes flew open.

The table wobbled precariously as they shoved back from it, chairs squealing as they scraped across the floor. They stood urgently, panic in their wild eyes as they flitted over them—Clarke, Lexa, Raven, Anya, and then back to one another.

“Luna?” said Evie the same time the other woman gasped, “Evie!”

They stared at one another, tension building, and then—they both started laughing.

“Oh that’s funny,” murmured Raven, beaming as she watched Evie and Luna throw their arms around each other and cling to one another.

“I can’t believe it,” said Evie breathlessly, pulling back slightly to appraise Luna, eyes shining as she swept loose strands of hair out of Luna’s face. “Everything’s okay. We’re here. We get a second chance!”

Luna laughed again, pushing forward to smother Evie’s face in playful kisses. “More like a third chance for us, babe.”

They kissed then, and kept kissing, to the point where Raven snickered and looked at an amused Anya, and Clarke just exchanged a lost look with a bemused Lexa before shaking her head and looking at Raven. “Rae? Gonna fill us in on what the fuck is going on?”
The glee on Raven’s face faltered and fell away, and a sense of foreboding washed over Clarke. “You just…you gotta take your memories back, Clarke.”

“What memories? Where are they from?”

“It’ll be easier if you just take them, it’s too much to explain.”

“I’m not taking them unless I know what they are,” warned Clarke.

“Just take them, Clarke,” said Evie, echoed in agreement by Luna nodding beside her.

“Take them,” pleaded Raven. “Trust me, Clarke, please. You guys have to take them.”

Clarke hesitated, looking down at the last bottle in the tin, silvery substance swirling within it. As crazy as Raven was, she trusted her with her life. She glanced up at Lexa, who did not seem to be feeling a similar softening. Her face was as hard as the glint in her eyes as she tilted up her chin and told Raven, in a voice that left little to discuss, “No.”

Raven’s face fell, but Anya stepped forward. “Lexa, you don’t have to trust her, but you can trust me. It’s real. The memories are real and they are yours, and you need them back.”

“I did trust you, until you began acting so strange, right after you began spending time with her,” she nodded toward Raven. “And I see no reason why I would ever willingly remove my own memories.”

“But you did it before—“ began Raven incredulously; Anya cut her off.

“I vouch for Raven,” said Anya, eyes flashing warmingly at her, “And you can’t see why now, but you will. This is important. It…has to do with the Flame.”

Lexa’s eyes widened. Everyone in the room stiffened, as though the very air turned colder, but this time Clarke knew it wasn’t because of a Shadow-Eater.
“What’s the Flame?”

Anya shifted her gaze from Clarke to Raven and then back to Clarke. “It’s a very powerful weapon that has been propheticized to turn the tide in the war against the Ice Queen. And it is why we’re all standing here now, and why you have those memories."

“Your father developed a Time-Turner, Clarke,” said Evie, she and Luna walking forward to join them. “That’s what he was arrested for. He made an illegal Time-Turner.”

Clarke gaped at them all.

“It’s true,” said Raven earnestly.

Clarke turned to face Lexa, helplessly, as though hoping Lexa would agree that this was all absolute madness. But Lexa’s brow furrowed, her jaw clenched.

“This is what Nia’s been after?” Everyone nodded. Lexa still seemed composed, still stood tall, but she clenched her fists and sucked in a quiet, shaky breath as she glanced between Raven and Anya and put two and two together. “So…it’s been used, then. Right? You two...you had never met in this life, yet you knew each other already.”

“Yes,” said Anya, glancing at Raven. “I don’t have my memories, I didn’t make it in the other...in the other time. Raven found her memories under Clarke’s bed and showed them to me when we first arrived.” She frowned, looking at Clarke. “But...she said she hadn’t found anything else there...”

“Clarke must have had a charm on them,” said Raven as it dawned on her. “Only her, or the owner of the memories, could see them.”

All the color had drained from Lexa’s face. “You were dead?”

“Yes. So was Costia, and Gustus, and almost everyone else.”

“Not anymore though,” said Raven quickly. “This time is different. This time we’ll win. We know all about Becca and nightbloods and everything...we know where Nia’s hideout is, we know who’s
working with her...we know where the Flame is.”

The horror faded to be replaced with calculation and something like seething emotion boiling in her eyes. Lexa tilted her head, began in a slow, dangerous voice, “And then...I am guessing by the fact that we are here...and Nia’s still free out there...we were not successful. That Nia beat us? But someone managed to take the Flame and escape, to come back to try again?”

“Well, actually, you kicked Nia’s ass,” said Raven at a weak attempt to lighten things up. “Ontari was the one who went crazy. She, uh, turned into a dragon and destroyed London. All of us—minus Anya—went to save the world, basically. And...well, I’m not sure exactly how it ended but I think that we all died except for Clarke…”

Clarke’s eyes were nearly bugging out of her head at this point. None of this made any sense to her. What the fuck is going on?

“Why have you not gone to Titus?” said Lexa abruptly, staring at Anya. “We should already be making a move against Nia. Why—“

“Because we can’t trust him,” said Anya, her nostrils flaring. Lexa paused, immediately scowling, and Anya stepped forward threateningly “I’ve always told you I don’t trust him and this proves me right. He was the one who killed you in the other time, Lexa!”

Lexa staggered back as though she’d been shot. “I—what? Titus would not—he would never harm me—”

“It was an accident,” said Raven hastily, ignoring the glare Anya shot at her, “But it still happened. He tried to kill Clarke so Nia couldn’t get to her to use her to get the Flame, and you got in the way because—“ She didn’t finish, looking between Clarke and Lexa. That told Lexa enough.

“Because I was weak and distracted, exactly what he warned me would happen!” snarled Lexa.

“Oh, not this fucking shit again.” Anya stepped forward, drilling a finger into Lexa’s chest as she said, “Having emotions doesn’t make you weak! Hiding from them does!”

“Say what you want,” said Lexa coldly, “But this—this is proof.”
“You know what?” begins Anya dangerously, lips curling in a sneer, “Be a coward if you want. Run and hide. Your feelings will catch up to you. In fact, I’d say they already have,” she added, glancing pointedly at Clarke. Lexa sucked in a breath, visibly shaken at Anya’s words. “Throw all the angst tantrums you want. You’re going to take those memories, eventually, and then you will understand. And I’ll be right here to tell you I told you so.”

Lexa glared at Anya, scowl deepening when Anya turned to grin at Raven, who only grinned back. Even Evie and Luna were smiling at them. An uncomfortable heat crept up Clarke’s chest to flush her face; she didn’t like feeling as though she wasn’t in on the joke. Lexa clearly didn’t either; her mouth opened in a snarl and she was about to respond to Anya when another knock interrupted them.

“Hello?”

A man popped his head in, looking curiously at the six women who stared back. He pushed the door open farther and stepped inside, wiping his feet on the mat. He tucked his hat more securely on his head and gave them all a warm, confused smile. “You were late for dinner so I thought I’d come check…what’s going on? Er…Evie?”

Evie startled as though she hadn’t realized the man had been addressing her. Her breath tumbled out of her lips as she stared at him as though not quite sure what she was seeing was real. “Frankie.”

“Yes?” said the man, sounding amused. His smile brightened when he spotted Luna beside her. “Luna? Luna Rivers? Merlin’s pants, I haven’t seen you in years!” He bounded forward, reaching for her hand; she half-heartedly extended it and allowed him to shake it exuberantly. “How are you, how are you?”

“Um, I’m.” She glanced at Evie, eyes wide. “I’m good, Frankie, I, uh…how are you?”

“Oh, I’m doing great,” he said heartily, beaming at Evie. “I just took over the Hog’s Head, actually!”

Luna’s brow furrowed. “Oh…does your family not own The Leaky Cauldron anymore?”

“Well, yes, I mean The Leaky Cauldron has been in my family for three generations. But my dad, he wanted to branch out a bit. So he bought some property in Hogsmeade as well, and when he passed he left The Hog’s Head to me.” He grinned. “I see why you missed dinner now, Evie! You didn’t tell
“me you were having a reunion with an old friend!”

“I, uh. Hadn’t planned on it, it just...kind of happened,” said Evie in an oddly airy, strangled voice. Luna shot her an uncertain look.

Frankie turned around to appraise the rest of them. “And who might you all be?”

“We’re leaving,” said Anya at the same time Evie said, “They’re leaving.”

“So am I,” said Luna at once.

“Er, give me a minute to see them off,” continued Evie before ushering them forward and out the door. She pulled it half shut behind her and turned to whisper urgently to them, “Make sure these two get their memories back. Raven, I’ll send you an owl as soon as I can so we can meet up again. In the meantime I’m going to speak to Jamie about—“

“No!” Evie paused, surprised, and Raven hastily continued, “It’s too dangerous, she’s too loyal to the Order and the Ministry! If Titus or Jaha find out—“

“My sister is loyal to me,” said Evie calmly. “I promise you, she won’t be telling either of them.”

“All right,” said Raven, shoulders lowering as she relaxed.

“Be careful going back to the school. And Raven, Anya—“ Evie paused, smiling again as light green eyes settled on them. “Thank you. So much.”

Raven grinned. “No problem.”

The four of them walked a ways away to give Luna and Evie some privacy.

“I love you,” whispered Evie, pressing a kiss to Luna’s mouth. “Will you come back tonight?”
“I love you too. Let me just go back to the ship, pack some things, give the crew a cover story, and I’ll head straight back here. I’ll give you some time to…”

Evie glanced over her shoulder at Frankie, who was still smiling, appearing a bit bewildered by the turn of events. Evie turned back, tucking the door shut more securely behind her. “Let me deal with this and I’ll see you in a few. Stay safe.”

She dropped another kiss before waving at the rest of them and withdrawing back into the pub. They could hear her say, “Frankie…we need to talk,” before the door closed. Luna turned to them.

“Be careful about this,” she warned them. “We don’t want to spook the Queen into running because then we’ll never catch her. We’ll speak soon,” she promised, before Disapparating with a loud crack.

Lexa shivered in the cool night air, trying her best to ignore the panic still thrumming through her, racing in her veins.

“How’d you guys get here, anyway?” asked Raven.

The words had barely left her lips when her question was answered for her, when the two thestrals that had been poking their muzzles into the rubbish in the alley approached them. Lexa didn’t hesitate, using the panic still fluttering inside her to spur her on; she swung herself up onto the nearest thestral’s back, and looked expectantly at Clarke. Raven and Anya appeared impressed.

“Here, you guys share one and I’ll share the other with Anya—“ began Raven, but Anya cut her off.

“You go with Lexa,” she said, nodding toward her but never taking her eyes off Clarke, who now looked unnerved. “I’ll go with Clarke.”

Raven deadpanned. “Is now really the right time for the best friend talk? Really?” She lifted her palms, rolling her eyes at the glare Anya shot her. “Fine, whatever. Let’s just go.”

Clarke looked as crestfallen as Lexa felt at this turn of development, but Lexa scooted up to allow room for a new rider and helped Raven clamber on while Clarke and Anya climbed onto their own. The thestrals seemed unbothered by the added weight as they smoothly rocketed up into the air and set off. Clarke and Anya fell a bit behind as Lexa urged her thestral forward, keen to be back and alone as soon as possible.
“So, have you told Clarke you love her yet?” yelled Raven suddenly over the wind rushing in their ears.

The thestral swerved to the side as Lexa jumped so hard she accidentally tugged on its mane. It shook its neck out as she quickly loosened her grip. She twisted her head back to look at Raven, her heart hammering in her chest.

“I’m—I don’t—I mean—“

“Don’t bullshit me, Woods,” shouted Raven, sounding far too amused. “You were in love in the other time and you tried denying it too. Don’t make me sing old Disney songs to you.”

“The other time has no bearing on this one.”

“Exactly. You loved her then and you already love her in this one, too.”

“You can think what you want, but—“

“Who d’you think you’re kidding, she’s the earth and heaven to you—“

“Stop it,” balked Lexa, eyes widening; she glanced back at Clarke, but she seemed equally wrapped up and horrified by whatever Anya was practically bellowing into her ear.

“Try to keep it hidden, honey we can see right through you—“

“I’m going to curse you if you don’t quiet,” snapped Lexa.

“Girl you can’t conceal it, we know how you’re feeling, who you’re thinking—“

“Okay stop it, stop, please!” said Lexa hotly with a touch of panic, blushing so hard the tips of her ears were warm with it. She peeked at Clarke again before waving her wand, creating a little bubble
where she and Raven no longer had to shout to be heard, and there was no chance of Clarke overhearing. “Listen, even if you’re—if you’re right—whatever went wrong in the other time is proof that we can’t allow ourselves distractions if we want to triumph.”

“Or it’s proof that it’s exactly the reason we will triumph.”

“If that’s the case, why don’t you tell Anya you love her?”

“I already have, and she loves me too.” The words were said so smugly Lexa didn’t doubt it. “You can’t tell me you don’t love Clarke, Lex, I can see it already just by how you look at her.”

Lexa exhaled a shaky breath, throat bobbing as she tried to swallow down the growing tide of emotions within her. She shouldn’t ask this, but she couldn’t resist. “What were we…what were we like, in the other world?”

Raven hesitated. “Well, I mean…it was different. The situation was different. One, you were a lot more focused and closed off. Costia died when you guys were still dating so you were really messed up about that.”

Lexa frowned. “When we were still dating? That was nearly a year ago. How could anyone take the Flame back so far?”

“I dunno, me and Anya were wondering the same thing.”

Lexa lapsed into silence, troubled and disturbed. Costia, dead…the thought gave her as much anxiety as the idea of Anya being gone, of Gustus…

“So you were messed up about that, and then the tournament started and Clarke’s name was drawn even though she hadn’t entered herself, so she was pretty messed up too, and it took you guys a while to actually make a move, but you still found each other fast. It’s like…I don’t know. You just go together. You fit. I think you know that—and I think that’s why it scares you. You love her.”

Lexa swallowed, hands tightening in the thestral’s mane. “I’m not saying…look. I have a mission to focus on. Somehow, you know that. Which means you should also understand why it is so important. Titus said—“
“Literally no one gives a shit about what Titus said.”

“I do,” said Lexa firmly. “He is my teacher, my advisor.”

“Get a new one.”

“He’s the only one—“

“Actually, you know what? This isn’t even about him. This is about you. Titus is the one who fed you that love is weakness bullshit, but you ate it right up, too, didn’t you? It’s easier to think that way, isn’t it? Trust me, I get it. My parents weren’t great at loving me, either. It’s easier to shut down and pretend you don’t care, but it’s a fucking lie, too.”

Lexa grit her teeth, two seconds away from punching or cursing Raven; she wasn’t sure which was more tempting.

“You’re biggest obstacle is yourself. And it’s so ironic because of who you are. Can’t you see that?” Lexa furrowed her brow and opened her mouth to protest, but Raven cut her off. She *tsked* in exasperation, moving closer to urge, “You’re a nightblood, Lexa. You were chosen to be special. You have a dragon inside you, and instead of letting it, I don’t know, *empower* you, you run away from it! Or it’s like you actually run toward it, because you use it to build walls and help you run away from feeling anything!”

Lexa struggled to reign in the outrage at that statement as their thestral began descending. “I don’t run away from anything,” said Lexa stiffly.

“You’re running away from this, from your feelings. From the chance to be happy. You want Clarke, I think more than anything you’ve ever wanted in your life, but you’re not used to wanting things for yourself, are you? Not used to living for yourself?”

Lexa tried to hide the tremble of her hands as she slid off the thestral and helped Raven off. “There is nothing that can be done,” she said quietly, face uncomfortably hot as she glanced at Clarke and Anya lowering down, moments away from landing. “I am a nightblood. I was born to fulfill the prophecy.”

Raven arched a brow. “The fact that you can turn into a dragon doesn’t mean you aren’t human.”
“Becca made nightbloods for a reason,” persisted Lexa. “There’s a reason there are so many studies on dragons and the magical qualities of their blood. An ancient warlock once said ‘he who fights too long against dragons becomes a dragon himself; and if you gaze too long into the abyss, the abyss will gaze into you.’ A dragon cannot be truly killed; they are not able to be directly reborn in the same way a phoenix is, but they are still immortal; their spirit is endless. Learning to become an animagi was painful. All the training I have done has been painful. Separating my feelings from my duties—that has been painful. But I have a duty to fulfill the prophecy and protect my people; if that means turning away from what my heart wants in the face of the abyss awaiting me, of the dragon within me, of my nightblood and my fate—so be it.”

Raven whistled, causing Lexa to sigh. “Jesus that was dramatic. Why won’t you just give it a shot? This Becca lady might be a maniac, but she surely wouldn’t have wanted you to just like, give up your entire life.”

“I have a mission to do and I cannot be distracted,” said Lexa simply. “My entire life has been leading up to this moment. I have to look into the abyss; I have to fight, even if it means my spirit must move on. I have no choice.”

“Okay, well, the way I see it, you have two options. You can turn around and face the dragon again, or you can put on your big girl panties and go tell Blondie you’re in love with her. Your choice.”

Lexa swallowed, wondering if the static crackling down her limbs and burning her fingertips was a lingering effect from riding the thestral or the feel of Clarke’s lips pressed to her own. She cleared her throat, staring back into Raven’s defiant gaze. “I think I will take the dragon,” Lexa answered firmly.

Raven threw her hands up and gave a long, exaggerated groan. “Merlin’s beard, you are so frustrating! Go! Just go! And take your damn memories so you can grow a pair of ovaries—“

“Raven, what are you ranting about now?” asked Clarke, windswept and incredulous, arching a brow at Raven as she approached them.

“This twat,” Raven carelessly flicked her hand toward Lexa, who was positively alarmed at the possibility of Raven revealing what they’d just discussed. “Do me a favor and take her with you. Go watch your damn memories before I kick both your asses.”

“You could try,” said Lexa coolly, ignoring Raven’s growl in favor of walking with Clarke back up towards the castle.
“Yeah, fuck off,” grumbled Raven, shaking her head as she turned toward Anya, who was amused and far too cheery for the conversation. “What did you say to Clarke, then?”

“Oh, enough,” said Anya smoothly, smirking to herself as Clarke and Lexa glanced back at them; she waved and Lexa rolled her eyes while Clarke looked ahead again. “Just told her Lexa isn’t as hard as she acts and if she ever hurts her she’ll have me to answer to.” She slanted a look at Raven. “What did you say to Lexa?”

Raven sighed. “I sang a Disney movie to her and told her to embrace her inner dragon.”

Anya blinked.

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It was a miracle Kane hadn’t caught them yet, but Lexa didn’t spare it much contemplation. Her thoughts were spinning riotously in her head, a cacophony of emotions ringing within her. The vial still clutched tightly in her sweaty hand felt more like a bomb liable to go off at any second. The revelations from today were still making her head spin.

Clarke was quiet too. Lexa couldn’t imagine what was going on in her head, having just learned what she did. That her father had been arrested for making an illegal time-turner, and that there had been a whole other life they lived that they couldn’t remember. Lexa’s stomach churned at the mere thought of it. Not just the fact that not being able to remember something so big made her feel off-balance and unsafe, but that they now knew information the Queen would gladly torture out of them if she got the chance.

They climbed the stairs of Ravenclaw tower in silence, mulling over their thoughts, and all too soon came to a stop before a door that was utterly plain save for the eagle-shaped bronze knocker; Clarke rapped her knuckles on the door and it opened its beak to inquire in a melodic voice, “What can crawl with no legs and fly without wings?”

“Time,” said Lexa and Clarke simultaneously; they glanced at each other wryly as the door swung open to let them in.
The stars were twinkling beyond the large arched windows, and the stars on the blue carpet and domed ceiling shone just as brightly. Clarke led them directly over to the tall-backed, intricate chairs set up near the fireplace. The wind was whistling and it was a bit chilly, so Clarke pointed her wand and cast a new fire.

They both sat into chairs beside one another; Clarke tucked a leg beneath herself so that she could turn and face Lexa. Lexa stared down at the vial in her hands, watching the glints of light from the fire bounce off the glass and the silvery contents. She risked a glance at Clarke and found her staring at the open tin and the one bottle left with her name on it.

You’re actually going to take it?” asked Lexa dubiously.

“I mean…shouldn’t we?” Clarke worried her bottom lip, looking into Lexa’s eyes. “I’m just…a little worried about what I might find. I don’t want to watch anyone die. And they said Raven and Anya did. Who else?”

Lexa swallowed, looking back down at the vial and thinking of Costia and Gustus. “I know what you mean.”

A stretch of silence before Lexa felt Clarke’s eyes on her; she met them, blue and uncertain, and Clarke opened her mouth but then hesitated. “Can I tell you something?”

“Oh,” said Lexa. She didn’t really know what else to say. Raven had told her she loved Clarke in the other time too, but she wouldn’t have guessed they had actually been involved in a romantic relationship. They lapsed a thick silence, Lexa’s heart kicking on in her chest at the mere idea.
Then Clarke continued, this time thoughtfully, “I don’t know how I ended up in a relationship with you.”

It took a beat of silence and Lexa’s throat bobbing as she swallowed for Clarke to realize that behind her impassive expression, she may have actually been offended, or even hurt. Clarke hastily clarified, “I don’t mean—I don’t mean with you, personally, nothing against you at all! I just, I can’t imagine being less in a place for a relationship, you know? A relationship is the last thing I want or need right now. With my dad in prison…all I wanted to do this year was focus on graduating.”

“I understand,” murmured Lexa. “I’m in the same position. I was supposed to come here and remain focused on the tournament. Instead…” She tightened her grip on the vial.

“Maybe we should just get it over with so we can stop worrying about it.”

“I can’t help but be worried.”

“About what? You don’t think Raven and Anya were lying?”

“No. It’s actually the opposite. That’s what worries me.”

Clarke’s gaze skimmed over the tin. “I’d rather have the truth than pretend everything’s okay when it’s not.”

Lexa wasn’t so sure. Sometimes lies were easier. Sometimes you could tell them so much you start to believe them, and then they become truths in their own right. But she knew that was wrong, too. Clarke was right—it was better to know the truth than live in a delusion. What awaited her in this vial was the truth, however terrifying it was.

“The truth,” said Lexa quietly. “It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution.”

“Albus Dumbledore,” said Clarke. Lexa nodded. “One of those words is key, Lexa. Beautiful. This could be a beautiful thing. Don’t you want to find out?”
Lexa didn’t answer. There was silence save for the distance whistling of the wind around the tower, and the crackling of the fire. Finally Clarke broke it, and asked uncertainly, “What if we watched each other’s?”

“That’s even worse.”

Hurt rippled across Clarke’s face. “You don’t trust me?”

“No, it’s…” Lexa sighed. “I’m not sure whether or not I trust myself.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t imagine ever willingly giving up my memories,” said Lexa, and then, figuring it wouldn’t hurt since Raven and Anya had already mentioned him earlier, Lexa went on to explain Titus and the lessons he taught her. By the time she finished, her stomach was clenching and she half wished she never said anything about him at all because Clarke looked horrified.

“That is a terrible thing to drill into a kid’s head!”

“He was just doing what he thought was right,” said Lexa wearily, shoving down the stirrings of resentment in her heart at herself for starting this conversation and Clarke for engaging in it. Actually, it wasn’t that at all...it was at Titus. Truth be told, it was always there, a dark little wriggling in the back of her head she tried her best to ignore because it was Titus, and Lexa had a duty to him and to the world...and now she felt weighed down with the knowledge that Titus’s good intentions had apparently been taken so far in another life that it actually killed her... She wondered how it happened. Her fingers itched toward her vial of memories...

It felt as though her entire world had been uprooted. One moment she knew exactly who she was, exactly who made up the small circle of people she cared about. She knew she had a duty to fill and it was her burden alone to bear...she already learned from her failed romantic relationship with Costia that it was one she must take alone. She felt comforted in the knowledge that Titus would protect her at all costs. She had both feet on the ground and knew exactly what must be done.

And now...
Now she knew she hadn’t succeeded in another life, that the prophecy was incorrect because she’d lost, she’d failed to protect her people. Anya, Gustus, Costia, and most likely everyone else she cared about had died. Titus could not be trusted. And she was head over heels for a Hogwarts student she was most definitely not supposed to care about this much.

There was only one thing left to do, really. She understood what Raven meant about drawing emotional strength from the dragon within herself, rather than just physical. Lexa was not a coward, and she wasn’t about to sit here frightened of a tiny little vial in her hands. If what Raven, Anya, Luna, and Evie claimed was true, then this really was a second chance. Perhaps this was the true prophecy. She had to get it right this time.

“You’re right.” Lexa lifted her chin, jaw clenching. “Let’s get it over with.”

“Are you definitely ready for this?” said Clarke seriously, watching Lexa anxiously as a muscle jumped in her jaw. Clarke reached forward, tentatively put a hand over Lexa’s wrist. She considered it a good sign that Lexa didn’t remove it. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

“I’m fine.” She steadily exhaled, meeting Clarke’s eyes, unsure how to voice how she’s feeling, the torn emotions warring within herself. “Just…I need…I can’t…”

Clarke nodded as though she understood exactly what Lexa was trying to say. “Let’s find out. Together.”

Lexa sighed. “Now that…I can do.”

They pulled the corks out of the vials and held them up before catching each other’s eye.

“So we just, we toss them back like shots, yeah?” One of Lexa’s brows arched and Clarke gave a slight smile, exasperated. “I don’t mean actually drink them. It was a figure of speech to get us motivated.”

“Very rousing, Clarke,” said Lexa solemnly enough Clarke chuckled. They raised the vials, before Lexa realized what the desperation boiling in her gut was urging her to do.

“Wait,” she said, reaching out to put a hand on Clarke’s wrist to stop her; she lowered her vial at once. “I don’t… we don’t know what we’re going to find, so before we…before everything
changes. Can I kiss you, Clarke?"

“God, Lexa,” said Clarke with fond exasperation, already gripping Lexa by the shoulder strap of her uniform and tugging her in, “You don’t have to ask every time, you know.” She covered Lexa’s smile with her own.

Lexa allowed herself a moment. Just one moment, where she melted into it. The fire was warm and crackling, the stars were bright and calming, and Clarke felt different than anything Lexa had ever known and yet somehow so familiar at the same time. She couldn’t put her finger on it, couldn’t decide where it came from…but something about Clarke was just so…it felt like…

She supposed she may find out in a minute, she thought as Clarke drew back, chasing her for one last kiss, the tips of their noses dragging together. Clarke blinked hazy blue eyes at her and gave her a soft, reassuring smile as she leaned back and lifted the vial. Lexa lifted her own, let Clarke tap the glasses together with a quiet clink, and then they touched their wand tips to the rims and withdrew the contents. They exchanged one more determined glance, one more shaky nod, before they brought their wands to their temples and the coolness of the substance, not quite solid or liquid or vapor but something else entirely, sank into her skin as the memories returned to her…

And oh, oh…

Now she remembered.

Home. That was what she felt like.

Clarke felt like home.

* * * /♀/ * *

They both awakened at the same time, rearing up in the chairs they were slumped in. The fire was low and smoldering; there was a chilly draft in the air that had little to do with the gooseflesh that had risen on their skin. They staggered up onto their feet before they could even register it; the empty vials fell and rolled across the carpet. Their eyes met and held, wide and wild and brimming with tears.
“Lexa,” Clarke breathed, falling forward into her arms.

“You did it.” Clarke leaned back to look up at Lexa, who stared down at her with awe in her shining eyes. “You did it, Clarke, you figured out how to use the Flame, you went back and…and you saved us all.”

Clarke reached up and used a thumb to rub away the tear rolling down Lexa’s cheek. Her breath shuddered out of her as the tears in her own eyes brimmed over, lump in her throat aching as her heart fissured. “Oh my God, Lexa. You guys…you died. You...”

“You did it.” Clarke leaned back to look at Lexa, who stared down at her with awe in her shining eyes. “You did it, Clarke, you figured out how to use the Flame, you went back and…and you saved us all.”

“He’s back,” she whispered, tears pooling in her eyes. “I’m right here.” She swept her thumbs over Clarke’s cheeks, smearing tear tracks into her skin. “I am here with you.”

That was a really underrated phrase, Clarke decided, as she pulled Lexa in tightly again and held her, held her, like she never planned on letting go (which, in all truthfulness, she didn’t ever plan on letting go). Being told something as simple as I am here with you. When it came down to it that was all she ever needed.

They pulled back just to look at each other, speechless as they hungrily pored over one another’s
features, and Clarke couldn’t help but notice…despite the overwhelming relief and joy crashing through her like waves that made her knees weak, there was also an icy trickle of heart-stopping dread curdling in the pit of her stomach. Lexa had died. Even if Clarke hadn’t seen her life actually end, she’d seen the act, had watched as Titus’s spell hit Lexa, as black tendrils of the curse spread out from the wound in her stomach. She hadn’t been able to save her.

The warmth her heart pumped through her was enough to keep the terror at bay, but Clarke knew it was only a matter of time before it burst free. She couldn’t help but look at her with a fair amount of guilt…what if she blamed her? On one hand, Clarke knew Lexa, knew she wouldn’t…if anything, she looked just as shocked and relieved at this turn of events as Clarke. But on the other hand…what if somewhere deep down, Lexa was just as scared? Titus had warned her that love would get her killed…and in a way, it had. What if that changed things in this time?

“Lexa…” she began, breath hitching as she gave a minute shake of her head. “I…”

“Thank you.”

Clarke blinked, lips parted. “What?”

“Thank you,” repeated Lexa, sincere as she lifted her shaky hands higher, brushing trembling fingertips over Clarke’s cheeks, stroking her skin as though she couldn’t stop touching her, as though she needed to reassure herself this was all real. Clarke clutched at her waist, thumbs digging into Lexa’s hips. “You kept fighting, you never gave up. You brought us back, you gave us life again. Thank you.”

“You don’t…you mean you aren’t…” Lexa waited patiently as Clarke faltered, throat catching. She swallowed and tried again. “You didn’t deserve…I’m just sorry that—“

“Clarke.” Lexa looked at her incredulously. “You have nothing to be sorry for. Victory stands on the back of sacrifice. All the pain we went through in the other time…it led us here.”

“But what if…” Clarke’s eyes stung but she ignored it, maintaining intense eye contact with Lexa, willing her to understand the ball of panic in her chest threatening to rise up and choke her. “All that suffering. Everything you went through. Titus—“

“Will be dealt with,” said Lexa firmly. “And all that suffering gave way to this. A new start. A chance to save everyone and rid the world of those who would use dark magic to ruin it. You can’t
get stuck on the what-ifs, you can’t focus on everything that went wrong. We must find meaning in the suffering, and eventually we will find peace.”

She didn’t give Clarke a chance to say anything else; she moved her head forward and gave her the softest, most gentle kiss she’d ever given her—which was saying something, because Lexa was already the most tender person she’d ever met. Their lips touched and it was as though Clarke could finally breathe again. Lexa’s arms wrapped around her, folding her into her embrace, pulling her so close every part of them was touching, melding together, and the rest of the world fell away. Shock and disbelief over this entire night had Clarke reacting on instinct, blindly and breathlessly allowing herself to be swept up in it, unable to do anything but helplessly follow along as Lexa took her hurtling into a haze of instinct and emotion. Lexa pulled back, nose grazing Clarke’s as she tilted her head to change the angle of the kiss, and when they met again, warmth flooded through Clarke in response to the pillow softness of that plush mouth melting onto her own. Lexa’s lips parted under hers, a quiet gasp escaping, and then the air abruptly changed, electricity crackling between them.

Lexa bit at Clarke’s bottom lip before their tongues slid together, Clarke’s stomach lurching pleasantly at the taste and sensation. Lexa’s fingers threaded through the soft hair at the back of her head and base of her neck, cradling Clarke as though she were holding the entire world in the palms of her hands. Clarke clutched at her, fingers clawing into the fine wool and cashmere fabric of her Durmstrang uniform.

Lexa had a point, Clarke realized as she slid a hand up to cup the sharp line of Lexa’s jaw, deepening the kiss. She had her back, alive and whole and hers. They were here and everything was okay…nothing else mattered. Lexa was right…had always been right, when it came down to this, to helping Clarke rise to meet the mantle of leadership that had been thrust on her the moment her name was entered in that godforsaken tournament. But Clarke had been right too—life is about more than just surviving. They had a world to save, but there was another one right here, in her arms…

She took control, taking one step forward, then another, walking Lexa backwards, Lexa’s hands dropping, sliding over her collarbones and down her arms and around to the small of her back before gripping her hips almost tightly enough to bruise and Clarke welcomed it, wanted Lexa’s fingers burning into every part of her body until all she knew was how to be alive and anything else was nothing but forgotten memories. The backs of Lexa’s knees hit the chair and she fell down into it, hands splaying on Clarke’s back and urging her forward to smoothly slide onto the chair with her, straddling her lap. The warmth between them rushed to fire burning through their veins as they remained wrapped up in one another, Lexa’s hands pressing insistently on Clarke’s skin, encouraging the sharp, desperate grind of her hips, rocking her pelvis into Lexa’s. Clarke moaned into her mouth, the rumble in her throat giving way to a quiet, needy gasp of Lexa’s name, sucking on her bottom lip before pressing her mouth fully against her again and kissing her with everything she had, until—

The frantically climb of rhythm suddenly broke. The slide of Lexa’s lips against hers faltered, juddered and parted to inhale a ragged breath. Clarke drew back slowly, her heart thundering and her lashes fluttering as she blinked hazily. She came back to earth at once when her eyes focused and she
realized Lexa’s lower lip was quivering uncontrollably, her chin trembling with it. Her eyes were so glassy it was a wonder she could see Clarke at all. Clarke watched, heart aching, as the glassy film brimming in them spilled over, and several tears fell at once, racing down the curves of gorgeous cheekbones.

“I’m sorry,” choked Lexa, screwing her face up against the onslaught of emotions battering her heart. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to—”

“Don’t apologize,” Clarke hushed her, skimming her hand through her hair before gently stroking flyaway strands back from her forehead. Lexa’s arms twined more tightly around her waist as Clarke pulled her into a hug; Lexa pressed her face into Clarke’s chest, burrowing against her hard as though it could still her shaking body; it didn’t. Clarke’s own eyes stung, and with her gaze soft on Lexa’s anguished face and the room being filled with the sound of her soft choking noises as she tried to gulp down her sobs, there wasn’t much Clarke could do to prevent the tear that escaped; once it trailed down her cheek, the others followed in a steady stream. They must have landed on Lexa, or perhaps she simply sensed it, because she lifted her head to peer up at her, face falling when she saw the evidence.

“Oh no, I didn’t mean to make you cry as well…” whispered Lexa, reaching up to gently wipe at Clarke’s face.

“You didn’t,” managed Clarke, giving her a weak, watery smile before closing her eyes and slowly pitching her head forward, resting her forehead on Lexa’s.

They remained like that for a long, suspended moment, clutching one another both gently and firmly enough to bruise, as though it reminded them this was real, they were here right now. It was silly, Clarke told herself, because this was their second chance and everyone they lost was now returned to them, but Clarke couldn’t help but feel as though she were grieving for everything that happened in the other time.

Lexa shakily exhaled, warm breath fanning over Clarke’s lips. “I’m sorry I left you,” she whispered. “I’m sorry I hurt you.”

Clarke grasped at her more tightly, willing her to understand. “You have nothing to apologize for.”

It felt like they were mourning, but maybe that’s what they needed. They never really had the time to before. Clarke draped her arms around Lexa’s neck, Lexa constricted hers around Clarke’s back, and they held one another. It felt like healing.
“Clarke?” murmured Lexa later, after the tears had finally stopped, leaving them exhausted but lighter.

“Mmm?”

Lexa’s hand swept up and down the length of Clarke’s spine, soothing and idle. “There is a scheduled Hogsmeade visit tomorrow, correct?”

Clarke pulled back from where she’d been nuzzling Lexa’s neck and blinked at her. “Yeah, there is. Why?”

Lexa met her gaze steadily. “I would like to take you on a date.”

Clarke blinked again, a smile slowly breaking out on her face. “A date?”

“Yes. We can eat in one of the pubs and have a stroll around the shops.” A corner of her mouth tugged up in a crooked smile. “I’ll buy you all the chocolate you could ever ask for.”

“That sounds amazing. I’d love to.”

They smiled at one another and Clarke’s heart swelled, fit to bursting. There were words on the tip of her tongue, words she was still a bit scared to say in case they jinxed everything, but God, every part of her urged her to say them. She opened her mouth—

And was promptly interrupted when the door swung open.

Raven paused in surprise, and Anya, who was trailing close behind, walked smack into her. They both looked at Clarke and Lexa, the way they were swathed up in an embrace, the gleaming tear-tracks on flushed, puffy faces.

They erupted into cheers and lunged forward, dragging Clarke and Lexa off the chair and buffeting them both with fierce hugs that drew laughter bubbling from their lips.
“Finally!” said Raven, grin stretching ear to ear on her face. “Oh, my God. We’ve been dying to tell you.”

“How long have you known?” asked Clarke.

Raven paused, guilt rippling over her face. “Uh, over a week. I found out the day the Durmstrangs and Beauxbatons arrived. Sorry I’ve kept it secret, but I didn’t know how to tell you…”

Clarke waved it away, exchanging a rueful smile with Lexa. “I get it, trust me.”

Raven looked visibly relieved. “Oh, good. I know how you can hold a grudge, Griffin.”

“If anything, the thing I’m going to hold a grudge about is how much detention you’ve landed me with,” said Clarke, only half joking.

“Hey, it gave you time together,” smirked Anya, gesturing between Clarke and Lexa.

“Yeah, I can’t believe how gay you guys are,” chortled Raven, eyes bright and teasing, “It’s literally been less than a week and you didn’t even have your memories but you still hooked up! Like how extra and gay can you be?”

“Lexa’s always been a useless lesbian,” said Anya airily, hooking an arm around Lexa’s neck; Lexa shoved at her and rolled her eyes and turned her head in a vain attempt to hide her smile.

“And Blondie’s a useless bisexual, so they were totally made for each other.”

“Hello! Can you guys please shut the fuck up when some of us are trying to sleep!” came a sudden grouchy voice; the four of them turned to see Fox standing at the foot of the staircase, auburn hair sticking up every which way, face screwed up with sleep and irritation. “I don’t care what you have going on, some of us have classes to attend in the morning, and some of us aren’t keen on landing detention on top of our broomsticks being taken away—“
“Wait, what?” said Raven.

“Long story, tell you later,” said Clarke out of the corner of her mouth.

“—and some of us actually plan on attending school like we’re supposed to unlike certain other people I know, who are off gallivanting around the grounds at all hours of the night for no apparent reason. So please. Shut. The fuck. Up. Good night.”

With that, Fox turned and began stomping up the stairs. “Sweet dreams, cranky,” called Raven up to her; they glimpsed the tips of Fox’s ears tint pink before she disappeared around the spiral staircase.

The four of them turned to look at each other and burst into laughter they tried their best to keep as close to silent as they could.

“We’ll talk more tomorrow,” whispered Raven, smiling as she pulled both Clarke and Lexa into a hug. “I’ll fill you guys in on everything that’s happened. I’m…I’m really glad you guys are here. Like, really here. You know what I mean.”

“Us too,” said Clarke, as Lexa patted Raven on the back.

“Very happy you are here as well,” added Lexa, closing her eyes to prevent more tears from spilling as she embraced Anya, and Clarke and Raven joined in on the tight hug.

“Things we lose have a way of coming back to us,” said Anya with a smirk. “And also…I told you so.”

“You just couldn’t resist.” grumbled Lexa as she pulled back. She gave her a sour look when Anya flicked her forehead before grabbing Raven’s hand and tugging her toward the door.

“See you guys tomorrow.”

“Where are you going?” asked Clarke.
“To sleep on the ship,” answered Raven, “We were just looking for you guys to check on you and make sure you made it back okay. Good night!”

“Good night.”

The door swung shut behind them, leaving them in silence. Clarke turned to Lexa, gave her a warm smile as she hugged her yet again, and pressed her lips to her neck. Lexa shivered beneath her and it set off the low pull in her stomach again, an ache to fix her teeth on Lexa’s throat, to drag her tongue across that sharp jaw, to pull one of those pouty lips into her mouth while she slid her hand down beneath her waistband… but there was an exhaustion settling into her, a tiredness she felt to her bones.

She could tell Lexa felt the same by how heavy her eyes were and how her shoulders sagged. Clarke led her over to the largest, comfiest chair nearest the fire and pushed her down into it before she clambered on too. It was a tight, snug fit, and Clarke was half on Lexa’s lap, but it was perfect.

“Are you okay?” asked Lexa around a yawn.

Clarke pressed her lips together, unable to stop from smiling. She gently brushed Lexa’s hair back from her face and dropped a kiss to her temple, smile widening at how Lexa’s eyes fluttered shut at the sensation. “I’m great. I’m…”

Lexa cracked one eye open, understanding shining within the green. She wordlessly reached out with one arm to tuck Clarke more securely to her, nuzzling into the curve where her neck met shoulder, dropping more kisses. A noise of contentment rumbled up Clarke’s throat and she felt the weight of comfort flood her body, eyes growing heavier. She found it made it easier to loosen her tongue and admit the tiny nagging fear inside her.

“Can I tell you something?”

“Anything.”

“It sort of freaks me out,” she admitted. “I mean…what if none of this is actually real? What if I never made it out of the City of Light…what if I’m still there, and all of this is happening in my head?”
Lexa shrugged. “Even if it is happening inside your head, who’s to say it isn’t real?” She lifted a hand to Clarke’s face, traced each feature before drifting her thumb over Clarke’s lips; Clarke kissed it. “It is real, though. I’m here. You’re here. This time it’s going to be different.”

Clarke took her hand and flipped it over so palm met palm and entwined their fingers, smiling as the warmth spread through her chest. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

“Me too,” murmured Lexa, pressing her lips just behind Clarke’s ear, inhaling the scent of her hair, turning drowsy with it. “Clarke…”

Clarke kissed her, lips moving softly, slowly—languidly, lashes fluttering as they both struggled to remain lucid and awake.

“Really tired,” mumbled Lexa.

“Me too.”

“Do you want me to carry you to bed?”

Clarke laughed softly, squeezing Lexa’s hand. “No, baby.” It slipped out without conscious thought; her smile quirked at how Lexa’s lips curved up. “I’m comfortable right here. And anyways, I’m not keen on listening to Fox fuming for an hour before she falls back asleep.”

“Okay,” sighed Lexa, already drifting off.

Clarke rested her head on her heart, listening to the steady rhythm and finding more comfort than she’d ever known there. She jumped slightly when Lexa twitched a finger and the tapestry hanging on the wall beside the window, a heavy blue Ravenclaw quilt adorned with a stitched bronze eagle, zoomed across the room to drape over them, tucked up to their torsos.

Clarke tilted her head up to look at Lexa. She was practically already asleep now, full lips parted and eyes closed. Her hair was still a wild mane of curls, nearly all her braids undone from flying on the thestrals earlier; Clarke narrowed her eyes as she focused on the last braid, concentrating, firmly thinking the spell, and the hair band snapped off and fell to the floor, hair falling free. She snuggled closer and pressed her lips to the dip in the hollow of Lexa’s throat, sleepily glancing up at her one last time. She was so beautiful it made her heart ache, and she loved her so much she could barely
breathe with it.

I’m going to marry this girl, she thought, before sleep took her under too.

*°・/ʃ/・°*

The smell of salt water assaulted her nostrils the moment Luna Apparated back onto her ship. She stood there for a moment, taking a second to adjust. She only had two words after the events of this evening: holy fuck.

But she’d have time to freak out later. Right now, she had things to do.

She marched down the ladder and headed for her room, planning on packing her bag up, finding Tomac to give him a sparkling promotion, and getting back to Evie as soon as possible so they could figure out this mess. That plan was put to a halt, however, when she descended below deck. Her stomach dropped and she put a hand on the wall to brace herself as her head spun. What…

The cloying stench of blood made her wish for the salt of the sea again. It was everywhere, all over the walls, the ceiling, soaking the floors. Luna haltingly walked forward, hand splaying out over her breastbone. It was everyone. All of her fucking crew. Body parts strewn about… She had to fight the urge to retch. Merlin’s beard. This was even worse than the time her camp in America had been slaughtered by the Hidebehind they’d been tracking.

Her lips parted to expel a shallow gasp as she spotted the body slumped over the desk, the blood splattered on pale skin as red as his curly hair. His eyes were open and unseeing, staring sightlessly forward. His hand was half-closed, fingers brushing a wand that rolled between the hand and the wall the desk was propped up against with each sway of the boat. Judging by his positioning, whatever happened here…Tomac had put up a good fight.

This was fucking…who could have done this?

Her answer was given to her a moment later, when she tentatively rounded the corner and came face to face with a huge, smelly mound of blood-matted fur. Her heart jumped into her throat, but the creature was unmoving and not breathing. It was a Pauna…and somehow it was dead. Judging by
the violent ends of her crew, this creature was to blame for their state. That was the logical answer. And yet…it didn’t make any sense. A Pauna could be deadly, yeah, but they weren’t impervious to magic. While stunning spells would glance off them, fire and more powerful magic wouldn’t. Her crew knew how to deal with a Pauna; they’d had no trouble capturing the beast when they were ordered to bring one for the tournament, so they would have no trouble containing her if she escaped her cage, either. How could a Pauna have done this?

Fuck, it even got Rudy. There were clumps of stone-like flesh littered along the floor at the Pauna’s feet. Her entire crew, a Pauna, and a Pogrebin, all dead. This was caused by something else, Luna was sure of it, and after everything she’d just learned about Nia… something strange had happened here. Thank fuck they hadn’t made it to Japan yet, otherwise they’d have an Isonade floating belly-up in the water. What else? Surely not the dragon too? Her shock and horror was fading, quickly giving way to rage. Whatever happened here, someone was going to pay. She turned round and headed for the trapdoor, shaking from head to toe with murderous intent. If the dragon was unharmed, she was freeing it, and it was going to help her burn whoever did this alive.

She had hardly taken two strides, however, when the hair on the back of her neck rose. She spun around just in time to deflect whatever spell was cast at her. A woman stood in the center of the room, though Luna had no idea how she hadn’t heard her walk in. Luna caught a glimpse of long dark hair pulled back in a ponytail and a vivid red dress before she slashed her wand through the air, casting a stunning spell.

The woman did not so much as lift a wand to block it, and the spell passed straight her.

*What?*

*“Stupefy! Sectumsepra! Crucio! Avada—“*

Again, the woman didn’t raise a single finger, yet Luna found herself flying back, wand spinning out of her hand as she slammed hard into the wall. She scrambled to her feet, ignoring the pain in her shoulder.

The woman tilted her head. One blink she was there, and the next, she was directly in front of Luna. Even worse, two creatures had appeared behind her…tall, stooping, hooded figures with hoarse, rattling breaths. The room was suddenly freezing; despair settled like ice in Luna’s chest.

*“What the fuck—“* began Luna, panicked, but the woman in the red dress stepped forward and Luna was pressed against the wall as though by an invisible force.
“Relax,” she said, voice as empty as her expression. Her hands were clasped before her, but there wasn’t a line of tension anywhere in her body. “As a Nightblood, you aren’t able to have your magic stolen from you. But your resistance and your Animagus form still poses a problem.”

“Who are you?” demanded Luna, grateful the anger was masking the fear and panic, rendering her voice steady and hard. “How are you—how did you do all this?”

“Quint,” said the woman simply. Luna’s brow knit, eyes darting to one of the bodies strewn on the floor. There was a leg missing and his face had been mangled, but she was pretty certain that was her newest hire, Quint. The woman noted her gaze and dipped her head once in acknowledgement. “He was a loose end that would eventually need to be tied up, so I took preemptive measures.”

Luna shivered, not even able to try to writhe against her invisible bonds. Hopelessness spiraled within her; even if she had her wand, she doubted she could produce a Patronus at this point. And something was preventing her from changing into her Animagus. How? Whoever this woman is, she didn’t seem human, but she definitely wasn’t a ghost either, not with how solid she looked. But only a witch or wizard could cast spells like this, so why—

Her answer was, once again, shown to her almost as soon as she thought it. Thelonious Jaha stepped around the Pauna, expression serene, wand held casually in hand.

“Minister!” choked Luna, eyes bulging in fury; the bonds around her neck tightened, slowly cutting off her air. “How—could you—why—“

His eyes were unfocused. She was still coherent enough to notice that. His eyes were unfocused, and there was something faraway about his expression. He was under some type of enchantment, but what—

Luna’s eyes slowly, joltingly as she struggled uselessly, skidded over to the woman, who was watching her without an ounce of emotion. “Who—what—are you—”

“I am Alie,” said the woman, impassively examining Luna’s face. “And I want what anyone wants. Equality. Peace. There is just one small thing I need before I can achieve that.”

“How—“ managed Luna, black spots dancing behind her eyes. She had to get out of this, had to warn the others, had to warn Evie, but she couldn’t breathe. No air. Not enough air. She was going to—she was going—
“Magic. I need more magic.”

Luna’s eyes rolled up. Her bonds broke the second she lost consciousness. She crumpled like a marionette with cut strings, head smacking the floor as she landed in a puddle of blood and moved no more.

* * * * /✧/・゚* 

Kane frowned down at the image shown to him through the fire of two girls tangled up together, snoozing soundly.

What the hell was in the water here? It had only been a week. How were these kids so attached to one another already? Yes, the main point behind the Triwizard Tournament had always been to use friendly competition as a means to foster relationships between students but this hadn’t quite been what he’d anticipated. He frowned at the image of Clarke Griffin and Lexa Woods curled up together on the chair next to the hearth and shook his head. According to the portraits that reported back to him, they’d slept there all night and had entered through the door, so they’d clearly snuck out again, though he had no idea how they’d escaped out of the tower when he’d taken away all the brooms.

Their sheer cheek infuriated him, but he couldn’t help to be a bit amused by it too, as exasperating as it was. He’d definitely be speaking to Indra later, and Clarke would have detention for the rest of the year at this rate, but he’d at least wait until after lunch to call them to his office. Kids will be kids, his mother always reminded him. He sighed. He supposed she was right.

By the time lunch rolled around, however, his plans changed. He was getting ready to head down to the Great Hall when the rotating spiral staircase began to rumble. When Jamie Potter stepped into his office, his brows shot to his hairline.

“Don’t tell me you caught more students in Hogsmeade,” he said, only half-jokingly.

“What?” Jamie frowned before realizing what he was on about, as though she’d forgotten all about it, and waved it away. “No, no. I actually have something very important to discuss with you.” She pulled out a bowl from beneath her traveling cloak, and Kane could do nothing more than watch as Jamie marched to his desk and set the pensive down there and gestured for him to sit. “This might
take a while, but bear with me…”

* * / ś / * *

Warmth.

That was the first thing Lexa registered. Warmth all up along her side, and a pleasant ache in her stomach, and joy—pure peace and contentment, unfiltered elation, lighter than air in her heart.

This is real.

Lexa instinctively tightened her arm, pulling Clarke closer, the back of her body melding into Lexa’s front. A quiet sound rumbled out of Clarke’s throat as she sleepily clutched Lexa’s arm, nuzzling her before shifting. Clarke turned in her arms, breath fanning over Lexa’s collarbones as she sighed. Lexa’s heart constricted as she greedily drank in the features of her face. Lexa couldn’t even remember the last time she’d seen her so relaxed, ever. Not for months, not since before the third task. Well…which wasn’t just months ago, but an entire world ago. It was difficult to wrap her mind around it.

She couldn’t believe it. Truthfully, a tiny part of her had wondered if any of this was even real or if she was dead—but it was real, and everything was different now. Anya was alive, Lincoln wasn’t turned, Octavia still had her magic, Gustus was still off traveling, and Costia’s grave had never even existed in this time. That part Lexa was admittedly still a little confused on—Costia had died almost a year ago, so how was she here now? It was a question she needed to ask Clarke. She knew Clarke had succeeded in taking the Flame back; even in the other time, long before they even knew exactly where the Flame was, she knew Clarke would be successful. But what happened? Did Lexa take care of Ontari to clear the path for Clarke? How did Clarke take the Flame back so far? What happened?

There was no urgency to know. Now, she knew, they had time. Time to discuss such things, and time to wake up slowly, to share soft morning kisses without a care in the world, perhaps have some breakfast together. Her heart thudded in her chest as a smile unfurled.

Clarke, meanwhile, found herself waking gradually. She couldn’t even remember the last time she’d slept so soundly, let alone not having been plagued by nightmares. The fire had long been
extinguished, but Clarke woke feeling safe and warm in Lexa’s arms, huddled beneath the tapestry they’d used as a blanket all night. She blinked blearily as she came to, automatically squeezing whatever was under her hand—a waist, in this case—and immediately focused on Lexa. Clarke observed her with an expression that reflected Lexa’s…one of quiet awe, of tremulous relief, of something impossibly soft that they’d yet to voice aloud.

“Hey,” said Lexa softly.

“Hey,” said Clarke, voice raspy with sleep.

They both looked at each other, wondering smiles on their faces. After all this time, ‘hey’ didn’t quite seem to encompass what they wanted to say. And Clarke knew what she wanted to say, but then Lexa was leaning forward, nose brushing Clarke’s. Soft lips pressed to hers, moving slowly with her own, and she felt everything she wanted to say and more. Lexa’s tongue slid along the seam of her lips and Clarke gave access at once, shivering and curling closer to her, breasts pressing together as what little space was left between them was eliminated. Fuck, it had been far too long. Well, technically they’d had sex only hours ago, but when you factor in all the time, it had been months…

“Lex,” she said against her lips, voice husky, unwilling to draw back but hoping to hint at where she wanted this heading toward; by the way Lexa’s spare arm—the one not holding Clarke to her—slipped beneath the tapestry to linger on her skin just beneath the hem of her shirt, she thought Lexa may already be ahead of her. Their kisses deepened, breath hitching as teeth sank into lips, and Clarke’s free hand was inching toward the apex of Lexa’s thighs without any conscious effort on her behalf—

“Oh, in the name of Merlin! Are you kidding me?”

They broke apart and turned to see Fox staggering back as though she’d been hit with a curse, slapping a hand over her eyes. Clarke exchanged a bemused glance with Lexa, both of them catching their breath a bit.

“Merlin’s beard, can’t you two get a room?”

“Well, we did get a room, and you complained about that, too.”

“I mean your own room!” said Fox, voice strangled and high-pitched. “Get some privacy! This is a big castle, Clarke!”
“All right, all right,” said Clarke, fighting the urge to laugh. She couldn't help but to look fondly at Fox; she could still see her so clearly in the other time, adorned in her Lester City pajamas, casting a ball of worms at Ontari before being struck down, body lying amongst the popcorn littering the hotel carpet. Now here she was, alive and well and positively irate, just like old times. “You can look around, you know, we aren’t naked in the common room.”

“Well I wouldn’t put it past you…” Fox lowered her hand and scowled at her before looking up at the clock. “Shouldn’t you be in class right now anyway? I thought you had Double Charms at eight?”

Ah, fuck. Kane really was going to kill her, now. Clarke sighed. “Yeah, I guess I overslept.”

“What a great example from our Head Girl,” said Fox nastily. She gave an irritated huff of breath before seizing the bag she’d dropped on the floor and marching to the door. She didn’t even spare them another glance before leaving.

“She’s fun,” commented Lexa.

“You’re one to talk,” said Clarke wryly.

Lexa arched a brow. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Clarke’s gaze lingered on her, the sleep mussed her and heavy-lidded eyes. She licked her lips. “You know, everyone will be leaving in a minute to head to class so the dorm will be empty. I’ve already missed the first half hour of class so there’s really not a point in going and even if there was…I can think of a much better use of my time.”

Lexa’s eyes visibly darkened, her lips parting to take a not-so-subtle intake of breath. “I’m amenable to that.”

“Oh you’re amenable, are you?”

“Clarke.” A wicked glint in her eye, Lexa leaned forward and brushed pouty lips along the shell of Clarke’s ear as she whispered exactly what else she was amenable to doing once they had privacy.
Clarke flushed and swallowed and tugged Lexa out of the recliner with her, Lexa’s laughter still echoing around the common room as they darted up the staircase.

There were quite a few girls still getting dressed upstairs, so Clarke instead gathered some of her things and took Lexa’s hand, unwilling to part for anything. She led her to the Prefect’s bathroom on the fifth floor and turned a few taps on, Lexa adding the few she’d liked the most during their time here when Lexa taught her how to swim in preparation for the first task, one of which caused the jet to rebound off the top of the water in graceful arcs. As the tub filled they stood side by side before the mirror to brush their teeth, and then spent the next five minutes kissing leisurely against the door, until the tub filled and the taps shut themselves off.

Clarke meant for it to be slow, romantic even—but apparently her body had different plans as she shed Lexa of her clothes, and Lexa seemed to feel the same way, if the way she tore at Clarke’s clothes was any indication, peeling them off and carelessly tossing them behind her. The moment Lexa was naked Clarke turned them around, eyes tracing all the smooth skin on display, lean and slender and gorgeous. She put her hand on the center of Lexa’s chest and paused long enough for Lexa to tilt her head; then she pushed, smiling as Lexa yelped as she fell back with a resounding splash. Lexa hadn’t even broken the surface when Clarke found herself magically yanked forward, no time to even suck in a breath before she tumbled down into warm, bubbly water. When she came up spluttering, Lexa’s laughter was ringing around the bathroom, and the sound of it, so pure and unrestrained, had her joining in.

Their laughter faded as they caught one another’s eyes and gravitated forward, Clarke kicking her legs out beneath her to bob above surface just as Lexa had taught her so long ago.

“You’re so beautiful,” said Lexa, voice hushed and eyes wide with veneration, tucking a thick strand of hair behind Clarke’s ear. When it fell forward again, Lexa smoothed it back with the rest of her wet hair, sleek and dark blonde.

“You are,” said Clarke breathlessly, gaze flitting all over Lexa to take it all in. There were droplets of water clinging to her long lashes and her cute tiny earlobes, sparkling like diamonds. They floated toward each other, glowing golden bubbles coalescing between them before they split to make way for Clarke and Lexa to press together, skin slick and smooth beneath the water’s surface. They both shuddered, hands exploring as their lips met.

Lexa’s mouth dropped to her neck, teeth scraping down the column of her throat, tongue lingering over her collarbones before she moved to suck at her pulse point. Clarke’s head dropped back as she breathed heavily into the perfumed air of the bathroom, before she realized there was a pair of eyes looming out of the darkness of the faucet, staring unblinkingly at them. Clarke broke away from Lexa, spluttering in indignation.

“What the fuck, Myrtle!” At that, Myrtle sulkily withdrew from the faucet and extended up to her full
spectral form, revealing a squat girl with thick round spectacles below a fringe of lank hair.

“You have a Durmstrang in here,” said Myrtle accusingly, pointedly glancing at Lexa, whose naked body was fortunately mostly hidden by the foam and bubbles on the surface of the water.

Clarke splashed water at her, ignoring the way Myrtle pouted and scowled. “Get out of here!” Myrtle shot into the air, causing Lexa to jump, and then plunged straight down into the tub dramatically before popping up and disappearing down the faucet.

“Um. Who was that?”

“A ghost,” said Clarke distractedly, inspecting the faucet with narrow eyes to make sure she actually left. Realizing she’d just voiced the obvious to Lexa, she said, “Bathrooms are her favorite haunts. She’s usually sulking in the girls bathroom on the second floor, but she comes in here quite often too, she likes watching people…and she’s a bit of a perv.”

“Is she gone?” asked Lexa curiously.

“She’s probably fucked off to the lake to cry about it,” said Clarke, unconcerned, as she turned round to face Lexa again. “She does that a lot,” she added in explanation when Lexa just looked at her. “We call her Moaning Myrtle.” Lexa paused, then a sly smile began creeping across her face, and Clarke pointed a finger threateningly at her. “Don’t you dare. I swear to Merlin if you make some kind of dirty joke about how there’s still going to be plenty of moaning or something, I’m going to have to kick your ass.”

Lexa raised her hands palm up, innocent and biting her lip to suppress her grin. Clarke rolled her eyes and decided there was a better way to shut her up. She lunged, and Lexa caught her, eagerly returning the enthusiastic kiss.

It took less than a minute to banish all thoughts of Myrtle from her mind, and that was mostly to do with Lexa’s leg slotting between Clarke’s own, a muscled thigh pressing up against her core. Any remaining restraint they had left was gone after Lexa’s name left Clarke’s lips in a breathy moan.

Everything was lost in a blur of wandering hands and stinging bites, soothing licks and deep, desperate kisses that had both their chests heaving. There was no time for teasing, not at first. When Clarke’s hips canted insistently, Lexa slipped two fingers inside her. Golden bubbles popped around them as Lexa moved inside her, and the arcing of the jet across the surface near the deep end of the
tub had dwindled to a gentle skipping by the time Clarke was coming down from her orgasm, bruises blooming down her neck and her shoulders, gasping and groaning as those perfect pouty lips wrapped around her nipple. She murmured Lexa’s name as she caught her breath, unable to voice what she wanted to say, but Lexa listened and somehow knew anyway. She leisurely stroked her hands up and down her sides as she pressed gentle kisses to Clarke’s temple, her forehead, the tip of her nose, her chin, her cheeks, her lips. Clarke’s throat burned with the urge to cry, because she once feared she’d never have this again but here they were. All she wanted to do was tell her she loved her, but now wasn’t the time, not when she’d just been thoroughly fucked and was winding down from her orgasm and Lexa’s eyes were dark and pupil-blown, her face flushed and her hips pressing insistently, seeking out some kind of friction to ease her need.

Clarke’s hands drifted over the swell of Lexa’s ass, squeezing gently before her left hand snuck around. Lexa’s breath caught as fingers slipped through her folds. The tip of Clarke’s thumb traced around her clit as two fingers sank inside her, and Clarke began to move before Lexa could so much as draw breath. Long legs wrapped around Clarke’s waist, Lexa holding her by the back of her neck, her forehead dropping to Clarke’s as she began grinding her hips, riding her fingers. The room filled with the sound of the sloshing water, the gasps and grunts of Clarke as she felt Lexa’s pleasure just as much as her own, and the nonstop stream of words uttered from Lexa’s lips, curses one minute and then revered utterances of Clarke’s name as though in prayer the next.

Lexa fell apart in Clarke’s arms, then again once more several minutes later, when Clarke lifted her out of the tub to sit on the side so she could bury her face between her legs. The bathroom was warm and sticky with steam from the water, and Lexa was flushed enough the tile probably felt quite cool and soothing on her skin as she settled, lying flat on her back until said back arched as Clarke sank her tongue inside her. Her cries echoed around the room but Clarke spared no thoughts for whether anyone in the hall outside could hear; she just fixed her mouth on her again and drank and drank, eyes on the clenching abdomen muscles on Lexa’s hard stomach, eyes on the pleasure rippling across Lexa’s face.

She smiled, half concerned she’d have to hold Lexa up lest she drown when she slumped back into the tub. That smile was quickly wiped away when Lexa eyed her, only slivers of green iris visible, her lips red and kiss-bruised. She looked hungry enough to devour her as she held her breath to duck underwater long enough to loop her arms around the bottom of Clarke’s thighs and hitch her up, lifting her half out of the tub and burying her tongue inside her; Clarke was helpless to do anything other than brace herself against the side of the tub with one hand, and fist the other around Lexa’s tangles of soaked hair. The strangled cry that tore out of her throat bounced around the room, and she didn’t remember being slid down to float in Lexa’s arms, but when she opened her eyes, there she was. She barely had time to blink at Lexa, drowsy and sated, before Lexa’s gaze dipped from her eyes to her lips as her hand snaked down between them, fingers trailing over her swollen clit, skating lower. Clarke was certain she didn’t have the energy to come again, but, well…

She came with Lexa’s name on her lips and Lexa’s lips on her throat.
One skipped class quickly led into two, then a third, and then Clarke decided she may as well skive off the entire day.

They didn’t even go to lunch. Instead, while Lexa was passed out in her bed back in the dorms, Clarke snuck down to the kitchens to receive a tray laden with food from the enthusiastic elves. Clarke gave them a few galleons they humbly accepted and then headed back upstairs, moving quickly and furtively and managing to avoid coming across anyone. She was surprised at this point that Kane had not arrived to rage at her; surely he would have heard of all the classes she wasn’t present in. But, no, there was no one to interrupt as Clarke lounged with Lexa for the better part of the afternoon, gratefully swapping kisses between gulping down sandwiches and fruit, and spending more than a fair amount of time communicating solely in gasps and moans and canting hips, eager to fully reacquaint themselves with one another.

After yet another round Clarke flopped back onto the bed and then craned over to reach her father’s wristwatch she’d left on the nightstand, noting they had at least another hour before afternoon classes finished and other girls would begin returning to the dorms to get ready for dinner. Her heart jolted when she realized the Resurrection Stone was no longer inside that watch, it was back at the Ministry… She cleared her throat and set the watch back down, turning to curl up into Lexa again.

“I was thinking,” said Clarke, propping herself up onto Lexa’s lovely, flushed bare chest. “I want to get my wand.”

“The one you managed to get before Ontari ambushed you?” said Lexa sleepily.

“Yes. Maybe we could make a day of it during the trip scheduled for this weekend? Wake up early, Disapparate from Hogsmeade and head to London?”

“Sounds good. I’d rather you have a wand better suited to you, it’ll protect you better.”

“How long do you think it’ll take to hear anything from them?” asked Clarke after a moment, voice quieter.

The sudden return to seriousness sobered Lexa up from her drowsy state; she blinked and opened her eyes, focusing. “Hopefully not long. I imagine things will have to move fairly quickly now. Jamie is
the head of the aurors and an Order member…she’ll want to get this all over with.”

Clarke glanced at her watch on the nightstand, fingers twitching almost as if she was itching for it. “Do you think…it would help if I call my dad here using the stone? We could ask for his advice. Plus… I’d love for you to meet him,” she added rather shyly, pink tinting her cheeks.

Lexa smiled, a bit sadly. “It’s up to you, Clarke. The decision is your own.”

“Yeah. I just worry about messing with it, plus we’d have to go back to the Ministry to get the Flame and if we were caught…” She cleared her throat. “And anyways, I don’t want to accidentally set the Flame off and turn back time again and…”

“I understand. Perhaps we could wait and, after everything is said and done, when we no longer need the Flame, you could remove the stone and…” Say goodbye. Lexa didn’t need to say the words for Clarke to hear them. She nodded and squeezed Lexa’s hand in response to Lexa’s squeezing hers. She would definitely need some closure after all this, though the last time she saw her dad… their brief talk in the Great Hall before she crept up to Ravenclaw Tower to place her memories… that had felt healing.

But, of course, the last hug would never feel like enough. Her eyes stung, but she blinked it away, taking in a shaky breath and pushing the emotions back. Time to compartmentalize; in the words of Raven Reyes, they had shit to do.

“You want to head down to dinner?”

Lexa nodded, so they got around and ready and headed downstairs, passing Fox briefly on the staircase, who only shook her head at Clarke in disapproval for shirking all her classes.

Dinner was an interesting affair. After fighting down the urge to curse Cage until he resembled nothing more than pale goo with eyes once she saw him, Clarke turned her back to him and focused on loading up her plate. She was halfway through her Lancashire hot spot when the headmaster approached her and asked to speak with her and Lexa; she was certain he’d somehow discovered they left again last night (Clarke partly suspected Fox of grassing on them out of revenge for waking her up several times) on top of being outraged over the fact that she’d skipped class today. She was fully anticipating a scolding and a year’s worth of detentions, so she was shocked when instead he revealed that he knew everything. As in everything everything. Apparently Jamie Potter had cornered him early afternoon and showed him the memories she’d been shown by Evie, and sworn him to secrecy.
He didn’t seem particularly certain about it, but he revoked the punishments he’d given her due to the extenuating circumstances. Honestly, Clarke thought perhaps he was just busy enough with other concerns right now that he couldn’t be bothered to arrange the detentions, but she wasn’t going to argue, especially when the other girls in the dormitory finally stopped shooting her filthy looks after Kane gave them their broomsticks back and lifted the ban. Now she was enjoying her Manchester tart and idly watching as Lexa and Costia had an animated discussion about whether apple pie was superior to raspberry ripple.

It had been interesting, meeting Costia. In the other time, she’d wondered, once or twice, if things would be different between she and Lexa had Costia been alive. From the way Lexa spoke about her, she’d been this epic first love. But now the question had been answered for her—Costia never died, and they broke up anyway. She had no idea why Costia was alive in this time, especially considering she’d died nearly a year before the events of the tournament anyway, but she was grateful for it. Costia was as lovely and lively as she’d imagined her to be, and Lexa was lighter because of it. Her eyes had been glistening when she found Costia and hugged her tightly earlier today, and Costia had taken one look at her, asked what was wrong in concern, and then called Lexa a big old sap when Lexa merely shook her head and hugged her again before moving to hug Lincoln. Costia then proceeded to be all big grins as Lexa introduced her to Clarke, which indicated Lexa was in for a teasing later…judging by the red glow to Lexa’s tiny ears, she knew that as well. Costia stiffened in surprise when Clarke hugged her, unable to resist, but returned in a bit later, though she looked more concerned than ever as she looked between Clarke and Lexa, then narrowed her eyes, gaze flitting over to Anya and Raven.

Happiness glowed in Clarke’s chest, warming her from within as she looked along the table. Everyone undamaged and alive. Raven was talking shit with Anya while she stole bits of pie off her plate; Lincoln was listening to Octavia avidly describe a Quidditch match while Bellamy watched them from the corner of his eyes a few tables down, when Gina wasn’t distracting him; Fox was still looking a bit cantankerous and tired, but she was focused on the book she was reading as she distractedly nibbled on a scone; Wells was listening to Costia and Lexa’s conversation with interest; Jasper and Monty were arguing about something silly while Miller tuned them out as he worked on his pudding; Murphy was slouching off in the distance, skipping dessert to head out. Clarke made a mental note to introduce him to Emori later. She’d been good for him…some of the time, anyway, which was still a success when it came to Murphy.

She wasn’t sure how much this time in this version of the world would change from the last, nor how much it should. When it came to Nia and the others, obviously, she knew what they should avoid…it was harder now, knowing what she did. It gave her even more appreciation for what her father had done, apparently an innumerable amount of times, too.

The night somehow ended in Hufflepuff Basement, full of raucous cheers as Lexa only just lost to Wells in a particularly violent game of Wizard’s Chess, and Jasper nearly brought the place down with a towering stack of Exploding Snap cards. They ended up dispersing after that before Professor Vera could arrive to tell them off, but a few people lingered—Miller and Monty, to help Jasper clean up, and Costia, who was interested in learning how to play Wizard’s chess and determined to win the
next time they played.

Clarke was far from ready to head back to the tower, nor did she want to go to Durmstrang ship, though she’d told Anya and Raven earlier that they’d be going to tonight. As they exited the kitchen corridor and emerged into the entrance hall, Clarke pulled Lexa toward the shadows under the main stairwell and crowded her against the wall.

Lexa’s surprised huff of breath was immediately swallowed, and Clarke absolutely ached at the faint taste of raspberry ripple on Lexa’s tongue. Lexa grasped at Clarke’s waist, responding with enthusiasm.

“Remember this place?”

Lexa shivered, licking her lips as Clarke set about kissing along the sharp line of her jaw. “How could I forget? Indra almost caught us in a rather compromising situation…”

“Rather?” It was Clarke’s turn to shiver as Lexa’s hands traversed her body, thumbs grazing the sides of her breasts, and eventually made their way down to cup her ass and squeeze, encouraging her to grind her hips forward. Clarke did so, breath catching as Lexa pitted a muscled thigh forward for her. “I was in the process of removing your underwear, if I remember correctly. It was a little more than rather.”

“You nearly made me come here,” confessed Lexa, eyes dark and unable to tear away from Clarke’s mouth.

The words brought a fresh wave of want. Clarke shifted her head, nose trailing the soft skin of Lexa’s cheek, and bit at the hinge of her jaw, soothing it with her tongue. “Nearly is the operative word. Wanna make it a definitely?”

“Definitely.”

Lexa turned her head to meet her lips, and they lost themselves in one another for a time, kissing so long their lips numbed with it, until Lexa spun them around. She pressed Clarke against the wall and slid her hand down to her thigh, urging her leg up to hook around her waist. Clarke’s breath hitched as Lexa pressed into her, the both of them grinding to find the friction they needed. It wasn’t enough. There were too many clothes, and they were in too open a place. They needed somewhere private, somewhere she could enjoy the sounds she drew from Lexa.
“Can we go somewhere else?” said Clarke breathlessly.

Lexa nodded, just as breathless as she drew back. “Anya and Raven may be worried, but I don’t want to go to the ship.”

“Fuck them,” agreed Clarke, nuzzling her nose into the warm curve of Lexa’s neck. She stilled as she remembered, and then she laughed. “They gave us detention! Those assholes. And had us worried sick. They can deal.”

“Room of Requirement?” suggested Lexa.

“God, yes.” Her mouth curved into smirk that she pressed to Lexa’s. “I’m suddenly not very sleepy.”

“I never need sleep again,” said Lexa seriously before sweeping Clarke up into her arms and swallowing her peals of laughter as they headed down the hallway. They’d hardly made it a few steps, however, when another voice rang out.

“Oi! You wankers, we’ve been waiting up for you and here are eating each other’s faces!”

They turned to face Raven and Anya, who were mostly amused as they walked toward them. Lexa squeezed Clarke’s hand in silent impatience and Clarke swept her thumb across her knuckles, fighting to suppress her smile.

“Hey, uh, what are you guys doing here?”

“What are you doing here? You said you’d be at the ship.”

“You said you’d be at the ship.”

Raven hesitated, exchanging a look with Anya before giving Clarke a guilty smile. Clarke’s eyes widened. “Oh, no way.”
“Yes way, it’s in the castle, it’s fair game.”

“I told you about that in confidence!”

“Yeah, and I’m confident that was in the other time. In this one, we were the ones who first set foot in it!”

“That’s totally cheating.”

“The Room of Requirement is ours!”

“I don’t see your name written on it!”

There was only one choice. There was no way Raven was beating them up seven stories. Clarke squeezed Lexa’s hand, certain she could feel the way her body tensed. Raven blinked at her lack of response, and Clarke made a run for it. “We’ll see about that!”

They tore up the stairs and Raven shouted after them, “Yeah a foot race is the only thing you can beat me at, you asshole!” She seized Anya’s hand and began hobbling past the stairs. “Come on, hurry! They might have two functional legs each but I know the best shortcuts,” sneered Raven. “Come on.”

They rounded the corner into another hallway and then paused before a statue of a wizard; Raven squeezed behind it and slipped farther in and Anya realized there was a room here, large and mostly empty save for a single bookcase. “Help me out here,” said Raven as she began to clamber up the shelves. Anya automatically reached out, alarmed, and pushed on Raven’s ass to nudge her up. Raven reached down to help her clamber up as well. They stood on a small balcony now that overlooked a hall filled with more bookcases. Raven precariously balanced on her good leg and leapt from shelf to shelf, and it was a miracle there was enough space for her to land beside Anya each time to ensure she didn’t go tumbling off. They scrambled up onto another balcony and reached another hall, this one carpeted and surrounded by towering windows and yet another dozen bookcases. Anya secretly thought this wasn’t quite worth the effort as she began to sweat as she helped Raven climb the shelves until they finally reached the third floor. Raven led them down the hallway and into a Trophy room, darting to a large ornate mirror that served as a door and hurrying down a dimly lit passageway until they finally emerged onto the fourth floor. They swept down the hallway and up a flight of stairs.
It wasn’t until they’d almost reached the seventh floor that Clarke and Lexa caught up to them.

“What the fuck! Raven, how in the hell did you—“

“Being a trouble-maker has its perks, Blondie!” shouted Raven, absently casting a spell that had a suit of armor springing to life behind them to block the path. Lexa Transfigured it into bubbles with a quick poke of her wand. “I know all the secret places around! Or, well, most of them anyway,” she said to Anya, lowering her voice. “Like, there’s some I’ve heard of but never been to. Like I know there’s a secret room near the Quidditch Training Grounds, because Jasper ran in there once when he was hiding from John Mbege and randomly found a box of Bertie Bott’s and a chocolate frog, and who knows how long they’d been down there, but he still ate them. And there’s an arcade on the second floor that you can get through to find this big room that’s great for parties. And Miller actually found a shortcut to the grand staircase through the library, and it’s nice because it’s hidden by a portrait of this old dude named Temeritus Shanks, who’ll summarize what’s on the newspaper for you that day so you can skip reading it. Oh, fuck.” Clarke and Lexa rushed past them, so really, Raven had no other choice than to pull out her wand and point it at them.

“Petrificus Totalus!”

Clarke’s eyes widened a second before her limbs sprang together and she froze, falling to her side with a thud that was certain to bruise. Raven began hobbling toward the left corridor, but Clarke glared at it and thought, “Protego!” and a shield sprang up that was so strong when Raven hit it, it sent her flying back to crash down beside Clarke.

“Clarke! You asshole!” howled Raven.

“Should we leave them?” Anya said flatly to Lexa. “I would be fine with heading to the ship and going to sleep and leaving them to be idiots.”

Lexa tilted her head, contemplating it, but decided she would very much rather be inside the Room of Requirement with Clarke right now. She knew they had a limited amount of time before they’d hear from Evie and Luna or Jamie, and then they’d be immersed in the chaos and stress of taking down multiple threats at once, so for now she wanted to enjoy this for as long as she could.

She arched a brow at Anya. “Rock paper scissors?”

“You’re on.”
She did rock, Anya did scissors. Lexa smiled in triumph.

“You’re getting predictable.”

“I’m the one who taught you that game in the first place.”

“Yes, and you always choose scissors first. *You’re* the useless gay.”

“You know I don’t use labels.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Get fucked.”

“I plan on it.”

Anya rolled her eyes but exchanged a smirk with her before walking over to Raven and hauling her up by her arm. “Come on, twat, let’s give the bigger twats their turn in the room.”

“Aw, what? Come on…” Raven pouted and flipped Clarke off when she, upon being unfrozen by Lexa, shot a grin smug Raven’s way.

“I hope that was worth those bruises,” said Lexa as she helped her to her feet.

“Oh, it will be, those bruises and any future ones.”

The Room of Requirement bloomed into being as they approached it hand in hand. They smiled at one another as Lexa swung the door open so they could both sweep inside. They paused at the sight that awaited them.
“…Is that a sex swing?”

“I knew it! I fucking told you!”

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“I haven’t heard from Luna yet.”

Jamie only responded with a noncommittal hum, pulling back the curtain to peek out the window.

“Jamie? Roan, tell her to quit, she’s making me more nervous.”

Roan gently eased Jamie away from the windows, steering her into a chair before the fire. Jamie sighed and gratefully took the cup of tea he offered her.

“Sorry. What did you say?”

“I said I haven’t heard from Luna at all yet,” said Evie anxiously, twisting her hands together before her. “I thought she was just going back to her ship to pack up, but she never came back. I haven’t heard from her since.”

“Maybe she just got caught up,” suggested Roan.

“I don’t know. I thought she’d at least send me a message…”

“I’m sure she’s fine,” said Jamie, forcing herself to take a drink. She couldn’t really taste it. She couldn’t taste much of anything lately; she hadn’t slept since Evie called her over to turn her world upside down, and now, knowing there was so much at stake…well. She’d be lucky if she’d sleep at all again until people were dead or behind bars. “She’s a nightblood. Nothing much can get in the way of a person who can turn into a dragon at will, you know.”
“I know, but…” Evie worried her bottom lip. “It just frightens me. I hate that I have no way to reach her, not with her ship being out in the middle of the ocean somewhere. But you’re right, it’s Luna, I’m sure she’s fine.” She took a deep, steadying breath, before directing her attention onto Roan. “So, you’re hiding out then?”

His face fell, lips flattening into a thin line that showed his displeasure with the idea. “I suppose. Not that I want to…”

“You don’t have a choice,” said Jamie doggedly. “Nia used you last time, we can’t let her do it again. All you have to do is lay low until we gather the forces to infiltrate the castle. And I still need to get a warrant…”

“A warrant?” said Evie in disbelief. “You must be joking. They’re killing people in there! Fuck a warrant!”

“I know,” said Jamie, weariness showing in the glint of firelight on the gray streaks in her hair. “I know. It’s more for decoration than anything. It’s difficult maneuvering around making plans when there are spies everywhere I turn. I’m trying to be careful. If I alert anyone…Merlin.” She dragged a hand over her face, tired and resigned. “Everyone’s connected, Evie. If I make a move on Pike or Sydney, it’ll put Wallace on alert, and Nia will withdraw to stay safe. If I storm the castle to arrest Wallace, we’ll have to go through Nia, assuming she doesn’t escape first, and then hunt down Pike and Sydney who will probably go on the lamb. And that’s not taking into consideration the fact that the Jaha is under the effects of an Imperius curse and I have no idea who’s done it—Pike, Sydney, Wallace, Nia, Ontari, who knows! Any one of them could alert him. And we still know next to nothing about the woman in the red dress Clarke mentioned who killed her father.”

Evie’s face creased in sorrow. “Did you…find his body?”

Jamie let out a dry chuckle that wasn’t in the least bit amused. “Ha. No, of course not. There’s some imposter in his place and if we let him know we’re onto Jaha, Ontari will find out, so Nia will know, and then everyone else.”

Evie cursed, planting her elbows onto the table and burying her face in her hands. “How the fuck are we going to do this?”

“Carefully,” said Jamie grimly. “We’ll have to get everyone on our side in on this, and get everyone in place, and then make moves all at the same time. We can’t treat this like we’re…like…” She
struggled to think of an analogy, too tired to be particularly coherent.

“We can’t treat it like we’re fishing for a single plimpy,” said Roan firmly. “We have to use a net and scoop out the whole lot at once. And hope like hell that a shrake doesn’t come along and destroy the net…”

“Right. Yeah. That’s it.” Jamie drained the rest of her cuppa in one go. Tense silence stretched on, until Jamie eventually said, “If plans proceed as expected…hopefully we’ll make a move within the week.”

“Within the week?” said Evie, surprised. “But the way you just made it sound—“

“It’s going to be hard. I don’t know if we’ll be ready in a week. But I’m slowly letting the Order know, one by one. Kane is up to date, so is Byrne and Lovejoy. I’ve sent a message out for Gustus and I’m going to speak to Indra tonight, I would have already but every time I’ve went to see her she’s been busy. I tried a few hours ago and she was in the middle of disciplining students, I didn’t want to interrupt.”

“What if they tell Titus?”

Jamie shook her head. “They won’t. I’ve put a code in the message to Gustus, he’ll know it’s urgent, and everyone else will understand once I’ve shown them the memories you gave me. I want to meet up with the kids sometime soon to gather up some from them as well, I’m just—“ She hesitated. “I didn’t want to have to bring them into it until it was necessary.”

“They’re already in it,” Evie pointed out. “The prophecies directly involve them. You can’t shelter them, Jamie.”

Jamie sighed. “I know. I know.” But she wished she could. Merlin knows those kids have been through enough.

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The next morning arrived bright and early, and found Raven in a terribly grumpy mood. Last night
had been fun, aside from the bruise on her back from Clarke knocking her on her ass (she’d totally get her revenge eventually), but when they returned to Durmstrang ship Indra had spent a good ten minutes lecturing them about curfew and how bringing students from another school onto the ship is inappropriate before sending Raven back to the castle. She’d met Octavia in the entrance hall; apparently Indra had just lectured her too, having caught her with Lincoln below deck, so no wonder Indra wasn’t in the best of moods. Raven was forced to sleep alone in her four-poster bed that was far less comfortable and inviting when she wasn’t in Anya’s arms.

Her mood was improved the next day just by the mere fact that it was Friday and she only had a couple classes today, Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. Plus tomorrow was a scheduled Hogsmeade trip, so she was looking forward to that.

For now, Arithmancy was already out of the way, and lunch served to make her mood improve even more.

“What a healthy meal,” said Octavia sarcastically as she watched Raven pile tortilla crisps onto her plate. Jasper shuddered at the mere word ‘healthy.’

“What? Hop off my dick. I had to beg the House Elves to put this on the menu.”

Bellamy snorted. “Beg, yeah, right. Like you have to beg House Elves to do anything.”

“Shut it, Blake.” Bellamy scowled and lifted an arm to guard his plate when Raven stretched out across the table to grab the bowls of avocados sitting a ways down. Her expression fell when she sat back down in her seat and realized all the avocados were bright green and far too ripe. “Damn it.”

“Ha!” said Jasper.

Raven shot him a withering look before pulling her wand out and tapping the tip to an avocado. “Fre shavaca do.” It trembled for a second, and then the skin blackened.

Smiling in satisfaction, Raven cut one open and used a spoon to scoop out the perfect insides awaiting her. Jasper watched in vague horror as she repeated it a few times before piling it into a bowl and mashing it with her fork. She added some garlic and salt before continuing on.

“I should have asked for some cilantro and jalapeños,” muttered Raven as she worked. “But
whatever.” She dipped a crisp in and popped it into her mouth. “Oh yes. Totally healthy and worth it.”

“Eating all those crisps and all that salt isn’t healthy,” said Fox.

“It’s avocado. It’s green. It’s basically a fuckin’ salad. Here, have some.”

Fox pursed her lips but took the crisp Raven offered her, tentatively scooping the green onto it and eating it. She licked her lips. “Okay, actually, that’s pretty delicious.”

“Right? I mean, there’s way better guac you can get out there, but I grew up on this since my mom’s a cheap ho. This is the poor man’s *guacamole con totopos.*”

“Still too green for me,” said Jasper.

“Shut up, no one asked you.”

Jasper opened his mouth to further antagonize her, but a distraction arrived in the form of Clarke and Lexa. There was only one free seat, between Octavia and Jasper, but Clarke pulled Lexa onto it with her and they crammed in, exchanging smiles so doe-eyed and thirsty Raven was about to gag.

“Ooh, guac,” said Clarke, lighting up as she spotted it. “Have you ever had it?” she asked Lexa; when Lexa shook her head, Clarke reached out to take the crisp Raven was already extending to her. She held it up for Lexa to take a bite and gave the same dopey smile when Lexa chewed it happily and nodded, “It’s good.”

Clarke leaned forward to kiss the taste off her lips and then lingered. Jasper watched with an open mouth before Octavia kicked him under the table and stifled her snickering in her hand. Fox appeared to be blushing slightly.

“Seriously guys?” complained Raven, deadpanning them when they broke apart. “Right in front of my salad? I’m trying to eat here.”

“Aren’t you always,” said Clarke dryly, extricating herself from Lexa’s arms so she could drag a
plate of scotch eggs over to them. “You’re one to talk, anyway. You and Anya are constantly making me lose my appetite.”

“Say that to my face, Griffin,” said Anya as she suddenly appeared, and squeezed her way between Fox and Bellamy to perch beside Raven on the chair. Both Fox and Bellamy shot her particularly nasty looks, which Anya promptly ignored and Raven didn’t even notice.

“Guac, yas,” said Costia as she caught up, reaching in to steal a crisp and steal some guac. “Oooh, this is lovely, much better than what they serve us at Durmstrang.” Raven shot her an appreciative grin while Anya rolled her eyes and snidely muttered something that caused Costia to smirk and stick her tongue out at Anya.

Still, despite all her bluster, Anya did not hesitate to sneak a hand beneath the table to take Raven’s. She hid her smile behind her goblet of cinnamon-dusted pumpkin juice for the rest of the meal.

While everyone else headed to class (even Lexa, Lincoln, and Costia, who were all looking forward to sitting in on a Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson, which they followed after Octavia and Jasper for), Raven and Anya remained at the table, only crumbs of crisps now left on the plate.

“So what are your plans for the afternoon, Cheekbones?” sighed Raven, nudging Anya with her braced leg to indicate for her to sidle nearer; she did so and Raven leaned into her, head on her shoulder.

“Relaxing in solitude on the ship for a couple hours,” said Anya, smirking. “It will be quiet and peaceful with all of you occupied with lessons.”

“Oh come one, you don’t want to sit in on my Ancient Runes class? You might learn something.” A corner of Raven’s lips curved up slowly as she waggled her brows. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

Anya snorted. “There’s nothing Hogwarts teaches that I couldn’t learn better in Durmstrang. Besides,” she added haughtily, gathering her things and making to stand, coolly ignoring Raven’s full-fledged grin now as she, as always, takes it as a challenge. “I have no interest in runes, ancient or otherwise.”

It turns out to be a lie, she learned, late that evening in the Room of Requirement when Raven later traced them into her.
Clarke woke extra early Saturday morning, muffling a yawn in her scarf as she met Lexa at the entrance doors. It was too early for breakfast, so they headed out right away. A few students were already heading toward the distant gate, equally eager to get a head start on the Hogsmeade visit. Clarke calmly ignored the strange looks the other students shot at her for strolling across the grounds hand-in-hand with a Durmstrang. They idly conversed as they walked, and it was nice, to have a casual day out, even with the threats looming overhead. Nia was out there somewhere gathering a Shadow-Eater army, but here and now, Clarke was holding Lexa’s hands and strolling into Hogsmeade, planning to walk to the outskirts of the town and Disapparate to London. If her headmaster found out he’d probably be furious, but what Kane didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

“It’s a little weird,” mused Clarke as they meandered down the cobblestone road, birds chirping overhead. “I’ve technically never Apparated in this world, except for during training at the end of sixth year.”

Lexa swept her thumb over the ridges of Clarke’s knuckles, nodding absently at the barman of the Hog’s Head—Frankie Longbottom—who was sweeping at the doorstep, looked up and waved at them, though his smile was a bit subdued. “Never at all?"

“No, wait, that’s a lie. I did do it once over summer. I Apparated into Wells’s house just to surprise him.”

Lexa hummed, lips curving with amusement. “We use it often at Durmstrang. Our castle is not quite as grand as Hogwarts, but our grounds are three times as large. It’s much quicker to Disapparate from your bedroom straight into your classroom than it is to wake earlier to take the half mile trek to the Defense Against the Dark Arts building outside.”

“You can Apparate inside your castle grounds?” queried Clarke in surprise.

“Within the grounds,” corrected Lexa. “No one can Apparate from outside into them, or vice versa. But within the grounds we are able to. There are designated places set aside for it.”

“That would be handy here,” said Clarke, thinking how nice it would be to sleep in a bit later before double charms in the morning, rather than waking up early to trek halfway across the castle.
maneuvering between the moving staircases, countless other students, and a chipper-eyed Peeves that was far too energetic so early in the morning.

They reached the outskirts of town and huddled together, Lexa brushing such a soft kiss across the tip of Clarke’s nose it brought a faint pink dusting to her cheeks before they gripped hands more tightly and turned, squeezing into a compressing nothingness that pressed against their ears and their throats. When they stepped out of it they were in the sprawling streets of Diagon Alley, busy shopkeepers opening up their stores as a fair amount of customers already strolled down the path, chattering as the sun rose higher into the sky.

“Would you like some breakfast before we begin?” asked Lexa when they approached Osias Wands and found the owner, Sienna, still in the process of opening the shop up, a little boy excitedly bobbing along beside her.

Clarke nodded in assent and they swung around. Clarke assumed Lexa was leading her to the Leaky Cauldron but Lexa instead tugged Clarke down a separate path so that they emerged into an area that was significantly darker than Diagon Alley, containing none of the bright, inviting colors of the shops.

“Uh, Lexa? What are we doing in Knockturn Alley?”

“Eating,” said Lexa mildly; she deliberately misinterpreted Clarke’s silence and cast a half-smirk over her shoulder. “Food.”

Clarke smiled slightly and rolled her eyes. “I know that, dorkus. I didn’t even know there was a place to eat here, I thought it was just a load of shops selling dark artifacts.”

“Never judge an alley by its shops, Clarke.”

“Lexa, that’s literally the point of—“

“Oh, come on.”

She led her to a set of stairs crammed between an undertakers and a tattoo parlor called Markus Scarrs Indelible Tattoos. At the top of the stairs was a pawnbrokers and, across from it, a heavy door on which was a sigil of a wyvern breathing fire. Lexa pushed the door open and led Clarke into a
pub, which despite the early hour was already crawling with an odd assortment of customers. There were floating trays moving between the tables and the rows of booths set against the walls. A few hags sat at the bar nursing drinks—looked like dragonwhisky, Clarke noted in mild alarm considering the fact that it was hardly nine in the morning—and a goblin was brooding over in the corner, reading the paper as he steadily made his way through a large helping of chips and vinegar; perhaps he’d already eaten the fish. There were a few witches, bleary-eyed but heatedly discussing some potential business deal, sitting at the table nearest the doors, several empty glasses before them, two of which had just been refilled with steaming coffee. Lastly, at the large round table near a jukebox, which was softly crooning with an old Celestina Warbeck hit, there was a smattering of loudly jubilant wizards with windswept hair, ruddy faces, and glassy eyes, their table littered with empty bottles of firewhisky.

“Hello, mams!” came a squeaky voice somewhere below their waists. Clarke turned to look down at a House Elf, short even for elven standards, beaming up at them. “Would you prefer bar, booth, or table?”

“A booth I should think, please,” said Lexa politely. The elf procured a pair of menus from the elf-sized podium and then gestured with a respectful bow for them to follow. Lexa smiled and squeezed Clarke’s hand at her quizzical expression, and followed the elf to a booth. The elf, who wore a tiny impeccable suit complete with a tie nearly as long as its body, asked their drink orders, and hardly ten seconds later Clarke realized the floating trays were not floating trays at all, but were carried overhead by other elves. Their server, a young-looking elf with a spotty face and a snout-like nose, smiled and bowed lowly and then shuffled away after placing two cups of steaming tea and an assortment of milk, cream, and sugar on the table before them.

“My name is Coco and I’ll be taking your orders today, mams,” squeaked the elf. She had huge green eyes and a beaky nose; her nose and cheeks were covered in a sparse smattering of freckles. “I’ll give you a moment to look over the menus!”

The moment she glided away, Clarke rounded on Lexa. “What is this place?

“The White Wyvern Pub,” said Lexa, smiling at Clarke over her menu. “It’s actually been around since the early 1500s, it was one of the first places here when Diagon Alley was created. It switched ownership almost a decade ago when the elves officially bought it out.”

There was an assortment of decorations on the wall that included several awards and certificates; Quidditch banners; a photograph of a woman with thick, bushy hair and a pretty smile beaming at the camera along with several elves standing at her side; a portrait of Hooky the House-Elf standing before his raft, who Clarke recognized from his statue located in the dungeons at Hogwarts; a shadow box displaying what looked to be a battered old button with the letters S. P. E. W on it; a portrait of an ancient-looking elf with a golden locket hanging over his thin chest standing before what looked like an army of elves in the Hogwarts kitchens, all of them with fierce expressions on
their little faces and wielding kitchen knives; and lastly, a huge painting of a House-Elf hung directly above the bar as the most eye-catching piece in the pub. The elf himself was true to size; the reason the portrait was so large were the several misshapen hats, at least a dozen, piled one on top of the other on his head. He wore a shrunken maroon sweater and a pair of mismatched sock, held a sock in one hand and a sea shell in the other, and wore a beaming smile as he caught Clarke’s eye and enthusiastically waved at her, which she returned.

“How do you know about this place?” asked Clarke in amazement, turning to Lexa once more and catching her quickly looking down at her menu again, not quite able to hide her broad smile in time. When she looked up and caught Clarke grinning, she stopped fighting it and let it take over.

“Most Durmstrangs do their school shopping at Hemmemagi’s in Oslo, but Trolldom Gate, the entrance, is guarded by a trolls who always demand outrageous amounts of money in order to pass through, so some prefer shopping elsewhere. In my second year I went shopping with Anya and her parents brought us here. They are the ones who sold it to Coco and her partner Popsey.” Lexa gestured toward the bar and Clarke twisted around to spot a small photograph she hadn’t noticed at first; a grin split across her face at once when she spied tiny little Anya, hardly a toddler, in her mother’s arms. That was clearly where she got her cheekbones, but her eyes were shared with her father’s. They stood next to two little elves, one of which was Coco and one of which was an elf who must be Popsey, who stood slightly taller than Coco and had bright blue eyes and a squashed, tomato-like nose. They were all beaming (minus Anya, who even at that age was scowling at the camera), and Coco and Popsey stood atop a stool and held scissors before a red ribbon stretching across the doorway of the pub.

“I think that’s possibly the best thing I’ve ever heard,” confessed Clarke as she turned around again.

Lexa smiled as she stirred milk into her tea. “I’m glad you like it. It’s one of my favorite places.”

“I think it might be one of mine now too,” said Clarke, smiling back and holding Lexa’s regard until the moment was broken by the sudden cheering of the wizard in Quidditch robes, who had clearly been here for some amount of time now judging by their drunken singing and renewed drinking games.

Clarke and Lexa used the time to peruse the menu. It only took Lexa a moment since she’d obviously been here many times before and knew what she liked, but it took Clarke a bit longer, carefully scrutinizing each item before finally making a decision. When Coco returned, she did not write down their orders but merely nodded enthusiastically with each word spoken, and cast them a warm, reassuring smile before gliding off again.

Their food was delivered almost instantly afterward, the waiter—Toddy, Clarke noted when she spied the tiny name badge on his suit—bringing refills for their tea along with it. The smell alone was
mouthwatering, let alone how delicious it looked. Their table was filled with it all: Clarke had ordered scrambled eggs with tomatoes and mushrooms, cucumber and black bread on the side, while Lexa had smoked ham and yogurt with banana and muesli.

Hardly any time later, Clarke was fit to bursting, her plates wiped clean by the time Toddy appeared to take them away.

“What do you think?” asked Lexa.

“I think the food was great and this place is amazing. Les get shit done,” said Clarke, pursing her lips to hide her smile as she brought them to the rim of her cup. Lexa laughed.

Lexa insisted on paying for the meal and they thanked Coco and Toddy and waving at Popsey, who was working the bar, before heading out. Clarke pressed a firm, grateful kiss to Lexa’s cheek and Lexa squeezed her hand as they made their way back to Osias Wands.

Once inside, Clarke couldn’t help the tremble of her heart in relief at seeing Sienna and her son healthy and undamaged. The little boy sat on a stool behind the front counter, his legs swinging, playing with a miniscule model of a broom—a Supernova Seven by the look of it—that zoomed around before him until he snatched it out of the air before it could go too far. Sienna warned him to behave himself before leading Clarke and Lexa deeper into the store, asking Clarke questions and measuring her up just as last time, climbing a ladder to grab several boxes and setting them on a nearby table. She stilled, and consequently the measuring tape stilled, hovering before Clarke’s nose, when she noticed Lexa’s wand poking out of her pocket. Sienna’s eyes widened.

“Is that an elder wand?”

Looking a little sheepish, Lexa withdrew it, allowing Sienna to step closer to eagerly observe it. Clarke, shaking her head in amusement, opened the first box Sienna gave her to pull out the wand; there was no warmth that flooded her fingertips, no familiarity to it. This wasn’t the one.

“It is an elder wand,” Sienna crowed enthusiastically, while Clarke opened up the next box. “Those are very rare wands, you know, they have a terrible reputation, very unlucky, ‘wand of elder, never prosper’ and all that. Of course, that’s all based in superstition because of that old children’s tale about The Deathly Hallows…although some say that was proven true in the case of the infamous Elder Wand,” she said thoughtfully, before adding with a hum, “But yes, I’m afraid they haven’t been made in quite some time. Last I heard there were five still lingering about, but most parents pitch a fit and refuse to buy it even if it does choose their child.” Clarke was trying her third wand now. Sienna handed Lexa her wand back, smiling as Lexa slipped it back into her pocket. “They say
when one is chosen by an elder wand, they’re marked out for a special destiny.”

On the fourth box, Clarke had a feeling before she even picked it up. She gasped, heart leaping as a familiar warmth spread through her hand. She lifted the wand fully out of the case. “This is it, this is the one!” She turned to smile joyously at Lexa, who smiled back just as enthusiastically. It was a strange sensation—in this time, she’d never held this wand before. But it vibrated in her palm, as though welcomed home.

Sienna walked forward, extending a hand, so Clarke offered the wand to her. Sienna turned it over in her hands, studying it closely. “Rowan, huh? They’re also known as mountain ash. They’re pretty powerful wands, I don’t think there’s ever been a single witch or wizard with one who bowed to the Dark Arts. Here, let me see it.” Sienne held it up to the light, eying it critically. “Phoenix tail feather, twelve and a quarter inches. Resilient. Handy with healing charms, and you’ll be able to produce some powerful protective charms with this—roman wands tend to work great defensive magic. It’s well suited to you,” she said, handing it to Clarke with a grin.

“Thank you!” It seemed Clarke couldn’t hold a smile for longer than two seconds without it immediately shifting onto Lexa. Sienna noticed, and her grin widened, turned a little sly.

“You know…rowan and elder wands are said to share a connection.”

“Really?”

Sienna nodded, her smile growing. “Really. I don’t know how well versed you are in wandlore and history, but Garrick Ollivander—one of the greatest wandmakers of all time—said there’s a powerful affinity between those wand types and their owners. They say it manifests in special abilities, like being able to sense if the other is in danger, and being able to find each other over great distances.”

Clarke exchanged an incredulous glance with Lexa. That explained how in the other world she managed to Disapparate to exactly where Lexa was, and why her wand had been acting like it did. Even now it shivered slightly in her hand, vibrating as though excited.

“Take good care of it,” Sienna told her, before winking at them. “And of each other.”

They barely blushed, but they still grinned shiftily at one another, before Sienna replaced the other boxes and led them back to the front of the shop where her son still sat quietly playing with his broom. Clarke paid her and thanked her, and she’d already switched out her old wand for her new one by the time she and Lexa were meandering up to the area set aside for Apparation at the back of
“You know, I’m curious. How much would a wand cost in muggle money? Do you know the exchange rate, between our money and muggle money?” It was something she’d never bothered asking Raven, Octavia, Bellamy, or any of her other friends familiar with the muggle world. She’d never even asked her own father. Truthfully, she’d never really given it much thought.

“Not exactly, but I could probably guess,” said Lexa thoughtfully. “Let me see…A galleon is probably about…twenty pounds. So you probably just spent…about a hundred and seventy five pounds or so on your wand. If my guess is correct…that could be wildly inaccurate.”

“Is that a lot, in muggle money?”

Lexa shrugged. “Depends on who you’re asking. My parents certainly wouldn’t think so, but there are many who would. Personally, I would imagine something as important as a wand, which will last you a lifetime, would cost much more than that.”

“Hmm.” Clarke lapsed into thought. In all honesty, she’d never particularly given much thought to the muggle world period. She’d watched old muggle movies and football games with her father and Wells, she’d even visited Raven and Octavia in the muggle world one summer, but it just had never been very exciting to her. Now, however, she found herself wondering all about the place Lexa came from. Perhaps after everything was said and done, she and Lexa could take a vacation of their own…

“What are you going to do with your old wand?” asked Lexa.

“I’m not taking it to St. Mungo’s to deliver to my mother right now, if that’s what you’re asking,” said Clarke dryly. Lexa chuckled. “I’ll just hang on to it and give it to her…when I see her.” It wasn’t a pleasant thought. Her mother…though Clarke had already went through everything with her and mostly forgiven her in the other world, in this one they had yet to speak. Her mother didn’t even know that her husband was dead, had been murdered by his best friend. She didn’t even know there were memories both she and her daughter were missing (though Clarke wasn’t missing them anymore). Clarke could now fully appreciate the position Lexa had been in before, when she hadn’t told Clarke everything she knew. Not only would it be dangerous for her mother to know, but…it would hurt telling her. Hurt both of them.

Imagining the similar anguish Lexa went through regarding her decision, Clarke quietly squeezed her hand, lifting it to brush a kiss across the back of it. Lexa looked at her curiously, though pleased. Clarke would tell her all that, eventually. Right now she didn’t want to ruin a nice day with such
heavy talk. So she smiled instead, and asked, “What did you think of what Sienna told us? About our wands?”

“A bit of a surprise. I thought it was strange when you showed up at the lakeside that day, but I was too relieved to question it at the time.”

“Same. I actually kind of thought somehow I just…went where I needed to be. Where I wanted to be.”

Lexa dipped her head in a nod, almost bashful. “I wondered if perhaps I wished so hard for you to be there…and with Anya wishing for Raven, and Lincoln wishing for Octavia, that perhaps it had influenced your Disapparation. I had never heard of such a thing happening, but then again, I had once never even imagined such a thing as witches and wizards were real either. Magic is a funny thing.”

“It really is.”

They Disapparated back to Hogsmeade and decided to poke around the shops a bit, fully relishing their ban being lifted. They didn’t buy anything at Arker’s (though they did amuse themselves there, particularly when Miller set off an Aviatomobile and instigated a race between Monty, wearing an Anti-Gravity Hat, and Jasper, wearing Sticky Trainers). They left Honeyduke’s with pockets laden with sweets, and then entered the Three Broomsticks hand in hand, hearts more full than their stomachs and pockets combined.

Evie spotted them at once, pausing in her wipe-down of the bar to wave. They returned it before finding a table, and had hardly sat down by the time Evie arrived, setting two gleaming bottles of butterbeer before them.

“No charge,” she said, waving a hand in dismissal when Clarke and Lexa reached for their pockets. They smiled warmly and thanked her, before noticing the tension in her shoulders, how the skin around her eyes was tight.

“What’s wrong?”

Evie hesitated, glancing around to ensure no customers were too close, but clearly deemed it to be too much of a risk. She subtly gestured for them to follow her and they did so, Clarke casting a furtive look over her shoulder to make certain no one had noticed before she and Lexa followed Evie half up the staircase, into the quiet shadows. “I haven’t heard from Luna yet.” When Lexa and Clarke immediately looked alarmed, Evie shook her head. “I’ve already told Jamie, she said it’s…”
probably nothing. Luna is a Nightblood after all, it’s not likely she’s been attacked or anything.”

“But not an impossibility,” said Lexa cautiously. “It’s feasible that something may have changed, Nia could have decided to make a risk and take out a possible threat, with Luna being both an Order member and a Nightblood…”

“Yes, but I don’t see why that would happen,” said Evie, though the anxious way she bit at the inside of her bottom lip contradicted the certainty of the statement. “Nothing has happened that’s significantly different from the other…time. I mean, aside from the fact that we all know, but we haven’t had done anything to show that we know, nothing that would instigate a change to the order of events that happened…”

Clarke still didn’t like the sound of it. It truly might be nothing. But her instincts told her (as she was sure Lexa’s and Evie’s did) that it was too great of a coincidence for this to happen now.

“Is Jamie around?” she asked.

Evie shook her head, lifting her wrist to peep at her watch. “She’s at your school right now, actually, I believe filling Indra and Gustus in.”

Lexa perked up at once. “Gustus is back?”

“Yeah, Jamie sent a message that managed to reach him.”

Clarke returned the relieved smile Lexa gave her.

“I better get back to work,” said Evie anxiously, peering over the corner down at the rest of the pub. “You two—I imagine Indra will want to speak to you once she knows what’s going on. In the meantime, stay on your guard, and stay safe. Take care of each other.”

“Always,” said Lexa solemnly.

Evie smiled in response, and Clarke did too, flushing and squeezing Lexa’s hand.
Indra filled them in on how Jamie was slowly reaching out to each Order member and swearing them all to secrecy. A plan was in motion to make a move on each threat at once, with the most obvious being Mount Weather. The only problem was a lack of people—it was going to be difficult having enough manpower to take down multiple people at once, so spread out. But Jamie was confident, she assured them the next day when she arrived, that they would be fine once every auror and hit wizard and witch joined the cause, so long as she could successfully keep Jaha none the wiser. Clarke and Lexa wasted no time at all in warning Jamie about how attacking Mount Weather may go. The problem was that Jamie didn’t have her own memories back, she’d merely seen the memories of others…so she didn’t quite get it.

“I’m telling you, Ontari is going to be your biggest problem, even more so than Nia. You have to concentrate on her.”

“Look, I know she did terrible things in the other lifetime—“

“Terrible things? That doesn’t even begin to describe it!” hissed Clarke. “She mass murdered thousands of people! She broke the Statute and revealed herself, to the entire muggle world!”

“Yes, Clarke, but we can’t just kill people with no proof,” said Jamie in exasperation, and then sighed when Clarke’s eyes bugged and she opened her mouth to furiously protest. “I’m not saying I’m not going to arrest her, Clarke. I’m saying that we have to be smart about this. I know she needs to be put away. I know she’s guilty. But there are going to be plenty of people out there who don’t, even with our memories as proof, they could say they’ve been tampered with or entirely fabricated. She has a cult following—or at least Nia does. Countless people who believe the same way they do, that muggles are below us, that they’re dangerous and threaten our very way of living.”

“Every Death Eater should be tossed into Azkaban too—“

“They aren’t all Death Eaters! The world isn’t split between good people and Death Eaters, Clarke! There are plenty of people who don’t take such an active role in it but still participate and contribute to the corruption in their own way. Voting against laws that would protect muggleborns. Brainwashing their children to blindly follow their beliefs. Nia will be easier to arrest, but Pike? Sydney? Wallace? We have to be smart about this, we have to be careful. We almost have enough evidence gathered up, we just need some more people, and then we can make a move and hope they don’t put up too much of a fight.”

“They won’t go quietly,” said Clarke fiercely. “Trust me.”
“You need to gather as many people as you can,” said Lexa. “Clarke is right. Cage and the others will never make it easy, not when their magic is at risk, let alone their source of income and their pride. You have one chance and you can’t afford to get it wrong.”

Jamie stared at the both of them, who glared back at her, and a tense silence stretched between them long enough Clarke thought they may have gone too far, that the Head of the Aurors was about to explode.

She didn’t. Instead, Jamie clamped her mouth shut, clenching her jaw in a way that oddly reminded Clarke of Lexa, and nodded.

“All right. I’ll take your words for it, okay? We’ll do this your way.”

“The right way,” asserted Lexa.

Jamie gave the ghost of an amused smile before heading out.

Indra suggested anyone from the other world who proved themselves trustworthy should be brought into the circle, so that night, Clarke, Lexa, Anya, and Raven gathered those they trusted most from the other world—Octavia, Lincoln, Wells, Fox, Bellamy, Monty, Miller, and Jasper—along with Costia and sat them down in the Room of Requirement. They showed them memories, more brief and chaste but enough they needed to know, and patiently waited the hours needed to watch them. When they reemerged, they were horrified, though their reactions varied (Fox was hysterical and ended up needing Clarke to brew her a Calming Draught from her emergency potions kit; Octavia, Bellamy and Miller were stony and silent; Lincoln, Wells, Jasper, and Monty were in blank shock; and poor Costia some mixture of the last two). Another several hours were spent going over everything and swearing them to the utmost secrecy before they allowed them to leave, and then Clarke, Raven, Lexa, Anya, Lincoln and inexplicably Wells of all people lingered even longer to comfort Costia, who was still in shock. There were tears (a fair amount shed by Lexa, too), more hugs, and awkward shoulder-patting from Wells, but finally, they all headed off to bed, Clarke pausing in the hallway to double-check Wells was okay (he had just discovered his father was in danger and somehow responsible for the murder of Clarke’s father, after all). Then Clarke and Raven dragged themselves up the tower to bed, separated from Lexa and Anya for once, who both wanted to see Gustus and also felt as though they should be with Costia for the night, which was the right choice.

It took a few days, but eventually people calmed down. They even found ways to laugh and keep upbeat about it.
“Hey, maybe they’ll write books about us!” enthused Jasper during dinner as he ladled a ridiculous amount of potatoes onto his plate; Clarke, who had never been particularly warm to the idea in the first place, once again doubted their choice to include Jasper, partly because he was an idiot who got on her nerves, but mostly because he’d also proven himself to be reckless and unstable when grieving. But he’d been part of their group in the other world, and he’d yet to even meet Maya in this time, and Monty would have probably told him everything anyway. “How cool is that? Hey Bell, you could be teaching about us.”

Bellamy made a face. “Merlin help my future students.”

“They’ll probably change facts up,” said Octavia wisely, drowning her own mash in gravy before taking a bite. Her cheeks bulged as she added, “You know, like, they’ll add shit in to make it even more dramatic. Say that we defeated evil while surfing on our broomsticks one-handed, stuff like that.”

“They’ll give us all typical literary archetypes,” said Wells. “Maybe they’ll make me a scholar. Most of us would be warriors, though.”

“Clarke would be the commander of death,” said Anya with a smirk.

“No, no, I know how it’ll go,” said Raven, waving her fork-full of stabbed peas to silence them. “Lexa’s the commander of blood, Clarke’s the commander of death, and I’m the motherfuckin’ hero that saves all of your asses.” She gave a crooked grin. “I’m the savior!”

“What am I?” wondered Fox.

“The booknerd,” said Raven.

“What about me?” grunted Bellamy.

“You’re the idiot,” said Raven seriously. She cackled when he rolled his eyes and pushed at her shoulder.

Jamie visited again that night, along with some frightening news: Luna had turned up, severely
injured and barely coherent, at the Ministry. She barely managed to say three words; Jaha, escape, dark, before she collapsed. It was too dangerous to take her to St. Mungo’s so Jamie retrieved Abby instead, giving her—at Clarke’s bequest, for she didn’t want her mother to know the full extent of what happened in the previous world, on top of the fact that her father was dead quite yet—only a brief summarization of what was going on. Clarke felt like a horrible hypocrite for keeping it a secret, but spending the night apologizing to Lexa with soft kisses all over her body seemed to make it a bit better. Jamie assured her that after Luna was healed, Abby would be going into protection, hiding out with Roan.

The news about Luna was horrifying. She had yet to wake up so far, placed in a medical coma for the time being as the various potions and healing charms worked to the full effect. Meanwhile, it fueled everyone else more than ever to work out a plan to take down every dark witch and wizard in their path. They needed a secure place where they wouldn’t be disturbed or spied on, so Raven and Clarke (somewhat) reluctantly led them all to the Room of Requirement, which transformed itself into a huge, airy space that looked somewhat like an office that would belong to hard-hitting, obsessive aurors.

They spent the rest of the night strategizing. Raven retrieved all the work she and Anya had done and spread various articles and a roughly constructed timeline out over the giant board hanging on the wall. They spent hours picking over every tiny detail, slowly but surely developing a plan. Anya informed them about the Erumpent horn in Mount Weather and how it could be utilized. Clarke refused to tell anyone (save for Lexa, Evie, Luna, Raven, and Anya who already knew) exact details about the Flame or its location, paranoid someone could be captured by Nia and tortured for the information, which Jamie actually agreed with, though later, in secret, they decided it was safer for Clarke to carry the Flame on her at all times, so they planned for her to be snuck into the Ministry at some point to do that. They played memories on the wall like an old-school projector (according to Raven’s terminology, whatever the hell that meant). And even with all the small flaws in their plans, there was still one giant, glaringly obvious one.

“What do we do about the woman in red?” asked Clarke. A dozen other people just stared grimly back at her. “We don’t know…literally anything about her, aside from the fact that her name is Alie and she’s bewitching people. Not only did she murder my dad, but she’s somehow wrapped up right in the heart of all this. She has Jaha on her side, and she looked exactly like Becca.”

“I didn’t see anything in any of my research,” said Raven with a grimace.

No one else had any answers, but in the late hours when some left and those who remained ordered the students to go to bed since they technically had class the next day, as they headed toward Ravenclaw Tower, Raven said, “You know, I wonder…” before trailing off, stopping in her tracks and causing the rest of them (Clarke, Anya, and Lexa) to stop with her.

Clarke raised her brows. “You wonder what?”
Raven opened her mouth, brow furrowing as she hesitated; her eyes darted toward Clarke’s wrist. “The Resurrection Stone. How exactly does it work? I mean, does it bring back a ghost, or is it like—a real person?”

“Not ghosts,” said Clarke, shaking her head. “I mean, they weren’t very…human, either. But they were definitely more than ghosts.”

“They?” inquired Lexa.

“I brought a few people back. You, Anya, Wells, Fox, and my Dad.”

“What the fuck, I was dead too!” said Raven, gaping at her in mild outrage. “Why didn’t you call me back?”

“I didn’t know if you were dead or not,” said Clarke defensively. “And I mean, I didn’t exactly choose who came back anyway, I just turned the stone and people showed—you know what, this doesn’t even matter!”

“Doesn’t matter to you,” muttered Raven. “I was probably dead. You bring fucking Fox Buechner of all people back to life and not even your best friend but that’s cool I guess—”

“Raven.” Clarke pinched the bridge of her nose, taking a breath. “Seriously, what’s your point?”

“My point,” continued Raven hotly, “is, what if Becca was brought back and then forced to kill your dad? Or like, did it willingly because she’s evil? Like what if this was her plan all along? The Flame is some sick game to gain a form of immortality, she somehow tricked your dad into fixing it for her so she could return one day—”

“I doubt it,” said Clarke flatly. “That woman just seemed…off. I don’t know how to explain it.”

“Well, why don’t we just use the stone? We could call her back to ask her. Or we could speak to your dad!”
“We considered that,” said Clarke, looking sideways at Lexa, who nodded. “Lexa suggested it too, but then we were too worried we’d mess up the Flame. It doesn’t exactly come with an instruction manual. And if we break it, then we’re fucked. Anyone that dies…” She swallowed. “…would stay that way, for good. We can’t risk that. We’re just going to have to figure things out on our own. That’s what we do best anyway,” she said, voice growing more solemn, abruptly turning and starting up the staircase again. Raven opened her mouth to protest, but stopped when Anya shook her head and Lexa placed a gentle, placating hand on her shoulder.

But the idea didn’t go away.

* * *

There were three days to go until the Choosing Ceremony, and Raven didn’t know what to do.

On one hand, they obviously weren’t going through with the tournament. It could be cancelled beforehand, but not after, because ancient magic apparently had a lot of rules that were a pain in the ass, as most rules tended to be. But if Kane went ahead and cancelled it, that’d send up a big red flag to Diana Sydney, Pike, and the Wallaces, who would all feed the information back to Nia, who would know something’s up. Not to mention Jaha and the mysterious lady in red. The Order had arranged to proceed with their plan tonight, meaning in only a matter of hours they would be striking against everyone, making arrests and attacking… but they were no closer to knowing who the woman in red was. It was too dangerous to leave her out of the equation and they had to do something. It was becoming increasingly obvious to Raven, yet apparently no one else, what they had to do.

So she stole Clarke’s watch.

She rose in the dead of night, leaving Anya slightly snoring in her four-poster bed. She skimmed a cautious glance over Clarke and Lexa’s sleeping forms in their own bed before raising her wand. Clarke had taken to wearing it 24/7 after retrieving the stone only a couple days ago; she’d came back exhausted and shaky, stating the City of Light was no picnic even when there wasn’t a murderous, rampaging dragon attempting to swallow you whole. This was probably more dangerous than even that, though, attempting to remove this while Clarke, Lexa, and Anya all slept, but fortunately Raven may have found an easier way. She crouched low over the wand and whispered, “Ascende Superious. Seek Higher Things.” The watch didn’t budge; Raven rolled her eyes, trying to remember which exact phrase it was Clarke had mentioned. “May we meet again.”
Success. There was a few seconds’ worth of ticking and whirring that made Raven cringe, glancing at Clarke and Lexa’s faces, but they just slept on. The watch popped open and Raven didn’t hesitate in reaching in to gingerly grasp the small stone nestled in the frame. She held it tightly in her palm. Then she carefully—probably more carefully than she’d ever done in her life—crept down the staircase and out of the common room, heading straight for the Room of Requirement where she knew she wouldn’t be overheard or interrupted.

Her heart was pounding when she finally reached it, shutting the door behind her and opening her hand. The stone was slightly damp from her sweaty palm, but whatever. She closed her eyes and turned the stone three times.

“Raven Reyes. I’ve been waiting for this moment for a long time.”

Raven’s eyes flew open. There was a woman standing there, but she wasn’t wearing a red dress. Becca looked just as she did in the photographs on her articles, all elegance and grace with a hint of something more sincere, more down to earth just beneath the surface.

Raven cleared her throat. “Uh, hey. You know me, I guess.”

“Yes, I do.” Becca wore sweeping robes that may have been silvery, though it was hard to tell since her appearance was…strange. Not transparent, but not exactly solid, either. “As I said, I’ve been waiting for a long time. Ask me whatever you need.”

It was now Raven found herself standing with her foot in her mouth, unnerved at Becca’s expectancy.

“Um, so…what’s up with the woman in the red dress who looks like you?” she said feebly.

Becca’s lips pressed together as though to suppress a smile at how Raven asked. “I created Alie in an attempt to fix the problem I made when I created Nia and the Shadow-Eaters. It backfired.”

“Oh,” said Raven lamely. Becca supplied nothing else, and it was awkward enough Raven felt heat creep up her neck. Pull it together, Reyes. She cleared her throat again and straightened. This room was small and square, a single table and two chairs placed in the middle, torches around the room fairly low-lying save for the single bright chandelier above. This room was made for interrogations. Raven had a feeling the chairs would remain untouched. “Clarke said her dad said that you were arrested for doing experiments with dark magic?”
“I was arrested on murder charges, actually,” said Becca lightly. Somberness was etched into every feature of her face. “I got carried away, swept up in my ideas…I knew the Flame would save the world, I knew I’d be the one to create it. At the time, I thought nothing else mattered. What were a few lives in face of saving the world? It was for the greater good, I told myself. I found people to test it for me. Most of them wouldn’t ever come back. Some did, and…they didn’t make it anyway. Again and again, I refused to stop because I was determined to succeed. At first the Ministry attributed the missing people to Nia, but when they realized…” She shrugged. “By that time, I’d realized what I had became. I tried to make Alie instead, but you know how that turned out. I put her to sleep and went willingly. I spent the rest of my admittedly short life in Azkaban.”

“So Alie was supposed to be like…a savior?”

Becca closed her eyes. “I was wrong. Alie was…she was my attempt to fix everything, but it ended up making everything worse.”

“But what is she?”

“She’s muggle technology.” Raven’s heart skipped a beat, her eyes widening. “I studied the ways muggle technology reacts when enchanted…it often serves as a host, absorbing and holding onto the magic before starting to create its own. I assumed that Alie would operate as a foil to the Shadow-Eaters…rather than absorbing magic, she would start to produce some, and then provide that to those who had their magic stolen, along with squibs and muggleborns. So I found the most advanced muggle technology I could. The best of the best. The muggles thought I was working on an artificial intelligence and began using the acronym ALIE and it stuck. They thought I was developing something to help deal with the issues in the muggle world…something solution to global warming, or overpopulation…in reality, I planned on using ALIE to help the wizarding community. Not overpopulation at all, but rather the opposite…there were fewer and fewer purebloods and more muggleborns than ever.”

Raven stared at her with a crease between her brow and her lips downturned. “What’s wrong with that?”

Becca sighed. “Maybe nothing. At the time, I considered it to be a problem. I had grown up knowing there was something different about me, but I was never able to talk about it to anyone. After all, how could I? How could I tell anyone that I sometimes had visions that would end up coming true, or that I could do a host of bizarre things I could never explain—things like picking things up without touching them, or growing my own hair out several inches overnight, or shattering glass without ever lifting a finger or uttering a sound?”
“I know what that feels like,” muttered Raven.

Becca nodded knowingly. “Then you know it is a lonely life. Meanwhile, squibs live the reversal—they are different, and they know it and everyone around them knows it, but they’re unable to do anything about it, either. I sought to bring those two problems together to cultivate a solution…I knew muggleborns must have ancestry tied in to wizardry, that it resurfaces generations later. Muggleborns are derived from squibs, which are derived from purebloods. It’s all a cycle, you see? So the political divide in our world—even the divide between muggles and wizardkind period—it’s unnecessary. This is where my upbringing became a key factor. What advantages had I learned spending sixteen years living as a muggle?”

“You were a scientist…” said Raven slowly, “So…so you were trying to figure out stuff about our genes. Stuff other wizards would never do…”

“Exactly,” nodded Becca. “Being a muggleborn yourself, you know better than most how backwards the wizarding world can be at times. The majority of wizards and witches are not very logical…why would they be, after all? Why would they need to be? When the solution to nearly any problem they could have is resolved with a simple wave of a wand? But muggles are resourceful and inventive in ways wizards could never be…they were forced to learn how to advance, to adapt to a changing world and rise to meet it. They developed technology so innovative that it’s a marvel, technology like magic in its own right. What better way to study the divide between magic and non-magic than by using a bit of both? So I returned to the muggle world in secret, joined a team of the best and brightest scientists, and began borrowing the equipment to run experiments. My plan was to study how the manifestation of genes could skip generations under specific circumstances. My goal was to figure out how to ensure that the gene for the ability to do magic was always passed down.”

“So you wanted to get rid of muggles,” said Raven, mouth open in something between awe and disgust. “Just…in a different way.”

“I wanted to make magic available to everyone,” affirmed Becca. “Make it to where one day, in the distant future, squibs and muggleborns no longer exist because everyone is always born with magic.”

Raven didn’t say anything; she didn’t quite know what to think of this. Something about it didn’t sit right with her, but in a way, she could see where Becca was coming from at the same time.

“That was the end goal, anyway,” continued Becca. “But I knew that was a long, long way off, and in the meantime I sought to find Band-Aid solutions until that day came.” She shook her head, lip curling, appearing deeply revolted with herself. “My experiments with muggle equipment were difficult; in many circumstances, you need magic to find magic, and I was researching things that had never before been so thoroughly looked into. It would take me years of study, decades, centuries I didn’t have. I decided to use magic rather…recklessly. I was arrogant and foolish.” She took a
breath. “I should first explain to you that I have always had a soft spot for animals. Creatures of any kind—I had many pets growing up who became my only confidants. The cat I had at seven years old was the best friend in whom I confided all of my deepest, darkest secrets about my strange powers, all the way up until I was sixteen and found out the truth. I enjoyed all my classes, and was—for my lack of modesty—very gifted in all of my classes, but Care of Magical Creatures was always one of the classes I enjoyed most. I had briefly considered going on a mission after graduation to study dragons in Romania, but the offer to work in the Department of Mysteries was too great to give up, so I took it instead.

“One of the issues the ministry was dealing with at the time was rounding up the remaining dementors that still existed after the war with Voldemort. They were in hiding but still capable of having a population explosion, and the Ministry was concerned there may be another wave of them. I was curious with their ability to evolve and adapt—for years of being hunted, fleeing from patronuses, had afforded them the ability to shift into shadow itself...they were sometimes forced to breed with other creatures, lethifolds and boggarts being examples...I found it fascinating. I arranged for some to be delivered to me. For the next few years, I experimented on them. I encouraged them to breed with lethifolds and discovered certain traits passed on but evolved with them...the ability to expunge one’s magic as well as soul, for example. I hid it from most of the ministry, but the ones who did know, but were enthusiastic, thinking we could use them as a weapon...all I wanted to do was study and learn from them, but I ended up creating a terrible weapon anyway, wizardkind’s ultimate weapon...and worst enemy. At the time, I didn’t think so. I thought we were making historical strides, I thought I was making a difference. The Kwins were the last line of a pureblood family eager to give their daughter magic, and I ignored the fact that they wanted it for all the wrong reasons, for their prejudice and ignorance, in an effort to help the girl instead. Even when I recognized the darkness inside her—I worked so closely with dementors and lethifolds that I knew very well what that look in her eyes meant—I ignored it, convinced myself she was just cold because her parents were hard on her...

“I was a fool,” said Becca calmly. “There is an ancient quote by a known squib that brings the situation to light. Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect. I had the majority of the ministry at my back, every politician who supported the initial drafts of the Pro-Blood Exclusion Act. At first we only took magic from those who volunteered...old wizards and witches on their deathbed, happy to help. It wasn’t until after I was arrested that I discovered some of my co-workers were going behind my back to supply the Shadow-Eaters, and Nia, with fresher magic. These people went on to be her first followers. According to them, if they stole from muggleborns, it wasn’t a crime, is it? Just taking away what was never theirs in the first place. Thieving from thieves. Yet I still thought what I was doing was good. It wasn’t until I made a prophecy determining the future fate of the world that things changed.

“No two Seers are alike. They are all unique in their power and ability; some simply voice prophecies aloud during an episode they won’t be able to remember, some See them, some hear whispers, some find themselves painting the events...I could See and hear them.”

“What did you see?” asked Raven, heart beating fast.
A world in which the divide was greater than ever. Muggles were imprisoned and treated like
slaves, muggleborns were considered a threat and killed, Shadow-Eaters were growing like a plague.
Nia paved the way for even darker witches and wizards to rise to the mantle of truly heinous crimes.”

*Ontari*, thought Raven. She ran her hands through her hair, stressed and hot enough she started
pulling it together, using the tie on her wrist to put up a sloppy ponytail. “And that snapped you back
to reality?”

Becca smiled, a bit sadly and a bit wryly, at Raven’s way of putting it. “You could say that. I had
another vision, later. One that was difficult to See…it was blurry and distorted. A bit like a static
television, with warbled voices and unfocused picture coming through. And that’s how I Knew.”

“Knew what?”

“That there was a chance. Hope.” She smiled for real this time. “I Knew Nia would attempt to make
her rise to power, to control everything the way she never could as a child. I Saw there were those
that helped her in an attempt to gain some of their own power, though I could not see who. I Saw
there were those who would oppose her. I Knew the fate of the world was wrapped up three
people…I Saw blonde hair and blue eyes, a wristwatch and stars, who moved within death itself; I
Saw a child with powerful blood, whose absence of love from those who bore her turned her into an
orphan who had to fight for everything she had; and lastly, I Felt the cold emanating from someone
who chose power and darkness over the light.”

“Clarke, Lexa, and Nia,” surmised Raven.

“Yes…and no.” When Raven tilted her head, frowning again, Becca said, “It could be Clarke, Lexa,
and Nia. Or it could also be Jake Griffin, you, and Ontari. Or even some other combination of the six
of you.”

There was a pregnant pause as the words sank in; then Raven’s jaw dropped. “Wait. *Me?* How
could it be—there’s no way! I’m not—I’m not a prodigy—“

Becca arched a brow. “Are you not?”

“I mean. I…” Raven shook her head, flustered. “I’m good at magic and stuff, yeah, but I don’t—I
just blow stuff up, I’m not all controlled or powered up like Lexa or Ontari and—and I can’t turn into
a dragon or anything—“
“How do you know? Have you tried?”

Raven just stared at her, at a loss for words. Becca stared back. Finally, Raven wet her dry mouth and said weakly, “But I can’t be. I’m not a Nightblood. If I was a Nightblood, Titus would have found me, or the Order, or something.”

Becca hummed in acknowledgement. “You are right. You’re not a Nightblood, not exactly. But you are still something special. There’s powerful magic that runs through your blood. Blood you share with me.”

The words rang in Raven’s head. She shares blood with Becca Praimheda. She’s related to Becca Praimheda? Holy fucking shit.

“What?”

"I believe I’m your great, great aunt." Becca smiled. "You know I was studying genealogy within wizardkind, you think I didn’t bother to check out my own ancestry?"

“But you died!” burst Raven. “You’re dead, you’ve been dead for years! There’s no way you could—how could you possibly know—“

“Jake Griffin,” said Becca straightforwardly. “He found the Resurrection Stone, he brought me back—well, a form of me,” she amended, gesturing down at her ghostly form. “I found out I had a half-brother on my mother’s side. I already knew my great-grandmother was a squib—that’s who I knew for certain we have inherited magic from. My mother had me young and gave me up for adoption…the kindest thing she could have done for me, I think, since records show she was fond of alcohol and drugs,” said Becca thoughtfully; Raven thought of her own mother. Apparently it runs in the family. “Years later, she gave birth to my half brother. No signs of magic, of course. Then he had a son, and he had a daughter…and that woman gave birth to you, and the magic that our grandmother never had ended up surfacing in you."

Raven blinked, stunned. All her life, her family had been a source of shame. An abusive mother, a passive father. And now she found out she was related to one of the most brilliant witches to ever exist…Although…also the witch responsible for creating Shadow-Eaters and the Ice Queen and, by extension, Ontari herself. Not that she should really feel that conflicted about all this in the first place, considering Becca’s…dead. Raven’s gaze flitted greedily over Becca’s face, half convinced she could see herself in the lines of Becca’s face, could see the shape of her mother’s eyes in Becca’s…
To her horror, Raven found herself swallowing around a lump in her throat, her eyes stinging as anguish hollowed her heart. This was ridiculous, she definitely shouldn’t feel torn up about this. But somehow…it just felt like a loss. Here was an admittedly intriguing, fascinating person who grew up as a muggle just like Raven did…someone brilliant and inventive who would have been so enthralling to share conversations with…and it could never happen. Because Becca was dead, and Raven knew enough to know tampering with the Resurrection Stone any longer than she had to wasn’t good for anyone.

“I imagine it’s not quite the homecoming I wish it could be,” said Becca apologetically. She opened her mouth, closed it, opened it again and hesitated. “I wish…things could have been different, with us. I know there was never any real chance of a relationship…I would have been a very old woman by this point,” she said, the attempt at a light tone ruined by the anguish in her eyes; Becca was never able to grow old the way she could have. She found her death in the cell of an Azkaban prison instead. “But…I wish it could have been, somehow.”

“Me too,” managed Raven.

“At the very least, I wish I could be someone you could be proud of sharing blood with. I can only hope…I can only hope that my efforts to save everyone and what I’ve gone through to arrange it…I can only hope that serves as my repentances. Maybe you could forgive me one day.”

Raven didn’t trust herself to speak, so she just nodded. They lapsed into silence; Becca seemed to understand Raven needed a moment. Finally, once she no longer felt a lump searing her throat threatening to choke her, Raven asked, “So that’s why you made the Flame, then?”

“The Flame, and Nightblood.”

“How did you do it?” asked Raven, too curious to be ashamed of the obvious awe in her voice.

“They both turned out to be my ultimate projects, but I was only ever able to properly finish one,” admitted Becca heavily. “The Time-Turner initially started out as the simpler project. All the Time-Turners had previously been destroyed years ago, during a battle at the ministry in the year of Voldemort’s return. It took many years, and many desperate attempts to locate ancient texts on the original study of Time in the Department of Mysteries to be able to begin designing more starting from scratch. My intention wasn’t to create a new batch, but a single powerful one instead, able to go back years rather than mere hours. I needed the ashes of a phoenix. That’s why I called it the Flame. But they are very rare creatures and very difficult to find; the last sighting of a phoenix had been years prior, right after the death of Albus Dumbledore. They are wild, elusive creatures, only two ever having been known to be domesticated…one belonging to Albus Dumbledore, and one
belonging to the Moutohora Macaws Quidditch team in New Zealand, both of which supplied wandmakers with a very large amount of feathers. It took many false leads, but eventually I managed to catch wind of a possible spotting of one around the mountains of Tibet, but I was arrested before I could go any further with it.”

“What about Nightbloods?”

“A strong potion and a spell of sacrifice,” said Becca simply. “I knew in the future, with Nia plotting to seize the Shadow-Eaters for her own and plenty of Death Eaters and Pro-Blood Exclusionists who didn’t mind, that muggleborns would need extra protection. I also knew, thanks to how I studied the dementors and Shadow-Eaters, that animals were one of the few creatures able to resist the full effects of their dark magic. I ended up going to Romania for a while after all, and I found a thirteenth use for dragon blood. It wouldn’t work for every muggleborn ever born, but for some of them. Enough of them. All it did was help protect them against the effects of the Shadow-Eaters…their magic can be temporarily neutralized, but never stolen. It darkened their blood, and somehow enhanced their chances of developing a rare animagus…I suppose to do with the quality of magical blood. Like I said, animals are best able to resist the effects of such creatures, so the blood helped them become what they needed to, something more adept at resisting the effects of the shadows. Nightblood. And to ensure it remained there for years to come, I took the potion and I cast the end-all of enchantments, the most powerful type of magic…a spell that, the moment I finished, would end up taking my life. It was worth it, I think.”

Raven was rendered speechless again. Her throat still hurt. “That’s…um. I think I read about that. In…in the Potter studies. That was what his mum…”

Becca smiled sadly. “It was actually what gave me the inspiration.” Raven jolted when there was a knock on the door; how the hell was anyone knocking on the door?

“Raven! We know you’re in there! Where the fuck is the door,” hissed Anya.

“Just keep hitting the wall, she’ll hear it. Raven, open the door!” ordered Clarke.

Oh, so they weren’t hitting on the door. “Hang on, give me a minute!” Raven met Becca’s eyes again, a bit panicked, but Becca only nodded seriously. “It’s time for you to go.”

“But, wait! You still haven’t explained how I’m a part of the prophecy when I’m not even special!”
“You are special. We come from a powerful lineage. One of our ancestors is actually Morgan Le Faye.”

Raven’s eyes widened. “Was her animagus a dragon too?”

“No. It was actually a raven.” Becca smiled when Raven only blinked. “Fate works in mysterious ways, doesn’t it?”

“So I’m really not a Nightblood?” said Raven, a bit let down. It would have been amazing to transform into a dragon. There was a reason Raven loved Quidditch, loved flying. No injured leg to slow her down. But, of course, that required a broomstick…to be able to just transform into a dragon and take off into the sky? It would have been incredible.

“No, Raven, you’re not. But we have powerful magic in our blood. And like I said, while all Nightbloods are muggleborn, not all muggleborns are Nightbloods.”

“Wait a minute, wait a minute,” said Raven, waving a hand as a thought occurred to her. “Then how is Ontari a Nightblood? She’s a pureblood!”

Becca shook her head. “It is a lie. She may not even be aware of it. Her parents—adoptive parents, that is—were unable to have a child, but her father did have a squib sister who had a young daughter already exhibiting signs of magic at only four years old.” Becca took a breath, expression solemn. “The squib and her muggle husband disappeared, leaving Ontari on their doorstep. Though there was never any proof, we can surmise what happened. They were an ancient pureblood family, rich and powerful within political circles. There was never even an investigation. And Ontari’s parents never treated her with love anyway…they simply wanted someone to carry on the family line and a powerful magical child to boast of. They treated her with so little regard that she ended up leaving them for Nia as soon as the opportunity presented itself, and I imagine Ontari went back to murder them as soon as she could; I think by this point, they are most likely already dead.”

Disgust and pity churned in Raven’s stomach, which just made her feel worse. She remembered all the thingsOntari did in the other world very well; how she tortured Anya and Clarke, how she killed Fox and countless others, how she probably killed Raven herself. Yet a part of Raven couldn’t help but to pity her…Ontari had only been a baby. Whose to say how differently her life would have turned out, had she not been stolen away?"

There was another knock on the door and Becca suddenly turned urgent. “Raven, listen to me. Nia, Ontari, and the others—they’re still problems, but they aren’t the main ones to be looking at. Whatever you do and whatever she says, don’t trust Alie. This is a game to her, one she intends on winning, and this entire game has puppet masters. I’ve been working with Jake to ensure everything happens as it’s supposed to, and Alie has been doing the same on her end. Everyone else has just
been a pawn to her, pieces to move and use to get what she wants.”

“But what does she want?”

Another knock. “Raven?” said Clarke; “What’s taking so long?” came Anya’s muffled voice.

“Perverse instantiation,” said Becca miserably. “Which means she had a good goal—creating a more equal world—but tried to reach it through terrible methods that I, as her creator, never could have foreseen…ironic, given my visions, but I never imagined Alie was the one…” She cleared her throat. “My goal was to make equality by creating a world where everyone has magic. Alie is…when it comes down to it, Raven, she’s nothing more than a glorified supercomputer that magic has turned sentient.” Raven lifted a hand to her throat, feeling for scars that she never received in this world. Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can’t see where it keeps its brain echoed in her head, along with Fox’s shrill voice. “She took it too literally. She saw that my goal wasn’t possible—giving magic to every muggle, gaining equality by ensuring every person is born with magic, that’s not possible. But the opposite is.”

Raven’s mouth fell open. Everything suddenly made more sense. The fact that the Shadow-Eaters could take magic away, how arguably the most influential wizard in the country, the minister for magic, was who she chose to enchant, how Alie wanted to have the wand of all wands that could take down any other all to herself. “She wants to take away magic?”

“Yes, that’s the only thing her calculations would come to. You can’t create magic in everyone, but you can take it away.”

“She’s the one behind everything,” realized Raven. “Nia’s evil but Alie’s been letting her do her work for her. Nia’s stealing magic from people and putting it inside people who aren’t meant to hold it so it ends up used up and wasted…and in the meantime she’s breeding more and more Shadow-Eaters, which Alie’s just been waiting for the right moment to take control of…”

Becca nodded, triumphant Raven is understanding. “Yes, Raven. She’s been lying dormant in the ministry for years, hidden and sleeping until the moment her calculations told her to wake up.”

“How does she know this stuff? How did she get her calculations?”

“Technology turns sentient and absorbs some of the power of those who enchanted it,” said Becca, guilt flashing across her face. “I’m afraid, being the one who created her, I ended up unintentionally
“Oh fucking great.” Raven ran her hands over her face. One of the most powerful witches of all
time…fucking fuck. “So she’s, what, psychic too?”

“A Seer,” corrected Becca. “And yes, in a way. Her powers are still restricted to her own
capabilities. Being a computer program, her predictions manifest in the form of code, data, numbers
and estimations. She knew of my prophecies. She knew there was a specific time she needed to
wake that would be when she had to make her move. She knew I was attempting to create the Flame
and that it gave whoever held it the power to undo her. The Flame has made you one step ahead of
Nia and the others—but Alie is two steps ahead. She’s been using the others to do her work for her,
and she’ll be using you for the same reason, to get rid of them. And then she’ll make her move. You
cannot let her succeed, you must stop her. The fate of the world, of our entire future, depends on it.”

“How do we kill her?” asked Raven, brow furrowing. “I still don’t even understand what she is. She
must have—I mean, she’s a computer system, right? So there’s gotta be a computer that you
enchanted that…” Her voice trails away when Becca shook her head sadly.

“It doesn’t work like that. Magic works outside the laws of logic. Originally she was a computer,
yes, but she’s an AI, and enchantments on muggle technology grow stronger over time. By the time I
understood what she was and what I had done, she was already powerful enough to separate from
the confines of the technology she was born in and exist as her own entity.” When Raven was silent,
Becca stepped forward, put her hand on Raven’s shoulder. It was a strange sensation, warm but cool,
not quite as substantial as a human but not nothingness like a ghost either. “I’m sorry, Raven, I know
I am leaving you an impossible task. But, since we are being honest here…there is no better person I
would trust it to.”

Raven swallowed thickly. “Thanks…sort of.” Fuck. Fuck, fuck. This almost made her feel as though
it made things worse. What the hell was she supposed to do about this? She was just a stupid kid,
right? She closed her eyes, scowling as she willed away her own mother’s voice that floated
unbidden to the front of her mind. Worthless, helpless. That wasn’t true. She knew it wasn’t true.

But honestly, what could she do? What difference could she make? They were fighting someone
who, like Becca said, was a step ahead of them. When they destroy Nia, Ontari, and the others,
they’d be playing right into her hands, doing her dirty work for her, just as Nia had been for the past
eighty plus years. How do you even kill something that isn’t human? It wasn’t like they could just
whip out their wands and avada kedavra her to pieces. Spells would probably sail right through her
anyway. What could they even do?

Becca hesitated, before leaning down a bit and murmuring, “You are Raven Reyes, one of the most
brilliant witches of the century. You are inventive, creative, and determined, and most importantly,
you are a survivor. Even with darkness surrounding you your entire life, you’ve always sought the light. Hold on to that.”

Raven swallowed thickly around the lump in her throat. “Thanks.”

Becca smiled. “Good luck.”

The stone was put back into the watch, and the apparition of Becca vanished at once. Raven paused to merely breathe for a moment, before she returned to the wall Clarke and Anya were banging on again and pulled the door open to reveal the two of them standing there seething, along with a sleepy, mildly annoyed Lexa who blinked owlishly at her.

“Fucking finally,” snarled Anya, glowering around the room before eying Raven like a predator. “Are you hurt? Are you all right?”

“I’m fine, guys. Sorry.”

“What the hell, Raven,” said Clarke tightly, pinching the bridge of her nose, apparently reigning in her dangerously unstable temper. She snatched the stone out of Raven’s hands and shook it in her face. “Can you not freak us the fuck out and give us a warning of when you’re going to do crazy shit in the future, please? For fuck’s sake!”

“Sorry!” repeated Raven, though she really wasn’t. “Listen, though, we need to talk.”

“Talk about what?” said Anya suspiciously at the same time Clarke did, eyes flashing,

“I used the Resurrection Stone and spoke to Becca,” said Raven quickly, ignoring Anya and Clarke’s outraged expressions.

“But the stone is supposed to be dangerous—“

“I told you not to risk that! Why—“
“Guys!” interjected Raven loudly. “This is a big deal, go round up everyone else and meet me back here!”

That gave them pause. “Everyone everyone?” asked Clarke dubiously. “Like even Wells and Fo—“

“Yes, everyone! I have to fill them in before they make the attack today! Hurry the fuck up, Griffin,” barked Raven, steering her around and slapping her on the ass to get her to scoot. “What part of huge news don’t you understand!”

“You didn’t even specifically say huge news,” groused Clarke, but she still hurried down the hallway.

“I will get Kane and have him notify the rest of the Order,” said Lexa, sweeping after her.

Anya rolled her eyes. “I will grab the others from the ship.” She aimed a steely glare at Raven that told her she still wasn’t happy, but surged forward to kiss her nonetheless before striding off.

Raven paced in the hallway as she waited, mind reeling with its recent influx of information. Wells was the first to arrive, quickly followed by Fox, and then others began arriving more quickly. It took nearly half an hour for the last stragglers to arrive—Jamie, Evie, and to their surprise, Luna, still wrapped in bandages in some places, faded yellow bruises splotching her skin. She moved weakly as Evie helped her inside.

“She only just woke up,” said Evie in a hushed tone, the eyes of everyone in the crowded room focused on the two of them as she helped Luna limp over to the couch. “She’s still a bit disoriented.”

“I’m fine,” croaked Luna, flapping a hand dismissively and wincing a moment later. “Ish. Fine-ish.”

“What happened to you?” breathed Octavia.

“They ambushed me on my ship,” said Luna, grimacing as she shifted on the leather couch, attempting to get comfortable. “Killed my whole crew, killed a couple of my animals—all of them, actually, since my dragon was still there when they sunk the ship,” she added grievously. “Anyway, it was Jaha, Jaha and a woman in red called Alie, who said she wanted more—“
“Magic?” Everyone looked at Raven. She fixed her stare on Luna, who nodded. “What did she want with you?”

“She wanted me out of the picture,” huffed Luna, face screwing up as she tried to recall. “I can’t remember exactly what all went on… she tried to perform Legilimency but I used Occlumency against her, I’ve always been good at it, and my blood helps… She said something about needing more magic in order to do something… and that she wanted to study how my Nightblood protected me from her effects so—“

“She could figure out how to circumvent it,” finished Raven heavily. Her cheeks puffed as she blew out a breath; everyone waited with bated breath, watching as Raven pulled her hairtie out and ran a hand through messy dark hair. “Great. Okay, so, long story short, I found out that about a century ago Becca Praimheda started experimenting in the Department of Mysteries and created Shadow-Eaters and Nia, and then realized way too late how super evil they are so she created Alie, who’s enchanted muggle technology that turned sentient, and then realized way too late how super evil she is, so she created Nightbloods in the hope that Alie wouldn’t be able to just totally wipe out all magic.”

Most of the room gaped back at her for a full five seconds before general chaos burst free.

“Wait, what?” said Wells.

“She created the Ice Queen?” frowned Gustus.

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing,” said Kane, disturbed. "She wants to wipe out magic?"

“Alie is muggle technology?” said Luna.

“Sounds like a major Misuse of Muggle Artefacts,” muttered Fox, arms folded tightly beneath her chest.

“What about the Nightbloods?” asked Indra.

“She basically made the Nightbloods as a kind of contingency plan, I think,” said Raven, a crease appearing between her brow and her lips down turning as she considered it. “Becca was a Seer and made a prophecy that three people—or six—or like, some combination? I don’t know she was a little
vague on that, I think she thought the ambiguity was impressive—would eventually rise up to save the world, and she knew one of the people—or two, I guess?—had powerful blood. Nightblood.”

“That is why Shadow-Eaters cannot steal our magic,” realized Lexa, looking down at Luna, who peered back up at her through reddened eyes.

“Yeah. She said that Alie has been using Nia and the others to basically gather up magic for her, just waiting for the right moment to steal it. Alie is…she kind of has Seer powers, so in the other world she bided her time because she knew that wasn’t right. In this world, somehow she must know we took the Flame back and we’re a step ahead, so she’s going to make her move now.”

“But what does she want exactly?” asked Jamie.

“Well, Becca’s goal was to get equality by giving magic to everyone, not just squibs but muggles too.” Everyone looked taken aback, some (such as Fox) appearing horrified. “But that went south when she realized Nia and the Shadow-Eaters were stealing magic from muggleborns because they’re racist assholes who believe they stole the magic in the first place. So Becca created Alie, thinking she could make something that was like the opposite of the Shadow-Eaters and would be able to create more magic, but turns out that’s impossible, so Alie decided the only way to make everyone equal would be to take away everyone’s magic, so everyone’s a muggle, and then, y’know, probably kill nearly everyone so it's mostly forgotten and no one'll retaliate against her. Except, then there’s Nightbloods. She can’t do anything about it really, because thanks to the spell Becca cast—which ended up killing her so you know it’s a hella strong spell—it’s created at random, only surfacing in some muggleborns. So according to Alie, the only thing left to do is probably to absorb as much magic as she can to become as strong as she can, steal the strongest wand so no one can use it against her or maybe to try to steal its magic? I dunno—and kill most of us all off so she has a smaller control group to worry about. Those are my guesses, anyway.”

There was silence. Everyone looked seriously disturbed.

“So did you call us here just to tell us that, or do you have a plan? Please tell me someone has a plan,” said Evie beseechingly. “Because I’ve got nothing.”

“I’m working on it,” Raven assured her, mind whirring fast, “But my main point was to warn you guys before you make a move on the others. Alie knows what we’re doing, she’s using it to our advantage. We’re just getting rid of her flunkies so she doesn’t have to. But the minute we’re not useful, she’s going to make a move on us. Considering the fact that she’s been plotting this for ages, she’ll probably make a big move and try to take us out in one go. Just…be ready.”
The meeting dispersed, with some such as Jamie and Byrne hurrying off at once, while others such as Evie and Luna lingered. Wells and Luna were deep in conversation, and Raven caught snippets of it as she stood before the board on the wall trying to think of how to take down Alie.

"Your dad is just…not himself, I’m sorry," Luna told Wells. "Alie obviously has him under some sort of enchantment that works similarly to the Imperius curse. I tried to get him to snap out of it, I tried using you to get through to him, but it was like he didn’t even recognize me, like he didn’t even recognize your name. Considering the fact that she tried so hard to get into my head, I think she erases memories. He couldn’t…he just couldn’t remember anything."

Wells rubbed the back of his neck, rotating his head to alleviate the tension there. “I figured as much,” he said heavily, voice forlorn. “I just hope we can find a way to reach him, and save him.”

“Me too,” said Evie somberly, reaching forward to bracingly rub Wells’s back.

“How did you get away?” asked Octavia. “I mean, are you positive she didn’t let you escape?”

“How do we know she isn’t controlling you right now?” asked Fox suspiciously.

“She didn’t,” said Luna, shaking her head. “I promise.”

“On top of that, Jamie’s already had a thousand tests ran on her, used Legilimency on her, and gave her Veritaserum,” Evie assured them. “She’s clean.”

“How did you get away, then?” said Jasper in awe.

“I can’t remember too well,” said Luna honestly, brow furrowing as she concentrated. “I know… they had me in some broken down building and were basically torturing me for a while. Alie doesn’t really have any emotions so it’s not like she was pissed she couldn’t get in my head, but I could tell there was this undercurrent of…frustration? Anyways, so she kept messing with me and threatening to slit my throat if I didn’t cooperate, and then they moved me into this weird room with all kinds of muggle technology in it. Alie had Jaha using magic on it, running codes or something. I think it was how she was keeping track of things…her form of propheticizing, maybe?" Luna shook her head, frown deepening. “They just brought me with them wherever they went because they never wanted me alone, so when they were in that room, so was I. When Jaha wasn’t working on that tech, he transfigured it into this wooden dresser? Though I don’t really know what the point was in disguising it when we were in the middle of some random building anyway. Alie left sometimes with a few
Shadow-Eaters, maybe to go take more magic, and Jaha was left guarding me. I was trying to reach him, asking him about his son, trying to figure out what was going on but also trying to distract him, because if he could just come closer and loosen his grip on his wand a bit, I might be able to use a nonverbal summon to take it off him. In the end I pretty much got him talking about how great Alie was and then I did it. Took his wand, knocked him out, Vanished my chains, and then blasted the hell out of the dresser—the muggle tech. Set the whole place on fire, but the fire was weird, super bright, I think just from whatever the computers were made of, I don't know. Alie showed up again and now she actually seemed pissed, but she wouldn’t come into the room and neither would the Shadow-Eaters, it was like they couldn’t go near the fire. I Disapparated and got away.”

“Jesus,” murmured Octavia.

“Yeah, so she’s probably not very happy right now.

“I wouldn’t think so,” said Wells thoughtfully. All the color had drained from his face. “I hope my dad wasn’t caught up in the fire.”

“I’m not going to lie to you, Wells, I have no idea and I wasn’t sticking around to check,” admitted Luna.

Clarke, meanwhile, was huddled in the corner with Lexa and Costia.

“I’m not kidding,” she said seriously, crossly focused on Lexa, who looked put out by the entire conversation, “I don’t think you should take part in any of this. You’re a Nighthood. It’s not like it was with Nia, who liked to play with her food before she ate, and who didn’t know enough about Nightbloods so she thought she might eventually be able to steal your power. Alie knows what Nightbloods are, and to her, they’re a threat. She’ll try to kill you, Lexa. Full stop.”

“Clarke is right,” said Costia, forehead puckered and brows drawn together. “You need to go into hiding.”

Lexa ground her jaw. “I am not going to be a coward hiding away,” she bit out.

“You aren’t a coward. It’s no different than Roan having to go into hiding; it’s too dangerous to risk Nia trying to use him against us again. How are we supposed to defeat Alie if we’re too busy worrying about her trying to kill you?”
Lexa’s eyes dart to the side as if she’s too twitchy with her frustration to actually roll them. “She’s trying to kill all of us, Clarke, that doesn’t even make sense.”

“No, she won’t just kill the rest of us,” said Costia, “She’ll try to take our magic. But she can’t do that with you—you can’t give her anything, so she’ll just try to get rid of you right away. You should just lay low for a while and let the rest of us fight for once.”

“I am a Nightblood,” said Lexa dangerously, eyes flashing. “No one fights for me.”

“Wrong,” said Clarke sharply. “I fight for you.” She met Costia’s eyes and the two of them nodded. “We all fight for you.”

“We fight for each other. That’s the point,” said Anya, approaching them after finishing up her conversation with Gustus. “I don’t know why you two are even trying. There is no world that exists where Lexa would calmly step aside to allow the rest of us to fight while she does nothing.”

“Exactly,” said Lexa, looking pointedly between Clarke and Costia.

Clarke sighed. “I know. I hoped I could at least make you consider it, Lex.”

Anya smirked. “The fact that you fuck her isn’t going to soften her up and make her any less stubborn.” Costia relaxed into a smirk too, automatically shifting into teasing mode. Lexa flushed.

Clarke couldn’t help it; a corner of her lips curved up too as her gaze, suddenly heavy, lingered on Lexa. “It does sometimes.”

Lexa’s ears tinted red, and Anya grimaced and waved a hand. “No, no, stop. I don’t know why I even started that.”

Amused, Clarke leaned over to brush a soft kiss over Lexa’s cheek, and if it was a bit lower—more near her jaw line—no one said anything, not even when Lexa shivered. “I’m going to catch up with Raven, I’ll be back,” she murmured before slipping away, leaving Lexa to resume arguing with Costia.
“Hey,” greeted Clarke as she came to Raven’s side. “Any ideas yet?”

“Not so far,” said Raven, and it was so stoic that Clarke had to look at her more closely. She was paler than she’d seen her in a long time, shadows under her eyes. It didn’t help that it was the crack of dawn and no one had slept long anyway, but Raven was under a great deal of pressure at the moment. They all were, but Raven was Raven, and when there was a complex problem before her, she would work tirelessly to solve it.

“Hey, it’s okay.” She looped an arm around Raven’s. “We’ll figure this out.” They scrutinized the board for a time, though no sudden strikes of inspiration came to mind. Finally, Clarke said, “Since you used the stone fine, maybe we could call my dad back? He might have ideas.”

“I wouldn’t,” said Raven gloomily, reaching up to make a minor correction on the timeline. “Speaking with family that way apparently doesn’t do anything but depress you and confuse you even more.”

Clarke paused. “Wait. Family?”

With that, Raven explained her talk with Becca in detail. When she finished, Clarke was gawking at her.

“I mean, whoa. That’s…that’s…”

“Wild, I know.” Raven sighed. “Just figures. I finally find out I’m related to someone halfway decent but then they turn out to be probably one of the worst people ever.”

“I don’t think she’s the worst ever,” said Clarke thoughtfully. When Raven side-eyed her, she hastily amended, “Don’t get me wrong, she’s made huge mistakes, but…she did have good intentions, at least. She wanted to make the world a better place for everyone, she just...went about it the wrong way.”

“Cool motive, still murder.”

“I’m sorry,” said Clarke softly, rubbing her arm.
“It’s okay,” said Raven, half shrugging. “Just stresses me out, you know? Just…all this pain. That we’ve all went through. It sucks.”

Clarke remembered what Lexa told her. “We have to choose to find meaning in our suffering, and eventually, we’ll find peace.”

Raven stilled, quite unexpectedly, and Clarke drew back to frown at her. Raven’s eyes snapped up at her, incredulous and wide. “What? Where did you hear that?”

“Lexa,” said Clarke, brow furrowing. She opened her mouth to ask why Raven was reacting the way she was when Raven burst into laughter. “Raven, what are you—“

“Lexa quoted a cartoon!” gasped Raven, practically hooting at this point. “She quoted an anime, actually, which is even better!”

“What the hell is—“

Raven waved her hand impatiently, “It’s a type of TV show. Anyways, that’s where that quote comes from. The little shit.”

“Oh,” Clarke lapsed into thought, still a bit baffled as to why Raven found it so amusing. “Well, it’s a good saying. It helped me. Maybe it could help you too.”

“Oh it has already,” chortled Raven, wiping tears from her eyes as she sobers up. “It’s one of the best TV shows of all time. I used to binge watch it after school when my mom was passed out drunk. It’s actually one of the ways I found out I have magic. There’s a kid in the show who has these powers, and she can basically lift rocks with her mind, so I’d go out to the pond sometimes and try to lift the pebbles with my mind. I did it eventually too, after I met Finn, it was how he convinced his dad he had magic.”

“Oh,” said Clarke, not quite sure what else to say.

“This is why we’re going to win, you know,” said Raven after a moment, once she’d sobered up, though her eyes were still gleaming. “Because we have reasons to laugh, and smile. Something to keep fighting for.” Her dark eyes shifted to gaze behind Clarke’s shoulder, tracing Anya’s features. “Something to live for.”
Clarke smiled slightly, turning to look in the direction Raven was, eyes lingering on Lexa, those soft lips and vivid green eyes. Her heart ached. “Yeah, I know.”

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That night, as Clarke and Lexa lay in bed together in the Room of Requirement, they held one another closely, breathing steadily and staring sightlessly up at the charred ceiling.

“I wish I could be there,” said Lexa. “I worry about them facing Ontari. You need a Nightblood to fight a Nightblood.”

“They have Luna,” Clarke reminded her.

“Yes, but she is still recovering from her injuries.”

“Plus, Ontari isn’t as crazy overpowered as she was in the other world. Nia hasn’t died, so she hasn’t absorbed any extra powers or anything.”

“That we know of,” said Lexa. “Who is to say it will stay that way?”

Clarke sighed, her heart trembling. Lexa had a point. While Alie was definitely their biggest threat at the moment, Ontari was still a wild card. They had done all they could do; they asked to join the fight but Jamie, Kane, and the others told them no, to leave it to the adults, which stung, considering one, most of them were of age, and two, just because they were still in school didn’t mean they hadn’t saved the world the last time (sort of). So they did all they could do, warned Jamie and the others, whatever you do, don’t let Ontari get away, and now all they could do was wait. Breathe, and wait.

“Just imagine when all of this is finally over,” said Lexa, deliberately relaxing, attempting to alleviate some of the tension in both of them.

“What’s the plan?”
“Well, right now I’m thinking I really want to take you on a date. See the muggle town, so to speak.”

Clarke smiled. “Yeah?”

“Yes. I could do with a vacation, we both could.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Lexa rolled over to face Clarke and Clarke did the same; the light humor faded as they both looked at one another, the room so quiet only the sound of their shallow breathing could be heard. Lexa’s heart was pulsing in her ears. She blindly found Clarke’s hand and intertwined their fingers, holding it between them. Clarke’s palm was as sweaty as hers. They would most likely not be getting any sleep tonight, and not for the reasons Lexa preferred. But, as much as her blood sang and she wanted to be in the thick of things, wanted to help take down Ontari and Nia and the others, there was also nowhere she’d rather be than here. As long as she was with Clarke, she was at peace.

She gazed into deep blue eyes, overwhelmed by the familiar sensation of falling headfirst into the sky. It gave her the same swooping in her stomach as soaring with wings or a broomstick.

Lexa wanted to tell her. Tell her what she meant to her, tell her that she wants forever with her. She opened her mouth, every intention to do so, but paused at the last second. She didn’t want it to feel like goodbye. She wanted it to be the beginning, not the end.

So she closed her mouth, smiled, and waited. By the slow curving of Clarke’s lips, she seemed to know exactly what Lexa wasn’t saying anyway. Lexa smiled too, full and warm, and scooted closer, nudging Clarke’s nose with her own before pressing their mouths together, kissing her softly, gently, lips a whisper of movement.

Her heart swelled in her chest and this was it.

Lexa was not a Seer. But this was why she just knew that everything…everything would be okay.

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The next morning, below deck of Durmstrang ship, Raven and Anya were curled up on the small twin sized bed together, watching the way the water’s reflection through the enchanted porthole rippled across the room as they had a similar discussion. It was a sleepless night. They felt sick with apprehension, wondering how the attempt went. At the same time, Raven had a gut feeling… somehow things were going to work out. Therefore she had no qualms, nor did Anya, about attempting to distract one another.

“I have no idea what I plan to do after school,” said Anya unconcernedly, though the slight crease between her brows betrayed her uncertainty. “I am not particularly good at anything beyond dueling and terrifying people.

Raven grinned. “Yeah, you are really great at that.” She loved the way it made Anya smile; she smacked a kiss onto her. “Seriously, though, I think you’d be good at anything. You’ll just have to give a few things a try to figure out what you like.”

Anya eyed her, contentment etched in every line of her face. “So what’s your plan, Reyes?”

“Me? Well, first I’m going to finish off this year. Win the House Cup, smash the NEWTS, and smash my hot long-distance girlfriend when we visit each other every weekend. I don’t know after that.” Raven shrugged. “Maybe get an internship at the Ministry. It’d be cool to work in the Department of Mysteries,” she said sheepishly, glancing at Anya quickly before looking away. “Nearly ending the world aside, Becca did some pretty amazing stuff there.”

“You would do amazing there too,” said Anya, nodding as though it was a no brainer. It made the confidence swell in Raven, made her beam and smack another kiss to Anya’s cheek.

They were interrupted by a frantic knock on their door that had them both jolting up, hearts in their throats.

“Guys, get up, get up!” insisted Costia, followed by Lincoln urging, “Come outside, quick!”

Raven and Anya looked at one another for one stricken beat before springing out of bed.

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Clarke and Lexa weren’t the last to arrive; they had already been above deck for over fifteen minutes by the time Clarke and Lexa caught word and rushed over. Clarke clutched Lexa’s hand like a lifeline, terror churning like static in her veins. “What’s going on?” she asked breathlessly when they reached the cluster of people deep in conversation standing at the lake’s edge. She didn’t know why they were out in the open like this, so many adults would draw the attention of any students who looked out, let alone the fact that the Potters were amongst the group. Several of them were covered in blood, dirt, and had various marks of wear and tear on their robes. Clarke didn’t immediately notice the tall, stooping bald man in their midst, however, Lexa did.

“Titus?” she questioned, face blank with shock and—something else. Something Titus may not recognize, but Clarke did at once. A heartbreaking mixture of trepidation and resentment with, underneath it all, deep hurt. The last time Lexa saw Titus was directly after he shot her with a killing curse and then fell to his death through the veil.

“Lexa,” he said, voice tight with worry; he started forward, movements so jerky he nearly stumbled over his black cloak. Clarke moved out of instinct, placing herself between the two of them. Titus’s face immediately hardened, his eyes narrowing.

“What are you doing here?” asked Lexa, knuckles turning white as she gripped her wand. “I thought you were supposed to be in hiding from the Ice Queen? Or…” Lexa turned her head, though she kept her body angled toward Titus, warily eying Jamie. “Did you manage to defeat her?”

Jamie grimaced. “We’ve arrested Pike, Diana Sydney, Dante Wallace, Cuyler Ridley, and several others. But Ontari managed to give us the slip.”

Clarke actually took a step back in horror, while nearly everyone around her froze or gasped.

“The cat’s among the pixies now,” said Jamie grimly. “I’d be willing to bet she knows the game’s up and is prepared to…” She turned to arch a brow at Raven. “How did you word it?”

“Go big or go home,” supplied Raven. “She knows the only way we’d know about Mount Weather and everything is if we managed to find the Flame, so she knows she doesn’t have a chance.”

“On top of the fact that Mount Weather is out of the picture now,” chimed in Evie.

“Yeah, so she’s probably feeling pretty desperate and wanting to go out with a bang now,” said
Raven.

“Wait, so, you did defeat Nia?”

Silence, as everyone seemed to hold their breath; then the tightest ring of people, composed of Byrne, Lovejoy, Gideon, and a dozen others, all stepped aside to reveal the woman on her knees before them, bound and gagged, head lolling on her shoulders.

“You brought Nia here?” hissed Lexa in outrage, teeth bared.

“Why would you bring her here?” asked Clarke, horrified. “There are kids here! She’s too dangerous!”

“Wait, listen first,” said Jamie, face contorted in concern. “Something’s—something’s wrong with her.”

“What do you mean?” Clarke frowned, scrutinizing Nia, and realized Jamie was right. Nia was barely breathing and her skin had taken on a strange gray pallor. “What happened? What’d you do to her?”

“It wasn’t really anything we did. There was—when we arrived there, strange things were going on. Wallace and his son were there, plus a few other Beauxbatons,” Probably Emerson and Tsing, thought Clarke, “And then a ton of Death Eaters. Since we took them by surprise, we fought our way through, chased the wolves out and freed some of the remaining prisoners…we think they were feeding the wolves with them,” said Jamie, repulsion flickering across her face. “But at the top, we found Nia and…the woman in the red dress, Alie, was there, along with a few Shadow-Eaters. When we charged in, Alie and Nia were standing a few feet apart, Nia had her wand out…like they were facing off. But I don’t think Nia was winning.”

“She had stuff on her,” said Luna, crease between her brows, “Black stuff, she…it reminded me of Ontari, in, you know…It was horrible. Just really cold and unnatural and…wrong.”

“It shows up every now and then,” said Jamie, gesturing toward Nia. Even as they watched, Clarke saw it—a flicker of something dark and pulsating, drifting out of her chest just over her heart, disappearing like wisps of smoke. Clarke’s stomach dropped to her toes, ice flooding through her. She could only think of one thing that reminded her of that, and it was Ontari in the other world, when all the magic she’d stolen regurgitated in the form of pure dark magic…
“Fuck,” she whispered under her breath. “That’s…not good, to say the least.”

“We know. That’s why we came here. Ontari practically told us she was coming for the Flame before she got away, so we need to guard the castle, and there’s nowhere safe to keep Nia. We’ll have to evacuate.”

Kane looked as though he were in shock, and didn’t respond.

“Do you know what’s happening to her, Clarke?” asked Jamie, watching her closely.

“I…no, not really. I’ve seen it before but I didn’t really understand what it was last time, either. I thought it happened with Ontari just because she was a pureblood taking on more magic…”

“Ontari’s not a pureblood,” said Raven suddenly. Everyone looked at her. “Seriously, she’s not. She’s…” Raven turned as though something occurred to her, staring down at Nia; the darkness flickered again, stronger this time. Raven looked up, eyes blazing. “I need to talk to someone. Everyone else needs to get ready for battle. Ontari could be here any minute.”

The group moved frantically, shouting over one another. Jamie and some others began dragging Nia back towards the shadows of the Forbidden Forest. Indra grabbed the Durmstrangs nearest her—Anya and Lincoln—and instructed them to begin evacuating some of the students in the ship, moving them into the castle to join the Hogwarts student, and then sent Gustus off to help the remaining Beauxbatons from their carriage, who were currently without a headmaster.

“Clarke, help me,” barked Kane, lifting an arm to gesture her over the mess of people running around them, “You’re Head Girl, I need you to start waking the other students up, we need to get them out of here!”

Before Clarke could take another step, Raven lunged out to stop her with a hand on her shoulder “Wait, Clarke, give me the stone first!”

“Wha—“

“There’s no time to explain, just quick! I have to ask Becca something!”
Trying to stay calm but finding it difficult with her hands shaking as they were, Clarke removed the stone from her watch and pushed it into Raven’s hand before starting toward Kane. “Be careful with it—”

“Yeah, yeah, I will! I’ll be back soon!” Raven seized Lexa’s arm, stopping her from following Clarke. “Lex, come with me!”

Lexa followed her, though she looked perplexed. “Why me?”

“Because you’re a nightblood,” said Raven seriously, “And you deserve your questions answered too.”

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Some time later, the air was thick with tension. It reminded Clarke of the second battle in the other world, where Nia’s remaining forces joined with Ontari and began attacking the castle. The same tension existed here, panic and steely resolve found in every face. Pre-duel jitters, as Raven called them.

She had no idea where the hell Lexa disappeared to, but she assumed it was with Raven. What were they doing?

Clarke had already had time to help Kane coral all the kids into the Great Hall to await further instructions, on top of running upstairs to dig around her trunk for the tiny glass bottle of shimmering gold liquid she’d been saving for ages. She totally forgot about it in the other world—it would have been handy for other battles. She gave it to her friends to split between them. They were not trained, this would be their first battle (in this world), they needed it the most. Hopefully it would be their only battle too.

For now, Clarke paced in the space near the gates. She was mostly alone out here; Wells had been with her, but he ended up walking a distance away when Jamie came to inform him that his father was currently in critical condition in St.Mungo’s, and he was still in conversation with her now. Clarke stood in the shade of the nearby trees, on edge, tightly clenching her wands. Something felt wrong. The hairs on her arms were starting to stand; she warily turned around, but there didn’t seem
to be anything… Still, she had a feeling she shouldn’t be out here alone. She took one step forward and then it happened.

It was as though an invisible hook yanked her back by the scruff of her neck. She found herself knocked off her feet and flying backwards, no time to even draw breath to scream with, and then the slam into a thick tree trunk took away any remaining air she left in her lungs. She fell hard to her hands and knees, wand handle pressed between the earth and her palm, and gasped for breath. She made to lift her wand.

“Ah ah ah,” sang an awfully familiar voice; it sent shivers through Clarke, like icy fingers up and down her spine.

“Ontari,” rasped Clarke, teeth gnashing together as she staggered to her feet and turned to see the shorter, slighter girl, wearing a black cloak and a smirk that was sharper than the scars on her face.

“Me,” said Ontari, amused. She tilted her head, dark eyes glittering as she curiously took in Clarke. “And you’re Clarke Griffin. I’m guessing this isn’t the first time you’ve met me.”

Clarke’s stomach lurched, her heart beating a tattoo against her chest as she slowly, cautiously rotated in place, unwilling to turn her back on Ontari, who had started to circle around her.

“Guess daddy really did leave a list of instructions for you,” she taunted. "Didn't save him though, did it? Didn't stop Nia from killing him." Ontari sneered.

The taunt fell short, considering Clarke knew it was a lie. Nia must have known it was Alie and claimed it was her. Of course she did. She would have wanted to take credit for that.

"I’m very interested in hearing what happened. How far back did you take the Flame?" Ontari stepped closer, hatred flickering in her eyes even as her grin turned sharper, more feral. “How… close, were we?”

“You were dead, if that answers any questions,” snarled Clarke, satisfied in the slight tension it put in Ontari’s body, how her next step faltered before she continued as though Clarke hadn’t said anything worrisome at all.

“Yet here I am,” said Ontari sardonically, opening her arms.
“Here you are.” Clarke raised her wand. “If you’re smart, you won’t make the same mistakes as last time.”

She knew Ontari well enough by now to know exactly what she was going to do; when Ontari made a sudden movement, Clarke reacted instinctively. Her shield was up before Ontari could even finish saying her spell. It rebounded off the shield and Ontari had to duck to avoid it. With a twitch of Clarke’s wand, the shield faded away. She raised a brow at Ontari.

“Looks like you know how to play,” said Ontari, breathing heavily. She was still grinning.

“Are you really going to make me watch you die again?” said Clarke coldly, noting the minute reactions of Ontari again; the way the skin around her eyes tightened, a flicker of something uncertain in them. “It wasn’t very pretty the first time.”

“You’re a liar,” said Ontari, voice much confident than the look in her eyes. “And a coward. You knew you were losing so you took the Flame to start again. If you won, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

“This isn’t a game,” retorted Clarke. She looked over Ontari’s shoulder, noting they were still fairly close to the outskirts of the forest; she could see the gate clearly from here. “It isn’t about people winning or losing.”

“You’re wrong there,” said Ontari softly, which was, Clarke remembered vividly, definitely her most frightening voice. “That’s all it’s about.” And then Ontari was reacting, ready for Clarke’s quick reflexes this time. The moment she deflected one spell, another came sailing her way, then another, then another—

She lost her breath as the force of Ontari’s spells pushed her back into the tree trunk again; she only just managed to stay on her feet. Jesus, she’d forgotten how Nightbloods pack a punch.

“Ventus,” snarled Ontari.

“Protego!”
Even with her shield, the gust of wind still slammed Clarke into the tree, smacking the back of her head against the truck. Dizzy, it took her a split second to late to register what just came out of Ontari’s mouth; she ducked just in time as Ontari’s blasting curse exploded the trunk she’d been pressed against only half a second ago. Bits of bark and wooden splinters bulleted against Clarke, and since her shield was placed between she and Ontari, her back and sides were left entirely unguarded and the debris tore into her, ripping her robes and leaving countless cuts and bruises. She cried out, rolling to her feet, barely managing to cast another shield before Ontari was pushing forward again, relentless.

“Incarcerous!”

“Relashio!”

“Incendio!”

“Aguamenti!”

“Hold fucking still,” hissed Ontari, eyes wild and dark braids swinging as she lurched to the side to avoid Clarke’s stunning spell. “Crucio!”

“Crucio!”

The spell hit the tree Ontari ducked behind, causing an earsplitting crack as it split into two. Ontari was lunging out from behind it before Clarke could even draw breath again. “Confringo!”

The spell hit the earth before Clarke’s feet with the force of a small bomb; it tossed her into the air and she only just managed to keep her wand in hand. Ontari’s next blasting curse nearly blew up in her face; she managed to cast a shield last minute, but the force of the curse sent her up in the air, back smacking the topmost tree branches before she crashed back down, landing on her wrist with another sick crack that wasn’t quite loud enough to hide the sound of glass shattering, and Clarke gasped, momentarily paralyzed with horror. Oh, no. No, no, no.

The watch. The Flame.

Her wrist was broken to the point there was bone sticking out, but she barely even noticed it, too wrapped up in the terrible fact that the Flame had just been broken by the force of Ontari’s curses, gravity, and Clarke’s own weight. She stared down, aghast, as the face of the watch broke apart,
even the strap undone; the watch remained on the ground, shattered and ruined, while Ontari’s next spell yanked Clarke into the air, thick black ropes wrapping around her. Clarke writhed as Ontari advanced on her.

“Stup—“

“Silencio!” snapped Ontari. She patted Clarke’s pockets before roughly tugging her down to search her neckline. “Where is it? Where’s the Flame?”

“Fuck you,” choked Clarke.

“Silencio!” ordered Ontari again, resuming her searching. Clarke kicked out hard, narrowly avoiding connecting her foot with Ontari’s face; she gasped again, wheezing when Ontari casually punched her in the gut.

“You won’t find it,” she rasped, struggling against the ropes.

Ontari frowned up at her, and even Clarke didn’t know how she was managing to break through Ontari’s charms.

“We’ll see about that,” sneered Ontari, lifting her wand. “Crucio!” Nothing happened. Ontari’s face went slack with shock for a moment, before fury contorted it. “Crucio! Crucio!” It clicked for Clarke a moment later, why her spells weren’t having any effect. She laughed weakly, which more than anything sent Ontari into a rage. She pulled her fist back and Clarke didn’t so much as flinch, glaring at her, anticipating the hit to her face—it never came.

“Stupefy!”

A jet of red light streaked through the forest, slamming into Ontari with so much force it sent her twisting through the air as though in a horizontal pirouette before she slammed into a tree and crumpled, limp and motionless, on the forest floor. Clarke fell a second later, ropes disappearing, leaving only mild burns against her skin.

“Are you okay?” asked Lexa anxiously, dropping to her knees, hands running along Clarke’s body as though feeling for injuries. She hissed when Clarke rolled over, spotting the bone sticking out of her blood-soaked arm. “Hang on,” said Lexa, voice as unsteady as her hands suddenly were. “I am
not the best with healing spells, wait for Lincoln, he is on his way—“

“Clarke,” cried Octavia, the next to reach them, followed closely by Lincoln, who immediately knelt down to hover his wand over Clarke’s injury. “You’re all right? You’re okay?”

“I’m fine,” she ground out, chest heaving as her bone was pushed back in and skin instantly seamed together. It still ached, and she was sure she’d have bruises later. She took the hands Lincoln and Lexa offered to her gratefully, allowing them to pull her to her feet. She plucked her wand up from where it had fallen. “The Flame isn’t, though,” she said bitterly. They followed the line of where she gestured to; Octavia gasped and Lexa and Lincoln took sharp intakes of breath upon seeing the dilapidated remains of the watch.

“Oh my God. What does that mean?” asked Octavia, dismayed.

“Lexa,” croaked Clarke, looking at her helplessly, desperately. She didn’t know how to name the tidal wave of fear crashing through her; all she could do was plead, “Lexa.”

Lexa looked at her, alarm in her green eyes, but shook her head at once. “We’ll figure it out,” she said shortly. “For now, we have bigger problems.”

What could possibly be a bigger problem than the Flame being gone? It was answered for her a second later, when Costia, Raven, and Wells caught up.

“Ontari!” said Costia, brown eyes widening as they landed on the motionless girl. “Was she trying to rescue Nia?”

“Probably,” said Clarke, still catching her breath. “But I was the first person she ran into, and it was more fun for her to try to torture someone.”

“No chance of her rescuing Nia,” said Lexa. “She is dead.”

Clarke, Costia, and Wells’s heads snapped up; Lincoln, Octavia, and Raven must already know, for they didn’t seem surprised.
“The darkness was taking her over,” said Lexa, distractedly reaching over to swipe dirt off Clarke’s arm. “She managed to break free of her bonds, knocked Jamie and some others unconscious, but when she turned her wand on me, she cast the killing curse and it appeared to have backfired. Tergeo,” she added quietly, siphoning the blood off Clarke’s arm; she did not like seeing it.

“Someone help me grab her, let’s get out of this forest,” said Clarke, reaching down to grab one of Ontari’s arms; Lincoln seized her other and together they dragged Ontari’s body out of the thicket of trees and back near the gates, before Clarke pointed her wand at her and muttered, “Mobilicorpus.” Ontari’s body floated alongside them like a bizarre balloon as they trekked across the grounds, stopping near the lake again where most of the others stood. Nia’s body lay there, just as charred and leathery as Ontari’s had been in the other world; the darkness was growing, not as fast or strong as it had been for Ontari, but it was there nevertheless, inky tendrils creeping out from Nia’s unmoving chest.

“One down, two to go,” said Costia, glancing between Ontari and Nia.

“We still don’t know what to do about Alie,” said Fox anxiously, arriving at their side; her forehead was shining with perspiration.

“When Ontari wakes up, she’s going to see Nia and go ballistic just like she did last time,” said Luna, limping over to them, face set and grim. “We have to kill her before she can do it.”

“Kill her?” squeaked Fox, terrified eyes darting down; Ontari looked so much smaller and younger like this.

“Wait,” said Raven, “We might need her.”

Evie looked at her incredulously. “Need her? What, like she’s going to join us in the fight? Don’t be thick. She’s evil.”

“I’m not saying she’s not evil! She can rot in Azkaban forever after this as far as I’m concerned. But three Nightbloods might be better than two.”

“Raven, that’s crazy,” said Luna. “There’s no way Ontari would side with us!”

“She might,” said Clarke, directing all the disbelieving faces to her. “You don’t understand, I was
there in the other world, I saw her as she started to die. The only thing she cares about more than power is her own life. If she sees what happened, she might think twice.” She shrugged. “It’s at least worth a try. If it doesn’t take…” She trailed off but Lexa nodded, tightening her grip on her wand.

“Fine,” gritted Luna. “Hurry it up, though. Alie could be here any moment.”

They took her below the deck of the Durmstrang ship where they could have some privacy. There was a flash of red light as Clarke revived Ontari, who immediately began to thrash against the chains Jamie had conjured around her.

“I’m going to show you exactly what happened in the other world,” Clarke told her sternly, causing Ontari to still for a moment, eyes widening. When Clarke lifted her wand, Ontari bucked again, teeth bared as though prepared to sink them into anyone who came near. It didn’t take her long to realize they’d cast the charm that prevented her from transforming into her animagus form right now; she thrashed even harder, eyes wheeling in panic as much as wrath now.

“Stop struggling and watch!” said Clarke, lifting the silvery strand she’d withdrawn from her temple high above their heads; it undulated until she twitched her wand, and then it spun into a circle, spinning until it flattened into an obelisk with a smooth glossy surface. Clarke pointed her wand at Ontari, whose eyes widened a fraction right before it shot forward to envelop her face. Her body jerked and convulsed and then went still and tense as the memories played for her.

“Do you think she’ll get it?” asked Wells.

“She will have to,” said Lexa, watching Ontari critically. “Though it doesn’t matter much in the long run. She will still be locked up in Azkaban when this is all over.”

“Will she?” said Wells dubiously, hesitation written all over his face. “I mean, I know you said in the other time she hurt people, but she hasn’t really had a chance to do much here, she’s just been Nia’s prisoner…”

Lexa shook her head, but Clarke spoke next. “Trust me,” she said grimly, “She’s already murdered countless people, Wells, and she’s not Nia’s prisoner, she’s her right hand. She’ll be in prison for life.”

“We can’t let what happened last time happen again,” said Raven. “She has to understand that how she reacted when Nia died in the other world, she can’t do it again here or she’ll just die again.”
“The problem is how do we stop her when the same events that happened last time haven’t happened in this time,” said Wells.

“Wait a second, Ontari basically became like a super-powered Shadow-Eater, right? She was absorbing magic, feeding off despair. Do you think we could treat her like one? Use the Patronus Charm to keep her away?” said Raven, directing the question to Clarke and Lexa.

Clarke opened her mouth, but then hesitated, brow furrowed. “I…don’t know,” she said honestly.

“They are creatures that dwell in darkness and feed on fear,” said Lexa slowly, “So light and hope is their obvious foil…but Ontari was human.”

“Not really,” said Raven. “Not anymore. She was…something else.”

“She still bleeds,” said Anya dismissively. “She needs air and food and water like the rest of us. I say we keep her locked up and wait it out.”

“That won’t work,” said Raven impatiently, stepping forward with urgency. “Look, Ontari wasn’t normal anymore, she was like—corrupted by it all. Becca said that was what would happen, that she wouldn’t be able to handle all the power she was soaking in and it would eventually consume her. She was unstable!”

“Well, that’s definitely true,” said Clarke, thinking of what happened in the other lifetime, right before she’d taken the Flame. She remembered her battle with Ontari, how she’d been impossibly powerful but, as Raven said, unstable, too. How the strange shadowy magic emanating from her had grown stronger and stronger, until it eventually overcame her. It hadn’t been Ontari’s spell backfiring that had finished her off; it was the darkness. “But I don’t want to experience that again. And if we let her free, it will do, if we don’t stop it first. And trust me. We want to stop it first.”

“What is she, though?” asked Fox, frowning. “Some sort of like…is she turning into a Shadow-Eater?”

“Not exactly,” said Clarke, “It was more like…something else. It was like a…like a sentient dark magic. It made her stronger, but it wasn’t on her side. It was what killed her in the end.”
“An obscurus,” said Raven. “Lexa and I went to talk to Becca to ask her about it, we told her how the magic reacted in the other time, and she said that’s what it sounded like.”

“What’s an obscurus?” asked Octavia.

“We studied it in A History of Magic,” said Bellamy, “But we didn’t learn much about it. They were a thing centuries ago, but not so much anymore.”

“Yeah but what is it exactly?” persisted Octavia. “How are they made?”

“They’re created when a kid suppresses their own magic.”

“But that’s not what Ontari did,” said Fox, “She stole magic to enhance her own, right?”

“An obscurus is made when a kid is forced to repress their magic because they’re being abused, treated like shit, persecuted by muggles, that kind of thing, which yeah, is completely different than Ontari being a total psychopath stealing other people’s magic,” said Raven, twisting the cap in her hand until it popped into place. “But it’s essentially the same thing, too. She’s taking magic and cramming it down somewhere it doesn’t belong. It’s not hers, she’s forcing it. So it creates a magical parasite that’ll grow stronger and stronger until it kills its host—which is her.”

“So…okay…” The determination in Octavia faltered before coming back the stronger, though no less hesitant. “Rae…don’t take offense to this, but…why…why weren’t you an Obscurial?”

“That was one of the questions I asked Becca, actually.” Raven’s easy tone brought visible relief to Octavia. “She said it takes really precise situations for Obscurial to be made, and maybe I didn’t meet them—maybe because I kept it a secret from my mum for so long, so she didn’t have the chance to focus on it and abuse me for it. She abused me for every other reason under the sun, but not that. My abilities were special to me, I didn’t want her to touch them, to…taint them, if that makes sense. But sometimes it did explode out of me…” A crease appeared between her brow, but she carried on, “Sometimes when I was scared or pissed off, magic would explode from me. I’d bust glass a lot, especially any bottles my mum would be holding. Which most witches and wizards do as kids, before they learn to control my magic, but because I was in such a hostile environment, Becca said that could have been like, little symptoms that could have developed into a full-blown obscurus. But I was never trying to suppress my magic. Hell, I wanted it to be stronger, which was one of the reasons I was so pumped when Sinclair showed up at my door and told me I’d been accepted to Hogwarts.”

“So what do you do with them? How do you destroy them?”
Raven hesitated. “Uhm. I’m not really sure, she didn’t know. In the past, she said they were just destroyed with a bunch of offensive spells at once, but that was just a single natural-born obscurus… obviously what happened with Ontari isn’t natural. And it’s what Alie’s planning on doing, so that’s definitely not natural. But if Ontari can help us distract her long enough to figure out a way to take her out…”

“Even if she helps us, how’s that going to help against Alie when we don’t know how to take her out?” demanded Bellamy, a worried scowl on his face.

“I don’t know,” admitted Lexa, looking at Clarke.

“Ontari only died because her spell backfired,” said Clarke hesitatingly. “She was using a wand that wouldn’t kill me because I had its allegiance… plus Lexa and my dad and everyone else had sacrificed themselves for me, for all of us, so that magic played a factor too. But Alie is… she’s not even human, I don’t know if the same logic applies to her.”

“Magic works outside the laws of logic,” mused Raven, stroking her chin as she contemplated. “I think I might have some ideas.”

“I told you I do not approve of your ideas,” said Lexa sharply.

“What ideas?” said Anya at once, eyes narrowed on Raven, who had the good sense to look away, guilty, and shift her leg weight, fidgeting.

“Raven thinks if she sacrifices herself for us, that magic may protect all of us.”

The room immediately burst into protest.

“No, Raven,” said Clarke, at the same time Octavia shouted, “No!”

“No fucking way,” growled Bellamy, at the same time Wells and Fox and everyone else simply said, “NO.”
Anya, for once, could not find the words or threats. She blindly reached forward, grasping Raven’s hand and gripping it tightly, looking at her with utter desperation and despair in eyes that suddenly gleamed; no one ever saw Anya look this vulnerable. It made everyone want to look away. Anya beseechingely shook her head at Raven, speechless save for an incomprehensible choking noise, and Raven swallowed, her own eyes glistening.

“It was just an idea,” said Raven hoarsely. “I just…didn’t know any other way.”

“If magic won’t work, can’t we use one of those things that muggle nutters use?” asked Fox desperately. “One of those gum things?”

“Guns,” said Bellamy, “And no, I doubt they’d work here.”

“They would just pass right through her,” said Luna. “She’s not even solid. I mean, maybe she will be once she absorbs more magic, I don’t know.”

“Wait.” Raven stilled, brown eyes widening. “Right now, we don’t know how to defeat Alie. But Becca said she’s like a bottle, she takes magic in, holds it and makes more. Once she absorbs all that dark magic, she’ll basically be dark magic. If Alie is all dark magic, then can’t we use light to defeat her? If the Patronus Charm can take on an army of Shadow-Eaters, then shouldn’t it be enough to take on Alie?”

“But Nia died without it,” said Costia, frowning in confusion. “And you didn’t use the Patronus charm on her.”

“Nia died, but her obscurus didn’t.”

“Hang on, this doesn’t make any sense,” said Bellamy, frustrated. “What’s the point? Why would Alie put all that magic into Nia? And how does Ontari and Nightbloods and all this shit tie in to her and Becca?”

“You don’t know the full story, Bell,” said Clarke. They didn’t bother explaining every single detail to the others, after all.

“Becca made Nightbloods,” said Raven. “They can resist the effects of Shadow-Eaters, they have a higher chance of a rare animagus, and a bunch of other stuff that helps protect them. Nia knew about
it from Becca and that’s why she encouraged Ontari to join her, she wanted to study her. In the other world, Nia never took too much magic—Lexa defeated her in a duel, the normal way. But Ontari did. Nightbloods are special that they can take more magic…that and the fact that Ontari isn’t a squib…well, unlike Nia, who was more like an empty vase to temporarily hold magic in until she used it up, Ontari was full and shoving extra magic on top of the magic she already had, so she was forcing it into her and it had nowhere to go and became an Obscurus instead, which is something that Becca—and Nia—never saw coming.”

Octavia whistled, eyes wide. “Dayum. That’s crazy.”

“So how is Nia forming one now then?” asked Costia, frowning. “If she’s just an empty vessel…”

“I dunno, but it must have something to do with Alie.” Raven’s eyes widened as yet another new idea occurred to her. “Wait, Becca said that Alie can create magic…anytime any sort of technology and electricity and all that junk is enchanted, the magic strengthens over time and can keep reproducing itself. That’s why there’s still that beat up car driving around the forest, and why my ipod took a while before it tried strangling me in the other world. Alie’s existed for a century, so she’s obviously been building up a lot of power. Maybe she forced even more magic into Nia!”

Clarke stiffened. “That makes sense, actually. I remember Ontari in the other world saying that Nia never took more than she needed because it was painful and she didn’t want to go to far, but maybe she knew what would happen. There’s not enough room for it. Now Alie just shoved more into her because—“

“Because she wants it to happen,” said Lexa quietly in realization. They all turned to her, stricken into silence. Lexa looked at them all. “The Shadow-Eaters will consume it, and Alie will take it from them. She will have the highest forms of concentrated dark magic…enough to kill everyone. Even Nightbloods.”

“Oh my God,” said Clarke softly. “She wanted this to happen all along.”

“She’s been banking on it,” said Raven dully, wooden-faced. “She wanted to make Nia one, and Ontari. Ontari’s a Nightblood so imagine the power it could give her…”

“And we played right into Alie’s hands,” said Anya, stricken.

Raven nodded, pale. “She wanted us to take Nia, she wanted Ontari to come looking for her and
hang around here, whether because she started absorbing her own magic or because she’s siding with us against her. The Shadow-Eaters…they don’t really belong to Nia, they were never really under her control. Everything they do…it’s because Alie wanted them to. They’re hers.”

“Merlin’s pants,” moaned Fox, covering her eyes with a shaky hand. “I can’t take this. What are we going to do? How are we supposed to stop it?”

They were interrupted by a sudden gasp. Ontari exited the memories as though she’d been underwater and was coming up for air. Her gaze wheeled around before finding Clarke, stared up at her in a sort of adjunct horror, panic in her eyes. “What was that? What was that—that darkness?”

“Your own corrupted magic,” said Lexa, watching Ontari closely. “We did warn you.”

Any was studying her with more obvious disdain. “We warned you siding with dark magic would come back to bite you in the—“

“Is this really the moment to say I told you so?” snapped Ontari, easily returning to her former self as she rounded on Lexa and Anya. “I swear to Merlin, I will end both of you.”

“I’d like to see you try,” snarled Anya, flaring up at once. “You already made that mistake once, do I need to remind you how that went?”

“I was thirteen and you were nearly sixteen,” said Ontari with a sneer, “Not much to brag about. Still, I’d think even a pathetic bloodtraitor like you would have enough brain cells to rub together to know how that fight would go now.”

“I don’t give a fuck if you can transform into a dragon, I’ll still kick your ass!”

“Enough!” commanded Lexa before it could escalate.

Ontari actually paused for once, her scarred face hard with ire as she cast her gaze around, lingering on Luna, Evie, Fox, Wells. “I killed so many of you.” Her gaze stopped on Costia; her lip curled in a cold sneer. “I especially enjoyed helping Nia kill you.”
Anya and Lincoln stepped forward threateningly, but Costia only rolled her eyes. Lexa hovered a firm finger before Ontari’s chin, magically tilting her up to look at her; Clarke tensed, half certain Ontari would try to actually bite Lexa’s finger. “Enough,” said Lexa again, calmly this time. “You have two options. Either we kill you—and believe me. None of us are offended by the idea. Or you can come quietly, allow us to place you under arrest, and live to see another day, even if it is behind bars. It is your choice.”

Ontari looked around, shrinking back somewhat even though her eyes were still blazing with rage, nostrils flared as though steam was about to come out. Clarke waited expectantly; she knew what Ontari would do, what she was thinking. In the other world, with Nia gone and the power of her army in Ontari’s control, Ontari had truly believed she had won, that nothing could touch her, but now she’d been forced to see reality...to watch her own death. The only thing stronger than her pride and bloodlust was the urge to survive. Sure enough, Ontari seemed to realize the truth; the longer she looked around at everyone’s stony expressions, the quieter and calmer she became, until finally she swallowed and said bitterly, “Fine.”

That was the end of it.

Jamie and a dozen others gave Ontari a potion that would ensure she remained unconscious before locking her in a magically reinforced cage with countless powerful enchantments placed on it that prevented her from transforming or making any attempts to break free. They placed it in the bowels of Durmstrang ship, leaving several high-ranking Magical Law Enforcement officials and aurors to guard it.

Outside, more people had arrived—Abby Griffin and Roan Kwin among them, the Fidelius charm no longer necessary now that Nia was gone. After assuring her tearful mother she was fine and they needed to concentrate on the mission at hand, Clarke awaited instructions from Jamie. With Nia, Ontari, and Mount Weather out of the picture, what remained of the Death Eaters and werewolves weren’t much of a worry, but an influx of every last Shadow-Eaters certainly was. As such, everyone was readying themselves for battle. Most people were calm and composed, but there was one person who was not that Clarke would have expected to be: Kane. Apparently the Hogwarts express was having trouble reaching them; Clarke wondered if Ontari had sabotaged the tracks near the school when she broke into the grounds. So now they had to worry about hundreds of children as well. Great.

Jamie was directing people where to go. Most people were stationed at various parts of the grounds, in a large circle around the castle; that was the prerogative, protect the castle and all the trapped students inside. Clarke was stationed with Lexa, Raven, Anya, Costia, Octavia, Lincoln, Wells, and Fox, guarding the grounds near the pitch. Bellamy had been with them earlier, but left with Gina, Miller, Monty, and Jasper to keep an eye on the scared first-years crowded in the dining hall, at the bequest of Kane. The Durmstrangs were stalking the area near the lake along with some Hogwarts students (Harper, Monroe, Atom, and Sterling just to name a few), and several Beauxbatons that had elected to stay; most of the Ministry and Order members located themselves near the entrance doors and scattered all over the grounds and in the castle; Luna, Evie, Gideon, Frankie Longbottom, and a
few others were at the castle gates. Everyone was on edge and pacing in place, both anxious for and
dreading the day to proceed. It was eerily quiet out as the sun inched toward the horizon.

Clarke stood off to the side a bit, the small Resurrection Stone in her pocket feeling more like a huge
boulder than the pebble it was. Ever since Raven had given it back to her, she’d wanted to use it.
Now, with everyone adequately distracted—the only people talking were Raven and Anya, and off
in the distance, Lexa and Titus, who seemed to be arguing (Clarke had been keeping a very close
eye on them), she didn’t know what she was waiting for. It just felt as though it might jinx
everything. She could tell the Felix Felices was already wearing off for her friends; the sagging of
their shoulders and worrisome frowns proved that much. She chewed on the inside of her lip as she
considered it…just a quick word with her father would be enough…

She jolted and looked up a moment later, startled, and everyone else turned toward the sudden noise
too. Titus and Lexa were shouting at one another.

"You know of my prophecies, you know one specifically states that the weakness of the girl from the
stars and the commander of the earth will bring an end to the world! If you care for Clarke then you
will distance yourself, it is the only way any of us will be safe! This weakness is dangerous and you
are letting your feelings cloud over your sense of judgement!

"I am more than capable of separating feelings from duty!" Fury and pain was etched into every
line of her face; Clarke automatically moved toward her, stomach lurching and heart drumming in
her throat, but Anya swept out an arm to stop her. "I am so sick of you treating me like a pawn,
making me feel as though I am selfish for wanting more for myself! You have no idea, the lives I’ve
lived! And in each one, you are always there, controlling me, sabotaging me—"

"Sabotaging you?" bellowed Titus. "I have been protecting you! All I want is for you to live the life
you were meant to live! To fulfill your destiny and prophec—"

"You have not been protecting me, you have been killing me!"

The words took the air from Titus’s lungs. He paused absurdly in mid-rant, his expression akin to
one who has been clubbed over the head. "I—killing you?" he spluttered, blinking rapidly. "I—that
is ridiculous. I would never harm a hair on your head. Everything I do is to help you survive."

"Well perhaps that is too much.” Lexa’s voice was strained now, the cords in her neck sticking out
more now than they were earlier when she was yelling. Her eyes were bright, her lower lip trembling
as she said, “Living is not the same as having a life. You have helped me survive and I am grateful
for that, but life should be about more than just surviving. You have sheltered me from the joys of
life far more than the horrors of it. I had never even had the opportunity for something as simple as
eating Honeyduke’s chocolate before.” Titus looked confused at that, but now that words were
spilling from Lexa’s lips, she found it difficult to stop them. “I have done everything you ever asked
of me, but it didn’t benefit anyone, not even you. Since I was a child you have drilled into my head, again and again, that love is the worst weakness. You drove me away from Costia with it. In the other world, she died at Nia’s hands, and you took advantage of my grief to harden my heart with it; I was not myself, just an empty shell, and it took getting away from you to find myself again. In the other world, you considered Clarke to be a danger to me and the Order, and you tried to kill her. Your spell hit me instead. According to Jake Griffin, there are many other versions of time in which you betray me in some measure, because you are always so convinced that your way is the only way.” Titus just gapes helplessly at her, at a loss for words. Lexa takes a deep, ragged breath, once, twice, and on her third time, her breathing is more even. “I am a strong person, but not just because of your teachings. I have always been strong, and the fact that I want to live my life just makes me that much stronger. I do not think you should be in my life any longer. There is no place for someone so toxic to think I am not a person but merely exist to fulfill a prophecy. I am a human being and I deserve to live.”

She didn’t give him a chance to respond. She turned on her heel and marched straight across the grounds. Her eyes found Clarke’s and held; it was a wonder she could see at all, they were so filled with tears, but she didn’t let a single one fall. Everyone politely looked away, as Clarke opened her arms and Lexa stepped into them, into her embrace, burying her face in Clarke’s neck and shuddering. Over Lexa’s head, Clarke watched Titus for a moment. He stared at them, looking lost and defeated. He eventually rearranged his expression into one of impassivity, though there was still a war in his eyes, and inclined his head, before turning around, heading toward the congregation of people near the ship.

“Are you okay?” murmured Clarke into Lexa’s hair, stroking a hand down its silk before rubbing consolingly at the small of Lexa’s back.

Lexa nodded, smearing wetness across Clarke’s neck; she held her tighter.

“I’m proud of you,” she said softly. “I think you needed that.”

“I think so too,” said Lexa, exhaling a weak, shaky breath before shuddering and burrowing deeper into Clarke’s arms. “I could forgive him for what he did to me, but I could never…never forgive him for attacking you.”

“Hey, hey,” whispered Clarke, fingers carding through Lexa’s hair again. “Don’t worry, Lex. We’re going to get through this.”

“I am not worried, Clarke,” said Lexa, her sigh caressing Clarke’s skin. “I am with you.”
After a few moments, Lexa drew back, sniffling. There were glistening tracks on her cheeks, but she blinked and her eyes were clear. “Thank you, Clarke. I feel...better,” she decided. “Lighter. I needed that.”

“Good.” Clarke leaned forward, gently kissing her before brushing another kiss across the tip of her nose.

Lexa watched her closely, eyes wide and open. “Do you ever think of why we find each other, Clarke?”

Clarke swallowed, mouth dry as she stared into those green eyes. “Yeah. Sometimes. It feels like we’re...”

“Inevitable?” whispered Lexa. Clarke nodded, stomach fluttering and heart aching.

Lexa lifted a hand, tracing the curve of Clarke’s cheek before bringing her in for another slow kiss that sent warmth flooding through Clarke’s body.

“I’m scared,” admitted Clarke when they broke apart, breathless and aching. “We don’t have the Flame anymore. If something happens—“

“It won’t,” promised Lexa. “Just one more thing, and this is all over with.”

“I’m just...” Clarke shook her head, the hand cupping Lexa’s jaw starting to tremble; she moved it to Lexa’s shoulder. “Just please, please...please don’t get hurt,” she begged. “I don't—I can’t lose you. Not again.”

Lexa’s throat dipped as she swallowed. “I’ll try not to.

“Well,” began Clarke, attempting to smile, voice trembling in spite of her attempt to sound light and teasing. “If something happens to you again, I might have to kick your ass.”

It did what she’d hoped; Lexa’s expression cleared, green eyes turning brighter. Her mouth quirked. “I lived, didn’t I?”
Clarke’s lips twitched. “All right, girl who lived. Keep doing that.”

They looked at each other, dopey smiles growing on their faces.

They were interrupted by the arrival of Raven who, inexplicably, had a bottle of half-drunken butterbeer in hand.

“Where the hell did you get that?” asked Clarke.

“Evie,” answers Raven, taking another swig. “She brought a bunch of butterbeer and chocolate, said it would help with the Shadow-Eaters. I’m mostly drinking it so when Alie gets here, I can tell her, I came here to drink butterbeer and kick ass.” She smacked her lips together, tossing the empty bottle behind her so it landed somewhere in the grass. “And I’m all out of butterbeer.”

“Raven, that’s littering,” said Fox reproachfully.

Raven rounded on her to bicker and Clarke immediately tuned it out.

“Want some?” asked Octavia, words muffled with her bulging cheeks; she offered a bar of chocolate, but Clarke and Lexa shook their heads. Octavia shrugged, swallowing and immediately going for another bite. “Your loss.”

Clarke stared at her, smiling in mingled admiration and disbelief. “How do you stay so positive, O? Even in the other world. You lost your magic, Lincoln, even Bellamy in a way—but you never gave up. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone with more nerve.”

“You know what they say about nerve. Anything’s possible if you’ve got enough of it,” said Octavia, a grin unfurling on her face.

They were interrupted again by Costia’s approach. “Hey, so, uh, burning Nia’s body didn’t work. It took a while to see, but it looks like Nia’s obscurus is forming anyway, in the fire and the ashes… and if it’s here then Alie can’t be far behind. We need to move, now.”
They hurried over, and as they ran, Fox panted, “Wait, so what are we doing? I thought we were waiting for Alie to arrive?”

“We are, but first we have to destroy Nia’s obscurus, and when we do that, it’s going to release all the magic she’s stolen at once,” said Clarke. “In the other time, when it happened to Ontari, it burst free and it was like…it was strange. It was like it was raining…”

“What did it look like?”

“Stars falling like snow. It was actually pretty beautiful,” said Clarke.

“And what happened to it?”

“It just sort of faded away, because it had nowhere to go…”

“Well, we don’t want these to fade,” said Lexa firmly. “If we can gather them, maybe we can return them to their owners.”

“There’s just going to be one problem,” said Anya as they neared the lake. “The last time this happened, Clarke was alone in a specific chamber of the City of Light with Ontari. This time it’ll be out in the open…and what do you think will happen when a large amount of untethered magic is gathered like that?”

They all skidded to a halt as the words sank in.

“Fuck,” said Raven breathlessly, staring at her. “Every Shadow-Eater’s going to be drawn here. It’s basically a free all-you-can-eat buffet.”

“Problem, we’ve got a big fucking problem!” shouted Luna from across the grounds; they turned to see her arms wind milling, urgently pointing toward the distant eastern sky, where distant storm clouds were gathering. “She’s coming! They’re coming right now!”

Oh, fuck. They weren’t storm clouds at all.

“Shit!” exclaimed Raven, “Oh, shit! Those are—what the fuck!”
"I've never seen so many Shadow-Eaters at once," said Anya, stunned.

"What do we do?" cried Fox, looking around at them all. "How are we supposed to face them all?"

Clarke shook her head, at a loss.

'I have an idea," said Raven suddenly.

Anya rounded on her. "Not this again! You are not getting hurt in any way, shape, or form-" began Anya threateningly, but Raven shook her head, waving her hands.

"No, no, listen. Think of where Clarke got the Flame."

"The Love chamber?" said Anya, confused.

"Yes! And why was it the most mysterious, dangerous chamber? What was it called?"

"Love is the strongest magic," answered Lexa slowly, recognition filtering in her eyes. "And it's..."

"The City of Light," realized Clarke, her eyes widening.


"But we already covered that, we're using patronuses against the Shadow-Eaters, but against Alie..." said Lincoln.

"I think maybe they'll work the best against her! She's like an empty husk holding the dark magic, right, so she basically is dark magic..." Raven shrugged.

"I think you're right," said Clarke. In the other world, when Ontari's obscurus was finally destroyed, it had exploded into light.
"Of course I am," said Raven, grinning.

“Clarke!” Kane and Jamie were bustling toward them, their hair whipping in the sudden cold wind.

“Forget about Nia’s obscurus,” panted Jamie, gesturing toward the black fire burning near the edge of the lake. “We have bigger plimpies to fry right now. We need to iron out the rest of your plan in the next twenty seconds, Raven.”

“There isn’t time for this,” said Kane harshly. “I have a castle full of children and there are a thousand Shadow-Eaters moving toward us right now. We have to move!”

“They aren’t just coming for Nia’s obscurus,” said Clarke. “They’re coming for us, all of us. Alie knows about the prophecy and she’s going to try to stop us before we can stop her.” She caught Kane’s eye, firm and unyielding. “You have to evacuate the school.”

“Clarke, the train won’t come and there’s no way we can Disapparate quickly enough—“

“Take them through the secret passageway to Hogsmeade! The same one Lexa and I took!”

“How could we possibly have enough time?” he said desperately, before pausing, hope burning in his countenance. “Wait, time, that’s what we need! Can you use the Flame to—“

She cut across him. “We don’t have it anymore.”

Kane’s eyes practically bugged in alarm. “What—“

“There’s no time!” cried Jamie, actually shoving Kane forward toward the castle. “Let’s go, move it!”

“Okay,” said Kane, sounding shaken before resolve steadied him; he rushed away.
Kane led the students through the secret passageway to Hogsmeade, one huge, extended line of children flying down the tunnels. Once there they would apparently be circling around to get on the Hogsmeade express. There were many students of age who chose to stay behind, however, though most of them weren’t sure exactly what was happening beyond the fact that the castle would soon be under attack.

“We’re going to keep guarding the castle grounds,” Jamie told her as they hurried across the castle from where they’d just been magically sealing the passageways. “The Order will be stationed all over, we’ll take on whatever Alie throws at us. You guys need to go through with your plan.”

“Make sure you cast as many patronuses as you can,” Raven told her.

Jamie nodded. “We will. Good luck—stay safe!”

“You guys take ‘em high, we’ll take them low,” Costia said, seizing those nearest her—Wells and Fox—and tugging them with her back toward the lake, where Harper, Monroe, Maya, Artigas, Tris, Gustus, Indra, Titus, and a few other Durmstrangs were casting spell after spell at the ball of black fire spitting wisps of darkness before it shot into the sky, zooming toward the approaching Shadow-Eaters. Clarke caught a glimpse of red among them. Alie.

“We need a higher vantage point,” said Raven, squinting up at the topmost tower. “Accio brooms!”

The wind was whistling so hard they could barely hear the sound of half a dozen broomsticks bulleting toward them all the way from the shed at the Quidditch pitch. They hovered to a quivering halt before them, knee-level.

“Hurry,” urged Clarke; they all clambered on a broomstick and pushed off the ground, soaring into the sky.

The wind buffeted them as they climbed higher, and they looked to the right with horror at the approaching Shadow-Eaters. Clarke’s hands were so clammy she nearly lost grip on her broomstick; her heart was beating so hard her head was spinning.

“Oh my God, oh my God,” said Octavia, panic-stricken, as they landed on the Astronomy tower. “There are so fucking many of them! We can’t take on that many at once! We’ll never make it!”
“We can do it,” said Lexa, eyes focused as she drew her wand higher. “A single patronus can hold off dozens of these creatures at once. It stands to reason multiple patronuses would hold even better.”

“Yeah except not all of us can do that charm! That’s advanced magic!”

“You’ve done it before, O,” said Clarke firmly, raising her wand, body tensed as what looked like a wall of storm clouds roared toward them.

“I haven’t in this world!” snapped Octavia. “Most adults can’t do it and we haven’t even had any training—”

“Well, you’re about to take the crash course,” said Anya sharply. “Shut up and focus on a happy memory.”

“That’s all you have to do,” interjected Lincoln quietly when Octavia opened her mouth to snap back at Anya, briefly reaching down with his free hand to squeeze Octavia’s encouragingly. “Think of your happiest moments in life. Think of a time you felt free.”

It was that simple word that had the tension in Octavia’s face slackening, followed with resolve that tightened it and a glint in her eyes. It was definitely the right word to use, thought Clarke, looking away from O to observe the sky again. They all had their thing. She knew Octavia’s happy moment would be something to do with the elation and relief provided by freedom; the day she left the orphanage to go to Hogwarts, perhaps, or more likely her first time riding a broomstick. Raven’s would probably be the day she discovered magic. Clarke’s—well, she was fortunate enough to have many to choose from. The strongest, though, was the girl standing beside her. The memory of waking from the memories, of knowing they had a second chance and all their friends were alive again, of that first touch of Lexa’s plump lips to hers….

It felt as though she was glowing from within, her heart pumping the light through her veins. She embraced the swell of emotion, let it fuel her as she tightened her grip on her wand as the wave of shadows approached, countless Shadow-Eaters now distinguishable, their tattered cloaks rippling in the air, clawed, scabby hands outstretched, eager to feast—

“All! Now!” called Lexa.

All six of them shouted out the spell together. “*Expecto Patronum!*”
On Clarke’s right, she saw a dog, an owl, and a cluster of butterflies sail forward, bright and warm. But in front of her, it wasn’t exactly what she quite expected. She’d anticipated the usual lion from the other world, but instead, a glowing dragon burst from her wand. Wide eyed and gaping, she turned her head to see Lexa’s reaction, and Lexa seemed just as surprised, though she’d yet to even see Clarke’s patronus yet. Clarke followed her gaze and—holy shit—

“Is that a griffin?” asked Octavia, barking with laughter when she chanced another look and, yep, that’s what it was. A huge, glowing griffin, the body of a lion and the head and talons of an eagle with wings to boot. “And Clarke, a dragon? You guys really couldn’t be any gayer.”

It was more the absence of Raven’s teasing snarks that alerted Clarke to the fact that something was wrong, rather than the fact that only five Patronuses were soaring through the sky. Raven had always had trouble with this charm. It was the one thing she couldn’t ever just easily get right away.

“Expecto Patronum! Expecto Patronum! Expec—fuck, I can’t do it!” said Raven, panic in her voice, face screwed up with the effort. “There’s too much bad shit popping into my head, I can’t—I’m not —” I’m not enough.

“Damn it, Reyes, you’re fucking brilliant!” yelled Anya, hair whipping wildly. “You’ve suffered more than anyone here but you can use that in this, just like you use it for everything else, let it fuel you! Get your shit together and focus! You can do this!”

Raven was visibly shaking as she squinted at the Shadow-Eaters; they had all came to a halt, the Patronuses serving as a wall, but there weren’t enough. They didn’t need them as a defense right now, they needed them as an offense. Raven focused, but not just on a happy memory. Everything she went through…her mother, her father, Finn, discovering magic, finding a home in Hogwarts, befriending Clarke and O and Bell and Wells and the others, and now Lexa and Lincoln, finding Anya—beautiful, fierce Anya who never failed to challenge her at every turn even while making her feel more safe and protected and loved than she’d ever felt before—she focused on that. A crescendo of memories and a thousand different sensations spun wildly through her head; cigarette burns on her skin and her father’s gnarled hands on his chair; Finn’s charming grin; the rush of warmth as her wand chose her; the castle looming overhead for the first time; the first time she experienced a Hogwarts feast, more food than she’d ever ate in her entire life; soaring across the Quidditch pitch; her friends’ laughter; losing Anya just like always lost everything else, but finding her again. Raven let the anguish grow within her, all the pain and rage, and then the joy too, the hope—and she screamed out with it.

The raven that exploded into the air was no bigger than the usual size, reasonably life-sized, but it was five times as bright as it usually was. Clarke had never seen such a bright patronus, nearly blinding. The other patronuses began to glow brighter too, gliding forward toward the shadows that were now knocking into one another in their haste to retreat, but it was too late, the light was growing, so bright now Clarke and the others had to look away before it blinded them. There was a
rush of sound like a deafening wind, and they had no choice but to press their hands over their ears and squeeze their eyes shut, gasping, waiting—

When the vivid red of their eyelids faded, they cautiously opened their eyes and lowered their hands, ears ringing so the next sounds of their gasps were drowned out. Their patronuses were fading, but the light was unnecessary. There was a single woman hanging in the sky—the woman in the red dress. Alie. She hung there like an apparition, face as blank as ever but something there, perhaps the higher arch to her brows and slight widening of her eyes, indicating her shock. She clutched at her chest as though trying to hold herself together, but Clarke could see the tendrils of darkness escaping beneath her palm.

It wasn’t as violent as Ontari’s end had been in the other world, perhaps because Ontari’s death had been at the hands of her own backfired killing curse. And this time, Clarke felt no pity as she watched the darkness grow, emanating like an aura just as it had with Ontari. Alie wasn’t real. There was no pain on her face, only that blank shock as the shadows crept over her until they swallowed her whole, leaving behind a pulsating ball of dark magic that hung in the air like a black sun before shrinking, compacting until it was the size of a quaffle, and then abruptly shot upward. Clarke followed its trajectory into the sky; she knew what was about to happen and sure enough, the darkness exploded into a thousand pieces, giving way to the light.

Those around her made quiet noises of astonishment, watching in incredulity as far above, glowing balls of light hovered in the sky before slowly, slowly descending. Like falling stars.

“We need to catch them,” said Raven breathlessly, looking round and seizing two broomsticks, tossing one to Anya. “Everyone needs to catch them, they’re stolen magic we can give back!” She and Anya flew down toward the grounds where the others were standing stock-still, gazing up at the sky in shock.

“C’mon Linc,” said Octavia, and the two of them swung a leg over their own broomsticks, waving at Clarke and Lexa before descending out of sight.

Clarke and Lexa’s broomsticks remained untouched as they stood there, Lexa observing the falling light while Clarke watched her. A few were nearly close enough to touch now.

“It’s like nothing you’ve ever seen before, isn’t it?”

“I….wow,” breathed Lexa, barely able to nod in agreement. The light was level with them now, one slowly falling and just beyond the tip of Lexa’s nose; it reflected in her wide eyes.
“Here.” With a flourish of her wand, Clarke conjured two glass jars out of thin air and passed one over to Lexa.

Lexa popped open the lid and watched, eyes wide, as a few glowing balls landed inside it. They didn’t need to move around; the light slowly gravitated toward them, as though they knew what to do. Clarke and Lexa stood at the edge of the tower for a time, collecting them; they could see a few dark figures moving on the grassy lawn and they could hear excited voices; Raven and the others had the same idea, clearly, except they’d remained on their broomsticks. Clarke couldn’t help it; laughter bubbled out of her as she watched her friends soaring, high above the grounds but far below where they stood atop the tower, delightedly swiping at the lights like they were slow-moving snitches. They’d just started, but Octavia had already amassed several, clenching one arm around the basket she’d conjured and weaving between a clumsy Jasper and Monty as though she were holding a quaffle. Costia and Wells were struggling and laughing at one another, slow-moving and awkward on the school’s ancient Nimbus 3000s. Even Fox herself was overcome with delight, sprinting alongside other students, skipping and leaping up into the air to catch the lights.

Clarke was at a loss for words. Weak with relief—for they’d finally done it, the Ice Queen was defeated, Ontari, Cage, Pike, Diana Sydney, and many others would be rotting away in Azkaban, and Alie was no more; the world was safe—she could do nothing more than take Lexa’s hand and hold it. It was all they needed. Lexa squeezed back wordlessly, leaning over to kiss her before lifting her jar to collect a nearby falling star, and Clarke sighed, smiling.

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When the day broke, it brought with it a new calm.

The remaining Death Eaters were being rounded up. The werewolves were in chains. The magic was being returned to who it had been stolen from; any that belonged to those who had already died had already faded away, leaving them with very little to begin with, but it was better than nothing, and the witches and wizards who regained their magic were more relieved and joyful than words could express.

The morning was spent checking on friends. Raven and Octavia sat outside, strewn out over the stairs leading into the castle with some of the Durmstrangs; Anya, Lincoln, Tris, Artigas, and a few others. Lexa, after a warm kiss and a brief squeeze of Clarke’s wrist, stood with Indra and Gustus,
discussing everything that had happened. Titus, Clarke was pleased to see, was nowhere to be found.

Wells was doing all right too, she’d discovered when she went to check on him and found him calmly sitting in the Great Hall where most of the remaining students and Order members were as House Elves distributed breakfast to those who could eat. He was playing a quiet game of Wizard’s Chess with Costia. There was sadness lining his face as he embraced Clarke, and when he pulled back there was shared understanding channeling in their locked eyes. Jaha was in St. Mungo’s for now, but he would eventually be arrested, for the entire reason he’d found Alie in the first place had been because he was tampering where he wasn’t supposed to in the Department of Mysteries. In a way, they both lost their fathers to Azkaban, but at least Jaha might change his ways and eventually be freed one day.

Fox, Clarke was amused to see, was already back to studying. She was absently eating a bowl of oatmeal as she perused a book; Clarke paused in surprise, however, when she saw it was certainly not a book Fox took classes for. It was *The Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles* by Wilhelm Wigworthy the Third. Unquestionably not a usual staple in Fox’s curriculum. But it didn’t matter much anyway since Fox was interrupted a moment later by Harper and Monroe, who plopped down beside her and began engaging her in conversation. Fox seemed surprised, but pleased, and set the book down to join in. It made Clarke happy to see. Fox had never really had any friends in her grade, or any friends period, really, apart from Clarke, Wells, and a few others, and in all honesty that was only because Clarke walked in on her in the second floor girl’s bathroom and caught her crying to Moaning Myrtle during her third year and reached out to befriend her after that.

Everyone was alive and well. Monty, Miller, and Jasper were shoveling eggs down their throats as they chatted animatedly about the events of the night. Bellamy sat eating breakfast with Gina, the two of them often exchanging quick, shy smiles. Murphy was off slouching in the corner, brooding as usual so nothing new there; when Emori appeared with a tray of food and was not so subtly looking around for a place to sit, Clarke directed her to the empty space across from Murphy.

Clarke spent the rest of the day with her friends and her mother, who was staying at an inn in Hogsmeade to be near her for the next few days. She’d been understandably distraught when the truth was revealed to her, but after spending a few hours catching up via Clarke’s memories, she was okay. She was shaken and devastated by her husband’s death and Jaha’s betrayal, but they had each other, and Clarke didn’t mind at all sitting in silence at the Black Lake with her for a time. When she introduced Lexa to her, Abby pulled her into a hug, and Clarke thought maybe, one day, they really would be okay again.

With her mother in discussion with Professor Cartwig and Lexa deep in conversation with Indra and Gustus, Clarke felt all right to step away for a bit. She stood in the outskirts of the forest, pulled the stone out of her pocket, closed her eyes, and—

“Hang on, kiddo.”
Her eyes flew open; she hadn’t turned the stone. She swung around to see her father standing there, the invisibility cloak pulled back and draped over his shoulders, wearing the same sweater he’d been wearing the last time she saw him, in the Great Hall. “Dad. You’re—” she stepped forward cautiously, eyes falling to the watch strapped to his wrist. “You’re really here?”

He smiled, opening his arms. “I’m here. I had to see how it all played out, didn’t I?”

“Dad,” she half-sobbed, half-laughed, falling into his arms. He swung her around in a bear hug, just as he had so many times before.

“I know I say this a lot, but I’m so damn proud of you.”

“Dad,” she breathed, clutching him tightly, fingers digging into his back. “Can you stay? Please, stay.”

“I’m sorry, you know I can’t, kiddo.”

“But it’s not fair,” she said, throat scratchy as she leaned back to look at him. “You saved everyone, you even went back to save Costia! Why do you have to be the one who doesn’t get a happy ending? It’s not fair, it’s not.”

“Because, Clarke,” he began gently, putting his hands on her shoulders, blue eyes soft on her. “My sacrifice was the one that set this all into motion. It kept you from dying. Every killing curse that ever missed you, Ontari’s killing curse backfiring…Just like Becca’s sacrifice created the Nightbloods, and Lexa’s sacrifice kept you safe, and your sacrifice kept everyone else safe in this world. It’s the most powerful magic, kid, nothing else can touch it. In the other lifetime, Costia had to die. She died for Lexa, and it was her love that kept Nia from touching her, the same way me dying for you protected you from the killing curse. You died for Lexa in the other lifetime, and that carried over to here, she died for you and it kept you safe here too. You died for Lexa and everyone else, Lexa died for you and everyone else, I died for you and everyone else. My theory was proven,” said Jake happily. “When it comes down to it…most people make the right choice. The choice to do good.”

She hugged him again, because it was all she wanted to do. Breathed in his scent of home. She didn’t want to let go, but she knew she had to eventually. This couldn’t last forever.

“I broke the Flame,” she whispered, fear sneaking into her voice again.
“That’s how it should be,” he said quietly. “No one needs that kind of power. Becca only had me make it to fix things the way they should be; no more, and no less.”

She couldn’t help it; she didn’t like it. She wanted the Flame, wanted that backup in case anything else went wrong. When she pulled back, she couldn’t resist asking the question that had her heart squeezing and her breath stuttering in her dry throat. “Dad. Will—will Lexa die in this life, too?”

“Yes,” said Jake solemnly. Clarke’s eyes widened as her breath caught, but before she could do more than take a stumbling step back, Jake put a hand on her shoulder and leaned down to look her in the eyes as he said softly, “When she’s old, and gray, and lived a long life with you. Might be cheating a little to tell you that, but you’ve been through enough. You deserve a little stability and comfort, I think. I’d say you earned that much, wouldn’t you?” He winked.

Relief and joy flooded through Clarke, and she smiled despite herself, laughing a little as her father swept his thumbs across her cheeks to wipe away the tears that escaped.

“I just…I wish you could be there, too.”

“Oh, I will be.” Jake grinned. “You won’t see me every day, but I’ll come visit you. I didn’t travel through the fabric of time and space for nothing. I saw you at your graduation. I made it to a few of your kids’ birthday parties. I watched your mum fall in love all over again. I watched Raven accidentally light the place on fire during Octavia and Lincoln’s wedding reception.” Clarke’s eyes were huge, but Jake just chuckled. “To say Octavia was angry would be an understatement, but they made up. Partly because Anya transfigured Raven into a hamster and stuck her in a cage.”

“I just…I wish I could see you every day, though,” admitted Clarke. “…it’s strange. You’ll be dead, but I’ll still see you sometimes? It’s like you’re a ghost. I just wish I could have all of you.”

“Well, not really a ghost. More like an annoying poltergeist. If Lexa wasn’t so polite, she could make really great jokes about having me for an in-law. Raven makes them for her, at least.” He sobered, seeing the way Clarke’s smile didn’t quite meet her eyes. He sighed, wrapping her up in another hug. “I know, kid. I wish it didn’t have to be that way either, but I’m happy I get to be in your life at least in some capacity. You’ll see me less and less as the years go by. I don’t like sticking around too much because I want you guys to move on—especially your mother. But at least it’s a way you know I’m always with you. I love you, and I’m so proud of you, and I’m so happy I was able to watch you grow up. Even though you’ll still always be my little lion cub,” he added, ruffling a hand through her hair and laughing when Clarke did.
They stilled when they noticed the person approaching them, looking at them as though she couldn’t believe her eyes. “Give us a minute, will you kiddo?” said Jake, solemnity creeping into his voice even as his eyes brightened as they fell on his wife—his widow, now. “Let me say goodbye to your mother. She needs some closure.”

Clarke nodded and walked a respectable distance away. She lingered as her parents cried, and laughed, and kissed and held one another and said their goodbyes. The moment they gestured for her to join them, she ran to them, embracing the both of them. They held one another, together for the very last time.

“You two take care of each other,” said Jake, voice cracking. “I love you both so much.”

“We love you too,” choked Clarke, while Abby said the same, though it came out as more of an incoherent whimper.

When he disappeared, Clarke and her mother walked slowly back up to the castle, arm in arm, and it almost felt as though he were still with them.

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At dinner that evening, Kane announced the rest of the students would be returning in a week’s time and the school year would continue, though the Triwizard Tournament would no longer be held. No one protested; everyone here seemed to have had quite enough adventure for one year. Octavia was beyond fine with it when she realized Quidditch was back on. At least until—

“Oh, fuck!” blurted Octavia, spoonful of ice cream pausing before her mouth.

“What?” said Clarke.

“I just realized. If the rest of the year is normal, that means we still have to take our end of year exams!”

Raven grinned. “Tick off kicking ass in my N.E.W.T.S next to saving the world for my list of accomplishments this year.”

Octavia swore. “This is bullshit! We just saved the world and I have two years of schooling left!”

“Schooling you need,” said Bellamy sternly, the jelly at the end of his fork wobbling as he pointed it at her.

“Easy for you to say when you’re nearly done!”
Clarke took a bite of treacle tart to hide her smile. She met green eyes dancing with amusement and it grew. Suddenly, as much as she loved her friends, she wanted nothing more than to be alone with Lexa. In the chaos of the battle and the recovery afterwards, spending time with her mother and checking on her friends, she hadn’t had much time alone with her.

“Good night,” she said quickly, seizing Lexa’s hand and tugging her away from what was left of her apple pie; the two people sitting nearest her, Costia and Anya, both smirked.

“Use protection,” snickered Jasper; he cried out a moment later when Clarke’s nonverbal protego sent the fork he’d tried to bring to his mouth flying away, splattering food on the floor. All their friends roared with laughter but Clarke didn’t look back once, instead exchanging a grin with Lexa as they left the hall.

It was beautiful outside. The distant hum of voices faded immediately when the entrance doors closed behind them. The castle towered behind them as they strolled across the grounds, no real destination in mind so it took Clarke a minute to realize they were heading toward the lake. The sky above stretched out like midnight velvet, an infinite number of stars reflected in the surface of the calm lake. The Durmstrang ship was as impressive as ever silhouetted against a full moon. It reminded Clarke of something.

“Have you spoken to Titus at all?”

Lexa shook her head. “No. Indra told me he was waiting for me in the ship, but he was not there. But he did leave me a…a basket of Honeyduke’s finest chocolates.” There was conflict in those green eyes, and Clarke understood. It was perhaps the closest to an apology Lexa would ever get from Titus. It wasn’t really what it should be…but it was enough, and Lexa understood that.

In a way, Titus had been right. His prophecies had been fulfilled- Clarke and Lexa meeting, their relationship, what they felt for each other…it had, in a way, caused the world to end. But the other world, not this one. And the other world had to end in order for this one to exist. Fate was a funny thing. Titus had been wrong about one thing, though, the biggest thing- love wasn’t a weakness. It was strength, and truly the most powerful of all magic.

“I bet you’ll have eaten all of them by tonight,” teased Clarke in a transparent attempt to lighten the subject. Lexa accepted it gratefully.

“Only if you’ll help me get through them.”
“You don’t have to ask me twice.”

They smiled at once another, Clarke’s heart starting to pound in her chest as she realized she could finally say what she’s wanted to for so long. Before she could, however, Lexa spoke.

“You did well today. More than well. Amazing.” When Clarke arched a brow, flushing slightly, Lexa took both of her hands in her own and pulled Clarke with her, sitting them down on the soft grass overlooking the lake. “We would not have won this war if it weren’t for you.”

“And you,” Clarke pointed out. “And Raven, and Anya, and everyone else. We all had something—someone—worth fighting for, and that’s what made the difference. That’s why we won.”

Lexa studied her, eyes wide and green and so knowing. “I am so…I’m so grateful that we came here.” She took a breath, glancing around Hogwarts. “I don’t want to leave. As much as I love Durmstrang, I don’t want to leave you. I don’t want to wake up without you, I don’t want to fall asleep without you by my side. I have been spoiled, being with you here. I don’t like the idea of not being able to reach for you and there you are.”

“We’ll visit every chance we get,” Clarke promised, bringing the back of Lexa’s hand up to her lips. “And then after we finish the school year…” She trailed off, pulse picking up again as she decided to be honest. “Lexa, you…from the moment I met you, you terrified me.” Lexa’s face fell as she looked down; Clarke reached over to gently nudge her up again to meet her eyes, and blue held green as she said, “Not for the reasons you think. Not because you’re the big bad Lexa Woods or anything like that. But because I…I felt something, the minute I saw you. I didn’t know what it was at first, but I just knew…and it’s scary, letting someone in. Not just putting your trust in them, but putting your trust in the universe. People lose someone they care about every day and it’s terrifying to meet the one person you know without a doubt you couldn’t live through losing.”

Lexa took a shaky, shallow intake of breath, wetting her lips before saying, “I know what you mean. I…I had lost Costia, and my parents were never…I was frightened too, Clarke, for the same reasons. Letting someone in, it means you are vulnerable and exposed to an element of the world you have absolutely no control of.” She studied Clarke thoughtfully. “For the longest time, I thought that meant it was a weakness.”

“Do you still believe that?”

Lexa’s lips curved slightly. “No, I do not. I have you to thank for that. You have no idea how happy you make me, Clarke.”
Clarke smiled, heart aching. “You deserve it.”

“Are you happy?” asked Lexa seriously.

“Are you kidding?” Clarke snorted quietly. “How many people get to say that they fell for the same person for the first time, twice? I think it’s amazing, Lexa. It’s like—it’s like we had two chances, and we nailed both of them. We found each other in two different lifetimes. According to my dad, in countless different lifetimes.”

Lexa regarded her for a moment, long enough that Clarke fell silent and heat spread from her cheeks all the way to the tips of her ears as she realized what she’d said. She waited for Lexa’s response, unnerved.

Lexa’s throat moved as she swallowed again and Clarke felt that familiar rush of adoration for this beautiful, stoic, gentle girl. “I would find you in every lifetime, Clarke.”

It was Clarke’s turn to swallow thickly, and that same overwhelming understanding washed over her.

“I love you,” she said, smiling when Lexa’s eyes widened. “I do. I love you. I love you so much, Lexa.”

Lexa blinked again, before the skin around her plump lips creased a split second before her mouth curved in a smile, and kept curving, until it was broad and stretched across her face. No holding back.

Clarke knew her answer, but her heart still thumped on as Lexa reached forward to take her hand and thread their fingers together. She brushed her lips over the back of Clarke’s knuckles before chasing a trail up Clarke’s neck to linger just below her jaw. The tip of her nose dragged across Clarke’s ear as she said in a quiet, fervent voice as soft as her kisses, “I love you more than anything, Clarke.”

Clarke swallowed, a little in awe, as she looked from Lexa’s fluttering lashes to their clasped hands and entwined fingers. She almost couldn’t believe it, that this was real. That this incredible person wanted to share a life—or lifetimes—with her. She shuffled in close to Lexa in her sudden vulnerability; Lexa’s lips quirked up in a soft smile again as she released Clarke’s hand to wrap her
arms around her waist, enveloping her in a warm hug that Clarke felt all the way down to her bones. She buried her face in the smooth crook of Lexa’s neck, breathing in the hearty, fire smoke smell of Lexa’s waves of braided hair. “You do?”

Lexa nodded, nuzzling into Clarke’s own hair, hands sliding along the length of her back and the flare of her hips. “I do, and I always will. Forever.”

Happiness, the calmest, most peaceful form of it, swelled within Clarke’s heart. At the same time, terror made her clutch Lexa closer—for all her talk, Clarke Griffin knew death. She could still see her father’s face as Alië took away his light, could still see Lexa’s face as Titus’s curse hit her, as black blood bubbled out of her abdomen. Clarke knew what it felt like to lose someone she loved. And she wasn’t sure if there was anything more terrifying than loving someone so much that it wasn’t as though she couldn’t live without them—simply that she didn’t, couldn’t, imagine any sort of life without them. She needed Lexa to be here, to be in her arms, to be by her side, more than anything she’d ever needed before. More even than the air to breathe, she needed Lexa to be alive in every sense of the word: safe, healthy, happy.

Clarke tightened her arms around Lexa’s neck, pulling her even closer. She wondered if Lexa could feel her heart beating wildly against her chest. She must, because the hand gently circling her lower back was more comforting than anything.

“Promise?” Clarke whispered. “Promise you won’t ever leave me again, and—and that if you do, you’ll take me with you?”

“Clarke,” Lexa whispered back, pulling back and pushing Clarke back far enough to gaze intently into her eyes. Clarke held contact, aware her own eyes were wide and shimmering, but she couldn’t help it. Lexa lifted her hands to Clarke’s face, brushed back her hair before sweetly cupping her cheeks. “I was with you in any lives we may have had before this one, I am with you in this life, and I will be with you in the next, and the one after that, and the one after that, and so on. I will always be with you,” she added fiercely, holding Clarke’s gaze, until Clarke closed her eyes and leaned forward into her hands. Lexa took the cue and brought Clarke’s face to hers, sliding her mouth across hers, swallowing away the tears that rolled down.

The kissing was interrupted when the stretch of their lips grew into smiles too broad. “I love you,” Clarke whispered again, grinning as she pressed a kiss to Lexa’s nose. She couldn’t say it enough, and it was amazing that she would be saying it for the rest of their lives, again and again and again.

Lexa’s smile was just as bright. “I love you too,” she said, pressing a kiss to Clarke’s forehead that had her sighing all over again, heart still trembling with happiness. Lexa pressed her down into the soft grass, kissing her softly before pulling back to look at her, laid down on the ground. Clarke gazed back up at her, framed against the night sky, stars and constellations endlessly stretched out.
above. Clarke clutched at her arms, fingers stroking over the steady pulse strumming in Lexa’s wrist, her gaze shifting from brilliant green eyes down to perfect pouty lips that grew into a smile that mirrored her own. Clarke’s lashes fluttered as she tipped her head up, taking Lexa’s lips in a warm kiss that had every nerve in her body singing. She had no idea what the future held, but whatever it was, she knew she and Lexa would face it together, side by side, hand in hand.

They had each other. Always.

* * /♡/ * ∞ * * /♡/ * *

Chapter End Notes

4. I will have an epilogue posted (so a chapter 23) posted on June 4th. It's totally optional to read. It's basically going to be a nineteen years later thing like in TDH, but with less ridiculous names and much more gayness, which automatically makes it better, I think.

5. Wow, so here we are! 2 years and 10 months, almost 500k words later, and this epic tale is complete. This was probably one of the hardest chapters to write, and I think a big chunk of that is because I've spent so long writing it that it's a bit sad to be finished with it. I've went through so much with this fic and with you all. When I started this, I had just graduated college and my girlfriend was in another state playing semi-pro soccer. Now we are married and living together, and in a couple weeks we'll be going to England (my first time), and going to HP studios! :D

6. This was been an amazing experience and it blows my mind that there are people out there who actually enjoy reading my writing. I just wanted to say that I am seriously so incredibly thankful for each and every one of you who use your precious time to read this and leave me your thoughts and just. Writing this for fun and reading your thoughts have been a huge source of comfort, especially since I love Clexa with all my heart and this was a way to keep them alive, and I love HP and God knows it needs more diversity, so all in all, this was very healing and made me very happy. All your enthusiasm and support genuinely helped me so much through some of the hardest years of my life. Words seriously cannot begin to describe my gratitude and love for you all. Lexa and Clexa are so real and important to me, and it’s not just the writer that creates a new universe, it’s those who read it too. I guess, to sound extremely cheesy especially considering this is an HP fic, you fuel the magic. Thank you all. Much love.

7. I'm super excited to hear what you think about the conclusion of this fic, I'm worried it's a giant hot mess since so many of these scenes were written over the course of the past couple years and I had to basically string them together like a big puzzle lol! Let me know what you think and thank you for reading! xx
Nineteen Years Later

Chapter Summary

The epilogue.

Chapter Notes

Hello all! For the past 3 weeks I've been all over England and also briefly visited Wales! It's been absolutely lovely and I think quite fitting that I'm posting this epilogue today bc I'm a lextra sappy ho who wanted to post this on the 3 year anniversary of this fic.

Thank you all so much for your comments. I'm eventually going to respond to them all but let me tell you I read each and every one and they mean so much to me. The fact that people have enjoyed this fic alone means the world to me, but that this fic has helped some of you through hard times...that is everything. Likewise, I hope you know that writing this fic has been very cathartic for me, and helped me through dark times myself, and therefore you guys taking the time to tell me how it made you feel...thank you. Just thank you. It's magical to be a part of fandom like this. We're so powerful! Look at how we keep someone alive! Keep writing, keep reading, keep drawing, keep creating, keep leaving feedback, keep the spirit moving, keep finding new ways to bring Clexa to life.

I hope you enjoy this epilogue. I tried to leave most things a bit vague and up in the air that way you can imagine what you wish, but I do obviously have my own ideas of everything that's happened since the last chapter and what will happen in the future, so if you're curious and have any questions, feel free to ask and I'll answer! I also plan on posting some pics I made of the Clexa + gang on chocolate frog cards :) I made a few of them, I just can't post them atm since my laptop is in another country and I'm uploading this via a saved draft on mobile. Oh, I visited HP studios in London btw! Thought of this fic the whole time XD seriously. Means the absolute world to me, words will never be enough. Thank you.

Otherwise, this is it. It's been a pleasure. May we meet again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Moodboard

I think we deserve a soft epilogue, my love.

We are good people
“Lexa? Hey, Lex.”

Lexa’s brow furrowed as a raspy voice and light tapping on her wrist stirred her from a deep sleep. She hummed and burrowed closer to the warmth of the body pressed into hers, arms wrapping more tightly around it.

“It’s morning, baby, we have to get up…”

She could tell by the orange light bleeding through her eyelids that it was morning, sunlight filtering into the room through the window blinds. But it was still far too early to wake, exhaustion settled bone-deep in her body. She’d had a hard week at work, on top of little sleep from the mad packing of the past few days. On top of that, today was a very important day, and one that would be emotionally exhausting. She should be well rested.

“Sleep,” mumbled Lexa.

She vaguely registered Clarke shifting, sliding down her body, before she slipped back into sleep. It didn’t last long.

Lexa woke gradually, awareness settling into her in increments. Fingertips trailing down her sides. The tickle of blonde hair scattering over her chest as soft lips brushed butterfly-light kisses on the undersides of her breasts. Her breath constricted in her throat, a low ache turning in her stomach, when one of her nipples was encased in warm, wet heat.

“Clarke,” she gasped, back arching as Clarke sucked, her thumb sweeping over the stiff peak of her other breast. Lexa’s hands automatically tangled in messy blonde curls. “It’s—ah—shouldn’t we get up and ready to leave before—”

“No one’s up yet,” murmured Clarke, lathing her tongue over the hardened bud while her other hand
wandered, shifting down over her torso, briefly gripping a hip bone before sliding over Lexa’s thigh. “Alarm hasn’t went off yet either. We have some time.”

“I—oh, fuck,” Lexa trembled, eyes squeezing shut with pleasure as Clarke’s hand urged her legs apart and fingertips drifted over her.

“Working on it.” Lexa lost her breath, opening her mouth to protest at once when Clarke suddenly pulled off her. But Clarke only leaned up to kiss Lexa for a moment, before straddling her to take off her shirt. Lexa’s was peeled off her next, followed quickly by the rest of their clothes. When Clarke lay down atop her again, they both sighed at the sensation, hands wandering as they kissed again, possibly a bit too leisurely when they were on a schedule, but they couldn’t help it; it had been, as Lexa said, a very busy, exhausting week, and they’d had little opportunity to do this. Things had been so chaotic lately that it had been two weeks since they’d even managed much more than chaste kisses. It had been weeks since they’d even been able to wake up together, without one of them having to fumble around for clothes and hurry off to deal with the day.

This morning was peaceful and quiet and still, so unlike what was happening in their bed. Lexa’s body quaked, her hips jerking while Clarke gripped her thighs to keep her still. The room filled with the hushed sounds of Lexa panting and the sloppy sounds of Clarke’s mouth working between her legs.

“Baby, you have to be quiet,” whispered Clarke, tongue lapping at Lexa, who shuddered before blindly fumbling toward the nightstand.

She managed to grasp her wand and point it in the general direction of the bedroom door. “Alohomora. Muffliato.”

“Better,” said Clarke, rewarding her with a tongue slipped inside as deeply as it could go. Lexa keened.

It didn’t take long at all; Lexa had been on edge anyway, tension coiling at the base of her spine. “That’s it,” encouraged Clarke, fingers digging into Lexa’s thighs, squeezing, as Lexa’s back bowed up and her hips faltered, “That’s it, baby, let go—“

She broke. Clarke let up, gently guiding her through as the waves of sharp, intense pleasure crashed through her body before Clarke drew it out, softened the edges until it was warm and drowsy and slow, and when Lexa finally collapsed back onto the mattress, bone-­limp and dazed, Clarke crawled up to let her kiss the taste of herself off her lips.
As tired as she was, the insistent hunger in Clarke’s kisses easily gave Lexa a second wind. She slipped a hand between Clarke’s legs, swallowing Clarke’s hitch of breath as she glided her fingers through dripping heat. Clarke didn’t have time to draw another breath before Lexa was flipping them over and descending, dropping fervent kisses over soft, gorgeous curves before finally finding her home nestled between thick thighs.

“Oh, God, yes,” breathed Clarke, head tipping back and eyes slamming shut as Lexa licked through her. She gripped the headboard of their bed and spread her legs further, gasp biting off into a moan as Lexa teased a fingertip over her entrance.

“I’ve missed you,” said Lexa lowly, closing her own eyes and humming in satisfaction a the delicious musky taste bursting on her tongue.

“Fuck, I’ve—I’ve missed you too.” Clarke arched her back as Lexa slowly pushed the length of one finger inside her, rotating and curling it, stroking against her inner walls. “I was—I was going to pop by yesterday…do you remember what happened the last time I cornered you in your office? What happened on—oh God, yes, right there—on your desk? I wanted a repeat.”

Lexa paused for a moment, squeezing her legs together as a flood of want rushed through her. “Mmm. Why didn’t you?”

Clarke jostled her hips, impatiently indicating for Lexa to resume; she smiled and obliged. “Let’s just say there was an incident with a toy broom and a very grumpy owl. I’ll explain later. For now, just please, God, make me come.”

“As you wish,” said Lexa soberly, lips quirking at Clarke’s chuckle, which immediately cut off into a groan when Lexa sucked her clit into her mouth.

Clarke’s noises gradually grew in frequency and pitch, keeping in time with the grinding of her hips as she pushed herself into Lexa’s mouth and onto her fingers. Lexa kept the pressure deliberately light, preferring to watch her fuck herself like this, but it couldn’t last long. As Clarke’s orgasm drew nearer, the ache between Lexa’s legs grew unbearable, and she lapped at her until Clarke was breaking, her gasps and moans bouncing off the walls as she shuddered and writhed, finally going limp and pawing weakly at Lexa’s head to still her.

“Come here,” she said, urging Lexa up. Lexa shifted up her body but didn’t remove her finger; Clarke’s intake of breath as Lexa kissed her had her kneeling between her legs, knees at the backs of
her thighs to push them up before she pushed her finger deeper inside her. “Oh, Lex, fuck-”

She didn’t have to ask. Lexa settled over her without a word, breasts rubbing together as she lay over Clarke. Their lips met and Clarke’s hands settled on her ass, encouraging her to use the slow grind of her hips behind each thrust. Everything simmered hot and sticky between them, and birds chirped beyond the window, and it felt as though fire crackled through Lexa’s veins. Clarke’s muscles clenched around her finger, her breath hitching, she was close again and so was Lexa, grinding against her thigh, so close—

Then there was a rap of knuckles on the door.

“Mum, Ma, are you up?”

Lexa and Clarke froze and didn’t answer. They stared at one another with expressions akin to deer trapped in the headlights of muggle cars, eyes wide with alarm, lips thinning as they tried to fight the bizarre urge to laugh.

Another knock on the door, followed by Aden repeating the words.

Clarke dropped her head, her groan of disappointment muffled in Lexa’s shoulder. Lexa bit her tongue so she wouldn’t curse, or tell her son that he may just have to be late to the train station.

Clarke’s face creased apologetically and Lexa frantically shook her head. “We have to get up,” whispered Clarke, though her hands squeezing Lexa’s ass certainly didn’t strengthen their resolve. Blue eyes cast a quick glance at the clock on the wall. “The alarm will be going off any second anyway.”

“Give me five more minutes,” requested Lexa, biting her lip when Clarke cocked a brow. “Or one. All I need is one.” Clarke’s mouth fell open again, lashes fluttering when Lexa pressed two fingers deeper inside her, stroking her inner walls as muscles trembled around them. “Thirty seconds, perhaps.”

Clarke’s hips canted and she looked as though she was going to agree, but then another knock sounded, this one harder and more insistent, followed by a rattling doorknob.

“Hello? Why’s your door locked?”
“Merlin’s fucking beard,” muttered Clarke, seizing her wand from the nightstand and removing *Muffliato* with an aggravated twitch. Her wand clattered to the floor a second later, red sparks spitting from the tip, when Lexa added a third finger and placed a thumb on her clit.

“I’m up. Just woke up,” said Clarke, voice steady, not giving anything away even as her legs fell open, encouraging Lexa to begin moving inside her. She withdrew, slowly, before pushing in again, and Clarke’s breath caught, just a bit too airy as she said, “We’ll be downstairs soon to start breakfast, can you go wake your sister?”

“I already tried,” he said, voice slightly muffled through the door. He sighed. “She won’t get out of bed, and she threw a shoe at me when I tried to make her.”

“O—Okay,” said Clarke, straining to sound normal even as she tipped her head back, closing her eyes, a sharp intake of breath rasping in her throat as Lexa lowered down to kiss her neck. “Well. We’ll be up in just a second, your—you’re mum’s still asleep too, let me get her up—“

“Can you hurry,” said Aden seriously, voice tight with anxiety. “I don’t want to miss the train.” He paused and the distant sound of the front door opening had Clarke and Lexa stilling. “Aunt Raven’s here!” he said, sounding considerably more relieved and excited, and they heard him hasten away downstairs.

“God fucking damn it,” hissed Clarke, brow furrowing. Lexa resisted the urge to laugh. There was no way they would be able to continue if Raven was here. Unlike Aden, she was perfectly capable of unlocking their door, and would have zero qualms about doing so.

Lexa pressed a soft, placating kiss to Clarke’s lips as she withdrew her fingers, swallowing her small whine. Clarke snorted a second later, when Lexa wiped them on her thighs and rolled off the bed before Clarke could swat at her.

They were just pulling on their clothes when the clock on the wall lit the room up in flashing rainbow lights and screamed, “Seize the day you silly gay! Seize the day you silly gay!”

“Have I mentioned I hate that?” lamented Clarke, staring up at the ceiling with the type of forlorn emptiness only Raven’s pranks could cause.
“Only every day for the last ten years,” said Lexa seriously. She ducked and laughed when Clarke suddenly tossed a shoe at her. “That’s exactly where Madi gets it from!”

“Shush it, you.”

“Out of bed you twat, go to work, don’t be a prat!”

“I swear to—“ Clarke brandished her wand at the clock and shut it off, and Lexa chuckled, catching the sock Clarke flung at her next. Clarke pulled her into a scorching, all-consuming kiss right there before the shuttered window, before pushing her back and smirking at Lexa’s dazed expression. She blinked herself out of it in time to watch a naked Clarke’s hips swaying as she sashayed over to the bathroom.

Lexa smirked and shook her head, warmth and love coursing through her chest. God help her when it came to Clarke Griffin.

By the time they were downstairs, someone had managed to wake Madi up. Judging by the way she huddled next to Anya, bleary-faced and unnaturally solemn, Lexa could guess who.

Raven had apparently already started up breakfast, bacon rashers sizzling on the stove before magically flipping itself over, and pancake batter pouring itself onto a skillet.

“Hello, you utter shithead,” Clarke directed at Raven, mouth set in a thin, bemused line. Raven, of course, saw right through it.

“Good morning, sunshine,” greeted Raven, smirking. “I could hear the clock all the way from here. Glad to know it’s still useful.”

“Useful in giving us all a headache, you mean.”

“It woke me up too, Ma,” said Madi reproachfully, perking up slightly when Clarke leaned over to press a kiss to her forehead and set some bacon down on a plate before her.
“Sorry, honey. Blame your Aunty Raven.”

“You know Anya’s actually the one that found it, right?”

“I’m not the one who enchanted it to say obnoxious things, though,” said Anya loftily, arching a brow at Raven, who only stuck her tongue out at her.

“It’s gets them out of bed, doesn’t it? It does the job.”

“A little too thoroughly,” groused Clarke.

Raven shrugged and snatched a piece of bacon off Madi’s plate, ignoring the glare she threw her; Madi was quite similar to Clarke in that they were both absolutely not morning people. “All’s well that ends well, right?”

“Not right,” said Lexa sourly.

“We were in the middle of a very deep sleep, Rae,” said Clarke pointedly, face deadpan. “I was having a very good dream.”

Raven snickered, though she did at least look a bit ashamed. “Oops.”

Lexa dropped a kiss to the top of Aden’s head, catching him in front of the fridge as he retrieved a jug of apple juice.

“Are you nervous?” murmured Lexa, squeezing his shoulders.

His throat dipped as he swallowed, but his jaw set, and he met Lexa’s eyes steadily. “A little,” he admitted, before saying, “But I’m excited, too.”

Lexa smiled reassuringly. “I know you are. You’re going to have so much fun.”
“When’s Nana and Granddad coming?” asked Madi, looking considerably more awake now as she stuffed her mouth with a butter-slathered rolled up pancake, eating it just like Anya did beside her. Aden wrinkled his nose, making a point to make his extra drenched in syrup before cutting into them.

“They should be here any moment,” said Clarke, pulling up a chair between Raven and Lexa. “But we’ll meet O and Lincoln and everyone else at the station.”

“This is old hat for them by now,” said Raven, her pancake nearly as syrup-soaked as Clarke’s and Aden’s. “Bet you ten bucks Fox starts bawling, unless Gen does first.” At the meaningful look Clarke gave her, Raven stilled and glanced at Aden, who had fallen silent and stone-faced. “How you doing, buddy? Excited?”

“Yeah.” He cleared his throat and took a drink before saying, “Bit nervous as well.”

“You’re going to do great,” enthused Clarke. “You’ll have so much fun!”

“I just want to be in the same House as Eli, Ilian, and Nyko.” He gloomily prodded at the remaining slop of pancake on his plate with the tines of his fork. “But I don’t know if that’ll happen.”

“It could,” said Raven reasonably. “The Sorting Hat takes your choice into account, you know.”

At that, Aden looked up hopefully. “Really?”

“Really! Just ask your mum.”

“Your other mum,” said Lexa when Aden looked at her, shaking her head before gesturing toward Clarke; she exchanged a faint smile with Anya.

“Durmstrangs don’t do anything as silly as use a hat to determine where they sleep,” said Anya dryly. “You lot should have all went to Durmstrang instead.”
They had seriously considered it, but it was easier to send the kids to Hogwarts when she and Clarke were both working in London, and Indra had retired several years ago anyway. Besides, she knew first-hand her children were in excellent hands at Hogwarts, with Kane, Professor Cartwig, and the others Lexa had come to know during her brief time there so many years ago.

“Really,” said Clarke, smiling at Aden; he and Madi both listened with awe as Clarke told them how she’d been a hatstall and eventually chose Ravenclaw.

Breakfast was cut short by the arrival of Abby and Kane, and it wasn’t long at all before they were all getting ready to head out the door. It was almost amusing, thought Lexa as she shut and locked the door with a sweep of her wand as they headed toward the magically extended muggle car waiting for them, her hand in Clarke’s and Madi excitedly bouncing along before them. She worked a high-pressure, dangerous job that meant she had to be on her toes and ready for danger at a moment’s notice, yet her heart was pounding harder now than it ever did at work. Simply at the prospect of her first child essentially leaving the nest, off to school for his first year. On a rational level, she knew her anxiousness was unnecessary; Aden was kind, clever, and friendly, and she had no doubts he’d enjoy his time at school. On the other, he was also somewhere far away where it would be difficult to watch over him, to ensure nothing went wrong and no harm came to him.

An impossible feat, of course, she mused as she started the car and carefully began to drive, Clarke’s hand reassuring on her knee. This was a part of life. Children grew up and had to venture out on their own. Most of her concern (and Clarke’s, who was every bit as terrified as Lexa was and also working hard to conceal it from the kids, who undoubtedly sensed it anyway) was due to the incident with Ontari nearly a decade ago. An enemy managing to break out of prison and kidnap your toddler to hold him as ransom would have that effect on anyone, she’d imagine. But part of her concern was also the normal response of a parent. Abby had reassured her of this, when she ended up consoling she and Clarke for half an hour after dinner the other night, when Clarke had pulled out an old photo album of Aden and they found themselves crying as they watched their clumsy baby stumbling around, green eyes bright under a mop of blonde hair, chubby hands reaching for his toy broom. Filtering through to come across the moving photographs of Madi, taken only a few years ago yet so young, with her wild lion-mane dark hair and endless laughter, had only reminded them they only have a few more years with her before she’d be off to school as well. Time flies indeed.

When they pulled into the parking lot and everyone began filing out of the car chattering excitedly (even Aden, though he did look a bit pale), Lexa paused to take in a breath. She turned her head to see Clarke doing the same, watching her, so much love and adoration in her eyes that it automatically settled Lexa, relaxing her shoulders and curving her lips.

“Are you ready?” she asked gently, taking Clarke’s hand.

Clarke sighed, hand on the door handle, unsettled but smiling tiredly anyway. “Not really, but it’s happening anyway. Are you?”
“As I’ll ever be.” Lexa’s lips quirked when Clarke’s did, and Clarke laughed, shaking her head.

Then her eyes grew misty. “We’re being so ridiculous about this.”

Lexa glanced out the window beyond Clarke’s shoulder. Everyone was waiting for them outside; they clearly understood they needed a minute, because they were all patiently talking amongst themselves, backs to the car.

“I’m just going to miss him,” whispered Clarke.

“As will I, love,” said Lexa, trailing her fingertips over Clarke’s cheek, rubbing away a tear. “He will be fine, though. We’ve raised him well.”

Clarke turned her head, pressing her lips to Lexa’s palm. “You’re the best mother.”

“So are you.” Lexa leaned in to kiss Clarke softly. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

They exited the car and held hands, Lexa taking Madi’s as well beside them Aden pushed his trolley of luggage, his new tawny owl hooting softly in its cage, growing more and more excited with each step toward the platform.

* * /✧/ * *

They met Octavia, Lincoln, and their children just before the brick wall concealing the platform. Clarke absently wondered whether it would ever be possible for all of them to be together without there being a risk of the International Statute of Secrecy being broken; the children were all loud and giggle, and the adults weren’t much better off. They’d garnered more than a few odd looks from nearby muggles as they strolled down the station, two owls and a fat toad all blinking balefully at the
muggles who gawked at them. No one except Clarke and Lexa seem to pay it much mind, though. Once they reached the brick wall concealing the platform, they all paused to relax and chat, necessary considering the nearby muggle worker suspiciously eying their large, eccentric group. Clarke took the time to catch up with Octavia, pleased to know they’d had a late start this morning too. And then, like usual of late, the conversation steered around to Aden’s impending first year.

“So, I’m still betting on Gryffindor,” said Octavia through a grin, slanting a smirk at Lincoln, who rolled his eyes and shook his head, smiling. They had clearly been discussing it only moments ago.

“No way.” Raven popped up beside Clarke, who startled; none of them had even heard her approach. “I’m with Clarke and Lex on this one, Hufflepuff all the way.”

“Why not Slytherin?” said Abby, arching a brow. Kane appeared amused beside her. “Someone’s got to take after their nana.”

“Oh, don’t worry. That one will definitely be a Slytherin,” said Raven, jerking a thumb toward the small girl hovering behind Lexa, clutching her hand. She grinned and stuck a tongue out.

“Good girl, Madi,” said Abby approvingly, her eyes twinkling as she smiled at her granddaughter. “I’ll teach you about the Giant Squid so when you go to Hogwarts in a few years, you can be the only first year with a monster friend.”

“Your classmates will be very impressed,” said Kane wisely.

Aden frowned. “I want to know secrets about the Giant Squid.”

“Oh, honey, you won’t be able to see the Giant Squid from your House,” said Abby, pulling him into a one-armed hug as they walked. “You—“

“How about we stop talking loudly about giant squids in the muggle world?” said Clarke dryly.

“Why? Muggles have giant squids too,” said Raven. “I mean, I doubt theirs play football and squirt rainbow ink, but still.”
They took turns entering the platform, emerging onto the station. The familiar swelling took place in Clarke’s heart at seeing the Hogwarts Express, though it was always tinged bittersweet now. Don’t get her wrong, she was glad to be out of school, she enjoyed her job and she loved everything about their home, but sometimes she missed it. Missed days spent soaring above the Quidditch pitch, missed the excitement of learning new magic in her classes, missed loud meals in the Great Hall with her friends, missed kissing Lexa in dark, quiet corridors…

She shook herself out of her reverie, rejoining the conversation as they walked toward the train.

“…and so, as your Godmother number one, I come bearing gifts,” Raven was proudly announcing to Aden, who looked equal parts thrilled and suspicious about what kind of gift his unofficial aunt was about to unfold.

A moment later it was nothing but jubilation; Raven had pulled a huge box of Chocolate Frogs, Aden’s favorite treat, out of her magically expanded bag. It was so heavy that Aden’s knees buckled beneath him when she dropped it in his arms, and Lexa and Clarke automatically reached out to help him.

“It’s the Order of Merlin: First Class edition, too, so some of your favorite people might be in here,” said Raven with a wink.

“Thanks!” crowed Aden, exchanging a grin with Raven before eying the box as though he wanted to open it now. Lexa arched a brow at him and he deflated.

“Wait until you get to school,” said Lexa, and Clarke added, “The trolley has sweets you can get until then.”

Anyah, looking amused probably because she knew Raven had planned this, nodded toward the backpack Aden had slung over his shoulders rather than the luggage on his trolley he was pushing forward. “Here, kid, hang on, I’ll fit them into your bag.” She worked on unbuckling and unclasping it as she leaned down to whisper, “Then you can open them on the train as soon as you’re far enough away.” Aden’s grin broadened, and Lexa and Clarke smiled, shaking their heads as Anyah smirked at them.

A second later Anyah’s smirk turned incredulous as she succeeded in opening Aden’s backpack up. “Jesus, Lexa, how many candles did you pack into Aden’s bag?”
“He needs to be able to see,” said Lexa defensively.

“Yeah, see or be able to start up his own bonfire night?”

While those two bickered and Clarke focused on magically extending Aden’s bag, Raven quickly opened the box to sneak an armful of chocolate frogs out. She snuck one to Madi and stuck her finger to her lips, smiling when Madi giggled. Clarke, of course, caught them.

“I swear, sometimes it’s like we have four children,” she sighed, looking pointedly at Raven and Anya.

“Shut up and eat your frog,” suggested Raven, tossing one to her.

They did so, tearing into them as they walked; Madi’s leapt out of her hands and she chased after it, giggling, and Clarke chased after her, torn between laughter and concern as she warned Madi not to eat it now that it's been on the dirty floor.

“Hey, look who I got!” crowed Octavia, waving her chocolate frog card in the air. The all stopped to look, and Clarke saw her own face smiling back at her.
“To this day, Lexa can’t look at Clarke’s Chocolate Frog card without getting turned on,” said Raven, lowering her voice so none of the kids could hear.

“I—that’s not true,” Lexa protested feebly, but her thick swallow and inability to stop her eyes from darting back to the card were proof enough.

“It is a good pic, Griff,” said Raven airily. “You look like you’re willing to spank someone if they’re naughty and enjoy it too.”

Clarke deadpanned her. “And what about yours? You look like you’re modeling for a cover of Witch Weekly.”

“Yeah, and I look hot as hell. No shame. Oh, fate is gross, look who I got.” She gave a wide, shit-eating grin when she unwrapped her own chocolate frog card, and held it up for the others to see; even in the small card, Lexa’s eyes still managed to shine vivid green.

Octavia laughed. “Every time I see Lexa’s, I crack up. Like, could you make it any more obvious that you’d rather be anywhere else? You look like you’re moments away from murder.”
“Seriously, Lex, you look like you’re about to kick the photographer straight off the tower,” said Raven, critically observing the card as though they hadn’t seen a countless amount of them over the years.

Lexa rolled her eyes. “It was cold, I was tired, and—“

“And Clarke was home and you couldn’t wait to go see her,” supplied Octavia.

Lexa huffed, but relented with a shrug a second later. “Yeah, pretty much.”

Amused, Clarke pressed a warm kiss to Lexa’s cheek, lingering and ignoring the scathing teasing from her friends and exaggerated gagging from the children.

“I just hate that they used my full name,” grumbled Lexa as they reached their destination near the back of the train.

“Well, if you’d just stayed put instead of being grumpy and peacing out the minute they took the picture, you could have told them not to! Besides, what’s wrong with Alexandria?” said Octavia. “I think it’s pretty.”

“I was named after my father Alexander,” said Lexa dryly.

“Oh.”

“Just like Clarke was named after me,” said Abby. “Clarke was my maiden name.”

“That’s kinda cool, that you were both named after your parents,” said Lincoln.

“And Clarke’s father was actually named after a wizard from the 1900s who sought the old Cursed Vaults in Hogwarts, too.”
“Cool!” enthused Madi.

“Who was I named after?” asked Aden thickly as he swallowed the last of his frog.

Raven slung an arm around his shoulders. “Aden Jacob Griffin-Woods, you were named after the bravest city I ever knew. A port city in Yemen. Population roughly 800,000. Presumably filled with batty tourists trying to dig up the bodies of Cain and Abel—“

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Aden is your name because we liked that name.”

Raven pouted. “Why do you have to go and ruin it for me? I went through the hard work of googling that in the muggle world.”

“Because, Raven, you’re a pain in the ass who does pain in the ass things.”

“I resent that! Like what?”

Clarke’s eyes narrowed. “Like the time you decided to visit without warning and came in our house while Lexa was napping, and thought it would be a good idea to teach Aden to poke Lexa with a stick, and when she woke up, defended yourself by saying you felt it was your God-given duty as an aunt to teach him to be brave enough to wake a sleeping dragon.”

“Or when you cast that spell that made cartoon hearts bloom out of Lexa’s eyes every time she looked at Clarke,” said Abby.

“I still stand by the fact that it happened naturally.”

“Or like the time you cast that charm on Lexa to make her blurt out ridiculous pick-up lines every time she tried to ask for help,” piped up Octavia.

Raven slanted a glare at her. “Not helping, O.”

“Or like the time you encouraged Lexa to buy that damn crup, golden retriever mutt when I clearly
told her Aden was too young and they were *supposed* to just go buy a freshwater plimpy!” said Clarke.

“Hey, Fish is not just a mutt! He’s an esteemed member of the Griffin-Woods-Reyes-Lachman family.”

Octavia snorted while Clarke rolled her eyes. Lexa, meanwhile, was frowning faintly. “I notice most of your trouble seems to involve me.”

“Not my fault you’re easy. At least Clarke enjoys it,” snickered Raven.

“Okay, I think I’m going to get on the train now,” said Aden, voice pointedly loud, and the group immediately buffeted him with hugs, both of his mothers especially anxious as they fretted over him.

“Make sure you get enough sleep, okay?” said Clarke. “Whatever house you’re in, your friends will be just as excited as you and I know you’re going to want to stay up to hang out with them, but you can’t let your schoolwork suffer.”

“Here we go,” said Octavia with a smirk.

“Make sure you take advantage of the meals, especially breakfast because it’s the most important meal of the day and you need that energy,” said Lexa.

“God I miss Hogwarts’ meals,” said Raven wistfully. “Except for the giant sandwiches every damn day, those got old. Otherwise, I miss the feasts.”

Anya arched a brow. “Don’t act like you don’t enjoy my cooking.”

“You know I love eating whatever you give me.”

“Raven!” admonished Octavia, fixing a stern look on her as she pressed her hands to the sides of Gavriel’s head, covering his ears. Her other two were thankfully already on the train, ready to leave for their fifth year.
“Relax, I’m joking. Anya’s a terrible cook.”

“I make good muggle toast,” said Anya indignantly.

Raven’s eyes widened and she pressed her lips together, clearly trying not to crack. “I’m…yes, yeah, you’re right, you…you did good. Muggle toasters are very difficult to figure out.”

“No they’re not,” said Fox from nearby, clearly having overheard them. She frowned at Raven. “Toasters are very simple to work out.”

While Anya looked outraged, Raven pinched the bridge of her nose, cursing Fox under her breath.

“Make sure you try to study an extra hour for every class you have,” continued Clarke, “I know that may seem like a lot, but it’s a good way to retain the information, okay?”

The train blew its horn and Aden looked exasperated.

“If you need any potions supplies, owl me or your Nana, she always has extra at the hospital so she can get you as much as you need. Don’t forget to wear your dragon skin gloves too, I don’t want to have to Apparate out in the middle of the day because you’ve burned a hole through your hand.”

Raven’s nose wrinkled as she looked at Lexa. “Isn’t that kind of weird, Aden wearing your skin? That’s got to be like, the makings of a psychopathic serial killer or something.”

“What?” said Aden, distracted.

“If you end up breaking your silver scales or rusting your cauldron,” continued Clarke, turning Aden to face her again with her index finger and thumb gripping his chin with gentle insistence, “please make sure to owl me as soon as it happens since I’ll have to make another trip to Diagon Alley.”

The train blew its horn again, steam billowing over the platform.
“Mum!” complained Aden.

“If for some reason you can’t get ahold of any of us—“

“Doubt it, considering there’s like a million of us,” muttered Raven.

“—just ask Bellamy and I’m sure he’ll be more than happy to help.”

“I can’t do that, that’ll look like special treatment from a professor!”

“No it won’t, everyone knows that’s your uncle.”

“Family is more than just blood,” said Octavia sagely.

“I know I’m fussing over you, but I’m just so excited for you. I hope you have the best year ever,” added Clarke, leaning forward to press her lips to her son’s forehead.

“I gotta go!” said Aden urgently as the train blew its horn a third time.

When Clarke felt the gentle pressure of Lexa’s hand on her lower back, she sighed. “I know, I know.” She blinked rapidly against the stinging pressure of tears at the back of her eyes. She swiped at them, sniffling. “I’m sorry, Aden. Fuck. I—”

“Swear jar,” everyone, including little Gavriel, chanted at the same time; Madi sounded especially gleeful.

Clarke huffed, fishing a sickle out of her pocket. With a twitch of her wand, a jar full of change was conjured out of thin air; she dropped the sickle into it and then Vanished the jar again.

Lexa squatted down to be eye level with Aden; the two of them had identical expressions, green eyes wide and solemn as they looked at one another. “I love you so much,” said Lexa seriously. “I hope you have so much fun. Be yourself, try your best, and write to us as much as you need. We’re so proud of you.”
Aden’s thin little chest puffed out and his chin lifted and he looked so much like Lexa that Clarke’s heart swelled as she fell even more in love with the both of them. She squeezed back when she felt Madi grip her hand, looked down to wink at her daughter; Madi smiled back at her, blue eyes shining.

“I can’t wait ‘til I go to Hogwarts,” she said. “Just four more years, right Ma?”

Clarke’s eyes brimmed with tears at the thought, but she still gave a watery smile as a thumb drifted soothingly across the back of her knuckles; she half turned to see Lexa, her eyes just as glossy, and pressed a kiss into her cheek. She startled a second later when a soft hand clapped onto her shoulder.

“Hey!” exclaimed Clarke, turning to see Wells. As the rest of the group greeted him, she knelt down to embrace Eli, who aside from the wild dark curls that belonged to his mother was a spitting image of his father at age eleven: short, adorably chubby, and the picture of a well-behaved child. “Finally! What held you up?”

“His mother decided he needed to have her world famous crumpets for breakfast, and he decided he better eat as many of them as he can since he won’t be back until Christmas break,” said Wells, exchanging a wry grin with his son.

“Where is she?” asked Clarke.

“Catching up with Fox,” he said, nodding toward where his wife stood chatting with Fox and Niylah, Fox’s wife. Genevieve, their daughter, who was also about to embark on her first year, had already bid them goodbye and hurried onto the train, clearly anxious not to miss it. Niylah looked ecstatic standing next to Fox, barely participating in the conversation because she was too busy looking around in awe at the station, all the owls and creatures making noises in their cages, and other signs of magic.

Aden and Eli, meanwhile, were busy having a hushed conversation that looked equal parts excitement and nervousness, debating what their houses might be. When the horn blew again they both jumped, appearing stricken; it was final call.

Clarke and Lexa and Madi made a family sandwich around Aden, laughing at his half-hearted struggles between giggles. They pulled back to let the other members of their troupe embrace them, Eli and Gavriel beaming as Lincoln initiated their ‘secret handshake,’ with Aden trying to politely stifle his laughter and Madi outright cackling as Anya cracked some joke at Raven’s expense, who
playfully shoved her shoulder.

“They grow up so fast, huh?” asked Wells, smiling as he gazed at his son over the top of Clarke’s head.

“They really do,” said Abby, glancing fondly at Clarke, who wordlessly grasped her mother’s hand.

They were interrupted by a body knocking into them as it flew past; they turned to see a blonde blur sprinting toward the train where a brunette girl was waving her over, accidentally dropping a tattered old red scarf behind her. Lexa picked it up.

“Hey…” Lexa opened her mouth to call after the girl, but then she hesitated, frowning. “Those two are together so much, I forget who’s who…”

“That’s Elyza, Lex,” Clarke pointed at the blonde before shifting her gaze onto the brunette girl. “And that’s—“

“I know that’s Alicia, Clarke,” said Lexa. She winked at Clarke. “I was just testing you.”

Clarke rolled her eyes. “Uh huh.”

Before they could call Elyza’s name, the scarf leapt out of Lexa’s hand and went whizzing forward toward an exasperated Evie Potter, who caught it after her summoning charm. Luna caught sight of them and grinned as she waved. They smiled and waved back.

Evie, meanwhile, quickly wrapped the scarf around her daughter’s neck before she and Luna both pressed a kiss to either sides of her cheeks. “You are a nightmare,” said Evie wearily, though she looked affectionate as she glanced down at her daughter, wild blonde hair tipped pink and interspersed with braids.

Elyza’s face lit up as she finally spotted her best friend standing near the train with her mother and father; her lips tugged up into a delighted smirk that very much looked like Luna’s as she gave her mothers a final hug goodbye before bounding across the station.
Evie’s frown deepened. “I know she’s in her last year and all, but she better stay out of trouble. She’s of age now, she can get the Ministry at her if she behaves like she did last year—“

“She’s not going to blow up the Chamber of Secrets twice,” said Luna with a roll of her eyes. “Besides, I’m sure Frank was furious too, and if anyone can keep Elyza in line, it’s Alicia.”

“Exactly another cause for concern,” said Evie. “Elyza’s even more of a trouble-maker than you were.”

Luna snorted, then smirked as Frankie waved cheerily at the two of them. She looped her free arm through Evie’s and waved back. “I think at this point we should just be grateful that our future in-laws are good people, frankly. Hah, frankly, get it?”

“I got it the first thousand times you did it. And we don’t know that they’re going to end up together.”

“Sure we don’t,” said Luna with another roll of her eyes as she watched her daughter embrace Alicia. “You have to be blind if you can’t see the way they look at each other, those heart eyes are ridiculous. They’re traveling together after they graduate—wanna bet they’re officially together by the time they get back?”

“No,” said Evie in amusement. “I don’t take bets I know I’m going to lose.”

Luna laughed. “Exactly.” She sobered, smile softening as she watched Alicia animatedly explaining some story about her summer break to Elyza, who intently absorbed every word. “It is kind of funny, though.”

Evie’s smile widened. “I know what you mean. If you went back in time and told me that Frankie and I would break up, you and I would get married, and one day our daughter and Frankie’s daughter would get together…”

“Never would have believed it.” Luna shook her head. “Elyza Potter and Alicia Longbottom. Who would have thought?” She slanted a sly smirk Evie’s way before tugging her closer. “Do you wanna have another?”

Evie pursed her lips thoughtfully. “You know, I think I do.” When Luna’s grin slid off her face to be
replaced by sheer horror, Evie burst into laughter. She pressed her grin to Luna’s rueful little smile. “God, no. Elyza was a handful. I don’t think I can take another.”

“Good,” breathed Luna. “Sometimes I find myself wondering how the hell we were the ones who had a kid. I mean, I expected Gideon to be a bachelor for life, but I figured Jamie and Roan would have one or two at least. They’d be great parents.”

Evie shrugged. “They’ve just never wanted any. They like having their own space.”

“Me too. It’s about time we have a peaceful retirement, anyway.”

“Don’t act like you’re not going to be wandering into Elyza’s empty room like a lost puppy,” said Evie teasingly. “You’ll miss it.”

Luna snorted. “It’s basically as if someone let loose an erumpent in the house. Please.” But their chuckles faded, wistfulness softening their features as they watched their daughter laughing with her best friend. The train blew its horn again; Alicia gave Frank and her mother one last hug before grabbing Elyza’s hand and hauling her onto the train, probably (rightfully) concerned if she didn’t get her on there in time, they’d actually miss it even though they were right next to it, and that certainly wouldn’t look good for Alicia considering she was Head Girl this year. Evie and Luna waved as Elyza turned back to them again with her wide grin and gave them a salute before she disappeared with Alicia, off to find a compartment.

“I’m going to miss that little shit,” sighed Luna.

Evie smiled, resting her head on her wife’s shoulder. “Me too.”

Meanwhile, Aden Griffin-Woods was still being wrapped up in hug after hug from all the members of his large family.

“Have fun, buddy,” said Lincoln, ruffling his hair, “Ilian and Nyko will look after you.”

“And you look after them,” said Octavia, expression suddenly cross.

The kids ran off onto the train, throwing haphazard waves back over their shoulders as they disappeared into the throng, rushing away to find a compartment. Clarke watched, trying desperately
to keep an eye on the blonde head bobbing in and out of sight through the windows. Madi and Gavriel ran after the train as it slowly began to pull out of the station, and remained together several feet away to engage in clumsy races, laughing through breathless declarations that they could run faster than the other.

Octavia narrowed her eyes when she heard Raven snort. “What? I’m serious. If I get one more letter about the twins, they’re getting a howler and I’m locking away their brooms.”

Kane pressed his lips together to hide his smile, considering he’d been the last to send a letter, after Professor Nygel showed up at his office raging over the twins’ latest prank (they still hadn’t managed to completely rid the dungeons of the smell of cat piss and owl droppings).

“It’s all your fault, O,” said Raven with a wide grin. “They think they’re above classes because their mom was a hot shot who won the Triwizard Tournament in her last year and went on to play professional Quidditch.”

“God, I wish you guys had kids,” complained Octavia, though even she couldn’t fight back the smile growing on her face as Raven and Anya exchanged smirks. “You deserve little terrors just like you.”

“But, I’m much happier with the extra money, frequent holidays, and freedom to do whatever we want, wherever we want, whenever we want,” said Raven with a shrug. Anya nodded in agreement.

“We’ll leave the spawn-making to you,” said Anya.

Lincoln cleared his throat. “I think four is enough for now.”

“You’re pregnant again?”

They should have known; Octavia was glowing.

She laughed, folding her hands over her stomach, though she clearly wasn’t far along yet, considering there wasn’t even a bump. “Last one, I promise.”

“Are you sure?” said Raven sarcastically. “One more and you’ll have enough for your own
Octavia and Lincoln paused, eyes flitting to one another as though they were actually considering it, and Anya groaned.

“Merlin, no, babysitting is a pain in the ass enough with three of your kids, let alone another two. You have a brood. A brood, Lincoln.”

“And that’s not even considering when Bell and Echo drop off Perce!” said Raven. “Add in Aden and Madi and it’s like we’re teaching a whole fuc—friggin class!” She rolled her eyes and dropped money into the swear jar Clarke sternly Conjured before her.

“Well what do you expect, when you’re the only one without kids?” laughed Octavia. “You’re basically the designated baby sitter for all time now!”

While they continued squabbling on, Clarke turned to Lexa, amused. “We’re definitely done, right?”

“Yes,” said Lexa with such a grave nod it had Clarke laughing.

“Think of all the free time we’ll have when Madi goes to school.”

“The house will be so quiet. We won’t know what to do with ourselves.”

Clarke’s lips curved up, one corner at a time. “I can think of a few ways to pass the time.”

Lexa’s answering smirk sent a familiar pleasant heat simmering through Clarke’s belly.

“Ugh, will you two chill out?” said Raven so suddenly Clarke and Lexa jumped; they hadn’t even noticed the others had stopped with their conversations, nor that Costia, Fox, and Niylah had joined them and were looking between them in amusement. “I swear. Over twenty years together and you’re still as disgusting as you were the day you met.”

Lexa’s smirk widened. “Which time?”
Raven rolled her eyes. “Anything that can possibly exist involving you two will automatically be disgusting. Need I bring up the Christmas Portrait Incident?”

“What’s the Christmas Portrait Incident?” said Niylah enthusiastically, watching them keenly as though hoping to hear more stories of great feats of magic.

“Right, so like a decade ago—”

Clarke groaned. “Raven, no.”

“No no, I want to hear this too!” said Costia.

Lexa looked at her witheringly. “Costia, you’ve heard this at least a dozen times—”

“And it never gets old,” laughed Costia, dimples flashing.

Clarke glared at Raven with Lexa looking at her just as disapprovingly, but with an air of exasperation, as though she’d finally come to expect this. Raven just tilted her chin up as though she was dignified in her faux righteousness.

“It was a special occasion, the twentieth Christmas spent at Mama G’s, so I decided to get her a really nice gift and got a portrait made of us all. This turned into the most awkward moment of my life, because the place is packed, all of us jammed into Abby’s living room when I whisk the cover off the painting and bam, there we all are, smiling and waving at Abby…all except for two people. Two people, one of whom is her actual daughter. Two people who are off in the corner of the portrait, curled up on the sofa we were posing on, intensely sucking face.”

Clarke buried her face in her hands as her friends’ laughter rang around her. She did it to hide the blush, mostly, but she kind of had to hide her growing smile, too. It was embarrassing but she could also appreciate the hilarity of the situation…at rare times.

“It was a nice innocent portrait of all of us together, you know, you think that’d be a nice picture, but no—every time I even visit now, I catch your portrait selves snogging.”
Clarke paled. Abby, to her credit, just looked amused; time had evidently helped her find the amusement in the situation.

“I tried a few charms to keep them separated, but then they’d just go into a neighboring portrait and the inhabitants weren’t very happy then,” said Abby. Her brow momentarily furrowed. “Although sometimes they didn’t seem to mind…”

Lexa’s cheeks were as pink as Clarke’s. “It doesn’t make sense but I feel as though we should apologize for our portrait selves’ poor behavior.”

“What’s most interesting is that when portraits are made of their living counterparts, enchantments are made to take the current disposition of the counterparts,” said Costia lightly, stoic-faced and innocent save for the twinkle in her eyes.

Raven caught on at once, giving a wolfish grin. “So clearly the reason your portrait selves can’t keep their hands off each other is because that was exactly what you two were feeling and thinking during your photo session.”

Lexa opened her mouth to retort but clearly thought better of it when Madi and Gavriel came galloping back to their little group, winded and hyper after playing. Abby leapt at the opportunity.

“How about I take the kids out for some ice cream?” she suggested. Madi and Gavriel gasped and jumped excitedly in place.

“Could we have a slumber party at your house, Nana?” asked Madi, expression shifting into an exaggerated pout reminiscent of Clarke’s.

“I don’t see why not,” said Abby, smiling. “As long as it’s okay with your parents.”

“That’s fine,” said Clarke, kneeling down with Lexa so Madi could throw her arms around the both of them. They pressed kisses to her cheeks and squeezed back. “Just make sure she eats something other than sweets,” she added, eying Madi pointedly before looking up at her mother.

Abby pursed her lips to hide her smile. “Of course. I’m a Healer, Clarke, you know I advocate a
healthy lifestyle.”

“Yeah, and you’re also a grandmother.”

“I’ll see to it that she gets a good dinner, Clarke,” smiled Kane, smiling calmly when Madi playfully pouted, “I’ll ask the elves if they’ll wrap something up for me from the welcoming feast to bring home.”

“Thank you.”

Kane glanced at his wristwatch. “Well, we better head out to get that ice cream, I only have an hour before I need to get back to the school.”

They said goodbyes to everyone else before setting off, Madi and Gavriel twisting round to wave extra goodbyes at their parents before skipping on. Clarke and Lexa watched them disappear through the platform before they turned to say their farewells to the others.

Clarke and Lexa politely joined in for the conversation for a time (longer than usual, but that was because Raven was still throwing them knowing glances), but they were itching to leave so they eventually waved their goodbyes, ignoring Raven’s gloating grin. They slipped their hands together as they strolled through the platform.

They’d only just reached the parking lot when a familiar whistle that immediately had her heart in her throat drew Clarke back.

A man with sandy-blonde hair and crow’s feet framing his bright blue eyes greeted her with a broad grin. The sight brought tears to Clarke’s eyes; she’d been praying she would see him today. The last time she’d seen him was nearly eight years ago, when they had Madi.

“Dad!”

“Hey!” He laughed, sweeping Clarke up in his arms before dropping her back to her feet and looking between she and Lexa, appraising them. “It’s my favorite couple. How’re you guys doing?”

"Mr. Griffin. Jake," greeted Lexa warmly, returning his hug. “We are well.”
“How’d that problem you had last time we talked go? Get it sorted?”

Lexa pressed her lips together, eyes twinkling. “You know I did.” She spared an affectionate glance at the watch sparkling on Clarke’s wrist. Clarke tilted her head, curiously returning Lexa’s gaze. So her father had helped her. It wasn’t the Flame—that was, probably fortunately, gone for good. But Lexa had went to an extraordinary amount of work in replicating the watch itself so Clarke could feel as though she had a piece of her father back. It made sense that her father helped her do it. She pressed a grateful kiss to Lexa’s cheek.

“How’s your mother?” Jake asked Clarke, smile turning softer. Clarke hadn’t seen her father in eight years, but for her mother it had been over fifteen. As happy as the visits made her, it eventually did more harm to her mother than good, as Jake had anticipated. She couldn’t move on when she felt as though she was waiting for him all the time, living for his brief visits. She struggled and resisted her growing feelings for Kane at first because of it. But after Jake’s last visit, where they had a lengthy talk, and he informed her that was it, the last time she’d ever see him, it had given her some closure.

“She’s good. Happy.”

Jake practically beamed. “Good.” He clapped a hand on Clarke’s shoulder and looked out at King’s Cross, eyes lingering on the platform wall. He sighed. “It only felt like yesterday I was bringing you here for your first year.”

Clarke smiled sadly at her father. It was, in many ways, so strange; they were now quite close in age. Eventually he would visit and she would be older than him.

Lexa tilted her head, smiling slightly. "So what house is he in?"

Jake gave an exaggerated scandalized expression. "I can't take all the fun away!"

“Oh come on!” Clarke laughed when her father stubbornly shook his head, blonde hair flopping over his forehead.

“He’s a good kid. You two’ve done a good job raising him. I’m proud of you both.”

It felt like goodbye was approaching. Clarke and Lexa stepped forward, swept up in another tight hug.
“I miss you.”

“I know you do, kiddo.” He hesitated. “If this gets too hard—""

“It’s not,” interrupted Clarke, drawing back and swiping at her eyes. “I mean, it is hard, but—it means the world, too. I love you, Dad.”

“I love you too, both of you. Take care of each other.”

“Always,” promised Lexa.

He walked off through the crowd and they soon lost sight of him. Clarke wondered when the next time she’d see him would be. Surely in a few years when Madi took her first turn here? But perhaps he’d come every year to see Aden off, and then Madi too. Clarke hoped so.

“So.” Lexa took Clarke’s hand.

“So.”

“We have the rest of the day and the night to ourselves,” said Lexa as they crossed the stations and emerged outside. “What do you want to do first?”

“Mmm.” Clarke inhaled, breathing in the crisp morning air as they rounded the building for a discreet place to Disapparate. They’d take care of the car later. “I don’t really want to head home yet.”

“No? Where do you want to go, then?”

Clarke smiled and leaned into her, wrapping her arm around her waist. “Wanna get lost together?”

Lexa’s answering smile, full and toothy, was as beautiful as ever, and Clarke marveled at how her heart still skipped a beat and her stomach fluttered at the sight of it now, with years and years
between them. Sometimes she thought of how much she loved Lexa even in the first few months she’d known her, and how she loves her so much more, impossibly so, now. She loves Lexa more and more every day. She couldn’t imagine what that meant for the future, how her heart must swell with it when they’re gray-haired and wrinkled, but she couldn’t wait to find out.

“I’m craving mountains,” she decided. “I want a beautiful view.”

“I already have the most beautiful view,” said Lexa, leaning in to brush her lips across Clarke’s temple.

“You and your pickup lines. So cheesy,” said Clarke with a grin. Lexa smiled and squeezed her hand; a moment later they emerged from the compressing darkness and stepped out onto one of their favorite haunts. They’d found this spot years ago, when they went traveling the world together after graduating. Despite how many times they’d been here—how many magnificent places they’d been period—it still took Clarke’s breath away, as the two of them sat on a rock at the edge and looked out at the rolling land before them.

Silence stretched on as they simply held one another and gazed out at the world around them, before Clarke finally had to say what was on her mind.

“Do you think he’ll be okay?”

Lexa nodded, still calmly staring out at the horizon. “I do.”

“He’s so shy sometimes,” began Clarke, hesitant with concern, “I just don’t want him to have trouble making friends. Or get picked on, because he’s our son.”

“Fame is not easy,” said Lexa simply with a shrug, but she tightened her grip on Clarke’s hand, entwining their fingers. “But he’s a good person. He’s level-headed and kind. I imagine anyone who tries to be cruel to him will find themselves his friend not long later. Besides, he already has plenty of friends there, from all different houses. He’ll be fine.”

Clarke took another breath, easier this time. She knew she was perhaps a bit overanxious with it all, but as her mother reminded her, this was her first child and to be expected. Next year would be easier, her mother had promised. In the meantime, she’d look forward to Christmas break—Aden’s return home with so many new stories to tell them, the four of them out in the garden playing a game of Quidditch before retiring to the living room and playing a few rounds of Wizard’s Chess before
Madi beat them all in Exploding Snap. Falling asleep beside Lexa, knowing her children were snug in their beds, Fish curled up at Aden’s feet.

Lexa absently trailed circles on the back of Clarke’s knuckles, the pad of her thumb skimming across her ring. Clarke squeezed her hand to get her attention, and when Lexa looked at her, leaned in to kiss her softly, their mouths curving until they were smiling against each other’s lips and warmth flooded Clarke’s body all the way to the fingertips she brushed through Lexa’s tangled braids. “Did you ever think it was possible?”

“How?”

“To be this happy.” Blue eyes held green and she dropped another kiss to the tip of Lexa’s nose. “Our son is off for his first year and our daughter is being pumped full of sweets by her grandparents, we’re surrounded by friends, we work together and have a home full of memories…when you think of where we are now, and what it took to get here…it was all worth it, wasn’t it?”

“More than worth it,” murmured Lexa, pressing a soft kiss to the top of Clarke’s head. “You are the best thing that has ever happened to me, you know.”

Clarke exhaled, closing her eyes and nodding, forehead resting against Lexa’s, and smiled. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I love you, Lexa.”

“I love you, Clarke.” Lexa suddenly arched a teasing brow before saying innocently, “Would you say everything was worth it? Even the mutant gorilla that attacked us?”

Clarke burst into laughter. “Oh my God. Yes. Even the mutant gorilla.”

“Octavia threw a shoe at it.”

“Octavia threw a shoe at it,” echoed Clarke, nodding, still chortling. “She misunderstood my advice!”

“Mmm-hmm. And those detentions?”

Clarke gave a lofty smirk. “Those really worked out, if you remember.”
“I remember,” said Lexa, eyes dipping to Clarke’s lips momentarily, before meeting Clarke’s eyes again. “You see? Everything worked out in the end.”

“Yeah, it did.” Clarke sighed, wrapping an arm around Lexa’s waist. “It’s like Raven said, all’s well that ends well. And all is well. Right?”

“Right…except Raven interrupted something this morning that I would very much like to continue,” said Lexa with a slow-growing curl of her lips, green eyes bright.

Clarke tugged a chestnut curl behind one cute, tiny ear before leaning forward to press her lips just beneath it. Lexa shivered. “Then let’s head home, Lex.” Gentle, insistent hands shifted down Lexa’s arms, briefly cupped her elbows, before moving to take her hand, fingers intertwining as she pulled the both of them to their feet, preparing to Disapparate. “What do you say to that?”

Lexa chuckled, leaning forward to softly drag her nose across Clarke’s before pressing warm lips together. “Then yes, Clarke.” She wrapped her arms around her, kissing her soundly before resting their foreheads together. Even after the crack of magic sounded as they headed home, her whispered words still echoed around the earth and sky. “All is well.”

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If you’d like to see all the chocolate frog cards I made (they have information on the back, and some of the jobs I imagine the gang to have are listed), here’s a link. Otherwise, this is the final chapter of Those Icy Fingers, and I thank you so much for reading. If you’d like to read some of my other works, my two newest ones are complete modern aus created for Clexaweek2018:

- **Sweety Tweety**, which is a short, funny two-shot where Lexa has a very rude pet parrot with a filthy mouth that shouts out intimate details of Lexa’s sex life to the point where Lexa can’t ever invite anyone over to her apartment without traumatizing them.
- And **Lipstick Stamps on my Passport**, a smutty, fluffy one-shot where Lexa gives up her seat on the plane to a pretty blonde who ends up holding her hand through the flight, and when they meet again in an airport a year later...let’s just say Lexa isn’t an entirely useless lesbian that night ;)

I have some other fics in the works too, so look out for those in the future! :) May we meet again, kru x
Update—December 2nd 2018-

Hey guys! I just wanted to say I do still read each and every new comment and I love them all so much, thank you. <3

I've written a few new fics since then, with my next big project being Between Our Love, probably another long multi-chapter fic with monthly updates just like this fic was.

Also, my wife and I finally adopted a puppy :D Her name is Maverick and she's a total sweetheart.

I hope life finds all of you well! May we meet again!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!